

# THE DR. THORNDYKE OMNIBUS



Richard

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

---

## THE ART OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

THE status in the world of letters of that type of fiction which finds its principal motive in the unravelment of crimes or similar intricate mysteries presents certain anomalies. By the critic and the professedly literary person the detective story—to adopt the unprepossessing name by which this class of fiction is now universally known—is apt to be dismissed contemptuously as outside the pale of literature, to be conceived of as a type of work produced by half-educated and wholly incompetent writers for consumption by office boys, factory girls, and other persons devoid of culture and literary taste.

That such works are produced by such writers for such readers is an undeniable truth; but in mere badness of quality the detective story holds no monopoly. By similar writers and for similar readers there are produced love stories, romances, and even historical tales of no better quality. But there is this difference: that, whereas the place in literature of the love story or the romance has been determined by the consideration of the masterpieces of each type, the detective story appears to have been judged by its failures. The status of the whole class has been fixed by an estimate formed from inferior samples.

What is the explanation of this discrepancy? Why is it that, whereas a bad love story or romance is condemned merely on its merits as a defective specimen of a respectable class, a detective story is apt to be condemned without trial in virtue of some sort of assumed original sin? The assumption as to the class of reader is manifestly untrue. There is no type of fiction that is more universally popular than the detective story. It is a familiar fact that many famous men have found in this kind of reading their favourite recreation, and that it is consumed with pleasure, and even with enthusiasm, by many learned and intellectual men, not infrequently in preference to any other form of fiction.

This being the case, I again ask for an explanation of the contempt in which the whole genus of detective fiction is held by the professedly literary. Clearly, a form of literature which arouses the enthusiasm of men of intellect and culture can be affected by no inherently base quality. It cannot be foolish, and is unlikely to be immoral. As a matter of fact, it is neither. The explanation is probably to be found in the great proportion of failures; in the tendency of the tyro and the amateur perversely to adopt this difficult and intricate form for their 'prentice efforts; in the crude literary technique often associated with otherwise satisfactory productions; and perhaps in the falling off in quality of the work of regular novelists when they experiment in this department of fiction, to which they may be adapted neither by temperament nor by training.

Thus critical judgment has been formed, not on what the detective story can be and should be, but on what it too frequently was in the past when crudely and incompetently done. Unfortunately, this type of work is still prevalent; but it is not representative. In late years there has arisen a new school of writers who, taking the detective story seriously, have set a more exacting standard, and whose work, admirable alike in construction and execution, probably accounts for the recent growth in popularity of this class of fiction. But, though representative, they are a minority; and it is still true that a detective story which fully develops the distinctive qualities proper to its genus, and is, in addition, satisfactory in diction, in background treatment, in characterization, and in general literary workmanship is probably the rarest of all forms of fiction.

The rarity of good detective fiction is to be explained by a fact which appears to be little recognized either by critics or by authors; the fact, namely, that a completely executed detective story is a very difficult and highly technical work, a work demanding in its creator the union of qualities which, if not mutually antagonistic, are at least seldom met with united in a single individual. On the one hand, it is a work of imagination, demanding the creative, artistic faculty; on the other, it is a work of ratiocination, demanding the power of logical analysis and subtle and acute reasoning; and, added to these inherent qualities, there must be a somewhat extensive outfit of special knowledge. Evidence alike of the difficulty of the work and the failure to realize it is furnished by those occasional experiments of novelists of the orthodox kind which have been referred to, experiments which commonly fail by reason of a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the work and the qualities that it should possess.

A widely prevailing error is that a detective story needs to be highly sensational. It tends to be confused with the mere crime story, in which the incidents—tragic, horrible, even repulsive—form the actual theme, and the quality aimed at is horror—crude and pungent sensationalism. Here the writer's object is to make the reader's flesh creep; and since that reader has probably, by a course of similar reading, acquired a somewhat extreme degree of obtuseness, the violence of the means has to be progressively increased in proportion to the insensitiveness of the subject. The sportsman in the juvenile verse sings:

*I shoot the hippopotamus with bullets made of platinum  
Because if I use leaden ones his hide is sure to flatten 'em;*

and that, in effect, is the position of the purveyor of gross sensationalism. His purpose is, at all costs, to penetrate his reader's mental epidermis, to the density of which he must needs adjust the weight and velocity of his literary projectile.

Now no serious author will complain of the critic's antipathy to mere sensationalism. It is a quality that is attainable by the least gifted writer and acceptable to the least critical reader; and, unlike the higher qualities of literature, which beget

in the reader an increased receptiveness and more subtle appreciation, it creates, as do drugs and stimulants, a tolerance which has to be met by an increase of the dose. The entertainments of the cinema have to be conducted on a scale of continually increasing sensationalism. The wonders that thrilled at first become commonplace, and must be reinforced by marvels yet more astonishing. Incident must be piled on incident, climax on climax, until any kind of construction becomes impossible. So, too, in literature. In the newspaper serial of the conventional type, each instalment of a couple of thousand words, or less, must wind up with a thrilling climax, blandly ignored at the opening of the next instalment; while that ne plus ultra of wild sensationalism, the film novel, in its extreme form is no more than a string of astonishing incidents, unconnected by any intelligible scheme, each incident an independent "thrill," unexplained, unprepared for, devoid alike of antecedents and consequences.

Some productions of the latter type are put forth in the guise of detective stories, with which they apparently tend to be confused by some critics. They are then characterized by the presentation of a crime—often in impossible circumstances which are never accounted for—followed by a vast amount of rushing to and fro of detectives or unofficial investigators in motor cars, aeroplanes, or motor boats, with a liberal display of revolvers or automatic pistols and a succession of hair-raising adventures. If any conclusion is reached, it is quite unconvincing, and the interest of the story to its appropriate reader is in the incidental matter, and not in the plot. But the application of the term "detective story" to works of this kind is misleading, for in the essential qualities of the type of fiction properly so designated they are entirely deficient. Let us now consider what those qualities are.

The distinctive quality of a detective story, in which it differs from all other types of fiction, is that the satisfaction that it offers to the reader is primarily an intellectual satisfaction. This is not to say that it need be deficient in the other qualities appertaining to good fiction: in grace of diction, in humour, in interesting characterization, in picturesqueness of setting or in emotional presentation. On the contrary, it should possess all these qualities. It should be an interesting story, well and vivaciously told. But whereas in other fiction these are the primary, paramount qualities, in detective fiction they are secondary and subordinate to the intellectual interest, to which they must be, if necessary, sacrificed. The entertainment that the connoisseur looks for is an exhibition of mental gymnastics in which he is invited to take part; and the excellence of the entertainment must be judged by the completeness with which it satisfies the expectations of the type of reader to whom it is addressed.

Thus, assuming that good detective fiction must be good fiction in general terms, we may dismiss those qualities which it should possess in common with all other works of imagination and give our attention to those qualities in which it differs from them and which give to it its special character. I have said that the satisfaction which it is designed to yield to the reader is primarily intellectual, and we may now consider in somewhat more detail the exact nature of the satisfaction demanded and the way in which it can best be supplied. And first we may ask: What are the characteristics of the representative reader? To what kind of person is a carefully constructed detective story especially addressed?

We have seen that detective fiction has a wide popularity. The general reader, however, is apt to be uncritical. He reads impartially the bad and the good, with no very clear perception of the difference, at least in the technical construction. The real connoisseurs, who avowedly prefer this type of fiction to all others, and who read it with close and critical attention, are to be found among men of the definitely intellectual class: theologians, scholars, lawyers, and to a less extent, perhaps, doctors and men of science. Judging by the letters which I have received from time to time, the enthusiast par excellence is the clergyman of a studious and scholarly habit.

Now the theologian, the scholar and the lawyer have a common characteristic: they are all men of a subtle type of mind. They find a pleasure in intricate arguments, in dialectical contests, in which the matter to be proved is usually of less consideration than the method of proving it. The pleasure is yielded by the argument itself and tends to be proportionate to the intricacy of the proof. The disputant enjoys the mental exercise, just as a muscular man enjoys particular kinds of physical exertion. But the satisfaction yielded by an argument is dependent upon a strict conformity with logical methods, upon freedom from fallacies of reasoning, and especially upon freedom from any ambiguities as to the data.

By schoolboys, street-corner debaters, and other persons who are ignorant of the principles of discussion, debates are commonly conducted by means of what we may call "argument by assertion." Each disputant seeks to overwhelm his opponent by pelting him with statements of alleged fact, each of which the other disputes, and replies by discharging a volley of counterstatements, the truth of which is promptly denied. Thus the argument collapses in a chaos of conflicting assertions. The method of the skilled dialectician is exactly the opposite of this. He begins by making sure of the matter in dispute and by establishing agreement with his adversary on the fundamental data. Theological arguments are usually based upon propositions admitted as true by both parties; and the arguments of counsel are commonly concerned, not with questions of fact, but with the consequences deducible from evidence admitted equally by both sides.

Thus the intellectual satisfaction of an argument is conditional on the complete establishment of the data. Disputes on questions of fact are of little, if any, intellectual interest; but in any case an argument—an orderly train of reasoning—cannot begin until the data have been clearly set forth and agreed upon by both parties. This very obvious truth is continually lost sight of by authors. Plots, i.e., arguments, are frequently based upon alleged "facts"—physical, chemical, and other—which the educated reader knows to be untrue, and of which the untruth totally invalidates conclusions drawn from them and thus destroys the intellectual interest of the argument.

The other indispensable factor is freedom from fallacies of reasoning. The conclusion must emerge truly and inevitably from the premises; it must be the only possible conclusion, and must leave the competent reader in no doubt as to its

unimpeachable truth.

It is here that detective stories most commonly fail. They tend to be pervaded by logical fallacies, and especially by the fallacy of the undistributed middle term. The conclusion reached by the gifted investigator, and offered by him as inevitable, is seen by the reader to be merely one of a number of possible alternatives. The effect when the author's "must have been" has to be corrected by the reader into "might have been" is one of anti-climax. The promised and anticipated demonstration peters out into a mere suggestion; the argument is left in the air and the reader is balked of the intellectual satisfaction which he was seeking.

Having glanced at the nature of the satisfaction sought by the reader, we may now examine the structure of a detective story and observe the means employed to furnish that satisfaction. On the general fictional qualities of such a story we need not enlarge excepting to contest the prevalent belief that detective fiction possesses no such qualities. Apart from a sustained love interest—for which there is usually no room—a detective novel need not, and should not, be inferior in narrative interest or literary workmanship to any other work of fiction. Interests which conflict with the main theme and hinder its clear exposition are evidently inadmissible; but humour, picturesque setting, vivid characterization and even emotional episodes are not only desirable on aesthetic grounds, but, if skilfully used, may be employed to distract the reader's attention at critical moments in place of the nonsensical "false clues" and other exasperating devices by which writers too often seek to confuse the issues. The *Mystery of Edwin Drood* shows us the superb fictional quality that is possible in a detective story from the hand of a master.

Turning now to the technical side, we note that the plot of a detective novel is, in effect, an argument conducted under the guise of fiction. But it is a peculiar form of argument. The problem having been stated, the data for its solution are presented inconspicuously and in a sequence purposely dislocated so as to conceal their connexion; and the reader's task is to collect the data, to rearrange them in their correct logical sequence and ascertain their relations, when the solution of the problem should at once become obvious. The construction thus tends to fall into four stages: (1) statement of the problem; (2) production of the data for its solution ("clues"); (3) the discovery, i.e., completion of the inquiry by the investigator and declaration by him of the solution; (4) proof of the solution by an exposition of the evidence.

1. The problem is usually concerned with a crime, not because a crime is an attractive subject, but because it forms the most natural occasion for an investigation of the kind required. For the same reason—suitability—crime against the person is more commonly adopted than crime against property; and murder—actual, attempted or suspected—is usually the most suitable of all. For the villain is the player on the other side; and since we want him to be a desperate player, the stakes must be appropriately high. A capital crime gives us an adversary who is playing for his life, and who consequently furnishes the best subject for dramatic treatment.

2. The body of the work should be occupied with the telling of the story, in the course of which the data, or "clues," should be produced as inconspicuously as possible, but clearly and without ambiguity in regard to their essentials. The author should be scrupulously fair in his conduct of the game. Each card as it is played should be set down squarely, face upwards, in full view of the reader. Under no circumstances should there be any deception as to the facts. The reader should be quite clear as to what he may expect as true. In stories of the older type, the middle action is filled out with a succession of false clues and with the fixing of suspicion first on one character, then on another, and again on a third, and so on. The clues are patiently followed, one after another, and found to lead nowhere. There is feverish activity, but no result. All this is wearisome to the reader and is, in my opinion, bad technique. My practice is to avoid false clues entirely and to depend on keeping the reader occupied with the narrative. If the ice should become uncomfortably thin, a dramatic episode will distract the reader's attention and carry him safely over the perilous spot. Devices to confuse and mislead the reader are bad practice. They deaden the interest, and they are quite unnecessary; the reader can always be trusted to mislead himself, no matter how plainly the data are given. Some years ago I devised, as an experiment, an inverted detective story in two parts [*"The Case of Oscar Brodski"*]. The first part was a minute and detailed description of a crime, setting forth the antecedents, motives, and all attendant circumstances. The reader had seen the crime committed, knew all about the criminal, and was in possession of all the facts. It would have seemed that there was nothing left to tell. But I calculated that the reader would be so occupied with the crime that he would overlook the evidence. And so it turned out. The second part, which described the investigation of the crime, had to most readers the effect of new matter. All the facts were known; but their evidential quality had not been recognized.

This failure of the reader to perceive the evidential value of facts is the foundation on which detective fiction is built. It may generally be taken that the author may exhibit his facts fearlessly provided only that he exhibits them separately and unconnected. And the more boldly he displays the data, the greater will be the intellectual interest of the story. For the tacit understanding of the author with the reader is that the problem is susceptible of solution by the latter by reasoning from the facts given; and such solution should be actually possible. Then the data should be produced as early in the story as is practicable. The reader should have a body of evidence to consider while the tale is telling. The production of a leading fact near the end of the book is unfair to the reader, while the introduction of capital evidence—such as that of an eye-witness—at the extreme end is radically bad technique, amounting to a breach of the implied covenant with the reader.

3. The "discovery," i.e., the announcement by the investigator of the conclusion reached by him, brings the inquiry formally to an end. It is totally inadmissible thereafter to introduce any new matter. The reader is given to understand that he now has before him the evidence and the conclusion, and that the latter is contained in the former. If it is not, the construction has failed, and the reader has been cheated. The "discovery" will usually come as a surprise to the reader and will thus form the dramatic climax of the story, but it is to be noted that the dramatic quality of the climax is strictly



dependent on the intellectual conviction which accompanies it. This is frequently overlooked, especially by general novelists who experiment in detective fiction. In their eagerness to surprise the reader, they forget that he has also to be convinced. A literary friend of mine, commenting on a particularly conclusive detective story, declared that "the rigid demonstration destroyed the artistic effect." But the rigid demonstration was the artistic effect. The entire dramatic effect of the climax of a detective story is due to the sudden recognition by the reader of the significance of a number of hitherto uncomprehended facts; or if such recognition should not immediately occur, the effect of the climax becomes suspended until it is completed in the final stage.

4. Proof of the solution. This is peculiar to "detective" construction. In all ordinary novels, the climax, or denouement, finishes the story, and any continuation is anti-climax. But a detective story has a dual character. There is the story, with its dramatic interest, and enclosed in it, so to speak, is the logical problem; and the climax of the former may leave the latter apparently unsolved. It is then the duty of the author, through the medium of the investigator, to prove the solution by an analysis and exposition of the evidence. He has to demonstrate to the reader that the conclusion emerged naturally and reasonably from the facts known to him, and that no other conclusion was possible.

If it is satisfactorily done, this is to the critical reader usually the most interesting part of the book; and it is the part by which he—very properly—judges the quality of the whole work. Too often it yields nothing but disappointment and a sense of anticlimax. The author is unable to solve his own problem. Acting on the pernicious advice of the pilot in the old song to "Fear not, but trust in Providence," he has piled up his mysteries in the hope of being able to find a plausible explanation; and now, when he comes to settle his account with the reader, his logical assets are nil. What claims to be a demonstration turns out to be a mere specious attempt to persuade the reader that the inexplicable has been explained; that the fortunate guesses of an inspired investigator are examples of genuine reasoning. A typical instance of this kind of anti-climax occurs in Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" when Dupin follows the unspoken thoughts of his companion and joins in at the appropriate moment. The reader is astonished and marvels how such an apparently impossible feat could have been performed. Then Dupin explains; but his explanation is totally unconvincing, and the impossibility remains. The reader has had his astonishment for nothing. It cannot be too much emphasized that to the critical reader the quality in a detective story which takes precedence of all others is conclusiveness. It is the quality which, above all others, yields that intellectual satisfaction that the reader seeks; and it is the quality which is the most difficult to attain, and which costs more than any other in care and labour to the author.

---

---

## MEET DR JOHN EVELYN THORNDYKE

A FASCINATING INSIGHT INTO THE CHARACTER WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR

MY subject is Dr. John Thorndyke, the hero or central character of most of my detective stories. So I'll give you a short account of his real origin; of the way in which he did in fact come into existence.

To discover the origin of John Thorndyke I have to reach back into the past for at least fifty years, to the time when I was a medical student preparing for my final examination. For reasons which I need not go into I gave rather special attention to the legal aspects of medicine and the medical aspects of law. And as I read my text-books, and especially the illustrative cases, I was profoundly impressed by their dramatic quality. Medical jurisprudence deals with the human body in its relation to all kinds of legal problems. Thus its subject matter includes all sorts of crime against the person and all sorts of violent death and bodily injury: hanging, drowning, poisons and their effects, problems of suicide and homicide, of personal identity and survivorship, and a host of other problems of the highest dramatic possibilities, though not always quite presentable for the purposes of fiction. And the reported cases which were given in illustration were often crime stories of the most thrilling interest. Cases of disputed identity such as the Tichbourne Case, famous poisoning cases such

as the Rugeley Case and that of Madeline Smith, cases of mysterious disappearance or the detection of long-forgotten crimes such as that of Eugene Aram; all these, described and analysed with strict scientific accuracy, formed the matter of Medical Jurisprudence which thrilled me as I read and made an indelible impression.

But it produced no immediate results. I had to pass my examinations and get my diploma, and then look out for the means of earning my living. So all this curious lore was put away for the time being in the pigeon-holes of my mind—which Dr. Freud would call the Unconscious—not forgotten, but ready to come to the surface when the need for it should arise. And there it reposed for some twenty years, until failing health compelled me to abandon medical practice and take to literature as a profession.

It was then that my old studies recurred to my mind. A fellow doctor, Conan Doyle, had made a brilliant and well-deserved success by the creation of the immortal Sherlock Holmes. Considering that achievement, I asked myself whether it might not be possible to devise a detective story of a slightly different kind; one based on the science of Medical Jurisprudence, in which, by the sacrifice of a certain amount of dramatic effect, one could keep entirely within the facts of real life, with nothing fictitious excepting the persons and the events. I came to the conclusion that it was, and began to turn the idea over in my mind.

But I think that the influence which finally determined the character of my detective stories, and incidentally the character of John Thorndyke, operated when I was working at the Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital. There I used to take the patients into the dark room, examine their eyes with the ophthalmoscope, estimate the errors of refraction, and construct an experimental pair of spectacles to correct those errors. When a perfect correction had been arrived at, the formula for it was embodied in a prescription which was sent to the optician who made the permanent spectacles.

Now when I was writing those prescriptions it was borne in on me that in many cases, especially the more complex, the formula for the spectacles, and consequently the spectacles themselves, furnished an infallible record of personal identity. If, for instance, such a pair of spectacles should have been found in a railway carriage, and the maker of those spectacles could be found, there would be practically conclusive evidence that a particular person had travelled by that train. About that time I drafted out a story based on a pair of spectacles, which was published some years later under the title of *The Mystery of 31 New Inn*, and the construction of that story determined, as I have said, not only the general character of my future work but of the hero around whom the plots were to be woven. But that story remained for some years in cold storage. My first published detective novel was *The Red Thumb-mark*, and in that book we may consider that John Thorndyke was born. And in passing on to describe him I may as well explain how and why he came to be the kind of person that he is.

I may begin by saying that he was not modelled after any real person. He was deliberately created to play a certain part, and the idea that was in my mind was that he should be such a person as would be likely and suitable to occupy such a position in real life. As he was to be a medico-legal expert, he had to be a doctor and a fully trained lawyer. On the physical side I endowed him with every kind of natural advantage. He is exceptionally tall, strong, and athletic because those qualities are useful in his vocation. For the same reason he has acute eyesight and hearing and considerable general manual skill, as every doctor ought to have. In appearance he is handsome and of an imposing presence, with a symmetrical face of the classical type and a Grecian nose. And here I may remark that his distinguished appearance is not merely a concession to my personal taste but is also a protest against the monsters of ugliness whom some detective writers have evolved.

These are quite opposed to natural truth. In real life a first-class man of any kind usually tends to be a good-looking man.

Mentally, Thorndyke is quite normal. He has no gifts of intuition or other supernormal mental qualities. He is just a highly intellectual man of great and varied knowledge with exceptionally acute reasoning powers and endowed with that invaluable asset, a scientific imagination (by a scientific imagination I mean that special faculty which marks the born investigator; the capacity to perceive the essential nature of a problem before the detailed evidence comes into sight). But he arrives at his conclusions by ordinary reasoning, which the reader can follow when he has been supplied with the facts; though the intricacy of the train of reasoning may at times call for an exposition at the end of the investigation.

Thorndyke has no eccentricities or oddities which might detract from the dignity of an eminent professional man, unless one excepts an unnatural liking for Trichinopoly cheroots. In manner he is quiet, reserved and self-contained, and rather markedly secretive, but of a kindly nature, though not sentimental, and addicted to occasional touches of dry humour. That is how Thorndyke appears to me.

As to his age. When he made his first bow to the reading public from the doorway of Number 4 King's Bench Walk he was between thirty-five and forty. As that was thirty years ago, he should now be over sixty-five. But he isn't. If I have to let him "grow old along with me" I need not saddle him with the infirmities of age, and I can (in his case) put the brake on the passing years. Probably he is not more than fifty after all!

Now a few words as to how Thorndyke goes to work. His methods are rather different from those of the detectives of the Sherlock Holmes school. They are more technical and more specialized. He is an investigator of crime but he is not a detective. The technique of Scotland Yard would be neither suitable nor possible to him. He is a medico-legal expert, and his methods are those of medico-legal science. In the investigation of a crime there are two entirely different methods of approach. One consists in the careful and laborious examination of a vast mass of small and commonplace detail: inquiring into the movements of suspected and other persons; interrogating witnesses and checking their statements particularly as to times and places; tracing missing persons, and so forth—the aim being to accumulate a great body of circumstantial

evidence which will ultimately disclose the solution of the problem. It is an admirable method, as the success of our police proves, and it is used with brilliant effect by at least one of our contemporary detective writers. But it is essentially a police method.

The other method consists in the search for some fact of high evidential value which can be demonstrated by physical methods and which constitutes conclusive proof of some important point. This method also is used by the police in suitable cases. Finger-prints are examples of this kind of evidence, and another instance is furnished by the Gutteridge murder. Here the microscopical examination of a cartridge-case proved conclusively that the murder had been committed with a particular revolver; a fact which incriminated the owner of that revolver and led to his conviction.

This is Thorndyke's procedure. It consists in the interrogation of things rather than persons; of the ascertainment of physical facts which can be made visible to eyes other than his own. And the facts which he seeks tend to be those which are apparent only to the trained eye of the medical practitioner.

I feel that I ought to say a few words about Thorndyke's two satellites, Jervis and Polton. As to the former, he is just the traditional narrator proper to this type of story. Some of my readers have complained that Dr. Jervis is rather slow in the uptake. But that is precisely his function. He is the expert misunderstander. His job is to observe and record all the facts, and to fail completely to perceive their significance. Thereby he gives the reader all the necessary information, and he affords Thorndyke the opportunity to expound its bearing on the case.

Polton is in a slightly different category. Although he is not drawn from any real person, he is associated in my mind with two actual individuals. One is a Mr. Pollard, who was the laboratory assistant in the hospital museum when I was a student, and who gave me many a valuable tip in matters of technique, and who, I hope, is still to the good. The other was a watch- and clock-maker of the name of Parsons —familiarily known as Uncle Parsons—who had premises in a basement near the Royal Exchange, and who was a man of boundless ingenuity and technical resource. Both of these I regard as collateral relatives, so to speak, of Nathaniel Polton. But his personality is not like either. His crinkly countenance is strictly his own copyright.

To return to Thorndyke, his rather technical methods have, for the purposes of fiction, advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that his facts are demonstrably true, and often they are intrinsically interesting. The disadvantage is that they are frequently not matters of common knowledge, so that the reader may fail to recognize them or grasp their significance until they are explained. But this is the case with all classes of fiction. There is no type of character or story that can be made sympathetic and acceptable to every kind of reader. The personal equation affects the reading as well as the writing of a story



## THE RED THUMB MARK

---

### I. — MY LEARNED BROTHER

“CONFLAGRATAM An° 1677. Fabricatam An° 1698. Richardo Powell Armiger Thesaurar.” The words, set in four panels, which formed a frieze beneath the pediment of a fine brick portico, summarised the history of one of the tall houses at the upper end of King’s Bench Walk and as I, somewhat absently, read over the inscription, my attention was divided between admiration of the exquisitely finished carved brickwork and the quiet dignity of the building, and an effort to reconstitute the dead and gone Richard Powell, and the stirring times in which he played his part.

I was about to turn away when the empty frame of the portico became occupied by a figure, and one so appropriate, in its wig and obsolete habiliments, to the old-world surroundings that it seemed to complete the picture, and I lingered idly to look at it. The barrister had halted in the doorway to turn over a sheaf of papers that he held in his hand, and, as he replaced the red tape which bound them together, he looked up and our eyes met. For a moment we regarded one another with the incurious gaze that casual strangers bestow on one another; then there was a flash of mutual recognition; the impassive and rather severe face of the lawyer softened into a genial smile, and the figure, detaching itself from its frame, came down the steps with a hand extended in cordial greeting.

“My dear Jervis,” he exclaimed, as we clasped hands warmly, “this is a great and delightful surprise. How often have I thought of my old comrade and wondered if I should ever see him again, and lo! here he is, thrown up on the sounding beach of the Inner Temple, like the proverbial bread cast upon the waters.”

“Your surprise, Thorndyke, is nothing to mine,” I replied, “for your bread has at least returned as bread; whereas I am in the position of a man who, having cast his bread upon the waters, sees it return in the form of a buttered muffin or a Bath bun. I left a respectable medical practitioner and I find him transformed into a bewigged and begowned limb of the law.”

Thorndyke laughed at the comparison.

“Likened not your old friend unto a Bath bun,” said he. “Say, rather, that you left him a chrysalis and come back to find him a butterfly. But the change is not so great as you think. Hippocrates is only hiding under the gown of Solon, as you will understand when I explain my metamorphosis; and that I will do this very evening, if you have no engagement.”

“I am one of the unemployed at present,” I said, “and quite at your service.”

“Then come round to my chambers at seven,” said Thorndyke, “and we will have a chop and a pint of claret together and exchange autobiographies. I am due in court in a few minutes.”

“Do you reside within that noble old portico?” I asked.

“No,” replied Thorndyke. “I often wish I did. It would add several inches to one’s stature to feel that the mouth of one’s burrow was graced with a Latin inscription for admiring strangers to ponder over. No; my chambers are some doors further down—number 6A”—and he turned to point out the house as we crossed towards Crown Office Row.

At the top of Middle Temple Lane we parted, Thorndyke taking his way with fluttering gown towards the Law Courts, while I directed my steps westward towards Adam Street, the chosen haunt of the medical agent.

The soft-voiced bell of the Temple clock was telling out the hour of seven in muffled accents (as though it apologised for breaking the studious silence) as I emerged from the archway of Mitre Court and turned into King’s Bench Walk.

The paved footway was empty save for a single figure, pacing slowly before the doorway of number 6A, in which, though the wig had now given place to a felt hat and the gown to a jacket, I had no difficulty in recognising my friend.

“Punctual to the moment, as of old,” said he, meeting me half-way. “What a blessed virtue is punctuality, even in small things. I have just been taking the air in Fountain Court, and will now introduce you to my chambers. Here is my humble retreat.”

We passed in through the common entrance and ascended the stone stairs to the first floor, where we were confronted by a massive door, above which my friend’s name was written in white letters.

“Rather a forbidding exterior,” remarked Thorndyke, as he inserted the latchkey, “but it is homely enough inside.”

The heavy door swung outwards and disclosed a baize-covered inner door, which Thorndyke pushed open and held for me to pass in.

“You will find my chambers an odd mixture,” said Thorndyke, “for they combine the attractions of an office, a museum, a laboratory and a workshop.”

“And a restaurant,” added a small, elderly man, who was decanting a bottle of claret by means of a glass syphon: “you forgot that, sir.”

“Yes, I forgot that, Polton,” said Thorndyke, “but I see you have not.” He glanced towards a small table that had been placed near the fire and set out with the requisites for our meal.

"Tell me," said Thorndyke, as we made the initial onslaught on the products of Polton's culinary experiments, "what has been happening to you since you left the hospital six years ago?"

"My story is soon told," I answered, somewhat bitterly. "It is not an uncommon one. My funds ran out, as you know, rather unexpectedly. When I had paid my examination and registration fees the coffer was absolutely empty, and though, no doubt, a medical diploma contains—to use Johnson's phrase—the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, there is a vast difference in practice between the potential and the actual. I have, in fact, been earning a subsistence, sometimes as an assistant, sometimes as a *locum tenens*. Just now I've got no work to do, and so have entered my name on Turcival's list of eligibles."

Thorndyke pursed up his lips and frowned.

"It's a wicked shame, Jervis," said he presently, "that a man of your abilities and scientific acquirements should be frittering away his time on odd jobs like some half-qualified wastrel."

"It is," I agreed. "My merits are grossly undervalued by a stiff-necked and obtuse generation. But what would you have, my learned brother? If poverty steps behind you and claps the occulting bushel over your thirty thousand candle-power luminary, your brilliancy is apt to be obscured."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," grunted Thorndyke, and he remained for a time in deep thought.

"And now," said I, "let us have your promised explanation. I am positively frizzling with curiosity to know what chain of circumstances has converted John Evelyn Thorndyke from a medical practitioner into a luminary of the law."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently.

"The fact is," said he, "that no such transformation has occurred. John Evelyn Thorndyke is still a medical practitioner."

"What, in a wig and gown!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, a mere sheep in wolf's clothing," he replied. "I will tell you how it has come about. After you left the hospital, six years ago, I stayed on, taking up any small appointments that were going—assistant demonstrator—or curatorships and such like—hung about the chemical and physical laboratories, the museum and post mortem room, and meanwhile took my M.D. and D.Sc. Then I got called to the bar in the hope of getting a coronership, but soon after this, old Stedman retired unexpectedly—you remember Stedman, the lecturer on medical jurisprudence—and I put in for the vacant post. Rather to my surprise, I was appointed lecturer, whereupon I dismissed the coronership from my mind, took my present chambers and sat down to wait for anything that might come."

"And what has come?" I asked.

"Why, a very curious assortment of miscellaneous practice," he replied. "At first I only got an occasional analysis in a doubtful poisoning case, but, by degrees, my sphere of influence has extended until it now includes all cases in which a special knowledge of medicine or physical science can be brought to bear upon law."

"But you plead in court, I observe," said I.

"Very seldom," he replied. "More usually I appear in the character of that *bête noir* of judges and counsel—the scientific witness. But in most instances I do not appear at all; I merely direct investigations, arrange and analyse the results, and prime the counsel with facts and suggestions for cross-examination."

"A good deal more interesting than acting as understudy for an absent g.p.," said I, a little enviously. "But you deserve to succeed, for you were always a deuce of a worker, to say nothing of your capabilities."

"Yes, I worked hard," replied Thorndyke, "and I work hard still; but I have my hours of labour and my hours of leisure, unlike you poor devils of general practitioners, who are liable to be dragged away from the dinner table or roused out of your first sleep by—confound it all! who can that be?"

For at this moment, as a sort of commentary on his self-congratulation, there came a smart rapping at the outer door.

"Must see who it is, I suppose," he continued, "though one expects people to accept the hint of a closed oak."

He strode across the room and flung open the door with an air of by no means gracious inquiry.

"It's rather late for a business call," said an apologetic voice outside, "but my client was anxious to see you without delay."

"Come in, Mr. Lawley," said Thorndyke, rather stiffly, and, as he held the door open, the two visitors entered. They were both men—one middle-aged, rather foxy in appearance and of a typically legal aspect, and the other a fine, handsome young fellow of very prepossessing exterior, though at present rather pale and wild-looking, and evidently in a state of profound agitation.

"I am afraid," said the latter, with a glance at me and the dinner table, "that our visit—for which I am alone responsible—is a most unseasonable one. If we are really inconveniencing you, Dr. Thorndyke, pray tell us, and my business must wait."

Thorndyke had cast a keen and curious glance at the young man, and he now replied in a much more genial tone—

"I take it that your business is of a kind that will not wait, and as to inconveniencing us, why, my friend and I are both doctors, and, as you are aware, no doctor expects to call any part of the twenty-four hours his own unreservedly."

I had risen on the entrance of the two strangers, and now proposed to take a walk on the Embankment and return later, but the young man interrupted me.

"Pray don't go away on my account," he said. "The facts that I am about to lay before Dr. Thorndyke will be known to all the world by this time to-morrow, so there is no occasion for any show of secrecy."

"In that case," said Thorndyke, "let us draw our chairs up to the fire and fall to business forthwith. We had just finished our dinner and were waiting for the coffee, which I hear my man bringing down at this moment."

We accordingly drew up our chairs, and when Polton had set the coffee on the table and retired, the lawyer plunged into the matter without preamble.

---

## II. — THE SUSPECT

"I HAD better," said he, "give you a general outline of the case as it presents itself to the legal mind, and then my client, Mr. Reuben Hornby, can fill in the details if necessary, and answer any questions that you may wish to put to him."

"Mr. Reuben occupies a position of trust in the business of his uncle, John Hornby, who is a gold and silver refiner and dealer in precious metals generally. There is a certain amount of outside assay work carried on in the establishment, but the main business consists in the testing and refining of samples of gold sent from certain mines in South Africa."

"About five years ago Mr. Reuben and his cousin Walter—another nephew of John Hornby—left school, and both were articled to their uncle, with the view to their ultimately becoming partners in the house; and they have remained with him ever since, occupying, as I have said, positions of considerable responsibility."

"And now for a few words as to how business is conducted in Mr. Hornby's establishment. The samples of gold are handed over at the docks to some accredited representative of the firm—generally either Mr. Reuben or Mr. Walter—who has been despatched to meet the ship, and conveyed either to the bank or to the works according to circumstances. Of course every effort is made to have as little gold as possible on the premises, and the bars are always removed to the bank at the earliest opportunity; but it happens unavoidably that samples of considerable value have often to remain on the premises all night, and so the works are furnished with a large and powerful safe or strong room for their reception. This safe is situated in the private office under the eye of the principal, and, as an additional precaution, the caretaker, who acts as night-watchman, occupies a room directly over the office, and patrols the building periodically through the night."

"Now a very strange thing has occurred with regard to this safe. It happens that one of Mr. Hornby's customers in South Africa is interested in a diamond mine, and, although transactions in precious stones form no part of the business of the house, he has, from time to time, sent parcels of rough diamonds addressed to Mr. Hornby, to be either deposited in the bank or handed on to the diamond brokers."

"A fortnight ago Mr. Hornby was advised that a parcel of stones had been despatched by the *Elmina Castle*, and it appeared that the parcel was an unusually large one and contained stones of exceptional size and value. Under these circumstances Mr. Reuben was sent down to the docks at an early hour in the hope the ship might arrive in time for the stones to be lodged in the bank at once. Unfortunately, however, this was not the case, and the diamonds had to be taken to the works and locked up in the safe."

"Who placed them in the safe?" asked Thorndyke.

"Mr. Hornby himself, to whom Mr. Reuben delivered up the package on his return from the docks."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "and what happened next?"

"Well, on the following morning, when the safe was opened, the diamonds had disappeared."

"Had the place been broken into?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. The place was all locked up as usual, and the caretaker, who had made his accustomed rounds, had heard nothing, and the safe was, outwardly, quite undisturbed. It had evidently been opened with keys and locked again after the stones were removed."

"And in whose custody were the keys of the safe?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Mr. Hornby usually kept the keys himself, but, on occasions, when he was absent from the office, he handed them over to one of his nephews—whichever happened to be in charge at the time. But on this occasion the keys did not go out of his custody from the time when he locked up the safe, after depositing the diamonds in it, to the time when it was opened by him on the following morning."

"And was there anything that tended to throw suspicion upon anyone?" asked Thorndyke.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Lawley, with an uncomfortable glance at his client, "unfortunately there was. It seemed that the person who abstracted the diamonds must have cut or scratched his thumb or finger in some way, for there were two drops of blood on the bottom of the safe and one or two bloody smears on a piece of paper, and, in addition, a remarkably clear imprint of a thumb."

"Also in blood?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes. The thumb had apparently been put down on one of the drops and then, while still wet with blood, had been pressed on the paper in taking hold of it or otherwise."

"Well, and what next?"

"Well," said the lawyer, fidgeting in his chair, "to make a long story short, the thumb-print has been identified as that of Mr. Reuben Hornby."

"Ha!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "The plot thickens with a vengeance. I had better jot down a few notes before you proceed any further."

He took from a drawer a small paper-covered notebook, on the cover of which he wrote "Reuben Hornby," and then, laying the book open on a blotting-pad, which he rested on his knee, he made a few brief notes.

"Now," he said, when he had finished, "with reference to this thumb-print. There is no doubt, I suppose, as to the identification?"

"None whatever," replied Mr. Lawley. "The Scotland Yard people, of course, took possession of the paper, which was handed to the director of the finger-print department for examination and comparison with those in their collection. The report of the experts is that the thumb-print does not agree with any of the thumb-prints of criminals in their possession; that it is a very peculiar one, inasmuch as the ridge-pattern on the bulb of the thumb—which is a remarkably distinct and characteristic one—is crossed by the scar of a deep cut, rendering identification easy and infallible; that it agrees in every respect with the thumb-print of Mr. Reuben Hornby, and is, in fact, his thumb-print beyond any possible doubt."

"Is there any possibility," asked Thorndyke, "that the paper bearing the thumb-print could have been introduced by any person?"

"No," answered the lawyer. "It is quite impossible. The paper on which the mark was found was a leaf from Mr. Hornby's memorandum book. He had pencilled on it some particulars relating to the diamonds, and laid it on the parcel before he closed up the safe."

"Was anyone present when Mr. Hornby opened the safe in the morning?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, he was alone," answered the lawyer. "He saw at a glance that the diamonds were missing, and then he observed the paper with the thumb-mark on it, on which he closed and locked the safe and sent for the police."

"Is it not rather odd that the thief did not notice the thumb-mark, since it was so distinct and conspicuous?"

"No, I think not," answered Mr. Lawley. "The paper was lying face downwards on the bottom of the safe, and it was only when he picked it up and turned it over that Mr. Hornby discovered the thumb-print. Apparently the thief had taken hold of the parcel, with the paper on it, and the paper had afterwards dropped off and fallen with the marked surface downwards—probably when the parcel was transferred to the other hand."

"You mentioned," said Thorndyke, "that the experts at Scotland Yard have identified this thumb-mark as that of Mr. Reuben Hornby. May I ask how they came to have the opportunity of making the comparison?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Lawley. "Thereby hangs a very curious tale of coincidences. The police, of course, when they found that there was so simple a means of identification as a thumb-mark, wished to take thumb-prints of all the employees in the works; but this Mr. Hornby refused to sanction—rather quixotically, as it seems to me—saying that he would not allow his nephews to be subjected to such an indignity. Now it was, naturally, these nephews in whom the police were chiefly interested, seeing that they alone had had the handling of the keys, and considerable pressure was brought to bear upon Mr. Hornby to have the thumb-prints taken."

"However, he was obdurate, scouting the idea of any suspicion attaching to either of the gentlemen in whom he had reposed such complete confidence and whom he had known all their lives, and so the matter would probably have remained a mystery but for a very odd circumstance."

"You may have seen on the bookstalls and in shop windows an appliance called a 'Thumbograph,' or some such name, consisting of a small book of blank paper for collecting the thumb-prints of one's friends, together with an inking pad."

"I have seen those devices of the Evil One," said Thorndyke, "in fact, I have one, which I bought at Charing Cross Station."

"Well, it seems that some months ago Mrs. Hornby, the wife of John Hornby, purchased one of these toys—"

"As a matter of fact," interrupted Reuben, "it was my cousin Walter who bought the thing and gave it to her."

"Well, that is not material," said Mr. Lawley (though I observed that Thorndyke made a note of the fact in his book); "at any rate, Mrs. Hornby became possessed of one of these appliances and proceeded to fill it with the thumb-prints of her friends, including her two nephews. Now it happened that the detective in charge of this case called yesterday at Mr. Hornby's house when the latter was absent from home, and took the opportunity of urging her to induce her husband to consent to have the thumb-prints of her nephews taken for the inspection of the experts at Scotland Yard. He pointed out that the procedure was really necessary, not only in the interests of justice but in the interests of the young men themselves, who were regarded with considerable suspicion by the police, which suspicion would be completely removed if it could be shown by actual comparison that the thumb-print could not have been made by either of them. Moreover, it



seemed that both the young men had expressed their willingness to have the test applied, but had been forbidden by their uncle. Then Mrs. Hornby had a brilliant idea. She suddenly remembered the 'Thumbograph,' and thinking to set the question at rest once for all, fetched the little book and showed it to the detective. It contained the prints of both thumbs of Mr. Reuben (among others), and, as the detective had with him a photograph of the incriminating mark, the comparison was made then and there; and you may imagine Mrs. Hornby's horror and amazement when it was made clear that the print of her nephew Reuben's left thumb corresponded in every particular with the thumb-print that was found in the safe.

"At this juncture Mr. Hornby arrived on the scene and was, of course, overwhelmed with consternation at the turn events had taken. He would have liked to let the matter drop and make good the loss of the diamonds out of his own funds, but, as that would have amounted practically to compounding a felony, he had no choice but to prosecute. As a result, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Mr. Reuben, and was executed this morning, and my client was taken forthwith to Bow Street and charged with the robbery."

"Was any evidence taken?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. Only evidence of arrest. The prisoner is remanded for a week, bail having been accepted in two sureties of five hundred pounds each."

Thorndyke was silent for a space after the conclusion of the narrative. Like me, he was evidently not agreeably impressed by the lawyer's manner, which seemed to take his client's guilt for granted, a position indeed not entirely without excuse having regard to the circumstances of the case.

"What have you advised your client to do?" Thorndyke asked presently.

"I have recommended him to plead guilty and throw himself on the clemency of the court as a first offender. You must see for yourself that there is no defence possible."

The young man flushed crimson, but made no remark.

"But let us be clear how we stand," said Thorndyke. "Are we defending an innocent man or are we endeavouring to obtain a light sentence for a man who admits that he is guilty?"

Mr. Lawley shrugged his shoulders.

"That question can be best answered by our client himself," said he.

Thorndyke directed an inquiring glance at Reuben Hornby, remarking—

"You are not called upon to incriminate yourself in any way, Mr. Hornby, but I must know what position you intend to adopt."

Here I again proposed to withdraw, but Reuben interrupted me.

"There is no need for you to go away, Dr. Jervis," he said. "My position is that I did not commit this robbery and that I know nothing whatever about it or about the thumb-print that was found in the safe. I do not, of course, expect you to believe me in the face of the overwhelming evidence against me, but I do, nevertheless, declare in the most solemn manner before God, that I am absolutely innocent of this crime and have no knowledge of it whatever."

"Then I take it that you did not plead 'guilty'?" said Thorndyke.

"Certainly not; and I never will," replied Reuben hotly.

"You would not be the first innocent man, by very many, who has entered that plea," remarked Mr. Lawley. "It is often the best policy, when the defence is hopelessly weak."

"It is a policy that will not be adopted by me," rejoined Reuben. "I may be, and probably shall be, convicted and sentenced, but I shall continue to maintain my innocence, whatever happens. Do you think," he added, turning to Thorndyke, "that you can undertake my defence on that assumption?"

"It is the only assumption on which I should agree to undertake the case," replied Thorndyke.

"And—if I may ask the question—" pursued Reuben anxiously, "do you find it possible to conceive that I may really be innocent?"

"Certainly I do," Thorndyke replied, on which I observed Mr. Lawley's eyebrows rise perceptibly. "I am a man of facts, not an advocate, and if I found it impossible to entertain the hypothesis of your innocence, I should not be willing to expend time and energy in searching for evidence to prove it. Nevertheless," he continued, seeing the light of hope break out on the face of the unfortunate young man, "I must impress upon you that the case presents enormous difficulties and that we must be prepared to find them insuperable in spite of all our efforts."

"I expect nothing but a conviction," replied Reuben in a calm and resolute voice, "and can face it like a man if only you do not take my guilt for granted, but give me a chance, no matter how small, of making a defence."

"Everything shall be done that I am capable of doing," said Thorndyke; "that I can promise you. The long odds against us are themselves a spur to endeavour, as far as I am concerned. And now, let me ask you, have you any cuts or scratches on your fingers?"

Reuben Hornby held out both his hands for my colleague's inspection, and I noticed that they were powerful and

shapely, like the hands of a skilled craftsman, though faultlessly kept. Thorndyke set on the table a large condenser such as is used for microscopic work, and taking his client's hand, brought the bright spot of light to bear on each finger in succession, examining their tips and the parts around the nails with the aid of a pocket lens.

"A fine, capable hand, this," said he, regarding the member approvingly, as he finished his examination, "but I don't perceive any trace of a scar on either the right or left. Will you go over them, Jervis? The robbery took place a fortnight ago, so there has been time for a small cut or scratch to heal and disappear entirely. Still, the matter is worth noting."

He handed me the lens and I scrutinised every part of each hand without being able to detect the faintest trace of any recent wound.

"There is one other matter that must be attended to before you go," said Thorndyke, pressing the electric bell-push by his chair. "I will take one or two prints of the left thumb for my own information."

In response to the summons, Polton made his appearance from some lair unknown to me, but presumably the laboratory, and, having received his instructions, retired, and presently returned carrying a box, which he laid on the table. From this receptacle Thorndyke drew forth a bright copper plate mounted on a slab of hard wood, a small printer's roller, a tube of finger-print ink, and a number of cards with very white and rather glazed surfaces.

"Now, Mr. Hornby," said he, "your hands, I see, are beyond criticism as to cleanliness, but we will, nevertheless, give the thumb a final polish."

Accordingly he proceeded to brush the bulb of the thumb with a well-soaked badger-hair nail-brush, and, having rinsed it in water, dried it with a silk handkerchief, and gave it a final rub on a piece of chamois leather. The thumb having been thus prepared, he squeezed out a drop of the thick ink on to the copper plate and spread it out with the roller, testing the condition of the film from time to time by touching the plate with the tip of his finger and taking an impression on one of the cards.

When the ink had been rolled out to the requisite thinness, he took Reuben's hand and pressed the thumb lightly but firmly on to the inked plate; then, transferring the thumb to one of the cards, which he directed me to hold steady on the table, he repeated the pressure, when there was left on the card a beautifully sharp and clear impression of the bulb of the thumb, the tiny papillary ridges being shown with microscopic distinctness, and even the mouths of the sweat glands, which appeared as rows of little white dots on the black lines of the ridges. This manoeuvre was repeated a dozen times on two of the cards, each of which thus received six impressions. Thorndyke then took one or two rolled prints, *i.e.* prints produced by rolling the thumb first on the inked slab and then on the card, by which means a much larger portion of the surface of the thumb was displayed in a single print.

"And now," said Thorndyke, "that we may be furnished with all the necessary means of comparison, we will take an impression in blood."

The thumb was accordingly cleansed and dried afresh, when Thorndyke, having pricked his own thumb with a needle, squeezed out a good-sized drop of blood on to a card.

"There," said he, with a smile, as he spread the drop out with the needle into a little shallow pool, "it is not every lawyer who is willing to shed his blood in the interests of his client."

He proceeded to make a dozen prints as before on two cards, writing a number with his pencil opposite each print as he made it.

"We are now," said he, as he finally cleansed his client's thumb, "furnished with the material for a preliminary investigation, and if you will now give me your address, Mr. Hornby, we may consider our business concluded for the present. I must apologise to you, Mr. Lawley, for having detained you so long with these experiments."

The lawyer had, in fact, been viewing the proceedings with hardly concealed impatience, and he now rose with evident relief that they were at an end.

"I have been highly interested," he said mendaciously, "though I confess I do not quite fathom your intentions. And, by the way, I should like to have a few words with you on another matter, if Mr. Reuben would not mind waiting for me in the square just a few minutes."

"Not at all," said Reuben, who was, I perceived, in no way deceived by the lawyer's pretence. "Don't hurry on my account; my time is my own—at present." He held out his hand to Thorndyke, who grasped it cordially.

"Good-bye, Mr. Hornby," said the latter. "Do not be unreasonably sanguine, but at the same time, do not lose heart. Keep your wits about you and let me know at once if anything occurs to you that may have a bearing on the case."

The young man then took his leave, and, as the door closed after him, Mr. Lawley turned towards Thorndyke.

"I thought I had better have a word with you alone," he said, "just to hear what line you propose to take up, for I confess that your attitude has puzzled me completely."

"What line would you propose?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well," said the lawyer, with a shrug of his shoulders, "the position seems to be this: our young friend has stolen a parcel of diamonds and has been found out; at least, that is how the matter presents itself to me."

"That is not how it presents itself to me," said Thorndyke drily. "He may have taken the diamonds or he may not. I have no means of judging until I have sifted the evidence and acquired a few more facts. This I hope to do in the course of the next day or two, and I suggest that we postpone the consideration of our plan of campaign until I have seen what line of defence it is possible to adopt."

"As you will," replied the lawyer, taking up his hat, "but I am afraid you are encouraging the young rogue to entertain hopes that will only make his fall the harder—to say nothing of our own position. We don't want to make ourselves ridiculous in court, you know."

"I don't, certainly," agreed Thorndyke. "However, I will look into the matter and communicate with you in the course of a day or two."

He stood holding the door open as the lawyer descended the stairs, and when the footsteps at length died away, he closed it sharply and turned to me with an air of annoyance.

"The 'young rogue,'" he remarked, "does not appear to me to have been very happy in his choice of a solicitor. By the way, Jervis, I understand you are out of employment just now?"

"That is so," I answered.

"Would you care to help me—as a matter of business, of course—to work up this case? I have a lot of other work on hand and your assistance would be of great value to me."

I said, with great truth, that I should be delighted.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "come round to breakfast to-morrow and we will settle the terms, and you can commence your duties at once. And now let us light our pipes and finish our yarns as though agitated clients and thick-headed solicitors had no existence."

---

### III. — A LADY IN THE CASE

WHEN I arrived at Thorndyke's chambers on the following morning, I found my friend already hard at work. Breakfast was laid at one end of the table, while at the other stood a microscope of the pattern used for examining plate-cultures of micro-organisms, on the wide stage of which was one of the cards bearing six thumb-prints in blood. A condenser threw a bright spot of light on the card, which Thorndyke had been examining when I knocked, as I gathered from the position of the chair, which he now pushed back against the wall.

"I see you have commenced work on our problem," I remarked as, in response to a double ring of the electric bell, Polton entered with the materials for our repast.

"Yes," answered Thorndyke. "I have opened the campaign, supported, as usual, by my trusty chief-of-staff; eh! Polton?"

The little man, whose intellectual, refined countenance and dignified bearing seemed oddly out of character with the tea-tray that he carried, smiled proudly, and, with a glance of affectionate admiration at my friend, replied—

"Yes, sir. We haven't been letting the grass grow under our feet. There's a beautiful negative washing upstairs and a bromide enlargement too, which will be mounted and dried by the time you have finished your breakfast."

"A wonderful man that, Jervis," my friend observed as his assistant retired. "Looks like a rural dean or a chancery judge, and was obviously intended by Nature to be a professor of physics. As an actual fact he was first a watchmaker, then a maker of optical instruments, and now he is mechanical factotum to a medical jurist. He is my right-hand, is Polton; takes an idea before you have time to utter it—but you will make his more intimate acquaintance by-and-by."

"Where did you pick him up?" I asked.

"He was an in-patient at the hospital when I first met him, miserably ill and broken, a victim of poverty and undeserved misfortune. I gave him one or two little jobs, and when I found what class of man he was I took him permanently into my service. He is perfectly devoted to me, and his gratitude is as boundless as it is uncalled for."

"What are the photographs he was referring to?" I asked.

"He is making an enlarged *facsimile* of one of the thumb-prints on bromide paper and a negative of the same size in case we want the print repeated."

"You evidently have some expectation of being able to help poor Hornby," said I, "though I cannot imagine how you propose to go to work. To me his case seems as hopeless a one as it is possible to conceive. One doesn't like to condemn him, but yet his innocence seems almost unthinkable."

"It does certainly look like a hopeless case," Thorndyke agreed, "and I see no way out of it at present. But I make it a rule, in all cases, to proceed on the strictly classical lines of inductive inquiry—collect facts, make hypotheses, test them and seek for verification. And I always endeavour to keep a perfectly open mind."

"Now, in the present case, assuming, as we must, that the robbery has actually taken place, there are four conceivable hypotheses: (1) that the robbery was committed by Reuben Hornby; (2) that it was committed by Walter Hornby; (3) that it was committed by John Hornby, or (4) that it was committed by some other person or persons."

"The last hypothesis I propose to disregard for the present and confine myself to the examination of the other three."

"You don't think it possible that Mr. Hornby could have stolen the diamonds out of his own safe?" I exclaimed.

"I incline at present to no one theory of the matter," replied Thorndyke. "I merely state the hypotheses. John Hornby had access to the diamonds, therefore it is possible that he stole them."

"But surely he was responsible to the owners."

"Not in the absence of gross negligence, which the owners would have difficulty in proving. You see, he was what is called a gratuitous bailee, and in such a case no responsibility for loss lies with the bailee unless there has been gross negligence."

"But the thumb-mark, my dear fellow!" I exclaimed. "How can you possibly get over that?"

"I don't know that I can," answered Thorndyke calmly; "but I see you are taking the same view as the police, who persist in regarding a finger-print as a kind of magical touchstone, a final proof, beyond which inquiry need not go. Now, this is an entire mistake. A finger-print is merely a fact—a very important and significant one, I admit—but still a fact, which, like any other fact, requires to be weighed and measured with reference to its evidential value."

"And what do you propose to do first?"

"I shall first satisfy myself that the suspected thumb-print is identical in character with that of Reuben Hornby—of which, however, I have very little doubt, for the finger-print experts may fairly be trusted in their own speciality."

"And then?"

"I shall collect fresh facts, in which I look to you for assistance, and, if we have finished breakfast, I may as well induct you into your new duties."

He rose and rang the bell, and then, fetching from the office four small, paper-covered notebooks, laid them before me on the table.

"One of these books," said he, "we will devote to data concerning Reuben Hornby. You will find out anything you can—anything, mind, no matter how trivial or apparently irrelevant—in any way connected with him and enter it in this book." He wrote on the cover "Reuben Hornby" and passed the book to me. "In this second book you will, in like manner, enter anything that you can learn about Walter Hornby, and, in the third book, data concerning John Hornby. As to the fourth book, you will keep that for stray facts connected with the case but not coming under either of the other headings. And now let us look at the product of Polton's industry."

He took from his assistant's hand a photograph ten inches long by eight broad, done on glazed bromide paper and mounted flatly on stiff card. It showed a greatly magnified *facsimile* of one of the thumb-prints, in which all the minute details, such as the orifices of the sweat glands and trifling irregularities in the ridges, which, in the original, could be seen only with the aid of a lens, were plainly visible to the naked eye. Moreover, the entire print was covered by a network of fine black lines, by which it was divided into a multitude of small squares, each square being distinguished by a number.

"Excellent, Polton," said Thorndyke approvingly; "a most admirable enlargement. You see, Jervis, we have photographed the thumb-print in contact with a numbered micrometer divided into square twelfths of an inch. The magnification is eight diameters, so that the squares are here each two-thirds of an inch in diameter. I have a number of these micrometers of different scales, and I find them invaluable in examining cheques, doubtful signatures and such like. I see you have packed up the camera and the microscope, Polton; have you put in the micrometer?"

"Yes, sir," replied Polton, "and the six-inch objective and the low-power eye-piece. Everything is in the case; and I have put 'special rapid' plates into the dark-slides in case the light should be bad."

"Then we will go forth and beard the Scotland Yard lions in their den," said Thorndyke, putting on his hat and gloves.

"But surely," said I, "you are not going to drag that great microscope to Scotland Yard, when you only want eight diameters. Haven't you a dissecting microscope or some other portable instrument?"

"We have a most delightful instrument of the dissecting type, of Polton's own make—he shall show it to you. But I may have need of a more powerful instrument—and here let me give you a word of warning: whatever you may see me do, make no comments before the officials. We are seeking information, not giving it, you understand."

At this moment the little brass knocker on the inner door—the outer oak being open—uttered a timid and apologetic rattat.

"Who the deuce can that be?" muttered Thorndyke, replacing the microscope on the table. He strode across to the door and opened it somewhat brusquely, but immediately whisked his hat off, and I then perceived a lady standing on the threshold.

"Dr. Thorndyke?" she inquired, and as my colleague bowed, she continued, "I ought to have written to ask for an appointment but the matter is rather urgent—it concerns Mr. Reuben Hornby and I only learned from him this morning that he had consulted you."

"Pray come in," said Thorndyke. "Dr. Jervis and I were just setting out for Scotland Yard on this very business. Let me present you to my colleague, who is working up the case with me."

Our visitor, a tall handsome girl of twenty or thereabouts, returned my bow and remarked with perfect self-possession, "My name is Gibson—Miss Juliet Gibson. My business is of a very simple character and need not detain you many minutes."

She seated herself in the chair that Thorndyke placed for her, and continued in a brisk and business-like manner—

"I must tell you who I am in order to explain my visit to you. For the last six years I have lived with Mr. and Mrs. Hornby, although I am no relation to them. I first came to the house as a sort of companion to Mrs. Hornby, though, as I was only fifteen at the time, I need hardly say that my duties were not very onerous; in fact, I think Mrs. Hornby took me because I was an orphan without the proper means of getting a livelihood, and she had no children of her own.

"Three years ago I came into a little fortune which rendered me independent; but I had been so happy with my kind friends that I asked to be allowed to remain with them, and there I have been ever since in the position of an adopted daughter. Naturally, I have seen a great deal of their nephews, who spend a good part of their time at the house, and I need not tell you that the horrible charge against Reuben has fallen upon us like a thunderbolt. Now, what I have come to say to you is this: I do not believe that Reuben stole those diamonds. It is entirely out of character with all my previous experience of him. I am convinced that he is innocent, and I am prepared to back my opinion."

"In what way?" asked Thorndyke.

"By supplying the sinews of war," replied Miss Gibson. "I understand that legal advice and assistance involves considerable expense."

"I am afraid you are quite correctly informed," said Thorndyke.

"Well, Reuben's pecuniary resources are, I am sure, quite small, so it is necessary for his friends to support him, and I want you to promise me that nothing shall be left undone that might help to prove his innocence if I make myself responsible for any costs that he is unable to meet. I should prefer, of course, not to appear in the matter, if it could be avoided."

"Your friendship is of an eminently practical kind, Miss Gibson," said my colleague, with a smile. "As a matter of fact, the costs are no affair of mine. If the occasion arose for the exercise of your generosity you would have to approach Mr. Reuben's solicitor through the medium of your guardian, Mr. Hornby, and with the consent of the accused. But I do not suppose the occasion will arise, although I am very glad you called, as you may be able to give us valuable assistance in other ways. For example, you might answer one or two apparently impertinent questions."

"I should not consider any question impertinent that you considered necessary to ask," our visitor replied.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I will venture to inquire if any special relations exist between you and Mr. Reuben."

"You look for the inevitable motive in a woman," said Miss Gibson, laughing and flushing a little. "No, there have been no tender passages between Reuben and me. We are merely old and intimate friends; in fact, there is what I may call a tendency in another direction—Walter Hornby."

"Do you mean that you are engaged to Mr. Walter?"

"Oh, no," she replied; "but he has asked me to marry him—he has asked me, in fact, more than once; and I really believe that he has a sincere attachment to me."

She made this latter statement with an odd air, as though the thing asserted were curious and rather incredible, and the tone was evidently noticed by Thorndyke as well as me for he rejoined—

"Of course he has. Why not?"

"Well, you see," replied Miss Gibson, "I have some six hundred a year of my own and should not be considered a bad match for a young man like Walter, who has neither property nor expectations, and one naturally takes that into account. But still, as I have said, I believe he is quite sincere in his professions and not merely attracted by my money."

"I do not find your opinion at all incredible," said Thorndyke, with a smile, "even if Mr. Walter were quite a mercenary young man—which, I take it, he is not."

Miss Gibson flushed very prettily as she replied—

"Oh, pray do not trouble to pay me compliments; I assure you I am by no means insensible of my merits. But with regard to Walter Hornby, I should be sorry to apply the term 'mercenary' to him, and yet—well, I have never met a young man who showed a stronger appreciation of the value of money. He means to succeed in life and I have no doubt he will."

"And do I understand that you refused him?"

"Yes. My feelings towards him are quite friendly, but not of such a nature as to allow me to contemplate marrying him."

"And now, to return for a moment to Mr. Reuben. You have known him for some years?"

"I have known him intimately for six years," replied Miss Gibson.

"And what sort of character do you give him?"

"Speaking from my own observation of him," she replied, "I can say that I have never known him to tell an untruth or do

a dishonourable deed. As to theft, it is merely ridiculous. His habits have always been inexpensive and frugal, he is unambitious to a fault, and in respect to the 'main chance' his indifference is as conspicuous as Walter's keenness. He is a generous man, too, although careful and industrious."

"Thank you, Miss Gibson," said Thorndyke. "We shall apply to you for further information as the case progresses. I am sure that you will help us if you can, and that you can help us if you will, with your clear head and your admirable frankness. If you will leave us your card, Dr. Jervis and I will keep you informed of our prospects and ask for your assistance whenever we need it."

After our fair visitor had departed, Thorndyke stood for a minute or more gazing dreamily into the fire. Then, with a quick glance at his watch, he resumed his hat and, catching up the microscope, handed the camera case to me and made for the door.

"How the time goes!" he exclaimed, as we descended the stairs; "but it hasn't been wasted, Jervis, hey?"

"No, I suppose not," I answered tentatively.

"You suppose not!" he replied. "Why here is as pretty a little problem as you could desire—what would be called in the jargon of the novels, a psychological problem—and it is your business to work it out, too."

"You mean as to Miss Gibson's relations with these two young men?"

Thorndyke nodded.

"Is it any concern of ours?" I asked.

"Certainly it is," he replied. "Everything is a concern of ours at this preliminary stage. We are groping about for a clue and must let nothing pass unscrutinised."

"Well, then, to begin with, she is not wildly infatuated with Walter Hornby, I should say."

"No," agreed Thorndyke, laughing softly; "we may take it that the canny Walter has not inspired a grand passion."

"Then," I resumed, "if I were a suitor for Miss Gibson's hand, I think I would sooner stand in Reuben's shoes than in Walter's."

"There again I am with you," said Thorndyke. "Go on."

"Well," I continued, "our fair visitor conveyed to me the impression that her evident admiration of Reuben's character was tempered by something that she had heard from a third party. That expression of hers, 'speaking from my own observation,' seemed to imply that her observations of him were not in entire agreement with somebody else's."

"Good man!" exclaimed Thorndyke, slapping me on the back, to the undissembled surprise of a policeman whom we were passing; "that is what I had hoped for in you—the capacity to perceive the essential underneath the obvious. Yes; somebody has been saying something about our client, and the thing that we have to find out is, what is it that has been said and who has been saying it. We shall have to make a pretext for another interview with Miss Gibson."

"By the way, why didn't you ask her what she meant?" I asked foolishly.

Thorndyke grinned in my face. "Why didn't you?" he retorted.

"No," I rejoined, "I suppose it is not politic to appear too discerning. Let me carry the microscope for a time; it is making your arm ache, I see."

"Thanks," said he, handing the case to me and rubbing his fingers; "it is rather ponderous."

"I can't make out what you want with this great instrument," I said. "A common pocket lens would do all that you require. Besides, a six-inch objective will not magnify more than two or three diameters."

"Two, with the draw-tube closed," replied Thorndyke, "and the low-power eye-piece brings it up to four. Polton made them both for me for examining cheques, bank-notes and other large objects. But you will understand when you see me use the instrument, and remember, you are to make no comments."

We had by this time arrived at the entrance to Scotland Yard, and were passing up the narrow thoroughfare, when we encountered a uniformed official who halted and saluted my colleague.

"Ah, I thought we should see you here before long, doctor," said he genially. "I heard this morning that you have this thumb-print case in hand."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "I am going to see what can be done for the defence."

"Well," said the officer as he ushered us into the building, "you've given us a good many surprises, but you'll give us a bigger one if you can make anything of this. It's a foregone conclusion, I should say."

"My dear fellow," said Thorndyke, "there is no such thing. You mean that there is a *prima facie* case against the accused."

"Put it that way if you like," replied the officer, with a sly smile, "but I think you will find this about the hardest nut you ever tried your teeth on—and they're pretty strong teeth too, I'll say that. You had better come into Mr. Singleton's office," and he conducted us along a corridor and into a large, barely-furnished room, where we found a sedate-looking gentleman

seated at a large writing table.

"How-d'ye-do, doctor?" said the latter, rising and holding out his hand. "I can guess what you've come for. Want to see that thumb-print, eh?"

"Quite right," answered Thorndyke, and then, having introduced me, he continued: "We were partners in the last game, but we are on opposite sides of the board this time."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Singleton; "and we are going to give you check-mate."

He unlocked a drawer and drew forth a small portfolio, from which he extracted a piece of paper which he laid on the table. It appeared to be a sheet torn from a perforated memorandum block, and bore the pencilled inscription: "Handed in by Reuben at 7.3 p.m., 9.3.01. J. H." At one end was a dark, glossy blood-stain, made by the falling of a good-sized drop, and this was smeared slightly, apparently by a finger or thumb having been pressed on it. Near to it were two or three smaller smears and a remarkably distinct and clean print of a thumb.

Thorndyke gazed intently at the paper for a minute or two, scrutinising the thumb-print and the smears in turn, but making no remark, while Mr. Singleton watched his impassive face with expectant curiosity.

"Not much difficulty in identifying that mark," the official at length observed.

"No," agreed Thorndyke; "it is an excellent impression and a very distinctive pattern, even without the scar."

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Singleton; "the scar makes it absolutely conclusive. You have a print with you, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, and he drew from a wide flap-pocket the enlarged photograph, at the sight of which Mr. Singleton's face broadened into a smile.

"You don't want to put on spectacles to look at that," he remarked; "not that you gain anything by so much enlargement; three diameters is ample for studying the ridge-patterns. I see you have divided it up into numbered squares—not a bad plan; but ours—or rather Galton's, for we borrowed the method from him—is better for this purpose."

He drew from the portfolio a half-plate photograph of the thumb-print which appeared magnified to about four inches in length. The print was marked by a number of figures written minutely with a fine-pointed pen, each figure being placed on an "island," a loop, a bifurcation or some other striking and characteristic portion of the ridge-pattern.

"This system of marking with reference numbers," said Mr. Singleton, "is better than your method of squares, because the numbers are only placed at points which are important for comparison, whereas your squares or the intersections of the lines fall arbitrarily on important or unimportant points according to chance. Besides, we can't let you mark our original, you know, though, of course, we can give you a photograph, which will do as well."

"I was going to ask you to let me take a photograph presently," said Thorndyke.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Singleton, "if you would rather have one of your own taking. I know you don't care to take anything on trust. And now I must get on with my work, if you will excuse me. Inspector Johnson will give you any assistance you may require."

"And see that I don't pocket the original," added Thorndyke, with a smile at the inspector who had shown us in.

"Oh, I'll see to that," said the latter, grinning; and, as Mr. Singleton returned to his table, Thorndyke unlocked the microscope case and drew forth the instrument.

"What, are you going to put it under the microscope?" exclaimed Mr. Singleton, looking round with a broad smile.

"Must do something for my fee, you know," replied Thorndyke, as he set up the microscope and screwed on two extra objectives to the triple nose-piece.

"You observe that there is no deception," he added to the inspector, as he took the paper from Mr. Singleton's table and placed it between two slips of glass.

"I'm watching you, sir," replied the officer, with a chuckle; and he did watch, with close attention and great interest, while Thorndyke laid the glass slips on the microscope stage and proceeded to focus.

I also watched, and was a good deal exercised in my mind by my colleague's proceedings. After a preliminary glance with the six-inch glass, he swung round the nose-piece to the half-inch objective and slipped in a more powerful eye-piece, and with this power he examined the blood-stains carefully, and then moved the thumb-print into the field of vision. After looking at this for some time with deep attention, he drew from the case a tiny spirit lamp which was evidently filled with an alcoholic solution of some sodium salt, for when he lit it I recognised the characteristic yellow sodium flame. Then he replaced one of the objectives by a spectroscopic attachment, and having placed the little lamp close to the microscope mirror, adjusted the spectroscope. Evidently my friend was fixing the position of the "D" line (or sodium line) in the spectrum.

Having completed the adjustments, he now examined afresh the blood-smears and the thumb-print, both by transmitted and reflected light, and I observed him hurriedly draw one or two diagrams in his notebook. Then he replaced the spectroscope and lamp in the case and brought forth the micrometer—a slip of rather thin glass about three inches by one and a half—which he laid over the thumb-print in the place of the upper plate of glass.

Having secured it in position by the clips, he moved it about, comparing its appearance with that of the lines on the large photograph, which he held in his hand. After a considerable amount of adjustment and readjustment, he appeared to be satisfied, for he remarked to me—

“I think I have got the lines in the same position as they are on our print, so, with Inspector Johnson’s assistance, we will take a photograph which we can examine at our leisure.”

He extracted the camera—a quarter-plate instrument—from its case and opened it. Then, having swung the microscope on its stand into a horizontal position, he produced from the camera case a slab of mahogany with three brass feet, on which he placed the camera, and which brought the latter to a level with the eye-piece of the microscope.

The front of the camera was fitted with a short sleeve of thin black leather, and into this the eye-piece end of the microscope was now passed, the sleeve being secured round the barrel of the microscope by a stout indiarubber band, thus producing a completely light-tight connection.

Everything was now ready for taking the photograph. The light from the window having been concentrated on the thumb-print by means of a condenser, Thorndyke proceeded to focus the image on the ground-glass screen with extreme care and then, slipping a small leather cap over the objective, introduced the dark slide and drew out the shutter.

“I will ask you to sit down and remain quite still while I make the exposure,” he said to me and the inspector. “A very little vibration is enough to destroy the sharpness of the image.”

We seated ourselves accordingly, and Thorndyke then removed the cap, standing motionless, watch in hand, while he exposed the first plate.

“We may as well take a second, in case this should not turn out quite perfect,” he said, as he replaced the cap and closed the shutter.

He reversed the dark slide and made another exposure in the same way, and then, having removed the micrometer and replaced it by a slip of plain glass, he made two more exposures.

“There are two plates left,” he remarked, as he drew out the second dark slide. “I think I will take a record of the blood-stain on them.”

He accordingly made two more exposures—one of the larger blood-stain and one of the smaller smears.

“There,” said he, with an air of satisfaction, as he proceeded to pack up what the inspector described as his “box of tricks.” “I think we have all the data that we can squeeze out of Scotland Yard, and I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Singleton, for giving so many facilities to your natural enemy, the counsel for the defence.”

“Not our natural enemies, doctor,” protested Mr. Singleton. “We work for a conviction, of course, but we don’t throw obstacles in the way of the defence. You know that perfectly well.”

“Of course I do, my dear sir,” replied Thorndyke, shaking the official by the hand. “Haven’t I benefited by your help a score of times? But I am greatly obliged all the same. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, doctor. I wish you luck, though I fear you will find it ‘no go’ this time.”

“We shall see,” replied Thorndyke, and with a friendly wave of the hand to the inspector he caught up the two cases and led the way out of the building.

---

#### IV. — CONFIDENCES

DURING our walk home my friend was unusually thoughtful and silent, and his face bore a look of concentration under which I thought I could detect, in spite of his habitually impassive expression, a certain suppressed excitement of a not entirely unpleasurable kind. I forbore, however, from making any remarks or asking questions, not only because I saw that he was preoccupied, but also because, from my knowledge of the man, I judged that he would consider it his duty to keep his own counsel and to make no unnecessary confidences even to me.

On our arrival at his chambers he immediately handed over the camera to Polton with a few curt directions as to the development of the plates, and, lunch being already prepared, we sat down at the table without delay.

We had proceeded with our meal in silence for some time when Thorndyke suddenly laid down his knife and fork and looked into my face with a smile of quiet amusement.

“It has just been borne in upon me, Jervis,” said he, “that you are the most companionable fellow in the world. You have the heaven-sent gift of silence.”

“If silence is the test of companionability,” I answered, with a grin, “I think I can pay you a similar compliment in even more emphatic terms.”

He laughed cheerfully and rejoined—

“You are pleased to be sarcastic, I observe; but I maintain my position. The capacity to preserve an opportune silence is the rarest and most precious of social accomplishments. Now, most men would have plied me with questions and babbled



comments on my proceedings at Scotland Yard, whereas you have allowed me to sort out, without interruption, a mass of evidence while it is still fresh and impressive, to docket each item and stow it away in the pigeonholes of my brain. By the way, I have made a ridiculous oversight."

"What is that?" I asked.

"The 'Thumbograph.' I never ascertained whether the police have it or whether it is still in the possession of Mrs. Hornby."

"Does it matter?" I inquired.

"Not much; only I must see it. And perhaps it will furnish an excellent pretext for you to call on Miss Gibson. As I am busy at the hospital this afternoon and Polton has his hands full, it would be a good plan for you to drop in at Endsley Gardens—that is the address, I think—and if you can see Miss Gibson, try to get a confidential chat with her, and extend your knowledge of the manners and customs of the three Messieurs Hornby. Put on your best bedside manner and keep your weather eye lifting. Find out everything you can as to the characters and habits of those three gentlemen, regardless of all scruples of delicacy. Everything is of importance to us, even to the names of their tailors."

"And with regard to the 'Thumbograph'?"

"Find out who has it, and, if it is still in Mrs. Hornby's possession, get her to lend it to us or—what might, perhaps, be better—get her permission to take a photograph of it."

"It shall be done according to your word," said I. "I will furbish up my exterior, and this very afternoon make my first appearance in the character of Paul Pry."

About an hour later I found myself upon the doorstep of Mr. Hornby's house in Endsley Gardens listening to the jangling of the bell that I had just set in motion.

"Miss Gibson, sir?" repeated the parlourmaid in response to my question. "She *was* going out, but I am not sure whether she has gone yet. If you will step in, I will go and see."

I followed her into the drawing-room, and, threading my way amongst the litter of small tables and miscellaneous furniture by which ladies nowadays convert their special domain into the semblance of a broker's shop, let go my anchor in the vicinity of the fireplace to await the parlourmaid's report.

I had not long to wait, for in less than a minute Miss Gibson herself entered the room. She wore her hat and gloves, and I congratulated myself on my timely arrival.

"I didn't expect to see you again so soon, Dr. Jervis," she said, holding out her hand with a frank and friendly manner, "but you are very welcome all the same. You have come to tell me something?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "I have come to ask you something."

"Well, that is better than nothing," she said, with a shade of disappointment. "Won't you sit down?"

I seated myself with caution on a dwarf chair of scrofulous aspect, and opened my business without preamble.

"Do you remember a thing called a 'Thumbograph'?"

"Indeed I do," she replied with energy. "It was the cause of all this trouble."

"Do you know if the police took possession of it?"

"The detective took it to Scotland Yard that the finger-print experts might examine it and compare the two thumb-prints; and they wanted to keep it, but Mrs. Hornby was so distressed at the idea of its being used in evidence that they let her have it back. You see, they really had no further need of it, as they could take a print for themselves when they had Reuben in custody; in fact, he volunteered to have a print taken at once, as soon as he was arrested, and that was done."

"So the 'Thumbograph' is now in Mrs. Hornby's possession?"

"Yes, unless she has destroyed it. She spoke of doing so."

"I hope she has not," said I, in some alarm, "for Dr. Thorndyke is extremely anxious, for some reason, to examine it."

"Well, she will be down in a few minutes, and then we shall know. I told her you were here. Have you any idea what Dr. Thorndyke's reason is for wanting to see it?"

"None whatever," I replied. "Dr. Thorndyke is as close as an oyster. He treats me as he treats every one else—he listens attentively, observes closely, and says nothing."

"It doesn't sound very agreeable," mused Miss Gibson; "and yet he seemed very nice and sympathetic."

"He is very nice and sympathetic," I retorted with some emphasis, "but he doesn't make himself agreeable by divulging his clients' secrets."

"I suppose not; and I regard myself as very effectively snubbed," said she, smiling, but evidently somewhat piqued by my not very tactful observation.

I was hastening to repair my error with apologies and self-accusations, when the door opened and an elderly lady

entered the room. She was somewhat stout, amiable and placid of mien, and impressed me (to be entirely truthful) as looking rather foolish.

"Here is Mrs. Hornby," said Miss Gibson, presenting me to her hostess; and she continued, "Dr. Jervis has come to ask about the 'Thumbograph.' You haven't destroyed it, I hope?"

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Hornby. "I have it in my little bureau. What did Dr. Jervis wish to know about it?"

Seeing that she was terrified lest some new and dreadful surprise should be sprung upon her, I hastened to reassure her.

"My colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, is anxious to examine it. He is directing your nephew's defence, you know."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Hornby. "Juliet told me about him. She says he is a dear. Do you agree with her?"

Here I caught Miss Gibson's eye, in which was a mischievous twinkle, and noted a little deeper pink in her cheeks.

"Well," I answered dubiously, "I have never considered my colleague in the capacity of a dear, but I have a very high opinion of him in every respect."

"That, no doubt, is the masculine equivalent," said Miss Gibson, recovering from the momentary embarrassment that Mrs. Hornby's artless repetition of her phrase had produced. "I think the feminine expression is more epigrammatic and comprehensive. But to return to the object of Dr. Jervis's visit. Would you let him have the 'Thumbograph,' aunt, to show to Dr. Thorndyke?"

"Oh, my dear Juliet," replied Mrs. Hornby, "I would do anything—anything—to help our poor boy. I will never believe that he could be guilty of theft—common, vulgar theft. There has been some dreadful mistake—I am convinced there has—I told the detectives so. I assured them that Reuben could not have committed the robbery, and that they were totally mistaken in supposing him to be capable of such an action. But they would not listen to me, although I have known him since he was a little child, and ought to be able to judge, if anyone is. Diamonds, too! Now, I ask you, what could Reuben want with diamonds? and they were not even cut."

Here Mrs. Hornby drew forth a lace-edged handkerchief and mopped her eyes.

"I am sure Dr. Thorndyke will be very much interested to see this little book of yours," said I, with a view to stemming the tide of her reflections.

"Oh, the 'Thumbograph,'" she replied. "Yes, I will let him have it with the greatest pleasure. I am so glad he wishes to see it; it makes one feel hopeful to know that he is taking so much interest in the case. Would you believe it, Dr. Jervis, those detective people actually wanted to keep it to bring up in evidence against the poor boy. My 'Thumbograph,' mind you. But I put my foot down there and they had to return it. I was resolved that they should not receive any assistance from me in their efforts to involve my nephew in this horrible affair."

"Then, perhaps," said Miss Gibson, "you might give Dr. Jervis the 'Thumbograph' and he can hand it to Dr. Thorndyke."

"Of course I will," said Mrs. Hornby; "instantly; and you need not return it, Dr. Jervis. When you have finished with it, fling it into the fire. I wish never to see it again."

But I had been considering the matter, and had come to the conclusion that it would be highly indiscreet to take the book out of Mrs. Hornby's custody, and this I now proceeded to explain.

"I have no idea," I said, "for what purpose Dr. Thorndyke wishes to examine the 'Thumbograph,' but it occurs to me that he may desire to put it in evidence, in which case it would be better that it should not go out of your possession for the present. He merely commissioned me to ask for your permission to take a photograph of it."

"Oh, if he wants a photograph," said Mrs. Hornby, "I could get one done for him without any difficulty. My nephew Walter would take one for us, I am sure, if I asked him. He is so clever, you know—is he not, Juliet, dear?"

"Yes, aunt," replied Miss Gibson quickly, "but I expect Dr. Thorndyke would rather take the photograph himself."

"I am sure he would," I agreed. "In fact, a photograph taken by another person would not be of much use to him."

"Ah," said Mrs. Hornby in a slightly injured tone, "you think Walter is just an ordinary amateur; but if I were to show you some of the photographs he has taken you would really be surprised. He is remarkably clever, I assure you."

"Would you like us to bring the book to Dr. Thorndyke's chambers?" asked Miss Gibson. "That would save time and trouble."

"It is excessively good of you—" I began.

"Not at all. When shall we bring it? Would you like to have it this evening?"

"We should very much," I replied. "My colleague could then examine it and decide what is to be done with it. But it is giving you so much trouble."

"It is nothing of the kind," said Miss Gibson. "You would not mind coming with me this evening, would you, aunt?"

"Certainly not, my dear," replied Mrs. Hornby, and she was about to enlarge on the subject when Miss Gibson rose and, looking at her watch, declared that she must start on her errand at once. I also rose to make my adieux, and she then remarked—

"If you are walking in the same direction as I am, Dr. Jervis, we might arrange the time of our proposed visit as we go along."

I was not slow to avail myself of this invitation, and a few seconds later we left the house together, leaving Mrs. Hornby smiling fatuously after us from the open door.

"Will eight o'clock suit you, do you think?" Miss Gibson asked, as we walked up the street.

"It will do excellently, I should say," I answered. "If anything should render the meeting impossible I will send you a telegram. I could wish that you were coming alone, as ours is to be a business conference."

Miss Gibson laughed softly—and a very pleasant and musical laugh it was.

"Yes," she agreed. "Dear Mrs. Hornby is a little diffuse and difficult to keep to one subject; but you must be indulgent to her little failings; you would be if you had experienced such kindness and generosity from her as I have."

"I am sure I should," I rejoined; "in fact, I am. After all, a little diffuseness of speech and haziness of ideas are no great faults in a generous and amiable woman of her age."

Miss Gibson rewarded me for these highly correct sentiments with a little smile of approval, and we walked on for some time in silence. Presently she turned to me with some suddenness and a very earnest expression, and said—

"I want to ask you a question, Dr. Jervis, and please forgive me if I beg you to put aside your professional reserve just a little in my favour. I want you to tell me if you think Dr. Thorndyke has any kind of hope or expectation of being able to save poor Reuben from the dreadful peril that threatens him."

This was a rather pointed question, and I took some time to consider it before replying.

"I should like," I replied at length, "to tell you as much as my duty to my colleague will allow me to; but that is so little that it is hardly worth telling. However, I may say this without breaking any confidence: Dr. Thorndyke has undertaken the case and is working hard at it, and he would, most assuredly, have done neither the one nor the other if he had considered it a hopeless one."

"That is a very encouraging view of the matter," said she, "which, had, however, already occurred to me. May I ask if anything came of your visit to Scotland Yard? Oh, please don't think me encroaching; I am so terribly anxious and troubled."

"I can tell you very little about the results of our expedition, for I know very little; but I have an idea that Dr. Thorndyke is not dissatisfied with his morning's work. He certainly picked up some facts, though I have no idea of their nature, and as soon as we reached home he developed a sudden desire to examine the 'Thumbograph.'"

"Thank you, Dr. Jervis," she said gratefully. "You have cheered me more than I can tell you, and I won't ask you any more questions. Are you sure I am not bringing you out of the way?"

"Not at all," I answered hastily. "The fact is, I had hoped to have a little chat with you when we had disposed of the 'Thumbograph,' so I can regard myself as combining a little business with a great deal of pleasure if I am allowed to accompany you."

She gave me a little ironical bow as she inquired—

"And, in short, I may take it that I am to be pumped?"

"Come, now," I retorted. "You have been plying the pump handle pretty vigorously yourself. But that is not my meaning at all. You see, we are absolute strangers to all the parties concerned in this case, which, of course, makes for an impartial estimate of their characters. But, after all, knowledge is more useful to us than impartiality. There is our client, for instance. He impressed us both very favourably, I think; but he might have been a plausible rascal with the blackest of records. Then you come and tell us that he is a gentleman of stainless character and we are at once on firmer ground."

"I see," said Miss Gibson thoughtfully; "and suppose that I or some one else had told you things that seemed to reflect on his character. Would they have influenced you in your attitude towards him?"

"Only in this," I replied; "that we should have made it our business to inquire into the truth of those reports and ascertain their origin."

"That is what one should always do, I suppose," said she, still with an air of deep thoughtfulness which encouraged me to inquire—

"May I ask if anyone to your knowledge has ever said anything to Mr. Reuben's disadvantage?"

She pondered for some time before replying, and kept her eyes bent pensively on the ground. At length she said, not without some hesitation of manner—

"It is a small thing and quite without any bearing on this affair. But it has been a great trouble to me since it has to some extent put a barrier between Reuben and me; and we used to be such close friends. And I have blamed myself for letting it influence me—perhaps unjustly—in my opinion of him. I will tell you about it, though I expect you will think me very foolish."

"You must know, then, that Reuben and I used, until about six months ago, to be very much together, though we were

only friends, you understand. But we were on the footing of relatives, so there was nothing out of the way in it. Reuben is a keen student of ancient and mediaeval art, in which I also am much interested, so we used to visit the museums and galleries together and get a great deal of pleasure from comparing our views and impressions of what we saw.

"About six months ago, Walter took me aside one day and, with a very serious face, asked me if there was any kind of understanding between Reuben and me. I thought it rather impertinent of him, but nevertheless, I told him the truth, that Reuben and I were just friends and nothing more.

"If that is the case," said he, looking mighty grave, "I would advise you not to be seen about with him quite so much."

"And why not?" I asked very naturally.

"Why, the fact is," said Walter, "that Reuben is a confounded fool. He has been chattering to the men at the club and seems to have given them the impression that a young lady of means and position has been setting her cap at him very hard, but that he, being a high-souled philosopher above the temptations that beset ordinary mortals, is superior both to her blandishments and her pecuniary attractions. I give you the hint for your own guidance," he continued, "and I expect this to go no farther. You mustn't be annoyed with Reuben. The best of young men will often behave like prigs and donkeys, and I have no doubt the fellows have grossly exaggerated what he said; but I thought it right to put you on your guard."

"Now this report, as you may suppose, made me excessively angry, and I wanted to have it out with Reuben then and there. But Walter refused to sanction this—"there was no use in making a scene" he said—and he insisted that the caution was given to me in strict confidence; so what was I to do? I tried to ignore it and treat Reuben as I always had done, but this I found impossible; my womanly pride was much too deeply hurt. And yet I felt it the lowest depth of meanness to harbour such thoughts of him without giving him the opportunity to defend himself. And although it was most unlike Reuben in some respects, it was very like him in others; for he has always expressed the utmost contempt for men who marry for a livelihood. So I have remained on the horns of a dilemma and am there still. What do you think I ought to have done?"

I rubbed my chin in some embarrassment at this question. Needless to say, I was most disagreeably impressed by Walter Hornby's conduct, and not a little disposed to blame my fair companion for giving an ear to his secret disparagement of his cousin; but I was obviously not in a position to pronounce, offhand, upon the merits of the case.

"The position appears to be this," I said, after a pause, "either Reuben has spoken most unworthily and untruthfully of you, or Walter has lied deliberately about him."

"Yes," she agreed, "that is the position; but which of the two alternatives appears to you the more probable?"

"That is very difficult to say," I answered. "There is a certain kind of cad who is much given to boastful rhodomontade concerning his conquests. We all know him and can generally spot him at first sight, but I must say that Reuben Hornby did not strike me as that kind of man at all. Then it is clear that the proper course for Walter to have adopted, if he had really heard such rumours, was to have had the matter out with Reuben, instead of coming secretly to you with whispered reports. That is my feeling, Miss Gibson, but, of course, I may be quite wrong. I gather that our two young friends are not inseparable companions?"

"Oh, they are very good friends, but you see, their interests and views of life are quite different. Reuben, although an excellent worker in business hours, is a student, or perhaps rather what one would call a scholar, whereas Walter is more a practical man of affairs—decidedly long-headed and shrewd. He is undoubtedly very clever, as Mrs. Hornby said."

"He takes photographs, for instance," I suggested.

"Yes. But not ordinary amateur photographs; his work is more technical and quite excellent of its kind. For example, he did a most beautiful series of micro-photographs of sections of metalliferous rocks which he reproduced for publication by the collotype process, and even printed off the plates himself."

"I see. He must be a very capable fellow."

"He is, very," she assented, "and very keen on making a position; but I am afraid he is rather too fond of money for its own sake, which is not a pleasant feature in a young man's character, is it?"

I agreed that it was not.

"Excessive keenness in money affairs," proceeded Miss Gibson oracularly, "is apt to lead a young man into bad ways—oh, you need not smile, Dr. Jervis, at my wise saws; it is perfectly true, and you know it. The fact is, I sometimes have an uneasy feeling that Walter's desire to be rich inclines him to try what looks like a quick and easy method of making money. He had a friend—a Mr. Horton—who is a dealer on the Stock Exchange and who 'operates' rather largely—'operate' I believe is the expression used, although it seems to be nothing more than common gambling—and I have more than once suspected Walter of being concerned in what Mr. Horton calls 'a little flutter.'"

"That doesn't strike me as a very long-headed proceeding," I remarked, with the impartial wisdom of the impecunious, and therefore untempted.

"No," she agreed, "it isn't. But your gambler always thinks he is going to win—though you mustn't let me give you the impression that Walter is a gambler. But here is my destination. Thank you for escorting me so far, and I hope you are

beginning to feel less like a stranger to the Hornby family. We shall make our appearance to-night at eight punctually."

She gave me her hand with a frank smile and tripped up the steps leading to the street door; and when I glanced back, after crossing the road, she gave me a little friendly nod as she turned to enter the house.

---

## V. — THE 'THUMBOGRAPH'

"SO your net has been sweeping the quiet and pleasant waters of feminine conversation," remarked Thorndyke when we met at the dinner table and I gave him an outline of my afternoon's adventures.

"Yes," I answered, "and here is the catch cleaned and ready for the consumer."

I laid on the table two of my notebooks in which I had entered such facts as I had been able to extract from my talk with Miss Gibson.

"You made your entries as soon as possible after your return, I suppose?" said Thorndyke—"while the matter was still fresh?"

"I wrote down my notes as I sat on a seat in Kensington Gardens within five minutes after leaving Miss Gibson."

"Good!" said Thorndyke. "And now let us see what you have collected."

He glanced quickly through the entries in the two books, referring back once or twice, and stood for a few moments silent and abstracted. Then he laid the little books down on the table with a satisfied nod.

"Our information, then," he said, "amounts to this: Reuben is an industrious worker at his business and, in his leisure, a student of ancient and medieval art; possibly a babbling fool and a cad or, on the other hand, a maligned and much-abused man.

"Walter Hornby is obviously a sneak and possibly a liar; a keen man of business, perhaps a flutterer round the financial candle that burns in Throgmorton Street; an expert photographer and a competent worker of the collotype process. You have done a very excellent day's work, Jervis. I wonder if you see the bearing of the facts that you have collected."

"I think I see the bearing of some of them," I answered; "at least, I have formed certain opinions."

"Then keep them to yourself, *mon ami*, so that I need not feel as if I ought to unbosom myself of my own views."

"I should be very much surprised if you did, Thorndyke," I replied, "and should have none the better opinion of you. I realise fully that your opinions and theories are the property of your client and not to be used for the entertainment of your friends."

Thorndyke patted me on the back playfully, but he looked uncommonly pleased, and said, with evident sincerity, "I am really grateful to you for saying that, for I have felt a little awkward in being so reticent with you who know so much of this case. But you are quite right, and I am delighted to find you so discerning and sympathetic. The least I can do under the circumstances is to uncork a bottle of Pommard, and drink the health of so loyal and helpful a colleague. Ah! Praise the gods! here is Polton, like a sacrificial priest accompanied by a sweet savour of roasted flesh. Rump steak I ween," he added, sniffing, "food meet for the mighty Shamash (that pun was fortuitous, I need not say) or a ravenous medical jurist. Can you explain to me, Polton, how it is that your rump steak is better than any other steak? Is it that you have command of a special brand of ox?"

The little man's dry countenance wrinkled with pleasure until it was as full of lines as a ground-plan of Clapham Junction.

"Perhaps it is the special treatment it gets, sir," he replied. "I usually bruise it in the mortar before cooking, without breaking up the fibre too much, and then I heat up the little cupel furnace to about 600 C, and put the steak in on a tripod."

Thorndyke laughed outright. "The cupel furnace, too," he exclaimed. "Well, well, 'to what base uses'—but I don't know that it is a base use after all. Anyhow, Polton, open a bottle of Pommard and put a couple of ten by eight 'process' plates in your dark slides. I am expecting two ladies here this evening with a document."

"Shall you bring them upstairs, sir?" inquired Polton, with an alarmed expression.

"I expect I shall have to," answered Thorndyke.

"Then I shall just smarten the laboratory up a bit," said Polton, who evidently appreciated the difference between the masculine and feminine view as to the proper appearance of working premises.

"And so Miss Gibson wanted to know our private views on the case?" said Thorndyke, when his voracity had become somewhat appeased.

"Yes," I answered; and then I repeated our conversation as nearly as I could remember it.

"Your answer was very discreet and diplomatic," Thorndyke remarked, "and it was very necessary that it should be, for it is essential that we show the backs of our cards to Scotland Yard; and if to Scotland Yard, then to the whole world. We know what their trump card is and can arrange our play accordingly, so long as we do not show our hand."

"You speak of the police as your antagonists; I noticed that at the 'Yard' this morning, and was surprised to find that they accepted the position. But surely their business is to discover the actual offender, not to fix the crime on some particular person."

"That would seem to be so," replied Thorndyke, "but in practice it is otherwise. When the police have made an arrest they work for a conviction. If the man is innocent, that is his business, not theirs; it is for him to prove it. The system is a pernicious one—especially since the efficiency of a police officer is, in consequence, apt to be estimated by the number of convictions he has secured, and an inducement is thus held out to him to obtain a conviction, if possible; but it is of a piece with legislative procedure in general. Lawyers are not engaged in academic discussions or in the pursuit of truth, but each is trying, by hook or by crook, to make out a particular case without regard to its actual truth or even to the lawyer's own belief on the subject. That is what produces so much friction between lawyers and scientific witnesses; neither can understand the point of view of the other. But we must not sit over the table chattering like this; it has gone half-past seven, and Polton will be wanting to make this room presentable."

"I notice you don't use your office much," I remarked.

"Hardly at all, excepting as a repository for documents and stationery. It is very cheerless to talk in an office, and nearly all my business is transacted with solicitors and counsel who are known to me, so there is no need for such formalities. All right, Polton; we shall be ready for you in five minutes."

The Temple bell was striking eight as, at Thorndyke's request, I threw open the iron-bound "oak"; and even as I did so the sound of footsteps came up from the stairs below. I waited on the landing for our two visitors, and led them into the room.

"I am so glad to make your acquaintance," said Mrs. Hornby, when I had done the honours of introduction; "I have heard so much about you from Juliet—"

"Really, my dear aunt," protested Miss Gibson, as she caught my eye with a look of comical alarm, "you will give Dr. Thorndyke a most erroneous impression. I merely mentioned that I had intruded on him without notice and had been received with undeserved indulgence and consideration."

"You didn't put it quite in that way, my dear," said Mrs. Hornby, "but I suppose it doesn't matter."

"We are highly gratified by Miss Gibson's favourable report of us, whatever may have been the actual form of expression," said Thorndyke, with a momentary glance at the younger lady which covered her with smiling confusion, "and we are deeply indebted to you for taking so much trouble to help us."

"It is no trouble at all, but a great pleasure," replied Mrs. Hornby; and she proceeded to enlarge on the matter until her remarks threatened, like the rippling circles produced by a falling stone, to spread out into infinity. In the midst of this discourse Thorndyke placed chairs for the two ladies, and, leaning against the mantelpiece, fixed a stony gaze upon the small handbag that hung from Mrs. Hornby's wrist.

"Is the 'Thumbograph' in your bag?" interrupted Miss Gibson, in response to this mute appeal.

"Of course it is, my dear Juliet," replied the elder lady. "You saw me put it in yourself. What an odd girl you are. Did you think I should have taken it out and put it somewhere else? Not that these handbags are really very secure, you know, although I daresay they are safer than pockets, especially now that it is the fashion to have the pocket at the back. Still, I have often thought how easy it would be for a thief or a pickpocket or some other dreadful creature of that kind, don't you know, to make a snatch and—in fact, the thing has actually happened. Why, I knew a lady—Mrs. Moggridge, you know, Juliet—no, it wasn't Mrs. Moggridge, that was another affair, it was Mrs.—Mrs.—dear me, how silly of me!—now, what was her name? Can't you help me, Juliet? You must surely remember the woman. She used to visit a good deal at the Hawley-Johnsons—I think it was the Hawley-Johnsons', or else it was those people, you know—"

"Hadn't you better give Dr. Thorndyke the 'Thumbograph'?" interrupted Miss Gibson.

"Why, of course, Juliet, dear. What else did we come here for?" With a slightly injured expression, Mrs. Hornby opened the little bag and commenced, with the utmost deliberation, to turn out its contents on to the table. These included a laced handkerchief, a purse, a card-case, a visiting list, a packet of *papier poudré*, and when she had laid the last-mentioned article on the table, she paused abruptly and gazed into Miss Gibson's face with the air of one who has made a startling discovery.

"I remember the woman's name," she said in an impressive voice. "It was Gudge—Mrs. Gudge, the sister-in-law of—"

Here Miss Gibson made an unceremonious dive into the open bag and fished out a tiny parcel wrapped in notepaper and secured with a silk thread.

"Thank you," said Thorndyke, taking it from her hand just as Mrs. Hornby was reaching out to intercept it. He cut the thread and drew from its wrappings a little book bound in red cloth, with the word "Thumbograph" stamped upon the cover, and was beginning to inspect it when Mrs. Hornby rose and stood beside him.

"That," said she, as she opened the book at the first page, "is the thumb-mark of a Miss Colley. She is no connection of ours. You see it is a little smeared—she said Reuben jogged her elbow, but I don't think he did; at any rate he assured me he did not, and, you know—"

"Ah! Here is one we are looking for," interrupted Thorndyke, who had been turning the leaves of the book regardless of Mrs. Hornby's rambling comments; "a very good impression, too, considering the rather rough method of producing it."

He reached out for the reading lens that hung from its nail above the mantelpiece, and I could tell by the eagerness with which he peered through it at the thumb-print that he was looking for something. A moment later I felt sure that he had found that something which he had sought, for, though he replaced the lens upon its nail with a quiet and composed air and made no remark, there was a sparkle of the eye and a scarcely perceptible flush of suppressed excitement and triumph which I had begun to recognise beneath the impassive mask that he presented to the world.

"I shall ask you to leave this little book with me, Mrs. Hornby," he said, breaking in upon that lady's inconsequent babblings, "and, as I may possibly put it in evidence, it would be a wise precaution for you and Miss Gibson to sign your names—as small as possible—on the page which bears Mr. Reuben's thumb-mark. That will anticipate any suggestion that the book has been tampered with after leaving your hands."

"It would be a great impertinence for anyone to make any such suggestion," Mrs. Hornby began; but on Thorndyke's placing his fountain pen in her hand, she wrote her signature in the place indicated and handed the pen to Miss Gibson, who signed underneath.

"And now," said Thorndyke, "we will take an enlarged photograph of this page with the thumb-mark; not that it is necessary that it should be done now, as you are leaving the book in my possession; but the photograph will be wanted, and as my man is expecting us and has the apparatus ready, we may as well despatch the business at once."

To this both the ladies readily agreed (being, in fact, devoured by curiosity with regard to my colleague's premises), and we accordingly proceeded to invade the set of rooms on the floor above, over which the ingenious Polton was accustomed to reign in solitary grandeur.

It was my first visit to these mysterious regions, and I looked about me with as much curiosity as did the two ladies. The first room that we entered was apparently the workshop, for it contained a small woodworker's bench, a lathe, a bench for metal work and a number of mechanical appliances which I was not then able to examine; but I noticed that the entire place presented to the eye a most unworkmanlike neatness, a circumstance that did not escape Thorndyke's observation, for his face relaxed into a grim smile as his eye travelled over the bare benches and the clean-swept floor.

From this room we entered the laboratory, a large apartment, one side of which was given up to chemical research, as was shown by the shelves of reagents that covered the wall, and the flasks, retorts and other apparatus that were arranged on the bench, like ornaments on a drawing-room mantelpiece. On the opposite side of the room was a large, massively-constructed copying camera, the front of which, carrying the lens, was fixed, and an easel or copyholder travelled on parallel guides towards, or away, from it, on a long stand.

This apparatus Thorndyke proceeded to explain to our visitors while Polton was fixing the "Thumbograph" in a holder attached to the easel.

"You see," he said, in answer to a question from Miss Gibson, "I have a good deal to do with signatures, cheques and disputed documents of various kinds. Now a skilled eye, aided by a pocket-lens, can make out very minute details on a cheque or bank-note; but it is not possible to lend one's skilled eye to a judge or jurymen, so that it is often very convenient to be able to hand them a photograph in which the magnification is already done, which they can compare with the original. Small things, when magnified, develop quite unexpected characters; for instance, you have handled a good many postage stamps, I suppose, but have you ever noticed the little white spots in the upper corner of a penny stamp, or even the difference in the foliage on the two sides of the wreath?"

Miss Gibson admitted that she had not.

"Very few people have, I suppose, excepting stamp-collectors," continued Thorndyke; "but now just glance at this and you will find these unnoticed details forced upon your attention." As he spoke, he handed her a photograph, which he had taken from a drawer, showing a penny stamp enlarged to a length of eight inches.

While the ladies were marvelling over this production, Polton proceeded with his work. The "Thumbograph" having been fixed in position, the light from a powerful incandescent gas lamp, fitted with a parabolic reflector, was concentrated on it, and the camera racked out to its proper distance.

"What are those figures intended to show?" inquired Miss Gibson, indicating the graduation on the side of one of the guides.

"They show the amount of magnification or reduction," Thorndyke explained. "When the pointer is opposite 0, the photograph is the same size as the object photographed; when it points to, say,  $\times 4$ , the photograph will be four times the width and length of the object, while if it should point to, say,  $\div 4$ , the photograph will be one-fourth the length of the object. It is now, you see, pointing to  $\times 8$ , so the photograph will be eight times the diameter of the original thumb-mark."

By this time Polton had brought the camera to an accurate focus and, when we had all been gratified by a glimpse of the enlarged image on the focussing screen, we withdrew to a smaller room which was devoted to bacteriology and microscopical research, while the exposure was made and the plate developed. Here, after an interval, we were joined by Polton, who bore with infinite tenderness the dripping negative on which could be seen the grotesque transparency of a colossal thumb-mark.

This Thorndyke scrutinised eagerly, and having pronounced it satisfactory, informed Mrs. Hornby that the object of her visit was attained, and thanked her for the trouble she had taken.

"I am very glad we came," said Miss Gibson to me, as a little later we walked slowly up Mitre Court in the wake of Mrs. Hornby and Thorndyke; "and I am glad to have seen these wonderful instruments, too. It has made me realise that something is being done and that Dr. Thorndyke really has some object in view. It has really encouraged me immensely."

"And very properly so," I replied. "I, too, although I really know nothing of what my colleague is doing, feel very strongly that he would not take all this trouble and give up so much valuable time if he had not some very definite purpose and some substantial reasons for taking a hopeful view."

"Thank you for saying that," she rejoined warmly; "and you will let me have a crumb of comfort when you can, won't you?" She looked in my face so wistfully as she made this appeal that I was quite moved; and, indeed, I am not sure that my state of mind at that moment did not fully justify my colleague's reticence towards me.

However, I, fortunately, had nothing to tell, and so, when we emerged into Fleet Street to find Mrs. Hornby already ensconced in a hansom, I could only promise, as I grasped the hand that she offered to me, to see her again at the earliest opportunity—a promise which my inner consciousness assured me would be strictly fulfilled.

"You seem to be on quite confidential terms with our fair friend," Thorndyke remarked, as we strolled back towards his chambers. "You are an insinuating dog, Jervis."

"She is very frank and easy to get on with," I replied.

"Yes. A good girl and a clever girl, and comely to look upon withal. I suppose it would be superfluous for me to suggest that you mind your eye?"

"I shouldn't, in any case, try to cut out a man who is under a cloud," I replied sulkily.

"Of course you wouldn't; hence the need of attention to the ophthalmic member. Have you ascertained what Miss Gibson's actual relation is to Reuben Hornby?"

"No," I answered.

"It might be worth while to find out," said Thorndyke; and then he relapsed into silence.

---

## VI. — COMMITTED FOR TRIAL

THORNDYKE'S hint as to the possible danger foreshadowed by my growing intimacy with Juliet Gibson had come upon me as a complete surprise, and had, indeed, been resented by me as somewhat of an impertinence. Nevertheless, it gave me considerable food for meditation, and I presently began to suspect that the watchful eyes of my observant friend might have detected something in my manner towards Miss Gibson suggestive of sentiments that had been unsuspected by myself.

Of course it would be absurd to suppose that any real feeling could have been engendered by so ridiculously brief an acquaintance. I had only met the girl three times, and even now, excepting for business relations, was hardly entitled to more than a bow of recognition. But yet, when I considered the matter impartially and examined my own consciousness, I could not but recognise that she had aroused in me an interest which bore no relation to the part that she had played in the drama that was so slowly unfolding. She was undeniably a very handsome girl, and her beauty was of a type that specially appealed to me—full of dignity and character that gave promise of a splendid middle age. And her personality was in other ways not less attractive, for she was frank and open, sprightly and intelligent, and though evidently quite self-reliant, was in nowise lacking in that womanly softness that so strongly engages a man's sympathy.

In short, I realised that, had there been no such person as Reuben Hornby, I should have viewed Miss Gibson with uncommon interest.

But, unfortunately, Reuben Hornby was a most palpable reality, and, moreover, the extraordinary difficulties of his position entitled him to very special consideration by any man of honour. It was true that Miss Gibson had repudiated any feelings towards Reuben other than those of old-time friendship; but young ladies are not always impartial judges of their own feelings, and, as a man of the world, I could not but have my own opinion on the matter—which opinion I believed to be shared by Thorndyke. The conclusions to which my cogitations at length brought me were: first, that I was an egotistical donkey, and, second, that my relations with Miss Gibson were of an exclusively business character and must in future be conducted on that basis, with the added consideration that I was the confidential agent, for the time being, of Reuben Hornby, and in honour bound to regard his interests as paramount.

"I am hoping," said Thorndyke, as he held out his hand for my teacup, "that these profound reflections of yours are connected with the Hornby affair; in which case I should expect to hear that the riddle is solved and the mystery made plain."

"Why should you expect that?" I demanded, reddening somewhat, I suspect, as I met his twinkling eye. There was something rather disturbing in the dry, quizzical smile that I encountered and the reflection that I had been under observation, and I felt as much embarrassed as I should suppose a self-conscious water-flea might feel on finding itself on



the illuminated stage of a binocular microscope.

"My dear fellow," said Thorndyke, "you have not spoken a word for the last quarter of an hour; you have devoured your food with the relentless regularity of a sausage-machine, and you have, from time to time, made the most damnable faces at the coffee-pot—though there I'll wager the coffee-pot was even with you, if I may judge by the presentment that it offers of my own countenance."

I roused myself from my reverie with a laugh at Thorndyke's quaint conceit and a glance at the grotesquely distorted reflection of my face in the polished silver.

"I am afraid I *have* been a rather dull companion this morning," I admitted apologetically.

"By no means," replied Thorndyke, with a grin. "On the contrary, I have found you both amusing and instructive, and I only spoke when I had exhausted your potentialities as a silent entertainer."

"You are pleased to be facetious at my expense," said I.

"Well, the expense was not a very heavy one," he retorted. "I have been merely consuming a by-product of your mental activity—Hallo! that's Anstey already."

A peculiar knock, apparently delivered with the handle of a walking-stick on the outer door, was the occasion of this exclamation, and as Thorndyke sprang up and flung the door open, a clear, musical voice was borne in, the measured cadences of which proclaimed at once the trained orator.

"Hail, learned brother!" it exclaimed. "Do I disturb you untimely at your studies?" Here our visitor entered the room and looked round critically. "'Tis even so," he declared. "Physiological chemistry and its practical applications appears to be the subject. A physico-chemical inquiry into the properties of streaky bacon and fried eggs. Do I see another learned brother?"

He peered keenly at me through his pince-nez, and I gazed at him in some embarrassment.

"This is my friend Jervis, of whom you have heard me speak," said Thorndyke. "He is with us in this case, you know."

"The echoes of your fame have reached me, sir," said Anstey, holding out his hand. "I am proud to know you. I should have recognised you instantly from the portrait of your lamented uncle in Greenwich Hospital."

"Anstey is a wag, you understand," explained Thorndyke, "but he has lucid intervals. He'll have one presently if we are patient."

"Patient!" snorted our eccentric visitor, "it is I who need to be patient when I am dragged into police courts and other sinks of iniquity to plead for common thieves and robbers like a Kennington Lane advocate."

"You've been talking to Lawley, I see," said Thorndyke.

"Yes, and he tells me that we haven't a leg to stand upon."

"No, we've got to stand on our heads, as men of intellect should. But Lawley knows nothing about the case."

"He thinks he knows it all," said Anstey.

"Most fools do," retorted Thorndyke. "They arrive at their knowledge by intuition—a deuced easy road and cheap travelling too. We reserve our defence—I suppose you agree to that?"

"I suppose so. The magistrate is sure to commit unless you have an unquestionable *alibi*."

"We shall put in an *alibi*, but we are not depending on it."

"Then we had better reserve our defence," said Anstey; "and it is time that we wended on our pilgrimage, for we are due at Lawley's at half-past ten. Is Jervis coming with us?"

"Yes, you'd better come," said Thorndyke. "It's the adjourned hearing of poor Hornby's case, you know. There won't be anything done on our side, but we may be able to glean some hint from the prosecution."

"I should like to hear what takes place, at any rate," I said, and we accordingly sallied forth together in the direction of Lincoln's Inn, on the north side of which Mr. Lawley's office was situated.

"Ah!" said the solicitor, as we entered, "I am glad you've come; I was getting anxious—it doesn't do to be late on these occasions, you know. Let me see, do you know Mr. Walter Hornby? I don't think you do." He presented Thorndyke and me to our client's cousin, and as we shook hands, we viewed one another with a good deal of mutual interest.

"I have heard about you from my aunt," said he, addressing himself more particularly to me. "She appears to regard you as a kind of legal Maskelyne and Cooke. I hope, for my cousin's sake, that you will be able to work the wonders that she anticipates. Poor old fellow! He looks pretty bad, doesn't he?"

I glanced at Reuben, who was at the moment talking to Thorndyke, and as he caught my eye he held out his hand with a warmth that I found very pathetic. He seemed to have aged since I had last seen him, and was pale and rather thinner, but he was composed in his manner and seemed to me to be taking his trouble very well on the whole.

"Cab's at the door, sir," a clerk announced.

"Cab," repeated Mr. Lawley, looking dubiously at me; "we want an omnibus."

"Dr. Jervis and I can walk," Walter Hornby suggested. "We shall probably get there as soon as you, and it doesn't matter if we don't."

"Yes, that will do," said Mr. Lawley; "you two walk down together. Now let us go."

We trooped out on to the pavement, beside which a four-wheeler was drawn up, and as the others were entering the cab, Thorndyke stood close beside me for a moment.

"Don't let him pump you," he said in a low voice, without looking at me; then he sprang into the cab and slammed the door.

"What an extraordinary affair this is," Walter Hornby remarked, after we had been walking in silence for a minute or two; "a most ghastly business. I must confess that I can make neither head nor tail of it."

"How is that?" I asked.

"Why, do you see, there are apparently only two possible theories of the crime, and each of them seems to be unthinkable. On the one hand there is Reuben, a man of the most scrupulous honour, as far as my experience of him goes, committing a mean and sordid theft for which no motive can be discovered—for he is not poor, nor pecuniarily embarrassed nor in the smallest degree avaricious. On the other hand, there is this thumb-print, which, in the opinion of the experts, is tantamount to the evidence of an eye-witness that he did commit the theft. It is positively bewildering. Don't you think so?"

"As you put it," I answered, "the case is extraordinarily puzzling."

"But how else would you put it?" he demanded, with ill-concealed eagerness.

"I mean that, if Reuben is the man you believe him to be, the thing is incomprehensible."

"Quite so," he agreed, though he was evidently disappointed at my colourless answer.

He walked on silently for a few minutes and then said: "I suppose it would not be fair to ask if you see any way out of the difficulty? We are all, naturally anxious about the upshot of the affair, seeing what poor old Reuben's position is."

"Naturally. But the fact is that I know no more than you do, and as to Thorndyke, you might as well cross-examine a Whitstable native as put questions to him."

"Yes, so I gathered from Juliet. But I thought you might have gleaned some notion of the line of defence from your work in the laboratory—the microscopical and photographic work I mean."

"I was never in the laboratory until last night, when Thorndyke took me there with your aunt and Miss Gibson; the work there is done by the laboratory assistant, and his knowledge of the case, I should say, is about as great as a type-founder's knowledge of the books that he is helping to produce. No; Thorndyke is a man who plays a single-handed game and no one knows what cards he holds until he lays them on the table."

My companion considered this statement in silence while I congratulated myself on having parried, with great adroitness, a rather inconvenient question. But the time was not far distant when I should have occasion to reproach myself bitterly for having been so explicit and emphatic.

"My uncle's condition," Walter resumed after a pause, "is a pretty miserable one at present, with this horrible affair added to his own personal worries."

"Has he any special trouble besides this, then?" I asked.

"Why, haven't you heard? I thought you knew about it, or I shouldn't have spoken—not that it is in any way a secret, seeing that it is public property in the city. The fact is that his financial affairs are a little entangled just now."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, considerably startled by this new development.

"Yes, things have taken a rather awkward turn, though I think he will pull through all right. It is the usual thing, you know—investments, or perhaps one should say speculations. He appears to have sunk a lot of capital in mines—thought he was 'in the know,' not unnaturally; but it seems he wasn't after all, and the things have gone wrong, leaving him with a deal more money than he can afford locked up and the possibility of a dead loss if they don't revive. Then there are these infernal diamonds. He is not morally responsible, we know; but it is a question if he is not legally responsible, though the lawyers think he is not. Anyhow, there is going to be a meeting of the creditors to-morrow."

"And what do you think they will do?"

"Oh, they will, most probably, let him go on for the present; but, of course, if he is made accountable for the diamonds there will be nothing for it but to 'go through the hoop,' as the sporting financier expresses it."

"The diamonds were of considerable value, then?"

"From twenty-five to thirty thousand pounds' worth vanished with that parcel."

I whistled. This was a much bigger affair than I had imagined, and I was wondering if Thorndyke had realised the magnitude of the robbery, when we arrived at the police court.

"I suppose our friends have gone inside," said Walter. "They must have got here before us."

This supposition was confirmed by a constable of whom we made inquiry, and who directed us to the entrance to the court. Passing down a passage and elbowing our way through the throng of idlers, we made for the solicitor's box, where we had barely taken our seats when the case was called.

Unspeakably dreary and depressing were the brief proceedings that followed, and dreadfully suggestive of the helplessness of even an innocent man on whom the law has laid its hand and in whose behalf its inexorable machinery has been set in motion.

The presiding magistrate, emotionless and dry, dipped his pen while Reuben, who had surrendered to his bail, was placed in the dock and the charge read over to him. The counsel representing the police gave an abstract of the case with the matter-of-fact air of a house-agent describing an eligible property. Then, when the plea of "not guilty" had been entered, the witnesses were called. There were only two, and when the name of the first, John Hornby, was called, I glanced towards the witness-box with no little curiosity.

I had not hitherto met Mr. Hornby, and as he now entered the box, I saw an elderly man, tall, florid, and well-preserved, but strained and wild in expression and displaying his uncontrollable agitation by continual nervous movements which contrasted curiously with the composed demeanour of the accused man. Nevertheless, he gave his evidence in a perfectly connected manner, recounting the events connected with the discovery of the crime in much the same words as I had heard Mr. Lawley use, though, indeed, he was a good deal more emphatic than that gentleman had been in regard to the excellent character borne by the prisoner.

After him came Mr. Singleton, of the finger-print department at Scotland Yard, to whose evidence I listened with close attention. He produced the paper which bore the thumb-print in blood (which had previously been identified by Mr. Hornby) and a paper bearing the print, taken by himself, of the prisoner's left thumb. These two thumb-prints, he stated, were identical in every respect.

"And you are of opinion that the mark on the paper that was found in Mr. Hornby's safe, was made by the prisoner's left thumb?" the magistrate asked in dry and business-like tones.

"I am certain of it."

"You are of opinion that no mistake is possible?"

"No mistake is possible, your worship. It is a certainty."

The magistrate looked at Anstey inquiringly, whereupon the barrister rose.

"We reserve our defence, your worship."

The magistrate then, in the same placid, business-like manner, committed the prisoner for trial at the Central Criminal Court, refusing to accept bail for his appearance, and, as Reuben was led forth from the dock, the next case was called.

By special favour of the authorities, Reuben was to be allowed to make his journey to Holloway in a cab, thus escaping the horrors of the filthy and verminous prison van, and while this was being procured, his friends were permitted to wish him farewell.

"This is a hard experience, Hornby," said Thorndyke, when we three were, for a few moments, left apart from the others; and as he spoke the warmth of a really sympathetic nature broke through his habitual impassivity. "But be of good cheer; I have convinced myself of your innocence and have good hopes of convincing the world—though this is for your private ear, you understand, to be mentioned to no one."

Reuben wrung the hand of this "friend in need," but was unable, for the moment, to speak; and, as his self-control was evidently strained to the breaking point, Thorndyke, with a man's natural instinct, wished him a hasty good-bye, and passing his hand through my arm, turned away.

"I wish it had been possible to save the poor fellow from this delay, and especially from the degradation of being locked up in a jail," he exclaimed regretfully as we walked down the street.

"There is surely no degradation in being merely accused of a crime," I answered, without much conviction, however. "It may happen to the best of us; and he is still an innocent man in the eyes of the law."

"That, my dear Jervis, you know, as well as I do, to be mere casuistry," he rejoined. "The law professes to regard the unconvicted man as innocent; but how does it treat him? You heard how the magistrate addressed our friend; outside the court he would have called him *Mr.* Hornby. You know what will happen to Reuben at Holloway. He will be ordered about by warders, will have a number label fastened on to his coat, he will be locked in a cell with a spy-hole in the door, through which any passing stranger may watch him; his food will be handed to him in a tin pan with a tin knife and spoon; and he will be periodically called out of his cell and driven round the exercise yard with a mob composed, for the most part, of the sweepings of the London slums. If he is acquitted, he will be turned loose without a suggestion of compensation or apology for these indignities or the losses he may have sustained through his detention."

"Still I suppose these evils are unavoidable," I said.

"That may or may not be," he retorted. "My point is that the presumption of innocence is a pure fiction; that the treatment of an accused man, from the moment of his arrest, is that of a criminal. However," he concluded, hailing a passing hansom, "this discussion must be adjourned or I shall be late at the hospital. What are you going to do?"

"I shall get some lunch and then call on Miss Gibson to let her know the real position."

"Yes, that will be kind, I think; baldly stated, the news may seem rather alarming. I was tempted to thrash the case out in the police court, but it would not have been safe. He would almost certainly have been committed for trial after all, and then we should have shown our hand to the prosecution."

He sprang into the hansom and was speedily swallowed up in the traffic, while I turned back towards the police court to make certain inquiries concerning the regulations as to visitors at Holloway prison. At the door I met the friendly inspector from Scotland Yard, who gave me the necessary information, whereupon with a certain homely little French restaurant in my mind I bent my steps in the direction of Soho.

---

## VII. — SHOALS AND QUICKSANDS

WHEN I arrived at Endsley Gardens, Miss Gibson was at home, and to my unspeakable relief, Mrs. Hornby was not. My veneration for that lady's moral qualities was excessive, but her conversation drove me to the verge of insanity—an insanity not entirely free from homicidal tendencies.

"It is good of you to come—though I thought you would," Miss Gibson said impulsively, as we shook hands. "You have been so sympathetic and human—both you and Dr. Thorndyke—so free from professional stiffness. My aunt went off to see Mr. Lawley directly we got Walter's telegram."

"I am sorry for her," I said (and was on the point of adding "and him," but fortunately a glimmer of sense restrained me); "she will find him dry enough."

"Yes; I dislike him extremely. Do you know that he had the impudence to advise Reuben to plead 'guilty'?"

"He told us he had done so, and got a well-deserved snubbing from Thorndyke for his pains."

"I am so glad," exclaimed Miss Gibson viciously. "But tell me what has happened. Walter simply said 'Transferred to higher court,' which we agreed was to mean, 'Committed for trial.' Has the defence failed? And where is Reuben?"

"The defence is reserved. Dr. Thorndyke considered it almost certain that the case would be sent for trial, and that being so, decided that it was essential to keep the prosecution in the dark as to the line of defence. You see, if the police knew what the defence was to be they could revise their own plans accordingly."

"I see that," said she dejectedly, "but I am dreadfully disappointed. I had hoped that Dr. Thorndyke would get the case dismissed. What has happened to Reuben?"

This was the question that I had dreaded, and now that I had to answer it I cleared my throat and bent my gaze nervously on the floor.

"The magistrate refused bail," I said after an uncomfortable pause.

"Well?"

"Consequently Reuben has been—er—detained in custody."

"You don't mean to say that they have sent him to prison?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Not as a convicted prisoner, you know. He is merely detained pending his trial."

"But in prison?"

"Yes," I was forced to admit; "in Holloway prison."

She looked me stonily in the face for some seconds, pale and wide-eyed, but silent; then, with a sudden catch in her breath, she turned away, and, grasping the edge of the mantel-shelf, laid her head upon her arm and burst into a passion of sobbing.

Now I am not, in general, an emotional man, nor even especially impulsive; but neither am I a stock or a stone or an effigy of wood; which I most surely must have been if I could have looked without being deeply moved on the grief, so natural and unselfish, of this strong, brave, loyal-hearted woman. In effect, I moved to her side and, gently taking in mine the hand that hung down, murmured some incoherent words of consolation in a particularly husky voice.

Presently she recovered herself somewhat and softly withdrew her hand, as she turned towards me drying her eyes.

"You must forgive me for distressing you, as I fear I have," she said; "for you are so kind, and I feel that you are really my friend and Reuben's."

"I am indeed, dear Miss Gibson," I replied, "and so, I assure you, is my colleague."

"I am sure of it," she rejoined. "But I was so unprepared for this—I cannot say why, excepting that I trusted so entirely in Dr. Thorndyke—and it is so horrible and, above all, so dreadfully suggestive of what may happen. Up to now the whole thing has seemed like a nightmare—terrifying, but yet unreal. But now that he is actually in prison, it has suddenly become a dreadful reality and I am overwhelmed with terror. Oh! poor boy! What will become of him? For pity's sake, Dr. Jervis, tell me what is going to happen."

What could I do? I had heard Thorndyke's words of encouragement to Reuben and knew my colleague well enough to feel sure that he meant all he had said. Doubtless my proper course would have been to keep my own counsel and put Miss Gibson off with cautious ambiguities. But I could not; she was worthy of more confidence than that.

"You must not be unduly alarmed about the future," I said. "I have it from Dr. Thorndyke that he is convinced of Reuben's innocence, and is hopeful of being able to make it clear to the world. But I did not have this to repeat," I added, with a slight qualm of conscience.

"I know," she said softly, "and I thank you from my heart."

"And as to this present misfortune," I continued, "you must not let it distress you too much. Try to think of it as of a surgical operation, which is a dreadful thing in itself, but is accepted in lieu of something which is immeasurably more dreadful."

"I will try to do as you tell me," she answered meekly; "but it is so shocking to think of a cultivated gentleman like Reuben, herded with common thieves and murderers, and locked in a cage like some wild animal. Think of the ignominy and degradation!"

"There is no ignominy in being wrongfully accused," I said—a little guiltily, I must own, for Thorndyke's words came back to me with all their force. But regardless of this I went on: "An acquittal will restore him to his position with an unstained character, and nothing but the recollection of a passing inconvenience to look back upon."

She gave her eyes a final wipe, and resolutely put away her handkerchief.

"You have given me back my courage," she said, "and chased away my terror. I cannot tell you how I feel your goodness, nor have I any thank-offering to make, except the promise to be brave and patient henceforth, and trust in you entirely."

She said this with such a grateful smile, and looked withal so sweet and womanly that I was seized with an overpowering impulse to take her in my arms. Instead of this I said with conscious feebleness: "I am more than thankful to have been able to give you any encouragement—which you must remember comes from me second-hand, after all. It is to Dr. Thorndyke that we all look for ultimate deliverance."

"I know. But it is you who came to comfort me in my trouble, so, you see, the honours are divided—and not divided quite equally, I fear, for women are unreasoning creatures, as, no doubt, your experience has informed you. I think I hear my aunt's voice, so you had better escape before your retreat is cut off. But before you go, you must tell me how and when I can see Reuben. I want to see him at the earliest possible moment. Poor fellow! He must not be allowed to feel that his friends have forgotten him even for a single instant."

"You can see him to-morrow, if you like," I said; and, casting my good resolutions to the winds, I added: "I shall be going to see him myself, and perhaps Dr. Thorndyke will go."

"Would you let me call at the Temple and go with you? Should I be much in the way? It is rather an alarming thing to go to a prison alone."

"It is not to be thought of," I answered. "If you will call at the Temple—it is on the way—we can drive to Holloway together. I suppose you are resolved to go? It will be rather unpleasant, as you are probably aware."

"I am quite resolved. What time shall I come to the Temple?"

"About two o'clock, if that will suit you."

"Very well. I will be punctual; and now you must go or you will be caught."

She pushed me gently towards the door and, holding out her hand, said—

"I haven't thanked you half enough and I never can. Good-bye!"

She was gone, and I stood alone in the street, up which yellowish wreaths of fog were beginning to roll. It had been quite clear and bright when I entered the house, but now the sky was settling down into a colourless grey, the light was failing and the houses dwindling into dim, unreal shapes that vanished at half their height. Nevertheless I stepped out briskly and strode along at a good pace, as a young man is apt to do when his mind is in somewhat of a ferment. In truth, I had a good deal to occupy my thoughts and, as will often happen both to young men and old, those matters that bore most directly upon my own life and prospects were the first to receive attention.

What sort of relations were growing up between Juliet Gibson and me? And what was my position? As to hers, it seemed plain enough; she was wrapped up in Reuben Hornby and I was her very good friend because I was his. But for myself, there was no disguising the fact that I was beginning to take an interest in her that boded ill for my peace of mind.

Never had I met a woman who so entirely realised my conception of what a woman should be, nor one who exercised so great a charm over me. Her strength and dignity, her softness and dependency, to say nothing of her beauty, fitted her with the necessary weapons for my complete and utter subjugation. And utterly subjugated I was—there was no use in denying the fact, even though I realised already that the time would presently come when she would want me no more and there would remain no remedy for me but to go away and try to forget her.

But was I acting as a man of honour? To this I felt I could fairly answer "yes," for I was but doing my duty, and could hardly act differently if I wished to. Besides, I was jeopardising no one's happiness but my own, and a man may do as he

pleases with his own happiness. No; even Thorndyke could not accuse me of dishonourable conduct.

Presently my thoughts took a fresh turn and I began to reflect upon what I had heard concerning Mr. Hornby. Here was a startling development, indeed, and I wondered what difference it would make in Thorndyke's hypothesis of the crime. What his theory was I had never been able to guess, but as I walked along through the thickening fog I tried to fit this new fact into our collection of data and determine its bearings and significance.

In this, for a time, I failed utterly. The red thumb-mark filled my field of vision to the exclusion of all else. To me, as to everyone else but Thorndyke, this fact was final and pointed to a conclusion that was unanswerable. But as I turned the story of the crime over and over, there came to me presently an idea that set in motion a new and very startling train of thought.

Could Mr. Hornby himself be the thief? His failure appeared sudden to the outside world, but he must have seen difficulties coming. There, indeed, was the thumb-mark on the leaf which he had torn from his pocket-block. Yes! but who had seen him tear it off? No one. The fact rested on his bare statement.

But the thumb-mark? Well, it was possible (though unlikely)—still possible—that the mark might have been made accidentally on some previous occasion and forgotten by Reuben, or even unnoticed. Mr. Hornby had seen the "Thumbograph," in fact his own mark was in it, and so would have had his attention directed to the importance of fingerprints in identification. He might have kept the marked paper for future use, and, on the occasion of the robbery, pencilled a dated inscription on it, and slipped it into the safe as a sure means of diverting suspicion. All this was improbable in the highest degree, but then so was every other explanation of the crime; and as to the unspeakable baseness of the deed, what action is too base for a gambler in difficulties?

I was so much excited and elated by my own ingenuity in having formed an intelligible and practicable theory of the crime, that I was now impatient to reach home that I might impart my news to Thorndyke and see how they affected him. But as I approached the centre of the town the fog grew so dense that all my attention was needed to enable me to thread my way safely through the traffic; while the strange, deceptive aspect that it lent to familiar objects and the obliteration of landmarks made my progress so slow that it was already past six o'clock when I felt my way down Middle Temple Lane and crept through Crown Office Row towards my colleague's chambers.

On the doorstep I found Polton peering with anxious face into the blank expanse of yellow vapour.

"The Doctor's late, sir," said he. "Detained by the fog, I expect. It must be pretty thick in the Borough."

(I may mention that, to Polton, Thorndyke was The Doctor. Other inferior creatures there were, indeed, to whom the title of "doctor" in a way, appertained; but they were of no account in Polton's eyes. Surnames were good enough for them.)

"Yes, it must be," I replied, "judging by the condition of the Strand."

I entered and ascended the stairs, glad enough of the prospect of a warm and well-lighted room after my comfortless groping in the murky streets, and Polton, with a final glance up and down the walk reluctantly followed.

"You would like some tea, sir, I expect?" said he, as he let me in (though I had a key of my own now).

I thought I should, and he accordingly set about the preparations in his deft methodical way, but with an air of abstraction that was unusual with him.

"The Doctor said he should be home by five," he remarked, as he laid the tea-pot on the tray.

"Then he is a defaulter," I answered. "We shall have to water his tea."

"A wonderful punctual man, sir, is the Doctor," pursued Polton. "Keeps his time to the minute, as a rule, he does."

"You can't keep your time to a minute in a 'London Particular,'" I said a little impatiently, for I wished to be alone that I might think over matters, and Polton's nervous flutterings irritated me somewhat. He was almost as bad as a female housekeeper.

The little man evidently perceived my state of mind, for he stole away silently, leaving me rather penitent and ashamed, and, as I presently discovered on looking out of the window, resumed his vigil on the doorstep. From this coign of vantage he returned after a time to take away the tea-things; and thereafter, though it was now dark as well as foggy, I could hear him softly flitting up and down the stairs with a gloomy stealthiness that at length reduced me to a condition as nervously apprehensive as his own.



## VIII. — A SUSPICIOUS ACCIDENT

THE Temple clock had announced in soft and confidential tones that it was a quarter to seven, in which statement it was stoutly supported by its colleague on our mantelpiece, and still there was no sign of Thorndyke. It was really a little strange, for he was the soul of punctuality, and moreover, his engagements were of such a kind as rendered punctuality possible. I was burning with impatience to impart my news to him, and this fact, together with the ghostly proceedings of Polton, worked me up to a state of nervous tension that rendered either rest or thought equally impossible. I looked out of the window at the lamp below, glaring redly through the fog, and then, opening the door, went out on to the landing to listen.

At this moment Polton made a silent appearance on the stairs leading from the laboratory, giving me quite a start; and I was about to retire into the room when my ear caught the tinkle of a hansom approaching from Paper Buildings.

The vehicle drew nearer, and at length stopped opposite the house, on which Polton slid down the stairs with the agility of a harlequin. A few moments later I heard his voice ascending from the hall—

“I do hope, sir, you’re not much hurt?”

I ran down the stairs and met Thorndyke coming up slowly with his right hand on Polton’s shoulder. His clothes were muddy, his left arm was in a sling, and a black handkerchief under his hat evidently concealed a bandage.

“I am not really hurt at all,” Thorndyke replied cheerily, “though very disreputable to look at. Just came a cropper in the mud, Jervis,” he added, as he noted my dismayed expression. “Dinner and a clothes-brush are what I chiefly need.” Nevertheless, he looked very pale and shaken when he came into the light on the landing, and he sank into his easy-chair in the limp manner of a man either very weak or very fatigued.

“How did it happen?” I asked when Polton had crept away on tip-toe to make ready for dinner.

Thorndyke looked round to make sure that his henchman had departed, and said—

“A queer affair, Jervis; a very odd affair indeed. I was coming up from the Borough, picking my way mighty carefully across the road on account of the greasy, slippery mud, and had just reached the foot of London Bridge when I heard a heavy lorry coming down the slope a good deal too fast, considering that it was impossible to see more than a dozen yards ahead, and I stopped on the kerb to see it safely past. Just as the horses emerged from the fog, a man came up behind and lurched violently against me and, strangely enough, at the same moment passed his foot in front of mine. Of course I went sprawling into the road right in front of the lorry. The horses came stamping and sliding straight on to me, and, before I could wriggle out of the way, the hoof of one of them smashed in my hat—that was a new one that I came home in—and half-stunned me. Then the near wheel struck my head, making a dirty little scalp wound, and pinned down my sleeve so that I couldn’t pull away my arm, which is consequently barked all the way down. It was a mighty near thing, Jervis; another inch or two and I should have been rolled out as flat as a starfish.”

“What became of the man?” I asked, wishing I could have had a brief interview with him.

“Lost to sight though to memory dear: he was off like a lamplighter. An alcoholic apple-woman picked me up and escorted me back to the hospital. It must have been a touching spectacle,” he added, with a dry smile at the recollection.

“And I suppose they kept you there for a time to recover?”

“Yes; I went into dry dock in the O. P. room, and then old Langdale insisted on my lying down for an hour or so in case any symptoms of concussion should appear. But I was only a trifle shaken and confused. Still, it was a queer affair.”

“You mean the man pushing you down in that way?”

“Yes; I can’t make out how his foot got in front of mine.”

“You don’t think it was intentional, surely?” I said.

“No, of course not,” he replied, but without much conviction, as it seemed to me; and I was about to pursue the matter when Polton reappeared, and my friend abruptly changed the subject.

After dinner I recounted my conversation with Walter Hornby, watching my colleague’s face with some eagerness to see what effect this new information would produce on him. The result was, on the whole, disappointing. He was interested, keenly interested, but showed no symptoms of excitement.

“So John Hornby has been plunging in mines, eh?” he said, when I had finished. “He ought to know better at his age. Did you learn how long he had been in difficulties?”

“No. But it can hardly have been quite sudden and unforeseen.”

“I should think not,” Thorndyke agreed. “A sudden slump often proves disastrous to the regular Stock Exchange gambler who is paying differences on large quantities of unpaid-for stock. But it looks as if Hornby had actually bought and paid for these mines, treating them as investments rather than speculations, in which case the depreciation would not have affected him in the same way. It would be interesting to know for certain.”

“It might have a considerable bearing on the present case, might it not?”

"Undoubtedly," said Thorndyke. "It might bear on the case in more ways than one. But you have some special point in your mind, I think."

"Yes. I was thinking that if these embarrassments had been growing up gradually for some time, they might have already assumed an acute form at the time of the robbery."

"That is well considered," said my colleague. "But what is the special bearing on the case supposing it was so?"

"On the supposition," I replied, "that Mr. Hornby was in actual pecuniary difficulties at the date of the robbery, it seems to me possible to construct a hypothesis as to the identity of the robber."

"I should like to hear that hypothesis stated," said Thorndyke, rousing himself and regarding me with lively interest.

"It is a highly improbable one," I began with some natural shyness at the idea of airing my wits before this master of inductive method; "in fact, it is almost fantastic."

"Never mind that," said he. "A sound thinker gives equal consideration to the probable and the improbable."

Thus encouraged, I proceeded to set forth the theory of the crime as it had occurred to me on my way home in the fog, and I was gratified to observe the close attention with which Thorndyke listened, and his little nods of approval at each point that I made.

When I had finished, he remained silent for some time, looking thoughtfully into the fire and evidently considering how my theory and the new facts on which it was based would fit in with the rest of the data. At length he spoke, without, however, removing his eyes from the red embers—

"This theory of yours, Jervis, does great credit to your ingenuity. We may disregard the improbability, seeing that the alternative theories are almost equally improbable, and the fact that emerges, and that gratifies me more than I can tell you, is that you are gifted with enough scientific imagination to construct a possible train of events. Indeed, the improbability—combined, of course, with possibility—really adds to the achievement, for the dullest mind can perceive the obvious—as, for instance, the importance of a finger-print. You have really done a great thing, and I congratulate you; for you have emancipated yourself, at least to some extent, from the great finger-print obsession, which has possessed the legal mind ever since Galton published his epoch-making monograph. In that work I remember he states that a finger-print affords evidence requiring no corroboration—a most dangerous and misleading statement which has been fastened upon eagerly by the police, who have naturally been delighted at obtaining a sort of magic touchstone by which they are saved the labour of investigation. But there is no such thing as a single fact that 'affords evidence requiring no corroboration.' As well might one expect to make a syllogism with a single premise."

"I suppose they would hardly go so far as that," I said, laughing.

"No," he admitted. "But the kind of syllogism that they do make is this—

"The crime was committed by the person who made this finger-print.

"But John Smith is the person who made the finger-print.

"Therefore the crime was committed by John Smith."

"Well, that is a perfectly good syllogism, isn't it?" I asked.

"Perfectly," he replied. "But, you see, it begs the whole question, which is, 'Was the crime committed by the person who made this finger-print?' That is where the corroboration is required."

"That practically leaves the case to be investigated without reference to the finger-print, which thus becomes of no importance."

"Not at all," rejoined Thorndyke; "the finger-print is a most valuable clue as long as its evidential value is not exaggerated. Take our present case, for instance. Without the thumb-print, the robbery might have been committed by anybody; there is no clue whatever. But the existence of the thumb-print narrows the inquiry down to Reuben or some person having access to his finger-prints."

"Yes, I see. Then you consider my theory of John Hornby as the perpetrator of the robbery as quite a tenable one?"

"Quite," replied Thorndyke. "I have entertained it from the first; and the new facts that you have gathered increase its probability. You remember I said that four hypotheses were possible: that the robbery was committed either by Reuben, by Walter, by John Hornby, or by some other person. Now, putting aside the 'some other person' for consideration only if the first three hypotheses fail, we have left, Reuben, Walter, and John. But if we leave the thumb-print out of the question, the probabilities evidently point to John Hornby, since he, admittedly, had access to the diamonds, whereas there is nothing to show that the others had. The thumb-print, however, transfers the suspicion to Reuben; but yet, as your theory makes evident, it does not completely clear John Hornby. As the case stands, the balance of probabilities may be stated thus: John Hornby undoubtedly had access to the diamonds, and therefore might have stolen them. But if the thumb-mark was made after he closed the safe and before he opened it again, some other person must have had access to them, and was probably the thief.

"The thumb-mark is that of Reuben Hornby, a fact that establishes a *prima facie* probability that he stole the diamonds. But there is no evidence that he had access to them, and if he had not, he could not have made the thumb-mark in the



manner and at the time stated.

"But John Hornby may have had access to the previously-made thumb-mark of Reuben, and may possibly have obtained it; in which case he is almost certainly the thief.

"As to Walter Hornby, he may have had the means of obtaining Reuben's thumb-mark; but there is no evidence that he had access either to the diamonds or to Mr. Hornby's memorandum block. The *prima facie* probabilities in his case, therefore, are very slight."

"The actual points at issue, then," I said, "are, whether Reuben had any means of opening the safe, and whether Mr. Hornby ever did actually have the opportunity of obtaining Reuben's thumb-mark in blood on his memorandum block."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "Those are the points—with some others—and they are likely to remain unsettled. Reuben's rooms have been searched by the police, who failed to find any skeleton or duplicate keys; but this proves nothing, as he would probably have made away with them when he heard of the thumb-mark being found. As to the other matter, I have asked Reuben, and he has no recollection of ever having made a thumb-mark in blood. So there the matter rests."

"And what about Mr. Hornby's liability for the diamonds?"

"I think we may dismiss that," answered Thorndyke. "He had undertaken no liability and there was no negligence. He would not be liable at law."

After my colleague retired, which he did quite early, I sat for a long time pondering upon this singular case in which I found myself involved. And the more I thought about it the more puzzled I became. If Thorndyke had no more satisfactory explanation to offer than that which he had given me this evening, the defence was hopeless, for the court was not likely to accept his estimate of the evidential value of finger-prints. Yet he had given Reuben something like a positive assurance that there would be an adequate defence, and had expressed his own positive conviction of the accused man's innocence. But Thorndyke was not a man to reach such a conviction through merely sentimental considerations. The inevitable conclusion was that he had something up his sleeve—that he had gained possession of some facts that had escaped my observation; and when I had reached this point I knocked out my pipe and betook myself to bed.

---

## IX. — THE PRISONER

ON the following morning, as I emerged from my room, I met Polton coming up with a tray (our bedrooms were on the attic floor above the laboratory and workshop), and I accordingly followed him into my friend's chamber.

"I shan't go out to-day," said Thorndyke, "though I shall come down presently. It is very inconvenient, but one must accept the inevitable. I have had a knock on the head, and, although I feel none the worse, I must take the proper precautions—rest and a low diet—until I see that no results are going to follow. You can attend to the scalp wound and send round the necessary letters, can't you?"

I expressed my willingness to do all that was required and applauded my friend's self-control and good sense; indeed, I could not help contrasting the conduct of this busy, indefatigable man, cheerfully resigning himself to most distasteful inaction, with the fussy behaviour of the ordinary patient who, with nothing of importance to do, can hardly be prevailed upon to rest, no matter how urgent the necessity. Accordingly, I breakfasted alone, and spent the morning in writing and despatching letters to the various persons who were expecting visits from my colleague.

Shortly after lunch (a very spare one, by the way, for Polton appeared to include me in the scheme of reduced diet) my expectant ear caught the tinkle of a hansom approaching down Crown Office Row.

"Here comes your fair companion," said Thorndyke, whom I had acquainted with my arrangements, "Tell Hornby, from me, to keep up his courage, and, for yourself, bear my warning in mind. I should be sorry indeed if you ever had cause to regret that you had rendered me the very valuable services for which I am now indebted to you. Good-bye; don't keep her waiting."

I ran down the stairs and came out of the entry just as the cabman had pulled up and flung open the doors.

"Holloway Prison—main entrance," I said, as I stepped up on to the footboard.

"There ain't no back door there, sir," the man responded, with a grin; and I was glad that neither the answer nor the grin was conveyed to my fellow-passenger.

"You are very punctual, Miss Gibson," I said. "It is not half-past one yet."

"Yes; I thought I should like to get there by two, so as to have as long a time with him as is possible without shortening your interview."

I looked at my companion critically. She was dressed with rather more than her usual care, and looked, in fact, a very fine lady indeed. This circumstance, which I noted at first with surprise and then with decided approbation, caused me some inward discomfort, for I had in my mind a very distinct and highly disagreeable picture of the visiting arrangements at a local prison in one of the provinces, at which I had acted temporarily as medical officer.

"I suppose," I said at length, "it is of no use for me to re-open the question of the advisability of this visit on your part?"

"Not the least," she replied resolutely, "though I understand and appreciate your motive in wishing to do so."

"Then," said I, "if you are really decided, it will be as well for me to prepare you for the ordeal. I am afraid it will give you a terrible shock."

"Indeed?" said she. "Is it so bad? Tell me what it will be like."

"In the first place," I replied, "you must keep in your mind the purpose of a prison like Holloway. We are going to see an innocent man—a cultivated and honourable gentleman. But the ordinary inmates of Holloway are not innocent men; for the most part, the remand cases on the male side are professional criminals, while the women are either petty offenders or chronic inebriates. Most of them are regular customers at the prison—such is the idiotic state of the law—who come into the reception-room like travellers entering a familiar hostelry, address the prison officers by name and demand the usual privileges and extra comforts—the 'drunks,' for instance, generally ask for a dose of bromide to steady their nerves and a light in the cell to keep away the horrors. And such being the character of the inmates, their friends who visit them are naturally of the same type—the lowest outpourings of the slums; and it is not surprising to find that the arrangements of the prison are made to fit its ordinary inmates. The innocent man is a negligible quantity, and no arrangements are made for him or his visitors."

"But shall we not be taken to Reuben's cell?" asked Miss Gibson.

"Bless you! no," I answered; and, determined to give her every inducement to change her mind, I continued: "I will describe the procedure as I have seen it—and a very dreadful and shocking sight I found it, I can tell you. It was while I was acting as a prison doctor in the Midlands that I had this experience. I was going my round one morning when, passing along a passage, I became aware of a strange, muffled roar from the other side of the wall."

"What is that noise?" I asked the warder who was with me.

"Prisoners seeing their friends," he answered. "Like to have a look at them, sir?"

"He unlocked a small door and, as he threw it open, the distant, muffled sound swelled into a deafening roar. I passed through the door and found myself in a narrow alley at one end of which a warder was sitting. The sides of the alley were formed by two immense cages with stout wire bars, one for the prisoners and the other for the visitors; and each cage was lined with faces and hands, all in incessant movement, the faces mouthing and grimacing, and the hands clawing restlessly at the bars. The uproar was so terrific that no single voice could be distinguished, though every one present was shouting his loudest to make himself heard above the universal din. The result was a very strange and horrid illusion, for it seemed as if no one was speaking at all, but that the noise came from outside, and that each one of the faces—low, vicious faces, mostly—was silently grimacing and gibbering, snapping its jaws and glaring furiously at the occupants of the opposite cage. It was a frightful spectacle. I could think of nothing but the monkey-house at the Zoo. It seemed as if one ought to walk up the alley and offer nuts and pieces of paper to be torn to pieces."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Miss Gibson. "And do you mean to say that we shall be turned loose into one of these cages with a herd of other visitors?"

"No. You are not turned loose anywhere in a prison. The arrangement is this: each cage is divided by partitions into a number of small boxes or apartments, which are numbered. The prisoner is locked in one box and his visitor in the corresponding box opposite. They are thus confronted, with the width of the alley between them; they can see one another and talk but cannot pass any forbidden articles across—a very necessary precaution, I need hardly say."

"Yes, I suppose it is necessary, but it is horrible for decent people. Surely they ought to be able to discriminate."

"Why not give it up and let me take a message to Reuben? He would understand and be thankful to me for dissuading you."

"No, no," she said quickly; "the more repulsive it is the greater the necessity for me to go. He must not be allowed to think that a trifling inconvenience or indignity is enough to scare his friends away. What building is that ahead?"

We had just swung round from Caledonian Road into a quiet and prosperous-looking suburban street, at the end of which rose the tower of a castellated building.

"That is the prison," I replied. "We are looking at it from the most advantageous point of view; seen from the back, and especially from the inside, it is a good deal less attractive."

Nothing more was said until the cab drove into the courtyard and set us down outside the great front gates. Having directed the cabman to wait for us, I rang the bell and we were speedily admitted through a wicket (which was immediately closed and locked) into a covered court closed in by a second gate, through the bars of which we could see across an inner courtyard to the actual entrance to the prison. Here, while the necessary formalities were gone through, we found ourselves part of a numerous and very motley company, for a considerable assemblage of the prisoners' friends was awaiting the moment of admission. I noticed that my companion was observing our fellow-visitors with a kind of horrified curiosity, which she strove, however, and not unsuccessfully, to conceal; and certainly the appearance of the majority furnished eloquent testimony to the failure of crime as a means of worldly advancement. Their present position was productive of very varied emotions; some were silent and evidently stricken with grief; a larger number were voluble and excited, while a considerable proportion were quite cheerful and even inclined to be facetious.

At length the great iron gate was unlocked and our party taken in charge by a warder, who conducted us to that part of

the building known as “the wing”; and, in the course of our progress, I could not help observing the profound impression made upon my companion by the circumstance that every door had to be unlocked to admit us and was locked again as soon as we had passed through.

“It seems to me,” I said, as we neared our destination, “that you had better let me see Reuben first; I have not much to say to him and shall not keep you waiting long.”

“Why do you think so?” she asked, with a shade of suspicion.

“Well,” I answered, “I think you may be a little upset by the interview, and I should like to see you into your cab as soon as possible afterwards.”

“Yes,” she said; “perhaps you are right, and it is kind of you to be so thoughtful on my account.”

A minute later, accordingly, I found myself shut into a narrow box, like one of those which considerate pawnbrokers provide for their more diffident clients, and in a similar, but more intense, degree, pervaded by a subtle odour of uncleanness. The woodwork was polished to an unctuous smoothness by the friction of numberless dirty hands and soiled garments, and the general appearance—taken in at a glance as I entered—was such as to cause me to thrust my hands into my pockets and studiously avoid contact with any part of the structure but the floor. The end of the box opposite the door was closed in by a strong grating of wire—excepting the lower three feet, which was of wood—and looking through this, I perceived, behind a second grating, Reuben Hornby, standing in a similar attitude to my own. He was dressed in his usual clothes and with his customary neatness, but his face was unshaven and he wore, suspended from a button-hole, a circular label bearing the characters “B.31”; and these two changes in his exterior carried with them a suggestiveness as subtle as it was unpleasant, making me more than ever regretful that Miss Gibson had insisted on coming.

“It is exceedingly good of you, Dr. Jervis, to come and see me,” he said heartily, making himself heard quite easily, to my surprise, above the hubbub of the adjoining boxes; “but I didn’t expect you here. I was told I could see my legal advisers in the solicitor’s box.”

“So you could,” I answered. “But I came here by choice because I have brought Miss Gibson with me.”

“I am sorry for that,” he rejoined, with evident disapproval; “she oughtn’t to have come among these riff-raff.”

“I told her so, and that you wouldn’t like it, but she insisted.”

“I know,” said Reuben. “That’s the worst of women—they will make a beastly fuss and sacrifice themselves when nobody wants them to. But I mustn’t be ungrateful; she means it kindly, and she’s a deuced good sort, is Juliet.”

“She is indeed,” I exclaimed, not a little disgusted at his cool, unappreciative tone; “a most noble-hearted girl, and her devotion to you is positively heroic.”

The faintest suspicion of a smile appeared on the face seen through the double grating; on which I felt that I could have pulled his nose with pleasure—only that a pair of tongs of special construction would have been required for the purpose.

“Yes,” he answered calmly, “we have always been very good friends.”

A rejoinder of the most extreme acidity was on my lips. Damn the fellow! What did he mean by speaking in that supercilious tone of the loveliest and sweetest woman in the world? But, after all, one cannot trample on a poor devil locked up in a jail on a false charge, no matter how great may be the provocation. I drew a deep breath, and, having recovered myself, outwardly at least, said—

“I hope you don’t find the conditions here too intolerable?”

“Oh, no,” he answered. “It’s beastly unpleasant, of course, but it might easily be worse. I don’t mind if it’s only for a week or two; and I am really encouraged by what Dr. Thorndyke said. I hope he wasn’t being merely soothing.”

“You may take it that he was not. What he said, I am sure he meant. Of course, you know I am not in his confidence—nobody is—but I gather that he is satisfied with the defence he is preparing.”

“If he is satisfied, I am,” said Reuben, “and, in any case, I shall owe him an immense debt of gratitude for having stood by me and believed in me when all the world—except my aunt and Juliet—had condemned me.”

He then went on to give me a few particulars of his prison life, and when he had chatted for a quarter of an hour or so, I took my leave to make way for Miss Gibson.

Her interview with him was not as long as I had expected, though, to be sure, the conditions were not very favourable either for the exchange of confidences or for utterances of a sentimental character. The consciousness that one’s conversation could be overheard by the occupants of adjacent boxes destroyed all sense of privacy, to say nothing of the disturbing influence of the warder in the alley-way.

When she rejoined me, her manner was abstracted and very depressed, a circumstance that gave me considerable food for reflection as we made our way in silence towards the main entrance. Had she found Reuben as cool and matter-of-fact as I had? He was assuredly a very calm and self-possessed lover, and it was conceivable that his reception of the girl, strung up, as she was, to an acute pitch of emotion, might have been somewhat in the nature of an anticlimax. And then, was it possible that the feeling was on her side only? Could it be that the priceless pearl of her love was cast before—I was tempted to use the colloquial singular and call him an “unappreciative swine!” The thing was almost unthinkable to me,

and yet I was tempted to dwell upon it; for when a man is in love—and I could no longer disguise my condition from myself—he is inclined to be humble and to gather up thankfully the treasure that is rejected of another.

I was brought up short in these reflections by the clank of the lock in the great iron gate. We entered together the gloomy vestibule, and a moment later were let out through the wicket into the courtyard; and as the lock clicked behind us, we gave a simultaneous sigh of relief to find ourselves outside the precincts of the prison, beyond the domain of bolts and bars.

I had settled Miss Gibson in the cab and given her address to the driver, when I noticed her looking at me, as I thought, somewhat wistfully.

“Can’t I put you down somewhere?” she said, in response to a half-questioning glance from me.

I seized the opportunity with thankfulness and replied—

“You might set me down at King’s Cross if it is not delaying you;” and giving the word to the cabman, I took my place by her side as the cab started and a black-painted prison van turned into the courtyard with its freight of squalid misery.

“I don’t think Reuben was very pleased to see me,” Miss Gibson remarked presently, “but I shall come again all the same. It is a duty I owe both to him and to myself.”

I felt that I ought to endeavour to dissuade her, but the reflection that her visits must almost of necessity involve my companionship, enfeebled my will. I was fast approaching a state of infatuation.

“I was so thankful,” she continued, “that you prepared me. It was a horrible experience to see the poor fellow caged like a wild beast, with that dreadful label hanging from his coat; but it would have been overwhelming if I had not known what to expect.”

As we proceeded, her spirits revived somewhat, a circumstance that she graciously ascribed to the enlivening influence of my society; and I then told her of the mishap that had befallen my colleague.

“What a terrible thing!” she exclaimed, with evidently unaffected concern. “It is the merest chance that he was not killed on the spot. Is he much hurt? And would he mind, do you think, if I called to inquire after him?”

I said that I was sure he would be delighted (being, as a matter of fact, entirely indifferent as to his sentiments on the subject in my delight at the proposal), and when I stepped down from the cab at King’s Cross to pursue my way homewards, there already opened out before me the prospect of the renewal of this bitter-sweet and all too dangerous companionship on the morrow.

---

## X. — POLTON IS MYSTIFIED

A COUPLE of days sufficed to prove that Thorndyke’s mishap was not to be productive of any permanent ill consequences; his wounds progressed favourably and he was able to resume his ordinary avocations.

Miss Gibson’s visit—but why should I speak of her in these formal terms? To me, when I thought of her, which I did only too often, she was Juliet, with perhaps an adjective thrown in; and as Juliet I shall henceforth speak of her (but without the adjective) in this narrative, wherein nothing has been kept back from the reader—Juliet’s visit, then, had been a great success, for my colleague was really pleased by the attention, and displayed a quiet geniality that filled our visitor with delight.

He talked a good deal of Reuben, and I could see that he was endeavouring to settle in his own mind the vexed question of her relations with and sentiments towards our unfortunate client; but what conclusions he arrived at I was unable to discover, for he was by no means communicative after she had left. Nor was there any repetition of the visit—greatly to my regret—since, as I have said, he was able, in a day or two, to resume his ordinary mode of life.

The first evidence I had of his renewed activity appeared when I returned to the chambers at about eleven o’clock in the morning, to find Polton hovering dejectedly about the sitting-room, apparently perpetrating as near an approach to a “spring clean” as could be permitted in a bachelor establishment.

“Hallo, Polton!” I exclaimed, “have you contrived to tear yourself away from the laboratory for an hour or two?”

“No, sir,” he answered gloomily. “The laboratory has torn itself away from me.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“The Doctor has shut himself in and locked the door, and he says I am not to disturb him. It will be a cold lunch to-day.”

“What is he doing in there?” I inquired.

“Ah!” said Polton, “that’s just what I should like to know. I’m fair eaten up with curiosity. He is making some experiments in connection with some of his cases, and when the Doctor locks himself in to make experiments, something interesting generally follows. I should like to know what it is this time.”

“I suppose there is a keyhole in the laboratory door?” I suggested, with a grin.

“Sir!” he exclaimed indignantly. “Dr. Jervis, I am surprised at you.” Then, perceiving my facetious intent, he smiled also

and added: "But there is a keyhole if you'd like to try it, though I'll wager the Doctor would see more of you than you would of him."

"You are mighty secret about your doings, you and the Doctor," I said.

"Yes," he answered. "You see, it's a queer trade this of the Doctor's, and there are some queer secrets in it. Now, for instance, what do you make of this?"

He produced from his pocket a leather case, whence he took a piece of paper which he handed to me. On it was a neatly executed drawing of what looked like one of a set of chessmen, with the dimensions written on the margin.

"It looks like a pawn—one of the Staunton pattern," I said.

"Just what I thought; but it isn't. I've got to make twenty-four of them, and what the Doctor is going to do with them fairly beats me."

"Perhaps he has invented some new game," I suggested facetiously.

"He is always inventing new games and playing them mostly in courts of law, and then the other players generally lose. But this is a puzzler, and no mistake. Twenty-four of these to be turned up in the best-seasoned boxwood! What can they be for? Something to do with the experiments he is carrying on upstairs at this very moment, I expect." He shook his head, and, having carefully returned the drawing to his pocket-book, said, in a solemn tone—"Sir, there are times when the Doctor makes me fairly dance with curiosity. And this is one of them."

Although not afflicted with a curiosity so acute as that of Polton, I found myself speculating at intervals on the nature of my colleague's experiments and the purpose of the singular little objects which he had ordered to be made; but I was unacquainted with any of the cases on which he was engaged, excepting that of Reuben Hornby, and with the latter I was quite unable to connect a set of twenty-four boxwood chessmen. Moreover, on this day, I was to accompany Juliet on her second visit to Holloway, and that circumstance gave me abundant mental occupation of another kind.

At lunch, Thorndyke was animated and talkative but not communicative. He "had some work in the laboratory that he must do himself," he said, but gave no hint as to its nature; and as soon as our meal was finished, he returned to his labours, leaving me to pace up and down the walk, listening with ridiculous eagerness for the sound of the hansom that was to transport me to the regions of the blest, and—incidentally—to Holloway Prison.

When I returned to the Temple, the sitting-room was empty and hideously neat, as the result of Polton's spring-cleaning efforts. My colleague was evidently still at work in the laboratory, and, from the circumstance that the tea-things were set out on the table and a kettle of water placed in readiness on the gas-ring by the fireplace, I gathered that Polton also was full of business and anxious not to be disturbed.

Accordingly, I lit the gas and made my tea, enlivening my solitude by turning over in my mind the events of the afternoon.

Juliet had been charming—as she always was—frank, friendly and unaffectedly pleased to have my companionship. She evidently liked me and did not disguise the fact—why should she indeed?—but treated me with a freedom, almost affectionate, as though I had been a favourite brother; which was very delightful, and would have been more so if I could have accepted the relationship. As to her feelings towards me, I had not the slightest misgiving, and so my conscience was clear; for Juliet was as innocent as a child, with the innocence that belongs to the direct, straightforward nature that neither does evil itself nor looks for evil motives in others. For myself, I was past praying for. The thing was done and I must pay the price hereafter, content to reflect that I had trespassed against no one but myself. It was a miserable affair, and many a heartache did it promise me in the lonely days that were to come, when I should have said "good-bye" to the Temple and gone back to my old nomadic life; and yet I would not have had it changed if I could; would not have bartered the bitter-sweet memories for dull forgetfulness.

But other matters had transpired in the course of our drive than those that loomed so large to me in the egotism of my love. We had spoken of Mr. Hornby and his affairs, and from our talk there had emerged certain facts of no little moment to the inquiry on which I was engaged.

"Misfortunes are proverbially sociable," Juliet had remarked, in reference to her adopted uncle. "As if this trouble about Reuben were not enough, there are worries in the city. Perhaps you have heard of them."

I replied that Walter had mentioned the matter to me.

"Yes," said Juliet rather viciously; "I am not quite clear as to what part that good gentleman has played in the matter. It has come out, quite accidentally, that he had a large holding in the mines himself, but he seems to have 'cut his loss,' as the phrase goes, and got out of them; though how he managed to pay such large differences is more than we can understand. We think he must have raised money somehow to do it."

"Do you know when the mines began to depreciate?" I asked.

"Yes, it was quite a sudden affair—what Walter calls 'a slump'—and it occurred only a few days before the robbery. Mr. Hornby was telling me about it only yesterday, and he recalled it to me by a ridiculous accident that happened on that day."

"What was that?" I inquired.

"Why, I cut my finger and nearly fainted," she answered, with a shamefaced little laugh. "It was rather a bad cut, you know, but I didn't notice it until I found my hand covered with blood. Then I turned suddenly faint, and had to lie down on the hearthrug—it was in Mr. Hornby's study, which I was tidying up at the time. Here I was found by Reuben, and a dreadful fright it gave him at first; and then he tore up his handkerchief to tie up the wounded finger, and you never saw such an awful mess as he got his hands in. He might have been arrested as a murderer, poor boy, from the condition he was in. It will make your professional gorge rise to learn that he fastened up the extemporised bandage with red tape, which he got from the writing table after rooting about among the sacred papers in the most ruthless fashion.

"When he had gone I tried to put the things on the table straight again, and really you might have thought some horrible crime had been committed; the envelopes and papers were all smeared with blood and marked with the print of gory fingers. I remembered it afterwards, when Reuben's thumb-mark was identified, and thought that perhaps one of the papers might have got into the safe by accident; but Mr. Hornby told me that was impossible; he tore the leaf off his memorandum block at the time when he put away the diamonds."

Such was the gist of our conversation as the cab rattled through the streets on the way to the prison; and certainly it contained matter sufficiently important to draw away my thoughts from other subjects, more agreeable, but less relevant to the case. With a sudden remembrance of my duty, I drew forth my notebook, and was in the act of committing the statements to writing, when Thorndyke entered the room.

"Don't let me interrupt you, Jervis," said he. "I will make myself a cup of tea while you finish your writing, and then you shall exhibit the day's catch and hang your nets out to dry."

I was not long in finishing my notes, for I was in a fever of impatience to hear Thorndyke's comments on my latest addition to our store of information. By the time the kettle was boiling my entries were completed, and I proceeded forthwith to retail to my colleague those extracts from my conversation with Juliet that I have just recorded.

He listened, as usual, with deep and critical attention.

"This is very interesting and important," he said, when I had finished; "really, Jervis, you are a most invaluable coadjutor. It seems that information, which would be strictly withheld from the forbidding Jorkins, trickles freely and unasked into the ear of the genial Spenlow. Now, I suppose you regard your hypothesis as having received very substantial confirmation?"

"Certainly, I do."

"And very justifiably. You see now how completely you were in the right when you allowed yourself to entertain this theory of the crime in spite of its apparent improbability. By the light of these new facts it has become quite a probable explanation of the whole affair, and if it could only be shown that Mr. Hornby's memorandum block was among the papers on the table, it would rise to a high degree of probability. The obvious moral is, never disregard the improbable. By the way, it is odd that Reuben failed to recall this occurrence when I questioned him. Of course, the bloody finger-marks were not discovered until he had gone, but one would have expected him to recall the circumstance when I asked him, pointedly, if he had never left bloody finger-prints on any papers."

"I must try to find out if Mr. Hornby's memorandum block was on the table and among the marked papers," I said.

"Yes, that would be wise," he answered, "though I don't suppose the information will be forthcoming."

My colleague's manner rather disappointed me. He had heard my report with the greatest attention, he had discussed it with animation, but yet he seemed to attach to the new and—as they appeared to me—highly important facts an interest that was academic rather than practical. Of course, his calmness might be assumed; but this did not seem likely, for John Thorndyke was far too sincere and dignified a character to cultivate in private life the artifices of the actor. To strangers, indeed, he presented habitually a calm and impassive exterior; but this was natural to him, and was but the outward sign of his even and judicial habit of mind.

No; there was no doubt that my startling news had left him unmoved, and this must be for one of two reasons: either he already knew all that I had told him (which was perfectly possible), or he had some other and better means of explaining the crime. I was turning over these two alternatives, not unobserved by my watchful colleague, when Polton entered the room; a broad grin was on his face, and a drawing-board, that he carried like a tray, bore twenty-four neatly turned boxwood pieces.

Thorndyke at once entered into the unspoken jest that beamed from the countenance of his subordinate.

"Here is Polton with a problem for you, Jervis," he said. "He assumes that I have invented a new parlour game, and has been trying to work out the moves. Have you succeeded yet, Polton?"

"No, sir, I haven't; but I suspect that one of the players will be a man in a wig and gown."

"Perhaps you are right," said Thorndyke; "but that doesn't take you very far. Let us hear what Dr. Jervis has to say."

"I can make nothing of them," I answered. "Polton showed me the drawing this morning, and then was terrified lest he had committed a breach of confidence, and I have been trying ever since, without a glimmer of success, to guess what they can be for."

"H'm," grunted Thorndyke, as he sauntered up and down the room, teacup in hand, "to guess, eh? I like not that word

'guess' in the mouth of a man of science. What do you mean by a 'guess'?"

His manner was wholly facetious, but I professed to take his question seriously, and replied—

"By a guess, I mean a conclusion arrived at without data."

"Impossible!" he exclaimed, with mock sternness. "Nobody but an utter fool arrives at a conclusion without data."

"Then I must revise my definition instantly," I rejoined. "Let us say that a guess is a conclusion drawn from insufficient facts."

"That is better," said he; "but perhaps it would be better still to say that a guess is a particular and definite conclusion deduced from facts which properly yield only a general and indefinite one. Let us take an instance," he continued. "Looking out of the window, I see a man walking round Paper Buildings. Now suppose I say, after the fashion of the inspired detective of the romances, 'That man is a stationmaster or inspector,' that would be a guess. The observed facts do not yield the conclusion, though they do warrant a conclusion less definite and more general."

"You'd have been right though, sir!" exclaimed Polton, who had stepped forward with me to examine the unconscious subject of the demonstration. "That gent used to be the stationmaster at Camberwell. I remember him well."

The little man was evidently greatly impressed.

"I happen to be right, you see," said Thorndyke; "but I might as easily have been wrong."

"You weren't though, sir," said Polton. "You spotted him at a glance."

In his admiration of the result he cared not a fig for the correctness of the means by which it had been attained.

"Now why do I suggest that he is a stationmaster?" pursued Thorndyke, disregarding his assistant's comment.

"I suppose you were looking at his feet," I answered. "I seem to have noticed that peculiar, splay-footed gait in stationmasters, now that you mention it."

"Quite so. The arch of the foot has given way; the plantar ligaments have become stretched and the deep calf muscles weakened. Then, since bending of the weakened arch causes discomfort, the feet have become turned outwards, by which the bending of the foot is reduced to a minimum; and as the left foot is the more flattened, so it is turned out more than the right. Then the turning out of the toes causes the legs to splay outward from the knees downwards—a very conspicuous condition in a tall man like this one—and you notice that the left leg splays out more than the other.

"But we know that depression of the arch of the foot is brought about by standing for long periods. Continuous pressure on a living structure weakens it, while intermittent pressure strengthens it; so the man who stands on his feet continuously develops a flat instep and a weak calf, while the professional dancer or runner acquires a high instep and a strong calf. Now there are many occupations which involve prolonged standing and so induce the condition of flat foot: waiters, hall-porters, hawkers, policemen, shop-walkers, salesmen, and station officials are examples. But the waiter's gait is characteristic—a quick, shuffling walk which enables him to carry liquids without spilling them. This man walks with a long, swinging stride; he is obviously not a waiter. His dress and appearance in general exclude the idea of a hawker or even a hall-porter; he is a man of poor physique and so cannot be a policeman. The shop-walker or salesman is accustomed to move in relatively confined spaces, and so acquires a short, brisk step, and his dress tends to rather exuberant smartness; the station official patrols long platforms, often at a rapid pace, and so tends to take long strides, while his dress is dignified and neat rather than florid. The last-mentioned characteristics, you see, appear in the subject of our analysis; he agrees with the general description of a stationmaster. But if we therefore conclude that he is a stationmaster, we fall into the time-honoured fallacy of the undistributed middle term—the fallacy that haunts all brilliant guessers, including the detective, not only of romance, but too often also of real life. All that the observed facts justify us in inferring is that this man is engaged in some mode of life that necessitates a good deal of standing; the rest is mere guess-work."

"It's wonderful," said Polton, gazing at the now distant figure; "perfectly wonderful. I should never have known he was a stationmaster." With this and a glance of deep admiration at his employer, he took his departure.

"You will also observe," said Thorndyke, with a smile, "that a fortunate guess often brings more credit than a piece of sound reasoning with a less striking result."

"Yes, that is unfortunately the case, and it is certainly true in the present instance. Your reputation, as far as Polton is concerned, is now firmly established even if it was not before. In his eyes you are a wizard from whom nothing is hidden. But to return to these little pieces, as I must call them, for the lack of a better name. I can form no hypothesis as to their use. I seem to have no 'departure,' as the nautical phrase goes, from which to start an inquiry. I haven't even the material for guess-work. Ought I to be able to arrive at any opinion on the subject?"

Thorndyke picked up one of the pieces, fingering it delicately and inspecting with a critical eye the flat base on which it stood, and reflected for a few moments.

"It is easy to trace a connection when one knows all the facts," he said at length, "but it seems to me that you have the materials from which to form a conjecture. Perhaps I am wrong, but I think, when you have had more experience, you will find yourself able to work out a problem of this kind. What is required is constructive imagination and a rigorous exactness in reasoning. Now, you are a good reasoner, and you have recently shown me that you have the necessary imagination; you merely lack experience in the use of your faculties. When you learn my purpose in having these things made—as you will

before long—you will probably be surprised that their use did not occur to you. And now let us go forth and take a brisk walk to refresh ourselves (or perhaps I should say myself) after the day's labour.

---

## XI. — THE AMBUSH

"I AM going to ask for your collaboration in another case," said Thorndyke, a day or two later. "It appears to be one of suicide, but the solicitors to the 'Griffin' office have asked me to go down to the place, which is in the neighbourhood of Barnet, and be present at the *post-mortem* and the inquest. They have managed to arrange that the inquest shall take place directly after the *post-mortem*, so that we shall be able to do the whole business in a single visit."

"Is the case one of any intricacy?" I asked.

"I don't think so," he answered. "It looks like a common suicide; but you can never tell. The importance of the case at present arises entirely from the heavy insurance; a verdict of suicide will mean a gain of ten thousand pounds to the 'Griffin,' so, naturally, the directors are anxious to get the case settled and not inclined to boggle over a little expense."

"Naturally. And when will the expedition take place?" I asked.

"The inquest is fixed for to-morrow—what is the matter? Does that fall foul of any arrangement of yours?"

"Oh, nothing of any importance," I replied hastily, deeply ashamed of the momentary change of countenance that my friend had been so quick to observe.

"Well, what is it?" persisted Thorndyke. "You have got something on."

"It is nothing, I tell you, but what can be quite easily arranged to suit your plans."

"*Cherchez la—h'm?*" queried Thorndyke, with an exasperating grin.

"Yes," I answered, turning as red as a pickled cabbage; "since you are so beastly inquisitive. Miss Gibson wrote, on behalf of Mrs. Hornby, asking me to dine with them *en famille* to-morrow evening, and I sent off an acceptance an hour ago."

"And you call that 'nothing of any importance!'" exclaimed Thorndyke. "Alas! and likewise alackaday (which is an approximately synonymous expression)! The age of chivalry is past, indeed. Of course you must keep your appointment; I can manage quite well alone."

"We shouldn't be back early enough for me to go to Kensington from the station, I suppose?"

"No; certainly not. I find that the trains are very awkward; we should not reach King's Cross until nearly one in the morning."

"Then, in that case, I shall write to Miss Gibson and excuse myself."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," said Thorndyke; "it will disappoint them, and really it is not necessary."

"I shall write forthwith," I said firmly, "so please don't try to dissuade me. I have been feeling quite uncomfortable at the thought that, all the time I have been in your employ, I seem to have done nothing but idle about and amuse myself. The opportunity of doing something tangible for my wage is too precious to be allowed to slip."

Thorndyke chuckled indulgently. "You shall do as you please, my dear boy," he said; "but don't imagine that you have been eating the bread of idleness. When you see this Hornby case worked out in detail, you will be surprised to find how large a part you have taken in unravelling it. Your worth to me has been far beyond your poor little salary, I can assure you."

"It is very handsome of you to say that," I said, highly gratified to learn that I was really of use, and not, as I had begun to suspect, a mere object of charity.

"It is perfectly true," he answered; "and now, since you are going to help me in this case, I will set you your task. The case, as I have said, appears to be quite simple, but it never does to take the simplicity for granted. Here is the letter from the solicitors giving the facts as far as they are known at present. On the shelves there you will find Casper, Taylor, Guy and Ferrier, and the other authorities on medical jurisprudence, and I will put out one or two other books that you may find useful. I want you to extract and make classified notes of everything that may bear on such a case as the present one may turn out to be. We must go prepared to meet any contingency that may arise. This is my invariable practice, and even if the case turns out to be quite simple, the labour is never wasted, for it represents so much experience gained."

"Casper and Taylor are pretty old, aren't they?" I objected.

"So is suicide," he retorted drily. "It is a capital mistake to neglect the old authorities. 'There were strong men before Agamemnon,' and some of them were uncommonly strong, let me tell you. Give your best attention to the venerable Casper and the obsolete Taylor and you will not be without your reward."

As a result of these injunctions, I devoted the remainder of the day to the consideration of the various methods by which a man might contrive to effect his exit from the stage of human activities. And a very engrossing study I found it, and the more interesting in view of the problem that awaited solution on the morrow; but yet not so engrossing but that I was able to find time to write a long, rather intimate and minutely explanatory letter to Miss Gibson, in which I even mentioned the



hour of our return as showing the impossibility of my keeping my engagement. Not that I had the smallest fear of her taking offence, for it is an evidence of my respect and regard for her that I cancelled the appointment without a momentary doubt that she would approve of my action; but it was pleasant to write to her at length and to feel the intimacy of keeping her informed of the details of my life.

The case, when we came to inquire into it on the spot, turned out to be a suicide of the most transparent type; whereat both Thorndyke and I were, I think, a little disappointed—he at having apparently done so little for a very substantial fee, and I at having no opportunity for applying my recently augmented knowledge.

“Yes,” said my colleague, as we rolled ourselves up in our rugs in adjacent corners of the railway carriage, “it has been a flat affair, and the whole thing could have been managed by the local solicitor. But it is not a waste of time after all, for, you see, I have to do many a day’s work for which I get not a farthing of payment, nor even any recognition, so that I do not complain if I occasionally find myself receiving more payment than my actual services merit. And as to you, I take it that you have acquired a good deal of valuable knowledge on the subject of suicide, and knowledge, as the late Lord Bacon remarked with more truth than originality, is power.”

To this I made no reply, having just lit my pipe and feeling uncommonly drowsy; and, my companion having followed my example, we smoked in silence, becoming more and more somnolent, until the train drew up in the terminus and we turned out, yawning and shivering, on to the platform.

“Bah!” exclaimed Thorndyke, drawing his rug round his shoulders; “this is a cheerless hour—a quarter past one. See how chilly and miserable all these poor devils of passengers look. Shall we cab it or walk?”

“I think a sharp walk would rouse our circulation after sitting huddled up in the carriage for so long,” I answered.

“So do I,” said Thorndyke, “so let us away; hark forward! and also Tally Ho! In fact one might go so far as to say Yoicks! That gentleman appears to favour the strenuous life, if one may judge by the size of his sprocket-wheel.”

He pointed to a bicycle that was drawn up by the kerb in the approach—a machine of the road-racer type, with an enormous sprocket-wheel, indicating a gear of, at least, ninety.

“Some scorcher or amateur racer, probably,” I said, “who takes the opportunity of getting a spin on the wood pavement when the streets are empty.” I looked round to see if I could identify the owner, but the machine appeared to be, for the moment, taking care of itself.

King’s Cross is one of those districts of which the inhabitants are slow in settling down for the night, and even at a quarter past one in the morning its streets are not entirely deserted. Here and there the glimmer of a street lamp or the far-reaching ray from a tall electric light reveals the form of some nocturnal prowler creeping along with cat-like stealthiness, or bursting, cat-like, into unmelodious song. Not greatly desirous of the society of these roysterers, we crossed quickly from the station into the Gray’s Inn Road, now silent and excessively dismal in aspect, and took our way along the western side. We had turned the curve and were crossing Manchester Street, when a series of yelps from ahead announced the presence of a party of merry-makers, whom we were not yet able to see, however, for the night was an exceptionally dark one; but the sounds of revelry continued to increase in volume as we proceeded, until, as we passed Sidmouth Street, we came in sight of the revellers. They were some half-dozen in number, all of them roughs of the hooligan type, and they were evidently in boisterous spirits, for, as they passed the entrance to the Royal Free Hospital, they halted and battered furiously at the gate. Shortly after this exploit they crossed the road on to our side, whereupon Thorndyke caught my arm and slackened his pace.

“Let them draw ahead,” said he. “It is a wise precaution to give all hooligan gangs a very wide berth at this time of night. We had better turn down Heathcote Street and cross Mecklenburgh Square.”

We continued to walk on at reduced speed until we reached Heathcote Street, into which we turned and so entered Mecklenburgh Square, where we mended our pace once more.

“The hooligan,” pursued Thorndyke, as we walked briskly across the silent square, “covers a multitude of sins, ranging from highway robbery with violence and paid assassination (technically known as ‘bashing’) down to the criminal folly of the philanthropic magistrate, who seems to think that his function in the economy of nature is to secure the survival of the unfittest. There goes a cyclist along Guildford Street. I wonder if that is our strenuous friend from the station. If so, he has slipped past the hooligans.”

We were just entering Doughty Street, and, as Thorndyke spoke, a man on a bicycle was visible for an instant at the crossing of the two streets. When we reached Guildford Street we both looked down the long, lamp-lighted vista, but the cyclist had vanished.

“We had better go straight on into Theobald’s Road,” said Thorndyke, and we accordingly pursued our way up the fine old-world street, from whose tall houses our footfalls echoed, so that we seemed to be accompanied by an invisible multitude, until we reached that part where it unaccountably changes its name and becomes John Street.

“There always seems to me something very pathetic about these old Bloomsbury streets,” said Thorndyke, “with their faded grandeur and dignified seediness. They remind me of some prim and aged gentlewoman in reduced circumstances who—Hullo! What was that?”

A faint, sharp thud from behind had been followed instantly by the shattering of a ground-floor window in front.

We both stopped dead and remained, for a couple of seconds, staring into the gloom, from whence the first sound had come; then Thorndyke darted diagonally across the road at a swift run and I immediately followed.

At the moment when the affair happened we had gone about forty yards up John Street, that is, from the place where it is crossed by Henry Street, and we now raced across the road to the further corner of the latter street. When we reached it, however, the little thoroughfare was empty, and, as we paused for a moment, no sound of retreating footsteps broke the silence.

"The shot certainly came from here!" said Thorndyke; "come on," and he again broke into a run. A few yards up the street a mews turns off to the left, and into this my companion plunged, motioning me to go straight on, which I accordingly did, and in a few paces reached the top of the street. Here a narrow thoroughfare, with a broad, smooth pavement, bears off to the left, parallel with the mews, and, as I arrived at the corner and glanced up the little street, I saw a man on a bicycle gliding swiftly and silently towards Little James' Street.

With a mighty shout of "Stop thief!" I started in hot pursuit, but, though the man's feet were moving in an apparently leisurely manner, he drew ahead at an astonishing pace, in spite of my efforts to overtake him; and it then dawned upon me that the slow revolutions of his feet were due, in reality, to the unusually high gear of the machine that he was riding. As I realised this, and at the same moment recalled the bicycle that we had seen in the station, the fugitive swung round into Little James' Street and vanished.

The speed at which the man was travelling made further pursuit utterly futile, so I turned and walked back, panting and perspiring from the unwonted exertion. As I re-entered Henry Street, Thorndyke emerged from the mews and halted on seeing me.

"Cyclist?" he asked laconically, as I came up.

"Yes," I answered; "riding a machine geared up to about ninety."

"Ah! he must have followed us from the station," said Thorndyke. "Did you notice if he was carrying anything?"

"He had a walking-stick in his hand. I didn't see anything else."

"What sort of walking-stick?"

"I couldn't see very distinctly. It was a stoutish stick—I should say a Malacca, probably—and it had what looked like a horn handle. I could see that as he passed a street lamp."

"What kind of lamp had he?"

"I couldn't see; but, as he turned the corner, I noticed that it seemed to burn very dimly."

"A little vaseline, or even oil, smeared on the outside of the glass will reduce the glare of a lamp very appreciably," my companion remarked, "especially on a dusty road. Ha! here is the proprietor of the broken window. He wants to know, you know."

We had once more turned into John Street and now perceived a man, standing on the wide doorstep of the house with the shattered window, looking anxiously up and down the street.

"Do either of you gents know anything about this here?" he asked, pointing to the broken pane.

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "we happened to be passing when it was done; in fact," he added, "I rather suspect that the missile, whatever it was, was intended for our benefit."

"Oh!" said the man. "Who done it?"

"That I can't say," replied Thorndyke. "Whoever he was, he made off on a bicycle and we were unable to catch him."

"Oh!" said the man once more, regarding us with growing suspicion. "On a bicycle, hay! Dam funny, ain't it? What did he do it with?"

"That is what I should like to find out," said Thorndyke. "I see this house is empty."

"Yes, it's empty—leastways it's to let. I'm the caretaker. But what's that got to do with it?"

"Merely this," answered Thorndyke, "that the object—stone, bullet or whatever it may have been—was aimed, I believe, at me, and I should like to ascertain its nature. Would you do me the favour of permitting me to look for it?"

The caretaker was evidently inclined to refuse this request, for he glanced suspiciously from my companion to me once or twice before replying, but, at length, he turned towards the open door and gruffly invited us to enter.

A paraffin lamp was on the floor in a recess of the hall, and this our conductor took up when he had elosed the street door.

"This is the room," he said, turning the key and thrusting the door open; "the library they call it, but it's the front parlour in plain English." He entered and, holding the lamp above his head, stared balefully at the broken window.

Thorndyke glanced quickly along the floor in the direction that the missile would have taken, and then said—

"Do you see any mark on the wall there?"

As he spoke, he indicated the wall opposite the window, which obviously could not have been struck by a projectile entering with such extreme obliquity; and I was about to point out this fact when I fortunately remembered the great virtue of silence.

Our friend approached the wall, still holding up the lamp, and scrutinised the surface with close attention; and while he was thus engaged, I observed Thorndyke stoop quickly and pick up something, which he deposited carefully, and without remark, in his waistcoat pocket.

"I don't see no bruise anywhere," said the caretaker, sweeping his hand over the wall.

"Perhaps the thing struck this wall," suggested Thorndyke, pointing to the one that was actually in the line of fire. "Yes, of course," he added, "it would be this one—the shot came from Henry Street."

The caretaker crossed the room and threw the light of his lamp on the wall thus indicated.

"Ah! here we are!" he exclaimed, with gloomy satisfaction, pointing to a small dent in which the wall-paper was turned back and the plaster exposed; "looks almost like a bullet mark, but you say you didn't hear no report."

"No," said Thorndyke, "there was no report; it must have been a catapult."

The caretaker set the lamp down on the floor and proceeded to grope about for the projectile, in which operation we both assisted; and I could not suppress a faint smile as I noted the earnestness with which Thorndyke peered about the floor in search of the missile that was quietly reposing in his waistcoat pocket.

We were deep in our investigations when there was heard an uncompromising double knock at the street door, followed by the loud pealing of a bell in the basement.

"Bobby, I suppose," growled the caretaker. "Here's a blooming fuss about nothing." He caught up the lamp and went out, leaving us in the dark.

"I picked it up, you know," said Thorndyke, when we were alone.

"I saw you," I answered.

"Good; I applaud your discretion," he rejoined. The caretaker's supposition was correct. When he returned, he was accompanied by a burly constable, who saluted us with a cheerful smile and glanced facetiously round the empty room.

"Our boys," said he, nodding towards the broken window; "they're playful lads, that they are. You were passing when it happened, sir, I hear."

"Yes," answered Thorndyke; and he gave the constable a brief account of the occurrence, which the latter listened to, notebook in hand.

"Well," said he when the narrative was concluded, "if those hooligan boys are going to take to catapults they'll make things lively all round."

"You ought to run some of 'em in," said the caretaker.

"Run 'em in!" exclaimed the constable in a tone of disgust; "yes! And then the magistrate will tell 'em to be good boys and give 'em five shillings out of the poor-box to buy illustrated Testaments. I'd Testament them, the worthless varminths!"

He rammed his notebook fiercely into his pocket and stalked out of the room into the street, whither we followed.

"You'll find that bullet or stone when you sweep up the room," he said, as he turned on to his beat; "and you'd better let us have it. Good night, sir."

He strolled off towards Henry Street, while Thorndyke and I resumed our journey southward.

"Why were you so secret about that projectile?" I asked my friend as we walked up the street.

"Partly to avoid discussion with the caretaker," he replied; "but principally because I thought it likely that a constable would pass the house and, seeing the light, come in to make inquiries."

"And then?"

"Then I should have had to hand over the object to him."

"And why not? Is the object a specially interesting one?"

"It is highly interesting to me at the present moment," replied Thorndyke, with a chuckle, "because I have not examined it. I have a theory as to its nature, which theory I should like to test before taking the police into my confidence."

"Are you going to take me into your confidence?" I asked.

"When we get home, if you are not too sleepy," he replied.

On our arrival at his chambers, Thorndyke desired me to light up and clear one end of the table while he went up to the workshop to fetch some tools. I turned back the table cover, and, having adjusted the gas so as to light this part of the table, waited in some impatience for my colleague's return. In a few minutes he re-entered bearing a small vice, a metal saw and a wide-mouthed bottle.

"What have you got in that bottle?" I asked, perceiving a metal object inside it.

"That is the projectile, which I have thought fit to rinse in distilled water, for reasons that will presently appear."

He agitated the bottle gently for a minute or so, and then, with a pair of dissecting forceps, lifted out the object and held it above the surface of the water to drain, after which he laid it carefully on a piece of blotting-paper.

I stooped over the projectile and examined it with great curiosity, while Thorndyke stood by regarding me with almost equal interest.

"Well," he said, after watching me in silence for some time, "what do you see?"

"I see a small brass cylinder," I answered, "about two inches long and rather thicker than an ordinary lead pencil. One end is conical, and there is a small hole at the apex which seems to contain a steel point; the other end is flat, but has in the centre a small square projection such as might fit a watch-key. I notice also a small hole in the side of the cylinder close to the flat end. The thing looks like a miniature shell, and appears to be hollow."

"It is hollow," said Thorndyke. "You must have observed that, when I held it up to drain, the water trickled out through the hole at the pointed end."

"Yes, I noticed that."

"Now take it up and shake it."

I did so and felt some heavy object rattle inside it.

"There is some loose body inside it," I said, "which fits it pretty closely, as it moves only in the long diameter."

"Quite so; your description is excellent. And now, what is the nature of this projectile?"

"I should say it is a miniature shell or explosive bullet."

"Wrong!" said Thorndyke. "A very natural inference, but a wrong one."

"Then what is the thing?" I demanded, my curiosity still further aroused.

"I will show you," he replied. "It is something much more subtle than an explosive bullet—which would really be a rather crude appliance—admirably thought out and thoroughly well executed. We have to deal with a most ingenious and capable man."

I was fain to laugh at his enthusiastic appreciation of the methods of his would-be assassin, and the humour of the situation then appeared to dawn on him, for he said, with an apologetic smile—

"I am not expressing approval, you must understand, but merely professional admiration. It is this class of criminal that creates the necessity for my services. He is my patron, so to speak; my ultimate employer. For the common crook can be dealt with quite efficiently by the common policeman!"

While he was speaking he had been fitting the little cylinder between two pads of tissue-paper in the vice, which he now screwed up tight. Then, with the fine metal saw, he began to cut the projectile, lengthwise, into two slightly unequal parts. This operation took some time, especially since he was careful not to cut the loose body inside, but at length the section was completed and the interior of the cylinder exposed, when he released it from the vice and held it up before me with an expression of triumph.

"Now, what do you make it?" he demanded.

I took the object in my fingers and looked at it closely, but was at first more puzzled than before. The loose body I now saw to be a cylinder of lead about half an inch long, accurately fitting the inside of the cylinder but capable of slipping freely backwards and forwards. The steel point which I had noticed in the hole at the apex of the conical end, was now seen to be the pointed termination of a slender steel rod which projected fully an inch into the cavity of the cylinder, and the conical end itself was a solid mass of lead.

"Well?" queried Thorndyke, seeing that I was still silent.

"You tell me it is not an explosive bullet," I replied, "otherwise I should have been confirmed in that opinion. I should have said that the percussion cap was carried by this lead plunger and struck on the end of that steel rod when the flight of the bullet was suddenly arrested."

"Very good indeed," said Thorndyke. "You are right so far that this is, in fact, the mechanism of a percussion shell."

"But look at this. You see this little rod was driven inside the bullet when the latter struck the wall. Let us replace it in its original position."

He laid the end of a small flat file against the end of the rod and pressed it firmly, when the rod slid through the hole until it projected an inch beyond the apex of the cone. Then he handed the projectile back to me.

A single glance at the point of the steel rod made the whole thing clear, and I gave a whistle of consternation; for the "rod" was a fine tube with a sharply pointed end.

"The infernal scoundrel!" I exclaimed; "it is a hypodermic needle."

"Yes. A veterinary hypodermic, of extra large bore. Now you see the subtlety and ingenuity of the whole thing. If he had had a reasonable chance he would certainly have succeeded."

"You speak quite regretfully," I said, laughing again at the oddity of his attitude towards the assassin.

"Not at all," he replied. "I have the character of a single-handed player, but even the most self-reliant man can hardly make a *post-mortem* on himself. I am merely appreciating an admirable piece of mechanical design most efficiently carried out. Observe the completeness of the thing, and the way in which all the necessities of the case are foreseen and met. This projectile was discharged from a powerful air-gun—the walking-stick form—provided with a force-pump and key. The barrel of that gun was rifled."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"Well, to begin with, it would be useless to fit a needle to the projectile unless the latter was made to travel with the point forwards; but there is direct evidence that the barrel was rifled. You notice the little square projection on the back surface of the cylinder. That was evidently made to fit a washer or wad—probably a thin plate of soft metal which would be driven by the pressure from behind into the grooves of the rifling and thus give a spinning motion to the bullet. When the latter left the barrel, the wad would drop off, leaving it free."

"I see. I was wondering what the square projection was for. It is, as you say, extremely ingenious."

"Highly ingenious," said Thorndyke, enthusiastically, "and so is the whole device. See how perfectly it would have worked but for a mere fluke and for the complication of your presence. Supposing that I had been alone, so that he could have approached to a shorter distance. In that case he would not have missed, and the thing would have been done. You see how it was intended to be done, I suppose?"

"I think so," I answered; "but I should like to hear your account of the process."

"Well, you see, he first finds out that I am returning by a late train—which he seems to have done—and he waits for me at the terminus. Meanwhile he fills the cylinder with a solution of a powerful alkaloidal poison, which is easily done by dipping the needle into the liquid and sucking at the small hole near the back end, when the piston will be drawn up and the liquid will follow it. You notice that the upper side of the piston is covered with vaseline—introduced through the hole, no doubt—which would prevent the poison from coming out into the mouth, and make the cylinder secure from leakage. On my arrival, he follows me on his bicycle until I pass through a sufficiently secluded neighbourhood. Then he approaches me, or passes me and waits round a corner, and shoots at pretty close range. It doesn't matter where he hits me; all parts are equally vital, so he can aim at the middle of my back. Then the bullet comes spinning through the air point foremost; the needle passes through the clothing and enters the flesh, and, as the bullet is suddenly stopped, the heavy piston flies down by its own great momentum and squirts out a jet of the poison into the tissues. The bullet then disengages itself and drops on to the ground.

"Meanwhile, our friend has mounted his bicycle and is off, and when I feel the prick of the needle, I turn, and, without stopping to look for the bullet, immediately give chase. I am, of course, not able to overtake a man on a racing machine, but still I follow him some distance. Then the poison begins to take effect—the more rapidly from the violent exercise—and presently I drop insensible. Later on, my body is found. There are no marks of violence, and probably the needle-puncture escapes observation at the *post-mortem*, in which case the verdict will be death from heart-failure. Even if the poison and the puncture are discovered, there is no clue. The bullet lies some streets away, and is probably picked up by some boy or passing stranger, who cannot conjecture its use, and who would never connect it with the man who was found dead. You will admit that the whole plan has been worked out with surprising completeness and foresight."

"Yes," I answered; "there is no doubt that the fellow is a most infernally clever scoundrel. May I ask if you have any idea who he is?"

"Well," Thorndyke replied, "seeing that, as Carlyle has unkindly pointed out, clever people are not in an overwhelming majority, and that, of the clever people whom I know, only a very few are interested in my immediate demise, I am able to form a fairly probable conjecture."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"For the present I shall maintain an attitude of masterly inactivity and avoid the night air."

"But, surely," I exclaimed, "you will take some measures to protect yourself against attempts of this kind. You can hardly doubt now that your accident in the fog was really an attempted murder."

"I never did doubt it, as a matter of fact, although I prevaricated at the time. But I have not enough evidence against this man at present, and, consequently, can do nothing but show that I suspect him, which would be foolish. Whereas, if I lie low, one of two things will happen; either the occasion for my removal (which is only a temporary one) will pass, or he will commit himself—will put a definite clue into my hands. Then we shall find the air-cane, the bicycle, perhaps a little stock of poison, and certain other trifles that I have in my mind, which will be good confirmatory evidence, though insufficient in themselves. And now, I think, I must really adjourn this meeting, or we shall be good for nothing to-morrow."

---

## XII. — IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

IT was now only a week from the date on which the trial was to open. In eight days the mystery would almost certainly be solved (if it was capable of solution), for the trial promised to be quite a short one, and then Reuben Hornby would be either a convicted felon or a free man, clear of the stigma of the crime.

For several days past, Thorndyke had been in almost constant possession of the laboratory, while his own small room, devoted ordinarily to bacteriology and microscopical work was kept continually locked; a state of things that reduced Polton to a condition of the most extreme nervous irritation, especially when, as he told me indignantly, he met Mr. Anstey emerging from the holy of holies, grinning and rubbing his hands and giving utterance to genial but unparliamentary expressions of amused satisfaction.

I had met Anstey on several occasions lately, and each time liked him better than the last; for his whimsical, facetious manner covered a nature (as it often does) that was serious and thoughtful; and I found him, not only a man of considerable learning, but one also of a lofty standard of conduct. His admiration for Thorndyke was unbounded, and I could see that the two men collaborated with the utmost sympathy and mutual satisfaction.

But although I regarded Mr. Anstey with feelings of the liveliest friendship, I was far from gratified when, on the morning of which I am writing, I observed him from our sitting-room window crossing the gravelled space from Crown Office Row and evidently bearing down on our chambers. For the fact is that I was awaiting the arrival of Juliet, and should greatly have preferred to be alone at the moment, seeing that Thorndyke had already gone out. It is true that my fair enslaver was not due for nearly half-an-hour, but then, who could say how long Anstey would stay, or what embarrassments might arise from my efforts to escape? By all of which it may be perceived that my disease had reached a very advanced stage, and that I was unequal to those tactics of concealment that are commonly attributed to the ostrich.

A sharp rap of the knocker announced the arrival of the disturber of my peace, and when I opened the door Anstey walked in with the air of a man to whom an hour more or less is of no consequence whatever. He shook my hand with mock solemnity, and, seating himself upon the edge of the table, proceeded to roll a cigarette with exasperating deliberation.

"I infer," said he, "that our learned brother is practising parlour magic upstairs, or peradventure he has gone on a journey?"

"He has a consultation this morning," I answered. "Was he expecting you?"

"Evidently not, or he would have been here. No, I just looked in to ask a question about the case of your friend Hornby. You know it comes on for trial next week?"

"Yes; Thorndyke told me. What do you think of Hornby's prospects? Is he going to be convicted, or will he get an acquittal?"

"*He* will be entirely passive," replied Anstey, "but *we*"—here he slapped his chest impressively—"are going to secure an acquittal. You will be highly entertained, my learned friend, and Mr. The Enemy will be excessively surprised." He inspected the newly-made cigarette with a critical air and chuckled softly.

"You seem pretty confident," I remarked.

"I am," he answered, "though Thorndyke considers failure possible—which, of course, it is if the jury-box should chance to be filled with microcephalic idiots and the judge should prove incapable of understanding simple technical evidence. But we hope that neither of these things will happen, and, if they do not, we feel pretty safe. By the way, I hope I am not divulging your principal's secrets?"

"Well," I replied, with a smile, "you have been more explicit than Thorndyke ever has."

"Have I?" he exclaimed, with mock anxiety; "then I must swear you to secrecy. Thorndyke is so very close—and he is quite right too. I never cease admiring his tactics of allowing the enemy to fortify and barricade the entrance that he does *not* mean to attack. But I see you are wishing me at the devil, so give me a cigar and I will go—though not to that particular destination."

"Will you have one of Thorndyke's special brand?" I asked malignantly.

"What! those foul Trichinopolies? Not while brown paper is to be obtained at every stationer's; I'd sooner smoke my own wig."

I tendered my own case, from which he selected a cigar with anxious care and much sniffing; then he bade me a ceremonious adieu and departed down the stairs, blithely humming a melody from the latest comic opera.

He had not left more than five minutes when a soft and elaborate rat-tat from the little brass knocker brought my heart into my mouth. I ran to the door and flung it open, revealing Juliet standing on the threshold.

"May I come in?" she asked. "I want to have a few words with you before we start."

I looked at her with some anxiety, for she was manifestly agitated, and the hand that she held out to me trembled.

"I am greatly upset, Dr. Jervis," she said, ignoring the chair that I had placed for her. "Mr. Lawley has been giving us his views of poor Reuben's case, and his attitude fills me with dismay."

"Hang Mr. Lawley!" I muttered, and then apologised hastily. "What made you go to him, Miss Gibson?"

"I didn't go to him; he came to us. He dined with us last night—he and Walter—and his manner was gloomy in the extreme. After dinner Walter took him apart with me and asked him what he really thought of the case. He was most pessimistic. 'My dear sir,' he said, 'the only advice I can give you is that you prepare yourself to contemplate disaster as philosophically as you can. In my opinion your cousin is almost certain to be convicted.' 'But,' said Walter, 'what about the defence? I understood that there was at least a plausible case.' Mr. Lawley shrugged his shoulders. 'I have a sort of *alibi* that will go for nothing, but I have no evidence to offer in answer to that of the prosecution, and no case; and I may say, speaking in confidence, that I do not believe there is any case. I do not see how there can be any case, and I have heard nothing from Dr. Thorndyke to lead me to suppose that he has really done anything in the matter.' Is this true, Dr. Jervis? Oh! do tell me the real truth about it! I have been so miserable and terrified since I heard this, and I was so full of hope before. Tell me, is it true? Will Reuben be sent to prison after all?"

In her agitation she laid her hands on my arm and looked up into my face with her grey eyes swimming with tears, and was so piteous, so trustful, and, withal, so bewitching that my reserve melted like snow before a July sun.

"It is not true," I answered, taking her hands in mine and speaking perforce in a low tone that I might not betray my emotion. "If it were, it would mean that I have wilfully deceived you, that I have been false to our friendship; and how much that friendship has been to me, no one but myself will ever know."

She crept a little closer to me with a manner at once penitent and wheedling.

"You are not going to be angry with me, are you? It was foolish of me to listen to Mr. Lawley after all you have told me, and it did look like a want of trust in you, I know. But you, who are so strong and wise, must make allowance for a woman who is neither. It is all so terrible that I am quite unstrung; but say you are not really displeased with me, for that would hurt me most of all."

Oh! Delilah! That concluding stroke of the shears severed the very last lock, and left me—morally speaking—as bald as a billiard ball. Henceforth I was at her mercy and would have divulged, without a scruple, the uttermost secrets of my principal, but that that astute gentleman had placed me beyond the reach of temptation.

"As to being angry with you," I answered, "I am not, like Thorndyke, one to essay the impossible, and if I could be angry it would hurt me more than it would you. But, in fact, you are not to blame at all, and I am an egotistical brute. Of course you were alarmed and distressed; nothing could be more natural. So now let me try to chase away your fears and restore your confidence."

"I have told you what Thorndyke said to Reuben: that he had good hopes of making his innocence clear to everybody. That alone should have been enough."

"I know it should," murmured Juliet remorsefully; "please forgive me for my want of faith."

"But," I continued, "I can quote you the words of one to whose opinions you will attach more weight. Mr. Anstey was here less than half-an-hour ago—"

"Do you mean Reuben's counsel?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say? Oh, do tell me what he said."

"He said, in brief, that he was quite confident of obtaining an acquittal, and that the prosecution would receive a great surprise. He seemed highly pleased with his brief, and spoke with great admiration of Thorndyke."

"Did he really say that—that he was confident of an acquittal?" Her voice was breathless and unsteady, and she was clearly, as she had said, quite unstrung. "What a relief it is," she murmured incoherently; "and so very, very kind of you!" She wiped her eyes and laughed a queer, shaky little laugh; then, quite suddenly, she burst into a passion of sobbing.

Hardly conscious of what I did, I drew her gently towards me, and rested her head on my shoulder whilst I whispered into her ear I know not what words of consolation; but I am sure that I called her "dear Juliet," and probably used other expressions equally improper and reprehensible. Presently she recovered herself, and, having dried her eyes, regarded me somewhat shamefacedly, blushing hotly, but smiling very sweetly nevertheless.

"I am ashamed of myself," she said, "coming here and weeping on your bosom like a great baby. It is to be hoped that your other clients do not behave in this way."

Whereat we both laughed heartily, and, our emotional equilibrium being thus restored, we began to think of the object of our meeting.

"I am afraid I have wasted a great deal of time," said Juliet, looking at her watch. "Shall we be too late, do you think?"

"I hope not," I replied, "for Reuben will be looking for us; but we must hurry."

I caught up my hat, and we went forth, closing the oak behind us, and took our way up King's Bench Walk in silence, but with a new and delightful sense of intimate comradeship. I glanced from time to time at my companion, and noted that her cheek still bore a rosy flush, and when she looked at me there was a sparkle in her eye, and a smiling softness in her glance, that stirred my heart until I trembled with the intensity of the passion that I must needs conceal. And even while I was feeling that I must tell her all, and have done with it, tell her that I was her abject slave, and she my goddess, my queen;

that in the face of such a love as mine no man could have any claim upon her; even then, there arose the still, small voice that began to call me an unfaithful steward and to remind me of a duty and trust that were sacred even beyond love.

In Fleet Street I hailed a cab, and, as I took my seat beside my fair companion, the voice began to wax and speak in bolder and sterner accents.

"Christopher Jervis," it said, "what is this that you are doing? Are you a man of honour or nought but a mean, pitiful blackguard? You, the trusted agent of this poor, misused gentleman, are you not planning in your black heart how you shall rob him of that which, if he is a man at all, must be more to him than his liberty, or even his honour? Shame on you for a miserable weaking! Have done with these philanderings and keep your covenants like a gentleman—or, at least, an honest man!"

At this point in my meditations Juliet turned towards me with a coaxing smile.

"My legal adviser seems to be revolving some deep and weighty matter," she said.

I pulled myself together and looked at her—at her sparkling eyes and rosy, dimpling cheeks, so winsome and lovely and lovable.

"Come," I thought, "I must put an end to this at once, or I am lost." But it cost me a very agony of effort to do it—which agony, I trust, may be duly set to my account by those who may sit in judgement on me.

"Your legal adviser, Miss Gibson," I said (and at that "Miss Gibson" I thought she looked at me a little queerly), "has been reflecting that he has acted considerably beyond his jurisdiction."

"In what respect?" she asked.

"In passing on to you information which was given to him in very strict confidence, and, in fact, with an implied promise of secrecy on his part."

"But the information was not of a very secret character, was it?"

"More so than it appeared. You see, Thorndyke thinks it so important not to let the prosecution suspect that he has anything up his sleeve, that he has kept even Mr. Lawley in the dark, and he has never said as much to me as Anstey did this morning."

"And now you are sorry you told me; you think I have led you into a breach of trust. Is it not so?" She spoke without a trace of petulance, and her tone of dignified self-accusation made me feel a veritable worm.

"My dear Miss Gibson," I expostulated, "you entirely misunderstand me. I am not in the least sorry that I told you. How could I have done otherwise under the circumstances? But I want you to understand that I have taken the responsibility of communicating to you what is really a professional secret, and that you are to consider it as such."

"That was how I understood it," replied Juliet; "and you may rely upon me not to utter a syllable on the subject to anyone."

I thanked her for this promise, and then, by way of making conversation, gave her an account in detail of Anstey's visit, not even omitting the incident of the cigar.

"And are Dr. Thorndyke's cigars so extraordinarily bad?" she asked.

"Not at all," I replied; "only they are not to every man's taste. The Trichinopoly cheroot is Thorndyke's one dissipation, and, I must say, he takes it very temperately. Under ordinary circumstances he smokes a pipe; but after a specially heavy day's work, or on any occasion of festivity or rejoicing, he indulges in a Trichinopoly, and he smokes the very best that can be got."

"So even the greatest men have their weaknesses," Juliet moralised; "but I wish I had known Dr. Thorndyke's sooner, for Mr. Hornby had a large box of Trichinopoly cheroots given to him, and I believe they were exceptionally fine ones. However, he tried one and didn't like it, so he transferred the whole consignment to Walter, who smokes all sorts and conditions of cigars."

So we talked on from one commonplace to another, and each more conventional than the last. In my nervousness, I overdid my part, and having broken the ice, proceeded to smash it to impalpable fragments. Endeavouring merely to be unemotional and to avoid undue intimacy of manner, I swung to the opposite extreme and became almost stiff; and perhaps the more so since I was writhing with the agony of repression.

Meanwhile a corresponding change took place in my companion. At first her manner seemed doubtful and bewildered; then she, too, grew more distant and polite and less disposed for conversation. Perhaps her conscience began to rebuke her, or it may be that my coolness suggested to her that her conduct had not been quite of the kind that would have commended itself to Reuben. But however that may have been, we continued to draw farther and farther apart; and in that short half-hour we retraced the steps of our growing friendship to such purpose that, when we descended from the cab at the prison gate, we seemed more like strangers than on the first day that we met. It was a miserable ending to all our delightful comradeship, and yet what other end could one expect in this world of cross purposes and things that might have been? In the extremity of my wretchedness I could have wept on the bosom of the portly warder who opened the wicket, even as Juliet had wept upon mine; and it was almost a relief to me, when our brief visit was over, to find that we



should not return together to King's Cross as was our wont, but that Juliet would go back by omnibus that she might do some shopping in Oxford Street, leaving me to walk home alone.

I saw her into her omnibus, and stood on the pavement looking wistfully at the lumbering vehicle as it dwindled in the distance. At last, with a sigh of deepest despondency, I turned my face homeward, and, walking like one in a dream, retraced the route over which I had journeyed so often of late and with such different sensations.

---

### XIII. — MURDER BY POST

THE next few days were perhaps the most unhappy that I have known. My life, indeed, since I had left the hospital had been one of many disappointments and much privation. Unfulfilled desires and ambitions unrealised had combined with distaste for the daily drudgery that had fallen to my lot to embitter my poverty and cause me to look with gloomy distrust upon the unpromising future. But no sorrow that I had hitherto experienced could compare with the grief that I now felt in contemplating the irretrievable ruin of what I knew to be the great passion of my life. For to a man like myself, of few friends and deep affections, one great emotional upheaval exhausts the possibilities of nature; leaving only the capacity for feeble and ineffective echoes. The edifice of love that is raised upon the ruins of a great passion can compare with the original no more than can the paltry mosque that perches upon the mound of Jonah with the glories of the palace that lies entombed beneath.

I had made a pretext to write to Juliet and had received a reply quite frank and friendly in tone, by which I knew that she had not—as some women would have done—set the blame upon me for our temporary outburst of emotion. And yet there was a subtle difference from her previous manner of writing that only emphasised the finality of our separation.

I think Thorndyke perceived that something had gone awry, though I was at great pains to maintain a cheerful exterior and keep myself occupied, and he probably formed a pretty shrewd guess at the nature of the trouble; but he said nothing, and I only judged that he had observed some change in my manner by the fact that there was blended with his usual quiet geniality an almost insensible note of sympathy and affection.

A couple of days after my last interview with Juliet, an event occurred which served, certainly, to relieve the tension and distract my thoughts, though not in a very agreeable manner.

It was the pleasant, reposeful hour after dinner when it was our custom to sit in our respective easy chairs and, as we smoked our pipes, discuss some of the many topics in which we had a common interest. The postman had just discharged into the capacious letter-box an avalanche of letters and circulars, and as I sat glancing through the solitary letter that had fallen to my share, I looked from time to time at Thorndyke and noticed, as I had often done before, with some surprise, a curious habit that he had of turning over and closely scrutinising every letter and package before he opened it.

"I observe, Thorndyke," I now ventured to remark, "that you always examine the outside of a letter before looking at the inside. I have seen other people do the same, and it has always appeared to me a singularly foolish proceeding. Why speculate over an unopened letter when a glance at the contents will tell you all there is to know?"

"You are perfectly right," he answered, "if the object of the inspection is to discover who is the sender of the letter. But that is not my object. In my case the habit is one that has been deliberately cultivated—not in reference to letters only, but to everything that comes into my hands—the habit of allowing nothing to pass without a certain amount of conscious attention. The observant man is, in reality, the attentive man, and the so-called power of observation is simply the capacity for continuous attention. As a matter of fact, I have found in practice, that the habit is a useful one even in reference to letters; more than once I have gleaned a hint from the outside of a letter that has proved valuable when applied to the contents. Here, for instance, is a letter which has been opened after being fastened up—apparently by the aid of steam. The envelope is soiled and rubbed, and smells faintly of stale tobacco, and has evidently been carried in a pocket along with a well-used pipe. Why should it have been opened? On reading it I perceive that it should have reached me two days ago, and that the date has been skilfully altered from the thirteenth to the fifteenth. The inference is that my correspondent has a highly untrustworthy clerk."

"But the correspondent may have carried the letter in his own pocket," I objected.

"Hardly," replied Thorndyke. "He would not have troubled to steam his own letter open and close it again; he would have cut the envelope and addressed a fresh one. This the clerk could not do, because the letter was confidential and was addressed in the principal's handwriting. And the principal would have almost certainly added a postscript; and, moreover, he does not smoke. This, however, is all very obvious; but here is something rather more subtle which I have put aside for more detailed examination. What do you make of it?"

He handed me a small parcel to which was attached by string a typewritten address label, the back of which bore the printed inscription, "James Bartlett and Sons, Cigar Manufacturers, London and Havana."

"I am afraid," said I, after turning the little packet over and examining every part of it minutely, "that this is rather too subtle for me. The only thing that I observe is that the typewriter has bungled the address considerably. Otherwise this seems to me a very ordinary packet indeed."

"Well, you have observed one point of interest, at any rate," said Thorndyke, taking the packet from me. "But let us examine the thing systematically and note down what we see. In the first place, you will notice that the label is an ordinary

luggage label such as you may buy at any stationer's, with its own string attached. Now, manufacturers commonly use a different and more substantial pattern, which is attached by the string of the parcel. But that is a small matter. What is much more striking is the address on the label. It is typewritten and, as you say, typed very badly. Do you know anything about typewriters?"

"Very little."

"Then you do not recognise the machine? Well, this label was typed with a Blickensderfer—an excellent machine, but not the form most commonly selected for the rough work of a manufacturer's office; but we will let that pass. The important point is this: the Blickensderfer Company make several forms of machine, the smallest and lightest of which is the literary, specially designed for the use of journalists and men of letters. Now this label was typed with the literary machine, or, at least, with the literary typewheel; which is really a very remarkable circumstance indeed."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"By this asterisk, which has been written by mistake, the inexpert operator having pressed down the figure lever instead of the one for capitals. The literary typewheel is the only one that has an asterisk, as I noticed when I was thinking of purchasing a machine. Here, then, we have a very striking fact, for even if a manufacturer chose to use a 'Blick' in his factory, it is inconceivable that he should select the literary form in preference to the more suitable 'commercial' machine."

"Yes," I agreed; "it is certainly very singular."

"And now," pursued Thorndyke, "to consider the writing itself. It has been done by an absolute beginner. He has failed to space in two places, he has written five wrong letters, and he has written figures instead of capitals in two instances."

"Yes; he has made a shocking muddle of it. I wonder he didn't throw the label away and type another."

"Precisely," said Thorndyke. "And if we wish to find out why he did not, we have only to look at the back of the label. You see that the name of the firm, instead of being printed on the label itself in the usual manner, is printed on a separate slip of paper which is pasted on the label—a most foolish and clumsy arrangement, involving an immense waste of time. But if we look closely at the printed slip itself we perceive something still more remarkable; for that slip has been cut down to fit the label, and has been cut with a pair of scissors. The edges are not quite straight, and in one place the 'overlap,' which is so characteristic of the cut made with scissors, can be seen quite plainly."

He handed the packet to me with a reading-lens, through which I could distinctly make out the points he had mentioned.

"Now I need not point out to you," he continued, "that these slips would, ordinarily, have been trimmed by the printer to the correct size in his machine, which would leave an absolutely true edge; nor need I say that no sane business man would adopt such a device as this. The slip of paper has been cut with scissors to fit the label, and it has then been pasted on to the surface that it has been made to fit, when all this waste of time and trouble—which, in practice, means money—could have been saved by printing the name on the label itself."

"Yes, that is so; but I still do not see why the fellow should not have thrown away this label and typed another."

"Look at the slip again," said Thorndyke. "It is faintly but evenly discoloured and, to me, has the appearance of having been soaked in water. Let us, for the moment, assume that it has been. That would look as if it had been removed from some other package, which again would suggest that the person using it had only the one slip, which he had soaked off the original package, dried, cut down and pasted on the present label. If he pasted it on before typing the address—which he would most probably have done—he might well be unwilling to risk destroying it by soaking it a second time."

"You think, then, there is a suspicion that the package may have been tampered with?"

"There is no need to jump to conclusions," replied Thorndyke. "I merely gave this case as an instance showing that careful examination of the outside of a package or letter may lead us to bestow a little extra attention on the contents. Now let us open it and see what those contents are."

With a sharp knife he divided the outside cover, revealing a stout cardboard box wrapped in a number of advertisement sheets. The box, when the lid was raised, was seen to contain a single cigar—a large cheroot—packed in cotton wool.

"A 'Trichy,' by Jove!" I exclaimed. "Your own special fancy, Thorndyke."

"Yes; and another anomaly, at once, you see, which might have escaped our notice if we had not been on the *qui vive*."

"As a matter of fact, I *don't* see," said I. "You will think me an awful blockhead, but I don't perceive anything singular in a cigar manufacturer sending a sample cigar."

"You read the label, I think?" replied Thorndyke. "However, let us look at one of these leaflets and see what they say. Ah! here we are: 'Messrs. Bartlett and Sons, who own extensive plantations on the island of Cuba, manufacture their cigars exclusively from selected leaves grown by themselves.' They would hardly make a Trichinopoly cheroot from leaf grown in the West Indies, so we have here a striking anomaly of an East Indian cigar sent to us by a West Indian grower."

"And what do you infer from that?"

"Principally that this cigar—which, by the way, is an uncommonly fine specimen and which I would not smoke for ten thousand pounds—is deserving of very attentive examination." He produced from his pocket a powerful doublet lens, with the aid of which he examined every part of the surface of the cigar, and finally, both ends.

"Look at the small end," he said, handing me the cigar and the lens, "and tell me if you notice anything."

I focussed the lens on the flush-cut surface of closely-rolled leaf, and explored every part of it minutely.

"It seems to me," I said, "that the leaf is opened slightly in the centre, as if a fine wire had been passed up it."

"So it appeared to me," replied Thorndyke; "and, as we are in agreement so far, we will carry our investigations a step further."

He laid the cigar down on the table, and, with the keen, thin-bladed penknife, neatly divided it lengthwise into two halves.

"*Ecce signum!*" exclaimed Thorndyke, as the two parts fell asunder; and for a few moments we stood silently regarding the dismembered cheroot. For, about half an inch from the small end, there appeared a little circular patch of white, chalky material which, by the even manner in which it was diffused among the leaf, had evidently been deposited from a solution.

"Our ingenious friend again, I surmise," said Thorndyke at length, taking up one of the halves and examining the white patch through his lens. "A thoughtful soul, Jervis, and original too. I wish his talents could be applied in some other direction. I shall have to remonstrate with him if he becomes troublesome."

"It is your duty to society, Thorndyke," I exclaimed passionately, "to have this infernal, cold-blooded scoundrel arrested instantly. Such a man is a standing menace to the community. Do you really know who sent this thing?"

"I can form a pretty shrewd guess, which, however, is not quite the same thing. But, you see, he has not been quite so clever this time, for he has left one or two traces by which his identity might be ascertained."

"Indeed! What traces has he left?"

"Ah! now there is a nice little problem for us to consider." He settled himself in his easy chair and proceeded to fill his pipe with the air of a man who is about to discuss a matter of merely general interest.

"Let us consider what information this ingenious person has given us about himself. In the first place, he evidently has a strong interest in my immediate decease. Now, why should he feel so urgent a desire for my death? Can it be a question of property? Hardly; for I am far from a rich man, and the provisions of my will are known to me alone. Can it then be a question of private enmity or revenge? I think not. To the best of my belief I have no private enemies whatever. There remains only my vocation as an investigator in the fields of legal and criminal research. His interest in my death must, therefore, be connected with my professional activities. Now, I am at present conducting an exhumation which may lead to a charge of murder; but if I were to die to-night the inquiry would be carried out with equal efficiency by Professor Spicer or some other toxicologist. My death would not affect the prospects of the accused. And so in one or two other cases that I have in hand; they could be equally well conducted by someone else. The inference is that our friend is not connected with any of these cases, but that he believes me to possess some exclusive information concerning him—believes me to be the one person in the world who suspects and can convict him. Let us assume the existence of such a person—a person of whose guilt I alone have evidence. Now this person, being unaware that I have communicated my knowledge to a third party, would reasonably suppose that by making away with me he had put himself in a position of security.

"Here, then, is our first point. The sender of this offering is probably a person concerning whom I hold certain exclusive information.

"But see, now, the interesting corollary that follows from this. I, alone, suspect this person; therefore I have not published my suspicions, or others would suspect him too. Why, then, does he suspect me of suspecting him, since I have not spoken? Evidently, he too must be in possession of exclusive information. In other words, my suspicions are correct; for if they were not, he could not be aware of their existence.

"The next point is the selection of this rather unusual type of cigar. Why should he have sent a Trichinopoly instead of an ordinary Havana such as Bartletts actually manufacture? It looks as if he were aware of my peculiar predilection, and, by thus consulting my personal tastes, had guarded against the chance of my giving the cigar to some other person. We may, therefore, infer that our friend probably has some knowledge of my habits.

"The third point is, What is the social standing of this gentle stranger, whom we will call X? Now, Bartletts do not send their advertisements and samples to Thomas, Richard and Henry. They send, chiefly, to members of the professions and men of means and position. It is true that the original package might have been annexed by a clerk, office boy or domestic servant; but the probabilities are that X received the package himself, and this is borne out by the fact that he was able to obtain access to a powerful alkaloidal poison—such as this undoubtedly is."

"In that case he would probably be a medical man or a chemist," I suggested.

"Not necessarily," replied Thorndyke. "The laws relating to poisons are so badly framed and administered that any well-to-do person, who has the necessary knowledge, can obtain almost any poison that he wants. But social position is an important factor, whence we may conclude that X belongs, at least, to the middle class.

"The fourth point relates to the personal qualities of X. Now it is evident, from this instance alone, that he is a man of exceptional intelligence, of considerable general information, and both ingenious and resourceful. This cigar device is not only clever and original, but it has been adapted to the special circumstances with remarkable forethought. Thus the cheroot was selected, apparently, for two excellent reasons: first, that it was the most likely form to be smoked by the

person intended, and second, that it did not require to have the end cut off—which might have led to a discovery of the poison. The plan also shows a certain knowledge of chemistry; the poison was not intended merely to be dissolved in the moisture of the mouth. The idea evidently was that the steam generated by the combustion of the leaf at the distal end, would condense in the cooler part of the cigar and dissolve the poison, and the solution would then be drawn into the mouth. Then the nature of the poison and certain similarities of procedure seem to identify X with the cyclist who used that ingenious bullet. The poison in this case is a white, non-crystalline solid; the poison contained in the bullet was a solution of a white, non-crystalline solid, which analysis showed to be the most poisonous of all alkaloids.

“The bullet was virtually a hypodermic syringe; the poison in this cigar has been introduced, in the form of an alcoholic or ethereal solution, by a hypodermic syringe. We shall thus be justified in assuming that the bullet and the cigar came from the same person; and, if this be so, we may say that X is a person of considerable knowledge, of great ingenuity and no mean skill as a mechanician—as shown by the manufacture of the bullet.

“These are our principal facts—to which we may add the surmise that he has recently purchased a second-hand Blickensderfer of the literary form or, at least, fitted with a literary typewheel.”

“I don’t quite see how you arrive at that,” I said, in some surprise.

“It is merely a guess, you know,” he replied, “though a probable one. In the first place he is obviously unused to typing, as the numerous mistakes show; therefore he has not had the machine very long. The type is that which is peculiar to the Blickensderfer, and, in one of the mistakes, an asterisk has been printed in place of a letter. But the literary typewheel is the only one that has the asterisk. As to the age of the machine, there are evident signs of wear, for some of the letters have lost their sharpness, and this is most evident in the case of those letters which are the most used—the ‘e,’ you will notice, for instance, is much worn; and ‘e’ occurs more frequently than any other letter of the alphabet. Hence the machine, if recently purchased, was bought second-hand.”

“But,” I objected, “it may not have been his own machine at all.”

“That is quite possible,” answered Thorndyke, “though, considering the secrecy that would be necessary, the probabilities are in favour of his having bought it. But, in any case, we have here a means of identifying the machine, should we ever meet with it.”

He picked up the label and handed it to me, together with his pocket lens.

“Look closely at the ‘e’ that we have been discussing; it occurs five times; in ‘Thorndyke,’ in ‘Bench,’ in ‘Inner,’ and in ‘Temple.’ Now in each case you will notice a minute break in the loop, just at the summit. That break corresponds to a tiny dent in the type—caused, probably, by its striking some small, hard object.”

“I can make it out quite distinctly,” I said, “and it should be a most valuable point for identification.”

“It should be almost conclusive,” Thorndyke replied, “especially when joined to other facts that would be elicited by a search of his premises. And now let us just recapitulate the facts which our friend X has placed at our disposal.

“First: X is a person concerning whom I possess certain exclusive information.

“Second: He has some knowledge of my personal habits.

“Third: He is a man of some means and social position.

“Fourth: He is a man of considerable knowledge, ingenuity and mechanical skill.

“Fifth: He has probably purchased, quite recently, a second-hand ‘Blick’ fitted with a literary typewheel.

“Sixth: That machine, whether his own or some other person’s property, can be identified by a characteristic mark on the small ‘e.’

“If you will note down those six points and add that X is probably an expert cyclist and a fairly good shot with a rifle, you may possibly be able, presently, to complete the equation, X = ?”

“I am afraid,” I said, “I do not possess the necessary data; but I suspect you do, and if it is so, I repeat that it is your duty to society—to say nothing of your clients, whose interests would suffer by your death—to have this fellow laid by the heels before he does any mischief.”

“Yes; I shall have to interfere if he becomes really troublesome, but I have reasons for wishing to leave him alone at present.”

“You do really know who he is, then?”

“Well, I think I can solve the equation that I have just offered to you for solution. You see, I have certain data, as you suggest, which you do not possess. There is, for instance, a certain ingenious gentleman concerning whom I hold what I believe to be exclusive information, and my knowledge of him does not make it appear unlikely that he might be the author of these neat little plans.”

“I am much impressed,” I said, as I put away my notebook, after having jotted down the points that Thorndyke had advised me to consider—“I am much impressed by your powers of observation and your capacity for reasoning from apparently trivial data; but I do not see, even now, why you viewed that cigar with such immediate and decided suspicion. There was nothing actually to suggest the existence of poison in it, and yet you seemed to form the suspicion at once and to

search for it as though you expected to find it."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "to a certain extent you are right. The idea of a poisoned cigar was not new to me—and thereby hangs a tale."

He laughed softly and gazed into the fire with eyes that twinkled with quiet amusement. "You have heard me say," he resumed, after a short pause, "that when I first took these chambers I had practically nothing to do. I had invented a new variety of medico-legal practice and had to build it up by slow degrees, and the natural consequence was that, for a long time, it yielded nothing but almost unlimited leisure. Now, that leisure was by no means wasted, for I employed it in considering the class of cases in which I was likely to be employed, and in working out theoretical examples; and seeing that crimes against the person have nearly always a strong medical interest, I gave them special attention. For instance, I planned a series of murders, selecting royal personages and great ministers as the victims, and on each murder I brought to bear all the special knowledge, skill and ingenuity at my command. I inquired minutely into the habits of my hypothetical victims; ascertained who were their associates, friends, enemies and servants; considered their diet, their residences, their modes of conveyance, the source of their clothing and, in fact, everything which it was necessary to know in order to achieve their deaths with certainty and with absolute safety to the murderer."

"How deeply gratified and flattered those great personages would have felt," I remarked, "if they had known how much attention they were receiving."

"Yes; I suppose it would have been somewhat startling, to the Prime Minister, for instance, to have learned that he was being watched and studied by an attentive observer and that the arrangements for his decease had been completed down to the minutest detail. But, of course, the application of the method to a particular case was the essential thing, for it brought into view all the incidental difficulties, in meeting which all the really interesting and instructive details were involved. Well, the particulars of these crimes I wrote out at length, in my private shorthand, in a journal which I kept for the purpose—and which, I need not say, I locked up securely in my safe when I was not using it. After completing each case, it was my custom to change sides and play the game over again from the opposite side of the board; that is to say, I added, as an appendix to each case, an analysis with a complete scheme for the detection of the crime. I have in my safe at the present moment six volumes of cases, fully indexed; and I can assure you that they are not only highly instructive reading, but are really valuable as works of reference."

"That I can readily believe," I replied, laughing heartily, nevertheless, at the grotesqueness of the whole proceeding, "though they might have proved rather incriminating documents if they had passed out of your possession."

"They would never have been read," rejoined Thorndyke. "My shorthand is, I think, quite undecipherable; it has been so made intentionally with a view to secrecy."

"And have any of your theoretical cases ever turned up in real life?"

"Several of them have, though very imperfectly planned and carried out as a rule. The poisoned cigar is one of them, though, of course I should never have adopted such a conspicuous device for presenting it; and the incident of the other night is a modification—for the worse—of another. In fact, most of the intricate and artistic crimes with which I have had to deal professionally have had their more complete and elaborate prototypes in my journals."

I was silent for some time, reflecting on the strange personality of my gifted friend and the singular fitness that he presented for the part he had chosen to play in the drama of social life; but presently my thoughts returned to the peril that overshadowed him, and I came back, once more, to my original question.

"And now, Thorndyke," I said, "that you have penetrated both the motives and the disguise of this villain, what are you going to do? Is he to be put safely under lock and key, or is he to be left in peace and security to plan some other, and perhaps more successful, scheme for your destruction?"

"For the present," replied Thorndyke, "I am going to put these things in a place of safety. To-morrow you shall come with me to the hospital and see me place the ends of the cigar in the custody of Dr. Chandler, who will make an analysis and report on the nature of the poison. After that we shall act in whatever way seems best."

Unsatisfactory as this conclusion appeared, I knew it was useless to raise further objections, and, accordingly, when the cigar with its accompanying papers and wrappings had been deposited in a drawer, we dismissed it, if not from our thoughts, at least from our conversation.

---

#### XIV. — A STARTLING DISCOVERY

THE morning of the trial, so long looked forward to, had at length arrived, and the train of events which it has been my business to chronicle in this narrative was now fast drawing to an end. To me those events had been in many ways of the deepest moment. Not only had they transported me from a life of monotonous drudgery into one charged with novelty and dramatic interest; not only had they introduced me to a renaissance of scientific culture and revived under new conditions my intimacy with the comrade of my student days; but, far more momentous than any of these, they had given me the vision—all too fleeting—of happiness untold, with the reality of sorrow and bitter regret that promised to be all too enduring.

Whence it happened that on this morning my thoughts were tinged with a certain greyness. A chapter in my life that had been both bitter and sweet was closing, and already I saw myself once more an Ishmaelite and a wanderer among strangers.

This rather egotistical frame of mind, however, was soon dispelled when I encountered Polton, for the little man was in a veritable twitter of excitement at the prospect of witnessing the clearing up of the mysteries that had so severely tried his curiosity; and even Thorndyke, beneath his habitual calm, showed a trace of expectancy and pleasurable anticipation.

"I have taken the liberty of making certain little arrangements on your behalf," he said, as we sat at breakfast, "of which I hope you will not disapprove. I have written to Mrs. Hornby, who is one of the witnesses, to say that you will meet her at Mr. Lawley's office and escort her and Miss Gibson to the court. Walter Hornby may be with them, and, if he is, you had better leave him, if possible, to come on with Lawley."

"You will not come to the office, then?"

"No. I shall go straight to the court with Anstey. Besides, I am expecting Superintendent Miller from Scotland Yard, who will probably walk down with us."

"I am glad to hear that," I said; "for I have been rather uneasy at the thought of your mixing in the crowd without some kind of protection."

"Well, you see that I am taking precautions against the assaults of the too-ingenuous X, and, to tell the truth—and also to commit a flagrant bull—I should never forgive myself if I allowed him to kill me before I had completed Reuben Hornby's defence. Ah, here is Polton—that man is on wires this morning; he has been wandering in and out of the rooms ever since he came, like a cat in a new house."

"It's quite true, sir," said Polton, smiling and unabashed, "so it's no use denying it. I have come to ask what we are going to take with us to the court."

"You will find a box and a portfolio on the table in my room," replied Thorndyke. "We had better also take a microscope and the micrometers, though we are not likely to want them; that is all, I think."

"A box and a portfolio," repeated Polton in a speculative tone. "Yes, sir, I will take them with me." He opened the door and was about to pass out, when, perceiving a visitor ascending the stairs, he turned back.

"Here's Mr. Miller, from Scotland Yard, sir; shall I show him in?"

"Yes, do." He rose from his chair as a tall, military-looking man entered the room and saluted, casting, at the same time, an inquiring glance in my direction.

"Good morning, Doctor," he said briskly. "I got your letter and couldn't make such of it, but I have brought down a couple of plain-clothes men and a uniform man, as you suggested. I understand you want a house watched?"

"Yes, and a man, too. I will give you the particulars presently—that is, if you think you can agree to my conditions."

"That I act entirely on my own account and make no communication to anybody? Well, of course, I would rather you gave me all the facts and let me proceed in the regular way; but if you make conditions I have no choice but to accept them, seeing that you hold the cards."

Perceiving that the matter in hand was of a confidential nature, I thought it best to take my departure, which I accordingly did, as soon as I had ascertained that it wanted yet half-an-hour to the time at which Mrs. Hornby and Juliet were due at the lawyer's office.

Mr. Lawley received me with stiffness that bordered on hostility. He was evidently deeply offended at the subordinate part that he had been compelled to play in the case, and was at no great pains to conceal the fact.

"I am informed," said he, in a frosty tone, when I had explained my mission, "that Mrs. Hornby and Miss Gibson are to meet you here. The arrangement is none of my making; none of the arrangements in this case are of my making. I have been treated throughout with a lack of ceremony and confidence that is positively scandalous. Even now, I—the solicitor for the defence—am completely in the dark as to what defence is contemplated, though I fully expect to be involved in some ridiculous fiasco. I only trust that I may never again be associated with any of your hybrid practitioners. *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*, sir, is an excellent motto; let the medical cobbler stick to his medical last."

"It remains to be seen what kind of boot he can turn out on the legal last," I retorted.

"That is so," he rejoined; "but I hear Mrs. Hornby's voice in the outer office, and as neither you nor I have any time to waste in idle talk, I suggest that you make your way to the court without delay. I wish you good morning!"

Acting on this very plain hint, I retired to the clerks' office, where I found Mrs. Hornby and Juliet, the former undisguisedly tearful and terrified, and the latter calm, though pale and agitated.

"We had better start at once," I said, when we had exchanged greetings. "Shall we take a cab, or walk?"

"I think we will walk, if you don't mind," said Juliet. "Mrs. Hornby wants to have a few words with you before we go into court. You see, she is one of the witnesses, and she is terrified lest she should say something damaging to Reuben."

"By whom was the subpoena served?" I asked.

"Mr. Lawley sent it," replied Mrs. Hornby, "and I went to see him about it the very next day, but he wouldn't tell me anything—he didn't seem to know what I was wanted for, and he wasn't at all nice—not at all."

"I expect your evidence will relate to the 'Thumbograph,'" I said. "There is really nothing else in connection with the case that you have any knowledge of."

"That is just what Walter said," exclaimed Mrs. Hornby. "I went to his rooms to talk the matter over with him. He is very upset about the whole affair, and I am afraid he thinks very badly of poor Reuben's prospects. I only trust he may be wrong! Oh dear! What a dreadful thing it is, to be sure!" Here the poor lady halted to mop her eyes elaborately, to the surprise and manifest scorn of a passing errand boy.

"He was very thoughtful and sympathetic—Walter, I mean, you know," pursued Mrs. Hornby, "and most helpful. He asked me all I knew about that horrid little book, and took down my answers in writing. Then he wrote out the questions I was likely to be asked, with my answers, so that I could read them over and get them well into my head. Wasn't it good of him! And I made him print them with his machine so that I could read them without my glasses, and he did it beautifully. I have the paper in my pocket now."

"I didn't know Mr. Walter went in for printing," I said. "Has he a regular printing press?"

"It isn't a printing press exactly," replied Mrs. Hornby; "it is a small thing with a lot of round keys that you press down—Dickensblerfer, I think it is called—ridiculous name, isn't it? Walter bought it from one of his literary friends about a week ago; but he is getting quite clever with it already, though he does make a few mistakes still, as you can see."

She halted again, and began to search for the opening of a pocket which was hidden away in some occult recess of her clothing, all unconscious of the effect that her explanation had produced on me. For, instantly, as she spoke, there flashed into my mind one of the points that Thorndyke had given me for the identification of the mysterious X. "He has probably purchased, quite recently, a second-hand Blickensderfer, fitted with a literary typewheel." The coincidence was striking and even startling, though a moment's reflection convinced me that it was nothing more than a coincidence; for there must be hundreds of second-hand "Blicks" on the market, and, as to Walter Hornby, he certainly could have no quarrel with Thorndyke, but would rather be interested in his preservation on Reuben's account.

These thoughts passed through my mind so rapidly that by the time Mrs. Hornby had run her pocket to earth I had quite recovered from the momentary shock.

"Ah! here it is," she exclaimed triumphantly, producing an obese Morocco purse. "I put it in here for safety, knowing how liable one is to get one's pocket picked in these crowded London streets." She opened the bulky receptacle and drew it out after the manner of a concertina, exhibiting multitudinous partitions, all stuffed with pieces of paper, coils of tape and sewing silk, buttons, samples of dress materials and miscellaneous rubbish, mingled indiscriminately with gold, silver, and copper coins.

"Now just run your eye through that, Dr. Jervis," she said, handing me a folded paper, "and give me your advice on my answers."

I opened the paper and read: "The Committee of the Society for the Protection of Paralysed Idiots, in submitting this—"

"Oh! that isn't it; I have given you the wrong paper. How silly of me! That is the appeal of—you remember, Juliet, dear, that troublesome person—I had, really, to be quite rude, you know, Dr. Jervis; I had to tell him that charity begins at home, although, thank Heaven! none of us are paralysed, but we must consider our own, mustn't we? And then—"

"Do you think this is the one, dear?" interposed Juliet, in whose pale cheek the ghost of a dimple had appeared. "It looks cleaner than most of the others."

She selected a folded paper from the purse which Mrs. Hornby was holding with both hands extended to its utmost, as though she were about to produce a burst of music, and, opening it, glanced at its contents.

"Yes, this is your evidence," she said, and passed the paper to me.

I took the document from her hand and, in spite of the conclusion at which I had arrived, examined it with eager curiosity. And at the very first glance I felt my head swim and my heart throb violently. For the paper was headed: "Evidence respecting the Thumbograph," and in every one of the five small "e's" that occurred in that sentence I could see plainly by the strong out-door light a small break or interval in the summit of the loop.

I was thunderstruck.

One coincidence was quite possible and even probable; but the two together, and the second one of so remarkable a character, were beyond all reasonable limits of probability. The identification did not seem to admit of a doubt, and yet—

“Our legal adviser appears to be somewhat preoccupied,” remarked Juliet, with something of her old gaiety of manner; and, in fact, though I held the paper in my hand, my gaze was fixed unmeaningly on an adjacent lamp-post. As she spoke, I pulled myself together, and, scanning the paper hastily, was fortunate enough to find in the first paragraph matter requiring comment.

“I observe, Mrs. Hornby,” I said, “that in answer to the first question, ‘Whence did you obtain the “Thumbograph”?’ you say, ‘I do not remember clearly; I think I must have bought it at a railway bookstall.’ Now I understood that it was brought home and given to you by Walter himself.”

“That was what I thought,” replied Mrs. Hornby, “but Walter tells me that it was not so, and, of course, he would remember better than I should.”

“But, my dear aunt, I am sure he gave it to you,” interposed Juliet. “Don’t you remember? It was the night the Colleys came to dinner, and we were so hard pressed to find amusement for them, when Walter came in and produced the “Thumbograph.”

“Yes, I remember quite well now,” said Mrs. Hornby. “How fortunate that you reminded me. We must alter that answer at once.”

“If I were you, Mrs. Hornby,” I said, “I would disregard this paper altogether. It will only confuse you and get you into difficulties. Answer the questions that are put, as well as you can, and if you don’t remember, say so.”

“Yes, that will be much the wisest plan,” said Juliet. “Let Dr. Jervis take charge of the paper and rely on your own memory.”

“Very well, my dear,” replied Mrs. Hornby, “I will do what you think best, and you can keep the paper, Dr. Jervis, or throw it away.”

I slipped the document into my pocket without remark, and we proceeded on our way, Mrs. Hornby babbling inconsequently, with occasional outbursts of emotion, and Juliet silent and abstracted. I struggled to concentrate my attention on the elder lady’s conversation, but my thoughts continually reverted to the paper in my pocket, and the startling solution that it seemed to offer of the mystery of the poisoned cigar.

Could it be that Walter Hornby was in reality the miscreant X? The thing seemed incredible, for, hitherto, no shadow of suspicion had appeared to fall on him. And yet there was no denying that his description tallied in a very remarkable manner with that of the hypothetical X. He was a man of some means and social position; he was a man of considerable knowledge and mechanical skill, though as to his ingenuity I could not judge. He had recently bought a second-hand Blickensderfer which probably had a literary typewheel, since it was purchased from a literary man; and that machine showed the characteristic mark on the small “e.” The two remaining points, indeed, were not so clear. Obviously I could form no opinion as to whether or not Thorndyke held any exclusive information concerning him, and, with reference to his knowledge of my friend’s habits, I was at first inclined to be doubtful until I suddenly recalled, with a pang of remorse and self-accusation, the various details that I had communicated to Juliet and that she might easily, in all innocence, have handed on to Walter. I had, for instance, told her of Thorndyke’s preference for the Trichinopoly cheroot, and of this she might very naturally have spoken to Walter, who possessed a supply of them. Again, with regard to the time of our arrival at King’s Cross, I had informed her of this in a letter which was in no way confidential, and again there was no reason why the information should not have been passed on to Walter, who was to have been one of the party at the family dinner. The coincidence seemed complete enough, in all truth; yet it was incredible that Reuben’s cousin could be so blackhearted a villain or could have any motive for these dastardly crimes.

Suddenly a new idea struck me. Mrs Hornby had obtained access to this typewriting machine; and if Mrs. Hornby could do so, why not John Hornby? The description would, for the most part, fit the elder man as well as the younger, though I had no evidence of his possessing any special mechanical skill; but my suspicions had already fastened upon him, and I remembered that Thorndyke had by no means rejected my theory which connected him with the crime.

At this point, my reflections were broken in upon by Mrs. Hornby, who grasped my arm and uttered a deep groan. We had reached the corner of the Old Bailey, and before us were the frowning walls of Newgate. Within those walls, I knew—though I did not mention the fact—that Reuben Hornby was confined with the other prisoners who were awaiting their trial; and a glance at the massive masonry, stained to a dingy grey by the grime of the city, put an end to my speculations and brought me back to the drama that was so nearly approaching its climax.

Down the old thoroughfare, crowded with so many memories of hideous tragedy; by the side of the gloomy prison; past the debtors’ door with its forbidding spiked wicket; past the gallows gate with its festoons of fetters; we walked in silence until we reached the entrance to the Sessions House.

Here I was not a little relieved to find Thorndyke on the look-out for us, for Mrs. Hornby, in spite of really heroic efforts to control her emotion, was in a state of impending hysteria, while Juliet, though outwardly calm and composed, showed by the waxen pallor of her cheeks and a certain wildness of her eyes that all her terror was reviving; and I was glad that they were spared the unpleasantness of contact with the policemen who guarded the various entrances.

“We must be brave,” said Thorndyke gently, as he took Mrs. Hornby’s hand, “and show a cheerful face to our friend who



has so much to bear and who bears it so patiently. A few more hours, and I hope we shall see restored, not only his liberty, but his honour. Here is Mr. Anstey, who, we trust, will be able to make his innocence apparent."

Anstey, who, unlike Thorndyke, had already donned his wig and gown, bowed gravely, and, together, we passed through the mean and grimy portals into a dark hall. Policemen in uniform and unmistakable detectives stood about the various entries, and little knots of people, evil-looking and unclean for the most part, lurked in the background or sat on benches and diffused through the stale, musty air that distinctive but indescribable odour that clings to police vans and prison reception rooms; an odour that, in the present case, was pleasantly mingled with the suggestive aroma of disinfectants. Through the unsavoury throng we hurried, and up a staircase to a landing from which several passages diverged. Into one of these passages—a sort of "dark entry," furnished with a cage-like gate of iron bars—we passed to a black door, on which was painted the inscription, "Old Court. Counsel and clerks."

Anstey held the door open for us, and we passed through into the court, which at once struck me with a sense of disappointment. It was smaller than I had expected, and plain and mean to the point of sordidness. The woodwork was poor, thinly disguised by yellow graining, and slimy with dirt wherever a dirty hand could reach it. The walls were distempered a pale, greenish grey; the floor was of bare and dirty planking, and the only suggestions of dignity or display were those offered by the canopy over the judge's seat—lined with scarlet baize and surmounted by the royal arms—the scarlet cushions of the bench, and the large, circular clock in the gallery, which was embellished with a gilded border and asserted its importance by a loud, aggressive tick.

Following Anstey and Thorndyke into the well of the court, we were ushered into one of the seats reserved for counsel—the third from the front—where we sat down and looked about us, while our two friends seated themselves in the front bench next to the central table. Here, at the extreme right, a barrister—presumably the counsel for the prosecution—was already in his place and absorbed in the brief that lay on the desk before him. Straight before us were the seats for the jury, rising one above the other, and at their side the witness-box. Above us on the right was the judge's seat, and immediately below it a structure somewhat resembling a large pew or a counting-house desk, surmounted by a brass rail, in which a person in a grey wig—the clerk of the court—was mending a quill pen. On our left rose the dock—suggestively large and roomy—enclosed at the sides with high glazed frames; and above it, near the ceiling, was the spectators' gallery.

"What a hideous place!" exclaimed Juliet, who separated me from Mrs. Hornby. "And how sordid and dirty everything looks!"

"Yes," I answered. "The uncleanness of the criminal is not confined to his moral being; wherever he goes, he leaves a trail of actual, physical dirt. It is not so long ago that the dock and the bench alike used to be strewn with medicinal herbs, and I believe the custom still survives of furnishing the judge with a nosegay as a preventive of jail-fever."

"And to think that Reuben should be brought to a place like this!" Juliet continued bitterly; "to be herded with such people as we saw downstairs!"

She sighed and looked round at the benches that rose behind us, where a half-dozen reporters were already seated and apparently in high spirits at the prospect of a sensational case.

Our conversation was now interrupted by the clatter of feet on the gallery stairs, and heads began to appear over the wooden parapet. Several junior counsel filed into the seats in front of us; Mr. Lawley and his clerk entered the attorney's bench; the ushers took their stand below the jury-box; a police officer seated himself at a desk in the dock; and inspectors, detectives and miscellaneous officers began to gather in the entries or peer into the court through the small glazed openings in the doors.

---

## XV. — THE FINGER-PRINT EXPERTS

THE hum of conversation that had been gradually increasing as the court filled suddenly ceased. A door at the back of the dais was flung open; counsel, solicitors, and spectators alike rose to their feet; and the judge entered, closely followed by the Lord Mayor, the sheriff, and various civic magnates, all picturesque and gorgeous in their robes and chains of office. The Clerk of Arraignment took his place behind his table under the dais; the counsel suspended their conversation and fingered their briefs; and, as the judge took his seat, lawyers, officials, and spectators took their seats, and all eyes were turned towards the dock.

A few moments later Reuben Hornby appeared in the enclosure in company with a warder, the two rising, apparently, from the bowels of the earth, and, stepping forward to the bar, stood with a calm and self-possessed demeanour, glancing somewhat curiously around the court. For an instant his eye rested upon the group of friends and well-wishers seated behind the counsel, and the faintest trace of a smile appeared on his face; but immediately he turned his eyes away and never again throughout the trial looked in our direction.

The Clerk of Arraignment now rose and, reading from the indictment which lay before him on the table, addressed the prisoner—

"Reuben Hornby, you stand indicted for that you did, on the ninth or tenth day of March, feloniously steal a parcel of diamonds of the goods and chattels of John Hornby. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," replied Reuben.

The Clerk of Arraignment, having noted the prisoner's reply, then proceeded—

"The gentlemen whose names are about to be called will form the jury who are to try you. If you wish to object to any of them, you must do so as each comes to the book to be sworn, and before he is sworn. You will then be heard."

In acknowledgment of this address, which was delivered in clear, ringing tones, and with remarkable distinctness, Reuben bowed to the clerk, and the process of swearing-in the jury was commenced, while the counsel opened their briefs and the judge conversed facetiously with an official in a fur robe and a massive neck chain.

Very strange, to unaccustomed eyes and ears, was the effect of this function—half solemn and half grotesque, with an effect intermediate between that of a religious rite and that of a comic opera. Above the half-suppressed hum of conversation the clerk's voice arose at regular intervals, calling out the name of one of the jurymen, and, as its owner stood up, the court usher, black-gowned and sacerdotal of aspect, advanced and proffered the book. Then, as the jurymen took the volume in his hand, the voice of the usher resounded through the court like that of a priest intoning some refrain or antiphon—an effect that was increased by the rhythmical and archaic character of the formula—

"Samuel Seppings!"

A stolid-looking working-man rose and, taking the Testament in his hand, stood regarding the usher while that official sang out in a solemn monotone—

"You shall well and truly try and true deliverance make between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, whom you shall have in charge, and a true verdict give according to the evidence. So help you God!"

"James Piper!" Another jurymen rose and was given the Book to hold; and again the monotonous sing-song arose—

"You shall well and truly try and true deliverance make, etc."

"I shall scream aloud if that horrible chant goes on much longer," Juliet whispered. "Why don't they all swear at once and have done with it?"

"That would not meet the requirements," I answered. "However, there are only two more, so you must have patience."

"And you will have patience with me, too, won't you? I am horribly frightened. It is all so solemn and dreadful."

"You must try to keep up your courage until Dr. Thorndyke has given his evidence," I said. "Remember that, until he has spoken, everything is against Reuben; so be prepared."

"I will try," she answered meekly; "but I can't help being terrified."

The last of the jurymen was at length sworn, and when the clerk had once more called out the names one by one, the usher counting loudly as each man answered to his name, the latter officer turned to the Court and spectators, and proclaimed in solemn tones—

"If anyone can inform my Lords the King's justices, the King's attorney-general, or the King's serjeant, ere this inquest be now taken between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, of any treason, murder, felony or misdemeanour, committed or done by him, let him come forth and he shall be heard; for the prisoner stands at the bar upon his deliverance."

This proclamation was followed by a profound silence, and after a brief interval the Clerk of Arraignment turned towards the jury and addressed them collectively—

"Gentlemen of the jury, the prisoner at the bar stands indicted by the name of Reuben Hornby, for that he, on the ninth or tenth of March, feloniously did steal, take and carry away a parcel of diamonds of the goods of John Hornby. To this indictment he has pleaded that he is not guilty, and your charge is to inquire whether he be guilty or not and to hearken to the evidence."

When he had finished his address the clerk sat down, and the judge, a thin-faced, hollow-eyed elderly man, with bushy grey eyebrows and a very large nose, looked attentively at Reuben for some moments over the tops of his gold-rimmed pince-nez. Then he turned towards the counsel nearest the bench and bowed slightly.

The barrister bowed in return and rose, and for the first time I obtained a complete view of Sir Hector Trumpler, K.C., the counsel for the prosecution. His appearance was not prepossessing nor—though he was a large man and somewhat florid as to his countenance—particularly striking, except for a general air of untidiness. His gown was slipping off one shoulder, his wig was perceptibly awry, and his pince-nez threatened every moment to drop from his nose.

"The case that I have to present to you, my lord and gentlemen of the jury," he began in a clear, though unmusical voice, "is one the like of which is but too often met with in this court. It is one in which we shall see unbounded trust met by treacherous deceit, in which we shall see countless benefactions rewarded by the basest ingratitude, and in which we shall witness the deliberate renunciation of a life of honourable effort in favour of the tortuous and precarious ways of the criminal. The facts of the case are briefly as follows: The prosecutor in this case—most unwilling prosecutor, gentlemen—is Mr. John Hornby, who is a metallurgist and dealer in precious metals. Mr. Hornby has two nephews, the orphan sons of his two elder brothers, and I may tell you that since the decease of their parents he has acted the part of a father to both of them. One of these nephews is Mr. Walter Hornby, and the other is Reuben Hornby, the prisoner at the bar. Both of these nephews were received by Mr. Hornby into his business with a view to their succeeding him when he should retire, and

both, I need not say, occupied positions of trust and responsibility.

"Now, on the evening of the ninth of March there was delivered to Mr. Hornby a parcel of rough diamonds of which one of his clients asked him to take charge pending their transfer to the brokers. I need not burden you with irrelevant details concerning this transaction. It will suffice to say that the diamonds, which were of the aggregate value of about thirty thousand pounds, were delivered to him, and the unopened package deposited by him in his safe, together with a slip of paper on which he had written in pencil a memorandum of the circumstances. This was on the evening of the ninth of March, as I have said. Having deposited the parcel, Mr. Hornby locked the safe, and shortly afterwards left the premises and went home, taking the keys with him.

"On the following morning, when he unlocked the safe, he perceived with astonishment and dismay that the parcel of diamonds had vanished. The slip of paper, however, lay at the bottom of the safe, and on picking it up Mr. Hornby perceived that it bore a smear of blood, and in addition, the distinct impression of a human thumb. On this he closed and locked the safe and sent a note to the police station, in response to which a very intelligent officer—Inspector Sanderson—came and made a preliminary examination. I need not follow the case further, since the details will appear in the evidence, but I may tell you that, in effect, it has been made clear, beyond all doubt, that the thumb-print on that paper was the thumb-print of the prisoner, Reuben Hornby."

He paused to adjust his glasses, which were in the very act of falling from his nose, and hitch up his gown, while he took a leisurely survey of the jury, as though he were estimating their impressionability. At this moment I observed Walter Hornby enter the court and take up a position at the end of our bench nearest the door; and, immediately after, Superintendent Miller came in and seated himself on one of the benches opposite.

"The first witness whom I shall call," said Sir Hector Trumpler, "is John Hornby."

Mr. Hornby, looking wild and agitated, stepped into the witness-box, and the usher, having handed him the Testament, sang out—

"The evidence you shall give to the court and jury sworn, between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; so help you God!"

Mr. Hornby kissed the Book, and, casting a glance of unutterable misery at his nephew, turned towards the counsel.

"Your name is John Hornby, is it not?" asked Sir Hector.

"It is."

"And you occupy premises in St. Mary Axe?"

"Yes. I am a dealer in precious metals, but my business consists principally in the assaying of samples of ore and quartz and bars of silver and gold."

"Do you remember what happened on the ninth of March last?"

"Perfectly. My nephew Reuben—the prisoner—delivered to me a parcel of diamonds which he had received from the purser of the *Elmina Castle*, to whom I had sent him as my confidential agent. I had intended to deposit the diamonds with my banker, but when the prisoner arrived at my office, the banks were already closed, so I had to put the parcel, for the night, in my own safe. I may say that the prisoner was not in any way responsible for the delay."

"You are not here to defend the prisoner," said Sir Hector. "Answer my questions and make no comments, if you please. Was anyone present when you placed the diamonds in the safe?"

"No one was present but myself."

"I did not ask if you were present when you put them in," said Sir Hector (whereupon the spectators sniggered and the judge smiled indulgently). "What else did you do?"

"I wrote in pencil on a leaf of my pocket memorandum block, 'Handed in by Reuben at 7.3 p.m., 9.3.01,' and initialled it. Then I tore the leaf from the block and laid it on the parcel, after which I closed the safe and locked it."

"How soon did you leave the premises after this?"

"Almost immediately. The prisoner was waiting for me in the outer office—"

"Never mind where the prisoner was; confine your answers to what is asked. Did you take the keys with you?"

"Yes."

"When did you next open the safe?"

"On the following morning at ten o'clock."

"Was the safe locked or unlocked when you arrived?"

"It was locked. I unlocked it."

"Did you notice anything unusual about the safe?"

"No."

"Had the keys left your custody in the interval?"

"No. They were attached to a key-chain, which I always wear."

"Are there any duplicates of those keys?—the keys of the safe, I mean."

"No, there are no duplicates."

"Have the keys ever gone out of your possession?"

"Yes. If I have had to be absent from the office for a considerable time, it has been my custom to hand the keys to one of my nephews, whichever has happened to be in charge at the time."

"And never to any other person?"

"Never to any other person."

"What did you observe when you opened the safe?"

"I observed that the parcel of diamonds had disappeared."

"Did you notice anything else?"

"Yes. I found the leaf from my memorandum block lying at the bottom of the safe. I picked it up and turned it over, and then saw that there were smears of blood on it and what looked like the print of a thumb in blood. The thumb-mark was on the under-surface, as the paper lay at the bottom of the safe."

"What did you do next?"

"I closed and locked the safe, and sent a note to the police station saying that a robbery had been committed on my premises."

"You have known the prisoner several years, I believe?"

"Yes; I have known him all his life. He is my eldest brother's son."

"Then you can tell us, no doubt, whether he is left-handed or right-handed?"

"I should say he was ambidextrous, but he uses his left hand by preference."

"A fine distinction, Mr. Hornby; a very fine distinction. Now tell me, did you ascertain beyond all doubt that the diamonds were really gone?"

"Yes; I examined the safe thoroughly, first by myself and afterwards with the police. There was no doubt that the diamonds had really gone."

"When the detective suggested that you should have the thumb-prints of your two nephews taken, did you refuse?"

"I refused."

"Why did you refuse?"

"Because I did not choose to subject my nephews to the indignity. Besides, I had no power to make them submit to the proceeding."

"Had you any suspicions of either of them?"

"I had no suspicions of anyone."

"Kindly examine this piece of paper, Mr. Hornby," said Sir Hector, passing across a small oblong slip, "and tell us if you recognise it."

Mr. Hornby glanced at the paper for a moment, and then said—

"This is the memorandum slip that I found lying at the bottom of the safe."

"How do you identify it?"

"By the writing on it, which is in my own hand, and bears my initials."

"Is it the memorandum that you placed on the parcel of diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Was there any thumb-mark or blood-smear on it when you placed it in the safe?"

"No."

"Was it possible that there could have been any such marks?"

"Quite impossible. I tore it from my memorandum block at the time I wrote upon it."

"Very well." Sir Hector Trumpler sat down, and Mr. Anstey stood up to cross-examine the witness.

"You have told us, Mr. Hornby," said he, "that you have known the prisoner all his life. Now what estimate have you formed of his character?"

"I have always regarded him as a young man of the highest character—honourable, truthful, and in every way trustworthy. I have never, in all my experience of him, known him to deviate a hair's-breadth from the strictest honour and honesty of conduct."

"You regarded him as a man of irreproachable character. Is that so?"

"That is so; and my opinion of him is unchanged."

"Has he, to your knowledge, any expensive or extravagant habits?"

"No. His habits are simple and rather thrifty."

"Have you ever known him to bet, gamble, or speculate?"

"Never."

"Has he ever seemed to be in want of money?"

"No. He has a small private income, apart from his salary, which I know he does not spend, since I have occasionally employed my broker to invest his savings."

"Apart from the thumb-print which was found in the safe, are you aware of any circumstances that would lead you to suspect the prisoner of having stolen the diamonds?"

"None whatever."

Mr. Anstey sat down, and as Mr. Hornby left the witness-box, mopping the perspiration from his forehead, the next witness was called.

"Inspector Sanderson!"

The dapper police officer stepped briskly into the box, and having been duly sworn, faced the prosecuting counsel with the air of a man who was prepared for any contingency.

"Do you remember," said Sir Hector, after the usual preliminaries had been gone through, "what occurred on the morning of the tenth of March?"

"Yes. A note was handed to me at the station at 10.23 a.m. It was from Mr. John Hornby, and stated that a robbery had occurred at his premises in St. Mary Axe. I went to the premises and arrived there at 10.31 a.m. There I saw the prosecutor, Mr. John Hornby, who told me that a parcel of diamonds had been stolen from the safe. At his request I examined the safe. There were no signs of its having been forced open; the locks seemed to be quite uninjured and in good order. Inside the safe, on the bottom, I found two good-sized drops of blood, and a slip of paper with pencil-writing on it. The paper bore two blood-smears and a print of a human thumb in blood."

"Is this the paper?" asked the counsel, passing a small slip across to the witness.

"Yes," replied the inspector, after a brief glance at the document.

"What did you do next?"

"I sent a message to Scotland Yard acquainting the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department with the facts, and then went back to the station. I had no further connection with the case."

Sir Hector sat down, and the judge glanced at Anstey.

"You tell us," said the latter, rising, "that you observed two good-sized drops of blood on the bottom of the safe. Did you notice the condition of the blood, whether moist or dry?"

"The blood looked moist, but I did not touch it. I left it undisturbed for the detective officers to examine."

The next witness called was Sergeant Bates, of the Criminal Investigation Department. He stepped into the box with the same ready, business-like air as the other officer, and, having been sworn, proceeded to give his evidence with a fluency that suggested careful preparation, holding an open notebook in his hand but making no references to it.

"On the tenth of March, at 12.8 p.m., I received instructions to proceed to St. Mary Axe to inquire into a robbery that had taken place there. Inspector Sanderson's report was handed to me, and I read it in the cab on my way to the premises. On arriving at the premises at 12.30 p.m., I examined the safe carefully. It was quite uninjured, and there were no marks of any kind upon it. I tested the locks and found them perfect; there were no marks or indications of any picklock having been used. On the bottom of the inside I observed two rather large drops of a dark fluid. I took up some of the fluid on a piece of paper and found it to be blood. I also found, in the bottom of the safe, the burnt head of a wax match, and, on searching the floor of the office, I found, close by the safe, a used wax match from which the head had fallen. I also found a slip of paper which appeared to have been torn from a perforated block. On it was written in pencil, 'Handed in by Reuben at 7.3 p.m. 9.3.01. J.H.' There were two smears of blood on the paper and the impression of a human thumb in blood. I took possession of the paper in order that it might be examined by the experts. I inspected the office doors and the outer door of the premises, but found no signs of forcible entrance on any of them. I questioned the housekeeper, but obtained no information from him. I then returned to headquarters, made my report and handed the paper with the marks on it to the Superintendent."

"Is this the paper that you found in the safe?" asked the counsel, once more handing the leaflet across.

"Yes; this is the paper."

"What happened next?"

"The following afternoon I was sent for by Mr. Singleton, of the Finger-print Department. He informed me that he had gone through the files and had not been able to find any thumb-print resembling the one on the paper, and recommended me to endeavour to obtain prints of the thumbs of any persons who might have been concerned in the robbery. He also gave me an enlarged photograph of the thumb-print for reference if necessary. I accordingly went to St. Mary Axe and had an interview with Mr. Hornby, when I requested him to allow me to take prints of the thumbs of all the persons employed on the premises, including his two nephews. This he refused, saying that he distrusted finger-prints and that there was no suspicion of anyone on the premises. I asked if he would allow his nephews to furnish their thumb-prints privately, to which he replied, 'Certainly not.'"

"Had you then any suspicion of either of the nephews?"

"I thought they were both open to some suspicion. The safe had certainly been opened with false keys, and as they had both had the real keys in their possession it was possible that one of them might have taken impressions in wax and made counterfeit keys."

"Yes."

"I called on Mr. Hornby several times and urged him, for the sake of his nephews' reputations, to sanction the taking of the thumb-prints; but he refused very positively and forbade them to submit, although I understood that they were both willing. It then occurred to me to try if I could get any help from Mrs. Hornby, and on the fifteenth of March I called at Mr. Hornby's private house and saw her. I explained to her what was wanted to clear her nephews from the suspicion that rested on them, and she then said that she could dispose of those suspicions at once, for she could show me the thumb-prints of the whole family: she had them all in a 'Thumbograph.'"

"A 'Thumbograph'?" repeated the judge. "What is a 'Thumbograph'?"

Anstey rose with the little red-covered volume in his hand.

"A 'Thumbograph,' my lord," said he, "is a book, like this, in which foolish people collect the thumb-prints of their more foolish acquaintances."

He passed the volume up to the judge, who turned over the leaves curiously and then nodded to the witness.

"Yes. She said she had them all in a 'Thumbograph.'"

"Then she fetched from a drawer a small red-covered book which she showed to me. It contained the thumb-prints of all the family and some of her friends."

"Is this the book?" asked the judge, passing the volume down to the witness.

The sergeant turned over the leaves until he came to one which he apparently recognised, and said—

"Yes, m'lord; this is the book. Mrs. Hornby showed me the thumb-prints of various members of the family, and then found those of the two nephews. I compared them with the photograph that I had with me and discovered that the print of the left thumb of Reuben Hornby was in every respect identical with the thumb-print shown in the photograph."

"What did you do then?"

"I asked Mrs. Hornby to lend me the 'Thumbograph' so that I might show it to the Chief of the Finger-print Department, to which she consented. I had not intended to tell her of my discovery, but, as I was leaving, Mr. Hornby arrived home, and when he heard of what had taken place, he asked me why I wanted the book, and then I told him. He was greatly astonished and horrified, and wished me to return the book at once. He proposed to let the whole matter drop and take the loss of the diamonds on himself; but I pointed out that this was impossible as it would practically amount to compounding a felony. Seeing that Mrs. Hornby was so distressed at the idea of her book being used in evidence against her nephew, I promised her that I would return it to her if I could obtain a thumb-print in any other way.

"I then took the 'Thumbograph' to Scotland Yard and showed it to Mr. Singleton, who agreed that the print of the left thumb of Reuben Hornby was in every respect identical with the thumb-print on the paper found in the safe. On this I applied for a warrant for the arrest of Reuben Hornby, which I executed on the following morning. I told the prisoner what I had promised Mrs. Hornby, and he then offered to allow me to take a print of his left thumb so that his aunt's book should not have to be used in evidence."

"How is it, then," asked the judge, "that it has been put in evidence?"

"It has been put in by the defence, my lord," said Sir Hector Trumpler.

"I see," said the judge. "'A hair of the dog that bit him.' The 'Thumbograph' is to be applied as a remedy on the principle that *similia similibus curantur*. Well?"

"When I arrested him, I administered the usual caution, and the prisoner then said, 'I am innocent. I know nothing about the robbery.'"

The counsel for the prosecution sat down, and Anstey rose to cross-examine.

"You have told us," said he, in his clear musical voice, "that you found at the bottom of the safe two rather large drops of a dark fluid which you considered to be blood. Now, what led you to believe that fluid to be blood?"

"I took some of the fluid up on a piece of white paper, and it had the appearance and colour of blood."

"Was it examined microscopically or otherwise?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Was it quite liquid?"

"Yes, I should say quite liquid."

"What appearance had it on paper?"

"It looked like a clear red liquid of the colour of blood, and was rather thick and sticky."

Anstey sat down, and the next witness, an elderly man, answering to the name of Francis Simmons, was called.

"You are the housekeeper at Mr. Hornby's premises in St. Mary Axe?" asked Sir Hector Trumpler.

"I am."

"Did you notice anything unusual on the night of the ninth of March?"

"I did not."

"Did you make your usual rounds on that occasion?"

"Yes. I went all over the premises several times during the night, and the rest of the time I was in a room over the private office."

"Who arrived first on the morning of the tenth?"

"Mr. Reuben. He arrived about twenty minutes before anybody else."

"What part of the building did he go to?"

"He went into the private office, which I opened for him. He remained there until a few minutes before Mr. Hornby arrived, when he went up to the laboratory."

"Who came next?"

"Mr. Hornby, and Mr. Walter came in just after him."

The counsel sat down, and Anstey proceeded to cross-examine the witness.

"Who was the last to leave the premises on the evening of the ninth?"

"I am not sure."

"Why are you not sure?"

"I had to take a note and a parcel to a firm in Shoreditch. When I started, a clerk named Thomas Holker was in the outer office and Mr. Walter Hornby was in the private office. When I returned they had both gone."

"Was the outer door locked?"

"Yes."

"Had Holker a key of the outer door?"

"No. Mr. Hornby and his two nephews had each a key, and I have one. No one else had a key."

"How long were you absent?"

"About three-quarters of an hour."

"Who gave you the note and the parcel?"

"Mr. Walter Hornby."

"When did he give them to you?"

"He gave them to me just before I started, and told me to go at once for fear the place should be closed before I got there."

"And was the place closed?"

"Yes. It was all shut up, and everybody had gone."

Anstey resumed his seat, the witness shuffled out of the box with an air of evident relief, and the usher called out, "Henry James Singleton."

Mr. Singleton rose from his seat at the table by the solicitors for the prosecution and entered the box. Sir Hector adjusted

his glasses, turned over a page of his brief, and cast a steady and impressive glance at the jury.

"I believe, Mr. Singleton," he said at length, "that you are connected with the Finger-print Department at Scotland Yard?"

"Yes. I am one of the chief assistants in that department."

"What are your official duties?"

"My principal occupation consists in the examination and comparison of the finger-prints of criminals and suspected persons. These finger-prints are classified by me according to their characters and arranged in files for reference."

"I take it that you have examined a great number of finger-prints?"

"I have examined many thousands of finger-prints, and have studied them closely for purposes of identification."

"Kindly examine this paper, Mr. Singleton" (here the fatal leaflet was handed to him by the usher); "have you ever seen it before?"

"Yes. It was handed to me for examination at my office on the tenth of March."

"There is a mark upon it—the print of a finger or thumb. Can you tell us anything about that mark?"

"It is the print of the left thumb of Reuben Hornby, the prisoner at the bar."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"I am quite sure."

"Do you swear that the mark upon that paper was made by the thumb of the prisoner?"

"I do."

"Could it not have been made by the thumb of some other person?"

"No; it is impossible that it could have been made by any other person."

At this moment I felt Juliet lay a trembling hand on mine, and, glancing at her, I saw that she was deathly pale. I took her hand in mine and, pressing it gently, whispered to her, "Have courage; there is nothing unexpected in this."

"Thank you," she whispered in reply, with a faint smile; "I will try; but it is all so horribly unnerving."

"You consider," Sir Hector proceeded, "that the identity of this thumb-print admits of no doubt?"

"It admits of no doubt whatever," replied Mr. Singleton.

"Can you explain to us, without being too technical, how you have arrived at such complete certainty?"

"I myself took a print of the prisoner's thumb—having first obtained the prisoner's consent after warning him that the print would be used in evidence against him—and I compared that print with the mark on this paper. The comparison was made with the greatest care and by the most approved method, point by point and detail by detail, and the two prints were found to be identical in every respect.

"Now it has been proved by exact calculations—which calculations I have personally verified—that the chance that the print of a single finger of any given person will be exactly like the print of the same finger of any other given person is as one to sixty-four thousand millions. That is to say that, since the number of the entire human race is about sixteen thousand millions, the chance is about one to four that the print of a single finger of any one person will be identical with that of the same finger of any other member of the human race.

"It has been said by a great authority—and I entirely agree with the statement—that a complete, or nearly complete, accordance between two prints of a single finger affords evidence requiring no corroboration that the persons from whom they were made are the same.

"Now, these calculations apply to the prints of ordinary and normal fingers or thumbs. But the thumb from which these prints were taken is not ordinary or normal. There is upon it a deep but clean linear scar—the scar of an old incised wound—and this scar passes across the pattern of the ridges, intersecting the latter at certain places and disturbing their continuity at others. Now this very characteristic scar is an additional feature, having a set of chances of its own. So that we have to consider not only the chance that the print of the prisoner's left thumb should be identical with the print of some other person's left thumb—which is as one to sixty-four thousand millions—but the further chance that these two identical thumb-prints should be traversed by the impression of a scar identical in size and appearance, and intersecting the ridges at exactly the same places and producing failures of continuity in the ridges of exactly the same character. But these two chances, multiplied into one another, yield an ultimate chance of about one to four thousand trillions that the prisoner's left thumb will exactly resemble the print of some other person's thumb, both as to the pattern and the scar which crosses the pattern; in other words such a coincidence is an utter impossibility."

Sir Hector Trumpler took off his glasses and looked long and steadily at the jury as though he should say, "Come, my friends; what do you think of that?" Then he sat down with a jerk and turned towards Anstey and Thorndyke with a look of triumph.

"Do you propose to cross-examine the witness?" inquired the judge, seeing that the counsel for the defence made no



sign.

“No, my lord,” replied Anstey.

Thereupon Sir Hector Trumpler turned once more towards the defending counsel, and his broad, red face was illumined by a smile of deep satisfaction. That smile was reflected on the face of Mr. Singleton as he stepped from the box, and, as I glanced at Thorndyke, I seemed to detect, for a single instant, on his calm and immovable countenance, the faintest shadow of a smile.

“Herbert John Nash!”

A plump, middle-aged man, of keen, though studious, aspect, stepped into the box, and Sir Hector rose once more.

“You are one of the chief assistants in the Finger-print Department, I believe, Mr. Nash?”

“I am.”

“Have you heard the evidence of the last witness?”

“I have.”

“Do you agree with the statements made by that witness?”

“Entirely. I am prepared to swear that the print on the paper found in the safe is that of the left thumb of the prisoner, Reuben Hornby.”

“And you are certain that no mistake is possible?”

“I am certain that no mistake is possible.”

Again Sir Hector glanced significantly at the jury as he resumed his seat, and again Anstey made no sign beyond the entry of a few notes on the margin of his brief.

“Are you calling any more witnesses?” asked the judge, dipping his pen in the ink.

“No, my lord,” replied Sir Hector. “That is our case.”

Upon this Anstey rose and, addressing the judge, said—

“I call witnesses, my lord.”

The judge nodded and made an entry in his notes while Anstey delivered his brief introductory speech—

“My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I shall not occupy the time of the Court with unnecessary appeals at this stage, but shall proceed to take the evidence of my witnesses without delay.”

There was a pause of a minute or more, during which the silence was broken only by the rustle of papers and the squeaking of the judge’s quill pen. Juliet turned a white, scared face to me and said in a hushed whisper—

“This is terrible. That last man’s evidence is perfectly crushing. What can possibly be said in reply? I am in despair; oh! poor Reuben! He is lost, Dr. Jervis! He hasn’t a chance now.”

“Do you believe that he is guilty?” I asked.

“Certainly not!” she replied indignantly. “I am as certain of his innocence as ever.”

“Then,” said I, “if he is innocent, there must be some means of proving his innocence.”

“Yes. I suppose so,” she rejoined in a dejected whisper. “At any rate we shall soon know now.”

At this moment the usher’s voice was heard calling out the name of the first witness for the defence.

“Edmund Horford Rowe!”

A keen-looking, grey-haired man, with a shaven face and close-cut side-whiskers, stepped into the box and was sworn in due form.

“You are a doctor of medicine, I believe,” said Anstey, addressing the witness, “and lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence at the South London Hospital?”

“I am.”

“Have you had occasion to study the properties of blood?”

“Yes. The properties of blood are of great importance from a medico-legal point of view.”

“Can you tell us what happens when a drop of blood—say from a cut finger—falls upon a surface such as the bottom of an iron safe?”

“A drop of blood from a living body falling upon any non-absorbent surface will, in the course of a few minutes, solidify into a jelly which will, at first, have the same bulk and colour as the liquid blood.”

“Will it undergo any further change?”

“Yes. In a few minutes more the jelly will begin to shrink and become more solid so that the blood will become separated

into two parts, the solid and the liquid. The solid part will consist of a firm, tough jelly of a deep red colour, and the liquid part will consist of a pale yellow, clear, watery liquid."

"At the end, say, of two hours, what will be the condition of the drop of blood?"

"It will consist of a drop of clear, nearly colourless liquid, in the middle of which will be a small, tough, red clot."

"Supposing such a drop to be taken up on a piece of white paper, what would be its appearance?"

"The paper would be wetted by the colourless liquid, and the solid clot would probably adhere to the paper in a mass."

"Would the blood on the paper appear as a clear, red liquid?"

"Certainly not. The liquid would appear like water, and the clot would appear as a solid mass sticking to the paper."

"Does blood always behave in the way you have described?"

"Always, unless some artificial means are taken to prevent it from clotting."

"By what means can blood be prevented from clotting or solidifying?"

"There are two principal methods. One is to stir or whip the fresh blood rapidly with a bundle of fine twigs. When this is done, the fibrin—the part of the blood that causes solidification—adheres to the twigs, and the blood that remains, though it is unchanged in appearance, will remain liquid for an indefinite time. The other method is to dissolve a certain proportion of some alkaline salt in the fresh blood, after which it no longer has any tendency to solidify."

"You have heard the evidence of Inspector Sanderson and Sergeant Bates?"

"Yes."

"Inspector Sanderson has told us that he examined the safe at 10.31 a.m. and found two good-sized drops of blood on the bottom. Sergeant Bates has told us that he examined the safe two hours later, and that he took up one of the drops of blood on a piece of white paper. The blood was then quite liquid, and, on the paper, it looked like a clear, red liquid of the colour of blood. What should you consider the condition and nature of that blood to have been?"

"If it was really blood at all, I should say that it was either defibrinated blood—that is, blood from which the fibrin has been extracted by whipping—or that it had been treated with an alkaline salt."

"You are of opinion that the blood found in the safe could not have been ordinary blood shed from a cut or wound?"

"I am sure it could not have been."

"Now, Dr. Rowe, I am going to ask you a few questions on another subject. Have you given any attention to finger-prints made by bloody fingers?"

"Yes. I have recently made some experiments on the subject."

"Will you give us the results of those experiments?"

"My object was to ascertain whether fingers wet with fresh blood would yield distinct and characteristic prints. I made a great number of trials, and as a result found that it is extremely difficult to obtain a clear print when the finger is wetted with fresh blood. The usual result is a mere red blot showing no ridge pattern at all, owing to the blood filling the furrows between the ridges. But if the blood is allowed to dry almost completely on the finger, a very clear print is obtained."

"Is it possible to recognise a print that has been made by a nearly dry finger?"

"Yes; quite easily. The half-dried blood is nearly solid and adheres to the paper in a different way from the liquid, and it shows minute details, such as the mouths of the sweat glands, which are always obliterated by the liquid."

"Look carefully at this paper, which was found in the safe, and tell me what you see."

The witness took the paper and examined it attentively, first with the naked eye and then with a pocket-lens.

"I see," said he, "two blood-marks and a print, apparently of a thumb. Of the two marks, one is a blot, smeared slightly by a finger or thumb; the other is a smear only. Both were evidently produced with quite liquid blood. The thumb-print was also made with liquid blood."

"You are quite sure that the thumb-print was made with liquid blood?"

"Quite sure."

"Is there anything unusual about the thumb-print?"

"Yes. It is extraordinarily clear and distinct. I have made a great number of trials and have endeavoured to obtain the clearest prints possible with fresh blood; but none of my prints are nearly as distinct as this one."

Here the witness produced a number of sheets of paper, each of which was covered with the prints of bloody fingers, and compared them with the memorandum slip.

The papers were handed to the judge for his inspection, and Anstey sat down, when Sir Hector Trumpler rose, with a somewhat puzzled expression on his face, to cross-examine.

"You say that the blood found in the safe was defibrinated or artificially treated. What inference do you draw from that fact?"

"I infer that it was not dropped from a bleeding wound."

"Can you form any idea how such blood should have got into the safe?"

"None whatever."

"You say that the thumb-print is a remarkably distinct one. What conclusion do you draw from that?"

"I do not draw any conclusion. I cannot account for its distinctness at all."

The learned counsel sat down with rather a baffled air, and I observed a faint smile spread over the countenance of my colleague.

"Arabella Hornby."

A muffled whimpering from my neighbour on the left hand was accompanied by a wild rustling of silk. Glancing at Mrs. Hornby, I saw her stagger from the bench, shaking like a jelly, mopping her eyes with her handkerchief and grasping her open purse. She entered the witness-box, and, having gazed wildly round the court, began to search the multitudinous compartments of her purse.

"The evidence you shall give," sang out the usher—whereat Mrs. Hornby paused in her search and stared at him apprehensively—"to the court and jury sworn, between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar shall be the truth,—"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Hornby stiffly, "I—"

"—the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; so help you God!"

He held out the Testament, which she took from him with a trembling hand and forthwith dropped with a resounding bang on to the floor of the witness-box, diving after it with such precipitancy that her bonnet jammed violently against the rail of the box.

She disappeared from view for a moment, and then rose from the depths with a purple face and her bonnet flattened and cocked over one ear like an artillery-man's forage cap.

"Kiss the Book, if you please," said the usher, suppressing a grin by an heroic effort, as Mrs. Hornby, encumbered by her purse, her handkerchief and the Testament, struggled to unfasten her bonnet-strings. She clawed frantically at her bonnet, and, having dusted the Testament with her handkerchief, kissed it tenderly and laid it on the rail of the box, whence it fell instantly on to the floor of the court.

"I am really very sorry!" exclaimed Mrs. Hornby, leaning over the rail to address the usher as he stooped to pick up the Book, and discharging on to his back a stream of coins, buttons and folded bills from her open purse; "you will think me very awkward, I'm afraid."

She mopped her face and replaced her bonnet rakishly on one side, as Anstey rose and passed a small red book across to her.

"Kindly look at that book, Mrs. Hornby."

"I'd rather not," said she, with a gesture of repugnance. "It is associated with matters of so extremely disagreeable a character—"

"Do you recognise it?"

"Do I recognise it! How can you ask me such a question when you must know—"

"Answer the question," interposed the judge. "Do you or do you not recognise the book in your hand?"

"Of course I recognise it. How could I fail to—"

"Then say so," said the judge.

"I have said so," retorted Mrs. Hornby indignantly.

The judge nodded to Anstey, who then continued—"It is called a 'Thumbograph,' I believe."

"Yes: the name 'Thumbograph' is printed on the cover, so I suppose that is what it is called."

"Will you tell us, Mrs. Hornby, how the 'Thumbograph' came into your possession?"

For one moment Mrs. Hornby stared wildly at her interrogator; then she snatched a paper from her purse, unfolded it, gazed at it with an expression of dismay, and crumpled it up in the palm of her hand.

"You are asked a question," said the judge.

"Oh! yes," said Mrs. Hornby. "The Committee of the Society—no, that is the wrong one—I mean Walter, you know—at least—"

"I beg your pardon," said Anstey, with polite gravity.

"You were speaking of the committee of some society," interposed the judge. "What society were you referring to?"

Mrs. Hornby spread out the paper and, after a glance at it, replied—

"The Society of Paralysed Idiots, your worship," whereat a rumble of suppressed laughter arose from the gallery.

"But what has that society to do with the 'Thumbograph'?" inquired the judge.

"Nothing, your worship. Nothing at all."

"Then why did you refer to it?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Mrs. Hornby, wiping her eyes with the paper and then hastily exchanging it for her handkerchief.

The judge took off his glasses and gazed at Mrs. Hornby with an expression of bewilderment. Then he turned to the counsel and said in a weary voice—"Proceed, if you please, Mr. Anstey."

"Can you tell us, Mrs. Hornby, how the 'Thumbograph' came into your possession?" said the latter in persuasive accents.

"I thought it was Walter, and so did my niece, but Walter says it was not, and he ought to know, being young and having a most excellent memory, as I had myself when I was his age, and really, you know, it can't possibly matter where I got the thing—"

"But it does matter," interrupted Anstey. "We wish particularly to know."

"If you mean that you wish to get one like it—"

"We do not," said Anstey. "We wish to know how that particular 'Thumbograph' came into your possession. Did you, for instance, buy it yourself, or was it given to you by someone?"

"Walter says I bought it myself, but I thought he gave it to me, but he says he did not, and you see—"

"Never mind what Walter says. What is your own impression?"

"Why I still think that he gave it to me, though, of course, seeing that my memory is not what it was—"

"You think that Walter gave it to you?"

"Yes, in fact I feel sure he did, and so does my niece."

"Walter is your nephew, Walter Hornby?"

"Yes, of course. I thought you knew."

"Can you recall the occasion on which the 'Thumbograph' was given to you?"

"Oh yes, quite distinctly. We had some people to dinner—some people named Colley—not the Dorsetshire Colleys, you know, although they are exceedingly nice people, as I have no doubt the other Colleys are, too, when you know them, but we don't. Well, after dinner we were a little dull and rather at a loss, because Juliet, my niece, you know, had cut her finger and couldn't play the piano excepting with the left hand, and that is so monotonous as well as fatiguing, and the Colleys are not musical, excepting Adolphus, who plays the trombone, but he hadn't got it with him, and then, fortunately, Walter came in and brought the 'Thumbograph' and took all our thumb-prints and his own as well, and we were very much amused, and Matilda Colley—that is the eldest daughter but one—said that Reuben jogged her elbow, but that was only an excuse—"

"Exactly," interrupted Anstey. "And you recollect quite clearly that your nephew Walter gave you the 'Thumbograph' on that occasion?"

"Oh, distinctly; though, you know, he is really my husband's nephew—"

"Yes. And you are sure that he took the thumb-prints?"

"Quite sure."

"And you are sure that you never saw the 'Thumbograph' before that?"

"Never. How could I? He hadn't brought it."

"Have you ever lent the 'Thumbograph' to anyone?"

"No, never. No one has ever wanted to borrow it, because, you see—"

"Has it never, at any time, gone out of your possession?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that; in fact, I have often thought, though I hate suspecting people, and I really don't suspect anybody in particular, you know, but it certainly was very peculiar and I can't explain it in any other way. You see, I kept the 'Thumbograph' in a drawer in my writing table, and in the same drawer I used to keep my handkerchief-bag—in fact I do still, and it is there at this very moment, for in my hurry and agitation, I forgot about it until we were in the cab, and then it was too late, because Mr. Lawley—"

"Yes. You kept it in a drawer with your handkerchief-bag."

"That was what I said. Well, when Mr. Hornby was staying at Brighton he wrote to ask me to go down for a week and bring Juliet—Miss Gibson, you know—with me. So we went, and, just as we were starting, I sent Juliet to fetch my handkerchief-bag from the drawer, and I said to her, 'Perhaps we might take the thumb-book with us; it might come in useful on a wet day.' So she went, and presently she came back and said that the 'Thumbograph' was not in the drawer. Well, I was so surprised that I went back with her and looked myself, and sure enough the drawer was empty. Well, I didn't think much of it at the time, but when we came home again, as soon as we got out of the cab, I gave Juliet my handkerchief-bag to put away, and presently she came running to me in a great state of excitement. 'Why, Auntie,' she said, 'the "Thumbograph" is in the drawer; somebody must have been meddling with your writing table.' I went with her to the drawer, and there, sure enough, was the 'Thumbograph.' Somebody must have taken it out and put it back while we were away."

"Who could have had access to your writing table?"

"Oh, anybody, because, you see, the drawers were never locked. We thought it must have been one of the servants."

"Had anyone been to the house during your absence?"

"No. Nobody, except, of course, my two nephews; and neither of them had touched it, because we asked them, and they both said they had not."

"Thank you." Anstey sat down, and Mrs. Hornby having given another correcting twist to her bonnet, was about to step down from the box when Sir Hector rose and bestowed upon her an intimidating stare.

"You made some reference," said he, "to a society—the Society of Paralysed Idiots, I think, whatever that may be. Now what caused you to make that reference?"

"It was a mistake; I was thinking of something else."

"I know it was a mistake. You referred to a paper that was in your hand."

"I did not refer to it, I merely looked at it. It is a letter from the Society of Paralysed Idiots. It is nothing to do with me really, you know; I don't belong to the society, or anything of that sort."

"Did you mistake that paper for some other paper?"

"Yes, I took it for a paper with some notes on it to assist my memory."

"What kind of notes?"

"Oh, just the questions I was likely to be asked."

"Were the answers that you were to give to those questions also written on the paper?"

"Of course they were. The questions would not have been any use without the answers."

"Have you been asked the questions that were written on the paper?"

"Yes; at least, some of them."

"Have you given the answers that were written down?"

"I don't think I have—in fact, I am sure I haven't, because, you see—"

"Ah! you don't think you have." Sir Hector Trumpler smiled significantly at the jury, and continued—

"Now who wrote down those questions and answers?"

"My nephew, Walter Hornby. He thought, you know—"

"Never mind what he thought. Who advised or instructed him to write them down?"

"Nobody. It was entirely his own idea, and very thoughtful of him, too, though Dr. Jervis took the paper away from me and said I must rely on my memory."

Sir Hector was evidently rather taken aback by this answer, and sat down suddenly, with a distinctly chapfallen air.

"Where is this paper on which the questions and answers are written?" asked the judge. In anticipation of this inquiry I had already handed it to Thorndyke, and had noted by the significant glance that he bestowed on me that he had not failed to observe the peculiarity in the type. Indeed the matter was presently put beyond all doubt, for he hastily passed to me a scrap of paper, on which I found, when I opened it out, that he had written "X = W.H."

As Anstey handed the rather questionable document up to the judge, I glanced at Walter Hornby and observed him to flush angrily, though he strove to appear calm and unconcerned, and the look that he directed at his aunt was very much the reverse of benevolent.

"Is this the paper?" asked the judge, passing it down to the witness.

"Yes, your worship," answered Mrs. Hornby, in a tremulous voice; whereupon the document was returned to the judge, who proceeded to compare it with his notes.

"I shall order this document to be impounded," said he sternly, after making a brief comparison. "There has been a

distinct attempt to tamper with witnesses. Proceed with your case, Mr. Anstey."

There was a brief pause, during which Mrs. Hornby tottered across the court and resumed her seat, gasping with excitement and relief; then the usher called out—

"John Evelyn Thorndyke!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Juliet, clasping her hands. "Oh! will he be able to save Reuben? Do you think he will, Dr. Jervis?"

"There is someone who thinks he will," I replied, glancing towards Polton, who, clasping in his arms the mysterious box and holding on to the microscope case, gazed at his master with a smile of ecstasy. "Polton has more faith than you have, Miss Gibson."

"Yes, the dear, faithful little man!" she rejoined. "Well, we shall know the worst very soon now, at any rate."

"The worst or the best," I said. "We are now going to hear what the defence really is."

"God grant that it may be a good defence," she exclaimed in a low voice; and I—though not ordinarily a religious man—murmured "Amen!"

---

## XVI. — THORNDYKE PLAYS HIS CARD

AS Thorndyke took his place in the box I looked at him with a sense of unreasonable surprise, feeling that I had never before fully realised what manner of man my friend was as to his externals. I had often noted the quiet strength of his face, its infinite intelligence, its attractiveness and magnetism; but I had never before appreciated what now impressed me most: that Thorndyke was actually the handsomest man I had ever seen. He was dressed simply, his appearance unaided by the flowing gown or awe-inspiring wig, and yet his presence dominated the court. Even the judge, despite his scarlet robe and trappings of office, looked commonplace by comparison, while the jurymen, who turned to look at him, seemed like beings of an inferior order. It was not alone the distinction of the tall figure, erect and dignified, nor the power and massive composure of his face, but the actual symmetry and comeliness of the face itself that now arrested my attention; a comeliness that made it akin rather to some classic mask, wrought in the ivory-toned marble of Pentelicus, than to the eager faces that move around us in the hurry and bustle of a life at once strenuous and trivial.

"You are attached to the medical school at St. Margaret's Hospital, I believe, Dr. Thorndyke?" said Anstey.

"Yes. I am the lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology."

"Have you had much experience of medico-legal inquiries?"

"A great deal. I am engaged exclusively in medico-legal work."

"You heard the evidence relating to the two drops of blood found in the safe?"

"I did."

"What is your opinion as to the condition of that blood?"

"I should say there is no doubt that it had been artificially treated—probably by defibrination."

"Can you suggest any explanation of the condition of that blood?"

"I can."

"Is your explanation connected with any peculiarities in the thumb-print on the paper that was found in the safe?"

"It is."

"Have you given any attention to the subject of finger-prints?"

"Yes. A great deal of attention."

"Be good enough to examine that paper" (here the usher handed to Thorndyke the memorandum slip). "Have you seen it before?"

"Yes. I saw it at Scotland Yard."

"Did you examine it thoroughly?"

"Very thoroughly. The police officials gave me every facility and, with their permission, I took several photographs of it."

"There is a mark on that paper resembling the print of a human thumb?"

"There is."

"You have heard two expert witnesses swear that that mark was made by the left thumb of the prisoner, Reuben Hornby?"

"I have."

"Do you agree to that statement?"

"I do not."

"In your opinion, was the mark upon that paper made by the thumb of the prisoner?"

"No. I am convinced that it was not made by the thumb of Reuben Hornby."

"Do you think that it was made by the thumb of some other person?"

"No. I am of opinion that it was not made by a human thumb at all."

At this statement the judge paused for a moment, pen in hand, and stared at Thorndyke with his mouth slightly open, while the two experts looked at one another with raised eyebrows.

"By what means do you consider that the mark was produced?"

"By means of a stamp, either of indiarubber or, more probably, of chromicized gelatine."

Here Polton, who had been, by degrees, rising to an erect posture, smote his thigh a resounding thwack and chuckled aloud, a proceeding that caused all eyes, including those of the judge, to be turned on him.

"If that noise is repeated," said the judge, with a stony stare at the horrified offender—who had shrunk into the very smallest space that I have ever seen a human being occupy—"I shall cause the person who made it to be removed from the court."

"I understand, then," pursued Anstey, "that you consider the thumb-print, which has been sworn to as the prisoner's, to be a forgery?"

"Yes. It is a forgery."

"But is it possible to forge a thumb-print or a finger-print?"

"It is not only possible, but quite easy to do."

"As easy as to forge a signature, for instance?"

"Much more so, and infinitely more secure. A signature, being written with a pen, requires that the forgery should also be written with a pen, a process demanding very special skill and, after all, never resulting in an absolute *facsimile*. But a finger-print is a stamped impression—the finger-tip being the stamp; and it is only necessary to obtain a stamp identical in character with the finger-tip, in order to produce an impression which is an absolute *facsimile*, in every respect, of the original, and totally indistinguishable from it."

"Would there be no means at all of detecting the difference between a forged finger-print and the genuine original?"

"None whatever; for the reason that there would be no difference to detect."

"But you have stated, quite positively, that the thumb-print on this paper is a forgery. Now, if the forged print is indistinguishable from the original, how are you able to be certain that this particular print is a forgery?"

"I was speaking of what is possible with due care, but, obviously, a forger might, through inadvertence, fail to produce an absolute *facsimile* and then detection would be possible. That is what has happened in the present case. The forged print is not an absolute *facsimile* of the true print. There is a slight discrepancy. But, in addition to this, the paper bears intrinsic evidence that the thumb-print on it is a forgery."

"We will consider that evidence presently, Dr. Thorndyke. To return to the possibility of forging a finger-print, can you explain to us, without being too technical, by what methods it would be possible to produce such a stamp as you have referred to?"

"There are two principal methods that suggest themselves to me. The first, which is rather crude though easy to carry out, consists in taking an actual cast of the end of the finger. A mould would be made by pressing the finger into some plastic material, such as fine modelling clay or hot sealing wax, and then, by pouring a warm solution of gelatine into the mould, and allowing it to cool and solidify, a cast would be produced which would yield very perfect finger-prints. But this method would, as a rule, be useless for the purpose of the forger, as it could not, ordinarily, be carried out without the knowledge of the victim; though in the case of dead bodies and persons asleep or unconscious or under an anaesthetic, it could be practised with success, and would offer the advantage of requiring practically no technical skill or knowledge and no special appliances. The second method, which is much more efficient, and is the one, I have no doubt, that has been used in the present instance, requires more knowledge and skill.

"In the first place it is necessary to obtain possession of, or access to, a genuine finger-print. Of this finger-print a photograph is taken, or rather, a photographic negative, which for this purpose requires to be taken on a reversed plate, and the negative is put into a special printing frame, with a plate of gelatine which has been treated with potassium bichromate, and the frame is exposed to light.

"Now gelatine treated in this way—chromicized gelatine, as it is called—has a very peculiar property. Ordinary gelatine, as is well known, is easily dissolved in hot water, and chromicized gelatine is also soluble in hot water as long as it is not exposed to light; but on being exposed to light, it undergoes a change and is no longer capable of being dissolved in hot water. Now the plate of chromicized gelatine under the negative is protected from the light by the opaque parts of the negative, whereas the light passes freely through the transparent parts; but the transparent parts of the negative

correspond to the black marks on the finger-print, and these correspond to the ridges on the finger. Hence it follows that the gelatine plate is acted upon by light only on the parts corresponding to the ridges; and in these parts the gelatine is rendered insoluble, while all the rest of the gelatine is soluble. The gelatine plate, which is cemented to a thin plate of metal for support, is now carefully washed with hot water, by which the soluble part of the gelatine is dissolved away leaving the insoluble part (corresponding to the ridges) standing up from the surface. Thus there is produced a *facsimile* in relief of the finger-print having actual ridges and furrows identical in character with the ridges and furrows of the finger-tip. If an inked roller is passed over this relief, or if the relief is pressed lightly on an inked slab, and then pressed on a sheet of paper, a finger-print will be produced which will be absolutely identical with the original, even to the little white spots which mark the orifices of the sweat glands. It will be impossible to discover any difference between the real finger-print and the counterfeit because, in fact, no difference exists."

"But surely the process you have described is a very difficult and intricate one?"

"Not at all; it is very little more difficult than ordinary carbon printing, which is practised successfully by numbers of amateurs. Moreover, such a relief as I have described—which is practically nothing more than an ordinary process block—could be produced by any photo-engraver. The process that I have described is, in all essentials, that which is used in the reproduction of pen-and-ink drawings, and any of the hundreds of workmen who are employed in that industry could make a relief-block of a finger-print, with which an undetectable forgery could be executed."

"You have asserted that the counterfeit finger-print could not be distinguished from the original. Are you prepared to furnish proof that this is the case?"

"Yes. I am prepared to execute a counterfeit of the prisoner's thumb-print in the presence of the Court."

"And do you say that such a counterfeit would be indistinguishable from the original, even by the experts?"

"I do."

Anstey turned towards the judge. "Would your lordship give your permission for a demonstration such as the witness proposes?"

"Certainly," replied the judge. "The evidence is highly material. How do you propose that the comparison should be made?" he added, addressing Thorndyke.

"I have brought, for the purpose, my lord," answered Thorndyke, "some sheets of paper, each of which is ruled into twenty numbered squares. I propose to make on ten of the squares counterfeits of the prisoner's thumb-mark, and to fill the remaining ten with real thumb-marks. I propose that the experts should then examine the paper and tell the Court which are the real thumb-prints and which are the false."

"That seems a fair and efficient test," said his lordship. "Have you any objection to offer, Sir Hector?"

Sir Hector Trumpler hastily consulted with the two experts, who were sitting in the attorney's bench, and then replied, without much enthusiasm—

"We have no objection to offer, my lord."

"Then, in that case, I shall direct the expert witnesses to withdraw from the court while the prints are being made."

In obedience to the judge's order, Mr. Singleton and his colleague rose and left the court with evident reluctance, while Thorndyke took from a small portfolio three sheets of paper which he handed up to the judge.

"If your lordship," said he, "will make marks in ten of the squares on two of these sheets, one can be given to the jury and one retained by your lordship to check the third sheet when the prints are made on it."

"That is an excellent plan," said the judge; "and, as the information is for myself and the jury, it would be better if you came up and performed the actual stamping on my table in the presence of the foreman of the jury and the counsel for the prosecution and defence."

In accordance with the judge's direction Thorndyke stepped up on the dais, and Anstey, as he rose to follow, leaned over towards me.

"You and Polton had better go up too," said he: "Thorndyke will want your assistance, and you may as well see the fun. I will explain to his lordship."

He ascended the stairs leading to the dais and addressed a few words to the judge, who glanced in our direction and nodded, whereupon we both gleefully followed our counsel, Polton carrying the box and beaming with delight.

The judge's table was provided with a shallow drawer which pulled out at the side and which accommodated the box comfortably, leaving the small table-top free for the papers. When the lid of the box was raised, there were displayed a copper inking-slab, a small roller and the twenty-four "pawns" which had so puzzled Polton, and on which he now gazed with a twinkle of amusement and triumph.

"Are those all stamps?" inquired the judge, glancing curiously at the array of turned-wood handles.

"They are all stamps, my lord," replied Thorndyke, "and each is taken from a different impression of the prisoner's thumb."



"But why so many?" asked the judge.

"I have multiplied them," answered Thorndyke, as he squeezed out a drop of finger-print ink on to the slab and proceeded to roll it out into a thin film, "to avoid the tell-tale uniformity of a single stamp. And I may say," he added, "that it is highly important that the experts should not be informed that more than one stamp has been used."

"Yes, I see that," said the judge. "You understand that, Sir Hector," he added, addressing the counsel, who bowed stiffly, clearly regarding the entire proceeding with extreme disfavour.

Thorndyke now inked one of the stamps and handed it to the judge, who examined it curiously and then pressed it on a piece of waste paper, on which there immediately appeared a very distinct impression of a human thumb.

"Marvellous!" he exclaimed. "Most ingenious! Too ingenious!" He chuckled softly and added, as he handed the stamp and the paper to the foreman of the jury: "It is well, Dr. Thorndyke, that you are on the side of law and order, for I am afraid that, if you were on the other side, you would be one too many for the police. Now, if you are ready, we will proceed. Will you, please, stamp an impression in square number three."

Thorndyke drew a stamp from its compartment, inked it on the slab, and pressed it neatly on the square indicated, leaving there a sharp, clear thumb-print.

The process was repeated on nine other squares, a different stamp being used for each impression. The judge then marked the ten corresponding squares of the other two sheets of paper, and having checked them, directed the foreman to exhibit the sheet bearing the false thumb-prints to the jury, together with the marked sheet which they were to retain, to enable them to check the statements of the expert witnesses. When this was done, the prisoner was brought from the dock and stood beside the table. The judge looked with a curious and not unkindly interest at the handsome, manly fellow who stood charged with a crime so sordid and out of character with his appearance, and I felt, as I noted the look, that Reuben would, at least, be tried fairly on the evidence, without prejudice or even with some prepossession in his favour.

With the remaining part of the operation Thorndyke proceeded carefully and deliberately. The inking-slab was rolled afresh for each impression, and, after each, the thumb was cleansed with petrol and thoroughly dried; and when the process was completed and the prisoner led back to the dock, the twenty squares on the paper were occupied by twenty thumb-prints, which, to my eye, at any rate, were identical in character.

The judge sat for near upon a minute poring over this singular document with an expression half-way between a frown and a smile. At length, when we had all returned to our places, he directed the usher to bring in the witnesses.

I was amused to observe the change that had come over the experts in the short interval. The confident smile, the triumphant air of laying down a trump card, had vanished, and the expression of both was one of anxiety, not unmixed with apprehension. As Mr. Singleton advanced hesitatingly to the table, I recalled the words that he had uttered in his room at Scotland Yard; evidently his scheme of the game that was to end in an easy checkmate, had not included the move that had just been made.

"Mr. Singleton," said the judge, "here is a paper on which there are twenty thumb-prints. Ten of them are genuine prints of the prisoner's left thumb and ten are forgeries. Please examine them and note down in writing which are the true prints and which are the forgeries. When you have made your notes the paper will be handed to Mr. Nash."

"Is there any objection to my using the photograph that I have with me for comparison, my lord?" asked Mr. Singleton.

"I think not," replied the judge. "What do you say, Mr. Anstey?"

"No objection whatever, my lord," answered Anstey.

Mr. Singleton accordingly drew from his pocket an enlarged photograph of the thumb-print and a magnifying glass, with the aid of which he explored the bewildering array of prints on the paper before him; and as he proceeded I remarked with satisfaction that his expression became more and more dubious and worried. From time to time he made an entry on a memorandum slip beside him, and, as the entries accumulated, his frown grew deeper and his aspect more puzzled and gloomy.

At length he sat up, and taking the memorandum slip in his hand, addressed the judge.

"I have finished my examination, my lord."

"Very well. Mr. Nash, will you kindly examine the paper and write down the results of your examination?"

"Oh! I wish they would make haste," whispered Juliet. "Do you think they will be able to tell the real from the false thumb-prints?"

"I can't say," I replied; "but we shall soon know. They looked all alike to me."

Mr. Nash made his examination with exasperating deliberateness, and preserved throughout an air of stolid attention; but at length he, too, completed his notes and handed the paper back to the usher.

"Now, Mr. Singleton," said the judge, "let us hear your conclusions. You have been sworn."

Mr. Singleton stepped into the witness-box, and, laying his notes on the ledge, faced the judge.

"Have you examined the paper that was handed to you?" asked Sir Hector Trumpler.

"I have."

"What did you see on the paper?"

"I saw twenty thumb-prints, of which some were evident forgeries, some were evidently genuine, and some were doubtful."

"Taking the thumb-prints *seriatim*, what have you noted about them?"

Mr. Singleton examined his notes and replied—"The thumb-print on square one is evidently a forgery, as is also number two, though it is a passable imitation. Three and four are genuine; five is an obvious forgery. Six is a genuine thumb-print; seven is a forgery, though a good one; eight is genuine; nine is, I think, a forgery, though it is a remarkably good imitation. Ten and eleven are genuine thumb-marks; twelve and thirteen are forgeries; but as to fourteen I am very doubtful, though I am inclined to regard it as a forgery. Fifteen is genuine, and I think sixteen is also; but I will not swear to it. Seventeen is certainly genuine. Eighteen and nineteen I am rather doubtful about, but I am disposed to consider them both forgeries. Twenty is certainly a genuine thumb-print."

As Mr. Singleton's evidence proceeded, a look of surprise began to make its appearance on the judge's face, while the jury glanced from the witness to the notes before them and from their notes to one another in undisguised astonishment.

As to Sir Hector Trumpler, that luminary of British jurisprudence was evidently completely fogged; for, as statement followed statement, he pursed up his lips and his broad, red face became overshadowed by an expression of utter bewilderment.

For a few seconds he stared blankly at his witness and then dropped on to his seat with a thump that shook the court.

"You have no doubt," said Anstey, "as to the correctness of your conclusions? For instance, you are quite sure that the prints one and two are forgeries?"

"I have no doubt."

"You swear that those two prints are forgeries?"

Mr. Singleton hesitated for a moment. He had been watching the judge and the jury and had apparently misinterpreted their surprise, assuming it to be due to his own remarkable powers of discrimination; and his confidence had revived accordingly.

"Yes," he answered; "I swear that they are forgeries."

Anstey sat down, and Mr. Singleton, having passed his notes up to the judge, retired from the box, giving place to his colleague.

Mr. Nash, who had listened with manifest satisfaction to the evidence, stepped into the box with all his original confidence restored. His selection of the true and the false thumb-prints was practically identical with that of Mr. Singleton, and his knowledge of this fact led him to state his conclusions with an air that was authoritative and even dogmatic.

"I am quite satisfied of the correctness of my statements," he said, in reply to Anstey's question, "and I am prepared to swear, and do swear, that those thumb-prints which I have stated to be forgeries, are forgeries, and that their detection presents no difficulty to an observer who has an expert acquaintance with finger-prints."

"There is one question that I should like to ask," said the judge, when the expert had left the box and Thorndyke had re-entered it to continue his evidence. "The conclusions of the expert witnesses—manifestly *bona fide* conclusions, arrived at by individual judgement, without collusion or comparison of results—are practically identical. They are virtually in complete agreement. Now, the strange thing is this: their conclusions are wrong in every instance" (here I nearly laughed aloud, for, as I glanced at the two experts, the expression of smug satisfaction on their countenances changed with lightning rapidity to a ludicrous spasm of consternation); "not sometimes wrong and sometimes right, as would have been the case if they had made mere guesses, but wrong every time. When they are quite certain, they are quite wrong; and when they are doubtful, they incline to the wrong conclusion. This is a very strange coincidence, Dr. Thorndyke. Can you explain it?"

Thorndyke's face, which throughout the proceedings had been as expressionless as that of a wooden figurehead, now relaxed into a dry smile.

"I think I can, my lord," he replied. "The object of a forger in executing a forgery is to produce deception on those who shall examine the forgery."

"Ah!" said the judge; and *his* face relaxed into a dry smile, while the jury broke out into unconcealed grins.

"It was evident to me," continued Thorndyke, "that the experts would be unable to distinguish the real from the forged thumb-prints, and, that being so, that they would look for some collateral evidence to guide them. I, therefore, supplied that collateral evidence. Now, if ten prints are taken, without special precautions, from a single finger, it will probably happen that no two of them are exactly alike; for the finger being a rounded object of which only a small part touches the paper, the impressions produced will show little variations according to the part of the finger by which the print is made. But a stamp such as I have used has a flat surface like that of a printer's type, and, like a type, it always prints the same

impression. It does not reproduce the finger-tip, but a particular print of the finger, and so, if ten prints are made with a single stamp, each print will be a mechanical repetition of the other nine. Thus, on a sheet bearing twenty finger-prints, of which ten were forgeries made with a single stamp, it would be easy to pick out the ten forged prints by the fact that they would all be mechanical repetitions of one another; while the genuine prints could be distinguished by the fact of their presenting trifling variations in the position of the finger.

“Anticipating this line of reasoning, I was careful to make each print with a different stamp and each stamp was made from a different thumb-print, and I further selected thumb-prints which varied as widely as possible when I made the stamps. Moreover, when I made the real thumb-prints, I was careful to put the thumb down in the same position each time as far as I was able; and so it happened that, on the sheet submitted to the experts, the real thumb-prints were nearly all alike, while the forgeries presented considerable variations. The instances in which the witnesses were quite certain were those in which I succeeded in making the genuine prints repeat one another, and the doubtful cases were those in which I partially failed.”

“Thank you, that is quite clear,” said the judge, with a smile of deep content, such as is apt to appear on the judicial countenance when an expert witness is knocked off his pedestal. “We may now proceed, Mr. Anstey.”

“You have told us,” resumed Anstey, “and have submitted proofs, that it is possible to forge a thumb-print so that detection is impossible. You have also stated that the thumb-print on the paper found in Mr. Hornby’s safe is a forgery. Do you mean that it *may* be a forgery, or that it actually is one?”

“I mean that it actually is a forgery.”

“When did you first come to the conclusion that it was a forgery?”

“When I saw it at Scotland Yard. There are three facts which suggested this conclusion. In the first place the print was obviously produced with liquid blood, and yet it was a beautifully clear and distinct impression. But such an impression could not be produced with liquid blood without the use of a slab and roller, even if great care were used, and still less could it have been produced by an accidental smear.

“In the second place, on measuring the print with a micrometer, I found that it did not agree in dimensions with a genuine thumb-print of Reuben Hornby. It was appreciably larger. I photographed the print with the micrometer in contact and on comparing this with a genuine thumb-print, also photographed with the same micrometer in contact, I found that the suspected print was larger by the fortieth of an inch, from one given point on the ridge-pattern to another given point. I have here enlargements of the two photographs in which the disagreement in size is clearly shown by the lines of the micrometer. I have also the micrometer itself and a portable microscope, if the Court wishes to verify the photographs.”

“Thank you,” said the judge, with a bland smile; “we will accept your sworn testimony unless the learned counsel for the prosecution demands verification.”

He received the photographs which Thorndyke handed up and, having examined them with close attention, passed them on to the jury.

“The third fact,” resumed Thorndyke, “is of much more importance, since it not only proves the print to be a forgery, but also furnishes a very distinct clue to the origin of the forgery, and so to the identity of the forger.” (Here the court became hushed until the silence was so profound that the ticking of the clock seemed a sensible interruption. I glanced at Walter, who sat motionless and rigid at the end of the bench, and perceived that a horrible pallor had spread over his face, while his forehead was covered with beads of perspiration.) “On looking at the print closely, I noticed at one part a minute white mark or space. It was of the shape of a capital S and had evidently been produced by a defect in the paper—a loose fibre which had stuck to the thumb and been detached by it from the paper, leaving a blank space where it had been. But, on examining the paper under a low power of the microscope, I found the surface to be perfect and intact. No loose fibre had been detached from it, for if it had, the broken end or, at least, the groove in which it had lain, would have been visible. The inference seemed to be that the loose fibre had existed, not in the paper which was found in the safe, but in the paper on which the original thumb-mark had been made. Now, as far as I knew, there was only one undoubted thumb-print of Reuben Hornby’s in existence—the one in the ‘Thumbograph.’ At my request, the ‘Thumbograph’ was brought to my chambers by Mrs. Hornby, and, on examining the print of Reuben Hornby’s left thumb, I perceived on it a minute, S-shaped white space occupying a similar position to that in the red thumb-mark; and when I looked at it through a powerful lens, I could clearly see the little groove in the paper in which the fibre had lain and from which it had been lifted by the inked thumb. I subsequently made a systematic comparison of the marks in the two thumb-prints; I found that the dimensions of the mark were proportionally the same in each—that is to say, the mark in the ‘Thumbograph’ print had an extreme length of 26/1000 of an inch and an extreme breadth of 14.5/1000 of an inch, while that in the red thumb-mark was one-fortieth larger in each dimension, having an extreme length of 26.65/1000 of an inch and an extreme breadth of 14.86/1000 of an inch; that the shape was identical, as was shown by superimposing tracings of greatly enlarged photographs of each mark on similar enlargements of the other; and that the mark intersected the ridges of the thumb-print in the same manner and at exactly the same parts in the two prints.”

“Do you say that—having regard to the facts which you have stated—it is certain that the red thumb-mark is a forgery?”

“I do; and I also say that it is certain that the forgery was executed by means of the ‘Thumbograph.’”

“Might not the resemblances be merely a coincidence?”

“No. By the law of probabilities which Mr. Singleton explained so clearly in his evidence, the adverse chances would run into untold millions. Here are two thumb-prints made in different places and at different times—an interval of many weeks intervening. Each of them bears an accidental mark which is due not to any peculiarity of the thumb, but to a peculiarity of the paper. On the theory of coincidences it is necessary to suppose that each piece of paper had a loose fibre of exactly identical shape and size and that this fibre came, by accident, in contact with the thumb at exactly the same spot. But such a supposition would be more opposed to probabilities even than the supposition that two exactly similar thumb-prints should have been made by different persons. And then there is the further fact that the paper found in the safe had no loose fibre to account for the mark.”

“What is your explanation of the presence of defibrinated blood in the safe?”

“It was probably used by the forger in making the thumb-print, for which purpose fresh blood would be less suitable by reason of its clotting. He would probably have carried a small quantity in a bottle, together with the pocket slab and roller invented by Mr. Galton. It would thus be possible for him to put a drop on the slab, roll it out into a thin film and take a clean impression with his stamp. It must be remembered that these precautions were quite necessary, since he had to make a recognisable print at the first attempt. A failure and a second trial would have destroyed the accidental appearance, and might have aroused suspicion.”

“You have made some enlarged photographs of the thumb-prints, have you not?”

“Yes. I have here two enlarged photographs, one of the ‘Thumbograph’ print and one of the red thumb-print. They both show the white mark very clearly and will assist comparison of the originals, in which the mark is plainly visible through a lens.”

He handed the two photographs up to the judge, together with the ‘Thumbograph,’ the memorandum slip, and a powerful doublet lens with which to examine them.

The judge inspected the two original documents with the aid of the lens and compared them with the photographs, nodding approvingly as he made out the points of agreement. Then he passed them on to the jury and made an entry in his notes.

While this was going on my attention was attracted by Walter Hornby. An expression of terror and wild despair had settled on his face, which was ghastly in its pallor and bedewed with sweat. He looked furtively at Thorndyke and, as I noted the murderous hate in his eyes, I recalled our midnight adventure in John Street and the mysterious cigar.

Suddenly he rose to his feet, wiping his brow and steadying himself against the bench with a shaking hand; then he walked quietly to the door and went out. Apparently, I was not the only onlooker who had been interested in his doings, for, as the door swung to after him, Superintendent Miller rose from his seat and went out by the other door.

“Are you cross-examining this witness?” the judge inquired, glancing at Sir Hector Trumpler.

“No, my lord,” was the reply.

“Are you calling any more witnesses, Mr. Anstey?”

“Only one, my lord,” replied Anstey—“the prisoner, whom I shall put in the witness-box, as a matter of form, in order that he may make a statement on oath.”

Reuben was accordingly conducted from the dock to the witness-box, and, having been sworn, made a solemn declaration of his innocence. A brief cross-examination followed, in which nothing was elicited, but that Reuben had spent the evening at his club and gone home to his rooms about half-past eleven and had let himself in with his latchkey. Sir Hector at length sat down; the prisoner was led back to the dock, and the Court settled itself to listen to the speeches of the counsel.

“My lord and gentlemen of the jury,” Anstey commenced in his clear, mellow tones, “I do not propose to occupy your time with a long speech. The evidence that has been laid before you is at once so intelligible, so lucid, and so conclusive, that you will, no doubt, arrive at your verdict uninfluenced by any display of rhetoric either on my part or on the part of the learned counsel for the prosecution.

“Nevertheless, it is desirable to disentangle from the mass of evidence those facts which are really vital and crucial.

“Now the one fact which stands out and dominates the whole case is this: The prisoner’s connection with this case rests solely upon the police theory of the infallibility of finger-prints. Apart from the evidence of the thumb-print there is not, and there never was, the faintest breath of suspicion against him. You have heard him described as a man of unsullied honour, as a man whose character is above reproach; a man who is trusted implicitly by those who have had dealings with him. And this character was not given by a casual stranger, but by one who has known him from childhood. His record is an unbroken record of honourable conduct; his life has been that of a clean-living, straightforward gentleman. And now he stands before you charged with a miserable, paltry theft; charged with having robbed that generous friend, the brother of his own father, the guardian of his childhood and the benefactor who has planned and striven for his well-being; charged, in short, gentlemen, with a crime which every circumstance connected with him and every trait of his known character renders utterly inconceivable. Now upon what grounds has this gentleman of irreproachable character been charged with this mean and sordid crime? Baldly stated, the grounds of the accusation are these: A certain learned and eminent man of

science has made a statement, which the police have not merely accepted but have, in practice, extended beyond its original meaning. That statement is as follows: 'A complete, or nearly complete, accordance between two prints of a single finger ... affords evidence requiring no corroboration, that the persons from whom they were made are the same.'

"That statement, gentlemen, is in the highest degree misleading, and ought not to have been made without due warning and qualification. So far is it from being true, in practice, that its exact contrary is the fact; the evidence of a finger-print, in the absence of corroboration, is absolutely worthless. Of all forms of forgery, the forgery of a finger-print is the easiest and most secure, as you have seen in this court to-day. Consider the character of the high-class forger—his skill, his ingenuity, his resource. Think of the forged banknotes, of which not only the engraving, the design and the signature, but even the very paper with its private watermarks, is imitated with a perfection that is at once the admiration and the despair of those who have to distinguish the true from the false; think of the forged cheque, in which actual perforations are filled up, of which portions are cut out bodily and replaced by indistinguishable patches; think of these, and then of a finger-print, of which any photo-engraver's apprentice can make you a forgery that the greatest experts cannot distinguish from the original, which any capable amateur can imitate beyond detection after a month's practice; and then ask yourselves if this is the kind of evidence on which, without any support or corroboration, a gentleman of honour and position should be dragged before a criminal court and charged with having committed a crime of the basest and most sordid type.

"But I must not detain you with unnecessary appeals. I will remind you briefly of the salient facts. The case for the prosecution rests upon the assertion that the thumb-print found in the safe was made by the thumb of the prisoner. If that thumb-print was not made by the prisoner, there is not only no case against him but no suspicion of any kind.

"Now, was that thumb-print made by the prisoner's thumb? You have had conclusive evidence that it was not. That thumb-print differed in the size, or scale, of the pattern from a genuine thumb-print of the prisoner's. The difference was small, but it was fatal to the police theory; the two prints were not identical.

"But, if not the prisoner's thumb-print, what was it? The resemblance of the pattern was too exact for it to be the thumb-print of another person, for it reproduced not only the pattern of the ridges on the prisoner's thumb, but also the scar of an old wound. The answer that I propose to this question is, that it was an intentional imitation of the prisoner's thumb-print, made with the purpose of fixing suspicion on the prisoner, and so ensuring the safety of the actual criminal. Are there any facts which support this theory? Yes, there are several facts which support it very strongly.

"First, there are the facts that I have just mentioned. The red thumb-print disagreed with the genuine print in its scale or dimensions. It was not the prisoner's thumb-print; but neither was it that of any other person. The only alternative is that it was a forgery.

"In the second place, that print was evidently made with the aid of certain appliances and materials, and one of those materials, namely defibrinated blood, was found in the safe.

"In the third place, there is the coincidence that the print was one which it was possible to forge. The prisoner has ten digits—eight fingers and two thumbs. But there were in existence actual prints of the two thumbs, whereas no prints of the fingers were in existence; hence it would have been impossible to forge a print of any of the fingers. So it happens that the red thumb-print resembled one of the two prints of which forgery was possible.

"In the fourth place, the red thumb-print reproduces an accidental peculiarity of the 'Thumbograph' print. Now, if the red thumb-print is a forgery, it must have been made from the 'Thumbograph' print, since there exists no other print from which it could have been made. Hence we have the striking fact that the red thumb-print is an exact replica—including accidental peculiarities—of the only print from which a forgery could have been made. The accidental S-shaped mark in the 'Thumbograph' print is accounted for by the condition of the paper; the occurrence of this mark in the red thumb-print is not accounted for by any peculiarity of the paper, and can be accounted for in no way, excepting by assuming the one to be a copy of the other. The conclusion is thus inevitable that the red thumb-print is a photo-mechanical reproduction of the 'Thumbograph' print.

"But there is yet another point. If the red thumb-print is a forgery reproduced from the 'Thumbograph' print, the forger must at some time have had access to the 'Thumbograph.' Now, you have heard Mrs. Hornby's remarkable story of the mysterious disappearance of the 'Thumbograph' and its still more mysterious reappearance. That story can have left no doubt in your minds that some person had surreptitiously removed the 'Thumbograph' and, after an unknown interval, secretly replaced it. Thus the theory of forgery receives confirmation at every point, and is in agreement with every known fact; whereas the theory that the red thumb-print was a genuine thumb-print, is based upon a gratuitous assumption, and has not had a single fact advanced in its support.

"Accordingly, gentlemen, I assert that the prisoner's innocence has been proved in the most complete and convincing manner, and I ask you for a verdict in accordance with that proof."

As Anstey resumed his seat, a low rumble of applause was heard from the gallery. It subsided instantly on a gesture of disapproval from the judge, and a silence fell upon the court, in which the clock, with cynical indifference, continued to record in its brusque monotone the passage of the fleeting seconds.

"He is saved, Dr. Jervis! Oh! surely he is saved!" Juliet exclaimed in an agitated whisper. "They must see that he is innocent now."

"Have patience a little longer," I answered. "It will soon be over now."

Sir Hector Trumpler was already on his feet and, after bestowing on the jury a stern hypnotic stare, he plunged into his reply with a really admirable air of conviction and sincerity.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury: The case which is now before this Court is one, as I have already remarked, in which human nature is presented in a highly unfavourable light. But I need not insist upon this aspect of the case, which will already, no doubt, have impressed you sufficiently. It is necessary merely for me, as my learned friend has aptly expressed it, to disentangle the actual facts of the case from the web of casuistry that has been woven around them.

"Those facts are of extreme simplicity. A safe has been opened and property of great value abstracted from it. It has been opened by means of false keys. Now there are two men who have, from time to time, had possession of the true keys, and thus had the opportunity of making copies of them. When the safe is opened by its rightful owner, the property is gone, and there is found the print of the thumb of one of these two men. That thumb-print was not there when the safe was closed. The man whose thumb-print is found is a left-handed man; the print is the print of a left thumb. It would seem, gentlemen, as if the conclusion were so obvious that no sane person could be found to contest it; and I submit that the conclusion which any sane person would arrive at—the only possible conclusion—is, that the person whose thumb-print was found in the safe is the person who stole the property from the safe. But the thumb-print was, admittedly, that of the prisoner at the bar, and therefore the prisoner at the bar is the person who stole the diamonds from the safe.

"It is true that certain fantastic attempts have been made to explain away these obvious facts. Certain far-fetched scientific theories have been propounded and an exhibition of legerdemain has taken place which, I venture to think, would have been more appropriate to some place of public entertainment than to a court of justice. That exhibition has, no doubt, afforded you considerable amusement. It has furnished a pleasing relaxation from the serious business of the court. It has even been instructive, as showing to what extent it is possible for plain facts to be perverted by misdirected ingenuity. But unless you are prepared to consider this crime as an elaborate hoax—as a practical joke carried out by a facetious criminal of extraordinary knowledge, skill and general attainments—you must, after all, come to the only conclusion that the facts justify: that the safe was opened and the property abstracted by the prisoner. Accordingly, gentlemen, I ask you, having regard to your important position as the guardians of the well-being and security of your fellow-citizens, to give your verdict in accordance with the evidence, as you have solemnly sworn to do; which verdict, I submit, can be no other than that the prisoner is guilty of the crime with which he is charged."

Sir Hector sat down, and the jury, who had listened to his speech with solid attention, gazed expectantly at the judge, as though they should say: "Now, which of these two are we to believe?"

The judge turned over his notes with an air of quiet composure, writing down a word here and there as he compared the various points in the evidence. Then he turned to the jury with a manner at once persuasive and confidential—

"It is not necessary, gentlemen," he commenced, "for me to occupy your time with an exhaustive analysis of the evidence. That evidence you yourselves have heard, and it has been given, for the most part, with admirable clearness. Moreover, the learned counsel for the defence has collated and compared that evidence so lucidly, and, I may say, so impartially, that a detailed repetition on my part would be superfluous. I shall therefore confine myself to a few comments which may help you in the consideration of your verdict.

"I need hardly point out to you that the reference made by the learned counsel for the prosecution to far-fetched scientific theories is somewhat misleading. The only evidence of a theoretical character was that of the finger-print experts. The evidence of Dr. Rowe and of Dr. Thorndyke dealt exclusively with matters of fact. Such inferences as were drawn by them were accompanied by statements of the facts which yielded such inferences.

"Now, an examination of the evidence which you have heard shows, as the learned counsel for the defence has justly observed, that the entire case resolves itself into a single question, which is this: 'Was the thumb-print that was found in Mr. Hornby's safe made by the thumb of the prisoner, or was it not?' If that thumb-print was made by the prisoner's thumb, then the prisoner must, at least, have been present when the safe was unlawfully opened. If that thumb-print was not made by the prisoner's thumb, there is nothing to connect him with the crime. The question is one of fact upon which it will be your duty to decide; and I must remind you, gentlemen, that you are the sole judges of the facts of the case, and that you are to consider any remarks of mine as merely suggestions which you are to entertain or to disregard according to your judgement.

"Now let us consider this question by the light of the evidence. This thumb-print was either made by the prisoner or it was not. What evidence has been brought forward to show that it was made by the prisoner? Well, there is the evidence of the ridge-pattern. That pattern is identical with the pattern of the prisoner's thumb-print, and even has the impression of a scar which crosses the pattern in a particular manner in the prisoner's thumb-print. There is no need to enter into the elaborate calculations as to the chances of agreement; the practical fact, which is not disputed, is that if this red thumb-print is a genuine thumb-print at all, it was made by the prisoner's thumb. But it is contended that it is not a genuine thumb-print; that it is a mechanical imitation—in fact a forgery.

"The more general question thus becomes narrowed down to the more particular question: 'Is this a genuine thumb-print or is it a forgery?' Let us consider the evidence. First, what evidence is there that it is a genuine thumb-print? There is none. The identity of the pattern is no evidence on this point, because a forgery would also exhibit identity of pattern. The genuineness of the thumb-print was assumed by the prosecution, and no evidence has been offered.

"But now what evidence is there that the red thumb-print is a forgery?"

"First, there is the question of size. Two different-sized prints could hardly be made by the same thumb. Then there is the evidence of the use of appliances. Safe-robbers do not ordinarily provide themselves with inking-slabs and rollers with which to make distinct impressions of their own fingers. Then there is the accidental mark on the print which also exists on the only genuine print that could have been used for the purpose of forgery, which is easily explained on the theory of a forgery, but which is otherwise totally incomprehensible. Finally, there is the strange disappearance of the 'Thumbograph' and its strange reappearance. All this is striking and weighty evidence, to which must be added that adduced by Dr. Thorndyke as showing how perfectly it is possible to imitate a finger-print.

"These are the main facts of the case, and it is for you to consider them. If, on careful consideration, you decide that the red thumb-print was actually made by the prisoner's thumb, then it will be your duty to pronounce the prisoner guilty; but if, on weighing the evidence, you decide that the thumb-print is a forgery, then it will be your duty to pronounce the prisoner not guilty. It is now past the usual luncheon hour, and, if you desire it, you can retire to consider your verdict while the Court adjourns."

The jurymen whispered together for a few moments and then the foreman stood up.

"We have agreed on our verdict, my lord," he said.

The prisoner, who had just been led to the back of the dock, was now brought back to the bar. The grey-wigged clerk of the court stood up and addressed the jury.

"Are you all agreed upon your verdict, gentlemen?"

"We are," replied the foreman.

"What do you say, gentlemen? Is the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," replied the foreman, raising his voice and glancing at Reuben.

A storm of applause burst from the gallery and was, for the moment, disregarded by the judge. Mrs. Hornby laughed aloud—a strange, unnatural laugh—and then crammed her handkerchief into her mouth, and so sat gazing at Reuben with the tears coursing down her face, while Juliet laid her head upon the desk and sobbed silently.

After a brief space the judge raised an admonitory hand, and, when the commotion had subsided, addressed the prisoner, who stood at the bar, calm and self-possessed, though his face bore a slight flush—

"Reuben Hornby, the jury, after duly weighing the evidence in this case, have found you to be not guilty of the crime with which you were charged. With that verdict I most heartily agree. In view of the evidence which has been given, I consider that no other verdict was possible, and I venture to say that you leave this court with your innocence fully established, and without a stain upon your character. In the distress which you have recently suffered, as well as in your rejoicing at the verdict of the jury, you have the sympathy of the Court, and of everyone present, and that sympathy will not be diminished by the consideration that, with a less capable defence, the result might have been very different.

"I desire to express my admiration at the manner in which that defence was conducted, and I desire especially to observe that not you alone, but the public at large, are deeply indebted to Dr. Thorndyke, who, by his insight, his knowledge and his ingenuity, has probably averted a very serious miscarriage of justice. The Court will now adjourn until half-past two."

The judge rose from his seat and everyone present stood up; and, amidst the clamour of many feet upon the gallery stairs, the door of the dock was thrown open by a smiling police officer and Reuben came down the stairs into the body of the court.

---

## XVII. — AT LAST

"WE had better let the people clear off," said Thorndyke, when the first greetings were over and we stood around Reuben in the fast-emptying court. "We don't want a demonstration as we go out."

"No; anything but that, just now," replied Reuben. He still held Mrs. Hornby's hand, and one arm was passed through that of his uncle, who wiped his eyes at intervals, though his face glowed with delight.

"I should like you to come and have a little quiet luncheon with me at my chambers—all of us friends together," continued Thorndyke.

"I should be delighted," said Reuben, "if the programme would include a satisfactory wash."

"You will come, Anstey?" asked Thorndyke.

"What have you got for lunch?" demanded Anstey, who was now disrobed and in his right mind—that is to say, in his usual whimsical, pseudo-frivolous character.

"That question savours of gluttony," answered Thorndyke. "Come and see."

"I will come and eat, which is better," answered Anstey, "and I must run off now, as I have to look in at my chambers."

"How shall we go?" asked Thorndyke, as his colleague vanished through the doorway. "Polton has gone for a four-wheeler, but it won't hold us all."

"It will hold four of us," said Reuben, "and Dr. Jervis will bring Juliet; won't you, Jervis?"

The request rather took me aback, considering the circumstances, but I was conscious, nevertheless, of an unreasonable thrill of pleasure and answered with alacrity: "If Miss Gibson will allow me, I shall be very delighted." My delight was, apparently, not shared by Juliet, to judge by the uncomfortable blush that spread over her face. She made no objection, however, but merely replied rather coldly: "Well, as we can't sit on the roof of the cab, we had better go by ourselves."

The crowd having by this time presumably cleared off, we all took our way downstairs. The cab was waiting at the kerb, surrounded by a group of spectators, who cheered Reuben as he appeared at the doorway, and we saw our friends enter and drive away. Then we turned and walked quickly down the Old Bailey towards Ludgate Hill.

"Shall we take a hansom?" I asked.

"No; let us walk," replied Juliet; "a little fresh air will do us good after that musty, horrible court. It all seems like a dream, and yet what a relief—oh! what a relief it is."

"It is rather like the awakening from a nightmare to find the morning sun shining," I rejoined.

"Yes; that is just what it is like," she agreed; "but I still feel dazed and shaken."

We turned presently down New Bridge Street, towards the Embankment, walking side by side without speaking, and I could not help comparing, with some bitterness, our present stiff and distant relations with the intimacy and comradeship that had existed before the miserable incident of our last meeting.

"You don't look so jubilant over your success as I should have expected," she said at length, with a critical glance at me; "but I expect you are really very proud and delighted, aren't you?"

"Delighted, yes; not proud. Why should I be proud? I have only played jackal, and even that I have done very badly."

"That is hardly a fair statement of the facts," she rejoined, with another quick, inquisitive look at me; "but you are in low spirits to-day—which is not at all like you. Is it not so?"

"I am afraid I am a selfish, egotistical brute," was my gloomy reply. "I ought to be as gay and joyful as everyone else to-day, whereas the fact is that I am chafing over my own petty troubles. You see, now that this case is finished, my engagement with Dr. Thorndyke terminates automatically, and I relapse into my old life—a dreary repetition of journeying amongst strangers—and the prospect is not inspiring. This has been a time of bitter trial to you, but to me it has been a green oasis in the desert of a colourless, monotonous life. I have enjoyed the companionship of a most lovable man, whom I admire and respect above all other men, and with him have moved in scenes full of colour and interest. And I have made one other friend whom I am loth to see fade out of my life, as she seems likely to do."

"If you mean me," said Juliet, "I may say that it will be your own fault if I fade out of your life. I can never forget all that you have done for us, your loyalty to Reuben, your enthusiasm in his cause, to say nothing of your many kindnesses to me. And, as to your having done your work badly, you wrong yourself grievously. I recognised in the evidence by which Reuben was cleared to-day how much you had done, in filling in the details, towards making the case complete and convincing. I shall always feel that we owe you a debt of the deepest gratitude, and so will Reuben, and so, perhaps, more than either of us, will someone else."

"And who is that?" I asked, though with no great interest. The gratitude of the family was a matter of little consequence to me.

"Well, it is no secret now," replied Juliet. "I mean the girl whom Reuben is going to marry. What is the matter, Dr. Jervis?" she added, in a tone of surprise.

We were passing through the gate that leads from the Embankment to Middle Temple Lane, and I had stopped dead under the archway, laying a detaining hand upon her arm and gazing at her in utter amazement.

"The girl that Reuben is going to marry!" I repeated. "Why, I had always taken it for granted that he was going to marry you."

"But I told you, most explicitly, that was not so!" she exclaimed with some impatience.

"I know you did," I admitted ruefully; "but I thought—well, I imagined that things had, perhaps, not gone quite smoothly and—"

"Did you suppose that if I had cared for a man, and that man had been under a cloud, I should have denied the relation or pretended that we were merely friends?" she demanded indignantly.

"I am sure you wouldn't," I replied hastily. "I was a fool, an idiot—by Jove, what an idiot I have been!"

"It was certainly very silly of you," she admitted; but there was a gentleness in her tone that took away all bitterness from the reproach.

"The reason of the secrecy was this," she continued; "they became engaged the very night before Reuben was arrested, and, when he heard of the charge against him, he insisted that no one should be told unless, and until, he was fully acquitted. I was the only person who was in their confidence, and as I was sworn to secrecy, of course I couldn't tell you; nor did I suppose that the matter would interest you. Why should it?"



"Imbecile that I am," I murmured. "If I had only known!"

"Well, if you *had* known," said she; "what difference could it have made to you?"

This question she asked without looking at me, but I noted that her cheek had grown a shade paler.

"Only this," I answered. "That I should have been spared many a day and night of needless self-reproach and misery."

"But why?" she asked, still keeping her face averted. "What had you to reproach yourself with?"

"A great deal," I answered, "if you consider my supposed position. If you think of me as the trusted agent of a man, helpless and deeply wronged—a man whose undeserved misfortunes made every demand upon chivalry and generosity; if you think of me as being called upon to protect and carry comfort to the woman whom I regarded as, virtually, that man's betrothed wife; and then if you think of me as proceeding straightway, before I had known her twenty-four hours, to fall hopelessly in love with her myself, you will admit that I had something to reproach myself with."

She was still silent, rather pale and very thoughtful, and she seemed to breathe more quickly than usual.

"Of course," I continued, "you may say that it was my own look-out, that I had only to keep my own counsel, and no one would be any the worse. But there's the mischief of it. How can a man who is thinking of a woman morning, noon and night; whose heart leaps at the sound of her coming, whose existence is a blank when she is away from him—a blank which he tries to fill by recalling, again and again, all that she has said and the tones of her voice, and the look that was in her eyes when she spoke—how can he help letting her see, sooner or later, that he cares for her? And if he does, when he has no right to, there is an end of duty and chivalry and even common honesty."

"Yes, I understand now," said Juliet softly. "Is this the way?" She tripped up the steps leading to Fountain Court and I followed cheerfully. Of course it was not the way, and we both knew it, but the place was silent and peaceful, and the plane-trees cast a pleasant shade on the gravelled court. I glanced at her as we walked slowly towards the fountain. The roses were mantling in her cheeks now and her eyes were cast down, but when she lifted them to me for an instant, I saw that they were shining and moist.

"Did you never guess?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied in a low voice, "I guessed; but—but then," she added shyly, "I thought I had guessed wrong."

We walked on for some little time without speaking again until we came to the further side of the fountain, where we stood listening to the quiet trickle of the water, and watching the sparrows as they took their bath on the rim of the basin. A little way off another group of sparrows had gathered with greedy joy around some fragments of bread that had been scattered abroad by the benevolent Templars, and hard by a more sentimentally-minded pigeon, unmindful of the crumbs and the marauding sparrows, puffed out his breast and strutted and curtsied before his mate with endearing gurgles.

Juliet had rested her hand on one of the little posts that support the chain by which the fountain is enclosed and I had laid my hand on hers. Presently she turned her hand over so that mine lay in its palm; and so we were standing hand-in-hand when an elderly gentleman, of dry and legal aspect, came up the steps and passed by the fountain. He looked at the pigeons and then he looked at us, and went his way smiling and shaking his head.

"Juliet," said I.

She looked up quickly with sparkling eyes and a frank smile that was yet a little shy, too.

"Yes."

"Why did he smile—that old gentleman—when he looked at us?"

"I can't imagine," she replied mendaciously.

"It was an approving smile," I said. "I think he was remembering his own spring-time and giving us his blessing."

"Perhaps he was," she agreed. "He looked a nice old thing." She gazed fondly at the retreating figure and then turned again to me. Her cheeks had grown pink enough by now, and in one of them a dimple displayed itself to great advantage in its rosy setting.

"Can you forgive me, dear, for my unutterable folly?" I asked presently, as she glanced up at me again.

"I am not sure," she answered. "It was dreadfully silly of you."

"But remember, Juliet, that I loved you with my whole heart—as I love you now and shall love you always."

"I can forgive you anything when you say that," she answered softly.

Here the voice of the distant Temple clock was heard uttering a polite protest. With infinite reluctance we turned away from the fountain, which sprinkled us with a parting benediction, and slowly retraced our steps to Middle Temple Lane and thence into Pump Court.

"You haven't said it, Juliet," I whispered, as we came through the archway into the silent, deserted court.

"Haven't I, dear?" she answered; "but you know it, don't you? You know I do."

"Yes, I know," I said; "and that knowledge is all my heart's desire." She laid her hand in mine for a moment with a gentle pressure and then drew it away; and so we passed through into the cloisters.



## I. — THE MAN WITH THE NAILED SHOES

THERE are, I suppose, few places even on the East Coast of England more lonely and remote than the village of Little Sundersley and the country that surrounds it. Far from any railway, and some miles distant from any considerable town, it remains an outpost of civilization, in which primitive manners and customs and old-world tradition linger on into an age that has elsewhere forgotten them. In the summer, it is true, a small contingent of visitors, adventurous in spirit, though mostly of sedate and solitary habits, make their appearance to swell its meagre population, and impart to the wide stretches of smooth sand that fringe its shores a fleeting air of life and sober gaiety; but in late September—the season of

the year in which I made its acquaintance—its pasture-lands lie desolate, the rugged paths along the cliffs are seldom trodden by human foot, and the sands are a desert waste on which, for days together, no footprint appears save that left by some passing sea-bird.

I had been assured by my medical agent, Mr. Turcival, that I should find the practice of which I was now taking charge “an exceedingly soft billet, and suitable for a studious man;” and certainly he had not misled me, for the patients were, in fact, so few that I was quite concerned for my principal, and rather dull for want of work. Hence, when my friend John Thorndyke, the well-known medico-legal expert, proposed to come down and stay with me for a weekend and perhaps a few days beyond, I hailed the proposal with delight, and welcomed him with open arms.

“You certainly don’t seem to be overworked, Jervis,” he remarked, as we turned out of the gate after tea, on the day of his arrival, for a stroll on the shore. “Is this a new practice, or an old one in a state of senile decay?”

“Why, the fact is,” I answered, “there is virtually no practice. Cooper—my principal—has been here about six years, and as he has private means he has never made any serious effort to build one up; and the other man, Dr. Burrows, being uncommonly keen, and the people very conservative, Cooper has never really got his foot in. However, it doesn’t seem to trouble him.”

“Well, if he is satisfied, I suppose you are,” said Thorndyke, with a smile. “You are getting a seaside holiday, and being paid for it. But I didn’t know you were as near to the sea as this.”

We were entering, as he spoke, an artificial gap-way cut through the low cliff, forming a steep cart-track down to the shore. It was locally known as *Sundersley Gap*, and was used principally, when used at all, by the farmers’ carts which came down to gather seaweed after a gale.

“What a magnificent stretch of sand!” continued Thorndyke, as we reached the bottom, and stood looking out seaward across the deserted beach. “There is something very majestic and solemn in a great expanse of sandy shore when the tide is out, and I know of nothing which is capable of conveying the impression of solitude so completely. The smooth, unbroken surface not only displays itself untenanted for the moment, but it offers convincing testimony that it has lain thus undisturbed through a considerable lapse of time. Here, for instance, we have clear evidence that for several days only two pairs of feet besides our own have trodden this gap.”

“How do you arrive at the ‘several days’?” I asked.

“In the simplest manner possible,” he replied. “The moon is now in the third quarter, and the tides are consequently neap-tides. You can see quite plainly the two lines of seaweed and jetsam which indicate the high-water marks of the spring-tides and the neap-tides respectively. The strip of comparatively dry sand between them, over which the water has not risen for several days, is, as you see, marked by only two sets of footprints, and those footprints will not be completely obliterated by the sea until the next spring-tide—nearly a week from to-day.”

“Yes, I see now, and the thing appears obvious enough when one has heard the explanation. But it is really rather odd that no one should have passed through this gap for days, and then that four persons should have come here within quite a short interval of one another.”

“What makes you think they have done so?” Thorndyke asked.

“Well,” I replied, “both of these sets of footprints appear to be quite fresh, and to have been made about the same time.”

“Not at the same time, Jervis,” rejoined Thorndyke. “There is certainly an interval of several hours between them, though precisely how many hours we cannot judge, since there has been so little wind lately to disturb them; but the fisherman unquestionably passed here not more than three hours ago, and I should say probably within an hour; whereas the other man—who seems to have come up from a boat to fetch something of considerable weight—returned through the gap certainly not less, and probably more, than four hours ago.”

I gazed at my friend in blank astonishment, for these events befell in the days before I had joined him as his assistant, and his special knowledge and powers of inference were not then fully appreciated by me.

“It is clear, Thorndyke,” I said, “that footprints have a very different meaning to you from what they have for me. I don’t see in the least how you have reached any of these conclusions.”

“I suppose not,” was the reply; “but, you see, special knowledge of this kind is the stock-in-trade of the medical jurist, and has to be acquired by special study, though the present example is one of the greatest simplicity. But let us consider it point by point; and first we will take this set of footprints which I have inferred to be a fisherman’s. Note their enormous size. They should be the footprints of a giant. But the length of the stride shows that they were made by a rather short man. Then observe the massiveness of the soles, and the fact that there are no nails in them. Note also the peculiar clumsy tread—the deep toe and heel marks, as if the walker had wooden legs, or fixed ankles and knees. From that character we can safely infer high boots of thick, rigid leather, so that we can diagnose high boots, massive and stiff, with nailless soles, and many sizes too large for the wearer. But the only boot that answers this description is the fisherman’s thigh-boot—made of enormous size to enable him to wear in the winter two or three pairs of thick knitted stockings, one over the other. Now look at the other footprints; there is a double track, you see, one set coming from the sea and one going towards it. As the man (who was bow-legged and turned his toes in) has trodden in his own footprints, it is obvious that he came from the sea, and returned to it. But observe the difference in the two sets of prints; the returning ones are much deeper than the others, and the stride much shorter. Evidently he was carrying something when he returned, and that something was very

heavy. Moreover, we can see, by the greater depth of the toe impressions, that he was stooping forward as he walked, and so probably carried the weight on his back. Is that quite clear?"

"Perfectly," I replied. "But how do you arrive at the interval of time between the visits of the two men?"

"That also is quite simple. The tide is now about halfway out; it is thus about three hours since high water. Now, the fisherman walked just about the neap-tide, high-water mark, sometimes above it and sometimes below. But none of his footprints have been obliterated; therefore he passed after high water—that is, less than three hours ago; and since his footprints are all equally distinct, he could not have passed when the sand was very wet. Therefore he probably passed less than an hour ago. The other man's footprints, on the other hand, reach only to the neap-tide, high-water mark, where they end abruptly. The sea has washed over the remainder of the tracks and obliterated them. Therefore he passed not less than three hours and not more than four days ago—probably within twenty-four hours."

As Thorndyke concluded his demonstration the sound of voices was borne to us from above, mingled with the tramping of feet, and immediately afterwards a very singular party appeared at the head of the gap descending towards the shore. First came a short burly fisherman clad in oilskins and sou'-wester, clumping along awkwardly in his great sea-boots, then the local police-sergeant in company with my professional rival Dr. Burrows, while the rear of the procession was brought up by two constables carrying a stretcher. As he reached the bottom of the gap the fisherman, who was evidently acting as guide, turned along the shore, retracing his own tracks, and the procession followed in his wake.

"A surgeon, a stretcher, two constables, and a police-sergeant," observed Thorndyke. "What does that suggest to your mind, Jervis?"

"A fall from the cliff," I replied, "or a body washed up on the shore."

"Probably," he rejoined; "but we may as well walk in that direction."

We turned to follow the retreating procession, and as we strode along the smooth surface left by the retiring tide Thorndyke resumed:

"The subject of footprints has always interested me deeply for two reasons. First, the evidence furnished by footprints is constantly being brought forward, and is often of cardinal importance; and, secondly, the whole subject is capable of really systematic and scientific treatment. In the main the data are anatomical, but age, sex, occupation, health, and disease all give their various indications. Clearly, for instance, the footprints of an old man will differ from those of a young man of the same height, and I need not point out to you that those of a person suffering from locomotor ataxia or paralysis agitans would be quite unmistakable."

"Yes, I see that plainly enough," I said.

"Here, now," he continued, "is a case in point." He halted to point with his stick at a row of footprints that appeared suddenly above high-water mark, and having proceeded a short distance, crossed the line again, and vanished where the waves had washed over them. They were easily distinguished from any of the others by the clear impressions of circular rubber heels.

"Do you see anything remarkable about them?" he asked.

"I notice that they are considerably deeper than our own," I answered.

"Yes, and the boots are about the same size as ours, whereas the stride is considerably shorter—quite a short stride, in fact. Now there is a pretty constant ratio between the length of the foot and the length of the leg, between the length of leg and the height of the person, and between the stature and the length of stride. A long foot means a long leg, a tall man, and a long stride. But here we have a long foot and a short stride. What do you make of that?" He laid down his stick—a smooth partridge cane, one side of which was marked by small lines into inches and feet—beside the footprints to demonstrate the discrepancy.

"The depth of the footprints shows that he was a much heavier man than either of us," I suggested; "perhaps he was unusually fat."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that seems to be the explanation. The carrying of a dead weight shortens the stride, and fat is practically a dead weight. The conclusion is that he was about five feet ten inches high, and excessively fat." He picked up his cane, and we resumed our walk, keeping an eye on the procession ahead until it had disappeared round a curve in the coast-line, when we mended our pace somewhat. Presently we reached a small headland, and, turning the shoulder of cliff, came full upon the party which had preceded us. The men had halted in a narrow bay, and now stood looking down at a prostrate figure beside which the surgeon was kneeling.

"We were wrong, you see," observed Thorndyke. "He has not fallen over the cliff, nor has he been washed up by the sea. He is lying above high-water mark, and those footprints that we have been examining appear to be his."

As we approached, the sergeant turned and held up his hand.

"I'll ask you not to walk round the body just now, gentlemen," he said. "There seems to have been foul play here, and I want to be clear about the tracks before anyone crosses them."

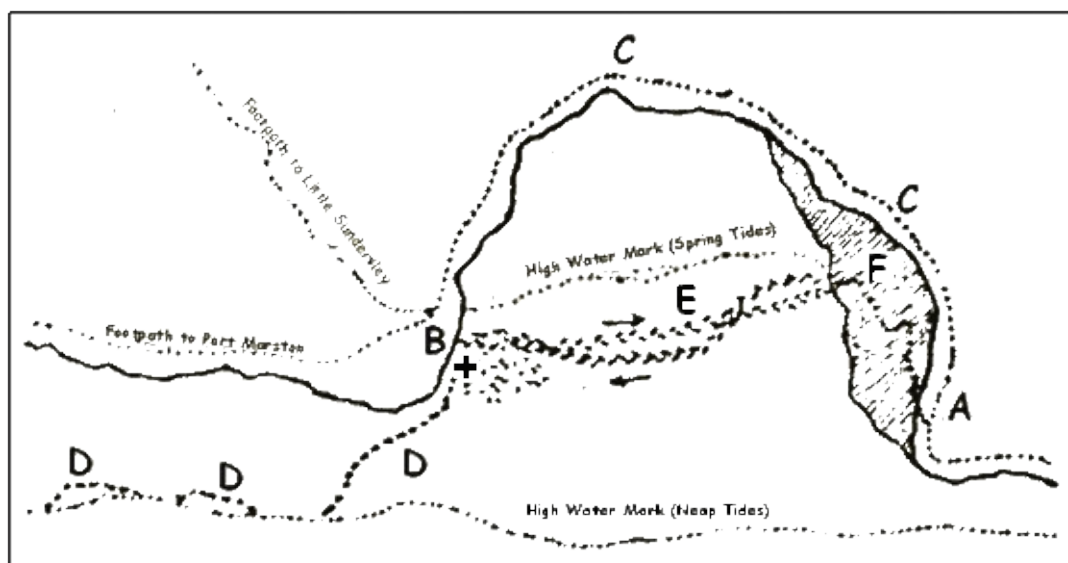
Acknowledging this caution, we advanced to where the constables were standing, and looked down with some curiosity at the dead man. He was a tall, frail-looking man, thin to the point of emaciation, and appeared to be about thirty-five

years of age. He lay in an easy posture, with half-closed eyes and a placid expression that contrasted strangely enough with the tragic circumstances of his death.

"It is a clear case of murder," said Dr. Burrows, dusting the sand from his knees as he stood up. "There is a deep knife-wound above the heart, which must have caused death almost instantaneously."

"How long should you say he has been dead, Doctor?" asked the sergeant.

"Twelve hours at least," was the reply. "He is quite cold and stiff."



*Plan of St. Bridget's Bay.*

+ Position of body. D D D, Tracks of Hearn's shoes. A, Top of Shepherd's Path. E, Tracks of the nailed shoes. B, Overhanging cliff. F, Shepherd's Path ascending shelving cliff. C, Footpath along edge of cliff.]

"Twelve hours, eh?" repeated the officer. "That would bring it to about six o'clock this morning."

"I won't commit myself to a definite time," said Dr. Burrows hastily. "I only say not *less* than twelve hours. It might have been considerably more."

"Ah!" said the sergeant. "Well, he made a pretty good fight for his life, to all appearances." He nodded at the sand, which for some feet around the body bore the deeply indented marks of feet, as though a furious struggle had taken place. "It's a mighty queer affair," pursued the sergeant, addressing Dr. Burrows. "There seems to have been only one man in it—there is only one set of footprints besides those of the deceased—and we've got to find out who he is; and I reckon there won't be much trouble about that, seeing the kind of trade-marks he has left behind him."

"No," agreed the surgeon; "there ought not to be much trouble in identifying those boots. He would seem to be a labourer, judging by the hob-nails."

"No, sir; not a labourer," dissented the sergeant. "The foot is too small, for one thing; and then the nails are not regular hob-nails. They're a good deal smaller; and a labourer's boots would have the nails all round the edges, and there would be iron tips on the heels, and probably on the toes too. Now these have got no tips, and the nails are arranged in a pattern on the soles and heels. They are probably shooting-boots or sporting shoes of some kind." He strode to and fro with his notebook in his hand, writing down hasty memoranda, and stooping to scrutinize the impressions in the sand. The surgeon also busied himself in noting down the facts concerning which he would have to give evidence, while Thorndyke regarded in silence and with an air of intense preoccupation the footprints around the body which remained to testify to the circumstances of the crime.

"It is pretty clear, up to a certain point," the sergeant observed, as he concluded his investigations, "how the affair happened, and it is pretty clear, too, that the murder was premeditated. You see, Doctor, the deceased gentleman, Mr. Hearn, was apparently walking home from Port Marston; we saw his footprints along the shore—those rubber heels make them easy to identify—and he didn't go down Sunderley Gap. He probably meant to climb up the cliff by that little track that you see there, which the people about here call the Shepherd's Path. Now the murderer must have known that he was coming, and waited upon the cliff to keep a lookout. When he saw Mr. Hearn enter the bay, he came down the path and attacked him, and, after a tough struggle, succeeded in stabbing him. Then he turned and went back up the path. You can see the double track between the path and the place where the struggle took place, and the footprints going to the path are on top of those coming from it."

"If you follow the tracks," said Dr. Burrows, "you ought to be able to see where the murderer went to."

"I'm afraid not," replied the sergeant. "There are no marks on the path itself—the rock is too hard, and so is the ground above, I fear. But I'll go over it carefully all the same."

The investigations being so far concluded, the body was lifted on to the stretcher, and the cortège, consisting of the bearers, the Doctor, and the fisherman, moved off towards the Gap, while the sergeant, having civilly wished us "Good-evening," scrambled up the Shepherd's Path, and vanished above.

"A very smart officer that," said Thorndyke. "I should like to know what he wrote in his notebook."

"His account of the circumstances of the murder seemed a very reasonable one," I said.

"Very. He noted the plain and essential facts, and drew the natural conclusions from them. But there are some very singular features in this case; so singular that I am disposed to make a few notes for my own information."

He stooped over the place where the body had lain, and having narrowly examined the sand there and in the place where the dead man's feet had rested, drew out his notebook and made a memorandum. He next made a rapid sketch-plan of the bay, marking the position of the body and the various impressions in the sand, and then, following the double track leading from and to the Shepherd's Path, scrutinized the footprints with the deepest attention, making copious notes and sketches in his book.

"We may as well go up by the Shepherd's Path," said Thorndyke. "I think we are equal to the climb, and there may be visible traces of the murderer after all. The rock is only a sandstone, and not a very hard one either."

We approached the foot of the little rugged track which zigzagged up the face of the cliff, and, stooping down among the stiff, dry herbage, examined the surface. Here, at the bottom of the path, where the rock was softened by the weather, there were several distinct impressions on the crumbling surface of the murderer's nailed boots, though they were somewhat confused by the tracks of the sergeant, whose boots were heavily nailed. But as we ascended the marks became rather less distinct, and at quite a short distance from the foot of the cliff we lost them altogether, though we had no difficulty in following the more recent traces of the sergeant's passage up the path.

When we reached the top of the cliff we paused to scan the path that ran along its edge, but here, too, although the sergeant's heavy boots had left quite visible impressions on the ground, there were no signs of any other feet. At a little distance the sagacious officer himself was pursuing his investigations, walking backwards and forwards with his body bent double, and his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Not a trace of him anywhere," said he, straightening himself up as we approached. "I was afraid there wouldn't be after all this dry weather. I shall have to try a different tack. This is a small place, and if those boots belong to anyone living here they'll be sure to be known."

"The deceased gentleman—Mr. Hearn, I think you called him," said Thorndyke as we turned towards the village—"is he a native of the locality?"

"Oh no, sir," replied the officer. "He is almost a stranger. He has only been here about three weeks; but, you know, in a little place like this a man soon gets to be known—and his business, too, for that matter," he added, with a smile.

"What was his business, then?" asked Thorndyke.

"Pleasure, I believe. He was down here for a holiday, though it's a good way past the season; but, then, he had a friend living here, and that makes a difference. Mr. Draper up at the Poplars was an old friend of his, I understand. I am going to call on him now."

We walked on along the footpath that led towards the village, but had only proceeded two or three hundred yards when a loud hail drew our attention to a man running across a field towards us from the direction of the cliff.

"Why, here is Mr. Draper himself," exclaimed the sergeant, stopping short and waving his hand. "I expect he has heard the news already."

Thorndyke and I also halted, and with some curiosity watched the approach of this new party to the tragedy. As the stranger drew near we saw that he was a tall, athletic-looking man of about forty, dressed in a Norfolk knickerbocker suit, and having the appearance of an ordinary country gentleman, excepting that he carried in his hand, in place of a walking-stick, the staff of a butterfly-net, the folding ring and bag of which partly projected from his pocket.

"Is it true, Sergeant?" he exclaimed as he came up to us, panting from his exertions. "About Mr. Hearn, I mean. There is a rumour that he has been found dead on the beach."

"It's quite true, sir, I am sorry to say; and, what is worse, he has been murdered."

"My God! you don't say so!"

He turned towards us a face that must ordinarily have been jovial enough, but was now white and scared and, after a brief pause, he exclaimed:

"Murdered! Good God! Poor old Hearn! How did it happen, Sergeant? and when? and is there any clue to the murderer?"

"We can't say for certain when it happened," replied the sergeant, "and as to the question of clues, I was just coming up to call on you."

"On me!" exclaimed Draper, with a startled glance at the officer. "What for?"

"Well, we should like to know something about Mr. Hearn—who he was, and whether he had any enemies, and so forth; anything, in fact, that would give us a hint where to look for the murderer. And you are the only person in the place who knew him at all intimately."

Mr Draper's pallid face turned a shade paler, and he glanced about him with an obviously embarrassed air.

"I'm afraid," he began in a hesitating manner, "I'm afraid I shan't be able to help you much. I didn't know much about his affairs. You see he was—well—only a casual acquaintance—"

"Well," interrupted the sergeant, "you can tell us who and what he was, and where he lived, and so forth. We'll find out the rest if you give us the start."

"I see," said Draper. "Yes, I expect you will." His eyes glanced restlessly to and fro, and he added presently: "You must come up to-morrow, and have a talk with me about him, and I'll see what I can remember."

"I'd rather come this evening," said the sergeant firmly.

"Not this evening," pleaded Draper. "I'm feeling rather—this affair, you know, has upset me. I couldn't give proper attention—"

His sentence petered out into a hesitating mumble, and the officer looked at him in evident surprise at his nervous, embarrassed manner. His own attitude, however, was perfectly firm, though polite.

"I don't like pressing you, sir," said he, "but time is precious—we'll have to go single file here; this pond is a public nuisance. They ought to bank it up at this end. After you, sir."

The pond to which the sergeant alluded had evidently extended at one time right across the path, but now, thanks to the dry weather, a narrow isthmus of half-dried mud traversed the morass, and along this Mr. Draper proceeded to pick his way. The sergeant was about to follow, when suddenly he stopped short with his eyes riveted upon the muddy track. A single glance showed him the cause of his surprise, for on the stiff, putty-like surface, standing out with the sharp distinctness of a wax mould, were the fresh footprints of the man who had just passed, each footprint displaying on its sole the impression of stud-nails arranged in a diamond-shaped pattern, and on its heel a group of similar nails arranged in a cross.

The sergeant hesitated for only a moment, in which he turned a quick startled glance upon us; then he followed, walking gingerly along the edge of the path as if to avoid treading in his predecessor's footprints. Instinctively we did the same, following closely, and anxiously awaiting the next development of the tragedy. For a minute or two we all proceeded in silence, the sergeant being evidently at a loss how to act, and Mr. Draper busy with his own thoughts. At length the former spoke.

"You think, Mr. Draper, you would rather that I looked in on you to-morrow about this affair?"

"Much rather, if you wouldn't mind," was the eager reply.

"Then, in that case," said the sergeant, looking at his watch, "as I've got a good deal to see to this evening, I'll leave you here, and make my way to the station."

With a farewell flourish of his hand he climbed over a stile, and when, a few moments later, I caught a glimpse of him through an opening in the hedge, he was running across the meadow like a hare.

The departure of the police-officer was apparently a great relief to Mr. Draper, who at once fell back and began to talk with us.

"You are Dr. Jervis, I think," said he. "I saw you coming out of Dr. Cooper's house yesterday. We know everything that is happening in the village, you see." He laughed nervously, and added: "But I don't know your friend."

I introduced Thorndyke, at the mention of whose name our new acquaintance knitted his brows, and glanced inquisitively at my friend.

"Thorndyke," he repeated; "the name seems familiar to me. Are you in the Law, sir?"

Thorndyke admitted the impeachment, and our companion, having again bestowed on him a look full of curiosity, continued: "This horrible affair will interest you, no doubt, from a professional point of view. You were present when my poor friend's body was found, I think?"

"No," replied Thorndyke; "we came up afterwards, when they were removing it."

Our companion then proceeded to question us about the murder, but received from Thorndyke only the most general and ambiguous replies. Nor was there time to go into the matter at length, for the footpath presently emerged on to the road close to Mr. Draper's house.

"You will excuse my not asking you in to-night," said he, "but you will understand that I am not in much form for visitors just now."

We assured him that we fully understood, and, having wished him "Good-evening," pursued our way towards the village.

"The sergeant is off to get a warrant, I suppose," I observed.

"Yes; and mighty anxious lest his man should be off before he can execute it. But he is fishing in deeper waters than he thinks, Jervis. This is a very singular and complicated case; one of the strangest, in fact, that I have ever met. I shall follow its development with deep interest."

"The sergeant seems pretty cocksure, all the same," I said.

"He is not to blame for that," replied Thorndyke. "He is acting on the obvious appearances, which is the proper thing to do in the first place. Perhaps his notebook contains more than I think it does. But we shall see."

When we entered the village I stopped to settle some business with the chemist, who acted as Dr. Cooper's dispenser, suggesting to Thorndyke that he should walk on to the house; but when I emerged from the shop some ten minutes later he was waiting outside, with a smallish brown-paper parcel under each arm. Of one of these parcels I insisted on relieving him, in spite of his protests, but when he at length handed it to me its weight completely took me by surprise.

"I should have let them send this home on a barrow," I remarked.

"So I should have done," he replied, "only I did not wish to draw attention to my purchase, or give my address."

Accepting this hint I refrained from making any inquiries as to the nature of the contents (although I must confess to considerable curiosity on the subject), and on arriving home I assisted him to deposit the two mysterious parcels in his room.

When I came downstairs a disagreeable surprise awaited me. Hitherto the long evenings had been spent by me in solitary and undisturbed enjoyment of Dr. Cooper's excellent library, but to-night a perverse fate decreed that I must wander abroad, because, forsooth, a preposterous farmer, who resided in a hamlet five miles distant, had chosen the evening of my guest's arrival to dislocate his bucolic elbow. I half hoped that Thorndyke would offer to accompany me, but he made no such suggestion, and in fact seemed by no means afflicted at the prospect of my absence.

"I have plenty to occupy me while you are away," he said cheerfully; and with this assurance to comfort me I mounted my bicycle and rode off somewhat sulkily along the dark road.

My visit occupied in all a trifle under two hours, and when I reached home, ravenously hungry and heated by my ride, half-past nine had struck, and the village had begun to settle down for the night.

"Sergeant Payne is a-waiting in the surgery, sir," the housemaid announced as I entered the hall.

"Confound Sergeant Payne!" I exclaimed. "Is Dr. Thorndyke with him?"

"No, sir," replied the grinning damsel. "Dr. Thorndyke is hout."

"Hout!" I repeated (my surprise leading to unintentional mimicry).

"Yes, sir. He went hout soon after you, sir, on his bicycle. He had a basket strapped on to it—leastways a hamper—and he borrowed a basin and a kitchen-spoon from the cook."

I stared at the girl in astonishment. The ways of John Thorndyke were, indeed, beyond all understanding.

"Well, let me have some dinner or supper at once," I said, "and I will see what the sergeant wants."

The officer rose as I entered the surgery, and, laying his helmet on the table, approached me with an air of secrecy and importance.

"Well, sir," said he, "the fat's in the fire. I've arrested Mr. Draper, and I've got him locked up in the court-house. But I wish it had been someone else."

"So does he, I expect," I remarked.

"You see, sir," continued the sergeant, "we all like Mr. Draper. He's been among us a matter of seven years, and he's like one of ourselves. However, what I've come about is this; it seems the gentleman who was with you this evening is Dr. Thorndyke, the great expert. Now Mr. Draper seems to have heard about him, as most of us have, and he is very anxious for him to take up the defence. Do you think he would consent?"

"I expect so," I answered, remembering Thorndyke's keen interest in the case; "but I will ask him when he comes in."

"Thank you, sir," said the sergeant. "And perhaps you wouldn't mind stepping round to the court-house presently yourself. He looks uncommon queer, does Mr. Draper, and no wonder, so I'd like you to take a look at him, and if you could bring Dr. Thorndyke with you, he'd like it, and so should I, for, I assure you, sir, that although a conviction would mean a step up the ladder for me, I'd be glad enough to find that I'd made a mistake."

I was just showing my visitor out when a bicycle swept in through the open gate, and Thorndyke dismounted at the door, revealing a square hamper—evidently abstracted from the surgery—strapped on to a carrier at the back. I conveyed the sergeant's request to him at once, and asked if he was willing to take up the case.

"As to taking up the defence," he replied, "I will consider the matter; but in any case I will come up and see the prisoner."

With this the sergeant departed, and Thorndyke, having unstrapped the hamper with as much care as if it contained a collection of priceless porcelain, bore it tenderly up to his bedroom; whence he appeared, after a considerable interval,



smilingly apologetic for the delay.

"I thought you were dressing for dinner," I grumbled as he took his seat at the table.

"No," he replied. "I have been considering this murder. Really it is a most singular case, and promises to be uncommonly complicated, too."

"Then I assume that you will undertake the defence?"

"I shall if Draper gives a reasonably straightforward account of himself."

It appeared that this condition was likely to be fulfilled, for when we arrived at the court-house (where the prisoner was accommodated in a spare office, under rather free-and-easy conditions considering the nature of the charge) we found Mr. Draper in an eminently communicative frame of mind.

"I want you, Dr. Thorndyke, to undertake my defence in this terrible affair, because I feel confident that you will be able to clear me. And I promise you that there shall be no reservation or concealment on my part of anything that you ought to know."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "By the way, I see you have changed your shoes."

"Yes, the sergeant took possession of those I was wearing. He said something about comparing them with some footprints, but there can't be any footprints like those shoes here in Sundersley. The nails are fixed in the soles in quite a peculiar pattern. I had them made in Edinburgh."

"Have you more than one pair?"

"No. I have no other nailed boots."

"That is important," said Thorndyke. "And now I judge that you have something to tell us that bears on this crime. Am I right?"

"Yes. There is something that I am afraid it is necessary for you to know, although it is very painful to me to revive memories of my past that I had hoped were buried for ever. But perhaps, after all, it may not be necessary for these confidences to be revealed to anyone but yourself."

"I hope not," said Thorndyke; "and if it is not necessary you may rely upon me not to allow any of your secrets to leak out. But you are wise to tell me everything that may in any way bear upon the case."

At this juncture, seeing that confidential matters were about to be discussed, I rose and prepared to withdraw; but Draper waved me back into my chair.

"You need not go away, Dr. Jervis," he said. "It is through you that I have the benefit of Dr. Thorndyke's help, and I know that you doctors can be trusted to keep your own counsel and your clients' secrets. And now for some confessions of mine. In the first place, it is my painful duty to tell you that I am a discharged convict—an 'old lag,' as the cant phrase has it."

He coloured a dusky red as he made this statement, and glanced furtively at Thorndyke to observe its effect. But he might as well have looked at a wooden figure-head or a stone mask as at my friend's immovable visage; and when his communication had been acknowledged by a slight nod, he proceeded:

"The history of my wrong-doing is the history of hundreds of others. I was a clerk in a bank, and getting on as well as I could expect in that not very progressive avocation, when I had the misfortune to make four very undesirable acquaintances. They were all young men, though rather older than myself, and were close friends, forming a sort of little community or club. They were not what is usually described as 'fast.' They were quite sober and decently-behaved young fellows, but they were very decidedly addicted to gambling in a small way, and they soon infected me. Before long I was the keenest gambler of them all. Cards, billiards, pool, and various forms of betting began to be the chief pleasures of my life, and not only was the bulk of my scanty salary often consumed in the inevitable losses, but presently I found myself considerably in debt, without any visible means of discharging my liabilities. It is true that my four friends were my chief—in fact, almost my only—creditors, but still, the debts existed, and had to be paid.

"Now these four friends of mine—named respectively Leach, Pitford, Hearn, and Jezzard—were uncommonly clever men, though the full extent of their cleverness was not appreciated by me until too late. And I, too, was clever in my way, and a most undesirable way it was, for I possessed the fatal gift of imitating handwriting and signatures with the most remarkable accuracy. So perfect were my copies that the writers themselves were frequently unable to distinguish their own signatures from my imitations, and many a time was my skill invoked by some of my companions to play off practical jokes upon the others. But these jests were strictly confined to our own little set, for my four friends were most careful and anxious that my dangerous accomplishment should not become known to outsiders.

"And now follows the consequence which you have no doubt foreseen. My debts, though small, were accumulating, and I saw no prospect of being able to pay them. Then, one night, Jezzard made a proposition. We had been playing bridge at his rooms, and once more my ill luck had caused me to increase my debt. I scribbled out an IOU, and pushed it across the table to Jezzard, who picked it up with a very wry face, and pocketed it.

"'Look here, Ted,' he said presently, 'this paper is all very well, but, you know, I can't pay my debts with it. My creditors demand hard cash.'

“I’m very sorry,’ I replied, ‘but I can’t help it.’

“Yes, you can,’ said he, ‘and I’ll tell you how.’ He then propounded a scheme which I at first rejected with indignation, but which, when the others backed him up, I at last allowed myself to be talked into, and actually put into execution. I contrived, by taking advantage of the carelessness of some of my superiors at the bank, to get possession of some blank cheque forms, which I filled up with small amounts—not more than two or three pounds—and signed with careful imitations of the signatures of some of our clients. Jezzard got some stamps made for stamping on the account numbers, and when this had been done I handed over to him the whole collection of forged cheques in settlement of my debts to all of my four companions.

“The cheques were duly presented—by whom I do not know; and although, to my dismay, the modest sums for which I had drawn them had been skilfully altered into quite considerable amounts, they were all paid without demur excepting one. That one, which had been altered from three pounds to thirty-nine, was drawn upon an account which was already slightly overdrawn. The cashier became suspicious; the cheque was impounded, and the client communicated with. Then, of course, the mine exploded. Not only was this particular forgery detected, but inquiries were set afoot which soon brought to light the others. Presently circumstances, which I need not describe, threw some suspicion on me. I at once lost my nerve, and finally made a full confession.

“The inevitable prosecution followed. It was not conducted vindictively. Still, I had actually committed the forgeries, and though I endeavoured to cast a part of the blame on to the shoulders of my treacherous confederates, I did not succeed. Jezzard, it is true, was arrested, but was discharged for lack of evidence, and, consequently, the whole burden of the forgery fell upon me. The jury, of course, convicted me, and I was sentenced to seven years’ penal servitude.

“During the time that I was in prison an uncle of mine died in Canada, and by the provisions of his will I inherited the whole of his very considerable property, so that when the time arrived for my release, I came out of prison, not only free, but comparatively rich. I at once dropped my own name, and, assuming that of Alfred Draper, began to look about for some quiet spot in which I might spend the rest of my days in peace, and with little chance of my identity being discovered. Such a place I found in Sundersley, and here I have lived for the last seven years, liked and respected, I think, by my neighbours, who have little suspected that they were harbouring in their midst a convicted felon.

“All this time I had neither seen nor heard anything of my four confederates, and I hoped and believed that they had passed completely out of my life. But they had not. Only a month ago I met them once more, to my sorrow, and from the day of that meeting all the peace and security of my quiet existence at Sundersley have vanished. Like evil spirits they have stolen into my life, changing my happiness into bitter misery, filling my days with dark forebodings and my nights with terror.”

Here Mr. Draper paused, and seemed to sink into a gloomy reverie.

“Under what circumstances did you meet these men?” Thorndyke asked.

“Ah!” exclaimed Draper, arousing with sudden excitement, “the circumstances were very singular and suspicious. I had gone over to Eastwich for the day to do some shopping. About eleven o’clock in the forenoon I was making some purchases in a shop when I noticed two men looking in the window, or rather pretending to do so, whilst they conversed earnestly. They were smartly dressed, in a horsy fashion, and looked like well-to-do farmers, as they might very naturally have been since it was market-day. But it seemed to me that their faces were familiar to me. I looked at them more attentively, and then it suddenly dawned upon me, most unpleasantly, that they resembled Leach and Jezzard. And yet they were not quite like. The resemblance was there, but the differences were greater than the lapse of time would account for. Moreover, the man who resembled Jezzard had a rather large mole on the left cheek just under the eye, while the other man had an eyeglass stuck in one eye, and wore a waxed moustache, whereas Leach had always been clean-shaven, and had never used an eyeglass.

“As I was speculating upon the resemblance they looked up, and caught my intent and inquisitive eye, whereupon they moved away from the window; and when, having completed my purchases, I came out into the street, they were nowhere to be seen.

“That evening, as I was walking by the river outside the town before returning to the station, I overtook a yacht which was being towed down-stream. Three men were walking ahead on the bank with a long tow-line, and one man stood in the cockpit steering. As I approached, and was reading the name *Otter* on the stern, the man at the helm looked round, and with a start of surprise I recognized my old acquaintance Hearn. The recognition, however, was not mutual, for I had grown a beard in the interval, and I passed on without appearing to notice him; but when I overtook the other three men, and recognized, as I had feared, the other three members of the gang, I must have looked rather hard at Jezzard, for he suddenly halted, and exclaimed: ‘Why, it’s our old friend Ted! Our long-lost and lamented brother!’ He held out his hand with effusive cordiality, and began to make inquiries as to my welfare; but I cut him short with the remark that I was not proposing to renew the acquaintance, and, turning off on to a footpath that led away from the river, strode off without looking back.

“Naturally this meeting exercised my mind a good deal, and when I thought of the two men whom I had seen in the town, I could hardly believe that their likeness to my quondam friends was a mere coincidence. And yet when I had met Leach and Jezzard by the river, I had found them little altered, and had particularly noticed that Jezzard had no mole on his face, and that Leach was clean-shaven as of old.

"But a day or two later all my doubts were resolved by a paragraph in the local paper. It appeared that on the day of my visit to Eastwich a number of forged cheques had been cashed at the three banks. They had been presented by three well-dressed, horsy-looking men who looked like well-to-do farmers. One of them had a mole on the left cheek, another was distinguished by a waxed moustache and a single eyeglass, while the description of the third I did not recognize. None of the cheques had been drawn for large amounts, though the total sum obtained by the forgers was nearly four hundred pounds; but the most interesting point was that the cheque-forms had been manufactured by photographic process, and the water-mark skilfully, though not quite perfectly, imitated. Evidently the swindlers were clever and careful men, and willing to take a good deal of trouble for the sake of security, and the result of their precautions was that the police could make no guess as to their identity.

"The very next day, happening to walk over to Port Marston, I came upon the *Otter* lying moored alongside the quay in the harbour. As soon as I recognized the yacht, I turned quickly and walked away, but a minute later I ran into Leach and Jezzard, who were returning to their craft. Jezzard greeted me with an air of surprise. 'What! Still hanging about here, Ted?' he exclaimed. 'That is not discreet of you, dear boy. I should earnestly advise you to clear out.'

"What do you mean?' I asked.

"Tut, tut!' said he. 'We read the papers like other people, and we know now what business took you to Eastwich. But it's foolish of you to hang about the neighbourhood where you might be spotted at any moment.'

"The implied accusation took me aback so completely that I stood staring at him in speechless astonishment, and at that unlucky moment a tradesman, from whom I had ordered some house-linen, passed along the quay. Seeing me, he stopped and touched his hat.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Draper,' said he, 'but I shall be sending my cart up to Sandersley to-morrow morning if that will do for you.'

"I said that it would, and as the man turned away, Jezzard's face broke out into a cunning smile.

"So you are Mr. Draper, of Sandersley, now, are you?' said he. 'Well, I hope you won't be too proud to come and look in on your old friends. We shall be staying here for some time.'

"That same night Hearn made his appearance at my house. He had come as an emissary from the gang, to ask me to do some work for them—to execute some forgeries, in fact. Of course I refused, and pretty bluntly, too, whereupon Hearn began to throw out vague hints as to what might happen if I made enemies of the gang, and to utter veiled, but quite intelligible, threats. You will say that I was an idiot not to send him packing, and threaten to hand over the whole gang to the police; but I was never a man of strong nerve, and I don't mind admitting that I was mortally afraid of that cunning devil, Jezzard.

"The next thing that happened was that Hearn came and took lodgings in Sandersley, and, in spite of my efforts to avoid him, he haunted me continually. The yacht, too, had evidently settled down for some time at a berth in the harbour, for I heard that a local smack-boy had been engaged as a deck-hand; and I frequently encountered Jezzard and the other members of the gang, who all professed to believe that I had committed the Eastwich forgeries. One day I was foolish enough to allow myself to be lured on to the yacht for a few minutes, and when I would have gone ashore, I found that the shore ropes had been cast off, and that the vessel was already moving out of the harbour. At first I was furious, but the three scoundrels were so jovial and good-natured, and so delighted with the joke of taking me for a sail against my will, that I presently cooled down, and having changed into a pair of rubber-soled shoes (so that I should not make dents in the smooth deck with my hobnails), bore a hand at sailing the yacht, and spent quite a pleasant day.

"From that time I found myself gradually drifting back into a state of intimacy with these agreeable scoundrels, and daily becoming more and more afraid of them. In a moment of imbecility I mentioned what I had seen from the shop-window at Eastwich, and, though they passed the matter off with a joke, I could see that they were mightily disturbed by it. Their efforts to induce me to join them were redoubled, and Hearn took to calling almost daily at my house—usually with documents and signatures which he tried to persuade me to copy.

"A few evenings ago he made a new and startling proposition. We were walking in my garden, and he had been urging me once more to rejoin the gang—unsuccessfully, I need not say. Presently he sat down on a seat against a yew-hedge at the bottom of the garden, and, after an interval of silence, said suddenly:

"Then you absolutely refuse to go in with us?"

"Of course I do,' I replied. 'Why should I mix myself up with a gang of crooks when I have ample means and a decent position?"

"Of course,' he agreed, 'you'd be a fool if you did. But, you see, you know all about this Eastwich job, to say nothing of our other little exploits, and you gave us away once before. Consequently, you can take it from me that, now Jezzard has run you to earth, he won't leave you in peace until you have given us some kind of a hold on you. You know too much, you see, and as long as you have a clean sheet you are a standing menace to us. That is the position. You know it, and Jezzard knows it, and he is a desperate man, and as cunning as the devil.'

"I know that,' I said gloomily.

"Very well,' continued Hearn. 'Now I'm going to make you an offer. Promise me a small annuity—you can easily afford it

—or pay me a substantial sum down, and I will set you free for ever from Jezzard and the others.’

“‘How will you do that?’ I asked.

“‘Very simply,’ he replied. ‘I am sick of them all, and sick of this risky, uncertain mode of life. Now I am ready to clean off my own slate and set you free at the same time; but I must have some means of livelihood in view.’

“‘You mean that you will turn King’s evidence?’ I asked.

“‘Yes, if you will pay me a couple of hundred a year, or, say, two thousand down on the conviction of the gang.’

“I was so taken aback that for some time I made no reply, and as I sat considering this amazing proposition, the silence was suddenly broken by a suppressed sneeze from the other side of the hedge.

“Hearn and I started to our feet. Immediately hurried footsteps were heard in the lane outside the hedge. We raced up the garden to the gate and out through a side alley, but when we reached the lane there was not a soul in sight. We made a brief and fruitless search in the immediate neighbourhood, and then turned back to the house. Hearn was deathly pale and very agitated, and I must confess that I was a good deal upset by the incident.

“‘This is devilish awkward,’ said Hearn.

“‘It is rather,’ I admitted; ‘but I expect it was only some inquisitive yokel.’

“‘I don’t feel so sure of that,’ said he. ‘At any rate, we were stark lunatics to sit up against a hedge to talk secrets.’

“He paced the garden with me for some time in gloomy silence, and presently, after a brief request that I would think over his proposal, took himself off.

“I did not see him again until I met him last night on the yacht. Pitford called on me in the morning, and invited me to come and dine with them. I at first declined, for my housekeeper was going to spend the evening with her sister at Eastwich, and stay there for the night, and I did not much like leaving the house empty. However, I agreed eventually, stipulating that I should be allowed to come home early, and I accordingly went. Hearn and Pitford were waiting in the boat by the steps—for the yacht had been moved out to a buoy—and we went on board and spent a very pleasant and lively evening. Pitford put me ashore at ten o’clock, and I walked straight home, and went to bed. Hearn would have come with me, but the others insisted on his remaining, saying that they had some matters of business to discuss.”

“Which way did you walk home?” asked Thorndyke.

“I came through the town, and along the main road.”

“And that is all you know about this affair?”

“Absolutely all,” replied Draper. “I have now admitted you to secrets of my past life that I had hoped never to have to reveal to any human creature, and I still have some faint hope that it may not be necessary for you to divulge what I have told you.”

“Your secrets shall not be revealed unless it is absolutely indispensable that they should be,” said Thorndyke; “but you are placing your life in my hands, and you must leave me perfectly free to act as I think best.”

With this he gathered his notes together, and we took our departure.

“A very singular history, this, Jervis,” he said, when, having wished the sergeant “Good-night,” we stepped out on to the dark road. “What do you think of it?”

“I hardly know what to think,” I answered, “but, on the whole, it seems rather against Draper than otherwise. He admits that he is an old criminal, and it appears that he was being persecuted and blackmailed by the man Hearn. It is true that he represents Jezzard as being the leading spirit and prime mover in the persecution, but we have only his word for that. Hearn was in lodgings near him, and was undoubtedly taking the most active part in the business, and it is quite possible, and indeed probable, that Hearn was the actual *deus ex machina*.”

Thorndyke nodded. “Yes,” he said, “that is certainly the line the prosecution will take if we allow the story to become known. Ha! what is this? We are going to have some rain.”

“Yes, and wind too. We are in for an autumn gale, I think.”

“And that,” said Thorndyke, “may turn out to be an important factor in our case.”

“How can the weather affect your case?” I asked in some surprise. But, as the rain suddenly descended in a pelting shower, my companion broke into a run, leaving my question unanswered.

On the following morning, which was fair and sunny after the stormy night, Dr. Burrows called for my friend. He was on his way to the extemporized mortuary to make the *post-mortem* examination of the murdered man’s body. Thorndyke, having notified the coroner that he was watching the case on behalf of the accused, had been authorized to be present at the autopsy; but the authorization did not include me, and, as Dr. Burrows did not issue any invitation, I was not able to be present. I met them, however, as they were returning, and it seemed to me that Dr. Burrows appeared a little huffy.

“Your friend,” said he, in a rather injured tone, “is really the most outrageous stickler for forms and ceremonies that I have ever met.”

Thorndyke looked at him with an amused twinkle, and chuckled indulgently.

"Here was a body," Dr. Burrows continued irritably, "found under circumstances clearly indicative of murder, and bearing a knife-wound that nearly divided the arch of the aorta; in spite of which, I assure you that Dr. Thorndyke insisted on weighing the body, and examining every organ—lungs, liver, stomach, and brain—yes, actually the brain!—as if there had been no clue whatever to the cause of death. And then, as a climax, he insisted on sending the contents of the stomach in a jar, sealed with our respective seals, in charge of a special messenger, to Professor Copland, for analysis and report. I thought he was going to demand an examination for the tubercle bacillus, but he didn't; which," concluded Dr. Burrows, suddenly becoming sourly facetious, "was an oversight, for, after all, the fellow may have died of consumption."

Thorndyke chuckled again, and I murmured that the precautions appeared to have been somewhat excessive.

"Not at all," was the smiling response. "You are losing sight of our function. We are the expert and impartial umpires, and it is our business to ascertain, with scientific accuracy, the cause of death. The *prima facie* appearances in this case suggest that the deceased was murdered by Draper, and that is the hypothesis advanced. But that is no concern of ours. It is not our function to confirm an hypothesis suggested by outside circumstances, but rather, on the contrary, to make certain that no other explanation is possible. And that is my invariable practice. No matter how glaringly obvious the appearances may be, I refuse to take anything for granted."

Dr. Burrows received this statement with a grunt of dissent, but the arrival of his dogcart put a stop to further discussion.

Thorndyke was not subpoenaed for the inquest. Dr. Burrows and the sergeant having been present immediately after the finding of the body, his evidence was not considered necessary, and, moreover, he was known to be watching the case in the interests of the accused. Like myself, therefore, he was present as a spectator, but as a highly interested one, for he took very complete shorthand notes of the whole of the evidence and the coroner's comments.

I shall not describe the proceedings in detail. The jury, having been taken to view the body, trooped into the room on tiptoe, looking pale and awe-stricken, and took their seats; and thereafter, from time to time, directed glances of furtive curiosity at Draper as he stood, pallid and haggard, confronting the court, with a burly rural constable on either side.

The medical evidence was taken first. Dr. Burrows, having been sworn, began, with sarcastic emphasis, to describe the condition of the lungs and liver, until he was interrupted by the coroner.

"Is all this necessary?" the latter inquired. "I mean, is it material to the subject of the inquiry?"

"I should say not," replied Dr. Burrows. "It appears to me to be quite irrelevant, but Dr. Thorndyke, who is watching the case for the defence, thought it necessary."

"I think," said the coroner, "you had better give us only the facts that are material. The jury want you to tell them what you consider to have been the cause of death. They don't want a lecture on pathology."

"The cause of death," said Dr. Burrows, "was a penetrating wound of the chest, apparently inflicted with a large knife. The weapon entered between the second and third ribs on the left side close to the sternum or breast-bone. It wounded the left lung, and partially divided both the pulmonary artery and the aorta—the two principal arteries of the body."

"Was this injury alone sufficient to cause death?" the coroner asked.

"Yes," was the reply; "and death from injury to these great vessels would be practically instantaneous."

"Could the injury have been self-inflicted?"

"So far as the position and nature of the wound are concerned," replied the witness, "self-infliction would be quite possible. But since death would follow in a few seconds at the most, the weapon would be found either in the wound, or grasped in the hand, or, at least, quite close to the body. But in this case no weapon was found at all, and the wound must therefore certainly have been homicidal."

"Did you see the body before it was moved?"

"Yes. It was lying on its back, with the arms extended and the legs nearly straight; and the sand in the neighbourhood of the body was trampled as if a furious struggle had taken place."

"Did you notice anything remarkable about the footprints in the sand?"

"I did," replied Dr. Burrows. "They were the footprints of two persons only. One of these was evidently the deceased, whose footmarks could be easily identified by the circular rubber heels. The other footprints were those of a person—apparently a man—who wore shoes, or boots, the soles of which were studded with nails; and these nails were arranged in a very peculiar and unusual manner, for those on the soles formed a lozenge or diamond shape, and those on the heel were set out in the form of a cross."

"Have you ever seen shoes or boots with the nails arranged in this manner?"

"Yes. I have seen a pair of shoes which I am informed belong to the accused; the nails in them are arranged as I have described."

"Would you say that the footprints of which you have spoken were made by those shoes?"

"No; I could not say that. I can only say that, to the best of my belief, the pattern on the shoes is similar to that in the footprints."

This was the sum of Dr. Burrows' evidence, and to all of it Thorndyke listened with an immovable countenance, though with the closest attention. Equally attentive was the accused man, though not equally impassive; indeed, so great was his agitation that presently one of the constables asked permission to get him a chair.

The next witness was Arthur Jezzard. He testified that he had viewed the body, and identified it as that of Charles Hearn; that he had been acquainted with deceased for some years, but knew practically nothing of his affairs. At the time of his death deceased was lodging in the village.

"Why did he leave the yacht?" the coroner inquired. "Was there any kind of disagreement!"

"Not in the least," replied Jezzard. "He grew tired of the confinement of the yacht, and came to live ashore for a change. But we were the best of friends, and he intended to come with us when we sailed."

"When did you see him last?"

"On the night before the body was found—that is, last Monday. He had been dining on the yacht, and we put him ashore about midnight. He said as we were rowing him ashore that he intended to walk home along the sands as the tide was out. He went up the stone steps by the watch-house, and turned at the top to wish us good-night. That was the last time I saw him alive."

"Do you know anything of the relations between the accused and the deceased?" the coroner asked.

"Very little," replied Jezzard. "Mr. Draper was introduced to us by the deceased about a month ago. I believe they had been acquainted some years, and they appeared to be on excellent terms. There was no indication of any quarrel or disagreement between them."

"What time did the accused leave the yacht on the night of the murder?"

"About ten o'clock. He said that he wanted to get home early, as his housekeeper was away and he did not like the house to be left with no one in it."

This was the whole of Jezzard's evidence, and was confirmed by that of Leach and Pitford. Then, when the fisherman had deposed to the discovery of the body, the sergeant was called, and stepped forward, grasping a carpet-bag, and looking as uncomfortable as if he had been the accused instead of a witness. He described the circumstances under which he saw the body, giving the exact time and place with official precision.

"You have heard Dr. Burrows' description of the footprints?" the coroner inquired.

"Yes. There were two sets. One set were evidently made by deceased. They showed that he entered St. Bridget's Bay from the direction of Port Marston. He had been walking along the shore just about high-water mark, sometimes above and sometimes below. Where he had walked below high-water mark the footprints had of course been washed away by the sea."

"How far back did you trace the footprints of deceased?"

"About two-thirds of the way to Sundersley Gap. Then they disappeared below high-water mark. Later in the evening I walked from the Gap into Port Marston, but could not find any further traces of deceased. He must have walked between the tide-marks all the way from Port Marston to beyond Sundersley. When these footprints entered St. Bridget's Bay they became mixed up with the footprints of another man, and the shore was trampled for a space of a dozen yards as if a furious struggle had taken place. The strange man's tracks came down from the Shepherd's Path, and went up it again; but, owing to the hardness of the ground from the dry weather, the tracks disappeared a short distance up the path, and I could not find them again."

"What were these strange footprints like?" inquired the coroner.

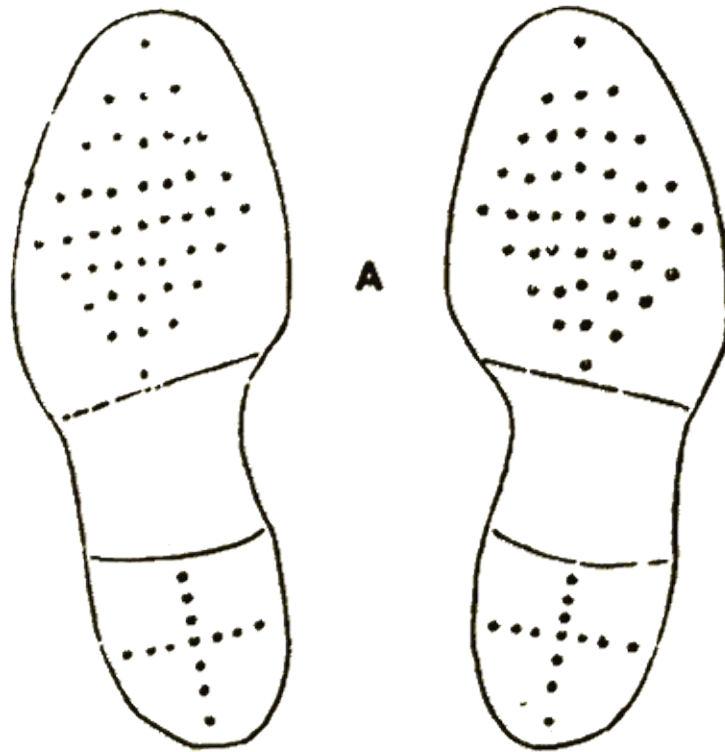
"They were very peculiar," replied the sergeant. "They were made by shoes armed with smallish hob-nails, which were arranged in a diamond-shaped pattern on the holes and in a cross on the heels. I measured the footprints carefully, and made a drawing of each foot at the time." Here the sergeant produced a long notebook of funereal aspect, and, having opened it at a marked place, handed it to the coroner, who examined it attentively, and then passed it on to the jury. From the jury it was presently transferred to Thorndyke, and, looking over his shoulder, I saw a very workmanlike sketch of a pair of footprints with the principal dimensions inserted.

Thorndyke surveyed the drawing critically, jotted down a few brief notes, and returned the sergeant's notebook to the coroner, who, as he took it, turned once more to the officer.

"Have you any clue, sergeant, to the person who made these footprints?" he asked.

By way of reply the sergeant opened his carpet-bag, and, extracting therefrom a pair of smart but stoutly made shoes, laid them on the table.

"Those shoes," he said, "are the property of the accused; he was wearing them when I arrested him. They appear to correspond exactly to the footprints of the murderer. The measurements are the same, and the nails with which they are studded are arranged in a similar pattern."



*The Sergeant's Sketch.*

Extreme length,  $11\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Width at A,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Length of heel,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches Width of heel at cross, 3 inches.]

"Would you swear that the footprints were made with these shoes?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir, I would not," was the decided answer. "I would only swear to the similarity of size and pattern."

"Had you ever seen these shoes before you made the drawing?"

"No, sir," replied the sergeant; and he then related the incident of the footprints in the soft earth by the pond which led him to make the arrest.

The coroner gazed reflectively at the shoes which he held in his hand, and from them to the drawing; then, passing them to the foreman of the jury, he remarked:

"Well, gentlemen, it is not for me to tell you whether these shoes answer to the description given by Dr. Burrows and the sergeant, or whether they resemble the drawing which, as you have heard, was made by the officer on the spot and before he had seen the shoes; that is a matter for you to decide. Meanwhile, there is another question that we must consider." He turned to the sergeant and asked: "Have you made any inquiries as to the movements of the accused on the night of the murder?"

"I have," replied the sergeant, "and I find that, on that night, the accused was alone in the house, his housekeeper having gone over to Eastwich. Two men saw him in the town about ten o'clock, apparently walking in the direction of Sandersley."

This concluded the sergeant's evidence, and when one or two more witnesses had been examined without eliciting any fresh facts, the coroner briefly recapitulated the evidence, and requested the jury to consider their verdict. Thereupon a solemn hush fell upon the court, broken only by the whispers of the jurymen, as they consulted together; and the spectators gazed in awed expectancy from the accused to the whispering jury. I glanced at Draper, sitting huddled in his chair, his clammy face as pale as that of the corpse in the mortuary hard by, his hands tremulous and restless; and, scoundrel as I believed him to be, I could not but pity the abject misery that was written large all over him, from his damp hair to his incessantly shifting feet.

The jury took but a short time to consider their verdict. At the end of five minutes the foreman announced that they were agreed, and, in answer to the coroner's formal inquiry, stood up and replied:

"We find that the deceased met his death by being stabbed in the chest by the accused man, Alfred Draper."

"That is a verdict of wilful murder," said the coroner, and he entered it accordingly in his notes. The Court now rose. The spectators reluctantly trooped out, the jurymen stood up and stretched themselves, and the two constables, under the guidance of the sergeant, carried the wretched Draper in a fainting condition to a closed fly that was waiting outside.

"I was not greatly impressed by the activity of the defence," I remarked maliciously as we walked home.

Thorndyke smiled. "You surely did not expect me to cast my pearls of forensic learning before a coroner's jury," said he.

"I expected that you would have something to say on behalf of your client," I replied. "As it was, his accusers had it all their own way."

"And why not?" he asked. "Of what concern to us is the verdict of the coroner's jury?"

"It would have seemed more decent to make some sort of defence," I replied.

"My dear Jervis," he rejoined, "you do not seem to appreciate the great virtue of what Lord Beaconsfield so felicitously called 'a policy of masterly inactivity'; and yet that is one of the great lessons that a medical training impresses on the student."

"That may be so," said I. "But the result, up to the present, of your masterly policy is that a verdict of wilful murder stands against your client, and I don't see what other verdict the jury could have found."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke.

I had written to my principal, Dr. Cooper, describing the stirring events that were taking place in the village, and had received a reply from him instructing me to place the house at Thorndyke's disposal, and to give him every facility for his work. In accordance with which edict my colleague took possession of a well-lighted, disused stable-loft, and announced his intention of moving his things into it. Now, as these "things" included the mysterious contents of the hamper that the housemaid had seen, I was possessed with a consuming desire to be present at the "flitting," and I do not mind confessing that I purposely lurked about the stairs in the hopes of thus picking up a few crumbs of information.

But Thorndyke was one too many for me. A misbegotten infant in the village having been seized with inopportune convulsions, I was compelled, most reluctantly, to hasten to its relief; and I returned only in time to find Thorndyke in the act of locking the door of the loft.

"A nice light, roomy place to work in," he remarked, as he descended the steps, slipping the key into his pocket.

"Yes," I replied, and added boldly: "What do you intend to do up there?"

"Work up the case for the defence," he replied, "and, as I have now heard all that the prosecution have to say, I shall be able to forge ahead."

This was vague enough, but I consoled myself with the reflection that in a very few days I should, in common with the rest of the world, be in possession of the results of his mysterious proceedings. For, in view of the approaching assizes, preparations were being made to push the case through the magistrate's court as quickly as possible in order to obtain a committal in time for the ensuing sessions. Draper had, of course, been already charged before a justice of the peace and evidence of arrest taken, and it was expected that the adjourned hearing would commence before the local magistrates on the fifth day after the inquest.

The events of these five days kept me in a positive ferment of curiosity. In the first place an inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department came down and browsed about the place in company with the sergeant. Then Mr. Bashfield, who was to conduct the prosecution, came and took up his abode at the "Cat and Chicken." But the most surprising visitor was Thorndyke's laboratory assistant, Polton, who appeared one evening with a large trunk and a sailor's hammock, and announced that he was going to take up his quarters in the loft.

As to Thorndyke himself, his proceedings were beyond speculation. From time to time he made mysterious appearances at the windows of the loft, usually arrayed in what looked suspiciously like a nightshirt. Sometimes I would see him holding a negative up to the light, at others manipulating a photographic printing-frame; and once I observed him with a paintbrush and a large gallipot; on which I turned away in despair, and nearly collided with the inspector.

"Dr. Thorndyke is staying with you, I hear," said the latter, gazing earnestly at my colleague's back, which was presented for his inspection at the window.

"Yes," I answered. "Those are his temporary premises."

"That is where he does his bedevilments, I suppose?" the officer suggested.

"He conducts his experiments there," I corrected haughtily.

"That's what I mean," said the inspector; and, as Thorndyke at this moment turned and opened the window, our visitor began to ascend the steps.

"I've just called to ask if I could have a few words with you, Doctor," said the inspector, as he reached the door.

"Certainly," Thorndyke replied blandly. "If you will go down and wait with Dr. Jervis, I will be with you in five minutes."

The officer came down the steps grinning, and I thought I heard him murmur "Sold!" But this may have been an illusion. However, Thorndyke presently emerged, and he and the officer strode away into the shrubbery. What the inspector's business was, or whether he had any business at all, I never learned; but the incident seemed to throw some light on the presence of Polton and the sailor's hammock. And this reference to Polton reminds me of a very singular change that took place about this time in the habits of this usually staid and sedate little man; who, abandoning the somewhat clerical style



of dress that he ordinarily affected, broke out into a semi-nautical costume, in which he would sally forth every morning in the direction of Port Marston. And there, on more than one occasion, I saw him leaning against a post by the harbour, or lounging outside a waterside tavern in earnest and amicable conversation with sundry nautical characters.

On the afternoon of the day before the opening of the proceedings we had two new visitors. One of them, a grey-haired spectacled man, was a stranger to me, and for some reason I failed to recall his name, Copland, though I was sure I had heard it before. The other was Anstey, the barrister who usually worked with Thorndyke in cases that went into Court. I saw very little of either of them, however, for they retired almost immediately to the loft, where, with short intervals for meals, they remained for the rest of the day, and, I believe, far into the night. Thorndyke requested me not to mention the names of his visitors to anyone, and at the same time apologized for the secrecy of his proceedings.

"But you are a doctor, Jervis," he concluded, "and you know what professional confidences are; and you will understand how greatly it is in our favour that we know exactly what the prosecution can do, while they are absolutely in the dark as to our line of defence."

I assured him that I fully understood his position, and with this assurance he retired, evidently relieved, to the council chamber.

The proceedings, which opened on the following day, and at which I was present throughout, need not be described in detail. The evidence for the prosecution was, of course, mainly a repetition of that given at the inquest. Mr. Bashfield's opening statement, however, I shall give at length, inasmuch as it summarized very clearly the whole of the case against the prisoner.

"The case that is now before the Court," said the counsel, "involves a charge of wilful murder against the prisoner Alfred Draper, and the facts, in so far as they are known, are briefly these: On the night of Monday, the 27th of September, the deceased, Charles Hearn, dined with some friends on board the yacht *Otter*. About midnight he came ashore, and proceeded to walk towards Sundersley along the beach. As he entered St. Bridget's Bay, a man, who appears to have been lying in wait, and who came down the Shepherd's Path, met him, and a deadly struggle seems to have taken place. The deceased received a wound of a kind calculated to cause almost instantaneous death, and apparently fell down dead.

"And now, what was the motive of this terrible crime? It was not robbery, for nothing appears to have been taken from the corpse. Money and valuables were found, as far as is known, intact. Nor, clearly, was it a case of a casual affray. We are, consequently, driven to the conclusion that the motive was a personal one, a motive of interest or revenge, and with this view the time, the place, and the evident deliberateness of the murder are in full agreement.

"So much for the motive. The next question is, Who was the perpetrator of this shocking crime? And the answer to that question is given in a very singular and dramatic circumstance, a circumstance that illustrates once more the amazing lack of precaution shown by persons who commit such crimes. The murderer was wearing a very remarkable pair of shoes, and those shoes left very remarkable footprints in the smooth sand, and those footprints were seen and examined by a very acute and painstaking police-officer, Sergeant Payne, whose evidence you will hear presently. The sergeant not only examined the footprints, he made careful drawings of them on the spot—on the spot, mind you, not from memory—and he made very exact measurements of them, which he duly noted down. And from those drawings and those measurements, those tell-tale shoes have been identified, and are here for your inspection.

"And now, who is the owner of those very singular, those almost unique shoes? I have said that the motive of this murder must have been a personal one, and, behold! the owner of those shoes happens to be the one person in the whole of this district who could have had a motive for compassing the murdered man's death. Those shoes belong to, and were taken from the foot of, the prisoner, Alfred Draper, and the prisoner, Alfred Draper, is the only person living in this neighbourhood who was acquainted with the deceased.

"It has been stated in evidence at the inquest that the relations of these two men, the prisoner and the deceased, were entirely friendly; but I shall prove to you that they were not so friendly as has been supposed. I shall prove to you, by the evidence of the prisoner's housekeeper, that the deceased was often an unwelcome visitor at the house, that the prisoner often denied himself when he was really at home and disengaged, and, in short, that he appeared constantly to shun and avoid the deceased.

"One more question and I have finished. Where was the prisoner on the night of the murder? The answer is that he was in a house little more than half a mile from the scene of the crime. And who was with him in that house? Who was there to observe and testify to his going forth and his coming home? No one. He was alone in the house. On that night, of all nights, he was alone. Not a soul was there to rouse at the creak of a door or the tread of a shoe—to tell as whether he slept or whether he stole forth in the dead of the night.

"Such are the facts of this case. I believe that they are not disputed, and I assert that, taken together, they are susceptible of only one explanation, which is that the prisoner, Alfred Draper, is the man who murdered the deceased, Charles Hearn."

Immediately on the conclusion of this address, the witnesses were called, and the evidence given was identical with that at the inquest. The only new witness for the prosecution was Draper's housekeeper, and her evidence fully bore out Mr. Bashfield's statement. The sergeant's account of the footprints was listened to with breathless interest, and at its conclusion the presiding magistrate—a retired solicitor, once well known in criminal practice—put a question which interested me as showing how clearly Thorndyke had foreseen the course of events, recalling, as it did, his remark on the night when we were caught in the rain.

"Did you," the magistrate asked, "take these shoes down to the beach and compare them with the actual footprints?"

"I obtained the shoes at night," replied the sergeant, "and I took them down to the shore at daybreak the next morning. But, unfortunately, there had been a storm in the night, and the footprints were almost obliterated by the wind and rain."

When the sergeant had stepped down, Mr. Bashfield announced that that was the case for the prosecution. He then resumed his seat, turning an inquisitive eye on Anstey and Thorndyke.

The former immediately rose and opened the case for the defence with a brief statement.

"The learned counsel for the prosecution," said he, "has told us that the facts now in the possession of the Court admit of but one explanation—that of the guilt of the accused. That may or may not be; but I shall now proceed to lay before the Court certain fresh facts—facts, I may say, of the most singular and startling character, which will, I think, lead to a very different conclusion. I shall say no more, but call the witnesses forthwith, and let the evidence speak for itself."

The first witness for the defence was Thorndyke; and as he entered the box I observed Polton take up a position close behind him with a large wicker trunk. Having been sworn, and requested by Anstey to tell the Court what he knew about the case, he commenced without preamble:

"About half-past four in the afternoon of the 28th of September I walked down Sandersley Gap with Dr. Jervis. Our attention was attracted by certain footprints in the sand, particularly those of a man who had landed from a boat, had walked up the Gap, and presently returned, apparently to the boat.

"As we were standing there Sergeant Payne and Dr. Burrows passed down the Gap with two constables carrying a stretcher. We followed at a distance, and as we walked along the shore we encountered another set of footprints—those which the sergeant has described as the footprints of the deceased. We examined these carefully, and endeavoured to frame a description of the person by whom they had been made."

"And did your description agree with the characters of the deceased?" the magistrate asked.

"Not in the least," replied Thorndyke, whereupon the magistrate, the inspector, and Mr. Bashfield laughed long and heartily.

"When we turned into St. Bridget's Bay, I saw the body of deceased lying on the sand close to the cliff. The sand all round was covered with footprints, as if a prolonged, fierce struggle had taken place. There were two sets of footprints, one set being apparently those of the deceased and the other those of a man with nailed shoes of a very peculiar and conspicuous pattern. The incredible folly that the wearing of such shoes indicated caused me to look more closely at the footprints, and then I made the surprising discovery that there had in reality been no struggle; that, in fact, the two sets of footprints had been made at different times."

"At different times!" the magistrate exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes. The interval between them may have been one of hours or one only of seconds, but the undoubted fact is that the two sets of footprints were made, not simultaneously, but in succession."

"But how did you arrive at that fact?" the magistrate asked.

"It was very obvious when one looked," said Thorndyke. "The marks of the deceased man's shoes showed that he repeatedly trod in his own footprints; but never in a single instance did he tread in the footprints of the other man, although they covered the same area. The man with the nailed shoes, on the contrary, not only trod in his own footprints, but with equal frequency in those of the deceased. Moreover, when the body was removed, I observed that the footprints in the sand on which it was lying were exclusively those of the deceased. There was not a sign of any nail-marked footprint under the corpse, although there were many close around it. It was evident, therefore, that the footprints of the deceased were made first and those of the nailed shoes afterwards."

As Thorndyke paused the magistrate rubbed his nose thoughtfully, and the inspector gazed at the witness with a puzzled frown.

"The singularity of this fact," my colleague resumed, "made me look at the footprints yet more critically, and then I made another discovery. There was a double track of the nailed shoes, leading apparently from and back to the Shepherd's Path. But on examining these tracks more closely, I was astonished to find that the man who had made them had been walking backwards; that, in fact, he had walked backwards from the body to the Shepherd's Path, had ascended it for a short distance, had turned round, and returned, still walking backwards, to the face of the cliff near the corpse, and there the tracks vanished altogether. On the sand at this spot were some small, inconspicuous marks which might have been made by the end of a rope, and there were also a few small fragments which had fallen from the cliff above. Observing these, I examined the surface of the cliff, and at one spot, about six feet above the beach, I found a freshly rubbed spot on which were parallel scratches such as might have been made by the nailed sole of a boot. I then ascended the Shepherd's Path, and examined the cliff from above, and here I found on the extreme edge a rather deep indentation, such as would be made by a taut rope, and, on lying down and looking over, I could see, some five feet from the top, another rubbed spot with very distinct parallel scratches."

"You appear to infer," said the chairman, "that this man performed these astonishing evolutions and was then hauled up the cliff?"

"That is what the appearances suggested," replied Thorndyke.

The chairman pursed up his lips, raised his eyebrows, and glanced doubtfully at his brother magistrates. Then, with a resigned air, he bowed to the witness to indicate that he was listening.

"That same night," Thorndyke resumed, "I cycled down to the shore, through the Gap, with a supply of plaster of Paris, and proceeded to take plaster moulds of the more important of the footprints." (Here the magistrates, the inspector, and Mr. Bashfield with one accord sat up at attention; Sergeant Payne swore quite audibly; and I experienced a sudden illumination respecting a certain basin and kitchen spoon which had so puzzled me on the night of Thorndyke's arrival.) "As I thought that liquid plaster might confuse or even obliterate the prints in sand, I filled up the respective footprints with dry plaster, pressed it down lightly, and then cautiously poured water on to it. The moulds, which are excellent impressions, of course show the appearance of the boots which made the footprints, and from these moulds I have prepared casts which reproduce the footprints themselves.

"The first mould that I made was that of one of the tracks from the boat up to the Gap, and of this I shall speak presently. I next made a mould of one of the footprints which have been described as those of the deceased."

"Have been described!" exclaimed the chairman. "The deceased was certainly there, and there were no other footprints, so, if they were not his, he must have flown to where he was found."

"I will call them the footprints of the deceased," replied Thorndyke imperturbably. "I took a mould of one of them, and with it, on the same mould, one of my own footprints. Here is the mould, and here is a cast from it." (He turned and took them from the triumphant Polton, who had tenderly lifted them out of the trunk in readiness.) "On looking at the cast, it will be seen that the appearances are not such as would be expected. The deceased was five feet nine inches high, but was very thin and light, weighing only nine stone six pounds, as I ascertained by weighing the body, whereas I am five feet eleven and weigh nearly thirteen stone. But yet the footprint of the deceased is nearly twice as deep as mine—that is to say, the lighter man has sunk into the sand nearly twice as deeply as the heavier man."

The magistrates were now deeply attentive. They were no longer simply listening to the despised utterances of a mere scientific expert. The cast lay before them with the two footprints side by side; the evidence appealed to their own senses and was proportionately convincing.

"This is very singular," said the chairman; "but perhaps you can explain the discrepancy?"

"I think I can," replied Thorndyke; "but I should prefer to place all the facts before you first."

"Undoubtedly that would be better," the chairman agreed. "Pray proceed."

"There was another remarkable peculiarity about these footprints," Thorndyke continued, "and that was their distance apart—the length of the stride, in fact. I measured the steps carefully from heel to heel, and found them only nineteen and a half inches. But a man of Hearn's height would have an ordinary stride of about thirty-six inches—more if he was walking fast. Walking with a stride of nineteen and a half inches he would look as if his legs were tied together.

"I next proceeded to the Bay, and took two moulds from the footprints of the man with the nailed shoes, a right and a left. Here is a cast from the mould, and it shows very clearly that the man was walking backwards."

"How does it show that?" asked the magistrate.

"There are several distinctive points. For instance, the absence of the usual 'kick off' at the toe, the slight drag behind the heel, showing the direction in which the foot was lifted, and the undisturbed impression of the sole."

"You have spoken of moulds and casts. What is the difference between them?"

"A mould is a direct, and therefore reversed, impression. A cast is the impression of a mould, and therefore a facsimile of the object. If I pour liquid plaster on a coin, when it sets I have a mould, a sunk impression, of the coin. If I pour melted wax into the mould I obtain a cast, a facsimile of the coin. A footprint is a mould of the foot. A mould of the footprint is a cast of the foot, and a cast from the mould reproduces the footprint."

"Thank you," said the magistrate. "Then your moulds from these two footprints are really facsimiles of the murderer's shoes, and can be compared with these shoes which have been put in evidence?"

"Yes, and when we compare them they demonstrate a very important fact."

"What is that?"

"It is that the prisoner's shoes were not the shoes that made those footprints." A buzz of astonishment ran through the court, but Thorndyke continued stolidly: "The prisoner's shoes were not in my possession, so I went on to Barker's pond, on the clay margin of which I had seen footprints actually made by the prisoner. I took moulds of those footprints, and compared them with these from the sand. There are several important differences, which you will see if you compare them. To facilitate the comparison I have made transparent photographs of both sets of moulds to the same scale. Now, if we put the photograph of the mould of the prisoner's right shoe over that of the murderer's right shoe, and hold the two superposed photographs up to the light, we cannot make the two pictures coincide. They are exactly of the same length, but the shoes are of different shape. Moreover, if we put one of the nails in one photograph over the corresponding nail in the other photograph, we cannot make the rest of the nails coincide. But the most conclusive fact of all—from which there is no possible escape—is that the number of nails in the two shoes is not the same. In the sole of the prisoner's right shoe there

are forty nails; in that of the murderer there are forty-one. The murderer has one nail too many."

There was a deathly silence in the court as the magistrates and Mr. Bashfield pored over the moulds and the prisoner's shoes, and examined the photographs against the light. Then the chairman asked: "Are these all the facts, or have you something more to tell us?" He was evidently anxious to get the key to this riddle.

"There is more evidence, your Worship," said Anstey. "The witness examined the body of deceased." Then, turning to Thorndyke, he asked:

"You were present at the *post-mortem* examination?"

"I was."

"Did you form any opinion as to the cause of death?"

"Yes. I came to the conclusion that death was occasioned by an overdose of morphia."

A universal gasp of amazement greeted this statement. Then the presiding magistrate protested breathlessly:

"But there was a wound, which we have been told was capable of causing instantaneous death. Was that not the case?"

"There was undoubtedly such a wound," replied Thorndyke. "But when that wound was inflicted the deceased had already been dead from a quarter to half an hour."

"This is incredible!" exclaimed the magistrate. "But, no doubt, you can give us your reasons for this amazing conclusion?"

"My opinion," said Thorndyke, "was based on several facts. In the first place, a wound inflicted on a living body gapes rather widely, owing to the retraction of the living skin. The skin of a dead body does not retract, and the wound, consequently, does not gape. This wound gaped very slightly, showing that death was recent, I should say, within half an hour. Then a wound on the living body becomes filled with blood, and blood is shed freely on the clothing. But the wound on the deceased contained only a little blood-clot. There was hardly any blood on the clothing, and I had already noticed that there was none on the sand where the body had lain."

"And you consider this quite conclusive?" the magistrate asked doubtfully.

"I do," answered Thorndyke. "But there was other evidence which was beyond all question. The weapon had partially divided both the aorta and the pulmonary artery—the main arteries of the body. Now, during life, these great vessels are full of blood at a high internal pressure, whereas after death they become almost empty. It follows that, if this wound had been inflicted during life, the cavity in which those vessels lie would have become filled with blood. As a matter of fact, it contained practically no blood, only the merest oozing from some small veins, so that it is certain that the wound was inflicted after death. The presence and nature of the poison I ascertained by analyzing certain secretions from the body, and the analysis enabled me to judge that the quantity of the poison was large; but the contents of the stomach were sent to Professor Copland for more exact examination."

"Is the result of Professor Copland's analysis known?" the magistrate asked Anstey.

"The professor is here, your Worship," replied Anstey, "and is prepared to swear to having obtained over one grain of morphia from the contents of the stomach; and as this, which is in itself a poisonous dose, is only the unabsorbed residue of what was actually swallowed, the total quantity taken must have been very large indeed."

"Thank you," said the magistrate. "And now, Dr. Thorndyke, if you have given us all the facts, perhaps you will tell us what conclusions you have drawn from them."

"The facts which I have stated," said Thorndyke, "appear to me to indicate the following sequence of events. The deceased died about midnight on September 27, from the effects of a poisonous dose of morphia, how or by whom administered I offer no opinion. I think that his body was conveyed in a boat to Sundersley Gap. The boat probably contained three men, of whom one remained in charge of it, one walked up the Gap and along the cliff towards St. Bridget's Bay, and the third, having put on the shoes of the deceased, carried the body along the shore to the Bay. This would account for the great depth and short stride of the tracks that have been spoken of as those of the deceased. Having reached the Bay, I believe that this man laid the corpse down on his tracks, and then trampled the sand in the neighbourhood. He next took off deceased's shoes and put them on the corpse; then he put on a pair of boots or shoes which he had been carrying—perhaps hung round his neck—and which had been prepared with nails to imitate Draper's shoes. In these shoes he again trampled over the area near the corpse. Then he walked backwards to the Shepherd's Path, and from it again, still backwards, to the face of the cliff. Here his accomplice had lowered a rope, by which he climbed up to the top. At the top he took off the nailed shoes, and the two men walked back to the Gap, where the man who had carried the rope took his confederate on his back, and carried him down to the boat to avoid leaving the tracks of stockinged feet. The tracks that I saw at the Gap certainly indicated that the man was carrying something very heavy when he returned to the boat."

"But why should the man have climbed a rope up the cliff when he could have walked up the Shepherd's Path?" the magistrate asked.

"Because," replied Thorndyke, "there would then have been a set of tracks leading out of the Bay without a corresponding set leading into it; and this would have instantly suggested to a smart police-officer—such as Sergeant

Payne—a landing from a boat.”

“Your explanation is highly ingenious,” said the magistrate, “and appears to cover all the very remarkable facts. Have you anything more to tell us?”

“No, your Worship,” was the reply, “excepting” (here he took from Polton the last pair of moulds and passed them up to the magistrate) “that you will probably find these moulds of importance presently.”

As Thorndyke stepped from the box—for there was no cross-examination—the magistrates scrutinized the moulds with an air of perplexity; but they were too discreet to make any remark.

When the evidence of Professor Copland (which showed that an unquestionably lethal dose of morphia must have been swallowed) had been taken, the clerk called out the—to me—unfamiliar name of Jacob Gummer. Thereupon an enormous pair of brown dreadnought trousers, from the upper end of which a smack-boy’s head and shoulders protruded, walked into the witness-box.

Jacob admitted at the outset that he was a smack-master’s apprentice, and that he had been “hired out” by his master to one Mr. Jezzard as deck-hand and cabin-boy of the yacht *Otter*.

“Now, Gummer,” said Anstey, “do you remember the prisoner coming on board the yacht?”

“Yes. He has been on board twice. The first time was about a month ago. He went for a sail with us then. The second time was on the night when Mr. Hearn was murdered.”

“Do you remember what sort of boots the prisoner was wearing the first time he came?”

“Yes. They were shoes with a lot of nails in the soles. I remember them because Mr. Jezzard made him take them off and put on a canvas pair.”

“What was done with the nailed shoes?”

“Mr. Jezzard took ‘em below to the cabin.”

“And did Mr. Jezzard come up on deck again directly?”

“No. He stayed down in the cabin about ten minutes.”

“Do you remember a parcel being delivered on board from a London boot-maker?”

“Yes. The postman brought it about four or five days after Mr. Draper had been on board. It was labelled ‘Walker Bros., Boot and Shoe Makers, London.’ Mr. Jezzard took a pair of shoes from it, for I saw them on the locker in the cabin the same day.”

“Did you ever see him wear them?”

“No. I never see ‘em again.”

“Have you ever heard sounds of hammering on the yacht?”

“Yes. The night after the parcel came I was on the quay alongside, and I heard someone a-hammering in the cabin.”

“What did the hammering sound like?”

“It sounded like a cobbler a-hammering in nails.”

“Have you ever seen any boot-nails on the yacht?”

“Yes. When I was a-clearin’ up the cabin the next mornin’, I found a hobnail on the floor in a corner by the locker.”

“Were you on board on the night when Mr. Hearn died?”

“Yes. I’d been ashore, but I came aboard about half-past nine.”

“Did you see Mr. Hearn go ashore?”

“I see him leave the yacht. I had turned into my bunk and gone to sleep, when Mr. Jezzard calls down to me: ‘We’re putting Mr. Hearn ashore,’ says he; ‘and then,’ he says, ‘we’re a-going for an hour’s fishing. You needn’t sit up,’ he says, and with that he shuts the scuttle. Then I got up and slid back the scuttle and put my head out, and I see Mr. Jezzard and Mr. Leach a-helpin’ Mr. Hearn across the deck. Mr. Hearn he looked as if he was drunk. They got him into the boat—and a rare job they had—and Mr. Pitford, what was in the boat already, he pushed off. And then I popped my head in again, ‘cause I didn’t want them to see me.”

“Did they row to the steps?”

“No. I put my head out again when they were gone, and I heard ‘em row round the yacht, and then pull out towards the mouth of the harbour. I couldn’t see the boat, ‘cause it was a very dark night.”

“Very well. Now I am going to ask you about another matter. Do you know anyone of the name of Polton?”

“Yes,” replied Gummer, turning a dusky red. “I’ve just found out his real name. I thought he was called Simmons.”

“Tell us what you know about him,” said Anstey, with a mischievous smile.

"Well," said the boy, with a ferocious scowl at the bland and smiling Polton, "one day he come down to the yacht when the gentlemen had gone ashore. I believe he'd seen 'em go. And he offers me ten shillin' to let him see all the boots and shoes we'd got on board. I didn't see no harm, so I turns out the whole lot in the cabin for him to look at. While he was lookin' at 'em he asks me to fetch a pair of mine from the fo'c'sle, so I fetches 'em. When I come back he was pitchin' the boots and shoes back into the locker. Then, presently, he nips off, and when he was gone I looked over the shoes, and then I found there was a pair missing. They was an old pair of Mr. Jezzard's, and what made him nick 'em is more than I can understand."

"Would you know those shoes if you saw them!"

"Yes, I should," replied the lad.

"Are these the pair?" Anstey handed the boy a pair of dilapidated canvas shoes, which he seized eagerly.

"Yes, these is the ones what he stole!" he exclaimed.

Anstey took them back from the boy's reluctant hands, and passed them up to the magistrate's desk. "I think," said he, "that if your Worship will compare these shoes with the last pair of moulds, you will have no doubt that these are the shoes which made the footprints from the sea to Sundersley Gap and back again."

The magistrates together compared the shoes and the moulds amidst a breathless silence. At length the chairman laid them down on the desk.

"It is impossible to doubt it," said he. "The broken heel and the tear in the rubber sole, with the remains of the chequered pattern, make the identity practically certain."

As the chairman made this statement I involuntarily glanced round to the place where Jezzard was sitting. But he was not there; neither he, nor Pitford, nor Leach. Taking advantage of the preoccupation of the Court, they had quietly slipped out of the door. But I was not the only person who had noted their absence. The inspector and the sergeant were already in earnest consultation, and a minute later they, too, hurriedly departed.

The proceedings now speedily came to an end. After a brief discussion with his brother-magistrates, the chairman addressed the Court.

"The remarkable and I may say startling evidence, which has been heard in this court to-day, if it has not fixed the guilt of this crime on any individual, has, at any rate, made it clear to our satisfaction that the prisoner is not the guilty person, and he is accordingly discharged. Mr. Draper, I have great pleasure in informing you that you are at liberty to leave the court, and that you do so entirely clear of all suspicion; and I congratulate you very heartily on the skill and ingenuity of your legal advisers, but for which the decision of the Court would, I am afraid, have been very different."

That evening, lawyers, witnesses, and the jubilant and grateful client gathered round a truly festive board to dine, and fight over again the battle of the day. But we were scarcely halfway through our meal when, to the indignation of the servants, Sergeant Payne burst breathlessly into the room.

"They've gone, sir!" he exclaimed, addressing Thorndyke. "They've given us the slip for good."

"Why, how can that be?" asked Thorndyke.

"They're dead, sir! All three of them!"

"Dead!" we all exclaimed.

"Yes. They made a burst for the yacht when they left the court, and they got on board and put out to sea at once, hoping, no doubt, to get clear as the light was just failing. But they were in such a hurry that they did not see a steam trawler that was entering, and was hidden by the pier. Then, just at the entrance, as the yacht was creeping out, the trawler hit her amidships, and fairly cut her in two. The three men were in the water in an instant, and were swept away in the eddy behind the north pier; and before any boat could put out to them they had all gone under. Jezzard's body came up on the beach just as I was coming away."

We were all silent and a little awed, but if any of us felt regret at the catastrophe, it was at the thought that three such cold-blooded villains should have made so easy an exit; and to one of us, at least, the news came as a blessed relief.

---

## II. — THE STRANGER'S LATCHKEY

THE contrariety of human nature is a subject that has given a surprising amount of occupation to makers of proverbs and to those moral philosophers who make it their province to discover and expound the glaringly obvious; and especially have they been concerned to enlarge upon that form of perverseness which engenders dislike of things offered under compulsion, and arouses desire of them as soon as their attainment becomes difficult or impossible. They assure us that a man who has had a given thing within his reach and put it by, will, as soon as it is beyond his reach, find it the one thing necessary and desirable; even as the domestic cat which has turned disdainfully from the preferred saucer, may presently be seen with her head jammed hard in the milk-jug, or, secretly and with horrible relish, slaking her thirst at the scullery sink.

To this peculiarity of the human mind was due, no doubt, the fact that no sooner had I abandoned the clinical side of my

profession in favour of the legal, and taken up my abode in the chambers of my friend Thorndyke, the famous medico-legal expert, to act as his assistant or junior, than my former mode of life—that of a locum tenens, or minder of other men's practices—which had, when I was following it, seemed intolerably irksome, now appeared to possess many desirable features; and I found myself occasionally hankering to sit once more by the bedside, to puzzle out the perplexing train of symptoms, and to wield that power—the greatest, after all, possessed by man—the power to banish suffering and ward off the approach of death itself.

Hence it was that on a certain morning of the long vacation I found myself installed at The Larches, Burling, in full charge of the practice of my old friend Dr. Hanshaw, who was taking a fishing holiday in Norway. I was not left desolate, however, for Mrs. Hanshaw remained at her post, and the roomy, old-fashioned house accommodated three visitors in addition. One of these was Dr. Hanshaw's sister, a Mrs. Haldean, the widow of a wealthy Manchester cotton factor; the second was her niece by marriage, Miss Lucy Haldean, a very handsome and charming girl of twenty-three; while the third was no less a person than Master Fred, the only child of Mrs. Haldean, and a strapping boy of six.

"It is quite like old times—and very pleasant old times, too—to see you sitting at our breakfast-table, Dr. Jervis." With these gracious words and a friendly smile, Mrs. Hanshaw handed me my tea-cup.

I bowed. "The highest pleasure of the altruist," I replied, "is in contemplating the good fortune of others."

Mrs. Haldean laughed. "Thank you," she said. "You are quite unchanged, I perceive. Still as suave and as—shall I say oleaginous?"

"No, please don't!" I exclaimed in a tone of alarm.

"Then I won't. But what does Dr. Thorndyke say to this backsliding on your part? How does he regard this relapse from medical jurisprudence to common general practice?"

"Thorndyke," said I, "is unmoved by any catastrophe; and he not only regards the 'Decline and Fall-off of the Medical Jurist' with philosophic calm, but he even favours the relapse, as you call it. He thinks it may be useful to me to study the application of medico-legal methods to general practice."

"That sounds rather unpleasant—for the patients, I mean," remarked Miss Haldean.

"Very," agreed her aunt. "Most cold-blooded. What sort of man is Dr. Thorndyke? I feel quite curious about him. Is he at all human, for instance?"

"He is entirely human," I replied; "the accepted tests of humanity being, as I understand, the habitual adoption of the erect posture in locomotion, and the relative position of the end of the thumb—"

"I don't mean that," interrupted Mrs. Haldean. "I mean human in things that matter."

"I think those things matter," I rejoined. "Consider, Mrs. Haldean, what would happen if my learned colleague were to be seen in wig and gown, walking towards the Law Courts in any posture other than the erect. It would be a public scandal."

"Don't talk to him, Mabel," said Mrs. Hanshaw; "he is incorrigible. What are you doing with yourself this morning, Lucy?"

Miss Haldean (who had hastily set down her cup to laugh at my imaginary picture of Dr. Thorndyke in the character of a quadruped) considered a moment.

"I think I shall sketch that group of birches at the edge of Bradham Wood," she said.

"Then, in that case," said I, "I can carry your traps for you, for I have to see a patient in Bradham."

"He is making the most of his time," remarked Mrs. Haldean maliciously to my hostess. "He knows that when Mr. Winter arrives he will retire into the extreme background."

Douglas Winter, whose arrival was expected in the course of the week, was Miss Haldean's fiancé. Their engagement had been somewhat protracted, and was likely to be more so, unless one of them received some unexpected accession of means; for Douglas was a subaltern in the Royal Engineers, living, with great difficulty, on his pay, while Lucy Haldean subsisted on an almost invisible allowance left her by an uncle.

I was about to reply to Mrs. Haldean when a patient was announced, and, as I had finished my breakfast, I made my excuses and left the table.

Half an hour later, when I started along the road to the village of Bradham, I had two companions. Master Freddy had joined the party, and he disputed with me the privilege of carrying the "traps," with the result that a compromise was effected, by which he carried the camp-stool, leaving me in possession of the easel, the bag, and a large bound sketching-block.

"Where are you going to work this morning?" I asked, when we had trudged on some distance.

"Just off the road to the left there, at the edge of the wood. Not very far from the house of the mysterious stranger." She glanced at me mischievously as she made this reply, and chuckled with delight when I rose at the bait.

"What house do you mean?" I inquired.

"Ha!" she exclaimed, "the investigator of mysteries is aroused. He saith, 'Ha! ha!' amidst the trumpets; he smelleth the

battle afar off."

"Explain instantly," I commanded, "or I drop your sketch-block into the very next puddle."

"You terrify me," said she. "But I will explain, only there isn't any mystery except to the bucolic mind. The house is called Lavender Cottage, and it stands alone in the fields behind the wood. A fortnight ago it was let furnished to a stranger named Whitelock, who has taken it for the purpose of studying the botany of the district; and the only really mysterious thing about him is that no one has seen him. All arrangements with the house-agent were made by letter, and, as far as I can make out, none of the local tradespeople supply him, so he must get his things from a distance—even his bread, which really is rather odd. Now say I am an inquisitive, gossiping country bumpkin."

"I was going to," I answered, "but it is no use now."

She relieved me of her sketching appliances with pretended indignation, and crossed into the meadow, leaving me to pursue my way alone; and when I presently looked back, she was setting up her easel and stool, gravely assisted by Freddy.

My "round," though not a long one, took up more time than I had anticipated, and it was already past the luncheon hour when I passed the place where I had left Miss Haldean. She was gone, as I had expected, and I hurried homewards, anxious to be as nearly punctual as possible. When I entered the dining-room, I found Mrs. Haldean and our hostess seated at the table, and both looked up at me expectantly.

"Have you seen Lucy?" the former inquired.

"No," I answered. "Hasn't she come back? I expected to find her here. She had left the wood when I passed just now."

Mrs. Haldean knitted her brows anxiously. "It is very strange," she said, "and very thoughtless of her. Freddy will be famished."

I hurried over my lunch, for two fresh messages had come in from outlying hamlets, effectually dispelling my visions of a quiet afternoon; and as the minutes passed without bringing any signs of the absentees, Mrs. Haldean became more and more restless and anxious. At length her suspense became unbearable; she rose suddenly, announcing her intention of cycling up the road to look for the defaulters, but as she was moving towards the door, it burst open, and Lucy Haldean staggered into the room.

Her appearance filled us with alarm. She was deadly pale, breathless, and wild-eyed; her dress was dragged and torn, and she trembled from head to foot.

"Good God, Lucy!" gasped Mrs. Haldean. "What has happened? And where is Freddy?" she added in a sterner tone.

"He is lost!" replied Miss Haldean in a faint voice, and with a catch in her breath. "He strayed away while I was painting. I have searched the wood through, and called to him, and looked in all the meadows. Oh! where can he have gone?" Her sketching "kit," with which she was loaded, slipped from her grasp and rattled on to the floor, and she buried her face in her hands and sobbed hysterically.

"And you have dared to come back without him?" exclaimed Mrs. Haldean.

"I was getting exhausted. I came back for help," was the faint reply.

"Of course she was exhausted," said Mrs. Hanshaw. "Come, Lucy: come, Mabel; don't make mountains out of molehills. The little man is safe enough. We shall find him presently, or he will come home by himself. Come and have some food, Lucy."

Miss Haldean shook her head. "I can't, Mrs. Hanshaw—really I can't," she said; and, seeing that she was in a state of utter exhaustion, I poured out a glass of wine and made her drink it.

Mrs. Haldean darted from the room, and returned immediately, putting on her hat. "You have got to come with me and show me where you lost him," she said.

"She can't do that, you know," I said rather brusquely. "She will have to lie down for the present. But I know the place, and will cycle up with you."

"Very well," replied Mrs. Haldean, "that will do. What time was it," she asked, turning to her niece, "when you lost the child? and which way—"

She paused abruptly, and I looked at her in surprise. She had suddenly turned ashen and ghastly; her face had set like a mask of stone, with parted lips and staring eyes that were fixed in horror on her niece.

There was a deathly silence for a few seconds. Then, in a terrible voice, she demanded: "What is that on your dress, Lucy?" And, after a pause, her voice rose into a shriek. "What have you done to my boy?"

I glanced in astonishment at the dazed and terrified girl, and then I saw what her aunt had seen—a good-sized blood-stain halfway down the front of her skirt, and another smaller one on her right sleeve. The girl herself looked down at the sinister patch of red and then up at her aunt. "It looks like—like blood," she stammered. "Yes, it is—I think—of course it is. He struck his nose—and it bled—"

"Come," interrupted Mrs. Haldean, "let us go," and she rushed from the room, leaving me to follow.

I lifted Miss Haldean, who was half fainting with fatigue and agitation, on to the sofa, and, whispering a few words of



encouragement into her ear, turned to Mrs. Hanshaw.

"I can't stay with Mrs. Haldean," I said. "There are two visits to be made at Rebworth. Will you send the dogcart up the road with somebody to take my place?"

"Yes," she answered. "I will send Giles, or come myself if Lucy is fit to be left."

I ran to the stables for my bicycle, and as I pedalled out into the road I could see Mrs. Haldean already far ahead, driving her machine at frantic speed. I followed at a rapid pace, but it was not until we approached the commencement of the wood, when she slowed down somewhat, that I overtook her.

"This is the place," I said, as we reached the spot where I had parted from Miss Haldean. We dismounted and wheeled our bicycles through the gate, and laying them down beside the hedge, crossed the meadow and entered the wood.

It was a terrible experience, and one that I shall never forget—the white-faced, distracted woman, tramping in her flimsy house-shoes over the rough ground, bursting through the bushes, regardless of the thorny branches that dragged at skin and hair and dainty clothing, and sending forth from time to time a tremulous cry, so dreadfully pathetic in its mingling of terror and coaxing softness, that a lump rose in my throat, and I could barely keep my self-control.

"Freddy! Freddy-boy! Mummy's here, darling!" The wailing cry sounded through the leafy solitude; but no answer came save the whirr of wings or the chatter of startled birds. But even more shocking than that terrible cry—more disturbing and eloquent with dreadful suggestion—was the way in which she peered, furtively, but with fearful expectation, among the roots of the bushes, or halted to gaze upon every molehill and hummock, every depression or disturbance of the ground.

So we stumbled on for a while, with never a word spoken, until we came to a beaten track or footpath leading across the wood. Here I paused to examine the footprints, of which several were visible in the soft earth, though none seemed very recent; but, proceeding a little way down the track, I perceived, crossing it, a set of fresh imprints, which I recognized at once as Miss Haldean's. She was wearing, as I knew, a pair of brown golf-boots, with rubber pads in the leather soles, and the prints made by them were unmistakable.

"Miss Haldean crossed the path here," I said, pointing to the footprints.

"Don't speak of her before me!" exclaimed Mrs. Haldean; but she gazed eagerly at the footprints, nevertheless, and immediately plunged into the wood to follow the tracks.

"You are very unjust to your niece, Mrs. Haldean," I ventured to protest.

She halted, and faced me with an angry frown.

"You don't understand!" she exclaimed. "You don't know, perhaps, that if my poor child is really dead, Lucy Haldean will be a rich woman, and may marry to-morrow if she chooses?"

"I did not know that," I answered, "but if I had, I should have said the same."

"Of course you would," she retorted bitterly. "A pretty face can muddle any man's judgment."

She turned away abruptly to resume her pursuit, and I followed in silence. The trail which we were following zigzagged through the thickest part of the wood, but its devious windings eventually brought us out on to an open space on the farther side. Here we at once perceived traces of another kind. A litter of dirty rags, pieces of paper, scraps of stale bread, bones and feathers, with hoof-marks, wheel ruts, and the ashes of a large wood fire, pointed clearly to a gipsy encampment recently broken up. I laid my hand on the heap of ashes, and found it still warm, and on scattering it with my foot a layer of glowing cinders appeared at the bottom.

"These people have only been gone an hour or two," I said. "It would be well to have them followed without delay."

A gleam of hope shone on the drawn, white face as the bereaved mother caught eagerly at my suggestion.

"Yes," she exclaimed breathlessly; "she may have bribed them to take him away. Let us see which way they went."

We followed the wheel tracks down to the road, and found that they turned towards London. At the same time I perceived the dogcart in the distance, with Mrs. Hanshaw standing beside it; and, as the coachman observed me, he whipped up his horse and approached.

"I shall have to go," I said, "but Mrs. Hanshaw will help you to continue the search."

"And you will make inquiries about the gipsies, won't you?" she said.

I promised to do so, and as the dogcart now came up, I climbed to the seat, and drove off briskly up the London Road.

The extent of a country doctor's round is always an unknown quantity. On the present occasion I picked up three additional patients, and as one of them was a case of incipient pleurisy, which required to have the chest strapped, and another was a neglected dislocation of the shoulder, a great deal of time was taken up. Moreover, the gipsies, whom I ran to earth on Rebworth Common, delayed me considerably, though I had to leave the rural constable to carry out the actual search, and, as a result, the clock of Burling Church was striking six as I drove through the village on my way home.

I got down at the front gate, leaving the coachman to take the dogcart round, and walked up the drive; and my astonishment may be imagined when, on turning the corner, I came suddenly upon the inspector of the local police in earnest conversation with no less a person than John Thorndyke.

"What on earth has brought you here?" I exclaimed, my surprise getting the better of my manners.

"The ultimate motive-force," he replied, "was an impulsive lady named Mrs. Haldean. She telegraphed for me—in your name."

"She oughtn't to have done that," I said.

"Perhaps not. But the ethics of an agitated woman are not worth discussing, and she has done something much worse—she has applied to the local J.P. (a retired Major-General), and our gallant and unlearned friend has issued a warrant for the arrest of Lucy Haldean on the charge of murder."

"But there has been no murder!" I exclaimed.

"That," said Thorndyke, "is a legal subtlety that he does not appreciate. He has learned his law in the orderly-room, where the qualifications to practise are an irritable temper and a loud voice. However, the practical point is, inspector, that the warrant is irregular. You can't arrest people for hypothetical crimes."

The officer drew a deep breath of relief. He knew all about the irregularity, and now joyfully took refuge behind Thorndyke's great reputation.

When he had departed—with a brief note from my colleague to the General—Thorndyke slipped his arm through mine, and we strolled towards the house.

"This is a grim business, Jervis," said he. "That boy has got to be found for everybody's sake. Can you come with me when you have had some food?"

"Of course I can. I have been saving myself all the afternoon with a view to continuing the search."

"Good," said Thorndyke. "Then come in and feed."

A nondescript meal, half tea and half dinner, was already prepared, and Mrs. Hanshaw, grave but self-possessed, presided at the table.

"Mabel is still out with Giles, searching for the boy," she said. "You have heard what she has done!"

I nodded.

"It was dreadful of her," continued Mrs. Hanshaw, "but she is half mad, poor thing. You might run up and say a few kind words to poor Lucy while I make the tea."

I went up at once and knocked at Miss Haldean's door, and, being bidden to enter, found her lying on the sofa, red-eyed and pale, the very ghost of the merry, laughing girl who had gone out with me in the morning. I drew up a chair, and sat down by her side, and as I took the hand she held out to me, she said:

"It is good of you to come and see a miserable wretch like me. And Jane has been so sweet to me, Dr. Jervis; but Aunt Mabel thinks I have killed Freddy—you know she does—and it was really my fault that he was lost. I shall never forgive myself!"

She burst into a passion of sobbing, and I proceeded to chide her gently.

"You are a silly little woman," I said, "to take this nonsense to heart as you are doing. Your aunt is not responsible just now, as you must know; but when we bring the boy home she shall make you a handsome apology. I will see to that."

She pressed my hand gratefully, and as the bell now rang for tea, I bade her have courage and went downstairs.

"You need not trouble about the practice," said Mrs. Hanshaw, as I concluded my lightning repast, and Thorndyke went off to get our bicycles. "Dr. Symons has heard of our trouble, and has called to say that he will take anything that turns up; so we shall expect you when we see you."

"How do you like Thorndyke?" I asked.

"He is quite charming," she replied enthusiastically; "so tactful and kind, and so handsome, too. You didn't tell us that. But here he is. Good-bye, and good luck."

She pressed my hand, and I went out into the drive, where Thorndyke and the coachman were standing with three bicycles.

"I see you have brought your outfit," I said as we turned into the road; for Thorndyke's machine bore a large canvas-covered case strapped on to a strong bracket.

"Yes; there are many things that we may want on a quest of this kind. How did you find Miss Haldean?"

"Very miserable, poor girl. By the way, have you heard anything about her pecuniary interest in the child's death?"

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "It appears that the late Mr. Haldean used up all his brains on his business, and had none left for the making of his will—as often happens. He left almost the whole of his property—about eighty thousand pounds—to his son, the widow to have a life-interest in it. He also left to his late brother's daughter, Lucy, fifty pounds a year, and to his surviving brother Percy, who seems to have been a good-for-nothing, a hundred a year for life. But—and here is the utter folly of the thing—if the son should die, the property was to be equally divided between the brother and the niece, with the exception of five hundred a year for life to the widow. It was an insane arrangement."

"Quite," I agreed, "and a very dangerous one for Lucy Haldean, as things are at present."

"Very; especially if anything should have happened to the child."

"What are you going to do now?" I inquired, seeing that Thorndyke rode on as if with a definite purpose.

"There is a footpath through the wood," he replied. "I want to examine that. And there is a house behind the wood which I should like to see."

"The house of the mysterious stranger," I suggested.

"Precisely. Mysterious and solitary strangers invite inquiry."

We drew up at the entrance to the footpath, leaving Willett the coachman in charge of the three machines, and proceeded up the narrow track. As we went, Thorndyke looked back at the prints of our feet, and nodded approvingly.

"This soft loam," he remarked, "yields beautifully clear impressions, and yesterday's rain has made it perfect."

We had not gone far when we perceived a set of footprints which I recognized, as did Thorndyke also, for he remarked: "Miss Haldean—running, and alone." Presently we met them again, crossing in the opposite direction, together with the prints of small shoes with very high heels. "Mrs. Haldean on the track of her niece," was Thorndyke's comment; and a minute later we encountered them both again, accompanied by my own footprints.

"The boy does not seem to have crossed the path at all," I remarked as we walked on, keeping off the track itself to avoid confusing the footprints.

"We shall know when we have examined the whole length," replied Thorndyke, plodding on with his eyes on the ground. "Ha! here is something new," he added, stopping short and stooping down eagerly—"a man with a thick stick—a smallish man, rather lame. Notice the difference between the two feet, and the peculiar way in which he uses his stick. Yes, Jervis, there is a great deal to interest us in these footprints. Do you notice anything very suggestive about them?"

"Nothing but what you have mentioned," I replied. "What do you mean?"

"Well, first there is the very singular character of the prints themselves, which we will consider presently. You observe that this man came down the path, and at this point turned off into the wood; then he returned from the wood and went up the path again. The imposition of the prints makes that clear. But now look at the two sets of prints, and compare them. Do you notice any difference?"

"The returning footprints seem more distinct—better impressions."

"Yes; they are noticeably deeper. But there is something else." He produced a spring tape from his pocket, and took half a dozen measurements. "You see," he said, "the first set of footprints have a stride of twenty-one inches from heel to heel—a short stride; but he is a smallish man, and lame; the returning ones have a stride of only nineteen and a half inches; hence the returning footprints are deeper than the others, and the steps are shorter. What do you make of that?"

"It would suggest that he was carrying a burden when he returned," I replied.

"Yes; and a heavy one, to make that difference in the depth. I think I will get you to go and fetch Willett and the bicycles."

I strode off down the path to the entrance, and, taking possession of Thorndyke's machine, with its precious case of instruments, bade Willett follow with the other two.

When I returned, my colleague was standing with his hands behind him, gazing with intense preoccupation at the footprints. He looked up sharply as we approached, and called out to us to keep off the path if possible.

"Stay here with the machines, Willett," said he. "You and I, Jervis, must go and see where our friend went to when he left the path, and what was the burden that he picked up."

We struck off into the wood, where last year's dead leaves made the footprints almost indistinguishable, and followed the faint double track for a long distance between the dense clumps of bushes. Suddenly my eye caught, beside the double trail, a third row of tracks, smaller in size and closer together. Thorndyke had seen them, too, and already his measuring-tape was in his hand.

"Eleven and a half inches to the stride," said he. "That will be the boy, Jervis. But the light is getting weak. We must press on quickly, or we shall lose it."

Some fifty yards farther on, the man's tracks ceased abruptly, but the small ones continued alone; and we followed them as rapidly as we could in the fading light.

"There can be no reasonable doubt that these are the child's tracks," said Thorndyke; "but I should like to find a definite footprint to make the identification absolutely certain."

A few seconds later he halted with an exclamation, and stooped on one knee. A little heap of fresh earth from the surface-burrow of a mole had been thrown up over the dead leaves; and fairly planted on it was the clean and sharp impression of a diminutive foot, with a rubber heel showing a central star. Thorndyke drew from his pocket a tiny shoe, and pressed it on the soft earth beside the footprint; and when he raised it the second impression was identical with the first.

"The boy had two pairs of shoes exactly alike," he said, "so I borrowed one of the duplicate pair."

He turned, and began to retrace his steps rapidly, following our own fresh tracks, and stopping only once to point out the place where the unknown man had picked the child up. When we regained the path we proceeded without delay until we emerged from the wood within a hundred yards of the cottage.

"I see Mrs. Haldean has been here with Giles," remarked Thorndyke, as he pushed open the garden-gate. "I wonder if they saw anybody."

He advanced to the door, and having first rapped with his knuckles and then kicked at it vigorously, tried the handle.

"Locked," he observed, "but I see the key is in the lock, so we can get in if we want to. Let us try the back."

The back door was locked, too, but the key had been removed.

"He came out this way, evidently," said Thorndyke, "though he went in at the front, as I suppose you noticed. Let us see where he went."

The back garden was a small, fenced patch of ground, with an earth path leading down to the back gate. A little way beyond the gate was a small barn or outhouse.

"We are in luck," Thorndyke remarked, with a glance at the path. "Yesterday's rain has cleared away all old footprints, and prepared the surface for new ones. You see there are three sets of excellent impressions—two leading away from the house, and one set towards it. Now, you notice that both of the sets leading *from* the house are characterized by deep impressions and short steps, while the set leading *to* the house has lighter impressions and longer steps. The obvious inference is that he went down the path with a heavy burden, came back empty-handed, and went down again—and finally—with another heavy burden. You observe, too, that he walked with his stick on each occasion."

By this time we had reached the bottom of the garden. Opening the gate, we followed the tracks towards the outhouse, which stood beside a cart-track; but as we came round the corner we both stopped short and looked at one another. On the soft earth were the very distinct impressions of the tyres of a motor-car leading from the wide door of the outhouse. Finding that the door was unfastened, Thorndyke opened it, and looked in, to satisfy himself that the place was empty. Then he fell to studying the tracks.

"The course of events is pretty plain," he observed. "First the fellow brought down his luggage, started the engine, and got the car out—you can see where it stood, both by the little pool of oil, and by the widening and blurring of the wheel-tracks from the vibration of the free engine; then he went back and fetched the boy—carried him pick-a-back, I should say, judging by the depth of the toe-marks in the last set of footprints. That was a tactical mistake. He should have taken the boy straight into the shed."

He pointed as he spoke to one of the footprints beside the wheel-tracks, from the toe of which projected a small segment of the print of a little rubber heel.

We now made our way back to the house, where we found Willett pensively rapping at the front door with a cycle-spanner. Thorndyke took a last glance, with his hand in his pocket, at an open window above, and then, to the coachman's intense delight, brought forth what looked uncommonly like a small bunch of skeleton keys. One of these he inserted into the keyhole, and as he gave it a turn, the lock clicked, and the door stood open.

The little sitting-room, which we now entered, was furnished with the barest necessities. Its centre was occupied by an oilcloth-covered table, on which I observed with surprise a dismembered "Bee" clock (the works of which had been taken apart with a tin-opener that lay beside them) and a box-wood bird-call. At these objects Thorndyke glanced and nodded, as though they fitted into some theory that he had formed; examined carefully the oilcloth around the litter of wheels and pinions, and then proceeded on a tour of inspection round the room, peering inquisitively into the kitchen and store-cupboard.

"Nothing very distinctive or personal here," he remarked. "Let us go upstairs."

There were three bedrooms on the upper floor, of which two were evidently disused, though the windows were wide open. The third bedroom showed manifest traces of occupation, though it was as bare as the others, for the water still stood in the wash-hand basin, and the bed was unmade. To the latter Thorndyke advanced, and, having turned back the bedclothes, examined the interior attentively, especially at the foot and the pillow. The latter was soiled—not to say grimy—though the rest of the bed-linen was quite clean.

"Hair-dye," remarked Thorndyke, noting my glance at it; then he turned and looked out of the open window. "Can you see the place where Miss Haldean was sitting to sketch?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied; "there is the place well in view, and you can see right up the road. I had no idea this house stood so high. From the three upper windows you can see all over the country excepting through the wood."

"Yes," Thorndyke rejoined, "and he has probably been in the habit of keeping watch up here with a telescope or a pair of field-glasses. Well, there is not much of interest in this room. He kept his effects in a cabin trunk which stood there under the window. He shaved this morning. He has a white beard, to judge by the stubble on the shaving-paper, and that is all. Wait, though. There is a key hanging on that nail. He must have overlooked that, for it evidently does not belong to this house. It is an ordinary town latchkey."

He took the key down, and having laid a sheet of notepaper, from his pocket, on the dressing-table, produced a pin, with which he began carefully to probe the interior of the key-barrel. Presently there came forth, with much coaxing, a large ball of grey fluff, which Thorndyke folded up in the paper with infinite care.

"I suppose we mustn't take away the key," he said, "but I think we will take a wax mould of it."

He hurried downstairs, and, unstrapping the case from his bicycle, brought it in and placed it on the table. As it was now getting dark, he detached the powerful acetylene lamp from his machine, and, having lighted it, proceeded to open the mysterious case. First he took from it a small insufflator, or powder-blower, with which he blew a cloud of light yellow powder over the table around the remains of the clock. The powder settled on the table in an even coating, but when he blew at it smartly with his breath, it cleared off, leaving, however, a number of smeary impressions which stood out in strong yellow against the black oilcloth. To one of these impressions he pointed significantly. It was the print of a child's hand.

He next produced a small, portable microscope and some glass slides and cover-slips, and having opened the paper and tipped the ball of fluff from the key-barrel on to a slide, set to work with a pair of mounted needles to tease it out into its component parts. Then he turned the light of the lamp on to the microscope mirror and proceeded to examine the specimen.

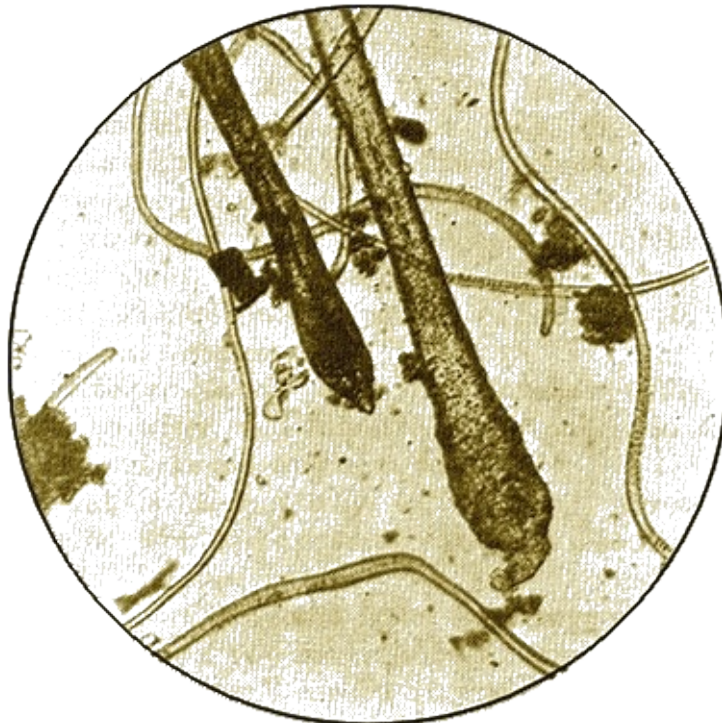
"A curious and instructive assortment this, Jervis," he remarked, with his eye at the microscope: "woollen fibres—no cotton or linen; he is careful of his health to have woollen pockets—and two hairs; very curious ones, too. Just look at them, and observe the root bulbs."

I applied my eye to the microscope, and saw, among other things, two hairs—originally white, but encrusted with a black, opaque, glistening stain. The root bulbs, I noticed, were shrivelled and atrophied.

"But how on earth," I exclaimed, "did the hairs get into his pocket?"

"I think the hairs themselves answer that question," he replied, "when considered with the other curios. The stain is obviously lead sulphide; but what else do you see?"

"I see some particles of metal—a white metal apparently—and a number of fragments of woody fibre and starch granules, but I don't recognize the starch. It is not wheat-starch, nor rice, nor potato. Do you make out what it is?"



*Fluff from Key-Barrel. Magnified 77 diameters.*

Thorndyke chuckled. "Experientia does it," said he. "You will have, Jervis, to study the minute properties of dust and dirt. Their evidential value is immense. Let us have another look at that starch; it is all alike, I suppose."

It was; and Thorndyke had just ascertained the fact when the door burst open and Mrs. Haldean entered the room, followed by Mrs. Hanshaw and the police inspector. The former lady regarded my colleague with a glance of extreme

disfavour.

"We heard that you had come here, sir," said she, "and we supposed you were engaged in searching for my poor child. But it seems we were mistaken, since we find you here amusing yourselves fiddling with these nonsensical instruments."

"Perhaps, Mabel," said Mrs. Hanshaw stiffly, "it would be wiser, and infinitely more polite, to ask if Dr. Thorndyke has any news for us."

"That is undoubtedly so, madam," agreed the inspector, who had apparently suffered also from Mrs. Haldean's impulsiveness.

"Then perhaps," the latter lady suggested, "you will inform us if you have discovered anything."

"I will tell you," replied Thorndyke, "all that we know. The child was abducted by the man who occupied this house, and who appears to have watched him from an upper window, probably through a glass. This man lured the child into the wood by blowing this bird-call; he met him in the wood, and induced him—by some promises, no doubt—to come with him. He picked the child up and carried him—on his back, I think—up to the house, and brought him in through the front door, which he locked after him. He gave the boy this clock and the bird-call to amuse him while he went upstairs and packed his trunk. He took the trunk out through the back door and down the garden to the shed there, in which he had a motor-car. He got the car out and came back for the boy, whom he carried down to the car, locking the back door after him. Then he drove away."

"You know he has gone," cried Mrs. Haldean, "and yet you stay here playing with these ridiculous toys. Why are you not following him?"

"We have just finished ascertaining the facts," Thorndyke replied calmly, "and should by now be on the road if you had not come."

Here the inspector interposed anxiously. "Of course, sir, you can't give any description of the man. You have no clue to his identity, I suppose?"

"We have only his footprints," Thorndyke answered, "and this fluff which I raked out of the barrel of his latchkey, and have just been examining. From these data I conclude that he is a rather short and thin man, and somewhat lame. He walks with the aid of a thick stick, which has a knob, not a crook, at the top, and which he carries in his left hand. I think that his left leg has been amputated above the knee, and that he wears an artificial limb. He is elderly, he shaves his beard, has white hair dyed a greyish black, is partly bald, and probably combs a wisp of hair over the bald place; he takes snuff, and carries a leaden comb in his pocket."

As Thorndyke's description proceeded, the inspector's mouth gradually opened wider and wider, until he appeared the very type and symbol of astonishment. But its effect on Mrs. Haldean was much more remarkable. Rising from her chair, she leaned on the table and stared at Thorndyke with an expression of awe—even of terror; and as he finished she sank back into her chair, with her hands clasped, and turned to Mrs. Hanshaw.

"Janel!" she gasped, "it is Percy—my brother-in-law! He has described him exactly, even to his stick and his pocket-comb. But I thought he was in Chicago."

"If that is so," said Thorndyke, hastily repacking his case, "we had better start at once."

"We have the dogcart in the road," said Mrs. Hanshaw.

"Thank you," replied Thorndyke. "We will ride on our bicycles, and the inspector can borrow Willett's. We go out at the back by the cart-track, which joins the road farther on."

"Then we will follow in the dogcart," said Mrs. Haldean. "Come, Jane."

The two ladies departed down the path, while we made ready our bicycles and lit our lamps.

"With your permission, inspector," said Thorndyke, "we will take the key with us."

"It's hardly legal, sir," objected the officer. "We have no authority."

"It is quite illegal," answered Thorndyke; "but it is necessary; and necessity—like your military J.P.—knows no law."

The inspector grinned and went out, regarding me with a quivering eyelid as Thorndyke locked the door with his skeleton key. As we turned into the road, I saw the light of the dogcart behind us, and we pushed forward at a swift pace, picking up the trail easily on the soft, moist road.

"What beats me," said the inspector confidentially, as we rode along, "is how he knew the man was bald. Was it the footprints or the latchkey? And that comb, too, that was a regular knock-out."

These points were, by now, pretty clear to me. I had seen the hairs with their atrophied bulbs—such as one finds at the margin of a bald patch; and the comb was used, evidently, for the double purpose of keeping the bald patch covered and blackening the sulphur-charged hair. But the knobbed stick and the artificial limb puzzled me so completely that I presently overtook Thorndyke to demand an explanation.

"The stick," said he, "is perfectly simple. The ferrule of a knobbed stick wears evenly all round; that of a crooked stick wears on one side—the side opposite the crook. The impressions showed that the ferrule of this one was evenly convex;

therefore it had no crook. The other matter is more complicated. To begin with, an artificial foot makes a very characteristic impression, owing to its purely passive elasticity, as I will show you to-morrow. But an artificial leg fitted below the knee is quite secure, whereas one fitted above the knee—that is, with an artificial knee-joint worked by a spring—is much less reliable. Now, this man had an artificial foot, and he evidently distrusted his knee-joint, as is shown by his steadying it with his stick on the same side. If he had merely had a weak leg, he would have used the stick with his right hand—with the natural swing of the arm, in fact—unless he had been very lame, which he evidently was not. Still, it was only a question of probability, though the probability was very great. Of course, you understand that those particles of woody fibre and starch granules were disintegrated snuff-grains.”

This explanation, like the others, was quite simple when one had heard it, though it gave me material for much thought as we pedalled on along the dark road, with Thorndyke’s light flickering in front, and the dogcart pattering in our wake. But there was ample time for reflection; for our pace rather precluded conversation, and we rode on, mile after mile, until my legs ached with fatigue. On and on we went through village after village, now losing the trail in some frequented street, but picking it up again unfailingly as we emerged on to the country road, until at last, in the paved High Street of the little town of Horsefield, we lost it for good. We rode on through the town out on to the country road; but although there were several tracks of motors, Thorndyke shook his head at them all. “I have been studying those tyres until I know them by heart,” he said. “No; either he is in the town, or he has left it by a side road.”

There was nothing for it but to put up the horse and the machines at the hotel, while we walked round to reconnoitre; and this we did, tramping up one street and down another, with eyes bent on the ground, fruitlessly searching for a trace of the missing car.

Suddenly, at the door of a blacksmith’s shop, Thorndyke halted. The shop had been kept open late for the shoeing of a carriage horse, which was just being led away, and the smith had come to the door for a breath of air. Thorndyke accosted him genially.

“Good-evening. You are just the man I wanted to see. I have mislaid the address of a friend of mine, who, I think, called on you this afternoon—a lame gentleman who walks with a stick. I expect he wanted you to pick a lock or make him a key.”

“Oh, I remember him!” said the man. “Yes, he had lost his latchkey, and wanted the lock picked before he could get into his house. Had to leave his motor-car outside while he came here. But I took some keys round with me, and fitted one to his latch.”

He then directed us to a house at the end of a street close by, and, having thanked him, we went off in high spirits.

“How did you know he had been there?” I asked.

“I didn’t; but there was the mark of a stick and part of a left foot on the soft earth inside the doorway, and the thing was inherently probable, so I risked a false shot.”

The house stood alone at the far end of a straggling street, and was enclosed by a high wall, in which, on the side facing the street, was a door and a wide carriage-gate. Advancing to the former, Thorndyke took from his pocket the purloined key, and tried it in the lock. It fitted perfectly, and when he had turned it and pushed open the door, we entered a small courtyard. Crossing this, we came to the front door of the house, the latch of which fortunately fitted the same key; and this having been opened by Thorndyke, we trooped into the hall. Immediately we heard the sound of an opening door above, and a reedy, nasal voice sang out:

“Hello, there! Who’s that below?”

The voice was followed by the appearance of a head projecting over the baluster rail.

“You are Mr. Percy Haldean, I think,” said the inspector.

At the mention of this name, the head was withdrawn, and a quick tread was heard, accompanied by the tapping of a stick on the floor. We started to ascend the stairs, the inspector leading, as the authorized official; but we had only gone up a few steps, when a fierce, wiry little man danced out on to the landing, with a thick stick in one hand and a very large revolver in the other.

“Move another step, either of you,” he shouted, pointing the weapon at the inspector, “and I let fly; and mind you, when I shoot I hit.”

He looked as if he meant it, and we accordingly halted with remarkable suddenness, while the inspector proceeded to parley.

“Now, what’s the good of this, Mr. Haldean?” said he. “The game’s up, and you know it.”

“You clear out of my house, and clear out sharp,” was the inhospitable rejoinder, “or you’ll give me the trouble of burying you in the garden.”

I looked round to consult with Thorndyke, when, to my amazement, I found that he had vanished—apparently through the open hall-door. I was admiring his discretion when the inspector endeavoured to reopen negotiations, but was cut short abruptly.

“I am going to count fifty,” said Mr. Haldean, “and if you aren’t gone then, I shall shoot.”

He began to count deliberately, and the inspector looked round at me in complete bewilderment. The flight of stairs was a long one, and well lighted by gas, so that to rush it was an impossibility. Suddenly my heart gave a bound and I held my breath, for out of an open door behind our quarry, a figure emerged slowly and noiselessly on to the landing. It was Thorndyke, shoeless, and in his shirt-sleeves.

Slowly and with cat-like stealthiness, he crept across the landing until he was within a yard of the unconscious fugitive,



and still the nasal voice droned on, monotonously counting out the allotted seconds.

"Forty-one, forty-two, forty-three—"

There was a lightning-like movement—a shout—a flash—a bang—a shower of falling plaster, and then the revolver came clattering down the stairs. The inspector and I rushed up, and in a moment the sharp click of the handcuffs told Mr. Percy Haldean that the game was really up.

\*\*\*\*\*

Five minutes later Freddy-boy, half asleep, but wholly cheerful, was borne on Thorndyke's shoulders into the private sitting-room of the Black Horse Hotel. A shriek of joy saluted his entrance, and a shower of maternal kisses brought him to the verge of suffocation. Finally, the impulsive Mrs. Haldean, turning suddenly to Thorndyke, seized both his hands, and for a moment I hoped that she was going to kiss him, too. But he was spared, and I have not yet recovered from the disappointment.

---

### III. — THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AT LARGE

THORNDYKE was not a newspaper reader. He viewed with extreme disfavour all scrappy and miscellaneous forms of literature, which, by presenting a disorderly series of unrelated items of information, tended, as he considered, to destroy the habit of consecutive mental effort.

"It is most important," he once remarked to me, "habitually to pursue a definite train of thought, and to pursue it to a finish, instead of flitting indolently from one uncompleted topic to another, as the newspaper reader is so apt to do. Still, there is no harm in a daily paper—so long as you don't read it."

Accordingly, he patronized a morning paper, and his method of dealing with it was characteristic. The paper was laid on the table after breakfast, together with a blue pencil and a pair of office shears. A preliminary glance through the sheets enabled him to mark with the pencil those paragraphs that were to be read, and these were presently cut out and looked through, after which they were either thrown away or set aside to be pasted in an indexed book.

The whole proceeding occupied, on an average, a quarter of an hour.

On the morning of which I am now speaking he was thus engaged. The pencil had done its work, and the snick of the shears announced the final stage. Presently he paused with a newly-excised cutting between his fingers, and, after glancing at it for a moment, he handed it to me.

"Another art robbery," he remarked. "Mysterious affairs, these—as to motive, I mean. You can't melt down a picture or an ivory carving, and you can't put them on the market as they stand. The very qualities that give them their value make them totally unnegotiable."

"Yet I suppose," said I, "the really inveterate collector—the pottery or stamp maniac, for instance—will buy these contraband goods even though he dare not show them."

"Probably. No doubt the *cupiditas habendi*, the mere desire to possess, is the motive force rather than any intelligent purpose—"

The discussion was at this point interrupted by a knock at the door, and a moment later my colleague admitted two gentlemen. One of these I recognized as a Mr. Marchmont, a solicitor, for whom we had occasionally acted; the other was a stranger—a typical Hebrew of the blonde type—good-looking, faultlessly dressed, carrying a bandbox, and obviously in a state of the most extreme agitation.

"Good-morning to you, gentlemen," said Mr. Marchmont, shaking hands cordially. "I have brought a client of mine to see you, and when I tell you that his name is Solomon Löwe, it will be unnecessary for me to say what our business is."

"Oddly enough," replied Thorndyke, "we were, at the very moment when you knocked, discussing the bearings of his case."

"It is a horrible affair!" burst in Mr. Löwe. "I am distracted! I am ruined! I am in despair!"

He banged the bandbox down on the table, and flinging himself into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

"Come, come," remonstrated Marchmont, "we must be brave, we must be composed. Tell Dr. Thorndyke your story, and let us hear what he thinks of it."

He leaned back in his chair, and looked at his client with that air of patient fortitude that comes to us all so easily when we contemplate the misfortunes of other people.

"You must help us, sir," exclaimed Löwe, starting up again—"you must, indeed, or I shall go mad. But I shall tell you what has happened, and then you must act at once. Spare no effort and no expense. Money is no object—at least, not in reason," he added, with native caution. He sat down once more, and in perfect English, though with a slight German accent, proceeded volubly: "My brother Isaac is probably known to you by name."

Thorndyke nodded.

“He is a great collector, and to some extent a dealer—that is to say, he makes his hobby a profitable hobby.”

“What does he collect?” asked Thorndyke.

“Everything,” replied our visitor, flinging his hands apart with a comprehensive gesture—“everything that is precious and beautiful—pictures, ivories, jewels, watches, objects of art and *vertu*—everything. He is a Jew, and he has that passion for things that are rich and costly that has distinguished our race from the time of my namesake Solomon onwards. His house in Howard Street, Piccadilly, is at once a museum and an art gallery. The rooms are filled with cases of gems, of antique jewellery, of coins and historic relics—some of priceless value—and the walls are covered with paintings, every one of which is a masterpiece. There is a fine collection of ancient weapons and armour, both European and Oriental; rare books, manuscripts, papyri, and valuable antiquities from Egypt, Assyria, Cyprus, and elsewhere. You see, his taste is quite catholic, and his knowledge of rare and curious things is probably greater than that of any other living man. He is never mistaken. No forgery deceives him, and hence the great prices that he obtains; for a work of art purchased from Isaac Löwe is a work certified as genuine beyond all cavil.”

He paused to mop his face with a silk handkerchief, and then, with the same plaintive volubility, continued:

“My brother is unmarried. He lives for his collection, and he lives with it. The house is not a very large one, and the collection takes up most of it; but he keeps a suite of rooms for his own occupation, and has two servants—a man and wife—to look after him. The man, who is a retired police sergeant, acts as caretaker and watchman; the woman as housekeeper and cook, if required, but my brother lives largely at his club. And now I come to this present catastrophe.”

He ran his fingers through his hair, took a deep breath, and continued:

“Yesterday morning Isaac started for Florence by way of Paris, but his route was not certain, and he intended to break his journey at various points as circumstances determined. Before leaving, he put his collection in my charge, and it was arranged that I should occupy his rooms in his absence. Accordingly, I sent my things round and took possession.

“Now, Dr. Thorndyke, I am closely connected with the drama, and it is my custom to spend my evenings at my club, of which most of the members are actors. Consequently, I am rather late in my habits; but last night I was earlier than usual in leaving my club, for I started for my brother’s house before half-past twelve. I felt, as you may suppose, the responsibility of the great charge I had undertaken; and you may, therefore, imagine my horror, my consternation, my despair, when, on letting myself in with my latchkey, I found a police-inspector, a sergeant, and a constable in the hall. There had been a robbery, sir, in my brief absence, and the account that the inspector gave of the affair was briefly this:

“While taking the round of his district, he had noticed an empty hansom proceeding in leisurely fashion along Howard Street. There was nothing remarkable in this, but when, about ten minutes later, he was returning, and met a hansom, which he believed to be the same, proceeding along the same street in the same direction, and at the same easy pace, the circumstance struck him as odd, and he made a note of the number of the cab in his pocket-book. It was 72,863, and the time was 11.35.

“At 11.45 a constable coming up Howard Street noticed a hansom standing opposite the door of my brother’s house, and, while he was looking at it, a man came out of the house carrying something, which he put in the cab. On this the constable quickened his pace, and when the man returned to the house and reappeared carrying what looked like a portmanteau, and closing the door softly behind him, the policeman’s suspicions were aroused, and he hurried forward, hailing the cabman to stop.

“The man put his burden into the cab, and sprang in himself. The cabman lashed his horse, which started off at a gallop, and the policeman broke into a run, blowing his whistle and flashing his lantern on to the cab. He followed it round the two turnings into Albemarle Street, and was just in time to see it turn into Piccadilly, where, of course, it was lost. However, he managed to note the number of the cab, which was 72,863, and he describes the man as short and thick-set, and thinks he was not wearing any hat.

“As he was returning, he met the inspector and the sergeant, who had heard the whistle, and on his report the three officers hurried to the house, where they knocked and rang for some minutes without any result. Being now more than suspicious, they went to the back of the house, through the mews, where, with great difficulty, they managed to force a window and effect an entrance into the house.

“Here their suspicions were soon changed to certainty, for, on reaching the first-floor, they heard strange muffled groans proceeding from one of the rooms, the door of which was locked, though the key had not been removed. They opened the door, and found the caretaker and his wife sitting on the floor, with their backs against the wall. Both were bound hand and foot, and the head of each was enveloped in a green-baize bag; and when the bags were taken off, each was found to be lightly but effectively gagged.

“Each told the same story. The caretaker, fancying he heard a noise, armed himself with a truncheon, and came downstairs to the first-floor, where he found the door of one of the rooms open, and a light burning inside. He stepped on tiptoe to the open door, and was peering in, when he was seized from behind, half suffocated by a pad held over his mouth, pinioned, gagged, and blindfolded with the bag.

“His assailant—whom he never saw—was amazingly strong and skilful, and handled him with perfect ease, although he—the caretaker—is a powerful man, and a good boxer and wrestler. The same thing happened to the wife, who had come down to look for her husband. She walked into the same trap, and was gagged, pinioned, and blindfolded without ever

having seen the robber. So the only description that we have of this villain is that furnished by the constable."

"And the caretaker had no chance of using his truncheon?" said Thorndyke.

"Well, he got in one backhanded blow over his right shoulder, which he thinks caught the burglar in the face; but the fellow caught him by the elbow, and gave his arm such a twist that he dropped the truncheon on the floor."

"Is the robbery a very extensive one?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Löwe, "that is just what we cannot say. But I fear it is. It seems that my brother had quite recently drawn out of his bank four thousand pounds in notes and gold. These little transactions are often carried out in cash rather than by cheque"—here I caught a twinkle in Thorndyke's eye—"and the caretaker says that a few days ago Isaac brought home several parcels, which were put away temporarily in a strong cupboard. He seemed to be very pleased with his new acquisitions, and gave the caretaker to understand that they were of extraordinary rarity and value.

"Now, this cupboard has been cleared out. Not a vestige is left in it but the wrappings of the parcels, so, although nothing else has been touched, it is pretty clear that goods to the value of four thousand pounds have been taken; but when we consider what an excellent buyer my brother is, it becomes highly probable that the actual value of those things is two or three times that amount, or even more. It is a dreadful, dreadful business, and Isaac will hold me responsible for it all."

"Is there no further clue?" asked Thorndyke. "What about the cab, for instance?"

"Oh, the cab," groaned Löwe—"that clue failed. The police must have mistaken the number. They telephoned immediately to all the police stations, and a watch was set, with the result that number 72,863 was stopped as it was going home for the night. But it then turned out that the cab had not been off the rank since eleven o'clock, and the driver had been in the shelter all the time with several other men. But there is a clue; I have it here."

Mr. Löwe's face brightened for once as he reached out for the bandbox.

"The houses in Howard Street," he explained, as he untied the fastening, "have small balconies to the first-floor windows at the back. Now, the thief entered by one of these windows, having climbed up a rain-water pipe to the balcony. It was a gusty night, as you will remember, and this morning, as I was leaving the house, the butler next door called to me and gave me this; he had found it lying in the balcony of his house."

He opened the bandbox with a flourish, and brought forth a rather shabby billycock hat.

"I understand," said he, "that by examining a hat it is possible to deduce from it, not only the bodily characteristics of the wearer, but also his mental and moral qualities, his state of health, his pecuniary position, his past history, and even his domestic relations and the peculiarities of his place of abode. Am I right in this supposition?"

The ghost of a smile flitted across Thorndyke's face as he laid the hat upon the remains of the newspaper. "We must not expect too much," he observed. "Hats, as you know, have a way of changing owners. Your own hat, for instance" (a very spruce, hard felt), "is a new one, I think."

"Got it last week," said Mr. Löwe.

"Exactly. It is an expensive hat, by Lincoln and Bennett, and I see you have judiciously written your name in indelible marking-ink on the lining. Now, a new hat suggests a discarded predecessor. What do you do with your old hats?"

"My man has them, but they don't fit him. I suppose he sells them or gives them away."

"Very well. Now, a good hat like yours has a long life, and remains serviceable long after it has become shabby; and the probability is that many of your hats pass from owner to owner; from you to the shabby-genteel, and from them to the shabby ungentleel. And it is a fair assumption that there are, at this moment, an appreciable number of tramps and casuals wearing hats by Lincoln and Bennett, marked in indelible ink with the name S. Löwe; and anyone who should examine those hats, as you suggest, might draw some very misleading deductions as to the personal habits of S. Löwe."

Mr. Marchmont chuckled audibly, and then, remembering the gravity of the occasion, suddenly became portentously solemn.

"So you think that the hat is of no use, after all?" said Mr. Löwe, in a tone of deep disappointment.

"I won't say that," replied Thorndyke. "We may learn something from it. Leave it with me, at any rate; but you must let the police know that I have it. They will want to see it, of course."

"And you will try to get those things, won't you?" pleaded Löwe.

"I will think over the case. But you understand, or Mr. Marchmont does, that this is hardly in my province. I am a medical jurist, and this is not a medico-legal case."

"Just what I told him," said Marchmont. "But you will do me a great kindness if you will look into the matter. Make it a medico-legal case," he added persuasively.

Thorndyke repeated his promise, and the two men took their departure.

For some time after they had left, my colleague remained silent, regarding the hat with a quizzical smile. "It is like a game of forfeits," he remarked at length, "and we have to find the owner of 'this very pretty thing.'" He lifted it with a pair of forceps into a better light, and began to look at it more closely.

"Perhaps," said he, "we have done Mr. Löwe an injustice, after all. This is certainly a very remarkable hat."

"It is as round as a basin," I exclaimed. "Why, the fellow's head must have been turned in a lathe!"

Thorndyke laughed. "The point," said he, "is this. This is a hard hat, and so must have fitted fairly, or it could not have been worn; and it was a cheap hat, and so was not made to measure. But a man with a head that shape has got to come to a clear understanding with his hat. No ordinary hat would go on at all.

"Now, you see what he has done—no doubt on the advice of some friendly hatter. He has bought a hat of a suitable size, and he has made it hot—probably steamed it. Then he has jammed it, while still hot and soft, on to his head, and allowed it to cool and set before removing it. That is evident from the distortion of the brim. The important corollary is, that this hat fits his head exactly—is, in fact, a perfect mould of it; and this fact, together with the cheap quality of the hat, furnishes the further corollary that it has probably only had a single owner.

"And now let us turn it over and look at the outside. You notice at once the absence of old dust. Allowing for the circumstance that it had been out all night, it is decidedly clean. Its owner has been in the habit of brushing it, and is therefore presumably a decent, orderly man. But if you look at it in a good light, you see a kind of bloom on the felt, and through this lens you can make out particles of a fine white powder which has worked into the surface."

He handed me his lens, through which I could distinctly see the particles to which he referred.

"Then," he continued, "under the curl of the brim and in the folds of the hatband, where the brush has not been able to reach it, the powder has collected quite thickly, and we can see that it is a very fine powder, and very white, like flour. What do you make of that?"

"I should say that it is connected with some industry. He may be engaged in some factory or works, or, at any rate, may live near a factory, and have to pass it frequently."

"Yes; and I think we can distinguish between the two possibilities. For, if he only passes the factory, the dust will be on the outside of the hat only; the inside will be protected by his head. But if he is engaged in the works, the dust will be inside, too, as the hat will hang on a peg in the dust-laden atmosphere, and his head will also be powdered, and so convey the dust to the inside."

He turned the hat over once more, and as I brought the powerful lens to bear upon the dark lining, I could clearly distinguish a number of white particles in the interstices of the fabric.

"The powder is on the inside, too," I said.

He took the lens from me, and, having verified my statement, proceeded with the examination. "You notice," he said, "that the leather head-lining is stained with grease, and this staining is more pronounced at the sides and back. His hair, therefore, is naturally greasy, or he greases it artificially; for if the staining were caused by perspiration, it would be most marked opposite the forehead."

He peered anxiously into the interior of the hat, and eventually turned down the head-lining; and immediately there broke out upon his face a gleam of satisfaction.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "This is a stroke of luck. I was afraid our neat and orderly friend had defeated us with his brush. Pass me the small dissecting forceps, Jervis."

I handed him the instrument, and he proceeded to pick out daintily from the space behind the head-lining some half a dozen short pieces of hair, which he laid, with infinite tenderness, on a sheet of white paper.

"There are several more on the other side," I said, pointing them out to him.

"Yes, but we must leave some for the police," he answered, with a smile. "They must have the same chance as ourselves, you know."

"But surely," I said, as I bent down over the paper, "these are pieces of horsehair!"

"I think not," he replied; "but the microscope will show. At any rate, this is the kind of hair I should expect to find with a head of that shape."

"Well, it is extraordinarily coarse," said I, "and two of the hairs are nearly white."

"Yes; black hairs beginning to turn grey. And now, as our preliminary survey has given such encouraging results, we will proceed to more exact methods; and we must waste no time, for we shall have the police here presently to rob us of our treasure."

He folded up carefully the paper containing the hairs, and taking the hat in both hands, as though it were some sacred vessel, ascended with me to the laboratory on the next floor.

"Now, Polton," he said to his laboratory assistant, "we have here a specimen for examination, and time is precious. First of all, we want your patent dust-extractor."

The little man bustled to a cupboard and brought forth a singular appliance, of his own manufacture, somewhat like a miniature vacuum cleaner. It had been made from a bicycle foot-pump, by reversing the piston-valve, and was fitted with a glass nozzle and a small detachable glass receiver for collecting the dust, at the end of a flexible metal tube.

"We will sample the dust from the outside first," said Thorndyke, laying the hat upon the work-bench. "Are you ready, Polton?"

The assistant slipped his foot into the stirrup of the pump and worked the handle vigorously, while Thorndyke drew the glass nozzle slowly along the hat-brim under the curled edge. And as the nozzle passed along, the white coating vanished as if by magic, leaving the felt absolutely clean and black, and simultaneously the glass receiver became clouded over with a white deposit.

"We will leave the other side for the police," said Thorndyke, and as Polton ceased pumping he detached the receiver, and laid it on a sheet of paper, on which he wrote in pencil, "Outside," and covered it with a small bell-glass. A fresh receiver having been fitted on, the nozzle was now drawn over the silk lining of the hat, and then through the space behind the leather head-lining on one side; and now the dust that collected in the receiver was much of the usual grey colour and fluffy texture, and included two more hairs.

"And now," said Thorndyke, when the second receiver had been detached and set aside, "we want a mould of the inside of the hat, and we must make it by the quickest method; there is no time to make a paper mould. It is a most astonishing head," he added, reaching down from a nail a pair of large callipers, which he applied to the inside of the hat; "six inches and nine-tenths long by six and six-tenths broad, which gives us"—he made a rapid calculation on a scrap of paper—"the extraordinarily high cephalic index of 95.6."

Polton now took possession of the hat, and, having stuck a band of wet tissue-paper round the inside, mixed a small bowl of plaster-of-Paris, and very dexterously ran a stream of the thick liquid on to the tissue-paper, where it quickly solidified. A second and third application resulted in a broad ring of solid plaster an inch thick, forming a perfect mould of the inside of the hat, and in a few minutes the slight contraction of the plaster in setting rendered the mould sufficiently loose to allow of its being slipped out on to a board to dry.

We were none too soon, for even as Polton was removing the mould, the electric bell, which I had switched on to the laboratory, announced a visitor, and when I went down I found a police-sergeant waiting with a note from Superintendent Miller, requesting the immediate transfer of the hat.

"The next thing to be done," said Thorndyke, when the sergeant had departed with the bandbox, "is to measure the thickness of the hairs, and make a transverse section of one, and examine the dust. The section we will leave to Polton—as time is an object, Polton, you had better imbed the hair in thick gum and freeze it hard on the microtome, and be very careful to cut the section at right angles to the length of the hair—meanwhile, we will get to work with the microscope."

The hairs proved on measurement to have the surprisingly large diameter of  $1/135$  of an inch—fully double that of ordinary hairs, although they were unquestionably human. As to the white dust, it presented a problem that even Thorndyke was unable to solve. The application of reagents showed it to be carbonate of lime, but its source for a time remained a mystery.

"The larger particles," said Thorndyke, with his eye applied to the microscope, "appear to be transparent, crystalline, and distinctly laminated in structure. It is not chalk, it is not whiting, it is not any kind of cement. What can it be?"

"Could it be any kind of shell?" I suggested. "For instance—"

"Of course!" he exclaimed, starting up; "you have hit it, Jervis, as you always do. It must be mother-of-pearl. Polton, give me a pearl shirt-button out of your oddments box."

The button was duly produced by the thrifty Polton, dropped into an agate mortar, and speedily reduced to powder, a tiny pinch of which Thorndyke placed under the microscope.

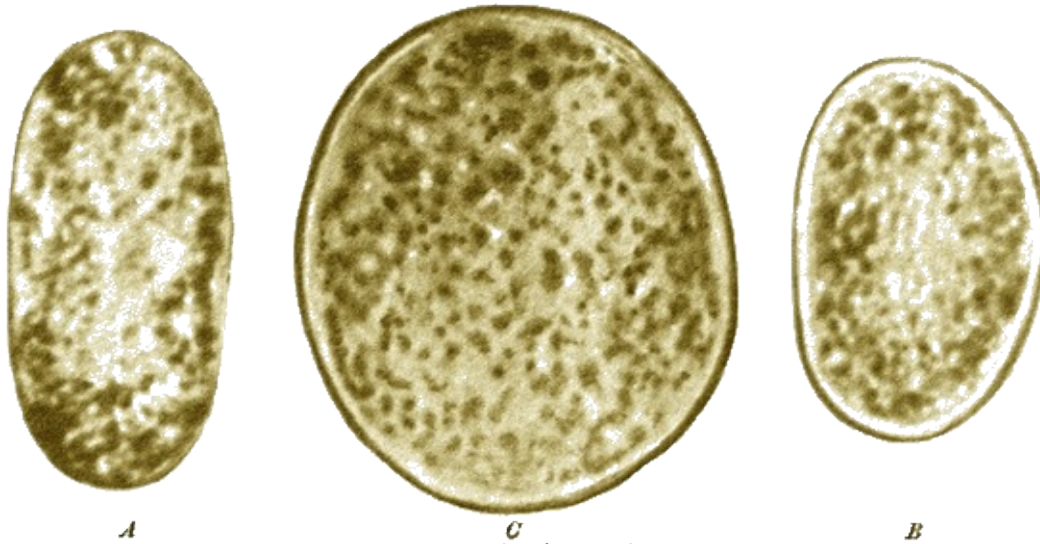
"This powder," said he, "is, naturally, much coarser than our specimen, but the identity of character is unmistakable. Jervis, you are a treasure. Just look at it."

I glanced down the microscope, and then pulled out my watch. "Yes," I said, "there is no doubt about it, I think; but I must be off. Anstey urged me to be in court by 11.30 at the latest."

With infinite reluctance I collected my notes and papers and departed, leaving Thorndyke diligently copying addresses out of the Post Office Directory.

My business at the court detained me the whole of the day, and it was near upon dinner-time when I reached our chambers. Thorndyke had not yet come in, but he arrived half an hour later, tired and hungry, and not very communicative.

"What have I done?" he repeated, in answer to my inquiries. "I have walked miles of dirty pavement, and I have visited every pearl-shell cutter's in London, with one exception, and I have not found what I was looking for. The one mother-of-pearl factory that remains, however, is the most likely, and I propose to look in there to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, we have completed our data, with Polton's assistance. Here is a tracing of our friend's skull taken from the mould; you see it is an extreme type of brachycephalic skull, and markedly unsymmetrical. Here is a transverse section of his hair, which is quite circular—unlike yours or mine, which would be oval. We have the mother-of-pearl dust from the outside of the hat, and from the inside similar dust mixed with various fibres and a few granules of rice starch. Those are our data."



*Transverse Sections of Human Hair:  
A, of a Negro; B, of an Englishman; C, of the Burglar. All magnified 600 diameters.*

“Supposing the hat should not be that of the burglar after all?” I suggested.

“That would be annoying. But I think it is his, and I think I can guess at the nature of the art treasures that were stolen.”

“And you don’t intend to enlighten me?”

“My dear fellow,” he replied, “you have all the data. Enlighten yourself by the exercise of your own brilliant faculties. Don’t give way to mental indolence.”

I endeavoured, from the facts in my possession, to construct the personality of the mysterious burglar, and failed utterly; nor was I more successful in my endeavour to guess at the nature of the stolen property; and it was not until the following morning, when we had set out on our quest and were approaching Limehouse, that Thorndyke would revert to the subject.

“We are now,” he said, “going to the factory of Badcomb and Martin, shell importers and cutters, in the West India Dock Road. If I don’t find my man there, I shall hand the facts over to the police, and waste no more time over the case.”

“What is your man like?” I asked.

“I am looking for an elderly Japanese, wearing a new hat or, more probably, a cap, and having a bruise on his right cheek or temple. I am also looking for a cab-yard; but here we are at the works, and as it is now close on the dinner-hour, we will wait and see the hands come out before making any inquiries.”

We walked slowly past the tall, blank-faced building, and were just turning to re-pass it when a steam whistle sounded, a wicket opened in the main gate, and a stream of workmen—each powdered with white, like a miller—emerged into the street. We halted to watch the men as they came out, one by one, through the wicket, and turned to the right or left towards their homes or some adjacent coffee-shop; but none of them answered to the description that my friend had given.

The outcoming stream grew thinner, and at length ceased; the wicket was shut with a bang, and once more Thorndyke’s quest appeared to have failed.

“Is that all of them, I wonder?” he said, with a shade of disappointment in his tone; but even as he spoke the wicket opened again, and a leg protruded. The leg was followed by a back and a curious globular head, covered with iron-grey hair, and surmounted by a cloth cap, the whole appertaining to a short, very thick-set man, who remained thus, evidently talking to someone inside.

Suddenly he turned his head to look across the street; and immediately I recognized, by the pallid yellow complexion and narrow eye-slits, the physiognomy of a typical Japanese. The man remained talking for nearly another minute; then, drawing out his other leg, he turned towards us; and now I perceived that the right side of his face, over the prominent cheekbone, was discoloured as though by a severe bruise.

“Ha!” said Thorndyke, turning round sharply as the man approached, “either this is our man or it is an incredible coincidence.” He walked away at a moderate pace, allowing the Japanese to overtake us slowly, and when the man had at length passed us, he increased his speed somewhat, so as to maintain the distance.

Our friend stepped along briskly, and presently turned up a side street, whither we followed at a respectful distance, Thorndyke holding open his pocket-book, and appearing to engage me in an earnest discussion, but keeping a sharp eye on his quarry.

“There he goes!” said my colleague, as the man suddenly disappeared—“the house with the green window-sashes. That

will be number thirteen.”

It was; and, having verified the fact, we passed on, and took the next turning that would lead us back to the main road.

Some twenty minutes later, as we were strolling past the door of a coffee-shop, a man came out, and began to fill his pipe with an air of leisurely satisfaction. His hat and clothes were powdered with white like those of the workmen whom we had seen come out of the factory. Thorndyke accosted him.

“Is that a flour-mill up the road there?”

“No, sir; pearl-shell. I work there myself.”

“Pearl-shell, eh?” said Thorndyke. “I suppose that will be an industry that will tend to attract the aliens. Do you find it so?”

“No, sir; not at all. The work’s too hard. We’ve only got one foreigner in the place, and he ain’t an alien—he’s a Jap.”

“A Jap!” exclaimed Thorndyke. “Really. Now, I wonder if that would chance to be our old friend Kotei—you remember Kotei?” he added, turning to me.

“No, sir; this man’s name is Futashima. There was another Jap in the works, a chap named Itu, a pal of Futashima’s, but he’s left.”

“Ah! I don’t know either of them. By the way, usen’t there to be a cab-yard just about here?”

“There’s a yard up Rankin Street where they keep vans and one or two cabs. That chap Itu works there now. Taken to horseflesh. Drives a van sometimes. Queer start for a Jap.”

“Very.” Thorndyke thanked the man for his information, and we sauntered on towards Rankin Street. The yard was at this time nearly deserted, being occupied only by an ancient and crazy four-wheeler and a very shabby hansom.

“Curious old houses, these that back on to the yard,” said Thorndyke, strolling into the enclosure. “That timber gable, now,” pointing to a house, from a window of which a man was watching us suspiciously, “is quite an interesting survival.”

“What’s your business, mister?” demanded the man in a gruff tone.

“We are just having a look at these quaint old houses,” replied Thorndyke, edging towards the back of the hansom, and opening his pocket-book, as though to make a sketch.

“Well, you can see ‘em from outside,” said the man.

“So we can,” said Thorndyke suavely, “but not so well, you know.”

At this moment the pocket-book slipped from his hand and fell, scattering a number of loose papers about the ground under the hansom, and our friend at the window laughed joyously.

“No hurry,” murmured Thorndyke, as I stooped to help him to gather up the papers—which he did in the most surprisingly slow and clumsy manner. “It is fortunate that the ground is dry.” He stood up with the rescued papers in his hand, and, having scribbled down a brief note, slipped the book in his pocket.

“Now you’d better mizzle,” observed the man at the window.

“Thank you,” replied Thorndyke, “I think we had;” and, with a pleasant nod at the custodian, he proceeded to adopt the hospitable suggestion.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Mr. Marchmont has been here, sir, with Inspector Badger and another gentleman,” said Polton, as we entered our chambers. “They said they would call again about five.”

“Then,” replied Thorndyke, “as it is now a quarter to five, there is just time for us to have a wash while you get the tea ready. The particles that float in the atmosphere of Limehouse are not all mother-of-pearl.”



Our visitors arrived punctually, the third gentleman being, as we had supposed, Mr. Solomon Löwe. Inspector Badger I had not seen before, and he now impressed me as showing a tendency to invert the significance of his own name by endeavouring to “draw” Thorndyke; in which, however, he was not brilliantly successful.

“I hope you are not going to disappoint Mr. Löwe, sir,” he commenced facetiously. “You have had a good look at that hat—we saw your marks on it—and he expects that you will be able to point us out the man, name and address all complete.” He grinned patronizingly at our unfortunate client, who was looking even more haggard and worn than he had been on the previous morning.

“Have you—have you made any—discovery?” Mr Löwe asked with pathetic eagerness.

“We examined the hat very carefully, and I think we have established a few facts of some interest.”

“Did your examination of the hat furnish any information as to the nature of the stolen property, sir?” inquired the humorous inspector.

Thorndyke turned to the officer with a face as expressionless as a wooden mask.

“We thought it possible,” said he, “that it might consist of works of Japanese art, such as netsukes, paintings, and such like.”

Mr. Löwe uttered an exclamation of delighted astonishment, and the facetiousness faded rather suddenly from the inspector’s countenance.

“I don’t know how you can have found out,” said he. “We have only known it half an hour ourselves, and the wire came direct from Florence to Scotland Yard.”

“Perhaps you can describe the thief to us,” said Mr. Löwe, in the same eager tone.

“I dare say the inspector can do that,” replied Thorndyke.

“Yes, I think so,” replied the officer. “He is a short strong man, with a dark complexion and hair turning grey. He has a very round head, and he is probably a workman engaged at some whiting or cement works. That is all we know; if you can tell us any more, sir, we shall be very glad to hear it.”

“I can only offer a few suggestions,” said Thorndyke, “but perhaps you may find them useful. For instance, at 13, Birket Street, Limehouse, there is living a Japanese gentleman named Futashima, who works at Badcomb and Martin’s mother-of-pearl factory. I think that if you were to call on him, and let him try on the hat that you have, it would probably fit him.”

The inspector scribbled ravenously in his notebook, and Mr. Marchmont—an old admirer of Thorndyke’s—leaned back in his chair, chuckling softly and rubbing his hands.

“Then,” continued my colleague, “there is in Rankin Street, Limehouse, a cab-yard, where another Japanese gentleman named Itu is employed. You might find out where Itu was the night before last; and if you should chance to see a hansom cab there—number 22,481—have a good look at it. In the frame of the number-plate you will find six small holes. Those holes may have held brads, and the brads may have held a false number card. At any rate, you might ascertain where that cab was at 11.30 the night before last. That is all I have to suggest.”

Mr. Löwe leaped from his chair. “Let us go—now—at once—there is no time to be lost. A thousand thanks to you, doctor—a thousand million thanks. Come!”

He seized the inspector by the arm and forcibly dragged him towards the door, and a few moments later we heard the footsteps of our visitors clattering down the stairs.

“It was not worth while to enter into explanations with them,” said Thorndyke, as the footsteps died away—“nor perhaps with you?”

“On the contrary,” I replied, “I am waiting to be fully enlightened.”

“Well, then, my inferences in this case were perfectly simple ones, drawn from well-known anthropological facts. The human race, as you know, is roughly divided into three groups—the black, the white, and the yellow races. But apart from the variable quality of colour, these races have certain fixed characteristics associated especially with the shape of the skull, of the eye-sockets, and the hair.

“Thus in the black races the skull is long and narrow, the eye-sockets are long and narrow, and the hair is flat and ribbon-like, and usually coiled up like a watch-spring. In the white races the skull is oval, the eye-sockets are oval, and the hair is slightly flattened or oval in section, and tends to be wavy; while in the yellow or Mongol races, the skull is short and round, the eye-sockets are short and round, and the hair is straight and circular in section. So that we have, in the black races, long skull, long orbits, flat hair; in the white races, oval skull, oval orbits, oval hair; and in the yellow races, round skull, round orbits, round hair.

“Now, in this case we had to deal with a very short round skull. But you cannot argue from races to individuals; there are many short-skulled Englishmen. But when I found, associated with that skull, hairs which were circular in section, it became practically certain that the individual was a Mongol of some kind. The mother-of-pearl dust and the granules of rice starch from the inside of the hat favoured this view, for the pearl-shell industry is specially connected with China and Japan, while starch granules from the hat of an Englishman would probably be wheat starch.

“Then as to the hair: it was, as I mentioned to you, circular in section, and of very large diameter. Now, I have examined many thousands of hairs, and the thickest that I have ever seen came from the heads of Japanese; but the hairs from this hat were as thick as any of them. But the hypothesis that the burglar was a Japanese received confirmation in various ways. Thus, he was short, though strong and active, and the Japanese are the shortest of the Mongol races, and very strong and active.

“Then his remarkable skill in handling the powerful caretaker—a retired police-sergeant—suggested the Japanese art of ju-jitsu, while the nature of the robbery was consistent with the value set by the Japanese on works of art. Finally, the fact that only a particular collection was taken, suggested a special, and probably national, character in the things stolen, while their portability—you will remember that goods of the value of from eight to twelve thousand pounds were taken away in two hand-packages—was much more consistent with Japanese than Chinese works, of which the latter tend rather to be bulky and ponderous. Still, it was nothing but a bare hypothesis until we had seen Futashima—and, indeed, is no more now. I may, after all, be entirely mistaken.”

He was not, however; and at this moment there reposes in my drawing-room an ancient netsuke, which came as a thank-offering from Mr. Isaac Löwe on the recovery of the booty from a back room in No. 13, Birket Street, Limehouse. The treasure, of course, was given in the first place to Thorndyke, but transferred by him to my wife on the pretence that but for my suggestion of shell-dust the robber would never have been traced. Which is, on the face of it, preposterous.

---

## IV. — THE BLUE SEQUIN

*First published in Pearson's Magazine, December 1908*

THORNDYKE stood looking up and down the platform with anxiety that increased as the time drew near for the departure of the train.

"This is very unfortunate," he said, reluctantly stepping into an empty smoking compartment as the guard executed a flourish with his green flag. "I am afraid we have missed our friend." He closed the door, and, as the train began to move, thrust his head out of the window.

"Now I wonder if that will be he," he continued. "If so, he has caught the train by the skin of his teeth, and is now in one of the rear compartments."

The subject of Thorndyke's speculations was Mr. Edward Stopford, of the firm of Stopford and Myers, of Portugal Street, solicitors, and his connection with us at present arose out of a telegram that had reached our chambers on the preceding evening. It was reply-paid, and ran thus:

"Can you come here to-morrow to direct defence? Important case. All costs undertaken by us.—STOPFORD AND MYERS."

Thorndyke's reply had been in the affirmative, and early on this present morning a further telegram—evidently posted overnight—had been delivered:

"Shall leave for Woldhurst by 8.25 from Charing Cross. Will call for you if possible.—EDWARD STOPFORD."

He had not called, however, and, since he was unknown personally to us both, we could not judge whether or not he had been among the passengers on the platform.

"It is most unfortunate," Thorndyke repeated, "for it deprives us of that preliminary consideration of the case which is so invaluable." He filled his pipe thoughtfully, and, having made a fruitless inspection of the platform at London Bridge, took up the paper that he had bought at the bookstall, and began to turn over the leaves, running his eye quickly down the columns, unmindful of the journalistic baits in paragraph or article.

"It is a great disadvantage," he observed, while still glancing through the paper, "to come plump into an inquiry without preparation—to be confronted with the details before one has a chance of considering the case in general terms. For instance—"

He paused, leaving the sentence unfinished, and as I looked up inquiringly I saw that he had turned over another page, and was now reading attentively.

"This looks like our case, Jervis," he said presently, handing me the paper and indicating a paragraph at the top of the page. It was quite brief, and was headed "Terrible Murder in Kent," the account being as follows:

"A shocking crime was discovered yesterday morning at the little town of Woldhurst, which lies on the branch line from Halbury Junction. The discovery was made by a porter who was inspecting the carriages of the train which had just come in. On opening the door of a first-class compartment, he was horrified to find the body of a fashionably-dressed woman stretched upon the floor. Medical aid was immediately summoned, and on the arrival of the divisional surgeon, Dr. Morton, it was ascertained that the woman had not been dead more than a few minutes.

“The state of the corpse leaves no doubt that a murder of a most brutal kind has been perpetrated, the cause of death being a penetrating wound of the head, inflicted with some pointed implement, which must have been used with terrible violence, since it has perforated the skull and entered the brain. That robbery was not the motive of the crime is made clear by the fact that an expensively fitted dressing-bag was found on the rack, and that the dead woman’s jewellery, including several valuable diamond rings, was untouched. It is rumoured that an arrest has been made by the local police.”

“A gruesome affair,” I remarked, as I handed back the paper, “but the report does not give us much information.”

“It does not,” Thorndyke agreed, “and yet it gives us something to consider. Here is a perforating wound of the skull, inflicted with some pointed implement—that is, assuming that it is not a bullet wound. Now, what kind of implement would be capable of inflicting such an injury? How would such an implement be used in the confined space of a railway-carriage, and what sort of person would be in possession of such an implement? These are preliminary questions that are worth considering, and I commend them to you, together with the further problems of the possible motive—excluding robbery—and any circumstances other than murder which might account for the injury.”

“The choice of suitable implements is not very great,” I observed.

“It is very limited, and most of them, such as a plasterer’s pick or a geological hammer, are associated with certain definite occupations. You have a notebook?”

I had, and, accepting the hint, I produced it and pursued my further reflections in silence, while my companion, with his notebook also on his knee, gazed steadily out of the window. And thus he remained, wrapped in thought, jotting down an entry now and again in his book, until the train slowed down at Halbury Junction, where we had to change on to a branch line.

As we stepped out, I noticed a well-dressed man hurrying up the platform from the rear and eagerly scanning the faces of the few passengers who had alighted. Soon he espied us, and, approaching quickly, asked, as he looked from one of us to the other:

“Dr. Thorndyke?”

“Yes,” replied my colleague, adding: “And you, I presume, are Mr. Edward Stopford?”

The solicitor bowed. “This is a dreadful affair,” he said, in an agitated manner. “I see you have the paper. A most shocking affair. I am immensely relieved to find you here. Nearly missed the train, and feared I should miss you.”

“There appears to have been an arrest,” Thorndyke began.

“Yes—my brother. Terrible business. Let us walk up the platform; our train won’t start for a quarter of an hour yet.”

We deposited our joint Gladstone and Thorndyke’s travelling-case in an empty first-class compartment, and then, with the solicitor between us, strolled up to the unfrequented end of the platform.

“My brother’s position,” said Mr. Stopford, “fills me with dismay—but let me give you the facts in order, and you shall judge for yourself. This poor creature who has been murdered so brutally was a Miss Edith Grant. She was formerly an artist’s model, and as such was a good deal employed by my brother, who is a painter—Harold Stopford, you know, A.R.A. now—”

“I know his work very well, and charming work it is.”

“I think so, too. Well, in those days he was quite a youngster—about twenty—and he became very intimate with Miss Grant, in quite an innocent way, though not very discreet; but she was a nice respectable girl, as most English models are, and no one thought any harm. However, a good many letters passed between them, and some little presents, amongst which was a beaded chain carrying a locket, and in this he was fool enough to put his portrait and the inscription, ‘Edith, from Harold.’

“Later on Miss Grant, who had a rather good voice, went on the stage, in the comic opera line, and, in consequence, her habits and associates changed somewhat; and, as Harold had meanwhile become engaged, he was naturally anxious to get his letters back, and especially to exchange the locket for some less compromising gift. The letters she eventually sent him, but refused absolutely to part with the locket.

“Now, for the last month Harold has been staying at Halbury, making sketching excursions into the surrounding country, and yesterday morning he took the train to Shinglehurst, the third station from here, and the one before Woldhurst.

“On the platform here he met Miss Grant, who had come down from London, and was going on to Worthing. They entered the branch train together, having a first-class compartment to themselves. It seems she was wearing his locket at the time, and he made another appeal to her to make an exchange, which she refused, as before. The discussion appears to have become rather heated and angry on both sides, for the guard and a porter at Munsden both noticed that they seemed to be quarrelling; but the upshot of the affair was that the lady snapped the chain, and tossed it together with the locket to my brother, and they parted quite amiably at Shinglehurst, where Harold got out. He was then carrying his full sketching kit, including a large holland umbrella, the lower joint of which is an ash staff fitted with a powerful steel spike for driving into the ground.

“It was about half-past ten when he got out at Shinglehurst; by eleven he had reached his pitch and got to work, and he painted steadily for three hours. Then he packed up his traps, and was just starting on his way back to the station, when he was met by the police and arrested.

“And now, observe the accumulation of circumstantial evidence against him. He was the last person seen in company with the murdered woman—for no one seems to have seen her after they left Munsden; he appeared to be quarrelling with her when she was last seen alive, he had a reason for possibly wishing for her death, he was provided with an implement—a spiked staff—capable of inflicting the injury which caused her death, and, when he was searched, there was found in his possession the locket and broken chain, apparently removed from her person with violence.

“Against all this is, of course, his known character—he is the gentlest and most amiable of men—and his subsequent conduct—imbecile to the last degree if he had been guilty; but, as a lawyer, I can’t help seeing that appearances are almost hopelessly against him.”

“We won’t say ‘hopelessly,’” replied Thorndyke, as we took our places in the carriage, “though I expect the police are pretty cocksure. When does the inquest open?”

“To-day at four. I have obtained an order from the coroner for you to examine the body and be present at the *post-mortem*.”

“Do you happen to know the exact position of the wound?”

"Yes; it is a little above and behind the left ear—a horrible round hole, with a ragged cut or tear running from it to the side of the forehead."

"And how was the body lying?"

"Right along the floor, with the feet close to the off-side door."

"Was the wound on the head the only one?"

"No; there was a long cut or bruise on the right cheek—a contused wound the police surgeon called it, which he believes to have been inflicted with a heavy and rather blunt weapon. I have not heard of any other wounds or bruises."

"Did anyone enter the train yesterday at Shinglehurst?" Thorndyke asked.

"No one entered the train after it left Halbury."

Thorndyke considered these statements in silence, and presently fell into a brown study, from which he roused only as the train moved out of Shinglehurst station.

"It would be about here that the murder was committed," said Mr. Stopford; "at least, between here and Woldhurst."

Thorndyke nodded rather abstractedly, being engaged at the moment in observing with great attention the objects that were visible from the windows.

"I notice," he remarked presently, "a number of chips scattered about between the rails, and some of the chair-wedges look new. Have there been any platelayers at work lately?"

"Yes," answered Stopford, "they are on the line now, I believe—at least, I saw a gang working near Woldhurst yesterday, and they are said to have set a rick on fire; I saw it smoking when I came down."

"Indeed; and this middle line of rails is, I suppose, a sort of siding?"

"Yes; they shunt the goods trains and empty trucks on to it. There are the remains of the rick—still smouldering, you see."

Thorndyke gazed absently at the blackened heap until an empty cattle-truck on the middle track hid it from view. This was succeeded by a line of goods-waggons, and these by a passenger coach, one compartment of which—a first-class—was closed up and sealed. The train now began to slow down rather suddenly, and a couple of minutes later we brought up in Woldhurst station.

It was evident that rumours of Thorndyke's advent had preceded us, for the entire staff—two porters, an inspector, and the station-master—were waiting expectantly on the platform, and the latter came forward, regardless of his dignity, to help us with our luggage.

"Do you think I could see the carriage?" Thorndyke asked the solicitor.

"Not the inside, sir," said the station-master, on being appealed to. "The police have sealed it up. You would have to ask the inspector."

"Well, I can have a look at the outside, I suppose?" said Thorndyke, and to this the station-master readily agreed, and offered to accompany us.

"What other first-class passengers were there?" Thorndyke asked.

"None, sir. There was only one first-class coach, and the deceased was the only person in it. It has given us all a dreadful turn, this affair has," he continued, as we set off up the line. "I was on the platform when the train came in. We were watching a rick that was burning up the line, and a rare blaze it made, too; and I was just saying that we should have to move the cattle-truck that was on the mid-track, because, you see, sir, the smoke and sparks were blowing across, and I thought it would frighten the poor beasts. And Mr. Felton he don't like his beasts handled roughly. He says it spoils the meat."

"No doubt he is right," said Thorndyke. "But now, tell me, do you think it is possible for any person to board or leave the train on the off-side unobserved? Could a man, for instance, enter a compartment on the off-side at one station and drop off as the train was slowing down at the next, without being seen?"

"I doubt it," replied the station-master. "Still, I wouldn't say it is impossible."

"Thank you. Oh, and there's another question. You have a gang of men at work on the line, I see. Now, do those men belong to the district?"

"No, sir; they are strangers, every one, and pretty rough diamonds some of 'em are. But I shouldn't say there was any real harm in 'em. If you was suspecting any of 'em of being mixed up in this—"

"I am not," interrupted Thorndyke rather shortly. "I suspect nobody; but I wish to get all the facts of the case at the outset."

"Naturally, sir," replied the abashed official; and we pursued our way in silence.

"Do you remember, by the way," said Thorndyke, as we approached the empty coach, "whether the off-side door of the compartment was closed and locked when the body was discovered?"

"It was closed, sir, but not locked. Why, sir, did you think—?"

"Nothing, nothing. The sealed compartment is the one, of course?"

Without waiting for a reply, he commenced his survey of the coach, while I gently restrained our two companions from shadowing him, as they were disposed to do. The off-side footboard occupied his attention specially, and when he had scrutinized minutely the part opposite the fatal compartment, he walked slowly from end to end with his eyes but a few inches from its surface, as though he was searching for something.

Near what had been the rear end he stopped, and drew from his pocket a piece of paper; then, with a moistened fingertip he picked up from the footboard some evidently minute object, which he carefully transferred to the paper, folding the latter and placing it in his pocket-book.

He next mounted the footboard, and, having peered in through the window of the sealed compartment, produced from his pocket a small insufflator or powder-blower, with which he blew a stream of impalpable smoke-like powder on to the edges of the middle window, bestowing the closest attention on the irregular dusty patches in which it settled, and even measuring one on the jamb of the window with a pocket-rule. At length he stepped down, and, having carefully looked over the near-side footboard, announced that he had finished for the present.

As we were returning down the line, we passed a working man, who seemed to be viewing the chairs and sleepers with more than casual interest.

"That, I suppose, is one of the plate-layers?" Thorndyke suggested to the station-master.

"Yes, the foreman of the gang," was the reply.

"I'll just step back and have a word with him, if you will walk on slowly." And my colleague turned back briskly and overtook the man, with whom he remained in conversation for some minutes.

"I think I see the police inspector on the platform," remarked Thorndyke, as we approached the station.

"Yes, there he is," said our guide. "Come down to see what you are after, sir, I expect." Which was doubtless the case, although the officer professed to be there by the merest chance.

"You would like to see the weapon, sir, I suppose?" he remarked, when he had introduced himself.

"The umbrella-spike," Thorndyke corrected. "Yes, if I may. We are going to the mortuary now."

"Then you'll pass the station on the way; so, if you care to look in, I will walk up with you."

This proposition being agreed to, we all proceeded to the police-station, including the station-master, who was on the very tiptoe of curiosity.

"There you are, sir," said the inspector, unlocking his office, and ushering us in. "Don't say we haven't given every facility to the defence. There are all the effects of the accused, including the very weapon the deed was done with."

"Come, come," protested Thorndyke; "we mustn't be premature." He took the stout ash staff from the officer, and, having examined the formidable spike through a lens, drew from his pocket a steel calliper-gauge, with which he carefully measured the diameter of the spike, and the staff to which it was fixed. "And now," he said, when he had made a note of the measurements in his book, "we will look at the colour-box and the sketch. Ha! a very orderly man, your brother. Mr. Stopford. Tubes all in their places, palette-knives wiped clean, palette cleaned off and rubbed bright, brushes wiped—they ought to be washed before they stiffen—all this is very significant." He unstrapped the sketch from the blank canvas to which it was pinned, and, standing it on a chair in a good light, stepped back to look at it.

"And you tell me that that is only three hours' work!" he exclaimed, looking at the lawyer. "It is really a marvellous achievement."

"My brother is a very rapid worker," replied Stopford dejectedly.

"Yes, but this is not only amazingly rapid; it is in his very happiest vein—full of spirit and feeling. But we mustn't stay to look at it longer." He replaced the canvas on its pins, and having glanced at the locket and some other articles that lay in a drawer, thanked the inspector for his courtesy and withdrew.

"That sketch and the colour-box appear very suggestive to me," he remarked, as we walked up the street.

"To me also," said Stopford gloomily, "for they are under lock and key, like their owner, poor old fellow."

He sighed heavily, and we walked on in silence.

The mortuary-keeper had evidently heard of our arrival, for he was waiting at the door with the key in his hand, and, on being shown the coroner's order, unlocked the door, and we entered together; but, after a momentary glance at the ghostly, shrouded figure lying upon the slate table, Stopford turned pale and retreated, saying that he would wait for us outside with the mortuary-keeper.

As soon as the door was closed and locked on the inside, Thorndyke glanced curiously round the bare, whitewashed building. A stream of sunlight poured in through the skylight, and fell upon the silent form that lay so still under its covering-sheet, and one stray beam glanced into a corner by the door, where, on a row of pegs and a deal table, the dead woman's clothing was displayed.

"There is something unspeakably sad in these poor relics, Jervis," said Thorndyke, as we stood before them. "To me they are more tragic, more full of pathetic suggestion, than the corpse itself. See the smart, jaunty hat, and the costly skirts hanging there, so desolate and forlorn; the dainty *lingerie* on the table, neatly folded—by the mortuary-man's wife, I hope—the little French shoes and open-work silk stockings. How pathetically eloquent they are of harmless, womanly vanity, and the gay, careless life, snapped short in the twinkling of an eye. But we must not give way to sentiment. There is another life threatened, and it is in our keeping."

He lifted the hat from its peg, and turned it over in his hand. It was, I think, what is called a "picture-hat"—a huge, flat, shapeless mass of gauze and ribbon and feather, spangled over freely with dark-blue sequins. In one part of the brim was a ragged hole, and from this the glittering sequins dropped off in little showers when the hat was moved.

"This will have been worn tilted over on the left side," said Thorndyke, "judging by the general shape and the position of the hole."

"Yes," I agreed. "Like that of the Duchess of Devonshire in Gainsborough's portrait."

"Exactly."

He shook a few of the sequins into the palm of his hand, and, replacing the hat on its peg, dropped the little discs into an envelope, on which he wrote, "From the hat," and slipped it into his pocket. Then, stepping over to the table, he drew back the sheet reverently and even tenderly from the dead woman's face, and looked down at it with grave pity. It was a comely face, white as marble, serene and peaceful in expression, with half-closed eyes, and framed with a mass of brassy, yellow hair; but its beauty was marred by a long linear wound, half cut, half bruise, running down the right cheek from the eye to the chin.

"A handsome girl," Thorndyke commented—"a dark-haired blonde. What a sin to have disfigured herself so with that horrible peroxide." He smoothed the hair back from her forehead, and added: "She seems to have applied the stuff last about ten days ago. There is about a quarter of an inch of dark hair at the roots. What do you make of that wound on the cheek?"

"It looks as if she had struck some sharp angle in falling, though, as the seats are padded in first-class carriages, I don't see what she could have struck."

"No. And now let us look at the other wound. Will you note down the description?" He handed me his notebook, and I wrote down as he dictated: "A clean-punched circular hole in skull, an inch behind and above margin of left ear—diameter, an inch and seven-sixteenths; starred fracture of parietal bone; membranes perforated, and brain entered deeply; ragged scalp-wound, extending forward to margin of left orbit; fragments of gauze and sequins in edges of wound. That will do for the present. Dr. Morton will give us further details if we want them."

He pocketed his callipers and rule, drew from the bruised scalp one or two loose hairs, which he placed in the envelope with the sequins, and, having looked over the body for other wounds or bruises (of which there were none), replaced the sheet, and prepared to depart.

As we walked away from the mortuary, Thorndyke was silent and deeply thoughtful, and I gathered that he was piecing together the facts that he had acquired. At length Mr. Stopford, who had several times looked at him curiously, said:

"The *post-mortem* will take place at three, and it is now only half-past eleven. What would you like to do next?"

Thorndyke, who, in spite of his mental preoccupation, had been looking about him in his usual keen, attentive way, halted suddenly.

"Your reference to the *post-mortem*," said he, "reminds me that I forgot to put the ox-gall into my case."

"Ox-gall!" I exclaimed, endeavouring vainly to connect this substance with the technique of the pathologist. "What were you going to do with—"

But here I broke off, remembering my friend's dislike of any discussion of his methods before strangers.

"I suppose," he continued, "there would hardly be an artist's colourman in a place of this size?"

"I should think not," said Stopford. "But couldn't you get the stuff from a butcher? There's a shop just across the road."

"So there is," agreed Thorndyke, who had already observed the shop. "The gall ought, of course, to be prepared, but we can filter it ourselves—that is, if the butcher has any. We will try him, at any rate."

He crossed the road towards the shop, over which the name "Felton" appeared in gilt lettering, and, addressing himself to the proprietor, who stood at the door, introduced himself and explained his wants.

"Ox-gall?" said the butcher. "No, sir, I haven't any just now; but I am having a beast killed this afternoon, and I can let you have some then. In fact," he added, after a pause, "as the matter is of importance, I can have one killed at once if you wish it."

"That is very kind of you," said Thorndyke, "and it would greatly oblige me. Is the beast perfectly healthy?"

"They're in splendid condition, sir. I picked them out of the herd myself. But you shall see them—ay, and choose the one that you'd like killed."



"You are really very good," said Thorndyke warmly. "I will just run into the chemist's next door, and get a suitable bottle, and then I will avail myself of your exceedingly kind offer."

He hurried into the chemist's shop, from which he presently emerged, carrying a white paper parcel; and we then followed the butcher down a narrow lane by the side of his shop. It led to an enclosure containing a small pen, in which were confined three handsome steers, whose glossy, black coats contrasted in a very striking manner with their long, greyish-white, nearly straight horns.

"These are certainly very fine beasts, Mr. Felton," said Thorndyke, as we drew up beside the pen, "and in excellent condition, too."

He leaned over the pen and examined the beasts critically, especially as to their eyes and horns; then, approaching the nearest one, he raised his stick and bestowed a smart tap on the under-side of the right horn, following it by a similar tap on the left one, a proceeding that the beast viewed with stolid surprise.

"The state of the horns," explained Thorndyke, as he moved on to the next steer, "enables one to judge, to some extent, of the beast's health."

"Lord bless you, sir," laughed Mr. Felton, "they haven't got no feeling in their horns, else what good 'ud their horns be to 'em?"

Apparently he was right, for the second steer was as indifferent to a sounding rap on either horn as the first. Nevertheless, when Thorndyke approached the third steer, I unconsciously drew nearer to watch; and I noticed that, as the stick struck the horn, the beast drew back in evident alarm, and that when the blow was repeated, it became manifestly uneasy.

"He don't seem to like that," said the butcher. "Seems as if—Hullo, that's queer!"

Thorndyke had just brought his stick up against the left horn, and immediately the beast had winced and started back, shaking his head and moaning. There was not, however, room for him to back out of reach, and Thorndyke, by leaning into the pen, was able to inspect the sensitive horn, which he did with the closest attention, while the butcher looked on with obvious perturbation.

"You don't think there's anything wrong with this beast, sir, I hope," said he.

"I can't say without a further examination," replied Thorndyke. "It may be the horn only that is affected. If you will have it sawn off close to the head, and sent up to me at the hotel, I will look at it and tell you. And, by way of preventing any mistakes, I will mark it and cover it up, to protect it from injury in the slaughter-house."

He opened his parcel and produced from it a wide-mouthed bottle labelled "Ox-gall," a sheet of gutta-percha tissue, a roller bandage, and a stick of sealing-wax. Handing the bottle to Mr. Felton, he encased the distal half of the horn in a covering by means of the tissue and the bandage, which he fixed securely with the sealing-wax.

"I'll saw the horn off and bring it up to the hotel myself, with the ox-gall," said Mr. Felton. "You shall have them in half an hour."

He was as good as his word, for in half an hour Thorndyke was seated at a small table by the window of our private sitting-room in the Black Bull Hotel. The table was covered with newspaper, and on it lay the long grey horn and Thorndyke's travelling-case, now open and displaying a small microscope and its accessories. The butcher was seated solidly in an armchair waiting, with a half-suspicious eye on Thorndyke for the report; and I was endeavouring by cheerful talk to keep Mr. Stopford from sinking into utter despondency, though I, too, kept a furtive watch on my colleague's rather mysterious proceedings.

I saw him unwind the bandage and apply the horn to his ear, bending it slightly to and fro. I watched him, as he scanned the surface closely through a lens, and observed him as he scraped some substance from the pointed end on to a glass slide, and, having applied a drop of some reagent, began to tease out the scraping with a pair of mounted needles. Presently he placed the slide under the microscope, and, having observed it attentively for a minute or two, turned round sharply.

"Come and look at this, Jervis," said he.

I wanted no second bidding, being on tenterhooks of curiosity, but came over and applied my eye to the instrument.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"A multipolar nerve corpuscle—very shrivelled, but unmistakable."

"And this?"

He moved the slide to a fresh spot.

"Two pyramidal nerve corpuscles and some portions of fibres."

"And what do you say the tissue is?"

"Cortical brain substance, I should say, without a doubt."

"I entirely agree with you. And that being so," he added, turning to Mr. Stopford, "we may say that the case for the defence is practically complete."

"What, in Heaven's name, do you mean?" exclaimed Stopford, starting up.

"I mean that we can now prove when and where and how Miss Grant met her death. Come and sit down here, and I will explain. No, you needn't go away, Mr. Felton. We shall have to subpoena you. Perhaps," he continued, "we had better go over the facts and see what they suggest. And first we note the position of the body, lying with the feet close to the off-side door, showing that, when she fell, the deceased was sitting, or more probably standing, close to that door. Next there is this." He drew from his pocket a folded paper, which he opened, displaying a tiny blue disc. "It is one of the sequins with which her hat was trimmed, and I have in this envelope several more which I took from the hat itself.

"This single sequin I picked up on the rear end of the off side footboard, and its presence there makes it nearly certain that at some time Miss Grant had put her head out of the window on that side.

"The next item of evidence I obtained by dusting the margins of the off-side window with a light powder, which made visible a greasy impression three and a quarter inches long on the sharp corner of the right-hand jamb (right-hand from the inside, I mean).

"And now as to the evidence furnished by the body. The wound in the skull is behind and above the left ear, is roughly circular, and measures one inch and seven-sixteenths at most, and a ragged scalp-wound runs from it towards the left eye. On the right cheek is a linear contused wound three and a quarter inches long. There are no other injuries.

"Our next facts are furnished by this." He took up the horn and tapped it with his finger, while the solicitor and Mr. Felton stared at him in speechless wonder. "You notice it is a left horn, and you remember that it was highly sensitive. If you put your ear to it while I strain it, you will hear the grating of a fracture in the bony core. Now look at the pointed end, and you will see several deep scratches running lengthwise, and where those scratches end the diameter of the horn is, as you see by this calliper-gauge, one inch and seven-sixteenths. Covering the scratches is a dry blood-stain, and at the extreme tip is a small mass of a dried substance which Dr. Jervis and I have examined with the microscope and are satisfied is brain tissue."

"Good God!" exclaimed Stopford eagerly. "Do you mean to say—"

"Let us finish with the facts, Mr. Stopford," Thorndyke interrupted. "Now, if you look closely at that blood-stain, you will see a short piece of hair stuck to the horn, and through this lens you can make out the root-bulb. It is a golden hair, you notice, but near the root it is black, and our calliper-gauge shows us that the black portion is fourteen sixty-fourths of an inch long. Now, in this envelope are some hairs that I removed from the dead woman's head. They also are golden hairs, black at the roots, and when I measure the black portion I find it to be fourteen sixty-fourths of an inch long. Then, finally, there is this."

He turned the horn over, and pointed to a small patch of dried blood. Embedded in it was a blue sequin.

Mr. Stopford and the butcher both gazed at the horn in silent amazement; then the former drew a deep breath and looked up at Thorndyke.

"No doubt," said he, "you can explain this mystery, but for my part I am utterly bewildered, though you are filling me with hope."

"And yet the matter is quite simple," returned Thorndyke, "even with these few facts before us, which are only a selection from the body of evidence in our possession. But I will state my theory, and you shall judge." He rapidly sketched a rough plan on a sheet of paper, and continued: "These were the conditions when the train was approaching Woldhurst: Here was the passenger-coach, here was the burning rick, and here was a cattle-truck. This steer was in that truck. Now my hypothesis is that at that time Miss Grant was standing with her head out of the off-side window, watching the burning rick. Her wide hat, worn on the left side, hid from her view the cattle-truck which she was approaching, and then this is what happened." He sketched another plan to a larger scale. "One of the steers—this one—had thrust its long horn out through the bars. The point of that horn struck the deceased's head, driving her face violently against the corner of the window, and then, in disengaging, ploughed its way through the scalp, and suffered a fracture of its core from the violence of the wrench. This hypothesis is inherently probable, it fits all the facts, and those facts admit of no other explanation."

The solicitor sat for a moment as though dazed; then he rose impulsively and seized Thorndyke's hands. "I don't know what to say to you," he exclaimed huskily, "except that you have saved my brother's life, and for that may God reward you!"

The butcher rose from his chair with a slow grin.

"It seems to me," said he, "as if that ox-gall was what you might call a blind, eh, sir?"

And Thorndyke smiled an inscrutable smile.

\*\*\*\*\*

When we returned to town on the following day we were a party of four, which included Mr. Harold Stopford. The verdict of "Death by misadventure," promptly returned by the coroner's jury, had been shortly followed by his release from custody, and he now sat with his brother and me, listening with rapt attention to Thorndyke's analysis of the case.

"So, you see," the latter concluded, "I had six possible theories of the cause of death worked out before I reached Halbury, and it only remained to select the one that fitted the facts. And when I had seen the cattle-truck, had picked up that sequin, had heard the description of the steers, and had seen the hat and the wounds, there was nothing left to do but

the filling in of details.”

“And you never doubted my innocence?” asked Harold Stopford.

Thorndyke smiled at his quondam client.

“Not after I had seen your colour-box and your sketch,” said he, “to say nothing of the spike.”

---

## V. — THE MOABITE CIPHER

A LARGE and motley crowd lined the pavements of Oxford Street as Thorndyke and I made our way leisurely eastward. Floral decorations and drooping bunting announced one of those functions inaugurated from time to time by a benevolent Government for the entertainment of fashionable loungers and the relief of distressed pickpockets. For a Russian Grand Duke, who had torn himself away, amidst valedictory explosions, from a loving if too demonstrative people, was to pass anon on his way to the Guildhall; and a British Prince, heroically indiscreet, was expected to occupy a seat in the ducal carriage.

Near Rathbone Place Thorndyke halted and drew my attention to a smart-looking man who stood lounging in a doorway, cigarette in hand.

“Our old friend Inspector Badger,” said Thorndyke. “He seems mightily interested in that gentleman in the light overcoat. How d’ye do, Badger?” for at this moment the detective caught his eye and bowed. “Who is your friend?”

“That’s what I want to know, sir,” replied the inspector. “I’ve been shadowing him for the last half-hour, but I can’t make him out, though I believe I’ve seen him somewhere. He don’t look like a foreigner, but he has got something bulky in his pocket, so I must keep him in sight until the Duke is safely past. I wish,” he added gloomily, “these beastly Russians would stop at home. They give us no end of trouble.”

“Are you expecting any—occurrences, then?” asked Thorndyke.

“Bless you, sir,” exclaimed Badger, “the whole route is lined with plain-clothes men. You see, it is known that several desperate characters followed the Duke to England, and there are a good many exiles living here who would like to have a rap at him. Hallo! What’s he up to now?”

The man in the light overcoat had suddenly caught the inspector’s too inquiring eye, and forthwith dived into the crowd at the edge of the pavement. In his haste he trod heavily on the foot of a big, rough-looking man, by whom he was in a moment hustled out into the road with such violence that he fell sprawling face downwards. It was an unlucky moment. A mounted constable was just then backing in upon the crowd, and before he could gather the meaning of the shout that arose from the bystanders, his horse had set down one hind-hoof firmly on the prostrate man’s back.

The inspector signalled to a constable, who forthwith made a way for us through the crowd; but even as we approached the injured man, he rose stiffly and looked round with a pale, vacant face.

“Are you hurt?” Thorndyke asked gently, with an earnest look into the frightened, wondering eyes.

“No, sir,” was the reply; “only I feel queer—sinking—just here.”

He laid a trembling hand on his chest, and Thorndyke, still eyeing him anxiously, said in a low voice to the inspector: “Cab or ambulance, as quickly as you can.”

A cab was led round from Newman Street, and the injured man put into it. Thorndyke, Badger, and I entered, and we drove off up Rathbone Place. As we proceeded, our patient’s face grew more and more ashen, drawn, and anxious; his breathing was shallow and uneven, and his teeth chattered slightly. The cab swung round into Goodge Street, and then—suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye—there came a change. The eyelids and jaw relaxed, the eyes became filmy, and the whole form subsided into the corner in a shrunken heap, with the strange gelatinous limpness of a body that is dead as a whole, while its tissues are still alive.

“God save us! The man’s dead!” exclaimed the inspector in a shocked voice—for even policemen have their feelings. He sat staring at the corpse, as it nodded gently with the jolting of the cab, until we drew up inside the courtyard of the Middlesex Hospital, when he got out briskly, with suddenly renewed cheerfulness, to help the porter to place the body on the wheeled couch.

“We shall know who he is now, at any rate,” said he, as we followed the couch to the casualty-room. Thorndyke nodded unsympathetically. The medical instinct in him was for the moment stronger than the legal.

The house-surgeon leaned over the couch, and made a rapid examination as he listened to our account of the accident. Then he straightened himself up and looked at Thorndyke.

“Internal hæmorrhage, I expect,” said he. “At any rate, he’s dead, poor beggar!—as dead as Nebuchadnezzar. Ah! here comes a bobby; it’s his affair now.”

A sergeant came into the room, breathing quickly, and looked in surprise from the corpse to the inspector. But the latter, without loss of time, proceeded to turn out the dead man’s pockets, commencing with the bulky object that had first attracted his attention; which proved to be a brown-paper parcel tied up with red tape.

"Pork-pie, begad!" he exclaimed with a crestfallen air as he cut the tape and opened the package. "You had better go through his other pockets, sergeant."

The small heap of odds and ends that resulted from this process tended, with a single exception, to throw little light on the man's identity; the exception being a letter, sealed, but not stamped, addressed in an exceedingly illiterate hand to Mr. Adolf Schönberg, 213, Greek Street, Soho.

"He was going to leave it by hand, I expect," observed the inspector, with a wistful glance at the sealed envelope. "I think I'll take it round myself, and you had better come with me, sergeant."

He slipped the letter into his pocket, and, leaving the sergeant to take possession of the other effects, made his way out of the building.

"I suppose, Doctor," said he, as we crossed into Berners Street, "you are not coming our way! Don't want to see Mr. Schönberg, h'm?"

Thorndyke reflected for a moment. "Well, it isn't very far, and we may as well see the end of the incident. Yes; let us go together."

No. 213, Greek Street, was one of those houses that irresistibly suggest to the observer the idea of a church organ, either jamb of the doorway being adorned with a row of brass bell-handles corresponding to the stop-knobs.

These the sergeant examined with the air of an expert musician, and having, as it were, gauged the capacity of the instrument, selected the middle knob on the right-hand side and pulled it briskly; whereupon a first-floor window was thrown up and a head protruded. But it afforded us a momentary glimpse only, for, having caught the sergeant's upturned eye, it retired with surprising precipitancy, and before we had time to speculate on the apparition, the street-door was opened and a man emerged. He was about to close the door after him when the inspector interposed.

"Does Mr. Adolf Schönberg live here?"

The new-comer, a very typical Jew of the red-haired type, surveyed us thoughtfully through his gold-rimmed spectacles as he repeated the name.

"Schönberg—Schönberg? Ah, yes! I know. He lives on the third-floor. I saw him go up a short time ago. Third-floor back;" and indicating the open door with a wave of the hand, he raised his hat and passed into the street.

"I suppose we had better go up," said the inspector, with a dubious glance at the row of bell-pulls. He accordingly started up the stairs, and we all followed in his wake.

There were two doors at the back on the third-floor, but as the one was open, displaying an unoccupied bedroom, the inspector rapped smartly on the other. It flew open almost immediately, and a fierce-looking little man confronted us with a hostile stare.

"Well?" said he.

"Mr. Adolf Schönberg?" inquired the inspector.

"Well? What about him?" snapped our new acquaintance.

"I wished to have a few words with him," said Badger.

"Then what the deuce do you come banging at *my* door for?" demanded the other.

"Why, doesn't he live here?"

"No. First-floor front," replied our friend, preparing to close the door.

"Pardon me," said Thorndyke, "but what is Mr. Schönberg like? I mean—"

"Like?" interrupted the resident. "He's like a blooming Sheeny, with a carrotty beard and gold gig-lamps!" and, having presented this impressionist sketch, he brought the interview to a definite close by slamming the door and turning the key.

With a wrathful exclamation, the inspector turned towards the stairs, down which the sergeant was already clattering in hot haste, and made his way back to the ground-floor, followed, as before, by Thorndyke and me. On the doorstep we found the sergeant breathlessly interrogating a smartly-dressed youth, whom I had seen alight from a hansom as we entered the house, and who now stood with a notebook tucked under his arm, sharpening a pencil with deliberate care.

"Mr. James saw him come out, sir," said the sergeant. "He turned up towards the Square."

"Did he seem to hurry?" asked the inspector.

"Rather," replied the reporter. "As soon as you were inside, he went off like a lamplighter. You won't catch him now."

"We don't want to catch him," the detective rejoined gruffly; then, backing out of earshot of the eager pressman, he said in a lower tone: "That was Mr. Schönberg, beyond a doubt, and it is clear that he has some reason for making himself scarce; so I shall consider myself justified in opening that note."

He suited the action to the word, and, having cut the envelope open with official neatness, drew out the enclosure.

"My hat!" he exclaimed, as his eye fell upon the contents. "What in creation is this? It isn't shorthand, but what the deuce

is it?"

He handed the document to Thorndyke, who, having held it up to the light and felt the paper critically, proceeded to examine it with keen interest. It consisted of a single half-sheet of thin notepaper, both sides of which were covered with strange, crabbed characters, written with a brownish-black ink in continuous lines, without any spaces to indicate the divisions into words; and, but for the modern material which bore the writing, it might have been a portion of some ancient manuscript or forgotten codex.

"What do you make of it, Doctor?" inquired the inspector anxiously, after a pause, during which Thorndyke had scrutinized the strange writing with knitted brows.

"Not a great deal," replied Thorndyke. "The character is the Moabite or Phoenician—primitive Semitic, in fact—and reads from right to left. The language I take to be Hebrew. At any rate, I can find no Greek words, and I see here a group of letters which *may* form one of the few Hebrew words that I know—the word *badim*, 'lies.' But you had better get it deciphered by an expert."

"If it is Hebrew," said Badger, "we can manage it all right. There are plenty of Jews at our disposal."

"You had much better take the paper to the British Museum," said Thorndyke, "and submit it to the keeper of the Phoenician antiquities for decipherment."

Inspector Badger smiled a foxy smile as he deposited the paper in his pocket-book. "We'll see what we can make of it ourselves first," he said; "but many thanks for your advice, all the same, Doctor. No, Mr. James, I can't give you any information just at present; you had better apply at the hospital."

"I suspect," said Thorndyke, as we took our way homewards, "that Mr. James has collected enough material for his purpose already. He must have followed us from the hospital, and I have no doubt that he has his report, with 'full details,' mentally arranged at this moment. And I am not sure that he didn't get a peep at the mysterious paper, in spite of the inspector's precautions."

"By the way," I said, "what do you make of the document?"

"A cipher, most probably," he replied. "It is written in the primitive Semitic alphabet, which, as you know, is practically identical with primitive Greek. It is written from right to left, like the Phoenician, Hebrew, and Moabite, as well as the earliest Greek, inscriptions. The paper is common cream-laid notepaper, and the ink is ordinary indelible Chinese ink, such as is used by draughtsmen. Those are the facts, and without further study of the document itself, they don't carry us very far."

"Why do you think it is a cipher rather than a document in straightforward Hebrew?"

"Because it is obviously a secret message of some kind. Now, every educated Jew knows more or less Hebrew, and, although he is able to read and write only the modern square Hebrew character, it is so easy to transpose one alphabet into another that the mere language would afford no security. Therefore, I expect that, when the experts translate this document, the translation or transliteration will be a mere farrago of unintelligible nonsense. But we shall see, and meanwhile the facts that we have offer several interesting suggestions which are well worth consideration."

"As, for instance—?"

"Now, my dear Jervis," said Thorndyke, shaking an admonitory forefinger at me, "don't, I pray you, give way to mental indolence. You have these few facts that I have mentioned. Consider them separately and collectively, and in their relation to the circumstances. Don't attempt to suck my brain when you have an excellent brain of your own to suck."

On the following morning the papers fully justified my colleague's opinion of Mr. James. All the events which had occurred, as well as a number that had not, were given in the fullest and most vivid detail, a lengthy reference being made to the paper "found on the person of the dead anarchist," and "written in a private shorthand or cryptogram."

The report concluded with the gratifying—though untrue—statement that "in this intricate and important case, the police have wisely secured the assistance of Dr. John Thorndyke, to whose acute intellect and vast experience the portentous cryptogram will doubtless soon deliver up its secret."

"Very flattering," laughed Thorndyke, to whom I read the extract on his return from the hospital, "but a little awkward if it should induce our friends to deposit a few trifling mementoes in the form of nitro-compounds on our main staircase or in the cellars. By the way, I met Superintendent Miller on London Bridge. The 'cryptogram,' as Mr. James calls it, has set Scotland Yard in a mighty ferment."

"Naturally. What have they done in the matter?"

"They adopted my suggestion, after all, finding that they could make nothing of it themselves, and took it to the British Museum. The Museum people referred them to Professor Poppelbaum, the great palæographer, to whom they accordingly submitted it."

"Did he express any opinion about it?"

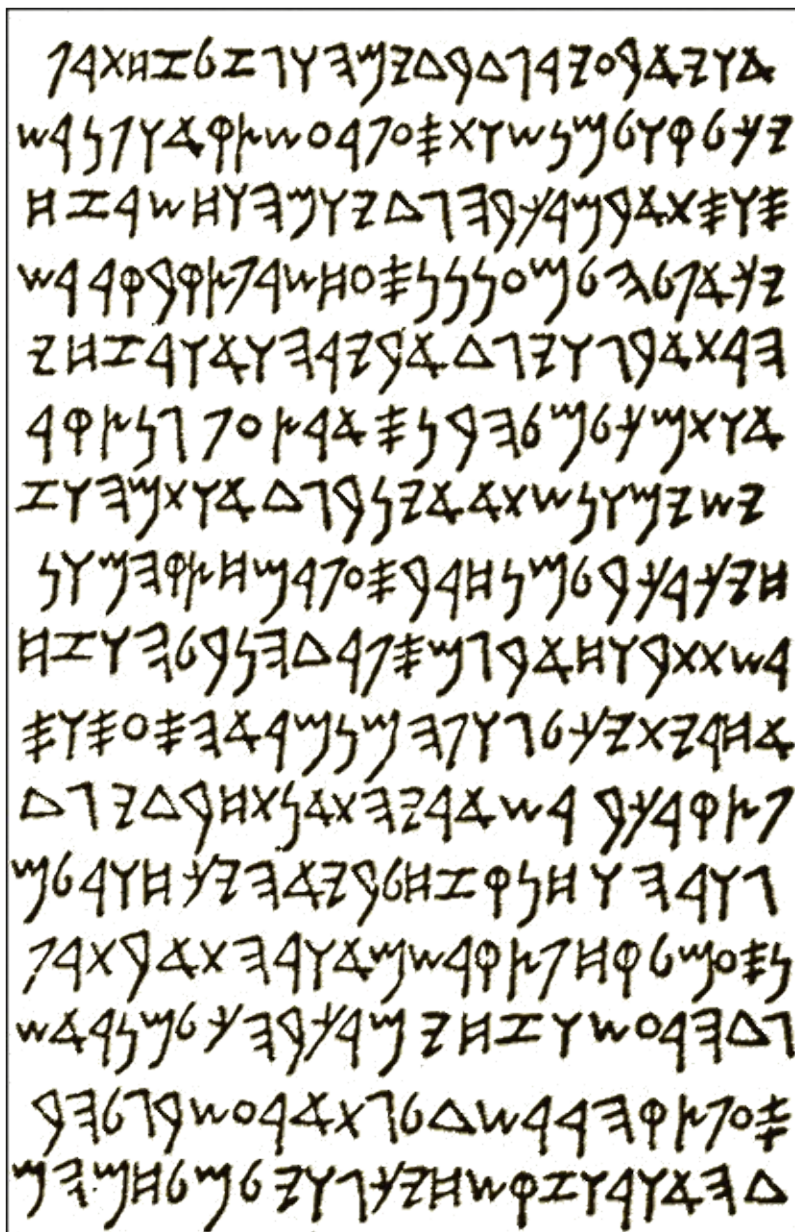
"Yes, provisionally. After a brief examination, he found it to consist of a number of Hebrew words sandwiched between apparently meaningless groups of letters. He furnished the Superintendent off-hand with a translation of the words, and

Miller forthwith struck off a number of hectograph copies of it, which he has distributed among the senior officials of his department; so that at present”—here Thorndyke gave vent to a soft chuckle—“Scotland Yard is engaged in a sort of missing word—or, rather, missing sense—competition. Miller invited me to join in the sport, and to that end presented me with one of the hectograph copies on which to exercise my wits, together with a photograph of the document.”

“And shall you?” I asked.

“Not I,” he replied, laughing. “In the first place, I have not been formally consulted, and consequently am a passive, though interested, spectator. In the second place, I have a theory of my own which I shall test if the occasion arises. But if you would like to take part in the competition, I am authorized to show you the photograph and the translation. I will pass them on to you, and I wish you joy of them.”

He handed me the photograph and a sheet of paper that he had just taken from his pocket-book, and watched me with grim amusement as I read out the first few lines.



*The Moabite Cipher.*

“Woe, city, lies, robbery, prey, noise, whip, rattling, wheel, horse, chariot, day, darkness, gloominess, clouds, darkness, morning, mountain, people, strong, fire, them, flame.”

"It doesn't look very promising at first sight," I remarked. "What is the Professor's theory?"

"His theory—provisionally, of course—is that the words form the message, and the groups of letters represent mere filled-up spaces between the words."

"But surely," I protested, "that would be a very transparent device."

Thorndyke laughed. "There is a childlike simplicity about it," said he, "that is highly attractive—but discouraging. It is much more probable that the words are dummies, and that the letters contain the message. Or, again, the solution may lie in an entirely different direction. But listen! Is that cab coming here?"

It was. It drew up opposite our chambers, and a few moments later a brisk step ascending the stairs heralded a smart rat-tat at our door. Flinging open the latter, I found myself confronted by a well-dressed stranger, who, after a quick glance at me, peered inquisitively over my shoulder into the room.

"I am relieved, Dr. Jervis," said he, "to find you and Dr. Thorndyke at home, as I have come on somewhat urgent professional business. My name," he continued, entering in response to my invitation, "is Barton, but you don't know me, though I know you both by sight. I have come to ask you if one of you—or, better still, both—could come to-night and see my brother."

"That," said Thorndyke, "depends on the circumstances and on the whereabouts of your brother."

"The circumstances," said Mr. Barton, "are, in my opinion, highly suspicious, and I will place them before you—of course, in strict confidence."

Thorndyke nodded and indicated a chair.

"My brother," continued Mr. Barton, taking the proffered seat, "has recently married for the second time. His age is fifty-five, and that of his wife twenty-six, and I may say that the marriage has been—well, by no means a success. Now, within the last fortnight, my brother has been attacked by a mysterious and extremely painful affection of the stomach, to which his doctor seems unable to give a name. It has resisted all treatment hitherto. Day by day the pain and distress increase, and I feel that, unless something decisive is done, the end cannot be far off."

"Is the pain worse after taking food?" inquired Thorndyke.

"That's just it!" exclaimed our visitor. "I see what is in your mind, and it has been in mine, too; so much so that I have tried repeatedly to obtain samples of the food that he is taking. And this morning I succeeded." Here he took from his pocket a wide-mouthed bottle, which, disengaging from its paper wrappings, he laid on the table. "When I called, he was taking his breakfast of arrowroot, which he complained had a gritty taste, supposed by his wife to be due to the sugar. Now I had provided myself with this bottle, and, during the absence of his wife, I managed unobserved to convey a portion of the arrowroot that he had left into it, and I should be greatly obliged if you would examine it and tell me if this arrowroot contains anything that it should not."

He pushed the bottle across to Thorndyke, who carried it to the window, and, extracting a small quantity of the contents with a glass rod, examined the pasty mass with the aid of a lens; then, lifting the bell-glass cover from the microscope, which stood on its table by the window, he smeared a small quantity of the suspected matter on to a glass slip, and placed it on the stage of the instrument.

"I observe a number of crystalline particles in this," he said, after a brief inspection, "which have the appearance of arsenious acid."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Barton, "just what I feared. But are you certain?"

"No," replied Thorndyke; "but the matter is easily tested."

He pressed the button of the bell that communicated with the laboratory, a summons that brought the laboratory assistant from his lair with characteristic promptitude.

"Will you please prepare a Marsh's apparatus, Polton," said Thorndyke.

"I have a couple ready, sir," replied Polton.

"Then pour the acid into one and bring it to me, with a tile."

As his familiar vanished silently, Thorndyke turned to Mr. Barton.

"Supposing we find arsenic in this arrowroot, as we probably shall, what do you want us to do?"

"I want you to come and see my brother," replied our client.

"Why not take a note from me to his doctor?"

"No, no; I want you to come—I should like you both to come—and put a stop at once to this dreadful business. Consider! It's a matter of life and death. You won't refuse! I beg you not to refuse me your help in these terrible circumstances."

"Well," said Thorndyke, as his assistant reappeared, "let us first see what the test has to tell us."

Polton advanced to the table, on which he deposited a small flask, the contents of which were in a state of brisk effervescence, a bottle labelled "calcium hypochlorite," and a white porcelain tile. The flask was fitted with a safety-funnel

and a glass tube drawn out to a fine jet, to which Polton cautiously applied a lighted match. Instantly there sprang from the jet a tiny, pale violet flame. Thorndyke now took the tile, and held it in the flame for a few seconds, when the appearance of the surface remained unchanged save for a small circle of condensed moisture. His next proceeding was to thin the arrowroot with distilled water until it was quite fluid, and then pour a small quantity into the funnel. It ran slowly down the tube into the flask, with the bubbling contents of which it became speedily mixed. Almost immediately a change began to appear in the character of the flame, which from a pale violet turned gradually to a sickly blue, while above it hung a faint cloud of white smoke. Once more Thorndyke held the tile above the jet, but this time, no sooner had the pallid flame touched the cold surface of the porcelain, than there appeared on the latter a glistening black stain.

"That is pretty conclusive," observed Thorndyke, lifting the stopper out of the reagent bottle, "but we will apply the final test." He dropped a few drops of the hypochlorite solution on to the tile, and immediately the black stain faded away and vanished. "We can now answer your question, Mr. Barton," said he, replacing the stopper as he turned to our client. "The specimen that you brought us certainly contains arsenic, and in very considerable quantities."

"Then," exclaimed Mr. Barton, starting from his chair, "you will come and help me to rescue my brother from this dreadful peril. Don't refuse me, Dr. Thorndyke, for mercy's sake, don't refuse."

Thorndyke reflected for a moment.

"Before we decide," said he, "we must see what engagements we have."

With a quick, significant glance at me, he walked into the office, whither I followed in some bewilderment, for I knew that we had no engagements for the evening.

"Now, Jervis," said Thorndyke, as he closed the office door, "what are we to do?"

"We must go, I suppose," I replied. "It seems a pretty urgent case."

"It does," he agreed. "Of course, the man may be telling the truth, after all."

"You don't think he is, then?"

"No. It is a plausible tale, but there is too much arsenic in that arrowroot. Still, I think I ought to go. It is an ordinary professional risk. But there is no reason why you should put your head into the noose."

"Thank you," said I, somewhat huffily. "I don't see what risk there is, but if any exists I claim the right to share it."

"Very well," he answered with a smile, "we will both go. I think we can take care of ourselves."

He re-entered the sitting-room, and announced his decision to Mr. Barton, whose relief and gratitude were quite pathetic.

"But," said Thorndyke, "you have not yet told us where your brother lives."

"Rexford," was the reply—"Rexford, in Essex. It is an out-of-the-way place, but if we catch the seven-fifteen train from Liverpool Street, we shall be there in an hour and a half."

"And as to the return? You know the trains, I suppose?"

"Oh yes," replied our client; "I will see that you don't miss your train back."

"Then I will be with you in a minute," said Thorndyke; and, taking the still-bubbling flask, he retired to the laboratory, whence he returned in a few minutes carrying his hat and overcoat.

The cab which had brought our client was still waiting, and we were soon rattling through the streets towards the station, where we arrived in time to furnish ourselves with dinner-baskets and select our compartment at leisure.

During the early part of the journey our companion was in excellent spirits. He despatched the cold fowl from the basket and quaffed the rather indifferent claret with as much relish as if he had not had a single relation in the world, and after dinner he became genial to the verge of hilarity. But, as time went on, there crept into his manner a certain anxious restlessness. He became silent and preoccupied, and several times furtively consulted his watch.

"The train is confoundedly late!" he exclaimed irritably. "Seven minutes behind time already!"

"A few minutes more or less are not of much consequence," said Thorndyke.

"No, of course not; but still—Ah, thank Heaven, here we are!"

He thrust his head out of the off-side window, and gazed eagerly down the line; then, leaping to his feet, he bustled out on to the platform while the train was still moving.

Even as we alighted a warning bell rang furiously on the up-platform, and as Mr. Barton hurried us through the empty booking-office to the outside of the station, the rumble of the approaching train could be heard above the noise made by our own train moving off.

"My carriage doesn't seem to have arrived yet," exclaimed Mr. Barton, looking anxiously up the station approach. "If you will wait here a moment, I will go and make inquiries."

He darted back into the booking-office and through it on to the platform, just as the up-train roared into the station. Thorndyke followed him with quick but stealthy steps, and, peering out of the booking-office door, watched his



proceedings; then he turned and beckoned to me.

"There he goes," said he, pointing to an iron footbridge that spanned the line; and, as I looked, I saw, clearly defined against the dim night sky, a flying figure racing towards the "up" side.

It was hardly two-thirds across when the guard's whistle sang out its shrill warning.

"Quick, Jervis," exclaimed Thorndyke; "she's off!"

He leaped down on to the line, whither I followed instantly, and, crossing the rails, we clambered up together on to the foot-board opposite an empty first-class compartment. Thorndyke's magazine knife, containing, among other implements, a railway-key, was already in his hand. The door was speedily unlocked, and, as we entered, Thorndyke ran through and looked out on to the platform.

"Just in time!" he exclaimed. "He is in one of the forward compartments."

He relocked the door, and, seating himself, proceeded to fill his pipe.

"And now," said I, as the train moved out of the station, "perhaps you will explain this little comedy."

"With pleasure," he replied, "if it needs any explanation. But you can hardly have forgotten Mr. James's flattering remarks in his report of the Greek Street incident, clearly giving the impression that the mysterious document was in my possession. When I read that, I knew I must look out for some attempt to recover it, though I hardly expected such promptness. Still, when Mr. Barton called without credentials or appointment, I viewed him with some suspicion. That suspicion deepened when he wanted us both to come. It deepened further when I found an impossible quantity of arsenic in his sample, and it gave place to certainty when, having allowed him to select the trains by which we were to travel, I went up to the laboratory and examined the time-table; for I then found that the last train for London left Rexford ten minutes after we were due to arrive. Obviously this was a plan to get us both safely out of the way while he and some of his friends ransacked our chambers for the missing document."

"I see; and that accounts for his extraordinary anxiety at the lateness of the train. But why did you come, if you knew it was a 'plant'?"

"My dear fellow," said Thorndyke, "I never miss an interesting experience if I can help it. There are possibilities in this, too, don't you see?"

"But supposing his friends have broken into our chambers already?"

"That contingency has been provided for; but I think they will wait for Mr. Barton—and us."

Our train, being the last one up, stopped at every station, and crawled slothfully in the intervals, so that it was past eleven o'clock when we reached Liverpool Street. Here we got out cautiously, and, mingling with the crowd, followed the unconscious Barton up the platform, through the barrier, and out into the street. He seemed in no special hurry, for, after pausing to light a cigar, he set off at an easy pace up New Broad Street.

Thorndyke hailed a hansom, and, motioning me to enter, directed the cabman to drive to Clifford's Inn Passage.

"Sit well back," said he, as we rattled away up New Broad Street. "We shall be passing our gay deceiver presently—in fact, there he is, a living, walking illustration of the folly of underrating the intelligence of one's adversary."

At Clifford's Inn Passage we dismissed the cab, and, retiring into the shadow of the dark, narrow alley, kept an eye on the gate of Inner Temple Lane. In about twenty minutes we observed our friend approaching on the south side of Fleet Street. He halted at the gate, plied the knocker, and after a brief parley with the night-porter vanished through the wicket. We waited yet five minutes more, and then, having given him time to get clear of the entrance, we crossed the road.

The porter looked at us with some surprise.

"There's a gentleman just gone down to your chambers, sir," said he. "He told me you were expecting him."

"Quite right," said Thorndyke, with a dry smile, "I was. Good-night."

We slunk down the lane, past the church, and through the gloomy cloisters, giving a wide berth to all lamps and lighted entries, until, emerging into Paper Buildings, we crossed at the darkest part to King's Bench Walk, where Thorndyke made straight for the chambers of our friend Anstey, which were two doors above our own.

"Why are we coming here?" I asked, as we ascended the stairs.

But the question needed no answer when we reached the landing, for through the open door of our friend's chambers I could see in the darkened room Anstey himself with two uniformed constables and a couple of plain-clothes men.

"There has been no signal yet, sir," said one of the latter, whom I recognized as a detective-sergeant of our division.

"No," said Thorndyke, "but the M.C. has arrived. He came in five minutes before us."

"Then," exclaimed Anstey, "the ball will open shortly, ladies and gents. The boards are waxed, the fiddlers are tuning up, and—"

"Not quite so loud, if you please, sir," said the sergeant. "I think there is somebody coming up Crown Office Row."

The ball had, in fact, opened. As we peered cautiously out of the open window, keeping well back in the darkened room, a

stealthy figure crept out of the shadow, crossed the road, and stole noiselessly into the entry of Thorndyke's chambers. It was quickly followed by a second figure, and then by a third, in which I recognized our elusive client.

"Now listen for the signal," said Thorndyke. "They won't waste time. Confound that clock!"

The soft-voiced bell of the Inner Temple clock, mingling with the harsher tones of St. Dunstan's and the Law Courts, slowly told out the hour of midnight; and as the last reverberations were dying away, some metallic object, apparently a coin, dropped with a sharp clink on to the pavement under our window.

At the sound the watchers simultaneously sprang to their feet.

"You two go first," said the sergeant, addressing the uniformed men, who thereupon stole noiselessly, in their rubber-soled boots, down the stone stairs and along the pavement. The rest of us followed, with less attention to silence, and as we ran up to Thorndyke's chambers, we were aware of quick but stealthy footsteps on the stairs above.

"They've been at work, you see," whispered one of the constables, flashing his lantern on to the iron-bound outer door of our sitting-room, on which the marks of a large jemmy were plainly visible.

The sergeant nodded grimly, and, bidding the constables to remain on the landing, led the way upwards.

As we ascended, faint rustlings continued to be audible from above, and on the second-floor landing we met a man descending briskly, but without hurry, from the third. It was Mr. Barton, and I could not but admire the composure with which he passed the two detectives. But suddenly his glance fell on Thorndyke, and his composure vanished. With a wild stare of incredulous horror, he halted as if petrified; then he broke away and raced furiously down the stairs, and a moment later a muffled shout and the sound of a scuffle told us that he had received a check. On the next flight we met two more men, who, more hurried and less self-possessed, endeavoured to push past; but the sergeant barred the way.

"Why, bless me!" exclaimed the latter, "it's Moakey; and isn't that Tom Harris?"

"It's all right, sergeant," said Moakey plaintively, striving to escape from the officer's grip. "We've come to the wrong house, that's all."

The sergeant smiled indulgently. "I know," he replied. "But you're always coming to the wrong house, Moakey; and now you're just coming along with me to the right house."

He slipped his hand inside his captive's coat, and adroitly fished out a large, folding jemmy; whereupon the discomfited burglar abandoned all further protest.

On our return to the first-floor, we found Mr. Barton sulkily awaiting us, handcuffed to one of the constables, and watched by Polton with pensive disapproval.

"I needn't trouble you to-night, Doctor," said the sergeant, as he marshalled his little troop of captors and captives. "You'll hear from us in the morning. Good-night, sir."

The melancholy procession moved off down the stairs, and we retired into our chambers with Anstey to smoke a last pipe.

"A capable man, that Barton," observed Thorndyke—"ready, plausible, and ingenious, but spoilt by prolonged contact with fools. I wonder if the police will perceive the significance of this little affair."

"They will be more acute than I am if they do," said I.

"Naturally," interposed Anstey, who loved to "cheek" his revered senior, "because there isn't any. It's only Thorndyke's bounce. He is really in a deuce of a fog himself."

However this may have been, the police were a good deal puzzled by the incident, for, on the following morning, we received a visit from no less a person than Superintendent Miller, of Scotland Yard.

"This is a queer business," said he, coming to the point at once—"this burglary, I mean. Why should they want to crack your place, right here in the Temple, too? You've got nothing of value here, have you? No 'hard stuff,' as they call it, for instance?"

"Not so much as a silver teaspoon," replied Thorndyke, who had a conscientious objection to plate of all kinds.

"It's odd," said the superintendent, "deuced odd. When we got your note, we thought these anarchist idiots had mixed you up with the case—you saw the papers, I suppose—and wanted to go through your rooms for some reason. We thought we had our hands on the gang, instead of which we find a party of common crooks that we're sick of the sight of. I tell you, sir, it's annoying when you think you've hooked a salmon, to bring up a blooming eel."

"It must be a great disappointment," Thorndyke agreed, suppressing a smile.

"It is," said the detective. "Not but what we're glad enough to get these beggars, especially Halkett, or Barton, as he calls himself—a mighty slippery customer is Halkett, and mischievous, too—but we're not wanting any disappointments just now. There was that big jewel job in Piccadilly, Taplin and Horne's; I don't mind telling you that we've not got the ghost of a clue. Then there's this anarchist affair. We're all in the dark there, too."

"But what about the cipher?" asked Thorndyke.

"Oh, hang the cipher!" exclaimed the detective irritably. "This Professor Poppelbaum may be a very learned man, but he doesn't help us much. He says the document is in Hebrew, and he has translated it into Double Dutch. Just listen to this!" He dragged out of his pocket a bundle of papers, and, dabbing down a photograph of the document before Thorndyke, commenced to read the Professor's report. "The document is written in the characters of the well-known inscription of Mesha, King of Moab' (who the devil's he? Never heard of him. Well known, indeed!) 'The language is Hebrew, and the words are separated by groups of letters, which are meaningless, and obviously introduced to mislead and confuse the reader. The words themselves are not strictly consecutive, but, by the interpellation of certain other words, a series of intelligible sentences is obtained, the meaning of which is not very clear, but is no doubt allegorical. The method of decipherment is shown in the accompanying tables, and the full rendering suggested on the enclosed sheet. It is to be noted that the writer of this document was apparently quite unacquainted with the Hebrew language, as appears from the absence of any grammatical construction.' That's the Professor's report, Doctor, and here are the tables showing how he worked it out. It makes my head spin to look at 'em."

He handed to Thorndyke a bundle of ruled sheets, which my colleague examined attentively for a while, and then passed on to me.

"This is very systematic and thorough," said he. "But now let us see the final result at which he arrives."

"It may be all very systematic," growled the superintendent, sorting out his papers, "but I tell you, sir, it's all BOSH!" The latter word he jerked out viciously, as he slapped down on the table the final product of the Professor's labours. "There," he continued, "that's what he calls the 'full rendering,' and I reckon it'll make your hair curl. It might be a message from Bedlam."

Thorndyke took up the first sheet, and as he compared the constructed renderings with the literal translation, the ghost of a smile stole across his usually immovable countenance.

"The meaning is certainly a little obscure," he observed, "though the reconstruction is highly ingenious; and, moreover, I think the Professor is probably right. That is to say, the words which he has supplied are probably the omitted parts of the passages from which the words of the cryptogram were taken. What do you think, Jervis?"

*Analysis of the cipher with transliteration into modern square Hebrew characters + translation into English. N.B. The cipher reads from right to left.*

Moabite Hebrew Translation	Space YQ	Word YQAG QYQ LIES	Space AG	Word QZO YQ CITY	Space QA	Word ZYA YK WOE
Moabite Hebrew Translation	QY	QYQ QY NOISE	QYQ	YQX QYQ PREY	QY	QYQ QY ROBBERY
Moabite Hebrew Translation	WQ	QYQ QYX WHEEL	QY	WQX QYQ RATTLING	QY	QYQ QY WHIP
Moabite Hebrew Translation	YQ	QYQ QY DAY	AG	QYQ QYQ CHARLOT	QYX	QYQ QY HORSE

*The Professor's Analysis.*

Handwritten: Analysis of the cipher with translation into modern square Hebrew characters + a translation into English. N.B. The cipher reads from right to left.]

He handed me the two papers, of which one gave the actual words of the cryptogram, and the other a suggested reconstruction, with omitted words supplied. The first read:

"Woe city lies robbery prey noise whip rattling wheel horse chariot day darkness gloominess cloud darkness morning mountain people strong fire them flame."

Turning to the second paper, I read out the suggested rendering:

"*Woe to the bloody city! It is full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not. The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots.*

"*A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds, and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains, a great people and a strong.*

"*A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth.*"

Here the first sheet ended, and, as I laid it down, Thorndyke looked at me inquiringly.

"There is a good deal of reconstruction in proportion to the original matter," I objected. "The Professor has 'supplied' more than three-quarters of the final rendering."

"Exactly," burst in the superintendent; "it's all Professor and no cryptogram."

"Still, I think the reading is correct," said Thorndyke. "As far as it goes, that is."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the dismayed detective. "Do you mean to tell me, sir, that that balderdash is the real meaning of the thing?"

"I don't say that," replied Thorndyke. "I say it is correct as far as it goes; but I doubt its being the solution of the cryptogram."

"Have you been studying that photograph that I gave you?" demanded Miller, with sudden eagerness.

"I have looked at it," said Thorndyke evasively, "but I should like to examine the original if you have it with you."

"I have," said the detective. "Professor Poppelbaum sent it back with the solution. You can have a look at it, though I can't leave it with you without special authority."

He drew the document from his pocket-book and handed it to Thorndyke, who took it over to the window and scrutinized it closely. From the window he drifted into the adjacent office, closing the door after him; and presently the sound of a faint explosion told me that he had lighted the gas-fire.

"Of course," said Miller, taking up the translation again, "this gibberish is the sort of stuff you might expect from a parcel of crack-brained anarchists; but it doesn't seem to mean anything."

"Not to us," I agreed; "but the phrases may have some pre-arranged significance. And then there are the letters between the words. It is possible that they may really form a cipher."

"I suggested that to the Professor," said Miller, "but he wouldn't hear of it. He is sure they are only dummies."

"I think he is probably mistaken, and so, I fancy, does my colleague. But we shall hear what he has to say presently."

"Oh, I know what he will say," growled Miller. "He will put the thing under the microscope, and tell us who made the paper, and what the ink is composed of, and then we shall be just where we were." The superintendent was evidently deeply depressed.

We sat for some time pondering in silence on the vague sentences of the Professor's translation, until, at length, Thorndyke reappeared, holding the document in his hand. He laid it quietly on the table by the officer, and then inquired:

"Is this an official consultation?"

"Certainly," replied Miller. "I was authorized to consult you respecting the translation, but nothing was said about the original. Still, if you want it for further study, I will get it for you."

"No, thank you," said Thorndyke. "I have finished with it. My theory turned out to be correct."

"Your theory!" exclaimed the superintendent, eagerly. "Do you mean to say—?"

"And, as you are consulting me officially, I may as well give you this."

He held out a sheet of paper, which the detective took from him and began to read.

"What is this?" he asked, looking up at Thorndyke with a puzzled frown. "Where did it come from?"

"It is the solution of the cryptogram," replied Thorndyke.

The detective re-read the contents of the paper, and, with the frown of perplexity deepening, once more gazed at my colleague.

"This is a joke, sir; you are fooling me," he said sulkily.

"Nothing of the kind," answered Thorndyke. "That is the genuine solution."

"But it's impossible!" exclaimed Miller. "Just look at it, Dr. Jervis."

I took the paper from his hand, and, as I glanced at it, I had no difficulty in understanding his surprise. It bore a short

inscription in printed Roman capitals, thus:

"THE PICKERDILLEY STUF IS UP THE CHIMBLY 416 WARDOUR ST 2ND FLOUR BACK IT WAS HID BECOS OF OLD MOAKEYS JOOD MOAKEY IS A BLITER."

"Then that fellow wasn't an anarchist at all?" I exclaimed.

"No," said Miller. "He was one of Moakey's gang. We suspected Moakey of being mixed up with that job, but we couldn't fix it on him. By Jove!" he added, slapping his thigh, "if this is right, and I can lay my hands on the loot! Can you lend me a bag, doctor? I'm off to Wardour Street this very moment."

We furnished him with an empty suit-case, and, from the window, watched him making for Mitre Court at a smart double.

"I wonder if he will find the booty," said Thorndyke. "It just depends on whether the hiding-place was known to more than one of the gang. Well, it has been a quaint case, and instructive, too. I suspect our friend Barton and the evasive Schönberg were the collaborators who produced that curiosity of literature."

"May I ask how you deciphered the thing?" I said. "It didn't appear to take long."

"It didn't. It was merely a matter of testing a hypothesis; and you ought not to have to ask that question," he added, with mock severity, "seeing that you had what turn out to have been all the necessary facts, two days ago. But I will prepare a document and demonstrate to you to-morrow morning."

\*\*\*\*\*

"So Miller was successful in his quest," said Thorndyke, as we smoked our morning pipes after breakfast. "The 'entire swag,' as he calls it, was 'up the chimbly,' undisturbed."

He handed me a note which had been left, with the empty suit-case, by a messenger, shortly before, and I was about to read it when an agitated knock was heard at our door. The visitor, whom I admitted, was a rather haggard and dishevelled elderly gentleman, who, as he entered, peered inquisitively through his concave spectacles from one of us to the other.

"Allow me to introduce myself, gentlemen," said he. "I am Professor Poppelbaum."

Thorndyke bowed and offered a chair.

"I called yesterday afternoon," our visitor continued, "at Scotland Yard, where I heard of your remarkable decipherment and of the convincing proof of its correctness. Thereupon I borrowed the cryptogram, and have spent the entire night in studying it, but I cannot connect your solution with any of the characters. I wonder if you would do me the great favour of enlightening me as to your method of decipherment, and so save me further sleepless nights? You may rely on my discretion."

"Have you the document with you?" asked Thorndyke.

The Professor produced it from his pocket-book, and passed it to my colleague.

"You observe, Professor," said the latter, "that this is a laid paper, and has no water-mark?"

"Yes, I noticed that."

"And that the writing is in indelible Chinese ink?"

"Yes, yes," said the savant impatiently; "but it is the inscription that interests me, not the paper and ink."

"Precisely," said Thorndyke. "Now, it was the ink that interested me when I caught a glimpse of the document three days ago. 'Why,' I asked myself, 'should anyone use this troublesome medium'—for this appears to be stick ink—'when good writing ink is to be had?' What advantages has Chinese ink over writing ink? It has several advantages as a drawing ink, but for writing purposes it has only one: it is quite unaffected by wet. The obvious inference, then, was that this document was, for some reason, likely to be exposed to wet. But this inference instantly suggested another, which I was yesterday able to put to the test—thus."

He filled a tumbler with water, and, rolling up the document, dropped it in. Immediately there began to appear on it a new set of characters of a curious grey colour. In a few seconds Thorndyke lifted out the wet paper, and held it up to the light, and now there was plainly visible an inscription in transparent lettering, like a very distinct water-mark. It was in printed Roman capitals, written across the other writing, and read:

"THE PICKERDILLEY STUF IS UP THE CHIMBLY 416 WARDOUR ST 2ND FLOUR BACK IT WAS HID BECOS OF OLD MOAKEYS JOOD MOAKEY IS A BLITER."

The Professor regarded the inscription with profound disfavour.

"How do you suppose this was done?" he asked gloomily.

"I will show you," said Thorndyke. "I have prepared a piece of paper to demonstrate the process to Dr. Jervis. It is exceedingly simple."

He fetched from the office a small plate of glass, and a photographic dish in which a piece of thin notepaper was soaking in water.

"This paper," said Thorndyke, lifting it out and laying it on the glass, "has been soaking all night, and is now quite pulpy."

He spread a dry sheet of paper over the wet one, and on the former wrote heavily with a hard pencil, "Moakey is a bliter." On lifting the upper sheet, the writing was seen to be transferred in a deep grey to the wet paper, and when the latter was held up to the light the inscription stood out clear and transparent as if written with oil.

"When this dries," said Thorndyke, "the writing will completely disappear, but it will reappear whenever the paper is again wetted."

The Professor nodded.

"Very ingenious," said he—"a sort of artificial palimpsest, in fact. But I do not understand how that illiterate man could have written in the difficult Moabite script."

"He did not," said Thorndyke. "The 'cryptogram' was probably written by one of the leaders of the gang, who, no doubt, supplied copies to the other members to use instead of blank paper for secret communications. The object of the Moabite writing was evidently to divert attention from the paper itself, in case the communication fell into the wrong hands, and I must say it seems to have answered its purpose very well."

The Professor started, stung by the sudden recollection of his labours.

"Yes," he snorted; "but I am a scholar, sir, not a policeman. Every man to his trade."

He snatched up his hat, and with a curt "Good-morning," flung out of the room in dudgeon.

Thorndyke laughed softly.

"Poor Professor!" he murmured. "Our playful friend Barton has much to answer for."

---

## VI. — THE MANDARIN'S PEARL

MR. BRODRIBB stretched out his toes on the kerb before the blazing fire with the air of a man who is by no means insensible to physical comfort.

"You are really an extraordinarily polite fellow, Thorndyke," said he.

He was an elderly man, rosy-gilled, portly, and convivial, to whom a mass of bushy, white hair, an expansive double chin, and a certain prim sumptuousness of dress imparted an air of old-world distinction. Indeed, as he dipped an amethystine nose into his wine-glass, and gazed thoughtfully at the glowing end of his cigar, he looked the very type of the well-to-do lawyer of an older generation.

"You are really an extraordinarily polite fellow, Thorndyke," said Mr. Brodribb.

"I know," replied Thorndyke. "But why this reference to an admitted fact?"

"The truth has just dawned on me," said the solicitor. "Here am I, dropping in on you, uninvited and unannounced, sitting in your own armchair before your fire, smoking your cigars, drinking your Burgundy—and deuced good Burgundy, too, let me add—and you have not dropped a single hint of curiosity as to what has brought me here."

"I take the gifts of the gods, you see, and ask no questions," said Thorndyke.

"Devilish handsome of you, Thorndyke—unsociable beggar like you, too," rejoined Mr. Brodribb, a fan of wrinkles spreading out genially from the corners of his eyes; "but the fact is I have come, in a sense, on business—always glad of a pretext to look you up, as you know—but I want to take your opinion on a rather queer case. It is about young Calverley. You remember Horace Calverley? Well, this is his son. Horace and I were schoolmates, you know, and after his death the boy, Fred, hung on to me rather. We're near neighbours down at Weybridge, and very good friends. I like Fred. He's a good fellow, though cranky, like all his people."

"What has happened to Fred Calverley?" Thorndyke asked, as the solicitor paused.

"Why, the fact is," said Mr. Brodribb, "just lately he seems to be going a bit queer—not mad, mind you—at least, I think not—but undoubtedly queer. Now, there is a good deal of property, and a good many highly interested relatives, and, as a natural consequence, there is some talk of getting him certified. They're afraid he may do something involving the estate or develop homicidal tendencies, and they talk of possible suicide—you remember his father's death—but I say that's all bunkum. The fellow is just a bit cranky, and nothing more."

"What are his symptoms?" asked Thorndyke.

"Oh, he thinks he is being followed about and watched, and he has delusions; sees himself in the glass with the wrong face, and that sort of thing, you know."

"You are not highly circumstantial," Thorndyke remarked.

Mr. Brodribb looked at me with a genial smile.

"What a glutton for facts this fellow is, Jervis. But you're right, Thorndyke; I'm vague. However, Fred will be here

presently. We travel down together, and I took the liberty of asking him to call for me. We'll get him to tell you about his delusions, if you don't mind. He's not shy about them. And meanwhile I'll give you a few preliminary facts. The trouble began about a year ago. He was in a railway accident, and that knocked him all to pieces. Then he went for a voyage to recruit, and the ship broke her propeller-shaft in a storm and became helpless. That didn't improve the state of his nerves. Then he went down the Mediterranean, and after a month or two, back he came, no better than when he started. But here he is, I expect."

He went over to the door and admitted a tall, frail young man whom Thorndyke welcomed with quiet geniality, and settled in a chair by the fire. I looked curiously at our visitor. He was a typical neurotic—slender, fragile, eager. Wide-open blue eyes with broad pupils, in which I could plainly see the characteristic "hippus"—that incessant change of size that marks the unstable nervous equilibrium—parted lips, and wandering taper fingers, were as the stigmata of his disorder. He was of the stuff out of which prophets and devotees, martyrs, reformers, and third-rate poets are made.

"I have been telling Dr. Thorndyke about these nervous troubles of yours," said Mr. Brodribb presently. "I hope you don't mind. He is an old friend, you know, and he is very much interested."

"It is very good of him," said Calverley. Then he flushed deeply, and added: "But they are not really nervous, you know. They can't be merely subjective."

"You think they can't be?" said Thorndyke.

"No, I am sure they are not." He flushed again like a girl, and looked earnestly at Thorndyke with his big, dreamy eyes. "But you doctors," he said, "are so dreadfully sceptical of all spiritual phenomena. You are such materialists."

"Yes," said Mr. Brodribb; "the doctors are not hot on the supernatural, and that's the fact."

"Supposing you tell us about your experiences," said Thorndyke persuasively. "Give us a chance to believe, if we can't explain away."

Calverley reflected for a few moments; then, looking earnestly at Thorndyke, he said:

"Very well; if it won't bore you, I will. It is a curious story."

"I have told Dr. Thorndyke about your voyage and your trip down the Mediterranean," said Mr. Brodribb.

"Then," said Calverley, "I will begin with the events that are actually connected with these strange visitations. The first of these occurred in Marseilles. I was in a curio-shop there, looking over some Algerian and Moorish tilings, when my attention was attracted by a sort of charm or pendant that hung in a glass case. It was not particularly beautiful, but its appearance was quaint and curious, and took my fancy. It consisted of an oblong block of ebony in which was set a single pear-shaped pearl more than three-quarters of an inch long. The sides of the ebony block were lacquered—probably to conceal a joint—and bore a number of Chinese characters, and at the top was a little gold image with a hole through it, presumably for a string to suspend it by. Excepting for the pearl, the whole thing was uncommonly like one of those ornamental tablets of Chinese ink.

"Now, I had taken a fancy to the thing, and I can afford to indulge my fancies in moderation. The man wanted five pounds for it; he assured me that the pearl was a genuine one of fine quality, and obviously did not believe it himself. To me, however, it looked like a real pearl, and I determined to take the risk; so I paid the money, and he bowed me out with a smile—I may almost say a grin—of satisfaction. He would not have been so well pleased if he had followed me to a jeweller's to whom I took it for an expert opinion; for the jeweller pronounced the pearl to be undoubtedly genuine, and worth anything up to a thousand pounds.

"A day or two later, I happened to show my new purchase to some men whom I knew, who had dropped in at Marseilles in their yacht. They were highly amused at my having bought the thing, and when I told them what I had paid for it, they positively howled with derision.

"'Why, you silly guffin,' said one of them, a man named Halliwell, 'I could have had it ten days ago for half a sovereign, or probably five shillings. I wish now I had bought it; then I could have sold it to you.'

"It seemed that a sailor had been hawking the pendant round the harbour, and had been on board the yacht with it.

"'Deuced anxious the beggar was to get rid of it, too,' said Halliwell, grinning at the recollection. 'Swore it was a genuine pearl of priceless value, and was willing to deprive himself of it for the trifling sum of half a jimmy. But we'd heard that sort of thing before. However, the curio-man seems to have speculated on the chance of meeting with a greenhorn, and he seems to have pulled it off. Lucky curio man!'

"I listened patiently to their gibes, and when they had talked themselves out I told them about the jeweller. They were most frightfully sick; and when we had taken the pendant to a dealer in gems who happened to be staying in the town, and he had offered me five hundred pounds for it, their language wasn't fit for a divinity students' debating club. Naturally the story got noised abroad, and when I left, it was the talk of the place. The general opinion was that the sailor, who was traced to a tea-ship that had put into the harbour, had stolen it from some Chinese passenger; and no less than seventeen different Chinamen came forward to claim it as their stolen property.

"Soon after this I returned to England, and, as my nerves were still in a very shaky state, I came to live with my cousin Alfred, who has a large house at Weybridge. At this time he had a friend staying with him, a certain Captain Raggerton, and

the two men appeared to be on very intimate terms. I did not take to Raggerton at all. He was a good-looking man, pleasant in his manners, and remarkably plausible. But the fact is—I am speaking in strict confidence, of course—he was a bad egg. He had been in the Guards, and I don't quite know why he left; but I do know that he played bridge and baccarat pretty heavily at several clubs, and that he had a reputation for being a rather uncomfortably lucky player. He did a good deal at the race-meetings, too, and was in general such an obvious undesirable that I could never understand my cousin's intimacy with him, though I must say that Alfred's habits had changed somewhat for the worse since I had left England.

"The fame of my purchase seems to have preceded me, for when, one day, I produced the pendant to show them, I found that they knew all about it. Raggerton had heard the story from a naval man, and I gathered vaguely that he had heard something that I had not, and that he did not care to tell me; for when my cousin and he talked about the pearl, which they did pretty often, certain significant looks passed between them, and certain veiled references were made which I could not fail to notice.

"One day I happened to be telling them of a curious incident that occurred on my way home. I had travelled to England on one of Holt's big China boats, not liking the crowd and bustle of the regular passenger-lines. Now, one afternoon, when we had been at sea a couple of days, I took a book down to my berth, intending to have a quiet read till tea-time. Soon, however, I dropped off into a doze, and must have remained asleep for over an hour. I awoke suddenly, and as I opened my eyes, I perceived that the door of the state-room was half-open, and a well-dressed Chinaman, in native costume, was looking in at me. He closed the door immediately, and I remained for a few moments paralyzed by the start that he had given me. Then I leaped from my bunk, opened the door, and looked out. But the alley-way was empty. The Chinaman had vanished as if by magic.

"This little occurrence made me quite nervous for a day or two, which was very foolish of me; but my nerves were all on edge—and I am afraid they are still."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "There was nothing mysterious about the affair. These boats carry a Chinese crew, and the man you saw was probably a Serang, or whatever they call the gang-captains on these vessels. Or he may have been a native passenger who had strayed into the wrong part of the ship."

"Exactly," agreed our client. "But to return to Raggerton. He listened with quite extraordinary interest as I was telling this story, and when I had finished he looked very queerly at my cousin.

"A deuced odd thing, this, Calverley," said he. "Of course, it may be only a coincidence, but it really does look as if there was something, after all, in that—"

"Shut up, Raggerton," said my cousin. "We don't want any of that rot."

"What is he talking about?" I asked.

"Oh, it's only a rotten, silly yarn that he has picked up somewhere. You're not to tell him, Raggerton."

"I don't see why I am not to be told," I said, rather sulkily. "I'm not a baby."

"No," said Alfred, "but you're an invalid. You don't want any horrors."

"In effect, he refused to go into the matter any further, and I was left on tenter-hooks of curiosity.

"However, the very next day I got Raggerton alone in the smoking-room, and had a little talk with him. He had just dropped a hundred pounds on a double event that hadn't come off, and I expected to find him pliable. Nor was I disappointed, for, when we had negotiated a little loan, he was entirely at my service, and willing to tell me everything, on my promising not to give him away to Alfred.

"Now, you understand," he said, "that this yarn about your pearl is nothing but a damn silly fable that's been going the round in Marseilles. I don't know where it came from, or what sort of demented rotter invented it; I had it from a Johnnie in the Mediterranean Squadron, and you can have a copy of his letter if you want it."

"I said that I did want it. Accordingly, that same evening he handed me a copy of the narrative extracted from his friend's letter, the substance of which was this:

"About four months ago there was lying in Canton Harbour a large English barque. Her name is not mentioned, but that is not material to the story. She had got her cargo stowed and her crew signed on, and was only waiting for certain official formalities to be completed before putting to sea on her homeward voyage. Just ahead of her, at the same quay, was a Danish ship that had been in collision outside, and was now laid up pending the decision of the Admiralty Court. She had been unloaded, and her crew paid off, with the exception of one elderly man, who remained on board as ship-keeper. Now, a considerable part of the cargo of the English barque was the property of a certain wealthy mandarin, and this person had been about the vessel a good deal while she was taking in her lading.

"One day, when the mandarin was on board the barque, it happened that three of the seamen were sitting in the galley smoking and chatting with the cook—an elderly Chinaman named Wo-li—and the latter, pointing out the mandarin to the sailors, expatiated on his enormous wealth, assuring them that he was commonly believed to carry on his person articles of sufficient value to buy up the entire lading of a ship.

"Now, unfortunately for the mandarin, it chanced that these three sailors were about the greatest rascals on board; which is saying a good deal when one considers the ordinary moral standard that prevails in the fore-castle of a sailing-ship.



Nor was Wo-li himself an angel; in fact, he was a consummate villain, and seems to have been the actual originator of the plot which was presently devised to rob the mandarin.

"This plot was as remarkable for its simplicity as for its cold-blooded barbarity. On the evening before the barque sailed, the three seamen, Nilsson, Foucault, and Parratt, proceeded to the Danish ship with a supply of whisky, made the ship-keeper royally drunk, and locked him up in an empty berth. Meanwhile Wo-li made a secret communication to the mandarin to the effect that certain stolen property, believed to be his, had been secreted in the hold of the empty ship. Thereupon the mandarin came down hot-foot to the quay-side, and was received on board by the three seamen, who had got the covers off the after-hatch in readiness. Parratt now ran down the iron ladder to show the way, and the mandarin followed; but when they reached the lower deck, and looked down the hatch into the black darkness of the lower hold, he seems to have taken fright, and begun to climb up again. Meanwhile Nilsson had made a running bowline in the end of a loose halyard that was rove through a block aloft, and had been used for hoisting out the cargo. As the mandarin came up, he leaned over the coaming of the hatch, dropped the noose over the Chinaman's head, jerked it tight, and then he and Foucault hove on the fall of the rope. The unfortunate Chinaman was dragged from the ladder, and, as he swung clear, the two rascals let go the rope, allowing him to drop through the hatches into the lower hold. Then they belayed the rope, and went down below. Parratt had already lighted a slush-lamp, by the glimmer of which they could see the mandarin swinging to and fro like a pendulum within a few feet of the ballast, and still quivering and twitching in his death-throes. They were now joined by Wo-li, who had watched the proceedings from the quay, and the four villains proceeded, without loss of time, to rifle the body as it hung. To their surprise and disgust, they found nothing of value excepting an ebony pendant set with a single large pearl; but Wo-li, though evidently disappointed at the nature of the booty, assured his comrades that this alone was well worth the hazard, pointing out the great size and exceptional beauty of the pearl. As to this, the seamen know nothing about pearls, but the thing was done, and had to be made the best of; so they made the rope fast to the lower deck-beams, cut off the remainder and unrove it from the block, and went back to their ship.

"It was twenty-four hours before the ship-keeper was sufficiently sober to break out of the berth in which he had been locked, by which time the barque was well out to sea; and it was another three days before the body of the mandarin was found. An active search was then made for the murderers, but as they were strangers to the ship-keeper, no clues to their whereabouts could be discovered.

"Meanwhile, the four murderers were a good deal exercised as to the disposal of the booty. Since it could not be divided, it was evident that it must be entrusted to the keeping of one of them. The choice in the first place fell upon Wo-li, in whose chest the pendant was deposited as soon as the party came on board, it being arranged that the Chinaman should produce the jewel for inspection by his confederates whenever called upon.

"For six weeks nothing out of the common occurred; but then a very singular event befell. The four conspirators were sitting outside the galley one evening, when suddenly the cook uttered a cry of amazement and horror. The other three turned to see what it was that had so disturbed their comrade, and then they, too, were struck dumb with consternation; for, standing at the door of the companion-hatch—the barque was a flush-decked vessel—was the mandarin whom they had left for dead. He stood quietly regarding them for fully a minute, while they stared at him transfixed with terror. Then he beckoned to them, and went below.

"So petrified were they with astonishment and mortal fear that they remained for a long time motionless and dumb. At last they plucked up courage, and began to make furtive inquiries among the crew; but no one—not even the steward—knew anything of any passengers, or, indeed, of any Chinaman, on board the ship, excepting Wo-li.

"At day-break the next morning, when the cook's mate went to the galley to fill the coppers, he found Wo-li hanging from a hook in the ceiling. The cook's body was stiff and cold, and had evidently been hanging several hours. The report of the tragedy quickly spread through the ship, and the three conspirators hurried off to remove the pearl from the dead man's chest before the officers should come to examine it. The cheap lock was easily picked with a bent wire, and the jewel abstracted; but now the question arose as to who should take charge of it. The eagerness to be the actual custodian of the precious bauble, which had been at first displayed, now gave place to equally strong reluctance. But someone had to take charge of it, and after a long and angry discussion Nilsson was prevailed upon to stow it in his chest.

"A fortnight passed. The three conspirators went about their duties soberly, like men burdened with some secret anxiety, and in their leisure moments they would sit and talk with bated breath of the apparition at the companion-hatch, and the mysterious death of their late comrade.

"At last the blow fell.

"It was at the end of the second dog-watch that the hands were gathered on the forecastle, preparing to make sail after a spell of bad weather. Suddenly Nilsson gave a husky shout, and rushed at Parratt, holding out the key of his chest.

"Here you, Parratt," he exclaimed, 'go below and take that accursed thing out of my chest.'

"What for?" demanded Parratt; and then he and Foucault, who was standing close by, looked aft to see what Nilsson was staring at.

"Instantly they both turned white as ghosts, and fell trembling so that they could hardly stand; for there was the mandarin, standing calmly by the companion, returning with a steady, impassive gaze their looks of horror. And even as they looked he beckoned and went below.

“D’ye hear, Parratt?” gasped Nilsson; ‘take my key and do what I say, or else—’

“But at this moment the order was given to go aloft and set all plain sail; the three men went off to their respective posts, Nilsson going up the fore-topmast rigging, and the other two to the main-top. Having finished their work aloft, Foucault and Parratt who were both in the port watch, came down on deck, and then, it being their watch below, they went and turned in.

“When they turned out with their watch at midnight, they looked about for Nilsson, who was in the starboard watch, but he was nowhere to be seen. Thinking he might have slipped below unobserved, they made no remark, though they were very uneasy about him; but when the starboard watch came on deck at four o’clock, and Nilsson did not appear with his mates, the two men became alarmed, and made inquiries about him. It was now discovered that no one had seen him since eight o’clock on the previous evening, and, this being reported to the officer of the watch, the latter ordered all hands to be called. But still Nilsson did not appear. A thorough search was now instituted, both below and aloft, and as there was still no sign of the missing man, it was concluded that he had fallen overboard.

“But at eight o’clock two men were sent aloft to shake out the fore-royal. They reached the yard almost simultaneously, and were just stepping on to the foot-ropes when one of them gave a shout; then the pair came sliding down a backstay, with faces as white as tallow. As soon as they reached the deck, they took the officer of the watch forward, and, standing on the heel of the bowsprit, pointed aloft. Several of the hands, including Foucault and Parratt, had followed, and all looked up; and there they saw the body of Nilsson, hanging on the front of the fore-topgallant sail. He was dangling at the end of a gasket, and bouncing up and down on the taut belly of the sail as the ship rose and fell to the send of the sea.

“The two survivors were now in some doubt about having anything further to do with the pearl. But the great value of the jewel, and the consideration that it was now to be divided between two instead of four, tempted them. They abstracted it from Nilsson’s chest, and then, as they could not come to an agreement in any other way, they decided to settle who should take charge of it by tossing a coin. The coin was accordingly spun, and the pearl went to Foucault’s chest.

“From this moment Foucault lived in a state of continual apprehension. When on deck, his eyes were for ever wandering towards the companion hatch, and during his watch below, when not asleep, he would sit moodily on his chest, lost in gloomy reflection. But a fortnight passed, then three weeks, and still nothing happened. Land was sighted, the Straits of Gibraltar passed, and the end of the voyage was but a matter of days. And still the dreaded mandarin made no sign.

“At length the ship was within twenty-four hours of Marseilles, to which port a large part of the cargo was consigned. Active preparations were being made for entering the port, and among other things the shore tackle was being overhauled. A share in this latter work fell to Foucault and Parratt, and about the middle of the second dog-watch—seven o’clock in the evening—they were sitting on the deck working an eye-splice in the end of a large rope. Suddenly Foucault, who was facing forward, saw his companion turn pale and stare aft with an expression of terror. He immediately turned and looked over his shoulder to see what Parratt was staring at. It was the mandarin, standing by the companion, gravely watching them; and as Foucault turned and met his gaze, the Chinaman beckoned and went below.

“For the rest of that day Parratt kept close to his terrified comrade, and during their watch below he endeavoured to remain awake, that he might keep his friend in view. Nothing happened through the night, and the following morning, when they came on deck for the forenoon watch, their port was well in sight. The two men now separated for the first time, Parratt going aft to take his trick at the wheel, and Foucault being set to help in getting ready the ground tackle.

“Half an hour later Parratt saw the mate stand on the rail and lean outboard, holding on to the mizzen-shrouds while he stared along the ship’s side. Then he jumped on to the deck and shouted angrily: ‘Forward, there! What the deuce is that man up to under the starboard cat-head?’

“The men on the forecastle rushed to the side and looked over; two of them leaned over the rail with the bight of a rope between them, and a third came running aft to the mate. ‘It’s Foucault, sir,’ Parratt heard him say. ‘He’s hanged hisself from the cat-head.’

“As soon as he was off duty, Parratt made his way to his dead comrade’s chest, and, opening it with his pick-lock, took out the pearl. It was now his sole property, and, as the ship was within an hour or two of her destination, he thought he had little to fear from its murdered owner. As soon as the vessel was alongside the wharf, he would slip ashore and get rid of the jewel, even if he sold it at a comparatively low price. The thing looked perfectly simple.

“In actual practice, however, it turned out quite otherwise. He began by accosting a well-dressed stranger and offering the pendant for fifty pounds; but the only reply that he got was a knowing smile and a shake of the head. When this experience had been repeated a dozen times or more, and he had been followed up and down the streets for nearly an hour by a suspicious gendarme, he began to grow anxious. He visited quite a number of ships and yachts in the harbour, and at each refusal the price of his treasure came down, until he was eager to sell it for a few francs. But still no one would have it. Everyone took it for granted that the pearl was a sham, and most of the persons whom he accosted assumed that it had been stolen. The position was getting desperate. Evening was approaching—the time of the dreaded dog-watches—and still the pearl was in his possession. Gladly would he now have given it away for nothing, but he dared not try, for this would lay him open to the strongest suspicion.

“At last, in a by-street, he came upon the shop of a curio-dealer. Putting on a careless and cheerful manner, he entered and offered the pendant for ten francs. The dealer looked at it, shook his head, and handed it back.

“‘What will you give me for it?’ demanded Parratt, breaking out into a cold sweat at the prospect of a final refusal.

“The dealer felt in his pocket, drew out a couple of francs, and held them out.

“‘Very well,’ said Parratt. He took the money as calmly as he could, and marched out of the shop, with a gasp of relief, leaving the pendant in the dealer’s hand.

“The jewel was hung up in a glass case, and nothing more was thought about it until some ten days later, when an English tourist, who came into the shop, noticed it and took a liking to it. Thereupon the dealer offered it to him for five pounds, assuring him that it was a genuine pearl, a statement that, to his amazement, the stranger evidently believed. He was then deeply afflicted at not having asked a higher price, but the bargain had been struck, and the Englishman went off with his purchase.

“This was the story told by Captain Raggerton’s friend, and I have given it to you in full detail, having read the manuscript over many times since it was given to me. No doubt you will regard it as a mere traveller’s tale, and consider me a superstitious idiot for giving any credence to it.”

“It certainly seems more remarkable for picturesqueness than for credibility,” Thorndyke agreed. “May I ask,” he continued, “whether Captain Raggerton’s friend gave any explanation as to how this singular story came to his knowledge, or to that of anybody else?”

“Oh yes,” replied Calverley; “I forgot to mention that the seaman, Parratt, very shortly after he had sold the pearl, fell down the hatch into the hold as the ship was unloading, and was very badly injured. He was taken to the hospital, where he died on the following day; and it was while he was lying there in a dying condition that he confessed to the murder, and gave this circumstantial account of it.”

“I see,” said Thorndyke; “and I understand that you accept the story as literally true?”

“Undoubtedly.” Calverley flushed defiantly as he returned Thorndyke’s look, and continued: “You see, I am not a man of science: therefore my beliefs are not limited to things that can be weighed and measured. There are things, Dr. Thorndyke, which are outside the range of our puny intellects; things that science, with its arrogant materialism, puts aside and ignores with close-shut eyes. I prefer to believe in things which obviously exist, even though I cannot explain them. It is the humbler and, I think, the wiser attitude.”

“But, my dear Fred,” protested Mr. Brodribb, “this is a rank fairy-tale.”

Calverley turned upon the solicitor. “If you had seen what I have seen, you would not only believe: you would *know*.”

“Tell us what you have seen, then,” said Mr. Brodribb.

“I will, if you wish to hear it,” said Calverley. “I will continue the strange history of the Mandarin’s Pearl.”

He lit a fresh cigarette and continued:

“The night I came to Beech-hurst—that is my cousin’s house, you know—a rather absurd thing happened, which I mention on account of its connection with what has followed. I had gone to my room early, and sat for some time writing letters before getting ready for bed. When I had finished my letters, I started on a tour of inspection of my room. I was then, you must remember, in a very nervous state, and it had become my habit to examine the room in which I was to sleep before undressing, looking under the bed, and in any cupboards and closets that there happened to be. Now, on looking round my new room, I perceived that there was a second door, and I at once proceeded to open it to see where it led to. As soon as I opened the door, I got a terrible start. I found myself looking into a narrow closet or passage, lined with pegs, on which the servant had hung some of my clothes; at the farther end was another door, and, as I stood looking into the closet, I observed, with startled amazement, a man standing holding the door half-open, and silently regarding me. I stood for a moment staring at him, with my heart thumping and my limbs all of a tremble; then I slammed the door and ran off to look for my cousin.

“He was in the billiard-room with Raggerton, and the pair looked up sharply as I entered.

“‘Alfred,’ I said, ‘where does that passage lead to out of my room?’

“‘Lead to?’ said he. ‘Why, it doesn’t lead anywhere. It used to open into a cross corridor, but when the house was altered, the corridor was done away with, and this passage closed up. It is only a cupboard now.’

“‘Well, there’s a man in it—or there was just now.’

“‘Nonsense!’ he exclaimed; ‘impossible! Let us go and look at the place.’

“He and Raggerton rose, and we went together to my room. As we flung open the door of the closet and looked in, we all three burst into a laugh. There were three men now looking at us from the open door at the other end, and the mystery was solved. A large mirror had been placed at the end of the closet to cover the partition which cut it off from the cross corridor.

“This incident naturally exposed me to a good deal of chaff from my cousin and Captain Raggerton; but I often wished that the mirror had not been placed there, for it happened over and over again that, going to the cupboard hurriedly, and not thinking of the mirror, I got quite a bad shock on being confronted by a figure apparently coming straight at me through an open door. In fact, it annoyed me so much, in my nervous state, that I even thought of asking my cousin to give me a different room; but, happening to refer to the matter when talking to Raggerton, I found the Captain so scornful of

my cowardice that my pride was touched, and I let the affair drop.

“And now I come to a very strange occurrence, which I shall relate quite frankly, although I know beforehand that you will set me down as a liar or a lunatic. I had been away from home for a fortnight, and as I returned rather late at night, I went straight to my room. Having partly undressed, I took my clothes in one hand and a candle in the other, and opened the cupboard door. I stood for a moment looking nervously at my double, standing, candle in hand, looking at me through the open door at the other end of the passage; then I entered, and, setting the candle on a shelf, proceeded to hang up my clothes. I had hung them up, and had just reached up for the candle, when my eye was caught by something strange in the mirror. It no longer reflected the candle in my hand, but instead of it, a large coloured paper lantern. I stood petrified with astonishment, and gazed into the mirror; and then I saw that my own reflection was changed, too; that, in place of my own figure, was that of an elderly Chinaman, who stood regarding me with stony calm.

“I must have stood for near upon a minute, unable to move and scarce able to breathe, face to face with that awful figure. At length I turned to escape, and, as I turned, he turned also, and I could see him, over my shoulder, hurrying away. As I reached the door, I halted for a moment, looking back with the door in my hand, holding the candle above my head; and even so *he* halted, looking back at me, with his hand upon the door and his lantern held above his head.

“I was so much upset that I could not go to bed for some hours, but continued to pace the room, in spite of my fatigue.

Now and again I was impelled, irresistibly, to peer into the cupboard, but nothing was to be seen in the mirror save my own figure, candle in hand, peeping in at me through the half-open door. And each time that I looked into my own white, horror-stricken face, I shut the door hastily and turned away with a shudder; for the pegs, with the clothes hanging on them, seemed to call to me. I went to bed at last, and before I fell asleep I formed the resolution that, if I was spared until the next day, I would write to the British Consul at Canton, and offer to restore the pearl to the relatives of the murdered mandarin.

"On the following day I wrote and despatched the letter, after which I felt more composed, though I was haunted continually by the recollection of that stony, impassive figure; and from time to time I felt an irresistible impulse to go and look in at the door of the closet, at the mirror and the pegs with the clothes hanging from them. I told my cousin of the visitation that I had received, but he merely laughed, and was frankly incredulous; while the Captain bluntly advised me not to be a superstitious donkey.

"For some days after this I was left in peace, and began to hope that my letter had appeased the spirit of the murdered man; but on the fifth day, about six o'clock in the evening, happening to want some papers that I had left in the pocket of a coat which was hanging in the closet, I went in to get them. I took in no candle, as it was not yet dark, but left the door wide open to light me. The coat that I wanted was near the end of the closet, not more than four paces from the mirror, and as I went towards it I watched my reflection rather nervously as it advanced to meet me. I found my coat, and as I felt for the papers, I still kept a suspicious eye on my double. And, even as I looked, a most strange phenomenon appeared: the mirror seemed for an instant to darken or cloud over, and then, as it cleared again, I saw, standing dark against the light of the open door behind him, the figure of the mandarin. After a single glance, I ran out of the closet, shaking with agitation; but as I turned to shut the door, I noticed that it was my own figure that was reflected in the glass. The Chinaman had vanished in an instant.

"It now became evident that my letter had not served its purpose, and I was plunged in despair; the more so since, on this day, I felt again the dreadful impulse to go and look at the pegs on the walls of the closet. There was no mistaking the meaning of that impulse, and each time that I went, I dragged myself away reluctantly, though shivering with horror. One circumstance, indeed, encouraged me a little; the mandarin had not, on either occasion, beckoned to me as he had done to the sailors, so that perhaps some way of escape yet lay open to me.

"During the next few days I considered very earnestly what measures I could take to avert the doom that seemed to be hanging over me. The simplest plan, that of passing the pearl on to some other person, was out of the question; it would be nothing short of murder. On the other hand, I could not wait for an answer to my letter; for even if I remained alive, I felt that my reason would have given way long before the reply reached me. But while I was debating what I should do, the mandarin appeared to me again; and then, after an interval of only two days, he came to me once more. That was last night. I remained gazing at him, fascinated, with my flesh creeping, as he stood, lantern in hand, looking steadily in my face. At last he held out his hand to me, as if asking me to give him the pearl; then the mirror darkened, and he vanished in a flash; and in the place where he had stood there was my own reflection looking at me out of the glass.

"That last visitation decided me. When I left home this morning the pearl was in my pocket, and as I came over Waterloo Bridge, I leaned over the parapet and flung the thing into the water. After that I felt quite relieved for a time; I had shaken the accursed thing off without involving anyone in the curse that it carried. But presently I began to feel fresh misgivings, and the conviction has been growing upon me all day that I have done the wrong thing. I have only placed it for ever beyond the reach of its owner, whereas I ought to have burnt it, after the Chinese fashion, so that its non-material essence could have joined the spiritual body of him to whom it had belonged when both were clothed with material substance.

"But it can't be altered now. For good or for evil, the thing is done, and God alone knows what the end of it will be."

As he concluded, Calverley uttered a deep sigh, and covered his face with his slender, delicate hands. For a space we were all silent and, I think, deeply moved; for, grotesquely unreal as the whole thing was, there was a pathos, and even a tragedy, in it that we all felt to be very real indeed.

Suddenly Mr. Brodribb started and looked at his watch.

"Good gracious, Calverley, we shall lose our train."

The young man pulled himself together and stood up. "We shall just do it if we go at once," said he. "Good-bye," he added, shaking Thorndyke's hand and mine. "You have been very patient, and I have been rather prosy, I am afraid. Come along, Mr. Brodribb."

Thorndyke and I followed them out on to the landing, and I heard my colleague say to the solicitor in a low tone, but very earnestly: "Get him away from that house, Brodribb, and don't let him out of your sight for a moment."

I did not catch the solicitor's reply, if he made any, but when we were back in our room I noticed that Thorndyke was more agitated than I had ever seen him.

"I ought not to have let them go," he exclaimed. "Confound me! If I had had a grain of wit, I should have made them lose their train."

He lit his pipe and fell to pacing the room with long strides, his eyes bent on the floor with an expression sternly reflective. At last, finding him hopelessly taciturn, I knocked out my pipe and went to bed.

\*\*\*\*\*

As I was dressing on the following morning, Thorndyke entered my room. His face was grave even to sternness, and he held a telegram in his hand.

"I am going to Weybridge this morning," he said shortly, holding the "flimsy" out to me. "Shall you come?"

I took the paper from him, and read:

"Come, for God's sake! F. C. is dead. You will understand.—BRODRIBB."

I handed him back the telegram, too much shocked for a moment to speak. The whole dreadful tragedy summed up in that curt message rose before me in an instant, and a wave of deep pity swept over me at this miserable end to the sad, empty life.

"What an awful thing, Thorndyke!" I exclaimed at length. "To be killed by a mere grotesque delusion."

"Do you think so?" he asked dryly. "Well, we shall see; but you will come?"

"Yes," I replied; and as he retired, I proceeded hurriedly to finish dressing.

Half an hour later, as we rose from a rapid breakfast, Polton came into the room, carrying a small roll-up case of tools and a bunch of skeleton keys.

"Will you have them in a bag, sir?" he asked.

"No," replied Thorndyke; "in my overcoat pocket. Oh, and here is a note, Polton, which I want you to take round to Scotland Yard. It is to the Assistant Commissioner, and you are to make sure that it is in the right hands before you leave. And here is a telegram to Mr. Brodribb."

He dropped the keys and the tool-case into his pocket, and we went down together to the waiting hansom.

At Weybridge Station we found Mr. Brodribb pacing the platform in a state of extreme dejection. He brightened up somewhat when he saw us, and wrung our hands with emotional heartiness.

"It was very good of you both to come at a moment's notice," he said warmly, "and I feel your kindness very much. You understood, of course, Thorndyke?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "I suppose the mandarin beckoned to him."

Mr. Brodribb turned with a look of surprise. "How did you guess that?" he asked; and then, without waiting for a reply, he took from his pocket a note, which he handed to my colleague. "The poor old fellow left this for me," he said. "The servant found it on his dressing-table."

Thorndyke glanced through the note and passed it to me. It consisted of but a few words, hurriedly written in a tremulous hand.

"He has beckoned to me, and I must go. Good-bye, dear old friend."

"How does his cousin take the matter?" asked Thorndyke.

"He doesn't know of it yet," replied the lawyer. "Alfred and Raggerton went out after an early breakfast, to cycle over to Guildford on some business or other, and they have not returned yet. The catastrophe was discovered soon after they left. The maid went to his room with a cup of tea, and was astonished to find that his bed had not been slept in. She ran down in alarm and reported to the butler, who went up at once and searched the room; but he could find no trace of the missing one, except my note, until it occurred to him to look in the cupboard. As he opened the door he got rather a start from his own reflection in the mirror; and then he saw poor Fred hanging from one of the pegs near the end of the closet, close to the glass. It's a melancholy affair—but here is the house, and here is the butler waiting for us. Mr. Alfred is not back yet, then, Stevens?"

"No, sir." The white-faced, frightened-looking man had evidently been waiting at the gate from distaste of the house, and he now walked back with manifest relief at our arrival. When we entered the house, he ushered us without remark up on to the first-floor, and, preceding us along a corridor, halted near the end. "That's the room, sir," said he; and without another word he turned and went down the stairs.

We entered the room, and Mr. Brodribb followed on tiptoe, looking about him fearfully, and casting awe-struck glances at the shrouded form on the bed. To the latter Thorndyke advanced, and gently drew back the sheet.

"You'd better not look, Brodribb," said he, as he bent over the corpse. He felt the limbs and examined the cord, which still remained round the neck, its raggedly-severed end testifying to the terror of the servants who had cut down the body. Then he replaced the sheet and looked at his watch. "It happened at about three o'clock in the morning," said he. "He must have struggled with the impulse for some time, poor fellow! Now let us look at the cupboard."

We went together to a door in the corner of the room, and, as we opened it, we were confronted by three figures, apparently looking in at us through an open door at the other end.

"It is really rather startling," said the lawyer, in a subdued voice, looking almost apprehensively at the three figures that advanced to meet us. "The poor lad ought never to have been here."

It was certainly an eerie place, and I could not but feel, as we walked down the dark, narrow passage, with those other three dimly-seen figures silently coming towards us, and mimicking our every gesture, that it was no place for a nervous, superstitious man like poor Fred Calverley. Close to the end of the long row of pegs was one from which hung an end of stout box-cord, and to this Mr. Brodribb pointed with an awe-struck gesture. But Thorndyke gave it only a brief glance, and then walked up to the mirror, which he proceeded to examine minutely. It was a very large glass, nearly seven feet high, extending the full width of the closet, and reaching to within a foot of the floor; and it seemed to have been let into the partition from behind, for, both above and below, the woodwork was in front of it. While I was making these observations, I watched Thorndyke with no little curiosity. First he rapped his knuckles on the glass; then he lighted a wax match, and, holding it close to the mirror, carefully watched the reflection of the flame. Finally, laying his cheek on the glass, he held the match at arm's length, still close to the mirror, and looked at the reflection along the surface. Then he blew out the match and walked back into the room, shutting the cupboard door as we emerged.

"I think," said he, "that as we shall all undoubtedly be subpoenaed by the coroner, it would be well to put together a few notes of the facts. I see there is a writing-table by the window, and I would propose that you, Brodribb, just jot down a *précis* of the statement that you heard last night, while Jervis notes down the exact condition of the body. While you are doing this, I will take a look round."

"We might find a more cheerful place to write in," grumbled Mr. Brodribb; "however—"

Without finishing the sentence, he sat down at the table, and, having found some sermon paper, dipped a pen in the ink by way of encouraging his thoughts. At this moment Thorndyke quietly slipped out of the room, and I proceeded to make a detailed examination of the body: in which occupation I was interrupted at intervals by requests from the lawyer that I should refresh his memory.

We had been occupied thus for about a quarter of an hour, when a quick step was heard outside, the door was opened abruptly, and a man burst into the room. Brodribb rose and held out his hand.

"This is a sad home-coming for you, Alfred," said he.

"Yes, my God!" the newcomer exclaimed. "It's awful."

He looked askance at the corpse on the bed, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. Alfred Calverley was not extremely prepossessing. Like his cousin, he was obviously neurotic, but there were signs of dissipation in his face, which, just now, was pale and ghastly, and wore an expression of abject fear. Moreover, his entrance was accompanied by that of a perceptible odour of brandy.

He had walked over, without noticing me, to the writing-table, and as he stood there, talking in subdued tones with the lawyer, I suddenly found Thorndyke at my side. He had stolen in noiselessly through the door that Calverley had left open.

"Show him Brodribb's note," he whispered, "and then make him go in and look at the peg."

With this mysterious request, he slipped out of the room as silently as he had come, unperceived either by Calverley or the lawyer.

"Has Captain Raggerton returned with you?" Brodribb was inquiring.

"No, he has gone into the town," was the reply; "but he won't be long. This will be a frightful shock to him."

At this point I stepped forward. "Have you shown Mr. Calverley the extraordinary letter that the deceased left for you?" I asked.

"What letter was that?" demanded Calverley, with a start.

Mr. Brodribb drew forth the note and handed it to him. As he read it through, Calverley turned white to the lips, and the paper trembled in his hand.

"He has beckoned to me, and I must go," he read. Then, with a furtive glance at the lawyer: "Who had beckoned? What did he mean?"

Mr. Brodribb briefly explained the meaning of the allusion, adding: "I thought you knew all about it."

"Yes, yes," said Calverley, with some confusion; "I remember the matter now you mention it. But it's all so dreadful and bewildering."

At this point I again interposed. "There is a question," I said, "that may be of some importance. It refers to the cord with which the poor fellow hanged himself. Can you identify that cord, Mr. Calverley?"

"I!" he exclaimed, staring at me, and wiping the sweat from his white face; "how should I? Where is the cord?"

"Part of it is still hanging from the peg in the closet. Would you mind looking at it?"

"If you would very kindly fetch it—you know I—er—naturally—have a—"

"It must not be disturbed before the inquest," said I; "but surely you are not afraid—"

"I didn't say I was afraid," he retorted angrily. "Why should I be?"

With a strange, tremulous swagger, he strode across to the closet, flung open the door, and plunged in.

A moment later we heard a shout of horror, and he rushed out, livid and gasping.

"What is it, Calverley?" exclaimed Mr. Brodribb, starting up in alarm.

But Calverley was incapable of speech. Dropping limply into a chair, he gazed at us for a while in silent terror; then he fell back uttering a wild shriek of laughter.

Mr. Brodribb looked at him in amazement. "What is it, Calverley?" he asked again.

As no answer was forthcoming, he stepped across to the open door of the closet and entered, peering curiously before him. Then he, too, uttered a startled exclamation, and backed out hurriedly, looking pale and flurried.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "Is the place bewitched?"

He sat down heavily and stared at Calverley, who was still shaking with hysteric laughter; while I, now consumed with curiosity, walked over to the closet to discover the cause of their singular behaviour. As I flung open the door, which the lawyer had closed, I must confess to being very considerably startled; for though the reflection of the open door was plain enough in the mirror, my own reflection was replaced by that of a Chinaman. After a momentary pause of astonishment, I entered the closet and walked towards the mirror; and simultaneously the figure of the Chinaman entered and walked towards me. I had advanced more than halfway down the closet when suddenly the mirror darkened; there was a whirling flash, the Chinaman vanished in an instant, and, as I reached the glass, my own reflection faced me.

I turned back into the room pretty completely enlightened, and looked at Calverley with a new-born distaste. He still sat facing the bewildered lawyer, one moment sobbing convulsively, the next yelping with hysteric laughter. He was not an agreeable spectacle, and when, a few moments later, Thorndyke entered the room, and halted by the door with a stare of disgust, I was moved to join him. But at this juncture a man pushed past Thorndyke, and, striding up to Calverley, shook him roughly by the arm.

"Stop that row!" he exclaimed furiously. "Do you hear? Stop it!"

"I can't help it, Raggerton," gasped Calverley. "He gave me such a turn—the mandarin, you know."

"What!" ejaculated Raggerton.

He dashed across to the closet, looked in, and turned upon Calverley with a snarl. Then he walked out of the room.

"Brodribb," said Thorndyke, "I should like to have a word with you and Jervis outside." Then, as we followed him out on to the landing, he continued: "I have something rather interesting to show you. It is in here."

He softly opened an adjoining door, and we looked into a small unfurnished room. A projecting closet occupied one side of it, and at the door of the closet stood Captain Raggerton, with his hand upon the key. He turned upon us fiercely, though with a look of alarm, and demanded:

"What is the meaning of this intrusion? and who the deuce are you? Do you know that this is my private room?"

"I suspected that it was," Thorndyke replied quietly. "Those will be your properties in the closet, then?"

Raggerton turned pale, but continued to bluster. "Do I understand that you have dared to break into my private closet?" he demanded.

"I have inspected it," replied Thorndyke, "and I may remark that it is useless to wrench at that key, because I have hampered the lock."

"The devil you have!" shouted Raggerton.

"Yes; you see, I am expecting a police-officer with a search warrant, so I wished to keep everything intact."

Raggerton turned livid with mingled fear and rage. He stalked up to Thorndyke with a threatening air, but, suddenly altering his mind, exclaimed, "I must see to this!" and flung out of the room.

Thorndyke took a key from his pocket, and, having locked the door, turned to the closet. Having taken out the key to unhamper the lock with a stout wire, he reinserted it and unlocked the door. As we entered, we found ourselves in a narrow closet, similar to the one in the other room, but darker, owing to the absence of a mirror. A few clothes hung from the pegs, and when Thorndyke had lit a candle that stood on a shelf, we could see more of the details.

"Here are some of the properties," said Thorndyke. He pointed to a peg from which hung a long, blue silk gown of Chinese make, a mandarin's cap, with a pigtail attached to it, and a beautifully-made papier-mâché mask. "Observe," said Thorndyke, taking the latter down and exhibiting a label on the inside, marked "Renouard à Paris," "no trouble has been spared."

He took off his coat, slipped on the gown, the mask, and the cap, and was, in a moment, in that dim light, transformed into the perfect semblance of a Chinaman.

"By taking a little more time," he remarked, pointing to a pair of Chinese shoes and a large paper lantern, "the make-up could be rendered more complete; but this seems to have answered for our friend Alfred."

"But," said Mr. Brodribb, as Thorndyke shed the disguise, "still, I don't understand—"

"I will make it clear to you in a moment," said Thorndyke. He walked to the end of the closet, and, tapping the right-



hand wall, said: "This is the back of the mirror. You see that it is hung on massive well-oiled hinges, and is supported on this large, rubber-tyred castor, which evidently has ball bearings. You observe three black cords running along the wall, and passing through those pulleys above. Now, when I pull this cord, notice what happens."

He pulled one cord firmly, and immediately the mirror swung noiselessly inwards on its great castor, until it stood diagonally across the closet, where it was stopped by a rubber buffer.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Brodribb. "What an extraordinary thing!"

The effect was certainly very strange, for, the mirror being now exactly diagonal to the two closets they appeared to be a single, continuous passage, with a door at either end. On going up to the mirror, we found that the opening which it had occupied was filled by a sheet of plain glass, evidently placed there as a precaution to prevent any person from walking through from one closet into the other, and so discovering the trick.

"It's all very puzzling," said Mr. Brodribb; "I don't clearly understand it now."

"Let us finish here," replied Thorndyke, "and then I will explain. Notice this black curtain. When I pull the second cord, it slides across the closet and cuts off the light. The mirror now reflects nothing into the other closet; it simply appears dark. And now I pull the third cord."

He did so, and the mirror swung noiselessly back into its place.

"There is only one other thing to observe before we go out," said Thorndyke, "and that is this other mirror standing with its face to the wall. This, of course, is the one that Fred Calverley originally saw at the end of the closet; it has since been removed, and the larger swinging glass put in its place. And now," he continued, when we came out into the room, "let me explain the mechanism in detail. It was obvious to me, when I heard poor Fred Calverley's story, that the mirror was 'faked,' and I drew a diagram of the probable arrangement, which turns out to be correct. Here it is." He took a sheet of paper from his pocket and handed it to the lawyer. "There are two sketches. Sketch 1 shows the mirror in its ordinary position, closing the end of the closet. A person standing at A, of course, sees his reflection facing him at, apparently, A 1. Sketch 2 shows the mirror swung across. Now a person standing at A does not see his own reflection at all; but if some other person is standing in the other closet at B, A sees the reflection of B apparently at B 1—that is, in the identical position that his own reflection occupied when the mirror was straight across."

"I see now," said Brodribb; "but who set up this apparatus, and why was it done?"

"Let me ask you a question," said Thorndyke. "Is Alfred Calverley the next-of-kin?"

"No; there is Fred's younger brother. But I may say that Fred has made a will quite recently very much in Alfred's favour."

"There is the explanation, then," said Thorndyke. "These two scoundrels have conspired to drive the poor fellow to suicide, and Raggerton was clearly the leading spirit. He was evidently concocting some story with which to work on poor Fred's superstitions when the mention of the Chinaman on the steamer gave him his cue. He then invented the very picturesque story of the murdered mandarin and the stolen pearl. You remember that these 'visitations' did not begin until after that story had been told, and Fred had been absent from the house on a visit. Evidently, during his absence, Raggerton took down the original mirror, and substituted this swinging arrangement; and at the same time procured the Chinaman's dress and mask from the theatrical property dealers. No doubt he reckoned on being able quietly to remove the swinging glass and other properties and replace the original mirror before the inquest."

"By God!" exclaimed Mr. Brodribb, "it's the most infamous, cowardly plot I have ever heard of. They shall go to gaol for it, the villains, as sure as I am alive."

But in this Mr. Brodribb was mistaken; for immediately on finding themselves detected, the two conspirators had left the house, and by nightfall were safely across the Channel; and the only satisfaction that the lawyer obtained was the setting aside of the will on facts disclosed at the inquest.

As to Thorndyke, he has never to this day forgiven himself for having allowed Fred Calverley to go home to his death.

---

## VII. — THE ALUMINIUM DAGGER

THE "urgent call"—the instant, peremptory summons to professional duty—is an experience that appertains to the medical rather than the legal practitioner, and I had supposed, when I abandoned the clinical side of my profession in favour of the forensic, that henceforth I should know it no more; that the interrupted meal, the broken leisure, and the jangle of the night-bell, were things of the past; but in practice it was otherwise. The medical jurist is, so to speak, on the borderland of the two professions, and exposed to the vicissitudes of each calling, and so it happened from time to time that the professional services of my colleague or myself were demanded at a moment's notice. And thus it was in the case that I am about to relate.

The sacred rite of the "tub" had been duly performed, and the freshly-dried person of the present narrator was about to be insinuated into the first instalment of clothing, when a hurried step was heard upon the stair, and the voice of our laboratory assistant, Polton, arose at my colleague's door.

"There's a gentleman downstairs, sir, who says he must see you instantly on most urgent business. He seems to be in a rare twitter, sir—"

Polton was proceeding to descriptive particulars, when a second and more hurried step became audible, and a strange voice addressed Thorndyke.

"I have come to beg your immediate assistance, sir; a most dreadful thing has happened. A horrible murder has been committed. Can you come with me now?"

"I will be with you almost immediately," said Thorndyke. "Is the victim quite dead?"

"Quite. Cold and stiff. The police think—"

"Do the police know that you have come for me?" interrupted Thorndyke.

"Yes. Nothing is to be done until you arrive."

"Very well. I will be ready in a few minutes."

"And if you would wait downstairs, sir," Polton added persuasively, "I could help the doctor to get ready."

With this crafty appeal, he lured the intruder back to the sitting-room, and shortly after stole softly up the stairs with a small breakfast tray, the contents of which he deposited firmly in our respective rooms, with a few timely words on the folly of "undertaking murders on an empty stomach." Thorndyke and I had meanwhile clothed ourselves with a celerity known only to medical practitioners and quick-change artists, and in a few minutes descended the stairs together, calling in at the laboratory for a few appliances that Thorndyke usually took with him on a visit of investigation.

As we entered the sitting-room, our visitor, who was feverishly pacing up and down, seized his hat with a gasp of relief. "You are ready to come?" he asked. "My carriage is at the door;" and, without waiting for an answer, he hurried out, and rapidly preceded us down the stairs.

The carriage was a roomy brougham, which fortunately accommodated the three of us, and as soon as we had entered and shut the door, the coachman whipped up his horse and drove off at a smart trot.

"I had better give you some account of the circumstances, as we go," said our agitated friend. "In the first place, my name is Curtis, Henry Curtis; here is my card. Ah! and here is another card, which I should have given you before. My solicitor, Mr. Marchmont, was with me when I made this dreadful discovery, and he sent me to you. He remained in the rooms to see that nothing is disturbed until you arrive."

"That was wise of him," said Thorndyke. "But now tell us exactly what has occurred."

"I will," said Mr. Curtis. "The murdered man was my brother-in-law, Alfred Hartridge, and I am sorry to say he was—well, he was a bad man. It grieves me to speak of him thus—*de mortuis*, you know—but, still, we must deal with the facts, even though they be painful."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Thorndyke.

"I have had a great deal of very unpleasant correspondence with him—Marchmont will tell you about that—and yesterday I left a note for him, asking for an interview, to settle the business, naming eight o'clock this morning as the hour, because I had to leave town before noon. He replied, in a very singular letter, that he would see me at that hour, and Mr. Marchmont very kindly consented to accompany me. Accordingly, we went to his chambers together this morning, arriving punctually at eight o'clock. We rang the bell several times, and knocked loudly at the door, but as there was no response, we went down and spoke to the hall-porter. This man, it seems, had already noticed, from the courtyard, that the electric lights were full on in Mr. Hartridge's sitting-room, as they had been all night, according to the statement of the night-porter; so now, suspecting that something was wrong, he came up with us, and rang the bell and battered at the door. Then, as there was still no sign of life within, he inserted his duplicate key and tried to open the door—unsuccessfully, however, as it proved to be bolted on the inside. Thereupon the porter fetched a constable, and, after a consultation, we decided that we were justified in breaking open the door; the porter produced a crowbar, and by our unified efforts the door was eventually burst open. We entered, and—my God! Dr. Thorndyke, what a terrible sight it was that met our eyes! My brother-in-law was lying dead on the floor of the sitting-room. He had been stabbed—stabbed to death; and the dagger had not even been withdrawn. It was still sticking out of his back."

He mopped his face with his handkerchief, and was about to continue his account of the catastrophe when the carriage entered a quiet side-street between Westminster and Victoria, and drew up before a block of tall, new, red-brick buildings. A flurried hall-porter ran out to open the door, and we alighted opposite the main entrance.

"My brother-in-law's chambers are on the second-floor," said Mr. Curtis. "We can go up in the lift."

The porter had hurried before us, and already stood with his hand upon the rope. We entered the lift, and in a few seconds were discharged on to the second floor, the porter, with furtive curiosity, following us down the corridor. At the end of the passage was a half-open door, considerably battered and bruised. Above the door, painted in white lettering, was the inscription, "Mr. Hartridge"; and through the doorway protruded the rather foxy countenance of Inspector Badger.

"I am glad you have come, sir," said he, as he recognized my colleague. "Mr. Marchmont is sitting inside like a watchdog, and he growls if any of us even walks across the room."

The words formed a complaint, but there was a certain geniality in the speaker's manner which made me suspect that Inspector Badger was already navigating his craft on a lee shore.

We entered a small lobby or hall, and from thence passed into the sitting-room, where we found Mr. Marchmont keeping his vigil, in company with a constable and a uniformed inspector. The three rose softly as we entered, and greeted us in a whisper; and then, with one accord, we all looked towards the other end of the room, and so remained for a time without speaking.

There was, in the entire aspect of the room, something very grim and dreadful. An atmosphere of tragic mystery enveloped the most commonplace objects; and sinister suggestions lurked in the most familiar appearances. Especially impressive was the air of suspense—of ordinary, every-day life suddenly arrested—cut short in the twinkling of an eye. The electric lamps, still burning dim and red, though the summer sunshine streamed in through the windows; the half-emptied tumbler and open book by the empty chair, had each its whispered message of swift and sudden disaster, as had the hushed voices and stealthy movements of the waiting men, and, above all, an awesome shape that was but a few hours since a living man, and that now sprawled, prone and motionless, on the floor.

"This is a mysterious affair," observed Inspector Badger, breaking the silence at length, "though it is clear enough up to a certain point. The body tells its own story."

We stepped across and looked down at the corpse. It was that of a somewhat elderly man, and lay, on an open space of floor before the fireplace, face downwards, with the arms extended. The slender hilt of a dagger projected from the back below the left shoulder, and, with the exception of a trace of blood upon the lips, this was the only indication of the mode of death. A little way from the body a clock-key lay on the carpet, and, glancing up at the clock on the mantelpiece, I perceived that the glass front was open.

"You see," pursued the inspector, noting my glance, "he was standing in front of the fireplace, winding the clock. Then the murderer stole up behind him—the noise of the turning key must have covered his movements—and stabbed him. And you see, from the position of the dagger on the left side of the back, that the murderer must have been left-handed. That is all clear enough. What is not clear is how he got in, and how he got out again."

"The body has not been moved, I suppose," said Thorndyke.

"No. We sent for Dr. Egerton, the police-surgeon, and he certified that the man was dead. He will be back presently to see you and arrange about the post-mortem."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "we will not disturb the body till he comes, except to take the temperature and dust the dagger-hilt."

He took from his bag a long, registering chemical thermometer and an insufflator or powder-blower. The former he introduced under the dead man's clothing against the abdomen, and with the latter blew a stream of fine yellow powder on to the black leather handle of the dagger. Inspector Badger stooped eagerly to examine the handle, as Thorndyke blew away the powder that had settled evenly on the surface.

"No finger-prints," said he, in a disappointed tone. "He must have worn gloves. But that inscription gives a pretty broad hint."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the metal guard of the dagger, on which was engraved, in clumsy lettering, the single word, "TRADITORE."

"That's the Italian for 'traitor,'" continued the inspector, "and I got some information from the porter that fits in with that suggestion. We'll have him in presently, and you shall hear."

"Meanwhile," said Thorndyke, "as the position of the body may be of importance in the inquiry, I will take one or two photographs and make a rough plan to scale. Nothing has been moved, you say? Who opened the windows?"

"They were open when we came in," said Mr. Marchmont. "Last night was very hot, you remember. Nothing whatever has been moved."

Thorndyke produced from his bag a small folding camera, a telescopic tripod, a surveyor's measuring-tape, a boxwood scale, and a sketch-block. He set up the camera in a corner, and exposed a plate, taking a general view of the room, and including the corpse. Then he moved to the door and made a second exposure.

"Will you stand in front of the clock, Jervis," he said, "and raise your hand as if winding it? Thanks; keep like that while I expose a plate."

I remained thus, in the position that the dead man was assumed to have occupied at the moment of the murder, while the plate was exposed, and then, before I moved, Thorndyke marked the position of my feet with a blackboard chalk. He next set up the tripod over the chalk marks, and took two photographs from that position, and finally photographed the body itself.

The photographic operations being concluded, he next proceeded, with remarkable skill and rapidity, to lay out on the sketch-block a ground-plan of the room, showing the exact position of the various objects, on a scale of a quarter of an inch to the foot—a process that the inspector was inclined to view with some impatience.

"You don't spare trouble, Doctor," he remarked; "nor time either," he added, with a significant glance at his watch.

"No," answered Thorndyke, as he detached the finished sketch from the block; "I try to collect all the facts that may bear on a case. They may prove worthless, or they may turn out of vital importance; one never knows beforehand, so I collect them all. But here, I think, is Dr. Egerton."

The police-surgeon greeted Thorndyke with respectful cordiality, and we proceeded at once to the examination of the body. Drawing out the thermometer, my colleague noted the reading, and passed the instrument to Dr. Egerton.

"Dead about ten hours," remarked the latter, after a glance at it. "This was a very determined and mysterious murder."

"Very," said Thorndyke. "Feel that dagger, Jervis."

I touched the hilt, and felt the characteristic grating of bone.

"It is through the edge of a rib!" I exclaimed.

"Yes; it must have been used with extraordinary force. And you notice that the clothing is screwed up slightly, as if the blade had been rotated as it was driven in. That is a very peculiar feature, especially when taken together with the violence of the blow."

"It is singular, certainly," said Dr. Egerton, "though I don't know that it helps us much. Shall we withdraw the dagger before moving the body?"

"Certainly," replied Thorndyke, "or the movement may produce fresh injuries. But wait." He took a piece of string from his pocket, and, having drawn the dagger out a couple of inches, stretched the string in a line parallel to the flat of the blade. Then, giving me the ends to hold, he drew the weapon out completely. As the blade emerged, the twist in the clothing disappeared. "Observe," said he, "that the string gives the direction of the wound, and that the cut in the clothing no longer coincides with it. There is quite a considerable angle, which is the measure of the rotation of the blade."

"Yes, it is odd," said Dr. Egerton, "though, as I said, I doubt that it helps us."

"At present," Thorndyke rejoined dryly, "we are noting the facts."

"Quite so," agreed the other, reddening slightly; "and perhaps we had better move the body to the bedroom, and make a preliminary inspection of the wound."

We carried the corpse into the bedroom, and, having examined the wound without eliciting anything new, covered the remains with a sheet, and returned to the sitting-room.

"Well, gentlemen," said the inspector, "you have examined the body and the wound, and you have measured the floor and the furniture, and taken photographs, and made a plan, but we don't seem much more forward. Here's a man murdered in his rooms. There is only one entrance to the flat, and that was bolted on the inside at the time of the murder. The windows are some forty feet from the ground; there is no rain-pipe near any of them; they are set flush in the wall, and there isn't a foothold for a fly on any part of that wall. The grates are modern, and there isn't room for a good-sized cat to crawl up any of the chimneys. Now, the question is, How did the murderer get in, and how did he get out again?"

"Still," said Mr. Marchmont, "the fact is that he did get in, and that he is not here now; and therefore he must have got out; and therefore it must have been possible for him to get out. And, further, it must be possible to discover how he got out."

The inspector smiled sourly, but made no reply.

"The circumstances," said Thorndyke, "appear to have been these: The deceased seems to have been alone; there is no trace of a second occupant of the room, and only one half-emptied tumbler on the table. He was sitting reading when apparently he noticed that the clock had stopped—at ten minutes to twelve; he laid his book, face downwards, on the table, and rose to wind the clock, and as he was winding it he met his death."

"By a stab dealt by a left-handed man, who crept up behind him on tiptoe," added the inspector.

Thorndyke nodded. "That would seem to be so," he said. "But now let us call in the porter, and hear what he has to tell us."

The custodian was not difficult to find, being, in fact, engaged at that moment in a survey of the premises through the slit of the letter-box.

"Do you know what persons visited these rooms last night?" Thorndyke asked him, when he entered looking somewhat sheepish.

"A good many were in and out of the building," was the answer, "but I can't say if any of them came to this flat. I saw Miss Curtis pass in about nine."

"My daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Curtis, with a start. "I didn't know that."

"She left about nine-thirty," the porter added.

"Do you know what she came about?" asked the inspector.

"I can guess," replied Mr. Curtis.

"Then don't say," interrupted Mr. Marchmont. "Answer no questions."

"You're very close, Mr. Marchmont," said the inspector; "we are not suspecting the young lady. We don't ask, for instance, if she is left-handed."

He glanced craftily at Mr. Curtis as he made this remark, and I noticed that our client suddenly turned deathly pale, whereupon the inspector looked away again quickly, as though he had not observed the change.

"Tell us about those Italians again," he said, addressing the porter. "When did the first of them come here?"

"About a week ago," was the reply. "He was a common-looking man—looked like an organ-grinder—and he brought a note to my lodge. It was in a dirty envelope, and was addressed 'Mr. Hartridge, Esq., Brackenhurst Mansions,' in a very bad handwriting. The man gave me the note and asked me to give it to Mr. Hartridge; then he went away, and I took the note up and dropped it into the letter-box."

"What happened next?"

"Why, the very next day an old hag of an Italian woman—one of them fortune-telling swines with a cage of birds on a stand—came and set up just by the main doorway. I soon sent her packing, but, bless you! she was back again in ten minutes, birds and all. I sent her off again—I kept on sending her off, and she kept on coming back, until I was reg'lar wore to a thread."

"You seem to have picked up a bit since then," remarked the inspector with a grin and a glance at the sufferer's very pronounced bow-window.

"Perhaps I have," the custodian replied haughtily. "Well, the next day there was a ice-cream man—a reg'lar waster, *he* was. Stuck outside as if he was froze to the pavement. Kept giving the errand-boys tasters, and when I tried to move him on, he told me not to obstruct his business. Business, indeed! Well, there them boys stuck, one after the other, wiping their tongues round the bottoms of them glasses, until I was fit to bust with aggravation. And *he* kept me going all day.

"Then, the day after that there was a barrel-organ, with a mangy-looking monkey on it. He was the worst of all. Profane, too, *he* was. Kept mixing up sacred tunes and comic songs: 'Rock of Ages,' 'Bill Bailey,' 'Cujus Animal,' and 'Over the Garden Wall.' And when I tried to move him on, that little blighter of a monkey made a run at my leg; and then the man grinned and started playing, 'Wait till the Clouds roll by.' I tell you, it was fair sickening."

He wiped his brow at the recollection, and the inspector smiled appreciatively.

"And that was the last of them?" said the latter; and as the porter nodded sulkily, he asked: "Should you recognize the note that the Italian gave you?"

"I should," answered the porter with frosty dignity.

The inspector bustled out of the room, and returned a minute later with a letter-case in his hand.

"This was in his breast-pocket," said he, laying the bulging case on the table, and drawing up a chair. "Now, here are three letters tied together. Ah! this will be the one." He untied the tape, and held out a dirty envelope addressed in a sprawling, illiterate hand to "Mr. Hartridge, Esq." "Is that the note the Italian gave you?"

The porter examined it critically. "Yes," said he; "that is the one."

The inspector drew the letter out of the envelope, and, as he opened it, his eyebrows went up.

"What do you make of that, Doctor?" he said, handing the sheet to Thorndyke.

Thorndyke regarded it for a while in silence, with deep attention. Then he carried it to the window, and, taking his lens from his pocket, examined the paper closely, first with the low power, and then with the highly magnifying Coddington attachment.

"I should have thought you could see that with the naked eye," said the inspector, with a sly grin at me. "It's a pretty bold design."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "a very interesting production. What do you say, Mr. Marchmont?"

The solicitor took the note, and I looked over his shoulder. It was certainly a curious production. Written in red ink, on the commonest notepaper, and in the same sprawling hand as the address, was the following message: "You are given six days to do what is just. By the sign above, know what to expect if you fail." The sign referred to was a skull and crossbones, very neatly, but rather unskilfully, drawn at the top of the paper.

"This," said Mr. Marchmont, handing the document to Mr. Curtis, "explains the singular letter that he wrote yesterday. You have it with you, I think?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Curtis; "here it is."

He produced a letter from his pocket, and read aloud:

*"Yes: come if you like, though it is an ungodly hour. Your threatening letters have caused me great amusement. They are worthy of Sadler's Wells in its prime.*

*"ALFRED HARTRIDGE."*

"Was Mr. Hartridge ever in Italy?" asked Inspector Badger.

"Oh yes," replied Mr. Curtis. "He stayed at Capri nearly the whole of last year."

"Why, then, that gives us our clue. Look here. Here are these two other letters; E.C. postmark—Saffron Hill is E.C. And just look at that!"

He spread out the last of the mysterious letters, and we saw that, besides the *memento mori*, it contained only three words: "Beware! Remember Capri!"

"If you have finished, Doctor, I'll be off and have a look round Little Italy. Those four Italians oughtn't to be difficult to find, and we've got the porter here to identify them."

"Before you go," said Thorndyke, "there are two little matters that I should like to settle. One is the dagger: it is in your pocket, I think. May I have a look at it?"

The inspector rather reluctantly produced the dagger and handed it to my colleague.

"A very singular weapon, this," said Thorndyke, regarding the dagger thoughtfully, and turning it about to view its different parts. "Singular both in shape and material. I have never seen an aluminium hilt before, and bookbinder's morocco is a little unusual."

"The aluminium was for lightness," explained the inspector, "and it was made narrow to carry up the sleeve, I expect."

"Perhaps so," said Thorndyke.

He continued his examination, and presently, to the inspector's delight, brought forth his pocket lens.

"I never saw such a man!" exclaimed the jocose detective. "His motto ought to be, 'We magnify thee.' I suppose he'll measure it next."

The inspector was not mistaken. Having made a rough sketch of the weapon on his block, Thorndyke produced from his bag a folding rule and a delicate calliper-gauge. With these instruments he proceeded, with extraordinary care and precision, to take the dimensions of the various parts of the dagger, entering each measurement in its place on the sketch, with a few brief, descriptive details.

"The other matter," said he at length, handing the dagger back to the inspector, "refers to the houses opposite."

He walked to the window, and looked out at the backs of a row of tall buildings similar to the one we were in. They were about thirty yards distant, and were separated from us by a piece of ground, planted with shrubs and intersected by gravel paths.

"If any of those rooms were occupied last night," continued Thorndyke, "we might obtain an actual eyewitness of the crime. This room was brilliantly lighted, and all the blinds were up, so that an observer at any of those windows could see right into the room, and very distinctly, too. It might be worth inquiring into."

"Yes, that's true," said the inspector; "though I expect, if any of them have seen anything, they will come forward quick enough when they read the report in the papers. But I must be off now, and I shall have to lock you out of the rooms."

As we went down the stairs, Mr. Marchmont announced his intention of calling on us in the evening, "unless," he added, "you want any information from me now."

"I do," said Thorndyke. "I want to know who is interested in this man's death."

"That," replied Marchmont, "is rather a queer story. Let us take a turn in that garden that we saw from the window. We shall be quite private there."

He beckoned to Mr. Curtis, and, when the inspector had departed with the police-surgeon, we induced the porter to let us into the garden.

"The question that you asked," Mr. Marchmont began, looking up curiously at the tall houses opposite, "is very simply answered. The only person immediately interested in the death of Alfred Hartridge is his executor and sole legatee, a man named Leonard Wolfe. He is no relation of the deceased, merely a friend, but he inherits the entire estate—about twenty thousand pounds. The circumstances are these: Alfred Hartridge was the elder of two brothers, of whom the younger, Charles, died before his father, leaving a widow and three children. Fifteen years ago the father died, leaving the whole of his property to Alfred, with the understanding that he should support his brother's family and make the children his heirs."

"Was there no will?" asked Thorndyke.

"Under great pressure from the friends of his son's widow, the old man made a will shortly before he died; but he was then very old and rather childish, so the will was contested by Alfred, on the grounds of undue influence, and was ultimately set aside. Since then Alfred Hartridge has not paid a penny towards the support of his brother's family. If it had not been for my client, Mr. Curtis, they might have starved; the whole burden of the support of the widow and the education of the children has fallen upon him."

"Well, just lately the matter has assumed an acute form, for two reasons. The first is that Charles's eldest son, Edmund, has come of age. Mr. Curtis had him articulated to a solicitor, and, as he is now fully qualified, and a most advantageous proposal for a partnership has been made, we have been putting pressure on Alfred to supply the necessary capital in

accordance with his father's wishes. This he had refused to do, and it was with reference to this matter that we were calling on him this morning. The second reason involves a curious and disgraceful story. There is a certain Leonard Wolfe, who has been an intimate friend of the deceased. He is, I may say, a man of bad character, and their association has been of a kind creditable to neither. There is also a certain woman named Hester Greene, who had certain claims upon the deceased, which we need not go into at present. Now, Leonard Wolfe and the deceased, Alfred Hartridge, entered into an agreement, the terms of which were these: (1) Wolfe was to marry Hester Greene, and in consideration of this service (2) Alfred Hartridge was to assign to Wolfe the whole of his property, absolutely, the actual transfer to take place on the death of Hartridge."

"And has this transaction been completed?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, it has, unfortunately. But we wished to see if anything could be done for the widow and the children during Hartridge's lifetime. No doubt, my client's daughter, Miss Curtis, called last night on a similar mission—very indiscreetly, since the matter was in our hands; but, you know, she is engaged to Edmund Hartridge—and I expect the interview was a pretty stormy one."

Thorndyke remained silent for a while, pacing slowly along the gravel path, with his eyes bent on the ground: not abstractedly, however, but with a searching, attentive glance that roved amongst the shrubs and bushes, as though he were looking for something.

"What sort of man," he asked presently, "is this Leonard Wolfe? Obviously he is a low scoundrel, but what is he like in other respects? Is he a fool, for instance?"

"Not at all, I should say," said Mr. Curtis. "He was formerly an engineer, and, I believe, a very capable mechanic. Latterly he has lived on some property that came to him, and has spent both his time and his money in gambling and dissipation. Consequently, I expect he is pretty short of funds at present."

"And in appearance?"

"I only saw him once," replied Mr. Curtis, "and all I can remember of him is that he is rather short, fair, thin, and clean-shaven, and that he has lost the middle finger of his left hand."

"And he lives at?"

"Eltham, in Kent. Morton Grange, Eltham," said Mr. Marchmont. "And now, if you have all the information that you require, I must really be off, and so must Mr. Curtis."

The two men shook our hands and hurried away, leaving Thorndyke gazing meditatively at the dingy flower-beds.

"A strange and interesting case, this, Jervis," said he, stooping to peer under a laurel-bush. "The inspector is on a hot scent—a most palpable red herring on a most obvious string; but that is his business. Ah, here comes the porter, intent, no doubt, on pumping us, whereas—" He smiled genially at the approaching custodian, and asked: "Where did you say those houses fronted?"

"Cotman Street, sir," answered the porter. "They are nearly all offices."

"And the numbers? That open second-floor window, for instance?"

"That is number six; but the house opposite Mr. Hartridge's rooms is number eight."

"Thank you."

Thorndyke was moving away, but suddenly turned again to the porter.

"By the way," said he, "I dropped something out of the window just now—a small flat piece of metal, like this." He made on the back of his visiting card a neat sketch of a circular disc, with a hexagonal hole through it, and handed the card to the porter. "I can't say where it fell," he continued; "these flat things scale about so; but you might ask the gardener to look for it. I will give him a sovereign if he brings it to my chambers, for, although it is of no value to anyone else, it is of considerable value to me."

The porter touched his hat briskly, and as we turned out at the gate, I looked back and saw him already wading among the shrubs.

The object of the porter's quest gave me considerable mental occupation. I had not seen Thorndyke drop any thing, and it was not his way to finger carelessly any object of value. I was about to question him on the subject, when, turning sharply round into Cotman Street, he drew up at the doorway of number six, and began attentively to read the names of the occupants.

"Third-floor," he read out, "'Mr. Thomas Barlow, Commission Agent.' Hum! I think we will look in on Mr. Barlow."

He stepped quickly up the stone stairs, and I followed, until we arrived, somewhat out of breath, on the third-floor. Outside the Commission Agent's door he paused for a moment, and we both listened curiously to an irregular sound of shuffling feet from within. Then he softly opened the door and looked into the room. After remaining thus for nearly a minute, he looked round at me with a broad smile, and noiselessly set the door wide open. Inside, a lanky youth of fourteen was practising, with no mean skill, the manipulation of an appliance known by the appropriate name of diabolio; and so absorbed was he in his occupation that we entered and shut the door without being observed. At length the shuttle missed

the string and flew into a large waste-paper basket; the boy turned and confronted us, and was instantly covered with confusion.

"Allow me," said Thorndyke, rooting rather unnecessarily in the waste-paper basket, and handing the toy to its owner. "I need not ask if Mr. Barlow is in," he added, "nor if he is likely to return shortly."

"He won't be back to-day," said the boy, perspiring with embarrassment; "he left before I came. I was rather late."

"I see," said Thorndyke. "The early bird catches the worm, but the late bird catches the diabolio. How did you know he would not be back?"

"He left a note. Here it is."

He exhibited the document, which was neatly written in red ink. Thorndyke examined it attentively, and then asked:

"Did you break the inkstand yesterday?"

The boy stared at him in amazement. "Yes, I did," he answered. "How did you know?"

"I didn't, or I should not have asked. But I see that he has used his stylo to write this note."

The boy regarded Thorndyke distrustfully, as he continued:

"I really called to see if your Mr. Barlow was a gentleman whom I used to know; but I expect you can tell me. My friend was tall and thin, dark, and clean-shaved."

"This ain't him, then," said the boy. "He's thin, but he ain't tall or dark. He's got a sandy beard, and he wears spectacles and a wig. I know a wig when I see one," he added cunningly, "cause my father wears one. He puts it on a peg to comb it, and he swears at me when I larf."

"My friend had injured his left hand," pursued Thorndyke.

"I dunno about that," said the youth. "Mr. Barlow nearly always wears gloves; he always wears one on his left hand, anyhow."

"Ah well! I'll just write him a note on the chance, if you will give me a piece of notepaper. Have you any ink?"

"There's some in the bottle. I'll dip the pen in for you."

He produced, from the cupboard, an opened packet of cheap notepaper and a packet of similar envelopes, and, having dipped the pen to the bottom of the ink-bottle, handed it to Thorndyke, who sat down and hastily scribbled a short note. He had folded the paper, and was about to address the envelope, when he appeared suddenly to alter his mind.

"I don't think I will leave it, after all," he said, slipping the folded paper into his pocket. "No. Tell him I called—Mr. Horace Budge—and say I will look in again in a day or two."

The youth watched our exit with an air of perplexity, and he even came out on to the landing, the better to observe us over the balusters; until, unexpectedly catching Thorndyke's eye, he withdrew his head with remarkable suddenness, and retired in disorder.

To tell the truth, I was now little less perplexed than the office-boy by Thorndyke's proceedings; in which I could discover no relevancy to the investigation that I presumed he was engaged upon: and the last straw was laid upon the burden of my curiosity when he stopped at a staircase window, drew the note out of his pocket, examined it with his lens, held it up to the light, and chuckled aloud.

"Luck," he observed, "though no substitute for care and intelligence, is a very pleasant addition. Really, my learned brother, we are doing uncommonly well."

When we reached the hall, Thorndyke stopped at the housekeeper's box, and looked in with a genial nod.

"I have just been up to see Mr. Barlow," said he. "He seems to have left quite early."

"Yes, sir," the man replied. "He went away about half-past eight."

"That was very early; and presumably he came earlier still?"

"I suppose so," the man assented, with a grin; "but I had only just come on when he left."

"Had he any luggage with him?"

"Yes, sir. There was two cases, a square one and a long, narrow one, about five foot long. I helped him to carry them down to the cab."

"Which was a four-wheeler, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Barlow hasn't been here very long, has he?" Thorndyke inquired.

"No. He only came in last quarter-day—about six weeks ago."

"Ah well! I must call another day. Good-morning," and Thorndyke strode out of the building, and made directly for the



cab-rank in the adjoining street. Here he stopped for a minute or two to parley with the driver of a four-wheeled cab, whom he finally commissioned to convey us to a shop in New Oxford Street. Having dismissed the cabman with his blessing and a half-sovereign, he vanished into the shop, leaving me to gaze at the lathes, drills, and bars of metal displayed in the window. Presently he emerged with a small parcel, and explained, in answer to my inquiring look: "A strip of tool steel and a block of metal for Polton."

His next purchase was rather more eccentric. We were proceeding along Holborn when his attention was suddenly arrested by the window of a furniture shop, in which was displayed a collection of obsolete French small-arms—relics of the tragedy of 1870—which were being sold for decorative purposes. After a brief inspection, he entered the shop, and shortly reappeared carrying a long sword-bayonet and an old Chassepôt rifle.

"What may be the meaning of this martial display?" I asked, as we turned down Fetter Lane.

"House protection," he replied promptly. "You will agree that a discharge of musketry, followed by a bayonet charge, would disconcert the boldest of burglars."

I laughed at the absurd picture thus drawn of the strenuous house-protector, but nevertheless continued to speculate on the meaning of my friend's eccentric proceedings, which I felt sure were in some way related to the murder in Brackenhurst Chambers, though I could not trace the connection.

After a late lunch, I hurried out to transact such of my business as had been interrupted by the stirring events of the morning, leaving Thorndyke busy with a drawing-board, squares, scale, and compasses, making accurate, scaled drawings from his rough sketches; while Polton, with the brown-paper parcel in his hand, looked on at him with an air of anxious expectation.

As I was returning homeward in the evening by way of Mitre Court, I overtook Mr. Marchmont, who was also bound for our chambers, and we walked on together.

"I had a note from Thorndyke," he explained, "asking for a specimen of handwriting, so I thought I would bring it along myself, and hear if he has any news."

When we entered the chambers, we found Thorndyke in earnest consultation with Polton, and on the table before them I observed, to my great surprise, the dagger with which the murder had been committed.



*The Aluminium Dagger.*

"I have got you the specimen that you asked for," said Marchmont. "I didn't think I should be able to, but, by a lucky chance, Curtis kept the only letter he ever received from the party in question."

He drew the letter from his wallet, and handed it to Thorndyke, who looked at it attentively and with evident satisfaction.

"By the way," said Marchmont, taking up the dagger, "I thought the inspector took this away with him."

"He took the original," replied Thorndyke. "This is a duplicate, which Polton has made, for experimental purposes, from my drawings."

"Really!" exclaimed Marchmont, with a glance of respectful admiration at Polton; "it is a perfect replica—and you have made it so quickly, too."

"It was quite easy to make," said Polton, "to a man accustomed to work in metal."

"Which," added Thorndyke, "is a fact of some evidential value."

At this moment a hansom drew up outside. A moment later flying footsteps were heard on the stairs. There was a furious battering at the door, and, as Polton threw it open, Mr. Curtis burst wildly into the room.

"Here is a frightful thing, Marchmont!" he gasped. "Edith—my daughter—arrested for the murder. Inspector Badger came to our house and took her. My God! I shall go mad!"

Thorndyke laid his hand on the excited man's shoulder. "Don't distress yourself, Mr. Curtis," said he. "There is no occasion, I assure you. I suppose," he added, "your daughter is left-handed?"

"Yes, she is, by a most disastrous coincidence. But what are we to do? Good God! Dr. Thorndyke, they have taken her to prison—to prison—think of it! My poor Edith!"

"We'll soon have her out," said Thorndyke. "But listen; there is someone at the door."

A brisk rat-tat confirmed his statement; and when I rose to open the door, I found myself confronted by Inspector Badger. There was a moment of extreme awkwardness, and then both the detective and Mr. Curtis proposed to retire in favour of the other.

"Don't go, inspector," said Thorndyke; "I want to have a word with you. Perhaps Mr. Curtis would look in again, say, in

an hour. Will you? We shall have news for you by then, I hope."

Mr. Curtis agreed hastily, and dashed out of the room with his characteristic impetuosity. When he had gone, Thorndyke turned to the detective, and remarked dryly:

"You seem to have been busy, inspector?"

"Yes," replied Badger; "I haven't let the grass grow under my feet; and I've got a pretty strong case against Miss Curtis already. You see, she was the last person seen in the company of the deceased; she had a grievance against him; she is left-handed, and you remember that the murder was committed by a left-handed person."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. I have seen those Italians, and the whole thing was a put-up job. A woman, in a widow's dress and veil, paid them to go and play the fool outside the building, and she gave them the letter that was left with the porter. They haven't identified her yet, but she seems to agree in size with Miss Curtis."

"And how did she get out of the chambers, with the door bolted on the inside?"

"Ah, there you are! That's a mystery at present—unless you can give us an explanation." The inspector made this qualification with a faint grin, and added: "As there was no one in the place when we broke into it, the murderer must have got out somehow. You can't deny that."

"I do deny it, nevertheless," said Thorndyke. "You look surprised," he continued (which was undoubtedly true), "but yet the whole thing is exceedingly obvious. The explanation struck me directly I looked at the body. There was evidently no practicable exit from the flat, and there was certainly no one in it when you entered. Clearly, then, *the murderer had never been in the place at all.*"

"I don't follow you in the least," said the inspector.

"Well," said Thorndyke, "as I have finished with the case, and am handing it over to you, I will put the evidence before you *seriatim*. Now, I think we are agreed that, at the moment when the blow was struck, the deceased was standing before the fireplace, winding the clock. The dagger entered obliquely from the left, and, if you recall its position, you will remember that its hilt pointed directly towards an open window."

"Which was forty feet from the ground."

"Yes. And now we will consider the very peculiar character of the weapon with which the crime was committed."

He had placed his hand upon the knob of a drawer, when we were interrupted by a knock at the door. I sprang up, and, opening it, admitted no less a person than the porter of Brackenhurst Chambers. The man looked somewhat surprised on recognizing our visitors, but advanced to Thorndyke, drawing a folded paper from his pocket.

"I've found the article you were looking for, sir," said he, "and a rare hunt I had for it. It had stuck in the leaves of one of them shrubs."

Thorndyke opened the packet, and, having glanced inside, laid it on the table.

"Thank you," said he, pushing a sovereign across to the gratified official. "The inspector has your name, I think?"

"He have, sir," replied the porter; and, pocketing his fee, he departed, beaming.

"To return to the dagger," said Thorndyke, opening the drawer. "It was a very peculiar one, as I have said, and as you will see from this model, which is an exact duplicate." Here he exhibited Polton's production to the astonished detective. "You see that it is extraordinarily slender, and free from projections, and of unusual materials. You also see that it was obviously not made by an ordinary dagger-maker; that, in spite of the Italian word scrawled on it, there is plainly written all over it 'British mechanic.' The blade is made from a strip of common three-quarter-inch tool steel; the hilt is turned from an aluminium rod; and there is not a line of engraving on it that could not be produced in a lathe by any engineer's apprentice. Even the boss at the top is mechanical, for it is just like an ordinary hexagon nut. Then, notice the dimensions, as shown on my drawing. The parts A and B, which just project beyond the blade, are exactly similar in diameter—and such exactness could hardly be accidental. They are each parts of a circle having a diameter of 10.9 millimetres—a dimension which happens, by a singular coincidence, to be exactly the calibre of the old Chassepôt rifle, specimens of which are now on sale at several shops in London. Here is one, for instance."

He fetched the rifle that he had bought, from the corner in which it was standing, and, lifting the dagger by its point, slipped the hilt into the muzzle. When he let go, the dagger slid quietly down the barrel, until its hilt appeared in the open breech.

"Good God!" exclaimed Marchmont. "You don't suggest that the dagger was shot from a gun?"

"I do, indeed; and you now see the reason for the aluminium hilt—to diminish the weight of the already heavy projectile—and also for this hexagonal boss on the end?"

"No, I do not," said the inspector; "but I say that you are suggesting an impossibility."

"Then," replied Thorndyke, "I must explain and demonstrate. To begin with, this projectile had to travel point foremost; therefore it had to be made to spin—and it certainly was spinning when it entered the body, as the clothing and the wound

showed us. Now, to make it spin, it had to be fired from a rifled barrel; but as the hilt would not engage in the rifling, it had to be fitted with something that would. That something was evidently a soft metal washer, which fitted on to this hexagon, and which would be pressed into the grooves of the rifling, and so spin the dagger, but would drop off as soon as the weapon left the barrel. Here is such a washer, which Polton has made for us."

He laid on the table a metal disc, with a hexagonal hole through it.

"This is all very ingenious," said the inspector, "but I say it is impossible and fantastic."

"It certainly sounds rather improbable," Marchmont agreed.

"We will see," said Thorndyke. "Here is a makeshift cartridge of Polton's manufacture, containing an eighth charge of smokeless powder for a 20-bore gun."

He fitted the washer on to the boss of the dagger in the open breech of the rifle, pushed it into the barrel, inserted the cartridge, and closed the breech. Then, opening the office-door, he displayed a target of padded strawboard against the wall.

"The length of the two rooms," said he, "gives us a distance of thirty-two feet. Will you shut the windows, Jervis?"

I complied, and he then pointed the rifle at the target. There was a dull report—much less loud than I had expected—and when we looked at the target, we saw the dagger driven in up to its hilt at the margin of the bull's-eye.

"You see," said Thorndyke, laying down the rifle, "that the thing is practicable. Now for the evidence as to the actual occurrence. First, on the original dagger there are linear scratches which exactly correspond with the grooves of the rifling. Then there is the fact that the dagger was certainly spinning from left to right—in the direction of the rifling, that is—when it entered the body. And then there is this, which, as you heard, the porter found in the garden."

He opened the paper packet. In it lay a metal disc, perforated by a hexagonal hole. Stepping into the office, he picked up from the floor the washer that he had put on the dagger, and laid it on the paper beside the other. The two discs were identical in size, and the margin of each was indented with identical markings, corresponding to the rifling of the barrel.

The inspector gazed at the two discs in silence for a while; then, looking up at Thorndyke, he said:

"I give in, Doctor. You're right, beyond all doubt; but how you came to think of it beats me into fits. The only question now is, Who fired the gun, and why wasn't the report heard?"

"As to the latter," said Thorndyke, "it is probable that he used a compressed-air attachment, not only to diminish the noise, but also to prevent any traces of the explosive from being left on the dagger. As to the former, I think I can give you the murderer's name; but we had better take the evidence in order. You may remember," he continued, "that when Dr. Jervis stood as if winding the clock, I chalked a mark on the floor where he stood. Now, standing on that marked spot, and looking out of the open window, I could see two of the windows of a house nearly opposite. They were the second- and third-floor windows of No. 6, Cotman Street. The second-floor is occupied by a firm of architects; the third-floor by a commission agent named Thomas Barlow. I called on Mr. Barlow, but before describing my visit, I will refer to another matter. You haven't those threatening letters about you, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have," said the inspector; and he drew forth a wallet from his breast-pocket.

"Let us take the first one, then," said Thorndyke. "You see that the paper and envelope are of the very commonest, and the writing illiterate. But the ink does not agree with this. Illiterate people usually buy their ink in penny bottles. Now, this envelope is addressed with Draper's dichroic ink—a superior office ink, sold only in large bottles—and the red ink in which the note is written is an unfixed, scarlet ink, such as is used by draughtsmen, and has been used, as you can see, in a stylographic pen. But the most interesting thing about this letter is the design drawn at the top. In an artistic sense, the man could not draw, and the anatomical details of the skull are ridiculous. Yet the drawing is very neat. It has the clean, wiry line of a machine drawing, and is done with a steady, practised hand. It is also perfectly symmetrical; the skull, for instance, is exactly in the centre, and, when we examine it through a lens, we see why it is so, for we discover traces of a pencilled centre-line and ruled cross-lines. Moreover, the lens reveals a tiny particle of draughtsman's soft, red, rubber, with which the pencil lines were taken out; and all these facts, taken together, suggest that the drawing was made by someone accustomed to making accurate mechanical drawings. And now we will return to Mr. Barlow. He was out when I called, but I took the liberty of glancing round the office, and this is what I saw. On the mantelshelf was a twelve-inch flat boxwood rule, such as engineers use, a piece of soft, red rubber, and a stone bottle of Draper's dichroic ink. I obtained, by a simple ruse, a specimen of the office notepaper and the ink. We will examine it presently. I found that Mr. Barlow is a new tenant, that he is rather short, wears a wig and spectacles, and always wears a glove on his left hand. He left the office at 8.30 this morning, and no one saw him arrive. He had with him a square case, and a narrow, oblong one about five feet in length; and he took a cab to Victoria, and apparently caught the 8.51 train to Chatham."

"Ah!" exclaimed the inspector.

"But," continued Thorndyke, "now examine those three letters, and compare them with this note that I wrote in Mr. Barlow's office. You see that the paper is of the same make, with the same water-mark, but that is of no great significance. What is of crucial importance is this: You see, in each of these letters, two tiny indentations near the bottom corner. Somebody has used compasses or drawing-pins over the packet of notepaper, and the points have made little indentations, which have marked several of the sheets. Now, notepaper is cut to its size after it is folded, and if you stick a pin into the

top sheet of a section, the indentations on all the underlying sheets will be at exactly similar distances from the edges and corners of the sheet. But you see that these little dents are all at the same distance from the edges and the corner." He demonstrated the fact with a pair of compasses. "And now look at this sheet, which I obtained at Mr. Barlow's office. There are two little indentations—rather faint, but quite visible—near the bottom corner, and when we measure them with the compasses, we find that they are exactly the same distance apart as the others, and the same distance from the edges and the bottom corner. The irresistible conclusion is that these four sheets came from the same packet."

The inspector started up from his chair, and faced Thorndyke. "Who is this Mr. Barlow?" he asked.

"That," replied Thorndyke, "is for you to determine; but I can give you a useful hint. There is only one person who benefits by the death of Alfred Hartridge, but he benefits to the extent of twenty thousand pounds. His name is Leonard Wolfe, and I learn from Mr. Marchmont that he is a man of indifferent character—a gambler and a spendthrift. By profession he is an engineer, and he is a capable mechanic. In appearance he is thin, short, fair, and clean-shaven, and he has lost the middle finger of his left hand. Mr. Barlow is also short, thin, and fair, but wears a wig, a board, and spectacles, and always wears a glove on his left hand. I have seen the handwriting of both these gentlemen, and should say that it would be difficult to distinguish one from the other."

"That's good enough for me," said the inspector. "Give me his address, and I'll have Miss Curtis released at once."

\*\*\*\*\*

The same night Leonard Wolfe was arrested at Eltham, in the very act of burying in his garden a large and powerful compressed-air rifle. He was never brought to trial, however, for he had in his pocket a more portable weapon—a large-bore Derringer pistol—with which he managed to terminate an exceedingly ill-spent life.

"And, after all," was Thorndyke's comment, when he heard of the event, "he had his uses. He has relieved society of two very bad men, and he has given us a most instructive case. He has shown us how a clever and ingenious criminal may take endless pains to mislead and delude the police, and yet, by inattention to trivial details, may scatter clues broadcast. We can only say to the criminal class generally, in both respects, 'Go thou and do likewise.'"

---

## VIII. — A MESSAGE FROM THE DEEP SEA

THE Whitechapel Road, though redeemed by scattered relics of a more picturesque past from the utter desolation of its neighbour the Commercial Road, is hardly a gay thoroughfare. Especially at its eastern end, where its sordid modernity seems to reflect the colourless lives of its inhabitants, does its grey and dreary length depress the spirits of the wayfarer. But the longest and duller road can be made delightful by sprightly discourse seasoned with wit and wisdom, and so it was that, as I walked westward by the side of my friend John Thorndyke, the long, monotonous road seemed all too short.

We had been to the London Hospital to see a remarkable case of acromegaly, and, as we returned, we discussed this curious affection, and the allied condition of gigantism, in all their bearings, from the origin of the "Gibson chin" to the physique of Og, King of Bashan.

"It would have been interesting," Thorndyke remarked as we passed up Aldgate High Street, "to have put one's finger into His Majesty's pituitary fossa—after his decease, of course. By the way, here is Harrow Alley; you remember Defoe's description of the dead-cart waiting out here, and the ghastly procession coming down the alley." He took my arm and led me up the narrow thoroughfare as far as the sharp turn by the "Star and Still" public-house, where we turned to look back.

"I never pass this place," he said musingly, "but I seem to hear the clang of the bell and the dismal cry of the carter—"

He broke off abruptly. Two figures had suddenly appeared framed in the archway, and now advanced at headlong speed. One, who led, was a stout, middle-aged Jewess, very breathless and dishevelled; the other was a well-dressed young man, hardly less agitated than his companion. As they approached, the young man suddenly recognized my colleague, and accosted him in agitated tones.

"I've just been sent for to a case of murder or suicide. Would you mind looking at it for me, sir? It's my first case, and I feel rather nervous."

Here the woman darted back, and plucked the young doctor by the arm.

"Hurry! hurry!" she exclaimed, "don't stop to talk." Her face was as white as lard, and shiny with sweat; her lips twitched, her hands shook, and she stared with the eyes of a frightened child.

"Of course I will come, Hart," said Thorndyke; and, turning back, we followed the woman as she elbowed her way frantically among the foot-passengers.

"Have you started in practice here?" Thorndyke asked as we hurried along.

"No, sir," replied Dr. Hart; "I am an assistant. My principal is the police-surgeon, but he is out just now. It's very good of you to come with me, sir."

"Tut, tut," rejoined Thorndyke. "I am just coming to see that you do credit to my teaching. That looks like the house."

We had followed our guide into a side street, halfway down which we could see a knot of people clustered round a doorway. They watched us as we approached, and drew aside to let us enter. The woman whom we were following rushed

into the passage with the same headlong haste with which she had traversed the streets, and so up the stairs. But as she neared the top of the flight she slowed down suddenly, and began to creep up on tiptoe with noiseless and hesitating steps. On the landing she turned to face us, and pointing a shaking forefinger at the door of the back room, whispered almost inaudibly, "She's in there," and then sank half-fainting on the bottom stair of the next flight.

I laid my hand on the knob of the door, and looked back at Thorndyke. He was coming slowly up the stairs, closely scrutinizing floor, walls, and handrail as he came. When he reached the landing, I turned the handle, and we entered the room together, closing the door after us. The blind was still down, and in the dim, uncertain light nothing out of the common was, at first, to be seen. The shabby little room looked trim and orderly enough, save for a heap of cast-off feminine clothing piled upon a chair. The bed appeared undisturbed except by the half-seen shape of its occupant, and the quiet face, dimly visible in its shadowy corner, might have been that of a sleeper but for its utter stillness and for a dark stain on the pillow by its side.

Dr. Hart stole on tiptoe to the bedside, while Thorndyke drew up the blind; and as the garish daylight poured into the room, the young surgeon fell back with a gasp of horror.

"Good God!" he exclaimed; "poor creature! But this is a frightful thing, sir!"

The light streamed down upon the white face of a handsome girl of twenty-five, a face peaceful, placid, and beautiful with the austere and almost unearthly beauty of the youthful dead. The lips were slightly parted, the eyes half closed and drowsy, shaded with sweeping lashes; and a wealth of dark hair in massive plaits served as a foil to the translucent skin.

Our friend had drawn back the bedclothes a few inches, and now there was revealed, beneath the comely face, so serene and inscrutable, and yet so dreadful in its fixity and waxen pallor, a horrible, yawning wound that almost divided the shapely neck.

Thorndyke looked down with stern pity at the plump white face.

"It was savagely done," said he, "and yet mercifully, by reason of its very savagery. She must have died without waking."

"The brute!" exclaimed Hart, clenching his fists and turning crimson with wrath. "The infernal cowardly beast! He shall hang! By God, he shall hang!" In his fury the young fellow shook his fists in the air, even as the moisture welled up into his eyes.

Thorndyke touched him on the shoulder. "That is what we are here for, Hart," said he. "Get out your notebook;" and with this he bent down over the dead girl.

At the friendly reproof the young surgeon pulled himself together, and, with open notebook, commenced his investigation, while I, at Thorndyke's request, occupied myself in making a plan of the room, with a description of its contents and their arrangements. But this occupation did not prevent me from keeping an eye on Thorndyke's movements, and presently I suspended my labours to watch him as, with his pocket-knife, he scraped together some objects that he had found on the pillow.

"What do you make of this?" he asked, as I stepped over to his side. He pointed with the blade to a tiny heap of what looked like silver sand, and, as I looked more closely, I saw that similar particles were sprinkled on other parts of the pillow.

"Silver sand!" I exclaimed. "I don't understand at all how it can have got there. Do you?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "We will consider the explanation later," was his reply. He had produced from his pocket a small metal box which he always carried, and which contained such requisites as cover-slips, capillary tubes, moulding wax, and other "diagnostic materials." He now took from it a seed-envelope, into which he neatly shovelled the little pinch of sand with his knife. He had closed the envelope, and was writing a pencilled description on the outside, when we were startled by a cry from Hart.

"Good God, sir! Look at this! It was done by a woman!"

He had drawn back the bedclothes, and was staring aghast at the dead girl's left hand. It held a thin tress of long, red hair.

Thorndyke hastily pocketed his specimen, and, stepping round the little bedside table, bent over the hand with knitted brows. It was closed, though not tightly clenched, and when an attempt was made gently to separate the fingers, they were found to be as rigid as the fingers of a wooden hand. Thorndyke stooped yet more closely, and, taking out his lens, scrutinized the wisp of hair throughout its entire length.

"There is more here than meets the eye at the first glance," he remarked. "What say you, Hart?" He held out his lens to his quondam pupil, who was about to take it from him when the door opened, and three men entered. One was a police-inspector, the second appeared to be a plain-clothes officer, while the third was evidently the divisional surgeon.

"Friends of yours, Hart?" inquired the latter, regarding us with some disfavour.

Thorndyke gave a brief explanation of our presence to which the newcomer rejoined:

"Well, sir, your *locus standi* here is a matter for the inspector. My assistant was not authorized to call in outsiders. You needn't wait, Hart."

With this he proceeded to his inspection, while Thorndyke withdrew the pocket-thermometer that he had slipped under the body, and took the reading.

The inspector, however, was not disposed to exercise the prerogative at which the surgeon had hinted; for an expert has his uses.

"How long should you say she'd been dead, sir?" he asked affably.

"About ten hours," replied Thorndyke.

The inspector and the detective simultaneously looked at their watches. "That fixes it at two o'clock this morning," said the former. "What's that, sir?"

The surgeon was pointing to the wisp of hair in the dead girl's hand.

"My word!" exclaimed the inspector. "A woman, eh? She must be a tough customer. This looks like a soft job for you, sergeant."

"Yes," said the detective. "That accounts for that box with the hassock on it at the head of the bed. She had to stand on them to reach over. But she couldn't have been very tall."

"She must have been mighty strong, though," said the inspector; "why, she has nearly cut the poor wench's head off." He moved round to the head of the bed, and, stooping over, peered down at the gaping wound. Suddenly he began to draw his hand over the pillow, and then rub his fingers together. "Why," he exclaimed, "there's sand on the pillow—silver sand! Now, how can that have come there?"

The surgeon and the detective both came round to verify this discovery, and an earnest consultation took place as to its meaning.

"Did you notice it, sir?" the inspector asked Thorndyke.

"Yes," replied the latter; "it's an unaccountable thing, isn't it?"

"I don't know that it is, either," said the detective, he ran over to the washstand, and then uttered a grunt of satisfaction. "It's quite a simple matter, after all, you see," he said, glancing complacently at my colleague. "There's a ball of sand-soap on the washstand, and the basin is full of blood-stained water. You see, she must have washed the blood off her hands, and off the knife, too—a pretty cool customer she must be—and she used the sand-soap. Then, while she was drying her hands, she must have stood over the head of the bed, and let the sand fall on to the pillow. I think that's clear enough."

"Admirably clear," said Thorndyke; "and what do you suppose was the sequence of events?"

The gratified detective glanced round the room. "I take it," said he, "that the deceased read herself to sleep. There is a book on the table by the bed, and a candlestick with nothing in it but a bit of burnt wick at the bottom of the socket. I imagine that the woman came in quietly, lit the gas, put the box and the hassock at the bedhead, stood on them, and cut her victim's throat. Deceased must have waked up and clutched the murderess's hair—though there doesn't seem to have been much of a struggle; but no doubt she died almost at once. Then the murderess washed her hands, cleaned the knife, tidied up the bed a bit, and went away. That's about how things happened, I think, but how she got in without anyone hearing, and how she got out, and where she went to, are the things that we've got to find out."

"Perhaps," said the surgeon, drawing the bedclothes over the corpse, "we had better have the landlady in and make a few inquiries." He glanced significantly at Thorndyke, and the inspector coughed behind his hand. My colleague, however, chose to be obtuse to these hints: opening the door, he turned the key backwards and forwards several times, drew it out, examined it narrowly, and replaced it.

"The landlady is outside on the landing," he remarked, holding the door open.

Thereupon the inspector went out, and we all followed to hear the result of his inquiries.

"Now, Mrs. Goldstein," said the officer, opening his notebook, "I want you to tell us all that you know about this affair, and about the girl herself. What was her name?"

The landlady, who had been joined by a white-faced, tremulous man, wiped her eyes, and replied in a shaky voice: "Her name, poor child, was Minna Adler. She was a German. She came from Bremen about two years ago. She had no friends in England—no relatives, I mean. She was a waitress at a restaurant in Fenchurch Street, and a good, quiet, hard-working girl."

"When did you discover what had happened?"

"About eleven o'clock. I thought she had gone to work as usual, but my husband noticed from the back yard that her blind was still down. So I went up and knocked, and when I got no answer, I opened the door and went in, and then I saw —" Here the poor soul, overcome by the dreadful recollection, burst into hysterical sobs.

"Her door was unlocked, then; did she usually lock it?"

"I think so," sobbed Mrs. Goldstein. "The key was always inside."

"And the street door; was that secure when you came down this morning?"

"It was shut. We don't bolt it because some of the lodgers come home rather late."

"And now tell us, had she any enemies? Was there anyone who had a grudge against her?"

"No, no, poor child! Why should anyone have a grudge against her? No, she had no quarrel—no real quarrel—with anyone; not even with Miriam."

"Miriam!" inquired the inspector. "Who is she?"

"That was nothing," interposed the man hastily. "That was not a quarrel."

"Just a little unpleasantness, I suppose, Mr. Goldstein?" suggested the inspector.

"Just a little foolishness about a young man," said Mr. Goldstein. "That was all. Miriam was a little jealous. But it was nothing."

"No, no. Of course. We all know that young women are apt to—"

A soft footstep had been for some time audible, slowly descending the stair above, and at this moment a turn of the staircase brought the newcomer into view. And at that vision the inspector stopped short as if petrified, and a tense, startled silence fell upon us all. Down the remaining stairs there advanced towards us a young woman, powerful though short, wild-eyed, dishevelled, horror-stricken, and of a ghastly pallor: and her hair was a fiery red.

Stock still and speechless we all stood as this apparition came slowly towards us; but suddenly the detective slipped back into the room, closing the door after him, to reappear a few moments later holding a small paper packet, which, after a quick glance at the inspector, he placed in his breast pocket.

"This is my daughter Miriam that we spoke about, gentlemen," said Mr. Goldstein. "Miriam, those are the doctors and the police."

The girl looked at us from one to the other. "You have seen her, then," she said in a strange, muffled voice, and added: "She isn't dead, is she? Not really dead?" The question was asked in a tone at once coaxing and despairing, such as a distracted mother might use over the corpse of her child. It filled me with vague discomfort, and, unconsciously, I looked round towards Thorndyke.

To my surprise he had vanished.

Noiselessly backing towards the head of the stairs, where I could command a view of the hall, or passage, I looked down, and saw him in the act of reaching up to a shelf behind the street door. He caught my eye, and beckoned, whereupon I crept away unnoticed by the party on the landing. When I reached the hall, he was wrapping up three small objects, each in a separate cigarette-paper; and I noticed that he handled them with more than ordinary tenderness.

"We didn't want to see that poor devil of a girl arrested," said he, as he deposited the three little packets gingerly in his pocket-box. "Let us be off." He opened the door noiselessly, and stood for a moment, turning the latch backwards and forwards, and closely examining its bolt.

I glanced up at the shelf behind the door. On it were two flat china candlesticks, in one of which I had happened to notice, as we came in, a short end of candle lying in the tray, and I now looked to see if that was what Thorndyke had annexed; but it was still there.

I followed my colleague out into the street, and for some time we walked on without speaking. "You guessed what the sergeant had in that paper, of course," said Thorndyke at length.

"Yes. It was the hair from the dead woman's hand; and I thought that he had much better have left it there."

"Undoubtedly. But that is the way in which well-meaning policemen destroy valuable evidence. Not that it matters much in this particular instance; but it might have been a fatal mistake."

"Do you intend to take any active part in this case?" I asked.

"That depends on circumstances. I have collected some evidence, but what it is worth I don't yet know. Neither do I know whether the police have observed the same set of facts; but I need not say that I shall do anything that seems necessary to assist the authorities. That is a matter of common citizenship."

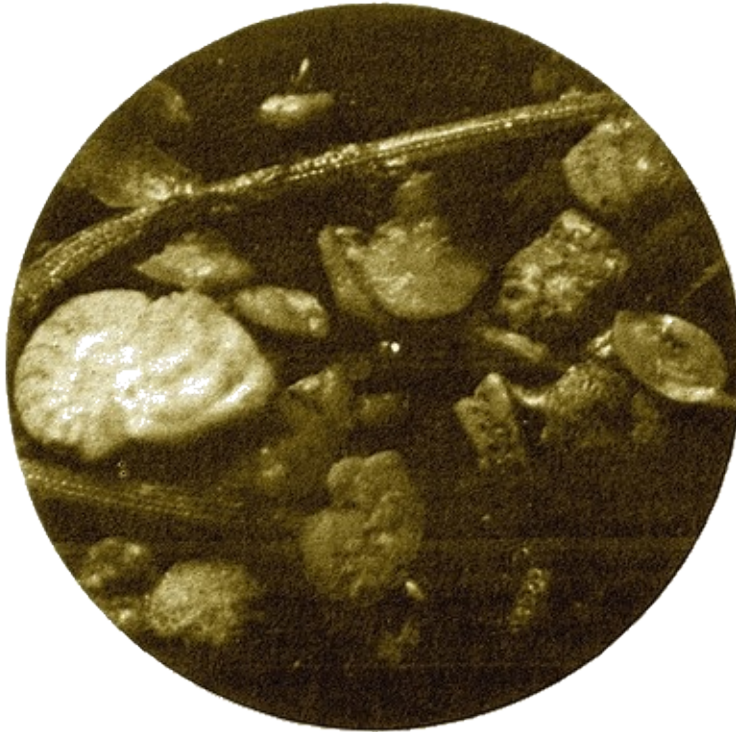
The inroads made upon our time by the morning's adventures made it necessary that we should go each about his respective business without delay; so, after a perfunctory lunch at a tea-shop, we separated, and I did not see my colleague again until the day's work was finished, and I turned into our chambers just before dinner-time.

Here I found Thorndyke seated at the table, and evidently full of business. A microscope stood close by, with a condenser throwing a spot of light on to a pinch of powder that had been sprinkled on to the slide; his collecting-box lay open before him, and he was engaged, rather mysteriously, in squeezing a thick white cement from a tube on to three little pieces of moulding-wax.

"Useful stuff, this Fortafix," he remarked; "it makes excellent casts, and saves the trouble and mess of mixing plaster, which is a consideration for small work like this. By the way, if you want to know what was on that poor girl's pillow, just take a peep through the microscope. It is rather a pretty specimen."

I stepped across, and applied my eye to the instrument. The specimen was, indeed, pretty in more than a technical sense.

Mingled with crystalline grains of quartz, glassy spicules, and water-worn fragments of coral, were a number of lovely little shells, some of the texture of fine porcelain, others like blown Venetian glass.



*The sand from the Murdered Woman's Pillow. Magnified 25 diameters.*

"These are Foraminifera!" I exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Then it is not silver sand, after all?"

"Certainly not."

"But what is it, then?"

Thorndyke smiled. "It is a message to us from the deep sea, Jervis; from the floor of the Eastern Mediterranean."

"And can you read the message?"

"I think I can," he replied, "but I shall know soon, I hope."

I looked down the microscope again, and wondered what message these tiny shells had conveyed to my friend. Deep-sea sand on a dead woman's pillow! What could be more incongruous? What possible connection could there be between this sordid crime in the east of London and the deep bed of the "tideless sea"?

Meanwhile Thorndyke squeezed out more cement on to the three little pieces of moulding-wax (which I suspected to be the objects that I had seen him wrapping up with such care in the hall of the Goldsteins' house); then, laying one of them down on a glass slide, with its cemented side uppermost, he stood the other two upright on either side of it. Finally he squeezed out a fresh load of the thick cement, apparently to bind the three objects together, and carried the slide very carefully to a cupboard, where he deposited it, together with the envelope containing the sand and the slide from the stage of the microscope.

He was just locking the cupboard when a sharp rat-tat on our knocker sent him hurriedly to the door. A messenger-boy, standing on the threshold, held out a dirty envelope.

"Mr. Goldstein kept me a awful long time, sir," said he; "I haven't been a-loitering."

Thorndyke took the envelope over to the gas-light, and, opening it, drew forth a sheet of paper, which he scanned quickly and almost eagerly; and, though his face remained as inscrutable as a mask of stone, I felt a conviction that the paper had told him something that he wished to know.

The boy having been sent on his way rejoicing, Thorndyke turned to the bookshelves, along which he ran his eye thoughtfully until it alighted on a shabbily-bound volume near one end. This he reached down, and as he laid it open on



the table, I glanced at it, and was surprised to observe that it was a bi-lingual work, the opposite pages being apparently in Russian and Hebrew.

"The Old Testament in Russian and Yiddish," he remarked, noting my surprise. "I am going to get Polton to photograph a couple of specimen pages—is that the postman or a visitor?"

It turned out to be the postman, and as Thorndyke extracted from the letter-box a blue official envelope, he glanced significantly at me.

"This answers your question, I think, Jervis," said he. "Yes; coroner's subpoena and a very civil letter: 'sorry to trouble you, but I had no choice under the circumstances'—of course he hadn't—'Dr. Davidson has arranged to make the autopsy to-morrow at 4 p.m., and I should be glad if you could be present. The mortuary is in Barker Street, next to the school.' Well, we must go, I suppose, though Davidson will probably resent it." He took up the Testament, and went off with it to the laboratory.

We lunched at our chambers on the following day, and, after the meal, drew up our chairs to the fire and lit our pipes. Thorndyke was evidently preoccupied, for he laid his open notebook on his knee, and, gazing meditatively into the fire, made occasional entries with his pencil as though he were arranging the points of an argument. Assuming that the Aldgate murder was the subject of his cogitations, I ventured to ask:

"Have you any material evidence to offer the coroner?"

He closed his notebook and put it away. "The evidence that I have," he said, "is material and important; but it is disjointed and rather inconclusive. If I can join it up into a coherent whole, as I hope to do before I reach the court, it will be very important indeed—but here is my invaluable familiar, with the instruments of research." He turned with a smile towards Polton, who had just entered the room, and master and man exchanged a friendly glance of mutual appreciation. The relations of Thorndyke and his assistant were a constant delight to me: on the one side, service, loyal and whole-hearted; on the other, frank and full recognition.

"I should think those will do, sir," said Polton, handing his principal a small cardboard box such as playing-cards are carried in. Thorndyke pulled off the lid, and I then saw that the box was fitted internally with grooves for plates, and contained two mounted photographs. The latter were very singular productions indeed; they were copies each of a page of the Testament, one Russian and the other Yiddish; but the lettering appeared white on a black ground, of which it occupied only quite a small space in the middle, leaving a broad black margin. Each photograph was mounted on a stiff card, and each card had a duplicate photograph pasted on the back.

Thorndyke exhibited them to me with a provoking smile, holding them daintily by their edges, before he slid them back into the grooves of their box.

"We are making a little digression into philology, you see," he remarked, as he pocketed the box. "But we must be off now, or we shall keep Davidson waiting. Thank you, Polton."

The District Railway carried us swiftly eastward, and we emerged from Aldgate Station a full half-hour before we were due. Nevertheless, Thorndyke stepped out briskly, but instead of making directly for the mortuary, he strayed off unaccountably into Mansell Street, scanning the numbers of the houses as he went. A row of old houses, picturesque but grimy, on our right seemed specially to attract him, and he slowed down as we approached them.

"There is a quaint survival, Jervis," he remarked, pointing to a crudely painted, wooden effigy of an Indian standing on a bracket at the door of a small old-fashioned tobacconist's shop. We halted to look at the little image, and at that moment the side door opened, and a woman came out on to the doorstep, where she stood gazing up and down the street.

Thorndyke immediately crossed the pavement, and addressed her, apparently with some question, for I heard her answer presently: "A quarter-past six is his time, sir, and he is generally punctual to the minute."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke; "I'll bear that in mind;" and, lifting his hat, he walked on briskly, turning presently up a side-street which brought us out into Aldgate. It was now but five minutes to four, so we strode off quickly to keep our tryst at the mortuary; but although we arrived at the gate as the hour was striking, when we entered the building we found Dr. Davidson hanging up his apron and preparing to depart.

"Sorry I couldn't wait for you," he said, with no great show of sincerity, "but a *post-mortem* is a mere farce in a case like this; you have seen all that there was to see. However, there is the body; Hart hasn't closed it up yet."

With this and a curt "good-afternoon" he departed.

"I must apologize for Dr. Davidson, sir," said Hart, looking up with a vexed face from the desk at which he was writing out his notes.

"You needn't," said Thorndyke; "you didn't supply him with manners; and don't let me disturb you. I only want to verify one or two points."

Accepting the hint, Hart and I remained at the desk, while Thorndyke, removing his hat, advanced to the long slate table, and bent over its burden of pitiful tragedy. For some time he remained motionless, running his eye gravely over the corpse, in search, no doubt, of bruises and indications of a struggle. Then he stooped and narrowly examined the wound, especially at its commencement and end. Suddenly he drew nearer, peering intently as if something had attracted his attention, and

having taken out his lens, fetched a small sponge, with which he dried an exposed process of the spine. Holding his lens before the dried spot, he again scrutinized it closely, and then, with a scalpel and forceps, detached some object, which he carefully washed, and then once more examined through his lens as it lay in the palm of his hand. Finally, as I expected, he brought forth his "collecting-box," took from it a seed-envelope, into which he dropped the object—evidently something quite small—closed up the envelope, wrote on the outside of it, and replaced it in the box.

"I think I have seen all that I wanted to see," he said, as he pocketed the box and took up his hat. "We shall meet tomorrow morning at the inquest." He shook hands with Hart, and we went out into the relatively pure air.

On one pretext or another, Thorndyke lingered about the neighbourhood of Aldgate until a church bell struck six, when he bent his steps towards Harrow Alley. Through the narrow, winding passage he walked, slowly and with a thoughtful mien, along Little Somerset Street and out into Mansell Street, until just on the stroke of a quarter-past we found ourselves opposite the little tobacconist's shop.

Thorndyke glanced at his watch and halted, looking keenly up the street. A moment later he hastily took from his pocket the cardboard box, from which he extracted the two mounted photographs which had puzzled me so much. They now seemed to puzzle Thorndyke equally, to judge by his expression, for he held them close to his eyes, scrutinizing them with an anxious frown, and backing by degrees into the doorway at the side of the tobacconist's. At this moment I became aware of a man who, as he approached, seemed to eye my friend with some curiosity and more disfavour; a very short, burly young man, apparently a foreign Jew, whose face, naturally sinister and unprepossessing, was further disfigured by the marks of smallpox.

"Excuse me," he said brusquely, pushing past Thorndyke; "I live here."

"I am sorry," responded Thorndyke. He moved aside, and then suddenly asked: "By the way, I suppose you do not by any chance understand Yiddish?"

"Why do you ask?" the newcomer demanded gruffly.

"Because I have just had these two photographs of lettering given to me. One is in Greek, I think, and one in Yiddish, but I have forgotten which is which." He held out the two cards to the stranger, who took them from him, and looked at them with scowling curiosity.

"This one is Yiddish," said he, raising his right hand, "and this other is Russian, not Greek." He held out the two cards to Thorndyke, who took them from him, holding them carefully by the edges as before.

"I am greatly obliged to you for your kind assistance," said Thorndyke; but before he had time to finish his thanks, the man had entered, by means of his latchkey, and slammed the door.

Thorndyke carefully slid the photographs back into their grooves, replaced the box in his pocket, and made an entry in his notebook.

"That," said he, "finishes my labours, with the exception of a small experiment which I can perform at home. By the way, I picked up a morsel of evidence that Davidson had overlooked. He will be annoyed, and I am not very fond of scoring off a colleague; but he is too uncivil for me to communicate with."

\*\*\*\*\*

The coroner's subpoena had named ten o'clock as the hour at which Thorndyke was to attend to give evidence, but a consultation with a well-known solicitor so far interfered with his plans that we were a quarter of an hour late in starting from the Temple. My friend was evidently in excellent spirits, though silent and preoccupied, from which I inferred that he was satisfied with the results of his labours; but, as I sat by his side in the hansom, I forbore to question him, not from mere unselfishness, but rather from the desire to hear his evidence for the first time in conjunction with that of the other witnesses.

The room in which the inquest was held formed part of a school adjoining the mortuary. Its vacant bareness was on this occasion enlivened by a long, baize-covered table, at the head of which sat the coroner, while one side was occupied by the jury; and I was glad to observe that the latter consisted, for the most part, of genuine working men, instead of the stolid-faced, truculent "professional jurymen" who so often grace these tribunals.

A row of chairs accommodated the witnesses, a corner of the table was allotted to the accused woman's solicitor, a smart dapper gentleman in gold pince-nez, a portion of one side to the reporters, and several ranks of benches were occupied by a miscellaneous assembly representing the public.

There were one or two persons present whom I was somewhat surprised to see. There was, for instance, our pock-marked acquaintance of Mansell Street, who greeted us with a stare of hostile surprise; and there was Superintendent Miller of Scotland Yard, in whose manner I seemed to detect some kind of private understanding with Thorndyke. But I had little time to look about me, for when we arrived, the proceedings had already commenced. Mrs. Goldstein, the first witness, was finishing her recital of the circumstances under which the crime was discovered, and, as she retired, weeping hysterically, she was followed by looks of commiseration from the sympathetic jurymen.

The next witness was a young woman named Kate Silver. As she stepped forward to be sworn she flung a glance of hatred and defiance at Miriam Goldstein, who, white-faced and wild of aspect, with her red hair streaming in dishevelled masses on to her shoulders, stood apart in custody of two policemen, staring about her as if in a dream.

"You were intimately acquainted with the deceased, I believe?" said the coroner.

"I was. We worked at the same place for a long time—the Empire Restaurant in Fenchurch Street—and we lived in the same house. She was my most intimate friend."

"Had she, as far as you know, any friends or relations in England?"

"No. She came to England from Bremen about three years ago. It was then that I made her acquaintance. All her relations were in Germany, but she had many friends here, because she was a very lively, amiable girl."

"Had she, as far as you know, any enemies—any persons, I mean, who bore any grudge against her and were likely to do her an injury?"

"Yes. Miriam Goldstein was her enemy. She hated her."

"You say Miriam Goldstein hated the deceased. How do you know that?"

"She made no secret of it. They had had a violent quarrel about a young man named Moses Cohen. He was formerly Miriam's sweetheart, and I think they were very fond of one another until Minna Adler came to lodge at the Goldsteins' house about three months ago. Then Moses took a fancy to Minna, and she encouraged him, although she had a sweetheart of her own, a young man named Paul Petrofsky, who also lodged in the Goldsteins' house. At last Moses broke off with Miriam, and engaged himself to Minna. Then Miriam was furious, and complained to Minna about what she called her perfidious conduct; but Minna only laughed, and told her she could have Petrofsky instead."

"And what did Minna say to that?" asked the coroner.

"She was still more angry, because Moses Cohen is a smart, good-looking young man, while Petrofsky is not much to look at. Besides, Miriam did not like Petrofsky; he had been rude to her, and she had made her father send him away from the house. So they were not friends, and it was just after that that the trouble came."

"The trouble?"

"I mean about Moses Cohen. Miriam is a very passionate girl, and she was furiously jealous of Minna, so when Petrofsky annoyed her by taunting her about Moses Cohen and Minna, she lost her temper, and said dreadful things about both of them."

"As, for instance—?"

"She said that she would kill them both, and that she would like to cut Minna's throat."

"When was this?"

"It was the day before the murder."

"Who heard her say these things besides you?"

"Another lodger named Edith Bryant and Petrofsky. We were all standing in the hall at the time."

"But I thought you said Petrofsky had been turned away from the house."

"So he had, a week before; but he had left a box in his room, and on this day he had come to fetch it. That was what started the trouble. Miriam had taken his room for her bedroom, and turned her old one into a workroom. She said he should not go to her room to fetch his box."

"And did he?"

"I think so. Miriam and Edith and I went out, leaving him in the hall. When we came back the box was gone, and, as Mrs. Goldstein was in the kitchen and there was nobody else in the house, he must have taken it."

"You spoke of Miriam's workroom. What work did she do?"

"She cut stencils for a firm of decorators."

Here the coroner took a peculiarly shaped knife from the table before him, and handed it to the witness.

"Have you ever seen that knife before?" he asked.

"Yes. It belongs to Miriam Goldstein. It is a stencil-knife that she used in her work."

This concluded the evidence of Kate Silver, and when the name of the next witness, Paul Petrofsky, was called, our Mansell Street friend came forward to be sworn. His evidence was quite brief, and merely corroborative of that of Kate Silver, as was that of the next witness, Edith Bryant. When these had been disposed of, the coroner announced:

"Before taking the medical evidence, gentlemen, I propose to hear that of the police-officers, and first we will call Detective-sergeant Alfred Bates."

The sergeant stepped forward briskly, and proceeded to give his evidence with official readiness and precision.

"I was called by Constable Simmonds at eleven-forty-nine, and reached the house at two minutes to twelve in company with Inspector Harris and Divisional Surgeon Davidson. When I arrived Dr. Hart, Dr. Thorndyke, and Dr. Jervis were already in the room. I found the deceased woman, Minna Adler, lying in bed with her throat cut. She was dead and cold.

There were no signs of a struggle, and the bed did not appear to have been disturbed. There was a table by the bedside on which was a book and an empty candlestick. The candle had apparently burnt out, for there was only a piece of charred wick at the bottom of the socket. A box had been placed on the floor at the head of the bed and a hassock stood on it. Apparently the murderer had stood on the hassock and leaned over the head of the bed to commit the murder. This was rendered necessary by the position of the table, which could not have been moved without making some noise and perhaps disturbing the deceased. I infer from the presence of the box and hassock that the murderer is a short person."

"Was there anything else that seemed to fix the identity of the murderer?"

"Yes. A tress of a woman's red hair was grasped in the left hand of the deceased."

As the detective uttered this statement, a simultaneous shriek of horror burst from the accused woman and her mother. Mrs. Goldstein sank half-fainting on to a bench, while Miriam, pale as death, stood as one petrified, fixing the detective with a stare of terror, as he drew from his pocket two small paper packets, which he opened and handed to the coroner.

"The hair in the packet marked A," said he, "is that which was found in the hand of the deceased; that in the packet marked B is the hair of Miriam Goldstein."

Here the accused woman's solicitor rose. "Where did you obtain the hair in the packet marked B?" he demanded.

"I took it from a bag of combings that hung on the wall of Miriam Goldstein's bedroom," answered the detective.

"I object to this," said the solicitor. "There is no evidence that the hair from that bag was the hair of Miriam Goldstein at all."

Thorndyke chuckled softly. "The lawyer is as dense as the policeman," he remarked to me in an undertone. "Neither of them seems to see the significance of that bag in the least."

"Did you know about the bag, then?" I asked in surprise.

"No. I thought it was the hair-brush."

I gazed at my colleague in amazement, and was about to ask for some elucidation of this cryptic reply, when he held up his finger and turned again to listen.

"Very well, Mr. Horwitz," the coroner was saying, "I will make a note of your objection, but I shall allow the sergeant to continue his evidence."

The solicitor sat down, and the detective resumed his statement.

"I have examined and compared the two samples of hair, and it is my opinion that they are from the head of the same person. The only other observation that I made in the room was that there was a small quantity of silver sand sprinkled on the pillow around the deceased woman's head."

"Silver sand!" exclaimed the coroner. "Surely that is a very singular material to find on a woman's pillow?"

"I think it is easily explained," replied the sergeant. "The wash-hand basin was full of bloodstained water, showing that the murderer had washed his—or her—hands, and probably the knife, too, after the crime. On the washstand was a ball of sand-soap, and I imagine that the murderer used this to cleanse his—or her—hands, and, while drying them, must have stood over the head of the bed and let the sand sprinkle down on to the pillow."

"A simple but highly ingenious explanation," commented the coroner approvingly, and the jurymen exchanged admiring nods and nudges.

"I searched the rooms occupied by the accused woman, Miriam Goldstein, and found there a knife of the kind used by stencil cutters, but larger than usual. There were stains of blood on it which the accused explained by saying that she cut her finger some days ago. She admitted that the knife was hers."

This concluded the sergeant's evidence, and he was about to sit down when the solicitor rose.

"I should like to ask this witness one or two questions," said he, and the coroner having nodded assent, he proceeded: "Has the finger of the accused been examined since her arrest?"

"I believe not," replied the sergeant. "Not to my knowledge, at any rate."

The solicitor noted the reply, and then asked: "With reference to the silver sand, did you find any at the bottom of the wash-hand basin?"

The sergeant's face reddened. "I did not examine the wash-hand basin," he answered.

"Did anybody examine it?"

"I think not."

"Thank you." Mr. Horwitz sat down, and the triumphant squeak of his quill pen was heard above the muttered disapproval of the jury.

"We shall now take the evidence of the doctors, gentlemen," said the coroner, "and we will begin with that of the divisional surgeon. You saw the deceased, I believe, Doctor," he continued, when Dr. Davidson had been sworn, "soon after the discovery of the murder, and you have since then made an examination of the body?"

"Yes. I found the body of the deceased lying in her bed, which had apparently not been disturbed. She had been dead about ten hours, and rigidity was complete in the limbs but not in the trunk. The cause of death was a deep wound extending right across the throat and dividing all the structures down to the spine. It had been inflicted with a single sweep of a knife while deceased was lying down, and was evidently homicidal. It was not possible for the deceased to have inflicted the wound herself. It was made with a single-edged knife, drawn from left to right; the assailant stood on a hassock placed on a box at the head of the bed and leaned over to strike the blow. The murderer is probably quite a short person, very muscular, and right-handed. There was no sign of a struggle, and, judging by the nature of the injuries, I should say that death was almost instantaneous. In the left hand of the deceased was a small tress of a woman's red hair. I have compared that hair with that of the accused, and am of opinion that it is her hair."

"You were shown a knife belonging to the accused?"

"Yes; a stencil-knife. There were stains of dried blood on it which I have examined and find to be mammalian blood. It is probably human blood, but I cannot say with certainty that it is."

"Could the wound have been inflicted with this knife?"

"Yes, though it is a small knife to produce so deep a wound. Still, it is quite possible."

The coroner glanced at Mr. Horwitz. "Do you wish to ask this witness any questions?" he inquired.

"If you please, sir," was the reply. The solicitor rose, and, having glanced through his notes, commenced: "You have described certain blood-stains on this knife. But we have heard that there was blood-stained water in the wash-hand basin, and it is suggested, most reasonably, that the murderer washed his hands and the knife. But if the knife was washed, how do you account for the bloodstains on it?"

"Apparently the knife was not washed, only the hands."

"But is not that highly improbable?"

"No, I think not."

"You say that there was no struggle, and that death was practically instantaneous, but yet the deceased had torn out a lock of the murderer's hair. Are not those two statements inconsistent with one another?"

"No. The hair was probably grasped convulsively at the moment of death. At any rate, the hair was undoubtedly in the dead woman's hand."

"Is it possible to identify positively the hair of any individual?"

"No. Not with certainty. But this is very peculiar hair."

The solicitor sat down, and, Dr. Hart having been called, and having briefly confirmed the evidence of his principal, the coroner announced: "The next witness, gentleman, is Dr. Thorndyke, who was present almost accidentally, but was actually the first on the scene of the murder. He has since made an examination of the body, and will, no doubt, be able to throw some further light on this horrible crime."

Thorndyke stood up, and, having been sworn, laid on the table a small box with a leather handle. Then, in answer to the coroner's questions, he described himself as the lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence at St. Margaret's Hospital, and briefly explained his connection with the case. At this point the foreman of the jury interrupted to ask that his opinion might be taken on the hair and the knife, as these were matters of contention, and the objects in question were accordingly handed to him.

"Is the hair in the packet marked *A* in your opinion from the same person as that in the packet marked *B*?" the coroner asked.

"I have no doubt that they are from the same person," was the reply.

"Will you examine this knife and tell us if the wound on the deceased might have been inflicted with it?"

Thorndyke examined the blade attentively, and then handed the knife back to the coroner.

"The wound might have been inflicted with this knife," said he, "but I am quite sure it was not."

"Can you give us your reasons for that very definite opinion?"

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that it will save time if I give you the facts in a connected order." The coroner bowed assent, and he proceeded: "I will not waste your time by reiterating facts already stated. Sergeant Bates has fully described the state of the room, and I have nothing to add on that subject. Dr. Davidson's description of the body covers all the facts: the woman had been dead about ten hours, the wound was unquestionably homicidal, and was inflicted in the manner that he has described. Death was apparently instantaneous, and I should say that the deceased never awakened from her sleep."

"But," objected the coroner, "the deceased held a lock of hair in her hand."

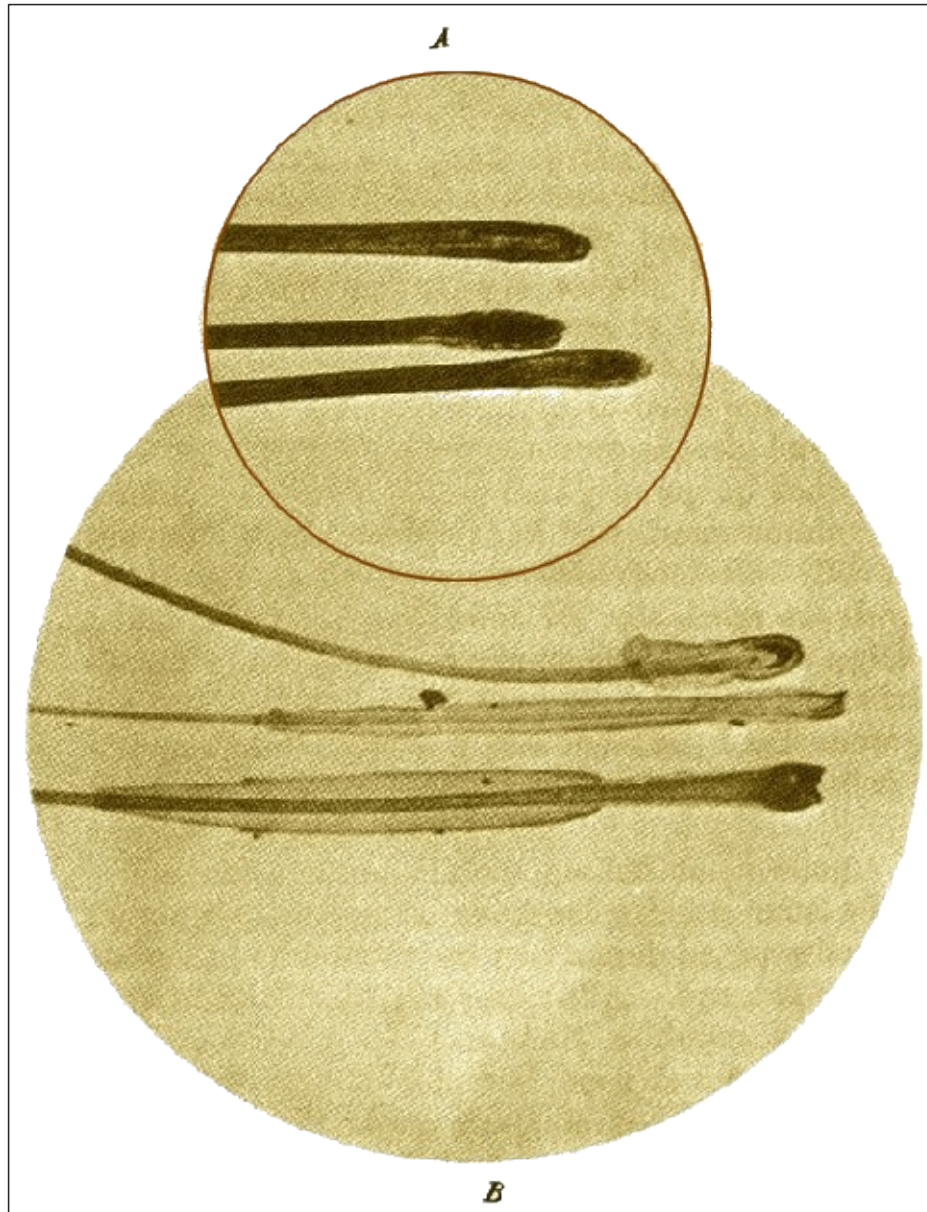
"That hair," replied Thorndyke, "was not the hair of the murderer. It was placed in the hand of the corpse for an obvious purpose; and the fact that the murderer had brought it with him shows that the crime was premeditated, and that it was committed by someone who had had access to the house and was acquainted with its inmates."

As Thorndyke made this statement, coroner, jurymen, and spectators alike gazed at him in open-mouthed amazement. There was an interval of intense silence, broken by a wild, hysteric laugh from Mrs. Goldstein, and then the coroner asked:

“How did you know that the hair in the hand of the corpse was not that of the murderer?”

“The inference was very obvious. At the first glance the peculiar and conspicuous colour of the hair struck me as suspicious. But there were three facts, each of which was in itself sufficient to prove that the hair was probably not that of the murderer.

“In the first place there was the condition of the hand. When a person, at the moment of death, grasps any object firmly, there is set up a condition known as cadaveric spasm. The muscular contraction passes immediately into *rigor mortis*, or death-stiffening, and the object remains grasped by the dead hand until the rigidity passes off. In this case the hand was perfectly rigid, but it did not grasp the hair at all. The little tress lay in the palm quite loosely and the hand was only partially closed. Obviously the hair had been placed in it after death. The other two facts had reference to the condition of the hair itself. Now, when a lock of hair is torn from the head, it is evident that all the roots will be found at the same end of the lock. But in the present instance this was not the case; the lock of hair which lay in the dead woman’s hand had roots at both ends, and so could not have been torn from the head of the murderer. But the third fact that I observed was still more conclusive. The hairs of which that little tress was composed had not been pulled out at all. They had fallen out spontaneously. They were, in fact, shed hairs—probably combings. Let me explain the difference. When a hair is shed naturally, it drops out of the little tube in the skin called the root sheath, having been pushed out by the young hair growing up underneath; the root end of such a shed hair shows nothing but a small bulbous enlargement—the root bulb. But when a hair is forcibly pulled out, its root drags out the root sheath with it, and this can be plainly seen as a glistening mass on the end of the hair. If Miriam Goldstein will pull out a hair and pass it to me, I will show you the great difference between hair which is pulled out and hair which is shed.”



*A, Shed Hairs showing the naked bulb, magnified 32 diameters.  
B, Hairs plucked from scalp, showing the adherent root-sheaths, magnified 20 diameters.*

The unfortunate Miriam needed no pressing. In a twinkling she had tweaked out a dozen hairs, which a constable handed across to Thorndyke, by whom they were at once fixed in a paper-clip. A second clip being produced from the box, half a dozen hairs taken from the tress which had been found in the dead woman's hand were fixed in it. Then Thorndyke handed the two clips, together with a lens, to the coroner.

"Remarkable!" exclaimed the latter, "and most conclusive." He passed the objects on to the foreman, and there was an interval of silence while the jury examined them with breathless interest and much facial contortion.

"The next question," resumed Thorndyke, "was, Whence did the murderer obtain these hairs? I assumed that they had been taken from Miriam Goldstein's hair-brush; but the sergeant's evidence makes it pretty clear that they were obtained from the very bag of combings from which he took a sample for comparison."

"I think, Doctor," remarked the coroner, "you have disposed of the hair clue pretty completely. May I ask if you found anything that might throw any light on the identity of the murderer?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "I observed certain things which determine the identity of the murderer quite conclusively." He turned a significant glance on Superintendent Miller, who immediately rose, stepped quietly to the door, and then returned, putting something into his pocket. "When I entered the hall," Thorndyke continued, "I noted the following facts:

Behind the door was a shelf on which were two china candlesticks. Each was fitted with a candle, and in one was a short candle-end, about an inch long, lying in the tray. On the floor, close to the mat, was a spot of candle-wax and some faint marks of muddy feet. The oil-cloth on the stairs also bore faint footmarks, made by wet goloshes. They were ascending the stairs, and grew fainter towards the top. There were two more spots of candle-wax on the stairs, and one on the handrail; a burnt end of a wax match halfway up the stairs, and another on the landing. There were no descending footmarks, but one of the spots of wax close to the balusters had been trodden on while warm and soft, and bore the mark of the front of the heel of a golosh descending the stairs. The lock of the street door had been recently oiled, as had also that of the bedroom door, and the latter had been unlocked from outside with a bent wire, which had made a mark on the key. Inside the room I made two further observations. One was that the dead woman's pillow was lightly sprinkled with sand, somewhat like silver sand, but greyer and less gritty. I shall return to this presently.

"The other was that the candlestick on the bedside table was empty. It was a peculiar candlestick, having a skeleton socket formed of eight flat strips of metal. The charred wick of a burnt-out candle was at the bottom of the socket, but a little fragment of wax on the top edge showed that another candle had been stuck in it and had been taken out, for otherwise that fragment would have been melted. I at once thought of the candle-end in the hall, and when I went down again I took that end from the tray and examined it. On it I found eight distinct marks corresponding to the eight bars of the candlestick in the bedroom. It had been carried in the right hand of some person, for the warm, soft wax had taken beautifully clear impressions of a right thumb and forefinger. I took three moulds of the candle-end in moulding wax, and from these moulds have made this cement cast, which shows both the fingerprints and the marks of the candlestick." He took from his box a small white object, which he handed to the coroner.

"And what do you gather from these facts?" asked the coroner.

"I gather that at about a quarter to two on the morning of the crime, a man (who had, on the previous day visited the house to obtain the tress of hair and oil the locks) entered the house by means of a latchkey. We can fix the time by the fact that it rained on that morning from half-past one to a quarter to two, this being the only rain that has fallen for a fortnight, and the murder was committed at about two o'clock. The man lit a wax match in the hall and another halfway up the stairs. He found the bedroom door locked, and turned the key from outside with a bent wire. He entered, lit the candle, placed the box and hassock, murdered his victim, washed his hands and knife, took the candle-end from the socket and went downstairs, where he blew out the candle and dropped it into the tray.

"The next clue is furnished by the sand on the pillow. I took a little of it, and examined it under the microscope, when it turned out to be deep-sea sand from the Eastern Mediterranean. It was full of the minute shells called 'Foraminifera,' and as one of these happened to belong to a species which is found only in the Levant, I was able to fix the locality."

"But this is very remarkable," said the coroner. "How on earth could deep-sea sand have got on to this woman's pillow?"

"The explanation," replied Thorndyke, "is really quite simple. Sand of this kind is contained in considerable quantities in Turkey sponges. The warehouses in which the sponges are unpacked are often strewn with it ankle deep; the men who unpack the cases become dusted over with it, their clothes saturated and their pockets filled with it. If such a person, with his clothes and pockets full of sand, had committed this murder, it is pretty certain that in leaning over the head of the bed in a partly inverted position he would have let fall a certain quantity of the sand from his pockets and the interstices of his clothing. Now, as soon as I had examined this sand and ascertained its nature, I sent a message to Mr. Goldstein asking him for a list of the persons who were acquainted with the deceased, with their addresses and occupations. He sent me the list by return, and among the persons mentioned was a man who was engaged as a packer in a wholesale sponge warehouse in the Minories. I further ascertained that the new season's crop of Turkey sponges had arrived a few days before the murder.

"The question that now arose was, whether this sponge-packer was the person whose fingerprints I had found on the candle-end. To settle this point, I prepared two mounted photographs, and having contrived to meet the man at his door on his return from work, I induced him to look at them and compare them. He took them from me, holding each one between a forefinger and thumb. When he returned them to me, I took them home and carefully dusted each on both sides with a certain surgical dusting-powder. The powder adhered to the places where his fingers and thumbs had pressed against the photographs, showing the fingerprints very distinctly. Those of the right hand were identical with the prints on the candle, as you will see if you compare them with the cast." He produced from the box the photograph of the Yiddish lettering, on the black margin of which there now stood out with startling distinctness a yellowish-white print of a thumb.

Thorndyke had just handed the card to the coroner when a very singular disturbance arose. While my friend had been giving the latter part of his evidence, I had observed the man Petrofsky rise from his seat and walk stealthily across to the door. He turned the handle softly and pulled, at first gently, and then with more force. But the door was locked. As he realized this, Petrofsky seized the handle with both hands and tore at it furiously, shaking it to and fro with the violence of a madman, and his shaking limbs, his starting eyes, glaring insanely at the astonished spectators, his ugly face, dead white, running with sweat and hideous with terror, made a picture that was truly shocking.

Suddenly he let go the handle, and with a horrible cry thrust his hand under the skirt of his coat and rushed at Thorndyke. But the superintendent was ready for this. There was a shout and a scuffle, and then Petrofsky was born down, kicking and biting like a maniac, while Miller hung on to his right hand and the formidable knife that he grasped.



"I will ask you to hand that knife to the coroner," said Thorndyke, when Petrofsky had been secured and handcuffed, and the superintendent had readjusted his collar. "Will you kindly examine it, sir," he continued, "and tell me if there is a notch in the edge, near to the point—a triangular notch about an eighth of an inch long?"

The coroner looked at the knife, and then said in a tone of surprise: "Yes, there is. You have seen this knife before, then?"

"No, I have not," replied Thorndyke. "But perhaps I had better continue my statement. There is no need for me to tell you that the fingerprints on the card and on the candle are those of Paul Petrofsky; I will proceed to the evidence furnished by the body.

"In accordance with your order, I went to the mortuary and examined the corpse of the deceased. The wound has been fully and accurately described by Dr. Davidson, but I observed one fact which I presume he had overlooked. Embedded in the bone of the spine—in the left transverse process of the fourth vertebra—I discovered a small particle of steel, which I carefully extracted."

He drew his collecting-box from his pocket, and taking from it a seed-envelope, handed the latter to the coroner. "That fragment of steel is in this envelope," he said, "and it is possible that it may correspond to the notch in the knife-blade."

Amidst an intense silence the coroner opened the little envelope, and let the fragment of steel drop on to a sheet of

paper. Laying the knife on the paper, he gently pushed the fragment towards the notch. Then he looked up at Thorndyke.

"It fits exactly," said he.

There was a heavy thud at the other end of the room and we all looked round.

Petrofsky had fallen on to the floor insensible.

\* \* \* \* \*

"An instructive case, Jervis," remarked Thorndyke, as we walked homewards—"a case that reiterates the lesson that the authorities still refuse to learn."

"What is that?" I asked.

"It is this. When it is discovered that a murder has been committed, the scene of that murder should instantly become as the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty. Not a grain of dust should be moved, not a soul should be allowed to approach it, until the scientific observer has seen everything *in situ* and absolutely undisturbed. No trappings of excited constables, no rummaging by detectives, no scrambling to and fro of bloodhounds. Consider what would have happened in this case if we had arrived a few hours later. The corpse would have been in the mortuary, the hair in the sergeant's pocket, the bed rummaged and the sand scattered abroad, the candle probably removed, and the stairs covered with fresh tracks.

"There would not have been the vestige of a clue."

"And," I added, "the deep sea would have uttered its message in vain."

THE END.

# THE EYE OF OSIRIS

---

## I. — THE VANISHING MAN

THE SCHOOL of St Margaret's Hospital was fortunate in its lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence, or Forensic Medicine, as it is sometimes described. At some schools the lecturer on this subject is appointed apparently for the reason that he lacks the qualifications to lecture on any other. But with us it was very different: John Thorndyke was not only an enthusiast, a man of profound learning and great reputation, but he was an exceptional teacher, lively and fascinating in style and of endless resources. Every remarkable case that had ever been reported he appeared to have at his fingers' ends; every fact—chemical, physical, biological, or even historical—that could in any way be twisted into a medico-legal significance, was pressed into his service; and his own varied and curious experiences seemed as inexhaustible as the widow's cruse. One of his favourite devices for giving life and interest to a rather dry subject was that of analysing and commenting upon contemporary cases as reported in the papers (always, of course, with a due regard to the legal and social proprieties); and it was in this way that I first became introduced to the astonishing series of events that was destined to exercise so great an influence on my own life.

The lecture which had just been concluded had dealt with the rather unsatisfactory subject of survivorship. Most of the students had left the theatre, and the remainder had gathered round the lecturer's table to listen to the informal comments

that Dr. Thorndyke was wont to deliver on these occasions in an easy, conversational manner, leaning against the edge of the table and apparently addressing his remarks to a stick of blackboard chalk that he held in his fingers.

‘The problem of survivorship,’ he was saying, in reply to a question put by one of the students, ‘ordinarily occurs in cases where the bodies of the parties are producible, or where, at any rate, the occurrence of death and its approximate time are actually known. But an analogous difficulty may arise in a case where the body of one of the parties is not forthcoming, and the fact of death may have to be assumed on collateral evidence.

‘Here, of course, the vital question to be settled is, what is the latest instant at which it is certain that this person was alive? And the settlement of that question may turn on some circumstance of the most trivial and insignificant kind. There is a case in this morning’s paper which illustrates this. A gentleman has disappeared rather mysteriously. He was last seen by the servant of a relative at whose house he had called. Now, if this gentleman should never reappear, dead or alive, the question as to what was the latest moment at which he was certainly alive will turn upon the further question: “Was he or was he not wearing a particular article of jewellery when he called at the relative’s house?”’

He paused with a reflective eye bent upon the stump of chalk he still held; then, noting the expectant interest with which we were regarding him, he resumed:

‘The circumstances in this case are very curious; in fact, they are highly mysterious; and if any legal issues should arise in respect of them, they are likely to yield some very remarkable complications. The gentleman who has disappeared, Mr. John Bellingham, is a man well known in archaeological circles. He recently returned from Egypt, bringing with him a very fine collection of antiquities—some of which, by the way, he has presented to the British Museum, where they are now on view—and having made this presentation, he appears to have gone to Paris on business. I may mention that the gift consisted of a very fine mummy and a complete set of tomb-furniture. The latter, however, had not arrived from Egypt at the time when the missing man left for Paris, but the mummy was inspected on the fourteenth of October at Mr. Bellingham’s house by Dr. Norbury of the British Museum, in the presence of the donor and his solicitor, and the latter was authorised to hand over the complete collection to the British Museum authorities when the tomb-furniture arrived; which he has since done.

‘From Paris he seems to have returned on the twenty-third of November, and to have gone direct to Charing Cross to the house of a relative, a Mr. Hurst, who is a bachelor and lives at Eltham. He appeared at the house at twenty minutes past five, and as Mr. Hurst had not yet come down from town and was not expected until a quarter to six, he explained who he was and said he would wait in the study and write some letters. The housemaid accordingly showed him into the study, furnished him with writing materials, and left him.

‘At a quarter to six Mr. Hurst let himself in with his latchkey, and before the housemaid had time to speak to him he had passed through into the study and shut the door.

‘At six o’clock, when the dinner bell was rung, Mr. Hurst entered the dining-room alone, and observing the table was laid for two, asked the reason.

“I thought Mr. Bellingham was staying to dinner, sir,” was the housemaid’s reply.

“Mr. Bellingham!” exclaimed the astonished host. “I didn’t know he was here. Why was I not told?”

“I thought he was in the study with you, sir,” said the housemaid.

‘On this a search was made for the visitor, with the result that he was nowhere to be found. He had disappeared without leaving a trace, and what made the incident more odd was that the housemaid was certain that he had not gone out by the front door. For since neither she nor the cook was acquainted with Mr. John Bellingham, she had remained the whole time either in the kitchen, which commanded a view of the front gate, or in the dining-room, which opened into the hall opposite the study door. The study itself has a French window opening on a narrow grass plot, across which is a side-gate that opens into an alley; and it appears that Mr. Bellingham must have made his exit by this rather eccentric route. At any rate—and this is the important fact—he was not in the house, and no one had seen him leave it.

‘After a hasty meal Mr. Hurst returned to town and called at the office of Mr. Bellingham’s solicitor and confidential agent, a Mr. Jellicoe, and mentioned the matter to him. Mr. Jellicoe knew nothing of his client’s return from Paris, and the two men at once took the train down to Woodford, where the missing man’s brother, Mr. Godfrey Bellingham, lives. The servant who admitted them said that Mr. Godfrey was not at home, but that his daughter was in the library, which is a detached building situated in a shrubbery beyond the garden at the back of the house. Here the two men found, not only Miss Bellingham, but also her father, who had come in by the back gate.

‘Mr. Godfrey and his daughter listened to Mr. Hurst’s story with the greatest surprise, and assured him that they had neither seen nor heard anything of John Bellingham.

‘Presently the party left the library to walk up to the house; but only a few feet from the library door Mr. Jellicoe noticed an object lying in the grass and pointed it out to Mr. Godfrey.

‘The latter picked it up, and they all recognised it as a scarab which Mr. John Bellingham had been accustomed to wear suspended from his watch-chain. There was no mistaking it. It was a very fine scarab of the eighteenth dynasty fashioned of lapis lazuli and engraved with the cartouche of Amenhotep III. It had been suspended by a gold ring fastened to a wire which passed through the suspension hole, and the ring, though broken, was still in position.

‘This discovery of course only added to the mystery, which was still further increased when, on inquiry, a suit-case bearing the initials J. B. was found to be unclaimed in the cloak-room at Charing Cross. Reference to the counterfoil of the ticket-book showed that it had been deposited about the time of the arrival of the Continental express on the twenty-third of November, so that its owner must have gone straight on to Eltham.

‘That is how the affair stands at present, and, should the missing man never reappear or should his body never be found, the question, as you see, which will be required to be settled is, “What is the exact time and place, when and where, he was last known to be alive!” As to the place, the importance of the issues involved in that question are obvious and we need not consider them. But the question of time has another kind of significance. Cases have occurred, as I pointed out in the lecture, in which proof of survivorship by less than a minute has secured succession to property. Now, the missing man was last seen alive at Mr. Hurst’s house at twenty minutes past five on the twenty-third of November. But he appears to have visited his brother’s house at Woodford, and, since nobody saw him at that house, it is at present uncertain whether he went there before calling on Mr. Hurst. If he went there first, then twenty minutes past five on the evening of the twenty-third is the latest moment at which he is known to have been alive; but if he went there after, there would have to be added to this time the shortest time possible in which he could travel from the one house to the other.

‘But the question as to which house he visited first hinges on the scarab. If he was wearing the scarab when he arrived at Mr. Hurst’s house, it would be certain that he went there first; but if it was not then on his watch-chain, a probability would be established that he went first to Woodford. Thus, you see, a question which may conceivably become of the most vital moment in determining the succession of property turns on the observation or non-observation by this housemaid of an apparently trivial and insignificant fact.’

‘Has the servant made any statement on this subject, sir?’ I ventured to enquire.

‘Apparently not,’ replied Dr. Thorndyke; ‘at any rate, there is no reference to any such statement in the newspaper report, though otherwise, the case is reported in great detail; indeed, the wealth of detail, including plans of the two houses, is quite remarkable and well worth noting as being in itself a fact of considerable interest.’

‘In what respect, sir, is it of interest?’ one of the students asked.

‘Ah,’ replied Dr. Thorndyke, ‘I think I must leave you to consider that question yourself. This is an untried case, and we mustn’t make free with the actions and motives of individuals.’

‘Does the paper give any description of the missing man, sir?’ I asked.

‘Yes; quite an exhaustive description. Indeed, it is exhaustive to the verge of impropriety, considering that the man may turn up alive and well at any moment. It seems that he has an old Pott’s fracture of the left ankle, a linear, longitudinal scar on each knee—origin not stated, but easily guessed at—and that he has tattooed on his chest in vermilion a very finely and distinctly executed representation of the symbolical Eye of Osiris—or Horus or Ra, as the different authorities have it. There certainly ought to be no difficulty in identifying the body. But we hope that it will not come to that.

‘And now I must really be running away, and so must you; but I would advise you all to get copies of the paper and file them when you have read the remarkably full details. It is a most curious case, and it is highly probable that we shall hear of it again. Good afternoon, gentlemen.’

Dr Thorndyke’s advice appealed to all who heard it, for medical jurisprudence was a live subject at St Margaret’s, and all of us were keenly interested in it. As a result, we sallied forth in a body to the nearest newsvendor’s, and, having each provided himself with a copy of the Daily Telegraph, adjourned together to the Common Room to devour the report and thereafter to discuss the bearings of the case, unhampered by those considerations of delicacy that afflicted our more squeamish and scrupulous teacher.

---

## II. — THE EAVESDROPPER

IT IS one of the canons of correct conduct, scrupulously adhered to (when convenient) by all well-bred persons, that an acquaintance should be initiated by a proper introduction. To this salutary rule, which I have disregarded to the extent of an entire chapter, I now hasten to conform; and the more so inasmuch as nearly two years have passed since my first informal appearance.

Permit me then, to introduce Paul Berkeley, MB, etc., recently—very recently—qualified, faultlessly attired in the professional frock-coat and tall hat, and, at the moment of introduction, navigating with anxious care a perilous strait between a row of well-filled coal-sacks and a colossal tray piled high with kidney potatoes.

The passage of this strait landed me on the terra firma of Fleur-de-Lys Court, where I halted for a moment to consult my visiting list. There was only one more patient for me to see this morning, and he lived at 49, Nevill’s Court, wherever that might be. I turned for information to the presiding deity of the coal shop.

‘Can you direct me, Mrs. Jablett, to Nevill’s Court?’

She could and she did, grasping me confidentially by the arm (the mark remained on my sleeve for weeks) and pointing a shaking forefinger at the dead wall ahead. ‘Nevill’s Court’, said Mrs. Jablett, ‘is a alley, and you goes into it through a archway. It turns out on Fetter Lane on the right and as you goes up, oppersight Bream’s Buildings.’

I thanked Mrs. Jablett and went on my way, glad that the morning round was nearly finished, and vaguely conscious of a growing appetite and of a desire to wash in hot water.

The practice which I was conducting was not my own. It belonged to poor Dick Barnard, an old St Margaret's man of irrepressible spirits and indifferent physique, who had started only the day before for a trip down the Mediterranean on board a tramp engaged in the currant trade; and this, my second morning's round, was in some sort a voyage of geographical discovery.

I walked on briskly up Fetter Lane until a narrow arched opening, bearing the superscription 'Nevill's Court', arrested my steps, and here I turned to encounter one of those surprises that lie in wait for the traveller in London by-ways. Expecting to find the grey squalor of the ordinary London court, I looked out from under the shadow of the arch past a row of decent little shops through a vista full of light and colour—a vista of ancient, warm-toned roofs and walls relieved by sunlit foliage. In the heart of London a tree is always a delightful surprise; but here were not only trees, but bushes and even flowers. The narrow footway was bordered by little gardens, which, with their wooden palings and well-kept shrubs, gave to the place an air of quaint and sober rusticity; and even as I entered a bevy of workgirls, with gaily-coloured blouses and hair aflame in the sunlight, brightened up the quiet background like the wild flowers that sprangle a summer hedgerow.

In one of the gardens I noticed that the little paths were paved with what looked like circular tiles, but which, on inspection, I found to be old-fashioned stone ink-bottles, buried bottom upwards; and I was meditating upon the quaint conceit of the forgotten scrivener who had thus adorned his habitation—a law-writer perhaps or an author, or perchance even a poet—when I perceived the number that I was seeking inscribed on a shabby door in a high wall. There was no bell or knocker, so, lifting the latch, I pushed the door open and entered.

But if the court itself had been a surprise, this was a positive wonder, a dream. Here, within earshot of the rumble of Fleet Street, I was in an old-fashioned garden enclosed by high walls and, now that the gate was shut, cut off from all sight and knowledge of the urban world that seethed without. I stood and gazed in delighted astonishment. Sun-gilded trees and flower beds gay with blossom; lupins, snapdragons, nasturtiums, spiry foxgloves, and mighty hollyhocks formed the foreground; over which a pair of sulphur-tinted butterflies flitted, unmindful of a buxom and miraculously clean white cat which pursued them, dancing across the borders and clapping her snowy paws fruitlessly in mid-air. And the background was no less wonderful; a grand old house, dark-eaved and venerable, that must have looked down on this garden when ruffled dandies were borne in sedan chairs through the court, and gentle Izaak Walton, stealing forth from his shop in Fleet Street, strolled up Fetter Lane to 'go a-angling' at Temple Mills.

So overpowered was I by this unexpected vision that my hand was on the bottom knob of a row of bell-pulls before I recollected myself; and it was not until a most infernal jangling from within recalled me to my business that I observed underneath it a small brass plate inscribed 'Miss Oman'.

The door opened with some suddenness and a short, middle-aged woman surveyed me hungrily.

'Have I rung the wrong bell?' I asked—foolishly enough, I must admit.

'How can I tell?' she demanded. 'I expect you have. It's the sort of thing a man would do—ring the wrong bell and then say he's sorry.'

'I didn't go as far as that,' I retorted. 'It seems to have had the desired effect, and I've made your acquaintance into the bargain.'

'Whom do you want to see?' she asked.

'Mr. Bellingham.'

'Are you the doctor?'

'I'm a doctor.'

'Follow me upstairs,' said Miss Oman, 'and don't tread on the paint.'

I crossed the spacious hall, and, preceded by my conductress, ascended a noble oak staircase, treading carefully on a ribbon of matting that ran up the middle. On the first-floor landing Miss Oman opened a door and, pointing to the room, said, 'Go in there and wait; I'll tell her you're here.'

'I said Mr. Bellingham—' I began; but the door slammed on me, and Miss Oman's footsteps retreated rapidly down the stairs.

It was at once obvious to me that I was in a very awkward position. The room into which I had been shown communicated with another, and though the door of communication was shut, I was unpleasantly aware of a conversation that was taking place in the adjoining room. At first, indeed, only a vague mutter, with a few disjointed phrases, came through the door, but suddenly an angry voice rang out clear and painfully distinct:

'Yes, I did! And I say it again. Bribery! Collusion! That's what it amounts to. You want to square me!'

'Nothing of the kind, Godfrey,' was the reply in a lower tone; but at this point I coughed emphatically and moved a chair, and the voices subsided once more into an indistinct murmur.

To distract my attention from my unseen neighbours I glanced curiously about the room and speculated upon the personal ties of its occupants. A very curious room it was, with its pathetic suggestion of decayed splendour and old-world dignity; a room full of interest and character and of contrasts and perplexing contradictions. For the most part it spoke of unmistakable though decent poverty. It was nearly bare of furniture, and what little there was was of the cheapest—a small kitchen table and three Windsor chairs (two of them with arms); a threadbare string carpet on the floor, and a cheap cotton cloth on the table; these, with a set of bookshelves, frankly constructed of grocer's boxes, formed the entire suite. And yet, despite its poverty, the place exhaled an air of homely if rather ascetic comfort, and the taste was irreproachable. The quiet russet of the table-cloth struck a pleasant harmony with the subdued bluish green of the worn carpet; the Windsor chairs and the legs of the table had been carefully denuded of their glaring varnish and stained a sober brown; and the austerity of the whole was relieved by a ginger jar filled with fresh-cut flowers and set in the middle of the table.

But the contrasts of which I have spoken were most singular and puzzling. There were the bookshelves, for instance, home made and stained at the cost of a few pence, but filled with recent and costly new works on archaeology and ancient art. There were the objects on the mantelpiece: a facsimile in bronze—not bronze plaster—of the beautiful head of Hypnos and a pair of fine Ushabti figures. There were the decorations of the walls, a number of etchings—signed proofs, every one of them—of Oriental subjects, and a splendid facsimile reproduction of an Egyptian papyrus. It was incongruous in the extreme, this mingling of costly refinements with the barest and shabbiest necessities of life, of fastidious culture with manifest poverty. I could make nothing of it. What manner of man, I wondered, was this new patient of mine? Was he a miser, hiding himself and his wealth in this obscure court? An eccentric savant? A philosopher? Or—more probably—a crank? But at this point my meditations were interrupted by the voice from the adjoining room, once more raised in anger.

'Tut I say that you are making an accusation! You are implying that I made away with him.'

'Not at all,' was the reply; 'but I repeat that it is your business to ascertain what has become of him. The responsibility rests upon you.'

'Upon me!' rejoined the first voice. 'And what about you? Your position is a pretty fishy one if it comes to that.'

'What!' roared the other. 'Do you insinuate that I murdered my own brother?'

During this amazing colloquy I had stood gaping with sheer astonishment. Suddenly I recollected myself, and dropping into a chair, set my elbows on my knees and clapped my hands over my ears; and thus I must have remained for a full minute when I became aware of the closing of a door behind me.

I sprang to my feet and turned in some embarrassment (for I must have looked unspeakably ridiculous) to confront the sombre figure of a rather tall and strikingly handsome girl, who, as she stood with her hand on the knob of the door, saluted me with a formal bow. In an instantaneous glance I noted how perfectly she matched her strange surroundings. Black-robed, black-haired, with black-grey eyes and a grave sad face of ivory pallor, she stood, like one of old Terboch's portraits, a harmony in tones so low as to be but a step removed from monochrome. Obviously a lady in spite of the worn and rusty dress, and something in the poise of the head and the set of the straight brows hinted at a spirit that adversity had hardened rather than broken.

'I must ask you to forgive me for keeping you waiting,' she said; and as she spoke a certain softening at the corners of the austere mouth reminded me of the absurd position in which she had found me.

I murmured that the trifling delay was of no consequence whatever; that I had, in fact, been rather glad of the rest; and I was beginning somewhat vaguely to approach the subject of the invalid when the voice from the adjoining room again broke forth with hideous distinctness.

'I tell you I'll do nothing of the kind! Why, confound you, it's nothing less than a conspiracy that you're proposing!'

Miss Bellingham—as I assumed her to be—stepped quickly across the floor, flushing angrily, as well she might; but, as she reached the door, it flew open and a small, spruce, middle-aged man burst into the room.

'Your father is mad, Ruth!' he exclaimed; 'absolutely stark mad! And I refuse to hold any further communication with him.'

'The present interview was not of his seeking,' Miss Bellingham replied coldly.

'No, it was not,' was the wrathful rejoinder; 'it was my mistaken generosity. But there—what is the use of talking? I've done my best for you and I'll do no more. Don't trouble to let me out; I can find my way. Good-morning.' With a stiff bow and a quick glance at me, the speaker strode out of the room, banging the door after him.

'I must apologise for this extraordinary reception,' said Miss Bellingham; 'but I believe medical men are not easily astonished. I will introduce you to your patient now.' She opened the door and, as I followed her into the adjoining room, she said: 'Here is another visitor for you, dear. Doctor—'

'Berkeley,' said I. 'I am acting for my friend Doctor Barnard.'

The invalid, a fine-looking man of about fifty-five, who sat propped up in bed with a pile of pillows, held out an excessively shaky hand, which I grasped cordially, making a mental note of the tremor.

'How do you do, sir?' said Mr. Bellingham. 'I hope Doctor Barnard is not ill.'

'Oh, no,' I answered; 'he has gone for a trip down the Mediterranean on a currant ship. The chance occurred rather

suddenly, and I hustled him off before he had time to change his mind. Hence my rather unceremonious appearance, which I hope you will forgive.'

'Not at all,' was the hearty response. 'I'm delighted to hear that you sent him off; he wanted a holiday, poor man. And I am delighted to make your acquaintance, too.'

'It is very good of you,' I said; whereupon he bowed as gracefully as a man may who is propped up in bed with a heap of pillows; and having thus exchanged broadsides of civility, so to speak, we—or, at least, I—proceeded to business.

'How long have you been laid up?' I asked cautiously, not wishing to make too evident the fact that my principal had given me no information respecting his case.

'A week to-day,' he replied. 'The fons et origo mail was a hansom-cab which upset me opposite the Law Courts—sent me sprawling in the middle of the road. My own fault, of course—at least, the cabby said so, and I suppose he knew. But that was no consolation to me.'

'Were you hurt much?'

'No, not really; but the fall bruised my knee rather badly and gave me a deuce of a shake up. I'm too old for that sort of thing, you know.'

'Most people are,' said I.

'True; but you can take a cropper more gracefully at twenty than at fifty-five. However, the knee is getting on quite well—you shall see it presently—and you observe that I am giving it complete rest. But that isn't the whole of the trouble or the worst of it. It's my confounded nerves. I'm as irritable as the devil and as nervous as a cat. And I can't get a decent night's rest.'

I recalled the tremulous hand that he had offered me. He did not look like a drinker, but still—

'Do you smoke much?' I inquired diplomatically.

He looked at me slyly and chuckled. 'That's a very delicate way to approach the subject, Doctor,' he said. 'No, I don't smoke much, and I don't crook my little finger. I saw you look at my shaky hand just now—oh, it's all right; I'm not offended. It's a doctor's business to keep lifting his eyelids. But my hand is steady enough as a rule, when I'm not upset, but the least excitement sets me shaking like a jelly. And the fact is that I have just had a deucedly unpleasant interview—'

'I think,' Miss Bellingham interrupted, 'Doctor Berkeley and, in fact, the neighbourhood at large, are aware of the fact.'

Mr. Bellingham laughed rather shamefacedly. 'I'm afraid I did lose my temper,' he said; 'but I am always an impulsive old fellow, Doctor, and when I'm put out I'm apt to speak my mind—a little too bluntly perhaps.'

'And audibly,' his daughter added. 'Do you know that Doctor Berkeley was reduced to the necessity of stopping his ears?' She glanced at me as she spoke, with something like a twinkle in her solemn grey eyes.

'Did I shout?' Mr. Bellingham asked, not very contritely, I thought, though he added: 'I'm very sorry, my dear; but it won't happen again. I think we've seen the last of that good gentleman.'

'I am sure I hope so,' she rejoined, adding: 'And now I will leave you to your talk; I shall be in the next room if you should want me.'

I opened the door for her, and when she had passed out with a stiff little bow I seated myself by the bedside and resumed the consultation. It was evidently a case of breakdown, to which the cab accident had, no doubt, contributed. As to the other antecedents, they were of no concern of mine, though Mr. Bellingham seemed to think otherwise, for he resumed: 'That cab business was the last straw, you know, and it finished me off, but I have been going down the hill for a long time. I've had a lot of trouble during the last two years. But I suppose I oughtn't to pester you with the details of my personal affairs.'

'Anything that bears on your present state of health is of interest to me if you don't mind telling me it,' I said.

'Mind!' he exclaimed. 'Did you ever meet an invalid who didn't enjoy talking about his own health? It's the listener who minds, as a rule.'

'Well, the present listener doesn't,' I said.

'Then,' said Mr. Bellingham, 'I'll treat myself to the luxury of telling you all my troubles; I don't often get the chance of a confidential grumble to a responsible man of my own class. And I really have some excuses for railing at Fortune, as you will agree when I tell you that, a couple of years ago, I went to bed one night a gentleman of independent means and excellent prospects and woke up in the morning to find myself practically a beggar. Not a cheerful experience that, you know, at my time of life, eh?'

'No,' I agreed, 'not at any other.'

'And that was not all,' he continued; 'For at the same moment I lost my brother, my dearest, kindest friend. He disappeared—vanished off the face of the earth; but perhaps you have heard of the affair. The confounded papers were full of it at the time.'

He paused abruptly, noticing, no doubt, a sudden change in my face. Of course, I recollected the case now. Indeed, ever



since I had entered the house some chord of memory had been faintly vibrating, and now his last words had struck out the full note.

'Yes,' I said, 'I remember the incident, though I don't suppose I should but for the fact that our lecturer on medical jurisprudence drew my attention to it.'

'Indeed,' said Mr. Bellingham, rather uneasily, as I fancied. 'What did he say about it?'

'He referred to it as a case that was calculated to give rise to some very pretty legal complications.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Bellingham, 'that man was a prophet! Legal complications, indeed! But I'll be bound he never guessed at the sort of infernal tangle that has actually gathered round the affair. By the way, what was his name?'

'Thorndyke,' I replied. 'Doctor John Thorndyke.'

'Thorndyke,' Mr. Bellingham repeated in a musing, retrospective tone. 'I seem to remember the name. Yes, of course. I have heard a legal friend of mine, a Mr. Marchmont, speak of him in reference to the case of a man whom I knew slightly years ago—a certain Jeffrey Blackmore, who also disappeared very mysteriously. I remember now that Dr. Thorndyke unravelled that case with most remarkable ingenuity.'

'I daresay he would be very much interested to hear about your case,' I suggested.

'I daresay he would,' was the reply; 'but one can't take up a professional man's time for nothing, and I couldn't afford to pay him. And that reminds me that I'm taking up your time by gossiping about purely personal affairs.'

'My morning round is finished,' said I, 'and, moreover, your personal affairs are highly interesting. I suppose I mustn't ask what is the nature of the legal entanglement?'

'Not unless you are prepared to stay here for the rest of the day and go home a raving lunatic. But I'll tell you this much: the trouble is about my poor brother's will. In the first place it can't be administered because there is not sufficient evidence that my brother is dead; and in the second place, if it could, all the property would go to people who were never intended to benefit. The will itself is the most diabolically exasperating document that was ever produced by the perverted ingenuity of a wrong-headed man. That's all. Will you have a look at my knee?'

As Mr. Bellingham's explanation (delivered in a rapid crescendo and ending almost in a shout) had left him purple-faced and trembling, I thought it best to bring our talk to an end. Accordingly I proceeded to inspect the injured knee, which was now nearly well, and to overhaul my patient generally; and having given him detailed instructions as to his general conduct, I rose and took my leave.

'And remember,' I said as I shook his hand, 'no tobacco, no coffee, no excitement of any kind. Lead a quiet, bovine life.'

'That's all very well,' he grumbled, 'but supposing people come here and excite me?'

'Disregard them,' said I, 'and read Whitaker's Almanack.' And with this parting advice I passed out into the other room.

Miss Bellingham was seated at the table with a pile of blue-covered notebooks before her, two of which were open, displaying pages closely written in a small, neat handwriting. She rose as I entered and looked at me inquiringly.

'I heard you advising my father to read Whitaker's Almanack,' she said. 'Was that a curative measure?'

'Entirely,' I replied. 'I recommended it for its medicinal virtues, as an antidote to mental excitement.'

She smiled faintly. 'It certainly is not a highly emotional book,' she said, and then asked: 'Have you any other instructions to give?'

'Well, I might give the conventional advice—to maintain a cheerful outlook and avoid worry; but I don't suppose you would find it very helpful.'

'No,' she answered bitterly; 'it is a counsel of perfection. People in our position are not a very cheerful class, I'm afraid; but still they don't seek out worries from sheer perverseness. The worries come unsought. But, of course, you can't enter into that.'

'I can't give you any practical help, I fear, though I do sincerely hope that your father's affairs will straighten themselves out soon.'

She thanked me for my good wishes and accompanied me down to the street door, where, with a bow and a rather stiff handshake, she gave me my conge.

Very ungratefully the noise of Fetter Lane smote on my ears as I came out through the archway, and very squalid and unrestful the little street looked when contrasted with the dignity and monastic quiet of the old garden. As to the surgery, with its oilcloth floor and walls made hideous with gaudy insurance show-cards in sham gilt frailties, its aspect was so revolting that I flew to the day-book for distraction, and was still busily entering the morning's visits when the bottle-boy, Adolphus, entered stealthily to announce lunch.

---

### III. — JOHN THORNDYKE

THAT THE character of an individual tends to be reflected in his dress is a fact familiar to the least observant. That the observation is equally applicable to aggregates of men is less familiar, but equally true. Do not the members of the fighting professions, even to this day, deck themselves in feathers, in gaudy colours and gilded ornaments, after the manner of the African war-chief or the Redskin 'brave', and thereby indicate the place of war in modern civilisation? Does not the Church of Rome send her priests to the altar in habiliments that were fashionable before the fall of the Roman Empire, in token of her immovable conservatism? And, lastly, does not the Law, lumbering on in the wake of progress, symbolise its subjection to precedent by head-gear reminiscent of the good days of Queen Anne?

I should apologise for obtruding upon the reader these somewhat trite reflections; which were set going by the quaint stock-in-trade of the wig-maker's shop in the cloisters of the Inner Temple, whither I strayed on a sultry afternoon in quest of shade and quiet. I had halted opposite the little shop window, and, with my eyes bent dreamily on the row of wigs, was pursuing the above train of thought when I was startled by a deep voice saying softly in my ear: 'I'd have the full-bottomed one if I were you.'

I turned swiftly and rather fiercely, and looked into the face of my old friend and fellow-student, Jervis, behind whom, regarding us with a sedate smile, stood my former teacher, Dr. John Thorndyke. Both men greeted me with a warmth that I felt to be very flattering, for Thorndyke was quite a great personage, and even Jervis was several years my academic senior.

'You are coming in to have a cup of tea with us, I hope,' said Thorndyke; and as I assented gladly, he took my arm and led me across the court in the direction of the Treasury.

'But why that hungry gaze at those forensic vanities, Berkeley?' he asked. 'Are you thinking of following my example and Jervis's—deserting the bedside for the Bar?'

'What! Has Jervis gone in for the law?' I exclaimed.

'Bless you, yes!' replied Jervis. 'I have become parasitical on Thorndyke! "The big fleas have little fleas", you know. I am the additional fraction trailing after the whole number in the rear of a decimal point.'

'Don't you believe him, Berkeley,' interposed Thorndyke. 'He is the brains of the firm. I supply the respectability and moral worth. But you haven't answered my question. What are you doing here on a summer afternoon staring into a wig-maker's window?'

'I am Barnard's locum; he is in practice in Fetter Lane.'

'I know,' said Thorndyke; 'we meet him occasionally, and very pale and peaky he has been looking of late. Is he taking a holiday?'

'Yes. He has gone for a trip to the Isles of Greece in a currant ship.'

'Then,' said Jervis, 'you are actually a local GP. I thought you were looking beastly respectable.'

'And judging from your leisured manner when we encountered you,' added Thorndyke, 'the practice is not a strenuous one. I suppose it is entirely local?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'The patients mostly live in the small streets and courts within a half-mile radius of the surgery, and the abodes of some of them are pretty squalid. Oh! and that reminds me of a very strange coincidence. It will interest you, I think.'

'Life is made up of strange coincidences,' said Thorndyke. 'Nobody but a reviewer of novels is ever really surprised at a coincidence. But what is yours?'

'It is connected with a case that you mentioned to us at the hospital about two years ago, the case of a man who disappeared under rather mysterious circumstances. Do you remember it? The man's name was Bellingham.'

'The Egyptologist? Yes, I remember the case quite well. What about it?'

'The brother is a patient of mine. He is living in Nevill's Court with his daughter, and they seem to be as poor as church mice.'

'Really,' said Thorndyke, 'this is quite interesting. They must have come down in the world rather suddenly. If I remember rightly, the brother was living in a house of some pretensions standing in its own grounds.'

'Yes, that is so. I see you recollect all about the case.'

'My dear fellow,' said Jervis, 'Thorndyke never forgets a likely case. He is a sort of medico-legal camel. He gulps down the raw facts from the newspapers or elsewhere, and then, in his leisure moments, he calmly regurgitates them and has a quiet chew at them. It is a quaint habit. A case crops up in the papers or in one of the courts, and Thorndyke swallows it whole. Then it lapses and every one forgets it. A year or two later it crops up in a new form, and, to your astonishment, you find that Thorndyke has got it all cut and dried. He has been ruminating on it periodically in the interval.'

'You notice,' said Thorndyke, 'that my learned friend is pleased to indulge in mixed metaphors. But his statement is substantially true, though obscurely worded. You must tell us more about the Bellinghams when we have fortified you with a cup of tea.'

Our talk had brought us to Thorndyke's chambers, which were on the first floor of No. 5A, King's Bench Walk, and as we

entered the fine, spacious, panelled room we found a small, elderly man, neatly dressed in black, setting out the tea-service on the table. I glanced at him with some curiosity. He hardly looked like a servant, in spite of his neat, black clothes: in fact, his appearance was rather puzzling, for while his quiet dignity and his serious, intelligent face suggested some kind of professional man, his neat, capable hands were those of a skilled mechanic.

Thorndyke surveyed the tea-tray thoughtfully and then looked at his retainer. 'I see you have put three tea-cups, Polton,' he said. 'Now, how did you know I was bringing some one in to tea?'

The little man smiled a quaint, crinkly smile of gratification as he explained:

'I happened to look out of the laboratory window as you turned the corner, sir.'

'How disappointingly simple,' said Jervis. 'We were hoping for something abstruse and telepathic.'

'Simplicity is the soul of efficiency, sir,' replied Polton as he checked the tea-service to make sure that nothing was forgotten, and with this remarkable aphorism he silently evaporated.

'To return to the Bellingham case,' said Thorndyke, when he had poured out the tea. 'Have you picked up any facts relating to the parties—and facts, I mean, of course, that it would be proper for you to mention?'

'I have learned one or two things that there is no harm in repeating. For instance, I gather that Godfrey Bellingham—my patient—lost all his property quite suddenly about the time of the disappearance.'

'That is really odd,' said Thorndyke. 'The opposite condition would be quite understandable, but one doesn't see exactly how this can have happened, unless there was an allowance of some sort.'

'No, that was what struck me. But there seem to be some queer features in the case, and the legal position is evidently getting complicated. There is a will, for example, which is giving trouble.'

'They will be hardly able to administer the will without either proof or presumption of death,' Thorndyke remarked.

'Exactly. That's one of the difficulties. Another is that there seems to be some fatal drafting of the will itself. I don't know what it is, but I expect I shall hear sooner or later. By the way, I mentioned the interest that you have taken in the case, and I think Bellingham would have liked to consult you, but, of course, the poor devil has no money.'

'That is awkward for him if the other interested parties have, There will probably be legal proceedings of some kind, and as the law takes no account of poverty, he is likely to go to the wall. He ought to have advice of some sort.'

'I don't see how he is to get it,' said I.

'Neither do I,' Thorndyke admitted. 'There are no hospitals for impecunious litigants; it is assumed that only persons of means have a right to go to law. Of course, if we knew the man and the circumstances we might be able to help him; but for all we know to the contrary, he may be an arrant scoundrel.'

I had recalled the strange conversation that I had overheard, and wondered what Thorndyke would have thought of it if it had been allowable for me to repeat it. Obviously it was not, however, and I could only give my own impressions.

'He doesn't strike me as that,' I said; 'but, of course, one never knows. Personally, he impressed me rather favourably, which is more than the other man did.'

'What other man?' asked Thorndyke.

'There was another man in the case, wasn't there? I forget his name. I saw him at the house and didn't much like the look of him. I suspect he's putting some sort of pressure on Bellingham.'

'Berkeley knows more about this than he's telling us,' said Jervis. 'Let us look up the report and see who this stranger is.' He took down from a shelf a large volume of newspaper cuttings and laid it on the table.

'You see,' said he, as he ran his finger down the index. 'Thorndyke files all the cases that are likely to come to something, and I know he had expectations regarding this one. I fancy he had some ghoulish hope that the missing gentleman's head might turn up in somebody's dust-bin. Here we are; the other man's name is Hurst. He is apparently a cousin, and it was at his house the missing man was last seen alive.'

'So you think Mr. Hurst is moving in the matter?' said Thorndyke, when he had glanced over the report.

'That is my impression,' I replied, 'though I really know nothing about it.'

'Well,' said Thorndyke, 'if you should learn what is being done and should have permission to speak of it, I shall be very interested to hear how the case progresses; and if an unofficial opinion on any point would be of service, I think there would be no harm in giving it.'

'It would certainly be of great value if the other parties are taking professional advice,' I said; and then, after a pause, I asked: 'Have you given this case much consideration?'

Thorndyke reflected. 'No,' he said, 'I can't say that I have. I turned it over rather carefully when the report first appeared, and I have speculated on it occasionally since. It is my habit, as Jervis was telling you, to utilise odd moments of leisure (such as a railway journey, for instance) by constructing theories to account for the facts of such obscure cases as have come to my notice. It is a useful habit, I think, for, apart from the mental exercise and experience that one gains from it, an

appreciable portion of these cases ultimately comes into my hands, and then the previous consideration of them is so much time gained.'

'Have you formed any theory to account for the facts in this case?' I asked.

'Yes; I have several theories, one of which I especially favour, and I am awaiting with great interest such new facts as may indicate to me which of these theories is probably the correct one.'

'It's no use your trying to pump him, Berkeley,' said Jervis. 'He is fitted with an information valve that opens inwards. You can pour in as much as you like, but you can't get any out.'

Thorndyke chuckled. 'My learned friend is, in the main, correct,' he said. 'You see, I may be called upon any day to advise on this case, in which event I should feel remarkably foolish if I had already expounded my views in detail. But I should like to hear what you and Jervis make of the case as reported in the newspapers.'

'There now,' exclaimed Jervis, 'what did I tell you? He wants to suck your brains.'

'As far as my brain is concerned,' I said, 'the process of suction isn't likely to yield much except vacuum, so I will resign in favour of you. You are a full-blown lawyer, whereas I am only a simple GP.'

Jervis filled his pipe with deliberate care and lighted it. Then, blowing a slender stream of smoke into the air, he said:

'If you want to know what I make of the case from that report, I can tell you in one word—nothing. Every road seems to end in a cul-de-sac.'

'Oh, come!' said Thorndyke, 'this is mere laziness. Berkeley wants to witness a display of your forensic wisdom. A learned counsel may be in a fog—he very often is—but he doesn't state the fact baldly; he wraps it up in a decent verbal disguise. Tell us how you arrive at your conclusion. Show us that you have really weighed the facts.'

'Very well,' said Jervis, 'I will give you a masterly analysis of the case—leading to nothing.' He continued to puff at his pipe for a time with slight embarrassment, as I thought—and I fully sympathised with him. Finally he blew a little cloud and commenced:

'The position appears to be this: Here is a man seen to enter a certain house, who is shown into a certain room, and shut in. He is not seen to come out, and yet, when the room is next entered, it is found to be empty; and that man is never seen again, alive or dead. That is a pretty tough beginning.

'Now, it is evident that one of three things must have happened. Either he must have remained in that room, or at least in that house, alive; or he must have died, naturally or otherwise, and his body have been concealed; or he must have left the house unobserved. Let us take the first case. Now, he couldn't have remained alive in the house for two years. This affair happened nearly two years ago. He would have been noticed. The servants, for instance, when cleaning out the rooms, would have observed him.'

Here Thorndyke interposed with an indulgent smile at his junior: 'My learned friend is treating the inquiry with unbecoming levity. We accept the conclusion that the man did not remain in the house alive.'

'Very well. Then did he remain in it dead? Apparently not. The report says that as soon as the man was missed, Hurst and the servants together searched the house thoroughly. But there had been no time or opportunity to dispose of the body, whence the only possible conclusion is that the body was not there. Moreover, if we admit the possibility of his having been murdered—for that is what concealment of the body would imply—there is the question: Who could have murdered him? Not the servants, obviously, and as to Hurst—well, of course, we don't know what his relations with the missing man may have been—at least, I don't.'—

'Neither do I,' said Thorndyke. 'I know nothing beyond what is in the newspaper report and what Berkeley has told us.'

'Then we know nothing. He may have had a motive for murdering the man or he may not. The point is that he doesn't seem to have had the opportunity. Even if we suppose that he managed to conceal the body temporarily, still there was the final disposal of it. He couldn't have buried it in the garden with the servants about; neither could he have burned it. The only conceivable method by which he could have got rid of it would have been that of cutting it up into fragments and burying the dismembered parts in some secluded spots or dropping them into ponds or rivers. But no remains of the kind have been found, as some of them probably would have been by now, so that there is nothing to support this suggestion; indeed, the idea of murder, in this house at least, seems to be excluded by the search that was made the instant the man was missed.

'Then to take the third alternative: Did he leave the house unobserved? Well, it is not impossible, but it would be a queer thing to do. He may have been an impulsive or eccentric man. We can't say. We know nothing about him. But two years have elapsed and he has never turned up, so that if he left the house secretly he must have gone into hiding and be hiding still. Of course, he may have been the sort of lunatic who would behave in that manner or he may not. We have no information as to his personal character.

'Then there is the complication of the scarab that was picked up in the grounds of his brother's house at Woodford. That seems to show that he visited that house at some time. But no one admits having seen him there; and it is uncertain, therefore, whether he went first to his brother's house or to Hurst's. If he was wearing the scarab when he arrived at the Eltham house, he must have left that house unobserved and gone to Woodford; but if he was not wearing it he probably

went from Woodford to Eltham, and there finally disappeared. As to whether he was or was not wearing the scarab when he was last seen alive by Hurst's housemaid, there is at present no evidence.

'If he went to his brother's house after his visit to Hurst, the disappearance is more understandable if we don't mind flinging accusations of murder about rather casually; for the disposal of the body would be much less difficult in that case. Apparently no one saw him enter the house, and, if he did enter, it was by a back gate which communicated with the library—a separate building some distance from the house. In that case it would have been physically possible for the Bellinghams to have made away with him. There was plenty of time to dispose of the body unobserved—temporarily, at any rate. Nobody had seen him come to the house, and nobody knew that he was there—if he was there; and apparently no search was made either at the time or afterwards. In fact, if it could be shown that the missing man left Hurst's house alive, or that he was wearing the scarab when he arrived there, things would look rather fishy for the Bellinghams—for, of course, the girl must have been in it if the father was. But there's the crux: there is no proof that the man ever did leave Hurst's house alive. And if he didn't—but there! as I said at first, whichever turning you take, you find that it ends in a blind alley.'—

'A lame ending to a masterly exposition,' was Thorndyke's comment.

'I know,' said Jervis. 'But what would you have? There are quite a number of possible solutions, and one of them must be the true one. But how are we to judge which it is? I maintain that until we know something of the parties and the financial and other interests involved we have no data.'

'There,' said Thorndyke, 'I disagree with you entirely. I maintain that we have ample data. You say that we have no means of judging which of the various possible solutions is the true one; but I think that if you read the report carefully and thoughtfully you will find that the facts now known point clearly to one explanation, and one only. It may not be the true explanation, and I don't suppose it is. But we are now dealing with the matter speculatively, academically, and I contend that our data yield a definite conclusion. What do you say, Berkeley?'

'I say that it is time for me to be off; the evening consultations begin at half-past six.'

'Well,' said Thorndyke, 'don't let us keep you from your duties, with poor Barnard currant-picking in the Grecian Isles. But come in and see us again. Drop in when you like after your work is done. You won't be in our way even if we are busy, which we very seldom are after eight o'clock.'

I thanked Dr. Thorndyke most heartily for making me free of his chambers in this hospitable fashion and took my leave, setting forth homewards by way of Middle Temple Lane and the Embankment; not a very direct route for Fetter Lane, it must be confessed; but our talk had revived my interest in the Bellingham household and put me in a reflective vein.

From the remarkable conversation that I had overheard it was evident that the plot was thickening. Not that I supposed that these two respectable gentlemen really suspected one another of having made away with the missing man; but still, their unguarded words, spoken in anger, made it clear that each had allowed the thought of sinister possibilities to enter his mind—a dangerous condition that might easily grow into actual suspicion. And then the circumstances really were highly mysterious, as I realised with especial vividness now after listening to my friend's analysis of the evidence.

From the problem itself my mind travelled, not for the first time during the last few days, to the handsome girl, who had seemed in my eyes the high-priestess of this temple of mystery in the quaint little court. What a strange figure she had made against this strange background, with her quiet, chilly, self-contained manner, her pale face, so sad and worn, her black, straight brows and solemn grey eyes, so inscrutable, mysterious, Sibylline. A striking, even impressive, personality this, I reflected, with something in it sombre and enigmatic that attracted and yet repelled.

And here I recalled Jervis's words: 'The girl must have been in it if the father was.' It was a dreadful thought, even though only speculatively uttered, and my heart rejected it; rejected it with indignation that rather surprised me. And this notwithstanding that the sombre black-robed figure that my memory conjured up was one that associated itself with the idea of mystery and tragedy.

---

#### IV. — LEGAL COMPLICATIONS AND A JACKAL

MY MEDITATIONS brought me by a circuitous route, and ten minutes late, to the end of Fetter Lane, where, exchanging my rather abstracted air for the alert manner of a busy practitioner, I strode briskly forward and darted into the surgery with knitted brows, as though just released from an anxious case. But there was only one patient waiting, and she saluted me as I entered with a snort of defiance.

'Here you are, then?' said she.

'You are perfectly correct, Miss Oman,' I replied; 'in fact, you have put the case in a nutshell. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?'

'Nothing,' was the answer. 'My medical adviser is a lady; but I've brought a note from Mr. Bellingham. Here it is,' and she thrust the envelope into my hand.

I glanced through the note and learned that my patient had had a couple of bad nights and a very harassing day. 'Could I have something to give me a night's rest?' it concluded.

I reflected for a few moments. One is not very ready to prescribe sleeping draughts for unknown patients, but still,

insomnia is a very distressing condition. In the end I temporised with a moderate dose of bromide, deciding to call and see if more energetic measures were necessary.

‘He had better take a dose of this at once, Miss Oman,’ said I, as I handed her the bottle, ‘and I will look in later and see how he is.’

‘I expect he will be glad to see you,’ she answered, ‘for he is all alone to-night and very dumpy. Miss Bellingham is out. But I must remind you that he’s a poor man and pays his way. You must excuse my mentioning it.’

‘I am much obliged to you for the hint, Miss Oman,’ I rejoined. ‘It isn’t necessary for me to see him, but I should like just to look in and have a chat.’

‘Yes, it will do him good. You have your points, though punctuality doesn’t seem to be one of them,’ and with this parting shot Miss Oman bustled away.

Half-past eight found me ascending the great, dim staircase the house in Nevill’s Court preceded by Miss Oman, by whom I was ushered into the room. Mr. Bellingham, who had just finished some sort of meal, was sitting hunched up in his chair gazing gloomily into the empty grate. He brightened up as I entered, but was evidently in very low spirits.

‘I didn’t mean to drag you out after your day’s work was finished,’ he said, ‘though I am very glad to see you.’

‘You haven’t dragged me out. I heard you were alone, so I just dropped in for a few minutes’ gossip.’

‘That is really kind of you,’ he said heartily. ‘But I’m afraid you’ll find me rather poor company. A man who is full of his own highly disagreeable affairs is not a desirable companion.’

‘You mustn’t let me disturb you if you’d rather be alone,’ said I, with a sudden fear that I was intruding.

‘Oh, you won’t disturb me,’ he replied; adding, with a laugh: ‘It’s more likely to be the other way about. In fact, if I were not afraid of boring you to death I would ask you to let me talk my difficulties over with you.’

‘You won’t bore me,’ I said. ‘It is generally interesting to share another man’s experiences without their inconveniences. “The proper study of mankind is—man,” you know, especially to a doctor.’

Mr. Bellingham chuckled grimly. ‘You make me feel like a microbe,’ he said. ‘However, if you would care to take a peep at me through your microscope, I will crawl on to the stage for your inspection, though it is not my actions that furnish the materials for your psychological studies. It is my poor brother who is the *Deus ex machina*, who, from his unknown grave, as I fear, pulls the strings of this infernal puppet-show.’

He paused and for a space gazed thoughtfully into the grate as if he had forgotten my presence. At length he looked up and resumed:

‘It is a curious story, Doctor—a very curious story. Part of it you know—the middle part. I will tell you it from the beginning, and then you will know as much as I do; for, as to the end, that is known to no one. It is written, no doubt, in the book of destiny, but the page has yet to be turned.

‘The mischief began with my father’s death. He was a country clergyman of very moderate means, a widower with two children, my brother John and me. He managed to send us both to Oxford, after which John went into the Foreign Office and I was to have gone into the Church. But I suddenly discovered that my views on religion had undergone a change that made this impossible, and just about this time my father came into a quite considerable property. Now, as it was his expressed intention to leave the estate equally divided between my brother and me, there was no need for me to take up any profession for a livelihood. Archaeology was already the passion of my life, and I determined to devote myself henceforth to my favourite study, in which, by the way, I was following a family tendency; for my father was an enthusiastic student of ancient Oriental history, and John was, as you know, an ardent Egyptologist.

‘Then my father died quite suddenly, and left no will. He had intended to have one drawn up, but had put it off until it was too late. And since nearly all the property was in the form of real estate, my brother inherited practically the whole of it. However, in deference to the known wishes of my father, he made me an allowance of five hundred a year, which was about a quarter of the annual income. I urged him to assign me a lump sum, but he refused to do this. Instead, he instructed his solicitor to pay me an allowance in quarterly instalments during the rest of his life; and it was understood that, on his death, the entire estate should devolve on me, or if I died first, on my daughter, Ruth. Then, as you know, he disappeared suddenly, and as the circumstances suggested that he was dead, and there was no evidence that he was alive, his solicitor—a Mr. Jellicoe—found himself unable to continue the payment of the allowance. On the other hand, as there was no positive evidence that my brother was dead, it was impossible to administer the will.’

‘You say the circumstances suggested that your brother was dead. What circumstances were they?’

‘Principally the suddenness and completeness of the disappearance. His luggage, as you may remember, was found lying unclaimed at the railway station; and there was another circumstance even more suggestive. My brother drew a pension from the Foreign Office, for which he had to apply in person, or, if abroad, produce proof that he was alive on the date when the payment became due. Now, he was exceedingly regular in this respect; in fact, he had never been known to fail, either to appear in person or to transmit the necessary documents to his agent, Mr. Jellicoe. But from the moment when he vanished so mysteriously to the present day, nothing whatever has been heard of him.’

‘It’s a very awkward position for you,’ I said, ‘but I should think there will not be much difficulty in obtaining the

permission of the Court to presume death and to proceed to prove the will.'

Mr. Bellingham made a wry face. 'I expect you are right,' he said, 'but that doesn't help me much. You see, Mr. Jellicoe, having waited a reasonable time for my brother to reappear, took a very unusual but, I think, in the special circumstances, a very proper step: he summoned me and the other interested party to his office and communicated to us the provisions of the will. And very extraordinary provisions they turned out to be. I was thunderstruck when I heard them. And the exasperating thing is that I feel sure my poor brother imagined that he had made everything perfectly safe and simple.'

'They generally do,' I said, rather vaguely.

'I suppose they do,' said Mr. Bellingham; 'but poor John has made the most infernal hash of his will, and I am certain that he has utterly defeated his own intentions. You see, we are an old London family. The house in Queen Square where my brother nominally lived, but actually kept his collection, has been occupied by us for generations, and most of the Bellinghams are buried in St George's burial-ground close by, though some members of the family are buried in other churchyards in the neighbourhood. Now, my brother—who, by the way, was a bachelor—had a strong feeling for the family traditions, and he stipulated, not unnaturally, in his will that he should be buried in St George's burial-ground among his ancestors, or, at least, in one of the places of burial appertaining to his native parish. But instead of simply expressing the wish and directing his executors to carry it out, he made it a condition affecting the operation of the will.'

'Affecting it in what respect?' I asked.

'In a very vital respect,' answered Mr. Bellingham. 'The bulk of the property he bequeathed to me, or if I predeceased him, to my daughter Ruth. But the bequest was subject to the condition I have mentioned—that he should be buried in a certain place—and if that condition was not fulfilled, the bulk of the property was to go to my cousin, George Hurst.'

'But in that case,' said I, 'as you can't produce the body, neither of you can get the property.'

'I am not so sure of that,' he replied. 'If my brother is dead, it is pretty certain that he is not buried in St George's or any of the other places mentioned, and the fact can easily be proved by; production of the registers. So that a permission to presume death would result in the handing over to Hurst of almost the entire estate.'

'Who is the executor?' I asked.

'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'there is another muddle. There are two executors; Jellicoe is one, and the other is the principal beneficiary—Hurst or myself, as the case may be. But, you see, neither of us can become an executor until the Court has decided which of us is the principal beneficiary.'

'But who is to apply to the Court? I thought that was the business of the executors.'

'Exactly, that is Hurst's difficulty. We were discussing it when you called the other day, and a very animated discussion it was,' he added, with a grim smile. 'You see, Jellicoe naturally refuses to move in the matter alone. He says he must have the support of the other executor. But Hurst is not at present the other executor; neither am I. But the two of us together are the co-executor, since the duty devolves upon one or other of us, in any case.'

'It's a complicated position,' I said.

'It is; and the complication has elicited a very curious proposal from Hurst. He points out—quite correctly, I am afraid—that as the conditions as to burial have not been complied with, the property must come to him, and he proposes a very neat little arrangement, which is this: That I shall support him and Jellicoe in their application for permission to presume death and to administer the will, and that he shall pay me four hundred a year for life; the arrangement to hold good in all eventualities.'

'What does he mean by that?'

'He means,' said Bellingham, fixing me with a ferocious scowl, 'that if the body should turn up at any future time, so that the conditions as to burial should be able to be carried out, he should still retain the property and pay me the four hundred a year.'—

'The deuce!' said I. 'He seems to know how to drive a bargain.'

'His position is that he stands to lose four hundred a year for the term of my life if the body is never found, and he ought to stand to win if it is.'

'And I gather that you have refused this offer?'

'Yes; very emphatically, and my daughter agrees with me; but I am not sure that I have done the right thing. A man should think twice, I suppose, before he burns his boats.'

'Have you spoken to Mr. Jellicoe about the matter?'

'Yes, I have been to see him to-day. He is a cautious man, and he doesn't advise me one way or the other. But I think he disapproves of my refusal; in fact, he remarked that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, especially when the whereabouts of the bush is unknown.'

'Do you think he will apply to the Court without your sanction?'

'He doesn't want to; but I suppose, if Hurst puts pressure on him, he will have to. Besides, Hurst, as an interested party,

could apply on his own account, and after my refusal he probably will; at least, that is Jellicoe's opinion.'

'The whole thing is a most astonishing muddle,' I said, 'especially when one remembers that your brother had a lawyer to advise him. Didn't Mr. Jellicoe point out to him how absurd the provisions were?'

'Yes, he did. He tells me that he implored my brother to let him draw up a will embodying the matter in a reasonable form. But John wouldn't listen to him. Poor old fellow! he could be very pigheaded when he chose.'

'And is Hurst's proposal still open?'

'No, thanks to my peppery temper. I refused it very definitely, and sent him off with a flea in his ear. I hope I have not made a false step; I was quite taken by surprise when Hurst made the proposal and got rather angry. You remember, my brother was last seen alive at Hurst's house—but there, I oughtn't to talk like that, and I oughtn't to pester you with my confounded affairs when you come in for a friendly chat, though I gave you fair warning, you remember.'

'Oh, but you have been highly entertaining. You don't realise what an interest I take in your case.'

Mr. Bellingham laughed somewhat grimly. 'My case!' he repeated. 'You speak as if I were some rare and curious sort of criminal lunatic. However, I'm glad you find me amusing. It's more than I find myself.'

'I didn't say amusing; I said interesting. I view you with deep respect as the central figure of a stirring drama. And I am not the only person who regards you in that light. Do you remember my speaking to you of Doctor Thorndyke?'

'Yes, of course I do.'

'Well, oddly enough, I met him this afternoon and we had a long talk at his chambers. I took the liberty of mentioning that I had made your acquaintance. Did I do wrong?'

'No. Certainly not. Why shouldn't you tell him? Did he remember my infernal case, as you call it?'

'Perfectly, in all its details. He is quite an enthusiast, you know, and uncommonly keen to hear how the case develops.'

'So am I, for that matter,' said Mr. Bellingham.

'I wonder,' said I, 'if you would mind my telling him what you have told me to-night? It would interest him enormously.'

Mr. Bellingham reflected for a while with his eyes fixed on the empty grate. Presently he looked up, and said slowly:

'I don't know why I should. It's no secret; and if it were, I hold no monopoly on it. No; tell him, if you think he'd care to hear about it.'

'You needn't be afraid of his talking,' I said. 'He's as close as an oyster; and the facts may mean more to him than they do to us. He may be able to give a useful hint or two.'

'Oh, I'm not going to pick his brains,' Mr. Bellingham said quickly and with some wrath. 'I'm not the sort of man who goes round cadging for free professional advice. Understand that, Doctor?'

'I do,' I answered hastily. 'That wasn't what I meant at all. Is that Miss Bellingham coming in? I heard the front door shut.'

'Yes, that will be my girl, I expect; but don't run away. You're not afraid of her, are you?' he added as I hurriedly picked up my hat.

'I'm not sure that I'm not,' I answered. 'She is rather a majestic young lady.'

Mr. Bellingham chuckled and smothered a yawn, and at that moment his daughter entered the room; and, in spite of her shabby black dress and a shabbier handbag that she carried, I thought her appearance and manner fully justified my description.

'You come in, Miss Bellingham,' I said as she shook my hand with cool civility, 'to find your father yawning and me taking my departure. So I have my uses, you see. My conversation is the infallible cure for insomnia.'

Miss Bellingham smiled. 'I believe I am driving you away,' she said.

'Not at all,' I replied hastily. 'My mission was accomplished, that was all.'

'Sit down for a few moments, Doctor,' urged Mr. Bellingham, 'and let Ruth sample the remedy. She will be affronted if you run away as soon as she comes in.'

'Well, you mustn't let me keep you up,' I said.

'Oh, I'll let you know when I fall asleep,' he replied, with a chuckle; and with this understanding I sat down again—not at all unwillingly.

At this moment Miss Oman entered with a small tray and a smile of which I should not have supposed her capable.

'You'll take your toast and cocoa while they're hot, dear, won't you?' she said coaxingly.

'Yes, I will, Phyllis, thank you,' Miss Bellingham answered. 'I am only just going to take off my hat,' and she left the room, followed by the astonishingly transfigured spinster.

She returned almost immediately as Mr. Bellingham was in the midst of a profound yawn, and sat down to her frugal



meal, when her father mystified me considerably by remarking:

'You're late to-night, chick. Have the Shepherd Kings been giving trouble?'

'No,' she replied; 'but I thought I might as well get them done. So I dropped in at the Ormond Street library on my way home and finished them.'

'Then they are ready for stuffing now?'

'Yes.' As she answered she caught my astonished eye (for a stuffed Shepherd King is undoubtedly a somewhat surprising phenomenon) and laughed softly.

'We mustn't talk in riddles like this,' she said, 'before Doctor Berkeley, or he will turn us both into pillars of salt. My father is referring to my work,' she explained to me.

'Are you a taxidermist, then?' I asked.

She hastily set down the cup that she was raising to her lips and broke into a ripple of quiet laughter.

'I am afraid my father has misled you with his irreverent expressions. He will have to atone by explaining.'

'You see, Doctor,' said Mr. Bellingham, 'Ruth is a literary searcher—'

'Oh, don't call me a searcher!' Miss Bellingham protested. 'It suggests the female searcher at a police-station. Say investigator.'

'Very well, investigator or investigatrix, if you like. She hunts up references and bibliographies at the Museum for people who are writing books. She looks up everything that has been written on a given subject, and then, when she has crammed herself to a bursting-point with facts, she goes to her client and disgorges and crams him or her, and he or she finally disgorges into the Press.'

'What a disgusting way to put it!' said his daughter. 'However, that is what it amounts to. I am a literary jackal, a collector of provender for the literary lions. Is that quite clear?'

'Perfectly. But I don't think that, even now, I quite understand about the stuffed Shepherd Kings.'

'Oh, it was not the Shepherd Kings who were to be stuffed. It was the author! That was mere obscurity of speech on the part of my father. The position is this: A venerable Archdeacon wrote an article on the patriarch Joseph—'

'And didn't know anything about him,' interrupted Mr. Bellingham, 'and got tripped up by a specialist who did, and then got shirty—'

'Nothing of the kind,' said Miss Bellingham. 'He knew as much as venerable archdeacons ought to know; but the expert knew more. So the archdeacon commissioned me to collect the literature on the state of Egypt at the end of the seventeenth dynasty, which I have done; and to-morrow I shall go and stuff him, as my father expresses it, and then—'

'And then,' Mr. Bellingham interrupted, 'the archdeacon will rush forth and pelt that expert with Shepherd Kings and Sequenen-Ra and the whole tag-rag and bobtail of the seventeenth dynasty. Oh, there'll be wigs on the green, I can tell you.'

'Yes, I expect there will be quite a skirmish,' said Miss Bellingham. And thus dismissing the subject she made an energetic attack on the toast while her father refreshed himself with a colossal yawn.

I watched her with furtive admiration and deep and growing interest. In spite of her pallor, her weary eyes, and her drawn and almost haggard face, she was an exceedingly handsome girl; and there was in her aspect a suggestion of purpose, of strength and character that marked her off from the rank and file of womanhood. I noted this as I stole an occasional glance at her or turned to answer some remark addressed to me; and I noted, too, that her speech, despite a general undertone of depression, was yet not without a certain caustic, ironical humour. She was certainly a rather enigmatical young person, but very decidedly interesting.

When she had finished her repast she put aside the tray and, opening the shabby handbag, asked:

'Do you take any interest in Egyptian history? We are as mad as hatters on the subject. It seems to be a family complaint.'

'I don't know much about it,' I answered. 'Medical studies are rather engrossing and don't leave much time for general reading.'

'Naturally,' she said. 'You can't specialise in everything. But if you would care to see how the business of a literary jackal is conducted, I will show you my notes.'

I accepted the offer eagerly (not, I fear, from pure enthusiasm for the subject), and she brought forth from the bag four blue-covered, quarto notebooks, each dealing with one of the four dynasties from the fourteenth to the seventeenth. As I glanced through the neat and orderly extracts with which they were filled we discussed the intricacies of the peculiarly difficult and confused period that they covered, gradually lowering our voices as Mr. Bellingham's eyes closed and his head fell against the back of his chair. We had just reached the critical reign of Apepa II when a resounding snore broke in upon the studious quiet of the room and sent us both into a fit of silent laughter.

'Your conversation has done its work,' she whispered as I stealthily picked up my hat, and together we stole on tiptoe to the door, which she opened without a sound. Once outside, she suddenly dropped her bantering manner and said quite earnestly:

'How kind it was of you to come and see him to-night! You have done him a world of good, and I am most grateful. Good-night!'

She shook hands with me really cordially, and I took my way down the creaking stairs in a whirl of happiness that I was quite at a loss to account for.

---

## V. — THE WATERCRESS-BED

BARNARD'S PRACTICE, like most others, was subject to those fluctuations that fill the struggling practitioner alternately with hope and despair. The work came in paroxysms with intervals of almost complete stagnation. One of these intermissions occurred on the day after my visit to Nevill's Court, with the result that by half-past eleven I found myself wondering what I should do with the remainder of the day. The better to consider this weighty problem, I strolled down to the Embankment, and, leaning on the parapet, contemplated the view across the river; the grey stone bridge with its perspective of arches, the picturesque pile of the shot-towers, and beyond, the shadowy shapes of the Abbey and St Stephen's.

It was a pleasant scene, restful and quiet, with a touch of life and a hint of sober romance, when a barge swept down through the—middle arch of the bridge with a lugsail hoisted to a jury mast and a white-aproned woman at the tiller. Dreamily I watched the craft creep by upon the moving tide, noted the low freeboard, almost awash, the careful helmswoman, and the dog on the forecastle yapping at the distant shore—and thought of Ruth Bellingham.

What was there about this strange girl that had made so deep an impression on me? That was the question that I propounded to myself, and not for the first time. Of the fact itself there was no doubt. But what was the explanation? Was it her unusual surroundings? Her occupation and rather recondite learning? Her striking personality and exceptional good looks? Or her connection with the dramatic mystery of her lost uncle?

I concluded that it was all of these. Everything connected with her was unusual and arresting; but over and above these circumstances there was a certain sympathy and personal affinity of which I was strongly conscious and of which I dimly hoped that she, perhaps, was a little conscious too. At any rate, I was deeply interested in her; of that there was no doubt whatever. Short as our acquaintance had been, she held a place in my thoughts that had never been held by any other woman.

From Ruth Bellingham my reflections passed by a natural transition to the curious story that her father had told me. It was a queer affair, that ill-drawn will, with the baffled lawyer protesting in the background. It almost seemed as if there must be something behind it all, especially when I remembered Mr. Hurst's very singular proposal. But it was out of my depth; it was a case for a lawyer, and to a lawyer it should go. This very night, I resolved, I would go to Thorndyke and give him the whole story as it had been told to me.

And then there happened one of those coincidences at which we all wonder when they occur, but which are so frequent as to have become enshrined in a proverb. For even as I formed the resolution, I observed two men approaching from the direction of Blackfriars, and recognised in them my quondam teacher and his junior.

'I was just thinking about you,' I said as they came up.

'Very flattering,' replied Jervis; 'but I thought you had to talk of the devil.'

'Perhaps,' suggested Thorndyke, 'he was talking to himself. But why were you thinking of us, and what was the nature of your thoughts?'

'My thoughts had reference to the Bellingham case. I spent the whole of last evening at Nevill's Court.'

'Ha! And are there any fresh developments?'

'Yes, by Jove! there are. Bellingham gave me a full detailed description of the will; and a pretty document it seems to be.'

'Did he give you permission to repeat the details to me?'

'Yes. I asked specifically if I might, and he had no objection whatever.'

'Good. We are lunching at Soho to-day as Polton has his hands full. Come with us and share our table and tell us your story as we go. Will that suit you?'

It suited me admirably in the present state of the practice, and I accepted the invitation with undissembled glee.

'Very well,' said Thorndyke; 'then let us walk slowly and finish with matters confidential before we plunge into the madding crowd.'

We set forth at a leisurely pace along the broad pavement and I commenced my narration. As well as I could remember, I related the circumstances that had led up to the present disposition of the property and then proceeded to the actual provisions of the will; to all of which my two friends listened with rapt interest, Thorndyke occasionally stopping me to jot

down a memorandum in his pocket-book.

'Why, the fellow must have been a stark lunatic!' Jervis exclaimed, when I had finished. 'He seems to have laid himself out with the most devilish ingenuity to defeat his own ends.'

'That is not an uncommon peculiarity with testators,' Thorndyke remarked. 'A direct and perfectly intelligible will is rather the exception. But we can hardly judge until we have seen the actual document. I suppose Bellingham hasn't a copy?'

'I don't know,' said I; 'but I will ask him.'

'If he has one, I should like to look through it,' said Thorndyke. 'The provisions are very peculiar, and, as Jervis says, admirably calculated to defeat the testator's wishes if they have been correctly reported. And, apart from that, they have a remarkable bearing on the circumstances of the disappearance. I daresay you noticed that.'

'I noticed that it is very much to Hurst's advantage that the body has not been found.'

'Yes, of course. But there are some other points that are very significant. However, it would be premature to discuss the terms of the will until we have seen the actual document or a certified copy.'

'If there is a copy extant,' I said, 'I will try to get hold of it. But Bellingham is terribly afraid of being suspected of a desire to get professional advice gratis.'

'That,' said Thorndyke, 'is natural enough, and not discreditable. But you must overcome his scruples somehow. I expect you will be able to. You are a plausible young gentleman, as I remember of old, and you seem to have established yourself as quite the friend of the family.'

'They are rather interesting people,' I explained; 'very cultivated and with a strong leaning towards archaeology. It seems to be in the blood.'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke; 'a family tendency, probably due to contact and common surroundings rather than heredity. So you like Godfrey Bellingham?'

'Yes. He is a trifle peppery and impulsive, but quite an agreeable, genial old butler.'

'And the daughter,' said Jervis, 'what is she like?'

'Oh, she is a learned lady; works up bibliographies and references at the Museum.'

'Ah!' Jervis exclaimed with disfavour, 'I know the breed. Inky fingers; no chest to speak of; all side and spectacles.'

'You're quite wrong,' I exclaimed indignantly, contrasting Jervis's hideous presentment with the comely original. 'She is an exceedingly good-looking girl, and her manners all that a lady's should be. A little stiff, perhaps, but then I am only an acquaintance—almost a stranger.'

'But,' Jervis persisted, 'what is she like, in appearance I mean. Short? fat? sandy? Give us intelligible details.'

I made a rapid mental inventory, assisted by my recent cogitations.

'She is about five feet seven, slim but rather plump, very erect in carriage and graceful in movements; black hair, loosely parted in the middle and falling very prettily away from the forehead; pale, clear complexion, dark grey eyes, straight eyebrows, straight, well-shaped nose, short mouth, rather full; round chin—what the deuce are you grinning at, Jervis?' For my friend had suddenly unmasked his batteries and now threatened, like the Cheshire cat, to dissolve into a mere abstraction of amusement.

'If there is a copy of that will, Thorndyke,' he said, 'we shall get it. I think you agree with me, reverend senior?'

'I have already said,' was the reply, 'that I put my trust in Berkeley. And now let us dismiss professional topics. This is our hostelry.'

He pushed open an unpretentious glazed door, and we followed him into the restaurant, whereof the atmosphere was pervaded by an appetising mealiness mingled with less agreeable suggestions of the destructive distillation of fat.

It was some two hours later when I wished my friends adieu under the golden-leaved plane trees of King's Bench Walk.

'I won't ask you to come in now,' said Thorndyke, 'as we have some consultations this afternoon. But come in and see us soon; don't wait for that copy of the will.'

'No,' said Jervis. 'Drop in in the evening when your work is done; unless, of course, there is more attractive society elsewhere. Oh, you needn't turn that colour, my dear child; we have all been young once; there is even a tradition that Thorndyke was young some time back in the pre-dynastic period.'

'Don't take any notice of him, Berkeley,' said Thorndyke. 'The egg-shell is sticking to his head still. He'll know better when he is my age.'

'Methuselah!' exclaimed Jervis; 'I hope I shan't have to wait as long as that!'

Thorndyke smiled benevolently at his irrepressible junior, and, shaking my hand cordially, turned into the entry.

From the Temple I wended northward, to the adjacent College of Surgeons, where I spent a couple of profitable hours

examining the 'pickles' and refreshing my memory on the subjects of pathology and anatomy; marvelling afresh (as every practical anatomist must marvel) at the incredibly perfect technique of the dissections, and inwardly paying tribute to the founder of the collection. At length the warning of the clock, combined with an increasing craving for tea, drove me forth and bore me towards the scene of my not very strenuous labours. My mind was still occupied with the contents of the cases and the great glass jars, so that I found myself at the corner of Fetter Lane without a very clear idea of how I had got there. But at that point I was aroused from my reflections rather abruptly by a raucous voice in my ear.

'Orrible discovery at Sidcup!'

I turned wrathfully—for a London street-boy's yell, let off at point-blank range, is, in effect, like the smack of an open hand—but the inscription on the staring yellow poster that was held up for my inspection changed my anger to curiosity.

'Horrible discovery in a watercress-bed!'

Now, let prigs deny it if they will, but there is something very attractive in a 'horrible discovery'. It hints at tragedy, at mystery, at romance. It promises to bring into our grey and commonplace life that element of the dramatic which is the salt that our existence is savoured withal. 'In a watercress-bed,' too! The rusticity of the background seemed to emphasise the horror of the discovery, whatever it might be.

I bought a copy of the paper, and, tucking it under my arm, hurried on to the surgery, promising myself a mental feast of watercress; but as I opened the door I found myself confronted by a corpulent woman of piebald and pimply aspect who saluted me with a deep groan. It was the lady from the coal shop in Fleur-de-Lys Court.

'Good-evening, Mrs. Jablett,' I said briskly; 'not come about yourself, I hope.'

'Yes, I have,' she answered, rising and following me gloomily into the consulting-room; and then, when I had seated her in the patient's chair and myself at the writing table, she continued: 'It's my inside, you know, doctor.'

The statement lacked anatomical precision and merely excluded the domain of the skin specialist. I accordingly waited for enlightenment and speculated on the watercress-beds, while Mrs. Jablett regarded me expectantly with a dim and watery eye.

'Ah!' I said at length; 'it's your—your inside, is it, Mrs. Jablett?'

'Yus. And my 'ead,' she added, with a voluminous sigh that filled the apartment with odorous reminiscences of 'unsweetened'.

'Your head aches, does it?'

'Something chronic!' said Mrs. Jablett. 'Feels as if it was a-opening and a-shutting, a-opening and a-shutting, and when I sit down I feel as if I should bust.'

This picturesque description of her sensations—not wholly inconsistent with her figure—gave the clue to Mrs. Jablett's sufferings. Resisting a frivolous impulse to reassure her as to the elasticity of the human integument, I considered her case in exhaustive detail, coasting delicately round the subject of 'unsweetened' and finally sent her away, revived in spirits and grasping a bottle of Mist. Sodae cum Bismutho from Barnard's big stock-jar. Then I went back to investigate the Horrible Discovery; but before I could open the paper, another patient arrived (*Impetigo contagiosa*, this time, affecting the 'wide and arched-front sublime' of a juvenile Fetter Laner), and then yet another, and so on through the evening, until at last I forgot the watercress-beds altogether. It was only when I had purified myself from the evening consultations with hot water and a nail-brush and was about to sit down to a frugal supper, that I remembered the newspaper and fetched it from the drawer of the consulting-room table, where it had been hastily thrust out of sight. I folded it into a convenient form, and, standing it upright against the water-jug, read the report at my ease as I supped.

There was plenty of it. Evidently the reporter had regarded it as a 'scoop', and the editor had backed him up with ample space and hair-raising head-lines.

'HORRIBLE DISCOVERY

IN A WATERCRESS-BED

AT SIDCUP!'

'A startling discovery was made yesterday afternoon in the course of clearing out a watercress-bed near the erstwhile rural village of Sidcup in Kent; a discovery that will occasion many a disagreeable qualm to those persons who have been in the habit of regaling themselves with this refreshing esculent. But before proceeding to a description of the circumstances of the actual discovery or of the objects found—which, however, it may be stated at once, are nothing more or less than the fragments of a dismembered human body—it will be interesting to trace the remarkable chain of coincidences by virtue of which the discovery was made.

'The beds in question have been laid out in a small artificial lake fed by a tiny streamlet which forms one of the numerous tributaries of the River Cray. Its depth is greater than usual in the watercress-beds, otherwise the gruesome relics could never have been concealed beneath its surface, and the flow of water through it, though continuous, is slow. The tributary streamlet meanders through a succession of pasture meadows, in one of which the beds themselves are situated, and here throughout most of the year the fleecy victims of the human carnivore carry on the industry of converting grass into mutton. Now it happened some years ago that the sheep frequenting these pastures became affected with the disease

known as “liver-rot”; and here we must make a short digression into the domain of pathology.

“Liver-rot” is a disease of quite romantic antecedents. Its cause is a small flat worm—the liver-fluke—which infests the liver and bile-ducts of the affected sheep.

Now how does the worm get into the sheep’s liver? That is where the romance comes in. Let us see.

The cycle of transformations begins with the deposit of the eggs of the fluke in some shallow stream or ditch running through pasture lands. Now each egg has a sort of lid, which presently opens and lets out a minute, hairy creature who swims away in search of a particular kind of water-snail—the kind called by naturalists *Limnosa truncatula*. If he finds a snail, he bores his way into its flesh and soon begins to grow and wax fat. Then he brings forth a family—of tiny worms quite unlike himself, little creatures called rediae, which soon give birth to families of young rediae. So they go on for several generations, but at last there comes a generation of rediae which, instead of giving birth to fresh rediae, produce families of totally different offspring; big-headed, long-tailed creatures like miniature tadpoles, called by the learned cercarice. The cercarice soon wriggle their way out of the body of the snail, and then complications arise: for it is the habit of this particular snail to leave the water occasionally and take a stroll in the fields. Thus the cercarice, escaping from the snail, find themselves on the grass, whereupon they promptly drop their tails and stick themselves to the grass-blades. Then comes the unsuspecting sheep to take his frugal meal, and, cropping the grass, swallows it, cercarice and all. But the latter, when they find themselves in the sheep’s stomach, make their way straight to the bile-ducts, up which they travel to the liver. Here, in a few weeks, they grow up into full-blown flukes and begin the important business of producing eggs.

Such is the pathological romance of the “liver-rot”; and now what is its connection with this mysterious discovery? It is this. After the outbreak of “liver-rot” above referred to, the ground landlord, a Mr. John Bellingham, instructed his solicitor to insert a clause in the lease of the beds directing that the latter should be periodically cleared and examined by an expert to make sure that they were free from the noxious water-snails. The last lease expired about two years ago, and since then the beds have been out of cultivation; but, for the safety of the adjacent pastures, it was considered necessary to make the customary periodical inspection, and it was in the course of cleaning the beds for this purpose that the present discovery was made.

The operation began two days ago. A gang of three men proceeded systematically to grub up the plants and collect the multitudes of water-snails that they might be examined by the expert to see if any obnoxious species were present. They had cleared nearly half of the beds when, yesterday afternoon, one of the men working in the deepest part came upon some bones, the appearance of which excited his suspicion. Thereupon he called his mates, and they carefully picked away the plants piece-meal, a process that soon laid bare an unmistakable human hand lying on the mud amongst the roots. Fortunately they had the wisdom not to disturb the remains, but at once sent off a message to the police. Very soon, an inspector and a sergeant, accompanied by the divisional surgeon, arrived on the scene, and were able to view the remains lying as they had been found. And now another very strange fact came to light; for it was seen that the hand—a left one—lying on the mud was minus its third finger. This is regarded by the police as a very important fact as bearing on the question of identification, seeing that the number of persons having the third finger of the left hand missing must be quite small. After a thorough examination on the spot, the bones were carefully collected and conveyed to the mortuary, where they now lie awaiting further inquiries.

The divisional surgeon, Dr. Brandon, in an interview with our representative, made the following statements:

“The bones are those of the left arm of a middle-aged or elderly man about five feet eight inches in height. All the bones of the arm are present, including the scapula, or shoulder-blade, and the clavicle, or collar-bone, but the three bones of the third finger are missing.”

“Is this a deformity or has the finger been cut off?” our correspondent asked.

“The finger has been amputated,” was the reply. “If it had been absent from birth, the corresponding hand bone, or metacarpal, would have been wanting or deformed, whereas it is present and quite normal.”

“How long have the bones been in the water?” was the next question.

“More than a year, I should say. They are quite clean; there is not a vestige of the soft structures left.”

“Have you any theory as to how the arm came to be deposited where it was found?”

“I should rather not answer that question,” was the guarded response.

“One more question,” our correspondent urged. “The ground landlord, Mr. John Bellingham; is he not the gentleman who disappeared so mysteriously some time ago?”

“So I understand,” Dr. Brandon replied.

“Can you tell me if Mr. Bellingham had lost the third finger of his left hand?”

“I cannot say,” said Dr. Brandon; and he added with a smile, “you had better ask the police.”

That is how the matter stands at present. But we understand that the police are making active inquiries for any missing man who has lost the third finger of his left hand, and if any of our readers know of such a person, they are earnestly requested to communicate at once, either with us or with the authorities.

‘Also we believe that a systematic search is to be made for further remains.’

I laid the newspaper down and fell into a train of reflection. It was certainly a most mysterious affair. The thought that had evidently come to the reporter's mind stole naturally into mine. Could these remains be those of John Bellingham? It was obviously possible, though I could not but see that the fact of the bones having been found on his land, while it undoubtedly furnished the suggestion, did not in any way add to its probability. The connection was accidental and in nowise relevant.

Then, too, there was the missing finger. No reference to any such deformity had been made in the original report of the disappearance, though it could hardly have been overlooked. I should be seeing Thorndyke in the course of the next few days, and, undoubtedly, if the discovery had any bearing upon the disappearance of John Bellingham, I should hear of it. With such a reflection I rose from the table, and, adopting the advice contained in the spurious Johnsonian quotation, proceeded to 'take a walk in Fleet Street' before settling down for the evening.

---

## VI. — SIDELIGHTS

THE association of coal with potatoes is one upon which I have frequently speculated, without arriving at any more satisfactory explanation than that both products are of the earth, earthy. Of the connection itself Barnard's practice furnished several instances besides Mrs. Jablett's establishment in Fleur-de-Lys Court, one of which was a dark and mysterious cavern a foot below the level of the street, that burrowed under an ancient house on the west side of Fetter Lane—a crinkly, timber house of the three-decker type that leaned back drunkenly from the road as if about to sit down in its own back yard.

Passing this repository of the associated products about ten o'clock in the morning, I perceived in the shadows of the cavern no less a person than Miss Oman. She saw me at the same moment, and beckoned peremptorily with a hand that held a large Spanish onion. I approached with a deferential smile.

'What a magnificent onion, Miss Oman! and how generous of you to offer it to me—'

'I wasn't offering it to you. But there! Isn't it just like a man—'

'Isn't what just like a man?' I interrupted. 'If you mean the onion—'

'I don't!' she snapped; 'and I wish you wouldn't talk such a parcel of nonsense. A grown man and a member of a serious profession, too! You ought to know better.'

'I suppose I ought,' I said reflectively. And she continued:

'I called in at the surgery just now.'—

'To see me?'—

'What else should I come for? Do you suppose that I called to consult the bottle-boy?'

'Certainly not, Miss Oman. So you find the lady doctor no use, after all?'

Miss Oman gnashed her teeth at me (and very fine teeth they were too).

'I called,' she said majestically, 'on behalf of Miss Bellingham.'

My facetiousness evaporated instantly. 'I hope Miss Bellingham is not ill,' I said with a sudden anxiety that elicited a sardonic smile from Miss Oman.

'No,' was the reply, 'she is not ill, but she has cut her hand rather badly. It's her right hand too, and she can't afford to lose the use of it, not being a great, hulky, lazy, lolloping man. So you had better go and put some stuff on it.'

With this advice, Miss Oman whisked to the right-about and vanished into the depths of the cavern like the witch of Wokey, while I hurried on to the surgery to provide myself with the necessary instruments and materials, and thence proceeded to Nevill's Court.

Miss Oman's juvenile maidservant, who opened the door to me, stated the existing conditions with epigrammatic conciseness.

'Mr. Bellingham is hout, sir; but Miss Bellingham is hin.'

Having thus delivered herself she retreated towards the kitchen and I ascended the stairs, at the head of which I found Miss Bellingham awaiting me with her right hand encased in what looked like a white boxing-glove.

'I'm glad you have come,' she said. 'Phyllis—Miss Oman, you know—has kindly bound up my hand, but I should like you to see that it is all right.'

We went into the sitting-room, where I laid out my paraphernalia on the table while I inquired into the particulars of the accident.

'It is most unfortunate that it should have happened just now,' she said, as I wrestled with one of those remarkable feminine knots that, while they seem to defy the utmost efforts of human ingenuity to untie, yet have a singular habit of untying themselves at inopportune moments.

‘Why just now in particular?’ I asked.

‘Because I have some specially important work to do. A very learned lady who is writing an historical book has commissioned me to collect all the literature relating to the Tell el Amarna letters—the cuneiform tablets, you know, of Amenhotep the Fourth.’

‘Well,’ I said soothingly, ‘I expect your hand will soon be well.’

‘Yes, but that won’t do. The work has to be done immediately. I have to send in completed notes not later than this day week, and it will be quite impossible. I am dreadfully disappointed.’

By this time I had unwound the voluminous wrappings and exposed the injury—a deep gash in the palm that must have narrowly missed a good-sized artery. Obviously the hand would be useless for fully a week.

‘I suppose,’ she said, ‘you couldn’t patch it up so that I could write with it?’

I shook my head.

‘No, Miss Bellingham. I shall have to put it on a splint. We can’t run any risks with a deep wound like this.’

‘Then I shall have to give up the commission, and I don’t know how my client will get the work done in the time. You see, I am pretty well up in the literature of Ancient Egypt; in fact, I was to receive special payment on that account. And it would have been such an interesting task, too. However, it can’t be helped.’

I proceeded methodically with the application of the dressings, and meanwhile reflected. It was evident that she was deeply disappointed. Loss of work meant loss of money, and it needed but a glance at her rusty black dress to see that there was little margin for that. Possibly, too, there was some special need to be met. Her manner seemed almost to imply that there was. And at this point I had a brilliant idea.

‘I’m not sure that it can’t be helped,’ said I.

She looked at me inquiringly, and I continued: ‘I am going to make a proposition, and I shall ask you to consider it with an open mind.’

‘That sounds rather portentous,’ said she; ‘but I promise. What is it?’

‘It is this: When I was a student I acquired the useful art of writing shorthand. I am not a lightning reporter, you understand, but I can take matter down from dictation at quite respectable speed.’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, I have several hours free every day—usually the whole afternoon up to six or half-past—and it occurs to me that if you were to go to the Museum in the mornings you could get out your book, look up passages (you could do that without using your right hand), and put in bookmarks. Then I could come along in the afternoon and you could read out the selected passages to me, and I could take them down in shorthand. We should get through as much in a couple of hours as you could in a day using long-hand.’

‘Oh, but how kind of you, Dr. Berkeley!’ she exclaimed. ‘How very kind! Of course, I couldn’t think of taking up all your leisure in that way; but I do appreciate your kindness very much.’

I was rather chapfallen at this very definite refusal, but persisted feebly:

‘I wish you would. It may seem rather a cheek for a comparative stranger like me to make such a proposal to a lady: but if you’d been a man—in those special circumstances—I should have made it all the same, and you would have accepted as a matter of course.’

‘I doubt that. At any rate, I am not a man. I sometimes wish I were.’

‘Oh, I am sure you are much better as you are!’ I exclaimed, with such earnestness that we both laughed. And at this moment Mr. Bellingham entered the room carrying several large brand-new books in a strap.

‘Well, I’m sure!’ he exclaimed genially; ‘here are pretty goings on. Doctor and patient giggling like a pair of schoolgirls! What’s the joke?’

He thumped his parcel of books down on the table and listened smilingly while my unconscious witticism was expounded.

‘The doctor’s quite right,’ he said. ‘You’ll do as you are, chick; but the Lord knows what sort of man you would make. You take his advice and let well alone.’

Finding him in this genial frame of mind, I ventured to explain my proposition to him and to enlist his support. He considered it with attentive approval, and when I had finished turned to his daughter.

‘What is your objection, chick?’ he asked.

‘It would give Doctor Berkeley such a fearful lot of work,’ she answered.

‘It would give him a fearful lot of pleasure,’ I said. ‘It would really.’

‘Then why not?’ said Mr. Bellingham. ‘We don’t mind being under an obligation to the Doctor, do we?’

‘Oh, it isn’t that!’ she exclaimed hastily.

‘Then take him at his word. He means it. It is a kind action and he’ll like doing it, I’m sure. That’s all right, Doctor; she accepts, don’t you, chick?’

‘Yes, if you say so, I do; and most thankfully.’

She accompanied the acceptance with a gracious smile that was in itself a large repayment on account, and when we had made the necessary arrangements, I hurried away in a state of the most perfect satisfaction to finish my morning’s work and order an early lunch.

When I called for her a couple of hours later I found her waiting in the garden with the shabby handbag, of which I relieved her, and we set forth together, watched jealously by Miss Oman, who had accompanied her to the gate.

As I walked up the court with this wonderful maid by my side I could hardly believe in my good fortune. By her presence and my own resulting happiness the mean surroundings became glorified and the commonest objects transfigured into things of beauty. What a delightful thoroughfare, for instance, was Fetter Lane, with its quaint charm and mediaeval grace! I snuffed the cabbage-laden atmosphere and seemed to breathe the scent of the asphodel. Holborn was even as the Elysian Fields; the omnibus that bore us westward was a chariot of glory; and the people who swarmed verminously on the pavements bore the semblance of the children of light.

Love is a foolish thing judged by workaday standards, and the thoughts and actions of lovers foolish beyond measure. But the workaday standard is the wrong one, after all; for the utilitarian mind does but busy itself with the trivial and transitory interests of life, behind which looms the great and everlasting reality of the love of man and woman. There is more significance in a nightingale’s song in the hush of a summer night than in all the wisdom of Solomon (who, by the way, was not without his little experiences of the tender passion).

The janitor in the little glass box by the entrance to the library inspected us and passed us on, with a silent benediction, to the lobby, whence (when I had handed my stick to a bald-headed demigod and received a talismanic disc in exchange) we entered the enormous rotunda of the reading-room.

I have often thought that, if some lethal vapour of highly preservative properties—such as formaldehyde, for instance—could be shed into the atmosphere of this apartment, the entire and complete collection of books and book-worms would be well worth preserving, for the enlightenment of posterity, as a sort of anthropological appendix to the main collection of the Museum. For, surely, nowhere else in the world are so many strange and abnormal human beings gathered together in one place. And a curious question that must have occurred to many observers is: Whence do these singular creatures come, and whither do they go when the very distinct-faced clock (adjusted to literary eyesight) proclaims closing time? The tragic-faced gentleman, for instance, with the corkscrew ringlets that bob up and down like spiral springs as he walks? Or the short, elderly gentleman in the black cassock and bowler hat, who shatters your nerves by turning suddenly and revealing himself as a middle-aged woman? Whither do they go? One never sees them elsewhere. Do they steal away at closing time into the depths of the Museum and hide themselves until morning in sarcophagi or mummy cases? Or do they creep through spaces in the book-shelves and spend the night behind the volumes in a congenial atmosphere of leather and antique paper? Who can say? What I do know is that when Ruth Bellingham entered the reading-room she appeared in comparison with these like a creature of another order; even as the head of Antinous, which formerly stood (it has since been moved) amidst the portrait-busts of the Roman Emperors, seemed like the head of a god set in a portrait gallery of illustrious baboons.

‘What have we got to do?’ I asked when we had found a vacant seat. ‘Do you want to look up the catalogue?’

‘No, I have the tickets in my bag. The books are waiting in the “kept books” department.’

I placed my hat on the leather-covered shelf, dropped her gloves into it—how delightfully intimate and companionable it seemed!—altered the numbers on the tickets, and then we proceeded together to the ‘kept books’ desk to collect the volumes that contained the material for our day’s work.

It was a blissful afternoon. Two and a half hours of happiness unalloyed did I spend at that shiny, leather-clad desk, guiding my nimble pen across the pages of the notebook. It introduced me to a new world—a world in which love and learning, sweet intimacy and crusted archaeology, were mingled into the oddest, most whimsical and most delicious confection that the mind of man can conceive. Hitherto, these recondite histories had been far beyond my ken. Of the wonderful heretic, Amenhotep the Fourth, I had already heard—at the most he had been a mere name; the Hittites a mythical race of undetermined habitat; while cuneiform tablets had presented themselves to my mind merely as an uncouth kind of fossil biscuit suited to the digestion of a prehistoric ostrich.

Now all this was changed. As we sat with our chairs creaking together and she whispered the story of those stirring times into my receptive ear—talking is strictly forbidden in the reading-room—the disjointed fragments arranged themselves into a romance of supreme fascination. Egyptian, Babylonian, Aramaean, Hittite, Memphis, Babylon, Hamath, Megiddo—I swallowed them all thankfully, wrote them down, and asked for more. Only once did I disgrace myself. An elderly clergyman of ascetic and acidulous aspect had passed us with a glance of evident disapproval, clearly setting us down as intruding philanderers; and when I contrasted the parson’s probable conception of the whispered communications that were being poured into my ear so tenderly and confidentially with the dry reality, I chuckled aloud. But my fair taskmistress only paused, with her finger on the page, smilingly to rebuke me, and then went on with the dictation. She



was certainly a Tartar for work.

It was a proud moment for me when, in response to my interrogative 'Yes?' my companion said 'That is all' and closed the book. We had extracted the pith and marrow of six considerable volumes in two and a half hours.

'You have been better than your word,' she said. 'It would have taken me two full days of really hard work to make the notes that you have written down since we commenced. I don't know how to thank you.'

'There's no need to. I've enjoyed myself and polished up my shorthand. What is the next thing? We shall want some books for to-morrow, shan't we?'

'Yes. I have made out a list, so if you will come with me to the catalogue desk I will look out the numbers and ask you to write the tickets.'

The selection of a fresh batch of authorities occupied us for another quarter of an hour, and then, having handed in the volumes that we had squeezed dry, we took our way out of the reading-room.

'Which way shall we go?' she asked as we passed out of the gate, where stood a massive policeman, like the guardian angel at the gate of Paradise (only, thank Heaven! he bore no flaming sword forbidding re-entry).

'We are going,' I replied, 'to Museum Street, where is a milkshop in which one can get an excellent cup of tea.'

She looked as if she would have demurred, but eventually followed obediently, and we were soon settled side by side at the little marble-topped table, retracing the ground we had covered in the afternoon's work and discussing various points of interest over a joint teapot.

'Have you been doing this sort of work long?' I asked, as she handed me my second cup of tea.

'Professionally,' she answered, 'only about two years; since we broke up our home, in fact. But long before that I used to come to the Museum with my Uncle John—the one who disappeared, you know, in that dreadfully mysterious way—and help him to look up references. We were good friends, he and I.'

'I suppose he was a very learned man?' I suggested.

'Yes, in a certain way; in the way of the better-class collector he was very learned indeed. He knew the contents of every museum in the world, in so far as they were connected with Egyptian antiquities, and had studied them specimen by specimen. Consequently, as Egyptology is largely a museum science, he was a learned Egyptologist. But his real interest was in things rather than events. Of course, he knew a great deal—a very great deal—about Egyptian history, but still he was, before all, a collector.'

'And what will happen to his collection if he is really dead?'

'The greater part of it goes to the British Museum by his will, and the remainder he has left to his solicitor, Mr. Jellicoe.'

'To Mr. Jellicoe! Why, what will Mr. Jellicoe do with Egyptian antiquities?'

'Oh, he is an Egyptologist too, and quite an enthusiast. He has really a fine collection of scarabs and other small objects such as it is possible to keep in a private house. I have always thought that it was his enthusiasm for everything Egyptian that brought him and my uncle together on terms of such intimacy; though I believe he is an excellent lawyer, and he is certainly a very discreet, cautious man.'

'Is he? I shouldn't have thought so, judging by your uncle's will.'

'Oh, but that was not Mr. Jellicoe's fault. He assures us that he entreated my uncle to let him draw up a fresh document with more reasonable provisions. But he says Uncle John was immovable; and he really was a rather obstinate man. Mr. Jellicoe repudiates any responsibility in the matter. He washes his hands of the whole affair, and says that it is the will of a lunatic. And so it is. I was glancing through it only a night or two ago, and really I cannot conceive how a sane man could have written such nonsense.'

'You have a copy then?' I asked eagerly, remembering Thorndyke's parting instructions.

'Yes. Would you like to see it? I know my father has told you about it, and it is worth reading as a curiosity of perverseness.'

'I should very much like to show it to my friend, Doctor Thorndyke,' I replied. 'He said he would be interested to read it and learn the exact provisions; and it might be well to let him, and hear what he has to say about it.'

'I see no objection,' she rejoined; 'but you know what my father is: his horror, I mean, of what he calls "cadging for advice gratis".'

'Oh, but he need have no scruples on that score. Doctor Thorndyke wants to see the will because the case interests him. He is an enthusiast, you know, and he put the request as a personal favour to himself.'

'That is very nice and delicate of him, and I will explain the position to my father. If he is willing for Doctor Thorndyke to see the copy, I will send or bring it over this evening. Have we finished?'

I regretfully admitted that we had, and, when I had paid the modest reckoning, we sallied forth, turning back with one accord into Great Russell Street to avoid the noise and bustle of the larger thoroughfares.

‘What sort of man was your uncle?’ I asked presently, as we walked along the quiet, dignified street. And then I added hastily: ‘I hope you don’t think me inquisitive, but, to my mind, he presents himself as a kind of mysterious abstraction; the unknown quantity of a legal problem.’

‘My Uncle John,’ she answered reflectively, ‘was a very peculiar man, rather obstinate, very self-willed, what people call “masterful”, and decidedly wrong-headed and unreasonable.’

‘That is certainly the impression that the terms of his will convey,’ I said.

‘Yes, and not the will only. There was the absurd allowance that he made to my father. That was a ridiculous arrangement, and very unfair too. He ought to have divided the property up as my grandfather intended. And yet he was by no means ungenerous, only he would have his own way, and his own way was very commonly the wrong way.’

‘I remember,’ she continued, after a short pause, ‘a very odd instance of his wrong-headedness and obstinacy. It was a small matter, but very typical of him. He had in his collection a beautiful little ring of the eighteenth dynasty. It was said to have belonged to Queen Ti, the mother of our friend Amenhotep the Fourth; but I don’t think that could have been so, because the device on it was the Eye of Osiris, and Ti, as you know, was an Aten-worshipper. However, it was a very charming ring, and Uncle John, who had a queer sort of devotion to the mystical eye of Osiris, commissioned a very clever goldsmith to make two exact copies of it, one for himself and one for me. The goldsmith naturally wanted to take the measurements of our fingers, but this Uncle John would not hear of; the rings were to be exact copies, and an exact copy must be the same size as the original. You can imagine the result; my ring was so loose that I couldn’t keep it on my finger, and Uncle John’s was so tight that though he did manage to get it on, he was never able to get it off. And it was only the circumstance that his left hand was decidedly smaller than his right that made it possible for him to wear it at all.’

‘So you never wore your copy?’

‘No. I wanted to have it altered to make it fit, but he objected strongly; so I put it away, and have it in a box still.’

‘He must have been an extraordinarily pig-headed old fellow,’ I remarked.

‘Yes; he was very tenacious. He annoyed my father a good deal, too, by making unnecessary alterations in the house in Queen Square when he fitted up his museum. We have a certain sentiment with regard to that house. Our people have lived in it ever since it was built, when the square was first laid out in the reign of Queen Anne, after whom it was named. It is a dear old house. Would you like to see it? We are quite near it now.’

I assented eagerly. If it had been a coal-shed or a fried-fish shop I would still have visited it with pleasure, for the sake of prolonging our walk; but I was also really interested in this old house as a part of the background of the mystery of the vanished John Bellingham.

We crossed into Cosmo Place, with its quaint row of the now rare, cannon-shaped iron posts, and passing through stood for a few moments looking into the peaceful, stately old square. A party of boys disported themselves noisily on the range of stone posts that form a bodyguard round the ancient lamp-surmounted pump, but otherwise the place was wrapped in dignified repose suited to its age and station. And very pleasant it looked on this summer afternoon with the sunlight gilding the foliage of its widespreading plane trees and lighting up the warm-toned brick of the house-fronts. We walked slowly down the shady west side, near the middle of which my companion halted.

‘This is the house,’ she said. ‘It looks gloomy and forsaken now; but it must have been a delightful house in the days when my ancestors could look out of the windows through the open end of the square across the fields of meadows to the heights of Hampstead and Highgate.’

She stood at the edge of the pavement looking up with a curious wistfulness at the old house; a very pathetic figure, I thought, with her handsome face and proud carriage, her threadbare dress and shabby gloves, standing at the threshold of the home that had been her family’s for generations, that should now have been hers, and that was shortly to pass away into the hands of strangers.

I, too, looked up at it with a strange interest, impressed by something gloomy and forbidding in its aspect. The windows were shuttered from basement to attic, and no sign of life was visible. Silent, neglected, desolate, it breathed an air of tragedy. It seemed to mourn in sackcloth and ashes for its lost master. The massive door within the splendid carved portico was crusted with grime, and seemed to have passed out of use as completely as the ancient lamp-irons or the rusted extinguishers wherein the footmen were wont to quench their torches when some Bellingham dame was borne up the steps in her gilded chair, in the days of good Queen Anne.

It was in a somewhat sobered frame of mind that we presently turned away and started homeward by way of Great Ormond Street. My companion was deeply thoughtful, relapsing for a while into that sombreness of manner that had so impressed me when I first met her. Nor was I without a certain sympathetic pensiveness; as if, from the great, silent house, the spirit of the vanished man had issued forth to bear us company.

But still it was a delightful walk, and I was sorry when at last we arrived at the entrance to Nevill’s Court, and Miss Bellingham halted and held out her hand.

‘Good-bye,’ she said; ‘and many, many thanks for your invaluable help. Shall I take the bag?’

‘If you want it. But I must take out the note-books.’

‘Why must you take them?’ she asked.

‘Why, haven’t I got to copy the notes out into long-hand?’

An expression of utter consternation spread over her face; in fact, she was so completely taken aback that she forgot to release my hand.

‘Heavens!’ she exclaimed. ‘How idiotic of me! But it is impossible, Doctor Berkeley! It will take you hours!’

‘It is perfectly possible, and it is going to be done; otherwise the notes would be useless. Do you want the bag?’

‘No, of course not. But I am positively appalled. Hadn’t you better give up the idea?’

‘And this is the end of our collaboration?’ I exclaimed tragically, giving her hand a final squeeze (whereby she became suddenly aware of its position, and withdrew it rather hastily). ‘Would you throw away a whole afternoon’s work? I won’t certainly; so, goodbye until to-morrow. I shall turn up in the reading-room as early as I can. You had better take the tickets. Oh, and you won’t forget a bin t the copy of the will for Doctor Thorndyke, will you?’

‘No; if my father agrees, you shall have it this evening.’

She took the tickets from me, and, thanking me yet again, retired into the court.

---

## VII. — JOHN BELLINGHAM’S WILL

THE task upon which I had embarked so light-heartedly, when considered in cold blood, did certainly appear, as Miss Bellingham had said, rather appalling. The result of two and a half hours’ pretty steady work at an average speed of nearly a hundred words a minute, would take some time to transcribe into long-hand; and if the notes were to be delivered punctually on the morrow, the sooner I got to work the better.

Recognising this truth, I lost no time, but, within five minutes of my arrival at the surgery, was seated at the writing-table with my copy before me busily converting the sprawling, inexpressive characters into good, legible round-hand.

The occupation was by no means unpleasant, apart from the fact that it was a labour of love; for the sentences, as I picked them up, were fragrant with the reminiscences of the gracious whisper in which they had first come to me. And then the matter itself was full of interest. I was gaining a fresh outlook on life, was crossing the threshold of a new world (which was her world); and so the occasional interruptions from the patients, while they gave me intervals of enforced rest, were far from welcome.

The evening wore on without any sign from Nevill’s Court, and I began to fear that Mr. Bellingham’s scruples had proved insurmountable. Not, I am afraid, that I was so much concerned for the copy of the will as for the possibility of a visit, no matter howsoever brief, from my fair employer; and when, on the stroke of half-past seven, the surgery door flew open with startling abruptness, my fears were allayed and my hopes shattered simultaneously. For it was Miss Oman who stalked in, holding out a blue foolscap envelope with a warlike air as if it were an ultimatum.

‘I’ve brought you this from Mr. Bellingham,’ she said. ‘There’s a note inside.’

‘May I read the note, Miss Oman?’ I asked.

‘Bless the man!’ she exclaimed. ‘What else would you do with it? Isn’t that what it’s brought for?’

I supposed it was; and, thanking her for her gracious permission, I glanced through the note—a few lines authorising me to show the copy of the will to Dr. Thorndyke. When I looked up from the paper I found her eyes fixed on me with an expression critical and rather disapproving.

‘You seem to be making yourself mighty agreeable in a certain quarter,’ she remarked.

‘I make myself universally agreeable. It is my nature to.’

‘Ha!’ she snorted.

‘Don’t you find me rather agreeable?’ I asked.

‘Oily,’ said Miss Oman. And then with a sour smile at the open notebooks, she remarked:

‘You’ve got some work to do now; quite a change for you.’

‘A delightful change, Miss Oman. “For Satan findeth”—but no doubt you are acquainted with the philosophical works of Dr. Watts?’

‘If you are referring to “idle hands”,’ she replied, ‘I’ll give you a bit of advice. Don’t you keep that hand idle any longer than is really necessary. I have my suspicions about that splint—oh, you know what I mean,’ and before I had time to reply, she had taken advantage of the entrance of a couple of patients to whisk out of the surgery with the abruptness that had distinguished her arrival.

The evening consultations were considered to be over by half-past eight; at which time Adolphus was wont with exemplary punctuality to close the outer door of the surgery. To-night he was not less prompt than usual; and having performed this, his last daily office, and turned down the surgery gas, he reported the fact and took his departure.

As his retreating footsteps died away and the slamming of the outer door announced his final disappearance, I sat up and stretched myself. The envelope containing the copy of the will lay on the table, and I considered it thoughtfully. It ought to be conveyed to Thorndyke with as little delay as possible, and, as it certainly could not be trusted out of my hands, it ought to be conveyed by me.

I looked at the notebooks. Nearly two hours' work had made a considerable impression on the matter that I had to transcribe, but still, a great deal of the task yet remained to be done. However, I reflected, I could put in a couple of hours or more before going to bed and there would be an hour or two to spare in the morning. Finally I locked the notebooks, open as they were, in the writing-table drawer, and slipping the envelope into my pocket, set out for the Temple.

The soft chime of the Treasury clock was telling out, in confidential tones, the third quarter as I rapped with my stick on the forbidding 'oak' of my friends' chambers. There was no response, nor had I perceived any gleam of light from the windows as I approached, and I was considering the advisability of trying the laboratory on the next floor, when footsteps on the stone stairs and familiar voices gladdened my ear.

'Hallo, Berkeley!' said Thorndyke, 'do we find you waiting like a Peri at the gates of Paradise? Polton is upstairs, you know, tinkering at one of his inventions. If you ever find the nest empty, you had better go up and bang at the laboratory door. He's always there in the evenings.'

'I haven't been waiting long,' said I, 'and I was just thinking of rousing him up when you came.'

'That was right,' said Thorndyke, turning up the gas. 'And what news do you bring? Do I see a blue envelope sticking out of your pocket?'

'You do.'

'Is it a copy of the will?' he asked.

I answered 'yes', and added that I had full permission to show it to him.

'What did I tell you?' exclaimed Jervis. 'Didn't I say that he would get the copy for us if it existed?'

'We admit the excellence of your prognosis,' said Thorndyke, 'but there is no need to be boastful. Have you read through the document, Berkeley?'

'No, I haven't taken it out of the envelope.'

'Then it will be equally new to us all, and we shall see if it tallies with your description.'

He placed three easy chairs at a convenient distance from the light, and Jervis, watching him with a smile, remarked:

'Now Thorndyke is going to enjoy himself. To him, a perfectly unintelligible will is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever; especially if associated with some kind of recondite knavery.'

'I don't know,' said I, 'that this will is particularly unintelligible. The mischief seems to be that it is rather too intelligible. However, here it is,' and I handed it over to Thorndyke.

'I suppose that we can depend on this copy,' said the latter, as he drew out the document and glanced at it. 'Oh, yes,' he added, 'I see it is copied by Godfrey Bellingham, compared with the original and certified correct. In that case I will get you to read it out slowly, Jervis, and I will make a rough copy for reference. Let us make ourselves comfortable and light our pipes before we begin.'

He provided himself with a writing-pad, and, when we had seated ourselves and got our pipes well alight, Jervis opened the document, and with a premonitory 'hem!' commenced the reading.

'In the name of God, Amen. This is the last will and testament of me John Bellingham of number 141 Queen Square in the parish of St George Bloomsbury London in the county of Middlesex Gentleman made this twenty-first day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety-two.

'1. I give and bequeath unto Arthur Jellicoe of number 184 New Square Lincoln's Inn London in the county of Middlesex Attorney-at-law the whole of my collection of seals and scarabs and those in my cabinets marked A, B, and D together with the contents thereof and the sum of two thousand pounds sterling free of legacy duty.

'Unto the trustees of the British Museum the residue of my collection of antiquities.

'Unto my cousin George Hurst of The Poplars Eltham in the county of Kent the sum of five thousand pounds free of legacy duty and unto my brother Godfrey Bellingham or if he should die before the occurrence of my death unto his daughter Ruth Bellingham the residue of my estate and effects real and personal subject to the conditions set forth hereinafter namely:

'2. That my body shall be deposited with those of my ancestors in the churchyard appertaining to the church and parish of St George the Martyr or if that shall not be possible in some other churchyard cemetery burial ground church or chapel or other authorised place for the reception of bodies of the dead situate within or appertaining to the parishes of St Andrew above the Bars and St George the Martyr or St George Bloomsbury and St Giles in the Fields. But if the condition in this clause be not carried out then

'3. I give and devise the said residue of my estate and effects unto my cousin George Hurst aforesaid and I hereby revoke

all wills and codicils made by me at any time heretofore and I appoint Arthur Jellicoe aforesaid to be the executor of this my will jointly with the principal beneficiary and residuary legatee that is to say with the aforesaid Godfrey Bellingham if the conditions set forth hereinbefore in clause 2 shall be duly carried out but with the aforesaid George Hurst if the said conditions in the said clause 2 be not carried out.

‘John Bellingham

‘Signed by the said testator John Bellingham in the presence of us present at the same time who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as witnesses.

‘Frederick Wilton, 16 Medford Road, London, N, clerk.

‘James Barber, 32 Wadbury Crescent, London, SW, clerk.’

‘Well,’ said Jervis, laying down the document as Thorndyke detached the last sheet from his writing-pad, ‘I have met with a good many idiotic wills, but this one can give them all points. I don’t see how it is ever going to be administered. One of the two executors is a mere abstraction—a sort of algebraical problem with no answer.’

‘I think that difficulty could be overcome,’ said Thorndyke.

‘I don’t see how,’ retorted Jervis. ‘If the body is deposited in a certain place, A is the executor; if it is somewhere else, B is the executor. But as you cannot produce the body, and no one has the least idea where it is, it is impossible to prove either that it is or that it is not in any specified place.’

‘You are magnifying the difficulty, Jervis,’ said Thorndyke. ‘The body may, of course, be anywhere in the entire world, but the place where it is lying is either inside or out the general boundary of those two parishes. If it has been deposited within the boundary of those two parishes, the fact must be ascertainable by examining the burial certificates issued since the date when the missing man was last seen alive and by consulting the registers of those specified places of burial. I think that if no record can be found of any such interment within the boundary of those two parishes, that fact will be taken by the Court as proof that no such interment has taken place, and that therefore the body must have been deposited somewhere else. Such a decision would constitute George Hurst the co-executor and residuary legatee.’

‘That is cheerful for your friends, Berkeley,’ Jervis remarked, ‘for we may take it as pretty certain that the body has not been deposited in any of the places named.’

‘Yes,’ I agreed gloomily, ‘I’m afraid there is very little doubt of that. But what an ass the fellow must have been to make such a to-do about his beastly carcass! What the deuce could it have mattered to him where it was dumped, when he had done with it?’

Thorndyke chuckled softly. ‘Thus the irreverent youth of to-day,’ said he. ‘But yours is hardly a fair comment, Berkeley. Our training makes us materialists, and puts us a little out of sympathy with those in whom primitive beliefs and emotions survive. A worthy priest who came to look at our dissecting-room expressed surprise to me that the students, thus constantly in the presence of relics of mortality, should be able to think of anything but the resurrection and the life hereafter. He was a bad psychologist. There is nothing so dead as a dissecting-room “subject”; and the contemplation of the human body in the process of being quietly taken to pieces—being resolved into its structural units like a worn-out clock or an old engine in the scrapper’s yard—is certainly not conducive to a vivid realisation of the doctrine of the resurrection.’

‘No; but this absurd anxiety to be buried in some particular place has nothing to do with religious belief; it is merely silly sentiment.’

‘It is sentiment, I admit,’ said Thorndyke, ‘but I wouldn’t call it silly. The feeling is so widespread in time and space that we must look on it with respect as something inherent in human nature. Think—as doubtless John Bellingham did—of the ancient Egyptians, whose chief aspiration was that of everlasting repose for the dead. See the trouble they took to achieve it. Think of the great Pyramid, or that of Amenemhat the Fourth with its labyrinth of false passages and its sealed and hidden sepulchral chambers. Think of Jacob, borne after death all those hundreds of weary miles in order that he might sleep with his fathers, and then remember Shakespeare and his solemn adjuration to posterity to let him rest undisturbed in his grave. No, Berkeley, it is not a silly sentiment. I am as indifferent as you as to what becomes of my body “when I have done with it,” to use your irreverent phrase; but I recognise the solicitude that some other men display on the subject as a natural feeling that has to be taken seriously.’

‘But even so,’ I said, ‘if this man had a hankering for a freehold residence in some particular bone-yard, he might have gone about the business in a more reasonable way.’

‘There I am entirely with you,’ Thorndyke replied. ‘It is the absurd way in which this provision is worded that not only creates all the trouble but also makes the whole document so curiously significant in view of the testator’s disappearance.’

‘How significant?’ Jervis demanded eagerly.

‘Let us consider the provisions of the will point by point,’ said Thorndyke; ‘and first note that the testator commanded the services of a very capable lawyer.’

‘But Mr. Jellicoe disapproved of the will,’ said I; ‘in fact, he protested strongly against the form of it.’

‘We will bear that in mind too,’ Thorndyke replied. ‘And now with reference to what we may call the contentious clauses:

the first thing that strikes us is their preposterous injustice. Godfrey's inheritance is made conditional on a particular disposal of the testator's body. But this is a matter not necessarily under Godfrey's control. The testator might have been lost at sea, or killed in a fire or explosion, or have died abroad and been buried where his grave could not have been identified. There are numerous probable contingencies besides the improbable one that has happened that might prevent the body from being recovered.

'But even if the body had been recovered, there is another difficulty. The places of burial in the parishes have all been closed for many years. It would be impossible to reopen any of them without a special faculty, and I doubt whether such a faculty would be granted. Possibly cremation might meet the difficulty, but even that is doubtful; and, in any case, the matter would not be in the control of Godfrey Bellingham. Yet, if the required interment should prove impossible, he is to be deprived of his legacy.'

'It is a monstrous and absurd injustice,' I exclaimed.

'It is,' Thorndyke agreed; 'but this is nothing to the absurdity that comes to light when we consider clauses two and three in detail. Observe that the testator presumably wished to be buried in a certain place; also he wished his brother should benefit under the will. Let us take the first point and see how he has set about securing the accomplishment of what he desired. Now if we read clauses two and three carefully, we shall see that he has rendered it virtually impossible that his wishes can be carried out. He desires to be buried in a certain place and makes Godfrey responsible for his being so buried. But he gives Godfrey no power or authority to carry out the provision, and places insuperable obstacles in his way. For until Godfrey is an executor, he has no power or authority to carry out the provisions; and until the provisions are carried out, he does not become an executor.'

'It is a preposterous muddle,' exclaimed Jervis.

'Yes, but that is not the worst of it,' Thorndyke continued. 'The moment John Bellingham dies, his dead body has come into existence; and it is "deposited", for the time being, wherever he happens to have died. But unless he should happen to have died in one of the places of burial mentioned—which is in the highest degree unlikely—his body will be, for the time being, "deposited" in some place other than those specified. In that case clause two is—for the time being—not complied with, and consequently George Hurst becomes, automatically, the co-executor.'

'But will George Hurst carry out the provisions of clause two? Probably not. Why should he? The will contains no instructions to that effect. It throws the whole duty on Godfrey. On the other hand, if he should carry out clause two, what happens? He ceases to be an executor and he loses some seventy thousand pounds. We may be pretty certain that he will do nothing of the kind. So that, on considering the two clauses, we see that the wishes of the testator could only be carried out in the unlikely event of his dying in one of the burial-places mentioned, or his body being conveyed immediately after death to p. public mortuary in one of the said parishes. In any other event, it is virtually certain that he will be buried in some place other than that which he desired, and that his brother will be left absolutely without provision or recognition.'

'John Bellingham could never have intended that,' I said.

'Clearly not,' agreed Thorndyke; 'the provisions of the will furnish internal evidence that he did not. You note that he bequeathed five thousand pounds to George Hurst, in the event of clause two being carried out; but he has made no bequest to his brother in the event of its not being carried out. Obviously, he had not entertained the possibility of this contingency at all. He assumed, as a matter of course, that the conditions of clause two would be fulfilled, and regarded the conditions themselves as a mere formality.'

'But,' Jervis objected, 'Jellicoe must have seen the danger of a miscarriage and pointed it out to his client.'

'Exactly,' said Thorndyke. 'There is the mystery. We understand that he objected strenuously, and that John Bellingham was obdurate. Now it is perfectly understandable that a man should adhere obstinately to the most stupid and perverse disposition of his property; but that a man should persist in retaining a particular form of words after it has been proved to him that the use of such form will almost certainly result in the defeat of his own wishes; that, I say, is a mystery that calls for very careful consideration.'

'If Jellicoe had been an interested party,' said Jervis, 'one would have suspected him of lying low. But the form of clause two doesn't affect him at all.'

'No,' said Thorndyke; 'the person who stands to profit by the muddle is George Hurst. But we understand that he was unacquainted with the terms of the will, and there is certainly nothing to suggest that he is in any way responsible for it.'

'The practical question is,' said I, 'what is going to happen? and what can be done for the Bellinghams?'

'The probability is,' Thorndyke replied, 'that the next move will be made by Hurst. He is the party immediately interested. He will probably apply to the Court for permission to presume death and administer the will.'

'And what will the Court do?'

Thorndyke smiled dryly. 'Now you are asking a very pretty conundrum. The decisions of Courts depend on idiosyncrasies of temperament that no one can foresee. But one may say that a Court does not lightly grant permission to presume death. There will be a rigorous inquiry—and a decidedly unpleasant one, I suspect—and the evidence will be reviewed by the judge with a strong predisposition to regard the testator as being still alive. On the other hand, the known facts point very distinctly to the probability that he is dead; and, if the will were less complicated and all the parties interested were

unanimous in supporting the application, I don't see why it might not be granted. But it will clearly be to the interest of Godfrey to oppose the application, unless he can show that the conditions of clause two have been complied with—which it is virtually certain he cannot; and he may be able to bring forward reasons for believing John to be still alive. But even if he is unable to do this, inasmuch as it is pretty clear that he was intended to be the chief beneficiary, his opposition is likely to have considerable weight with the Court.'

'Oh, is it?' I exclaimed eagerly. 'Then that accounts for a very peculiar proceeding on the part of Hurst. I have stupidly forgotten to tell you about it. He has been trying to come to a private agreement with Godfrey Bellingham.'

'Indeed!' said Thorndyke. 'What sort of agreement?'

'His proposal was this: that Godfrey should support him and Jellicoe in an application to the Court for permission to presume death and to administer the will, that if it was successful, Hurst should pay him four hundred pounds a year for life: the arrangement to hold good in all eventualities.'

'By which he means?'

'That if the body should be discovered at any future time, so that the conditions of clause two could be carried out, Hurst should still retain the property and continue to pay Godfrey the four hundred a year for life.'

'Hey, ho!' exclaimed Thorndyke; 'that is a queer proposal; a very queer proposal indeed.'

'Not to say fishy,' added Jervis. 'I don't fancy the Court would look with approval on that little arrangement.'

'The law does not look with much favour on any little arrangements that aim at getting behind the provisions of a will,' Thorndyke replied; 'though there would be nothing to complain of in this proposal if it were not for the reference to "all eventualities". If a will is hopelessly impracticable, it is not unreasonable or improper for the various beneficiaries to make such private arrangements among themselves as may seem necessary to avoid useless litigation and delay in administering the will. If, for instance, Hurst had proposed to pay four hundred a year to Godfrey so long as the body remained undiscovered on condition that, in the event of its discovery, Godfrey should pay him a like sum for life, there would have been nothing to comment upon. It would have been an ordinary sporting chance. But the reference to "all eventualities" is an entirely different matter. Of course, it may be mere greediness, but all the same it suggests some very curious reflections.'

'Yes, it does,' said Jervis. 'I wonder if he has any reason to expect that the body will be found? Of course it doesn't follow that he has. He may be merely taking the opportunity offered by the other man's poverty to make sure of the bulk of the property whatever happens. But it is uncommonly sharp practice, to say the least.'

'Do I understand that Godfrey declined the proposal?' Thorndyke asked.

'Yes, he did, very emphatically; and I fancy the two gentlemen proceeded to exchange opinions on the circumstances of the disappearance with more frankness than delicacy.'

'Ah,' said Thorndyke, 'that is a pity. If the case comes into Court, there is bound to be a good deal of unpleasant discussion and still more unpleasant comment in the newspapers. But if the parties themselves begin to express suspicions of one another there is no telling where the matter will end.'

'No, by Jove!' said Jervis. 'If they begin flinging accusations of murder about, the fat will be in the fire with a vengeance. That way lies the Old Bailey.'

'We must try to prevent them from making an unnecessary scandal,' said Thorndyke. 'It may be that an exposure will be unavoidable, and that must be ascertained in advance. But to return to your question, Berkeley, as to what is to be done. Hurst will probably make some move pretty soon. Do you know if Jellicoe will act with him?'

'No, he won't. He declines to take any steps without Godfrey's assent—at least, that is what he says at present. His attitude is one of correct neutrality.'

'That is satisfactory so far,' said Thorndyke, 'though he may alter his tone when the case comes into Court. From what you said just now I gathered that Jellicoe would prefer to have the will administered and be quit of the whole business; which is natural enough, especially as he benefits under the will to the extent of two thousand pounds and a valuable collection. Consequently, we may fairly assume that, even if he maintains an apparent neutrality, his influence will be exerted in favour of Hurst rather than of Bellingham; from which it follows that Bellingham ought certainly to be properly advised, and, when the case goes into Court, properly represented.'

'He can't afford either the one or the other,' said I. 'He's as poor as an insolvent church mouse and as proud as the devil. He wouldn't accept professional aid that he couldn't pay for.'

'H'm,' grunted Thorndyke, 'that's awkward. But we can't allow the case to go "by default", so to speak—to fail for the mere lack of technical assistance. Besides, it is one of the most interesting cases that I have ever met with, and I am not going to see it bungled. He couldn't object to a little general advice in a friendly, informal way—amicus curia, as old Brodribb is so fond of saying; and there is nothing to prevent us from pushing forward the preliminary inquiries.'

'Of what nature would they be?'

'Well, to begin with, we have to satisfy ourselves that the conditions of clause two have not been complied with: that

John Bellingham has not been buried within the parish boundaries mentioned. Of course he has not, but we must not take anything for granted. Then we have to satisfy ourselves that he is not still alive and accessible. It is perfectly possible that he is, after all, and it is our business to trace him, if he is still in the land of the living. Jervis and I can carry out these investigations without saying anything to Bellingham; my learned brother will look through the register of burials—not forgetting the cremations—in the metropolitan area, and I will take the other matter in hand.'

'You really think that John Bellingham may still be alive?' said I.

'Since his body has not been found, it is obviously a possibility. I think it in the highest degree improbable, but the improbable has to be investigated before it can be excluded.'

'It sounds rather a hopeless quest,' I remarked. 'How do you propose to begin?'

'I think of beginning at the British Museum. The people there may be able to throw some light on his movements. I know that there are some important excavations in progress at Heliopolis—in fact, the Director of the Egyptian Department is out there at the present moment; and Doctor Norbury, who is taking his place temporarily, is an old friend of Bellingham's. I shall call on him and try to discover if there is anything that might have induced Bellingham suddenly to go abroad—to Heliopolis, for instance. Also he may be able to tell me what it was that took the missing man to Paris on that last, rather mysterious journey. That might turn out to be an important clue. And meanwhile, Berkeley, you must endeavour tactfully to reconcile your friend to the idea of letting us give an eye to the case. Make it clear to him that I am doing this entirely for the enlargement of my own knowledge.'

'But won't you have to be instructed by a solicitor?' I asked.

'Yes, nominally; but only as a matter of etiquette. We shall do all the actual work. Why do you ask?'

'I was thinking of the solicitor's costs, and I was going to mention that I have a little money of my own—'

'Then you keep it, my dear fellow. You'll want it when you go into practice. There will be no difficulty about the solicitor; I shall ask one of my friends to act nominally as a personal favour to me—Marchmont would take the case for us, Jervis, I am sure.'

'Yes,' said Jervis. 'Or old Brodribb, if we put it to him *amicus curia*.'

'It is excessively kind of both of you to take this benevolent interest in the case of my friends,' I said; 'and it is to be hoped that they won't be foolishly proud and stiff-necked about it. It's rather the way with poor gentlefolk.'

'I'll tell you what!' exclaimed Jervis. 'I have a most brilliant idea. You shall give us a little supper at your rooms and invite the Bellinghams to meet us. Then you and I will attack the old gentleman, and Thorndyke shall exercise his persuasive powers on the lady. These chronic incurable old bachelors, you know, are quite irresistible.'

'You observe that my respected junior condemns me to lifelong celibacy,' Thorndyke remarked. 'But,' he added, 'his suggestion is quite a good one. Of course, we mustn't put any sort of pressure on Bellingham to employ us—for that is what it amounts to, even if we accept no payment—but a friendly talk over the supper-table would enable us to put the matter delicately and yet convincingly.'

'Yes,' said I, 'I see that, and I like the idea immensely. But it won't be possible for several days, because I've got a job that takes up all my spare time—and that I ought to be at work on now,' I added, with a sudden qualm at the way in which I had forgotten the passage of time in the interest of Thorndyke's analysis.

My two friends looked at me inquiringly and I felt it necessary to explain about the injured hand and the Tell el Amarna tablets; which I accordingly did rather shyly and with a nervous eye upon Jervis. The slow grin, however, for which I was watching, never came; on the contrary, he not only heard me through quite gravely, but when I had finished said with some warmth, and using my old hospital pet name:

'I'll say one thing for you, Polly; you're a good chum, and you always were. I hope your Nevill's Court friends appreciate the fact.'

'They are far more appreciative than the occasion warrants,' I answered. 'But to return to this question: how will this day week suit you?'

'It will suit me,' Thorndyke answered, with a glance at his junior.

'And me too,' said the latter; 'so, if it will do for the Bellinghams, we will consider it settled; but if they can't come, you must fix another night.'

'Very well,' I said, rising and knocking out my pipe, 'I will issue the invitation to-morrow. And now I must be off to have another slog at those notes.'

As I walked homewards I speculated cheerfully on the prospect of entertaining my friends under my own (or rather Barnard's) roof, if they could be lured out of their eremitical retirement. The idea had, in fact, occurred to me already, but I had been deterred by the peculiarities of Barnard's housekeeper. For Mrs. Gummer was one of those housewives who make up for an archaic simplicity of production by preparations on the most portentous and alarming scale. But this time I would not be deterred. If only the guests could be enticed into my humble lair it would be easy to furnish the raw materials of the feast from outside; and the consideration of ways and means occupied me pleasantly until I found myself once more



at my writing-table, confronted by my voluminous notes on the incidents of the North Syrian War.

---

## VIII. — A MUSEUM IDYLL

WHETHER it was that practice revived a forgotten skill on my part, or that Miss Bellingham had over-estimated the amount of work to be done, I am unable to say. But whichever may have been the explanation, the fact is that the fourth afternoon saw our task so nearly completed that I was fain to plead that a small remainder might be left over to form an excuse for yet one more visit to the reading-room.

Short, however, as had been the period of our collaboration, it had been long enough to produce a great change in our relations to one another. For there is no friendship so intimate and satisfying as that engendered by community of work, and none—between man and woman, at any rate—so frank and wholesome.

Every day had arrived to find a pile of books with the places duly marked and the blue-covered quarto notebooks in readiness. Every day we had worked steadily at the allotted task, had then handed in the books and gone forth together to enjoy a most companionable tea in the milk-shop; thereafter to walk home by way of Queen Square, talking over the day's work and discussing the state of the world in the far-off days when Ahkhenaten was king and the Tell el Amarna tablets were a-writing.

It had been a pleasant time, so pleasant, that as I handed in the books for the last time, I sighed to think that it was over; that not only was the task finished, but that the recovery of my fair patient's hand, from which I had that morning removed the splint, had put an end to the need of my help.

'What shall we do?' I asked, as we came out into the central hall. 'It is too early for tea. Shall we go and look at some of the galleries?'

'Why not?' she answered. 'We might look over some of the things connected with what we have been doing. For instance, there is a relief of Ahkhenaten upstairs in the Third Egyptian Room; we might go and look at it.'

I fell in eagerly with the suggestion, placing myself under her experienced guidance, and we started by way of the Roman Gallery, past the long row of extremely commonplace and modern-looking Roman Emperors.

'I don't know,' she said, pausing for a moment opposite a bust labelled 'Trajan' (but obviously a portrait of Phil May), 'how I am ever even to thank you for all that you have done, to say nothing of repayment.'

'There is no need to do either,' I replied. 'I have enjoyed working with you so I have had my reward. But still,' I added, 'if you want to do me a great kindness, you have it in your power.'

'How?'

'In connection with my friend, Doctor Thorndyke. I told you he was an enthusiast. Now he is, for some reason, most keenly interested in everything relating to your uncle, and I happen to know that, if any legal proceedings should take place, he would very much like to keep a friendly eye on the case.'

'And what do you want me to do?'

'I want you, if an opportunity should occur for him to give your father advice or help of any kind, to use your influence with your father in favour of, rather than in opposition to, his accepting it—always assuming that you have no real feeling against his doing so.'

Miss Bellingham looked at me thoughtfully for a few moments, and then laughed softly.

'So the great kindness that I am to do you is to let you do me a further kindness through your friend!'

'No,' I protested; 'that is where you are mistaken. It isn't benevolence on Doctor Thorndyke's part; it's professional enthusiasm.'

She smiled sceptically.

'You don't believe in it,' I said; 'but consider other cases. Why does a surgeon get out of bed on a winter's night to do an emergency operation at a hospital? He doesn't get paid for it. Do you think it is altruism?'

'Yes, of course. Isn't it?'

'Certainly not. He does it because it is his job, because it is his business to fight with disease—and win.'

'I don't see much difference,' she said. 'It's work done for love instead of for payment. However, I will do as you ask if the opportunity arises; but I shan't suppose that I am repaying your kindness to me.'

'I don't mind so long as you do it,' I said, and we walked on for some time in silence.

'Isn't it odd,' she said presently, 'how our talk always seems to come back to my uncle? Oh, and that reminds me that the things he gave to the Museum are in the same room as the Ahkhenaten relief. Would you like to see them?'

'Of course I should.'

'Then we will go and look at them first.' She paused, and then, rather shyly and with a rising colour, she continued: 'And

I think I should like to introduce you to a very dear friend of mine—with your permission, of course.’

This last addition she made hastily, seeing, I suppose, that I looked rather glum at the suggestion. Inwardly I consigned her friend to the devil, especially if of the masculine gender; outwardly I expressed my felicity at making the acquaintance of any person whom she should honour with her friendship. Whereat, to my discomfiture, she laughed enigmatically; a very soft laugh, low-pitched and musical, like the cooing of a glorified pigeon.

I strolled on by her side, speculating a little anxiously on the coming introduction. Was I being conducted to the lair of one of the servants attached to the establishment? and would he add a superfluous third to our little party of two, so complete and companionable, *solus cum sola*, in this populated wilderness? Above all, would he turn out to be a young man, and bring my aerial castles tumbling about my ears. The shy look and the blush with which she had suggested the introduction were ominous indications, upon which I mused gloomily as we ascended the stairs and passed through the wide doorway. I glanced apprehensively at my companion, and met a quiet, inscrutable smile; and at that moment she halted opposite a wall-case and faced me.

‘This is my friend,’ she said. ‘Let me present you to Artemidorus, late of the Fayyum. Oh, don’t smile!’ she pleaded. ‘I am quite serious. Have you never heard of pious Catholics who cherish a devotion to some long-departed saint? That is my feeling towards Artemidorus, and if you only knew what comfort he has shed into the heart of a lonely woman; what a quiet, unobtrusive friend he has been to me in my solitary, friendless days, always ready with a kindly greeting on his gentle, thoughtful face, you would like him for that alone. And I want you to like him and to share our silent friendship. Am I very silly, very sentimental?’

A wave of relief swept over me, and the mercury of my emotional thermometer, which had shrunk almost into the bulb, leaped up to summer heat. How charming it was of her and how sweetly intimate, to wish to share this mystical friendship with me! And what a pretty conceit it was, too, and how like this strange, inscrutable maiden, to come here and hold silent converse with this long-departed Greek. And the pathos of it all touched me deeply amidst the joy of this new-born intimacy.

‘Are you scornful?’ she asked, with a shade of disappointment, as I made no reply.

‘No, indeed I am not,’ I answered earnestly. ‘I want to make you aware of my sympathy and my appreciation without offending you by seeming to exaggerate, and I don’t know how to express it.’ Oh, never mind about the expression, so long as you feel it. I thought you would understand,’ and she gave me a smile that made me tingle to my finger-tips.

We stood awhile gazing in silence at the mummy—for such, indeed, was her friend Artemidorus. But not an ordinary mummy. Egyptian in form, it was entirely Greek in feeling; and brightly coloured as it was, in accordance with the racial love of colour, the tasteful refinement with which the decoration of the case was treated made those around look garish and barbaric. But the most striking feature was a charming panel picture which occupied the place of the usual mask. This painting was a revelation to me. Except that it was executed in tempera instead of oil, it differed in no respect from modern work. There was nothing archaic or ancient about it. With its freedom of handling and its correct rendering of light and shade, it might have been painted yesterday; indeed, enclosed in an ordinary gilt frame, it might have passed without remark in an exhibition of modern portraits.

Miss Bellingham observed my admiration and smiled approvingly.

‘It is a charming little portrait, isn’t it?’ she said; ‘and such a sweet face too; so thoughtful and human, with a shade of melancholy. But the whole thing is full of charm. I fell in love with it the first time I saw it. And it is so Greek!’

‘Yes, it is, in spite of the Egyptian gods and symbols.’

‘Rather because of them, I think,’ said she. ‘There we have the typical Greek attitude, the genial, cultivated eclecticism that appreciated the fitness of even the most alien forms of art. There is Anubis standing beside the bier; there are Isis and Nephthys, and there below Horus and Tahuti. But we can’t suppose Artemidorus worshipped or believed in those gods. They are there because they are splendid decoration and perfectly appropriate in character. The real feeling of those who loved the dead man breaks out in the inscription.’ She pointed to a band below the pectoral, where, in gilt capital letters, was written the two words, (Greek).’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘it is very dignified and very human.’

‘And so sincere and full of real emotion,’ she added. ‘I find it unspeakably touching. “O Artemidorus, farewell!” There is the real note of human grief, the sorrow of eternal parting. How much finer it is than the vulgar boastfulness of the Semitic epitaphs, or our own miserable, insincere make-believe of the “Not lost but gone before” type. He has gone from them for ever; they would look on his face and hear his voice no more; they realised that this was their last farewell. Oh, there is a world of love and sorrow in those two simple words!’

For some time neither of us spoke. The glamour of this touching memorial of a long-buried grief had stolen over me, and I was content to stand silent by my beloved companion and revive, with a certain pensive pleasure, the ghosts of human emotions over which the many centuries had rolled. Presently she turned to me with a frank smile. ‘You have been weighed in the balance of friendship,’ she said, ‘and not found wanting. You have the gift of sympathy, even with a woman’s sentimental fancies.’

I suspected that a good many men would have developed this precious quality under the circumstances, but I refrained from saying so. There is no use in crying down one’s own wares. I was glad enough to have earned her good opinion so

easily, and when she at length turned away from the case and passed through into the adjoining room, it was a very complacent young man who bore her company.

'Here is Ahkhenaten—or Khu-en-aten, as the authorities here render the hieroglyphics. She indicated a fragment of a coloured relief labelled: 'Portion of a painted stone tablet with a portrait figure of Amenhotep IV, and we stopped to look at the frail, effeminate figure of the great king, with his large cranium, his queer, pointed chin, and the Aten rays stretching out their weird hands as if caressing him.

'We mustn't stay here if you want to see my uncle's gift, because this room closes at four to-day.' With this admonition she moved on to the other end of the room, where she halted before a large floor-case containing a mummy and a large number of other objects. A black label with white lettering set forth the various contents with a brief explanation as follows:

'Mummy of Sebekhotep, a scribe of the twenty-second dynasty, together with the objects found in the tomb. These include the four Canopic jars, in which the internal organs were deposited, the Ushabti figures, tomb provisions and various articles that had belonged to the deceased; his favourite chair, his head-rest, his ink-palette, inscribed with his name and the name of the king, Osorkon I, in whose reign he lived, and other smaller articles. Presented by John Bellingham, Esq.'

'They have put all the objects together in one case,' Miss Bellingham explained, 'to show the contents of an ordinary tomb of the better class. You see that the dead man was provided with all his ordinary comforts: provisions, furniture, the ink-palette that he had been accustomed to use in writing on papyri, and a staff of servants to wait on him.'

'Where are the servants?' I asked.

'The little Ushabti figures,' she answered; 'they were the attendants of the dead, you know, his servants in the underworld. It was a quaint idea, wasn't it? But it was all very complete and consistent, and quite reasonable, too, if one once accepts the belief in the persistence of the individual apart from the body.'

'Yes,' I agreed, 'and that is the only fair way to judge a religious system, by taking the main beliefs for granted. But what a business it must have been, bringing all these things from Egypt to London.'

'It was worth the trouble, though, for it is a fine and instructive collection. And the work is all very good of its kind. You notice that the Ushabti figures and the heads that form the stoppers of the Canopic jars are quite finely modelled. The mummy itself, too, is rather handsome, though that coat of bitumen on the back doesn't improve it. But Sebekhotep must have been a fine-looking man.'

'The mask on the face is a portrait, I suppose?'

'Yes; in fact, it's rather more. To some extent it is the actual face of the man himself. This mummy is enclosed in what is called a cartonnage, that is a case moulded on the figure. The cartonnage was formed of a number of layers of linen or papyrus united by glue or cement, and when the case had been fitted to a mummy it was moulded to the body, so that the general form of the features and limbs was often apparent. After the cement was dry the case was covered with a thin layer of stucco and the face modelled more completely, and then decorations and inscriptions were painted on. So that, you see, in a cartonnage, the body was sealed up like a nut in its shell, unlike the more ancient forms in which the mummy was merely rolled up and enclosed in a wooden coffin.'

At this moment there smote upon our ears a politely protesting voice announcing in sing-song tones that it was closing time; and simultaneously a desire for tea suggested the hospitable milk-shop. With leisurely dignity that ignored the official who shepherded us along the galleries, we made our way to the entrance, still immersed in conversation on matters sepulchral.

It was rather earlier than our usual hour for leaving the Museum and, moreover, it was our last day—for the present. Wherefore we lingered over our tea to an extent that caused the milk-shop lady to view us with some disfavour, and when at length we started homeward, we took so many short cuts that six o'clock found us no nearer our destination than Lincoln's Inn Fields; whither we had journeyed by a slightly indirect route that traversed (among other places) Russell Square, Red Lion Square, with the quaint passage of the same name, Bedford Row, Jockey's Fields, Hand Court, and Great Turnstile.

It was in the latter thoroughfare that our attention was attracted by a flaming poster outside a newsvendor's bearing the startling inscription:

MORE MEMENTOES  
OF MURDERED MAN  
,

Miss Bellingham glanced at the poster and shuddered.

'Horrible, isn't it?' she said. 'Have you read about them?'

'I haven't been noticing the papers the last few days,' I replied.

'No, of course you haven't. You've been slaving at those wretched notes. We don't very often see the papers, at least we

don't take them in, but Miss Oman has kept us supplied during the last day or two. She is a perfect little ghoul; she delights in horrors of every kind, and the more horrible the better.'

'But,' I asked, 'what is it they have found?'

'Oh, they are the remains of some poor creature who seems to have been murdered and cut into pieces. It is dreadful. It made me shudder to read of it, for I couldn't help thinking of poor Uncle John, and, as for my father, he was really quite upset.'

'Are these the bones that were found in a watercress-bed at Sidcup?'

'Yes, but they have found several more. The police have been most energetic. They seem to have been making a systematic search, and the result has been that they have discovered several portions of the body, scattered about in very widely separated places—Sidcup, Lee, St Mary Cray; and yesterday it was reported that an arm had been found in one of the ponds called "the Cuckoo Pits," close to our old home.'

'What! in Essex?' I exclaimed.

'Yes, in Epping Forest, quite near Woodford. Isn't it dreadful to think of it? They were probably hidden when we were living there. I think it was that that horrified my father so much. When he read it he was so upset that he gathered up the whole bundle of newspapers and tossed them out of the window; and they blew over the wall, and poor Miss Oman had to rush and pursue them up the court.'

'Do you think he suspects that these remains may be those of your uncle?'

'I think so, though he has said nothing to that effect, and, of course, I have not made any suggestion to him. We always preserve the fiction between ourselves of believing that Uncle John is still alive.'

'But you don't think he is, do you?'

'No, I'm afraid I don't; and I feel pretty sure that my father doesn't think so either, but he doesn't like to admit it to me.'

'Do you happen to remember what bones have been found?'

'No, I don't. I know that an arm was found in the Cuckoo Pits, and I think a thigh-bone was dredged up out of a pond near St Mary Cray. But Miss Oman will be able to tell you all about it, if you are interested. She will be delighted to meet a kindred spirit,' Miss Bellingham added, with a smile.

'I don't know that I claim spiritual kinship with a ghoul,' said I; 'especially such a very sharp-tempered ghoul.'

'Oh, don't disparage her, Doctor Berkeley!' Miss Bellingham pleaded. 'She isn't really bad-tempered; only a little prickly on the surface. I oughtn't to have called her a ghoul; she is just the sweetest, most affectionate, most unselfish little angelic human hedgehog that you could find if you travelled the wide world through. Do you know that she has been working her fingers to the bone making an old dress of mine presentable because she is so anxious that I shall look nice at your little supper party.'

'You are sure to do that, in any case,' I said; 'but I withdraw my remark as to her temper unreservedly. And I really didn't mean it, you know; I have always liked the little lady.'

'That's right; and now won't you come in and have a few minutes' chat with my father? We are quite early in spite of the short cuts.'

I accepted readily, and the more so inasmuch as I wanted a few words with Miss Oman on the subject of catering and did not want to discuss it before my friends. Accordingly I went and gossiped with Mr. Bellingham, chiefly about the work we had done at the Museum, until it was time for me to return to the surgery.

Having taken my leave, I walked down the stairs with reflective slowness and as much creaking of my boots as I could manage; with the result, hopefully anticipated, that as I approached the door of Miss Oman's room it opened and the lady's head protruded.

'I'd change my cobbler if I were you,' she said.

I thought of the 'angelic human hedgehog', and nearly sniggered in her face.

'I am sure you would, Miss Oman, instantly; though, mind you, the poor fellow can't help his looks.'

'You are a very flippant young man,' she said severely. Whereat I grinned, and she regarded me silently with a baleful glare. Suddenly I remembered my mission and became serious and sober.

'Miss Oman,' I said, 'I very much want to take your advice on a matter of some importance—to me, at least.' (That ought to fetch her, I thought. The 'advice fly'—strangely neglected by Izaak Walton—is guaranteed to kill in any weather.) And it did fetch her. She rose in a flash and gorged it, cock's feathers, worsted body and all.

'What is it about?' she asked eagerly. 'But don't stand out here where everybody can hear but me. Come in and sit down.'

Now I didn't want to discuss the matter here, and, besides, there was not time. I therefore assumed an air of mystery.

'I can't, Miss Oman. I'm due at the surgery now. But if you should be passing and should have a few minutes to spare, I should be greatly obliged if you would look in. I really don't quite know how to act.'

'No, I expect not. Men very seldom do. But you're better than most, for you know when you are in difficulties and have the sense to consult a woman. But what is it about? Perhaps I might be thinking it over.'

'Well, you know,' I began evasively, 'it's a simple matter, but I can't very well—no, by Jove!' I added, looking at my watch, 'I must run, or I shall keep the multitude waiting.' And with this I bustled away, leaving her literally dancing with curiosity.

---

## IX. — THE SPHINX OF LINCOLN'S INN

AT the age of twenty-six one cannot claim to have attained to the position of a person of experience. Nevertheless, the knowledge of human nature accumulated in that brief period sufficed to make me feel confident that, at some time during the evening, I should receive a visit from Miss Oman. And circumstances justified my confidence; for the clock yet stood at two minutes to seven when a premonitory tap at the surgery door heralded her arrival.

'I happened to be passing,' she explained, and I forbore to smile at the coincidence, 'so I thought I might as well drop in and hear what you wanted to ask me about.'

She seated herself in the patients' chair and laying a bundle of newspapers on the table, glared at me expectantly.

'Thank you, Miss Oman,' said I. 'It is very good of you to look in on me. I am ashamed to give you all this trouble about such a trifling matter.'

She rapped her knuckles impatiently on the table.

'Never mind about the trouble,' she exclaimed tartly. 'What—is—it—that—you—want—to—ask—me about?'

I stated my difficulties in respect of the supper-party, and, as I proceeded, an expression of disgust and disappointment spread over her countenance.

'I don't see why you need have been so mysterious about it,' she said glumly.

'I didn't mean to be mysterious; I was only anxious not to make a mess of the affair. It's all very fine to assume a lofty scorn of the pleasures of the table, but there is great virtue in a really good feed, especially when low-living and high-thinking have been the order of the day.'

'Coarsely put,' said Miss Oman, 'but perfectly true.'

'Very well. Now, if I leave the management to Mrs. Gummer, she will probably provide a tepid Irish stew with flakes of congealed fat on it, and a plastic suet-pudding or something of that kind, and turn the house upside down in getting it ready. So I thought of having a cold spread and getting the things from outside. But I don't want it to look as if I had been making enormous preparations.'

'They won't think the things came down from heaven,' said Miss Oman.

'No, I suppose they won't. But you know what I mean. Now, where do you advise me to go for the raw materials of conviviality?'

Miss Oman reflected. 'You had better let me do your shopping and manage the whole business,' was her final verdict.

This was precisely what I wanted, and I accepted thankfully, regardless of the feelings of Mrs. Gummer. I handed her two pounds, and, after some protests at my extravagance, she bestowed them in her purse; a process that occupied time, since that receptacle, besides being a sort of miniature Record Office of frayed and time-stained bills, already bulged with a lading of draper's samples, ends of tape, a card of linen buttons, another of hooks and eyes, a lump of beeswax, a rat-eaten stump of lead-pencil, and other trifles that I have forgotten. As she closed the purse at the imminent risk of wrenching off its fastenings she looked at me severely and pursed her lips.

'You're a very plausible young man,' she remarked.

'What makes you say that?' I asked.

'Philandering about museums,' she continued, 'with handsome young ladies on the pretence of work. Work, indeed! Oh, I heard her telling her father about it. She thinks you were perfectly enthralled by the mummies and dried cats and chunks of stone and all the other trash. She doesn't know what humbugs men are.'

'Really, Miss Oman—' I began.

'Oh, don't talk to me!' she snapped. 'I can see it all. You can't impose upon me. I can see you staring into those glass cases, egging her on to talk and listening open-mouthed and bulging-eyed and sitting at her feet—now, didn't you?'

'I don't know about sitting at her feet,' I said, 'though it might easily have come to that with those infernal slippery floors; but I had a very jolly time, and I mean to go again if I can. Miss Bellingham is the cleverest and most accomplished woman I have ever spoken to.'

This was a poser for Miss Oman, whose admiration and loyalty, I knew, were only equalled by my own. She would have liked to contradict me, but the thing was impossible. To cover her defeat she snatched up the bundle of newspapers and began to open them out.

‘What sort of stuff is “hibernation”?’ she demanded suddenly.

‘Hibernation!’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes. They found a patch of it on a bone that was discovered in a pond at St Mary Cray, and a similar patch on one that was found at some other place in Essex. Now, I want to know what “hibernation” is.’

‘You must mean “eburnation,”’ I said, after a moment’s reflection.

‘The newspapers say “hibernation,” and I suppose they know what they are talking about. If you don’t know what it is, don’t be ashamed to say so.’

‘Well, then, I don’t.’

‘In that case you had better read the papers and find out,’ she said, a little illogically. And then: ‘Are you fond of murders? I am, awfully.’

‘What a shocking little ghoul you must be!’ I exclaimed.

She stuck out her chin at me. ‘I’ll trouble you,’ she said, ‘to be a little more respectful in your language. Do you realise that I am old enough to be your mother?’

‘Impossible!’ I ejaculated.

‘Fact,’ said Miss Oman.

‘Well, anyhow,’ said I, ‘age is not the only qualification. And besides, you are too late for the billet. The vacancy’s filled.’

Miss Oman slapped the papers down on the table and rose abruptly.

‘You had better read the papers and see if you can learn a little sense,’ she said severely as she turned to go. ‘Oh, and don’t forget the finger!’ she added eagerly. ‘That is really thrilling.’

‘The finger?’ I repeated.

‘Yes. They found a hand with one missing. The police think it is an important clue. I don’t know what they mean; but you read the account and tell me what you think.’

With this parting injunction she bustled out through the surgery, and I followed to bid her a ceremonious adieu on the doorstep. I watched her little figure tripping with quick, bird-like steps down Fetter Lane, and was about to turn back into the surgery when my attention was attracted by the evolutions of an elderly gentleman on the opposite side of the street. He was a somewhat peculiar-looking man, tall, gaunt, and bony, and the way in which he carried his head suggested to the medical mind a pronounced degree of near sight and a pair of deep spectacle glasses. Suddenly he espied me and crossed the road with his chin thrust forward and a pair of keen blue eyes directed at me through the centres of his spectacles.

‘I wonder if you can and will help me,’ said he, with a courteous salute. ‘I wish to call on an acquaintance, and I have forgotten his address. It is in some court, but the name of that court has escaped me for the moment. My friend’s name is Bellingham. I suppose you don’t chance to know it? Doctors know a great many people, as a rule.’

‘Do you mean Mr. Godfrey Bellingham?’

‘Ah! Then you do know him. I have not consulted the oracle in vain. He is a patient of yours, no doubt?’

‘A patient and personal friend. His address is Forty-nine Nevill’s Court.’

‘Thank you, thank you. Oh, and as you are a friend, perhaps you can inform me as to the customs of the household. I am not expected, and I do not wish to make an untimely visit. What are Mr. Bellingham’s habits as to his evening meal? Would this be a convenient time to call?’

‘I generally make my evening visits a little later than this—say about half-past eight; they have finished their meal by then.’

‘Ah! Half-past eight, then? Then I suppose I had better take a walk until that time. I don’t want to disturb them.’

‘Would you care to come in and smoke a cigar until it is time to make your call? If you would, I could walk over with you and show you the house.’

‘That is very kind of you,’ said my new acquaintance, with an inquisitive glance at me through his spectacles. ‘I think I should like to sit down. It’s a dull affair, mooning about the streets, and there isn’t time to go back to my chambers—in Lincoln’s Inn.’

‘I wonder,’ said I, as I ushered him into the room lately vacated by Miss Oman, ‘if you happen to be Mr. Jellicoe?’

He turned his spectacles full on me with a keen, suspicious glance. ‘What makes you think I am Mr. Jellicoe?’ he asked.

‘Oh, only that you live in Lincoln’s Inn.’

‘Ha! I see. I live in Lincoln’s Inn; Mr. Jellicoe lives in Lincoln’s Inn; therefore I am Mr. Jellicoe. Ha! ha! Bad logic, but a correct conclusion. Yes, I am Mr. Jellicoe. What do you know about me?’

‘Mighty little, excepting that you were the late John Bellingham’s man of business.’

'The "late John Bellingham," hey! How do you know he is the late John Bellingham?'

'As a matter of fact, I don't; only I rather understood that that was your own belief.'

'You understood! Now from whom did you "understand" that? From Godfrey Bellingham? H'm! And how did he know what I believe? I never told him. It is a very unsafe thing, my dear sir, to expound another man's beliefs.'

'Then you think that John Bellingham is alive?'

'Do I? Who said so? I did not, you know.'

'But he must be either dead or alive.'

'There,' said Mr. Jellicoe, 'I am entirely with you. You have stated an undeniable truth.'

'It is not a very illuminating one, however,' I replied, laughing.

'Undeniable truths often are not,' he retorted. 'They are apt to be extremely general. In fact, I would affirm that the certainty of the truth of a given proposition is directly proportional to its generality.'

'I suppose that is so,' said I.

'Undoubtedly. Take an instance from your own profession. Given a million normal human beings under twenty, and you can say with certainty that a majority of them will die before reaching a certain age, that they will die in certain circumstances and of certain diseases. Then take a single unit from that million, and what can you predict concerning him? Nothing. He may die to-morrow; he may live to be a couple of hundred. He may die of a cold in the head or a cut finger, or from falling off the cross of St Paul's. In a particular case you can predict nothing.'

'That is perfectly true,' said I. And then realising that I had been led away from the topic of John Bellingham, I ventured to return to it.

'That was a very mysterious affair—the disappearance of John Bellingham, I mean.'

'Why mysterious?' asked Mr. Jellicoe. 'Men disappear from time to time, and when they reappear, the explanations that they give (when they give any) seem more or less adequate.'

'But the circumstances were surely rather mysterious.'

'What circumstances?' asked Mr. Jellicoe.

'I mean the way in which he vanished from Mr. Hurst's house.'

'In what way did he vanish from it?'

'Well, of course, I don't know.'

'Precisely. Neither do I. Therefore I can't say whether that way was a mysterious one or not.'

'It is not even certain that he did leave it,' I remarked, rather recklessly.

'Exactly,' said Mr. Jellicoe. 'And if he did not, he is there still. And if he is there still, he has not disappeared—in the sense understood. And if he has not disappeared, there is no mystery.'

I laughed heartily, but Mr. Jellicoe preserved a wooden solemnity and continued to examine me through his spectacles (which I, in my turn, inspected and estimated at about minus five dioptries). There was something highly diverting about this grim lawyer, with his dry contentedness and almost farcical caution. His ostentatious reserve encouraged me to ply him with fresh questions, the more indiscreet the better.

'I suppose,' said I, 'that, under these circumstances, you would hardly favour Mr. Hurst's proposal to apply for permission to presume death?'

'Under what circumstances?' he inquired.

'I was referring to the doubt you have expressed as to whether John Bellingham is, after all, really dead.'

'My dear sir,' said he, 'I fail to see your point. If it were certain that the man was alive, it would be impossible to presume that he was dead; and if it were certain that he was dead, presumption of death would still be impossible. You do not presume a certainty. The uncertainty is of the essence of the transaction.'

'But,' I persisted, 'if you really believe that he may be alive, I should hardly have thought that you would take the responsibility of presuming his death and dispersing his property.'

'I don't,' said Mr. Jellicoe. 'I take no responsibility. I act in accordance with the decision of the Court and have no choice in the matter.'

'But the Court may decide that he is dead and he may nevertheless be alive.'

'Not at all. If the Court decides that he is presumably dead, then he is presumably dead. As a mere irrelevant, physical circumstance he may, it is true, be alive. But legally speaking, and for testamentary purposes, he is dead. You fail to perceive the distinction, no doubt?'

'I am afraid I do,' I admitted.

'Yes; the members of your profession usually do. That is what makes them such bad witnesses in a court of law. The scientific outlook is radically different from the legal. The man of science relies on his own knowledge and observation and judgment, and disregards testimony. A man comes to you and tells you he is blind in one eye. Do you accept his statement? Not in the least. You proceed to test his eyesight with some infernal apparatus of coloured glasses, and you find that he can see perfectly well with both eyes. Then you decide that he is not blind in one eye; that is to say, you reject his testimony in favour of facts of your own ascertaining.'

'But surely that is the rational method of coming to a conclusion?'

'In science, no doubt. Not in law. A court of law must decide according to the evidence which is before it; and that evidence is of the nature of sworn testimony. If a witness is prepared to swear that black is white and no evidence to the contrary is offered, the evidence before the Court is that black is white, and the Court must decide accordingly. The judge and the jury may think otherwise—they may even have private knowledge to the contrary—but they have to decide according to the evidence.'

'Do you mean to say that a judge would be justified in giving a decision which he knew to be contrary to the facts? Or that he might sentence a man whom he knew to be innocent?'

'Certainly. It has been done. There is a case of a judge who sentenced a man to death and allowed the execution to take place, notwithstanding that he—the judge—had actually seen the murder committed by another man. But that was carrying correctness of procedure to the verge of pedantry.'

'It was, with a vengeance,' I agreed. 'But to return to the case of John Bellingham. Supposing that after the Court has decided that he is dead he should return alive? What then?'

'Ah! It would then be his turn to make an application, and the Court, having fresh evidence laid before it, would probably decide that he was alive.'

'And meantime his property would have been dispersed?'

'Probably. But you will observe that the presumption of death would have arisen out of his own proceedings. If a man acts in such a way as to create a belief that he is dead, he must put up with the consequences.'

'Yes, that is reasonable enough,' said I. And then, after a pause, I asked: 'Is there any immediate likelihood of proceedings of the kind being commenced?'

'I understood from what you said just now that Mr. Hurst was contemplating some action of the kind. No doubt you had your information from a reliable quarter.' This answer Mr. Jellicoe delivered without moving a muscle, regarding me with the fixity of a spectacled figurehead.

I smiled feebly. The operation of pumping Mr. Jellicoe was rather like the sport of boxing with a porcupine, being chiefly remarkable as a demonstration of the power of passive resistance. I determined, however, to make one more effort, rather, I think, for the pleasure of witnessing his defensive manoeuvres than with the expectation of getting anything out of him. I accordingly 'opened out' on the subject of the 'remains.'

'Have you been following these remarkable discoveries of human bones that have been appearing in the papers?' I asked.

He looked at me stonily for some moments, and then replied:

'Human bones are rather more within your province than mine, but, now that you mention it, I think I recall having read of some such discoveries. They were disconnected bones, I believe.'

'Yes; evidently parts of a dismembered body.'

'So I should suppose. No, I have not followed the accounts. As we get on in life our interests tend to settle into grooves, and my groove is chiefly connected with conveyancing. These discoveries would be of more interest to a criminal lawyer.'

'I thought you might, perhaps, have connected them with the disappearance of your client?'

'Why should I? What could be the nature of the connection?'

'Well,' I said, 'these are the bones of a man—'

'Yes; and my client was a man with bones. That is a connection, certainly, though not a very specific or distinctive one. But perhaps you had something more particular in your mind?'

'I had,' I replied. 'The fact that some of the bones were actually found on land belonging to your client seemed to me rather significant.'

'Did it, indeed?' said Mr. Jellicoe. He reflected for a few moments, gazing steadily at me the while, and then continued: 'In that I am unable to follow you. It would have seemed to me that the finding of human remains upon a certain piece of land might conceivably throw a *prima facie* suspicion upon the owner or occupant of the land as being the person who deposited them. But the case that you suggest is the one case in which this would be impossible. A man cannot deposit his own dismembered remains.'

'No, of course not. I was not suggesting that he deposited them himself, but merely that the fact of their being deposited on his land, in a way, connected these remains with him.'



‘Again,’ said Mr. Jellicoe, ‘I fail to follow you, unless you are suggesting that it is customary for murderers who mutilate bodies to be punctilious in depositing the dismembered remains upon land belonging to their victims. In which case I am sceptical as to your facts. I am not aware of the existence of any such custom. Moreover, it appears that only a portion of the body was deposited on Mr. Bellingham’s land, the remaining portions having been scattered broadcast over a wide area. How does that agree with your suggestion?’

‘It doesn’t, of course,’ I admitted. ‘But there is another fact that I think you will admit to be more significant. The first remains that were discovered were found at Sidcup. Now, Sidcup is close to Eltham; and Eltham is the place where Mr. Bellingham was last seen alive.’

‘And what is the significance of this? Why do you connect the remains with one locality rather than the various other localities in which other portions of the body were found?’

‘Well,’ I replied, rather gravelled by this very pertinent question, ‘the appearances seem to suggest that the person who deposited these remains started from the neighbourhood of Eltham, where the missing man was last seen.’

Mr. Jellicoe shook his head. ‘You appear,’ said he, ‘to be confusing the order of deposition with the order of discovery. What evidence is there that the remains found at Sidcup were deposited before those found elsewhere?’

‘I don’t know that there is any,’ I admitted.

‘Then,’ said he, ‘I don’t see how you support your suggestion that the person started from the neighbourhood of Eltham.’

On consideration, I had to admit that I had nothing to offer in support of my theory; and having thus shot my last arrow in this very unequal contest, I thought it time to change the subject.

‘I called in at the British Museum the other day,’ said I, ‘and had a look at Mr. Bellingham’s last gift to the nation. The things are very well shown in that central case.’

‘Yes. I was very pleased with the position they have given to the exhibit, and so would my poor old friend have been. I wished, as I looked at the case, that he could have seen it. But perhaps he may, after all.’

‘I am sure I hope he will,’ said I, with more sincerity, perhaps, than the lawyer gave me credit for. For the return of John Bellingham would most effectually have cut the Gordian knot of my friend Godfrey’s difficulties. ‘You are a good deal interested in Egyptology yourself, aren’t you?’ I added.

‘Greatly interested,’ replied Mr. Jellicoe, with more animation than I had thought possible in his wooden face. ‘It is a fascinating subject, the study of this venerable civilisation, extending back to the childhood of the human race, preserved for ever for our instruction in its own unchanging monuments like a fly in a block of amber. Everything connected with Egypt is full of an impressive solemnity. A feeling of permanence, of stability, defying time and change, pervades it. The place, the people, and the monuments alike breathe of eternity.’

I was mightily surprised at this rhetorical outburst on the part of this dry, taciturn lawyer. But I liked him the better for the touch of enthusiasm that made him human, and determined to keep him astride of his hobby.

‘Yet,’ said I, ‘the people must have changed in the course of centuries.’

‘Yes, that is so. The people who fought against Cambyes were not the race who marched into Egypt five thousand years before—the dynastic people whose portraits we see on the early monuments. In those fifty centuries the blood of Hyksos and Syrians and Ethiopians and Hittites, and who can say how many more races, must have mingled with that of the old Egyptians. But still the national life went on without a break; the old culture leavened the new peoples, and the immigrant strangers ended by becoming Egyptians. It is a wonderful phenomenon. Looking back on it from our own time, it seems more like a geological period than the life history of a single nation. Are you at all interested in the subject?’

‘Yes, decidedly, though I am completely ignorant of it. The fact is that my interest is of quite recent growth. It is only of late that I have been sensible of the glamour of things Egyptian.’

‘Since you made Miss Bellingham’s acquaintance, perhaps?’ suggested Mr. Jellicoe, himself as unchanging in aspect as an Egyptian effigy.

I suppose I must have reddened—I certainly resented the remark—for he continued in the same even tone: ‘I made the suggestion because I know that she takes an intelligent interest in the subject and is, in fact, quite well informed on it.’

‘Yes; she seems to know a great deal about the antiquities of Egypt, and I may as well admit that your surmise was correct. It was she who showed me her uncle’s collection.’

‘So I had supposed,’ said Mr. Jellicoe. ‘And a very instructive collection it is, in a popular sense; very suitable for exhibition in a public museum, though there is nothing in it of unusual interest to the expert. The tomb furniture is excellent of its kind and the cartonnage case of the mummy is well made and rather finely decorated.’

‘Yes, I thought it quite handsome. But can you explain to me why, after taking all that trouble to decorate it, they should have disfigured it with those great smears of bitumen?’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Jellicoe, ‘that is quite an interesting question. It is not unusual to find mummy cases smeared with bitumen; there is a mummy of a priestess in the next gallery which is completely coated with bitumen except the gilded face. Now, this bitumen was put on for a purpose—for the purpose of obliterating the inscriptions and thus concealing the

identity of the deceased from the robbers and desecrators of tombs. And there is the oddity of this mummy of Sebekhotep. Evidently there was an intention of obliterating the inscriptions. The whole of the back is covered thickly with bitumen, and so are the feet. Then the workers seem to have changed their minds and left the inscriptions and decoration untouched. Why they intended to cover it, and why, having commenced, they left it partially covered only, is a mystery. The mummy was found in its original tomb and quite undisturbed, so far as tomb-robbers are concerned. Poor Bellingham was greatly puzzled as to what the explanation could be.'

'Speaking of bitumen,' said I, 'reminds me of a question that has occurred to me. You know that this substance has been used a good deal by modern painters and that it has a very dangerous peculiarity; I mean its tendency to liquefy, without any obvious reason, long after it has dried.'

'Yes, I know. Isn't there some story about a picture of Reynolds' in which bitumen had been used? A portrait of a lady, I think. The bitumen softened, and one of the lady's eyes slipped down on to her cheek; and they had to hang the portrait upside down and keep it warm until the eye slipped back again into its place. But what was your question?'

'I was wondering whether the bitumen used by the Egyptian artists has ever been known to soften after this great lapse of time.'

'Yes, I think it has. I have heard of instances in which the bitumen coatings have softened under certain circumstances and become quite "tacky". But, bless my soul! here am I gossiping with you and wasting your time, and it is nearly a quarter to nine!'

My guest rose hastily, and I, with many apologies for having detained him, proceeded to fulfil my promise to guide him to his destination. As we sallied forth together the glamour of Egypt faded by degrees, and when he shook my hand stiffly at the gate of the Bellinghams' house, all his vivacity and enthusiasm had vanished, leaving the taciturn lawyer, dry, uncommunicative, and not a little suspicious.

---

## X. — THE NEW ALLIANCE

THE 'Great Lexicographer'—tutelary deity of my adopted habitat—has handed down to shuddering posterity a definition of the act of eating which might have been framed by a dyspeptic ghoul, 'Eat: to devour with the mouth.' It is a shocking view to take of so genial a function: cynical, indelicate, and finally unforgivable by reason of its very accuracy. For, after all, that is what eating amounts to, if one must needs express it with such crude brutality. But if 'the ingestion of alimentary substances'—to ring a modern change upon the older formula—is in itself a process material even unto carnality, it is undeniable that it forms a highly agreeable accompaniment to more psychic manifestations.

And so, as the lamplight, reinforced by accessory candles, falls on the little first-floor room looking on Fetter Lane—only now the curtains are drawn—the conversation is not the less friendly and bright for a running accompaniment executed with knives and forks, for clink of goblet, and jovial gurgle of wine-flask. On the contrary, to one of us, at least—to wit, Godfrey Bellingham—the occasion is one of uncommon festivity, and his boyish enjoyment of the simple feast makes pathetic suggestions of hard times, faced uncomplainingly, but keenly felt nevertheless.

The talk flitted from topic to topic, mainly concerning itself with matters artistic, and never for one moment approaching the critical subject of John Bellingham's will. From the stepped pyramid of Sakkara with its encaustic tiles to mediaeval church floors; from Elizabethan woodwork to Mycenaean pottery, and thence to the industrial arts of the Stone age and the civilisation of the Aztecs, began to suspect that my two legal friends were so carried away by the interest of the conversation that they had forgotten the secret purpose of the meeting, for the dessert had been placed on the table (by Mrs. Gummer with the manner of a bereaved dependant dispensing funeral bakemeats), and still no reference had been made to the 'case'. But it seemed that Thorndyke was but playing a waiting game; was only allowing the intimacy to ripen while he watched for the opportunity. And that opportunity came, even as Mrs. Gummer vanished spectrally with a tray of plates and glasses.

'So you had a visitor last night, Doctor,' said Mr. Bellingham. 'I mean my friend Jellicoe. He told us he had seen you, and mighty curious he was about you. I have never known Jellicoe to be so inquisitive before. What did you think of him?'

'A quaint old cock. I found him highly amusing. We entertained one another for quite a long time with questions and crooked answers; I affecting eager curiosity, he replying with a defensive attitude of universal ignorance. It was a most diverting encounter.'

'He needn't have been so close,' Miss Bellingham remarked, 'seeing that all the world will be regaled with our affairs before long.'

'They are proposing to take the case into Court, then?' said Thorndyke.

'Yes,' said Mr. Bellingham. 'Jellicoe came to tell me that my cousin, Hurst, has instructed his solicitors to make the application and to invite me to join him. Actually he came to deliver an ultimatum from Hurst—but I mustn't disturb the harmony of this festive gathering with litigious discords.'

'Now, why mustn't you?' asked Thorndyke. 'Why is a subject in which we are all keenly interested to be taboo? You don't mind telling us about it, do you?'

'No, of course not. But what do you think of a man who buttonholes a doctor at a dinner-party to retail a list of ailments?'

'It depends on what his ailments are,' replied Thorndyke. 'If he is a chronic dyspeptic and wishes to expound the virtues of Doctor Snaffler's Purple Pills for Pimple People, he is merely a bore. But if he chances to suffer from some rare and choice disease, such as Trypanosomiasis or Acromegaly, the doctor will be delighted to listen.'

'Then are we to understand,' Miss Bellingham asked, 'that we are rare and choice products, in a legal sense?'

'Undoubtedly,' replied Thorndyke. 'The case of John Bellingham is, in many respects, unique. It will be followed with the deepest interest by the profession at large, and especially by medical jurists.'

'How gratifying that should be to us!' said Miss Bellingham. 'We may even attain undying fame in textbooks and treatises; and yet we are not so very much puffed up with our importance.'

'No,' said her father; 'we could do without the fame quite well, and so, I think, could Hurst. Did Berkeley tell you of the proposal that he made?'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke; 'and I gather from what you say that he has repeated it.'

'Yes. He sent Jellicoe to give me another chance, and I was tempted to take it; but my daughter was strongly against any compromise, and probably she is right. At any rate, she is more concerned than I am.'

'What view did Mr. Jellicoe take?' Thorndyke asked.

'Oh, he was very cautious and reserved, but he didn't disguise his feeling that I should be wise to take a certainty in lieu of a very problematical fortune. He would certainly like me to agree, for he naturally wishes to get the affair settled and pocket his legacy.'

'And have you definitely refused?'

‘Yes; quite definitely. So Hurst will apply for permission to presume death and prove the will, and Jellicoe will support him; he says he has no choice.’

‘And you?’

‘I suppose I shall oppose the application, though I don’t quite know on what grounds.’

‘Before you take definite steps,’ said Thorndyke, ‘you ought to give the matter very careful consideration. I take it that you have very little doubt that your brother is dead. And if he is dead, any benefit that you may receive under the will must be conditional on the previous presumption or proof of death. But perhaps you have taken advice?’

‘No, I have not. As our friend the Doctor has probably told you, my means—or rather, the lack of them—do not admit of my getting professional advice. Hence my delicacy about discussing the case with you.’

‘Then do you propose to conduct your case in person?’

‘Yes; if it is necessary for me to appear in Court, as I suppose it will be, if I oppose the application.’

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments and then said gravely:

‘You had much better not appear in person to conduct your case, Mr. Bellingham, for several reasons. To begin with, Mr. Hurst is sure to be represented by a capable counsel, and you will find yourself quite unable to meet the sudden exigencies of a contest in Court. You will be out-manoeuvred. Then there is the judge to be considered.’

‘But surely one can rely on the judge dealing fairly with a man who is unable to afford a solicitor and counsel?’

‘Undoubtedly, as a rule, a judge will give an unrepresented litigant every assistance and consideration. English judges in general are high-minded men with a deep sense of their great responsibilities. But you cannot afford to take any chances. You must consider the exceptions. A judge has been a counsel, and he may carry to the bench some of the professional prejudices of the bar. Indeed, if you consider the absurd licence permitted to counsel in their treatment of witnesses, and the hostile attitude adopted by some judges towards medical and other scientific men who have to give their evidence, you will see that the judicial mind is not always quite as judicial as one would wish, especially when the privileges and immunities of the profession are concerned. Now, your appearance in person to conduct your case must unavoidably cause some inconvenience to the Court. Your ignorance of procedure and legal details must occasion some delay; and if the judge should happen to be an irritable man he might resent the inconvenience and delay. I don’t say that would affect his decision—I don’t think it would—but I am sure it would be wise to avoid giving offence to the judge. And, above all, it is most desirable to be able to detect and reply to any manoeuvres on the part of the opposing counsel, which you certainly would not be able to do.’

‘This is excellent advice, Doctor Thorndyke,’ said Bellingham, with a grim smile; ‘but I’m afraid I shall have to take my chance.’

‘Not necessarily,’ said Thorndyke. ‘I am going to make a little proposal, which I will ask you to consider without prejudice as a mutual accommodation. You see, your case is one of exceptional interest—it will become a textbook case, as Miss Bellingham prophesied; and, since it lies within my speciality, it will be necessary for me to follow it in the closest detail. Now, it would be much more satisfactory for me to study it from within than from without, to say nothing of the credit which would accrue to me if I should be able to conduct it to a successful issue. I am therefore going to ask you to put your case in my hands and let me see what can be done with it. I know this is an unusual course for a professional man to take, but I think it is not improper under the circumstances.’

Mr. Bellingham pondered in silence for a few moments, and then, after a glance at his daughter, began rather hesitatingly: ‘It’s very generous of you, Doctor Thorndyke—’

‘Pardon me,’ interrupted Thorndyke, ‘it is not. My motives, as I have explained, are purely egoistic.’

Mr. Bellingham laughed uneasily and again glanced at his daughter, who, however, pursued her occupation of peeling a pear with calm deliberation and without lifting her eyes. Getting no help from her he asked: ‘Do you think that there is any possibility whatever of a successful issue?’

‘Yes, a remote possibility—very remote, I fear, as things look at present; but if I thought the case absolutely hopeless I should advise you to stand aside and let events take their course.’

‘Supposing the case should come to a favourable termination, would you allow me to settle your fees in the ordinary way?’

‘If the choice lay with me,’ replied Thorndyke, ‘I should say “yes” with pleasure. But it does not. The attitude of the profession is very definitely unfavourable to “speculative” practice. You may remember the well-known firm of Dodson and Fogg, who gained thereby much profit, but little credit. But why discuss contingencies of this kind? If I bring your case to a successful issue I shall have done very well for myself. We shall have benefited one another mutually. Come now, Miss Bellingham, I appeal to you. We have eaten salt together, to say nothing of pigeon pie and other cakes. Won’t you back me up, and at the same time do a kindness to Doctor Berkeley?’

‘Why, is Doctor Berkeley interested in our decision?’

‘Certainly he is, as you will appreciate when I tell you that he actually tried to bribe me secretly out of his own pocket.’

‘Did you?’ she asked, looking at me with an expression that rather alarmed me.

‘Well, not exactly,’ I replied, mighty hot and uncomfortable, and wishing Thorndyke at the devil with his confidences. ‘I merely mentioned that the—the—solicitor’s costs, you know, and that sort of thing—but you needn’t jump on me, Miss Bellingham; Doctor Thorndyke did all that was necessary in that way.’

She continued to look at me thoughtfully as I stammered out my excuses, and then said: ‘I wasn’t going to. I was only thinking that poverty has its compensations. You are all so very good to us; and, for my part, I should accept Doctor Thorndyke’s generous offer most gratefully, and thank him for making it so easy for us.’

‘Very well, my dear,’ said Mr. Bellingham; ‘we will enjoy the sweets of poverty, as you say—we have sampled the other kind of it pretty freely—and do ourselves the pleasure of accepting a | great kindness, most delicately offered.’

‘Thank you,’ said Thorndyke. ‘You have justified my faith in you, Miss Bellingham, and in the power of Dr. Berkeley’s salt. I understand that you place your affairs in my hands?’

‘Entirely and thankfully,’ replied Mr. Bellingham. ‘Whatever you think best to be done we agree to beforehand.’

‘Then,’ said I, ‘let us drink success to the cause. Port, if you please, Miss Bellingham; the vintage is not recorded, but it is quite wholesome, and a suitable medium for the sodium chloride of friendship.’ I filled her glass, and when the bottle had made its circuit, we stood up and solemnly pledged the new alliance.

There is just one thing I would say before we dismiss the subject for the present,’ said Thorndyke. ‘It is a good thing to keep one’s own counsel. When you get formal notice from Mr. Hurst’s solicitors that proceedings are being commenced, you may refer them to Mr. Marchmont of Gray’s Inn, who will nominally act for you. He will actually have nothing to do, but we must preserve the fiction that I am instructed by a solicitor. Meanwhile, and until the case goes into Court, I think it very necessary that neither Mr. Jellicoe nor anyone else should know that I am connected with it. We must keep the other side in the dark, if we can.’

‘We will be as secret as the grave,’ said Mr. Bellingham; ‘and, as a matter of fact, it will be quite easy, since it happens, by a curious coincidence, that I am already acquainted with Mr. Marchmont. He acted for Stephen Blackmore, you remember, in that case that you unravelled so wonderfully well. I knew the Blackmores.’

‘Did you?’ said Thorndyke. ‘What a small world it is. And what a remarkable affair that was! The intricacies and cross-issues made it quite absorbingly interesting; and it is noteworthy for me in another respect, for it was one of the first cases in which I was associated with Doctor Jervis.’

‘Yes, and a mighty useful associate I was,’ remarked Jervis, ‘though I did pick up one or two facts by accident. And, by the way, the Blackmore case had certain points in common with your case, Mr. Bellingham. There was a disappearance and a disputed will, and the man who vanished was a scholar and an antiquarian.’

‘Cases in our speciality are apt to have certain general resemblances,’ Thorndyke said; and as he spoke he directed a keen glance at his junior, the significance of which I partly understood when he abruptly changed the subject.

‘The newspaper reports of your brother’s disappearance, Mr. Bellingham, were remarkably full of detail. There were even plans of your house and that of Mr. Hurst. Do you know who supplied the information?’

‘No, I don’t,’ replied Mr. Bellingham. ‘I know that I didn’t. Some newspaper men came to me for information, but I sent them packing. So, I understand, did Hurst; and as for Jellicoe, you might as well cross-examine an oyster.’

‘Well,’ said Thorndyke, ‘the pressmen have queer methods of getting “copy”; but still, some one must have given them that description of your brother and those plans. It would be interesting to know who it was. However, we don’t know; and now let us dismiss these legal topics, with suitable apologies for having introduced them.’

‘And perhaps,’ said I, ‘we may as well adjourn to what we call the drawing-room—it is really Barnard’s den—and leave the housekeeper to wrestle with the debris.’

We migrated to the cheerfully shabby little apartment, and, when Mrs. Gummer had served coffee, with gloomy resignation (as who should say: ‘If you will drink this sort of stuff I suppose you must, but don’t blame me for the consequences’), I settled Mr. Bellingham in Barnard’s favourite lop-sided easy chair—the depressed seat of which suggested its customary use by an elephant of sedentary habits—and opened the diminutive piano.

‘I wonder if Miss Bellingham would give us a little music?’ I said.

‘I wonder if she could?’ was the smiling response. ‘Do you know,’ she continued, ‘I have not touched a piano for nearly two years? It will be quite an interesting experiment—to me; but if it fails, you will be the sufferers. So you must choose.’

‘My verdict,’ said Mr. Bellingham, ‘is fiat experimentum, though I won’t complete the quotation, as that would seem to disparage Doctor Barnard’s piano. But before you begin, Ruth, there is one rather disagreeable matter that I want to dispose of, so that I may not disturb the harmony with it later.’

He paused and we all looked at him expectantly.

‘I suppose, Doctor Thorndyke,’ he said, ‘you read the newspapers?’

‘I don’t,’ replied Dr. Thorndyke. ‘But I ascertain, for purely business purposes, what they contain.’

‘Then,’ said Mr. Bellingham, ‘you have probably met with some accounts of the finding of certain human remains, apparently portions of a mutilated body.’

‘Yes, I have seen those reports and filed them for future reference.’

‘Exactly. Well, now, it can hardly be necessary for me to tell you that those remains—the mutilated remains of some poor murdered creature, as there can be no doubt they are—have seemed to have a very dreadful significance for me. You will understand what I mean; and I want to ask you if—if they have made a similar suggestion to you?’

Thorndyke paused before replying, with his eyes bent thoughtfully on the floor, and we all looked at him anxiously.

‘It’s very natural,’ he said at length, ‘that you should associate these remains with the mystery of your brother’s disappearance. I should like to say that you are wrong in doing so, but if I did I should be uncandid. There are certain facts that do, undoubtedly, seem to suggest a connection, and, up to the present, there are no definite facts of a contrary significance.’

Mr. Bellingham sighed deeply and shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

‘It is a horrible affair!’ he said huskily; ‘horrible! Would you mind, Doctor Thorndyke, telling us just how the matter stands in your opinion—what the probabilities are, for and against?’

Again Thorndyke reflected awhile, and it seemed to me that he was not very willing to discuss the subject. However, the question had been asked pointedly, and eventually he answered:

‘At the present stage of the investigation it is not very easy to state the balance of probabilities. The matter is still quite speculative. The bones which have been found hitherto (for we are dealing with a skeleton, not with a body) have been exclusively those which are useless for personal identification; which is, in itself, a rather curious and striking fact. The general character and dimension of the bones seem to suggest a middle-aged man of about your brother’s height, and the date of deposition appears to be in agreement with the date of his disappearance.’

‘Is it known, then, when they were deposited?’ asked Mr. Bellingham.

‘In the case of those found at Sidcup it seems possible to deduct an approximate date. The watercress-bed was cleaned out about two years ago, so they could not have been lying there longer than that; and their condition suggests that they could not have been there much less than two years, as there is apparently no vestige of the soft structures left. Of course, I am speaking from the newspaper reports only; I have no direct knowledge of the matter.’

‘Have they found any considerable part of the body yet? I haven’t been reading the papers myself. My little friend, Miss Oman, brought a great bundle of ‘em for me to read, but I couldn’t stand it; I pitched the whole boiling of ‘em out of the window.’

I thought I detected a slight twinkle in Thorndyke’s eye, but he answered quite gravely:

‘I think I can give you the particulars from memory, though I won’t guarantee the dates. The original discovery was made, apparently quite accidentally, at Sidcup on the fifteenth of July. It consisted of a complete left arm, minus the third finger and including the bones of the shoulder—the shoulder-blade and collar bone. This discovery seems to have set the local population, especially the juvenile part of it, searching all the ponds and streams of the neighbourhood—’

‘Cannibals!’ interjected Mr. Bellingham.

‘With the result that there was dredged up out of a pond near St Mary Cray, in Kent, a right thigh-bone. There is a slight clue to identity in respect of this bone, since the head of it has a small patch of “eburnation”—that is a sort of porcelain-like polish that occurs on the parts of bones that form a joint when the natural covering of cartilage is destroyed by disease. It is produced by the unprotected surface of the bone grinding against the similarly unprotected surface of another.’

‘And how,’ Mr. Bellingham asked, ‘would that help the identification?’

‘It would indicate,’ Thorndyke replied, ‘that the deceased had probably suffered from rheumatoid arthritis—what is commonly known as rheumatic gout—and he would probably have limped! slightly and complained of some pain in the right hip.’

‘I’m afraid that doesn’t help us very much,’ said Mr. Bellingham; ‘for, you see, John had a pretty pronounced limp from another cause, an old injury to his left ankle; and as to complaining of pain—well, he was a hardy old fellow and not much given to making complaints of any kind. But don’t let me interrupt you.’

‘The next discovery,’ continued Thorndyke, ‘was made near Lee, by the police this time. They seem to have developed sudden activity in the matter, and in searching the neighbourhood of West Kent they dragged out of a pond near Lee the bones of a right foot. Now, if it had been the left instead of the right we might have a clue, as I understand your brother had fractured his left ankle, and there might have been some traces of the injury on the foot itself.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Bellingham. ‘I suppose there might. The injury was described as a Pott’s fracture.’

‘Exactly. Well, now, after this discovery at Lee it seems that the police set on foot a systematic search of all the ponds and small pieces of water around London, and, on the twenty-third, they found in the Cuckoo Pits in Epping Forest, not far from Woodford, the bones of a right arm (including those of the shoulder, as before), which seem to be part of the same body.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Bellingham, ‘I heard of that. Quite close to my old house. Horrible! horrible! It gave me the shudders to think of it—to think that poor old John may have been waylaid and murdered when he was actually coming to see me. He may even have got into the grounds by the back gate, if it was left unfastened, and been followed in there and murdered. You remember that a scarab from his watch-chain was found there? But is it clear that this arm was the fellow of the arm that was found at Sidcup?’

‘It seems to agree in character and dimensions,’ said Thorndyke, ‘and the agreement is strongly supported by a discovery made two days later.’

‘What is that?’ Mr. Bellingham demanded.

‘It is the lower half of a trunk which the police dragged out of a rather deep pond on the skirts of the forest at Loughton—Staple’s Pond, it is called. The bones found were the pelvis—that is, the two hip-bones—and six vertebrae, or joints of the backbone. Having discovered these, the police dammed the stream and pumped the pond dry, but no other bones were found; which is rather odd, as there should have been a pair of ribs belonging to the upper vertebra—the twelfth dorsal vertebra. It suggests some curious questions as to the method of dismemberment; but I mustn’t go into unpleasant details. The point is that the cavity of the right hip-joint showed a patch of eburnation corresponding to that on the head of the right thigh-bone that was found at St Mary Cray. So there can be very little doubt that these bones are all part of the same body.’

‘I see,’ grunted Mr. Bellingham; and he added, after a moment’s thought: ‘Now, the question is, Are these bones the remains of my brother John? What do you say, Doctor Thorndyke?’

‘I say that the question cannot be answered on the facts at present known to us. It can only be said that they may be, and that some of the circumstances suggest that they are. But we can only wait for further discoveries. At any moment the police may light upon some portion of the skeleton which will settle the question definitely one way or the other.’

‘I suppose,’ said Mr. Bellingham, ‘I can’t be of any service to you in the matter of identification?’

‘Indeed you can,’ said Thorndyke, ‘and I was going to ask you to assist me. What I want you to do is this: Write down a full description of your brother, including every detail known to you, together with an account of every illness or injury from which you know him to have suffered; also the names and, if possible, the addresses of any doctors, surgeons, or dentists who may have attended him at any time. The dentists are particularly important, as their information would be invaluable if the skull belonging to these bones should be discovered.’

Mr. Bellingham shuddered.

‘It’s a shocking idea,’ he said, ‘but, of course you are right. You must have the facts if you are to form an opinion. I will write out what you want and send it to you without delay. And now, for God’s sake, let us throw off this nightmare, for a little while, at least! What is there, Ruth, among Doctor Barnard’s music that you can manage?’

Barnard’s collection in general inclined to the severely classical, but we disinterred from the heap a few lighter works of an old-fashioned kind, including a volume of Mendelssohn’s *Lieder ohne Worte*, and with one of these Miss Bellingham made trial of her skill, playing it with excellent taste and quite adequate execution. That, at least, was her father’s verdict; for, as to me, I found it the perfection of happiness merely to sit and look at her—a state of mind that would have been in no wise disturbed even by ‘Silver Waves’ or ‘The Maiden’s Prayer’.

Thus with simple, homely music, and conversation always cheerful and sometimes brilliant, slipped away one of the pleasantest evenings of my life, and slipped away all too soon. St Dunstan’s clock was the fly in the ointment, for it boomed out intrusively the hour of eleven just as my guests were beginning to thoroughly appreciate one another, and thereby carried the sun (with a minor paternal satellite) out of the firmament of my heaven. For I had, in my professional capacity, given strict injunctions that Mr. Bellingham should on no account sit up late; and now, in my social capacity, I had smilingly to hear ‘the doctor’s orders’ quoted. It was a scurvy return for all my care.

When Mr. and Miss Bellingham departed, Thorndyke and Jervis would have gone too; but noting my bereaved condition, and being withal compassionate and tender of heart, they were persuaded to stay awhile and bear me company in a consolatory pipe.

---

## XI. — THE EVIDENCE REVIEWED

‘SO THE game has opened,’ observed Thorndyke, as he struck a match. ‘The play has begun with a cautious lead off by the other side. Very cautious and not very confident.’

‘Why do you say “not very confident”?’ I asked.

‘Well, it is evident that Hurst—and, I fancy, Jellicoe too—is anxious to buy off Bellingham’s opposition, and at a pretty long price, under the circumstances. And when we consider how very little Bellingham has to offer against the presumption of his brother’s death, it looks as if Hurst hadn’t much to say on his side.’

‘No,’ said Jervis, ‘he can’t hold many trumps or he wouldn’t be willing to pay four hundred a year for his opponent’s chances; and that is just as well, for it seems to me that our own hand is a pretty poor one.’

‘We must look through our hand and see what we do hold,’ said Thorndyke. ‘Our trump card at present—a rather small one, I’m afraid—is the obvious intention of the testator that the bulk of the property should go to his brother.’

‘I suppose you will begin your inquiries now?’ I said.

‘We began them some time ago—the day after you brought us the will, in fact. Jervis had been through the registers and has ascertained that no interment under the name of John Bellingham has taken place since the disappearance; which was just what we expected. He has also discovered that some other person has been making similar inquiries; which, again, is what we expected.’

‘And your own investigations?’

‘Have given negative results for the most part. I found Doctor Norbury, at the British Museum, very friendly and helpful; so friendly, in fact, that I am thinking whether I may not be able to enlist his help in certain private researches of my own, with reference to the change effected by time in the physical properties of certain substances.’

‘Oh; you haven’t told me about that,’ said Jervis.

‘No; I haven’t really commenced to plan my experiments yet, and they will probably lead to nothing when I do. It occurred to me that, possibly, in the course of time, certain molecular changes might take place in substances such as wood, bone, pottery, stucco, and other common materials, and that these changes might alter their power of conducting or transmitting molecular vibrations. Now, if this should turn out to be the case, it would be a fact of considerable importance, medico-legally and otherwise; for it would be possible to determine approximately the age of any object of known composition by testing its reactions to electricity, heat, light and other molecular vibrations. I thought of seeking Doctor Norbury’s assistance because he can furnish me with materials for experiment of such great age that the reactions, if any, should be extremely easy to demonstrate. But to return to our case. I learned from him that John Bellingham had certain friends in Paris—collectors and museum officials—whom he was in the habit of visiting for the purpose of study and exchange of specimens. I have made inquiries of all these, and none of them had seen him during his last visit. In fact, I have not yet discovered anyone who had seen Bellingham in Paris on this occasion. So his visit there remains a mystery for the present.’

‘It doesn’t seem to be of much importance, since he undoubtedly came back,’ I remarked; but to this Thorndyke demurred.

‘It is impossible to estimate the importance of the unknown,’ said he.

‘Well, how does the matter stand,’ asked Jervis, ‘on the evidence that we have? John Bellingham disappeared on a certain date. Is there anything to show what was the manner of his disappearance?’

‘The facts in our possession,’ said Thorndyke, ‘which are mainly those set forth in the newspaper report, suggest several alternative possibilities; and in view of the coming inquiry—for they will, no doubt, have to be gone into in Court, to some extent—it may be worth while to consider them. There are five conceivable hypotheses’—here Thorndyke checked them on his fingers as he proceeded—‘First, he may still be alive. Second, he may have died and been buried without identification. Third, he may have been murdered by some unknown person. Fourth, he may have been murdered by Hurst and his body concealed. Fifth, he may have been murdered by his brother. Let us examine these possibilities seriatim.’

‘First, he may still be alive. If he is, he must either have disappeared voluntarily, have lost his memory suddenly and not been identified, or have been imprisoned—on a false charge or otherwise. Let us take the first case—that of voluntary disappearance. Obviously, its improbability is extreme.’

‘Jellicoe doesn’t think so,’ said I. ‘He thinks it quite on the cards that John Bellingham is alive. He says that it is not a very unusual thing for a man to disappear for a time.’

‘Then why is he applying for a presumption of death?’

‘Just what I asked him. He says that it is the correct thing to do; that the entire responsibility rests on the Court.’

‘That is all nonsense,’ said Thorndyke. ‘Jellicoe is the trustee for his absent client, and, if he thinks that client is alive, it is his duty to keep the estate intact; and he knows that perfectly well. We may take it that Jellicoe is of the same opinion as I am: that John Bellingham is dead.’

‘Still,’ I urged, ‘men do disappear from time to time, and turn up again after years of absence.’

‘Yes, but for a definite reason. Either they are irresponsible vagabonds who take this way of shuffling of their responsibilities, or they are men who have been caught in a net of distasteful circumstances. For instance, a civil servant or a solicitor or a tradesman finds himself bound for life to a locality and an occupation of intolerable monotony. Perhaps he has an ill-tempered wife, who after the amiable fashion of a certain type of woman, thinking that her husband is pinned down without a chance of escape, gives a free rein to her temper. The man puts up with it for years, but at last it becomes unbearable. Then he suddenly disappears; and small blame to him. But this was not Bellingham’s case. He was a wealthy bachelor with an engrossing interest in life, free to go whither he would and to do whatsoever he wished. Why should he disappear? The thing is incredible.’

‘As to his having lost his memory and remained unidentified, that, also, is incredible in the case of a man who had visiting-cards and letters in his pocket, whose linen was marked, and who was being inquired for everywhere by the police.’



As to his being in prison, we may dismiss that possibility, inasmuch as a prisoner, both before and after conviction, would have full opportunity of communicating with his friends.

‘The second possibility, that he may have died suddenly and been buried without identification, is highly improbable; but, as it is conceivable that the body might have been robbed and the means of identification thus lost, it remains as a possibility that has to be considered, remote as it is.

‘The third hypothesis, that he may have been murdered by some unknown person, is, under the circumstances, not wildly improbable; but, as the police were on the lookout and a detailed description of the missing man’s person was published in the papers, it would involve the complete concealment of the body. But this would exclude the most probable form of crime—the casual robbery with violence. It is therefore possible, but highly improbable.

‘The fourth hypothesis is that Bellingham was murdered by Hurst. Now the one fact which militates against this view is that Hurst apparently had no motive for committing the murder. We are assured by Jellicoe that no one but himself knew the contents of the will, and if this is so—but mind, we have no evidence that it is so—Hurst would have no reason to suppose that he had anything material to gain by his cousin’s death. Otherwise the hypothesis presents no inherent improbabilities. The man was last seen alive at Hurst’s house. He was seen to enter it and he was never seen to leave it—we are still taking the facts as stated in the newspapers, remember—and it now appears that he stands to benefit enormously by that man’s death.’

‘But,’ I objected, ‘you are forgetting that, directly the man was missed Hurst and the servants together searched the entire house.’

‘Yes. What did they search for?’

‘Why, for Mr. Bellingham, of course.’

‘Exactly; for Mr. Bellingham. That is, for a living man. Now how do you search a house for a living man? You look in all the rooms. When you look in a room if he is there, you see him; if you do not see him, you assume that he is not there. You don’t look under the sofa or behind the piano, you don’t pull out large drawers or open cupboards. You just look into the rooms. That is what these people seem to have done. And they did not see Mr. Bellingham. Mr. Bellingham’s corpse might have been stowed away out of sight in any one of the rooms that they looked into.’

‘That is a grim thought,’ said Jervis; ‘but it is perfectly true. There is no evidence that the man was not lying dead in the house at the very time of the search.’

‘But even so,’ said I, ‘there was the body to be disposed of somehow. Now how could he possibly have got rid of the body without being observed?’

‘Ah!’ said Thorndyke, ‘now we are touching on a point of crucial importance. If anyone should ever write a treatise on the art of murder—not an exhibition of literary fireworks like De Quincey’s, but a genuine working treatise—he might leave all other technical details to take care of themselves if he could describe to me some really practicable plan for disposing of the body. That is, and always has been, the great stumbling-block to the murderer: to get rid of the body. The human body,’ he continued, thoughtfully regarding his pipe, just as, in the days of my pupilage, he was wont to regard the black-board chalk, ‘is a very remarkable object. It presents a combination of properties that makes it singularly difficult to conceal permanently. It is bulky and of an awkward shape, it is heavy, it is completely incombustible, it is chemically unstable, and its decomposition yields great volumes of highly odorous gases, and it nevertheless contains identifiable structures of the highest degree of permanence. It is extremely difficult to preserve unchanged, and it is still more difficult completely to destroy. The essential permanence of the human body is well known in the classical case of Eugene Aram; but a still more striking instance is that of Sekenen-Ra the Third, one of the last kings of the seventeenth Egyptian dynasty. Here, after a lapse of four thousand years, it has been possible to determine not only the cause of death and the manner of its occurrence, but the way in which the king fell, the nature of the weapon with which the fatal wound was inflicted, and even the position of the assailant. And the permanence of the body under other conditions is admirably shown in the case of Doctor Parkman, of Boston, USA, in which identification was actually effected by means of remains collected from the ashes of a furnace.’

‘Then we may take it,’ said Jervis, ‘that the world has not yet seen the last of John Bellingham.’

‘I think we may regard that as almost a certainty,’ replied Thorndyke. ‘The only question—and a very important one—is to when the reappearance may take place. It may be to-morrow or it may be centuries hence, when all the issues involved have been! forgotten.’

‘Assuming,’ said I, ‘for the sake of argument, that Hurst did murder him and that the body was concealed in the study at the time the search was made. How could it have been disposed of? If you had been in Hurst’s place, how would you have gone to work?’

Thorndyke smiled at the bluntness of my question.

‘You are asking me for an incriminating statement,’ said he, ‘delivered in the presence of a witness too. But, as a matter of fact, there is no use in speculating a priori, we should have to reconstruct a purely imaginary situation, the circumstances of which are unknown to us, and we should almost certainly reconstruct it wrong. What we may fairly assume is that no reasonable person, no matter how immoral, would find himself in the position that you suggest. Murder is usually a crime of impulse, and the murderer a person of feeble self-control. Such persons are most unlikely to make

elaborate and ingenious arrangements for the disposal of the bodies of their victims. Even the cold-blooded perpetrators of the most carefully planned murders appear as I have said, to break down at this point. The almost insuperable difficulty of getting rid of the human body is not appreciated until the murderer suddenly finds himself face to face with it.

'In the case you are suggesting, the choice would seem to lie between burial on the premises or dismemberment and dispersal of the fragments; and either method would be pretty certain to lead to discovery.'

'As illustrated by the remains of which you were speaking to Mr. Bellingham,' Jervis remarked.

'Exactly,' Thorndyke answered, 'though we could hardly imagine a reasonably intelligent criminal adopting a watercress-bed as a hiding place.'

'No. That was certainly an error of judgment. By the way, I thought it best to say nothing while you were talking to Bellingham, but I noticed that, in discussing the possibility of those being the bones of his brother, you made no comment on the absence of the third ring of the left hand. I am sure you didn't overlook it, but isn't it a point of some importance?'

'As to identification? Under the present circumstances, I think not! If there were a man missing who had lost that finger it would, of course, be an important fact. But I have not heard of any such man. Or, again, if there were any evidence that the finger had been removed before death, it would be highly important. But there is no such evidence. It may have been cut off after death, and that is where the real significance of its absence lies.'

'I don't see quite what you mean,' said Jervis.

'I mean that, if there is no report of any missing man who had lost that particular finger, the probability is that the finger was removed after death. And then arises the interesting question of motive. Why should it have been removed? It could hardly have become detached accidentally. What do you suggest?'

'Well,' said Jervis, 'it might have been a peculiar finger; a finger, for instance, with some characteristic deformity such as an ankylosed joint, which would be easy to identify.'

'Yes; but that explanation introduces the same difficulty. No person with a deformed or ankylosed finger has been reported as missing.'

Jervis puckered up his brows, and looked at me.

'I'm hanged if I see any other explanation,' he said. 'Do you, Berkeley?'

I shook my head.

'Don't forget which finger it is that is missing,' said Thorndyke. 'The third finger of the left hand.'

'Oh, I see!' said Jervis. 'The ring-finger. You mean that it may have been removed for the sake of a ring that wouldn't come off.'

'Yes. It would not be the first instance of the kind. Fingers have been severed from dead hands—and even from living ones—for the sake of rings that were too tight to be drawn off. And the fact that it is the left hand supports the suggestion; for a ring that was inconveniently tight would be worn by preference on the left hand, as that is usually slightly smaller than the right. What is the matter, Berkeley?'

A sudden light had burst upon me, and I suppose my countenance betrayed the fact.

'I am a confounded fool!' I exclaimed.

'Oh, don't say that,' said Jervis. 'Give your friends a chance.'

'I ought to have seen this long ago and told you about it. John Bellingham did wear a ring, and it was so tight that, when once he had got it on, he could never get it off again.'

'Do you happen to know on which hand he wore it?' Thorndyke asked.

'Yes. It was on the left hand; because Miss Bellingham, who told me about it, said that he would never have been able to get the ring on at all but for the fact this his left hand was slightly smaller than his right.'

'There it is, then,' said Thorndyke. 'With this new fact in our possession, the absence of the finger furnishes the starting-point of some very curious speculations.'

'As, for instance,' said Jervis.

'Ah, under the circumstances, I must leave you to pursue those speculations independently. I am now acting for Mr. Bellingham.'

Jervis grinned and was silent for a while, refilling his pipe thoughtfully; but when he had got it alight he resumed.

'To return to the question of the disappearance; you don't consider it highly improbable that Bellingham might have been murdered by Hurst?'

'Oh, don't imagine I am making an accusation. I am considering the various probabilities merely in the abstract. The same reasoning applies to the Bellinghams. As to whether any of them did commit the murder, that is a question of personal character. I certainly do not suspect the Bellinghams after having seen them, and with regard to Hurst, I know nothing, or at least very little, to his disadvantage.'

'Well,' Thorndyke said, with some hesitation, 'it seems a thought unkind to rake up the little details of a man's past, and yet it has to be done. I have, of course, made the usual routine inquiries concerning the parties to this affair, and this is what they have brought to light:

'Hurst, as you know, is a stockbroker—a man of good position and reputation; but, about ten years ago, he seems to have committed an indiscretion, to put it mildly, which nearly got him into rather serious difficulties. He appears to have speculated rather heavily and considerably beyond his means, for when a sudden spasm of the markets upset his calculations, it turned out that he had been employing his clients' capital and securities. For a time it looked as if there was going to be serious trouble; then, quite unexpectedly, he managed to raise the necessary amount in some way and settle all claims. Whence he got the money has never been discovered to this day, which is a curious circumstance, seeing that the deficiency was rather over five thousand pounds; but the important fact is that he did get it and that he paid up all that he owed. So that he was only a potential defaulter, so to speak; and discreditable as the affair undoubtedly was, it does not seem to have any direct bearing on this present case.'

'No,' Jervis agreed, 'though it makes one consider his position with more attention than one would otherwise.'

'Undoubtedly,' said Thorndyke. 'A reckless gambler is a man whose conduct cannot be relied on. He is subject to vicissitudes of fortune which may force him into other kinds of wrong doing. Many an embezzlement has been preceded by an unlucky plunge on the turf.'

'Assuming the responsibility for this disappearance to lie between Hurst and—and the Bellinghams,' said I, with an uncomfortable gulp as I mentioned the names of my friends, 'to which side does the balance of probability incline?'

'To the side of Hurst, I should say, without doubt,' replied Thorndyke. 'The case stands thus—on the facts presented to us: Hurst appears to have had no motive for killing the deceased (as we will call him); but the man was seen to enter the house, was never seen to leave it, and was never again seen alive. Bellingham, on the other hand, had a motive, as he had believed himself to be the principal beneficiary under the will. But the deceased was not seen at his house, and there is no evidence that he went to the house or to the neighbourhood, excepting the scarab that was found there. But the evidence of the scarab is vitiated by the fact that Hurst was present when it was picked up, and that it was found on a spot over which Hurst had passed only a few minutes previously. Until Hurst is cleared, it seems to me that the presence of the scarab proves nothing against the Bellinghams.'

'Then your opinions on the case,' said I, 'are based entirely on the facts that have been made public.'

'Yes, mainly. I do not necessarily accept those facts just as they are presented, and I may have certain views of my own on the case. But if I have, I do not feel in a position to discuss them. For the present, discussion has to be limited to the facts and inferences offered by the parties concerned.'

'There!' exclaimed Jervis, rising to knock his pipe out, 'that is where Thorndyke has you. He lets you think you're in the thick of the "know" until one fine morning you wake up and discover that you have only been a gaping outsider; and then you are mightily astonished—and so are the other side, too, for that matter. But we must really be off now, mustn't we, reverend senior?'

'I suppose we must,' replied Thorndyke; and, as he drew on his gloves, he asked: 'Have you heard from Barnard lately?'

'Oh, yes,' I answered. 'I wrote to him at Smyrna to say that the practice was flourishing and that I was quite happy and contented, and that he might stay away as long as he liked. He writes by return that he will prolong his holiday if an opportunity offers, but will let me know later.'

'Gad,' said Jervis, 'it was a stroke of luck for Barnard that Bellingham happened to have such a magnificent daughter—there! don't mind me, old man. You go in and win—she's worth it, isn't she, Thorndyke?'

'Miss Bellingham's a very charming young lady,' replied Thorndyke. 'I am most favourably impressed by both the father and the daughter, and I only trust that we may be able to be of some service to them.' With this sedate little speech Thorndyke shook my hand, and I watched my two friends go on their way until their fading shapes were swallowed up in the darkness of Fetter Lane.

---

## XII. — A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

IT was two or three mornings after my little supper party that, as I stood in the consulting-room brushing my hat preparatory to starting on my morning round, Adolphus appeared at the door to announce two gentlemen waiting in the surgery. I told him to bring them in, and a moment later Thorndyke entered, accompanied by Jervis. I noted that they looked uncommonly large in that little apartment, especially Thorndyke, but I had no time to consider this phenomenon, for the latter, when he had shaken my hand, proceeded at once to explain the object of their visit.

'We have come to ask a favour, Berkeley,' he said; 'to ask you to do us a very great service in the interests of your friends the Bellinghams.'

'You know I shall be delighted,' I said warmly. 'What is it?'

'I will explain. You know—or perhaps you don't—that the police have collected all the bones that have been discovered and deposited them in the mortuary at Woodford, where they are to be viewed by the coroner's jury. Now, it has become

imperative that I should have more definite and reliable information than I can get from the newspapers. The natural thing for me would be to go down and examine them myself, but there are circumstances that make it very desirable that my connection with the case should not leak out. Consequently, I can't go myself, and, for the same reason, I can't send Jervis. On the other hand, as it is now stated pretty openly that the police consider the bones to be almost certainly those of John Bellingham, it would seem perfectly natural that you, as Godfrey Bellingham's doctor, should go down to view them on his behalf.'

'I should like to,' I said. 'I would give anything to go; but how is it to be managed? It would mean a whole day off and leaving the practice to look after itself.'

'I think it could be managed,' said Thorndyke; 'and the matter is really important for two reasons. One is that the inquest opens tomorrow, and someone certainly ought to be there to watch the proceedings on Godfrey's behalf; and the other is that our client has received notice from Hurst's solicitors that the application will be heard in the Probate Court in a few days.'

'Isn't that rather sudden?' I asked.

'It certainly suggests that there has been a good deal more activity than we were given to understand. But you see the importance of the affair. The inquest will be a sort of dress rehearsal for the Probate Court, and it is quite essential that we should have a chance of estimating the management.'

'Yes, I see that. But how are we to manage about the practice?'

'We shall find you a substitute.'

'Through a medical agent?'

'Yes,' said Jervis. 'Percival will find us a man; in fact, he has done it. I saw him this morning; he has a man who is waiting up in town to negotiate for the purchase of a practice and who would do the job for a couple of guineas. Quite a reliable man. Only say the word, and I will run off to Adam Street and engage him definitely.'

'Very well. You engage the locum tenens, and I will be prepared to start for Woodford as soon as he turns up.'

'Excellent!' said Thorndyke. 'That is a great weight off my mind. And if you could manage to drop in this evening and smoke a pipe with us we could talk over the plan of campaign and let you know what items of information we are particularly in want of.'

I promised to turn up at King's Bench Walk as soon after half-past eight as possible, and my two friends then took their departure, leaving me to set out in high spirits on my scanty round of visits.

It is surprising what different aspects things present from different points of view; how relative are our estimates of the conditions and circumstances of life. To the urban workman—the journeyman baker or tailor, for instance, labouring year in year out in a single building—a holiday ramble on Hampstead Heath is a veritable voyage of discovery; whereas to the sailor the shifting panorama of the whole wide world is but the commonplace of the day's work.

So I reflected as I took my place in the train at Liverpool Street on the following day. There had been a time when a trip by rail to the borders of Epping Forest would have been far from a thrilling experience; now, after vegetating in the little world of Fetter Lane, it was quite an adventure.

The enforced inactivity of a railway journey is favourable to thought, and I had much to think about. The last few weeks had witnessed momentous changes in my outlook. New interests had arisen, new friendships had grown up, and above all, there had stolen into my life that supreme influence that, for good or for evil, according to my fortune, was to colour and pervade it even to its close. Those few days of companionable labour in the reading-room, with the homely hospitalities of the milk-shop and the pleasant walks homeward through the friendly London streets, had called into existence a new world—a world in which the gracious personality of Ruth Bellingham was the one dominating reality. And thus, as I leaned back in the corner of the railway carriage with an unlighted pipe in my hand, the events of the immediate past, together with those more problematical ones of the impending future, occupied me rather to the exclusion of the business of the moment, which was to review the remains collected in the Woodford mortuary, until, as the train approached Stratford, the odours of the soap and bone-manure factories poured in at the open window and (by a natural association of ideas) brought me back to the object of my quest.

As to the exact purpose of this expedition, I was not very clear; but I knew that I was acting as Thorndyke's proxy and thrilled with pride at the thought. But what particular light my investigations were to throw upon the intricate Bellingham case I had no very definite idea. With a view to fixing the procedure in my mind, I took Thorndyke's written instructions from my pocket and read them over carefully. They were very full and explicit, making ample allowance for my lack of experience in medico-legal matters:

- '1. Do not appear to make minute investigations or in any way excite remark.
- '2. Ascertain if all the bones belonging to each region are present, and if not, which are missing.
- '3. Measure the extreme length of the principal bones and compare those of opposite sides.
- '4. Examine the bones with reference to age, sex, and muscular development of the deceased.

'5. Note the presence or absence of signs of constitutional disease, local disease of bone or adjacent structures, old or recent injuries, and any other departures from the normal or usual.

'6. Observe the presence or absence of adipocere and its position, if present.

'7. Note any remains of tendons, ligaments, or other soft structures.

'8. Examine the Sidcup hand with reference to the question as to whether the finger was separated before or after death.

'9. Estimate the probable period of submersion and note any changes (as e.g., mineral or organic staining) due to the character of the water or mud.

'10. Ascertain the circumstances (immediate and remote) that led to the discovery of the bones and the names of the persons concerned in those circumstances.

'11. Commit all information to writing as soon as possible, and make plans and diagrams on the spot, if circumstances permit.

'12. Preserve an impassive exterior: listen attentively but without eagerness; ask as few questions as possible; pursue any inquiry that your observations on the spot may suggest.'

These were my instructions, and, considering that I was going merely to inspect a few dry bones, they appeared rather formidable; in fact, the more I read them over the greater became my misgivings as to my qualifications for the task.

As I approached the mortuary it became evident that some, at least, of Thorndyke's admonitions were by no means unnecessary. The place was in charge of a police sergeant, who watched my approach suspiciously; and some half-dozen men, obviously newspaper reporters, hovered about the entrance like a pack of jackals. I presented the coroner's order which Mr. Marchmont had obtained, and which the sergeant read with his back against the wall, to prevent the newspaper men from looking over his shoulder.

My credentials being found satisfactory, the door was unlocked and I entered, accompanied by three enterprising reporters, whom, however, the sergeant summarily ejected and locked out, returning to usher me into the presence and to observe my proceedings with intelligent but highly embarrassing interest.

The bones were laid out on a large table and covered with a sheet, which the sergeant slowly turned back, watching my face intently as he did so to note the impression that the spectacle made upon me. I imagine that he must have been somewhat disappointed by my impassive demeanour, for the remains suggested to me nothing more than a rather shabby set of 'student's osteology.' The whole collection had been set out by the police surgeon (as the sergeant informed me) in their proper anatomical order; notwithstanding which I counted them over carefully to make sure that none were missing, checking them by the list with which Thorndyke had furnished me.

'I see you have found the left thigh-bone,' I remarked, observing that this did not appear in the list.

'Yes,' said the sergeant; 'that turned up yesterday evening in a big pond called Baldwin's Pond in the Sandpit plain, near Little Monk Wood.'

'Is that near here?' I asked.

'In the forest up Loughton way,' was the reply.

I made a note of the fact (on which the sergeant looked as if he was sorry he had mentioned it), and then turned my attention to a general consideration of the bones before examining them in detail. Their appearance would have been improved and examination facilitated by a thorough scrubbing, for they were just as they had been taken from their respective resting-places, and it was difficult to decide whether their reddish-yellow colour was an actual stain or due to a deposit on the surface. In any case, as it affected them all alike, I thought it an interesting feature and made a note of it. They bore numerous traces of their sojourn in the various ponds from which they had been recovered, but these gave me little help in determining the length of time during which they had been submerged. They were, of course, encrusted with mud, and little wisps of pond-weed stuck to them in places; but these facts furnished only the vaguest measure of time.

Some of the traces were, indeed, more informing. To several of the bones, for instance, there adhered the dried egg-clusters of the common pond-snail, and in one of the hollows of the right shoulder-blade (the 'infra-spinous fossa') was a group of the mud-built tubes of the red river-worm. These remains gave proof of a considerable period of submersion, and since they could not have been deposited on the bones until all the flesh had disappeared they furnished evidence that some time—a month or two, at any rate—had elapsed since this had happened. Incidentally, too, their distribution showed the position in which the bones had lain, and though this appeared to be of no importance in the existing circumstances, I made careful notes of the situation of each adherent body, illustrating their position by rough sketches.

The sergeant watched my proceedings with an indulgent smile.

'You're making a regular inventory, sir,' he remarked, 'as if you were going to put 'em up for auction. I shouldn't think those snails' eggs would be much help in identification. And all that has been done already,' he added as I produced my measuring-tape.

'No doubt,' I replied; 'but my business is to make independent observations, to check the others, if necessary.' And I proceeded to measure each of the principal bones separately and to compare those of the opposite sides. The agreement in

dimensions and general characteristics of the pairs of bones left little doubt that all were parts of one skeleton, a conclusion that was confirmed by the eburnated patch on the head of the right thigh-bone and the corresponding patch in the socket of the right hip-bone. When I had finished my measurements I went over the entire series of bones in detail, examining each with the closest attention for any of those signs which Thorndyke had indicated, and eliciting nothing but a monotonously reiterated negative. They were distressingly and disappointingly normal.

‘Well, sir, what do you make of ‘em?’ the sergeant asked cheerfully as I shut up my notebook and straightened my back. ‘Whose bones are they? Are they Mr. Bellingham’s, think ye?’

‘I should be very sorry to say whose bones they are,’ I replied. ‘One bone is very much like another, you know.’

‘I suppose it is,’ he agreed; ‘but I thought that, with all that measuring and all those notes, you might have arrived at something definite.’ Evidently he was disappointed in me; and I was somewhat disappointed in myself when I contrasted Thorndyke’s elaborate instructions with the meagre result of my investigations. For what did my discoveries amount to? And how much was the inquiry advanced by the few entries in my notebook?

The bones were apparently those of a man of fair though not remarkable muscular development; over thirty years of age, but how much older I was unable to say. His height I judged roughly to be five feet eight inches, but my measurements would furnish data for a more exact estimate by Thorndyke. Beyond this the bones were quite uncharacteristic. There were no signs of diseases either local or general, no indications of injuries either old or recent, no departures of any kind from the normal or usual; and the dismemberment had been effected with such care that there was not a single scratch on any of the separated surfaces. Of adipocere (the peculiar waxy or soapy substance that is commonly found in bodies that have slowly decayed in damp situations) there was not a trace; and the only remnant of the soft structures was a faint indication, like a spot of dried glue, of the tendon on the tip of the right elbow.

The sergeant was in the act of replacing the sheet, with the air of a showman who has just given an exhibition, when there came a sharp rapping on the mortuary door. The officer finished spreading the sheet with official precision, and having ushered me out into the lobby, turned the key and admitted three persons, holding the door open after they had entered for me to go out. But the appearance of the new-comers inclined me to linger. One of them was a local constable, evidently in official charge; a second was a labouring man, very wet and muddy, who carried a small sack; while in the third I thought I scented a professional brother.

The sergeant continued to hold the door open.

‘Nothing more I can do for you, sir?’ he asked genially.

‘Is that the divisional surgeon?’ I inquired.

‘Yes. I am the divisional surgeon,’ the new-comer answered. ‘Did you want anything of me?’

‘This,’ said the sergeant, ‘is a medical gentleman who has got permission from the coroner to inspect the remains. He is acting for the family of the deceased—I mean, for the family of Mr. Bellingham,’ he added in answer to an inquiring glance from the surgeon.

‘I see,’ said the latter. ‘Well, they have found the rest of the trunk, including, I understand, the ribs that were missing from the other part. Isn’t that so, Davis?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the constable. ‘Inspector Badger says all the ribs is here, and all the bones of the neck as well.’

‘The inspector seems to be an anatomist,’ I remarked.

The sergeant grinned. ‘He is a very knowing gentleman, is Mr. Badger. He came down here this morning quite early and spent a long time looking over the bones and checking them by some notes in his pocket-book. I fancy he’s got something on, but he was precious close about it.’

Here the sergeant shut up rather suddenly—perhaps contrasting his own conduct with that of his superior.

‘Let us have these new bones out on the table,’ said the police surgeon. ‘Take the sheet off, and don’t shoot them out as if they were coals. Hand them out carefully.’

The labourer fished out the wet and muddy bones one by one from the sack, and as he laid them on the table the surgeon arranged them in their proper relative positions.

‘This has been a neatly executed job,’ he remarked; ‘none of your clumsy hacking with a chopper or a saw. The bones have been cleanly separated at the joints. The fellow who did this must have had some anatomical knowledge, unless he was a butcher, which, by the way, is not impossible. He has used his knife uncommonly skilfully, and you notice that each arm was taken off with the scapula attached, just as a butcher takes off a shoulder of mutton. Are there any more bones in that bag?’

‘No, sir,’ replied the labourer, wiping his hands with an air of finality on the posterior aspect of his trousers; ‘that’s the lot.’

The surgeon looked thoughtfully at the bones as he gave a final touch to their arrangement, and remarked:

‘The inspector is right. All the bones of the neck are there. Very odd. Don’t you think so?’

‘You mean—’

'I mean that this very eccentric murderer seems to have given himself such an extraordinary amount of trouble for no reason that one can see. There are these neck vertebrae, for instance. He must have carefully separated the skull from the atlas instead of just cutting through the neck. Then there is the way he divided the trunk; the twelfth ribs have just come in with this lot, but the twelfth dorsal vertebra to which they belong was attached to the lower half. Imagine the trouble he must have taken to do that, and without cutting or hacking the bones about, either. It is extraordinary. This is rather interesting, by the way. Handle it carefully.'

He picked up the breast-bone daintily—for it was covered with wet mud—and handed it to me with the remark:

'That is the most definite piece of evidence we have.'

'You mean,' I said, 'that the union of the two parts into a single mass fixes this as the skeleton of an elderly man?'

'Yes, that is the obvious suggestion, which is confirmed by the deposit of bone in the rib-cartilages. You can tell the inspector, Davis, that I have checked this lot of bones and that they are all here.'

'Would you mind writing it down, sir?' said the constable. 'Inspector Badger said I was to have everything in writing.'

The surgeon took out his pocket-book, and, while he was selecting a suitable piece of paper, he asked: 'Did you form any opinion as to the height of the deceased?'

'Yes, I thought he would be about five feet eight' (here I caught the sergeant's eyes, fixed on me with a knowing leer).

'I made it five eight and a half,' said the police surgeon; 'but we shall know better when we have seen the lower leg-bones. Where was this lot found, Davis?'

'In the pond just off the road in Lord's Bushes, sir, and the inspector has gone off now to—'

'Never mind where he's gone,' interrupted the sergeant. 'You just answer questions and attend to your business.'

The sergeant's reproof conveyed a hint to me on which I was not slow to act. Friendly as my professional colleague was, it was clear that the police were disposed to treat me as an interloper who was to be kept out of the 'know' as far as possible. Accordingly I thanked my colleague and the sergeant for their courtesy, and bidding them adieu until we should meet at the inquest, took my departure and walked away quickly until I found an inconspicuous position from which I could keep the door of the mortuary in view. A few moments later I saw Constable Davis emerge and stride away up the road.

I watched his rapidly diminishing figure until he had gone as far as I considered desirable, and then I set forth in his wake. The road led straight away from the village, and in less than half a mile entered the outskirts of the forest. Here I quickened my pace to close up somewhat, and it was well that I did so, for suddenly he diverged from the road into a green lane, where for a while I lost sight of him. Still hurrying forward, I again caught sight of him just as he turned off into a narrow path that entered a beech wood with a thickish undergrowth of holly, along which I followed him for several minutes, gradually decreasing the distance between us, until suddenly there fell on my ear a rhythmical sound like the clank of a pump. Soon after I caught the sound of men's voices, and then the constable struck off the path into the wood.

I now advanced more cautiously, endeavouring to locate the search party by the sound of the pump, and when I had done this I made a little detour so that I might approach from the opposite direction to that from which the constable had appeared.

Still guided by the noise of the pump, I at length came out into a small opening among the trees and halted to survey the scene. The centre of the opening was occupied by a small pond, not more than a dozen yards across, by the side of which stood a builder's handcart. The little two-wheeled vehicle had evidently been used to convey the appliances which were deposited on the ground near it, and which consisted of a large tub—now filled with water—a shovel, a rake, a sieve, and a portable pump, the latter being fitted with a long delivery hose. There were three men besides the constable, one of whom was working the handle of the pump, while another was glancing at a paper that the constable had just delivered to him. He looked up sharply as I appeared, and viewed me with unconcealed disfavour.

'Hallo, sir!' said he. 'You can't come here.'

Now, seeing that I was actually here, this was clearly a mistake, and I ventured to point out the fallacy.

'Well, I can't allow you to stay here. Our business is of a private nature.'

'I know exactly what your business is, Inspector Badger.'

'Oh, do you?' said he, surveying me with a foxy smile. 'And I expect I know what yours is, too. But we can't have any of you newspaper gentry spying on us just at present, so you just be off.'

I thought it best to undeceive him at once, and accordingly, having explained who I was, I showed him the coroner's permit, which he read with manifest annoyance.

'This is all very well, sir,' said he as he handed me back the paper, 'but it doesn't authorise you to come spying on the proceedings of the police. Any remains that we discover will be deposited in the mortuary, where you can inspect them to your heart's content; but you can't stay here and watch us.'

I had no defined object in keeping a watch on the inspector's proceedings; but the sergeant's indiscreet hint had aroused my curiosity, which was further excited by Mr. Badger's evident desire to get rid of me. Moreover, while we had been

talking, the pump had stopped (the muddy floor of the pond being now pretty fully exposed), and the inspector's assistant was handling the shovel impatiently.

'Now I put it to you, Inspector,' said I, persuasively, 'is it politic of you to allow it to be said that you refused an authorised representative of the family facilities for verifying any statements that you may make hereafter?'

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'I mean that if you should happen to find some bone which could be identified as part of the body of Mr. Bellingham, that fact would be of more importance to his family than to anyone else. You know that there is a very valuable estate and a rather difficult will.'

'I didn't know it, and I don't see the bearing of it now' (neither did I for that matter); 'but if you make such a point of being present at the search, I can't very well refuse. Only you mustn't get in our way, that's all.'

On hearing this conclusion, his assistant, who looked like a plain-clothes officer, took up his shovel and stepped into the mud that formed the bottom of the pond, stooping as he went and peering among the masses of weed that had been left stranded by the withdrawal of the water. The inspector watched him anxiously, cautioning him from time to time to 'look out where he was treading'; the labourer left the pump and craned forward from the margin of the mud, and the constable and I looked on from our respective points of vantage. For some time the search was fruitless. Once the searcher stooped and picked up what turned out to be a fragment of decayed wood; then the remains of a long-deceased jay were discovered, examined, and rejected. Suddenly the man bent down by the side of a small pool that had been left in one of the deeper hollows, stared intently into the mud, and stood up.

'There's something here that looks like a bone, sir,' he sang out.

'Don't grub about then,' said the inspector. 'Drive your shovel right into the mud where you saw it and bring it to the sieve.'

The man followed out these instructions, and as he came shore-wards with a great pile of the slimy mud on his shovel we all converged on the sieve, which the inspector took up and held over the tub, directing the constable and labourer to 'lend a hand,' meaning thereby that they were to crowd round the tub and exclude me as completely as possible. This, in fact, they did very effectively with his assistance, for, when the shovelful of mud had been deposited on the sieve, the four men leaned over it and so nearly hid it from view that it was only by craning over, first on one side and then on the other, that I was able to catch an occasional glimpse of it and to observe it gradually melting away as the sieve, immersed in the water, was shaken to and fro.

Presently the inspector raised the sieve from the water and stooped over it more closely to examine its contents. Apparently the examination yielded no very conclusive results, for it was accompanied by a series of rather dubious grunts.

At length the officer stood up, and turning to me with a genial but foxy smile, held out the sieve for my inspection.

'Like to see what we have found, Doctor?' said he.

I thanked him and stood over the sieve. It contained the sort of litter of twigs, skeleton leaves, weed, pond-snails, dead shells, and fresh-water mussels that one would expect to strain out from the mud of an ancient pond; but in addition to these there were three small bones which at first glance gave me quite a start until I saw what they were.

The inspector looked at me inquiringly. 'H'm?' said he.

'Yes,' I replied. 'Very interesting.'

'Those will be human bones, I fancy; h'm?'

'I should say so, undoubtedly,' I answered.

'Now,' said the inspector, 'could you say, off-hand, which finger those bones belong to?'

I smothered a grin (for I had been expecting this question), and answered:

'I can say off-hand that they don't belong to any finger. They are the bones of the left great toe.'

The inspector's jaw dropped.

'The deuce they are!' he muttered. 'H'm. I thought they looked a bit stout.'

'I expect,' said I, 'that if you go through the mud close to where this came from you'll find the rest of the foot.'

The plain-clothes man proceeded at once to act on my suggestion, taking the sieve with him to save time. And sure enough, after filling it twice with the mud from the bottom of the pool, the entire skeleton of the foot was brought to light.

'Now you're happy, I suppose,' said the inspector when I had checked the bones and found them all present.

'I should be more happy,' I replied, 'if I knew what you were searching for in this pond. You weren't looking for the foot, were you?'

'I was looking for anything that I might find,' he answered. 'I shall go on searching until we have the whole body. I shall go through all the streams and ponds around here, excepting Con-naught Water. That I shall leave to the last, as it will be a case of dredging from a boat and isn't so likely as the smaller ponds. Perhaps the head will be there; it's deeper than any of



the others.'

It now occurred to me that as I had learned all that I was likely to learn, which was little enough, I might as well leave the inspector to pursue his searches unembarrassed by my presence. Accordingly I thanked him for his assistance and departed by the way I had come.

But as I retraced my steps along the shady path I speculated profoundly on the officer's proceedings. My examinations of the mutilated hand had yielded the conclusion that the finger had been removed after death or shortly before, but more probably after. Some one else had evidently arrived at the same conclusion, and had communicated his opinion to Inspector Badger; for it was clear that that gentleman was in full cry after the missing finger. But why was he searching for it here when the hand had been found at Sidcup? And what did he expect to learn from it when he found it? There is nothing particularly characteristic about a finger, or, at least, the bones of one; and the object of the present researches was to determine the identity of the person of whom these bones were the remains. There was something mysterious about the affair, something suggesting that Inspector Badger was in possession of private information of some kind. But what information could he have? And whence could he have obtained it? These were questions to which I could find no answer, and I was still fruitlessly revolving them when I arrived at the modest inn where the inquest was to be held, and I proposed to fortify myself with a correspondingly modest lunch as a preparation for my attendance at the inquiry.

---

### XIII. — THE CORONER'S QUEST

THE proceedings of that fine old institution, the coroner's court, are apt to have their dignity impaired by the somewhat unjudicial surroundings amidst which they are conducted. The present inquiry was to be held in a long room attached to the inn, ordinarily devoted, as its various appurtenances testified, to gatherings of a more convivial character.

Hither I betook myself after a protracted lunch and a meditative pipe, and being the first to arrive—the jury having already been sworn and conducted to the mortuary to view the remains—whiled away the time by considering the habits of the customary occupants of the room by the light of the objects contained in it. A wooden target with one or two darts sticking in it hung on the end wall and invited the Robin Hoods of the village to try their skill; a system of incised marks on the oaken table made sinister suggestions of shove-halfpenny; and a large open box filled with white wigs, gaudily coloured robes and wooden spears, swords and regalia, crudely coated with gilded paper, obviously appertained to the puerile ceremonials of the Order of Druids.

I had exhausted the interest of these relics and had transferred my attentions to the picture gallery when the other spectators and the witnesses began to arrive. Hastily I seated myself in the only comfortable chair besides the one placed at the head of the table, presumably for the coroner; and I had hardly done so when the latter entered accompanied by the jury. Immediately after them came the sergeant, Inspector Badger, one or two plain-clothes men, and finally the divisional surgeon.

The coroner took his seat at the head of the table and opened his book, and the jury seated themselves on a couple of benches on one side of the long table.

I looked with some interest at the twelve 'good men and true.' They were a representative group of British tradesmen, quiet, attentive, and rather solemn; but my attention was particularly attracted by a small man with a very large head and a shock of upstanding hair whom I had diagnosed, after a glance at his intelligent but truculent countenance and the shiny knees of his trousers, as the village cobbler. He sat between the broad-shouldered foreman, who looked like a blacksmith, and a dogged, red-faced man whose general aspect of prosperous greasiness suggested the calling of a butcher.

'The inquiry, gentlemen,' the coroner commenced, 'upon which we are now entering concerns itself with two questions. The first is that of identity: who was this person whose body we have just viewed? The second is: How, when, and by what means did he come by his death? We will take the identity first and begin with the circumstances under which the body was discovered.'

Here the cobbler stood up and raised an excessively dirty hand.

'I rise, Mr. Chairman,' said he, 'to a point of order.' The other jurymen looked at him curiously and some of them, I regret to say, grinned. 'You have referred, sir,' he continued, 'to the body which we have just viewed. I wish to point out that we have not viewed a body; we have viewed a collection of bones.'

'We will refer to them as the remains, if you prefer it,' said the coroner.

'I do prefer it,' was the reply, and the objector sat down.

'Very well,' rejoined the coroner, and he proceeded to call the witnesses, of whom the first was a labourer who had discovered the bones in the watercress-bed.

'Do you happen to know how long it was since the watercress-beds had been cleaned out previously?' the coroner asked, when the witness had told the story of the discovery.

'They was cleaned out by Mr. Tapper's orders just before he gave them up. That will be a little better than two years ago. In May it were. I helped to clean 'em. I worked on this very same place and there wasn't no bones there then.'

The coroner glanced at the jury. 'Any questions, gentlemen,' he asked.

The cobbler directed an intimidating scowl at the witness and demanded:

‘Were you searching for bones when you came on these remains?’

‘Me!’ exclaimed the witness. ‘What should I be searching for bones for?’

‘Don’t prevaricate,’ said the cobbler sternly; ‘answer the question: Yes or no.’

‘No, of course I wasn’t.’

The juryman shook his enormous head dubiously as though implying that he would let it pass this time but it mustn’t happen again; and the examination of the witnesses continued, without eliciting anything that was new to me or giving rise to any incident, until the sergeant had described the finding of the right arm in the Cuckoo Pits.

‘Was this an accidental discovery?’ the coroner asked.

‘No. We had instructions from Scotland Yard to search any likely ponds in this neighbourhood.’

The coroner discreetly forbore to press this matter any further, but my friend the cobbler was evidently on the qui-vive, and I anticipated a brisk cross-examination for Mr. Badger when his turn came. The inspector was apparently of the same opinion, for I saw him cast a glance of the deepest malevolence at the too inquiring disciple of St Crispin. In fact, his turn came next, and the cobbler’s hair stood up with unholy joy.

The finding of the lower half of the trunk in Staple’s Pond at Loughton was the inspector’s own achievement, but he was not boastful about it. The discovery, he remarked, followed naturally on the previous one in the Cuckoo Pits.

‘Had you any private information that led you to search this particular neighbourhood?’ the cobbler asked.

‘We had no private information whatever,’ replied Badger.

‘Now I put it to you,’ pursued the juryman, shaking a forensic, and very dirty, forefinger at the inspector; ‘here are certain remains found at Sidcup; here are certain other remains found at St Mary Cray, and certain others at Lee. All those places are in Kent. Now isn’t it very remarkable that you should come straight down to Epping Forest, which is in Essex, and search for those bones and find ‘em?’

‘We were making a systematic search of all likely places,’ replied Badger.

‘Exactly,’ said the cobbler, with a ferocious grin, ‘that’s just my point. I say, isn’t it very funny that, after finding the remains in Kent some twenty miles from here, with the River Thames between, you should come here to look for the bones and go straight to Staple’s Pond, where they happen to be—and find ‘em?’

‘It would have been more funny,’ Badger replied sourly, ‘if we’d gone straight to a place where they happened not to be—and found them.’

A gratified snigger arose from the other eleven good men and true, and the cobbler grinned savagely; but before he could think of a suitable rejoinder the coroner interposed.

‘The question is not very material,’ he said, ‘and we mustn’t embarrass the police by unnecessary inquiries.’

‘It’s my belief,’ said the cobbler, ‘that he knew they were there all the time.’

‘The witness has stated that he had no private information,’ said the coroner; and he proceeded to take the rest of the inspector’s evidence, watched closely by the critical juror.

The account of the finding of the remains having been given in full, the police surgeon was called and sworn; the jurymen straightened their backs with an air of expectancy, and I turned over a page of my notebook.

‘You have examined the bones at present lying in the mortuary and forming the subject of this inquiry?’ the coroner asked.

‘I have.’

‘Will you kindly tell us what you have observed?’

‘I find that the bones are human bones, and are, in my opinion, all parts of the same person. They form a skeleton which is complete with the exception of the skull, the third finger of the left hand, the knee-caps, and the leg-bones—I mean the bones between the knees and the ankles.’

‘Is there anything to account for the absence of the missing finger?’

‘No. There is no deformity and no sign of its having been amputated during life. In my opinion it was removed after death.’

‘Can you give us any description of the deceased?’

‘I should say that these are the bones of an elderly man, probably over sixty years of age, about five feet eight and a half inches in height, of rather stout build, fairly muscular, and well preserved. There are no signs of disease excepting some old-standing rheumatic gout of the right hip-joint.’

‘Can you form any opinion as to the cause of death?’

'No. There are no marks of violence or signs of injury. But it will be impossible to form any opinion as to the cause of death until we have seen the skull.'

'Did you note anything else of importance?'

'Yes. I was struck by the appearance of anatomical knowledge and skill on the part of the person who dismembered the body. The knowledge of anatomy is proved by the fact that the corpse has been divided into definite anatomical regions. For instance, the bones of the neck are complete and include the top joint of the backbone known as the atlas; whereas a person without anatomical knowledge would probably take off the head by cutting through the neck. Then the arms have been separated with the scapula (or shoulder-blade) and clavicle (or collar-bone) attached, just as an arm would be removed for dissection.'

'The skill is shown by the neat way in which the dismemberment has been carried out. The parts have not been rudely hacked asunder, but have been separated at the joints so skilfully that I have not discovered a single scratch or mark of the knife on any of the bones.'

'Can you suggest any class of person who would be likely to possess the knowledge and skill to which you refer?'

'It would, of course, be possessed by a surgeon or medical student, and possibly by a butcher.'

'You think that the person who dismembered this body may have been a surgeon or a medical student?'

'Yes; or a butcher. Some one accustomed to the dismemberment of bodies and skilful with the knife.'

Here the cobbler suddenly rose to his feet.

'I rise, Mr. Chairman,' said he, 'to protest against the statement that has just been made.'

'What statement?' demanded the coroner.

'Against the aspersion,' continued the cobbler, with an oratorical flourish, 'that has been cast upon a honourable calling.'

'I don't understand you,' said the coroner.

'Doctor Summers has insinuated that this murder was committed by a butcher. Now a member of that honourable calling is sitting on this jury—'

'You let me alone,' growled the butcher.

'I will not let you alone,' persisted the cobbler. 'I desire—'

'Oh, shut up, Pope!' This was from the foreman, who, at the same moment, reached out an enormous hairy hand with which he grabbed the cobbler's coat-tails and brought him into a sitting posture with a thump that shook the room.

But Mr. Pope, though seated, was not silenced. 'I desire,' he said, 'to have my protest put on record.'

'I can't do that,' said the coroner, 'and I can't allow you to interrupt the witnesses.'

'I am acting,' said Mr. Pope, 'in the interests of my friend here and the members of a honourable—'

But here the butcher turned on him savagely, and, in a hoarse stage-whisper, exclaimed:

'Look here, Pope; you've got too much of what the cat licks—'

'Gentlemen! gentlemen!' the coroner protested sternly; 'I cannot permit this unseemly conduct. You are forgetting the solemnity of the occasion and your own responsible positions. I must insist on more decent and decorous behaviour.'

There was profound silence, in the midst of which the butcher concluded in the same hoarse whisper:

'—licks 'er paws with.'

The coroner cast a withering glance at him, and, turning to the witness, resumed the examination.

'Can you tell us, Doctor, how long a time has elapsed since the death of the deceased?'

'I should say not less than eighteen months, but probably more. How much more it is impossible from inspection alone to say. The bones are perfectly clean—that is, clean of all soft structures—and will remain substantially in their present condition for many years.'

'The evidence of the man who found the remains in the watercress-bed suggests that they could not have been there for more than two years. Do the appearances in your opinion agree with that view?'

'Yes; perfectly.'

'There is one more point, Doctor; a very important one. Do you find anything in any of the bones, or all of them together, which would enable you to identify them as the bones of any particular individual?'

'No,' replied Dr. Summers; 'I found no peculiarity that could furnish the means of personal identification.'

'The description of a missing individual has been given to us,' said the coroner; 'a man, fifty-nine years of age, five feet eight inches in height, healthy, well preserved, rather broad in build, and having an old Pott's fracture of the left ankle. Do the remains that you have examined agree with that description?'

'Yes, so far as agreement is possible. There is no disagreement.'

'The remains might be those of that individual?'

'They might; but there is no positive evidence that they are. The description would apply to a large proportion of elderly men, except as to the fracture.'

'You found no signs of such a fracture?'

'No. Pott's fracture affects the bone called the fibula. That is one of the bones that has not yet been found, so there is no evidence on that point. The left foot was quite normal, but then it would be in any case, unless the fracture had resulted in great deformity.'

'You estimated the height of the deceased as half an inch greater than that of the missing person. Does that constitute a disagreement?'

'No; my estimate is only approximate. As the arms are complete and the legs are not, I have based my calculations on the width across the two arms. But measurement of the thigh-bones gives the same result. The length of the thigh-bones is one foot seven inches and five-eighths.'

'So the deceased might not have been taller than five feet eight?'

'That is so; from five feet eight to five feet nine.'

'Thank you. I think that is all we want to ask you, Doctor; unless the jury wish to put any questions.'

He glanced uneasily at that august body, and instantly the irrepressible Pope rose to the occasion.

'About that finger that is missing,' said the cobbler. 'You say that it was cut off after death?'

'That is my opinion.'

'Now can you tell us why it was cut off?'

'No, I cannot.'

'Oh, come now, Doctor Summers, you must have formed some opinion on the subject.'

Here the coroner interposed. 'The Doctor is only concerned with the evidence arising out of the actual examination of the remains. Any personal opinions or conjectures that he may have formed are not evidence, and he must not be asked about them.'

'But, sir,' objected Pope, 'we want to know why that finger was cut off. It couldn't have been took off for no reason. May I ask, sir, if the person who is missing had anything peculiar about that finger?'

'Nothing is stated to that effect in the written description,' replied the coroner.

'Perhaps,' suggested Pope, 'Inspector Badger can tell us.'

'I think,' said the coroner, 'we had better not ask the police too many questions. They will tell us anything that they wish to be made public.'

'Oh, very well,' snapped the cobbler. 'If it's a matter of hushing it up I've got no more to say; only I don't see how we are to arrive at a verdict if we don't have the facts put before us.'

All the witnesses having now been examined, the coroner proceeded to sum up and address the jury.

'You have heard the evidence, gentlemen, of the various witnesses, and you will have perceived that it does not enable us to answer either of the questions that form the subject of this inquiry. We now know that the deceased was an elderly man, about sixty years of age, and about five feet eight to nine in height; and that his death took place from eighteen months to two years ago. That is all we know. From the treatment to which the body has been subjected we may form conjectures as to the circumstances of his death. But we have no actual knowledge. We do not know who the deceased was or how he came by his death. Consequently, it will be necessary to adjourn this inquiry until fresh facts are available, and as soon as that is the case, you will receive due notice that your attendance is required.'

The silence of the Court gave place to the confused noise of moving chairs and a general outbreak of eager talk, amidst which I rose and made my way out into the street. At the door I encountered Dr. Summers, whose dog-cart was waiting close by.

'Are you going back to town now?' he asked.

'Yes,' I answered; 'as soon as I can catch a train.'

'If you jump into my cart I'll run you down in time for the five-one. You'll miss it if you walk.'

I accepted his offer thankfully, and a minute later was spinning briskly down the road to the station.

'Queer little devil, that man Pope,' Dr. Summers remarked. 'Quite a character; a socialist, labourite, agitator, general crank; anything for a row.'

'Yes,' I answered; 'that was what his appearance suggested. It must be trying for the coroner to get a truculent rascal like

that on a jury.'

Summers laughed. 'I don't know. He supplies the comic relief. And then, you know, those fellows have their uses. Some of his questions were pretty pertinent.'

'So Badger seemed to think.'

'Yes, by Jove,' chuckled Summers. 'Badger didn't like him a bit; and I suspect the worthy inspector was sailing pretty close to the wind in his answers.'

'You think he really has some private information?'

'Depends upon what you mean by "information." The police are not a speculative body. They wouldn't be taking all this trouble unless they had a pretty straight tip from somebody. How are Mr. and Miss Bellingham? I used to know them when they lived here.'

I was considering a discreet answer to this question when we swept into the station yard. At the same moment the train drew up at the platform, and, with a hurried hand-shake and hastily spoken thanks, I sprang from the dog-cart and darted into the station.

During the rather slow journey homewards I read over my notes and endeavoured to extract from the facts they set forth some significance other than that which lay on the surface, but without much success. Then I fell to speculating on what Thorndyke would think of the evidence at the inquest and whether he would be satisfied with the information that I had collected. These speculations lasted me, with occasional digressions, until I arrived at the Temple and ran up the stairs rather eagerly to my friends' chambers.

But here a disappointment awaited me. The nest was empty with the exception of Polton, who appeared at the laboratory door in his white apron, with a pair of flat-nosed pliers in his hand.

'The Doctor had to go down to Bristol to consult over an urgent case,' he explained, 'and Doctor Jervis has gone with him. They'll be away a day or two, I expect, but the Doctor left this note for you.'

He took a letter from the shelf, where it had been stood conspicuously on edge, and handed it to me. It was a short note from Thorndyke apologising for his sudden departure and asking me to give Polton my notes with any comments that I had to make.

'You will be interested to learn,' he added, 'that the application will be heard in the Probate Court the day after tomorrow. I shall not be present, of course, nor will Jervis, so I should like you to attend and keep your eyes open for anything that may happen during the hearing and that may not appear in the notes that Marchmont's clerk will be instructed to take. I have retained Dr. Payne to stand by and help you with the practice, so that you can attend the Court with a clear conscience.'

This was highly flattering and quite atoned for the small disappointment; with deep gratification at the trust that Thorndyke had reposed in me, I pocketed the letter, handed my notes to Polton, wished him 'Good-evening,' and betook myself to Fetter Lane.

---

#### XIV. — WHICH CARRIES THE READER INTO THE PROBATE COURT

THE Probate Court wore an air of studious repose when I entered with Miss Bellingham and her father. Apparently the great and inquisitive public had not become aware of the proceedings that were about to take place, or had not realised their connection with the sensational 'Mutilation Case'; but barristers and Pressmen, better informed, had gathered in some strength, and the hum of their conversation filled the air like the droning of the voluntary that ushers in a cathedral service.

As we entered, a pleasant-faced, elderly gentleman rose and came forward to meet us, shaking Mr. Bellingham's hand cordially and saluting Miss Bellingham with a courtly bow.

'This is Mr. Marchmont, Doctor,' said the former, introducing me; and the solicitor, having thanked me for the trouble I had taken in attending at the inquest, led us to a bench, at the farther end of which was seated a gentleman whom I recognised as Mr. Hurst.

Mr. Bellingham recognised him at the same moment and glared at him wrathfully.

'I see that scoundrel is here!' he exclaimed in a distinctly audible voice, 'pretending that he doesn't see me, because he is ashamed to look me in the face, but—'

'Hush! hush! my dear sir,' exclaimed the horrified solicitor; 'we mustn't talk like that, especially in this place. Let me beg you—let me entreat you to control your feelings, to make no indiscreet remarks; in fact, to make no remarks at all,' he added, with the evident conviction that any remarks that Mr. Bellingham might make would be certain to be indiscreet.

'Forgive me, Marchmont,' Mr. Bellingham replied contritely. 'I will control myself: I will really be quite discreet. I won't even look at him again—because, if I do, I shall probably go over and pull his nose.'

This form of discretion did not appear to be quite to Mr. Marchmont's liking, for he took the precaution of insisting that

Miss Bellingham and I should sit on the farther side of his client, and thus effectually separate him from his enemy.

'Who's the long-nosed fellow talking to Jellicoe?' Mr. Bellingham asked.

'That is Mr. Loram, KG, Mr. Hurst's counsel; and the convivial-looking gentleman next to him is our counsel, Mr. Heath, a most able man and'—here Mr. Marchmont whispered behind his hand—'fully instructed by Doctor Thorndyke.'

At this juncture the judge entered and took his seat; the usher proceeded with great rapidity to swear in the jury, and the Court gradually settled down into that state of academic quiet which it maintained throughout the proceedings, excepting when the noisy swing-doors were set oscillating by some bustling clerk or reporter.

The judge was a somewhat singular-looking old gentleman, very short as to his face and very long as to his mouth; which peculiarities, together with a pair of large and bulging eyes (which he usually kept closed), suggested a certain resemblance to a frog. And he had a curious frog-like trick of flattening his eyelids—as if in the act of swallowing a large beetle—which was the only outward and visible sign of emotion that he ever displayed.

As soon as the swearing in of the jury was completed Mr. Loram rose to introduce the case; whereupon his lordship leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, as if bracing himself for a painful operation.

'The present proceedings,' Mr. Loram explained, 'are occasioned by the unaccountable disappearance of Mr. John Bellingham, of 141, Queen Square, Bloomsbury, which occurred about two years ago, or, to be more precise, on the twenty-third of November, nineteen hundred and two. Since that date nothing has been heard of Mr. Bellingham, and, as there are certain substantial reasons for believing him to be dead, the principal beneficiary under his will, Mr. George Hurst, is now applying to the Court for permission to presume the death of the testator and prove the will. As the time which has elapsed since the testator was last seen alive is only two years, the application is based upon the circumstances of the disappearance, which were, in many respects, very singular, the most remarkable feature of that disappearance being, perhaps, its suddenness and completeness.'

Here the judge remarked in a still, small voice that 'It would, perhaps, have been even more remarkable if the testator had disappeared gradually and incompletely.'

'No doubt, my lord,' agreed Mr. Loram; 'but the point is that the testator, whose habits had always been regular and orderly, disappeared on the date mentioned without having made any of the usual provisions for the conduct of his affairs, and has not since then been seen or heard of.'

With this preamble Mr. Loram proceeded to give a narrative of the events connected with the disappearance of John Bellingham, which was substantially identical with that which I had read in the newspapers; and having laid the actual facts before the jury, he went on to discuss their probable import.

'Now, what conclusion,' he asked, 'will this strange, this most mysterious train of events suggest to an intelligent person who shall consider it impartially? Here is a man who steps forth from the house of his cousin or his brother, as the case may be, and forthwith, in the twinkling of an eye, vanishes from human ken. What is the explanation? Did he steal forth and, without notice or hint of his intention, take train to some seaport, thence to embark for some distant land, leaving his affairs to take care of themselves and his friends to speculate vainly as to his whereabouts? Is he now hiding abroad, or even at home, indifferent alike to the safety of his own considerable property and the peace of mind of his friends? Or is it that death has come upon him unawares by sickness, by accident, or, more probably, by the hand of some unknown criminal? Let us consider the probabilities.'

'Can he have disappeared by his own deliberate act? Why not? it may be asked. Men undoubtedly do disappear from time to time, to be discovered by chance or to reappear voluntarily after intervals of years and find their names almost forgotten and their places filled by new-comers. Yes; but there is always some reason for a disappearance of this kind, even though it be a bad one. Family discords that make life a weariness; pecuniary difficulties that make life a succession of anxieties; distaste for particular circumstances and surroundings from which there seems no escape; inherent restlessness and vagabond tendencies, and so on.

'Do any of these explanations apply to the present case? No, they do not. Family discords—at least those capable of producing chronic misery—appertain exclusively to a married state. But the testator was a bachelor with no encumbrances whatever. Pecuniary anxieties can be equally excluded. The testator was in easy, in fact, in affluent circumstances. His mode of life was apparently agreeable and full of interest and activity, and he had full liberty of change if he wished. He had been accustomed to travel, and could do so again without absconding. He had reached an age when radical changes do not seem desirable. He was a man of fixed and regular habits, and his regularity was of his own choice and not due to compulsion or necessity. When last seen by his friends, as I shall prove, he was proceeding to a definite destination with the expressed intention of returning for purposes of his own appointing. He did return and then vanished, leaving those purposes unachieved.

'If we conclude that he has voluntarily disappeared and is at present in hiding, we adopt an opinion that is entirely at variance with all these weighty facts. If, on the other hand, we conclude that he has died suddenly, or has been killed by an accident or otherwise, we are adopting a view that involves no inherent improbabilities and that is entirely congruous with the known facts; facts that will be proved by the testimony of the witnesses whom I shall call. The supposition that the testator is dead is not only more probable than that he is alive; I submit it is the only reasonable explanation of the circumstances of his disappearance.

‘But this is not all. The presumption of death which arises so inevitably out of the mysterious and abrupt manner in which the testator disappeared has recently received most conclusive and dreadful confirmation. On the fifteenth of July last there were discovered at Sidcup the remains of a human arm—a left arm, gentlemen, from the hand of which the third, or ring, finger was missing. The doctor who has examined that arm will tell you that the finger was cut off either after death or immediately before; and his evidence will prove conclusively that that arm must have been deposited in the place where it was found just about the time when the testator disappeared. Since that first discovery, other portions of the same mutilated body have come to light; and it is a strange and significant fact that they have all been found in the immediate neighbourhood of Eltham or Woodford. You will remember, gentlemen, that it was either at Eltham or Woodford that the testator was last seen alive.

‘And now observe the completeness of the coincidence. These human remains, as you will be told presently by the experienced and learned medical gentleman who has examined them most exhaustively, are those of a man of about sixty years of age, about five feet eight inches in height, fairly muscular and well preserved, apparently healthy, and rather stoutly built. Another witness will tell you that the missing man was about sixty years of age, about five feet eight inches in height, fairly muscular and well preserved, apparently healthy, and rather stoutly built. And—another most significant and striking fact—the testator was accustomed to wear upon the third finger of his left hand—the very finger that is missing from the remains that were found—a most peculiar ring, which fitted so tightly that he was unable to get it off after once putting it on; a ring, gentlemen, of so peculiar a pattern that had it been found on the body must have instantly established the identity of the remains. In a word, gentlemen, the remains which have been found are those of a man exactly like the testator; they differ from him in no respect whatever; they display a mutilation which suggests an attempt to conceal an identifying peculiarity which he undoubtedly presented; and they were deposited in their various hiding-places about the time of the testator’s disappearance. Accordingly, when you have heard these facts proved by the sworn testimony of competent witnesses, together with the facts relating to the disappearance, I shall ask you for a verdict in accordance with that evidence.’

Mr. Loram sat down, and adjusting a pair of pince-nez, rapidly glanced over his brief while the usher was administering the oath to the first witness.

This was Mr. Jellicoe, who stepped into the box and directed a stony gaze at the (apparently) unconscious judge. The usual preliminaries having been gone through, Mr. Loram proceeded to examine him.

‘You were the testator’s solicitor and confidential agent, I believe?’

‘I was—and am.’

‘How long have you known him?’

‘Twenty-seven years.’

‘Judging from your experience of him, should you say that he was a person likely to disappear voluntarily and suddenly to cease to communicate with his friends?’

‘No.’

‘Kindly give your reasons for that opinion.’

‘Such conduct on the part of the testator would be entirely opposed to his habits and character as they are known to me. He was exceedingly regular and businesslike in his dealings with me.

When travelling abroad he always kept me informed as to his whereabouts, or, if he was likely to be beyond reach of communications, he always advised me beforehand. One of my duties was to collect a pension which he drew from the Foreign Office, and on no occasion, previous to his disappearance, has he ever failed to furnish me punctually with the necessary documents.’

‘Had he, so far as you know, any reasons for wishing to disappear?’

‘No.’

‘When and where did you last see him alive?’

‘At six o’clock in the evening, on the fourteenth of October, nineteen hundred and two, at 141, Queen Square, Bloomsbury.’

‘Kindly tell us what happened on that occasion.’

‘The testator had called for me at my office at a quarter past three, and asked me to come with him to his house to meet Doctor Norbury. I accompanied him to 141, Queen Square, and shortly after we arrived Doctor Norbury came to look at some antiquities that the testator proposed to give to the British Museum. The gift consisted of a mummy with four Canopic jars and other tomb-furniture which the testator stipulated should be exhibited together in a single case and in the state in which they were then presented. Of these objects, the mummy only was ready for inspection. The tomb-furniture had not yet arrived in England, but was expected within a week. Doctor Norbury accepted the gift on behalf of the Museum, but could not take possession of the objects until he had communicated with the Director and obtained his formal authority. The testator accordingly gave me certain instructions concerning the delivery of the gift, as he was leaving England that evening.’

‘Are those instructions relevant to the subject of this inquiry?’

‘I think they are. The testator was going to Paris, and perhaps thence to Vienna. He instructed me to receive and unpack the tomb-furniture on its arrival, and to store it, with the mummy, in a particular room, where it was to remain for three weeks. If he returned within that time he was to hand it over in person to the Museum authorities; if he had not returned within that time, he desired me to notify the Museum authorities that they were at liberty to take possession of and remove the collection at their convenience. From these instructions I gathered that the testator was uncertain as to the length of his absence from England and the extent of his journey.’

‘Did he state precisely where he was going?’

‘No. He said he was going to Paris and perhaps to Vienna, but he gave no particulars and I asked for none.’ ‘Do you, in fact, know where he went?’

‘No. He left the house at six o’clock wearing a long, heavy overcoat and carrying a suit-case and an umbrella. I wished him “Good-bye” at the door and watched him walk away as if going towards Southampton Row. I have no idea where he went, and I never saw him again.’

‘Had he no other luggage than the suit-case?’ ‘I do not know, but I believe not. He was accustomed to travel with the bare necessities, and to buy anything further he wanted en route.’

‘Did he say nothing to the servants as to the probable date of his return?’

‘There were no servants excepting the caretaker. The house was not used for residential purposes. The testator slept and took his meals at his club, though he kept his clothes at the house.’ ‘Did you receive any communication from him after he left?’ ‘No. I never heard from him again in any way. I waited for three weeks as he had instructed me, and then notified the Museum authorities that the collection was ready for removal. Five days later Doctor Norbury came and took formal possession of it, and it was transferred to the Museum forthwith.’ ‘When did you next hear of the testator?’

‘On the twenty-third of November following at a quarter-past seven in the evening. Mr. George Hurst came to my rooms, which are over my office, and informed me that the testator had called at his house during his absence and had been shown into the study to wait for him. That on his—Mr. Hurst’s—arrival it was found that the testator had disappeared without acquainting the servants of his intended departure, and without being seen by anyone to leave the house. Mr. Hurst thought this so remarkable that he had hastened up to town to inform me. I also thought it a remarkable circumstance, especially as I had received no communication from the testator, and we both decided that it was advisable to inform the testator’s brother, Godfrey, of what had happened.

‘Accordingly—Mr. Hurst and I proceeded as quickly as possible to Liverpool Street and took the first train available to Woodford, where Mr. Godfrey Bellingham then resided. We arrived at his house at five minutes to nine, and were informed by the servant that he was not at home, but that his daughter was in the library, which was a detached building situated in the grounds. The servant lighted a lantern and conducted us through the grounds to the library, where we found Mr. Godfrey Bellingham and Miss Bellingham. Mr. Godfrey had only just come in and had entered by the back gate, which had a bell that rang in the library. Mr. Hurst informed Mr. Godfrey of what had occurred, and then we left the library to walk up to the house. A few paces from the library I noticed by the light of the lantern, which Mr. Godfrey was carrying, a small object lying on the lawn. I pointed it to him and he picked it up, and then we all recognised it as a scarab that the testator was accustomed to wear on his watch-chain. It was fitted with a gold wire passed through the suspension hole and a gold ring. Both the wire and the ring were in position, but the ring was broken. We went to the house and questioned the servants as to visitors; but none of them had seen the testator, and they all agreed that no visitor whatsoever had come to the house during the afternoon or evening. Mr. Godfrey and Miss Bellingham both declared that they had neither seen nor heard anything of the testator, and were both unaware that he had returned to England. As the circumstances were somewhat disquieting, I communicated, on the following morning, with the police and requested them to make inquiries; which they did, with the result that a suit-case bearing the initials “J. B.”, was found to be lying unclaimed in the cloak-room at Charing Cross Station. I was able to identify the suit-case as that which I had seen the testator carry away from Queen Square. I was also able to identify some of the contents. I interviewed the cloak-room attendant, who informed me that the suit-case had been deposited on the twenty-third about 4.15 p.m. He had no recollection of the person who deposited it. It remained unclaimed in the possession of the railway company for three months, and was then surrendered to me.’

‘Were there any marks or labels on it showing the route by which it had travelled?’

‘There were no labels on it and no marks other than the initials “J.B.”

‘Do you happen to know the testator’s age?’

‘Yes. He was fifty-nine on the eleventh of October, nineteen hundred and two.’

‘Can you tell us what his height was?’

‘Yes. He was exactly five feet eight inches.’

‘What sort of health had he?’

‘So far as I know his health was good. I am not aware that he suffered from any disease. I am only judging by his appearance, which was that of a healthy man.’



‘Should you describe him as well preserved or otherwise?’

‘I should describe him as a well preserved man for his age.’

‘How should you describe his figure?’

‘I should describe him as rather broad and stout in build, and fairly muscular, though not exceptionally so.’

Mr. Loram made a rapid note of these answers and then said:

‘You have told us, Mr. Jellicoe, that you have known the testator intimately for twenty-seven years. Now, did you ever notice whether he was accustomed to wear any rings upon his fingers?’

‘He wore upon the third finger of his left hand a copy of an antique ring which bore the device of the Eye of Osiris. That was the only ring he ever wore as far as I know.’

‘Did he wear it constantly?’

‘Yes, necessarily; because it was too small for him, and having once squeezed it on he was never able to get it off again.’

This was the sum of Mr. Jellicoe’s evidence, and at its conclusion the witness glanced inquiringly at Mr. Bellingham’s counsel. But Mr. Heath remained seated, attentively considering the notes that he had just made, and finding that there was to be no cross-examination, Mr. Jellicoe stepped down from the box. I leaned back on my bench, and, turning my head, observed Miss Bellingham deep in thought.

‘What do you think of it?’ I asked.

‘It seems very complete and conclusive,’ she replied. And then, with a sigh, she murmured: ‘Poor old Uncle John! How horrid it sounds to talk of him in this cold-blooded, business-like way, as “the testator,” as if he were nothing but a sort of algebraical sign.’

‘There isn’t much room for sentiment, I suppose, in the proceedings of the Probate Court,’ I replied. To which she assented, and then asked: ‘Who is this lady?’

‘This lady’ was a fashionably dressed young woman who had just bounced into the witness-box and was now being sworn. The preliminaries being finished, she answered Miss Bellingham’s question and Mr. Loram’s by stating that her name was Augustina Gwendoline Dobbs, and that she was housemaid to Mr. George Hurst, of The Poplars, Eltham.

‘Mr. Hurst lives alone, I believe?’ said Mr. Loram.

‘I don’t know what you mean by that,’ Miss Dobbs began; but the barrister explained.

‘I mean that I believe he is unmarried?’

‘Well, and what about it?’ the witness demanded tartly.

‘I am asking you a question.’

‘I know that,’ said the witness viciously; ‘and I say that you’ve no business to make any such insinuations to a respectable young lady when there’s a cook-housekeeper and a kitchenmaid living in the house, and him old enough to be my father—’

Here his lordship flattened his eyelids with startling effect, and Mr. Loram interrupted: ‘I make no insinuations. I merely ask, Is your employer, Mr. Hurst, an unmarried man, or is he not?’

‘I never asked him,’ said the witness sulkily.

‘Please answer my question—yes or no.’

‘How can I answer your question? He may be married or he may not. How do I know? I’m no private detective.’

Mr. Loram directed a stupefied gaze at the witness, and in the ensuing silence a plaintive voice came from the bench:

‘Is that point material?’

‘Certainly, my lord,’ replied Mr. Loram.

‘Then, as I see that you are calling Mr. Hurst, perhaps you had better put the question to him. He will probably know.’

Mr. Loram bowed, and as the judge subsided into his normal state of coma he turned to the triumphant witness.

‘Do you remember anything remarkable occurring on the twenty-third of November the year before last?’

‘Yes. Mr. John Bellingham called at our house.’

‘How did you know he was Mr. John Bellingham?’

‘I didn’t; but he said he was, and I supposed he knew.’

‘At what time did he arrive?’

‘At twenty minutes past five in the evening.’

‘What happened then?’

‘I told him that Mr. Hurst had not come home yet, and he said he would wait for him in the study and write some letters;

so I showed him into the study and shut the door.'

'What happened next?'

'Nothing. Then Mr. Hurst came home at his usual time—a quarter to six—and let himself in with his key. He went straight into the study where I supposed Mr. Bellingham still was, so I took no notice, but laid the table for two. At six o'clock Mr. Hurst came into the dining-room—he has tea in the City and dines at six—and when he saw the table laid for two he asked the reason. I said I thought Mr. Bellingham was staying to dinner.

"Mr. Bellingham!" says he. "I didn't know he was here. Why didn't you tell me?" he says. "I thought he was with you, sir," I said. "I showed him into the study," I said. "Well, he wasn't there when I came in," he said, "and he isn't there now," he said. "Perhaps he has gone to wait in the drawing-room," he said. So we went and looked in the drawing-room, but he wasn't there. Then Mr. Hurst said he thought Mr. Bellingham must have got tired of waiting and gone away; but I told him I was quite sure he hadn't, because I had been watching all the time. Then he asked me if Mr. Bellingham was alone or whether his daughter was with him, and I said that it wasn't that Mr. Bellingham at all, but Mr. John Bellingham, and then he was more surprised than ever. I said we had better search the house to make sure whether he was there or not, and Mr. Hurst said he would come with me; so we all went over the house and looked in all the rooms, but there was not a sign of Mr. Bellingham in any of them. Then Mr. Hurst got very nervous and upset, and when he had just snatched a little dinner he ran off to catch the six thirty-one train up to town.'

'You say that Mr. Bellingham could not have left the house because you were watching all the time. Where were you while you were watching?'

'I was in the kitchen. I could see the front gate from the kitchen window.'

'You say that you laid the table for two. Where did you lay it?'

'In the dining-room, of course.'

'Could you see the front gate from the dining-room?'

'No, but I could see the study door. The study is opposite the dining-room.'

'Do you have to come upstairs to get from the kitchen to the dining-room?'

'Yes, of course you do!'

'Then, might not Mr. Bellingham have left the house while you were coming up the stairs?'

'No, he couldn't have done.'

'Why not?'

'Because it would have been impossible.'

'But why would it have been impossible?'

'Because he couldn't have done it.'

'I suggest that Mr. Bellingham left the house quietly while you were on the stairs?'

'No, he didn't.'

'How do you know he did not?'

'I am quite sure he didn't.'

'But how can you be certain?'

'Because I should have seen him if he had.'

'But I mean when you were on the stairs.'

'He was in the study when I was on the stairs.'

'How do you know he was in the study?'

'Because I showed him in there and he hadn't come out.'

Mr. Loram paused and took a deep breath, and his lordship flattened his eyelids.

'Is there a gate to the premises?' the barrister resumed wearily.

'Yes. It opens into a narrow lane at the side of the house.'

'And there is a French window in the study, is there not?'

'Yes It opens on to the small grass plot opposite the side gate.'

'Were the window and the gate locked or would it have been possible for Mr. Bellingham to let himself out into the lane?'

'The window and the gate both have catches on the inside. He could have got out that way, but, of course, he didn't.'

'Why not?'

'Well, no gentleman would go creeping out the back way like a thief.'

'Did you look to see if the French window was shut and fastened after you missed Mr. Bellingham?'

'I looked at it when we shut the house up for the night. It was then shut and fastened on the inside.'

'And the side gate?'

'That gate was shut and latched. You have to slam the gate to make the latch fasten, so no one could have gone out of the gate without being heard.'

Here the examination-in-chief ended, and Mr. Loram sat down with an audible sigh of relief. Miss Dobbs was about to step down from the witness-box when Mr. Heath rose to cross-examine.

'Did you see Mr. Bellingham in a good light?' he asked.

'Pretty good. It was dark outside, but the hall-lamp was alight.'

'Kindly look at this'—here a small object was passed across to the witness. 'It is a trinket that Mr. Bellingham is stated to have carried suspended from his watch-guard. Can you remember if he was wearing it in that manner when he came to the house?'

'No, he was not.'

'You are sure of that.'

'Quite sure.'

'Thank you. And now I want to ask you about the search that you have mentioned. You say that you went all over the house. Did you go into the study?'

'No—at least, not until Mr. Hurst had gone to London.'

'When you did go in, was the window fastened?'

'Yes.'

'Could it have been fastened from the outside?'

'No; there is no handle outside.'

'What furniture is there in the study?'

'There is a writing-table, a revolving-chair, two easy chairs, two large book-cases, and a wardrobe that Mr. Hurst keeps his overcoats and hats in.'

'Does the wardrobe lock?'

'Yes.'

'Was it locked when you went in?'

'I'm sure I don't know. I don't go about trying the cupboards and drawers.'

'What furniture is there in the drawing-room?'

'A cabinet, six or seven chairs, a Chesterfield sofa, a piano, a silver-table, and one or two occasional tables.'

'Is the piano a grand or upright?'

'It is an upright grand.'

'In what position is it placed?'

'It stands across a corner near the window.'

'Is there sufficient room behind it for a man to conceal himself?'

Miss Dobbs was amused and did not dissemble. 'Oh, yes,' she sniggered, 'there's plenty of room for a man to hide behind it.'

'When you searched the drawing-room, did you look behind the piano?'

'No, I didn't,' Miss Dobbs replied scornfully.

'Did you look under the sofa?'

'Certainly not!'

'What did you do then?'

'We opened the door and looked into the room. We were not looking for a cat or a monkey; we were looking for a middle-aged gentleman.'

'And am I to take it that your search over the rest of the house was conducted in a similar manner?'

'Certainly. We looked into the rooms, but we did not search under the beds or in the cupboards.'

‘Are all the rooms in the house in use as living or sleeping rooms?’

‘No; there is one room on the second floor that is used as a store and lumber-room, and one on the first floor that Mr. Hurst uses to store trunks and things that he is not using.’

‘Did you look in those rooms when you searched the house?’

‘No.’

‘Have you looked in them since?’

‘I have been in the lumber-room since, but not in the other. It is always kept locked.’

At this point an ominous flattening became apparent in his lordship’s eyelids, but these symptoms passed when Mr. Heath sat down and indicated that he had no further questions to ask.

Miss Dobbs once more prepared to step down from the witness-box when Mr. Loram shot up like a jack-in-the-box.

‘You have made certain statements,’ said he, ‘concerning the scarab which Mr. Bellingham was accustomed to wear suspended from his watch-guard. You say that he was not wearing it when he came to Mr. Hurst’s house on the twenty-third of November, nineteen hundred and two. Are you quite sure of that?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘I must ask you to be very careful in your statement on this point. The question is a highly important one. Do you swear that the scarab was not hanging from his watch-guard?’

‘Yes, I do.’

‘Did you notice the watch-guard particularly?’

‘No; not particularly.’

‘Then what makes you sure that the scarab was not attached to it?’

‘It couldn’t have been.’

‘Why could it not?’

‘Because if it had been there I should have seen it.’

‘What kind of watch-guard was Mr. Bellingham wearing?’

‘Oh, an ordinary sort of watch-guard.’

‘I mean was it a chain or a ribbon or a strap?’

‘A chain, I think—or perhaps a ribbon—or it might have been a strap.’

His lordship flattened his eyelids, but made no further sign and Mr. Loram continued:

‘Did you or did you not notice what kind of watch-guard Mr. Bellingham was wearing?’

‘I did not. Why should I? It was no business of mine.’

‘But yet you are quite sure about the scarab?’

‘Yes, quite sure.’

‘You noticed that then?’

Mr. Loram paused and looked helplessly at the witness; a suppressed titter arose from the body of the Court, and a faint voice from the bench inquired:

‘Are you quite incapable of giving a straightforward answer?’

Miss Dobbs’s only reply was to burst into tears; whereupon Mr. Loram abruptly sat down and abandoned his re-examination.

The witness-box vacated by Miss Dobbs was occupied successively by Dr. Norbury, Mr. Hurst and the cloakroom attendant, none of whom contributed any new facts, but merely corroborated the statements made by Mr. Jellicoe and the housemaid. Then came the labourer who discovered the bones at Sidcup, and who repeated the evidence that he had given at the inquest, showing that the remains could not have been lying in the watercress-bed more than two years. Finally Dr. Summers was called, and, after he had given a brief description of the bones that he had examined, was asked by Mr. Loram:

‘You have heard the description that Mr. Jellicoe has given of the testator?’

‘I have.’

‘Does that description apply to the person whose remains you examined?’

‘In a general way it does.’

‘I must ask you for a direct answer—yes or no. Does it apply?’

‘Yes. But I ought to say that my estimate of the height of the deceased is only approximate.’

‘Quite so. Judging from your examination of those remains and from Mr. Jellicoe’s description, might those remains be the remains of the testator, John Bellingham?’

‘Yes, they might.’

On receiving this admission Mr. Loram sat down, and Mr. Heath immediately rose to cross-examine.

‘When you examined these remains, Doctor Summers, did you discover any personal peculiarities which would enable you to identify them as the remains of any one individual rather than any other individual of similar size, age, and proportions?’

‘No. I found nothing that would identify the remains as those of any particular individual.’

As Mr. Heath asked no further questions, the witness received his dismissal, and Mr. Loram informed the Court that that was his case. The judge bowed somnolently, and then Mr. Heath rose to address the Court on behalf of the respondent. It was not a long speech, nor was it enriched by any displays of florid rhetoric; it concerned itself exclusively with a rebutment of the arguments of the counsel for the petitioner.

Having briefly pointed out that the period of absence was too short to give rise of itself to the presumption of death, Mr. Heath continued:

‘The claim therefore rests upon evidence of a positive character. My learned friend asserts that the testator is presumably dead, and it is for him to prove what he has affirmed. Now, has he done this? I submit that he has not. He has argued with great force and ingenuity that the testator, being a bachelor, a solitary man without wife or child, dependant or master, public or private office of duty, or any bond, responsibility, or any other condition limiting his freedom of action, had no reason or inducement for absconding. This is my learned friend’s argument, and he has conducted it with so much skill and ingenuity that he has not only succeeded in proving his case; he has proved a great deal too much. For if it is true, as my learned friend so justly argues, that a man thus unfettered by obligations of any kind has no reason for disappearing, is it not even more true that he has no reason for not disappearing? My friend has urged that the testator was at liberty to go where he pleased, when he pleased, and how he pleased; and that therefore there was no need for him to abscond. I reply, if he was at liberty to go away, whither, when, and how he pleased, why do we express surprise that he has made use of his liberty? My learned friend points out that the testator notified to nobody his intention of going away and has acquainted no one with his whereabouts; but, I ask, whom should he have notified? He was responsible to nobody; there was no one dependent upon him; his presence or absence was the concern of nobody but himself. If circumstances suddenly arising made it desirable that he should go abroad, why should he not go? I say there was no reason whatever.

‘My learned friend has said that the testator went away leaving his affairs to take care of themselves. Now, gentlemen, I ask you if this can fairly be said of a man whose affairs are, as they have been for many years, in the hands of a highly capable, completely trustworthy agent who is better acquainted with them than the testator himself? Clearly it cannot.

‘To conclude this part of the argument: I submit that the circumstances of the so-called disappearance of the testator present nothing out of the ordinary. The testator is a man of ample means, without any responsibilities to fetter his movements, and has been in the constant habit of travelling, often into remote and distant regions. The mere fact that he has been absent somewhat longer; than usual affords no ground whatever for the drastic proceeding of presumption of death and taking possession of his property.

‘With reference to the human remains which have been mentioned in connection with the case I need say but little. The attempt; to connect them with the testator has failed completely. You, yourselves have heard Doctor Summers state on oath that they cannot be identified as the remains of any particular person. That would seem to dispose of them effectually. I must remark upon a very singular point that has been raised by the learned counsel for the petitioner, which is this:

‘My learned friend points out that these remains were discovered near Eltham and near Woodford and that the testator was last seen alive at one of these two places. This he considers for some reason to be a highly significant fact. But I cannot agree with him. If the testator had been last seen alive at Woodford and the remains had been found at Woodford, or if he had disappeared from Eltham, and the remains had been found at Eltham, that would have had some significance. But he can only have been last seen at one of the places, whereas the remains have been found at both places. Here again my learned friend seems to have proved too much.

‘But I need not occupy your time further. I repeat that, in order to justify us in presuming the death of the testator, clear and positive evidence would be necessary. That no such evidence has been brought forward. Accordingly, seeing that the testator may return at any time and is entitled to find his property intact, I shall ask you for a verdict that will secure to him this measure of ordinary justice.’

At the conclusion of Mr. Heath’s speech the judge, as if awakening from a refreshing nap, opened his eyes; and uncommonly shrewd, intelligent eyes they were when the expressive eyelids were duly tucked up out of the way. He commenced by reading over a part of the will and certain notes—which he appeared to have made in some miraculous fashion with his eyes shut—and then proceeded to review the evidence and the counsels’ arguments for the instruction of the jury.

‘Before considering the evidence which you have heard, gentlemen’ he said, ‘it will be well for me to say a few words to you on the general aspects of the case which is occupying our attention.’

'If a person goes abroad or disappears from his home and his ordinary places of resort and is absent for a long period of time, the presumption of death arises at the expiration of seven years from the date on which he was last heard of. That is to say, that the total disappearance of an individual for seven years constitutes presumptive evidence that the said individual is dead; and the presumption can be set aside only by the production of evidence that he was alive at some time within that period of seven years. But if, on the other hand, it is sought to presume the death of a person who has been absent for a shorter period than seven years, it is necessary to produce such evidence as shall make it highly probable that the said person is dead. Of course, presumption implies supposition as opposed to actual demonstration; but, nevertheless, the evidence in such a case must be of a kind that tends to create a very strong belief that death has occurred; and I need hardly say that the shorter the period of absence, the more convincing must be the evidence.

'In the present case, the testator, John Bellingham, has been absent somewhat under two years. This is a relatively short period, and in itself gives rise to no presumption of death. Nevertheless, death has been presumed in a case where the period of absence was even shorter and the insurance recovered; but here the evidence supporting the belief in the occurrence of death was exceedingly weighty.

'The testator in this case was a shipmaster, and his disappearance was accompanied by the disappearance of the ship and the entire ship's company in the course of a voyage from London to Marseilles. The loss of the ship and her crew was the only reasonable explanation of the disappearance, and, short of actual demonstration, the facts offered convincing evidence of the death of all persons on board. I mention this case as an illustration. You are not dealing with speculative probabilities. You are contemplating a very momentous proceeding, and you must be very sure of your ground. Consider what it is that you are asked to do.

'The petitioner asks permission to presume the death of the testator in order that the testator's property may be distributed among the beneficiaries under the will. The granting of such permission involves us in the gravest responsibility. An ill-considered decision might be productive of a serious injustice to the testator, an injustice that could never be remedied. Hence it is incumbent upon you to weigh the evidence with the greatest care, to come to no decision without the profoundest consideration of all the facts.

'The evidence that you have heard divides itself into two parts—that relating to the circumstances of the testator's disappearance, and that relating to certain human remains. In connection with the latter I can only suggest my surprise and regret that the application was not postponed until the completion of the coroner's inquest, and leave you to consider the evidence. You will bear in mind that Doctor Summers has stated explicitly that the remains cannot be identified as those of any particular individual, but that the testator and the unknown deceased had so many points of resemblance that they might possibly be one and the same person.

'With reference to the circumstances of the disappearance, you have heard the evidence of Mr. Jellicoe to the effect that the testator has on no previous occasion gone abroad without informing him as to his proposed destination. But in considering what weight you are to give to this statement you will bear in mind that when the testator set out for Paris after his interview with Doctor Norbury he left Mr. Jellicoe without any information as to his specific destination, his address in Paris, or the precise date when he should return, and that Mr. Jellicoe was unable to tell us where the testator went or what was his business. Mr. Jellicoe was, in fact, for a time without any means of tracing the testator or ascertaining his whereabouts.

'The evidence of the housemaid, Dobbs, and of Mr. Hurst is rather confusing. It appears that the testator came to the house, and when looked for later was not to be found. A search of the premises showed that he was not in the house, whence it seems to follow that he must have left it; but since no one was informed of his intention to leave, and he had expressed the intention of staying to see Mr. Hurst, his conduct in thus going away surreptitiously must appear somewhat eccentric. The point that you have to consider, therefore, is whether a person who is capable of thus departing in a surreptitious and eccentric manner from a house, without giving notice to the servants, is capable also of departing in a surreptitious and eccentric manner from his usual places of resort without giving notice to his friends or thereafter informing them of his whereabouts.

'The questions, then, gentlemen, that you have to ask yourselves before deciding on your verdict are two: first, Are the circumstances of the testator's disappearance and his continued absence incongruous with his habits and personal peculiarities as they are known to you? and second, Are there any facts which indicate in a positive manner that the testator is dead? Ask yourselves these questions, gentlemen, and the answers to them, furnished by the evidence that you have heard, will guide you to your decision.'

Having delivered himself of the above instructions, the judge applied himself to the perusal of the will with professional gusto, in which occupation he was presently disturbed by the announcement of the foreman of the jury that a verdict had been agreed upon.

The judge sat up and glanced at the jury-box, and when the foreman proceeded to state that 'We find no sufficient reason for presuming the testator, John Bellingham, to be dead,' he nodded approvingly. Evidently that was his opinion, too, as he was careful to explain when he conveyed to Mr. Loram the refusal of the Court to grant the permission applied for.

The decision was a great relief to me, and also, I think, to Miss Bellingham; but most of all to her father, who, with instinctive good manners, since he could not suppress a smile of triumph, rose and hastily stumped out of the Court, so that the discomfited Hurst should not see him. His daughter and I followed, and as we left the Court she remarked, with a smile:

‘So our pauperism is not, after all, made absolute. There is still a chance for us in the Chapter of Accidents—and perhaps even for poor old Uncle John.’

---

## XV. — CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

THE morning after the hearing saw me setting forth on my round in more than usually good spirits. The round itself was but a short one, for my list contained only a couple of ‘chronics,’ and this, perhaps, contributed to my cheerful outlook on life. But there were other reasons. The decision of the Court had come as an unexpected reprieve and the ruin of my friends’ prospects was at least postponed. Then, I had learned that Thorndyke was back from Bristol and wished me to look in on him; and, finally, Miss Bellingham had agreed to spend this very afternoon with me, browsing round the galleries at the British Museum.

I had disposed of my two patients by a quarter to eleven, and three minutes later was striding down Mitre Court, all agog to hear what Thorndyke had to say with reference to my notes on the inquest. The ‘oak’ was open when I arrived at his chambers, and a modest flourish on the little brass knocker of the inner door was answered by my quondam teacher himself.

‘How good of you, Berkeley,’ he said, shaking hands genially, ‘to look me up so early. I am alone, just looking through the report of the evidence in yesterday’s proceedings.’

He placed an easy chair for me, and, gathering up a bundle of typewritten papers, laid them aside on the table.

‘Were you surprised at the decision?’ I asked.

‘No,’ he answered. ‘Two years is a short period of absence; but still, it might easily have gone the other way. I am greatly relieved. The respite gives us time to carry out our investigations without undue hurry.’

‘Did you find my notes of any use?’ I asked.

‘Heath did. Polton handed them to him, and they were invaluable to him for his cross-examination. I haven’t seen them yet; in fact, I have only just got them back from him. Let us go through them together now.’

He opened a drawer and taking from it my notebook, seated himself, and began to read through my notes with grave attention, while I stood and looked shyly over his shoulder. On the page that contained my sketches of the Sidcup arm, showing the distribution of the snails’ eggs on the bones, he lingered with a faint smile that made me turn hot and red.

‘Those sketches look rather footy,’ I said; ‘but I had to put something in my notebook.’

‘You did not attach any importance, then, to the facts that they illustrated?’

‘No. The egg-patches were there, so I noted the fact. That’s all.’

‘I congratulate you, Berkeley. There is not one man in twenty who would have had the sense to make a careful note of what he considers an unimportant or irrelevant fact; and the investigator who notes only those things that appear significant is perfectly useless. He gives himself no material for reconsideration. But you don’t mean that these egg-patches and worm tubes appeared to you to have no significance at all?’

‘Oh, of course, they show the position in which the bones were lying.’

‘Exactly. The arm was lying, fully extended, with the dorsal side uppermost. But we also learn from these egg-patches that the hand had been separated from the arm before it was thrown into the pond; and there is something very remarkable in that.’

I leaned over his shoulder and gazed at my sketches, amazed at the rapidity with which he had reconstructed the limb from my rough drawings of the individual bones.

‘I don’t quite see how you arrived at it, though,’ I said.

‘Well, look at your drawings. The egg-patches are on the dorsal surface of the scapula, the humerus, and the bones of the fore-arm. But here you have shown six of the bones of the hand: two metacarpals, the os magnum, and three phalanges; and they all have egg-patches on the palmar surface. Therefore the hand was lying palm upwards.’

‘But the hand may have been pronated.’

‘If you mean pronated in relation to the arm, that is impossible, for the position of the egg-patches shows clearly that the bones of the arm were lying in the position of supination. Thus the dorsal surface of the arm and the palmar surface of the hand respectively were uppermost, which is an anatomical impossibility so long as the hand is attached to the arm.’

‘But might not the hand have become detached after lying in the pond some time?’

‘No. It could not have been detached until the ligaments had decayed, and if it had been separated after the decay of the soft parts, the bones would have been thrown into disorder. But the egg-patches are all on the palmar surface, showing that the bones were still in their normal relative positions. No, Berkeley, that hand was thrown into the pond separately from the arm.’

‘But why should it have been?’ I asked.

‘Ah, there is a very pretty little problem for you to consider. And, meantime, let me tell you that your expedition has been a brilliant success. You are an excellent observer. Your only fault is that when you have noted certain facts you don’t seem fully to appreciate their significance—which is merely a matter of inexperience. As to the facts that you have collected, several of them are of prime importance.’

‘I am glad you are satisfied,’ said I, ‘though I don’t see that I have discovered much excepting those snails’ eggs; and they don’t seem to have advanced matters very much.’

‘A definite fact, Berkeley, is a definite asset. Perhaps we may presently find a little space in our Chinese puzzle which this fact of the detached hand will just drop into. But, tell me, did you find nothing unexpected or suggestive about those bones—as to their number and condition, for instance?’

‘Well, I thought it a little queer that the scapula and clavicle should be there. I should have expected him to cut the arm off at the shoulder-joint.’

‘Yes,’ said Thorndyke; ‘so should I; and so it has been done in every case of dismemberment that I am acquainted with. To an ordinary person, the arm seems to join on to the trunk at the shoulder-joint, and that is where he would naturally sever it. What explanation do you suggest of this unusual mode of severing the arm?’

‘Do you think the fellow could have been a butcher?’ I asked, remembering Dr. Summers’ remark. ‘This is the way a shoulder of mutton is taken off.’

‘No,’ replied Thorndyke. ‘A butcher includes the scapula in a shoulder of mutton for a specific purpose, namely, to take off a given quantity of meat. And also, as a sheep has no clavicle, it is the easiest way to detach the limb. But I imagine a butcher would find himself in difficulties if he attempted to take off a man’s arm in that way. The clavicle would be a new and perplexing feature. Then, too a butcher does not deal very delicately with his subject; if he has to divide a joint, he just cuts through it and does not trouble himself to avoid marking the bones. But you note here that there is not a single scratch or score on any one of the bones, not even where the finger was removed. Now, if you have ever prepared bones for a museum, as I have, you will remember the extreme care that is necessary in disarticulating joints to avoid disfiguring the articular ends of the bones with cuts and scratches.’

‘Then you think that the person who dismembered this body must have had some anatomical knowledge and skill?’

‘That is what has been suggested. The suggestion is not mine.’

‘Then I infer that you don’t agree?’

Thorndyke smiled. ‘I am sorry to be so cryptic, Berkeley, but you understand that I can’t make statements. Still, I am trying to lead you to make certain inferences from the facts that are in your possession.’

‘If I make the right inference, will you tell me?’ I asked.

‘It won’t be necessary,’ he answered, with the same quiet smile. ‘When you have fitted the puzzle together you don’t need to be told you have done it.’

It was most infernally tantalising. I pondered on the problem with a scowl of such intense cogitation that Thorndyke laughed outright.

‘It seems to me,’ I said, at length, ‘that the identity of the remains is the primary question and that it is a question of fact. It doesn’t seem any use to speculate about it.’

‘Exactly. Either these bones are the remains of John Bellingham or they are not. There will be no doubt on the subject when all the bones are assembled—if ever they are. And the settlement of that question will probably throw light on the further question: Who deposited them in the places in which they were found? But to return to your observations: did you gather nothing from the other bones? From the complete state of the neck vertebrae, for instance?’

‘Well, it did strike me as rather odd that the fellow should have gone to the trouble of separating the atlas from the skull. He must have been pretty handy with the scalpel to have done it as cleanly as he seems to have done; but I don’t see why he should have gone about the business in the most inconvenient way.’

‘You notice the uniformity of method. He has separated the head from the spine, instead of cutting through the spine lower down, as most persons would have done: he removed the arms with the entire shoulder-girdle, instead of simply cutting them off at the shoulder-joints. Even in the thighs the same peculiarity appears; for in neither case was the knee-cap found with the thigh-bone, although it seems to have been searched for. Now the obvious way to divide the leg is to cut through the patellar ligament, leaving the knee-cap attached to the thigh. But in this case, the knee-cap appears to have been left attached to the shank. Can you explain why this person should have adopted this unusual and rather inconvenient method? Can you suggest a motive for this procedure, or can you think of any circumstances which might lead a person to adopt this method by preference?’

‘It seems as if he wished, for some reason, to divide the body into definite anatomical regions.’

Thorndyke chuckled. ‘You are not offering that suggestion as an explanation, are you? Because it would require more explaining than the original problem. And it is not even true. Anatomically speaking, the knee-cap appertains to the thigh rather than to the shank. It is a sesamoid bone belonging to the thigh muscles; yet in this case it has been left attached, apparently, to the shank. No, Berkeley, that cat won’t jump. Our unknown operator was not preparing a skeleton as a



museum specimen; he was dividing a body up into convenient sized portions for the purpose of conveying them to various ponds. Now what circumstances might have led him to divide it in this peculiar manner?’

‘I am afraid I have no suggestion to offer. Have you?’

Thorndyke suddenly lapsed into ambiguity. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘it is possible to conceive such circumstances, and so, probably, will you if you think it over.’

‘Did you gather anything of importance from the evidence at the inquest?’ I asked.

‘It is difficult to say,’ he replied. ‘The whole of my conclusions in this case are based on what is virtually circumstantial evidence. I have not one single fact of which I can say that it admits only of a single interpretation. Still, it must be remembered that even the most inconclusive facts, if sufficiently multiplied, yield a highly conclusive total. And my little pile of evidence is growing, particle by particle; but we mustn’t sit here gossiping at this hour of the day; I have to consult with Marchmont and you say that you have an early afternoon engagement. We can walk together as far as Fleet Street.’

A minute or two later we went our respective ways, Thorndyke towards Lombard Street and I to Fetter Lane, not unmindful of those coming events that were casting so agreeable a shadow before them.

There was only one message awaiting me, and when Adolphus had delivered it (amidst mephitic fumes that rose from the basement, premonitory of fried plaice), I pocketed my stethoscope and betook myself to Gunpowder Alley, the aristocratic abode of my patient, joyfully threading the now familiar passages of Gough Square and Wine Office Court, and meditating pleasantly on the curious literary flavour that pervades these little-known regions. For the shade of the author of ‘Rasselas’ still seems to haunt the scenes of his Titanic labours and his ponderous but homely and temperate rejoicings. Every court and alley whispers of books and of the making of books: formes of type, trundled noisily on trolleys by ink-smearing boys, salute the wayfarer at odd corners; piles of strawboard, rolls or bales of paper, drums of printing-ink or roller composition stand on the pavement outside dark entries; basement windows give glimpses into Hadean caverns tenanted by legions of printer’s devils; and the very air is charged with the hum of press and with odours of glue and paste and oil. The entire neighbourhood is given up to the printer and binder; and even my patient turned out to be a guillotine-knife grinder—a ferocious and revolutionary calling strangely at variance with his harmless appearance and meek bearing.

I was in good time at my tryst, despite the hindrances of fried plaice and invalid guillotins; but, early as I was, Miss Bellingham was already waiting in the garden—she had been filling a bowl with flowers—ready to sally forth.

‘It is quite like old times,’ she said, as we turned into Fetter Lane, ‘to be going to the Museum together. It brings back the Tell el Amarna tablets and all your kindness and unselfish labour, suppose we shall walk there to-day?’

‘Certainly,’ I replied; ‘I am not going to share your society with the common mortals who ride in omnibuses. That would be sheer, simple waste. Besides, it is more companionable to walk.’

‘Yes, it is; and the bustle of the streets makes one more appreciative of the quiet of the Museum. What are we going to look at when we get there?’

‘You must decide that,’ I replied. ‘You know the collection much better than I do.’

‘Well, now,’ she mused, ‘I wonder what you would like to see; or, in other words, what I should like you to see. The old English pottery is rather fascinating, especially the Fulham ware. I rather think I shall take you to see that.’

She reflected a while, and then, just as we reached the gate of Staple Inn, she stopped and looked thoughtfully down the Gray’s Inn Road.

‘You have taken a great interest in our “case” as Doctor Thorndyke calls it. Would you like to see the churchyard where Uncle John wished to be buried? It is a little out of our way, but we are not in a hurry, are we?’

I, certainly, was not. Any deviation that might prolong our walk was welcome, and, as to the place—why, all places were alike to me if only she were by my side. Besides, the churchyard was really of some interest, since it was undoubtedly the ‘exciting cause’ of the obnoxious paragraph two of the will. I accordingly expressed a desire to make its acquaintance, and we crossed to the entrance to Gray’s Inn Road.

‘Do you ever try,’ she asked, as we turned down the dingy thoroughfare, ‘to picture familiar places as they looked a couple of hundred years ago?’

‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘and very difficult I find it. One has to manufacture the materials for reconstruction, and then the present aspect of the place will keep obtruding itself. But some places are easier to reconstitute than others.’

‘That is what I find,’ said she. ‘Now Holborn, for example, is quite easy to reconstruct, though I daresay the imaginary form isn’t a bit like the original. But there are fragments left, like Staple Inn and the front of Gray’s Inn; and then one has seen prints of the old Middle Row and some of the taverns, so that one has some material with which to help out one’s imagination. But this road we are walking in always baffles me. It looks so old and yet is, for the most part, so new that I find it impossible to make a satisfactory picture of its appearance, say, when Sir Roger de Coverley might have strolled in Gray’s Inn Walks, or farther back, when Francis Bacon had chambers in the Inn.’

‘I imagine,’ said I, ‘that part of the difficulty is in the mixed character of the neighbourhood. Here, on the one side, is old Gray’s Inn, not much changed since Bacon’s time—his chambers are still to be seen, I think, over the gateway; and there, on the Clerkenwell side, is a dense and rather squalid neighbourhood which has grown up over a region partly rural and

wholly fugitive in character. Places like Bagnigge Wells and Hockley in the Hole would not have had many buildings that were likely to survive; and in the absence of surviving specimens the imagination hasn't much to work from.'

'I daresay you are right,' said she. 'Certainly, the purlieus of old Clerkenwell present a very confused picture to me; whereas, in the case of an old street like, say, Great Ormond Street, one has only to sweep away the modern buildings and replace them with glorious old houses like the few that remain, dig up the roadway and pavements and lay down cobblestones, plant a few wooden posts, hang up one or two oil-lamps, and the transformation is complete. And a very delightful transformation it is.'

'Very delightful; which, by the way, is a melancholy thought. For we ought to be doing better work than our forefathers; whereas what we actually do is to pull down the old buildings, clap the doorways, porticoes, panelling, and mantels in our museums, and then run up something inexpensive and useful and deadly uninteresting in their place.'

My companion looked at me and laughed softly. 'For a naturally cheerful, and even gay young man,' said she, 'you are most amazingly pessimistic. The mantle of Jeremiah—if he ever wore one—seems to have fallen on you, but without in the least impairing your good spirits excepting in regard to matters architectural.'

'I have much to be thankful for,' said I. 'Am I not taken to the Museum by a fair lady? And does she not stay me with mummy cases and comfort me with crockery?'

'Pottery,' she corrected; and then as we met a party of grave-looking women emerging from a side-street, she said: 'I suppose these are lady medical students.'

'Yes, on their way to the Royal Free Hospital. Note the gravity of their demeanour and contrast it with the levity of the male student.'

'I was doing so,' she answered, 'and wondering why professional women are usually so much more serious than men.'

'Perhaps,' I suggested, 'it is a matter of selection. A peculiar type of woman is attracted to the professions, whereas every man has to earn his living as a matter of course.'

'Yes, I daresay that is the explanation. This is our turning.'

We passed into Heathcote Street, at the end of which was an open gate giving entrance to one of those disused and metamorphosed burial-grounds that are to be met with in the older districts of London; in which the dispossessed dead are jostled into corners to make room for the living. Many of the headstones were still standing, and others, displaced to make room for asphalted walks and seats, were ranged around by the walls exhibiting inscriptions made meaningless by their removal. It was a pleasant enough place on this summer afternoon, contrasted with the dingy streets whence we had come, though its grass was faded and yellow and the twitter of the birds in the trees mingled with the hideous Board-school drawl of the children who played around the seats and the few remaining tombs.

'So this is the last resting-place of the illustrious house of Bellingham,' said I.

'Yes; and we are not the only distinguished people who repose in this place. The daughter of no less a person than Richard Cromwell is buried here; the tomb is still standing—but perhaps you have been here before, and know it.'

'I don't think I have ever been here before; and yet there is something about the place that seems familiar.' I looked around, cudgelling my brains for the key to the dimly reminiscent sensations that the place evoked; until, suddenly, I caught sight of a group of buildings away to the west, enclosed within a wall heightened by a wooden trellis.

'Yes, of course!' I exclaimed. 'I remember the place now. I have never been in this part before, but in that enclosure beyond, which opens at the end of Henrietta Street, there used to be and may be still, for all I know, a school of anatomy, at which I attended in my first year; in fact, I did my first dissection there.'

'There was a certain gruesome appropriateness in the position of the school,' remarked Miss Bellingham. 'It would have been really convenient in the days of the resurrection men. Your material would have been delivered at your very door. Was it a large school?'

'The attendance varied according to the time of the year. Sometimes I worked there quite alone. I used to let myself in with a key and hoist my subject out of a sort of sepulchral tank by means of a chain tackle. It was a ghoulis business. You have no idea how awful the body used to look to my unaccustomed eyes, as it rose slowly out of the tank. It was like the resurrection scenes that you see on some old tombstones, where the deceased is shown rising out of his coffin while the skeleton, Death, falls vanquished with his dart shattered and his crown toppling off.

'I remember, too, that the demonstrator used to wear a blue apron, which created a sort of impression of a cannibal butcher's shop. But I am afraid I am shocking you.'

'No you are not. Every profession has its unpresentable aspects, which ought not to be seen by outsiders. Think of the sculptor's studio and of the sculptor himself when he is modelling a large figure or group in the clay. He might be a bricklayer or a road-sweeper if you judge by his appearance. This is the tomb I was telling you about.'

We halted before the plain coffer of stone, weathered and wasted by age, but yet kept in decent repair by some pious hands, and read the inscription, setting forth with modest pride, that here reposed Anna, sixth daughter of Richard Cromwell, 'The Protector.' It was a simple monument and commonplace enough, with the crude severity of the ascetic age to which it belonged. But still, it carried the mind back to those stirring times when the leafy shades of Gray's Inn Lane

must have resounded with the clank of weapons and the tramp of armed men; when this bald recreation-ground was a rustic churchyard, standing amidst green fields and hedgerows, and countrymen leading their pack-horses into London through the Lane would stop to look in over the wooden gate.

Miss Bellingham looked at me critically as I stood thus reflecting, and presently remarked: 'I think you and I have a good many mental habits in common.'

'I looked up inquiringly, and she continued: 'I notice that an old tombstone seems to set you meditating. So it does me. When I look at an ancient monument, and especially an old headstone, I find myself almost unconsciously retracing the years to the date that is written on the stone. Why do you think that is? Why should a monument be so stimulating to the imagination? And why should a common headstone be more so than any other?'

'I suppose it is,' I answered reflectively, 'that a churchyard monument is a peculiarly personal thing and appertains in a peculiar way to a particular time. And the circumstance that it has stood untouched by the passing years while everything around has changed, helps the imagination to span the interval. And the common headstone, the memorial of some dead and gone farmer or labourer who lived and died in the village hard by, is still more intimate and suggestive. The rustic, childish sculpture of the village mason and the artless doggerel of the village schoolmaster, bring back the time and place and the conditions of life more vividly than the more scholarly inscriptions and the more artistic enrichments of monuments of greater pretensions. But where are your own family tombstones?'

'They are over in that farther corner. There is an intelligent, but inopportune, person apparently copying the epitaphs. I wish he would go away. I want to show them to you.'

I now noticed, for the first time, an individual engaged, notebook in hand, in making a careful survey of a group of old headstones. Evidently he was making a copy of the inscriptions, for not only was he poring attentively over the writing on the face of the stone, but now and again he helped out his vision by running his fingers over the worn lettering.

'That is my grandfather's tombstone that he is copying now,' said Miss Bellingham; and even as she spoke, the man turned and directed a searching glance at us with a pair of keen, spectacled eyes.

Simultaneously we uttered an exclamation of surprise; for the investigator was Mr. Jellicoe.

---

## XVI. — O ARTEMIDORUS, FAREWELL!

WHETHER or not Mr. Jellicoe was surprised to see us, it is impossible to say. His countenance (which served the ordinary purposes of a face, inasmuch as it contained the principal organs of special sense, with inlets to the alimentary and respiratory tracts) was, as an apparatus for the expression of the emotions, a total failure. To a thought-reader it would have been about as helpful as the face carved upon the handle of an umbrella; a comparison suggested, perhaps, by a certain resemblance to such an object. He advanced, holding open his notebook and pencil, and having saluted us with a stiff bow and an old-fashioned flourish of his hat, shook hands rheumatically and waited for us to speak.

‘This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Jellicoe,’ said Miss Bellingham.

‘It is very good of you to say so,’ he replied.

‘And quite a coincidence—that we should all happen to come here on the same day.’

‘A coincidence, certainly,’ he admitted, ‘and if we all happened not to come—which must have occurred frequently—that also would have been a coincidence.’

‘I suppose it would,’ said she, ‘but I hope we are not interrupting you.’

‘Thank you, no. I had just finished when I had the pleasure of perceiving you.’

You were making some notes in reference to the case, I imagine,’ said I. It was an impertinent question, put with malice aforethought for the mere pleasure of hearing him evade it.

‘The case?’ he repeated. ‘You are referring, perhaps, to Stevens versus the Parish Council?’

‘I think Doctor Berkeley was referring to the case of my uncle’s will,’ Miss Bellingham said quite gravely, though with a suspicious dimpling about the corners of her mouth.

‘Indeed,’ said Mr. Jellicoe. ‘There is a case, is there; a suit?’

‘I mean the proceedings instituted by Mr. Hurst.’

‘Oh, but that was merely an application to the Court, and is, moreover, finished and done with. At least, so I understand. I speak, of course, subject to correction; I am not acting for Mr. Hurst, you will be pleased to remember. As a matter of fact,’ he continued, after a brief pause, ‘I was just refreshing my memory as to the wording of the inscriptions on these stones, especially that of your grandfather, Francis Bellingham. It has occurred to me that if it should appear by the finding of the coroner’s jury that your uncle is deceased, it would be proper and decorous that some memorial should be placed here. But, as the burial ground is closed, there might be some difficulty about erecting a new monument, whereas there would probably be none in adding an inscription to one already existing. Hence these investigations. For if the inscriptions on your grandfather’s stone had set forth that “here rests the body of Francis Bellingham,” it would have been manifestly improper to add “also that of John Bellingham, son of the above”. Fortunately the inscription was more discreetly drafted, merely recording the fact that this monument is “sacred to the memory of the said Francis”, and not committing itself as to the whereabouts of the remains. But perhaps I am interrupting you.’

‘No, not at all,’ replied Miss Bellingham (which was grossly untrue; he was interrupting me most intolerably); ‘we were going to the British Museum and just looked in here on our way.’

‘Ha,’ said Mr. Jellicoe, ‘now, I happen to be going to the Museum too, to see Doctor Norbury. I suppose that is another coincidence?’

‘Certainly it is,’ Miss Bellingham replied; and then she asked: ‘Shall we walk together?’ and the old curmudgeon actually said ‘yes’—confound him!

We returned to the Gray’s Inn Road, where, as there was now room for us to walk abreast, I proceeded to indemnify myself for the lawyer’s unwelcome company by leading the conversation back to the subject of the missing man.

‘Was there anything, Mr. Jellicoe, in Mr. John Bellingham’s state of health that would make it probable that he might die suddenly?’

The lawyer looked at me suspiciously for a few moments and then remarked:

‘You seem to be greatly interested in John Bellingham and his affairs.’

‘I am. My friends are deeply concerned in them, and the case itself is of more than common interest from a professional point of view.’

‘And what is the bearing of this particular question?’

‘Surely it is obvious,’ said I. ‘If a missing man is known to have suffered from some affection, such as heart disease, aneurism, or arterial degeneration, likely to produce sudden death, that fact will surely be highly material to the question as to whether he is probably dead or alive.’

‘No doubt you are right,’ said Mr. Jellicoe. ‘I have little knowledge of medical affairs, but doubtless you are right. As to the question itself, I am Mr. Bellingham’s lawyer, not his doctor. His health is a matter that lies outside my jurisdiction.’

But you heard my evidence in Court, to the effect that the testator appeared, to my untutored observation, to be a healthy man. I can say no more now.'

'If the question is of any importance,' said Miss Bellingham, 'I wonder they did not call his doctor and settle it definitely. My own impression is that he was—or is—rather a strong and sound man. He certainly recovered very quickly and completely after his accident.'

'What accident was that?' I asked.

'Oh, hasn't my father told you? It occurred while he was staying with us. He slipped from a kerb and broke one of the bones of the left ankle—somebody's fracture—'

'Pott's?'

'Yes; that was the name—Pott's fracture; and he broke both his knee-caps as well. Sir Morgan Bennet had to perform an operation, or he would have been a cripple for life. As it was, he was about again in a few weeks, apparently none the worse excepting for a slight weakness of the left ankle.'

'Could he walk upstairs?' I asked.

'Oh, yes; and play golf and ride a bicycle.'

'You are sure he broke both knee-caps?'

'Quite sure. I remember that it was mentioned as an uncommon injury, and that Sir Morgan seemed quite pleased with him for doing it.'

'That sounds rather libellous; but I expect he was pleased with the result of the operation. He might well be.'

Here there was a brief lull in the conversation, and, even as I was trying to think of a poser for Mr. Jellicoe, that gentleman took the opportunity to change the subject.

'Are you going to the Egyptian rooms?' he asked.

'No,' replied Miss Bellingham; 'we are going to look at the pottery.'

'Ancient or modern?'

'That old Fulham ware is what chiefly interests us at present; that of the seventeenth century. I don't know whether you call that ancient or modern.'

'Neither do I,' said Mr. Jellicoe. 'Antiquity and modernity are terms that have no fixed connotation. They are purely relative and their application in a particular instance has to be determined by a sort of sliding-scale. To a furniture collector, a Tudor chair or a Jacobean chest is ancient; to an architect, their period is modern, whereas an eleventh-century church is ancient; but to an Egyptologist, accustomed to remains of a vast antiquity, both are products of modern periods separated by an insignificant interval. And, I suppose,' he added reflectively, 'that to a geologist, the traces of the very earliest dawn of human history appertain only to the recent period. Conceptions of time, like all other conceptions, are relative.'

'You would appear to be a disciple of Herbert Spencer,' I remarked.

'I am a disciple of Arthur Jellicoe, sir,' he retorted. And I believed him.

By the time we had reached the Museum he had become almost genial; and, if less amusing in this frame, he was so much more instructive and entertaining that I refrained from baiting him, and permitted him to discuss his favourite topic unhindered, especially since my companion listened with lively interest. Nor, when we entered the great hall, did he relinquish possession of us, and we followed submissively, as he led the way past the winged bulls of Nineveh and the great seated statues, until we found ourselves, almost without the exercise of our volition, in the upper room amidst the glaring mummy cases that had witnessed the birth of my friendship with Ruth Bellingham.

'Before I leave you,' said Mr. Jellicoe, 'I should like to show you that mummy that we were discussing the other evening; the one, you remember, that my friend, John Bellingham, presented to the Museum a little time before his disappearance. The point that I mentioned is only a trivial one, but it may become of interest hereafter if any plausible explanation should be forthcoming.' He led us along the room until we arrived at the case containing John Bellingham's gift, where he halted and gazed in at the mummy with the affectionate reflectiveness of the connoisseur.

'The bitumen coating was what we were discussing, Miss Bellingham,' said he. 'You have seen it, of course.'

'Yes,' she answered. 'It is a dreadful disfigurement, isn't it?'

'Aesthetically it is to be deplored, but it adds a certain speculative interest to the specimen. You notice that the black coating leaves the principal decoration and the whole of the inscription untouched, which is precisely the part that one would expect to find covered up; whereas the feet and the back, which probably bore no writing, are quite thickly crusted. If you stoop down, you can see that the bitumen was daubed freely into the lacings of the back, where it served no purpose, so that even the strings are embedded.' He stooped as he spoke, and peered up inquisitively at the back of the mummy, where it was visible between the supports.

'Has Doctor Norbury any explanation to offer?' asked Miss Bellingham.

'None whatever,' replied Mr. Jellicoe. 'He finds it as great a mystery as I do. But he thinks that we may get some suggestion from the Director when he comes back. He is a very great authority, as you know, and a practical excavator of great experience too. I mustn't stay here talking of these things, and keeping you from your pottery. Perhaps I have stayed too long already. If I have I ask your pardon, and I will now wish you a very good afternoon.' With a sudden return to his customary wooden impassivity, he shook hands with us, bowed stiffly, and took himself off towards the curator's office.

'What a strange man that is,' said Miss Bellingham, as Mr. Jellicoe disappeared through the doorway at the end of the room, 'or perhaps I should say, a strange being, for I can hardly think of him as a man. I have never met any other human creature at all like him.'

'He is certainly a queer old fogey,' I agreed.

'Yes, but there is something more than that. He is so emotionless, so remote and aloof from all mundane concerns. He moves among ordinary men and women, but as a mere presence, an unmoved spectator of their actions, quite dispassionate and impersonal.'

'Yes; he is astonishingly self-contained; in fact, he seems, as you say, to go to and fro among men, enveloped in a sort of infernal atmosphere of his own, like Marley's ghost. But he is lively and human enough as soon as the subject of Egyptian antiquities is broached.'

'Lively, but not human. He is always, to me, quite unhuman. Even when he is most interested, and even enthusiastic, he is a mere personification of knowledge. Nature ought to have furnished him with an ibis' head like Tahuti; then he would have looked his part.'

'He would have made a rare sensation in Lincoln's Inn if he had,' said I; and we both laughed heartily at the imaginary picture of Tahuti Jellicoe, slender-beaked and top-hatted, going about his business in Lincoln's Inn and the Law Courts.

Insensibly, as we talked, we had drawn near to the mummy of Artemidorus, and now my companion halted before the case with her thoughtful grey eyes bent dreamily on the face that looked out at us. I watched her with reverent admiration. How charming she looked as she stood with her sweet, grave face turned so earnestly to the object of her mystical affection! How dainty and full of womanly dignity and grace! And then, suddenly it was borne in upon me that a great change had come over her since the day of our first meeting. She had grown younger, more girlish, and more gentle. At first she had seemed much older than I; a sad-faced woman, weary, solemn, enigmatic, almost gloomy, with a bitter, ironic humour and a bearing distant and cold. Now she was only maidenly and sweet; tinged, it is true, with a certain seriousness, but frank and gracious and wholly lovable.

Could the change be due to our friendship? As I asked myself the question, my heart leaped with a new hope. I yearned to tell her all that she was to me—all that I hoped we might be to one another in the years to come.

At length I ventured to break in upon her reverie.

'What are you thinking about so earnestly, fair lady?'

She turned quickly with a bright smile and sparkling eyes that looked frankly into mine. 'I was wondering,' said she, 'if he was jealous of my new friend. But what a baby I am to talk such nonsense!'

She laughed softly and happily with just an adorable hint of shyness.

'Why should he be jealous?' I asked.

'Well, you see, before—we were friends, he had me all to himself. I have never had a man friend before—except my father—and no really intimate friend at all. And I was very lonely in those days, after our troubles had befallen. I am naturally solitary, but still, I am only a girl; I am not a philosopher. So when I felt very lonely, I used to come here and look at Artemidorus and make believe that he knew all the sadness of my life and sympathised with me. It was very silly, I know, but yet, somehow it was a real comfort to me.'

'It was not silly of you at all. He must have been a good man, a gentle, sweet-faced man who had won the love of those who knew him, as this beautiful memorial tells; and it was wise and good of you to sweeten the bitterness of your life with the fragrance of this human love that blossoms in the dust after the lapse of centuries. No, you were not silly, and Artemidorus is not jealous of your new friend.'

'Are you sure?' She still smiled as she asked the question, but was soft—almost tender—and there was a note of whimsical anxiety in her voice.

'Quite sure. I give you my confident assurance.' She laughed gaily.

'Then,' said she, 'I am satisfied, for I am sure you know. But here is a mighty telepathist who can read the thoughts even of a mummy. A most formidable companion. But tell me how you know.'

'I know because it is he who gave you to me to be my friend. Don't you remember?'

'Yes, I remember,' she answered softly. 'It was when you were so sympathetic with my foolish whim that I felt we were really friends.'

'And I, when you confided your pretty fancy to me, thanked you for the gift of your friendship, and treasured it, and do still treasure it, above everything on earth.'

She looked at me quickly with a sort of nervousness in her manner, and cast down her eyes. Then, after a few moments' almost embarrassed silence, as if to bring back our talk to a less emotional plane, she said:

'Do you notice the curious way in which this memorial divides itself up into two parts?'

'How do you mean?' I asked, a little disconcerted by the sudden descent.

'I mean that there is a part of it that is purely decorative and a part that is expressive or emotional. You notice that the general design and scheme of decoration, although really Greek in feeling, follows rigidly the Egyptian conventions. But the portrait is entirely in the Greek manner, and when they came to that pathetic farewell, j'-'it had to be spoken in their own tongue, written in their own familiar characters.'

'Yes. I have noticed that and admired the taste with which they have kept the inscription so inconspicuous as not to clash with the decoration. An obtrusive inscription in Greek characters would have spoiled the consistency of the whole scheme.'

'Yes, it would.' She assented absently as if she were thinking of something else, and once more gazed thoughtfully at the mummy. I watched her with deep content: noted the lovely contour of her cheek, the soft masses of hair that strayed away so gracefully from her brow, and thought her the most wonderful creature that had ever trod the earth. Suddenly she looked at me reflectively.

'I wonder,' she said, 'what made me tell you about Artemidorus. It was a rather silly, childish sort of make-believe, and I wouldn't have told anyone else for the world; not even my father. How did I know that you would sympathise and understand?'

She asked the question in all simplicity with her serious grey eyes looking inquiringly into mine. And the answer came to me in a flash, with the beating of my own heart.

'I will tell you how you know, Ruth,' I whispered passionately. 'It was because I loved you more than anyone else in the world has ever loved you, and you felt my love in your heart and called it sympathy.'

I stopped short, for she had blushed scarlet, and then turned deathly pale. And now she looked at me wildly, almost with terror.

'Have I shocked you, Ruth dearest?' I exclaimed penitently, 'have I spoken too soon? If I have, forgive me. But I had to tell you. I have been eating my heart out for love of you for I don't know how long. I think I have loved you from the first day we met. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken yet, but, Ruth dear, if you only knew what a sweet girl you are, you wouldn't blame me.'

'I don't blame you,' she said, almost in a whisper; 'I blame myself. I have been a bad friend to you, who have been so loyal and loving to me. I ought not to have let this happen. For it can't be, Paul; I can't say what you want me to say. We can never be anything more to one another than friends.'

A cold hand seemed to grasp my heart—a horrible fear that I had lost all that I cared for—all that made life desirable.

'Why can't we?' I asked. 'Do you mean that—that the gods have been gracious to some other man?'

'No, no,' she answered hastily—almost indignantly, 'of course I don't mean that.'

'Then it is only that you don't love me yet. Of course you don't. Why should you? But you will, dear, some day. And I will wait patiently until that day comes and not trouble you with entreaties. I will wait for you as Jacob waited for Rachel; and as the long years seemed to him but as a few days because of the love he bore her, so it shall be with me, if only you will not send me away quite without hope.'

She was looking down, white-faced, with a hardening of the lips as if she were in bodily pain. 'You don't understand,' she whispered. 'It can't be—it can never be. There is something that makes it impossible, now and always. I can't tell you more than that.'

But, Ruth dearest,' I pleaded despairingly, 'may it not become possible some day? Can it not be made possible? I can wait, but I can't give you up. Is there no chance whatever that this obstacle may be removed?'

'Very little, I fear. Hardly any. No, Paul; it is hopeless, and I can't bear to talk about it. Let me go now. Let us say good-bye here and see one another no more for a while. Perhaps we may be friends again some day—when you have forgiven me.'

'Forgiven you, dearest!' I exclaimed. 'There is nothing to forgive. And we are friends, Ruth. Whatever happens, you are the dearest friend I have on earth, or can ever have.'

'Thank you, Paul,' she said faintly. 'You are very good to me. But let me go, please. I must be alone.'

4 She held out a trembling hand, and, as I took it, I was shocked to see how terribly agitated and ill she looked.

'May I not come with you, dear?' I pleaded.

'No, no!' she exclaimed breathlessly; 'I must go away by myself. I want to be alone. Good-bye.'

'Before I let you go, Ruth—if you must go—I must have a most solemn promise from you.'

Her sad grey eyes met mine and her lips quivered with an unspoken question.

'You must promise me,' I went on, 'that if ever this barrier that parts us should be removed, you will let me know instantly. Remember that I love you always, and that I am waiting for you always on this side of the grave.'

She caught her breath in a quick little sob, and pressed my hand.

'Yes,' she whispered: 'I promise. Good-bye.'

She pressed my hand again and was gone; and, as I gazed at the empty doorway through which she had passed, I caught a glimpse of her reflection in a glass on the landing, where she had paused for a moment to wipe her eyes. I felt it, in a manner, indelicate to have seen her, and turned away my head quickly; and yet I was conscious of a certain selfish satisfaction in the sweet sympathy that her grief bespoke.

But now that she was gone a horrible sense of desolation descended on me. Only now, by the consciousness of irreparable loss, did I begin to realise the meaning of this passion of love that had stolen unawares into my life. How it had glorified the present and spread a glamour of delight over the dimly considered future: how all pleasures and desires, hopes and ambitions, had converged upon it as a focus; how it had stood out as the one great reality behind which the other circumstances of life were as a background, shimmering, half seen, immaterial and unreal. And now it was gone—lost, as it seemed, beyond hope; and that which was left to me was but the empty frame from which the picture had vanished.

I have no idea how long I stood rooted to the spot where she had left me, wrapped in a dull consciousness of pain, immersed in a half-numb reverie. Recent events flitted, dream-like, through my mind; our happy labours in the reading-room; our first visit to the Museum; and this present day that had opened so brightly and with such joyous promise. One by one these phantoms of a vanished happiness came and went. Occasional visitors sauntered into the room—but the galleries were mostly empty that day—gazed inquisitively at my motionless figure, and went their way. And still the dull, intolerable ache in my breast went on, the only vivid consciousness that was left to me.

Presently I raised my eyes and met those of the portrait. The sweet, pensive face of the old Greek settler looked out at me wistfully as though he would offer comfort; as though he would tell me that he, too, had known sorrow when he lived his life in the sunny Fayyum. And a subtle consolation, like the faint scent of old rose leaves, seemed to exhale from that friendly face that had looked on the birth of my happiness and had seen it wither and fade. I turned away, at last, with a silent farewell; and when I looked back, he seemed to speed me on my way with gentle valediction.

---

## XVII. — THE ACCUSING FINGER

OF my wanderings after I left the Museum on that black and dismal day, I have but a dim recollection. But I must have travelled a quite considerable distance, since it wanted an hour or two to the time for returning to the surgery, and I spent the interval walking swiftly through streets and squares, unmindful of the happenings around, intent only on my present misfortune, and driven by a natural impulse to seek relief in bodily exertion. For mental distress sets up, as it were, a sort of induced current of physical unrest; a beneficent arrangement, by which a dangerous excess of emotional excitement may be transformed into motor energy, and so safely got rid of. The motor apparatus acts as a safety-valve to the psychical; and if the engine races for a while, with the onset of a bodily fatigue the emotional pressure-gauge returns to a normal reading.

And so it was with me. At first I was conscious of nothing but a sense of utter bereavement, of the shipwreck of all my hopes. But, by degrees, as I threaded my way among the moving crowds, I came to a better and more worthy frame of mind. After all, I had lost nothing that I had ever had. Ruth was still all that she had ever been to me—perhaps even more; and if that had been a rich endowment yesterday, why not to-day also? And how unfair it would be to her if I should mope and grieve over a disappointment that was no fault of hers and for which there was no remedy! Thus I reasoned with myself, and to such purpose that, by the time I reached Fetter Lane, my dejection had come to quite manageable proportions and I had formed the resolution to get back to the status quo ante helium as soon as possible.

About eight o'clock, as I was sitting alone in the consulting-room, gloomily persuading myself that I was now quite resigned to the inevitable, Adolphus brought me a registered packet, at the handwriting on which my heart gave such a bound that I had much ado to sign the receipt. As soon as Adolphus had retired (with undissembled contempt of the shaky signature) I tore open the packet, and as I drew out a letter a tiny box dropped on the table.

The letter was all too short, and I devoured it over and over again with the eagerness of a condemned man reading a reprieve:

'MY DEAR PAUL.

'Forgive me for leaving you so abruptly this afternoon, and leaving you so unhappy, too. I am more sane and reasonable now, and so send you greeting and beg you not to grieve for that which can never be. It is quite impossible, dear friend, and I entreat you, as you care for me, never speak of it again; never again to make me feel that I can give you so little when you have given so much. And do not try to see me for a little while. I shall miss your visits, and so will my father, who is very fond of you; but it is better that we should not meet, until we can take up our old relations—if that can ever be.

'I am sending you a little keepsake in case we should drift apart on the eddies of life. It is the ring that I told you about—the one that my uncle gave me. Perhaps you may be able to wear it as you have a small hand, but in any case keep it in remembrance of our friendship. The device on it is the Eye of Osiris, a mystic symbol for which I have a sentimentally



superstitious affection, as also had my poor uncle, who actually bore it tattooed in scarlet on his breast. It signifies that the great judge of the dead looks down on men to see that justice is done and that truth prevails. So I commend you to the good Osiris; may his eye be upon you, ever watchful over your welfare in the absence of

'Your affectionate friend.

'RUTH.'

It was a sweet letter, I thought, even if it carried little comfort; quiet and reticent like its writer, but with an undertone of affection. I laid it down at length, and, taking the ring from its box, examined it fondly. Though but a copy, it had all the quaintness and feeling of the antique original, and, above all, it was fragrant with the spirit of the giver. Dainty and delicate, wrought of silver and gold, with an inlay of copper, I would not have exchanged it for the Koh-i-noor; and when I had slipped it on my finger its tiny eye of blue enamel looked up at me so friendly and companionable that I felt the glamour of the old-world superstition stealing over me too.

Not a single patient came in this evening, which was well for me (and also for the patient), as I was able forthwith to write in reply a long letter; but this I shall spare the long-suffering reader excepting its concluding paragraph:

'And now, dearest, I have said my say; once for all I have said it, and I will not open my mouth on the subject again (I am not actually opening it now) "until the times do alter". And if the times do never alter

—if it shall come to pass, in due course, that we two shall sit side by side, white-haired, and crinkly-nosed, and lean our poor old chins upon our sticks and mumble and gibber amicably over the things that might have been if the good Osiris had come up to the scratch—I will still be content, because your friendship, Ruth, is better than another woman's love. So you see, I have taken my gruel and come up to lime smiling—if you will pardon the pugilistic metaphor—and I promise you loyally to do your bidding and never again to distress you.'

'Your faithful and loving friend.

Paul.'

This letter I addressed and stamped, and then, with a wry grimace which I palmed off on myself (but not on Adolphus) as a cheerful smile, I went out and dropped it into the post-box; after which I further deluded myself by murmuring *Nunc dimittis* and assuring myself that the incident was now absolutely closed.

But despite this comfortable assurance I was, in the days that followed, an exceedingly miserable young man. It is all very well to write down troubles of this kind as trivial and sentimental. They are nothing of the kind. When a man of essentially serious nature has found the one woman of all the world who fulfils his highest ideals of womanhood, who is, in fact, a woman in ten thousand, to whom he has given all that he has to give of love and worship, the sudden wreck of all his hopes is no small calamity. And so I found it. Resign myself as I would to the bitter reality, the ghost of the might-have-been haunted me night and day, so that I spent my leisure wandering abstractedly about the streets, always trying to banish thought and never for an instant succeeding. A great unrest was upon me; and when I received a letter from Dick Barnard announcing his arrival at Madeira, homeward bound, I breathed a sigh of relief. I had no plans for the future, but I longed to be rid of thenow irksome, routine of the practice—to be free to come and go when and how I pleased.

One evening, as I sat consuming with little appetite my solitary supper, there fell on me a sudden sense of loneliness. The desire that I had hitherto felt to be alone with my own miserable reflections gave place to a yearning for human companionship. That, indeed, which I craved for most was forbidden, and I must abide by my lady's wishes; but there were my friends in the Temple. It was more than a week since I had seen them; in fact, we had not met since the morning of that unhappiest day of my life. They would be wondering what had become of me. I rose from the table, and having filled my pouch from a tin of tobacco, set forth for King's Bench Walk.

As I approached the entry of No. 5A in the gathering darkness I met Thorndyke himself emerging encumbered with two deck-chairs, a reading-lantern, and a book.

'Why, Berkeley!' he exclaimed, 'is it indeed thou? We have been wondering what had become of you.'

'It is a long time since I looked you up,' I admitted.

He scrutinised me attentively by the light of the entry lamp, and then remarked: 'Fetter Lane doesn't seem to be agreeing with you very well, my son. You are looking quite thin and peaky.'

'Well, I've nearly done with it. Barnard will be back in about ten days. His ship is putting in at Madeira to coal and take in some cargo, and then he is coming home. Where are you going with those chairs?'

'I am going to sit down at the end of the Walk by the railings. It's cooler there than indoors. If you will wait a moment I will go and fetch another chair for Jervis, though he won't be back for a little while.' He ran up the stairs, and presently returned with a third chair, and we carried our impedimenta down to the quiet corner of the Walk.

'So your term of servitude is coming to an end,' said he, when we had placed the chairs and hung the lantern on the railings. 'Any other news?'

'No. Have you any?'

'I am afraid I have not. All my inquiries have yielded negative results. There is, of course, a considerable body of

evidence, and it all seems to point one way. But I am unwilling to make a decisive move without something more definite. I am really waiting for confirmation or otherwise of my ideas on the subject; for some new item of evidence.'

'I didn't know there was any evidence.'

'Didn't you?' said Thorndyke. 'But you know as much as I know. You have all the essential facts; but apparently you haven't collated them and extracted their meaning. If you had, you would have found them curiously significant.'

'I suppose I mustn't ask what their significance is?' No, I think not. When I am conducting a case I mention my surmises to nobody—not even to Jervis. Then I can say confidently that there has been no leakage. Don't think I distrust you. Remember that my thoughts are my client's property, and that the essence of strategy is to keep the enemy in the dark.'

'Yes, I see that. Of course I ought not to have asked.'

'You ought not to need to ask,' Thorndyke replied, with a smile; 'you should put the facts together and reason from them yourself.'

While we had been talking I had noticed Thorndyke glance at me inquisitively from time to time. Now after an interval of silence, he asked suddenly:

'Is anything amiss, Berkeley? Are you worrying about your friends' affairs?'

'No, not particularly; though their prospects don't look very rosy.' Perhaps they are not quite so bad as they look,' said he. 'But I am afraid something is troubling you. All your gay spirits seem to have evaporated.' He paused for a few moments, and then added: 'I don't want to intrude on your private affairs, but if I can help you by advice or otherwise, remember that we are old friends and that you are my academic offspring.'

Instinctively, with a man's natural reticence, I began to mumble a half-articulate disclaimer; and then I stopped. After all, why should I not confide in him? He was a good man and a wise man, full of human sympathy, as I knew, though so cryptic and secretive in his professional capacity. And I wanted a friend badly just now.

'I'm afraid,' I began shyly, 'it is not a matter that admits of much help, and it's hardly the sort of thing that I ought to worry you by talking about—'

'If it is enough to make you unhappy, my dear fellow, it is enough to merit serious consideration by your friend; so if you don't mind telling me—'

'Of course I don't, sir!' I exclaimed.

'Then fire away; and don't call me "sir." We are brother practitioners just now.'

Thus encouraged, I poured out the story of my little romance; bashfully at first and with halting phrases, but later, with more freedom and confidence. He listened with grave attention, and once or twice put a question when my narrative became a little disconnected. When I had finished he laid his hand softly on my arm.

'You have had rough luck, Berkeley. I don't wonder that you are miserable. I am more sorry than I can tell you.'

'Thank you,' I said. 'It's exceedingly good of you to listen so patiently, but it's a shame for me to pester you with my sentimental troubles.'

'Now, Berkeley, you don't think that, and I hope you don't think that I do. We should be bad biologists and worse physicians if we should underestimate the importance of that which is nature's chiefest care. The one salient biological truth is the paramount importance of sex; and we are deaf and blind if we do not hear and see it in everything that lives when we look abroad upon the world; when we listen to the spring song of the birds, or when we consider the lilies of the field. And as is man to the lower organisms, so is human love to their merely reflex manifestations of sex. I will maintain, and you will agree with me, I know, that the love of a serious and honourable man for a woman who is worthy of him is the most momentous of all human affairs. It is the foundation of social life, and its failure is a serious calamity, not only to those whose lives may be thereby spoiled, but to society at large.'

'It's a serious enough matter for the parties concerned,' I agreed; 'but that is no reason why they should bore their friends.'

'But they don't. Friends should help one another and think it a privilege.'

'Oh, I shouldn't mind coming to you for help, knowing you as I do. But no one can help a poor devil in a case like this—and certainly not a medical jurist.'

'Oh, come, Berkeley!' he protested, 'don't rate us too low. The humblest of creatures has its uses—"even the little pismire," you know, as Isaak Walton tells us. Why, I have got substantial help from a stamp-collector. And then reflect upon the motor-scorcher and the earth-worm and the blow-fly. All these lowly creatures play their parts in the scheme of nature; and shall we cast out the medical jurist as nothing worth?'

I laughed dejectedly at my teacher's genial irony.

What I meant,' said I, 'was that there is nothing to be done but wait—perhaps for ever. I don't know why she isn't able to marry me, and I mustn't ask her. She can't be married already.'

'Certainly not. She told you explicitly that there was no man in the case.'

‘Exactly. And I can think of no other valid reason, excepting that she doesn’t care enough for me. That would be a perfectly sound reason, but then it would only be a temporary one, not the insuperable obstacle that she assumes to exist, especially as we really got on excellently together. I hope it isn’t some confounded perverse feminine scruple. I don’t see how it could be; but women are most frightfully tortuous and wrong-headed at times.’

‘I don’t see,’ said Thorndyke, ‘why we should cast about for perversely abnormal motives when there is a perfectly reasonable explanation staring us in the face.’

‘Us there?’ I exclaimed. ‘I see none.’

‘You are, not unnaturally, overlooking some of the circumstances that affect Miss Bellingham; but I don’t suppose she has failed to grasp their meaning. Do you realise what her position really is? I mean with regard to her uncle’s disappearance?’

‘I don’t think I quite understand you.’

‘Well, there is no use in blinking the facts,’ said Thorndyke. ‘The position is this: if John Bellingham ever went to his brother’s house at Woodford, it is nearly certain that he went there after his visit to Hurst. Mind, I say “if he went”; I don’t say that I believe he did. But it is stated that he appears to have gone there; and if he did go, he was never seen alive afterwards. Now, he did not go in at the front door. No one saw him enter the house. But there was a back gate, which John Bellingham knew, and which had a bell which rang in the library. And you will remember that, when Hurst and Jellicoe called, Mr. Bellingham had only just come in. Previous to that time Miss Bellingham had been alone in the library; that is to say, she was alone in the library at the very time when John Bellingham is said to have made his visit. That is the position, Berkeley. Nothing pointed has been said up to the present. But, sooner or later, if John Bellingham is not found, dead or alive, the question will be opened. Then it is certain that Hurst, in self-defence, will make the most of any facts that may transfer suspicion from him to some one else. And that some one else will be Miss Bellingham.’

I sat for some moments literally paralysed with horror. Then my dismay gave place to indignation. ‘But, damn it!’ I exclaimed, starting up—‘I beg your pardon—but could anyone have the infernal audacity to insinuate that that gentle, refined lady murdered her uncle?’

‘That is what will be hinted, if not plainly asserted; and she knows it. And that being so, is it difficult to understand why she should refuse to allow you to be publicly associated with her? To run the risk of dragging your honourable name into the sordid transactions of the police-court or the Old Bailey? To invest it, perhaps, with a dreadful notoriety?’

‘Oh, don’t! for God’s sake! It is too horrible! Not that I would care for myself. I would be proud to share her martyrdom of ignominy, if it had to be; but it is the sacrilege, the blasphemy of even thinking of her in such terms, that enrages me.’

‘Yes,’ said Thorndyke; ‘I understand and sympathise with you. Indeed, I share your righteous indignation at this dastardly affair. So you mustn’t think me brutal for putting the case so plainly.’

‘I don’t. You have only shown me the danger that I was fool enough not to see. But you seem to imply that this hideous position has been brought about deliberately.’

‘Certainly I do! This is no chance affair. Either the appearances indicate the real events—which I am sure they do not—or they have been created of a set purpose to lead to false conclusions. But the circumstances convince me that there has been a deliberate plot; and I am waiting—in no spirit of Christian patience, I can tell you—to lay my hand on the wretch who has done this.’

‘What are you waiting for?’ I asked.

‘I am waiting for the inevitable,’ he replied; ‘for the false move that the most artful criminal invariably makes. At present he is lying low; but presently he will make a move, and then I shall have him.’

‘But he may go on lying low. What will you do then?’

‘Yes, that is the danger. We may have to deal with the perfect villain who knows when to leave well alone. I have never met him, but he may exist, nevertheless.’

‘And then we should have to stand by and see our friends go under.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Thorndyke; and we both subsided into gloomy and silent reflection.

The place was peaceful and quiet, as only a backwater of London can be. Occasional hoots from far-away tugs and steamers told of the busy life down below in the crowded Pool. A faint hum of traffic was borne in from the streets outside the precincts, and the shrill voices of newspaper boys came in unceasing chorus from the direction of Carmelite Street. They were too far away to be physically disturbing, but the excited yells, toned down as they were by distance, nevertheless stirred the very marrow in my bones, so dreadfully suggestive were they of those possibilities of the future at which Thorndyke had hinted. They seemed like the sinister shadows oncoming misfortunes.

Perhaps they called up the same association of ideas in Thorndyke’s mind, for he remarked presently: ‘The newsvendor is abroad to-night like a bird of ill-omen. Something unusual has happened: some public or private calamity, most likely, and these yelling ghouls are out to feast on the remains. The newspaper men have a good deal in common with the carrion-birds that hover over a battle-field.’

Again we subsided into silence and reflection. Then, after an interval, I asked:

'Would it be possible for me to help in any way in this investigation of yours?'

'That is exactly what I have been asking myself,' replied Thorndyke. 'It would be right and proper that you should, and I think you might.'

'How?' I asked eagerly.

'I can't say off-hand; but Jervis will be going away for his holiday almost at once—in fact, he will go off actual duty to-night. There is very little doing; the long vacation is close upon us, and I can do without him. But if you would care to come down here and take his place, you would be very useful to me; and if there should be anything to be done in the Bellinghams' case, I am sure you would make up in enthusiasm for any deficiency in experience.'

'I couldn't really take Jervis's place,' said I, 'but if you would let me help you in any way it would be a great kindness. I would rather clean your boots than be out of it altogether.'

'Very well. Let us leave it that you come here as soon as Barnard has done with you. You can have Jervis's room, which he doesn't often use nowadays, and you will be more happy here than elsewhere, I know. I may as well give you my latch-key now. I have a duplicate upstairs, and you understand that my chambers are yours too from this moment.'

He handed me the latch-key and I thanked him warmly from my heart, for I felt sure that the suggestion was made, not for any use that I should be to him, but for my own peace of mind. I had hardly finished speaking when a quick step on the paved walk caught my ear.

'Here is Jervis,' said Thorndyke. 'We will let him know that there is a locum tenens ready to step into his shoes when he wants to be off.' He flashed the lantern across the path, and a few moments later his junior stepped up briskly with a bundle of newspapers tucked under his arm.

It struck me that Jervis looked at me a little queerly when he recognised me in the dim light; also he was a trifle constrained in his manner, as if my presence were an embarrassment. He listened to Thorndyke's announcement of our newly made arrangement without much enthusiasm and with none of his customary facetious comments. And again I noticed a quick glance at me, half curious, half uneasy, and wholly puzzling to me.

'That's all right,' he said when Thorndyke had explained the situation. 'I daresay you'll find Berkeley as useful as me, and, in any case, he'll be better here than staying on with Barnard.' He spoke with unwonted gravity, and there was in his tone a solicitude for me that attracted my notice and that of Thorndyke as well, for the latter looked at him curiously, though he made no comment. After a short silence, however, he asked: 'And what news does my learned brother bring? There is a mighty shouting among the outer barbarians and I see a bundle of newspapers under my learned friend's arm. Has anything in particular happened?'

Jervis looked more uncomfortable than ever. 'Well—yes,' he replied hesitatingly, 'something has happened—there! It's no use beating about the bush; Berkeley may as well learn it from me as from those yelling devils outside.' He took a couple of papers from his bundle and silently handed one to me and the other to Thorndyke.

Jervis's ominous manner, naturally enough, alarmed me not a little. I opened the paper with a nameless dread. But whatever my vague fears, they fell far short of the occasion; and when I saw those yells from without crystallised into scare head-lines and flaming capitals I turned for a moment sick and dizzy with fear.

The paragraph was only a short one, and I read it through in less than a minute.

'THE MISSING FINGER

DRAMATIC DISCOVERY AT WOODFORD'

'The mystery that has surrounded the remains of a mutilated human body, portions of which have been found in various places in Kent and Essex, has received a partial and very sinister solution. The police have, all along, suspected that those remains were those of a Mr. John Bellingham who disappeared under circumstances of some suspicion about two years ago. There is now no doubt upon the subject, for the finger which was missing from the hand that was found at Sidcup has been discovered at the bottom of a disused well together with a ring, which has been identified as one habitually worn by Mr. John Bellingham.

'The house in the garden of which the well is situated was the property of the murdered man, and was occupied at the time of the disappearance by his brother, Mr. Godfrey Bellingham. But the latter left it very soon after, and it has been empty ever since. Just lately it has been put in repair, and it was in this way that the well came to be emptied and cleaned out. It seems that Detective-Inspector Badger, who was searching the neighbourhood for further remains, heard of the emptying of the well and went down in the bucket to examine the bottom, where he found the three bones and the ring.

'Thus the identity of the body is established beyond all doubt, and the question that remains is, Who killed John Bellingham? It may be remembered that a trinket, apparently broken from his watch-chain, was found in the grounds of this house on the day that he disappeared, and that he was never again seen alive. What may be the import of these facts time will show.'

That was all; but it was enough. I dropped the paper to the ground and glanced round furtively at Jervis, who sat gazing gloomily at the toes of his boots. It was horrible! It was incredible! The blow was so crushing that it left my faculties numb,

and for a while I seemed unable even to think intelligibly.

I was aroused by Thorndyke's voice—calm, businesslike, composed:

'Time will show, indeed! But meanwhile we must go warily. And don't be unduly alarmed, Berkeley. Go home, take a good dose of bromide with a little stimulant, and turn in. I am afraid this has been rather a shock to you.'

I rose from my chair like one in a dream and held out my hand to Thorndyke; and even in the dim light and in my dazed condition I noticed that his face bore a look that I had never seen before; the look of a granite mask of Fate—grim, stern, inexorable.

My two friends walked with me as far as the gateway at the top of Inner Temple Lane, and as we reached the entry a stranger, coming quickly up the Lane, overtook and passed us. In the glare of the lamp outside the porter's lodge he looked at us quickly over his shoulder, and though he passed on without halt or greeting, I recognised him with a certain dull surprise which I did not understand then and do not understand now. It was Mr. Jellicoe.

I shook hands once more with my friends and strode out into Fleet Street, but as soon as I was outside the gate I made direct for Nevill's Court. What was in my mind I do not know; only that some instinct of protection led me there, where my lady lay unconscious of the hideous menace that hung over her. At the entrance to the Court a tall, powerful man was lounging against the wall, and he seemed to look at me curiously as I passed; but I hardly noticed him and strode forward into the narrow passage. By the shabby gateway of the house I halted and looked up at such of the windows as I could see over the wall. They were all dark. All the inmates, then, were in bed. Vaguely comforted by this, I walked on to the New Street end of the Court and looked out. Here, too, a man—a tall, thick-set man—was loitering; and as he looked inquisitively into my face I turned and re-entered the Court, slowly retracing my steps. As I again reached the gate of the house I stopped to look once more at the windows, and turning I found the man whom I had last noticed close behind me. Then, in a flash of dreadful comprehension, I understood. These two were plain-clothes policemen.

For a moment a blind fury possessed me. An insane impulse urged me to give battle to this intruder; to avenge upon this person the insult of his presence. Fortunately the impulse was but momentary, and I recovered myself without making any demonstration. But the appearance of those two policemen brought the peril into the immediate present, imparted to it a horrible actuality. A chilly sweat of terror stood on my forehead, and my ears were ringing when I walked with faltering steps out into Fetter Lane.

---

## XVIII. — JOHN BELLINGHAM

THE next few days were a very nightmare of horror and gloom. Of course, I repudiated my acceptance of the decree of banishment that Ruth had passed upon me. I was her friend, at least, and in time of peril my place was at her side. Tacitly—though thankfully enough, poor girl!—she had recognised the fact and made me once more free of the house.

For there was no disguising the situation. Newspaper boys yelled the news up and down Fleet Street from morning to night; soul-shaking posters grinned on gaping crowds; and the newspapers fairly wallowed in the 'Shocking details.'

It is true that no direct accusations were made; but the original reports of the disappearance were reprinted with such comments as made me gnash my teeth with fury.

The wretchedness of those days will live in my memory until my dying day. Never can I forget the dread that weighed me down, the horrible suspense, the fear that clutched at my heart as I furtively scanned the posters in the streets. Even the wretched detectives who prowled about the entrances to Nevill's Court became grateful to my eyes, for, embodying as they did the hideous menace that hung over my dear lady, their presence at least told me that the blow had not yet fallen. Indeed, we came, after a time, to exchange glances of mutual recognition, and I thought that they seemed to be sorry for her and for me, and had no great liking for their task. Of course, I spent most of my leisure at the old house, though my heart ached more there than elsewhere; and I tried, with but poor success, I fear to maintain a cheerful, confident manner, cracking my little jokes as of old, and even essaying to skirmish with Miss Oman. But this last experiment was a dead failure; and when she had suddenly broken down in a stream of brilliant repartee to weep hysterically on my breast, I abandoned the attempt and did not repeat it.

A dreadful gloom had settled down upon the old house. Poor Miss Oman crept silently but restlessly up and down the ancient stairs with dim eyes and a tremulous chin, or moped in her room with a parliamentary petition (demanding, if I remember rightly, the appointment of a female judge to deal with divorce and matrimonial causes) which lay on her table languidly awaiting signatures that never came. Mr. Bellingham, whose mental condition at first alternated between furious anger and absolute panic, was fast sinking into a state of nervous prostration that I viewed with no little alarm. In fact, the only really self-possessed person in the entire household was Ruth herself, and even she could not conceal the ravages of sorrow and suspense and overshadowing peril. Her manner was almost unchanged; or rather, I should say, she had gone back to that which I had first known—quiet, reserved, taciturn, with a certain bitter humour showing through her unvarying amiability. When she and I were alone, indeed, her reserve melted away and she was all sweetness and gentleness. But it wrung my heart to look at her, to see how, day by day, she grew ever more thin and haggard; to watch the growing pallor of her cheek; to look into her solemn grey eyes, so sad and tragic and yet so brave and defiant of fate.

It was a terrible time; and through it all the dreadful questions haunted me continually: When will the blow fall? What is

it that the police are waiting for? And when they do strike, what will Thorndyke have to say?

So things went on for four dreadful days. But on the fourth day, just as the evening consultations were beginning and the surgery was filled with waiting patients, Polton appeared with a note, which he insisted, to the indignation of Adolphus, on delivering into my own hands. It was from Thorndyke, and was to the following effect:

'I learn from Dr. Norbury that he has recently heard from Hen Lederbogen, of Berlin—a learned authority on Oriental antiquities—who makes some reference to an English Egyptologist whom he met in Vienna about a year ago. He cannot recall the Englishman's name, but there are certain expressions in the letter which make Dr. Norbury suspect that he is referring to John Bellingham.'

'I want you to bring Mr. and Miss Bellingham to my chambers this evening at 8.30, to meet Dr. Norbury and talk over his letter; and in view of the importance of the matter, I look to you not to fail me.'

A wave of hope and relief swept over me. It was still possible that this Gordian knot might be cut; that the deliverance might not come before it was too late. I wrote a hasty note to Thorndyke and another to Ruth, making the appointment; and having given them both to the trusty Polton, returned somewhat feverishly to my professional duties. To my profound relief, the influx of patients ceased, and the practice sank into its accustomed torpor; whereby I was able without base and mendacious subterfuge to escape in good time to my tryst.

It was near upon eight o'clock when I passed through the archway into Nevill's Court. The warm afternoon light had died away, for the summer was running out apace. The last red glow of the setting sun had faded from the ancient roofs and chimney stacks, and down in the narrow court the shades of evening had begun to gather in nooks and corners. I was due at eight, and, as it still wanted some minutes to the hour, I sauntered slowly down the Court, looking reflectively on the familiar scene and the well-known friendly faces.

The day's work was drawing to a close. The little shops were putting up their shutters; lights were beginning to twinkle in parlour windows; a solemn hymn arose in the old Moravian chapel, and its echoes stole out through the dark entry that opens into the court under the archway.

Here was Mr. Finneymore (a man of versatile gifts, with a leaning towards paint and varnish) sitting, white-aproned and shirt-sleeved, on a chair in his garden, smoking his pipe with a complacent eye on his dahlias. There at an open window a young man, with a brush in his hand and another behind his ear, stood up and stretched himself while an older lady deftly rolled up a large map. The barber was turning out the gas in his little saloon; the greengrocer was emerging with a cigarette in his mouth and an aster in his button-hole, and a group of children were escorting the lamp-lighter on his rounds.

All these good, homely folk were Nevill's Courtiers of the genuine breed' born in the court, as had been their fathers before them for generations. And of such to a great extent was the population of the place. Miss Oman herself claimed aboriginal descent and so did the sweet-faced Moravian lady next door—a connection of the famous La Trobes of the old Conventicle, whose history went back to the Gordon Riots; and as to the gentleman who lived in the ancient timber-and-plaster house at the bottom of the court, it was reported that his ancestors had dwelt in that very house since the days of James the First.

On these facts I reflected as I sauntered down the court, on the strange phenomenon of an old-world hamlet with its ancient population lingering in the very heart of the noisy city; an island of peace set in an ocean of unrest, an oasis in a desert of change and ferment.

My meditations brought me to the shabby gate in the high wall, and as I raised the latch and pushed it open, I saw Ruth standing at the door of the house talking to Miss Oman. She was evidently waiting for me, for she wore her sombre black coat and hat and a black veil, and when she saw me she came out, closing the door after her, and holding out her hand.

'You are punctual,' said she. 'St Dunstan's clock is striking now.'

'Yes,' I answered. 'But where is your father?'

'He has gone to bed, poor old dear. He didn't feel well enough to come, and I did not urge him. He is really very ill. This dreadful suspense will kill him if it goes on much longer.'

'Let us hope it won't,' I said, but with little conviction, I fear, in my tone.

It was harrowing to see her torn by anxiety for her father, and I yearned to comfort her. But what was there to say? Mr. Bellingham was breaking up visibly under the stress of the terrible menace that hung over his daughter, and no words of mine could make the fact less manifest.

We walked silently up the court. The lady at the window greeted us with a smiling salutation, Mr. Finneymore removed his pipe and raised his cap, receiving a gracious bow from Ruth in return, and then we passed through the covered way into Fetter Lane, where my companion paused and looked about her.

'What are you looking for?' I asked.

'The detective,' she answered quietly. 'It would be a pity if the poor man should miss me after waiting so long. However, I don't see him.' And she turned away towards Fleet Street. It was an unpleasant surprise to me that her sharp eyes detected the secret spy upon her movements; and the dry, sardonic tone of her remark pained me too, recalling, as it did, the frigid self-possession that had so repelled me in the early days of our acquaintance. And yet I could not but admire the cool

unconcern with which she faced her horrible peril.

'Tell me a little more about this conference,' she said, as we walked down Fetter Lane. 'Your note was rather more concise than lucid; but I suppose you wrote it in a hurry.'

'Yes, I did. And I can't give you any details now. All I know is that Doctor Norbury has had a letter from a friend of his in Berlin, an Egyptologist, as I understand, named Lederbogen, who refers to an English acquaintance of his and Norbury's whom he saw in Vienna about a year ago. He cannot remember the Englishman's name, but from some of the circumstances Norbury seems to think that he is referring to your Uncle John. Of course, if this should turn out to be really the case, it would set everything straight; so Thorndyke was anxious that you and your father should meet Norbury and talk it over.'

'I see,' said Ruth. Her tone was thoughtful but by no means enthusiastic.

'You don't seem to attach much importance to the matter,' I remarked.

'No. It doesn't seem to fit the circumstances. What is the use of suggesting that poor Uncle John is alive—and behaving like an imbecile, which he certainly was not—when his dead body has actually been found?'

'But,' I suggested lamely, 'there may be some mistake. It may not be his body after all.'

'And the ring?' she asked, with a bitter smile.

'That may be just a coincidence. It was a copy of a well-known form of antique ring. Other people may have had copies made as well as your uncle. Besides,' I added with more conviction, 'we haven't seen the ring. It may not be his at all.'

She shook her head. 'My dear Paul,' she said quietly, 'it is useless to delude ourselves. Every known fact points to the certainty that it is his body. John Bellingham is dead: there can be no doubt of that. And to every one except his unknown murderer and one or two of my own loyal friends, it must seem that his death lies at my door. I realised from the beginning that the suspicion lay between George Hurst and me; and the finding of the ring fixes it definitely on me. I am only surprised that the police have made no move yet.'

The quiet conviction of her tone left me for a while speechless with horror and despair. Then I recalled Thorndyke's calm, even confident, attitude, and I hastened to remind her of it.

'There is one of your friends,' I said, 'who is still undismayed. Thorndyke seems to anticipate no difficulties.'

'And yet,' she replied, 'he is ready to consider a forlorn hope like this. However, we shall see.'

I could think of nothing more to say, and it was in gloomy silence that we pursued our way down Inner Temple Lane and through the dark entries and tunnel-like passages that brought us out, at length, by the Treasury.

'I don't see any light in Thorndyke's chambers,' I said, as we crossed King's Bench Walk; and I pointed out the row of windows all dark and blank.

'No; and yet the shutters are not closed. He must be out.'

'He can't be after making an appointment with you and your father. It is most mysterious. Thorndyke is so very punctilious about his engagements.'

The mystery was solved, when we reached the landing, by a slip of paper fixed by a tack on the iron-bound 'oak.'

'A note for P. B. is on the table,' was the laconic message: on reading which I inserted my key, swung the heavy door outward, and opened the lighter inner door. The note was lying on the table and I brought it out to the landing to read by the light of the staircase lamp.

'Apologise to our friends,' it ran, 'for the slight change of programme. Norbury is anxious that I should get my experiments over before the Director returns, so as to save discussion. He has asked me to begin to-night and says he will see Mr. and Miss Bellingham here, at the Museum. Please bring them along at once. I think some matters of importance may transpire at the interview.—J. E. T.'

'I hope you don't mind,' I said apologetically, when I had read the note to Ruth.

'Of course I don't,' she replied. 'I am rather pleased. We have so many associations with the dear old Museum, haven't we?' She looked at me for a moment with a strange and touching wistfulness and then turned to descend the stone stairs. —|

At the Temple gate I hailed a hansom, and we were soon speeding westward and north to the soft twinkle of the horse's bell.

'What are these experiments that Doctor Thorndyke refers to?' she asked presently.

'I can only answer you vaguely,' I replied. 'Their object, I believe, is to ascertain whether the penetrability of organic substances by the X-rays becomes altered by age; whether, for instance, an ancient block of wood is more or less transparent to the rays than a new block of the same size.'

'And of what use would the knowledge be, if it were obtained?'

'I can't say. Experiments are made to obtain knowledge without regard to its utility. The use appears when the

knowledge has been acquired. But in this case, if it should be possible to determine the age of any organic substance by its reaction to X-rays, the discovery might be found of some value in legal practice—as in demonstrating a new seal on an old document, for instance. But I don't know whether Thorndyke has anything definite in view; I only know that the preparations have been on a most portentous scale.'

'How do you mean?'

'In regard to size. When I went into the workshop yesterday morning, I found Polton erecting a kind of portable gallows about nine feet high, and he had just finished varnishing a pair of enormous wooden trays each over six feet long. It looked as if he and Thorndyke were contemplating a few private executions with subsequent post-mortems on the victims.'

'What a horrible suggestion!'

'So Polton said, with his quaint, crinkly smile. But he was mighty close about the use of the apparatus all the same. I wonder if we shall see anything of the experiments, when we get there. This is Museum Street, isn't it?'

'Yes.' As she spoke, she lifted the flap of one of the little windows in the back of the cab and peered out. Then, closing it with a quiet, ironic smile, she said:

'It is all right; he hasn't missed us. It will be quite a nice little change for him.'

The cab swung round into Great Russell Street, and, glancing out as it turned, I saw another hansom following; but before I had time to inspect its solitary passenger, we drew up at the Museum gates.

The gate porter, who seemed to expect us, ushered us up the drive to the great portico and into the Central Hall, where he handed us over to another official.

'Doctor Norbury is in one of the rooms adjoining the Fourth Egyptian Room,' the latter stated in answer to our inquiries: and, providing himself with a wire-guarded lantern, he prepared to escort us thither.

Up the great staircase, now wrapped in mysterious gloom, we passed in silence with bitter-sweet memories of that day of days when we had first trodden its steps together; through the Central Saloon, the Mediaeval Room and the Asiatic Saloon, and so into the long range of the Ethnographical Galleries.

It was a weird journey. The swaying lantern shot its beams abroad into the darkness of the great, dim galleries, casting instantaneous flashes on the objects in the cases, so that they leaped into being and vanished in the twinkling of an eye. Hideous idols with round, staring eyes started forth from the darkness, glared at us for an instant and were gone. Grotesque masks, suddenly revealed by the shimmering light, took on the semblance of demon faces that seemed to mow and gibber at us as we passed. As for the life-sized models—realistic enough by daylight—their aspect was positively alarming; for the moving light and shadow endowed them with life and movement, so that they seemed to watch us furtively, to lie in wait and to hold themselves in readiness to steal out and follow us.

The illusion evidently affected Ruth as well as me, for she drew nearer to me and whispered:

'These figures are quite startling. Did you see that Polynesian? I really felt as if he were going to spring out on us.'

'They are rather uncanny,' I admitted, 'but the danger is over now. We are passing out of their sphere of influence.'

We came out on a landing as I spoke and then turned sharply to the left along the North Gallery, from the centre of which we entered the Fourth Egyptian Room.

Almost immediately, a door in the opposite wall opened; a peculiar, high-pitched humming sound became audible, and Jervis came out on tiptoe with his hand raised.

'Tread as lightly as you can,' he said. 'We are just making an exposure.'

The attendant turned back with his lantern, and we followed Jervis into the room from whence he had come. It was a large room, and little lighter than the galleries, for the single glow-lamp that burned at the end where we entered left the rest of the apartment in almost complete obscurity. We seated ourselves at once on the chairs that had been placed for us, and, when the mutual salutations had been exchanged, I looked about me. There were three people in the room besides Jervis: Thorndyke, who sat with his watch in his hand, a grey-headed gentleman whom I took to be Dr. Norbury, and a smaller person at the dim farther end—undistinguishable, but probably Polton. At our end of the room were the two large trays that I had seen in the workshop, now mounted on trestles and each fitted with a rubber drain-tube leading down to a bucket. At the farther end of the room the sinister shape of the gallows reared itself aloft in the gloom; only now I could see that it was not a gallows at all. For affixed to the top cross-bar was a large, bottomless glass basin, inside which was a glass bulb that glowed with a strange green light; and in the heart of the bulb a bright spot of red.

It was all clear enough so far. The peculiar sound that filled the air was the hum of the interrupter; the bulb was, of course, a Crookes' tube, and the red spot inside it, the glowing red-hot disc of the anti-cathode. Clearly an X-ray photograph was being made; but of what? I strained my eyes, peering into the gloom at the foot of the gallows, but though I could make out an elongated object lying on the floor directly under the bulb, I could not resolve the dimly seen shape into anything recognisable. Presently, however, Dr. Norbury supplied the clue.

'I am rather surprised,' said he, 'that you chose so composite an object as a mummy to begin on. I should have thought that a simpler object, such as a coffin or a wooden figure, would have been more instructive.'



‘In some ways it would,’ replied Thorndyke, ‘but the variety of materials that the mummy gives us has its advantages. I hope your father is not ill, Miss Bellingham.’

‘He is not at all well,’ said Ruth, ‘and we agreed that it was better for me to come alone. I knew Herr Lederbogen quite well. He stayed with us for a time when he was in England.’

‘I trust,’ said Dr. Norbury, ‘that I have not troubled you for nothing. Herr Lederbogen speaks of “our erratic English friend with the long name that I can never remember,” and it seemed to me that he might be referring to your uncle.’

‘I should have hardly have called my uncle erratic,’ said Ruth.

‘No, no. Certainly not,’ Dr. Norbury agreed hastily. ‘However, you shall see the letter presently and judge for yourself. We mustn’t introduce irrelevant topics while the experiment is in progress, must we, Doctor?’

‘You had better wait until we have finished,’ said Thorndyke, ‘because I am going to turn out the light. Switch off the current, Polton.’

The green light vanished from the bulb, the hum of the interrupter swept down an octave or two and died away. Then Thorndyke and Dr. Norbury rose from their chairs and went towards the mummy, which they lifted tenderly while Polton drew from beneath it what presently turned out to be a huge black paper envelope. The single glow-lamp was switched off, leaving the room in total darkness until there burst suddenly a bright orange red light immediately above one of the trays.

We all gathered round to watch, as Polton—the high priest of these mysteries—drew from the black envelope a colossal sheet of bromide paper, laid it carefully in the tray and proceeded to wet it with a large brush which he had dipped in a pail of water.

‘I thought you always used plates for this kind of work,’ said Dr. Norbury.

‘We do, by preference; but a six-foot plate would be impossible, so I had a special paper made to the size.’

There is something singularly fascinating in the appearance of a developing photograph; in the gradual, mysterious emergence of the picture from the blank, white surface of plate or paper. But a skiagraph, or X-ray photograph, has a fascination all its own. Unlike the ordinary photograph, which yields a picture of things already seen, it gives a presentment of objects hitherto invisible; and hence, when Polton poured the developer on the already wet paper, we all craned over the tray with the keenest curiosity.

The developer was evidently a very slow one. For fully half a minute no change could be seen in the uniform surface. Then, gradually, almost insensibly, the marginal portion began to darken, leaving the outline of the mummy in pale relief. The change, once started, proceeded apace. Darker and darker grew the margin of the paper until from slate grey it had turned to black; and still the shape of the mummy, now in strong relief, remained an elongated patch of bald white. But not for long. Presently the white shape began to be tinged with grey, and, as the colour deepened, there grew out of it a paler form that seemed to steal out of the enshrouding grey like an apparition, spectral, awesome, mysterious. The skeleton was coming into view.

‘It is rather uncanny,’ said Dr. Norbury. ‘I feel as if I were assisting at some unholy rite. Just look at it now!’

The grey shadow of the cartonnage, the wrappings and the flesh was fading away into the background and the white skeleton stood out in sharp contrast. And it certainly was rather a weird spectacle.

‘You’ll lose the bones if you develop much farther,’ said Dr. Norbury.

‘I must let the bones darken,’ Thorndyke replied, ‘in case there are any metallic objects. I have three more papers in the envelope.’

The white shape of the skeleton now began to grey over and, as Dr. Norbury had said, its distinctness became less and yet less. Thorndyke leaned over the tray with his eyes fixed on a point in the middle of the breast and we all watched him in silence. Suddenly he rose. ‘Now, Polton,’ he said sharply, ‘get the hypo on as quickly as you can.’

Polton, who had been waiting with his hand on the stop-cock of the drain-tube, rapidly ran off the developer into the bucket and flooded the paper with the fixing solution.

‘Now we can look at it at our leisure,’ said Thorndyke. After waiting a few seconds, he switched on one of the glow-lamps, and as the flood of light fell on the photograph, he added: ‘You see we haven’t quite lost the skeleton.’

‘No.’ Dr. Norbury put on a pair of spectacles and bent down over the tray; and at this moment I felt Ruth’s hand touch my arm, lightly, at first, and then with a strong nervous grasp; and I could feel that her hand was trembling. I looked round at her anxiously and saw that she had turned deathly pale.

‘Would you rather go out into the gallery?’ I asked; for the room with its tightly shut windows was close and hot.

‘No,’ she replied quietly, ‘I will stay here. I am quite well.’ But still she kept hold of my arm.

Thorndyke glanced at her keenly and then looked away as Dr. Norbury turned to ask him a question.

‘Why is it, think you, that some of the teeth show so much whiter than others?’

‘I think the whiteness of the shadows is due to the presence of metal,’ Thorndyke replied.

‘Do you mean that the teeth have metal fillings?’ asked Dr. Norbury.

‘Yes.’

‘Really! This is very interesting. The use of gold stoppings—and artificial teeth, too—by the ancient Egyptians is well known, but we have no examples in this Museum. This mummy ought to be unrolled. Do you think all those teeth are filled with the same metal? They are not equally white.’

‘No,’ replied Thorndyke. ‘Those teeth that are perfectly white are undoubtedly filled with gold, but that greyish one is probably filled with tin.’

‘Very interesting,’ said Dr. Norbury. ‘Very interesting! And what do you make of that faint mark across the chest, near the top of the sternum?’

It was Ruth who answered his question. ‘It is the eye of Osiris!’ she exclaimed in a hushed voice.

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Dr. Norbury, ‘so it is. You are quite right. It is the Utchat—the Eye of Horus—or Osiris, if you prefer to call it so. That, I presume, will be a gilded device on some of the wrappings.’

‘No; I should say it is a tattoo mark. It is too indefinite for a gilded device. And I should say further that the tattooing is done in vermilion, as carbon tattooing would cast no visible shadow.’

‘I think you must be mistaken about that,’ said Dr. Norbury, ‘but we shall see, if the Director allows us to unroll the mummy. By the way, those little objects in front of the knees are metallic, I suppose?’

‘Yes, they are metallic. But they are not in front of the knees—they are in the knees. They are pieces of silver wire which have been I used to repair fractured kneecaps.’

‘Are you sure of that?’ exclaimed Dr. Norbury, peering at the little white marks with ecstasy; ‘because if you are, and if these objects are what you say they are, the mummy of Sebekhotep is an absolutely unique specimen.’

‘I am quite certain of it,’ said Thorndyke.

‘Then,’ said Dr. Norbury, ‘we have made a discovery, thanks to your inquiring spirit. Poor John Bellingham! He little knew what a treasure he was giving us! How I wish he could have known! How I wish he could have been here with us to-night!’

He paused once more to gaze in rapture at the photograph. And then Thorndyke, in his quiet, impassive way, said:

‘John Bellingham is here, Doctor Norbury. This is John Bellingham.’

Dr Norbury started back and stared at Thorndyke in speechless amazement.

‘You don’t mean,’ he exclaimed, after a long pause, ‘that this mummy is the body of John Bellingham!’

‘I do indeed. There is no doubt of it.’

‘But it is impossible! The mummy was here in the gallery a full three weeks before he disappeared.’

‘Not so,’ said Thorndyke. ‘John Bellingham was last seen alive by you and Mr. Jellicoe on the fourteenth of October, more than three weeks before the mummy left Queen Square. After that date he was never seen alive or dead by any person who knew him and could identify him.’

Dr Norbury reflected awhile in silence. Then, in a faint voice, he asked:

‘How do you suggest that John Bellingham’s body came to be inside that cartonnage?’

‘I think Mr. Jellicoe is the most likely person to be able to answer that question,’ Thorndyke replied dryly.

There was another interval of silence, and then Dr. Norbury asked suddenly:

‘But what do you suppose has become of Sebekhotep? The real Sebekhotep, I mean?’

‘I take it,’ said Thorndyke, ‘that the remains of Sebekhotep, or at least a portion of them, are at present lying in the Woodford mortuary awaiting an adjourned inquest.’

As Thorndyke made this statement a flash of belated intelligence, mingled with self-contempt, fell on me. Now that the explanation was given, how obvious it was! And yet I, a competent anatomist and physiologist and actually a pupil of Thorndyke’s, had mistaken those ancient bones for the remains of a recent body!

Dr Norbury considered the last statement for some time in evident perplexity. ‘It is all consistent enough, I must admit,’ said he, at length, ‘and yet—are you quite sure there is no mistake? It seems so incredible.’

There is no mistake, I assure you,’ Thorndyke answered. ‘To convince you, I will give you the facts in detail. First, as to the teeth. I have seen John Bellingham’s dentist and obtained particulars from his case-book. There were in all five teeth that had been filled. The right upper wisdom-tooth, the molar next to it, and the second lower molar on the left side, had all extensive gold fillings. You can see them all quite plainly in the skiagraph. The left lower lateral incisor had a very small gold filling, which you can see as a nearly circular white dot. In addition to these, a filling of tin amalgam had been inserted while the deceased was abroad, in the second left upper bicuspid, the rather grey spot that we have already noticed. These would, by themselves, furnish ample means of identification. But in addition, there is the tattooed device of the eye of

Osiris—'

'Horus,' murmured Dr. Norbury.

'Horus, then—in the exact locality in which it was borne by the deceased and tattooed, apparently, with the same pigment. There are, further, the suture wires in the knee-caps; Sir Morgan Bennet, having looked up the notes of the operation, informs me that he introduced three suture wires into the left patella and two into the right; which is what the skiagraph shows. Lastly, the deceased had an old Pott's fracture on the left side. It is not very apparent now, but I saw it quite distinctly just now when the shadows of the bones were whiter. I think that you may take it that the identification is beyond all doubt or question.'

'Yes,' agreed Dr. Norbury, with gloomy resignation, 'it sounds, as you say, quite conclusive. Well, well, it is a most horrible affair. Poor old John Bellingham! It looks uncommonly as if he had met with foul play. Don't you think so?'

'I do,' replied Thorndyke. 'There was a mark on the right side of the skull that looked rather like a fracture. It was not very clear, being at the side, but we must develop the negative to show it.'

Dr Norbury drew his breath in sharply through his teeth. 'This is a gruesome business, Doctor,' said he. 'A terrible business. Awkward for our people, too. By the way, what is our position in the matter? What steps ought we to take?'

'You should give notice to the coroner—I will manage the police—and you should communicate with one of the executors of the will.'

'Mr. Jellicoe?'

'No, not Mr. Jellicoe, under the peculiar circumstances. You had better write to Mr. Godfrey Bellingham.'

'But I rather understood that Mr. Hurst was the co-executor,' said Dr. Norbury.

'He is, surely, as matters stand,' said Jervis.

'Not at all,' replied Thorndyke. 'He was as matters stood; but he is not now. You are forgetting the conditions of clause two. That clause sets forth the conditions under which Godfrey Bellingham shall inherit the bulk of the estate and become the co-executor; and those conditions are: "that the body of the testator shall be deposited in some authorised place for the reception of the bodies of the dead, situate within the boundaries of, or appertaining to some place of worship within, the parish of St George, Bloomsbury, and St Giles in the Fields, or St Andrews above the Bars and St George the Martyr. Now Egyptian mummies are bodies of the dead, and this Museum is an authorised place for their reception; and this building is situate within the boundaries of the parish of St George, Bloomsbury. Therefore the provisions of clause two have been duly carried out and therefore Godfrey Bellingham is the principal beneficiary under the will, and the co-executor, in accordance with the wishes of the testator. Is that quite clear?'

'Perfectly,' said Dr. Norbury; 'and a most astonishing coincidence—but, my dear young lady, had you not better sit down? You are looking very ill.'

He glanced anxiously at Ruth, who was pale to the lips and was now leaning heavily on my arm.

'I think, Berkeley,' said Thorndyke, 'you had better take Miss Bellingham out into the gallery, where there is more air. This has been a tremendous climax to all the trials she has borne so bravely. Go out with Berkeley,' he added gently, laying his hand on her shoulder, 'and sit down while we develop the other negatives. You mustn't break down now, you know, when the storm has passed and the sun is beginning to shine.' He held the door open and as we passed out his face softened into a smile of infinite kindness. 'You won't mind my locking you out,' said he; 'this is a photographic dark-room at present.'

The key grated in the lock and we turned away into the dim gallery. It was not quite dark, for a beam of moonlight filtered in here and there through the blinds that covered the sky-lights. We walked on slowly, her arm linked in mine, and for a while neither of us spoke. The great rooms were very silent and peaceful and solemn. The hush, the stillness, the mystery of the half-seen forms in the cases around, were all in harmony with the deeply-felt sense of a great deliverance that filled our hearts.

We had passed through into the next room before either of us broke the silence. Insensibly our hands had crept together, and as they met and clasped with mutual pressure, Ruth exclaimed: 'How dreadful and tragic it is! Poor, poor Uncle John! It seems as if he had come back from the world of shadows to tell us of this awful thing. But, O God! what a relief it is!'

She caught her breath in one or two quick sobs and pressed my hand passionately.

'It is over, dearest,' I said. 'It is gone for ever. Nothing remains but the memory of your sorrow and your noble courage and patience.'

'I can't realise it yet,' she murmured. 'It has been like a frightful, interminable dream.'

'Let us put it away,' said I, 'and think only of the happy life that is opening.'

She made no reply, and only a quick catch in her breath, now and again, told of the long agony that she had endured with such heroic calm.

We walked on slowly, scarcely disturbing the silence with our soft footfalls, through the wide doorway into the second room. The vague shapes of mummy-cases standing erect in the wall-cases, loomed out dim and gigantic, silent watchers

keeping their vigil with the memories of untold centuries locked in their shadowy breasts. They were an awesome company. Reverend survivors from a vanished world, they looked out from the gloom of their abiding-place, but with no shade of menace or of malice in their silent presence; rather with a solemn benison on the fleeting creatures of to-day.

Half-way along the room a ghostly figure, somewhat aloof from its companions, showed a dim, pallid blotch where its face would have been. With one accord we halted before it.

‘Do you know who this is, Ruth?’ I asked.

‘Of course I do,’ she answered. ‘It is Artemidorus.’

We stood, hand in hand, facing the mummy, letting our memories fill in the vague silhouette with its well-remembered details. Presently I drew her nearer to me and whispered:

‘Ruth! do you remember when we last stood here?’

‘As if I could ever forget!’ she answered passionately. ‘Oh, Paul! The sorrow of it! The misery! How it wrung my heart to tell you! Were you very unhappy when I left you?’

‘Unhappy! I never knew, until then, what real, heart-breaking sorrow was. It seemed as if the light had gone out of my life for ever. But there was just one little spot of brightness left.’

‘What was that?’

‘You made me a promise, dear—a solemn promise; and I felt—at least I hoped—that the day would come, if I only waited patiently, when you would be able to redeem it.’

She crept closer to me and yet closer, until her head nestled on my shoulder and her soft cheek lay against mine.

‘Dear heart,’ I whispered, ‘is it now? Is the time fulfilled?’

‘Yes, dearest,’ she murmured softly. ‘It is now—and for ever.’

Reverently I folded her in my arms; gathered her to the heart that worshipped her utterly. Henceforth no sorrows could hurt us, no misfortunes vex; for we should walk hand in hand on our earthly pilgrimage and find the way all too short.

Time, whose sands run out with such unequal swiftness for the just and the unjust, the happy and the wretched, lagged, no doubt, with the toilers in the room that we had left. But for us its golden grains trickled out apace, and left the glass empty before we had begun to mark their passage. The turning of a key and the opening of a door aroused us from our dream of perfect happiness. Ruth raised her head to listen, and our lips met for one brief moment. Then, with a silent greeting to the friend who had looked on our grief and witnessed our final happiness, we turned and retraced our steps quickly, filling the great empty rooms with chattering echoes.

‘We won’t go back into the dark-room—which isn’t dark now,’ said Ruth.

‘Why not?’ I asked.

‘Because—when I came out I was very pale; and I’m—well, I don’t think I am very pale now. Besides, poor Uncle John is in there—and—I should be ashamed to look at him with my selfish heart overflowing with happiness.’

‘You needn’t be,’ said I. ‘It is the day of our lives and we have a right to be happy. But you shan’t go in, if you don’t wish to,’ and I accordingly steered her adroitly past the beam of light that streamed from the open door.

‘We have developed four negatives,’ said Thorndyke, as he emerged with the others, ‘and I am leaving them in the custody of Doctor Norbury, who will sign each when they are dry, as they may have to be put in evidence. What are you going to do?’

I looked at Ruth to see what she wished.

‘If you won’t think me ungrateful,’ said she, ‘I should rather be alone with my father to-night. He is very weak, and—’

‘Yes, I understand,’ I said hastily. And I did. Mr. Bellingham was a man of strong emotions and would probably be somewhat overcome by the sudden change of fortune and the news of his brother’s tragic death.

‘In that case,’ said Thorndyke, ‘I will bespeak your services. Will you go on and wait for me at my chambers, when you have seen Miss Bellingham home?’

I agreed to this, and we set forth under the guidance of Dr. Norbury (who carried an electric lamp) to return by the way we had come; two of us, at least, in a vastly different frame of mind. The party broke up at the entrance gates, and as Thorndyke wished my companion ‘Good-night,’ she held his hand and looked up in his face with swimming eyes.

‘I haven’t thanked you, Doctor Thorndyke,’ she said, ‘and I don’t feel that I ever can. What you have done for me and my father is beyond all thanks. You have saved his life and you have rescued me from the most horrible ignominy. Good-bye! and God bless you!’

The hansom that bowled along eastward—at most unnecessary speed—bore two of the happiest human beings within the wide boundaries of the town. I looked at my companion as the lights of the street shone into the cab, and was astonished at the transformation. The pallor of her cheek had given place to a rosy pink; the hardness, the tension, the haggard self-repression that had aged her face, were all gone, and the girlish sweetness that had so bewitched me in the early days of

our love had stolen back. Even the dimple was there when the sweeping lashes lifted and her eyes met mine in a smile of infinite tenderness.

Little was said on that brief journey. It was happiness enough to sit, hand clasped in hand, and know that our time of trial was past; that no cross of Fate could ever part us now.

The astonished cabman set us down, according to instructions, at the entrance to Nevill's Court, and watched us with open mouth as we vanished into the narrow passage. The court had settled down for the night, and no one marked our return; no curious eye looked down on us from the dark house-front as we said 'Good-bye' just inside the gate.

'You will come and see us to-morrow, dear, won't you?' she asked.

'Do you think it possible that I could stay away, then?'

'I hope not, but come as early as you can. My father will be positively frantic to see you; because I shall have told him, you know. And, remember, that it is you who have brought us this great deliverance. Good-night, Paul.'

'Good-night, sweetheart.'

She put up her face frankly to be kissed and then ran up to the ancient door; whence she waved me a last good-bye. The shabby gate in the wall closed behind me and hid her from my sight; but the light of her love went with me and turned the dull street into a path of glory.

---

## XIX. — A STRANGE SYMPOSIUM

IT came upon me with something of a shock of surprise to find the scrap of paper still tacked to the oak of Thorndyke's chambers. So much had happened since I had last looked on it that it seemed to belong to another epoch of my life. I removed it thoughtfully and picked out the tack before entering, and then, closing the inner door, but leaving the oak open, I lit the gas and fell to pacing the room.

What a wonderful episode it had been! How the whole aspect of the world had been changed in a moment by Thorndyke's revelation! At another time, curiosity would have led me to endeavour to trace back the train of reasoning by which the subtle brain of my teacher had attained this astonishing conclusion. But now my own happiness held exclusive possession of my thoughts. The image of Ruth filled the field of my mental vision. I saw her again as I had seen her in the cab with her sweet, pensive face and downcast eyes; I felt again the touch of her soft cheek and the parting kiss by the gate, so frank and simple, so intimate and final.

I must have waited quite a long time, though the golden minutes sped unreckoned, for when my two colleagues arrived they tendered needless apologies.

'And I suppose,' said Thorndyke, 'you have been wondering what I wanted you for.'

I had not, as a matter of fact, given the matter a moment's consideration.

'We are going to call on Mr. Jellicoe,' Thorndyke explained. 'There is something behind this affair, and until I have ascertained what it is, the case is not complete from my point of view.'

'Wouldn't it have done as well to-morrow?' I asked.

'It might; and then it might not. There is an old saying as to catching a weasel asleep. Mr. Jellicoe is a somewhat wide-awake person, and I think it best to introduce him to Inspector Badger at the earliest possible moment.'

'The meeting of a weasel and a badger suggests a sporting interview,' remarked Jervis. 'But you don't expect Jellicoe to give himself away, do you?'

'He can hardly do that, seeing that there is nothing to give away. But I think he may make a statement. There were some exceptional circumstances, I feel sure.'

'How long have you known that the body was in the Museum?' I asked.

'About thirty or forty seconds longer than you have, I should say.'

'Do you mean,' I exclaimed, 'that you did not know until the negative was developed?'

'My dear fellow,' he replied, 'do you suppose that, if I had had certain knowledge where the body was, I should have allowed that noble girl to go on dragging out a lingering agony of suspense that I could have cut short in a moment? Or that I should have made these humbugging pretences of scientific experiments if a more dignified course had been open to me?'

'As to the experiments,' said Jervis, 'Norbury could hardly have refused if you had taken him into your confidence.'

'Indeed he could, and probably would. My "confidence" would have involved a charge of murder against a highly respectable gentleman who was well known to him. He would probably have referred me to the police, and then what could I have done? I had plenty of suspicions, but not a single solid fact.'

Our discussion was here interrupted by hurried footsteps on the stairs and a thundering rat-tat on our knocker.

As Jervis opened the door, Inspector Badger burst into the room in a highly excited state.

‘What is all this, Doctor Thorndyke?’ he asked. ‘I see you’ve sworn an information against Mr. Jellicoe, and I have a warrant to arrest him; but before anything else is done I think it right to tell you that we have more evidence than is generally known pointing to quite a different quarter.’

‘Derived from Mr. Jellicoe’s information,’ said Thorndyke. ‘But the fact is that I have just examined and identified the body at the British Museum, where it was deposited by Mr. Jellicoe. I don’t say that he murdered John Bellingham—though that is what appearances suggest—but I do say that he will have to account for his secret disposal of the body.’

Inspector Badger was thunderstruck. Also he was visibly annoyed. The salt which Mr. Jellicoe had so adroitly sprinkled on the constabulary tail appeared to develop irritating properties, for when Thorndyke had given him a brief outline of the facts he stuck his hands in his pockets and exclaimed gloomily:

‘Well, I’m hanged! And to think of all the time and trouble I’ve spent on those damned bones! I suppose they were just a plant?’

‘Don’t let us disparage them,’ said Thorndyke. ‘They have played a useful part. They represent the inevitable mistake that every criminal makes sooner or later. The murderer will always do a little too much. If he would only lie low and let well alone, the detective might whistle for a clue. But it is time we were starting.’

‘Are we all going?’ asked the inspector, looking at me in particular with no very gracious recognition.

‘We will all come with you,’ said Thorndyke; ‘but you will, naturally, make the arrest in the way that seems best to you.’

‘It’s a regular procession,’ grumbled the inspector; but he made no more definite objection, and we started forth on our quest.

The distance from the Temple to Lincoln’s Inn is not great. In five minutes we were at the gateway in Chancery Lane, and a couple of minutes later saw us gathered round the threshold of the stately old house in New Square.

‘Seems to be a light in the first-floor front,’ said Badger. ‘You’d better move away before I ring the bell.’

But the precaution was unnecessary. As the inspector advanced to the bell-pull a head was thrust out of the open window immediately above the street door.

‘Who are you?’ inquired the owner of the head in a voice which I recognised as that of Mr. Jellicoe.

‘I am Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department. I wish to see Mr. Arthur Jellicoe.’

‘Then look at me. I am Mr. Arthur Jellicoe.’

‘I hold a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Jellicoe. You are charged with the murder of Mr. John Bellingham, whose body has been discovered in the British Museum.’

‘By whom?’

‘By Doctor Thorndyke.’

‘Indeed,’ said Mr. Jellicoe. ‘Is he here?’

‘Yes.’

‘Ha! and you wish to arrest me, I presume?’

‘Yes. That is what I am here for.’

‘Well, I will agree to surrender myself subject to certain conditions.’

‘I can’t make any conditions, Mr. Jellicoe.’

‘No, I will make them, and you will accept them. Otherwise you will not arrest me.’

‘It’s no use for you to talk like that,’ said Badger. ‘If you don’t let me in I shall have to break in. And I may as well tell you,’ he added mendaciously, ‘that the house is surrounded.’

‘You may accept my assurance,’ Mr. Jellicoe replied calmly, ‘that you will not arrest me if you do not accept my conditions.’

‘Well, what are your conditions?’ demanded Badger.

‘I desire to make a statement,’ said Mr. Jellicoe.

‘You can do that, but I must caution you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you.’

‘Naturally. But I wish to make the statement in the presence of Doctor Thorndyke, and I desire to hear a statement from him of the method of investigation by which he discovered the whereabouts of the body. That is to say, if he is willing.’

‘If you mean that we should mutually enlighten one another, I am very willing indeed,’ said Thorndyke.

‘Very well. Then my conditions, Inspector, are that I shall hear Doctor Thorndyke’s statement and that I shall be permitted to make a statement myself, and that until those statements are completed, with any necessary interrogation and discussion, I shall remain at liberty and shall suffer no molestation or interference of any kind. And I agree that, on the conclusion of the said proceedings, I will submit without resistance to any course that you may adopt.’

'I can't agree to that,' said Badger.

'Can't you?' said Mr. Jellicoe coldly; and after a pause he added: 'Don't be hasty. I have given you warning.'

There was something in Mr. Jellicoe's passionless tone that disturbed the inspector exceedingly, for he turned to Thorndyke and said in a low tone:

'I wonder what his game is? He can't get away, you know.'

'There are several possibilities,' said Thorndyke.

'M'm, yes,' said Badger, stroking his chin perplexedly.

'After all, is there any objection? His statement might save trouble, and you'd be on the safe side. It would take you some time to break in.'

'Well,' said Mr. Jellicoe, with his hand on the window, 'do you agree—yes or no?'

'All right,' said Badger sulkily. 'I agree.'

'You promise not to molest me in any way until I have quite finished?'

'I promise.'

Mr. Jellicoe's head disappeared and the window closed. After a short pause we heard the jar of massive bolts and the clank of a chain, and, as the heavy door swung open, Mr. Jellicoe stood revealed, calm and impassive, with an old-fashioned office candlestick in his hand.

Who are the others?' he inquired, peering out sharply through his spectacles.

'Oh, they are nothing to do with me,' replied Badger.

They are Doctor Berkeley and Doctor Jervis,' said Thorndyke.

Ha!' said Mr. Jellicoe; 'very kind and attentive of them to call. Pray, come in, gentlemen. I am sure you will be interested to hear our little discussion.'

He held the door open with a certain stiff courtesy, and we all entered the hall led by Inspector Badger. He closed the door softly and preceded us up the stairs and into the apartment from the window of which he had dictated the terms of surrender. It was a fine old room, spacious, lofty, and dignified, with panelled walls and a carved mantelpiece, the central escutcheon of which bore the initials 'J. W. P.' with the date '1671.' A large writing-table stood at the farther end, and behind it an iron safe.

'I have been expecting this visit,' Mr. Jellicoe remarked tranquilly as he placed four chairs opposite the table. 'Since when?' asked Thorndyke.

'Since last Monday evening, when I had the pleasure of seeing you conversing with my friend Doctor Berkeley at the Inner Temple gate, and then inferred that you were retained in the case. That was a circumstance that had not been fully provided for. May I offer you gentlemen a glass of sherry?'

As he spoke he placed on the table a decanter and a tray of glasses, and looked at us interrogatively with his hand on the stopper.

'Well, I don't mind if I do, Mr. Jellicoe,' said Badger, on whom the lawyer's glance had finally settled. Mr. Jellicoe filled a glass and handed it to him with a stiff bow; then, with the decanter still in his hand, he said persuasively: 'Doctor Thorndyke, pray allow me to fill you a glass?'

'No, thank you,' said Thorndyke, in a tone so decided that the inspector looked round at him quickly. And as Badger caught his eye, the glass which he was about to raise to his lips became suddenly arrested and was slowly returned to the table untasted.

'I don't want to hurry you, Mr. Jellicoe,' said the inspector, 'but it's rather late, and I should like to get this business settled. What is it that you wish to do?'

'I desire,' replied Mr. Jellicoe, 'to make a detailed statement of the events that have happened, and I wish to hear from Doctor Thorndyke precisely how he arrived at his very remarkable conclusion. When this has been done I shall be entirely at your service; and I suggest that it would be more interesting if Doctor Thorndyke would give us his statement before I furnish you with the actual facts.'

'I am entirely of your opinion,' said Thorndyke.—I

'Then in that case,' said Mr. Jellicoe, 'I suggest that you disregard me, and address your remarks to your friends as if I were not present.'

Thorndyke acquiesced with a bow, and Mr. Jellicoe, having seated himself in his elbow-chair behind the table, poured himself out a glass of water, selected a cigarette from a neat silver case, lighted it deliberately, and leaned back to listen at his ease.

'My first acquaintance with this case,' Thorndyke began without preamble, 'was made through the medium of the daily papers about two years ago; and I may say that, although I had no interest in it beyond the purely academic interest of a

specialist in a case that lies in his particular speciality, I considered it with deep attention. The newspaper reports contained no particulars of the relations of the parties that could furnish any hints as to motives on the part of any of them, but merely a bare statement of the events. And this was a distinct advantage, inasmuch as it left one to consider the facts of the case without regard to motive—to balance the *prima facie* probabilities with an open mind. And it may surprise you to learn that those *prima facie* probabilities pointed from the very first to that solution which has been put to the test of experiment this evening. Hence it will be well for me to begin by giving the conclusions that I reached by reasoning from the facts set forth in the newspapers before any of the further facts came to my knowledge.

‘From the facts as stated in the newspaper reports it is obvious that there were four possible explanations of the disappearance.

‘1. The man might be alive and in hiding. This was highly improbable, for the reasons that were stated by Mr. Loram at the late hearing of the application, and for a further reason that I shall mention presently.

‘2. He might have died by accident or disease, and his body failed to be identified. This was even more improbable, seeing that he carried on his person abundant means of identification, including visiting cards.

‘3. He might have been murdered by some stranger for the sake of his portable property. This was highly improbable for the same reason: his body could hardly have failed to be identified.

‘These three explanations are what we may call the outside explanations. They touched none of the parties mentioned; they were all obviously improbable on general grounds; and to all of them there was one conclusive answer—the scarab which was found in Godfrey Bellingham’s garden. Hence I put them aside and gave my attention to the fourth explanation. This was that the missing man had been made away with by one of the parties mentioned in the report. But, since the reports mentioned three parties, it was evident that there was a choice of three hypotheses namely:

‘(a) That John Bellingham had been made away with by Hurst; or (b) by the Bellinghams; or (c) by Mr. Jellicoe.

‘Now, I have constantly impressed on my pupils that the indispensable question that must be asked at the outset of such an inquiry as this is, “When was the missing person last undoubtedly seen or known to be alive?” That is the question that I asked myself after reading the newspaper report; and the answer was, that he was last certainly seen alive on the fourteenth of October, nineteen hundred and two, at 141, Queen Square, Bloomsbury. Of the fact that he was alive at that time and place there could be no doubt whatever; for he was seen at the same moment by two persons, both of whom were intimately acquainted with him, and one of whom, Doctor Norbury, was apparently a disinterested witness. After that date he was never seen, alive or dead, by any person who knew him and was able to identify him. It was stated that he had been seen on the twenty-third of November following by the housemaid of Mr. Hurst; but as this person was unacquainted with him, it was uncertain whether the person whom she saw was or was not John Bellingham.

‘Hence the disappearance dated, not from the twenty-third of November, as every one seems to have assumed, but from the fourteenth of October; and the question was not, “What became of John Bellingham after he entered Mr. Hurst’s house?” but, “What became of him after his interview in Queen Square?”

‘But as soon as I had decided that that interview must form the real starting point of the inquiry, a most striking set of circumstances came into view. It became obvious that if Mr. Jellicoe had had any reason for wishing to make away with John Bellingham, he had such an opportunity as seldom falls to the lot of an intending murderer.

‘Just consider the conditions. John Bellingham was known to be setting out alone upon a journey beyond the sea. His exact destination was not stated. He was to be absent for an undetermined period, but at least three weeks. His disappearance would occasion no comment; his absence would lead to no inquiries, at least for several weeks, during which the murderer would have leisure quietly to dispose of the body and conceal all traces of the crime. The conditions were, from a murderer’s point of view, ideal.

‘But that was not all. During that very period of John Bellingham’s absence Mr. Jellicoe was engaged to deliver to the British Museum what was admittedly a dead human body; and that body was to be enclosed in a sealed case. Could any more perfect or secure method of disposing of a body be devised by the most ingenious murderer? The plan would have had only one weak point: the mummy would be known to have left Queen Square after the disappearance of John Bellingham, and suspicion might in the end have arisen. To this point I shall return presently; meanwhile we will consider the second hypothesis—that the missing man was made away with by Mr. Hurst.

‘Now, there seemed to be no doubt that some person, purporting to be John Bellingham, did actually visit Mr. Hurst’s house; and he must either have left the house or remained in it. If he left, he did so surreptitiously; if he remained, there could be no reasonable doubt that he had been murdered and that his body had been concealed. Let us consider the probabilities in each case.

‘Assuming—as every one seems to have done—that the visitor was really John Bellingham, we are dealing with a responsible, middle-aged gentleman, and the idea that such a person would enter a house, announce his intention of staying, and then steal away unobserved is very difficult to accept. Moreover, he would appear to have come down to Eltham by rail immediately on landing in England, leaving his luggage in the cloak-room at Charing Cross. This pointed to a definiteness of purpose quite inconsistent with his casual disappearance from the house.

‘On the other hand, the idea that he might have been murdered by Hurst was not inconceivable. The thing was physically possible. If Bellingham had really been in the study when Hurst came home, the murder could have been committed—by



appropriate means—and the body temporarily concealed in the cupboard or elsewhere. But, although possible it was not at all probable. There was no real opportunity. The risk and the subsequent difficulties would be very great; there was not a particle of positive evidence that a murder had occurred; and the conduct of Hurst in immediately leaving the house in possession of the servants is quite inconsistent with the supposition that there was a body concealed in it. So that, while it is almost impossible to believe that John Bellingham left the house of his own accord, it is equally difficult to believe that he did not leave it.

‘But there is a third possibility, which, strange to say, no one seems to have suggested. Supposing that the visitor was not John Bellingham at all, but some one who was personating him? That would dispose of the difficulties completely. The strange disappearance ceases to be strange, for a personator would necessarily make off before Mr. Hurst should arrive and discover the imposture. But if we accept this supposition, we raise two further questions: “Who was the personator?” and “What was the object of the personation?”

‘Now, the personator was clearly not Hurst himself, for he would have been recognised by his housemaid; he was therefore either Godfrey Bellingham or Mr. Jellicoe or some other person; and as no other person was mentioned in the newspaper reports I confined my speculations to these two.

‘And, first, as to Godfrey Bellingham. It did not appear whether he was or was not known to the housemaid, so I assumed—wrongly, as it turns out—that he was not. Then he might have been the personator. But why should he have personated his brother? He could not have already committed the murder. There had not been time enough. He would have had to leave Woodford before John Bellingham had set out from Charing Cross. And even if he had committed the murder, he would have no object in raising this commotion. His cue would have been to remain quiet and know nothing. The probabilities were all against the personator being Godfrey Bellingham.

‘Then could it be Mr. Jellicoe? The answer to this question is contained in the answer to the further question: What could have been the object of the personation?

‘What motive could this unknown person have had in appearing, announcing himself as John Bellingham, and forthwith vanishing? There could only have been one motive: that, namely, of fixing the date of John Bellingham’s disappearance—of furnishing a definite moment at which he was last seen alive.

‘But who was likely to have had such a motive? Let us see.

‘I said just now that if Mr. Jellicoe had murdered John Bellingham and disposed of the body in the mummy-case, he would have been absolutely safe for the time being. But there would be a weak spot in his armour. For a month or more the disappearance of his client would occasion no remark. But presently, when he failed to return, inquiries would be set on foot; and then it would appear that no one had seen him since he left Queen Square. Then it would be noted that the last person with whom he was seen was Mr. Jellicoe. It might, further, be remembered that the mummy had been delivered to the Museum some time after the missing man was last seen alive. And so suspicion might arise and be followed by disastrous investigations. But supposing it should be made to appear that John Bellingham had been seen alive more than a month after his interview with Mr. Jellicoe and some weeks after the mummy had been deposited in the Museum? Then Mr. Jellicoe would cease to be in any way connected with the disappearance and henceforth would be absolutely safe.

‘Hence, after carefully considering this part of the newspaper report, I came to the conclusion that the mysterious occurrence at Mr. Hurst’s home had only one reasonable explanation, namely, that the visitor was not John Bellingham, but some one personating him; and that that some one was Mr. Jellicoe.

‘It remains to consider the case of Godfrey Bellingham and his daughter, though I cannot understand how any sane person can have seriously suspected either’ (here Inspector Badger smiled a sour smile). ‘The evidence against them was negligible, for there was nothing to connect them with the affair save the finding of the scarab on their premises; and that event, which might have been highly suspicious under other circumstances, was robbed of any significance by the fact that the scarab was found on a spot which had been passed a few minutes previously by the other suspected party, Hurst. The finding of the scarab did, however, establish two important conclusions: namely, that John Bellingham had probably met with foul play, and that of the four persons present when it was found, one at least had had possession of the body. As to which of the four was the one, the circumstances furnished only a hint, which was this: If the scarab had been purposely dropped, the most likely person to find it was the one who dropped it. And the person who discovered it was Mr. Jellicoe.

‘Following up this hint, if we ask ourselves what motive Mr. Jellicoe could have had for dropping it—assuming him to be the murderer—the answer is obvious. It would not be his policy to fix the crime on any particular person, but rather to set up a complication of conflicting evidence which would occupy the attention of investigators and divert it from himself.

‘Of course, if Hurst had been the murderer, he would have had a sufficient motive for dropping the scarab, so that the case against Mr. Jellicoe was not conclusive; but the fact that it was he who found it was highly significant.

‘This completes the analysis of the evidence contained in the original newspaper report describing the circumstances of the disappearance. The conclusions that followed from it were, as you will have seen:

- ‘1. That the missing man was almost certainly dead, as proved by the finding of the scarab after his disappearance.
- ‘2. That he had probably been murdered by one or more of four persons, as proved by the finding of the scarab on the premises occupied by two of them and accessible to the others.
- ‘3. That, of those four persons, one—Mr. Jellicoe—was the last person who was known to have been in the company of

the missing man; had had an exceptional opportunity for committing the murder; and was known to have delivered a dead body to the Museum subsequently to the disappearance.

'4. That the supposition that Mr. Jellicoe had committed the murder rendered all the other circumstances of the disappearance clearly intelligible, whereas on any other supposition they were quite inexplicable.

'The evidence of the newspaper report, therefore, clearly pointed to the probability that John Bellingham had been murdered by Mr. Jellicoe and his body concealed in the mummy-case.

'I do not wish to give you the impression that I, then and there, believed that Mr. Jellicoe was the murderer. I did not. There was no reason to suppose that the report contained all the essential facts, and I merely considered it speculatively as a study in probabilities. But I did decide that that was the only probable conclusion from the facts that were given.

'Nearly two years had passed before I heard anything more of the case. Then it was brought to my notice by my friend, Doctor Berkeley, and I became acquainted with certain new facts, which I will consider in the order in which they became known to me.

'The first new light on the case came from the will. As soon as I had read the document I felt convinced that there was something wrong. The testator's evident intention was that his brother should inherit the property, whereas the construction of the will was such as almost certainly to defeat that intention. The devolution of the property depended on the burial clause—clause two; but the burial arrangements would ordinarily be decided by the executor, who happened to be Mr. Jellicoe. Thus the will left the disposition of the property under the control of Mr. Jellicoe, though his action could have been contested.

'Now, this will, although drawn up by John Bellingham, was executed in Mr. Jellicoe's office as is proved by the fact that it was witnessed by two of his clerks. He was the testator's lawyer, and it was his duty to insist on the will being properly drawn. Evidently he did nothing of the kind, and this fact strongly suggested some kind of collusion on his part with Hurst, who stood to benefit by the miscarriage of the will. And this was the odd feature in the case; for whereas the party responsible for the defective provisions was Mr. Jellicoe, the party who benefited was Hurst.

'But the most startling peculiarity of the will was the way in which it fitted the circumstances of the disappearance. It looked as if clause two had been drawn up with those very circumstances in view. Since, however, the will was ten years old, this was impossible. But if clause two could not have been devised to fit the disappearance, could the disappearance have been devised to fit clause two? That was by no means impossible: under the circumstances it looked rather probable. And if it had been so contrived, who was the agent in that contrivance? Hurst stood to benefit, but there was no evidence that he even knew the contents of the will. There only remained Mr. Jellicoe, who had certainly connived at the misdrawing of the will for some purpose of his own—some dishonest purpose.

'The evidence of the will, then, pointed to Mr. Jellicoe as the agent in the disappearance, and, after reading it, I definitely suspected him of the crime.

'Suspicion, however, is one thing and proof is another; I had not nearly enough evidence to justify me in laying an information, and I could not approach the Museum officials without making a definite accusation. The great difficulty of the case was that I could discover no motive. I could not see any way in which Mr. Jellicoe would benefit by the disappearance. His own legacy was secure, whenever and however the testator died. The murder and concealment apparently benefited Hurst alone; and, in the absence of any plausible motive, the facts required to be much more conclusive than they were.'

'Did you form absolutely no opinion as to motive?' asked Mr. Jellicoe.

He put the question in a quiet, passionless tone, as if he were discussing some cause celebre in which he had nothing more than a professional interest. Indeed, the calm, impersonal interest that he displayed in Thorndyke's analysis, his unmoved attention, punctuated by little nods of approval at each telling point in the argument, were the most surprising features of this astounding interview.

'I did form an opinion,' replied Thorndyke, 'but it was merely speculative, and I was never able to confirm it. I discovered that about ten years ago Mr. Hurst had been in difficulties and that he had suddenly raised a considerable sum of money, no one knew how or on what security. I observed that this event coincided with the execution of the will, and I surmised that there might be some connection between them. But that was only a surmise; and, as the proverb has it, "He discovers who proves." I could prove nothing, so that I never discovered Mr. Jellicoe's motive, and I don't know it now.'

'Don't you really?' said Mr. Jellicoe, in something approaching a tone of animation. He laid down the end of his cigarette, and, as he selected another from the silver case, he continued: 'I think that is the most interesting feature of your really remarkable analysis. It does you great credit. The absence of motive would have appeared to most persons a fatal objection to the theory of, what I may call, the prosecution. Permit me to congratulate you on the consistency and tenacity with which you have pursued the actual, visible facts.'

He bowed stiffly to Thorndyke (who returned his bow with equal stiffness), lighted a fresh cigarette, and once more leaned back in his chair with the calm, attentive manner of a man who is listening to a lecture or a musical performance.

'The evidence, then, being insufficient to act upon,' Thorndyke resumed, 'there was nothing for it but to wait for some new facts. Now, the study of a large series of carefully conducted murders brings into view an almost invariable phenomenon. The cautious murderer, in his anxiety to make himself secure, does too much; and it is this excess of

precaution that leads to detection. It happens constantly; indeed, I may say that it always happens—in those murders that are detected; of those that are not we say nothing—and I had strong hopes that it would happen in this case. And it did.

‘At the very moment when my client’s case seemed almost hopeless, some human remains were discovered at Sidcup. I read the account of the discovery in the evening paper, and, scanty as the report was, it recorded enough facts to convince me that the inevitable mistake had been made.’

‘Did it, indeed?’ said Mr. Jellicoe. ‘A mere, inexpert, hearsay report! I should have supposed it to be quite valueless from a scientific point of view.’

‘So it was,’ said Thorndyke. ‘But it gave the date of the discovery and the locality, and it also mentioned what bones had been found. Which were all vital facts. Take the question of time. These remains, after lying perdu for two years, suddenly come to light just as the parties—who have also been lying perdu—have begun to take action in respect of the will; in fact, within a week or two of the hearing of the application. It was certainly a remarkable coincidence. And when the circumstances that occasioned the discovery were considered, the coincidence became more remarkable still. For these remains were found on land actually belonging to John Bellingham, and their discovery resulted from certain operations (the clearing of the watercress-beds) carried out on behalf of the absent landlord. But by whose orders were those works undertaken? Clearly by the orders of the landlord’s agent. But the landlord’s agent was known to be Mr. Jellicoe. Therefore these remains were brought to light at this peculiarly opportune moment by the action of Mr. Jellicoe. The coincidence, I say again, was very remarkable.’

‘But what instantly arrested my attention on reading the newspaper report was the unusual manner in which the arm had been separated; for, beside the bones of the arm proper, there were those of what anatomists call the “shoulder-girdle”—the shoulder-blade and collar-bone. This was very remarkable. It seemed to suggest a knowledge of anatomy, and yet no murderer, even if he possessed such knowledge, would make a display of it on such an occasion. It seemed to me that there must be some other explanation. Accordingly, when other remains had come to light and all had been collected at Woodford, I asked my friend Berkeley to go down there and inspect them. He did so, and this is what he found:

‘Both arms had been detached in the same peculiar manner; both were complete, and all the bones were from the same body. The bones were quite clean—of soft structures, I mean. There were no cuts, scratches or marks on them. There was not a trace of adipocere—the peculiar waxy soap that forms in bodies that decay in water or in a damp situation. The right hand had been detached at the time the arm was thrown into the pond, and the left ring finger had been separated and had vanished. This latter fact had attracted my attention from the first, but I will leave its consideration for the moment and return to it later.’

‘How did you discover that the hand had been detached?’ Mr. Jellicoe asked.

‘By the submersion marks,’ replied Thorndyke. ‘It was lying on the bottom of the pond in a position which would have been impossible if it had been attached to the arm.’

‘You interest me exceedingly,’ said Mr. Jellicoe. ‘It appears that a medico-legal expert finds “books in the running brooks, sermons in bones, and evidence in everything.” But don’t let me interrupt you.’

‘Doctor Berkeley’s observations,’ Thorndyke resumed, ‘together with the medical evidence at the inquest, led me to certain conclusions.’

‘Let me state the facts which were disclosed.’

‘The remains which had been assembled formed a complete human skeleton with the exception of the skull, one finger, and the legs from the knee to the ankle, including both knee-caps. This was a very impressive fact; for the bones that were missing included all those which could have been identified as belonging or not belonging to John Bellingham; and the bones that were present were the unidentifiable remainder.’

‘It had a suspicious appearance of selection.’

‘But the parts that were present were also curiously suggestive. In all cases the mode of dismemberment was peculiar; for an ordinary person would have divided the knee-joint leaving the kneecap attached to the thigh, whereas it had evidently been left attached to the shin-bone; and the head would most probably have been removed by cutting through the neck instead of being neatly detached from the spine. And all these bones were almost entirely free from marks or scratches such as would naturally occur in an ordinary dismemberment, and all were quite free from adipocere. And now as to the conclusions which I drew from these facts. First, there was the peculiar grouping of the bones. What was the meaning of that? Well, the idea of a punctilious anatomist was obviously absurd, and I put it aside. But was there any other explanation? Yes, there was. The bones had appeared in the natural groups that are held together by ligaments; and they had separated at points where they were attached principally by muscles. The knee-cap, for instance, which really belongs to the thigh, is attached to it by muscle, but to the shin-bone by a stout ligament. And so with the bones of the arm; they are connected to one another by ligaments; but to the trunk only by muscle, excepting at one end of the collarbone.’

But this was a very significant fact. Ligament decays much more slowly than muscle, so that in a body of which the muscles had largely decayed the bones might still be held together by ligament. The peculiar grouping therefore suggested that the body had been partly reduced to a skeleton before it was dismembered; that it had then been merely pulled apart and not divided with a knife.

‘This suggestion was remarkably confirmed by the total absence of knife-cuts or scratches.’

'Then there was the fact that all the bones were quite free from adipocere. Now, if an arm or a thigh should be deposited in water and left undisturbed to decay, it is certain that large masses of adipocere would be formed. Probably more than half of the flesh would be converted into this substance. The absence of adipocere therefore proved that the bulk of the flesh had disappeared or been removed from the bones before they were deposited in the pond. That, in fact, it was not a body, but a skeleton, that had been deposited.

'But what kind of skeleton? If it was the recent skeleton of a murdered man, then the bones had been carefully stripped of flesh so as to leave the ligaments intact. But this was highly improbable; for there could be no object in preserving the ligaments. And the absence of scratches was against this view.

'Then they did not appear to be graveyard bones. The collection was too complete. It is very rare to find a graveyard skeleton of which many of the small bones are not missing. And such bones are usually more or less weathered or friable.

'They did not appear to be bones such as may be bought at an osteological dealer's, for these usually have perforations to admit the macerating fluid to the marrow cavities. Dealers' bones, too, are very seldom all from the same body; and the small bones of the hand are drilled with holes to enable them to be strung on catgut.

'They were not dissecting-room bones, as there was no trace of red lead in the openings for the nutrient arteries.

'What the appearances did suggest was that these were parts of a body which had decayed in a very dry atmosphere (in which no adipocere would be formed), and which had been pulled or broken apart. Also that the ligaments which held the body—or rather skeleton—together were brittle and friable as suggested by the detached hand, which had probably broken off accidentally. But the only kind of body that completely answered this description is an Egyptian mummy. A mummy, it is true, has been more or less preserved; but on exposure to the air of such a climate as ours it perishes rapidly, the ligaments being the last of the soft parts to disappear.

'The hypothesis that these bones were parts of a mummy naturally suggested Mr. Jellicoe. If he had murdered John Bellingham and concealed his body in the mummy-case, he would have a spare mummy on his hands, and that mummy would have been exposed to the air and to somewhat rough handling.

'A very interesting circumstance connected with these remains was that the ring finger was missing. Now, fingers have on sundry occasions been detached from dead hands for the sake of the rings on them. But in such cases the object has been to secure a valuable ring uninjured. If this hand was the hand of John Bellingham, there was no such object. The purpose was to prevent identification; and that purpose would have been more easily, and much more completely, achieved by sacrificing the ring, by filing through it or breaking it off the finger. The appearances, therefore, did not quite agree with the apparent purpose.

'Then, could there be any other purpose with which they agreed better? Yes, there could.

'If it had happened that John Bellingham were known to have worn a ring on that finger, and especially if that ring fitted tightly, the removal of the finger would serve a very useful purpose. It would create an impression that the finger had been removed on account of a ring, to prevent identification; which impression would, in turn, produce a suspicion that the hand was that of John Bellingham. And yet it would not be evidence that could be used to establish identity. Now, if Mr. Jellicoe were the murderer and had the body hidden elsewhere, vague suspicion would be precisely what he would desire, and positive evidence what he would wish to avoid.

'It transpired later that John Bellingham did wear a ring on that finger and that the ring fitted very tightly. Whence it followed that the absence of the finger was an additional point tending to implicate Mr. Jellicoe.

'And now let us briefly review this mass of evidence. You will see that it consists of a multitude of items, each either trivial or speculative. Up to the time of the actual discovery I had not a single crucial fact, nor any clue as to motive. But, slight as the individual points of evidence were, they pointed with impressive unanimity to one person—Mr. Jellicoe. Thus:

'The person who had the opportunity to commit murder and dispose of the body was Mr. Jellicoe.

'The deceased was last certainly seen alive with Mr. Jellicoe.

'An unidentified human body was delivered to the Museum by Mr. Jellicoe.

'The only person who could have a motive for personating the deceased was Mr. Jellicoe.

'The only known person who could possibly have done so was Mr. Jellicoe.

'One of the two persons who could have had a motive for dropping the scarab was Mr. Jellicoe. The person who found that scarab was Mr. Jellicoe, although, owing to his defective eyesight and his spectacles, he was the most unlikely person of those present to find it.

'The person who was responsible for the execution of the defective will was Mr. Jellicoe.

'Then as to the remains. They were apparently not those of John Bellingham, but parts of a particular kind of body. But the only person who was known to have had such a body in his possession was Mr. Jellicoe.

'The only person who could have had any motive for substituting those remains for the remains of the deceased was Mr. Jellicoe.

'Finally, the person who caused the discovery of those remains at that singularly opportune moment was Mr. Jellicoe.

'This was the sum of the evidence that was in my possession up to the time of the hearing and, indeed, for some time after, and it was not enough to act upon. But when the case had been heard in Court, it was evident either that the proceedings would be abandoned—which was unlikely—or that there would be new developments.

'I watched the progress of events with profound interest. An attempt had been made (by Mr. Jellicoe or some other person) to get the will administered without producing the body of John Bellingham; and that attempt had failed. The coroner's jury had refused to identify the remains; the Probate Court had refused to presume the death of the testator. As affairs stood the will could not be administered.

'What would be the next move?

'It was virtually certain that it would consist in the production of something which would identify the unrecognised remains as those of the testator.

'But what would that something be?

'The answer to that question would contain the answer to another question: Was my solution of the mystery the true solution?

'If I was wrong, it was possible that some of the undoubtedly genuine bones of John Bellingham might presently be discovered; for instance, the skull, the knee-cap, or the left fibula, by any of which the remains could be positively identified.

'If I was right, only one thing could possibly happen. Mr. Jellicoe would have to play the trump card that he had been holding back in case the Court should refuse the application; a card that he was evidently reluctant to play.

'He would have to produce the bones of the mummy's finger, together with John Bellingham's ring. No other course was possible.

'But not only would the bones and the ring have to be found together. They would have to be found in a place which was accessible to Mr. Jellicoe, and so far under his control that he could determine the exact time when the discovery should be made.

'I waited patiently for the answer to my question. Was I right or was I wrong?

'And, in due course, the answer came.

'The bones and the ring were discovered in the well in the grounds of Godfrey Bellingham's late house. That house was the property of John Bellingham. Mr. Jellicoe was John Bellingham's agent. Hence it was practically certain that the date on which the well was emptied was settled by Mr. Jellicoe.

'The oracle had spoken.

'The discovery proved conclusively that the bones were not those of John Bellingham (for if they had been the ring would have been unnecessary for identification). But if the bones were not John Bellingham's, the ring was; from which followed the important corollary that whoever had deposited those bones in the well had had possession of the body of John Bellingham. And there could be no doubt that that person was Mr. Jellicoe.

'On receiving this final confirmation of my conclusions, I applied forthwith to Doctor Norbury for permission to examine the mummy of Sebekhotep, with the result that you are already acquainted with.'

As Thorndyke concluded, Mr. Jellicoe regarded him thoughtfully for a moment and then said: 'You have given us a most complete and lucid exposition of your method of investigation, sir. I have enjoyed it exceedingly, and should have profited by it hereafter—under other circumstances. Are you sure you won't allow me to fill your glass?' He touched the stopper of the decanter, and Inspector Badger ostentatiously consulted his watch.

'Time is running on, I fear,' said Mr. Jellicoe.

'It is, indeed,' Badger assented emphatically.

'Well, I need not detain you long,' said the lawyer. 'My statement is a narration of events. But I desire to make it, and you, no doubt, will be interested to hear it.'

He opened the silver case and selected a fresh cigarette, which, however, he did not light. Inspector Badger produced a funeral notebook, which he laid open on his knee; and the rest of us settled ourselves in our chairs with no little curiosity to hear Mr. Jellicoe's statement.

---

## XX. — THE END OF THE CASE

A PROFOUND silence had fallen on the room and its occupants. Mr. Jellicoe sat with his eyes fixed on the table as if deep in thought, the unlighted cigarette in one hand, the other grasping the tumbler of water. Presently Inspector Badger coughed impatiently and he looked up. 'I beg your pardon, gentlemen,' he said. 'I am keeping you waiting.'

He took a sip from the tumbler, opened a match-box and took out a match, but apparently altering his mind, laid it down and commenced:

‘The unfortunate affair which has brought you here to-night, had its origin ten years ago. At that time my friend Hurst became suddenly involved in financial difficulties—am I speaking too fast for you, Mr. Badger?’

‘No not at all,’ replied Badger. ‘I am taking it down in shorthand.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mr. Jellicoe. ‘He became involved in serious difficulties and came to me for assistance. He wished to borrow five thousand pounds to enable him to meet his engagements. I had a certain amount of money at my disposal, but I did not consider Hurst’s security satisfactory; accordingly I felt compelled to refuse. But on the very next day, John Bellingham called on me with a draft of his will which he wished me to look over before it was executed.’

‘It was an absurd will, and I nearly told him so; but then an idea occurred to me in connection with Hurst. It was obvious to me, as soon as I glanced through the will, that, if the burial clause was left as the testator had drafted it, Hurst had a very good chance of inheriting the property; and, as I was named as the executor I should be able to give full effect to that clause. Accordingly, I asked for a few days to consider the will, and then I called upon Hurst and made a proposal to him; which was this: That I should advance him five thousand pounds without security; that I should ask for no repayment, but that he should assign to me any interest that he might have or acquire in the estate of John Bellingham up to ten thousand pounds, or two-thirds of any sum that he might inherit if over that amount. He asked if John had yet made any will, and I replied, quite correctly, that he had not. He inquired if I knew what testamentary arrangements John intended to make, and again I answered, quite correctly, that I believed John proposed to devise the bulk of his property to his brother, Godfrey.’

‘Thereupon, Hurst accepted my proposal; I made him the advance and he executed the assignment. After a few days’ delay, I passed the will as satisfactory. The actual document was written from the draft by the testator himself; and a fortnight after Hurst had executed the assignment, John signed the will in my office. By the provisions of that will I stood an excellent chance of becoming virtually the principal beneficiary, unless Godfrey should contest Hurst’s claim and the Court should override the conditions of clause two.’

‘You will now understand the motives which governed my subsequent actions. You will also see, Doctor Thorndyke, how very near to the truth your reasoning carried you; and you will understand, as I wish you to do, that Mr. Hurst was no party to any of those proceedings which I am about to describe.’

‘Coming now to the interview in Queen Square in October, nineteen hundred and two, you are aware of the general circumstances from my evidence in Court, which was literally correct up to a certain point. The interview took place in a room on the third floor, in which were stored the cases which John had brought with him from Egypt. The mummy was unpacked, as were some other objects that he was not offering to the Museum, but several cases were still unopened. At the conclusion of the interview I accompanied Doctor Norbury down to the street door, and we stood on the doorstep conversing for perhaps a quarter of an hour. Then Doctor Norbury went away and I returned upstairs.’

‘Now the house in Queen Square is virtually a museum. The upper part is separated from the lower by a massive door which opens from the hall and gives access to the staircase and which is fitted with a Chubb night-latch. There are two latch-keys, of which John used to keep one and I the other. You will find them both in the safe behind me. The caretaker had no key and no access to the upper part of the house unless admitted by one of us.’

‘At the time when I came in, after Doctor Norbury had left, the caretaker was in the cellar, where I could hear him breaking coke for the hot-water furnace. I had left John on the third floor opening some of the packing-cases by the light of a lamp with a tool somewhat like a plasterer’s hammer; that is, a hammer with a small axe-blade at the reverse of the head. As I stood talking to Doctor Norbury, I could hear him knocking out the nails and wrenching up the lids; and when I entered the doorway leading to the stairs, I could still hear him. Just as I closed the staircase door behind me, I heard a rumbling noise from above; then all was still.’

‘I went up the stairs to the second floor, where, as the staircase was all in darkness, I stopped to light the gas. As I turned to ascend the next flight, I saw a hand projecting over the edge of the halfway landing. I ran up the stairs, and there, on the landing, I saw John lying huddled up in a heap at the foot of the top flight. There was a wound at the side of his forehead from which a little blood was trickling. The case-opener lay on the floor close by him and there was blood on the axe-blade. When I looked up the stairs I saw a rag of torn matting over the top stair.’

‘It was quite easy to see what had happened. He had walked quickly out on the landing with the case-opener in his hand. His foot had caught in the torn matting and he had pitched head foremost down the stairs still holding the case-opener. He had fallen so that his head had come down on the upturned edge of the axe-blade; he had then rolled over and the case-opener had dropped from his hand.’

‘I lit a wax match and stooped down to look at him. His head was in a very peculiar position, which made me suspect that his neck was broken. There was extremely little bleeding from the wound; he was perfectly motionless; I could detect no sign of breathing; and I felt no doubt that he was dead.’

‘It was an exceedingly regrettable affair, and it placed me, as I perceived at once, in an extremely awkward position. My first impulse was to send the caretaker for a doctor and a policeman; but a moment’s reflection convinced me that there were serious objections to this course.’

‘There was nothing to show that I had not, myself, knocked him down with the case-opener. Of course, there was nothing to show that I had; but we were alone in the house with the exception of the caretaker, who was down in the basement out

of earshot.

‘There would be an inquest. At the inquest inquiries would be made as to the will which was known to exist. But as soon as the will was produced, Hurst would become suspicious. He would probably make a statement to the coroner and I should be charged with the murder. Or, even if I were not charged, Hurst would suspect me and would probably repudiate the assignment; and, under the circumstances, it would be practically impossible for me to enforce it. He would refuse to pay and I could not take my claim into Court.

I sat down on the stairs just above poor John’s body and considered the matter in detail. At the worst, I stood a fair chance of hanging; at the best, I stood to lose close upon fifty thousand pounds. These were not pleasant alternatives.

‘Supposing, on the other hand, I concealed the body and gave out that John had gone to Paris. There was, of course, the risk of discovery, in which case I should certainly be convicted of the murder. But if no discovery occurred, I was not only safe from suspicion, but I secured the fifty thousand pounds. In either case there was considerable risk, but in one there was the certainty of loss, whereas in the other there was a material advantage to justify the risk. The question was whether it would be possible to conceal the body. If it were, then the contingent profit was worth the slight additional risk. But a human body is a very difficult thing to dispose of, especially to a person of so little scientific culture as myself.

‘It is curious that I considered this question for a quite considerable time before the obvious solution presented itself. I turned over at least a dozen methods of disposing of the body, and rejected them all as impracticable. Then, suddenly, I remembered the mummy upstairs.

‘At first it only occurred to me as a fantastic possibility that I could conceal the body in the mummy-case. But as I turned over the idea I began to see that it was really practicable; and not only practicable but easy; and not only easy but eminently safe. If once the mummy-case was in the Museum, I was rid of it for ever.

‘The circumstances were, as you, sir, have justly observed, singularly favourable. There would be no hue and cry, no hurry, no anxiety; but ample time for all the necessary preparations. Then the mummy-case itself was curiously suitable. Its length was ample, as I knew from having measured it. It was a cartonnage of rather flexible material and had an opening behind, secured with a lacing so that it could be opened without injury. Nothing need be cut but the lacing, which could be replaced. A little damage might be done in extracting the mummy and in introducing the deceased; but such cracks as might occur would be of no importance. For here again Fortune favoured me. The whole of the back of the mummy-case was coated with bitumen, and it would be easy when once the deceased was safely inside to apply a fresh coat, which would cover up not only the cracks but also the new lacing.

‘After careful consideration, I decided to adopt the plan. I went downstairs and sent the caretaker on an errand to the Law Courts. Then I returned and carried the deceased up to one of the third-floor rooms, where I removed his clothes and laid him out on a long packing-case in the position in which he would lie in the mummy-case. I folded his clothes neatly and packed them, with the exception of his boots, in a suit-case that he had been taking to Paris and which contained nothing but his night-clothes, toilet articles, and a change of linen. By the time I had done this and thoroughly washed the oilcloth on the stairs and landing, the caretaker had returned. I informed him that Mr. Bellingham had started for Paris and then I went home. The upper part of the house was, of course, secured by the Chubb lock, but I had also—*ex abundantia caulela*—locked the door of the room in which I had deposited the deceased.

‘I had, of course, some knowledge of the methods of embalming, but principally of those employed by the ancients. Hence, on the following day, I went to the British Museum library and consulted the most recent works on the subject; and exceedingly interesting they were, as showing the remarkable improvements that modern knowledge has effected in this ancient art. I need not trouble you with details that are familiar to you. The process that I selected as the simplest for a beginner was that of formalin injection, and I went straight from the Museum to purchase the necessary materials. I did not, however, buy an embalming syringe: the book stated that an ordinary anatomical injecting syringe would answer the same purpose, and I thought it a more discreet purchase.

‘I fear that I bungled the injection terribly, although I had carefully studied the plates in a treatise on anatomy—Gray’s, I think. However, if my methods were clumsy, they were quite effectual. I carried out the process on the evening of the third day; and when I locked up the house that night, I had the satisfaction of knowing that poor John’s remains were secure from corruption and decay.

‘But this was not enough. The great weight of a fresh body as compared with that of a mummy would be immediately noticed by those who had the handling of the mummy-case. Moreover, the damp from the body would quickly ruin the cartonnage and would cause a steamy film on the inside of the glass case in which it would be exhibited. And this would probably lead to an examination. Clearly, then, it was necessary that the remains of the deceased should be thoroughly dried before they were enclosed in the cartonnage.

‘Here my unfortunate deficiency in scientific knowledge was a great drawback. I had no idea how this result would be achieved and, in the end, was compelled to consult a taxidermist, to whom I represented that I wished to collect some small animals and reptiles and rapidly dry them for convenience of transport. By this person I was advised to immerse the dead animals in a jar of methylated spirit for a week and then expose them in a current of warm, dry air.

‘But the plan of immersing the remains of the deceased in ajar of methylated spirit was obviously impracticable. However, I bethought me that we had in our collection a porphyry sarcophagus, the cavity of which had been shaped to receive a small mummy in its case. I tried the deceased in the sarcophagus and found that he just fitted the cavity loosely. I

obtained a few gallons of methylated spirit, which I poured into the cavity, just covering the body, and then I put on the lid and luted it down air-tight with putty. I trust I do not weary you with these particulars?’

‘I’ll ask you to cut it as short as you can, Mr. Jellicoe,’ said Badger. ‘It has been a long yarn and time is running on.’

‘For my part,’ said Thorndyke, ‘I find these details deeply interesting and instructive. They fill in the outline that I had drawn by inference.’

‘Precisely,’ said Mr. Jellicoe; ‘then I will proceed.’

‘I left the deceased soaking in the spirit for a fortnight and then took him out, wiped him dry, and laid him on four cane-bottomed chairs just over the hot-water pipes, and I let a free current of air pass through the room. The result interested me exceedingly. By the end of the third day the hands and feet had become quite dry and shrivelled and horny—so that the ring actually dropped off the shrunken finger—the nose looked like a fold of parchment; and the skin of the body was so dry and smooth that you could have engrossed a lease on it. For the first day or two I turned the deceased at intervals so that he should dry evenly, and then I proceeded to get the case ready. I divided the lacing and extracted the mummy with great care—with great care as to the case, I mean; for the mummy suffered some injury in the extraction. It was very badly embalmed, and so brittle that it broke in several places while I was getting it out; and when I unrolled it the head separated and both the arms came off.

‘On the sixth day after the removal from the sarcophagus, I took the bandages that I had removed from Sebekhotep and very carefully wrapped the deceased in them, sprinkling powdered myrrh and gum benzoin freely on the body and between the folds of the wrappings to disguise the faint odour of the spirit and the formalin that still lingered about the body. When the wrappings had been applied, the deceased really had a most workmanlike appearance; he would have looked quite well in a glass case even without the cartonnage, and I felt almost regretful at having to put him out of sight for ever.

‘It was a difficult business getting him into the case without assistance, and I cracked the cartonnage badly in several places before he was safely enclosed. But I got him in at last, and then, when I had closed up the case with a new lacing, I applied a fresh layer of bitumen which effectually covered up the cracks and the new cord. A dusty cloth dabbed over the bitumen when it was dry disguised its newness, and the cartonnage with its tenant was ready for delivery. I notified Doctor Norbury of the fact, and five days later he came and removed it to the Museum.

‘Now that the main difficulty was disposed of, I began to consider the further difficulty to which you, sir, have alluded with such admirable perspicuity. It was necessary that John Bellingham should make one more appearance in public before sinking into final oblivion.

‘Accordingly, I devised the visit to Hurst’s house, which was calculated to serve two purposes. It created a satisfactory date for the disappearance, eliminating me from any connection with it, and by throwing some suspicion on Hurst it would make him more amenable—less likely to dispute my claim when he learned the provisions of the will.

‘The affair was quite simple. I knew that Hurst had changed his servants since I was last at his house, and I knew his habits. On that day I took the suit-case to Charing Cross and deposited it in the cloak-room, called at Hurst’s office to make sure that he was there, and went from thence direct to Cannon Street and caught the train to Eltham. On arriving at the house, I took the precaution to remove my spectacles—the only distinctive feature of my exterior—and was duly shown into the study at my request. As soon as the housemaid had left the room I quietly let myself out by the French window, which I closed behind me but could not fasten, went out at the side gate and closed that also behind me, holding the bolt of the latch back with my pocket-knife so that I need not slam the gate to shut it.

‘The other events of that day, including the dropping of the scarab, I need not describe, as they are known to you. But I may fitly make a few remarks on the unfortunate tactical error into which I fell in respect of the bones. That error arose, as you have doubtless perceived, from the lawyer’s incurable habit of underestimating the scientific expert. I had no idea mere bones were capable of furnishing so much information to a man of science.

‘The way in which the affair came about was this: the damaged mummy of Sebekhotep, perishing gradually by exposure to the air, was not only an eyesore to me: it was a definite danger. It was the only remaining link between me and the disappearance. I resolved to be rid of it and cast about for some means of destroying it. And then, in an evil moment, the idea of utilising it occurred to me.

‘There was an undoubted danger that the Court might refuse to presume death after so short an interval; and if the permission should be postponed, the will might never be administered during my lifetime. Hence, if these bones of Sebekhotep could be made to simulate the remains of the deceased testator, a definite good would be achieved. But I knew that the entire skeleton could never be mistaken for his. The deceased had broken his knee-caps and damaged his ankle, injuries which I assumed would leave some permanent trace. But if a judicious selection of the bones were deposited in a suitable place, together with some object clearly identifiable as appertaining to the deceased, it seemed to me that the difficulty would be met. I need not trouble you with details. The course which I adopted is known to you with the attendant circumstances, even to the accidental detachment of the right hand—which broke off as I was packing the arm in my handbag. Erroneous as that course was, it would have been successful but for the unforeseen contingency of your being retained in the case.

‘Thus, for nearly two years, I remained in complete security. From time to time I dropped in at the Museum to see if the deceased was keeping in good condition; and on those occasions I used to reflect with satisfaction on the gratifying



circumstance—accidental though it was—that his wishes, as expressed (very imperfectly) in clause two, had been fully complied with, and that without prejudice to my interests.

‘The awakening came on that evening when I saw you at the Temple gate talking with Doctor Berkeley. I suspected immediately that something was gone amiss and that it was too late to take any useful action. Since then, I have waited here in hourly expectation of this visit. And now the time has come. You have made the winning move and it remains only for me to pay my debts like an honest gambler.’

He paused and quietly lit his cigarette. Inspector Badger yawned and put away his notebook.

‘Have you done, Mr. Jellicoe?’ the inspector asked. ‘I want to carry out my contract to the letter, you know, though it’s getting devilish late.’

Mr. Jellicoe took his cigarette from his mouth and drank a glass of water.

‘I forgot to ask,’ he said, ‘whether you unrolled the mummy—if I may apply the term to the imperfectly treated remains of my deceased client.’

‘I did not open the mummy-case,’ replied Thorndyke.

‘You did not!’ exclaimed Mr. Jellicoe. ‘Then how did you verify your suspicions?’

‘I took an X-ray photograph.’

‘Ah! Indeed!’ Mr. Jellicoe pondered for some moments. ‘Astonishing!’ he murmured; ‘and most ingenious. The resources of science at the present day are truly wonderful.’

‘Is there anything more that you want to say?’ asked Badger; ‘because if you don’t, time’s up.’

‘Anything more?’ Mr. Jellicoe repeated slowly; ‘anything more? No—I—think—think—the time—is—up. Yes—the—the—time—’

He broke off and sat with a strange look fixed on Thorndyke.

His face had suddenly undergone a curious change. It looked shrunken and cadaverous and his lips had assumed a peculiar cherry-red colour.

‘Is anything the matter, Mr. Jellicoe?’ Badger asked uneasily. ‘Are you not feeling well, sir?’

Mr. Jellicoe did not appear to have heard the question, for he returned no answer, but sat motionless, leaning back in his chair, with his hands spread out on the table and his strangely intent gaze bent on Thorndyke.

Suddenly his head dropped on his breast and his body seemed to collapse; and as with one accord we sprang to our feet, he slid forward off his chair and disappeared under the table.

‘Good Lord! The man’s fainted!’ exclaimed Badger.

In a moment he was down on his hands and knees, trembling with excitement, groping under the table. He dragged the unconscious lawyer out into the light and knelt over him, staring into his face.

‘What’s the matter with him, Doctor?’ he asked, looking up at Thorndyke. ‘Is it apoplexy? Or is it a heart attack, think you?’

Thorndyke shook his head, though he stooped and put his fingers on the unconscious man’s wrist.

‘Prussic acid or potassium cyanide is what the appearances suggest,’ he replied.

‘But can’t you do anything?’ demanded the inspector.

Thorndyke dropped the arm, which fell limply to the floor.

‘You can’t do much for a dead man,’ he said.

‘Dead! Then he has slipped through our fingers after all!’

‘He has anticipated the sentence. That is all.’ Thorndyke spoke in an even, impassive tone which struck me as rather strange, considering the suddenness of the tragedy, as did also the complete absence of surprise in his manner. He seemed to treat the occurrence as a perfectly natural one.

Not so Inspector Badger; who rose to his feet and stood with his hands thrust into his pockets scowling sullenly down at the dead lawyer.

‘I was an infernal fool to agree to his blasted conditions,’ he growled savagely.

‘Nonsense,’ said Thorndyke. ‘If you had broken in you would have found a dead man. As it was you found a live man and obtained an important statement. You acted quite properly.’

‘How do you suppose he managed it?’ asked Badger.

Thorndyke held out his hand.

‘Let us look at his cigarette case,’ said he.

Badger extracted the little silver case from the dead man's pocket and opened it. There were five cigarettes in it, two of which were plain, while the other three were gold-tipped. Thorndyke took out one of each kind and gently pinched their ends. The gold-tipped one he returned; the plain one he tore through, about a quarter of an inch from the end; when two little black tabloids dropped out on to the table. Badger eagerly picked one up and was about to smell it when Thorndyke grasped his wrist. 'Be careful,' said he; and when he had cautiously sniffed at the tabloid—held at a safe distance from his nose—he added: 'Yes, potassium cyanide. I thought so when his lips turned that queer colour. It was in that last cigarette; you can see that he has bitten the end off.'

For some time we stood silently looking down at the still form stretched on the floor. Presently Badger looked up.

'As you pass the porter's lodge on your way out,' said he, 'you might just drop in and tell him to send a constable to me.'

'Very well,' said Thorndyke. 'And by the way, Badger, you had better tip that sherry back into the decanter and put it under lock and key, or else pour it out of the window.'

'Gad, yes!' exclaimed the inspector. 'I'm glad you mentioned it. We might have had an inquest on a constable as well as a lawyer. Good-night, gentlemen, if you are off.'

We went out and left him with his prisoner—passive enough, indeed, according to his ambiguously worded promise. As we passed through the gateway Thorndyke gave the inspector's message, curtly and without comment, to the gaping porter, and then we issued forth into Chancery Lane.

We were all silent and very grave, and I thought that Thorndyke seemed somewhat moved. Perhaps Mr. Jellicoe's last intent look—which I suspect he knew to be the look of a dying man—lingered in his memory as it did in mine. Half-way down Chancery Lane he spoke for the first time; and then it was only to ejaculate, 'Poor devil!'

Jervis took him up. 'He was a consummate villain, Thorndyke.'

'Hardly that,' was the reply. 'I should rather say that he was non-moral. He acted without malice and without scruple or remorse. His conduct exhibited a passionateless expediency which was dreadful because utterly unhuman. But he was a strong man—a courageous, self-contained man, and I had been better pleased if it could have been ordained that some other hand than mine should let the axe fall.'

Thorndyke's compunction may appear strange and inconsistent, but yet his feeling was also my own. Great as was the misery and suffering that this inscrutable man had brought into the lives of those I loved, I forgave him; and in his downfall forgot the callous relentlessness with which he had pursued his evil purpose. For it was he who had brought Ruth into my life; who had opened for me the Paradise of Love into which I had just entered. And so my thoughts turned away from the still shape that lay on the floor of the stately old room in Lincoln's Inn, away to the sunny vista of the future, where I should walk hand in hand with Ruth until my time, too, should come; until I, too, like the grim lawyer, should hear the solemn evening bell bidding me put out into the darkness of the silent sea.



---

## I. — THE CASE OF OSCAR BRODSKI

### PART I. — THE MECHANISM OF CRIME

A SURPRISING amount of nonsense has been talked about conscience. On the one hand remorse (or the “again-bite,” as certain scholars of ultra-Teutonic leanings would prefer to call it); on the other hand “an easy conscience”: these have been accepted as the determining factors of happiness or the reverse.

Of course there is an element of truth in the “easy conscience” view, but it begs the whole question. A particularly hardy conscience may be quite easy under the most unfavourable conditions—conditions in which the more feeble conscience might be severely afflicted with the “again-bite.” And, then, it seems to be the fact that some fortunate persons have no conscience at all; a negative gift that raises them above the mental vicissitudes of the common herd of humanity.

Now, Silas Hickler was a case in point. No one, looking into his cheerful, round face, beaming with benevolence and wreathed in perpetual smiles, would have imagined him to be a criminal. Least of all, his worthy, high-church housekeeper, who was a witness to his unvarying amiability, who constantly heard him carolling light-heartedly about the house and noted his appreciative zest at meal-times.

Yet it is a fact that Silas earned his modest, though comfortable, income by the gentle art of burglary. A precarious trade and risky withal, yet not so very hazardous if pursued with judgment and moderation. And Silas was eminently a man of judgment. He worked invariably alone. He kept his own counsel. No confederate had he to turn King’s Evidence at a pinch; no one he knew would bounce off in a fit of temper to Scotland Yard. Nor was he greedy and thriftless, as most criminals are. His “scoops” were few and far between, carefully planned, secretly executed, and the proceeds judiciously invested in “weekly property.”

In early life Silas had been connected with the diamond industry, and he still did a little rather irregular dealing. In the trade he was suspected of transactions with I.D.B.’s, and one or two indiscreet dealers had gone so far as to whisper the ominous word “fence.” But Silas smiled a benevolent smile and went his way. He knew what he knew, and his clients in Amsterdam were not inquisitive.

Such was Silas Hickler. As he strolled round his garden in the dusk of an October evening, he seemed the very type of modest, middle-class prosperity. He was dressed in the travelling suit that he wore on his little continental trips; his bag was packed and stood in readiness on the sitting-room sofa. A parcel of diamonds (purchased honestly, though without impertinent questions, at Southampton) was in the inside pocket of his waistcoat, and another more valuable parcel was stowed in a cavity in the heel of his right boot. In an hour and a half it would be time for him to set out to catch the boat train at the junction; meanwhile there was nothing to do but to stroll round the fading garden and consider how he should invest the proceeds of the impending deal. His housekeeper had gone over to Welham for the week’s shopping, and would probably not be back until eleven o’clock. He was alone in the premises and just a trifle dull.

He was about to turn into the house when his ear caught the sound of footsteps on the unmade road that passed the end of the garden. He paused and listened. There was no other dwelling near, and the road led nowhere, fading away into the waste land beyond the house. Could this be a visitor? It seemed unlikely, for visitors were few at Silas Hickler’s house. Meanwhile the footsteps continued to approach, ringing out with increasing loudness on the hard, stony path.

Silas strolled down to the gate, and, leaning on it, looked out with some curiosity. Presently a glow of light showed him the face of a man, apparently lighting his pipe; then a dim figure detached itself from the enveloping gloom, advanced towards him and halted opposite the garden. The stranger removed a cigarette from his mouth and, blowing out a cloud of smoke, asked—

“Can you tell me if this road will take me to Badsham Junction?”

"No," replied Hickler, "but there is a footpath farther on that leads to the station."

"Footpath!" growled the stranger. "I've had enough of footpaths. I came down from town to Catley intending to walk across to the junction. I started along the road, and then some fool directed me to a short cut, with the result that I have been blundering about in the dark for the last half-hour. My sight isn't very good, you know," he added.

"What train do you want to catch?" asked Hickler.

"Seven fifty-eight," was the reply.

"I am going to catch that train myself," said Silas, "but I shan't be starting for another hour. The station is only three-quarters of a mile from here. If you like to come in and take a rest, we can walk down together and then you'll be sure of not missing your way."

"It's very good of you," said the stranger, peering, with spectacled eyes, at the dark house, "but—I think—?"

"Might as well wait here as at the station," said Silas in his genial way, holding the gate open, and the stranger, after a momentary hesitation, entered and, flinging away his cigarette, followed him to the door of the cottage.

The sitting-room was in darkness, save for the dull glow of the expiring fire, but, entering before his guest, Silas applied a match to the lamp that hung from the ceiling. As the flame leaped up, flooding the little interior with light, the two men regarded one another with mutual curiosity.

"Brodski, by Jingo!" was Hickler's silent commentary, as he looked at his guest. "Doesn't know me, evidently—wouldn't, of course, after all these years and with his bad eyesight. Take a seat, sir," he added aloud. "Will you join me in a little refreshment to while away the time?"

Brodski murmured an indistinct acceptance, and, as his host turned to open a cupboard, he deposited his hat (a hard, grey felt) on a chair in a corner, placed his bag on the edge of the table, resting his umbrella against it, and sat down in a small arm-chair.

"Have a biscuit?" said Hickler, as he placed a whisky-bottle on the table together with a couple of his best star-pattern tumblers and a siphon.

"Thanks, I think I will," said Brodski. "The railway journey and all this confounded tramping about, you know—?"

"Yes," agreed Silas. "Doesn't do to start with an empty stomach. Hope you don't mind oat-cakes; I see they're the only biscuits I have."

Brodski hastened to assure him that oat-cakes were his special and peculiar fancy, and in confirmation, having mixed himself a stiff jorum, he fell to upon the biscuits with evident gusto.

Brodski was a deliberate feeder, and at present appeared to be somewhat sharp set. His measured munching being unfavourable to conversation, most of the talking fell to Silas; and, for once, that genial transgressor found the task embarrassing. The natural thing would have been to discuss his guest's destination and perhaps the object of his journey; but this was precisely what Hickler avoided doing. For he knew both, and instinct told him to keep his knowledge to himself.

Brodski was a diamond merchant of considerable reputation, and in a large way of business. He bought stones principally in the rough, and of these he was a most excellent judge. His fancy was for stones of somewhat unusual size and value, and it was well known to be his custom, when he had accumulated a sufficient stock, to carry them himself to Amsterdam and supervise the cutting of the rough stones. Of this Hickler was aware, and he had no doubt that Brodski was now starting on one of his periodical excursions; that somewhere in the recesses of his rather shabby clothing was concealed a paper packet possibly worth several thousand pounds.

Brodski sat by the table munching monotonously and talking little. Hickler sat opposite him, talking nervously and rather wildly at times, and watching his guest with a growing fascination. Precious stones, and especially diamonds, were Hickler's specialty. "Hard stuff"—silver plate—he avoided entirely; gold, excepting in the form of specie, he seldom touched; but stones, of which he could carry off a whole consignment in the heel of his boot and dispose of with absolute safety, formed the staple of his industry. And here was a man sitting opposite him with a parcel in his pocket containing the equivalent of a dozen of his most successful "scoops;" stones worth perhaps—? Here he pulled himself up short and began to talk rapidly, though without much coherence. For, even as he talked, other Words, formed subconsciously, seemed to insinuate themselves into the interstices of the sentences, and to carry on a parallel train of thought.

"Gets chilly in the evenings now, doesn't it?" said Hickler.

"It does indeed," Brodski agreed, and then resumed his slow munching, breathing audibly through his nose.

"Five thousand at least," the subconscious train of thought resumed; "probably six or seven, perhaps ten." Silas fidgeted in his chair and endeavoured to concentrate his ideas on some topic of interest. He was growing disagreeably conscious of a new and unfamiliar state of mind.

"Do you take any interest in gardening?", he asked. Next to diamonds and weekly "property," his besetting weakness was fuchsias.

Brodski chuckled sourly. "Hatton Garden is the nearest approach—?" He broke off suddenly, and then added, "I am a

Londoner, you know.”

The abrupt break in the sentence was not unnoticed by Silas, nor had he any difficulty in interpreting it. A man who carries untold wealth upon his person must needs be wary in his speech.

“Yes,” he answered absently, “it’s hardly a Londoner’s hobby.” And then, half consciously, he began a rapid calculation. Put it at five thousand pounds. What would that represent in weekly property? His last set of houses had cost two hundred and fifty pounds apiece, and he had let them at ten shillings and sixpence a week. At that rate, five thousand pounds represented twenty houses at ten and sixpence a week—say ten pounds a week—one pound eight shillings a day—five hundred and twenty pounds a year—for life. It was a competency. Added to what he already had, it was wealth. With that income he could fling the tools of his trade into the river and live out the remainder of his life in comfort and security.

He glanced furtively at his guest across the table, and then looked away quickly as he felt stirring within him an impulse the nature of which he could not mistake. This must be put an end to. Crimes against the person he had always looked upon as sheer insanity. There was, it is true, that little affair of the Weybridge policeman, but that was unforeseen and unavoidable, and it was the constable’s doing after all. And there was the old housekeeper at Epsom, too, but, of course, if the old idiot would shriek in that insane fashion—well, it was an accident, very regrettable, to be sure, and no one could be more sorry for the mishap than himself. But deliberate homicide!—robbery from the person! It was the act of a stark lunatic.

Of course, if he had happened to be that sort of person, here was the opportunity of a lifetime. The immense booty, the empty house, the solitary neighbourhood, away from the main road and from other habitations; the time, the darkness—but, of course, there was the body to be thought of; that was always the difficulty. What to do with the body? Here he caught the shriek of the up express, rounding the curve in the line that ran past the waste land at the back of the house. The sound started a new train of thought, and, as he followed it out, his eyes fixed themselves on the unconscious and taciturn Brodski, as he sat thoughtfully sipping his whisky. At length, averting his gaze with an effort, he rose suddenly from his chair and turned to look at the clock on the mantelpiece, spreading out his hands before the dying fire. A tumult of strange sensations warned him to leave the house. He shivered slightly, though he was rather hot than chilly, and, turning his head, looked at the door.

“Seems to be a confounded draught,” he said, with another slight shiver; “did I shut the door properly, I wonder?” He strode across the room and, opening the door wide, looked out into the dark garden. A desire, sudden and urgent, had come over him to get out into the open air, to be on the road and have done with this madness that was knocking at the door of his brain.

“I wonder if it is worth while to start yet,” he said, with a yearning glance at the murky, starless sky.

Brodski roused himself and looked round. “Is your clock right?” he asked.

Silas reluctantly admitted that it was.

“How long will it take us to walk to the station?” inquired Brodski.

“Oh, about twenty-five minutes to half-an-hour,” replied Silas, unconsciously exaggerating the distance.

“Well,” said Brodski, “we’ve got more than an hour yet, and it’s more comfortable here than hanging about the station. I don’t see the use of starting before we need.”

“No; of course not,” Silas agreed. A wave of strange emotion, half-regretful, half-triumphant, surged through his brain. For some moments he remained standing on the threshold, looking out dreamily into the night. Then he softly closed the door; and, seemingly without the exercise of his volition, the key turned noiselessly in the lock.

He returned to his chair and tried to open a conversation with the taciturn Brodski, but the words came faltering and disjointed. He felt his face growing hot, his brain full and intense, and there was a faint, high-pitched singing in his ears. He was conscious of watching his guest with a new and fearful interest, and, by sheer force of will, turned away his eyes; only to find them a moment later involuntarily returning to fix the unconscious man with yet more horrible intensity. And ever through his mind walked, like a dreadful procession, the thoughts of what that other man—the man of blood and violence—would do in these circumstances. Detail by detail the hideous synthesis fitted together the parts of the imagined crime, and arranged them in due sequence until they formed a succession of events, rational, connected and coherent.

He rose uneasily from his chair, with his eyes still riveted upon his guest. He could not sit any longer opposite that man with his hidden store of precious gems. The impulse that he recognized with fear and wonder was growing more ungovernable from moment to moment. If he stayed it would presently overpower him, and then? He shrank with horror from the dreadful thought, but his fingers itched to handle the diamonds. For Silas was, after all, a criminal by nature and habit. He was a beast of prey. His livelihood had never been earned; it had been taken by stealth or, if necessary, by force. His instincts were predacious, and the proximity of unguarded valuables suggested to him, as a logical consequence, their abstraction or seizure. His unwillingness to let these diamonds go away beyond his reach was fast becoming overwhelming.

But he would make one more effort to escape. He would keep out of Brodski’s actual presence until the moment for starting came.

“If you’ll excuse me,” he said, “I will go and put on a thicker pair of boots. After all this dry weather we may get a change, and damp feet are very uncomfortable when you are travelling.”

"Yes; dangerous too," agreed Brodski.

Silas walked through into the adjoining kitchen, where, by the light of the little lamp that was burning there, he had seen his stout, country boots placed, cleaned and in readiness, and sat down upon a chair to make the change. He did not, of course, intend to wear the country boots, for the diamonds were concealed in those he had on. But he would make the change and then alter his mind; it would all help to pass the time. He took a deep breath. It was a relief, at any rate, to be out of that room. Perhaps if he stayed away, the temptation would pass. Brodski would go on his way—he wished that he was going alone—and the danger would be over—at least—and the opportunity would have gone—the diamonds—?

He looked up as he slowly unlaced his boot. From where he sat he could see Brodski sitting by the table with his back towards the kitchen door. He had finished eating, now, and was composedly rolling a cigarette. Silas breathed heavily, and, slipping off his boot, sat for a while motionless, gazing steadily at the other man's back. Then he unlaced the other boot, still staring abstractedly at his unconscious guest, drew it off, and laid it very quietly on the floor.

Brodski calmly finished rolling his cigarette, licked the paper, put away his pouch, and, having dusted the crumbs of tobacco from his knees, began to search his pockets for a match. Suddenly, yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, Silas stood up and began stealthily to creep along the passage to the sitting-room. Not a sound came from his stockinged feet. Silently as a cat he stole forward, breathing softly with parted lips, until he stood at the threshold of the room. His face flushed duskiy, his eyes, wide and staring, glittered in the lamplight, and the racing blood hummed in his ears.

Brodski struck a match—Silas noted that it was a wooden vesta—lighted his cigarette, blew out the match and flung it into the fender. Then he replaced the box in his pocket and commenced to smoke.

Slowly and without a sound Silas crept forward into the room, step by step, with catlike stealthiness, until he stood close behind Brodski's chair—so close that he had to turn his head that his breath might not stir the hair upon the other man's head. So, for half-a-minute, he stood motionless, like a symbolical statue of Murder, glaring down with horrible, glittering eyes upon the unconscious diamond merchant, while his quick breath passed without a sound through his open mouth and his fingers writhed slowly like the tentacles of a giant hydra. And then, as noiselessly as ever, he backed away to the door, turned quickly and walked back into the kitchen.

He drew a deep breath. It had been a near thing. Brodski's life had hung upon a thread. For it had been so easy. Indeed, if he had happened, as he stood behind the man's chair, to have a weapon—a hammer, for instance, or even a stone?

He glanced round the kitchen and his eyes lighted on a bar that had been left by the workmen who had put up the new greenhouse. It was an odd piece cut off from a square, wrought-iron stanchion, and was about a foot long and perhaps three-quarters of an inch thick. Now, if he had had that in his hand a minute ago—

He picked the bar up, balanced it in his hand and swung it round his head. A formidable weapon this: silent, too. And it fitted the plan that had passed through his brain. Bah! He had better put the thing down.

But he did not. He stepped over to the door and looked again at Brodski, sitting, as before, meditatively smoking, with his back towards the kitchen.

Suddenly a change came over Silas. His face flushed, the veins of his neck stood out and a sullen scowl settled on his face. He drew out his watch, glanced at it earnestly and replaced it. Then he strode swiftly but silently along the passage into the sitting-room.

A pace away from his victim's chair he halted and took deliberate aim. The bar swung aloft, but not without some faint rustle of movement, for Brodski looked round quickly even as the iron whistled through the air. The movement disturbed the murderer's aim, and the bar glanced off his victim's head, making only a trifling wound. Brodski sprang up with a tremulous, bleating cry, and clutched his assailant's arms with the tenacity of mortal terror.

Then began a terrible struggle, as the two men, locked in a deadly embrace, swayed to and fro and trampled backwards and forwards. The chair was overturned, an empty glass swept from the table and, with Brodski's spectacles, crushed beneath stamping feet. And thrice that dreadful, pitiful, bleating cry rang out into the night, filling Silas, despite his murderous frenzy, with terror lest some chance wayfarer should hear it. Gathering his great strength for a final effort, he forced his victim backwards onto the table and, snatching up a corner of the tablecloth, thrust it into his face and crammed it into his mouth as it opened to utter another shriek. And thus they remained for a full two minutes, almost motionless, like some dreadful group of tragic allegory. Then, when the last faint twitchings had died away, Silas relaxed his grasp and let the limp body slip softly onto the floor.

It was over. For good or for evil, the thing was done. Silas stood up, breathing heavily, and, as he wiped the sweat from his face, he looked at the clock. The hands stood at one minute to seven. The whole thing had taken a little over three minutes. He had nearly an hour in which to finish his task. The goods train that entered into his scheme came by at twenty minutes past, and it was only three hundred yards to the line. Still, he must not waste time. He was now quite composed, and only disturbed by the thought that Brodski's cries might have been heard. If no one had heard them it was all plain sailing.

He stooped, and, gently disengaging the table-cloth from the dead man's teeth, began a careful search of his pockets. He was not long finding what he sought, and, as he pinched the paper packet and felt the little hard bodies grating on one another inside, his faint regrets for what had happened were swallowed up in self-congratulations.

He now set about his task with business-like briskness and an attentive eye on the clock. A few large drops of blood had

fallen on the table-cloth, and there was a small bloody smear on the carpet by the dead man's head. Silas fetched from the kitchen some water, a nail-brush and a dry cloth, and, having washed out the stains from the table-cover—not forgetting the deal table-top underneath—and cleaned away the smear from the carpet and rubbed the damp places dry, he slipped a sheet of paper under the head of the corpse to prevent further contamination. Then he set the tablecloth straight, stood the chair upright, laid the broken spectacles on the table and picked up the cigarette, which had been trodden flat in the struggle, and flung it under the grate. Then there was the broken glass, which he swept up into a dust-pan. Part of it was the remains of the shattered tumbler, and the rest the fragments of the broken spectacles. He turned it out onto a sheet of paper and looked it over carefully, picking out the larger recognizable pieces of the spectacle-glasses and putting them aside on a separate slip of paper, together with a sprinkling of the minute fragments. The remainder he shot back into the dust-pan and, having hurriedly put on his boots, carried it out to the rubbish-heap at the back of the house.

It was now time to start. Hastily cutting off a length of string from his string-box—for Silas was an orderly man and despised the oddments of string with which many people make shift—he tied it to the dead man's bag and umbrella and slung them from his shoulder. Then he folded up the paper of broken glass, and, slipping it and the spectacles into his pocket, picked up the body and threw it over his shoulder. Brodski was a small, spare man, weighing not more than nine stone; not a very formidable burden for a big, athletic man like Silas.

The night was intensely dark, and, when Silas looked out of the back gate over the waste land that stretched from his house to the railway, he could hardly see twenty yards ahead. After listening cautiously and hearing no sound, he went out, shut the gate softly behind him and set forth at a good pace, though carefully, over the broken ground. His progress was not as silent as he could have wished for, though.

The scanty turf that covered the gravelly land was thick enough to deaden his footfalls, the swinging bag and umbrella made an irritating noise; indeed, his movements were more hampered by them than by the weightier burden.

The distance to the line was about three hundred yards. Ordinarily he would have walked it in from three to four minutes, but now, going cautiously with his burden and stopping now and again to listen, it took him just six minutes to reach the three-bar fence that separated the waste land from the railway. Arrived here he halted for a moment and once more listened attentively, peering into the darkness on all sides. Not a living creature was to be seen or heard in this desolate spot, but far away, the shriek of an engine's whistle warned him to hasten.

Lifting the corpse easily over the fence, he carried it a few yards farther to a point where the line curved sharply.

Here he laid it face downwards, with the neck over the near rail. Drawing out his pocket-knife, he cut through the knot that fastened the umbrella to the string and also secured the bag; and when he had flung the bag and umbrella on the track beside the body, he carefully pocketed the string, excepting the little loop that had fallen to the ground when the knot was cut.

The quick snort and clanking rumble of an approaching goods train began now to be clearly audible. Rapidly, Silas; drew from his pockets the battered spectacles and the packet of broken glass. The former he threw down by the dead man's head, and then, emptying the packet into his hand, sprinkled the fragments of glass around the spectacles.

He was none too soon. Already the quick, laboured puffing of the engine sounded close at hand. His impulse was to stay and watch; to witness the final catastrophe that should convert the murder into an accident or suicide. But it was hardly safe: it would be better that he should not be near lest he should not be able to get away without being seen. Hastily he climbed back over the fence and strode away across the rough fields, while the train came snorting and clattering towards the curve.

He had nearly reached his back gate when a sound from the line brought him to a sudden halt; it was a prolonged whistle accompanied by the groan of brakes and the loud clank of colliding trucks. The snorting of the engine had ceased and was replaced by the penetrating hiss of escaping steam.

The train had stopped!

For one brief moment Silas stood with bated breath and mouth agape like one petrified; then he strode forward quickly to the gate, and, letting himself in, silently slid the bolt. He was undeniably alarmed. What could have happened on the line? It was practically certain that the body had been seen; but what was happening now? and would they come to the house? He entered the kitchen, and having paused again to listen—for somebody might come and knock at the door at any moment—he walked through the sitting-room and looked round. All seemed in order there. There was the bar, though, lying where he had dropped it in the scuffle. He picked it up and held it under the lamp. There was no blood on it; only one or two hairs. Somewhat absently he wiped it with the table-cover, and then, running out through the kitchen into the back garden, dropped it over the wall into a bed of nettles. Not that there was anything incriminating in the bar, but, since he had used it as a weapon, it had somehow acquired a sinister aspect to his eye.

He now felt that it would be well to start for the station at once. It was not time yet, for it was barely twenty-five minutes past seven; but he did not wish to be found in the house if any one should come. His soft hat was on the sofa with his bag, to which his umbrella was strapped. He put on the hat, caught up the bag and stepped over to the door; then he came back to turn down the lamp. And it was at this moment, when he stood with his hand raised to the burner, that his eyes, travelling by chance into the dim corner of the room, lighted on Brodski's grey felt hat, reposing on the chair where the dead man had placed it when he entered the house.

Silas stood for a few moments as if petrified, with the chilly sweat of mortal fear standing in beads upon his forehead. Another instant and he would have turned the lamp down and gone on his way; and then—? He strode over to the chair, snatched up the hat and looked inside it. Yes, there was the name, "Oscar Brodski," written plainly on the lining. If he had gone away, leaving it to be discovered, he would have been lost; indeed, even now, if a search-party should come to the house, it was enough to send him to the gallows.

His limbs shook with horror at the thought, but in spite of his panic he did not lose his self-possession. Darting through into the kitchen, he grabbed up a handful of the dry brush-wood that was kept for lighting fires and carried it to the sitting-room grate where he thrust it on the extinct, but still hot, embers, and crumpling up the paper that he had placed under Brodski's head—on which paper he now noticed, for the first time, a minute bloody smear—he poked it in under the wood, and striking a wax match, set light to it. As the wood flared up, he hacked at the hat with his pocket knife and threw the ragged strips into the blaze.

And all the while his heart was thumping and his hands a-tremble with the dread of discovery. The fragments of felt were far from inflammable, tending rather to fuse into cindery masses that smoked and smouldered than to burn away into actual ash. Moreover, to his dismay, they emitted a powerful resinous stench mixed with the odour of burning hair, so that he had to open the kitchen window (since he dared not unlock the front door) to disperse the reek. And still, as he fed the fire with small cut fragments, he strained his ears to catch, above the crackling of the wood, the sound of the dreaded footsteps, the knock on the door that should be as the summons of Fate.

The time, too, was speeding on. Twenty-one minutes to eight! In a few minutes more he must set out or he would miss the train. He dropped the dismembered hat-brim on the blazing wood and ran upstairs to open a window, since he must close that in the kitchen before he left. When he came back, the brim had already curled up into a black, clinkery mass that bubbled and hissed as the fat, pungent smoke rose from it sluggishly to the chimney.

Nineteen minutes to eight! It was time to start. He took up the poker and carefully beat the cinders into small particles, stirring them into the glowing embers of the wood and coal. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the grate. It was his constant custom to burn letters and other discarded articles in the sitting-room fire: his housekeeper would notice nothing out of the common. Indeed, the cinders would probably be reduced to ashes before she returned. He had been careful to notice that there were no metallic fittings of any kind in the hat, which might have escaped burning.

Once more he picked up his bag, took a last look round, turned down the lamp and, unlocking the door, held it open for a few moments. Then he went out, locked the door, pocketed the key (of which his housekeeper had a duplicate) and set off at a brisk pace for the station.

He arrived in good time after all, and, having taken his ticket, strolled through onto the platform. The train was not yet signalled, but there seemed to be an unusual stir in the place. The passengers were collected in a group at one end of the platform, and were all looking in one direction down the line; and, even as he walked towards them, with a certain tremulous, nauseating curiosity, two men emerged from the darkness and ascended the slope to the platform, carrying a stretcher covered with a tarpaulin. The passengers parted to let the bearers pass, turning fascinated eyes upon the shape that showed faintly through the rough pall; and, when the stretcher had been borne into the lamp-room, they fixed their attention upon a porter who followed carrying a hand-bag and an umbrella.

Suddenly one of the passengers started forward with an exclamation.

"Is that his umbrella?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," answered the porter, stopping and holding it out for the speaker's inspection.

"My God!" ejaculated the passenger; then, turning sharply to a tall man who stood close by, he said excitedly: "That's Brodski's umbrella. I could swear to it. You remember Brodski?" The tall man nodded, and the passenger, turning once more to the porter, said: "I identify that umbrella. It belongs to a gentleman named Brodski. If you look in his hat you will see his name written in it. He always writes his name in his hat."

"We haven't found his hat yet," said the porter; "but here is the station-master coming up the line." He awaited the arrival of his superior and then announced: "This gentleman, sir, has identified the umbrella."

"Oh," said the station-master, "you recognize the umbrella, sir, do you? Then perhaps you would step into the lamp-room and see if you can identify the body."

"Is it—he—very much injured?" the passenger asked tremulously.

"Well, yes," was the reply. "You see, the engine and six of the trucks went over him before they could stop the train. Took his head clean off, in fact."

"Shocking! shocking!" gasped the passenger. "I think, if you don't mind—I'd—I'd rather not. You don't think it's necessary, doctor, do you?"

"Yes, I do," replied the tall man. "Early identification may be of the first importance."

"Then I suppose I must," said the passenger.

Very reluctantly he allowed himself to be conducted by the station-master to the lamp-room, as the clang of the bell announced the approaching train. Silas Hickler followed and took his stand with the expectant crowd outside the closed



door. In a few moments the passenger burst out, pale and awe-stricken, and rushed up to his tall friend. "It is!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "It's Brodski! Poor old Brodski! Horrible! horrible! He was to have met me here and come on with me to Amsterdam."

"Had he any—merchandize about him?" the tall man asked; and Silas strained his ears to catch the reply.

"He had some stones, no doubt, but I don't know what.

His clerk will know, of course. By the way, doctor, could you watch the case for me? Just to be sure it was really an accident or—you know what. We were old friends, you know, fellow townsmen, too; we were both born in Warsaw. I'd like you to give an eye to the case."

"Very well," said the other. "I will satisfy myself that—there is nothing more than appears, and let you have a report. Will that do?"

"Thank you. It's excessively good of you, doctor. Ah! here comes the train. I hope it won't inconvenience you to stay and see to this matter."

"Not in the least," replied the doctor. "We are not due at Warmington until to-morrow afternoon, and I expect we can find out all that is necessary to know before that."

Silas looked long and curiously at the tall, imposing man who was, as it were, taking his seat at the chessboard, to play against him for his life. A formidable antagonist he looked, with his keen, thoughtful face, so resolute and calm. As Silas stepped into his carriage he thought with deep discomfort of Brodski's hat, and hoped that he had made no other oversight.

---

PART II. — THE MECHANISM OF DETECTION

(RELATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.)

THE singular circumstances that attended the death of Mr. Oscar Brodski, the well-known diamond merchant of Hatton Garden, illustrated very forcibly the importance of one or two points in medico-legal practice which Thorndyke was accustomed to insist were not sufficiently appreciated. What those points were, I shall leave my friend and teacher to state at the proper place; and meanwhile, as the case is in the highest degree instructive, I shall record the incidents in the order of their occurrence.

The dusk of an October evening was closing in as Thorndyke and I, the sole occupants of a smoking compartment, found ourselves approaching the little station of Ludham; and, as the train slowed down, we peered out at the knot of country, people who were waiting on the platform. Suddenly Thorndyke exclaimed in a tone of surprise: "Why, that is surely Boscovitch!" and almost at the same moment a brisk, excitable little man darted at the door of our compartment and literally tumbled in.

"I hope I don't intrude on this learned conclave," he said, shaking hands genially and banging his Gladstone with impulsive violence into the rack; "but I saw your faces at the window, and naturally jumped at the chance of such pleasant companionship."

"You are very flattering," said Thorndyke; "so flattering that you leave us nothing to say. But what in the name of fortune are you doing at—what's the name of the place—Ludham?"

"My brother has a little place a mile or so from here, and I have been spending a couple of days with him," Mr. Boscovitch explained. "I shall change at Badsham Junction and catch the boat train for Amsterdam. But whither are you two bound? I see you have your mysterious little green box up on the hat-rack, so I infer that you are on some romantic quest, eh? Going to unravel some dark and intricate crime?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "We are bound for Warmington on a quite prosaic errand. I am instructed to watch the proceedings at an inquest there to-morrow on behalf of the Griffin Life Insurance Office, and we are travelling down to-night as it is rather a cross-country journey."

"But why the box of magic?" asked Boscovitch, glancing up at the hat-rack.

"I never go away from home without it," answered Thorndyke. "One never knows what may turn up; the trouble of carrying it is small when set off against the comfort of having appliances at hand in an emergency."

Boscovitch continued to stare up at the little square case covered with Willesden canvas. Presently he remarked: "I often used to wonder what you had in it when you were down at Chelmsford in connection with that bank murder—what an amazing case that was, by the way, and didn't your methods of research astonish the police!" As he still looked up wistfully at the case, Thorndyke good-naturedly lifted it down and unlocked it. As a matter of fact he was rather proud of his "portable laboratory," and certainly it was a triumph of condensation, for, small as it was—only a foot square by four inches deep—it contained a fairly complete outfit for a preliminary investigation.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Boscovitch, when the case lay open before him, displaying its rows of little re-agent bottles, tiny test-tubes, diminutive spirit-lamp, dwarf microscope and assorted instruments on the same Lilliputian scale; "it's like a doll's house—everything looks as if it was seen through the wrong end of a telescope. But are these tiny things really efficient? That microscope now—?"

"Perfectly efficient at low and moderate magnifications," said Thorndyke. "It looks like a toy, but it isn't one; the lenses are the best that can be had. Of course a full-sized instrument would be infinitely more convenient—but I shouldn't have it with me, and should have to make shift with a pocket-lens. And so with the rest of the under-sized appliances; they are the alternative to no appliances."

Boscovitch pored over the case and its contents, fingering the instruments delicately and asking questions innumerable about their uses; indeed, his curiosity was but half appeased when, half-an-hour later, the train began to slow down.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, starting up and seizing his bag, "here we are at the junction already. You change here too, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "We take the branch train on to Warmington."

As we stepped out onto the platform, we became aware that something unusual was happening or had happened. All the passengers and most of the porters and supernumeraries were gathered at one end of the station, and all were looking intently into the darkness down the line.

"Anything wrong?" asked Mr. Boscovitch, addressing the station-inspector.

"Yes, sir," the official replied; "a man has been run over by the goods train about a mile down the line. The station-master has gone down with a stretcher to bring him in, and I expect that is his lantern that you see coming this way."

As we stood watching the dancing light grow momentarily brighter, flashing fitful reflections from the burnished rails, a man came out of the booking-office and joined the group of onlookers. He attracted my attention, as I afterwards remembered, for two reasons: in the first place his round, jolly face was excessively pale and bore a strained and wild expression, and, in the second, though he stared into the darkness with eager curiosity he asked no questions.

The swinging lantern continued to approach, and then suddenly two men came into sight bearing a stretcher covered with a tarpaulin, through which the shape of a human figure was dimly discernible. They ascended the slope to the platform, and proceeded with their burden to the lamp-room, when the inquisitive gaze of the passengers was transferred to a porter who followed carrying a handbag and umbrella and to the station-master who brought up the rear with his lantern.

As the porter passed, Mr. Boscovitch started forward with sudden excitement.

"Is that his umbrella?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the porter, stopping and holding it out for the speaker's inspection.

"My God!" ejaculated Boscovitch; then, turning sharply to Thorndyke, he exclaimed: "That's Brodski's umbrella. I could swear to it. You remember Brodski?"

Thorndyke nodded, and Boscovitch, turning once more to the porter, said: "I identify that umbrella. It belongs to a gentleman named Brodski. If you look in his hat, you will see his name written in it. He always writes his name in his hat."

"We haven't found his hat yet," said the porter; "but here is the station-master." He turned to his superior and announced: "This gentleman, sir, has identified the umbrella."

"Oh," said the station-master, "you recognize the umbrella, sir, do you? Then perhaps you would step into the lamp-room and see if you can identify the body."

Mr. Boscovitch recoiled with a look of alarm. "Is it? is he—very much injured?" he asked nervously.

"Well, yes," was the reply. "You see, the engine and six of the trucks went over him before they could stop the train. Took his head clean off, in fact."

"Shocking! shocking!" gasped Boscovitch. "I think? if you don't mind—I'd—I'd rather not. You don't think it necessary, doctor, do you?"

"Yes, I do," replied Thorndyke. "Early identification may be of the first importance."

"Then I suppose I must," said Boscovitch; and, with extreme reluctance, he followed the station-master to the lamp-room, as the loud ringing of the bell announced the approach of the boat train. His inspection must have been of the briefest, for, in a few moments, he burst out, pale and awe-stricken, and rushed up to Thorndyke.

"It is!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "It's Brodski! Poor" old Brodski! Horrible! horrible! He was to have met me here and come on with me to Amsterdam."

"Had he any—merchandise about him?" Thorndyke asked; and, as he spoke, the stranger whom I had previously noticed edged up closer as if to catch the reply.

"He had some stones, no doubt," answered Boscovitch, "but I don't know what they were. His clerk will know, of course. By the way, doctor, could you watch the case for me? Just to be sure it was really an accident or—you know what. We were old friends, you know, fellow townsmen, too; we were both born in Warsaw. I'd like you to give an eye to the case."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "I will satisfy myself that there is nothing more than appears, and let you have a report. Will that do?"

"Thank you," said Boscovitch. "It's excessively good of you, doctor. Ah, here comes the train. I hope it won't inconvenience you to stay and see to the matter."

"Not in the least," replied Thorndyke. "We are not due at Warmington until to-morrow afternoon, and I expect we can find out all that is necessary to know and still keep our appointment."

As Thorndyke spoke, the stranger, who had kept close to us with the evident purpose of hearing what was said, bestowed on him a very curious and attentive look; and it was only when the train had actually come to rest by the platform that he hurried away to find a compartment.

No sooner had the train left the station than Thorndyke sought out the station-master and informed him of the instructions that he had received from Boscovitch. "Of course," he added, in conclusion, "we must not move in the matter until the police arrive. I suppose they have been informed?"

"Yes," replied the station-master; "I sent a message at once to the Chief Constable, and I expect him or an inspector at any moment. In fact, I think I will slip out to the approach and see if he is coming." He evidently wished to have a word in private with the police officer before committing himself to any statement.

As the official departed, Thorndyke and I began to pace the now empty platform, and my friend, as was his wont, when entering on a new inquiry, meditatively reviewed the features of the problem.

"In a case of this kind," he remarked, "we have to decide on one of three possible explanations: accident, suicide or homicide; and our decision will be determined by inferences from three sets of facts: first, the general facts of the case; second, the special data obtained by examination of the body, and, third, the special data obtained by examining the spot on which the body was found. Now the only general facts at present in our possession are that the deceased was a diamond merchant making a journey for a specific purpose and probably having on his person property of small bulk and great value. These facts are somewhat against the hypothesis of suicide and somewhat favourable to that of homicide. Facts relevant to the question of accident would be the existence or otherwise of a level crossing, a road or path leading to the line, an enclosing fence with or without a gate, and any other facts rendering probable or otherwise the accidental presence of the deceased at the spot where the body was found. As we do not possess these facts, it is desirable that we extend our knowledge."

"Why not put a few discreet questions to the porter who brought in the bag and umbrella?" I suggested. "He is at this moment in earnest conversation with the ticket collector and would, no doubt, be glad of a new listener."

"An excellent suggestion, Jervis," answered Thorndyke. "Let us see what he has to tell us." We approached the porter and found him, as I had anticipated, bursting to unburden himself of the tragic story.

"The way the thing happened, sir, was this," he said, in answer to Thorndyke's question: "There's a sharpish bend in the road just at that place, and the goods train was just rounding the curve when the driver suddenly caught sight of something lying across the rails. As the engine turned, the head-lights shone on it and then he saw it was a man. He shut off steam at once, blew his whistle, and put the brakes down hard, but, as you know, sir, a goods train takes some stopping; before they could bring her up, the engine and half-a-dozen trucks had gone over the poor beggar."

"Could the driver see how the man was lying?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, he could see him quite plain, because the headlights were full on him. He was lying on his face with his neck over the near rail on the downside. His head was in the four-foot and his body by the side of the track. It looked as if he had laid himself out a-purpose."

"Is there a level crossing thereabouts?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, sir. No crossing, no road, no path, no nothing," said the porter, ruthlessly sacrificing grammar to emphasis. "He must have come across the fields and climbed over the fence to get onto the permanent way. Deliberate suicide is what it looks like."

"How did you learn all this?" Thorndyke inquired.

"Why, the driver, you see, sir, when him and his mate had lifted the body off the track, went on to the next signal-box and sent in his report by telegram. The station-master told me all about it as we walked down the line."

Thorndyke thanked the man for his information, and, as we strolled back towards the lamp-room, discussed the bearing of these new facts.

"Our friend is unquestionably right in one respect," he said; "this was not an accident. The man might, if he were near-sighted, deaf or stupid, have climbed over the fence and got knocked down by the train. But his position, lying across the rails, can only be explained by one of two hypotheses: either it was, as the porter says, deliberate suicide, or else the man was already dead or insensible. We must leave it at that until we have seen the body, that is, if the police will allow us to see it. But here comes the station-master and an officer with him. Let us hear what they have to say."

The two officials had evidently made up their minds to decline any outside assistance. The divisional surgeon would make the necessary examination, and information could be obtained through the usual channels. The production of Thorndyke's card, however, somewhat altered the situation. The police inspector hummed and hawed irresolutely, with the card in his hand, but finally agreed to allow us to view the body, and we entered the lamp-room together, the station-

master leading the way to turn up the gas.

The stretcher stood on the floor by one wall, its grim burden still hidden by the tarpaulin, and the hand-bag and umbrella lay on a large box, together with the battered frame of a pair of spectacles from which the glasses had fallen out.

"Were these spectacles found by the body?" Thorndyke inquired.

"Yes," replied the station-master. "They were close to the head and the glass was scattered about on the ballast."

Thorndyke made a note in his pocket-book, and then, as the inspector removed the tarpaulin, he glanced down on the corpse, lying limply on the stretcher and looking grotesquely horrible with its displaced head and distorted limbs. For fully a minute he remained silently stooping over the uncanny object, on which the inspector was now throwing the light of a large lantern; then he stood up and said quietly to me: "I think we can eliminate two out of the three hypotheses."

The inspector looked at him quickly, and was about to ask a question, when his attention was diverted by the travelling-case which Thorndyke had laid on a shelf and now opened to abstract a couple of pairs of dissecting forceps.

"We've no authority to make a post mortem, you know," said the inspector.

"No, of course not," said Thorndyke. "I am merely going to look into the mouth." With one pair of forceps he turned back the lip and, having scrutinized its inner surface, closely examined the teeth.

"May I trouble you for your lens, Jervis?" he said; and, as I handed him my doublet ready opened, the inspector brought the lantern close to the dead face and leaned forward eagerly. In his usual systematic fashion, Thorndyke slowly passed the lens along the whole range of sharp, uneven teeth, and then, bringing it back to the centre, examined with more minuteness the upper incisors. At length, very delicately, he picked out with his forceps some minute object from between two of the upper front teeth and held it in the focus of the lens. Anticipating his next move, I took a labelled microscope-slide from the case and handed it to him together with a dissecting needle, and, as he transferred the object to the slide and spread it out with the needle, I set up the little microscope on the shelf.

"A drop of Farrant and a cover-glass, please, Jervis," said Thorndyke.

I handed him the bottle, and, when he had let a drop of the mounting fluid fall gently on the object and put on the cover-slip, he placed the slide on the stage of the microscope and examined it attentively.

Happening to glance at the inspector, I observed on his countenance a faint grin, which he politely strove to suppress when he caught my eye.

"I was thinking, sir," he said apologetically, "that it's a bit off the track to be finding out what he had for dinner. He didn't die of unwholesome feeding."

Thorndyke looked up with a smile. "It doesn't do, inspector, to assume that anything is off the track in an inquiry of this kind. Every fact must have some significance, you know."

"I don't see any significance in the diet of a man who has had his head cut off," the inspector rejoined defiantly.

"Don't you?" said Thorndyke. "Is there no interest attaching to the last meal of a man who has met a violent death? These crumbs, for instance, that are scattered over the dead man's waistcoat. Can we learn nothing from them?"

"I don't see what you can learn," was the dogged rejoinder.

Thorndyke picked off the crumbs, one by one, with his forceps, and having deposited them on a slide, inspected them, first with the lens and then through the microscope.

"I learn," said he, "that shortly before his death, the deceased partook of some kind of whole-meal biscuits, apparently composed partly of oatmeal."

"I call that nothing," said the inspector. "The question that we have got to settle is not what refreshments had the deceased been taking, but what was the cause of his death: did he commit suicide? was he killed by accident? or was there any foul play?"

"I beg your pardon," said Thorndyke, "the questions that remain to be settled are, who killed the deceased and with what motive? The others are already answered as far as I am, concerned."

The inspector stared in sheer amazement not unmingled with incredulity.

"You haven't been long coming to a conclusion, sir," he said.

"No, it was a pretty obvious case of murder," said Thorndyke. "As to the motive, the deceased was a diamond merchant and is believed to have had a quantity of stones about his person. I should suggest that you search the body."

The inspector gave vent to an exclamation of disgust. "I see," he said. "It was just a guess on your part. The dead man was a diamond merchant and had valuable property about him; therefore he was murdered." He drew himself up, and, regarding Thorndyke with stern reproach, added: "But you must understand, sir, that this is a judicial inquiry, not a prize competition in a penny paper. And, as to searching the body, why, that is what I principally came for." He ostentatiously turned his back on us and proceeded systematically to turn out the dead man's pockets, laying the articles, as he removed them, on the box by the side of the hand-bag and umbrella.

While he was thus occupied, Thorndyke looked over the body generally, paying special attention to the soles of the boots, which, to the inspector's undissembled amusement, he very thoroughly examined with the lens.

"I should have thought, sir, that his feet were large enough to be seen with the naked eye," was his comment; "but perhaps," he added, with a sly glance at the station-master, "you're a little near-sighted."

Thorndyke chuckled good-humouredly, and, while the officer continued his search, he looked over the articles that had already been laid on the box. The purse and pocket-book he naturally left for the inspector to open, but the reading-glasses, pocket-knife and card-case and other small pocket articles were subjected to a searching scrutiny. The inspector watched him out of the corner of his eye with furtive amusement; saw him hold up the glasses to the light to estimate their refractive power, peer into the tobacco pouch, open the cigarette book and examine the watermark of the paper, and even inspect the contents of the silver match-box.

"What might you have expected to find in his tobacco pouch?" the officer asked, laying down a bunch of keys from the dead man's pocket.

"Tobacco," Thorndyke replied stolidly; "but I did not expect to find fine-cut Latakia. I don't remember ever having seen pure Latakia smoked in cigarettes."

"You do take an interest in things, sir," said the inspector, with a side glance at the stolid station-master.

"I do," Thorndyke agreed; "and I note that there are no diamonds among this collection."

"No, and we don't know that he had any about him; but there's a gold watch and chain, a diamond scarf-pin, and a purse containing"—he opened it and tipped out its contents into his hand—"twelve pounds in gold. That doesn't look much like robbery, does it? What do you say to the murder theory now?"

"My opinion is unchanged," said Thorndyke, "and I should like to examine the spot where the body was found. Has the engine been inspected?" he added, addressing the station-master.

"I telegraphed to Bradfield to have it examined," the official answered. "The report has probably come in by now. I'd better see before we start down the line."

We emerged from the lamp-room and, at the door, found the station-inspector waiting with a telegram. He handed it to the station-master, who read it aloud.

"The engine has been carefully examined by me. I find small smear of blood on near leading wheel and smaller one on next wheel following. No other marks." He glanced questioningly at Thorndyke, who nodded and remarked: "It will be interesting to see if the line tells the same tale."

The station-master looked puzzled and was apparently about to ask for an explanation; but the inspector, who had carefully pocketed the dead man's property, was impatient to start and, accordingly, when Thorndyke had repacked his case and had, at his own request, been furnished with a lantern, we set off down the permanent way, Thorndyke carrying the light and I the indispensable green case.

"I am a little in the dark about this affair," I said, when we had allowed the two officials to draw ahead out of earshot; "you came to a conclusion remarkably quickly. What was it that so immediately determined the opinion of murder as against suicide?"

"It was a small matter but very conclusive," replied Thorndyke. "You noticed a small scalp-wound above the left temple? It was a glancing wound, and might easily have been made by the engine. But the wound had bled; and it had bled for an appreciable time. There were two streams of blood from it, and in both the blood was firmly clotted and partially dried. But the man had been decapitated; and this wound, if inflicted by the engine, must have been made after the decapitation, since it was on the side most distant from the engine as it approached. Now, a decapitated head does not bleed. Therefore, this wound was inflicted before the decapitation.

"But not only had the wound bled: the blood had trickled down in two streams at right angles to one another. First, in the order of time as shown by the appearance of the stream, it had trickled down the side of the face and dropped on the collar. The second stream ran from the wound to the back of the head. Now, you know, Jervis, there are no exceptions to the law of gravity. If the blood ran down the face towards the chin, the face must have been upright at the time; and if the blood trickled from the front to the back of the head, the head must have been horizontal and face upwards. But the man when he was seen by the engine-driver, was lying face downwards. The only possible inference is that when the wound was inflicted, the man was in the upright position—standing or sitting; and that subsequently, and while he was still alive, he lay on his back for a sufficiently long time for the blood to have trickled to the back of his head."

"I see. I was a duffer not to have reasoned this out for myself," I remarked contritely.

"Quick observation and rapid inference come by practice," replied Thorndyke. "What did you notice about the face?"

"I thought there was a strong suggestion of asphyxia."

"Undoubtedly," said Thorndyke. "It was the face of a suffocated man. You must have noticed, too, that the tongue was very distinctly swollen and that on the inside of the upper lip were deep indentations made by the teeth, as well as one or two slight wounds, obviously caused by heavy pressure on the mouth. And now observe how completely these facts and inferences agree with those from the scalp wound. If we knew that the deceased had received a blow on the head, had

struggled with his assailant and been finally borne down and suffocated, we should look for precisely those signs which we have found."

"By the way, what was it that you found wedged between the teeth? I did not get a chance to look through the microscope."

"Ah!" said Thorndyke, "there we not only get confirmation, but we carry our inferences a stage further. The object was a little tuft of some textile fabric. Under the microscope I found it to consist of several different fibres, differently dyed. The bulk of it consisted of wool fibres dyed crimson, but there were also cotton fibres dyed blue and a few which looked like jute, dyed yellow. It was obviously a parti-coloured fabric and might have been part of a woman's dress, though the presence of the jute is much more suggestive of a curtain or rug of inferior quality."

"And its importance?"

"Is that, if it is not part of an article of clothing, then it must have come from an article of furniture, and furniture suggests a habitation."

"That doesn't seem very conclusive," I objected.

"It is not; but it is valuable corroboration."

"Of what?"

"Of the suggestion offered by the soles of the dead man's boots. I examined them most minutely and could find no trace of sand, gravel or earth, in spite of the fact that he must have crossed fields and rough land to reach the place where he was found. What I did find was fine tobacco ash, a charred mark as if a cigar or cigarette had been trodden on, several crumbs of biscuit, and, on a projecting brad, some coloured fibres, apparently from a carpet. The manifest suggestion is that the man was killed in a house with a carpeted floor, and carried from thence to the railway."

I was silent for some moments. Well as I knew Thorndyke, I was completely taken by surprise; a sensation, indeed, that I experienced anew every time that I accompanied him on one of his investigations. His marvellous power of co-ordinating apparently insignificant facts, of arranging them into an ordered sequence and making them tell a coherent story, was a phenomenon that I never got used to; every exhibition of it astonished me afresh.

"If your inferences are correct," I said, "the problem is practically solved. There must be abundant traces inside the house. The only question is, which house is it?"

"Quite so," replied Thorndyke; "that is the question, and a very difficult question it is. A glance at that interior would doubtless clear up the whole mystery. But how are we to get that glance? We cannot enter houses speculatively to see if they present traces of a murder. At present, our clue breaks off abruptly. The other end of it is in some unknown house, and, if we cannot join up the two ends, our problem remains unsolved. For the question is, you remember, Who killed Oscar Brodski?"

"Then what do you propose to do?" I asked.

"The next stage of the inquiry is to connect some particular house with this crime. To that end, I can only gather up all available facts and consider each in all its possible bearings. If I cannot establish any such connection, then the inquiry will have failed and we shall have to make a fresh start—say, at Amsterdam, if it turns out that Brodski really had diamonds on his person, as I have no doubt he had."

Here our conversation was interrupted by our arrival at the spot where the body had been found. The station-master had halted, and he and the inspector were now examining the near rail by the light of their lanterns.

"There's remarkably little blood about," said the former. "I've seen a good many accidents of this kind and there has always been a lot of blood, both on the engine and on the road. It's very curious."

Thorndyke glanced at the rail with but slight attention: that question had ceased to interest him. But the light of his lantern flashed onto the ground at the side of the track—a loose, gravelly soil mixed with fragments of chalk—and from thence to the soles of the inspector's boots, which were displayed as he knelt by the rail.

"You observe, Jervis?" he said in a low voice, and I nodded. The inspector's boot-soles were covered with adherent particles of gravel and conspicuously marked by the chalk on which he had trodden.

"You haven't found the hat, I suppose?" Thorndyke asked, stooping to pick up a short piece of string that lay on the ground at the side of the track.

"No," replied the inspector, "but it can't be far off. You seem to have found another clue, sir," he added, with a grin, glancing at the piece of string.

"Who knows," said Thorndyke. "A short end of white twine with a green strand in it. It may tell us something later. At any rate we'll keep it," and, taking from his pocket a small tin box containing, among other things, a number of seed envelopes, he slipped the string into one of the latter and scribbled a note in pencil on the outside. The inspector watched his proceedings with an indulgent smile, and then returned to his examination of the track, in which Thorndyke now joined.

"I suppose the poor chap was near-sighted," the officer remarked, indicating the remains of the shattered spectacles;

“that might account for his having strayed onto the line.”

“Possibly,” said Thorndyke. He had already noticed the fragments scattered over a sleeper and the adjacent ballast, and now once more produced his “collecting-box,” from which he took another seed envelope. “Would you hand me a pair of forceps, Jervis,” he said; “and perhaps you wouldn’t mind taking a pair yourself and helping me to gather up these fragments.”

As I complied, the inspector looked up curiously.

“There isn’t any doubt that these spectacles belonged to the deceased, is there?” he asked. “He certainly wore spectacles, for I saw the mark on his nose.”

“Still, there is no harm in verifying the fact,” said Thorndyke, and he added to me in a lower tone, “Pick up every particle you can find, Jervis. It may be most important.”

“I don’t quite see how,” I said, groping amongst the shingle by the light of the lantern in search of the tiny splinters of glass.

“Don’t you?” returned Thorndyke. “Well, look at these fragments; some of them are a fair size, but many of these on the sleeper are mere grains. And consider their number. Obviously, the condition of the glass does not agree with the circumstances in which we find it. These are thick concave spectacle-lenses broken into a great number of minute fragments. Now how were they broken? Not merely by falling, evidently: such a lens, when it is dropped, breaks into a small number of large pieces. Nor were they broken by the wheel passing over them, for they would then have been reduced to fine powder, and that powder would have been visible on the rail, which it is not. The spectacle-frames, you may remember, presented the same incongruity: they were battered and damaged more than they would have been by falling, but not nearly so much as they would have been if the wheel had passed over them.”

“What do you suggest, then?” I asked.

“The appearances suggest that the spectacles had been trodden on. But, if the body was carried here the probability is that the spectacles were carried here too, and that they were then already broken; for it is more likely that they were trodden on during the struggle than that the murderer trod on them after bringing them here. Hence the importance of picking up every fragment.”

“But why?” I inquired, rather foolishly, I must admit.

“Because, if, when we have picked up every fragment that we can find, there still remains missing a larger portion of the lenses than we could reasonably expect, that would tend to support our hypothesis and we might find the missing remainder elsewhere. If, on the other hand, we find as much of the lenses as we could expect to find, we must conclude that they were broken on this spot.”

While we were conducting our search, the two officials were circling around with their lanterns in quest of the missing hat; and, when we had at length picked up the last fragment, and a careful search, even aided by a lens, failed to reveal any other, we could see their lanterns moving, like will-o’-the-wisps, some distance down the line.

“We may as well see what we have got before our friends come back,” said Thorndyke, glancing at the twinkling lights. “Lay the case down on the grass by the fence; it will serve for a table.”

I did so, and Thorndyke, taking a letter from his pocket, opened it, spread it out flat on the case, securing it with a couple of heavy stones, although the night was quite calm. Then he tipped the contents of the seed envelope out on the paper, and carefully spreading out the pieces of glass, looked at them for some moments in silence. And, as he looked, there stole over his face a very curious expression; with sudden eagerness he began picking out the large fragments and laying them on two visiting-cards which he had taken from his card-case. Rapidly and with wonderful deftness he fitted the pieces together, and, as the reconstituted lenses began gradually to take shape on their cards I looked on with growing excitement, for something in my colleague’s manner told me that we were on the verge of a discovery.

At length the two ovals of glass lay on their respective cards, complete save for one or two small gaps; and the little heap that remained consisted of fragments so minute as to render further reconstruction impossible. Then Thorndyke leaned back and laughed softly.

“This is certainly an unlooked-for result,” said he.

“What is?” I asked.

“Don’t you see, my dear fellow? There’s too much glass. We have almost completely built up the broken lenses, and the fragments that are left over are considerably more than are required to fill up the gaps.”

I looked at the little heap of small fragments and saw at once that it was as he had said. There was a surplus of small pieces.

“This is very extraordinary,” I said. “What do you think can be the explanation?”

“The fragments will probably tell us,” he replied, “if we ask them intelligently.”

He lifted the paper and the two cards carefully onto the ground, and, opening the case, took out the little microscope, to which he fitted the lowest-power objective and eye-piece—having a combined magnification of only ten diameters. Then he

transferred the minute fragments of glass to a slide, and, having arranged the lantern as a microscope-lamp, commenced his examination.

"Ha!" he exclaimed presently. "The plot thickens. There is too much glass and yet too little; that is to say, there are only one or two fragments here that belong to the spectacles; not nearly enough to complete the building up of the lenses. The remainder consists of a soft, uneven, moulded glass, easily distinguished from the clear, hard optical glass. These foreign fragments are all curved, as if they had formed part of a cylinder, and are, I should say, portions of a wine-glass or tumbler." He moved the slide once or twice, and then continued: "We are in luck, Jervis. Here is a fragment with two little diverging lines etched on it, evidently the points of an eight-rayed star—and here is another with three points—the ends of three rays. This enables us to reconstruct the vessel perfectly. It was a clear, thin glass—probably a tumbler—decorated with scattered stars; I dare say you know the pattern. Sometimes there is an ornamented band in addition, but generally the stars form the only decoration. Have a look at the specimen."

I had just applied my eye to the microscope when the station-master and the inspector came up. Our appearance, seated on the ground with the microscope between us, was too much for the police officer's gravity, and he laughed long and joyously.

"You must excuse me, gentlemen," he said apologetically, "but really, you know, to an old hand, like myself, it does look a little—well—you understand—I dare say a microscope is a very interesting and amusing thing, but it doesn't get you much forwarder in a case like this, does it?"

"Perhaps not," replied Thorndyke. "By the way, where did you find the hat, after all?"

"We haven't found it," the inspector replied.

"Then we must help you to continue the search," said Thorndyke. "If you will wait a few moments, we will come with you." He poured a few drops of xylol balsam on the cards to fix the reconstituted lenses to their supports and then, packing them and the microscope in the case, announced that he was ready to start.

"Is there any village or hamlet near?" he asked the station-master.

"None nearer than Corfield. That is about half-a-mile from here."

"And where is the nearest road?"

"There is a half-made road that runs past a house about three hundred yards from here. It belonged to a building estate that was never built. There is a footpath from it to the station."

"Are there any other houses near?"

"No. That is the only house for half-a-mile round, and there is no other road near here."

"Then the probability is that Brodski approached the railway from that direction, as he was found on that side of the permanent way."

The inspector agreeing with this view, we all set off slowly towards the house, piloted by the station-master and searching the ground as we went. The waste land over which we passed was covered with patches of docks and nettles, through each of which the inspector kicked his way, searching with feet and lantern for the missing hat. A walk of three hundred yards brought us to a low wall enclosing a garden, beyond which we could see a small house; and here we halted while the inspector waded into a large bed of nettles beside the wall and kicked vigorously. Suddenly there came a clinking sound mingled with objurgations, and the inspector hopped out holding one foot and soliloquizing profanely.

"I wonder what sort of a fool put a thing like that into a bed of nettles!" he exclaimed, stroking the injured foot. Thorndyke picked the object up and held it in the light of the lantern, displaying a piece of three-quarter inch rolled iron bar about a foot long. "It doesn't seem to have been there very long," he observed, examining it closely, "there is hardly any rust on it."

"It has been there long enough for me," growled the inspector, "and I'd like to bang it on the head of the blighter that put it there."

Callously indifferent to the inspector's sufferings, Thorndyke continued calmly to examine the bar. At length, resting his lantern on the wall, he produced his pocket-lens, with which he resumed his investigation, a proceeding that so exasperated the inspector that that afflicted official limped off in dudgeon, followed by the station-master, and we heard him, presently, rapping at the front door of the house.

"Give me a slide, Jervis, with a drop of Farrant on it," said Thorndyke. "There are some fibres sticking to this bar."

I prepared the slide, and, having handed it to him together with a cover-glass, a pair of forceps and a needle, set up the microscope on the wall.

"I'm sorry for the inspector," Thorndyke remarked, with his eye applied to the little instrument, "but that was a lucky kick for us. Just take a look at the specimen."

I did so, and, having moved the slide about until I had seen the whole of the object, I gave my opinion. "Red wool fibres, blue cotton fibres and some yellow vegetable fibres that look like jute."

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "the same combination of fibres as that which we found on the dead man's teeth and probably



from the same source. This bar has probably been wiped on that very curtain or rug with which poor Brodski was stifled. We will place it on the wall for future reference, and meanwhile, by hook or by crook, we must get into that house. This is much too plain a hint to be disregarded."

Hastily repacking the case, we hurried to the front of the house, where we found the two officials looking rather vaguely up the unmade road.

"There's a light in the house," said the inspector, "but there's no one at home. I have knocked a dozen times and got no answer. And I don't see what we are hanging about here for at all. The hat is probably close to where the body was found, and we shall find it in the morning."

Thorndyke made no reply, but, entering the garden, stepped up the path, and having knocked gently at the door, stooped and listened attentively at the key-hole.

"I tell you there's no one in the house, sir," said the inspector irritably; and, as Thorndyke continued to listen, he walked away, muttering angrily. As soon as he was gone, Thorndyke flashed his lantern over the door, the threshold, the path and the small flower-beds; and, from one of the latter, I presently saw him stoop and pick something up.

"Here is a highly instructive object, Jervis," he said, coming out to the gate, and displaying a cigarette of which only half-an-inch had been smoked.

"How instructive?" I asked. "What do you learn from it?"

"Many things," he replied. "It has been lit and thrown away unsmoked; that indicates a sudden change of purpose. It was thrown away at the entrance to the house, almost certainly by someone entering it. That person was probably a stranger, or he would have taken it in with him. But he had not expected to enter the house, or he would not have lit it. These are the general suggestions; now as to the particular ones. The paper of the cigarette is of the kind known as the 'Zig-Zag' brand; the very conspicuous water-mark is quite easy to see. Now Brodski's cigarette book was a 'Zig-Zag' book—so called from the way in which the papers pull out. But let us see what the tobacco is like." With a pin from his coat, he hooked out from the unburned end a wisp of dark, dirty brown tobacco, which he held out for my inspection.

"Fine-cut Latakia," I pronounced, without hesitation.

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "Here is a cigarette made of an unusual tobacco similar to that in Brodski's pouch and wrapped in an unusual paper similar to those in Brodski's cigarette book. With due regard to the fourth rule of the syllogism, I suggest that this cigarette was made by Oscar Brodski. But, nevertheless, we will look for corroborative detail."

"What is that?" I asked.

"You may have noticed that Brodski's match-box contained round wooden vestas—which are also rather unusual. As he must have lighted the cigarette within a few steps of the gate, we ought to be able to find the match with which he lighted it. Let us try up the road in the direction from which he would probably have approached."

We walked very slowly up the road, searching the ground with the lantern, and we had hardly gone a dozen paces when I espied a match lying on the rough path and eagerly picked it up. It was a round wooden vesta.

Thorndyke examined it with interest and having deposited it, with the cigarette, in his "collecting-box," turned to retrace his steps. "There is now, Jervis, no reasonable doubt that Brodski was murdered in that house. We have succeeded in connecting that house with the crime, and now we have got to force an entrance and join up the other clues." We walked quickly back to the rear of the premises, where we found the inspector conversing disconsolately with the station-master.

"I think, sir," said the former, "we had better go back now; in fact, I don't see what we came here for, but—here! I say, sir, you mustn't do that!" For Thorndyke, without a word of warning, had sprung up lightly and thrown one of his long legs over the wall.

"I can't allow you to enter private premises, sir," continued the inspector; but Thorndyke quietly dropped down on the inside and turned to face the officer over the wall.

"Now, listen to me, inspector," said he. "I have good reasons for believing that the dead man, Brodski, has been in this house, in fact, I am prepared to swear an information to that effect. But time is precious; we must follow the scent while it is hot. And I am not proposing to break into the house off-hand. I merely wish to examine the dust-bin."

"The dust-bin!" gasped the inspector. "Well, you really are a most extraordinary gentleman! What do you expect to find in the dust-bin?"

"I am looking for a broken tumbler or wine-glass. It is a thin glass vessel decorated with a pattern of small, eight-pointed stars. It may be in the dust-bin or it may be inside the house."

The inspector hesitated, but Thorndyke's confident manner had evidently impressed him.

"We can soon see what is in the dust-bin," he said, "though what in creation a broken tumbler has to do with the case is more than I can understand. However, here goes." He sprang up onto the wall, and, as he dropped down into the garden, the station-master and I followed.

Thorndyke lingered a few moments by the gate examining the ground, while the two officials hurried up the path. Finding nothing of interest, however, he walked towards the house, looking keenly about him as he went; but we were

hardly half-way up the path when we heard the voice of the inspector calling excitedly.

"Here you are, sir, this way," he sang out, and, as we hurried forward, we suddenly came on the two officials standing over a small rubbish-heap and looking the picture of astonishment. The glare of their lanterns illuminated the heap, and showed us the scattered fragments of a thin glass, star-pattern tumbler.

"I can't imagine how you guessed it was here, sir," said the inspector, with a new-born respect in his tone, "nor what you're going to do with it now you have found it."

"It is merely another link in the chain of evidence," said Thorndyke, taking a pair of forceps from the case and stooping over the heap. "Perhaps we shall find something else." He picked up several small fragments of glass, looked at them closely and dropped them again. Suddenly his eye caught a small splinter at the base of the heap. Seizing it with the forceps, he held it close to his eye in the strong lamplight, and, taking out his lens, examined it with minute attention. "Yes," he said at length, "this is what I was looking for. Let me have those two cards, Jervis."

I produced the two visiting-cards with the reconstructed lenses stuck to them, and, laying them on the lid of the case, threw the light of the lantern on them. Thorndyke looked at them intently for some time, and from them to the fragment that he held. Then, turning to the inspector, he said: "You saw me pick up this splinter of glass?"

"Yes, sir," replied the officer.

"And you saw where we found these spectacle-glasses and know whose they were?"

"Yes, sir. They are the dead man's spectacles, and you found them where the body had been."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "now observe;" and, as the two officials craned forward with parted lips, he laid the little splinter in a gap in one of the lenses and then gave it a gentle push forward, when it occupied the gap perfectly, joining edge to edge with the adjacent fragments and rendering that portion of the lens complete.

"My God!" exclaimed the inspector. "How on earth did you know?"

"I must explain that later," said Thorndyke. "Meanwhile we had better have a look inside the house. I expect to find there a cigarette—or possibly a cigar—which has been trodden on, some whole-meal biscuits, possibly a wooden vesta, and perhaps even the missing hat."

At the mention of the hat, the inspector stepped eagerly to the back door, but, finding it bolted, he tried the window. This also was securely fastened and, on Thorndyke's advice, we went round to the front door.

"This door is locked too," said the inspector. "I'm afraid we shall have to break in. It's a nuisance, though."

"Have a look at the window," suggested Thorndyke.

The officer did so, struggling vainly to undo the patent catch with his pocket-knife.

"It's no go," he said, coming back to the door. "We shall have to—?" He broke off with an astonished stare, for the door stood open and Thorndyke was putting something in his pocket.

"Your friend doesn't waste much time—even in picking a lock," he remarked to me, as we followed Thorndyke into the house; but his reflections were soon merged in a new surprise. Thorndyke had preceded us into a small sitting-room dimly lighted by a hanging lamp turned down low.

As we entered he turned up the light and glanced about the room. A whisky-bottle was on the table, with a siphon, a tumbler and a biscuit-box. Pointing to the latter, Thorndyke said to the inspector: "See what is in that box."

The inspector raised the lid and peeped in, the station-master peered over his shoulder, and then both stared at Thorndyke.

"How in the name of goodness did you know that there were whole-meal biscuits in the house, sir?" exclaimed the station-master.

"You'd be disappointed if I told you," replied Thorndyke. "But look at this." He pointed to the hearth, where lay a flattened, half-smoked cigarette and a round wooden vesta. The inspector gazed at these objects in silent wonder, while, as to the station-master, he continued to stare at Thorndyke with what I can only describe as superstitious awe.

"You have the dead man's property with you, I believe?" said my colleague.

"Yes," replied the inspector; "I put the things in my pocket for safety."

"Then," said Thorndyke, picking up the flattened cigarette, "let us have a look at his tobacco-pouch."

As the officer produced and opened the pouch, Thorndyke neatly cut open the cigarette with his sharp pocket-knife. "Now," said he, "what kind of tobacco is in the pouch?"

The inspector took out a pinch, looked at it and smelt it distastefully. "It's one of those stinking tobaccos," he said, "that they put in mixtures—Latakia, I think."

"And what is this?" asked Thorndyke, pointing to the open cigarette.

"Same stuff, undoubtedly," replied the inspector.

"And now let us see his cigarette papers," said Thorndyke.

The little book, or rather packet—for it consisted of separated papers—was produced from the officer's pocket and a sample paper abstracted. Thorndyke laid the half-burnt paper beside it, and the inspector, having examined the two, held them up to the light.

"There isn't much chance of mistaking that 'Zig-Zag' watermark," he said. "This cigarette was made by the deceased; there can't be the shadow of a doubt."

"One more point," said Thorndyke, laying the burnt wooden vesta on the table. "You have his match-box?"

The inspector brought forth the little silver casket, opened it and compared the wooden vestas that it contained with the burnt end. Then he shut the box with a snap.

"You've proved it up to the hilt," said he. "If we could only find the hat, we should have a complete case."

"I'm not sure that we haven't found the hat," said Thorndyke. "You notice that something besides coal has been burned in the grate."

The inspector ran eagerly to the fire-place and began with feverish hands, to pick out the remains of the extinct fire. "The cinders are still warm," he said, "and they are certainly not all coal cinders. There has been wood burned here on top of the coal, and these little black lumps are neither coal nor wood. They may quite possibly be the remains of a burnt hat, but, lord! who can tell? You can put together the pieces of broken spectacle-glasses, but you can't build up a hat out of a few cinders." He held out a handful of little, black, spongy cinders and looked ruefully at Thorndyke, who took them from him and laid them out on a sheet of paper.

"We can't reconstitute the hat, certainly," my friend agreed, "but we may be able to ascertain the origin of these remains. They may not be cinders of a hat, after all." He lit a wax match and, taking up one of the charred fragments, applied the flame to it. The cindery mass fused at once with a crackling, seething sound, emitting a dense smoke, and instantly the air became charged with a pungent, resinous odour mingled with the smell of burning animal matter.

"Smells like varnish," the station-master remarked.

"Yes. Shellac," said Thorndyke; "so the first test gives a positive result. The next test will take more time."

He opened the green case and took from it a little flask, fitted for Marsh's arsenic test, with a safety funnel and escape tube, a small folding tripod, a spirit lamp and a disc of asbestos to serve as a sand-bath. Dropping into the flask several of the cindery masses, selected after careful inspection, he filled it up with alcohol and placed it on the disc, which he rested on the tripod. Then he lighted the spirit lamp underneath and sat down to wait for the alcohol to boil.

"There is one little point that we may as well settle," he said presently, as the bubbles began to rise in the flask. "Give me a slide with a drop of Farrant on it, Jervis."

I prepared the slide while Thorndyke, with a pair of forceps, picked out a tiny wisp from the table-cloth. "I fancy we have seen this fabric before," he remarked, as he laid the little pinch of fluff in the mounting fluid and slipped the slide onto the stage of the microscope. "Yes," he continued, looking into the eye-piece, "here are our old acquaintances, the red wool fibres, the blue cotton and the yellow jute. We must label this at once or we may confuse it with the other specimens."

"Have you any idea how the deceased met his death?" the inspector asked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I take it that the murderer enticed him into this room and gave him some refreshments. The murderer sat in the chair in which you are sitting, Brodski sat in that small arm-chair. Then I imagine the murderer attacked him with that iron bar that you found among the nettles, failed to kill him at the first stroke, struggled with him and finally suffocated him with the table-cloth. By the way, there is just one more point. You recognize this piece of string?" He took from his "collecting-box" the little end of twine that had been picked up by the line. The inspector nodded. "Look behind you, you will see where it came from."

The officer turned sharply and his eye lighted on a string-box on the mantelpiece. He lifted it down, and Thorndyke drew out from it a length of white twine with one green strand, which he compared with the piece in his hand. "The green strand in it makes the identification fairly certain," he said. "Of course the string was used to secure the umbrella and hand-bag. He could not have carried them in his hand, encumbered as he was with the corpse. But I expect our other specimen is ready now." He lifted the flask off the tripod, and, giving it a vigorous shake, examined the contents through his lens. The alcohol had now become dark-brown in colour, and was noticeably thicker and more syrupy in consistence.

"I think we have enough here for a rough test," said he, selecting a pipette and a slide from the case. He dipped the former into the flask and, having sucked up a few drops of the alcohol from the bottom, held the pipette over the slide on which he allowed the contained fluid to drop.

Laying a cover-glass on the little pool of alcohol, he put the slide on the microscope stage and examined it attentively, while we watched him in expectant silence.

At length he looked up, and, addressing the inspector, asked: "Do you know what felt hats are made of?"

"I can't say that I do, sir," replied the officer.

"Well, the better quality hats are made of rabbits' and hares' wool—the soft under-fur, you know—cemented together

with shellac. Now there is very little doubt that these cinders contain shellac, and with the microscope I find a number of small hairs of a rabbit. I have, therefore, little hesitation in saying that these cinders are the remains of a hard felt hat; and, as the hairs do not appear to be dyed, I should say it was a grey hat."

At this moment our conclave was interrupted by hurried footsteps on the garden path and, as we turned with one accord, an elderly woman burst into the room.

She stood for a moment in mute astonishment, and then, looking from one to the other, demanded: "Who are you? and what are you doing here?"

The inspector rose. "I am a police officer, madam," said he. "I can't give you any further information just now, but, if you will excuse me asking, who are you?"

"I am Mr. Hickler's housekeeper," she replied.

"And Mr. Hickler; are you expecting him home shortly?"

"No, I am not," was the curt reply. "Mr. Hickler is away from home just now. He left this evening by the boat train."

"For Amsterdam?" asked Thorndyke.

"I believe so, though I don't see what business it is of yours," the housekeeper answered.

"I thought he might, perhaps, be a diamond broker or merchant," said Thorndyke. "A good many of them travel by that train."

"So he is," said the woman, "at least, he has something to do with diamonds."

"Ah. Well, we must be going, Jervis," said Thorndyke, "we have finished here, and we have to find an hotel or inn. Can I have a word with you, inspector?"

The officer, now entirely humble and reverent, followed us out into the garden to receive Thorndyke's parting advice.

"You had better take possession of the house at once, and get rid of the housekeeper. Nothing must be removed. Preserve those cinders and see that the rubbish-heap is not disturbed, and, above all, don't have the room swept. An officer will be sent to relieve you."

With a friendly "good-night" we went on our way, guided by the station-master; and here our connection with the case came to an end. Hickler (whose Christian name turned out to be Silas) was, it is true, arrested as he stepped ashore from the steamer, and a packet of diamonds, subsequently identified as the property of Oscar Brodski, found upon his person. But he was never brought to trial, for on the return voyage he contrived to elude his guards for an instant as the ship was approaching the English coast, and it was not until three days later, when a hand-cuffed body was cast up on the lonely shore by Orfordness, that the authorities knew the fate of Silas Hickler.

"An appropriate and dramatic end to a singular and yet typical case," said Thorndyke, as he put down the newspaper. "I hope it has enlarged your knowledge, Jervis, and enabled you to form one or two useful corollaries."

"I prefer to hear you sing the medico-legal doxology," I answered, turning upon him like the proverbial worm and grinning derisively (which the worm does not).

"I know you do," he retorted, with mock gravity, "and I lament your lack of mental initiative. However, the points that this case illustrates are these: First, the danger of delay; the vital importance of instant action before that frail and fleeting thing that we call a clue has time to evaporate. A delay of a few hours would have left us with hardly a single datum. Second, the necessity of pursuing the most trivial clue to an absolute finish, as illustrated by the spectacles. Third, the urgent need of a trained scientist to aid the police; and, last," he concluded, with a smile, "we learn never to go abroad without the invaluable green case."

---

## II. — A CASE OF PREMEDITATION

### PART I. — THE ELIMINATION OF MR. PRATT

THE wine merchant who should supply a consignment of petit vin to a customer who had ordered, and paid for, a vintage wine, would render himself subject to unambiguous comment. Nay! more; he would be liable to certain legal penalties. And yet his conduct would be morally indistinguishable from that of the railway company which, having accepted a first-class fare, inflicts upon the passenger that kind of company which he has paid to avoid. But the corporate conscience, as Herbert Spencer was wont to explain, is an altogether inferior product to that of the individual.

Such were the reflections of Mr. Rufus Pembury when, as the train was about to move out of Maidstone (West) station, a coarse and burly man (clearly a denizen of the third-class) was ushered into his compartment by the guard. He had paid the higher fare, not for cushioned seats, but for seclusion or, at least, select companionship. The man's entry had deprived him of both, and he resented it.

But if the presence of this stranger involved a breach of contract, his conduct was a positive affront—an indignity; for, no sooner had the train started than he fixed upon Mr. Pembury a gaze of impertinent intensity, and continued thereafter to regard him with a stare as steady and unwinking as that of a Polynesian idol.

It was offensive to a degree, and highly disconcerting withal. Mr. Pembury fidgeted in his seat with increasing discomfort and rising temper. He looked into his pocket-book, read one or two letters and sorted a collection of visiting-cards. He even thought of opening his umbrella. Finally, his patience exhausted and his wrath mounting to boiling-point, he turned to the stranger with frosty remonstrance.

"I imagine, sir, that you will have no difficulty in recognizing me, should we ever meet again—which God forbid."

"I should recognize you among ten thousand," was the reply, so unexpected as to leave Mr. Pembury speechless.

"You see," the stranger continued impressively, "I've got the gift of faces. I never forget."

"That must be a great consolation," said Pembury.

"It's very useful to me," said the stranger, "at least, it used to be, when I was a warder at Portland—you remember me, I dare say: my name is Pratt. I was assistant-warder in your time. God-forsaken hole, Portland, and mighty glad I was when they used to send me up to town on reckernizing duty. Holloway was the house of detention then, you remember; that was before they moved to Brixton."

Pratt paused in his reminiscences, and Pembury, pale and gasping with astonishment, pulled himself together.

"I think," said he, "you must be mistaking me for someone else."

"I don't," replied Pratt. "You're Francis Dobbs, that's who you are. Slipped away from Portland one evening about twelve years ago. Clothes washed up on the Bill next day. No trace of fugitive. As neat a mizzle as ever I heard of. But there are a couple of photographs and a set of fingerprints at the Habitual Criminals Register. P'r'aps you'd like to come and see 'em?"

"Why should I go to the Habitual Criminals Register?" Pembury demanded faintly.

"Ah! Exactly. Why should you? When you are a man of means, and a little judiciously invested capital would render it unnecessary?"

Pembury looked out of the window, and for a minute or more preserved a stony silence. At length he turned suddenly to Pratt. "How much?" he asked.

"I shouldn't think a couple of hundred a year would hurt you," was the calm reply.

Pembury reflected awhile. "What makes you think I am a man of means?" he asked presently.

Pratt smiled grimly. "Bless you, Mr. Pembury," said he, "I know all about you. Why, for the last six months I have been living within half-a-mile of your house."

"The devil you have!"

"Yes. When I retired from the service, General O'Gorman engaged me as a sort of steward or caretaker of his little place at Baysford—he's very seldom there himself—and the very day after I came down, I met you and spotted you, but, naturally, I kept out of sight myself. Thought I'd find out whether you were good for anything before I spoke, so I've been keeping my ears open and I find you are good for a couple of hundred."

There was an interval of silence, and then the ex-warder resumed—"That's what comes of having a memory for faces. Now there's Jack Ellis, on the other hand; he must have had you under his nose for a couple of years, and yet he's never twigged—he never will either," added Pratt, already regretting the confidence into which his vanity had led him.

"Who is Jack Ellis?" Pembury demanded sharply.

"Why, he's a sort of supernumerary at the Baysford Police Station; does odd jobs; rural detective, helps in the office and that sort of thing. He was in the Civil Guard at Portland, in your time, but he got his left forefinger chopped off, so they pensioned him, and, as he was a Baysford man, he got this billet. But he'll never reckernize you, don't you fear."

"Unless you direct his attention to me," suggested Pembury.

"There's no fear of that," laughed Pratt. "You can trust me to sit quiet on my own nest-egg. Besides, we're not very friendly. He came nosing round our place after the parlourmaid—him a married man, mark you! But I soon boosted him out, I can tell you; and Jack Ellis don't like me now."

"I see," said Pembury reflectively; then, after a pause, he asked: "Who is this General O'Gorman? I seem to know the name."

"I expect you do," said Pratt. "He was governor of Dartmoor when I was there—that was my last billet—and, let me tell you, if he'd been at Portland in your time, you'd never have got away."

"How is that?"

"Why, you see, the general is a great man on bloodhounds. He kept a pack at Dartmoor and, you bet, those lags knew it. There were no attempted escapes in those days. They wouldn't have had a chance."

"He has the pack still, hasn't he?" asked Pembury.

"Rather. Spends any amount of time on training 'em, too. He's always hoping there'll be a burglary or a murder in the neighbourhood so as he can try 'em, but he's never got a chance yet. P'r'aps the crooks have heard about 'em. But, to come back to our little arrangement: what do you say to a couple of hundred, paid quarterly, if you like?"

"I can't settle the matter off-hand," said Pembury. "You must give me time to think it over."

"Very well," said Pratt. "I shall be back at Baysford to-morrow evening. That will give you a clear day to think it over. Shall I look in at your place to-morrow night?"

"No," replied Pembury; "you'd better not be seen at my house, nor I at yours. If I meet you at some quiet spot, where we shan't be seen, we can settle our business without any one knowing that we have met. It won't take long, and we can't be too careful."

"That's true," agreed Pratt. "Well, I'll tell you what. There's an avenue leading up to our house; you know it, I expect. There's no lodge, and the gates are always ajar, excepting at night. Now I shall be down by the six-thirty at Baysford. Our place is a quarter of an hour from the station. Say you meet me in the avenue at a quarter to seven."

"That will suit me," said Pembury; "that is, if you are sure the bloodhounds won't be straying about the grounds."

"Lord bless you, no!" laughed Pratt. "D'you suppose the general lets his precious hounds stray about for any casual crook to feed with poisoned sausage? No, they're locked up safe in the kennels at the back of the house. Hallo! This'll be Swanley, I expect. I'll change into a smoker here and leave you time to turn the matter over in your mind. So long. To-morrow evening in the avenue at a quarter to seven. And, I say, Mr. Pembury, you might as well bring the first installment with you—fifty, in small notes or gold."

"Very well," said Mr. Pembury. He spoke coldly enough, but there was a flush on his cheeks and an angry light in his eyes, which, perhaps, the ex-warder noticed; for when he had stepped out and shut the door, he thrust his head in at the window and said threateningly—

"One more word, Mr. Pembury-Dobbs: no hanky-panky, you know. I'm an old hand and pretty fly, I am. So don't you try any chickery-pokery on me. That's all." He withdrew his head and disappeared, leaving Pembury to his reflections.

The nature of those reflections—if some telepathist transferring his attention for the moment from hidden courtyards or missing thimbles to more practical matters—could have conveyed them into the mind of Mr. Pratt, would have caused that quondam official some surprise and, perhaps, a little disquiet. For long experience of the criminal, as he appears when in durance, had produced some rather misleading ideas as to his behaviour when at large. In fact, the ex-warder had considerably under-estimated the ex-convict.

Rufus Pembury, to give his real name—for Dobbs was literally a *nom de guerre*—was a man of strong character and intelligence. So much so that, having tried the criminal career and found it not worth pursuing, he had definitely abandoned it. When the cattle-boat that picked him up off Portland Bill had landed him at an American port, he brought his entire ability and energy to bear on legitimate commercial pursuits, and with such success that, at the end of ten years, he was able to return to England with a moderate competence. Then he had taken a modest house near the little town of Baysford, where he had lived quietly on his savings for the last two years, holding aloof without much difficulty from the rather exclusive local society; and here he might have lived out the rest of his life in peace but for the unlucky chance that brought the man Pratt into the neighbourhood. With the arrival of Pratt his security was utterly destroyed.

There is something eminently unsatisfactory about a blackmailer. No arrangement with him has any permanent validity. No undertaking that he gives is binding. The thing which he has sold remains in his possession to sell over again. He pockets the price of emancipation, but retains the key of the fetters. In short, the blackmailer is a totally impossible person.

Such were the considerations that had passed through the mind of Rufus Pembury, even while Pratt was making his proposals; and those proposals he had never for an instant entertained. The ex-warder's advice to him to "turn the matter over in his mind" was unnecessary. For his mind was already made up. His decision was arrived at in the very moment when Pratt had disclosed his identity. The conclusion was self-evident. Before Pratt appeared he was living in peace and security. While Pratt remained, his liberty was precarious from moment to moment. If Pratt should disappear, his peace and security would return. Therefore Pratt must be eliminated.

It was a logical consequence.

The profound meditations, therefore, in which Pembury remained immersed for the remainder of the journey, had nothing whatever to do with the quarterly allowance; they were concerned exclusively with the elimination of ex-warder Pratt.

Now Rufus Pembury was not a ferocious man. He was not even cruel. But he was gifted with a certain magnanimous cynicism which ignored the trivialities of sentiment and regarded only the main issues. If a wasp hummed over his tea-cup, he would crush that wasp; but not with his bare hand. The wasp carried the means of aggression. That was the wasp's look-out. His concern was to avoid being stung.

So it was with Pratt. The man had elected, for his own profit, to threaten Pembury's liberty. Very well. He had done it at his own risk. That risk was no concern of Pembury's. His concern was his own safety.

When Pembury alighted at Charing Cross, he directed his steps (after having watched Pratt's departure from the station) to Buckingham Street, Strand, where he entered a quiet private hotel. He was apparently expected, for the manageress greeted him by his name as she handed him his key.

"Are you staying in town, Mr. Pembury?" she asked.

"No," was the reply. "I go back to-morrow morning, but I may be coming up again shortly. By the way, you used to have an encyclopaedia in one of the rooms. Could I see it for a moment?"

"It is in the drawing-room," said the manageress. "Shall I show you—but you know the way, don't you?"

Certainly Mr. Pembury knew the way. It was on the first floor; a pleasant old-world room looking on the quiet old street; and on a shelf, amidst a collection of novels, stood the sedate volumes of Chambers's Encyclopaedia.

That a gentleman from the country should desire to look up the subject of "hounds" would not, to a casual observer, have seemed unnatural. But when from hounds the student proceeded to the article on blood, and thence to one devoted to perfumes, the observer might reasonably have felt some surprise; and this surprise might have been augmented if he had followed Mr. Pembury's subsequent proceedings, and specially if he had considered them as the actions of a man whose immediate aim was the removal of a superfluous unit of the population.

Having deposited his bag and umbrella in his room, Pembury set forth from the hotel as one with a definite purpose; and his footsteps led, in the first place, to an umbrella shop on the Strand, where he selected a thick rattan cane. There was nothing remarkable in this, perhaps; but the cane was of an uncomely thickness and the salesman protested. "I like a thick cane," said Pembury.

"Yes, sir; but for a gentleman of your height" (Pembury was a small, slightly-built man) "I would venture to suggest—?"

"I like a thick cane," repeated Pembury. "Cut it down to the proper length and don't rivet the ferrule on. I'll cement it on when I get home."

His next investment would have seemed more to the purpose, though suggestive of unexpected crudity of method. It was a large Norwegian knife. But not content with this he went on forthwith to a second cutler's and purchased a second knife, the exact duplicate of the first. Now, for what purpose could he want two identically similar knives? And why not have bought them both at the same shop? It was highly mysterious.

Shopping appeared to be a positive mania with Rufus Pembury. In the course of the next half-hour he acquired a cheap hand-bag, an artist's black-japanned brush-case, a three-cornered file, a stick of elastic glue and a pair of iron crucible-tongs. Still insatiable, he repaired to an old-fashioned chemist's shop in a by-street, where he further enriched himself with a packet of absorbent cotton-wool and an ounce of permanganate of potash; and, as the chemist wrapped up these articles, with the occult and necromantic air peculiar to chemists, Pembury watched him impassively.

"I suppose you don't keep musk?" he asked carelessly.

The chemist paused in the act of heating a stick of sealing-wax, and appeared as if about to mutter an incantation. But he merely replied: "No, sir. Not the solid musk; it's so very costly. But I have the essence."

"That isn't as strong as the pure stuff, I suppose?"

"No," replied the chemist, with a cryptic smile, "not so strong, but strong enough. These animal perfumes are so very penetrating, you know; and so lasting. Why, I venture to say that if you were to sprinkle a table-spoonful of the essence in the middle of St. Paul's, the place would smell of it six months hence."

"You don't say so!" said Pembury. "Well, that ought to be enough for anybody. I'll take a small quantity, please, and, for goodness' sake, see that there isn't any on the outside of the bottle. The stuff isn't for myself, and I don't want to go about smelling like a civet cat."

"Naturally you don't, sir," agreed the chemist. He then produced an ounce bottle, a small glass funnel and a stoppered bottle labelled "Ess. Moschi," with which he proceeded to perform a few trifling feats of legerdemain.

"There, sir," said he, when he had finished the performance, "there is not a drop on the outside of the bottle, and, if I fit it with a rubber cork, you will be quite secure."

Pembury's dislike of musk appeared to be excessive, for, when the chemist had retired into a secret cubicle as if to hold converse with some familiar spirit (but actually to change half-a-crown), he took the brush-case from his bag, pulled off its lid, and then, with the crucible-tongs, daintily lifted the bottle off the counter, slid it softly into the brush-case, and, replacing the lid, returned the case and tongs to the bag. The other two packets he took from the counter and dropped into his pocket, and, when the presiding wizard, having miraculously transformed a single half-crown into four pennies, handed him the product, he left the shop and walked thoughtfully back towards the Strand. Suddenly a new idea seemed to strike him. He halted, considered for a few moments and then strode away northward to make the oddest of all his purchases.

The transaction took place in a shop in the Seven Dials, whose strange stock-in-trade ranged the whole zoological gamut, from water-snails to Angora cats. Pembury looked at a cage of guinea-pigs in the window and entered the shop.

"Do you happen to have a dead guinea-pig?" he asked.

"No; mine are all alive," replied the man, adding, with a sinister grin: "But they're not immortal, you know."

Pembury looked at the man distastefully. There is an appreciable difference between a guinea-pig and a blackmailer. "Any small mammal would do," he said.

"There's a dead rat in that cage, if he's any good," said the man. "Died this morning, so he's quite fresh."

"I'll take the rat," said Pembury; "he'll do quite well."

The little corpse was accordingly made into a parcel and deposited in the bag, and Pembury, having tendered a complimentary fee, made his way back to the hotel.

After a modest lunch he went forth and spent the remainder of the day transacting the business which had originally brought him to town. He dined at a restaurant and did not return to his hotel until ten o'clock, when he took his key, and tucking under his arm a parcel that he had brought in with him, retired for the night. But before undressing—and after locking his door—he did a very strange and unaccountable thing. Having pulled off the loose ferrule from his newly-purchased cane, he bored a hole in the bottom of it with the spike end of the file. Then, using the latter as a broach, he enlarged the hole until only a narrow rim of the bottom was left. He next rolled up a small ball of cottonwool and pushed it into the ferrule; and having smeared the end of the cane with elastic glue, he replaced the ferrule, warming it over the gas to make the glue stick.

When he had finished with the cane, he turned his attention to one of the Norwegian knives. First, he carefully removed with the file most of the bright, yellow varnish from the wooden case or handle.

Then he opened the knife, and, cutting the string of the parcel that he had brought in, took from it the dead rat which he had bought at the zoologist's. Laying the animal on a sheet of paper, he cut off its head, and, holding it up by the tail, allowed the blood that oozed from the neck to drop on the knife, spreading it over both sides of the blade and handle with his finger.

Then he laid the knife on the paper and softly opened the window. From the darkness below came the voice of a cat, apparently perfecting itself in the execution of chromatic scales; and in that direction Pembury flung the body and head of the rat, and closed the window. Finally, having washed his hands and stuffed the paper from the parcel into the fire-place, he went to bed.

But his proceedings in the morning were equally mysterious. Having breakfasted betimes, he returned to his bedroom and locked himself in. Then he tied his new cane, handle downwards, to the leg of the dressing-table. Next, with the crucible-tongs, he drew the little bottle of musk from the brush-case, and, having assured himself, by sniffing at it, that the exterior was really free from odour, he withdrew the rubber cork. Then, slowly and with infinite care, he poured a few drops—perhaps half-a-teaspoonful—of the essence on the cotton-wool that bulged through the hole in the ferrule, watching the absorbent material narrowly as it soaked up the liquid. When it was saturated he proceeded to treat the knife in the same fashion, letting fall a drop of the essence on the wooden handle—which soaked it up readily. This done, he slid up the window and looked out. Immediately below was a tiny yard in which grew, or rather survived, a couple of faded laurel bushes. The body of the rat was nowhere to be seen; it had apparently been spirited away in the night. Holding out the bottle, which he still held, he dropped it into the bushes, flinging the rubber cork after it.

His next proceeding was to take a tube of vaseline from his dressing-bag and squeeze a small quantity onto his fingers. With this he thoroughly smeared the shoulder of the brush-case and the inside of the lid, so as to ensure an air-tight joint. Having wiped his fingers, he picked the knife up with the crucible-tongs, and, dropping it into the brush-case, immediately pushed on the lid. Then he heated the tips of the tongs in the gas flame to destroy the scent, packed the tongs and brush-case in the bag, untied the cane—carefully avoiding contact with the ferrule—and, taking up the two bags, went out, holding the cane by its middle.

There was no difficulty in finding an empty compartment, for first-class passengers were few at that time in the morning. Pembury waited on the platform until the guard's whistle sounded, when he stepped into the compartment, shut the door and laid the cane on the seat with its ferrule projecting out of the off-side window, in which position it remained until the train drew up in Baysford station.

Pembury left his dressing-bag at the cloak-room, and, still grasping the cane by its middle, he sallied forth. The town of Baysford lay some half-a-mile to the east of the station; his own house was a mile along the road to the west; and half-way between his house and the station was the residence of General O'Gorman. He knew the place well. Originally a farmhouse, it stood on the edge of a great expanse of flat meadows and communicated with the road by an avenue, nearly three hundred yards long, of ancient trees. The avenue was shut off from the road by a pair of iron gates, but these were merely ornamental, for the place was unenclosed and accessible from the surrounding meadows—indeed, an indistinct footpath crossed the meadows and intersected the avenue about half-way up.

On this occasion Pembury, whose objective was the avenue, elected to approach it by the latter route; and at each stile or fence that he surmounted, he paused to survey the country. Presently the avenue arose before him, lying athwart the narrow track, and, as he entered it between two of the trees, he halted and looked about him.

He stood listening for a while. Beyond the faint rustle of leaves no sound was to be heard. Evidently there was no one about, and, as Pratt was at large, it was probable that the general was absent.

And now Pembury began to examine the adjacent trees with more than a casual interest. The two between which he had entered were respectively an elm and a great pollard oak, the latter being an immense tree whose huge, warty bole divided about seven feet from the ground into three limbs, each as large as a fair-sized tree, of which the largest swept outward in a great curve half-way across the avenue. On this patriarch Pembury bestowed especial attention, walking completely round it and finally laying down his bag and cane (the latter resting on the bag with the ferrule off the ground) that he might climb up, by the aid of the warty outgrowths, to examine the crown; and he had just stepped up into the space between the



three limbs, when the creaking of the iron gates was followed by a quick step in the avenue. Hastily he let himself down from the tree, and, gathering up his possessions, stood close behind the great bole.

"Just as well not to be seen," was his reflection, as he hugged the tree closely and waited, peering cautiously round the trunk. Soon a streak of moving shadow heralded the stranger's approach, and he moved round to keep the trunk between himself and the intruder. On the footsteps came, until the stranger was abreast of the tree; and when he had passed Pembury peeped round at the retreating figure. It was only the postman, but then the man knew him, and he was glad he had kept out of sight.

Apparently the oak did not meet his requirements, for he stepped out and looked up and down the avenue. Then, beyond the elm, he caught sight of an ancient pollard hornbeam—a strange, fantastic tree whose trunk widened out trumpet-like above into a broad crown, from the edge of which multitudinous branches uprose like the limbs of some weird hamadryad.

That tree he approved at a glance, but he lingered behind the oak until the postman, returning with brisk step and cheerful whistle, passed down the avenue and left him once more in solitude. Then he moved on with a resolute air to the hornbeam.

The crown of the trunk was barely six feet from the ground. He could reach it easily, as he found on trying. Standing the cane against the tree—ferrule downwards, this time—he took the brush-case from the bag, pulled off the lid, and, with the crucible-tongs, lifted out the knife and laid it on the crown of the tree, just out of sight, leaving the tongs also invisible—still grasping the knife. He was about to replace the brush-case in the bag, when he appeared to alter his mind. Sniffing at it, and finding it reeking with the sickly perfume, he pushed the lid on again and threw the case up into the tree, where he heard it roll down into the central hollow of the crown. Then he closed the bag, and, taking the cane by its handle, moved slowly away in the direction whence he had come, passing out of the avenue between the elm and the oak.

His mode of progress was certainly peculiar. He walked with excessive slowness, trailing the cane along the ground, and every few paces he would stop and press the ferrule firmly against the earth, so that, to any one who should have observed him, he would have appeared to be wrapped in an absorbing reverie.

Thus he moved on across the fields, not, however, returning to the high road, but crossing another stretch of fields until he emerged into a narrow lane that led out into the High Street. Immediately opposite to the lane was the police station, distinguished from the adjacent cottages only by its lamp, its open door and the notices pasted up outside. Straight across the road Pembury walked, still trailing the cane, and halted at the station door to read the notices, resting his cane on the doorstep as he did so. Through the open doorway he could see a man writing at a desk. The man's back was towards him, but, presently, a movement brought his left hand into view, and Pembury noted that the forefinger was missing. This, then, was Jack Ellis, late of the Civil Guard at Portland.

Even while he was looking the man turned his head, and Pembury recognized him at once. He had frequently met him on the road between Baysford and the adjoining village of Thorpe, and always at the same time. Apparently Ellis paid a daily visit to Thorpe—perhaps to receive a report from the rural constable—and he started between three and four and returned between seven and a quarter past.

Pembury looked at his watch. It was a quarter past three. He moved away thoughtfully (holding his cane, now, by the middle), and began to walk slowly in the direction of Thorpe—westward.

For a while he was deeply meditative, and his face wore a puzzled frown. Then, suddenly, his face cleared and he strode forward at a brisker pace. Presently he passed through a gap in the hedge, and, walking in a field parallel with the road, took out his purse—a small pigskin pouch.

Having frugally emptied it of its contents, excepting a few shillings, he thrust the ferrule of his cane into the small compartment ordinarily reserved for gold or notes.

And thus he continued to walk on slowly, carrying the cane by the middle and the purse jammed on the end.

At length he reached a sharp double curve in the road whence he could see back for a considerable distance; and here opposite a small opening, he sat down to wait. The hedge screened him effectually from the gaze of passers-by—though these were few enough—without interfering with his view.

A quarter of an hour passed. He began to be uneasy. Had he been mistaken? Were Ellis's visits only occasional instead of daily, as he had thought? That would be tiresome though not actually disastrous. But at this point in his reflections a figure came into view, advancing along the road with a steady swing. He recognized the figure. It was Ellis.

But there was another figure advancing from the opposite direction: a labourer, apparently. He prepared to shift his ground, but another glance showed him that the labourer would pass first. He waited. The labourer came on and, at length, passed the opening, and, as he did so, Ellis disappeared for a moment in a bend of the road. Instantly Pembury passed his cane through the opening in the hedge, shook off the purse and pushed it into the middle of the foot-way. Then he crept forward, behind the hedge, towards the approaching official, and again sat down to wait. On came the steady tramp of the unconscious Ellis, and, as it passed, Pembury drew aside an obstructing branch and peered out at the retreating figure. The question now was, would Ellis see the purse? It was not a very conspicuous object.

The footsteps stopped abruptly. Looking out, Pembury saw the police official stoop, pick up the purse, examine its contents and finally stow it in his trousers pocket. Pembury heaved a sigh of relief; and, as the dwindling figure passed out of sight round a curve in the road, he rose, stretched himself and strode away briskly.

Near the gap was a group of ricks, and, as he passed them, a fresh idea suggested itself. Looking round quickly he passed to the farther side of one and, thrusting his cane deeply into it, pushed it home with a piece of stick that he picked up near the rick, until the handle was lost among the straw. The bag was now all that was left, and it was empty—for his other purchases were in the dressing-bag, which, by the way, he must fetch from the station. He opened it and smelt the interior, but, though he could detect no odour, he resolved to be rid of it if possible.

As he emerged from the gap a wagon jogged slowly past. It was piled high with sacks, and the tail-board was down. Stepping into the road, he quickly overtook the wagon, and, having glanced round, laid the bag lightly on the tail-board. Then he set off for the station.

On arriving home he went straight up to his bedroom, and, ringing for his housekeeper, ordered a substantial meal. Then he took off his clothes and deposited them, even to his shirt, socks and necktie, in a trunk, wherein his summer clothing was stored with a plentiful sprinkling of naphthol to preserve it from the moth. Taking the packet of permanganate of potash from his dressing-bag, he passed into the adjoining bathroom, and, tipping the crystals into the bath, turned on the water. Soon the bath was filled with a pink solution of the salt, and into this he plunged, immersing his entire body and thoroughly soaking his hair. Then he emptied the bath and rinsed himself in clear water, and, having dried himself, returned to the bedroom and dressed himself in fresh clothing. Finally he took a hearty meal, and then lay down on the sofa to rest until it should be time to start for the rendezvous.

Half-past six found him lurking in the shadow by the station-approach, within sight of the solitary lamp. He heard the train come in, saw the stream of passengers emerge, and noted one figure detach itself from the throng and turn on to the Thorpe road. It was Pratt, as the lamplight showed him; Pratt, striding forward to the meeting-place with an air of jaunty satisfaction and an uncommonly creaky pair of boots.

Pembury followed him at a safe distance, and rather by sound than sight, until he was well past the stile at the entrance to the footpath. Evidently he was going on to the gates. Then Pembury vaulted over the stile and strode away swiftly across the dark meadows.

When he plunged into the deep gloom of the avenue, his first act was to grope his way to the hornbeam and slip his hand up onto the crown and satisfy himself that the tongs were as he had left them. Reassured by the touch of his fingers on the iron loops, he turned and walked slowly down the avenue. The duplicate knife—ready opened—was in his left inside breast-pocket, and he fingered its handle as he walked.

Presently the iron gate squeaked mournfully, and then the rhythmical creak of a pair of boots was audible, coming up the avenue. Pembury walked forward slowly until a darker smear emerged from the surrounding gloom, when he called out—

“Is that you, Pratt?”

“That’s me,” was the cheerful, if ungrammatical response, and, as he drew nearer, the ex-warder asked: “Have you brought the rhino, old man?”

The insolent familiarity of the man’s tone was agreeable to Pembury: it strengthened his nerve and hardened his heart. “Of course,” he replied; “but we must have a definite understanding, you know.”

“Look here,” said Pratt, “I’ve got no time for jaw. The General will be here presently; he’s riding over from Bingfield with a friend. You hand over the dibs and we’ll talk some other time.”

“That is all very well,” said Pembury, “but you must understand—?” He paused abruptly and stood still. They were now close to the hornbeam, and, as he stood, he stared up into the dark mass of foliage.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Pratt. “What are you staring at?” He, too, had halted and stood gazing intently into the darkness.

Then, in an instant, Pembury whipped out the knife and drove it, with all his strength, into the broad back of the ex-warder, below the left shoulder-blade.

With a hideous yell Pratt turned and grappled with his assailant. A powerful man and a competent wrestler, too, he was far more than a match for Pembury unarmed, and, in a moment, he had him by the throat. But Pembury clung to him tightly, and, as they trampled to and fro and round and round, he stabbed again and again with the viciousness of a scorpion, while Pratt’s cries grew more gurgling and husky. Then they fell heavily to the ground, Pembury underneath. But the struggle was over. With a last bubbling groan, Pratt relaxed his hold and in a moment grew limp and inert. Pembury pushed him off and rose, trembling and breathing heavily.

But he wasted no time. There had been more noise than he had bargained for. Quickly stepping up to the hornbeam, he reached up for the tongs. His fingers slid into the looped handles; the tongs grasped the knife, and he lifted it out from its hiding-place and carried it to where the corpse lay, depositing it on the ground a few feet from the body. Then he went back to the tree and carefully pushed the tongs over into the hollow of the crown.

At this moment a woman’s voice sounded shrilly from the top of the avenue.

“Is that you, Mr. Pratt?” it called.

Pembury started and then stepped back quickly, on tiptoe, to the body. For there was the duplicate knife. He must take that away at all costs.

The corpse was lying on its back. The knife was underneath it, driven in to the very haft. He had to use both hands to lift the body, and even then he had some difficulty in disengaging the weapon. And, meanwhile, the voice, repeating its question, drew nearer.

At length he succeeded in drawing out the knife and thrust it into his breast-pocket. The corpse fell back, and he stood up gasping.

"Mr. Pratt! Are you there?" The nearness of the voice startled Pembury, and, turning sharply, he saw a light twinkling between the trees. And then the gates creaked loudly and he heard the crunch of a horse's hoofs on the gravel.

He stood for an instant bewildered—utterly taken by surprise. He had not reckoned on a horse. His intended flight across the meadows towards Thorpe was now impracticable. If he were overtaken he was lost, for he knew there was blood on his clothes and his hands were wet and slippery—to say nothing of the knife in his pocket.

But his confusion lasted only for an instant. He remembered the oak tree; and, turning out of the avenue, he ran to it, and, touching it as little as he could with his bloody hands, climbed quickly up into the crown. The great horizontal limb was nearly three feet in diameter, and, as he lay out on it, gathering his coat closely round him, he was quite invisible from below.

He had hardly settled himself when the light which he had seen came into full view, revealing a woman advancing with a stable lantern in her hand. And, almost at the same moment, a streak of brighter light burst from the opposite direction. The horseman was accompanied by a man on a bicycle.

The two men came on apace, and the horseman, sighting the woman, called out: "Anything the matter, Mrs. Parton?" But, at that moment, the light of the bicycle lamp fell full on the prostrate corpse. The two men uttered a simultaneous cry of horror; the woman shrieked aloud: and then the horseman sprang from the saddle and ran forward to the body.

"Why," he exclaimed, stooping over it, "it's Pratt;" and, as the cyclist came up and the glare of his lamp shone on a great pool of blood, he added: "There's been foul play here, Hanford."

Hanford flashed his lamp around the body, lighting up the ground for several yards.

"What is that behind you, O'Gorman?" he said suddenly; "isn't it a knife?" He was moving quickly towards it when O'Gorman held up his hand.

"Don't touch it!" he exclaimed. "We'll put the hounds onto it. They'll soon track the scoundrel, whoever he is. By God! Hanford, this fellow has fairly delivered himself into our hands." He stood for a few moments looking down at the knife with something uncommonly like exultation, and then, turning quickly to his friend, said: "Look here, Hanford; you ride off to the police station as hard as you can pelt. It is only three-quarters of a mile; you'll do it in five minutes. Send or bring an officer and I'll scour the meadows meanwhile. If I haven't got the scoundrel when you come back, we'll put the hounds onto this knife and run the beggar down."

"Right," replied Hanford, and without another word he wheeled his machine about, mounted and rode away into the darkness.

"Mrs. Parton," said O'Gorman, "watch that knife. See that nobody touches it while I go and examine the meadows."

"Is Mr. Pratt dead, sir?" whimpered Mrs. Parton.

"Gad! I hadn't thought of that," said the general. "You'd better have a look at him; but mind! nobody is to touch that knife or they will confuse the scent."

He scrambled into the saddle and galloped away across the meadows in the direction of Thorpe; and, as Pembury listened to the diminuendo of the horse's hoofs, he was glad that he had not attempted to escape; for that was the direction in which he had meant to go, and he would surely have been overtaken.

As soon as the general was gone, Mrs. Parton, with many a terror-stricken glance over her shoulder, approached the corpse and held the lantern close to the dead face. Suddenly she stood up, trembling violently, for footsteps were audible coming down the avenue. A familiar voice reassured her.

"Is anything wrong, Mrs. Parton?" The question proceeded from one of the maids who had come in search of the elder woman, escorted by a young man, and the pair now came out into the circle of light.

"Good God!" ejaculated the man. "Who's that?"

"It's Mr. Pratt," replied Mrs. Parton. "He's been murdered."

The girl screamed, and then the two domestics approached on tiptoe, staring at the corpse with the fascination of horror.

"Don't touch that knife," said Mrs. Parton, for the man was about to pick it up. "The general's going to put the bloodhounds onto it."

"Is the general here, then?" asked the man; and, as he spoke, the drumming of hoofs, growing momentarily louder, answered him from the meadow.

O'Gorman reined in his horse as he perceived the group of servants gathered about the corpse. "Is he dead, Mrs. Parton?" he asked.

"I am afraid so, sir," was the reply.

"Ha! Somebody ought to go for the doctor; but not you, Bailey. I want you to get the hounds ready and wait with them at the top of the avenue until I call you."

He was off again into the Baysford meadows, and Bailey hurried away, leaving the two women staring at the body and talking in whispers.

Pembury's position was cramped and uncomfortable. He dared not move, hardly dared to breathe, for the women below him were not a dozen yards away; and it was with mingled feelings of relief and apprehension that he presently saw from his elevated station a group of lights approaching rapidly along the road from Baysford. Presently they were hidden by the trees, and then, after a brief interval, the whirr of wheels sounded on the drive and streaks of light on the tree-trunks announced the new arrivals. There were three bicycles, ridden respectively by Mr. Hanford, a police inspector and a sergeant; and, as they drew up, the general came thundering back into the avenue.

"Is Ellis with you?" he asked, as he pulled up.

"No, sir," was the reply. "He hadn't come in from Thorpe when we left. He's rather late to-night."

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"Yes, sir, I've sent for Dr. Hills," said the inspector, resting his bicycle against the oak. Pembury could smell the reek of the lamp as he crouched. "Is Pratt dead?"

"Seems to be," replied O'Gorman, "but we'd better leave that to the doctor. There's the murderer's knife. Nobody has touched it. I'm going to fetch the bloodhounds now."

"Ah! that's the thing," said the inspector. "The man can't be far away." He rubbed his hands with a satisfied air as O'Gorman cantered away up the avenue.

In less than a minute there came out from the darkness the deep baying of a hound followed by quick footsteps on the gravel. Then into the circle of light emerged three sinister shapes, loose-limbed and gaunt, and two men advancing at a shambling trot.

"Here, inspector," shouted the general, "you take one; I can't hold 'em both."

The inspector ran forward and seized one of the leashes, and the general led his hound up to the knife, as it lay on the ground. Pembury, peering cautiously round the bough, watched the great brute with almost impersonal curiosity; noted its high poll, its wrinkled forehead and melancholy face as it stooped to snuff suspiciously at the prostrate knife.

For some moments the hound stood motionless, sniffing at the knife; then it turned away and walked to and fro with its muzzle to the ground. Suddenly it lifted its head, bayed loudly, lowered its muzzle and started forward between the oak and the elm, dragging the general after it at a run.

The inspector next brought his hound to the knife, and was soon bounding away to the tug of the leash in the general's wake.

"They don't make no mistakes, they don't," said Bailey, addressing the gratified sergeant, as he brought forward the third hound; "you'll see—?" But his remark was cut short by a violent jerk of the leash, and the next moment he was flying after the others, followed by Mr. Hanford.

The sergeant daintily picked the knife up by its ring, wrapped it in his handkerchief and bestowed it in his pocket. Then he ran off after the hounds.

Pembury smiled grimly. His scheme was working out admirably in spite of the unforeseen difficulties. If those confounded women would only go away, he could come down and take himself off while the coast was clear. He listened to the baying of the hounds, gradually growing fainter in the increasing distance, and cursed the dilatoriness of the doctor. Confound the fellow! Didn't he realize that this was a case of life or death?

Suddenly his ear caught the tinkle of a bicycle bell; a fresh light appeared coming up the avenue and then a bicycle swept up swiftly to the scene of the tragedy, and a small elderly man jumped down by the side of the body. Giving his machine to Mrs. Parton, he stooped over the dead man, felt the wrist, pushed back an eyelid, held a match to the eye and then rose. "This is a shocking affair, Mrs. Parton," said he. "The poor fellow is quite dead. You had better help me to carry him to the house. If you two take the feet I will take the shoulders."

Pembury watched them raise the body and stagger away with it up the avenue. He heard their shuffling steps die away and the door of the house shut. And still he listened. From far away in the meadows came, at intervals, the baying of the hounds. Other sounds there was none. Presently the doctor would come back for his bicycle, but, for the moment, the coast was clear. Pembury rose stiffly. His hands had stuck to the tree where they had pressed against it, and they were still sticky and damp. Quickly he let himself down to the ground, listened again for a moment, and then, making a small circuit to avoid the lamplight, softly crossed the avenue and stole away across the Thorpe meadows.

The night was intensely dark, and not a soul was stirring in the meadows. He strode forward quickly, peering into the darkness and stopping now and again to listen; but no sound came to his ears, save the now faint baying of the distant hounds. Not far from his house, he remembered, was a deep ditch spanned by a wooden bridge, and towards this he now

made his way; for he knew that his appearance was such as to convict him at a glance. Arrived at the ditch, he stooped to wash his hands and wrists; and, as he bent forward, the knife fell from his breast-pocket into the shallow water at the margin. He groped for it, and, having found it, drove it deep into the mud as far out as he could reach. Then he wiped his hands on some water-weed, crossed the bridge and started homewards.

He approached his house from the rear, satisfied himself that his housekeeper was in the kitchen, and, letting himself in very quietly with his key, went quickly up to his bedroom. Here he washed thoroughly—in the bath, so that he could get rid of the discoloured water—changed his clothes and packed those that he took off in a portmanteau.

By the time he had done this the gong sounded for supper. As he took his seat at the table, spruce and fresh in appearance, quietly cheerful in manner, he addressed his housekeeper. “I wasn’t able to finish my business in London,” he said. “I shall have to go up again to-morrow.”

“Shall you come home the same day?” asked the housekeeper.

“Perhaps,” was the reply, “and perhaps not. It will depend on circumstances.”

He did not say what the circumstances might be, nor did the housekeeper ask. Mr. Pembury was not addicted to confidences. He was an eminently discreet man: and discreet men say little.

---

PART II. — RIVAL SLEUTH-HOUNDS

(RELATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.)

THE half-hour that follows breakfast, when the fire has, so to speak, got into its stride, and the morning pipe throws up its clouds of incense, is, perhaps, the most agreeable in the whole day. Especially so when a sombre sky, brooding over the town, hints at streets pervaded by the chilly morning air, and hoots from protesting tugs upon the river tell of lingering mists, the legacy of the lately-vanished night.

The autumn morning was raw: the fire burned jovially. I thrust my slippered feet towards the blaze and meditated, on nothing in particular, with cat-like enjoyment. Presently a disapproving grunt from Thorndyke attracted my attention, and I looked round lazily. He was extracting, with a pair of office shears, the readable portions of the morning paper, and had paused with a small cutting between his finger and thumb. “Bloodhounds again,” said he. “We shall be hearing presently of the revival of the ordeal by fire.”

“And a deuced comfortable ordeal, too, on a morning like this,” I said, stroking my legs ecstatically. “What is the case?”

He was about to reply when a sharp rat-tat from the little brass knocker announced a disturber of our peace. Thorndyke stepped over to the door and admitted a police inspector in uniform, and I stood up, and, presenting my dorsal aspect to the fire, prepared to combine bodily comfort with attention to business.

“I believe I am speaking to Dr. Thorndyke,” said the officer, and, as Thorndyke nodded, he went on: “My name, sir, is Fox, Inspector Fox of the Baysford Police. Perhaps you’ve seen the morning paper?”

Thorndyke held up the cutting, and, placing a chair by the fire, asked the inspector if he had breakfasted.

“Thank you, sir, I have,” replied Inspector Fox. “I came up to town by the late train last night so as to be here early, and stayed at an hotel. You see, from the paper, that we have had to arrest one of our own men. That’s rather awkward, you know, sir.”

“Very,” agreed Thorndyke.

“Yes; it’s bad for the force and bad for the public too. But we had to do it. There was no way out that we could see. Still, we should like the accused to have every chance, both for our sake and his own, so the chief constable thought he’d like to have your opinion on the case, and he thought that, perhaps, you might be willing to act for the defence.”

“Let us have the particulars,” said Thorndyke, taking a writing-pad from a drawer and dropping into his armchair. “Begin at the beginning,” he added, “and tell us all you know.”

“Well,” said the inspector, after a preliminary cough, “to begin with the murdered man: his name is Pratt. He was a retired prison warder, and was employed as steward by General O’Gorman, who is a retired prison governor—you may have heard of him in connection with his pack of bloodhounds. Well, Pratt came down from London yesterday evening by a train arriving at Baysford at six-thirty. He was seen by the guard, the ticket collector and the outside porter. The porter saw him leave the station at six-thirty-seven. General O’Gorman’s house is about half-a-mile from the station. At five minutes to seven the general and a gentleman named Hanford and the general’s housekeeper, a Mrs. Parton, found Pratt lying dead in the avenue that leads up to the house. He had apparently been stabbed, for there was a lot of blood about, and a knife—a Norwegian knife—was lying on the ground near the body. Mrs. Parton had thought she heard someone in the avenue calling out for help, and, as Pratt was just due, she came out with a lantern. She met the general and Mr. Hanford, and all three seem to have caught sight of the body at the same moment. Mr. Hanford cycled down to us, at once, with the news; we sent for a doctor, and I went back with Mr. Hanford and took a sergeant with me. We arrived at twelve minutes past seven, and then the general, who had galloped his horse over the meadows each side of the avenue without having seen anybody, fetched out his bloodhounds and led them up to the knife. All three hounds took up the scent at once—I held the leash of one of them—and they took us across the meadows without a pause or a falter, over stiles and fences, along a lane,

out into the town, and then, one after the other, they crossed the road in a bee-line to the police station, bolted in at the door, which stood open, and made straight for the desk, where a supernumerary officer, named Ellis, was writing. They made a rare to-do, struggling to get at him, and it was as much as we could manage to hold them back. As for Ellis, he turned as pale as a ghost."

"Was any one else in the room?" asked Thorndyke.

"Oh, yes. There were two constables and a messenger. We led the hounds up to them, but the brutes wouldn't take any notice of them. They wanted Ellis."

"And what did you do?"

"Why, we arrested Ellis, of course. Couldn't do anything else—especially with the general there."

"What had the general to do with it?" asked Thorndyke.

"He's a J.P. and a late governor of Dartmoor, and it was his hounds that had run the man down. But we must have arrested Ellis in any case."

"Is there anything against the accused man?"

"Yes, there is. He and Pratt were on distinctly unfriendly terms. They were old comrades, for Ellis was in the Civil Guard at Portland when Pratt was warder there—he was pensioned off from the service because he got his left forefinger chopped off—but lately they had had some unpleasantness about a woman, a parlourmaid of the general's. It seems that Ellis, who is a married man, paid the girl too much attention—or Pratt thought he did—and Pratt warned Ellis off the premises. Since then they had not been on speaking terms."

"And what sort of a man is Ellis?"

"A remarkably decent fellow he always seemed; quiet, steady, good-natured; I should have said he wouldn't have hurt a fly. We all liked him—better than we liked Pratt, in fact; poor Pratt was what you'd call an old soldier—sly, you know, sir—and a bit of a sneak."

"You searched and examined Ellis, of course?"

"Yes. There was nothing suspicious about him except that he had two purses. But he says he picked up one of them? a small, pigskin pouch—on the footpath of the Thorpe road yesterday afternoon; and there's no reason to disbelieve him. At any rate, the purse was not Pratt's."

Thorndyke made a note on his pad, and then asked: "There were no blood-stains or marks on his clothing?"

"No. His clothing was not marked or disarranged in any way."

"Any cuts, scratches or bruises on his person?"

"None whatever," replied the inspector.

"At what time did you arrest Ellis?"

"Half-past seven exactly."

"Have you ascertained what his movements were? Had he been near the scene of the murder?"

"Yes; he had been to Thorpe and would pass the gates of the avenue on his way back. And he was later than usual in returning, though not later than he has often been before."

"And now, as to the murdered man: has the body been examined?"

"Yes; I had Dr. Hills's report before I left. There were no less than seven deep knife-wounds, all on the left side of the back. There was a great deal of blood on the ground, and Dr. Hills thinks Pratt must have bled to death in a minute or two."

"Do the wounds correspond with the knife that was found?"

"I asked the doctor that, and he said 'Yes,' though he wasn't going to swear to any particular knife. However, that point isn't of much importance. The knife was covered with blood, and it was found close to the body."

"What has been done with it, by the way?" asked Thorndyke.

"The sergeant who was with me picked it up and rolled it in his handkerchief to carry in his pocket. I took it from him, just as it was, and locked it in a dispatch-box."

"Has the knife been recognized as Ellis's property?"

"No, sir, it has not."

"Were there any recognizable footprints or marks of a struggle?" Thorndyke asked.

The inspector grinned sheepishly. "I haven't examined the spot, of course, sir," said he, "but, after the general's horse and the bloodhounds and the general on foot and me and the gardener and the sergeant and Mr. Hanford had been over it twice, going and returning, why, you see, sir—?"

"Exactly, exactly," said Thorndyke. "Well, inspector, I shall be pleased to act for the defence; it seems to me that the case

against Ellis is in some respects rather inconclusive.”

The inspector was frankly amazed. “It certainly hadn’t struck me in that light, sir,” he said.

“No? Well, that is my view; and I think the best plan will be for me to come down with you and investigate matters on the spot.”

The inspector assented cheerfully, and, when we had provided him with a newspaper, we withdrew to the laboratory to consult time-tables and prepare for the expedition.

“You are coming, I suppose, Jervis?” said Thorndyke.

“If I shall be of any use,” I replied.

“Of course you will,” said he. “Two heads are better than one, and, by the look of things, I should say that ours will be the only ones with any sense in them. We will take the research case, of course, and we may as well have a camera with us. I see there is a train from Charing Cross in twenty minutes.”

For the first half-hour of the journey Thorndyke sat in his corner, alternately conning over his notes and gazing with thoughtful eyes out of the window. I could see that the case pleased him, and was careful not to break in upon his train of thought. Presently, however, he put away his notes and began to fill his pipe with a more companionable air, and then the inspector, who had been wriggling with impatience, opened fire.

“So you think, sir, that you see a way out for Ellis?”

“I think there is a case for the defence,” replied Thorndyke. “In fact, I call the evidence against him rather flimsy.”

The inspector gasped. “But the knife, sir? What about the knife?”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “what about the knife? Whose knife was it? You don’t know. It was covered with blood. Whose blood? You don’t know. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it was the murderer’s knife. Then the blood on it was Pratt’s blood. But if it was Pratt’s blood, when the hounds had smelt it they should have led you to Pratt’s body, for blood gives a very strong scent. But they did not. They ignored the body. The inference seems to be that the blood on the knife was not Pratt’s blood.”

The inspector took off his cap and gently scratched the back of his head. “You’re perfectly right, sir,” he said. “I’d never thought of that. None of us had.”

“Then,” pursued Thorndyke, “let us assume that the knife was Pratt’s. If so, it would seem to have been used in self-defence. But this was a Norwegian knife, a clumsy tool—not a weapon at all—which takes an appreciable time to open and requires the use of two free hands. Now, had Pratt both hands free? Certainly not after the attack had commenced. There were seven wounds, all on the left side of the back; which indicates that he held the murderer locked in his arms and that the murderer’s arms were around him. Also, incidentally, that the murderer is right-handed. But, still, let us assume that the knife was Pratt’s. Then the blood on it was that of the murderer. Then the murderer must have been wounded. But Ellis was not wounded. Then Ellis is not the murderer. The knife doesn’t help us at all.”

The inspector puffed out his cheeks and blew softly. “This is getting out of my depth,” he said. “Still, sir, you can’t get over the bloodhounds. They tell us distinctly that the knife is Ellis’s knife and I don’t see any answer to that.”

“There is no answer because there has been no statement. The bloodhounds have told you nothing. You have drawn certain inferences from their actions, but those inferences may be totally wrong and they are certainly not evidence.”

“You don’t seem to have much opinion of bloodhounds,” the inspector remarked.

“As agents for the detection of crime,” replied Thorndyke, “I regard them as useless. You cannot put a bloodhound in the witness-box. You can get no intelligible statement from it. If it possesses any knowledge, it has no means of communicating it. The fact is,” he continued, “that the entire system of using bloodhounds for criminal detection is based on a fallacy. In the American plantations these animals were used with great success for tracking runaway slaves. But the slave was a known individual. All that was required was to ascertain his whereabouts. That is not the problem that is presented in the detection of a crime. The detective is not concerned in establishing the whereabouts of a known individual, but in discovering the identity of an unknown individual. And for this purpose bloodhounds are useless. They may discover such identity, but they cannot communicate their knowledge. If the criminal is unknown, they cannot identify him: if he is known, the police have no need of the bloodhound.

“To return to our present case,” Thorndyke resumed, after a pause; “we have employed certain agents—the hounds—with whom we are not en rapport, as the spiritualists would say; and we have no ‘medium.’ The hound possesses a special sense—the olfactory—which in man is quite rudimentary. He thinks, so to speak, in terms of smell, and his thoughts are untranslatable to beings in whom the sense of smell is undeveloped. We have presented to the hound a knife, and he discovers in it certain odorous properties; he discovers similar or related odorous properties in a tract of land and a human individual—Ellis. We cannot verify his discoveries or ascertain their nature. What remains? All that we can say is that there appears to exist some odorous relation between the knife and the man Ellis. But until we can ascertain the nature of that relation, we cannot estimate its evidential value or bearing. All the other ‘evidence’ is the product of your imagination and that of the general. There is, at present, no case against Ellis.”

“He must have been pretty close to the place when the murder happened,” said the inspector.

"So, probably, were many other people," answered Thorndyke; "but had he time to wash and change? Because he would have needed it."

"I suppose he would," the inspector agreed dubiously.

"Undoubtedly. There were seven wounds which would have taken some time to inflict. Now we can't suppose that Pratt stood passively while the other man stabbed him. Indeed, as I have said, the position of the wounds shows that he did not. There was a struggle. The two men were locked together. One of the murderer's hands was against Pratt's back; probably both hands were, one clasp and the other stabbing. There must have been blood on one hand and probably on both. But you say there was no blood on Ellis, and there doesn't seem to have been time or opportunity for him to wash."

"Well, it's a mysterious affair," said the inspector; "but I don't see how you are going to get over the bloodhounds."

Thorndyke shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "The bloodhounds are an obsession," he said. "The whole problem really centres around the knife. The questions are, Whose knife was it? and what was the connection between it and Ellis? There is a problem, Jervis," he continued, turning to me, "that I submit for your consideration. Some of the possible solutions are exceedingly curious."

As we set out from Baysford station, Thorndyke looked at his watch and noted the time. "You will take us the way that Pratt went," he said.

"As to that," said the inspector, "he may have gone by the road or by the footpath; but there's very little difference in the distance."

Turning away from Baysford, we walked along the road westward, towards the village of Thorpe, and presently passed on our right a stile at the entrance to a footpath.

"That path," said the inspector, "crosses the avenue about half-way up. But we'd better keep to the road." A quarter of a mile further on we came to a pair of rusty iron gates one of which stood open, and, entering, we found ourselves in a broad drive bordered by two rows of trees, between the trunks of which a long stretch of pasture meadows could be seen on either hand. It was a fine avenue, and, late in the year as it was, the yellowing foliage clustered thickly overhead.

When we had walked about a hundred and fifty yards from the gates, the inspector halted.

"This is the place," he said; and Thorndyke again noted the time.

"Nine minutes exactly," said he. "Then Pratt arrived here about fourteen minutes to seven, and his body was found at five minutes to seven—nine minutes after his arrival. The murderer couldn't have been far away then."

"No, it was a pretty fresh scent," replied the inspector. "You'd like to see the body first, I think you said, sir?"

"Yes; and the knife, if you please."

"I shall have to send down to the station for that. It's locked up in the office."

He entered the house, and, having dispatched a messenger to the police station, came out and conducted us to the outbuilding where the corpse had been deposited. Thorndyke made a rapid examination of the wounds and the holes in the clothing, neither of which presented anything particularly suggestive. The weapon used had evidently been a thick-backed, single-edged knife similar to the one described, and the discolouration around the wounds indicated that the weapon had a definite shoulder like that of a Norwegian knife, and that it had been driven in with savage violence.

"Do you find anything that throws any light on the case?" the inspector asked, when the examination was concluded.

"That is impossible to say until we have seen the knife," replied Thorndyke; "but while we are waiting for it, we may as well go and look at the scene of the tragedy. These are Pratt's boots, I think?" He lifted a pair of stout laced boots from the table and turned them up to inspect the soles.

"Yes, those are his boots," replied Fox, "and pretty easy they'd have been to track, if the case had been the other way about. Those Blakey's protectors are as good as a trademark."

"We'll take them, at any rate," said Thorndyke; and, the inspector having taken the boots from him, we went out and retraced our steps down the avenue.

The place where the murder had occurred was easily identified by a large dark stain on the gravel at one side of the drive, half-way between two trees—an ancient pollard hornbeam and an elm. Next to the elm was a pollard oak with a squat, warty bole about seven feet high, and three enormous limbs, of which one slanted half-way across the avenue; and between these two trees the ground was covered with the tracks of men and hounds superimposed upon the hoof-prints of a horse.

"Where was the knife found?" Thorndyke asked.

The inspector indicated a spot near the middle of the drive, almost opposite the hornbeam and Thorndyke, picking up a large stone, laid it on the spot. Then he surveyed the scene thoughtfully, looking up and down the drive and at the trees that bordered it, and, finally, walked slowly to the space between the elm and the oak, scanning the ground as he went. "There is no dearth of footprints," he remarked grimly, as he looked down at the trampled earth.

"No, but the question is, whose are they?" said the inspector.

"Yes, that is the question," agreed Thorndyke; "and we will begin the solution by identifying those of Pratt."



"I don't see how that will help us," said the inspector. "We know he was here."

Thorndyke looked at him in surprise, and I must confess that the foolish remark astonished me too, accustomed as I was to the quick-witted officers from Scotland Yard.

"The hue and cry procession," remarked Thorndyke, "seems to have passed out between the elm and the oak; elsewhere the ground seems pretty clear." He walked round the elm, still looking earnestly at the ground, and presently continued: "Now here, in the soft earth bordering the turf, are the prints of a pair of smallish feet wearing pointed boots; a rather short man, evidently, by the size of foot and length of stride, and he doesn't seem to have belonged to the procession. But I don't see any of Pratt's; he doesn't seem to have come off the hard gravel." He continued to walk slowly towards the hornbeam with his eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly he halted and stooped with an eager look at the earth; and, as Fox and I approached, he stood up and pointed. "Pratt's footprints—faint and fragmentary, but unmistakable. And now, inspector, you see their importance. They furnish the time factor in respect of the other footprints. Look at this one and then look at that." He pointed from one to another of the faint impressions of the dead man's foot.

"You mean that there are signs of a struggle?" said Fox.

"I mean more than that," replied Thorndyke. "Here is one of Pratt's footprints treading into the print of a small, pointed foot; and there at the edge of the gravel is another of Pratt's nearly obliterated by the tread of a pointed foot. Obviously the first pointed footprint was made before Pratt's, and the second one after his; and the necessary inference is that the owner of the pointed foot was here at the same time as Pratt."

"Then he must have been the murderer!" exclaimed Fox.

"Presumably," answered Thorndyke; "but let us see whither he went. You notice, in the first place, that the man stood close to this tree"—he indicated the hornbeam—"and that he went towards the elm. Let us follow him. He passes the elm, you see, and you will observe that these tracks form a regular series leading from the hornbeam and not mixed up with the marks of the struggle. They were, therefore, probably made after the murder had been perpetrated. You will also notice that they pass along the backs of the trees—outside the avenue, that is; what does that suggest to you?"

"It suggests to me," I said, when the inspector had shaken his head hopelessly, "that there was possibly someone in the avenue when the man was stealing off."

"Precisely," said Thorndyke. "The body was found not more than nine minutes after Pratt arrived here. But the murder must have taken some time. Then the housekeeper thought she heard someone calling and came out with a lantern, and, at the same time, the general and Mr. Hanford came up the drive. The suggestion is that the man sneaked along outside the trees to avoid being seen. However, let us follow the tracks. They pass the elm and they pass on behind the next tree; but wait! There is something odd here." He passed behind the great pollard oak and looked down at the soft earth by its roots. "Here is a pair of impressions much deeper than the rest, and they are not a part of the track since their toes point towards the tree. What do you make of that?" Without waiting for an answer he began closely to scan the bole of the tree and especially a large, warty protuberance about three feet from the ground. On the bark above this was a vertical mark, as if something had scraped down the tree, and from the wart itself a dead twig had been newly broken off and lay upon the ground. Pointing to these marks Thorndyke set his foot on the protuberance, and, springing up, brought his eye above the level of the crown, whence the great boughs branched off.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Here is something much more definite." With the aid of another projection, he scrambled up into the crown of the tree, and, having glanced quickly round, beckoned to us. I stepped up on the projecting lump and, as my eyes rose above the crown, I perceived the brown, shiny impression of a hand on the edge. Climbing into the crown, I was quickly followed by the inspector, and we both stood up by Thorndyke between the three boughs. From where we stood we looked on the upper side of the great limb that swept out across the avenue; and there on its lichen-covered surface, we saw the imprints in reddish-brown of a pair of open hands.

"You notice," said Thorndyke, leaning out upon the bough, "that he is a short man; I cannot conveniently place my hands so low. You also note that he has both forefingers intact, and so is certainly not Ellis."

"If you mean to say, sir, that these marks were made by the murderer," said Fox, "I say it's impossible. Why, that would mean that he was here looking down at us when we were searching for him with the hounds. The presence of the hounds proves that this man could not have been the murderer."

"On the contrary," said Thorndyke, "the presence of this man with bloody hands confirms the other evidence, which all indicates that the hounds were never on the murderer's trail at all. Come now, inspector, I put it to you: Here is a murdered man; the murderer has almost certainly blood upon his hands; and here is a man with bloody hands, lurking in a tree within a few feet of the corpse and within a few minutes of its discovery (as is shown by the footprints); what are the reasonable probabilities?"

"But you are forgetting the bloodhounds, sir, and the murderer's knife," urged the inspector.

"Tut, tut, man!" exclaimed Thorndyke; "those bloodhounds are a positive obsession. But I see a sergeant coming up the drive, with the knife, I hope. Perhaps that will solve the riddle for us."

The sergeant, who carried a small dispatch-box, halted opposite the tree in some surprise while we descended, when he came forward with a military salute and handed the box to the inspector, who forthwith unlocked it, and, opening the lid, displayed an object wrapped in a pocket-handkerchief.

"There is the knife, sir," said he, "just as I received it. The handkerchief is the sergeant's."

Thorndyke unrolled the handkerchief and took from it a large-sized Norwegian knife, which he looked at critically and then handed to me. While I was inspecting the blade, he shook out the handkerchief and, having looked it over on both sides, turned to the sergeant.

"At what time did you pick up this knife?" he asked.

"About seven-fifteen, sir; directly after the hounds had started. I was careful to pick it up by the ring, and I wrapped it in the handkerchief at once."

"Seven-fifteen," said Thorndyke. "Less than half-an-hour after the murder. That is very singular. Do you observe the state of this handkerchief? There is not a mark on it. Not a trace of any bloodstain; which proves that when the knife was picked up, the blood on it was already dry. But things dry slowly, if they dry at all, in the saturated air of an autumn evening. The appearances seem to suggest that the blood on the knife was dry when it was thrown down. By the way, sergeant, what do you scent your handkerchief with?"

"Scent, sir!" exclaimed the astonished officer in indignant accents; "me scent my handkerchief! No, sir, certainly not. Never used scent in my life, sir."

Thorndyke held out the handkerchief, and the sergeant sniffed at it incredulously. "It certainly does seem to smell of scent," he admitted, "but it must be the knife." The same idea having occurred to me, I applied the handle of the knife to my nose and instantly detected the sickly-sweet odour of musk.

"The question is," said the inspector, when the two articles had been tested by us all, "was it the knife that scented the Handkerchief or the handkerchief that scented the knife?"

"You heard what the sergeant said," replied Thorndyke. "There was no scent on the handkerchief when the knife was wrapped in it. Do you know, inspector, this scent seems to me to offer a very curious suggestion. Consider the facts of the case: the distinct trail leading straight to Ellis, who is, nevertheless, found to be without a scratch or a spot of blood; the inconsistencies in the case that I pointed out in the train, and now this knife, apparently dropped with dried blood on it and scented with musk. To me it suggests a carefully-planned, coolly-premeditated crime. The murderer knew about the general's bloodhounds and made use of them as a blind. He planted this knife, smeared with blood and tainted with musk, to furnish a scent. No doubt some object, also scented with musk, would be drawn over the ground to give the trail. It is only a suggestion, of course, but it is worth considering."

"But, sir," the inspector objected eagerly, "if the murderer had handled the knife, it would have scented him too."

"Exactly; so, as we are assuming that the man is not a fool, we may assume that he did not handle it. He will have left it here in readiness, hidden in some place whence he could knock it down, say, with a stick, without touching it."

"Perhaps in this very tree, sir," suggested the sergeant, pointing to the oak.

"No," said Thorndyke, "he would hardly have hidden in the tree where the knife had been. The hounds might have scented the place instead of following the trail at once. The most likely hiding-place for the knife is the one nearest the spot where it was found." He walked over to the stone that marked the spot, and looking round, continued: "You see, that hornbeam is much the nearest, and its flat crown would be very convenient for the purpose—easily reached even by a short man, as he appears to be. Let us see if there are any traces of it. Perhaps you will give me a 'back up', sergeant, as we haven't a ladder."

The sergeant assented with a faint grin, and stooping beside the tree in an attitude suggesting the game of leapfrog, placed his hands firmly on his knees. Grasping a stout branch, Thorndyke swung himself up on the sergeant's broad back, whence he looked down into the crown of the tree. Then, parting the branches, he stepped onto the ledge and disappeared into the central hollow.

When he re-appeared he held in his hands two very singular objects: a pair of iron crucible-tongs and an artist's brush-case of black-japanned tin. The former article he handed down to me, but the brush-case he held carefully by its wire handle as he dropped to the ground.

"The significance of these things is, I think, obvious," he said. "The tongs were used to handle the knife with and the case to carry it in, so that it should not scent his clothes or bag. It was very carefully planned."

"If that is so," said the inspector, "the inside of the case ought to smell of musk."

"No doubt," said Thorndyke; "but before we open it, there is a rather important matter to be attended to. Will you give me the Vitogen powder, Jervis?"

I opened the canvas-covered "research case" and took from it an object like a diminutive pepper-caster—an iodo-form dredger in fact—and handed it to him. Grasping the brush-case by its wire handle, he sprinkled the pale yellow powder from the dredger freely all round the pull-off lid, tapping the top with his knuckles to make the fine particles spread. Then he blew off the superfluous powder, and the two police officers gave a simultaneous gasp of joy; for now, on the black background, there stood out plainly a number of finger-prints, so clear and distinct that the ridge-pattern could be made out with perfect ease.

"These will probably be his right hand," said Thorndyke. "Now for the left." He treated the body of the case in the same

way, and, when he had blown off the powder, the entire surface was spotted with yellow, oval impressions. "Now, Jervis," said he, "if you will put on a glove and pull off the lid, we can test the inside."

There was no difficulty in getting the lid off, for the shoulder of the case had been smeared with vaseline—apparently to produce an airtight joint—and, as it separated with a hollow sound, a faint, musky odour exhaled from its interior.

"The remainder of the inquiry," said Thorndyke, when I pushed the lid on again, "will be best conducted at the police station, where, also, we can photograph these fingerprints."

"The shortest way will be across the meadows," said Fox; "the way the hounds went."

By this route we accordingly travelled, Thorndyke carrying the brush-case tenderly by its handle.

"I don't quite see where Ellis comes in in this job," said the inspector, as we walked along, "if the fellow had a grudge against Pratt. They weren't chums."

"I think I do," said Thorndyke. "You say that both men were prison officers at Portland at the same time. Now doesn't it seem likely that this is the work of some old convict who had been identified—and perhaps blackmailed—by Pratt, and possibly by Ellis too? That is where the value of the finger-prints comes in. If he is an old 'lag' his prints will be at Scotland Yard. Otherwise they are not of much value as a clue."

"That's true, sir," said the inspector. "I suppose you want to see Ellis."

"I want to see that purse that you spoke of, first," replied Thorndyke. "That is probably the other end of the clue."

As soon as we arrived at the station, the inspector unlocked a safe and brought out a parcel. "These are Ellis's things," said he, as he unfastened it, "and that is the purse."

He handed Thorndyke a small pigskin pouch, which my colleague opened, and having smelt the inside, passed to me. The odour of musk was plainly perceptible, especially in the small compartment at the back.

"It has probably tainted the other contents of the parcel," said Thorndyke, sniffing at each article in turn, "but my sense of smell is not keen enough to detect any scent. They all seem odourless to me, whereas the purse smells quite distinctly. Shall we have Ellis in now?"

The sergeant took a key from a locked drawer and departed for the cells, whence he presently re-appeared accompanied by the prisoner—a stout, burly man, in the last stage of dejection.

"Come, cheer up, Ellis," said the inspector. "Here's Dr. Thorndyke come down to help us and he wants to ask you one or two questions."

Ellis looked piteously at Thorndyke, and exclaimed: "I know nothing whatever about this affair, sir, I swear to God I don't."

"I never supposed you did," said Thorndyke. "But there are one or two things that I want you to tell me. To begin with, that purse: where did you find it?"

"On the Thorpe road, sir. It was lying in the middle of the footway."

"Had any one else passed the spot lately? Did you meet or pass any one?"

"Yes, sir, I met a labourer about a minute before I saw the purse. I can't imagine why he didn't see it."

"Probably because it wasn't there," said Thorndyke. "Is there a hedge there?"

"Yes, sir; a hedge on a low bank."

"Ha! Well, now, tell me: is there any one about here whom you knew when you and Pratt were together at Portland? Any old lag—to put it bluntly—whom you and Pratt have been putting the screw on."

"No, sir, I swear there isn't. But I wouldn't answer for Pratt. He had a rare memory for faces."

Thorndyke reflected. "Were there any escapes from Portland in your time?" he asked.

"Only one—a man named Dobbs. He made off to the sea in a sudden fog and he was supposed to be drowned. His clothes washed up on the Bill, but not his body. At any rate, he was never heard of again."

"Thank you, Ellis. Do you mind my taking your fingerprints?"

"Certainly not, sir," was the almost eager reply; and the office inking-pad being requisitioned, a rough set of finger-prints was produced; and when Thorndyke had compared them with those on the brush-case and found no resemblance, Ellis returned to his cell in quite buoyant spirits.

Having made several photographs of the strange fingerprints, we returned to town that evening, taking the negatives with us; and while we waited for our train, Thorndyke gave a few parting injunctions to the inspector. "Remember," he said, "that the man must have washed his hands before he could appear in public. Search the banks of every pond, ditch and stream in the neighbourhood for footprints like those in the avenue; and, if you find any, search the bottom of the water thoroughly, for he is quite likely to have dropped the knife into the mud."

The photographs, which we handed in at Scotland Yard that same night, enabled the experts to identify the fingerprints

as those of Francis Dobbs, an escaped convict. The two photographs—profile and full-face—which were attached to his record, were sent down to Baysford with a description of the man, and were, in due course, identified with a somewhat mysterious individual, who passed by the name of Rufus Pembury and who had lived in the neighbourhood as a private gentleman for some two years. But Rufus Pembury was not to be found either at his genteel house or elsewhere. All that was known was, that on the day after the murder, he had converted his entire “personalty” into “bearer securities,” and then vanished from mortal ken. Nor has he ever been heard of to this day.

“And, between ourselves,” said Thorndyke, when we were discussing the case some time after, “he deserved to escape. It was clearly a case of blackmail, and to kill a blackmailer—when you have no other defence against him—is hardly murder. As to Ellis, he could never have been convicted, and Dobbs, or Pembury, must have known it. But he would have been committed to the Assizes, and that would have given time for all traces to disappear. No, Dobbs was a man of courage, ingenuity and resource; and, above all, he knocked the bottom out of the great bloodhound superstition.”

---

### III. — THE ECHO OF A MUTINY

#### PART I. — DEATH ON THE GIRDLER

POPULAR belief ascribes to infants and the lower animals certain occult powers of divining character denied to the reasoning faculties of the human adult; and is apt to accept their judgment as finally overriding the pronouncements of mere experience.

Whether this belief rests upon any foundation other than the universal love of paradox it is unnecessary to inquire. It is very generally entertained, especially by ladies of a certain social status; and by Mrs. Thomas Solly it was loyally maintained as an article of faith.

"Yes," she moralized, "it's surprisin' how they know, the little children and the dumb animals. But they do. There's no deceivin' them. They can tell the gold from the dross in a moment, they can, and they reads the human heart like a book. Wonderful, I call it. I suppose it's instinct."

Having delivered herself of this priceless gem of philosophic thought, she thrust her arms elbow-deep into the foaming wash-tub and glanced admiringly at her lodger as he sat in the doorway, supporting on one knee an obese infant of eighteen months and on the other a fine tabby cat.

James Brown was an elderly seafaring man, small and slight in build and in manner suave, insinuating and perhaps a trifle sly. But he had all the sailor's love of children and animals, and the sailor's knack of making himself acceptable to them, for, as he sat with an empty pipe wobbling in the grasp of his toothless gums, the baby beamed with humid smiles, and the cat, rolled into a fluffy ball and purring like a stocking-loom, worked its fingers ecstatically as if it were trying on a new pair of gloves.

"It must be mortal lonely out at the lighthouse," Mrs. Solly resumed. "Only three men and never a neighbour to speak to; and, Lord! what a muddle they must be in with no woman to look after them and keep 'em tidy. But you won't be overworked, Mr. Brown, in these long days; daylight till past nine o'clock. I don't know what you'll do to pass the time."

"Oh, I shall find plenty to do, I expect," said Brown, "what with cleanin' the lamps and glasses and paintin' up the ironwork. And that reminds me," he added, looking round at the clock, "that time's getting on. High water at half-past ten, and here it's gone eight o'clock."

Mrs. Solly, acting on the hint, began rapidly to fish out the washed garments and wring them out into the form of short ropes. Then, having dried her hands on her apron, she relieved Brown of the protesting baby.

"Your room will be ready for you, Mr. Brown," said she, "when your turn comes for a spell ashore; and main glad me and Tom will be to see you back."

"Thank you, Mrs. Solly, ma'am," answered Brown, tenderly placing the cat on the floor; "you won't be more glad than what I will." He shook hands warmly with his landlady, kissed the baby, chuckled the cat under the chin, and, picking up his little chest by its becket, swung it onto his shoulder and strode out of the cottage.

His way lay across the marshes, and, like the ships in the offing, he shaped his course by the twin towers of Reculver that stood up grotesquely on the rim of the land; and as he trod the springy turf, Tom Solly's fleecy charges looked up at him with vacant stares and valedictory bleatings. Once, at a dyke-gate, he paused to look back at the fair Kentish landscape: at the grey tower of St. Nicholas-at-Wade peeping above the trees and the faraway mill at Sarre, whirling slowly in the summer breeze; and, above all, at the solitary cottage where, for a brief spell in his stormy life, he had known the homely joys of domesticity and peace. Well, that was over for the present, and the lighthouse loomed ahead. With a half-sigh he passed through the gate and walked on towards Reculver.

Outside the whitewashed cottages with their official black chimneys a petty-officer of the coast-guard was adjusting the halyards of the flagstaff. He looked round as Brown approached, and hailed him cheerily.

"Here you are, then," said he, "all figged out in your new togs, too. But we're in a bit of a difficulty, d'ye see. We've got to pull up to Whitstable this morning, so I can't send a man out with you and I can't spare a boat."

"Have I got to swim out, then?" asked Brown.

The coast-guard grinned. "Not in them new clothes, mate," he answered. "No, but there's old Willett's boat; he isn't using her to-day; he's going over to Minster to see his daughter, and he'll let us have the loan of the boat. But there's no one to go with you, and I'm responsible to Willett."

"Well, what about it?" asked Brown, with the deep-sea sailor's (usually misplaced) confidence in his power to handle a sailing-boat. "D'ye think I can't manage a tub of a boat? Me what's used the sea since I was a kid of ten?"

"Yes," said the coast-guard; "but who's to bring her back?"

"Why, the man that I'm going to relieve," answered Brown. "He don't want to swim no more than what I do."

The coast-guard reflected with his telescope pointed at a passing barge. "Well, I suppose it'll be all right," he concluded; "but it's a pity they couldn't send the tender round. However, if you undertake to send the boat back, we'll get her afloat. It's time you were off."

He strolled away to the back of the cottages, whence he presently returned with two of his mates, and the four men proceeded along the shore to where Willett's boat lay just above high-water mark.

The Emily was a beamy craft of the type locally known as a "half-share skiff," solidly built of oak, with varnished planking and fitted with main and mizzen lugs. She was a good handful for four men, and, as she slid over the soft chalk rocks with a hollow rumble, the coast-guards debated the advisability of lifting out the bags of shingle with which she was ballasted. However, she was at length dragged down, ballast and all, to the water's edge, and then, while Brown stepped the mainmast, the petty-officer gave him his directions. "What you've got to do," said he, "is to make use of the flood-tide. Keep her nose nor'-east, and with this trickle of nor'-westerly breeze you ought to make the light-house in one board. Anyhow don't let her get east of the lighthouse, or, when the ebb sets in, you'll be in a fix."

To these admonitions Brown listened with jaunty indifference as he hoisted the sails and watched the incoming tide creep over the level shore. Then the boat lifted on the gentle swell. Putting out an oar, he gave a vigorous shove off that sent the boat, with a final scrape, clear of the beach, and then, having dropped the rudder onto its pintles, he seated himself and calmly belayed the main-sheet.

"There he goes," growled the coast-guard; "makin' fast his sheet. They will do it" (he invariably did it himself), "and that's how accidents happen. I hope old Willett'll see his boat back all right."

He stood for some time watching the dwindling boat as it sidled across the smooth water; then he turned and followed his mates towards the station.

Out on the south-western edge of the Girdler Sand, just inside the two-fathom line, the spindle-shanked lighthouse stood a-straddle on its long screw-piles like some uncouth red-bodied wading bird. It was now nearly half flood tide. The highest shoals were long since covered, and the lighthouse rose above the smooth sea as solitary as a slaver becalmed in the "middle passage."

On the gallery outside the lantern were two men, the entire staff of the building, of whom one sat huddled in a chair with his left leg propped up with pillows on another, while his companion rested a telescope on the rail and peered at the faint grey line of the distant land and the two tiny points that marked the twin spires of Reculver.

"I don't see any signs of the boat, Harry," said he.

The other man groaned. "I shall lose the tide," he complained, "and then there's another day gone."

"They can pull you down to Birchington and put you in the train," said the first man.

"I don't want no trains," growled the invalid. "The boat'll be bad enough. I suppose there's nothing coming our way, Tom?"

Tom turned his face eastward and shaded his eyes. "There's a brig coming across the tide from the north," he said. "Looks like a collier." He pointed his telescope at the approaching vessel, and added: "She's got two new cloths in her upper fore top-sail, one on each leech."

The other man sat up eagerly. "What's her trysail like, Tom?" he asked.

"Can't see it," replied Tom. "Yes, I can, now: it's tanned. Why, that'll be the old Utopia, Harry; she's the only brig I know that's got a tanned trysail."

"Look here, Tom," exclaimed the other, "If that's the Utopia, she's going to my home and I'm going aboard of her. Captain Mockett'll give me a passage, I know."

"You oughtn't to go until you're relieved, you know, Barnett," said Tom doubtfully; "it's against regulations to leave your station."

"Regulations be blowed!" exclaimed Barnett. "My leg's more to me than the regulations. I don't want to be a cripple all my life. Besides, I'm no good here, and this new chap, Brown, will be coming out presently. You run up the signal, Tom, like a good comrade, and hail the brig."

"Well, it's your look-out," said Tom, "and I don't mind saying that if I was in your place I should cut off home and see a doctor, if I got the chance." He sauntered off to the flag-locker, and, selecting the two code-flags, deliberately toggled them onto the halyards. Then, as the brig swept up within range, he hoisted the little balls of bunting to the flagstaff-head and jerked the halyards, when the two flags blew out making the signal "Need assistance."

Promptly a coal-soiled answering pennant soared to the brig's main-truck; less promptly the collier went about, and, turning her nose down stream, slowly drifted stern-forwards towards the lighthouse. Then a boat slid out through her gangway, and a couple of men plied the oars vigorously.

"Lighthouse ahoy!" roared one of them, as the boat came within hail. "What's amiss?"

"Harry Barnett has broke his leg," shouted the lighthouse keeper, "and he wants to know if Captain Mockett will give him a passage to Whitstable."

The boat turned back to the brig, and after a brief and bellowed consultation, once more pulled towards the lighthouse.

"Skipper says yus," roared the sailor, when he was within ear-shot, "and he says look alive, 'cause he don't want to miss his tide."

The injured man heaved a sigh of relief. "That's good news," said he, "though, how the blazes I'm going to get down the ladder is more than I can tell. What do you say, Jeffreys?"

"I say you'd better let me lower you with the tackle," replied Jeffreys. "You can sit in the bight of a rope and I'll give you a line to steady yourself with."

"Ah, that'll do, Tom," said Barnett; "but, for the Lord's sake, pay out the fall-rope gently."

The arrangements were made so quickly that by the time the boat was fast alongside everything was in readiness, and a minute later the injured man, dangling like a gigantic spider from the end of the tackle, slowly descended, cursing volubly to the accompaniment of the creaking of the blocks. His chest and kit-bag followed, and, as soon as these were unhooked from the tackle, the boat pulled off to the brig, which was now slowly creeping stern-foremost past the lighthouse. The sick man was hoisted up the side, his chest handed up after him, and then the brig was put on her course due south across the Kentish Flats.

Jeffreys stood on the gallery watching the receding vessel and listening to the voices of her crew as they grew small and weak in the increasing distance. Now that his gruff companion was gone, a strange loneliness had fallen on the lighthouse. The last of the homeward-bound ships had long since passed up the Princes Channel and left the calm sea desolate and blank. The distant buoys, showing as tiny black dots on the glassy surface, and the spindly shapes of the beacons which stood up from invisible shoals, but emphasized the solitude of the empty sea, and the tolling of the bell buoy on the Shivering Sand, stealing faintly down the wind, sounded weird and mournful. The day's work was already done. The lenses were polished, the lamps had been trimmed, and the little motor that worked the foghorn had been cleaned and oiled. There were several odd jobs, it is true, waiting to be done, as there always are in a lighthouse; but, just now, Jeffreys was not in a working humour. A new comrade was coming into his life to-day, a stranger with whom he was to be shut up alone, night and day, for a month on end, and whose temper and tastes and habits might mean for him pleasant companionship or jangling and discord without end. Who was this man Brown? What had he been? and what was he like? These were the questions that passed, naturally enough, through the lighthouse keeper's mind and distracted him from his usual thoughts and occupations.

Presently a speck on the landward horizon caught his eye. He snatched up the telescope eagerly to inspect it. Yes, it was a boat; but not the coast-guard's cutter, for which he was looking. Evidently a fisherman's boat and with only one man in it. He laid down the telescope with a sigh of disappointment, and, filling his pipe, leaned on the rail with a dreamy eye bent on the faint grey line of the land.

Three long years had he spent in this dreary solitude, so repugnant to his active, restless nature: three blank, interminable years, with nothing to look back on but the endless succession of summer calms, stormy nights and the chilly fogs of winter, when the unseen steamers hooted from the void and the fog-horn bellowed its hoarse warning.

Why had he come to this God-forsaken spot? and why did he stay, when the wide world called to him? And then memory painted him a picture on which his mind's eye had often looked before and which once again arose before him, shutting out the vision of the calm sea and the distant land. It was a brightly-coloured picture. It showed a cloudless sky brooding over the deep blue tropic sea: and in the middle of the picture, see-sawing gently on the quiet swell, a white-painted barque.

Her sails were clewed up untidily, her swinging yards jerked at the slack braces and her untended wheel revolved to and fro to the oscillations of the rudder.

She was not a derelict, for more than a dozen men were on her deck; but the men were all drunk and mostly asleep, and there was never an officer among them.

Then he saw the interior of one of her cabins. The chart-rack, the tell-tale compass and the chronometers marked it as the captain's cabin. In it were four men, and two of them lay dead on the deck. Of the other two, one was a small, cunning-faced man, who was, at the moment, kneeling beside one of the corpses to wipe a knife upon its coat. The fourth man was himself.

Again, he saw the two murderers stealing off in a quarter-boat, as the barque with her drunken crew drifted towards the spouting surf of a river-bar. He saw the ship melt away in the surf like an icicle in the sunshine; and, later, two shipwrecked mariners, picked up in an open boat and set ashore at an American port.

That was why he was here. Because he was a murderer. The other scoundrel, Amos Todd, had turned Queen's Evidence and denounced him, and he had barely managed to escape. Since then he had hidden himself from the great world, and here he must continue to hide, not from the law—for his person was unknown now that his shipmates were dead—but from the partner of his crime. It was the fear of Todd that had changed him from Jeffrey Rorke to Tom Jeffreys and had sent him to the Girdler, a prisoner for life. Todd might die—might even now be dead—but he would never hear of it: would never hear the news of his release.

He roused himself and once more pointed his telescope at the distant boat. She was considerably nearer now and seemed to be heading out towards the lighthouse. Perhaps the man in her was bringing a message; at any rate, there was no sign of the coast-guard's cutter.

He went in, and, betaking himself to the kitchen, busied himself with a few simple preparations for dinner. But there was nothing to cook, for there remained the cold meat from yesterday's cooking, which he would make sufficient, with some biscuit in place of potatoes. He felt restless and unstrung; the solitude irked him, and the everlasting wash of the water

among the piles jarred on his nerves.

When he went out again into the gallery the ebb-tide had set in strongly and the boat was little more than a mile distant; and now, through the glass, he could see that the man in her wore the uniform cap of the Trinity House. Then the man must be his future comrade, Brown; but this was very extraordinary. What were they to do with the boat? There was no one to take her back.

The breeze was dying away. As he watched the boat, he saw the man lower the sail and take to his oars; and something of hurry in the way the man pulled over the gathering tide, caused Jeffreys to look round the horizon. And then, for the first time, he noticed a bank of fog creeping up from the east and already so near that the beacon on the East Girdler had faded out of sight. He hastened in to start the little motor that compressed the air for the fog-horn and waited awhile to see that the mechanism was running properly. Then, as the deck vibrated to the roar of the horn, he went out once more into the gallery.

The fog was now all round the lighthouse and the boat was hidden from view. He listened intently. The enclosing wall of vapour seemed to have shut out sound as well as vision. At intervals the horn bellowed its note of warning, and then all was still save the murmur of the water among the piles below, and, infinitely faint and far away, the mournful tolling of the bell on the Shivering Sand.

At length there came to his ear the muffled sound of oars working in the holes; then, at the very edge of the circle of grey water that was visible, the boat appeared through the fog, pale and spectral, with a shadowy figure pulling furiously. The horn emitted a hoarse growl; the man looked round, perceived the lighthouse and altered his course towards it.

Jeffreys descended the iron stairway, and, walking along the lower gallery, stood at the head of the ladder earnestly watching the approaching stranger. Already he was tired of being alone. The yearning for human companionship had been growing ever since Barnett left. But what sort of comrade was this stranger who was coming into his life? And coming to occupy so dominant a place in it.

The boat swept down swiftly athwart the hurrying tide. Nearer it came and yet nearer: and still Jeffreys could catch no glimpse of his new comrade's face. At length it came fairly alongside and bumped against the fender-posts; the stranger whisked in an oar and grabbed a rung of the ladder, and Jeffreys dropped a coil of rope into the boat. And still the man's face was hidden.

Jeffreys leaned out over the ladder and watched him anxiously, as he made fast the rope, unhooked the sail from the traveller and unstepped the mast. When he had set all in order, the stranger picked up a small chest, and, swinging it over his shoulder, stepped onto the ladder. Slowly, by reason of his encumbrance, he mounted, rung by rung, with never an upward glance, and Jeffreys gazed down at the top of his head with growing curiosity. At last he reached the top of the ladder and Jeffreys stooped to lend him a hand. Then, for the first time, he looked up, and Jeffreys started back with a blanched face.

"God Almighty!" he gasped. "It's Amos Todd!"

As the newcomer stepped on the gallery, the fog-horn emitted a roar like that of some hungry monster. Jeffreys turned abruptly without a word, and walked to the stairs, followed by Todd, and the two men ascended with never a sound but the hollow clank of their footsteps on the iron plates. Silently Jeffreys stalked into the living-room and, as his companion followed, he turned and motioned to the latter to set down his chest.

"You ain't much of a talker, mate," said Todd, looking round the room in some surprise; "ain't you going to say 'good-morning'? We're going to be good comrades, I hope. I'm Jim Brown, the new hand, I am; what might your name be?"

Jeffreys turned on him suddenly and led him to the window. "Look at me carefully, Amos Todd," he said sternly, "and then ask yourself what my name is."

At the sound of his voice Todd looked up with a start and turned pale as death. "It can't be," he whispered, "it can't be Jeff Rorke!"

The other man laughed harshly, and leaning forward, said in a low voice: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!"

"Don't say that!" exclaimed Todd. "Don't call me your enemy, Jeff. Lord knows but I'm glad to see you, though I'd never have known you without your beard and with that grey hair. I've been to blame, Jeff, and I know it; but it ain't no use raking up old grudges. Let bygones be bygones, Jeff, and let us be pals as we used to be." He wiped his face with his handkerchief and watched his companion apprehensively.

"Sit down," said Rorke, pointing to a shabby rep-covered arm-chair; "sit down and tell me what you've done with all that money. You've blued it all, I suppose, or you wouldn't be here."

"Robbed, Jeff," answered Todd; "robbed of every penny. Ah! that was an unfortunate affair, that job on board the old Sea-flower. But it's over and done with and we'd best forget it. They're all dead but us, Jeff, so we're safe enough so long as we keep our mouths shut; all at the bottom of the sea—and the best place for 'em too."

"Yes," Rorke replied fiercely, "that's the best place for your shipmates when they know too much; at the bottom of the sea or swinging at the end of a rope." He paced up and down the little room with rapid strides, and each time that he approached Todd's chair the latter shrank back with an expression of alarm.



"Don't sit there staring at me," said Rorke. "Why don't you smoke or do something?"

Todd hastily produced a pipe from his pocket, and having filled it from a moleskin pouch, stuck it in his mouth while he searched for a match. Apparently he carried his matches loose in his pocket, for he presently brought one forth—a red-headed match, which, when he struck it on the wall, lighted with a pale-blue flame. He applied it to his pipe, sucking in his cheeks while he kept his eyes fixed on his companion. Rorke, meanwhile, halted in his walk to cut some shavings from a cake of hard tobacco with a large clasp-knife; and, as he stood, he gazed with frowning abstraction at Todd.

"This pipe's stopped," said the latter, sucking ineffectually at the mouthpiece. "Have you got such a thing as a piece of wire, Jeff?"

"No, I haven't," replied Rorke; "not up here. I'll get a bit from the store presently. Here, take this pipe till you can clean your own: I've got another in the rack there." The sailor's natural hospitality overcoming for the moment his animosity, he thrust the pipe that he had just filled towards Todd, who took it with a mumbled "Thank you" and an anxious eye on the open knife. On the wall beside the chair was a roughly-carved pipe-rack containing: several pipes, one of which Rorke lifted out; and, as he leaned over the chair to reach it, Todd's face went several shades paler.

"Well, Jeff," he said, after a pause, while Rorke cut a fresh "fill" of tobacco, "are we going to be pals same as what we used to be?"

Rorke's animosity lighted up afresh. "Am I going to be pals with the man that tried to swear away my life?" he said sternly; and after a pause he added: "That wants thinking about, that does; and meantime I must go and look at the engine."

When Rorke had gone the new hand sat, with the two pipes in his hands, reflecting deeply. Abstractedly he stuck the fresh pipe into his mouth, and, dropping the stopped one into the rack, felt for a match. Still with an air of abstraction he lit the pipe, and having smoked for a minute or two, rose from the chair and began softly to creep across the room, looking about him and listening intently. At the door he paused to look out into the fog, and then, having again listened attentively, he stepped on tip-toe out onto the gallery and along towards the stairway. Of a sudden the voice of Rorke brought him up with a start.

"Hallo, Todd! where are you off to?"

"I'm just going down to make the boat secure," was the reply.

"Never you mind about the boat," said Rorke. "I'll see to her."

"Right-o, Jeff," said Todd, still edging towards the stairway. "But, I say, mate, where's the other man—the man that I'm to relieve?"

"There ain't any other man," replied Rorke; "he went off aboard a collier."

Todd's face suddenly became grey and haggard. "Then there's no one here but us two!" he gasped; and then, with an effort to conceal his fear, he asked: "But who's going to take the boat back?"

"We'll see about that presently," replied Rorke; "you get along in and unpack your chest."

He came out on the gallery as he spoke, with a lowering frown on his face. Todd cast a terrified glance at him, and then turned and ran for his life towards the stairway.

"Come back!" roared Rorke, springing forward along the gallery; but Todd's feet were already clattering down the iron steps. By the time Rorke reached the head of the stairs, the fugitive was near the bottom; but here, in his haste, he stumbled, barely saving himself by the handrail, and when he recovered his balance Rorke was upon him. Todd darted to the head of the ladder, but, as he grasped the stanchion, his pursuer seized him by the collar. In a moment he had turned with his hand under his coat. There was a quick blow, a loud curse from Rorke, an answering yell from Todd, and a knife fell spinning through the air and dropped into the fore-peak of the boat below.

"You murderous little devil!" said Rorke in an ominously quiet voice, with his bleeding hand gripping his captive by the throat. "Handy with your knife as ever, eh? So you were off to give information, were you?"

"No, I wasn't Jeff," replied Todd in a choking voice; "I wasn't, s'elp me, God. Let go, Jeff. I didn't mean no harm. I was only—" With a sudden wrench he freed one hand and struck out frantically at his captor's face. But Rorke warded off the blow, and, grasping the other wrist, gave a violent push and let go. Todd staggered backward a few paces along the staging, bringing up at the extreme edge; and here, for a sensible time, he stood with wide-open mouth and starting eye-balls, swaying and clutching wildly at the air. Then, with a shrill scream, he toppled backwards and fell, striking a pile in his descent and rebounding into the water.

In spite of the audible thump of his head on the pile, he was not stunned, for when he rose to the surface, he struck out vigorously, uttering short, stifled cries for help. Rorke watched him with set teeth and quickened breath, but made no move. Smaller and still smaller grew the head with its little circle of ripples, swept away on the swift ebb-tide, and fainter the bubbling cries that came across the smooth water. At length as the small black spot began to fade in the fog, the drowning man, with a final effort, raised his head clear of the surface and sent a last, despairing shriek towards the lighthouse. The fog-horn sent back an answering bellow; the head sank below the surface and was seen no more; and in the dreadful stillness that settled down upon the sea there sounded faint and far away the muffled tolling of a bell.

Rorke stood for some minutes immovable, wrapped in thought. Presently the distant hoot of a steamer's whistle aroused him. The ebb-tide shipping was beginning to come down and the fog might lift at any moment; and there was the boat still alongside. She must be disposed of at once. No one had seen her arrive and no one must see her made fast to the lighthouse. Once get rid of the boat and all traces of Todd's visit would be destroyed. He ran down the ladder and stepped into the boat. It was simple. She was heavily ballasted, and would go down if she filled.

He shifted some of the bags of shingle, and, lifting the bottom boards, pulled out the plug. Instantly a large jet of water spouted up into the bottom. Rorke looked at it critically, and, deciding that it would fill her in a few minutes, replaced the bottom boards; and having secured the mast and sail with a few turns of the sheet round a thwart, to prevent them from floating away, he cast off the mooring-rope and stepped on the ladder.

As the released boat began to move away on the tide, he ran up and mounted to the upper gallery to watch her disappearance. Suddenly he remembered Todd's chest. It was still in the room below. With a hurried glance around into the fog, he ran down to the room, and snatching up the chest, carried it out on the lower gallery. After another nervous glance around to assure himself that no craft was in sight, he heaved the chest over the handrail, and, when it fell with a loud splash into the sea, he waited to watch it float away after its owner and the sunken boat. But it never rose; and presently he returned to the upper gallery.

The fog was thinning perceptibly now, and the boat remained plainly visible as she drifted away. But she sank more slowly than he had expected, and presently as she drifted farther away, he fetched the telescope and peered at her with growing anxiety. It would be unfortunate if any one saw her; if she should be picked up here, with her plug out, it would be disastrous.

He was beginning to be really alarmed. Through the glass he could see that the boat was now rolling in a sluggish, water-logged fashion, but she still showed some inches of free-board, and the fog was thinning every moment.

Presently the blast of a steamer's whistle sounded close at hand. He looked round hurriedly and, seeing nothing, again pointed the telescope eagerly at the dwindling boat. Suddenly he gave a gasp of relief. The boat had rolled gunwale under; had staggered back for a moment and then rolled again, slowly, finally, with the water pouring in over the submerged gunwale.

In a few more seconds she had vanished. Rorke lowered the telescope and took a deep breath. Now he was safe. The boat had sunk unseen. But he was better than safe: he was free. His evil spirit, the standing menace of his life, was gone, and the wide world, the world of life, of action, of pleasure, called to him.

In a few minutes the fog lifted. The sun shone brightly on the red-funnelled cattle-boat whose whistle had startled him just now, the summer blue came back to sky and sea, and the land peeped once more over the edge of the horizon.

He went in, whistling cheerfully, and stopped the motor; returned to coil away the rope that he had thrown to Todd; and, when he had hoisted a signal for assistance, he went in once more to eat his solitary meal in peace and gladness.

---

## PART II. — "THE SINGING BONE"

(RELATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.)

IN every kind of scientific work a certain amount of manual labour naturally appertains, labour that cannot be performed by the scientist himself, since art is long but life is short. A chemical analysis involves a laborious "clean up" of apparatus and laboratory, for which the chemist has no time; the preparation of a skeleton—the maceration, bleaching, "assembling," and riveting together of bones—must be carried out by someone whose time is not too precious. And so with other scientific activities. Behind the man of science with his outfit of knowledge is the indispensable mechanic with his outfit of manual skill.

Thorndyke's laboratory assistant, Polton, was a fine example of the latter type, deft, resourceful, ingenious and untiring. He was somewhat of an inventive genius, too; and it was one of his inventions that connected us with the singular case that I am about to record.

Though by trade a watchmaker, Polton was, by choice, an optician. Optical apparatus was the passion of his life; and when, one day, he produced for our inspection an improved prism for increasing the efficiency of gas-buoys, Thorndyke at once brought the invention to the notice of a friend at the Trinity House.

As a consequence, we three—Thorndyke, Polton and I—found ourselves early on a fine July morning making our way down Middle Temple Lane bound for the Temple Pier. A small oil-launch lay alongside the pontoon, and, as we made our appearance, a red-faced, white-whiskered gentleman stood up in the cockpit.

"Here's a delightful morning, doctor," he sang out in a fine, brassy, resonant, sea-faring voice; "sort of day for a trip to the lower river, hey? Hallo, Polton! Coming down to take the bread out of our mouths, are you? Ha, ha!" The cheery laugh rang out over the river and mingled with the throb of the engine as the launch moved off from the pier.

Captain Grumpass was one of the Elder Brethren of the Trinity House. Formerly a client of Thorndyke's he had subsided, as Thorndyke's clients were apt to do, into the position of a personal friend, and his hearty regard included our invaluable assistant.

"Nice state of things," continued the captain, with a chuckle, "when a body of nautical experts have got to be taught their

business by a parcel of lawyers or doctors, what? I suppose trade's slack and 'Satan findeth mischief still,' hey, Polton?"

"There isn't much doing on the civil side, sir," replied Polton, with a quaint, crinkly smile, "but the criminals are still going strong."

"Ha! mystery department still flourishing, what? And, by Jove! talking of mysteries, doctor, our people have got a queer problem to work out; something quite in your line—quite. Yes, and, by the Lord Moses, since I've got you here, why shouldn't I suck your brains?"

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "Why shouldn't you?"

"Well, then, I will," said the captain, "so here goes. All hands to the pump!" He lit a cigar, and, after a few preliminary puffs, began: "The mystery, shortly stated, is this: one of our lighthousemen has disappeared—vanished off the face of the earth and left no trace. He may have bolted, he may have been drowned accidentally or he may have been murdered. But I'd rather give you the particulars in order. At the end of last week a barge brought into Ramsgate a letter from the screw-pile lighthouse on the Girdler. There are only two men there, and it seems that one of them, a man named Barnett, had broken his leg, and he asked that the tender should be sent to bring him ashore. Well, it happened that the local tender, the Warden, was up on the slip in Ramsgate Harbour, having a scrape down, and wouldn't be available for a day or two, so, as the case was urgent, the officer at Ramsgate sent a letter to the lighthouse by one of the pleasure steamers saying that the man should be relieved by boat on the following morning, which was Saturday. He also wrote to a new hand who had just been taken on, a man named James Brown, who was lodging near Reculver, waiting his turn, telling him to go out on Saturday morning in the coast-guard's boat; and he sent a third letter to the coast-guard at Reculver asking him to take Brown out to the lighthouse and bring Barnett ashore. Well, between them, they made a fine muddle of it. The coast-guard couldn't spare either a boat or a man, so they borrowed a fisherman's boat, and in this the man Brown started off alone, like an idiot, on the chance that Barnett would be able to sail the boat back in spite of his broken leg.

"Meanwhile Barnett, who is a Whitstable man, had signalled a collier bound for his native town, and got taken off; so that the other keeper, Thomas Jeffreys, was left alone until Brown should turn up.

"But Brown never did turn up. The coast-guard helped him to put off and saw him well out to sea, and the keeper, Jeffreys, saw a sailing-boat with one man in her making for the lighthouse. Then a bank of fog came up and hid the boat, and when the fog cleared she was nowhere to be seen. Man and boat had vanished and left no sign."

"He may have been run down," Thorndyke suggested.

"He may," agreed the captain, "but no accident has been reported. The coast-guards think he may have capsized in a squall—they saw him make the sheet fast. But there weren't any squalls; the weather was quite calm."

"Was he all right and well when he put off?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Yes," replied the captain, "the coast-guards' report is highly circumstantial; in fact, it's full of silly details that have no bearing on anything. This is what they say." He pulled out an official letter and read: "'When last seen, the missing man was seated in the boat's stern to windward of the helm. He had belayed the sheet. He was holding a pipe and tobacco-pouch in his hands and steering with his elbow. He was filling the pipe from the tobacco-pouch.' There! 'He was holding the pipe in his hand,' mark you! not with his toes; and he was filling it from a tobacco-pouch, whereas you'd have expected him to fill it from a coalscuttle or a feeding-bottle. Bah!" The captain rammed the letter back in his pocket and puffed scornfully at his cigar.

"You are hardly fair to the coast-guard," said Thorndyke, laughing at the captain's vehemence. "The duty of a witness is to give all the facts, not a judicious selection."

"But, my dear sir," said Captain Grumpass, "what the deuce can it matter what the poor devil filled his pipe from?"

"Who can say?" answered Thorndyke. "It may turn out to be a highly material fact. One never knows beforehand. The value of a particular fact depends on its relation to the rest of the evidence."

"I suppose it does," grunted the captain; and he continued to smoke in reflective silence until we opened Black-wall Point, when he suddenly stood up.

"There's a steam trawler alongside our wharf," he announced. "Now what the deuce can she be doing there?" He scanned the little steamer attentively, and continued:

"They seem to be landing something, too. Just pass me those glasses, Polton. Why, hang me! it's a dead body! But why on earth are they landing it on our wharf? They must have known you were coming, doctor."

As the launch swept alongside the wharf, the captain sprang up lightly and approached the group gathered round the body. "What's this?" he asked. "Why have they brought this thing here?"

The master of the trawler, who had superintended the landing, proceeded to explain.

"It's one of your men, sir," said he. "We saw the body lying on the edge of the South Shingles Sand, close to the beacon, as we passed at low water, so we put off the boat and fetched it aboard. As there was nothing to identify the man by, I had a look in his pockets and found this letter."

He handed the captain an official envelope addressed to: "Mr. J. Brown, co Mr. Solly, Shepherd, Reculver, Kent."

"Why, this is the man we were speaking about, doctor," exclaimed Captain Grumpass. "What a very singular coincidence. But what are we to do with the body?"

"You will have to write to the coroner," replied Thorndyke. "By the way, did you turn out all the pockets?" he asked, turning to the skipper of the trawler.

"No, sir," was the reply. "I found the letter in the first pocket that I felt in, so I didn't examine any of the others. Is there anything more that you want to know, sir?"

"Nothing but your name and address, for the coroner," replied Thorndyke, and the skipper, having given this information and expressed the hope that the coroner would not keep him "hanging about," returned to his vessel and pursued his way to Billingsgate.

"I wonder if you would mind having a look at the body of this poor devil, while Polton is showing us his contraptions," said Captain Grumpass.

"I can't do much without a coroner's order," replied Thorndyke; "but if it will give you any satisfaction, Jervis and I will make a preliminary inspection with pleasure."

"I should be glad if you would," said the captain. "We should like to know that the poor beggar met his end fairly."

The body was accordingly moved to a shed, and, as Polton was led away, carrying the black bag that contained his precious model, we entered the shed and commenced our investigation.

The deceased was a small, elderly man, decently dressed in a somewhat nautical fashion. He appeared to have been dead only two or three days, and the body, unlike the majority of sea-borne corpses, was uninjured by fish or crabs. There were no fractured bones or other gross injuries, and no wounds, excepting a rugged tear in the scalp at the back of the head.

"The general appearance of the body," said Thorndyke, when he had noted these particulars, "suggests death by drowning, though, of course, we can't give a definite opinion until a post mortem has been made."

"You don't attach any significance to that scalp-wound, then?" I asked.

"As a cause of death? No. It was obviously inflicted during life, but it seems to have been an oblique blow that spent its force on the scalp, leaving the skull uninjured. But it is very significant in another way."

"In what way?" I asked.

Thorndyke took out his pocket-case and extracted a pair of forceps. "Consider the circumstances," said he. "This man put off from the shore to go to the lighthouse, but never arrived there. The question is, where did he arrive?" As he spoke he stooped over the corpse and turned back the hair round the wound with the beak of the forceps. "Look at those white objects among the hair, Jervis, and inside the wound. They tell us something, I think."

I examined, through my lens, the chalky fragments to which he pointed. "These seem to be bits of shells and the tubes of some marine worm," I said.

"Yes," he answered; "the broken shells are evidently those of the acorn barnacle, and the other fragments are mostly pieces of the tubes of the common serpula. The inference that these objects suggest is an important one. It is that this wound was produced by some body encrusted by acorn barnacles and serpula; that is to say, by a body that is periodically submerged. Now, what can that body be, and how can the deceased have knocked his head against it?"

"It might be the stem of a ship that ran him down," I suggested.

"I don't think you would find many serpulæ on the stem of a ship," said Thorndyke. "The combination rather suggests some stationary object between tidemarks, such as a beacon. But one doesn't see how a man could knock his head against a beacon, while, on the other hand, there are no other stationary objects out in the estuary to knock against except buoys, and a buoy presents a flat surface that could hardly have produced this wound. By the way, we may as well see what there is in his pockets, though it is not likely that robbery had anything to do with his death."

"No," I agreed, "and I see his watch is in his pocket; quite a good silver one," I added, taking it out. "It has stopped at 12.13."

"That may be important," said Thorndyke, making a note of the fact; "but we had better examine the pockets one at a time, and put the things back when we have looked at them."

The first pocket that we turned out was the left hip-pocket of the monkey jacket. This was apparently the one that the skipper had rifled, for we found in it two letters, both bearing the crest of the Trinity House. These, of course, we returned without reading, and then passed on to the right pocket. The contents of this were common-place enough, consisting of a briar pipe, a moleskin pouch and a number of loose matches.

"Rather a casual proceeding, this," I remarked, "to carry matches loose in the pocket, and a pipe with them, too."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke; "especially with these very inflammable matches. You notice that the sticks had been coated at the upper end with sulphur before the red phosphorous heads were put on. They would light with a touch, and would be very difficult to extinguish; which, no doubt, is the reason that this type of match is so popular among seamen, who have to light their pipes in all sorts of weather." As he spoke he picked up the pipe and looked at it reflectively, turning it over in his hand and peering into the bowl. Suddenly he glanced from the pipe to the dead man's face and then, with the forceps,

turned back the lips to look into the mouth.

"Let us see what tobacco he smokes," said he.

I opened the sodden pouch and displayed a mass of dark, fine-cut tobacco. "It looks like shag," I said.

"Yes, it is shag," he replied; "and now we will see what is in the pipe. It has been only half-smoked out." He dug out the "dottle" with his pocket-knife onto a sheet of paper, and we both inspected it. Clearly it was not shag, for it consisted of coarsely-cut shreds and was nearly black.

"Shavings from a cake of 'hard,'" was my verdict, and Thorndyke agreed as he shot the fragments back into the pipe.

The other pockets yielded nothing of interest, except a pocket-knife, which Thorndyke opened and examined closely. There was not much money, though as much as one would expect, and enough to exclude the idea of robbery.

"Is there a sheath-knife on that strap?" Thorndyke asked, pointing to a narrow leather belt. I turned back the jacket and looked.

"There is a sheath," I said, "but no knife. It must have dropped out."

"That is rather odd," said Thorndyke. "A sailor's sheath-knife takes a deal of shaking out as a rule. It is intended to be used in working on the rigging when the man is aloft, so that he can get it out with one hand while he is holding on with the other. It has to be and usually is very secure, for the sheath holds half the handle as well as the blade. What makes one notice the matter in this case is that the man, as you see, carried a pocket-knife; and, as this would serve all the ordinary purposes of a knife, it seems to suggest that the sheath-knife was carried for defensive purposes: as a weapon, in fact. However, we can't get much further in the case without a post mortem, and here comes the captain."

Captain Grumpass entered the shed and looked down commiseratingly at the dead seaman.

"Is there anything, doctor, that throws any light on the man's disappearance?" he asked.

"There are one or two curious features in the case," Thorndyke replied; "but, oddly enough, the only really important point arises out of that statement of the coastguard's, concerning which you were so scornful."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the captain.

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "the coast-guard states that when last seen deceased was filling his pipe from his tobacco-pouch. Now his pouch contains shag; but the pipe in his pocket contains hard cut."

"Is there no cake tobacco in any of the pockets?"

"Not a fragment. Of course, it is possible that he might have had a piece and used it up to fill the pipe; but there is no trace of any on the blade of his pocket-knife, and you know how this juicy black cake stains a knife-blade. His sheath-knife is missing, but he would hardly have used that to shred tobacco when he had a pocket-knife."

"No," assented the captain; "but are you sure he hadn't a second pipe?"

"There was only one pipe," replied Thorndyke, "and that was not his own."

"Not his own!" exclaimed the captain, halting by a huge, chequered buoy, to stare at my colleague. "How do you know it was not his own?"

"By the appearance of the vulcanite mouthpiece," said Thorndyke. "It showed deep tooth-marks; in fact, it was nearly bitten through. Now a man who bites through his pipe usually presents certain definite physical peculiarities, among which is, necessarily, a fairly good set of teeth. But the dead man had not a tooth in his head."

The captain cogitated a while, and then remarked: "I don't quite see the bearing of this."

"Don't you?" said Thorndyke. "It seems to me highly suggestive. Here is a man who, when last seen, was filling his pipe with a particular kind of tobacco. He is picked up dead, and his pipe contains a totally different kind of tobacco. Where did that tobacco come from? The obvious suggestion is that he had met someone."

"Yes, it does look like it," agreed the captain.

"Then," continued Thorndyke, "there is the fact that his sheath-knife is missing. That may mean nothing, but we have to bear it in mind. And there is another curious circumstance: there is a wound on the back of the head caused by a heavy bump against some body that was covered with acorn barnacles and marine worms. Now there are no piers or stages out in the open estuary. The question is, what could he have struck?"

"Oh, there is nothing in that," said the captain. "When a body has been washing about in a tide-way for close on three days—"

"But this is not a question of a body," Thorndyke interrupted. "The wound was made during life."

"The deuce it was!" exclaimed the captain. "Well, all I can suggest is that he must have fouled one of the beacons in the fog, stove in his boat and bumped his head, though, I must admit, that's rather a lame explanation." He stood for a minute gazing at his toes with a cogitative frown and then looked up at Thorndyke.

"I have an idea," he said. "From what you say, this matter wants looking into pretty carefully. Now, I am going down on the tender to-day to make inquiries on the spot. What do you say to coming with me as adviser—as a matter of business, of

course—you and Dr. Jervis? I shall start about eleven; we shall be at the lighthouse by three o'clock, and you can get back to town to-night, if you want to. What do you say?"

"There's nothing to hinder us," I put in eagerly, for even at Bugsby's Hole the river looked very alluring on this summer morning.

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "we will come. Jervis is evidently hankering for a sea-trip, and so am I, for that matter."

"It's a business engagement, you know," the captain stipulated.

"Nothing of the kind," said Thorndyke; "it's unmitigated pleasure; the pleasure of the voyage and your high well-born society."

"I didn't mean that," grumbled the captain, "but, if you are coming as guests, send your man for your nightgear and let us bring you back to-morrow evening."

"We won't disturb Polton," said my colleague; "we can take the train from Blackwall and fetch our things ourselves. Eleven o'clock, you said?"

"Thereabouts," said Captain Grumpass; "but don't put yourselves out."

The means of communication in London have reached an almost undesirable state of perfection. With the aid of the snorting train and the tinkling, two-wheeled "gondola," we crossed and re-crossed the town with such celerity that it was barely eleven when we re-appeared on Trinity Wharf with a joint Gladstone and Thorndyke's little green case.

The tender had hauled out of Bow Creek, and now lay alongside the wharf with a great striped can buoy dangling from her derrick, and Captain Grumpass stood at the gangway, his jolly, red face beaming with pleasure. The buoy was safely stowed forward, the derrick hauled up to the mast, the loose shrouds rehooked to the screw-lanyards, and the steamer, with four jubilant hoots, swung round and shoved her sharp nose against the incoming tide.

For near upon four hours the ever-widening stream of the "London River" unfolded its moving panorama. The smoke and smell of Woolwich Reach gave place to lucid air made soft by the summer haze; the grey huddle of factories fell away and green levels of cattle-spotted marsh stretched away to the high land bordering the river valley. Venerable training ships displayed their chequered hulls by the wooded shore, and whispered of the days of oak and hemp, when the tall three-decker, comely and majestic, with her soaring heights of canvas, like towers of ivory, had not yet given place to the mud-coloured saucepans that fly the white ensign now-a-days and devour the substance of the British taxpayer: when a sailor was a sailor and not a mere seafaring mechanic. Sturdily breasting the flood tide, the tender threaded her way through the endless procession of shipping; barges, billy-boys, schooners, brigs; lumpish Black-seamen, blue-funnelled China tramps, rickety Baltic barques with twirling windmills, gigantic liners, staggering under a mountain of top-hamper. Erith, Purfleet, Greenhithe, Grays greeted us and passed astern. The chimneys of Northfleet, the clustering roofs of Gravesend, the populous anchorage and the lurking batteries, were left behind, and, as we swung out of the Lower Hope, the wide expanse of sea reach spread out before us like a great sheet of blue-shot satin.

About half-past twelve the ebb overtook us and helped us on our way, as we could see by the speed with which the distant land slid past, and the freshening of the air as we passed through it.

But sky and sea were hushed in a summer calm. Balls of fleecy cloud hung aloft, motionless in the soft blue; the barges drifted on the tide with drooping sails, and a big, striped bell buoy—surmounted by a staff and cage and labelled, "Shivering Sand"—sat dreaming in the sun above its motionless reflection, to rouse for a moment as it met our wash, nod its cage drowsily, utter a solemn ding-dong, and fall asleep again.

It was shortly after passing the buoy that the gaunt shape of a screw-pile lighthouse began to loom up ahead, its dull-red paint turned to vermilion by the early afternoon sun. As we drew nearer, the name Girdler, painted in huge, white letters, became visible, and two men could be seen in the gallery around the lantern, inspecting us through a telescope.

"Shall you be long at the lighthouse, sir?" the master of the tender inquired of Captain Grumpass; "because we're going down, to the North-East Pan Sand to fix this new buoy and take up the old one."

"Then you'd better put us off at the lighthouse and come back for us when you've finished the job," was the reply. "I don't know how long we shall be."

The tender was brought to, a boat lowered, and a couple of hands pulled us across the intervening space of water.

"It will be a dirty climb for you in your shore-going clothes," the captain remarked—he was as spruce as a new pin himself, "but the stuff will all wipe off." We looked up at the skeleton shape. The falling tide had exposed some fifteen feet of the piles, and piles and ladder alike were swathed in sea-grass and encrusted with barnacles and worm-tubes. But we were not such town-sparrows as the captain seemed to think, for we both followed his lead without difficulty up the slippery ladder, Thorndyke clinging tenaciously to his little green case, from which he refused to be separated even for an instant.

"These gentlemen and I," said the captain, as we stepped on the stage at the head of the ladder, "have come to make inquiries about the missing man, James Brown. Which of you is Jeffreys?"

"I am, sir," replied a tall, powerful, square-jawed, beetle-browed man, whose left hand was tied up in a rough bandage.

"What have you been doing to your hand?" asked the captain.

"I cut it while I was peeling some potatoes," was the reply. "It isn't much of a cut, sir."

"Well, Jeffreys," said the captain, "Brown's body has been picked up and I want particulars for the inquest. You'll be summoned as a witness, I suppose, so come in and tell us all you know."

We entered the living-room and seated ourselves at the table. The captain opened a massive pocket-book, while Thorndyke, in his attentive, inquisitive fashion, looked about the odd, cabin-like room as if making a mental inventory of its contents.

Jeffreys' statement added nothing to what we already knew. He had seen a boat with one man in it making for the lighthouse. Then the fog had drifted up and he had lost sight of the boat. He started the fog-horn and kept a bright lookout, but the boat never arrived. And that was all he knew. He supposed that the man must have missed the lighthouse and been carried away on the ebb-tide, which was running strongly at the time.

"What time was it when you last saw the boat?" Thorndyke asked.

"About half-past eleven," replied Jeffreys.

"What was the man like?" asked the captain.

"I don't know, sir; he was rowing, and his back was towards me."

"Had he any kit-bag or chest with him?" asked Thorndyke.

"He'd got his chest with him," said Jeffreys.

"What sort of chest was it?" inquired Thorndyke.

"A small chest, painted green, with rope beackets."

"Was it corded?"

"It had a single cord round, to hold the lid down."

"Where was it stowed?"

"In the stern-sheets, sir."

"How far off was the boat when you last saw it?"

"About half-a-mile."

"Half-a-mile!" exclaimed the captain. "Why, how the deuce could you see that chest half-a-mile away?"

The man reddened and cast a look of angry suspicion at Thorndyke. "I was watching the boat through the glass, sir," he replied sulkily.

"I see," said Captain Grumpass. "Well, that will do, Jeffreys. We shall have to arrange for you to attend the inquest. Tell Smith I want to see him."

The examination concluded, Thorndyke and I moved our chairs to the window, which looked out over the sea to the east. But it was not the sea or the passing ships that engaged my colleague's attention. On the wall, beside the window, hung a rudely-carved pipe-rack containing five pipes. Thorndyke had noted it when we entered the room, and now, as we talked, I observed him regarding it from time to time with speculative interest.

"You men seem to be inveterate smokers," he remarked to the keeper, Smith, when the captain had concluded the arrangements for the "shift."

"Well, we do like our bit of 'baccy, sir, and that's a fact," answered Smith. "You see, sir," he continued, "it's a lonely life, and tobacco's cheap out here."

"How is that?" asked Thorndyke.

"Why, we get it given to us. The small craft from foreign, especially the Dutchmen, generally heave us a cake or two when they pass close. We're not ashore, you see, so there's no duty to pay."

"So you don't trouble the tobacconists much? Don't go in for cut tobacco?"

"No, sir; we'd have to buy it, and then the cut stuff wouldn't keep. No, it's hard-tack to eat out here and hard tobacco to smoke."

"I see you've got a pipe-rack, too, quite a stylish affair."

"Yes," said Smith, "I made it in my off-time. Keeps the place tidy and looks more ship-shape than letting the pipes lay about anywhere."

"Someone seems to have neglected his pipe," said Thorndyke, pointing to one at the end of the rack which was coated with green mildew.

"Yes; that's Parsons, my mate. He must have left it when he went off near a month ago. Pipes do go mouldy in the damp

air out here.”

“How soon does a pipe go mouldy if it is left untouched?” Thorndyke asked.

“It’s according to the weather,” said Smith. “When it’s warm and damp they’ll begin to go in about a week. Now here’s Barnett’s pipe that he’s left behind—the man that broke his leg, you know, sir—it’s just beginning to spot a little. He couldn’t have used it for a day or two before he went.”

“And are all these other pipes yours?”

“No, sir. This here one is mine. The end one is Jeffreys’, and I suppose the middle one is his too, but I don’t know it.”

“You’re a demon for pipes, doctor,” said the captain, strolling up at this moment; “you seem to make a special study of them.”

“The proper study of mankind is man,” replied Thorndyke, as the keeper retired, “and ‘man’ includes those objects on which his personality is impressed. Now a pipe is a very personal thing. Look at that row in the rack. Each has its own physiognomy which, in a measure, reflects the peculiarities of the owner. There is Jeffreys’ pipe at the end, for instance. The mouth-piece is nearly bitten through, the bowl scraped to a shell and scored inside and the brim battered and chipped. The whole thing speaks of rude strength and rough handling. He chews the stem as he smokes, he scrapes the bowl violently, and he bangs the ashes out with unnecessary force. And the man fits the pipe exactly: powerful, square-jawed and, I should say, violent on occasion.”

“Yes, he looks a tough customer, does Jeffreys,” agreed the captain.

“Then,” continued Thorndyke, “there is Smith’s pipe, next to it; ‘coked’ up until the cavity is nearly filled and burnt all round the edge; a talker’s pipe, constantly going out and being relit. But the one that interests me most is the middle one.”

“Didn’t Smith say that was Jeffreys’ too?” I said.

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke, “but he must be mistaken. It is the very opposite of Jeffreys’ pipe in every respect. To begin with, although it is an old pipe, there is not a sign of any tooth-mark on the mouth-piece. It is the only one in the rack that is quite unmarked. Then the brim is quite uninjured: it has been handled gently, and the silver band is jet-black, whereas the band on Jeffreys’ pipe is quite bright.”

“I hadn’t noticed that it had a band,” said the captain. “What has made it so black?”

Thorndyke lifted the pipe out of the rack and looked at it closely. “Silver sulphide,” said he, “the sulphur no doubt derived from something carried in the pocket.”

“I see,” said Captain Grumpass, smothering a yawn and gazing out of the window at the distant tender. “Incidentally it’s full of tobacco. What moral do you draw from that?”

Thorndyke turned the pipe over and looked closely at the mouth-piece. “The moral is,” he replied, “that you should see that your pipe is clear before you fill it.” He pointed to the mouth-piece, the bore of which was completely stopped up with fine fluff.

“An excellent moral too,” said the captain, rising with another yawn. “If you’ll excuse me a minute I’ll just go and see what the tender is up to. She seems to be crossing to the East Girdler.” He reached the telescope down from its brackets and went out onto the gallery.

As the captain retreated, Thorndyke opened his pocket-knife, and, sticking the blade into the bowl of the pipe, turned the tobacco out into his hand.

“Shag, by Jove!” I exclaimed.

“Yes,” he answered, poking it back into the bowl. “Didn’t you expect it to be shag?”

“I don’t know that I expected anything,” I admitted. “The silver band was occupying my attention.”

“Yes, that is an interesting point,” said Thorndyke, “but let us see what the obstruction consists of.” He opened the green case, and, taking out a dissecting needle, neatly extracted a little ball of fluff from the bore of the pipe. Laying this on a glass slide, he teased it out in a drop of glycerine and put on a cover-glass while I set up the microscope.

“Better put the pipe back in the rack,” he said, as he laid the slide on the stage of the instrument. I did so and then turned, with no little excitement, to watch him as he examined the specimen. After a brief inspection he rose and waved his hand towards the microscope.

“Take a look at it, Jervis,” he said.

I applied my eye to the instrument, and, moving the slide about, identified the constituents of the little mass of fluff. The ubiquitous cotton fibre was, of course, in evidence, and a few fibres of wool, but the most remarkable objects were two or three hairs—very minute hairs of a definite zigzag shape and having a flat expansion near the free end like the blade of a paddle.

“These are the hairs of some small animal,” I said; “not a mouse or rat or any rodent, I should say. Some small insectivorous animal, I fancy. Yes! Of course! They are the hairs of a mole.” I stood up, and, as the importance of the discovery flashed on me, I looked at my colleague in silence.



"Yes," he said, "they are unmistakable; and they furnish the keystone of the argument."

"You think that this is really the dead man's pipe, then?" I said.

"According to the law of multiple evidence," he replied, "it is practically a certainty. Consider the facts in sequence. Since there is no sign of mildew on it, this pipe can have been here only a short time, and must belong either to Barnett, Smith, Jeffreys or Brown. It is an old pipe, but it has no tooth-marks on it. Therefore it has been used by a man who has no teeth. But Barnett, Smith and Jeffreys all have teeth and mark their pipes, whereas Brown has no teeth. The tobacco in it is shag. But these three men do not smoke shag, whereas Brown had shag in his pouch. The silver band is encrusted with sulphide; and Brown carried sulphur-tipped matches loose in his pocket with his pipe. We find hairs of a mole in the bore of the pipe; and Brown carried a moleskin pouch in the pocket in which he appears to have carried his pipe. Finally, Brown's pocket contained a pipe which was obviously not his and which closely resembled that of Jeffreys; it contained tobacco similar to that which Jeffreys smokes and different from that in Brown's pouch. It appears to me quite conclusive, especially when we add to this evidence the other items that are in our possession."

"What items are they?" I asked.

"First there is the fact that the dead man had knocked his head heavily against some periodically submerged body covered with acorn barnacles and serpulæ. Now the piles of this lighthouse answer to the description exactly, and there are no other bodies in the neighbourhood that do: for even the beacons are too large to have produced that kind of wound. Then the dead man's sheath-knife is missing, and Jeffreys has a knife-wound on his hand. You must admit that the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming."

At this moment the captain bustled into the room with the telescope in his hand. "The tender is coming up towing a strange boat," he said. "I expect it's the missing one, and, if it is, we may learn something. You'd better pack up your traps and get ready to go on board."

We packed the green case and went out into the gallery, where the two keepers were watching the approaching tender; Smith frankly curious and interested, Jeffreys restless, fidgety and noticeably pale. As the steamer came opposite the lighthouse, three men dropped into the boat and pulled across, and one of them—the mate of the tender—came climbing up the ladder.

"Is that the missing boat?" the captain sang out.

"Yes, sir," answered the officer, stepping onto the staging and wiping his hands on the reverse aspect of his trousers, "we saw her lying on the dry patch of the East Girdler. There's been some hanky-panky in this job, sir."

"Foul play, you think, hey?"

"Not a doubt of it, sir. The plug was out and lying loose in the bottom, and we found a sheath-knife sticking into the kelson forward among the coils of the painter. It was stuck in hard as if it had dropped from a height."

"That's odd," said the captain. "As to the plug, it might have got out by accident."

"But it hadn't sir," said the mate. "The ballast-bags had been shifted along to get the bottom boards up. Besides, sir, a seaman wouldn't let the boat fill; he'd have put the plug back and baled out."

"That's true," replied Captain Grumpass; "and certainly the presence of the knife looks fishy. But where the deuce could it have dropped from, out in the open sea? Knives don't drop from the clouds—fortunately. What do you say, doctor?"

"I should say that it is Brown's own knife, and that it probably fell from this staging."

Jeffreys turned swiftly, crimson with wrath. "What d'ye mean?" he demanded. "Haven't I said that the boat never came here?"

"You have," replied Thorndyke; "but if that is so, how do you explain the fact that your pipe was found in the dead man's pocket and that the dead man's pipe is at this moment in your pipe-rack?"

The crimson flush on Jeffreys' face faded as quickly as it had come. "I don't know what you're talking about," he faltered.

"I'll tell you," said Thorndyke. "I will relate what happened and you shall check my statements. Brown brought his boat alongside and came up into the living-room, bringing his chest with him. He filled his pipe and tried to light it, but it was stopped and wouldn't draw. Then you lent him a pipe of yours and filled it for him. Soon afterwards you came out on this staging and quarrelled. Brown defended himself with his knife, which dropped from his hand into the boat. You pushed him off the staging and he fell, knocking his head on one of the piles. Then you took the plug out of the boat and sent her adrift to sink, and you flung the chest into the sea. This happened about ten minutes past twelve. Am I right?"

Jeffreys stood staring at Thorndyke, the picture of amazement and consternation; but he uttered no word in reply. "Am I right?" Thorndyke repeated.

"Strike me blind!" muttered Jeffreys. "Was you here, then? You talk as if you had been. Anyhow," he continued, recovering somewhat, "you seem to know all about it. But you're wrong about one thing. There was no quarrel. This chap, Brown, didn't take to me and he didn't mean to stay out here. He was going to put off and go ashore again and I wouldn't let him. Then he hit out at me with his knife and I knocked it out of his hand and he staggered backwards and went overboard."

"And did you try to pick him up?" asked the captain.

"How could I," demanded Jeffreys, "with the tide racing down and me alone on the station? I'd never have got back."

"But what about the boat, Jeffreys? Why did you scuttle her?"

"The fact is," replied Jeffreys, "I got in a funk, and I thought the simplest plan was to send her to the cellar and know nothing about it. But I never shoved him over. It was an accident, sir; I swear it!"

"Well, that sounds a reasonable explanation," said the captain. "What do you say, doctor?"

"Perfectly reasonable," replied Thorndyke, "and, as to its truth, that is no affair of ours."

"No. But I shall have to take you off, Jeffreys, and hand you over to the police. You understand that?"

"Yes, sir, I understand," answered Jeffreys.

"That was a queer case, that affair on the Girdler," remarked Captain Grumpass, when he was spending an evening with us some six months later. "A pretty easy let off for Jeffreys, too—eighteen months, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was a very queer case indeed," said Thorndyke. "There was something behind that 'accident,' I should say. Those men had probably met before."

"So I thought," agreed the captain. "But the queerest part of it to me was the way you nosed it all out. I've had a deep respect for briar pipes since then. It was a remarkable case," he continued. "The way in which you made that pipe tell the story of the murder seems to me like sheer enchantment."

"Yes," said I, "it spoke like the magic pipe—only that wasn't a tobacco-pipe—in the German folk-story of the 'Singing Bone.' Do you remember it? A peasant found the bone of a murdered man and fashioned it into a pipe. But when he tried to play on it, it burst into a song of its own—

*"My brother slew me and buried my bones  
Beneath the sand and under the stones."*

"A pretty story," said Thorndyke, "and one with an excellent moral. The inanimate things around us have each of them a song to sing to us if we are but ready with attentive ears."

---

## IV. — A WASTREL'S ROMANCE

### PART I. — THE SPINSTERS' GUEST

THE lingering summer twilight was fast merging into night as a solitary cyclist, whose evening-dress suit was thinly disguised by an overcoat, rode slowly along a pleasant country road. From time to time he had been overtaken and passed by a carriage, a car or a closed cab from the adjacent town, and from the festive garb of the occupants he had made shrewd guesses at their destination. His own objective was a large house, standing in somewhat extensive grounds just off the road, and the peculiar circumstances that surrounded his visit to it caused him to ride more and more slowly as he approached his goal.

Willowdale—such was the name of the house—was, tonight, witnessing a temporary revival of its past glories. For many months it had been empty and a notice-board by the gate-keeper's lodge had silently announced its forlorn state; but to-night, its rooms, their bare walls clothed in flags and draperies, their floors waxed or carpeted, would once more echo the sound of music and cheerful voices and vibrate to the tread of many feet. For on this night the spinsters of Raynesford were giving a dance; and chief amongst the spinsters was Miss Halliwell, the owner of Willowdale.

It was a great occasion. The house was large and imposing; the spinsters were many and their purses were long. The guests were numerous and distinguished, and included no less a person than Mrs. Jehu B. Chater. This was the crowning triumph of the function, for the beautiful American widow was the lion (or should we say lioness?) of the season. Her wealth was, if not beyond the dreams of avarice, at least beyond the powers of common British arithmetic, and her diamonds were, at once, the glory and the terror of her hostesses.

All these attractions notwithstanding, the cyclist approached the vicinity of Willowdale with a slowness almost hinting at reluctance; and when, at length, a curve of the road brought the gates into view, he dismounted and halted irresolutely. He was about to do a rather risky thing, and, though by no means a man of weak nerve, he hesitated to make the plunge.

The fact is, he had not been invited.

Why, then, was he going? And how was he to gain admittance? To which questions the answer involves a painful explanation.

Augustus Bailey lived by his wits. That is the common phrase, and a stupid phrase it is. For do we not all live by our wits, if we have any? And does it need any specially brilliant wits to be a common rogue? However, such as his wits were, Augustus Bailey lived by them, and he had not hitherto made a fortune.

The present venture arose out of a conversation overheard at a restaurant table and an invitation-card carelessly laid

down and adroitly covered with the menu. Augustus had accepted the invitation that he had not received (on a sheet of Hotel Cecil notepaper that he had among his collection of stationery) in the name of Geoffrey Harrington-Baillie; and the question that exercised his mind at the moment was, would he or would he not be spotted? He had trusted to the number of guests and the probable inexperience of the hostesses. He knew that the cards need not be shown, though there was the awkward ceremony of announcement.

But perhaps it wouldn't get as far as that. Probably not, if his acceptance had been detected as emanating from an uninvited stranger.

He walked slowly towards the gates with growing discomfort. Added to his nervousness as to the present were certain twinges of reminiscence. He had once held a commission in a line regiment—not for long, indeed; his “wits” had been too much for his brother officers—but there had been a time when he would have come to such a gathering as this an invited guest. Now, a common thief, he was sneaking in under a false name, with a fair prospect of being ignominiously thrown out by the servants.

As he stood hesitating, the sound of hoofs on the road was followed by the aggressive bellow of a motor-horn. The modest twinkle of carriage lamps appeared round the curve and then the glare of acetylene headlights. A man came out of the lodge and drew open the gates; and Mr. Bailey, taking his courage in both hands, boldly trundled his machine up the drive.

Half-way up—it was quite a steep incline—the car whizzed by; a large Napier filled with a bevy of young men who economized space by sitting on the backs of the seats and on one another's knees. Bailey looked at them and decided that this was his chance, and, pushing forward, he saw his bicycle safely bestowed in the empty coach-house and then hurried on to the cloak-room. The young men had arrived there before him and, as he entered, were gaily peeling off their overcoats and flinging them down on a table. Bailey followed their example, and, in his eagerness to enter the reception-room with the crowd, let his attention wander from the business of the moment, and, as he pocketed the ticket and hurried away, he failed to notice that the bewildered attendant had put his hat with another man's coat and affixed his duplicate to them both.

“Major Podbury, Captain Barker-Jones, Captain Sparker, Mr. Watson, Mr. Goldsmith, Mr. Smart, Mr. Harrington-Baillie!”

As Augustus swaggered up the room, hugging the party of officers and quaking inwardly, he was conscious that his hostesses glanced from one man to another with more than common interest.

But at that moment the footman's voice rang out, sonorous and clear—

“Mrs. Chater, Colonel Grumpier!” and, as all eyes were turned towards the new arrivals, Augustus made his bow and passed into the throng. His little game of bluff had “come off,” after all.

He withdrew modestly into the more crowded portion of the room, and there took up a position where he would be shielded from the gaze of his hostesses. Presently, he reflected, they would forget him, if they had really thought about him at all, and then he would see what could be done in the way of business. He was still rather shaky, and wondered how soon it would be decent to steady his nerves with a “refresher.” Meanwhile he kept a sharp look-out over the shoulders of neighbouring guests, until a movement in the crowd of guests disclosed Mrs. Chater shaking hands with the presiding spinster. Then Augustus got a most uncommon surprise.

He knew her at the first glance. He had a good memory for faces, and Mrs. Chater's face was one to remember. Well did he recall the frank and lovely American girl with whom he had danced at the regimental ball years ago. That was in the old days when he was a subaltern, and before that little affair of the pricked court-cards that brought his military career to an end. They had taken a mutual liking, he remembered, that sweet-faced Yankee maid and he had danced many dances and had sat out others, to talk mystical nonsense which, in their innocence, they had believed to be philosophy. He had never seen her since. She had come into his life and gone out of it again, and he had forgotten her name, if he had ever known it. But here she was, middle-aged now, it was true, but still beautiful and a great personage withal. And, ye gods! what diamonds! And here was he, too, a common rogue, lurking in the crowd that he might, perchance, snatch a pendant or “pinch” a loose brooch.

Perhaps she might recognize him. Why not? He had recognized her. But that would never do. And thus reflecting, Mr. Bailey slipped out to stroll on the lawn and smoke a cigarette. Another man, somewhat older than himself, was pacing to and fro thoughtfully, glancing from time to time through the open windows into the brilliantly-lighted rooms. When they had passed once or twice, the stranger halted and addressed him.

“This is the best place on a night like this,” he remarked; “it's getting hot inside already. But perhaps you're keen on dancing.”

“Not so keen as I used to be,” replied Bailey; and then, observing the hungry look that the other man was bestowing on his cigarette, he produced his case and offered it.

“Thanks awfully!” exclaimed the stranger, pouncing with avidity on the open case. “Good Samaritan, by Jove. Left my case in my overcoat. Hadn't the cheek to ask, though I was starving for a smoke.” He inhaled luxuriously, and, blowing out a cloud of smoke, resumed: “These chits seem to be running the show pretty well, h'm? Wouldn't take it for an empty house to look at it, would you?”

"I have hardly seen it," said Bailey; "only just come, you know."

"We'll have a look round, if you like," said the genial stranger, "when we've finished our smoke, that is. Have a drink too; may cool us a bit. Know many people here?"

"Not a soul," replied Bailey. "My, hostess doesn't seem to have turned up."

"Well, that's easily remedied," said the stranger. "My daughter's one of the spinsters—Granby, my name; when we've had a drink, I'll make her find you a partner—that is, if you care for the light fantastic."

"I should like a dance or two," said Bailey, "though I'm getting a bit past it now, I suppose. Still, it doesn't do to chuck up the sponge prematurely."

"Certainly not," Granby agreed jovially; "a man's as young as he feels. Well, come and have a drink and then we'll hunt up my little girl." The two men flung away the stumps of their cigarettes and headed for the refreshments.

The spinsters' champagne was light, but it was well enough if taken in sufficient quantity; a point to which Augustus? and Granby too—paid judicious attention; and when he had supplemented the wine with a few sandwiches, Mr. Bailey felt in notably better spirits. For, to tell the truth, his diet, of late, had been somewhat meagre. Miss Granby, when found, proved to be a blonde and guileless "flapper" of some seventeen summers, childishly eager to play her part of hostess with due dignity; and presently Bailey found himself gyrating through the eddying crowd in company with a comely matron of thirty or thereabouts.

The sensations that this novel experience aroused rather took him by surprise. For years past he had been living a precarious life of mean and sordid shifts that oscillated between mere shabby trickery and downright crime; now conducting a paltry swindle just inside the pale of the law, and now, when hard pressed, descending to actual theft; consorting with shady characters, swindlers and knaves and scurvy rogues like himself; gambling, borrowing, cadging and, if need be, stealing, and always slinking abroad with an apprehensive eye upon "the man in blue."

And now, amidst the half-forgotten surroundings, once so familiar; the gaily-decorated rooms, the rhythmic music, the twinkle of jewels, the murmur of gliding feet and the rustle of costly gowns, the moving vision of honest gentlemen and fair ladies; the shameful years seemed to drop away and leave him to take up the thread of his life where it had snapped so disastrously. After all, these were his own people. The seedy knaves in whose steps he had walked of late were but aliens met by the way.

He surrendered his partner, in due course, with regret—which was mutual—to an inarticulate subaltern, and was meditating another pilgrimage to the refreshment-room, when he felt a light touch upon his arm. He turned swiftly. A touch on the arm meant more to him than to some men. But it was no wooden-faced plain-clothes man that he confronted; it was only a lady. In short, it was Mrs. Chater, smiling nervously and a little abashed by her own boldness.

"I expect you've forgotten me," she began apologetically, but Augustus interrupted her with an eager disclaimer.

"Of course I haven't," he said; "though I have forgotten your name, but I remember that Portsmouth dance as well as if it were yesterday; at least one incident in it—the only one that was worth remembering. I've often hoped that I might meet you again, and now, at last, it has happened."

"It's nice of you to remember," she rejoined. "I've often and often thought of that evening and all the wonderful things that we talked about. You were a nice boy then; I wonder what you are like now. What a long time ago it is!"

"Yes," Augustus agreed gravely, "it is a long time. I know it myself; but when I look at you, it seems as if it could only have been last season."

"Oh, fie!" she exclaimed. "You are not simple as you used to be. You didn't flatter then; but perhaps there wasn't the need." She spoke with gentle reproach, but her pretty face flushed with pleasure nevertheless, and there was a certain wistfulness in the tone of her concluding sentence.

"I wasn't flattering," Augustus replied, quite sincerely; "I knew you directly you entered the room and marvelled that Time had been so gentle with you. He hasn't been as kind to me."

"No. You have gotten a few grey hairs, I see, but after all, what are grey hairs to a man? Just the badges of rank, like the crown on your collar or the lace on your cuffs, to mark the steps of your promotion—for I guess you'll be a colonel by now."

"No," Augustus answered quickly, with a faint flush, "I left the army some years ago."

"My! what a pity!" exclaimed Mrs. Chater. "You must tell me all about it—but not now. My partner will be looking for me. We will sit out a dance and have a real gossip. But I've forgotten your name—never could recall it, in fact, though that didn't prevent me from remembering you; but, as our dear W. S. remarks, 'What's in a name—'"

"Ah, indeed," said Mr. Harrington-Baillie; and apropos of that sentiment, he added: "Mine is Rowland—Captain Rowland. You may remember it now."

Mrs. Chater did not, however, and said so. "Will number six do?" she asked, opening her programme; and, when Augustus had assented, she entered his provisional name, remarking complacently: "We'll sit out and have a right-down good talk, and you shall tell me all about yourself and if you still think the same about free-will and personal responsibility. You had very lofty ideals, I remember, in those days, and I hope you have still. But one's ideals get rubbed down rather

faint in the friction of life. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I am afraid you're right," Augustus assented gloomily. "The wear and tear of life soon fetches the gilt off the gingerbread. Middle age is apt to find us a bit patchy, not to say naked."

"Oh, don't be pessimistic," said Mrs. Chater; "that is the attitude of the disappointed idealist, and I am sure you have no reason, really, to be disappointed in yourself. But I must run away now. Think over all the things you have to tell me, and don't forget that it is number six." With a bright smile and a friendly nod she sailed away, a vision of glittering splendour, compared with which Solomon in all his glory was a mere matter of commonplace bullion.

The interview, evidently friendly and familiar, between the unknown guest and the famous American widow had by no means passed unnoticed; and in other circumstances, Bailey might have endeavoured to profit by the reflected glory that enveloped him. But he was not in search of notoriety; and the same evasive instinct that had led him to sink Mr. Harrington-Baillie in Captain Rowland, now advised him to withdraw his dual personality from the vulgar gaze. He had come here on very definite business. For the hundredth time he was "stony-broke," and it was the hope of picking up some "unconsidered trifles" that had brought him. But, somehow, the atmosphere of the place had proved unfavourable. Either opportunities were lacking or he failed to seize them. In any case, the game pocket that formed an unconventional feature of his dress-coat was still empty, and it looked as if a pleasant evening and a good supper were all that he was likely to get. Nevertheless, be his conduct never so blameless, the fact remained that he was an uninvited guest, liable at any moment to be ejected as an impostor, and his recognition by the widow had not rendered this possibility any the more remote.

He strayed out onto the lawn, whence the grounds fell away on all sides. But there were other guests there, cooling themselves after the last dance, and the light from the rooms streamed through the windows, illuminating their figures, and among them, that of the too-companionable Granby. Augustus quickly drew away from the lighted area, and, chancing upon a narrow path, strolled away along it in the direction of a copse or shrubbery that he saw ahead. Presently he came to an ivy-covered arch, lighted by one or two fairy lamps, and, passing through this, he entered a winding path, bordered by trees and shrubs and but faintly lighted by an occasional coloured lamp suspended from a branch.

Already he was quite clear of the crowd; indeed, the deserted condition of the pleasant retreat rather surprised him, until he reflected that to couples desiring seclusion there were whole ranges of untenanted rooms and galleries available in the empty house.

The path sloped gently downwards for some distance; then came a long flight of rustic steps and, at the bottom, a seat between two trees. In front of the seat the path extended in a straight line, forming a narrow terrace; on the right the ground sloped up steeply towards the lawn; on the left it fell away still more steeply towards the encompassing wall of the grounds; and on both sides it was covered with trees and shrubs.

Bailey sat down on the seat to think over the account of himself that he should present to Mrs. Chater. It was a comfortable seat, built into the trunk of an elm, which formed one end and part of the back. He leaned against the tree, and, taking out his silver case, selected a cigarette. But it remained unlighted between his fingers as he sat and meditated upon his unsatisfactory past and the melancholy tale of what might have been. Fresh from the atmosphere of refined opulence that pervaded the dancing-rooms, the throng of well-groomed men and dainty women, his mind travelled back to his sordid little flat in Bermondsey, encompassed by poverty and squalor, jostled by lofty factories, grimy with the smoke of the river and the reek from the great chimneys. It was a hideous contrast. Verily the way of the transgressor was not strewn with flowers.

At that point in his meditations he caught the sound of voices and footsteps on the path above and rose to walk on along the path. He did not wish to be seen wandering alone in the shrubbery. But now a woman's laugh sounded from somewhere down the path. There were people approaching that way too. He put the cigarette back in the case and stepped round behind the seat, intending to retreat in that direction, but here the path ended, and beyond was nothing but a rugged slope down to the wall thickly covered with bushes. And while he was hesitating, the sound of feet descending the steps and the rustle of a woman's dress left him to choose between staying where he was or coming out to confront the new-comers. He chose the former, drawing up close behind the tree to wait until they should have passed on.

But they were not going to pass on. One of them—a woman—sat down on the seat, and then a familiar voice smote on his ear.

"I guess I'll rest here quietly for a while; this tooth of mine is aching terribly; and, see here, I want you to go and fetch me something. Take this ticket to the cloak-room and tell the woman to give you my little velvet bag. You'll find in it a bottle of chloroform and a packet of cotton-wool."

"But I can't leave you here all alone, Mrs. Chater," her partner expostulated.

"I'm not hankering for society just now," said Mrs. Chater. "I want that chloroform. Just you hustle off and fetch it, like a good boy. Here's the ticket."

The young officer's footsteps retreated rapidly, and the voices of the couple advancing along the path grew louder. Bailey, cursing the chance that had placed him in his ridiculous and uncomfortable position, heard them approach and pass on up the steps; and then all was silent, save for an occasional moan from Mrs. Chater and the measured creaking of the seat as she rocked uneasily to and fro. But the young man was uncommonly prompt in the discharge of his mission, and in a very few minutes Bailey heard him approaching at a run along the path above and then bounding down the steps.

"Now I call that real good of you," said the widow gratefully. "You must have run like the wind. Cut the string of the packet and then leave me to wrestle with this tooth."

"But I can't leave you here all—"

"Yes, you can," interrupted Mrs. Chater. "There won't be any one about—the next dance is a waltz. Besides, you must go and find your partners."

"Well, if you'd really rather be alone," the subaltern began; but Mrs. Chater interrupted him.

"Of course I would, when I'm fixing up my teeth. Now go along, and a thousand thanks for your kindness."

With mumbled protestations the young officer slowly retired, and Bailey heard his reluctant feet ascending the steps. Then a deep silence fell on the place in which the rustle of paper and the squeak of a withdrawn cork seemed loud and palpable. Bailey had turned with his face towards the tree, against which he leaned with his lips parted scarcely daring to breathe. He cursed himself again and again for having thus entrapped himself for no tangible reason, and longed to get away. But there was no escape now without betraying himself. He must wait for the woman to go.

Suddenly, beyond the edge of the tree, a hand appeared holding an open packet of cotton-wool. It laid the wool down on the seat, and, pinching off a fragment, rolled it into a tiny ball. The fingers of the hand were encircled by rings, its wrist enclosed by a broad bracelet; and from rings and bracelet the light of the solitary fairy-lamp, that hung from a branch of the tree, was reflected in prismatic sparks. The hand was withdrawn and Bailey stared dreamily at the square pad of cotton-wool. Then the hand came again into view. This time it held a small phial which it laid softly on the seat, setting the cork beside it. And again the light flashed in many-coloured scintillations from the encrusting gems.

Bailey's knees began to tremble, and a chilly moisture broke out upon his forehead.

The hand drew back, but, as it vanished, Bailey moved his head silently until his face emerged from behind the tree. The woman was leaning back, her head resting against the trunk only a few inches away from his face. The great stones of the tiara flashed in his very eyes. Over her shoulder, he could even see the gorgeous pendant, rising and falling on her bosom with ever-changing fires; and both her raised hands were a mass of glitter and sparkle, only the deeper and richer for the subdued light.

His heart throbbed with palpable blows that drummed aloud in his ears. The sweat trickled clammy down his face, and he clenched his teeth to keep them from chattering. An agony of horror—of deadly fear—was creeping over him? a terror of the dreadful impulse that was stealing away his reason and his will.

The silence was profound. The woman's soft breathing, the creak of her bodice, were plainly—grossly—audible; and he checked his own breath until he seemed on the verge of suffocation.

Of a sudden through the night air was borne faintly the dreamy music of a waltz. The dance had begun. The distant sound but deepened the sense of solitude in this deserted spot.

Bailey listened intently. He yearned to escape from the invisible force that seemed to be clutching at his wrists, and dragging him forward inexorably to his doom.

He gazed down at the woman with a horrid fascination. He struggled to draw back out of sight—and struggled in vain.

Then, at last, with a horrible, stealthy deliberation, a clammy, shaking hand crept forward towards the seat. Without a sound it grasped the wool, and noiselessly, slowly drew back. Again it stole forth. The fingers twined snakily around the phial, lifted it from the seat and carried it back into the shadow.

After a few seconds it reappeared and softly replaced the bottle—now half empty. There was a brief pause. The measured cadences of the waltz stole softly through the quiet night and seemed to keep time with the woman's breathing. Other sound there was none. The place was wrapped in the silence of the grave.

Suddenly, from the hiding-place, Bailey leaned forward over the back of the seat. The pad of cotton-wool was in his hand.

The woman was now leaning back as if dozing, and her hands rested in her lap. There was a swift movement. The pad was pressed against her face and her head dragged back against the chest of the invisible assailant. A smothered gasp burst from her hidden lips as her hands flew up to clutch at the murderous arm; and then came a frightful struggle, made even more frightful by the gay and costly trappings of the writhing victim. And still there was hardly a sound; only muffled gasps, the rustle of silk, the creaking of the seat, the clink of the falling bottle and, afar off, with dreadful irony, the dreamy murmur of the waltz.

The struggle was but brief. Quite suddenly the jewelled hands dropped, the head lay resistless on the crumpled shirt-front, and the body, now limp and inert, began to slip forward off the seat. Bailey, still grasping the passive head, climbed over the back of the seat and, as the woman slid gently to the ground, he drew away the pad and stooped over her. The struggle was over now; the mad fury of the moment was passing swiftly into the chill of mortal fear.

He stared with incredulous horror into the swollen face, but now so comely, the sightless eyes that but a little while since had smiled into his with such kindly recognition.

He had done this! He, the sneaking wastrel, discarded of all the world, to whom this sweet woman had held out the hand

of friendship. She had cherished his memory, when to all others he was sunk deep under the waters of oblivion. And he had killed her—for to his ear no breath of life seemed to issue from those purple lips.

A sudden hideous compunction for this irrevocable thing that he had done surged through him, and he stood up clutching at his damp hair with a hoarse cry that was like the cry of the damned.

The jewels passed straightaway out of his consciousness. Everything was forgotten now but the horror of this unspeakable thing that he had done. Remorse incurable and haunting fear were all that were left to him.

The sound of voices far away along the path aroused him, and the vague horror that possessed him materialized into abject bodily fear. He lifted the limp body to the edge of the path and let it slip down the steep declivity among the bushes. A soft, shuddering sigh came from the parted lips as the body turned over, and he paused a moment to listen. But there was no other sound of life. Doubtless that sigh was only the result of the passive movement.

Again he stood for an instant as one in a dream, gazing at the huddled shape half hidden by the bushes, before he climbed back to the path; and even then he looked back once more, but now she was hidden from sight. And, as the voices drew nearer, he turned, and ran up the rustic steps.

As he came out on the edge of the lawn the music ceased, and, almost immediately, a stream of people issued from the house. Shaken as he was, Bailey yet had wits enough left to know that his clothes and hair were disordered and that his appearance must be wild. Accordingly he avoided the dancers, and, keeping to the margin of the lawn, made his way to the cloak-room by the least frequented route. If he had dared, he would have called in at the refreshment-room, for he was deadly faint and his limbs shook as he walked. But a haunting fear pursued him and, indeed, grew from moment to moment. He found himself already listening for the rumour of the inevitable discovery.

He staggered into the cloak-room, and, flinging his ticket down on the table, dragged out his watch. The attendant looked at him curiously and, pausing with the ticket in his hand, asked sympathetically: "Not feeling very well, sir?"

"No," said Bailey. "So beastly hot in there."

"You ought to have a glass of champagne, sir, before you start," said the man.

"No time," replied Bailey, holding out a shaky hand for his coat. "Shall lose my train if I'm not sharp."

At this hint the attendant reached down the coat and hat, holding up the former for its owner to slip his arms into the sleeves. But Bailey snatched it from him, and, flinging it over his arm, put on his hat and hurried away to the coachhouse. Here, again, the attendant stared at him in astonishment, which was not lessened when Bailey, declining his offer to help him on with his coat, bundled the latter under his arm, clicked the lever of the "variable" on to the ninety gear, sprang onto the machine and whirled away down the steep drive, a grotesque vision of flying coat-tails.

"You haven't lit your lamp, sir," roared the attendant; but Bailey's ears were deaf to all save the clamour of the expected pursuit.

Fortunately the drive entered the road obliquely, or Bailey must have been flung into the opposite hedge. As it was, the machine, rushing down the slope, flew out into the road with terrific velocity; nor did its speed diminish then, for its rider, impelled by mortal terror, trod the pedals with the fury of a madman. And still, as the machine whizzed along the dark and silent road, his ears were strained to catch the clatter of hoofs or the throb of a motor from behind.

He knew the country well, in fact, as a precaution, he had cycled over the district only the day before; and he was ready, at any suspicious sound, to slip down any of the lanes or byways, secure of finding his way. But still he sped on, and still no sound from the rear came to tell him of the dread discovery.

When he had ridden about three miles, he came to the foot of a steep hill. Here he had to dismount and push his machine up the incline, which he did at such speed that he arrived at the top quite breathless. Before mounting again he determined to put on his coat, for his appearance was calculated to attract attention, if nothing more. It was only half-past eleven, and presently he would pass through the streets of a small town. Also he would light his lamp. It would be fatal to be stopped by a patrol or rural constable.

Having lit his lamp and hastily put on his coat he once more listened intently, looking back over the country that was darkly visible from the summit of the hill. No moving lights were to be seen, no ringing hoofs or throbbing engines to be heard, and, turning to mount, he instinctively felt in his overcoat pocket for his gloves.

A pair of gloves came out in his hand, but he was instantly conscious that they were not his. A silk muffler was there also; a white one. But his muffler was black.

With a sudden shock of terror he thrust his hand into the ticket-pocket, where he had put his latch-key. There was no key there; only an amber cigar-holder, which he had never seen before. He stood for a few moments in utter consternation. He had taken the wrong coat. Then he had left his own coat behind. A cold sweat of fear broke out afresh on his face as he realized this. His Yale latch-key was in its pocket; not that that mattered very much. He had a duplicate at home, and, as to getting in, well, he knew his own outside door and his tool-bag contained one or two trifles not usually found in cyclists' tool-bags. The question was whether that coat contained anything that could disclose his identity. And then suddenly he remembered, with a gasp of relief, that he had carefully turned the pockets out before starting.

No; once let him attain the sanctuary of his grimy little flat, wedged in as it was between the great factories by the river-

side, and he would be safe: safe from everything but the horror of himself, and the haunting vision of a jewelled figure huddled up in a silken heap beneath the bushes.

With a last look round he mounted his machine, and, driving it over the brow of the hill, swept away into the darkness.

---

PART II. — MUNERA PULVERIS

(RELATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.)

IT is one of the drawbacks of medicine as a profession that one is never rid of one's responsibilities. The merchant, the lawyer, the civil servant, each at the appointed time locks up his desk, puts on his hat and goes forth a free man with an interval of uninterrupted leisure before him. Not so the doctor. Whether at work or at play, awake or asleep, he is the servant of humanity, at the instant disposal of friend or stranger alike whose need may make the necessary claim.

When I agreed to accompany my wife to the spinsters' dance at Raynesford, I imagined that, for that evening, at least, I was definitely off duty; and in that belief I continued until the conclusion of the eighth dance. To be quite truthful, I was not sorry when the delusion was shattered. My last partner was a young lady of a slanginess of speech that verged on the inarticulate. Now it is not easy to exchange ideas in "pidgin" English; and the conversation of a person to whom all things are either "ripping" or "rotten" is apt to lack subtlety. In fact, I was frankly bored; and, reflecting on the utility of the humble sandwich as an aid to conversation, I was about to entice my partner to the refreshment-room when I felt someone pluck at my sleeve. I turned quickly and looked into the anxious and rather frightened face of my wife.

"Miss Halliwell is looking for you," she said. "A lady has been taken ill. Will you come and see what is the matter?" She took my arm and, when I had made my apologies to my partner, she hurried me on to the lawn.

"It's a mysterious affair," my wife continued. "The sick lady is a Mrs. Chater, a very wealthy American widow. Edith Halliwell and Major Podbury found her lying in the shrubbery all alone and unable to give any account of herself. Poor Edith is dreadfully upset. She doesn't know what to think."

"What do you mean?" I began; but at this moment Miss Halliwell, who was waiting by an ivy-covered rustic arch, espied us and ran forward.

"Oh, do hurry, please, Dr. Jervis," she exclaimed; "such a shocking thing has happened. Has Juliet told you?" Without waiting for an answer, she darted through the arch and preceded us along a narrow path at the curious, flat-footed, shambling trot common to most adult women. Presently we descended a flight of rustic steps which brought us to a seat, from whence extended a straight path cut like a miniature terrace on a steep slope, with a high bank rising to the right and declivity falling away to the left. Down in the hollow, his head and shoulders appearing above the bushes, was a man holding in his hand a fairy-lamp that he had apparently taken down from a tree. I climbed down to him, and, as I came round the bushes, I perceived a richly-dressed woman lying huddled on the ground. She was not completely insensible, for she moved slightly at my approach, muttering a few words in thick, indistinct accents. I took the lamp from the man, whom I assumed to be Major Podbury, and, as he delivered it to me with a significant glance and a faint lift of the eyebrows, I understood Miss Halliwell's agitation. Indeed—for one horrible moment I thought that she was right—that the prostrate woman was intoxicated. But when I approached nearer, the flickering light of the lamp made visible a square reddened patch on her face, like the impression of a mustard plaster, covering the nose and mouth; and then I scented mischief of a more serious kind.

"We had better carry her up to the seat," I said, handing the lamp to Miss Halliwell. "Then we can consider moving her to the house." The major and I lifted the helpless woman and, having climbed cautiously up to the path, laid her on the seat.

"What is it, Dr. Jervis?" Miss Halliwell whispered.

"I can't say at the moment," I replied; "but it's not what you feared."

"Thank God for that!" was her fervent rejoinder. "It would have been a shocking scandal."

I took the dim lamp and once more bent over the half-conscious woman.

Her appearance puzzled me not a little. She looked like a person recovering from an anaesthetic, but the square red patch on her face, recalling, as it did, the Burke murders, rather suggested suffocation. As I was thus reflecting, the light of the lamp fell on a white object lying on the ground behind the seat, and holding the lamp forward, I saw that it was a square pad of cotton-wool. The coincidence of its shape and size with that of the red patch on the woman's face instantly struck me, and I stooped down to pick it up; and then I saw, lying under the seat, a small bottle. This also I picked up and held in the lamplight. It was a one-ounce phial, quite empty, and was labelled "Methylated Chloroform." Here seemed to be a complete explanation of the thick utterance and drunken aspect; but it was an explanation that required, in its turn, to be explained. Obviously no robbery had been committed, for the woman literally glittered with diamonds. Equally obviously she had not administered the chloroform to herself.

There was nothing for it but to carry her indoors and await her further recovery, so, with the major's help, we conveyed her through the shrubbery and kitchen garden to a side door, and deposited her on a sofa in a half-furnished room.

Here, under the influence of water dabbed on her face and the plentiful use of smelling salts, she quickly revived, and was soon able to give an intelligible account of herself.



The chloroform and cotton-wool were her own. She had used them for an aching tooth; and she was sitting alone on the seat with the bottle and the wool beside her when the incomprehensible thing had happened. Without a moment's warning a hand had come from behind her and pressed the pad of wool over her nose and mouth. The wool was saturated with chloroform, and she had lost consciousness almost immediately.

"You didn't see the person, then?" I asked.

"No, but I know he was in evening dress, because I felt my head against his shirt-front."

"Then," said I, "he is either here still or he has been to the cloak-room. He couldn't have left the place without an overcoat."

"No, by Jove!" exclaimed the major; "that's true. I'll go and make inquiries." He strode away all agog, and I, having satisfied myself that Mrs. Chater could be left safely, followed him almost immediately.

I made my way straight to the cloak-room, and here I found the major and one or two of his brother officers putting on their coats in a flutter of gleeful excitement.

"He's gone," said Podbury, struggling frantically into his overcoat; "went off nearly an hour ago on a bicycle. Seemed in a deuce of a stew, the attendant says, and no wonder. We're goin' after him in our car. Care to join the hunt?"

"No, thanks. I must stay with the patient. But how do you know you're after the right man?"

"Isn't any other. Only one Johnnie's left. Besides—here, confound it! you've given me the wrong coat!" He tore off the garment and handed it back to the attendant, who regarded it with an expression of dismay.

"Are you sure, sir?" he asked.

"Perfectly," said the major. "Come, hurry up, my man."

"I'm afraid, sir," said the attendant, "that the gentleman who has gone has taken your coat. They were on the same peg, I know. I am very sorry, sir."

The major was speechless with wrath. What the devil was the good of being sorry; and how the deuce was he to get his coat back—

"But," I interposed, "if the stranger has got your coat, then this coat must be his."

"I know," said Podbury; "but I don't want his beastly coat."

"No," I replied, "but it may be useful for identification."

This appeared to afford the bereaved officer little consolation, but as the car was now ready, he bustled away, and I, having directed the man to put the coat away in a safe place, went back to my patient.

Mrs. Chater was by now fairly recovered, and had developed a highly vindictive interest in her late assailant. She even went so far as to regret that he had not taken at least some of her diamonds, so that robbery might have been added to the charge of attempted murder, and expressed the earnest hope that the officers would not be foolishly gentle in their treatment of him when they caught him.

"By the way, Dr. Jervis," said Miss Halliwell, "I think I ought to mention a rather curious thing that happened in connection with this dance. We received an acceptance from a Mr. Harrington-Baillie, who wrote from the Hotel Cecil. Now I am certain that no such name was proposed by any of the spinsters."

"But didn't you ask them?" I inquired.

"Well, the fact is," she replied, "that one of them, Miss Waters, had to go abroad suddenly, and we had not got her address; and as it was possible that she might have invited him, I did not like to move in the matter. I am very sorry I didn't now. We may have let in a regular criminal? though why he should have wanted to murder Mrs. Chater I cannot imagine."

It was certainly a mysterious affair, and the mystery was in no wise dispelled by the return of the search party an hour later. It seemed that the bicycle had been tracked for a couple of miles towards London, but then, at the cross-roads, the tracks had become hopelessly mixed with the impressions of other machines and the officers, after cruising about vaguely for a while, had given up the hunt and returned.

"You see, Mrs. Chater," Major Podbury explained apologetically, "the fellow must have had a good hour's start, and that would have brought him pretty close to London."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Mrs. Chater, regarding the major with hardly-concealed contempt, "that that villain has got off scot-free?"

"Looks rather like it," replied Podbury, "but if I were you I should get the man's description from the attendants who saw him and go up to Scotland Yard to-morrow. They may know the Johnny there, and they may even recognize the coat if you take it with you."

"That doesn't seem very likely," said Mrs. Chater, and it certainly did not; but since no better plan could be suggested the lady decided to adopt it; and I supposed that I had heard the last of the matter.

In this, however, I was mistaken. On the following day, just before noon, as I was drowsily considering the points in a brief dealing with a question of survivorship, while Thorndyke drafted his weekly lecture, a smart rat-tat at the door of our chambers announced a visitor. I rose wearily—I had had only four hours' sleep—and opened the door, whereupon there sailed into the room no less a person than Mrs. Chater, followed by Superintendent Miller, with a grin on his face and a brown-paper parcel under his arm.

The lady was not in the best of tempers, though wonderfully lively and alert considering the severe shock that she had suffered so recently, and her disapproval of Miller was frankly obvious.

"Dr. Jervis has probably told you about the attempt to murder me last night," she said, when I had introduced her to my colleague. "Well, now, will you believe it? I have been to the police, I have given them a description of the murderous villain, and I have even shown them the very coat that he wore, and they tell me that nothing can be done. That, in short, this scoundrel must be allowed to go his way free and unmolested."

"You will observe, doctor," said Miller, "that this lady has given us a description that would apply to fifty per cent, of the middle-class men of the United Kingdom, and has shown us a coat without a single identifying mark of any kind on it, and expects us to lay our hands on the owner without a solitary clue to guide us. Now we are not sorcerers at the Yard; we're only policemen. So I have taken the liberty of referring Mrs. Chater to you." He grinned maliciously and laid the parcel on the table.

"And what do you want me to do?" Thorndyke asked quietly.

"Why sir," said Miller, "there is a coat. In the pockets were a pair of gloves, a muffler, a box of matches, a tram-ticket and a Yale key. Mrs. Chater would like to know whose coat it is." He untied the parcel with his eye cocked at our rather disconcerted client, and Thorndyke watched him with a faint smile.

"This is very kind of you, Miller," said he, "but I think a clairvoyant would be more to your purpose."

The superintendent instantly dropped his facetious manner.

"Seriously, sir," he said, "I should be glad if you would take a look at the coat. We have absolutely nothing to go on, and yet we don't want to give up the case. I have gone through it most thoroughly and can't find any clue to guide us. Now I know that nothing escapes you, and perhaps you might notice something that I have overlooked; something that would give us a hint where to start on, our inquiry. Couldn't you turn the microscope on it, for instance?" he added, with a deprecating smile.

Thorndyke reflected, with an inquisitive eye on the coat. I saw that the problem was not without its attractions to him; and when the lady seconded Miller's request with persuasive eagerness, the inevitable consequence followed.

"Very well," he said. "Leave the coat with me for an hour or so and I will look it over. I am afraid there is not the remotest chance of our learning anything from it, but even so, the examination will have done no harm. Come back at two o'clock; I shall be ready to report my failure by then."

He bowed our visitors out and, returning to the table, looked down with a quizzical smile on the coat and the large official envelope containing articles from the pockets.

"And what does my learned brother suggest?" he asked, looking up at me.

"I should look at the tram-ticket first," I replied, "and then—well, Miller's suggestion wasn't such a bad one; to explore the surface with the microscope."

"I think we will take the latter measure first," said he. "The tram-ticket might create a misleading bias. A man may take a tram anywhere, whereas the indoor dust on a man's coat appertains mostly to a definite locality."

"Yes," I replied; "but the information that it yields is excessively vague."

"That is true," he agreed, taking up the coat and envelope to carry them to the laboratory, "and yet, you know, Jervis, as I have often pointed out, the evidential value of dust is apt to be under-estimated. The naked-eye appearances? which are the normal appearances—are misleading. Gather the dust, say, from a table-top, and what have you? A fine powder of a characterless grey, just like any other dust from any other table-top. But, under the microscope, this grey powder is resolved into recognizable fragments of definite substances, which fragments may often be traced with certainty to the masses from which they have been detached. But you know all this as well as I do."

"I quite appreciate the value of dust as evidence in certain circumstances," I replied, "but surely the information that could be gathered from dust on the coat of an unknown man must be too general to be of any use in tracing the owner."

"I am afraid you are right," said Thorndyke, laying the coat on the laboratory bench; "but we shall soon see, if Polton will let us have his patent dust-extractor."

The little apparatus to which my colleague referred was the invention of our ingenious laboratory assistant, and resembled in principle the "vacuum cleaners" used for restoring carpets. It had, however, one special feature: the receiver was made to admit a microscope-slide, and on this the dust-laden air was delivered from a jet.

The "extractor" having been clamped to the bench by its proud inventor, and a wetted slide introduced into the receiver, Thorndyke applied the nozzle of the instrument to the collar of the coat while Polton worked the pump. The slide was then

removed and, another having been substituted, the nozzle was applied to the right sleeve near the shoulder, and the exhauster again worked by Polton. By repeating this process, half-a-dozen slides were obtained charged with dust from different parts of the garment, and then, setting up our respective microscopes, we proceeded to examine the samples.

A very brief inspection showed me that this dust contained matter not usually met with—at any rate, in appreciable quantities. There were, of course, the usual fragments of wool, cotton and other fibres derived from clothing and furniture, particles of straw, husk, hair, various mineral particles and, in fact, the ordinary constituents of dust from clothing. But, in addition to these, and in much greater quantity, were a number of other bodies, mostly of vegetable origin and presenting well-defined characters in considerable variety, and especially abundant were various starch granules.

I glanced at Thorndyke and observed he was already busy with a pencil and a slip of paper, apparently making a list of the objects visible in the field of the microscope. I hastened to follow his example, and for a time we worked on in silence. At length my colleague leaned back in his chair and read over his list.

“This is a highly interesting collection, Jervis,” he remarked. “What do you find on your slides out of the ordinary?”

“I have quite a little museum here,” I replied, referring to my list. “There is, of course, chalk from the road at Raynesford. In addition to this I find various starches, principally wheat and rice, especially rice, fragments of the cortices of several seeds, several different stone-cells, some yellow masses that look like turmeric, black pepper resin-cells, one ‘port wine’ pimento cell, and one or two particles of graphite.”

“Graphite!” exclaimed Thorndyke. “I have found no graphite, but I have found traces of cocoa—spiral vessels and starch grains—and of hops—one fragment of leaf and several lupulin glands. May I see the graphite?”

I passed him the slide and he examined it with keen interest. “Yes,” he said, “this is undoubtedly graphite, and no less than six particles of it. We had better go over the coat systematically. You see the importance of this?”

“I see that this is evidently factory dust and that it may fix a locality, but I don’t see that it will carry us any farther.”

“Don’t forget that we have a touchstone,” said he; and, as I raised my eyebrows inquiringly, he added, “The Yale latchkey. If we can narrow the locality down sufficiently, Miller can make a tour of the front doors.”

“But can we?” I asked incredulously. “I doubt it.”

“We can try,” answered Thorndyke. “Evidently some of the substances are distributed over the entire coat, inside and out, while others, such as the graphite, are present only on certain parts. We must locate those parts exactly and then consider what this special distribution means.” He rapidly sketched out on a sheet of paper a rough diagram of the coat, marking each part with a distinctive letter, and then, taking a number of labelled slides, he wrote a single letter on each. The samples of dust taken on the slides could thus be easily referred to the exact spots whence they had been obtained.

Once more we set to work with the microscope, making, now and again, an addition to our lists of discoveries, and, at the end of nearly an hour’s strenuous search, every slide had been examined and the lists compared.

“The net result of the examination,” said Thorndyke, “is this. The entire coat, inside and out, is evenly powdered with the following substances: Rice-starch in abundance, wheat-starch in less abundance, and smaller quantities of the starches of ginger, pimento and cinnamon; bast fibre of cinnamon, various seed cortices, stone-cells of pimento, cinnamon, cassia and black pepper, with other fragments of similar origin, such as resin-cells and ginger pigment—not turmeric. In addition there are, on the right shoulder and sleeve, traces of cocoa and hops, and on the back below the shoulders a few fragments of graphite. Those are the data; and now, what are the inferences? Remember this is not mere surface dust, but the accumulation of months, beaten into the cloth by repeated brushing—dust that nothing but a vacuum apparatus could extract.”

“Evidently,” I said, “the particles that are all over the coat represent dust that is floating in the air of the place where the coat habitually hangs. The graphite has obviously been picked up from a seat and the cocoa and hops from some factories that the man passes frequently, though I don’t see why they are on the right side only.”

“That is a question of time,” said Thorndyke, “and incidentally throws some light on our friend’s habits. Going from home, he passes the factories on his right; returning home, he passes them on his left, but they have then stopped work. However, the first group of substances is the more important as they indicate the locality of his dwelling—for he is clearly not a workman or factory employee. Now rice-starch, wheat-starch and a group of substances collectively designated ‘spices’ suggest a rice-mill, a flour-mill and a spice factory. Polton, may I trouble you for the Post Office Directory?”

He turned over the leaves of the “Trades” section and resumed: “I see there are four rice-mills in London, of which the largest is Carbutt’s at Dockhead. Let us look at the spice-factories.” He again turned over the leaves and read down the list of names. “There are six spice-grinders in London,” said he. “One of them, Thomas Williams & Co., is at Dockhead. None of the others is near any rice-mill. The next question is as to the flour-mill. Let us see. Here are the names of several flour millers, but none of them is near either a rice-mill or a spice-grinder, with one exception: Seth Taylor’s, St. Saviour’s Flour Mills, Dockhead.”

“This is really becoming interesting,” said I.

“It has become interesting,” Thorndyke retorted. “You observe that at Dockhead we find the peculiar combination of factories necessary to produce the composite dust in which this coat has hung; and the directory shows us that this particular combination exists nowhere else in London. Then the graphite, the cocoa and the hops tend to confirm the other

suggestions. They all appertain to industries of the locality. The trams which pass Dockhead, also, to my knowledge, pass at no great distance from the black-lead works of Pearce Duff & Co. in Rouel Road, and will probably collect a few particles of black-lead on the seats in certain states of the wind. I see, too, that there is a cocoa factory—Payne's—in Goat Street, Horsleydown, which lies to the right of the tram line going west, and I have noticed several hop warehouses on the right side of Southwark Street, going west. But these are mere suggestions; the really important data are the rice and flour mills and the spice-grinders, which seem to point unmistakably to Dockhead."

"Are there any private houses at Dockhead?" I asked.

"We must look up the 'Street' list," he replied. "The Yale latch-key rather suggests a flat, and a flat with a single occupant, and the probable habits of our absent friend offer a similar suggestion." He ran his eye down the list and presently turned to me with his finger on the page.

"If the facts that we have elicited—the singular series of agreements with the required conditions—are only a string of coincidences, here is another. On the south side of Dockhead, actually next door to the spice-grinders and opposite to Carbutt's rice-mills, is a block of workmen's flats, Hanover Buildings. They fulfil the conditions exactly. A coat hung in a room in those flats, with the windows open (as they would probably be at this time of year), would be exposed to the air containing a composite dust of precisely the character of that which we have found. Of course, the same conditions obtain in other dwellings in this part of Dockhead, but the probability is in favour of the buildings. And that is all that we can say. It is no certainty. There may be some radical fallacy in our reasoning. But, on the face of it, the chances are a thousand to one that the door that that key will open is in some part of Dockhead, and most probably in Hanover Buildings. We must leave the verification to Miller."

"Wouldn't it be as well to look at the tram-ticket?" I asked.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten the ticket. Yes, by all means." He opened the envelope and, turning its contents out on the bench, picked up the dingy slip of paper. After a glance at it he handed it to me. It was punched for the journey from Tooley Street to Dockhead.

"Another coincidence," he remarked; "and by yet another, I think I hear Miller knocking at our door."

It was the superintendent, and, as we let him into the room, the hum of a motor-car entering from Tudor Street announced the arrival of Mrs. Chater. We waited for her at the open door, and, as she entered, she held out her hands impulsively.

"Say, now, Dr. Thorndyke," she exclaimed, "have you gotten something to tell us?"

"I have a suggestion to make," replied Thorndyke. "I think that if the superintendent will take this key to Hanover Buildings, Dockhead, Bermondsey, he may possibly find a door that it will fit."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Miller. "I beg your pardon, madam; but I thought I had gone through that coat pretty completely. What was it that I had overlooked, sir? Was there a letter hidden in it, after all?"

"You overlooked the dust on it, Miller; that is all," said Thorndyke.

"Dust!" exclaimed the detective, staring round-eyed at my colleague. Then he chuckled softly. "Well," said he, "as I said before, I'm not a sorcerer; I'm only a policeman." He picked up the key and asked: "Are you coming to see the end of it, sir?"

"Of course he is coming," said Mrs. Chater, "and Dr. Jervis too, to identify the man. Now that we have gotten the villain we must leave him no loophole for escape."

Thorndyke smiled dryly. "We will come if you wish it, Mrs. Chater," he said, "but you mustn't look upon our quest as a certainty. We may have made an entire miscalculation, and I am, in fact, rather curious to see if the result works out correctly. But even if we run the man to earth, I don't see that you have much evidence against him. The most that you can prove is that he was at the house and that he left hurriedly."

Mrs. Chater regarded my colleague for a moment in scornful silence, and then, gathering up her skirts, stalked out of the room. If there is one thing that the average woman detests more than another, it is an entirely reasonable man.

The big car whirled us rapidly over Blackfriars Bridge into the region of the Borough, whence we presently turned down Tooley Street towards Bermondsey.

As soon as Dockhead came into view, the detective, Thorndyke and I, alighted and proceeded on foot, leaving our client, who was now closely veiled, to follow at a little distance in the car. Opposite the head of St. Saviour's Dock, Thorndyke halted and, looking over the wall, drew my attention to the snowy powder that had lodged on every projection on the backs of the tall buildings and on the decks of the barges that were loading with the flour and ground rice. Then, crossing the road, he pointed to the wooden lantern above the roof of the spice works, the louvres of which were covered with greyish-buff dust.

"Thus," he moralized, "does commerce subserve the ends of justice—at least, we hope it does," he added quickly, as Miller disappeared into the semi-basement of the buildings.

We met the detective returning from his quest as we entered the building.

"No go there," was his report. "We'll try the next floor."

This was the ground-floor, or it might be considered the first floor. At any rate, it yielded nothing of interest, and, after a glance at the doors that opened on the landing, he strode briskly up the stone stairs. The next floor was equally unrewarding, for our eager inspection disclosed nothing but the gaping keyhole associated with the common type of night-latch.

"What name was you wanting?" inquired a dusty knight of industry who emerged from one of the flats.

"Muggs," replied Miller, with admirable promptness.

"Don't know 'im," said the workman. "I expect it's farther up."

Farther up we accordingly went, but still from each door the artless grin of the invariable keyhole saluted us with depressing monotony. I began to grow uneasy, and when the fourth floor had been explored with no better result, my anxiety became acute. A mare's nest may be an interesting curiosity, but it brings no kudos to its discoverer.

"I suppose you haven't made any mistake, sir?" said Miller, stopping to wipe his brow.

"It's quite likely that I have," replied Thorndyke, with unmoved composure. "I only proposed this search as a tentative proceeding, you know."

The superintendent grunted. He was accustomed—as was I too, for that matter—to regard Thorndyke's "tentative suggestions" as equal to another man's certainties.

"It will be an awful suck-in for Mrs. Chater if we don't find him after all," he growled as we climbed up the last flight. "She's counted her chickens to a feather." He paused at the head of the stairs and stood for a few moments looking round the landing. Suddenly he turned eagerly, and, laying his hand on Thorndyke's arm, pointed to a door in the farthest corner.

"Yale lock!" he whispered impressively.

We followed him silently as he stole on tip-toe across the landing, and watched him as he stood for an instant with the key in his hand looking gloatingly at the brass disc. We saw him softly apply the nose of the fluted key-blade to the crooked slit in the cylinder, and, as we watched, it slid noiselessly up to the shoulder. The detective looked round with a grin of triumph, and, silently withdrawing the key, stepped back to us.

"You've run him to earth, sir," he whispered, "but I don't think Mr. Fox is at home. He can't have got back yet."

"Why not?" asked Thorndyke.

Miller waved his hand towards the door. "Nothing has been disturbed," he replied. "There's not a mark on the paint. Now he hadn't got the key, and you can't pick a Yale lock. He'd have had to break in, and he hasn't broken in."

Thorndyke stepped up to the door and softly pushed in the flap of the letter-slit, through which he looked into the flat.

"There's no letter-box," said he. "My dear Miller, I would undertake to open that door in five minutes with a foot of wire and a bit of resined string."

Miller shook his head and grinned once more. "I am glad you're not on the lay, sir; you'd be one too many for us. Shall we signal to the lady?"

I went out onto the gallery and looked down at the waiting car. Mrs. Chater was staring intently up at the building, and the little crowd that the car had collected stared alternately at the lady and at the object of her regard. I wiped my face with my handkerchief—the signal agreed upon—and she instantly sprang out of the car, and in an incredibly short time she appeared on the landing, purple and gasping, but with the fire of battle flashing from her eyes.

"We've found his flat, madam," said Miller, "and we're going to enter. You're not intending to offer any violence, I hope," he added, noting with some uneasiness the lady's ferocious expression.

"Of course I'm not," replied Mrs. Chater. "In the States ladies don't have to avenge insults themselves. If you were American men you'd hang the ruffian from his own bedpost."

"We're not American men, madam," said the superintendent stiffly. "We are law-abiding Englishmen, and, moreover, we are all officers of the law. These gentlemen are barristers and I am a police officer."

With this preliminary caution, he once more inserted the key, and as he turned it and pushed the door open, we all followed him into the sitting-room.

"I told you so, sir," said Miller, softly shutting the door; "he hasn't come back yet."

Apparently he was right. At any rate, there was no one in the flat, and we proceeded unopposed on our tour of inspection. It was a miserable spectacle, and, as we wandered from one squalid room to another, a feeling of pity for the starving wretch into whose lair we were intruding stole over me and began almost to mitigate the hideousness of his crime. On all sides poverty—utter, grinding poverty—stared us in the face. It looked at us hollow-eyed in the wretched sitting-room, with its bare floor, its solitary chair and tiny deal table; its unfurnished walls and windows destitute of blind or curtain. A piece of Dutch cheese-rind on the table, scraped to the thinness of paper, whispered of starvation; and famine lurked in the gaping cupboard, in the empty bread-tin, in the tea-caddy with its pinch of dust at the bottom, in the jam-jar, wiped clean, as a few crumbs testified, with a crust of bread. There was not enough food in the place to furnish a meal for a

healthy mouse.

The bedroom told the same tale, but with a curious variation. A miserable truckle-bed with a straw mattress and a cheap jute rug for bed-clothes, an orange-case, stood on end, for a dressing-table, and another, bearing a tin washing-bowl, formed the wretched furniture. But the suit that hung from a couple of nails was well-cut and even fashionable, though shabby; and another suit lay on the floor, neatly folded and covered with a newspaper; and, most incongruous of all, a silver cigarette-case reposed on the dressing-table.

"Why on earth does this fellow starve," I exclaimed, "when he has a silver case to pawn?"

"Wouldn't do," said Miller. "A man doesn't pawn the implements of his trade."

Mrs. Chater, who had been staring about her with the mute amazement of a wealthy woman confronted, for the first time, with abject poverty, turned suddenly to the superintendent. "This can't be the man!" she exclaimed. "You have made some mistake. This poor creature could never have made his way into a house like Willowdale."

Thorndyke lifted the newspaper. Beneath it was a dress suit with the shirt, collar and tie all carefully smoothed out and folded. Thorndyke unfolded the shirt and pointed to the curiously crumpled front. Suddenly he brought it close to his eye and then, from the sham diamond stud, he drew a single hair—a woman's hair.

"That is rather significant," said he, holding it up between his finger and thumb; and Mrs. Chater evidently thought so too, for the pity and compunction suddenly faded from her face, and once more her eyes flashed with vindictive fire.

"I wish he would come," she exclaimed viciously. "Prison won't be much hardship to him after this, but I want to see him in the dock all the same."

"No," the detective agreed, "it won't hurt him much to swap this for Portland. Listen!"

A key was being inserted into the outer door, and as we all stood like statues, a man entered and closed the door after him. He passed the door of the bedroom without seeing us, and with the dragging steps of a weary, dispirited man. Almost immediately we heard him go to the kitchen and draw water into some vessel. Then he went back to the sitting-room.

"Come along," said Miller, stepping silently towards the door. We followed closely, and as he threw the door open, we looked in over his shoulder.

The man had seated himself at the table, on which now lay a hunk of household bread resting on the paper in which he had brought it, and a tumbler of water. He half rose as the door opened, and as if petrified remained staring at Miller with a dreadful expression of terror upon his livid face.

At this moment I felt a hand on my arm, and Mrs. Chater brusquely pushed past me into the room. But at the threshold she stopped short; and a singular change crept over the man's ghastly face, a change so remarkable that I looked involuntarily from him to our client. She had turned, in a moment, deadly pale, and her face had frozen into an expression of incredulous horror.

The dramatic silence was broken by the matter-of-fact voice of the detective.

"I am a police officer," said he, "and I arrest you for—?"

A peal of hysterical laughter from Mrs. Chater interrupted him, and he looked at her in astonishment. "Stop, stop!" she cried in a shaky voice. "I guess we've made a ridiculous mistake. This isn't the man. This gentleman is Captain Rowland, an old friend of mine."

"I'm sorry he's a friend of yours," said Miller, "because I shall have to ask you to appear against him."

"You can ask what you please," replied Mrs. Chater. "I tell you he's not the man."

The superintendent rubbed his nose and looked hungrily at his quarry. "Do I understand, madam," he asked stiffly, "that you refuse to prosecute?"

"Prosecute!" she exclaimed. "Prosecute my friends for offences that I know they have not committed? Certainly I refuse."

The superintendent looked at Thorndyke, but my colleague's countenance had congealed into a state of absolute immobility and was as devoid of expression as the face of a Dutch clock.

"Very well," said Miller, looking sourly at his watch. "Then we have had our trouble for nothing. I wish you good afternoon, madam."

"I am sorry I troubled you, now," said Mrs. Chater.

"I am sorry you did," was the curt reply; and the superintendent, flinging the key on the table, stalked out of the room.

As the outer door slammed the man sat down with an air of bewilderment; and then, suddenly flinging his arms on the table, he dropped his head on them and burst into a passion of sobbing.

It was very embarrassing. With one accord Thorndyke and I turned to go, but Mrs. Chater motioned us to stay. Stepping over to the man, she touched him lightly on the arm.

"Why did you do it?" she asked in a tone of gentle reproach.

The man sat up and flung out one arm in an eloquent gesture that comprehended the miserable room and the yawning

cupboard.

"It was the temptation of a moment," he said. "I was penniless, and those accursed diamonds were thrust in my face; they were mine for the taking. I was mad, I suppose."

"But why didn't you take them?" she said. "Why didn't you?"

"I don't know. The madness passed; and then—when I saw you lying there—? Oh, God! Why don't you give me up to the police?" He laid his head down and sobbed afresh.

Mrs. Chater bent over him with tears standing in her pretty grey eyes. "But tell me," she said, "why didn't you take the diamonds? You could if you'd liked, I suppose?"

"What good were they to me?" he demanded passionately. "What did anything matter to me? I thought you were dead."

"Well, I'm not, you see," she said, with a rather tearful smile; "I'm just as well as an old woman like me can expect to be. And I want your address, so that I can write and give you some good advice."

The man sat up and produced a shabby cardcase from his pocket, and, as he took out a number of cards and spread them out like the "hand" of a whist player, I caught a twinkle in Thorndyke's eye.

"My name is Augustus Bailey," said the man. He selected the appropriate card, and, having scribbled his address on it with a stump of lead pencil, relapsed into his former position.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Chater, lingering for a moment by the table. "Now we'll go. Good-bye, Mr. Bailey. I shall write to-morrow, and you must attend seriously to the advice of an old friend."

I held open the door for her to pass out and looked back before I turned to follow. Bailey still sat sobbing quietly, with his hand resting on his arms; and a little pile of gold stood on the corner of the table.

"I expect, doctor," said Mrs. Chater, as Thorndyke handed her into the car, "you've written me down a sentimental fool."

Thorndyke looked at her with an unwonted softening of his rather severe face and answered quietly, "It is written: Blessed are the Merciful."

---

## V. — THE OLD LAG

### PART I. — THE CHANGED IMMUTABLE

AMONG the minor and purely physical pleasures of life, I am disposed to rank very highly that feeling of bodily comfort that one experiences on passing from the outer darkness of a wet winter's night to a cheerful interior made glad by mellow lamplight and blazing hearth. And so I thought when, on a dreary November night, I let myself into our chambers in the Temple and found my friend smoking his pipe in slippers, by a roaring fire, and facing an empty arm-chair evidently placed in readiness for me.

As I shed my damp overcoat, I glanced inquisitively at my colleague, for he held in his hand an open letter, and I seemed to perceive in his aspect something meditative and self-communing—something, in short, suggestive of a new case.

"I was just considering," he said, in answer to my inquiring look, "whether I am about to become an accessory after the fact. Read that and give me your opinion."

He handed me the letter, which I read aloud.

*"Dear sir,—I am in great danger and distress. A warrant has been issued for my arrest on a charge of which I am entirely innocent. Can I come and see you, and will you let me leave in safety? The bearer will wait for a reply."*

"I said 'Yes,' of course; there was nothing else to do," said Thorndyke. "But if I let him go, as I have promised to do, I shall be virtually conniving at his escape."

"Yes, you are taking a risk," I answered. "When is he coming?"

"He was due five minutes ago—and I rather think—yes, here he is."

A stealthy tread on the landing was followed by a soft tapping on the outer door.

Thorndyke rose and, flinging open the inner door, unfastened the massive "oak."

"Dr. Thorndyke?" inquired a breathless, quavering voice.

"Yes, come in. You sent me a letter by hand?"

"I did, sir," was the reply; and the speaker entered, but at the sight of me he stopped short.

"This is my colleague, Dr. Jervis," Thorndyke explained. "You need have no—?"

"Oh, I remember him," our visitor interrupted in a tone of relief. "I have seen you both before, you know, and you have seen me too—though I don't suppose you recognize me," he added, with a sickly smile.

"Frank Belfield?" asked Thorndyke, smiling also.

Our visitor's jaw fell and he gazed at my colleague in sudden dismay.

"And I may remark," pursued Thorndyke, "that for a man in your perilous position, you are running most unnecessary risks. That wig, that false beard and those spectacles—through which you obviously cannot see—are enough to bring the entire police force at your heels. It is not wise for a man who is wanted by the police to make up as though he had just escaped from a comic opera."

Mr. Belfield seated himself with a groan, and, taking off his spectacles, stared stupidly from one of us to the other.

"And now tell us about your little affair," said Thorndyke. "You say that you are innocent?"

"I swear it, doctor," replied Belfield; adding, with great earnestness, "And you may take it from me, sir, that if I was not, I shouldn't be here. It was you that convicted me last time, when I thought myself quite safe, so I know your ways too well to try to gammon you."

"If you are innocent," rejoined Thorndyke, "I will do what I can for you; and if you are not—well, you would have been wiser to stay away."

"I know that well enough," said Belfield, "and I am only afraid that you won't believe what I am going to tell you."

"I shall keep an open mind, at any rate," replied Thorndyke.

"If you only will," groaned Belfield, "I shall have a look in, in spite of them all. You know, sir, that I have been on the crook, but I have paid in full. That job when you tripped me up was the last of it—it was, sir, so help me. It was a woman that changed me—the best and truest woman on God's earth. She said she would marry me when I came out if I promised her to go straight and live an honest life. And she kept her promise—and I have kept mine. She found me work as clerk in a warehouse and I have stuck to it ever since, earning fair wages and building up a good character as an honest, industrious man. I thought all was going well, and that I was settled for life, when only this very morning the whole thing comes tumbling about my ears like a house of cards."

"What happened this morning, then?" asked Thorndyke.

"Why, I was on my way to work when, as I passed the police station, I noticed a bill with the heading 'Wanted' and a photograph. I stopped for a moment to look at it, and you may imagine my feelings when I recognized my own portrait—taken at Holloway—and read my own name and description. I did not stop to read the bill through, but ran back home and told my wife, and she ran down to the station and read the bill carefully. Good God, sir! What do you think I am wanted for?" He paused for a moment, and then replied in breathless tones to his own question: "The Camberwell murder!"

Thorndyke gave a low whistle.

"My wife knows I didn't do it," continued Belfield, "because I was at home all the evening and night; but what use is a man's wife to prove an alibi?"

"Not much, I fear," Thorndyke admitted; "and you have no other witness?"

"Not a soul. We were alone all the evening."

"However," said Thorndyke, "if you are innocent—as I am assuming—the evidence against you must be entirely circumstantial and your alibi may be quite sufficient. Have you any idea of the grounds of suspicion against you?"

"Not the faintest. The papers said that the police had an excellent clue, but they did not say what it was. Probably someone has given false information for the—?"

A sharp rapping at the outer door cut short the explanation, and our visitor rose, trembling and aghast, with beads of sweat standing upon his livid face.

"You had better go into the office, Belfield, while we see who it is," said Thorndyke. "The key is on the inside."

The fugitive wanted no second bidding, but hurried into the empty apartment, and, as the door closed, we heard the key turn in the lock.

As Thorndyke threw open the outer door, he cast a meaning glance at me over his shoulder which I understood when the newcomer entered the room; for it was none other than Superintendent Miller of Scotland Yard.

"I have just dropped in," said the superintendent, in his brisk, cheerful way, "to ask you to do me a favour. Good-evening, Dr. Jervis. I hear you are reading for the bar; learned counsel soon, sir, hey? Medico-legal expert. Dr. Thorndyke's mantle going to fall on you, sir?"

"I hope Dr. Thorndyke's mantle will continue to drape his own majestic form for many a long year yet," I answered; "though he is good enough to spare me a corner—but what on earth have you got there?" For during this dialogue the superintendent had been deftly unfastening a brown-paper parcel, from which he now drew a linen shirt, once white, but now of an unsavoury grey.

"I want to know what this is," said Miller, exhibiting a brownish-red stain on one sleeve. "Just look at that, sir, and tell me if it is blood, and, if so, is it human blood?"



"Really, Miller," said Thorndyke, with a smile, "you flatter me; but I am not like the wise woman of Bagdad who could tell you how many stairs the patient had tumbled down by merely looking at his tongue. I must examine this very thoroughly. When do you want to know?"

"I should like to know to-night," replied the detective.

"Can I cut a piece out to put under the microscope?"

"I would rather you did not," was the reply.

"Very well; you shall have the information in about an hour."

"It's very good of you, doctor," said the detective; and he was taking up his hat preparatory to departing, when Thorndyke said suddenly—"By the way, there is a little matter that I was going to speak to you about. It refers to this Camberwell murder case. I understand you have a clue to the identity of the murderer?"

"Clue!" exclaimed the superintendent contemptuously. "We have spotted our man all right, if we could only lay hands on him; but he has given us the slip for the moment."

"Who is the man?" asked Thorndyke.

The detective looked doubtfully at Thorndyke for some seconds and then said, with evident reluctance: "I suppose there is no harm in telling you—especially as you probably know already"—this with a sly grin; "it's an old crook named Belfield."

"And what is the evidence against him?"

Again the superintendent looked doubtful and again relented.

"Why, the case is as clear as—as cold Scotch," he said (here Thorndyke in illustration of this figure of speech produced a decanter, a syphon and a tumbler, which he pushed towards the officer). "You see, sir, the silly fool went and stuck his sweaty hand on the window; and there we found the marks—four fingers and a thumb, as beautiful prints as you could wish to see. Of course we cut out the piece of glass and took it up to the Finger-print Department; they turned up their files and out came Mr. Belfield's record, with his finger-prints and photograph all complete."

"And the finger-prints on the window-pane were identical with those on the prison form?"

"Identical."

"H'm!" Thorndyke reflected for a while, and the superintendent watched him foxily over the edge of his tumbler.

"I guess you are retained to defend Belfield," the latter observed presently.

"To look into the case generally," replied Thorndyke.

"And I expect you know where the beggar is hiding," continued the detective.

"Belfield's address has not yet been communicated to me," said Thorndyke. "I am merely to investigate the case—and there is no reason, Miller, why you and I should be at cross purposes. We are both working at the case; you want to get a conviction and you want to convict the right man."

"That's so—and Belfield's the right man—but what do you want of us, doctor?"

"I should like to see the piece of glass with the finger-prints on it, and the prison form, and take a photograph of each. And I should like to examine the room in which the murder took place—you have it locked up, I suppose?"

"Yes, we have the keys. Well, it's all rather irregular, letting you see the things. Still, you've always played the game fairly with us, so we might stretch a point. Yes, I will. I'll come back in an hour for your report and bring the glass and the form. I can't let them go out of my custody, you know. I'll be off now—no, thank you, not another drop."

The superintendent caught up his hat and strode away, the personification of mental alertness and bodily vigour.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than Thorndyke's stolid calm changed instantaneously into feverish energy. Darting to the electric bell that rang into the laboratories above, he pressed the button while he gave me my directions.

"Have a look at that blood-stain, Jervis, while I am finishing with Belfield. Don't wet it; scrape it into a drop of warm normal saline solution."

I hastened to reach down the microscope and set out on the table the necessary apparatus and reagents, and, as I was thus occupied, a latch-key turned in the outer door and our invaluable helpmate, Polton, entered the room in his habitual silent, unobtrusive fashion.

"Let me have the finger-print apparatus, please, Polton," said Thorndyke; "and have the copying camera ready by nine o'clock. I am expecting Mr. Miller with some documents."

As his laboratory assistant departed, Thorndyke rapped at the office door.

"It's all clear, Belfield," he called; "you can come out."

The key turned and the prisoner emerged, looking ludicrously woebegone in his ridiculous wig and beard.

"I am going to take your finger-prints, to compare with some that the police found on the window."

"Finger-prints!" exclaimed Belfield, in a tone of dismay. "They don't say they're my finger-prints, do they, sir?"

"They do indeed," replied Thorndyke, eyeing the man narrowly. "They have compared them with those taken when you were at Holloway, and they say that they are identical."

"Good God!" murmured Belfield, collapsing into a chair, faint and trembling. "They must have made some awful mistake. But are mistakes possible with finger-prints?"

"Now look here, Belfield," said Thorndyke. "Were you in that house that night, or were you not? It is of no use for you to tell me any lies."

"I was not there, sir; I swear to God I was not."

"Then they cannot be your finger-prints, that is obvious." Here he stepped to the door to intercept Polton, from whom he received a substantial box, which he brought in and placed on the table.

"Tell me all you know about this case," he continued, as he set out the contents of the box on the table.

"I know nothing about it whatever," replied Belfield; "nothing, at least, except—?"

"Except what?" demanded Thorndyke, looking up sharply as he squeezed a drop from a tube of finger-print ink onto a smooth copper plate.

"Except that the murdered man, Caldwell, was a retired fence."

"A fence, was he?" said Thorndyke in a tone of interest.

"Yes; and I suspect he was a 'nark' too. He knew more than was wholesome for a good many."

"Did he know anything about you?"

"Yes; but nothing that the police don't know."

With a small roller Thorndyke spread the ink upon the plate into a thin film. Then he laid on the edge of the table a smooth white card and, taking Belfield's right hand, pressed the forefinger firmly but quickly, first on the inked plate and then on the card, leaving on the latter a clear print of the finger-tip. This process he repeated with the other fingers and thumb, and then took several additional prints of each.

"That was a nasty injury to your forefinger, Belfield," said Thorndyke, holding the finger to the light and examining the tip carefully. "How did you do it?"

"Stuck a tin-opener into it—a dirty one, too. It was bad for weeks; in fact, Dr. Sampson thought at one time that he would have to amputate the finger."

"How long ago was that?"

"Oh, nearly a year ago, sir."

Thorndyke wrote the date of the injury by the side of the finger-print and then, having rolled up the inking plate afresh, laid on the table several larger cards. "I am now going to take the prints of the four fingers and the thumb all at once," he said.

"They only took the four fingers at once at the prison," said Belfield. "They took the thumb separately."

"I know," replied Thorndyke; "but I am going to take the impression just as it would appear on the window glass."

He took several impressions thus, and then, having looked at his watch, he began to repack the apparatus in its box. While doing this, he glanced, from time to time, in meditative fashion, at the suspected man who sat, the living picture of misery and terror, wiping the greasy ink from his trembling fingers with his handkerchief.

"Belfield," he said at length, "you have sworn to me that you are an innocent man and are trying to live an honest life. I believe you; but in a few minutes I shall know for certain."

"Thank God for that, sir," exclaimed Belfield, brightening up wonderfully.

"And now," said Thorndyke, "you had better go back into the office, for I am expecting Superintendent Miller, and he may be here at any moment."

Belfield hastily slunk back into the office, locking the door after him, and Thorndyke, having returned the box to the laboratory and deposited the cards bearing the finger-prints in a drawer, came round to inspect my work. I had managed to detach a tiny fragment of dried clot from the blood-stained garment, and this, in a drop of normal saline solution, I now had under the microscope.

"What do you make out, Jervis?" my colleague asked.

"Oval corpuscles with distinct nuclei," I answered.

"Ah," said Thorndyke, "that will be good hearing for some poor devil. Have you measured them?"

"Yes. Long diameter one twenty-one hundredth of an inch; short diameter about one thirty-four hundredth of an inch."

Thorndyke reached down an indexed note-book from a shelf of reference volumes and consulted a table of histological

measurements.

"That would seem to be the blood of a pheasant, then, or it might, more probably, be that of a common fowl." He applied his eye to the microscope and, fitting in the eyepiece micrometer, verified my measurements. He was thus employed when a sharp tap was heard on the outer door, and rising to open it he admitted the superintendent.

"I see you are at work on my little problem, doctor," said the latter, glancing at the microscope. "What do you make of that stain?"

"It is the blood of a bird—probably a pheasant, or perhaps a common fowl."

The superintendent slapped his thigh. "Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed. "You're a regular wizard, doctor, that's what you are. The fellow said he got that stain through handling a wounded pheasant and here are you able to tell us yes or no without a hint from us to help you. Well, you've done my little job for me, sir, and I'm much obliged to you; now I'll carry out my part of the bargain." He opened a hand-bag and drew forth a wooden frame and a blue foolscap envelope and laid them with extreme care on the table.

"There you are, sir," said he, pointing to the frame; "you will find Mr. Belfield's trade-mark very neatly executed, and in the envelope is the finger-print sheet for comparison."

Thorndyke took up the frame and examined it. It enclosed two sheets of glass, one being the portion of the window-pane and the other a cover-glass to protect the fingerprints. Laying a sheet of white paper on the table, where the light was strongest, Thorndyke held the frame over it and gazed at the glass in silence, but with that faint lighting up of his impassive face which I knew so well and which meant so much to me. I walked round, and looking over his shoulder saw upon the glass the beautifully distinct imprints of four fingers and a thumb—the finger-tips, in fact, of an open hand.

After regarding the frame attentively for some time, Thorndyke produced from his pocket a little wash-leather bag, from which he extracted a powerful doublet lens, and with the aid of this he again explored the finger-prints, dwelling especially upon the print of the forefinger.

"I don't think you will find much amiss with those finger-prints, doctor," said the superintendent, "they are as clear as if he made them on purpose."

"They are indeed," replied Thorndyke, with an inscrutable smile, "exactly as if he had made them on purpose. And how beautifully clean the glass is—as if he had polished it before making the impression."

The superintendent glanced at Thorndyke with quick suspicion; but the smile had faded and given place to a wooden immobility from which nothing could be gleaned.

When he had examined the glass exhaustively, Thorndyke drew the finger-print form from its envelope and scanned it quickly, glancing repeatedly from the paper to the glass and from the glass to the paper. At length he laid them both on the table, and turning to the detective looked him steadily in the face.

"I think, Miller," said he, "that I can give you a hint."

"Indeed, sir? And what might that be?"

"It is this: you are after the wrong man."

The superintendent snorted—not a loud snort, for that would have been rude, and no officer could be more polite than Superintendent Miller. But it conveyed a protest which he speedily followed up in words.

"You don't mean to say that the prints on that glass are not the finger-prints of Frank Belfield?"

"I say that those prints were not made by Frank Belfield," Thorndyke replied firmly.

"Do you admit, sir, that the finger-prints on the official form were made by him?"

"I have no doubt that they were."

"Well, sir, Mr. Singleton, of the Finger-print Department, has compared the prints on the glass with those on the form and he says they are identical; and I have examined them and I say they are identical."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke; "and I have examined them and I say they are identical—and that therefore those on the glass cannot have been made by Belfield."

The superintendent snorted again—somewhat louder this time—and gazed at Thorndyke with wrinkled brows.

"You are not pulling my leg, I suppose, sir?" he asked, a little sourly.

"I should as soon think of tickling a porcupine," Thorndyke answered, with a suave smile.

"Well," rejoined the bewildered detective, "if I didn't know you, sir, I should say you were talking confounded nonsense. Perhaps you wouldn't mind explaining what you mean."

"Supposing," said Thorndyke, "I make it clear to you that those prints on the window-pane were not made by Belfield. Would you still execute the warrant?"

"What do you think?" exclaimed Miller. "Do you suppose we should go into court to have you come and knock the bottom out of our case, like you did in that Hornby affair? By the way, that was a finger-print case too, now I come to think

of it," and the superintendent suddenly became thoughtful.

"You have often complained," pursued Thorndyke, "that I have withheld information from you and sprung unexpected evidence on you at the trial. Now I am going to take you into my confidence, and when I have proved to you that this clue of yours is a false one, I shall expect you to let this poor devil Belfield go his way in peace."

The superintendent grunted—a form of utterance that committed him to nothing.

"These prints," continued Thorndyke, taking up the frame once more, "present several features of interest, one of which, at least, ought not to have escaped you and Mr. Singleton, as it seems to have done. Just look at that thumb."

The superintendent did so, and then pored over the official paper.

"Well," he said, "I don't see anything the matter with it. It's exactly like the print on the paper."

"Of course it is," rejoined Thorndyke, "and that is just the point. It ought not to be. The print of the thumb on the paper was taken separately from the fingers. And why? Because it was impossible to take it at the same time. The thumb is in a different plane from the fingers; when the hand is laid flat on any surface—as this window-pane, for instance—the palmar surfaces of the fingers touch it, whereas it is the side of the thumb which comes in contact and not the palmar surface. But in this"—he tapped the framed glass with his finger—"the prints show the palmar surfaces of all the five digits in contact at once, which is an impossibility. Just try to put your own thumb in that position and you will see that it is so."

The detective spread out his hand on the table and immediately perceived the truth of my colleague's statement.

"And what does that prove?" he asked.

"It proves that the thumb-print on the window-pane was not made at the same time as the finger-prints—that it was added separately; and that fact seems to prove that the prints were not made accidentally, but—as you ingeniously suggested just now—were put there for a purpose."

"I don't quite see the drift of all this," said the superintendent, rubbing the back of his head perplexedly; "and you said a while back that the prints on the glass can't be Belfield's because they are identical with the prints on the form. Now that seems to me sheer nonsense, if you will excuse my saying so."

"And yet," replied Thorndyke, "it is the actual fact. Listen: these prints"—here he took up the official sheet—"were taken at Holloway six years ago. These"—pointing to the framed glass—"were made within the present week. The one is, as regards the ridge-pattern, a perfect duplicate of the other. Is that not so?"

"That is so, doctor," agreed the superintendent.

"Very well. Now suppose I were to tell you that within the last twelve months something had happened to Belfield that made an appreciable change in the ridge-pattern on one of his fingers?"

"But is such a thing possible?"

"It is not only possible but it has happened. I will show you."

He brought forth from the drawer the cards on which Belfield had made his finger-prints, and laid them before the detective.

"Observe the prints of the forefinger," he said, indicating them; "there are a dozen, in all, and you will notice in each a white line crossing the ridges and dividing them. That line is caused by a scar, which has destroyed a portion of the ridges, and is now an integral part of Belfield's finger-print. And since no such blank line is to be seen in this print on the glass—in which the ridges appear perfect, as they were before the injury—it follows that that print could not have been made by Belfield's finger."

"There is no doubt about the injury, I suppose?"

"None whatever. There is the scar to prove it, and I can produce the surgeon who attended Belfield at the time."

The officer rubbed his head harder than before, and regarded Thorndyke with puckered brows.

"This is a teaser," he growled, "it is indeed. What you say, sir, seems perfectly sound, and yet—there are those finger-prints on the window-glass. Now you can't get fingerprints without fingers, can you?"

"Undoubtedly you can," said Thorndyke.

"I should want to see that done before I could believe even you, sir," said Miller.

"You shall see it done now," was the calm rejoinder. "You have evidently forgotten the Hornby case—the case of the Red Thumb-mark, as the newspapers called it."

"I only heard part of it," replied Miller, "and I didn't really follow the evidence in that."

"Well, I will show you a relic of that case," said Thorndyke. He unlocked a cabinet and took from one of the shelves a small box labelled "Hornby," which, being opened, was seen to contain a folded paper, a little red-covered oblong book and what looked like a large boxwood pawn.

"This little book," Thorndyke continued, "is a 'thumb-ograph'—a sort of finger-print album—I dare say you know the kind of thing."

The superintendent nodded contemptuously at the little volume.

"Now while Dr. Jervis is finding us the print we want, I will run up to the laboratory for an inked slab."

He handed me the little book and, as he left the room, I began to turn over the leaves—not without emotion, for it was this very "thumbograph" that first introduced me to my wife, as is related elsewhere—glancing at the various prints above the familiar names and marvelling afresh at the endless variations of pattern that they displayed. At length I came upon two thumb-prints of which one—the left—was marked by a longitudinal white line—evidently the trace of a scar; and underneath them was written the signature "Reuben Hornby."

At this moment Thorndyke re-entered the room carrying the inked slab, which he laid on the table, and seating himself between the superintendent and me, addressed the former.

"Now, Miller, here are two thumb-prints made by a gentleman named Reuben Hornby. Just glance at the left one; it is a highly characteristic print."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "one could swear to that from memory, I should think."

"Then look at this." Thorndyke took the paper from the box and, unfolding it, handed it to the detective. It bore a pencilled inscription, and on it were two blood-smears and a very distinct thumb-print in blood. "What do you say to that thumb-print?"

"Why," answered Miller, "it's this one, of course; Reuben Hornby's left thumb."

"Wrong, my friend," said Thorndyke. "It was made by an ingenious gentleman named Walter Hornby (whom you followed from the Old Bailey and lost on Ludgate Hill); but not with his thumb."

"How, then?" demanded the superintendent incredulously.

"In this way." Thorndyke took the boxwood "paw" from its receptacle and pressed its flat base onto the inked slab; then lifted it and pressed it onto the back of a visiting-card, and again raised it; and now the card was marked by a very distinct thumb-print.

"My God!" exclaimed the detective, picking up the card and viewing it with a stare of dismay, "this is the very devil, sir. This fairly knocks the bottom out of finger-print identification. May I ask, sir, how you made that stamp—for I suppose you did make it?"

"Yes, we made it here, and the process we used was practically that used by photo-engravers in making line blocks; that is to say, we photographed one of Mr. Hornby's thumb-prints, printed it on a plate of chrome-gelatine, developed the plate with hot water and this"—here he touched the embossed surface of the stamp—"is what remained. But we could have done it in various other ways; for instance, with common transfer paper and lithographic stone; indeed, I assure you, Miller, that there is nothing easier to forge than a finger-print, and it can be done with such perfection that the forger himself cannot tell his own forgery from a genuine original, even when they are placed side by side."

"Well, I'm hanged," grunted the superintendent, "you've fairly knocked me, this time, doctor." He rose gloomily and prepared to depart. "I suppose," he added, "your interest in this case has lapsed, now Belfield's out of it?"

"Professionally, yes; but I am disposed to finish the case for my own satisfaction. I am quite curious as to who our too-ingenious friend may be."

Miller's face brightened. "We shall give you every facility, you know—and that reminds me that Singleton gave me these two photographs for you, one of the official paper and one of the prints on the glass. Is there anything more that we can do for you?"

"I should like to have a look at the room in which the murder took place."

"You shall, doctor; to-morrow, if you like; I'll meet you there in the morning at ten, if that will do."

It would do excellently, Thorndyke assured him, and with this the superintendent took his departure in renewed spirits.

We had only just closed the door when there came a hurried and urgent tapping upon it, whereupon I once more threw it open, and a quietly-dressed woman in a thick veil, who was standing on the threshold, stepped quickly past me into the room.

"Where is my husband?" she demanded, as I closed the door; and then, catching sight of Thorndyke, she strode up to him with a threatening air and a terrified but angry face.

"What have you done with my husband, sir?" she repeated. "Have you betrayed him, after giving your word? I met a man who looked like a police officer on the stairs."

"Your husband, Mrs. Belfield, is here and quite safe," replied Thorndyke. "He has locked himself in that room," indicating the office.

Mrs. Belfield darted across and rapped smartly at the door. "Are you there, Frank?" she called.

In immediate response the key turned, the door opened and Belfield emerged looking very pale and worn.

"You have kept me a long time in there, sir," he said.

"It took me a long time to prove to Superintendent Miller that he was after the wrong man. But I succeeded, and now, Belfield, you are free. The charge against you is withdrawn."

Belfield stood for a while as one stupefied, while his wife, after a moment of silent amazement, flung her arms round his neck and burst into tears. "But how did you know I was innocent, sir?" demanded the bewildered Belfield.

"Ah! how did I? Every man to his trade, you know. Well, I congratulate you, and now go home and have a square meal and get a good night's rest."

He shook hands with his clients—vainly endeavouring to prevent Mrs. Belfield from kissing his hand—and stood at the open door listening until the sound of their retreating footsteps died away.

"A noble little woman, Jervis," said he, as he closed the door. "In another moment she would have scratched my face—and I mean to find out the scoundrel who tried to wreck her happiness."

---

PART II. — THE SHIP OF THE DESERT

THE case which I am now about to describe has always appeared to me a singularly instructive one, as illustrating the value and importance of that fundamental rule in the carrying out of investigations which Thorndyke had laid down so emphatically—the rule that all facts, in any way relating to a case, should be collected impartially and without reference to any theory, and each fact, no matter how trivial or apparently irrelevant, carefully studied. But I must not anticipate the remarks of my learned and talented friend on this subject which I have to chronicle anon; rather let me proceed to the case itself.

I had slept at our chambers in King's Bench Walk—as I commonly did two or three nights a week—and on coming down to the sitting-room, found Thorndyke's man, Polton, putting the last touches to the breakfast-table, while Thorndyke himself was poring over two photographs of fingerprints, of which he seemed to be taking elaborate measurements with a pair of hair-dividers. He greeted me with his quiet, genial smile and, laying down the dividers, took his seat at the breakfast-table.

"You are coming with me this morning, I suppose," said he; "the Camberwell murder case, you know."

"Of course I am if you will have me, but I know practically nothing of the case. Could you give me an outline of the facts that are known?"

Thorndyke looked at me solemnly, but with a mischievous twinkle. "This," he said, "is the old story of the fox and the crow; you 'bid me discourse,' and while I 'enchant thine ear,' you claw to windward with the broiled ham. A deep-laid plot, my learned brother."

"And such," I exclaimed, "is the result of contact with the criminal classes!"

"I am sorry that you regard yourself in that light," he retorted, with a malicious smile. "However, with regard to this case. The facts are briefly these: The murdered man, Caldwell, who seems to have been formerly a receiver of stolen goods and probably a police spy as well, lived a solitary life in a small house with only an elderly woman to attend him.

"A week ago this woman went to visit a married daughter and stayed the night with her, leaving Caldwell alone in the house. When she returned on the following morning she found her master lying dead on the floor of his office, or study, in a small pool of blood.

"The police surgeon found that he had been dead about twelve hours. He had been killed by a single blow, struck from behind, with some heavy implement, and a jemmy which lay on the floor beside him fitted the wound exactly. The deceased wore a dressing-gown and no collar, and a bedroom candlestick lay upside down on the floor, although gas was laid on in the room; and as the window of the office appears to have been forced with the jemmy that was found, and there were distinct footprints on the flower-bed outside the window, the police think that the deceased was undressing to go to bed when he was disturbed by the noise of the opening window; that he went down to the office and, as he entered, was struck down by the burglar who was lurking behind the door. On the window-glass the police found the greasy impression of an open right hand, and, as you know, the finger-prints were identified by the experts as those of an old convict named Belfield. As you also know, I proved that those finger-prints were, in reality, forgeries, executed with rubber or gelatine stamps. That is an outline of the case."

The close of this recital brought our meal to an end, and we prepared for our visit to the scene of the crime. Thorndyke slipped into his pocket his queer outfit—somewhat like that of a field geologist—locked up the photographs, and we set forth by way of the Embankment.

"The police have no clue, I suppose, to the identity of the murderer, now that the finger-prints have failed?" I asked, as we strode along together.

"I expect not," he replied, "though they might have if they examined their material. I made out a rather interesting point this morning, which is this: the man who made those sham finger-prints used two stamps, one for the thumb and the other for the four fingers; and the original from which those stamps were made was the official finger-print form."

"How did you discover that?" I inquired.

"It was very simple. You remember that Mr. Singleton of the Finger-print Department sent me, by Superintendent

Miller, two photographs, one of the prints on the window and one of the official form with Belfield's finger-prints on it. Well, I have compared them and made the most minute measurements of each, and they are obviously duplicates. Not only are all the little imperfections on the form—due to defective inking—reproduced faithfully on the window-pane, but the relative positions of the four fingers on both cases agree to the hundredth of an inch. Of course the thumb stamp was made by taking an oval out of the rolled impression on the form."

"Then do you suggest that this murder was committed by someone connected with the Finger-print Department at Scotland Yard?"

"Hardly. But someone has had access to the forms. There has been leakage somewhere."

When we arrived at the little detached house in which the murdered man had lived, the door was opened by an elderly woman, and our friend, Superintendent Miller, greeted us in the hall.

"We are all ready for you, doctor," said he. "Of course, the things have all been gone over once, but we are turning them out more thoroughly now." He led the way into the small, barely-furnished office in which the tragedy had occurred. A dark stain on the carpet and a square hole in one of the window-panes furnished memorials of the crime, which were supplemented by an odd assortment of objects laid out on the newspaper-covered table. These included silver teaspoons, watches, various articles of jewellery, from which the stones had been removed—none of them of any considerable value—and a roughly-made jemmy.

"I don't know why Caldwell should have kept all these odds and ends," said the detective superintendent. "There is stuff here, that I can identify, from six different burglaries—and not a conviction among the six."

Thorndyke looked over the collection with languid interest; he was evidently disappointed at finding the room so completely turned out.

"Have you any idea what has been taken?" he asked.

"Not the least. We don't even know if the safe was opened. The keys were on the writing-table, so I suppose he went through everything, though I don't see why he left these things if he did. We found them all in the safe."

"Have you powdered the jemmy?"

The superintendent turned very red. "Yes," he growled, "but some half-dozen blithering idiots had handled the thing before I saw it—been trying it on the window, the blighters—so, of course, it showed nothing but the marks of their beastly paws."

"The window had not really been forced, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

"No," replied Miller, with a glance of surprise at my colleague, "that was a plant; so were the footprints. He must have put on a pair of Caldwell's boots and gone out and made them—unless Caldwell made them himself, which isn't likely."

"Have you found any letter or telegram?"

"A letter making an appointment for nine o'clock on the night of the murder. No signature or address, and the handwriting evidently disguised."

"Is there anything that furnishes any sort of clue?"

"Yes, sir, there is. There's this, which we found in the safe." He produced a small parcel which he proceeded to unfasten, looking somewhat queerly at Thorndyke the while. It contained various odds and ends of jewellery, and a smaller parcel formed of a pocket-handkerchief tied with tape. This the detective also unfastened, revealing half-a-dozen silver teaspoons, all engraved with the same crest, two salt-cellars and a gold locket bearing a monogram. There was also a half-sheet of note-paper on which was written, in a manifestly disguised hand: "These are the goods I told you about. F. B." But what riveted Thorndyke's attention and mine was the handkerchief itself (which was not a very clean one and was sullied by one or two small blood-stains), for it was marked in one corner with the name "F. Belfield," legibly printed in marking-ink with a rubber stamp.

Thorndyke and the superintendent looked at one another and both smiled.

"I know what you are thinking, sir," said the latter.

"I am sure you do," was the reply, "and it is useless to pretend that you don't agree with me."

"Well, sir," said Miller doggedly, "if that handkerchief has been put there as a plant, it's Belfield's business to prove it. You see, doctor," he added persuasively, "it isn't this job only that's affected. Those spoons, those salt-cellars and that locket are part of the proceeds of the Winchmore Hill burglary, and we want the gentleman who did that crack—we want him very badly."

"No doubt you do," replied Thorndyke, "but this handkerchief won't help you. A sharp counsel—Mr. Anstey, for instance—would demolish it in five minutes. I assure you, Miller, that handkerchief has no evidential value whatever, whereas it might prove an invaluable instrument of research. The best thing you can do is to hand it over to me and let me see what I can learn from it."

The superintendent was obviously dissatisfied, but he eventually agreed, with manifest reluctance, to Thorndyke's suggestion.

"Very well, doctor," he said; "you shall have it for a day or two. Do you want the spoons and things as well?"

"No. Only the handkerchief and the paper that was in it."

The two articles were accordingly handed to him and deposited in a tin box which he usually carried in his pocket, and, after a few more words with the disconsolate detective, we took our departure.

"A very disappointing morning," was Thorndyke's comment as we walked away. "Of course the room ought to have been examined by an expert before anything was moved."

"Have you picked up anything in the way of information?" I asked.

"Very little excepting confirmation of my original theory. You see, this man Caldwell was a receiver and evidently a police spy. He gave useful information to the police, and they, in return, refrained from inconvenient inquiries. But a spy, or 'nark,' is nearly always a blackmailer too, and the probabilities in this case are that some crook, on whom Caldwell was putting the screw rather too tightly, made an appointment for a meeting when the house was empty, and just knocked Caldwell on the head. The crime was evidently planned beforehand, and the murderer came prepared to kill several birds with one stone. Thus he brought with him the stamps to make the sham finger-prints on the window, and I have no doubt that he also brought this handkerchief and the various oddments of plate and jewellery from those burglaries that Miller is so keen about, and planted them in the safe. You noticed, I suppose, that none of the things were of any value, but all were capable of easy identification?"

"Yes, I noticed that. His object, evidently, was to put those burglaries as well as the murder onto poor Belfield."

"Exactly. And you see what Miller's attitude is; Belfield is the bird in the hand, whereas the other man—if there is another—is still in the bush; so Belfield is to be followed up and a conviction obtained if possible. If he is innocent, that is his affair, and it is for him to prove it."

"And what shall you do next?" I asked.

"I shall telegraph to Belfield to come and see us this evening. He may be able to tell us something about this handkerchief that, with the clue we already have, may put us on the right track. What time is your consultation?"

"Twelve-thirty—and here comes my 'bus. I shall be in to lunch." I sprang onto the footboard, and as I took my seat on the roof and looked back at my friend striding along with an easy swing, I knew that he was deep in thought, though automatically attentive to all that was happening. My consultation—it was a lunacy case of some importance—was over in time to allow of my return to our chambers punctually at the luncheon hour; and as I entered, I was at once struck by something new in Thorndyke's manner—a certain elation and gaiety which I had learned to associate with a point scored successfully in some intricate and puzzling case. He made no confidences, however, and seemed, in fact, inclined to put away, for a time, all his professional cares and business.

"Shall we have an afternoon off, Jervis?" he said gaily. "It is a fine day and work is slack just now. What say you to the Zoo? They have a splendid chimpanzee and several specimens of that remarkable fish *Periophthalmos Kolreuteri*. Shall we go?"

"By all means," I replied; "and we will mount the elephant, if you like, and throw buns to the grizzly bear and generally renew our youth like the eagle."

But when, an hour later, we found ourselves in the gardens, I began to suspect my friend of some ulterior purpose in this holiday jaunt; for it was not the chimpanzee or even the wonderful fish that attracted his attention. On the contrary, he hung about the vicinity of the lamas and camels in a way that I could not fail to notice; and even there it appeared to be the sheds and houses rather than the animals themselves that interested him.

"Behold, Jervis," he said presently, as a saddled camel of seedy aspect was led towards its house, "behold the ship of the desert, with raised saloon-deck amidships, fitted internally with watertight compartments and displaying the effects of rheumatoid arthritis in his starboard hip-joint. Let us go and examine him before he hauls into dock." We took a cross-path to intercept the camel on its way to its residence, and Thorndyke moralized as we went.

"It is interesting," he remarked, "to note the way in which these specialized animals, such as the horse, the reindeer and the camel, have been appropriated by man, and their special character made to subserve human needs. Think, for instance, of the part the camel has played in history, in ancient commerce—and modern too, for that matter—and in the diffusion of culture; and of the role he has enacted in war and conquest from the Egyptian campaign of Cambyses down to that of Kitchener. Yes, the camel is a very remarkable animal, though it must be admitted that this particular specimen is a scurvy-looking beast."

The camel seemed to be sensible of these disparaging remarks, for as it approached it saluted Thorndyke with a supercilious grin and then turned away its head.

"Your charge is not as young as he used to be," Thorndyke observed to the man who was leading the animal.

"No, sir, he isn't; he's getting old, and that's the fact. He shows it too."

"I suppose," said Thorndyke, strolling towards the house by the man's side, "these beasts require a deal of attention?"

"You're right, sir; and nasty-tempered brutes they are."



"So I have heard; but they are interesting creatures, the camels and lamas. Do you happen to know if complete sets of photographs of them are to be had here?"

"You can get a good many at the lodge, sir," the man replied, "but not all, I think. If you want a complete set, there's one of our men in the camel-house that could let you have them; he takes the photos himself, and very clever he is at it, too. But he isn't here just now."

"Perhaps you could give me his name so that I could write to him," said Thorndyke.

"Yes, sir. His name is Woodthorpe—Joseph Woodthorpe. He'll do anything for you to order. Thank you, sir; good-afternoon, sir;" and pocketing an unexpected tip, the man led his charge towards its lair.

Thorndyke's absorbing interest in the camels seemed now suddenly to become extinct, and he suffered me to lead him to any part of the gardens that attracted me, showing an imperial interest in all the inmates from the insects to the elephants, and enjoying his holiday—if it was one—with the gaiety and high spirits of a schoolboy. Yet he never let slip a chance of picking up a stray hair or feather, but gathered up each with care, wrapped it in its separate paper, on which was written its description, and deposited it in his tin collecting-box.

"You never know," he remarked, as we turned away from the ostrich enclosure, "when a specimen for comparison may be of vital importance. Here, for instance, is a small feather of a cassowary, and here the hair of a wapiti deer; now the recognition of either of those might, in certain circumstances, lead to the detection of a criminal or save the life of an innocent man. The thing has happened repeatedly, and may happen again to-morrow."

"You must have an enormous collection of hairs in your cabinet," I remarked, as we walked home.

"I have," he replied, "probably the largest in the world. And as to other microscopical objects of medico-legal interest, such as dust and mud from different localities and from special industries and manufactures, fibres, food-products and drugs, my collection is certainly unique."

"And you have found your collection useful in your work?" I asked.

"Constantly. Over and over again I have obtained, by reference to my specimens, the most unexpected evidence, and the longer I practise, the more I become convinced that the microscope is the sheet-anchor of the medical jurist."

"By the way," I said, "you spoke of sending a telegram to Belfield. Did you send it?"

"Yes. I asked him to come to see me to-night at half-past eight, and, if possible, bring his wife with him. I want to get to the bottom of that handkerchief mystery."

"But do you think he will tell you the truth about it?"

"That is impossible to judge; he will be a fool if he does not. But I think he will; he has a godly fear of me and my methods."

As soon as our dinner was finished and cleared away, Thorndyke produced the "collecting-box" from his pocket, and began to sort out the day's "catch," giving explicit directions to Polton for the disposal of each specimen. The hairs and small feathers were to be mounted as microscopic objects, while the larger feathers were to be placed, each in its separate labelled envelope, in its appropriate box. While these directions were being given, I stood by the window absently gazing out as I listened, gathering many a useful hint in the technique of preparation and preservation, and filled with admiration alike at my colleague's exhaustive knowledge of practical detail and the perfect manner in which he had trained his assistant. Suddenly I started, for a well-known figure was crossing from Crown Office Row and evidently bearing down on our chambers.

"My word, Thorndyke," I exclaimed, "here's a pretty mess!"

"What is the matter?" he asked, looking up anxiously.

"Superintendent Miller heading straight for our doorway. And it is now twenty minutes past eight."

Thorndyke laughed. "It will be a quaint position," he remarked, "and somewhat of a shock for Belfield. But it really doesn't matter; in fact, I think, on the whole, I am rather pleased that he should have come."

The superintendent's brisk knock was heard a few moments later, and when he was admitted by Polton, he entered and looked round the room a little, sheepishly.

"I am ashamed to come worrying you like this, sir," he began apologetically.

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke, serenely slipping the cassowary's feather into an envelope, and writing the name, date and locality on the outside. "I am your servant in this case, you know. Polton, whisky and soda for the superintendent."

"You see, sir," continued Miller, "our people are beginning to fuss about this case, and they don't approve of my having handed that handkerchief and the paper over to you as they will have to be put in evidence."

"I thought they might object," remarked Thorndyke.

"So did I, sir; and they do. And, in short, they say that I have got to get them back at once. I hope it won't put you out, sir."

"Not in the least," said Thorndyke. "I have asked Belfield to come here to-night—I expect him in a few minutes—and when I have heard what he has to say I shall have no further use for the handkerchief."

"You're not going to show it to him!" exclaimed the detective, aghast.

"Certainly I am."

"You mustn't do that, sir. I can't sanction it; I can't indeed."

"Now, look you here, Miller," said Thorndyke, shaking his forefinger at the officer; "I am working for you in this case, as I have told you. Leave the matter in my hands. Don't raise silly objections; and when you leave here tonight you will take with you not only the handkerchief and the paper, but probably also the name and address of the man who committed this murder and those various burglaries that you are so keen about."

"Is that really so, sir?" exclaimed the astonished detective. "Well, you haven't let the grass grow under your feet. Ah!" as a gentle rap at the door was heard, "here's Belfield, I suppose."

It was Belfield—accompanied by his wife—and mightily disturbed they were when their eyes lighted on our visitor.

"You needn't be afraid of me, Belfield," said Miller, with ferocious geniality; "I am not here after you." Which was not literally true, though it served to reassure the affrighted ex-convict.

"The superintendent dropped in by chance," said Thorndyke; "but it is just as well that he should hear what passes. I want you to look at this handkerchief and tell me if it is yours. Don't be afraid, but just tell us the simple truth."

He took the handkerchief out of a drawer and spread it on the table; and I now observed that a small square had been cut out of one of the bloodstains.

Belfield took the handkerchief in his trembling hands, and as his eye fell on the stamped name in the corner he turned deadly pale.

"It looks like mine," he said huskily. "What do you say, Liz?" he added, passing it to his wife.

Mrs. Belfield examined first the name and then the hem. "It's yours, right enough, Frank," said she. "It's the one that got changed in the wash. You see, sir," she continued, addressing Thorndyke, "I bought him half-a-dozen new ones about six months ago, and I got a rubber stamp made and marked them all. Well, one day when I was looking over his things I noticed that one of his handkerchiefs had got no mark on it. I spoke to the laundress about it, but she couldn't explain it, so as the right one never came back, I marked the one that we got in exchange."

"How long ago was that?" asked Thorndyke.

"About two months ago I noticed it."

"And you know nothing more about it."

"Nothing whatever, sir. Nor you, Frank, do you?"

Her husband shook his head gloomily, and Thorndyke replaced the handkerchief in the drawer.

"And now," said he, "I am going to ask you a question on another subject. When you were at Holloway there was a warder—or assistant warder—there, named Woodthorpe. Do you remember him?"

"Yes, sir, very well indeed; in fact, it was him that—?"

"I know," interrupted Thorndyke. "Have you seen him since you left Holloway?"

"Yes, sir, once. It was last Easter Monday. I met him at the Zoo; he is a keeper there now in the camel-house" (here a sudden light dawned upon me and I chuckled aloud, to Belfield's great astonishment). "He gave my little boy a ride on one of the camels and made himself very pleasant."

"Do you remember anything else happening?" Thorndyke inquired.

"Yes, sir. The camel had a little accident; he kicked out—he was an ill-tempered beast—and his leg hit a post; there happened to be a nail sticking out from that post, and it tore up a little flap of skin. Then Woodthorpe got out his handkerchief to tie up the wound, but as it was none of the cleanest, I said to him: 'Don't use that, Woodthorpe; have mine,' which was quite a clean one. So he took it and bound up the camel's leg, and he said to me: 'I'll have it washed and send it to you if you give me your address.' But I told him there was no need for that; I should be passing the camel-house on my way out and I would look in for the handkerchief. And I did: I looked in about an hour later, and Woodthorpe gave me my handkerchief, folded up but not washed."

"Did you examine it to see if it was yours?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, sir. I just slipped it in my pocket as it was."

"And what became of it afterwards?"

"When I got home I dropped it into the dirty-linen basket."

"Is that all you know about it?"

"Yes, sir; that is all I know."

"Very well, Belfield, that will do. Now you have no reason to be uneasy. You will soon know all about the Camberwell murder—that is, if you read the papers."

The ex-convict and his wife were obviously relieved by this assurance and departed in quite good spirits. When they were gone, Thorndyke produced the handkerchief and the half-sheet of paper and handed them to the superintendent, remarking—"This is highly satisfactory, Miller; the whole case seems to join up very neatly indeed. Two months ago the wife first noticed the substituted handkerchief, and last Easter Monday—a little over two months ago—this very significant incident took place in the Zoological Gardens."

"That is all very well, sir," objected the superintendent, "but we've only their word for it, you know."

"Not so," replied Thorndyke. "We have excellent corroborative evidence. You noticed that I had cut a small piece out of the blood-stained portion of the handkerchief?"

"Yes; and I was sorry you had done it. Our people won't like that."

"Well, here it is, and we will ask Dr. Jervis to give us his opinion of it."

From the drawer in which the handkerchief had been hidden he brought forth a microscope slide, and setting the microscope on the table, laid the slide on the stage.

"Now, Jervis," he said, "tell us what you see there."

I examined the edge of the little square of fabric (which had been mounted in a fluid reagent) with a high-power objective, and was, for a time, a little puzzled by the appearance of the blood that adhered to it.

"It looks like bird's blood," I said presently, with some hesitation, "but yet I can make out no nuclei." I looked again, and then, suddenly, "By Jove!" I exclaimed, "I have it; of course! It's the blood of a camel!"

"Is that so, doctor?" demanded the detective, leaning forward in his excitement.

"That is so," replied Thorndyke. "I discovered it after I came home this morning. You see," he explained, "it is quite unmistakable. The rule is that the blood corpuscles of mammals are circular; the one exception is the camel family, in which the corpuscles are elliptical."

"Why," exclaimed Miller, "that seems to connect Woodthorpe with this Camberwell job."

"It connects him with it very conclusively," said Thorndyke. "You are forgetting the finger-prints."

The detective looked puzzled. "What about them?" he asked.

"They were made with stamps—two stamps, as a matter of fact—and those stamps were made by photographic process from the official finger-print form. I can prove that beyond all doubt."

"Well, suppose they were. What then?"

Thorndyke opened a drawer and took out a photograph, which he handed to Miller. "Here," he said, "is the photograph of the official finger-print form which you were kind enough to bring me. What does it say at the bottom there?" and he pointed with his finger.

The superintendent read aloud: "Impressions taken by Joseph Woodthorpe. Rank, Warder; Prison, Holloway." He stared at the photograph for a moment, and then exclaimed—"Well, I'm hanged! You have worked this out neatly, doctor! and so quick too. We'll have Mr. Woodthorpe under lock and key the first thing to-morrow morning. But how did he do it, do you think?"

"He might have taken duplicate finger-prints and kept one form; the prisoners would not know there was anything wrong; but he did not in this case. He must have contrived to take a photograph of the form before sending it in—it would take a skilful photographer only a minute or two with a suitable hand-camera placed on a table at the proper distance from the wall; and I have ascertained that he is a skilful photographer. You will probably find the apparatus, and the stamps too, when you search his rooms."

"Well, well. You do give us some surprises, doctor. But I must be off now to see about this warrant. Good-night, sir, and many thanks for your help."

When the superintendent had gone we sat for a while looking at one another in silence. At length Thorndyke spoke. "Here is a case, Jervis," he said, "which, simple as it is, teaches a most invaluable lesson—a lesson which you should take well to heart. It is this: The evidential value of any fact is an unknown quantity until the fact has been examined. That seems a self-evident truth, but like many other self-evident truths, it is constantly overlooked in practice. Take this present case. When I left Caldwell's house this morning the facts in my possession were these: (1) The man who murdered Caldwell was directly or indirectly connected with the Finger-print Department. (2) He was almost certainly a skilled photographer. (3) He probably committed the Winchmore Hill and the other burglaries. (4) He was known to Caldwell, had had professional dealings with him and was probably being blackmailed. This was all; a very vague clue, as you see.

"There was the handkerchief, planted, as I had no doubt; but could not prove; the name stamped on it was Belfield's, but any one can get a rubber stamp made. Then it was stained with blood, as handkerchiefs often are; that blood might or might not be human blood; it did not seem to matter a straw whether it was or not. Nevertheless, I said to myself: If it is human, or at least mammalian blood, that is a fact; and if it is not human blood, that is also a fact. I will have that fact, and

then I shall know what its value is. I examined the stain when I reached home, and behold! it was camel's blood; and immediately this insignificant fact swelled up into evidence of primary importance. The rest was obvious. I had seen Woodthorpe's name on the form, and I knew several other officials. My business was to visit all places in London where there were camels, to get the names of all persons connected with them and to ascertain if any among them was a photographer. Naturally I went first to the Zoo, and at the very first cast hooked Joseph Woodthorpe. Wherefore I say again: Never call any fact irrelevant until you have examined it."

The remarkable evidence given above was not heard at the trial, nor did Thorndyke's name appear among the witnesses; for when the police searched Woodthorpe's rooms, so many incriminating articles were found (including a pair of fingerprint stamps which exactly answered to Thorndyke's description of them, and a number of photographs of fingerprint forms) that his guilt was put beyond all doubt; and society was shortly after relieved of a very undesirable member.

---

THE END

# 31 NEW INN

## I. — THE MYSTERIOUS PATIENT

THE hour of nine was approaching—the blessed hour of release when the casual patient ceases from troubling (or is expected to do so) and the weary practitioner may put on his slippers and turn down the surgery gas.

The fact was set forth with needless emphasis by the little American clock on the mantel-shelf, which tick-tacked frantically, as though it were eager to get the day over and be done with it; indeed, the approaching hour might have been ninety-nine from the to-do the little clock made about the matter.

The minute-hand was creeping up to the goal and the little clock had just given a kind of preliminary cough to announce its intention of striking the hour, when the bell on the door of the outer surgery rang to announce the arrival of a laggard visitor. A moment later the office-boy thrust his head in at my door and informed me that a gentleman wished to see me.

They were all gentlemen in Kennington Lane—unless they were ladies or children. Sweeps, milkmen, bricklayers, costermongers, all were impartially invested with rank and title by the democratic office-boy, and I was not, therefore, surprised or disappointed when the open door gave entrance to a man in the garb of a cabman or coachman.

As he closed the door behind him, he drew from his coat pocket a note, which he handed to me without remark. It was not addressed to me, but to my principal—to the doctor, that is to say, of whose practise I was taking charge in his absence.

"You understand, I suppose," I said, as I prepared to open the envelope, "that I am not Dr. Pike? He is out of town at present, and I am looking after his patients."

"It's of no consequence," the man replied. "You'll do just as well as him, I expect."

On this I opened the note and read the contents, which were quite brief and, at first sight, in no way remarkable.

*DEAR SIR:*

*Could you come at once and see my brother? The bearer of this will give you further particulars and convey you to the house.*

*Yours truly,*

*J. MORGAN.*

There was no address on the paper and no date, and the name of the writer was, of course, unknown to me.

"This note speaks of some further particulars," I said to the messenger. "What are the particulars referred to?"

"Why, sir, the fact is," he replied, "it's a most ridic'lous affair altogether. The sick gentleman don't seem to me to be quite right in his head; at any rate, he's got some very peculiar ideas. He's been ailing now for some time, and the master, Mr. Morgan, has tried everything he knew to get him to see a doctor. But he wouldn't. However, at last it seems he gave way, but only on one condition. He said the doctor was to come from a distance and was not to be told who he was or where he lived or anything about him; and he made the master promise to keep to these conditions before he would let him send for advice. Do you think you could come and see him on them conditions, sir?"

I considered the question for a while before replying. We doctors all know the kind of idiot who is possessed with an insane dislike and distrust of the members of our profession and we like to have as little to do with him as possible. If this had been my own practise I would have declined the case off-hand; but I could not lightly refuse work that would bring profit to my principal.

As I turned the matter over in my mind I half-unconsciously scrutinized my visitor—rather to his embarrassment—and I liked his appearance as little as I liked his message. He kept his hat on, which I resented, and he stood near the door where the light was dim, for the illumination was concentrated on the table and the patient's chair; but I could see that he had a sly, unprepossessing face and a greasy red mustache that seemed out of character with his livery, though this was mere prejudice. Moreover, his voice was disagreeable, having that dull, snuffling quality that, to the medical ear, suggests a nasal polypus. Altogether I was unpleasantly impressed, but decided, nevertheless, to undertake the case.

"I suppose," I answered at length, "it is no affair of mine who the sick man is or where he lives; but how do you propose to manage the business? Am I to be blindfolded like the visitor to the bandits' cave?"

"No, sir," he replied with a forced smile and with evident relief at my agreement. "I have a carriage waiting to take you."

"Very well," I rejoined, opening the door to let him out, "I will be with you in a minute."

I slipped into a bag a small supply of emergency drugs and a few diagnostic instruments, turned down the gas and passed out through the surgery. The carriage was standing by the curb and I viewed it with mingled curiosity and disfavor; it was a kind of large brougham, such as is used by some commercial travelers, the usual glass windows being replaced by wooden shutters intended to conceal the piles of sample-boxes, and the doors capable of being locked from outside.

As I emerged, the coachman unlocked the door and held it open.

"How long will the journey take?" I asked, pausing with my foot on the step.

"Nigh upon half an hour," was the reply.

I glanced at my watch and, reflecting gloomily that my brief hour of leisure would be entirely absorbed by this visit, stepped into the uninviting vehicle. Instantly the coachman slammed the door and turned the key, leaving me in total darkness.

As the carriage rattled along, now over the macadam of quiet side-streets and now over the granite of the larger thoroughfares, I meditated on the oddity of this experience and on the possible issues of the case. For one moment a suspicion arose in my mind that this might be a trick to lure me to some thieves' den where I might be robbed and possibly murdered; but I immediately dismissed this idea, reflecting that so elaborate a plan would not have been devised for so unremunerative a quarry as an impecunious general practitioner.

---

## II. — I MEET MR. MORGAN

MY reflections were at length brought to an end by the carriage slowing down and passing under an archway—as I could tell by the hollow sound—where it presently stopped. Then I distinguished the clang of heavy wooden gates closed behind me, and a moment later the carriage door was unlocked and opened. I stepped out into a covered way that seemed to lead down to a stable; but it was all in darkness and I had no time to make any detailed observations, for the carriage had drawn up opposite a side door which was open, and in which stood an elderly woman holding a candle.

"Is that the doctor?" she inquired, shading the candle with her hand and peering at me with screwed-up eyes. Then, with evident relief: "I am glad you have come, sir. Will you please to step in?"

I followed her across a dark passage into a large room almost destitute of furniture, where she set down the candle on a chest of drawers and turned to depart.

"The master will see you in a moment," she said. "I will go and tell him you are here."

With that she left me in the twilight of the solitary candle to gaze curiously at the bare and dismal apartment with its three rickety chairs, its unswept floor, its fast-closed shutters and the dark drapery of cobwebs that hung from the ceiling to commemorate a long and illustrious dynasty of spiders.

Presently the door opened and a shadowy figure appeared, standing close by the threshold.

"Mr. Morgan, I presume?" said I, advancing toward the stranger as he remained standing by the doorway.

"Quite right, sir," he answered, and as he spoke I started, for his voice had the same thick, snuffling quality that I had already noticed in that of the coachman. The coincidence was certainly an odd one, and it caused me to look at the stranger narrowly. He appeared somewhat shorter than his servant, but then he had a pronounced stoop, whereas the coachman was stiff and upright in his carriage; then the coachman had short hair of a light brown and a reddish mustache, whereas this man appeared, so far as I could see in the gloom, to have a shock head of black hair and a voluminous black beard. Moreover he wore spectacles. "Quite right, sir," said this individual, "and I thought I had better give you an outline of the case before you go up to the patient. My brother is, as my man has probably told you, very peculiar in some of his ideas, whence these rather foolish proceedings, for which I trust you will not hold me responsible, though I feel obliged to carry out his wishes. He returned a week or two ago from New York and, being then in rather indifferent health, he asked me to put him up for a time, as he had no settled home of his own. From that time he has gradually become worse and has really caused me a good deal of anxiety, for until now I have been quite unable to prevail on him to seek medical advice. And even now he has only consented subject to the ridiculous conditions that my man has probably explained to you."

"What is the nature of his illness?" I asked. "Does he complain of any definite symptoms?"

"No," was the reply. "Indeed, he makes very few complaints of any kind, although he is obviously ill, but the fact is that he is hardly ever more than half awake. He lies in a kind of dreamy stupor from morning to night."

This struck me as excessively odd and by no means in agreement with the patient's energetic refusal to see a doctor.

"But does he never rouse completely?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," Mr. Morgan answered quickly; "he rouses occasionally and is then quite rational and, as you may have gathered, rather obstinate. But perhaps you had better see for yourself what his condition is. Follow me, please: the stairs are rather dark."

The stairs were very dark and were, moreover, without any covering of carpet, so that our footsteps resounded on the bare boards as though we were in an empty house. I stumbled up after my guide, feeling my way by the hand-rail, and on the first floor followed him into a room similar in size to the one below and very barely furnished, though less squalid than the other. A single candle at the farther end threw its feeble light on a figure in the bed, leaving the rest of the room in a dim twilight.

"Here is the doctor, Henry," Mr. Morgan called out as we entered, and, receiving no answer, he added: "He seems to be dozing as usual."

I stepped forward to look at my patient while Mr. Morgan remained at the other end of the room, pacing noiselessly backward and forward in the semi-obscurity. By the light of the candle I saw an elderly man with good features and an intelligent and even attractive face, but dreadfully emaciated, bloodless and yellow. He lay with half-closed eyes and seemed to be in a dreamy, somnolent state, although not actually asleep. I advanced to the bedside and addressed him somewhat loudly by name, but the only response was a slight lifting of the eyelids which, after a brief, drowsy glance at me, slowly subsided to their former position.

I now proceeded to feel his pulse, grasping his wrist with intentional brusqueness in the hope of rousing him from his stupor. The beats were slow and feeble and slightly irregular, giving clear evidence, if any were wanted, of his generally lowered vitality. My attention was next directed to the patient's eyes, which I examined closely with the aid of the candle, raising the lids somewhat roughly so as to expose the whole of the iris. He submitted without resistance to my rather ungentle handling, and showed no signs of discomfort even when I brought the flame of the candle to within a couple of inches of his eyes.

His extreme tolerance of light, however, was in no way surprising when one came to examine the pupils, for they were contracted to such a degree as to present only the minutest point of black upon the gray iris.

But the excessive contraction of the pupils was not the only singular feature in the sick man's eyes. As he lay on his back, the right iris sagged down slightly toward its center, showing a distinctly concave surface and, whenever any slight movement of the eyeball took place, a perceptible undulatory movement could be detected in it.

The patient had, in fact, what is known as a tremulous iris, a condition that is seen in cases where the crystalline lens has been extracted for the cure of cataract, or where it has become accidentally displaced, leaving the iris unsupported. Now, in the present case the complete condition of the iris made it clear that the ordinary extraction operation had not been performed, nor was I able, on the closest inspection with the aid of a lens, to find any signs of the less common "needle operation." The inference was that the patient had suffered from the accident known as dislocation of the lens, and this led to the further inference that he was almost or completely blind in the right eye.

This conclusion was, indeed, to some extent negated by a deep indentation on the bridge of the nose, evidently produced by spectacles habitually worn, for if only one eye were useful, a monocle would answer the purpose. Yet this objection was of little weight, for many men, under the circumstances, would elect to wear spectacles rather than submit to the inconvenience and disfigurement of the single eyeglass.

As to the nature of the patient's illness, only one opinion seemed possible; it was a clear case of opium or morphia poisoning. To this conclusion all his symptoms seemed to point plainly enough. His coated tongue, which he protruded slowly and tremulously in response to a command bawled in his ear; his yellow skin and ghastly expression; his contracted pupils and the stupor from which he could be barely roused by the roughest handling, and which yet did not amount to actual insensibility—these formed a distinct and coherent group of symptoms, not only pointing plainly to the nature of the drug, but also suggesting a very formidable dose.

The only question that remained was: How and by whom that dose had been administered. The closest scrutiny of his arms and legs failed to reveal a single mark such as would be made by a hypodermic needle, and there was, of course, nothing to show or suggest whether the drug had been taken voluntarily by the patient himself or administered by some one else.

And then there remained the possibility that I might, after all, be mistaken in my diagnosis—a reflection that, in view of the obviously serious condition of the patient, I found eminently disturbing. As I pocketed my stethoscope and took a last look at my patient I realized that my position was one of extraordinary difficulty and perplexity. On the one hand my suspicions inclined me to extreme reticence, while, on the other, it was evidently my duty to give any information that might prove serviceable to the patient.

---



### III. — FOUL PLAY?

"WELL, Doctor, what do you think of my brother?" Mr. Morgan asked as I joined him at the darkened end of the room. His manner, in asking the question, struck me as anxious and eager, but of course there was nothing remarkable in this.

"I think rather badly of him, Mr. Morgan," I replied. "He is certainly in a very low state."

"But you are able to form an opinion as to the nature of the disease?" he asked, still in a tone of suppressed eagerness.

"I can not give a very definite opinion at present," I replied guardedly. "The symptoms are decidedly obscure and might equally well indicate several different affections. They might be due to congestion of the brain and, in the absence of any other explanation, I am inclined to adopt that view. The most probable alternative is some narcotic drug such as opium, if it were possible for him to obtain access to it without your knowledge— but I suppose it is not?"

"I should say decidedly not," he replied. "You see, my brother is not very often left alone, and he never leaves the room, so I don't see how he could obtain anything. My housekeeper is absolutely trustworthy."

"Is he often as drowsy as he seems now?"

"Oh, very often. In fact, that is his usual condition. He rouses now and again and is quite lucid and natural for perhaps half an hour, and then he dozes off again and remains asleep for hours on end. You don't think this can be a case of sleeping-sickness, I suppose?"

"I think not," I answered, making a mental note, nevertheless, to look up the symptoms of this rare and curious disease as soon as I reached home. "Besides, he has not been in Africa, has he?"

"I can't say where he has been," was the reply. "He has just come from New York, but where he was before going there I have no idea."

"Well," I said, "we will give him some medicine and attend to his general condition, and I think I had better see him again very shortly. Meanwhile you must watch him closely, and perhaps you may have something to report to me at my next visit."

I then gave him some general directions as to the care of the patient, to which he listened attentively, and I once more suggested that I ought to see the sick man again quite soon.

"Very well, Doctor," Mr. Morgan replied, "I will send for you again in a day or two if he does not get better; and now if you will allow me to pay your fee, I will go and order the carriage while you write the prescription."

He handed me the fee and, having indicated some writing materials on a table near the bed, wished me good-evening and left the room.

As soon as I was left alone, I drew from my bag the hypodermic syringe with its little magazine of drugs that I always carried with me on my rounds. Charging the syringe with a full dose of atropin, I approached the patient once more, and, slipping up the sleeve of his night-shirt, injected the dose under the skin of his forearm. The prick of the needle roused him for a moment and he gazed at me with dull curiosity, mumbling some indistinguishable words. Then he relapsed once more into silence and apathy while I made haste to put the syringe back into its receptacle. I had just finished writing the prescription (a mixture of permanganate of potash to destroy any morphia that might yet remain in the patient's stomach) and was watching the motionless figure on the bed, when the housekeeper looked in at the door.

"The carriage is ready, doctor," said she, whereupon I rose and followed her downstairs.

The vehicle was drawn up in the covered way, as I perceived by the glimmer of the housekeeper's candle, which also enabled me dimly to discern the coachman standing close by in the shadow. I entered the carriage, the door was banged to and locked, and I then heard the heavy bolts of the gates withdrawn and the loud creaking of hinges. Immediately after, the carriage passed out and started off at a brisk pace, which was never relaxed until we reached our destination.

My reflections during the return journey were the reverse of pleasant, for I could not rid myself of the conviction that I was being involved in some very suspicious proceedings. And yet it was possible that I might be entirely mistaken—that the case might in reality be one of some brain affection accompanied by compression such as slow hemorrhage, abscess, tumor or simple congestion. Again, the patient might be a confirmed opium-eater, unknown to his brother. The cunning of these unfortunates is proverbial, and it would be quite possible for him to feign profound stupor so long as he was watched and then, when left alone for a few minutes, to nip out of bed and help himself from some secret store of the drug.

Still I did not believe this to be the true explanation. In spite of all the various possibilities, my suspicions came back to Mr. Morgan and refused to be dispelled. All the circumstances of the case itself were suspicious; so was the strange and sinister resemblance between the coachman and his employer; and so, most of all, was the fact that Mr. Morgan had told me a deliberate lie.

For he had lied, beyond all doubt. His statement as to the almost continuous stupor was absolutely irreconcilable with his other statement as to his brother's wilfulness and obstinacy; and even more irreconcilable with the deep and comparatively fresh marks of the spectacles on the patient's nose. The man had certainly worn spectacles within twenty-four hours, which he would hardly have done if he had been in a state bordering on coma.

My reflections were, for the moment, interrupted by the stopping of the carriage. The door was unlocked and thrown open and I emerged from my dark and stuffy prison.

"You seem to have a good fresh horse," I remarked, as a pretext for having another look at the coachman.

"Ay," he answered, "he can go, he can. Good-night, sir."

He slammed the carriage door, mounted the box and drove off as if to avoid further conversation; and as I again compared his voice with those of his master, and his features with those I had seen so imperfectly in the darkened rooms, I was still inclined to entertain my suspicion that the coachman and Mr. Morgan were one and the same person.

Over my frugal supper I found myself taking up anew the thread of my meditations, and afterward, as I smoked my last pipe by the expiring surgery fire, the strange and sinister features of the case continued to obtrude themselves on my notice. Especially was I puzzled as to what course of action I ought to follow. Should I maintain the professional secrecy to which I was tacitly committed, or ought I to convey a hint to the police?

Suddenly, and with a singular feeling of relief, I bethought me of my old friend and fellow student, John Thorndyke, now an eminent authority on medical jurisprudence. Thorndyke was a barrister in extensive special practise and so would be able to tell me at once what was my duty from a legal point of view, and, as he was also a doctor of medicine, he would understand the exigencies of medical practise. If I could only find time to call at the Temple and put the case before him, all my doubts and difficulties would be resolved.

Anxiously I opened my visiting-list to see what kind of day's work was in store for me on the morrow. It was not a heavy day, but I was doubtful whether it would allow of my going so far from my district, until my eye caught, near the foot of the page, the name of Burton. Now Mr. Burton lived in one of the old houses on the east side of Bouverie Street—less than five minutes' walk from Thorndyke's chambers in King's Bench Walk, and he was, moreover, a "chronic" who could safely be left for the last. When I had done with Mr. Burton, I could look in on my friend with a good chance of catching him on his return from the hospital.

Having thus arranged my program, I rose, in greatly improved spirits, and knocked out my pipe just as the little clock banged out the hour of midnight.



#### IV. — I CONSULT THORNDYKE

"AND so," said Thorndyke, eyeing me critically as we dropped into our respective easy chairs by the fire with the little tea-table between us, "you are back once more on the old trail?"

"Yes," I answered, with a laugh, "the old trail, the long trail, the trail that is always new."

"And leads nowhere," added Thorndyke grimly.

I laughed again—not very heartily, for there was an uncomfortable element of truth in my friend's remark, to which my own experience bore only too complete testimony. The medical practitioner whose lack of means forces him to subsist by taking temporary charge of other men's practises is likely to find that the passing years bring him little but gray hairs and a wealth of disagreeable experience.

"You will have to drop it, Jervis, you will, indeed," Thorndyke resumed after a pause. "This casual employment is preposterous for a man of your class and professional attainments. Besides, are you not engaged to be married, and to a most charming girl?"

"Juliet has just been exhorting me in similar terms—except as to the last particular," I replied. "She threatens to buy a practise and put me in at a small salary and batten on the proceeds. Moreover, she seems to imply that my internal charge of pride, vanity and egotism is equal to about four hundred pounds to the square inch and is rapidly approaching bursting-point. I am not sure that she is not right, too."

"Her point of view is eminently reasonable, at any rate," said Thorndyke. "But as to buying a practise, before you commit yourself to any such thing I would ask you to consider the suggestion that I have made more than once—that you join me here as my junior. We worked together with excellent results in the 'Red Thumbmark' case, as the newspapers called it, and we could do as well in many another. Of course, if you prefer general practise, well and good; only remember that I should be glad to have you as my junior, and that in that capacity and with your abilities you would have an opening for something like a career."

"My dear Thorndyke," I answered, not without emotion. "I am more rejoiced at your offer and more grateful than I can tell you, and I should like to go into the matter this very moment. But I must not, for I have only a very short time now before I must go back to my work, and I have not yet touched upon the main object of my visit."

"I supposed that you had come to see me," remarked Thorndyke.

"So I did. I came to consult you professionally. The fact is, I am in a dilemma, and I want you to tell me what you think I ought to do."

Thorndyke paused in the act of refilling my cup and glanced at me anxiously.

"It is nothing that affects me personally at all," I continued. "But perhaps I had better give you an account of the whole affair from the beginning."

Accordingly I proceeded to relate in detail the circumstances connected with my visit to the mysterious patient of the preceding evening, to all of which Thorndyke listened with close attention and evident interest.

"A very remarkable story, Jervis," he said, as I concluded my narrative. "In fact, quite a fine mystery of the good, old-fashioned Adelphi drama type. I particularly like the locked carriage. You have obviously formed certain hypotheses on the subject?"

"Yes; but I have come to you to hear yours."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "I expect yours and mine are pretty much alike, for there are two obvious alternative explanations of the affair."

"As for instance?"

"That Mr. Morgan's account of his brother's illness may be perfectly true and straightforward. The patient may be an opium-eater or morphinomaniac hitherto unsuspected. The secrecy and reticence attributed to him are quite consistent with such a supposition. On the other hand, Mr. J. Morgan's story may be untrue—which is certainly more probable—and he may be administering morphia for his own ends.

"The objection to this view is that morphia is a very unusual and inconvenient poison, except in a single fatal dose, on account of the rapidity with which tolerance of the drug is established. Nevertheless we must not forget that slow morphia poisoning might prove eminently suitable in certain cases. The prolonged use of morphia in large doses enfeebles the will, confuses the judgment and debilitates the body, and so might be adopted by a poisoner whose aim was to get some instrument or document executed, such as a will or assignment, after which, death might, if necessary, be brought about by other means. Did it seem to you as if Mr. Morgan was sounding you as to your willingness to give a death-certificate?"

"He said nothing to that effect, but the matter was in my mind, which was one reason for my extreme reticence."

"Yes, you showed excellent judgment in circumstances of considerable difficulty," said Thorndyke, "and, if our friend is up to mischief, he has not made a happy selection in his doctor. Just consider what would have happened—assuming the

man to be bent on murder—if some blundering, cocksure idiot had rushed in, jumped to a diagnosis, called the case, let us say, an erratic form of Addison's disease, and predicted a fatal termination. Thenceforward the murderer's course would be clear; he could compass his victim's death at any moment, secure of getting a death-certificate. As it is, he will have to move cautiously for the present—always assuming that we are not doing him a deep injustice."

"Yes," I answered, "we may take it that nothing fatal will happen just at present, unless some more easy-going practitioner is called in. But the question that is agitating me is, What ought I to do? Should I, for instance, report the case to the police?"

"I should say certainly not," replied Thorndyke. "In the first place, you can give no address, nor even the slightest clue to the whereabouts of the house, and, in the second, you have nothing definite to report. You certainly could not swear an information and, if you made any statement, you might find, after all, that you had committed a gross and ridiculous breach of professional confidence. No, if you hear no more from Mr. J. Morgan, you must watch the reports of inquests carefully and attend if necessary. If Mr. Morgan sends for you again, you ought undoubtedly to fix the position of the house. That is your clear duty for many and obvious reasons, and especially in view of your finding it necessary to communicate with the coroner or the police."

"That is all very well," I exclaimed, "but will you kindly tell me, my dear Thorndyke, how a man, boxed up in a pitch-dark carriage, is going to locate any place to which he may be conveyed?"

"I don't think the task presents any difficulties," he replied. "You would be prepared to take a little trouble, I suppose?"

"Certainly," I rejoined. "I will do my utmost to carry out any plan you may suggest."

"Very well, then. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"It must be only a few," I answered, "for I ought to be getting back to my work."

"I won't detain you more than five minutes," said Thorndyke. "I will just run up to the workshop and get Polton to prepare what you will want, and when I have shown you how to get it to work I will let you go."

He hurried away, leaving the door open, and returned in less than a couple of minutes.

"Come into the office," said he, and I followed him into the adjoining room—a rather small but light apartment of which the walls were lined with labeled deed-boxes. A massive safe stood in one corner and, in another, close to a window, was a great roll-top table surmounted by a nest of over a hundred labeled drawers. From one of the latter he drew a paper-covered pocket note-book and, sitting down at the table, began to rule the pages each into three columns, two quite narrow and one broad.

He was just finishing the last page when there came a very gentle tap at the door.

"Is that you, Polton? Come in," said my friend.

The dry, shrewd-looking, little elderly man entered and I was at once struck by the incongruity of his workman's apron and rolled-up sleeves with his refined and intellectual face.

"Will this do?" he asked, holding out a little thin board about seven inches by five, to one corner of which a pocket compass had been fixed with shellac.

"The very thing, Polton, thank you."

"What a wonderful old fellow that is, Jervis!" my friend observed, as his assistant retired with a friendly smile at me. "He took in the idea instantly and he seems to have produced the finished article by magic, as the conjurers bring forth bowls of goldfish at a moment's notice. And now as to the use of this appliance. Can you read a compass?"

"Oh, yes," I replied. "I used to sail a small yacht at one time."

"Good, then you will have no difficulty, though I expect the compass needle will jig about a good deal in the carriage. Here is a pocket reading-lamp, which you can hook on to the carriage lining. This note-book can be fixed to the board with an india-rubber band—so. You observe that the thoughtful Polton has stuck a piece of thread on the glass of the compass to serve as a lubber's line. Now this is how you will proceed: As soon as you are locked in the carriage, light your lamp—better have a book with you in case the light is seen—get out your watch and put the board on your knee. Then enter in one narrow column of your note-book the time; in the other, the direction shown by the compass and, in the broad column, any particulars, including the number of steps the horse makes in a minute. Thus:—"

He opened the note-book and made one or two sample entries in pencil as follows:

9:40—S.E. Start from home.

9:41—S.W. Granite blocks.

9:43—S.W. Wood pavement. Hoofs 104.

9:47—W. by S. Granite crossing Macadam.

"And so on. You follow the process, Jervis?"

"Perfectly," I answered. "It is quite clear and simple, though, I must say, highly ingenious. But I must really go now."

"Good-by, then," said Thorndyke, slipping a well-sharpened pencil through the rubber band that fixed the note-book to the board. "Let me know how you get on, and come and see me again as soon as you can, in any case."

He handed me the board and the lamp, and when I had slipped them into my pocket we shook hands and I hurried away, a little uneasy at having left my charge so long.



## V. — THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

A COUPLE of days passed without my receiving any fresh summons from Mr. Morgan, a circumstance that occasioned me some little disappointment, for I was now eager to put into practise Thorndyke's ingenious plan for discovering the whereabouts of the house of mystery. When the evening of the third day was well advanced and Mr. Morgan still made no sign, I began to think that I had seen the last of my mysterious patient and that the elaborate preparations for tracking him to his hiding-place had been made in vain.

It was therefore with a certain sense of relief and gratification that I received, at about ten minutes to nine, the office-boy's laconic announcement of "Mr. Morgan's carriage," followed by the inevitable "Wants you to go and see him at once."

The two remaining patients were of the male sex—an important time-factor in medical practise—and, as they were both cases of simple and common ailments, I was able to dispatch their business in about ten minutes.

Then, bidding the boy close up the surgery, I put on my overcoat, slipped the little board and the lamp into the pocket, tucked a newspaper under my arm and went out.

The coachman was standing by the horse's head and touched his hat as he came forward to open the door.

"I have fortified myself for the long drive, you see," I remarked, exhibiting the newspaper as I stepped into the carriage. "But you can't read in the dark," said he.

"No, but I have a lamp," I replied, producing it and striking a match.

"Oh, I see," said the coachman, adding, as I hooked the lamp on to the back cushion, "I suppose you found it rather a dull ride last time?" Then, without waiting for a reply, he slammed and locked the door and mounted the box.

I laid the board on my knee, looked at my watch and made the first entry.

*9:05—S.W. Start from home. Horse 13 hands.*

As on the previous occasion, the carriage was driven at a smart and regular pace, but as I watched the compass I became more and more astonished at the extraordinarily indirect manner in which it proceeded. For the compass needle, though it oscillated continually with the vibration, yet remained steady enough to show the main direction quite plainly, and I was able to see that our course zigzagged in a way that was difficult to account for.

Once we must have passed close to the river, for I heard a steamer's whistle—apparently a tug's—quite near at hand, and several times we passed over bridges or archways. All these meanderings I entered carefully in my note-book, and mightily busy the occupation kept me; for I had hardly time to scribble down one entry before the compass needle would swing round sharply, showing that we had, once more, turned a corner.

At length the carriage slowed down and turned into the covered way, whereupon, having briefly noted the fact and the direction, I smuggled the board and the note-book—now nearly half-filled with hastily scrawled memoranda—into my pocket; and when the door was unlocked and thrown open, I was deep in the contents of the evening paper.

I was received, as before, by the housekeeper, who, in response to my inquiry as to the patient's condition, informed me that he had seemed somewhat better. "As, indeed, he ought to," she added, "with all the care and watching he gets from the master. But you'll see that for yourself, sir, and, if you will wait here, I will go and tell Mr. Morgan you have come."

An interval of about five minutes elapsed before she returned to usher me up the dark staircase to the sick-room, and, on entering, I perceived Mr. Morgan, stooping over the figure on the bed. He rose, on seeing me, and came to meet me with his hand extended.

"I had to send for you again, you see, Doctor," he said. "The fact is, he is not quite so well this evening, which is extremely disappointing, for he had begun to improve so much that I hoped recovery had fairly set in. He has been much brighter and more wakeful the last two days, but this afternoon he sank into one of his dozes and has seemed to be getting more and more heavy ever since."

"He has taken his medicine?" I asked.

"Quite regularly," replied Mr. Morgan, indicating with a gesture the half-empty bottle on the table by the bedside.

"And as to food?"

"Naturally he takes very little; and, of course, when these attacks of drowsiness come on, he is without food for rather long periods."

I stepped over to the bed, leaving Mr. Morgan in the shadow, as before, and looked down at the patient. His aspect was, if anything, more ghastly and corpse-like than before; he lay quite motionless and relaxed, the only sign of life being the slight rise and fall of his chest and the soft gurgling snore at each shallow breath. At the first glance I should have said that he was dying, and indeed, with my previous knowledge of the case, I viewed him with no little anxiety, even now.

He opened his eyes, however, when I shouted in his ear, and even put out his tongue when asked in similar stentorian tones, but I could get no answer to any of my questions—not even the half-articulate mumble I had managed to elicit on

the previous occasion. His stupor was evidently more profound now than then and, whatever might be the cause of his symptoms, he was certainly in a condition of extreme danger. Of that I had no doubt.

"I am afraid you don't find him any better to-night," remarked Mr. Morgan as I joined him at the other end of the room.

"No," I answered. "His condition appears to me to be very critical. I should say it is very doubtful whether he will rouse at all."

"You don't mean that you think he is dying?" Mr. Morgan spoke in tones of very unmistakable anxiety—even of terror.

"I think he might die at any moment," I replied.

"Good God!" exclaimed Morgan. "You horrify me!"

He evidently spoke the truth, for his appearance and manner denoted the most extreme agitation.

"I really think," he continued, "—at least I hope that you take an unnecessarily serious view of his condition. He has been like this before, you know."

"Possibly," I answered. "But there comes a last time, and it may have come now."

"Have you been able to form any more definite opinion as to the nature of this dreadful complaint?" he asked.

I hesitated for a moment and he continued:

"As to your suggestion that his symptoms might be due to drugs, I think we may consider that disposed of. He has been watched, practically without cessation, since you came last and, moreover, I have myself turned out the room and examined the bed, and not a trace of any drug was to be found. Have you considered the question of sleeping-sickness?"

I looked at the man narrowly before answering, and distrusted him more than ever. Still, my concern was with the patient and his present needs; I was, after all, a doctor, not a detective, and the circumstances called for straightforward speech and action on my part.

"His symptoms are not those of sleeping-sickness," I replied. "They are brain symptoms and are, in my opinion, due to morphia poisoning."



## VI. — MR. MORGAN'S SPECTACLES

"BUT, my dear sir," he exclaimed, "the thing is impossible! Haven't I just told you that he has been watched continuously?"

"I can judge only by the appearances I find," I answered. Then, seeing that he was about to offer fresh objections, I continued: "Don't let us waste precious time in discussion, or your brother may be dead before we have reached a conclusion. If you will get some strong coffee made, I will take the other necessary measures, and perhaps we may manage to pull him round."

The decision of my manner cowed him; besides which he was manifestly alarmed. Replying stiffly that I "must do as I thought best," he hurried from the room, leaving me to carry out my part of the cure. And as soon as he was gone I set to work without further loss of time.

Having injected a full dose of atropin, I took down from the mantelshelf the bottle containing the mixture that I had prescribed—a solution of potassium permanganate. The patient's lethargic condition made me fear that he might be unable to swallow, so that I could not take the risk of pouring the medicine into his mouth for fear of suffocating him. A stomach-tube would have solved the difficulty, but of course I had none with me.

I had, however, a mouth-speculum, which also acted as a gag, and, having propped the patient's mouth open with this, I hastily slipped off one of the rubber tubes from my stethoscope and inserted into one end of it a vulcanite ear-speculum to act as a funnel. Then, introducing the other end of the tube into the gullet, I cautiously poured a small quantity of the medicine into the extemporized funnel.

To my great relief, a movement of the throat showed that the swallowing reflex still existed, and, thus encouraged, I poured down the tube as much of the fluid as I thought it wise to administer at one time.

I had just withdrawn the tube and was looking round for some means of cleansing it when Mr. Morgan returned and, contrary to his usual practise, came close up to the bed. He glanced anxiously from the prostrate figure to the tube that I was holding and then announced that the coffee was being prepared. As he spoke, I was able, for the first time, to look him fairly in the face by the light of the candle.

Now it is a curious fact—though one that most persons must have observed—that there sometimes occurs a considerable interval between the reception of a visual impression and its transfer to the consciousness. A thing may be seen, as it were, unconsciously, and the impression consigned, apparently, to instant oblivion, and yet the picture may be subsequently revived by memory with such completeness that its details can be studied as though the object were still actually visible. Something of that kind must have happened to me now, for, preoccupied as I was by the condition of the patient, the professional habit of rapid and close observation caused me to direct a searching glance at the man before me. It was only a brief glance, for Mr. Morgan, perhaps embarrassed by my intent regard of him, almost immediately withdrew into the shadow, but it revealed two facts of which I took no conscious note at the time, but which came back to me later and gave me much food for speculation.

One fact thus observed was that Mr. Morgan's eyes were of a bluish-gray, like those of his brother, and were surmounted by light-coloured eyebrows, entirely incongruous with his black hair and beard.

But the second fact was much more curious. As he stood, with his head slightly turned, I was able to look through one glass of his spectacles at the wall beyond. On the wall was a framed print, and the edge of the frame, seen through the spectacle-glass, appeared unaltered and free from distortion, as though seen through plain window-glass; and yet the reflections of the candle-flame in the spectacles showed the flame inverted, clearly proving that the glasses were concave on one surface at least.

These two apparently irreconcilable appearances, when I subsequently recalled them, puzzled me completely, and it was not until some time afterward that the explanation of the mystery came to me.

For the moment, however, the sick man occupied my attention to the exclusion of all else. As the atropin took effect he became somewhat less lethargic, for when I spoke loudly in his ear and shook him gently by the arm he opened his eyes and looked dreamily into my face; but the instant he was left undisturbed, he relapsed into his former condition. Presently the housekeeper arrived with a jug of strong black coffee, which I proceeded to administer in spoonfuls, giving the patient a vigorous shake-up between whiles and talking loudly into his ear.

Under this treatment he revived considerably and began to mumble and mutter in reply to my questions, at which point Mr. Morgan suggested that he should continue the treatment while I wrote a prescription.

"It seems as if you were right, after all, Doctor," he conceded, as he took his place by the bedside, "but it is a complete mystery to me. I shall have to watch him more closely than ever, that is evident."

His relief at the improvement of his brother's condition was most manifest and, as the invalid continued to revive apace, I thought it now safe to take my departure.

"I am sorry to have kept you so long," he said, "but I think the patient will be all right now. If you will take charge of him for a moment, I will go and call the coachman; and perhaps, as it is getting late, you could make up the prescription yourself and send the medicine back with the carriage."



To this request I assented and, as he left the room, I renewed my assaults upon the unresisting invalid.

In about five minutes the housekeeper made her appearance to tell me that the carriage was waiting and that she would stay with the patient until the master returned.

"If you take my candle, you will be able to find your way down, sir," she said.

To this I agreed and took my departure, candle in hand, leaving her shaking the patient's hand with pantomimic cordiality and squalling into his ear shrill exhortations to "wake up and pull himself together."

As soon as I was shut in the carriage, I lighted my lamp and drew forth the little board and note-book, but the notes that I jotted down on the return journey were must less complete than before, for the horse, excelling his previous performances, rattled along at a pace that rendered writing almost impossible, and indeed more than once he broke into a gallop.

The incidents of that evening made me resolve to seek the advice of Thorndyke on the morrow and place the note-book in his hands, if the thing could possibly be done, and with this comforting resolution I went to bed. But:

*The best-laid schemes of mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley,*

and my schemes, in this respect, went "a-gley" with a vengeance. In the course of the following morning a veritable avalanche of urgent messages descended on the surgery, piling up a visiting-list at which I stood aghast.

Later on, it appeared that a strike in the building trade had been followed immediately by a general failure of health on the part of the bricklayers who were members of the benefit clubs, accompanied by symptoms of the most alarming and unclassical character, ranging from "sciatica of the blade-bones," which consigned one horny-handed sufferer to an armchair by the kitchen fire, to "windy spavins," which reduced another to a like piteous plight. Moreover, the sufferings of these unfortunates were viewed with callous skepticism by their fellow members (not in the building trade) who called aloud for detailed reports from the medical officer.

And, as if this were not enough, a local milkman, having secretly indulged in an attack of scarlatina, proceeded to shed microbes into the milk-cans, with the result that a brisk epidemic swept over the neighborhood.

From these causes I was kept hard at work from early morning to late at night, with never an interval for repose or reflection. Not only was I unable to call upon Thorndyke, but the incessant round of visits, consultations and reports kept my mind so preoccupied that the affairs of my mysterious patient almost faded from my recollection. Now and again, indeed, I would give a passing thought to the silent figure in the dingy house, and, as the days passed and the carriage came no more, I would wonder whether I ought not to communicate my deepening suspicions to the police. But, as I have said, my time was spent in an unceasing rush of work and the matter was allowed to lapse.

---

## VII.—JEFFREY BLACKMORE'S WILL

THE hurry and turmoil continued without abatement during the three weeks that remained before my employer was due to return. Long harassing days spent in tramping the dingy streets of Kennington, or scrambling up and down narrow stairways, alternated with nights made hideous by the intolerable jangle of the night-bell, until I was worn out with fatigue. Nor was the labor made more grateful by the incessant rebuffs that fall to the lot of the "substitute," or by the reflection that for all this additional toil and anxiety I should reap not a farthing of profit.

As I trudged through the dreary thoroughfares of this superannuated suburb with its once rustic villas and its faded gardens, my thoughts would turn enviously to the chambers in King's Bench Walk and I would once again register a vow that this should be my last term of servitude.

From all of which it will be readily understood that when one morning there appeared opposite our house a four-wheeled cab laden with trunks and portmanteaux I hurried out with uncommon cordiality to greet my returning principal. He was not likely to grumble at the length of the visiting-list, for he was, as he once told me, a glutton for work, and a full day-book makes a full ledger. And, in fact, when he ran his eye down the crowded pages of my list he chuckled aloud and expressed himself as more than eager to get to work at once.

In this I was so far from thwarting him that by two o'clock I had fairly closed my connection with the practise, and half-an-hour later found myself strolling across Waterloo Bridge with the sensations of a newly-liberated convict and a check for twenty-five guineas in my pocket. My objective was the Temple, for I was now eager to hear more of Thorndyke's proposal, and wished, also, to consult him as to where in his neighborhood I might find lodgings in which I could put up for a few days.

The "oak" of my friend's chambers stood open and when I plied the knocker the inner door was opened by Polton.

"Why, it's Dr. Jervis," said he, peering up at me in his quick birdlike manner. "The Doctor is out just now, but I am sure he wouldn't like to miss you. Will you come in and wait? He will be in very shortly."

I entered and found two strangers seated by the fire, one an elderly professional-looking man—a lawyer as I guessed; the other a man of about twenty-five, fresh-faced, sunburnt and decidedly prepossessing in appearance. As I entered, the latter rose and made a place for me by the fire, for the day was chilly, though it was late Spring.

"You are one of Thorndyke's colleagues, I gather," said the elder man after we had exchanged a few remarks on the weather. "Since I have known him I have acquired a new interest in and respect for doctors. He is a most remarkable man, sir, a positive encyclopedia of out-of-the-way and unexpected knowledge."

"His acquirements certainly cover a very wide area," I agreed.

"Yes, and the way in which he brings his knowledge to bear on intricate cases is perfectly astonishing," my new acquaintance continued. "I seldom abandon an obscure case or let it go into court until I have taken his opinion. An ordinary counsel looks at things from the same point of view as I do myself and has the same kind of knowledge, if rather more of it, but Thorndyke views things from a radically different standpoint and brings a new and totally different kind of knowledge into the case. He is a lawyer and a scientific specialist in one, and the combination of the two types of culture in one mind, let me tell you emphatically, is an altogether different thing from the same two types in separate minds."

"I can well believe that," I said and was about to illustrate my opinion when a key was heard in the latch and the subject of our discourse entered the room.

"Why, Jervis," he exclaimed cheerily, "I thought you had given me the slip again. Where have you been?"

"Up to my eyes in work," I replied. "But I am free—my engagement is finished."

"Good!" said he. "And how are you, Mr. Marchmont?"

"Well, not so young as I was at your age," answered the solicitor with a smile. "I have brought a client of mine to see you," he continued—, "Mr. Stephen Blackmore."

Thorndyke shook hands with the younger man and hoped that he might be of service to him.

"Shall I take a walk and look in a little later?" I suggested.

"Oh, no," answered Thorndyke. "We can talk over our business in the office."

"For my part," said Mr. Blackmore, "I see no necessity for Dr. Jervis to go away. We have nothing to tell that is not public property."

"If Mr. Marchmont agrees to that," said Thorndyke, "I shall have the advantage of being able to consult with my colleague if necessary."

"I leave the matter in your hands, Doctor," said the solicitor. "Your friend is no doubt used to keeping his own counsel."

"He is used to keeping mine, as a matter of fact," replied Thorndyke. "He was with me in the Hornby case, you may remember, Marchmont, and a most trusty colleague I found him; so, with your permission, we will consider your case with the aid of a cup of tea." He pressed an electric bell three times, in response to which signal Polton presently appeared with

a teapot and, having set out the tea-service with great precision and gravity, retired silently to his lair on the floor above.

"Now," said Mr. Marchmont, "let me explain at the outset that ours is a forlorn hope. We have no expectations whatever."

"Blessed are they who expect nothing," murmured Thorndyke.

"Quite so—by the way, what delicious tea you brew in these chambers! Well, as to our little affair. Legally speaking, we have no case—not the ghost of one. Yet I have advised my client to take your opinion on the matter, on the chance that you may perceive some point that we have overlooked. The circumstances, briefly stated, are these: My client, who is an orphan, had two uncles, John Blackmore, and Jeffrey, his younger brother. Some two years ago—to be exact, on the twenty-third of July, 1898—Jeffrey executed a will by which he made my client his executor and sole legatee. He had a pension from the Foreign Office, on which he lived, and he possessed personal property to the extent of about two thousand pounds.

"Early last year he left the rooms in Jermyn Street, where he had lived for some years, stored his furniture and went to Nice, where he remained until November. In that month, it appears, he returned to England and at once took chambers in New Inn, which he furnished with some of the things from his old rooms. He never communicated with any of his friends, so that the fact of his being in residence at the Inn only became known to them when he died.

"This was all very strange and different from his customary conduct, as was also the fact that he seems to have had no one to cook for him or look after his rooms.

"About a fortnight ago he was found dead in his chambers—under slightly peculiar circumstances, and a more recent will was then discovered, dated the ninth of December, 1899. Now no change had taken place in the circumstances of the testator to account for the new will, nor was there any material change in the disposition of the property. The entire personalty, with the exception of fifty pounds, was bequeathed to my client, but the separate items were specified, and the testator's brother, John Blackmore, was named as the executor and residuary legatee."

"I see," said Thorndyke. "So that your client's interest in the will would appear to be practically unaffected by the change."

"There it is!" exclaimed the solicitor, slapping the table to add emphasis to his words. "Apparently his interest is unaffected; but actually the change in the form of the will affects him in the most vital manner."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I have said that no change had taken place in the testator's circumstances at the time the new will was executed. But only two days before his death, his sister, Mrs. Edmund Wilson, died and, on her will being proved, it appears that she had bequeathed to him her entire personalty, estimated at nearly thirty thousand pounds."

Thorndyke gave a low whistle.

"You see the point," continued Mr. Marchmont. "By the original will this great sum would have accrued to my client, whereas by the second will it goes to the residuary legatee, Mr. John Blackmore; and this, it appears to us, could not have been in accordance with the wishes and intentions of Mr. Jeffrey, who evidently desired his nephew to inherit his property."

"The will is perfectly regular?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Perfectly. Not a flaw in it."

"There seem to be some curious features in the case," said Thorndyke. "Perhaps we had better have a narrative of the whole affair from the beginning."

He fetched from the office a small note-book and a blotting-pad which he laid on his knee as he reseated himself.

"Now let us have the facts in their order," said he.

---

## VIII. — THORNDYKE TAKES EVIDENCE

"WELL," said Mr. Marchmont, "we will begin with the death of Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore. It seems that about eleven o'clock in the morning of the twenty-seventh of March, that is, about a fortnight ago, a builder's man was ascending a ladder to examine a gutter on one of the houses in New Inn when, on passing a window that was open at the top, he looked in and perceived a gentleman lying on the bed. The gentleman was fully dressed and had apparently lain down to rest, but, looking again, the workman was struck by the remarkable pallor of the face and by the entire absence of movement. On coming down, he reported the matter to the porter at the lodge.

"Now the porter had already that morning knocked at Mr. Blackmore's door to hand him the receipt for the rent and, receiving no answer, had concluded that the tenant was absent. When he received the workman's report, therefore, he went to the door of the chambers, which were on the second floor, and knocked loudly and repeatedly, but there was still no answer.

"Considering the circumstances highly suspicious, he sent for a constable, and when the latter arrived the workman was directed to enter the chambers by the window and open the door from the inside. This was done, and the porter and the constable, going into the bedroom, found Mr. Blackmore lying upon the bed, dressed in his ordinary clothes, and quite dead."

"How long had he been dead?" asked Thorndyke.

"Less than twenty-four hours, for the porter saw him on the previous day. He came to the Inn about half-past six in a four-wheeled cab."

"Was any one with him?"

"That the porter can not say. The glass window of the cab was drawn up and he saw Mr. Blackmore's face through it only by the light of the lamp outside the lodge as the cab passed through the archway. There was a dense fog at the time—you may remember that very foggy day about a fortnight ago?"

"I do," replied Thorndyke. "Was that the last time the porter saw Mr. Blackmore?"

"No. The deceased came to the lodge at eight o'clock and paid the rent."

"By a check?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, a crossed check. That was the last time the porter saw him."

"You said, I think, that the circumstances of his death were suspicious."

"No, I said 'peculiar,' not 'suspicious'; it was a clear case of suicide. The constable reported to his inspector, who came to the chambers at once and brought the divisional surgeon with him. On examining the body they found a hypodermic syringe grasped in the right hand, and at the post-mortem a puncture was found in the right thigh. The needle had evidently entered vertically and deeply instead of being merely passed through the skin, which was explained by the fact that it had been driven in through the clothing.

"The syringe contained a few drops of a concentrated solution of strophanthin, and there were found on the dressing-table two empty tubes labeled 'Hypodermic Tabloids; Strophanthin I-500 grain,' and a tiny glass mortar and pestle containing crystals of strophanthin. It was concluded that the entire contents of both tubes, each of which was proved to have contained twenty tabloids, had been dissolved to charge the syringe. The post-mortem showed, naturally, that death was due to poisoning by strophanthin.

"It was also proved that the deceased had been in the habit of taking morphia, which was confirmed by the finding in the chamber of a large bottle half full of morphia pills, each containing half a grain."

"The verdict was suicide, of course?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. The theory of the doctors was that the deceased had taken morphia habitually and that, in a fit of depression caused by reaction from the drug, he had taken his life by means of the more rapidly acting poison."

"A very reasonable explanation," agreed Thorndyke. "And now to return to the will. Had your Uncle Jeffrey any expectations from his sister, Mr. Blackmore?"

"I can't say with certainty," replied Blackmore. "I knew very little of my aunt's affairs, and I don't think my uncle knew much more, for he was under the impression that she had only a life interest in her late husband's property."

"Did she die suddenly?" asked Thorndyke.

"No," replied Blackmore. "She died of cancer."

Thorndyke made an entry on his note-book and, turning to the solicitor, said:

"The will, you say, is perfectly regular. Has the signature been examined by an expert?"

"As a matter of form," replied Mr. Marchmont, "I got the head cashier of the deceased's bank to step round and compare the signatures of the two wills. There were, in fact, certain trifling differences; but these are probably to be explained by the

drug habit, especially as a similar change was to be observed in the checks that have been paid in during the last few months. In any case the matter is of no moment, owing to the circumstances under which the will was executed."

"Which were?"

"That on the morning of the ninth of December Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore came into the lodge and asked the porter and his son, a house-painter, who happened to be in the lodge at the time, to witness his signature. 'This is my will,' said he, producing the document, 'and perhaps you had better glance through it, though that is not necessary.' The porter and his son accordingly read through the will and then witnessed the signature and so were able to swear to the document at the inquest."

"Ah, then that disposes of the will," said Thorndyke, "even of the question of undue influence. Now, as to your Uncle Jeffrey, Mr. Blackmore. What kind of man was he?"

"A quiet, studious, gentle-mannered man," answered Blackmore, "very nervous, about fifty-five years of age, and not very robust. He was of medium height—about five feet seven—fair, slightly gray, clean shaven, rather spare, had gray eyes, wore spectacles and stooped slightly as he walked."

"And is now deceased," added Mr. Marchmont dryly, as Thorndyke noted down these apparently irrelevant particulars.

"How came he to be a civil-service pensioner at fifty-five?" asked Thorndyke.

"He had a bad fall from a horse, which left him, for a time, a complete wreck. Moreover, his eyesight, which was never very good, became much worse. In fact, he practically lost the sight of one eye altogether—it was the right one, I think—and as this had been his good eye, he felt the loss very much."

"You mentioned that he was a studious man. Of what nature were the subjects that occupied him?"

"He was an Oriental scholar of some position, I believe. He had been attached to the legations at Bagdad and Tokyo and had given a good deal of attention to Oriental languages and literature. He was also much interested in Babylonian and Assyrian archeology and assisted, for a time, in the excavations at Birs Nimroud."

"I see," said Thorndyke; "a man of considerable attainments. And now as to your Uncle John?"

"I can't tell you much about him," answered Blackmore. "Until I saw him at the inquest I had not met him since I was a boy, but he is as great a contrast to Uncle Jeffrey in character as in appearance."

"The two brothers were very unlike in exterior, then?"

"Well, perhaps I am exaggerating the difference. They were of much the same height, though John was a shade taller, and their features were, I suppose, not unlike; and their coloring was similar, but, you see, John is a healthy man with good eyesight and a brisk, upright carriage and he wears a large beard and mustache. He is rather stout, too, as I noticed when I met him at the inquest. As to his character, I am afraid he has not been a great credit to his family. He started in life as a manufacturing chemist, but of late years he has been connected with what they call, I think, a bucket-shop, though he describes himself as a stock broker."

"I see—an outside broker. Was he on good terms with his brother?"

"Not very, I think. At any rate, they saw very little of each other."

"And what were his relations with your aunt?"

"Not friendly at all. I think Uncle John had done something shady—let Mr. Wilson in, in some way, over a bogus investment, but I don't know the details."

"Would you like a description of the lady, Thorndyke?" asked Mr. Marchmont with genial sarcasm.

"Not just now, thanks," answered Thorndyke with a quiet smile, "but I will note down her full name."

"Julia Elizabeth Wilson."

"Thank you. There is just one more point—what were your uncle's habits and manner of life at New Inn?"

"According to the porter's evidence at the inquest," said Mr. Blackmore, "he lived in a very secluded manner. He had no one to look after his rooms, but did everything for himself, and no one is known to have visited the chambers. He was seldom seen about the Inn and the porter thinks that he must have spent most of his time indoors or else he must have been away a good deal—he can not say which."

"By the way, what has happened to the chambers since your uncle's death?"

"I understand that the porter has been instructed by the executor to let them."

"Thank you, Mr. Blackmore. I think that is all I have to ask at present. If anything fresh occurs to me, I will communicate with you through Mr. Marchmont."

The two men rose and prepared to depart,

"I am afraid there is little to hope for," said the solicitor as he shook my friend's hand, "but I thought it worth while to give you a chance of working a miracle."

"You would like to set aside the second will, of course?" said Thorndyke.

"Naturally; and a more unlikely case I never met with."

"It is not promising, I must admit. However, I will digest the material and let you have my views after due reflection."

The lawyer and his client took their departure, and Thorndyke, with a thoughtful and abstracted air, separated the written sheets from his note-book, made two perforations in the margins by means of a punch, and inserted them into a small Stolzenburg file, on the outside of which he wrote, "Jeffrey Blackmore's Will."

"There," said he, depositing the little folio in a drawer labeled "B,"—"there is the nucleus of the body of data on which our investigations must be based; and I am afraid it will not receive any great additions, though there are some very singular features in the case, as you doubtless observed."

"I observed that the will seemed as simple and secure as a will could be made," I answered, "and I should suppose the setting of it aside to be a wild impossibility."

"Perhaps you are right," rejoined Thorndyke, "but time will show. Meanwhile I understand that you are a gentleman at large now; what are your plans?"

"My immediate purpose is to find lodgings for a week or so, and I came to you for guidance as to their selection."

"You had better let me put you up for the night, at any rate. Your old bedroom is at your service and you can pursue your quest in the morning, if you wish to. Give me a note and I will send Polton with it to bring up your things in a cab."

"It is exceedingly good of you, Thorndyke, but I hardly like to—"

"Now don't raise obstacles, my dear fellow," urged Thorndyke. "Say yes, and let us have a long chat to-night over old times."

I was glad enough to be persuaded to so pleasant an arrangement, so I wrote a few lines on one of my cards, which was forthwith dispatched by the faithful Polton.



## IX. — THE CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTION

"WE have an hour and a half to dispose of before dinner," said Thorndyke, looking at his watch. "What say you, my dear Jervis—shall we wander over the breezy uplands of Fleet Street or shall we seek the leafy shades of New Inn? I incline to New Inn, if that sylvan retreat commends itself to you."

"Very well," said I, "let it be New Inn. I suppose you want to nose around the scene of the tragedy, though what you expect to find is a mystery to me."

"A man of science," replied Thorndyke, "expects nothing. He collects facts and keeps an open mind. As for me, I am a mere legal snapper-up of unconsidered trifles of evidence. When I have accumulated a few facts I arrange them and reason from them. It is a capital error to decide beforehand what data are to be sought for."

"But surely," said I, as we emerged from the doorway and turned up toward Mitre Court, "you can not see any possible grounds for disputing that will?"

"I don't," he answered, "or I should have said so; but I am engaged to look into the case and I shall do so, as I said just now with an open mind. Moreover, the circumstances of the case are so singular, so full of strange coincidences and improbabilities, that they call for the closest and most searching examination."

"I hadn't observed anything so very abnormal in the case," I said. "Of course, I can see that the second will was unnecessary—that a codicil would have answered all purposes; that, as things have turned out, it does not seem to carry out the wishes of the testator; but then, if he had lived, Jeffrey Blackmore would probably have made a new will."

"Which would not have suited Brother John. But have you considered the significance of the order in which the events occurred and the strange coincidences in the dates?"

"I am afraid I missed that point," I replied. "How do the dates run?"

"The second will," replied Thorndyke, "was made on the ninth of December 1899; Mrs. Wilson died of cancer on the twenty-fourth of March, 1900; Jeffrey Blackmore was seen alive on the twenty-sixth of March, thus establishing the fact that he survived Mrs. Wilson, and his body was found on the twenty-seventh of March. Does that group of dates suggest nothing to you?"

I reflected for awhile and then had to confess that it suggested nothing at all.

"Then make a note of it and consider it at your leisure," said Thorndyke; "or I will write out the dates for you later, for here we are at our destination."

It was a chilly day, and a cold wind blew through the archway leading into New Inn. Halting at the half-door of the lodge we perceived a stout, purple-faced man crouching over the fire, coughing violently. He held up his hand to intimate that he was fully occupied for the moment, so we waited for his paroxysm to subside.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Thorndyke sympathetically, "you ought not to be sitting in this drafty lodge with your delicate chest. You should make them fit a glass door with a pigeonhole."

"Bless you," said the porter, wiping his eyes, "I daren't make any complaints. There's plenty of younger men ready to take the job. But it's terrible work for me in the Winter, especially when the fogs are about."

"It must be," rejoined Thorndyke, and then, rather to my surprise, he proceeded to inquire with deep interest into the sufferer's symptoms and the history of the attack, receiving in reply a wealth of detail and discursive reminiscence delivered with the utmost gusto. To all of this I listened a little impatiently, for chronic bronchitis is not, medically speaking, an entertaining complaint, and consultations out of business hours are an abomination to doctors. Something of this perhaps appeared in my manner, for the man broke off suddenly with an apology:

"But I mustn't detain you gentlemen talking about my health. It can't interest you, though it's serious enough for me."

"I am sure it is," said Thorndyke, "and I hope we may be able to do something for you. I am a medical man and so is my friend. We came to ask if you had any chambers to let."

"Yes, we've got three sets empty."

"Not furnished, I suppose?"

"Yes, one set is furnished. It is the one," he added, lowering his voice, "that the gentleman committed suicide in—but you wouldn't mind that, being a doctor?"

"Oh, no," laughed Thorndyke, "the disease is not catching. What is the rent?"

"Twenty-three pounds, but the furniture would have to be taken at a valuation. There isn't much of it."

"May I see the rooms?"

"Certainly. Here's the key; I've only just had it back from the police. There's no need for me to come with gentlemen like you; it's such a drag up all those stairs. The gas hasn't been cut off because the tenancy has not expired. It's Number 31, second floor."

We made our way across the Inn to the doorway of Number 31, the ground floor of which was occupied by solicitors' offices. The dusk was just closing in and a man was lighting a lamp on the first-floor landing as we came up the stairs.

"Who occupies the chambers on the third floor?" Thorndyke asked him as we turned on to the next flight.

"The third floor has been empty for about three months," was the reply.

"We are looking at the chambers on the second floor," said Thorndyke. "Are they pretty quiet?"

"Quiet!" exclaimed the man. "Lord bless you! the place is like a deaf and dumb cemetery. There's the solicitors on the ground floor and the architects on the first floor. They both clear out at about six, and then the 'ouse is as empty as a blown hegg. I don't wonder poor Mr. Blackmore made away with hisself; he must 'ave found it awful dull."

"So," said Thorndyke, as the man's footsteps echoed down the stairs, "when Jeffrey Blackmore came home that last evening the house was empty."

He inserted the key into the door, above which was painted in white letters the deceased man's name, and we entered, my companion striking a wax vesta and lighting the gas in the sitting-room.

"Spare and simple," remarked Thorndyke, looking round critically. "but well enough for a solitary bachelor. A cupboard of a kitchen—never used, apparently, and a small bedroom opening out of the sitting-room. Why, the bed hasn't been made since the catastrophe! There is the impression of the body! Rather gruesome for a new tenant, eh?"

He wandered round the sitting-room, looking at the various objects it contained as though he would question them as to what they had witnessed. The apartment was bare and rather comfortless and its appointments were all old and worn. A small glass-fronted bookcase held a number of solid-looking volumes—proceedings of the Asiatic Society and works on Oriental literature for the most part; and a half-dozen framed photographs of buildings and objects of archeological interest formed the only attempts at wall decoration.

Before one of these latter Thorndyke halted and, having regarded it for a few moments with close attention, uttered an exclamation.

"Here is a very strange thing. Jervis," said he.

I stepped across the room and looked over his shoulder at an oblong frame enclosing a photograph of an inscription in the weird and cabalistic arrow-head character.

"Yes," I agreed; "the cuneiform writing is surely the most uncanny-looking script that was ever invented. I wonder if poor Blackmore was able to read this stuff; I suppose he was, or it wouldn't be here."

"I should say there is no doubt that he was able to read the cuneiform character; and that is just what constitutes the strangeness of this," and Thorndyke pointed, as he spoke, to the framed photograph on the wall.

"I don't follow you at all," I said. "It would seem to me much more odd if a man were to hang upon his wail an inscription that he could *not* read."

"No doubt," replied Thorndyke. "But you will agree with me that it would be still more odd if a man should hang upon his wall an inscription that he *could* read—and hang it *upside-down*!"

"You don't mean to say that this is up-side-down!" I exclaimed.

"I do indeed," he replied.

"But how can you tell that? I didn't know that Oriental scholarship was included in your long list of accomplishments."

Thorndyke chuckled. "It isn't," he replied; "but I have read with very keen interest the wonderful history of the decipherment of the cuneiform characters, and I happen to remember one or two of the main facts. This particular inscription is in the Persian cuneiform, a much more simple form of the script than the Babylonian or Assyrian; in fact, I suspect that this is the famous inscription from the gateway at Persepolis—the first to be deciphered, which would account for its presence here in a frame.

"Now this script reads, like our own writing, from left to right, and the rule is that all the wedge-shaped characters point to the right or downward, while the arrow-head forms are open toward the right. But if you examine this inscription you will see that the wedges point upward and to the left, and that the arrow-head characters are open toward the left. Obviously the photograph is upside-down."

"But this is really mysterious!" I exclaimed. "What do you suppose can be the explanation? Do you think poor Blackmore's eyesight was failing him, or were his mental faculties decaying?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "we may perhaps get a suggestion from the back of the frame. Let us see." He disengaged the frame from the two nails on which it hung and, turning it round, glanced for a moment at the back, which he then presented toward me with a quaint, half-quizzical smile. A label on the backing paper bore the words: "J. Budge, Framemaker and Gilder, Gt. Anne St., W.C."

"Well?" I said, when I had read the label without gathering from it anything fresh.

"The label, you observe, is the right way up."



"So it is," I rejoined hastily, a little annoyed that I had not been quicker to observe so obvious a fact. "I see your point. You mean that the frame-maker hung the thing upside-down and Blackmore never noticed the mistake."

"No, I don't think that is the explanation," replied Thorndyke. "You will notice that the label is an old one; it must have been on some years, to judge by its dingy appearance, whereas the two mirror-plates look to me comparatively new. But we can soon put that matter to the test, for the label was evidently stuck on when the frame was new, and if the plates were screwed on at the same time, the wood which they cover will be clean and new-looking."

He drew from his pocket a "combination" knife containing, among other implements, a screw-driver, with which he carefully extracted the screws from one of the little brass plates by which the frame had been suspended from the nails.

"You see," he said, when he had removed the plate and carried the photograph over to the gas-jet, "the wood covered by the plate is as dirty and time-stained as the rest of the frame. The plates have been put on recently."

"And what are we to infer from that?"

"Well, since there are no other marks of plates or rings upon the frame, we may safely infer that the photograph was never hung up until it came to these rooms."

"Yes, I suppose we may. But what is the suggestion that this photograph makes to you? I know you have something in mind that bears upon the case you are investigating. What is it?"

"Come, come, Jervis," said Thorndyke, playfully, "I am not going to wet-nurse you in this fashion! You are a man of ingenuity and far from lacking in the scientific imagination; you must work out the rest of the train of deduction by yourself."

"That is how you always tantalize me!" I complained. "You take out the stopper from your bottle of wisdom and present the mouth to my nose; and then, when I have taken a hearty sniff and got my appetite fairly whetted, you clap in the stopper again and leave me, metaphorically speaking, with my tongue hanging out."

Thorndyke chuckled as he replaced the little brass plate and inserted the screws.

"You must learn to take out the stopper for yourself," said he; "then you will be able to slake your divine thirst to your satisfaction. Shall we take a look round the bedroom?"



## X. — WE RENT 31 NEW INN

HE hung the photograph upon its nails and we passed on to the little chamber, glancing once more at the depression on the narrow bed, which seemed to make the tragedy so real.

"The syringe and the rest of the lethal appliances and material have been removed, I see," remarked Thorndyke. "I suppose the police or the coroner's officers have kept them."

He looked keenly about the bare, comfortless apartment, taking mental notes, apparently, of its general aspect and the few details it presented.

"Jeffrey Blackmore would seem to have been a man of few needs," he observed presently. "I have never seen a bedroom in which less attention seemed to be given to the comfort of the occupant."

He pulled at the drawer of the dressing-table, disclosing a solitary hair-brush; peeped into a cupboard, where an overcoat surmounted by a felt hat hung from a peg like an attenuated suicide; he even picked up and examined the cracked and shrunken cake of soap on the washstand, and he was just replacing this in its dish when his attention was apparently attracted by something in the dark corner close by. As he knelt on the floor to make a close scrutiny, I came over and stooped beside him. I found the object of his regard to be a number of tiny fragments of glass, which had the appearance of having been trodden upon and then scattered by a kick of the foot.

"What have you found?" I asked.

"That is what I am asking myself," he replied. "As far as I can judge from the appearance of these fragments, they appear to be the remains of a small watch-glass. But we can examine them more thoroughly at our leisure."

He gathered up the little splintered pieces with infinite care and bestowed them in the envelope of a letter which he drew from his pocket.

"And now," he said as he rose and dusted his knees, "we had better go back to the lodge, or the porter will begin to think that there has been another tragedy in New Inn."

We passed out into the sitting-room, where Thorndyke once more halted before the inverted photograph.

"Yes," he said, surveying it thoughtfully, "we have picked up a trifle of fact which may mean nothing, or, on the other hand, may be of critical importance."

He paused for a few moments and then said suddenly:

"Jervis, how should you like to be the new tenant of these rooms?"

"It is the one thing necessary for my complete happiness," I replied with a grin.

"I am not joking," said he. "Seriously, these chambers might be very convenient for you, especially in some new circumstances that I, and I hope you also, have in contemplation. But in any case, I should like to examine the premises at my leisure, and I suppose you would not mind appearing as the tenant if I undertake all liabilities?"

"Certainly not," I answered.

"Then let us go down and see what arrangements we can make." He turned out the gas and we made our way back to the lodge.

"What do you think of the rooms, sir?" asked the porter as I handed him back the key.

"I think they would suit me," I replied, "if the furniture could be had on reasonable terms."

"Oh, that will be all right," said the porter. "The executor—deceased's brother—has written to me saying that the things are to be got rid of for what they will fetch, but as quickly as possible. He wants those chambers off his hands, so, as I am his agent, I shall instruct the valuer to price them low."

"Can my friend have immediate possession?" asked Thorndyke. "You can have possession as soon as the valuer has seen the effects," said the porter. "The man from the broker's shop down Wych Street will look them over for us."

"I would suggest that we fetch him up at once," said Thorndyke. "Then you can pay over the price agreed on and move your things in without delay—that is, if our friend here has no objection."

"Oh, I have no objection," said the porter. "If you like to pay the purchase-money for the furniture and give me a letter agreeing to take on the tenancy, and a reference, you can have the key at once and sign the regular agreement later."

In a very short time this easy-going arrangement was carried out. The furniture broker was decoyed to the Inn and, having received his instructions from the porter, accompanied us to the vacant chambers.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, looking round disparagingly at the barely furnished rooms, "you tell me what things you are going to take and I will make my estimate."

"We are going to take everything—stock, lock and barrel," said Thorndyke.

"What! clothes and all?" exclaimed the man, grinning.

"Clothes, hats, boots—everything. We can throw out what we don't want afterward, but my friend wishes to have immediate possession of the rooms."

"I understand," said the broker, and without more ado he produced a couple of sheets of foolscap and fell to work on the inventory.

"This gentleman didn't waste much money on clothes," he remarked presently after examining the contents of a cupboard and a chest of drawers. "Why, there's only two suits all told!"

"He doesn't seem to have embarrassed himself with an excessive number of hats or boots either," said Thorndyke. "But I believe he spent most of his time indoors."

"That might account for it," rejoined the broker, and he proceeded to add to his list the meager account of clothing.

The inventory was soon completed and the prices affixed to the items, when it appeared that the value of the entire contents of the rooms amounted to no more than eighteen pounds, twelve shillings. This sum, at Thorndyke's request, I paid to the porter, handing him my recently-acquired check for twenty-five guineas and directing him to drop the change into the letter-box of the chambers.

"That is a good thing done," remarked Thorndyke, as we took our way back toward the Strand. "I will give you a check this evening and you might let me have the key for the present. I will send Polton down with a trunk this evening, to keep up appearances. And now we will go and have some dinner."

"To come back," said Thorndyke, when Polton had set before us our simple meal, with a bottle of sound claret, "to the new arrangement I proposed the other day: You know that Polton gives me a great deal of help in my work, especially by making appliances and photographs and carrying out chemical processes under my directions. But still, clever as he is and wonderfully well-informed, he is not a scientific man, properly speaking, and of course his education and social training do not allow of his taking my place excepting in a quite subordinate capacity. Now there are times when I am greatly pushed for the want of a colleague of my own class, and it occurred to me that you might like to join me as my junior or assistant. We know that we can rub along together in a friendly way, and I know enough of your abilities and accomplishments to feel sure that your help would be of value to me. What do you think of the proposal?"

To exchange the precarious, disagreeable and uninteresting life of a regular "locum" with its miserable pay and utter lack of future prospects, for the freedom and interest of the life thus held out to me with its chances of advancement and success, was to rise at a bound out of the abyss into which misfortune had plunged me, and to cut myself free from the millstone of poverty which had held me down so long. Moreover, with the salary that Thorndyke offered and the position that I should occupy as junior to a famous expert, I could marry without the need of becoming pecuniarily indebted to my wife; a circumstance which I was sure she would regard with as much satisfaction as I did. Hence I accepted joyfully, much to Thorndyke's gratification, and, the few details of our engagement being settled, we filled our glasses and drank to our joint success.

---

## XI. — THE EMPTY HOUSE

"BY the way, Jervis," said my new principal—or colleague, as he preferred to style himself—when, our dinner over and our chairs drawn up to the fire, we were filling our pipes in preparation for a gossip, "you never told me the end of that odd adventure of yours."

"I went to the house once again," I answered, "and followed your directions to the letter, though how much skill and intelligence I displayed in following them you will be able to judge when you have seen the notebook; it is in my trunk upstairs with your lamp and compass."

"And what became of the patient?"

"Ah," I replied, "that is what I have often wondered. I don't like to think about it."

"Tell me what happened at the second visit," said Thorndyke.

I gave him a circumstantial description of all that I had seen and all that had happened on that occasion, recalling every detail that I could remember, even to the momentary glimpse I had of Mr. J. Morgan, as he stood in the light of the candle. To all of this my friend listened with rapt attention and asked me so many questions about my first visit that I practically gave him the whole story over again from the beginning.

"It was a fishy business," commented Thorndyke as I concluded, "but of course you could do nothing. You had not enough facts to swear an information on. But it would be interesting to plot the route and see where this extremely cautious gentleman resides. I suggest that we do so forthwith."

To this I assented with enthusiasm and, having fetched the notebook from my room, we soon had it spread before us on the table. Thorndyke ran his eye over the various entries, noting the details with an approving smile.

"You seem to the manner born, Jervis," said he with a chuckle, as he came to the end of the first route. "That is quite an artistic touch—'Passenger station to left.' How did you know there was a station?"

"I heard the guard's whistle and the starting of a train—evidently a long and heavy one, for the engine skidded badly."

"Good!" said Thorndyke. "Have you looked these notes over?"

"No," I answered. "I put the book away when I came in and have never looked at it since."

"It is a quaint document. You seem to be rich in railway bridges in those parts, and the route was certainly none of the most direct. However, we will plot it out and see whither it leads us."

He retired to the laboratory and presently returned with a T-square, a military protractor, a pair of dividers and a large drawing-board, upon which was pinned a sheet of paper.

"I see," said he, "that the horse kept up a remarkably even pace, so we can take the time as representing distance. Let us say that one inch equals one minute—that will give us a fair scale. Now you read out the notes and I will plot the route."

I read out the entries from the notebook—a specimen page of which I present for the reader's inspection—and Thorndyke laid off the lines of direction with the protractor, taking out the distance with the dividers from a scale of equal parts on the back of the instrument.

<b>9.03 S.W.</b>	<b><i>Start from house.</i></b>
<b><i>Horse 13 hands.</i></b>	
<b>9.05.30 S.E. by E.</b>	<b><i>Macadam. Hoofs 110.</i></b>
<b>9.06 N.E. by N.</b>	<b><i>Granite.</i></b>
<b>9.06.25 S.E.</b>	<b><i>Macadam.</i></b>
<b>9.07.20 N.</b>	<b><i>Macadam.</i></b>
<b>9.08 N.E.</b>	<b><i>Under bridge. Hoofs</i></b>
<b>120.</b>	
<b>9.08.30 N.E.</b>	<b><i>Cross granite road.</i></b>
<b><i>Tram-lines.</i></b>	

<b>9.09.35 N.N.W.</b>	<b><i>Still macadam. Hoofs</i></b>
<b>120.</b>	
<b>9.10.30 W. by S.</b>	<b><i>Still macadam. Hoofs</i></b>
<b>120.</b>	
<b>9.11.30 W. by S.</b>	<b><i>Cross granite road.</i></b>
<b><i>Tram-lines.</i></b>	
	<b><i>Then under bridge.</i></b>
<b>9.12 S.S.E.</b>	<b><i>Macadam.</i></b>
<b>9.12.15 E.N.E.</b>	<b><i>Macadam.</i></b>
<b>9.12.30 E.N.E.</b>	<b><i>Under bridge. Hoofs</i></b>
<b>116.</b>	
<b>9.12.45 S.S.E.</b>	<b><i>Granite road. Tram-</i></b>
<b><i>lines.</i></b>	
<b>9.14 E.N.E.</b>	<b><i>Macadam.</i></b>

As the work proceeded a smile of quiet amazement spread over his keen, attentive face, and at each new reference to a railway bridge he chuckled softly.

"What! again?" he laughed, as I recorded the passage of the eighth bridge. "Why, it's like a game of croquet! Ah, here we are at last! '9.38—Slow down; enter arched gateway to left; Stop; Wooden gates closed.' Just look at your route, Jervis."

He held up the board with a quizzical smile, when I perceived with astonishment that the middle of the paper was occupied by a single line that zigzagged, crossed and recrossed in the most intricate manner, and terminated at no great distance from its commencement.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "let us get the map and see if we can give to each of these marvelous and erratic lines 'a local habitation and a name.' You started from Lower Kennington Lane, I think?" "Yes; from this point," indicating the spot with a pencil.

"Then," said Thorndyke, after a careful comparison of the map with the plotted route, "I think we may take it that your gateway was on the north side of Upper Kennington Lane, some three hundred yards from Vauxhall Station. The heavy train that you heard starting was no doubt one of the Southwestern expresses. You see that, rough as was the method of tracing the route, it is quite enough to enable us to identify all the places on the map. The tram-lines and railway bridges are invaluable."

He wrote by the side of the strange crooked lines the names of the streets that its different parts represented and, on comparing the amended sketch with the ordnance map, I saw that the correspondence was near enough to preclude all doubt.

"To-morrow morning," observed Thorndyke, "I shall have an hour or two to spare, and I propose that we take a stroll through Upper Kennington Lane and gaze upon this abode of mystery. This chart has fairly aroused the trailing instinct—although, of course, the affair is no business of mine."

The following morning, after an early breakfast, we pocketed the chart and the notebook and, issuing forth into the Strand, chartered a passing hansom to convey us to Vauxhall Station.

"There should be no difficulty in locating the house," remarked Thorndyke presently, as we bowled along the Albert Embankment. "It is evidently about three hundred yards from the station, and I see you have noted a patch of newly laid macadam about half way."

"That new macadam will be pretty well smoothed down by now," I objected.

"Not so very completely," answered Thorndyke. "It is only three weeks, and there has been no wet weather lately."

A few minutes later the cab drew up at the station and, having alighted and paid the driver, we made our way to the

bridge that spans the junction of Harleyford Road and Upper Kennington Lane.

"From here to the house," said Thorndyke, "is three hundred yards—say four hundred and twenty paces, and at about two hundred paces we ought to pass a patch of new road-metal. Now, are you ready? If we keep step we shall average our stride."

We started together at a good pace, stepping out with military regularity, and counting aloud as we went. As we told out the hundred and ninety-fourth pace I observed Thorndyke nod toward the roadway a little ahead and, looking at it attentively as we approached, it was easy to see, by the regularity of the surface and lighter color, that it had recently been remetaled.

Having counted out the four hundred and twenty paces, we halted, and Thorndyke turned to me with a smile of triumph.

"Not a bad estimate, Jervis," said he. "That will be your house if I am not much mistaken." He pointed to a narrow turning a dozen yards ahead, apparently the entrance to a yard and closed by a pair of massive wooden gates.

"Yes," I answered, "there is no doubt that this is the place. But, by Jove!" I added, as we drew nearer, "the nest is empty. Do you see?" I pointed to a small bill that was stuck on the gate announcing, "These premises, including stabling and workshops, to be let," and giving the name and address of an auctioneer in Upper Kennington Lane as the agent.

"Here is a new and startling development," said Thorndyke, "which leads one to wonder still more what has happened to your patient. Now the question is, should we make a few inquiries of the auctioneer or should we get the keys and have a look at the inside of the house? I think we will do both, and the latter first, if Messrs Ryman Brothers will trust us with the keys."

We made our way to the auctioneer's office, and were, without demur, given permission to inspect the premises.

"You will find the place in a very dirty and neglected condition," said the clerk, as he handed us a couple of keys with a wooden label attached. "The house has not been cleaned yet, but is just as it was left when we took out the furniture."

"Was Mr. Morgan sold up then?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Oh, no. But he had to leave rather unexpectedly, and he asked us to dispose of his effects for him."

"He had not been in the house very long, had he?"

"No. Less than six months, I should say."

"Do you know where he has moved to?"

"I don't. He said he should be travelling for a time and he paid us a half-year's rent in advance to be quit. The larger key is that of the wicket in the front gate."

Thorndyke took the keys and we returned together to the house which, with its closed window-shutters, had a very gloomy and desolate aspect. We let ourselves in at the wicket, when I perceived, half-way down the entry, the side door at which I had been admitted by the unknown woman.

"We will look at the bedroom first," said Thorndyke, as we stood in the dark and musty-smelling hall. "That is, if you can remember which room it was."

"It was on the first floor," said I, "and the door was just at the head of the stairs." We ascended the two flights and as we reached the landing I halted. "This was the door," I said, and was about to turn the handle when Thorndyke caught me by the arm. "One moment, Jervis," said he. "What do you make of this?" He pointed to four screw-holes, neatly filled with putty, near the bottom of the door, and two others on the jamb opposite them.

"Evidently," I answered, "there has been a bolt there, though it seems a queer place to fix one."

"Not at all," rejoined Thorndyke. "If you look up you will see that there was another at the top of the door and, as the lock is in the middle, they must have been highly effective. But there are one or two other things that strike one. First, you will notice that the bolts have been fixed on pretty recently, for the paint that they covered is of the same grimy tint as that on the rest of the door. Next, they have been taken off, which, seeing that they could hardly have been worth the trouble of removal, seems to suggest that the person who fixed them considered that their presence might appear remarkable, while the screw-holes would be less conspicuous."

"They are on the *outside* of the door—an unusual situation for bolts; and if you look closely you can see a slight indentation in the wood of the jamb, made by the sharp edges of the socket-plate, as though at some time a forcible attempt has been made to drag the door open when it was bolted."

"There was a second door, I remember," said I. "Let us see if that was guarded in a similar manner."

We strode through the empty room, awakening dismal echoes as we trod the bare boards, and flung open the other door. At top and bottom similar groups of screw-holes showed that this also had been made secure, the bolts in all cases being of a very substantial size.

"I am afraid these fastenings have a very sinister significance," said Thorndyke gravely, "for I suppose we can have no doubt as to their object or by whom they were fixed."

"No, I suppose not," I answered; "but if the man was really imprisoned, could he not have smashed the window and

called for help?"

"The window looks out on the yard, as you see. And I expect it was secured, too."

He drew the massive old-fashioned shutters out of their recess and closed them.

"Yes, here we are!" He pointed to four groups of screw-holes at the corners of the shutters and, lighting a match, narrowly examined the insides of the recesses into which the shutters folded.

"The nature of the fastening is quite evident," said he. "An iron bar passed right across at the top and bottom and was secured by a staple and padlock. You can see the mark the bar made in the recess when the shutters were folded. By heaven, Jervis," he exclaimed as he flung the shutters open again, "this was a diabolical affair, and I would give a good round sum to lay my hand on Mr. J. Morgan!"



## XII. — IN A LITTLE HEAP OF RUBBISH

"IT is a thousand pities we were unable to look round before they moved out the furniture," I remarked. "We might then have found some clue to the scoundrel's identity."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, gazing round ruefully at the bare walls, "there isn't much information to be gathered here, I am afraid. I see they have swept up the litter under the grate; we may as well turn it over, though it is not likely that we shall find anything of much interest."

He raked out the little heap of rubbish with the crook of his stick and spread it out on the hearth. It certainly looked unpromising enough, being just such a rubbish-heap as may be swept up in any untidy room during a move. But Thorndyke went through it systematically, examining each item attentively, even to the local tradesmen's bills and empty paper bags, before laying them aside. One of the latter he folded up neatly and laid on the mantel-shelf before resuming his investigations.

"Here is something that may give us a hint," said he presently. He held up a battered pair of spectacles of which only one hooked side-bar remained, while both the glasses were badly cracked.

"Left eye a concave cylindrical lens," he continued, peering through the glasses at the window; "right eye plain glass—these must have belonged to your patient, Jervis. You said the tremulous iris was in the right eye, I think?"

"Yes," I replied, "these are his spectacles, no doubt."

"The frames, you notice, are peculiar," he continued. "The shape was invented by Stopford of Moorfields and is made, I believe, by only one optician—Cuxton and Parry of New Bond Street."

"What should you say that is?" I asked, picking up a small object from the rubbish. It was a tiny stick of bamboo furnished with a sheath formed of a shorter length of the same material, which fitted it closely, yet slid easily up and down the little cane.

"Ha!" exclaimed Thorndyke, taking the object eagerly from my hand. "This is really interesting. Have you never seen one of these before? It is a Japanese pocket brush or pencil, and very beautiful little instruments they are, with the most exquisitely delicate and flexible points. They are used principally for writing or drawing with Chinese or, as it is usually called, Indian ink. The bamboo, in this one, is cracked at the end and the hair has fallen out, but the sliding sheath, which protected the point, remains to show what it has been."

He laid the brush-stick on the mantel-shelf and once more turned to the rubbish-heap.

"Now here is a very suggestive thing," he said presently, holding out to me a small wide-mouthed bottle. "Observe the flies sticking to the inside, and the name on the label—'Fox, Russell Street, Covent Garden.' You were right, Jervis, in your surmise; Mr. Morgan and the coachman were one and the same person."

"I don't see how you arrive at that, all the same," I remarked.

"This," said Thorndyke, tapping the bottle with his finger, "contained—and still contains a small quantity of—a kind of cement. Mr. Fox is a dealer in the materials for making-up, theatrical or otherwise. Now your really artistic make-up does not put on an oakum wig nor does he tie on a false beard with strings as if it were a baby's feeder. If he dons a false mustache or beard, the thing is properly made and securely fixed on, and then the ends are finished with ends of loose hair, which are cemented to the skin and afterward trimmed with scissors. This is the kind of cement that is used for that purpose."

He laid the bottle beside his other treasure-trove and returned to his search. But, with the exception of a screw and a trouser-button, he met with no further reward for his industry. At length he rose and, kicking the discarded rubbish back under the grate, gathered up his gleanings and wrapped them in his handkerchief, having first tried the screw in one of the holes in the door, from which he had picked out the putty, and found that it fitted perfectly.

"A poor collection," was his comment, as he pocketed the small parcel of miscellaneous rubbish, "and yet not so poor as I had feared. Perhaps, if we question them closely enough, these unconsidered trifles may be made to tell us something worth hearing, after all. We may as well look through the house and yard before we go."

We did so, but met with nothing that even Thorndyke's inquisitive eye could view with interest and, having returned the keys to the agent, betook ourselves back to the Temple.

---



### XIII. — A CHANGE IN SIGNATURE

ON our return to Thorndyke's chambers I was inducted forthwith into my new duties, for an inquest of some importance was pending and my friend had been commissioned to examine the body and make a full report upon certain suspected matters.

I entered on the work with a pleasure and revived enthusiasm that tended to drive my recent experiences from my mind. Now and again, indeed, I gave a passing thought to the house in Kennington Lane and its mysterious occupants, but even then it was only the recollection of a strange experience that was past and done with.

Thorndyke, too, I supposed to have dismissed the subject from his mind, in spite of the strong feeling that he had shown and his implied determination to unravel the mystery. But on this point I was mistaken, as was proved to me by an incident that occurred on the fourth day of my residence and which I found, at the time, not a little startling.

We were sitting at breakfast, each of us glancing over the morning's letters, when Thorndyke said rather suddenly:

"Have you a good memory for faces, Jervis?"

"Yes," I answered, "I think I have, rather. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have a photograph here of a man whom I think you may have met. Just look at it and tell me if you remember the face."

He drew a cabinet-size photograph from an envelope that had come by the morning's post and passed it to me.

"I have certainly seen this face somewhere," said I, taking the portrait over to the window to examine it more thoroughly, "but I can not at the moment remember where."

"Try," said Thorndyke. "If you have seen the face before, you should be able to recall the person."

I looked intently at the photograph, and the more I looked, the more familiar did the face appear. Suddenly the identity of the man flashed into my mind and I exclaimed in a tone of astonishment:

"By heaven, Thorndyke, it is the mysterious patient of Kennington Lane!"

"I believe you are right," was the quiet reply, "and I am glad you were able to recognize him. The identification may be of value."

I need not say that the production of this photograph filled me with amazement and that I was seething with curiosity as to how Thorndyke had obtained it; but, as he replaced it impassively in its envelope without volunteering any explanation, I judged it best to ask no questions.

Nevertheless, I pondered upon the matter with undiminished wonder and once again realized that my friend was a man whose powers, alike of observation and inference, were of no ordinary kind. I had myself seen all that he had seen and, indeed, much more. I had examined the little handful of rubbish that he had gathered up so carefully and I would have flung it back under the grate without a qualm. Not a single glimmer of light had I perceived in the cloud of mystery, nor even a hint of the direction in which to seek enlightenment.

And yet Thorndyke had, in some incomprehensible manner, contrived to piece together facts that I had not even observed, and that very completely; for it was evident that he had already, in these few days, narrowed the field of inquiry down to a very small area and must be in possession of the leading facts of the case.

As to the other case—that of Jeffrey Blackmore's will—I had had occasional proofs that he was still engaged upon it, though with what object I could not imagine, for the will seemed to me as incontestable as a will could be. My astonishment may therefore be imagined when, on the very evening of the day on which he had shown me the photograph of my patient, Thorndyke remarked coolly, as we rose from the dinner-table:

"I have nearly finished with the Blackmore case. In fact, I shall write to Marchmont this evening and advise him to enter a caveat at once."

"Why," I exclaimed, "you don't mean to say that you have found a flaw in the second will, after all!"

"A flaw!" repeated Thorndyke. "My dear Jervis, that will is a forgery from beginning to end! Of that I have no doubt whatever. I am only waiting for the final, conclusive verification to institute criminal proceedings."

"You amaze me!" I declared. "I had imagined that your investigations were—well—"

"A demonstration of activity to justify the fee, eh?" suggested Thorndyke, with a mischievous smile.

I laughed a little shamefacedly, for my astute friend had, as usual, shot his bolt very near the mark.

"I haven't shown you the signatures, have I?" he continued. "They are rather interesting and suggestive. I persuaded the bank people to let me photograph the last year's checks in a consecutive series, so as to exhibit the change which was admitted to have occurred in the character of the signature. We pinned the checks to a board in batches, each check overlapping the one below so as to show the signature only and to save space, and the dates were written on a slip of paper at the side. I photographed them full size, a batch at a time, with a tele-photo lens."

"Why a tele-photo?" I asked.

"To enable me to get a full-sized image without bringing the checks close up to the camera," he replied. "If I had used an ordinary lens, the checks could hardly have been much more than a foot from the camera and then the signatures on the margin of the plate would certainly have undergone some distortion from the effects of perspective—even if the lens itself were free from all optical defects. As it is, the photographs are quite reliable, and the enlargements that Polton has made—magnified three diameters—show the characters perfectly."

He brought out from a drawer a number of whole-plate photographs which he laid on the table end to end. Each one contained four of the enlarged signatures and, thus exhibited in series in the order of their dates, it was easy to compare their characters. Further to facilitate the comparison, the signatures of the two wills—also enlarged—had each a card to itself and could thus be laid by the side of any one of the series.

"You will remember," said Thorndyke, "Marchmont referred to a change in the character of Jeffrey Blackmore's signature?"

I nodded.

"It was a very slight change and, though noticed at the bank, it was not considered to be of any moment. Now if you will cast your eye over the series, you will be able to distinguish the differences. They are very small indeed; the later signatures are a little stiffer, a little more shaky, and the B and the K are both appreciably different from those in the earlier signatures. But there is another fact which emerges when the whole series is seen together, and it is so striking and significant a fact that I am astonished at its having occasioned no inquiry."

"Indeed!" said I, stooping to examine the photographs with increased interest. "What is that?"

"It is a very simple matter and very obvious, but yet, as I have said, very significant. It is this: the change in the characters of the signatures is not a gradual or insidious change, nor is it progressive. It occurs at a certain definite point and then continues without increase or variation. Look carefully at the check dated twenty-ninth of September and you will see that the signature is in what we may call the 'old manner,' whereas the next check, dated the eighteenth of October, is in the new manner."

"Now if you will run your eye through the signatures previous to the twenty-ninth of September, you will observe that none of them shows any sign of change whatever; they are all in the 'old manner'; while the signatures subsequent to the twenty-ninth of September, from the eighteenth of October onwards, are, without exception, in the 'new manner.'"

"The alteration, slight and trivial as it is, is to be seen in every one of them; and you will also notice that it does not increase as time goes on; it is not a progressive change; the signature on the last check—the one that was drawn on the twenty-sixth of March to pay the rent—does not differ from the 'old manner' any more than that dated the eighteenth of October. A rather striking and important fact."

"Yes; and the signatures of the two wills?"

"The first will is signed in the 'old manner,' as you can see for yourself, while the signature of the second will has the characters of what we have called the 'new manner.' It is identical in style with the signatures subsequent to the twenty-ninth of September."

"Yes, I see that it is as you say," I agreed, when I had carefully made the comparison, "and it is certainly very curious and interesting. But what I do not see is the bearing of all this. The second will was signed in the presence of witnesses and that seems to dispose of the whole matter."

"It does," Thorndyke admitted; "but we must not let our data overlap. It is wise always to consider each separate fact on its own merits and work it out to a finish without allowing ourselves to be disturbed or our attention diverted by any seeming incompatibilities with other facts. Then, when we have each datum as complete as we can get it, we may put them all together and consider their relations to one another. It is surprising to see how the incompatibilities become eliminated if we work in this way—how the most (apparently) irreconcilable facts fall into agreement with one another."

"As an academic rule for conducting investigations," I replied, "your principle is, no doubt, entirely excellent. But when you seek to prove by indirect and collateral evidence that Jeffrey Blackmore did not sign a will which two respectable men have sworn they saw him sign, why, I am inclined to think that—"

"That, in the words of the late Captain Bunsby, 'the bearing of these observations lies in their application.'"

"Precisely," I agreed, and we both laughed.

---

#### XIV. — SOME BITS OF GLASS

"HOWEVER," I resumed presently, "as you are advising Marchmont to dispute the will, I presume you have some substantial grounds for action, though I can not conceive what they may be."

"You have all the facts that I had to start with and on which I formed the opinion that the will was probably a forgery. Of course I have more data now, for, as 'money makes money,' so knowledge begets knowledge, and I put my original capital out to interest. Shall we tabulate the facts that are in our joint possession and see what they suggest?"

"Yes, do," I replied, "for I am hopelessly in the dark."

Thorndyke produced a note-book from a drawer and, uncapping his fountain pen, wrote down the leading facts, reading each aloud as soon as it was written.

1. *The second will was unnecessary, since a codicil would have answered the purpose.*
2. *The evident intention of the testator was to leave the bulk of his property to Stephen Blackmore.*
3. *The second will did not, under existing circumstances, give effect to this intention, while the first will did.*
4. *The signature of the second will differs slightly from that of the first and also from the testator's ordinary signature.*

"And as to the very curious group of dates:—

5. *Mrs. Wilson made her will at the end of 1897, without acquainting Jeffrey Blackmore, who seems to have been unaware of the existence of this will.*
6. *His own second will was dated the ninth of December, 1899.*
7. *Mrs. Wilson died of cancer on the twenty-fourth of March, 1900.*
8. *Jeffrey Blackmore was last seen alive on the twenty-sixth of March, 1900, i.e., two days after Mrs. Wilson's death.*
9. *His body was discovered on the twenty-seventh of March, three days after Mrs. Wilson's death.*
10. *The change in the character of his signature occurred abruptly between the twenty-ninth of September and the eighteenth of October.*

"You will find that collection of facts repays careful study, Jervis, especially when considered in relation to the last of our data, which is:

11. *We found, in Blackmore's chambers, a framed inscription hung on the wall upside down."*

He passed the book to me and I pored over it intently, focusing my attention upon the various items with all the power of my will. But, struggle as I would, no general conclusion could be made to emerge from the mass of apparently disconnected facts.

"Well," said Thorndyke presently, after watching with grave interest my unavailing efforts, "what do you make of it?"

"Nothing!" I exclaimed desperately, slapping the book down upon the table. "Of course I can see that there are some queer features in the case, but you say the will is a forgery. Now I can find nothing in these facts to give the slightest color to such a supposition. You will think me an unmitigated donkey, I have no doubt, but I can't help that." My failure, it will be observed, had put me somewhat out of humor, and, observing this, Thorndyke hastened to reply:

"Not in the least my dear fellow; you merely lack experience. Wait until you have seen the trained legal intelligence brought to bear on these facts—which you will do, I feel little doubt, very soon after Marchmont gets my letter. You will have a better opinion of yourself then. By the way, here is another little problem for you. What was the object of which these are parts?"

He pushed across the table a little cardboard box, having first removed the lid. In it were a number of very small pieces of broken glass, some of which had been cemented together by their edges.

"These, I suppose, are the pieces of glass that you picked up in poor Blackmore's bedroom," I said, looking at them with considerable curiosity.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "You see that Polton has been endeavoring to reconstitute the object, whatever it was; but he has not been very successful, for the fragments were too small and irregular and the collection too incomplete. However, here is a specimen, built up of six small pieces, which exhibits the general character of the object fairly well."

He picked out the little irregular-shaped object and handed it to me, and I could not but admire the neatness with which Polton had joined the little fragments together.

"It was not a lens," I pronounced, holding it up before my eyes and moving it to and fro as I looked through it.

"No, it was not a lens," Thorndyke agreed.

"And so can not have been a spectacle glass. But the surface was curved—one side convex and the other concave—and the little piece that remains of the original edge seems to have been ground to fit a bezel or frame. I should say that these are portions of a small watch-glass."

"That is Polton's opinion," said Thorndyke. "And I think you are both wrong."

"What do you think it is?" I asked.

"I am submitting the problem for solution by my learned brother," he replied with an exasperating smile.

"You had better be careful!" I exclaimed, clapping the lid on to the box and pushing it across to him. "If I am tried beyond endurance I may be tempted to set a booby-trap to catch a medical jurist. And where will your reputation be then?"

Thorndyke's smile broadened, and he broke into an appreciative chuckle.

"Your suggestion has certainly extensive possibilities in the way of farce," he admitted "and I tremble at your threat. But I must write my letter to Marchmont and we will go out and lay the mine in the Fleet Street post-box. I should like to be in his office when it explodes."

"I expect, for that matter," said I, "the explosion will soon be felt pretty distinctly in these chambers."

"I expect so, too," replied Thorndyke. "And that reminds me that I shall be out all day to-morrow, so, if Marchmont calls and seems at all urgent, you might invite him to look in after dinner and talk the case over."

I promised to do so and hoped sincerely that the solicitor would accept the invitation; for I, at any rate, was on tenterhooks of curiosity to hear my colleague's views on Jeffrey Blackmore's will.



## XV. — A CALL FROM THE LAWYERS

MY friend's expectations in respect to Mr. Marchmont were fully realized, for on the following morning, within an hour of his departure from the chambers, the knocker was plied with more than usual emphasis and, on my opening the door, I discovered the solicitor in company with a somewhat older gentleman. Mr. Marchmont appeared rather out of humor, while his companion was obviously in a state of extreme irritation.

"Howdy-do, Dr. Jervis?" said Marchmont, as he entered at my invitation. "Your colleague, I suppose, is not in just now?"

"No, and he will not be returning until the evening."

"Hm; I'm sorry. We wished to see him rather particularly. This is my partner, Mr. Winwood."

The latter gentleman bowed stiffly, and Marchmont continued:

"We have had a letter from Mr. Thorndyke, and it is, I may say, a rather curious letter—in fact, a very singular letter indeed."

"It is the letter of a madman!" burst in Mr. Winwood.

"No, no, Winwood, don't say that; but it is really rather incomprehensible. It relates to the will of the late Jeffrey Blackmore—you know the main facts of the case—and we can not reconcile it with those facts."

"This is the letter," exclaimed Mr. Winwood, dragging the document from his wallet and slapping it down on the table. "If you are acquainted with the case, sir, just read that and let us hear what *you* think."

I took up the letter and read:

*DEAR MR. MARCHMONT,*

*Jeffrey Blackmore, decd.: I have gone into this case with some care and have now no doubt that the second will is a forgery. I therefore suggest that, pending the commencement of criminal proceedings, you lose no time in entering a caveat, and I will furnish you with particulars in due course.*

*Yours truly,*

*JOHN THORNDYKE.*

*F. C. MARCHMONT, ESQ.*

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Winwood, glaring ferociously at me, "what do you think of the learned counsel's opinion?"

"I knew that Thorndyke was writing to you to this effect," I replied "but I must frankly confess that I can make nothing of it. Have you acted on his advice?"

"Certainly not!" shouted the irascible lawyer. "Do you suppose we wish to make ourselves the laughing-stock of the courts? The thing is impossible—ridiculously impossible!"

"It can't be that, you know," said I a little stiffly, for I was somewhat nettled by Mr. Winwood's manner, "or Thorndyke would not have written this letter. You had better see him and let him give you the particulars, as he suggests. Could you look in this evening after dinner—say at eight o'clock?"

"It is very inconvenient," grumbled Mr. Winwood; "we should have to dine in town."

"Yes, but it will be the best plan," said Marchmont. "We can bring Mr. Stephen Blackmore with us and hear what Dr. Thorndyke has done. Of course, if what he says is correct, Mr. Stephen's position is totally changed."

"Bah!" exclaimed Winwood, "he has found a mare's-nest, I tell you. However, I suppose we must come, and we will bring Mr. Stephen by all means. The oracle's explanation should be worth hearing—to a man of leisure, at any rate."

With this the two lawyers took their departure, leaving me to meditate upon my colleague's astonishing statement, which I did, considerably to the prejudice of other employment. That Thorndyke would be able to justify the opinion he had given I had no doubt whatever; yet there was no denying that the thing was, upon the face of it, as Mr. Winwood had said, "ridiculously impossible."

When Thorndyke returned I acquainted him with the visit of the two lawyers, and also with the sentiments they had expressed, whereat he smiled with quiet amusement.

"I thought that letter would bring Marchmont to our door before long," said he. "As to Winwood, I have never met him, so he promises to give us what the variety artists would call an 'extra turn.' And what do you think of the affair yourself?"

"I have given it up," I answered, "and feel as if I had taken an overdose of *Cannabis Indica*."

Thorndyke laughed. "Come and dine," said he, "and let us crack a bottle, that our hearts may not turn to water under the frown of the disdainful Winwood."

He rang the bell for Polton, and when that ingenious person made his appearance, said:

"I expect that a man named Walker will call presently, Polton. If he does, take him to your room and detain him till I send for him."

We now betook ourselves to a certain old-world tavern in Fleet Street at which it was our custom occasionally to dine and where on the present occasion certain little extra touches gave a more than unusually festive character to our repast. Thorndyke was in excellent spirits, under the influence of which—and a bottle—he discoursed brilliantly on the evidence of the persistence of ancient racial types in modern populations, until the clock of the Law Courts, chiming three-quarters, warned us to return home.



## XVI. — SOME SINGULAR FACTS

WE had not been back in the chambers more than a few minutes when the little brass knocker announced the arrival of our visitors. Thorndyke himself admitted them and then closed the oak.

"We felt that we must come round and hear a few particulars from you," said Mr. Marchmont, whose manner was now somewhat flurried and uneasy. "We could not quite understand your letter."

"Quite so," said Thorndyke. "The conclusion was a rather unexpected one."

"I should say, rather," exclaimed Mr. Winwood with some heat, "that the conclusion was a palpably ridiculous one."

"That," replied Thorndyke suavely, "can perhaps be better determined after examining all the facts that led up to it."

"No doubt, sir," retorted Mr. Winwood, growing suddenly red and wrathful, "but I speak as a solicitor who was practising in the law when you were an infant in arms! You say that this will is a forgery. I would remind you, sir, that it was executed in broad daylight in the presence of two unimpeachable witnesses, who have not only sworn to their signatures but, one of whom—the house-painter—obligingly left four greasy finger-prints on the document, for subsequent identification, if necessary!"

"After the excellent custom of the Chinese," observed Thorndyke. "Have you verified those finger-prints?"

"No, sir, I have not," replied Mr. Winwood. "Have you?"

"No. The fact is they are of no interest to me, as I am not disputing the witnesses' signatures."

At this, Mr. Winwood fairly danced with irritation.

"Marchmont," he exclaimed fiercely, "this is a mere hoax! This gentleman has brought us here to make fools of us!"

"Pray, my dear Winwood," said Marchmont, "control your temper. No doubt he—"

"But, confound it!" roared Winwood, "you yourself have heard him say that the will is a forgery, but that he doesn't dispute the signatures, which," concluded Winwood, banging his fist down upon the table, "is—nonsense!"

"May I suggest," interposed Stephen Blackmore, "that we came here to listen to Dr. Thorndyke's explanation of his letter? Perhaps it would be better to postpone any comments until we have heard it."

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," said Marchmont. "Let me beg you, Winwood, to listen patiently and refrain from interruption until we have our learned friend's exposition of his opinion."

"Oh, very well," replied Winwood sulkily. "I'll say no more."

He sank into a chair with the manner of a man who shuts himself up and turns the key, and so remained throughout most of the subsequent proceedings, stony and impassive like a seated effigy at the portal of some Egyptian tomb. The other men also seated themselves, as did I, too, and Thorndyke, having laid on the table a small heap of documents, began without preamble.

"There are two ways in which I might lay the case before you," said he. "I might state my theory of the sequence of events and furnish the verification afterward, or I might retrace the actual course of my investigations and give you the facts in the order in which I obtained them myself, with the inferences from them. Which will you have first—the theory or the investigation?"

"Oh,—the theory!" growled Mr. Winwood, and shut himself up again with a snap.

"Perhaps it would be better," said Marchmont, "if we heard the whole argument from the beginning."

"I think," agreed Thorndyke, "that that method will enable you to grasp the evidence more easily. Now, when you and Mr. Stephen placed the outline of the case before me, there were certain curious features in it which attracted my attention, as they had, no doubt, attracted yours. In the first place, there was the strange circumstance that the second will should have been made at all, its provisions being, under the conditions then existing, practically identical with the first, so that the trifling alteration could have been met easily by a codicil. There was also the fact that the second will—making John Blackmore the residuary legatee—was obviously less in accordance with the intentions of the testator, so far as they may be judged, than the first one.

"The next thing that arrested my attention was the mode of death of Mrs. Wilson. She died of cancer. Now cancer is one of the few diseases of which the fatal termination can be predicted with certainty months before its occurrence, and its date fixed, in suitable cases, with considerable accuracy.

"And now observe the remarkable series of coincidences that are brought into light when we consider this peculiarity of the disease. Mrs. Wilson died on the twenty-fourth of March, 1900, having made her will two years previously. Mr. Jeffrey's second will was signed on the ninth of December, 1899—at a time, that is to say, when the existence of cancer must have been known to Mrs. Wilson's doctor, and might have been known to Mr. Jeffrey himself or any person interested. Yet it is practically certain that Mr. Jeffrey had no intention of bequeathing the bulk of his property to his brother John, as he did by executing this second will.

"Next, you will observe that the remarkable change in Mr. Jeffrey's habits coincides with the same events; for he came over from Nice, where he had been residing for a year—having stored his furniture meanwhile—and took up his residence at New Inn in September 1899, at a time when the nature of Mrs. Wilson's complaint must almost certainly have been known. At the same time, as I shall presently demonstrate to you, a distinct and quite sudden change took place in the character of his signature.

"I would next draw your attention to the singularly opportune date of his death, in reference to this will. Mrs. Wilson died upon the twenty-fourth of March. Mr. Jeffrey was found dead upon the twenty-seventh of March, and he was seen alive upon the twenty-sixth. If he had died only four days sooner, Mrs. Wilson's property would not have devolved upon him at all. If he had lived a few days longer, it is probable that he would have made a new will in his nephew's favor. Circumstances, therefore, conspired in the most singular manner in favor of Mr. John Blackmore.

"But there is yet another coincidence that you will probably have noticed.

"Mr. Jeffrey's body was found on the twenty-seventh of March, and then by the merest chance. It might have remained undiscovered for weeks—or even months; and if this had happened, it is certain that Mrs. Wilson's next of kin would have disputed John Blackmore's claim—most probably with success—on the grounds that Mr. Jeffrey died before Mrs. Wilson. But all this uncertainty and difficulty was prevented by the circumstance that Mr. Jeffrey paid his rent personally to the porter on the twenty-sixth, so establishing the fact beyond question that he was alive on that date.

"Thus, by a series of coincidences, John Blackmore is enabled to inherit the fortune of a man who, almost certainly, had no intention of bequeathing it to him."

Thorndyke paused, and Mr. Marchmont, who had listened with close attention, nodded as he glanced at his silent partner.

"You have stated the case with remarkable lucidity," he said, "and I am free to confess that some of the points you have raised had escaped my notice."

"Well, then," resumed Thorndyke, "to continue: The facts with which you furnished me, when thus collated, made it evident that the case was a very singular one, and it appeared to me that a case presenting such a series of coincidences in favor of one of the parties should be viewed with some suspicion and subjected to very close examination. But these facts yielded no further conclusion, and it was clear that no progress could be made until we had obtained some fresh data.

"In what direction, however, these new facts were to be looked for did not for the moment appear. Indeed, it seemed as if the inquiry had come to a full stop.

"But there is one rule which I follow religiously in all my investigations, and that is to collect facts of all kinds in any way related to the case in hand, no matter how trivial they may be or how apparently irrelevant."





## XVII. — THE MAN IN NEW INN

"NOW, in pursuance of this rule, I took an opportunity, which offered, of looking over the chambers in New Inn, which had been left untouched since the death of their occupant, and I had hardly entered the rooms when I made a very curious discovery. On the wall hung a framed photograph of an ancient Persian inscription in cuneiform characters."

The expectant look which had appeared on Mr. Marchmont's face changed suddenly to one of disappointment, as he remarked:

"Curious, perhaps, but not of much importance to us, I am afraid."

"My uncle was greatly interested in cuneiform texts, as I think I mentioned," said Stephen Blackmore. "I seem to remember this photograph, too—it used to stand on the mantelpiece in his old rooms, I believe."

"Very probably," replied Thorndyke. "Well, it hung on the wall at New Inn, and it was hung upside-down."

"Upside-down!" exclaimed Blackmore. "That is really very odd."

"Very odd indeed," agreed Thorndyke. "The inscription, I find, was one of the first to be deciphered. From it Grotefend, with incredible patience and skill, managed to construct a number of the hitherto unknown signs. Now is it not an astonishing thing that an Oriental scholar, setting so much store by this monument of human ingenuity that he has a photograph of it framed, should then hang that photograph upon his wall upside-down?"

"I see your point," said Marchmont, "and I certainly agree with you that the circumstance is strongly suggestive of the decay of the mental faculties."

Thorndyke smiled almost imperceptibly as he continued:

"The way in which it came to be inverted is pretty obvious. The photograph had evidently been in the frame some years, but had never been hung up until lately, for the plates by which it was suspended were new; and when I unscrewed one, I found the wood underneath as dark and time-stained as elsewhere; and there were no other marks of plates or rings."

"The frame-maker had, however, pasted his label on the back of the frame, and as this label hung the right way up, it appeared as if the person who fixed on the plates had adopted it as a guide."

"Possibly," said Mr. Marchmont somewhat impatiently. "But these facts, though doubtless very curious and interesting, do not seem to have much bearing upon the genuineness of the late Mr. Blackmore's will."

"On the contrary," replied Thorndyke, "they appeared to me to be full of significance. However, I will return to the chambers presently, and I will now demonstrate to you that the alteration, which you have told me had been noticed at the bank, in the character of Mr. Jeffrey's signature, occurred at the time that I mentioned and was quite an abrupt change."

He drew from his little pile of documents the photographs of the checks and handed them to our visitors, by whom they were examined with varying degrees of interest.

"You will see," said he, "that the change took place between the twenty-ninth of September and the eighteenth of October and was, therefore, coincident in time with the other remarkable changes in the habits of the deceased."

"Yes, I see that," replied Mr. Marchmont, "and no doubt the fact would be of some importance if there were any question as to the genuineness of the testator's signature. But there is not. The signature of the will was witnessed, and the witnesses have been produced."

"Whence it follows," added Mr. Winwood, "that all this hairsplitting is entirely irrelevant and, in fact, so much waste of time."

"If you will note the facts that I am presenting to you," said Thorndyke, "and postpone your conclusions and comments until I have finished, you will have a better chance of grasping the case as a whole. I will now relate to you a very strange adventure which befell Dr. Jervis."

He then proceeded to recount the incidents connected with my visits to the mysterious patient in Kennington Lane, including the construction of the chart, presenting the latter for the inspection of his hearers. To this recital our three visitors listened in utter bewilderment, as, indeed, did I also; for I could not conceive in what way my adventures could be related to the affairs of the late Mr. Blackmore. This was manifestly the view taken by Mr. Marchmont, for during a pause, in which the chart was handed to him, he remarked somewhat stiffly:

"I am assuming, Dr. Thorndyke, that the curious story you are telling us has some relevance to the matter in which we are interested."

"You are quite correct in your assumption," replied Thorndyke. "The story is very relevant indeed, as you will presently be convinced."

"Thank you," said Marchmont, sinking back once more into his chair with a sigh of resignation.

"A few days ago," pursued Thorndyke, "Dr. Jervis and I located, with the aid of this chart, the house to which he had been called. We found that it was to let, the recent tenant having left hurriedly, so, when we had obtained the keys, we entered and explored in accordance with the rule that I mentioned just now."

Here he gave a brief account of our visit and the conditions that we observed, and was proceeding to furnish a list of the articles that he had found, when Mr. Winwood started from his chair.

"Good heavens, sir!" he exclaimed, "have I come here, at great personal inconvenience, to hear you read the inventory of a dust-heap?"

"You came by your own wish," replied Thorndyke, "and I may add that you are not being forcibly detained."

At this hint Mr. Winwood sat down and shut himself up once more.

"We will now," pursued Thorndyke with unmoved serenity, "consider the significance of these relics and we will begin with this pair of spectacles. They belonged to a person who was near-sighted and astigmatic in the left eye and almost certainly blind in the right. Such a description agrees entirely with Dr. Jervis's account of the sick man."

He paused for a moment, and then, as no one made any comment, proceeded:

"We next come to this little bamboo stick. It is part of a Japanese brush, such as is used for writing in Chinese ink or for making small drawings."

Again he paused as though expecting some remark from his listeners; but no one spoke, and he continued:

"Then there is this bottle with the theatrical wig-maker's label on it, which once contained cement. Its presence suggests some person who was accustomed to 'make up' with a false mustache or beard. You have heard Dr. Jervis's account of Mr. Morgan and his coachman, and will agree with me that the circumstances bear out this suggestion."

He paused once more and looked round expectantly at his audience, none of whom, however, volunteered any remark.

"Do none of these objects that I have described seem to have any suggestion for us?" he asked in a tone of some surprise.

"They convey nothing to me," said Mr. Marchmont, glancing at his partner, who shook his head like a restive horse.

"Nor to you, Mr. Blackmore?"

"No," replied Stephen, "unless you mean to suggest that the sick man was my Uncle Jeffrey."

"That is precisely what I do mean to suggest," rejoined Thorndyke. "I had formed that opinion, indeed, before I saw them and I need not say how much they strengthened it."

"My uncle was certainly blind in the right eye," said Blackmore.

"And," interrupted Thorndyke, "from the same cause— dislocation of the crystalline lens."

"Possibly. And he probably used such a brush as you found, since I know that he corresponded in Japanese with his native friends in Tokyo. But this is surely very slender evidence."

"It is no evidence at all," replied Thorndyke. "It is merely a suggestion."

"Moreover," said Marchmont, "there is the insuperable objection that Mr. Jeffrey was living at New Inn at this time."

"What evidence is there of that?" asked Thorndyke.

"Evidence!" exclaimed Marchmont impatiently. "Why, my dear sir—" he paused suddenly and, leaning forward, regarded Thorndyke with a new and rather startled expression,—"you mean to suggest—" he began.

"I suggest to you what that inverted inscription suggested to me—that *the person who occupied those chambers in New Inn was not Jeffrey Blackmore!*"



## XVIII. — THORNDYKE EXPLAINS

THE lawyer appeared thunderstruck. "This is an amazing proposition!" he exclaimed. "Yet the thing is certainly not impossible, for now that you recall the fact, no one who had known him previously ever saw him at the Inn! The question of identity was never raised!"

"Excepting," said Mr. Winwood, "in regard to the body; which was certainly that of Jeffrey Blackmore."

"Yes, of course," said Marchmont; "I had forgotten that for the moment. The body was identified beyond doubt. You don't dispute the identity of the body, do you?"

"Certainly not," replied Thorndyke.

"Then for heaven's sake, tell us what you do mean, for I must confess that I am completely bewildered in this tangle of mysteries and contradictions!"

"It is certainly an intricate case," said Thorndyke, "but I think that you will find it comes together very completely. I have described to you my preliminary observations in the order in which I made them and have given you a hint of the nature of my inferences. Now I will lay before you the hypothesis that I have formed as to what were the actual occurrences in this mysterious case.

"It appeared to me probable that John Blackmore must have come to know, in some way, of the will that Mrs. Wilson had made in his brother's favor and that he kept himself informed as to the state of her health. When it became known to him that she was suffering from cancer, and that her death was likely to take place within a certain number of months, I think that he conceived the scheme that he subsequently carried out with such remarkable success.

"In September of 1899, Jeffrey Blackmore returned from Nice, and I think that John must have met him and either drugged him then and there and carried him to Kennington Lane, or induced him to go voluntarily. Once in the house and shut up in that dungeon-like bedroom, it would be easy to administer morphia—in small quantities at first and in larger doses afterward, as toleration of the drug became established."

"But could this be done against the victim's will?" asked Marchmont.

"Certainly. Small doses could be conveyed in food and drink, or administered during sleep, and then, you know, the morphia habit is quickly formed and, once it was established, the unfortunate man would probably take the drug voluntarily. Moreover this drug-habit weakens the will and paralyzes the mental faculties to an extraordinary degree—which was probably the principal object in using it.

"John Blackmore's intention, on this hypothesis, would be to keep his brother in a state of continual torpor and mental enfeeblement as long as Mrs. Wilson remained alive, so that the woman, his accomplice, could manage the prisoner, leaving him, John, free to play his part elsewhere.

"As soon he had thus secured his unfortunate brother, I suggest that this ingenious villain engaged the chambers at New Inn. In order to personate his brother, he must have shaved off his mustache and beard and worn spectacles; and these spectacles introduce a very curious and interesting feature into the case.

"To the majority of people the wearing of spectacles, for the purpose of disguise or personation, seems a perfectly simple and easy proceeding. But to a person of normal eyesight it is nothing of the kind; for if he wears spectacles suited for long sight, he is unable to see distinctly through them at all, while if he wears even weak concave or near-sight glasses, the effort to see through them soon produces such strain and fatigue that his eyes become disabled altogether. On the stage, of course, the difficulty is got over quite simply by using spectacles of plain window-glass, but in ordinary life this would hardly do; the 'property' spectacles would probably be noticed and give rise to suspicion.

"The personator would, therefore, be in this dilemma: if he wore actual spectacles he would not be able to see through them, while if he wore sham spectacles of plain glass his disguise might be detected. There is only one way out of the difficulty, and that not a very satisfactory one, but Mr. J. Morgan seems to have adopted it in lieu of a better.

"We have learned from Dr. Jervis that this gentleman wore spectacles and that these spectacles seemed to have had very peculiar optical properties; for while the image of the candle-flame reflected in them was inverted, showing that one surface at least was concave, my colleague observed that objects seen through them appeared quite free from distortion or change of size, as if seen through plain glass. But there is only one kind of glass which could possess these optical properties, and that is a plain glass with curved surfaces like an ordinary watch-glass."

I started when Thorndyke reached this point, and thought of the contents of the cardboard box, which I now saw was among the objects on the table.

"Do you follow the argument?" my colleague inquired.

"Yes," replied Mr. Marchmont, "I think I follow you, though I do not see the application of all this."

"That will appear presently. For the present we may take it that Mr. J. Morgan wore spectacles of this peculiar character, presumably for the purposes of disguise; and I am assuming, for the purposes of the argument, that Mr. J. Morgan and Mr. John Blackmore are one and the same."

"It is assuming a great deal," grunted Mr. Winwood.

"And now," continued Thorndyke, disregarding the last remark, "to return from this digression to John Blackmore's proceedings. I imagine that he spent very little time at the Inn—for the porter saw him only occasionally and believed him to be frequently absent—and when he was at Kennington Lane or at his office in the city, or elsewhere, he would replace his beard with a false one of the same appearance, which would require to be fixed on securely and finished round the edges with short hairs cemented to the skin—for an ordinary theatrical beard would be detected instantly in daylight.

"He would now commence experiments in forging his brother's handwriting, which he must have practised previously to have obtained Jeffrey's furniture from the repository where it was stored. The difference was observed at the bank, as Mr. Marchmont has told us, but the imitation was close enough not to arouse suspicion.

"The next thing was to make the fresh will and get it witnessed; and this was managed with such adroitness that, although neither of the witnesses had ever seen Jeffrey Blackmore, their identification has been accepted without question. It is evident that, when shaved, John Blackmore must have resembled his brother pretty closely or he would never have attempted to carry out this scheme, and he will have calculated, with much acuteness, that the porter, when called in to identify the body, would observe only the resemblance and would disregard any apparent difference in appearance.

"The position in which John Blackmore was now placed was one of extraordinary difficulty. His brother was immured in Kennington Lane, but, owing to the insecurity of his prison and the frequent absence of his jailer, this confinement could be maintained with safety only by keeping the imprisoned man continuously under the influence of full doses of morphia.

"This constant drugging must have been highly injurious to the health of a delicate man like Jeffrey and, as time went on, there must have loomed up the ever-increasing danger that he might die before the appointed time; in which event John would be involved in a double catastrophe, for, on the one hand, the will would now be useless, and, on the other, the crime would be almost inevitably discovered.

"It was, no doubt, with this danger in view that John called in Dr. Jervis—making, as it turned out, a very unsuitable choice. My colleague's assistance was invoked, no doubt, partly to keep the victim alive and partly in the hope that if that were impossible, he might be prepared to cover the crime with a death-certificate.

"We are now approaching the end of the tragedy. Mrs. Wilson died on the twenty-fourth of March. Circumstances point to the conclusion that the murder took place on the evening of the twenty-sixth. Now on that day, about half-past six in the evening, the supposed Jeffrey Blackmore entered New Inn in a four-wheeled cab, as you are aware, his face being seen at the window by the porter as the vehicle passed the lodge under the archway. There was a dense fog at the time, so the cab would be lost to sight as soon as it entered the Square. At this time the offices at No. 31 would be empty and not a soul present in the house to witness the arrival.

"From the first time that my suspicions took definite shape that cab seemed to me to hold the key to the mystery. There can be no doubt that it contained two people—one of them was John Blackmore, whose face was seen at the window, and the other, his victim, the unfortunate Jeffrey.

"As to what happened in that silent house there is no need to speculate. The peculiar vertical manner in which the needle of the syringe was introduced is naturally explained by the fact of its being thrust through the clothing, and we can not but admire the cool calculation with which the appliances of murder were left to give color to the idea of suicide.

"Having committed the crime, the murderer presently walked out and showed himself at the lodge, under the pretext of paying the rent, thus furnishing proof of survival in respect to Mrs. Wilson. After this he returned to the Inn, but not to the chambers, for there is a postern-gate, as you know, opening into Houghton Street. Through this, no doubt, the murderer left the Inn, and vanished, to reappear at the inquest unrecognizable in his beard, his padded clothing and eyes uncovered by spectacles.

"With regard to the identification of the body by the porter there is, as I have said, no mystery. There must have been a considerable resemblance between the two brothers, and the porter, taking it for granted that the body was that of his tenant, would naturally recognize it as such, for even if he had noticed any departure from the usual appearance, he would attribute the difference to changes produced by death.

"Such, gentlemen, is my theory of the circumstances that surrounded the death of Jeffrey Blackmore, and I shall be glad to hear any comments that you may have to make."

---

## XIX. — STEP BY STEP

THERE was an interval of silence after Thorndyke had finished which was at last broken by Mr. Winwood.

"I must admit, sir," said he, "that you have displayed extraordinary ingenuity in the construction of the astonishing story you have told us, and that this story, if it were true, would dispose satisfactorily of every difficulty and obscure point in the case. But is it true? It seems to me to be a matter of pure conjecture, woven most ingeniously around a few slightly suggestive facts. And, seeing that it involves a charge of murder of a most diabolical character against Mr. John Blackmore, nothing but the most conclusive proof would justify us in entertaining it."

"It is not conjecture," said Thorndyke, "although it was so at first. But when I had formed a hypothesis which fitted the facts known to me, I proceeded to test it and have now no doubt that it is correct."

"Would you mind laying before us any new facts that you have discovered which tend to confirm your theory?" said Mr. Marchmont.

"I will place the entire mass of evidence before you," said Thorndyke, "and then I think you will have no more doubts than I have."

"You will observe that there are four points which require to be proved: The first is the identity of Jeffrey with the sick man of Kennington Lane; the second is the identity of Mr. J. Morgan with John Blackmore; the third is the identity of John Blackmore with the tenant of 31 New Inn, and the fourth is the presence together of John and Jeffrey Blackmore at the chambers on the night of the latter gentleman's death."

"We will take the first point. Here are the spectacles I found in the empty house. I tested them optically with great care and measured them minutely and wrote down on this piece of paper then-description. I will read it to you:

"Spectacles for distance, curl sides, steel frames, Stopford's pattern, with gold plate under bridge. Distance between centers, 6.2 cm. Right eye plain glass. Left eye—3D spherical—2D cylindrical, axis 35°."

"Now spectacles of this pattern are, I believe, made only by Cuxton & Parry of New Bond Street. I therefore wrote to Mr. Cuxton, who knows me, and asked if he had supplied spectacles to the late Jeffrey Blackmore, Esq., and, if so, whether he would send me a description of them, together with the name of the oculist who prescribed them."

"He replied, in this letter here, that he had supplied spectacles to the late Jeffrey Blackmore and described them thus:

"The spectacles were for distance and had steel frames of Stopford's pattern, with curl sides and a gold plate under the bridge. The formula, which was from Mr. Hindley's prescription, was R.E. plain glass. L.E.—3D sph.—2D cyl., axis 35°."

"You see the descriptions are identical. I then wrote to Mr. Hindley, asking certain questions, to which he replied thus:

"You are quite right; Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore had a tremulous iris in his right eye (which was practically blind) due to dislocation of the lens. The pupils were rather large, certainly not contracted."

"Thus, you see, the description of the deceased tallies with that of the sick man as given by Dr. Jervis, excepting that there was then no sign of his being addicted to taking morphia. One more item of evidence I have on this point, and it is one that will appeal to the legal mind."

"A few days ago, I wrote to Mr. Stephen, asking him whether he possessed a recent photograph of his Uncle Jeffrey. He had one and sent it to me by return. This portrait I showed to Dr. Jervis, asking him if he recognised the person. After examining it attentively, without any hint from me, he identified it as a portrait of the sick man of Kennington Lane."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Marchmont. "This is most important. Are you prepared to swear to the resemblance, Dr. Jervis?"

"Perfectly, I have not the slightest doubt," I replied.

"Excellent!" said Mr. Marchmont. "Pray go on, Dr. Thorndyke."

"Well, that is all the evidence I have on the first point," said Thorndyke, "but, to my mind, it constitutes practically conclusive proof of identity."

"It is undoubtedly very weighty evidence," Mr. Marchmont agreed.

"Now, as to the second point—the identity of John Blackmore with Mr. J. Morgan of Kennington Lane. To begin with the *prima facie* probabilities, in relation to certain assumed data. If we assume:

"1. That the sick man was Jeffrey Blackmore;

"2. That his symptoms were due to the administration of a slow poison;

"3. That the poison was being administered by J. Morgan, as suggested by his manifest disguise and the strange secrecy of his conduct;

"And if we then ask ourselves who could have a motive for causing the death of Mr. Jeffrey in this manner and at this time, the answer is John Blackmore, the principal beneficiary under the very unstable second will. The most obvious hypothesis, then, is that Mr. J. Morgan and John Blackmore were one and the same person."

"But this is mere surmise," objected Mr. Marchmont.

"Exactly; as every hypothesis must be until it has been tested and verified. And now for the facts that tend to support this hypothesis. The first item—a very small one—I picked up when I called on the doctor who had attended Mrs. Wilson. My object was to obtain particulars as to her illness and death, but, incidentally, I discovered that he was well acquainted with John Blackmore and had treated him—without operation and, therefore, without cure—for a nasal polypus. You will remember that Mr. J. Morgan appeared to have a nasal polypus. I may mention, by the way, that John Blackmore had been aware of Mrs. Wilson's state of health from the onset of her symptoms and kept himself informed as to her progress. Moreover, at his request a telegram was sent to his office in Cophthall Avenue, announcing her death.

"The next item of evidence is more important. I made a second visit to the house-agent at Kennington for the purpose of obtaining, if possible, the names and addresses of the persons who had been mentioned as references when Mr. Morgan took the house. I ascertained that only one reference had been given—the intending tenant's stockbroker; and the name of that stockbroker was John Blackmore of Cophthall Avenue."

"That is a significant fact," remarked Mr. Marchmont.

"Yes," answered Thorndyke, "and it would be interesting to confront John Blackmore with this house-agent, who would have seen him with his beard on. Well, that is all the evidence that I have on this point. It is far from conclusive by itself, but, such as it is, it tends to support the hypothesis that J. Morgan and John Blackmore were one and the same.

"I will now pass on to the evidence of the third point—the identity of John Blackmore with the tenant of New Inn.

"With reference to the inverted inscription, that furnishes indirect evidence only. It suggests that the tenant was not Jeffrey. But, if not Jeffrey, it was some one who was personating him; and that some one must have resembled him closely enough for the personation to remain undetected even on the production of Jeffrey's body. But the only person known to us who answers this description is John Blackmore.

"Again, the individual who personated Jeffrey must have had some strong motive for doing so. But the only person known to us who could have had any such motive is John Blackmore.

"The next item of evidence on this point is also merely suggestive and indirect, though to me it was of the greatest value, since it furnished the first link in the chain of evidence connecting Jeffrey Blackmore with the sick man of Kennington. On the floor of the bedroom in New Inn I found the shattered remains of a small glass object which had been trodden on. Here are some of the fragments in this box, and you will see that we have joined a few of them together to help us in our investigations.

"My assistant, who was formerly a watch-maker, judged them to be fragments of the thin crystal glass of a lady's watch, and that, I think, was also Dr. Jervis's opinion. But the small part which remains of the original edge furnishes proof in two respects that this was not a watch-glass. In the first place, on taking a careful tracing of this piece of the edge, I found that its curve was part of an ellipse; but watch-glasses, nowadays, are invariably circular. In the second place, watch-glasses are ground on the edge to a single bevel to snap into the bezel or frame; but the edge of this is ground to a double bevel, like the edge of a spectacle-glass which fits into a groove and is held in position by a screw.

"The unavoidable inference is that this was a spectacle-glass, but, since it had the optical properties of plain glass, it could not have been used to assist vision and was therefore presumably intended for the purpose of disguise. Now you will remember that Mr. J. Morgan wore spectacles having precisely the optical properties of a crystal watch-glass, and it was this fact that first suggested to me a possible connection between New Inn and Kennington Lane."

"By the way," said Stephen Blackmore, "you said that my uncle had plain glass in one side of his spectacles?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "over his blind eye. But that was actually plain glass with flat surfaces, not curved like this one. I should like to observe, with reference to this spectacle-glass, that its importance as a clue is much greater than might, at first sight, appear. The spectacles worn by Mr. Morgan were not merely peculiar or remarkable; they were probably unique. It is exceedingly likely that there is not, in the whole world, another similar pair of spectacles. Hence, the finding of this broken glass does really establish a considerable probability that J. Morgan was, at some time, in the chambers in New Inn. But we have seen that it is highly probable that J. Morgan was, in fact, John Blackmore, wherefore the presence of this glass is evidence suggesting that John Blackmore is the man who personated Jeffrey at New Inn.

"You will have observed, no doubt, that the evidence on the second and third points is by no means conclusive when taken separately, but I think you will agree that the whole body of circumstantial evidence is very strong and might easily be strengthened by further investigation."

"Yes," said Marchmont, "I think we may admit that there is enough evidence to make your theory a possible and even a probable one; and if you can show that there are any good grounds for believing that John and Jeffrey Blackmore were together in the chambers on the evening of the twenty-sixth of March, I should say that you had made out a *prima facie* case. What say you, Winwood?"

"Let us hear the evidence," replied Mr. Winwood gruffly.

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "you shall. And, what is more, you shall have it first-hand."

---

## XX. — THE ENEMY DECIDES

HE pressed the button of the electric bell three times and, after a short interval, Polton let himself in with his latch-key and beckoned to some one on the landing.

"Here is Walker, sir," said he, and he then retired, shutting the oak after him and leaving a seedy-looking stranger standing near the door and gazing at the assembled company with a mixture of embarrassment and defiance.

"Sit down, Walker," said Thorndyke, placing a chair for him. "I want you to answer a few questions for the information of these gentlemen."

"I know," said Walker with an oracular nod. "You can ask me anything you like."

"Your name, I believe, is James Walker?"

"That's me, sir." "And your occupation?"

"My occupation, sir, don't agree with my name at all, because I drives a cab—a four-wheeled cab is what I drives—and a uncommon dry job it is, let me tell you."

Acting on this delicate hint, Thorndyke mixed a stiff whisky and soda and passed it across to the cabman, who consumed half at a single gulp and then peered thoughtfully into the tumbler.

"Rum stuff, this soda-water," he remarked. "Makes it taste as if there wasn't no whisky in it."

This hint Thorndyke ventured to ignore and continued his inquiries:

"Do you remember a very foggy day about three weeks ago?"

"Rather. It was the twenty-sixth of March. I remember it because my benefit society came down on me for arrears that morning."

"Will you tell us now what happened to you between six and seven in the evening of that day?"

"I will," replied the cabman, emptying his tumbler by way of bracing himself up for the effort. "I drove a fare to Vauxhall Station and got there a little before six. As I didn't pick up no one there, I drove away and was just turning down Upper Kennington Lane when I see two gentlemen standing at the corner by Harleyford Road, and one of 'em hails me, so I pulls up by the curb. One of 'em seemed to be drunk, for the other one was holding him up, but he might have been feeling queer—it wasn't no affair of mine."

"But the rum thing about 'em was that they was as like as two peas. Their faces was alike, their clothes was alike, they wore the same kind of hats and they both had spectacles. 'Wot Oi' says I to myself, 'ere's the Siamese Twins out on the jamboree!' Well, the gent what wasn't drunk he opens the door and shoves in the other one what was, and he says to me, he says: 'Do you know New Inn?' he says. Now there was a—silly question to ask a man what was born and brought up in White Horse Alley, Drury Lane. 'Do I know my grandmother?' says I."

"Well," says he, 'you drive in through the gate in Wych Street,' he says."

"Of course I shall," I says. 'Did you think I was going to drive in the back way down the steps?' I says."

"And then," he says, 'you drive down the Square nearly to the end and you'll see a house with a large brass plate at the corner of the doorway. That's where we want to be set down,' he says. With that he nips in and pulls up the windows and off we goes."

"It took us nigh upon half an hour to get to New Inn through the fog, and as I drove in under the archway I saw it was half-past six by the clock in the porter's lodge. I drove down nearly to the end of the square and drew up opposite a house where there was a large brass plate by the doorway. Then the gent what was sober jumps out and begins hauling out the other one. I was just getting down off the box to help him when he says, rather short-like:

"All right, cabman," he says, 'I can manage,' and he hands me five bob."

"The other gent seemed to have gone to sleep, and a rare job he had hauling him across the pavement. I see them, by the gas-lamps on the staircase, going up-stairs—regular Pilgrim's Progress it was, I tell you—but they got up at last, for I saw 'em light the gas in a room on the second floor. Then I drove off."

"Could you identify the house?" asked Thorndyke.

"I done it, this morning. You saw me. It was No. 31."

"How was it," said Marchmont, "that you did not come forward at the inquest?"

"What inquest?" inquired the cabman. "I don't know nothing about any inquest. The first I heard of the business was when one of our men told me yesterday about a notice what was stuck up in a shelter offering a reward for information concerning a four-wheel cab what drove to New Inn at six-thirty on the day of the fog at the end of last month. Then I came here and left a message, and this morning this gentleman came to me on the rank and paid up *like* a gentleman."

The latter ceremony was now repeated, and the cabman, having remarked that his services were at the disposal of the

present company to an unlimited extent on the same terms, departed, beaming with satisfaction.

When he had gone, our three visitors sat for awhile looking at one another in silence. At length Stephen Blackmore rose with a stern expression on his pale face and said to Thorndyke:

"The police must be informed of this at once. I shall never be able to rest until I know that justice has been dealt out to this cold-hearted, merciless villain!"

"The police have already been informed," said Thorndyke. "I completed the case this morning and at once communicated with Superintendent Miller of Scotland Yard. A warrant was obtained immediately and I had expected to hear that the arrest had been made long before this, for Mr. Miller is usually most punctilious in keeping me informed of the progress of cases which I introduce to him. We shall hear to-morrow, no doubt."

"And for the present the case seems to have passed out of our hands," observed Mr. Marchmont.

"I shall enter a caveat, all the same," said Mr. Winwood.

"Why, that doesn't seem very necessary," said Marchmont. "The evidence that we have heard is enough to secure a conviction, and there will be plenty more when the police go into the case. And a conviction would, of course, put an end to the second will."

"I shall enter a caveat, all the same," said Mr. Winwood.

As the two partners showed a disposition to become heated over this question, Thorndyke suggested that they might discuss it at leisure by the light of subsequent events.

Taking this as a hint, for it was now close upon midnight, our visitors prepared to depart and were, in fact, making their way towards the door, when the bell rang.

Thorndyke hastily dung open the door and, as he recognized his visitor, uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Ha! Mr. Miller, we were just speaking' of you. This is Mr. Stephen Blackmore, and these gentlemen are Messrs. Marchmont and Winwood, his solicitors, and my colleague, Dr. Jervis."

"Well, Doctor, I have just dropped in to give you the news, which will interest these gentlemen as well as yourself."

"Have you arrested the man?"

"No; he has arrested himself. He is dead!"

"Dead!" we all exclaimed together.

"Yes. It happened this way. We went down to his place at Surbiton early this morning, but it seemed he had just left for town, so we took the next train and went straight to his office. But they must have smoked us and sent him a wire, for, just as we were approaching the office, a man answering the description ran out, jumped into a hansom and drove off like the devil.

"We chanced its being the right man and followed at a run, hailing the first hansom that we met; but he had a good start and his cabby had a good horse, so that we had all our work cut out to keep him in sight. We followed him over Blackfriars Bridge and down Stamford Street to Waterloo; but as we drove up the slope to the station we met a cab coming down and, as the cabby kissed his hand and smiled at us, we concluded it was the one we had been following.

"I remembered that the Southampton Express was due to start about this time, so we made for the platform and, just as the guard was about to blow his whistle, we saw a man bolt through the barrier and run up the platform. We dashed through a few seconds later and just managed to get on the train as it was moving off. But he had seen us, for his head was out of the window when we jumped in, and we kept a sharp lookout on both sides in case he should hop out again before the train got up speed.

"However, he didn't, and nothing more happened until we stopped at Southampton. You may be sure we lost no time in getting out and we ran up the platform, expecting to see him make a rush for the barrier. But there was no sign of him anywhere, and we began to think that he had given us the slip.

"Then, while my inspector watched the barrier, I went down the train until I came to the compartment that I had seen him enter. And there he was, lying back in the off corner, apparently fast asleep. But he wasn't asleep. He was dead. I found this on the floor of the carriage."

He held up a tiny glass tube, labeled "Aconitin Nitrate gr. 1-640."

"Ha!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "This fellow was well up in poisons, it seems! This tube contained twenty tabloids, a thirty-second of a grain altogether, so if he swallowed them all he took about twelve times the medical dose. Well, perhaps he has done the best thing, after all."

"The best thing for you, gentlemen," said Mr. Miller, "for there is no need to raise any questions in detail at the inquest; and publicity would be very unpleasant for Mr. Blackmore. It is a thousand pities that you or Dr. Jervis hadn't put us on the scent in time to prevent the crime—though, of course, we couldn't have entered the premises without a warrant. But it is easy to be wise after the event. Well, good-night, gentlemen; I suppose this accident disposes of your business as far as the will is concerned?"

"I suppose it does," said Mr. Winwood; "but I shall enter a caveat, all the same."



# THE MYSTERY OF 31 NEW INN

## I. — THE MYSTERIOUS PATIENT

AS I look back through the years of my association with John Thorndyke, I am able to recall a wealth of adventures and strange experiences such as falls to the lot of very few men who pass their lives within hearing of Big Ben. Many of these experiences I have already placed on record; but it now occurs to me that I have hitherto left unrecorded one that is, perhaps, the most astonishing and incredible of the whole series; an adventure, too, that has for me the added interest that it inaugurated my permanent association with my learned and talented friend, and marked the close of a rather unhappy and unprosperous period of my life.

Memory, retracing the journey through the passing years to the starting-point of those strange events, lands me in a shabby little ground-floor room in a house near the Walworth end of Lower Kennington Lane. A couple of framed diplomas on the wall, a card of Snellen's test-types and a stethoscope lying on the writing-table, proclaim it a doctor's consulting-room; and my own position in the round-backed chair at the said table, proclaims me the practitioner in charge.

It was nearly nine o'clock. The noisy little clock on the mantelpiece announced the fact, and, by its frantic ticking,



seemed as anxious as I to get the consultation hours over. I glanced wistfully at my mud-splashed boots and wondered if I might yet venture to assume the slippers that peeped coyly from under the shabby sofa. I even allowed my thoughts to wander to the pipe that reposed in my coat pocket. Another minute and I could turn down the surgery gas and shut the outer door. The fussy little clock gave a sort of preliminary cough or hiccup, as if it should say: "Ahem! ladies and gentlemen, I am about to strike." And at that moment, the bottle-boy opened the door and, thrusting in his head, uttered the one word: "Gentleman."

Extreme economy of words is apt to result in ambiguity. But I understood. In Kennington Lane, the race of mere men and women appeared to be extinct. They were all gentlemen—unless they were ladies or children—even as the Liberian army was said to consist entirely of generals. Sweeps, labourers, milkmen, costermongers—all were impartially invested by the democratic bottle-boy with the rank and title of *armigeri*. The present nobleman appeared to favour the aristocratic recreation of driving a cab or job-master's carriage, and, as he entered the room, he touched his hat, closed the door somewhat carefully, and then, without remark, handed me a note which bore the superscription "Dr. Stillbury."

"You understand," I said, as I prepared to open the envelope, "that I am not Dr. Stillbury. He is away at present and I am looking after his patients."

"It doesn't signify," the man replied. "You'll do as well."

On this, I opened the envelope and read the note, which was quite brief, and, at first sight, in no way remarkable.

"DEAR SIR," it ran, "Would you kindly come and see a friend of mine who is staying with me? The bearer of this will give you further particulars and convey you to the house. Yours truly, H. WEISS."

There was no address on the paper and no date, and the writer was unknown to me.

"This note," I said, "refers to some further particulars. What are they?"

The messenger passed his hand over his hair with a gesture of embarrassment. "It's a ridicklus affair," he said, with a contemptuous laugh. "If I had been Mr. Weiss, I wouldn't have had nothing to do with it. The sick gentleman, Mr. Graves, is one of them people what can't abear doctors. He's been ailing now for a week or two, but nothing would induce him to see a doctor. Mr. Weiss did everything he could to persuade him, but it was no go. He wouldn't. However, it seems Mr. Weiss threatened to send for a medical man on his own account, because, you see, he was getting a bit nervous; and then Mr. Graves gave way. But only on one condition. He said the doctor was to come from a distance and was not to be told who he was or where he lived or anything about him; and he made Mr. Weiss promise to keep to that condition before he'd let him send. So Mr. Weiss promised, and, of course, he's got to keep his word."

"But," I said, with a smile, "you've just told me his name—if his name really is Graves."

"You can form your own opinion on that," said the coachman.

"And," I added, "as to not being told where he lives, I can see that for myself. I'm not blind, you know."

"We'll take the risk of what you see," the man replied. "The question is, will you take the job on?"

Yes; that was the question, and I considered it for some time before replying. We medical men are pretty familiar with the kind of person who "can't abear doctors," and we like to have as little to do with him as possible. He is a thankless and unsatisfactory patient. Intercourse with him is unpleasant, he gives a great deal of trouble and responds badly to treatment. If this had been my own practice, I should have declined the case off-hand. But it was not my practice. I was only a deputy. I could not lightly refuse work which would yield a profit to my principal, unpleasant though it might be.

As I turned the matter over in my mind, I half unconsciously scrutinized my visitor—somewhat to his embarrassment—and I liked his appearance as little as I liked his mission. He kept his station near the door, where the light was dim—for the illumination was concentrated on the table and the patient's chair—but I could see that he had a somewhat sly, unprepossessing face and a greasy, red moustache that seemed out of character with his rather perfunctory livery; though this was mere prejudice. He wore a wig, too—not that there was anything discreditable in that—and the thumb-nail of the hand that held his hat bore disfiguring traces of some injury—which, again, though unsightly, in no wise reflected on his moral character. Lastly, he watched me keenly with a mixture of anxiety and sly complacency that I found distinctly unpleasant. In a general way, he impressed me disagreeably. I did not like the look of him at all; but nevertheless I decided to undertake the case.

"I suppose," I answered, at length, "it is no affair of mine who the patient is or where he lives. But how do you propose to manage the business? Am I to be led to the house blindfolded, like the visitor to the bandit's cave?"

The man grinned slightly and looked very decidedly relieved.

"No, sir," he answered; "we ain't going to blindfold you. I've got a carriage outside. I don't think you'll see much out of that."

"Very well," I rejoined, opening the door to let him out, "I'll be with you in a minute. I suppose you can't give me any idea as to what is the matter with the patient?"

"No, sir, I can't," he replied; and he went out to see to the carriage.

I slipped into a bag an assortment of emergency drugs and a few diagnostic instruments, turned down the gas and

passed out through the surgery. The carriage was standing at the kerb, guarded by the coachman and watched with deep interest by the bottle-boy. I viewed it with mingled curiosity and disfavour. It was a kind of large brougham, such as is used by some commercial travellers, the usual glass windows being replaced by wooden shutters intended to conceal the piles of sample-boxes, and the doors capable of being locked from outside with a railway key.

As I emerged from the house, the coachman unlocked the door and held it open.

"How long will the journey take?" I asked, pausing with my foot on the step.

The coachman considered a moment or two and replied:

"It took me, I should say, nigh upon half an hour to get here."

This was pleasant hearing. A half an hour each way and a half an hour at the patient's house. At that rate it would be half-past ten before I was home again, and then it was quite probable that I should find some other untimely messenger waiting on the doorstep. With a muttered anathema on the unknown Mr. Graves and the unrestful life of a locum tenens, I stepped into the uninviting vehicle. Instantly the coachman slammed the door and turned the key, leaving me in total darkness.

One comfort was left to me; my pipe was in my pocket. I made shift to load it in the dark, and, having lit it with a wax match, took the opportunity to inspect the interior of my prison. It was a shabby affair. The moth-eaten state of the blue cloth cushions seemed to suggest that it had been long out of regular use; the oil-cloth floor-covering was worn into holes; ordinary internal fittings there were none. But the appearances suggested that the crazy vehicle had been prepared with considerable forethought for its present use. The inside handles of the doors had apparently been removed; the wooden shutters were permanently fixed in their places; and a paper label, stuck on the transom below each window, had a suspicious appearance of having been put there to cover the painted name and address of the job-master or livery-stable keeper who had originally owned the carriage.

These observations gave me abundant food for reflection. This Mr. Weiss must be an excessively conscientious man if he had considered that his promise to Mr. Graves committed him to such extraordinary precautions. Evidently no mere following of the letter of the law was enough to satisfy his sensitive conscience. Unless he had reasons for sharing Mr. Graves's unreasonable desire for secrecy—for one could not suppose that these measures of concealment had been taken by the patient himself.

The further suggestions that evolved themselves from this consideration were a little disquieting. Whither was I being carried and for what purpose? The idea that I was bound for some den of thieves where I might be robbed and possibly murdered, I dismissed with a smile. Thieves do not make elaborately concerted plans to rob poor devils like me. Poverty has its compensations in that respect. But there were other possibilities. Imagination backed by experience had no difficulty in conjuring up a number of situations in which a medical man might be called upon, with or without coercion, either to witness or actively to participate in the commission of some unlawful act.

Reflections of this kind occupied me pretty actively if not very agreeably during this strange journey. And the monotony was relieved, too, by other distractions. I was, for example, greatly interested to notice how, when one sense is in abeyance, the other senses rouse into a compensating intensity of perception. I sat smoking my pipe in darkness which was absolute save for the dim glow from the smouldering tobacco in the bowl, and seemed to be cut off from all knowledge of the world without. But yet I was not. The vibrations of the carriage, with its hard springs and iron-tired wheels, registered accurately and plainly the character of the roadway. The harsh rattle of granite setts, the soft bumpiness of macadam, the smooth rumble of wood-pavement, the jarring and swerving of crossed tram-lines; all were easily recognizable and together sketched the general features of the neighbourhood through which I was passing. And the sense of hearing filled in the details. Now the hoot of a tug's whistle told of proximity to the river. A sudden and brief hollow reverberation announced the passage under a railway arch (which, by the way, happened several times during the journey); and, when I heard the familiar whistle of a railway-guard followed by the quick snorts of a skidding locomotive, I had as clear a picture of a heavy passenger-train moving out of a station as if I had seen it in broad daylight.

I had just finished my pipe and knocked out the ashes on the heel of my boot, when the carriage slowed down and entered a covered way—as I could tell by the hollow echoes. Then I distinguished the clang of heavy wooden gates closed behind me, and a moment or two later the carriage door was unlocked and opened. I stepped out blinking into a covered passage paved with cobbles and apparently leading down to a mews; but it was all in darkness, and I had no time to make any detailed observations, as the carriage had drawn up opposite a side door which was open and in which stood a woman holding a lighted candle.

"Is that the doctor?" she asked, speaking with a rather pronounced German accent and shading the candle with her hand as she peered at me.

I answered in the affirmative, and she then exclaimed:

"I am glad you have come. Mr. Weiss will be so relieved. Come in, please."

I followed her across a dark passage into a dark room, where she set the candle down on a chest of drawers and turned to depart. At the door, however, she paused and looked back.

"It is not a very nice room to ask you into," she said. "We are very untidy just now, but you must excuse us. We have had so much anxiety about poor Mr. Graves."

"He has been ill some time, then?"

"Yes. Some little time. At intervals, you know. Sometimes better, sometimes not so well."

As she spoke, she gradually backed out into the passage but did not go away at once. I accordingly pursued my inquiries.

"He has not been seen by any doctor, has he?"

"No," she answered, "he has always refused to see a doctor. That has been a great trouble to us. Mr. Weiss has been very anxious about him. He will be so glad to hear that you have come. I had better go and tell him. Perhaps you will kindly sit down until he is able to come to you," and with this she departed on her mission.

It struck me as a little odd that, considering his anxiety and the apparent urgency of the case, Mr. Weiss should not have been waiting to receive me. And when several minutes elapsed without his appearing, the oddness of the circumstance impressed me still more. Having no desire, after the journey in the carriage, to sit down, I whiled away the time by an inspection of the room. And a very curious room it was; bare, dirty, neglected and, apparently, unused. A faded carpet had been flung untidily on the floor. A small, shabby table stood in the middle of the room; and beyond this, three horsehair-covered chairs and a chest of drawers formed the entire set of furniture. No pictures hung on the mouldy walls, no curtains covered the shuttered windows, and the dark drapery of cobwebs that hung from the ceiling to commemorate a long and illustrious dynasty of spiders hinted at months of neglect and disuse.

The chest of drawers—an incongruous article of furniture for what seemed to be a dining-room—as being the nearest and best lighted object received most of my attention. It was a fine old chest of nearly black mahogany, very battered and in the last stage of decay, but originally a piece of some pretensions. Regretful of its fallen estate, I looked it over with some interest and had just observed on its lower corner a little label bearing the printed inscription "Lot 201" when I heard footsteps descending the stairs. A moment later the door opened and a shadowy figure appeared standing close by the threshold.

"Good evening, doctor," said the stranger, in a deep, quiet voice and with a distinct, though not strong, German accent. "I must apologize for keeping you waiting."

I acknowledged the apology somewhat stiffly and asked: "You are Mr. Weiss, I presume?"

"Yes, I am Mr. Weiss. It is very good of you to come so far and so late at night and to make no objection to the absurd conditions that my poor friend has imposed."

"Not at all," I replied. "It is my business to go when and where I am wanted, and it is not my business to inquire into the private affairs of my patients."

"That is very true, sir," he agreed cordially, "and I am much obliged to you for taking that very proper view of the case. I pointed that out to my friend, but he is not a very reasonable man. He is very secretive and rather suspicious by nature."

"So I inferred. And as to his condition; is he seriously ill?"

"Ah," said Mr. Weiss, "that is what I want you to tell me. I am very much puzzled about him."

"But what is the nature of his illness? What does he complain of?"

"He makes very few complaints of any kind although he is obviously ill. But the fact is that he is hardly ever more than half awake. He lies in a kind of dreamy stupor from morning to night."

This struck me as excessively strange and by no means in agreement with the patient's energetic refusal to see a doctor.

"But," I asked, "does he never rouse completely?"

"Oh, yes," Mr. Weiss answered quickly; "he rouses from time to time and is then quite rational, and, as you may have gathered, rather obstinate. That is the peculiar and puzzling feature in the case; this alternation between a state of stupor and an almost normal and healthy condition. But perhaps you had better see him and judge for yourself. He had a rather severe attack just now. Follow me, please. The stairs are rather dark."

The stairs were very dark, and I noticed that they were without any covering of carpet, or even oil-cloth, so that our footsteps resounded dismally as if we were in an empty house. I stumbled up after my guide, feeling my way by the hand-rail, and on the first floor followed him into a room similar in size to the one below and very barely furnished, though less squalid than the other. A single candle at the farther end threw its feeble light on a figure in the bed, leaving the rest of the room in a dim twilight.

As Mr. Weiss tiptoed into the chamber, a woman—the one who had spoken to me below—rose from a chair by the bedside and quietly left the room by a second door. My conductor halted, and looking fixedly at the figure in the bed, called out:

"Philip! Philip! Here is the doctor come to see you."

He paused for a moment or two, and, receiving no answer, said: "He seems to be dozing as usual. Will you go and see what you can make of him?"

I stepped forward to the bedside, leaving Mr. Weiss at the end of the room near the door by which we had entered, where he remained, slowly and noiselessly pacing backwards and forwards in the semi-obscurity. By the light of the candle I saw

an elderly man with good features and a refined, intelligent and even attractive face, but dreadfully emaciated, bloodless and sallow. He lay quite motionless except for the scarcely perceptible rise and fall of his chest; his eyes were nearly closed, his features relaxed, and, though he was not actually asleep, he seemed to be in a dreamy, somnolent, lethargic state, as if under the influence of some narcotic.

I watched him for a minute or so, timing his slow breathing by my watch, and then suddenly and sharply addressed him by name; but the only response was a slight lifting of the eyelids, which, after a brief, drowsy glance at me, slowly subsided to their former position.

I now proceeded to make a physical examination. First, I felt his pulse, grasping his wrist with intentional brusqueness in the hope of rousing him from his stupor. The beats were slow, feeble and slightly irregular, giving clear evidence, if any were needed, of his generally lowered vitality. I listened carefully to his heart, the sounds of which were very distinct through the thin walls of his emaciated chest, but found nothing abnormal beyond the feebleness and uncertainty of its action. Then I turned my attention to his eyes, which I examined closely with the aid of the candle and my ophthalmoscope lens, raising the lids somewhat roughly so as to expose the whole of the irides. He submitted without resistance to my rather ungentle handling of these sensitive structures, and showed no signs of discomfort even when I brought the candle-flame to within a couple of inches of his eyes.

But this extraordinary tolerance of light was easily explained by closer examination; for the pupils were contracted to such an extreme degree that only the very minutest point of black was visible at the centre of the grey iris. Nor was this the only abnormal peculiarity of the sick man's eyes. As he lay on his back, the right iris sagged down slightly towards its centre, showing a distinctly concave surface; and, when I contrived to produce a slight but quick movement of the eyeball, a perceptible undulatory movement could be detected. The patient had, in fact, what is known as a tremulous iris, a condition that is seen in cases where the crystalline lens has been extracted for the cure of cataract, or where it has become accidentally displaced, leaving the iris unsupported. In the present case, the complete condition of the iris made it clear that the ordinary extraction operation had not been performed, nor was I able, on the closest inspection with the aid of my lens, to find any trace of the less common "needle operation." The inference was that the patient had suffered from the accident known as "dislocation of the lens"; and this led to the further inference that he was almost or completely blind in the right eye.

This conclusion was, indeed, to some extent negated by a deep indentation on the bridge of the nose, evidently produced by spectacles, and by marks which I looked for and found behind the ears, corresponding to the hooks or "curl sides" of the glasses. For those spectacles which are fitted with curl sides to hook over the ears are usually intended to be worn habitually, and this agreed with the indentation on the nose; which was deeper than would have been accounted for by the merely occasional use of spectacles for reading. But if only one eye was useful, a single eye-glass would have answered the purpose; not that there was any weight in this objection, for a single eye-glass worn constantly would be much less convenient than a pair of hook-sided spectacles.

As to the nature of the patient's illness, only one opinion seemed possible. It was a clear and typical case of opium or morphine poisoning. To this conclusion all his symptoms seemed to point with absolute certainty. The coated tongue, which he protruded slowly and tremulously in response to a command bawled in his ear; his yellow skin and ghastly expression; his contracted pupils and the stupor from which he could hardly be roused by the roughest handling and which yet did not amount to actual insensibility; all these formed a distinct and coherent group of symptoms, not only pointing plainly to the nature of the drug, but also suggesting a very formidable dose.

But this conclusion in its turn raised a very awkward and difficult question. If a large—a poisonous—dose of the drug had been taken, how, and by whom had that dose been administered? The closest scrutiny of the patient's arms and legs failed to reveal a single mark such as would be made by a hypodermic needle. This man was clearly no common morphinomaniac; and in the absence of the usual sprinkling of needlemarks, there was nothing to show or suggest whether the drug had been taken voluntarily by the patient himself or administered by someone else.

And then there remained the possibility that I might, after all, be mistaken in my diagnosis. I felt pretty confident. But the wise man always holds a doubt in reserve. And, in the present case, having regard to the obviously serious condition of the patient, such a doubt was eminently disturbing. Indeed, as I pocketed my stethoscope and took a last look at the motionless, silent figure, I realized that my position was one of extraordinary difficulty and perplexity. On the one hand my suspicions—aroused, naturally enough, by the very unusual circumstances that surrounded my visit—inclined me to extreme reticence; while, on the other, it was evidently my duty to give any information that might prove serviceable to the patient.

As I turned away from the bed Mr. Weiss stopped his slow pacing to and fro and faced me. The feeble light of the candle now fell on him, and I saw him distinctly for the first time. He did not impress me favourably. He was a thick-set, round-shouldered man, a typical fair German with tow-coloured hair, greased and brushed down smoothly, a large, ragged, sandy beard and coarse, sketchy features. His nose was large and thick with a bulbous end, and inclined to a reddish purple, a tint which extended to the adjacent parts of his face as if the colour had run. His eyebrows were large and beetling, overhanging deep-set eyes, and he wore a pair of spectacles which gave him a somewhat owlish expression. His exterior was unprepossessing, and I was in a state of mind that rendered me easily receptive of an unfavourable impression.

"Well," he said, "what do you make of him?" I hesitated, still perplexed by the conflicting necessities of caution and frankness, but at length replied:

"I think rather badly of him, Mr. Weiss. He is in a very low state."

"Yes, I can see that. But have you come to any decision as to the nature of his illness?"

There was a tone of anxiety and suppressed eagerness in the question which, while it was natural enough in the circumstances, by no means allayed my suspicions, but rather influenced me on the side of caution.

"I cannot give a very definite opinion at present," I replied guardedly. "The symptoms are rather obscure and might very well indicate several different conditions. They might be due to congestion of the brain, and, if no other explanation were possible, I should incline to that view. The alternative is some narcotic poison, such as opium or morphia."

"But that is quite impossible. There is no such drug in the house, and as he never leaves his room now, he could not get any from outside."

"What about the servants?" I asked.

"There are no servants excepting my housekeeper, and she is absolutely trustworthy."

"He might have some store of the drug that you are not aware of. Is he left alone much?"

"Very seldom indeed. I spend as much time with him as I can, and when I am not able to be in the room, Mrs Schallibaum, my housekeeper, sits with him."

"Is he often as drowsy as he is now?"

"Oh, very often; in fact, I should say that is his usual condition. He rouses up now and again, and then he is quite lucid and natural for, perhaps, an hour or so; but presently he becomes drowsy again and doses off, and remains asleep, or half asleep, for hours on end. Do you know of any disease that takes people in that way?"

"No," I answered. "The symptoms are not exactly like those of any disease that is known to me. But they are much very like those of opium poisoning."

"But, my dear sir," Mr. Weiss retorted impatiently, "since it is clearly impossible that it can be opium poisoning, it must be something else. Now, what else can it be? You were speaking of congestion of the brain."

"Yes. But the objection to that is the very complete recovery that seems to take place in the intervals."

"I would not say very complete," said Mr. Weiss. "The recovery is rather comparative. He is lucid and fairly natural in his manner, but he is still dull and lethargic. He does not, for instance, show any desire to go out, or even to leave his room."

I pondered uncomfortably on these rather contradictory statements. Clearly Mr. Weiss did not mean to entertain the theory of opium poisoning; which was natural enough if he had no knowledge of the drug having been used. But still—

"I suppose," said Mr. Weiss, "you have experience of sleeping sickness?"

The suggestion startled me. I had not. Very few people had. At that time practically nothing was known about the disease. It was a mere pathological curiosity, almost unheard of excepting by a few practitioners in remote parts of Africa, and hardly referred to in the text-books. Its connection with the trypanosome-bearing insects was as yet unsuspected, and, to me, its symptoms were absolutely unknown.

"No, I have not," I replied. "The disease is nothing more than a name to me. But why do you ask? Has Mr. Graves been abroad?"

"Yes. He has been travelling for the last three or four years, and I know that he spent some time recently in West Africa, where this disease occurs. In fact, it was from him that I first heard about it."

This was a new fact. It shook my confidence in my diagnosis very considerably, and inclined me to reconsider my suspicions. If Mr. Weiss was lying to me, he now had me at a decided disadvantage.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Is it possible that this can be sleeping sickness?"

"I should not like to say that it is impossible," I replied. "The disease is practically unknown to me. I have never practised out of England and have had no occasion to study it. Until I have looked the subject up, I should not be in a position to give an opinion. Of course, if I could see Mr. Graves in one of what we may call his 'lucid intervals' I should be able to form a better idea. Do you think that could be managed?"

"It might. I see the importance of it and will certainly do my best; but he is a difficult man; a very difficult man. I sincerely hope it is not sleeping sickness."

"Why?"

"Because—as I understood from him—that disease is invariably fatal, sooner or later. There seem to be no cure. Do you think you will be able to decide when you see him again?"

"I hope so," I replied. "I shall look up the authorities and see exactly what the symptoms are—that is, so far as they are known; but my impression is that there is very little information available."

"And in the meantime?"

"We will give him some medicine and attend to his general condition, and you had better let me see him again as soon as

possible." I was about to say that the effect of the medicine itself might throw some light on the patient's condition, but, as I proposed to treat him for morphine poisoning, I thought it wiser to keep this item of information to myself. Accordingly, I confined myself to a few general directions as to the care of the patient, to which Mr. Weiss listened attentively. "And," I concluded, "we must not lose sight of the opium question. You had better search the room carefully and keep a close watch on the patient, especially during his intervals of wakefulness."

"Very well, doctor," Mr. Weiss replied, "I will do all that you tell me and I will send for you again as soon as possible, if you do not object to poor Graves's ridiculous conditions. And now, if you will allow me to pay your fee, I will go and order the carriage while you are writing the prescription."

"There is no need for a prescription," I said. "I will make up some medicine and give it to the coachman."

Mr. Weiss seemed inclined to demur to this arrangement, but I had my own reasons for insisting on it. Modern prescriptions are not difficult to read, and I did not wish Mr. Weiss to know what treatment the patient was having.

As soon as I was left alone, I returned to the bedside and once more looked down at the impassive figure. And as I looked, my suspicions revived. It was very like morphine poisoning; and, if it was morphine, it was no common, medicinal dose that had been given. I opened my bag and took out my hypodermic case from which I extracted a little tube of atropine tabloids. Shaking out into my hand a couple of the tiny discs, I drew down the patient's under-lip and slipped the little tablets under his tongue. Then I quickly replaced the tube and dropped the case into my bag; and I had hardly done so when the door opened softly and the housekeeper entered the room.

"How do you find Mr. Graves?" she asked in what I thought a very unnecessarily low tone, considering the patient's lethargic state.

"He seems to be very ill," I answered.

"So!" she rejoined, and added: "I am sorry to hear that. We have been anxious about him."

She seated herself on the chair by the bedside, and, shading the candle from the patient's face—and her own, too—produced from a bag that hung from her waist a half-finished stocking and began to knit silently and with the skill characteristic of the German housewife. I looked at her attentively (though she was so much in the shadow that I could see her but indistinctly) and somehow her appearance prepossessed me as little as did that of the other members of the household. Yet she was not an ill-looking woman. She had an excellent figure, and the air of a person of good social position; her features were good enough and her colouring, although a little unusual, was not unpleasant. Like Mr. Weiss, she had very fair hair, greased, parted in the middle and brushed down as smoothly as the painted hair of a Dutch doll. She appeared to have no eyebrows at all—owing, no doubt, to the light colour of the hair—and the doll-like character was emphasized by her eyes, which were either brown or dark grey, I could not see which. A further peculiarity consisted in a "habit spasm," such as one often sees in nervous children; a periodical quick jerk of the head, as if a cap-string or dangling lock were being shaken off the cheek. Her age I judged to be about thirty-five.

The carriage, which one might have expected to be waiting, seemed to take some time in getting ready. I sat, with growing impatience, listening to the sick man's soft breathing and the click of the housekeeper's knitting-needles. I wanted to get home, not only for my own sake; the patient's condition made it highly desirable that the remedies should be given as quickly as possible. But the minutes dragged on, and I was on the point of expostulating when a bell rang on the landing.

"The carriage is ready," said Mrs. Schallibaum. "Let me light you down the stairs."

She rose, and, taking the candle, preceded me to the head of the stairs, where she stood holding the light over the baluster-rail as I descended and crossed the passage to the open side door. The carriage was drawn up in the covered way as I could see by the faint glimmer of the distant candle; which also enabled me dimly to discern the coachman standing close by in the shadow. I looked round, rather expecting to see Mr. Weiss, but, as he made no appearance, I entered the carriage. The door was immediately banged to and locked, and I then heard the heavy bolts of the gates withdrawn and the loud creaking of hinges. The carriage moved out slowly and stopped; the gates slammed to behind me; I felt the lurch as the coachman climbed to his seat and we started forward.

My reflections during the return journey were the reverse of agreeable. I could not rid myself of the conviction that I was being involved in some very suspicious proceedings. It was possible, of course, that this feeling was due to the strange secrecy that surrounded my connection with this case; that, had I made my visit under ordinary conditions, I might have found in the patient's symptoms nothing to excite suspicion or alarm. It might be so, but that consideration did not comfort me.

Then, my diagnosis might be wrong. It might be that this was, in reality, a case of some brain affection accompanied by compression, such as slow haemorrhage, abscess, tumour or simple congestion. These cases were very difficult at times. But the appearances in this one did not consistently agree with the symptoms accompanying any of these conditions. As to sleeping sickness, it was, perhaps a more hopeful suggestion, but I could not decide for or against it until I had more knowledge; and against this view was the weighty fact that the symptoms did exactly agree with the theory of morphine poisoning.

But even so, there was no conclusive evidence of any criminal act. The patient might be a confirmed opium-eater, and the symptoms heightened by deliberate deception. The cunning of these unfortunates is proverbial and is only equalled by their secretiveness and mendacity. It would be quite possible for this man to feign profound stupor so long as he was

watched, and then, when left alone for a few minutes, to nip out of bed and help himself from some secret store of the drug. This would be quite in character with his objection to seeing a doctor and his desire for secrecy. But still, I did not believe it to be the true explanation. In spite of all the various alternative possibilities, my suspicions came back to Mr. Weiss and the strange, taciturn woman, and refused to budge.

For all the circumstances of the case were suspicious. The elaborate preparations implied by the state of the carriage in which I was travelling; the make-shift appearance of the house; the absence of ordinary domestic servants, although a coachman was kept; the evident desire of Mr. Weiss and the woman to avoid thorough inspection of their persons; and, above all, the fact that the former had told me a deliberate lie. For he had lied, beyond all doubt. His statement as to the almost continuous stupor was absolutely irreconcilable with his other statement as to the patient's wilfulness and obstinacy and even more irreconcilable with the deep and comparatively fresh marks of the spectacles on the patient's nose. That man had certainly worn spectacles within twenty-four hours, which he would hardly have done if he had been in a state bordering on coma.

My reflections were interrupted by the stopping of the carriage. The door was unlocked and thrown open, and I emerged from my dark and stuffy prison opposite my own house.

"I will let you have the medicine in a minute or two," I said to the coachman; and, as I let myself in with my latch-key, my mind came back swiftly from the general circumstances of the case to the very critical condition of the patient. Already I was regretting that I had not taken more energetic measures to rouse him and restore his flagging vitality; for it would be a terrible thing if he should take a turn for the worse and die before the coachman returned with the remedies. Spurred on by this alarming thought, I made up the medicines quickly and carried the hastily wrapped bottles out to the man, whom I found standing by the horse's head.

"Get back as quickly as you can," I said, "and tell Mr. Weiss to lose no time in giving the draught in the small bottle. The directions are on the labels."

The coachman took the packages from me without reply, climbed to his seat, touched the horse with his whip and drove off at a rapid pace towards Newington Butts.

The little clock in the consulting-room showed that it was close on eleven; time for a tired G.P. to be thinking of bed. But I was not sleepy. Over my frugal supper I found myself taking up anew the thread of my meditations, and afterwards, as I smoked my last pipe by the expiring surgery fire, the strange and sinister features of the case continued to obtrude themselves on my notice. I looked up Stillbury's little reference library for information on the subject of sleeping sickness, but learned no more than that it was "a rare and obscure disease of which very little was known at present." I read up morphine poisoning and was only further confirmed in the belief that my diagnosis was correct; which would have been more satisfactory if the circumstances had been different.

For the interest of the case was not merely academic. I was in a position of great difficulty and responsibility and had to decide on a course of action. What ought I to do? Should I maintain the professional secrecy to which I was tacitly committed, or ought I to convey a hint to the police?

Suddenly, and with a singular feeling of relief, I bethought myself of my old friend and fellow-student, John Thorndyke, now an eminent authority on Medical Jurisprudence. I had been associated with him temporarily in one case as his assistant, and had then been deeply impressed by his versatile learning, his acuteness and his marvellous resourcefulness. Thorndyke was a barrister in extensive practice, and so would be able to tell me at once what was my duty from a legal point of view; and, as he was also a doctor of medicine, he would understand the exigencies of medical practice. If I could find time to call at the Temple and lay the case before him, all my doubts and difficulties would be resolved.

Anxiously, I opened my visiting-list to see what kind of day's work was in store for me on the morrow. It was not a heavy day, even allowing for one or two extra calls in the morning, but yet I was doubtful whether it would allow of my going so far from my district, until my eye caught, near the foot of the page, the name of Burton. Now Mr. Burton lived in one of the old houses on the east side of Bouverie Street, less than five minutes' walk from Thorndyke's chambers in King's Bench Walk; and he was, moreover, a "chronic" who could safely be left for the last. When I had done with Mr. Burton I could look in on my friend with a very good chance of catching him on his return from the hospital. I could allow myself time for quite a long chat with him, and, by taking a hansom, still get back in good time for the evening's work.

This was a great comfort. At the prospect of sharing my responsibilities with a friend on whose judgment I could so entirely rely, my embarrassments seemed to drop from me in a moment. Having entered the engagement in my visiting-list, I rose, in greatly improved spirits, and knocked out my pipe just as the little clock banged out impatiently the hour of midnight.

---

## II. — THORNDYKE DEVISES A SCHEME

AS I entered the Temple by the Tudor Street gate the aspect of the place smote my senses with an air of agreeable familiarity. Here had I spent many a delightful hour when working with Thorndyke at the remarkable Hornby case, which the newspapers had called "The Case of the Red Thumb Mark"; and here had I met the romance of my life, the story whereof is told elsewhere. The place was thus endeared to me by pleasant recollections of a happy past, and its associations suggested hopes of happiness yet to come and in the not too far distant future.



My brisk tattoo on the little brass knocker brought to the door no less a person than Thorndyke himself; and the warmth of his greeting made me at once proud and ashamed. For I had not only been an absentee; I had been a very poor correspondent.

"The prodigal has returned, Polton," he exclaimed, looking into the room. "Here is Dr. Jervis."

I followed him into the room and found Polton—his confidential servant, laboratory assistant, artificer and general "familiar"—setting out the tea-tray on a small table. The little man shook hands cordially with me, and his face crinkled up into the sort of smile that one might expect to see on a benevolent walnut.

"We've often talked about you, sir," said he. "The doctor was wondering only yesterday when you were coming back to us."

As I was not "coming back to them" quite in the sense intended I felt a little guilty, but reserved my confidences for Thorndyke's ear and replied in polite generalities. Then Polton fetched the tea-pot from the laboratory, made up the fire and departed, and Thorndyke and I subsided, as of old, into our respective arm-chairs.

"And whence do you spring from in this unexpected fashion?" my colleague asked. "You look as if you had been making professional visits."

"I have. The base of operations is in Lower Kennington Lane."

"Ah! Then you are 'back once more on the old trail'?"

"Yes," I answered, with a laugh, "the old trail, the long trail, the trail that is always new."

"And leads nowhere," Thorndyke added grimly.

I laughed again; not very heartily, for there was an uncomfortable element of truth in my friend's remark, to which my own experience bore only too complete testimony. The medical practitioner whose lack of means forces him to subsist by taking temporary charge of other men's practices is apt to find that the passing years bring him little but grey hairs and a wealth of disagreeable experience.

"You will have to drop it, Jervis; you will, indeed," Thorndyke resumed after a pause. "This casual employment is preposterous for a man of your class and professional attainments. Besides, are you not engaged to be married and to a most charming girl?"

"Yes, I know. I have been a fool. But I will really amend my ways. If necessary, I will pocket my pride and let Juliet advance the money to buy a practice."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is a very proper resolution. Pride and reserve between people who are going to be husband and wife, is an absurdity. But why buy a practice? Have you forgotten my proposal?"

"I should be an ungrateful brute if I had."

"Very well. I repeat it now. Come to me as my junior, read for the Bar and work with me, and, with your abilities, you will have a chance of something like a career. I want you, Jervis," he added, earnestly. "I must have a junior, with my increasing practice, and you are the junior I want. We are old and tried friends; we have worked together; we like and trust one another, and you are the best man for the job that I know. Come; I am not going to take a refusal. This is an ultimatum."

"And what is the alternative?" I asked with a smile at his eagerness.

"There isn't any. You are going to say yes."

"I believe I am," I answered, not without emotion; "and I am more rejoiced at your offer and more grateful than I can tell you. But we must leave the final arrangements for our next meeting—in a week or so, I hope—for I have to be back in an hour, and I want to consult you on a matter of some importance."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "we will leave the formal agreement for consideration at our next meeting. What is it that you want my opinion on?"

"The fact is," I said, "I am in a rather awkward dilemma, and I want you to tell me what you think I ought to do."

Thorndyke paused in the act of refilling my cup and glanced at me with unmistakable anxiety.

"Nothing of an unpleasant nature, I hope," said he.

"No, no; nothing of that kind," I answered with a smile as I interpreted the euphemism; for "something unpleasant," in the case of a young and reasonably presentable medical man is ordinarily the equivalent of trouble with the female of his species. "It is nothing that concerns me personally at all," I continued; "it is a question of professional responsibility. But I had better give you an account of the affair in a complete narrative, as I know that you like to have your data in a regular and consecutive order."

Thereupon I proceeded to relate the history of my visit to the mysterious Mr. Graves, not omitting any single circumstance or detail that I could recollect.

Thorndyke listened from the very beginning of my story with the closest attention. His face was the most impassive that I have ever seen; ordinarily as inscrutable as a bronze mask; but to me, who knew him intimately, there was a certain

something—a change of colour, perhaps, or an additional sparkle of the eye—that told me when his curious passion for investigation was fully aroused. And now, as I told him of that weird journey and the strange, secret house to which it had brought me, I could see that it offered a problem after his very heart. During the whole of my narration he sat as motionless as a statue, evidently committing the whole story to memory, detail by detail; and even when I had finished he remained for an appreciable time without moving or speaking.

At length he looked up at me. “This is a very extraordinary affair, Jervis,” he said.

“Very,” I agreed; “and the question that is agitating me is, what is to be done?”

“Yes,” he said, meditatively, “that is the question; and an uncommonly difficult question it is. It really involves the settlement of the antecedent question: What is it that is happening at that house?”

“What do you think is happening at that house?” I asked.

“We must go slow, Jervis,” he replied. “We must carefully separate the legal tissues from the medical, and avoid confusing what we know with what we suspect. Now, with reference to the medical aspects of the case. The first question that confronts us is that of sleeping sickness, or negro-lethargy as it is sometimes called; and here we are in a difficulty. We have not enough knowledge. Neither of us, I take it, has ever seen a case, and the extant descriptions are inadequate. From what I know of the disease, its symptoms agree with those in your case in respect of the alleged moroseness and in the gradually increasing periods of lethargy alternating with periods of apparent recovery. On the other hand, the disease is said to be confined to negroes; but that probably means only that negroes alone have hitherto been exposed to the conditions that produce it. A more important fact is that, as far as I know, extreme contraction of the pupils is not a symptom of sleeping sickness. To sum up, the probabilities are against sleeping sickness, but with our insufficient knowledge, we cannot definitely exclude it.”

“You think that it may really be sleeping sickness?”

“No; personally I do not entertain that theory for a moment. But I am considering the evidence apart from our opinions on the subject. We have to accept it as a conceivable hypothesis that it may be sleeping sickness because we cannot positively prove that it is not. That is all. But when we come to the hypothesis of morphine poisoning, the case is different. The symptoms agree with those of morphine poisoning in every respect. There is no exception or disagreement whatever. The common sense of the matter is therefore that we adopt morphine poisoning as our working diagnosis; which is what you seem to have done.”

“Yes. For purposes of treatment.”

“Exactly. For medical purposes you adopted the more probable view and dismissed the less probable. That was the reasonable thing to do. But for legal purposes you must entertain both possibilities; for the hypothesis of poisoning involves serious legal issues, whereas the hypothesis of disease involves no legal issues at all.”

“That doesn’t sound very helpful,” I remarked.

“It indicates the necessity for caution,” he retorted.

“Yes, I see that. But what is your own opinion of the case?”

“Well,” he said, “let us consider the facts in order. Here is a man who, we assume, is under the influence of a poisonous dose of morphine. The question is, did he take that dose himself or was it administered to him by some other person? If he took it himself, with what object did he take it? The history that was given to you seems completely to exclude the idea of suicide. But the patient’s condition seems equally to exclude the idea of morphinomania. Your opium-eater does not reduce himself to a state of coma. He usually keeps well within the limits of the tolerance that has been established. The conclusion that emerges is, I think, that the drug was administered by some other person; and the most likely person seems to be Mr. Weiss.”

“Isn’t morphine a very unusual poison?”

“Very; and most inconvenient except in a single, fatal dose, by reason of the rapidity with which tolerance of the drug is established. But we must not forget that slow morphine poisoning might be eminently suitable in certain cases. The manner in which it enfeebles the will, confuses the judgment and debilitates the body might make it very useful to a poisoner whose aim was to get some instrument or document executed, such as a will, deed or assignment. And death could be produced afterwards by other means. You see the important bearing of this?”

“You mean in respect of a death certificate?”

“Yes. Suppose Mr. Weiss to have given a large dose of morphine. He then sends for you and throws out a suggestion of sleeping sickness. If you accept the suggestion he is pretty safe. He can repeat the process until he kills his victim and then get a certificate from you which will cover the murder. It was quite an ingenious scheme—which, by the way, is characteristic of intricate crimes; your subtle criminal often plans his crime like a genius, but he generally executes it like a fool—as this man seems to have done, if we are not doing him an injustice.”

“How has he acted like a fool?”

“In several respects. In the first place, he should have chosen his doctor. A good, brisk, confident man who ‘knows his own mind’ is the sort of person who would have suited him; a man who would have jumped at a diagnosis and stuck to it;

or else an ignorant weakling of alcoholic tendencies. It was shockingly bad luck to run against a cautious scientific practitioner like my learned friend. Then, of course, all this secrecy was sheer tomfoolery, exactly calculated to put a careful man on his guard; as it has actually done. If Mr. Weiss is really a criminal, he has mismanaged his affairs badly."

"And you apparently think that he is a criminal?"

"I suspect him deeply. But I should like to ask you one or two questions about him. You say he spoke with a German accent. What command of English had he? Was his vocabulary good? Did he use any German idioms?"

"No. I should say that his English was perfect, and I noticed that his phrases were quite well chosen even for an Englishman."

"Did he seem to you 'made up' in any way; disguised, I mean?"

"I couldn't say. The light was so very feeble."

"You couldn't see the colour of his eyes, for instance?"

"No. I think they were grey, but I couldn't be sure."

"And as to the coachman. He wore a wig, you said. Could you see the colour of his eyes? Or any peculiarity by which you could recognize him?"

"He had a malformed thumb-nail on his right hand. That is all I can say about him."

"He didn't strike you as resembling Weiss in any way; in voice or features?"

"Not at all; and he spoke, as I told you, with a distinct Scotch accent."

"The reason I ask is that if Weiss is attempting to poison this man, the coachman is almost certain to be a confederate and might be a relative. You had better examine him closely if you get another chance."

"I will. And that brings me back to the question, What am I to do? Ought I to report the case to the police?"

"I am inclined to think not. You have hardly enough facts. Of course, if Mr. Weiss has administered poison 'unlawfully and maliciously' he has committed a felony, and is liable under the Consolidation Acts of 1861 to ten years' penal servitude. But I do not see how you could swear an information. You don't know that he administered the poison—if poison has really been administered—and you cannot give any reliable name or any address whatever. Then there is the question of sleeping sickness. You reject it for medical purposes, but you could not swear, in a court of law, that this is not a case of sleeping sickness."

"No," I admitted, "I could not."

"Then I think the police would decline to move in the matter, and you might find that you had raised a scandal in Dr. Stillbury's practice to no purpose."

"So you think I had better do nothing in the matter?"

"For the present. It is, of course, a medical man's duty to assist justice in any way that is possible. But a doctor is not a detective; he should not go out of his way to assume police functions. He should keep his eyes and ears open, and, though, in general, he should keep his own counsel, it is his duty to note very carefully anything that seems to him likely to bear on any important legal issues. It is not his business officiously to initiate criminal inquiries, but it is emphatically his business to be ready, if called upon, to assist justice with information that his special knowledge and opportunities have rendered accessible to him. You see the bearing of this?"

"You mean that I should note down what I have seen and heard and say nothing about it until I am asked."

"Yes; if nothing further happens. But if you should be sent for again, I think it is your duty to make further observations with a view, if necessary, to informing the police. It may be, for instance, of vital importance to identify the house, and it is your duty to secure the means of doing so."

"But, my dear Thorndyke," I expostulated, "I have told you how I was conveyed to the house. Now, will you kindly explain to me how a man, boxed up in a pitch-dark carriage, is going to identify any place to which he may be carried?"

"The problem doesn't appear to me to present any serious difficulties," he replied.

"Doesn't it?" said I. "To me it looks like a pretty solid impossibility. But what do you suggest? Should I break out of the house and run away up the street? Or should I bore a hole through the shutter of the carriage and peep out?"

Thorndyke smiled indulgently. "The methods proposed by my learned friend display a certain crudity inappropriate to the character of a man of science; to say nothing of the disadvantage of letting the enemy into our counsels. No, no, Jervis; we can do something better than that. Just excuse me for a minute while I run up to the laboratory."

He hurried away to Polton's sanctum on the upper floor, leaving me to speculate on the method by which he proposed that a man should be enabled, as Sam Weller would express it, "to see through a flight of stairs and a deal door"; or, what was equally opaque, the wooden shutters of a closed carriage.

"Now," he said, when he returned a couple of minutes later with a small, paper-covered notebook in his hand, "I have set Polton to work on a little appliance that will, I think, solve our difficulty, and I will show you how I propose that you should

make your observations. First of all, we have to rule the pages of this book into columns."

He sat down at the table and began methodically to rule the pages each into three columns, two quite narrow and one broad. The process occupied some time, during which I sat and watched with impatient curiosity the unhurried, precise movements of Thorndyke's pencil, all agog to hear the promised explanation. He was just finishing the last page when there came a gentle tap at the door, and Polton entered with a satisfied smile on his dry, shrewd-looking face and a small board in his hand.

"Will this do, sir?" he asked.

As he spoke he handed the little board to Thorndyke, who looked at it and passed it to me.

"The very thing, Polton," my friend replied. "Where did you find it? It's of no use for you to pretend that you've made it in about two minutes and a half."

Polton smiled one of his queer crinkly smiles, and remarking that "it didn't take much making," departed much gratified by the compliment.

"What a wonderful old fellow that is, Jervis," Thorndyke observed as his factotum retired. "He took in the idea instantly and seems to have produced the finished article by magic, as the conjurers bring forth rabbits and bowls of goldfish at a moment's notice. I suppose you see what your *modus operandi* is to be?"

I had gathered a clue from the little appliance—a plate of white fret-wood about seven inches by five, to one corner of which a pocket-compass had been fixed with shellac—but was not quite clear as to the details of the method.

"You can read a compass pretty quickly, I think?" Thorndyke said.

"Of course I can. Used we not to sail a yacht together when we were students?"

"To be sure we did; and we will again before we die. And now as to your method of locating this house. Here is a pocket reading-lamp which you can hook on the carriage lining. This notebook can be fixed to the board with an india-rubber band—thus. You observe that the thoughtful Polton has stuck a piece of thread on the glass of the compass to serve as a lubber's line. This is how you will proceed. As soon as you are locked in the carriage, light your lamp—better have a book with you in case the light is noticed—take out your watch and put the board on your knee, keeping its long side exactly in a line with the axis of the carriage. Then enter in one narrow column of your notebook the time, in the other the direction shown by the compass, and in the broad column any particulars, including the number of steps the horse makes in a minute. Like this."

He took a loose sheet of paper and made one or two sample entries on it in pencil, thus—

"9.40. S.E. Start from home.  
9.41 S.W. Granite setts.  
9.43. S.W. Wood pavement. Hoofs 104.  
9.47. W. by S Granite crossing. Macadam—

and so on. Note every change of direction, with the time; and whenever you hear or feel anything from outside, note it, with the time and direction; and don't forget to note any variations in the horse's pace. You follow the process?"

"Perfectly. But do you think the method is accurate enough to fix the position of a house? Remember, this is only a pocket-compass with no dial, and it will jump frightfully. And the mode of estimating distance is very rough."

"That is all perfectly true," Thorndyke answered. "But you are overlooking certain important facts. The track-chart that you will produce can be checked by other data. The house, for instance, has a covered way by which you could identify it if you knew approximately where to look for it. Then you must remember that your carriage is not travelling over a featureless plain. It is passing through streets which have a determined position and direction and which are accurately represented on the ordnance map. I think, Jervis, that, in spite of the apparent roughness of the method, if you make your observations carefully, we shall have no trouble in narrowing down the inquiry to a quite small area. If we get the chance, that is to say."

"Yes, if we do. I am doubtful whether Mr. Weiss will require my services again, but I sincerely hope he will. It would be rare sport to locate his secret burrow, all unsuspected. But now I must really be off."

"Good-bye, then," said Thorndyke, slipping a well-sharpened pencil through the rubber band that fixed the notebook to the board. "Let me know how the adventure progresses—if it progresses at all—and remember, I hold your promise to come and see me again quite soon in any case."

He handed me the board and the lamp, and, when I had slipped them into my pocket, we shook hands and I hurried away, a little uneasy at having left my charge so long.

---

### III. — "A CHIEL'S AMANG YE TAKIN' NOTES"

THE attitude of the suspicious man tends to generate in others the kind of conduct that seems to justify his suspicions. In most of us there lurks a certain strain of mischief which trustfulness disarms but distrust encourages. The inexperienced kitten which approaches us confidingly with arched back and upright tail, soliciting caresses, generally receives the gentle treatment that it expects; whereas the worldly-wise tom-cat, who, in response to friendly advances, scampers away and

grins at us suspiciously from the fancied security of an adjacent wall, impels us to accelerate his retreat with a well-directed clod.

Now the proceedings of Mr. H. Weiss resembled those of the tom-cat aforesaid and invited an analogous reply. To a responsible professional man his extraordinary precautions were at once an affront and a challenge. Apart from graver considerations, I found myself dwelling with unholy pleasure on the prospect of locating the secret hiding-place from which he seemed to grin at me with such complacent defiance; and I lost no time and spared no trouble in preparing myself for the adventure. The very hansom which bore me from the Temple to Kennington Lane was utilized for a preliminary test of Thorndyke's little apparatus. During the whole of that brief journey I watched the compass closely, noted the feel and sound of the road-material and timed the trotting of the horse. And the result was quite encouraging. It is true that the compass-needle oscillated wildly to the vibration of the cab, but still its oscillations took place around a definite point which was the average direction, and it was evident to me that the data it furnished were very fairly reliable. I felt very little doubt, after the preliminary trial, as to my being able to produce a moderately intelligible track-chart if only I should get an opportunity to exercise my skill.

But it looked as if I should not. Mr. Weiss's promise to send for me again soon was not fulfilled. Three days passed and still he made no sign. I began to fear that I had been too outspoken; that the shuttered carriage had gone forth to seek some more confiding and easy-going practitioner, and that our elaborate preparations had been made in vain. When the fourth day drew towards a close and still no summons had come, I was disposed reluctantly to write the case off as a lost opportunity.

And at that moment, in the midst of my regrets, the bottle-boy thrust an uncomely head in at the door. His voice was coarse, his accent was hideous, and his grammatical construction beneath contempt; but I forgave him all when I gathered the import of his message.

"Mr. Weiss's carriage is waiting, and he says will you come as quickly as you can because he's took very bad to-night."

I sprang from my chair and hastily collected the necessaries for the journey. The little board and the lamp I put in my overcoat pocket; I overhauled the emergency bag and added to its usual contents a bottle of permanganate of potassium which I thought I might require. Then I tucked the evening paper under my arm and went out.

The coachman, who was standing at the horse's head as I emerged, touched his hat and came forward to open the door.

"I have fortified myself for the long drive, you see," I remarked, exhibiting the newspaper as I stepped into the carriage.

"But you can't read in the dark," said he.

"No, but I have provided myself with a lamp," I replied, producing it and striking a match.

He watched me as I lit the lamp and hooked it on the back cushion, and observed:

"I suppose you found it rather a dull ride last time. It's a longish way. They might have fitted the carriage with an inside lamp. But we shall have to make it a quicker passage to-night. Governor says Mr. Graves is uncommon bad."

With this he slammed the door and locked it. I drew the board from my pocket, laid it on my knee, glanced at my watch, and, as the coachman climbed to his seat, I made the first entry in the little book.

"8.58. W. by S. Start from home. Horse 13 hands."

The first move of the carriage on starting was to turn round as if heading for Newington Butts, and the second entry accordingly read:

"8.58.30. E. by N."

But this direction was not maintained long. Very soon we turned south and then west and then south again. I sat with my eyes riveted on the compass, following with some difficulty its rapid changes. The needle swung to and fro incessantly but always within a definite arc, the centre of which was the true direction. But this direction varied from minute to minute in the most astonishing manner. West, south, east, north, the carriage turned, "boxing" the compass until I lost all count of direction. It was an amazing performance. Considering that the man was driving against time on a mission of life and death urgency, his carelessness as to direction was astounding. The tortuousness of the route must have made the journey twice as long as it need have been with a little more careful selection. At least so it appeared to me, though, naturally, I was not in a position to offer an authoritative criticism.

As far as I could judge, we followed the same route as before. Once I heard a tug's whistle and knew that we were near the river, and we passed the railway station, apparently at the same time as on the previous occasion, for I heard a passenger train start and assumed that it was the same train. We crossed quite a number of thoroughfares with tram-lines—I had no idea there were so many—and it was a revelation to me to find how numerous the railway arches were in this part of London and how continually the nature of the road-metal varied.

It was by no means a dull journey this time. The incessant changes of direction and variations in the character of the road kept me most uncommonly busy; for I had hardly time to scribble down one entry before the compass-needle would swing round sharply, showing that we had once more turned a corner; and I was quite taken by surprise when the carriage slowed down and turned into the covered way. Very hastily I scribbled down the final entry ("9.24. S.E. In covered way"), and having closed the book and slipped it and the board into my pocket, had just opened out the newspaper when the

carriage door was unlocked and opened, whereupon I unhooked and blew out the lamp and pocketed that too, reflecting that it might be useful later.

As on the last occasion, Mrs. Schallibaum stood in the open doorway with a lighted candle. But she was a good deal less self-possessed this time. In fact she looked rather wild and terrified. Even by the candle-light I could see that she was very pale and she seemed unable to keep still. As she gave me the few necessary words of explanation, she fidgeted incessantly and her hands and feet were in constant movement.

"You had better come up with me at once," she said. "Mr. Graves is much worse to-night. We will wait not for Mr. Weiss."

Without waiting for a reply she quickly ascended the stairs and I followed. The room was in much the same condition as before. But the patient was not. As soon as I entered the room, a soft, rhythmical gurgle from the bed gave me a very clear warning of danger. I stepped forward quickly and looked down at the prostrate figure, and the warning gathered emphasis. The sick man's ghastly face was yet more ghastly; his eyes were more sunken, his skin more livid; "his nose was as sharp as a pen," and if he did not "babble of green fields" it was because he seemed to be beyond even that. If it had been a case of disease, I should have said at once that he was dying. He had all the appearance of a man *in articulo mortis*. Even as it was, feeling convinced that the case was one of morphine poisoning, I was far from confident that I should be able to draw him back from the extreme edge of vitality on which he trembled so insecurely.

"He is very ill? He is dying?"

It was Mrs. Schallibaum's voice; very low, but eager and intense. I turned, with my finger on the patient's wrist, and looked into the face of the most thoroughly scared woman I have ever seen. She made no attempt now to avoid the light, but looked me squarely in the face, and I noticed, half-unconsciously, that her eyes were brown and had a curious strained expression.

"Yes," I answered, "he is very ill. He is in great danger."

She still stared at me fixedly for some seconds. And then a very odd thing occurred. Suddenly she squinted—squinted horribly; not with the familiar convergent squint which burlesque artists imitate, but with external or divergent squint of extreme near sight or unequal vision. The effect was quite startling. One moment both her eyes were looking straight into mine; the next, one of them rolled round until it looked out of the uttermost corner, leaving the other gazing steadily forward.

She was evidently conscious of the change, for she turned her head away quickly and reddened somewhat. But it was no time for thoughts of personal appearance.

"You can save him, doctor! You will not let him die! He must not be allowed to die!"

She spoke with as much passion as if he had been the dearest friend that she had in the world, which I suspected was far from being the case. But her manifest terror had its uses.

"If anything is to be done to save him," I said, "it must be done quickly. I will give him some medicine at once, and meanwhile you must make some strong coffee."

"Coffee!" she exclaimed. "But we have none in the house. Will not tea do, if I make it very strong?"

"No, it will not. I must have coffee; and I must have it quickly."

"Then I suppose I must go and get some. But it is late. The shops will be shut. And I don't like leaving Mr. Graves."

"Can't you send the coachman?" I asked.

She shook her head impatiently. "No, that is no use. I must wait until Mr. Weiss comes."

"That won't do," I said, sharply. "He will slip through our fingers while you are waiting. You must go and get that coffee at once and bring it to me as soon as it is ready. And I want a tumbler and some water."

She brought me a water-bottle and glass from the wash-stand and then, with a groan of despair, hurried from the room.

I lost no time in applying the remedies that I had to hand. Shaking out into the tumbler a few crystals of potassium permanganate, I filled it up with water and approached the patient. His stupor was profound. I shook him as roughly as was safe in his depressed condition, but elicited no resistance or responsive movement. As it seemed very doubtful whether he was capable of swallowing, I dared not take the risk of pouring the liquid into his mouth for fear of suffocating him. A stomach-tube would have solved the difficulty, but, of course, I had not one with me. I had, however, a mouth-speculum which also acted as a gag, and, having propped the patient's mouth open with this, I hastily slipped off one of the rubber tubes from my stethoscope and inserted into one end of it a vulcanite ear-speculum to serve as a funnel. Then, introducing the other end of the tube into the gullet as far as its length would permit, I cautiously poured a small quantity of the permanganate solution into the extemporized funnel. To my great relief a movement of the throat showed that the swallowing reflex still existed, and, thus encouraged, I poured down the tube as much of the fluid as I thought it wise to administer at one time.

The dose of permanganate that I had given was enough to neutralize any reasonable quantity of the poison that might yet remain in the stomach. I had next to deal with that portion of the drug which had already been absorbed and was

exercising its poisonous effects. Taking my hypodermic case from my bag, I prepared in the syringe a full dose of atropine sulphate, which I injected forthwith into the unconscious man's arm. And that was all that I could do, so far as remedies were concerned, until the coffee arrived.

I cleaned and put away the syringe, washed the tube, and then, returning to the bedside, endeavoured to rouse the patient from his profound lethargy. But great care was necessary. A little injudicious roughness of handling, and that thready, flickering pulse might stop for ever; and yet it was almost certain that if he were not speedily aroused, his stupor would gradually deepen until it shaded off imperceptibly into death. I went to work very cautiously, moving his limbs about, flicking his face and chest with the corner of a wet towel, tickling the soles of his feet, and otherwise applying stimuli that were strong without being violent.

So occupied was I with my efforts to resuscitate my mysterious patient that I did not notice the opening of the door, and it was with something of a start that, happening to glance round, I perceived at the farther end of the room the shadowy figure of a man relieved by two spots of light reflected from his spectacles. How long he had been watching me I cannot say, but, when he saw that I had observed him, he came forward—though not very far—and I saw that he was Mr. Weiss.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you do not find my friend so well to-night?"

"So well!" I exclaimed. "I don't find him well at all. I am exceedingly anxious about him."

"You don't—er—anticipate anything of a—er—anything serious, I hope?"

"There is no need to anticipate," said I. "It is already about as serious as it can be. I think he might die at any moment."

"Good God!" he gasped. "You horrify me!"

He was not exaggerating. In his agitation, he stepped forward into the lighter part of the room, and I could see that his face was pale to ghastliness—except his nose and the adjacent red patches on his cheeks, which stood out in grotesquely hideous contrast. Presently, however, he recovered a little and said:

"I really think—at least I hope—that you take an unnecessarily serious view of his condition. He has been like this before, you know."

I felt pretty certain that he had not, but there was no use in discussing the question. I therefore replied, as I continued my efforts to rouse the patient:

"That may or may not be. But in any case there comes a last time; and it may have come now."

"I hope not," he said; "although I understand that these cases always end fatally sooner or later."

"What cases?" I asked.

"I was referring to sleeping sickness; but perhaps you have formed some other opinion as to the nature of this dreadful complaint."

I hesitated for a moment, and he continued: "As to your suggestion that his symptoms might be due to drugs, I think we may consider that as disposed of. He has been watched, practically without cessation since you came last, and, moreover, I have myself turned out the room and examined the bed and have not found a trace of any drug. Have you gone into the question of sleeping sickness?"

I looked at the man narrowly before answering, and distrusted him more than ever. But this was no time for reticence. My concern was with the patient and his present needs. After all, I was, as Thorndyke had said, a doctor, not a detective, and the circumstances called for straightforward speech and action on my part.

"I have considered that question," I said, "and have come to a perfectly definite conclusion. His symptoms are not those of sleeping sickness. They are in my opinion undoubtedly due to morphine poisoning."

"But my dear sir!" he exclaimed, "the thing is impossible! Haven't I just told you that he has been watched continuously?"

"I can only judge by the appearances that I find," I answered; and, seeing that he was about to offer fresh objections, I continued: "Don't let us waste precious time in discussion, or Mr. Graves may be dead before we have reached a conclusion. If you will hurry them up about the coffee that I asked for some time ago, I will take the other necessary measures, and perhaps we may manage to pull him round."

The rather brutal decision of my manner evidently daunted him. It must have been plain to him that I was not prepared to accept any explanation of the unconscious man's condition other than that of morphine poisoning; whence the inference was pretty plain that the alternatives were recovery or an inquest. Replying stiffly that I "must do as I thought best," he hurried from the room, leaving me to continue my efforts without further interruption.

For some time these efforts seemed to make no impression. The man lay as still and impassive as a corpse excepting for the slow, shallow and rather irregular breathing with its ominous accompanying rattle. But presently, by imperceptible degrees, signs of returning life began to make their appearance. A sharp slap on the cheek with the wet towel produced a sensible flicker of the eyelids; a similar slap on the chest was followed by a slight gasp. A pencil, drawn over the sole of the foot, occasioned a visible shrinking movement, and, on looking once more at the eyes, I detected a slight change that told me that the atropine was beginning to take effect.

This was very encouraging, and, so far, quite satisfactory, though it would have been premature to rejoice. I kept the patient carefully covered and maintained the process of gentle irritation, moving his limbs and shoulders, brushing his hair and generally bombarding his deadened senses with small but repeated stimuli. And under this treatment, the improvement continued so far that on my bawling a question into his ear he actually opened his eyes for an instant, though in another moment, the lids had sunk back into their former position.

Soon after this, Mr. Weiss re-entered the room, followed by Mrs. Schallibaum, who carried a small tray, on which were a jug of coffee, a jug of milk, a cup and saucer and a sugar basin.

"How do you find him now?" Mr. Weiss asked anxiously.

"I am glad to say that there is a distinct improvement," I replied. "But we must persevere. He is by no means out of the wood yet."

I examined the coffee, which looked black and strong and had a very reassuring smell, and, pouring out half a cupful, approached the bed.

"Now, Mr. Graves," I shouted, "we want you to drink some of this."

The flaccid eyelids lifted for an instant but there was no other response. I gently opened the unresisting mouth and ladled in a couple of spoonfuls of coffee, which were immediately swallowed; whereupon I repeated the proceeding and continued at short intervals until the cup was empty. The effect of the new remedy soon became apparent. He began to mumble and mutter obscurely in response to the questions that I bellowed at him, and once or twice he opened his eyes and looked dreamily into my face. Then I sat him up and made him drink some coffee from the cup, and, all the time, kept up a running fire of questions, which made up in volume of sound for what they lacked of relevancy.

Of these proceedings Mr. Weiss and his housekeeper were highly interested spectators, and the former, contrary to his usual practice, came quite close up to the bed, to get a better view.

"It is really a most remarkable thing," he said, "but it almost looks as if you were right, after all. He is certainly much better. But tell me, would this treatment produce a similar improvement if the symptoms were due to disease?"

"No," I answered, "it certainly would not."

"Then that seems to settle it. But it is a most mysterious affair. Can you suggest any way in which he can have concealed a store of the drug?"

I stood up and looked him straight in the face; it was the first chance I had had of inspecting him by any but the feeblest light, and I looked at him very attentively. Now, it is a curious fact—though one that most persons must have observed—that there sometimes occurs a considerable interval between the reception of a visual impression and its complete transfer to the consciousness. A thing may be seen, as it were, unconsciously, and the impression consigned, apparently, to instant oblivion; and yet the picture may be subsequently revived by memory with such completeness that its details can be studied as though the object were still actually visible.

Something of this kind must have happened to me now. Preoccupied as I was, by the condition of the patient, the professional habit of rapid and close observation caused me to direct a searching glance at the man before me. It was only a brief glance—for Mr. Weiss, perhaps embarrassed by my keen regard of him, almost immediately withdrew into the shadow—and my attention seemed principally to be occupied by the odd contrast between the pallor of his face and the redness of his nose and by the peculiar stiff, bristly character of his eyebrows. But there was another fact, and a very curious one, that was observed by me subconsciously and instantly forgotten, to be revived later when I reflected on the events of the night. It was this:

As Mr. Weiss stood, with his head slightly turned, I was able to look through one glass of his spectacles at the wall beyond. On the wall was a framed print; and the edge of the frame, seen through the spectacle-glass, appeared quite unaltered and free from distortion, magnification or reduction, as if seen through plain window-glass; and yet the reflections of the candle-flame in the spectacles showed the flame upside down, proving conclusively that the glasses were concave on one surface at least. The strange phenomenon was visible only for a moment or two, and as it passed out of my sight it passed also out of my mind.

"No," I said, replying to the last question; "I can think of no way in which he could have effectually hidden a store of morphine. Judging by the symptoms, he has taken a large dose, and, if he has been in the habit of consuming large quantities, his stock would be pretty bulky. I can offer no suggestion whatever."

"I suppose you consider him quite out of danger now?"

"Oh, not at all. I think we can pull him round if we persevere, but he must not be allowed to sink back into a state of coma. We must keep him on the move until the effects of the drug have really passed off. If you will put him into his dressing-gown we will walk him up and down the room for a while."

"But is that safe?" Mr. Weiss asked anxiously.

"Quite safe," I answered. "I will watch his pulse carefully. The danger is in the possibility, or rather certainty, of a relapse if he is not kept moving."

With obvious unwillingness and disapproval, Mr. Weiss produced a dressing-gown and together we invested the patient



in it. Then we dragged him, very limp, but not entirely unresisting, out of bed and stood him on his feet. He opened his eyes and blinked owlshly first at one and then at the other of us, and mumbled a few unintelligible words of protest; regardless of which, we thrust his feet into slippers and endeavoured to make him walk. At first he seemed unable to stand, and we had to support him by his arms as we urged him forward; but presently his trailing legs began to make definite walking movements, and, after one or two turns up and down the room, he was not only able partly to support his weight, but showed evidence of reviving consciousness in more energetic protests.

At this point Mr. Weiss astonished me by transferring the arm that he held to the housekeeper.

"If you will excuse me, doctor," said he, "I will go now and attend to some rather important business that I have had to leave unfinished. Mrs. Schallibaum will be able to give you all the assistance that you require, and will order the carriage when you think it safe to leave the patient. In case I should not see you again I will say 'good night.' I hope you won't think me very unceremonious."

He shook hands with me and went out of the room, leaving me, as I have said, profoundly astonished that he should consider any business of more moment than the condition of his friend, whose life, even now, was but hanging by a thread. However, it was really no concern of mine. I could do without him, and the resuscitation of this unfortunate half-dead man gave me occupation enough to engross my whole attention.

The melancholy progress up and down the room re-commenced, and with it the mumbled protests from the patient. As we walked, and especially as we turned, I caught frequent glimpses of the housekeeper's face. But it was nearly always in profile. She appeared to avoid looking me in the face, though she did so once or twice; and on each of these occasions her eyes were directed at me in a normal manner without any sign of a squint. Nevertheless, I had the impression that when her face was turned away from me she squinted. The "swivel eye"—the left—was towards me as she held the patient's right arm, and it was almost continuously turned in my direction, whereas I felt convinced that she was really looking straight before her, though, of course, her right eye was invisible to me. It struck me, even at the time, as an odd affair, but I was too much concerned about my charge to give it much consideration.

Meanwhile the patient continued to revive apace. And the more he revived, the more energetically did he protest against this wearisome perambulation. But he was evidently a polite gentleman, for, muddled as his faculties were, he managed to clothe his objections in courteous and even gracious forms of speech singularly out of agreement with the character that Mr. Weiss had given him.

"I thanguyou," he mumbled thickly. "Ver' good take s'much trouble. Think I will lie down now." He looked wistfully at the bed, but I wheeled him about and marched him once more down the room. He submitted unresistingly, but as we again approached the bed he reopened the matter.

"S'quite s'fficient, thang you. Gebback to bed now. Much 'bliged frall your kindness"—here I turned him round—"no, really; m'feeling rather tired. Sh'like to lie down now, f'you'd be s'good."

"You must walk about a little longer, Mr. Graves," I said. "It would be very bad for you to go to sleep again."

He looked at me with a curious, dull surprise, and reflected awhile as if in some perplexity. Then he looked at me again and said:

"Thing, sir, you are mistake—mistaken me—mist—"

Here Mrs. Schallibaum interrupted sharply:

"The doctor thinks it's good for you to walk about. You've been sleeping too much. He doesn't want you to sleep any more just now."

"Don't wanter sleep; wanter lie down," said the patient.

"But you mustn't lie down for a little while. You must walk about for a few minutes more. And you'd better not talk. Just walk up and down."

"There's no harm in his talking," said I; "in fact it's good for him. It will help to keep him awake."

"I should think it would tire him," said Mrs. Schallibaum; "and it worries me to hear him asking to lie down when we can't let him."

She spoke sharply and in an unnecessarily high tone so that the patient could not fail to hear. Apparently he took in the very broad hint contained in the concluding sentence, for he trudged wearily and unsteadily up and down the room for some time without speaking, though he continued to look at me from time to time as if something in my appearance puzzled him exceedingly. At length his intolerable longing for repose overcame his politeness and he returned to the attack.

"Surely v' walked enough now. Feeling very tired. Am really. Would you be s'kind 's t'let me lie down few minutes?"

"Don't you think he might lie down for a little while?" Mrs. Schallibaum asked.

I felt his pulse, and decided that he was really becoming fatigued, and that it would be wiser not to overdo the exercise while he was so weak. Accordingly, I consented to his returning to bed, and turned him round in that direction; whereupon he tottered gleefully towards his resting-place like a tired horse heading for its stable.

As soon as he was tucked in, I gave him a full cup of coffee, which he drank with some avidity as if thirsty. Then I sat

down by the bedside, and, with a view to keeping him awake, began once more to ply him with questions.

"Does your head ache, Mr. Graves?" I asked.

"The doctor says 'does your head ache?'" Mrs. Schallibaum squalled, so loudly that the patient started perceptibly.

"I heard him, m'dear girl," he answered with a faint smile. "Not deaf you know. Yes. Head aches a good deal. But I thing this gennleman mistakes—"

"He says you are to keep awake. You mustn't go to sleep again, and you are not to close your eyes."

"All ri' Pol'n. Keep'm open," and he proceeded forthwith to shut them with an air of infinite peacefulness. I grasped his hand and shook it gently, on which he opened his eyes and looked at me sleepily. The housekeeper stroked his head, keeping her face half-turned from me—as she had done almost constantly, to conceal the squinting eye, as I assumed—and said:

"Need we keep you any longer, doctor? It is getting very late and you have a long way to go."

I looked doubtfully at the patient. I was loath to leave him, distrusting these people as I did. But I had my work to do on the morrow, with, perhaps, a night call or two in the interval, and the endurance even of a general practitioner has its limits.

"I think I heard the carriage some time ago," Mrs. Schallibaum added.

I rose hesitatingly and looked at my watch. It had turned half-past eleven.

"You understand," I said in a low voice, "that the danger is not over? If he is left now he will fall asleep, and in all human probability will never wake. You clearly understand that?"

"Yes, quite clearly. I promise you he shall not be allowed to fall asleep again."

As she spoke, she looked me full in the face for a few moments, and I noted that her eyes had a perfectly normal appearance, without any trace whatever of a squint.

"Very well," I said. "On that understanding I will go now; and I shall hope to find our friend quite recovered at my next visit."

I turned to the patient, who was already dozing, and shook his hand heartily.

"Good-bye, Mr. Graves!" I said. "I am sorry to have to disturb your repose so much; but you must keep awake, you know. Won't do to go to sleep."

"Ver' well," he replied drowsily. "Sorry t' give you all this trouble. L' keep awake. But I think you're mistak'n—"

"He says it's very important that you shouldn't go to sleep, and that I am to see that you don't. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I un'stan'. But why does this gennlem'n—?"

"Now it's of no use for you to ask a lot of questions," Mrs. Schallibaum said playfully; "we'll talk to you to-morrow. Good night, doctor. I'll light you down the stairs, but I won't come down with you, or the patient will be falling asleep again."

Taking this definite dismissal, I retired, followed by a dreamily surprised glance from the sick man. The housekeeper held the candle over the balusters until I reached the bottom of the stairs, when I perceived through the open door along the passage a glimmer of light from the carriage lamps. The coachman was standing just outside, faintly illuminated by the very dim lamplight, and as I stepped into the carriage he remarked in his Scotch dialect that I "seemed to have been makin' a night of it." He did not wait for any reply—none being in fact needed—but shut the door and locked it.

I lit my little pocket-lamp and hung it on the back cushion. I even drew the board and notebook from my pocket. But it seemed rather unnecessary to take a fresh set of notes, and, to tell the truth, I rather shirked the labour, tired as I was after my late exertions; besides, I wanted to think over the events of the evening, while they were fresh in my memory. Accordingly I put away the notebook, filled and lighted my pipe, and settled myself to review the incidents attending my second visit to this rather uncanny house.

Considered in leisurely retrospect, that visit offered quite a number of problems that called for elucidation. There was the patient's condition, for instance. Any doubt as to the cause of his symptoms was set at rest by the effect of the antidotes. Mr. Graves was certainly under the influence of morphine, and the only doubtful question was how he had become so. That he had taken the poison himself was incredible. No morphinomaniac would take such a knock-down dose. It was practically certain that the poison had been administered by someone else, and, on Mr. Weiss's own showing, there was no one but himself and the housekeeper who could have administered it. And to this conclusion all the other very queer circumstances pointed.

What were these circumstances? They were, as I have said, numerous, though many of them seemed trivial. To begin with, Mr. Weiss's habit of appearing some time after my arrival and disappearing some time before my departure was decidedly odd. But still more odd was his sudden departure this evening on what looked like a mere pretext. That departure coincided in time with the sick man's recovery of the power of speech. Could it be that Mr. Weiss was afraid that the half-conscious man might say something compromising to him in my presence? It looked rather like it. And yet he had gone away and left me with the patient and the housekeeper.

But when I came to think about it I remembered that Mrs. Schallibaum had shown some anxiety to prevent the patient from talking. She had interrupted him more than once, and had on two occasions broken in when he seemed to be about to ask me some question. I was "mistaken" about something. What was that something that he wanted to tell me?

It had struck me as singular that there should be no coffee in the house, but a sufficiency of tea. Germans are not usually tea-drinkers and they do take coffee. But perhaps there was nothing in this. Rather more remarkable was the invisibility of the coachman. Why could he not be sent to fetch the coffee, and why did not he, rather than the housekeeper, come to take the place of Mr. Weiss when the latter had to go away.

There were other points, too. I recalled the word that sounded like "Pol'n," which Mr. Graves had used in speaking to the housekeeper. Apparently it was a Christian name of some kind; but why did Mr. Graves call the woman by her Christian name when Mr. Weiss addressed her formally as Mrs. Schallibaum? And, as to the woman herself: what was the meaning of that curious disappearing squint? Physically it presented no mystery. The woman had an ordinary divergent squint, and, like many people, who suffer from this displacement, could, by a strong muscular effort, bring the eyes temporarily into their normal parallel position. I had detected the displacement when she had tried to maintain the effort too long, and the muscular control had given way. But why had she done it? Was it only feminine vanity—mere sensitiveness respecting a slight personal disfigurement? It might be so; or there might be some further motive. It was impossible to say.

Turning this question over, I suddenly remembered the peculiarity of Mr. Weiss's spectacles. And here I met with a real poser. I had certainly seen through those spectacles as clearly as if they had been plain window-glass; and they had certainly given an inverted reflection of the candle-flame like that thrown from the surface of a concave lens. Now they obviously could not be both flat and concave; but yet they had the properties peculiar to both flatness and concavity. And there was a further difficulty. If I could see objects unaltered through them, so could Mr. Weiss. But the function of spectacles is to alter the appearances of objects, by magnification, reduction or compensating distortion. If they leave the appearances unchanged they are useless. I could make nothing of it. After puzzling over it for quite a long time, I had to give it up; which I did the less unwillingly inasmuch as the construction of Mr. Weiss's spectacles had no apparent bearing on the case.

On arriving home, I looked anxiously at the message-book, and was relieved to find that there were no further visits to be made. Having made up a mixture for Mr. Graves and handed it to the coachman, I raked the ashes of the surgery fire together and sat down to smoke a final pipe while I reflected once more on the singular and suspicious case in which I had become involved. But fatigue soon put an end to my meditations; and having come to the conclusion that the circumstances demanded a further consultation with Thorndyke, I turned down the gas to a microscopic blue spark and betook myself to bed.

---

#### IV. — THE OFFICIAL VIEW

I ROSE on the following morning still possessed by the determination to make some opportunity during the day to call on Thorndyke and take his advice on the now urgent question as to what I was to do. I use the word "urgent" advisedly; for the incidents of the preceding evening had left me with the firm conviction that poison was being administered for some purpose to my mysterious patient, and that no time must be lost if his life was to be saved. Last night he had escaped only by the narrowest margin—assuming him to be still alive—and it was only my unexpectedly firm attitude that had compelled Mr. Weiss to agree to restorative measures.

That I should be sent for again I had not the slightest expectation. If what I so strongly suspected was true, Weiss would call in some other doctor, in the hope of better luck, and it was imperative that he should be stopped before it was too late. This was my view, but I meant to have Thorndyke's opinion, and act under his direction, but

*"The best laid plans of mice and men  
Gang aft agley."*

When I came downstairs and took a preliminary glance at the rough memorandum-book, kept by the bottle-boy, or, in his absence, by the housemaid, I stood aghast. The morning's entries looked already like a sample page of the Post Office directory. The new calls alone were more than equal to an ordinary day's work, and the routine visits remained to be added. Gloomily wondering whether the Black Death had made a sudden reappearance in England, I hurried to the dining-room and made a hasty breakfast, interrupted at intervals by the apparition of the bottle-boy to announce new messages.

The first two or three visits solved the mystery. An epidemic of influenza had descended on the neighbourhood, and I was getting not only our own normal work but a certain amount of overflow from other practices. Further, it appeared that a strike in the building trade had been followed immediately by a widespread failure of health among the bricklayers who were members of a certain benefit club; which accounted for the remarkable suddenness of the outbreak.

Of course, my contemplated visit to Thorndyke was out of the question. I should have to act on my own responsibility. But in the hurry and rush and anxiety of the work—for some of the cases were severe and even critical—I had no opportunity to consider any course of action, nor time to carry it out. Even with the aid of a hansom which I chartered, as Stillbury kept no carriage, I had not finished my last visit until near on midnight, and was then so spent with fatigue that I fell asleep over my postponed supper.

As the next day opened with a further increase of work, I sent a telegram to Dr. Stillbury at Hastings, whither he had

gone, like a wise man, to recruit after a slight illness. I asked for authority to engage an assistant, but the reply informed me that Stillbury himself was on his way to town; and to my relief, when I dropped in at the surgery for a cup of tea, I found him rubbing his hands over the open day-book.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," he remarked cheerfully as we shook hands. "This will pay the expenses of my holiday, including you. By the way, you are not anxious to be off, I suppose?"

As a matter of fact, I was; for I had decided to accept Thorndyke's offer, and was now eager to take up my duties with him. But it would have been shabby to leave Stillbury to battle alone with this rush of work or to seek the services of a strange assistant.

"I should like to get off as soon as you can spare me," I replied, "but I'm not going to leave you in the lurch."

"That's a good fellow," said Stillbury. "I knew you wouldn't. Let us have some tea and divide up the work. Anything of interest going?"

There were one or two unusual cases on the list, and, as we marked off our respective patients, I gave him the histories in brief synopsis. And then I opened the subject of my mysterious experiences at the house of Mr. Weiss.

"There's another affair that I want to tell you about; rather an unpleasant business."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Stillbury. He put down his cup and regarded me with quite painful anxiety.

"It looks to me like an undoubted case of criminal poisoning," I continued.

Stillbury's face cleared instantly. "Oh, I'm glad it's nothing more than that," he said with an air of relief. "I was afraid, it was some confounded woman. There's always that danger, you know, when a locum is young and happens—if I may say so, Jervis—to be a good-looking fellow. Let us hear about this case."

I gave him a condensed narrative of my connection with the mysterious patient, omitting any reference to Thorndyke, and passing lightly over my efforts to fix the position of the house, and wound up with the remark that the facts ought certainly to be communicated to the police.

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly, "I suppose you're right. Deuced unpleasant though. Police cases don't do a practice any good. They waste a lot of time, too; keep you hanging about to give evidence. Still, you are quite right. We can't stand by and see the poor devil poisoned without making some effort. But I don't believe the police will do anything in the matter."

"Don't you really?"

"No, I don't. They like to have things pretty well cut and dried before they act. A prosecution is an expensive affair, so they don't care to prosecute unless they are fairly sure of a conviction. If they fail they get hauled over the coals."

"But don't you think they would get a conviction in this case?"

"Not on your evidence, Jervis. They might pick up something fresh, but, if they didn't they would fail. You haven't got enough hard-baked facts to upset a capable defence. Still, that isn't our affair. You want to put the responsibility on the police and I entirely agree with you."

"There ought not to be any delay," said I.

"There needn't be. I shall look in on Mrs. Wackford and you have to see the Rummel children; we shall pass the station on our way. Why shouldn't we drop in and see the inspector or superintendent?"

The suggestion met my views exactly. As soon as we had finished tea, we set forth, and in about ten minutes found ourselves in the bare and forbidding office attached to the station.

The presiding officer descended from a high stool, and, carefully laying down his pen, shook hands cordially.

"And what can I do for you gentlemen?" he asked, with an affable smile.

Stillbury proceeded to open our business.

"My friend here, Dr. Jervis, who has very kindly been looking after my work for a week or two, has had a most remarkable experience, and he wants to tell you about it."

"Something in my line of business?" the officer inquired.

"That," said I, "is for you to judge. I think it is, but you may think otherwise"; and hereupon, without further preamble, I plunged into the history of the case, giving him a condensed statement similar to that which I had already made to Stillbury.

He listened with close attention, jotting down from time to time a brief note on a sheet of paper; and, when I had finished, he wrote out in a black-covered notebook a short précis of my statement.

"I have written down here," he said, "the substance of what you have told me. I will read the deposition over to you, and, if it is correct, I will ask you to sign it."

He did so, and, when I had signed the document, I asked him what was likely to be done in the matter.

"I am afraid," he replied, "that we can't take any active measures. You have put us on our guard and we shall keep our

eyes open. But I think that is all we can do, unless we hear something further."

"But," I exclaimed, "don't you think that it is a very suspicious affair?"

"I do," he replied. "A very fishy business indeed, and you were quite right to come and tell us about it."

"It seems a pity not to take some measures," I said. "While you are waiting to hear something further, they may give the poor wretch a fresh dose and kill him."

"In which case we should hear something further, unless some fool of a doctor were to give a death certificate."

"But that is very unsatisfactory. The man ought not to be allowed to die."

"I quite agree with you, sir. But we've no evidence that he is going to die. His friends sent for you, and you treated him skilfully and left him in a fair way to recovery. That's all that we really know about it. Yes, I know," the officer continued as I made signs of disagreement, "you think that a crime is possibly going to be committed and that we ought to prevent it. But you overrate our powers. We can only act on evidence that a crime has actually been committed or is actually being attempted. Now we have no such evidence. Look at your statement, and tell me what you can swear to."

"I think I could swear that Mr. Graves had taken a poisonous dose of morphine."

"And who gave him that poisonous dose?"

"I very strongly suspect—"

"That's no good, sir," interrupted the officer. "Suspicion isn't evidence. We should want you to swear an information and give us enough facts to make out a *prima facie* case against some definite person. And you couldn't do it. Your information amounts to this: that a certain person has taken a poisonous dose of morphine and apparently recovered. That's all. You can't swear that the names given to you are real names, and you can't give us any address or even any locality."

"I took some compass bearings in the carriage," I said. "You could locate the house, I think, without much difficulty."

The officer smiled faintly and fixed an abstracted gaze on the clock.

"You could, sir," he replied. "I have no doubt whatever that *you* could. *I* couldn't. But, in any case, we haven't enough to go upon. If you learn anything fresh, I hope you will let me know; and I am very much obliged to you for taking so much trouble in the matter. Good evening sir. Good evening, Dr. Stillbury."

He shook hands with us both genially, and, accepting perforce this very polite but unmistakable dismissal, we took our departure.

Outside the station, Stillbury heaved a comfortable sigh. He was evidently relieved to find that no upheavals were to take place in his domain.

"I thought that would be their attitude," he said, "and they are quite right, you know. The function of law is to prevent crime, it is true; but prophylaxis in the sense in which we understand it is not possible in legal practice."

I assented without enthusiasm. It was disappointing to find that no precautionary measures were to be taken. However, I had done all that I could in the matter. No further responsibility lay upon me, and, as it was practically certain that I had seen and heard the last of Mr. Graves and his mysterious household, I dismissed the case from my mind. At the next corner Stillbury and I parted to go our respective ways; and my attention was soon transferred from the romance of crime to the realities of epidemic influenza.

The plethora of work in Dr. Stillbury's practice continued longer than I had bargained for. Day after day went by and still found me tramping the dingy streets of Kennington or scrambling up and down narrow stairways; turning in at night dead tired, or turning out half awake to the hideous jangle of the night bell.

It was very provoking. For months I had resisted Thorndyke's persuasion to give up general practice and join him. Not from lack of inclination, but from a deep suspicion that he was thinking of my wants rather than his own; that his was a charitable rather than a business proposal. Now that I knew this not to be the case, I was impatient to join him; and, as I trudged through the dreary thoroughfares of this superannuated suburb, with its once rustic villas and its faded gardens, my thoughts would turn enviously to the quiet dignity of the Temple and my friend's chambers in King's Bench Walk.

The closed carriage appeared no more; nor did any whisper either of good or evil reach me in connection with the mysterious house from which it had come. Mr. Graves had apparently gone out of my life for ever.

But if he had gone out of my life, he had not gone out of my memory. Often, as I walked my rounds, would the picture of that dimly-lit room rise unbidden. Often would I find myself looking once more into that ghastly face, so worn, so wasted and haggard, and yet so far from repellent. All the incidents of that last night would reconstitute themselves with a vividness that showed the intensity of the impression that they had made at the time. I would have gladly forgotten the whole affair, for every incident of it was fraught with discomfort. But it clung to my memory; it haunted me; and ever as it returned it bore with it the disquieting questions: Was Mr. Graves still alive? And, if he was not, was there really nothing which could have been done to save him?

Nearly a month passed before the practice began to show signs of returning to its normal condition. Then the daily lists became more and more contracted and the day's work proportionately shorter. And thus the term of my servitude came to an end. One evening, as we were writing up the day-book, Stillbury remarked:

"I almost think, Jervis, I could manage by myself now. I know you are only staying on for my sake."

"I am staying on to finish my engagement, but I shan't be sorry to clear out if you can do without me."

"I think I can. When would you like to be off?"

"As soon as possible. Say to-morrow morning, after I have made a few visits and transferred the patients to you."

"Very well," said Stillbury. "Then I will give you your cheque and settle up everything to-night, so that you shall be free to go off when you like to-morrow morning."

Thus ended my connection with Kennington Lane. On the following day at about noon, I found myself strolling across Waterloo Bridge with the sensations of a newly liberated convict and a cheque for twenty-five guineas in my pocket. My luggage was to follow when I sent for it. Now, unhampered even by a hand-bag, I joyfully descended the steps at the north end of the bridge and headed for King's Bench Walk by way of the Embankment and Middle Temple Lane.

---

## V. — JEFFREY BLACKMORE'S WILL

MY arrival at Thorndyke's chambers was not unexpected, having been heralded by a premonitory post-card. The "oak" was open and an application of the little brass knocker of the inner door immediately produced my colleague himself and a very hearty welcome.

"At last," said Thorndyke, "you have come forth from the house of bondage. I began to think that you had taken up your abode in Kennington for good."

"I was beginning, myself, to wonder when I should escape. But here I am; and I may say at once that I am ready to shake the dust of general practice off my feet for ever—that is, if you are still willing to have me as your assistant."

"Willing!" exclaimed Thorndyke, "Barkis himself was not more willing than I. You will be invaluable to me. Let us settle the terms of our comradeship forthwith, and to-morrow we will take measures to enter you as a student of the Inner Temple. Shall we have our talk in the open air and the spring sunshine?"

I agreed readily to this proposal, for it was a bright, sunny day and warm for the time of year—the beginning of April. We descended to the Walk and thence slowly made our way to the quiet court behind the church, where poor old Oliver Goldsmith lies, as he would surely have wished to lie, in the midst of all that had been dear to him in his chequered life. I need not record the matter of our conversation. To Thorndyke's proposals I had no objections to offer but my own unworthiness and his excessive liberality. A few minutes saw our covenants fully agreed upon, and when Thorndyke had noted the points on a slip of paper, signed and dated it and handed it to me, the business was at an end.

"There," my colleague said with a smile as he put away his pocket-book, "if people would only settle their affairs in that way, a good part of the occupation of lawyers would be gone. Brevity is the soul of wit; and the fear of simplicity is the beginning of litigation."

"And now," I said, "I propose that we go and feed. I will invite you to lunch to celebrate our contract."

"My learned junior is premature," he replied. "I had already arranged a little festivity—or rather had modified one that was already arranged. You remember Mr. Marchmont, the solicitor?"

"Yes."

"He called this morning to ask me to lunch with him and a new client at the 'Cheshire Cheese.' I accepted and notified him that I should bring you."

"Why the 'Cheshire Cheese'?" I asked.

"Why not? Marchmont's reasons for the selection were, first, that his client has never seen an old-fashioned London tavern, and second, that this is Wednesday and he, Marchmont, has a gluttonous affection for a really fine beef-steak pudding. You don't object, I hope?"

"Oh, not at all. In fact, now that you mention it, my own sensations incline me to sympathize with Marchmont. I breakfasted rather early."

"Then come," said Thorndyke. "The assignation is for one o'clock, and, if we walk slowly, we shall just hit it off."

We sauntered up Inner Temple Lane, and, crossing Fleet Street, headed sedately for the tavern. As we entered the quaint old-world dining-room, Thorndyke looked round and a gentleman, who was seated with a companion at a table in one of the little boxes or compartments, rose and saluted us.

"Let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Stephen Blackmore," he said as we approached. Then, turning to his companion, he introduced us by our respective names.

"I engaged this box," he continued, "so that we might be private if we wished to have a little preliminary chat; not that beef-steak pudding is a great help to conversation. But when people have a certain business in view, their talk is sure to drift towards it, sooner or later."

Thorndyke and I sat down opposite the lawyer and his client, and we mutually inspected one another. Marchmont I

already knew; an elderly, professional-looking man, a typical solicitor of the old school; fresh-faced, precise, rather irascible, and conveying a not unpleasant impression of taking a reasonable interest in his diet. The other man was quite young, not more than five-and-twenty, and was a fine athletic-looking fellow with a healthy, out-of-door complexion and an intelligent and highly prepossessing face. I took a liking to him at the first glance, and so, I saw, did Thorndyke.

"You two gentlemen," said Blackmore, addressing us, "seem to be quite old acquaintances. I have heard so much about you from my friend, Reuben Hornby."

"Ah!" exclaimed Marchmont, "that was a queer case—'The Case of the Red Thumb Mark,' as the papers called it. It was an eye-opener to old-fashioned lawyers like myself. We've had scientific witnesses before—and bullied 'em properly, by Jove! when they wouldn't give the evidence that we wanted. But the scientific lawyer is something new. His appearance in court made us all sit up, I can assure you."

"I hope we shall make you sit up again," said Thorndyke.

"You won't this time," said Marchmont. "The issues in this case of my friend Blackmore's are purely legal; or rather, there are no issues at all. There is nothing in dispute. I tried to prevent Blackmore from consulting you, but he wouldn't listen to reason. Here! Waiter! How much longer are we to be waiters? We shall die of old age before we get our victuals!"

The waiter smiled apologetically. "Yessir!" said he. "Coming now, sir." And at this very moment there was borne into the room a Gargantuan pudding in a great bucket of a basin, which being placed on a three-legged stool was forthwith attacked ferociously by the white-clothed, white-capped carver. We watched the process—as did every one present—with an interest not entirely gluttonous, for it added a pleasant touch to the picturesque old room, with its sanded floor, its homely, pew-like boxes, its high-backed settles and the friendly portrait of the "great lexicographer" that beamed down on us from the wall.

"This is a very different affair from your great, glittering modern restaurant," Mr. Marchmont remarked.

"It is indeed," said Blackmore, "and if this is the way in which our ancestors lived, it would seem that they had a better idea of comfort than we have."

There was a short pause, during which Mr. Marchmont glared hungrily at the pudding; then Thorndyke said:

"So you refused to listen to reason, Mr. Blackmore?"

"Yes. You see, Mr. Marchmont and his partner had gone into the matter and decided that there was nothing to be done. Then I happened to mention the affair to Reuben Hornby, and he urged me to ask your advice on the case."

"Like his impudence," growled Marchmont, "to meddle with my client."

"On which," continued Blackmore, "I spoke to Mr. Marchmont and he agreed that it was worth while to take your opinion on the case, though he warned me to cherish no hopes, as the affair was not really within your specialty."

"So you understand," said Marchmont, "that we expect nothing. This is quite a forlorn hope. We are taking your opinion as a mere formality, to be able to say that we have left nothing untried."

"That is an encouraging start," Thorndyke remarked. "It leaves me unembarrassed by the possibility of failure. But meanwhile you are arousing in me a devouring curiosity as to the nature of the case. Is it highly confidential? Because if not, I would mention that Jervis has now joined me as my permanent colleague."

"It isn't confidential at all," said Marchmont. "The public are in full possession of the facts, and we should be only too happy to put them in still fuller possession, through the medium of the Probate Court, if we could find a reasonable pretext. But we can't."

Here the waiter charged our table with the fussy rapidity of the overdue.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, sir. Rather early, sir. Wouldn't like it underdone, sir."

Marchmont inspected his plate critically and remarked:

"I sometimes suspect these oysters of being mussels; and I'll swear the larks are sparrows."

"Let us hope so," said Thorndyke. "The lark is better employed 'at Heaven's gate singing' than garnishing a beef-steak pudding. But you were telling us about your case."

"So I was. Well it's just a matter of—ale or claret? Oh, claret, I know. You despise the good old British John Barleycorn."

"He that drinks beer thinks beer," retorted Thorndyke. "But you were saying that it is just a matter of—?"

"A matter of a perverse testator and an ill-drawn will. A peculiarly irritating case, too, because the defective will replaces a perfectly sound one, and the intentions of the testator were—er—were—excellent ale, this. A little heady, perhaps, but sound. Better than your sour French wine, Thorndyke—were—er—were quite obvious. What he evidently desired was—mustard? Better have some mustard. No? Well, well! Even a Frenchman would take mustard. You can have no appreciation of flavour, Thorndyke, if you take your victuals in that crude, unseasoned state. And, talking of flavour, do you suppose that there is really any difference between that of a lark and that of a sparrow?"

Thorndyke smiled grimly. "I should suppose," said he, "that they were indistinguishable; but the question could easily be put to the test of experiment."

"That is true," agreed Marchmont, "and it would really be worth trying, for, as you say, sparrows are more easily obtainable than larks. But, about this will. I was saying—er—now, what was I saying?"

"I understood you to say," replied Thorndyke, "that the intentions of the testator were in some way connected with mustard. Isn't that so, Jervis?"

"That was what I gathered," said I.

Marchmont gazed at us for a moment with a surprised expression and then, laughing good-humouredly, fortified himself with a draught of ale.

"The moral of which is," Thorndyke added, "that testamentary dispositions should not be mixed up with beef-steak pudding."

"I believe you're right, Thorndyke," said the unabashed solicitor. "Business is business and eating is eating. We had better talk over our case in my office or your chambers after lunch."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "come over to the Temple with me and I will give you a cup of coffee to clear your brain. Are there any documents?"

"I have all the papers here in my bag," replied Marchmont; and the conversation—such conversation as is possible "when beards wag all" over the festive board—drifted into other channels.

As soon as the meal was finished and the reckoning paid, we trooped out of Wine Office Court, and, insinuating ourselves through the line of empty hansoms that, in those days, crawled in a continuous procession on either side of Fleet Street, betook ourselves by way of Mitre Court to King's Bench Walk. There, when the coffee had been requisitioned and our chairs drawn up around the fire, Mr. Marchmont unloaded from his bag a portentous bundle of papers, and we addressed ourselves to the business in hand.

"Now," said Marchmont, "let me repeat what I said before. Legally speaking, we have no case—not the ghost of one. But my client wished to take your opinion, and I agreed on the bare chance that you might detect some point that we had overlooked. I don't think you will, for we have gone into the case very thoroughly, but still, there is the infinitesimal chance and we may as well take it. Would you like to read the two wills, or shall I first explain the circumstances?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "a narrative of the events in the order of their occurrence would be most helpful. I should like to know as much as possible about the testator before I examine the documents."

"Very well," said Marchmont. "Then I will begin with a recital of the circumstances, which, briefly stated, are these: My client, Stephen Blackmore, is the son of Mr. Edward Blackmore, deceased. Edward Blackmore had two brothers who survived him, John, the elder, and Jeffrey, the younger. Jeffrey is the testator in this case.

"Some two years ago, Jeffrey Blackmore executed a will by which he made his nephew Stephen his executor and sole legatee; and a few months later he added a codicil giving two hundred and fifty pounds to his brother John."

"What was the value of the estate?" Thorndyke asked.

"About three thousand five hundred pounds, all invested in Consols. The testator had a pension from the Foreign Office, on which he lived, leaving his capital untouched. Soon after having made his will, he left the rooms in Jermyn Street, where he had lived for some years, stored his furniture and went to Florence. From thence he moved on to Rome and then to Venice and other places in Italy, and so continued to travel about until the end of last September, when it appears that he returned to England, for at the beginning of October he took a set of chambers in New Inn, which he furnished with some of the things from his old rooms. As far as we can make out, he never communicated with any of his friends, excepting his brother, and the fact of his being in residence at New Inn or of his being in England at all became known to them only when he died."

"Was this quite in accordance with his ordinary habits?" Thorndyke asked.

"I should say not quite," Blackmore answered. "My uncle was a studious, solitary man, but he was not formerly a recluse. He was not much of a correspondent but he kept up some sort of communication with his friends. He used, for instance, to write to me sometimes, and, when I came down from Cambridge for the vacations, he had me to stay with him at his rooms."

"Is there anything known that accounts for the change in his habits?"

"Yes, there is," replied Marchmont. "We shall come to that presently. To proceed with the narrative: On the fifteenth of last March he was found dead in his chambers, and a more recent will was then discovered, dated the twelfth of November of last year. Now no change had taken place in the circumstances of the testator to account for the new will, nor was there any appreciable alteration in the disposition of the property. As far as we can make out, the new will was drawn with the idea of stating the intentions of the testator with greater exactness and for the sake of doing away with the codicil. The entire property, with the exception of two hundred and fifty pounds, was, as before, bequeathed to Stephen, but the separate items were specified, and the testator's brother, John Blackmore, was named as the executor and residuary legatee."

"I see," said Thorndyke. "So that your client's interest in the will would appear to be practically unaffected by the change."



"Yes. There it is," exclaimed the lawyer, slapping the table to add emphasis to his words. "That is the pity of it! If people who have no knowledge of law would only refrain from tinkering at their wills, what a world of trouble would be saved!"

"Oh, come!" said Thorndyke. "It is not for a lawyer to say that."

"No, I suppose not," Marchmont agreed. "Only, you see, we like the muddle to be made by the other side. But, in this case, the muddle is on our side. The change, as you say, seems to leave our friend Stephen's interests unaffected. That is, of course, what poor Jeffrey Blackmore thought. But he was mistaken. The effect of the change is absolutely disastrous."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. As I have said, no alteration in the testator's circumstances had taken place at the time the new will was executed. *But* only two days before his death, his sister, Mrs. Edmund Wilson, died; and on her will being proved it appeared that she had bequeathed to him her entire personalty, estimated at about thirty thousand pounds."

"Heigho!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "What an unfortunate affair!"

"You are right," said Mr. Marchmont; "it was a disaster. By the original will this great sum would have accrued to our friend Mr. Stephen, whereas now, of course, it goes to the residuary legatee, Mr. John Blackmore. And what makes it even more exasperating is the fact that this is obviously not in accordance with the wishes and intentions of Mr. Jeffrey, who clearly desired his nephew to inherit his property."

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "I think you are justified in assuming that. But do you know whether Mr. Jeffrey was aware of his sister's intentions?"

"We think not. Her will was executed as recently as the third of September last, and it seems that there had been no communication between her and Mr. Jeffrey since that date. Besides, if you consider Mr. Jeffrey's actions, you will see that they suggest no knowledge or expectation of this very important bequest. A man does not make elaborate dispositions in regard to three thousand pounds and then leave a sum of thirty thousand to be disposed of casually as the residue of the estate."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "And, as you have said, the manifest intention of the testator was to leave the bulk of his property to Mr. Stephen. So we may take it as virtually certain that Mr. Jeffrey had no knowledge of the fact that he was a beneficiary under his sister's will."

"Yes," said Mr. Marchmont, "I think we may take that as nearly certain."

"With reference to the second will," said Thorndyke, "I suppose there is no need to ask whether the document itself has been examined; I mean as to its being a genuine document and perfectly regular?"

Mr. Marchmont shook his head sadly.

"No," he said, "I am sorry to say that there can be no possible doubt as to the authenticity and regularity of the document. The circumstances under which it was executed establish its genuineness beyond any question."

"What were those circumstances?" Thorndyke asked.

"They were these: On the morning of the twelfth of November last, Mr. Jeffrey came to the porter's lodge with a document in his hand. 'This,' he said, 'is my will. I want you to witness my signature. Would you mind doing so, and can you find another respectable person to act as the second witness?' Now it happened that a nephew of the porter's, a painter by trade, was at work in the Inn. The porter went out and fetched him into the lodge and the two men agreed to witness the signature. 'You had better read the will,' said Mr. Jeffrey. 'It is not actually necessary, but it is an additional safeguard and there is nothing of a private nature in the document.' The two men accordingly read the document, and, when Mr. Jeffrey had signed it in their presence, they affixed their signatures; and I may add that the painter left the recognizable impressions of three greasy fingers."

"And these witnesses have been examined?"

"Yes. They have both sworn to the document and to their own signatures, and the painter recognized his finger-marks."

"That," said Thorndyke, "seems to dispose pretty effectually of any question as to the genuineness of the will; and if, as I gather, Mr. Jeffrey came to the lodge alone, the question of undue influence is disposed of too."

"Yes," said Mr. Marchmont. "I think we must pass the will as absolutely flawless."

"It strikes me as rather odd," said Thorndyke, "that Jeffrey should have known so little about his sister's intentions. Can you explain it, Mr. Blackmore?"

"I don't think that it is very remarkable," Stephen replied. "I knew very little of my aunt's affairs and I don't think my uncle Jeffrey knew much more, for he was under the impression that she had only a life interest in her husband's property. And he may have been right. It is not clear what money this was that she left to my uncle. She was a very taciturn woman and made few confidences to anyone."

"So that it is possible," said Thorndyke, "that she, herself, may have acquired this money recently by some bequest?"

"It is quite possible," Stephen answered.

"She died, I understand," said Thorndyke, glancing at the notes that he had jotted down, "two days before Mr. Jeffrey."

What date would that be?"

"Jeffrey died on the fourteenth of March," said Marchmont.

"So that Mrs. Wilson died on the twelfth of March?"

"That is so," Marchmont replied; and Thorndyke then asked:

"Did she die suddenly?"

"No," replied Stephen; "she died of cancer. I understand that it was cancer of the stomach."

"Do you happen to know," Thorndyke asked, "what sort of relations existed between Jeffrey and his brother John?"

"At one time," said Stephen, "I know they were not very cordial; but the breach may have been made up later, though I don't know that it actually was."

"I ask the question," said Thorndyke, "because, as I dare say you have noticed, there is, in the first will, some hint of improved relations. As it was originally drawn that will makes Mr. Stephen the sole legatee. Then, a little later, a codicil is added in favour of John, showing that Jeffrey had felt the necessity of making some recognition of his brother. This seems to point to some change in the relations, and the question arises: if such a change did actually occur, was it the beginning of a new and further improving state of feeling between the two brothers? Have you any facts bearing on that question?"

Marchmont pursed up his lips with the air of a man considering an unwelcome suggestion, and, after a few moments of reflection, answered:

"I think we must say 'yes' to that. There is the undeniable fact that, of all Jeffrey's friends, John Blackmore was the only one who knew that he was living in New Inn."

"Oh, John knew that, did he?"

"Yes, he certainly did; for it came out in the evidence that he had called on Jeffrey at his chambers more than once. There is no denying that. But, mark you!" Mr. Marchmont added emphatically, "that does not cover the inconsistency of the will. There is nothing in the second will to suggest that Jeffrey intended materially to increase the bequest to his brother."

"I quite agree with you, Marchmont. I think that is a perfectly sound position. You have, I suppose, fully considered the question as to whether it would be possible to set aside the second will on the ground that it fails to carry out the evident wishes and intentions of the testator?"

"Yes. My partner, Winwood, and I went into that question very carefully, and we also took counsel's opinion—Sir Horace Barnaby—and he was of the same opinion as ourselves; that the court would certainly uphold the will."

"I think that would be my own view," said Thorndyke, "especially after what you have told me. Do I understand that John Blackmore was the only person who knew that Jeffrey was in residence at New Inn?"

"The only one of his private friends. His bankers knew and so did the officials from whom he drew his pension."

"Of course he would have to notify his bankers of his change of address."

"Yes, of course. And à propos of the bank, I may mention that the manager tells me that, of late, they had noticed a slight change in the character of Jeffrey's signature—I think you will see the reason of the change when you hear the rest of his story. It was very trifling; not more than commonly occurs when a man begins to grow old, especially if there is some failure of eyesight."

"Was Mr. Jeffrey's eyesight failing?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, it was, undoubtedly," said Stephen. "He was practically blind in one eye and, in the very last letter that I ever had from him, he mentioned that there were signs of commencing cataract in the other."

"You spoke of his pension. He continued to draw that regularly?"

"Yes; he drew his allowance every month, or rather, his bankers drew it for him. They had been accustomed to do so when he was abroad, and the authorities seem to have allowed the practice to continue."

Thorndyke reflected a while, running his eye over the notes on the slips of paper in his hand, and Marchmont surveyed him with a malicious smile. Presently the latter remarked:

"Methinks the learned counsel is floored."

Thorndyke laughed. "It seems to me," he retorted, "that your proceedings are rather like those of the amiable individual who offered the bear a flint pebble, that he might crack it and extract the kernel. Your confounded will seems to offer no soft spot on which one could commence an attack. But we won't give up. We seem to have sucked the will dry. Let us now have a few facts respecting the parties concerned in it; and, as Jeffrey is the central figure, let us begin with him and the tragedy at New Inn that formed the starting-point of all this trouble."

---

## VI. — JEFFREY BLACKMORE, DECEASED

HAVING made the above proposition, Thorndyke placed a fresh slip of paper on the blotting pad on his knee and looked inquiringly at Mr. Marchmont; who, in his turn, sighed and looked at the bundle of documents on the table.

"What do you want to know?" he asked a little wearily.

"Everything," replied Thorndyke. "You have hinted at circumstances that would account for a change in Jeffrey's habits and that would explain an alteration in the character of his signature. Let us have those circumstances. And, if I might venture on a suggestion, it would be that we take the events in the order in which they occurred or in which they became known."

"That's the worst of you, Thorndyke," Marchmont grumbled. "When a case has been squeezed out to the last drop, in a legal sense, you want to begin all over again with the family history of every one concerned and a list of his effects and household furniture. But I suppose you will have to be humoured; and I imagine that the best way in which to give you the information you want will be to recite the circumstances surrounding the death of Jeffrey Blackmore. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly," replied Thorndyke; and thereupon Marchmont began:

"The death of Jeffrey Blackmore was discovered at about eleven o'clock in the morning of the fifteenth of March. It seems that a builder's man was ascending a ladder to examine a gutter on number 31, New Inn, when, on passing a second-floor window that was open at the top, he looked in and perceived a gentleman lying on a bed. The gentleman was fully clothed and had apparently lain down on the bed to rest; at least so the builder thought at the time, for he was merely passing the window on his way up, and, very properly, did not make a minute examination. But when, some ten minutes later, he came down and saw that the gentleman was still in the same position, he looked at him more attentively; and this is what he noticed—but perhaps we had better have it in his own words as he told the story at the inquest.

"When I came to look at the gentleman a bit more closely, it struck me that he looked rather queer. His face looked very white, or rather pale yellow, like parchment, and his mouth was open. He did not seem to be breathing. On the bed by his side was a brass object of some kind—I could not make out what it was—and he seemed to be holding some small metal object in his hand. I thought it rather a queer affair, so, when I came down I went across to the lodge and told the porter about it. The porter came out across the square with me and I showed him the window. Then he told me to go up the stairs to Mr. Blackmore's chambers on the second pair and knock and keep on knocking until I got an answer. I went up and knocked and kept on knocking as loud as I could, but, though I fetched everybody out of all the other chambers in the house, I couldn't get any answer from Mr. Blackmore. So I went downstairs again and then Mr. Walker, the porter, sent me for a policeman.

"I went out and met a policeman just by Dane's Inn and told him about the affair, and he came back with me. He and the porter consulted together, and then they told me to go up the ladder and get in at the window and open the door of the chambers from the inside. So I went up; and as soon as I got in at the window I saw that the gentleman was dead. I went through the other room and opened the outer door and let in the porter and the policeman."

"That," said Mr. Marchmont, laying down the paper containing the depositions, "is the way in which poor Jeffrey Blackmore's death came to be discovered.

"The constable reported to his inspector and the inspector sent for the divisional surgeon, whom he accompanied to New Inn. I need not go into the evidence given by the police officers, as the surgeon saw all that they saw and his statement covers everything that is known about Jeffrey's death. This is what he says, after describing how he was sent for and arrived at the Inn:

"In the bedroom I found the body of a man between fifty and sixty years of age, which has since been identified in my presence as that of Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore. It was fully dressed and wore boots on which was a moderate amount of dry mud. It was lying on its back on the bed, which did not appear to have been slept in, and showed no sign of any struggle or disturbance. The right hand loosely grasped a hypodermic syringe containing a few drops of clear liquid which I have since analysed and found to be a concentrated solution of strophanthin.

"On the bed, close to the left side of the body, was a brass opium-pipe of a pattern which I believe is made in China. The bowl of the pipe contained a small quantity of charcoal, and a fragment of opium together with some ash, and there was on the bed a little ash which appeared to have dropped from the bowl when the pipe fell or was laid down. On the mantelshelf in the bedroom I found a small glass-stoppered jar containing about an ounce of solid opium, and another, larger jar containing wood charcoal broken up into small fragments. Also a bowl containing a quantity of ash with fragments of half-burned charcoal and a few minute particles of charred opium. By the side of the bowl were a knife, a kind of awl or pricker and a very small pair of tongs, which I believe to have been used for carrying a piece of lighted charcoal to the pipe.

"On the dressing-table were two glass tubes labelled "Hypodermic Tabloids: Strophanthin 1/500 grain," and a minute glass mortar and pestle, of which the former contained a few crystals which have since been analysed by me and found to be strophanthin.

"On examining the body, I found that it had been dead about twelve hours. There were no marks of violence or any abnormal condition excepting a single puncture in the right thigh, apparently made by the needle of the hypodermic syringe. The puncture was deep and vertical in direction as if the needle had been driven in through the clothing.

"I made a post-mortem examination of the body and found that death was due to poisoning by strophanthin, which appeared to have been injected into the thigh. The two tubes which I found on the dressing-table would each have

contained, if full, twenty tabloids, each tabloid representing one five-hundredth of a grain of strophanthin. Assuming that the whole of this quantity was injected the amount taken would be forty five-hundredths, or about one twelfth of a grain. The ordinary medicinal dose of strophanthin is one five-hundredth of a grain.

"I also found in the body appreciable traces of morphine—the principal alkaloid of opium—from which I infer that the deceased was a confirmed opium-smoker. This inference was supported by the general condition of the body, which was ill-nourished and emaciated and presented all the appearances usually met with in the bodies of persons addicted to the habitual use of opium."

"That is the evidence of the surgeon. He was recalled later, as we shall see, but, meanwhile, I think you will agree with me that the facts testified to by him fully account, not only for the change in Jeffrey's habits—his solitary and secretive mode of life—but also for the alteration in his handwriting."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke, "that seems to be so. By the way, what did the change in the handwriting amount to?"

"Very little," replied Marchmont. "It was hardly perceptible. Just a slight loss of firmness and distinctness; such a trifling change as you would expect to find in the handwriting of a man who had taken to drink or drugs, or anything that might impair the steadiness of his hand. I should not have noticed it, myself, but, of course, the people at the bank are experts, constantly scrutinizing signatures and scrutinizing them with a very critical eye."

"Is there any other evidence that bears on the case?" Thorndyke asked.

Marchmont turned over the bundle of papers and smiled grimly.

"My dear Thorndyke," he said, "none of this evidence has the slightest bearing on the case. It is all perfectly irrelevant as far as the will is concerned. But I know your little peculiarities and I am indulging you, as you see, to the top of your bent. The next evidence is that of the chief porter, a very worthy and intelligent man named Walker. This is what he says, after the usual preliminaries.

"I have viewed the body which forms the subject of this inquiry. It is that of Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore, the tenant of a set of chambers on the second floor of number thirty-one, New Inn. I have known the deceased nearly six months, and during that time have seen and conversed with him frequently. He took the chambers on the second of last October and came into residence at once. Tenants at New Inn have to furnish two references. The references that the deceased gave were his bankers and his brother, Mr. John Blackmore. I may say that the deceased was very well known to me. He was a quiet, pleasant-mannered gentleman, and it was his habit to drop in occasionally at the lodge and have a chat with me. I went into his chambers with him once or twice on some small matters of business and I noticed that there were always a number of books and papers on the table. I understood from him that he spent most of his time indoors engaged in study and writing. I know very little about his way of living. He had no laundress to look after his rooms, so I suppose he did his own house-work and cooking; but he told me that he took most of his meals outside, at restaurants or his club.

"Deceased impressed me as a rather melancholy, low-spirited gentleman. He was very much troubled about his eyesight and mentioned the matter to me on several occasions. He told me that he was practically blind in one eye and that the sight of the other was failing rapidly. He said that this afflicted him greatly, because his only pleasure in life was in the reading of books, and that if he could not read he should not wish to live. On another occasion he said that 'to a blind man life was not worth living.'"

"On the twelfth of last November he came to the lodge with a paper in his hand which he said was his will—But I needn't read that," said Marchmont, turning over the leaf, "I've told you how the will was signed and witnessed. We will pass on to the day of poor Jeffrey's death.

"On the fourteenth of March," the porter says, 'at about half-past six in the evening, the deceased came to the Inn in a four-wheeled cab. That was the day of the great fog. I do not know if there was anyone in the cab with the deceased, but I think not, because he came to the lodge just before eight o'clock and had a little talk with me. He said that he had been overtaken by the fog and could not see at all. He was quite blind and had been obliged to ask a stranger to call a cab for him as he could not find his way through the streets. He then gave me a cheque for the rent. I reminded him that the rent was not due until the twenty-fifth, but he said he wished to pay it now. He also gave me some money to pay one or two small bills that were owing to some of the tradespeople—a milk-man, a baker and a stationer.

"This struck me as very strange, because he had always managed his business and paid the tradespeople himself. He told me that the fog had irritated his eye so that he could hardly read, and he was afraid he should soon be quite blind. He was very depressed; so much so that I felt quite uneasy about him. When he left the lodge, he went back across the square as if returning to his chambers. There was then no gate open excepting the main gate where the lodge is situated. That was the last time that I saw the deceased alive."

Mr. Marchmont laid the paper on the table. "That is the porter's evidence. The remaining depositions are those of Noble, the night porter, John Blackmore and our friend here, Mr. Stephen. The night porter had not much to tell. This is the substance of his evidence:

"I have viewed the body of the deceased and identify it as that of Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore. I knew the deceased well by sight and occasionally had a few words with him. I know nothing of his habits excepting that he used to sit up rather late. It is one of my duties to go round the Inn at night and call out the hours until one o'clock in the morning. When calling out 'one o'clock' I often saw a light in the sitting-room of the deceased's chambers. On the night of the fourteenth instant, the

light was burning until past one o'clock, but it was in the bedroom. The light in the sitting-room was out by ten o'clock.'

"We now come to John Blackmore's evidence. He says:

"I have viewed the body of the deceased and recognize it as that of my brother Jeffrey. I last saw him alive on the twenty-third of February, when I called at his chambers. He then seemed in a very despondent state of mind and told me that his eyesight was fast failing. I was aware that he occasionally smoked opium, but I did not know that it was a confirmed habit. I urged him, on several occasions, to abandon the practice. I have no reason to believe that his affairs were in any way embarrassed or that he had any reason for making away with himself other than his failing eyesight; but, having regard to his state of mind when I last saw him, I am not surprised at what has happened.'

"That is the substance of John Blackmore's evidence, and, as to Mr. Stephen, his statement merely sets forth the fact that he had identified the body as that of his uncle Jeffrey. And now I think you have all the facts. Is there anything more that you want to ask me before I go, for I must really run away now?"

"I should like," said Thorndyke, "to know a little more about the parties concerned in this affair. But perhaps Mr. Stephen can give me the information."

"I expect he can," said Marchmont; "at any rate, he knows more about them than I do; so I will be off. If you should happen to think of any way," he continued, with a sly smile, "of upsetting that will, just let me know, and I will lose no time in entering a caveat. Good-bye! Don't trouble to let me out."

As soon as he was gone, Thorndyke turned to Stephen Blackmore.

"I am going," he said, "to ask you a few questions which may appear rather trifling, but you must remember that my methods of inquiry concern themselves with persons and things rather than with documents. For instance, I have not gathered very completely what sort of person your uncle Jeffrey was. Could you tell me a little more about him?"

"What shall I tell you?" Stephen asked with a slightly embarrassed air.

"Well, begin with his personal appearance."

"That is rather difficult to describe," said Stephen. "He was a medium-sized man and about five feet seven—fair, slightly grey, clean-shaved, rather spare and slight, had grey eyes, wore spectacles and stooped a little as he walked. He was quiet and gentle in manner, rather yielding and irresolute in character, and his health was not at all robust though he had no infirmity or disease excepting his bad eyesight. His age was about fifty-five."

"How came he to be a civil-service pensioner at fifty-five?" asked Thorndyke.

"Oh, that was through an accident. He had a nasty fall from a horse, and, being a rather nervous man, the shock was very severe. For some time after he was a complete wreck. But the failure of his eyesight was the actual cause of his retirement. It seems that the fall damaged his eyes in some way; in fact he practically lost the sight of one—the right—from that moment; and, as that had been his good eye, the accident left his vision very much impaired. So that he was at first given sick leave and then allowed to retire on a pension."

Thorndyke noted these particulars and then said:

"Your uncle has been more than once referred to as a man of studious habits. Does that mean that he pursued any particular branch of learning?"

"Yes. He was an enthusiastic Oriental scholar. His official duties had taken him at one time to Yokohama and Tokio and at another to Bagdad, and while at those places he gave a good deal of attention to the languages, literature and arts of the countries. He was also greatly interested in Babylonian and Assyrian archaeology, and I believe he assisted for some time in the excavations at Birs Nimroud."

"Indeed!" said Thorndyke. "This is very interesting. I had no idea that he was a man of such considerable attainments. The facts mentioned by Mr. Marchmont would hardly have led one to think of him as what he seems to have been: a scholar of some distinction."

"I don't know that Mr. Marchmont realized the fact himself," said Stephen; "or that he would have considered it of any moment if he had. Nor, as far as that goes, do I. But, of course, I have no experience of legal matters."

"You can never tell beforehand," said Thorndyke, "what facts may turn out to be of moment, so that it is best to collect all you can get. By the way, were you aware that your uncle was an opium-smoker?"

"No, I was not. I knew that he had an opium-pipe which he brought with him when he came home from Japan; but I thought it was only a curio. I remember him telling me that he once tried a few puffs at an opium-pipe and found it rather pleasant, though it gave him a headache. But I had no idea he had contracted the habit; in fact, I may say that I was utterly astonished when the fact came out at the inquest."

Thorndyke made a note of this answer, too, and said:

"I think that is all I have to ask you about your uncle Jeffrey. And now as to Mr. John Blackmore. What sort of man is he?"

"I am afraid I can't tell you very much about him. Until I saw him at the inquest, I had not met him since I was a boy. But he is a very different kind of man from Uncle Jeffrey; different in appearance and different in character."

"You would say that the two brothers were physically quite unlike, then?"

"Well," said Stephen, "I don't know that I ought to say that. Perhaps I am exaggerating the difference. I am thinking of Uncle Jeffrey as he was when I saw him last and of uncle John as he appeared at the inquest. They were very different then. Jeffrey was thin, pale, clean shaven, wore spectacles and walked with a stoop. John is a shade taller, a shade greyer, has good eyesight, a healthy, florid complexion, a brisk, upright carriage, is distinctly stout and wears a beard and moustache which are black and only very slightly streaked with grey. To me they looked as unlike as two men could, though their features were really of the same type; indeed, I have heard it said that, as young men, they were rather alike, and they both resembled their mother. But there is no doubt as to their difference in character. Jeffrey was quiet, serious and studious, whereas John rather inclined to what is called a fast life; he used to frequent race meetings, and, I think, gambled a good deal at times."

"What is his profession?"

"That would be difficult to tell; he has so many; he is so very versatile. I believe he began life as an articled pupil in the laboratory of a large brewery, but he soon left that and went on the stage. He seems to have remained in 'the profession' for some years, touring about this country and making occasional visits to America. The life seemed to suit him and I believe he was decidedly successful as an actor. But suddenly he left the stage and blossomed out in connection with a bucket-shop in London."

"And what is he doing now?"

"At the inquest he described himself as a stockbroker, so I presume he is still connected with the bucket-shop."

Thorndyke rose, and taking down from the reference shelves a list of members of the Stock Exchange, turned over the leaves.

"Yes," he said, replacing the volume, "he must be an outside broker. His name is not in the list of members of 'the House.' From what you tell me, it is easy to understand that there should have been no great intimacy between the two brothers, without assuming any kind of ill-feeling. They simply had very little in common. Do you know of anything more?"

"No. I have never heard of any actual quarrel or disagreement. My impression that they did not get on very well may have been, I think, due to the terms of the will, especially the first will. And they certainly did not seek one another's society."

"That is not very conclusive," said Thorndyke. "As to the will, a thrifty man is not usually much inclined to bequeath his savings to a gentleman who may probably employ them in a merry little flutter on the turf or the Stock Exchange. And then there was yourself; clearly a more suitable subject for a legacy, as your life is all before you. But this is mere speculation and the matter is not of much importance, as far as we can see. And now, tell me what John Blackmore's relations were with Mrs. Wilson. I gather that she left the bulk of her property to Jeffrey, her younger brother. Is that so?"

"Yes. She left nothing to John. The fact is that they were hardly on speaking terms. I believe John had treated her rather badly, or, at any rate, she thought he had. Mr. Wilson, her late husband, dropped some money over an investment in connection with the bucket-shop that I spoke of, and I think she suspected John of having let him in. She may have been mistaken, but you know what ladies are when they get an idea into their heads."

"Did you know your aunt well?"

"No; very slightly. She lived down in Devonshire and saw very little of any of us. She was a taciturn, strong-minded woman; quite unlike her brothers. She seems to have resembled her father's family."

"You might give me her full name."

"Julia Elizabeth Wilson. Her husband's name was Edmund Wilson."

"Thank you. There is just one more point. What has happened to your uncle's chambers in New Inn since his death?"

"They have remained shut up. As all his effects were left to me, I have taken over the tenancy for the present to avoid having them disturbed. I thought of keeping them for my own use, but I don't think I could live in them after what I have seen."

"You have inspected them, then?"

"Yes; I have just looked through them. I went there on the day of the inquest."

"Now tell me: as you looked through those rooms, what kind of impression did they convey to you as to your uncle's habits and mode of life?"

Stephen smiled apologetically. "I am afraid," said he, "that they did not convey any particular impression in that respect. I looked into the sitting-room and saw all his old familiar household gods, and then I went into the bedroom and saw the impression on the bed where his corpse had lain; and that gave me such a sensation of horror that I came away at once."

"But the appearance of the rooms must have conveyed something to your mind," Thorndyke urged.

"I am afraid it did not. You see, I have not your analytical eye. But perhaps you would like to look through them yourself? If you would, pray do so. They are my chambers now."

"I think I should like to glance round them," Thorndyke replied.

"Very well," said Stephen. "I will give you my card now, and I will look in at the lodge presently and tell the porter to hand you the key whenever you like to look over the rooms."

He took a card from his case, and, having written a few lines on it, handed it to Thorndyke.

"It is very good of you," he said, "to take so much trouble. Like Mr. Marchmont, I have no expectation of any result from your efforts, but I am very grateful to you, all the same, for going into the case so thoroughly. I suppose you don't see any possibility of upsetting that will—if I may ask the question?"

"At present," replied Thorndyke, "I do not. But until I have carefully weighed every fact connected with the case—whether it seems to have any bearing or not—I shall refrain from expressing, or even entertaining, an opinion either way."

Stephen Blackmore now took his leave; and Thorndyke, having collected the papers containing his notes, neatly punched a couple of holes in their margins and inserted them into a small file, which he slipped into his pocket.

"That," said he, "is the nucleus of the body of data on which our investigations must be based; and I very much fear that it will not receive any great additions. What do you think, Jervis?"

"The case looks about as hopeless as a case could look," I replied.

"That is what I think," said he; "and for that reason I am more than ordinarily keen on making something of it. I have not much more hope than Marchmont has; but I shall squeeze the case as dry as a bone before I let go. What are you going to do? I have to attend a meeting of the board of directors of the Griffin Life Office."

"Shall I walk down with you?"

"It is very good of you to offer, Jervis, but I think I will go alone. I want to run over these notes and get the facts of the case arranged in my mind. When I have done that, I shall be ready to pick up new matter. Knowledge is of no use unless it is actually in your mind, so that it can be produced at a moment's notice. So you had better get a book and your pipe and spend a quiet hour by the fire while I assimilate the miscellaneous mental feast that we have just enjoyed. And you might do a little rumination yourself."

With this, Thorndyke took his departure; and I, adopting his advice, drew my chair closer to the fire and filled my pipe. But I did not discover any inclination to read. The curious history that I had just heard, and Thorndyke's evident determination to elucidate it further, disposed me to meditation. Moreover, as his subordinate, it was my business to occupy myself with his affairs. Wherefore, having stirred the fire and got my pipe well alight, I abandoned myself to the renewed consideration of the facts relating to Jeffrey Blackmore's will.



## VII. — THE CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTION

THE surprise which Thorndyke's proceedings usually occasioned, especially to lawyers, was principally due, I think, to my friend's habit of viewing occurrences from an unusual standpoint. He did not look at things quite as other men looked at them. He had no prejudices and he knew no conventions. When other men were cocksure, Thorndyke was doubtful. When other men despaired, he entertained hopes; and thus it happened that he would often undertake cases that had been rejected contemptuously by experienced lawyers, and, what is more, would bring them to a successful issue.

Thus it had been in the only other case in which I had been personally associated with him—the so-called “Red Thumb Mark” case. There he was presented with an apparent impossibility; but he had given it careful consideration. Then, from the category of the impossible he had brought it to that of the possible; from the merely possible to the actually probable; from the probable to the certain; and in the end had won the case triumphantly.

Was it conceivable that he could make anything of the present case? He had not declined it. He had certainly entertained it and was probably thinking it over at this moment. Yet could anything be more impossible? Here was the case of a man making his own will, probably writing it out himself, bringing it voluntarily to a certain place and executing it in the presence of competent witnesses. There was no suggestion of any compulsion or even influence or persuasion. The testator was admittedly sane and responsible; and if the will did not give effect to his wishes—which, however, could not be proved—that was due to his own carelessness in drafting the will and not to any unusual circumstances. And the problem—which Thorndyke seemed to be considering—was how to set aside that will.

I reviewed the statements that I had heard, but turn them about as I would, I could get nothing out of them but confirmation of Mr. Marchmont's estimate of the case. One fact that I had noted with some curiosity I again considered; that was Thorndyke's evident desire to inspect Jeffrey Blackmore's chambers. He had, it is true, shown no eagerness, but I had seen at the time that the questions which he put to Stephen were put, not with any expectation of eliciting information but for the purpose of getting an opportunity to look over the rooms himself.

I was still cogitating on the subject when my colleague returned, followed by the watchful Polton with the tea-tray, and I attacked him forthwith.

“Well, Thorndyke,” I said, “I have been thinking about this Blackmore case while you have been gadding about.”

“And may I take it that the problem is solved?”

“No, I'm hanged if you may. I can make nothing of it.”

“Then you are in much the same position as I am.”

“But, if you can make nothing of it, why did you undertake it?”

“I only undertook to think about it,” said Thorndyke. “I never reject a case off-hand unless it is obviously fishy. It is surprising how difficulties, and even impossibilities, dwindle if you look at them attentively. My experience has taught me that the most unlikely case is, at least, worth thinking over.”

“By the way, why do you want to look over Jeffrey's chambers? What do you expect to find there?”

“I have no expectations at all. I am simply looking for stray facts.”

“And all those questions that you asked Stephen Blackmore; had you nothing in your mind—no definite purpose?”

“No purpose beyond getting to know as much about the case as I can.”

“But,” I exclaimed, “do you mean that you are going to examine those rooms without any definite object at all?”

“I wouldn't say that,” replied Thorndyke. “This is a legal case. Let me put an analogous medical case as being more within your present sphere. Supposing that a man should consult you, say, about a progressive loss of weight. He can give no explanation. He has no pain, no discomfort, no symptoms of any kind; in short, he feels perfectly well in every respect; *but* he is losing weight continuously. What would you do?”

“I should overhaul him thoroughly,” I answered.

“Why? What would you expect to find?”

“I don't know that I should start by expecting to find anything in particular. But I should overhaul him organ by organ and function by function, and if I could find nothing abnormal I should have to give it up.”

“Exactly,” said Thorndyke. “And that is just my position and my line of action. Here is a case which is perfectly regular and straightforward excepting in one respect. It has a single abnormal feature. And for that abnormality there is nothing to account.

“Jeffrey Blackmore made a will. It was a well-drawn will and it apparently gave full effect to his intentions. Then he revoked that will and made another. No change had occurred in his circumstances or in his intentions. The provisions of the new will were believed by him to be identical with those of the old one. The new will differed from the old one only in having a defect in the drafting from which the first will was free, and of which he must have been unaware. Now why did he revoke the first will and replace it with another which he believed to be identical in its provisions? There is no answer to



that question. It is an abnormal feature in the case. There must be some explanation of that abnormality and it is my business to discover it. But the facts in my possession yield no such explanation. Therefore it is my purpose to search for new facts which may give me a starting-point for an investigation."

This exposition of Thorndyke's proposed conduct of the case, reasonable as it was, did not impress me as very convincing. I found myself coming back to Marchmont's position, that there was really nothing in dispute. But other matters claimed our attention at the moment, and it was not until after dinner that my colleague reverted to the subject.

"How should you like to take a turn round to New Inn this evening?" he asked.

"I should have thought," said I, "that it would be better to go by daylight. Those old chambers are not usually very well illuminated."

"That is well thought of," said Thorndyke. "We had better take a lamp with us. Let us go up to the laboratory and get one from Polton."

"There is no need to do that," said I. "The pocket-lamp that you lent me is in my overcoat pocket. I put it there to return it to you."

"Did you have occasion to use it?" he asked.

"Yes. I paid another visit to the mysterious house and carried out your plan. I must tell you about it later."

"Do. I shall be keenly interested to hear all about your adventures. Is there plenty of candle left in the lamp?"

"Oh yes. I only used it for about an hour."

"Then let us be off," said Thorndyke; and we accordingly set forth on our quest; and, as we went, I reflected once more on the apparent vagueness of our proceedings. Presently I reopened the subject with Thorndyke.

"I can't imagine," said I, "that you have absolutely nothing in view. That you are going to this place with no defined purpose whatever."

"I did not say exactly that," replied Thorndyke. "I said that I was not going to look for any particular thing or fact. I am going in the hope that I may observe something that may start a new train of speculation. But that is not all. You know that an investigation follows a certain logical course. It begins with the observation of the conspicuous facts. We have done that. The facts were supplied by Marchmont. The next stage is to propose to oneself one or more provisional explanations or hypotheses. We have done that, too—or, at least I have, and I suppose you have."

"I haven't," said I. "There is Jeffrey's will, but why he should have made the change I cannot form the foggiest idea. But I should like to hear your provisional theories on the subject."

"You won't hear them at present. They are mere wild conjectures. But to resume: what do we do next?"

"Go to New Inn and rake over the deceased gentleman's apartments."

Thorndyke smilingly ignored my answer and continued—

"We examine each explanation in turn and see what follows from it; whether it agrees with all the facts and leads to the discovery of new ones, or, on the other hand, disagrees with some facts or leads us to an absurdity. Let us take a simple example.

"Suppose we find scattered over a field a number of largish masses of stone, which are entirely different in character from the rocks found in the neighbourhood. The question arises, how did those stones get into that field? Three explanations are proposed. One: that they are the products of former volcanic action; two: that they were brought from a distance by human agency; three: that they were carried thither from some distant country by icebergs. Now each of those explanations involves certain consequences. If the stones are volcanic, then they were once in a state of fusion. But we find that they are unaltered limestone and contain fossils. Then they are not volcanic. If they were borne by icebergs, then they were once part of a glacier and some of them will probably show the flat surfaces with parallel scratches which are found on glacier-borne stones. We examine them and find the characteristic scratched surfaces. Then they have probably been brought to this place by icebergs. But this does not exclude human agency, for they might have been brought by men to this place from some other where the icebergs had deposited them. A further comparison with other facts would be needed.

"So we proceed in cases like this present one. Of the facts that are known to us we invent certain explanations. From each of those explanations we deduce consequences; and if those consequences agree with new facts, they confirm the explanation, whereas if they disagree they tend to disprove it. But here we are at our destination."

We turned out of Wych Street into the arched passage leading into New Inn, and, halting at the half-door of the lodge, perceived a stout, purple-faced man crouching over the fire, coughing violently. He held up his hand to intimate that he was fully occupied for the moment, and we accordingly waited for his paroxysm to subside. At length he turned towards us, wiping his eyes, and inquired our business.

"Mr. Stephen Blackmore," said Thorndyke, "has given me permission to look over his chambers. He said that he would mention the matter to you."

"So he has, sir," said the porter; "but he has just taken the key himself to go to the chambers. If you walk across the Inn you'll find him there; it's on the farther side; number thirty-one, second floor."

We made our way across to the house indicated, the ground floor of which was occupied by a solicitor's offices and was distinguished by a good-sized brass plate. Although it had now been dark some time there was no light on the lower stairs, but we encountered on the first-floor landing a man who had just lit the lamp there. Thorndyke halted to address him.

"Can you tell me who occupies the chambers on the third floor?"

"The third floor has been empty about three months," was the reply.

"We are going up to look at the chambers on the second floor," said Thorndyke. "Are they pretty quiet?"

"Quiet!" exclaimed the man. "Lord bless you the place is like a cemetery for the deaf and dumb. There's the solicitors on the ground floor and the architects on the first floor. They both clear out about six, and when they're gone the house is as empty as a blown hegg. I don't wonder poor Mr. Blackmore made away with his-self. Livin' up there all alone, it must have been like Robinson Crusoe without no man Friday and not even a blooming goat to talk to. Quiet! It's quiet enough, if that's what you want. Wouldn't be no good to *me*."

With a contemptuous shake of the head, he turned and retired down the next flight, and, as the echoes of his footsteps died away we resumed our ascent.

"So it would appear," Thorndyke commented, "that when Jeffrey Blackmore came home that last evening, the house was empty."

Arrived on the second-floor landing, we were confronted by a solid-looking door on the lintel of which the deceased man's name was painted in white lettering which still looked new and fresh. Thorndyke knocked at the door, which was at once opened by Stephen Blackmore.

"I haven't wasted any time before taking advantage of your permission, you see," my colleague said as we entered.

"No, indeed," said Stephen; "you are very prompt. I have been rather wondering what kind of information you expect to gather from an inspection of these rooms."

Thorndyke smiled genially, amused, no doubt, by the similarity of Stephen's remarks to those of mine which he had so recently criticized.

"A man of science, Mr. Blackmore," he said, "expects nothing. He collects facts and keeps an open mind. As to me, I am a mere legal Autolycus, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles of evidence. When I have accumulated a few facts, I arrange them, compare them and think about them. Sometimes the comparison yields new matter and sometimes it doesn't; but in any case, believe me, it is a capital error to decide beforehand what data are to be sought for."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," said Stephen; "though, to me, it almost looks as if Mr. Marchmont was right; that there is nothing to investigate."

"You should have thought of that before you consulted me," laughed Thorndyke. "As it is, I am engaged to look into the case and I shall do so; and, as I have said, I shall keep an open mind until I have all the facts in my possession."

He glanced round the sitting-room, which we had now entered, and continued:

"These are fine, dignified old rooms. It seems a sin to have covered up all this oak panelling and that carved cornice and mantel with paint. Think what it must have been like when the beautiful figured wood was exposed."

"It would be very dark," Stephen observed.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "and I suppose we care more for light and less for beauty than our ancestors did. But now, tell me; looking round these rooms, do they convey to you a similar impression to that which the old rooms did? Have they the same general character?"

"Not quite, I think. Of course the rooms in Jermyn Street were in a different kind of house, but beyond that, I seem to feel a certain difference; which is rather odd, seeing that the furniture is the same. But the old rooms were more cosy, more homelike. I find something rather bare and cheerless, I was almost going to say squalid, in the look of these chambers."

"That is rather what I should have expected," said Thorndyke. "The opium habit alters a man's character profoundly; and, somehow, apart from the mere furnishing, a room reflects in some subtle way, but very distinctly, the personality of its occupant, especially when that occupant lives a solitary life. Do you see any evidences of the activities that used to occupy your uncle?"

"Not very much," replied Stephen. "But the place may not be quite as he left it. I found one or two of his books on the table and put them back in the shelves, but I found no manuscript or notes such as he used to make. I noticed, too, that his ink-slab which he used to keep so scrupulously clean is covered with dry smears and that the stick of ink is all cracked at the end, as if he had not used it for months. It seems to point to a great change in his habits."

"What used he to do with Chinese ink?" Thorndyke asked.

"He corresponded with some of his native friends in Japan, and he used to write in the Japanese character even if they understood English. That was what he chiefly used the Chinese ink for. But he also used to copy the inscriptions from these things." Here Stephen lifted from the mantelpiece what looked like a fossil Bath bun, but was actually a clay tablet covered with minute indented writing.

"Your uncle could read the cuneiform character, then?"

"Yes; he was something of an expert. These tablets are, I believe, leases and other legal documents from Eridu and other Babylonian cities. He used to copy the inscriptions in the cuneiform writing and then translate them into English. But I mustn't stay here any longer as I have an engagement for this evening. I just dropped in to get these two volumes—*Thornton's History of Babylonia*, which he once advised me to read. Shall I give you the key? You'd better have it and leave it with the porter as you go out."

He shook hands with us and we walked out with him to the landing and stood watching him as he ran down the stairs. Glancing at Thorndyke by the light of the gas lamp on the landing, I thought I detected in his impassive face that almost imperceptible change of expression to which I have already alluded as indicating pleasure or satisfaction.

"You are looking quite pleased with yourself," I remarked.

"I am not displeased," he replied calmly. "Autolycus has picked up a few crumbs; very small ones, but still crumbs. No doubt his learned junior has picked up a few likewise?"

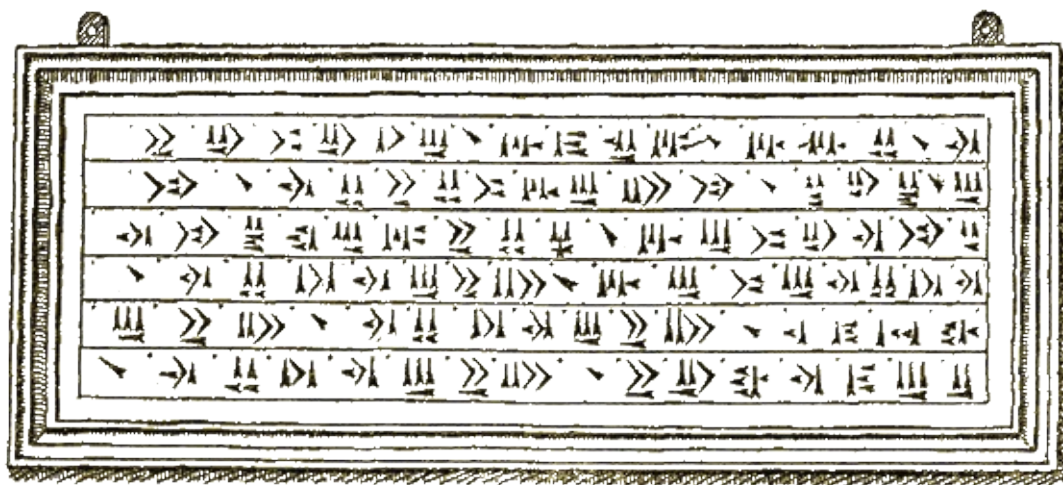
I shook my head—and inwardly suspected it of being rather a thick head.

"I did not perceive anything in the least degree significant in what Stephen was telling you," said I. "It was all very interesting, but it did not seem to have any bearing on his uncle's will."

"I was not referring only to what Stephen has told us, although that was, as you say, very interesting. While he was talking I was looking about the room, and I have seen a very strange thing. Let me show it to you."

He linked his arm in mine and, walking me back into the room, halted opposite the fire-place.

"There," said he, "look at that. It is a most remarkable object."



*The Inverted Inscription.*

I followed the direction of his gaze and saw an oblong frame enclosing a large photograph of an inscription in the weird and cabalistic arrow-head character. I looked at it in silence for some seconds and then, somewhat disappointed, remarked:

"I don't see anything very remarkable in it, under the circumstances. In any ordinary room it would be, I admit; but Stephen has just told us that his uncle was something of an expert in cuneiform writing."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "That is my point. That is what makes it so remarkable."

"I don't follow you at all," said I. "That a man should hang upon his wall an inscription that is legible to him does not seem to me at all out of the way. It would be much more singular if he should hang up an inscription that he could *not* read."

"No doubt," replied Thorndyke. "But you will agree with me that it would be still more singular if a man should hang upon his wall an inscription that he *could* read—and hang it upside down."

I stared at Thorndyke in amazement.

"Do you mean to tell me," I exclaimed, "that that photograph is really upside down?"

"I do indeed," he replied.

"But how do you know? Have we here yet another Oriental scholar?"

Thorndyke chuckled. "Some fool," he replied, "has said that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.' Compared with

much knowledge, it may be; but it is a vast deal better than no knowledge. Here is a case in point. I have read with very keen interest the wonderful history of the decipherment of the cuneiform writing, and I happen to recollect one or two of the main facts that seemed to me to be worth remembering. This particular inscription is in the Persian cuneiform, a much more simple and open form of the script than the Babylonian or Assyrian; in fact, I suspect that this is the famous inscription from the gateway at Persepolis—the first to be deciphered; which would account for its presence here in a frame. Now this script consists, as you see, of two kinds of characters; the small, solid, acutely pointed characters which are known as wedges, and the larger, more obtuse characters, somewhat like our government broad arrows, and called arrow-heads. The names are rather unfortunate, as both forms are wedge-like and both resemble arrow-heads. The script reads from left to right, like our own writing, and unlike that of the Semitic peoples and the primitive Greeks; and the rule for the placing of the characters is that all the ‘wedges’ point to the right or downwards and the arrow-head forms are open towards the right. But if you look at this photograph you will see that all the wedges point upwards to the left and that the arrow-head characters are open towards the left. Obviously the photograph is upside down.”

“But,” I exclaimed, “this is really most mysterious. What do you suppose can be the explanation?”

“I think,” replied Thorndyke, “that we may perhaps get a suggestion from the back of the frame. Let us see.”

He disengaged the frame from the two nails on which it hung, and, turning it round, glanced at the back; which he then presented for my inspection. A label on the backing paper bore the words, “J. Budge, Frame-maker and Gilder, 16, Gt. Anne Street, W.C.”

“Well?” I said, when I had read the label without gathering from it anything fresh.

“The label, you observe, is the right way up as it hangs on the wall.”

“So it is,” I rejoined hastily, a little annoyed that I had not been quicker to observe so obvious a fact. “I see your point. You mean that the frame-maker hung the thing upside down and Jeffrey never noticed the mistake?”

“That is a perfectly sound explanation,” said Thorndyke. “But I think there is something more. You will notice that the label is an old one; it must have been on some years, to judge by its dingy appearance, whereas the two mirror-plates look to me comparatively new. But we can soon put that matter to the test, for the label was evidently stuck on when the frame was new, and if the plates were screwed on at the same time, the wood that they cover will be clean and new-looking.”

He drew from his pocket a “combination” knife containing, among other implements, a screw-driver, with which he carefully extracted the screws from one of the little brass plates by which the frame had been suspended from the nails.

“You see,” he said, when he had removed the plate and carried the photograph over to the gasjet, “the wood covered by the plate is as dirty and time-stained as the rest of the frame. The plates have been put on recently.”

“And what are we to infer from that?”

“Well, since there are no other marks of plates or rings upon the frame, we may safely infer that the photograph was never hung up until it came to these rooms.”

“Yes, I suppose we may. But what then? What inference does that lead to?”

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments and I continued:

“It is evident that this photograph suggests more to you than it does to me. I should like to hear your exposition of its bearing on the case, if it has any.”

“Whether or no it has any real bearing on the case,” Thorndyke answered, “it is impossible for me to say at this stage. I told you that I had proposed to myself one or two hypotheses to account for and explain Jeffrey Blackmore’s will, and I may say that the curious misplacement of this photograph fits more than one of them. I won’t say more than that, because I think it would be profitable to you to work at this case independently. You have all the facts that I have and you shall have a copy of my notes of Marchmont’s statement of the case. With this material you ought to be able to reach some conclusion. Of course neither of us may be able to make anything of the case—it doesn’t look very hopeful at present—but whatever happens, we can compare notes after the event and you will be the richer by so much experience of actual investigation. But I will start you off with one hint, which is this: that neither you nor Marchmont seem to appreciate in the least the very extraordinary nature of the facts that he communicated to us.”

“I thought Marchmont seemed pretty much alive to the fact that it was a very queer will.”

“So he did,” agreed Thorndyke. “But that is not quite what I mean. The whole set of circumstances, taken together and in relation to one another, impressed me as most remarkable; and that is why I am giving so much attention to what looks at first sight like such a very unpromising case. Copy out my notes, Jervis, and examine the facts critically. I think you will see what I mean. And now let us proceed.”

He replaced the brass plate and having reinserted the screws, hung up the frame, and proceeded to browse slowly round the room, stopping now and again to inspect the Japanese colour-prints and framed photographs of buildings and other objects of archaeological interest that formed the only attempts at wall-decoration. To one of the former he drew my attention.

“These things are of some value,” he remarked. “Here is one by Utamaro—that little circle with the mark over it is his signature—and you notice that the paper is becoming spotted in places with mildew. The fact is worth noting in more than

one connection.”

I accordingly made a mental note and the perambulation continued.

“You observe that Jeffrey used a gas-stove, instead of a coal fire, no doubt to economize work, but perhaps for other reasons. Presumably he cooked by gas, too; let us see.”

We wandered into the little cupboard-like kitchen and glanced round. A ring-burner on a shelf, a kettle, a frying-pan and a few pieces of crockery were its sole appointments. Apparently the porter was correct in his statement as to Jeffrey’s habits.

Returning to the sitting-room, Thorndyke resumed his inspection, pulling out the table drawers, peering inquisitively into cupboards and bestowing a passing glance on each of the comparatively few objects that the comfortless room contained.

“I have never seen a more characterless apartment,” was his final comment. “There is nothing that seems to suggest any kind of habitual activity on the part of the occupant. Let us look at the bedroom.”

We passed through into the chamber of tragic memories, and, when Thorndyke had lit the gas, we stood awhile looking about us in silence. It was a bare, comfortless room, dirty, neglected and squalid. The bed appeared not to have been remade since the catastrophe, for an indentation still marked the place where the corpse had lain, and even a slight powdering of ash could still be seen on the shabby counterpane. It looked to me a typical opium-smoker’s bedroom.

“Well,” Thorndyke remarked at length, “there is character enough here—of a kind. Jeffrey Blackmore would seem to have been a man of few needs. One could hardly imagine a bedroom in which less attention seemed to have been given to the comfort of the occupant.”

He looked about him keenly and continued: “The syringe and the rest of the lethal appliances and material have been taken away, I see. Probably the analyst did not return them. But there are the opium-pipe and the jar and the ash-bowl, and I presume those are the clothes that the undertakers removed from the body. Shall we look them over?”

He took up the clothes which lay, roughly folded, on a chair and held them up, garment by garment.

“These are evidently the trousers,” he remarked, spreading them out on the bed. “Here is a little white spot on the middle of the thigh which looks like a patch of small crystals from a drop of the solution. Just light the lamp, Jervis, and let us examine it with a lens.”

I lit the lamp, and when we had examined the spot minutely and identified it as a mass of minute crystals, Thorndyke asked:

“What do you make of those creases? You see there is one on each leg.”

“It looks as if the trousers had been turned up. But if they have been they must have been turned up about seven inches. Poor Jeffrey couldn’t have had much regard for appearances, for they would have been right above his socks. But perhaps the creases were made in undressing the body.”

“That is possible,” said Thorndyke: “though I don’t quite see how it would have happened. I notice that his pockets seem to have been emptied—no, wait; here is something in the waistcoat pocket.”

He drew out a shabby, pigskin card-case and a stump of lead pencil, at which latter he looked with what seemed to me much more interest than was deserved by so commonplace an object.

“The cards, you observe,” said he, “are printed from type, not from a plate. I would note that fact. And tell me what you make of that.”

He handed me the pencil, which I examined with concentrated attention, helping myself even with the lamp and my pocket lens. But even with these aids I failed to discover anything unusual in its appearance. Thorndyke watched me with a mischievous smile, and, when I had finished, inquired:

“Well; what is it?”

“Confound you!” I exclaimed. “It’s a pencil. Any fool can see that, and this particular fool can’t see any more. It’s a wretched stump of a pencil, villainously cut to an abominably bad point. It is coloured dark red on the outside and was stamped with some name that began with C—O—Co-operative Stores, perhaps.”

“Now, my dear Jervis,” Thorndyke protested, “don’t begin by confusing speculation with fact. The letters which remain are C—O. Note that fact and find out what pencils there are which have inscriptions beginning with those letters. I am not going to help you, because you can easily do this for yourself. And it will be good discipline even if the fact turns out to mean nothing.”

At this moment he stepped back suddenly, and, looking down at the floor, said:

“Give me the lamp, Jervis, I’ve trodden on something that felt like glass.”

I brought the lamp to the place where he had been standing, close by the bed, and we both knelt on the floor, throwing the light of the lamp on the bare and dusty boards. Under the bed, just within reach of the foot of a person standing close by, was a little patch of fragments of glass. Thorndyke produced a piece of paper from his pocket and delicately swept the

little fragments on to it, remarking:

"By the look of things, I am not the first person who has trodden on that object, whatever it is. Do you mind holding the lamp while I inspect the remains?"

I took the lamp and held it over the paper while he examined the little heap of glass through his lens.

"Well," I asked. "What have you found?"

"That is what I am asking myself," he replied. "As far as I can judge by the appearance of these fragments, they appear to be portions of a small watch-glass. I wish there were some larger pieces."

"Perhaps there are," said I. "Let us look about the floor under the bed."

We resumed our groping about the dirty floor, throwing the light of the lamp on one spot after another. Presently, as we moved the lamp about, its light fell on a small glass bead, which I instantly picked up and exhibited to Thorndyke.

"Is this of any interest to you?" I asked.

Thorndyke took the bead and examined it curiously.

"It is certainly," he said, "a very odd thing to find in the bedroom of an old bachelor like Jeffrey, especially as we know that he employed no woman to look after his rooms. Of course, it may be a relic of the last tenant. Let us see if there are any more."

We renewed our search, crawling under the bed and throwing the light of the lamp in all directions over the floor. The result was the discovery of three more beads, one entire bugle and the crushed remains of another, which had apparently been trodden on. All of these, including the fragments of the bugle that had been crushed, Thorndyke placed carefully on the paper, which he laid on the dressing-table the more conveniently to examine our find.

"I am sorry," said he, "that there are no more fragments of the watch-glass, or whatever it was. The broken pieces were evidently picked up, with the exception of the one that I trod on, which was an isolated fragment that had been overlooked. As to the beads, judging by their number and the position in which we found some of them—that crushed bugle, for instance—they must have been dropped during Jeffrey's tenancy and probably quite recently."

"What sort of garment do you suppose they came from?" I asked.

"They may have been part of a beaded veil or the trimming of a dress, but the grouping rather suggests to me a tag of bead fringe. The colour is rather unusual."

"I thought they looked like black beads."

"So they do by this light, but I think that by daylight we shall find them to be a dark, reddish-brown. You can see the colour now if you look at the smaller fragments of the one that is crushed."

He handed me his lens, and, when I had verified his statement, he produced from his pocket a small tin box with a closely-fitting lid in which he deposited the paper, having first folded it up into a small parcel.

"We will put the pencil in too," said he; and, as he returned the box to his pocket he added: "you had better get one of these little boxes from Polton. It is often useful to have a safe receptacle for small and fragile articles."

He folded up and replaced the dead man's clothes as we had found them. Then, observing a pair of shoes standing by the wall, he picked them up and looked them over thoughtfully, paying special attention to the backs of the soles and the fronts of the heels.

"I suppose we may take it," said he, "that these are the shoes that poor Jeffrey wore on the night of his death. At any rate there seem to be no others. He seems to have been a fairly clean walker. The streets were shockingly dirty that day, as I remember most distinctly. Do you see any slippers? I haven't noticed any."

He opened and peeped into a cupboard in which an overcoat surmounted by a felt hat hung from a peg like an attenuated suicide; he looked in all the corners and into the sitting-room, but no slippers were to be seen.

"Our friend seems to have had surprisingly little regard for comfort," Thorndyke remarked. "Think of spending the winter evenings in damp boots by a gas fire!"

"Perhaps the opium-pipe compensated," said I; "or he may have gone to bed early."

"But he did not. The night porter used to see the light in his rooms at one o'clock in the morning. In the sitting-room, too, you remember. But he seems to have been in the habit of reading in bed—or perhaps smoking—for here is a candlestick with the remains of a whole dynasty of candles in it. As there is gas in the room, he couldn't have wanted the candle to undress by. He used stearine candles, too; not the common paraffin variety. I wonder why he went to that expense."

"Perhaps the smell of the paraffin candle spoiled the aroma of the opium," I suggested; to which Thorndyke made no reply but continued his inspection of the room, pulling out the drawer of the washstand—which contained a single, worn-out nail-brush—and even picking up and examining the dry and cracked cake of soap in the dish.

"He seems to have had a fair amount of clothing," said Thorndyke, who was now going through the chest of drawers,

“though, by the look of it, he didn’t change very often, and the shirts have a rather yellow and faded appearance. I wonder how he managed about his washing. Why, here are a couple of pairs of boots in the drawer with his clothes! And here is his stock of candles. Quite a large box—though nearly empty now—of stearine candles, six to the pound.”

He closed the drawer and cast another inquiring look round the room.

“I think we have seen all now, Jervis,” he said, “unless there is anything more that you would like to look into?”

“No,” I replied. “I have seen all that I wanted to see and more than I am able to attach any meaning to. So we may as well go.”

I blew out the lamp and put it in my overcoat pocket, and, when we had turned out the gas in both rooms, we took our departure.

As we approached the lodge, we found our stout friend in the act of retiring in favour of the night porter. Thorndyke handed him the key of the chambers, and, after a few sympathetic inquiries, about his health—which was obviously very indifferent—said:

“Let me see; you were one of the witnesses to Mr. Blackmore’s will, I think?”

“I was, sir,” replied the porter.

“And I believe you read the document through before you witnessed the signature?”

“I did, sir.”

“Did you read it aloud?”

“Aloud, sir! Lor’ bless you, no, sir! Why should I? The other witness read it, and, of course, Mr. Blackmore knew what was in it, seeing that it was in his own handwriting. What should I want to read it aloud for?”

“No, of course you wouldn’t want to. By the way, I have been wondering how Mr. Blackmore managed about his washing.”

The porter evidently regarded this question with some disfavour, for he replied only with an interrogative grunt. It was, in fact, rather an odd question.

“Did you get it done for him,” Thorndyke pursued.

“No, certainly not, sir. He got it done for himself. The laundry people used to deliver the basket here at the lodge, and Mr. Blackmore used to take it in with him when he happened to be passing.”

“It was not delivered at his chambers, then?”

“No, sir. Mr. Blackmore was a very studious gentleman and he didn’t like to be disturbed. A studious gentleman would naturally not like to be disturbed.”

Thorndyke cordially agreed with these very proper sentiments and finally wished the porter “good night.” We passed out through the gateway into Wych Street, and, turning our faces eastward towards the Temple, set forth in silence, each thinking his own thoughts. What Thorndyke’s were I cannot tell, though I have no doubt that he was busily engaged in piecing together all that he had seen and heard and considering its possible application to the case in hand.

As to me, my mind was in a whirl of confusion. All this searching and examining seemed to be the mere flogging of a dead horse. The will was obviously a perfectly valid and regular will and there was an end of the matter. At least, so it seemed to me. But clearly that was not Thorndyke’s view. His investigations were certainly not purposeless; and, as I walked by his side trying to conceive some purpose in his actions, I only became more and more mystified as I recalled them one by one, and perhaps most of all by the cryptic questions that I had just heard him address to the equally mystified porter.

---

## VIII. — THE TRACK CHART

AS Thorndyke and I arrived at the main gateway of the Temple and he swung round into the narrow lane, it was suddenly borne in on me that I had made no arrangements for the night. Events had followed one another so continuously and each had been so engrossing that I had lost sight of what I may call my domestic affairs.

“We seem to be heading for your chambers, Thorndyke,” I ventured to remark. “It is a little late to think of it, but I have not yet settled where I am to put up to-night.”

“My dear fellow,” he replied, “you are going to put up in your own bedroom which has been waiting in readiness for you ever since you left it. Polton went up and inspected it as soon as you arrived. I take it that you will consider my chambers yours until such time as you may join the benedictine majority and set up a home for yourself.”

“That is very handsome of you,” said I. “You didn’t mention that the billet you offered was a resident appointment.”

“Rooms and commons included,” said Thorndyke; and when I protested that I should at least contribute to the costs of living he impatiently waved the suggestion away. We were still arguing the question when we reached our chambers—as I

will now call them—and a diversion was occasioned by my taking the lamp from my pocket and placing it on the table.

“Ah,” my colleague remarked, “that is a little reminder. We will put it on the mantelpiece for Polton to collect and you shall give me a full account of your further adventures in the wilds of Kennington. That was a very odd affair. I have often wondered how it ended.”

He drew our two arm-chairs up to the fire, put on some more coal, placed the tobacco jar on the table exactly equidistant from the two chairs, and settled himself with the air of a man who is anticipating an agreeable entertainment.

I filled my pipe, and, taking up the thread of the story where I had broken off on the last occasion, began to outline my later experiences. But he brought me up short.

“Don’t be sketchy, Jervis. To be sketchy is to be vague. Detail, my child, detail is the soul of induction. Let us have all the facts. We can sort them out afterwards.”

I began afresh in a vein of the extremest circumstantiality. With deliberate malice I loaded a prolix narrative with every triviality that a fairly retentive memory could rake out of the half-forgotten past. I cudgelled my brains for irrelevant incidents. I described with the minutest accuracy things that had not the faintest significance. I drew a vivid picture of the carriage inside and out; I painted a lifelike portrait of the horse, even going into particulars of the harness—which I was surprised to find that I had noticed. I described the furniture of the dining-room and the cobwebs that had hung from the ceiling; the auction-ticket on the chest of drawers, the rickety table and the melancholy chairs. I gave the number per minute of the patient’s respirations and the exact quantity of coffee consumed on each occasion, with an exhaustive description of the cup from which it was taken; and I left no personal details unconsidered, from the patient’s finger-nails to the roseate pimples on Mr. Weiss’s nose.

But my tactics of studied prolixity were a complete failure. The attempt to fatigue Thorndyke’s brain with superabundant detail was like trying to surfeit a pelican with whitebait. He consumed it all with calm enjoyment and asked for more; and when, at last, I did really begin to think that I had bored him a little, he staggered me by reading over his notes and starting a brisk cross-examination to elicit fresh facts! And the most surprising thing of all was that when I had finished I seemed to know a great deal more about the case than I had ever known before.

“It was a very remarkable affair,” he observed, when the cross-examination was over—leaving me somewhat in the condition of a cider-apple that has just been removed from a hydraulic press—“a very suspicious affair with a highly unsatisfactory end. I am not sure that I entirely agree with your police officer. Nor do I fancy that some of my acquaintances at Scotland Yard would have agreed with him.”

“Do you think I ought to have taken any further measures?” I asked uneasily.

“No; I don’t see how you could. You did all that was possible under the circumstances. You gave information, which is all that a private individual can do, especially if he is an overworked general practitioner. But still, an actual crime is the affair of every good citizen. I think we ought to take some action.”

“You think there really was a crime, then?”

“What else can one think? What do you think about it yourself?”

“I don’t like to think about it at all. The recollection of that corpse-like figure in that gloomy bedroom has haunted me ever since I left the house. What do you suppose has happened?”

Thorndyke did not answer for a few seconds. At length he said gravely:

“I am afraid, Jervis, that the answer to that question can be given in one word.”

“Murder?” I asked with a slight shudder.

He nodded, and we were both silent for a while.

“The probability,” he resumed after a pause, “that Mr. Graves is alive at this moment seems to me infinitesimal. There was evidently a conspiracy to murder him, and the deliberate, persistent manner in which that object was being pursued points to a very strong and definite motive. Then the tactics adopted point to considerable forethought and judgment. They are not the tactics of a fool or an ignoramus. We may criticize the closed carriage as a tactical mistake, calculated to arouse suspicion, but we have to weigh it against its alternative.”

“What is that?”

“Well, consider the circumstances. Suppose Weiss had called you in in the ordinary way. You would still have detected the use of poison. But now you could have located your man and made inquiries about him in the neighbourhood. You would probably have given the police a hint and they would almost certainly have taken action, as they would have had the means of identifying the parties. The result would have been fatal to Weiss. The closed carriage invited suspicion, but it was a great safeguard. Weiss’s method’s were not so unsound after all. He is a cautious man, but cunning and very persistent. And he could be bold on occasion. The use of the blinded carriage was a decidedly audacious proceeding. I should put him down as a gambler of a very discreet, courageous and resourceful type.”

“Which all leads to the probability that he has pursued his scheme and brought it to a successful issue.”

“I am afraid it does. But—have you got your notes of the compass-bearings?”



"The book is in my overcoat pocket with the board. I will fetch them."

I went into the office, where our coats hung, and brought back the notebook with the little board to which it was still attached by the rubber band. Thorndyke took them from me, and, opening the book, ran his eye quickly down one page after another. Suddenly he glanced at the clock.

"It is a little late to begin," said he, "but these notes look rather alluring. I am inclined to plot them out at once. I fancy, from their appearance, that they will enable us to locate the house without much difficulty. But don't let me keep you up if you are tired. I can work them out by myself."

"You won't do anything of the kind," I exclaimed. "I am as keen on plotting them as you are, and, besides, I want to see how it is done. It seems to be a rather useful accomplishment."

"It is," said Thorndyke. "In our work, the ability to make a rough but reliable sketch survey is often of great value. Have you ever looked over these notes?"

"No. I put the book away when I came in and have never looked at it since."

"It is a quaint document. You seem to be rich in railway bridges in those parts, and the route was certainly none of the most direct, as you noticed at the time. However, we will plot it out and then we shall see exactly what it looks like and whither it leads us."

He retired to the laboratory and presently returned with a T-square, a military protractor, a pair of dividers and a large drawing-board on which was pinned a sheet of cartridge paper.

"Now," said he, seating himself at the table with the board before him, "as to the method. You started from a known position and you arrived at a place the position of which is at present unknown. We shall fix the position of that spot by applying two factors, the distance that you travelled and the direction in which you were moving. The direction is given by the compass; and, as the horse seems to have kept up a remarkably even pace, we can take time as representing distance. You seem to have been travelling at about eight miles an hour, that is, roughly, a seventh of a mile in one minute. So if, on our chart, we take one inch as representing one minute, we shall be working with a scale of about seven inches to the mile."

"That doesn't sound very exact as to distance," I objected.

"It isn't. But that doesn't matter much. We have certain landmarks, such as these railway arches that you have noted, by which the actual distance can be settled after the route is plotted. You had better read out the entries, and, opposite each, write a number for reference, so that we need not confuse the chart by writing details on it. I shall start near the middle of the board, as neither you nor I seem to have the slightest notion what your general direction was."

I laid the open notebook before me and read out the first entry:

"Eight fifty-eight. West by South. Start from home. Horse thirteen hands."

"You turned round at once, I understand," said Thorndyke, "so we draw no line in that direction. The next is—?"

"Eight fifty-eight minutes, thirty seconds, East by North'; and the next is 'Eight fifty-nine, North-east.'"

"Then you travelled east by north about a fifteenth of a mile and we shall put down half an inch on the chart. Then you turned north-east. How long did you go on?"

"Exactly a minute. The next entry is 'Nine. West north-west.'"

"Then you travelled about the seventh of a mile in a north-easterly direction and we draw a line an inch long at an angle of forty-five degrees to the right of the north and south line. From the end of that we carry a line at an angle of fifty-six and a quarter degrees to the left of the north and south line, and so on. The method is perfectly simple, you see."

"Perfectly; I quite understand it now."

I went back to my chair and continued to read out the entries from the notebook while Thorndyke laid off the lines of direction with the protractor, taking out the distances with the dividers from a scale of equal parts on the back of the instrument. As the work proceeded, I noticed, from time to time, a smile of quiet amusement spread over my colleague's keen, attentive face, and at each new reference to a railway bridge he chuckled softly.

"What, again!" he laughed, as I recorded the passage of the fifth or sixth bridge. "It's like a game of croquet. Go on. What is the next?"

I went on reading out the notes until I came to the final one:

"Nine twenty-four. South-east. In covered way. Stop. Wooden gates closed."

Thorndyke ruled off the last line, remarking: "Then your covered way is on the south side of a street which bears north-east. So we complete our chart. Just look at your route, Jervis."

He held up the board with a quizzical smile and I stared in astonishment at the chart. The single line, which represented the route of the carriage, zigzagged in the most amazing manner, turning, re-turning and crossing itself repeatedly, evidently passing more than once down the same thoroughfares and terminating at a comparatively short distance from its commencement.

“Why!” I exclaimed, the “rascal must have lived quite near to Stillbury’s house!”

Thorndyke measured with the dividers the distance between the starting and arriving points of the route and took it off from the scale.

“Five-eighths of a mile, roughly,” he said. “You could have walked it in less than ten minutes. And now let us get out the ordnance map and see if we can give to each of those marvellously erratic lines ‘a local habitation and a name.’”

He spread the map out on the table and placed our chart by its side.

“I think,” said he, “you started from Lower Kennington Lane?”

“Yes, from this point,” I replied, indicating the spot with a pencil.

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “if we swing the chart round twenty degrees to correct the deviation of the compass, we can compare it with the ordnance map.”

He set off with the protractor an angle of twenty degrees from the north and south line and turned the chart round to that extent. After closely scrutinizing the map and the chart and comparing the one with the other, he said:

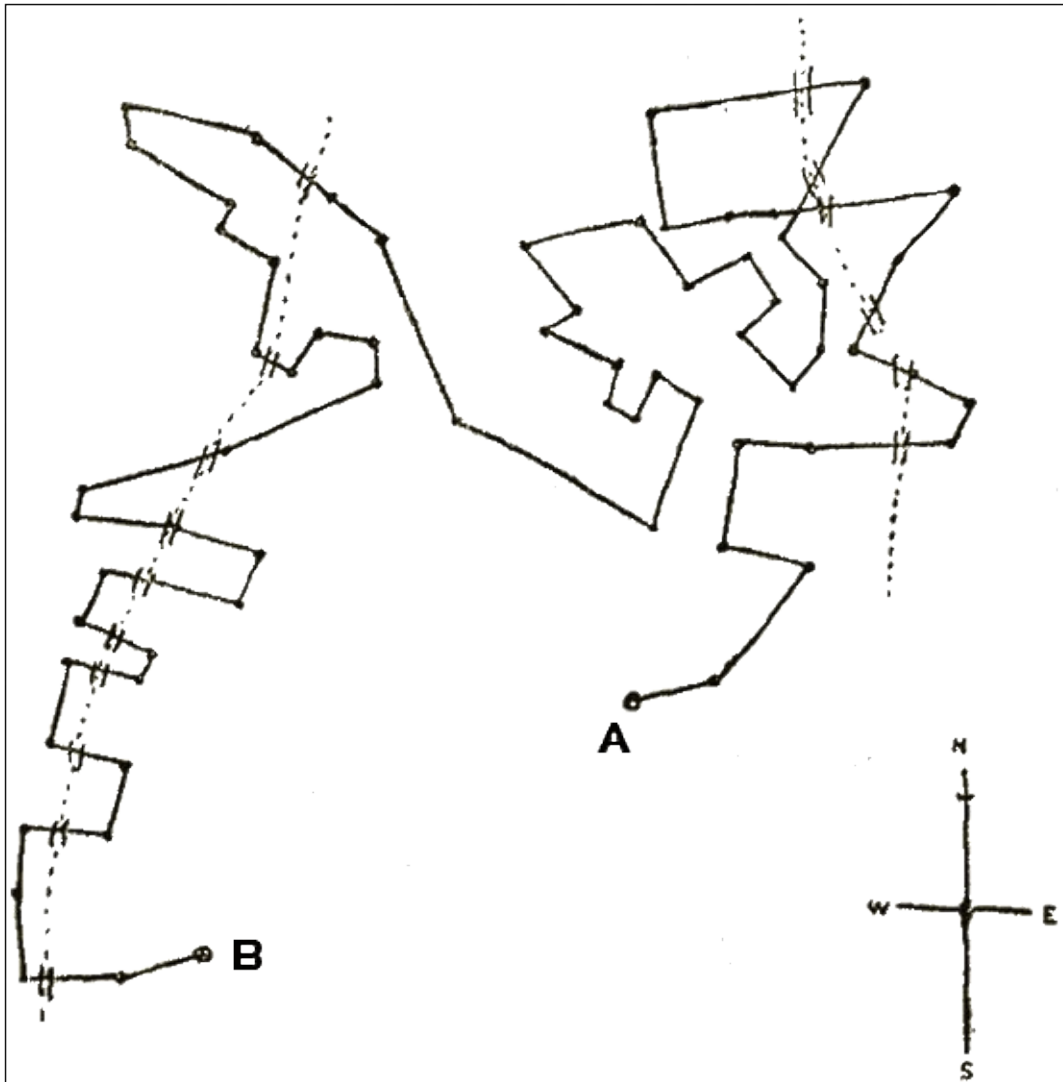
“By mere inspection it seems fairly easy to identify the thoroughfares that correspond to the lines of the chart. Take the part that is near your destination. At nine twenty-one you passed under a bridge, going westward. That would seem to be Glasshouse Street. Then you turned south, apparently along the Albert Embankment, where you heard the tug’s whistle. Then you heard a passenger train start on your left; that would be Vauxhall Station. Next you turned round due east and passed under a large railway bridge, which suggests the bridge that carries the Station over Upper Kennington Lane. If that is so, your house should be on the south side of Upper Kennington Lane, some three hundred yards from the bridge. But we may as well test our inferences by one or two measurements.”

“How can you do that if you don’t know the exact scale of the chart?”

“I will show you,” said Thorndyke. “We shall establish the true scale and that will form part of the proof.”

He rapidly constructed on the upper blank part of the paper, a proportional diagram consisting of two intersecting lines with a single cross-line.

“This long line,” he explained, “is the distance from Stillbury’s house to the Vauxhall railway bridge as it appears on the chart; the shorter cross-line is the same distance taken from the ordnance map. If our inference is correct and the chart is reasonably accurate, all the other distances will show a similar proportion. Let us try some of them. Take the distance from Vauxhall bridge to the Glasshouse Street bridge.”



*The Track Chart, showing the route followed by Weiss's carriage.*

A.—Starting-point in Lower Kennington Lane.  
 B.—Position of Mr. Weiss's house. The dotted lines connecting the bridges indicate probable railway lines.

He made the two measurements carefully, and, as the point of the dividers came down almost precisely in the correct place on the diagram, he looked up at me.

"Considering the roughness of the method by which the chart was made, I think that is pretty conclusive, though, if you look at the various arches that you passed under and see how nearly they appear to follow the position of the South-Western Railway line, you hardly need further proof. But I will take a few more proportional measurements for the satisfaction of proving the case by scientific methods before we proceed to verify our conclusions by a visit to the spot."

He took off one or two more distances, and on comparing them with the proportional distances on the ordnance map, found them in every case as nearly correct as could be expected.

"Yes," said Thorndyke, laying down the dividers, "I think we have narrowed down the locality of Mr. Weiss's house to a few yards in a known street. We shall get further help from your note of nine twenty-three thirty, when records a patch of newly laid macadam extending up to the house."

"That new macadam will be pretty well smoothed down by now," I objected.

"Not so very completely," answered Thorndyke. "It is only a little over a month ago, and there has been very little wet weather since. It may be smooth, but it will be easily distinguishable from the old."

"And do I understand that you propose to go and explore the neighbourhood?"

"Undoubtedly I do. That is to say, I intend to convert the locality of this house into a definite address; which, I think, will now be perfectly easy, unless we should have the bad luck to find more than one covered way. Even then, the difficulty would be trifling."

"And when you have ascertained where Mr. Weiss lives? What then?"

"That will depend on circumstances. I think we shall probably call at Scotland Yard and have a little talk with our friend Mr. Superintendent Miller; unless, for any reason, it seems better to look into the case ourselves."

"When is this voyage of exploration to take place?"

Thorndyke considered this question, and, taking out his pocket-book, glanced through his engagements.

"It seems to me," he said, "that to-morrow is a fairly free day. We could take the morning without neglecting other business. I suggest that we start immediately after breakfast. How will that suit my learned friend?"

"My time is yours," I replied; "and if you choose to waste it on matters that don't concern you, that's your affair."

"Then we will consider the arrangement to stand for to-morrow morning, or rather, for this morning, as I see that it is past twelve."

With this Thorndyke gathered up the chart and instruments and we separated for the night.

---

## IX. — THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY

HALF-PAST nine on the following morning found us spinning along the Albert Embankment in a hansom to the pleasant tinkle of the horse's bell. Thorndyke appeared to be in high spirits, though the full enjoyment of the matutinal pipe precluded fluent conversation. As a precaution, he had put my notebook in his pocket before starting, and once or twice he took it out and looked over its pages; but he made no reference to the object of our quest, and the few remarks that he uttered would have indicated that his thoughts were occupied with other matters.

Arrived at Vauxhall Station, we alighted and forthwith made our way to the bridge that spans Upper Kennington Lane near its junction with Harleyford Road.

"Here is our starting point," said Thorndyke. "From this place to the house is about three hundred yards—say four hundred and twenty paces—and at about two hundred paces we ought to reach our patch of new road-metal. Now, are you ready? If we keep step we shall average our stride."

We started together at a good pace, stepping out with military regularity and counting aloud as we went. As we told out the hundred and ninety-fourth pace I observed Thorndyke nod towards the roadway a little ahead, and, looking at it attentively as we approached, it was easy to see by the regularity of surface and lighter colour, that it had recently been re-metalled.

Having counted out the four hundred and twenty paces, we halted, and Thorndyke turned to me with a smile of triumph.

"Not a bad estimate, Jervis," said he. "That will be your house if I am not much mistaken. There is no other mews or private roadway in sight."

He pointed to a narrow turning some dozen yards ahead, apparently the entrance to a mews or yard and closed by a pair of massive wooden gates.

"Yes," I answered, "there can be no doubt that this is the place; but, by Jove!" I added, as we drew nearer, "the nest is empty! Do you see?"

I pointed to a bill that was stuck on the gate, bearing, as I could see at this distance, the inscription "To Let."

"Here is a new and startling, if not altogether unexpected, development," said Thorndyke, as we stood gazing at the bill; which set forth that "these premises, including stabling and workshops," were "to be let on lease or otherwise," and referred inquiries to Messrs. Ryebody Brothers, house-agents and valuers, Upper Kennington Lane. "The question is, should we make a few inquiries of the agent, or should we get the keys and have a look at the inside of the house? I am inclined to do both, and the latter first, if Messrs. Ryebody Brothers will trust us with the keys."

We proceeded up the lane to the address given, and, entering the office, Thorndyke made his request—somewhat to the surprise of the clerk; for Thorndyke was not quite the kind of person whom one naturally associates with stabling and workshops. However, there was no difficulty, but as the clerk sorted out the keys from a bunch hanging from a hook, he remarked:

"I expect you will find the place in a rather dirty and neglected condition. The house has not been cleaned yet; it is just as it was left when the brokers took away the furniture."

"Was the last tenant sold up, then?" Thorndyke asked.

"Oh, no. He had to leave rather unexpectedly to take up some business in Germany."

"I hope he paid his rent," said Thorndyke.

"Oh, yes. Trust us for that. But I should say that Mr. Weiss—that was his name—was a man of some means. He seemed to have plenty of money, though he always paid in notes. I don't fancy he had a banking account in this country. He hadn't been here more than about six or seven months and I imagine he didn't know many people in England, as he paid us a cash deposit in lieu of references when he first came."

"I think you said his name was Weiss. It wouldn't be H. Weiss by any chance?"

"I believe it was. But I can soon tell you." He opened a drawer and consulted what looked like a book of receipt forms. "Yes; H Weiss. Do you know him, sir?"

"I knew a Mr. H. Weiss some years ago. He came from Bremen, I remember."

"This Mr. Weiss has gone back to Hamburg," the clerk observed.

"Ah," said Thorndyke, "then it would seem not to be the same. My acquaintance was a fair man with a beard and a decidedly red nose and he wore spectacles."

"That's the man. You've described him exactly," said the clerk, who was apparently rather easily satisfied in the matter of description.

"Dear me," said Thorndyke; "what a small world it is. Do you happen to have a note of his address in Hamburg?"

"I haven't," the clerk replied. "You see we've done with him, having got the rent, though the house is not actually surrendered yet. Mr Weiss's housekeeper still has the front-door key. She doesn't start for Hamburg for a week or so, and meanwhile she keeps the key so that she can call every day and see if there are any letters."

"Indeed," said Thorndyke. "I wonder if he still has the same housekeeper."

"This lady is a German," replied the clerk, "with a regular jaw-twisting name. Sounded like Shallybang."

"Schallibaum. That is the lady. A fair woman with hardly any eyebrows and a pronounced cast in the left eye."

"Now that's very curious, sir," said the clerk. "It's the same name, and this is a fair woman with remarkably thin eyebrows, I remember, now that you mention it But it can't be the same person. I have only seen her a few times and then only just for a minute or so; but I'm quite certain she had no cast in her eye. So, you see, sir, she can't be the same person. You can dye your hair or you can wear a wig or you can paint your face; but a squint is a squint. There's no faking a swivel eye."

Thorndyke laughed softly. "I suppose not; unless, perhaps, some one might invent an adjustable glass eye. Are these the keys?"

"Yes, sir. The large one belongs to the wicket in the front gate. The other is the latch-key belonging to the side door. Mrs. Shallybang has the key of the front door."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. He took the keys, to which a wooden label was attached, and we made our way back towards the house of mystery, discussing the clerk's statements as we went.

"A very communicable young gentleman, that," Thorndyke remarked. "He seemed quite pleased to relieve the monotony of office work with a little conversation. And I am sure I was very delighted to indulge him."

"He hadn't much to tell, all the same," said I.

Thorndyke looked at me in surprise. "I don't know what you would have, Jervis, unless you expect casual strangers to present you with a ready-made body of evidence, fully classified, with all the inferences and implications stated. It seemed to me that he was a highly instructive young man."

"What did you learn from him?" I asked.

"Oh, come, Jervis," he protested; "is that a fair question, under our present arrangement? However, I will mention a few points. We learn that about six or seven months ago, Mr. H. Weiss dropped from the clouds into Kennington Lane and that he has now ascended from Kennington Lane into the clouds. That is a useful piece of information. Then we learn that Mrs. Schallibaum has remained in England; which might be of little importance if it were not for a very interesting corollary that it suggests."

"What is that?"

"I must leave you to consider the facts at your leisure; but you will have noticed the ostensible reason for her remaining behind. She is engaged in putting up the one gaping joint in their armour. One of them has been indiscreet enough to give this address to some correspondent—probably a foreign correspondent. Now, as they obviously wish to leave no tracks, they cannot give their new address to the Post Office to have their letters forwarded, and, on the other hand, a letter left in the box might establish such a connection as would enable them to be traced. Moreover, the letter might be of a kind that they would not wish to fall into the wrong hands. They would not have given this address excepting under some peculiar circumstances."

"No, I should think not, if they took this house for the express purpose of committing a crime in it."

"Exactly. And then there is one other fact that you may have gathered from our young friend's remarks."

"What is that?"

"That a controllable squint is a very valuable asset to a person who wishes to avoid identification."

"Yes, I did note that. The fellow seemed to think that it was absolutely conclusive."

"And so would most people; especially in the case of a squint of that kind. We can all squint towards our noses, but no normal person can turn his eyes away from one another. My impression is that the presence or absence, as the case might be, of a divergent squint would be accepted as absolute disproof of identity. But here we are."

He inserted the key into the wicket of the large gate, and, when we had stepped through into the covered way, he locked it from the inside.

"Why have you locked us in?" I asked, seeing that the wicket had a latch.

"Because," he replied, "if we now hear any one on the premises we shall know who it is. Only one person besides ourselves has a key."

His reply startled me somewhat. I stopped and looked at him.

"That is a quaint situation, Thorndyke. I hadn't thought of it. Why she may actually come to the house while we are here; in fact, she may be in the house at this moment."

"I hope not," said he. "We don't particularly want Mr. Weiss to be put on his guard, for I take it, he is a pretty wide-awake gentleman under any circumstances. If she does come, we had better keep out of sight. I think we will look over the house first. That is of the most interest to us. If the lady does happen to come while we are here, she may stay to show us over the place and keep an eye on us. So we will leave the stables to the last."

We walked down the entry to the side door at which I had been admitted by Mrs. Schallibaum on the occasion of my previous visits. Thorndyke inserted the latch-key, and, as soon as we were inside, shut the door and walked quickly through into the hall, whither I followed him. He made straight for the front door, where, having slipped up the catch of the lock, he began very attentively to examine the letter-box. It was a somewhat massive wooden box, fitted with a lock of good quality and furnished with a wire grille through which one could inspect the interior.

"We are in luck, Jervis," Thorndyke remarked. "Our visit has been most happily timed. There is a letter in the box."

"Well," I said, "we can't get it out; and if we could, it would be hardly justifiable."

"I don't know," he replied, "that I am prepared to assent off-hand to either of those propositions; but I would rather not tamper with another person's letter, even if that person should happen to be a murderer. Perhaps we can get the information we want from the outside of the envelope."

He produced from his pocket a little electric lamp fitted with a bull's-eye, and, pressing the button, threw a beam of light in through the grille. The letter was lying on the bottom of the box face upwards, so that the address could easily be read.

"Herrn Dr. H. Weiss," Thorndyke read aloud. "German stamp, postmark apparently Darmstadt. You notice that the 'Herrn Dr.' is printed and the rest written. What do you make of that?"

"I don't quite know. Do you think he is really a medical man?"

"Perhaps we had better finish our investigation, in case we are disturbed, and discuss the bearings of the facts afterwards. The name of the sender may be on the flap of the envelope. If it is not, I shall pick the lock and take out the letter. Have you got a probe about you?"

"Yes; by force of habit I am still carrying my pocket case."

I took the little case from my pocket and extracting from it a jointed probe of thickish silver wire, screwed the two halves together and handed the completed instrument to Thorndyke; who passed the slender rod through the grille and adroitly turned the letter over.

"Ha!" he exclaimed with deep satisfaction, as the light fell on the reverse of the envelope, "we are saved from the necessity of theft—or rather, unauthorized borrowing—'Johann Schnitzler, Darmstadt.' That is all that we actually want. The German police can do the rest if necessary."

He handed me back my probe, pocketed his lamp, released the catch of the lock on the door, and turned away along the dark, musty-smelling hall.

"Do you happen to know the name of Johann Schnitzler?" he asked.

I replied that I had no recollection of ever having heard the name before.

"Neither have I," said he; "but I think we may form a pretty shrewd guess as to his avocation. As you saw, the words 'Herrn Dr.' were printed on the envelope, leaving the rest of the address to be written by hand. The plain inference is that he is a person who habitually addresses letters to medical men, and as the style of the envelope and the lettering—which is printed, not embossed—is commercial, we may assume that he is engaged in some sort of trade. Now, what is a likely trade?"

"He might be an instrument maker or a drug manufacturer; more probably the latter, as there is an extensive drug and

chemical industry in Germany, and as Mr. Weiss seemed to have more use for drugs than instruments."

"Yes, I think you are right; but we will look him up when we get home. And now we had better take a glance at the bedroom; that is, if you can remember which room it was."

"It was on the first floor," said I, "and the door by which I entered was just at the head of the stairs."

We ascended the two flights, and, as we reached the landing, I halted.

"This was the door," I said, and was about to turn the handle when Thorndyke caught me by the arm.

"One moment, Jervis," said he. "What do you make of this?"

He pointed to a spot near the bottom of the door where, on close inspection, four good-sized screw-holes were distinguishable. They had been neatly stopped with putty and covered with knotting, and were so nearly the colour of the grained and varnished woodwork as to be hardly visible.

"Evidently," I answered, "there has been a bolt there, though it seems a queer place to fix one."

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "If you look up you will see that there was another at the top of the door, and, as the lock is in the middle, they must have been highly effective. But there are one or two other points that strike me. First, you will notice that the bolts have been fixed on quite recently, for the paint that they covered is of the same grimy tint as that on the rest of the door. Next, they have been taken off, which, seeing that they could hardly have been worth the trouble of removal, seems to suggest that the person who fixed them considered that their presence might appear remarkable, while the screw-holes, which have been so skilfully and carefully stopped, would be less conspicuous."

"Then, they are on the outside of the door—an unusual situation for bedroom bolts—and were of considerable size. They were long and thick."

"I can see, by the position of the screw-holes, that they were long; but how do you arrive at their thickness?"

"By the size of the counter-holes in the jamb of the door. These holes have been very carefully filled with wooden plugs covered with knotting; but you can make out their diameter, which is that of the bolts, and which is decidedly out of proportion for an ordinary bedroom door. Let me show you a light."

He flashed his lamp into the dark corner, and I was able to see distinctly the portentously large holes into which the bolts had fitted, and also to note the remarkable neatness with which they had been plugged.

"There was a second door, I remember," said I. "Let us see if that was guarded in a similar manner."

We strode through the empty room, awakening dismal echoes as we trod the bare boards, and flung open the other door. At top and bottom, similar groups of screw-holes showed that this also had been made secure, and that these bolts had been of the same very substantial character as the others.

Thorndyke turned away from the door with a slight frown.

"If we had any doubts," said he, "as to what has been going on in this house, these traces of massive fastenings would be almost enough to settle them."

"They might have been there before Weiss came," I suggested. "He only came about seven months ago and there is no date on the screw-holes."

"That is quite true. But when, with their recent fixture, you couple the facts that they have been removed, that very careful measures have been taken to obliterate the traces of their presence, and that they would have been indispensable for the commission of the crime that we are almost certain was being committed here, it looks like an excess of caution to seek other explanations."

"But," I objected, "if the man, Graves, was really imprisoned, could not he have smashed the window and called for help?"

"The window looks out on the yard, as you see; but I expect it was secured too."

He drew the massive, old-fashioned shutters out of their recess and closed them.

"Yes, here we are." He pointed to four groups of screw-holes at the corners of the shutters, and, once more producing his lamp, narrowly examined the insides of the recesses into which the shutters folded.

"The nature of the fastening is quite evident," said he. "An iron bar passed right across at the top and bottom and was secured by a staple and padlock. You can see the mark the bar made in the recess when the shutters were folded. When these bars were fixed and padlocked and the bolts were shot, this room was as secure, for a prisoner unprovided with tools, as a cell in Newgate."

We looked at one another for awhile without speaking; and I fancy that if Mr. H. Weiss could have seen our faces he might have thought it desirable to seek some retreat even more remote than Hamburg.

"It was a diabolical affair, Jervis," Thorndyke said at length, in an ominously quiet and even gentle tone. "A sordid, callous, cold-blooded crime of a type that is to me utterly unforgivable and incapable of extenuation. Of course, it may have failed. Mr. Graves may even now be alive. I shall make it my very especial business to ascertain whether he is or not. And if

he is not, I shall take it to myself as a sacred duty to lay my hand on the man who has compassed his death."

I looked at Thorndyke with something akin to awe. In the quiet unemotional tone of his voice, in his unruffled manner and the stony calm of his face, there was something much more impressive, more fateful, than there could have been in the fiercest threats or the most passionate denunciations. I felt that in those softly spoken words he had pronounced the doom of the fugitive villain.

He turned away from the window and glanced round the empty room. It seemed that our discovery of the fastenings had exhausted the information that it had to offer.

"It is a thousand pities," I remarked, "that we were unable to look round before they moved out the furniture. We might have found some clue to the scoundrel's identity."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "there isn't much information to be gathered here, I am afraid. I see they have swept up the small litter from the floor and poked it under the grate. We will turn that over, as there seems to be nothing else, and then look at the other rooms."

He raked out the little heap of rubbish with his stick and spread it out on the hearth. It certainly looked unpromising enough, being just such a rubbish heap as may be swept up in any untidy room during a move. But Thorndyke went through it systematically, examining each item attentively, even to the local tradesmen's bills and empty paper bags, before laying them aside. Another rake of his stick scattered the bulky masses of crumpled paper and brought into view an object which he picked up with some eagerness. It was a portion of a pair of spectacles, which had apparently been trodden on, for the side-bar was twisted and bent and the glass was shattered into fragments.

"This ought to give us a hint," said he. "It will probably have belonged either to Weiss or Graves, as Mrs. Schallibaum apparently did not wear glasses. Let us see if we can find the remainder."

We both groped carefully with our sticks amongst the rubbish, spreading it out on the hearth and removing the numerous pieces of crumpled paper. Our search was rewarded by the discovery of the second eye-piece of the spectacles, of which the glass was badly cracked but less shattered than the other. I also picked up two tiny sticks at which Thorndyke looked with deep interest before laying them on the mantelshelf.

"We will consider them presently," said he. "Let us finish with the spectacles first. You see that the left eye-glass is a concave cylindrical lens of some sort. We can make out that much from the fragments that remain, and we can measure the curvature when we get them home, although that will be easier if we can collect some more fragments and stick them together. The right eye is plain glass; that is quite evident. Then these will have belonged to your patient, Jervis. You said that the tremulous iris was in the right eye, I think?"

"Yes," I replied. "These will be his spectacles, without doubt."

"They are peculiar frames," he continued. "If they were made in this country, we might be able to discover the maker. But we must collect as many fragments of glass as we can."

Once more we searched amongst the rubbish and succeeded, eventually, in recovering some seven or eight small fragments of the broken spectacle-glasses, which Thorndyke laid on the mantelshelf beside the little sticks.

"By the way, Thorndyke," I said, taking up the latter to examine them afresh, "what are these things? Can you make anything of them?"

He looked at them thoughtfully for a few moments and then replied:

"I don't think I will tell you what they are. You should find that out for yourself, and it will be well worth your while to do so. They are rather suggestive objects under the circumstances. But notice their peculiarities carefully. Both are portions of some smooth, stout reed. There is a long, thin stick—about six inches long—and a thicker piece only three inches in length. The longer piece has a little scrap of red paper stuck on at the end; apparently a portion of a label of some kind with an ornamental border. The other end of the stick has been broken off. The shorter, stouter stick has had its central cavity artificially enlarged so that it fits over the other to form a cap or sheath. Make a careful note of those facts and try to think what they probably mean; what would be the most likely use for an object of this kind. When you have ascertained that, you will have learned something new about this case. And now, to resume our investigations. Here is a very suggestive thing." He picked up a small, wide-mouthed bottle and, holding it up for my inspection, continued: "Observe the fly sticking to the inside, and the name on the label, 'Fox, Russell Street, Covent Garden.'"

"I don't know Mr. Fox."

"Then I will inform you that he is a dealer in the materials for 'make-up,' theatrical or otherwise, and will leave you to consider the bearing of this bottle on our present investigation. There doesn't seem to be anything else of interest in this El Dorado excepting that screw, which you notice is about the size of those with which the bolts were fastened on the doors. I don't think it is worth while to unstop any of the holes to try it; we should learn nothing fresh."

He rose, and, having kicked the discarded rubbish back under the grate, gathered up his gleanings from the mantelpiece, carefully bestowing the spectacles and the fragments of glass in the tin box that he appeared always to carry in his pocket, and wrapping the larger objects in his handkerchief.

"A poor collection," was his comment, as he returned the box and handkerchief to his pocket, "and yet not so poor as I



had feared. Perhaps, if we question them closely enough, these unconsidered trifles may be made to tell us something worth learning after all. Shall we go into the other room?"

We passed out on to the landing and into the front room, where, guided by experience, we made straight for the fireplace. But the little heap of rubbish there contained nothing that even Thorndyke's inquisitive eye could view with interest. We wandered disconsolately round the room, peering into the empty cupboards and scanning the floor and the corners by the skirting, without discovering a single object or relic of the late occupants. In the course of my perambulations I halted by the window and was looking down into the street when Thorndyke called to me sharply:

"Come away from the window, Jervis! Have you forgotten that Mrs. Schallibaum may be in the neighbourhood at this moment?"

As a matter of fact I had entirely forgotten the matter, nor did it now strike me as anything but the remotest of possibilities. I replied to that effect.

"I don't agree with you," Thorndyke rejoined. "We have heard that she comes here to look for letters. Probably she comes every day, or even oftener. There is a good deal at stake, remember, and they cannot feel quite as secure as they would wish. Weiss must have seen what view you took of the case and must have had some uneasy moments thinking of what you might do. In fact, we may take it that the fear of you drove them out of the neighbourhood, and that they are mighty anxious to get that letter and cut the last link that binds them to this house."

"I suppose that is so," I agreed; "and if the lady should happen to pass this way and should see me at the window and recognize me, she would certainly smell a rat."

"A rat!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "She would smell a whole pack of foxes, and Mr. H. Weiss would be more on his guard than ever. Let us have a look at the other rooms; there is nothing here."

We went up to the next floor and found traces of recent occupation in one room only. The garrets had evidently been unused, and the kitchen and ground-floor rooms offered nothing that appeared to Thorndyke worth noting. Then we went out by the side door and down the covered way into the yard at the back. The workshops were fastened with rusty padlocks that looked as if they had not been disturbed for months. The stables were empty and had been tentatively cleaned out, the coach-house was vacant, and presented no traces of recent use excepting a half-bald spoke-brush. We returned up the covered way and I was about to close the side door, which Thorndyke had left ajar, when he stopped me.

"We'll have another look at the hall before we go," said he; and, walking softly before me, he made his way to the front door, where, producing his lamp, he threw a beam of light into the letter-box.

"Any more letters?" I asked.

"Any more!" he repeated. "Look for yourself."

I stooped and peered through the grille into the lighted interior; and then I uttered an exclamation.

The box was empty.

Thorndyke regarded me with a grim smile. "We have been caught on the hop, Jervis, I suspect," said he.

"It is queer," I replied. "I didn't hear any sound of the opening or closing of the door; did you?"

"No; I didn't hear any sound; which makes me suspect that she did. She would have heard our voices and she is probably keeping a sharp look-out at this very moment. I wonder if she saw you at the window. But whether she did or not, we must go very warily. Neither of us must return to the Temple direct, and we had better separate when we have returned the keys and I will watch you out of sight and see if anyone is following you. What are you going to do?"

"If you don't want me, I shall run over to Kensington and drop in to lunch at the Hornbys'. I said I would call as soon as I had an hour or so free."

"Very well. Do so; and keep a look-out in case you are followed. I have to go down to Guildford this afternoon. Under the circumstances, I shall not go back home, but send Polton a telegram and take a train at Vauxhall and change at some small station where I can watch the platform. Be as careful as you can. Remember that what you have to avoid is being followed to any place where you are known, and, above all, revealing your connection with number Five A, King's Bench Walk."

Having thus considered our immediate movements, we emerged together from the wicket, and locking it behind us, walked quickly to the house-agents', where an opportune office-boy received the keys without remark. As we came out of the office, I halted irresolutely and we both looked up and down the lane.

"There is no suspicious looking person in sight at present," Thorndyke said, and then asked: "Which way do you think of going?"

"It seems to me," I replied, "that my best plan would be to take a cab or an omnibus so as to get out of the neighbourhood as quickly as possible. If I go through Ravensden Street into Kennington Park Road, I can pick up an omnibus that will take me to the Mansion House, where I can change for Kensington. I shall go on the top so that I can keep a look-out for any other omnibus or cab that may be following."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that seems a good plan. I will walk with you and see that you get a fair start."

We walked briskly along the lane and through Ravensden Street to the Kennington Park Road. An omnibus was

approaching from the south at a steady jog-trot and we halted at the corner to wait for it. Several people passed us in different directions, but none seemed to take any particular notice of us, though we observed them rather narrowly, especially the women. Then the omnibus crawled up. I sprang on the foot-board and ascended to the roof, where I seated myself and surveyed the prospect to the rear. No one else got on the omnibus—which had not stopped—and no cab or other passenger vehicle was in sight. I continued to watch Thorndyke as he stood sentinel at the corner, and noted that no one appeared to be making any effort to overtake the omnibus. Presently my colleague waved his hand to me and turned back towards Vauxhall, and I, having satisfied myself once more that no pursuing cab or hurrying foot-passenger was in sight, decided that our precautions had been unnecessary and settled myself in a rather more comfortable position.

---

## X. — THE HUNTER HUNTED

THE omnibus of those days was a leisurely vehicle. Its ordinary pace was a rather sluggish trot, and in a thickly populated thoroughfare its speed was further reduced by frequent stoppages. Bearing these facts in mind, I gave an occasional backward glance as we jogged northward, though my attention soon began to wander from the rather remote possibility of pursuit to the incidents of our late exploration.

It had not been difficult to see that Thorndyke was very well pleased with the results of our search, but excepting the letter—which undoubtedly opened up a channel for further inquiry and possible identification—I could not perceive that any of the traces that we had found justified his satisfaction. There were the spectacles, for instance. They were almost certainly the pair worn by Mr. Graves. But what then? It was exceedingly improbable that we should be able to discover the maker of them, and if we were, it was still more improbable that he would be able to give us any information that would help us. Spectacle-makers are not usually on confidential terms with their customers.

As to the other objects, I could make nothing of them. The little sticks of reed evidently had some use that was known to Thorndyke and furnished, by inference, some kind of information about Weiss, Graves, or Mrs. Schallibaum. But I had never seen anything like them before and they conveyed nothing whatever to me. Then the bottle that had seemed so significant to Thorndyke was to me quite uninforming. It did, indeed, suggest that some member of the household might be connected with the stage, but it gave no hint as to which one. Certainly that person was not Mr. Weiss, whose appearance was as remote from that of an actor as could well be imagined. At any rate, the bottle and its label gave me no more useful hint than it might be worth while to call on Mr. Fox and make inquiries; and something told me very emphatically that this was not what it had conveyed to Thorndyke.

These reflections occupied me until the omnibus, having rumbled over London Bridge and up King William Street, joined the converging streams of traffic at the Mansion House. Here I got down and changed to an omnibus bound for Kensington; on which I travelled westward pleasantly enough, looking down into the teeming streets and whiling away the time by meditating upon the very agreeable afternoon that I promised myself, and considering how far my new arrangement with Thorndyke would justify me in entering into certain domestic engagements of a highly interesting kind.

What might have happened under other circumstances it is impossible to tell and useless to speculate; the fact is that my journey ended in a disappointment. I arrived, all agog, at the familiar house in Endsley Gardens only to be told by a sympathetic housemaid that the family was out; that Mrs. Hornby had gone into the country and would not be home until night, and—which mattered a good deal more to me—that her niece, Miss Juliet Gibson, had accompanied her.

Now a man who drops into lunch without announcing his intention or previously ascertaining those of his friends has no right to quarrel with fate if he finds an empty house. Thus philosophically I reflected as I turned away from the house in profound discontent, demanding of the universe in general why Mrs. Hornby need have perversely chosen my first free day to go gadding into the country, and above all, why she must needs spirit away the fair Juliet. This was the crowning misfortune (for I could have endured the absence of the elder lady with commendable fortitude), and since I could not immediately return to the Temple it left me a mere waif and stray for the time being.

Instinct—of the kind that manifests itself especially about one o'clock in the afternoon—impelled me in the direction of Brompton Road, and finally landed me at a table in a large restaurant apparently adjusted to the needs of ladies who had come from a distance to engage in the feminine sport of shopping. Here, while waiting for my lunch, I sat idly scanning the morning paper and wondering what I should do with the rest of the day; and presently it chanced that my eye caught the announcement of a *matinée* at the theatre in Sloane Square. It was quite a long time since I had been at a theatre, and, as the play—light comedy—seemed likely to satisfy my not very critical taste, I decided to devote the afternoon to reviving my acquaintance with the drama. Accordingly as soon as my lunch was finished, I walked down the Brompton Road, stepped on to an omnibus, and was duly deposited at the door of the theatre. A couple of minutes later I found myself occupying an excellent seat in the second row of the pit, oblivious alike of my recent disappointment and of Thorndyke's words of warning.

I am not an enthusiastic play-goer. To dramatic performances I am disposed to assign nothing further than the modest function of furnishing entertainment. I do not go to a theatre to be instructed or to have my moral outlook elevated. But, by way of compensation, I am not difficult to please. To a simple play, adjusted to my primitive taste, I can bring a certain bucolic appreciation that enables me to extract from the performance the maximum of enjoyment; and when, on this occasion, the final curtain fell and the audience rose, I rescued my hat from its insecure resting-place and turned to go with the feeling that I had spent a highly agreeable afternoon.

Emerging from the theatre, borne on the outgoing stream, I presently found myself opposite the door of a tea-shop. Instinct—the five o'clock instinct this time—guided me in; for we are creatures of habit, especially of the tea habit. The unoccupied table to which I drifted was in a shady corner not very far from the pay-desk; and here I had been seated less than a minute when a lady passed me on her way to the farther table. The glimpse that I caught of her as she approached—it was but a glimpse, since she passed behind me—showed that she was dressed in black, that she wore a beaded veil and hat, and in addition to the glass of milk and the bun that she carried, she was encumbered by an umbrella and a small basket, apparently containing some kind of needlework. I must confess that I gave her very little attention at the time, being occupied in anxious speculation as to how long it would be before the fact of my presence would impinge on the consciousness of the waitress.

The exact time by the clock on the wall was three minutes and a quarter, at the expiration of which an anaemic young woman sauntered up to the table and bestowed on me a glance of sullen interrogation, as if mutely demanding what the devil I wanted. I humbly requested that I might be provided with a pot of tea; whereupon she turned on her heel (which was a good deal worn down on the offside) and reported my conduct to a lady behind a marble-topped counter.

It seemed that the counter lady took a lenient view of the case, for in less than four minutes the waitress returned and gloomily deposited on the table before me a tea-pot, a milk-jug, a cup and saucer, a jug of hot water, and a small pool of milk. Then she once more departed in dudgeon.

I had just given the tea in the pot a preliminary stir and was about to pour out the first cup when I felt some one bump lightly against my chair and heard something rattle on the floor. I turned quickly and perceived the lady, whom I had seen enter, stooping just behind my chair. It seemed that having finished her frugal meal she was on her way out when she had dropped the little basket that I had noticed hanging from her wrist; which basket had promptly disgorged its entire contents on the floor.

Now every one must have noticed the demon of agility that seems to enter into an inanimate object when it is dropped, and the apparently intelligent malice with which it discovers, and rolls into, the most inaccessible places. Here was a case in point. This particular basket had contained materials for Oriental bead-work; and no sooner had it reached the floor than each item of its contents appeared to become possessed of a separate and particular devil impelling it to travel at headlong speed to some remote and unapproachable corner as distant as possible from its fellows.

As the only man—and almost the only person—near, the duty of salvage-agent manifestly devolved upon me; and down I went, accordingly, on my hands and knees, regardless of a nearly new pair of trousers, to grope under tables, chairs and settles in reach of the scattered treasure. A ball of the thick thread or twine I recovered from a dark and dirty corner after a brief interview with the sharp corner of a settle, and a multitude of the large beads with which this infernal industry is carried on I gathered from all parts of the compass, coming forth at length (quadrupedally) with a double handful of the treasure-trove and a very lively appreciation of the resistant qualities of a cast-iron table-stand when applied to the human cranium.

The owner of the lost and found property was greatly distressed by the accident and the trouble it had caused me; in fact she was quite needlessly agitated about it. The hand which held the basket into which I poured the rescued trash trembled visibly, and the brief glance that I bestowed on her as she murmured her thanks and apologies—with a very slight foreign accent—showed me that she was excessively pale. That much I could see plainly in spite of the rather dim light in this part of the shop and the beaded veil that covered her face; and I could also see that she was a rather remarkable looking woman, with a great mass of harsh, black hair and very broad black eyebrows that nearly met above her nose and contrasted strikingly with the dead white of her skin. But, of course, I did not look at her intently. Having returned her property and received her acknowledgments, I resumed my seat and left her to go on her way.

I had once more grasped the handle of the tea-pot when I made a rather curious discovery. At the bottom of the tea-cup lay a single lump of sugar. To the majority of persons it would have meant nothing. They would have assumed that they had dropped it in and forgotten it and would have proceeded to pour out the tea. But it happened that, at this time, I did not take sugar in my tea; whence it followed that the lump had not been put in by me. Assuming, therefore, that it had been carelessly dropped in by the waitress, I turned it out on the table, filled the cup, added the milk, and took a tentative draught to test the temperature.

The cup was yet at my lips when I chanced to look into the mirror that faced my table. Of course it reflected the part of the shop that was behind me, including the cashier's desk; at which the owner of the basket now stood paying for her refreshment. Between her and me was a gas chandelier which cast its light on my back but full on her face; and her veil notwithstanding, I could see that she was looking at me steadily; was, in fact, watching me intently and with a very curious expression—an expression of expectancy mingled with alarm. But this was not all. As I returned her intent look—which I could do unobserved, since my face, reflected in the mirror, was in deep shadow—I suddenly perceived that that steady gaze engaged her right eye only; the other eye was looking sharply towards her left shoulder. In short, she had a divergent squint of the left eye.

I put down my cup with a thrill of amazement and a sudden surging up of suspicion and alarm. An instant's reflection reminded me that when she had spoken to me a few moments before, both her eyes had looked into mine without the slightest trace of a squint. My thoughts flew back to the lump of sugar, to the unguarded milk-jug and the draught of tea that I had already swallowed; and, hardly knowing what I intended, I started to my feet and turned to confront her. But as I rose, she snatched up her change and darted from the shop. Through the glass door, I saw her spring on to the foot-board

of a passing hansom and give the driver some direction. I saw the man whip up his horse, and, by the time I reached the door, the cab was moving off swiftly towards Sloane Street.

I stood irresolute. I had not paid and could not run out of the shop without making a fuss, and my hat and stick were still on the rail opposite my seat. The woman ought to be followed, but I had no fancy for the task. If the tea that I had swallowed was innocuous, no harm was done and I was rid of my pursuer. So far as I was concerned, the incident was closed. I went back to my seat, and picking up the lump of sugar which still lay on the table where I had dropped it, put it carefully in my pocket. But my appetite for tea was satisfied for the present. Moreover it was hardly advisable to stay in the shop lest some fresh spy should come to see how I fared. Accordingly I obtained my check, handed it in at the cashier's desk and took my departure.

All this time, it will be observed, I had been taking it for granted that the lady in black had followed me from Kensington to this shop; that, in fact, she was none other than Mrs. Schallibaum. And, indeed, the circumstances had rendered the conclusion inevitable. In the very instant when I had perceived the displacement of the left eye, complete recognition had come upon me. When I had stood facing the woman, the brief glance at her face had conveyed to me something dimly reminiscent of which I had been but half conscious and had instantly forgotten. But the sight of that characteristic squint had at once revived and explained it. That the woman was Mrs. Schallibaum I now felt no doubt whatever.

Nevertheless, the whole affair was profoundly mysterious. As to the change in the woman's appearance, there was little in that. The coarse, black hair might be her own, dyed, or it might be a wig. The eyebrows were made-up; it was a simple enough proceeding and made still more simple by the beaded veil. But how did she come to be there at all? How did she happen to be made-up in this fashion at this particular time? And, above all, how came she to be provided with a lump of what I had little doubt was poisoned sugar?

I turned over the events of the day, and the more I considered them the less comprehensible they appeared. No one had followed the omnibus either on foot or in a vehicle, as far as I could see; and I had kept a careful look-out, not only at starting but for some considerable time after. Yet, all the time, Mrs. Schallibaum must have been following. But how? If she had known that I was intending to travel by the omnibus she might have gone to meet it and entered before I did. But she could not have known: and moreover she did not meet the omnibus, for we watched its approach from some considerable distance. I considered whether she might not have been concealed in the house and overheard me mention my destination to Thorndyke. But this failed to explain the mystery, since I had mentioned no address beyond "Kensington." I had, indeed, mentioned the name of Mrs. Hornby, but the supposition that my friends might be known by name to Mrs. Schallibaum, or even that she might have looked the name up in the directory, presented a probability too remote to be worth entertaining.

But, if I reached no satisfactory conclusion, my cogitations had one useful effect; they occupied my mind to the exclusion of that unfortunate draught of tea. Not that I had been seriously uneasy after the first shock. The quantity that I had swallowed was not large—the tea being hotter than I cared for—and I remembered that, when I had thrown out the lump of sugar, I had turned the cup upside down on the table; so there could have been nothing solid left in it. And the lump of sugar was in itself reassuring, for it certainly would not have been used in conjunction with any less conspicuous but more incriminating form of poison. That lump of sugar was now in my pocket, reserved for careful examination at my leisure; and I reflected with a faint grin that it would be a little disconcerting if it should turn out to contain nothing but sugar after all.

On leaving the tea-shop, I walked up Sloane Street with the intention of doing what I ought to have done earlier in the day. I was going to make perfectly sure that no spy was dogging my footsteps. But for my ridiculous confidence I could have done so quite easily before going to Endsley Gardens; and now, made wiser by a startling experience, I proceeded with systematic care. It was still broad daylight—for the lamps in the tea-shop had been rendered necessary only by the faulty construction of the premises and the dullness of the afternoon—and in an open space I could see far enough for complete safety. Arriving at the top of Sloane Street, I crossed Knightsbridge, and, entering Hyde Park, struck out towards the Serpentine. Passing along the eastern shore, I entered one of the long paths that lead towards the Marble Arch and strode along it at such a pace as would make it necessary for any pursuer to hurry in order to keep me in sight. Half-way across the great stretch of turf, I halted for a few moments and noted the few people who were coming in my direction. Then I turned sharply to the left and headed straight for the Victoria Gate, but again, half-way, I turned off among a clump of trees, and, standing behind the trunk of one of them, took a fresh survey of the people who were moving along the paths. All were at a considerable distance and none appeared to be coming my way.

I now moved cautiously from one tree to another and passed through the wooded region to the south, crossed the Serpentine bridge at a rapid walk and hurrying along the south shore left the Park by Apsley House. From hence I walked at the same rapid pace along Piccadilly, insinuating myself among the crowd with the skill born of long acquaintance with the London streets, crossed amidst the seething traffic at the Circus, darted up Windmill Street and began to zigzag amongst the narrow streets and courts of Soho. Crossing the Seven Dials and Drury Lane I passed through the multitudinous back-streets and alleys that then filled the area south of Lincoln's Inn, came out by Newcastle Street, Holywell Street and Half-Moon Alley into the Strand, which I crossed immediately, ultimately entering the Temple by Devereux Court.

Even then I did not relax my precautions. From one court to another I passed quickly, loitering in those dark entries and unexpected passages that are known to so few but the regular Templars, and coming out into the open only at the last where the wide passage of King's Bench Walk admits of no evasion. Half-way up the stairs, I stood for some time in the

shadow, watching the approaches from the staircase window; and when, at length, I felt satisfied that I had taken every precaution that was possible, I inserted my key and let myself into our chambers.

Thorndyke had already arrived, and, as I entered, he rose to greet me with an expression of evident relief.

"I am glad to see you, Jervis," he said. "I have been rather anxious about you."

"Why?" I asked.

"For several reasons. One is that you are the sole danger that threatens these people—as far as they know. Another is that we made a most ridiculous mistake. We overlooked a fact that ought to have struck us instantly. But how have you fared?"

"Better than I deserved. That good lady stuck to me like a burr—at least I believe she did."

"I have no doubt she did. We have been caught napping finely, Jervis."

"How?"

"We'll go into that presently. Let us hear about your adventures first."

I gave him a full account of my movements from the time when we parted to that of my arrival home, omitting no incident that I was able to remember and, as far as I could, reconstituting my exceedingly devious homeward route.

"Your retreat was masterly," he remarked with a broad smile. "I should think that it would have utterly defeated any pursuer; and the only pity is that it was probably wasted on the desert air. Your pursuer had by that time become a fugitive. But you were wise to take these precautions, for, of course, Weiss might have followed you."

"But I thought he was in Hamburg?"

"Did you? You are a very confiding young gentleman, for a budding medical jurist. Of course we don't know that he is not; but the fact that he has given Hamburg as his present whereabouts establishes a strong presumption that he is somewhere else. I only hope that he has not located you, and, from what you tell me of your later methods, I fancy that you would have shaken him off even if he had started to follow you from the tea-shop."

"I hope so too. But how did that woman manage to stick to me in that way? What was the mistake we made?"

Thorndyke laughed grimly. "It was a perfectly asinine mistake, Jervis. You started up Kennington Park Road on a leisurely, jog-trotting omnibus, and neither you nor I remembered what there is underneath Kennington Park Road."

"Underneath!" I exclaimed, completely puzzled for the moment. Then, suddenly realizing what he meant, "Of course!" I exclaimed. "Idiot that I am! You mean the electric railway?"

"Yes. That explains everything. Mrs. Schallibaum must have watched us from some shop and quietly followed us up the lane. There were a good many women about and several were walking in our direction. There was nothing to distinguish her from the others unless you had recognized her, which you would hardly have been able to do if she had worn a veil and kept at a fair distance. At least I think not."

"No," I agreed, "I certainly should not. I had only seen her in a half-dark room. In outdoor clothes and with a veil, I should never have been able to identify her without very close inspection. Besides there was the disguise or make-up."

"Not at that time. She would hardly come disguised to her own house, for it might have led to her being challenged and asked who she was. I think we may take it that there was no actual disguise, although she would probably wear a shady hat and a veil; which would have prevented either of us from picking her out from the other women in the street."

"And what do you think happened next?"

"I think that she simply walked past us—probably on the other side of the road—as we stood waiting for the omnibus, and turned up Kennington Park Road. She probably guessed that we were waiting for the omnibus and walked up the road in the direction in which it was going. Presently the omnibus would pass her, and there were you in full view on top keeping a vigilant look-out in the wrong direction. Then she would quicken her pace a little and in a minute or two would arrive at the Kennington Station of the South London Railway. In a minute or two more she would be in one of the electric trains whirling along under the street on which your omnibus was crawling. She would get out at the Borough Station, or she might take a more risky chance and go on to the Monument; but in any case she would wait for your omnibus, hail it and get inside. I suppose you took up some passengers on the way?"

"Oh dear, yes. We were stopping every two or three minutes to take up or set down passengers; and most of them were women."

"Very well; then we may take it that when you arrived at the Mansion House, Mrs. Schallibaum was one of your inside passengers. It was a rather quaint situation, I think."

"Yes, confound her! What a couple of noodles she must have thought us!"

"No doubt. And that is the one consoling feature in the case. She will have taken us for a pair of absolute greenhorns. But to continue. Of course she travelled in your omnibus to Kensington—you ought to have gone inside on both occasions, so that you could see every one who entered and examine the inside passengers; she will have followed you to Endsley Gardens and probably noted the house you went to. Thence she will have followed you to the restaurant and may even have lunched there."

"It is quite possible," said I. "There were two rooms and they were filled principally with women."

"Then she will have followed you to Sloane Street, and, as you persisted in riding outside, she could easily take an inside place in your omnibus. As to the theatre, she must have taken it as a veritable gift of the gods; an arrangement made by you for her special convenience."

"Why?"

"My dear fellow! consider. She had only to follow you in and see you safely into your seat and there you were, left till called for. She could then go home, make up for her part; draw out a plan of action, with the help, perhaps, of Mr. Weiss, provide herself with the necessary means and appliances and, at the appointed time, call and collect you."

"That is assuming a good deal," I objected. "It is assuming, for instance, that she lives within a moderate distance of Sloane Square. Otherwise it would have been impossible."

"Exactly. That is why I assume it. You don't suppose that she goes about habitually with lumps of prepared sugar in her pocket. And if not, then she must have got that lump from somewhere. Then the beads suggest a carefully prepared plan, and, as I said just now, she can hardly have been made-up when she met us in Kennington Lane. From all of which it seems likely that her present abode is not very far from Sloane Square."

"At any rate," said I, "it was taking a considerable risk. I might have left the theatre before she came back."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "But it is like a woman to take chances. A man would probably have stuck to you when once he had got you off your guard. But she was ready to take chances. She chanced the railway, and it came off; she chanced your remaining in the theatre, and that came off too. She calculated on the probability of your getting tea when you came out, and she hit it off again. And then she took one chance too many; she assumed that you probably took sugar in your tea, and she was wrong."

"We are taking it for granted that the sugar was prepared," I remarked.

"Yes. Our explanation is entirely hypothetical and may be entirely wrong. But it all hangs together, and if we find any poisonous matter in the sugar, it will be reasonable to assume that we are right. The sugar is the *Experimentum Crucis*. If you will hand it over to me, we will go up to the laboratory and make a preliminary test or two."

I took the lump of sugar from my pocket and gave it to him, and he carried it to the gas-burner, by the light of which he examined it with a lens.

"I don't see any foreign crystals on the surface," said he; "but we had better make a solution and go to work systematically. If it contains any poison we may assume that it will be some alkaloid, though I will test for arsenic too. But a man of Weiss's type would almost certainly use an alkaloid, on account of its smaller bulk and more ready solubility. You ought not to have carried this loose in your pocket. For legal purposes that would seriously interfere with its value as evidence. Bodies that are suspected of containing poison should be carefully isolated and preserved from contact with anything that might lead to doubt in the analysis. It doesn't matter much to us, as this analysis is only for our own information and we can satisfy ourselves as to the state of your pocket. But bear the rule in mind another time."

We now ascended to the laboratory, where Thorndyke proceeded at once to dissolve the lump of sugar in a measured quantity of distilled water by the aid of gentle heat.

"Before we add any acid," said he, "or introduce any fresh matter, we will adopt the simple preliminary measure of tasting the solution. The sugar is a disturbing factor, but some of the alkaloids and most mineral poisons excepting arsenic have a very characteristic taste."

He dipped a glass rod in the warm solution and applied it gingerly to his tongue.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, as he carefully wiped his mouth with his handkerchief, "simple methods are often very valuable. There isn't much doubt as to what is in that sugar. Let me recommend my learned brother to try the flavour. But be careful. A little of this will go a long way."

He took a fresh rod from the rack, and, dipping it in the solution, handed it to me. I cautiously applied it to the tip of my tongue and was immediately aware of a peculiar tingling sensation accompanied by a feeling of numbness.

"Well," said Thorndyke; "what is it?"

"Aconite," I replied without hesitation.

"Yes," he agreed; "aconite it is, or more probably aconitine. And that, I think, gives us all the information we want. We need not trouble now to make a complete analysis, though I shall have a quantitative examination made later. You note the intensity of the taste and you see what the strength of the solution is. Evidently that lump of sugar contained a very large dose of the poison. If the sugar had been dissolved in your tea, the quantity that you drank would have contained enough aconitine to lay you out within a few minutes; which would account for Mrs. Schallibaum's anxiety to get clear of the premises. She saw you drink from the cup, but I imagine she had not seen you turn the sugar out."

"No, I should say not, to judge by her expression. She looked terrified. She is not as hardened as her rascally companion."

"Which is fortunate for you, Jervis. If she had not been in such a flutter, she would have waited until you had poured out

your tea, which was what she probably meant to do, or have dropped the sugar into the milk-jug. In either case you would have got a poisonous dose before you noticed anything amiss."

"They are a pretty pair, Thorndyke," I exclaimed. "A human life seems to be no more to them than the life of a fly or a beetle."

"No; that is so. They are typical poisoners of the worst kind; of the intelligent, cautious, resourceful kind. They are a standing menace to society. As long as they are at large, human lives are in danger, and it is our business to see that they do not remain at large a moment longer than is unavoidable. And that brings us to another point. You had better keep indoors for the next few days."

"Oh, nonsense," I protested. "I can take care of myself."

"I won't dispute that," said Thorndyke, "although I might. But the matter is of vital importance and we can't be too careful. Yours is the only evidence that could convict these people. They know that and will stick at nothing to get rid of you—for by this time they will almost certainly have ascertained that the tea-shop plan has failed. Now your life is of some value to you and to another person whom I could mention; but apart from that, you are the indispensable instrument for ridding society of these dangerous vermin. Moreover, if you were seen abroad and connected with these chambers, they would get the information that their case was really being investigated in a businesslike manner. If Weiss has not already left the country he would do so immediately, and if he has, Mrs. Schallibaum would join him at once, and we might never be able to lay hands on them. You must stay indoors, out of sight, and you had better write to Miss Gibson and ask her to warn the servants to give no information about you to anyone."

"And how long," I asked, "am I to be held on parole?"

"Not long, I think. We have a very promising start. If I have any luck, I shall be able to collect all the evidence I want in about a week. But there is an element of chance in some of it which prevents me from giving a date. And it is just possible that I may have started on a false track. But that I shall be able to tell you better in a day or two."

"And I suppose," I said gloomily, "I shall be out of the hunt altogether?"

"Not at all," he replied. "You have got the Blackmore case to attend to. I shall hand you over all the documents and get you to make an orderly digest of the evidence. You will then have all the facts and can work out the case for yourself. Also I shall ask you to help Polton in some little operations which are designed to throw light into dark places and which you will find both entertaining and instructive."

"Supposing Mrs. Hornby should propose to call and take tea with us in the gardens?" I suggested.

"And bring Miss Gibson with her?" Thorndyke added dryly. "No, Jervis, it would never do. You must make that quite clear to her. It is more probable than not that Mrs. Schallibaum made a careful note of the house in Endsley Gardens, and as that would be the one place actually known to her, she and Weiss—if he is in England—would almost certainly keep a watch on it. If they should succeed in connecting that house with these chambers, a few inquiries would show them the exact state of the case. No; we must keep them in the dark if we possibly can. We have shown too much of our hand already. It is hard on you, but it cannot be helped."

"Oh, don't think I am complaining," I exclaimed. "If it is a matter of business, I am as keen as you are. I thought at first that you were merely considering the safety of my vile body. When shall I start on my job?"

"To-morrow morning. I shall give you my notes on the Blackmore case and the copies of the will and the depositions, from which you had better draw up a digest of the evidence with remarks as to the conclusions that it suggests. Then there are our gleanings from New Inn to be looked over and considered; and with regard to this case, we have the fragments of a pair of spectacles which had better be put together into a rather more intelligible form in case we have to produce them in evidence. That will keep you occupied for a day or two, together with some work appertaining to other cases. And now let us dismiss professional topics. You have not dined and neither have I, but I dare say Polton has made arrangements for some sort of meal. We will go down and see."

We descended to the lower floor, where Thorndyke's anticipations were justified by a neatly laid table to which Polton was giving the finishing touches.

---

## XI. — THE BLACKMORE CASE REVIEWED

ONE of the conditions of medical practice is the capability of transferring one's attention at a moment's notice from one set of circumstances to another equally important but entirely unrelated. At each visit on his round, the practitioner finds himself concerned with a particular, self-contained group of phenomena which he must consider at the moment with the utmost concentration, but which he must instantly dismiss from his mind as he moves on to the next case. It is a difficult habit to acquire; for an important, distressing or obscure case is apt to take possession of the consciousness and hinder the exercise of attention that succeeding cases demand; but experience shows the faculty to be indispensable, and the practitioner learns in time to forget everything but the patient with whose condition he is occupied at the moment.

My first morning's work on the Blackmore case showed me that the same faculty is demanded in legal practice; and it also showed me that I had yet to acquire it. For, as I looked over the depositions and the copy of the will, memories of the

mysterious house in Kennington Lane continually intruded into my reflections, and the figure of Mrs. Schallibaum, white-faced, terrified, expectant, haunted me continually.

In truth, my interest in the Blackmore case was little more than academic, whereas in the Kennington case I was one of the parties and was personally concerned. To me, John Blackmore was but a name, Jeffrey but a shadowy figure to which I could assign no definite personality, and Stephen himself but a casual stranger. Mr. Graves, on the other hand, was a real person. I had seen him amidst the tragic circumstances that had probably heralded his death, and had brought away with me, not only a lively recollection of him, but a feeling of profound pity and concern as to his fate. The villain Weiss, too, and the terrible woman who aided, abetted and, perhaps, even directed him, lived in my memory as vivid and dreadful realities. Although I had uttered no hint to Thorndyke, I lamented inwardly that I had not been given some work—if there was any to do—connected with this case, in which I was so deeply interested, rather than with the dry, purely legal and utterly bewildering case of Jeffrey Blackmore's will.

Nevertheless, I stuck loyally to my task. I read through the depositions and the will—without getting a single glimmer of fresh light on the case—and I made a careful digest of all the facts. I compared my digest with Thorndyke's notes—of which I also made a copy—and found that, brief as they were, they contained several matters that I had overlooked. I also drew up a brief account of our visit to New Inn, with a list of the objects that we had observed or collected. And then I addressed myself to the second part of my task, the statement of my conclusions from the facts set forth.

It was only when I came to make the attempt that I realized how completely I was at sea. In spite of Thorndyke's recommendation to study Marchmont's statement as it was summarized in those notes which I had copied, and of his hint that I should find in that statement something highly significant, I was borne irresistibly to one conclusion, and one only—and the wrong one at that, as I suspected: that Jeffrey Blackmore's will was a perfectly regular, sound and valid document.

I tried to attack the validity of the will from various directions, and failed every time. As to its genuineness, that was obviously not in question. There seemed to me only two conceivable respects in which any objection could be raised, viz. the competency of Jeffrey to execute a will and the possibility of undue influence having been brought to bear on him.

With reference to the first, there was the undoubted fact that Jeffrey was addicted to the opium habit, and this might, under some circumstances, interfere with a testator's competency to make a will. But had any such circumstances existed in this case? Had the drug habit produced such mental changes in the deceased as would destroy or weaken his judgment? There was not a particle of evidence in favour of any such belief. Up to the very end he had managed his own affairs, and, if his habits of life had undergone a change, they were still the habits of a perfectly sane and responsible man.

The question of undue influence was more difficult. If it applied to any person in particular, that person could be none other than John Blackmore. Now it was an undoubted fact that, of all Jeffrey's acquaintance, his brother John was the only one who knew that he was in residence at New Inn. Moreover John had visited him there more than once. It was therefore possible that influence might have been brought to bear on the deceased. But there was no evidence that it had. The fact that the deceased man's only brother should be the one person who knew where he was living was not a remarkable one, and it had been satisfactorily explained by the necessity of Jeffrey's finding a reference on applying for the chambers. And against the theory of undue influence was the fact that the testator had voluntarily brought his will to the lodge and executed it in the presence of entirely disinterested witnesses.

In the end I had to give up the problem in despair, and, abandoning the documents, turned my attention to the facts elicited by our visit to New Inn.

What had we learned from our exploration? It was clear that Thorndyke had picked up some facts that had appeared to him important. But important in what respect? The only possible issue that could be raised was the validity or otherwise of Jeffrey Blackmore's will; and since the validity of that will was supported by positive evidence of the most incontestable kind, it seemed that nothing that we had observed could have any real bearing on the case at all.

But this, of course, could not be. Thorndyke was no dreamer nor was he addicted to wild speculation. If the facts observed by us seemed to him to be relevant to the case, I was prepared to assume that they were relevant, although I could not see their connection with it. And, on this assumption, I proceeded to examine them afresh.

Now, whatever Thorndyke might have observed on his own account, I had brought away from the dead man's chambers only a single fact; and a very extraordinary fact it was. The cuneiform inscription was upside down. That was the sum of the evidence that I had collected; and the question was, What did it prove? To Thorndyke it conveyed some deep significance. What could that significance be?

The inverted position was not a mere temporary accident, as it might have been if the frame had been stood on a shelf or support. It was hung on the wall, and the plates screwed on the frame showed that its position was permanent and that it had never hung in any other. That it could have been hung up by Jeffrey himself was clearly inconceivable. But allowing that it had been fixed in its present position by some workman when the new tenant moved in, the fact remained that there it had hung, presumably for months, and that Jeffrey Blackmore, with his expert knowledge of the cuneiform character, had never noticed that it was upside down; or, if he had noticed it, that he had never taken the trouble to have it altered.

What could this mean? If he had noticed the error but had not troubled to correct it, that would point to a very singular state of mind, an inertness and indifference remarkable even in an opium-smoker. But assuming such a state of mind, I could not see that it had any bearing on the will, excepting that it was rather inconsistent with the tendency to make fussy and needless alterations which the testator had actually shown. On the other hand, if he had not noticed the inverted



position of the photograph he must have been nearly blind or quite idiotic; for the photograph was over two feet long and the characters large enough to be read easily by a person of ordinary eyesight at a distance of forty or fifty feet. Now he obviously was not in a state of dementia, whereas his eyesight was admittedly bad; and it seemed to me that the only conclusion deducible from the photograph was that it furnished a measure of the badness of the deceased man's vision—that it proved him to have been verging on total blindness.

But there was nothing startling new in this. He had, himself, declared that he was fast losing his sight. And again, what was the bearing of his partial blindness on the will? A totally blind man cannot draw up his will at all. But if he has eyesight sufficient to enable him to write out and sign a will, mere defective vision will not lead him to muddle the provisions. Yet something of this kind seemed to be in Thorndyke's mind, for now I recalled the question that he had put to the porter: "When you read the will over in Mr. Blackmore's presence, did you read it aloud?" That question could have but one significance. It implied a doubt as to whether the testator was fully aware of the exact nature of the document that he was signing. Yet, if he was able to write and sign it, surely he was able also to read it through, to say nothing of the fact that, unless he was demented, he must have remembered what he had written.

Thus, once more, my reasoning only led me into a blind alley at the end of which was the will, regular and valid and fulfilling all the requirements that the law imposed. Once again I had to confess myself beaten and in full agreement with Mr. Marchmont that "there was no case"; that "there was nothing in dispute." Nevertheless, I carefully fixed in the pocket file that Thorndyke had given me the copy that I had made of his notes, together with the notes on our visit to New Inn, and the few and unsatisfactory conclusions at which I had arrived; and this brought me to the end of my first morning in my new capacity.

"And how," Thorndyke asked as we sat at lunch, "has my learned friend progressed? Does he propose that we advise Mr. Marchmont to enter a caveat?"

"I've read all the documents and boiled all the evidence down to a stiff jelly; and I am in a worse fog than ever."

"There seems to be a slight mixture of metaphors in my learned friend's remarks. But never mind the fog, Jervis. There is a certain virtue in fog. It serves, like a picture frame, to surround the essential with a neutral zone that separates it from the irrelevant."

"That is a very profound observation, Thorndyke," I remarked ironically.

"I was just thinking so myself," he rejoined.

"And if you could contrive to explain what it means—"

"Oh, but that is unreasonable. When one throws off a subtly philosophic obiter dictum one looks to the discerning critic to supply the meaning. By the way, I am going to introduce you to the gentle art of photography this afternoon. I am getting the loan of all the cheques that were drawn by Jeffrey Blackmore during his residence at New Inn—there are only twenty-three of them, all told—and I am going to photograph them."

"I shouldn't have thought the bank people would have let them go out of their possession."

"They are not going to. One of the partners, a Mr. Britton, is bringing them here himself and will be present while the photographs are being taken; so they will not go out of his custody. But, all the same, it is a great concession, and I should not have obtained it but for the fact that I have done a good deal of work for the bank and that Mr. Britton is more or less a personal friend."

"By the way, how comes it that the cheques are at the bank? Why were they not returned to Jeffrey with the pass-book in the usual way?"

"I understand from Britton," replied Thorndyke, "that all Jeffrey's cheques were retained by the bank at his request. When he was travelling he used to leave his investment securities and other valuable documents in his bankers' custody, and, as he has never applied to have them returned, the bankers still have them and are retaining them until the will is proved, when they will, of course, hand over everything to the executors."

"What is the object of photographing these cheques?" I asked.

"There are several objects. First, since a good photograph is practically as good as the original, when we have the photographs we practically have the cheques for reference. Then, since a photograph can be duplicated indefinitely, it is possible to perform experiments on it which involve its destruction; which would, of course, be impossible in the case of original cheques."

"But the ultimate object, I mean. What are you going to prove?"

"You are incorrigible, Jervis," he exclaimed. "How should I know what I am going to prove? This is an investigation. If I knew the result beforehand, I shouldn't want to perform the experiment."

He looked at his watch, and, as we rose from the table, he said:

"If we have finished, we had better go up to the laboratory and see that the apparatus is ready. Mr. Britton is a busy man, and, as he is doing us a great service, we mustn't keep him waiting when he comes."

We ascended to the laboratory, where Polton was already busy inspecting the massively built copying camera which—

with the long, steel guides on which the easel or copy-holder travelled—took up the whole length of the room on the side opposite to that occupied by the chemical bench. As I was to be inducted into the photographic art, I looked at it with more attention than I had ever done before.

“We’ve made some improvements since you were here last, sir,” said Polton, who was delicately lubricating the steel guides. “We’ve fitted these steel runners instead of the blackleaded wooden ones that we used to have. And we’ve made two scales instead of one. Hallo! That’s the downstairs bell. Shall I go sir?”

“Perhaps you’d better,” said Thorndyke. “It may not be Mr. Britton, and I don’t want to be caught and delayed just now.”

However, it was Mr. Britton; a breezy alert-looking middle-aged man, who came in escorted by Polton and shook our hands cordially, having been previously warned of my presence. He carried a small but solid hand-bag, to which he clung tenaciously up to the very moment when its contents were required for use.

“So that is the camera,” said he, running an inquisitive eye over the instrument. “Very fine one, too; I am a bit of a photographer myself. What is that graduation on the side-bar?”

“Those are the scales,” replied Thorndyke, “that shows the degree of magnification or reduction. The pointer is fixed to the easel and travels with it, of course, showing the exact size of the photograph. When the pointer is opposite to the photograph will be identical in size with the object photographed; when it points to, say,  $\times 6$ , the photograph will be six times as long as the object, or magnified thirty-six times superficially, whereas if the pointer is at  $\div 6$ , the photograph will be a sixth of the length of the object, or one thirty-sixth superficial.”

“Why are there two scales?” Mr. Britton asked.

“There is a separate scale for each of the two lenses that we principally use. For great magnification or reduction a lens of comparatively short focus must be used, but, as a long-focus lens gives a more perfect image, we use one of very long focus—thirty-six inches—for copying the same size or for slight magnification or reduction.”

“Are you going to magnify these cheques?” Mr. Britton asked.

“Not in the first place,” replied Thorndyke. “For convenience and speed I am going to photograph them half-size, so that six cheques will go on one whole plate. Afterwards we can enlarge from the negatives as much as we like. But we should probably enlarge only the signatures in any case.”

The precious bag was now opened and the twenty-three cheques brought out and laid on the bench in a consecutive series in the order of their dates. They were then fixed by tapes—to avoid making pin-holes in them—in batches of six to small drawing boards, each batch being so arranged that the signatures were towards the middle. The first board was clamped to the easel, the latter was slid along its guides until the pointer stood at  $\div 2$  on the long-focus scale and Thorndyke proceeded to focus the camera with the aid of a little microscope that Polton had made for the purpose. When Mr. Britton and I had inspected the exquisitely sharp image on the focusing-screen through the microscope, Polton introduced the plate and made the first exposure, carrying the dark-slide off to develop the plate while the next batch of cheques was being fixed in position.

In his photographic technique, as in everything else, Polton followed as closely as he could the methods of his principal and instructor; methods characterized by that unhurried precision that leads to perfect accomplishment. When the first negative was brought forth, dripping, from the dark-room, it was without spot or stain, scratch or pin-hole; uniform in colour and of exactly the required density. The six cheques shown on it—ridiculously small in appearance, though only reduced to half-length—looked as clear and sharp as fine etchings; though, to be sure, my opportunity for examining them was rather limited, for Polton was uncommonly careful to keep the wet plate out of reach and so safe from injury.

“Well,” said Mr. Britton, when, at the end of the séance, he returned his treasures to the bag, “you have now got twenty-three of our cheques, to all intents and purposes. I hope you are not going to make any unlawful use of them—must tell our cashiers to keep a bright look-out; and”—here he lowered his voice impressively and addressed himself to me and Polton—“you understand that this is a private matter between Dr. Thorndyke and me. Of course, as Mr. Blackmore is dead, there is no reason why his cheques should not be photographed for legal purposes; but we don’t want it talked about; nor, I think, does Dr. Thorndyke.”

“Certainly not,” Thorndyke agreed emphatically; “but you need not be uneasy, Mr. Britton. We are very uncommunicative people in this establishment.”

As my colleague and I escorted our visitor down the stairs, he returned to the subject of the cheques.

“I don’t understand what you want them for,” he remarked. “There is no question turning on signatures in the case of Blackmore deceased, is there?”

“I should say not,” Thorndyke replied rather evasively.

“I should say very decidedly not,” said Mr. Britton, “if I understood Marchmont aright. And, even if there were, let me tell you, these signatures that you have got wouldn’t help you. I have looked them over very closely—and I have seen a few signatures in my time, you know. Marchmont asked me to glance over them as a matter of form, but I don’t believe in matters of form; I examined them very carefully. There is an appreciable amount of variation; a very appreciable amount. *But* under the variation one can trace the personal character (which is what matters); the subtle, indescribable quality that makes it recognizable to the expert eye as Jeffrey Blackmore’s writing. You understand me. There is such a quality, which

remains when the coarser characteristics vary; just as a man may grow old, or fat, or bald, or may take to drink, and become quite changed; and yet, through it all, he preserves a certain something which makes him recognizable as a member of a particular family. Well, I find that quality in all those signatures, and so will you, if you have had enough experience of handwriting. I thought it best to mention it in case you might be giving yourself unnecessary trouble."

"It is very good of you," said Thorndyke, "and I need not say that the information is of great value, coming from such a highly expert source. As a matter of fact, your hint will be of great value to me."

He shook hands with Mr. Britton, and, as the latter disappeared down the stairs, he turned into the sitting-room and remarked:

"There is a very weighty and significant observation, Jervis. I advise you to consider it attentively in all its bearings."

"You mean the fact that these signatures are undoubtedly genuine?"

"I meant, rather, the very interesting general truth that is contained in Britton's statement; that physiognomy is not a mere matter of facial character. A man carries his personal trademark, not in his face only, but in his nervous system and muscles—giving rise to characteristic movements and gait; in his larynx—producing an individual voice; and even in his mouth, as shown by individual peculiarities of speech and accent. And the individual nervous system, by means of these characteristic movements, transfers its peculiarities to inanimate objects that are the products of such movements; as we see in pictures, in carving, in musical execution and in handwriting. No one has ever painted quite like Reynolds or Romney; no one has ever played exactly like Liszt or Paganini; the pictures or the sounds produced by them, were, so to speak, an extension of the physiognomy of the artist. And so with handwriting. A particular specimen is the product of a particular set of motor centres in an individual brain."

"These are very interesting considerations, Thorndyke," I remarked; "but I don't quite see their present application. Do you mean them to bear in any special way on the Blackmore case?"

"I think they do bear on it very directly. I thought so while Mr. Britton was making his very illuminating remarks."

"I don't see how. In fact I cannot see why you are going into the question of the signatures at all. The signature on the will is admittedly genuine, and that seems to me to dispose of the whole affair."

"My dear Jervis," said he, "you and Marchmont are allowing yourselves to be obsessed by a particular fact—a very striking and weighty fact, I will admit, but still, only an isolated fact. Jeffrey Blackmore executed his will in a regular manner, complying with all the necessary formalities and conditions. In the face of that single circumstance you and Marchmont would 'chuck up the sponge,' as the old pugilists expressed it. Now that is a great mistake. You should never allow yourself to be bullied and browbeaten by a single fact."

"But, my dear Thorndyke!" I protested, "this fact seems to be final. It covers all possibilities—unless you can suggest any other that would cancel it."

"I could suggest a dozen," he replied. "Let us take an instance. Supposing Jeffrey executed this will for a wager; that he immediately revoked it and made a fresh will, that he placed the latter in the custody of some person and that that person has suppressed it."

"Surely you do not make this suggestion seriously!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly I do not," he replied with a smile. "I merely give it as an instance to show that your final and absolute fact is really only conditional on there being no other fact that cancels it."

"Do you think he might have made a third will?"

"It is obviously possible. A man who makes two wills may make three or more; but I may say that I see no present reason for assuming the existence of another will. What I want to impress on you is the necessity of considering all the facts instead of bumping heavily against the most conspicuous one and forgetting all the rest. By the way, here is a little problem for you. What was the object of which these are the parts?"

He pushed across the table a little cardboard box, having first removed the lid. In it were a number of very small pieces of broken glass, some of which had been cemented together by their edges.

"These, I suppose," said I, looking with considerable curiosity at the little collection, "are the pieces of glass that we picked up in poor Blackmore's bedroom?"

"Yes. You see that Polton has been endeavouring to reconstitute the object, whatever it was; but he has not been very successful, for the fragments were too small and irregular and the collection too incomplete. However, here is a specimen, built up of six small pieces, which exhibits the general character of the object fairly well."

He picked out the little irregularly shaped object and handed it to me; and I could not but admire the neatness with which Polton had joined the tiny fragments together.

I took the little "restoration," and, holding it up before my eyes, moved it to and fro as I looked through it at the window.

"It was not a lens," I pronounced eventually.

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "it was not a lens."

"And so cannot have been a spectacle-glass. But the surface was curved—one side convex and the other concave—and the little piece that remains of the original edge seems to have been ground to fit a bezel or frame. I should say that these are portions of a watch-glass."

"That is Polton's opinion," said Thorndyke, "and I think you are both wrong."

"What do you say to the glass of a miniature or locket?"

"That is rather more probable, but it is not my view."

"What do you think it is?" I asked. But Thorndyke was not to be drawn.

"I am submitting the problem for solution by my learned friend," he replied with an exasperating smile, and then added: "I don't say that you and Polton are wrong; only that I don't agree with you. Perhaps you had better make a note of the properties of this object, and consider it at your leisure when you are ruminating on the other data referring to the Blackmore case."

"My ruminations," I said, "always lead me back to the same point."

"But you mustn't let them," he replied. "Shuffle your data about. Invent hypotheses. Never mind if they seem rather wild. Don't put them aside on that account. Take the first hypothesis that you can invent and test it thoroughly with your facts. You will probably have to reject it, but you will be certain to have learned something new. Then try again with a fresh one. You remember what I told you of my methods when I began this branch of practice and had plenty of time on my hands?"

"I am not sure that I do."

"Well, I used to occupy my leisure in constructing imaginary cases, mostly criminal, for the purpose of study and for the acquirement of experience. For instance, I would devise an ingenious fraud and would plan it in detail, taking every precaution that I could think of against failure or detection, considering, and elaborately providing for, every imaginable contingency. For the time being, my entire attention was concentrated on it, making it as perfect and secure and undetectable as I could with the knowledge and ingenuity at my command. I behaved exactly as if I were proposing actually to carry it out, and my life or liberty depended on its success—excepting that I made full notes of every detail of the scheme. Then when my plans were as complete as I could make them, and I could think of no way in which to improve them, I changed sides and considered the case from the standpoint of detection. I analysed the case, I picked out its inherent and unavoidable weaknesses, and, especially, I noted the respects in which a fraudulent proceeding of a particular kind differed from the *bona fide* proceeding that it simulated. The exercise was invaluable to me. I acquired as much experience from those imaginary cases as I should from real ones, and in addition, I learned a method which is the one that I practise to this day."

"Do you mean that you still invent imaginary cases as mental exercises?"

"No; I mean that, when I have a problem of any intricacy, I invent a case which fits the facts and the assumed motives of one of the parties. Then I work at that case until I find whether it leads to elucidation or to some fundamental disagreement. In the latter case I reject it and begin the process over again."

"Doesn't that method sometimes involve a good deal of wasted time and energy?" I asked.

"No; because each time that you fail to establish a given case, you exclude a particular explanation of the facts and narrow down the field of inquiry. By repeating the process, you are bound, in the end, to arrive at an imaginary case which fits all the facts. Then your imaginary case is the real case and the problem is solved. Let me recommend you to give the method a trial."

I promised to do so, though with no very lively expectations as to the result, and with this, the subject was allowed, for the present, to drop.

---

## XII. — THE PORTRAIT

THE state of mind which Thorndyke had advised me to cultivate was one that did not come easily. However much I endeavoured to shuffle the facts of the Blackmore case, there was one which inevitably turned up on the top of the pack. The circumstances surrounding the execution of Jeffrey Blackmore's will intruded into all my cogitations on the subject with hopeless persistency. That scene in the porter's lodge was to me what King Charles's head was to poor Mr. Dick. In the midst of my praiseworthy efforts to construct some intelligible scheme of the case, it would make its appearance and reduce my mind to instant chaos.

For the next few days, Thorndyke was very much occupied with one or two civil cases, which kept him in court during the whole of the sitting; and when he came home, he seemed indisposed to talk on professional topics. Meanwhile, Polton worked steadily at the photographs of the signatures, and, with a view to gaining experience, I assisted him and watched his methods.

In the present case, the signatures were enlarged from their original dimensions—rather less than an inch and a half in length—to a length of four and a half inches; which rendered all the little peculiarities of the handwriting surprisingly distinct and conspicuous. Each signature was eventually mounted on a slip of card bearing a number and the date of the

cheque from which it was taken, so that it was possible to place any two signatures together for comparison. I looked over the whole series and very carefully compared those which showed any differences, but without discovering anything more than might have been expected in view of Mr. Britton's statement. There were some trifling variations, but they were all very much alike, and no one could doubt, on looking at them, that they were all written by the same hand.

As this, however, was apparently not in dispute, it furnished no new information. Thorndyke's object—for I felt certain that he had something definite in his mind—must be to test something apart from the genuineness of the signatures. But what could that something be? I dared not ask him, for questions of that kind were anathema, so there was nothing for it but to lie low and see what he would do with the photographs.

The whole series was finished on the fourth morning after my adventure at Sloane Square, and the pack of cards was duly delivered by Polton when he brought in the breakfast tray. Thorndyke took up the pack somewhat with the air of a whist player, and, as he ran through them, I noticed that the number had increased from twenty-three to twenty-four.

"The additional one," Thorndyke explained, "is the signature to the first will, which was in Marchmont's possession. I have added it to the collection as it carries us back to an earlier date. The signature of the second will presumably resembles those of the cheques drawn about the same date. But that is not material, or, if it should become so, we could claim to examine the second will."

He laid the cards out on the table in the order of their dates and slowly ran his eye down the series. I watched him closely and ventured presently to ask:

"Do you agree with Mr. Britton as to the general identity of character in the whole set of signatures?"

"Yes," he replied. "I should certainly have put them down as being all the signatures of one person. The variations are very slight. The later signatures are a little stiffer, a little more shaky and indistinct, and the B's and K's are both appreciably different from those in the earlier ones. But there is another fact which emerges when the whole series is seen together, and it is so striking and significant a fact, that I am astonished at its not having been remarked on by Mr. Britton."

"Indeed!" said I, stooping to examine the photographs with fresh interest; "what is that?"

"It is a very simple fact and very obvious, but yet, as I have said, very significant. Look carefully at number one, which is the signature of the first will, dated three years ago, and compare it with number three, dated the eighteenth of September last year."

"They look to me identical," said I, after a careful comparison.

"So they do to me," said Thorndyke. "Neither of them shows the change that occurred later. But if you look at number two, dated the sixteenth of September, you will see that it is in the later style. So is number four, dated the twenty-third of September; but numbers five and six, both at the beginning of October, are in the earlier style, like the signature of the will. Thereafter all the signatures are in the new style; but, if you compare number two, dated the sixteenth of September with number twenty-four, dated the fourteenth of March of this year—the day of Jeffrey's death—you see that they exhibit no difference. Both are in the 'later style,' but the last shows no greater change than the first. Don't you consider these facts very striking and significant?"

I reflected a few moments, trying to make out the deep significance to which Thorndyke was directing my attention—and not succeeding very triumphantly.

"You mean," I said, "that the occasional reversions to the earlier form convey some material suggestion?"

"Yes; but more than that. What we learn from an inspection of this series is this: that there was a change in the character of the signature; a very slight change, but quite recognizable. Now that change was not gradual or insidious nor was it progressive. It occurred at a certain definite time. At first there were one or two reversions to the earlier form, but after number six the new style continued to the end; and you notice that it continued without any increase in the change and without any variation. There are no intermediate forms. Some of the signatures are in the 'old style' and some in the 'new,' but there are none that are half and half. So that, to repeat: We have here two types of signature, very much alike, but distinguishable. They alternate, but do not merge into one another to produce intermediate forms. The change occurs abruptly, but shows no tendency to increase as time goes on; it is not a progressive change. What do you make of that, Jervis?"

"It is very remarkable," I said, poring over the cards to verify Thorndyke's statements. "I don't quite know what to make of it. If the circumstances admitted of the idea of forgery, one would suspect the genuineness of some of the signatures. But they don't—at any rate, in the case of the later will, to say nothing of Mr. Britton's opinion on the signatures."

"Still," said Thorndyke, "there must be some explanation of the change in the character of the signatures, and that explanation cannot be the failing eyesight of the writer; for that is a gradually progressive and continuous condition, whereas the change in the writing is abrupt and intermittent."

I considered Thorndyke's remark for a few moments; and then a light—though not a very brilliant one—seemed to break on me.

"I think I see what you are driving at," said I. "You mean that the change in the writing must be associated with some new condition affecting the writer, and that that condition existed intermittently?"

Thorndyke nodded approvingly, and I continued:

"The only intermittent condition that we know of is the effect of opium. So that we might consider the clearer signatures to have been made when Jeffrey was in his normal state, and the less distinct ones after a bout of opium-smoking."

"That is perfectly sound reasoning," said Thorndyke. "What further conclusion does it lead to?"

"It suggests that the opium habit had been only recently acquired, since the change was noticed only about the time he went to live at New Inn; and, since the change in the writing is at first intermittent and then continuous, we may infer that the opium-smoking was at first occasional and later became a confirmed habit."

"Quite a reasonable conclusion and very clearly stated," said Thorndyke. "I don't say that I entirely agree with you, or that you have exhausted the information that these signatures offer. But you have started in the right direction."

"I may be on the right road," I said gloomily; "but I am stuck fast in one place and I see no chance of getting any farther."

"But you have a quantity of data," said Thorndyke. "You have all the facts that I had to start with, from which I constructed the hypothesis that I am now busily engaged in verifying. I have a few more data now, for 'as money makes money' so knowledge begets knowledge, and I put my original capital out to interest. Shall we tabulate the facts that are in our joint possession and see what they suggest?"

I grasped eagerly at the offer, though I had conned over my notes again and again.

Thorndyke produced a slip of paper from a drawer, and, uncapping his fountain-pen, proceeded to write down the leading facts, reading each aloud as soon as it was written.

"1. The second will was unnecessary since it contained no new matter, expressed no new intentions and met no new conditions, and the first will was quite clear and efficient.

"2. The evident intention of the testator was to leave the bulk of his property to Stephen Blackmore.

"3. The second will did not, under existing circumstances, give effect to this intention, whereas the first will did.

"4. The signature of the second will differs slightly from that of the first, and also from what had hitherto been the testator's ordinary signature.

"And now we come to a very curious group of dates, which I will advise you to consider with great attention.

"5. Mrs. Wilson made her will at the beginning of September last year, without acquainting Jeffrey Blackmore, who seems to have been unaware of the existence of this will.

"6. His own second will was dated the twelfth of November of last year.

"7. Mrs. Wilson died of cancer on the twelfth of March this present year.

"8. Jeffrey Blackmore was last seen alive on the fourteenth of March.

"9. His body was discovered on the fifteenth of March.

"10. The change in the character of his signature began about September last year and became permanent after the middle of October.

"You will find that collection of facts repay careful study, Jervis, especially when considered in relation to the further data:

"11. That we found in Blackmore's chambers a framed inscription of large size, hung upside down, together with what appeared to be the remains of a watch-glass and a box of stearine candles and some other objects."

He passed the paper to me and I pored over it intently, focusing my attention on the various items with all the power of my will. But, struggle as I would, no general conclusion could be made to emerge from the mass of apparently disconnected facts.

"Well?" Thorndyke said presently, after watching with grave interest my unavailing efforts; "what do you make of it?"

"Nothing!" I exclaimed desperately, slapping the paper down on the table. "Of course, I can see that there are some queer coincidences. But how do they bear on the case? I understand that you want to upset this will; which we know to have been signed without compulsion or even suggestion in the presence of two respectable men, who have sworn to the identity of the document. That is your object, I believe?"

"Certainly it is."

"Then I am hanged if I see how you are going to do it. Not, I should say, by offering a group of vague coincidences that would muddle any brain but your own."

Thorndyke chuckled softly but pursued the subject no farther.

"Put that paper in your file with your other notes," he said, "and think it over at your leisure. And now I want a little help from you. Have you a good memory for faces?"

"Fairly good, I think. Why?"

"Because I have a photograph of a man whom I think you may have met. Just look at it and tell me if you remember the face."

He drew a cabinet size photograph from an envelope that had come by the morning's post and handed it to me.

"I have certainly seen this face somewhere," said I, taking the portrait over to the window to examine it more thoroughly, "but I can't, at the moment, remember where."

"Try," said Thorndyke. "If you have seen the face before, you should be able to recall the person."

I looked intently at the photograph, and the more I looked, the more familiar did the face appear. Suddenly the identity of the man flashed into my mind and I exclaimed in astonishment:

"It can't be that poor creature at Kennington, Mr. Graves?"

"I think it can," replied Thorndyke, "and I think it is. But could you swear to the identity in a court of law?"

"It is my firm conviction that the photograph is that of Mr. Graves. I would swear to that."

"No man ought to swear to more," said Thorndyke. "Identification is always a matter of opinion or belief. The man who will swear unconditionally to identity from memory only is a man whose evidence should be discredited. I think your sworn testimony would be sufficient."

It is needless to say that the production of this photograph filled me with amazement and curiosity as to how Thorndyke had obtained it. But, as he replaced it impassively in its envelope without volunteering any explanation, I felt that I could not question him directly. Nevertheless, I ventured to approach the subject in an indirect manner.

"Did you get any information from those Darmstadt people?" I asked.

"Schnitzler? Yes. I learned, through the medium of an official acquaintance, that Dr. H. Weiss was a stranger to them; that they knew nothing about him excepting that he had ordered from them, and been supplied with, a hundred grammes of pure hydrochlorate of morphine."

"All at once?"

"No. In separate parcels of twenty-five grammes each."

"Is that all you know about Weiss?"

"It is all that I actually know; but it is not all that I suspect—on very substantial grounds. By the way, what did you think of the coachman?"

"I don't know that I thought very much about him. Why?"

"You never suspected that he and Weiss were one and the same person?"

"No. How could they be? They weren't in the least alike. And one was a Scotchman and the other a German. But perhaps you know that they were the same?"

"I only know what you have told me. But considering that you never saw them together, that the coachman was never available for messages or assistance when Weiss was with you; that Weiss always made his appearance some time after you arrived, and disappeared some time before you left; it has seemed to me that they might have been the same person."

"I should say it was impossible. They were so very different in appearance. But supposing that they were the same; would the fact be of any importance?"

"It would mean that we could save ourselves the trouble of looking for the coachman. And it would suggest some inferences, which will occur to you if you think the matter over. But being only a speculative opinion, at present, it would not be safe to infer very much from it."

"You have rather taken me by surprise," I remarked. "It seems that you have been working at this Kennington case, and working pretty actively I imagine, whereas I supposed that your entire attention was taken up by the Blackmore affair."

"It doesn't do," he replied, "to allow one's entire attention to be taken up by any one case. I have half a dozen others—minor cases, mostly—to which I am attending at this moment. Did you think I was proposing to keep you under lock and key indefinitely?"

"Well, no. But I thought the Kennington case would have to wait its turn. And I had no idea that you were in possession of enough facts to enable you to get any farther with it."

"But you knew all the very striking facts of the case, and you saw the further evidence that we extracted from the empty house."

"Do you mean those things that we picked out from the rubbish under the grate?"

"Yes. You saw those curious little pieces of reed and the pair of spectacles. They are lying in the top drawer of that cabinet at this moment, and I should recommend you to have another look at them. To me they are most instructive. The pieces of reed offered an extremely valuable suggestion, and the spectacles enabled me to test that suggestion and turn it into actual information."

“Unfortunately,” said I, “the pieces of reed convey nothing to me. I don’t know what they are or of what they have formed a part.”

“I think,” he replied, “that if you examine them with due consideration, you will find their use pretty obvious. Have a good look at them and the spectacles too. Think over all that you know of that mysterious group of people who lived in that house, and see if you cannot form some coherent theory of their actions. Think, also, if we have not some information in our possession by which we might be able to identify some of them, and infer the identity of the others. You will have a quiet day, as I shall not be home until the evening; set yourself this task. I assure you that you have the material for identifying—or rather for testing the identity of—at least one of those persons. Go over your material systematically, and let me know in the evening what further investigations you would propose.”

“Very well,” said I. “It shall be done according to your word. I will addle my brain afresh with the affair of Mr. Weiss and his patient, and let the Blackmore case rip.”

“There is no need to do that. You have a whole day before you. An hour’s really close consideration of the Kennington case ought to show you what your next move should be, and then you could devote yourself to the consideration of Jeffrey Blackmore’s will.”

With this final piece of advice, Thorndyke collected the papers for his day’s work, and, having deposited them in his brief bag, took his departure, leaving me to my meditations.





### XIII. — THE STATEMENT OF SAMUEL WILKINS

AS soon as I was alone, I commenced my investigations with a rather desperate hope of eliciting some startling and unsuspected facts. I opened the drawer and taking from it the two pieces of reed and the shattered remains of the spectacles, laid them on the table. The repairs that Thorndyke had contemplated in the case of the spectacles, had not been made. Apparently they had not been necessary. The battered wreck that lay before me, just as we had found it, had evidently furnished the necessary information; for, since Thorndyke was in possession of a portrait of Mr. Graves, it was clear that he had succeeded in identifying him so far as to get into communication with some one who had known him intimately.

The circumstance should have been encouraging. But somehow it was not. What was possible to Thorndyke was, theoretically, possible to me—or to anyone else. But the possibility did not realize itself in practice. There was the personal equation. Thorndyke's brain was not an ordinary brain. Facts of which his mind instantly perceived the relation remained to other people unconnected and without meaning. His powers of observation and rapid inference were almost incredible, as I had noticed again and again, and always with undiminished wonder. He seemed to take in everything at a single glance and in an instant to appreciate the meaning of everything that he had seen.

Here was a case in point. I had myself seen all that he had seen, and, indeed, much more; for I had looked on the very people and witnessed their actions, whereas he had never set eyes on any of them. I had examined the little handful of rubbish that he had gathered up so carefully, and would have flung it back under the grate without a qualm. Not a glimmer of light had I perceived in the cloud of mystery, nor even a hint of the direction in which to seek enlightenment. And yet Thorndyke had, in some incomprehensible manner, contrived to piece together facts that I had probably not even observed, and that so completely that he had already, in these few days, narrowed down the field of inquiry to quite a small area.

From these reflections I returned to the objects on the table. The spectacles, as things of which I had some expert knowledge, were not so profound a mystery to me. A pair of spectacles might easily afford good evidence for identification; that I perceived clearly enough. Not a ready-made pair, picked up casually at a shop, but a pair constructed by a skilled optician to remedy a particular defect of vision and to fit a particular face. And such were the spectacles before me. The build of the frames was peculiar; the existence of a cylindrical lens—which I could easily make out from the remaining fragments—showed that one glass had been cut to a prescribed shape and almost certainly ground to a particular formula, and also that the distance between centres must have been carefully secured. Hence these spectacles had an individual character. But it was manifestly impossible to inquire of all the spectacle-makers in Europe—for the glasses were not necessarily made in England. As confirmation the spectacles might be valuable; as a starting-point they were of no use at all.

From the spectacles I turned to the pieces of reed. These were what had given Thorndyke his start. Would they give me a leading hint too? I looked at them and wondered what it was that they had told Thorndyke. The little fragment of the red paper label had a dark-brown or thin black border ornamented with a fret-pattern, and on it I detected a couple of tiny points of gold like the dust from leaf-gilding. But I learned nothing from that. Then the shorter piece of reed was artificially hollowed to fit on the longer piece. Apparently it formed a protective sheath or cap. But what did it protect? Presumably a point or edge of some kind. Could this be a pocket-knife of any sort, such as a small stencil-knife? No; the material was too fragile for a knife-handle. It could not be an etching-needle for the same reason; and it was not a surgical appliance—at least it was not like any surgical instrument that was known to me.

I turned it over and over and cudgelled my brains; and then I had a brilliant idea. Was it a reed pen of which the point had been broken off? I knew that reed pens were still in use by draughtsmen of decorative leanings with an affection for the "fat line." Could any of our friends be draughtsmen? This seemed the most probable solution of the difficulty, and the more I thought about it the more likely it seemed. Draughtsmen usually sign their work intelligibly, and even when they use a device instead of a signature their identity is easily traceable. Could it be that Mr. Graves, for instance, was an illustrator, and that Thorndyke had established his identity by looking through the works of all the well-known thick-line draughtsmen?

This problem occupied me for the rest of the day. My explanation did not seem quite to fit Thorndyke's description of his methods; but I could think of no other. I turned it over during my solitary lunch; I meditated on it with the aid of several pipes in the afternoon; and having refreshed my brain with a cup of tea, I went forth to walk in the Temple gardens—which I was permitted to do without breaking my parole—to think it out afresh.

The result was disappointing. I was basing my reasoning on the assumption that the pieces of reed were parts of a particular appliance, appertaining to a particular craft; whereas they might be the remains of something quite different, appertaining to a totally different craft or to no craft at all. And in no case did they point to any known individual or indicate any but the vaguest kind of search. After pacing the pleasant walks for upwards of two hours, I at length turned back towards our chambers, where I arrived as the lamp-lighter was just finishing his round.

My fruitless speculations had left me somewhat irritable. The lighted windows that I had noticed as I approached had given me the impression that Thorndyke had returned. I had intended to press him for a little further information. When, therefore, I let myself into our chambers and found, instead of my colleague, a total stranger—and only a back view at that

—I was disappointed and annoyed.

The stranger was seated by the table, reading a large document that looked like a lease. He made no movement when I entered, but when I crossed the room and wished him “Good evening,” he half rose and bowed silently. It was then that I first saw his face, and a mighty start he gave me. For one moment I actually thought he was Mr. Weiss, so close was the resemblance, but immediately I perceived that he was a much smaller man.

I sat down nearly opposite and stole an occasional furtive glance at him. The resemblance to Weiss was really remarkable. The same flaxen hair, the same ragged beard and a similar red nose, with the patches of *acne rosacea* spreading to the adjacent cheeks. He wore spectacles, too, through which he took a quick glance at me now and again, returning immediately to his document.

After some moments of rather embarrassing silence, I ventured to remark that it was a mild evening; to which he assented with a sort of Scotch “Hm—hm” and nodded slowly. Then came another interval of silence, during which I speculated on the possibility of his being a relative of Mr. Weiss and wondered what the deuce he was doing in our chambers.

“Have you an appointment with Dr. Thorndyke?” I asked, at length.

He bowed solemnly, and by way of reply—in the affirmative, as I assumed—emitted another “hm—hm.”

I looked at him sharply, a little nettled by his lack of manners; whereupon he opened out the lease so that it screened his face, and as I glanced at the back of the document, I was astonished to observe that it was shaking rapidly.

The fellow was actually laughing! What he found in my simple question to cause him so much amusement I was totally unable to imagine. But there it was. The tremulous movements of the document left me in no possible doubt that he was for some reason convulsed with laughter.

It was extremely mysterious. Also, it was rather embarrassing. I took out my pocket file and began to look over my notes. Then the document was lowered and I was able to get another look at the stranger’s face. He was really extraordinarily like Weiss. The shaggy eyebrows, throwing the eye-sockets into shadow, gave him, in conjunction with the spectacles, the same owlish, solemn expression that I had noticed in my Kennington acquaintance; and which, by the way, was singularly out of character with the frivolous behaviour that I had just witnessed.

From time to time as I looked at him, he caught my eye and instantly averted his own, turning rather red. Apparently he was a shy, nervous man, which might account for his giggling; for I have noticed that shy or nervous people have a habit of smiling inopportunistically and even giggling when embarrassed by meeting an over-steady eye. And it seemed my own eye had this disconcerting quality, for even as I looked at him, the document suddenly went up again and began to shake violently.

I stood it for a minute or two, but, finding the situation intolerably embarrassing, I rose, and brusquely excusing myself, went up to the laboratory to look for Polton and inquire at what time Thorndyke was expected home. To my surprise, however, on entering, I discovered Thorndyke himself just finishing the mounting of a microscopical specimen.

“Did you know that there is some one below waiting to see you?” I asked.

“Is it anyone you know?” he inquired.

“No,” I answered. “It is a red-nosed, sniggering fool in spectacles. He has got a lease or a deed or some other sort of document which he has been using to play a sort of idiotic game of Peep-Bo! I couldn’t stand him, so I came up here.”

Thorndyke laughed heartily at my description of his client.

“What are you laughing at?” I asked sourly; at which he laughed yet more heartily and added to the aggravation by wiping his eyes.

“Our friend seems to have put you out,” he remarked.

“He put me out literally. If I had stayed much longer I should have punched his head.”

“In that case,” said Thorndyke, “I am glad you didn’t stay. But come down and let me introduce you.”

“No, thank you. I’ve had enough of him for the present.”

“But I have a very special reason for wishing to introduce you. I think you will get some information from him that will interest you very much; and you needn’t quarrel with a man for being of a cheerful disposition.”

“Cheerful be hanged!” I exclaimed. “I don’t call a man cheerful because he behaves like a gibbering idiot.”

To this Thorndyke made no reply but a broad and appreciative smile, and we descended to the lower floor. As we entered the room, the stranger rose, and, glancing in an embarrassed way from one of us to the other, suddenly broke out into an undeniable snigger. I looked at him sternly, and Thorndyke, quite unmoved by his indecorous behaviour, said in a grave voice:

“Let me introduce you, Jervis; though I think you have met this gentleman before.”

“I think not,” I said stiffly.

“Oh yes, you have, sir,” interposed the stranger; and, as he spoke, I started; for the voice was uncommonly like the

familiar voice of Polton.

I looked at the speaker with sudden suspicion. And now I could see that the flaxen hair was a wig; that the beard had a decidedly artificial look, and that the eyes that beamed through the spectacles were remarkably like the eyes of our factotum. But the blotchy face, the bulbous nose and the shaggy, overhanging eyebrows were alien features that I could not reconcile with the personality of our refined and aristocratic-looking little assistant.

"Is this a practical joke?" I asked.

"No," replied Thorndyke; "it is a demonstration. When we were talking this morning it appeared to me that you did not realize the extent to which it is possible to conceal identity under suitable conditions of light. So I arranged, with Polton's rather reluctant assistance, to give you ocular evidence. The conditions are not favourable—which makes the demonstration more convincing. This is a very well-lighted room and Polton is a very poor actor; in spite of which it has been possible for you to sit opposite him for several minutes and look at him, I have no doubt, very attentively, without discovering his identity. If the room had been lighted only with a candle, and Polton had been equal to the task of supporting his make-up with an appropriate voice and manner, the deception would have been perfect."

"I can see that he has a wig on, quite plainly," said I.

"Yes; but you would not in a dimly lighted room. On the other hand, if Polton were to walk down Fleet Street at mid-day in this condition, the make-up would be conspicuously evident to any moderately observant passer-by. The secret of making up consists in a careful adjustment to the conditions of light and distance in which the make-up is to be seen. That in use on the stage would look ridiculous in an ordinary room; that which would serve in an artificially lighted room would look ridiculous out of doors by daylight."

"Is any effective make-up possible out of doors in ordinary daylight?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Thorndyke. "But it must be on a totally different scale from that of the stage. A wig, and especially a beard or moustache, must be joined up at the edges with hair actually stuck on the skin with transparent cement and carefully trimmed with scissors. The same applies to eyebrows; and alterations in the colour of the skin must be carried out much more subtly. Polton's nose has been built up with a small covering of toupée-paste, the pimples on the cheeks produced with little particles of the same material; and the general tinting has been done with grease-paint with a very light scumble of powder colour to take off some of the shine. This would be possible in outdoor make-up, but it would have to be done with the greatest care and delicacy; in fact, with what the art-critics call 'reticence.' A very little make-up is sufficient and too much is fatal. You would be surprised to see how little paste is required to alter the shape of the nose and the entire character of the face."

At this moment there came a loud knock at the door; a single, solid dab of the knocker which Polton seemed to recognize, for he ejaculated:

"Good lord, sir! That'll be Wilkins, the cabman! I'd forgotten all about him. Whatever's to be done?"

He stared at us in ludicrous horror for a moment or two, and then, snatching off his wig, beard and spectacles, poked them into a cupboard. But his appearance was now too much even for Thorndyke—who hastily got behind him—for he had now resumed his ordinary personality—but with a very material difference.

"Oh, it's nothing to laugh at, sir," he exclaimed indignantly as I crammed my handkerchief into my mouth. "Somebody's got to let him in, or he'll go away."

"Yes; and that won't do," said Thorndyke. "But don't worry, Polton. You can step into the office. I'll open the door."

Polton's presence of mind, however, seemed to have entirely forsaken him, for he only hovered irresolutely in the wake of his principal. As the door opened, a thick and husky voice inquired:

"Gent of the name of Polton live here?"

"Yes, quite right," said Thorndyke. "Come in. Your name is Wilkins, I think?"

"That's me, sir," said the voice; and in response to Thorndyke's invitation, a typical "growler" cabman of the old school, complete even to imbricated cape and dangling badge, stalked into the room, and glancing round with a mixture of embarrassment and defiance, suddenly fixed on Polton's nose a look of devouring curiosity.

"Here you are, then," Polton remarked nervously.

"Yus," replied the cabman in a slightly hostile tone. "Here I am. What am I wanted to do? And where's this here Mr. Polton?"

"I am Mr. Polton," replied our abashed assistant.

"Well, it's the other Mr. Polton what I want," said the cabman, with his eyes still riveted on the olfactory prominence.

"There isn't any other Mr. Polton," our subordinate replied irritably. "I am the—er—person who spoke to you in the shelter."

"Are you though?" said the manifestly incredulous cabby. "I shouldn't have thought it; but you ought to know. What do you want me to do?"

"We want you," said Thorndyke, "to answer one or two questions. And the first one is, Are you a teetotaller?"

The question being illustrated by the production of a decanter, the cabman's dignity relaxed somewhat.

"I ain't bigoted," said he.

"Then sit down and mix yourself a glass of grog. Soda or plain water?"

"May as well have all the extries," replied the cabman, sitting down and grasping the decanter with the air of a man who means business. "Per'aps you wouldn't mind squirtin' out the soda, sir, bein' more used to it."

While these preliminaries were being arranged, Polton silently slipped out of the room, and when our visitor had fortified himself with a gulp of the uncommonly stiff mixture, the examination began.

"Your name, I think, is Wilkins?" said Thorndyke.

"That's me, sir. Samuel Wilkins is my name."

"And your occupation?"

"Is a very tryin' one and not paid for as it deserves. I drives a cab, sir; a four-wheeled cab is what I drives; and a very poor job it is."

"Do you happen to remember a very foggy day about a month ago?"

"Do I not, sir! A regler sneezer that was! Wednesday, the fourteenth of March. I remember the date because my benefit society came down on me for arrears that morning."

"Will you tell us what happened to you between six and seven in the evening of that day?"

"I will, sir," replied the cabman, emptying his tumbler by way of bracing himself up for the effort. "A little before six I was waiting on the arrival side of the Great Northern Station, King's Cross, when I see a gentleman and a lady coming out. The gentleman he looks up and down and then he sees me and walks up to the cab and opens the door and helps the lady in. Then he says to me: 'Do you know New Inn?' he says. That's what he says to me what was born and brought up in White Horse Alley, Drury Lane.

"Get inside," says I.

"Well," says he, 'you drive in through the gate in Wych Street,' he says, as if he expected me to go in by Houghton Street and down the steps, 'and then,' he says, 'you drive nearly to the end and you'll see a house with a large brass plate at the corner of the doorway. That's where we want to be set down,' he says, and with that he nips in and pulls up the windows and off we goes.

"It took us a full half-hour to get to New Inn through the fog, for I had to get down and lead the horse part of the way. As I drove in under the archway, I saw it was half-past six by the clock in the porter's lodge. I drove down nearly to the end of the inn and drew up opposite a house where there was a big brass plate by the doorway. It was number thirty-one. Then the gent crawls out and hands me five bob—two 'arf-crowns—and then he helps the lady out, and away they waddles to the doorway and I see them start up the stairs very slow—regler Pilgrim's Progress. And that was the last I see of 'em."

Thorndyke wrote down the cabman's statement verbatim together with his own questions, and then asked:

"Can you give us any description of the gentleman?"

"The gent," said Wilkins, was a very respectable-looking gent, though he did look as if he'd had a drop of something short, and small blame to him on a day like that. But he was all there, and he knew what was the proper fare for a foggy evening, which is more than some of 'em do. He was a elderly gent, about sixty, and he wore spectacles, but he didn't seem to be able to see much through 'em. He was a funny 'un to look at; as round in the back as a turtle and he walked with his head stuck forward like a goose."

"What made you think he had been drinking?"

"Well, he wasn't as steady as he might have been on his pins. But he wasn't drunk, you know. Only a bit wobbly on the plates."

"And the lady; what was she like?"

"I couldn't see much of her because her head was wrapped up in a sort of woollen veil. But I should say she wasn't a chicken. Might have been about the same age as the gent, but I couldn't swear to that. She seemed a trifle rickety on the pins too; in fact they were a rum-looking couple. I watched 'em tottering across the pavement and up the stairs, hanging on to each other, him peering through his blinkers and she trying to see through her veil, and I thought it was a jolly good job they'd got a nice sound cab and a steady driver to bring 'em safe home."

"How was the lady dressed?"

"Can't rightly say, not being a hexpert. Her head was done up in this here veil like a pudden in a cloth and she had a small hat on. She had a dark brown mantle with a fringe of beads round it and a black dress; and I noticed when she got into the cab at the station that one of her stockings looked like the bellows of a concertina. That's all I can tell you."

Thorndyke wrote down the last answer, and, having read the entire statement aloud, handed the pen to our visitor.

"If that is all correct," he said, "I will ask you to sign your name at the bottom."

"Do you want me to swear an affidavit that it's all true?" asked Wilkins.

"No, thank you," replied Thorndyke. "We may have to call you to give evidence in court, and then you'll be sworn; and you'll also be paid for your attendance. For the present I want you to keep your own counsel and say nothing to anybody about having been here. We have to make some other inquiries and we don't want the affair talked about."

"I see, sir," said Wilkins, as he laboriously traced his signature at the foot of the statement; "you don't want the other parties for to ogle your lay. All right, sir; you can depend on me. I'm fly, I am."

"Thank you, Wilkins," said Thorndyke. "And now what are we to give you for your trouble in coming here?"

"I'll leave the fare to you, sir. You know what the information's worth; but I should think 'arf a thick-un wouldn't hurt you."

Thorndyke laid on the table a couple of sovereigns, at the sight of which the cabman's eyes glistened.

"We have your address, Wilkins," said he. "If we want you as a witness we shall let you know, and if not, there will be another two pounds for you at the end of a fortnight, provided you have not let this little interview leak out."

Wilkins gathered up the spoils gleefully. "You can trust me, sir," said he, "for to keep my mouth shut. I knows which side my bread's buttered. Good night, gentlemen all."

With this comprehensive salute he moved towards the door and let himself out.

"Well, Jervis; what do you think of it?" Thorndyke asked, as the cabman's footsteps faded away in a creaky diminuendo.

"I don't know what to think. This woman is a new factor in the case and I don't know how to place her."

"Not entirely new," said Thorndyke. "You have not forgotten those beads that we found in Jeffrey's bedroom, have you?"

"No, I had not forgotten them, but I did not see that they told us much excepting that some woman had apparently been in his bedroom at some time."

"That, I think, is all that they did tell us. But now they tell us that a particular woman was in his bedroom at a particular time, which is a good deal more significant."

"Yes. It almost looks as if she must have been there when he made away with himself."

"It does, very much."

"By the way, you were right about the colours of those beads, and also about the way they were used."

"As to their use, that was a mere guess; but it has turned out to be correct. It was well that we found the beads, for, small as is the amount of information they give, it is still enough to carry us a stage further."

"How so?"

"I mean that the cabman's evidence tells us only that this woman entered the house. The beads tell us that she was in the bedroom; which, as you say, seems to connect her to some extent with Jeffrey's death. Not necessarily, of course. It is only a suggestion; but a rather strong suggestion under the peculiar circumstances."

"Even so," said I, "this new fact seems to me so far from clearing up the mystery, only to add to it a fresh element of still deeper mystery. The porter's evidence at the inquest could leave no doubt that Jeffrey contemplated suicide, and his preparations pointedly suggest this particular night as the time selected by him for doing away with himself. Is not that so?"

"Certainly. The porter's evidence was very clear on that point."

"Then I don't see where this woman comes in. It is obvious that her presence at the inn, and especially in the bedroom, on this occasion and in these strange, secret circumstances, has a rather sinister look; but yet I do not see in what way she could have been connected with the tragedy. Perhaps, after all, she has nothing to do with it. You remember that Jeffrey went to the lodge about eight o'clock, to pay his rent, and chatted for some time with the porter. That looks as if the lady had already left."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "But, on the other hand, Jeffrey's remarks to the porter with reference to the cab do not quite agree with the account that we have just heard from Wilkins. Which suggests—as does Wilkins's account generally—some secrecy as to the lady's visit to his chambers."

"Do you know who the woman was?" I asked.

"No, I don't know," he replied. "I have a rather strong suspicion that I can identify her, but I am waiting for some further facts."

"Is your suspicion founded on some new matter that you have discovered, or is it deducible from facts that are known to me?"

"I think," he replied, "that you know practically all that I know, although I have, in one instance, turned a very strong suspicion into a certainty by further inquiries. But I think you ought to be able to form some idea as to who this lady

probably was."

"But no woman has been mentioned in the case at all."

"No; but I think you should be able to give this lady a name, notwithstanding."

"Should I? Then I begin to suspect that I am not cut out for medico-legal practice, for I don't see the faintest glimmer of a suggestion."

Thorndyke smiled benevolently. "Don't be discouraged, Jervis," said he. "I expect that when you first began to go round the wards, you doubted whether you were cut out for medical practice. I did. For special work one needs special knowledge and an acquired faculty for making use of it. What does a second year's student make of a small thoracic aneurysm? He knows the anatomy of the chest; he begins to know the normal heart sounds and areas of dullness; but he cannot yet fit his various items of knowledge together. Then comes the experienced physician and perhaps makes a complete diagnosis without any examination at all, merely from hearing the patient speak or cough. He has the same facts as the student, but he has acquired the faculty of instantly connecting an abnormality of function with its correlated anatomical change. It is a matter of experience. And, with your previous training, you will soon acquire the faculty. Try to observe everything. Let nothing escape you. And try constantly to find some connection between facts and events that seem to be unconnected. That is my advice to you; and with that we will put away the Blackmore case for the present and consider our day's work at an end."

---

#### XIV. — THORNDYKE LAYS THE MINE

THE information supplied by Mr. Samuel Wilkins, so far from dispelling the cloud of mystery that hung over the Blackmore case, only enveloped it in deeper obscurity, so far as I was concerned. The new problem that Thorndyke offered for solution was a tougher one than any of the others. He proposed that I should identify and give a name to this mysterious woman. But how could I? No woman, excepting Mrs. Wilson, had been mentioned in connection with the case. This new *dramatis persona* had appeared suddenly from nowhere and straightway vanished without leaving a trace, excepting the two or three beads that we had picked up in Jeffrey's room.

Nor was it in the least clear what part, if any, she had played in the tragedy. The facts still pointed as plainly to suicide as before her appearance. Jeffrey's repeated hints as to his intentions, and the very significant preparations that he had made, were enough to negative any idea of foul play. And yet the woman's presence in the chambers at that time, the secret manner of her arrival and her precautions against recognition, strongly suggested some kind of complicity in the dreadful event that followed.

But what complicity is possible in the case of suicide? The woman might have furnished him with the syringe and the poison, but it would not have been necessary for her to go to his chambers for that purpose. Vague ideas of persuasion and hypnotic suggestion floated through my brain; but the explanations did not fit the case and the hypnotic suggestion of crime is not very convincing to the medical mind. Then I thought of blackmail in connection with some disgraceful secret; but though this was a more hopeful suggestion, it was not very probable, considering Jeffrey's age and character.

And all these speculations failed to throw the faintest light on the main question: "Who was this woman?"

A couple of days passed, during which Thorndyke made no further reference to the case. He was, most of the time, away from home, though how he was engaged I had no idea. What was rather more unusual was that Polton seemed to have deserted the laboratory and taken to outdoor pursuits. I assumed that he had seized the opportunity of leaving me in charge, and I dimly surmised that he was acting as Thorndyke's private inquiry agent, as he seemed to have done in the case of Samuel Wilkins.

On the evening of the second day Thorndyke came home in obviously good spirits, and his first proceedings aroused my expectant curiosity. He went to a cupboard and brought forth a box of Trichinopoly cheroots. Now the Trichinopoly cheroot was Thorndyke's one dissipation, to be enjoyed only on rare and specially festive occasions; which, in practice, meant those occasions on which he had scored some important point or solved some unusually tough problem. Wherefore I watched him with lively interest.

"It's a pity that the 'Trichy' is such a poisonous beast," he remarked, taking up one of the cheroots and sniffing at it delicately. "There is no other cigar like it, to a really abandoned smoker." He laid the cigar back in the box and continued: "I think I shall treat myself to one after dinner to celebrate the occasion."

"What occasion?" I asked.

"The completion of the Blackmore case. I am just going to write to Marchmont advising him to enter a caveat."

"Do you mean to say that you have discovered a flaw in the will, after all?"

"A flaw!" he exclaimed. "My dear Jervis, that second will is a forgery."

I stared at him in amazement; for his assertion sounded like nothing more or less than arrant nonsense.

"But the thing is impossible, Thorndyke," I said. "Not only did the witnesses recognize their own signatures and the painter's greasy finger-marks, but they had both read the will and remembered its contents."

"Yes; that is the interesting feature in the case. It is a very pretty problem. I shall give you a last chance to solve it. To-morrow evening we shall have to give a full explanation, so you have another twenty-four hours in which to think it over. And, meanwhile, I am going to take you to my club to dine. I think we shall be pretty safe there from Mrs. Schallibaum."

He sat down and wrote a letter, which was apparently quite a short one, and having addressed and stamped it, prepared to go out.

"Come," said he, "let us away to 'the gay and festive scenes and halls of dazzling light.' We will lay the mine in the Fleet Street pillar box. I should like to be in Marchmont's office when it explodes."

"I expect, for that matter," said I, "that the explosion will be felt pretty distinctly in these chambers."

"I expect so, too," replied Thorndyke; "and that reminds me that I shall be out all day to-morrow, so, if Marchmont calls, you must do all that you can to persuade him to come round after dinner and bring Stephen Blackmore, if possible. I am anxious to have Stephen here, as he will be able to give us some further information and confirm certain matters of fact."

I promised to exercise my utmost powers of persuasion on Mr. Marchmont which I should certainly have done on my own account, being now on the very tiptoe of curiosity to hear Thorndyke's explanation of the unthinkable conclusion at which he had arrived—and the subject dropped completely; nor could I, during the rest of the evening, induce my colleague to reopen it even in the most indirect or allusive manner.

Our explanations in respect of Mr. Marchmont were fully realized; for, on the following morning, within an hour of Thorndyke's departure from our chambers, the knocker was plied with more than usual emphasis, and, on my opening the door, I discovered the solicitor in company with a somewhat older gentleman. Mr. Marchmont appeared somewhat out of humour, while his companion was obviously in a state of extreme irritation.

"How d'you do, Dr. Jervis?" said Marchmont as he entered at my invitation. "Your friend, I suppose, is not in just now?"

"No; and he will not be returning until the evening."

"Hm; I'm sorry. We wished to see him rather particularly. This is my partner, Mr. Winwood."

The latter gentleman bowed stiffly and Marchmont continued:

"We have had a letter from Dr. Thorndyke, and it is, I may say, a rather curious letter; in fact, a very singular letter indeed."

"It is the letter of a madman!" growled Mr. Winwood.

"No, no, Winwood; nothing of the kind. Control yourself, I beg you. But really, the letter is rather incomprehensible. It relates to the will of the late Jeffrey Blackmore—you know the main facts of the case; and we cannot reconcile it with those facts."

"This is the letter," exclaimed Mr. Winwood, dragging the document from his wallet and slapping it down on the table. "If you are acquainted with the case, sir, just read that, and let us hear what *you* think."

I took up the letter and read aloud:

"JEFFREY BLACKMORE, DECD.

"DEAR MR. MARCHMONT,—

"I have gone into this case with great care and have now no doubt that the second will is a forgery. Criminal proceedings will, I think, be inevitable, but meanwhile it would be wise to enter a caveat.

"If you could look in at my chambers to-morrow evening we could talk the case over; and I should be glad if you could bring Mr. Stephen Blackmore; whose personal knowledge of the events and the parties concerned would be of great assistance in clearing up obscure details.

"I am,

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN EVELYN THORNDYKE

"C.F. MARCHMONT, ESQ."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Winwood, glaring ferociously at me, "what do you think of the learned counsel's opinion?"

"I knew that Thorndyke was writing to you to this effect," I replied, "but I must frankly confess that I can make nothing of it. Have you acted on his advice?"

"Certainly not!" shouted the irascible lawyer. "Do you suppose that we wish to make ourselves the laughing-stock of the courts? The thing is impossible—ridiculously impossible!"

"It can't be that, you know," I said, a little stiffly, for I was somewhat nettled by Mr. Winwood's manner, "or Thorndyke would not have written this letter. The conclusion looks as impossible to me as it does to you; but I have complete confidence in Thorndyke. If he says that the will is a forgery, I have no doubt that it is a forgery."

"But how the deuce can it be?" roared Winwood. "You know the circumstances under which the will was executed."

"Yes; but so does Thorndyke. And he is not a man who overlooks important facts. It is useless to argue with me. I am in a complete fog about the case myself. You had better come in this evening and talk it over with him as he suggests."

"It is very inconvenient," grumbled Mr. Winwood. "We shall have to dine in town."

"Yes," said Marchmont, "but it is the only thing to be done. As Dr. Jervis says, we must take it that Thorndyke has something solid to base his opinion on. He doesn't make elementary mistakes. And, of course, if what he says is correct, Mr. Stephen's position is totally changed."

"Bah!" exclaimed Winwood, "he has found a mare's nest, I tell you. Still, I agree that the explanation should be worth hearing."

"You mustn't mind Winwood," said Marchmont, in an apologetic undertone; "he's a peppery old fellow with a rough tongue, but he doesn't mean any harm." Which statement Winwood assented to—or dissented from; for it was impossible to say which—by a prolonged growl.

"We shall expect you then," I said, "about eight to-night, and you will try to bring Mr. Stephen with you?"

"Yes," replied Marchmont; "I think we can promise that he shall come with us. I have sent him a telegram asking him to attend."

With this the two lawyers took their departure, leaving me to meditate upon my colleague's astonishing statement; which I did, considerably to the prejudice of other employment. That Thorndyke would be able to justify the opinion that he had given, I had no doubt whatever; but yet there was no denying that his proposition was what Mr. Dick Swiveller would call "a staggerer."

When Thorndyke returned, I informed him of the visit of our two friends, and acquainted him with the sentiments that they had expressed; whereat he smiled with quiet amusement.

"I thought," he remarked, "that letter would bring Marchmont to our door before long. As to Winwood, I have never met him, but I gather that he is one of those people whom you 'mustn't mind.' In a general way, I object to people who tacitly claim exemption from the ordinary rules of conduct that are held to be binding on their fellows. But, as he promises to give us what the variety artists call 'an extra turn,' we will make the best of him and give him a run for his money."

Here Thorndyke smiled mischievously—I understood the meaning of that smile later in the evening—and asked: "What do you think of the affair yourself?"

"I have given it up," I answered. "To my paralysed brain, the Blackmore case is like an endless algebraical problem propounded by an insane mathematician."

Thorndyke laughed at my comparison, which I flatter myself was a rather apt one.

"Come and dine," said he, "and let us crack a bottle, that our hearts may not turn to water under the frown of the disdainful Winwood. I think the old 'Bell' in Holborn will meet our present requirements better than the club. There is something jovial and roystering about an ancient tavern; but we must keep a sharp lookout for Mrs. Schallibaum."

Thereupon we set forth; and, after a week's close imprisonment, I once more looked upon the friendly London streets, the cheerfully lighted shop windows and the multitudes of companionable strangers who moved unceasingly along the pavements.

---

## XV. — THORNDYKE EXPLODES THE MINE

WE had not been back in our chambers more than a few minutes when the little brass knocker on the inner door rattled out its summons. Thorndyke himself opened the door, and, finding our three expected visitors on the threshold, he admitted them and closed the "oak."

"We have accepted your invitation, you see," said Marchmont, whose manner was now a little flurried and uneasy. "This is my partner, Mr. Winwood; you haven't met before, I think. Well, we thought we should like to hear some further particulars from you, as we could not quite understand your letter."

"My conclusion, I suppose," said Thorndyke, "was a little unexpected?"

"It was more than that, sir," exclaimed Winwood. "It was absolutely irreconcilable either with the facts of the case or with common physical possibilities."

"At the first glance," Thorndyke agreed, "it would probably have that appearance."

"It has that appearance still to me," said Winwood, growing suddenly red and wrathful, "and I may say that I speak as a solicitor who was practising in the law when you were an infant in arms. You tell us, sir, that this will is a forgery; this will,



which was executed in broad daylight in the presence of two unimpeachable witnesses who have sworn, not only to their signatures and the contents of the document, but to their very finger-marks on the paper. Are those finger-marks forgeries, too? Have you examined and tested them?"

"I have not," replied Thorndyke. "The fact is they are of no interest to me, as I am not disputing the witnesses' signatures."

At this, Mr. Winwood fairly danced with irritation.

"Marchmont!" he exclaimed fiercely, "you know this good gentleman, I believe. Tell me, is he addicted to practical jokes?"

"Now, my dear Winwood," groaned Marchmont, "I pray you—I beg you to control yourself. No doubt—"

"But confound it!" roared Winwood, "you have, yourself, heard him say that the will is a forgery, but that he doesn't dispute the signatures; which," concluded Winwood, banging his fist down on the table, "is damned nonsense."

"May I suggest," interposed Stephen Blackmore, "that we came here to receive Dr. Thorndyke's explanation of his letter. Perhaps it would be better to postpone any comments until we have heard it."

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," said Marchmont. "Let me entreat you, Winwood, to listen patiently and refrain from interruption until we have heard our learned friend's exposition of the case."

"Oh, very well," Winwood replied sulkily; "I'll say no more."

He sank into a chair with the manner of a man who shuts himself up and turns the key; and so remained—excepting when the internal pressure approached bursting-point—throughout the subsequent proceedings, silent, stony and impassive, like a seated statue of Obstinacy.

"I take it," said Marchmont, "that you have some new facts that are not in our possession?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "we have some new facts, and we have made some new use of the old ones. But how shall I lay the case before you? Shall I state my theory of the sequence of events and furnish the verification afterwards? Or shall I retrace the actual course of my investigations and give you the facts in the order in which I obtained them myself, with the inferences from them?"

"I almost think," said Mr. Marchmont, "that it would be better if you would put us in possession of the new facts. Then, if the conclusions that follow from them are not sufficiently obvious, we could hear the argument. What do you say, Winwood?"

Mr. Winwood roused himself for an instant, barked out the one word "Facts," and shut himself up again with a snap.

"You would like to have the new facts by themselves?" said Thorndyke.

"If you please. The facts only, in the first place, at any rate."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; and here I caught his eye with a mischievous twinkle in it that I understood perfectly; for I had most of the facts myself and realized how much these two lawyers were likely to extract from them. Winwood was going to "have a run for his money," as Thorndyke had promised.

My colleague, having placed on the table by his side a small cardboard box and the sheets of notes from his file, glanced quickly at Mr. Winwood and began:

"The first important new facts came into my possession on the day on which you introduced the case to me. In the evening, after you left, I availed myself of Mr. Stephen's kind invitation to look over his uncle's chambers in New Inn. I wished to do so in order to ascertain, if possible, what had been the habits of the deceased during his residence there. When I arrived with Dr. Jervis, Mr. Stephen was in the chambers, and I learned from him that his uncle was an Oriental scholar of some position and that he had a very thorough acquaintance with the cuneiform writing. Now, while I was talking with Mr. Stephen I made a very curious discovery. On the wall over the fire-place hung a large framed photograph of an ancient Persian inscription in the cuneiform character; and that photograph was upside down."

"Upside down!" exclaimed Stephen. "But that is really very odd."

"Very odd indeed," agreed Thorndyke, "and very suggestive. The way in which it came to be inverted is pretty obvious and also rather suggestive. The photograph had evidently been in the frame some years but had apparently never been hung up before."

"It had not," said Stephen, "though I don't know how you arrived at the fact. It used to stand on the mantelpiece in his old rooms in Jermyn Street."

"Well," continued Thorndyke, "the frame-maker had pasted his label on the back of the frame, and as this label hung the right way up, it appeared as if the person who fixed the photograph on the wall had adopted it as a guide."

"It is very extraordinary," said Stephen. "I should have thought the person who hung it would have asked Uncle Jeffrey which was the right way up; and I can't imagine how on earth it could have hung all those months without his noticing it. He must have been practically blind."

Here Marchmont, who had been thinking hard, with knitted brows, suddenly brightened up.

"I see your point," said he. "You mean that if Jeffrey was as blind as that, it would have been possible for some person to substitute a false will, which he might sign without noticing the substitution."

"That wouldn't make the will a forgery," growled Winwood. "If Jeffrey signed it, it was Jeffrey's will. You could contest it if you could prove the fraud. But he said: 'This is my will,' and the two witnesses read it and have identified it."

"Did they read it aloud?" asked Stephen.

"No, they did not," replied Thorndyke.

"Can you prove substitution?" asked Marchmont.

"I haven't asserted it," answered Thorndyke, "My position is that the will is a forgery."

"But it is not," said Winwood.

"We won't argue it now," said Thorndyke. "I ask you to note the fact that the inscription was upside down. I also observed on the walls of the chambers some valuable Japanese colour-prints on which were recent damp-spots. I noted that the sitting-room had a gas-stove and that the kitchen contained practically no stores or remains of food and hardly any traces of even the simplest cooking. In the bedroom I found a large box that had contained a considerable stock of hard stearine candles, six to the pound, and that was now nearly empty. I examined the clothing of the deceased. On the soles of the boots I observed dried mud, which was unlike that on my own and Jervis's boots, from the gravelly square of the inn. I noted a crease on each leg of the deceased man's trousers as if they had been turned up half-way to the knee; and in the waistcoat pocket I found the stump of a 'Contango' pencil. On the floor of the bedroom, I found a portion of an oval glass somewhat like that of a watch or locket, but ground at the edge to a double bevel. Dr. Jervis and I also found one or two beads and a bugle, all of dark brown glass."

Here Thorndyke paused, and Marchmont, who had been gazing at him with growing amazement, said nervously:

"Er—yes. Very interesting. These observations of yours—er—are—"

"Are all the observations that I made at New Inn."

The two lawyers looked at one another and Stephen Blackmore stared fixedly at a spot on the hearth-rug. Then Mr. Winwood's face contorted itself into a sour, lopsided smile.

"You might have observed a good many other things, sir," said he, "if you had looked. If you had examined the doors, you would have noted that they had hinges and were covered with paint; and, if you had looked up the chimney you might have noted that it was black inside."

"Now, now, Winwood," protested Marchmont in an agony of uneasiness as to what his partner might say next, "I must really beg you—er—to refrain from—what Mr. Winwood means, Dr. Thorndyke, is that—er—we do not quite perceive the relevancy of these—ah—observations of yours."

"Probably not," said Thorndyke, "but you will perceive their relevancy later. For the present, I will ask you to note the facts and bear them in mind, so that you may be able to follow the argument when we come to that."

"The next set of data I acquired on the same evening, when Dr. Jervis gave me a detailed account of a very strange adventure that befell him. I need not burden you with all the details, but I will give you the substance of his story."

He then proceeded to recount the incidents connected with my visits to Mr. Graves, dwelling on the personal peculiarities of the parties concerned and especially of the patient, and not even forgetting the very singular spectacles worn by Mr. Weiss. He also explained briefly the construction of the chart, presenting the latter for the inspection of his hearers. To this recital our three visitors listened in utter bewilderment, as, indeed did I also; for I could not conceive in what way my adventures could possibly be related to the affairs of the late Mr. Blackmore. This was manifestly the view taken by Mr. Marchmont, for, during a pause in which the chart was handed to him, he remarked somewhat stiffly:

"I am assuming, Dr. Thorndyke, that the curious story you are telling us has some relevance to the matter in which we are interested."

"You are quite correct in your assumption," replied Thorndyke. "The story is very relevant indeed, as you will presently be convinced."

"Thank you," said Marchmont, sinking back once more into his chair with a sigh of resignation.

"A few days ago," pursued Thorndyke, "Dr. Jervis and I located, with the aid of this chart, the house to which he had been called. We found that the late tenant had left somewhat hurriedly and that the house was to let; and, as no other kind of investigation was possible, we obtained the keys and made an exploration of the premises."

Here he gave a brief account of our visit and the conditions that we observed, and was proceeding to furnish a list of the articles that we had found under the grate, when Mr. Winwood started from his chair.

"Really, sir!" he exclaimed, "this is too much! Have I come here, at great personal inconvenience, to hear you read the inventory of a dust-heap?"

Thorndyke smiled benevolently and caught my eye, once more, with a gleam of amusement.

"Sit down, Mr. Winwood," he said quietly. "You came here to learn the facts of the case, and I am giving them to you."

Please don't interrupt needlessly and waste time."

Winwood stared at him ferociously for several seconds; then, somewhat disconcerted by the unruffled calm of his manner, he uttered a snort of defiance, sat down heavily and shut himself up again.

"We will now," Thorndyke continued, with unmoved serenity, "consider these relics in more detail, and we will begin with this pair of spectacles. They belonged to a person who was near-sighted and astigmatic in the left eye and almost certainly blind in the right. Such a description agrees entirely with Dr. Jervis's account of the sick man."

He paused for the moment, and then, as no one made any comment, proceeded:

"We next come to these little pieces of reed, which you, Mr. Stephen, will probably recognize as the remains of a Japanese brush, such as is used for writing in Chinese ink or for making small drawings."

Again he paused, as though expecting some remark from his listeners; but no one spoke, and he continued:

"Then there is this bottle with the theatrical wig-maker's label on it, which once contained cement such as is used for fixing on false beards, moustaches or eyebrows."

He paused once more and looked round expectantly at his audience, none of whom, however, volunteered any remark.

"Do none of these objects that I have described and shown you, seem to have any significance for us?" he asked, in a tone of some surprise.

"They convey nothing to me," said Mr. Marchmont, glancing at his partner, who shook his head like a restive horse.

"Nor to you, Mr. Stephen?"

"No," replied Stephen. "Under the existing circumstances they convey no reasonable suggestion to me."

Thorndyke hesitated as if he were half inclined to say something more; then, with a slight shrug, he turned over his notes and resumed:

"The next group of new facts is concerned with the signatures of the recent cheques. We have photographed them and placed them together for the purpose of comparison and analysis."

"I am not prepared to question the signatures," said Winwood. "We have had a highly expert opinion, which would override ours in a court of law even if we differed from it; which I think we do not."

"Yes," said Marchmont; "that is so. I think we must accept the signatures, especially as that of the will has been proved, beyond any question" to be authentic."

"Very well," agreed Thorndyke; "we will pass over the signatures. Then we have some further evidence in regard to the spectacles, which serves to verify our conclusions respecting them."

"Perhaps," said Marchmont, "we might pass over that, too, as we do not seem to have reached any conclusions."

"As you please," said Thorndyke. "It is important, but we can reserve it for verification. The next item will interest you more, I think. It is the signed and witnessed statement of Samuel Wilkins, the driver of the cab in which the deceased came home to the inn on the evening of his death."

My colleague was right. An actual document, signed by a tangible witness, who could be put in the box and sworn, brought both lawyers to a state of attention; and when Thorndyke read out the cabman's evidence, their attention soon quickened into undisguised astonishment.

"But this is a most mysterious affair," exclaimed Marchmont. "Who could this woman have been, and what could she have been doing in Jeffrey's chambers at this time? Can you throw any light on it, Mr. Stephen?"

"No, indeed I can't," replied Stephen. "It is a complete mystery to me. My uncle Jeffrey was a confirmed old bachelor, and, although he did not dislike women, he was far from partial to their society, wrapped up as he was in his favourite studies. To the best of my belief, he had not a single female friend. He was not on intimate terms even with his sister, Mrs. Wilson."

"Very remarkable," mused Marchmont; "most remarkable. But, perhaps, you can tell us, Dr. Thorndyke, who this woman was?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that the next item of evidence will enable you to form an opinion for yourselves. I only obtained it yesterday, and, as it made my case quite complete, I wrote off to you immediately. It is the statement of Joseph Ridley, another cabman, and unfortunately, a rather dull, unobservant fellow, unlike Wilkins. He has not much to tell us, but what little he has is highly instructive. Here is the statement, signed by the deponent and witnessed by me:

"My name is Joseph Ridley. I am the driver of a four-wheeled cab. On the fourteenth of March, the day of the great fog, I was waiting at Vauxhall Station, where I had just set down a fare. About five o'clock a lady came and told me to drive over to Upper Kennington Lane to take up a passenger. She was a middle-sized woman. I could not tell what her age was, or what she was like, because her head was wrapped up in a sort of knitted, woollen veil to keep out the fog. I did not notice how she was dressed. She got into the cab and I led the horse over to Upper Kennington Lane and a little way up the lane, until the lady tapped at the front, window for me to stop.

“She got out of the cab and told me to wait. Then she went away and disappeared in the fog. Presently a lady and gentleman came from the direction in which she had gone. The lady looked like the same lady, but I won’t answer to that. Her head was wrapped up in the same kind of veil or shawl, and I noticed that she had on a dark coloured mantle with bead fringe on it.

“The gentleman was clean shaved and wore spectacles, and he stooped a good deal. I can’t say whether his sight was good or bad. He helped the lady into the cab and told me to drive to the Great Northern Station, King’s Cross. Then he got in himself and I drove off. I got to the station about a quarter to six and the lady and gentleman got out. The gentleman paid my fare and they both went into the station. I did not notice anything unusual about either of them. Directly after they had gone, I got a fresh fare and drove away.’

“That,” Thorndyke concluded, “is Joseph Ridley’s statement; and I think it will enable you to give a meaning to the other facts that I have offered for your consideration.”

“I am not so sure about that,” said Marchmont. “It is all exceedingly mysterious. Your suggestion is, of course, that the woman who came to New Inn in the cab was Mrs. Schallibaum!”

“Not at all,” replied Thorndyke. “My suggestion is that the woman was Jeffrey Blackmore.”

There was deathly silence for a few moments. We were all absolutely thunderstruck, and sat gaping at Thorndyke in speechless-astonishment. Then—Mr. Winwood fairly bounced out of his chair.

“But—my—good—sir!” he screeched. “Jeffrey Blackmore was with her at the time!”

“Naturally,” replied Thorndyke, “my suggestion implies that the person who was with her was not Jeffrey Blackmore.”

“But he was!” bawled Winwood. “The porter saw him!”

“The porter saw a person whom he believed to be Jeffrey Blackmore. I suggest that the porter’s belief was erroneous.”

“Well,” snapped Winwood, “perhaps you can prove that it was. I don’t see how you are going to; but perhaps you can.”

He subsided once more into his chair and glared defiantly at Thorndyke.

“You seemed,” said Stephen, “to suggest some connection between the sick man, Graves, and my uncle. I noted it at the time, but put it aside as impossible. Was I right. Did you mean to suggest any connection?”

“I suggest something more than a connection. I suggest identity. My position is that the sick man, Graves, was your uncle.”

“From Dr. Jervis’s description,” said Stephen, “this man must have been very like my uncle. Both were blind in the right eye and had very poor vision with the left; and my uncle certainly used brushes of the kind that you have shown us, when writing in the Japanese character, for I have watched him and admired his skill; but—”

“But,” said Marchmont, “there is the insuperable objection that, at the very time when this man was lying sick in Kennington Lane, Mr. Jeffrey was living at New Inn.”

“What evidence is there of that?” asked Thorndyke.

“Evidence!” Marchmont exclaimed impatiently. “Why, my dear sir—”

He paused suddenly, and, leaning forward, regarded Thorndyke with a new and rather startled expression.

“You mean to suggest—” he began.

“I suggest that Jeffrey Blackmore never lived at New Inn at all.”

For the moment, Marchmont seemed absolutely paralysed by astonishment.

“This is an amazing proposition!” he exclaimed, at length. “Yet the thing is certainly not impossible, for, now that you recall the fact, I realize that no one who had known him previously—excepting his brother, John—ever saw him at the inn. The question of identity was never raised.”

“Excepting,” said Mr. Winwood, “in regard to the body; which was certainly that of Jeffrey Blackmore.”

“Yes, yes. Of course,” said Marchmont. “I had forgotten that for the moment. The body was identified beyond doubt. You don’t dispute the identity of the body, do you?”

“Certainly not,” replied Thorndyke.

Here Mr. Winwood grasped his hair with both hands and stuck his elbows on his knees, while Marchmont drew forth a large handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Stephen Blackmore looked from one to the other expectantly, and finally said:

“If I might make a suggestion, it would be that, as Dr. Thorndyke has shown us the pieces now of the puzzle, he should be so kind as to put them together for our information.”

“Yes,” agreed Marchmont, “that will be the best plan. Let us have the argument, Doctor, and any additional evidence that you possess.”

“The argument,” said Thorndyke, “will be a rather long one, as the data are so numerous, and there are some points in

verification on which I shall have to dwell in some detail. We will have some coffee to clear our brains, and then I will bespeak your patience for what may seem like a rather prolix demonstration."

---

## XVI. — AN EXPOSITION AND A TRAGEDY

"YOU may have wondered," Thorndyke commenced, when he had poured out the coffee and handed round the cups, "what induced me to undertake the minute investigation of so apparently simple and straightforward a case. Perhaps I had better explain that first and let you see what was the real starting-point of the inquiry.

"When you, Mr. Marchmont and Mr. Stephen, introduced the case to me, I made a very brief précis of the facts as you presented them, and of these there were one or two which immediately attracted my attention. In the first place, there was the will. It was a very strange will. It was perfectly unnecessary. It contained no new matter; it expressed no changed intentions; it met no new circumstances, as known to the testator. In short it was not really a new will at all, but merely a repetition of the first one, drafted in different and less suitable language. It differed only in introducing a certain ambiguity from which the original was free. It created the possibility that, in certain circumstances, not known to or anticipated by the testator, John Blackmore might become the principal beneficiary, contrary to the obvious wishes of the testator.

"The next point that impressed me was the manner of Mrs. Wilson's death. She died of cancer. Now people do not die suddenly and unexpectedly of cancer. This terrible disease stands almost alone in that it marks out its victim months in advance. A person who has an incurable cancer is a person whose death may be predicted with certainty and its date fixed within comparatively narrow limits.

"And now observe the remarkable series of coincidences that are brought into light when we consider this peculiarity of the disease. Mrs. Wilson died on the twelfth of March of this present year. Mr. Jeffrey's second will was signed on the twelfth of November of last year; at a time, that is to say, when the existence of cancer must have been known to Mrs. Wilson's doctor, and might have been known to any of her relatives who chose to inquire after her.

"Then you will observe that the remarkable change in Mr. Jeffrey's habits coincides in the most singular way with the same events. The cancer must have been detectable as early as September of last year; about the time, in fact, at which Mrs. Wilson made her will. Mr. Jeffrey went to the inn at the beginning of October. From that time his habits were totally changed, and I can demonstrate to you that a change—not a gradual, but an abrupt change—took place in the character of his signature.

"In short, the whole of this peculiar set of circumstances—the change in Jeffrey's habits, the change in his signature, and the execution of his strange will—came into existence about the time when Mrs. Wilson was first known to be suffering from cancer.

"This struck me as a very suggestive fact.

"Then there is the extraordinarily opportune date of Mr. Jeffrey's death. Mrs. Wilson died on the twelfth of March. Mr. Jeffrey was found dead on the fifteenth of March, having apparently died on the fourteenth, on which day he was seen alive. If he had died only three days sooner, he would have predeceased Mrs. Wilson, and her property would never have devolved on him at all; while, if he had lived only a day or two longer, he would have learned of her death and would certainly have made a new will or codicil in his nephew's favour.

"Circumstances, therefore, conspired in the most singular manner in favour of John Blackmore.

"But there is yet another coincidence. Jeffrey's body was found, by the merest chance, the day after his death. But it might have remained undiscovered for weeks, or even months; and if it had, it would have been impossible to fix the date of his death. Then Mrs. Wilson's next of kin would certainly have contested John Blackmore's claim—and probably with success—on the ground that Jeffrey died before Mrs. Wilson. But all this uncertainty is provided for by the circumstance that Mr. Jeffrey paid his rent personally—and prematurely—to the porter on the fourteenth of March, thus establishing beyond question the fact that he was alive on that date; and yet further, in case the porter's memory should be untrustworthy or his statement doubted, Jeffrey furnished a signed and dated document—the cheque—which could be produced in a court to furnish incontestable proof of survival.

"To sum up this part of the evidence. Here was a will which enabled John Blackmore to inherit the fortune of a man who, almost certainly, had no intention of bequeathing it to him. The wording of that will seemed to be adjusted to the peculiarities of Mrs. Wilson's disease; and the death of the testator occurred under a peculiar set of circumstances which seemed to be exactly adjusted to the wording of the will. Or, to put it in another way: the wording of the will and the time, the manner and the circumstances of the testator's death, all seemed to be precisely adjusted to the fact that the approximate date of Mrs. Wilson's death was known some months before it occurred.

"Now you must admit that this compound group of coincidences, all conspiring to a single end—the enrichment of John Blackmore—has a very singular appearance. Coincidences are common enough in real life; but we cannot accept too many at a time. My feeling was that there were too many in this case and that I could not accept them without searching inquiry."

Thorndyke paused, and Mr. Marchmont, who had listened with close attention, nodded, as he glanced at his silent partner.

"You have stated the case with remarkable clearness," he said; "and I am free to confess that some of the points that you

have raised had escaped my notice.”

“My first idea,” Thorndyke resumed, “was that John Blackmore, taking advantage of the mental enfeeblement produced by the opium habit, had dictated this will to Jeffrey. It was then that I sought permission to inspect Jeffrey’s chambers; to learn what I could about him and to see for myself whether they presented the dirty and disorderly appearance characteristic of the regular opium-smoker’s den. But when, during a walk into the City, I thought over the case, it seemed to me that this explanation hardly met the facts. Then I endeavoured to think of some other explanation; and looking over my notes I observed two points that seemed worth considering. One was that neither of the witnesses to the will was really acquainted with Jeffrey Blackmore; both being strangers who had accepted his identity on his own statement. The other was that no one who had previously known him, with the single exception of his brother John, had ever seen Jeffrey at the inn.

“What was the import of these two facts? Probably they had none. But still they suggested the desirability of considering the question: Was the person who signed the will really Jeffrey Blackmore? The contrary supposition—that some one had personated Jeffrey and forged his signature to a false will—seemed wildly improbable, especially in view of the identification of the body; but it involved no actual impossibility; and it offered a complete explanation of the, otherwise inexplicable, coincidences that I have mentioned.

“I did not, however, for a moment, think that this was the true explanation, but I resolved to bear it in mind, to test it when the opportunity arose, and consider it by the light of any fresh facts that I might acquire.

“The new facts came sooner than I had expected. That same evening I went with Dr. Jervis to New Inn and found Mr. Stephen in the chambers. By him I was informed that Jeffrey was a learned Orientalist, with a quite expert knowledge of the cuneiform writing; and even as he was telling me this, I looked over his shoulder and saw a cuneiform inscription hanging on the wall upside down.

“Now, of this there could be only one reasonable explanation. Disregarding the fact that no one would screw the suspension plates on a frame without ascertaining which was the right way up, and assuming it to be hung up inverted, it was impossible that the misplacement could have been overlooked by Jeffrey. He was not blind, though his sight was defective. The frame was thirty inches long and the individual characters nearly an inch in length—about the size of the D 18 letters of Snellen’s test-types, which can be read by a person of ordinary sight at a distance of fifty-five feet. There was, I repeat, only one reasonable explanation; which was that the person who had inhabited those chambers was not Jeffrey Blackmore.

“This conclusion received considerable support from a fact which I observed later, but mention in this place. On examining the soles of the shoes taken from the dead man’s feet, I found only the ordinary mud of the streets. There was no trace of the peculiar gravelly mud that adhered to my own boots and Jervis’s, and which came from the square of the inn. Yet the porter distinctly stated that the deceased, after paying the rent, walked back towards his chambers across the square; the mud of which should, therefore, have been conspicuous on his shoes.

“Thus, in a moment, a wildly speculative hypothesis had assumed a high degree of probability.

“When Mr. Stephen was gone, Jervis and I looked over the chambers thoroughly; and then another curious fact came to light. On the wall were a number of fine Japanese colour-prints, all of which showed recent damp-spots. Now, apart from the consideration that Jeffrey, who had been at the trouble and expense of collecting these valuable prints, would hardly have allowed them to rot on his walls, there arose the question: How came they to be damp? There was a gas stove in the room, and a gas stove has at least the virtue of preserving a dry atmosphere. It was winter weather, when the stove would naturally be pretty constantly alight. How came the walls to be so damp? The answer seemed to be that the stove had not been constantly alight, but had been lighted only occasionally. This suggestion was borne out by a further examination of the rooms. In the kitchen there were practically no stores and hardly any arrangements even for simple bachelor cooking; the bedroom offered the same suggestion; the soap in the wash-stand was shrivelled and cracked; there was no cast-off linen, and the shirts in the drawers, though clean, had the peculiar yellowish, faded appearance that linen acquires when long out of use. In short, the rooms had the appearance of not having been lived in at all, but only visited at intervals.

“Against this view, however, was the statement of the night porter that he had often seen a light in Jeffrey’s sitting-room at one o’clock in the morning, with the apparent implication that it was then turned out. Now a light may be left in an empty room, but its extinction implies the presence of some person to extinguish it; unless some automatic device be adopted for putting it out at a given time. Such a device—the alarm movement of a clock, for instance, with a suitable attachment—is a simple enough matter, but my search of the rooms failed to discover anything of the kind. However, when looking over the drawers in the bedroom, I came upon a large box that had held a considerable quantity of hard stearine candles. There were only a few left, but a flat candlestick with numerous wick-ends in its socket accounted for the remainder.

“These candles seemed to dispose of the difficulty. They were not necessary for ordinary lighting, since gas was laid on in all three rooms. For what purpose, then, were they used, and in such considerable quantities? I subsequently obtained some of the same brand—Price’s stearine candles, six to the pound—and experimented with them. Each candle was seven and a quarter inches in length, not counting the cone at the top, and I found that they burned in still air at the rate of a fraction over one inch in an hour. We may say that one of these candles would burn in still air a little over six hours. It would thus be possible for the person who inhabited these rooms to go away at seven o’clock in the evening and leave a light which would burn until past one in the morning and then extinguish itself. This, of course, was only surmise, but it

destroyed the significance of the night porter's statement.

"But, if the person who inhabited these chambers was not Jeffrey, who was he?"

"The answer to that question seemed plain enough. There was only one person who had a strong motive for perpetrating a fraud of this kind, and there was only one person to whom it was possible. If this person was not Jeffrey, he must have been very like Jeffrey; sufficiently like for the body of the one to be mistaken for the body of the other. For the production of Jeffrey's body was an essential part of the plan and must have been contemplated from the first. But the only person who fulfills the conditions is John Blackmore.

"We have learned from Mr. Stephen that John and Jeffrey, though very different in appearance in later years, were much alike as young men. But when two brothers who are much alike as young men, become unlike in later life, we shall find that the unlikeness is produced by superficial differences and that the essential likeness remains. Thus, in the present case, Jeffrey was clean shaved, had bad eyesight, wore spectacles and stooped as he walked; John wore a beard and moustache, had good eyesight, did not wear spectacles and had a brisk gait and upright carriage. But supposing John to shave off his beard and moustache, to put on spectacles and to stoop in his walk, these conspicuous but superficial differences would vanish and the original likeness reappear.

"There is another consideration. John had been an actor and was an actor of some experience. Now, any person can, with some care and practice, make up a disguise; the great difficulty is to support that disguise by a suitable manner and voice. But to an experienced actor this difficulty does not exist. To him, personation is easy; and, moreover, an actor is precisely the person to whom the idea of disguise and impersonation would occur.

"There is a small item bearing on this point, so small as to be hardly worth calling evidence, but just worth noting. In the pocket of the waistcoat taken from the body of Jeffrey I found the stump of a 'Contango' pencil; a pencil that is sold for the use of stock dealers and brokers. Now John was an outside broker and might very probably have used such a pencil, whereas Jeffrey had no connection with the stock markets and there is no reason why he should have possessed a pencil of this kind. But the fact is merely suggestive; it has no evidential value.

"A more important inference is to be drawn from the collected signatures. I have remarked that the change in the signature occurred abruptly, with one or two alterations of manner, last September, and that there are two distinct forms with no intermediate varieties. This is, in itself, remarkable and suspicious. But a remark made by Mr. Britton furnishes a really valuable piece of evidence on the point we are now considering. He admitted that the character of the signature had undergone a change, but observed that the change did not affect the individual or personal character of the writing. This is very important; for handwriting is, as it were, an extension of the personality of the writer. And just as a man to some extent snares his personality with his near blood-relations in the form of family resemblances, so his handwriting often shows a subtle likeness to that of his near relatives. You must have noticed, as I have, how commonly the handwriting of one brother resembles that of another, and in just this peculiar and subtle way. The inference, then, from Mr. Britton's statement is, that if the signature of the will was forged, it was probably forged by a relative of the deceased. But the only relative in question is his brother John.

"All the facts, therefore, pointed to John Blackmore as the person who occupied these chambers, and I accordingly adopted that view as a working hypothesis."

"But this was all pure speculation," objected Mr. Winwood.

"Not speculation," said Thorndyke. "Hypothesis. It was ordinary inductive reasoning such as we employ in scientific research. I started with the purely tentative hypothesis that the person who signed the will was not Jeffrey Blackmore. I assumed this; and I may say that I did not believe it at the time, but merely adopted it as a proposition that was worth testing. I accordingly tested it, 'Yes?' or 'No?' with each new fact; but as each new fact said 'Yes,' and no fact said definitely 'No,' its probability increased rapidly by a sort of geometrical progression. The probabilities multiplied into one another. It is a perfectly sound method, for one knows that if a hypothesis be true, it will lead one, sooner or later, to a crucial fact by which its truth can be demonstrated.

"To resume our argument. We have now set up the proposition that John Blackmore was the tenant of New Inn and that he was personating Jeffrey. Let us reason from this and see what it leads to.

"If the tenant of New Inn was John, then Jeffrey must be elsewhere, since his concealment at the inn was clearly impossible. But he could not have been far away, for he had to be producible at short notice whenever the death of Mrs. Wilson should make the production of his body necessary. But if he was producible, his person must have been in the possession or control of John. He could not have been at large, for that would have involved the danger of his being seen and recognized. He could not have been in any institution or place where he would be in contact with strangers. Then he must be in some sort of confinement. But it is difficult to keep an adult in confinement in an ordinary house. Such a proceeding would involve great risk of discovery and the use of violence which would leave traces on the body, to be observed and commented on at the inquest. What alternative method could be suggested?"

"The most obvious method is that of keeping the prisoner in such a state of debility as would confine him to his bed. But such debility could be produced by only starvation, unsuitable food, or chronic poisoning. Of these alternatives, poisoning is much more exact, more calculable in its effect and more under control. The probabilities, then, were in favour of chronic poisoning.

“Having reached this stage, I recalled a singular case which Jervis had mentioned to me and which seemed to illustrate this method. On our return home I asked him for further particulars, and he then gave me a very detailed description of the patient and the circumstances. The upshot was rather startling. I had looked on his case as merely illustrative, and wished to study it for the sake of the suggestions that it might offer. But when I had heard his account, I began to suspect that there was something more than mere parallelism of method. It began to look as if his patient, Mr. Graves, might actually be Jeffrey Blackmore.

“The coincidences were remarkable. The general appearance of the patient tallied completely with Mr. Stephen’s description of his uncle Jeffrey. The patient had a tremulous iris in his right eye and had clearly suffered from dislocation of the crystalline lens. But from Mr. Stephen’s account of his uncle’s sudden loss of sight in the right eye after a fall, I judged that Jeffrey had also suffered from dislocation of the lens and therefore had a tremulous iris in the right eye. The patient, Graves, evidently had defective vision in his left eye, as proved by the marks made behind his ears by the hooked side-bars of his spectacles; for it is only on spectacles that are intended for constant use that we find hooked side-bars. But Jeffrey had defective vision in his left eye and wore spectacles constantly. Lastly, the patient Graves was suffering from chronic morphine poisoning, and morphine was found in the body of Jeffrey.

“Once more, it appeared to me that there were too many coincidences.

“The question as to whether Graves and Jeffrey were identical admitted of fairly easy disproof; for if Graves was still alive, he could not be Jeffrey. It was an important question and I resolved to test it without delay. That night, Jervis and I plotted out the chart, and on the following morning we located the house. But it was empty and to let. The birds had flown, and we failed to discover whither they had gone.

“However, we entered the house and explored. I have told you about the massive bolts and fastenings that we found on the bedroom doors and window, showing that the room had been used as a prison. I have told you of the objects that we picked out of the dust-heap under the grate. Of the obvious suggestion offered by the Japanese brush and the bottle of ‘spirit gum’ or cement, I need not speak now; but I must trouble you with some details concerning the broken spectacles. For here we had come upon the crucial fact to which, as I have said, all sound inductive reasoning brings one sooner or later.

“The spectacles were of a rather peculiar pattern. The frames were of the type invented by Mr. Stopford of Moorfields and known by his name. The right eye-piece was fitted with plain glass, as is usual in the case of a blind, or useless, eye. It was very much shattered, but its character was obvious. The glass of the left eye was much thicker and fortunately less damaged, so that I was able accurately to test its refraction.

“When I reached home, I laid the pieces of the spectacles together, measured the frames very carefully, tested the left eye-glass, and wrote down a full description such as would have been given by the surgeon to the spectacle-maker. Here it is, and I will ask you to note it carefully.

“Spectacles for constant use. Steel frame, Stopford’s pattern, curl sides, broad bridge with gold lining. Distance between centres, 6.2 centimetres; extreme length of side-bars, 13.3 centimetres.

“Right eye plain glass.

“Left eye	<u>-5.75 D. spherical</u>
	-3.25 D. cylindrical, axis 35°.’

“The spectacles, you see, were of a very distinctive character and seemed to offer a good chance of identification. Stopford’s frames are, I believe, made by only one firm of opticians in London, Parry & Cuxton of Regent Street. I therefore wrote to Mr. Cuxton, who knows me, asking him if he had supplied spectacles to the late Jeffrey Blackmore, Esq.—here is a copy of my letter—and if so, whether he would mind letting me have a full description of them, together with the name of the oculist who prescribed them.

“He replied in this letter, which is pinned to the copy of mine, that, about four years ago, he supplied a pair of glasses to Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore, and described them thus: ‘The spectacles were for constant use and had steel frames of Stopford’s pattern with curl sides, the length of the side-bars including the curled ends being 13.3 cm. The bridge was broad with a gold lining-plate, shaped as shown by the enclosed tracing from the diagram on the prescription. Distance between centres 6.2 cm.

“Right eye plain glass.

“Left eye	<u>-5.75 D. spherical</u>
	-3.25 D. cylindrical, axis 35°.’

“The spectacles were prescribed by Mr. Hindley of Wimpole Street.’

“You see that Mr. Cuxton’s description is identical with mine. However, for further confirmation, I wrote to Mr. Hindley, asking certain questions, to which he replied thus:



"You are quite right. Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore had a tremulous iris in his right eye (which was practically blind), due to dislocation of the lens. The pupils were rather large; certainly not contracted."

"Here, then, we have three important facts. One is that the spectacles found by us at Kennington Lane were undoubtedly Jeffrey's; for it is as unlikely that there exists another pair of spectacles exactly identical with those as that there exists another face exactly like Jeffrey's face. The second fact is that the description of Jeffrey tallies completely with that of the sick man, Graves, as given by Dr. Jervis; and the third is that when Jeffrey was seen by Mr. Hindley, there was no sign of his being addicted to the taking of morphine. The first and second facts, you will agree, constitute complete identification."

"Yes," said Marchmont; "I think we must admit the identification as being quite conclusive, though the evidence is of a kind that is more striking to the medical than to the legal mind."

"You will not have that complaint to make against the next item of evidence," said Thorndyke. "It is after the lawyer's own heart, as you shall hear. A few days ago I wrote to Mr. Stephen asking him if he possessed a recent photograph of his uncle Jeffrey. He had one, and he sent it to me by return. This portrait I showed to Dr. Jervis and asked him if he had ever seen the person it represented. After examining it attentively, without any hint whatever from me, he identified it as the portrait of the sick man, Graves."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Marchmont. "This is most important. Are you prepared to swear to the identity, Dr. Jervis?"

"I have not the slightest doubt," I replied, "that the portrait is that of Mr. Graves."

"Excellent!" said Marchmont, rubbing his hands gleefully; "this will be much more convincing to a jury. Pray go on, Dr. Thorndyke."

"That," said Thorndyke, "completes the first part of my investigation. We had now reached a definite, demonstrable fact; and that fact, as you see, disposed at once of the main question—the genuineness of the will. For if the man at Kennington Lane was Jeffrey Blackmore, then the man at New Inn was not. But it was the latter who had signed the will. Therefore the will was not signed by Jeffrey Blackmore; that is to say, it was a forgery. The case was complete for the purposes of the civil proceedings; the rest of my investigations had reference to the criminal prosecution that was inevitable. Shall I proceed, or is your interest confined to the will?"

"Hang the will!" exclaimed Stephen. "I want to hear how you propose to lay hands on the villain who murdered poor old uncle Jeffrey—for I suppose he did murder him?"

"I think there is no doubt of it," replied Thorndyke.

"Then," said Marchmont, "we will hear the rest of the argument, if you please."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "As the evidence stands, we have proved that Jeffrey Blackmore was a prisoner in the house in Kennington Lane and that some one was personating him at New Inn. That some one, we have seen, was, in all probability, John Blackmore. We now have to consider the man Weiss. Who was he? and can we connect him in any way with New Inn?"

"We may note in passing that Weiss and the coachman were apparently one and the same person. They were never seen together. When Weiss was present, the coachman was not available even for so urgent a service as the obtaining of an antidote to the poison. Weiss always appeared some time after Jervis's arrival and disappeared some time before his departure, in each case sufficiently long to allow of a change of disguise. But we need not labour the point, as it is not of primary importance.

"To return to Weiss. He was clearly heavily disguised, as we see by his unwillingness to show himself even by the light of a candle. But there is an item of positive evidence on this point which is important from having other bearings. It is furnished by the spectacles worn by Weiss, of which you have heard Jervis's description. These spectacles had very peculiar optical properties. When you looked *through* them they had the properties of plain glass; when you looked *at* them they had the appearance of lenses. But only one kind of glass possesses these properties; namely, that which, like an ordinary watch-glass, has curved, parallel surfaces. But for what purpose could a person wear 'watch-glass' spectacles? Clearly, not to assist his vision. The only alternative is disguise.

"The properties of these spectacles introduce a very curious and interesting feature into the case. To the majority of persons, the wearing of spectacles for the purpose of disguise or personation, seems a perfectly simple and easy proceeding. But, to a person of normal eyesight, it is nothing of the kind. For, if he wears spectacles suited for long sight he cannot see distinctly through them at all; while, if he wears concave, or near sight, glasses, the effort to see through them produces such strain and fatigue that his eyes become disabled altogether. On the stage the difficulty is met by using spectacles of plain window-glass, but in real life this would hardly do; the 'property' spectacles would be detected at once and give rise to suspicion.

"The personator is therefore in this dilemma: if he wears actual spectacles, he cannot see through them; if he wears sham spectacles of plain glass, his disguise will probably be detected. There is only one way out of the difficulty, and that not a very satisfactory one; but Mr. Weiss seems to have adopted it in lieu of a better. It is that of using watch-glass spectacles such as I have described.

"Now, what do we learn from these very peculiar glasses? In the first place they confirm our opinion that Weiss was wearing a disguise. But, for use in a room so very dimly lighted, the ordinary stage spectacles would have answered quite

well. The second inference is, then, that these spectacles were prepared to be worn under more trying conditions of light—out of doors, for instance. The third inference is that Weiss was a man with normal eyesight; for otherwise he could have worn real spectacles suited to the state of his vision.

“These are inferences by the way, to which we may return. But these glasses furnish a much more important suggestion. On the floor of the bedroom at New Inn I found some fragments of glass which had been trodden on. By joining one or two of them together, we have been able to make out the general character of the object of which they formed parts. My assistant—who was formerly a watch-maker—judged that object to be the thin crystal glass of a lady’s watch, and this, I think, was Jervis’s opinion. But the small part which remains of the original edge furnishes proof in two respects that this was not a watch-glass. In the first place, on taking a careful tracing of this piece of the edge, I found that its curve was part of an ellipse; but watch-glasses, nowadays, are invariably circular. In the second place, watch-glasses are ground on the edge to a single bevel to snap into the bezel or frame; but the edge of this object was ground to a double bevel, like the edge of a spectacle-glass, which fits into a groove in the frame and is held by the side-bar screw. The inevitable inference was that this was a spectacle-glass. But, if so, it was part of a pair of spectacles identical in properties with those worn by Mr. Weiss.

“The importance of this conclusion emerges when we consider the exceptional character of Mr. Weiss’s spectacles. They were not merely peculiar or remarkable; they were probably unique. It is exceedingly likely that there is not in the entire world another similar pair of spectacles. Whence the finding of these fragments of glass in the bedroom establishes a considerable probability that Mr. Weiss was, at some time, in the chambers at New Inn.

“And now let us gather up the threads of this part of the argument. We are inquiring into the identity of the man Weiss. Who was he?

“In the first place, we find him committing a secret crime from which John Blackmore alone will benefit. This suggests the *prima-facie* probability that he was John Blackmore.

“Then we find that he was a man of normal eyesight who was wearing spectacles for the purpose of disguise. But the tenant of New Inn, whom we have seen to be, almost certainly, John Blackmore—and whom we will, for the present, assume to have been John Blackmore—was a man with normal eyesight who wore spectacles for disguise.

“John Blackmore did not reside at New Inn, but at some place within easy reach of it. But Weiss resided at a place within easy reach of New Inn.

“John Blackmore must have had possession and control of the person of Jeffrey. But Weiss had possession and control of the person of Jeffrey.

“Weiss wore spectacles of a certain peculiar and probably unique character. But portions of such spectacles were found in the chambers at New Inn.

“The overwhelming probability, therefore, is that Weiss and the tenant of New Inn were one and the same person; and that that person was John Blackmore.”

“That,” said Mr. Winwood, “is a very plausible argument. But, you observe, sir, that it contains an undistributed middle term.”

Thorndyke smiled genially. I think he forgave Winwood everything for that remark.

“You are quite right, sir,” he said. “It does. And, for that reason, the demonstration is not absolute. But we must not forget, what logicians seem occasionally to overlook: that the ‘undistributed middle,’ while it interferes with absolute proof, may be quite consistent with a degree of probability that approaches very near to certainty. Both the Bertillon system and the English fingerprint system involve a process of reasoning in which the middle term is undistributed. But the great probabilities are accepted in practice as equivalent to certainties.”

Mr. Winwood grunted a grudging assent, and Thorndyke resumed:

“We have now furnished fairly conclusive evidence on three heads: we have proved that the sick man, Graves, was Jeffrey Blackmore; that the tenant of New Inn was John Blackmore; and that the man Weiss was also John Blackmore. We now have to prove that John and Jeffrey were together in the chambers at New Inn on the night of Jeffrey’s death.

“We know that two persons, and two persons only, came from Kennington Lane to New Inn. But one of those persons was the tenant of New Inn—that is, John Blackmore. Who was the other? Jeffrey is known by us to have been at Kennington Lane. His body was found on the following morning in the room at New Inn. No third person is known to have come from Kennington Lane; no third person is known to have arrived at New Inn. The inference, by exclusion, is that the second person—the woman—was Jeffrey.

“Again; Jeffrey had to be brought from Kennington to the inn by John. But John was personating Jeffrey and was made up to resemble him very closely. If Jeffrey were undisguised the two men would be almost exactly alike; which would be very noticeable in any case and suspicious after the death of one of them. Therefore Jeffrey would have to be disguised in some way; and what disguise could be simpler and more effective than the one that I suggest was used?

“Again; it was unavoidable that some one—the cabman—should know that Jeffrey was not alone when he came to the inn that night. If the fact had leaked out and it had become known that a man had accompanied him to his chambers, some suspicion might have arisen, and that suspicion would have pointed to John, who was directly interested in his brother’s

death. But if it had transpired that Jeffrey was accompanied by a woman, there would have been less suspicion, and that suspicion would not have pointed to John Blackmore.

"Thus all the general probabilities are in favour of the hypothesis that this woman was Jeffrey Blackmore. There is, however, an item of positive evidence that strongly supports this view. When I examined the clothing of the deceased, I found on the trousers a horizontal crease on each leg as if the trousers had been turned up half-way to the knees. This appearance is quite understandable if we suppose that the trousers were worn under a skirt and were turned up so that they should not be accidentally seen. Otherwise it is quite incomprehensible."

"Is it not rather strange," said Marchmont, "that Jeffrey should have allowed himself to be dressed up in this remarkable manner?"

"I think not," replied Thorndyke. "There is no reason to suppose that he knew how he was dressed. You have heard Jervis's description of his condition; that of a mere automaton. You know that without his spectacles he was practically blind, and that he could not have worn them since we found them at the house in Kennington Lane. Probably his head was wrapped up in the veil, and the skirt and mantle put on afterwards; but, in any case, his condition rendered him practically devoid of will power. That is all the evidence I have to prove that the unknown woman was Jeffrey. It is not conclusive but it is convincing enough for our purpose, seeing that the case against John Blackmore does not depend upon it."

"Your case against him is on the charge of murder, I presume?" said Stephen.

"Undoubtedly. And you will notice that the statements made by the supposed Jeffrey to the porter, hinting at suicide, are now important evidence. By the light of what we know, the announcement of intended suicide becomes the announcement of intended murder. It conclusively disproves what it was intended to prove; that Jeffrey died by his own hand."

"Yes, I see that," said Stephen, and then after a pause he asked: "Did you identify Mrs. Schallibaum? You have told us nothing about her."

"I have considered her as being outside the case as far as I am concerned," replied Thorndyke. "She was an accessory; my business was with the principal. But, of course, she will be swept up in the net. The evidence that convicts John Blackmore will convict her. I have not troubled about her identity. If John Blackmore is married, she is probably his wife. Do you happen to know if he is married?"

"Yes; but Mrs. John Blackmore is not much like Mrs. Schallibaum, excepting that she has a cast in the left eye. She is a dark woman with very heavy eyebrows."

"That is to say that she differs from Mrs. Schallibaum in those peculiarities that can be artificially changed and resembles her in the one feature that is unchangeable. Do you know if her Christian name happens to be Pauline?"

"Yes, it is. She was a Miss Pauline Hagenbeck, a member of an American theatrical company. What made you ask?"

"The name which Jervis heard poor Jeffrey struggling to pronounce seemed to me to resemble Pauline more than any other name."

"There is one little point that strikes me," said Marchmont. "Is it not rather remarkable that the porter should have noticed no difference between the body of Jeffrey and the living man whom he knew by sight, and who must, after all, have been distinctly different in appearance?"

"I am glad you raised that question," Thorndyke replied, "for that very difficulty presented itself to me at the beginning of the case. But on thinking it over, I decided that it was an imaginary difficulty, assuming, as we do, that there was a good deal of resemblance between the two men. Put yourself in the porter's place and follow his mental processes. He is informed that a dead man is lying on the bed in Mr. Blackmore's rooms. Naturally, he assumes that the dead man is Mr. Blackmore—who, by the way, had hinted at suicide only the night before. With this idea he enters the chambers and sees a man a good deal like Mr. Blackmore and wearing Mr. Blackmore's clothes, lying on Mr. Blackmore's bed. The idea that the body could be that of some other person has never entered his mind. If he notes any difference of appearance he will put that down to the effects of death; for every one knows that a man dead looks somewhat different from the same man alive. I take it as evidence of great acuteness on the part of John Blackmore that he should have calculated so cleverly, not only the mental process of the porter, but the erroneous reasoning which every one would base on the porter's conclusions. For, since the body was actually Jeffrey's, and was identified by the porter as that of his tenant, it has been assumed by every one that no question was possible as to the identity of Jeffrey Blackmore and the tenant of New Inn."

There was a brief silence, and then Marchmont asked:

"May we take it that we have now heard all the evidence?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "That is my case."

"Have you given information to the police?" Stephen asked eagerly.

"Yes. As soon as I had obtained the statement of the cabman, Ridley, and felt that I had enough evidence to secure a conviction, I called at Scotland Yard and had an interview with the Assistant Commissioner. The case is in the hands of Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department, a most acute and energetic officer. I have been expecting to hear that the warrant has been executed, for Mr. Miller is usually very punctilious in keeping me informed of the progress of the cases to which I introduce him. We shall hear to-morrow, no doubt."

“And, for the present,” said Marchmont, “the case seems to have passed out of our hands.”

“I shall enter a caveat, all the same,” said Mr. Winwood.

“That doesn’t seem very necessary,” Marchmont objected. “The evidence that we have heard is amply sufficient to ensure a conviction and there will be plenty more when the police go into the case. And a conviction on the charges of forgery and murder would, of course, invalidate the second will.”

“I shall enter a caveat, all the same,” repeated Mr. Winwood.

As the two partners showed a disposition to become heated over this question, Thorndyke suggested that they might discuss it at leisure by the light of subsequent events. Acting on this hint—for it was now close upon midnight—our visitors prepared to depart; and were, in fact, just making their way towards the door when the bell rang. Thorndyke flung open the door, and, as he recognized his visitor, greeted him with evident satisfaction.

“Ha! Mr. Miller; we were just speaking of you. These gentlemen are Mr. Stephen Blackmore and his solicitors, Mr. Marchmont and Mr. Winwood. You know Dr. Jervis, I think.”

The officer bowed to our friends and remarked:

“I am just in time, it seems. A few minutes more and I should have missed these gentlemen. I don’t know what you’ll think of my news.”

“You haven’t let that villain escape, I hope,” Stephen exclaimed.

“Well,” said the Superintendent, “he is out of my hands and yours too; and so is the woman. Perhaps I had better tell you what has happened.”

“If you would be so kind,” said Thorndyke, motioning the officer to a chair.

The superintendent seated himself with the manner of a man who has had a long and strenuous day, and forthwith began his story.

“As soon as we had your information, we procured a warrant for the arrest of both parties, and then I went straight to their flat with Inspector Badger and a sergeant. There we learned from the attendant that they were away from home and were not expected back until to-day about noon. We kept a watch on the premises, and this morning, about the time appointed, a man and a woman, answering to the description, arrived at the flat. We followed them in and saw them enter the lift, and we were going to get into the lift too, when the man pulled the rope, and away they went. There was nothing for us to do but run up the stairs, which we did as fast as we could race; but they got to their landing first, and we were only just in time to see them nip in and shut the door. However, it seemed that we had them safe enough, for there was no dropping out of the windows at that height; so we sent the sergeant to get a locksmith to pick the lock or force the door, while we kept on ringing the bell.

“About three minutes after the sergeant left, I happened to look out of the landing window and saw a hansom pull up opposite the flats. I put my head out of the window, and, hang me if I didn’t see our two friends getting into the cab. It seems that there was a small lift inside the flat communicating with the kitchen, and they had slipped down it one at a time.

“Well, of course, we raced down the stairs like acrobats, but by the time we got to the bottom the cab was off with a fine start. We ran out into Victoria Street, and there we could see it half-way down the street and going like a chariot race. We managed to pick up another hansom and told the cabby to keep the other one in sight, and away we went like the very deuce; along Victoria Street and Broad Sanctuary, across Parliament Square, over Westminster Bridge and along York Road; we kept the other beggar in sight, but we couldn’t gain an inch on him. Then we turned into Waterloo Station, and, as we were driving up the slope we met another hansom coming down; and when the cabby kissed his hand and smiled at us, we guessed that he was the sportsman we had been following.

“But there was no time to ask questions. It is an awkward station with a lot of different exits, and it looked a good deal as if our quarry had got away. However, I took a chance. I remembered that the Southampton express was due to start about this time, and I took a short cut across the lines and made for the platform that it starts from. Just as Badger and I got to the end, about thirty yards from the rear of the train, we saw a man and a woman running in front of us. Then the guard blew his whistle and the train began to move. The man and the woman managed to scramble into one of the rear compartments and Badger and I raced up the platform like mad. A porter tried to head us off, but Badger capsized him and we both sprinted harder than ever, and just hopped on the foot-board of the guard’s van as the train began to get up speed. The guard couldn’t risk putting us off, so he had to let us into his van, which suited us exactly, as we could watch the train on both sides from the look-out. And we did watch, I can tell you; for our friend in front had seen us. His head was out of the window as we climbed on to the foot-board.

“However, nothing happened until we stopped at Southampton West. There, I need not say, we lost no time in hopping out, for we naturally expected our friends to make a rush for the exit. But they didn’t. Badger watched the platform, and I kept a look-out to see that they didn’t slip away across the line from the off-side. But still there was no sign of them. Then I walked up the train to the compartment which I had seen them enter. And there they were, apparently fast asleep in the corner by the off-side window, the man leaning back with his mouth open and the woman resting against him with her head on his shoulder. She gave me quite a turn when I went in to look at them, for she had her eyes half-closed and seemed

to be looking round at me with a most horrible expression; but I found afterwards that the peculiar appearance of looking round was due to the cast in her eye.”

“They were dead, I suppose?” said Thorndyke.

“Yes, sir. Stone dead; and I found these on the floor of the carriage.”

He held up two tiny yellow glass tubes, each labelled “Hypodermic tabloids. Aconitine Nitrate gr. 1/640.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Thorndyke, “this fellow was well up in alkaloidal poisons, it seems; and they appear to have gone about prepared for emergencies. These tubes each contained twenty tabloids, a thirty-second of a grain altogether, so we may assume that about twelve times the medicinal dose was swallowed. Death must have occurred in a few minutes, and a merciful death too.”

“A more merciful death than they deserved,” exclaimed Stephen, “when one thinks of the misery and suffering that they inflicted on poor old uncle Jeffrey. I would sooner have had them hanged.”

“It’s better as it is, sir,” said Miller. “There is no need, now, to raise any questions in detail at the inquest. The publicity of a trial for murder would have been very unpleasant for you. I wish Dr. Jervis had given the tip to me instead of to that confounded, over-cautious—but there, I mustn’t run down my brother officers: and it’s easy to be wise after the event.

“Good night, gentlemen. I suppose this accident disposes of your business as far as the will is concerned?”

“I suppose it does,” agreed Mr. Winwood. “But I shall enter a caveat, all the same.”

---

THE END

## **A SILENT WITNESS**

### **I — THE BEGINNING OF THE MYSTERY**

---

THE history upon which I am now embarking abounds in incidents so amazing that, as I look back on them, a something approaching to scepticism contends with my vivid recollections and makes me feel almost apologetic in laying them before the reader. Some of them indeed are so out of character with the workaday life in which they happened that they will appear almost incredible; but none is more fraught with mystery than the experience that befell me on a certain September night in the last year of my studentship and ushered in the rest of the astounding sequence.

It was past eleven o'clock when I let myself out of my lodgings at Gospel Oak; a dark night, cloudy and warm and rather inclined to rain. But, despite the rather unfavourable aspect of the weather, I turned my steps away from the town, and walking briskly up the Highgate Road, presently turned into Millfield Lane. This was my favourite walk and the pretty winding lane, meandering so pleasantly from Lower Highgate to the heights of Hampstead, was familiar to me under all its aspects.

On sweet summer mornings when the cuckoos called from the depths of Ken Wood, when the path was spangled with golden sunlight, and saucy squirrels played hide and seek in the shadows under the elms (though the place was within

earshot of Westminster and within sight of the dome of St. Paul's); on winter days when the Heath wore its mantle of white and the ring of gliding steel came up from the skaters on the pond below; on August evenings, when I would come suddenly on sequestered lovers (to our mutual embarrassment) and hurry by with ill-feigned unconsciousness. I knew all its phases and loved them all. Even its name was delightful, carrying the mind back to those more rustic days when the wits foregathered at the Old Flask Tavern and John Constable tramped through this very lane with his colour-box slung over his shoulder.

It was very dark after I had passed the lamp at the entrance to the lane. Very silent and solitary too. Not a soul was stirring at this hour, for the last of the lovers had long since gone home and the place was little frequented even in the daytime. The elms brooded over the road, shrouding it in shadows of palpable black, and their leaves whispered secretly in the soft night breeze. But the darkness, the quiet and the solitude were restful after the long hours of study and the glare of the printed page, and I strolled on past the ghostly pond and the little thatched cottage, now wrapped in silence and darkness, with a certain wistful regret that I must soon look my last on them. For I had now passed all my examinations but the final "Fellowship," and must soon be starting my professional career in earnest.

Presently a light rain began to fall. Foreseeing that I should have to curtail my walk, I stepped forward more briskly, and, passing between the posts, entered the narrowest and most secluded part of the lane. But now the rain suddenly increased, and a squall of wind drove it athwart the path. I drew up in the shelter of one of the tall oak fences by which the lane is here inclosed, and waited for the shower to pass. And as I stood with my back to the fence, pensively filling my pipe, I became for the first time sensible of the utter solitude of the place.

I looked about me and listened. The lane was darker here than elsewhere; a mere trench between the high fences. I could dimly see the posts at the entrance and a group of large elms over-shadowing them. In the other direction, where the lane doubled sharply upon itself, was absolute, inky blackness, save where a faint glimmer from the wet ground showed the corner of the fence and a projecting stump or tree-root jutting out from the corner and looking curiously like a human foot with the toes pointed upward.

The rain fell steadily with a soft, continuous murmur; the leaves of the elm-trees whispered together and answered the falling rain. The Scotch pines above my head stirred in the breeze with a sound like the surge of the distant sea. The voices of Nature, hushed and solemn, oblivious of man like the voices of the wilderness; and over all and through all, a profound, enveloping silence.

I drew up closer to the fence and shivered slightly, for the night was growing chill. It seemed a little lighter now in the narrow, trench-like lane; not that the sky was less murky but because the ground was now flooded with water. The posts stood out less vaguely against the background of wet road, and the odd-looking stump by the corner was almost distinct. And again it struck me as looking curiously like a foot—a booted foot with the toe pointing upwards.

The chime of a church clock sounded across the Heath, a human voice, this, penetrating the desolate silence. Then, after an interval, the solemn boom of Big Ben came up faintly from the sleeping city.

Midnight! and time for me to go home. It was of no use to wait for the rain to cease. This was no passing shower, but a steady drizzle that might last till morning. I re-lit my pipe, turned up my collar, and prepared to plunge into the rain. And as I stepped out, the queer-looking stump caught my eye once more. It was singularly like a foot; and it was odd, too, that I had never noticed it before in my many rambles through the lane.

A sudden, childish curiosity impelled me to see what it really was before I went, and the next moment I was striding sharply up the sodden path. Of course, I expected the illusion to vanish as I approached. But it did not. The resemblance increased as I drew nearer, and I hurried forward with something more than curiosity.

It was a foot! I realized it with a shock while I was some paces away; and, as I reached the corner, I came upon the body of a man lying in the sharp turn of the path; and the limp, sprawling posture, with one leg doubled under, told its tale at a glance.

I laid my finger on his wrist. It was clammy and cold, and not a vestige of a pulse could I detect. I struck a wax match and held it to his face. The eyes were wide-open and filmy, staring straight up into the reeking sky. The dilated pupils were insensitive to the glare of the match, the eyeballs insensitive to the touch of my finger.

Beyond all doubt the man was dead.

But how had he died? Had he simply fallen dead from some natural cause, or had he been murdered? There was no obvious injury, and no sign of blood. All that the momentary glimmer of the match showed was that his clothes were shiny with the wet; a condition that might easily, in the weak light, mask a considerable amount of bleeding.

When the match went out, I stood for some moments looking down on the prostrate figure as it lay with the rain beating down on the upturned face, professional interest contending with natural awe of the tragic presence. The former prompted me to ascertain without delay the cause of death; and, indeed, I was about to make a more thorough search for some injury or wound when something whispered to me that it is not well to be alone at midnight in a solitary place with a dead man—perchance a murdered man. Had there been any sign of life, my duty would have been clear. As it was, I must act for the best with a due regard to my own safety. And, reaching this conclusion, I turned away, with a last glance at the motionless figure and set forth homeward at a rapid pace.

As I turned out of Millfield Lane into Highgate Rise I perceived a policeman on the opposite side of the road standing

under a tree, where the light from a lamp fell on his shining tarpaulin cape. I crossed the road, and, as he civilly touched his helmet, I said: "I am afraid there is something wrong up the lane, Constable; I have just seen the body of a man lying on the pathway."

The constable woke up very completely. "Do you mean a dead man, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, he is undoubtedly dead," I replied.

"Whereabouts did you see the body?" enquired the constable.

"In the narrow part of the lane, just by the stables of Mansfield House."

"That's some distance from here," said the constable. "You had better come with me and report at the station. You're sure the man was dead, sir?"

"Yes, I have no doubt about it. I am a medical man," I added, with some pride (I had been a medical man about three months, and the sensation was still a novel one).

"Oh, are you, sir?" said the officer, with a glance at my half-fledged countenance; "then, I suppose you examined the body?"

"Sufficiently to make sure that the man was dead, but I did not stay to ascertain the cause of death."

"No, sir; quite so. We can find that out later."

As we talked, the constable swung along down the hill, without hurry, but at a pace that gave me very ample exercise, and I caught his eye from time to time, travelling over my person with obvious professional interest. When we had nearly reached the bottom of the hill, there appeared suddenly on the wet road ahead, a couple of figures in waterproof capes. "Ha!" said the constable, "this is fortunate. Here is the inspector and the sergeant. That will save us the walk to the station."

He accosted the officers as they approached and briefly related what I had told him. "You are sure the man was dead, sir?" said the inspector, scrutinizing me narrowly; "but, there, we needn't stay here to discuss that. You run down, Sergeant, and get a stretcher and bring it along as quickly as you can. I must trouble you, sir, to come with me and show me where the body is. Lend the gentleman your cape, sergeant; you can get another at the station."

I accepted the stout cape thankfully, for the rain still fell with steady persistency, and set forth with the inspector to retrace my steps. And as we splashed along through the deep gloom of the lane, the officer plied me with judicious questions. "How long did you think the man had been dead?" he asked.

"Not long, I should think. The body was still quite limp."

"You didn't see any marks of violence?"

"No. There were no obvious injuries."

"Which way were you going when you came on the body?"

"The way we are going now, and, of course, I came straight back."

"Did you meet or see anyone in the lane?"

"Not a soul," I answered.

He considered my answers for some time, and then came the question that I had been expecting. "How came you to be in the lane at this time of night?"

"I was taking a walk," I replied, "as I do nearly every night. I usually finish my evening's reading about eleven, and then I have some supper and take a walk before going to bed, and I take my walk most commonly in Millfield Lane. Some of your men must remember having met me."

This explanation seemed to satisfy him for he pursued the subject no farther, and we trudged on for awhile in silence. At length, as we passed through the posts into the narrow part of the lane, the inspector asked: "We're nearly there, aren't we?"

"Yes," I replied: "the body is lying in the bend just ahead."

I peered into the darkness in search of the foot that had first attracted my notice, but was not yet able to distinguish it. Nor, to my surprise, could I make it out as we approached more nearly; and when we reached the corner, I stopped short in utter amazement.

The body had vanished! "What's the matter?" asked the inspector. "I thought this was the place you meant."

"So it is," I answered. "This is the place where the body was lying; here, across the path, with one foot projecting round the corner. Someone must have carried it away."

The inspector looked at me sharply for a moment. "Well, it isn't here now," said he, "and if it has been taken away, it must have been taken along towards Hampstead Lane. We'd better go and see." Without waiting for a reply, he started off along the lane at a smart double and I followed.



We pursued the windings of the lane until we emerged into the road by the lodge gates, without discovering any traces of the missing corpse or meeting any person, and then we turned back and retraced our steps; and as we, once more, approached the crook in the lane where I had seen the body, we heard a quick, measured tramp. "Here comes the sergeant with the stretcher," observed the inspector; "and he might have saved himself the trouble." Once more the officer glanced at me sharply, and this time with unmistakable suspicion. "There's no body here, Robson," he said, as the sergeant came up, accompanied by two constables carrying a stretcher. "It seems to have disappeared."

"Disappeared!" exclaimed the sergeant, bestowing on me a look of extreme disfavour; "that's a rum go, sir. How could it have disappeared?"

"Ah! that's the question!" said the inspector. "And another question is, was it ever here? Are you prepared to make a sworn statement on the subject, sir?"

"Certainly I am," I replied.

"Then," said the inspector, "we will take it that there was a body here. Put down that stretcher. There is a gap in the fence farther along. We will get through there and search the meadow."

The bearers stood the stretcher up against a tree and we all proceeded up the lane to the place where the observant inspector had noticed the opening in the fence. The gravel, though sodden with the wet, took but the faintest impressions of the feet that trod it, and, though the sergeant and the two constables threw the combined light of their lanterns on the ground, we were only able to make out very faintly the occasional traces of our own footsteps.

We scrutinized the break in the fence and the earth around with the utmost minuteness, but could detect no sign of anyone having passed through. The short turf of the meadow, on which I had seen sheep grazing in the daytime, was not calculated to yield traces of anyone passing over it, and no traces of any kind were discoverable. When we had searched the meadow thoroughly and without result, we came back into the lane and followed its devious course to the "kissing-gate" at the Hampstead Lane entrance. And still there was no sign of anything unusual. True, there were obscure foot-prints in the soft gravel by the turnstile, but they told us nothing; we could not even be sure that they had not been made by ourselves on our previous visit. In short, the net result of our investigations was that the body had vanished and left no trace. "It's a very extraordinary affair," said the inspector, in a tone of deep discontent, as we walked back. "The body of a full-grown man isn't the sort of thing you can put in your pocket and stroll off with without being noticed, even at midnight. Are you perfectly sure the man was really dead and not in a faint?"

"I feel no doubt whatever that he was dead," I replied.

"With all respect to you, sir," said the sergeant, "I think you must be mistaken. I think the man must have been in a dead faint, and after you came away, the rain must have revived him so that he was able to get up and walk away."

"I don't think so," said I, though with less conviction; for, after all, it was not absolutely impossible that I should have been mistaken, since I had discovered no mortal injury, and the sergeant's suggestion was an eminently reasonable one.

"What sized man was he?" the inspector asked.

"That I couldn't say," I answered. "It is not easy to judge the height of a man when he is lying down and the light was excessively dim. But I should say he was not a tall man and rather slight in build."

"Could you give us any description of him?"

"He was an elderly man, about sixty, I should think, and he appeared to be a clergyman or a priest, for he wore a Roman collar with a narrow, dark stripe up the front. He was clean shaven, and, I think, wore a clerical suit of black. A tall hat was lying on the ground close by and a walking-stick which looked like a malacca, but I couldn't see it very well as he had fallen on it and most of it was hidden."

"And you saw all this by the light of one wax match," said the inspector. "You made pretty good use of your eyes, sir."

"A man isn't much use in my profession if he doesn't," I replied, rather stiffly.

"No, that's true," the inspector agreed. "Well, I must ask you to give us the full particulars at the station, and we shall see if anything fresh turns up. I'm sorry to keep you hanging about in the wet, but it can't be helped."

"Of course it can't," said I, and we trudged on in silence until we reached the station, which looked quite cheerful and homelike despite the grim blue lamp above the doorway. "Well, Doctor," said the inspector, when he had read over my statement and I had affixed my signature, "if anything turns up, you'll hear from us. But I doubt if we shall hear anything more of this. Dead or alive, the man seems to have vanished completely. Perhaps the sergeant's right after all, and your dead man is at this moment comfortably tucked up in bed. Good-night, Doctor, and thank you for all the trouble you have taken."

By the time that I reached my lodgings I was tired out and miserably cold; so cold that I was fain to brew myself a jorum of hot grog in my shaving pot. As a natural result, I fell fast asleep as soon as I got to bed and slept on until the autumn sunshine poured in through the slats of the Venetian blind.

---

## II — THE FINDING OF THE RELIQUARY

I AWOKE on the following morning to a dim consciousness of something unusual, and, as my wits returned with the rapidity that is natural to the young and healthy, the surprising events of the previous night reconstituted themselves and once more set a-going the train of speculation. Vividly I saw with my mind's eye the motionless figure lying limp and inert with the pitiless rain beating down on it; the fixed pupils, the insensitive eyeballs, the pulseless wrist and the sprawling posture. And again I saw the streaming path, void of its dreadful burden, the suspicious inspector, the incredulous sergeant; and the unanswerable questions formulated themselves anew.

Had I, after all, mistaken a living man for a dead body? It was in the highest degree improbable, and yet it was not impossible. Or had the body been spirited away without leaving a trace? That also was highly improbable and yet, not absolutely impossible. The two contending improbabilities cancelled one another. Each was as unlikely as the other.

I turned the problem over again and again as I shaved and took my bath. I pondered upon it over a late and leisurely breakfast. But no conclusion emerged from these reflections. The man, living or dead, had been lying motionless in the lane all the time that I was sheltering, and probably for some time before. In the interval of my absence he had vanished. These were actual facts despite the open incredulity of the police. How he had come there, what had occasioned his death or insensibility, how he had disappeared and whither he had gone; were questions to which no answer seemed possible.

The fatigues of the previous night had left me somewhat indolent. There was no occasion for me to go to the hospital to-day. It was vacation time; the school was closed; the teaching staff were mostly away, and there was little doing in the wards. I decided to take a holiday and spend a quiet day rambling about the Heath, and, having formed this resolution, I filled my pipe, slipped a sketch-book into my pocket, and set forth.

Automatically my feet turned towards Millfield Lane. It was, as I have said, my usual walk, and on this morning, with last night's recollections fresh in my mind, it was natural that I should take my way thither.

Very different was the aspect of the lane this morning from that which I had last looked upon. The gloom and desolation of the night had given place to the golden sunshine of a lovely autumn day. The elms, clothed already in the sober livery of the waning year, sighed with pensive reminiscence of the summer that was gone; the ponds repeated the warm blue of the sky; and the lane itself was a vista of flickering sunlight and cool, reposeful shadow.

The narrow continuation beyond the posts was wrapped as always, in a sombre shade, save where a gleam of yellow light streamed through a chink between the boards of the fence. I made my way straight to the spot where the body had lain and stooped over it, examining each pebble with the closest scrutiny. But not a trace remained. The hard, gravelly soil retained no impress either of the body or even of our footsteps; and as for the stain of blood, if there had ever been any, it would have been immediately removed by the falling rain, for the ground here had a quite appreciable slope and must have been covered last night by a considerable flowing stream.

I went on to the break in the fence—it was on the right-hand side of the path—and was at once discouraged by the aspect of the ground; for even our rough trappings had left hardly a trace behind. After an aimless walk across the meadow, now occupied by a flock of sheep, I returned to the lane and walked slowly back past the place where I had sheltered from the rain. And then it was that I discovered the first hint of any clue to the mystery. I had retraced my steps some little distance past the spot where I had seen the body, when my eye was attracted by a darkish streak on the upper part of the high fence. It was quite faint and not at all noticeable on the weather-stained oak, but it chanced to catch my eye and I stopped to examine it. The fence which bore it was the opposite one to that in which the break occurred, and, since I had sheltered under it, the side of it which looked towards the lane must have been the lee side and thus less exposed to the rain.

I looked at the stain attentively. It extended from the top of the fence—which was about seven feet high—half-way to the ground, fading away gradually in all directions. The colour was a dull brown, and the appearance very much that of blood which had run down a wet surface. The board which bore the stain was traversed by a vertical crack near one edge, so that I was able to break off a small piece without much difficulty; and on examining that portion of the detached piece which had formed the side of the crack, I found it covered with a brownish-red, shiny substance, which I felt little doubt was dried blood, here protected by the crack and so less altered by contact with water.

Naturally, my next proceeding was to scrutinize very carefully the ground immediately beneath the stain. At the foot of the fence, a few tussocks of grass and clumps of undergrown weeds struggled for life in the deep shade. The latter certainly had, on close examination, the appearance of having been trodden on, though it was not very evident. But while I was considering an undoubted bruise on the stalk of a little dead-nettle, my eye caught the glint of some bright object among the leaves. I picked it out eagerly and held it up to look at it; and a very curious object it was; evidently an article of jewellery of some kind, but quite unlike anything I had ever seen before. It appeared to be a little elongated, gold case, with eight sides and terminating at either end in a blunt octagonal pyramid with a tiny ring at its apex, so that it seemed to have been part of a necklace. Of the eight flat sides, six were ornamented with sunk quatre-foils, four on each side; the other two sides were plain except that each had a row of letters engraved on it—A.M.D.G on one side, and S.V.D.P on the other. There was no hall-mark and, as far as I could see, no means of opening the little case. It seemed to have been suspended by a thin silk cord, a portion of which remained attached to one ring and showed a frayed end where it had broken or chafed through.

I wrapped the little object and the detached fragment of the fence in my handkerchief (for I had broken off the latter with the idea of testing it chemically for blood-pigment), and then resumed my investigations. The appearances suggested that the body had been lifted over the fence, and the question arose, What was on the other side? I listened attentively for a few seconds, and then, hearing no sound of footsteps, I grasped the top of the fence, gave a good spring and hoisting myself up,

sat astride and looked about me. The fence skirted the margin of a small lake much overgrown with weeds, amidst which I could see a couple of waterhens making off in alarm at my appearance, and beyond the lake rose the dark mass of Ken Wood. The ground between the fence and the lake was covered with high, reedy grass, which, immediately below my perch, bore very distinct impressions of feet, and an equally distinct set of tracks led away towards the wood—or from the wood to the fence; it was impossible to say which. But in any case, as there were no other tracks, it was certain that the person who made them had climbed over the fence. I dropped down on the grass and, having examined the ground attentively without discovering anything fresh, set off to follow the tracks.

For some distance they continued through high grass in which the impressions were very distinct: then they entered the wood, and here also, in the soft humus, lightly sprinkled with fallen leaves, the footprints were deep and easy to follow. But presently they struck a path, and, as they did not reappear on the farther side, it was evident that the unknown person had proceeded along it. The path was an old one, well made of hard gravel, and, where it passed through the deeper shade of the wood, was covered with velvety moss and grey-green lichen; on which I made out with some difficulty, the imprints of feet. But these were no longer distinct; they did not form a connected track; nor was it possible to distinguish them from the footprints of other persons who might have passed along the path. Even these I soon lost where I had halted irresolutely under a noble beech that rose from a fantastic coil of roots, and was considering how, if at all, I should next proceed, when, there appeared round a curve of the path a man in cord breeches and gaiters, evidently a keeper. He touched his hat civilly and ventured to enquire my business. "I am afraid I have no business here at all," I replied, for I did not think it expedient to tell him what had brought me into the wood. "I suppose I am trespassing."

"Well, sir, it is private property," he rejoined, "and being so near London we have to be rather particular. Perhaps you would like me to show you the way out on to the Heath."

I accepted his offer with many thanks for his courteous method of ejecting a trespasser, and we walked together through the beautiful woodland until the path terminated at a rustic turnstile. "That will be your way, sir," he said, as he let me out, indicating a track that led down to the Vale of Health.

I thanked him once more and then asked: "Is that a private house or does it belong to your estate?" I pointed to a small house or large cottage that stood within a fenced enclosure not far from the edge of the wood.

"That, sir," he replied, "was formerly a keeper's lodge. It is now let for a short term to an artist gentleman who is making some pictures of the Heath, but I expect it will be pulled down before long, as there is some talk of the County Council taking over that piece of land to add to the public grounds. Good-morning, sir," and the keeper, with a parting salute, turned back into the wood.

As I took my way homeward by the Highgate Ponds I meditated on the relation of my new discoveries to the mystery of the preceding night. It was a strange affair, and sinister withal.

That the tracks led from the lane to the wood and not from the wood to the lane, I felt firmly convinced; and equally so that the body of the unknown priest or clergyman had undoubtedly been spirited away. But whither had it been carried? Presumably to some sequestered spot in the wood. And what better hiding-place could be found? There, buried in the soft leaf-mould, it might lie undisturbed for centuries, covered only the deeper as each succeeding autumn shed its russet burden on the unknown grave.

And what, I wondered, was the connection between this mysterious tragedy and the queer little object that I had picked up? Perhaps there was none. Its presence at that particular spot might be nothing but a coincidence. I took it from my handkerchief and examined it afresh. It was a very curious object. As to its use or meaning, I could only form vague surmises. Perhaps it was some kind of locket, enclosing a wisp of hair; the hair perhaps of some dead child or wife or husband or even lover. It was impossible to say. Of course, this question could be settled by taking it to pieces, but I was loth to injure the pretty little bauble; besides it was not mine. In fact, I felt that I ought to notify publicly that I had found it, though the circumstances did not make this very advisable. But if it had any connection with the tragedy, what was the nature of that connection? Had it dropped from the dead man or from the murderer—as I assumed the other man to be? Either was equally possible, though the two possibilities had very different values.

Then the question arose as to what course I should pursue. Clearly it would be my duty to inform the police of the mark on the fence and the tracks through the grass. But should I hand over the mysterious trinket to them? It seemed the correct thing to do, and yet there might after all be no connection between it and the crime. In the end I left the matter to be decided by the attitude of the police themselves.

I called at the station on my way home and furnished the inspector with an account of my new discoveries; of which he made a careful note, assuring me that the affair should be looked into. But his manner expressed frank disbelief, and was even a trifle hostile; and his emphatic request that I would abstain from mentioning the matter to anyone left me in no doubt that he regarded both my communications as wild delusions if not as a deliberate hoax. Consequently, though I frequently reproached myself afterwards with the omission, I said nothing about the trinket, and when I left the station I carried it in my pocket.

No communication on the subject of this mysterious affair ever reached me from the police. That they did actually make some perfunctory investigations, I learned later, as will appear in this narrative. But they gave no publicity to the affair and they sought no further information from me. For my own part, I could, naturally, never forget so strange an experience; but time and the multitudinous interests of my opening life tended to push it farther into the background of memory, and

there it might have remained for ever had not subsequent events drawn it once more from its obscurity.

---

### III — “WHO IS SYLVIA?”

THE winter session had commenced at the hospital, but at Hampstead the month of October had set in with something like a return to summer. It is true that the trees had lost something of their leafy opulence, and that here and there, amidst the sober green, patches of russet and gold had made their appearance, as if Nature's colour-orchestra were tuning up for the final symphony. But, meanwhile, the sun shone brightly and with a genial heat, and if, day by day, he fell farther from the zenith, there was nothing to show it but the lengthening noonday shadows, the warmer blue of the sky and the more rosy tint of the clouds that sailed across it.

Other and more capable pens than mine have set forth the charm of autumn and the beauties of Hampstead—queen of suburbs of the world's metropolis; therefore will I refrain, and only note, as relevant to the subject, the fact that on many a day, when the work of the hospital was in full swing, I might have been seen playing truant very agreeably on the inexhaustible Heath or in the lanes and fields adjacent thereto. In truth, I was taking the final stage of my curriculum rather lazily, having worked hard enough in the earlier years, and being still too young by several months to be admitted to the fellowship of the College of Surgeons; promising myself that when the weather broke I would settle down in earnest to the winter's work.

I have mentioned that Millfield Lane was one of my favourite haunts; indeed, from my lodgings, it was the most direct route to the Heath, and I passed along it almost daily; and never, now, without my thoughts turning back to that rainy night when I had found the dead—or unconscious—man lying across the narrow footway. One morning, as I passed the spot, it occurred to me to make a drawing of the place in my sketch-book, that I might have some memorial of that strange adventure. The pictorial possibilities of the lane just here were not great, but by taking my stand at the turn, on the very spot where I had seen the body lying, I was able to arrange a simple composition which was satisfactory enough.

I am no artist. A neat and intelligible drawing is the utmost that I can produce. But even this modest degree of achievement may be very useful, as I had discovered many a time in the wards or laboratories—indeed, I have often been surprised that the instructors of our youth attach such small value to the power of graphic expression; and it came in usefully now, though in a way that was unforeseen and not fully appreciated at the moment. I had dealt adequately with the fence, the posts, the tree-trunks and other well-defined forms and was beginning a less successful attack on the foliage, when I heard a light, quick step approaching from Hampstead Lane. Intuition—if there is such a thing—fitted the foot-step with a personality, and, for once in a way, was right; as the newcomer reached the sharp bend of the path, I saw a girl of about my own age, simply and serviceably dressed and carrying a pochade box and a small camp-stool. She was not an entire stranger to me. I had met her often in the lane and on the Heath—so often in fact that we had developed that profound unconsciousness of one another's existence that almost amounts to recognition—and had wondered vaguely who she was and what sort of work she did on the panels in that mysterious box.

As I drew back to make way for her, she brushed past, with a single, quick, inquisitive glance at my sketchbook, and went on her way, looking very much alive and full of business. I watched her as she tripped down the lane and passed between the posts out into the sunlight beyond, to vanish behind the trunks of the elms; then I returned to my sketch and my struggles to express foliage with a touch somewhat less suggestive of a birch-broom.

When I had finished my drawing, I sauntered on rather aimlessly, speculating for the hundredth time on the meaning of those discoveries of mine in this very lane. Was it possible that the man whom I had seen was not dead, but merely insensible? I could not believe it. The whole set of circumstances—the aspect of the body, the blood-stain on the fence, the tracks through the high grass and the mysterious gold trinket—were opposed to any such belief. Yet, on the other hand, one would think that a man could not disappear unnoticed. This was no tramp or nameless vagrant. He was a clergyman or a priest, a man who would be known to a great number of persons and whose disappearance must surely be observed at once and be the occasion of very stringent enquiries. But no enquiries had apparently been made. I had seen no notice in the papers of any missing cleric, and clearly the police had heard nothing or they would have looked me up. The whole affair was enveloped in the profoundest mystery. Dead or alive, the man had vanished utterly; and whether he was dead or alive, the mystery was equally beyond solution.

These reflections brought me, almost unconsciously, to another of my favourite walks; the pretty footpath from the Heath to Temple Fortune. I had crossed the stile and stepped off the path to survey the pleasant scene, when my eye was attracted by a number of streaks of alien colour on the leaves of a burdock. Stooping down, I perceived that they were smears of oil-paint, and inferred that someone had cleaned a palette on the herbage; an inference that was confirmed a moment later by what looked like the handle of a brush projecting from a clump of nettles. When I drew it out, however, it proved to be not a brush, but a very curious knife with a blade shaped like a diminutive and attenuated trowel; evidently a painting-knife and also evidently home-made, at least in part, for the tang had been thrust into a short, stout brush-handle and secured with a whipping of waxed thread. I dropped it into my outside breast pocket and went on my way, wondering if by chance it might have been dropped by my fair acquaintance; and the thought was still in my mind when its object hove in sight. Turning a bend in the path, I came on her quite suddenly, perched on her little camp-stool in the shadow of the hedge, with the open sketching-book on her knees, working away with an industry and concentration that seemed to rebuke my own idleness. Indeed, she was so much engrossed with her occupation that she did not notice me until I stepped off the path and approached with the knife in my hand. “I wonder,” said I, holding it out and raising my cap, “if this

happens to be your property. I picked it up just now among the nettles near the barn."

She took the knife from me and looked at it inquisitively. "No," she replied, "it isn't mine, but I think I know whose it is. I suspect it belongs to an artist who has been doing a good deal of work about the Heath. You may have seen him."

"I have seen several artists working about here during the summer. What was this one like?"

"Well," she answered with a smile, "he was like an artist. Very much like. Quite the orthodox get up. Wide brimmed hat, rather long hair and a ragged beard. And he wore sketching-spectacles—half-moon-shaped things, you know—and kid gloves—which were not quite so orthodox."

"Very inconvenient, I should think."

"Not so very. I work in gloves myself in the cold weather or if the midges are very troublesome. You soon get used to the feel of them; and the man I am speaking of wouldn't find them in the way at all because he works almost entirely with painting-knives. That is what made me think that this knife was probably his. He had several, I know, and very skilfully he used them, too."

"You have seen his work, then?"

"Well," she admitted, "I'm afraid I descended once or twice to play the 'snooper'. You see, his method of handling interested me."

"May I ask what a 'snooper' is?" I enquired.

"Don't you know? It's a student's slang name for the kind of person who makes some transparent pretext for coming off the path and passing behind you to get a look at your picture by false pretences."

For an instant there flashed into my mind the suspicion that she was administering a quiet "backhander", and I rejoined hastily: "I hope you are not including me in the genus 'snooper'."

She laughed softly. "It did sound rather like it. But I'll give you the benefit of the doubt in consideration of your finding the knife—which you had better keep in trust for the owner."

"Won't you keep it? You know the probable owner by sight and I don't; and meanwhile you might experiment with it yourself."

"Very well," she replied, dropping it into her brush-tray, "I'll keep it for the present at any rate."

There was a brief pause, and then I ventured to remark, "That looks a very promising sketch of yours. And how well the subject comes."

"I'm glad you like it," she replied, quite simply, viewing her work with her head on one side. "I want it to turn out well, because it's a commission, and commissions for small-oil paintings are rare and precious."

"Do you find small oil pictures very difficult to dispose of?" I asked.

"Not difficult. Impossible, as a rule. But I don't try now. I copy my oil sketches in water-colour, with modifications to suit the market."

Again there was a pause; and, as her brush wandered towards the palette, it occurred to me that I had stayed as long as good manners permitted. Accordingly, I raised my cap, and, having expressed the hope that I had not greatly hindered her, prepared to move away. "Oh, not at all," she answered, "and thank you for the knife, though it isn't mine—or, at any rate, wasn't. Good-morning."

With this and a pleasant smile and a little nod, she dismissed me; and once more I went my idle and meditative way.

It had been quite a pleasant little adventure. There is always something rather interesting in making the acquaintance of a person whom one has known some time by sight but who is otherwise an unknown quantity. The voice, the manner, and the little revelations of character, which confirm or contradict previous impressions, are watched with interest as they develop themselves and fill in, one by one, the blank spaces of the total personality. I had, as I have said, often met this industrious maiden in my walks and had formed the opinion that she looked a rather nice girl; an opinion that was probably influenced by her unusual good looks and graceful carriage. And a rather nice girl she had turned out to be; very dignified and self-possessed, but quite simple and frank—though, to be sure, her gracious reception of me had probably been due to my sketch-book; she had taken me for a kindred spirit. She had a pleasant voice and a faultless accent, with just a hint of the fine lady in her manner; but I liked her none the less for that. And her name was a pretty name, too, if I had guessed it correctly; for, on the inside of the lid of her box, which was partly uncovered by the upright panel, I had read the letters "Syl". The panel hid the rest, but the name could hardly be other than Sylvia; and what more charming and appropriate name could be bestowed upon a comely young lady who spent her days amidst the woods and fields of my beloved Hampstead?

Regaling myself with this somewhat small beer, I sauntered on along the grassy lane, between hedgerows that in the summer had been spangled with wild roses and that were now gay with the big, oval berries, sleek and glossy and scarlet, like overgrown beads of red coral; away, across the fields to Golder's Green and thence by Millfield Lane, back to my lodgings at Gospel Oak, and to my landlady, Mrs. Blunt, who had a few plaintive words to say respecting the disastrous effects of unpunctuality—and the resulting prolonged heat—on mutton cutlets and fried potatoes.

It had been an idle morning and apparently void of significant events; but yet, when I look back on it, I see a definite thread of causation running through its simple happenings, and I realize that, all unthinking, I had strung on one more bead to the chaplet of my destiny.

---

#### IV — SEPTIMUS MADDOCK, DECEASED

IT was getting well on into November when I strolled one afternoon into the hospital museum, not with any specific object but rather vaguely in search of something to do. During the last few days I had developed a slight revival of industry—which had coincided, oddly enough, with a marked deterioration of the weather—and, pathology being my weakest point, the museum had seemed to call me (though not very loudly, I fear) to browse amongst its multitudinous jars and dry preparations.

There was only one person in the great room; but he was a very important person; being none other than our lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence, Dr. John Thorndyke. He was seated at a small table whereon was set out a collection of jars and a number of large photographs, of which he appeared to be making a catalogue; but intent as he was on his occupation, he looked up as I entered and greeted me with a genial smile. "What do you think of my little collection, Jardine?" he asked, as I approached deferentially. Before replying, I ran a vaguely enquiring eye over the group of objects on the table and was mighty little enlightened thereby. It was certainly a queer collection. There was a flat jar which contained a series of five differently-coloured mice, another with a similar series of three rats, a human foot, a hand—manifestly deformed—a series of four fowls' heads and a number of photographs of plants. "It looks," I replied, at length, "like what the auctioneers would call a miscellaneous lot."

"Yes," Dr. Thorndyke agreed, "it is a miscellaneous collection in a sense. But there is a connecting idea. It illustrates certain phenomena of inheritance which were discovered and described by Mendel."

"Mendel!" I exclaimed. "Who is he? I never heard of him."

"I daresay not," said Thorndyke, "though he published his results before you were born. But the importance of his discoveries is only now beginning to be appreciated."

"I suppose," said I, "the subject is too large and complex for a short explanation to be possible."

"The subject is a large one, of course," he replied; "but, put in a nutshell, Mendel's great discovery amounts to this; that, whereas certain characters are inherited only partially and fade off gradually in successive generations, certain other characters are inherited completely and pass unchanged from generation to generation. To take a couple of illustrative cases: If a negro marries a European, the offspring are mulattoes—forms intermediate between the negro and the European. If a mulatto marries a European, the offspring are quadroons—another intermediate form; and the next generation gives us the octoroon—intermediate again between the quadroon and the European. And so, from generation to generation, the negro character gradually fades away and finally disappears. But there are other characters which are inherited entire or not at all, and such characters appear in pairs which are positive or negative to one another. Sex is a case in point. A male marries a female and the offspring are either male or female, never intermediate. The sex-character of only one parent is inherited, and it is inherited completely. The characters of maleness or femaleness pass down unchanged through the ages with no tendency to diminish or to shade off into one another. That is a case of Mendelian inheritance."

I ran my eyes over the collection and they presently lighted on the rather abnormal-looking foot, hanging, white and shrivelled in the clear spirit. I lifted the jar from the table and then, noticing for the first time, that the foot had a supernumerary toe, I enquired what point the specimen illustrated. "That six-toed foot," Thorndyke replied, "is an example of a deformity that is transmitted unchanged for an indefinite number of generations. This brachydactylous hand is another instance. The brachydactyly reappears in the offspring either completely or not at all. There are no intermediate conditions."

He picked up the jar, and, having wiped the glass with a duster, exhibited the hand which was suspended within; and a strange-looking hand it was; broad and stumpy, like the hand of a mole. "There seem to be only two joints to each finger," I said. "Yes. The fingers are all thumbs, and the thumb is only a demi-thumb. A joint is suppressed in each digit."

"It must make the hand very clumsy and useless," I remarked.

"So one would think. It isn't exactly the type of hand for a Liszt or a Paganini. And yet we mustn't assume too much. I once saw an armless man copying pictures in the Luxembourg, and copying them very well, too. He held his brush with his toes; and he was so handy with his feet that he not only painted really dextrously, but managed to take his hat off to a lady with quite a fine flourish. So you see, Jardine, it is not the hand that matters, but rather the brain that actuates it. A very indifferent hand will serve if the motor centres are of the right sort."

He replaced the jar on the table, and then, after a short pause, turning quickly to me, he asked: "What are you doing at present, Jardine?"

"Principally idling, sir," I replied.

"And not a bad thing to do either," he rejoined with a smile, "if you do it thoroughly and don't keep it up too long. How would you like to take charge of a practice for a week or so?"

"I don't know that I should particularly care to, sir," I answered.

"Why not? It would be a useful experience and would bring you useful knowledge; knowledge that you have got to acquire sooner or later. Hospital conditions, you know, are not normal conditions.

"General practice is normal medical practice, and the sooner you get to know the conditions of the great world the better for you. If you stick to the wards too long you will get to be like the nurses; who seem to think that,

"All the world's a hospital, And men and women only patients."

I reflected for a few moments. It was perfectly true. I was a qualified medical man, and yet of the ordinary routine of private practice I had not the faintest knowledge. To me, all sick people were either in-patients or out-patients. "Had you any particular practice in your mind, sir?" I asked.

"Yes. I met one of our old students just now. He is at his wit's end to find a locum tenens. He has to go away to-night or to-morrow morning, but he can't get anyone to look after his work. Won't you go to his relief? It's an easy practice, I believe."

I turned the question over in my mind and finally decided to try the venture. "That's right," said Dr. Thorndyke. "You'll help a professional brother, at any rate, and pick up a little experience. Our friend's name is Batson, and he lives in Jacob Street, Hampstead Road. I'll write it down."

He handed me a slip of paper with the address on it and wished me success; and I started at once from the hospital, already quite elated, as is the way of the youthful, at the prospect of a new experience.

Dr. Batson's establishment in Jacob Street was modest to the verge of dinginess. But Jacob Street, itself, was dingy, and so was the immediate neighbourhood; a district of tall, grimy houses that might easily have seen better days. However, Dr. Batson himself was spruce enough and in excellent spirits at my arrival, as was evident when he bounced into the room with a jovial greeting, bringing in with him a faint aroma of sherry. "Delighted to see you, Doctor!" he exclaimed in his large brisk voice (that "doctor" was a diplomatic hit on his part. They don't call newly-qualified men "doctor" at the hospital.) "I met Thorndyke this morning and told him of my predicament. A busy man is the Great Unraveller, but never too busy to do a kindness to his friends. Can you take over to-night?"

"I could," said I.

"Then do. I want particularly to be off by the eight-thirty from Liverpool Street. Drop in and have some grub about six-thirty; I shall have polished off the day's work by then and you'll just come in for the evening consultations."

"Are there any cases that you will want me to see with you?" I asked.

"Oh, no," Batson replied, rather airily I thought. "They're all plain sailing. There's a typhoid, he's doing well—fourth week; and there's a tonsillitis and a psoas abscess—that's rather tedious, but still, it's improving—and an old woman with a liver. You won't have any difficulty with them. There's only one queer case; a heart."

"Valvular?" I asked.

"No, not valvular; I can tell you that much. I know what it isn't, but I'm hanged if I know what it is. Chappie complains of pain, shortness of breath, faintness and so on, but I can't find anything to account for it. Heart-sounds all right, pulse quite good, no dropsy, no nothing. Seems like malingering, but I don't see why he should malingere. I think I'll get you to drop in this evening and have a look at him."

"Are you keeping him in bed?" I asked.

"Yes," said Batson, "I am now; not that his general condition seems to demand it. But he has had one or two fainting attacks, and yesterday he must needs fall down flop in his bedroom when there was nobody there, and, by way of making things more comfortable, he drops his medicine bottle and falls on the fragments. He might have killed himself, you know," Batson added in an aggrieved tone; "as it was, a long splinter from the bottom of the bottle stuck into his back and made quite a deep little wound. So I've kept him in bed since, out of harm's way; and there he is, deuced sorry for himself but, as far as I can make out, without a single tangible symptom."

"No facial signs? Nothing unusual in his colour or expression."

Batson laughed and tapped his gold-rimmed spectacles. "Ah! There you are! When you've got minus five D and some irregular astigmatism and a pair of glasses that don't correct it, all human beings look pretty much alike; a trifle sketchy, don't you know. I didn't see anything unusual in his face, but you might. Time will show. Now you cut along and fetch your traps, and I'll skip round and polish off the sufferers."

He launched me into the outer greyness of Jacob Street and bounced off in the direction of Cumberland Market, leaving me to pursue my way to my lodgings at Gospel Oak.

As I threaded the teeming streets of Camden Town I meditated on the new experience that was opening to me, and, with youthful egotism, I already saw myself making a brilliant diagnosis of an obscure heart case. Also I reflected with some surprise on the calm view that Batson took of his defective eyesight. A certain type of painter, as I had observed, finds in semi-blindness a valuable gift which helps him to eliminate trivial detail and to impart a noble breadth of effect to his pictures; but to a doctor no such self-delusion would seem possible. Visual acuteness is the most precious item in his

equipment.

I crammed into a large Gladstone bag the bare necessities for a week's stay, together with a few indispensable instruments, and then mounted the jingling horse-tram of those pre-electric days, which, in due course, deposited me at the end of Jacob Street, Hampstead Road. Dr. Batson had not returned from his round when I arrived, but a few minutes later he burst into the surgery humming an air from the Mikado. "Ha! Here you are then! Punctual to the minute!" He hung his hat on a peg, laid his visiting-list on the desk of the dispensing counter and began to compound medicine with the speed of a prestidigitateur, talking volubly all the time. "That's for the old woman with the liver, Mrs. Mudge, Cumberland Market, you'll see her prescription in the day book. S'pose you don't know how to wrap up a bottle of medicine. Better watch me. This is the way." He slapped the bottle down on a square of cut paper, gave a few dextrous twiddles of his fingers and held out for my inspection a little white parcel like the mummy-case of a deceased medicine bottle. "It's quite easy when you've had a little practice," he said, deftly sticking the ends down with sealing-wax, "but you'll make a frightful mucker of it at first." Which prophecy was duly fulfilled that very evening.

"What time had I better see that heart case?" said I.

"Oh, you won't have to see it at ail. Man's dead. Message left half an hour go. Pity, isn't it? I should have liked to hear what you thought of him. Must have been fatty heart. I'll write out the certificate while I think of it. Maggie! Where's that note that Mrs. Samway left?"

The question was roared out vaguely through the open door to a servant of unknown whereabouts, and resulted in the appearance of a somewhat scraggy housemaid bearing an opened note. "Here we are," said Batson, snatching the note out of its envelope and opening the book of certificate forms; "Septimus Maddock was the chappie's name, age fifty-one, address 23, Gayton Street, cause of death—that's just what I should like to know—primary cause, secondary causes—I wish these infernal government clerks had got something better to do than fill printed forms with silly connundrums. I shall put "Morbus Cordis"; that ought to be enough for them. Mrs. Samway—that's his landlady, you know—will probably call for the certificate during the evening."

"Aren't you going to inspect the body?" I asked.

"Lord, no! Why should I! It isn't necessary, you know. I'm not an undertaker. Wish I was. Dead people good deal more profitable than live ones."

"But surely," I exclaimed, "the death ought to be verified. Why the man may not be dead at all."

"I know," said Batson, scribbling away like a minor poet, "but that isn't my business. Business of the Law. Law wastes your time with a heap of silly questions that don't matter and leaves out the question that does. Asks exact time when I last saw him alive, which doesn't matter a hang, and doesn't ask whether I saw him dead. Bumble was right. Law's an ass."

"But still," I persisted, "leaving the legal requirements out of consideration, oughtn't you for your own sake, and as a public duty, to verify the death? Supposing the man were not really dead?"

"That would be awkward for him," said Batson, "and awkward for me, too, if he came to life before they buried him. But it doesn't really happen in real life. Premature burial only occurs in novels."

His easy-going confidence jarred on me considerably. How could he, or anyone else, know what happened? "I don't see how you arrive at that," I objected. "It could only be proved by wholesale disinterment. And the fact remains that, if you don't verify a reported death you have no security against premature burial—or even cremation."

Batson started up and stared at me, his wide-open, pale-blue eyes looking ridiculously small through his deep, concave spectacles. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I am glad you mentioned that—about cremation, I mean, because that is what will probably happen. I witnessed the chappie's will a couple of days ago, and I remember now that one of the clauses stipulated that his body should be cremated. So I shall have to verify the death for the purpose of the cremation certificate. We'd better pop round and see him at once."

With characteristic impulsiveness he sprang to his feet, snatched his hat from its peg, and started forth, leaving me to follow. "Beastly nuisance, these special regulations," said Batson, as he ambled briskly up the street. "Give a lot of trouble and cause a lot of delay."

"Isn't the ordinary death certificate sufficient in a case of cremation?" I asked.

"For purposes of law it is, though there is some talk of new legislation on the subject, but the Company are a law unto themselves. They have made the most infernally stringent regulations, and, as there is no crematorium near London excepting the one at Woking, you have to abide by their rules. And that reminds me—" here Batson halted and scowled at me ferociously through his spectacles.

"Reminds you?" I repeated.

"That they require a second death certificate, signed by a man with certain special qualifications." He stood awhile frowning and muttering under his breath and then suddenly turned and bounced off in a new direction. "Going to catch the other chappie and take him with us," he explained, as he darted out into the Hampstead Road. "Be off my mind then. A fellow named O'Connor, Assistant Physician to the North London Hospital. He'll do if we can catch him at home. If not, you'll have to manage him."



Batson looked at his watch—holding it within four inches of his nose—and broke into a trot as we entered a quiet square. Halfway up he halted at a door which bore a modest brass plate inscribed “Dr. O’Connor,” and seizing the bell-knob, worked it vigorously in and out as if it were the handle of an air-pump. “Doctor in?” he demanded briskly of a startled housemaid; and, without waiting for an answer, he darted into the hall, down the whole length of which he staggered, executing a sort of sword-dance, having caught his toe on an unobserved door-mat.

The doctor was in and he shortly appeared in evening dress with an overcoat on his arm, and apparently in as great a hurry as Batson himself. “Won’t it do to-morrow?” he asked, when Batson had explained his difficulties and the service required.

“Might as well come now,” said Batson persuasively; “won’t take a minute and then I can go away in peace.”

“Very well,” said O’Connor, wriggling into his overcoat. “You go along and I’ll follow in a few minutes. I’ve got to look in on a patient on my way up west, and I shall be late for my appointment as it is. Write the address on my card, here.”

He held out a card to my principal, and when the latter had scribbled the address on it, he bustled out and vanished up the square. Batson followed at the same headlong speed, and, again overlooking the mat, came out on the pavement like an ill-started sprinter.

Gayton Street, at which we shortly arrived, was a grey and dingy side-street exactly like a score of others in the same locality, and Number 23 differed from the rest of the seedy-looking houses in no respect save that it was perhaps a shade more dingy. The door was opened in answer to Batson’s indecorously brisk knock by a woman—or perhaps I should say a lady—who at once admitted us and to whom Batson began, without preface, to explain the situation. “I got your note, Mrs. Samway. Was going to bring my friend, here, round to see the patient. Very unfortunate affair. Very sad. Unexpected, too. Didn’t seem particularly bad yesterday. What time did it happen?”

“I can’t say exactly,” was the reply. “He seemed quite comfortable when I looked in on him the last thing at night, but when I went in about seven this morning he was dead. I should have let you know sooner, but I was expecting you to call.”

“H’m, yes,” said Batson, “very unfortunate. By the way, Mr. Maddock desired that his remains should be cremated, I think?”

“Yes, so my husband tells me. He is the executor of the will, you remember, in the absence of any relatives. All Mr. Maddock’s relations seem to be in America.”

“Have you got the certificate forms?” asked Batson.

“Yes. My husband got all the papers from the undertaker this afternoon.”

“Very well, Mrs. Samway, then we’ll just take a look at the body—have to certify that I’ve seen it, you know.”

Mrs. Samway ushered us into a sitting-room where she had apparently been working alone, for an unfinished mourning garment of some kind lay on the table. Leaving us here, she went away and presently returned with a sheaf of papers and a lighted candle, when we rose and followed her to a back room on the ground floor. It was a smallish room, sparsely furnished, with heavy curtains drawn across the window, and by one wall a bed, on which was a motionless figure covered by a sheet.

Our conductress stood the candlestick on a table by the bed and stepped back to make way for Batson, who drew back the sheet and looked down on the body in his peering, near-sighted fashion. The deceased seemed to be a rather frail-looking man of about fifty, but, beyond the fact that he was clean shaven, I could form very little idea of his appearance, since, in addition to the usual bandage under the chin to close the mouth, a tape had been carried round the head to secure a couple of pads of cotton wool over the eyes to keep the eyelids closed.

As Batson applied his stethoscope to the chest of the dead man, I glanced at our hostess not without interest. Mrs. Samway was an unusual-looking woman, and I thought her decidedly handsome though not attractive to me personally. She seemed to be about thirty, rather over the medium height and of fine Junoesque proportions, with a small head very gracefully set on the shoulders. Her jet-black hair, formally parted in the middle, was brought down either side of the forehead in wavy, but very smooth, masses and gathered behind in a neat, precisely-plaited coil. The general effect reminded me of the so-called “Clytie,” having the same reposefulness though not the gentleness and softness of that lovely head. But the most remarkable feature of this woman was the colour of her eyes, which were of the palest grey or hazel that I have ever seen; so pale in fact that they told as spots of light, like the eyes of some lemurs or those of a cat seen in the dusk; a peculiarity that imparted a curiously intense and penetrating quality to her glance.

I had just noted these particulars when Batson, having finished his examination, held out the stethoscope to me. “May as well listen, as you’re here,” said he, and, turning to our hostess, he added: “Let us see those papers, Mrs. Samway.”

As he stepped over to the table, I took his place on a chair by the bedside and proceeded to make an examination. It was, of course, only a matter of form, for the man was obviously dead; but having insisted so strongly on the necessity of verifying the death I had to make a show of becoming scepticism. Accordingly I tested, both by touch and with the stethoscope, the region of the heart. Needless to say, no heart-sounds were to be distinguished, nor any signs of pulsation; indeed, the very first touch of my hand on the chilly surface of the chest was enough to banish any doubt. No living body could be so entirely destitute of animal heat.

I laid down the stethoscope and looked reflectively at the dead man, lying so still and rigid, with his bandaged jaws and

blindfolded eyes, and speculated vaguely on his personality when alive and on the hidden disease that had so suddenly cut him off from the land of the living; and insensibly—by habit I suppose—my fingers strayed to his clammy, pulseless wrist. The sleeve of his night-shirt was excessively long, almost covering the fingers, and I had to turn it back to reach the spot where the pulse would normally be felt. In doing this, I moved the dead hand slightly and then became aware of a well-marked rigor mortis, or death stiffening in the arm of the corpse; a condition which I ought to have observed sooner.

At this moment, happening to look up, I caught the eye of Mrs. Samway fixed on me with a very remarkable expression. She was leaning over Batson as he filled up the voluminous certificate, but had evidently been watching me, and the expression of her pale, catlike eyes left no doubt in my mind that she strongly resented my proceedings. In some confusion, and accusing myself of some failure in outward decorum, I hastily drew down the dead man's sleeve and rose from the bedside. "You noticed, I suppose," said I, "that there is fairly well-marked rigor mortis?"

"I didn't," said Batson, "but if you did it'll do as well. Better mention it to O'Connor when he comes. He ought to be here now."

"Who is O'Connor?" asked Mrs. Samway.

"Oh, he is the doctor who is going to sign the confirmatory certificate."

Again a gleam of unmistakable anger flashed from our hostess' eyes as she demanded: "Then who is this gentleman?"

"This is Dr. Humphrey Jardine," said Batson. "Pologize for not introducing him before. Dr. Jardine is taking my practice while I'm away. I'm off to-night for about a week."

Mrs. Samway withered me with a baleful glance of her singular eyes, and remarked stiffly: "I don't quite see why you brought him here."

She turned her back on me, and I decided that Mrs. Samway was somewhat of a Tartar; though, to be sure, my presence was a distinct intrusion. I was about to beat a retreat when Batson's apologies were interrupted by a noisy rat-tat at the street door. "Ah, here's O'Connor," said Batson, and, as Mrs. Samway went out to open the door, he added: "Seem to have put our foot in it, though I don't see why she need have been so peppery about it. And O'Connor needn't have banged at the door like that, with death in the house. He'll get into trouble if he doesn't look out."

Our colleague's manner was certainly not ingratiating. He burst into the room with his watch in his hand protesting that he was three minutes late already, and, he added, "if there is one thing that I detest, it's being late at dinner. Got the forms?"

"Yes," replied Batson, "here they are. That's my certificate on the front page. Yours is overleaf."

Dr. O'Connor glanced rapidly down the long table of questions, muttering discontentedly. "Made careful external examination?" H'm. 'Have you made a post mortem?' No, of course, I haven't. What an infernal rigmarole! If cremation ever becomes general there'll be no time for anything but funerals. Who nursed the deceased?"

"I did," said Mrs. Samway. "My husband relieved me occasionally, but nearly all the nursing was done by me. My name is Letitia Samway."

"Was the deceased a relation of yours?"

"No; only a friend. He lived with us for a time in Paris and came to England with us."

"What was his occupation?"

"He was nominally a dealer in works of art. Actually he was a man of independent means."

"Have you any pecuniary interest in his death?"

"He has left us about seventy pounds. My husband is the executor of the will."

"I see. Well, I'd better have a few words with you outside, Batson, before I make my examination. It's all a confounded farce, but we must go through the proper forms, I suppose."

"Yes, by all means," said Batson. "Don't leave any loop-hole for queries or objections." He rose and accompanied O'Connor out into the hall, whence the sound of hurried muttering came faintly through the door.

As soon as we were alone, I endeavoured to make my peace with Mrs. Samway by offering apologies for my intrusion into the house of mourning. "For the time being," I concluded, "I am Dr. Batson's assistant, and, as he seemed to wish me to come with him, I came without considering that my presence might be objected to. I hope you will forgive me."

My humility appeared entirely to appease her; in a moment her stiff and forbidding manner melted into one that was quite gracious and she rewarded me with a smile that made her face really charming. "Of course," she said, "it was silly of me to be so cantankerous and rude, too. But it did look a little callous, you know, when I saw you playing with his poor, dead hand; so you must make allowances." She smiled again, very prettily, and at this moment my two colleagues re-entered the room. "Now, then," said O'Connor, "let us see the body and then we shall have finished."

He strode over to the bed, and, turning back the sheet, made a rapid inspection of the corpse. "Ridiculous farce," he muttered. "Looks all right. Would, in any case though. Parcel of red tape. What's the good of looking at the outside of a body? Post mortem's the only thing that's any use. What's this piece of tape-plaster on the back?"

"Oh," said Batson, "that is a little cut that he made by falling on a broken bottle. I stuck the plaster on because you can't get a bandage to hold satisfactorily on the back. Besides, he didn't want a bandage constricting his chest."

"No, of course not," O'Connor agreed. "Well, it's all regular and straightforward. Give me the form and I'll fill it up and sign it." He seated himself at the table, looked once more at his watch, groaned aloud and began to write furiously. "The Egyptians weren't such bad judges, after all," he remarked as he laid down the pen and rose from his chair. "Embalming may have been troublesome, but when it was done it was done for good. The deceased was always accessible for reference in case of a dispute, and all this red tape was saved. Good-night, Mrs. Samway." He buttoned up his coat and bustled off, and a minute or so later we followed.

"By jove!" exclaimed Batson, "this business has upset my arrangements finely. I shall have to buck up if I'm going to catch my train. There's all the medicine to be made up and sent out yet, to say nothing of dinner. But dinner will have to wait until the business is all settled up. Don't you hurry, Jardine. I'll just run on and get to work." He broke into an elephantine trot and soon disappeared round a corner, and, when I arrived at the surgery, I found him posting up the day-book with the speed of a parliamentary reporter.

Batson's dexterity with medicine-bottles and wrapping paper filled me with admiration and despair. I made a futile effort to assist, but in the end, he snatched away the crumpled paper in which I was struggling to enswathe a bottle, dropped it into the waste-paper basket, snatched up a clean sheet and—slap! bang! in the twinkling of an eye, he had transformed the bottle into a neat, little white parcel as a conjuror changes a cocked hat into a guinea-pig. It was wonderful.

My host was a cheerful soul, but restless. He got up from the table no less than six times to pack some article that he had just thought of; and after dinner, when I accompanied him to his bedroom, I saw him empty his trunk no less than three times to make sure that he had forgotten nothing. He quite worried me. Your over-quick man is apt to wear out other people's nerves more than his own. I began to look anxiously at the clock, and felt a real relief when the maid came to announce that the cab was at the door. "Well, good-bye. Doctor!" he sang out cheerily, shaking my hand through the open window of the cab. "Don't forget to keep the stock-bottles filled up. Saves a world of trouble. And don't take too long on your rounds. Ta! ta!"

The cab rattled away and I went back into the house, a full-blown general practitioner.

---

## V — THE LETHAL CHAMBER

A YOUNG and newly-qualified doctor, emerging for the first time into private practice, is apt to be somewhat surprised and disconcerted by the new conditions. Accustomed to the exclusively professional and scientific atmosphere of the hospital, the sudden appearance of the personal element as the predominant factor rather takes him aback. He finds himself in a new and unexpected position. No longer a mere, impersonal official, a portion of a great machine, he is the paid servant of his patients: who are not always above letting him feel the conditions of his service. The hospital patient, drilled into a certain respectful submissiveness by the discipline of the wards, has given place to an employer, usually critical, sometimes truculent and occasionally addicted to a disagreeable frankness of speech.

The locum tenens, moreover, is peculiarly susceptible to these conditions, especially if, as in my case, his appearance is youthful. Patients resent the substitution of a stranger for the familiar medical attendant and are at no great pains to disguise the fact. The "old woman with the liver" (to adopt Batson's pellucid phrase) hinted that I was rather young, adding encouragingly that I should get the better of that in time; while the more morose typhoid bluntly informed me that he hadn't bargained for being attended by a medical student.

Taken as a whole, I found private practice disappointing and soon began to wish myself back in the wards and to sigh for my quiet, solitary rambles on Hampstead Heath.

Still, there were rifts in the cloud. Some of the patients appreciated the interest that I took in their cases, evidently contrasting it with the rather casual attitude of my principal, and some were positively friendly. But, in general, my reception was such as to make me slightly apprehensive whenever a new patient appeared.

On the fourth evening after Batson's departure, Mrs. Samway was announced and I prepared myself for the customary snub. But I was mistaken. Nothing could be more gracious than her manner towards me, though the object of her visit occasioned me some embarrassment. "I have called, Dr. Jardine," she said, "to ask you if you could let me have the account for poor Mr. Maddock. My husband is the executor, you know, and, as we shall be going back to Paris quite shortly, he wants to get everything settled up."

I was in rather a quandary. Of the financial side of practice I was absolutely ignorant and I thought it best to say so. "But," I added, "Dr. Batson will be back on Friday evening, if you can wait so long."

"Oh, that will do quite well," she replied, "but don't forget to tell him that we want the account at once."

I promised not to forget, and then remarked that she would, no doubt, be glad to be back in Paris. "No," she answered, "I shall be rather sorry. Of course Camden Town is not a very attractive neighbourhood, but it is close to the heart of London; and then there are some delightful places near and quite accessible. There is Highgate, for instance."

"Yes; but it is getting very much built over, isn't it?"

"Unfortunately it is; but yet there are some very pleasant places left. The old village is still charming. So quaint and old world. And then there is Hampstead. What could be more delightful than the Heath? But perhaps you don't know Hampstead?"

"Oh, yes I do," said I; "my rooms are at Gospel Oak, quite near the Heath, and I think I know every nook and corner of the neighbourhood. I am pining for a stroll on the Heath at this very moment."

"I daresay you are," she said sympathetically. "This is a depressing neighbourhood if you can't get away from it. We found it very dismal, at first, after Paris."

"Do you live in Paris?" I asked.

"Not permanently," she replied. "But we spend a good deal of time there. My husband is a dealer in works of art, so he has to travel about a good deal. That is how we came to know Mr. Maddock."

"He was a dealer too, wasn't he?" I enquired.

"Yes, in a way. But he had means of his own and his dealing was a mere excuse for collecting things that he was not going to keep. He had a passion for buying, and then he used to sell the things in order to buy more. But I am afraid I am detaining you with my chatter?"

"No, not at all," I said eagerly, only too glad to have an intelligent, educated person to talk to; "you are the last caller, and I hope I have finished my day's work."

Accordingly she stayed quite a long time, chatting on a variety of subjects and finally on that of cremation. "I daresay," she said, "it is more sanitary and wholesome than burial, but there is something rather dreadful about it. Perhaps it is because we are not accustomed to the idea."

"Did you go to the funeral?" I asked.

"Yes. Mr. Maddock had no friends in England but my husband and me, so we both went. It was very solemn and awesome. The coffin was laid on the catafalque while a short service was read, and then two metal doors opened and it was passed through out of our sight. We waited some time and presently they brought us a little terra-cotta urn with just a handful or two of white ash in it. That was all that was left of our poor friend Septimus Maddock. Don't you think it is rather dreadful?"

"Death is always rather dreadful," I answered. "But when we look at the ashes of a dead person, we realize the total destruction of the body; whereas the grave keeps its secrets. If we could look down through the earth and see the changes that are taking place, we should probably find the slow decay more shocking than the swift consumption by fire. Fortunately we cannot. But we know that the final result is the same in both."

Mrs. Samway shuddered slightly, and drew her wraps more closely about her. "Yes," she said with a faint sigh; "the same end awaits us all—but it is better not to think about it."

We were both silent for awhile. I sat with my gaze bent rather absently on the case-book before me, turning over her last somewhat gloomy utterance, until, chancing to look up, I found her pale, penetrating eyes fixed on me with the same strange intentness that I had noticed when she had looked at me as I sat by the body of Maddock. As she met my glance, she looked down quickly but without confusion, and with a return to her habitual reposefulness.

Half-unconsciously I returned her scrutiny. She was a remarkable-looking woman. A beautiful woman, too, but of a type that is, in our time and country, rare: an ancient or barbaric type in which womanly beauty and grace are joined to manifest physical strength. I felt that some unusual racial mixture spoke in her inconsistent colouring; her clear, pink skin, her pale eyes and the jet-black hair that rippled down either side of her low forehead in little crimp waves, as regular and formal as the "archaic curls" of early Greek sculpture.

But predominant over all other qualities was that of strength. Full and plump, soft and almost ultra-feminine, lissom and flexible in every pose and movement, yet, to me, the chief impression that her appearance suggested was strength—sheer, muscular strength; not the rigid bull-dog strength of a strong man, but the soft and supple strength of a leopard. I looked at her as she sat almost limply in her chair, with her head on one side, her hands resting in her lap and a beautiful, soft, womanly droop of the shoulders; and I felt that she could have started up in an instant, active, strong, formidable, like a roused panther.

I was going on, I think, to make comparisons between her and that other woman who was wont to trip so daintily down Millfield Lane, when she raised her eyes slowly to mine; and suddenly she blushed scarlet. "Am I a very remarkable-looking person, Dr. Jardine?" she asked quietly, as if answering my thoughts.

The rebuke was well merited. For an instant a paltry compliment fluttered on my lips; but I swallowed it down. She wasn't that kind of woman. "I am afraid I have been staring you out of countenance, Mrs. Samway," I said apologetically.

"Hardly that," she replied with a smile; "but you certainly were looking at me very attentively."

"Well," I said, recovering myself, "after all, a cat may look at a king, you know."

She laughed softly—a very pretty, musical laugh—and rose, still blushing warmly. "And," she retorted, "by the same reasoning, you think a king may look at a cat. Very well, Dr. Jardine. Good-night."

She held out her hand; a beautifully-shaped hand, though rather large—but, as I have said, she was not a small woman; and as it clasped mine, though the pressure was quite gentle, it conveyed, like her appearance, an impression of abundant physical strength.

I accompanied her to the door and watched her as she walked up the dingy street with an easy, erect, undulating gait; even as might have walked those women who are portrayed for the wonder of all time on the ivory-toned marble of the Parthenon frieze. I followed with my eyes the dignified, graceful figure until it vanished round the corner, and then went back to the consulting-room dimly wondering why a woman of such manifest beauty and charm should offer little attraction to me.

Batson's practice, among its other drawbacks, suffered from a deadly lack of professional interest. Whether this was its normal condition, or whether his patients had got wind of me and called in other and more experienced practitioners, I know not; but certainly, after the stirring work of the hospital, the cases that I had to deal with seemed very small beer. Hence the prospect of a genuine surgical case came as a grateful surprise and I hailed it with enthusiasm.

It was on the day before Batson's expected return that I received the summons; which was delivered to me in a dirty envelope as I sat by the bedside of the last patient on my list. "Is the messenger waiting?" I asked, tearing open the envelope.

"No, Doctor. He just handed in the note and went off. He seemed to be in a hurry."

I ran my eye over the message, scrawled in a rather illiterate hand on a sheet of common notepaper, and read:

"SIR,

"Will you please come at once to the Mineral Water Works in Norton Street. One of our men has injured himself rather badly.

"Yours truly,

"J. PARKER.

"P.S.—He is bleeding a good deal, so please come quick."

The postscript gave a very necessary piece of information. An injury which bled would require certain dressings and surgical appliances over and above those contained in my pocket case; and to obtain these I should have to take Batson's house on the way. Slipping the note into my pocket, I wished my patient a hasty adieu and strode off at a swinging pace in the direction of Jacob Street.

The housemaid, Maggie, helped me to find the dressings and pack the bag—for she was a handy, intelligent girl though no beauty; and meanwhile I questioned her as to the whereabouts of Norton Street and the mineral water factory. "Oh, I know the place well enough, sir," said she, "though I didn't know the works were open. Norton Street is only a few minutes' walk from here. It's quite close to Gayton Street, in fact these works are just at the back of the Samway's house. You go up to the corner by the market and take the second on the right and then—"

"Look here, Maggie," I interrupted, "you'd better come and show me the way, as you know the place. There's no time to waste on fumbling for the right turning."

"Very well, sir," she replied, and the bag being now packed with all necessary instruments and dressings, we set forth together. "Is this a large factory?" I asked, as she trotted by my side, to the astonished admiration of Jacob Street, and the neighbourhood in general.

"No, sir," she replied. "It's quite a small place. The last people went bankrupt and the works were empty and to let for a long time. I thought they were still to let, but I suppose somebody has taken them and started the business afresh. It's round here."

She piloted me round a corner into a narrow bystreet, near the end of which she halted at the gate of a yard or mews. Above the entrance was a weather-beaten board bearing the inscription, "International Mineral Water Company" and a half-defaced printed bill offering the premises to let; and at the side was a large bell-pull. A vigorous tug at the latter set a bell jangling within, and, as Maggie tripped away up the street, a small wicket in the gate opened, disclosing the dimly-seen figure of a man standing in the inner darkness. "Are you the doctor?" he inquired.

I answered "Yes," and, being thereupon bidden to enter, stepped through the opening of the wicket, which the man immediately closed, shutting out the last gleam of light from the street lamp outside. "It's rather dark," said the unseen custodian, taking me by the arm.

"It is indeed," I replied, groping with my feet over the rough cobbles; "hadn't you better get a light of some kind?"

"I will in a minute," was the reply. "You see, all the other men have gone home. We close at six sharp. This is the way. I'll strike a match. The man is down in the bottling-room."

My conductor struck a match by the light of which he guided me through a doorway, along a passage or corridor and down a flight of stone steps. At the bottom of the steps was a flagged passage, out of which opened what looked like a range of cellars. Along the passage I walked warily, followed by the stranger and lighted, very imperfectly, by the matches that he struck; the glimmer of which threw a gigantic and ghostly shadow of myself on the stone floor, but failed utterly to pierce

the darkness ahead. I was exactly opposite the yawning doorway of one of the cellars when the match went out, and the man behind me exclaimed: "Wait a moment, Doctor! Don't move until I strike another light."

I halted abruptly; and the next moment I received a violent thrust that sent me staggering through the open doorway into the cellar. Instantly, the massive door slammed and a pair of heavy bolts were shot in succession on the outside.

"What the devil is the meaning of this?" I roared, battering and kicking furiously at the door. Of course there was no answer, and I quickly stopped my demonstrations, for it dawned on me in a moment that the factory was untenanted save by the ruffian who had admitted me; that I had been decoyed here of a set purpose, though what that purpose was I could not imagine.

But it was not long before I received a pretty broad hint as to the immediate intentions of my host. A gentle thumping at the door of my cellar attracted my attention and caused me to lay my ear against the wood. The sound that I heard was quite unmistakable. The crevices of the door were being filled, apparently with pieces of rag, which my friend was ramming home, presumably with a chisel. In fact the door was being "caulked" to make the joints airtight.

The object of this proceeding was clear enough. I was shut up in an air-tight cavity in which I was to be slowly suffocated. That was quite obvious. Why I was to be suffocated, I could form no sort of guess excepting that I had fallen into the hands of a homicidal lunatic. But I was not greatly alarmed. The air in a good-sized cellar will last a considerable time, and I could easily poke out anything that my friend might stuff into the keyhole. Then, when the men arrived in the morning, I could kick on the cellar door, and they would come and let me out. There was nothing to be particularly frightened about.

Were there any men? The injured man was evidently a myth. Supposing the other men were a myth too? I recalled Maggie's remark, that she "had thought the place was to let still." Perhaps it was. That would be rather more serious.

At this point my agitations were broken in upon by sounds from the adjoining cellar; the sound of someone moving about and dragging some heavy body. And it struck me at once as strange that I should hear these sounds so distinctly, seeing the massive door of my own cellar was sealed and the walls were of solid brick, as I ascertained by rapping at them with my knuckles. But I had no time to consider this circumstance, for there suddenly rose a new sound, whereat, I must confess my heart fairly came into my mouth; a loud, penetrating hiss like the shriek of escaping steam. It seemed to come from some part of the cellar in which I was immured; from a spot nearly overhead; and it was immediately echoed by a similar sound in the adjoining cellar and then by a third. Even as the last sound broke forth, the door of the adjoining cellar slammed, the bolts were shot and then faintly mingled with the discordant hissing. I could hear the dull thumping that told me that the cracks of that door, too, were being caulked.

It was a frightful situation. The hissing sound was obviously caused by the escape of gas under high pressure, and that gas must be entering my cellar through some opening. I felt for my match-box, and, groping along the wall towards the point whence the loudest sound—and, indeed, all the sounds—proceeded, I struck a match. The glimmer of the wax vesta made everything clear. Close to the ceiling, about seven feet from the ground, was an opening in the wall about six inches square; and pouring through this in a continuous stream was a cloud of white particles that glistened like snowflakes. As I stood under the opening, some of them settled on my face; and the more than icy coldness of the contact, told the whole, horrible tale in a moment.

This white powder WAS snow—carbonic acid snow. The hissing sound came from three of those great iron bottles, charged under pressure with liquified carbonic acid, which are used by mineral water manufacturers for aerating the water. The miscreant (or lunatic) who had imprisoned me had turned on the taps, and the liquid was escaping and turning into to snow with the cold produced by its own rapid evaporation and expansion. Of course the snow would quickly absorb heat, and, without again liquefying, evaporate into the gaseous form. In a very short time both cellars would be full of the poisonous gas, and I—well, in a word, I was shut up in a lethal chamber.

It has taken me some time to write this explanation, which, however, flashed through my brain in the twinkling of an eye as the light of the match fell on that sinister cloud of snowflakes. In a moment I had my coat off, and was stuffing it for dear life into the opening. It was but a poor protection against the gas, which would easily enough find its way through the interstices of the fabric; but it would stop the direct stream of snow and give me time to think.

On what incalculable chances do the great issues of our lives depend! If I had been a short man I must have been dead in half an hour; for the opening through which the cloud of snow was pouring was well over seven feet above the floor and would have been quite out of my reach. Even as it was, with my six feet of stature and corresponding length of arm, it was impossible to ram my coat into the opening with the necessary force, for I had to stand close to the wall with my arm upraised at a great mechanical disadvantage. Still, as I have said, imperfect as the obstruction was, it served to stop the intruding cloud of snow. It would take some time for the heavy gas in the adjoining cellar to rise to the level of the opening, and, meanwhile, I could be devising other measures.

I lit another match and looked about me. The cellar was much smaller than I had thought and was absolutely empty. The floor was of concrete, the walls of rough brickwork and the ceiling of plaster, all cracked and falling in. There was plenty of ventilation there, but that was of no interest to me. Carbonic acid gas is so heavy that it behaves almost like a liquid, and it would have filled the cellar and suffocated me even if the top of my prison had been open to the sky. The adjoining cellar was already filling rapidly, and when the gas in it reached the level of the opening, it would percolate through my coat and come pouring down into my cellar. But that, as I have said, would take some time—if the dividing wall was moderately sound. This important qualification, as soon as it occurred to me, set me exploring the wall with the aid of another match;

and very unsatisfactory was the result. It was a bad wall, built of inferior brick and worse mortar, and was marked by innumerable holes where wall-hooks and other fastenings had been driven in between the bricks. My brief survey convinced me that, so far from being gas-tight, the wall was as pervious as a sponge, and that whatever I meant to do to preserve my life, I must set about without delay.

But what was I to do? That was the urgent, the vital question. Escape was evidently impossible. There were no means of stopping up the numberless holes and weak places in the wall. The only vulnerable spot was the door. If I could establish some communication with the outer air, I could, for a time at least, disregard the poisonous gas with which I should presently be surrounded.

The first thing to be considered was the keyhole. That must be unstopped at once. Fumbling in my bag—for I had grown of a sudden niggardly with my matches—I found a good-sized probe, which I insinuated into the keyhole; and, in a moment, my hopes in that direction were extinguished. For the end of the probe impinged upon metal. The keyhole was not stopped with rag, but with a plate of metal fixed on the outside. With rapidly-growing alarm, but with a tidiness born of habit, I put the probe back in the bag and began feverishly to review the situation and consider my resources. And then I had an idea; only a poor, forlorn hope, but still an idea.

There is a certain ingenious type of pocket-knife, devised principally in the interest of the cutlery trade, that innocent persons (usually of the female persuasion) are wont to bestow as presents on their masculine friends. Such a knife I chanced to possess. It had been given to me by an aunt, and sentimental considerations had induced me to give it an amount of room in my trousers' pocket that I continually grudged. However, there it was at this critical moment, with its corkscrew, gimlet, its bewildering array of blades, its hoof-pick, tooth-pick, tweezers, file, screw-driver and assorted unclassifiable tools; a ponderous lump of pocket-destroying uselessness—and yet, the appointed means of saving my life.

The gimlet was the first tool that I called into requisition. Very gingerly—for these tools are commonly over-tempered and brittle—I bored in the thick plank a hole at about the level of my mouth; and as I worked I turned over my further plans. When the gimlet was through the door, I selected a tool on whose use I had often speculated—a sharp-edged spike, like a diminutive and very stumpy bayonet—which I proceeded to use broach-wise to enlarge the hole. When this tool worked loose, I exchanged it for the screwdriver, with which I managed to broach the hole out to about half an inch in width. And this was as large as I could make it, and it was not large enough. True, one could breathe fairly comfortably through a half-inch hole, but, with the deadly gas circulating around, a freer opening was very desirable.

Then I bethought me that the magic knife contained a saw—a wretched, thick-bladed affair, but still a saw—which would actually cut wood if you gave it time. This implement suggested a simple plan which I forthwith put into execution, working as rapidly as I could without running the risk of breaking the tools. My plan was to make a second hole some two inches diagonally below the first, and from each hole to carry two saw-cuts at right angles to one another. The two pairs of cuts would intersect and take a square piece out of the door, giving me a little window through which I could breathe in comfort.

It was a trifling task, but yet, with the miserable tools I had, it took a considerable time to execute; the more since the saw-blade was wider than the holes, excepting at its point. However, it was accomplished at last, and I had the satisfaction of pushing out the little separated square of wood and feeling that I now had free access to the pure air outside my dungeon.

But it was none too soon. As I rested from my labours, it occurred to me to test the condition of the air inside. Lighting a wax match, I held the little taper so that the flame ascended steadily, and then lowered it slowly. As it descended the flame changed colour somewhat, and about eighteen inches from the floor it went out quite suddenly. There was, then, a layer of the pure gas about eighteen inches deep covering the floor, and, no doubt, rising pretty rapidly.

This was rather startling, and it warned me to have recourse without delay to my breathing hole. For though carbonic acid gas behaves somewhat as a liquid, it is not a liquid: like other gases, it has the power of diffusing upwards, and the air of the cellar must be already getting unsafe. Accordingly, after carefully wiping the surface of the door with my handkerchief, I applied my mouth, with some distaste, to the opening and took in a deep draught of undoubtedly pure air.

The position in which I had to stand with my mouth to the hole was an irksome one, and I foresaw that it would presently become very fatiguing. Moreover, when the gas reached the level of my head, it would be difficult to prevent some of it from finding its way into my mouth and nostrils; and if it did, I should most assuredly be poisoned. This consideration suggested the necessity of making another hole at a lower level to let out the gas and allow me to rest myself by a change of position. But this new task had to be carried out with my mouth glued to the breathing hole; and very awkward and tiring I found it and very slow was the progress that I made. This second hole was smaller than the first, for time was precious, and I reflected that I could easily enlarge it by fresh saw-cuts, each two of which would take out a triangular piece of wood.

But it was tedious work, and its completion left me with aching arms; indeed, I was beginning to ache all over from the constrained position. Taking a deep breath and shutting my mouth, I stood up and stretched myself. Then I lit a match and looked at my watch. Half-past eight. I had been over two hours in the cellar. And meanwhile the patients were waiting for me at the surgery, and, no doubt, murmuring at the delay. How soon would my absence lead to enquiries? Or were enquiries being made even now?

Looking at the match that I still held in my hand, I noticed that its flame was pallid and bluish; and as I lowered it

slowly, it went out when it was a little over two feet from the floor. The gas, then, was still rising, though not so rapidly as I, had feared, but from the altered colour of the flame, it was evident that the air of the cellar, generally, contained enough diffused gas to be actively poisonous.

After a time, the erect position began to grow insupportably fatiguing. I felt that I must sit down for a few minutes' rest, even though prudence whispered that it was highly unsafe. I struggled for awhile, but eventually, conquered by fatigue, sat down on the floor with my mouth applied closely to the lower breathing-hole. I persuaded myself that I would sit only just long enough to recover some of my strength, but minute after minute sped by and still I felt an unaccountable reluctance to rise.

Suddenly I became conscious of a vague feeling of drowsiness; of a desire to lean back against the wall and doze. It was only slight, but its significance was so appalling that I scrambled to my feet in a panic, and, putting my mouth to the upper breathing-hole, took several deep inspirations. But I soon realized that the upright position was impossible. The drowsy feeling continued and there was growing with it a lassitude and weakness of the limbs that threatened to leave me only the choice between sitting or falling. A wave of furious anger swept over me and roused me a little; a burst of hatred of the cowardly wretch who had decoyed me, as I now suspected, to my death. Then this feeling passed and was succeeded by chilly fear, and I sank down once more into a sitting position with my mouth pressed to the lower opening.

The time ran on unreckoned by me. Gradually, by imperceptible degrees, my mental state grew more and yet more sluggish. Anger and fear and ever-dwindling hope flitted by turns across the slowly-fading field of my consciousness. Intervals of quiet indifference—almost of placid comfort—began to intervene, with increasing lassitude and a growing desire for rest. To lie down; that was what I wanted. To lay my head upon the stony floor and sink into sweet oblivion.

At last I must have actually dozed, though, fortunately, without removing my mouth from the breathing-hole, for I had no sense of the passage of time, when I was suddenly aroused by the loud and continuous jangling of a bell.

I listened with a sort of dull eagerness and keeping awake with a conscious effort.

The bell pealed wildly and without a pause for what seemed to me quite a long time.

Then it ceased, and again my consciousness began to grow dim. After an interval, I know not how long, there came to me dimly and only half-perceived, the closing of a door, the patter of quick footsteps, and then the voice of a man calling me by name.

I struggled to get on to my feet, but could not move. But I still held the clasp-knife and was able to rap with it feebly on the door. Again I heard the voice—it sounded nearer now, and yet infinitely far away—and again I rapped on the door and shouted through the breathing-hole; a thin, muffled cry, such as one utters in a troubled dream. And then the drowsiness crept over me again and I heard no more.

The next thing of which I was conscious was a sounding thwack on the cheek with something wet that felt like a dead fish. I opened my eyes and looked vaguely into two faces that were close to mine and seemed to be lighted by a lamp or candle. The faces were somehow familiar, but yet I failed clearly to recognize them, and, after staring stupidly for a few moments, I began to doze again. Then the dead fish returned to the assault and I again opened my eyes. Another vigorous flop caused me to open my mouth with an unparliamentary gasp. "Ah! That's better," said a familiar and yet "unplaced" voice. "When a man is able to swear, he is fairly on the road to recovery." Flop!

The renewed attentions of the dead fish (which turned out, later, to be merely a wet towel) evoked further demonstrations on my part of progressing recovery, accompanied by a nervous titter in a female voice. Gradually the clouds rolled away, and to my returning consciousness, the faces revealed themselves as those of Maggie, the housemaid, and Dr. Thorndyke. Even to my muddled wits, the presence of the latter was somewhat of a puzzle, and, in the intervals of anathematizing the deceased fish—which I had not yet identified—I found myself hazily speculating on the problem of how my revered teacher came to be in this place, and what place this was. "Come, now, Jardine," said Dr. Thorndyke, emptying a jug of water on my face, and receiving a volley of spluttered expletives in exchange, "pull yourself together. How did you get in that cellar?"

"Hang 'f I know," said I, composing myself for another nap. But here the wet towel came once more into requisition, and that with such vigour that, in a fit of exasperation, I sat up and yawned. "I think you'd better fetch a cab," said Thorndyke, as Maggie wrung out the towel afresh; "but leave the gate open when you go out."

"Wasser cab for?" I asked sulkily. "Can't I walk?"

"If you can, it will be better," said Thorndyke. "Let us see if you are able to stand." He hoisted me on to my feet and he and Maggie, taking each an arm, walked me slowly up and down the cobbled yard, which I now began to recognize as appertaining to the Mineral Water Works. At first I staggered very drunkenly, but by degrees the drowsy feeling wore off and I was able to walk with Thorndyke's assistance only. "I think we might venture out now," said he, at length, piloting me towards the gate, and when I had stumbled rather awkwardly through the wicket, we set forth homeward.

On my arrival home, Thorndyke ordered a supply of strong coffee and a light meal, after which—it being obvious that I was good for nothing in a professional sense, he suggested that I should go to bed. "Don't worry about the practice," said he. "I will send for my friend Jervis, and, between us, we will see that everything is looked after. If Maggie will give me a sheet of paper and an envelope I will write a note to him; and then she can take a hansom to my chambers and give the note either to Dr. Jervis or my man Polton. Meanwhile, I will stay here and see that you don't go to sleep prematurely."



He wrote the note; and Maggie, having made such improvements in her outward garb as befitted the status of a rider in hansom, took charge of it and departed with much satisfaction and dignity. Thorndyke made a few enquiries of me as to the circumstances that had led to my incarceration in the cellar, but finding that I knew no more than Maggie—whom he had already questioned—he changed the subject; nor would he allow me again to refer to it. “No, Jardine,” he said. “Better think no more of it for the present. Have a good night’s rest and then, if you are all right in the morning, we will go into the matter and see if we can put the puzzle together.”

---

## VI — A COUNCIL OF WAR

I AWOKE somewhat late on the following morning; indeed, I was but half awake when there came a somewhat masterful and peremptory tap at my bedroom door, followed by the appearance in the room of a rather tall gentleman of some thirty years of age. I should have diagnosed him instantly as a doctor by his self-possessed, proprietary manner of entering, but he left me no time for guessing as to his identity. “Good-morning, Jardine,” he said briskly, jingling the keys and small change in his trousers’ pockets, “my name is Jervis. Second violin in the Thorndyke orchestra. I’m in charge here pro tem. How are you feeling?”

“Oh, I’m all right. I was just going to get up. You needn’t trouble about the practice. I’m quite fit.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Jervis, “but you’d better keep quiet all the same. My orders are explicit, and I know my place too well to disobey. Thorndyke’s instructions were that you are not to make any visits or go abroad until after the inquest.”

“Inquest?” I exclaimed.

“Yes. He’s coming here at four o’clock to hold an inquiry into the circumstances that led to your being locked up in a cellar, and until then I’m to look after the practice and keep an eye on you. What time do you expect the offspring of the flittermouse?”

“Who?” I demanded.

“Batson. He’s coming back to-day, isn’t he?”

“Yes. About six o’clock to-night.”

“Then you’ll be able to clear out. So much the better. The neighbourhood doesn’t seem very wholesome for you.”

“I suppose I can do the surgery work,” said I.

“You’d better not. Better follow Thorndyke’s instructions literally. But you can tell me about the patients and help me to dispense. And that reminds me that a person named Samway called just now, a rather fine-looking woman—reminded me of a big, sleek tabby cat. She wouldn’t say what she wanted. Do you know anything about her?”

“I expect she came about her account. But she’ll have to see Batson. I told her so, only a night or two ago.”

“Very well,” said Jervis, “then I’ll be off now, and you take things easy and just think over what happened last night, so as to be ready for Thorndyke.”

With this he bustled away, leaving me to rise and breakfast at my leisure.

His advice to me to think over the events of the previous night was rather superfluous. The experience was not one that I was likely to forget. To have escaped from death by the very slenderest chance was in itself a matter to occupy one’s thoughts pretty completely, apart from the horrible circumstances, and then there was the mystery in which the whole affair was enveloped, a mystery which utterly baffled any attempt to penetrate it. Turn it over as I would—and it was hardly out of my thoughts for a minute at a time all day—no glimmer of light could I perceive, no faintest clue to any explanation of that hideous and incomprehensible crime.

At four o’clock punctually to the minute, Dr. Thorndyke arrived, and, having quickly looked me over to see that I was none the worse for my adventure, proceeded to business. “Have you finished the visits, Jervis?” he asked.

“Yes; and sent off all the medicine. There’s nothing more to do until six.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “we might have a cup of tea in the consulting-room and talk this affair over. I am rather taking possession of you, Jardine,” he added, “but I think we ought to see where we are quite clearly, even if we decide finally to hand the case over to the police. Don’t you agree with me?”

“Certainly,” I agreed, highly flattered by the interest he was taking in my affairs; “naturally, I should like to get to the bottom of the mystery.”

“So should I,” said he, “and to that end, I propose that you give us a completely circumstantial account of the whole affair. I have had a talk with your very intelligent little maid, Maggie, and now I want to hear what happened after she left you.”

“I don’t think I have much to tell that you don’t know,” said I; “however, I will take up the story where Maggie left off,” and I proceeded to describe the events in detail, much as I have related them to the reader.

Thorndyke listened to my story with profound attention, making an occasional memorandum but not uttering a word

until I had finished. Then, after a rapid glance through his memoranda, he said: "You spoke of a note that was handed in to you. Have you got that note?"

"I left it on the writing-table, and it is probably there still. Yes, here it is." I brought it over to the little table on which our tea was laid and handed it to him; and as he took it from me with the dainty carefulness of a photographer handling a wet plate, I noted mentally that the habit of delicate manipulation contracted in the laboratory makes itself evident in the most trifling of everyday actions.

"I see," he remarked, turning the envelope over and scrutinizing it minutely, "that this is addressed to 'Dr. H. Jardine.' It appears, then, that he knows your Christian name. Can you account for that?"

"No, I can't. The only letter I have had here was addressed 'Dr. Jardine', and I have signed no certificates or other documents."

He made a note of my answer, and, drawing the missive from its envelope, read it through. "The handwriting," he remarked, "looks disguised rather than illiterate, and the diction is inconsistent. The blatantly incorrect adverb at the end does not agree with the rest of the phraseology and the correct punctuation. As to the signature, we may neglect that, unless you are acquainted with anyone in these parts of the name of Parker."

"I am not," said I.

"Very well. Then if you will allow me to keep this note, I will file it for future reference. And now I will ask you a few questions about this adventure of yours, which is really a most astonishing and mysterious affair; even more mysterious, I may add, than it looks at the first glance. But we shall come to that presently. At the moment we are concerned with the crime itself—with a manifest attempt to murder you—and the circumstances that led up to it; and there are certain obvious questions that suggest themselves. The first is: Can you give any explanation of this attempt on your life?"

"No, I can't," I replied. "It is a complete mystery to me. I can only suppose that the fellow was a homicidal lunatic."

"A homicidal lunatic," said Thorndyke, "is the baffled investigator's last resource. But we had better not begin supposing at this stage. Let us keep strictly to facts. You do not know of anything that would explain this attack on you?"

"No."

"Then the next question is: Had you any property of value on your person?"

"No. Five pounds would cover the value of everything I had about me, including the instruments."

"Then that seems to exclude robbery as a motive. The next question is: Does any person stand to benefit considerably by your death? Have you any considerable expectations in the way of bequests, reversions or succession to landed property or titles?"

"No," I replied with a faint grin. "I shall come in for a thousand or two when my uncle dies, but I believe the London Hospital is the alternative legatee, and I suppose we would hardly suspect the hospital governors of this little affair. Otherwise, the only person who would benefit by my death would be the undertaker who got the contract to plant me."

Thorndyke nodded and made a note of my answer. "That," said he, "disposes of the principal motives for premeditated murder. There remains the question of personal enmity—not a common motive in this country. Have you, as far as you know, an enemy or enemies who might conceivably try to kill you?"

"As far as I know, I have not an enemy in the world, or anyone, even, who would wish to do me a bad turn."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "that seems to dispose of all the ordinary motives for murder; and I may say that I have only put these questions as a matter of routine precaution—*ex abundantia cautelarum*, as Jervis says, when he is in a forensic mood—because certain other facts which I have learned seem to exclude any of these motives except, perhaps, robbery from the person."

"You haven't been long picking up those other facts," remarked Jervis. "Why the affair only happened last night."

"I have only made a few simple enquiries," replied Thorndyke. "This morning I called on Mr. Highfield, whose name, as solicitor and agent to the landlords, I copied from the notice on the gate at the works last night. He knows me slightly so I was able to get from him the information that I wanted. It amounts to this.

"About four months ago, a Mr. Gill wrote to him and offered a lump sum for the use of the mineral water works for six months. Highfield accepted the offer and drew up an agreement, as desired, granting Gill immediate possession of the premises and the small stock and plant, of which the residue was to be taken back at a valuation by the landlords at the expiration of the term.

"I noted Gill's address, as it appeared on the agreement, and sent my man, Polton, to make enquiries.

"The address is that of a West Kensington lodging house at which Gill was staying when he signed the agreement. He had been there only three weeks, he left two days after the date of the agreement and the landlady does not know where he went or anything about him."

"Sounds a bit fishy," Jervis remarked. "Did he tell Highfield what he wanted the premises for?"

"I understood that something was said about some assay work in connection with certain—or rather uncertain—mineral

concessions. But of course that was no affair of Highfield's. His business was to get the rent, and, having got it, his interest in Mr. Gill lapsed. But you see the bearing of these facts. Gill's connection with these works does, as Jervis says, look a little queer, especially after what has happened. But, seeing that he made his arrangements four months ago, at a time when Jardine had no thought of coming into this neighbourhood, it is clear that those arrangements could have no connection with this particular attempt. Gill obviously did not take those works with the intention of murdering Jardine. He took them for some other purpose; quite possibly the purpose that he stated. And we must not assume that Gill was the perpetrator of this outrage at all. Could you identify the man who let you in?"

"No," I replied. "Certainly not. I hardly saw him at all. The place was pitch dark, and whenever he struck a match he was either behind me or in front with his back to me. The only thing I could make out about him was that he had some sort of coarse wash-leather gloves on."

"Ha!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "Then we were right, Jervis."

I looked in surprise from one to the other of my friends, and was on the point of asking Thorndyke what he meant, when he continued. "That closes another track. If you couldn't identify the man, a description of Gill, if we could obtain it, would not help us. We must begin at some other point."

"It seems to me," said Jervis, "that we haven't much to go upon at all."

"We haven't much," agreed Thorndyke, "but still we have something. We find that the motive of this attempt was apparently not robbery, nor the diversion of inheritable property, nor personal enmity. It must have been premeditated, but yet it could not have been planned more than a week in advance, for Jardine has only been in this neighbourhood for that time, and his coming was unexpected. The appearances very strongly suggest that the motive, whatever it was, has been generated recently and probably locally. So we had better make a start from that assumption."

"Is it possible," Jervis suggested, "that this man Gill may be some sort of anarchist crank? Or a sort of thug? It is actually conceivable that he may have taken these premises for the express purpose of having a secure place where he could perpetrate murders and conceal the bodies."

"It is quite conceivable," said Thorndyke, "and when we go and look over the works—which I propose we do presently—we may as well bear the possibility in mind. But it is merely a speculative suggestion. To return to your affairs, Jardine, has your stay here been quite uneventful?"

"Perfectly," I replied.

"No unusual or obscure cases? No injuries?"

"No, nothing out of the common," I replied.

"No deaths?"

"One. But the man died before I took over."

"Nothing unusual about that? Everything quite regular?"

"Oh, perfectly," I answered; and then with a sudden qualm, as I recalled Batson's uncertainty as to the actual cause of death, I added, "At least I hope so."

"You hope so?" queried Thorndyke. "Yes. Because it's too late to go into the question now. The man was cremated."

At this a singular silence fell. Both my friends seemed to stiffen in their chairs, and both looked at me silently but very attentively. Then Thorndyke asked, "Did you have anything to do with that case?"

"Yes," I replied. "I went with Batson to examine the body."

"And are you perfectly satisfied that everything was as it should be?"

I was on the point of saying "yes." And then suddenly there arose before my eyes the vision of Mrs. Samway looking at me over Batson's shoulder with that strange, inscrutable expression. And again, I recalled her unexplained anger and then her sudden change of mood. It had impressed me uncomfortably at the time, and it impressed me uncomfortably now. "I don't know that I am, now that I come to think it over," I replied.

"Why not?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well," I said, a little hesitatingly, "to begin with, I don't think the cause of death was quite clear, Batson couldn't find anything definite when he attended the man, and I know that the patient's death came as quite a surprise."

"But surely," exclaimed Thorndyke, "he took some measures to find out the cause of death!"

"He didn't. He assumed that it was a case of fatty heart and certified it as 'Morbus cordis'; and a man named O'Connor confirmed his certificate after examining the body."

"After merely inspecting the exterior?"

"Yes."

My two friends looked at one another significantly, and Thorndyke remarked, with a disapproving shake of the head: "And this is what all the elaborate precautions amount to in practice. A case which might have been one of the crudest and

baldest poisoning gets passed with hardly a pretence of scrutiny. And so it will always be. Routine precautions against the unsuspected are no precautions at all. That is the danger of cremation. It restores to the poisoner the security that he enjoyed in the old days when there were no such sciences as toxicology and organic chemistry, when it was impossible for him to be tripped up by an exhumation and an analysis."

"You don't think it likely that this was a case of poisoning, do you?" I asked.

"I know nothing about the case," he replied, "excepting that there was gross neglect in issuing the certificates. What do you think about it yourself? Looking back at the case, is there anything besides the uncertainty that strikes you as unsatisfactory?"

I hesitated, and again the figure of Mrs. Samway rose before me with that strange, baleful look in her eyes. Finally I described the incident to my colleagues. "Mrs. Samway!" exclaimed Jervis. "Is that the handsome Lucrezia Borgia lady with the mongoose eyes who called here this morning? By Jove! Jardine, you are giving me the creeps."

"I understand," said Thorndyke, "that you were making as if to feel the dead man's pulse?"

"Yes."

"There is no doubt, I suppose, that he really was dead?"

"None whatever. He was as cold as a fish, and, besides there was quite distinct rigor mortis."

"That seems conclusive enough," said Thorndyke, but he continued to gaze at his open note-book with a profoundly speculative and thoughtful expression.

"It certainly looks," said Jervis, "as if Jardine had either seen something or had been about to see something that he was not wanted to see; and the question is what that something could have been."

"Yes," I agreed, gloomily; "that is what I have just been asking myself. There might have been a wound or injury of some kind, or there might have been the marks of a hypodermic needle on the wrist. I wish I knew what she meant by looking at me in that way."

"Well," said Jervis, "we shall never know now. The grave gives up its secrets now and again, but the crematorium furnace never. Whether he died naturally or was murdered, Mr. Maddock is now a little heap of ashes with no message for anyone this side of the Day of Judgment."

Thorndyke looked up. "That seems to be so," said he, "and really, we have no substantial reasons for thinking that there was anything wrong. So we come back to your own affairs, Jardine, and the question is, What would you prefer to do?"

"In what respect?" I asked.

"In regard to this attempt on your life. You have told us that you have not an enemy in the world. But it appears as if you had; and a very dangerous one, too. Now would you like to put the case into the hands of the police, or would you rather that we kept our own counsel and looked into it ourselves?"

"I should like you to decide that," said I.

"The reason that I ask," said Thorndyke, "is this: the machinery of the police is adjusted to professional crime—burglary, coining, forgery, and so forth—and their methods are mostly based on 'information received.' The professional 'crook' is generally well known to the police, and, when wanted for any particular 'job,' can be found without much difficulty and the information necessary for his conviction obtained from the usual sources. But in cases of obscure, non-professional crime the police are at a disadvantage. The criminal is unknown to them; there are no confederates from whom to get information; consequently they have no starting-point for their enquiries. They can't create clues; and they, very naturally, will not devote time, labour and money to cases in which they have nothing to go on.

"Now this affair of yours does not look like a professional crime. No motive is evident and you can give no information that would help the police. I doubt if they would do much more than give you some rather disagreeable publicity, and they might even suspect you of some kind of imposture."

"Gad!" I exclaimed. "That's just what they would do. It's what they did last time, and this affair would write me down in their eyes a confirmed mystery-monger."

"Last time?" queried Thorndyke. "What last time is that? Have there been any other attempts?"

"Not on me," I replied. "But I had an adventure one night about six or seven weeks ago that has made the Hampstead police look on me, I think, with some suspicion"—and here I gave my two friends a description of my encounter with the dead (or insensible) cleric in Millfield Lane, and my discoveries on the following morning.

"But my dear Jardine!" Thorndyke exclaimed when I had finished, "what an extraordinary man you are! It seems as if you could hardly show your nose out of doors without becoming involved in some dark and dreadful mystery."

"Well," said I, "I hope I have now exhausted my gifts in that respect. I am not thirsting for more experiences. But what do you think about that Hampstead affair? Do you think I could possibly have been mistaken? Could the man have been merely insensible, after all, as the police suggested?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "I don't think," he replied, "that it is possible to take that view. You see the man had

disappeared. Now he could not have got away unassisted, in fact he could not have walked at all. One would have to assume that some persons appeared directly after you left and carried him away; and that they appeared and retired so quickly as not to be overtaken by you on your return a few minutes later with the police. That is assuming too much. And then there are the traces which you discovered on the following day, which seem to suggest strongly that a body had been carried away to Ken Wood. It is a thousand pities that you encountered that keeper, if you could have followed the tracks while they were fresh you might have been able to ascertain whither it had been carried. But now, to return to your latest experience, what shall we do? Shall we communicate with the police, or shall we make a few investigations on our own account?"

"As far as I am concerned," I replied eagerly, "a private investigation would be greatly preferable. But wouldn't it take up rather a lot of your time?"

"Now, Jardine, you needn't apologize," said Jervis. "Unless I am much mistaken, my respected senior has 'struck soundings,' as the nautical phrase has it. He has a theory of your case, and he would like to see it through. Isn't that so, Thorndyke?"

"Well," Thorndyke admitted, "I will confess that the case piques my curiosity somewhat. It is an unusual affair and suggests some curious hypotheses which might be worth testing. So, if you agree, Jardine, that we make at least a few preliminary investigations, I suggest that, as soon as Batson returns, we three go over to the what the newspapers would call 'the scene of the tragedy' and reconstitute the affair on the spot."

"And what about Batson?" I asked. "Shall we tell him anything?"

"I think we must," said Thorndyke, "if only to put him on his guard; for your unknown enemy may be his enemy, too."

At this moment the street door banged loudly, a quick step danced along the hall, and Batson himself burst into the room. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed, halting abruptly at the door and gazing in dismay at our little council. "What's the matter? Anything happened?"

Thorndyke laughed as he shook the hand of his quondam pupil.

"Come, come, Batson," said he, "don't make me out such a bird of ill-omen."

"I was afraid something awkward might have occurred, police job or inquest or something of that sort."

"You weren't so very far wrong," said Thorndyke. "When you are at liberty I'll tell you about it."

"I'm at liberty now," said Batson, dropping into a chair and glaring at Thorndyke through his spectacles. "No scandal, I hope."

Thorndyke reassured him on this point and gave him a brief account of my adventure and our proposed visit to the works; to which he listened with occasional ejaculations of astonishment and relief. "By Gum!" he exclaimed, "what a mercy you got there in time. If you hadn't there'd have been an inquest and a devil of a fuss. I should never have heard the last of it. Ruined the practice and worried me into a lunatic asylum. Oh, and about those works. I wouldn't go there if I were you."

"Why not?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well, you may have to answer some awkward questions, and we don't want this affair to get about, you know. No use raising a dust. Rumpus of any kind plays the deuce with a medical practice."

Thorndyke smiled at my principal's frank egoism. "Jervis and I went over last night," said he, "and had a hasty look round and we found the place quite deserted. Probably it is so still."

"Then you won't be able to get in. How jer get in last night?"

"I happened to have a piece of stiff wire in my pocket," Thorndyke replied impassively.

"Ha!" said Batson. "Wire, eh? Picklock in fact. I wouldn't, if I were you. Devil of a bobbery if anyone sees you. Hallo! There goes the bell. Patient. Let him wait. 'Tisn't six yet, is it?"

"Two minutes past," replied Thorndyke, rising and looking at his watch. "Perhaps we had better be starting as it's now dark, and the business at the works, if there is any, is probably over for the day."

"Hang the works!" exclaimed Batson. "I wouldn't go nosing about there. What's the good? Jardine's alright and the chappie isn't likely to be on view. You'll only raise a stink for nothing and bring in a crowd of beastly reporters humming about the place. There's that damn bell again. Well, if you won't stay, perhaps you'll look me up some other time. Always d'lighted to see you. Jervis too. You're not going, Jardine. I've got to settle up with you and hear your report."

"I'll look in later," said I; "when you've finished the evening's work."

"Right you are," said Batson, opening the door and adroitly edging us out. "Sorry you can't stay. Good-night! Good-night!"

He shepherded us persuasively and compellingly down the hall, with a skill born of long practice with garrulous patients, and, having exchanged us on the doorstep for a stout woman with two children, returned into the house with his prey and was lost to sight.

---

## VII — AN UNSEEN ENEMY

FROM my late principal's house we walked away quickly down the lamplit street, all, I think, dimly amused at the circumstances of our departure. "Is Batson always like that?" Thorndyke asked.

"Always," I replied. "Hurry and bustle are his normal states."

"Dear, dear," commented Thorndyke, "what a terrible amount of time he must waste. Of course, one can understand now how that cremation muddle came about. Your incurable hustler is always thinking of the things he has got to do next instead of the thing that he is doing at the moment. By the way, Jardine, I am taking it for granted that you would like to inspect these premises. It is not essential. Jervis and I had a preliminary look round last night, and I daresay we picked up most of the facts that are likely to be of importance if we should be going farther into the matter."

"I think it would be as well for me to take a look at the place and show you exactly where and how the affair happened."

"I think so too," said Thorndyke. "It was all pretty evident, but you might be able to show us something that we had overlooked. Here we are. I wonder if Mr. Gill is on the premises—supposing him still to frequent them."

He looked up and down the street, and, taking a key from his pocket, inserted it into the lock. "Why, how on earth did you get the key?" I asked.

Thorndyke looked at me slyly. "We keep a tame mechanic," said he, as he turned the key and opened the wicket.

"Yes, but how did he get the pattern of the lock?" I asked.

Thorndyke laughed softly. "It is only a simple trade lock. The fact is, Jardine, that in our branch of practice we have occasionally to take some rather irregular proceedings. For instance, I usually carry a small set of picklocks—fortunately for you. That is how I got in last night. Then I never go abroad without a little box of moulding wax; a most invaluable material, Jardine, for collecting certain kinds of evidence. Well, with a slip of wood and a bit of wax I was able to furnish my man with the necessary data for filing up a blank key. One doesn't want to be seen using a picklock. Now, can you show us the way?"

He flashed a pocket electric lamp on the ground, and we advanced over the rough cobbles until we reached a door at the side. "This is where I went in," said I. "It opens into a sort of corridor, and at the end is a door opening on some steps that lead down to the passage below."

Thorndyke tried the handle of the door and pushed, but it was evidently locked or bolted. "I left this door unlocked last night," said he; "so it is clear that someone has been here since. I hardly expected that. I thought our friend would have cleared off for good. But it is possible that Gill had nothing to do with the attempt. The premises may have been used by someone who happened to know that they were unoccupied. It would have been quite easy for such a person to gain admittance; as you see."

While speaking, he had produced from his pocket a little bunch of skeleton keys, with one of which he now quietly unlocked the door. "These builders' locks," said he, "are merely symbolic of security. You are not expected to unfasten them without authority, but you can if you like and happen to have a bit of stiff wire."

We entered the corridor, and, as we proceeded, looked into the rooms that opened out of it. One of them was meagrely furnished as an office, but the thick layer of dust on the desk and stools showed clearly that it had been long disused; the other rooms were empty and desolate, and showed no trace of use or occupation. "The worthy Gill," said Jervis, "seems to have been able, like Diogenes, to get on with a very modest outfit."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke, "it is a little difficult to guess what his occupation is. The place looks as if it had never been used at all. Shall I go first?"

He halted for a moment, passing the light of his lamp over the massive door at the head of the steps, and then began to descend. It was certainly a horrible and repulsive place, especially to my eyes, with the recollection of my late experience fresh in my mind. The rough brick walls, covered with the crumbling remains of old white-wash, the black masses of cobwebs that drooped like funereal stalactites from the ceiling, the fungi that sprouted in corners, and the snail-tracks that glistened in the lamplight on the stone floor, all contributed to a vault-like sepulchral effect that was most unpleasantly suggestive of what might have been and very nearly had been.

My late prison was easily distinguished by the two holes in the door. We looked in; but that cellar was completely empty save for a few chips of wood and a pinch or two of sawdust; memorials of my sojourn in the lethal chamber at which I could hardly look without a shudder. Then we passed on to the next cellar—the one adjoining my prison—and this was an object of no little curiosity to me. Here, while I was securely bolted into my cell, that unknown villain had, deliberately and in cold blood, made all the arrangements for my murder; arrangements which he little suspected that I should survive to look upon.

Thorndyke, too, was interested. He stood at the open door, looking in as if considering the positions of various objects. As in fact he was. "Someone has been here since last night, Jervis," said he.

"Yes," agreed Jervis.

"That gas bottle has been taken down from the opening. You see, Jardine," he continued, "he had stood that big packing-

case up on end and laid the gas bottle along the top, with its nozzle just opposite the hole. Two other bottles were standing upright with their nozzles upwards."

"I understand," said Thorndyke, "that you heard three bottles only turned on?"

"Yes," I answered; "there was the one opposite the hole and two others."

"I ask," Thorndyke said, "because there are, as you see, seven other bottles, lying by the wall. Those are all empty. We tried them when we came here last night."

"I know nothing about those others," said I. "The three bottles that I have mentioned I heard distinctly, and after he had turned on the third, the man went out of the cellar and closed up the door."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "the other seven were presumably used for some other—and let us hope, more legitimate—purpose. I wonder why our friend has been at the trouble of moving the cylinders."

"Perhaps," suggested Jervis, "he thought that the arrangement might be a little too illuminating for the police, if they should happen to pay a visit to the place. He may not be aware that the apparatus had already been inspected in situ by us. Or, again, the cylinders may have been moved by someone else. We are assuming that he is a lawful occupant of the premises; but he may be a mere secret intruder like ourselves, who has discovered that the place is more or less unoccupied and has made use of the premises and plant for his own benevolent purposes."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke, "that is perfectly true. But we can put the matter to the test, at least negatively. If the cylinders have been moved by an innocent stranger they will bear the prints of hands."

"But why shouldn't the man himself leave the prints of his hands on the cylinders?" I asked.

"Because, my dear Jardine, he is too knowing a bird. Jervis and I went carefully over the cylinders last night in the hope of getting a few finger-prints to submit to Scotland Yard; but not a vestige could we find. Our friend had seen to that. We assumed that he had operated in gloves and your description of him confirmed our assumption. Which, in its way, is an interesting fact, for a man who is knowing enough to take these precautions has probably had some previous experience of crime, or, at least, has some acquaintance with the ways of criminals. The suggestion, in fact, is that, although this is not an ordinary professional crime, the perpetrator may be a professional criminal. And the further suggestion is, of course, that of very deliberate premeditation."

While he had been speaking he had produced from his pocket a small, flattened bottle fitted with a metal cap and filled with a yellowish powder. Removing the cap and uncovering a perforated inner cap, like that of an iodoform dredger, he proceeded to shake a cloud of the light powder over the three upper cylinders, jarring them with his foot to make the powder spread. Then he blew sharply on them, one after the other, when the powder disappeared from their surfaces, leaving visible one or two shapeless whitened smears but never a trace of a finger-print or even the shape of a hand.

Thorndyke rose and slipped the bottle back in his pocket. "Apparently," said he, "the cylinders were moved by our unknown friend, with the same careful precautions as on the first occasion. A wary gentleman, this, Jervis. He'll give us a run for our money, at any rate."

"Yes," agreed Jervis; "he doesn't mean to give himself away. He preserves his incognito most punctiliously. I'll say that for him."

"And meanwhile," said Thorndyke, "we had better proceed with our measures for drawing him out of this modest retirement. I want you, Jardine, to look round this cellar and tell us if any of the things that you see in it reminds you of anything that has happened to you, or suggests any thought or reflection."

I looked round, I am afraid rather vacantly. A more unsuggestive collection of objects I have never looked upon. "There are the gas cylinders," I said, feebly; "but I have told you about them. I don't see anything else excepting a few oddments of rubbish."

"Then take a good look at the rubbish," said he. "Remember that it may be necessary at some future time for you to recall exactly what this cellar was like, and what it contained. You may even have to make a sworn statement. So cast your eye round and tell us what you see."

I did so, wondering inwardly what the deuce I was expected to see and what might be the importance of my seeing it. "I see," said I, "a mouldy-looking cellar about fifteen feet by twelve, with very bad brick walls, a plaster ceiling in an advanced stage of decay, and a concrete floor. In the left hand wall is a hole about six inches square opening into the adjoining cellar. The contents are ten gas cylinders, all apparently empty, a key or spanner which seems to have been used to turn the cocks, a large packing-case, which, to judge by its shape, seems to have contained gas cylinders—"

"The word 'large,'" interrupted Thorndyke, "is not a particularly exact one."

"Well, then, a packing-case about seven feet long by two and a half feet wide and deep."

"That's better," said Thorndyke. "Always give your dimensions in quantitative terms if possible. Go on."

"There are a couple of waterproof sheets," said I. "I don't see quite what they can have been used for."

"Never mind their use," said Thorndyke. "Note the fact that they are here."

"I have," said I; "and that seems to complete the list with the exception of the straw in which I suppose the gas cylinders

were packed. There is a large quantity of that, but not more than would seem necessary for the purpose. And that seems to complete the inventory, and, I may say, that none of these things conveys any suggestion whatever to my mind."

"Probably not," said Thorndyke, "and it is quite possible that none of these things has any particular significance at all. But as they are the only facts offered us, we must make the best of them. There is one other cellar that we have not yet looked into, I think."

We came out, and, walking along the passage, came to another door which stood slightly ajar. Thorndyke opened it, and, throwing in the light of his lamp, revealed a considerable stack of long iron gas bottles, and one or two packing-cases similar to the one I had already seen. "I presume," said he, "that these are full cylinders; the store from which our friend got his supply, but we may as well make sure."

He ran back into the adjoining cellar, and returned with the spanner, with which he proceeded to turn the cock of one of the topmost cylinders; upon which a loud hiss and a thin, snowy cloud showed that his surmise was correct.

He had just closed the cock and stepped out into the passage to take back the spanner, when I saw him stop suddenly as if listening. And then he sniffed once or twice. "What is it?" asked Jervis; but Thorndyke, without replying, ran quickly along the passage and up the steps, and I heard him trying the door at the top.

"Bring up one of the empty cylinders," he said quietly. "They have bolted us in and apparently set fire to the place."

We did not require much urging to act quickly. Picking up one of the long, ponderous iron cylinders, we ran with it along the passage towards the light of Thorndyke's lamp. As we ascended the steps I became plainly aware of the smell of burning wood and of a crackling sound, faintly audible through the massive door. "There is only one bolt," said Thorndyke; "I noticed it as we came in. I will throw my light on the part of the door where it is fixed, and you two must batter on that spot with the cylinder."

The door was, as I have said, a massive one, but it would have been a massive door indeed that could have withstood the blows of that ponderous iron cylinder, wielded by two strong men whose lives depended on their efforts. At the very first crash of the battering-ram, a tiny chink opened and at each thundering blow, the building shook. Furiously we pounded at the thick, plank-built door, and slowly the chink widened as the screws of the bolt tore out of the woodwork. And as the chink opened, a thin reek of pungent smoke filtered in, and the cold light of Thorndyke's lantern became contrasted with a red glare from without. And then suddenly, the door, under the heavy battering, burst from its fastenings and swung open. A blinding, choking cloud of smoke and sparks rolled in upon us, through which we could see in the corridor outside a pile of straw and crates and broken packing-cases, blazing and cracking furiously. It looked as if we were cut off beyond all hope.

Jervis and I had dropped the now useless cylinder and were gazing in horror at the blazing mass that filled the corridor and cut off our only means of escape, when we were recalled by the voice of Thorndyke, speaking in his usual quiet and precise manner. "We must get the full cylinders up as quickly as possible," said he; and, running down the steps he made straight for the end cellar, whither we followed him. Picking up one of the cylinders, we carried it quickly to the top of the steps. "Lay it down," said Thorndyke, "and fetch another."

Jervis and I ran back to the cellar, and taking up another cylinder, brought it along the passage. As we were ascending the steps, there suddenly arose a loud, penetrating hiss, and as we reached the top, we saw Thorndyke disengaging the spanner from the cock of the cylinder out of which a jet of liquid was issuing, mingled with a dense, snowy cloud.

An instantaneous glance, as we laid down the fresh cylinder, reassured me very considerably. The icy, volatile liquid and the falling cloud of intensely cold carbonic acid snow had produced an immediate effect; as was evident in a blackened, smouldering patch in the midst of the blazing mass. With reviving hope I followed Jervis once more down the steps and along the passage to the end cellar, from which we brought forth a third cylinder.

By this time the passage was so filled with smoke that it was difficult either to see or to breathe, and the bright light that had at first poured in through the open doorway had already pulled down so far that Thorndyke's figure, framed in the opening, loomed dim and shadowy amidst the smoke and against the dusky red background. We found him, when we reached the top of the steps, holding the great gas bottle and directing the stream of snow and liquid on to those parts of the wood and straw from which flames still issued. "It will be all right," he said in his calm, unemotional way; "the fire had not really got an effective start. The straw made a great show, but that is nearly all burnt now, and all this carbonic acid gas will soon smother the burning wood. But we must be careful that it doesn't smother us too. The steps will be the safest place for the present."

He opened the cock of the new cylinder and, having placed it so that it played on the most refractory part of the burning mass, backed to the steps where Jervis and I stood looking through the doorway. The fire was, as he had said, rapidly dying down. The volumes of gas produced by the evaporation of the liquid and the melting snow, cut off the supply of air so that, in place of the flames that had, at first, looked so alarming, only a dense reek of smoke arose. "Now," said Thorndyke, after we had waited on the steps a couple of minutes more, "I think we might make a sortie and put an end to it. If we can get the smouldering stuff off that wooden floor down on to the stone, the danger will be over."

He led the way cautiously into the corridor, and, once more bringing his electric lamp into requisition, began to kick the smouldering cases and crates and the blackened masses of straw down the steps on to the stone floor of the passage, whither we followed them and scattered them with our feet until they were completely safe from any chance of re-ignition.



"There," said Jervis, giving a final kick at a small heap of smoking straw, "I should think that ought to do. There's no fear of that stuff lighting up again. And, if I may venture to make the remark, the sooner we are off these premises the happier I shall be. Our friend's methods of entertaining his visitors are a trifle too strenuous for my taste. He might try dynamite next."

"Yes," I agreed; "or he might take pot shots at us with a revolver from some dark corner."

"It is much more likely," said Thorndyke, "that he has cleared off in anticipation of the alarm of fire. Still, it is undeniable that we shall be safer outside. Shall I go first and show you a light?"

He piloted us along the corridor and up the cobbled yard, putting away his lamp as he unlocked the wicket. There was no sign of anyone about the premises nor, when we had passed out of the gate, was there anyone in sight in the street. I looked about, expecting to see some sign of the fire; but there was no smoke visible, and only a slight smell of burning wood. The smoke must have drifted out at the back. "Well," Thorndyke remarked, "it has been quite an exciting little episode. And a highly satisfactory finish, as things turned out; though it might easily have been very much the reverse. But for the fortunate chance of those gas-bottles being available, I don't think we should be alive at this moment."

"No," agreed Jervis. "We should be in much the same condition by this time as Batson's late patient, Mr. Maddock, or at least, well on our way to that disembodied state. However, all's well that ends well. Are you coming our way, Jardine?"

"I will walk a little way with you," said I. "Then I must go back to Batson to settle up and fetch my traps."

I walked with them to Oxford Street and we discussed our late adventure as we went. "It was a pretty strong hint to clear out, wasn't it?" Jervis remarked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "it didn't leave us much option. But the affair can't be left at this. I shall have a watch set on those premises, and I shall make some more particular enquiries about Mr. Gill. By the way, Jardine, I haven't your address. I'd better have it in case I want to communicate with you; and you'd better have my card in case anything turns up which you think I ought to know."

We accordingly exchanged cards, and, as we had now reached the corner of Oxford Street, I wished my friends adieu and thoughtfully retraced my steps to Jacob Street.

---

## VIII — IT'S AN ILL WIND...

LONDON is a wonderful place. From the urban greyness of Jacob Street to the borders of Hampstead Heath was, even in those days of the slow horse tram, but a matter of minutes—a good many minutes, perhaps, but still, considerably under an hour. Yet, in that brief and leisurely journey, one exchanged the grim sordidness of a most unlovely street for the solitude and sweet rusticity of open and charming country.

A day or two after my second adventure in the mineral water works, I was leaning on the parapet of the viaduct—the handsome, red brick viaduct with which some builder, unknown to me, had spanned the pond beyond the Upper Heath, apparently with purely decorative motive, and in a spirit of sheer philanthropy. For no road seemed to lead anywhere in particular over it, and there was no reason why any wayfarer should wish to cross the pond rather than walk round it; indeed, in those days it was covered by a turfy expanse seldom trodden by any feet but those of the sheep that grazed in the meadows bordering the pond. I leaned on the parapet, smoking my pipe with deep contentment, and looking down into the placid water. Flags and rushes grew at its borders, water-lilies spread their flat leaves on its surface, and a small party of urchins angled from the margin, with the keen joy of the juvenile sportsman who suspects that his proceedings are unlawful.

I had lounged on the parapet for several minutes, when I became aware of a man, approaching along the indistinct track that crossed the viaduct, and, as he drew near, I recognized him as the keeper whom I had met in Ken Wood on the morning after my discovery of the body in Millfield Lane. I would have let him pass with a smile of recognition, but he had no intention of passing. Touching his hat politely, he halted, and, having wished me good-morning, remarked: "You didn't tell me, sir, what it was you were looking for that morning when I met you in the wood."

"No," I replied, "but apparently, someone else has."

"Well, sir, you see," he said, "the sergeant came up the next day with a plain-clothes man to have a look round, and, as the sergeant is an old acquaintance of mine, he gave me the tip as to what they were after. I am sorry, sir, you didn't tell me what you were looking for."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "we might have found something if we had looked while the tracks were fresh. Unfortunately there was a gale in the night that fetched down a lot of leaves, and blew up those that had already fallen, so that any foot-marks would have got hidden before the sergeant came."

"What did the police officers seem to think about it?" I asked.

"Why, to speak the truth," the keeper replied, "they seemed to think it was all bogey."

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "that they thought I had invented the whole story?"

"Oh, no, sir," he replied, "not that. They believed you had seen a man lying in the lane, but they didn't believe that he was a dead man and they thought your imagination had misled you about the tracks."

"Then, I suppose they didn't find anything?" said I.

"No, they didn't, and I haven't been able to find anything myself, though I've had a good look round."

And then, after a brief pause: "I wonder," he said, "if you would care to come up to the Wood and have a look at the place yourself."

I considered for a moment. I had nothing to do for I was taking a day off, and the man's proposal sounded rather attractive. Finally, I accepted his offer, and we turned back together towards the Wood.

Hampstead—the Hampstead of those days—was singularly rustic and remote. But, within the wood, it was incredible that the town of London actually lay within the sound of a church bell or the flight of a bullet. Along the shady paths, carpeted with moss and silvery lichen, overshadowed by the boughs of noble beeches; or in leafy hollows, with the humus of centuries under our feet, and the whispering silence of the woodland all around, we might have been treading the glades of some primeval forest. Nor was the effect of this strange remoteness less, when presently, emerging from the thicker portion of the wood, we came upon a moss-grown, half-ruinous boat-house on the sedgy margin of a lake, in which was drawn up a rustic-looking, and evidently, little-used punt.

"It's wonderful quiet about here, sir," the keeper remarked, as a water-hen stole out from behind a clump of high rushes and scrambled over the leaves of the water-lilies.

"And presumably," I remarked, "it's quieter still at night."

"You're right, sir," the keeper replied. "If that man had got as far as this, he'd have had mighty little trouble in putting the body where no one was ever likely to look for it."

"I suppose," said I, "that you had a good look at the edges of the lake?"

"Yes," he answered. "I went right round it, and so did the police, for that matter, and we had a good look at the punt, too. But, all the same, it wouldn't surprise me if, one fine day, that body came floating up among the lilies; always supposing, that is," he added, "that there really was a body."

"How far is it," I asked, "from the lake to the place where you met me that morning?"

"It's only a matter of two or three minutes," he answered, "we may as well walk that way and you can see for yourself." Accordingly, we set forth together, and, coming presently upon one of the moss-grown paths, followed it past a large summerhouse until we came in sight of the beech beyond which I had encountered him while I was searching for the tracks. As we went, he plied me with questions as to what I had seen on the night in the lane, and I made no scruple of telling him all that I had told the police, seeing that they, on their side, had made no secret of the matter.

Of course, it was idle, after this long period—for it was now more than seven weeks since I had seen the body—to attempt anything in the nature of a search. It certainly did look as if the man who had stolen into that wood that night had been bound for the solitary lake. The punt, I had noticed, was only secured with a rope, so that the murderer—for such I assumed he must have been—could easily have carried his dreadful burden out into the middle, and there sunk it with weights, and so hidden it for ever. It was a quick, simple and easy method of hiding the traces of his crime, and, if the police had not thought it worth while to search the water with drags, there was no reason why the buried secret should not remain buried for all time.

After we had walked for some time about the pleasant, shady wood, less shady now that the yellowing leaves were beginning to fall with the passing of autumn, the keeper conducted me to the exit by which I had left on the previous occasion.

As I was passing out of the wicket, my eye fell once more on the cottage which I had then noticed, and, recalling the remark that my fair acquaintance had let fall concerning the artist to whom the derelict knife was supposed to belong, I said: "You mentioned, I think, that that house was let to an artist."

"It was," he replied; "but it's empty now, the artist has gone away."

"It must be a pleasant little house to live in," I said, "at any rate, in summer."

"Yes," he replied, "a country house within an hour's walk of the Bank of England. Would you like to have a look at it, sir? I've got the keys."

Now I certainly had no intention of offering myself as a tenant, but, yet, to an idle man, there is a certain attractiveness in an empty house of an eligible kind, a certain interest in roaming through the rooms and letting one's fancy furnish them with one's own household goods. I accepted the man's invitation, and, opening the wide gate that admitted to the garden from a byroad, we walked up to the door of the house. "It's quite a nice little place," the keeper remarked. "There isn't much garden, you see, but then, you've got the Heath all around; and there's a small stable and coachhouse if you should be wanting to go into town."

"Did the last tenant keep any kind of carriage?" I asked.

"I don't think so," said the keeper, "but I fancy he used to hire a little cart sometimes when he had things to bring in from

town; but I don't know very much about him or his habits."

We walked through the empty rooms together, looking out of the windows and commenting on the pleasant prospects that all of them commanded, and talking about the man who had last lived in the house. "He was a queer sort of fellow," said the keeper. "He and his wife seem to have lived here all alone without any servant, and they seem often to have left the house to itself for a day or two at a time; but he could paint. I have stopped and had a look when he has been at work, and it was wonderful to see how he knocked off those pictures. He didn't seem to use brushes, but he had a lot of knives, like little trowels, and he used to shovel the paint on with them, and he always wore gloves when he was painting; didn't like to get the paint on his hands, I suppose."

"It sounds as if it would be very awkward," I said.

"Just what I should have thought," the keeper agreed. "But he didn't seem to find it so. This seems to be the place that he worked in."

Apparently the keeper was right. The room, which we had now entered, was evidently the late studio, and did not appear to have been cleaned up since the tenant left. The floor was littered with scraps of paper on which a palette-knife had been cleaned, with empty paint-tubes and one or two broken and worn-out brushes, and, in a packing-case, which seemed to have served as a receptacle for rubbish, were one or two canvases that had been torn from their stretchers and thrown away. I picked them out and glanced at them with some interest, remembering what my fair friend had said. For the most part, they were mere experiments or failures, deliberately defaced with strokes or daubs of paint, but one of them was a quite spirited and attractive sketch, rough and unfinished, but skilfully executed and undefaced. I stretched out the crumpled canvas and looked at it with considerable interest, for it represented Millfield Lane, and showed the large elms and the posts and the high fence under which I had sheltered in the rain. In fact, it appeared to have been taken from the exact spot on which the body had been lying, and from which I had made my own drawing; not that there was anything in the latter coincidence, for it was the only sketchable spot in the lane. "It's really quite a nice sketch," I said; "it seems a pity to leave it here among the rubbish."

"It does, sir," the keeper agreed. "If you like it, you had better roll it up and put it in your pocket. You won't be robbing anyone."

As it seemed that I was but rescuing it from a rubbish-heap, I ventured to follow the keeper's advice, and, rolling the canvas up, carefully stowed it in my pocket. And shortly after as I had now seen all that there was to see, which was mighty little, we left the house, and, at the gate, the keeper took leave of me with a touch of his hat.

I made my way slowly back towards my lodgings by way of the Spaniard's Road and Hampstead Lane, turning over in my mind as I went, the speculation suggested by my visit to the wood. Of the existence of the lake I had not been previously aware. Now that I had seen it, I felt very little doubt that it was known to the mysterious murderer—for such I felt convinced he was—who must have been lurking in the lane that night when I was sheltering under the lee of the fence. The route that he had then taken appeared to be the direct route to the lake. That he was carrying the body, I had no doubt whatever; and, seeing that he had carried it so far, it appeared probable that he had some definite hiding-place in view. And what hiding-place could be so suitable as this remote piece of still water? No digging, no troublesome and dangerous preparation would be necessary. There was the punt in readiness to bear him to the deep water in the middle; a silent, easily-handled conveyance. A few stones, or some heavy object from the boat-house, would be all that was needful; and in a moment he would be rid for ever of the dreadful witness of his crime.

Thus reflecting—not without dissatisfaction at the passive part that I had played in this sinister affair—I passed through the turnstile, or "kissing-gate," at the entrance to Millfield Lane. Almost certainly, the murderer or the victim or both, had passed through that very gate on the night of the tragedy. The thought came to me with added solemnity with the recollection of the silent wood and the dark, still water fresh in my mind, and caused me unconsciously to tread more softly and walk more sedately than usual.

The lane was little frequented at any time and now, at mid-day, was almost as deserted as at midnight. Very remote it seemed, too, and very quiet, with a silence that recalled the hush of the wood. And yet the silence was not quite unbroken. From somewhere ahead, from one of the many windings of the tortuous lane, came the sound of hurried footsteps. I stopped to listen. There were two persons, one treading lightly, the other more heavily, apparently a man and a woman. And both were running—running fast.

There was nothing remarkable in this, perhaps; but yet the sound smote on my ear with a certain note of alarm that made me quicken my pace and listen yet more intently. And suddenly there came another sound; a muffled, whimpering cry like that of a frightened woman. Instantly I gave an answering shout and sprang forward at a swift run.

I had turned one of the numerous corners and was racing down a straight stretch of the lane when a woman darted round the corner ahead, and ran towards me, holding out her hands. I recognised her at a glance, though now she was dishevelled, pale, wild-eyed, breathless and nearly frantic with terror, and rage against her assailant spurred me on to greater speed. But when I would have passed her to give chase to the wretch, she clutched my arm frantically with both hands and detained me. "Let me go and catch the scoundrel!" I exclaimed; but she only clung the tighter.

"No," she panted, "don't leave me! I am terrified! Don't go away!"

I ground my teeth. Even as we stood, I could hear the ruffian's footsteps receding as rapidly as they had advanced. In a

few moments he would be beyond pursuit. "Do let me go and stop that villain!" I implored. "You're quite safe now, and you can follow me and keep me in sight."

But she shook her head passionately, and, still clutching my sleeve with one hand, pressed the other to her heart. "No, no, no!" she gasped, with a catch in her voice that was almost a sob, "I can't be alone! I am frightened. Oh! Please don't go away from me!"

What could I do? The poor girl was evidently beside herself with terror, and exhausted by her frantic flight. It would have been cruel to leave her in that state. But all the same, it was infuriating. I had no idea what the man had done to terrify her in this way. But that was of no consequence. The natural impulse of a healthy young man when he learns that a woman has been ill-used is to hammer the offender effectively in the first place, and then to inquire into the affair. That was what I wanted to do; but it was not to be. "Well," I said, by way of compromise, "let us walk back together. Perhaps we may be able to find out which way the man went."

To this she agreed. I drew her arm through mine—for she was still trembling and looked faint and weak—and we began to retrace her steps towards Highgate. Of course the man was nowhere to be seen, and by the time that we had turned the sharp corner where I had found the body of the priest, the man was not only out of sight, but his footsteps were no longer audible.

Still we went on for some distance in the hopes of meeting someone who could tell us which way the miscreant had gone. But we met nobody. Only, some distance past the posts, we came in sight of a sketching box and a camp-stool, lying by the side of the path. "Surely those are your things?" I said.

"Yes," she answered. "I had forgotten all about them. I dropped them when I began to run."

I picked up the box and the stool, and debated with myself whether it was worth while to go on any farther. From where we stood, nothing was to be seen, for the lane was still enclosed on both sides by a seven foot fence of oak boards. But the chance of overtaking the fugitive was not to be considered; by this time he was probably out of the lane on the Heath or in the surrounding meadows; and meanwhile, my companion, though calmer and less breathless, looked very pale and shaken. "I don't know that it's any use," I said, "to tire you by going any farther. The man is evidently gone."

She seemed relieved at my decision, and it then occurred to me to suggest that she should sit down awhile on the bank under the high fence to recover herself, and to this, too, she assented gladly. "If it wouldn't distress you," I said, "would you mind telling me what had happened?"

She pondered for a few seconds and then answered: "It doesn't sound much in the telling and I expect you will think me very silly to be so much upset."

"I'm sure I shan't," I said, with perfect confidence in the correctness of my statement.

"Well," she said, "what happened was this as nearly as I can remember: I was coming up the path from the ponds and I had to pass a man who was leaning against the fence by the stile. As I came near to him, he looked at me, at first, in quite an ordinary way, and then, he suddenly began to stare in a most singular and disturbing fashion, not at me, so much, as at this little crucifix which I wear hung from my neck. As I passed through the turnstile, he spoke to me: 'Would you mind letting me look at that crucifix?' he asked. It was a most astonishing piece of impertinence, and I was so taken aback that I hardly had the presence of mind to refuse. However, I did, and very decidedly, too. Then he came up to me, and, in a most threatening and alarming manner, said: 'You found that crucifix. You picked it up somewhere near here. It's mine, and I'll ask you to let me have it, if you please.'

"Now this was perfectly untrue. The crucifix was given to me by my father when I was quite a little child, and I have worn it ever since I have been grown up—ever since he died, in fact, six years ago. I told the man this, but he made no pretence of believing me, and was evidently about to renew his demand, when two labourers appeared, coming down the lane. I thought this a good opportunity to escape, and walked away quickly up the lane; it was very silly of me; I ought to have gone the other way."

"Of course you ought," I agreed, "you ought to have got out into a public road at once."

"Yes, I see that now," she said. "It was very foolish of me. However, I walked on pretty quickly, for there was something in the man's face that had frightened me, and I was anxious to get home. I looked back, from time to time, and, when I saw no sign of the man, I began to recover myself; but just as I had got to the most solitary part of the lane, just about where we are now, shut in by these high fences, I heard quick footsteps behind me. I looked back and saw the man coming after me. Then, I suppose, I got in a sudden panic, for I dropped my sketching things and began to run. But as soon as I began to run, the man broke into a run too. I raced for my life, and when I heard the man gaining on me, I suppose I must have called out. Then I heard your shout from the upper part of the lane and ran on faster than ever to gain your protection. That's all, and I suppose you think that I have been making a great fuss about nothing."

"I don't think anything of the kind," I said, "and neither would our absent friend if I could get hold of him. By the way, what sort of person was he?—a tramp?"

"Oh, no, quite a respectable looking person; in fact, he would have passed for a gentleman."

"Can you give any sort of description of him, not that verbal descriptions are of much use except in the case of a hunchback or a Chinaman or some other easily identifiable creature."

"No, they are not," she agreed, "and I don't think that I can tell you much about this man excepting that he was clean-shaved, of medium height, quite well dressed, and wore a round hat and slate-coloured suede gloves."

"I'm afraid we shan't get hold of him from that description," I said. "The only thing that you can do is to avoid solitary places for the present and not to come through this lane again alone."

"Yes," she said. "I suppose I must, but it's very unfortunate. One cannot always take a companion when one goes sketching even if it were desirable, which it is not."

As to the desirability, in the case of a good-looking girl, of wandering about alone in solitary places, I had my own opinions; and very definite opinions they were. But I kept them to myself. And so we sat silent for awhile. She was still pale and agitated, and perhaps her recital of her misadventure had not been wholly beneficial. At the moment that this idea occurred to me, a crackling in my breast-pocket reminded me of the forgotten canvas, and I bethought me that perhaps a change of subject might divert her mind from her very disagreeable experience. Accordingly, I drew the canvas out of my pocket, and, unrolling it, asked her what she thought of the sketch. In a moment she became quite animated. "Why," she exclaimed, "this looks exactly like the work of that artist who was working on the Heath a little while ago."

"It is his," I replied, considerably impressed and rather astonished at her instantaneous recognition; "but I didn't know you were so familiar with his work."

"I'm not very familiar with it," she replied, "but, as I told you, I sometimes managed to steal a glance or two when I passed him. You see, his technique is so peculiar that it's easily recognised, and it interested me very much. I should have liked to stop and watch him and get a lesson."

"It is rather peculiar work," I said, looking at the canvas with new interest. "Very solid and yet very smooth."

"Yes. It is typical knife-work, almost untouched with the brush. That was what interested me. The knife is a dangerous tool for a comparative tyro like myself, but yet one would like to learn how to use it. Did he give you this sketch?"

I smiled guiltily. "The truth is," I admitted, "I stole it."

"How dreadful of you!" she said, "I suppose that you could not be bribed to steal another?"

"I would steal it for nothing if you asked me," I answered, "and meanwhile, you had better take possession of this one. It will be of more use to you than to me."

She shook her head: "No, I won't do that," she said, "though it is most kind of you. You paint, I think, don't you?"

"I'm only the merest amateur," I replied. "I annexed the sketch for the sake of the subject. I have rather an affection for this lane."

"So had I," said she, "until to-day. Now, I hate it, but, might I ask how you managed your theft?"

I told her about the empty cottage and the rejected canvases in the rubbish box. "I'm afraid none of the others would be of any use to you because he had drawn a brushful of paint across each of them."

"Oh, that wouldn't matter," she said. "The brush-strokes would be on dry paint and could easily be scraped off. Besides, it is not the subject but the technique that interests me."

"Then I will get into the cottage somehow and purloin the remaining canvases for you."

"Oh, but I mustn't give you all this trouble," she protested.

"It won't be any trouble," I said. "I shall quite enjoy a deliberate and determined robbery. But where shall I send the spoil?"

She produced her card-case, and, selecting a card, handed it to me, with a smile: "It seems to me," she said, "that I am inciting you to robbery and acting as a receiver of stolen goods, but I suppose there's no harm in it, though I feel that I ought not to give you all this trouble."

I made the usual polite rejoinder as I took from her the little magical slip of pasteboard that, in a moment, transformed her from a stranger to an acquaintance, and gave her a local habitation and a name. Before bestowing it in my pocket-book, I glanced at the neat copper-plate and read the inscription: "Miss Sylvia Vyne. The Hawthorns. North End."

The effect of our conversation had answered my expectations. Her agitation had passed off, the colour had come back to her cheeks, and, in fact, she seemed quite recovered. Apparently she thought so herself, for she rose, saying that she now felt well enough to walk home, and held out her hand for the colour-box and stool. "I think," said I, "that if you won't consider me intrusive, I should like to see you safely out on to an inhabited road at least."

"I shall accept your escort gratefully," she replied, "as far as the end of the lane, or farther if it is not taking you too much out of your way."

Needless to say, I would gladly have escorted so agreeable and winsome a protegee from John o' Groats to Land's End and found it not out of my way at all; and when she passed out of the gate into Hampstead Lane, I clung tenaciously to the box and stool and turned towards "The Spaniards" as though no such thing as a dismissal had ever been contemplated. In fact, with the reasonable excuse of carrying the impedimenta, I maintained my place by her side in the absence of a definite conge; and so we walked together, talking quite easily, principally about pictures and painting, until, in the pleasant little

hamlet, she halted by a garden gate, and, taking her possessions from me, held out a friendly hand. "Good-bye," she said. "I can't thank you enough for all your help and kindness. I hope I have not been very troublesome to you."

I assured her that she had been most amenable, and, when I had once more cautioned her to avoid solitary places, we exchanged a cordial hand-shake and parted, she to enter the pleasant, rustic-looking house, and I to betake myself back to my lodgings, lightening the way with much agreeable and self-congratulatory reflection.

---

## IX — THORNDYKE TAKES UP THE SCENT

AT my lodgings, which I reached at an unconscionably late hour for lunch, I found a little surprise awaiting me; a short note from Dr. Thorndyke asking me if I should be at liberty early on the following afternoon to show him the spot on which I had found the mysterious body. Of course, I answered by return, begging him to come straight on from the hospital to an early lunch, over which we could discuss the facts of the case before setting out. Having dispatched my letter, I called at the offices of the house agent who had the letting of the cottage on the Heath, to see if he had duplicate keys. Fortunately he had, and was willing to entrust them to me on the understanding that they should be returned some time during the next day. I did not, however, go on to the cottage, for it occurred to me that Thorndyke would probably wish to visit the wood, and I could make my visit and purloin the canvases then.

A telegram on the following morning informed me that Thorndyke would be with me at twelve o'clock, and, punctually to the minute, he arrived. "I hope you don't mind me swooping down on you in this fashion," he said, as the servant showed him into the room.

I assured him, very truthfully, that I was delighted to be honoured by a visit from him, and he then proceeded to explain. "You may wonder, Jardine, why I am busying myself about this case, which is really no business of mine, or, at least, appears to be none; but the fact is, that as a teacher and a practitioner of Medical Jurisprudence, I find it advisable to look into any unusual cases. Of course, there is always a considerable probability that I may be consulted concerning any out of the way case; but, apart from that, I have the ordinary specialist's interest in anything remarkable in my own speciality."

"I should think," said I, "that it would be well for me to give you all the facts before we start."

"Exactly, Jardine," he replied, "that is what I want. Tell me all you know about the affair and then we shall be able to test our conclusions on the spot."

He produced a large scale ordnance map, and, folding it under my direction, so that it showed only the region in which we were interested, he stood it up on the table against the water bottle, where we could both see it, and marked on it with a pencil each spot as I described it.

It is not necessary for me to record our conversation. I told him the whole story as I have already told it to the reader, pointing out on the map the exact locality where each event occurred. "It's a most remarkable case, Jardine," was his thoughtful comment when I had finished, "most remarkable; curiously puzzling and inconsistent too. For you see that on the one hand, it looks like a casual or accidental crime, and yet, on the other, strongly suggests premeditation. No man, one would think, could have planned to commit a murder in what is, after all, a public thoroughfare; and yet, the long distance which the body seems to have been carried, and the apparently selected hiding-place, seem to suggest a previously considered plan."

"You think that there is no doubt that the man was really dead?" I asked.

"Had you any doubt at the time yourself?"

"None at all," I replied, "it was only the disappearance of the body, and, perhaps, the sergeant's suggestion, that made me think it possible that I might have been mistaken."

Thorndyke shook his head. "No, Jardine," said he, "the man was dead. We are safe in assuming that; and on that assumption our investigations must be based. The next question is, how was the body taken away? Did you measure the fence?"

"No, but I should say it is about seven feet high."

"And what kind of fence is it? Are there any footholds?"

"I can show you exactly what the fence is like," I answered. "That sketch, which I have pinned up on the wall, was apparently painted from the exact spot on which the body lay. That fence on the right-hand side is the one under which I sheltered and is exactly like the one over which the body seems to have been lifted."

Thorndyke rose and walked over to the sketch, which I had fixed to the wall with drawing-pins. "Not a bad sketch, this, Jardine," he remarked; "very smartly put in, apparently mostly with the knife. Where did you get it?"

I had to confess that the canvas was unlawfully come by, and told him how I had obtained it. "You don't know the artist's name?" said Thorndyke, looking closely at the sketch.

"No. In fact, I know nothing about him, excepting that he worked mostly with a small painting-knife, and usually wore kid gloves."

"You don't mean that he worked in gloves?" said Thorndyke.

"So I am told," said I. "I never saw him."

"It's very odd," said Thorndyke. "I have heard of men wearing a glove on the palette-hand to keep off the midges, and many men paint in gloves in exceptionally cold weather. But this sketch seems to have been painted in the summer."

"I suppose," said I, "the midges don't confine their attentions to the palette-hand. And after all, to a man who worked entirely with the knife, a glove wouldn't be really in the way."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "that is true." He looked closely at the sketch, and even took out his pocket lens to help his vision, which seemed almost unnecessary. It appeared that he was as much interested in the unknown artist's peculiar technique as was my friend, Miss Sylvia Vyne. "By the way," said he, when he had resumed his seat at the table, "you were telling me about some kind of gold trinket that you had picked up at the foot of the fence. Shall we have a look at it?"

I fetched the little gold object from the dispatch box in which I had locked it up, and handed it to him. He turned it over in his fingers, read the letters that were engraved on it, and examined the little piece of silk cord that was attached to one ring. "There is no doubt," said he, "as to the nature of this object, nor of its connection with the dead man. This is evidently a reliquary, and these initials engraved upon it bear out exactly your description of the body. S.V.D.P. evidently means St. Vincent de Paul, who, as you probably know, was a saint who was distinguished for his works of charity. You have mentioned that the dead man wore a Roman collar, with a narrow, dark stripe up the front. That means that he was the lay-brother of some religious order, probably some philanthropic order, to whom St. Vincent de Paul would be an object of special devotion. The other letters, A.M.D.G., are the initials of the words *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*—the motto of the Society of Jesus. But as St. Vincent de Paul was not a Jesuit saint, the motto probably refers to the owner of the reliquary, who may have been a Jesuit or a friend of the Society. It was apparently attached—perhaps to the neck—by this silk cord, which seems to have been frayed nearly through, and probably broke when the body was drawn over the top of the fence."

"I suppose I ought to have shown it to the police," I said.

"I suppose you ought," he replied, "but, as you haven't, I think we had better say nothing about it now."

He handed it back to me, and I dropped it into my pocket, intending to return it presently to the dispatch box. A few minutes later, we sallied forth on our journey of exploration.

It is not necessary to describe this journey in detail since I have already taken the reader over the ground more than once. We went, of course, to the place where I had found the body and walked right through to Hampstead Lane. Then we returned, and reconstituted the circumstances of that eventful night, after which, I conducted Thorndyke to the place where I assumed that the body had been lifted over the fence. "I suppose," I said, "we must go round and pick up the track from the other side."

He looked up and down the lane and smiled. "Would your quondam professor lose your respect for ever, Jardine, if you saw him climb over a fence in a frock coat and a toppler?"

"No," I answered, "but it might look a little quaint if anyone else saw you."

"I think we will risk that," he said. "There is no one about, and I should rather like to try a little experiment. Would you mind if I hoisted you over the fence? You are something of an out-size, but then, so am I, too, which balances the conditions."

Of course I had no objection, and, when we had looked up and down the lane and listened to make sure that we had no observers, Thorndyke picked me up, with an ease that rather surprised me, and hoisted me above the level of the fence. "Is it all clear on the other side?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, "there's no one in sight."

"Then I want you to be quite passive," he said, and with this, he hoisted me up further until I hung with my own weight across the top of the fence. Leaving me hanging thus, he sprang up lightly, and, having got astride at the top, dropped down on the other side, when he once more took hold of me and drew me over. "It wasn't so very difficult," he said. "Of course, it would have been more so to a shorter man, but, on the other hand, it is extremely unlikely that the body was anything like your size and weight."

We now followed the track up to the wood, which we entered by an opening in the fence, through which I assumed that the murderer had probably passed. I conducted Thorndyke by the nearest route to the boat-house, and, when he had thoroughly examined the place and made notes of the points that appeared to interest him, I showed him the way out by the turnstile.

It was here when we came in sight of the cottage that I bethought me of my promise to Miss Vyne, and somewhat sheepishly explained the matter to Thorndyke. "It won't take me a minute to go in and sneak the things," I said apologetically, and was proposing that he should walk on slowly, when he interrupted me.

"I'll come in with you," said he. "There may be something else to filch. Besides, I am rather partial to empty houses. There is something quite interesting, I think, in looking over the traces of recent occupation, and speculating on the personality and habits of the late occupiers. Don't you find it so?"

I said "Yes," truthfully enough, for it was a feeling of this kind that had first led me to look over the cottage. But my interest was nothing to Thorndyke's; for no sooner had I let him in at the front door, than he began to browse about

through the empty rooms and passages, for all the world like a cat that has just been taken to a new house. "This was evidently the studio," he remarked, as we entered the room from which I had taken the canvas, "he doesn't seem to have had much of an outfit, as he appears to have worked on his sketching-easel; you can see the indentations made by the toe-points, and there are no marks of the castors of a studio easel. You notice, too, that he sat on a camp-stool to work."

It did not appear to me to matter very much what he had sat on, but I kept this opinion to myself and watched Thorndyke curiously as he picked up the empty paint tubes and scrutinized them one after the other. His inquisitiveness filled me with amused astonishment. He turned out the rubbish box completely, and having looked over every inch of the discarded canvases, he began systematically to examine, one by one, the pieces of paper on which the late resident had wiped his palette-knife.

Having rolled up and pocketed the waste canvases, I expressed myself as ready to depart. "If you're not in a hurry," said Thorndyke, "I should like to look over the rest of the premises."

He spoke as though we were inspecting some museum or exhibition, and, indeed, his interest and attention, as he wandered from room to room, were greater than that of the majority of visitors to a public gallery. He even insisted on visiting the little stable and coachhouse, and when he had explored them both, ascended the rickety steps to the loft over the latter. "I suppose," said I, "this was the lumber room or store. Judging by the quantity of straw it would seem as if some cases had been unpacked here."

"Probably," agreed Thorndyke. "In fact, you can see where the cases have been dragged along, and also, by that smooth indented line, where some heavy metallic object has been slid along the floor. Perhaps if we look over the straw, we may be able to judge what those cases contained."

It didn't seem to me to matter a brass farthing what they contained, but again I made no remark; and together we moved the great mass of straw, almost handful by handful, from one end of the loft to the other, while Thorndyke, not only examined the straw but even closely scrutinized the floor on which it lay.

As far as I could see, all this minute and apparently purposeless searching was entirely without result, until we were in the act of removing the last armful of straw from the corner; and even then the object that came to light did not appear a very remarkable one under the circumstances, though Thorndyke seemed to find what appeared to me a most unreasonable interest in it. The object was a pair of canvas-pliers, which Thorndyke picked up almost eagerly and examined with profound attention. "What do you make of that, Jardine?" he asked, at length, handing the implement to me.

"It's a pair of canvas-pliers," I replied.

"Obviously," he rejoined, "but what do you suppose they have been used for?"

I opined that they had been used for straining canvases, that being their manifest function. "But," objected Thorndyke, "he would hardly have strained his canvases up here. Besides, you will notice that they have, in fact, been used for something else. You observe that the handles are slightly bent, as if something had been held with great force, and if you look at the jaws, you will see that that something was a metallic object about three quarters of an inch wide with sharp corners. Now, what do you make of that?"

I looked at the pliers, inwardly reflecting that I didn't care twopence what the object was, and finally said that I would give it up. "The problem does not interest you keenly," Thorndyke remarked with a smile; "and yet it ought to, you know. However, we may consider the matter on some future occasion. Meanwhile, I shall follow your pernicious example and purloin the pliers."

His interest in this complete stranger appeared to me very singular, and it seemed for the moment to have displaced that in the mysterious case which was the object of his visit to me. "A strange, vagabond sort of man that artist must have been," he remarked, as we walked home across the Heath, "but I suppose one picks up vagabond habits in travelling about the world."

"Do you gather that he had travelled much, then?" I asked.

"He appears to have visited New York, Brussels and Florence, which is a selection suggesting other travels."

I was wondering vaguely how Thorndyke had arrived at these facts, and was indeed about to ask him, when he suddenly changed the subject by saying: "I suppose, Jardine, you don't wander about this place alone at night?"

"I do sometimes," I replied.

"Then I shouldn't," he said; "you must remember that a very determined attempt has been made on your life, and it would be unreasonable to suppose that it was made without some purpose. But that purpose is still unaccomplished. You don't know who your enemy is, and, consequently, can take no precautions against him excepting by keeping away from solitary places. It is an uncomfortable thought, but at present, you have to remember that any chance stranger may be an intending murderer. So be on your guard."

I promised to bear his warning in mind, though I must confess his language seemed to me rather exaggerated; and so we walked on, chatting about various matters until we arrived at my lodgings.

Thorndyke was easily persuaded to come in and have tea with me, and while we were waiting for its arrival, he renewed



his examination of the sketch upon the wall.

"Aren't you going to have this strained on a stretcher?" he asked.

I replied "yes," and that I intended to take it with me the next time I went into town.

"Let me take it for you," said Thorndyke. "I should like to show it to Jervis to illustrate the route that we have marked on the map. Then I can have it left at any place that you like."

I mentioned the name of an artist's-colourman in the Hampstead Road, and, unpinning the canvas, rolled it up and handed it to him.

He took it from me and, rolling it up methodically and carefully, bestowed it in his breast pocket. Then he brought forth the map, and, as we drank our tea and talked over our investigations, he checked our route on it and marked the position of the cottage. Shortly after tea he took his leave, and I then occupied an agreeable half-hour in composing a letter to Miss Vyne to accompany the loot from the deserted house.

---

## X — THE UNHEEDED WARNING

THORNDYKE'S warning, so emphatically expressed, ought to have been alike unnecessary and effective. As a matter of fact, it was neither. I suppose that to a young man, not naturally timorous, the idea of a constantly lurking danger amidst the prosaic conditions of modern civilization is one that is not readily accepted. At any rate, the fact is that I continued to walk abroad by day and by night with as much unconcern as if nothing unusual had ever befallen me. It was not that the recollection of those horrible hours in the poisoned cellar had in any way faded. That incident I could never forget. But I think, that in the back of my mind, there still lingered the idea of a homicidal lunatic; though that idea had been so scornfully rejected by Thorndyke.

But before I describe the amazing experience by which I once more came within a hair's breadth of sudden and violent death, I must refer to another incident; not because it seemed to be connected with that alarming occurrence, but because it came first in the order of time, and had its own significance later.

It was a couple of days after Thorndyke's visit that I walked down the Hampstead Road with the intention of fetching the sketch from the artist's-colourman's. The shop was within a few hundred yards of Jacob Street, and as I crossed the end of that street, I was just considering whether I ought to look in on Batson, when a lady bowed to me and made as if she would stop. It was Mrs. Samway. Of course, I stopped and shook hands, and while I was making the usual polite enquiries, I felt myself once more impressed with the unusualness of the woman. Even in her dress she was unlike other women, though not in the least eccentric or bizarre. At present, she was clothed from head to foot in black; but a scarlet bird's wing in the coquettish little velvet toque, and a scarlet bow at her throat, gave an effect of colour that, unusual as it was, harmonized completely and naturally with her jet-black hair and her strange, un-English beauty. "So you haven't started for Paris yet," I remarked.

"No," she replied, "my husband has gone and may, perhaps, come back. At any rate, I am staying in England for the present."

"Then I may possibly have the pleasure of seeing you again," I said, and she graciously replied that she hoped it might be so, as we shook hands and parted. A few minutes later, in the artist's-colourman's shop, I had another chance meeting and a more agreeable one. The proprietor had just produced the sketch, now greatly improved in appearance by being strained on a stretcher, when the glass door opened and a young lady entered the shop. Imagine my surprise when that young lady turned out to be none other than Miss Vyne. "Well," I exclaimed, as we mutually recognized each other, "what an extraordinary coincidence!"

"I don't see that it is very extraordinary," she replied. "Most of the Hampstead people come here because it's the nearest place where you can get proper artist's materials. Is that the sketch you were telling me about?"

"Yes," I answered, "and it's the pick of the loot. But it isn't too late to alter your mind. Say the word and it's yours."

"Well," she replied, with a smile, "I am not going to say the word, but I want to thank you for rescuing those other treasures for me."

She had, as a matter of fact, already thanked me in a very pretty little note, but I was not averse to her mentioning the subject again. We stepped back to the door, and in the brighter light, looked at the sketch together. "It's a pity," she remarked, "that he handled it so carelessly before the paint was hard. Those fingermarks wouldn't matter a bit on a brush-painted surface; but on the smooth knife-surface they are rather a disfigurement."

She placed the sketch in my hand, and I backed nearer to the glass door to get a better light. Happening to glance up, I noticed that a sudden and very curious change had come over her; a look of haughty displeasure and even anger, apparently directed at somebody or something outside the shop.

For a few moments I took no notice; then, half-unconsciously, I looked round just as some person moved away from the door. I looked once more at Miss Vyne. She was quite unmistakably angry. Her cheeks were flushed and there was a resentful light in her eyes that gave her an expression quite new to me.

I suppose she caught my enquiring glance for she exclaimed: "Did you see that woman? I never heard of such impertinence in my life."

"What did she do?" I asked.

"She came right up to the doorway and looked over your shoulder; and then stared at me in the most singular and insolent manner. I could have slapped her face."

"Not through the glass door," I suggested; on which her anger subsided in a ripple of laughter as quickly as it had arisen. "What was this objectionable person like?" I asked. "Was she a charwoman or a slavey?"

"Oh, not at all," replied Miss Vyne. "Quite a ladylike looking person, except for her manners. Rather tastefully dressed, too; a black and vermilion scheme of colour."

The reply startled me a little. "Had she a scarlet bird's wing in her hat?" I asked.

"Yes, and a scarlet bow at her throat. I hope you are not going to say that you know her."

It was a rather delicate situation. I could not actually disavow the acquaintance, but I did not feel inclined to have a black and scarlet fly introduced into the sweet-smelling ointment of my intercourse with the fair Sylvia; so I explained with great care the exact scope of the acquaintance; on which Miss Vyne remarked that "she supposed that doctors could not be held responsible for the people they knew"; and proceeded to make her purchases.

I did not take the sketch away with me after all, for it occurred to me that I might as well leave it to be framed; but instead, I carried forth with me the parcel containing Miss Vyne's purchases. I had not far to carry it, for she was returning at once to Hampstead. I was tempted to return, for the sake of enjoying a chat with her, too, but discreetly withstood the temptation, and, having escorted her to a tram, I turned my face south and walked away at a leisurely pace into the jaws of an all-unsuspected danger.

It was some hours, however, before anything remarkable happened.

My immediate objective was Lincoln's Inn Fields, where, at the College of Surgeons, a lecture on Epidermic Appendages was to be delivered by the Hunterian Professor; and there, in the college theatre, I spent a delightful hour while the genial professor took his hearers with him on a personally-conducted tour among structures that ranged from the plumage of the sun-bird to the dermal plates of the crocodile, from the silken locks of beauty to the quills of the porcupine or the mail of the armadillo.

When I came out, the dusk was just closing in. It was a slightly foggy evening. The last glow of the sunset in the western sky lighted up the haze into a rosy back-ground, against which the shadowy buildings were relieved in shapes of cloudy grey. It was a lovely effect; an effect such as London alone can show, and fugitive as a breath on a mirror. As I sauntered westward up the Strand I presently bethought me that, before the light should have faded completely, I would see how the effect looked by the riverside. Walking quickly down Buckingham Street, I came out on to the Embankment and looked into the west. But the light was nearly gone, the shadows of evening were closing in fast, and the fog, creeping up the river, ushered in the night.

I leaned on the parapet and watched the last glimmer die away; watched the darkness deepen on the river and the faint lights on the barges moored on the southern shore at first twinkle pallidly and then fade out as the fog thickened. I lit my pipe and looked down at the dark water swirling past, and gradually fell into a train of half-dreamy meditation.

Not for the first time since the occurrence, my thoughts turned to Mrs. Samway. Why had she stared at Miss Vyne in that singular manner—if indeed it was really Mrs. Samway, and if she really had stared in the manner alleged? It was an odd affair; but, after all, it did not very much matter. And with this, my thoughts rambled off in a new direction.

It was to the cottage on the Heath that they wandered this time, and the picture of Thorndyke's cat-like prowlings and prying arose before me. That was very queer, too. Was it possible that this learned and astute man habitually went about eagerly probing into the personal habits and trivial actions of chance strangers? The apparently puerile inquisitiveness that he had displayed seemed totally out of character with all that I knew about the man; but then it often happens that the private life of public men develops personal traits that are surprising and disappointing to those who have only known them in connection with their public activities.

I had become so completely immersed in my thoughts as to be almost oblivious of what was happening around. Indeed, there was mighty little happening. The gathering darkness and the thin fog limited my view to a few square yards. Now and again, a muffled hoot from the lower river spoke of life and movement on the water, and at long intervals an occasional wayfarer would pass along the pavement behind me.

My reflections had reached the point recorded above, when a person emerged from the obscurity near to the parapet and approached as if to pass close behind me. I only caught the dusky shape indistinctly with the tail of my eye; so indistinctly that I could not say certainly whether it was that of a man or a woman, for I was still gazing down at the dark water. He or she approached quietly, swerving towards me across the wide pavement, and was in the act of passing quite close to me when the thing happened. Of a sudden, I felt my knees clasped in a powerful grip, and at the same moment I was lifted off my feet and thrust forward over the parapet. Instinctively, I clutched at the stonework, but its flat surface offered nothing for my fingers to grasp. Then my assailant let go, and the next instant I plunged head-first into the icy water.

It was fortunate for me that the tide was nearly full, else must I, almost certainly, have broken my neck. As it was, my

head struck on the firm mud at the bottom with such force, that for some moments I was half-stunned. Nevertheless, I must have struck out automatically, for when I began to recover my wits my head was above water, and I was swimming as actively as my clinging garments would let me. But, apparently, in those moments of dazed semi-consciousness, I must have struck out towards the middle of the river, for now I was encompassed by a murky void in which nothing was visible save one or two reddish, luminous patches—presumably, the lamps on the Embankment.

Towards one of these I turned and struck out vigorously. The water was desperately cold, and hampered as I was with my clothing, I felt that I should not be able to keep myself afloat very long, strong swimmer as I was. The dim, red nebula of the unseen lamps moved past slowly, showing me that I was drifting down on the ebb-tide. Before me, I knew, was the long, inhospitable wall of the Embankment. True, there were some steps, if I was not mistaken, by Cleopatra's Needle, but the question was whether I had not drifted past them already. I had given one or two lusty shouts as soon as I had cleared my chest of the mouthful of water that I got in my first plunge, and I was now letting off another yell, when, out of the darkness behind me, came a prolonged hoot.

I looked round quickly in the direction whence the sound had come, and then became aware of the churning of a propeller. Almost at the same moment, a dim, ruddy smudge of light broke through the darkness over the river, and began rapidly to brighten until it took the form of the twin mast-head lights of a tug with a vessel in tow.

For a moment I hesitated. My first impulse was to avoid the danger of being run down; but suddenly I altered my mind. For, as the tug bore down on me, with a roaring of water and a loud clank of machinery, I saw that she was not absolutely end-on, for her green starboard light, which had been for a moment visible, suddenly disappeared. Of what happened during the next few moments, I have but a confused recollection.

A splashing and churning, with the loud wash of water, the throb of the engines and a glare of light which blazed before my eyes for a moment, to vanish in an instant into pitchy darkness; a huge, black object, felt rather than seen to sweep past before me; and then my hand clutched a wooden projection, and I felt myself dragged violently through the water. The projection that I had laid hold of was the lee-board of a sailing barge, as I discovered when the rush of the water banged me against it; and much ado I had to hold on, with the water dragging at me and spouting up over my head. But, with what strength was left to me, I reached out with the other hand and clawed hold of the dwarf bulwark over which the water was lapping; and so, with a last violent effort, contrived to drag myself up on to the deck.

I essayed to stand up, and did, in fact, succeed, but as my sensations suggested those of a leaden statue with india-rubber legs, I sat down hastily on the hatch-cover to avoid going overboard. And there I sat for a minute or two leaning against the lowered mast with my teeth chattering, and seeming to grow more and more chilled and exhausted every moment.

Numb as my mind was by this time, my medical instincts told me that this would not do. Somehow I must get warmth and shelter, for I might as well have been drowned at once as die of exposure and cold. I looked round lethargically. There was no sign of any-one on board. Another barge was towing alongside, and the bows of two others were dimly visible astern. On those rear-most barges there must certainly have been someone steering. But they were inaccessible to me, and I had not the energy to shout; nor could anyone have got across to me if I had.

Suddenly my eye fell on the little chimney that rose by the cabin scuttle. A thin stream of smoke issued from it and blew away astern. Perhaps, then, the crew were below, or, if not, at least there was a fire. I crawled aft, holding on with my hands, and, pushing back the scuttle, backed cautiously down the ladder closing the scuttle after me.

There seemed to be nobody below, and the cabin was in darkness, save for the glow of the fire that burned in the little grate. The air was probably warm, though to me it felt icy; but, at least, there was no wind to play on my wet clothes.

I sat down on the locker as near to the fire as I could, and rested my elbows on the little triangular table. Chilled to the marrow and utterly exhausted, I was sensible of a growing desire to sleep; a desire which I repressed, as I believed, with noble resolution. But apparently my efforts in this respect were not so successful as I had supposed, for the next incident opened with suspicious suddenness.

A vigorous shake, which dislodged one of my elbows, introduced the episode.

I looked up, blinking sulkily, at a bright and most objectionably dazzling light, which further inspection showed to proceed from a hurricane lamp held by a rather dirty hand. "Here, wake up, mister," said a hoarse voice, "this here ain't the Hotel Cecil, you know."

I sat up and stared vaguely at the speaker, or at least, the holder of the lamp, but could not think of anything appropriate to say. Then another voice emerged from nowhere in particular. "E's been overboard, that's what e's been."

"Any fool can see that," said the first man; "but the question is, who is he and what's he a-doin' in my cabin? Who are yer, mister?"

Now, that would seem to be a perfectly simple and straightforward question. But it is not so simple as it seems. To a complete stranger, the bare mention of a name is unilluminating. Further explanations are needed. And at that moment I did not feel equal to explanations. Besides, I was not so very clear on the subject myself. Consequently, I preserved a silence which, perhaps, was wooden rather than golden. "D'ye 'ear?" persisted the first man. "I'm a-arskin' you a question."

"What'a the good of arskin' questions of a man what's been a-rammin' 'is crumpet against the bottom of the river?" protested the other man.

“What d’ye mean?” demanded the first mariner.

“Can’t you see?” retorted the other, “as ‘e’s took the ground ‘ard? Look at ‘is ‘ed.”

Here the first mariner—Lucifer, or lamp-bearer—wiped his hand over the top of my head and then examined the tip of his forefinger critically as though it were the arming of a deep-sea lead. “You’re right, Abel,” said he. “That’s mud off the bottom, that is. He must have took a regular header. Sooicide perhaps, and altered his mind. Found it a bit damper’n what he expected. Put the kittle on, Abe.”

From this moment, the two mariners treated me as if I had been a lay-figure. Silently, they peeled off my wet clothes, and dried my skin with vigorous friction as if it had been a wet deck. They not only asked no further questions, but when I would have spoken they urged me to economize my wind. They inducted me into stiff and hairy garments of uncouth aspect, and finally, Abe set before me on the table a large earthenware mug, the contents of which steamed and diffused through the cabin a strong odour of Dutch gin. “You git outside that, mister,” said the luminiferous mariner (who turned out subsequently to be the skipper), “and then you’d best turn in.”

The treatment was not strictly orthodox, but I obeyed without demur. Most people would have done the same under the circumstances. But the process of “getting outside” it took time, for the grog was boiling hot and had been brewed with a flexible wrist. By the time that I had emptied the mug I was not only revived, but (so far as my memory serves) rather disposed to be garrulously explanatory and facetious. I even felt a slight inclination to sing. But my friends would stand no nonsense. As soon as the mug was fairly empty, they bundled me, neck and crop, into a sort of elongated cupboard and proceeded to pile on me untold quantities of textile fabrics, including a complete suit of oilskins. Then they commanded me to go to sleep; which I believe I must have done almost instantly.

---

## XI — A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS

AWAKENING in a strange place is always a memorable experience; especially to the young, in whom the capacity for novel sensations has not yet been exhausted by repetition. When I emerged, somewhat gradually, from the unconsciousness of sleep, my first impressions concerned themselves with the unusual appearance of the bedroom wall and its remarkable proximity to my nose. I further noticed that the bedstead had become inexplicably tilted and that the house appeared to be swaying; and as I mused on these phenomena with the vagueness of the half-awake, a loud voice, proceeding apparently from the floor above, roared out the mystic words, "Lee-O!" whereupon there ensued a sound like the shaking of colossal table cloths and the loud clanking of chains, and my bedstead took a sharp tilt to the opposite side. This roused me pretty completely, and turning over in the bunk, I looked out into the barge's cabin.

It was broad daylight and evidently not early, for a square patch of sunlight crept to and fro on the little table, whence presently it slipped down to the floor and slithered about unsteadily, as if Phoebus had overdone his morning dram and could not drive his chariot straight. I watched it lazily for some time and then, becoming conscious of a vacancy within, crept out from under the mountain of bedclothes and made my way to the ladder.

As I put my head through the companion hatch, a man who stood at the wheel regarded me stolidly. "So you've woke up, have yer?" said he. "Thought you was going right round the clock. Abel! he's woke up. Tell young Ted to stand by with them heggs and that there 'addick."

Here Abel looked round from behind the luff of the mainsail, and having verified the statement, conveyed the order to some invisible person in the fore-peak. Then he came aft with an obvious air of business. The time for explanations had arrived.

Accordingly I proceeded to "pitch them my yarn," as they expressed it; to which they listened with polite attention and manifest disappointment, clearly regarding the story as a fabrication from beginning to end. And no wonder. The whole affair was utterly incredible even to me; to them it must have seemed sheer nonsense. Their own verdict of "sooicide" during very temporary insanity with sudden mental recovery, under the influence of cold water, was so much more rational. Not that they obtruded their views. They listened patiently and said nothing; and nothing that they could have said could have been more expressive.

Meanwhile I looked about me with no little surprise. Some miles away to the south lay a stretch of low land, faint and grey, with a single salient object, apparently a church with two spires. In every other direction was the unbroken sea horizon. "You seem to have made a pretty good passage," I remarked.

"We've had sixteen hours to do it in," replied the skipper, "and spring tides and a nice bit of breeze. If it 'ud only hold—which I'm afraid it won't—we'd be in Folkestone Harbour this time to-morrow, or even sooner. Folkestone be much out of your way?"

I smiled at the artlessness of the question. It was undeniable that the route from Charing Cross to Hampstead by way of Folkestone was slightly indirect. But there was no need to insist on the fact. My hospitable friends had acted for the best and their prudence was justified by the result; for here I was, not a whit the worse for my ducking save that I badly wanted a bath. "Folkestone will suit me quite well," I replied, "if there is enough money left in my pockets to pay my fare home."

"That's all right," said the skipper. "I cleared out your pockets myself. You'll find the things in a mug in the starboard locker. Better overhaul 'em when you go below and see if you've dropped anything. Here comes young Ted with your grub."

As he spoke the apprentice rose through the fore-hatch like a stage apparition—if one can imagine an apparition burdened with a tin tea-pot, two "heggs" and an "addick"—and came grinning along the weather side-deck, to vanish through the cabin hatchway. I followed gleefully, and, almost before young Ted had finished the somewhat informal table arrangements, fell to on the food with voracious joy. "If you want any more eggs or anything," said the apprentice, "all you've got to do is just to touch the electric bell and the waiter'll come and take your orders," and having delivered this delicate shaft of irony he presented me with an excellent back view of a pair of brown dreadnoughts as he retired up the ladder.

As I consumed the rough but excellent breakfast I reflected on the strange events that had placed me in my present odd situation. For the first time, I began fairly to realize that I was in some way involved in a nexus of circumstances that I did not in the least understand. I had an enemy; a vindictive enemy, too, in whose eyes mere human life was a thing of no account. But who could he be? I knew of no one on whom I had ever inflicted the smallest injury. I bore no man any grudge and had never to my knowledge had unfriendly dealings with any human creature. Was this inveterate enemy of mine anyone whom I knew? Or was he some stranger whose path I had crossed without knowing it, and whom I should not recognize even if I saw him?

This last supposition was highly disquieting, especially as it seemed rather probable; for if my enemy was unknown to me, what precautions could I take?

Then, again, there was the question! What was the occasion of this extraordinary vendetta? What had I done to this man that he should pursue me with such deadly purpose? As to Jervis's suggestion, that I had seen something at the Samways' house that I was not wanted to see, there was nothing in it; for, as a matter of fact, I had seen nothing. There was nothing to see. The man Maddock was certainly dead. As to what he died of, that was Batson's affair; but even in that there was no

sign of anything suspicious. The man himself had consulted Batson, and had thought so badly of himself that he had made his will in Batson's presence. The patient himself was fully aware of his serious condition; it was only Batson, with his eternal hurry and bustle and his defective eyesight, who had missed observing it. The only circumstance that supported Jervis's view was that the acts of violence seemed to be connected with the locality of Batson's house.

Of course there remained the mystery of the dead priest or lay-brother. But with that these attempts seemed to have no connection. Nor was there any reason why the murderer should pursue me. I had seen the body, it is true; but nobody believed me and no proceedings were being taken. Nor could I have identified the murderer if I had been confronted with him. Clearly, he had nothing to fear from me.

From the causes of my present predicament I passed to the immediate future. I should have to get back from Folkestone, and I ought to send a telegram to my landlady, Mrs. Blunt, who would probably be in a deuce of a twitter about me. I raised the lid of the locker, and, reaching out the big earthenware mug, emptied its contents on the table. All my portable property seemed to be there, including the little gold reliquary, which I had carelessly carried in my pocket ever since I had shown it to Thorndyke. My available funds were some four or five pounds; amply sufficient to get me home and to discharge my liability to the skipper as well. I swept the things back into the mug, which I returned to the locker, and having cut myself another thick slice of bread, proceeded with the largest breakfast that I have ever eaten.

The skipper's forebodings were justified by the course of events. When I came on deck the breeze had died down to a mere faint breath, hardly sufficient to keep the big red main-sail asleep—as the pretty old nautical phrase has it. The skipper was still at the wheel and Abel was anxiously taking soundings with a hand-lead. "You won't do it, Bill," said the latter, coiling up the lead-line with an air of finality, "this 'ere breeze is a-petering right out."

The skipper said nothing, but stared gloomily at the land which was now right ahead and much nearer than when I had last looked; and from the land his eye travelled to a sand-bank from which rose a tall post at the top of which was an inverted cone. "Ought to a-gone about a bit sooner, Bill," pursued Abel; whereupon the skipper turned on him fiercely.

"What's the good o' saying that now!" he demanded. "If you'd a-told me the wind was going to drop, I a-gone about sooner. What water is there?"

"Five fathom here," replied Abel; "that means one and a quarter on the Woolpack. You'd best shove her nose round now, Bill."

"Oh, all right!" retorted the skipper, "Lee-O! This is going to be an all-night job, this is," and with this gloomy prediction, he spun the wheel round viciously, and once more headed away from the land.

Prophecy appeared to be the skipper's speciality and, like most prophets, he tended to view the future with an unfavourable eye. Gradually the breeze died away into a dead calm, so that we had presently to let go the anchor to avoid drifting on to a great sand-bank which now lay between us and the land. And here we remained not only for the rest of the day and the succeeding night, as the skipper had promised, but throughout the whole of the next day and following night.

I have already remarked on the incalculable chances by which the course of a man's life is determined. Looking back now, I see that the skipper's little miscalculation and his failure to cross the Woolpack Shoal into the inshore channel, was an antecedent determining the most momentous consequences for me. For had the barge been becalmed in the inshore channel, I could, and should, have landed in the boat and returned home forthwith; and if I had, certain events would not have happened and my life might have run a very different course. As it was miles of sea and the great bank known as the Margate Sand, lay between me and the shore; whence I was committed to the wanderings and dallies of the barge as irrevocably as if we were crossing the Pacific.

We lay, then, in the Queen's Channel, outside Margate Sand, for two whole days and nights; during which time the skipper and Abel slept much and smoked more, and young Ted, having cleaned and dried my clothes, inducted me into the art of bottom-fishing. On the third day, a faint breath of breeze enabled us to crawl round the North Foreland, and the skipper having elected to pass outside the Goodwin, managed to get becalmed again in the neighbourhood of the East Goodwin Lightship. A little breeze at night enabled us to move on a few miles farther; and so we continued to crawl along at intervals, mainly on the tide, until nine o'clock in the morning of the fifth day, when we finally crawled into Folkestone Harbour.

As soon as the barge was brought up to a buoy, young Ted was detailed to put me ashore in the boat. The skipper and Abel had insisted on treating me as a guest, and I had perforce to accept the position. But young Ted had no such pride; and when I ran up the wooden steps by the old fish-market, I left him on the stage below, staring with an incredulous grin at a gold coin in his none-too-delicate palm.

I was not sorry to be landed in this unfashionable quarter of the town, for in spite of young Ted's efforts, my turn-out left much to be desired, especially in the matter of shirt-cuffs and collar, and I was, moreover, hatless and somewhat imperfectly shaved. Accordingly, I slunk inconspicuously past the market and the groups of lounging fishermen, and when I saw a well-dressed, lady-like woman preceding me into the little narrow street, known as the Stade, I slackened my pace so as not to overtake her. She sauntered along with a leisurely air as if she were waiting for something or somebody, and this and the fact that she carried a light canvas portmanteau and a rug, suggested to me that she was probably travelling by the cross-channel boat which was due to start presently.

Suddenly my attention was diverted from her by a loud chattering and a series of shouts. A small crowd of men and

women ran excitedly past the end of the little street. The clattering rapidly drew nearer; and then a horse, with a light van, swept round the corner and passing under an archway, advanced at a furious gallop. Evidently the horse had bolted and now, mad with terror, dashed forward with trailing reins, zigzagging erratically and making the van sway to and fro, so that it took up the whole of the narrow street. The few wayfarers darted into doorways and sheltered corners, and I was about to secure my own safety in a similar manner, when I noticed that the woman in front of me had apparently become petrified with terror, for she stood stock still, gazing helplessly at the approaching horse. It was no time for ceremony. The infuriated animal and the swaying van were thundering up the street like an insane Juggernaut. With a hasty apology, I seized the woman from behind and half-dragged, half-carried her to the opening of a little yard beside a sail-loft. And even then, I was hardly quick enough, for as the van roared past some projecting object struck me between the shoulders and sent me flying, face downwards, on to a pile of tarred drift-net.

I had had the presence of mind to let go, as I was struck, so that my fair protegee was not involved in my downfall; but in a moment, she was stooping over me, and with many expressions of concern, endeavouring to help me to rise. Beyond a thump in the back, however, I was not hurt in the least, but picked myself up, grinning and turned to reassure her. And then I really did get a shock; for as I turned, the woman gave a shriek and fell back on the steps of the sail-loft, gasping, and staring at me with an expression of the utmost astonishment and terror. I supposed the accident had upset her nerves; but to be sure, my own received, as I have said, a pretty severe shock. For the woman was Mrs. Samway.

We remained for a moment or two gazing at one another in mute astonishment. Then I recollected myself, and advanced to shake hands; but to my discomfiture, she shrank away from me and began to sob and laugh in an unmistakably hysterical fashion. I must confess that I was somewhat surprised at these manifestations in so robust a woman as Mrs. Samway. Unreasonably so, indeed, for all women-kind are more or less prone to hysteria; but whereas the normal woman tends to laugh and cry, the weaker vessels develop inexplicable diseases, with a tendency to social reform and emancipation.

I put on my best bedside manner, at once matter-of-fact and persuasive. "You seem quite upset," I said, "and all about nothing, for the poor beggar of a horse must be half a mile away by now."

"Yes," she answered shakily, "it's ridiculous of me, but it was so sudden and so—" here she laughed noisily, and as the laugh ended in a portentous sniff, I hastened to continue the conversation. "Yes, it was a bit of a facer to see that beast coming up the street as if it was Tottenham Corner. Why on earth didn't you get out of the way?"

"I am sure I don't know," she answered. "I seemed to be paralyzed and idiotic and—" here the laughter began again.

"Well," I interrupted cheerfully, "you didn't get rolled on those tarred nets, so that's something to be thankful for."

This was a rather unlucky shot, for the semblance of facetiousness started a most alarming train of giggles, interrupted by rather loud sobs; but at this point, a new curative influence made itself manifest. Two smack boys halted outside the opening and surveyed her with frank interest and pleased surprise. Simultaneously, an elderly mariner appeared at the door of the sail-loft, grasping a black bottle and a tea-cup, and rather shyly descending the steps, suggested that "perhaps a drop o' sperits might do the lady good."

Mrs. Samway bounced off the steps, her hitherto pale cheeks aflame with anger. "I am making a fool of myself," she exclaimed. "Let us go away from here."

She walked out into the street, and I, having thanked the old gentleman for his most efficacious remedy, followed. As soon as I caught her up, she turned on me quickly and held out her hand. "Good-bye, Dr. Jardine," she said, "and thank you so very much for risking your life for a—for a wretched giggling woman."

"Oh, you're not going to send me packing like this," I protested, "when we've hardly said good morning. Besides, you're not fit to be left. But you're not to begin laughing again," I added, threateningly, for an ominous twitching of her mouth seemed to herald a relapse, "or I shall go back and get that black bottle."

She shook her head impatiently, but without looking at me. "I would rather you went away, Dr. Jardine," she said in an agitated voice. "I would, really. I wish to be alone. Don't think me ungracious. I am really most grateful to you, but I would rather you left me now."

Of course there was nothing more to be said. She was not really ill or in need of assistance, and probably her instinct was right. Hysteria is not one of those affections which waste their sweetness on the desert air, I shook her hand cordially and, advising her to keep out of the way of stray vans and horses, once more pursued my way towards the town, meditating as I went, on the oddity of the whole affair. It was an astonishing coincidence that I should have run against this woman in this out of the way place. I had left her but a few days since apparently firmly rooted in the Hampstead Road, and now, behold, as I step ashore from the barge, she is almost the first person that I meet. And yet the coincidence, which had evidently hit her as hard as it had me, like most coincidences, tended to disappear on closer inspection. The only really odd feature was my own presence in Folkestone. As to Mrs. Samway, she had probably been sent for by her husband, and was crossing by the boat that was now due to start.

Her anxiety to get rid of me was more puzzling, until I suddenly remembered my bare head, my crumpled collar and generally raffish and disreputable appearance. The latter was, in fact, at this moment brought to my notice by a man, with whom, in my preoccupation, I collided; who first uttered an impatient exclamation and then, bestowing on me a quick stare of astonishment, muttered a hasty apology and hurried past. The incident emphasized the necessity for some reform,

and I mended my pace towards the region of shops in a very ferment of uncomfortable self-consciousness.

With the purchase of a new hat, a collar, a pair of cuffs, a neck-tie, a pair of gloves and a stick, some faint glimmer of self-respect revived in me. I was even conscious of a temptation to linger in Folkestone and spend a few hours by the sea; but a sense of duty, aided by a large, muddy stain on my coat, finally decided me to return to town at once. Accordingly, having sent off a telegram to my landlady and ascertained that a train left for London in about twenty minutes, I betook myself to the station.

There were comparatively few people travelling by this particular train; in fact, when I had established myself with the morning paper in the off-side corner seat of a smoking compartment, I began, with an Englishman's proverbial unsociability, to congratulate myself on the prospect of having the compartment to myself, when my hopes were dashed by the entrance of an elderly clergyman; who not only broke up my solitude, but aggravated the offence by quite unnecessarily seating himself opposite to me. I was almost tempted to move to another corner, for my length of leg gives an added value to space; but it seemed a rude thing to do; and as the train moved off at this moment, I resigned myself to the trifling discomfort.

My clerical friend was a somewhat uncommon-looking man, with a countenance at once strong and secretive; a rectangular, masterful face, with a bull-like dew-lap and a small, and very sharp, Roman nose. On further inspection, I decided that he was either a High-Church parson or a Roman Catholic priest. His proceedings seemed to favour the latter hypothesis, for the train was barely out of the station before he had whisked out of his pocket an ecclesiastical-looking volume, which he opened at a marked place, and instantly began to read. I watched him with inquisitive interest, for his manner of reading was very singular. There was something habitual, almost mechanical, about it, suggesting an allotted and familiar task, and a lack of concentration that suggested a corresponding lack of novelty in the matter. As he read, his lips moved, and now and again I caught a faint whisper, by which I gathered that he was reading rapidly; but the most singular phenomenon was, that when his eyes strayed out of the carriage window, as they did at frequent intervals, his lips went on sputtering with unabated rapidity. Quite suddenly he appeared to come to the end of a sort of literary measured mile, for even as his lips were still moving, he clapped in the book-mark, shut the volume, and returned it to his pocket with a curious air of businesslike finality.

As his eyes were no longer occupied with the book, my observations had to be suspended, and my attention was now turned to my own affairs. Putting my hand in my coat pocket for my pipe and pouch, I became aware of a state of confusion in the said pocket which I had already noticed when making my purchases. The fact is, that I had nearly come away from the barge without my portable property. It was only at the last moment that the skipper, remembering the mug, had fetched it hurriedly from the locker and shot its contents bodily into my coat pocket. The present seemed a good opportunity for distributing the various articles among their proper receptacles. Accordingly I turned out the whole pocketful on the seat by my side, and a remarkably miscellaneous collection they formed; comprising knives, pencils, match-box, keys, the minor implements of my craft, and various other objects, useful and useless, including the little gold reliquary.

My neighbour opposite was, I think, quite interested in my proceedings, though he kept up a dignified pretence of being entirely unaware of my existence. Only for a while, however. Suddenly he sat up, very wide awake, and slewing his head round, stared with undisguised intentness at my little collection. I guessed at once what it was that had attracted his attention. A cleric would not be thrilled by the sight of a clinical thermometer or an ophthalmoscope. It was the reliquary that had caught his eye. That was an article in his own line of business.

With deliberate mischief, I left the little bauble exposed to view as I very slowly and methodically conveyed the other things one by one, each to its established pocket. Last of all, I picked up the reliquary and held it irresolutely as if debating where I should stow it. And at this point His Reverence intervened, unable any longer to contain his curiosity. "Zat is a very remargable liddle opchect, sir," he said in excellent Anglo-German. "Might one bresume to ask vat it's use is?"

I handed the reliquary to him and he took it from me with ill-disguised eagerness. "I understand," said I, "that it is a reliquary. But you probably know more about such things than I do. I haven't opened it so I can't say what is inside."

He nodded gravely. "Zo! I am glad to hear you zay zat. Probably zere is inside some holy relic vich ought not to be touched egzepting by bious handts." He turned the case over, and, putting on a pair of spectacles—which he had not appeared to require for reading—closely scrutinized the inscriptions, and even the wisp of cord that remained attached to one of the rings. "You zay," he resumed without raising his eyes, "zat you understandt zat zis is a reliquary. Do you not zen know? Ze berson who gafe it to you, did he not tell you vat it gondained?"

"It wasn't given to me at all," I replied. "In fact, it isn't properly mine. I picked it up and am merely keeping it until I find the owner."

He pondered this statement with a degree of profundity that seemed rather out of proportion to its matter; and he continued to gaze at the reliquary, never once raising his eyes to mine. At length, after a considerable pause and a most unnecessary amount of reflection, he asked: "Might one ask, if you shall bardon my guriosity, vere you found zis liddle opchect?"

I hesitated before replying. My first, and natural, impulse was to tell him exactly where and under what circumstances I had found the "opchect." But the way in which my information had been received by the police had made me rather chary of offering confidences; besides which, I had half promised them not to talk about the affair. And, after all, it was no



business of this good gentleman's where I found it. My answer was, therefore, not very explicit. "I picked it up in a lane at Hampstead, near London."

"At Hampstead!" he repeated. "Zo! Zat would be a very good blace to find such sings. I mean," he added, hastily, "zere are many beople in zat blace and some of zem will be of ze old religion."

Now, this last remark was such palpable nonsense that it set me speculating on what he had intended to say, for it was obvious that he had altered his mind in the middle of the sentence and completed it with the first words that came to hand. However, as I could read no sense into it at all, I said that "perhaps he was right," which seemed an eminently safe rejoinder to an unintelligible statement.

When he had finished his minute examination of the reliquary, he handed it back to me with such evident reluctance that, if it had been mine, I should have been tempted to ask him to accept it. But it was not mine. I was only a trustee. So I made no remark, but watched him as he, very deliberately, took off his spectacles and returned them to their case, looking meanwhile, at the floor with an air of deep abstraction. He appeared to be thinking hard, and I was quite curious as to what his next remark would be. A considerable interval elapsed before he spoke again; but at last the remark came, in the form of a question, and very disappointing it was. "You are not berhaps very much interested in relics and reliquaries?"

As a matter of fact, I didn't care two straws for either the one or the other; but there was no need to put it as strongly as that. "We are apt," I replied, "to find a lack of interest in subjects of which we are ignorant." That was a fine sentence. It might have come straight out of Sandford and Merton.

"Zat is vat I sink, too," he rejoined. "Ve do not know; ve do not care. But zere is a very eggeilent liddle book vich egsplains all ze gustoms and zeremonies connected vid relics of ze zainte. I should like you to read zat book. Vill you bermit me to send you a gobby vich I haf?"

Of course I said I should be delighted. It was an outrageous falsehood, but what else could I say? "Zen," said he, "I shall haf great pleasure in zending it to you if you vill kindly tell me how I shall address it."

I presented him with my card, which he read very attentively before bestowing it in his pocket-book. "I see," he remarked, "zat you are a doctor of medicine. It is a fine brofession, if one does not too much vorget ze spiritual life in garing for zat of ze body."

In this I acquiesced vaguely, and the conversation drifted into detached commonplaces, finally petering out as we approached Paddock Wood; where my reverend acquaintance bought a newspaper and underwent a total eclipse behind it.

As soon as the train started again, I took up my own paper; and the very first glance at it gave me a shock of surprise that sent all other matters clean out of my mind. It was an advertisement in the column headed "Personal" that attracted my attention, an advertisement that commenced with the word "Missing," in large type, and went on to offer Two Hundred Pounds Reward: thus:—

**"MISSING. TWO HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.**

"Whereas, on the 14th inst., Dr. Humphrey Jardine disappeared from his home and his usual places of resort; the above reward will be paid to any person who shall give information as to his whereabouts, if alive, or the whereabouts of his body if he is dead. He was last seen at 12.20 pm on the above date in the Hampstead Road, and was then walking towards Euston Road. The missing man is about twenty-six years of age; is somewhat over six feet in height; of medium complexion; has brown hair, grey eyes, straight nose and a rather thin face, which is clean-shaved. He was wearing a dark tweed suit, and soft felt hat.

"Information should be given to Hector Brodribb, Esquire, 65, New Square, Lincoln's Inn, by whom the above reward will be paid."

Here was a pretty state of affairs: It seemed that while I was placidly taking events as they came; smoking the skipper's tobacco and bottom-fishing with young Ted; my escapade had been producing somewhere a most almighty splash. I read the advertisement again, with a self-conscious grin, and out of it there arose one or two rather curious questions. In the first place, who the deuce was Hector Brodribb? And what concern was I of his? And how came he to know that I was walking down Hampstead Road at 12.20 on the 14th inst.?

I felt very little doubt it was actually Thorndyke who was tweaking the strings of the Brodribbian puppet. But even this left the mystery unsolved. For how did Thorndyke know? This was only the fifth day after my disappearance, and it would seem that there had hardly been time for exhaustive enquiries.

Then another highly interesting fact emerged. The only person who had seen me walk away down Hampstead Road was Sylvia Vyne; whence it followed that Thorndyke, or the mysterious Brodribb, had in some way got into touch with her. And reflecting on this, the mechanism of the enquiry came into view. The connecting-link was, of course, the sketch. Thorndyke had, himself, left the canvas with Mr. Robinson, the artist's-colourman, and he must have called to enquire if I had collected it. Then, he would have been told of my meeting with Miss Vyne, and as she was a regular customer, Mr. Robinson would have been able to give him her address. It was all perfectly simple, the only remarkable feature being the extraordinary promptitude with which the inquiry had been carried out. Which went to show how much more clearly Thorndyke had realized the danger that surrounded me than I had myself.

These various reflections gave me full occupation during the remainder of the journey, extending themselves into

consideration of how I should act in the immediate future. My first duty was obviously to report myself to Thorndyke without delay; after which, I persuaded myself, it would be highly necessary for me personally to re-assure the fair, and, perhaps, anxious Sylvia. As to how this was to be managed, I was not quite clear, and in spite of the most profound cogitation, I had reached no conclusion when the train rumbled into Charing Cross Station.

---

## XII — MISS VYNE

AS I stepped out on to the platform with a valedictory bow to my reverend fellow-passenger, my irresolution came to an end and my duty became clear. I must, in common decency, report myself at once to Thorndyke, seeing that he had been at so much trouble on my account. His card, which he had given me, I had unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately, as it turned out—left on the mantelpiece at my lodgings; but I remembered that the address was King’s Bench Walk and assumed that I should have no difficulty in finding the house. Nor had I, for, as I entered the Temple by the Tudor Street gate—having overshot my mark on the Embankment—I was almost immediately confronted by a fine brick doorway surmounted by a handsome pediment and bearing legibly painted on its jamb, “First pair, Dr. Thorndyke.”

I ascended the “first pair” of stairs, which brought me to an open oak door, massive and iron-bound, and a closed inner door, on the brass knocker of which I executed a flourish that would have done credit to a Belgravian footman; whereupon the door opened and a small man of sedate and clerical aspect regarded me with an air of mild enquiry. “Is Dr. Thorndyke at home?” I asked. “No, sir. He is at the hospital.”

“Dr. Jervis?”

“Is watching a case in the Probate Court. Perhaps you would like to leave a message or write a note. A message in writing would be preferable.”

“I don’t know that it’s necessary,” said I. “My name is Jardine, and if you tell him that I called that will probably be enough.”

The little man gave me a quick, bird-like glance of obviously heightened interest. “If you are Dr. Humphrey Jardine,” said he, “I think a few explanatory words would be acceptable. The Doctor has been extremely uneasy about you. A short note and an appointment, either here or at the hospital, would be desirable.”

With this he stepped back, holding the door invitingly open, and I entered, wondering who the deuce this prim little cathedral dean might be, with his persuasive manners and his quaintly precise forms of speech. He placed a chair for me at the table, and, having furnished me with writing materials, stood a little way off, unobtrusively examining me as I wrote. I had finished the short letter, closed it up and addressed it, and was rising to go, when, almost automatically, I took out my watch and glanced at it. Of course it had stopped. “Can you tell me the time?” I asked.

My acquaintance drew out his own watch and replied deliberately: “Seventeen minutes and forty seconds past one.” He paused for a moment and then added: “I hope, sir, you have not got any water into your watch.”

“I’m afraid I have,” I replied, rather taken aback by the rapidity of his diagnosis. “But I’ll just wind it up to make sure.”

“Oh, don’t do that, sir!” he exclaimed. “Allow me to examine it before you disturb the movement.” He whipped out of his pocket a watchmaker’s eyeglass, which miraculously glued itself to his eye, and, having taken a brief glance at the opened watch, produced a minute pocket screw-driver and a sheet of paper; and, in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed to me, the paper was covered with the dismembered structures which had in their totality formed my timepiece. “It’s quite a small matter, sir,” was his report, as he rose from his inspection and pocketed his eye-glass. “Just a speck or two of rust. If you will take my watch for the present, I will have your own in going order by the next time you call.”

It seemed an odd transaction; but the little man’s manner, though quiet, was so decisive that I took his proffered watch, and, affixing it to my chain, thanked him for his kindness and departed, wondering if it was possible that this prim clerical little person could possibly be the “tame mechanic” of whom Thorndyke had spoken.

Travelling in London was comparatively slow in those days—which, perhaps, was none the worse for a near and pleasant suburb like Hampstead; it had turned half-past two when I let myself into my lodgings with a rather rusty key and almost literally, fell into the arms of Mrs. Blunt. I feared, for a moment, that she was going to kiss me. But that was a false alarm. What she actually did was to seize both my hands and burst into tears with such violence as to cover me with confusion and cause the servant maid to rise like a domestic, and highly inquisitive, apparition from the kitchen stairs. I pacified Mrs. Blunt as well as I could and shook hands heartily with the maid, who thereupon retired, much gratified, to the underworld, whence presently issued an odour suggestive of sacrificial rites, not entirely unconnected with fried onions, and accompanied by an agreeable hissing sound. “But wherever have you been all this time?” Mrs. Blunt asked, as she preceded me up the stairs wiping her eyes, “and why didn’t you send us a line just to say that you were all right?”

To this question I made a somewhat guarded answer in so far as the cause of my immersion in the river was concerned; otherwise I gave her a fairly correct account of my adventures. “Well, well,” was her comment, “I suppose it was all for the best, but I do think those sailors might have put you on shore somewhere. Dear me, what a time it has been. I couldn’t sleep at night for thinking of you, and what Susan and I have eaten between us wouldn’t have kept a sparrow alive. And Dr. Thorndyke, too, I’m sure he was very anxious and worried about you, though he is such a quiet, self-contained man that you can’t tell what he is thinking of. And Lord; what a lot of questions he do ask, to be sure!”

"By the way, how did he come to know that I was missing?"

"Why I told him, of course. When you didn't come home that night—which Susan and me sat up for you until three in the morning—I thought there must be something wrong, you being so regular in your habits; so next day, the very first thing, I took his card from your mantelpiece and down I went to his office and told him what had happened. He came up here that evening to see if you had come home, and he's been here every day since to enquire."

"Has he really?"

"Yes. In a hansom cab. Every single day. And so has the young lady."

"The young lady!" I exclaimed. "What young lady?"

Mrs. Blunt regarded me with something as nearly approaching a wink as can be imagined in association with an elderly female of sedate aspect. "Now," she protested slyly, "as if you didn't know! What young lady indeed! Why, Miss Vyne, to be sure; and a very sweet young lady she is, and talked to me just as simple and friendly as if she'd been an ordinary young woman."

"How do you know that she isn't an ordinary young woman?" I asked.

Mrs. Blunt was shocked. "Do you suppose, Mr. Jardine, sir," she demanded severely, "that I who have been a head parlour-maid in a county family where my poor husband was coachman, don't know a real gentlewoman when I meet one? You surprise me, sir."

I apologized hastily and suggested that, as so many kind enquiries had been made, the least I could do was to call and return thanks without delay. "Certainly, sir," Mrs. Blunt agreed; "but not until you have had your lunch. It's a small porterhouse steak," she added alluringly, being evidently suspicious of my intentions. The announcement, seconded by an appetizing whiff from below, reminded me that I was prodigiously sharp set, having tasted no food since I had come ashore at Folkestone, and put the grosser physiological needs of the body, for the moment, in the ascendant. But even as I was devouring the steak with voracious gusto, my mind occupied itself with plans for a strategic descent on the abode of the fair Sylvia and with speculations on the reception I should get; and the noise of water running into the bath formed a pleasing accompaniment to the final mouthfuls.

When I had bathed, shaved and attired myself in carefully selected garments, I set forth, as smart and spruce as the frog that would a-wooing go—saving the opera hat, which would have been inappropriate to the occasion. The distance to Sylvia's house was not great, and a pair of long and rapidly-moving legs consumed it to such purpose that it was still quite reasonable calling time when I opened the gate of "The Hawthorns" and gave a modest pull at the bell. My summons was answered by a rather foolish-looking maid, by whom I was informed that Miss Vyne was at home, and when I had given her my name—which she seemed disposed to confuse with that of a well-known edible fish—she ushered me down a passage to a room at the back of the house, and, opening the door, announced me—correctly, I was glad to note; whereupon I assumed an ingratiating smile and entered.

Now there is nothing more disconcerting than a total failure of agreement between anticipation and realization. Unconsciously, I had pictured to myself the easy-mannered, genial Sylvia, seated, perhaps, at an easel or table, working on one of her pictures, and had prepared myself for a reception quite simple, friendly and unembarrassing. Confidently and entirely at my ease, I walked in through the doorway; and there the pleasant vision faded, leaving me with the smile frozen on my face, staring in consternation at one of the most appalling old women that it has ever been my misfortune to encounter.

I am, in general, rather afraid of old women. They are, to my mind, a rather alarming class of creature; but the present specimen exceeded my wildest nightmares. It was not merely that she was seated unnaturally in the exact centre of the room and that she sat with unhuman immobility, moving no muscle and uttering no sound as I entered, though that was somewhat embarrassing. It was her strange, forbidding appearance that utterly shattered my self-possession and seemed to disturb the very marrow in my bones.

She was a most remarkable-looking person. An immense Roman nose, a mop of frizzy grey fringe and a lofty surmounting cap or head-dress of some kind, suggested that monstrous and unreal bird, the helmeted hornbill; and the bird-like character was heightened by her eyes, which were small and glittering and set in the midst of a multitude of radiating wrinkles.

To this most alarming person I made a low bow—and dropped my stick, of which the maid had neglected to relieve me and for which I had found no appointed receptacle. As I stooped hastily to pick it up, my hat slipped from my grasp, and, urged by the devil that possess disengaged hats, instantly rolled under a deep ottoman, whence I had to hook it out with the handle of my stick. I rose, perspiring with embarrassment, to confront that immovable figure, and found the glittering eyes fixed on me attentively but without any sign of expression of human emotion. Haltingly I essayed to stammer out an explanation of my visit. "Er—I have—er—called—" Here I paused to collect my ideas and the old lady watched me stonily without offering any remark; indeed no comment was needed on a statement so self-evidently true. After a brief and hideous silence I began again. "I—er—thought it desirable—er—and in fact necessary and—er—proper to call—er and—"

Here my ideas again petered out and a horrid silence ensued, amidst which I heard a still, emotionless voice murmur: "Yes. And you have accordingly called."

"Exactly," I agreed, grasping eagerly at the slenderest straw of suggestion. "I have called to—er—well, the fact is that my

—er—very remarkable absence seemed to call for some explanation, especially as certain enquiries—er—

At this point I stopped suddenly with a horrible doubt as to whether I was not saying more than was discreet; and the misgiving was intensified by that chilly, calm voice, framing the question: “Enquiries made personally?”

Now this was a facer. I seemed to have put my foot in it at the first lead off. Supposing Sylvia had said nothing about her little visits to Mrs. Blunt? It would never do to give her away to this inquisitorial old waxwork. I endeavoured to temporize. “Well,” I stammered, “not exactly made personally to me.”

“By letter, perhaps?” the voice suggested in the same even, impassive tone.

“Er—no. Not by letter.”

There was a short embarrassing pause, and then the old lady, as if summing up the case, said frigidly: “Not exactly personally and not by letter.”

I was so utterly confounded by her judicial manner, her immovable, expressionless face and the hypnotic quality of those glittering eyes, that for the moment I could think of nothing to say. “Don’t let me interrupt you,” said she after some seconds of agonized silence on my part; whereupon I pulled myself together and made a fresh start. “I should, perhaps, have explained that I have been unavoidably absent from home for some time, and, as I was unable to communicate with my friends, I have, I am afraid, caused them some anxiety. It was this that seemed to make it necessary for me to call and give an account of myself.”

She pondered awhile on this statement—if a graven image can be said to ponder—and at length enquired: “You spoke of your friends. Are any of them known to me?”

“Well,” I replied, “I was referring more particularly to your daughter.”

She continued to regard me fixedly, and, after a brief interval, rejoined: “You are referring to my daughter. But I do not recall the existence of any such person. I think you must be mistaken.”

It seemed extremely probable, and I hastened to amend the description. “I beg your pardon. I should have said Miss Vyne. But perhaps she is not at home.”

“You are evidently mistaken,” was the paralyzing reply. “I am Miss Vyne; and I need not add that I am at home.”

“But,” I demanded despairingly, “is there not another Miss Vyne?”

“There is not,” she answered. “But it is possible that you are referring to Miss Sylvia Vyne. Is that so?”

I replied sulkily that it was; and being somewhat nettled by this unnecessary and rather offensive hairsplitting, offered no further remark. How the conversation would have proceeded after this, I cannot even surmise. But it did not proceed at all, for the embarrassing silence was brought to an end by a very agreeable interruption. The door opened softly and for one moment Sylvia herself stood framed in the portal; then, with a little cry, she ran towards me with her hands held out impulsively and the prettiest smile of welcome. “So it is really you!” she exclaimed. “That silly little goose of a maid has only just told me you were here. I am glad to see you. When did you graciously please to descend from the clouds?”

“I arrived home this afternoon, and as soon as I had changed and had lunch I came here to report myself.”

“How nice of you,” said Sylvia. “I suppose you guessed how anxious we should be?”

“I didn’t presume to think that you would actually be anxious about me,” I replied, with a furtive eye on the waxwork, “though I knew that you had been kind enough to express an interest in my fate.”

“What a cold-bloodedly polite way to put it!” laughed Sylvia. “Express an interest,’ indeed! We were most dreadfully worried about you.”

To a somewhat friendless man like myself this sympathetic warmth was very delightful, and my pleasure was not appreciably damped when a chill, emotionless voice affirmed: “The use of the first person singular would, I think, be preferable.”

Sylvia turned on her aunt with mock ferocity. “Well, really!” she exclaimed. “You are a dreadful impostor, Mopsy, dear! Just listen to her, Dr. Jardine. And if you had only seen what a twitter she was in as the time went on and no news came!”

I gasped, and the hair seemed to stir on my scalp. Mopsy! The name was obviously not applied to me. But could it be—was it possible that such a name could be associated with that terrific old lady? It was inconceivable. It was positively profane! It was almost as if one should presume to address the Deity as “old chap.” I could hardly believe my ears.

I glanced at her nervously and caught her glittering eye; but the grotesque face was as immovable as everlasting granite, though, indeed, by some ventriloquial magic, the word “Rubbish” managed to disengage itself from her person.

“It isn’t rubbish,” retorted Sylvia. “It’s the plain truth. We were both worried to death about you. And no wonder. Dr. Thorndyke was very quiet and matter-of-fact, but there was no disguising his fear that something dreadful had happened to you. And then there was the advertisement in the papers. Did you see that? Oh, it’s nothing to grin about. You’ve given us all a nice fright; and me especially, because, of course, I naturally thought of that ruffian from whom you rescued me in the lane.”

“But he never saw me.”

"You don't know. He may have done. At any rate, you owe us an explanation; so, when the tea comes in you shall give us the true story of your adventures. I hope you've let Dr. Thorndyke know about your resurrection."

I reassured her on this point, and as the "goose of a maid" now brought in the tea, I proceeded to "pitch my yarn," as the skipper had expressed it, without those reservations that I had considered necessary in the case of Mrs. Blunt.

The old lady, having been unmasked by Sylvia, developed a slight tendency to thaw. She even condescended, in a rigid and effigean fashion, to consume bread and butter; a proceeding that seemed to me weirdly incongruous, as though one should steal into the British Museum in off hours and find the seated statue of Amenhotep the Third in the act of refreshing itself with a sandwich and a glass of beer. But I was less terrified of her now since I had gathered that a core of warm humanity was somewhere concealed within that grim exterior; and even though her little sparkling eyes were fixed on me immovably, I told my story to the end without flinching.

Sylvia listened to my narration with a rapt attention that greatly flattered my vanity and made me feel like a very Othello, and when I had finished, she regarded me for a while silently and with an air of speculation. "It's a queer affair," she said at length, "and there is a smack of mystery and romance about it that is rather refreshing in these commonplace days. But I don't like it. Adventure is all very well, but there seems to have been a deliberate attempt to make away with you; unless you think it may have been a piece of silly horse-play that went farther than it was meant to."

"That is quite possible," I replied untruthfully—for I didn't think anything of the sort, and only made this evasive answer to avoid raising other and more delicate issues.

"I hope that is the explanation," said Sylvia, "though it sounds rather a lame one. You would know if you had an enemy who might wish to get rid of you. I suppose you don't know of any such person?"

It was a rather awkward question, I didn't want to tell an untruth, but, on the other hand, I knew that Thorndyke would not wish to have my affairs discussed while his investigations were in progress; so I "hedged" once more, replying, quite truthfully, that I was not acquainted with anyone who bore me the slightest ill-will.

My adventures done with, the talk drifted into other channels and presently came round to the little crucifix that had been the occasion of Sylvia's disagreeable experience in the lane. In spite of my confusion, I had noticed, on first entering the room, that the old lady was wearing suspended from her neck, a small enamelled crucifix, and had instantly identified it and wondered not a little that she should be thus disporting herself in borrowed ornaments; but when Sylvia had arrived, behold, the original crucifix was hanging on its chain from her neck. From time to time during my recital my eyes had wandered from one to the other seeking some difference or variation but finding none, and at length my inquisitive glances caught the younger lady's attention. "I can see. Dr. Jardine," said she, "that you are eaten up with curiosity about the crucifix that my Aunt is wearing. Now confess. Aren't you?"

"I am," I admitted. "When I first came in I naturally thought it was yours. Is it a copy?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Vyne, the elder. "They are duplicates."

Sylvia laughed. "You'd better not talk about copies," said she. "My aunt has only acquired her treasure lately, and she is as proud of it as a peacock; aren't you, dear?"

"The sensations of a peacock," replied Miss Vyne, "are unknown to me. I am very gratified at possessing the ornament."

"Gratified indeed!" said Sylvia. "I consider such vanity most unsuitable to a person of your age. But they are very charming, and there is quite a little story attached to them. My father and a cousin of his—"

"By marriage," interposed Miss Vyne.

"You needn't insist on that," said Sylvia, "as if poor old Vitalia were a person to be ashamed of. Well, my father and this cousin were at a Jesuit school in Belgium—at Louvain, in fact—and among the teachers in the school was an Italian Jesuit named Giglioli. Now the respected Giggley—"

"—oli," interposed Miss Vyne in a severe voice.

"—oli," continued Sylvia, "had formerly been a goldsmith; and the Father Superior, with that keen eye to the main chance which you may have noticed among professed religious, furnished him with a little workshop and employed him in making monstrances, thuribles and church plate in general. It was he who made these two crucifixes; and, with the Father Superior's consent, he gave one to my father and the other to the cousin as parting gifts on their leaving school. As the boys were inseparable friends, the two crucifixes were made absolute duplicates of one another, with the single exception that each had the owner's name engraved on the back. When my poor father died his crucifix became mine, and a short time ago, his cousin—who is now getting an old man—took a fancy that he would like the two crucifixes to be together once more and gave his to my aunt. So here they are, after all these years, under one roof again."

As she finished speaking, she detached the crucifix from her neck and, having given it to me to examine, proceeded to remove its fellow from the neck of the elder lady—who not only submitted quite passively but seemed to be unaware of the transaction—and handed that to me also.

I laid them side by side in my palm and compared them, but could not detect the slightest difference between them. They were complete duplicates. Each was a Latin cross with trefoiled extremities, wrought from a single piece of gold and enriched with champlévé enamel. The body of the cross was filled with a ground of deep, translucent blue, from which the

figure stood out in rather low relief, and the space between each of the trefoils was occupied by a single Greek letter—Iota and Chi at the top and bottom respectively, and at the ends of the horizontal arm Alpha and Omega. On turning them over, I saw that the back of each bore an engraved inscription carried across the horizontal arm, that on Sylvia's reading: "A. M. ROBERTUS, D.G.," while that on the other read: "A. M. VITALIS, D.G."

"They are very charming little things," I said, as I returned them to Sylvia; "and it was a pretty idea of the old Jesuit to make them both alike for the two friends. I suppose he didn't make any more of them for his other pupils?"

"What makes you ask that?" demanded Sylvia.

"I am thinking of that man in the lane. He must have had some reason for claiming the crucifix as his, one would think; and as these are quite unlike any ordinary commercial jewellery, the suggestion is that the worthy Giglioli was tempted to repeat his successes. What do you think?"

"I think," said Miss Vyne, "that the suggestion is inadmissible. Father Giglioli was an artist, and an artist does not repeat himself."

"I am inclined to agree with my aunt," said Sylvia. "An artist does not care to repeat a design, excepting for a definite purpose, as in the case of these duplicates; especially when the thing designed is intended as a gift."

To this I gave a somewhat qualified assent, though I found the argument far from convincing; and, as I had made a very long visitation, especially for a first call, I now rose to depart. "I hope I may be allowed to come and see you again," I ventured to say as Miss Vyne raised a sort of semaphore arm to my extended hand. "I see no reason why you should not," she replied judicially. "You seem to be a well-disposed young man, though indiscreet. Good-afternoon."

I bowed deferentially and then, to my gratification, was escorted as far as the garden gate by Sylvia; who evidently wished to gather my impressions of her relative, for, as she let me out, she asked with a mischievous smile: "What do you think of my aunt, Dr. Jardine?"

"She is rather a terrifying old lady," I replied.

Sylvia giggled delightedly. "She does look an awful old griffin, doesn't she? But it's all nonsense, you know. She is really a dear old thing, and as soft as butter."

"Well," I said, "she conceals the fact most perfectly."

"She does. She is a most complete impostor. I'll tell you a secret, Dr. Jardine," Sylvia added in a mysterious whisper, as we shook hands over the gate; "she trades on her nose. I've told her so. Her nose is her fortune, and she plays it for all it's worth. Goodbye—or rather, *au revoir!* for you've promised to come and see us again."

With a bright little nod she turned and ran up the garden path, still chuckling softly at her joke; and I wended homewards, very well pleased with the circumstances of my visit, despite the soul-shaking incidents with which it had opened.

---

### XIII — A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

ON the following morning I betook myself to the hospital intending to call later in the day at Dr. Thorndyke's chambers; but that visit turned out to be unnecessary, for, as I ran my eye over the names on the attendance board in the entrance hall, I saw that Thorndyke was in the building, although it was not the day on which he lectured. I found him, as I had expected, in the museum and was greeted with a hearty grip of the hand and a welcome, the warmth of which gratified me exceedingly. "Well, Jardine," he said, "you've given us all a pretty fine shake up. I have never been more relieved in my life than I was when my man Polton gave me your note. But you seem to have had another fairly close shave. What a fellow you are, to be sure! You seem to be as tenacious of life as the proverbial cat."

"So that little archbishop is your man Polton, is he?"

"Yes; and a most remarkable man, Jardine, and simply invaluable to me, though he ought to be in a very different position. But I think he is quite happy with me—especially now that he has got your watch to experiment on. You will see that watch again some day, when he has rated it to half a second. And meanwhile let us go into the curator's room and reconstitute your adventures."

The curator's room was empty at the moment; empty, that is to say, so far as human denizens were concerned. Otherwise it was decidedly full; the usual wilderness of glass jars, sepulchral slate tanks, bones in all stages of preparation and unfinished specimens, being supplemented by that all-pervading, unforgettable odour peculiar to curator's rooms, compounded of alcohol and mortality, and suggesting a necropolis for deceased dipsomaniacs. Thorndyke seated himself on a well-polished stool by the work-bench, and, motioning me to another, bade me speak on. Which I did in exhaustive detail; giving him a minute history of my experiences from the time of my parting from Sylvia to the present moment, not omitting my encounter with Mrs. Samway and the clerical gentleman in the train.

He listened to my narrative in his usual silent, attentive fashion, making no comments and asking no questions until I had finished; when he cross-examined me on one or two points of detail. "With regard to Mrs. Samway," he asked, "did you gather that she was crossing by the Boulogne boat?"

"I inferred that she was, but she said nothing on the subject."

He nodded and then asked; "Do I understand that you never saw your assailant at all?"

"I never got the slightest glimpse of him; in fact I could not say whether the person who attacked me was a man or a woman excepting that the obvious strength and the method of attack suggest a man."

To this he made no reply, but sat a while absorbed in thought. It was evident that he was deeply interested in the affair, not only on my account but by reason of the curious problems that it offered for solution. Indeed, his next remark was to this effect. "It is a most singular case, Jardine," he said. "So much of it is perfectly clear, and yet so much more is unfathomable mystery. But just now, the speculative interest is overshadowed by the personal. I am rather doubtful as to what we ought to do. It almost looks as if you ought not to be at large."

"I hope, sir, you don't suggest shutting me up," I exclaimed with a grin.

"That was in my mind," he answered. "You are evidently in considerable danger, and you are not as cautious as you ought to be."

"I shall be mighty cautious after this experience," I rejoined; "and you have yourself implied that I have nine lives."

"Even so," he retorted, "you have played away a third of them pretty rapidly. If you are not more careful of the other six, I shall have to put you somewhere out of harm's way. Do, for goodness sake, Jardine, keep away from unpopulated places and see that no stranger gets near enough to have you at a disadvantage."

I promised him to keep a constant watch for suspicious strangers and to avoid all solitary neighbourhoods and ill-lighted thoroughfares, and shortly after this we separated to go our respective ways, he back to the museum and I to the surgical wards.

For some time after this, the record of my daily life furnishes nothing but a chronicle of small beer. I had resumed pretty regular attendance at the hospital, setting forth from my lodgings in the morning and returning thither as the late afternoon merged into evening; taking the necessary exercise in the form of the long walk to and from the hospital, and keeping close indoors at night. It began to look as though my adventures were at an end and life were settling down to the old familiar jog trot.

And yet the beer was not quite so small as it looked. Coming events cast their shadows before them, but often enough those shadows wear a shape ill-defined and vague, and so creep on unnoticed. Thus it was in these days of apparent inaction, though even then there were certain little happenings at which I looked askance. Such an episode occurred within a few days of my return, and gave me considerable food for thought. I had climbed on to the yellow 'bus in the Tottenham Court Road and was seated on the top, smoking my pipe, when, as we passed up the Hampstead Road, I noticed a woman looking into the window of Mr. Robinson, the artist's-colourman. Something familiar or distinctive in the pose of the figure made me glance a second time; and then I think my eyes must have grown more and more round with astonishment as the 'bus gradually drew me out of range. For the woman was undoubtedly Mrs. Samway.

It was really a most surprising affair. This good lady seemed to be ubiquitous; to fly hither and thither and drop from the clouds as if she were the possessor of a magic carpet. Apparently she had not gone to Boulogne after all; or if she had, her stay on the Continent must have been uncommonly short. But if she had not crossed on the boat, what was she doing in Folkestone? It was all very well to say that she had as much right to be in Folkestone as I had. That was true enough, but it was a lame conclusion and no explanation at all.

It was my custom, as I have said, to walk from my lodgings to the hospital, a distance of some five miles; but this was practicable only in fine weather. On wet days I took the tram from the "Duke of St. Alban's"; and beguiled the slow journey by reading one of my text-books and observing the manners and customs of my fellow-passengers. Such a day was the one that followed the re-appearance of Mrs. Samway. A persistent drizzle put my morning walk out of the question and sent me reluctant but resigned to seek the shelter of the tram, where having settled myself with a volume of Gould's "Surgical Diagnosis," I began to read to the accompaniment of the monotonous rhythm of the horses' hoofs and the sleepy jingle of their bells. From time to time I looked up from my book to take a glance at the other occupants of the steamy interior, and on each occasion that I did so, I caught the eye of my opposite neighbour roving over my person as if taking an inventory of my apparel. Whenever he caught my eye, he immediately looked away; but the next time I glanced up I was sure to find him once more engaged in a leisurely examination of me.

There was nothing remarkable in this. People who sit opposite in a public vehicle unconsciously regard one another, as I was doing myself; but when I had met my neighbour's eye a dozen times or more, I began to grow annoyed at his persistent inspection; and finally, shutting up my book, proceeded to retaliate in kind.

This seemed to embarrass him considerably. Avoiding my steady gaze, his eyes flitted to and fro, passing restlessly from one part of the vehicle to another; and then it was that my medical eye noted a fact that gave an intrinsic interest to the inspection. The man had what is called a nystagmus; that is, a peculiar oscillatory movement of the eyeball. As his eyes passed quickly from object to object, they did not both come to rest instantaneously, but the right eye stopped with a sort of vertical stagger as if the bearings were loose. The condition is not a very common one, and the one-sided variety is decidedly rare. It is usually associated with some defect of vision or habitual strain of the eye-muscles, as in miners' nystagmus; whence my discovery naturally led to a further survey and speculation as to the cause of the condition in the present case.

The man was obviously not a miner. His hands—with a cigarette stain, as I noticed, on the left middle finger—were much too delicate, and he had not in any way the appearance of a labourer. Then the spasm must be due to some defect of eyesight. Yet he was not near-sighted, for, as we passed a church at some distance, I saw him glance out through the doorway at the clock and compare it with his watch; and again, I noticed that he took out his watch with his left hand. Then perhaps he had a blind eye or unequal vision in the two eyes; this seemed the most likely explanation; and I had hardly proposed it to myself when the chance was given to me to verify it. Confused by my persistent examination of him, my unwilling patient suddenly produced a newspaper from his pocket and, clapping a pair of pince-nez on his nose, began to read. Those pince-nez gave me the required information, for I could see that one glass was strongly convex while the other was nearly plane.

The question of my friend's eyesight being disposed of, I began to debate the significance of that stain of the left middle finger. Was he left-handed? It did not follow, though it seemed likely; and then I found myself noting the manner in which he held his paper, until, becoming suddenly conscious of the absurdity of the whole affair, I impatiently picked up my book and reverted to the diagnosis of renal calculus. I was becoming, I reflected disparagingly, as inquisitive as Thorndyke himself; from whom I seemed to have caught some infection that impelled me thus to concern myself with the trifling peculiarities of total strangers.

The trivial incident would probably have faded from my recollection but for another, equally trivial, which occurred a day or two later. I was returning home by way of Tottenham Court Road and had nearly reached the crossing at the north end when I suddenly remembered that I had come to the last of my note-books. The shop at which I obtained them was in Gower Street, hard by, and as the thought of the books occurred to me, I turned abruptly and, running across the road, strode quickly down a by-street that led to the shop.

As I came out into Gower Street I noticed a small, but rapidly augmenting crowd on the pavement, and, elbowing my way through, found at its centre a man lying on the ground, writhing in the convulsions of an epileptic fit. I proceeded to ward off the well-meant attentions of the usual excited bystanders, who were pulling open his hands and trying to sit him up, and had thrust the corner of a folded newspaper between his teeth to prevent him from biting his tongue when a constable arrived on the scene; upon which, as the officer bore on his sleeve the badge of the St. John's Ambulance Society, I gave him a few directions and began to back out of the crowd.

At this moment, I became aware of a pressure behind me and a suspicious fumbling, strongly suggestive of the presence of a pick-pocket. Instantly, I turned right about and directed a searching look at the people behind me, and especially at a bearded, nondescript person who seemed also to be backing out of the crowd. He gave me a single, quick glance as I followed him through the press and then averted his eyes; and as he did so, I noticed, with something of a start, that his right eye came to rest with a peculiar, rapid up-and-down shake. He had, in fact, a right-sided nystagmus.

The coincidence naturally struck me with some force. A nystagmus is not, as I have said, a very common condition; one-sided nystagmus is actually a rare one; and, of the one-sided instances, only some fifty per cent will affect the right eye. The coincidence was therefore quite a notable one; but had it any particular bearing? I had a half-formed inclination to follow the man; but he had not actually picked my pocket or done any other overt act, and one could hardly follow a person merely because he happened to suffer from an uncommon nervous affection.

The man was now walking up the street, briskly, but without manifest hurry; looking straight before him and swinging his stick with something of a flourish. I watched him speculatively, as I walked in the same direction, and then suddenly realized that he was carrying his stick in his left hand, and carrying it, too, with the unmistakable ease born of habit. Then he was left-handed! And here was another coincidence; not a remarkable one in itself, but, when added to the other, so singular and striking that I insensibly quickened my pace.

As my acquaintance reached the corner of the Euston Road, an omnibus stopped to put down a passenger. It was about to move on when he raised his stick, and, following it, stepped on the footboard and mounted to the roof. I was undecided what to do. Should I follow him? And, if so, to what purpose? He would certainly notice me if I did and be on his guard, so that I should probably have my trouble for nothing and possibly look like a fool into the bargain. And while I was thus standing irresolute at the corner, the omnibus rumbled away westward and decided the question for me.

I am not, as the reader may have gathered, a particularly cautious man or much given to suspicion. But recent events had made me a good deal more wary and had taught me to look with less charity on chance fellow creatures; and this left-handed person with the nystagmus occupied my thoughts to no small extent during the next day or two. Was he the man whom I had seen in the tram? Apparently not. The latter had been clean shaven and dressed neatly in the style of a clerk or ordinary City man, whereas the former wore a full beard and was shabby, almost beyond the verge of respectability. As to their respective statures, I could not judge, as I had seen the one man seated and the other standing; but, superficially, they were not at all alike, and, in all probability they were different persons.

But this conclusion was not at all inevitable. When I reflected on the matter, I saw that the resemblances and differences did not balance. The two men resembled one another in qualities that were inherent and unalterable, but they differed in qualities that were superficial and subject to change. A man cannot assume or cast off a nystagmus, but he can put on a false beard. A left-handed man may endeavour to conceal his peculiarity, but the superior deftness of the habitually used hand will make itself apparent in spite of his efforts; whereas he can make any alterations in his clothing that he pleases. And thus reflecting, the suspicion grew more and more strong that the two men might very well have been one and the same person, and that it would be discreet to keep a bright look-out for a left-handed man with a right-sided nystagmus.



During all this time I had seen nothing of my new friend Miss Sylvia. But I had by no means forgotten her. Without wishing to exaggerate my feelings, I may say that I had taken a strong liking to that very engaging young lady. She was a pleasant, easy-mannered girl, evidently good-tempered, and very frank and simple; a girl—as Mr. Sparkler would have said —“with no bigod nonsense about her.” Her tastes ran along very similar lines to my own, and she was clever enough to be a quite interesting companion. Then it was evident that she liked me—which was in itself an attraction, to say nothing of the credit that it reflected on her taste—and, in a perfectly modest way, she had made no secret of the fact. And finally, she was exceptionally good-looking. Now people may say, as they do, that beauty is only skin deep—which is perfectly untrue, by the way; but even so, one is more concerned with the skins of one’s fellow creatures than with their livers or vermiform appendices. The contact of persons, as of things, occurs at their respective surfaces.

From which it will be gathered that I was only allowing a decent interval to elapse before repeating my visit to “The Hawthorns”; indeed, I was beginning to think that a sufficient interval had already passed and to contemplate seriously my second call, when my intentions were forestalled by Sylvia herself. Returning home one Friday evening, I found on my mantelpiece a short letter from her, enclosing a ticket for an exhibition of paintings and sculpture at a gallery in Leicester Square, and mentioning—incidentally—that she proposed to visit the show on the following morning in order to see the works by a good light; which seemed such an eminently rational proceeding in these short winter days, that I determined instantly to follow her example and get the advantage of the morning light myself.

I acted on this decision with such thoroughness that, when I arrived at the gallery, I found the attendant in the act of opening the doors, and, for nearly half an hour I was in sole possession of the premises. Then, by twos and threes, other visitors began to straggle in, and among them Sylvia, looking very fresh and dainty and obviously pleased to see me. “I am glad you were able to come,” she said, as we shook hands. “I thought you would, somehow. It is so much nicer to have someone to talk over the pictures with, isn’t it?”

“Much more interesting,” I agreed. “I have been taking a preliminary look round and have already accumulated quite a lot of profound observations to discharge at you as occasion offers. Shall we begin at number one?”

We began at number one and worked our way methodically picture by picture, round the room, considering each work attentively with earnest discussion and a wealth of comment. As the morning wore on, visitors arrived in increasing numbers, until the two large rooms began to be somewhat inconveniently crowded. We had made a complete circuit of the pictures and were about to turn to the sculpture, which occupied the central floor space, when Sylvia touched me on the arm. “Let us sit down for a minute,” said she. “I want to speak to you.”

I led her to one of the large settees that disputed the floor-space with the busts and statuettes, and, somewhat mystified by her serious tone and by the rather agitated manner, which I now noticed for the first time, seated myself by her side. “What is it?” I asked.

She looked anxiously round the room, and, leaning towards me, said in a low tone: “Have you noticed a man who has been keeping near us and listening to our conversation?”

“No, I haven’t,” I replied. “If I had I would have given him a hint to keep farther off. But there’s nothing in it, you know. In picture galleries it is very usual for people to hang about and try to overhear criticisms. This man may be interested in the exhibits.”

“Yes, I know. But I don’t think this person was so much interested in the exhibits. He didn’t look at the pictures, he looked at us. I caught his eye several times reflected in the picture-glasses, and once or twice I saw him looking most attentively at this crucifix of mine. That was what really disturbed me. I wish, now, that I hadn’t unbuttoned my coat.”

“So do I. You will have to leave that crucifix at home if it attracts so much undesirable attention. Which is the man? Is he in this room?”

“No, I don’t see him now. I expect he has gone into the next room.”

“Then let us go there, too; and if you will point him out to me, I will pay him back in his own coin.”

We rose and made our way to the door of communication, and, as we passed into the second room, Sylvia grasped my arm nervously. “There he is—don’t let him see us looking at him—he is sitting on the settee at the farther end of the room.”

It was impossible to make a mistake since the settee held only a single person; a fairly well-dressed, ordinary-looking man, rather swarthy and foreign in appearance, with a small waxed moustache. He was sitting nearly opposite the entrance door and seemed, at the moment to be reading over the catalogue, which he held open on his knee; but, as he looked up almost at the moment when we entered, I turned my back to him and continued my inspection with the aid of the reflection in a picture-glass. “He is probably a journalist,” I said. “You see he is scribbling some notes on the blank leaves of his catalogue; probably some of your profound criticisms, which will appear, perhaps to-morrow morning, clothed in super-technical jargon, in a daily paper.”

Here I paused suddenly, for I had made a rather curious observation. The reflection in a mirror is, as everybody knows, reversed laterally; so that the right hand of a person appears to be the left, and vice versa. But in the present case, no reversal seemed to have taken place. The figure in the reflection was writing with his right hand. Obviously, then, the real person was writing with his left.

This put a rather different aspect on the affair. Up to the present, I had been disposed to think that Sylvia had been unduly disturbed; for there are plenty of ill-bred bounders to be met in any public place who will stare a good-looking girl

out of countenance. But now my suspicions were all awake. It is true that left-handed men are as common as blackberries; but still—"Can you tell me, Miss Vyne," I asked, as we worked our way towards the other end of the room, "if this man is at all like the one who frightened you so in Millfield Lane?"

"No, he is not. I am sure of that. The man in the lane was a good deal taller and thinner."

"Well," said I, "whoever he is, I want to have a good look at him, and the best plan will be to turn our attention to the sculpture. Shall we go and look at that rather remarkable pink bust? That will give our friend a chance of another stare at you, and, if he doesn't take it, I will go and inspect him where he sits."

The bust to which I had referred was executed in a curious, rose-tinted marble, very crystalline and translucent, a material that suited the soft, girlish features of its subject admirably. It stood on an isolated pedestal quite near the settee on which the suspicious stranger was sitting, and I hoped that our presence might lure him from his retreat. "I don't think," I said, taking up a position with my back to the settee, "that I have ever seen any marble quite like this. Have you?"

"No," replied Sylvia. "It looks like coarse lump sugar stained pink. And how very transparent it is; too transparent for most subjects."

Here she gave a quick, nervous glance at me, and I was aware of a shadow thrown by some person standing behind me. Had our friend risen to the bait already?

I continued the conversation in good audible tones. "Very awkward these isolated pedestals would be for slovenly artists who scamp the back of their work."

With this remark I moved round the pedestal as if to examine the back of the bust, and Sylvia followed. The move brought us opposite the person who had been standing behind me; and, sure enough, it was the gentleman from the settee. I continued to talk—rather blatantly, I fear—commenting on the careful treatment of the hair and the backs of the ears; and meanwhile took an occasional swift glance at the man opposite. He appeared to be gazing in wrapt admiration at the bust, but his glance, too, occasionally wandered; and when it did, the "point of fixation," as the oculists would express it, was Sylvia's crucifix, which was still uncovered.

Presently I ventured to take a good, steady look at him and was for a few moments unobserved. His left eye moved, as I could see, quite smoothly and evenly from point to point; but the right, at each change of position, gave a little, rapid, vertical oscillation. Suddenly he became aware of my, now undisguised, inspection of him, and, immediately, the oscillation became much more marked, as is often the case with these spasmodic movements. Perhaps he was conscious of the fact; at any rate, he turned his head away and then moved off to examine a statuette that stood near the middle of the room.

I looked after him, wondering what I ought to do. That he was the man whom I had seen on the two previous occasions I had not the slightest doubt, although I was still unable to identify his features or anything about him excepting the nystagmus and the left-handed condition. But there could be no question that he was the same man; and this very variability in his appearance only gave a more sinister significance to the affair, pointing clearly, as it did, to careful and efficient disguise. Evidently he had been, and still was, shadowing me, and, what was still worse, he seemed to be taking a most undesirable interest in Sylvia. And yet what could I do? My small knowledge of the law suggested that shadowing was not a criminal act unless some unlawful intent could be proved. As to punching the fellow's head—which was what I felt most inclined to do—that would merely give rise to disagreeable, and perhaps dangerous, publicity.

"My lord is pleased to meditate," Sylvia remarked at length, breaking in upon my brown study.

"I beg your pardon," I exclaimed. "The fact is I was wondering what we had better do next. Do you want to see anything else?"

"I should rather like to see the outside of the building," she answered. "That man has made me quite nervous."

"Then we will go at once, and we won't sign the visitor's book."

I led her to the door, and, as we rapidly descended the carpeted stairs, I considered once more what it were best to do. Had I been alone I would have kept our watcher in view and done a little shadowing on my own account; but Sylvia's presence made me uneasy. It was of the first importance that this sinister stranger should not learn where she lived. The only reasonable course seemed to be to give him the slip if possible. "What did you make of that man?" Sylvia asked when we were outside in the square. "Don't you think he was watching us?"

"Yes, I do. And I may say that I have seen him before."

She turned a terrified face to me and asked: "You don't think he is the wretch who pushed you into the river?"

Now this was exactly what I did think, but it was not worth while to say so. Accordingly I temporized. "It is impossible to say. I never saw that man, you know. But I have reason for thinking that this fellow is keeping a watch on me, and it occurs to me that, if he appears still to be following us, I had better put you into a hansom and keep my eye on him until you are out of sight."

"Oh, I'm not going to agree to that," she replied with great decision. "I don't suppose that my presence is much protection to you, but still, you are safer while we are together, and I'm not going to leave you."

This settled the matter. Of course she was quite right. I was much safer while she was with me, and if she refused to go

off alone, we must make our escape together. I looked up the square as we turned out of it towards the Charing Cross Road, but could see no sign of our follower, and, as we walked on at a good pace, I hoped that we might get clear away. But I was not going to take any chances. Before turning homewards, I decided to walk sharply some distance in an easterly direction and then see if there was any sign of pursuit; for my previous experiences of this good gentleman led me to suspect that he was by no means without skill and experience in the shadowing art.

We walked down to Charing Cross and turned eastward along the north side of the Strand. I had chosen this thoroughfare as offering a good cover to a pursuer, who could easily keep out of sight among the crowd of way-farers who thronged the pavement for the first question to be settled was whether we were or were not being shadowed. "Where are we going now?" Sylvia asked.

"We are going up Bedford Street," I answered. "There is a book shop on the right-hand side where we can loiter unobtrusively and keep a look-out. If we see nobody, we will try one of the courts off Maiden Lane where we should be certain to catch anyone who was following. But we will try the bookstall first because, if our friend is in attendance, I have a rather neat plan for getting rid of him."

We accordingly made our way to the bookstall in Bedford Street and began systematically to look through the second-hand volumes; and as we pored over an open book, we were able to keep an effective watch on the end of the street and the Strand beyond. Our vigil was not a long one. We had been at the stall less than a minute when Sylvia whispered to me: "Do you see that man looking in the shop on the farther side of the Strand?"

"Yes," I replied, "I have noticed him. He has only just arrived, and I fancy he is our man. If he is, he will probably go into the doorway so as not to have to keep his back to us."

Almost as I spoke, the man moved into the deep doorway as if to inspect the end of the shop window, and Sylvia exclaimed: "I'm sure that is the man. I can see his profile now."

There could be no doubt of the man's identity; and, at this moment, as if to clinch the matter, he took out a cigarette and lighted it, striking the match with his left hand. "Come along," said I. "We will now try my little plan for getting rid of him. We mustn't seem to hurry."

We sauntered up to the corner of Maiden Lane and there stood for a few moments looking about us. Then we strolled across to the farther side of Chandos Street, and, as soon as we were out of sight of our follower, crossed the road and slipped in at the entrance to the Civil Service Stores. Passing quickly through the provision department, we halted at the glazed doors, from which we could look out through the Bedford Street entrance. "There he is!" exclaimed Sylvia. And there he was, sure enough, walking rather quickly up the east side of Bedford Street. "Now," said I, "let us make a bolt for it. This way."

We darted out through the china, furniture and ironmongery departments, across the whole width of the building and out of the Agar Street entrance, where we immediately crossed into King William Street, turned down Adelaide Street, shot through the alley by St. Martin's Church, and came out opposite the National Portrait Gallery just as a yellow omnibus was about to start. We sprang into the moving vehicle, and, as it rumbled away into the Charing Cross Road, we kept a sharp watch on the end of King William Street. But there was no sign of our pursuer. We had got rid of him for the present, at any rate. "Don't you think," said Sylvia, "that he will suspect that we went into the Stores?"

"I have no doubt he will, and that is where we have him. He can't come away and leave the building unsearched. Most probably he is, at this very moment, racing madly up and down the stairs and trying to watch the three entrances at the same time."

Sylvia chuckled gleefully. "It has been quite good fun," she said, "but I am glad we have shaken him off. I think I shall stay indoors for a day or two and paint, and I hope you'll stay indoors, too. And that reminds me that I am out of Heyl's white. I must call in at Robinson's and get a pound tube. Do you mind? It won't delay us more than a few minutes."

Now I would much rather have gone straight on to Hampstead, for our unknown attendant certainly knew the whereabouts of my lodgings and might follow us when he failed to find us in the stores. Moreover, I had, of late, given the neighbourhood of the artist's-colourman's shop a rather wide berth, having seen Mrs. Samway from afar once or twice, thereabouts, and having surmised that she tended to haunt, that particular part of the Hampstead Road. But the fresh supply of flake white seemed to be a necessity, so I made no objection, and we accordingly alighted opposite the shop and entered. Nevertheless, while Sylvia was making her purchase, I stood near the glass door and kept a watchful eye on the street. When a tram stopped a short distance away, I glanced quickly over its passengers, as well as I could, though without observing anyone who might have been our absent friend. But just as it was about to move on, I saw a woman run out from the pavement and enter; and though I got but an indifferent view of her, I felt an uncomfortable suspicion that the woman was Mrs. Samway.

Looking back, I do not quite understand why I had avoided this woman or why I now looked with distaste on the fact that she was travelling in our direction. She was a pleasant-spoken, intelligent person, and I had no dislike of her, nor any cause for dislike. Perhaps it was the recollection of the offence that she had given Sylvia in this very shop, but a short time since, that made me unwilling to encounter her now in Sylvia's company. At any rate, whatever the cause may have been, throughout the otherwise, pleasant journey, and in spite of an animated and interesting conversation, the thought of Mrs. Samway continually recurred, and this notwithstanding that I kept a constant, unobtrusive look-out for the mysterious spy who might, even now, be hovering in our rear.

We alighted from the tram at the "Duke of St. Alban's" and made our way to North End by way of the Highgate Ponds. As we crossed the open fields and the Heath, I turned at intervals to see if there was any sign of our being followed; but no suspicious-looking person appeared in sight, though on two separate occasions, I noticed a woman ahead of us, and walking in much the same direction, turn round and look our way. There was no reason, however, to suppose that she was looking at us, and, in any case, she was too far ahead to be recognizable. At last, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Spaniard's Road, she finally disappeared, possibly into the hollow beyond, and I saw no more of her.

At the gate of "The Hawthorns" I delivered up the heavy tube of paint, and thus, as it were, formally brought our little outing to an end; and as we shook hands Sylvia treated me to a parting exhortation. "Now do take care of yourself and keep out of harm's way," she urged. "You are so large, you see," she added with a smile, "and such a very conspicuous object that you ought to take special precautions. And you must come and see us again quite soon. I assure you my aunt is positively pining for another conversation with you. Why shouldn't you drop in to-morrow and have tea with us?"

Now this very idea had already occurred to me, so I hastened to close with the invitation; and then, as she retired up the path with another "good-bye" and a wave of the hand, I turned away and walked back towards the Heath.

For some minutes I strode on, across furzy hollows or over little hills, traversed by sunken, sandy paths, occupying myself with thoughts of the pleasant, friendly girl whom I had just left and reflections on the strange events of the morning. Presently I mounted a larger hill, on which was perched a little, old-fashioned house. Skirting the wooden fence that enclosed it, I turned the corner and saw before me, at a distance of some forty yards, a rough, rustic seat. On that seat a woman was sitting; and somehow, when I looked at her and noted the graceful droop of the figure, it was without any feeling of surprise—almost that of realized expectation—that I recognized Mrs. Samway.

---

#### XIV — A LONELY WOMAN

IF I had had any intention of avoiding Mrs. Samway, that intention must inevitably have been frustrated, for her recognition was as instantaneous as my own. Almost as I turned the corner, she looked up and saw me; and a few moments later, she rose and advanced in my direction, so that, to an onlooker it would have appeared as if we had met by appointment. There was obviously nothing for it but to look as pleased as I could manage at such short notice; which I did, shaking her hand with hypocritical warmth. "And I suppose. Dr. Jardine," said she, "you are thinking what a very odd coincidence it is that we should happen to meet here?"

"Oh, I don't know that it is so very odd. I live about here and I understood you to say that you often come up to the Heath. At any rate, our last meeting was a good deal more odd."

"Yes, indeed. But the truth is that this is not a coincidence at all. I may as well confess that I came here deliberately with the intention of waylaying you."

This very frank statement took me aback considerably; so much so that I could think of no appropriate remark beyond mumbling something to the effect that "it was very flattering of her."

"I have been trying," she continued, "to get a few words with you for some time past; but, although I have lurked in your line of march in the most shameless manner, I have always managed to miss you. I thought, from what you told me, that you passed Robinson's shop on your way to the hospital."

"So I do," I replied mendaciously; for I could hardly tell her that I had lately taken to shooting up bystreets with the express purpose of avoiding that particular stretch of pavement.

"It's rather curious that I never happened to meet you there. However, I didn't, so, to-day, I determined to take the bull by the horns and catch you here."

This last statement, like the former ones, gave me abundant matter for reflection. How the deuce had she managed to "catch me here?" I supposed that she had seen Sylvia and me in the Hampstead Road and had guessed that we were coming on to this neighbourhood. That was a case of feminine intuition; which, like the bone-setter's skill, is a wonderful thing—when it comes off (and when it doesn't one isn't expected to notice the fact). Then she had gone on ahead—still guessing at our final destination—and kept us in sight while keeping out of view herself. It was not so very easy to understand and not at all comfortable to think of, for there was a disagreeable suggestion that she had somehow ascertained Sylvia's place of abode beforehand. And yet—well, the whole affair was rather mysterious. "You don't ask why it was that I wanted to waylay you," she said, at length, as I made no comment on her last statement.

"There is an old saying," I replied, "that one shouldn't look a gift-horse in the mouth."

"That is very diplomatic," she retorted with a laugh. "But I daresay your knowledge of women makes the question unnecessary."

"My knowledge of women," said I, "might be put into a nutshell and still leave plenty of room for the nut and a good, fat maggot besides."

"Then I must beware of you. The man who professes to know nothing of women is the most deep and dangerous class of person. But there is one item of knowledge that you seem to have acquired. You seem to know that women like to have pretty things said to them."

"If you call that knowledge," said I, "you must apply the same name to the mere blind impulse that leads a spider to spin a nice, symmetrical web."

She laughed softly and looked up at me with an expression of amused reflection. "I am thinking," she said, "what a very fine symmetrical web you would spin if you were a spider."

"Possibly," I replied. "But it looks as if the role of bluebottle were the one that is being marked out for me."

"Oh! Not a bluebottle. Dr. Jardine. It doesn't suit you at all. If you must make a comparison, why not say a Goliath beetle, and have something really dignified—and not so very inappropriate."

"Well, then, a Goliath beetle, if you prefer it; not that he would look very dignified, kicking his heels in the elegant web of the superlatively elegant feminine spider."

"Oh, but that isn't pretty of you at all, Dr. Jardine. In fact it is quite horrid; and unfair, too; because you are trying to get the information without asking a direct question."

"What question am I supposed to ask?"

"You needn't ask any. I will take pity on your masculine pride and tell you why I have been lying in wait for you, although I daresay you have guessed. The truth is, I am simply devoured by curiosity."

"Concerning what?"

"Now, how can you ask? Just think! One day I meet you in the Hampstead Road, going about your ordinary business, apparently a fixture, at least for months. A few days later, a hundred miles from London, I feel myself suddenly seized from behind; I turn round and there are you with tragedy and adventure written large all over you."

"I thought the tragedy was rather on your side; and so did the ancient mariner with the black bottle and the tea cup. But —"

"I don't wish to discuss the views of that well-meaning old brute. I want an explanation. I want to know how you came to be in Folkestone and in that extraordinary condition. I am sure something strange must have happened to you."

"Why? Haven't I as much right to be in Folkestone as you have?"

"That is mere evasion. When I see a man who is usually rather carefully and very neatly dressed, walking in the streets of a seaport town without hat or a stick and with a collar that looks as if it had been used to clean out a saucepan, and great stains on his clothes, I am justified in inferring that something unusual has happened to him."

"I didn't think you had noticed my negligé get-up."

"At the time I did not. I was very upset and agitated, I had just had a lot of worry and was compelled to cross to France at a moment's notice; and then there was that horrible horse, and the sudden way that you seized me and then got knocked down; and the—"

"The ancient mariner."

"Yes, the ancient mariner; and the knowledge that I was behaving like an idiot and couldn't help it—though you were so nice and kind to me. So you see, I was hardly conscious of what was happening at the time. But afterwards, when I had recovered my wits a little, I recalled the astonishing figure that you made, and I have been wondering ever since what had happened to you. I assure you. Dr. Jardine, you looked as if you might have swum to Folkestone."

"Did I, by Jove!" I exclaimed with a laugh. "Well, appearances weren't so very deceptive. The fact is that I had swum part of the way."

She looked at me incredulously. "Whatever do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that you are now looking on a modern and strictly up-to-date edition of Sinbad the Sailor."

"That isn't very explanatory. But I suppose it isn't meant to be. It is just a preliminary stimulant to whet my appetite for marvels, and a most unnecessary one, I can assure you, for I am absolutely agape with curiosity. Do go on. Tell me exactly what had happened to you."

Now the truth is that I had already said rather more than was strictly discreet and would gladly have drawn in my horns. But I had evidently let myself in for some sort of plausible explanation, and a lack of that enviable faculty that enables its possessor to tell a really convincing and workmanlike lie, condemned me to a mere unimaginative adherence to the bald facts, though I did make one slight and amateurish effort at variorum.

"You want a detailed log of Sinbad's voyages, do you?" said I. "Then you shall have it. We will begin at the beginning. The port of departure was the Embankment somewhere near Cleopatra's Needle. I was leaning over the parapet, staring down at the water like a fool, when some practical joker came along, and, apparently thinking it would be rather funny to give me a fright, suddenly lifted me off my feet. But my jocose friend hadn't allowed for the top-heaviness of a person of my height, and, before you could say 'knife,' I had slipped from his hold and taken a most stylish header into the water. Fortunately for me, a barge happened at the moment to be towing past, and, when I had managed to haul myself on board, I fell into the arms of a marine species of Good Samaritan, who, not having a supply of the orthodox oil and wine, proceeded to fill me up with hot gin and water, which is distinctly preferable for internal application. Then the Samaritan aforesaid clothed

me in gorgeous marine raiment and stowed me in a cupboard to sleep off the oil and wine, which I did after some sixteen hours, and then awoke to find our good ship on the broad bosom of the ocean. And so—not to weary you with the incidents of the voyage—I came to Folkestone, where I found a beautiful lady endeavouring, very unsuccessfully, to hypnotize a runaway horse; and so to the adventure of the tarred nets and the ancient mariner with the black bottle.”

Mrs. Samway smiled a little consciously as I mentioned the last incidents, but the smile quickly faded and left a deeply thoughtful expression on her face. “You take it all very calmly,” said she, “but it seems to me to have been a rather terrible experience. You really had a very narrow escape from death.”

“Yes; quite near enough. I’m far from wanting any more from the same tap.”

“And I don’t quite see why you assume that it was a mere clumsy joke that sent you into the river by accident.”

“Why, what else could it have been?”

“It looks more like a deliberate attempt to drown you. Perhaps you have some enemy who might want to make away with you.”

“I haven’t. There isn’t a soul in the world who owes me the slightest grudge.”

“That seems rather a bold thing to say, but I suppose you know. Still, I should think you ought to bear this strange affair in mind, and be a little careful when you go out at night; to avoid the riverside, for instance. Have you—did you give any information to the police about this accident, as you call it?”

“Good Lord! No! What would have been the use?”

“I thought you might have given them some description of the man who pushed you over.”

“But I never saw him. I don’t even know for certain that it was a man. It might have been a woman for all that I can tell.”

Mrs. Samway looked, up at me with that strangely penetrating expression that I had seen before in those singular, pale eyes of hers. “You don’t mean that?” she said. “You don’t really think that it could have been a woman?”

“I don’t think very much about it; but as I never saw the person who did me the honour of hoisting me overboard, I am clearly not in a position to depose as to the sex of that person. But if it was a woman, she must have been an uncommonly strong one.”

Mrs. Samway continued to look at me questioningly. “I thought you seemed to hint at a suspicion that it actually was a woman. You would surely be able to tell.”

“I suppose I should if there were time to think about the matter; but, you see, before I was fairly aware that anyone had hold of me, I was sticking my head into the mud at the bottom of the river, which is a process that does not tend very much to clarify one’s thoughts.”

“No, I suppose not,” she agreed. “But it is a most mysterious and dreadful affair. I can’t think how you can take it so calmly. You don’t seem to be in the least concerned by the fact that you have been within a hairsbreadth of being murdered. What do your friends think about it?”

“Well, you see, Mrs. Samway,” I replied evasively, “one doesn’t talk much about incidents of this kind. It doesn’t sound very credible, and one doesn’t want to gain a reputation as a sort of modern Munchausen. I shouldn’t have told you but that you were already partly in the secret and that you cross-examined me in such a determined fashion.”

“But,” she exclaimed, “do you mean to tell me that you have said nothing to anyone about this extraordinary adventure of yours?”

“No, I don’t say that. Of course, I had to give some sort of explanation to my landlady, for instance, but I didn’t tell her all that I have told you; and I would rather, if you don’t mind, that you didn’t mention the affair to anyone. I should hate to be suspected of romancing.”

“You shan’t be through anything that I may say,” she replied, “though I should hardly think that anyone who knew you would be likely to suspect you of inventing imaginary adventures.”

For some minutes after this we walked on without speaking, and, from time to time, I stole a glance at my companion. And, once again, I found myself impressed by something distinctive and unusual in her appearance. Her unquestionable beauty was not like that of most pretty women, localized and unequal, having features of striking attractiveness set in an indifferent or even defective matrix. It was diffused and all pervading, the product of sheer physical excellence. With most women one feels that the more attractive wares are judiciously pushed to the front of the window while a discreet reticence is maintained respecting the unrepresentable residue. Not so with Mrs. Samway. Her small, shapely head, her symmetrical face, her fine supple figure, and her easy movements, all spoke of a splendid physique. She was not merely a pretty woman, she was that infinitely rarer creature, a physically perfect human being; comely with the comeliness of faultless proportion, graceful with the grace of symmetry and strength.

Suddenly she looked up at me with just a hint of shyness and a little heightening of the colour in her cheek. “Are you going to tell me again, Dr. Jardine, that a cat may look at a king? Or was it that a king may look at a cat?”

“Whichever you please,” I replied. “We will put them on a footing of equality, excepting that the king might have the better claim if the cat happened to be an exceptionally good-looking cat. But I wasn’t really staring at you this time, I was

only giving you a sort of friendly look over. You weren't quite yourself, I think, when we met last."

"No, I certainly was not. So you are now making an inspection. May I ask if I am to be informed of the diagnosis, as I think you call it?"

Now, to tell the truth, I had thought her looking rather haggard and worn and decidedly thinner; and when her sprightliness subsided in the intervals of our somewhat flippant talk, it had seemed to me that her face took on an expression that was weary and even sad. But it would hardly do to say as much. "It is quite irregular," I replied. "The diagnosis is for the doctor; the patient is only concerned with the treatment. But I'll make an exception in your case, especially as my report is quite unsensational. I thought you looked as if you had been doing rather too much and not greatly enjoying the occupation. Am I right?"

"Yes. Quite right. I've had a lot of worry and bother lately, and not enough rest and peace."

"I hope all that is at an end now?"

"I don't know that it is," she replied, wearily, "or, for that matter, that it will ever be. Fate or destiny, or whatever we may call it, starts us upon a certain road, and along that road we must needs trudge, wherever it may lead."

I was rather startled at the sudden despondency of her tone. Apparently the road that Mrs. Samway trod was not strewn with roses. "Still," I said, "it is a long road that has no turning."

"It is," she agreed, bitterly, "but many have to travel such a road, to find the turning at last barred by the churchyard gate."

"Oh, come!" I protested, "we don't talk of churchyards at your time of life. We think of the jolly wayside inns and the buttercups and daisies and the may-blossom in the hedgerows. Churchyard indeed! We will leave that to the old folk and the village donkey, if you please."

She smiled rather wanly. Her gaiety seemed to have deserted her for good. "The wayside inns and the wayside flowers," said she, "are your portion—at least, I hope so. They are not for me. And, after all, there are worse things to think of than a nice quiet churchyard, with the village donkey browsing among the graves, as you say."

"I quite agree with you. From the standpoint of the disinterested spectator, not contemplating freehold investments, nothing can be more delightfully rustic and peaceful. It is the personal application that I object to."

Again she smiled, but very pensively, and for a while we walked on in silence. Presently she resumed. "I used to think that the shortness of life was quite a tragedy. That was when I was young. But now—"

"When you were young!" I interrupted. "Why, what are you now? I can tell you, Mrs. Samway, that there is many a girl of twenty who would be only too delighted to exchange personalities with you, and who would stand to make a mighty fine bargain if she could do it. If you talk like this, I shall have to refer you to the great Leonardo's advice to painters."

"What is that?" she asked.

"He recommends the frequent use of a looking-glass." She gave me a quick glance and then blushed so very deeply that I was quite alarmed lest I should have given offence. But her next words reassured me.

"It was nice of you to say that, and most kindly meant. I won't say that I don't care very much how I look, because that would be an ungracious return for your compliment and it wouldn't be quite true. There are times when one is quite glad to feel that one looks presentable; the present moment, for instance."

I acknowledged the compliment, with a bow. "Thank you," I said. "That was more than I deserved. I only wish that your fortune was equal to your looks, but I am afraid it isn't. I have an uncomfortable feeling that you are not very happy."

"I'm afraid I'm not," she replied. "Life is rather a lottery, you know, and the worst of it is that you can only take a single ticket. So, when you find that you've drawn the wrong number and you realize that there is no second chance—well, it isn't very inspiring, is it?"

I had to admit that it was not; and, after a short pause, she continued: "Women are poor dependent creatures, Dr. Jardine; dependent, I mean, for their happiness on the people who surround them."

"But that is true of us all."

"Not quite. A man—like yourself, for instance—has his work and his ambitions that make him independent of others. But, for a woman, whatever pretences she may make as to larger interests in life, a husband, a home and one or two nice children form the real goal of her ambition."

"But you are not a lone spinster, Mrs. Samway," I reminded her.

"No, I am not. But I have no children, no proper home, and not a real friend in the world—unless I may think of you as one."

"I hope you always will," I exclaimed impulsively; for there was, to me, something very pathetic in the evident loneliness of this woman. She must, I felt, be friendless indeed if she must needs appeal for friendship to a comparative stranger like myself.

"I am glad to hear you say that," she replied, "for I am making you bear a friend's burden. I hope you will forgive me for

pouring out my complaints to you in this way."

"It isn't difficult," said I, "to bear other people's troubles with fortitude. But if sympathy is any good, believe me, Mrs. Samway, when I tell you that I am really deeply grieved to think that you are getting so much less out of life than you ought. I only wish that I could do something more than sympathize."

"I believe you do," she said. "I felt, at Folkestone, how kind you were—as a good man is to a woman in her moments of weakness. That is why, I suppose, I was impelled to talk to you like this. And that is why," she added, after a little pause, "I felt a pang of envy when I saw you pass with your pretty companion."

I started somewhat at this. Where the deuce could she have seen us near enough to tell whether my companion was pretty or not? I turned the matter over rapidly in my mind, and meanwhile, I said: "I don't quite see why you envied me, Mrs. Samway."

"I didn't say that I envied you," she replied, with a faint smile and the suspicion of a blush.

"Or her either," I retorted. "We are only the merest acquaintances."

My conscience smote me somewhat as I made this outrageous statement, but Mrs. Samway took me up instantly. "Then you've only known her quite a short time?"

The rapidity with which she had jumped to this conclusion fairly took my breath away, and I had answered her question before I was aware of it. "But," I added, "I don't quite see how you arrived at your conclusion."

"I thought," she replied, "that you seemed to like one another very well."

"So we do, I think. But can't acquaintances like one another?"

"Oh, certainly; but if they are a young man and a maiden they are not likely to remain mere acquaintances very long. That was how I argued."

"I see. Very acute of you. By the way, where did you see us? I didn't see you."

"Of course you didn't. Yet you passed quite close to me on the Spaniard's Road, immersed in conversation, and little suspecting that the green eyes of envy were fixed on you."

"Oh, now, Mrs. Samway, I can't have that. They're not green, you know, although what their exact colour is I shouldn't like to say offhand."

"What! Not after that careful inspection?"

"That didn't include the eyes. Perhaps you wouldn't mind if I made another, just to satisfy my curiosity and settle the question for good."

"Oh, do, by all means, if it is such a weighty question."

We both halted and I stared into the clear depths of her singular, pale hazel eyes with an impertinent affectation of profound scrutiny, while she looked up smilingly into mine. Suddenly, to my utter confusion, her eyes filled and she turned away her head. "Oh! please forgive me!" she exclaimed. "I beg your pardon—I do beg your pardon most earnestly for being such a wretched bundle of emotions. You would forgive me if you knew—what I can't tell you."

"There is no need, dear Mrs. Samway," I said very gently, laying my hand on her arm. "Are we not friends? And may I not give you my warmest sympathy without asking too curiously what brings the tears to your eyes?"

I was, in truth, deeply moved, as a young man is apt to be by a pretty woman's tears. But more than this, something whispered to me that my playful impertinence had suddenly brought home to her the void that was in her life; the lack of intimate affection at which she had seemed to hint. And, instantly, all that was masculine in me had risen up with the immemorial instinct of the male in defence of the female; for, whatever her faults may have been, Mrs. Samway was feminine to the finger-tips.

She pressed my hand for a moment and impatiently brushed the tears from her eyes. "I do hope, Dr. Jardine," she said, looking up at me with a smile, "that your wife will be a good woman. You'll be a dreadful victim if she isn't, with your quick sympathy and your endless patience with feminine silliness. And now I won't plague you any more with my tantrums. I hope I am not bringing you a great deal out of your way. You do live in this direction, don't you?"

"Yes; and I have been assuming that my direction was yours, too. Is that right? Are you going back to Hampstead Road?"

"Not at once. I'm going to make a call at Highgate first."

"Then you'll want to go up Highgate Rise or Swain's Lane; and I will walk up with you if you'll let me."

"I think my nearest way will be up the little path that leads out of Swain's Lane. You know it, I expect?"

"Yes. It is locally known as Love Lane: it leads to the crest of the hill."

"That is right. You shall see me to the top of it and then I'll take myself off and leave you in peace."

We had by this time crossed Parliament Hill Fields and passed the end of the Highgate Ponds. A few paces more brought us out at the top of the Grove and a few more to the entrance of the rather steep and very narrow lane. For some time Mrs. Samway walked by my side in silence, and, by the reflective way in which she looked at the ground before her, seemed to be



wrapped in meditation, which I did not disturb. As we entered the lane, however, she looked up at me thoughtfully and said: "I wonder what you think of me, Dr. Jardine."

It was a fine opening for a compliment, but somehow, compliments seemed out of place, after what had passed between us. I accordingly evaded the question with another. "What do you suppose I think of you?"

"I don't know. I hardly know what I think of myself. You would be quite justified in thinking me rather forward, to waylay you in this deliberate fashion."

"Well, I don't. Your curiosity about that Folkestone affair seems most natural and reasonable."

"I'm glad you don't think me forward," she said; "but, as to my curiosity, I am beginning to doubt whether it was that alone that determined me of a sudden to come here and talk to you. I half suspect that I was feeling a little more solitary than usual, and that some instinct told me that you would be kind to me and say nice things and pet me just a little—as you have done."

I was deeply touched by her pathetic little confession; so deeply that I could find nothing to say in return. "You don't think any the worse of me," she continued, "for coming to you and begging a little sympathy and friendship?"

As she spoke, she looked up very wistfully and earnestly in my face, and rested her hand for a moment on my arm. I took it in mine and drew her arm under my own as I replied: "Of course I don't. Only I think it a wonder and a shame that my poor friendship and sympathy should be worth the consideration of a woman like you."

She pressed my arm slightly, and, after a little interval, said in a low voice with just the suspicion of a tremor in it: "You have been very kind to me, Dr. Jardine; more kind than you know. I am very, very grateful to you for taking what was really an intrusion so nicely."

"It was not in the least an intrusion," I protested; "and as to gratitude, a good many men would be very delighted to earn it on the same terms. You don't seem to set much value on your own exceedingly agreeable society."

She smiled very prettily at this, and again we walked on for a while up the slope without speaking. Once she turned her head as if listening for some sound from behind us, but our feet were making so much noise on the loose gravel, and the sound reverberated so much in the narrow space between the wooden fences that I, at least, heard nothing. Presently we turned a slight bend and came in sight of the opening at the top of the hill, guarded by a couple of posts. Within a few yards of the latter she halted, and withdrawing her hand from my arm, turned round and faced me. "We must say 'Good-bye' here," said she. "I wonder if I shall ever see you again."

For a moment I felt a strong impulse to propose some future meeting at a definite date, but fortunately some glimmering of discretion—and perhaps some thought of Sylvia—restrained me. "Why shouldn't you?" I asked.

"I don't know. But mine is rather a vagabond existence, and I suppose you will be travelling about. I hope we shall meet again soon; but if we do not, I shall always think of you as my friend, and you will have a kind thought for me sometimes, won't you?"

"I shall indeed. I shall think of you very often and hope that your life is brighter than it seems to be now."

"Thank you," she said earnestly; "and now 'Good-bye!'"

She held out her hand, and, as I grasped it, she looked in my face with the wistful, yearning expression that I had noticed before, and which so touched me to the heart that, yielding to a sudden impulse, I drew her to me and kissed her. Dim as was the light of the fading winter's day, I could see that she had, in an instant, turned scarlet. But she was not angry; for, as she drew away from me, shyly and almost reluctantly, she gave me one of her prettiest smiles and whispered "Good-bye" again. Then she ran out between the posts, and, turning once again—and still as red as a peony—waved me a last farewell.

I stood in the narrow entrance looking out after her with a strange mixture of emotions; pity, wonder and admiration and a little doubt as to my own part in the late transaction. For I had never before kissed a married woman, and cooling judgment did not altogether approve the new departure; for if Mr. Samway was not all that he might be, still he was Mr. Samway and I wasn't. Nevertheless, I stood and watched my late companion with very warm interest until she faded into the dusk; and even then I continued to stand by the posts, gazing out into the waning twilight and cogitating on our rather strange interview.

Suddenly my ear caught a sound from behind me, down the lane; a sound which, while it set my suspicion on the alert, brought a broad grin to my face. It was what I suppose I must call a stealthy footstep, but the stealthiness might have stood for the very type and essence of futility, for, as I have said, the ground sloped pretty steeply and was covered with loose pebbles, whereby every movement of the foot was rendered as audible as a thunderclap. However, absurd as the situation seemed—if the unseen person was really trying to approach by stealth—it was necessary to be on my guard. Moreover, if this should chance to be the person with the nystagmus, the present seemed to be an excellent opportunity for coming to some sort of understanding with him.

Accordingly I wheeled about and began to walk back down the lane. Instantly, the steps—no longer stealthy—began to retire. I quickened my pace; the unknown and invisible eavesdropper quickened his. Then I broke into a run, and so did he, notwithstanding which, I think I should have had him but for an untoward accident. The ground was not only sloping, but, under the loose gravel, was as hard as stone.

Consequently, the foothold was none of the best, as I presently discovered, for, as I raced down one of the steepest slopes, the pebbles suddenly rolled away under my foot and I lost my balance. But I did not fall instantly. Half recovering, I flew forward, clawing the air, stamping, staggering, kicking up the gravel, and making the most infernal hubbub and clatter, before I finally subsided into a sitting posture on the pebbles. When I rose, the footsteps were no longer audible, though the lower end of the lane was still some distance away.

I resumed my progress at a more sedate pace and kept a sharp look-out for a possible ambush, though the lane was too narrow, even in the darkness that now pervaded it, to furnish much cover to an enemy. Some distance down, I came to an opening in the fence, where one or two boards had become loose, and was half disposed to squeeze through and explore. But I did not, for, on reflection, it occurred to me that if the man was not there it would be useless for me to go, while if he should be hiding behind the fence it would be simply insane of me to put my head through the hole.

When I emerged into the road at the bottom, I looked about vaguely, but, of course there was no sign of the fugitive—nor, indeed, could I have identified him if I had met him. I loitered about undecidedly for a minute or two, and then, realizing the futility of keeping a watch on the entrance of the lane for a man whom I could not recognize, and becoming conscious of a ravenous desire for food I made my way down the Grove in the direction of my lodgings.

---

## XV — EXIT DR. JARDINE

MY second visit to “The Hawthorns,” to which I had looked forward with some eagerness, had, after all, to be postponed indefinitely. I say “had,” since, under the circumstances, it appeared to be so unsafe that I could not fairly take the risk that it involved. I had made the engagement thoughtlessly, and, in my preoccupation with Mrs. Samway, had not realized the indiscretion to which I had committed myself until I was brought back sharply to the actual conditions by the incident in Love Lane which I have mentioned. But, after that, I saw that it would be the wildest folly to show myself in the vicinity of Sylvia’s house. Evidently the spy, after we had given him the slip so neatly, had made direct for my lodgings and lurked in the neighbourhood, and there it must have been that he had picked me up again as I passed with Mrs. Samway. Of course it was possible that the unseen person in the lane was not really shadowing me at all; but his stealthy approach, his hasty retreat and his mysterious disappearance, left me in very little doubt on the subject.

I was not very nervous about this enigmatical person on my own account. In spite of my alarming experiences, I found it difficult to take him as seriously as I should have done, and still felt a quite unjustifiable confidence in my capability of taking care of myself. But on Sylvia’s account I was exceedingly uneasy. The interest that this man had shown in the unlucky little ornament that she wore, associated itself in my mind most disagreeably with her mysterious and terrifying adventure in Millfield Lane, and made me feel that it would be sheer insanity for me to go from my house to hers and so possibly give this unknown villain the clue to her whereabouts.

This conclusion, at which I had arrived overnight, was confirmed on the following morning, for, having taken a brisk walk out in the direction of Harrow, and having kept a very sharp look-out, I was distinctly conscious of the fact that there always appeared to be a man in sight. I never got near him and was not able to recognize him, but at intervals throughout the morning he continually reappeared in the distance, even on the comparatively solitary country roads and the hedge-divided meadows.

It was excessively irritating. Yet what could I do? Even if I could have identified him with the man who had apparently shadowed me before, I really had nothing against him. And cogitating on the matter, with no little annoyance, I determined to take counsel with Thorndyke, and meanwhile to avoid the neighbourhood of “The Hawthorns.”

After lunch, I wrote a letter to Sylvia, briefly explaining the state of affairs, and, having given it to our maid to deliver, I took the precaution to go out and saunter towards Kentish Town with the object of engaging the spy’s attention and preventing him from following my messenger to North End. The rest of the day I spent at home and occupied my time in writing a long letter to Thorndyke in which I gave a pretty detailed account of my recent experiences; which letter was duly posted by Mrs. Blunt herself in time for the evening collection.

I had barely seated myself at the breakfast table on the following morning when a telegram was brought to me. On opening it I found that it was from Thorndyke, advising me that a letter had been dispatched by hand and asking me to stay at home until I had received it; which I did; and within an hour it arrived and was delivered into my own hands by a messenger boy.

It was curt and rather peremptory in tone, desiring me to meet him at one o’clock at Salter’s Club in a turning off St. James’s Street and concluding with these somewhat remarkable instructions: “I want you to wear an overcoat and hat of a distinctive and easily recognizable character and to take every means that you can of being seen and, if possible, followed to the club. You had better put a few necessities in a bag or suit-case and tell your landlady that you may not be home to-night. Follow these instructions to the letter and bring this note with you.”

At the latter part of these directions I was somewhat disposed to boggle, remembering my worthy teacher’s threat to put me somewhere out of harm’s way. But Thorndyke was a difficult man to disobey. Suave and persuasive as his manners were, he had a certain final and compelling way with him that silenced objections and produced a sort of frictionless obedience without any sense of compulsion. Hence, notwithstanding a slight tendency to bluster and tell myself that I would see him hanged before I would submit to being mollycoddled like an idiot, I found myself, presently, walking down

the Grove in a buff overcoat and a grey felt hat, carrying a green canvas suit-case in which were packed the necessities for a brief stay away from home, and bearing in my pocket the incriminating letter.

I walked slowly as far as the Junction Road in order to give any pursuer a fair opportunity to take up the chase and to make the necessary observations on my tasteful turn-out. At the Junction I waited for a tram and carefully abstained from staring about in a manner which would have embarrassed any person who might wish unobserved to share the conveyance with me; and from the terminus at Euston Road I proceeded in leisurely fashion on foot, still resisting the temptation to look about and see if I had picked up a companion by the way.

Salter's Club was domiciled in a typical West End house situated in a quiet street of similar houses, graced at one end by a cabstand. I timed my arrival with such accuracy that a neighbouring church-clock struck one as I ascended the steps; and on my entering the hall, I was met by an elderly man in a quiet livery who seemed to expect me, for, when I mentioned Thorndyke's name, he asked, "Dr. Jardine, sir?" and, hardly waiting for my reply, showed me to the cloak-room. "Dr. Thorndyke," said he, "will be with you in a few minutes. When you have washed, I will show you to the dining room where he wished you to wait for him."

I was just a little surprised at even this short delay, for Thorndyke was the soul of punctuality. However, I had not to wait long. I had been sitting less than three minutes at a small table laid for two in the deep bay window, scanning the street through the wire-gauze blinds, when he arrived. "I needn't apologize, I suppose, Jardine," he said, shaking my hand heartily. "You will have guessed why I have kept you waiting."

"You flatter me, sir," I replied with a slight grin. "I haven't your powers of instantaneous deduction."

"You hardly needed them," he retorted. "Of course I was watching your approach and observing the corner by which you entered the street to see who came after you."

"Did anyone come after me?"

"Several persons. I examined them all very carefully with a prism binocular that magnifies twelve times linear, and an assistant is now at the same window—the one over this—following the fortunes of those persons with the same excellent glass."

"Did you spot anyone in particular as looking a likely person?"

"Yes. The second man who came after you seemed to be sauntering in a rather unpurposive fashion and looking a little obtrusively unconcerned. I noticed, too, that he was carrying an umbrella in his left hand. But we needn't concern ourselves. If anyone is shadowing you we are certain to see him. He must expose himself to view from time to time, for he can't afford to lose sight of our doorway for more than a few seconds, and there is practically no cover in this street."

"He might hide in a doorway," I suggested.

"Oh, might he! These are all clubs in this street. He'd very soon have the servants out wanting to know his business. No; he'll have to keep on the move and he'll have to keep mostly in sight of this house. And meanwhile we are going to take our lunch at our leisure and have a little talk to while away the time."

The lunch was on a scale that my youthful appetite approved strongly, though the number of courses and irrelevant, time-consuming kickshaws struck me as rather unusual. And I never saw a man eat so slowly and delay a meal so much as Thorndyke did on that occasion. I believe that it took him fully twenty minutes to consume a fried sole; and even then he created a further delay by drawing my attention to the skeleton on his plate as an illustration of inherited deformity adjusted to special environmental conditions. But all the time, whether eating or talking, I noticed that his eye continually travelled up and down the stretch of street that was visible through the wire blinds. "You haven't told me why you sent for me, sir," I said, after waiting patiently for him to open the subject.

"I dare say you have guessed," he replied; "but we may as well thrash the matter out now. You realize that you are running an enormous and unnecessary risk by going abroad with this man at your heels?"

"Well, I don't suppose he is following me about from sheer affection."

"No. I thought it possible that he might be a plain-clothes policeman, but I have ascertained that he is not. Who he is we don't know, but we have the strongest reasons for suspecting his intentions. There have been three very determined attempts on your life. They were all made with such remarkable caution and foresight that, though they failed, practically no traces have been left. Those attempts imply a strong motive, though to us, an unknown one; and that motive, presumably, still exists. Your enemy may well be getting desperate, and may be prepared to take greater risks to get rid of you; and if he is, the chances are that he will succeed sooner or later. Murder isn't very difficult to a cool-headed man who means business."

"Then what do you propose, sir?"

"I propose that you disappear from your ordinary surroundings and come and stay, for a time, at my chambers in the Temple."

This was no more than I had expected, but my jaw dropped considerably, notwithstanding. "It's awfully good of you, sir," I stammered—and so, to be sure, it was—"but don't you think it would be simpler to turn the tables on this Johnnie and shadow him?"

"An excellent idea, Jardine, and one, I may say, that I am acting on at this moment. But there isn't so much in it as you seem to think. Supposing we identify this man and even run him to earth? What then? We have nothing against him. We know of no crime that has been committed. We may suspect that the man whom you saw at Hampstead had been murdered. But we can't prove it. We can't produce the body or even prove that the man was dead. And we couldn't connect this person with the affair because nobody was known to be connected with it. I should like to know who this man is, but I don't want to put him on his guard; and above all, I can't agree to your going about as a sort of live-bait to enable us to locate him. By the way, that man on the opposite side of the street is the one whom I selected as being probably your attendant. Apparently I was right, as this is the third time he has passed. Do you recognize him?"

I looked attentively at the uncharacteristic figure on the farther side of the street, but could find nothing familiar in his appearance. "No," I replied; "he doesn't look to me like the same man. He is dressed differently—but that's nothing, as he has been dressed differently on each occasion—and that torpedo beard and full moustache are quite unlike, though there's nothing in that either; but the man looks different altogether—distinctly taller, for instance."

Thorndyke chuckled. "Good," said he. "Now look at his feet, as he passes opposite. Did you ever see an instep set at that angle to the sole? And does not your anatomical conscience cry out at a foot of that thickness?"

"Yes, by Jove!" I exclaimed; "there's room for a double row of metatarsals. It is a fake of some kind, I suppose?"

"Cork 'raisers' inside high-heeled boots. Through the glasses I could see that the boots gaped considerably at the instep, as they will when there is a pad inside as well as a foot. But you notice, also, that the man is dressed for height. He has a tall hat, a long coat, and his shoulders are obviously raised by padding. I think there is very little doubt that he is our man."

"It must be a dull job," I remarked, "hanging about by the hour to see a man come out of a house."

"Very," Thorndyke agreed. "I am quite sorry for the worthy person, especially as we are going to play him a rather shabby trick presently."

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

"We are going to let him in for one of the longest waits he has ever had, I am afraid. Perhaps I had better give you the particulars of our *modus operandi*. First, I shall send down to the stand for a hansom, which will draw up opposite the club; and thereupon I have no doubt our friend will hurry down to the cab-stand to be in readiness. At any rate, I shall let him get down to that end of the street before I do anything more. Then I shall take the liberty of putting on your coat and hat and go out to the cab with your suit-case in my hand; I shall stand on the kerb long enough to let our friend get a good view of my back, I shall get into the cab, give the driver the direction through the trap to drive to the hospital, and pay the fare in advance."

"Why in advance?" I asked.

"So that I shall not have to turn round and show my face when I get out at the hospital entrance. I assume that your friend will follow me in another hansom. Also that he will alight at the outer gates, whereas I shall drive into the courtyard right up to the main entrance, so that he will merely see your hat, coat and suit-case disappear into the building. Then, as I say, he will be in for an interminable vigil. I have a lecture to give this afternoon, and, when I have finished, I shall come away in a black overcoat and tall hat (which are at this moment hanging up in the curator's room), leaving your friend to wait for the reappearance of your coat, hat and suit-case. I only hope he won't wait too long."

"Why?"

"Because he may wear out the patience of my assistant. I have a plain-clothes man keeping a watch from the window above. If your friend sets off in pursuit of your garments, as I anticipate, the plain-clothes man will go straight to the hospital and take up his post in the porter's lodge, which, as you know, commands the whole street outside the gates."

"And what have I got to do?"

"First of all, you will put your tooth brush in your pocket—never mind about your razor—and let me try on your hat, in case we have to pad the lining. Then, when you have seen your friend start off in pursuit and are sure the coast is clear, you will make straight for my chambers and wait there for me."

"And supposing the chappie doesn't start off in pursuit? Supposing he twigs the imposture?"

"Then the plain-clothes man will go out and threaten to arrest him for loitering with intent to commit a felony. That would soon move him on out of the neighbourhood, and the officer might accompany him some distance and try to get his address. Meanwhile, you would be off to King's Bench Walk."

"But wouldn't it be simpler to run the Johnnie in, in any case? Then we should know all about him."

"No, it wouldn't do. The police wouldn't actually make an arrest without an information; and, if they did proceed, they would want me to appear. That wouldn't suit me at all. Until we obtain some fresh evidence, I don't want this man to get any suspicion that the case is being investigated. And now I think the time has come for a move. Let us go to the cloak-room and see if your hat fits me sufficiently well."

It was not a good fit, being just a shade small; but, as it was a soft felt, this was not a vital defect. The overcoat fitted well enough, though a trifle long in the sleeves, and when Thorndyke was fully arrayed in this borrowed plumage, his back view, so far as I could judge, was indistinguishable from my own. "If you will take out your toothbrush and hand me your suit-

case," said he, "I will send for a hansom, and then we will watch the progress of events from the dining-room window."

I handed him the green canvas case and we returned to the dining-room and there, when he had ordered the cab, we took up a position at the window, screened from observation by the wire blinds. "Our friend," said Thorndyke, "was walking towards the right hand end of the street when we saw him last. As the cabstand is at the left hand end, we may hope to look upon his face once again."

As he spoke, the air was rent by the shriek of the cab-whistle, and the leading hansom began immediately to bear down on the club. It had hardly come to rest at our door when a figure appeared from the opposite direction, advancing at a brisk walk on our side of the road. I recognized him instantly as the man to whom Thorndyke had directed my attention, and watched him closely, as he approached, to see if I could identify him with the man who had shadowed Sylvia and me at the picture gallery; but, though he passed within a few yards of the window, and I felt no doubt that he was the same man, I could trace no definite resemblance. It is true, that while actually passing the club, he averted his face somewhat; but I had a good view of him within an easy distance, and the face that I then saw was certainly not the face of the man at the gallery. The skilfulness of the make-up—assuming it to be really a disguise—was incredible, and I remarked on it to Thorndyke. "Yes," he agreed, "a really artistic make-up is apt to surprise the uninitiated. And that reminds me that Polton has instructions to make a few trifling alterations in your own appearance."

I stared at him aghast. "You don't mean to say," I exclaimed, "that you contemplate making me up?"

"We won't discuss the question now," he replied a little evasively. "You talk it over with Polton. It is time for me to go now, as our quarry has considerably acted up to our expectations. He little knows what confusion of our plans he would have occasioned by simply staying at the other end of the street."

The spy had, in fact, now halted opposite the cabstand and was apparently making some notes in a pocket-book, facing, meanwhile, in our direction. With a few parting instructions to me, Thorndyke picked up the suit-case and hurried out, and I saw him dart down the steps—with his face turned somewhat to the right—and stand for a few seconds at the edge of the pavement with his back to the cabstand, but in full view, looking at his watch as if considering some appointment. Suddenly he sprang into the cab and, pushing up the trap, gave the driver his instructions and handed up the fare. At the same moment I saw the unknown shadower hail a hansom, and, scrambling to the footboard, give some brief directions to the driver. Then Thorndyke's cabman touched his horse with the whip, and away he went at a smart trot; but hardly had the cab turned the first corner when the second hansom rattled past the club in hot pursuit.

I was about to turn away from the window when a tall, well-dressed man ran down the steps and immediately signalled to the cabstand with his stick. Thinking it probable that this was the plain-clothes policeman, I stopped to watch; and when I had seen him enter the cab and drive off in the same direction as the other two, I decided that the show was over and that it was time for me to take my departure; which I did, after stuffing a couple of envelopes into the lining of Thorndyke's hat, to prevent it from slipping down towards my ears.

That my arrival at number 5A, King's Bench Walk was not quite unexpected I gathered not only from the fact that the "oak" stood wide open, revealing the inner door, but from the instantaneous way in which this latter opened in response to my knock; and something gleeful and triumphant in Mr. Polton's manner as he invited me to enter, stirred my suspicions and aroused vague forebodings.

He helped me out of my—or rather Thorndyke's—overcoat, and; having taken the hat from me, peered inquiringly into its interior and fished out the two envelopes, which he politely offered to me. Then, having disposed of his employer's property, he returned to confront me, and, wrinkling his countenance into a most singular and highly corrugated smile, he opened his mouth and spoke. "So you have come, sir, the Doctor tells me, to take sanctuary for a time with us from the malice of your enemies."

"I don't know about that," I replied, "but there is a cockeyed transformationist who seems to be dodging about after me, and Dr. Thorndyke thinks I had better give him the go-by for the present."

"And very proper, too, sir. Discretion is the better part of valour, as the proverb says—though I really could never see that it is any part at all. But no doubt our forefathers, who made the proverb, knew best. Did the Doctor mention that he had given me certain instructions about you?"

"He said that I was to talk over some question with you, but I didn't quite follow him. What were his instructions?"

Polton rubbed his hands, and his face became more crinkly than ever. "The Doctor instructed me," he replied, looking at me hungrily and obviously making a mental inventory of my features, "to effect certain slight alterations in your outward personality."

"Oh, did he," said I. "And what does he mean by that? Does he mean that you are to make me up as an old woman or a nigger minstrel?"

"Not at all, sir," replied Polton. "Neither of those characters would be at all suitable. They would occasion remark, which it is our object to avoid; and as to a negro minstrel, his presence in chambers would undoubtedly be objected to by the benchers."

"But," I expostulated, "why any disguise at all, if I am to be boxed up in these chambers? The chappie isn't likely to come and look through the keyhole."

"He wouldn't see anything if he did," said Polton. "I fitted these locks. But, you see, sir, many strangers come to these chambers, and then, too, you might like to take a little exercise about the inn or the gardens. That would probably be quite safe if you were unrecognizable, but otherwise, I should think, inadmissible. And really, sir," he continued persuasively, "if you do a thing at all you may as well do it thoroughly. The Doctor wishes you to disappear; then disappear completely. Don't do it by halves."

I could not but admit to myself that this was reasonable advice. Nevertheless, I grumbled a little sulkily. "It seems to me that Dr. Thorndyke is making a lot of unnecessary fuss. It is absurd for an able-bodied man to be sneaking into a hiding-place and disguising himself like a runaway thief."

"I can offer no opinion on that, sir," said Polton; "but you're wrong about the Doctor. He is a cautious man but he is not nervous or fussy. You would be wise to act as he thinks best, I am sure."

"Very well," I said; "I won't be obstinate. When do you want to begin on me?"

"I should like," replied Polton, brightening up wonderfully at my sudden submission, "to have you ready for inspection by the time that the Doctor returns. If agreeable to you, sir, I would proceed immediately."

"Then in that case," said I, "we had better adjourn to the green-room forthwith."

"If you please, sir," replied Polton; and with this, having opened the door and cautiously inspected the landing, he conducted me up the stairs to the floor above, the rooms of which appeared to be fitted as workshops and laboratories. In one of the former, which appeared to be Polton's own special den, I saw my watch hanging from a nail, with a rating table pinned above it, and proceeded to claim it. "I suppose, sir," said Polton, reluctantly taking it from its nail and surrendering it to me, "as you are going to reside on the premises and I can keep it under observation, you may as well wear it. The present rate is plus one point three seconds daily. And now I will trouble you to sit down on this stool and take off your collar."

I did as he bade me, and, meanwhile, he turned up his cuffs and stood a little way off, surveying me as a sculptor might survey a bust on which he was at work. Then he fetched a large cardboard box, the contents of which I could not see, and fell to work.

His first proceeding was to oil my hair thoroughly, part it in the middle and brush it smoothly down either side of my forehead. Next he shaved off the outer third of each eyebrow, and, having applied some sort of varnish or adhesive, he proceeded to build up, with a number of short hairs, a continuation of the eyebrows at a higher level. The result seemed to please him amazingly, for he stepped back and viewed me with an exceedingly self-satisfied smirk. "It is really surprising, sir," said he, "how much expression there is in the corner of an eyebrow. You look a completely different gentleman already."

"Then," said I, "there's no need to do any more. We can leave it at this."

"Oh, no we can't, sir," Polton replied hastily, making a frantic dive into the cardboard box. "Begging your pardon, sir, it is necessary to attend to the lower part of the face, in case you should wish to wear a hat, which would cover the hair and throw the eyebrows into shadow."

Here he produced from the box an undeniable false beard of the torpedo type and approached me, holding it out as if it were a poultice. "You are not going to stick that beastly thing on my face!" I exclaimed, gazing at it with profound disfavour.

"Now, sir," protested Polton, "pray be patient. We will just try it on, and the Doctor shall decide if it is necessary."

With this he proceeded to affix the abomination to my jowl with the aid of the same sticky varnish that he had used previously, and, having attached a moustache to my upper lip, worked carefully round the edges of both with a quantity of loose hair, which he stuck on the skin with the adhesive liquid and afterwards trimmed off with scissors. The process was just completed and he had stepped back once more to admire his work when an electric bell rang softly in the adjoining room. "There's the Doctor," he remarked. "I'm glad we are ready for him. Shall we go down and submit our work for his inspection?"

I assented readily, having some hopes that Thorndyke would veto the beard, and we descended together to the sitting-room, where we found that Jervis and his principal had arrived together. As to the former, he greeted my entrance by staggering back several paces with an expression of terror, and then seated himself on the edge of the table and laughed with an air of enjoyment that was almost offensive; particularly to Polton, who stood by my side, rubbing his hands and smiling with devilish satisfaction. "I assume," Thorndyke said, gravely, "that this is our friend Jardine."

"It isn't," said Jervis. "It's the shopwalker from Wallis's. I recognized him instantly."

"Look here," I said, with some heat, "it's all very well for you to make me up like Charley's Aunt and then jeer at me, but what's the use of it? The fifth of November's past."

"My dear Jardine," Thorndyke said, soothingly, "you are confusing your sensations with your appearance. I daresay that make-up is rather uncomfortable, but it is completely successful, and I must congratulate Polton; for the highest aim of a disguise is the utterly common-place, and I assure you that you are now a most ordinary-looking person. Fetch the looking-glass from the office, Polton, and let him see for himself."

I gazed into the mirror which Polton held up to me with profound surprise. There was nothing in the least grotesque or unusual in the face that looked out at me, only it was the face of an utter stranger; and, as Thorndyke had said, a perfectly common-place stranger, at whom no one would look twice in the street. Grudgingly, I acknowledged the fact, but still objected to the beard. "Do you think it is really necessary, sir, in addition to the other disfigurements?"

"Yes, I do," replied Thorndyke. "It is only a temporary expedient, because, in a fortnight, your own beard will have grown enough to serve with a little artificial re-enforcement. And," he continued, as Polton retired with a gratified smile, "I am anxious that your disappearance shall be complete. It is not only a question of your safety—although that is very urgent, and I feel myself responsible for you, as we are not appealing to the police. There are other issues. Assuming, as we do assume, that some crime has been committed, the lapse of time must inevitably cause some of the consequences of that crime to develop. If the man whose body you saw at Hampstead was really murdered, he must presently be missed and enquired for. Then we shall learn who he was and perhaps we may gather what was the motive of the crime. Then, your secret enemy will be left unemployed and may produce some fresh evidence—for he can't wait indefinitely for your reappearance. And finally, certain enquiries which I am making may set us on the right track. And, if they do, you must remember, Jardine, that you are probably the sole witness to certain important items of evidence; so you must be preserved in safety as a matter of public policy, apart from your own prejudices in favour of remaining alive."

"I didn't know that you were actually working at the case," I said. "Have you been following up that man Gill of the mineral water works?"

"I followed him up to the vanishing-point. He has gone and left no trace; and I have been unable to get any description of him."

"Then," said I, "if it is allowable to ask the question, in what direction have you been making enquiries?"

"I have been interesting myself," Thorndyke replied, "in the other case; that of your patient Mr. Maddock, as the attacks on you seemed to be associated with his neighbourhood rather than with that of Hampstead. I have examined his will at Somerset House and am collecting information about the persons who benefited by its provisions. Especially, I am making some enquiries about a legatee who lives in New York, and concerning whom I am rather curious. I can't go into further details just now, but you will see that I am keeping the case in hand, and you must remember that, at any moment, fresh information may reach me from other sources. My practice is a very peculiar one, and there are few really obscure cases that are not, sooner or later, brought to me for an opinion."

"And, meanwhile, I am to eat the bread of idleness here and wait on events."

"You won't be entirely idle," Thorndyke replied. "We shall find you some work to do, and you will extend your knowledge of medico-legal practice. You write shorthand fairly well, don't you?"

"Yes; and I can draw a little, if that is of any use."

"Both accomplishments are of use, and, even if they are not, we should have to exercise them for the sake of appearances. It will certainly become known that you are here, so we had better make no secret of it, but find you such occupation as will account for your presence. And, as you will have to meet strangers now and again, we must find you a name. What do you think of 'William Morgan Howard'?"

"It will do as well as any other," I replied.

"Very well, then William Morgan Howard let it be. And, in case you might forget your alias, as the crooks are constantly doing, we will drop the name of Jardine and call you Howard even when we are alone. It will save us all from an untimely slip."

To this arrangement also I agreed with a sour smile, and so, with some physical discomfort in the neighbourhood of the lower jaw, and a certain relish of the novelty and absurdity of my position, I placed myself, under the name of Howard, on the roster of Thorndyke's establishment.

---

## XVI — ENTER FATHER HUMPERDINCK

ON the day following my—and Thorndyke's—masterly retreat from Salter's Club, the plain-clothes officer called to make his report; and even before he spoke, I judged from his rather sheepish expression that he had failed. And so it turned out. He had waited in the porter's lodge, he told us, until midnight keeping a watch on the watcher, who, for his part, lurked in the street, always keeping in sight of the hospital, and whiling away the time by gazing into the shop windows. The spy had evidently failed to recognize Thorndyke, for when the latter left the hospital in company with one of the physicians, he had given only a passing glance at the open carriage in which the two men sat.

After the shops had shut, the persevering shadower had occupied himself with a sort of dismal sentry-go up and down the street, disappearing into the darkness and reappearing at regular intervals. Once or twice, the plain-clothes man went out and followed his quarry in his perambulations, but, not considering it prudent to expose himself too much to view, he remained mostly in the Lodge. It was after one of these sallies that the mischance occurred. Returning to the Lodge, he saw the spy pass the gates and disappear up the dark street; he looked, after the usual interval, for him to reappear. But the interval passed and there was no reappearance. Then the officer hurried out in search of his quarry, but found only an empty street. Even the apparently inexhaustible patience of the spy had given out at last. And so the quest had ended.

I cannot say that Thorndyke impressed me as being deeply disappointed; in fact, I thought that he seemed, if anything, rather relieved at his emissary's failure. This was Jervis's opinion also, and he had no false delicacy about expressing it. "Well," Thorndyke replied, "as the fellow thrust himself right under my nose, I could hardly do less than make some sort of an attempt to find out who he is. But I don't particularly want to know. My investigations are proceeding from quite another direction; and you see, Jervis, how awkward it might have been to have this person on our hands. We could only charge him with loitering with felonious intent, and we couldn't prove the intent after all; for we can't produce any evidence connecting this man with the three attempted murders. He may not be the same man at all. And I certainly don't want to go into the witness box just now, and still less do I want my new clerk, Mr. Howard, put into that position. I don't want to take any action until I have the case quite complete and am in a position to make a decisive move."

"The truth is," said Jervis, addressing me confidentially in a stage whisper, "Thorndyke hates the idea of spoiling a really juicy problem by merely arresting the criminal and pumping his friends. He looks on such a proceeding much as a Master of Foxhounds would look on the act of poisoning a fox."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently at his junior. "There is such a thing," said he, "as failing to poison a fox and only making him too unwell to leave his residence. A premature prosecution is apt to fail; and then the prisoner has seen all the cards of his adversaries. At present I am playing against an unseen adversary, but I am hoping that I, in my turn, am unseen by him, and I am pretty certain that he has no idea what cards I hold."

"Gad!" exclaimed Jervis, "then he is much the same position as I am." And with this the subject dropped.

The first week of my residence in Thorndyke's chambers was quite uneventful, and was mainly occupied in settling down to the new conditions. My letters were sent on by Mrs. Blunt to the hospital whence they were brought by my principal—as I may now call my quondam teacher—with the exception of Sylvia's; which we had agreed were to be sent to the chambers enclosed in an envelope addressed to Thorndyke.

At first, I had feared that the confinement would be unendurable; but the reality proved to be much less wearisome than I had anticipated. A horizontal bar rigged up by Polton in the laboratory, gave me the means of abundant exercise of one kind; and in the early mornings, before the gates of the inn were opened, I made it my daily practice to trot round the precincts for an hour at a time, taking the circuit from our chambers through Crown Office Road to Fountain Court and back by way of Pump Court and the Cloisters, to the great benefit of my health and the mild surprise of the porters and laundresses.

Nor was I without occupation in the daytime. Besides an exhaustively detailed account of all the remarkable experiences that had befallen me of late which I wrote out at Thorndyke's request, I had a good deal of clerical work of one kind and another, and was frequently employed, when clients called, in exhibiting my skill as a stenographer; taking down oral statements, or making copies of depositions or other documents which were read over to me by Thorndyke or Jervis.

It was the exercise of these latter activities that introduced me to a certain Mr. Marchmont, and through him to some new and rather startling experiences. Mr. Marchmont was a solicitor, and, as I gathered, an old client of Thorndyke's; for, when he called one evening, about ten days after my arrival, with a bagful of documents, he made sundry references to former cases by which I understood that he and Thorndyke had been pretty frequently associated in their professional affairs. "I have got a lot of papers here," he said, opening the bag, "of which I suppose I ought to have had copies made; but there hasn't been time and I am afraid there won't be, as I have to return them to-morrow. But perhaps, if you run your eye over them, you will see what it is necessary to remember and make a few notes."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that my friend, Mr. Howard, will be able to help us by taking down the essentials in shorthand. Let me introduce you. Mr. Howard is very kindly assisting me for a time by relieving me of some of the extra clerical work."

Mr. Marchmont bowed, and, as we shook hands, looked at me, as I thought, rather curiously; then he extracted the papers from his bag, and, spreading them out on the table, briefly explained their nature. "There is no need," said he, "to have copies of them all, but I thought you had better see them. Perhaps you will glance through them and see which you think ought to be copied for reference."

Thorndyke ran his eye over the documents, and, having made one or two brief notes of the contents of some, which he then laid aside, collected the remainder and began to read them out to me, while I took down the matter verbatim, interpolating Marchmont's comments and explanations on a separate sheet of paper. The reading and the discussion occupied a considerable time, and, before the business was concluded, the Treasury clock had struck half-past nine. "It's getting late," said Marchmont, folding the papers and putting them back in the bag. "I must be going or you'll wish me at Halifax, if you aren't doing so already." He snapped the fastening of the bag, and, grasping the handle, was about to lift it from the table, when he appeared to recollect something, for he let go the handle and once more faced my principal.

"By the way, Thorndyke," said he, "there is a matter on which I have wanted to consult you for some time past, but couldn't get my client to agree. It is a curious affair; quite in your line, I think; a case of disappearance—not in the legal sense, as creating a presumption of death, but disappearance from ordinary places of resort with a very singular change of habits, so far as I can learn. Possibly a case of commencing insanity. I have been wanting to lay the facts before you, but my client, who is a Jesuit and as suspicious as the devil, insisted on trying to ferret out the evidence for himself and wouldn't hear of a consultation with you. Of course he has failed completely, and now, I think, he is more amenable."

"Are you in possession of the facts, yourself?" asked Thorndyke.



"No, I'm hanged if I am," replied Marchmont. "The case is concerned with a certain Mr. Reinhardt, who was a client of my late partner, poor Wyndhurst. I never had anything to do with him; and it unfortunately happens that our old clerk, Bell—you remember Bell—who had charge of Mr. Reinhardt's business, left us soon after poor Wyndhurst's death, so there is nobody in the office who has any personal knowledge of the parties."

"You say it is a case of disappearance?" said Thorndyke.

"Not exactly disappearance, but—well, it is a most singular case. I can make nothing of it, and neither can my worthy and reverend client, so as I say, he is now growing more amenable, and I think I shall be able to persuade him to come round with me and take your opinion on such facts as we have. Shall you be at home to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, I can make an appointment for to-morrow, after dinner, if you prefer that time."

"We won't call it an appointment," said Marchmont. "If I can overcome his obstinacy, I will bring him round and take the chance of your being in. But I think he'll come, as he is on his beam-ends; and if he does, I fancy you will find the little problem exactly to your liking."

With this Mr. Marchmont took his departure, leaving Thorndyke and me to discuss the various legal aspects of disappearance and the changes of habit and temperament that usher in an attack of mental alienation. I could see that the solicitor's guarded references to an obscure and intricate case had aroused Thorndyke's curiosity to no small extent, for, though he said little on the subject, it evidently remained in his mind, as I judged by the care with which he planned the disposal of his time of the following day, and the little preparations that he made for the reception of his visitors. Nor was Thorndyke the only expectant member of our little establishment. Jervis also, having caught the scent of an interesting case, made it his business to keep the evening free, and so it happened that when eight o'clock struck on the Temple bell, it found us gathered round the fire, chatting on indifferent subjects, but all three listening for the expected tread on the stairs. "It is to be hoped," said Jervis, "that our reverend friend won't jib at the last moment. I always expect something good from Marchmont. He doesn't get flummoxed by anything simple or common place. I think we have had most of our really thrilling cases through him. And seeing that Jardine has laid in two whole quarto note-blocks and put those delightful extra touches to his already alluring get-up—"

"There is no such person here as Jardine," Thorndyke interrupted.

"I beg his pardon. Mr. Howard, I should have said. But listen! There are two persons coming up the stairs. You had better take your place at the table, Ja-Howard, and look beastly business-like, or the reverend gentleman will want you chucked out, and then you'll lose the entertainment."

I hurried across to the table and had just seated myself and taken up a pen when the brass knocker on our inner door rattled out its announcement. Thorndyke strode across and threw the door open, and as Mr. Marchmont entered with his client I looked at the latter inquisitively. But only for a single instant. Then I looked down and tried to efface myself utterly, for Mr. Marchmont's client was none other than the cleric with whom I had travelled from Folkestone to London.

The solicitor ushered in his client with an air of but half-concealed triumph and proceeded with exaggerated geniality to do the honours of introduction. "Let me make you known to one another, gentlemen," said he. "This is the Very Reverend Father Humperdinck. These gentlemen are Dr. Thorndyke, Dr. Jervis and Mr. Howard, who will act, on this occasion, as the recording angel to take down in writing the particulars of your very remarkable story."

Father Humperdinck bowed stiffly. He was evidently a little disconcerted at finding so large an assembly, and glanced at me, in particular, with undisguised disfavour, while I, my oiled hair, deformed eyebrows and false beard notwithstanding, perspired with anxiety lest he should recognize me. But however unfavourably the reverend father may have viewed our little conclave, Mr. Marchmont, who had been watching him anxiously, gave him no chance of raising objections, but proceeded to open the matter forthwith.

"I have not brought any digest or precis of the case," said he, "because I know you prefer to hear the facts from the actual parties. But I had better give you a brief outline of the matter of our inquiry. The case is concerned with a Mr. Vitalis Reinhardt, who has been closely associated with Father Humperdinck for very many years past, and who has now, without notice or explanation, disappeared from his ordinary places of resort, ceased from communication with his friends, and adopted a mode of life quite alien from and inconsistent with his previous habits. Those are the main facts, stated in general terms."

"And the inquiry to which you referred?" said Thorndyke.

"Concerns itself with three questions," replied Marchmont, and he proceeded to check them off on his fingers. "First, is Vitalis Reinhardt alive or dead? Second, if he is alive, where is he? Third, having regard to the singular change in his habits, is his conduct such as might render it possible to place him under restraint or to prove him unfit to control his own affairs?"

"To certify him as insane, if I may put it bluntly," said Thorndyke. "That question could be decided only on a full knowledge of the nature of the changes in this person's habits, with which, no doubt, you are prepared to furnish us. But what instantly strikes me in your epitome of the proposed inquiry is this: you raise the question whether Mr. Reinhardt is alive or dead, and then you refer to certain changes in his habits; but, since a man must be alive to have any habits at all, the two questions seem to be mutually irreconcilable in relation to the same group of facts."

Father Humperdinck nodded approvingly. "Zat is chust our great diffulty," said he. "Zome zings make me suspect zat

my friend Reinhardt is dead; some ozzers zings make me feel certain zat he is alive. I do not know vich to zink. I am gombletely buzzled."

"Perhaps," said Thorndyke, "the best plan would be for Father Humperdinck to give us a detailed account of his relations with Mr. Reinhardt and of the latter gentleman's habits as they are known to him; after which we could discuss any questions that suggest themselves and clear up any points that seem to be obscure. What do you say, Marchmont?"

"It will be a long story," Marchmont replied doubtfully.

"So much the better," rejoined Thorndyke. "It will give us the more matter for consideration. I would suggest that Father Humperdinck tells us the story in his own way and that Mr. Howard takes down the statement. Then we shall have the principal data and can pursue any issue that seems to invite further investigation."

To this proposal Marchmont agreed, a little reluctantly, fortifying himself for the ordeal by lighting a cigar; and Father Humperdinck, having cast a somewhat disparaging glance at me, began his account of his missing friend, which I took down verbatim, and which I now reproduce shorn of the speaker's picturesque but rather tiresome peculiarities of pronunciation. "My acquaintance with Vitalis Reinhardt began more than forty years ago, when we were both schoolboys in the Jesuit's house at Louvain. But I did not see much of him then, as I was preparing for the novitiate while he was on the secular side. In spite of his German name, Vitalis was looked upon as an English boy, for his father had married a rich English lady and was settled in England; and Vitalis, being the only child, had very great expectations. When he left school I lost sight of him for some years, and it was only after the war had broken out between Germany and France that we met again. I had then just been ordained and was attached as chaplain to a Bavarian regiment; he had come out from England as a volunteer to attend the sick and wounded; and so we met, soon after the battle of Saarbrück, in the wards of a temporary hospital. But our career in the field was not a long one. Less than a month after Saarbrück, our little force met a French division and had to retreat, leaving a number of men and guns and all the wounded in the hands of the enemy. Both of us were among the prisoners, and Vitalis was one of the wounded, for, just as the retreat began, a French bullet struck him in the right hip. We were both taken to Paris with the rest of the prisoners, and there, in the hospital for wounded prisoners, I was allowed to visit him.

"His wound was a severe one. The bullet had entered deeply and lodged behind the bone of the hip, so that the repeated efforts of the surgeons to extract it not only failed but caused great pain and made the wound worse. From day to day poor Vitalis grew thinner and more yellow, and we could see plainly that if no change occurred, the end must come quite soon. So the doctors said and so Vitalis himself felt.

"Then it came to me that, if the skill of man failed us, we should ask for help from above. It happened that I possessed a relic of the blessed Saint Vincent de Paul, which was contained in a small gold reliquary, and which I had been permitted by the Father General to keep. I proposed to Vitalis that we should apply the relic and make a special appeal to the saint for help, and also that he should promise to dedicate some part of his great possessions to the service of God.

"He agreed readily, for he had always been a deeply pious man. Accordingly he made the promises as I had suggested, we offered up special prayers to the saint, and, with the permission of the surgeons, I attached the reliquary to the dressings of the wound, praying that it should avail to draw out the bullet."

"And did it?" asked Marchmont in a tone which evidently did not escape the observant Jesuit, for that noble-witted gentleman turned sharply on the lawyer and replied with severe emphasis: "No, sir, it did not. And why? Because there was no need. The very next day after the reliquary was applied, when the dressings were changed, a small shred of filthy cloth came out of the wound. That was the cause of the trouble, not the clean metal bullet. The saint, you see, sir, knew better than the surgeon."

"Evidently," said Marchmont, glancing quickly at me, and the expression that I caught in the eye of that elderly heathen suggested that he had actually contemplated a wink and then thought better of it.

"As soon as the piece of cloth was out of the wound," Father Humperdinck resumed, "all the trouble ceased. The fever abated, the wound healed, and very soon Vitalis was able to get about, none the worse for his mishap.

"It was natural that he should be grateful to the saint who had saved his life, for though we look forward to the hereafter, we do not wish to die. Also was it natural that he should feel a devotion to the holy relic which had been the appointed instrument of his recovery. He did, and to gratify him, I obtained the Father General's permission to bestow it on him, which gave him great joy, and thenceforth he always carried the reliquary on his person."

"I hope he kept his promise to the saint," said Marchmont.

"He did; faithfully, and, indeed, handsomely. No sooner was he recovered of his wound than he proposed to me the founding of a new society of brothers of charity to attend the sick and wounded. I consulted with the Father General of my Society—the Society of Jesus—and received his sanction to act as director of the new society or fraternity which was to be affiliated to the Society of Jesus under the title of 'The Poor Brothers of Saint Joseph of Aramithea'."

"Why not Saint Vincent de Paul?" asked Marchmont.

"Because there was already a society named after that saint, and because Saint Joseph was a man of eminent charity. But I shall not weary you with a history of our society. It was founded and blessed by His Holiness, the Pope, it prospered, and it still prospers to the glory of God and to the benefit and relief of the sick, the poor, and the suffering. At first Vitalis paid all the costs, and he has been a generous benefactor ever since."

"This is all extremely interesting," said Marchmont, "but—you will excuse my asking—has it any bearing on your friend's disappearance?"

"Yes, sir, it has," replied Father Humperdinck, "as you shall berceive ven I my narradive gondinue."

Mr. Marchmont bowed, and Father Humperdinck, quite undisturbed by the interruption, "gondinued his narradive."

"Our first house was established in Belgium, near Brussels, and Vitalis came to live with us in community. He did not regularly join the society or take any vows, but he lived with us as one of ourselves and wore the habit of a lay brother when in the house and the dress of one when he went abroad. This he has continued to do ever since. Though bound by no vows, he has lived the life of a professed religious by choice, occupying an ordinary cell for sleeping and taking his meals at the refectory table. But not always. From time to time he has taken little holidays to travel about and mix—with the outer world. Sometimes he would come to England to visit his relatives, and sometimes he would spend a few weeks in one of the great cities of the Continent, looking over the museums and picture-galleries. He was greatly interested in art and liked to frequent the society of painters and sculptors, of whom he knew several; and one, in particular—an English painter named Burton, whose acquaintance he made quite recently—he seemed very much attached to, for he stayed with him at Bruges for more than a month.

"When he came back from Bruges, he told me that he purposed going to England to see his relatives and to make certain arrangements with his lawyers for securing a part of his property to our Society. I had often urged him to do this, but, hitherto, he had retained complete control of his property and only paid the expenses of the Society as they occurred. He was most generous, but, of course, this was a bad arrangement, because, in the event of his death, we should have been left without the support that he had promised. It seemed that while he was at Bruges he had discussed this matter with Mr. Burton, who was a Catholic, and that the Englishman also had advised him to make a permanent provision for the Society. It seemed that he had decided to divide his property between our community and a cousin of his who lives in England, a project of which I strongly approved. After staying with us for a month or two, he left for England with the purpose of making this arrangement. That was in the middle of last September, and I have not seen him since."

"Did he complete the arrangements that he had mentioned?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, he did not. He made certain arrangements as to his property, but they were very different ones from those he had proposed. But we shall come to that presently. Let me finish my story.

"A few days after Vitalis left us, our oldest lay brother was taken very seriously ill. I wrote to Vitalis, who was deeply attached to Brother Bartholomew, telling him of this, and, as I did not know where he was staying, I sent the letter to his cousin's house at Hampstead. He replied, on the eighteenth of September, that he should return immediately. He said that he was then booking his luggage and paying his hotel bill; that he had to see his cousin again, but that he would try to come by the night train, or if he missed that, he would sleep at the station hotel and start as early as possible on the following day, the nineteenth. That was the last I ever heard from him. He never came and has never communicated with me since."

"You have made enquiries, of course?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. When he did not come, I wrote to his lawyer, Mr. Wyndhurst, whom I knew slightly. But Mr. Wyndhurst was dead, and my letter was answered by Mr. Marchmont. From him I learned that Vitalis had called on him on the morning of the nineteenth and made certain arrangements of which he, perhaps, will tell you. Mr. Marchmont ascertained that, on the same day, Vitalis's luggage was taken from the cloak-room in time to catch the boat train. I have made inquiries and find that he arrived at Calais, and I have succeeded in tracing him to Paris, but there I have lost him. Where he is now I am unable to discover.

"And now, before I finish my story, you had better hear what Mr. Marchmont has to tell. He has been very close with me, but you are a lawyer and perhaps know better how to deal with lawyers."

Thorndyke glanced enquiringly at the solicitor, who, in his turn, looked dubiously at the end of his waning cigar. "The fact is," said he, "I am in a rather difficult position. Mr. Reinhardt has employed me as his solicitor, and I don't quite see my way to discussing his private affairs without his authority."

"That is a perfectly correct attitude," said Thorndyke, "and yet I am going to urge you to tell us what passed at your interview with your client. I can't go into particulars at present, but I will ask you to take it from me that there are sound reasons why you should; and I will undertake to hold you immune from any blame for having done so."

Marchmont looked sharply and with evidently awakened interest at Thorndyke. "I think I know what that means," he said, "and I will take you at your word, having learned by experience what your word is worth. But before describing the interview, I had better let you know how Reinhardt had previously disposed of his property.

"About twelve years ago he got Wyndhurst to draft a will for him by which a life interest in the entire property was vested in his cousin, a Miss Augusta Vyne, with reversion to her niece, Sylvia Vyne, the only child of his cousin Robert. This will was duly executed in our office.

"After that our firm had, until quite recently, no special business to transact for Mr. Reinhardt beyond the management of his investments. The whole of his property—which was all personal—was in our hands to invest, and our relations with him were confined to the transfer of sums of money to his bank when we received instructions from him to effect such transfer. He never called at the office, and latterly there has been no one there who knew him excepting Wyndhurst himself and the clerk, Bell.

"The next development occurred last September. On the seventeenth I received a letter from him, written at Miss Vyne's house at Hampstead, saying that he had been discussing his affairs with her and that he should like to call on me and make some slight alterations in the disposal of the property. I replied on the eighteenth, addressing my letter to him at Miss Vyne's house, making an appointment for eleven o'clock on the morning of the nineteenth. He kept the appointment punctually, and we had a short interview, at which he explained the new arrangements which he wished to make.

"He began by saying that he had found it somewhat inconvenient, living, as he did, on the Continent, to have his account at an English Bank. He proposed, therefore, to transfer it to a private bank at Paris, conducted by a certain M. Desire, or rather to open an account there, for he did not suggest closing his account at his English bank."

"Do you know anything about this M. Desire?" asked Thorndyke.

"I did not, but I have since ascertained that he is a person of credit—quite a substantial man in fact—and that his business is chiefly that of private banker and agent to the officers of the army.

"Well, Mr. Reinhardt went on to say that he had become rather tired of the monotonous life of a lay brother—which he, after all, was not—and wished for a little freedom and change. Accordingly he intended to travel for a time—which was his reason for employing M. Desire—and did not propose, necessarily, to keep anyone informed of his whereabouts. He was a rich man and he had decided to get some advantage from his wealth, which really did not seem to me at all an unreasonable decision. He added that he had no intention of withdrawing his support from the Society of the Poor Brothers; he merely intended to dissociate himself, personally, from it, and he suggested that any occasions that might arise for pecuniary assistance should be addressed to him under cover of M. Desire.

"Finally, he desired me to transfer one thousand pounds stock to his new agent seven days from the date of our interview, and gave me an authority in writing to that effect in which he instructed me to accept M. Desire's receipt as a valid discharge."

"And you did so?" asked Thorndyke.

"Certainly I did. And I hold M. Desire's receipt for the amount."

"Did you think it necessary to raise the question of your client's identity, seeing that no one in the office knew him personally?"

"No, I did not. The question did not arise. There could not possibly be any doubt on the subject. He was an old client of the firm, and our correspondence had been carried on under cover of his cousin, Miss Vyne, who had known him all his life. You remember that I wrote to him at Miss Vyne's address, making the appointment for the interview."

"And what happened next?"

"The next development was a letter from Father Humperdinck asking if I could give him Mr. Reinhardt's address. Of course I could not, but I wrote to M. Desire asking him if he could give it to me. Desire replied that he did not, at the moment, know where Mr. Reinhardt was, but would, if desired, take charge of any communications and forward them at the first opportunity. This statement may or may not have been true, but I don't think we shall get any more information out of Desire. He is Reinhardt's agent and will act on his instructions. If Reinhardt has told him not to give anyone his address, naturally he won't give it. So there the matter ends, so far as I am concerned."

"Did Vitalis make no suggestion as to altering his will?" Father Humperdinck enquired.

"None whatever. Nothing was said about the will. But," Mr. Marchmont added, after a cogitative pause, "we must remember that he has another man of business now. There is no saying what he may have done through M. Desire."

Father Humperdinck nodded gloomily, and Thorndyke addressing the solicitor, asked: "And that is all you have to tell us?"

"Yes. And I'm not sure that it is not a good deal more than I ought to have told you. It is Father Humperdinck's turn now."

The Jesuit acknowledged the invitation to resume his narrative by a stiff bow and then proceeded: "You can now see, sir, that what I said is perfectly correct. The conduct of my friend Vitalis shows a sudden and unaccountable change. It is quite inconsistent with his habits and his way of thinking. And the change is, as I say, so sudden. One day he is coming with the greatest haste to the bedside of his sick friend, Brother Bartholomew, the next he is making arrangements for a life of selfish pleasure, utterly indifferent as to whether that friend is alive or dead. As a matter of fact, the good brother passed away to his reward the day after Vitalis should have arrived, without even a message from his old friend. But now I return to my story.

"When Vitalis failed to appear, and I could get no news of him, I became very anxious; and, as it happened that the business of our Society called me to England, I determined to inquire into the matter. Circumstances compelled me to travel by way of Boulogne and cross to Folkestone. I say 'circumstances,' but I should rather say that I was guided that way by the hand of Providence, for, in the train that brought me from Folkestone to London, I had a most astonishing experience. In the carriage, alone with me, there travelled a young man, a very strange young man indeed. He was a very large man—or, I should say, very high—and in appearance rather fierce and wild. His clothes were good, but they were disordered and stained with mud, as if he had been drunk at night and had rolled in the gutter. And this, I think, was the case, for, soon after we had started, he began to turn out his pockets on the seat of the carriage, as if to see whether he had

lost anything during his debauch. And then it was that I saw a most astonishing thing. Among the objects that this man took from his pockets and laid on the seat, was the reliquary that I had given so many years ago to Vitalis.

"I could not mistake it. Once it had been mine, and I had been accustomed to see it almost daily since. Moreover the young man had the effrontery to pass it to me that I might examine it, and I found on it the very letters which I, myself, had caused to be engraved on it. When I asked him where he had obtained it, he told me that he had picked it up at Hampstead, and he professed not to know what it was. But his answers were very evasive and I did not believe him."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Marchmont, "there was nothing improbable in his statement. Mr. Reinhardt had been at Hampstead and might have dropped it."

"Possibly. But he would have taken measures to recover it. He would not have left England until he had found it. He was a rich man, and he would have offered a large reward for this his most prized possession."

"You say," said Thorndyke, "that he habitually carried this reliquary on his person. Can you tell us how he carried or wore it?"

"That," replied Father Humperdinck, "was what I was coming to. The reliquary was a small gold object with a ring at each end. It was meant I suppose, to be worn round the wrist, or perhaps the neck, by means of a cord or chain attached to the two rings, or to be inserted into a chaplet of devotional beads. But this was not the way in which Vitalis carried it. He possessed a small and very beautiful crucifix which he set great store by, because it was given to him by one of the fathers when he left school, and which he used to wear suspended from his neck by a green silk cord. Now, when I gave him the reliquary, he caused a goldsmith to link one of its rings to the ring of the crucifix and he fastened the silk cord to the other ring, and so suspended both the reliquary and the crucifix from his neck."

"Did he wear them outside his clothing so that they were visible?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, outside his waistcoat, so that they were not only visible but very conspicuous when his coat was unbuttoned. It was, of course, very unsuitable to the dress of a lay brother, and I spoke to him about it several times. But he was sometimes rather self-willed, as you may judge by his refusal to settle an endowment on the Society, and, naturally, as he was not professed, I had no authority over him. But I shall return presently to the reliquary. Now I continue about this young man."

"When I had heard his explanation, and decided that he was telling me lies, I made a simple pretext to discover his name and place of abode. With the same effrontery, he gave me his card, which I have here, and which, you will see, is stained with mud, owing, no doubt, to those wallowings in the mire of which I have spoken." He drew the card from his pocket-book and handed it to Thorndyke, who read it gravely, and, pushing it across the table to me, said, without moving a muscle of his face: "You had better copy it into your notes, Mr. Howard, so that we may have the record complete."

I accordingly copied out my own name and address with due solemnity and a growing enjoyment of the situation, and then returned the card to Father Humperdinck, who pocketed it carefully and resumed: "Having the name and address of this young man, I telegraphed immediately to a private detective bureau in Paris, asking to have sent to me, if possible, a certain M. Foucault, who makes a speciality of following and watching suspected persons. This Foucault is a man of extraordinary talent. His power of disguising himself is beyond belief and his patience is inexhaustible. Fortunately he was disengaged and came to me without delay, and, when I had given him the name and address of this young man, Jardine, and described him from my recollection of him, he set a watch on the house and found that the man was really living there, as he had said, and that he made a daily journey to the hospital of St. Margaret's, where he seemed to have some business, as he usually stayed there until evening."

"St. Margaret's!" exclaimed Marchmont. "Why that is your hospital, Thorndyke. Do you happen to know this man Jardine?"

"There is, or was, a student of that name, who qualified some little time ago, and who is probably the man Father Humperdinck is referring to. A tall man; quite as tall, I should say, as my friend here, Mr. Howard."

"I should say," said Father Humperdinck, "that the man, Jardine, is taller, decidedly taller. I watched him as I walked behind him up the platform at Charing Cross, and M. Foucault has shown him to me since. But that matters not. Have you seen the man, Jardine, lately at the hospital?"

"Not very lately," Thorndyke replied. "I saw him there nearly a fortnight ago, but that, I think, was the last time."

"Ah!" exclaimed Humperdinck. "Exactly. But I shall continue my story. For some time M. Foucault kept a close watch on this man, but discovered nothing fresh. He went to the hospital daily, he came home, and he stayed indoors the whole evening. But, at last, there came a new discovery."

"One morning M. Foucault saw the man, Jardine, come out of his house, dressed more carefully than usual. From his house, Foucault followed him to a picture gallery in Leicester Square and went in after him; and there he saw him meet a female, evidently by a previous assignation. AND," Father Humperdinck continued, slapping the table to emphasize the climax of his story, "From-the-neck-of-that-female-was-hanging-Vitalis-Reinhardt's-CRUCIFIX!"

Having made this thrilling communication, our reverend client leaned back to watch its effect on his audience. I am afraid he must have been a little disappointed, for Thorndyke was habitually impassive in his exterior, and, as for Jarvis and me, we were fully occupied in maintaining a decent and befitting gravity. But Marchmont—the only person present who was not already acquainted with the incident—saved the situation by exclaiming: "Very remarkable! Very remarkable"

indeed!"

"It is more than remarkable," said Father Humperdinck. "It is highly suspicious. You observe that the reliquary and the crucifix had been linked together. Now they are separated, and since both the rings of the reliquary were unbroken, it follows that the ring of the crucifix must have been cut through and a new one made, by which to suspend it."

"I don't see anything particularly suspicious in that," said Marchmont. "If Jardine found the two articles fixed together, and—having failed to discover the owner—wished to give the crucifix to his friend, it is not unnatural that he should have separated them."

"I do not believe that he found them," Father Humperdinck replied doggedly; "but I shall continue my story and you will see. There is not much more to tell."

"It seems that the man, Jardine, suspected Foucault of watching him, for presently he left the gallery in company with the female, and, after being followed for some distance, he managed to escape. As soon as Foucault found that he had lost him, he went to Jardine's house and waited about the neighbourhood, and an hour or two later he had the good fortune to see him coming from Hampstead towards Highgate, in company with another female. He followed them until they entered a narrow passage or lane that leads up the hill, and when they had gone up this some distance, he followed, but could not get near enough to hear what they were saying."

"And now he had a most strange and terrible experience. For some time past he had felt a suspicion that some person—some accomplice of Jardine's perhaps—was following and watching him; and now he had proof of it. At the top of the lane, Jardine stopped to talk to the female, and Foucault crept on tiptoe towards him; and while he was doing so, he heard someone approaching stealthily up the lane, behind him. Suddenly, Jardine began to return down the lane. As it was not convenient for Foucault to meet him there, he also turned and walked back; and then he heard a sound as if someone were climbing the high wooden fence that enclosed the lane. Then Jardine began to run, and Foucault was compelled also to run but he would have been overtaken if it had not happened that Jardine fell down."

"Now, just as he heard Jardine fall, he came to a broken place in the fence, and it occurred to him to creep through the hole and hide while Jardine passed. He accordingly began to do so, but no sooner had he thrust his head through the hole than some unseen ruffian dealt him a violent blow which rendered him instantly insensible. When he recovered his senses, he found himself lying in a churchyard which adjoins the lane, but Jardine and the other ruffian were, of course, nowhere to be seen."

"And now I come to the last incident that I have to relate. The assault took place on a Saturday; on the Sunday M. Foucault was somewhat indisposed and unable to go out, but early on Monday he resumed his watch on Jardine's house. It was nearly noon when Jardine came out, dressed as if for travelling and carrying a valise. He went first to a house near Piccadilly and from thence to the hospital in a cab. Foucault followed in another cab and saw him go into the hospital and waited for him to come out. But he never came. Foucault waited until midnight, but he did not come out. He had vanished."

"He had probably come out by a back exit and gone home," said Marchmont.

"Not so," replied Humperdinck. "The next day Foucault watched Jardine's house, but he did not come there. Then he made enquiries; but Jardine is not there, and the landlady does not know where he is. Also the porter at the hospital knows nothing and is not at all polite. The man Jardine has disappeared as if he had never been."

"That really is rather queer," said Marchmont. "It is a pity that you did not give me all these particulars at first. However, that can't be helped now. Is this all that you have to tell us?"

"It is all; unless there is anything that you wish to ask me."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that it would be well for us to have a description of Mr. Reinhardt; and, as we have to trace him, if possible, a photograph would be exceedingly useful."

"I have not a photograph with me," said Father Humperdinck, "but I will obtain one and send it to you. Meanwhile I will tell you what my friend Vitalis is like. He is sixty-two years of age, spare, upright, rather tall—his height is a hundred and seventy-three centimetres—"

"Roughly five feet nine," interposed Thorndyke.

"His hair is nearly white, he is, of course, clean shaven, he has grey eyes, a straight nose, not very prominent, and remarkably good teeth for his age, which he shows somewhat when he talks. I think he is a little vain about his teeth and he well may be, for there are not many men of sixty-two who have not a single false tooth, nor even one that has been stopped by the dentist. As to his clothing, he wears the ordinary dress of a lay brother, which you are probably familiar with, and he nearly always wears gloves, even indoors."

"Is there any reason for his wearing gloves?" Thorndyke asked.

"Not now. The habit began when he had some affliction of the skin, which made it necessary for him to keep his hands covered with gloves which contained some ointment or dressing, and afterwards for a time to conceal the disagreeable appearance of the skin. The habit having been once formed, he continued it, saying that his hands were more comfortable covered up than when exposed to the air."

“Was he dressed in this fashion when he called at your office, Marchmont?” asked Thorndyke.

“Yes. Even to the gloves. I noticed, with some surprise, that he did not take them off even when he wrote and signed the note of which I told you.”

“Was he then wearing the reliquary and crucifix as Father Humperdinck has described, on the front of his waistcoat?”

“He may have been, but I didn’t notice them, as I fancy I should have done if they had been there.”

“And you have nothing more to tell us, Father Humperdinck, as to your friend’s personal appearance?”

“No. I will send you the photograph and write to you if I think of anything that I have forgotten. And now, perhaps you can tell me if you think that you will be able to answer those questions that Mr. Marchmont put to you.”

“I cannot, of course, answer them now,” replied Thorndyke. “The facts that you have given us will have to be considered and compared, and certain enquiries will have to be made. Are you staying long in England?”

“I shall be here for at least a month; and I may as well leave you my address, although Mr. Marchmont has it.”

“In the course of a month,” Thorndyke said, as he took the proffered card, “I think I may promise you that we shall have settled definitely whether your friend is alive or dead; and if we find that he is alive, we shall, no doubt, be able to ascertain his whereabouts.”

“That is very satisfactory,” said Father Humperdinck. “I hope you shall be able to make good your promise.”

With this he rose, and, having shaken hands stiffly with Thorndyke, bestowed on Jervis and me a ceremonious bow and moved towards the door. I thought that Marchmont looked a little wistful, as if he would have liked to stay and have a few words with us alone; indeed, he lingered for a moment or two after the door was open, but then, apparently altering his mind, he wished us “good-night” and followed his client.



## XVII — THE PALIMPSEST

IT was getting late when our friends left us, but nevertheless, as soon as they were gone, we all drew our chairs up to the fire with the obvious intention of discussing the situation and began, with one accord, to fill our pipes. Jervis was the first to get his tobacco alight, and, having emitted a voluminous preliminary puff, he proceeded to open the debate. "That man, Jardine, seems to be a pretty desperate character. Just think of his actually wallowing in the mire—not merely rolling, mind you, but wallowing—and of his repulsive habit of consorting with females; one after the other, too, in rapid succession. It's a shocking instance of depravity."

"Our reverend friend," said Thorndyke, "reaches his conclusions by a rather short route—in some cases, at least; in others, his methods seem a little indirect and roundabout."

"Yes," agreed Jervis, "he's a devil at guessing. But he didn't get much food for the imagination out of the man, Thorndyke. Why were you so extraordinarily secretive? With what he told you and what you knew before, you could surely have suggested a line of inquiry. Why didn't you?"

"Principally because of the man's personality. I could not have answered his questions; I could, only have suggested one or two highly probable solutions of the problem that he offered and partial solutions at that. But I am not much addicted to giving partial solutions—to handing over the raw material of a promising inquiry. Certainly, not to a man like this, who seems incapable of a straight forward action."

"The reverend father," said Jervis, "does certainly seem to be a rather unnecessarily downy bird. And he doesn't seem to have got much by his excessive artfulness, after all."

"No," agreed Thorndyke, "nothing whatever. Quite the contrary, in fact. Look at his ridiculous conduct in respect of 'the man Jardine'. I don't complain of his having taken the precaution to obtain that malefactor's address; but, when he had got it, if he had not been tortuous, so eager to be cunning; if, in short, he had behaved like an ordinary sensible man, he would have got, at once, all the information that Jardine had to give. He could have called on Jardine, written to him, employed a lawyer or applied to the police. Either of these simple and obvious plans would have been successful; instead of which, he must needs go to the trouble and expense of engaging this absurd spy."

"Who found a mare's nest and got his head thumped," remarked Jervis.

"Then," continued Thorndyke, "look at his behaviour to Marchmont. Evidently he put the case into Marchmont's hands, but, equally evident, he withheld material facts and secretly tinkered at the case himself. No, Jervis, I give no information to Father Humperdinck until I have this case complete to the last rivet. But, all the same, I am greatly obliged to him, and especially to Marchmont for bringing him here. He has given us a connected story to collate with our rather loose collection of facts and, what is perhaps more important, he has put our investigation on a business footing. That is a great advantage. If I should want to invoke the aid of the powers that be, I can do so now with a definite locus standi as the legal representative of interested parties."

"I can't imagine," said I, "in what direction you are going to push your inquiries. Father Humperdinck has given us, as you say, a connected story, but it is a very unexpected one, to me, at least, and does not fall into line at all with what we know—that is, if you are assuming, as I have been, that the man whom I saw lying in Millfield Lane was Vitalis Reinhardt."

"It is difficult," replied Thorndyke, "to avoid that assumption, though we must be on our guard against coincidences; but the man whom you saw agreed with the description that has been given to us, we know that Reinhardt was in the neighbourhood on that day, and you found the reliquary on the following morning in the immediate vicinity. We seem to be committed to the hypothesis that the man was Reinhardt unless we can prove that he was someone else, or that Reinhardt was in some other place at the time; which at present we cannot."

"Then," said I, "in that case, the bobby must have been right, after all. The man couldn't have been dead, seeing that he called on Marchmont the following day and was afterwards traced to Paris. But I must say that he looked as dead as Queen Anne. It just shows how careful one ought to be in giving opinions."

"Some authority has said," remarked Jervis, "that the only conclusive proof of death is decomposition. I believe it was old Taylor who said so, and I am inclined to think that he wasn't far wrong."

"But," said Thorndyke, "assuming that the man whom you saw was Reinhardt, and that he was not dead how do you explain the other circumstances? Was he insensible from the effects of injury or drugs? Or was he deliberately shamming insensibility? Was it he who passed over the fence? and if so, did he climb over unassisted or was he helped over? And what answers do you suggest to the questions that Marchmont propounded? You answer his first question: 'Is Reinhardt alive?' in the affirmative. What about the others?"

"As to where he is," I replied. "I can only say, the Lord knows; probably skulking somewhere on the Continent. As to his state of mind, the facts seem to suggest that, in vulgar parlance, he has gone off his onion. He must be as mad as a hatter to have behaved in the way that he has. For, even assuming that he wanted to get clear of the Poor Brothers of Saint Jeremiah Diddler without explicitly saying so, he adopted a fool's plan. There is no sense in masquerading as a corpse one day and turning up smiling at your lawyer's office the next. If he meant to be dead, he should have stuck to it and remained dead."

"The objection to that," said Jervis, "is that Marchmont would have proceeded to get permission to presume death and



administer the will.”

“I see. Then I can only suppose that he had got infected by Father Humperdinck and resolved to be artful at all costs and hang the consequences.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “I understand your view to be that Reinhardt is at present hiding somewhere on the Continent and that his mind is more or less affected?”

“Yes. Though as to his being unfit to control his own affairs, I am not so clear. I fancy there was more evidence in that direction when he was forking out the bulk of his income to maintain the poverty of the Poor Brothers. But the truth is, I haven’t any opinions on the case at all. I am in a complete fog about the whole affair.”

“And no wonder,” said Jervis. “One set of facts seems to suggest most strongly that Reinhardt must certainly be dead. Another set of facts seems to prove beyond doubt that he was alive, at least after that affair in Millfield Lane. He may be perpetrating an elephantine practical joke on the Poor Brothers; but that doesn’t seem to be particularly probable. The whole case is a tangle of contradictions which one might regard as beyond unravelment if it were not for a single clear and intelligible fact.”

“What is that?” I asked.

“That my revered senior has undertaken to furnish a solution in the course of a month; from which I gather that my revered senior has something up his sleeve.”

“There is nothing up my sleeve,” said Thorndyke, “that might not equally well be up yours. I have made no separate investigations. The actual data which I possess were acquired in the presence of one or both of you, and are now the common property of us all. I am referring, of course, to the original data, not to fresh matter obtained by inference from, or further examination of those data.”

Jervis smiled sardonically. “It is the old story,” said he. “The magician offers you his hat to inspect. ‘You observe, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no deception. You can look inside it and examine the lining, and you can also inspect the top of my head. I now put on my hat. I now take it off again and you notice that there is a guinea pig sitting in it. There was no deception, ladies and gentlemen, you had all the data.’”

Thorndyke laughed and shook his head, “That’s all nonsense, Jervis,” he said. “It is a false analogy. I have done nothing to divert your attention. The guinea pig has been staring you in the face all the time.”

“Very rude of him,” murmured Jervis.

“I have even drawn your attention to him once or twice. But, seriously, I don’t think that this case is so very obscure, though mind you, it is a mere hypothesis so far as I am concerned, and may break down completely when I come to apply the tests that I have in view. But what I mean is, that the facts known to us suggested a very obvious hypothesis and that the suggestion was offered equally to us all. The verification may fail, but that is another matter.”

“Are you going to work at the case immediately?” I asked.

“No,” Thorndyke replied. “Jervis and I have to attend at the Maidstone Assizes for the next few days. We are retained on a case which involves some very important issues in relation to life assurance, and that will take up most of our time. So this other affair will have to wait.

“And meanwhile,” said Jervis, “you will stay at home like a good boy and mind the shop; and I suppose we shall have to find you something to do, to keep you out of mischief. What do you say to making a longhand transcript of Father Humperdinck’s statement?”

“Yes, you had better do that,” said Thorndyke; “and attach it to the original shorthand copy. And now we must really turn in or we shall never be ready for our start in the morning.”

The transcription of Father Humperdinck’s statement gave me abundant occupation for the whole of the following morning. But when that was finished, I was without any definite employment, and, though I was not in the least dull—for I was accustomed to a solitary life—I suppose I was in that state of susceptibility to mischief that is proverbially associated with unemployment. And in these untoward circumstances I was suddenly exposed to a great temptation; and after some feeble efforts at resistance, succumbed ignominiously.

I shall offer no excuses for my conduct nor seek in any way to mitigate the judgment that all discreet persons will pass upon my folly. I make no claims to discretion or to the caution and foresight of a man like Thorndyke. At this time I was an impulsive and rather heedless young man, and my actions were pretty much those which might have been expected from a person of such temperament.

The voice of the tempter issued in the first place from our letter-box, and assumed the sound of the falling of letters thereinto. I hastened to extract the catch, and sorting out the envelopes, selected one, the superscription of which was in Sylvia’s now familiar handwriting. It was actually addressed to Dr. Thorndyke, but a private mark, on which we had agreed, exposed that naively pious fraud and gave me the right to open it; which I did, and seated myself in the armchair to enjoy its perusal at my ease.

It was a delightful letter; bright, gossipy and full of frank and intimate friendliness. As I read it, the trim, graceful figure and pretty face of the writer rose before me and made me wonder a little discontentedly how long it would be before I

should look on her and hear her voice again. It was now getting into the third week since I had last seen her, and, as the time passed, I was feeling more and more how great a blank in my life the separation from her had caused. Our friendship had grown up in a quiet and unsensational fashion and I suppose I had not realized all that it meant; but I was realizing it now; and, as I coned over her letter, with its little personal notes and familiar turns of expression, I began to be consumed with a desire to see her, to hear her speak, to tell her that she was not as other women to me, and to claim a like special place in her thoughts.

It was towards the end of the letter that the tempter spoke out in clear and unmistakable language, and these were the words that he used, through the medium of the innocent and unconscious Sylvia: "You remember those sketches that you stole for me—'pinched,' I think was your own expression. Well, I have cleaned off the daubs of paint with which they had been disfigured and put them in rough frames in my studio. All but one; and I began on that yesterday with a scraper and a rag dipped in chloroform. But I took off, not only the defacing marks but part of the surface as well; and then I got such a surprise! I shan't tell you what the surprise was, because you'll see, when you come out of the house of bondage. I am going to work on it again to-morrow, and perhaps I shall get the transformation finished. How I wish you could come and see it done! It takes away more than half the joy of exploration not to be able to share the discovery with you; in fact, I have a good mind to leave it unfinished so that we can complete the transformation together."

Now, I need not say that, as to the precious sketches, I cared not a fig what was under the top coat of paint. What I did care for was that this dear maid was missing me as I missed her; was wanting my sympathy with her little interests and pleasures and was telling me, half unconsciously, perhaps, that my absence had created a blank in her life, as her absence had in mine. And forthwith I began to ask myself whether there was really any good reason why I should not, just for this once, break out of my prison and snatch a few brief hours of sunshine. The spy had been exploded. He was not likely to pick up my tracks after all this time and now that my appearance was so altered; and I did not care much if he did seeing that he had been shown to be perfectly harmless. The only circumstance that tended to restrain me from this folly was the one that mitigated its rashness—the change in my appearance; and even that, now that I was used to it and knew that my aspect was neither grotesque nor ridiculous, had little weight, for Sylvia would be prepared for the change and we could enjoy the joke together.

I was aware, even at the time, that I was not being quite candid with myself, for, if I had been, I should obviously have consulted Thorndyke. Instead of which I answered the letter by return, announcing my intention of coming to tea on the following day; and having sent Polton out to post it, spent the remainder of the afternoon in gleeful anticipation of my little holiday, tempered by some nervousness as to what Thorndyke would have to say on the matter, and as to what "my pretty friend," as Mrs. Samway had very appropriately called her, would think of my having begun my letter with the words, "My dear Sylvia."

Nothing happened to interfere with my nefarious plans.

On the following morning, Thorndyke and Jervis went off after an early breakfast, leaving me in possession of the premises and master of my actions. I elected to anticipate the usual luncheon time by half an hour, and, when this meal was disposed of, I crept to my room and thoroughly cleansed my hair of the grease which Polton still persisted in applying to it; for, since my hat would conceal it while I was out of doors, the added disfigurement was unnecessary. I was even tempted to tamper slightly with my eyebrows, but this impulse I nobly resisted; and, having dried my hair and combed it in its normal fashion, I descended on tip-toe to the sitting-room and wrote a short, explanatory note to Polton, which I left conspicuously on the table. Then I switched the door-bell on to the laboratory, and, letting myself out like a retreating burglar, closed the door silently and sneaked away down the dark staircase.

Once fairly outside, I went off like a lamplighter, and, shooting out through the Tudor Street gate, made my way eastward to Broad Street Station, where I was fortunate enough to catch a train that was just on the point of starting. At Hampstead Heath Station I got out, and, snuffing the air joyfully, set forth at my best pace up the slope that leads to the summit; and in little over twenty minutes found myself at the gate of "The Hawthorns."

There was no need to knock or ring. My approach had been observed from the window, and, as I strode up the garden path, the door opened and Sylvia ran out to meet me. "It was nice of you to come!" she exclaimed, as I took her hand and held it in mine. "I don't believe you ought to have ventured out, but I am most delighted all the same. Don't make a noise; Mopsy is having a little doze in the drawing room. Come into the morning room and let me have a good look at you."

I followed her meekly into the front room, where, in the large bay window, she inspected me critically, her cheeks dimpling with a mischievous smile. "There's something radically wrong about your eyebrows," she said, "but, really, you are not in the least the fright that you made out. As to the beard and moustache, I am not sure that I don't rather like them."

"I hope you don't," I replied, "because, off they come at the first opportunity—unless, of course, you forbid it."

"Does my opinion of your appearance matter so much then?"

"It matters entirely. I don't care what I look like to anyone else."

"Oh! what a fib!" exclaimed Sylvia. "Don't I remember how very neatly turned out you always were when you used to pass me in the lane before we knew one another?"

"Exactly," I retorted. "We didn't know one another then. That makes all the difference in the world—to me, at any rate."

"Does it?" she said, colouring a little and looking at me thoughtfully. "It's very—very flattering of you to say so, Dr. Jardine."

"I hope you don't mean that as a snub," I said, rather uneasy at the form of her reply and thinking of my letter.

"A snub!" she exclaimed. "No, I certainly don't. What did I say?"

"You called me Dr. Jardine. I addressed you in my letter as 'Sylvia—My dear Sylvia.'"

"And what ought I to have said?" she asked, blushing warmly and casting down her eyes.

"Well, Sylvia, if you liked me as well as I like you, I don't see why you shouldn't call me Humphrey. We are quite old friends now."

"So we are," she agreed; "and perhaps it would be less formal. So Humphrey it shall be in future, since that is your royal command. But tell me, how did you prevail on Dr. Thorndyke to let you come here? Is there any change in the situation?"

"There's a change in my situation, and a mighty agreeable change, too. I'm here."

"Now don't be silly. How did you persuade Dr. Thorndyke to let you come?"

"Ha—that, my dear Sylvia, is a rather embarrassing question. Shall we change the subject?"

"No, we won't." She looked at me suspiciously for a moment and then exclaimed in low, tragical tones: "Humphrey! You don't mean to tell me that you came away without his knowledge!"

"I'm afraid that is what it amounts to. I saw a loop-hole and I popped through it; and here I am, as I remarked before."

"But how dreadful of you! Perfectly shocking! And whatever will he say to you when you go back?"

"That is a question that I am not proposing to present vividly to my consciousness until I arrive on the door-step. I've broken out of chokee and I'm going to have a good time—to go on having a good time, I should say."

"Then you consider that you are having a good time now?"

"I don't consider. I am sure of it. Am I not, at this very moment looking at you? And what more could a man desire?"

She tried to look severe, though the attempt was not strikingly successful, and retorted in an admonishing tone: "You needn't try to wheedle me with compliments. You are a very wicked person and most indiscreet. But it seems to me that some sort of change has come over you since you retired from the world. Don't you think I'm right?"

"You're perfectly right. I've improved. That's what it is. Matured and mellowed, you know, like a bottle of claret that has been left in a cellar and forgotten. Say you think I've improved, Sylvia."

"I won't," she replied, and then, changing her mind, she added: "Yes, I will. I'll say that you are more insinuating than ever, if that will do. And now, as, you are clearly quite incorrigible, I won't scold you any more, especially as you 'broke out of chokee' to come and see me. You shall tell me all about your adventures."

"I didn't come here to talk about myself, Sylvia. I came to tell you something—well, about myself, perhaps, but—er—not my adventures you know or—or that sort of thing—but, I have been thinking a good deal, since I have been alone so much—about you, I mean, Sylvia—and—er—Oh! the deuce!"

The latter exclamation was evoked by the warning voice of the gong, evidently announcing tea, and the subsequent appearance of the housemaid; who was certainly not such a goose as she was supposed to be, for she tapped discreetly at the door and waited three full seconds before entering; and even then she appeared demurely unconscious of my existence. "If you please, Miss Sylvia, Miss Vyne has woke up and I've taken in the tea."

Such was the paltry interruption that arrested the flow of my eloquence and scattered my flowers of rhetoric to the winds. I murmured inwardly, "Blow the tea!" for the opportunity was gone; but I comforted myself with the reflection that it didn't matter very much, since Sylvia and I seemed to have arrived at a pretty clear understanding; which understanding was further clarified by a momentary contact of our hands as we followed the maid to the drawing-room. Miss Vyne was on this occasion, as on the last, seated in the exact centre of the room, and with the same monumental effect; so that my thoughts were borne irresistibly to the ethnographical section of the British Museum, and especially to that part of it wherein the deities of Polynesia look out from their cases in perennial surprise at the degenerate European visitors. If she had been asleep previously, she was wide enough awake now; but the glittering eyes were not directed at me. From the moment of our entering the room they focussed themselves on Sylvia's face and there remained riveted, whereby the heightening of that young lady's complexion, which our interview had produced, became markedly accentuated. It was to no purpose that I placed myself before the rigid figure and offered my hand. A paw was lifted automatically to mine, but the eyes remained fixed on Sylvia. "What did you say this gentleman's name was!" the waxwork asked frigidly.

"This is Dr. Jardine," was the reply.

"Oh, indeed. And who was the gentleman who called some three weeks ago?"

"Why, that was Dr. Jardine; you know it was."

"So I thought, but my memory is not very reliable. And this is a Dr. Jardine, too? Very interesting. A medical family, apparently. But not much alike."

I was beginning to explain my identity and the cause of my altered appearance, when Sylvia approached with a cup of tea and a carefully dissected muffin, which latter she thrust under the nose of the elder lady; who regarded it attentively and with a slight squint, owing to its nearness. "It's of no use, you know," said Sylvia, "for you to pretend that you don't know him, because I've told you all about the transformation—that is, all I know myself. Don't you think it's rather a clever make-up?"

"If," said Miss Vyne, "by 'make-up' you mean a disguise, I think it is highly successful. The beard is a most admirable imitation."

"Oh, the beard is his own; at least, I think it is."

I confirmed this statement, ignoring Polton's slight additions. "Indeed," said Miss Vyne. "Then the wig—it is a wig, I suppose?"

"No, of course it isn't," Sylvia replied.

"Then," said Miss Vyne, majestically, "perhaps you will explain to me what the disguise consists of."

"Well," said Sylvia, "there are the eyebrows. You can see that they have been completely altered in shape."

"If I had committed the former shape of the eyebrows to memory, as you appear to have done," said Miss Vyne. "I should, no doubt, observe the change. But I did not. It seems to me that the disguise which you told me about with such a flourish of trumpets just amounts to this; that Dr. Jardine has allowed his beard to grow. I find the reality quite disappointing."

"Do you?" said Sylvia. "But, at any rate, you didn't recognize him; so your disappointment doesn't count for much."

The old lady, being thus hoist with her own petard, relapsed into majestic silence; and Sylvia then renewed her demand for an account of my adventures. "We want to hear all about that objectionable person who has been shadowing you, and how you finally got rid of him. Your letters were rather sketchy and wanting in detail, so you have got to make up the deficiency now."

Thus commanded, I plunged into an exhaustive account of those events which I have already chronicled at length and which I need not refer to again, nor need I record the cross-examination to which I was subjected, since it elicited nothing that is not set forth in the preceding pages. When I had finished my recital, however, Miss Vyne, who had listened to it in silence, hitherto, put a question which I had some doubts about answering. "Have you or Dr. Thorndyke been able to discover who this inquisitive person is and what is his object in following you about?"

I hesitated. As to my own experiences, I had no secrets from these friends of mine, excepting those that related to the subjects of Thorndyke's investigations, But I must not come here and babble about what took place in the sacred precincts of my principal's chambers. "I think I may tell you," said I, "that Dr. Thorndyke has discovered the identity of this man and that he is not the person whom we suspected him to be. But I mustn't say any more, as the information came through professional channels and consequently is not mine to give."

"Of course you mustn't," said Sylvia; "though I don't mind admitting that you have put me on tenterhooks of curiosity. But I daresay you will be able to tell us everything later."

I agreed that I probably should; and the talk then turned into fresh channels.

The short winter day was running out apace. The daylight had long since gone, and I began, with infinite reluctance, to think of returning to my cage. Indeed, when I looked at my watch, I was horrified to see how the time had fled. "My word!" I exclaimed. "I must be off, or Thorndyke will be putting the sleuth-hounds of the law on my track. And I don't know what you will think of me for having stayed such an unconscionable time."

"It isn't a ceremonial visit," said Sylvia, as I rose and made my adieux to her aunt. "We should have liked you to stay much longer."

Here she paused suddenly, and, clasping her hands, gazed at me with an expression of dismay. "Good Heavens! Humphrey!" she exclaimed.

"Eh?" said Miss Vyne.

"I was addressing Dr. Jardine," Sylvia explained, in some confusion.

"I didn't suppose you were addressing me," was the withering reply.

"Do you know," said Sylvia, "that I haven't shown you those sketches, after all. You must see them. They were the special object of your visit."

This was perfectly untrue, and she knew it; but I did not think it worth while to contest the statement in Miss Vyne's presence. Accordingly I expressed the utmost eagerness to see the trumpery sketches, and the more so since I had understood that they were on view in the studio; which turned out to be the case. "It won't take a minute for you to see them," said Sylvia. "I'll just run up and light the gas; and you are not to come in until I tell you."

She preceded me up the stairs to the little room on the first floor in which she worked, and, when I had waited a few moments on the landing she summoned me to enter. "These are the sketches," said she, "that I have finished. You see, they are quite presentable now. I cleaned off the rough daubs of paint with a scraper and finished up with a soft rag dipped in

chloroform."

I ran my eye over the framed sketches, which, now that the canvases were strained on stretchers and the disfiguring brush-strokes removed, were, as she had said, quite presentable, though too rough and unfinished to be attractive. "I daresay they are very interesting," said I, "but they are only bare beginnings. I shouldn't have thought them worth framing."

"Not as pictures," she agreed, "but as examples of a very curious technique, I find them most instructive. However, you haven't seen the real gem of the collection. This is it, on the easel. Sit down, on the chair and say when you are ready. I'm going to give you a surprise."

I seated myself on the chair opposite the easel, on which was a canvas with its back towards me. "Now," said Sylvia. "Are you ready? One, two, three!"

She picked up the canvas, and, turning it round quickly, presented its face to me. I don't know what I had expected—if I had expected anything; but certainly I was not in the least prepared for what I saw. The sketch had originally represented, very roughly, a dark mass of trees which occupied nearly the whole of the canvas; but of this the middle had been cleaned away, exposing an under painting. And this it was that filled me with such amazement that, after a first startled exclamation, I could do nothing but stare open-mouthed at the canvas; for, from the opening in the dark mass of foliage there looked out at me, distinct and unmistakable, the face of Mrs. Samway.

It was no illusion or chance resemblance. Rough as the painting was, the likeness was excellent. All the well-known features which made her so different from other women were there, though expressed by a mere dextrous turn of the knife; the jet-black, formally-parted hair, the clear, bright complexion, the pale, inscrutable eyes; all were there, even to the steady, penetrating expression that looked out at me from the canvas as if in silent recognition. As I sat staring at the picture with a surprise that almost amounted to awe, Sylvia looked at me a little blankly. "Well!" she exclaimed, at length, "I meant to give you a surprise, but—what is it, Humphrey? Do you know her?"

"Yes," I replied, "and so do you. Don't you remember a woman who looked in at you through the glass door of Robinson's shop?"

"Do you mean that black and scarlet creature? I didn't recognize her. I had no idea she was so handsome; for this is really a very beautiful face, though there is something about it that I don't understand. Something—well eerie; rather uncanny and almost sinister. Don't you think so?"

"I have always thought her a rather weird woman, but this is the weirdest appearance she has made. How on earth came her face on that canvas?"

"It is an odd coincidence. And yet I don't know that it is. She may have been some relative of that rather eccentric artist, or even his wife. I don't know why it shouldn't be so."

Neither did I. But the coincidence remained a very striking one, to me, at least; much more so than Sylvia realized; though what its significance might be—if it had any—I could not guess. Nor was there any opportunity to discuss it at the moment, for it was high time for me to be gone. "You will send me a telegram when you get back, to say that you have arrived home safely, won't you," said Sylvia, as we descended the stairs with our arms linked together. "Of course nothing is going to happen to you, but I can't help feeling a little nervous. And you'll go down to the station by the High Street, and keep to the main roads. That is a promise, isn't it?"

I made the promise readily having decided previously to take every possible precaution, and, when I had wished Sylvia "good-bye" at some length, I proceeded to execute it; making my way down the well-populated High Street and keeping a bright look-out both there and at the station. Once more I was fortunate in the matter of trains, and, having taken a hansom from Broad Street to the Temple, was set down in King's Bench Walk soon after half-past six.

As I approached our building, I looked up with some anxiety at the sitting-room windows; and when I saw them brightly lighted, a suspicion that Thorndyke had returned earlier than usual filled me with foreboding, I had had my dance and now I was going to pay the piper, and I did not much enjoy the prospect; in fact, as I ascended the stairs and took my latch-key from my pocket, I was as nervous as a school-boy who has been playing truant. However, there was no escape unless I sneaked up to my bed-room, so, inserting the key into the lock, I turned it as boldly as I could, and entered.

---

## XVIII — A VISITOR FROM THE STATES

AS I pushed open the inner door and entered the room I conceived the momentary hope of a reprieve from the wrath to come, for I found my two friends in what was evidently a business consultation with a stranger, and was on the point of backing out when Thorndyke stopped me. "Don't run away, Howard," said he. "There are no secrets being disclosed—at least, I think not. We have finished with your affairs, Mr. O'Donnell, haven't we?"

"Yes, doctor," was the answer; "you've run me dry with the exception—of your own little business."

"Then, come in and sit down, Howard, and let me present you to Mr. O'Donnell, who is a famous American detective and has been telling us all sorts of wonderful things."

Mr. O'Donnell paused in the act of returning a quantity of papers to a large attache case and offered his hand. "The

doctor," he remarked, "is blowing his trumpet at the wrong end. I haven't come here to give information but to get advice. But I guess I needn't tell you that."

"I hope that isn't quite true," said Thorndyke. "You spoke just now of my little business; haven't you anything to tell me?"

"I have; but I fancy it isn't what you wanted to hear. However, we'll just have a look at your letter to Curtis and take your questions one by one. By the way, what made you write to Curtis?"

"I saw, when I inspected Maddock's will at Somerset House, that he had left a small legacy to Curtis. Naturally, I inferred that Curtis knew him and could give me some account of him."

"It struck you as a bit queer, I reckon, that he should be leaving a legacy to the head of an American detective agency."

"The circumstance suggested possibilities," Thorndyke admitted.

O'Donnell laughed. "I can guess what possibilities suggested themselves to you, if you knew Maddock. Your letter and the lawyer's, announcing the legacy, came within a mail or two of one another. Curtis showed them both to me and we grinned. We took it for granted that the worthy testator was foxing. But we were wrong. And so are you, if that is what you thought."

"You assumed that the will was not a genuine one?"

"Yes; we thought it was a fake, put up with the aid of some shyster to bluff us into giving up Mr. Maddock as deceased. So, as I had to come across about these other affairs, Curtis suggested that I should look into the matter. And a considerable surprise I got when I did; for the will is perfectly regular and so is everything else. That legacy was a sort of posthumous joke, I guess."

"Then do I understand that Mr. Curtis was not really a friend of Maddock's?"

O'Donnell chuckled. "Not exactly a friend, doctor," said he. "He felt the warmest interest in Maddock's welfare, but they weren't what you might call bosom friends. The position was this: Curtis was the chief of our detective agency; Maddock was a gentleman whom he had been looking for and not finding for a matter of ten years. At last he found him; and then he lost him again; and this legacy, I take it, was a sort of playful hint to show which hole he'd gone down."

"Was Maddock in hiding all that time?" asked Thorndyke.

"In hiding!" repeated O'Donnell. "Bless your innocent heart, doctor, he had a nice convenient studio in one of the best blocks in New York a couple of doors from our agency, and he used to send us cards for his private views. No, sir, our dear departed friend wasn't the kind that lurks out of sight in cellars or garrets. It was Maddock, sure enough, that Curtis wanted, only he didn't know it. But I guess I'm fogging you. I'd best answer the questions that you put to Curtis."

"First, do we know anything about Maddock? Yes, we do. But we didn't know that his name was Maddock until a few months ago. Isaac Vandamme was the name we knew him by, and it seems that he had one or two other names that he used on occasion. We now know that the gay Isaac was a particularly versatile kind of crook, and a mighty uncommon kind, too, the Lord be praised; for, if there were many more like him we should have to raise our prices some. He wasn't the kind of fool that make a million dollar coup and then goes on the razzle and drops it all. That sort of man is easy enough to deal with. When he's loaded up with dollars everybody knows it, and he's sure to be back in a week or two with empty pockets, ready for another scoop. Isaac wasn't that sort. When he made a little pile, he invested his winnings like a sensible man and didn't live beyond his means; and the only mystery to me is that, when he died, he didn't leave more pickings. I see from his will—which I've had a look at—that the whole estate couldn't have been above five thousand dollars. He had a lot more than that at one time."

"He may have disposed of the bulk of his property by gift just before his death," Jervis suggested.

"That's possible," agreed O'Donnell. "He'd escape the death dues that way. However, to return to his engaging little ways. His leading line was penmanship—forgery—and he did it to an absolute finish. He was the most expert penman that I have ever known. But where he had us all was that he didn't only know how to write another man's name; he knew when to write it. I reckon that the great bulk of his forgeries were never spotted at all, and, of the remainder very few got beyond the bare suspicion that they were forgeries. In the case of the few that were actually spotted as forgeries, his tracks were covered up so cleverly that no one could guess who the forger was."

"And how did you come to suspect him eventually?" Thorndyke asked.

"Ah!" said O'Donnell. "There you are. Every crook—even the cleverest—has a strain of the fool in him. Isaac's folly took the form of suspicion. He suspected us of suspecting him. We didn't; but he thought we did, and then he started to dodge and make some false clues for us. That drew our attention to him. We looked into his record, traced his little wanderings and then we began to find things out. A nice collection there was, too, by the time we had worked a month or two at his biography; forgeries, false notes, and, at least two murders that had been a complete mystery to us all. We made ready to drop on Isaac, but, at that psychological moment, he disappeared. It looked, as if he had left the States, and, as we have no great affection for extradition cases, we let the matter rest, more or less, expecting that he would turn up again, sooner or later. And then came this lawyer's letter and yours, announcing his decease. Of course Curtis and I thought he was at the old game; that it was a bit of that sort of extra caution that won't let well alone. So, as I was coming over, I thought I'd just look into the affair as I told you; and, to my astonishment, I found everything perfectly regular; the will properly proved, the death certificate made out correctly and a second certificate signed by two doctors."

"Did you go into the question of identity?" asked Thorndyke.

"Oh, yes. I called on one of the doctors, a man named Batson, and ascertained that it was all correct. Batson's eyesight seemed to be none of the best, but he made it quite clear to me that his late patient was certainly our friend Isaac, or Maddock. So that's the end of the case. And if you want to go into it any further you've got to deal with a little pile of bone ash, for our friend is not only dead; he's cremated. That's enough for us. We don't follow our clients to the next world. We are not so thorough as you seem to be."

"You are flattering me unduly," said Thorndyke. "I'm not so thorough as that; but our clients, when they betake themselves to the happy hunting-ground, usually leave a few of their friends behind to continue their activities. Do you happen to know what Maddock's original occupation was? Had he any profession?"

"He was originally an engraver, and a very skilful engraver, too, I understand. That was what made him so handy in working the flash note racket. Then he went on the stage for a time, and didn't do badly at that; but I fancy he was more clever at making-up and mimicry than at acting in the dramatic sense. For the last ten years or so he was practising as a painter—chiefly of landscape, though he could do a figure subject or a portrait at a pinch. I don't fancy he sold much, or made any great efforts to sell his work. He liked painting and the art covered his real industries, for he used to tour about in search of subjects and so open up fresh ground for the little operations that actually produced his income."

"Was his work of any considerable merit?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well, in a way, yes. It was rather in the American taste, though Maddock was really an Englishman. Our taste, as you know, runs to technical smartness and novelty of handling; and Maddock's work was very peculiar and remarkably smart and slick in handling. He used the knife more than the brush, and he used it uncommonly cleverly. In fact, he was unusually skilful in many ways; and that's the really surprising thing about him, when one considers his extraordinary-looking paws."

"What was there peculiar about his hands?" asked Thorndyke. "Were they noticeably clumsy in appearance?"

"Clumsy!" exclaimed O'Donnell. "They were more than that. They were positively deformed. A monkey's hands would be delicate compared with Maddock's. They were short and thick like the paws of an animal. There's some jaw-twisting name for the deformity that he suffered from; bronchodaotilious, or something like that."

"Brachydactylous," suggested Thorndyke.

"That's the word; and I daresay you know the sort of paw I mean. It didn't look a very likely hand for a first-class penman and engraver of flash notes, but you can't always judge by appearances. And now as to your other questions: You ask what Maddock was like in appearance. I can only give you the description which I gave to Batson and which he recognized at once."

"Had he noticed the peculiarity of the hands?" enquired Thorndyke.

"Yes. I asked him about it and he remembered having observed it when he was attending Maddock. Well, then, our friend was about five feet nine in height, fairly broad and decidedly strong, of a medium complexion with grey eyes and darkish brown hair. That's all I can tell you about him."

"You haven't got his finger-prints, I suppose?"

"No. He was never in prison, so we had no chance of getting them."

"Was he married?"

"He had been; but some years ago his wife divorced him, or he divorced her. Latterly he has lived as a bachelor."

"There is nothing else that you can think of as throwing light on his personality or explaining his actions?"

"Nothing at all, doctor. I've told you all I know about him, and I only hope the information may be more useful than it looks to me."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke; "your information is not only useful; I expect to find it quite valuable. Reasoning, you know, Mr. O'Donnell," he continued, "is somewhat like building an arch. On a supporting mould, the builder lays a number of shaped stones, or voussoirs; but until all the voussoirs are there, it is a mere collection of stones, incapable of bearing its own weight. Then you drop the last voussoir—the keystone—into its place, and the arch is complete; and now you may take away the supports, for it will not only bear its own weight, but carry a heavy superstructure."

"That's so, doctor," said O'Donnell. "But, if I may ask, is this all gratuitous wisdom or has any particular bearing?"

"It has this bearing," replied Thorndyke. "I have myself been, for some time past, engaged, metaphorically, in the building of an arch. When you came here to-night, it was but a collection of shaped and adjusted stones, supported from without. With your kind aid, I have just dropped the keystone into its place. That is what I mean."

The American thoughtfully arranged the papers in his case, casting an occasional speculative glance at Thorndyke. "I'd like to know," he said presently, "what it was that I told you. It doesn't seem to me that I have produced any startling novelties. However, I know it's no use trying to squeeze you, so I'll get back to my hotel and have a chew at what you've told me."

He shook hands with us all round, and, when Thorndyke had let him out, we heard him bustling downstairs and away up

King's Bench Walk towards Mitre Court.

For a minute or more after his departure none of us spoke. Thorndyke was apparently ruminating on his newly-acquired information, and Jervis and I on the statement that had so naturally aroused the detective's curiosity.

At length Jervis opened the inevitable debate. "I begin to see a glimmer of daylight through the case of Septimus Maddock, deceased," said he; "but it is only a glimmer. Whereas, from what you said to O'Donnell, I gather that you have the case quite complete."

"Hardly that, Jervis," was the reply. "I spoke metaphorically, and metaphors are sometimes misleading. Perhaps I overstated the case; so we will drop metaphor and state the position literally in terms of good, plain, schoolboy logic. It is this: we had certain facts presented to us in connection with Maddock's death. For instance, we observed that the cause of death was obscure, that the body was utterly destroyed by cremation and that Jardine, who was an unofficial witness to some of the formalities, was subsequently pursued by some unknown person with the unmistakable purpose of murdering him. Those were some of the observed facts; and the explanation of those facts was the problem submitted to us; that is to say, we had to connect those facts and supply others by deduction and research, so that they should form a coherent and intelligible sequence, of which the motive for murdering Jardine should form a part.

"Having observed and examined our facts, we next propose a hypothesis which shall explain them. In this case it would naturally take the form of a hypothetical reconstruction of the circumstances of Maddock's death. That hypothesis must, of course, be in complete agreement with all the facts known to us, including the attempts to murder Jardine. Then, having invented a hypothesis which fits our facts completely, the next stage is to verify it. If the circumstances of Maddock's death were such as we have assumed, certain antecedent events must have occurred and certain conditions must have existed. We make the necessary inquiries and investigations, and we find that those events had actually occurred and those conditions had actually existed. Then it is probable that our hypothesis is correct, particularly if our researches have brought to light nothing that disagrees with it.

"With our new facts we can probably amplify our hypothesis; reconstruct it in greater detail; and then we have to test and verify it afresh in its amplified and detailed form. And if such new tests still yield an affirmative result, the confirmation of the hypothesis becomes overwhelmingly strong. It is, however, still only hypothesis. But perhaps we light on some final test which is capable of yielding a definite answer, yes or no. If we apply that test—the 'Crucial Experiment,' of the logicians—and obtain an affirmative result, our inquiry is at an end. It has passed out of the region of hypothesis into that of demonstrative proof."

"And are we to understand," asked Jervis, "that you have brought Maddock's case to the stage of complete demonstration?"

"No," answered Thorndyke. "I am still in the stage of hypothesis; and when O'Donnell came here to-night there were two points which I had been unable to verify. But with his aid I have been able to verify them both, and I now have a complete hypothesis of the case which has been tested exhaustively and has answered to every test. All that remains to be done is to apply the touchstone of the final experiment."

"I suppose," said Jervis, "you have obtained a good many new facts in the course of your investigations?"

"Not a great many," replied Thorndyke; "and what new data I have obtained, I have, for the most part, communicated to you and Jardine. I assure you, Jervis, that if you would only concentrate your attention on the case, you have ample material for a most convincing and complete elucidation of it."

Jervis looked at me with a wry smile. "Now Jardine-Howard," said he; "why don't you brush up your wits and tell us exactly what happened to the late Mr. Maddock and why some person unknown is so keen on your vile body. You have all the facts, you know."

"So you tell me," I retorted; "but this case of yours reminds me of those elaborate picture puzzles that used to weary my juvenile brain. You had a hatful of irregular-shaped pieces which, if you fitted them together, made a picture. Only the beggars wouldn't fit together."

"A very apt comparison," said Thorndyke. "You put the pieces together, and, if they made no intelligible part of a picture, you knew you were wrong, no matter how well they seemed to fit. On the other hand, if they seemed to make parts of a picture you had to verify the result by finding pieces of the exact shape and size of the empty spaces. That is what I have been doing in this case; trying the data together and watching to see if they made the expected picture. As I have told you, O'Donnell's visit found me with the picture entire save for two empty spaces of a particular shape and size; and from him I obtained two pieces that dropped neatly into those spaces and made the picture complete. All I have to do now is to see if the picture is a true representation or only a consistent work of imagination."

"I take it that you have worked the case out in pretty full detail," said Jervis.

"Yes. If the final verification is successful I shall be able to tell you exactly what happened in Maddock's house, what was the cause of death—and I may say that it was not that given in the certificates—who the person is who has been pursuing Jardine and what is his motive, together with a number of other very curious items of information. And the mention of that person reminds me that our friend has been disporting himself in public, contrary to advice and to what I thought was a definite understanding."

"But surely," I said, "it doesn't matter now. We have given that spy chappie the slip, and, even if he hasn't given up the



chase as hopeless, we know that he is quite harmless.”

“Harmless!” exclaimed Thorndyke. “Why, my dear fellow, he was your guardian angel. Didn’t you realize that from Father Humperdinck’s statement? He shadowed you so closely that no attack on you was possible; in fact, he actually caught a rap on the head that was apparently meant for you. You were infinitely safer with him at your heels than alone.”

“But we’ve given the other fellow the slip, too,” I urged.

“We mustn’t take that for granted,” said Thorndyke. “The French detective, you remember, came on the scene quite recently, whereas the other man has been with us from the beginning. He probably saw Jervis and me enter the mineral water works on the night of the fire, for he was certainly there; and he may even have followed us home to ascertain who we were. There are several ways in which he could have connected you with us and traced you here; so I must urge you most strongly not to venture out of the precincts of the Temple for the next few days, in fact, it would be much wiser to keep indoors altogether. It will be only a matter of days unless I get a quite unexpected set back, for I hope to have the case finally completed in less than a week; and when I do, I shall take such action as will give your friend some occupation other than shadowing you.”

“Very well,” I said. “I will promise not to attempt again to escape from custody. But, all the same, my little jaunt to-day has not been entirely without result. I have picked up a new fact, and a rather curious one, I think. What should you say if I suggested that Mrs. Samway was the wife of that eccentric artist who used to paint on the Heath? The man, I mean, who always worked in gloves?”

“I have assumed that she was in some such relation to him,” replied Thorndyke, “but I should like to hear the evidence.”

“Mrs. Samway,” Jervis said in a reflective tone; “isn’t that the handsome uncanny-looking lady with the mongoose eyes, who reminded me of Lucrezia Borgia?”

“That is the lady. Well, I met with a portrait of her to-day which was evidently the work of the man with the gloves,” and here I gave them a description of the portrait and an account of the odd way in which it had been disinterred from the landscape that had been painted over it, to which they both listened with close attention.

“It’s a queer incident,” said Thorndyke, “and quite dramatic. If one were inclined to be superstitious one might imagine some invisible agency uncovering the tracks that have been so carefully hidden and working unseen in the interests of justice. But haven’t you rather jumped to your conclusion? The existence of the portrait establishes a connection, but not necessarily that of husband and wife.”

“I only suggested the relationship; but it seemed a likely one as the portrait had been painted over and thrown into the rubbish box.”

Jervis laughed sardonically; and even Thorndyke’s impassive face relaxed into a smile. “Our young friend,” said the former, “doesn’t take as favourable a view of the married state as one might expect from a gay Lothario who breaks out of his cage to go a-philandering. But we’ll overlook that, in consideration of the very interesting information that he has brought back with him. Not that it conveys very much to me. It is obviously a new piece to fit into our puzzle, but I’m hanged if I see, at the moment, any suitable space to drop it into.”

“I think,” said Thorndyke, “that if you consider the picture as a whole, you will soon find a vacant space. And while you are considering it, I will just send off a letter, and then we had better adjourn this discussion. We have to catch the early train to Maidstone to-morrow, and that, I hope, will be the last time. Our case ought to be disposed of by the afternoon.”

He seated himself at the writing-table and wrote his letter, while Jervis stared into the fire with a cogitative frown. When the letter was sealed and addressed, Thorndyke laid it on the table while he went to the lobby to put on his hat and coat, and, glancing at it almost unconsciously, I noted that the envelope was of foolscap size and was addressed to the Home Office, Whitehall. The name of the addressee escaped me, for, suddenly realizing the impropriety of thus inspecting another man’s letter, I looked away hastily; but even then when Thorndyke had taken it away to the post, I found myself speculating vaguely on the nature of the communication and wondering if it had any relation to the mysterious and intricate case of Septimus Maddock.

---

## XIX — TENEBRAE

THE resigned composure with which I accepted Thorndyke’s sentence of confinement within doors was not entirely attributable to discretion or native virtue. My resolution to follow scrupulously my principal’s very pointed advice was somewhat like the ascetic resolutions formed by the gourmet as he rises replete from the banquet table; for, just as the latter is in a peculiarly favourable condition for the unmoved contemplation of a—temporary—abstinence from food, so I, having enjoyed my little dissipation, could now contemplate with fortitude a brief period of retirement. Moreover, the weather was in my favour, being—as Polton reported, when he returned, blue-nosed and powdered with snow, with a fresh supply of tobacco for me—bitterly cold, with a threatening of smoky fog from the east.

Under these circumstances it was no great hardship to sit in a roomy armchair with my slippered feet on the kerb and read and meditate as I basked in the warmth of a glowing fire; though, to be sure, my reading was perfunctory enough, for the treatise of “The Surface Markings of the Human Body,” admirable as it was, competed on very unfavourable terms with other claimants to my attention. In truth, I had plenty to think about even if I went no farther for matter than to the events

of the previous day. There was my visit to Sylvia, for instance. I had not said much to her, but what I had said had pledged me to a life-long companionship; which was a solemn thing to reflect upon even though I looked forward to the fulfilment of that pledge with nothing but hopeful pleasure. The dice were thrown. Of course they would turn up sixes, every one; but still—the dice were thrown.

From my own strictly personal affairs my thoughts rambled by an easy transition to the singular episode of the buried portrait, and thence to the subject of that strange palimpsest. Viewed by the light of Mr. O'Donnell's revelations, Mrs. Samway's position was not all that could have been desired. She and her husband had unquestionably been closely associated with Maddock; but Maddock was, it seemed, a habitual criminal. Could this fact have been known to the Samways? Or was it that the cunning forger and swindler had sheltered himself behind their respectability. It was impossible for me to say.

Then there was the strange and perplexing case of the man Maddock, himself. I could make nothing of that, had not, indeed, been aware that there had been a "case", until Thorndyke's investigations had put me in possession of the fact. And even now I could see nothing on which to base any suspicion, apart from the attempts on my life, which we were assuming to be in some way connected with events that had occurred in Maddock's house. The cause of death was apparently not "Morbus Cordis"; which might easily enough be, seeing that the diagnosis of heart disease was a mere guess on Batson's part. But if not Morbus Cordis, what was it? Thorndyke apparently knew, and seemed to hint that it was something other than ordinary disease. Could there have been foul play? And, if so, were the Samways involved in it in any way? It seemed incredible, for had not Maddock himself suspected that he was in a dangerous state of health. There was certainly one possibility which I considered with a good deal of distaste; namely, that Maddock had been in a hypochondriacal state and that the Samways had taken advantage of his gloomy views as to his health to administer poison. The thing was actually possible; but I did not entertain it; for, even if one assumed that poison had been administered, at any rate, the cremation of the body was not designed to hide the traces of the crime. The Samways had nothing to do with that; the cremation had been adopted in preference to burial by Maddock's own wish.

So my thoughts flitted from topic to topic, with occasional interludes of Surface Markings, through the lazy forenoon until Polton came to lay my solitary luncheon. And after this little break in the comfortable monotony, another spell of meditative idleness set in. Polton was busy upstairs in the laboratory with some photographic copying operations and I was disposed to wander up and look on; but my small friend politely but very firmly vetoed any such proceeding. On some other occasion he would be delighted to show me the working of the great copying camera, but, just now, he had a big job in hand, and, as he was working against time, he would prefer to be alone. He even suggested that I might attend to any stray callers and make my own tea on the gas-ring so as to avoid interrupting his work; and when I had agreed to relieve him to this extent, he thanked me profusely and retired and I saw no more of him.

For some time after his departure, I stood at the window looking out across the wide space at Paper Buildings and the end of Crown Office Bow. It was a wretched afternoon. The yellow, turbid sky brooded close down upon the houseroofs and grew darker and more brown moment by moment, as if the invisible sun had given the day up in despair and gone home early.

A comfortless powdering of snow filtered down at intervals and melted on the pavements, along which depressed wayfarers hurried with their coat collars turned up and their hands thrust deep into their pockets. I watched them commiseratingly, reflecting on the superior advantages of being within doors and forbidden to go out; and then, having flung another scoopful of coal on the fire, I betook myself once more to the armchair, the Surface Markings and idle meditation.

It was some time past four when my reflective browsings had begun to proceed in the direction of the teakettle, that I heard a light footstep on the landing as of someone wearing goloshes. Then a letter dropped softly into the box, and, as I instantly pushed back my chair to rise, the footsteps retreated. I crossed the room quickly and opened the door; but the messenger had already disappeared down the dark staircase, and had gone so silently on his rubber soles that, though I listened attentively, I could hear no sound from below.

Having closed the door, I extracted the letter from the box and took it over to the window to examine it, when I was not a little surprised to find that it was addressed to W. M. Howard, Esq. This was the first communication that I had received in my borrowed name, and my surprise at its arrival was not unreasonable, for, of the few persons who knew me by that name, none—with the exception, perhaps, of Mr. Marchmont—was in the least likely to write to me.

But, if the address on the envelope had surprised me, the letter itself surprised me a good deal more; for though the writer was quite unknown to me, even by name, he seemed to be in possession of certain information concerning me which I had supposed to be the exclusive property of Thorndyke, Jervis, Polton and myself. It bore the address, 29, Fig-tree Court, Inner Temple, and ran thus:

DEAR SIR,

*I am taking the liberty of writing to you to ask for your assistance as I happen to know that my friends, Drs. Thorndyke and Jervis, are away at Maidstone and not available at the moment, and I understand that you have some acquaintance with medical technicalities.*

*The circumstances are these. At half-past five today I shall be meeting a solicitor to advise as to action in*

*respect of a case in which I am retained; and the decision as to our action will be vitally affected by a certain issue on which I am not competent to form an opinion for lack of medical knowledge. If Dr. Thorndyke had been within reach I should have taken his opinion; as he is not, it occurred to me to ask if you would fill his place on this occasion, it being, of course, understood that the usual fee of five guineas will be paid by the solicitor.*

*If you should be unable to come to the consultation, do not trouble to reply, as I am now going out and shall not be returning until five-thirty, the time of the appointment. I am,*

*Yours faithfully,*  
ARTHUR COURTLAND.

The contents of this letter, as I have said, surprised me more than a little. How, in the name of all that was wonderful, had this stranger, whose very name was unknown to me, come to be aware that I had any knowledge of medicine? Not from Thorndyke, I felt perfectly sure; nor from Jervis, who, notwithstanding a certain flippant facetiousness of manner, was really an extremely cautious and judicious man. Could it be that my principal was overseen in his trusted laboratory assistant? Was it conceivable that the suave and discreet Polton had moments of leakiness, when, in unofficial talk outside, he let drop the secrets of which his employer's unbounded confidence had made him the repository? I could not believe it. Not only did Polton appear to be the very soul of discretion; there was Thorndyke himself; he was not the man to give his confidence to anyone until after the most exhaustive proof of the safety of so giving it. Nor was he a man who was likely to be deceived; for nothing escaped his observation, and nothing that he observed was passed over without careful consideration.

My lethargy having been shaken off, I addressed myself to the task of preparing tea; and, as I listened to the homely crescendo of the kettle's song, I turned the matter over in all its bearings. By some means this Mr. Courtland had become aware that I was either a doctor or a medical student. But by what means? Was it possible that he had merely inferred from the circumstance of my being associated with Thorndyke that I was of the same profession? That was just barely conceivable; but, if he had, then, as Jervis had said of Father Humperdinck, he must be "a devil at guessing."

As I made the tea and subsequently consumed it, I continued to ruminate on the contents of that singular letter. No answer to it was required. Then what was Mr. Courtland going to do if I did not turn up? He admitted that the issue, which seemed to be an important one, was beyond him, and yet he had to give an answer to the solicitor. And he was prepared to pay five guineas for the advice of a man of whom he—presumably—knew nothing. That was odd. In fact, the whole tone of the letter, with its inconsistent mixture of urgency and casual trusting to chance, seemed irreconcilable with the care and method that one expects from a professional man.

And there was another point. The time of the consultation was half-past five. Now within an hour of that time Thorndyke would be back—or even sooner if he came by the earlier train as he had done on the previous day—as Mr. Courtland must have known, since he knew whither my principal had gone, and he must have often attended assizes himself. Could he not have waited an hour? And again; had this business been sprung upon him so suddenly that he had had no time to get Thorndyke's opinion? And, yet again, why had he written at all, instead of dropping in at our chambers with the solicitor, as was so commonly done by Thorndyke's clients?

All of which were curious and puzzling questions which I put to myself, one by one, and had to dismiss unanswered. And then I came to the practical question, to which I had to find an answer, and which was: Could I, under the existing circumstances, accede to Mr. Courtland's request? To go outside the precincts of the Inn was, I recognized, absolutely forbidden; but I had given no actual promise to remain in our chambers, nor had I been positively forbidden to leave them. Thorndyke had advised me to remain indoors, and his advice had been given so pointedly and with so evident a desire that it should be followed that I had not hitherto even thought of leaving our premises. But this was an unforeseen contingency; and the question was, did it alter my position in regard to Thorndyke's advice?

I think I have never been so undecided in my life. On the one hand, I was strongly tempted to keep the appointment. The prospect of triumphantly handing to Thorndyke a five-guinea fee which I had earned as his deputy appealed to me with almost irresistible force. On the other hand, my knowledge of Thorndyke did not support this appeal. I knew him to be a man to whom a principle was much more important than any chance benefit gained by its abandonment, and my inner consciousness told me that he would be better pleased by a strict adherence to our understanding than by the increment of five guineas.

So my thoughts oscillated, to and fro, now impelling me to risk it and earn the fee, and now urging me to keep to the letter of my instructions; and, meanwhile, the time ran on and the hour of the consultation approached. What decision I should have reached, in the end, it is impossible to say. As matters turned out, I never reached any decision at all, for, just as the Treasury clock struck a quarter past five, I heard a light, quick step on our landing and immediately after a soft but hurried knock at the door.

I strode quickly across the room and threw the door open. And then I started back with an exclamation of astonishment. For the visitor—who stood full in the light of the landing-lamp—was a woman; and the woman was Mrs. Samway.

As I stood gazing at her in amazement, she slipped past me into the room and softly shut the door. And then I saw very plainly that there was something amiss, for she was as pale as death, and had a dreadful, frightened, hunted look which

haunts me even now as I write. She was somewhat dishevelled, too, and, though it was a bitter evening, her plump, shapely hands were ungloved and cold as ice, as I noted when I took them in mine. "Are you alone?" she asked, peering uneasily at the door of the little office.

"Yes. Quite alone," I replied.

She gazed at me with those strange, penetrating eyes of hers and said in a half-whisper: "How strange you look with that beard. I should hardly have known you if I had not expected—"

She stopped short, and, casting a strange, scared glance over her shoulder at the dark windows, whispered: "Can they see in? Can anyone see us from outside?"

"I shouldn't think so," I replied; but, nevertheless, I stepped over to the windows and drew the curtains. "That looks more comfortable, at any rate," said I. "And now tell me how in the name of wonder you knew I was here."

She grasped both my wrists and looked earnestly-almost fiercely-into my eyes. "Ask me no questions!" she exclaimed. "Ask me nothing! But listen. I have come here for a purpose. Has a letter been left here for you?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Asking you to go to a place in Fig-tree Court?"

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "How on earth—"

She shook my wrists impatiently in her strong grasp. "Answer me!" she exclaimed, "answer me!"

"Yes," I replied. "I was to go there at half-past five."

Again her strong grasp tightened on my wrists. "Humphrey," she said, in a low, earnest voice, "you are not to go. Do you hear me? You are not to go." And then, as I seemed to hesitate, she continued more urgently; "I ask you—I beg you to promise me that you won't."

I gazed at her in sheer amazement; but some instinct, some faint glimmer of understanding, restrained me from asking for any explanation. "Very well," I said. "I won't go if you say I'm not to."

"That is a promise?"

"Yes, it's a promise. Besides, it's nearly half-past already, so if I don't go now, the appointment falls through."

"And you won't go outside these rooms to-night. Promise me that, too."

"If I don't go to this lawyer, I shan't go out at all."

"And to-morrow, too. Give me your word that you won't let any sort of pretext draw you out of these rooms to-morrow, or the next day, or, in fact, until Dr. Thorndyke says you may."

For a few moments I was literally struck dumb with astonishment at her last words, and could do nothing but gaze at her in astounded silence. At length, recovering myself a little, I exclaimed: "My dear Mrs. Samway—," but she interrupted me.

"Don't call me by that horrible name! Give me my own name, Letitia; or," she added, a little shyly and in a soft, coaxing tone, "call me Lettie. Won't you, Humphrey, just for this once? You needn't mind. You wouldn't if you knew. I should like, when I think of my friend—the only friend that I care for—to remember that he called me by my own name when he said good-bye. You'll think me silly and sentimental, but you needn't mind indulging me just once. It's the last time."

"The last time!" I repeated. "What do you mean by that, Lettie, and by speaking of our saying good-bye? Are you going away?"

"Yes, I am going away. I don't suppose you will ever see me again. I am going out of your life."

"Not out of my life, Lettie. We are always friends, even if we never see one another."

"Are we?" she said, looking up at me earnestly. "Perhaps it is so; but still, this is good-bye. I ought to say it and go; but O God!" she exclaimed with sudden passion, "I don't want to go—away from you, Humphrey, out into the cold and the dark!"

She buried her face against my shoulder, and I could feel that she was sobbing though she uttered no sound.

It was a dreadful situation. Instinctively certain though I was that her grief had a real and tragic basis, I could offer no word of comfort. For what was there to say? She was going, clearly, to a life of wretchedness without hope of any relief or change and without a single friend to cheer her loneliness. That much I could guess, vaguely and dimly. But it was enough. And it wrung my heart to witness her passion of grief and to be able to offer no more than a pressure of the hand.

After a few seconds she raised her head and looked in my face, with the tears still clinging to her lashes. "Humphrey," she said, laying her hands on my shoulders, "I have a few last words to say to you, and then I must go. Listen to me, dearest friend, and remember what I say. When I am gone, people will tell you things and you will come to know others. People will say that I am a wicked woman, which is true enough, God knows. But if they say that I have done or connived at wickedness against you, try to believe that it was not as it seemed, and to forgive me for what I have done amiss. And say to yourself, 'This wicked woman would have willingly given her heart's blood for me.' Say that, Humphrey. It is true. I would gladly give my life to make you safe and happy. And try to think kindly of me in the evil report that will reach you sooner or later. Will you try, Humphrey?"

"My dear Lettie," I said, "we are friends, now and always. Nothing that I hear shall alter that."

"I believe you," she said, "and I thank you from my heart. And now I must go—I must go; and it's good-bye—good-bye, Humphrey, for the very last time."

She passed her arms around my neck and pressed her wet cheek to mine; then she kissed me, and, turning away abruptly, walked across to the door and opened it. On the landing, in the light of the lamp, she turned once more; and I saw that the hot blush that had risen to her cheek as she kissed me, had faded already into a deathly pallor, and that the dreadful, frightened, hunted look had come back into her face. She stood for a moment with her finger raised warningly and whispered: "Good-bye, dear, good-bye! Shut the door now and shut it quietly," and then she passed into the opening of the dark staircase.

I closed the door softly and turned away towards the window; and, as I did so, I heard her stumble slightly on the stair a short way down and utter a little startled cry. I was nearly going out to her, and did, in fact, stand a moment or two listening; but, as I heard nothing more, I moved over to the window, and, drawing back the curtain, looked down on our doorstep to see her go out. My mind was in a whirl of confused emotions. Profound pity for this lonely, unhappy, warm-hearted woman contended with amazement at the revelation of her manifest connection with the mystery that surrounded me; and I stood bewildered by the tumult of incoherent thought, grasping the curtain and looking down on the great square stone that I might, at least, catch a farewell glance at this poor soul who was passing so unwillingly out of my life.

The seconds passed. A man came out of our entry and, turning to the left, walked at a rapid pace towards the Tudor Street gate. Still she did not appear. Perhaps she had heard him on the stairs and was waiting to pass out unnoticed. But yet it was strange.

Nearly a minute had elapsed since she started to descend the stairs. Could I have missed her? It seemed impossible, since I had come to the window almost immediately. A vague uneasiness began to take possession of me. I recalled her white face and frightened eyes, and as I stared down at the door-step with growing anxiety, I found myself listening—listening nervously for I knew not what.

Suddenly I caught a sound—faint and vague, but certainly a sound. And it seemed to come from the staircase. In a moment I had the door open and was stealing on tip-toe out on the landing. The house was profoundly silent. No murmur even penetrated from the distant streets. I crept across the landing, breathing softly and listening. And then, from the stillness below, but near at hand came a faint, whispering sigh or moan. Instantly I sprang forward, all of a tremble and darted down the stairs.

At the first turn I saw, projecting round the angle, a hand—a woman's hand, plump and shapely and white as marble. With a gasp of terror I flew round the turn of the staircase and—

God in Heaven! She was there! Huddled limply in the angle, her head resting against the baluster and one hand spread out on her bosom, she lay so still that she might have been dead but for the shallow rise and fall of her breast and the wide-staring eyes that turned to me with such dreadful appeal, I stooped over her and spoke her name, and it seemed to me that a pitiful little smile trembled for a moment on the bloodless lips, but she made no answer beyond a faint, broken sigh, and it was only when she moved her hand slightly that the overwhelming horror of the reality burst upon me. Then when I saw the crimson stain upon her fingers and upon the bosom of her dress, the meaning of that horrible pallor, the sharpening features and strange, pinched expression flashed upon me with a shock that seemed to arrest the very blood at my heart. Yet, stunned as I was, I realized instantly that human skill could avail her nothing; that I could do nought for her but raise her from the sharp edge of the stair and rest her head on my arm. And so I held her, whispering endearments brokenly, and looking as well as I might through the blinding tears into those inscrutable eyes, that gazed up at me, no longer with that stare of horror but with a vague and childlike wonder. And, even as I looked, the change came in an instant. The wide eye-lids relaxed and drooped, the eyes grew filmy and sightless, the hand slipped from her breast and dropped with a thud on the stair, and the supple body in my arms shrank of a sudden with the horrible limpness of death.

Up to this point my recollection is clear, even vivid, but of what followed I have only a dim and confused impression. The awfulness—the unbelievable horror of this frightful thing that had happened left me so dazed and numb that I recall but vaguely the passage of time of what went on around me in this terrible dream from which there was to be no waking. Dimly I recollect kneeling by her side on the silent staircase—but how long I know not—holding her poor body in my arms and gazing incredulously at the marble-white face—now with its drowsy lids and parted lips, grown suddenly girlish and fragile—while the hot tears dropped down on her dress; choking with grief and horror and a fury of hate for the foul wretch who had done this appalling thing, and who was now far away out of reach. I see—dimly still—the livid marks of accursed fingers lingering yet on the whiteness around the mouth to tell me why no cry from her had reached me, and the dreadful, red-edged cut in the bodice mutely demanding vengeance from God and man.

And then of a sudden the silence is shattered by rushing feet and the clamour of voices. Someone—it is Jervis—leads me forcibly away to our room and places me in a chair by the table. Presently I see her lying on our sofa, drowsy-eyed, peaceful, like a marble figure on a tomb. And I see Thorndyke, with a strange, coppery flush and something grim and terrible in the set calm of his face, showing the letter, which I had left on the table, to a tall stranger, who hurries from the room. Anon come two constables with heads uncovered carrying a stretcher. I see her laid on the sordid bier and reverently covered. The dread procession moves out through the doorway, the door is shut after it, and so, in dreadful fulfilment of her words, she passed out of my life.

---

## XX — THE HUE AND CRY

THE silence of the room remained unbroken for a quite considerable time after the two bearers had passed out with their dreadful burden. My two friends sat apart and, with a tact of which I was gratefully sensible, left me quietly undisturbed by banal words of consolation, to sustain the first shock of grief and horror and get my emotion under control. Still dazed and half-incredulous, I sat with my elbows on the table and my teeth clenched hard, looking dreamily across the room, half unconsciously observing my two friends as they silently examined the fatal letter. I saw Thorndyke rise softly and take a small bottle from a cabinet, and watched him incuriously as he sprinkled on the paper some of the dark-coloured powder that it contained. Then I saw him blow the powder from the surface of the paper into the fire and scan the letter closely through a lens. And still no word was spoken. Only once, when Jervis, in crossing the room, let his hand rest for a moment on my shoulder, did any communication pass between us; and that silent touch told me unobtrusively—if it were needful to tell me—how well he understood my grief for the woman who had walked open-eyed into the valley of the shadow, had offered her heart's blood that I might pass unscathed.

In about a quarter of an hour the tall stranger returned, bringing with him an atmosphere of bustling activity that at once dispelled the gloomy silence. His busy presence and brisk, matter-of-fact speech, though distressing to me at the moment, served as a distraction and brought me out of my painful reverie to the grim realities of this appalling catastrophe. "You were quite right, sir," said he. "The chambers were an empty set. Mr. Courtland left them about six weeks ago, so they tell me at the office. I've looked them over carefully, and I think it is pretty clear what this man meant to do."

"Did you go in?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes. Mr. Polton went with me and picked the lock, so I was able to go right through the rooms. And it is evident that this villain was not acting on the spur of the moment. He'd made a very neat plan, and I should say that it was pretty near to coming off. He had selected his chambers with remarkable judgment, and uncommonly well suited they were to his purpose. In the first place, they were the top set—nothing above them; no chance strangers passing up or down; and they were the only set on that landing. Then some previous tenant had made a little trap or grille in the outer door, a little hole about six inches square with a sliding cover on the inside. That was the attraction, I fancy. The landing lamp was alight—he must have lighted it himself, as the landing was out of use—and I fancy he meant to watch through the grille for your friend to come and shoot him as he knocked at the door."

"That would be taking more risk than he usually did," said Thorndyke.

"You mean that the report of the shot would have been heard. Perhaps it might. But these modern, small-bore, repeating pistols make very little noise, though they are uncommonly deadly, especially if you open the nose of the bullets."

"But," objected Thorndyke, "if he had been heard, there he would have been, boxed up in the chambers with no means of escape."

Our acquaintance shook his head. "No," said he; "that's just what he wouldn't have been, and there is where he had planned the affair so neatly. These chambers are a double set. They have a second entrance that opens on the staircase of the next house. You see the idea. When he's fired his shot and made sure that it was all right—or all wrong, if you prefer it—he would just have slipped through to the other entrance, let himself out, shut the door quietly and walked down the stairs. Then, if the shot had been heard, there was he, coming out of the next house to join the crowd and see what was the matter. It was a clever scheme, and, as I say, it might very well have come off if this poor young lady hadn't given it away. So that's all about the chambers; and now"—here he cast a glance in my direction—"I must ask for a few particulars." He produced a large, black-covered notebook and, opening it on the table, looked at me inquiringly.

"This," said Thorndyke, "is Mr. Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department. He has charge of this case, so you must tell him exactly what happened. And try, Jardine, to be as clear and circumstantial as possible."

The Superintendent looked up sharply. "I had an impression," said he, "that this gentleman's name was Howard."

"He has used the name of Howard since he has been staying here, for reasons which no longer exist but which I will explain to you later. His name is Humphrey Jardine, and he is a bachelor of medicine."

Mr. Miller entered these particulars in his book and then said: "I suppose it is not necessary to ask if you were actually present when this poor lady was murdered?"

"No, I was not."

"And I presume you did not see the murderer?"

"I saw a man, whom I believe to have been the murderer, come out of our entry and walk quickly towards the Tudor Street Gate. But I can give you no description of him. I saw him from the window and by the light of the entry lamp."

The Superintendent wrote down my answer and reflected for a few moments. "Perhaps," said he, "you had better just give us an account of what happened and we can ask you any questions afterwards. It's very painful for you, I know, but it has to be, as you will understand."

It was more than painful; it was harrowing to reconstitute that hideous tragedy, step by step, with the knowledge that the poor murdered corpse was still warm. But it had to be, and I did it, haltingly, indeed, and with many a pause to command

my voice; but in the end, I gave the superintendent a full description of the actual occurrences, though I withheld any reference to those words that my poor dead friend had spoken for my ear alone. When I had read through and signed my statement, Mr. Miller studied his note-book with an air of dissatisfaction and then turned to Thorndyke. "This is all quite clear, Doctor," said he, "and just about what you inferred from that letter. But it doesn't help us much. The question is. Who is this man? I've an inkling that you know, Doctor."

"I have a very strong suspicion as to who he is," replied Thorndyke.

"That will do for me," said Miller. "Your strong suspicion is equal to another man's certainty. Do you know his name, sir?"

"He has recently passed under the name of Samway," replied Thorndyke. "What his real name is, I think I shall be able to tell you later. Meanwhile, I can give you such particulars as are necessary for making an arrest."

The Superintendent looked narrowly at Thorndyke as the latter pressed the button of the electric bell. "Apparently, Doctor," said he, "you have been making some investigations concerning this man, and, as it was not in connection with this crime, it must have been in connection with something else."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "you are quite right, Miller, and it will be a matter of the deepest regret to me to my dying day that circumstances have hindered those investigations as they have. The delay has cost this poor woman her life. A few more days and my case would almost certainly have been complete, and then this terrible disaster would have been impossible."

As Thorndyke finished speaking, the door opened quietly and Polton entered with a small, neatly-made parcel in his hand. "Ah!" said Thorndyke, "you guessed what I wanted, and guessed right, as you always do, Polton. How many are there in that parcel?"

"Three dozen, sir," replied Polton.

"That ought to be enough for the moment. Hand them to the Superintendent, Polton. If you want any more, Miller, we can let you have a further supply, and I am having a half-tone block made which will be ready to-morrow morning."

"Are these portraits of the man you suspect?" asked Miller.

"No, I haven't his portrait, unfortunately, but on each card is a photograph of three of his finger-prints, which are all I have been able to collect, and on the back is a description which will enable you easily to identify him. You can post them off to the various sea-ports and telegraph the description in advance; and I would recommend you especially to keep a watch on Dover and Folkestone, as I know that he has been in the habit of using that route."

"Speaking of finger-prints," said Miller, "have you tried that letter for them?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "I powdered it very carefully, but there is not a single trace of a fingerprint. He must have realised the risk he was taking and worn gloves when he wrote it."

The Superintendent pocketed the parcel with a thoughtful air, and, after a few moments' cogitation, turned once more to Thorndyke. "You've supplied me with the means of arresting the man, Doctor," said he, "but that's all. Supposing I find him and detain him in custody? What then? I don't know that he murdered this poor woman. Do you? Dr. Jardine can't identify him, and apparently no one else saw him. I have no doubt that you have substantial grounds for suspecting him, but I should like to know what they are."

Thorndyke reflected for a moment or two before replying. "You are quite right, Miller," he said, at length, "you ought to have enough information to establish a prima facie case. But I think, that on this occasion, I can say no more than that, if you produce the man, you can rely upon me to furnish enough evidence to secure a conviction. Will that do?"

"It will do from you, sir," replied Miller, rising and buttoning his overcoat. "I will get this description circulated at once. Oh—there was one more matter; the name of the deceased lady was Samway—the same as that of the suspected murderer. What was the relationship?"

"She passed as—and presumably was—his wife."

"Ah!" said Miller. "I see. That was how she knew. Well, well. She was a brave woman, to take the risk that she did, and she deserved something very different from what she got. But we are taught that there is a place where people who suffer injustice and misfortune in this world get it made up to them. I hope it's true, for her sake—and for his," he added abruptly with a sudden change of tone.

"Naturally you do," said Thorndyke, "but, meanwhile, our business is with this world. Spread your net close and wide, Miller. I shall never forgive you if you let this villain slip. It is our sacred duty to purge the world of his presence. You do your part, Miller, and be confident that I will do mine."

"You can depend on me to do my best, sir," said Miller, "though I am working rather in the dark. I suppose you couldn't give me any sort of hint as to what you've got up your sleeve. You've no doubt, for instance, that it was really the man Samway who committed this murder?"

Thorndyke, according to his usual habit, considered the Superintendent's question for awhile before answering. At length he replied: "I don't know why I shouldn't take you into my confidence to some extent, Miller, knowing you as I do."

But you will remember that this is a confidence. The fact is that I am proposing to proceed against this man on an entirely different charge. But I am not quite ready to lay an information; and I want you to secure his person on the charge of murdering his wife while I complete the other case."

"Is that another case of murder?" asked Miller.

"Yes. The facts are briefly these. A certain Septimus Maddock, who was living with the Samways, died some time ago under what seem to me very suspicious circumstances. He was nursed by Samway and his wife and by no one else. The cause of death given on the certificate was, in my opinion, not the true one, and I am proceeding to verify my theory as to what was the real cause of death."

"I see," said Miller. "You are applying for an exhumation of the body?"

"Well, hardly an exhumation. The man Maddock was cremated."

"Cremated!" exclaimed Miller. "Then we're done. There isn't any body to exhume."

"No," agreed Thorndyke, "there is no body, but there are the ashes."

"But, surely," said Miller, "you can't get any information out of a few handfuls of bone ash?"

"That remains to be proved," replied Thorndyke. "I have applied for an authority to make an exhaustive examination of those ashes, and, if my opinion as to the cause of death is correct, I shall be able to demonstrate its correctness; and that will involve a charge of murder against this man Samway. It will also support a charge against him of attempts to murder Dr. Jardine, and furnish strong evidence connecting him with the horrible crime that has just been committed. So you see, Miller, that the important thing is to get possession of him before he has time to escape from this country, and hold him in custody, if necessary, while the evidence against him is being examined and completed. And I must impress on you that no time ought to be lost in getting the description circulated."

"No, that's true," said Miller. "I'll go and telegraph it off at once, and I'll send one or two of our best men to watch the likely seaports."

He shook hands with us all round, and, when we had all most fervently wished him success he took his departure.

As soon as he was gone, Jervis turned to his senior, and, looking at him with a sort of puzzled curiosity exclaimed: "You are a most astounding person, Thorndyke! You really are! I thought I had begun to see daylight in that Maddock case, and now I find that I was all abroad. And I can't, for the life of me, conceive what in the world you expect to discover by examining a few pounds of calcined phosphates. Suppose Maddock was poisoned, what evidence will be obtainable from the ashes? Of the poisons which could possibly have been used under the known circumstances, not one would leave a trace after cremation. But, of course, you've thought of all that."

"Certainly, I have," replied Thorndyke, "and I agree with you that the ashes of a body that has been cremated are highly unpromising material for a primary investigation. But, does it not occur to you that, in a case where certain circumstantial evidence is available, excellent corroborative data might be obtained by the examination of the ashes?"

"No," replied Jervis, "I can't say that it does."

"It is not too late to consider the question," said Thorndyke. "I shall probably not get the authority for a day or two, so you will have time to turn the problem over in the interval. It is quite worth your while, I assure you, apart from this particular case, as a mere exercise in constructive theory. You can acquire experience from imaginary cases as well as from real ones, as I have often pointed out; in fact, much of my own experience has been gained in this way. I think I have mentioned to you that, in my early days, when I had more leisure than practice, it was my custom to construct imaginary crimes of an elaborately skilful type, and then—having, of course, all the facts—to consider the appropriate procedure for their detection. It was a most valuable exercise, for I was thus able to furnish myself with an abundance of problems of a kind that, in actual practice, are met with only at long intervals of years. And since then a quite considerable number of my imaginary cases have presented themselves, in a more or less modified form, for solution in the course of practice, and have come to me with the familiarity of problems that have already been considered and solved. That is what you should do, Jervis. Try the synthetic method and then consider what analytical procedure would be appropriate to your result."

"I have," Jervis replied, gloomily. "I have worked at this confounded case until I feel like a rat that has been trying to gnaw through a plate-glass window. Still, I'll have another try. By the way, where are you going to make this examination?"

"I think I shall do it here. I had thought of handing the ashes over to one of the more eminent analysts, but it will be only a small operation, well within the capacity of our own laboratory. I think of asking Professor Woodfield to come here and carry out the actual analysis. Polton will give him any help that he may want and, of course, we shall be here to give any further assistance if he should need it."

"Why not have made the analysis yourself?" asked Jervis. "Is there anything specially difficult or intricate about it?"

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "But, as the case will have to go into Court on a capital charge—that is, assuming that my hypothesis turns out to be correct—I thought it best to have the analysis made by a man whose name as an authority on chemistry will carry special weight. Neither the judge nor the jury are likely to have much special knowledge of chemistry, but they will be able to appreciate the fact that Woodfield is a man with a world-wide reputation, and they will respect his opinion accordingly."



"Yes," agreed Jervis, "I think you are quite right. A well-known name goes a long way with a jury. I hope your experiment will turn out as you expect, and I hope, too, that some of Miller's men will manage to lay that murderous devil by the heels. But I'm afraid they'll have their work cut out. He is a clever scoundrel; one must admit that. How do you suppose he contrived to track Jardine here?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that he must have seen us on one of the two occasions when we went to the mineral water works and followed us here. Then, when Jardine disappeared from his lodgings, he would naturally look for him here, this being, in fact, the only place known to him in connection with Jardine, excepting Batson's house, on which he also probably kept a watch."

"But how would he have discovered that Jardine actually was here?"

"There are a number of ways in which he might have ascertained the fact. A good many persons knew that we had a new resident. We could not conceal his presence here. Many of our visitors have seen him, and the porter and hangers-on of the inn will have noticed him taking his exercise in the morning. Samway, himself, even, may have seen him, and he would easily have penetrated the disguise if he saw him out of doors, for there is no disguising a man's stature. He might have made enquiries of one of the porters or lamp-lighters, or he might have employed someone else to make enquiries. The fact that someone was staying here and that his name was Howard could not have been very difficult to discover, while, as for ourselves, we are as well known in the inn as the griffin at Temple Bar. From the circumstance that he knew of our attendance at the Maidstone Assizes, it seems likely that he had subsidized some solicitor's clerk who would know our movements."

"And I suppose," said I, "as he is gone now, I may as well go back to my lodgings."

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "In the first place, we don't know that he is gone, and we do know that he is now absolutely desperate and reckless. And you must not forget, Jardine, that whether we charge him with murder in the case of Maddock, with the murder of poor Mrs. Samway, or the attempted murder of yourself, in either case you are the chief witness for the prosecution. You are the appointed instrument of retribution in this man's case, and you must take the utmost care of yourself until your mission is accomplished. He knows the value of your evidence better than you do, and it is still worth his while to get rid of you if he can. But you, I am sure, are at least as anxious as we are to see him hanged."

"I'd sooner twist his neck with my own hands," said I.

"I daresay you would," said Thorndyke, "and it is perfectly natural that you should. But it is not desirable. This is a case for a few fathoms of good, stout, hempen rope, and the common hangman. The private vengeance of a decent man would be an undeserved honour for a wretch like this. So you must stay here quietly for a few days more and give us a little help when we need it."

Thorndyke's decision was not altogether unwelcome. Shaken as I was by the shock of this horrible tragedy, I was in no state to return to the solitude of my lodgings. The quiet and tactful sympathy of my two friends—or I should rather say three, for Polton was as kind and gentle as a woman—was infinitely comforting and their sober cheerfulness and the interest of their talk prevented me from brooding morbidly over the catastrophe of which I had been the involuntary cause. And, dreadful as the associations of the place were, I could not but feel that those of my older resorts would be equally painful. For me, at present, the Heath would be haunted by the figure of poor Letitia, walking at my side, telling me her pitiful tale and so pathetically craving my sympathy and friendship. And the Highgate Road could not but wring my heart with the recollection of that evening when we had walked together up the narrow lane—all unconscious of a black-hearted murderer stealing after us and foiled only by that futile spy—when, as we said good-bye I had kissed her and she had run off blushing like a girl.

Moreover, if Thorndyke's chambers were fraught with terrible and gloomy associations, they were also pervaded by an atmosphere of resolute, relentless preparation which was itself a relief to me; for, as the first shock of horrified grief passed, it left me possessed by a fury of hatred for the murderer and consumed by an inextinguishable craving for vengeance. Nor by the time of suspense so long as we had anticipated, as the very next morning a letter arrived from the Home Office containing the necessary authority to make the proposed examination and informing Thorndyke that on the following day the police would take possession of the ashes, which would be delivered to him by an officer who would remain to witness the examination and to resume possession of the remains when it was concluded.

I saw very little more of Thorndyke that day, but gathered that he was busy making the final arrangements for the important work of the morrow and clearing off various tasks so as to leave himself in from engagements. Nor did I enjoy much of Jervis's society, for he, too, was anxious to have the day free for the "Crucial Experiment," which was—we hoped—to solve the mystery of Septimus Maddock's death and explain the villain Samway's strange vindictiveness towards me.

Left to myself, and by no means enamoured of my own society, I wandered up to the laboratory to see what Polton was doing and to distract my gloomy thoughts by a little gossip with him on the various technical processes of which he possessed so much curious information. I found him arrayed in a white apron, with his sleeves turned up, busily occupied with what I took to be a slab of dough, which he had spread on a pastry board and was levelling with a hard-wood rolling-pin. He greeted me, as I entered with his queer, crinkly smile, but made no remark; and I stood awhile in silence, watching him cut the paste in halves, sprinkle it with flour, fold it up and once more roll it out into a sheet with the wooden pin. "Is this going to be a meat pie, Polton?" I asked, at length.

His smile broadened at my question—for which I suspect he had been waiting. "I don't think you'd care much for the

flavour of it, if it was, sir," he answered. "But it does look like dough, doesn't it. It's moulding-wax; a special formula of the Doctor's own."

"I thought that white powder was flour."

"So it is, sir; the best wheaten flour. It's lighter than a mineral powder and more tenacious. You have to use some powder to reduce the stickiness of the wax, especially in a soft paste like this, which has a lot of lard in it."

"What are you going to use it for?" I asked.

"Ah!" exclaimed Polton, pausing to give the paste a vicious whack with the rolling-pin, "there you are, sir. That's just what I've been asking myself all the time I've been rolling it out. The Doctor, sir—God bless him—is the most exasperating gentleman in the world. He fairly drives me mad with curiosity, at times. He will give me a piece of work to do—something to make, perhaps—with full particulars—all the facts, you understand, perfectly clear and exact, with working drawings if necessary. But he never says what the thing is for. So I make a hypothesis for myself—whole bundles of hypotheses, I make. And they always turn out wrong. I assure you, sir," he concluded with solemn emphasis, "that I spend the best part of my life asking myself conundrums and giving myself the wrong answers."

"I should have thought," said I, "that you would have got used to his ways by now."

"You can't get used to him," rejoined Polton. "It's impossible. He doesn't think like any other man. Ordinary men's brains are turned out pretty much alike from a single mould, like a batch of pottery. But the Doctor's brain was a special order. If there was any mould at all, that mould was broken up when the job was finished."

"What you mean is," said I, "that he has a great deal more intelligence than is given to the rank and file of humanity."

"No, I don't," retorted Polton. "It isn't a question of quantity at all. It's a different kind of intelligence. Ordinary men have to reason from visible facts. He doesn't. He reasons from facts which his imagination tells him exists, but which nobody else can see. He's like a portrait painter who can do you a likeness of your face by looking at the back of your head. I suppose it's what he calls constructive imagination, such as Darwin and Harvey and Pasteur and other great discoverers had, which enabled them to see beyond the facts that were known to the common herd of humanity."

I was somewhat doubtful as to the soundness of Polton's views on the transcendental intellect, though respectfully admiring of the thoughtfulness of this curious little handicraftsman; accordingly I returned to the more concrete subject of wax. "Haven't you any idea what this stuff is going to be used for?"

"Not the slightest," he replied. "The Doctor's instructions were to make six pounds of it, to make it soft enough to take a squeeze of a stiff feather if warmed gently, and firm enough to keep its shape in a half-inch layer with a plaster backing, and to be sure to have it ready by to-morrow morning. That's all. I know there's an important analysis on to-morrow and I suppose this wax has got something to do with it. But, as to what moulding wax can have to do with a chemical analysis, that's a question that I can't make head or tail of."

Neither could I, though I had more data than Polton appeared to possess. Nor could Jervis, to whom I propounded the riddle when he came in to tea. We went up to the laboratory together and inspected, not only the wax, but the exterior of three large parcels addressed to Professor Woodfield, care of Dr. Thorndyke, and bearing the labels of a firm of wholesale chemists. But neither of us could suggest any solution of the mystery; and the only result of our visit to the laboratory was that Polton was somewhat scandalized by the conduct of his junior employer, who consoled himself for his failure by executing with the wax, a life-sized and highly grotesque portrait of Father Humperdinck.

---

## XXI — THE FINAL PROBLEM

AT exactly half-past eleven in the following forenoon, Professor Woodfield arrived, bearing a massive cowhide bag which he deposited on a chair as a preliminary to taking off his hat and wiping his forehead. He was a big burly, heavy-browed man, sparing of speech and rather gruff in manner. "Stuff arrived yet?" he asked when he had brought his forehead to a satisfactory polish.

"I think it came yesterday morning," replied Thorndyke.

"The deuce it did!" exclaimed Woodfield.

"Yes. Drapers—Three parcels from Townley and—"

"Oh, you're talking of the chemicals. I meant the other stuff."

"No; the officer hasn't arrived yet, but I expect he will be here in a few minutes. Superintendent Miller is a scrupulously punctual man."

The professor strode over to the window and glared out in the direction of Crown Office Row. "That man of yours got everything ready?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Thorndyke; "and I have looked over the laboratory myself. Everything is ready. You can begin the instant the ashes are delivered to us."

Woodfield expressed his satisfaction—or whatever he intended to express—by a grunt, without removing his eyes from

the approach to our chambers. "Cab coming," he announced a few moments later. "Man inside with a parcel. That the officer?"

Jervis looked out over the professor's shoulder. "Yes," said he, "that's Miller; and, confound it! here's Marchmont with old Humperdinck. Shall we bolt up to the laboratory and send down word that we're all out of town?"

"I don't see why we should," said Thorndyke. "Woodfield won't be inconsolable if we have to leave him to work by himself for a while."

The professor confirmed this statement by another grunt, and, shortly afterwards, the clamour of the little brass knocker announced the arrival of the first contingent, which, when I opened the door, was seen to consist of the solicitor and his very reverend client. "My dear Thorndyke!" exclaimed Marchmont, shaking our principal's hand; "what a shocking affair this is—this murder, I mean. I read about it in the paper. A dreadful affair!"

"Yes, indeed," Thorndyke assented; "a most callous and horrible crime."

"Terrible! Terrible!" said Marchmont. "So unpleasant for you, too, and so inconvenient. Actually on your own stairs, I understand. But I hope they'll be able to catch the villain. Have you any idea who he is?"

"I have a very strong suspicion," Thorndyke replied.

"Ah!" exclaimed Marchmont, "I thought so. The rascal brought his pigs to the wrong market. What? Like doing a burglary at Scotland Yard. He couldn't have known who lived here. Hallo! why here's Mr. Miller. Howdy-do, Superintendent!"

The officer, for whom I had left the door ajar, entered in his usual brisk fashion, and, having bestowed a comprehensive salutation on the assembled company, deposited on the table an apparently weighty parcel, securely wrapped and decorated with a label bearing the inscription "This side up."

"There, sir," said he, "there's your box of mystery; and I don't mind telling you that I'm on tenterhooks of curiosity to see what you are going to make of it."

"Professor Woodfield is the presiding magician," said Thorndyke, "so we will hand it over to him. I suppose the casket is sealed?"

"Yes; it was sealed in my presence, and I've got to be present when the seals are broken."

"We'll break the seals up in the laboratory," said Woodfield, "but we may as well undo the parcel here."

He produced a solid-looking pocket knife, fitted with a practicable corkscrew, and, having cut the string, stripped off the wrappings of the parcel. "God bless my soul!" exclaimed Marchmont, as the last wrapping was removed; "why, it's a cremation urn! What in the name of Fortune are you going to do?"

Miller tapped the lid of the urn with a dramatic gesture. "Dr. Thorndyke," said he, "is going, I hope, to extract from the ashes in this casket an instrument of vengeance on the murderer of Mrs. Samway."

"Ach!" exclaimed Father Humperdinck, "do not speak of vengeance in ze bresence of zese boor remains of a fellow creature. Chustice if you laig, but not vengeance. 'Vengeance is mine, saiz ze Lordt!'"

"M'yes," agreed Miller, "that's perfectly true, sir, and we quite understand your point of view. Still, we've got our job to do, you know."

"But," said Marchmont, "I don't understand. What is the connection? These appear to be the remains of Septimus Maddock, whoever he may have been, and he seems to have died last November. What has he to do with the murder of this poor woman, Samway?"

"The connection is this," replied Thorndyke; "the man who murdered Mrs. Samway murdered the man whose ashes are in this urn. That is my proposition; and I hope, with the skilful aid of my friend Professor Woodfield, to prove it."

"Well," said Marchmont, "it is a remarkable proposition and the proof will be still more remarkable. I certainly thought that a body that had been cremated was beyond the reach of any possible inquiry."

"I am afraid that is so, as a rule," Thorndyke admitted. "But I hope to find an exception in this case. Shall we go upstairs and commence the examination?"

Woodfield having agreed with gruff emphasis, Miller picked up the casket and we all proceeded to the laboratory, where Polton, like a presiding analytical demon, was discovered amidst his beloved apparatus. The casket was placed on a table, the seals broken and the cover removed by Woodfield, whereupon we all, with one accord, craned forward to peer in at what looked like a mass of fragments of snowy madrepore coral. "Ach!" exclaimed Father Humperdinck, "bot it is a solemn zought zat zese boor ashes vas vunce a living man chust like ourselves."

"Yes," said Marchmont, "it is, and I suppose we shall all be pretty much alike by the time we reach this stage. Cremation is a leveller, with a vengeance. Still, I will say this much, these remains are perfectly unobjectionable in every way, in fact they are almost agreeable in appearance; whereas, an ordinary disinterment after this lapse of time would have been a most horrid business."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Thorndyke; "I have had to make a good many examinations of exhumed bodies, and, as you say,

they were very different from this. If I were not a practitioner of legal medicine—in which exhumation often furnishes crucial evidence—I should say that this cleanly and decent method of disposing of the dead was incomparably superior to any other. Unfortunately it has serious medico-legal drawbacks. I think, Woodfield, that we will turn the ashes out on that sheet of paper on the bench, and then, with your permission, I will pick out the recognizable fragments and examine them while you are working on the small, powdery portions.”

He took up the urn—which was an oblong, terracotta vessel some fourteen inches in length—and very carefully inverted it over the large sheet of clean white paper. Then, from the dazzling, snowy heap, he picked out daintily the larger fragments—handling them with the utmost tenderness—for, of course, they were excessively fragile—and finally transferring them, one by one, to another sheet of paper at the other end of the bench.

The appearance of the remains was not quite as I had expected. Among the powdery debris was a quite considerable number of larger fragments, most of which were easily recognizable by the anatomical eye, while some of the larger long bones almost gave the impression of having been broken to enable them to be placed in the urn, and suggested that a partial reconstitution, for the purpose of determining the stature or other peculiarities of the skeleton was by no means as impossible as I had supposed. But, large and small alike, the pieces were strangely light and attenuated, like the ghosts of bones or artificial counterfeits in porous, spongy coral.

When Thorndyke had picked out such of the fragments as he wished to examine, Professor Woodfield glanced casually over the collection, but suddenly he paused and, stooping over a large piece of the right innominate bone, narrowly inspected a somewhat shiny yellow stain on its inner surface. “Looks as if you were right, Thorndyke,” he said in his laconic way, “qualitatively, at any rate. We shall see what the quantitative test says.”

I pored over that dull yellow stain—as did Jervis also—but could make no guess at its nature or conceive any explanation of its presence. What interested me more was a small depression or cavity in the bone at the centre of the stain. That it was not the result of cremation was obvious from the fact that it was surrounded by a small area of sclerosed or hardened bone, which was quite plainly distinguishable on the spongy background, and which clearly pointed to some inflammatory change that had occurred during life. But of its cause, as of that of the stain itself, I could think of no intelligible explanation. “Have you enough of the small fragments to go on with for the present, Woodfield?” Thorndyke asked.

“Plenty,” replied Woodfield.

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “I will get on with my side of the inquiry. I shall want the whole-plate camera first, Polton.”

While his assistant was preparing the camera, he laid several of the fragments on a baize-covered board and secured them in position by threads attached to wooden-headed pins like diminutive bradawls. When the fragments were fixed immovably, he placed the board in a vertical position on a stand in a good light, by which time Polton was ready to make the exposure.

Meanwhile, Professor Woodfield was proceeding—under the horrified supervision of Father Humperdinck—with his part of the investigation. He was a matter-of-fact man, a chemist to the backbone, and to him it was evident that the late Septimus Maddock was simply so many pounds of animal phosphates. Quite composedly he shovelled up a scoopful of the ashes, which he emptied into the pan of a spring-balance, and, having weighed out a pound and a quarter, shot the contents of the pan into a large mortar and forthwith began to grind the fragments to a fine powder, humming a cheerful stave to the ring of the pestle. But his next proceeding scandalized the worthy Jesuit still more deeply. Having weighed out certain quantities of charcoal, sodium carbonate and borax, he pulverized each in a second mortar, mixed the whole together and shot the mixture into the first mortar, which contained the ash, stirring the entire contents up into a repulsive-looking grey powder. “But, my dear sir!” exclaimed Father Humperdinck. “You are destroying ze remains!”

Woodfield looked at him from under his beetling brows, but went on stirring. “Matter is indestructible,” he replied stolidly; and with this he tipped the contents of the mortar on to a sheet of paper and transferred them to a large fireclay crucible. “Now, Polton,” said he, “is the furnace ready?”

Polton disengaged himself for a moment from the camera, and took up a position by the side of the big fireclay drum with his hand on the gas cock. Then Woodfield, having dropped three or four large iron nails into the crucible, carried the latter over to the furnace and lowered it into the central cavity. The cock was turned on by Polton and a match applied, whereupon a great purplish flame shot up with a roar from the mouth of the furnace; and even when this had been confined by the dropping on of the massive cover, the ironcased cylinder continued to emit a muffled, sullen growl.

While the crucible was heating, I transferred my attention to Thorndyke. The photographic operations were now concluded and the moulding wax had just been produced from a warmed incubator. Polton’s curiosity—and mine—was about to be satisfied.

Thorndyke began by laying a thick slab of the warm and pliable wax on the middle of a smooth plate of varnished plaster, at each corner of which was a small, hemispherical pit, and dusting powdered French chalk sparingly over the level surface of the wax. Then he took the large fragment of bone, which bore the mysterious yellow stain, and laid it on the wax with the stained side uppermost, pressing it very gently until it gradually sank into the soft, pasty mass. Next, he took a somewhat smaller slab of wax and, having dusted its surface with French chalk, laid it on the fragment of bone, pressing it on gently but firmly, especially in the neighbourhood of the stain. Having squeezed some irregular-shaped lumps of wax on the back of the top slab, he fastened a strip of india-rubber round the edge of the plaster plate, so that it formed an upright rim, and turned to Polton. “Now mix a bowl of plaster—and mix it extra stiff, so that it will set quickly and hard.”

With a soft brush he painted a thin coat of oil on the exposed portion of the plaster plate, up to the edges of the wax, and including the little circular hollows. By the time he had done this, Polton reappeared from the workshop with a basin of liquid plaster, which he was beating up with a spoon as if preparing a custard or batter pudding. As soon as the plaster began to thicken, he poured it on the wax and the oiled slab until it formed a level mass, nearly flush with the top of the india-rubber rim. In a surprisingly short time, the smooth, creamy liquid solidified into a substance having the appearance of icing-sugar, and when Polton had stripped away the india-rubber rim, exposing the edge of the new plaster slab, this part of the process was finished. "We will put this mould aside for the plaster to harden while we make the other mould," said Thorndyke.

"Aren't you going to make moulds of all the fragments?" asked Jervis.

"No," Thorndyke answered; "the photographs of the rest will be sufficient, and I don't think we shall want even those; in fact, what I am doing now is merely by way of extra precaution. We are obliged to destroy the fragments in order to make the analysis, so I am just putting their appearance on record. You never know what an ingenious defending counsel may spring on you."

As Polton produced a second plate of varnished plaster and Thorndyke began to prepare the wax for the next mould, I turned my attention once more to Professor Woodfield. He had now deserted the mortar—in which he had been preparing a further supply of "the stuff"—and taken up a position by the furnace, with a long pair of crucible-tongs in his hand. On the bench, hard by, was an iron plate, and on this an oblong block of iron in which were six conical hollows.

Presently Woodfield glanced at his watch, turned off the gas-cock, removed the cover of the furnace with his tongs, and, reaching down into the glowing interior, lifted out the nearly white-hot crucible. Instantly Marchmont, Humperdinck and Jervis gathered round to watch, and even Thorndyke left his mould to come and see the result of the first trial.

Having stood the crucible on the iron plate while he picked out the large nails, one by one, Woodfield lifted it and steadily poured its molten contents into the first hollow in the iron block, which they soon filled, and overflowing ran along the iron plate in glowing streams that soon grew dull from contact with the cold surface. I noticed that, as the crucible was slowly tilted, Thorndyke kept his eyes fixed on its interior, as also did Jervis and Woodfield; and, watching closely, I saw just as the vessel was nearly empty, what looked somewhat like a red-hot oil-globule floating in the last of the glowing liquid. This passed out as the crucible was tilted further, and disappeared into the iron mould; when Woodfield, having exchanged a quick, significant glance with Thorndyke, proceeded forthwith, in his matter-of-fact way to fill up the still red-hot vessel with another pound and a quarter of the late Septimus Maddock. "I suppose," said Marchmont, "it is premature to ask you what is the final object of these very interesting operations?"

"It's no use asking me," replied Woodfield, "because I don't know. I am searching for traces of a particular substance, but what may be the significance of its presence, I haven't the slightest idea. You'd better ask Dr. Thorndyke—and he won't tell you."

"No, I know," said Marchmont. "Thorndyke will never tell you anything until he can tell you everything. By the way, will the remains be completely destroyed or will it be possible to recover them?"

"They are not destroyed at all," replied Woodfield. "They are all in the slag that came out of the crucible. We shall simply put the slag in the urn. There is a little charcoal, soda and borax added, but nothing is taken away."

I could see that to the unchemical mind of Father Humperdinck, this was far from satisfactory, and I observed him poring, with obvious disapproval, over the dark-coloured, glassy masses of slag on the iron plate. "Ashes to Ashes" was an intelligible formula, but "ashes to slag" was quite another matter, for which no provision had been made in any known ritual.

After a rather hurried luncheon, the wax moulds were carefully opened and the fragments of bone picked out, when it was seen that each fragment had left a perfect impression on the wax surface into which it had been pressed. These hollow impressions were now filled with liquid plaster, and, when the latter had thickened sufficiently, the two halves of each mould were quickly fitted together and kept in close contact by a weight.

During the interval which was necessary to allow of the plaster setting quite firmly, I had leisure to note that Professor Woodfield had filled two more of the cavities in the iron mould. Now that the furnace was thoroughly hot, he was able to work rather more quickly, and he had economized time by leaving a crucible to heat while we were at lunch. He was preparing to take the fourth charge from the furnace when I observed Polton removing the weight from one of the moulds and hurriedly transferred my patronage to his part of the entertainment. The mould on which he was operating was the one bearing the impressions of the stained fragment of the innominate bone, and when he separated the two halves and exposed the newly-made cast inside one might have thought that the actual bone had been left in, so perfectly did the snowy plaster cast reproduce the dazzlingly-white calcined bone. But, naturally, the stain did not appear in the cast, a defect which Thorndyke proceeded at once to remedy by making a tracing of the exact position and extent of the coloured patch and transferring it to the cast. Then, and not till then, Thorndyke regretfully handed the original fragment to Professor Woodfield, who impassively dropped it into the mortar and pounded it into a mere characterless powder.

After the opening of the second mould and the removal of the casts, the interest of the investigation lapsed for a time. Woodfield's operations were, doubtless, the most important part of the procedure, but they were not thrilling to look on at. In fact they became by unvarying repetition, decidedly tedious, and when the last charge—containing the uttermost crumb of ash—had been placed in the furnace and there was nothing to do but stare at the great fireclay drum, Marchmont and

Humperdinck began to yawn in the most portentous manner. I rather wondered that they did not go, for the investigation was no business of theirs, and there was little entertainment in gazing at the outside of the furnace or watching Polton and the Superintendent gather up the masses of slag from the plate and drop them into the casket. But I supposed that they, like myself, were consoling themselves for the tedium of the chemist's manipulations by the prospect of satisfying their curiosity as to the final result of the experiment.

When at length, the last charge was ready, Woodfield withdrew the white-hot crucible from the furnace and stood it on the iron plate. But this time he did not pour out the contents. Instead, he tilted the iron mould, and, picking out the conical masses of slag that it contained, one by one, lowered them with his tongs into the hot crucible. Then, having thrown in a little fresh flux, he returned the crucible to the furnace. "Why didn't he pour out the melted stuff this time?" Marchmont asked.

"Because," Thorndyke replied, "I want, for certain reasons, to have the total result of the analysis in a single mass. Each of those little cones of slag contains the result from a sixth part of the ash; the crucible now contains the matter extracted from the whole of the ashes. For my purposes this is more suitable, as you will see in a few minutes—for we shall not have to leave the crucible in the furnace so long this time."

"I'm glad of that," said Marchmont, "though this has been a most interesting, and I may say, fascinating experience. I am delighted to have had an opportunity of witnessing these most instructive and—er—aw—"

The rest of the sentence was rendered somewhat obscure by a colossal yawn; but very soon the interest of the proceedings was revived by Woodfield, who approached the furnace with a determined air and removed its cover with somewhat of a flourish. "Now we shall see, Thorndyke," said he, turning off the gas and reaching down into the glowing cavity with his tongs. He lifted out the crucible and, standing it on the iron plate, took out the nails, tapping each on the side of the pot as he withdrew it. "Do you want me to pour it out, or shall I break the pot?" asked Woodfield.

"That rests with you," replied Thorndyke.

"Better break the pot, then," said Woodfield.

This entailed a further spell of expectant waiting, and we all stood round, gazing impatiently at the crucible as it slowly faded from bright red to dull red and from this to its natural dull drab. It was quite a long time before Woodfield considered it cool enough to be broken, indeed I half suspected him of prolonging our suspense with deliberate malice. At length he took up a peculiarly-shaped hammer which Polton had handed to him, and, laying the crucible on its side, struck it sharply near the bottom with the pointed beak; then he turned the pot over and struck a similar blow on the opposite side; upon which the bottom of the crucible broke off cleanly, exposing the mass of dark, glassy slag, and, embedded in it, a bright button of metal. "What metal is that?" Jervis demanded eagerly.

The professor struck the button smartly with the hammer, whereupon it detached itself from the slag and rolled on to the plate. "Lead," said he. "I don't vouch for its purity, but it is undoubtedly lead."

Jervis turned to Thorndyke with a puzzled look. "You can't be suggesting," said he, "that this was a case of acute lead poisoning. The circumstances didn't admit of it, and besides, the quantity of lead is impossibly large."

"I should suppose," interposed Miller, "that the doctor was suggesting a most particularly acute form of lead poisoning, only that it is impossible to imagine that a cremation certificate would be granted in a case where a man had been killed by a pistol shot."

"I am not so sure of that," said Thorndyke; "though it is not likely that a cremation certificate would be applied for under those circumstances. But I am certainly not suggesting lead poisoning."

"What do you say is the weight of this button, Thorndyke?" the professor asked.

"That," replied Thorndyke, "depends on its relation to the total content of lead in the ashes. What percentage do you suppose has been lost in the process of reduction?"

"Not more than ten per cent. I hope. You may take this button as representing ninety per cent of the total lead; perhaps a little more."

Thorndyke made a rapid calculation on a scrap of paper. "I suggest," said he, "that the total lead in the ashes was three hundred and eighty-six grains. Deducting a tenth, say thirty-eight and a half grains, we have three hundred and forty-seven and a half grains, which should be the weight of this button."

Woodfield picked up the button and striding over to the glass case which contained the chemical balance, slid up the front, and, placing the button in one pan, put the weight corresponding to Thorndyke's estimate, in the other. On turning the handle that released the balance, it was seen that the button was appreciably heavier than Thorndyke had stated, and Woodfield adjusted the weights with a small pair of forceps until the index stood in the middle of the graduated arc. "The weight is three hundred and forty-nine and a half grains," said Woodfield. "That means that my assay was rather better than I thought. You were quite right, Thorndyke, as you generally are. I wonder what the object was that weighed three hundred and eighty-six grains. Are you going to tell us?"

Thorndyke felt in his waistcoat pocket. "It was an object," said he, "very similar to this."

As he spoke, he produced a rather large, dark-coloured bullet, which he handed to Woodfield, who immediately placed it

in the pan of the balance and tested its weight. "Just a fraction short of three hundred and eighty-seven grains," said he.

The Superintendent peered curiously into the balance-case, and, taking the bullet out of the pan, turned it over in his fingers. "That's not a modern bullet," said he. "They don't make 'em that size now, and they don't generally make 'em of pure lead."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "They don't. This is an old French bullet; a chassapot of about 1870."

"A chassapot!" exclaimed Humperdinck, with suddenly-awakened interest.

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "and this button,"—he picked it up from the floor of the balance-case as he spoke—"was once a chassapot bullet, too. This, Father Humperdinck," he added, holding out the little mass of metal towards the Jesuit, "was the bullet which struck your friend, Vitalis Reinhardt, near Saarbrück more than thirty years ago."

The priest was thunderstruck. For some seconds, he gazed from Thorndyke's face to the button of lead, with his mouth agape and an expression of utter stupefaction. "But," he exclaimed, at length, "it is impossible! How can it be, in the ashes of a stranger!"

"I take it," said Marchmont, "that Dr. Thorndyke is suggesting that this was the body of Vitalis Reinhardt."

"Undoubtedly I am," said Thorndyke.

"It sounds a rather bold supposition," Marchmont observed, a little dubiously. "Isn't it basing a somewhat startling conclusion upon rather slender data? The presence of the lead is a striking fact, but still, taken alone—"

"But it isn't taken alone," Thorndyke interrupted. "It is the final link in a long chain of evidence. You will hear that evidence later, but, as it happens, I can prove the identity of these remains from facts elicited by the examination that we have just made. Let me put the argument briefly.

"First, I will draw your attention to these plaster casts, which you have seen me make from the original bones, Take, to begin with, these small fragments. Dr. Jervis will tell you what bones they are."

He handed the small casts to Jervis, who looked them over—not for the first time—and passed them to me. "I say that they represent two complete fingers and the first, or proximal, joint of a right thumb. What do you say, Jardine?"

"That is what I had already made them out to be," I replied.

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "That gives us an important initial fact. These remains contained two complete fingers and the first joint of a thumb. But these remains profess to be those of a man named Septimus Maddock. Now this man is known to have had deformed hands, of the kind described as brachydactylous. In such hands all the fingers are incomplete—they have only two joints instead of the normal three—and the first, or proximal joint of the thumb is absent. Obviously, then, these remains cannot be those of Septimus Maddock, as alleged.

"But, if not Maddock's remains, whose are they? From certain facts known to me, I had assumed them to be those of Vitalis Reinhardt. Let us see what support that assumption has received. Reinhardt is known to have been wounded in the right hip by a chassapot bullet, and the bullet was never extracted. Now I find, among these remains, a considerable portion of the right hip-bone. In that bone is a mark which plainly shows that it has been perforated and the perforation repaired, and there is a cavity in which a foreign body of about the size of a chassapot bullet has been partly embedded. The chemical composition of that foreign body is plainly indicated by a stain which surrounds the cavity; which stain is evidently due to oxide of lead. Clearly the foreign body was composed of lead, which will have melted in the cremation furnace and run away, but left a small portion, in the cavity, which small portion, becoming oxidized, the oxide will have liquified and become soaked up by the absorbent bone-ash, thus producing the stain.

"Finally, we find by assay, that this foreign body actually was composed of lead and that its weight was—within a negligible amount of error—three hundred and eighty-six grains, which is the weight of a chassapot bullet.

"I say that the evidence, from the ashes alone, is conclusive. But this is only corroborative of conclusions that I had already formed on a quite considerable body of evidence. Are you satisfied, Marchmont? I mean, of course, only in respect of a *prima facie* case."

"Perfectly satisfied," replied Marchmont. "And now I understand why you insisted on my being present at this investigation and bringing Father Humperdinck; which, I must admit, has been puzzling me the whole day. By the way, I rather infer, from what you said, that there has been foul play. Is that so?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "there can hardly be a doubt that Reinhardt was murdered by Septimus Maddock."

Father Humperdinck's face suddenly turned purple. "And zis man Maddock," he exclaimed fiercely, "zis murderer of my poor friendt Vitalis, vere is he?"

"He is being sought by the police at this moment," replied Thorndyke.

"He must be caught!" Father Humperdinck shouted in a furious voice, "and ven he is caught he must be bunished as he deserves. I shall not vun moment rest until he is hanged as high as Haman." Here I caught a quick glance from Marchmont's eyes and seemed to hear a faint murmur which framed the words "Vengeance is mine."

"But," the Jesuit continued, after a momentary pause, in the same loud, angry tone: "Zis villain has a double grime gommited; he has murdered a goot, a chenerous, a bious man; and he has robbed ze boor, ze suffering and ze

unfortunate.”

“How has he done that?” asked Marchmont.

“By murdering ze benefactor of our zoziety,” was the answer.

“Yes, to be sure,” agreed the solicitor. “I hadn’t thought of that. Of course, the original will in favour of Miss Vyne probably stands without modification.”

At this point Superintendent Miller interposed. “You were saying, sir, that the man Maddock is now being sought by the police. Do you mean under that name?”

“No,” answered Thorndyke. “I mean under the name of Samway. Septimus Maddock, alias Isaac Van Damme, is written off as deceased. But Samway, alias Maddock, alias Burton of Bruges, alias Gill, is his re-incarnation, and, as such, I commend him to your attention; and I hope, Miller, you will be able to produce him shortly, in the flesh. The evidence, as you see, is now ready, and all that is lacking is the prisoner.”

“He shan’t be lacking long, sir, if any efforts of mine can bring him to light. I see a case here that will pay for all the work that we can put into it; and now, with your permission, doctor, I will take possession of this urn and get off, to see that everything necessary is being done.”

The Superintendent, as so often happens with departing guests, infected our other two visitors with a sudden desire to be gone. Father Humperdinck, especially, seemed unwilling to lose sight of the police officer—who was correspondingly anxious to escape—and, having wished us a very hasty adieu, hurried down the stairs in his wake, followed, at a greater interval, by his legal adviser.

---

## XXII — THORNDYKE REVIEWS THE CASE

WHEN Professor Woodfield, having deliberately packed his bag and—to my great relief and Jarvis’s—declined Thorndyke’s invitation to stay and take tea with us, presently took his departure, we descended to the sitting-room, whither Polton followed us almost immediately with a tea-tray, having, apparently, boiled the kettle in the adjacent workshop while the final act of the analysis was in progress. He placed the tray on a small table by Thorndyke’s chair, and, evidently, anticipating the inevitable discussion on the results of the analysis, made up the fire on a liberal scale and retired with unconcealed reluctance.

As soon as we were alone, Jarvis opened the subject by voicing his and my joint desire for “more light.”

“This has been a great surprise to me, Thorndyke,” said he.

“A complete surprise?” Thorndyke asked.

“No, I can’t say that. The solution of the problem was one that I had proposed to myself, but I had rejected it as impossible; and it looks impossible still, though I now know it to be the true solution.”

“I quite appreciate your difficulty,” said Thorndyke, “and I see that if you did not happen to light on the answer to it, the difficulty was insuperable. That was the really brilliant feature in Maddock’s plan. But for a single fact which was almost certain to be overlooked, the real explanation of the circumstances would appear utterly incredible. Even if suspicion had been aroused later and the true explanation suggested, there seemed to be one fact with which it was absolutely irreconcilable.”

“Yes,” agreed Jarvis; “that is what I have felt.”

“The truth is,” said Thorndyke, “that this crime was planned with the most diabolical cleverness and subtlety. We realize that when we consider by what an infinitely narrow margin it failed. Indeed, we can hardly say that it did fail. As far as we can see, it succeeded completely, and if the criminal could only have accepted its success, there seems to be no reason why any discovery should ever have taken place. Looking back on the case, we see that our experience has been the same as O’Donnell’s; we had no clue whatever excepting the one that was furnished by the criminal himself in his unnecessary efforts to obtain even greater security. Suppose Maddock, having carried out his plan successfully, had been content to leave it at that, who would have known, or even suspected, that a crime had been committed? Not a soul, I believe. But instead of that he must needs do what the criminal almost invariably does; he must tinker at the crime when all is going well and surround himself by a number of needless safeguards by which, in the end, attention is attracted to his doings. He knows, or believes he knows, that Jardine has in his possession certain knowledge of a highly dangerous character; he does not ask himself whether Jardine is aware that he possesses such knowledge, but, appraising that knowledge at what he, himself, knows to be its value, he decides to get rid of Jardine as the one element of danger. And that was where he failed. If he had left Jardine alone, the whole affair would have passed off as perfectly normal and its details would soon have been lost sight of and forgotten. Even as it was, he missed complete success only by a hair’s breadth. But for the most trivial coincidence, Jardine’s body might be lying undiscovered in that cellar at this very moment.”

“That’s a comfortable thought for you, Jardine,” my younger colleague remarked.

“Very,” I agreed, with a slight shudder at the recollecting of that horrible death-trap. “But what was the coincidence? I never understood how you came to be in that most unlikely place at that very opportune moment.”



"It was the merest chance," replied Thorndyke. "I happened to have called in at the hospital that evening, and, having an hour to spare, it occurred to me to look in at Batson's and see if you were getting on quite happily in your new command. As I had induced you to take charge, I felt some sort of responsibility in the matter."

"It was exceedingly kind of you, sir," said I.

"Not in the least," said Thorndyke. "It was just the ordinary solicitude of the teacher for a promising pupil. Well, when I arrived at the house, I found that excellent girl, Maggie, standing on the doorstep, looking anxiously up and down the street. It seemed that, on reflection, she was still convinced that the works were untenanted, and the oddity of the whole set of circumstances had made her somewhat uneasy. I waited a few minutes and disposed of one or two patients, and then, as you did not return, after what seemed an unaccountably long absence, I very easily induced her to show me where the place was; and when we arrived there, the deserted aspect of the building and the notice board over the gate seemed rather to justify her anxiety."

"I rang the bell loudly, as I daresay you know, but I did not wait very long. When I failed to get any response, I too, became suspicious, and proceeded without delay to pick the lock of the wicket—and it is most fortunate that the wicket was unprovided with a bolt, which would have delayed me very considerably. You know the rest. When I shouted your name you must have tried to answer, for I caught a kind of muffled groan and the sound of tapping, which guided me and Maggie to your prison. But it was a near thing; for, when I opened the cellar door, you fell out quite unconscious and accompanied by a gush of carbon dioxide that was absolutely stifling."

"Yes," said I, "it was touch and go. A few minutes more and it would have been all up with me. I realised that as soon as I recovered consciousness. But I couldn't, for the life of me understand why anybody should want to murder me, and I am not so very clear on the subject now. I really knew nothing about Maddock."

"You knew more than anyone else knew, and he thought you knew more than you did. But perhaps it would be instructive to review the case in detail."

"It would be very instructive to me," said Jervis, "for I don't, even now, see how you managed to bridge over those gaps that stopped me in my attempts to make a hypothesis that covered all the circumstances."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "then we will begin at the beginning; and the beginning, for me, was the finding of Jardine, as I have described it. Here was a pretty plain case of attempted murder, evidently premeditated and apparently committed by some person who had access to these works; evidently, also, conceived and planned with considerable knowledge, skill and foresight, though with how much foresight I did not realize until I had heard Jardine's story. When I had Jardine's account of the affair, I saw that the crime had been planned with quite remarkable ingenuity and judgment; in fact, the circumstances had been so carefully considered, and contingencies so well provided for that, but for a single tactical error the plan would have succeeded. That error was in making the pretended emergency a surgical injury. If the letter to Jardine had stated that a man was in a fit, instead of suffering from a wound, our friend would have had no need to call at the surgery for appliances but would have gone straight to the works. And there, in all probability, his body would still be lying, for no one would have known whither he had gone; and even if his body had been accidentally discovered, all traces of the means by which he had been killed would probably have been removed. There would have been nothing to show that he had not strayed into the deserted factory and turned on the gas himself; indeed, it is pretty certain that matters would have been so arranged as to convey that impression to the persons who made the discovery."

"There was the letter," said I. "That would have given things away to some extent."

"But you would have had it in your pocket, from which he would, of course, have removed it. We may be sure that he had not overlooked the letter. It was the need for surgical appliances that he had overlooked; but, in spite of this error, the plan was ingenious, subtle, and clearly not the work of an ignorant man."

"And here I would point out to you that this latter fact was one of great importance in searching for the solution of the mystery. We knew something of our man. He was subtle, resourceful, and absolutely ruthless. Noting this, I was prepared, in pursuing the case, to find his other actions characterized by subtlety, resourcefulness and ruthlessness. His further actions were not going to be those of a dullard or an ignoramus."

"But this was not all the information that I had concerning the personality of this unknown villain. Jervis and I looked over the cellars that same night within an hour and a half of the rescue and before anything had been moved. We were then in a position to infer that the unknown was probably a somewhat tall man and above the average of strength, as shown by the weight, position and arrangement of the iron bottles. Moreover, since there was no faintest trace of a finger-print on any of them, it followed that some precaution against them—such as gloves—had been adopted; which again suggested either a professional criminal or a person well acquainted with criminal methods."

"So much for the man. As to the rest of the information that I obtained by looking into the cellar, it seemed, at the time meagre enough; and yet, when considered by the light of Jardine's statement, it turned out to be of vital importance. You remember what it was, Jardine? That cellar contained certain objects. They seemed very unilluminating and commonplace, but, according to my invariable custom, I considered them attentively and made a written list of them. Do you remember what they were?"

"Yes, quite well. There were ten empty cylinders, a spanner, a packing-case—"

"What were the dimensions of the case?" Thorndyke interrupted.

"Seven feet long by two and a half wide and deep. Then there were a couple of waterproof sheets and a quantity of straw. That is the lot, I think, and I'll be hanged if I can see what any of them—excepting the three cylinders that were used for my benefit—have to do with the case. Can you, Jervis?"

"I'm afraid I can't," he replied. "They are all such very ordinary objects."

"Ordinary or not," said Thorndyke, "there they were; and I made a note of them on the principle—which I am continually impressing on my students—that you can never judge in advance what the evidential value of any fact will be, and on the further principle that, in estimating evidence, there is no such thing as a commonplace fact or object."

"Until I had heard Jardine's account of the affair there was not much to be gained by thinking about the possibilities that it presented. There was, however one point to be settled, and I dealt with it at once. My slight inspection of the works had shown that no business was being carried on in them; and the question was whether they were completely untenanted or whether there was some person who had regular access to them. My enquiries resulted, as you know, in the unearthing of the mysterious Mr. Gill, but what his relation to the affair might be I was not, at the moment, in a position to judge."

"Then came our talk with Jardine, from which emerged the fact that the ordinary motives of murder apparently did not exist in this case, and that the crime appeared to have its origin in circumstances that had arisen locally and recently. And, on our proceeding to search for such conditions as might conceivably generate an adequate motive, we lighted on a case of cremation."

"Now, it is my habit, whenever I have to deal with death which has been followed by cremation, to approach the case with the utmost caution and scrutinize the circumstances most narrowly. For, admirable as is this method of disposing of the dead regarded from a hygienic standpoint, it has the fatal defect of lending itself most perfectly to the more subtle forms of murder, and especially to the administration of poison. By cremation all traces of the alkaloids, the toxins and the other organic poisons are utterly destroyed, while of the metals, the three whose compounds are most commonly employed for criminal purposes—arsenic, antimony and mercury—are volatilized by heat and would be more or less completely dissipated during the incineration of the body. It is true that the most elaborate precautions in the form of examination and certification are prescribed—and usually taken, I presume—before cremation is performed; but, as every medical jurist knows, precautions taken before the event are useless, for, to be effective, they would have to cover every possible cause of death, which would be impracticable. Hence, as suspicion, in case of poisoning, commonly does not arise until some time after death, I always give the closest consideration to the antecedent circumstances in cases where cremation has been performed."

"But in this case of Jardine's it was at once obvious that the circumstances called for the minutest inquiry and that no inquiry had been made. On the face of it the case was a suspicious one; and the curious incident that Jardine described made it look more suspicious still and, moreover, suggested a possible motive for the attempt on his life. Apparently he had seen, or was believed to have seen, something that he was not desired to see; something that it was not intended that anyone should see."

"Now what might that something have been? Apparently it was connected with the hand or with the part of the arm adjacent to the hand. I considered the possibilities; and at once they fell into two categories. That something might have been a wound, an injury, a hypodermic needle-mark; something, that is to say, related to the cause of death; or it might have been a mutilation, a deformity, a finger-ring, a tattoo-mark; something, that is to say, related to the identity of the deceased. And it followed that the cremation might have been made use of to conceal either the cause of death or the identity of the body. But all this was purely speculative. The case looked suspicious; but there was not a particle of positive evidence that anything abnormal had occurred."

"At this point Jardine exploded on us his second mystery; that of the dead cleric at Hampstead. This gave us, at once, an adequate motive for getting rid of him; for it had every appearance of a case of murder with successful concealment of the body, and Jardine was the only witness who could testify to its having occurred. On hearing of this I was for a moment disposed to dismiss the cremation case; to consider that the suspicious elements in it had been magnified by our imaginations in our endeavours to find an explanation of the assault on Jardine. Moreover, since we now had a sufficient motive for that assault the cremation case appeared to be outside the scope of the inquiry."

"But there was a difficulty. It was now six weeks since Jardine had encountered the body in the lane, and during that time he had been entirely unmolested. The assault had occurred on his moving into a new neighbourhood, to which he had come unexpectedly unannounced. Moreover, the assault had been committed by some person who either had access to the factory or was, at least, well acquainted with it and who, therefore, seemed to be connected with the new neighbourhood; and it was committed within a few days of the cremation incident. Furthermore, the assault was manifestly premeditated and prepared; but yet the circumstances—namely, Jardine's recent and unexpected appearance in the neighbourhood—were such as to make it certain that the crime could have been planned only a day or two before its execution. Which again seemed to connect it with the cremation case rather than with the Hampstead case."

"There were two more points. We have seen that Jardine's would-be murderer was a subtle, ingenious, resourceful and cautious villain. But a crime adjusted, to the conditions of cremation is exactly such a crime as we should expect of such a man; whereas the Hampstead crime—assuming it to be a crime—appeared to have been a somewhat clumsy affair, though the successful concealment of the body pointed to a person of some capacity. So that the former crime was more congruous with the known personality of the would-be murderer than the latter."

"The second point was made on further investigation. The day after our consultation I looked round the neighbourhood with the aid of a large-scale map; when I discovered that the yard of the factory in Norton Street backed on the garden of the Samways' house in Gayton Street. This, again, suggested a connection between the cremation case and the assault on Jardine; and the suggestion was so strong that once more the cremation incident assumed the uppermost place in my mind.

"I considered that case at length. Assuming a crime to have been committed, what was the probable nature of that crime? Now, cremation, as I have said, tends to destroy two kinds of evidence, namely; that relating to the cause of death and that relating to the identity of the body; whence it follows that the two crimes which it may be used to conceal are murder and substitution.

"To which of these crimes did the evidence point in the present instance? Well we had the undoubted fact that cremation had been performed pursuant to the expressed wishes of Septimus Maddock, the man who was alleged to have been cremated. But if it was a case of murder, the crime must have been hurriedly planned a few days before the man's death—that is, after the execution of the will; for we could assume that Maddock would not have connived at his own murder; whereas, if it was a case of substitution Maddock, himself, was probably the actual agent. Considering the circumstances—the inexplicable, symptomless illness and the unexpected death—the latter crime was obviously more probable than the former. The illness, in that case, would be a sham illness deliberately planned to prepare the way for the introduction of the substituted body.

"Moreover, the attendant circumstances were more in favour of substitution than of murder. Of the three doctors who saw the body, only one had seen the living man; and that one, Batson, was more than half blind and wholly inattentive and neglectful. For the purpose of substitution, no more perfectly suitable practitioner could have been selected. The identity of the body was taken for granted—naturally enough, I admit—and no verification was even thought of. Then, as to Jardine's experience. The hand or wrist is not at all a likely region on which to find either a fatal injury or the trace of a hypodermic injection; whereas it is a most important region for purposes of identification. The hand is highly characteristic in itself even when normal; and there is no part of the body that is so subject to mutilation or in which mutilations and deformities are so striking, so conspicuous, and so characteristic. Lost fingers, stiff fingers, webbed fingers, supernumary fingers, contracted palm, deformed nails, brachydactyly and numerous other abnormal conditions are not only easily recognized, but—since the hand is usually unclothed and visible—their existence will be known to a large number of persons.

"The evidence, in short, was strongly in favour of substitution as against murder.

"If, however, the body which was cremated was not that of Maddock, then it was the body of some other person; that is to say that the theory of substitution left us with a dead body that was unaccounted for. And since a dead body implies the death for some person, the theory of substitution left us with a death unaccounted for and obviously concealed; that is to say, it raised a strong presumption of the murder of some unknown person. And here it seemed that our data came to an end; that we had no material whatever for forming any hypothesis as to the identity of the person whose dead body we were assuming to have been substituted for that of Septimus Maddock.

"But while I was thus turning over the possibilities of this cremation case, the other—the Hampstead case—continued to lurk in the background of my mind. It was much less hypothetical. There was positive evidence of some weight that a crime had been committed. And the circumstances offered a fully adequate motive for getting rid of Jardine. Thus it was natural that I should raise the question. Was it possible that the two cases could be in any way connected?

"At the first glance, the suggestion looked absolutely wild. But still I considered it at length; and then it looked somewhat less wild. The two cases had this in common, that if a crime had been committed, Jardine was the sole witness. Moreover, the supposition that the two cases were connected and incriminated the same parties, greatly intensified the motive for making away with Jardine. But there was another and much stronger point in favour of this view. If we adopted the theory of substitution, it was impossible, on looking at the two cases, to avoid being struck by the very curious converseness of their conditions. In the Hampstead case we were dealing with a body which had suddenly vanished, no one could say whither; in the Maddock case we were dealing with a body which had suddenly appeared, no one could say whence.

"When I reflected on this very striking appearance of relation it was inevitable that I should ask myself the question. Is it conceivable that these two bodies could have been one and the same? That the body which was cremated could have been the body which Jardine saw in the lane?

"Again, at the first glance, the question looked absurd. The first body was seen by Jardine more than six weeks before the alleged death of Maddock; and the body which he saw at the Samways' house was that of a man newly dead, with rigor mortis just beginning. It was, indeed barely conceivable that the Hampstead body was not actually dead and that the man might have lingered on alive for six weeks. But this suggestion failed to fit the known facts in two respects. In the first place, the body which Jardine saw in the lane was, from his description, pretty unmistakably a dead body, and, in the second, the sham illness of Maddock and the elaborate, leisurely preparations suggest a complete control of the time factor, which would be absent if those preparations were adjusted to a dying man who might expire at any moment.

"Rejecting this suggestion, then, the further question arose. Is it possible that the body that was seen in the lane could, after an interval of six weeks, have been produced in Gayton Street, perfectly fresh and in a state of incipient rigor mortis? And when the question was thus fairly stated, the answer was obviously in the affirmative. For, is it, not a matter of common knowledge that the bodies of sheep are habitually brought from New Zealand to London, traversing the whole width of the Tropics in the voyage, and are delivered, after an interval of more than six weeks, perfectly fresh and in a state

of incipient rigor mortis? The physical possibility was beyond question.

“But if physically possible, was such preservation practicable? Well, how are the bodies of the sheep preserved? By exposing them continuously to intense cold. And how is that intense cold produced? Roughly speaking, by the volatilization of a liquified gas—ammonia, in the case of the sheep. But behold! The very man whom we are suspecting of being the agent in this crime is a man who has command of large quantities of a liquified gas, and who has hired a mineral water factory for no apparent reason and put the premises to no apparent use.”

At this point Jarvis brought his fist down with a bang on the arm of his chair. “Idiot!” he exclaimed. “Ass, fool, dolt, imbecile that I am! With those cylinders staring me in the face, too! Of course, it was that interval of six weeks that brought me up short. And yet I had actually heard Jardine describe the cloud of carbon dioxide snow that fell on his face! Don’t you consider me an absolute donkey, Thorndyke?”

“Certainly not,” replied Thorndyke. “You happened to miss a link and, of course, the chain would not hold. It occurs to us all now and again. But, do you see, Jardine, how ‘the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner’? Don’t you understand how, when I reached this point, there rose before me the picture of that cellar with the commonplace objects that it contained? The case, seven feet by two and a-half—so convenient for preserving a body in a bulky packing; the two waterproof sheets—so well adapted to holding a mass of carbon dioxide snow in contact with the body; the mass of straw—one of the most perfect non-conductors—so admirably fitted for its use as a protective packing for the frozen body; and lastly, those ten empty cylinders, of which seven had been used for some purpose unknown to us? Let this case be a lesson to you, Jardine, not only in legal medicine but in clinical medicine, too, to take the facts as you find them—relevant or irrelevant, striking or commonplace—note them carefully and trust them to find their own places in the inductive scheme.”

“It has been a most instructive lesson to me,” said I; “especially your analysis of the reasoning by which you identified the criminal.”

“Hum,” said Thorndyke. “I didn’t know I’d got as far as that.”

“But if the body was preserved in a frozen state, there could not be much doubt as to who had preserved it.”

“Possibly not,” Thorndyke agreed. “But I had not proved that it had been so preserved, but only that it was possible for it to have been; and that the supposition of its having been so preserved was in agreement with the known circumstances of the case. But I must impress on you that up to this point I was dealing in pure hypothesis. My hypothesis was perfectly sound, perfectly consistent in all its parts, and perfectly congruous with all the known facts, but it did not follow therefore that it was true. It was entirely unverified; for hitherto I had not one single item of positive evidence to support it.

“Nevertheless, the striking agreement between the hypothesis and the known facts encouraged me greatly; and, as it was evident that I had now exhausted the material yielded by the cremation incident, I decided to take up the clue at the other end; to investigate the details of the Hampstead affair. To this end I called on Jardine, who very kindly went over the case with me afresh. And here it was that I first came within hail of positive evidence. On his wall was pinned an oil sketch, and on that sketch was a distinct print of a right thumb. It was beautifully clear; for the paint having been dry on the surface but soft underneath, had taken the impression as sharply as a surface of warm wax.

“Now, you will remember that I took possession of the letter which summoned Jardine to the mineral water works and I may now say that I tested it most carefully for finger-prints. But paper is a poor material on which to develop invisible prints owing to its absorbent nature and I had very indifferent success. Still, I did not fail entirely. By the combined use of lycopodium powder and photography I obtained impressions of parts of two finger-tips and a portion of the end of a right thumb. They were wretched prints but yet available for corroboration, since one could see part of the pattern on each and could make out that the ridge-pattern of the thumb was of the kind known as a ‘twinned loop.’

“Bearing this fact in mind, you will understand that I was quite interested to find that the print on the sketch—also that of a right thumb—had a twinned loop pattern. I noted the fact as a coincidence, but, of course, attached no importance to it until Jardine told me that the artist who painted the sketch habitually worked in gloves; and even then I merely made a mental note that I would ascertain who and what the artist was.

“I need not go over our examination of the scene of the crime. I need only say that I was deeply interested in following the track along which the body had been carried because I was on the look-out for something; and that something was a house or other building in which the body might have been temporarily deposited.

“My hypothesis seemed to demand such a building. For, since the body was quite fresh and rigor mortis was only beginning when Jardine saw it at Gayton Street, it must have been frozen very shortly after death. Now, it obviously could not have been carried from Hampstead to Gayton Street on a man’s back; the alternative is either a vehicle waiting at an appointed place—and necessarily not far away—or a house or other building to which the body could be taken. But the vehicle would, under the circumstances be almost impracticable. It would hardly be possible to make an appointment with any exactness as to time; and the presence of a waiting or loitering vehicle would, at such an hour—it was about midnight, you will remember—be almost certain to arouse suspicion and inquiry.

“On the other hand, a house to which the body could be conveyed would meet the conditions perfectly. When once the body was deposited there, the danger of pursuit would be practically at an end; and it would be quite possible to have a supply of the liquid gas ready for use on its arrival. This is assuming long premeditation and very deliberate preparation;

an assumption supported by Gill's peculiar tenancy of the factory.

"I, therefore, kept a sharp look-out for a likely house or building; and, as Jardine and I came out of Ken Wood by the turnstile, behold! a house which answered the requirements to perfection. It was a solitary house; there was no other house near; and it lay right on the track along which the body had apparently been carried. Instantly, I decided to investigate the recent history of that house and its tenants; but Jardine saved me the trouble. From him I learned that, at the time of the assumed murder, it had been inhabited by the artist whom he had mentioned, but that it had now been empty for a week or two.

"Here were news indeed! This artist, who habitually wore gloves and whose right thumb-print was a twinned loop, had been living in this house at the time of the assumed murder, but had been living elsewhere at the time of the cremation! It was a striking group of facts, and I eagerly availed myself of the opportunity of looking over the house.

"At first, the examination was quite barren and disappointing. The man's habits, as shown by the few discarded articles of use or other traces, were of no interest to me—and still less to Jardine; and of traces of his personality there were none. I searched all the rejected canvases and every available scrap of paper in the hope of collecting some fresh finger-prints, but without the smallest result. In fact, the examination looked like being an utter failure up to the very last, when we entered the stable-loft; but here I came upon one or two really significant traces of occupation.

"The first of these was a smooth, indented line on the floor, as if some heavy, metallic object had been dragged along it, with other, rougher lines, apparently made by a heavy wooden case. Then there was a quantity of straw, not new straw such as you might expect to find in a stable-loft, but straw that had evidently been used for packing. And, finally, there was a pair of canvas pliers which appeared to have been strained by a violent effort to rotate from right to left some hard, metallic body, three quarters of an inch wide, with sharp corners and apparently square in section; some body, in fact, that in shape, in size and apparently in material, was identical with the square of the cock on one of the liquid gas bottles; which appeared to have been connected with a screw thread and had clearly required great force to turn it with this inadequate appliance.

"The evidence collected from the loft, suggesting that a large case had been moved in and out and that a gas cylinder had been opened, you will say was of the flimsiest. And so it was. But the effects of evidence are cumulative. To estimate the value of these observations made in the loft, you must add them to the facts just obtained concerning the artist himself, the position of his house and the date on which he vacated it; and these coincidences and agreements must be added to—or, more strictly, multiplied into—the body of coincidences and agreements which I have already described.

"But the evidence collected at the house was the least important part of the day's 'catch.' On returning to Jardine's rooms I ventured to borrow the sketch and took it home with me; and when I compared the thumb-print on it with the photograph of the thumb-print on the letter—employing the excellent method of comparison that is in use at Scotland Yard—there could be no possible doubt (disregarding for the moment, the chances of forgery) that they were the prints of one and the same thumb.

"Here, then, at last I had stepped out of the region of mere hypothesis. Here was an item of positive evidence, and one, moreover, of high probative value. It proved, beyond any reasonable doubt, the existence of some connection between the house on the Heath and the factory in Norton Street; and it established a strong presumption that the artist and the man at the factory were the same person; the weak point in this being the absence of proof that the thumb-print on the painting was made by the artist.

"And here, Jardine, I would draw your attention to the interesting way in which, when a long train of hypothetical reasoning has at length elicited an actual, demonstrable truth, that truth instantly reacts on the hypothesis, lifting it as a whole on to an entirely different plane of probability. I may compare the effect to that of a crystal, dropped into a super-saturated solution of a salt, such as sodium sulphate. So long as it is at rest, the solution remains a clear liquid; but drop into it the minutest crystal of its own salt, and, in a few moments the entire liquid has solidified into a mass of crystals.

"So it was in the present case. In the instant when it became an established fact that the house at Hampstead and the factory in Norton Street had been occupied by the same person, the entire sequence of events which I had hypothetically constructed sprang from the plane of mere conceivability to that of actual probability. It was now more likely than unlikely that the unknown cleric had been murdered, that his body had been conveyed to the artist's house, that it had there been frozen, transferred to the factory, preserved there for some weeks, passed over the wall to the Samways' house, and finally cremated under the name of Septimus Maddock.

"All that now remained to be done was the verification and identification of the body. As to the first, I examined the will at Somerset House and found it, as the American detectives suspected, a mere notification to the New York authorities that Septimus Maddock was dead. I wrote to the detective agency and in due course came O'Donnell with the answers to my questions; from which we learned for certain that the artist was Septimus Maddock and that the assumed peculiarity of the hands consisted of brachydactyly. And then came the good Father Humperdinck to enable us to give a name to the body and to furnish us with that unlocked for means of identification. Henceforward, all was plain sailing with only one possible source of failure; the possibility that the bullet might have been subsequently extracted. But this was highly improbable. We knew that the wound had healed completely, and it was pretty certain that the bullet was lying quietly encysted or embedded in the bone. Still, I will confess that I have never in my life been more relieved than I was when my eyes lighted on that dent in the ilium with the stain of lead oxide round it."

"So I can imagine," said Jervis. "It was a triumph; and you deserved it. I have never known even my revered senior to work out the theory of a crime more neatly or with less positive matter to work from. And I suppose you have a pretty clear and connected idea of the actual sequence of events."

"I think so," replied Thorndyke, "although much of it is necessarily conjectural. I take it that Maddock, while hiding in Bruges under the name of Burton, made the acquaintance of Reinhardt, and saw in the rich, friendless, eccentric bachelor a suitable subject for a crime which he had probably already considered in general terms. I should think that they were probably somewhat alike in appearance and that the idea of personation was first suggested by the circumstance that they both wore gloves habitually. Maddock will have learned of Reinhardt's intended visit to England and immediately begun his preparations. His scheme—and a most ingenious one it was, I must confess—was clearly to cause Reinhardt to disappear in one locality and produce his body after a considerable interval in another at some distance; and the house on the Heath was apparently taken with this object and to be near Reinhardt's haunts. I take it, that on the night of the murder, Reinhardt had an appointment to visit him at that house, but that, having learned at Miss Vyne's of the sudden illness of Brother Bartholomew, he suddenly altered his plans and refused to go. Then Maddock—who had probably waited for him on the road—seeing his scheme on the point of being wrecked, walked with him as he was going home and took the risk of killing him in Millfield Lane. The risk was not great, considering the time of night and the solitary character of the place, and the distance from the house was not too great for a strong man, as Maddock seems to have been, to carry the body.

"Death was almost certainly produced by a stab in the back; and Maddock was probably just about to carry the body away when destiny, in the form of Jardine, appeared. Then Maddock must have lurked, probably behind the fence which had the large hole in it, until Jardine went away, when he must instantly have picked up the body, carried it down the lane, pushed it over the fence—detaching the reliquary as he did so—carried it away to the house, stripped it and proceeded at once to freeze it, having provided a bottle of the gas in readiness.

"The next morning he will have gone to Marchmont's office, probably dressed in Reinhardt's clothes, from thence to Charing Cross, and, with Reinhardt's luggage, gone straight on to Paris, leaving the body packed in an abundance of the carbonic acid snow. At Paris he will have made his arrangements with Desire and then disappeared, returning in disguise to England to carry out the rest of the plan. And a wonderfully clever plan it was, and most ingeniously and resolutely executed. If it had succeeded—and it was within a hair's breath of succeeding—the hunted criminal, Maddock, would have been beyond the reach of Justice for ever, and the fictitious Reinhardt might have lived out his life in luxury and absolute security."

As Thorndyke concluded, he rose from his chair, and, stepping over to a cabinet, drew from some inner recess a cigar of melanotic complexion and repulsive aspect.

Jervis looked at it and chuckled. "Thorndyke's one dissipation," said he. "At the close of every successful case he proceeds, as a sort of thanksgiving ceremony, to funk us out of these chambers with the smoke of a Trichinopoly cheroot. But listen! Don't light it yet, Thorndyke. Here comes some harmless and inoffensive stranger."

Thorndyke paused with the cigar in his fingers. A quick step ascended the stairs and then came a sharp, official rat-tat from the little brass knocker. Thorndyke laid the cigar on the mantelpiece and strode over to the door. I saw him take in a telegram, open it, glance at the paper and dismiss the messenger. Then, closing the door, he came back to the fireside with the "flimsy" in his hand. "There, Jardine," said he, laying it on my knee; "there is your order of release."

I picked up the paper and read aloud its curt message. "Maddock arrested Folkestone now in custody Bow Street. Miller."

"That means to say," said Thorndyke, "that the halter is already around his neck. I think I may light my Trichinopoly now."

And he did so.

There is little more to tell. This has been a history of coincidences and one more coincidence brings it to a close. The very day on which my formal engagement to Sylvia was made public, chanced to be the day on which the execution of Septimus Maddock was described in the papers. On that day, too, the portrait of poor Letitia, painted by that skilful and murderous hand, was placed in the handsome ebony frame that I had caused to be made for it. As I write these closing words, it hangs before me, flanked on either side by the little jar of violets that are renewed religiously from day to day by my wife or me. The pale, inscrutable eyes look out on me, her friend whom she loved so faithfully and who so little merited her love; but as I look into them, the picture fades and shows me the same face glorified, waxen, pallid, drowsy-eyed, peaceful and sweet—the dead face of the woman who gave her heart's blood as the price of my ransom, and who was fated then to pass—out of my life indeed, but out of my heart's shrine and my most loving remembrance, never.

---

THE END

---

## XV. — THE MISSING MORTGAGEE

### PART I

EARLY in the afternoon of a warm, humid November day, Thomas Elton sauntered dejectedly along the Margate esplanade, casting an eye now on the slate-coloured sea with its pall of slate-coloured sky, and now on the harbour, where the ebb tide was just beginning to expose the mud. It was a dreary prospect, and Elton varied it by observing the few fishermen and fewer promenaders who walked foot to foot with their distorted reflections in the wet pavement; and thus it was that his eye fell on a smartly-dressed man who had just stepped into a shelter to light a cigar.

A contemporary joker has classified the Scotsmen who abound in South Africa into two groups: those, namely, who hail from Scotland, and those who hail from Palestine. Now, something in the aspect of the broad back that was presented to his view, in that of the curly, black hair and the exuberant raiment, suggested to Elton a Scotsman of the latter type. In fact, there was a suspicion of disagreeable familiarity in the figure which caused him to watch it and slacken his pace. The man backed out of the shelter, diffusing azure clouds, and, drawing an envelope from his pocket, read something that was written on it. Then he turned quickly—and so did Elton, but not quickly enough. For he was a solitary figure on that bald and empty expanse, and the other had seen him at the first glance. Elton walked away slowly, but he had not gone a dozen paces when he felt the anticipated slap on the shoulder and heard the too well-remembered voice.

"Blow me, if I don't believe you were trying to cut me, Tom," it said.

Elton looked round with ill-assumed surprise. "Hallo, Gordon! Who the deuce would have thought of seeing you here?"

Gordon laughed thickly. "Not you, apparently; and you don't look as pleased as you might now you have seen me. Whereas I'm delighted to see you, and especially to see that things are going so well with you."

"What do you mean?" asked Elton.

"Taking your winter holiday by the sea, like a blooming duke."

"I'm not taking a holiday," said Elton. "I was so worn out that I had to have some sort of change; but I've brought my work down with me, and I put in a full seven hours every day."

"That's right," said Gordon. "'Consider the ant.' Nothing like steady industry! I've brought my work down with me too; a little slip of paper with a stamp on it. You know the article, Tom."

"I know. But it isn't due till to-morrow, is it?"

"Isn't it, by gum! It's due this very day, the twentieth of the month. That's why I'm here. Knowing your little weakness in the matter of dates, and having a small item to collect in Canterbury, I thought I'd just come on, and save you the useless expense that results from forgetfulness."

Elton understood the hint, and his face grew rigid.

"I can't do it, Gordon; I can't really. Haven't got it, and shan't have it until I'm paid for the batch of drawings that I'm working on now."

"Oh, but what a pity!" exclaimed Gordon, taking the cigar from his thick, pouting lips to utter the exclamation. "Here you are, blueing your capital on seaside jaunts and reducing your income at a stroke by a clear four pounds a year."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Elton.

"Tut, tut," protested Gordon, "what an unbusinesslike chap you are! Here's a little matter of twenty pounds quarter's interest. If it's paid now, it's twenty. If it isn't, it goes on to the principal and there's another four pounds a year to be paid. Why don't you try to be more economical, dear boy?"

Elton looked askance at the vampire by his side; at the plump blue-shaven cheeks, the thick black eyebrows, the drooping nose, and the full, red lips that embraced the cigar, and though he was a mild tempered man he felt that he could have battered that sensual, complacent face out of all human likeness, with something uncommonly like enjoyment. But of these thoughts nothing appeared in his reply, for a man cannot afford to say all he would wish to a creditor who could ruin him with a word.

"You mustn't be too hard on me, Gordon," said he. "Give me a little time. I'm doing all I can, you know. I earn every penny that I am able, and I have kept my insurance paid up regularly. I shall be paid for this work in a week or two and then we can settle up."

Gordon made no immediate reply, and the two men walked slowly eastward, a curiously ill-assorted pair: the one prosperous, jaunty, overdressed; the other pale and dejected, and, with his well-brushed but napless clothes, his patched boots and shiny-brimmed hat, the very type of decent, struggling poverty.

They had just passed the pier, and were coming to the base of the jetty, when Gordon next spoke.

"Can't we get off this beastly wet pavement?" he asked, looking down at his dainty and highly-polished boots. "What's it like down on the sands?"

"Oh, it's very good walking," said Elton, "between here and Foreness, and probably drier than the pavement."

"Then," said Gordon, "I vote we go down;" and accordingly they descended the sloping way beyond the jetty. The stretch of sand left by the retiring tide was as smooth and firm as a sheet of asphalt, and far more pleasant to walk upon.

"We seem to have the place all to ourselves," remarked Gordon, "with the exception of some half-dozen dukes like yourself."

As he spoke, he cast a cunning black eye furtively at the dejected man by his side, considering how much further squeezing was possible, and what would be the probable product of a further squeeze; but he quickly averted his gaze as Elton turned on him a look eloquent of contempt and dislike. There was another pause, for Elton made no reply to the last observation; then Gordon changed over from one arm to the other the heavy fur overcoat that he was carrying. "Needn't have brought this beastly thing," he remarked, "if I'd known it was going to be so warm."

"Shall I carry it for you a little way?" asked the naturally polite Elton.

"If you would, dear boy," replied Gordon. "It's difficult to manage an overcoat, an umbrella and cigar all at once."

He handed over the coat with a sigh of relief, and having straightened himself and expanded his chest, remarked: "I suppose you're beginning to do quite well now, Tom?"

Elton shook his head gloomily. "No," he answered, "it's the same old grind."

"But surely they're beginning to recognise your talents by this time," said Gordon, with the persuasive air of a counsel.



"That's just the trouble," said Elton. "You see, I haven't any, and they recognised the fact long ago. I'm just a journeyman, and journeyman's work is what I get given to me."

"You mean to say that the editors don't appreciate talent when they see it."

"I don't know about that," said Elton, "but they're most infernally appreciative of the lack of it."

Gordon blew out a great cloud of smoke, and raised his eyebrows reflectively. "Do you think," he said after a brief pause, "you give 'em a fair chance? I've seen some of your stuff. It's blooming prim, you know. Why don't you try something more lively? More skittish, you know, old chap; something with legs, you know, and high shoes. See what I mean, old chap? High with good full calves and not too fat in the ankle. That ought to fetch 'em; don't you think so?"

Elton scowled. "You're thinking of the drawings in 'Hold Me Up,'" he said scornfully, "but you're mistaken. Any fool can draw a champagne bottle upside down with a French shoe at the end of it."

"No doubt, dear boy," said Gordon, "but I expect that sort of fool knows what pays."

"A good many fools seem to know that much," retorted Elton; and then he was sorry he had spoken, for Gordon was not really an amiable man, and the expression of his face suggested that he had read a personal application into the rejoinder. So, once more, the two men walked on in silence.

Presently their footsteps led them to the margin of the weed-covered rocks, and here, from under a high heap of bladder-wrack, a large green shorecrab rushed out and menaced them with uplifted claws. Gordon stopped and stared at the creature with Cockney surprise, prodding it with his umbrella, and speculating aloud as to whether it was good to eat. The crab, as if alarmed at the suggestion, suddenly darted away and began to scuttle over the green-clad rocks, finally plunging into a large, deep pool. Gordon pursued it, hobbling awkwardly over the slippery rocks, until he came to the edge of the pool, over which he stooped, raking inquisitively among the weedy fringe with his umbrella. He was so much interested in his quarry that he failed to allow for the slippery surface on which he stood. The result was disastrous. Of a sudden, one foot began to slide forward, and when he tried to recover his balance, was instantly followed by the other. For a moment he struggled frantically to regain his footing, executing a sort of splashing, stamping dance on the margin. Then, the circling sea birds were startled by a yell of terror, an ivory-handled umbrella flew across the rocks, and Mr. Solomon Gordon took a complete header into the deepest part of the pool. What the crab thought of it history does not relate. What Mr. Gordon thought of it is unsuitable for publication; but, as he rose, like an extremely up-to-date merman, he expressed his sentiments with a wealth of adjectives that brought Elton in the verge of hysteria.

"It's a good job you brought your overcoat, after all," Elton remarked for the sake of saying something, and thereby avoiding the risk of exploding into undeniable laughter. The Hebrew made no reply—at least, no reply that lends itself to verbatim report—but staggered towards the hospitable overcoat, holding out his dripping arms. Having inducted him into the garment and buttoned him up, Elton hurried off to recover the umbrella (and, incidentally, to indulge himself in a broad grin), and, having secured it, angled with it for the smart billycock which was floating across the pool.

It was surprising what a change the last minute or two had wrought. The positions of the two men were now quite reversed. Despite his shabby clothing, Elton seemed to walk quite jauntily as compared with his shuddering companion who trotted by his side with short miserable steps, shrinking into the uttermost depths of his enveloping coat, like an alarmed winkle into its shell, puffing out his cheeks and anathematising the Universe in general as well as his chattering teeth would let him.

For some time they hurried along towards the slope by the jetty without exchanging any further remarks; then suddenly, Elton asked: "What are you going to do, Gordon? You can't travel like that."

"Can't you lend me a change?" asked Gordon. Elton reflected. He had another suit, his best suit, which he had been careful to preserve in good condition for use on those occasions when a decent appearance was indispensable. He looked askance at the man by his side and something told him that the treasured suit would probably receive less careful treatment than it was accustomed to. Still the man couldn't be allowed to go about in wet clothes.

"I've got a spare suit," he said. "It isn't quite up to your style, and may not be much of a fit, but I daresay you'll be able to put up with it for an hour or two."

"It'll be dry anyhow," mumbled Gordon, "so we won't trouble about the style. How far is it to your rooms?"

The plural number was superfluous. Elton's room was in a little ancient flint house at the bottom of a narrow close in the old quarter of the town. You reached it without any formal preliminaries of bell or knocker by simply letting yourself in by a street door, crossing a tiny room, opening the door of what looked like a narrow cupboard, and squeezing up a diminutive flight of stairs, which was unexpectedly exposed to view. By following this procedure, the two men reached a small bed-sitting-room; that is to say, it was a bed room, but by sitting down on the bed, you converted it into a sitting-room.

Gordon puffed out his cheeks and looked round distastefully.

"You might just ring for some hot water, old chappie," he said.

Elton laughed aloud. "Ring!" he exclaimed. "Ring what? Your clothes are the only things that are likely to get wrung."

"Well, then, sing out for the servant," said Gordon.

Elton laughed again. "My dear fellow," said he, "we don't go in for servants. There is only my landlady and she never comes up here. She's too fat to get up the stairs, and besides, she's got a game leg. I look after my room myself. You'll be all right if you have a good rub down."

Gordon groaned, and emerged reluctantly from the depths of his overcoat, while Elton brought forth from the chest of drawers the promised suit and the necessary undergarments. One of these latter Gordon held up with a sour smile, as he regarded it with extreme disfavour.

"I shouldn't think," said he, "you need have been at the trouble of marking them so plainly. No one's likely to want to run away with them."

The undergarments certainly contrasted very unfavourably with the delicate garments which he was peeling off, excepting in one respect; they were dry; and that had to console him for the ignominious change.

The clothes fitted quite fairly, notwithstanding the difference between the figures of the two men; for while Gordon was a slender man grown fat, Elton was a broad man grown thin; which, in a way, averaged their superficial area.

Elton watched the process of investment and noted the caution with which Gordon smuggled the various articles from his own pockets into those of the borrowed garments without exposing them to view; heard the jingle of money; saw the sumptuous gold watch and massive chain transplanted and noted with interest the large leather wallet that came forth from the breast pocket of the wet coat. He got a better view of this from the fact that Gordon himself examined it narrowly, and even opened it to inspect its contents.

"Lucky that wasn't an ordinary pocketbook," he remarked. "If it had been, your receipt would have got wet, and so would one or two other little articles that wouldn't have been improved by salt water. And, talking of the receipt, Tom, shall I hand it over now?"

"You can if you like," said Elton; "but as I told you, I haven't got the money;" on which Gordon muttered: "Pity, pity," and thrust the wallet into his, or rather, Elton's breast pocket.

A few minutes later, the two men came out together into the gathering darkness, and as they walked slowly up the close, Elton asked: "Are you going up to town to-night, Gordon?"

"How can I?" was the reply. "I can't go without my clothes. No, I shall run over to Broadstairs. A client of mine keeps a boarding-house there. He'll have to put me up for the night, and if you can get my clothes cleaned and dried I can come over for them to-morrow."

These arrangements having been settled, the two men adjourned, at Gordon's suggestion, for tea at one of the restaurants on the Front; and after that, again at Gordon's suggestion, they set forth together along the cliff path that leads to Broadstairs by way of Kingsgate.

"You may as well walk with me into Broadstairs," said Gordon; "I'll stand you the fare back by rail;" and to this Elton had agreed, not because he was desirous of the other man's company, but because he still had some lingering hopes of being able to adjust the little difficulty respecting the instalment.

He did not, however, open the subject at once. Profoundly as he loathed and despised the human spider whom necessity made his associate for the moment, he exerted himself to keep up a current of amusing conversation. It was not easy; for Gordon, like most men whose attention is focussed on the mere acquirement of money, looked with a dull eye on the ordinary interests of life. His tastes in art he had already hinted at, and his other tastes lay much in the same direction. Money first, for its own sake, and then those coarser and more primitive gratifications that it was capable of purchasing. This was the horizon that bounded Mr. Solomon Gordon's field of vision.

Nevertheless, they were well on their way before Elton alluded to the subject that was uppermost in both their minds.

"Look here, Gordon," he said at length, "can't you manage to give me a bit more time to pay up this instalment? It doesn't seem quite fair to keep sending up the principal like this."

"Well, dear boy," replied Gordon, "it's your own fault, you know. If you would only bear the dates in mind, it wouldn't happen."

"But," pleaded Elton, "just consider what I'm paying you. I originally borrowed fifty pounds from you, and I'm now paying you eighty pounds a year in addition to the insurance premium. That's close on a hundred a year; just about half that I manage to earn by slaving like a nigger. If you stick it up any farther you won't leave me enough to keep body and soul together; which really means that I shan't be able to pay you at all."

There was a brief pause; then Gordon said dryly: "You talk about not paying, dear boy, as if you had forgotten about that promissory note."

Elton set his teeth. His temper was rising rapidly. But he restrained himself.

"I should have a pretty poor memory if I had," he replied, "considering the number of reminders you've given me."

"You've needed them, Tom," said the other. "I've never met a slacker man in keeping to his engagements."

At this Elton lost his temper completely.

"That's a damned lie!" he exclaimed, "and you know it, you infernal, dirty, blood-sucking parasite."

Gordon stopped dead.

"Look here, my friend," said he; "none of that. If I've any of your damned sauce, I'll give you a sound good hammering."

"The deuce you will!" said Elton, whose fingers were itching, not for the first time, to take some recompense for all that he had suffered from the insatiable usurer. "Nothing's preventing you now, you know, but I fancy cent. per cent. is more in your line than fighting."

"Give me any more sauce and you'll see," said Gordon.

"Very well," was the quiet rejoinder. "I have great pleasure in informing you that you are a human maw-worm. How does that suit you?"

For reply, Gordon threw down his overcoat and umbrella on the grass at the side of the path, and deliberately slapped Elton on the cheek.

The reply followed instantly in the form of a smart left-hander, which took effect on the bridge of the Hebrew's rather prominent nose. Thus the battle was fairly started, and it proceeded with all the fury of accumulated hatred on the one side and sharp physical pain on the other. What little science there was appertained to Elton, in spite of which, however, he had to give way to his heavier, better nourished and more excitable opponent. Regardless of the punishment he received, the infuriated Jew rushed at him and, by sheer weight of onslaught, drove him backward across the little green.

Suddenly, Elton, who knew the place by daylight, called out in alarm.

"Look out, Gordon! Get back, you fool!"

But Gordon, blind with fury, and taking this as attempt to escape, only pressed him harder. Elton's pugnacity died out instantly in mortal terror. He shouted out another warning and as Gordon still pressed him, battering furiously, he did the only thing that was possible: he dropped to the ground. And then, in the twinkling of an eye came the catastrophe. Borne forward by his own momentum, Gordon stumbled over Elton's prostrate body, staggered forward a few paces, and fell. Elton heard a muffled groan that faded quickly, and mingled with the sound of falling earth and stones. He sprang to his feet and looked round and saw that he was alone.

For some moments he was dazed by the suddenness of the awful thing that had happened. He crept timorously towards the unseen edge of the cliff, and listened.

There was no sound save the distant surge of the breakers, and the scream of an invisible sea-bird. It was useless to try to look over. Near as he was, he could not, even now, distinguish the edge of the cliff from the dark beach below. Suddenly he bethought him of a narrow cutting that led down from the cliff to the shore. Quickly crossing the green, and mechanically stooping to pick up Gordon's overcoat and umbrella, he made his way to the head of the cutting and ran down the rough chalk roadway. At the bottom he turned to the right and, striding hurriedly over the smooth sand, peered into the darkness at the foot of the cliff.

Soon there loomed up against the murky sky the shadowy form of the little headland on which he and Gordon had stood; and, almost at the same moment, there grew out of the darkness of the beach a darker spot amidst a constellation of smaller spots of white. As he drew nearer the dark spot took shape; a horrid shape with sprawling limbs and a head strangely awry. He stepped forward, trembling, and spoke the name that the thing had borne. He grasped the flabby hand, and laid his fingers on the wrist; but it only told him the same tale as did that strangely misplaced head. The body lay face downwards, and he had not the courage to turn it over; but that his enemy was dead he had not the faintest doubt. He stood up amidst the litter of fallen chalk and earth and looked down at the horrible, motionless thing, wondering numbly and vaguely what he should do. Should he go and seek assistance? The answer to that came in another question. How came that body to be lying on the beach? And what answer should he give to the inevitable questions? And swiftly there grew up in his mind, born of the horror of the thing that was, a yet greater horror of the thing that might be.

A minute later, a panic-stricken man stole with stealthy swiftness up the narrow cutting and set forth towards Margate, stopping anon to listen, and stealing away off the path into the darkness, to enter the town by the inland road.

Little sleep was there that night for Elton in his room in the old flint house. The dead man's clothes, which greeted him on his arrival, hanging limply on the towel-horse where he had left them, haunted him through the night. In the darkness, the sour smell of damp cloth assailed him with an endless reminder of their presence, and after each brief doze, he would start up in alarm and hastily light his candle; only to throw its flickering light on those dank, drowned-looking vestments. His thoughts, half-controlled, as night thoughts are, flitted erratically from the unhappy past to the unstable present, and thence to the incalculable future. Once he lighted the candle specially to look at his watch to see if the tide had yet crept up to that solitary figure on the beach; nor could he rest again until the time of high water was well past. And all through these wanderings of his thoughts there came, recurring like a horrible refrain, the question what would happen when the body was found? Could he be connected with it and, if so, would he be charged with murder? At last he fell asleep and slumbered on until the landlady thumped at the staircase door to announce that she had brought his breakfast.

As soon as he was dressed he went out. Not, however, until he had stuffed Gordon's still damp clothes and boots, the cumbrous overcoat and the smart billy-cock hat into his trunk, and put the umbrella into the darkest corner of the cupboard. Not that anyone ever came up to the room, but that, already, he was possessed with the uneasy secretiveness of the criminal. He went straight down to the beach; with what purpose he could hardly have said, but an irresistible impulse drove him thither to see if it was there. He went down by the jetty and struck out eastward over the smooth sand, looking

about him with dreadful expectation for some small crowd or hurrying messenger. From the foot of the cliffs, over the rocks to the distant line of breakers, his eye roved with eager dread, and still he hurried eastward, always drawing nearer to the place that he feared to look on. As he left the town behind, so he left behind the one or two idlers on the beach, and when he turned Foreness Point he lost sight of the last of them and went forward alone. It was less than half an hour later that the fatal headland opened out beyond Whiteness.

Not a soul had he met along that solitary beach, and though, once or twice, he had started at the sight of some mass of drift wood or heap of seaweed, the dreadful thing that he was seeking had not yet appeared. He passed the opening of the cutting and approached the headland, breathing fast and looking about him fearfully. Already he could see the larger lumps of chalk that had fallen, and looking up, he saw a clean, white patch at the summit of the cliff. But still there was no sign of the corpse. He walked on more slowly now, considering whether it could have drifted out to sea, or whether he should find it in the next bay. And then, rounding the headland, he came in sight of a black hole at the cliff foot, the entrance to a deep cave. He approached yet more slowly, sweeping his eye round the little bay, and looking apprehensively at the cavity before him. Suppose the thing should have washed in there. It was quite possible. Many things did wash into that cave, for he had once visited it and had been astonished at the quantity of seaweed and jetsam that had accumulated within it. But it was an uncomfortable thought. It would be doubly horrible to meet the awful thing in the dim twilight of the cavern. And yet, the black archway seemed to draw him on, step by step, until he stood at the portal and looked in. It was an eerie place, chilly and damp, the clammy walls and roof stained green and purple and black with encrusting lichens. At one time, Elton had been told, it used to be haunted by smugglers, and then communicated with an underground passage; and the old smuggler's look-out still remained; a narrow tunnel, high up the cliff, looking out into Kingsgate Bay; and even some vestiges of the rude steps that led up to the look-out platform could still be traced, and were not impossible to climb. Indeed, Elton had, at his last visit, climbed to the platform and looked out through the spy-hole. He recalled the circumstance now, as he stood, peering nervously into the darkness, and straining his eyes to see what jetsam the ocean had brought since then.

At first he could see nothing but the smooth sand near the opening; then, as his eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom, he could make out the great heap of seaweed on the floor of the cave. Insensibly, he crept in, with his eyes riveted on the weedy mass and, as he left the daylight behind him, so did the twilight of the cave grow clearer. His feet left the firm sand and trod the springy mass of weed, and in the silence of the cave he could now hear plainly the rain-like patter of the leaping sand-hoppers. He stopped for a moment to listen to the unfamiliar sound, and still the gloom of the cave grew lighter to his more accustomed eyes.

And then, in an instant, he saw it. From a heap of weed, a few paces ahead, projected a boot; his own boot; he recognised the patch on the sole; and at the sight, his heart seemed to stand still. Though he had somehow expected to find it here, its presence seemed to strike him with a greater shock of horror from that very circumstance.

He was standing stock still, gazing with fearful fascination at the boot and the swelling mound of weed, when, suddenly, there struck upon his ear the voice of a woman, singing.

He started violently. His first impulse was to run out of the cave. But a moment's reflection told him what madness this would be. And then the voice drew nearer, and there broke out the high, rippling laughter of a child. Elton looked in terror at the bright opening of the cavern's mouth, expecting every moment to see it frame a group of figures. If that happened, he was lost, for he would have been seen actually with the body. Suddenly he bethought him of the spy-hole and the platform, both of which were invisible from the entrance; and turning, he ran quickly over the sodden weed till he came to the remains of the steps. Climbing hurriedly up these, he reached the platform, which was enclosed in a large niche, just as the reverberating sound of voices told him that the strangers were within the mouth of the cave. He strained his ears to catch what they were saying and to make out if they were entering farther. It was a child's voice that he had first heard, and very weird were the hollow echoes of the thin treble that were flung back from the rugged walls. But he could not hear what the child had said. The woman's voice, however, was quite distinct, and the words seemed significant in more senses than one.

"No, dear," it said, "you had better not go in. It's cold and damp. Come out into the sunshine."

Elton breathed more freely. But the woman was more right than she knew. It was cold and damp, that thing under the black tangle of weed. Better far to be out in the sunshine. He himself was already longing to escape from the chill and gloom, of the cavern. But he could not escape yet. Innocent as he actually was, his position was that of a murderer. He must wait until the coast was clear, and then steal out, to hurry away unobserved.

He crept up cautiously to the short tunnel and peered out through the opening across the bay. And then his heart sank. Below him, on the sunny beach, a small party of visitors had established themselves just within view of the mouth of the cave; and even as he looked, a man approached from the wooden stairway down the cliff, carrying a couple of deck chairs. So, for the present his escape was hopelessly cut off.

He went back to the platform and sat down to wait for his release; and, as he sat, his thoughts went back once more to the thing that lay under the weed. How long would it lie there undiscovered? And what would happen when it was found? What was there to connect him with it? Of course, there was his name on the clothing, but there was nothing incriminating in that, if he had only had the courage to give information at once. But it was too late to think of that now. Besides, it suddenly flashed upon him, there was the receipt in the wallet. That receipt mentioned him by name and referred to a loan. Obviously, its suggestion was most sinister, coupled with his silence. It was a deadly item of evidence against him. But no sooner had he realised the appalling significance of this document than he also realised that it was still within his reach.

Why should he leave it there to be brought in evidence—in false evidence, too—against him?

Slowly he rose and, creeping down the tunnel, once more looked out. The people were sitting quietly in their chairs, the man was reading, and the child was digging in the sand. Elton looked across the bay to make sure that no other person was approaching, and then, hastily climbing down the steps, walked across the great bed of weed, driving an army of sand-hoppers before him. He shuddered at the thought of what he was going to do, and the clammy chill of the cave seemed to settle on him in a cold sweat.

He came to the little mound from which the boot projected, and began, shudderingly and with faltering hand, to lift the slimy, tangled weed. As he drew aside the first bunch, he gave a gasp of horror and quickly replaced it. The body was lying on its back, and, as he lifted the weed he had uncovered—not the face, for the thing had no face. It had struck either the cliff or a stone upon the beach and—but there is no need to go into particulars: it had no face. When he had recovered a little, Elton groped shudderingly among the weed until he found the breast-pocket from which he quickly drew out the wallet, now clammy, sodden and loathsome. He was rising with it in his hand when an apparition, seen through the opening of the cave, arrested his movement as if he had been suddenly turned into stone. A man, apparently a fisherman or sailor, was sauntering past some thirty yards from the mouth of the cave, and at his heels trotted a mongrel dog. The dog stopped, and, lifting his nose, seemed to sniff the air; and then he began to walk slowly and suspiciously towards the cave. The man sauntered on and soon passed out of view; but the dog still came on towards the cave, stopping now and again with upraised nose.

The catastrophe seemed inevitable. But just at that moment the man's voice rose, loud and angry, evidently calling the dog. The animal hesitated, looking wistfully from his master to the cave; but when the summons was repeated, he turned reluctantly and trotted away.

Elton stood up and took a deep breath. The chilly sweat was running down his face, his heart was thumping and his knees trembled, so that he could hardly get back to the platform. What hideous peril had he escaped and how narrowly! For there he had stood; and had the man entered, he would have been caught in the very act of stealing the incriminating document from the body. For that matter, he was little better off now, with the dead man's property on his person, and he resolved instantly to take out and destroy the receipt and put back the wallet. But this was easier thought of than done. The receipt was soaked with sea water, and refused utterly to light when he applied a match to it. In the end, he tore it up into little fragments and deliberately swallowed them, one by one.

But to restore the wallet was more than he was equal to just now. He would wait until the people had gone home to lunch, and then he would thrust it under the weed as he ran past. So he sat down again and once more took up the endless thread of his thoughts.

The receipt was gone now, and with it the immediate suggestion of motive. There remained only the clothes with their too legible markings. They certainly connected him with the body, but they offered no proof of his presence at the catastrophe. And then, suddenly, another most startling idea occurred to him. Who could identify the body—the body that had no face? There was the wallet, it was true, but he could take that away with him, and there was a ring on the finger and some articles in the pockets which might be identified. But—a voice seemed to whisper to him—these things were removable, too. And if he removed them, what then? Why, then, the body was that of Thomas Elton, a friendless, poverty-stricken artist, about whom no one would trouble to ask any questions.

He pondered on this new situation profoundly. It offered him a choice of alternatives. Either he might choose the imminent risk of being hanged for a murder that he had not committed, or he might surrender his identity for ever and move away to a new environment.

He smiled faintly. His identity! What might that be worth to barter against his life? Only yesterday he would gladly have surrendered it as the bare price of emancipation from the vampire who had fastened on to him.

He thrust the wallet into his pocket and buttoned his coat. Thomas Elton was dead; and that other man, as yet unnamed, should go forth, as the woman had said, into the sunshine.

---

## PART II

(Related by Christopher Jervis, M.D.)

FROM various causes, the insurance business that passed through Thorndyke's hands had, of late, considerably increased. The number of societies which regularly employed him had grown larger, and, since the remarkable case of Percival Bland, the Griffin had made it a routine practice to send all inquest cases to us for report.

[Compiler's note: the Percival Bland case actually follows directly after this one in the book: clearly the order of stories has been transposed.]

It was in reference to one of these latter that Mr. Stalker, a senior member of the staff of that office, called on us one afternoon in December; and when he had laid his bag on the table and settled himself comfortably before the fire, he opened the business without preamble.

"I've brought you another inquest case," said he; "a rather queer one, quite interesting from your point of view. As far as we can see, it has no particular interest for us excepting that it does rather look as if our examining medical officer had been a little casual."

"What is the special interest of the case from our point of view?" asked Thorndyke.

"I'll just give you a sketch of it," said Stalker, "and I think you will agree that it's a case after your own heart."

"On the 24th of last month, some men who were collecting seaweed, to use as manure, discovered in a cave at Kingsgate, in the Isle of Thanet, the body of a man, lying under a mass of accumulated weed. As the tide was rising, they put the body into their cart and conveyed it to Margate, where, of course, an inquest was held, and the following facts were elicited. The body was that of a man named Thomas Elton. It was identified by the name-marks on the clothing, by the visiting-cards and a couple of letters which were found in the pockets. From the address on the letters it was seen that Elton had been staying in Margate, and on inquiry at that address, it was learnt from the old woman who let the lodgings, that he had been missing about four days. The landlady was taken to the mortuary, and at once identified the body as that of her lodger. It remained only to decide how the body came into the cave; and this did not seem to present much difficulty; for the neck had been broken by a tremendous blow, which had practically destroyed the face, and there were distinct evidences of a breaking away of a portion of the top of the cliff, only a few yards from the position of the cave. There was apparently no doubt that Elton had fallen sheer from the top of the overhanging cliff on to the beach. Now, one would suppose with the evidence of this fall of about a hundred and fifty feet, the smashed face and broken neck, there was not much room for doubt as to the cause of death. I think you will agree with me, Dr. Jervis?"

"Certainly," I replied; "it must be admitted that a broken neck is a condition that tends to shorten life."

"Quite so," agreed Stalker; "but our friend, the local coroner, is a gentleman who takes nothing for granted—a very Thomas Didymus, who apparently agrees with Dr. Thorndyke that if there is no post mortem, there is no inquest. So he ordered a post mortem, which would have appeared to me an absurdly unnecessary proceeding, and I think that even you will agree with me, Dr. Thorndyke."

But Thorndyke shook his head.

"Not at all," said he. "It might, for instance, be much more easy to push a drugged or poisoned man over a cliff than to put over the same man in his normal state. The appearance of violent accident is an excellent mask for the less obvious forms of murder."

"That's perfectly true," said Stalker; "and I suppose that is what the coroner thought. At any rate, he had the post-mortem made, and the result was most curious; for it was found, on opening the body, that the deceased had suffered from a smallish thoracic aneurism, which had burst. Now, as the aneurism must obviously have burst during life, it leaves the cause of death—so I understand—uncertain; at any rate, the medical witness was unable to say whether the deceased fell over the cliff in consequence of the bursting of the aneurism or burst the aneurism in consequence of falling over the cliff. Of course, it doesn't matter to us which way the thing happened; the only question which interests us is, whether a comparatively recently insured man ought to have had an aneurism at all."

"Have you paid the claim?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, certainly not. We never pay a claim until we have had your report. But, as a matter of fact, there is another circumstance that is causing delay. It seems that Elton had mortgaged his policy to a money lender, named Gordon, and it is by him that the claim has been made, or rather, by a clerk of his, named Hyams. Now, we have had a good many dealings with this man Gordon, and hitherto he has always acted in person; and as he is a somewhat slippery gentleman we have thought it desirable to have the claim actually signed by him. And that is the difficulty. For it seems that Mr. Gordon is abroad, and his whereabouts unknown to Hyams; so, as we certainly couldn't take Hyams's receipt for payment, the matter is in abeyance until Hyams can communicate with his principal. And now, I must be running away. I have brought you, as you will see, all the papers, including the policy and the mortgage deed."

As soon as he was gone, Thorndyke gathered up the bundle of papers and sorted them out in what he apparently considered the order of their importance. First he glanced quickly through the proposal form, and then took up the copy of the coroner's depositions.

"The medical evidence," he remarked, "is very full and complete. Both the coroner and the doctor seem to know their business."

"Seeing that the man apparently fell over a cliff," said I, "the medical evidence would not seem to be of first importance. It would seem to be more to the point to ascertain how he came to fall over."

"That's quite true," replied Thorndyke; "and yet, this report contains some rather curious matter. The deceased had an aneurism of the arch; that was probably rather recent. But he also had some slight, old-standing aortic disease, with full compensatory hypertrophy. He also had a nearly complete set of false teeth. Now, doesn't it strike you, Jervis, as rather odd that a man who was passed only five years ago as a first-class life, should, in that short interval, have become actually uninsurable?"

"Yes, it certainly does look," said I, "as if the fellow had had rather bad luck. What does the proposal form say?"

I took the document up and ran my eyes over it. On Thorndyke's advice, medical examiners for the Griffin were instructed to make a somewhat fuller report than is usual in some companies. In this case, the ordinary answers to questions set forth that the heart was perfectly healthy and the teeth rather exceptionally good, and then, in the summary at the end, the examiner remarked: "the proposer seems to be a completely sound and healthy man; he presents no physical defects whatever, with the exception of a bony ankylosis of the first joint of the third finger of the left hand, which

he states to have been due to an injury."

Thorndyke looked up quickly. "Which finger, did you say?" he asked.

"The third finger of the left hand," I replied.

Thorndyke looked thoughtfully at the paper that he was reading. "It's very singular," said he, "for I see that the Margate doctor states that the deceased wore a signet ring on the third finger of the left hand. Now, of course, you couldn't get a ring on to a finger with bony ankylosis of the joint."

"He must have mistaken the finger," said I, "or else the insurance examiner did."

"That is quite possible," Thorndyke replied; "but, doesn't it strike you as very singular that, whereas the insurance examiner mentions the ankylosis, which was of no importance from an insurance point of view, the very careful man who made the post-mortem should not have mentioned it, though, owing to the unrecognisable condition of the face, it was of vital importance for the purpose of identification?"

I admitted that it was very singular indeed, and we then resumed our study of the respective papers. But presently I noticed that Thorndyke had laid the report upon his knee, and was gazing speculatively into the fire.

"I gather," said I, "that my learned friend finds some matter of interest in this case."

For reply, he handed me the bundle of papers, recommending me to look through them.

"Thank you," said I, rejecting them firmly, "but I think I can trust you to have picked out all the plums."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently. "They're not plums, Jervis," said he; "they're only currants, but they make quite a substantial little heap."

I disposed myself in a receptive attitude (somewhat after the fashion of the juvenile pelican) and he continued: "If we take the small and unimpressive items and add them together, you will see that a quite considerable sum of discrepancy results, thus:

"In 1903, Thomas Elton, aged thirty-one, had a set of sound teeth. In 1908, at the age of thirty-six, he was more than half toothless. Again, at the age of thirty-one, his heart was perfectly healthy. At the age of thirty-six, he had old aortic disease, with fully established compensation, and an aneurism that was possibly due to it. When he was examined he had a noticeable incurable malformation; no such malformation is mentioned in connection with the body.

"He appears to have fallen over a cliff; and he had also burst an aneurism. Now, the bursting of the aneurism must obviously have occurred during life; but it would occasion practically instantaneous death. Therefore, if the fall was accidental, the rupture must have occurred either as he stood at the edge of the cliff, as he was in the act of falling, or on striking the beach.

"At the place where he apparently fell, the footpath is some thirty yards distant from the edge of the cliff.

"It is not known how he came to that spot, or whether he was alone at the time.

"Someone is claiming five hundred pounds as the immediate result of his death.

"There, you see, Jervis, are seven propositions, none of them extremely striking, but rather suggestive when taken together."

"You seem," said I, "to suggest a doubt as to the identity of the body."

"I do," he replied. "The identity was not clearly established."

"You don't think the clothing and the visiting-cards conclusive."

"They're not parts of the body," he replied. "Of course, substitution is highly improbable. But it is not impossible."

"And the old woman—" I suggested, but he interrupted me.

"My dear Jervis," he exclaimed; "I'm surprised at you. How many times has it happened within our knowledge that women have identified the bodies of total strangers as those of their husbands, fathers or brothers? The thing happens almost every year. As to this old woman, she saw a body with an unrecognisable face, dressed in the clothes of her missing lodger. Of course, it was the clothes that she identified."

"I suppose it was," I agreed; and then I said: "You seem to suggest the possibility of foul play."

"Well," he replied, "if you consider those seven points, you will agree with me that they present a cumulative discrepancy which it is impossible to ignore. The whole significance of the case turns on the question of identity; for, if this was not the body of Thomas Elton, it would appear to have been deliberately prepared to counterfeit that body. And such deliberate preparation would manifestly imply an attempt to conceal the identity of some other body.

"Then," he continued, after a pause, "there is this deed. It looks quite regular and is correctly stamped, but it seems to me that the surface of the paper is slightly altered in one or two places and if one holds the document up to the light, the paper looks a little more transparent in those places." He examined the document for a few seconds with his pocket lens, and then passing lens and document to me, said: "Have a look at it, Jervis, and tell me what you think."

I scrutinised the paper closely, taking it over to the window to get a better light; and to me, also, the paper appeared to

be changed in certain places.

"Are we agreed as to the position of the altered places?" Thorndyke asked when I announced the fact.

"I only see three patches," I answered. "Two correspond to the name, Thomas Elton, and the third to one of the figures in the policy number."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke, "and the significance is obvious. If the paper has really been altered, it means that some other name has been erased and Elton's substituted; by which arrangement, of course, the correctly dated stamp would be secured. And this—the alteration of an old document—is the only form of forgery that is possible with a dated, impressed stamp."

"Wouldn't it be rather a stroke of luck," I asked, "for a forger to happen to have in his possession a document needing only these two alterations?"

"I see nothing remarkable in it," Thorndyke replied. "A moneylender would have a number of documents of this kind in hand, and you observe that he was not bound down to any particular date. Any date within a year or so of the issue of the policy would answer his purpose. This document is, in fact, dated, as you see, about six months after the issue of the policy."

"I suppose," said I, "that you will draw Stalker's attention to this matter."

"He will have to be informed, of course," Thorndyke replied; "but I think it would be interesting in the first place to call on Mr. Hyams. You will have noticed that there are some rather mysterious features in this case, and Mr. Hyams's conduct, especially if this document should turn out to be really a forgery, suggests that he may have some special information on the subject." He glanced at his watch and, after a few moments' reflection, added: "I don't see why we shouldn't make our little ceremonial call at once. But it will be a delicate business, for we have mighty little to go upon. Are you coming with me?"

If I had had any doubts, Thorndyke's last remark disposed of them; for the interview promised to be quite a sporting event. Mr. Hyams was presumably not quite newly-hatched, and Thorndyke, who utterly despised bluff of any kind, and whose exact mind refused either to act or speak one hair's breadth beyond his knowledge, was admittedly in somewhat of a fog. The meeting promised to be really entertaining.

Mr. Hyams was "discovered," as the playwrights have it, in a small office at the top of a high building in Queen Victoria Street. He was a small gentleman, of sallow and greasy aspect, with heavy eyebrows and a still heavier nose.

"Are you Mr. Gordon?" Thorndyke suavely inquired as we entered.

Mr. Hyams seemed to experience a momentary doubt on the subject, but finally decided that he was not. "But perhaps," he added brightly, "I can do your business for you as well."

"I daresay you can," Thorndyke agreed significantly; on which we were conducted into an inner den, where I noticed Thorndyke's eye rest for an instant on a large iron safe.

"Now," said Mr. Hyams, shutting the door ostentatiously, "what can I do for you?"

"I want you," Thorndyke replied, "to answer one or two questions with reference to the claim made by you on the Griffin Office in respect of Thomas Elton."

Mr. Hyams's manner underwent a sudden change. He began rapidly to turn over papers, and opened and shut the drawers of his desk, with an air of restless preoccupation.

"Did the Griffin people send you here?" he demanded brusquely.

"They did not specially instruct me to call on you," replied Thorndyke.

"Then," said Hyams bouncing out of his chair, "I can't let you occupy my time. I'm not here to answer conundrums from Tom, Dick or Harry."

Thorndyke rose from his chair. "Then I am to understand," he said, with unruffled suavity, "that you would prefer me to communicate with the Directors, and leave them to take any necessary action."

This gave Mr. Hyams pause. "What action do you refer to?" he asked. "And, who are you?"

Thorndyke produced a card and laid it on the table. Mr. Hyams had apparently seen the name before, for he suddenly grew rather pale and very serious.

"What is the nature of the questions that you wished to ask?" he inquired.

"They refer to this claim," replied Thorndyke. "The first question is, where is Mr. Gordon?"

"I don't know," said Hyams.

"Where do you think he is?" asked Thorndyke.

"I don't think at all," replied Hyams, turning a shade paler and looking everywhere but at Thorndyke.

"Very well," said the latter, "then the next question is, are you satisfied that this claim is really payable?"



"I shouldn't have made it if I hadn't been," replied Hyams.

"Quite so," said Thorndyke; "and the third question is, are you satisfied that the mortgage deed was executed as it purports to have been?"

"I can't say anything about that," replied Hyams, who was growing every moment paler and more fidgety, "it was done before my time."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "You will, of course, understand why I am making these inquiries."

"I don't," said Hyams.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "perhaps I had better explain. We are dealing, you observe, Mr. Hyams, with the case of a man who has met with a violent death under somewhat mysterious circumstances. We are dealing, also, with another man who has disappeared, leaving his affairs to take care of themselves; and with a claim, put forward by a third party, on behalf of the one man in respect of the other. When I say that the dead man has been imperfectly identified, and that the document supporting the claim presents certain peculiarities, you will see that the matter calls for further inquiry."

There was an appreciable interval of silence. Mr. Hyams had turned a tallowy white, and looked furtively about the room, as if anxious to avoid the stony gaze that my colleague had fixed on him.

"Can you give us no assistance?" Thorndyke inquired, at length.

Mr. Hyams chewed a pen-holder ravenously, as he considered the question. At length, he burst out in an agitated voice: "Look here, sir, if I tell you what I know, will you treat the information as confidential?"

"I can't agree to that, Mr. Hyams," replied Thorndyke. "It might amount to compounding a felony. But you will be wiser to tell me what you know. The document is a side-issue, which my clients may never raise, and my own concern is with the death of this man."

Hyams looked distinctly relieved. "If that's so," said he, "I'll tell you all I know, which is precious little, and which just amounts to this: Two days after Elton was killed, someone came to this office in my absence and opened the safe. I discovered the fact the next morning. Someone had been to the safe and rummaged over all the papers. It wasn't Gordon, because he knew where to find everything; and it wasn't an ordinary thief, because no cash or valuables had been taken. In fact, the only thing that I missed was a promissory note, drawn by Elton."

"You didn't miss a mortgage deed?" suggested Thorndyke, and Hyams, having snatched a little further refreshment from the pen-holder, said he did not.

"And the policy," suggested Thorndyke, "was apparently not taken?"

"No," replied Hyams "but it was looked for. Three bundles of policies had been untied, but this one happened to be in a drawer of my desk and I had the only key."

"And what do you infer from this visit?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well," replied Hyams, "the safe was opened with keys, and they were Gordon's keys—or at any rate, they weren't mine—and the person who opened it wasn't Gordon; and the things that were taken—at least the thing, I mean—chiefly concerned Elton. Naturally I smelt a rat; and when I read of the finding of the body, I smelt a fox."

"And have you formed any opinion about the body that was found?"

"Yes, I have," he replied. "My opinion is that it was Gordon's body: that Gordon had been putting the screw on Elton, and Elton had just pitched him over the cliff and gone down and changed clothes with the body. Of course, that's only my opinion. I may be wrong; but I don't think I am."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Hyams was not wrong. An exhumation, consequent on Thorndyke's challenge of the identity of the deceased, showed that the body was that of Solomon Gordon. A hundred pounds reward was offered for information as to Elton's whereabouts. But no one ever earned it. A letter, bearing the post mark of Marseilles, and addressed by the missing man to Thorndyke, gave a plausible account of Gordon's death; which was represented as having occurred accidentally at the moment when Gordon chanced to be wearing a suit of Elton's clothes.

Of course, this account may have been correct, or again, it may have been false; but whether it was true or false, Elton, from that moment, vanished from our ken and has never since been heard of.

---

---

## XVI — PERCIVAL BLAND'S PROXY

### PART I

MR. PERCIVAL BLAND was a somewhat uncommon type of criminal. In the first place he really had an appreciable amount of common-sense. If he had only had a little more, he would not have been a criminal at all. As it was, he had just sufficient judgment to perceive that the consequences of unlawful acts accumulate as the acts are repeated; to realise that the criminal's position must, at length, become untenable; and to take what he considered fair precautions against the inevitable catastrophe.

But in spite of these estimable traits of character and the precautions aforesaid, Mr. Bland found himself in rather a tight place and with a prospect of increasing tightness. The causes of this uncomfortable tension do not concern us, and may be dismissed with the remark, that, if one perseveringly distributes flash Bank of England notes among the money-changers of the Continent, there will come a day of reckoning when those notes are tendered to the exceedingly knowing old lady who lives in Threadneedle Street.

Mr. Bland considered uneasily the approaching storm-cloud as he raked over the "miscellaneous property" in the Sale-rooms of Messrs. Plimpton. He was a confirmed frequenter of auctions, as was not unnatural, for the criminal is essentially a gambler. And criminal and gambler have one quality in common: each hopes to get something of value without paying the market price for it.

So Percival turned over the dusty oddments and his own difficulties at one and the same time. The vital questions were: When would the storm burst? And would it pass by the harbour of refuge that he had been at such pains to construct? Let us inspect that harbour of refuge.

A quiet flat in the pleasant neighbourhood of Battersea bore a name-plate inscribed, Mr. Robert Lindsay; and the tenant was known to the porter and the char woman who attended to the flat, as a fair-haired gentleman who was engaged in the book trade as a travelling agent, and was consequently a good deal away from home. Now Mr. Robert Lindsay bore a distinct resemblance to Percival Bland; which was not surprising seeing that they were first cousins (or, at any rate, they said they were; and we may presume that they knew. But they were not very much alike. Mr. Lindsay had flaxen, or rather sandy, hair; Mr. Bland's hair was black. Mr. Bland had a mole under his left eye; Mr. Lindsay had no mole under his eye—but carried one in a small box in his waistcoat pocket.

At somewhat rare intervals the Cousins called on one another; but they had the very worst of luck, for neither of them ever seemed to find the other at home. And what was even more odd was that whenever Mr. Bland spent an evening at home in his lodgings over the oil shop in Bloomsbury, Mr. Lindsay's flat was empty; and as sure as Mr. Lindsay was at home in his flat so surely were Mr. Bland's lodgings vacant for the time being. It was a queer coincidence, if anyone had noticed it; but nobody ever did.

However, if Percival saw little of his cousin, it was not a case of "out of sight, out of mind." On the contrary; so great was

his solicitude for the latter's welfare that he not only had made a will constituting him his executor and sole legatee, but he had actually insured his life for no less a sum than three thousand pounds; and this will, together with the insurance policy, investment securities and other necessary documents, he had placed in the custody of a highly respectable solicitor. All of which did him great credit. It isn't every man who is willing to take so much trouble for a mere cousin.

Mr. Bland continued his perambulations, pawing over the miscellaneous raffle from sheer force of habit, reflecting on the coming crisis in his own affairs, and on the provisions that he had made for his cousin Robert. As for the latter, they were excellent as far as they went, but they lacked definiteness and perfect completeness. There was the contingency of a "stretch," for instance; say fourteen years' penal servitude. The insurance policy did not cover that. And, meanwhile, what was to become of the estimable Robert?

He had bruised his thumb somewhat severely in a screw-cutting lathe, and had abstractedly turned the handle of a bird-organ until politely requested by an attendant to desist, when he came upon a series of boxes containing, according to the catalogue, "a collection of surgical instruments the property of a lately deceased practitioner." To judge by the appearance of the instruments, the practitioner must have commenced practice in his early youth and died at a very advanced age. They were an uncouth set of tools, of no value whatever excepting as testimonials to the amazing tenacity of life of our ancestors; but Percival fingered them over according to his wont, working the handle of a complicated brass syringe and ejecting a drop of greenish fluid on to the shirt of a dressy Hebrew (who requested him to "point the dam' thing at thomeone elth nectht time"), opening musty leather cases, clicking off spring scarifiers and feeling the edges of strange, crooked, knives. Then he came upon a largish black box, which, when he raised the lid, breathed out an ancient and fish-like aroma and exhibited a collection of bones, yellow, greasy and spotted in places with mildew. The catalogue described them as "a complete set of human osteology" but they were not an ordinary "student's set," for the bones of the hands and feet, instead of being strung together on cat-gut, were united by their original ligaments and were of an unsavoury brown colour.

"I thay, misther," expostulated the Hebrew, "shut that boeth. Thmellth like a blooming inquetht."

But the contents of the black box seemed to have a fascination for Percival. He looked in at those greasy remnants of mortality, at the brown and mouldy hands and feet and the skull that peeped forth eerily from the folds of a flannel wrapping; and they breathed out something more than that stale and musty odour. A suggestion—vague and general at first, but rapidly crystallising into distinct shape—seemed to steal out of the black box into his consciousness; a suggestion that somehow seemed to connect itself with his estimable cousin Robert.

For upwards of a minute he stood motionless, as one immersed in reverie, the lid poised in his hand and a dreamy eye fixed on the half skull. A stir in the room roused him. The sale was about to begin. The members of the knock-out and other habitués seated themselves on benches around a long, baize table; the attendants took possession of the first lots and opened their catalogues as if about to sing an introductory chorus; and a gentleman with a waxed moustache and a striking resemblance to his late Majesty, the third Napoleon, having ascended to the rostrum bespoke the attention of the assembly by a premonitory tap with his hammer.

How odd are some of the effects of a guilty conscience! With what absurd self-consciousness do we read into the minds of others our own undeclared intentions, when those intentions are unlawful! Had Percival Bland wanted a set of human bones for any legitimate purpose—such as anatomical study—he would have bought it openly and unembarrassed. Now, he found himself earnestly debating whether he should not bid for some of the surgical instruments, just for the sake of appearances; and there being little time in which to make up his mind—for the deceased practitioner's effects came first in the catalogue—he was already the richer by a set of cupping-glasses, a tooth-key, and an instrument of unknown use and diabolical aspect, before the fateful lot was called.

At length the black box was laid on the table, an object of obscene mirth to the knockers-out, and the auctioneer read the entry: "Lot seventeen; a complete set of human osteology. A very useful and valuable set of specimens, gentlemen."

He looked round at the assembly majestically, oblivious of sundry inquiries as to the identity of the deceased and the verdict of the coroner's jury, and finally suggested five shillings.

"Six," said Percival.

An attendant held the box open, and, chanting the mystic word "Loddlemen!" (which, being interpreted, meant "Lot, gentlemen"), thrust it under the rather bulbous nose of the smart Hebrew; who remarked that "they 'ummed a bit too much to thoot him" and pushed it away.

"Going at six shillings," said the auctioneer, reproachfully; and as nobody contradicted him, he smote the rostrum with his hammer and the box was delivered into the hands of Percival on the payment of that modest sum.

Having crammed the cupping-glasses, the tooth-key and the unknown instrument into the box, Percival obtained from one of the attendants a length of cord, with which he secured the lid. Then he carried his treasure out into the street, and, chartering a four-wheeler, directed the driver to proceed to Charing Cross Station. At the station he booked the box in the cloak (in the name of Simpson) and left it for a couple of hours; at the expiration of which he returned, and, employing a different porters had it conveyed to a hansom, in which it was borne to his lodgings over the oil-shop in Bloomsbury. There he, himself, carried it, unobserved, up the stairs, and, depositing it in a large cupboard, locked the door and pocketed the key.

And thus was the curtain rung down on the first act. The second act opened only a couple of days later, the office of call-boy—to pursue the metaphor to the bitter end—being discharged by a Belgian police official who emerged from the main entrance to the Bank of England. What should have led Percival Bland into so unsafe a neighbourhood it is difficult to imagine, unless it was that strange fascination that seems so frequently to lure the criminal to places associated with his crime. But there he was within a dozen paces of the entrance when the officer came forth, and mutual recognition was instant. Almost equally instantaneous was the self-possessed Percival's decision to cross the road.

It is not a nice road to cross. The old horse would condescend to shout a warning to the indiscreet wayfarer. Not so the modern chauffeur, who looks stonily before him and leaves you to get out of the way of Juggernaut. He knows his "exonerating" coroner's jury. At the moment, however, the procession of Juggernauts was at rest; but Percival had seen the presiding policeman turn to move away and he darted across the fronts of the vehicles even as they started. The foreign officer followed. But in that moment the whole procession had got in motion. A motor omnibus thundered past in front of him; another was bearing down on him relentlessly. He hesitated, and sprang back; and then a taxi-cab, darting out from behind, butted him heavily, sending him sprawling in the road, whence he scrambled as best he could back on to the pavement.

Percival, meanwhile, had swung himself lightly on to the footboard of the first omnibus just as it was gathering speed. A few seconds saw him safely across at the Mansion House, and in a few more, he was whirling down Queen Victoria Street. The danger was practically over, though he took the precaution to alight at St. Paul's, and, crossing to Newgate Street, board another west-bound omnibus.

That night he sat in his lodgings turning over his late experience. It had been a narrow shave. That sort of thing mustn't happen again. In fact, seeing that the law was undoubtedly about to be set in motion, it was high time that certain little plans of his should be set in motion, too. Only, there was a difficulty; a serious difficulty. And as Percival thought round and round that difficulty his brows wrinkled and he hummed a soft refrain.

"Then is the time for disappearing,

Take a header—down you go—"

A tap at the door cut his song short. It was his landlady, Mrs. Brattle; a civil woman, and particularly civil just now. For she had a little request to make.

"It was about Christmas Night, Mr. Bland," said Mrs. Brattle. "My husband and me thought of spending the evening with his brother at Hornsey, and we were going to let the maid go home to her mother's for the night, if it wouldn't put you out."

"Wouldn't put me out in the least, Mrs. Brattle," said Percival.

"You needn't sit up for us, you see," pursued Mrs. Brattle, "if you just leave the side door unbolted. We shan't be home before two or three; but we'll come in quiet not to disturb you."

"You won't disturb me," Percival replied with a genial laugh. "I'm a sober man in general but 'Christmas comes but once a year'. When once I'm tucked up in bed, I shall take a bit of waking on Christmas Night."

Mrs. Brattle smiled indulgently. "And you won't feel lonely, all alone in the house?"

"Lonely!" exclaimed Percival. "Lonely! With a roaring fire, a jolly book, a box of good cigars and a bottle of sound port—ah, and a second bottle if need be. Not I."

Mrs. Brattle shook her head. "Ah," said she, "you bachelors! Well, well. It's a good thing to be independent," and with this profound reflection she smiled herself out of the room and descended the stairs.

As her footsteps died away Percival sprang from his chair and began excitedly to pace the room. His eyes sparkled and his face was wreathed with smiles. Presently he halted before the fireplace and, gazing into the embers, laughed aloud.

"Damn funny!" said he. "Deuced rich! Neat! Very neat! Ha! Ha!" And here he resumed his interrupted song: "When the sky above is clearing, When the sky above is clearing, Bob up serenely, bob up serenely, Bob up serenely from below!"

Which may be regarded as closing the first scene, of the second act.

During the few days that intervened before Christmas Percival went abroad but little; and yet he was a busy man. He did a little surreptitious shopping, venturing out as far as Charing Cross Road; and his purchases were decidedly miscellaneous. A porridge saucepan, a second-hand copy of "Gray's Anatomy," a rabbit skin, a large supply of glue and upwards of ten pounds of shin of beef seems a rather odd assortment; and it was a mercy that the weather was frosty, for otherwise Percival's bedroom, in which these delicacies were deposited under lock and key, would have yielded odorous traces of its wealth.

But it was in the long evenings that his industry was most conspicuous; and then it was that the big cupboard with the excellent lever lock, which he himself had fixed on, began to fill up with the fruits of his labours. In those evenings the porridge saucepan would simmer on the hob with a rich lading of good Scotch glue, the black box of the deceased practitioner would be hauled forth from its hiding-place, and the well-thumbed "Gray" laid open on the table.

It was an arduous business though; a stiffer task than he had bargained for. The right and left bones were so confoundingly alike, and the bones that joined were so difficult to fit together. However, the plates in "Gray" were large and very clear, so it was only a question of taking enough trouble.

His method of work was simple and practical. Having fished a bone out of the box, he would compare it with the illustrations in the book until he had identified it beyond all doubt, when he would tie on it a paper label with its name and side—right or left. Then he would search for the adjoining bone, and, having fitted the two together, would secure them with a good daub of glue and lay them in the fender to dry. It was a crude and horrible method of articulation that would have made a museum curator shudder. But it seemed to answer Percival's purpose—whatever that may have been—for gradually the loose "items" came together into recognisable members such as arms and legs, the vertebra—which were, fortunately, strung in their order on a thick cord—were joined up into a solid backbone, and even the ribs, which were the toughest job of all, fixed on in some semblance of a thorax. It was a wretched performance. The bones were plastered with gouts of glue and yet would have broken apart at a touch. But, as we have said, Percival seemed satisfied, and as he was the only person concerned, there was no more to be said.

In due course, Christmas Day arrived. Percival dined with the Brattles at two, dozed after dinner, woke up for tea, and then, as Mrs. Brattle, in purple and fine raiment, came in to remove the tea-tray, he spread out on the table the materials for the night's carouse. A quarter of an hour later, the side slammed, and, peering out of the window, he saw the shopkeeper and his wife hurrying away up the gas-lit street towards the nearest omnibus route.

Then Mr. Percival Bland began his evening's entertainment; and a most remark entertainment it was, even for a solitary bachelor, left alone in a house on Christmas Night. First, he took off his clothing and dressed himself in a fresh suit. Then, from the cupboard he brought forth the reconstituted "set of osteology" and, laying the various members on the table, returned to the bedroom, whence he presently reappeared with a large, savoury parcel which he had disinterred from a trunk. The parcel being opened revealed his accumulated purchases in the matter of shin of beef.

With a large knife, providently sharpened before hand, he cut the beef into large, thin slices which he proceed to wrap around the various bones that formed the "complete set;" whereby their nakedness was certainly mitigated though their attractiveness was by no means increased. Having thus "clothed the dry bones," he gathered up the scraps of offal that were left, to be placed presently inside the trunk. It was an extraordinary proceeding, but the next was more extraordinary still.

Taking up the newly clothed members one by one, he began very carefully to insinuate them into the garments that he had recently shed. It was a ticklish business, for the glued joints were as brittle as glass. Very cautiously the legs were separately inducted, first into underclothing and then into trousers, the skeleton feet were fitted with the cast-off socks and delicately persuaded into the boots. The arms, in like manner, were gingerly pressed into their various sleeves and through the arm-holes of the waistcoat; and then came the most difficult task of all—to fit the garments on the trunk. For the skull and ribs, secured to the back-bone with mere spots of glue, were ready to drop off at a shake; and yet the garments had to be drawn over them with the arms enclosed in the sleeves. But Percival managed it at last by resting his "restoration" in the big, padded arm-chair and easing the garments on inch by inch.

It now remained only to give the finishing touch; which was done by cutting the rabbit-skin to the requisite shape and affixing it to the skull with a thin coat of stiff glue; and when the skull had thus been finished with a sort of crude, makeshift wig, its appearance was so appalling as even to disturb the nerves of the matter-of-fact Percival. However, this was no occasion for cherishing sentiment. A skull in an extemporised wig or false scalp might be, and in fact was, a highly unpleasant object; but so was a Belgian police officer.

Having finished the "restoration," Percival fetched the water-jug from his bedroom, and, descending to the shop, the door of which had been left unlocked, tried the taps of the various drums and barrels until he came to the one which contained methylated spirit; and from this he filled his jug and returned to the bedroom. Pouring the spirit out into the basin, he tucked a towel round his neck and filling his sponge with spirit proceeded very vigorously to wash his hair and eyebrows; and as, by degrees, the spirit in the basin grew dark and turbid, so did his hair and eyebrows grow lighter in colour until, after a final energetic rub with a towel, they had acquired a golden or sandy hue indistinguishable from that of the hair of his cousin Robert. Even the mole under his eye was susceptible to the changing conditions, for when he had wetted it thoroughly with spirit, he was able, with the blade of a penknife to peel it off as neatly as if it had been stuck on with spirit-gum. Having done which, he deposited it in a tiny box which he carried in his waistcoat pocket.

The proceedings which followed were unmistakable as to their object. First he carried the basin of spirit through into the sitting-room and deliberately poured its contents on to the floor by the arm-chair. Then, having returned the basin to the bedroom, he again went down to the shop, where he selected a couple of galvanised buckets from the stock, filled them with paraffin oil from one of the great drums and carried them upstairs. The oil from one bucket he poured over the armchair and its repulsive occupant; the other bucket he simply emptied on the carpet, and then went down to the shop for a fresh supply.

When this proceeding had been repeated once or twice the entire floor and all the furniture were saturated, and such a reek of paraffin filled the air of the room that Percival thought it wise to turn out the gas. Returning to the shop, he poured a bucketful of oil over the stack of bundles of firewood, another over the counter and floor and a third over the loose articles on the walls and hanging from the ceiling. Looking up at the latter he now perceived a number of greasy patches where the oil had soaked through from the floor above, and some of these were beginning to drip on to the shop floor.

He now made his final preparations. Taking a bundle of "Wheel" firelighters, he made a small pile against the stack of firewood. In the midst of the firelighters he placed a ball of string saturated in paraffin; and in the central hole of the ball he stuck a half-dozen diminutive Christmas candles. This mine was now ready. Providing himself with a stock of

firelighters, a few balls of paraffined string and a dozen or so of the little candles, he went upstairs to the sitting-room, which was immediately above the shop. Here, by the glow of the fire, he built up one or two piles of firelighters around and partly under the arm-chair, placed the balls of string on the piles and stuck two or three bundles in each ball. Everything was now ready. Stepping into the bedroom, he took from the cupboard a spare overcoat, a new hat and a new umbrella—for he must leave his old hats, coat and umbrella in the hall. He put on the coat and hat, and, with the umbrella in his hand, returned to the sitting-room.

Opposite the arm-chair he stood awhile, irresolute, and a pang of horror shot through him. It was a terrible thing that he was going to do; a thing the consequences of which no one could foresee. He glanced furtively at the awful shape that sat huddled in the chair, its horrible head all awry and its rigid limbs sprawling in hideous grotesque deformity. It was but a dummy, a mere scarecrow; but yet, in the dim firelight, the grisly face under that horrid wig seemed to leer intelligently, to watch him with secret malice out of its shadowy eye-sockets, until he looked away with clammy skin and a shiver of half-superstitious terror.

But this would never do. The evening had run out, consumed by these engrossing labours; it was nearly eleven o'clock, and high time for him to be gone. For if the Brattles should return prematurely he was lost. Pulling himself together with an effort, he struck a match and lit the little candles one after the other. In a quarter of an hour or so, they would have burned down to the balls of string, and then—He walked quickly out of the room; but, at the door, he paused for a moment to look back at the ghastly figure, seated rigidly in the chair with the lighted candles at its feet, like some foul fiend appeased by votive fires. The unsteady flames threw flickering shadows on its face that made it seem to mow and gibber and grin in mockery of all his care and caution. So he turned and tremblingly ran down the stairs—opening the staircase window as he went. Running into the shop, he lit the candles there and ran out again, shutting the door after him.

Secretly and guiltily he crept down the hall, and opening the door a few inches peered out. A blast of icy wind poured in with a light powdering of dry snow. He opened his umbrella, flung open the door, looked up and down the empty street, stepped out, closed the door softly and strode away over the whitening pavement.

## PART II

(Related by Christopher Jervis, M.D.)

IT was one of the axioms of medico-legal practice laid down by my colleague, John Thorndyke, that the investigator should be constantly on his guard against the effect of suggestion. Not only must all prejudices and preconceptions be avoided, but when information is received from outside, the actual, undeniable facts must be carefully sifted from the inferences which usually accompany them. Of the necessity for this precaution our insurance practice furnished an excellent instance in the case of the fire at Mr. Brattle's oil-shop.

The case was brought to our notice by Mr. Stalker of the Griffin Fire and Life Insurance Society a few days after Christmas. He dropped in, ostensibly to wish us a Happy New Year, but a discreet pause in the conversation on Thorndyke's part elicited a further purpose.

"Did you see the account of that fire in Bloomsbury?" Mr. Stalker asked.

"The oil-shop? Yes. But I didn't note any details, excepting that a man was apparently burnt to death and that the affair happened on the twenty-fifth of December."

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Stalker. "It seems uncharitable, but one can't help looking a little askance at these quarter-day fires. And the date isn't the only doubtful feature in this one; the Divisional Officer of the Fire Brigade, who has looked over the ruins, tells me that there are some appearances suggesting that the fire broke out in two different places—the shop and the first-floor room over it. Mind you, he doesn't say that it actually did. The place is so thoroughly gutted that very little is to be learned from it; but that is his impression; and it occurred to me that if you were to take a look at the ruins, your radiographic eye might detect something that he had overlooked."

"It isn't very likely," said Thorndyke. "Every man to his trade. The Divisional Officer looks at a burnt house with an expert eye, which I do not. My evidence would not carry much weight if you were contesting the claim."

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Stalker, "and we are not anxious to contest the claim unless there is manifest fraud. Arson is a serious matter."

"It is wilful murder in this case," remarked Thorndyke.

"I know," said Stalker. "And that reminds me that the man who was burnt happens to have been insured in our office, too. So we stand a double loss."

"How much?" asked Thorndyke.

"The dead man, Percival Bland, had insured his life for three thousand pounds."

Thorndyke became thoughtful. The last statement had apparently made more impression on him than the former ones.

"If you want me to look into the case for you," said he, "you had better let me have all the papers connected with it, including the proposal forms."

Mr. Stalker smiled. "I thought you would say that—I know you of old, you see—so I slipped the papers in my pocket before coming here."

He laid the documents on the table and asked: "Is there anything that you want to know about the case?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I want to know all that you can tell me."

"Which is mighty little," said Stalker; "but such as it is, you shall have it."

"The oil-shop man's name is Brattle and the dead man, Bland, was his lodger. Bland appears to have been a perfectly steady, sober man in general; but it seems that he had announced his intention of spending a jovial Christmas Night and giving himself a little extra indulgence. He was last seen by Mrs. Brattle at about half-past six, sitting by a blazing fire, with a couple of unopened bottles of port on the table and a box of cigars. He had a book in his hand and two or three newspapers lay on the floor by his chair. Shortly after this, Mr. and Mrs. Brattle went out on a visit to Hornsey, leaving him alone in the house."

"Was there no servant?" asked Thorndyke.

"The servant had the day and night off duty to go to her mother's. That, by the way, looks a trifle fishy. However, to return to the Brattles; they spent the evening at Hornsey and did not get home until past three in the morning, by which time their house was a heap of smoking ruins. Mrs. Brattle's idea is that Bland must have drunk himself sleepy, and dropped one of the newspapers into the fender, where a chance cinder may have started the blaze. Which may or may not be the true explanation. Of course, an habitually sober man can get pretty mimsy on two bottles of port."

"What time did the fire break out?" asked Thorndyke.

"It was noticed about half-past eleven that flames were issuing from one of the chimneys, and the alarm was given at once. The first engine arrived ten minutes later, but, by that time, the place was roaring like a furnace. Then the water-plugs were found to be frozen hard, which caused some delay; in fact, before the engines were able to get to work the roof had fallen in, and the place was a mere shell. You know what an oil-shop is, when once it gets a fair start."

"And Mr. Bland's body was found in the ruins, I suppose?"

"Body!" exclaimed Mr. Stalker; "there wasn't much body! Just a few charred bones, which they dug out of the ashes next day."

"And the question of identity?"

"We shall leave that to the coroner. But there really isn't any question. To begin with, there was no one else in the house; and then the remains were found mixed up with the springs and castors of the chair that Bland was sitting in when he was last seen. Moreover, there were found, with the bones, a pocket knife, a bunch of keys and a set of steel waistcoat buttons, all identified by Mrs. Brattle as belonging to Bland. She noticed the cut steel buttons on his waistcoat when she wished him 'good-night.'"

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "was Bland reading by the light of an oil lamp?"

"No," replied Stalker. "There was a two-branch gasalier with a porcelain shade to one burner, and he had that burner alight when Mrs. Brattle left."

Thorndyke reflectively picked up the proposal form, and, having glanced through it, remarked: "I see that Bland is described as unmarried. Do you know why he insured his life for this large amount?"

"No; we assumed that it was probably in connection with some loan that he had raised. I learn from the solicitor who notified us of the death, that the whole of Bland's property is left to a cousin—a Mr. Lindsay, I think. So the probability is that this cousin had lent him money. But it is not the life claim that is interesting us. We must pay that in any case. It is the fire claim that we want you to look into."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "I will go round presently and look over the ruins, and see if I can detect any substantial evidence of fraud."

"If you would," said Mr. Stalker, rising to take his departure, "we should be very much obliged. Not that we shall probably contest the claim in any case."

When he had gone, my colleague and I glanced through the papers, and I ventured to remark: "It seems to me that Stalker doesn't quite appreciate the possibilities of this case."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "But, of course, it is an insurance company's business to pay, and not to boggle at anything short of glaring fraud. And we specialists too," he added with a smile, "must beware of seeing too much. I suppose that, to a rhinologist, there is hardly such a thing as a healthy nose—unless it is his own—and the uric acid specialist is very apt to find the firmament studded with dumb-bell crystals. We mustn't forget that normal cases do exist, after all."

"That is true," said I; "but, on the other hand, the rhinologist's business is with the unhealthy nose, and our concern is with abnormal cases."

Thorndyke laughed. "A Daniel come to judgement," said he. "But my learned friend is quite right. Our function is to pick holes. So let us pocket the documents and wend Bloomsbury way. We can talk the case over as we go."

We walked at an easy pace, for there was no hurry, and a little preliminary thought was useful. After a while, as Thorndyke made no remark, I reopened the subject.

"How does the case present itself to you?" I asked.

"Much as it does to you, I expect," he replied. "The circumstances invite inquiry, and I do not find myself connecting them with the shopkeeper. It is true that the fire occurred on quarter-day; but there is nothing to show that the insurance will do more than cover the loss of stock, chattels and the profits of trade. The other circumstances are much more suggestive. Here is a house burned down and a man killed. That man was insured for three thousand pounds, and, consequently, some person stands to gain by his death to that amount. The whole set of circumstances is highly favourable to the idea of homicide. The man was alone in the house when he died; and the total destruction of both the body and its surroundings seems to render investigation impossible. The cause of death can only be inferred; it cannot be proved; and the most glaring evidence of a crime will have vanished utterly. I think that there is a quite strong *prima facie* suggestion of murder. Under the known conditions, the perpetration of a murder would have been easy, it would have been safe from detection, and there is an adequate motive.

"On the other hand, suicide is not impossible. The man might have set fire to the house and then killed himself by poison or otherwise. But it is intrinsically less probable that a man should kill him self for another person's benefit than that he should kill another man for his own benefit.

"Finally, there is the possibility that the fire and the man's death were the result of accident; against which is the official opinion that the fire started in two places. If this opinion is correct, it establishes, in my opinion, a strong presumption of murder against some person who may have obtained access to the house."

This point in the discussion brought us to the ruined house, which stood at the corner of two small streets. One of the firemen in charge admitted us, when we had shown our credentials, through a temporary door and down a ladder into the basement, where we found a number of men treading gingerly, ankle deep in white ash, among a litter of charred wood-work, fused glass, warped and broken china, and more or less recognisable metal objects.

"The coroner and the jury," the fireman explained; "come to view the scene of the disaster." He introduced us to the former, who bowed stiffly and continued his investigations.

"These," said the other fireman, "are the springs of the chair that the deceased was sitting in. We found the body—or rather the bones—lying among them under a heap of hot ashes; and we found the buttons of his clothes and the things from his pockets among the ashes, too. You'll see them in the mortuary with the remains."

"It must have been a terrific blaze," one of the jurymen remarked. "Just look at this, sir," and he handed to Thorndyke what looked like part of a gas-fitting, of which the greater part was melted into shapeless lumps and the remainder encrusted into fused porcelain.

"That," said the fireman, "was the gas-alier of the first-floor room, where Mr. Bland was sitting. Ah! you won't turn that tap, sir; nobody'll ever turn that tap again."

Thorndyke held the twisted mass of brass towards me in silence, and, glancing up the blackened walls, remarked: "I think we shall have to come here again with the Divisional Officer, but meanwhile, we had better see the remains of the body. It is just possible that we may learn something from them."

He applied to the coroner for the necessary authority to make the inspection, and, having obtained a rather ungracious and grudging permission to examine the remains when the jury had "viewed" them, began to ascend the ladder.

"Our friend would have liked to refuse permission," he remarked when we had emerged into the street, "but he knew that I could and should have insisted."

"So I gathered from his manner," said I. "But what is he doing here? This isn't his district."

"No; he is acting for Bettsford, who is laid up just now; and a very poor substitute he is. A non-medical coroner is an absurdity in any case, and a coroner who is hostile to the medical profession is a public scandal. By the way, that gas-tap offers a curious problem. You noticed that it was turned off?"

"Yes."

"And consequently that the deceased was sitting in the dark when the fire broke out. I don't see the bearing of the fact, but it is certainly rather odd. Here is the mortuary. We had better wait and let the jury go in first."

We had not long to wait. In a couple of minutes or so the "twelve good men and true" made their appearance with a small attendant crowd of ragamuffins. We let them enter first, and then we followed. The mortuary was a good-sized room, well lighted by a glass roof, and having at its centre a long table on which lay the shell containing the remains. There was also a sheet of paper on which had been laid out a set of blackened steel waistcoat buttons, a bunch of keys, a steel-handled pocket-knife, a steel-cased watch on a partly-fused rolled-gold chain, and a pocket corkscrew. The coroner drew the attention of the jury to these objects, and then took possession of them, that they might be identified by witnesses. And meanwhile the jurymen gathered round the shell and stared shudderingly at its gruesome contents.

"I am sorry, gentlemen," said the coroner, "to have to subject you to this painful ordeal. But duty is duty. We must hope, as I think we may, that this poor creature met a painless if in some respects a rather terrible death."

At this point, Thorndyke, who had drawn near to the table, cast a long and steady glance down into the shell; and immediately his ordinarily rather impassive face seemed to congeal; all expression faded from it, leaving it as immovable



and uncommunicative as the granite face of an Egyptian statue. I knew the symptom of old and began to speculate on its present significance.

"Are you taking any medical evidence?" he asked.

"Medical evidence!" the coroner repeated, scornfully. "Certainly not, sir! I do not waste the public money by employing so-called experts to tell the jury what each of them can see quite plainly for himself. I imagine," he added, turning to the foreman, "that you will not require a learned doctor to explain to you how that poor fellow mortal met his death?"

And the foreman, glancing askance at the skull, replied, with a pallid and sickly smile, that "he thought not."

"Do you, sir," the coroner continued, with a dramatic wave of the hand towards the plain coffin, "suppose that we shall find any difficulty in determining how that man came by his death?"

"I imagine," replied Thorndyke, without moving a muscle, or, indeed, appearing to have any muscles to move, "I imagine you will find no difficulty what ever."

"So do I," said the coroner.

"Then," retorted Thorndyke, with a faint, inscrutable smile, "we are, for once, in complete agreement."

As the coroner and jury retired, leaving my colleague and me alone in the mortuary, Thorndyke remarked: "I suppose this kind of farce will be repeated periodically so long as these highly technical medical inquiries continue to be conducted by lay persons."

I made no reply, for I had taken a long look into the shell, and was lost in astonishment.

"But my dear Thorndyke!" I exclaimed; "what on earth does it mean? Are we to suppose that a woman can have palmed herself off as a man on the examining medical officer of a London Life Assurance Society?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "I think not," said he. "Our friend, Mr. Bland, may conceivably have been a woman in disguise, but he certainly was not a negress."

"A negress!" I gasped. "By Jove! So it is! I hadn't looked at the skull. But that only makes the mystery more mysterious. Because, you remember, the body was certainly dressed in Bland's clothes."

"Yes, there seems to be no doubt about that. And you may have noticed, as I did," Thorndyke continued dryly, "the remarkably fire-proof character of the waistcoat buttons, watch-case, knife-handle, and other identifiable objects."

"But what a horrible affair!" I exclaimed. "The brute must have gone out and enticed some poor devil of a negress into the house, have murdered her in cold blood and then deliberately dressed the corpse in his own clothes! It is perfectly frightful!"

Again Thorndyke shook his head. "It wasn't as bad as that, Jervis," said he, "though I must confess that I feel strongly tempted to let your hypothesis stand. It would be quite amusing to put Mr. Bland on trial for the murder of an unknown negress, and let him explain the facts himself. But our reputation is at stake. Look at the bones again and a little more critically. You very probably looked for the sex first; then you looked for racial characters. Now carry your investigations a step farther."

"There is the stature," said I. "But that is of no importance, as these are not Bland's bones. The only other point that I notice is that the fire seems to have acted very unequally on the different parts of the body."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke, "and that is the point. Some parts are more burnt than others; and the parts which are burnt most are the wrong parts. Look at the back-bone, for instance. The vertebrae are as white as chalk. They are mere masses of bone ash. But, of all parts of the skeleton, there is none so completely protected from fire as the back-bone, with the great dorsal muscles behind, and the whole mass of the viscera in front. Then look at the skull. Its appearance is quite inconsistent with the suggested facts. The bones of the face are bare and calcined and the orbits contain not a trace of the eyes or other structures; and yet there is a charred mass of what may or may not be scalp adhering to the crown. But the scalp, as the most exposed and the thinnest covering, would be the first to be destroyed, while the last to be consumed would be the structures about the jaws and the base, of which, you see, not a vestige is left."

Here he lifted the skull carefully from the shell, and, peering in through the great foramen at the base, handed it to me.

"Look in," he said, "through the Foramen Magnum—you will see better if you hold the orbits towards the skylight—and notice an even more extreme inconsistency with the supposed conditions. The brain and membranes have vanished without leaving a trace. The inside of the skull is as clean as if it had been macerated. But this is impossible. The brain is not only protected from the fire; it is also protected from contact with the air. But without access of oxygen, although it might become carbonised, it could not be consumed. No, Jervis; it won't do."

I replaced the skull in the coffin and looked at him in surprise. "What is it that you are suggesting?" I asked.

"I suggest that this was not a body at all, but merely a dry skeleton."

"But," I objected, "what about those masses of what looks like charred muscle adhering to the bones?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have been noticing them. They do, as you say, look like masses of charred muscle. But they are quite shapeless and structureless; I cannot identify a single muscle or muscular group; and there is not a vestige of any of the

tendons. Moreover, the distribution is false. For instance, will you tell me what muscle you think that is?"

He pointed to a thick, charred mass on the inner surface of the left tibia or shin-bone. "Now this portion of the bone—as many a hockey-player has had reason to realise—has no muscular covering at all. It lies immediately under the skin."

"I think you are right, Thorndyke," said I. "That lump of muscle in the wrong place gives the whole fraud away. But it was really a rather smart dodge. This fellow Bland must be an ingenious rascal."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke; "but an unscrupulous villain too. He might have burned down half the street and killed a score of people. He'll have to pay the piper for this little frolic."

"What shall you do now? Are you going to notify the coroner?"

"No; that is not my business. I think we will verify our conclusions and then inform our clients and the police. We must measure the skull as well as we can without callipers, but it is, fortunately, quite typical. The short, broad, flat nasal bones, with the 'Simian groove,' and those large, strong teeth, worn flat by hard and gritty food, are highly characteristic." He once more lifted out the skull, and, with a spring tape, made a few measurements, while I noted the lengths of the principal long bones and the width across the hips.

"I make the cranial-nasal index 55," said he, as he replaced the skull, "and the cranial index about 72, which are quite representative numbers; and, as I see that your notes show the usual disproportionate length of arm and the characteristic curve of the tibia, we may be satisfied. But it is fortunate that the specimen is so typical. To the experienced eye, racial types have a physiognomy which is unmistakable on mere inspection. But you cannot transfer the experienced eye. You can only express personal conviction and back it up with measurements.

"And now we will go and look in on Stalker, and inform him that his office has saved three thousand pounds by employing us. After which it will be Westward Ho! for Scotland Yard, to prepare an unpleasant little surprise for Mr. Percival Bland."

There was joy among the journalists on the following day. Each of the morning papers devoted an entire column to an unusually detailed account of the inquest on the late Percival Bland—who, it appeared, met his death by misadventure—and a verbatim report of the coroner's eloquent remarks on the danger of solitary, fireside tippling, and the stupefying effects of port wine. An adjacent column contained an equally detailed account of the appearance of the deceased at Bow Street Police Court to answer complicated charges of arson, fraud and forgery; while a third collated the two accounts with gleeful commentaries.

Mr. Percival Bland, alias Robert Lindsay, now resides on the breezy uplands of Dartmoor, where, in his abundant leisure, he, no doubt, regrets his misdirected ingenuity. But he has not laboured in vain. To the Lord Chancellor he has furnished an admirable illustration of the danger of appointing lay coroners; and to me an unforgettable warning against the effects of suggestion.



## THE CONFESSION OF HELEN VARDON

### PROLOGUE

TO every woman there comes a day (and that all too soon) when she receives the first hint that Time, the harvester, has not passed her by unnoticed. The waning of actual youth may have passed with but the faintest regret, if any; regret for the lost bud being merged in the triumph at the glory of the opening blossom. But the waning of womanhood is another matter. Old age has no compensations to offer for those delights that it steals away. At least, that is what I understand from those who know, for I must still speak on the subject from hearsay, having received from Father Time but the very faintest and most delicate hint on the subject.

I was sitting at my dressing-table brushing out my hair, which is of a docile habit, though a thought bulky, when amidst the black tress—blackier than it used to be when I was a girl—I noticed a single white hair. It was the first that I had seen, and I looked at it dubiously, picking it out from its fellows to see if it were all white, and noticing how like it was to a thread of glass. Should I pluck it out and pretend that it was never there? Or should I, more thriftily—for a hair is a hair after all, and enough of them will make a wig—should I dye it and hush up its treason?

I smiled at the foolish thought. What a to-do about a single white hair! I have seen girls in their twenties with snow-white hair and looking as sweet as lavender. As to this one, I would think of it as a souvenir from the troubled past rather than a harbinger of approaching age; and with this I swept my brush over it and buried it even as I had buried those sorrows and those dreadful experiences which might have left me white-headed years before.

But that glassy thread, buried once more amid the black, left a legacy of suggestion. Those hideous days were long past now. I could look back on them unmoved—nay, with a certain serene interest. Suppose I should write the history of them? Why not? To write is not necessarily to publish. And if, perchance, no eye but mine shall see these lines until the little taper of my life has burned down into its socket, then what matters it to me whether praise or blame, sympathy or condemnation, be my portion. Posterity has no gifts to offer that I need court its suffrages.

## BOOK I. — TRAGEDY

### I. — THE CRACK OF DOOM

THERE is no difficulty whatever in deciding upon the exact moment at which to open this history. Into some lives the fateful and significant creep by degrees, unnoticed till by the development of their consequences the mind is aroused and memory is set, like a sleuth-hound, to retrace the course of events and track the present to its origin in the past. Not so has it been with mine. Serene, eventless, its quiet years had slipped away unnumbered, from childhood to youth, from youth to womanhood, when, at the appointed moment, the voice of Destiny rang out, trumpet-tongued; and behold! in the twinkling of an eye all was changed.

“Happy,” it has been said, “is the nation which has no history!” And surely the same may be said with equal truth of individuals. So, at any rate, experience teaches me; for the very moment wherein I may be said to have begun to have a history saw a life-long peace shattered into a chaos of misery and disaster.

How well I remember the day—yea, and the very moment—when the blow fell, like a thunderbolt crashing down out of a cloudless sky. I had been sitting in my little room upstairs, reading very studiously and pausing now and again to think over what I had read. The book was Lecky’s “History of England in the Eighteenth Century,” and the period on which I was engaged was that of Queen Anne. And here, coming presently upon a footnote containing a short quotation from “The Spectator,” it occurred to me that I should like to look over the original letter. Accordingly, laying aside my book, I began to descend the stairs—very softly, because I knew that my father had a visitor—possibly a client—with him in his study. And when I came to the turn of the stair and saw that the study door was ajar, I stepped more lightly still, though I stole down quickly lest I should overhear what was being said.

The library, or book-room as we called it, was next to the study, and to reach it I had to pass the half-opened door, which I did swiftly on tip-toe, without hearing more than the vague murmur of conversation from within. “The Spectators” stood on a shelf close to the door; a goodly row clothed in rusty calf to which the worn gilt tooling imparted a certain sumptuousness that had always seemed very pleasant to my eye. My hand was on the third volume when I heard my father say:

“So that’s how the matter stands.”

I plucked the volume from the shelf, and, tucking it under my arm, stole out of the book-room, intending to dart up the stairs before there should be time for anything more to be said; but I had hardly crossed the threshold, and was, in fact, exactly opposite the study door, when a voice said very distinctly, though not at all loudly:

“Do you realise, Vardon, that this renders you liable to seven years’ penal servitude?”

At those terrible words I stopped as though I had been, in a moment, turned into stone: stopped with my lips parted, my very breathing arrested, clutching at the book under my arm, with no sign of life or movement save the tumultuous thumping of my heart. There was what seemed an interminable pause, and then my father replied: “Hardly, I think, Otway. Technically, perhaps, it amounts to a misdemeanour—”

“Technically!” repeated Mr. Otway.

“Yes, technically. The absence of any intent to defraud modifies the position considerably. Still, for the purpose of argument, we may admit that it amounts to a misdemeanour.”

“And,” said Mr. Otway, “the maximum punishment of that misdemeanour is seven years’ penal servitude. As to your plea of absence of fraudulent intent, you, as a lawyer of experience, must know well that judges are not apt to be very sympathetic with trustees who misappropriate property placed in their custody.”

“Misappropriate!” my father exclaimed.

“Yes, Mr. Otway, I say misappropriate. What other word could you apply? Here is a sum of money which has been placed in your custody. I come here with the intention to receive that money from you on behalf of the trustees, and you tell me that you haven’t got it. You are not only unable to produce it, but you are unable to give any date on which you could produce it. And meanwhile it seems that you have applied it to your own uses.”

“I haven’t spent it,” my father objected. “The money is locked up for the present, but it isn’t lost.”

“What is the use of saying that?” demanded Mr. Otway. “You haven’t got the money, and you can’t give any satisfactory account of it. The plain English of it is that you have used this trust money for your own private purposes, and that when the trustors ask to have it restored to them, you are unable to produce it.”

To this my father made no immediate reply; and in the silence that ensued I could hear my heart throbbing and the blood humming in the veins of my neck. At length my father asked: “Well, Otway, what are you going to do?”

“Do!” repeated Mr. Otway. “What can I do? As a trustee, it is my duty to get this money from you. I have to protect the interests of those whom I represent. And if you have misapplied these funds—well, you must see for yourself that I have no choice.”

"You mean that you'll prosecute?"

"What else can I do? I can't introduce personal considerations into the business of a trust; and even if I should decline to move in the matter, the trustors themselves would undoubtedly take action."

Here there followed a silence which seemed to me of endless duration; then Mr. Otway said, in a somewhat different tone: "There is just one way for you out of this mess, Vardon."

"Indeed!" said my father.

"Yes. I am going to make you a proposal, and I may as well put it quite bluntly. It is this. I am prepared to take over your liabilities, for the time being, on condition that I marry your daughter. If you agree, then on the day on which the marriage takes place, I pay into your bank the sum of five thousand pounds, you giving me an undertaking to repay the loan if and when you can."

"Have you any reason to suppose that my daughter wishes to marry you?" my father asked.

"Not the slightest," replied Mr. Otway; "but I think it probable that, if the case were put to her—"

"It is not going to be," my father interrupted. "I would rather go to gaol than connive at the sacrifice of my daughter's happiness."

"You might have thought of her happiness a little sooner, Vardon," Mr. Otway remarked. "We are not quite of an age, but she might easily find it more agreeable to be the wife of an elderly man than the daughter of a convict. At any rate, it would be only fair to give her the choice."

"It would be entirely unfair," my father retorted. "In effect, it would be asking her to make the sacrifice, and she might be fool enough to consent. And please bear in mind, Otway, that I am not a convict yet, and possibly may never be one. There are certain conceivable alternatives, you know."

"Oh," said Mr. Otway, "if you have resources that you have not mentioned, that is quite another matter. I understood that you had none. And as to sacrifice, there is no need to harp on that string so persistently. Your daughter might be happy enough as my wife."

"What infernal nonsense you are talking!" my father exclaimed, impatiently. "Do you suppose that Helen is a fool?"

"No, I certainly do not," Mr. Otway replied.

"Very well, then: what do you mean by her being happy as your wife? Here am I, standing over a mine—"

"Of your own laying," interrupted Mr. Otway.

"Quite so; of my own laying. And here you come with a lighted match and say to my daughter, in effect: 'My dear young lady, I am your devoted lover. Be my wife—consent this very instant or I fire this mine and blow you and your father to smithereens.' And then, you think, she would settle down with you and live happy ever after. By the Lord, Otway, you must be a devilish poor judge of character."

"I am quite willing to take the risk," said Mr. Otway.

"So you may be," my father retorted angrily, "but I'm not. I would rather see the poor girl in her grave than know that she was chained for life to a cold-blooded, blackmailing scoundrel—"

"Softly, Vardon!" Mr. Otway interrupted. "There is no need for that sort of language. And perhaps we had better shut the door."

Here, as I drew back hastily into the book-room, quick footsteps crossed the study floor and I heard the door close. The interruption brought me back to some sense of my position; though, to be sure, what I had overheard concerned me as much as it concerned anyone. Quickly slipping the book back on the shelf, I ran on tip-toe past the study door and up the stairs; and even then I was none too soon; for, as I halted on the threshold of my room, the study door opened again and the two men strode across the hail.

"You are taking a ridiculously wrong-headed view of the whole affair," I heard Mr. Otway declare.

"Possibly," my father replied, stiffly. "And if I do, I am prepared to take the consequences."

"Only the consequences won't fall on you alone," said Mr. Otway.

"Good afternoon," was the dry and final response. Then the hall door slammed, and I heard my father walk slowly back to the study.

---

## II. — ATRA CURA

As the study door closed, I sank into my easy chair with a sudden feeling of faintness and bodily exhaustion. The momentary shock of horror and amazement had passed, giving place to a numb and chilly dread that made me feel sick and weak. Scraps of the astounding conversation that I had heard came back to me, incoherently and yet with hideous distinctness, like the whisperings of some malignant spirit. Disjointed words and phrases repeated themselves again and

again, almost meaninglessly, but still with a vague undertone of menace.

And then, by degrees, as I sat gazing at the blurred pages of the book that still lay open on the reading-stand, my thoughts grew less chaotic; the words of that dreadful dialogue arranged themselves anew, and I began with more distinctness to gather their meaning.

Seven years penal servitude!

That was the dreadful refrain of this song of doom that was being chanted in my ear by the Spirit of Misfortune. And ruin—black, hideous ruin—for my father and me was the burden of that refrain; no mere loss, no paltry plunge into endurable poverty, but a descent into the bottomless pit of social degradation, from which there could be no hope of resurrection.

Nor was this the worst. For, gradually, as my thoughts began to arrange themselves into a coherent sequence, I realised that it was not the implied poverty and social disgrace that gave to that sentence its dreadful import. Poverty might be overcome, and disgrace could be endured; but when I thought of my father dragged away from me to be cast into gaol; when, in my mind's eye, I saw him clothed in the horrible livery of shame, wearing out his life within the prison walls and behind the fast-bolted prison doors; the thought and the imagined sight were unendurable. It was death—for him at least; for he was not a strong man. And for me?

Here, of a sudden, there came back to me the rather enigmatical speech of my father's, which I had heard without at the moment fully comprehending, but which I now recalled with a shock of alarm.

"Please bear in mind, Otway, that I am not a convict yet, and possibly may never be one. There are certain conceivable alternatives, you know."

The cryptic utterance had evidently puzzled Mr. Otway, who had clearly misunderstood it as referring to some unknown resources. To me, no such misunderstanding was possible. More than once my father had discussed with me the ethics of suicide, on which subject he held somewhat unorthodox opinions; and I now recalled with terrible distinctness the very definite statement that he had made on the occasion of our last talks "For my part," he had said, "if I should ever find myself in such a position that the continuance of life was less desirable than its termination, I should not hesitate to take the appropriate measures for exchanging the less desirable state for the more desirable."

In the face of such a statement, made, as I felt sure, in all sincerity and with sober judgment, how could I entertain any doubt as to the interpretation of that reference to "certain conceivable alternatives?" To a man of culture and some position and none too robust in health, what would be the aspect of life with its immediate future occupied by a criminal prosecution ending in an inevitable conviction and a term of penal servitude? Could the continuance of such a life be conceived as desirable? Assuredly not.

And then imagination began to torture me by filling in with hideous ingenuity the dreadful details. Now it was a pistol shot, heard in the night, and a group of terrified servants huddled together in the corridor. But no; that was not like my poor father. Such crude and bloody methods appertain rather to the terror-stricken fugitive than to one who is executing a considered and orderly retreat. Then I saw myself, in the grey of the morning, tapping at his bedroom door: tapping—tapping—and at last opening the door, or perhaps bursting it open. I saw the dim room—Oh! How horribly plain and vivid it was! With the cold light of the dawn glimmering through the blind, the curtained bed, the half-seen figure, still and silent in the shadow. Horrible! Horrible!

And then, in instant, the scene changed. I saw a man in our hall a man in uniform; a railway porter or inspector. I heard him tell, in a hushed, embarrassed voice, of a strange and dreadful accident down on the line...And yet again this awful phantasmagoria shifted the scene and showed me a new picture: a search party, prowling with lantern around a chalk pit; and anon a group of four men, treading softly and carrying something on a hurdle.

"Dear God!" I gasped, with my hands pressed to my forehead, "must I be—this awful thing! Is there no other way?"

And with that there fell on me a great calm. A chilly calm, bringing no comfort, and yet, in a manner, a relief. For, perhaps, after all, there was another way. It was true that my father had rejected Mr. Otway's proposal, and such was my habit of implicit obedience that, with his definite rejection of it, the alternative had, for me, ceased to exist. But now, with the horror of this dreadful menace upon me, I recalled the words that had been spoken, and asked myself if that avenue of escape were really closed. As to my father, I had no doubt; he would never consent; and even to raise the question might only be to precipitate the catastrophe. But with regard to Mr. Otway the manner in which my father had met and rejected his proposal seemed to close the subject finally. He had called him a blackmailing scoundrel and used other injurious expressions, which might make it difficult or, at least, uncomfortable to reopen the question. Still that was a small matter. When one is walking to the gallows, one does not boggle at an uncomfortable shoe.

As to my own inclinations, they were beside the mark. My father's life and good name must be saved if it were possible; and it seemed that it might be possible—at a price. Whether it were possible or not depended on Mr. Otway.

I recalled what I knew of this man who had thus in a moment become the arbiter of my father's fate and mine. My acquaintance with him was but slight, though I had met him pretty frequently and had sometimes wondered what his profession was, if he had any. I had assumed, from his evident acquaintance with legal matters, that he was a lawyer. But he was not in ordinary practice; and his business, whatever it was, seemed to involve a good deal of travelling. That was all I knew about him. As to his appearance, he was a huge, unwieldy man of a somewhat Jewish cast of face, some years older, I should think, than my father; pleasant spoken and genial in a somewhat heavy fashion, but quite uninteresting. Hitherto

I had neither liked nor disliked him. Now, it need hardly be said, I regarded him with decided aversion; for if he were not, as my father had said, “a blackmailing scoundrel,” he had, at any rate, taken the meanest, the most ungenerous advantage of my father’s difficulties, to say nothing of the callous, cynical indifference that he had shown in regard to me and my wishes and interests.

It may seem a little odd that I found myself attaching no blame to my father. Yet so it was. To me he appeared as merely the victim of circumstances. No doubt he had done something indiscreet—perhaps incorrect. But discretion and correctness are not qualities that appeal to a woman: whereas generosity—and my father was generous almost to a fault—makes the most powerful appeal to feminine sympathies. As to his honesty and good faith, I never doubted them for an instant; besides, he had plainly said that no fraudulent intent could be ascribed to him. What he had done I had not the least idea. Nor did I particularly care. It was not the act, but its consequences with which I was concerned.

My meditations were interrupted at length by an apologetic tap at the door, followed by the appearance of our housemaid.

“If you please, Miss Helen, shall I take Mr. Vardon’s tea to the study, or is he going to have it with you?”

The question brought me back from the region of tragedy and disaster in which my thoughts had been straying, to the homely commonplaces of everyday life.

“I’ll just run down and ask him, Jessie,” I answered; “and you needn’t wait. I’ll come and tell you what he says.”

I ran quickly down the stairs, but at the study door I paused with a sudden revival of those terrors that had so lately assailed me. Suppose he should open the subject and have something dreadful to tell me? Or suppose that, even now, already—At the half-formed thought, I raised a trembling hand, and, tapping lightly at the door, opened it and entered. He was sitting at the table with a small pile of sealed and stamped letters before him, and, as I stood, steadying my hand on the door knob, he looked up with his customary smile of friendly welcome.

“Hail! O Dame of the azure hosen,” said he, swinging round on his revolving chair, “and how fares it with our liege lady, Queen Anne?”

“She is quite well, thank you,” I replied.

“The Lord be praised!” he rejoined. “I seemed to have heard some rumour of her untimely decease. A mere canard, it would seem; a fiction of these confounded newspaper men. Or perchance I have been misled by the jocose and boisterous Lecky.”

The whimsical playfulness of speech, habitual as it was to him, impressed me—perhaps for that very reason—with a vague uneasiness. It was not what I had expected after that terrible conversation. The anti-climax to my own tragic thoughts was too sudden; the descent to the ordinary too uncomfortably steep. I perched myself on his knee, as I often did, despite my rather excessive size, and passed my hand over his thin, grey hair.

“Do you know,” I said, clinging desperately to the common-place, “that you are going bald? I can see the skin of your head quite plainly.”

“And why not?” he demanded. “Did you think my hair grew out of my cranium? But you won’t see it long. I’ve heard of an infallible hair-restorer.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, indeed! Guaranteed to grow a crop of ringlets on a bladder of lard. We’ll get a bottle and try it on the carpet broom; and if the result is satisfactory—well, we’ll just put Esau in his place in the second row.”

“You are a very frivolous old person, Mr. Pater,” said I. “Do you know that?”

“I hope so,” he replied. “And again I say, why not? When a man is too old to play the fool, it is time to carry him to the bone-yard. Am I going to have any tea?”

“Of course you are. Will you have it here alone or shall we have tea together?”

“What a question!” he exclaimed. “Am I in my dotage? Should I drink tea in musty solitude when I might bask in the smiles of a lovely maiden? Avaunt! No, I’ll tell you what we’ll do, Jimmy. I’ll just telephone down to the office and see if there is any silly nonsense there that may distract me from serious pursuits, and, if there isn’t, we’ll have tea in the workroom and then we’ll polish off that coal-scuttle.”

“Finish it! But there’s quite a lot to do.”

“Then we’ll do the lot.”

“But why this hurry? There’s no particular reason for getting it finished to-night, is there?”

“I don’t know that there is; but we’ve had the thing hanging about long enough. Better get it finished and start on something else. Now you trot off and see about tea while I ring up Jackson.”

As he turned to the telephone, I hurried away to give instructions to the maid and to set the workshop in order so that we might start without delay on our evening’s task, concerning which a few words of explanation would seem to be called for.

My father was by nature designed to be a craftsman. He was never so happy as when he was making something or in

some way working with his hands; and remarkably skilful hands they were, with an inborn capacity for the dexterous manipulation of every kind of material, tool or appliance. And to his natural skill he had added a vast amount of knowledge of methods and processes. He was an excellent woodworker, an admirable mechanic, and a quite passable potter. Our house abounded in the products of his industry; stools, cupboards, clocks, fenders, earthen ware jars; even our bicycles had been built, or, at least, “assembled” by him, and a bronze knocker on our door had been finished by him from castings made in our workshop. If his powers of design had been equal to his manual skill, he would have been a first-class art craftsman. Unfortunately they were not. Left to himself, his tendency was to aim at a neat trade finish, at smooth surfaces and mechanical precision. But he knew his limitations, and had been at great pains to have me instructed in the arts of design; and, as I apparently had some natural aptitude in that direction, I was able to help him by making sketches and working drawings and by criticising the work as it progressed. But my duties did not stop at that. In our happy, united life, I was his apprentice, his journeyman, his assistant—or foreman, as he pleased to call me—and his constant companion, in the house, in the workshop, and in our walks abroad.

As our maid, Jessie, laid the tea-tray on a vacant corner of the work-bench, I examined our latest joint-production, a bronze coal-scuttle, the design of which was based on a Roman helmet that I had seen in the British Museum. There was a good deal more than an ordinary evening’s work to be done before it could be finished. A portion of the embossed ornament on the foot required touching up, the foot itself had to be brazed to the body and the handle had to be riveted to the lugs, to say nothing of the “pickling,” scouring, and oxidizing. It was a colossal evening’s work.

But it was not the magnitude of the task that troubled me, for I shared my father’s love of manual work. What had instantly impressed me with a vague discomfort was the urgency of my father’s desire to get this piece of work finished and done with. That was not like him at all. Not only had he the genuine craftsman’s inexhaustible patience, but he had a habit of keeping an apparently finished work on hand, that he might tinker at it lovingly, smooth and polish it, and bring it to a state of even greater completeness and finish.

Why, then, this strange urgency and impatience? And, as I asked myself the question, all my fears came crowding back on me. Again there came that dreadful sinking at the heart, that strangling terror of the storm-cloud that hung over us, unseen but ready to burst and overwhelm us in ruin at any moment.

But I had little time for these gloomy and disquieting thoughts. The tinkling of the telephone bell in the study told me that my father had finished his talk with his managing clerk, and a few moments later he strode into the workshop and began taking off his coat.

“Where’s your apron, Jimmy?” he asked (the pet name “Jimmy” had been evolved out of an ancient fiction that my name was Jemima).

“There’s no hurry, Pater, dear,” said I. “Let a person have her tea in peace. And do sit down like a Christian man.”

He obediently perched himself on a stool as I handed him his tea, but in less than a minute he was on his feet again, prowling, cup in hand, around the end of the bench where the work lay.

“Wonder if I’d better anneal it a bit,” he mused, picking up the bronze foot and examining the unfinished space. “Mustn’t make it too soft. Think I will, though. We can hammer it up a little on the stake after it’s brazed on. That will harden it enough.”

He laid the foot down, but only that he might apply a match to the great gas blowpipe; and I watched him with a sinking heart as he stood with his teacup in one hand, while with the other he held the foot, gripped in a pair of tongs, in the roaring purple flame. What did it mean, this strange, restless haste to finish what was, after all, but a work of pleasure? Did it portend some change that he saw more clearly than I? Was he, impelled by the craftsman’s instinct, turning in this fashion a page of the book of life? Or was it—Oh! dreadful thought!—was it that he was deliberately writing “Finis” before closing the volume?

But whatever was in his secret mind, he chatted cheerfully as he worked, and submitted to be fed with scraps of bread and butter and to have cups of tea administered at intervals; yet still I noted that the chasing hammer flew at unwonted speed, and the depth of the punch-marks on the work that rested on the sand-bag told of an unusual weight in the blows.

“What a pity it is,” he remarked, “that social prejudices prevent a middle-class man from earning a livelihood with his hands. Now, here I am, a third-rate solicitor perforce, whereas, if I followed my bent, I should be a first-rate coppersmith. Shouldn’t I?”

“Quite first-rate,” I replied.

“Or even a silversmith,” he continued, “if I could have my mate, Jim, to do the art with a capital A while I did the work with a capital W. Hm?”

He looked up at me with a twinkle, and I took the opportunity to pop a piece of bread and butter into his mouth, which occasioned a pause in the conversation.

I had entertained faint—very faint—hopes that he might say something to me about his difficulties. Not that I was inquisitive on the subject; but, in view of a resolution that was slowly forming in my mind, I should have liked to have some idea what his position really was. It seemed pretty plain, however, that he did not intend to take me into his confidence; notwithstanding which I decided in a tentative way to give him an opening.



"Wasn't that Mr. Otway who was with you this afternoon?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "How did you know?"

"I heard his voice in the hall as you let him out," I answered, with something of a gulp at the implied untruth.

The chasing hammer was arrested for a moment in mid air, and, as my father's eye fixed itself reflectively on the punch that he held, I could see that he was trying to remember what Mr. Otway had said in the hall.

"Yes," he replied, after a brief pause, "it was Mr. Otway. I should hardly have thought you would have known his voice. Queer fellow, Otway. No brains to speak of, but yet an excellent man of business in his way."

"What does he do—by way of profession, I mean?"

"The Lord knows. He was originally a solicitor, but he hasn't practised for years. Now he is what is called a financier, which is a little vague, but apparently profitable. And I think he does something in the way of precious stones."

"Do you mean that he deals in them?"

"Yes, occasionally; at least, so I have heard. I know that he is something of a connoisseur in stones, and that he had a collection, which he sold some time ago. I have also heard—and I believe it is a fact—that his name was originally Levy, and that he is one of the Chosen. But why he changed his name I have no notion, unless it was an undesirable one to present to the financial world."

I was half disposed to pursue my enquiries further, but as he finished speaking, he once more began to ply the hammer with such furious energy that I became quite uneasy.

"You mustn't exert yourself so much, Pater," I remarked. "Remember what Dr. Sharpe said."

"Bah!" he replied. "Sharpe is an old woman. My heart is sound enough. At any rate, it will last as long as the rest of me. An old fellow like me cannot expect to go in for sprinting or high jumping, but there's no need for him to live in splints and cotton wool."

"Nor to endanger his health by perfectly unnecessary exertion. Why on earth are you in such a fever to get this thing finished?"

"I'm not in a fever, my dear," he answered; "I'm only tired of seeing this thing lying about unfinished. You see, as it stands, it is only so many pounds of old bronze, whereas a couple of hours' work turns it into a valuable piece of furniture, fit to take a dignified place in the catalogue when we are sold up. Just consider how finely it would read:

"'Handsome bronze scuttle, in form of Roman helmet, the work of the late owner and his charming and talented daughter, capable of serving either as a convenient receptacle for coal or as a becoming head-dress for a person with a suitable cranium.' Don't you think that would sound rather alluring?"

"Very," I replied; "but as we are not going to be sold up—"

The rest of my sentence was drowned in the din of the beaten metal as my father returned to his hammering, and I only watched in mute discomfort until this part of the work was done and the great brazing jet was once more set a-roaring.

The work progressed apace, for my father was not only skilful and neat, but could be very quick on occasion; and as I watched the completion of stage after stage, I was conscious of a growing uneasiness, a vague fear of seeing the work actually finished; as if this mere toy—for it was little more—held some deep and tragic symbolism. I felt like one looking on at the slow wasting of one of those waxen effigies which the sorceresses of old prepared with magical rites for the destruction of some victim, whose life should slowly wane and flicker away with the wasting of the wax.

And meanwhile, above the roar of the blowpipe flame, my father's voice sounded, now in a cheerful stave of song, and now in lively jest or playful badinage. But yet he did not deceive me. Behind all this show of high spirits was a sombre background that was never quite hidden. For the eye of love is very keen and can see plainly, despite quip or joke or jovial carol, when "Black Care rides behind the horseman."

What a miserable affair it was, this pitiful acting of two poor, leaden-hearted mortals, each hiding from each the desperate resolve with smiles and jests that were more bitter than tears! For I, too, had now my secret, and must needs preserve it with such a show of gaiety as I could muster by sheer effort of will. The resolution of which I have spoken was growing—growing, even as the toy that we were making was growing towards completion, and as I seemed to see, as if symbolized by it, the sands of destiny trickling out before my eyes. So I, too, had my part to play in this harrowing comedy.

Works which have consumed much time in the doing have a way of coming to an end with disconcerting suddenness. When I mixed the acid for the "pickle" in the great earthenware pan, it seemed that a great deal still remained to be done, in spite of my father's feverish energy and swift dexterity. And then, but a few minutes later, as it appeared to me, behold the finished piece standing on the bench its embossed ornament telling boldly against the sulphur-browned background, and my father stretching himself and wiping the blackened oil from his hands; and it was borne in on me that, with the final touch, his interest in the thing had fallen dead.

"Nunc dimittis!" he murmured. "It's finished at last. 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.' And that reminds me, Jim; don't the shops keep open late to-night?"

"Some of them do," I replied.

“Good,” said he. “Tell Jessie to bring up the supper while I’m washing. I’ve got to make a business call to-night, and I want to get some things, so we won’t make it a ceremonious meal. Not that I want to put you on short allowance, for I expect you are hungry after your Titanic labours. You mustn’t take any notice of me.”

As he hurried away, I rang the bell, and, when I had given the necessary instructions, I went up to my bedroom to remove the traces of the evening’s work and make myself presentable.

At the supper table my father preserved the same quiet gaiety of manner—his usual manner, in fact; for he was always cheerful and companionable—though, on this occasion, the speed with which he disposed of his food gave little opportunity for conversation. After a very hurried meal, he rose, and, pushing back his chair, glanced at his watch.

“You mustn’t mind my running away,” said he. “Time, tide and the shopkeeper wait for no man.”

He moved away toward the door, but before he reached it he paused and then came back and stood beside my chair.

“You need’nt sit up for me,” he said. “I may possibly be rather late. So I’d better say ‘good-night’ now.” He took my head in his hands, and, looking earnestly into my eyes, murmured: “Dear little Jim; best and most loyal of apprentices.” Then he kissed me very tenderly and passed his hands over my hair.

“Good-night, sweetheart,” said he. “Don’t sit up reading, but go to bed early like a sensible girlie—if you will pardon my thopping into Weggish poetry without notice.”

He turned away and walked quickly to the door, where he stood for a moment to wave his hand. I heard him go to the study, and sat stiffly in my chair listening. In a few moments he came out and stepped quietly across the hail; there was a brief pause, and then the outer door closed.

He was gone.

At the sound of the closing door, I sprang to my feet with all my terrors revived. Whither had he gone? It was unusual for him to leave his home at night. What was it that had taken him abroad on this night of all others? And what was it that he wanted to buy? And wanted so urgently that he could not wait until the morrow? And why had he wished me “good-night” with such tender earnestness? A foolish question, this, for he was a loving father, and never sought to veil his affection. But to-night I was unstrung; haunted by nameless fears that gave a dreadful significance to every passing incident. And as the chill of mortal terror crept round my heart, the resolution that had been growing—growing, came to its final completion.

It had to be. Horrible, loathsome as, even then, I felt it to be, it was the only alternative to that other nameless and unthinkable. The sacrifice must be made by us both for both our sakes—if it were not too late already.

Too late? Even as the dreadful thought smote like a hammer on my heart, I ran from the room and sped up the stairs on the wings of terror. With trembling fingers I took my hat and cloak from the wardrobe and hurried down stairs, putting them on as I went. At the dining-room door I called out a hasty message to the maid, and then, snatching up my gloves from the hall table, I opened the door and ran out into darkness.

---

### III. — THE COVENANT

As I sped swiftly along the quiet roads on the outskirts of the town the confusion and sense of helplessness began to subside under the influence of action and a definite purpose; by degrees my thoughts clarified, and I found myself shaping out, with surprising deliberation and judgment, the course that I intended to pursue. Mr. Otway’s house was about a mile distant from ours, somewhat farther out of town, though on a frequented road; a short distance and quickly covered by my flying feet. Yet, short as it was, and traversed with a phantom of terror in close pursuit, it gave me time to collect my faculties, so that, when I opened the gate and walked up the little drive, I had already to a large extent recovered my self-possession, though I was still trembling with the fear of what might be happening else where at this very moment.

The door was opened by a small frail-looking woman of about fifty, who did not look quite like an ordinary servant, and whose appearance instantly impressed me disagreeably. She stood with her face slightly averted, looking at me out of the corners of her eyes, and holding the door open as she asked, with a slight Scotch accent:

“Who would you be wanting?”

“I wish to see Mr. Otway, if he is at home?” I replied.

“If ye’ll come in and give me your name, I’ll tell him,” said she; and with this she showed me into a small room that opened out of the hall, where, when I had told her my name, she left me. In less than a minute Mr. Otway entered, and having carefully closed the door, shook hands gravely and offered me a chair.

“This is quite an unexpected pleasure, Miss Vardon,” said he. “Oddly enough, I was just thinking about you. I called on your father only this afternoon.”

“I know,” said I. “It was about that that I came to see you.”

“Your father, then,” said Mr. Otway, “has mentioned to you the subject of our not entirely pleasant interview?”

“No, he has not,” I replied. “Nothing has passed between us on the subject, and he is not aware that I have come here. The fact is, I overheard a part of your conversation and made it my business to hear as much of the rest as I could.”

"Ha! Indeed!" He gave me a quick glance, half enquiring, half suspicious, and added: "Perhaps, Miss Vardon, you had better tell me what you heard."

"There is no need for me to repeat it in detail," said I; "but, from what I heard, I gathered that my father had rendered himself liable to a prosecution. Is that correct?"

"Yes," said Mr. Otway, "that is unfortunately—most unfortunately—the case."

"And that the proceedings will be taken by you, and that you have the power to stay them if you choose?"

"I wouldn't put it that way, Miss Vardon. That hardly states the position fairly. Do you know nothing of the circumstances at all? Has your father not told you any thing about this unfortunate affair?"

"He has not spoken a word to me on the subject, and he has no idea that I know anything about it."

"H'm," Mr. Otway grunted, reflectively. "Yes. Well, Miss Vardon, if you wish to talk the matter over with me, perhaps I had better just let you know how the land lies, although, really, your father is the proper person to tell you."

"I think you had better tell me, if you don't mind," said I.

"Very well, Miss Vardon," he agreed. "Then the position is this: A sum of money—five thousand pounds, to be exact—was handed to your father by the trustees of a certain estate, to be invested by him on behalf of the trust; and the manner of its disposal—into which we need not enter—was quite clearly specified. But your father, instead of disposing of the money as directed, chose to make over the whole of it as a loan to a friend of his who was in temporary difficulties; a manufacturer, as I understand, who had suffered an unexpected loss and was on the verge of bankruptcy. There was no proper security, nor even, as I understand, any satisfactory arrangement as to the payment of interest. The whole affair was most improper; a gross violation of trust. In effect, your father converted this money and made use of it for his own purposes."

"Is the money lost?" I enquired.

Mr. Otway shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say? It may be recoverable some day, or it may not. But that is very little to the point. The position is that it is now demanded of your father and that he can't produce it."

"And so you are going to prosecute him?"

"Oh, please don't put it that way, Miss Vardon. I am a quite involuntary agent. My position is that I am instructed to get this money from your father and dispose of it in a particular way. But I can't get it; and when I report that fact, I shall, of course, be urged—in fact, compelled—to take criminal proceedings. I shall have no choice. It isn't my money, you know."

"But why criminal proceedings?" I asked. "It seems to me that a civil action to recover the money would be the natural course."

Again Mr. Otway shrugged his shoulders. "I don't see that it makes much difference," said he. "The money has been made away with. Even if the trustees took no criminal action, there is the Public Prosecutor and there is the Incorporated Law Society. A prosecution is inevitable."

"And supposing my father is convicted?"

"It is hardly necessary to suppose," said Mr. Otway. "He will be. There is no defence. As to the sentence, I don't imagine that the maximum punishment of seven years penal servitude is likely to be inflicted. Still, your father is a solicitor, and the law is, quite properly, very severe in the case of solicitors who misappropriate their clients' property. He is almost certain to get a term of imprisonment."

To this I made no reply. There was nothing to say. It was only too clear that every avenue of escape was closed—save one; and realizing more fully every moment where that one led, I could not bring myself to make the fateful move. So, for a while, we sat in a hideous silence through which the ticking of a clock penetrated noisily and seemed to keep pace with the thumping of my heart.

As I sat, bracing myself for the effort that had to be made, my eyes travelled, half unconsciously, over the person of my companion. His appearance was not prepossessing. Huge, unwieldy and shapeless, although by no means grossly fat, his great size carried no dignity; nor did his very marked and prominent features impart to his face anything of distinction or nobility. He was of a distinctly oriental type, with black and rather curly hair, oiled and combed over a slightly bald head, a large aquiline nose, a wide mouth, rather full and fleshy, and very dark eyes, under which were baggy folds of skin creased by innumerable tiny wrinkles. As I looked at him with growing distaste, I found myself comparing him to a gigantic spider. Suddenly it was borne in on me—perhaps by the measured ticking of the clock—that time was passing; time which might be infinitely precious. To delay further were mere cowardice. Nevertheless, when I spoke, it was in a voice so husky that I had to stop and begin again.

"You spoke, Mr. Otway—I heard you mention to my father that—that on certain conditions, you would—would be prepared to abandon your intention of prosecuting—Or, at least—"

I could get no farther. Fear and shame and loathing of this thing that I was going to do, overpowered me utterly. It was only by the most strenuous effort that I choked down the sob that was rising in my throat. But I had said enough, for Mr. Otway now came to my assistance.

"I told your father that I was prepared to take over his liabilities, for the time being, at least, on condition that you

became my wife. He refused, as perhaps you know refused very definitely, I may say."

"And rather rudely, I am afraid."

"He was not at any great pains to wrap his refusal up delicately. But we may let that pass. Is it in respect of this proposal of mine that you have done me the very great honour of calling on me, Miss Vardon?"

I felt myself turn scarlet, but nevertheless I answered, resolutely:

"Yes. I came to ask if my father's very blunt refusal had closed the matter finally, or whether you were prepared to—to re-open it."

"We won't talk about re-opening it. It was never closed, by me. The proposal that I made to your father I now make to you; and if you should see your way to accepting it, I believe you would never have occasion to regret your decision."

He spoke in a dry, commercial tone, as if he were trying to sell me something at a rather high price; as, in fact, he was. And meanwhile I found myself wondering dimly why on earth he wanted to marry me.

"May I ask," he continued, after a pause, "if you are disposed to entertain my proposal?"

"I would do anything to save my father," I replied.

"That," said he, "is what I thought, judging from my previous knowledge of you; and it was the knowledge of your devotion to your father that encouraged me to make the proposal. For it seemed to me that a young lady of your attractions who could so completely devote herself to an elderly father might find it possible to devote herself to an elderly husband."

His reasoning did not impress me as very sound, seeing that it took no account of the respective personalities of the father and the proposed husband. But I made no reply, and, after a further pause, he asked:

"Am I to understand that you—that you regard my proposal favourably?"

"I can't say that," I replied. "But I came here to-night prepared to accept your conditions, and I am ready to accept them now. But, of course, you understand that I do so under compulsion and not of my own free choice."

"I quite realise that," said he; "but I take it that you will carry out fairly any covenant into which you may enter."

"Certainly I shall," was my reply.

"Then may I take it that you are willing to marry me, on the conditions that I named?"

"Yes, Mr. Otway. I consent to marry you on those conditions and on certain others that I will propose."

"Let us hear the other conditions," said he.

"The first is that you give me a promise in writing that, in consideration of my consent to marry you, you will do what is necessary to get my father out of his present difficulties."

"That is quite fair, though it is rather unnecessary. I shouldn't want a convict for a father-in-law, you know. But, anyhow, I'll agree, as soon as the marriage is over, to pay into your father's bank a cheque for five thousand pounds, or, if he prefers it, to give him a full discharge for that amount. And I will give you an undertaking in writing to that effect before you leave here to-night. Will that do?"

"It will do quite well," I answered. "But I wish you also to add to that undertaking a proviso to the effect that, if at any time before the marriage takes place, any circumstances shall arise by which your pecuniary help shall become unnecessary, then this agreement between you and me shall not take effect, and you shall have no claim of any kind on me."

Mr. Otway looked at me in some surprise, and, indeed, I was somewhat surprised myself at the completeness with which my judgment and self-possession had revived as soon as it came to making terms; though I had considered the matter very carefully on my way to Mr. Otway's house.

"You are a true lawyer's daughter, Miss Vardon," said he, with a somewhat wry smile. "You are not going to give yourself away gratis. No play, no pay, h'm? How ever, you are quite right. You agree to marry me for a certain consideration. If you don't receive the consideration, you don't marry me. Very well. That is a perfectly business-like proposition, and I agree to it. You think that perhaps your father may be able to meet his liabilities, after all?"

"I do not think anything of the kind. The proviso was introduced by me in view of a very different contingency. I was making this sacrifice to save my father's life. If I failed in that, the sacrifice would be useless. But I did not think it necessary to mention this to Mr. Otway. I therefore replied that, as I knew very little about my father's affairs, I thought it wise to provide even against the improbable."

"Quite so, Miss Vardon, quite so," he agreed. "One should always make provision for the unexpected. Well, I have said that I accept your first two conditions. What is the next one?"

"I want you to write my father a letter which shall relieve him of all present anxieties, and I want you to give me that letter so that it may be delivered to-night."

At this Mr. Otway's countenance fell somewhat. He pursed up his lips disapprovingly, and, after some moments of reflection, said gravely: "That, you know, Miss Vardon, really anticipates the fulfilment of the contract on my side. Such a

letter would commit me to a withdrawal of my demand for immediate payment of this money.”

“But,” said I, “you have my promise, which I am willing to give you in writing, if you wish me to.”

“Well,” he replied, dubiously, “that would seem to meet the difficulty, not that I am suspecting you of trying to evade fulfilment. But, you see, your father has refused his consent and will probably continue to refuse, so that one would rather not raise the question. By the way, I suppose you are over twenty-one?”

“I was twenty-three last birthday.”

“Then, of course, his consent is not necessary. Still, one doesn’t want a fuss; and if you delivered this letter to him, he would be in possession of the facts, and then there would be trouble.”

“I was not proposing to deliver it to him. I should drop it in the letter-box and let him think that you had sent or left it. He would know nothing of my visit to you or of the arrangement we have come to.”

“I see. That alters the position somewhat. But is it really necessary? I can understand your wish to relieve his anxiety; but still, it need be only a day or two. Do you really think it is essential?”

“I do, Mr. Otway. I think it absolutely essential. If I had not, I should not have come here to-night. My father is in a desperate position, and one never knows what a desperate man may do.”

Mr. Otway gave me a quick glance, and I could see that he was considerably startled. The possibility at which I had hinted would have consequences for him as well as for me, and I saw that he fully realized this. But he did not answer hastily. Perhaps he saw more in my suggestion than I did myself. At any rate, he pondered for some seconds before he finally replied:

“Perhaps you are right, Miss Vardon. I’m sure I shall be very glad to put an end to his suspense. Yes, I’ll write the letter and give it to you. Are there any more conditions?”

“No; that is all. So if you will write the letter and the agreement and draft out what you want me to say, we shall have done. And please make as much haste as you can. It is rather late, and I am anxious to get home before my father if possible.”

My anxiety apparently communicated itself to Mr. Otway, for he immediately swung his chair round to his desk, and, taking one or two sheets of paper from the rack, began to write rapidly. In two or three minutes he turned, and, handing me what he had written, together with a blank sheet of paper and a pen and ink-bottle, took a fresh sheet himself, and, without a word, began once more to write. The draft which he had handed me was simply and concisely worded as follows:

—  
“I, Helen Vardon, of Stonebury, Maidstone, in the county of Kent, spinster, hereby promise to marry Lewis Otway, of the Beeches, Maidstone, in the county of Kent, attorney-at-law, within fourteen days from this present date, in consideration of his assuming the present liabilities of my father, William Henry Vardon, in respect of the estate of James Collis-Hardy deceased, this promise to be subject to the conditions set forth in a letter written to me by the said Lewis Otway and dated the 2 of April, 1908.

“(Signed) HELEN VARDON. Maidstone, Kent. 21st April, 1908.”

I read the draft through carefully, noting that it was not only quite simple and lucid, but that it embodied the terms of our agreement with scrupulous fairness and took over my father’s liabilities without any limit as to time; then I dipped the pen in the ink and made a fair copy on the blank sheet which I signed, and laid on the corner of the desk.

By the time I had finished my copy, Mr. Otway had completed the first of the documents, which he now handed to me; and as I read it, he took up the paper that I had written, and, having glanced through it, placed it in a drawer and began once more to write. The paper that he had given to me was in the form of a letter, and read thus:

“Dear Miss Vardon,

“At your request I put on record the terms of the arrangement which has been made between us to-day, and which are:

“1. That in consideration of my taking over your father’s liabilities in respect of the Collis-Hardy Estate, you agree to marry me within fourteen days of this present date.

“2. That on the completion of the marriage ceremony, or at such time thereafter as you may decide upon, I shall pay into your father’s bank the sum of five thousand pounds, or, if he prefers it, give him a full discharge of all liabilities in respect of the Collis-Hardy Estate aforesaid.

“3. Provided that if at any time prior to the said marriage your father shall discharge the said liabilities, or any circumstances shall arise by which the said payment or discharge by me shall become unnecessary, then the agreement between you and me which is herein recorded shall become void, and neither of us, the contracting parties, shall have any claim upon the other.

“I am, dear Miss Vardon,

“Your obedient servant,

“LEWIS OTWAY.

“Maidstone, Kent.

“2 April, 1908.”

Mr Otway glanced up from his desk as I folded the paper and bestowed it in my purse, and asked: “Will that do? I think it covers the terms of our arrangement.”

“Thank you,” I answered; “it will do quite well.”

He made no rejoinder, but went on with the letter that he was writing; and meanwhile I sat and watched him, with a strong distaste of his appearance, dimly wondering at this strange interview and at my own curious self-possession and mental alertness. But behind these hazy reflections was a background of haunting terror that had never quite faded even when I was putting the utmost strain upon my wits; terror lest all this bargaining should be useless after all; lest I should arrive home to find that my help had come too late.

These disquieting thoughts were presently interrupted by Mr. Otway, who, laying down his pen and swinging round in his revolving chair, took up the letter that he had just written.

“This is what I have said to your father, Miss Vardon. I think it will make his mind quite easy for the present, which is all we want.

“Dear Vardon,

“Since my talk with you this afternoon, I have been thinking over matters and considering whether it is not possible to give you more time. On looking into the affairs of the trust more closely, I think it can be done; in fact, I am sure it can, with some careful management on my part. So you may take it from me that the demand, which I felt compelled to make, is withdrawn for the time being. When you are in a position to surrender the money, you had better notify me; and in the meantime you have my assurance that no further demand will be made without reasonable notice.

“I hope this will relieve your natural anxiety, concerning which I have been a little uncomfortable since I left you.

“The Beeches.

“2 April, 1908.

“Yours sincerely,

“LEWIS OTWAY.”

He handed me the letter when he had finished reading, and I glanced through it quickly before returning it to him.

“I think that ought to relieve him of all anxiety,” said he.

“Yes,” I answered. “It will do admirably. And if you will kindly seal it and let me have it, I will go at once and drop it in the letter-box. It is most important that it should be in his hands as soon as possible.”

“Quite so,” he agreed; “and I won’t detain you further excepting to point out that, by giving you this letter, I am putting myself entirely in your hands. You will observe that this amounts to a surrender of my claim on your father for the time being. He will, of course, keep the letter, and could produce it in answer to any sudden demand for the restitution of the money. So I am really carrying out my part of the agreement in advance.”

“Yes, I see that,” I replied, “and I thank you most sincerely; but,” I added, rising and holding out my hand for the letter, “you have my solemn promise to carry out my part. If you were better acquainted with me, you would consider that enough.”

“But I do, Miss Vardon,” he rejoined, hastily; “I do. If I did not trust you implicitly, I should not have written this letter. However, I mustn’t delay you. I will make all the necessary arrangements and let you know when everything is ready. Will next Thursday be too soon?”

At the mention of an actual date, and one so near, too, something like a complete realisation of what I was doing flashed into my mind and set my heart thumping painfully. But it had to be, so why haggle for terms? Nor, indeed, since it must be, was there any use in trying to put off the evil day. The urgent need of the moment was to get this letter into my father’s hands, if it were not already too late.

“I must leave the arrangement of the affair to you, Mr. Otway,” I murmured, shakily. “Do as you think best. And now I must really go.”

He shook my hand in a drily courteous fashion and let me out, accompanying me down the drive to the outer gate, which he opened for me with a ceremonious bow. I wished him a hurried “good-night,” and, as soon as I was outside the gate, ran off in the direction of home, holding the precious letter in the little pocket of my cloak.

---

#### IV. — THE ELEVENTH HOUR

As I drew near the neighbourhood of our house my fears grew so that I was compelled by sheer breathlessness and the trembling of my limbs to slacken my pace. I was sick with terror. In my mind, pictures, vague and nebulous but unspeakably dreadful, rose like the visions of a nightmare. I clutched the precious order of release in my pocket and set my

teeth, trying not to think of what I might find at my journey's end.

At last I came in sight of the house. It was all dark save two of the upper windows—those of the servants' bedrooms. The servants, then, were going to bed as usual, for ours was an early household. This seemed reassuring, but only to a slight degree; for even if—I opened the gate softly—I do not know why, but somehow I instinctively avoided noise of any kind—and running up the garden path, let myself in quietly with my latch-key. With one quick and fearful glance around the darkened hall, I stole up to the hat-stand. Apparently my father had not yet come home, for his stick was not in the stand, and one of his hats was missing. I looked at the tall clock and noted that it was not yet half-past ten; I peered out through the open doorway, down the dark road, and listened awhile for the sound of footsteps; then, slipping the letter into the letter-box—which I could see contained no other missives—I lit one of the candles from the hall table, and, having peeped into the study, the book-room and the workshop, stole silently up the stairs.

First, I went to my father's bedroom, and, by the glimmer of gas that the maid had left burning, and the light of my candle, inspected it narrowly. I looked over the trifles on the mantelpiece and on the dressing-table, and even opened the little medicine-cupboard to run my eye over the collection of bottles and boxes, pausing from time to time that I might listen for footsteps, strange or familiar, as Fate might decree. But pry as I would, there was nothing unusual, nothing on which the most eager suspicion might fasten. All the details of that room were familiar to me, for it had been my daily task since my girlhood to look them over and see that my father's orderly arrangements were not disturbed by the servants; and everything was in its place, and nothing new or strange or sinister had made its appearance.

When I had finished my inspection, I stole softly along the corridor to my own bedroom, which was at the head of the stairs, and, turning up the gas, but leaving the door ajar, began slowly to undress, listening intently the while for any sounds that might confirm or dispel my fears. The house was very quiet and still; so quiet that the tinkle of the water, as I poured it out from the ewer, struck with disturbing harshness on my ear, and even the ticking of the little clock and my own slipped footfalls seemed an impertinent intrusion into that expectant silence.

It was a few minutes past eleven when the sound of a latch-key and the gentle closing of the hall door sent the blood tingling to my very finger-tips. No footsteps had been audible on the garden path, but this, in itself, was characteristic; for my father and I were alike in that we both disliked noise and habitually moved about softly, avoiding the slamming of doors or the production in any way of jarring sounds.

I crept on tip-toe to the door and listened. A stick was carefully put down in the hall-stand, and then I thought—but was not quite sure—that I heard my father unlock the letter-box. A few seconds later I caught a faint creak, which I recognised as proceeding from the study door, and, after a short interval, the creak was repeated and the door closed. Then the hall gas was turned out and soft footfalls began to ascend the stairs.

"Is that you, Pater, dear?" I asked.

"Is it I, indeed, O! wicked and disobedient child and likewise minx!" was the welcome answer. "Didn't I tell you to go to bed?"

"Yes, you did; and I am going. But I thought I would like to see you safely home from your roysterings."

"Mures rathi!" he exclaimed, as he came into the light from my open door. "It is poor old Queen Anne who has been keeping you out of your little nest. I know you."

Here he gave a gentle tug at one of the tails into which I had plaited my hair, and, having kissed me on the tip of my nose, continued:

"And you look as tired as the proverbial dog—which is the only kind of dog that ever does get tired. Now go to bed and sleep like a young dormouse. Good-night, Jimmy, dear."

With the aid of the convenient tail, he drew my face to his and kissed me again; then he went off along the corridor singing very softly, but just audibly to me:

"Her father he makes cabbage nets And in the streets does cry 'em; Her mother she sells laces long—"

Here a rapid diminuendo indicated the closing of the door, and the silence that had been so agreeably broken once again settled down upon the house. Still, I stood at the open door, looking out into the darkness. Had my father seen the letter? He had seemed very cheerful. But then, he would have seemed very cheerful if he had been walking to the scaffold or the stake. That was his nature. Yet his gaiety had appeared to me more genuine than that which he had exhibited earlier in the evening. However, there was no need to speculate; the question could easily be set at rest. Taking the match-box from my candlestick, I stole silently down the stairs, steadying myself by the hand-rail, and groped my way across the hall until I reached the door. Then I struck a match, and by its light, peered through the wire grating into the letter-box.

It was empty. The letter had been taken out.

I blew out the match, and, having dropped it into the salver on the table, crept back up the stairs to my room. Closing the door silently, I made my final preparations, turned out the light and crept into bed, feeling in the sudden ecstasy of relief that I could now shake off all care and bury the anxieties and alarms of this dreadful day in slumber.

My father was saved! No haunting fear of imminent tragedy, no dread of impending ruin and disgrace, remained to murder sleep or mingle it with frightful visions. My father was saved. At the eleventh hour I had made my bid for his life and liberty; and the eleventh hour had not been too late.

But it was long—very long before sleep came to shut out for a time the realities of life. The blessed feeling of escape from this appalling peril, the sense of restored security, was presently followed by the chill of reaction. For the end was not yet. I had bid for my father's life and had bought it in; but the price remained to be paid. And only now, when I could consider it undisturbed by terror for my father's safety, did I begin to realise fully how bitter a price it was. Not that I would have gone back on my bargain, for I had made it with my eyes open; and would have made it over again if the need had been. But it was a terrible price. I had sold my birth-right—my precious woman's birth-right to choose my own mate—for a mess of pottage. It was a price that I should have to pay, and go on paying as long as life lasted.

Hour after hour did I lie, gazing wide-eyed into the darkness, letting my thoughts flit hither and thither, now into the quiet, untroubled past, now into the dim and desolate future, whence they would come hurrying back affrighted. But always, whithersoever they wandered, behind them rose, now vague and remote, now horribly distinct, that unwieldy figure with the impassive oriental face; even, as to the eyes of the fisherman in the Arabian tale, the smoke from the magic jar shaped itself into the menacing form of the gigantic Jinn.

I tried to consider dispassionately the character of Mr. Otway. It was very difficult. For had he not come into our life like some malignant spirit, to dispel with a word and in the twinkling of an eye, all the peace and happiness of our quiet home? To snap off short my serene companionship with my father? To turn into dust and ashes all the vaguely-sweet dreams of maidenhood? To shut out the warm and hazy sunshine from my future and fill the firmament with unrelieved, leaden greyness? Still, I tried to consider him fairly. Callously, cynically, he had driven his Juggernaut car over my father and me, his eyes fixed upon his own desires and seeing nothing else. He was an absolute egoist. That was undeniable. For some reason, he wished to marry me; and to achieve that wish he had been willing to put us both on the rack, and, with passionless composure, to turn the screw until we yielded. It was not a pleasant thing to think of.

On the other hand, he seemed, in his way, to be a just man. By no hair's breadth had he sought to modify the terms that he had first proposed; indeed, in his letter to me he had treated the loan to my father as an almost unconditional gift, and the other details of our agreement he had expressed in writing fully and fairly, with no attempt at evasion. Nor was he niggardly. Five thousand pounds is a large sum to pay for the privilege of marrying an unwilling bride. Under other circumstances I might have appreciated the implied compliment. Now, I could only admit that, according to his lights, he seemed not ungenerous.

But when I considered him as the companion with whom I must share the remainder of my life—or, at least, that part of it which mattered—the thought was almost unendurable. To live, day after day and year after year, under the same roof with this huge, dull, uncomely man; to sit at table with him, to walk abroad by his side, to spend interminable evenings alone with him: it was appalling. I could hardly bear to think of it. And yet the horrible reality would be upon me in the course of a few swiftly-passing days.

Nor was it a question of mere companionship—but from this aspect I hurriedly averted my thoughts in sheer cowardice. I dared not let myself think even for a moment of what marriage actually meant. Under normal conditions it may be permitted to the modesty of an unwedded girl to cast an occasional glance, half-shy and not wholly unpleasurable, at the more intimate relations of married life: but to me, if the thought would rise unbidden, it could call up nought but the quick flush of shame and loathing whereat I would bury my face in the pillow with a moan of shuddering disgust.

It was a relief to turn from the distressful present and the unthinkable future to the past, or even to the future that might have been. For, like most other girls, I had had my day-dreams. The companionship with my father had been happy and full of interest; but it had never seemed final. I had looked on it as no more than the prologue to the real life, which lay, for the moment, hidden behind the near horizon of my maidenhood. And as to that reality, though it offered but a vague picture, yet it had a certain definiteness. To many modern girls, ambition seems to connect itself with the academy and the laboratory, with the platform and the forum. They appear to hanker after fame, or even mere notoriety, and would contend with men—who have nothing better to do—for the high places in politics, in science or in literature. I had read the impassioned demands of some of these women for political and economic equality with men, and had looked at them with a certain dim surprise to see them so eager to gather this Dead Sea fruit and turn their backs upon the Tree of Life, with its golden burden of love and blessed motherhood. Ambition of that kind had no message for me. So far my mind was perfectly clear. As to the terms in which I conceived the realities, the blossom and fructification of a woman's life, I am less clear. A home of my own like the pleasant, peaceful home that my father had made; a man of my own, in whom I could feel pride and by whom I could be linked to the greater world outside; and a sweet brood of little people in whom my youth could be renewed and for whom I could even cherish wider ambitions: this was probably what my rambling thoughts would have pictured if they could have been gathered up and brought to a definite focus. But they never had been. The necessary refracting medium had been absent. For what the burning-glass is to the sunbeam, the actual love of some particular man is to the opening mind of a young girl, bringing the scattered rays of thought to a single bright spot in which the wished-for future becomes sharp and distinct. And this influence, in its completeness, had never come into my life. The undoubted liking that I had for the society of men was due, chiefly, to their larger interests and wider knowledge. Of experiences sentimental or romantic there had been none.

And yet the little god had not entirely forgotten me. Indeed, his winged shaft had missed me so narrowly that I could hardly yet be certain that I had passed quite unscathed. That little episode—tame enough in all conscience—had occurred two years ago, when a Mr. Davenant had come from Oxford with a small party of fellow undergraduates, to spend a more or less studious vacation in our neighbourhood. I had met him, in all, three times on the footing of a casual acquaintance, and we had talked "high philosophy" with the eager interest of the very young. That was all. He had been a bird of passage,



alighting for a moment on the very outskirts of my life, only to soar away into the unknown and vanish for ever.

It seemed an insignificant affair. A score of other men had come and gone in the same way. But there was a difference—to me. Those other men, too, had talked “high philosophy,” but I had forgotten utterly what it was that they had said. Not so had it been in the case of Mr. Davenant. Again and again had I found myself thinking over his talks with me, not, I suspect, for the sake of the matter—which, to speak the truth, was neither weighty nor brilliantly original—but rather because I had enjoyed talking to him. And sometimes I had been surprised to notice how clearly I remembered those talks, even to the very words that he had used and the tones of his pleasant, manly voice. Two years had passed since then—a long time in a girl’s life; but still Mr. Davenant—his name, by the way, was Jasper, a pleasant-sounding name I had thought it—remained the one figure that had separated itself from the nebulous mass of humanity that had peopled my short existence. And to-night—on this night of misery and despair, when all that was worth living for seemed to be passing away, as I lay staring up into the darkness, the memory of him came back to me again. Once more I heard his voice—how strangely familiar it sounded!—framing those quaintly-abstruse sentences, I recalled the look in his eyes—clear, hazel eyes, they were, that sparkled with vivacity and the fresh interest of youth—and his smile, as he uttered some mild joke—a queer, humorous smile that drew his mouth just a little to one side and seemed to give an added piquancy to the jest by its own trifling oddity. I remembered it all, clearly, vividly, with the freshness of yesterday; the words of wisdom, the humorous turn of speech, the earnest, almost eager tone, the easy manner, friendly yet deferential—all came back to me as it had done a hundred times before, though it was two years ago.

He had been but a stranger—a mere passing stranger who had come and gone—who had sailed across the rim of my horizon and vanished. But even in that swift passage some virtue had exhaled from him by which it had been given to me to look beyond the present into a world hitherto invisible to me. He was my one little romance; a very little one, but all that I had; and, to me, he stood for all those things that might have been and now could never be. And so it happened that, on this night, when I seemed to be bidding farewell to my youth and all its dimly-cherished hopes, the memory of him lingered in my thoughts and was with me still when, at last, sleep—the sleep of utter weariness and exhaustion—closed my eyelids and shut out for a time the realities of that life on which I would have been well content never to look again.

---

## V.— ON THE BRINK

Of the four days that followed, I do not, even now, like to think. The dreadful change that was coming into my life loomed up every moment more distinct, more threatening, more terrible. The hideous realities of what was about to happen to me refused to be ignored. They thrust themselves upon me and filled my thoughts every instant of the day and haunted my dreams at night. There were times when I turned a wistful eye upon that solution of the hopeless difficulties of life at which my father had hinted; but alas! even that was no solution as matters stood. Death which would have released me from this bondage into which I had sold myself, would have left my father unemancipated; and to attain it by my own act would have been a grossly dishonest evasion of the covenant into which I had entered with Mr. Otway. Expediency and honour both demanded that I should carry out the terms of my agreement.

But it was a terrible burden that I bore during those four days, and bore, of necessity, with a cheerful face and as little change as might be from my usual manner. That was the most difficult part of all. To keep up the appearance of quiet gaiety, which was the tone of our house; to smile, to jest, to discuss projected work and to talk over the history which I was supposed still to be reading; and all the time to feel the day of doom creeping upon me, nearer and nearer with every beat of my aching heart. That was the hardest part. But it had to be done and done with thoroughness; for my father’s watchful and sympathetic eye would have detected at once the smallest flutter of a signal of distress. And it was imperative that he should be kept in the dark.

And that, perhaps, was the bitterest drop in this bitter potion. For the first time in my life I had a secret from my father. I was systematically deceiving him. And the secret that I withheld from him and shared with a mere stranger—with an enemy, in fact—was one that concerned him profoundly. And yet that, too, had to be. It was of the essence of the transaction. For, if he had suspected, for one instant, what I proposed to do, he would certainly have interfered; and I knew him well enough to feel sure that his interference would not have taken the form of mere persuasion. He was a quiet man, suave and gentle in manner; even-tempered, patient, forbearing—up to a certain point; but when that point was passed, a change occurred which was apt to surprise those who knew him but slightly. Like a heavy body, he was difficult to move and difficult to stop when moved. If he had suspected Mr. Otway of putting unfair pressure on me—which he would certainly have done—then I would not have answered for the consequences to Mr. Otway.

But strive as I would to keep my secret, the intolerable strain of those days of misery must have made itself visible in some change in my appearance. Once or twice I caught my father looking at me narrowly with something of anxiety in his expression, and hastened to put on a little extra spurt of gaiety and to divert his attention from myself. Still, he was not entirely deceived by my assumed cheerfulness, though he made no remark until the very last evening, when, I suppose, my efforts to conceal the grief and wretchedness that were gnawing at my heart were less successful than usual. Then it was that he took me quite seriously to task.

“I wonder what is the matter with my little girl,” he said, looking at me reflectively as we sat at the supper table. “She has been getting a little pale of late, and looks tired and worn. Is it too much Queen Anne and not enough sleep, think you?”

“I am feeling quite well,” I replied.

"That is an evasion, my dear, and a tarradiddle to boot, I suspect. You are looking quite well. What is it, Jimmy?"

"I don't think it is anything, Pater, dear," I answered, not without a qualm of conscience at the direct untruth. "I haven't been sleeping so very well lately, but that is not due to my sitting up reading. Perhaps it's the weather."

"H'm!" he grunted; "perhaps it is—and perhaps it isn't. Are you sure there is nothing troubling you? No—what shall we say? Well, to put it bluntly, no young man, for instance, competing with the good Queen Anne for your attention?"

I laughed a little, bitterly. If only there had been! But, alas! I was only too well secured against any troubles of that sort. So I was able to reply with a moderately clear conscience.

"No, of course there isn't. You know that perfectly well. How could there be when you keep me so securely in my little hutch?"

"That's true, Jimmy," he answered. "I certainly haven't noticed any buck rabbit sniffing around. But perhaps it is the hutch itself that is the trouble. It is a dull life for a girl, to be shut up with an old fellow like me. Coal-scuttles and such-like are all very well for an ancient fossil who has sucked all the juice out of life and must needs content himself with a modest nibble at the rind that's left. But it's not the sort of thing for a girl. Your orange is still unsucked, Jimmy, dear, and we mustn't leave it to get over-ripe."

"I've always been very happy with you, dear old Pater," I said; and a lump rose in my throat as I spoke. How happy I had been! And oh, how thankfully would I have gone on with that serene, peaceful life and never asked for anything different, if only it might have been so!

"I know you have, my dear," he rejoined; "always contented and cheerful and kind to your old father. But still—well, we mustn't get too groovy. We must have a little change now and again. I have been rather preoccupied these last few days, but I shall be more free now. What do you say to a few lays in London? It's quite a long time since we've been to town. Shall we take a week off and dissipate a little? Just spread a thin wash of carmine—quite a thin and delicate one—over the metropolis, and incidentally see for ourselves if the population of the great world doesn't still contain a few presentable human beings? What do you say?"

I don't know what I said, or how I controlled the almost irresistible impulse to fling myself on his neck and sob my secret into his ear. It was terrible to listen to him making these plans for one of those blissful little holidays that we had enjoyed together from time to time, and to know that the morrow would see my own life spoiled irrevocably and his home made desolate. Some vague answer I murmured, and then managed to lead the conversation into a less distressing channel. But once or twice during the evening he reverted to the subject, and when, at a rather early hour, I wished him "good-night," he said, as he held my hands and looked me over-critically:

"Yes; the blossom is undoubtedly a little faded. We must see to it, Jimmy. Think over my proposal and consider whether there is any particular kind of jaunt that you would like; whether, for instance, you would rather go to the sea than to London."

"Very well, Pater, dear," I replied; "I'll think about it," and with this only too easily fulfilled promise I turned away and went upstairs.

It was my last night at home; the last night of my girlhood and of freedom. Virtually and to all intents, I had said farewell to my father for ever; for though, hereafter, we should meet, I should be his daughter, in the old sense—no more. I should be the chattel of another man, and that man no friend of his.

For long after I went to my room I sat thinking these thoughts and gazing with scared, bewildered eyes into the dark future on whose threshold I already stood. What that future held for me, beyond the certainty of misery and degradation, who could tell? I dared not try to pierce that dread obscurity. From what might lie beyond that threshold my thoughts shrank back, appalled. The whole thing seemed like some hideous dream from which I should presently awaken, trembling, but with a sigh of relief. And yet it was not. Unbelievable as was this awful thing that had descended upon me in a moment, it was yet but too real for any hope of awakening.

And what of my father? For him, too, the old pleasant life was at an end. The quiet gaiety, the serene happiness of his home was gone for ever. Henceforth he would be a lonely man, mourning the loss of his companion and cherishing a bitter resentment against the man who had stolen her away. But what would he feel about this ship wreck of my life—for so he would certainly regard it? What portion of the wretchedness and degradation into which I had sold myself would have to be borne by him? It was a question which I had hardly asked myself before; but now, when I thought of his devotion to me, of his sympathy with me and his self-forgetfulness, a sudden misgiving crept into my mind. Was it worth while, after all? If my father and I were both to be made wretched for life, what good had I done by this sacrifice?

I thought of him as he had been this evening and for the last day or two. All his light-heartedness had come back. He was quite himself again. Since I had delivered Mr. Otway's letter, all signs of care had vanished. That letter had apparently put him entirely at his ease; naturally enough, since it had put an end to his immediate difficulties, and since he knew nothing of the price at which it had been purchased. And though I knew better, yet his ease and confidence were not without their effect on me. Under the clear sky and in the sunshine, it was hard to believe that the thunderbolt was still ready to fall. And so it was that, more than once on that night, I found myself asking if it were possible that I had done the wrong thing? Had I been too precipitate?

But it was of no use to think of that now. The bargain had been made, and payment accepted in advance. Nor if it had

been possible for me to go back on a promise voluntarily given—which it obviously was not—could Mr. Otway have been held to his. The original situation would have been created afresh.

Before undressing, I sat down at my little bureau and wrote a letter to my father in case there should be no time on the morrow. For the arrangements—which Mr. Otway had communicated to me in a letter addressed in a feminine handwriting—were necessarily of a somewhat clandestine character. Mr. Otway had obtained a special license and had given notice to the clergyman of a small church on the outskirts of the town, and on the by-road leading to the church I was to meet him on Thursday morning as near as possible to eleven o'clock. There was not likely to be any difficulty in carrying out my part of the arrangement, but nevertheless, it was as well to leave nothing to be done on the morrow.

The letter that I wrote to my father was quite short. There was no need for a long one, since the facts to be communicated were of the simplest and I should probably see him in the course of the day. What I wrote was as follows:

“My dearest Father,

“I am writing to tell you that I am about to do a thing of which I fear you will disapprove. I am going to marry Mr. Otway; and by the time you get this, the marriage will have taken place.

“You will understand why I have done this when I tell you that I accidentally became aware of your difficulties and of the claim which he had on you and you will understand, too, why I have kept my intention secret from you. It was the only way out for us; and you are not to think that I have done it for you only. I was equally concerned, and have acted in my own interests as well as yours.

“Please, dearest, try to forgive me for taking this step without your sanction. You would never have consented, and yet it had to be.

“Your loving daughter,

“HELEN.”

I sealed the letter, and, having addressed it, placed it in my bureau in readiness for the morning. Then I made various little arrangements of my possessions, tidying up my bureau and wardrobe, tearing up letters that had been answered and packing a small trunk with necessary articles of dress, to be sent for on the morrow; and all this I did with a curious stony calm and the sense of setting my affairs in order as if preparing to bid farewell to life. And this calm—a calm like that which persons of character often exhibit in the face of unavoidable death, or on the eve of a dangerous operation, continued even after I went to bed, so that, in contrast to the perturbed nights that I had passed since my interview with Mr. Otway, I presently fell into a sound sleep and slept late into the morning.

---

## VI. — A MEETING AND A PARTING

IT turned out to be easier than I had expected to keep my appointment with Mr. Otway, for my father had business that took him abroad early, and, when I came down to breakfast, he had already left the house; which was a profound relief to me, since it saved me the added misery of a last farewell and the necessity of further deception.

It was half-past ten when, after placing my letter in the salver on the hall table, I set forth from the house. The most direct way to the church was across the town, but the fear of meeting my father or any of my acquaintances led me to the roads that led out from the environs towards the country, and thus skirt the circumference of the town. I walked at a good pace, unconsciously threading my way through the rather complicated maze of by-roads, and still pervaded by the curious, half-dreamy calm that had possessed me on the preceding evening.

As I approached the vicinity of the little church—which was a kind of mission-chapel, in charge of a supernumerary curate—I glanced at my watch and saw that it was five minutes to eleven; and almost at the same moment, on turning a corner, I came in sight of a figure the very first glance at which so completely shattered my self-possession that I felt ready to sink down upon the pavement. There was no mistaking it, though the back was towards me; a huge, ponderous figure that walked away from me with the peculiar gait of the heavy and unathletic man; a silent, deliberate gait that recalls the action of the hind legs of an elephant.

I followed him breathlessly up the rather sordid-looking street, noting that, from time to time, a thin cloud of blue smoke floated over his shoulder. At length, at the corner of an intersecting road, he turned and saw me; upon which he flung away a cigar, and, retracing his steps towards me, saluted me with a flourish of his hat and held out his hand.

“This is good of you, Miss Vardon,” he said, “to be so punctual. I hardly hoped that you would be able to be here so—er—so punctually.”

I took his hand limply, but made no reply. The shock of the sudden encounter was slowly passing off and giving place to a sort of benumbed indifference mingled with vague curiosity. I felt as if I had been drugged or were walking abroad in a hypnotic trance, half conscious and waiting with dull expectancy to see what would happen next. I walked at Mr. Otway's side up the mean little street with a feeling somewhat like that with which one would walk in a dream beside some historical or mythical personage, accepting the incongruous situation from mere mental inertia.

Mr. Otway, too, seemed subdued by the strangeness of the position, or perhaps he was embarrassed by my silence. At any rate, although he occasionally cleared his throat as if about to make a remark, he did not actually speak again until we

turned a corner, when there appeared, embedded in a row of mean houses, a small brick building which, in general shape and design, resembled a large dog-kennel.

"That," said he, "is the church, Miss Vardon—or perhaps I should say, Helen. It is a little difficult to—ah—get used to these—these intimacies, I may say, at so short a notice. No doubt you find it so?"

"Yes," I answered.

"I am sure you do. Naturally. My own name, you may remember, is Lewis. My Christian name, I mean," he added, shying slightly at the word "Christian."

"I remember," said I.

"Quite so. I had no doubt you would. Ahem." He cleared his throat once or twice in an embarrassed manner, and then, as we crossed over towards the church, he continued: "I think we shall find the doors open. The law, I believe, requires it. And we shall find my housekeeper, Mrs. Gregg, inside. She will be one of the witnesses, you know. The other will be the sexton."

The outer door was on the latch, as he had said, and, when he had admitted me, he closed and relatched it. From the dark vestibule, I stepped into the bare, comfortless building, from the white-washed wall of which a great, emblazoned text grinned at me, as if in derision, with the words: "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the House of the Lord.'"

Near the door, on one of the deal benches, the little, frail-looking woman whom I had seen at Mr. Otway's house was seated, conversing with a very bald and rather seedy elderly man; but, as we entered, the man hurried away towards the vestry and the woman rose and came forward a few paces to meet us.

"This is Miss Vardon, Mrs. Gregg," said Mr. Otway, introducing me in a heavy, embarrassed manner.

Mrs. Gregg stared at me with undisguised curiosity and something of hostility in her expression, as she replied: "Ah've seen her before."

"Yes," said Mr. Otway, "I believe you have. Yes. To be sure. Of course. And I—er—hope—in fact, I may say that I—ah—"

What he was going to say I have no idea, and I suspect that he was not very clear himself; but at this moment the man—who was apparently the sexton—emerged from the vestry in company with a young clergyman, vested already in his surplice and carrying a book in his hand.

Apparently everything had been explained and arranged beforehand by Mr. Otway, for, as we advanced up the nave, the curate took his place before the communion table and opened his book. I noticed that he gave me one quick and intense look, full of surprise and curiosity, and thereafter seemed, as far as possible, to avoid even glancing in my direction.

The ceremony began abruptly and without preamble. With dim surprise, I became aware that the clergyman was speaking, or rather reading aloud, in a rapid and indistinct undertone. I listened with but slight attention, and failed, for the most part, to distinguish the words which, I think, was what the curate intended; his half-apologetic mumble being, I believe, designed to mitigate the effect of those coarsely-phrased impertinences with which the service is besprinkled, and which have survived so inappropriately into this age of decent and reticent speech. I tried to fix my thoughts on the ceremony in which I was taking part, but found them constantly wandering away to my father, busying themselves with his present whereabouts and occupation. Was he still at his office? Or had he perchance called in at our house, as he sometimes did, and already seen my letter?

I was brought back to the happenings of the moment by a question addressed to me by name in more distinct tones, and followed by the murmured instruction: "Say I will." I obeyed the gently-spoken command, and then, with my right hand enveloped in a large and flabby grasp, I heard Mr. Otway repeat after the curate the solemn form of words that should mean so much and that was, as now spoken, so empty a mockery; of which the phrase "to have and to hold from this day forward" seemed to separate itself as the only part truly applicable.

Still passive, and conscious only of a certain, dull discomfort and surprise at the incongruity of the whole affair, I permitted our hands to be separated and re-joined, and obediently repeated the form of words as the curate dictated.

"I, Helen Vardon, take thee, Lewis Otway, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth."

It was amazing. These burning words, so charged with love, with utter devotion and self-abandonment I was actually addressing to a mere stranger, to a man who, even now, was but a name attached to an unfamiliar, ungracious personality; upon whose corpse, if he had fallen dead at my feet in the very moment of my speaking, I could have looked with no emotion but relief.

It was an astounding situation. The wonder, the incredibility of it filled my mind to the exclusion of all else until, as Mr. Otway began once more to speak at the curate's dictation, and I became aware that a ring had been slipped on my finger, I realised dimly that the ceremony was complete and that the irrevocable change had occurred.

But even then my thoughts quickly flitted away from this significant scene to others that seemed more deeply to concern me. As I knelt at Mr. Otway's side and the monotonous mumble recommenced, I began once more to wonder where my father was and what he was doing. Had he come in and seen my letter, or had the maid noticed it and taken it to the office? And would he be angry or only grieved? Would he think that I had acted rightly? Or would he condemn my action as ill-

considered or even unnecessary? And lastly, was it just barely possible that I had done the wrong thing? Had I sacrificed myself—and him—without sufficient cause?

Thus my thoughts wandered to and fro to the mumbled accompaniment of the interminable prayers and exhortations that rolled past me in an unheeded stream. At last the ceremony came to an end. Rising from our knees, we trooped after the curate to the vestry, where, as I signed the familiar name in the register, the first clear realization of my changed condition came upon me. But even then the vivid flash of perception was but transient. Hardly had I shaken hands with the clergyman and passed out into the street, when my thoughts sped away once more to my home—my real home—and my father.

For some time after leaving the church Mr. Otway and I walked in silence. He hemmed once or twice and seemed on the point of speaking, but either he could find nothing appropriate to say or he found some difficulty in opening the subject of his thoughts. And meanwhile I pursued my own reflections. At length, however, after one or two preliminary hems, he managed to make a beginning.

“I am afraid, Helen, you may think that I have put rather unfair pressure on you to marry me.”

I roused myself to consider what he had said, and replied, after a slight pause:

“Whatever I may think, I am not complaining. I don’t forget that I accepted your proposal of my own free will; and I intend to try to carry out honestly my part of the bargain.”

“I am glad to hear you say that, Helen,” he said eagerly. “I was afraid you might feel resentful—might think I had driven a rather hard bargain.”

“Perhaps I do,” I replied. “But that doesn’t affect the terms of the bargain. My feelings towards you were no part of the agreement.”

“No; that’s true,” he agreed hastily; but he was visibly crestfallen, and walked by my side for some time without speaking. My thoughts began to wander again; and then, suddenly, there occurred to me a question that I had already asked myself over and over again without finding any answer. Now, moved by a fresh impulse of curiosity, I put it into words.

“Would you mind telling me, Mr. Otway, why you wished to marry me?”

He looked at me in some surprise and a little confusion.

“Why, my dear Helen,” he replied hesitatingly, “there is nothing remarkable about it, is there? I wished to marry you for the same reason that any other man would; because you are a handsome girl—a beautiful girl, I may say—and clever and bright, and, as far as I could judge from your manner to your father, a good, affectionate girl. I have admired you ever since I first met you, a year and a half ago.”

I suppose I looked surprised—I certainly felt so, seeing that he had made no effort to cultivate our acquaintance—for he continued:

“Yes, Helen, I admired you; but as I had nothing to offer in the way of personal attractions, and I did not suppose that my means would be a sufficient set-off for my—ah—personal disadvantages, I kept my admiration to myself. In fact, I suppose, if it had not been for this lucky chance—lucky for me, I mean—a little unfortunate perhaps for you—though not so unfortunate as it might—er—at least I venture to hope that things may turn out—”

He paused awkwardly, as if expecting me to help him. But I made no comment. My momentary curiosity was satisfied. I had heard his explanation, and a very insufficient one it seemed to be. So the sentence remained unfinished, and, in the silence that ensued, my thoughts went back once more to my father.

When would he get my letter? And what would be his feelings when he realized that his daughter—his companion and playmate, his beloved apprentice—was lost to him for ever? And what would be his attitude to Mr. Otway? Deeply resentful, beyond a doubt. His scornful rejection of the proposal had shown that clearly enough. Yes, he would be angry—furiously angry; for quiet and gentle as his manners were, he was a passionate man. He could even be violent, as I knew from one or two experiences. And our doctor, Dr. Sharpe, knew it, too, and had warned him to be careful, had cautioned him not only to avoid over-exertion, but excessive excitement of any kind. The doctor’s words came back to me now with a qualm of uneasiness. I had not thought of that before. His distress, his grief, his anger against the man who had exacted this price from me—all that I had thought of and fretted over. But the actual physical shock that my letter would inflict on him, utterly unprepared as he was—that I had somehow overlooked. And yet it was palpable enough. He would come home expecting to find me waiting for him as usual; and then, without an instant’s warning, in the very twinkling of an eye, he would learn that I had been spirited away out of his life for ever. It would be a terrible blow.

The more I thought of it the more uneasy I became. Supposing he should become seriously ill on receiving my letter. It was quite possible; it was even very probable. And if he should have got my letter already! If he should be, at this very moment, lying, prostrated by the shock, with none but the servants to tend him! As I thought of this dreadful possibility, my anxiety grew, moment by moment; and I was beginning to consider how soon I could contrive to escape to him, to satisfy myself that all was well, when the voice of Mr. Otway broke in on my thoughts. I did not at first gather clearly what he was saying until, by an effort, I detached my attention from the agitating subject of my reflections.

“Of course,” he was saying as I endeavoured to catch up the thread of his remarks, “it answered my purpose as a solitary bachelor; but it won’t do now. We shall have to get quite a different class of house. And we shall want some other servants.

I shall keep Mrs. Gregg, if you don't object, as she has been with me so long and knows my ways, but we shall want a couple of maids in addition, I suppose."

"Is Mrs. Gregg your only servant?" I asked, rather absently.

"Yes," he replied; "that is to say, the only resident servant. She has a girl to help her in the mornings with the housework and to mind the place when she goes out shopping. That is how she was able to attend at the church this morning."

As he was speaking, we turned into the quiet, countrified road in which he lived, and a few more steps brought us to the house. Mrs. Gregg, who had apparently hurried on in advance by a different route, was standing at the open door talking to a girl of about sixteen, and, as we ascended the steps, she addressed Mr. Otway.

"I've got to see to some things in the town. D'ye want Lizzie to stay or will ye open the door yourself if anyone comes?"

"Oh, she needn't stay, Mrs. Gregg," was the reply. "I shan't be going out. But don't be any longer than you can help."

On this Mrs. Gregg dismissed the girl, and followed her out, shutting the door after her. Mr. Otway hung his hat on a peg in the hall, and placing his umbrella in the stand, remarked apologetically:

"Mrs. Gregg's manner is not all that might be desired in a servant; but she is a capable woman and absolutely trustworthy. She comes from the North, you know, where manners run a little more blunt than with us. Shall I show you your room?"

Without waiting for a reply, he preceded me up the stairs to the first floor, where he ushered me into a bedroom and stood by the door with an embarrassed and rather deprecating air, casting a glance of obvious disparagement over its somewhat meagre appointments.

"It's a poor place to bring you to, Helen," he remarked, "but that can be mended. It was good enough for a bachelor. You'll find the wardrobe and chest of drawers empty when you send for your things. Mine are in the dressing-room—that little room to the right. And now I'll leave you in possession for the present."

With this he went out, closing the door behind him, and I heard his soft, heavy tread descending the stairs.

For some time after he had gone I stood looking about me in absolute dismay. The room was mean almost to sordidness—surprisingly mean for the habitation of an admittedly wealthy man. But it was not that which filled me with consternation. Delicately as I had been brought up, the mere surroundings of life were of no great consideration to me. What appalled me utterly was the fact now brought home to me with overwhelming force; that I was no more my own; that I had surrendered myself to the possession of another person, a strange man, towards whom I felt a growing repugnance. This was not my room: it was our room. No longer had I any rights of privacy or of personal reticence. I was his, "to have and to hold from this day forward," with no power of escape or protest against the most repulsive familiarities. I had voluntarily surrendered, not only my liberty, but even the appearance of security from the most outrageous intrusions.

Of course I had known all this before. But in the hurry and rush, the alarms and agitations of the events that had forced me to my hasty decision, perception had been partly obscured. I had known what I was doing, but had only dimly realized. It had needed the sight of that mean room, with its significant contents and the presence of that man who stood at my side as joint occupier, to light up the vague perception into realization of the most horrid vividness.

Presently I began, with the dull curiosity of a prisoner introduced to a new cell, to explore the room, opening the empty wardrobe and pulling out the ill-fitting drawers of the plain pine chest. Then I peeped into the dressing-room—a bare little closet, furnished with a wash-stand, a dressing-table and a chest of drawers—and even stepped in to glance over the half-blind down into the garden and street beyond. I was about to turn away when I noticed a man approaching the house at a rapid pace; and in an instant my heart leaped with mingled joy and alarm.

It was my father.

I watched him nervously as he strode towards the house, and my fears rose with each step that he took. Every movement was expressive of excitement and anger; the swift stride, the forward-thrust chin, the very set of the shoulders; the way in which he grasped his stick by the middle, as if aiming a blow, was full of menace. As he drew nearer I shrank behind the curtain, but still watched him; watched him with growing alarm, for now I could see that his eyes were wild under the frowning brows, his mouth was set and his face was of a strange, blotchy, purple colour. He looked as if he had been drinking, but I knew he had not.

As he reached the gate, he wrenched it open violently, and, entering, slammed it behind him; a thing I had never before known him to do. He strode up the path, without a glance upwards, and disappeared from my sight, and a moment later there came a wild jangling of the bell, followed by a thundering knock at the door.

I hesitated, undecided what I should do. Should I go down and meet him with appeasing words, or should I wait until the first explosion of his wrath had subsided? I crept out of the bedroom to the landing and stood with my hand on the baluster rail, listening. I heard Mr. Otway walk along the hall, softly and rather slowly. I heard him open the door, and then my father's voice rose, loud and fierce.

"Where is my daughter, Otway? Is she here?"

"Yes," Mr. Otway replied; "she is upstairs. We have just returned from the church."

"Do you mean to say," my father demanded, "that the marriage has actually taken place?"

"Yes," Mr. Otway answered. "We were married half an hour ago."

"What!" roared my father. "After my letter! Did you tell her about that letter? You didn't, you damned scoundrel! You've tricked her! You've swindled her!"

"As to your letter, Mr. Vardon," I heard Mr. Otway reply, "I haven't seen it myself, yet. The morning's correspondence is still—"

Here a door closed, and his voice became inaudible. They had gone into one of the rooms. I staggered back into the bedroom and sank on to a chair, trembling from head to foot. In the name of God, what did my father mean? Tricked! Swindled! Could it be true? Was it actually possible that I had been lured into the arms of this ungainly lout by a false pretence? It was incredible. And yet—As the first shock of this amazing statement began to pass off, a storm of anger and indignation arose in my breast; and I was on the point of rising to go down and confront Mr. Otway, when the house shook to a heavy concussion. I sprang from the chair, and flying on the wings of terror down the stairs, opened the first door that I came to.

Years have rolled by since that unforgettable moment, but even now, as I write, the tableau that met my eyes as I opened the door rises before me vivid and distinct as the dreadful reality. I saw it even then but for a single instant, as I darted into the room; but it has remained with me and will remain till my dying day.

My father lay motionless on the floor near the fire-place; his face an awful, livid grey, his eyes staring fixedly at the ceiling; and from a small wound on the right side of his forehead a few drops of dark blood trickled down his temple. Beside him, and stooping over him, stood Mr. Otway, with ashen face and dropped jaw, the very picture of horror and mortal fear; and in Mr. Otway's right hand was grasped my father's stick, a stout Malacca, with a heavily-loaded silver knob.

I flew past him and sank on my knees by my father's side; and in that moment I knew that my father was dead. I had never seen a dead person before. But it was unmistakable. I spoke to him; I called to him in an agonised whisper; I patted his head and touched his face. But all the while I knew that he was dead; that he was gone from me for ever. Even as I looked at him, the livid grey of his face faded to a dead white; the staring eyes relaxed and seemed to sink into their sockets; and the mouth slowly fell open. It was death. I knew it. Dazed, stricken, almost bereft of consciousness and the power of thought, I knew it, with the dull certainty of despair.

As I had entered the room, Mr. Otway had started up with a look of terror, and when I sank at my father's side, I had heard him move away softly towards the writing-table. He was now back and once more stooping over my father's body. I felt that he was there, although my eyes were fixed on that pallid face that gave back no answering glance. Presently he spoke, in a hushed, awe-stricken whisper.

"This is terrible, Helen! Can't we do anything?"

I looked up at him with a sudden flush of loathing and detestation; and as I looked, I noticed that he no longer held the stick. I rose slowly to my feet and faced him.

"No," I answered. "He is dead. He is dead. Mr. Otway, you have killed my father."

As I faced him, he shrank away from me, staring at me as if I had been some horrid apparition. His face, blanched to a horrible white and shiny with sweat, was dreadful to look upon; the face of abject, mortal terror.

"Helen!" he gasped. "Helen! For God's sake don't look at me like that! It was not I who killed him. I swear to God it was not. He fainted. I was trying to take the stick from him—I had to, or he would have killed me—and his head struck the mantelpiece. Then he fainted and fell. I am telling you the truth, Helen. I am, before God!"

To this I made no reply. Whether I believed him or not, I cannot say. Stunned as I was by this frightful thing that had befallen, I could only look at him with utter loathing as the cause of it all.

"Helen!" he continued, imploringly, "say you believe me! I swear I never touched him. And don't look at me like that! Helen! Why do you look at me in that awful way?"

He clasped his hands, and, casting a fearful glance at my poor father's corpse, moaned: "My God! my God! but this is horrible! Horrible! Do you think he is really dead? Don't you think—can't we do anything? If a doctor were here—if we only had someone to send—Shall I go and fetch a doctor, Helen?"

"Yes," I answered, "you had better."

"I will," he said. "But you do believe me, don't you? I swear—"

"You had better go at once, Mr. Otway," I interrupted.

He gave me one pitiful glance of appeal, and then, with a despairing moan, turned and left the room. I heard him hurry along the hall and a moment later the outer door closed.

Once more I sank on my knees beside my father, and, taking the passive hand in mine, looked into the pallid face, dimly surprised to find something new and unfamiliar creeping into it. I did not weep. The blow was too crushing, too overwhelming to call forth common emotion. Nor did I think coherently; but knelt, looking dumbly into the face that was

my father's, and yet was not, wrapped in a sort of dreadful trance, conscious only of bitter pain and a sense of unutterable loss.

After a time—I do not know how long—I became aware of sounds of movement in the house, and presently soft foot steps approached the room. The door, which Mr. Otway had left ajar, opened with a faint creak, and the voice of Mrs. Gregg ejaculated: “Sakes! What’s this?”

She stole on tip-toe into the room until she stood beside me, looking down with a scared expression at my father’s corpse.

“Why!” she exclaimed, “the man’s dead! Who is he?”

“He is my father, Mrs. Gregg,” I replied.

She stood for some time in silence, apparently considering the import of my answer. Then she walked round and looked down curiously at the wound on the forehead.

“Where is Mr. Otway?” she asked.

“He has gone to fetch a doctor,” I answered.

“A doctor!” she repeated. “And what might be the good of a doctor when the man is dead? D’ye know how it happened?”

Before I had time to reply to her question, there came the sound of a latch-key inserted into the hall door. She turned quickly and made as if she would leave the room, but, as she reached the threshold, Mr. Otway entered, followed by the doctor, and she fell back to let them pass. I rose to my feet, and the doctor—a hard-faced, middle-aged man whom I knew by sight—knelt down in my place. He lifted the limp hand and laid his finger on the wrist; he raised the eyelid and touched the glazing eyeball; then drawing out his stethoscope he listened for some time at the chest over the region of the heart. And meanwhile we all stood watching him in a profound silence through which the ticking of the clock broke noisily, as it had done on that fateful night when I had sat in this very room unconsciously preparing the elements of this tragedy.

At length the doctor rose, and, folding his stethoscope, deliberately slipped it into his pocket and turned to Mr. Otway.

“I am sorry to say that it is as you feared,” said he. “He is quite dead. From what you have told me, I should say it was a case of heart failure from over-excitement. Have there been any previous attacks?”

“No,” I answered. “But I think Dr. Sharpe considered that his heart was weak.”

“Ah! He did, did he? Well, I had better call on Dr. Sharpe and hear what he knows about the case.” He walked round, and, stooping down, examined the wound attentively. Then, without looking at Mr. Otway, he asked: “You say he struck his head against the corner of the mantelpiece? This corner, I suppose?”

He touched the right hand corner of the marble shelf, and, as Mr. Otway assented, I saw him place his shoulder against it as if to measure its height.

“Was that when he was in the act of falling?” he asked, with his eyes fixed on the wound.

“Yes,” replied Mr. Otway. “At least, I think so—I should say yes, certainly—that is, to the best of my belief. Of course, Dr. Bury, you will understand that I am a little confused in my recollection. The—ah—the circumstances were very agitating and—ah—confusing. Is the point of any importance?”

“Well, you see,” the doctor replied a little drily, “when a man dies suddenly and only one person is present—as I understand was the case in this instance—every point is of importance.”

“Yes, of course. It would be, naturally.”

Mr. Otway spoke these words in a low, husky voice, and, as I looked at him, I saw that he had turned as pale as death and that his face had again broken out into a greasy sweat. Nor was I the only observer. Mrs. Gregg, who had been standing in the corner by the door, quietly attentive to all that passed, was now watching her employer narrowly and with a very curious expression. There was a brief interval of silence, and then Mr. Otway having cleared his throat once or twice, asked, in the same husky, unsteady voice:

“I suppose, when you have talked the matter over with Dr. Sharpe, you will be able to certify the death in the usual way?”

“In the usual way?” Dr. Bury repeated. “Yes: in the way that is usual in cases of sudden death. Of course, I shan’t be able to give an ordinary certificate. I shall write to the coroner, giving him the facts, and he will decide whether an inquest is necessary or whether he can issue a certificate on my statement.”

“I see,” said Mr. Otway. “You will report the facts—and, I suppose, you will state what your own views on the case are?”

“I shall make any comments that seem to be called for, but, of course, the facts are what the coroner wants.”

“And would you consider that, in a case like this, an inquiry is necessary?”

“I don’t know that I should,” was the reply; “but it doesn’t rest with me. Would you like me to help you to move him? You can’t leave him lying here, and you can hardly have him carried to his own house by daylight.”

“No,” Mr. Otway agreed, “we could not. If you will kindly help me to carry him to the drawing-room, we can lay him on the sofa.”



The two men raised my poor father, and, while I supported his head, they carried him to the drawing-room and laid him on the sofa, when Dr. Bury, having taken an embroidered cover from a table and spread it over him, drew down the blinds.

"Perhaps," said he, "you had better leave him here until we know what the coroner intends to do. In case he should decide—"

Here he glanced a little uncomfortably at me, and I realised that he would rather speak of the grim details unembarrassed by my presence. Accordingly, I stole from the room and returned to the one from which we had just come. The door was open as we had left it, and, as I came opposite to it, treading softly, as was my habit, I saw Mrs. Gregg standing by the roll-top table with my father's stick in her hand, apparently testing the weight of the heavy lead loading that the silver knob concealed. She started as she suddenly became aware of my presence, but, quickly recovering her self-possession, asked:

"Will this be your father's stick?"

I answered that it was, whereupon she remarked, as she stood it in the corner behind the writing-table, whence, I suppose, she had taken it:

"I thought 'twas a stranger to me. A fine stick it is, too, and a trusty companion 'twould be on a dark night and a lonely road."

To this I made no reply; and when she had glanced at the clock and peered curiously into my father's hat, which stood on the table, she turned abruptly and left the room.

---

## VII. — THE TERMS OF RELEASE

WHEN Mrs. Gregg had gone, I shut the door, and, sinking on to the chair by the writing-table, tried to collect my thoughts. But though I was vaguely conscious that this dreadful disaster vitally affected my position, and must in some way affect my actions, overwhelming grief and a sense of irreparable loss rendered coherent thought impossible. My father was dead. That was all I could think of. My one perfect friend, who had absorbed all my affection and given me all of his, had gone out of my life. Henceforward I was alone in the world.

Presently I heard Dr. Bury leave the house, and then the door opened, and Mr. Otway came into the room, looking like a man who had risen prematurely after a severe illness. He dropped limply on a chair, and sat, with his hands on his knees, looking at me with a pitiable expression of misery and consternation.

"This is a terrible affair, Helen," he said in a broken voice. "Terrible! Terrible!"

I made no reply, but looked at him, half-curiously and resentfully. In the extremity of my grief, I had no pity to spare for him who was the cause of this dreadful calamity.

"Won't you speak to me, Helen?" he said, imploringly. "Won't you try to give me some comfort? Think of the awful position I am in."

At his miserable egotism, my grief blazed up into sudden wrath.

"You!" I exclaimed, scornfully. "And what of me? You have robbed me of my father—of all that matters to me in life—and now you ask me to comfort you!"

He stretched out his hands to me with a gesture of entreaty.

"Don't say that, Helen!" he implored. "Don't say I robbed you of him. It was an accident that no one could foresee. And after all, you know, Helen," he added, persuasively, "if you have lost a father, you have gained a devoted husband."

At these words I gazed at him in utter amazement; and quite suddenly the confusion of my thoughts began to clear up. I began to realise that some action was called for, though what that action was I could not clearly see at the moment. But what I did see quite clearly was that the thing he was suggesting was utterly unthinkable.

"Do you suppose, Mr. Otway," I demanded, "that I could possibly live with you as your wife after what has happened?"

"But you are my wife, Helen," he protested.

"I agreed to marry you, Mr. Otway, in order to save my father. My father has not been saved."

"That was, no doubt, your motive, Helen," he answered. "I don't deny that. But, actually, you agreed to be my wife on certain specific conditions, which I carried out—or, at least, was prepared—"

He hesitated with sudden embarrassment; and the embarrassment, with the statement, in the midst of which he had broken off, gave me my cue.

"Mr. Otway," I said, "you had a letter from my father. What was in that letter?"

At this question his self-possession broke down completely.

"I have had no letter," he stammered; "at least, that is to say, I haven't seen—he spoke of a letter, but—but the fact is, in my excitement this morning I forgot to look at my correspondence. If there was a letter, it must be in the box still."

"Let us go and see if it is there," said I. My confusion of mind was fast clearing up, and as my wits returned, I found myself shaping a definite course of action. I rose and accompanied him to the hall door and stood by while he unlocked the letter-box. As he opened the trap, I perceived that the box contained a single letter; and even in that agitating moment, the significance of the fact struck me. It was strange, indeed, that the morning's delivery should bring to a man of business no more than a single letter.

He picked the missive out, and, having glanced at it, handed it to me. I looked at it, and, perceiving that it was in my father's handwriting, tore open the envelope and drew out the letter, which I read aloud. It ran thus:—

"Stonebury, Maidstone.

"25th April, 1908.

"Dear Otway,

"You will, no doubt, be glad to learn that our little difficulty is at an end. The unexpected has happened. My friend has been able to raise the wherewith to repay the loan that I made to him, and has sent a cheque for the full amount. I have paid it into my bank, but, as a measure of security, in view of the magnitude of the sum, I am waiting until the cheque is cleared before sending you mine. However, you may expect to receive payment in full in the course of three clear days from this date.

"With many thanks for your forbearance,

"I am, yours very truly,

"W. H. VARDON."

As I finished reading, I looked Mr. Otway sternly in the face.

"You realize," I said, "that this letter makes our agreement void?"

He did not reply immediately, but stood with his eyes averted from me and his fingers working nervously.

"Do you realize that?" I demanded.

"Well, in a way, yes," he replied, hesitatingly. "If it had reached me sooner—that is to say, if I had seen it—"

"If you had seen it!" I interrupted, angrily. "What has that to do with the question? The letter was delivered to you, as the post-mark shows, before you left the house. It came by the first post. If you chose to leave it unopened, that is your affair. When you met me this morning, the agreement was already at an end."

He glanced nervously along the hall towards the kitchen stairs.

"We needn't stand here," he said. "Let us go into the study and talk this affair over quietly."

He led the way back to the room we had left, and, having shut the door, turned to me deprecatingly.

"It's an unfortunate business, Helen," he said. "Very unfortunate. Of course, I ought to have looked over the morning's post, but, in my natural excitement, I overlooked it; and now I don't see that there is anything for us to do but make the best of it."

I looked at him in amazement. "But," I exclaimed, "you don't seem to realize that our agreement was at an end before the marriage took place."

"No, I don't," he replied. "You see this letter is only a notification—a conditional promise to pay. It doesn't discharge the debt."

At this my patience gave out completely. "Let us have no evasions or quibbles, Mr. Otway," I said. "Our agreement was at an end before the marriage took place, and I have no doubt that you knew it. You obtained my consent by fraud."

"I don't admit that," said he. "But even if it were so, what would you propose?"

"I propose to have the marriage annulled," I replied.

He shook his head. "That is impossible, Helen," he said. "The marriage is not voidable. An action for nullity can be sustained only on certain conditions, none of which exist in our case."

"But," I exclaimed, "my consent was obtained on a fraudulent pretence! Surely that is a sufficient ground for claiming to have the marriage annulled!"

"I deny the fraud," he replied, doggedly. "But in any case it is not material. The marriage was perfectly regular, you are of full adult age, you gave your consent without compulsion, and there are none of those impediments which the law recognises. I assure you, Helen, that our marriage is not voidable—that it cannot be annulled by ordinary process."

Little as I trusted to his truth or honour, I suspected that what he was now saying was true. But yet the position was unthinkable.

"Do you mean to tell me," I demanded, "that the law would uphold a marriage between a woman and the murderer of her father?"

He winced as if I had struck him a blow, and his face grew sensibly paler.

"For the love of God, Helen," he entreated, "don't talk like that! You don't believe it. I can see you don't. You know I did not kill your father."

"I know nothing," I replied, "but this—that when I came into the room my father was lying dead with a wound on his forehead and that you were standing over him with a formidable weapon in your hand."

I thought he would have fainted. He sank into a chair with a gasp that was almost a sob, and the sweat streamed down his pallid face. He was a pitiable spectacle; but yet I felt no pity for him. I was bent only on escaping from the net in which he had caught me.

"I swear I never touched him, Helen," he protested, breathlessly. "I swear it. But you know I did not. You are only saying this to torture me. You don't believe it. I know you don't."

"It is of little importance what I believe, Mr. Otway," I replied, coldly. "The decision will not rest with me. You will be judged by others on the facts which I have stated."

He made no immediate reply. He seemed absolutely paralysed by terror, and sat, breathing quickly and staring at me, as if he expected me to kill him then and there. At length he spoke in a husky, indistinct voice.

"Helen. What is it you want of me?"

"I want this marriage set aside," I answered.

"But," he protested, "I have told you that is impossible. It cannot be annulled in the ordinary sense. Be reasonable, Helen. Let us talk the matter over and see if we can't come to terms."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well," he said, persuasively, "I should like to meet your wishes if I can. I am not unreasonable. I can see that, as things are, you would not wish to live with me as my wife. We can't get the marriage annulled, but we can arrange a separation—a temporary separation, say, without prejudice to any future arrangements—by mutual consent. What do you say to that?"

"If the marriage cannot be set aside, I suppose a separation would be the next best thing. Do I understand that you are willing to agree to a separation?"

"Yes," he replied; "on certain conditions I am willing to agree to a separation—a temporary separation, you know."

"What are your conditions?" I asked.

He cleared his throat once or twice, as if in doubt how best to put the matter. Then, avoiding my eye, he began, hesitatingly, but with an obsequiously persuasive manner.

"The exact circumstances of your father's most lamentable death, Helen, are known to you and to me and to no one else. As I have told you, and I am convinced that you believe, the heart attack which killed him came as we were struggling for possession of his stick. It was due to the excitement and the violent exertion. Perhaps the blow on the head from the corner of the mantelpiece may have had something to do with it, for the fainting attack came on almost directly afterwards. He relaxed his hold on the stick and fell, leaving it in my hands. There was no violence on my part. I never struck him or did anything that could in any way make me responsible for his death. That is the truth, Helen, and I am convinced that you believe it, in spite of what you have said."

"I have only your word that it is the truth," said I.

"Exactly," he agreed. "But you believe me. You know what your father's state of health was, and you know that he was liable, on occasions, to be —er—somewhat violent. So you believe me. But others, who have not the knowledge that you have—ah—might—ah—might not believe me."

"I haven't said that I do," I interposed. "However, we will let that pass. Go on, please."

He paused to wipe his face with his handkerchief, and then proceeded:

"You said just now that when you entered the room you saw me standing over your father with a weapon in my hand."

"So I did."

"I know you did, Helen. You saw me holding your father's loaded stick. It is quite true. But—it would—ah—greatly simplify matters if—well, if that circumstance were not communicated to—ah—to anyone else."

"You mean to say," said I, "that you want me to suppress the fact that I saw you standing over my father's dead body holding a loaded stick?"

"I wouldn't use the word 'suppress,' Helen," he replied, passing his handkerchief once more over his haggard face. "I only ask you to refrain—in the interests of justice and—ah—of common humanity—from mentioning a circumstance that—ah—mentioned, might mislead the hearers, and might, conceivably, lead them to quite erroneous conclusions. It is a reasonable thing to ask. No doubt you blame me; you look upon me as the cause of this dreadful trouble—which, in a certain sense, I admit I am. But you would not be vindictive, Helen, or unjust. You would not wish to see me placed in the dock—perhaps even convicted—think of that, Helen! Convicted and sentenced when I am absolutely innocent! My God! It would be an awful thing! You wouldn't wish to have such a frightful miscarriage of justice as that on your conscience, I am sure."

"It wouldn't be on my conscience," I replied, coldly. "The verdict would not be mine; and besides, I have only your word that you are innocent. You have made the statement to me, and you could make it to others, who would take it for what it is worth."

He clasped his hands passionately and leaned forward towards me with an imploring gesture.

"Helen!" he exclaimed. "Don't be so hard, so cold! Have you no pity for me? Think of my awful position—an innocent man, but yet with appearances so horribly against me. And the whole issue is in your hands. You were not present when—it happened. You have only to say so and to refrain from making any unnecessary additions to that statement, and no miscarriage of justice can occur. I am not asking you to say anything that is not true; I am only asking you to keep irrelevant and misleading matter out of the inquiry. Do this, Helen, and I promise to execute a deed surrendering all claims on you—at least for a time."

I made no immediate answer. Mr. Otway was perfectly right on one point. I did not believe that he had killed my father. I think I only half believed it, even, at the awful moment of the discovery; for the alarming appearance that my father had presented as he strode up the garden path, with his wild eyes and his strange, blotchy colour, had made me fear a catastrophe; and when the catastrophe had almost immediately followed, it was natural that my mind should refer it to a cause already considered rather than to one totally unexpected. Moreover, Mr. Otway's account of the tragedy was intrinsically probable; it fitted the facts that were known to me; whereas the supposition that he had killed my father was wildly improbable.

It is not to be supposed, however, that, in my present agitated state, I reasoned the matter out consciously in this methodical fashion. But unconsciously, and perhaps vaguely, my mind had worked along these lines to a conclusion; and that conclusion was that Mr. Otway's account of what had happened was substantially correct. Nevertheless, I was not prepared to admit this at the moment; indeed, my whole desire was to be rid of the man's irksome presence—to be alone with my grief.

"I can't give you an answer now, Mr. Otway," I said. "I am not in a condition to discuss anything. I want to go home and be quiet."

He acquiesced with surprising readiness, no doubt encouraged by my tacit abandonment of the accusation.

"Of course you do," he agreed. "It has been a fearful shock for you. Go home and keep yourself quiet. I shall hear from Dr. Bury, in the course of the day, what the coroner intends to do, and I will call and let you know. And I will bring a draft of the deed for you to look at. The sooner we arrive at a settlement, the better. And, Helen, let me beg you not to say anything to anyone about—anything that might complicate matters. You understand what I mean."

I nodded wearily and moved towards the door. I was still wearing my outdoor clothes, so I had no preparations to make. Mr. Otway opened the door for me and I passed out into the hall; but before leaving the house, I turned back into the darkened drawing-room, and, raising the cover from my father's face, kissed his already cold cheek.

"Good-bye, dearest! Good-bye!" I whispered, passionately; and then, feeling the tears rushing to my eyes, I kissed him again, and, replacing the cover, hurried from the room. Mr. Otway was standing at the hall door to let me out, and timidly offered his hand; but I walked quickly past him, and, running down the steps, made my way out through the gate that had admitted me to my ruin and my father to his death.

---

## VIII. — "WHOM GOD HATH JOINED—"

OUR states of mind in certain unforeseen circumstances are sometimes surprising, even, to ourselves. As I walked away from Mr. Otway's house, I think I was dimly surprised at my own self-possession. The worst had happened. The calamity which I had feared, and which I had made such sacrifices to avert, had befallen; and yet I was comparatively calm. My heart ached, it is true, with a grief such as I had never known before; with a sense of irreparable loss and a feeling of utter loneliness and desolation; but yet, under it all was a certain indefinable peace.

Looking back with more natural knowledge and experience, this state of mind is not difficult to understand. My father's sudden death was a crushing calamity; but, in the very moment of its happening, the incubus of my relation to Mr. Otway was lifted. For, though I was not at the time conscious of the fact, I now see clearly that, even as I passed out of the house of the man whom the law regarded as my husband, my mind was made up that I had done with Mr. Otway.

Moreover, my new trouble was in other ways more easy to bear than the misery of the last few days. My marriage had seemed, in a manner, to put an end to my life. It had offered nothing but an unending vista of wretchedness, an unending submission to a state of things that was intolerable even to think of. But this new catastrophe was sudden and final. The blow had fallen, once for all; shattering, indeed, my present, but calling upon me instantly to make provision for the future. And in action, the necessity of which forced itself upon me even before I reached home, I found, if not relief from my sorrow, at least some temporary distraction.

As I let myself in with my latch-key, our housemaid met me in the hall to announce that lunch had been waiting for some time, and to ask me if I knew at what time my father would come in.

"My father is dead, Jessie," I replied. "He died suddenly at Mr. Otway's house about an hour ago. I can't tell you any more just now."

I walked past her and ascended the stairs to my room, leaving her standing in the hall as if petrified; but, before I reached the landing, I heard her rush away towards the kitchen, making the house resound with her hysterical shrieks and lamentations. It was very dreadful and distressing, but yet it had a steadying effect on me, reminding me of my isolated position and of the need for firmness and self-control. In a few minutes I came down, and disregarding Jessie's sobs and tears, sat out the simple formalities of lunch as a matter of discipline and example, and even compelled myself to take a certain amount of food.

As I sat at my silent and solitary meal, my thoughts were busy with the many things that had to be done. Not willingly, indeed; for I longed to be quiet and nurse my grief—to forget everything but my sorrow and my great bereavement. But that was impossible. I was practically alone in the world, for I had no near relatives, and all that had to be done must be done, or at least directed, by me. There was my father's funeral to be arranged, the business to be transferred or wound up, the property to be realised—and there was Mr. Otway.

Naturally enough, my thoughts constantly came back to him. As to his moral claim on me, it was null and void. Whether he had, as I suspected, seen my father's letter and deliberately left it unopened, or whether he had simply neglected to look for it, made no difference. It had been delivered to him, and thereupon our agreement had ceased to exist. But if he had no moral claim, he had, apparently, a legal hold on me which would have to be considered. If he could be induced to surrender that, the position would be greatly simplified. And he was ready to surrender it on a certain condition.

To Mr. Otway's proposal my thoughts came back again and again. The condition that he had made was not an unreasonable one, or, at least, it did not appear so to me. My father had died when they were alone together. They had admittedly been quarrelling; my father bore the mark of a heavy blow; and Mr. Otway had been found standing over the body with a loaded stick in his hand. The appearances suggested that he had killed my father. And yet I was convinced that he had not. Profoundly loathing him as the cause of all my misfortunes, I still felt that he was, in this respect, an innocent man; and common justice demanded that he should not be made to suffer for a crime that he had not committed.

Now what was my position in the affair? Practically I held the scales of justice. The one absolutely damning fact was in my sole possession; and I alone, in all probability, would appreciate the misleading appearances which that fact created. That was my dilemma. I could make known the fact itself to those who should judge him, but could I make them understand how little it was worth? It seemed very doubtful. I had trembled for my father's safety and had seen him come in at the gate, already in a dangerous condition. They had not. They might easily fail to weigh his state of health against that one, apparently, sinister fact of the loaded stick. In short, it came to this: that if I mentioned what I had seen, Mr. Otway ran a serious risk of being punished for a crime which he had not committed, whereas if I refrained from mentioning it, justice would take its proper course.

That, I think, is, in effect, how I argued. Neither the logician nor the jurist will commend me. But women have their own ways of looking at things, and one of those ways is somewhat to confuse conviction with knowledge. A thing firmly believed is apt to present itself as a thing known. I had come to the conclusion that Mr. Otway was innocent of my father's death, and having done so, had unconsciously treated his innocence as a fact that was within my knowledge.

After lunch, I telephoned to the office, asking Mr. Jackson, my father's managing clerk, to come and see me; and while I was waiting for him, I took down from the study shelves a treatise of the Law of Husband and Wife, and turned over those of its unsavoury pages which dealt with suits for nullity. Apparently Mr. Otway was right. So far as I could make out, the circumstances of our marriage afforded no grounds for such a suit. I was married irrevocably. My complete freedom was gone beyond recall; I should have to be content with such incomplete freedom as is conferred by a deed of separation.

I had just returned the book to the shelf when Mr. Jackson arrived and entered the room looking very flurried and uncomfortable.

"What a dreadful thing this is, Miss Vardon!" he exclaimed. "Shocking! Shocking! So unexpected! I need not say how much we all sympathize with you."

"It is very kind of you," I said, offering him a chair.

"Not at all," he rejoined. "It is a terrible misfortune for all of us. Would it distress you very much to tell me how it happened?"

"It was for that purpose that I sent for you, Mr. Jackson; to tell you exactly what has happened and to ask your advice," and here I gave him a brief account of the events of the morning.

At the mention of my marriage he looked profoundly surprised, but also, I thought, distinctly relieved; but he did not make any comment until I had finished the whole tragic story, when he remarked:

"I am very glad to hear that you are married, Miss Vardon—or rather, I should say, Mrs. Otway—to a man of such very substantial means, if I am rightly informed."

"Why are you glad?" I asked.

"Because," he replied, "it disposes of rather a difficulty. Your father was a man of great abilities and an excellent lawyer, but he was somewhat inattentive to the financial side of his profession. I am afraid you would have been left rather badly provided for."

"I am sorry to hear that," said I, "because I am not proposing to live with Mr. Otway. I have asked him to agree to a

separation.”

Mr Jackson raised his eyebrows. “May I ask why?” he enquired.

“I don’t want to go into details just now,” I answered, “but I may say that the marriage was an affair of accommodation; I supposed my father to be in a position of embarrassment, and I made the arrangement with Mr. Otway without his knowledge. It turns out that I was mistaken. He was not embarrassed. When the marriage took place, I was under a misapprehension and I was misled by Mr. Otway. Accordingly, I have asked to have a separation deed drawn up.”

“Does he agree to the separation?”

“He has not yet, but I think he will; so I shall have to consider my resources, after all.”

“But,” Mr Jackson objected, “he will have to make you an allowance.”

“That,” I said, “is impossible. If I repudiate the marriage, I could not, of course, allow him to support me.”

“Why not?” demanded Mr. Jackson. “He is legally bound to. You are his wife. While the marriage stands, you can’t marry anybody else. Besides, he is not likely to raise any objection. He is a lawyer, you know.”

“I am not thinking of him: I am thinking of myself. I wish to be under no obligations to Mr. Otway, and I shall not accept any assistance from him.”

“I am sorry to hear you say that,” Mr. Jackson said, gloomily; “because I am afraid you will be rather badly off. The business is a very personal one, and is worth practically nothing to sell. If I were a qualified solicitor, I might be able to carry it on. But I’m not; and I doubt if anyone would care to buy the good-will at any price. Still, I’ll see what can be done. As to your father’s will, I happen to know that you are the residuary legatee—practically the sole legatee—but what that amounts to, I shouldn’t like to say. Mighty little, I fear. However, it’s of no use to worry you with these matters now. If you will authorize me to look into your father’s affairs, I will let you know exactly how things stand; and if I could be of service to you in any way, I hope you’ll let me know. There’s the funeral, for instance—”

He paused suddenly, and ran an uncomfortable eye along the rows of law books on the shelves.

“You are very kind, Mr. Jackson,” I said, “and your help will be invaluable. As my father’s friend, I should like you to take charge of the funeral arrangements, if you would be so good.”

The rest of our conversation was concerned with the various things which had to be done during the next day or two, and it left with a feeling of the warmest gratitude to this quiet and rather dry man of business, whose sympathy took such a practical and acceptable form.

It was past six o’clock when the red-eyed Jessie came to the study to announce that Mr. Otway was waiting in the drawing-room; and there I found him wandering restlessly round by the walls and making a show of examining the pictures. He was still very pale and looked haggard and weary, but yet he held out his hand to me with a certain confidence.

“I think, Helen,” said he, “that you will be a little relieved at my news. I have seen Dr. Bury, and he tells me that the coroner will be satisfied with his evidence and Dr. Sharpe’s.”

“Do you mean that there is to be no inquest?” I demanded, with sudden suspicion.

“No, no,” he replied. “Of course, there will be an inquest. But the coroner thinks that the circumstances do not call for a post-mortem. I thought you would be glad to know that. The—er—body will remain where it is until the jury have viewed it, and then it can be brought here for the—ah—the funeral.”

I nodded but made no comment on this statement, and he continued after a brief pause:

“I suppose, Helen, you would like me to act for you in regard to the funeral arrangements.”

“Thank you, Mr. Otway,” I replied, “but Mr. Jackson has very kindly undertaken that for me.”

He looked somewhat crestfallen at this, and said, deprecatingly:

“I am sorry you did not leave the arrangements to me. It would have looked better.” Which it undeniably would—from his point of view.

As I made no rejoinder, there followed a slightly uncomfortable pause, during which he was evidently bracing himself up for what was the real object of his visit. At length he began nervously:

“Have you been able to give any more consideration to my proposal, Helen?”

“Yes,” I answered; “I have thought about it a good deal. Perhaps we had better go into the study, which is more out of the way of the servants than this.”

We crossed the hall, and, when we had entered the study and closed the door, I resumed:

“I may as well say, Mr. Otway, that I am prepared to accept your statement. On reflection, I believe that your account of what happened is true.”

“Thank God for that!” he ejaculated. “I felt sure you believed me, Helen; but it is an unspeakable relief to hear you say so. And I am sure you will agree with me that the—the apparently incriminating circumstance need not be mentioned.”

"I might even agree to that," I replied; "but there must be a clear understanding. I am not going to say anything that is not strictly true."

"Oh, certainly not!" he agreed. "All that I ask is that you refrain from volunteering a perfectly unnecessary and misleading statement. Will you promise to do that?"

"I am not sure that I have any right to make such a promise, Mr. Otway; but still, on the conditions that you mentioned, I am prepared to do so."

His relief was really pathetic. Its intensity made me understand what torments of terror he had been suffering. He flung out his hands as if he would have embraced me, but drew back, as I said, coldly:

"You are prepared on your side, Mr. Otway, to carry out your part? You agree to execute a deed of separation, as I asked?"

"If you insist," he replied. "It's a hard bargain, but if you hold me to it, I have no choice. Would not a short, informal separation do?"

"No, Mr. Otway," I replied firmly, "it would not. I am acting somewhat against my conscience in agreeing to suppress this fact, and I want full compensation for doing so. I must have a legally valid deed of separation."

"Very well, Helen," said he; "if it must be, it must. I hope that, later, you will take a kinder view of our relations, but meanwhile I will do exactly as you wish. I have drafted out a deed, in a simple form, with as little legal verbiage as possible. If its terms satisfy you, I will copy it out and sign it."

He handed me a sheet of paper on which the deed was drafted, and I read it through carefully. Like the other documents that he had drawn up, it was lucid, simple and concise, and set forth quite fairly the conditions to which he had agreed, with one exception. It determined automatically at the end of three months.

"I can't agree to that," I said. "There must be no specified time; it is to be just a separation."

"But," he exclaimed, "you don't propose that the separation should last for ever, do you?"

That was precisely what I did propose, but I thought it politic not to express myself too definitely.

"It is impossible," I replied, "to say what may happen in the future; but if you make the separation determinable by mutual consent, that will provide for all eventualities."

He agreed, with a somewhat wry smile, that this was so, and then asked how soon I should like to have the deed executed.

"As it must be signed before I give my evidence," I replied, "it had better be done now. If you will make two copies, I will go and fetch the maids to witness the signatures."

"Dear me, Helen!" he exclaimed. "What an extra ordinarily business-like young lady you are! But I suppose you are right; only I would suggest that you do not acquaint the witnesses with the nature of the document. We don't want to take the world into our confidence, especially just now."

This was reasonable enough, though it would obviously be impossible to keep the world in the dark as to our position, particularly after what I had said to Mr. Jackson. However, I agreed to maintain a discreet reticence, and when he had made the two copies—which I carefully read through—I went out and called Jessie and the cook.

"I want you," said I, "to witness my signature and Mr. Otway's to a couple of documents. You have just to see us sign our names and then sign your own underneath."

The two women came into the study with an air of mystery and awe, gazing furtively from me to Mr. Otway. The two documents lay on the table, each with a sheet of blotting paper spread over it, exposing only the blank spaces which were to receive the signatures, on each of which a red wafer seal had been stuck. Mr. Otway signed first, and then, indicating to the cook the place where she was to write her name, placed the pen in her hand.

"That's right," said he, when she had painfully and with protruded tongue, executed the signature of 'Ivy Stokes.' "Now you will do the same with the other paper as soon as Mrs. Otway has signed."

The cook gazed curiously at me as I signed the second document, and then, in the same strained and laborious fashion, traced the scrawling characters over the name that I had lightly pencilled in for her guidance. Having watched with feverish interest while I marked the next space, she drew back and made way for Jessie, who, by watching her colleague, had learned what was required of her.

When the formalities were completed and the two maids dismissed—to discuss these strange proceedings, doubtless, in the kitchen—Mr. Otway handed me the copy, bearing his signature, and, taking the other, rose to depart.

"Before I go, Helen," he said, "there is one matter to settle. In the document I thought it best to say nothing about an allowance—"

"You were quite right," I interrupted. "Of course, I should not ask for, or accept, any allowance under the circumstances."

"You won't need one at present," said he. "We know there are five thousand pounds lying to your father's credit at his bank—"

"That money was not his," I said, "and it is not mine. As soon as the will is proved it will be paid to you on behalf of your clients."

"But that is quite unnecessary, Helen," said he. "The use, for an unspecified time, of that sum of money was the consideration in respect of which you agreed to marry me. As the marriage has taken place, it is only fair and reasonable that you should receive the consideration. In effect, that five thousand is yours by the terms of our agreement."

I was on the point of replying that our agreement was null and void, and that I had no intention of carrying out its conditions; but prudence whispered that I had better keep my intentions to myself, at least as to my ultimate conduct. Besides which, Mr. Otway's statement was not entirely correct, as I proceeded to point out.

"The use of this money," I said, "was to relieve my father, who was assumed to be insolvent. But it appears that he was not insolvent; and it is my intention that all his debts shall be paid, in so far as there are funds to meet them. It is certainly what he would have wished."

"But," Mr. Otway protested, "supposing the payment of these debts should consume all the available assets? How are you going to live?"

"I suppose I shall do as other women do when they have no independent means. I shall work for my living. But it is premature to discuss that until I have had Mr. Jackson's report. I don't suppose I shall be absolutely penniless."

He shook his head gloomily. "You are Quixotic, Helen, and wrong-headed, too. There is no reason why you should work for your living. As a married woman, you are entitled to maintenance, and I am willing, and even anxious, to maintain you. But I won't press the matter now. If you want money, you know that you can have it, not as a favour but as a right. And now there is just one other matter that I want to speak about. In the deed of separation I said nothing about our relations other than was actually necessary. I made no stipulation as to your keeping me informed of your whereabouts; but I ask you now, if you should be leaving Maidstone, to let me have your address and to allow me to keep up communication with you. It is a reasonable request, Helen, and I am sure you will not hesitate to accede to it."

I did hesitate, however, for some time. In truth, I was not at all willing to agree to this proposal. My wish was to sponge Mr. Otway, once and for all, out of my life and to make a fresh start. Still, the request was a reasonable one, and could, I suspected, have been enforced as a demand; and, in the end, though very reluctantly, I yielded.

"Thank you, Helen," said he, holding out his hand; "then I won't worry you any more just now. It is understood that I am not to lose sight of you, and that if you should want help, pecuniary or other, you will let me know. And I may rely on you to say no more at the inquest than is actually necessary?"

I gave him the required assurance on this point, and, having somewhat frigidly shaken his hand, accompanied him to the hall door and let him out.

As I stood in the open doorway, watching him walk away up the street in his heavy, elephantine fashion, a man entered at the gate, and, approaching with a deferential and rather uncomfortable air, took off his hat and offered me a small, blue envelope, which bore the superscription "Mrs. Lewis Otway." I took it from him, and, closing the door, went back to the study, where I opened the envelope and extracted the little slip of blue paper that it enclosed; which turned out, as I had expected, to be the subpoena to the Inquest. I glanced through the peremptory phrases of the summons, and, laying the slip of paper on the table, went up to my own room to be quiet and think upon all that lay before me.

But thought—orderly, useful thought—was impossible. Everything around me spoke of the life that had been so tragically broken off, rather than of the future that loomed so vague and empty before me. The open book on the reading-stand, the hastily scribbled notes upon the writing-block, the unanswered letters and a little pile of rough drawings on the table, all seemed to call to me to take up afresh the thread that had been dropped; seemed to interpose the unfinished past before the uncommenced future. Restlessly I wandered down to the workshop—where the coal scuttle still stood on the bench, a mute but eloquent memorial of that tragic final evening—only to gather a fresh sense of loss and desolation. And so, for the rest of the day, I haunted the house like some unquiet spirit, watched with pity, not unmixed with fear, by the awe-stricken servants, tearless and outwardly calm, but inwardly torn by grief and a sense of bereavement that seemed to intensify moment by moment.

And yet, when, in the silence of the night, the tears came at last, and my sorrow, no longer mute, voiced itself in sobs and moans of pain, still, under the feeling of utter bereavement and desolation, was a half-felt sense of peace, of respite, and of relieve.

---

## IX. — TESTIMONY AND COUNSEL

THOSE who are apt to refer in contemptuous terms to the artificiality of the plots of the novelist must have failed to observe the orderly way in which events arrange themselves in real life; how the circumstances of the vital and essential happenings of our lives may, if attentively considered, be separated out in a coherent group of causes and effects as closely knit and inevitably connected as the parts of the story-teller's plot.

The reflection is suggested to me by the distressing experiences of the inquest on my father's death. Clearly enough, indeed, did I realise at the time that this would never have been but for those fateful words so calamitously overheard by me, and for my ill-considered, though well-meant, efforts to avert the apparently impending catastrophe. But I realised not



at all—as, indeed, how should I?—that this day of sorrow, of shame and humiliation, was not only the harvest of the irrevocable past but the seed-time of an even more momentous future.

As I approached the school-house in which the inquest was to be held, I observed Mr. Otway pacing slowly up and down the little court-yard. He was pale and haggard, and though he preserved his usual ponderously reposeful manner, it was not difficult to see that he was in a state of intense, nervous excitement and suppressed anxiety.

He was evidently waiting for me, and turned to meet me as I entered the gate.

“I thought we had better go in together, Helen,” he said, as we exchanged a formal greeting. “They know that we are married, and, of course, they don’t know that our—ah—our arrangements are in—ah—in suspense. And it would perhaps be as well if no reference were made to—ah—to those—ahem—temporary modifications which—ah—in short, to our provisional agreement.”

He looked at me deprecatingly and I nodded. There would be quite enough painful detail to be dragged into the light of day without this sordid addition. Besides, any reference to the deed of separation would start enquiries which neither of us desired, as was plainly evident to Mr. Otway; for he continued in a husky undertone, as we approached the schoolroom door:

“And you will fulfil your part of our covenant faithfully, Helen, I am sure.”

“Most undoubtedly I shall,” I replied. “But you will remember that our covenant does not include false evidence. I shall say as little as is possible, but if I am asked a direct question I must answer it, and answer it truthfully.”

“Of course you must,” he agreed: “but it is often possible to ward off an inconvenient, question which may lead to others still more inconvenient.”

“You make take it,” I said, “that I shall carry out my part of our bargain in the spirit as well as in the letter.”

With this assurance he appeared to be satisfied, and we now moved slowly towards the door of the school-house. While we had been talking, a party of men—the coroner and his jury—had filed past us and entered; and when we followed a minute later, we found them already in their places and the proceedings about to begin. We seated ourselves on the two chairs placed for us, which were next to those of the two medical witnesses, and as I glanced round the Court, I observed Mr. Jackson sitting near the coroner, and by his side a gentleman whose face I seemed to recognise, but to whom I could not give a name. Some dim recollection connected the quiet, strong, intellectual face with my father and the happy past, but not until near the close of the inquiry was I able to bring my memory to a clear focus.

The attitude of the coroner and jury alike—they were all local men and most of them known to me—made my difficult task as easy as was possible. They were all anxious to spare me to the utmost and to make the best of what the coroner described as “a grievous and terrible calamity.” Moreover, they restrained in the most delicate manner their evident curiosity as to the relations of Mr. Otway and myself. But, of course, the facts had to be given, and very distressing and humiliating it was to me to have to confess to what must have looked like a mere sordid intrigue with the uncouth creature at my side.

As the only person present when the death occurred, Mr. Otway was necessarily the first witness; and a very nervous, hesitating witness he was; and very fortunate was it for him that he had so sympathetic a court. As he stammered out his evidence I noted, again and again, the searching, grey eye of the strange gentleman fixed upon him, not indeed with any obvious distrust, but with the most concentrated attention.

“Do we understand,” asked the coroner, “that Mr. Vardon was angry and excited when he arrived at your house?”

“Yes—furiously angry.”

“Do you know why he was angry and excited?”

Yes, the witness did know. And as he proceeded to relate, in husky, uncertain tones, the circumstances of the secret marriage, more than one of the jurymen glanced from him to me with hardly-concealed astonishment; and I felt my face burning and my eyes filling with humiliation.

“Was there any reason for this secrecy?” the coroner asked.

“Yes. The deceased had already refused his consent to the marriage.”

“But that is hardly a reason for secrecy in the case of an adult. Could he have prevented the marriage from taking place?”

“No. But it seemed better to—ah—to avoid discussion and unpleasantness.”

The coroner looked dissatisfied. He considered a few moments, and then asked: “Do you know why the deceased objected to the marriage?”

“I think he considered that the—ah—the inequality of age was undesirable,” Mr. Otway replied.

Still the coroner looked dissatisfied, and as he paused to reflect, and the jurymen looked at him expectantly, Mr. Otway furtively wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. Evidently, he was profoundly disturbed, as well he might be; for if this line of inquiry were pursued much farther, it must inevitably lay bare the real nature of the transaction.

At length the coroner turned to the jury. “Well, gentlemen,” said he, “I suppose the question is not very material. It is

clear that the deceased was extremely excited and angry. The ultimate cause of his anger is, perhaps, not very relevant to the subject of our inquiry.”

To this the foreman of the jury readily agreed, and I could almost see the sigh of relief with which Mr. Otway hailed the passing of this perilous incident—a relief in which I participated to no small extent.

The narrative was now resumed, and as it proceeded, Mr. Otway’s voice became more and more husky and his speech more hesitating. He had a difficult course to steer, and his nerves were at their utmost tension. He had to tell a consistent story without telling the whole truth, and he had to bear in mind that my evidence was yet to be given. It was a position that might have shattered the nerve of a much bolder man than Mr. Otway.

“You tell us that the deceased was violent and threatening in his manner. Do you mean that he was physically violent?”

“Yes—at least he threatened to use physical violence.”

“He did not actually assault you?”

“Not actually. The blow that he aimed—at least that he was about to aim —ah—did not—er—did not take effect.”

The coroner’s brows puckered into a puzzled frown. “This is not quite clear,” said he. “Did he or did he not aim a blow at you?”

“He did—at least, that is to say, he appeared—” here Mr. Otway mopped his streaming forehead—“well, I think he actually raised his—ah—his —ah—his clenched fist.”

“Did you have to restrain him?”

“No,” replied Mr. Otway, with rather unnecessary emphasis. “No, I did not. I stepped back, and—ah—the incident—ah—passed. In fact, it was at this moment that the fatal attack occurred.”

“Tell us exactly what happened then.”

“He suddenly turned very pale,” said Mr. Otway, speaking now with more fluency as he got back to the narration of the actual events, “and seemed to stand unsteadily. Then he staggered backwards and fell, striking his head on the corner of the mantelpiece.”

“Did he appear to have fainted before he struck his head?”

“I should say, yes, but—ah—I would not—ah—I was very agitated and alarmed—and—ah—”

“Naturally. But you would say that the fainting attack preceded the blow on the head?”

“There was no blow,” Mr. Otway exclaimed quickly; and then, perceiving his mistake, he added, hastily, “that is to say, you are referring to his striking the corner of the mantelpiece?”

“That is what you were telling us about.”

“Yes. I should say that he struck—or rather that he fainted and staggered and that he struck his head in falling.”

Once more the coroner paused and seemed to reflect; and in the intense silence and stillness that enveloped the court my eye travelled from the huge, ungainly figure of the witness to the face of the tall stranger by Mr. Jackson’s side. And a very striking face it was: a handsome, symmetrical face, but strangely—almost unhumanly—reposeful and impassive. Yet, though it was as immobile as a mask of stone, it conveyed an impression of intense attention—almost of watchfulness; and the clear, grey eyes never moved from the face of the witness. To me there was something a little uncanny and disturbing in that immovable mask and that steady, unrelaxing gaze. I found myself hoping that those searching grey eyes would not be fixed on me in that relentless observation when my turn came to give my evidence. And even as this thought flitted through my mind, I remembered who this stranger was. He was a Dr. Thorndyke, an old, though not very intimate, friend of my father’s, a famous criminal lawyer and a great authority on medical jurisprudence. I had met him only once, when he had dined, many years ago, at our house; but I had often heard my father speak of him in terms of the highest admiration.

When the coroner resumed his interrogation, it seemed that the crisis was past, so far as Mr. Otway was concerned, for his first question was: “What did you do when the deceased fell down?”

“For a moment or two,” was the reply, “I was too bewildered to do anything. Then his daughter—my wife—came into the room, and, as he appeared to be dying or dead, I went off to fetch a doctor.”

This virtually concluded his evidence, and the next name called was my own, which, in its new form—Helen Otway—I heard with a start of surprise and something like disgust. As I rose to approach the table, I caught an instantaneous glance—a terrified, imploring glance—from Mr. Otway; and as my eye lighted immediately afterwards on Dr. Thorndyke’s face, I felt that this momentary look, too, had been noted by that inexorably attentive grey eye. But I was relieved to observe that he did not look at me, but, as I gave my evidence, fixed a steady, introspective gaze upon a spot upon the opposite wall.

My task turned out to be easier than I had hoped, though perhaps it might have been less easy if I had had more time to reflect on the significance of the questions. The coroner began by expressing the sympathy of the court with my bereavement and apologizing for imposing on me the painful duty of attending the inquiry. Then he asked: “You have heard the evidence of Mr. Otway with reference to your marriage and your father’s attitude in regard to it. Do you confirm what he has said?”

"I do," I replied.

"You were not present at the interview of Mr. Otway with the deceased?"

"No, I was not. When I entered the room my father was lying on the floor and appeared to be already dead."

"Had you seen your father since the solemnization of the marriage?"

"I saw him from the window as he entered Mr. Otway's garden."

"Did you notice anything unusual in his appearance?"

"Yes; his appearance alarmed me very much. He seemed excessively excited, and his face was deeply flushed and of a strange, purplish colour."

"Had you any special reason to be alarmed?"

"Yes. I knew that his doctor had warned him to avoid all excitement and exertion on account of the weak state of his heart."

"You did not hear what passed between your father and Mr. Otway?"

"I heard my father ask where I was, and I heard Mr. Otway tell him that the marriage had taken place."

"Did you hear anything more?"

"My father then called Mr. Otway a scoundrel, and was still speaking loudly and angrily when the study door closed and I heard no more."

"What made you go to the study?"

"I heard and felt the shock when my father fell."

"Would you mind telling us again in what condition you found your father?"

"He appeared to be dead. His face was at first a livid grey, but it faded to marble whiteness as I looked at him. There was a small wound on the right side of his forehead and a drop of blood had run down on to his cheek and on his temple."

The coroner glanced at the jurymen. "I think, gentlemen," he said, "that is all we need ask Mrs. Otway?"

And when the foreman had acquiesced, and he had thanked me for "the very clear and lucid manner" in which I had given my evidence, I was permitted to resume my seat.

"I can never thank you enough, Helen," whispered Mr. Otway, as I sat down. "You managed admirably—admirably."

To this I made no reply; for now that the ordeal was over I began to be assailed by certain doubts as to whether I had been quite candid. I had told all that was really material to the inquiry; but—however, at this point Dr. Sharpe approached the table and picked up the Testament.

His evidence practically settled the verdict. He testified that my father had suffered for some years from a dilated heart and arterial degeneration. "I warned him frequently to avoid excitement and undue exertion, for he was inclined to be careless and take liberties with himself."

"You considered his state of health precarious?"

"I thought he might fall down dead at any moment."

"You have heard the evidence of the two previous witnesses. Does that evidence contain any suggestion to you as to the cause of death?"

"It suggests to me that the deceased hurried to Mr. Otway's house in a towering rage, and that, during the interview, he worked himself up into a fury. I should say that the combined exertion and excitement brought on a fatal attack of syncope."

"You think that death was caused by heart failure?"

"I have no doubt of it."

Dr. Bury's evidence was much to the same effect, though less positive.

"The deceased had apparently been dead about half an hour when I arrived. The cause of death was not obvious, but the appearances were consistent with the account given by Mr. Otway. There was a small, contused wound at the junction of the forehead and right temple, apparently caused by the violent impact of some hard and blunt body. Judging by the small amount of bleeding, the wound had been sustained immediately before death. A single drop of blood had trickled down on to the cheek, and one or two drops on to the temple."

"You have heard Mr. Otway's account of the way in which that wound was occasioned. Do you consider that the appearances are in agreement with that account?"

"There is no disagreement. The appearance of the wound was consistent with its production in the manner described."

"Would you say that it was probably so produced?"

"That," replied Dr. Bury, "is a question for the jury. It might have been. I can't go beyond the appearances."

"No, of course you can't. And is that all that you have to tell us?"

"That is all," was the reply; and this virtually brought the inquiry to an end. After a brief summing-up by the coroner, the jury held an equally brief consultation and then unanimously returned a verdict of "Death from natural causes."

On the announcement of the verdict everyone rose, including myself and Mr. Otway, and the latter, turning to me, said in a low voice:

"I think I won't wait. I want to get home and be quiet; but I shall call on you to-morrow, if I may, to make—ah—any—ah—arrangements that—ah—in fact, to speak to you about the—ah—the funeral."

"Very well," I said, reluctantly—for, deeply as I loathed him, I could not exclude him even from that sacred ceremony without creating an open scandal. "You had better come early in the forenoon." and with this I dismissed him with a stiff bow, and made my way to where Mr. Jackson and Dr. Thorndyke were standing. As I held out my hand to the latter and recalled to him our meeting years ago, Mr. Jackson said: "Dr. Thorndyke happened to be in Maidstone to-day and to call at our office, so I prevailed on him to come here and watch the proceedings on our behalf in case any complications should arise. But everything has gone off quite smoothly."

"Very smoothly indeed," Dr. Thorndyke agreed, with, as it seemed to me, a certain degree of emphasis.

"Both the coroner and the jury were most considerate," pursued Mr. Jackson.

"Most considerate," assented Dr. Thorndyke; and again I seemed to detect a note of emphasis, as also, I think, did Mr. Jackson, for he glanced quickly at our companion, though he made no remark.

"I wonder," said I, "if you two gentlemen would care to come and take a cup of tea with me?"

Mr. Jackson had an engagement at the office, and as Dr. Thorndyke appeared to hesitate, I added quickly: "I should be very glad if you could, though I don't wish to take up your time if you are busy."

"My time is my own for the next three hours," said Dr. Thorndyke, "and if I should really not be an inopportune visitor, I should like very much to have tea with you."

"Let us go, then," said I. "Mr. Jackson will accompany us as far as Gabriel's Hill, won't you?" And as my old friend assented with a prim, little bow, we set forth.

"I have offered no condolences, Mrs. Otway," said Dr. Thorndyke. "I knew your father, I saw you and him together, and I realize what this loss must mean to you. There is nothing to say except that you have my most real sympathy."

"Thank you," I said, and for a time we walked on in silence. And as we walked I found myself recalling, with a strong, speculative interest, that curious, subtle emphasis which Dr. Thorndyke had conveyed into his agreement with Mr. Jackson. At length, when we had dropped the latter near the Town Hall, I summoned up courage to raise the question.

"I have an impression, Dr. Thorndyke, which may be quite a mistaken one, that you were not completely satisfied with the way in which the inquest was conducted. Am I mistaken?"

"Well," he replied, slowly, "the coroner's methods were not what one would call rigorous."

"I suppose they were not. But in what respect are you disposed to find fault with them?"

"Principally," he replied, "in his failure to elicit a really conclusive verdict. The verdict of the jury was based upon Dr. Sharpe's opinion as to the cause of death. That opinion was probably correct, but it was based upon reasoning which was not sound. His position was this: If certain circumstances—excitement or exertion—should arise, there would be a great probability of their causing sudden death. But those circumstances had actually arisen and sudden death had actually followed. Therefore the death was due to the factors of the said circumstances. But this conclusion is fallacious. It does not prove a fact: it merely indicates a probability."

"But are not all verdicts statements of probability?"

"Too often they are. But it is a coroner's business to bring the conclusions of his court, as far as possible, into the region of ascertained fact. The immediate cause of death can usually be demonstrated by scientific methods, and the inquiry can then be built up on a foundation of certainty. Opinion should never be accepted where knowledge is obtainable."

"Do you think, then, that the verdict was not a proper one?"

"I am not criticizing the verdict," he replied, "but the methods by which it was arrived at. I think that the cause of death should have been established beyond all doubt before any contributory circumstances were inquired into."

"But otherwise; apart from that one point?"

"I thought the examination of the witnesses rather easy going. No doubt it elicited all the relevant facts. But that is impossible to decide on. One cannot judge of the relevancy of a fact until one has got the fact. I think, for instance, that most counsel would have pressed your husband a good deal more closely. The coroner appeared to decide that the matter was not relevant without being quite clear as to what matter he was dealing with."

This, I must confess, had been my own impression, but I had been so relieved at the manner in which the difficult

passages had been allowed to pass that I had been little disposed to criticise the considerate and sympathetic coroner. Nor did it seem quite safe to pursue the present discussion much farther, for it was tending in a rather dangerous direction. My own reservations began to weigh on me somewhat—and Dr. Thorndyke was not quite the same type of listener as the coroner. Nevertheless, the conversation pleased me, though I could not but be struck by the oddity of this detached discussion of a matter which was of such vital moment to me. But that very oddity was itself an element of gratification; for a woman is naturally flattered when an intellectual man appears to credit her with the power of impartial judgment of her own conduct and affairs—that faculty not being one by which our sex is peculiarly distinguished.

But at this point, our discussion was brought naturally to an end by our arrival at my house—as I must now call it; and here a quick glance of surprised recognition on my companion's part gave me a new note of warning and prepared me for the inevitable question.

"You are living at your father's house, I see."

"I am, for the present. Mr. Otway remains in his own house."

"Yes. I suppose it will be more convenient to settle everything up here before joining your husband."

I was on the point of temporising by a vague assent; but my lips refused to frame the implied falsehood. It may have been my natural dislike of secrecy and concealment, it may be that my womanly pride resented the very idea of association with that unwieldy human spider. At any rate, an irresistible impulse drove me to say:

"I am not going to join my husband at all, Dr. Thorndyke. I am not going to live with Mr. Otway."

I did not look at Dr. Thorndyke as I made this statement, and he made no comment beyond a matter-of-fact "Indeed." But I had the feeling that, in the silence that followed, he was fitting this new fact into its place in some ordered scheme; that he was docketing it as an appendix to Mr. Otway's evidence.

Nothing more was said until we had entered the house and I had given instructions for tea to be brought to the study. But in that interval I was aware of a growing impulse to have done with this miserable secrecy—this sordid fencing and dodging, which must come, in the end, to downright lying—and tell this strong, wise man the whole wretched story. Besides, I wanted counsel and guidance: and who was so fit to give them as he?

Accordingly, when the tray had been laid on the study table, I re-opened the subject.

"I did not mention this matter in my evidence," I said. "It had no bearing on the inquiry."

"I am not clear," he replied, "that you were entitled to make any reservations. A witness's duty is to state the whole truth. The question of relevancy is for the court to consider."

"But unfortunately there were other reservations that had to be made. Dr. Thorndyke, I want to tell you the whole story—in confidence—and to ask your advice."

"I counsel you to make no confidences," he said, gravely, "unless you really wish to consult me in my professional capacity."

"That is what I wish to do," I said.

"Very well," said he. "That places us in the secure relation of lawyer and client; and I need not say that your father's daughter is very welcome to any help or advice that I can give."

With this encouragement, I poured forth the story that I have told in these pages and in almost as much detail. But still I held back one fact. I said nothing of my having found Mr. Otway grasping my father's loaded stick. That single reservation had to be. Not only was I bound by a solemn promise; my silence on that point was the price of my release. The letter of the covenant, indeed, had reference only to my evidence at the inquest; but its spirit sealed my lips even in this my most intimate confidence.

And so, once again, a secret guarded from a friendly eye remained, like a seed dropped in a summer's drought, to germinate and bring forth its fruit in its season.

---

## X. — THE TURNING OF THE PAGE

DR. THORNDYKE listened to my recital of the history of the tragedy, not only with patience, but with close attention and apparently keen interest, interrupting me only at rare intervals to ask a question or elucidate some point that was not quite clear. When I had come to an end I was disposed to be apologetic, for I had told the story in the fullest detail, with only the single reservation that I have noted.

"I am afraid," I said, "that I have been rather victimizing you and trespassing on your very great patience."

"By no means," he replied. "Men and men's actions and motives are my merchandise. If I could listen to a story like yours without the deepest interest I should not be in my present profession. But, now that I have heard it, I think I can guess the subject on which you wish to consult me. You would like to annul your marriage with Mr. Otway."

"Yes; if it is possible."

"It is very natural that you should wish to recover your freedom. I sympathize with you entirely, and I wish I could give you some encouragement. But I fear that you have no remedy."

"It seems rather hard," I said, "that I should be bound for life to this man whom I detest and who has done me such grievous injuries."

"It is very hard," he agreed, "and, humanly speaking, there ought to be some remedy. But the law provides none; nor is it really possible for the law to make provision for every imaginable contingency. Yours is a very exceptional case."

"Yes, I see that; but it seems unreasonable to compel two people to maintain a relationship which is not only unsuitable but quite unreal."

"It does," he admitted. "But the law takes a very unsentimental view of these matters. It regards marriage as an institution concerned with the establishment of families and the orderly devolution of property, and its interference is, in the main, limited to circumstances connected with that assumed function. Of the human aspects of marriage it takes little account. In a purely legal sense—which is what we are considering—your position is this: You were competent to contract a marriage and you did contract one, of your own free will, without any compulsion or misrepresentation that the law would recognise. The circumstances that appeared to exist before the marriage still appear to exist. No new facts have come to light which would affect the competence of either party. It is a case in which one of the parties has disregarded the old legal maxim, *Caveat emptor*—buyer beware! You bought, at a high price, something which turns out to be of no value. You agreed to marry Mr. Otway for a consideration—the release of your father from his embarrassments—which seemed to be valuable enough to justify the great sacrifice that you contemplated. But it turned out that your father needed no release; and the consideration thereupon ceased to have any value. As far as the law is concerned, you have simply made a very bad bargain."

"Does the law attach no importance to fraud?" I demanded.

"But has there been fraud?" he objected. "No representations, true or false, were made to you by Mr. Otway. You acted on knowledge which you assumed that you possessed. You laid down the conditions; he accepted them. You demanded a certain consideration; he furnished the consideration demanded. Even with regard to the letter from your father, we may—and do—suspect that he knew that it was in the box, and probably guessed at its contents. But we have no proof. Moreover, if he did know that it was there—even if he had opened it and read it, he was under no obligation to communicate its contents to you. Your agreement made no such provision. It laid down specific conditions, and with these Mr. Otway had fully complied. On the plea of fraud, I am afraid you would have no case."

"Apparently not," I agreed. "You are most horribly convincing, Dr. Thorndyke."

"I am putting the case as a lawyer, and very much against my own feeling as a man. But my present office is rather like that of a Devil's Advocate in a theological council. I think that this marriage ought to be annulled, but I am sure that, in point of law, it is not voidable."

"But there is yet another aspect of the case, and you must forgive me if I put it rather bluntly. There are not many women to whom I should have spoken in as downright a fashion as I have to you, and I shall continue to pay you this rather unpleasant compliment. Mrs. Otway, even if, legally speaking, you had a case, you could not take it into court."

"Why not?" I asked, more than a little startled.

"Because of the incidents of the inquest. You have spoken of certain reservations in your evidence. But in the case of Mr. Otway there was more than reservation. There was deliberate mis-statement, and that, too, in respect of a question that was highly material to the inquiry. He was asked the reason of your father's resentment of this marriage, and he stated it to be the disparity of age. But that was not the reason, and he knew it was not. Your father would have raised no obstacle if you had really wished to marry Mr. Otway. He resented the marriage because it had been brought about by means which he regarded as—morally speaking—fraudulent. Mr. Otway's evidence was false evidence, and it was deliberately given with the intention of misleading the jury."

"But it was a small point and of no importance. Besides, Mr. Otway's evidence is no concern of mine."

"Pardon me," Dr. Thorndyke objected, gravely, "the point was of very great importance. It would have started a train of entirely new issues. And Mr. Otway's evidence is very much your concern. You heard it given, you were asked if you confirmed it, and you did confirm it. There upon, Mr. Otway's evidence became your evidence."

"Now, if you were to embark on a suit for the annulment of your marriage, the plea of fraud, on which you would base your claim, would have to be supported by evidence which would conflict with that given by you at the inquest. Your position would be a very uncomfortable one, and it would be made more so by the fact that your evidence was in agreement with Mr. Otway's. When two witnesses agree in a departure from the actual facts known to them, a suspicion of collusion is apt to be raised; and collusion again suggests purpose and motive. I am afraid, Mrs. Otway, that the Devil's Advocate is making out a diabolically complete case. But that, you know, is his business. The conclusion is that a malignant fate has woven around you a mesh of circumstances from which there is no escape, and that the less you struggle the less irksome will be your bonds."

To this conclusion, unsatisfactory as it was, I assented with a readiness born not only of conviction but of a certain amount of alarm. I had heard my father speak with admiration of Dr. Thorndyke's amazing power of analysing evidence and extracting its essentials, and I now began to wonder how much of the actual truth he had extracted from the evidence

at the inquest, elucidated by my narrative. His warning as to a possible suspicion of collusion with “a purpose and a motive” in the back ground, set me speculating as to whether he, himself, entertained such a suspicion; and his next question was by no means reassuring on this point.

“You spoke,” said he, “of having decided not to live with Mr. Otway, and of having communicated your intention to him. Do I understand that he assents to a separation?”

“Yes. He sees that the position would be quite impossible.”

“Is your arrangement with him merely a verbal one or has it been placed on a regular footing by a document of some kind?”

“Mr. Otway has executed a deed of separation, which I think is quite regular. But I had better let you see it.”

With some trepidation, I produced the deed and nervously watched him as he read it through, which he did with an inscrutable expression, and—as it seemed to me—a horrible appearance of seeing through it to the rather questionable circumstances that had brought it into existence.

“Yes,” he said, as he handed it back to me; “it is quite regular. You may congratulate yourself on finding Mr. Otway so compliant. It is more than one would have expected of him.”

“He could hardly have done otherwise,” I answered hastily. “We couldn’t possibly have lived together after what had happened. Still, I am glad he took the reasonable view. It leaves me free to make my own arrangements for my future.”

“And what arrangements do you propose—if your legal adviser is not too inquisitive.”

“Not at all. I was going to ask you to advise me. I don’t think there will be enough to support me, and, of course, I can’t accept any help from Mr. Otway. I shall have to earn my living in some way.”

“You could compel Mr. Otway to support you, but I appreciate your unwillingness to accept an allowance and thereby recognise the relationship. Have you any means of livelihood in your mind?”

I hesitated a little shyly. For I had; but my plan might sound rather an odd one, at least to a stranger.

“I thought,” said I, at length, “of trying to get a living by doing what I have been accustomed to do as a hobby—by making simple jewellery and small, ornamental metal objects. I am afraid you will look on it as rather a wild scheme.”

“No,” he answered. “It is an unconventional scheme, but not in any way a wild one. I think we often appreciate insufficiently the wisdom of the artist’s choice of his profession. In choosing a means of livelihood we are choosing the way in which we shall spend the greater part of our lives. We have something to sell—the bulk of our waking lives; and we are apt to think too much of its selling price—its value to the purchaser—and not enough of its value to ourselves. A man, such as a navvy, a miner, a bank-clerk or a factory hand, barter for the means of subsistence so many hours a day spent in doing something that he does not want to do. He sells the best part of his life. But the artist or craftsman makes a much better bargain, for he contrives to obtain a subsistence by doing what he enjoys doing and what he would elect to do for his own satisfaction. He sells only the by-products of his life; the whole of that life he retains for his own use, to be spent as he would, in any case, wish to spend it. But there is an inevitable proviso; his acceptable occupation must really yield a subsistence. His wares must be of value to the purchaser, and he must be able to find a market. Do you think you could satisfy those conditions?”

“I think I could make the things pretty well, but, as to selling them, that is a different matter. I have to find that out. May I show you some of my work?”

“I should like very much to see some of it,” he replied.

“I will fetch a few pieces. And meanwhile, that clock on the mantelpiece is partly my work. My father made the clock, itself; but I made the dial, the hands and the case.”

Dr. Thorndyke rose, and, stepping over to the mantel piece, looked at the work with keen interest. It was a little bracket-clock with a bronze dial, a silver circle for the figures, silver-gilt hands and a simple wooden case decorated with gesso. Leaving my visitor to inspect it, I went away and collected a few samples of my work in metal; a bronze candlestick, an enamelled silver belt-buckle, a gold pendant set with opals, and one or two silver spoons; all of which Dr. Thorndyke examined with that friendly interest—unmistakeable to the artist or craftsman—that evinces some knowledge of and liking for the thing examined.

“Well,” he said, as he laid down the last of the spoons, “these things answer the first question. They are quite workmanlike, and they are attractive and tastefully designed. The next question is the economic one. Could you sell them? and if so, would they realize a price that would furnish a reasonable livelihood? You would have to compete with commercial products made in large numbers by cheap processes. Your hammered, embossed and chased work would compete with work stamped from steel dies or with comparatively rough castings. Of course, your work is infinitely better value; but this is a commercial age, and buyers are bad judges. And then you would have to sell to dealers who would demand not less than fifty per cent profit, which, I am afraid, would leave you a pitiable, small return for your labour and skill.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “That is all quite true. But still, I think I will try. The work would be interesting and pleasant, and, as you implied just now, an artist cannot expect to be paid as much for doing what he likes doing as another man receives for

doing what he dislikes. Pleasant work is, to some extent at least, its own reward; and if my work doesn't yield enough to live on, I shall have to try something else. But I don't suppose I shall be absolutely without means when my father's estate has been wound up."

"Do you think of continuing to live here?" Dr. Thorndyke asked.

"No. As soon as everything is settled, I propose to go to London. It will be much easier—or, at least, less difficult—to dispose of my work there."

"Undoubtedly. And have you any definite arrangements in your mind—where and how you are going to live, for instance?"

"None whatever, at present."

"I ask because I happen to know of a place where you could put up, at least temporarily; where you would be comfortably lodged, well fed and cared for, and where you could pursue your labours under good working conditions and at small expense. There is only one drawback, but you may consider that a fatal one. It is in the immediate neighbourhood of Ratcliff Highway—or, as it has been renamed, St. George's Street."

"Is that a very dreadful place?"

"It is far from being an aristocratic locality. But let me describe the establishment. It is conducted by a Miss Polton, who is the sister of my laboratory assistant—a most expert and talented mechanic. Miss Polton was at one time a nurse; but when her brother entered my employment, he was able to help her to set up in Wellclose Square, Ratcliff, a boarding-house for mercantile marine officers. At the same time, she, being like her brother, a highly-capable, ingenious person, got herself a hand-loom and took up weaving as a hobby. But since then times have changed. Sailing ships have to a great extent disappeared, and Miss Polton's clients with them, while the hobby of making excellent cloth has turned out quite a profitable one. So Miss Polton plies her shuttle industriously, and, in the place of the merchant seamen, has collected a little family of women who also work at handicrafts for their living. I believe they form quite a happy little community, and, of course, they are able to assist one another in disposing of their wares. So that is the position. I know that Miss Polton has room for another boarder, for it is quite a large house—Wellclose Square was once the abode of well-to-do shipowners and retired sea-captains—and I am sure she would welcome another novice to her community. The drawback, as I have said, is the neighbourhood, which is—to put it bluntly—just a trifle squalid."

"I don't see that the neighbourhood matters," said I; "and in every other respect it sounds like the very thing I want."

"I think you would be quite well-advised to give it a trial. You would be among friends and fellow-workers, and, if you found that the neighbourhood was too much for you, you would be in London and could seek a new residence at your leisure. I will write the address on one of my cards, and if on reflection you decide to give Ratcliff a trial, you can write to Miss Polton and me at the same time."

He wrote the address, and, handing me the card, stood up and glanced at his watch.

"How long will it take me to walk to the station?" he asked.

"Less than twenty minutes."

"I have half an hour, so I can walk easily. Good-bye, Mrs. Otway. I wish I could have given you a better account of your position. But I can only advise you to make the best of a bad bargain and keep your own counsel."

"You have been most kind, Dr. Thorndyke," I said, earnestly, "in giving me so much time and patient attention. I don't know how I can thank you."

"I will tell you," said he. "By keeping a good heart and letting me know how your affairs progress."

He shook my hand heartily, and, when I had let him out, strode down the garden path, the very personification of manly dignity, alertness and vigour. At the gate he turned to raise his hat, with a smile of friendly farewell; and I closed the door and turned back into the house, feeling, for the first time since my father's death, that I was not alone in the world, but that, if the need should arise, the strength of this strong, commanding man was at my call.

The short remainder of my life at Maidstone I shall pass over briefly. It comes back to me in scenes like those of a play, separate but related. I see the interior of the parish church, noble, spacious, cathedral-like; I hear the voice of the clergyman reciting reverently those flowers of ancient poetry rendered into perfect English speech that usher the departed into the realms of silence with so gracious a dignity; I see the flower-strewn coffin sink into the grave wherein sleeps my unremembered mother, while the russet-sailed barges glide past the churchyard on the placid river below towards the mills at Tovil. And so farewell for ever to the best of fathers and the kindest, most lovable of friends.

These closing weeks, in which I wound up my old life and made ready for the new, were full of bustle and unrest. I had written to Miss Polton and Dr. Thorndyke, and from the former had received a kindly letter assuring me of the warmest welcome: and now I was busily collecting my tools and workshop appliances and packing them into travelling boxes to be dispatched with my heavier luggage. There was the furniture to be stored or set aside for sale, the servants to be placed in new situations, and various business to be transacted with Mr. Jackson, who, indeed, relieved me of all that lay within his powers.

Then there was Mr. Otway, from whom I received an abject letter and with whom I must needs have a rather distressing



interview. He was really horrified at my proposed mode of life (I suspect he had never done a stroke of manual work in his life), and even more so at my proposed place of residence; and was, I believe, sincerely distressed at my firm refusal to permit him to make me an allowance. Indeed, the devotion which he professed for me, little as I wanted it, seemed to be as real as was possible in the case of a man so self-centred and so callously egoistic. But the very sight of him hardened my heart and lighted up afresh my indignation at the havoc that he had wrought in my life. What I had agreed to do, I did; but I made no hair's breadth of concession. I gave him my future address, and agreed to his addressing letters there; but I refused resolutely to receive any visits from him, or even to enter into any correspondence other than that which circumstances might render necessary.

And now the last day has come; the day of final parting. I see myself wandering through the empty house, stripped of all but the barest necessities and filled with new and strange echoes; the van drawn up at the gate to take away the last of the furniture, and the tearful Jessie carrying my two little portmanteaux down the path to the porter's barrow. I see her return, wiping her eyes and gazing at me in dumb appeal, and, with a sudden impulse of tenderness, I kiss her and stroke her hair; whereupon she bursts into tears and throws herself sobbing on to my breast.

It was hard to close the old life, which had been so sweet and peaceful, so full and satisfying; to bid farewell to the beautiful old town which was the only place I had known and which I had loved so well. As I took my way through the streets, attaché-case in hand, all my old friends seemed to look on me reproachfully and call on me to stay. The quaint plaster-fronted house in Week Street, the venerable medieval pile at the corner of Gabriel's Hill, the grinning masks on the corbels of the old house-fronts of Middle Row; all the old familiar landmarks, had suddenly grown dear and precious, and each exacted its twinge of regret as I looked my last on it. On the bridge I halted to survey the upper river, with the church and the Old Palace, both embowered in trees and brooding over the quiet water. Often as I had looked upon that view, it had never seemed to me so pleasant and desirable as now. And with this last impression—to be recalled how often in the troubled future!—I turned away and headed resolutely for the station.

---

## BOOK II. — ROMANCE

### XI. — A HARBOUR OF REFUGE

IT was the cabman who first made it clear to me that my town address was somewhat out of the common. He had stowed my two portmanteaux on the roof (it was a four-wheeled cab), and, descending to hold the door open for me to enter, shut it after me with a bang and waited while I stated my destination.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he said, incredulously; "did you say Wellclose Square?"

"Yes. Number sixty-nine."

Again he regarded me with wrinkled brows. "That won't be Wellclose Square down by the Docks?" he suggested.

"I don't know if it's near the Docks," I replied, "but it isn't far from Ratcliff Highway."

"That's the place, sure enough," said he. "Number sixty-nine, Well, I'm jiggered." With this he turned and slowly climbed to the box, looking in at me through the front window as he mounted; and even when he had taken his seat and gathered up the reins, he took yet another confirmatory glance over his shoulder before starting. These mysterious proceedings occasioned me some surprise, not entirely unmixed with anxiety. Dr. Thorndyke had admitted that the neighbourhood was squalid, and the question arose, How squalid was it? The first part of the journey, through Eastcheap and Great Tower Street, was rather reassuring; and as we crossed Tower Hill and the grey pile of ancient buildings loomed up above the trees, I was quite pleasantly impressed. But then came a change for the worse. Long streets of characterless houses, all of a dingy, grey colour—the colour of all-pervading dirt—and growing greyer and dingier as we proceeded; populated by men and women, and especially children, of the same cobwebby tint, with something foreign and unfamiliar in their aspect and manners—a deficiency of artificial head covering with a remarkable profusion of the natural, and a tendency to sit about on doorsteps; these, with a general outbreak on the shop signs of Wowskys, Minskys, Stems and Popoffs, were the features of the neighbourhood that chiefly attracted my attention as the cab rattled eastward. But there was not much time for extended observation, for I had barely noted these appearances when we turned into a short side-street and emerged into a square, the dingyness of which was somewhat relieved by a group of faded trees in the central enclosure.

Round the square the cab trundled slowly until it drew up opposite a tall house of the Georgian type, with white window frames and a green door. As the cab stopped, the green door opened and a small elderly lady came forth, while three younger women lurked in the background. Escaping from the cab, I advanced to meet the elderly lady, who received me with a singularly pleasant smile and a few quietly-spoken words of welcome; a proceeding that was observed with furtive interest by the cabman as he transferred my portmanteaux from the cab-roof to the pavement and thence to the hall; nor did his curious observation of me cease until it was brought to an end by actual invisibility, for, as the cab moved out of the square, I saw his face still turned towards me over the roof, with the same I expression of puzzled surprise.

"You would like to see your room, I expect," said the elderly lady whom I had correctly assumed to be Miss Polton; "then we will have tea and talk over your arrangements." She moved towards the stairs (up which I had just seen one of the young women hopping with surprising agility, with one of my portmanteaux in either hand), and conducted me to a room on the second floor, where the portmanteaux had been duly deposited, though the bearer had vanished.

"It's rather bare," said Miss Polton, "but you can have some pictures and ornaments if you like. My young ladies usually prefer to have their own things and arrange them in their own way. Your workroom is downstairs. I consulted my brother about it, and he said he thought you would like a room with a stone floor if you were going to do hammered work and use a furnace. So, as I had one with quite a good light, I have kept it for you—that is, of course, if you like it."

"I expect I shall," I replied. "A wooden floor is dreadfully noisy when one is hammering on a stake, and not very safe when there are red-hot crucibles about."

"Yes," she agreed, "and you can have a mat for your feet when you are sitting at the bench. And now I will leave you and go and see about the tea."

Left to myself, I looked around at my new home. The room, though spacious, was undeniably bare, but yet it gave me an impression of comfort. For its bareness was due merely to the absence of superfluities. The empty walls, distempered a pale cream colour, were severe to baldness; but how much better than the usual boarding house walls, covered with staring flowered paper and disfigured with horrible prints or illuminated texts. They, like the empty book-shelves, were ready to receive the personal touches and to become friendly and sympathetic. Of actual necessities there were more than in many an over-furnished room; a small wardrobe, a good-sized, firm table, a chest of drawers with a looking-glass on it, a small writing chair, a comfortable folding arm-chair, a washing-stand and a sponge bath, besides the book-shelves aforesaid, and a daintily-furnished bed, gave me a foundation of material comfort and convenience on which it would be easy to build and make additions. As I concluded my survey and refreshed myself with a wash, I decided that, whatever the surroundings of the house might be like, its interior seemed to have the makings of a home.

Nor was I less favourably impressed when I went down stairs. The dining-room, in which I found the ladies assembled, was pervaded by an air of spotless cleanliness with a severity approaching bareness. The absence of superfluous furniture and useless ornaments and bric-a-brac struck me, indeed, as rather odd in a household composed—so far as I knew—entirely of women.

"I must introduce you to the family," said Miss Polton, with a pleasant wrinkly smile, "at least those who are at home. There are three more who will come in to dinner. This is Miss Blake, and these ladies are Miss Barnard and Miss Finch."

I shook hands with my new comrades—the last being the little lady who had skipped up the stairs so actively with my luggage—and then we sat down to the table, at the head of which Miss Polton presided, and made the tea in a delightful Delft teapot from a brass kettle on which I cast an expert and somewhat disapproving eye, for it was of a blatantly commercial type and quite unworthy of the teapot. At first, conversation was spasmodic and punctuated by considerable pauses. Miss Polton was evidently a silent, self-contained woman, though genial in a quiet, restful way. Miss Finch, too, who sat by me, was quiet and a little shy, speaking rarely but silently plying me with food. Miss Blake, on the other hand, had a restless manner, and, though she spoke little at first, was undisguisedly interested in me, for whenever I looked at her I caught her wide-open, blue eyes fixed on me with an intensity that was almost embarrassing. She was a rather remarkable-looking girl, with a wealth of red-gold hair, a white and pink complexion, and a profile which, with its sharp, projecting chin and retroussé nose, might have been taken direct from one of Miss Burne-Jones's allegories; indeed, my first glance at her made me think of the "Briar Rose" and the "Golden Stairs."

And now, as I caught her intense gaze again and again, I had the feeling that she was wanting to say something to me; and the more so since I thought I detected a certain expectancy in the expression of her neighbour, Miss Barnard. Nor was I mistaken; for, after one of the periodic pauses in the conversation, she leaned over the table towards me and said in low, portentous tones: "Mrs. Otway, I want to ask you a question, if you won't think me too inquisitive." Here she paused—and Miss Barnard also paused in the conveyance to her mouth of a large piece of bread and marmalade.

Miss Polton explained that "Miss Blake was somewhat of a mystic."

"Like her famous namesake," said I.

"And ancestor," Miss Blake added, eagerly.

"Really!" I exclaimed, clutching at this straw; "you are actually a descendant of William Blake? And I dare say you are a great admirer of his works?"

"I should think she is!" exclaimed Miss Barnard. "You should just see her fashion plates."

Recalling Blake's usual rendering of the human figure and its unadaptability to the conditions of our climate, I secretly resolved to take an early opportunity of examining those fashion plates. Meanwhile, I remarked, "I was thinking of his poems rather than the drawings."

"Yes," said Miss Blake; "though the drawings are very spiritual, too. But to return to my question. You see, I had been looking at your face. It is a face, you know, in which the workings of the subconscious appear, as it were. It's an extraordinary psychic face, do you know?"

"Is it?" said I, noting that Miss Barnard had broken out into a slow smile, which she was trying to obliterate with the lump of bread and marmalade.

"Oh, very. Intensely so."

"I don't suppose your question would be too inquisitive," I said, guardedly.

"It isn't really," said she. "You know, I have been looking at your face, watching it with deep interest, and I have been hoping that, at last, I had met with a kindred spirit. I do hope—I feel convinced—that I have. I've been wondering if you are, as I am, a dweller in the larger world beyond that inhabited by the conscious self, beyond the mere material universe. Is it not so, Mrs. Otway?"

Now this was a "facer." As my dear father would have expressed it in his playful fashion, it "knocked me side-ways." I cast a bewildered glance round the table, and was aware of a very extensive outbreak of tact: Miss Polton was blandly indulgent, her face transformed into a network of amiable wrinkles; Miss Finch was engaged in an intense scrutiny of the bowl of a jam spoon; while Miss Barnard's feats, with the bread and marmalade, were becoming positively dangerous.

"I am not sure I understand your question, Miss Blake," I managed to respond at length.

"Perhaps I did not put my question very clearly—it is difficult to be very definite when one is speaking of the psychic life; but I was wondering if you had ever had experiences that had made you aware of that larger world beyond the world of mere matter and sense-perception; if you had sometimes felt the thoughts of other minds stealing into your own without the aid of speech or bodily presence and even, perhaps, held converse with those dear to you who, while they have passed out of this little, material world, still share with you the greater world in which soul speaks to soul unhampered by the limitations—"

The humorous wrinkles had suddenly faded from Miss Polton's face, leaving it grave and quiet; and now, in a quiet, grave voice, she interposed:

"I think, Lilith, dear, that Mrs. Otway's griefs are too new and too real—"

"I know!" Miss Blake exclaimed, impulsively. "I am an egotistical wretch. It was horrid of me to be so wrapped up in my own interests. I am so sorry; so very, very sorry. Please forgive me, dear Mrs. Otway! Let us talk of something else."

"I don't think we must talk of anything much longer," said Miss Polton. "We have finished tea and we ought to get on

with our work. Besides, Mrs. Otway will want to unpack her things and set her room in order."

On this there was a general up-rising. Miss Finch immediately fell to work gathering up the debris and returning the cups and saucers to the tray, while Miss Blake renewed her apologies and expressions of sympathy. Then Miss Polton took possession of me, and, having shown me my workshop—a smallish, well-lighted room, with a paved floor and a large window looking on an unexpectedly pleasant garden—took me upstairs to a box-room in which my personal luggage had been deposited.

"Supper is at eight o'clock," said she. "We have made it rather late so that everyone may have a good, long day's work and all the wanderers may have come home. It is the social event of the day. And now I will leave you to your unpacking."

She tripped away up a narrow flight of stairs that opened from the landing, towards what I took to be the attics; from whence presently came a rhythmical "click-clack" that I associated with the loom of which Dr. Thorndyke had spoken. Meanwhile, I fell to work on my trunks, with a view to transferring their contents to my room; but I had hardly got them open when Miss Finch appeared at the open door.

"Can I help you?" she asked. "If I carry some of the things down you won't have so many journeys."

"But aren't you busy?" I asked in return.

"Do I look like it? No, I'm lazy this afternoon, but I should like to help you, if you will let me."

Of course I was only too glad, and forthwith loaded her with an armful of books, following her with a second consignment. For some time we continued our journeys up and down the stairs with very little said on either side, and gradually my room began to lose its emptiness and severity, and to take on the friendly aspect of an inhabited apartment.

"It doesn't look so bad," said Miss Finch, surveying it critically. "Looks as if someone lived in it. Do you like the wash-stand?"

"I've been admiring it. It's so simple and so tasteful and unusual."

"Yes; and yet it is only stained deal, with a few touches of gesso. Phillibar made it—Phyllis Barton, you know. You'll meet her at supper."

"Is she a carpenter?"

"No; she makes frames for mirrors and pictures; wooden frames decorated with gesso, or compo, or else carved. But she's very thorough. Does it all herself. Makes up the frames from the plank, makes the compo and the moulds and does the gilding. And she is quite a good wood-worker and carves beautifully."

"And does she make a pretty good living?" I asked, bearing Dr. Thorndyke's observations in mind.

"She does quite well now, though she had a hard struggle at first. But now she works direct for the artists and gets as much as she can do. You will often see her frames in the exhibitions. The floor-cloth is rather nice, too, isn't it, though it is only stencilled sacking. You'd be surprised to see how durable it is. The more it is worn, the better it looks—if it is properly done. This is stencilled with a stain. Lilith did it."

"Lilith? Is that Miss Blake?"

"Yes. Her name is really Winifred, but we call her Lilith because she looks as if she had come out of a stained-glass window. You might think that she was a little—well, a little barmy. But she's awfully clever."

"She does fashion-plates, doesn't she?"

"Yes, poor Lilith! She hates them, but she does them rippingly all the same. She would rather paint pictures or mural decorations or design tapestries, but you've got to do what you can sell, you know, if you want to make a living; and Lilith has a little brother whom she keeps at school—an awfully nice little kiddie. She's a really good sort, you know, though frightfully spooky—planchette, crystal ball and all that sort of tosh; and she thinks she has found a fellow-spook, so you will have to look out."

As Miss Finch paused to take another survey, her eye and mine fell upon the wash-stand, or rather on what it supported.

"I think," I remarked, "that I shall have to treat myself to some new crockery. That jug and basin are hardly worthy of Miss Barton's masterpiece."

"No; they're horrid, aren't they? Regular Whitechapel china-shop stuff. But I believe I've got some—I'll just run up and see."

She tripped away up the stairs and presently returned, bearing a basin and pitcher of simple, reddish-buff earthen ware glazed internally with a fine green glaze.

"They are frightfully crude and coarse," she said apologetically (and with cheeks several shades redder than the ware), "but they aren't vulgar. Would you like to have them until you can get something better?"

"I shall have them a long time, then," said I. "They are charming—delightful, and they suit the wash-stand perfectly. What a house this is for pottery! I noticed the teapot and the beautiful cups and plates, all so interesting and uncommon. And now you produce these wonderful things like some benevolent enchantress. How do you do it? Do you keep a crystal ball, too?"

Miss Finch laughed and blushed very prettily. "We all do our little bit towards making the home presentable and saving expense. Miss Polton distempered these walls, and Joan Allen painted the woodwork—you'll like Joan, I think; she paints portraits when she can get them, and fills in her time by doing magazine covers and book-wrappers. We shall expect a diploma work from you, too. You're a goldsmith, aren't you?"

It was my turn to laugh and blush as this magnificent title was applied to me. "Not exactly a goldsmith," I protested. "Say, rather, a very elementary jeweller and metal-worker, or perhaps a coppersmith. And, as we have finished with this room for the present, I had better begin to get my workshop in going order."

"And you'll let me help you with that, too, won't you?" said Miss Finch, with a wheedling air; and as I gladly accepted her help, she linked her arm in mine and we descended together to the scene of my future labours.

My experience of various workers has led me to observe that manual skill is a much more generalized quality than is commonly realized. The old saw of the "Jack of all trades and master of none" is entirely misleading; for manual skill acquired in the practice of one art is largely transferable to others. The acquirement of a particular kind of skill results in the establishment of a generally increased manual faculty, so that a person who has completely learned one handicraft is already more than half-way towards the attainment of skill in any other. This fact was impressed upon me as I watched little Miss Finch and noted her extraordinary handiness with probably unfamiliar appliances and her instant comprehension of the uses of things that she had probably never seen before. My two benches—the jeweller's and the general bench—had fortunately been made in a portable form, and now had to be joined up with their screw-bolts. But my little assistant took this in at a glance, and, before I had half finished unpacking the tool cases, she had the bench-tops up-ended, had sorted out the legs, struts and the appropriate bolts, and was hard at work with the spanner. Yet, as she worked, she kept an alert and interested eye on the tools and appliances that came forth from the cases.

"What a jolly little muffle!" she exclaimed, as I deposited the small enamel furnace on the floor, pending the erection of its stand; "but won't it eat up the gas. You'll have to have your own meter—watch it, too, to see that your earnings don't all go to the gas company. And what a little duck of an anvil! But what on earth are those things?" pointing to a bundle of body-tools and snarling irons.

I explained the use of these mysterious appliances and of sundry others and so, with a good deal of gossip, partly personal and partly technical, we worked on until the sound of the first supper-bell sent us to our rooms to make ourselves presentable; by which time the fitting out of the workshop was so far advanced as to make it possible for me to begin work on the morrow.

The great social function of supper introduced me to the rest of my comrades; Phyllis Barton, who turned out, to my surprise, to be a tiny, frail-looking middle-aged woman of meek aspect—I had pictured her as a large, muscular, boisterous young woman; Joan Allen, who really corresponded somewhat to this description, and whom I detected more than once in the act of inspecting me with one eye closed; and a tall, rather shy girl, by name Edith Palgrave, a scrivener and calligrapher, who, I learned from Miss Finch, wrote, by choice, Church service books and illuminated addresses, but, by necessity, gained her principal livelihood by writing shop-tickets.

It was a pleasant genial gathering: homely, informal, and yet quite regardful of the indispensable social amenities. What the social class of my companions might have been I could hardly guess. They were all educated women, of good intelligence and pleasant manners, all keenly interested in one another's doings, but each fully occupied with her own activities. The agreeable impression was conveyed that, in this little human hive, the companionship arising from the community of domestic life tended in no way to hinder a self-contained person like myself from living her own life and pursuing her own interests and satisfactions.

And so, when, somewhat early, I retired to my room to spend an hour with my books before going to bed, my thoughts turned gratefully to Dr. Thorndyke, and I congratulated myself not a little on having found this quiet anchorage in which to rest after the stormy passages of my troubled life.

---

## XII. — THE HIDDEN HAND

I HAD been settled in my new home about a month when I received a letter from Mr. Jackson. It was principally devoted to a report on business matters concerned with the disposal of my father's practice and the sale of the surplus furniture and effects, but it contained one passage that gave me considerable food for thought. The passage in question had been added as a postscript, and ran thus: "You have probably heard that Mr. Otway has left Maidstone. I fancy things had become rather uncomfortable for him. From what transpired at the inquest, an impression got abroad that he was, to a great extent responsible for your father's death, and there was consequently a rather strong feeling against him. I don't know where he has gone, but rumour has it that he has migrated to London."

This was, in more than one respect, somewhat disquieting news. I turned it over again and again as I sat at my bench and tried to estimate its significance. The inquest had "gone off quite smoothly," as Mr. Jackson had expressed it, but it was clear that some, at least, of the persons present had read a meaning into the evidence which the coroner and his jury seemed to have missed. Dr. Thorndyke was one of these; but, as no rumour could be traceable to him, there were evidently others. What did this portend? To Mr. Jackson it meant no more than a local prejudice. To me, conscious of a secret covenant which I had not dared to confide even to Dr. Thorndyke, it conveyed an uneasy feeling that suspicion was abroad,

that it might become cumulative, and that, even yet, that covenant might be dragged into the light of day which it would bear so ill.

Ever since my talk with Dr. Thorndyke, my conscience had been somewhat ill at ease. I felt that, as a witness giving testimony on oath, I had been at least uncandid, if not positively untruthful; and the word "collusion" had acquired an unpleasantly personal quality.

And then, what of Mr. Otway? Had he slipped away out of my life to hide himself where suspicion would not reach him? Or had he really migrated to London, and would his sinister shadow presently fall upon my new life as it had done upon the old? My hopes pictured him driven by his fears—for he was a timorous man—far afield, perhaps beyond the seas; but a presentiment whispered that I had not heard or seen the last of him.

It was a few days later, in fact, that I returned from a walk to find a letter from Mr. Otway, requesting me to see him. I met him the following day at the Tower Wharf. He was more agitated even than usual, and rose to greet me with a audible explanation of relief. "Miss Vardon—that is—Mrs—ah—Helen. I have received a letter."

"Your correspondence is of no interest to me." I told him coldly.

"But the contents of this one are so extraordinary that I ventured to write to you about it. I hoped you would—er—respond to my appeal. It is strange," he added, "considering what our relations are and what your feelings are towards me, that I seem to look to you, and to you alone, for support and counsel in this—er—this unexpected trouble."

"I don't suppose," said I, "that any counsel of mine will be of much value to a man of your experience. But perhaps you had better tell me what the trouble is—Shall we sit down here? You spoke of having received a letter."

"Yes," he replied, as we sat down on a seat near the bridge. "It is an anonymous letter, and its purport is—ah—very singular, and is—ah—to the effect that—er—in fact—"

"Is there any objection to your repeating the actual wording of the letter?" I asked.

"Well, no. Certainly not. Perhaps it would be better. You are really remarkably business-like and clear-headed. I suppose it is your upbringing and being so much with your father. No, there is no objection. In fact,"—here he produced from his pocket, with evident reluctance, a leather wallet, from which he extracted a folded paper—"in fact, you may as well see the letter for yourself."

I took the paper from him, and opening it found it to be a quite short letter, typewritten upon ordinary typist's paper, without any address or other heading, and undated save for Mr. Otway's written and signed endorsement. There was no signature, but in place of one was written in typed characters, "A Well Wisher" and this is what it said:

"Mr. Lewis Otway,

"The undersigned is writing to put you on your guard because Somebody knows something about how Mr. Vardon came by his death, and that somebody is not friend, so you had better keep a sharp look out for your enemy and see what they mean to do. I can't tell you any more at present.

"A WELL WISHER."

I read it through twice, noting, the second time, the peculiar construction, the faulty grammar and punctuation, and especially the confusion in the pronouns which is so characteristic of the writing of an uneducated person. Of course, these peculiarities might have been assumed as a disguise; but they established a probability that the writer was a person of indifferent education; to which class, indeed, the bulk of anonymous letter-writers belong. I handed the document back to Mr. Otway, and asked: "Does this letter convey anything to you?"

"Nothing," he replied. "Absolutely nothing. It speaks of somebody knowing something. But that is impossible. There was no one in the house but you and I and—er—your father. Besides, there is nothing to know—excepting what you know."

"Have you any idea or suspicion as to who the writer of this letter may be?"

"None whatever. I have not the faintest clue. You see, there is nobody in the world who has any—er—any special knowledge of the—ah—the exact circumstances but yourself." He paused for a few moments, and then, in a lower tone, asked hesitatingly: "I suppose, Helen, you cannot—er—guess or—ah—surmise who might have—"

I looked up quickly and caught a furtive glance which was instantly averted; and in a moment it was borne in on me that he suspected me of either being the writer or concerned in writing of this letter.

"Mr. Otway," said I, speaking slowly and quietly, the better to command my temper, "if you have any idea that I know anything of this wretched production, dismiss it. If you have any idea that there lurks in my mind any suspicion that your account of my father's death was untrue, dismiss that, too. If I had known, or even had the smallest grounds for suspecting, that my father met with foul play, you would not have had to wait till now to hear from me; nor would my communication have reached you in this form or through these channels."

As I said this, looking at him, I do not doubt, sternly and forbiddingly enough, he turned horribly pale and seemed to shrink visibly. He was completely cowed; so much so that, cordially as I detested him, I felt really sorry for him.

"You mistake me, Helen. You misjudge me," he protested, huskily; "you do, indeed. I had no intention—I never, for one moment, suspected—but why do I say this? Of course, you must know I did not. I merely thought it possible that you might

be able to guess—you might know of some person—”

“I do not, Mr. Otway,” said I. “No one connected with me has any knowledge that is not public knowledge. Nor do I believe that anyone else has. I should say that this person—apparently a person of the lower class—is just a common blackmailer, who was present at, or has read the report of, the inquest, and is trying to make you believe that some suspicion attaches to you.” I could not but admire the adroitness with which Mr. Otway made me a participator in his own difficulties and secured me as an ally against his unseen enemy. And the blackmailer is a rather formidable enemy to a man who is concealing an incriminating fact. We were partners in an unlawful act. That, I had already recognised; and the different significance of that act in our respective cases did not so very much affect our position in the present circumstances.

“Probably you are right, Helen. But you notice that there is no threat—no, direct threat, at least—and that there is no suggestion of any attempt to obtain money from me.”

“Perhaps that will come later,” said I.

Again he drew a long breath and cast a furtive glance at me. “Perhaps it will,” he agreed. “This may be the preliminary move, the laying of ground-bait, so to speak. It’s a harassing business, Helen. What do you think I had better do? You see, I rely on you for counsel, although I am so much older. But you have your father’s gift of clear judgment and perfect coolness in emergencies.”

It was rather a tactless observation, for it recalled vividly my dear father’s coolness in that last, fatal emergency; his composure and unruffled cheerfulness when the menace of ruin and disgrace—set up by Mr. Otway—had seemed poised over his head, ready to fall at any moment; and the recollection did not tend to increase my present sympathy.

“For my part,” I said, coldly, “I should do nothing at present. I should ignore this letter and wait for the writer to show his hand more clearly. If he should make any threats or demands for hush-money, I should at once put the matter in the hands of the police.”

I could see that this advice—particularly the latter part of it—did not greatly commend itself to Mr. Otway. Nor did it to me. But circumstances offered no choice. Any risk is better than that of life-long subjection to a blackmailer.

“It would be very unsafe,” said Mr. Otway, “to have—any dealings with the police. They are pretty severe on blackmailers, but they are naturally ready to listen to anyone who professes to have information to give them. And a blackmailer may be very dangerous if he is brought to bay. We couldn’t afford to have any enquiries made that might seem to establish what they would call collusion to suppress evidence. We know that the facts that we withheld were not material. Other people would not.”

I had nothing further to say, but to repeat that I should ignore the letter; and for a time we sat silent, looking out on the river. Mr. Otway drew a deep breath and reflected gloomily. Perhaps my suggestion was not a very comforting one, for an uncomfortable aspect of the case was that he was right.

“Well,” said Mr. Otway, at length, “so be it. We will wait and see what happens. And now let us put this miserable affair away and talk about your future. I have seen some of your work, and I am sure that you could get good prices for it if it were placed in the proper quarter. But the ordinary shops would be of no use to you. The common retailer does not know or care anything about individual work. He just buys from the wholesaler or the manufacturer, and sells to the public. He would probably not look at your work, or if he were willing to buy it, he would pay no more than he pays to the manufacturer who rattles off his goods by the thousand, with the aid of cheap labour and machinery.

“But there are people who know the difference between artists’ works and manufactured goods, and are willing to pay for the better things. And there are dealers who supply them. Mr. Campbell is one. I have known him for many years, and I can assure you that he is an excellent judge of works of art and very anxious to get the best for his customers, who are mostly good judges, too. He is well known in artistic circles, and, as he is able to dispose of things of real value, he can afford to pay the artist a fair price. I strongly advise you to give him a trial. Of course, I would infinitely rather that you accepted an allowance from me, but, if you really—”

“It is very good of you, Mr. Otway, but I assure you that it is out of the question.”

“Very well, then. If you are quite resolved, I can only advise you to make the most profitable use of your talents. Go to Mr. Campbell, and I am sure that you will be treated fairly.”

I thanked him for his advice and promised to act on it; and very shortly after this I brought the interview to an end.

As I took my way slowly back to Wellclose Square, I reflected on the new developments that my meeting with Mr. Otway had disclosed. That some mischief was brewing there could hardly be a doubt. The disguise of the “Well Wisher” was too thin to create any illusion. As to the somebody who knew something, he was an obvious myth, for, as Mr. Otway had said, the circumstances did not admit of anyone knowing even what was known to me. My own explanation was that some person, who had been present at the inquest, had observed Mr. Otway’s excessive nervousness and had marked him as a likely subject for blackmailing operations. It was a chance shot and nothing more.

But Mr. Otway’s evident alarm was not difficult to account for. He was a naturally timorous man; he had been subjected to a great and prolonged strain, and he had an incriminating secret. His position was, in fact, one of appreciable danger, as he fully realized. If the details of my father’s death had been fully disclosed at the inquest, Mr. Otway’s statement and

explanation would probably have been accepted without demur. But the suppression of certain material facts put a different complexion on the matter. If the inquiry were now revived, he would have to explain, not only the original circumstances, but his motives for suppressing them. He had very good reason for alarm.

And yet his abject terror produced an uncomfortable impression on me. I could not disguise from myself that the whole tragedy of my father's death was due to an error of judgment on my part. The secret marriage was the out come of a mistake. Woman-like, I had acted on a strong conviction; and that conviction had been wrong. What if I had once again acted on an erroneous belief? I had assumed that Mr. Otway's account of my dear father's death was correct. There had seemed to be excellent reasons for the assumption. But what if I had been wrong, after all? If I had actually misled a Court of Justice to shield the murderer of my dearly loved father? It was undeniably possible. I had formed my opinion on mere probabilities, backed by a statement that, however plausible, was manifestly worthless as evidence. And that opinion might have been utterly wrong. It was a dreadful thought. So dreadful that, though I tried to put it away and remind myself that I did not entertain and never had entertained it, it haunted me during the whole of my walk home, even to the exclusion of the menace to myself that lurked in this blackmailer's letter.

---

### XIII. — A CRYSTAL-GAZER AND OTHER MATTERS

THE cheerful atmosphere of the old house in Wellclose Square soon dissipated my gloomy thoughts. It was nearing supper-time when I arrived, and an agreeable clink of china proceeded from the dining-room, accompanied by a faint aroma suggestive of curry. On my landing I found Lilith and Miss Finch engaged in earnest discussion, and both greeted me as if I had returned after a long absence.

"We have been wondering," said the former, "what had become of our Sibyl," (she had bestowed this title on me, presumably, by reason of my peculiarly 'psychic' cast of countenance). "As for the poor Titmouse," (this was Miss Finch's pet name), "she has been wandering about like a cat that has lost its kitten."

"Or like a kitten that has lost its cat," I suggested, bestowing an affectionate pinch on my little comrade's ear. "Well, I haven't been far afield, but I have done quite an important stroke of business."

"You don't mean to say you've sold something!" the Titmouse exclaimed, incredulously.

"Not actually sold. But I have discovered a market. I have tidings of a benevolent person—of the Scottish persuasion, I believe—who traffics in works of art and other productions of the human hand."

"A Scotchman!" exclaimed Miss Finch. "I thought all art dealers were Jews. When are you going to call on the Laird?"

"It is hardly worth while to call on him until I have a fair collection of work to show him," said I.

"I don't agree with you, Sibyl," said Lilith. "The first thing to do is to catch your dealer. To do that, you must find out what he wants. He is sure to have his own personal fancies, and he knows what he can sell most easily. Take him all that you have ready. He will be able to see from that what you can do, and he will tell you what kind of work he will take from you. And don't lose any time. I should go to-morrow if I were you."

"Does an artist have to work to order, then, like salaried journeymen?" I asked.

"Practically, yes," replied Lilith. "And why not? He makes things that he wants people to buy. Surely it is only reasonable that he should consider the needs and the wishes of the buyers. And all good craftsmen do. Chippendale's chairs were not only good to look at; they were comfortable to sit on and serviceable in use. The only difference between an artist craftsman and a commercial producer is that the artist always does his best, for his own satisfaction apart from the question of payment; whereas the commercial producer thinks of the profit only, and turns out the worst stuff that the buyer will put up with."

"But surely an artist may choose what he will make," said I.

"Of course he may," replied Lilith, "if he is willing to keep the thing when he has made it. Not if he is going to ask someone to pay him money for it."

I was inwardly somewhat taken aback by this exhibition of hard-headed reasonableness on the part of the mystical Lilith; so much so that, when she had gone to her room, I remarked on it to Miss Finch.

"Yes," she agreed; "Lilith is an extraordinary girl. In fact, there seem to be two Liliths; one is as cranky as a March hare, and the other is perfectly sane and really very shrewd. I sometimes wonder whether she really believes in all that crystal-gazing tosh and telepathic bunkum. But she practices what she has just been preaching. She does her fashion-plates according to orders—but ever so much better than she need—and does other work to please herself and is content to keep it. You should look in at her studio and see her at work; then you'd understand."

"And you think I had better take her advice?"

"I do. First catch your dealer; and if he wants to keep you turning out the same things over and over again, try to catch another dealer who wants something different. The great thing is to get a market. It's frightfully disheartening to keep on doing good work and having it all left on your hands."

Impressed by this wise counsel, I betook myself after supper to my workshop and reviewed my stock. A month's work



had produced no great accumulation, for I was still a slow worker, though the continuous practice was improving that. On the other hand, I had brought with me a certain number of unfinished pieces as well as some of my finished work; so that I had enough to give Mr. Campbell the means of judging my capabilities. When I had looked over the collection and withdrawn one or two pieces that were not up to my present standard, I packed the approved specimens in a hand-bag which I took up with me in readiness for the morrow. I was just opening the door of my room when Lilith came running up the stairs.

"You see," I said, holding up the hand-bag. "I am acting on your advice. I have packed up a selection from my stock to take to the dealer to-morrow morning."

"I am glad of that," said she. "The business side of art is tedious and disagreeable, but you have got to sell if you are to live by your work. Would you mind giving me a private view of your masterpieces?"

"I shall be proud to show them to you," I replied, conducting her into my room and placing the arm-chair by the table, "Let us put out the whole collection."

I emptied the bag of its contents, which I set out on the table to the best advantage, and she examined the pieces one by one.

"They are charming," she exclaimed, enthusiastically. "I can't judge the work, though it looks most expert to my inexperienced eye, but the design is delightful. They are all so individual and full of character, and so simple and restrained. You have a fine colour-sense, too. I think your use of enamel quite masterly, and I like your employment of bronze in place of the precious metals. It is fortunate that your dealer is a Scotchman, for the Jews, from Solomon downwards, have always had a leaning towards gold."

"Yes," said I; "bronze is my favourite material, even for personal ornaments. And it is capable of great variety in the patina, especially if one uses the Japanese methods of surface treatment. I wish it took the enamel better."

"You seem to have overcome the difficulties pretty completely," said Lilith. "This pendant, for instance, is beautiful, and so is the belt-clasp. Do you know, Sibyl, I think we might collaborate. Some of my designs might very well include metal ornaments—clasps, buckles, and buttons forming part of the decorative scheme. We must talk it over. And now, my dear Sibyl, I want to say something to you—something quite serious—and I want you to listen without prejudice."

I looked at her, and was instantly aware of a change that had come over her. The shrewd, business-like, capable Lilith had suddenly become transformed into the mystic—wide-eyed, dreamy, yet intense.

"I have avoided talking to you about the things that are to me the great things of life," she said in low, earnest, tones. "I have wished to, but I have been fearful of intruding on your strongly individual, self-contained personality. But I have felt that you have great gifts—great psychic gifts. You are a woman of power. The common herd live their little lives locked up in the prison of the visible and the conscious. If they would convey their thoughts to other minds they must use the unwieldy means of speech and visible signs. What they know of their fellow-immortals reaches them crudely through the organs of sense; and through those primitive and inadequate media they must needs communicate with others, bound by the limitations of time and space and mere material contact—at least, so long as they are prisoned within a material body. But there are others for whom no such limitations exist; specially gifted souls who can see without mere material eyes, who can hear without ears, who can speak their thoughts across the gulfs of time and space; who can look into the remote past, and even into the future; who can make their will-power operate at limitless distances and without the aid of gross bodily action. And you are one of these, Sibyl. I am convinced that you are endowed with these powers. But they are latent, unsuspected, because you have never tried to exercise them; because you have never sought to bring the subconscious within the domain of the conscious, or rather to make a contact between the two."

To this strange and rather wild harangue (which the matter-of-fact Titmouse would have called "barmy") I listened with grave attention, though with little enough conviction—for I could not but recall my ignorance and my mistaken judgment in the greatest crisis of my life—noting how like a prophetess the picturesque Lilith looked, with her golden aureole of auburn hair and her great, blue eyes and parted lips. But I made no reply—there was, indeed, nothing to say—and after a short pause she continued:

"Don't think I am saying this with any impertinent intention of trying to force my own views on you. I have a definite practical purpose. You are going to-morrow to make your first essay in a vitally important branch of an artist's calling. On your success depends the possibility of your following art as a profession—that is, if you have not enough to live without work."

"I have not," said I.

"Then artistic success is not sufficient. You must achieve industrial success; you must get a livelihood out of your work. As far as the creation of beautiful things is concerned you are quite competent and will become more so with more practice. Now you have to learn how to dispose of those works profitably; how to make people buy them."

"But surely that will be decided by the suitability of the things themselves."

"Partly, no doubt. But you mustn't leave it at that. You must learn to exercise the power of silent willing combined with suggestion."

"I don't think I quite understand," said I.

"We must talk about this more fully some other time," said Lilith, "and go into the theory and the results of experiments. For the present you must try to take my word for the fact that silent willing and suggestion are real powers. I don't ask you to believe it without proof—I will give you the proof later—but I do beg you, dear Sibyl, to give the method a trial. If it fails in your hands you will be none the worse; but it won't fail if you make up your mind to succeed."

"What do you want me to do, Lilith?" I asked, not a little bit bewildered by her mysterious and rather vague expressions.

"I will tell you what I do myself," she replied. "When I take a batch of drawings to a publisher, I stand outside the office for five minutes and silently will that he shall accept them. Sometimes I write on a piece of paper a command to the publisher to accept my work, and while I am waiting for the interview I keep my eyes fixed on the writing and mentally endorse the command. The writing, you see, helps me to concentrate my will-power. Then, at the interview, I use the method of suggestion. Whatever the editor or publisher may say, whatever objections he may make to my work, I continue steadily to impress on him that he is going to accept it, that, in fact, he has accepted it. If he refuses it, I ignore the refusal and go on talking as if he had accepted it—not rudely, of course; one must do these things tactfully—and all the time that he is talking, I continue silently to concentrate my will-power on him."

"And what is the result?" I asked.

"The result, my dear Sibyl, is that I sell all the drawings that I offer for sale."

This sounded convincing enough, and would have been more so if I had not happened to know that Lilith's drawings were of the very best of their kind, and that she submitted them to the most rigorous criticism before letting anyone see them. Still, the fact that she sold her work was undeniable, and it was impossible to say how many excellent drawings had failed to gain acceptance. Certainly every capable artist is not a successful one.

"And what is it exactly that you want me to do?" I asked.

"I want you," she replied, "to do just what I do myself. I want you to stand outside the shop for five minutes and silently will that this dealer shall buy your work. It would probably help you if you were to write down the command and keep your eyes fixed on the writing while you are willing; but if the dealer himself should happen to be visible, it would be well to fix your eyes on him so as to direct the will-force with more precision. And when you go into the shop, keep on willing with the greatest concentration that you can command, and when you are talking to the dealer, talk as if he had bought your work; keep on impressing on him that he has bought it, and don't take any notice of contrary statements on his part. If he seems to think that he has refused it, you must correct his mistake and guide his thoughts into the proper channels."

I suppose I must have looked somewhat dismayed at this rather startling programme, for Lilith continued, eagerly: "Now, don't raise objections, Sibyl, dear. It will be quite easy if you will only make up your mind. You have abundant will-power, and I am certain that you have the gift of projecting your mental states into the minds of others. And I am so anxious that you should succeed and that your great gifts should not be wasted. Say you will try, Sibyl, if only to please your friend."

What could I do? Utterly as my mind refused to accept the connection between the alleged cause and effect, I could not say that no such connection existed. I was completely unconvinced; but my unconviction might conceivably be less rational than Lilith's whole-hearted belief. For she declared herself able to support her belief with proof, whereas I had to admit that my scepticism was largely a matter of temperament. And she was so eager, and it was so sweet of her to be so full of anxiety on my behalf, that it would have seemed ungracious to make difficulties. The end of it was that I agreed to carry out her plan of conquest, on which she further inducted me into the arts of silent willing and suggestion and even supervised me while I wrote out, at her dictation, a peremptory command to the dealer, which I promised to use, as directed, for the reinforcement of my will-power at the appropriate time.

On the following morning, after a careful study of my father's atlas of London, which I had brought with me from Maidstone, I set forth, hand-bag in hand and encouraged by the good wishes of my comrades and of Lilith in particular. Entering the Underground Railway at Mark Lane, I came to the surface at Charing Cross Station and bore away northwards across Leicester Square. During the journey, I had turned over in my mind the plan of attack to which I stood committed, with increasing distaste, I must admit, as the time for its execution drew nearer. And as my dislike grew, so also did my scepticism. I found myself recalling the fact that Lilith, successful as she claimed to be, was yet a fashion-plate artist very much against her own wishes, and reflecting that, if her silent willing were as efficacious as she believed it to be, she might surely compel the purchase of the kind of work that she enjoyed doing, instead of being herself compelled to follow a distasteful occupation. However, it was useless to think about it now. I had promised to give the method a trial and must carry out my promise.

These reflections brought me to the bottom of Wardour Street, and my attention was now fully occupied by the search for Mr. Campbell's shop. Mr. Otway had omitted to give me the number of the house, but I remembered his saying that it was on the west side near the Oxford Street end; so I walked slowly up the east side and scanned the shop-fronts across the road. Near the top of the street my eye lighted on a smallish shop, above the window of which was inscribed in faded gold lettering "Donald Campbell," and I immediately crossed the road, becoming aware as I did so of a sudden access of nervousness. For this was a new experience to me. Hitherto all my transactions with shopkeepers had been in the character of a purchaser; and my transformation into a vendor was accompanied by a diffidence and shyness that I had not expected or foreseen. Indeed, in the course of that short journey across the road, my bashfulness increased so much that I had nearly forgotten my promise to Lilith and was on the point of entering the shop when it flashed into my mind.

But even when I recalled Lilith's instructions, they were not easy to carry out. I swerved from the shop door to the side of the window and stood there trying to concentrate my will-power. But it would not be concentrated. In the window was displayed a fascinating array of base metal spoons which instantly riveted my attention; particularly a set of the late seventeenth century, wrought in a fine-coloured latten, and exhibiting in a most charming manner the combined effect of delicate workmanship, with the patina of age and the softening of outlines from use and wear.

Unconsciously, I had begun to compare them with my own cruder productions before I realized that my will-power had escaped control. Then I jerked myself back from the spoons to my present task, and, hastily drawing the paper from my pocket, fixed my eyes on the written command and struggled to concentrate my thoughts on it and to suppress a growing consciousness of the absurdity of the whole proceeding. Presently I raised my eyes from the paper, and as they sought to dodge the spoons, they encountered another object equally disturbing. "It was only a face at the window," as the ridiculous song has it, but it instantly engrossed my attention and transported me in spirit, not to any Highland glen, but straight away to the banks of the Jordan; a fattish face, framed with glossy, black hair that broke out at the temples into rows of little crisp curls like a barrister's wig; a face with small, grey eyes, full under the lids, and surmounted by strong, black eyebrows, with full, red lips and a rather sketchy nose of the general form of a William pear with the stalk uppermost. It was clearly not Mr. Campbell's face, but it appertained to the establishment; and, recalling Lilith's instructions to direct my will power with more precision by fixing my eyes on the dealer, I directed a stony stare at the face and willed silently. But here I was countered again; for the owner of the face was also apparently possessed of psychic gifts, and fixed on me a gaze of such intensity that I was covered with confusion. On this I straightway forgot all about will-power, and, hastily pocketing the paper, walked nervously and guiltily into the shop.

The proprietor of the face confronted me impassively across the counter; and such was my trepidation that, although he obviously was not Mr. Campbell, I could think of nothing better than to ask him if he was; whereupon he completed my discomfiture by replying in the affirmative.

"I am Mrs. Otway," said I; at which he suddenly grew keenly attentive, and I continued: "I understand that Mr. Otway—Mr. Lewis Otway—has written to you about me. I had a letter from him to that effect."

"Yes," said Mr. Campbell, "he has; and, if I remember rightly, he suggested that I might be able to dispose of some of your work. I think he said you did some repoussé or something of the kind."

Apparently Mr. Campbell was preparing to treat me as an amateur, and my work as the product of a hobby. This would not do at all. Before saying anything further, I opened my bag and handed out the pieces one by one, setting them on the counter before him.

"Oh!" said he. "Yes; ha—hum; this isn't exactly what I expected." He picked up a teaspoon, turned it over between his fingers, closely examined the joining of the shank and bowl and the little bust that formed the knob, and then held it at arm's length with his head on one side. There was something in the action and the facial expression that accompanied it which encouraged me even before he spoke.

"Nithe thpoon that," was his comment as he laid it down (I observed that he tended to develop a lisp when preoccupied or off his guard); "well made, well designed; quite original, too. Spoons are my fancy—you saw that set in the window. If I could afford it, I would specialize in them more than I do. Not but what I'm fond of all goldsmith's work if it's good—or any other art work, for that matter; but I do love a good spoon."

This was pleasant hearing, for I had a weakness for spoons myself. They are useful objects, they admit of infinite variety in design, and their small size adapted them peculiarly to my rather limited resources.

"But there is one thing that you must bear in mind," continued Mr. Campbell. "Single spoons are not very saleable unless they are antique or collectors' pieces. Modern spoons are bought for use as well as ornament, and buyers like them in sets; not all alike, of course, but with a general design running through the set. Twelve spoons, all different, but all brothers; that's what they want."

"Like the apostle sets," said I.

"Yes," he replied, "but we don't want any more apostles. Too many on the market already. The apostles are done. They're a back number. Everybody does them because they can't think of anything else connected with the number twelve. But there is an opening for something original. If you can do me a set with a good striking design, I think I know where I can place them at a liberal price."

I made a note of this proposal, and Mr. Campbell proceeded with his examination of my samples, accompanying the process with shrewd comments and useful hints. "Now, I'm rather doubtful about this," said he, picking up a bronze paper-weight on which was a little figure with an open book; "it's pretty and might take the fancy of a bookish man, but I question whether you'll get paid for the work that you've put into it. People don't always realize the value of a bronze casting. You must have done this by the *cire perdue* process."

"I did."

"Well, I should save that for more important pieces. Simple modelling and sand-casting is good enough for paper-weights. And you are too lavish with your silver. Just feel this candlestick. You could have done it with half the silver and got paid just as much. The extra cost of the unnecessary silver will have to come off the workmanship—at least, that is the tendency, although it is nominally sold by weight."

As Mr. Campbell was speaking, a woman came out of an inner room and advanced to the counter. I glanced at her casually and then looked again more attentively, for I had instantly the feeling of having seen her before, though I could not recollect where. She was a Jewess of the dark and sallow type, about my own age, and of a sombre and rather forbidding aspect; and the glance that she cast on my samples, though impassive, was faintly disparaging.

"This is Mrs. Otway, me dear," said Mr. Campbell. "You remember the letter I showed you about her. And these pretty things are her work."

Mrs. Campbell—as I assumed her to be—raised her eyes and bestowed on me a quietly insolent stare, but made no remark. Then she cast another disparaging glance at my wares and said coldly: "They are all right of their kind; but you don't want to fill the place up with modern stuff."

Disagreeable as the remark was, its matter impressed me less than its manner. For again I was sensible of a certain vague familiarity in the voice, the intonation and the accent. She gave me, however, no opportunity for studying either, for, with the curt observation that "she supposed he knew his own business," she retired to the inner room without taking any further notice of me.

"Well," said Mr. Campbell, "there's some truth in what my wife says. I can't afford to lock up my capital in things that I can't sell. But I like your work. It is good work, and you'll improve. I am willing to buy this lot of pieces—at a price. But it will have to be a low price, because I don't know how they will go. If you take my advice, you'll leave them with me and let me try the market with them. When I have sold one or two I shall know what I can do with them, and then I can offer you a fair price based on what they fetch. How will that thoot you?"

It seemed, on the whole, the most satisfactory arrangement, though I should have liked to have some definite idea as to the value of my work. I mentioned this, pointing out that I wanted to know if it would be worth my while to continue this kind of occupation.

"Well," said Mr. Campbell, "you leave the things with me, and I will look them over carefully and weigh the silver. Then I will make you the best offer I can for the lot, and you can either accept it or refuse it, or wait and see what the things fetch. Give me your address and I will write you out a receipt for what you leave. Will that do?"

I replied that it would do admirably, whereupon he supplied me with a slip of paper and pen and ink, and retired to the desk with my collection to write out the receipt. I had taken off my glove and was beginning to write when somebody entered the shop with a quick, light step, suggesting a young and active man. Just behind me the footsteps stopped short, and a pleasant, masculine voice addressed the dealer.

"All right, Mr. Campbell; don't let me disturb you. I'm in no hurry."

"I'm afraid, sir, your things are not quite ready, but if you don't mind waiting a moment I'll make sure."

"I suspected," the voice rejoined, "that I might be a little over-punctual. However, you finish what you are doing, while I browse round the museum."

At the first sound of the voice my pen stopped short; and it seemed as if my heart stopped, too—though it soon began to make up for lost time. I was disconcerted and vaguely annoyed that a small surprise should set up such a disproportionate disturbance. Perhaps, too, I was a little startled to find a voice so long unheard elicit such instant and undoubting recognition. But I recovered immediately and resumed my writing, though, to be sure, the pen-point no longer traced the firm and steady lines of the first-written words. Meanwhile, Mr. Campbell had completed his receipt and we now exchanged our documents, I checking his list of my sample works, and he scanning my address with apparent surprise.

"Wellclose Square," he read out. "There is a Wellclose Square somewhere down Wapping way. It won't be that one?"

"Yes. But I think it is actually in Ratcliff. When shall I hear from you?"

"I will write and post the letter this evening."

"Thank you, Mr. Campbell. Good morning."

As we exchanged bows, I turned and met the newcomer approaching the counter. He glanced at me, at first without recognition; then he looked again.

"Why, surely it is Miss Vardon!" he exclaimed.

"Wrong, Mr. Davenant," said I. "It is Mrs. Otway. But that is a mere quibble. I am the person whom you knew as Miss Vardon."

"Well, well," said he, "what a piece of luck to meet you—and here of all places!"

"Is this a peculiarly unlikely place, then?" I asked.

"Well, I suppose it isn't, really; at any rate, I mustn't let Mr. Campbell hear me say that it is. Do you mind waiting a moment while I settle my little business with him? I want to hear all your news."

His little business amounted to no more than an arrangement that he should call in about three days for his "things," whatever they were, and when this had been settled, we left the shop together.

"Which way are you walking?" he asked.

"I really don't know," I answered. "I think I had some dim idea of seeing the town and taking a look at the shops."

"Then," said he, "as you are a country mouse, whereas I am a town sparrow of the deepest dye, perhaps I may be permitted to act as conductor and expositor of the wonders of the Metropolis, while you give me the news from Maidstone."

"There is little to tell you excepting that I have lost my father. He died quite suddenly, about two months ago, from heart failure."

"Ah!" said Mr. Davenant, "I had a presentiment that it was so. Seeing you in mourning, I was afraid to ask after him; and I need not tell you how deeply I sympathise with you. I remember how much you were to one another. What a mercy it is that you were married!"

To this I made no reply, and for a time we walked on slowly without speaking. But though nothing was said, much was thought, at least by me. For I had to make up my mind now, and once for all, on a point that I felt to be of vital importance. Should I tell him how things were with me? Or should I let him think that all was well, and that I was a normal married woman? Something—I did not ask myself what—urged me to tell him everything. But caution, prudence, whispered—and that none too softly—that it were better not. The sudden wave of emotion that had surged over me at the sound of his voice was still a vivid and startling memory; and it counselled reticence.

Thus two opposing forces contended; on the one hand, an emotional impulse, on the other the admonitions of reason; and it is needless to say that reason played losing game. Swiftly I argued out the issues. Sooner or later, the inevitable question must come, and with it the choice of an evasion or a straightforward answer. If it was to be evasion, then I put Jasper Davenant out of my life at once and for ever, for the evasion could never be maintained; must shut out this gleam of sunshine that came to me from the old, happy days as if to light up my sombre, lonely life, and wend on my pilgrimage without a friend save the companions of my working days.

And reason whispered again that it were better so.

---

#### XIV.—JASPER DAVENANT

THE silence that had fallen between me and my companion remained unbroken (with one exception, when he briefly drew my attention to the old stone name-tablet, inscribed "Wardour Streete 1686") until we came opposite a church, standing back from the road, and distinguished by a sort of tumour—containing a clock—on its spire. Here Mr. Davenant halted, and looking up at the tower, remarked:

"A quaint-looking church, this; odd and ugly, but yet not without a certain character and picturesqueness. Quite an aristocratic church, too, for it is the burial place of a king."

"Indeed," said I. "Which of the kings is buried there?"

"He was but a shabby little king—Theodore of Corsica—and he has the shabbiest little moralizing monument. But he was a somewhat original monarch in his way, for, being in acute financial difficulties, he conceived the brilliant idea of making over his kingdom to his creditors. Would you care to see the monument?"

I assented, without enthusiasm, and we mounted the steps to the grimy churchyard, where presently, against the wall of the church, we found the monument. And still, as we deciphered the weathered inscription, I debated the question whether I should or should not tell him; and still I reached no conclusion.

"By the way," my companion said, suddenly, "I am acting the showman on the assumption that you are the complete and perfect country bumpkin. But perhaps you are, by now, a fully acclimatized Londoner. How long have you been living in town?"

"About a month."

"Then the hay-seed is still in your hair, so to speak. I still address a country cousin, and have not presumed unduly; though, no doubt, you are beginning to learn the rudiments. I heard Mr. Campbell speak of Wellclose Square, for instance, as a region known to you."

"Yes. That is where I live."

As I caught his look of astonishment my heart began to race; for I knew that the inevitable question was coming.

"I suppose your husband is connected with the docks?"

"No," I replied. "And he doesn't live at Wellclose Square. I am not living with my husband, Mr. Davenant. I never have lived with him, and it is not my intention ever to live with him."

The deed was done. The murder was out. And though I knew that I had taken the wrong course, I drew a deep breath of relief. As to Mr. Davenant, he was, for a few moments, too much taken aback to make any comment. At length he said, somewhat gloomily:

"I am sorry to hear this, Mrs. Otway. Very sorry. It sounds as if your domestic affairs were not very comfortable."

"They are not," I answered. "But, as I have told you so much, I should like to tell you what the position really is. Would

you mind?"

"Mind!" he exclaimed. "Of course I want to know, if you are willing to tell me. Aren't we old friends? I am most concerned about you."

"Thank you, Mr. Davenant. I should like to tell you how this extraordinary position has come about. Shall we sit down? This place is quieter than the street."

He dusted the wooden bench with his handkerchief, and we sat down just below the shabby monument of the poor, little, bankrupt king. And there I told once again that tragic story of cross-purposes and well-meant blundering. I had intended to give him but a bare outline of the catastrophe; but it could not be. For the bald fact was that I had sold myself to Mr. Otway for money; and my womanly pride and self-respect would not be satisfied with anything short of a complete justification such as might be accepted by a scrupulous, high-minded man. And as I poured out my miserable history, glancing at him from time to time, I was surprised and almost alarmed at the change that came over him. He was a sunny-natured man, buoyant, high-spirited, playful and humorous, though all in a quiet way. But now, as he listened to my story, the genial face grew rigid, the humorous mouth set hard and stern, and the short, sharp questions that he put from time to time, came in a voice that was strange to me.

"So now," said I, when I had come to the end of my recital, "you will understand why I refuse to recognize this marriage; and why I elect to live the life of a spinster, though without a spinster's privileges."

In a moment his face softened, and his clear, hazel eyes looked into mine with grave tenderness.

"Yes," he said; "I understand. I wish I could say more. I wish I could tell you adequately how I grieve for you—for all the sorrow that you have had to endure and for the maimed life that lies before you. But words are poor instruments." He laid his hand on mine for an instant, and added: "Yet I hope you will feel what I want to express in these threadbare phrases."

I thanked him for the sympathy, which he had indeed made very clearly evident, and for a time neither of us spoke. Nevertheless, I could see that he was cogitating something. Once or twice he seemed about to speak, for he looked at me, but then again bent his gaze reflectively on the ground. At length, with some hesitation, he said:

"I hope you won't think me inquisitive or impertinent, but I feel rather anxious as to—as to how you are placed. I gather that this man Otway does not—er—contribute—"

"He is quite willing to. But I can't allow him to maintain me if I repudiate the marriage."

"No; at least I think you are quite wise not to. But—you don't mind my asking, do you? Are you properly provided for? I'm really not—"

"Of course, you're not," I interrupted, smiling at his diffidence. "As to my means—well, I don't quite know what they will be eventually, but at present I am living in a reasonable state of comfort. I am not anxious about the future."

My answer did not seem to satisfy him completely, for he continued to cogitate rather uneasily. But, now that I had the key, I could read pretty clearly, without the aid of any magic crystal, what was passing in his mind. He knew that I lived in a squalid east-end neighbourhood. He had seen me at the dealers, and evidently surmised that I was not there as a buyer; that I was in straitened circumstances—perhaps in a state of actual poverty—and that I was disposing of my jewellery and valuables to enable me to live. That, I had no doubt, was what he suspected; and the question that he was debating so earnestly was whether he could, without impertinence, extract any further information and whether our friendship was intimate enough to allow of his making any kind of offer of help.

I should have liked to set his mind at rest, but, in truth, I was none too confident about my future. That depended largely on the nature of Mr. Campbell's offer; on my ability to earn a reasonable livelihood.

"Well," Mr. Davenant said, at length, "I hope your confidence is justified. But in any case, I suppose you have friends?"

"There's no need for you to worry about me," I replied, evasively—for I had no near relatives from whom I could claim assistance. "I am in quite comfortable circumstances at present. And now let us put away my bothersome affairs and talk of something more pleasant."

"Very well," said he. "Let us choose an agreeable topic and discuss it in all its bearings as we used to do." He drew his watch from his pocket, and, glancing at it, continued: "It is now nearly one o'clock. What do you say to the question of lunch as an agreeable topic for our debate?"

I admitted that the subject was not without its attractions.

"Then," said he, "I will suggest that a club is an appropriate place in which to consume it, and that a mixed club satisfies the most extreme proprieties."

"I should hardly have suspected you of a mixed dub."

"In strict confidence," he replied, "between you and me and our friend Theodore of insolvent memory, I have another—unmixed—for normal club purposes. This one is my lunch club. It is quite near to my chambers, and is quieter and more pleasant than a restaurant. And it has a special character of its own, as is indicated by its name. It is called the 'Magpies' Club."

"That sounds rather ominous."

"Doesn't it? But it isn't a burglars' club. Its members are collectors and connoisseurs—furniture and china maniacs and so forth; and the main function of the club is to enable them to show their specimens to one another and to exchange or sell duplicate pieces. May I take it that you consent to honour the 'Magpies'?"

I accepted the invitation gladly, for a month's residence in the East End had made me decidedly appreciative of the amenities of the more civilized regions. We decided to walk to Essex Street, in which the club had its premises, and to go by way of the side streets for greater quiet and ease of conversation.

"You spoke just now of your chambers," said I. "Does that mean that you are in practice now?"

"Yes. But not in the law. I finished my legal studies and got called, but then I decided to give up the Bench and the Woolsack, though they shouted for me never so loudly, and return to an old love. I am now an architect."

"Is a barrister allowed to practice as an architect?"

"On that I am not quite clear; but it really doesn't matter to me. It is a question for the benchers or other authorities."

"Have you been in practice long?"

"Exactly three weeks to-day. And when I tell you that I have already received a commission to design and erect a greenhouse no less than twelve feet by eight in plan, you will realize that I am mounting the ladder of professional success, with the speed of an eagle with a balloon attachment. My client, by the way, is a member of the club."

Thus gossiping, we made our way by devious routes through the less frequented streets, by Garrick Street, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, until, by the Law Courts, we emerged into the Strand, crossed to Essex Street, and presently arrived at the roomy, old-fashioned house in which the Magpies had their meeting-place.

It was a pleasant, homely club, and certainly there could be no question as to its eminent respectability, for the aspect of the members—mostly middle-aged and many of them elderly—bordered on the frumpish. The room in which we selected our table was a large, oblong apartment, quietly furnished and decorated and provided with a glazed museum case, which occupied the centre; while a sort of dais at one end was devoted to the display of pieces of furniture exhibited by the members. I noticed, too, that the walls were occupied by pictures, each of which bore a written descriptive label.

"Are you interested in ancient ivories?" Mr. Davenant asked, as we looked into the glass case, in which a collection of very brown and cracked specimens were exhibited by a Mr. Udimore-Jones. "For my part, I find it difficult to develop great enthusiasm over the dental arrangements of superannuated elephants, carved into funny shapes by piously-facetious middle-agers. Look out! Here comes my client. Let us sneak off to our table. Aha! Too late! She's seen us."

"Which is your client?" I asked, looking round furtively.

"The elderly damsel with the smile—a Miss Tallboy Smith. There! She has caught my eye now. Did you ever see such a set of teeth? She had better be careful or Udimore-Jones will have her."

We were edging away towards our table, with a feeble hope of escape, when she caught us.

"Now, I don't believe you've seen my cup," she exclaimed, with an engaging smile. "You must see it. It is not only genuine Nantgarw, but the roses on it are unquestionable Billingsleys."

"Observe," said Mr. Davenant, "the pride of the inveterate collector. You'd think she had painted those roses herself."

"Indeed, you wouldn't," retorted Miss Tallboy-Smith; "not if you had seen them and knew anything about ceramic painting. And as to pride, isn't it something to be proud of? Nantgarw porcelain is rare, and roses painted by Billingsley are rare; and when you have them both in a single piece, why then, you see, you—"

"Then," said Mr. Davenant, "you multiply the rarity of the one by the rarity of the other, and the product of the multiplication is the rarity of the piece as a whole."

"Isn't he absurd?" she simpered, "treating me to a complete private view of the 'ancient ivories.'"

"Perfectly incorrigible. Don't you agree with me, Miss—Mrs—"

"Otway," said I.

"Oh, really! Now I wonder—my brother knew a Mr. Otway—oh, but he was a money-lender. That wouldn't be—but won't you come and look at my cup?"

We returned to the glass case, of which Miss Tallboy Smith opened a door and lifted from its shelf a dainty porcelain teacup.

"Just feel how thin and light it is," she said, holding it out to me.

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Mr. Davenant. "This Nantgarw stuff crumbles like a baked egg-shell; and it's hideously valuable."

"Don't take any notice of him," said Miss Tallboy Smith. "Just feel it—it's positively delicious to touch; and look at the lovely roses; no one but William Billingsley could have painted those roses. And, if there could be any doubt, you have only to turn the piece up and look at the bottom. There is Billingsley's personal mark—the number 7. That's infallible."

I took from her hand the delicate, translucent cup, and was admiring the freedom and softness of the flower painting

when she drew nearer and said in a warning whisper: "Here comes Major Dewham-Brown. If he tries to sell you anything, don't buy it. He only brings his bad bargains here."

She had barely uttered her warning when a brassy voice behind me exclaimed: "How d'you do, Miss Tallboy Smith? and how are you, Davenant?" and a tall, smart, rather stupid-looking man with a large nose—which seemed to have been produced at the expense of his eyes and chin—sailed into my field of vision.

"Ha!" said he. "Pretty cup, that. Worth a pot of money, too, I expect, though I don't know much about 'em. And that reminds me that I've got rather an interesting thing that I picked up the other day; bit of old church plate; seventeenth century, if not earlier. Like to see it?"

Without waiting for a reply, he fished out of a "poacher's" pocket a flat object wrapped in a silk handkerchief.

"Curious piece, this: interested me very much. The repoussé-work on it is remarkably fine." He unfolded the handkerchief as he spoke, and at length extracted, with a sort of conjuror's flourish, a small, circular, silver platter—apparently a paten, to judge by its size. This he handed to Miss Tallboy-Smith, who grinned at it indulgently and passed it to Mr. Davenant, who, having looked it over without enthusiasm, handed it to me. A very brief inspection, with the piece in my hand, was enough to make Miss Tallboy-Smith's warning unnecessary; for, apart from the unsuitability of the ornament—if it was really meant for a paten—it was an obvious electrotype, which had, however, been pickled, polished and sulphured with intent to deceive. Having noted this fact, I returned the piece to its owner with a few words of polite and colourless commendation of the design; and the Major, chilled by the lack of enthusiasm, invested his treasure once more in its silken wrapping and went off in search of a more appreciative audience. Under cover of his parting courtesies to Miss Tallboy-Smith, Mr. Davenant and I retreated to our table.

"That antique of the Major's looked to me rather like fake," said my companion, when we had ordered our lunch. "It was so very venerable."

"It is an electrotype, sulphured to give an appearance of age," said I.

"Is it, by Jove? Now, how did you spot it as an electrotype?"

"It was the disagreement between the back and the face that first attracted my attention. The face was repoussé—pretty coarse too—but there was not a vestige of a toolmark on the back, where, of course, most of the punch-marks would be; nothing but the smooth surface of the deposited metal."

Mr. Davenant chuckled. "I seem to have imported an expert Magpie. Oh! But I remember now that you and your father used to do all sorts of wonderful works in metal. Ha, ha! Poor old Dewham-Brown! He little suspected that he was dealing with a practical artificer."

Here the advent of food put a temporary stop to conversation, for we were both pretty sharp-set; but during the progress of the meal I looked about me and was vastly entertained by the proceedings of the Magpies. The glass case was the centre of interest, around which a small crowd of enthusiasts gathered, eagerly discussing the exhibits, which the proud owners expounded, with their noses flattened against the glass, or tenderly lifted out for closer inspection. And now and again a new exhibitor would arrive with a bag or attaché case, from which fresh treasures were disgorged into the glazed sanctuary.

"I suppose," said I, "your members will have nothing to do with any but antique works?"

"Not as a rule," Mr. Davenant replied. "The collector is usually a lover of old things. But there are exceptions. A good many of the pictures shown here are modern; some, I suspect, are shown by the artists themselves. Then we have one member who collects modern pottery exclusively—not commercial stuff, of course, but the work of modern artist-potters, like De Morgan, the Martin Brothers and other individual workers. Fine stuff it is, too. I have a few pieces myself. And, talk of the old gentleman—there he is. I'll fetch him over and make him show us what he has got in that bag."

He rose from the table, and crossed the room, and I saw him accost a very tall, pleasant-looking young man who was bearing down on the glass case with a good-sized hand-bag, but readily allowed himself to be led over our table.

"Now, Hawkesley," said Mr. Davenant, "my guest wants to see what really high-class modern pottery is like. What have you got?"

"I have only three pieces with me," replied Mr. Hawkesley, "and they are all of the same type; what I call 'mystery-ware.'"

"What is the mystery about it? Mr. Davenant asked.

"The mystery is, who makes it? As far as I know, there is only one dealer who has it, and he absolutely refuses to say where he gets it. I have never seen any of it exhibited—excepting here—and nobody can tell me the name of the potter or anything about it beyond the fact that it seems to be the exclusive monopoly of this one dealer, and that he has very little of it, and charges accordingly. But it is wonderful stuff." He lifted out of his bag a couple of jars and a bowl—handling them with that curious delicacy that one often notices in persons with large, strong, supple hands—and placed them carefully on the table.

"You see," he continued, "there are two methods of treatment, which are sometimes combined, as on this jar; and these two styles are based on two very different types of old work—the old English slip-ware, such as the Wrotham and Staffordshire and Toftware, and the old French Henri Deux, or Oiron ware. In the one, the ornament is produced by laying on pipes or threads of coloured slip—that is, clay in the semi-liquid state; in the other by inlaying coloured paste or enamel



in cavities in the body, which seems to be made with tools like those used by book binders. This covered jar—which looks almost like a piece of fine Japanese cloisonné—and this bowl show the inlay method, and this other jar is an example of the slip decoration, but with one or two spots of enamel inlay.”

“I think I prefer the pure inlay,” said Mr. Davenant.

“So do I,” said Mr. Hawkesley, “and so, I think, does the artist. All his finest work is done by the inlay method, though he uses the slip decoration with such skill and taste that it is virtually a new method. The old Wrotham and Toftware looks very primitive by the side of this scholarly, refined work.”

I turned the three pieces of pottery over in my hands and warmly commended the judgment of the collector. No modern work that I had ever seen approached it for perfection of finish or grace of design; while the colour-scheme combined richness, delicacy and restraint in a truly marvellous manner. It seemed to unite the brilliancy of enamel to the sober beauty of old tapestry. And even the little blue bird, inlaid on the bottom of each piece to form the potter’s mark, was finished with care and taste.

“May one inquire as to the local habitation and name of the dealer?” Mr. Davenant asked.

“You may,” was the reply. “His name is Maurice Goldstein, and he is to be found at Number 56, Hand Court, Holborn. And I should like to wring his neck.”

We both laughed at the vindictive tone in which this benevolent wish was uttered, and at the sudden ferocity of aspect that swept over the usually good-humoured, kindly face.

“Why this homicidal craving?” Mr. Davenant asked.

“Don’t you see,” the other demanded, indignantly, “that this infernal Goldswine—I beg your pardon—”

“You needn’t,” said I.

“That this miserable huckster is grinding the face of some poor artist; that he is not only devouring the earnings of this industrious, painstaking worker, but—for his own paltry profit—he is robbing that artist of the credit—of the fame—to which his genius and his enthusiasm entitle him. Look at this lovely jar! I gave that mean worm ten guineas for it. How much do you suppose he gave the potter?”

“Ten shillings, perhaps,” suggested Mr. Davenant.

“Probably not much more, though there is getting on for a week’s work in it.”

“Still,” I said, with a mischievous desire to stir up his indignation afresh, “the potter probably enjoys making these beautiful things. The work is its own reward.”

“I can’t agree to that,” Mr. Hawkesley rejoined, warmly. “He doesn’t enjoy being hard up and having to work for a pittance. Besides, it isn’t just. This man makes a jar that is going to give me a life-long pleasure. I want to pay him for that pleasure. I want to know who he is, to shake his hand and thank him and tell him that he is the salt of the earth. And this Shylock hides him away and just feeds on him like the beastly parasite that he is.”

He gathered up the treasured masterpieces, and having wished us adieu, with a sudden return to his customary geniality, crossed to the glass case to find a vacant niche for his samples of “mystery ware.”

“I like Jack Hawkesley,” said my companion; as we watched him.

“So do I,” I agreed warmly. “He takes a human interest in the artist. I wish more collectors were like him.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Davenant. “He is a good type of rich man. Would that there were more Hawkesleys.” He poured out the coffee which the waitress had just brought and then asked: “What do you think of this club—as a feeding and resting place, I mean?”

“It seems a comfortable, homely place, and the members and their exhibits are quite interesting.”

“I find it so. You wouldn’t care to join, I suppose? It is cheap, as clubs go: five guineas a year and no entrance fee. I should think you would find it a great convenience, living so far from the centre of town.”

“It would be a great convenience. But should I be eligible? I am not a collector, you know.”

“No, but you are something of an expert. At any rate, Hawkesley and I would manage the formalities. Think it over, and if you decide to honour us, drop me a line. This is my address—56, Clifford’s Inn.”

He handed me his card, and when he had made a note of my address, I prepared to depart.

“I have wasted a fearful amount of your time, Mr. Davenant,” said I; “but it has been a very pleasant interlude for me.”

“Has it really? I hope it has. For my part, I have enjoyed myself just as I did in the old days when you used to let me wag a philosophic chin at you, and I am reluctant to let you go so soon. Mayn’t I see you to the station, or wherever you are going?”

“I thought of walking back to get myself acquainted with London.”

“Then let me put you on the right road and show you some of the short cuts.”

“But what about your work?”

He regarded me with that quaint, humorous smile that I had always found so attractive. “My work is, at present, of a somewhat intermittent type. This is one of the intermissions. Let us fare forth and study the architectural beauties of the Metropolis.”

And we fared forth accordingly.

The short cuts discovered by my companion did not in the least conform to Euclid’s definition of a straight line; and their brevity was relieved by sundry excursions into alleys and by-streets and incursions into churches and other ancient buildings. They led us by way of the Temple and its old round church, Mitre Court, Fetter Lane, Nevill’s Court, Gough Square, and so to St. Paul’s Churchyard and into the Cathedral; thence by Paul’s Alley, Paternoster Row, Cheapside and Lombard Street, dropping into one or two churches on our way, until we came out on Great Tower Hill, and drifted slowly down Royal Mint Street. And all the while we gossiped pleasantly of this wonderful city and its wonderful, inexhaustible past; and my guide expounded, with all his old gaiety and brightness—and with astonishing knowledge of his subject—until I had almost forgotten Wellclose Square and the sinister shadow that hung over my life, and seemed to be back in the untroubled days of my girlhood.

But not quite. For, even as I talked—or more often listened—with the liveliest interest and pleasure, a project was maturing in my mind. I had, in fact, conceived a brilliant idea. Mr. Davenant’s suggestion that I should join the club had started a train of thought that ran as an under-current—in the subconscious mind, perhaps, as Lilith would have said. It had begun vaguely when I saw the modern pictures on the walls, and the modern works in the glass case and the Major hawking round his little platter. Here was a place in which the work of the unknown artist could be shown and perhaps sold; my own work, Lilith’s work, the Titmouse’s, Philibar’s, even Miss Polton’s. For five guineas a year I could open this emporium, not only to myself, but to my fellow-workers; could slip past the dealer and secure his profits for us all. I say it was a brilliant idea—at least, it appeared so to me; and throughout that long peregrination, made delightful by the sympathetic companionship of my newly-recovered friend it germinated and grew until, as we halted to say good-bye at the corner of Cable Street, it had grown to full maturity.

“I have been thinking,” said I, “of your suggestion—about joining the club, you know. It would be nice to have a place to go to for a rest or a meal, in the centre of town. And I shall often want such a place.”

His face brightened perceptibly—perhaps at the implied assurance that I could afford to spend five guineas.

“Then, may I put your name up for election?”

“Will you be so kind?”

“Won’t I? It will be jolly, and we shan’t lose sight of one another again; though that was my fault for not writing. I was often on the point of sending you a letter, and then I felt a silly diffidence—thought that you might consider I was presuming on a mere acquaintanceship. However, I will propose you for membership at once, and in about a week’s time you will be a full-blown Magpie. Then I will send you a line, though, of course, you will get the official notification.”

He handed me my bag, and with a hearty hand-shake, we said “Good-bye,” and went our respective ways.

It was but a few minutes’ walk to Wellclose Square, and I took it slowly; for now that my companion was gone and I was bereft of his buoyancy and vitality, I was suddenly aware of intense bodily fatigue. Moreover, I felt a certain reluctance to bring to a definite close what had been an interval of quiet but perfect happiness. And so, in spite of my fatigue, I sauntered on, loitering awhile in St. George’s churchyard and stopping to look up at the quaint stone name-tablet at the corner of Chigwell Lane, until weariness and growing hunger drove me homewards. And even then, it was not without regret that I pulled the brass bell-knob and, as it were, wrote “Finis” to this pleasant and eventful chapter.

---

## XV. — THE MAGIC PENDULUM

THE weighty question whether my handicraft would yield me a livelihood was answered on the following morning by the arrival of a letter from Mr. Campbell; and it was answered, though not very emphatically, in the affirmative. The prices that he offered, provisionally—and advised me not to accept—were appallingly low; very little above those of mere commercial goods. But even so, it would be possible, by hard work and spare living, to eke out a bare subsistence. And it was fair to assume that Mr. Campbell’s offer was, as indeed he explicitly stated, a minimum, on which an advance might be expected. Accordingly, I declined the offer and decided to await the results of actual sales to his customers.

I was turning these matters over at the breakfast table, when Lilith came and took a vacant chair by my side.

“Well, Sibyl,” she said, in a low voice, “how did you fare yesterday? Did you have any success?”

“Yes. I came back with an empty bag.”

“And a full purse?”

“Ah! That is another matter. The tide of handicraft doesn’t seem exactly to lead on to fortune.”

“I want to hear all about it,” said Lilith. “But we can’t discuss it here. Let us have a quiet talk up in my room after breakfast. If you will run up when you’ve finished, I will join you in a few minutes.”

I assented gladly, for Lilith, apart from what the irreverent Titmouse characterised as her “crystal-gazing tosh,” was a sound adviser on business affairs; and a few minutes later I betook myself upstairs to her studio. I had scarcely seen this room before, for there was an unwritten law, sternly enforced by Miss Polton, forbidding the boarders to enter one another’s workrooms except by invitation and on specific business, and I now looked about me with a good deal of curiosity.

It was a queer room. The two sides of Lilith’s personality, like two separate persons, seemed to have parcelled it out into two distinct territories. There was the working territory, neat, precise, business-like, strangely free from the usual muddle and disorder of a woman-artist’s studio; the big water-colour easel, the orderly painting cabinet, the papier-mache lay figure, quaintly arrayed in a walking costume such as might have been seen in a Regent Street shop window (miraculously built up, as I observed, of draperies, pinned, tied or lightly stitched together), the charcoal studies from the figure, pinned up on the wall for reference, with careful pencil drawings of heads, hands and feet, and one or two casts of faces and hands. The working department was a model of matter-of-fact efficiency.

In curious contrast to this was the domain of Lilith, the mystic. In a well-lighted corner stood a small table supporting a black velvet cushion on which reposed a crystal globe of the size of a cricket ball. Above the table a couple of book-shelves exhibited a collection of volumes treating of Spiritualism, Telepathy, Apparitions, Psychical Research and other occult subjects. On the upper shelf stood a box filled with the letters of a dissected alphabet; while, hanging on the wall, was a small heart-shaped object with tiny castors, which I assumed to be Planchette, and by its side a single Egyptian bead suspended at the end of a silken thread.

Yet these two aspects of this strange girl’s character were not without a connecting link. On the walls were several framed paintings signed “Winifred Blake,” mystical figure subjects, recalling, but not imitating, the works of Burne Jones and Rosetti, exquisitely drawn and delicately painted in water-colour. The work on the easel was a similar drawing of a frieze-like character, the figures nude but with lightly indicated draperies; and one of the nude figures had been traced on to a fashion-plate board and was already partly clothed in the walking costume.

My survey of the room and its contents was interrupted by the arrival of its occupant, who having seated me in the easy chair, perched herself on her painting-stool and opened the examination.

“Now,” said she, “I don’t want to be inquisitive, but I do want to know just how you got on. Did you carry out the methods that I proposed?”

“I did—at least as far as the silent willing was concerned—though not very thoroughly. I don’t think I did much in the way of suggestion.”

“And did you sell your work?”

“Yes, I think I may say I did,” and here I gave her an account of Mr. Campbell’s two alternative offers.

“You have done admirably, Sibyl,” she said enthusiastically. “Your first essay has been a perfect success. And now, tell me: are you convinced?”

As I could not truthfully say that I was, I took refuge in polite evasion, which, however, Lilith brushed aside with some impatience.

“I can never understand this kind of scepticism,” said she. “You have the cause and effect before your eyes, but yet you refuse to recognise the connection. You take your work to this man. Outside the shop you will find that he shall buy it. You go in and he does buy it. What more could you want?”

“But he might have bought the things if I hadn’t willed, you know.”

“Yes,” she agreed; “he might. But that is not the way we reason about material things. I strike a match and apply it to a laid fire, and the fire burns. It might have burned if I had not applied the lighted match, but no one doubts the connection between the lighted match and the lighted fire. Physical causes and effects are accepted with unquestioning faith, but as soon as we come to spiritual or psychical phenomena, this extraordinary scepticism springs up—this curious refusal to admit and accept the obvious.”

“I am not asserting that there was no connection between the silent willing and the purchase of my work,” said I. “All I say is that I don’t regard the connection as proved. I can’t decide for or against because there doesn’t seem to be enough evidence either way.”

“Yes; I suppose you are right,” she admitted, reluctantly. “But I should like to convince you, because I am sure you have very unusual powers.”

She was silent for a short space, and then, suddenly, she asked: “Have you ever been to a séance, Sibyl?”

“Never,” I replied.

“Well,” said she, “you ought to go to one—not to any of those silly public shows conducted by mere mountebanks, but to a private séance, carried out by really earnest people who are seeking to extend our knowledge. Would you care to come to one with me?”

“It would be rather interesting,” I replied, without much enthusiasm.

"It would," said she. "You were speaking of evidence just now. Well, at a genuine séance you would obtain evidence that I think would convince you of the reality of psychical phenomena. I have a friend—a Mr. Quecks—who has given me some most remarkable demonstrations, and I have no doubt that he would be very pleased for you to accompany me to one of them."

"Is Mr. Quecks a medium?" I asked.

"No; I shouldn't describe him as a medium, though he is very sensitive and has most extraordinary powers. But he is a profound student of super-normal phenomena and deeply interested in psychical research. May I ask him to show you some of his experiments?"

"Thank you, Lilith; and I hope you will find me less disappointing than you have to-day. I am really quite curious about these things, although I admit a rather sceptical frame of mind. I was wondering, before you came up, what you do with that bead on the string."

"That," replied Lilith, all agog at the question, "is the *pendule explorateur*—the magic pendulum. It is an instrument of the kind known in psychical science as an autoscope—an appliance for, as it were, bringing the subconscious into view."

"But how does it work?"

"It works by the influence of the subconscious mind upon the muscles. Let me show you—but you shall try it yourself because you are an unbeliever."

She removed the crystal ball and its cushion from the table, and taking the bowl of loose letters, turned out its contents and rapidly arranged the letters in a circle, forming a clock-wise alphabet. Then she took the pendulum down from its hook.

"Now," said she, "what you have to do is this: you rest your elbow on the table to steady your hand, and you hold the string with the thumb and finger, letting the bead hang just clear of the table in the centre of the circle; and you must keep your hand perfectly still and steady."

"But if I do, the bead will remain still, too."

"No, it won't, excepting just at first. Presently it will begin to swing, apparently of its own accord, but really in accordance with your mental state. For instance, if you let it hang inside a glass and you will that it shall strike the hour, it will strike the hour. If you will—or I hold your other hand and will—that it shall swing round in a circle to the right or left, it will swing round in the direction willed. But that is an exercise of the conscious will. In the experiment that we are making now we tap the subconscious. If there is any thing or person occupying your subconscious mind, the pendulum will spell out the name of that thing or person by swinging towards the letters. Let me put the chair comfortably for you, so that you can keep quite still."

As I listened to Lilith's explanation I began to wish heartily that I had never embarked on this experiment. Of course, I did not believe for a moment that this absurd pendulum would develop the occult powers that Lilith claimed for it; but yet her confidence shook mine. And I had a very strong feeling that, on this day of all days, I should prefer to keep my subconscious mind to myself. However, there was no escape; so I seated myself and proceeded to carry out Lilith's directions.

For nearly half a minute the bead hung quite motionless from my steady hand. Then it began almost imperceptibly to oscillate. My eye had already taken in the positions of the letters which might be incriminating, and now I observed with uneasy surprise that the faint oscillations of the pendulum were taking a direction towards the letter J. I could detect no movement in my hand, but, nevertheless, the oscillations grew wider and wider until the bead, as if possessed by a private demon, swung briskly half-way across the circle.

"That is pretty definite," said Lilith. "It is swinging towards U—or is it J? The circle ought to have been bigger, so that the letters need not have been opposite to one another. But I'll write down both; U or J."

The swing of the pendulum now began to shorten; and then, almost abruptly, it changed its direction to one at right angles, and I observed with astonishment that it was pointing direct to A.

"It's either A or P," said Lilith. "I'll put them both down."

Once again the pendulum changed the direction of its swing, and Lilith noted down E or S; and so, to my growing consternation, it continued to take up quite distinct changes of direction until six variations had occurred, when the pendulum became stationary and then began to swing round in a circle.

"It has finished," said Lilith—whereupon I instantly dropped the pendulum. "It is a word of six letters: U or J, A or P, E or S, A or P, E or S, F or R. Let us see if we can make out what the word is. It is a pity the letters were opposite; it muddles it up so. They ought to be in a half-circle, but then they would be too close. But let us try a few combinations. U P E A S F; it can't be that. U P S A S F; it can't be that. We'll try it with J—J A E P E F; that isn't it. J A S B S F; that can't be the word. Do the letters suggest anything to you, Sibyl? Is there any name that might be lurking in your subconscious mind, beginning with U or J? Try to think. What did you do in town yesterday?"

"Oh, various things. I went to the dealer, of course; and then I went to a private show of pottery and antiques."

"Pottery," mused Lilith, scanning the letters that she had written down. "Let me see: Upchurch? No, that won't do." She

looked the letters through again and then asked eagerly: "There wasn't any Wedgwood there, I suppose?"

Now it happened that while Mr. Hawkesley was talking to us I had noticed an old gentleman tenderly placing a very fine green Wedgwood cup and saucer in the show case. So I could, and did, answer truthfully.

"Yes, there was; a beautiful green Jasper-ware cup and saucer."

"There!" Lilith exclaimed triumphantly. "Jasper! That is the word! And yet I don't suppose you have given that cup and saucer a thought since you saw it."

"I had forgotten its existence until you spoke of Wedgwood."

"Exactly," said Lilith. "And that is the mysterious peculiarity of the subconscious. You see a thing or a person perhaps only for a moment, and straightway forget it. It seems to be gone for ever. But it is not. It has sunk into the subconscious, to remain there unnoticed possibly for years until some chance association, or perhaps a dream, brings it to the surface. But all the time it has been there. And at any moment it can be brought into view by the use of some kind of autoscope such as the pendulum or the crystal."

"The crystal is an autoscope, too, is it?" I asked.

"Yes; but of quite a different kind. The pendulum acts by the effects of the subconscious mind upon the muscles; the crystal by the effects of the subconscious mind on the centres of visual perception."

"That sounds very learned; but tell me exactly what you do with the crystal."

"As to me, personally," replied Lilith, "I do very little with it. Crystal vision—or 'scrying,' to use the technical term—is a rather rare faculty. I am a very poor scryer. But in the case of a really gifted observer, the most astonishing results are obtained. The method of using the instrument is this: The scryer sits in a restful position with the crystal before her (all the best scryers, I think, are women) and gazes steadily at the bright lights in it, keeping the conscious mind in a passive state—thinking of nothing, in fact. After a time the lights in the crystal grow dim; a kind of cloud or mist seems to float before it, and in this cloud, and gradually taking its place, the picture or vision appears; sometimes dim and vague, but often quite clear and bright, like the little pictures that you see in a convex mirror or a silver ball."

"And what is this picture? I mean what is its subject?"

"That varies. It may be a scene from the past that had been forgotten by the conscious memory, or something that never happened at all—just a jumble of bits of memory like a dream. Or it may be the picture of some event that is going to take place in the near future."

"But," I objected, "how can an event which has not yet occurred be in your subconscious mind?"

"I know," said Lilith. "The whole subject of pre-recognition is a very difficult one. But there seems to be no doubt that prophetic visions do really occur. And then there is clairvoyance—seeing across space and through obstacles. A really gifted scryer, by concentrating her thought on a particular person or place as she looks into the crystal, can see that person or place, no matter how great the distance may be; can see exactly what the person is doing or what is happening at the place."

"Really!" I exclaimed. "That sounds like rather an undesirable faculty. Doesn't it strike you, Lilith, as a very great intrusion on the privacy and liberty of the subject to scry a person without his or her consent? Supposing the scryer should happen to discover the scryed one in the act of taking her—or his—morning tub. Wouldn't it be rather a liberty?"

Lilith laughed (but I could see that the idea was new to her): "You are dreadfully matter-of-fact, Sibyl. But, of course, you are quite right. We shouldn't misuse our powers. As for me, I have very little power of the kind to misuse, for I have never seen anything more than a sort of vague picture of unrecognisable figures in undistinguishable surroundings. But I think you might do better, for I am still convinced that you have special gifts. Would you like to try the crystal, Sibyl?"

"Not now, thank you, Lilith. We ought to get to work after all this gossip. And that reminds me that, before you came up, I was looking at your exquisite paintings and wondering if you are not, to some extent, wasting your great talents."

"In what way?" she asked.

"Of course," I said, "these designs would make magnificent tapestries or wall decorations. But if you can't get a wall, you might condescend to a smaller surface. Have you ever tried designing and painting a fan?"

"No," she replied.

"I wish you would," said I. "You would do it splendidly with your power of design and your delicate technique. And Phillibar could make the sticks and carve the guards, or I could do you a pair in silver repoussé, and a jewelled pin and loop. Will you think over the proposal?"

Lilith picked up the crystal on its cushion and, smiling at me, said:

"I will make a bargain with you. If you will take the crystal to your room and give it a thorough trial whenever you have time, I will get out a design for a fan. Do you agree?"

I held out my hand for the crystal. Primarily, my desire was to introduce Lilith to Fame and Fortune through the medium of the Magpies Club; but the startling success of the magic pendulum had aroused my curiosity in regard to the

other “autoscope,” though I have to confess that, when I had borne it to my room, I concealed it guiltily in a locked drawer, where it should be secure from the prying eyes of the servant-maid, and above all from the observation of the sarcastic and sceptical Titmouse.

But there were other matters than crystals and magic pendulums to be thought of. There was, for instance, the set of twelve spoons which Mr. Campbell had asked me to make and to which he had again referred in his letter. I knew now that I should be paid for them at a reasonably remunerative rate, and this, and the congenial nature of the task, encouraged me to get to work. But before I could begin there was the motive of the design to be considered; and since the apostles were ruled out as obsolete, I had to find some other group of twelve related objects. After a whole day’s anxious thought, I fixed upon the Signs of the Zodiac as furnishing a picturesque and manageable motive, and with this scheme in my mind, I fell to work in earnest, first with the pencil and then with the wax and metal.

But busy as I was, and happy in the interest of my work, I was yet aware of a change, of a something new that had come into my life. From the little workshop which had been my world, I found my thoughts straying out into the larger world, and particularly that part of it which is adjacent to Temple Bar; and if at times I viewed this change with some misgivings, I was more often conscious of a sense of exhilaration such as one feels when embarking on some new adventure.

In due course I received notice of my election as a member of the Magpies Club, and by the same post a letter from Mr. Davenant asking me to celebrate the event by lunching with him there; and, as I had occasion to go into town to replenish my silver and some other materials, I accepted his invitation, intending to return to Wellclose Square in the afternoon. But it appeared that a loan collection of antique silver was being exhibited at the South Kensington Museum, and that he had hoped to have the pleasure of inspecting it under my expert guidance. Now, to a craftsman (or crafts-woman) of small experience, there is no technical education to compare with the study of admitted masterpieces. I felt that strongly, and I felt that I needed that technical education; furthermore, I felt that the attempt to explain the merits of the old work to an attentive and sympathetic listener would help me to concentrate my own attention. And perhaps it did. At any rate, I spent a long and pleasant afternoon at the museum, and we subsequently discussed the exhibits (and various other matters) very companionably over the dinner table at the club.

“It has been a jolly day for me, Mrs. Otway,” said Mr. Davenant, as he wished me ‘good-bye’ at the Underground Station. “I’ve learned no end about silver—you are a perfect encyclopaedia of knowledge in regard to goldsmith’s work. And the delightful thing to think of is that we’ve only scratched the surface of the museum. The place is inexhaustible. Do you think I may hope for the pleasure of another visit there with you before long?”

I gave what I intended to be an ambiguous answer. But it was not ambiguous to me; and I suspect that Mr. Davenant went on his way with a feeling that a precedent had been created.

When I arrived home, I found a letter awaiting me from Mr. Otway. It was not entirely unexpected, for I had felt pretty certain that he would presently hear further from his mysterious correspondent. It now appeared that he had received one or two short letters, ostensibly of the nature of warnings, but actually threatening, though in vague, indefinite terms, and one more recently of a more explicitly menacing character. These he wished me to see and discuss with him, and he asked me to make an appointment, at my convenience, to meet him for that purpose. I replied, suggesting, as before, the Tower Wharf; and there, a couple of evenings later, I met him.

In appearance he had by no means improved. His pale face had a strained, wild expression, his eye-lids were puffy and covered with curious, minute wrinkles. His hands were markedly tremulous, and his fingers bore the deep stains that mark the inveterate cigarette smoker. His dress was noticeably less neat than it had used to be; indeed, he presented a distinctly shabby and neglected appearance. Oddly enough, too, he seemed to have grown somewhat stouter.

I should have been less than human if these plain indications of sustained misery had awakened in me no feeling of pity. That his sufferings were the indirect result of his indifference to the happiness or misery of others, could not entirely stifle compassion, and I found myself speaking to him in a tone almost sympathetic.

“I am afraid, Mr. Otway,” said I, “you are letting these nonsensical letters worry you quite unnecessarily. You are not looking at all well.”

“I am not at all well, Helen,” he replied, dejectedly.

“And I think you are smoking too much.”

“I am. And I am drinking too much—I, who have been a temperate man all my life. And I have to take drugs to get a decent night’s rest. This worry is breaking me up.”

“Oh, come, Mr. Otway,” I protested, “you mustn’t give way in this manner. What is it all about, after all? Just a wretched blackmailer whom you know to be an impostor, whose threats you know to be mere empty vapourings.”

“That is not quite true, Helen. The man is an impostor, no doubt. He doesn’t really know anything. There is nothing for him to know. But he could create a great deal of trouble. He could, in fact, cause the—ah—the inquiry to be re-opened and—ah—”

“Exactly. And if it were re-opened? There would be unpleasant comment on the fact that a detail of the evidence had been withheld at the inquest. But that is the worst that could happen.”

Mr. Otway looked at me with a sort of dumb gratitude that was quite pathetic, but his gloom was in nowise dispelled by

my optimism.

"It is very good of you, Helen," said he, "to speak in this cheerful, confident tone. But I assure you, you minimize the danger. There is no saying what construction might be put upon the suppression of that detail; what considerations of motive might be read into it—especially as there was what they would call collusion between us to suppress it. But let me show you the last letter—the others are of no consequence."

He produced his wallet, and, after some awkward fumbling, drew out the letter, which he held out to me with a hand that shook so that the paper rattled. Like the last, it was typewritten unskilfully, and characterized by the same semi-illiterate confusion in the wording, which ran thus:

"Mr. Lewis Otway,

"The writer of this warns you once more to look out for trouble. The person that I spoke of knows that some thing was held back at the inquest at least they say so and that they know why your wife won't live with you and that she knows all about it too and that someone knows more than you think anybody knows. This is a friendly warning.

"FROM A WELL WISHER."

I returned the letter to Mr. Otway after reading it through twice, and I must confess that my confidence was somewhat shaken. If the writer was merely guessing, he seemed to have an uncanny aptitude for guessing right. As to his claim to possess some further knowledge, I did not see how that could be possible. When the fatal interview took place between my father and Mr. Otway, there were—to the best of my belief—only three persons in the house. Of those actually present at the interview there was only a single survivor—Mr. Otway himself—and he alone knew with certainty what occurred. The claim was therefore almost certainly false. And yet, even as I dismissed it, there crept into my mind once again a vague discomfort, a doubt whether there might not be something that I was unaware of, and that Mr. Otway knew; some dreadful secret that I, of all persons in the world, had been instrumental in guarding from discovery. And as I glanced at Mr. Otway—haggard, wild, trembling, and terrified out of all proportion to the danger, so far as it was known to me—the horrid doubts seemed to deepen into something like suspicion.

"Of course," said he, when he had returned the letter to the wallet, "I realize that you are right; that there is nothing to be done but to wait for this person to show his hand more plainly. It would be madness to apply to the police. They would immediately ask if there had been any evidence withheld and why you were not living with me. And if they succeeded in getting hold of the writer of this letter, we should have more to fear from them than from the writer himself. He may be, as you believe, a mere blackmailer who is preparing to extort money, but if he were brought to bay he would try to justify his threats."

With this I could not but agree. The implied allegations in this letter were, in point of fact, true; and any attempt to obtain help from the police would probably result in their truth being made manifest.

"Have you no idea whatever," I asked, "who might be the writer of this letter? He can hardly be a complete stranger. Have you no suspicion? Can you think of no one who might have written it?"

He looked at me furtively and cleared his throat once or twice before replying; and when he did answer, his manner was hesitating and even evasive.

"Suspensions," he said, "are—er—not very—ah—helpful. I have no facts. The mere—ah—conjecture that this person or that might possibly be concerned—if a motive could be supplied—and—ah—if one can think of no motive—"

He left the sentence uncompleted, giving me the vague impression that he was reserving something that he did not wish to discuss.

We were silent for some time, and I was beginning to consider bringing the interview to an end when he suddenly turned to me with a gesture of appeal.

"Helen," he said earnestly, "is it not possible for me to prevail on you to—ah—to reconsider your decision and—ah—to—to terminate this—er—this unhappy separation. Consider my loneliness, Helen, my broken health and this trouble—which is our joint trouble—and—ah—"

"Mr. Otway," I answered, "it is not possible. I assure you it is not. I am deeply distressed to think of your unhappiness and to see you looking so ill, but I could not entertain what you suggest. You must remember that we are strangers. We have never been otherwise than separated. As we are, so we must continue."

"You don't mean that we must always remain apart?" he exclaimed. "It was only meant to be a temporary separation."

"At any rate," I rejoined, "the time has not come to consider a change. But I shall be glad to hear how things go with you and to give you any help that I can."

I rose and held out my hand, which he took reluctantly (though it was the first time that I had ever offered to shake hands with him).

"I am driving you away, Helen," he said.

"No, indeed," I replied. "I had to go. You will write to me if anything fresh happens?"

He promised readily, and we turned and walked away in opposite directions. When I had gone a little way, I paused to

look back at him; and as I noted his dejected droop and his air of something approaching physical decrepitude, I felt a pang—not of remorse, but of regret that I could not in some way lighten the burden of his evident misery. It is true that his unhappiness was of his own making, and that in wrecking his own life he had wrecked mine and my father's. But vindictiveness is a character alien to the civilized and developed mind. For what he had done I still loathed him; but it pained me to think of the haunting dread, the abiding fear that was his companion night and day.

---



## XVI. — THE SWEATED ARTIST

I HAD told Mr. Otway that I had to go; but I did not tell him why. If I had, he would probably have been considerably startled. For the fact is that while we were talking I had formed a resolution which had rapidly matured—the resolution to go to Dr. Thorndyke and make a clean breast of the whole affair. He had invited me to call on him and report from time to time, especially if I should be in need of advice or help, and I had been intending to write and propose a visit. Now, however, I decided to call on the chance of his being disengaged, and if he should be unable to see me, to make an appointment.

From the Tower Wharf I made my way quickly to Mark Lane, noting as I entered the station that it was a quarter to six; and as the train rumbled westward I turned over the situation and decided on what I should say. That some trouble was brewing I had little doubt, and though I did not share Mr. Otway's alarm, I was more than a little uneasy. For, at the best, the re-opening of the inquiry into my father's death must entail a scandal and exhibit my conduct in a decidedly questionable light; and such a scandal would be a disaster. As a discredited witness, how could I face my comrades at Wellclose Square? And how should I stand with Jasper Davenant? These were unpleasant questions to reflect on. And underneath these reflections was the uneasy feeling that perhaps there was something more in Mr. Otway's fear than was known to me; something of which I had hardly dared to think.

From the Temple Station I found my way without difficulty to Dr. Thorndyke's chambers at Number 5A, King's Bench Walk, and was relieved to find the outer oak door open and a small brass knocker on the inner one tacitly accepting the possibility of visitors. I plied it modestly, and was immediately confronted by Mr. Polton, whose countenance, at the sight of me, became covered with a net work of benevolent and amicable wrinkles.

"The doctor is up in the laboratory looking over his apparatus, but I expect he has nearly finished. I'll go and tell him you are here. Have you had tea?"

I had not and admitted the fact, whereupon Mr. Polton nodded meaningly, and having offered me an arm-chair, took his departure. In a minute or two Dr. Thorndyke entered the room and greeted me with a cordiality that put me at my ease instantly.

"I have been wondering when you were coming to see me; in fact, I have seriously considered calling at Wellclose Square to see how you were getting on. Polton will bring you some tea in a moment, and then you must tell me all your news. I hope you are comfortable in your new home."

"I am very happy, indeed, Dr. Thorndyke, and very grateful to you for finding me such a congenial home. And I have made quite a promising start in my new profession, too. But I have really come to ask your advice—and to make a confession."

"A confession," said Dr. Thorndyke, looking at me gravely. "Is it necessary? and have you given it due consideration?"

"Yes, I think so. There is only one point. I should have told you this secret before, but as another person is involved in it, I felt that it would be a breach of confidence. But I now feel that my legal adviser should be told every thing."

"That is so. Advice can only be based on known facts. And I may say that anything that you may tell me in my professional capacity is a privileged communication. A lawyer cannot be compelled to reveal anything that his client has told him, and is, in fact, forbidden to do so. You are, therefore, committing no breach of confidence in giving me any necessary information."

"I am glad to know that, because, when I last spoke to you about my affairs, I held back something that you may consider important."

"Something relating to the inquest?" he asked.

"Yes. Did you suspect that I had?"

"I suspected that Mr. Otway was holding something back when he gave his evidence—but here is your tea, with all the little lady-like extras, just to show you what an old bachelor can do in the way of domestic miracles. I am ashamed of you, Polton. I call that embroidered tea-cloth sheer ostentation."

Mr. Polton laid out the dainty service, beaming with satisfaction at the doctor's recognition of his efforts to maintain the credit of the establishment, and as he went out I heard him close the outer door.

"Polton evidently smells a conference," commented Dr. Thorndyke. "The infallible way in which he always does the right thing without a word of instruction almost makes me believe in telepathy—which might be awkward if he were not as secret as an oyster. Now don't hurry, but tell me quietly what you want me to know."

Thus encouraged, I gave him the suppressed facts relating to the loaded stick that I had seen in Mr. Otway's hand, and then told him about the mysterious letters. He listened very attentively, and seemed deeply interested, for he questioned me at some length about Mr. Otway's establishment at Maidstone, his mode of life and such of his antecedents as were known to me.

"Is the stick in your possession or has Mr. Otway got it?" he asked.

"I suppose he has it. At any rate, I have never seen it since that day."

"And you know nothing of any of his associates, other than the housekeeper?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Is Mrs. Gregg still with him?"

"I believe so, but I am not sure."

"And you know nothing of his present mode of life excepting that he lives in Lyon's Inn Chambers?"

"No. I really know nothing about him."

"It is very satisfactory for you," Dr. Thorndyke observed. "You are quite in the dark. These letters suggest an intention to extort money, but they may come from a personal enemy or from someone who has some design other than direct blackmail. And the question is, what cards does that person hold? Is he acting on a mere guess or has he any actual knowledge? The problem involves two questions: was there anyone in the house, that morning, besides you, your father and Mr. Otway? and did anything occur on that occasion beyond what Mr. Otway told you? The answer seems to be in the negative in both cases; but we cannot be certain on either point. Meanwhile, your position is very unpleasant, and Mr. Otway's still more so, for his apprehensions, though perhaps exaggerated, are not entirely groundless. He has behaved with consummate folly. Whether his account of the tragedy be true or false, if he had had the courage to give it in full at the inquest, it must have been accepted in the absence of contrary evidence. But that is by no means the case now. If the inquiry were re-opened, a jury would tend to regard his suppression of certain facts as evidence of the importance of those facts."

"As to advice: there is nothing that you can do but try to forget these menacing letters. I will make a few cautious enquiries—though we have very little to go on; and you must let me know at once if there are any fresh developments."

This ended the conference, but not the conversation, for Dr. Thorndyke insisted on a full account of my progress as a craftswoman, and even called down Mr. Polton to give an expert opinion on Mr. Campbell's prices; which opinion was to the effect that they were as good as could be expected.

"So," said Dr. Thorndyke, as I rose to depart, "you have justified your rather bold choice of a profession. You have already made it an economic success, and with more experience on the commercial side, you will probably earn a very satisfactory livelihood."

This was encouraging enough, backed as it was by Mr. Polton's practical experience. But with the other results of this conference I was much less satisfied. Indeed, my talk with Dr. Thorndyke, though it had relieved me of the burden of concealment, so far from setting my apprehensions at rest, had rather increased them. Not only was it evident that he regarded these mysterious letters as indications of a real danger, but he clearly entertained the possibility that Mr. Otway might have something more than I knew to conceal; in fact, I was by no means sure that he did not suspect Mr. Otway of having killed my father.

Here, then, was abundant matter for reflection, and that none of the most pleasant; and during the next few days my mind was very full of these new complications, of this dark cloud which had arisen over my brightening horizon. Again and again I recalled in detail the incidents of that terrible morning when my dear father was snatched from me, but no new light, either on the tragedy itself or on these sinister echoes of it, came to me. I even tried Lilith's crystal—having first locked my door—but either my faith was weak or I lacked those special psychical gifts with which its owner credited me. I did, indeed, get as far as the cloud, or mist, of which Lilith had spoken; which gathered before my eyes and blotted out the crystal. But that was all. When the mist cleared away, no picture emerged from it, but only the crystal ball with the diminutive image of my own head reflected on its bright surface.

But anxieties sit lightly on the young and healthy. As the days passed, the gloomy impressions faded and I became once more absorbed in my work. The Zodiac spoons were progressing apace, and were going to do me credit; and daily I became conscious of growing facility, of increasing skill, which not only lessened my labour but was itself a source of pleasure. To do a thing with ease is to do it with enjoyment; and, incidentally, added skill means added speed and greater earning power. Already I began to speculate on what Mr. Campbell's idea of "a good price" would turn out to be.

Moreover, there were other distractions. Once or twice a week I looked in at the club, and these visits had a pleasant way of developing into impromptu jaunts—to picture galleries, exhibitions, museums, and even on one or two occasions a concert or a *matinée*. Of the relations which were growing up between Jasper Davenant and me I did not care to think much. Perhaps the ostrich is a wiser bird than we are apt to imagine, for it does, at least, avoid the pains of anticipation. Sooner or later, no doubt, some understanding would have to be arrived at; but meanwhile Mr. Davenant was a delightful companion—gay, cheerful, buoyant, humorous, but withal a man of earnest purpose and a serious outlook on life. In all our junketings was little, real frivolity; the fun and gaiety were but the condiments to season the more solid and serious interests. In so far as a friendship between a young man and a young woman, which must necessarily stop at friendship, can be, our friendship was unexceptionable. But; of course, there was the qualification. However, as I have said, I let the future take care of itself and drifted pleasantly with the stream.

About this time, I made quite a startling discovery. It happened that in one of my journeys to town I had seen in a bookseller's window a book on studio pottery, and, thinking that it might be useful to Miss Finch, I had bought it, but had forgotten to give it to her. In the middle of my morning's work I suddenly remembered the book, which I had put in a

cupboard in the workshop, and got up from my bench to take it to her. Her “works” were at the bottom of the garden, in an outhouse which had once been a ship-smith’s shop; but, close neighbours as we were, and close friends, too, I had only once been in her workshop, when, on an off day, she had shown me her wheel, her lathe and her small glass kiln. About her work she was extraordinarily secretive; but then, she was a reticent girl in general, so far as her own affairs were concerned, though she showed a warm interest in her friends, and was, indeed, very affectionate and lovable.

As I came round the clump of bushes that hid her premises from the house, the silence and repose of the place gave me some qualms, and for a moment I hesitated to interrupt her work. However, I pocketed my scruples and rapped boldly on the door; whereupon the familiar voice at its highest pitch—several ledger lines above the stave—demanded who was there.

“It is I, Peggy; Helen Otway,” I replied apologetically. There was a pause of nearly half a minute, and then she unlocked and opened the door, looking rather embarrassed and very pink.

“I always lock myself in when I am at work,” she explained.

“Well, Peggy, don’t let me disturb you. I’ve only brought you a book that I got for you in town.”

“Oh, come in, Sibyl,” said she. “Of course I don’t mind you.”

She took the volume from me, and quickly turning over the pages and glancing at the illustrations, exclaimed, “What a ripping book! I shall enjoy reading it. And how sweet of you to think of getting it for me!” She linked her arm affectionately in mine and conducted me into her domain, passing through the outer room, which was devoted to plaster work—the making of moulds and “bats”—to the clay room, where the little gas engine and the mysterious wheel stood idle and a general tidying up appeared to have taken place. Here we stood chatting rather disjointedly, she still turning over the pages of the book with approving comments, and I looking about me with a craftsman’s curiosity respecting the materials and appliances of an unfamiliar craft. And here I got my first surprise; for, on a side bench I noticed a collection of what were evidently bookbinder’s tools. Was it possible that the secretive Titmouse was a bookbinder as well as a potter? I determined to inquire into this, but meanwhile my attention was attracted by the bench at which she had evidently been working, as suggested by the displaced stool. On this bench stood an object of some size—about twelve inches high—enveloped in a damp cloth. By its side were a spray-diffuser, a number of little spatulas and tiny modelling tools, and several little covered pots of a creamy, white earthenware delicately ornamented with floral decoration in a warm blue. Venturing to lift the cover of one, I found it to be filled with little rolls of brightly-tinted clay that looked like coloured crayons.

“You are mighty fastidious about your apparatus,” I remarked, picking up the dainty little pot and wiping some smears of clay from its surface.

“And why not?” demanded Peggy. “Why shouldn’t one have pretty things to work with? The old craftsmen did. I’ve seen some old planes and chisel-handles beautifully carved, and I am sure they did better work for having beautiful tools to work with. I would have pretty tools myself if I could make them.”

“You shall, Peggy,” said I. “You shall show me what you want and I will make them for you.”

As I was speaking I absently turned the little pot upside down and glanced at the bottom. And then I really did get a shock. There was only a single spot of ornament on the base, but that spot was a revelation: for it was a little blue bird.

I smothered the exclamation that rose to my lips and put the pot down on the bench. What could be the meaning of this? Had Peggy, like Mr. Hawkesley, been attracted by Mr. Goldstein’s wares? Or was it possible—“Won’t you show me what you were doing, Peggy?” I asked.

She turned scarlet at the question, and looked so distressed that I felt it a cruelty to press her. But cruel or not, I meant to get to the bottom of the mystery.

“I’d rather not, Sibyl, if you don’t mind,” she said, shyly.

“But why? What an extraordinary little person you are.”

“Well,” she said, doggedly, “if you must know, I am not allowed to show my work to anyone.”

“Not allowed by whom?”

“By the dealer who takes all my work. For some reason, best known to himself, he makes a secret of it; won’t allow anyone to know who makes it.”

“But apart from the dealer, Peggy, you wouldn’t mind my seeing your work?”

“Of course I shouldn’t. I should like you to see it. But a promise is a promise, you know.”

“Of course,” I agreed; and then I stepped quickly up to the bench and very carefully picking up the damp cloth, lifted it clear of the object which it covered; which turned out to be a jar standing on a small turn-table. Peggy sprang forward with a gasp of consternation; but she was too late. The deed was done; moreover, the murder was out; for in the moment when my first glance fell on the jar, Mr. Hawkesley’s “mystery ware” had ceased to be a mystery so far as I was concerned.

The appearance of the jar was rather curious, but perfectly unmistakable. The clay, in its “green” state—unbaked and still somewhat plastic—was of a cool, grey colour, and the surface of the squat, octagonal body and the short neck and rim was covered with rich and intricate floral ornament, very minute, sharp and delicate. In the completed part this ornament was

of dull blue and finished flush with the surface; in the unfinished part it was simply indented and had the appearance of what bookbinders call "blind tooling," but was somewhat deeper.

From the work, my eyes turned with a sort of respectful wonder to the creator, who stood by my side with an air partly embarrassed, partly defiant. To me there was some thing very impressive in the thought that this unassuming, little lady was actually a master craftsman (I am compelled to use the masculine form, there being no feminine equivalent); the creator of masterpieces which would live in the great collections of the future for the admiration of generations yet unborn. And in the first shock of surprised admiration and pride in my friend's achievement I had nearly blurted out all that I knew. But reflection suggested a better plan.

"My dear Peggy!" I exclaimed. "I never dreamed that you did work of this quality."

"There's nothing very wonderful about it," she replied, regarding the jar with a kind of affectionate disparagement. "It is only a poor imitation of the beautiful Oiron ware. That pottery has always interested me; partly because it is so lovely, and partly because, according to tradition, it was made by a woman—Helene de Hangest-Gerilis. But my work isn't a patch of hers, and it isn't even as good as I could do."

"How is that?"

"Well, you see, it ought to have more modelled ornament than I put on. It ought to be more important. Her pieces were most elaborately modelled—many of them had figures in the full round. But I can't afford to carry my work as far as that. It would take too long. Besides, I have to work to order, to some extent, and my orders are to keep to moderately, simple pieces."

"Your orders! From the dealer, I suppose? Tell me about him, Peggy, and how it is that you are such a slave."

"I'm not a slave," she retorted doggedly. "But I have a contract with a dealer. He takes the whole of my work, and he makes it a condition that I shan't sell anything to any one else or let anybody know what kind of work I do. I oughtn't to have let you in, but I know that I can trust you not to breathe a word to anyone of what you have seen here."

Mr. Hawkesley was right, then; and I recalled with sympathetic vindictiveness his desire to wring the dealer's neck.

"Concerning this contract, Peggy," said I. "You say the dealer has the right to the whole of your work. Did he pay you anything for this privilege?"

"Yes. He paid five pounds when the agreement was signed; but he deducted it from the payment for the first lot of pieces."

"Then it was only payment on account, not payment for the exclusive right to all your work. And with regard to the prices, how are they fixed?"

"Oh, the dealer fixes the prices, of course. He knows more about it than I do."

"Evidently. But what sort of prices does he fix?"

"Oh, ordinary prices, I suppose. He will probably give me fifteen shillings for this jar."

"And how long will it take you to make it?"

"Let me see," she said, reflectively. "There is the throwing and turning; that doesn't take very long. Then this one had to be shaped after it was turned. Then there comes the decorating; of course that is what takes the time. Including the cover, I should say there is nearly a week's work in that jar. And then it has to be fired and glazed; but the firing and glazing are done in batches."

"And all this for fifteen shillings a week!" I exclaimed.

"Say a pound," said she. "That is about what I earn. It isn't much, is it? But I have a little money of my own, though I spent most of it on fitting up the workshop."

"And what period does this precious contract cover? When does it expire?"

"Expire?" she repeated, a little sheepishly. "I don't know that it expires at all. No period is mentioned in it."

"Peggy," I said, solemnly; "you should alter your potter's mark. Take out the little, blue finch and put in a little, green goose. But, seriously, we must see into this. I am a lawyer's daughter—not that I profess to have inherited a knowledge of law. But I am certain that this agreement is not binding. Will you let me show it to a friend of mine who is a lawyer? In strict confidence, of course."

"Yes, if you like, Sibyl. But I don't see that it matters. I like doing the work and I do make a living by it. What more would you have?"

"I thought you said you would like to do something more ambitious—the very best work of which you are capable. Wouldn't you?"

She was silent for a while, and a far-away, wistful look stole into her face. Suddenly she said: "Sibyl, I'm going to show you something; but you mustn't tell anyone." She led me to a large cupboard, the door of which she unlocked and threw open. On the single shelf was a model in red wax of a tall candlestick or lamp-holder of the most elaborate design, the shaft and capital-like socket enriched—though sparingly—with fine relief decoration, and the base occupied by a spirited and

graceful group of figures, beautifully modelled and full of life and expression.

"That," she said, "is to be my chef d'art—though it doesn't look much in the wax. You must think of it in ivory-white, with a rich coloured inlay and perhaps some under-glaze painting. It has taken me months, doing a bit whenever I have had time, or when I couldn't resist the temptation to go on with it. Now it is finished, as far as the modelling goes, and the next thing will be to mould it. But I shan't actually make the piece at present, because I don't mean him to have it—the dealer, you know. If I finished it now, it would be his, of course."

"Yes, by the contract it would. And it mustn't. This piece ought to give you a position in the front rank of artist potters. But I mustn't waste any more of your time. You will let me have that agreement, won't you?"

She promised that I should have it at lunch-time, and with this I went back to my workshop to consider a plan that had come into my mind for her enlightenment and emancipation. But it turned out that there was no need for scheming on my part, for chance or Providence offered me the opportunity ready-made. That very evening I received a short note from Mr. Davenant informing me that Miss Tallboy-Smith had acquired a collection of English and French soft porcelain, and that she proposed to exhibit the whole of her new acquisition for a week at the club.

"She rather wants," he said, "to make the opening day something of a function, and has asked Hawkesley and me to be there to lunch. Can you come, too? It would please her if you could—and you know how delighted Hawkesley and I would be. Besides, I think it will really be a very interesting show."

Here was the very chance that I wanted. Forthwith, I swooped down on the unsuspecting Titmouse and secured her agreement to bear me company to a "pottery show," without giving too many particulars. Then I wrote to Mr. Davenant telling him that I was bringing a guest who was deeply interested in pottery and porcelain, and suggesting that we might form a party of four at a small table.

By the same post I sent off Peggy's agreement to Dr. Thorndyke, with the request that he would tell me whether it was or was not legally binding. And, having thus laid the train, as I hoped, for the discomfiture of Mr. Goldstein, I felt at liberty to return to my own affairs.

---

## XVII.—THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE TITMOUSE

THE respective merits of hard and soft porcelain have been, from time to time, warmly debated by collectors and experts, but never, perhaps, have they been more earnestly discussed than on the occasion of the opening of Miss Tallboy-Smith's exhibition. During the half-hour which preceded lunch, the central glass case and the additional show-cases which had been set up for the occasion were surrounded by groups of eager connoisseurs, and the contrasting virtues of the *pate tendre* and the more durable, if less beautiful, true porcelain were once more considered and expounded.

The attendance of the members and their friends must have been highly gratifying to Miss Tallboy-Smith, though it was no greater than was warranted by the importance of the exhibition; for the collection included representative pieces, not only of Chelsea, Bow, Nantgarw, Pinxton, and other English ware; but also of the old, French soft paste porcelain, including several early examples of Sevres. The preliminary glance at the collection had furnished material for conversation, as I could see by observing the occupants of the long central table, at the head of which sat the beaming hostess, supported by Major Dewham-Brown (who talked little, but consumed his food with intense concentration of purpose); and even our own small table, tucked away inconspicuously in a corner, was not immune from the influence of soft porcelain, for Mr. Hawkesley and my guest discussed the topic with a wealth of knowledge that reduced Mr. Davenant and me to respectful and attentive silence.

Our two friends were evidently very pleased with one another; and not without reason. For Mr. Hawkesley was much more than a mere collector; he was an enthusiastic and learned student of all kinds of ceramic work; while, as to my friend Peggy, her conversation revealed a familiarity with all kinds of materials and processes that made me feel quite shy as I thought of the artless handbook with which I had presented her.

But, indeed, Miss Peggy was quite transfigured. She had met with a kindred spirit. And under the influence of contagious enthusiasm, the usually silent and secretive Titmouse blossomed out in a manner that surprised me. As I listened to the animated duet of her chirping treble with Mr. Hawkesley's robust baritone, I found it difficult to identify her with the quiet little potter who was wont to work behind locked doors in the old shipsmith's shop at Wellclose Square.

After lunch the siege of the showcases began again on a more portentous scale. Glass cases were opened for more complete inspection of their contents, and pieces were even handed out to be handled, stroked and smelled at by the more infatuated devotees. As neither Mr. Davenant nor I could be included among the latter, we were satisfied by a comparatively brief inspection of the treasures, after which we retired to a sheltered seat to look on and talk.

"Just look at those two china-maniacs!" exclaimed Mr. Davenant. "They are as thick as thieves already. And what is Miss Finch going to do with that *bleu de roi* vase? Is she going to kiss it? No; she has given it back to the Tallboy-Smith. Well, well; enthusiasm is a fine thing. By the way, she is a nice little lady, this friend of yours; pretty and picturesque, too, and uncommonly well turned out. I'm beginning to have a new respect for Wellclose Square."

I looked at the Titmouse with a sort of motherly pride (though she was about my own age). The word picturesque described her admirably with her warm colour, her graceful hair, and the trim, petite figure that was so well set off by the

simple, artistic dress—in which I seemed to trace the hand of Lilith. She was my importation to the Magpies, and I felt that she was doing me credit.

“I have often wondered,” Mr. Davenant said, after a reflective pause, “what made you choose such an unlikely locality as Wellclose Square for a residence, and, indeed, how you came to know of its existence. Very few middle-class people do. I hope Miss Vardon will not consider me unduly inquisitive.”

“Mrs. Otway will not,” said I.

“Mrs. Otway is a myth—a legal fiction. I refuse to recognise her existence. She is a mere creature of documents, of church registers. The real person is Miss Helen Vardon.”

“That sounds rather like nonsense,” said I, “but, of course, it can’t be, because the speaker is Mr. Davenant. Perhaps there is some hidden meaning in these cryptic observations.”

“There isn’t,” he rejoined; “or, at any rate, it shan’t remain hidden. I mean that I refuse to recognise your connection with this man, Otway, or to associate you with his beastly name.”

“But it is my beastly name, too, according to law and custom.”

“I don’t care for law and custom,” said he. “The name Otway is abhorrent to me, and it doesn’t properly belong to you. I shall call you Miss Vardon, unless you let me call you Helen; and I don’t see why you shouldn’t, considering that we are old and intimate friends.”

“It would undoubtedly have the support of a well-established precedent. There was a certain bishop who was called Peter because that was his name. That precedent would apply to Helen, but it certainly would not to Miss Vardon.”

“Then,” he rejoined, “let us follow this excellent precedent. Let it be Helen. Is that agreed?”

“I don’t seem to have much choice; for if ‘Mrs. Otway’ is a legal fiction, ‘Miss Vardon’ is an illegal one.”

“Well, don’t let us have any fictions at all. Let us adhere to the actual baptismal facts.”

“Very well, Mr. Davenant.”

“But why ‘Mr. Davenant’? My baptismal designation is Jasper.”

“And a very pretty name, too,” said I. “But the precedent does not apply in your case. You have not married Mr. Otway.”

“No, thank Heaven! If I had, there would be a case of petty treason. But neither have you, for that matter. You have only gone through a ridiculous ceremony which means nothing and signed a document which sets forth what is not true.”

“It seems to me,” I said, “that we are not adhering to our agreement to avoid fictions. My marriage, unfortunately, is perfectly real and valid in the eyes of the law.”

“The law!” he exclaimed, contemptuously. “Who cares for the law? Have we not the pronouncement of that illustrious legal luminary, Bumble C.J., that the law is a ass and a idiot? And, mark you, he was specially referring to matrimonial law. Now, who would base his actions and beliefs on the opinions of an ass and a idiot?”

“And to think,” said I, “that you have abandoned the law for mere architecture! With your gift for casuistry, you ought to have been a Chancery lawyer or else a Jesuit. But here is Miss Tallboy-Smith. She thinks we are neglecting her treasures.”

But our hostess had not come to utter reproaches. On the contrary, she was brimming over with pleasure and gratitude.

“My dear Mrs. Otway,” she exclaimed, beaming on me and grasping my hands affectionately, “I can’t thank you enough for bringing that dear young lady, Miss Finch, to see my porcelain. She is a sweet girl, and she simply knows everything about china. It is perfectly wonderful. She might be a potter herself. And her love of the beautiful things and her enjoyment in looking at them has given me, I can’t tell you how much, pleasure. You must really bring her to see my whole collection. Will you? I shall love showing it to her.”

I agreed joyfully, for this would mean another nail in the coffin of Mr. Goldstein; and as Peggy and Mr. Hawkesley joined us at this moment, I was able to complete the arrangement and fix a date.

As Miss Tallboy-Smith bustled away, Mr. Hawkesley put in his claim.

“I don’t see,” said he, “why I should be left out in the cold. I’ve got a collection, too; and I think it would really interest Miss Finch, for she tells me she has seen very little modern pottery. Won’t you bring her to see it, Mrs. Otway?”

Again I accepted gladly, with Peggy’s consent. My scheme was working rapidly towards a successful conclusion, and I felt that I could push it forward energetically; for that very morning I had received a letter from Dr. Thorndyke returning the agreement and denouncing it as legally worthless and utterly opposed to public policy.

“As to fixing a date,” said Mr. Hawkesley, “I suggest that we all adjourn to my rooms now. Come and have a cup of tea with me and then we can look over the crockery. How will that do?”

It suited Peggy and me quite well, and we said so.

“And you, Davenant?” asked Mr. Hawkesley.

“Well, I had one or two cathedrals to finish,” was the reply; “but they must wait. Art is long—deuced long, in my case.”

Yes, let us adjourn and combine crockery and tea—which, as Pepys reminds us is a ‘China drink,’ and therefore appropriate to the occasion.”

On this, we sallied forth and made our way to the Strand, where we chartered a couple of hansoms to convey us to Dover Street, Piccadilly, where Mr. Hawkesley had his abode in one of those fine, spacious, dignified houses that one finds in the hinterland of the West End of London. His rooms were on the first floor, and when we arrived there by way of a staircase which would have allowed us to walk up four abreast, we were received by a sedate and impassive gentleman, whose appearance and manner suggested a Foreign Office official of superior rank.

“Would you let us have some tea, please, Taplow?” said Mr. Hawkesley, addressing the official deferentially. Mr. Taplow opened a door for us, and having signified a disposition to accede to the request, departed stealthily.

As we entered the large, lofty room, well lighted by its range of tall windows, I looked about me curiously, for I was instantly struck by the absence of pottery among its ornaments. The available wall-spaces were occupied by important pictures—all modern; the mantelpiece and other suitable surfaces supported statuettes of marble or bronze—again all modern. But of ceramic ware there was not a trace, with the single exception of a small framed cameo relief. Rather did the apartment suggest the abode of a furniture collector, for one side of the room, opposite the windows, was occupied by a range of armoires, or standing cupboards, mostly old French or Flemish.

“You don’t favour the glass case, I notice, Hawkesley,” said Mr. Davenant.

“No,” was the reply. “They are well enough for public museums, but they are unlovely things. And one doesn’t want to look at one’s whole collection at once. I like to take the pieces out singly and enjoy them one at a time. You see, each piece is an individual work. It was the product of a separate creative effort, and ought to be enjoyed by a separate act of appreciation.”

“You seem, Mr. Hawkesley,” said I, “to have a preference for modern work. Do you think it is as good as the old?”

“I think,” he replied, “that the best modern work is as good as any that was ever done. Of course, I am not speaking of commercial stuff. That is negligible in an artistic sense. I mean individual work, done under the same conditions and by the same class of men as the old craft work. That is quite good. The pity is that there is so little of it. But I am afraid the supply is equal to the demand.”

“Don’t you think,” said Mr. Davenant, “that that is partly the fault of the modern craftsman? Of his tendency to confine himself to fine and elaborate, and therefore costly, productions? Of course, the old work was not cheap in the modern factory sense of cheapness. The pottery and china that was made at the Etruria works or those of Bow or Chelsea was by no means given away. But the prices were practicable for every day purposes, whereas modern studio pottery is impossible for domestic use. And the same is true of other craftwork, such as book-binding, fine printing, textiles, metal work, and so on. If the modern craftsman caters only for the collector and ignores the utilitarian consumer, he can’t complain at being ousted by commercial production.”

Here the arrival of Mr. Taplow with the tea arrested what threatened to prove a too-interesting discussion. I should have liked to continue it—on another occasion; at present, my desire was rather to “cut the cackle and get to the hosses.” Accordingly, while the tea was being consumed, I rather studiously obstructed any revival of the debate by keeping up a conversation of a general and somewhat discursive character; and as soon as we appeared to have finished I introduced the subject of Ceramics.

“Is that plaque on the wall a Wedgwood cameo?” I asked.

“Oh, no,” Mr. Hawkesley replied. “That is an example of Solon’s wonderful *pate-sur-pate* work. It is done with white porcelain slip on a dark, coloured ground. Come and look at it.”

We all rose and gathered round the plaque while Mr. Hawkesley descanted on its beauties; which were, indeed, evident enough.

“It is lovely work,” said he; “so free and spontaneous. The Wedgwood reliefs look quite stiff and hard compared with these of Solon’s. I have some of his vases with the same kind of decoration, and we may as well look at those first.”

He wheeled a travelling turn-table towards a fine Flemish armoire of carved oak, and opening the latter, displayed a range of pieces of this beautiful work, at the sight of which Peggy’s eyes glistened. One after another they were carefully placed on the turn-table, viewed from all points, admired, discussed and replaced. The other contents of the armoire were less important works—mostly French—but all received respectful attention. The next receptacle, a French armoire of carved walnut, was devoted to modern stone-ware by the Martin Brothers, Wells and other individual workers, concerning which our host was specially enthusiastic.

“There,” said he, placing on the turn-table a wonderful Toby jug of brown Martin ware, “Show me any old salt-glaze ware that is equal to that! Look at the modelling! Look at the beautiful surface and the quality of the actual potting! And then go and look at the stuff in the shop windows. Just good enough for the slavey to smash.”

“Well,” Mr. Davenant remarked, “you can’t say that she doesn’t appreciate its qualities and do justice to them. If former generations had been as energetic smashers as the present, collectors of old stuff would have had to seek their treasures in ancient rubbish-heaps.”

“Yes, that is a fact,” agreed Mr. Hawkesley, as we moved on to the next cupboard. “When domestic pottery was more

valuable it got more respectful treatment. Now this cupboard is only partly filled. I keep it for the work of one artist whose name I don't know. I've shown you some of the ware, Mrs. Otway, but it may be new to Miss Finch."

As he unlocked the door my heart began to thump, and I cast an anxious eye on Peggy. For I knew what was coming, but I didn't know how she would take it. At the moment she was looking at the closed door with pleased expectancy. Then the door swung open, and in a moment she turned pale as death. For one instant I thought she was going to faint, and so, apparently, did Mr. Davenant, for he made a quick movement towards her. But the deadly pallor passed, and was succeeded as rapidly by a crimson flush; but her quick breathing and the trembling of her hand showed how great the shock had been.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hawkesley, all unconscious, was glancing over the row of vases, jars and bowls, and expatiating on the peculiar beauties of the "mystery ware." The pieces were separated into two groups; the works in pure inlay and those combining the inlay with slip decoration and embossed ornament; and one of the latter he presently lifted from its shelf and placed on the turn-table.

"Now, isn't that a lovely jar, Miss Finch?" said he. "And doesn't it remind you of the beautiful St. Porchaire, or Oiron ware?"

Peggy gazed at the jar with an inscrutable expression as she slowly rotated the turn-table. "It is somewhat like," she agreed; "at least, the method of work is similar."

"Oh, don't give my favourites the cold shoulder, Miss Finch," said Mr. Hawkesley. "I think I prize my pieces of this ware more than anything that I have. It is so very charming and so interesting. For, you see, it is real pottery; I mean that, beautiful and precious as it is, it is quite serviceable for domestic purposes, whereas much of the studio pottery is made for the gallery or the cabinet."

"You haven't discovered yet where it is made, I suppose?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Its origin is still a mystery and something of a romance—which may be one reason why I am so devoted to it. I often speculate about the potter, and invent all sorts of queer theories about him."

"As for instance?"

"Well, sometimes I fancy that he may be in debt to this dealer—that he may have had advances or loans and be unable to pay them off and get free. It is quite possible, you know. Then, sometimes I have thought that he may be one of those poor creatures who drink or take drugs, and that the dealer may keep him slaving in some cellar for his bare maintenance and his miserable luxuries. But I've given that idea up. This work is too sane and reasonable and painstaking for a drunkard or drug-taker. But, who ever and whatever he is, I wish I could find him out, and thank him for all the pleasure that he has given me, and help him to get a proper reward for his labour, which I am sure he does not."

"I don't know why you are so sure," said Mr. Davenant. "This ware is pretty expensive, isn't it?"

"Not if you consider that each piece is an individual work on which a great deal of time and labour has been expended. The price that I paid Goldstein for this particular piece was seven guineas, which wouldn't represent very high remuneration if the artist had the whole of it."

"Seven guineas, Mr. Hawkesley!" exclaimed Peggy, incredulously.

"Yes, Miss Finch; and I should say very cheap at the price."

I glanced at Peggy with malicious satisfaction, for her cheeks were aflame with anger and the light of battle was in her eyes.

"What a shame!" she protested. "How perfectly scandalous! The grasping, avaricious wretch! To charge seven guineas for a piece that he bought for fifteen shillings!"

For a few seconds there was an awesome silence. Peggy's exclamation had fallen like a thunderbolt, and the two men gazed at her in speechless astonishment; while she, poor Titmouse, stood, covered with blushes and confusion, looking as if she had been convicted of pocketing the spoons.

"You actually know," Mr. Hawkesley said, at length, "that Goldstein gave only fifteen shillings for that jar?"

"Yes," she stammered faintly, "I—I happen to have—to be aware—that—that was the amount paid—"

She broke off with an appealing glance at me, and I proceeded to "put in my oar."

"It's no use, Peggy. The cat is out of the bag—at least her head is, and we may as well let out the rest of her. The fact is, Mr. Hawkesley, that this ware is Miss Finch's own work."

I now thought that Mr. Hawkesley was going to faint. Never have I seen a man look so astonished. He was thunderstruck.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Otway," he exclaimed, "that Miss Finch actually makes this ware herself?"

"I do. It is her work from beginning to end. She does the potting, the decorating, the firing and the glazing. And she does it without any assistance whatever."

Mr. Hawkesley gazed at Peggy with such undissembled admiration and reverence that I was disposed to smile—though I



liked him for his generous enthusiasm—and the unfortunate Titmouse was reduced to an agony of shyness.

“This is a red letter day for me, Miss Finch,” said he. “It has been my dearest wish to meet the creator of that pottery that I admire so intensely; and now that wish is gratified, it is an extra pleasure to find the artist so much beyond—”

He paused to avoid the inevitable compliment, and Mr. Davenant held up a warning finger.

“Now, Hawkesley,” said he; “be careful.”

“I know,” said Mr. Hawkesley. “It is difficult to steer clear of banal compliments and yet to say what one would like to say; but really the personality of the mysterious artist has furnished a very pleasant surprise.”

“I can believe that,” said Mr. Davenant. “I can imagine, for instance, that you find Miss Finch a very agreeable substitute for the intoxicated gentleman in the cellar.”

At this we all laughed, which cleared the air and put us at our ease.

“But,” said Mr. Davenant, “proud as we are to have made the acquaintance of a distinguished potter, we are haunted by the spectre of that fifteen shillings. We get the impression that Miss Finch’s business arrangements want looking into.”

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Hawkesley, “they do indeed. Why do you let this fellow have your work, at such ridiculous prices, too?”

“It isn’t so ridiculous as it looks,” replied Peggy. “When I began, I couldn’t sell any of my work at all. It was frightfully discouraging. No one would have any thing to do with it. My first work was simple earthenware, and even the cheap china shops wouldn’t have it. Then I chanced upon Mr. Goldstein, and he bought one or two simple, red earthenware jars and bowls for a few pence each. It didn’t pay me, but still it was a start. Then I experimented on this pipe-clay body with slip decoration and coloured inlay and showed the pieces to Mr. Goldstein; and he advised me to go on and offered to take the whole of my work, if I signed an agreement. So I signed the agreement, and he has had all my work ever since.”

“At his own prices?”

“Yes. I didn’t know what the things were worth.”

“Well,” said Mr. Davenant, “my law is a trifle rusty, but I should say that that agreement would not hold water.”

“It won’t,” said I. “We have just had counsel’s opinion on it, and our adviser assures us that it is worthless, and that we can disregard it.”

“Then,” said Mr. Davenant, “you had better formally denounce it at once.”

“Why trouble to denounce it?” demanded Mr. Hawkesley. “Much better let me call on Goldstein and make him tear up the duplicate. He has got a fine, handy warming-pan hanging up in his shop. I saw it only this morning.”

“The connection is not very clear to me,” said I.

“It would be clear enough to him,” was the grim reply.

Mr. Davenant chuckled. “Your methods, Hawkesley, appeal to me strongly, I must admit; but they are not politic. Legal process is better than a warming-pan, even if it were filled with hot coals. Let us hand the agreement to a reputable solicitor, and let him write to Goldstein stating the position. Miss Finch won’t hear any more of her benefactor after that.”

After some discussion, in which I supported Mr. Hawkesley’s proposal, the less picturesque method of procedure was adopted, and Mr. Davenant was commissioned to carry it out.

“And we will have a one woman show of Blue Bird Ware at the club,” said Mr. Hawkesley. “I will take my whole collection there and exhibit it with a big label giving the artist’s name in block capitals. The pottery collectors will just tumble over one another to get specimens of the work when the artist is known.”

The rest of Mr. Hawkesley’s collection received but a perfunctory consideration. Even the gorgeous De Morgan earthenware, glowing with the hues of the rainbow, came as something of an anti-climax; and we closed the last of the cabinets with almost an air of relief.

“And now,” said Mr. Hawkesley, as he pocketed his keys, “I suggest that we mark this joyful occasion by a modest festival—say, a homely little dinner at the club and an evening at the play. Who seconds my proposal?”

“We shall have to go as we are then,” said I, “as we can’t change.”

“I think we can enjoy ourselves in morning dress,” he rejoined; “and as we shall all be in the same shocking condition, we can keep one another in countenance.”

The proposal was accordingly adopted with acclamation and carried into effect with triumphant success, and some slight disturbance of the orderly routine of the establishment in Wellclose Square; for it was on the stroke of midnight when Miss Polton, blinking owlishly, opened the green door to admit the two roisterers who had just emerged from a hansom-cab.

“It has been a jolly day!” Peggy exclaimed fervently as we said ‘good-night’ on our landing. “And it will be a jolly to-morrow, too.”

“Yes; you will be able to get on with your masterpiece now; and when it is finished we can show it at the club and you will be able to sell it for a small fortune.”

"I shan't want to sell it," she said. "If it is good enough, and if it wouldn't seem too forward or improper, I should like to give it to Mr. Hawkesley—as a sort of thank-offering, you know."

"Thank-offering for what?"

"For his appreciation of my work. I really feel very grateful to him, as well as to you, Sibyl, dear. You see, he not only liked the things, but he thought of the worker who made them. All the time that I was working alone, with the door locked, from morning to night to fill that cormorant's pockets, Mr. Hawkesley was thinking of me, the unknown worker, looking for me and wanting to help me. I don't forget that it is you who have got me out of Mr. Goldstein's clutches. But I do feel very, very grateful to Mr. Hawkesley. Don't you think it is quite natural that I should, Sibyl?"

"I think you are a little, green goose," said I, and kissed her; and so ended the day that saw the end of her servitude and the dawn of prosperity and success.

---

## XVIII. — AMONG THE BREAKERS

My preoccupation with Peggy Finch's affairs had to some extent submerged my own, but now that my little friend had triumphantly emerged from the house of Bondage, I returned to my labours with a new zest. In spite of the various interruptions, the Zodiac spoons had made steady progress, and it was but a few days after our momentous visit to Mr. Hawkesley's rooms that, almost regretfully, I put the finishing touches to the Fishes spoon—the last of the set.

It had been a pleasant labour, and as I laid out the completed set, I was not dissatisfied. True, there had been difficulties; but difficulties are the salt of craftsmanship. Some of the signs, such as Aries, Taurus, Leo, Virgo and Capricornus, had been quite simple, the head of the Ram, the Bull, or other symbolic creature furnishing an obvious and appropriate knop for the spoon. But others, such as Gemini, Pisces, and especially Libra, had been less easy to manage. Indeed, the last had involved a slight evasion; for, since it seemed quite impossible to work a pair of scales into a presentable knop, I had relegated them to the shoulder of the bowl and formed the knop of a more or less appropriate head of Justice blindfolded. So all the difficulties had been met by a pleasant and interesting exercise of thought and ingenuity, and the work—my magnum opus, for the present—was finished. And it was rounded off by a very agreeable little addition; for Phyllis Barton, who had seen and greatly admired the set, had made a delightful little case to contain it—just a pair of walnut slabs hinged together, the lower slab having twelve shaped recesses to hold the spoons and the lid ornamented with shallow carvings of a winged hour-glass and the phases of the moon.

I made up the spoons into a parcel and the case into another, so that they should not be treated together in a single transaction; and having advised Mr. Campbell by a letter on the previous day, set forth one morning for Wardour Street. The silent willing which should have preceded my entry to the shop was inadvertently omitted, for as I crossed the street I observed Mr. Campbell exchanging blandishments with a large Persian cat of the "smoky" persuasion, and, as he saw me at the same moment, I had no choice but to enter straightway.

He received me with the most encouraging affability—indeed, he even condescended to shake hands—and was evidently pleased to see me. And his reception of my work was still more encouraging. There was none of the buyer's proverbial disparagement. He was frankly enthusiastic. He held up each spoon separately at arm's length, wagging his head from side to side; he inspected it through a watchmaker's lens; he stroked it with a peculiarly flexible thumb, and finally laid it down with a grunt of satisfaction.

Then came the question of terms; and when he offered twenty-four guineas for the set, I was quite glad that the silent willing had been omitted. For I should probably have willed eighteen.

Having settled the price of my own work, I produced the wooden case. Phyllis had priced it at half a guinea, which was ridiculous. I boldly demanded a guinea for it.

"That's a long price," said Mr. Campbell, pulling a face; of proportionate length. But I watched his thumb travel ling over the clean-cut carving, I saw him delicately fitting the spoons, one by one, into their little niches, and I knew that that guinea was as good as in Phillibar's pocket.

"It is a long price, Mrs. Otway," he repeated, cocking his head on one side at the case. "But it's a pretty bit of work; and it's the right thing—that's what I like about it. So suitable; it would be a sin to put those spoons into a velvet-lined case, as if they were common, stamped, trade-goods. Very well, Mrs. Otway, I'll spring a guinea for the case; and I should like to see some more work from the same hand."

This was highly satisfactory (though it was not without a pang of bereavement that I saw the little case closed and hidden from my sight for ever in a locked drawer); and when I had received the two cheques—I asked for a separate one for Phyllis—I tripped away down Wardour Street as buoyantly as if I had not a care in the world.

The association of ideas is a phenomenon that has received a good deal of attention. It was brought to my notice on this occasion when I found myself opposite St Anne's Church; for no sooner had my eye lighted on its quaint warty spire than my thoughts turned to Mr Davenant—or rather, I should say, to Jasper. Perhaps he was in my mind already; possibly in the subconscious, as Lilith would have said, and the church spire may have acted as an autoscope—it would not have had to be an exceptionally powerful one. At any rate, my thoughts turned to him and to the Magpies Club, and it was not unnatural that my steps should take a similar direction.

As I followed the well-remembered route, I reflected on the changes that a few short months had brought. In that brief space a new life had opened. The solitary, friendless orphan who had sought sanctuary in Miss Polton's house, how changed was her condition! Happy in her work, in her home, in her friends; for had she not her Lilith, her Phyllis, her Peggy—and Jasper? And here a still, small voice asked softly but insistently a question that had of late intruded itself from time to time. Whither was I drifting? My friendship with Jasper was ripening apace. But ripening to what? There could be but one answer; and that answer only raised a further question. In normal circumstances the love of a man and a woman finds a permanent satisfaction in marriage. But where marriage is impossible love is a mere disaster; a voyage with nothing but rocks and breakers at the end.

So whispered the still, small voice into ears but half attentive; and as I neared the bottom of Essex Street it became inaudible, for approaching the club-house from the opposite direction was Jasper himself.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "this is a piece of luck! And yet I had hoped that you might be coming into town to-day. Is it business or pleasure?"

"It has been business, and now I hope it is going to be pleasure. I am taking the rest of the day off."

"Now, what a very singular coincidence! I am actually taking the rest of the day off myself."

"Your coincidences," I remarked, "somehow remind me of the misadventures of the bread-and-butter fly; they always happen."

"Quite so," he agreed. "But then, you see, if they didn't happen they wouldn't be coincidences. Do we begin by fortifying ourselves with nourishment?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'begin,' but I came here to get some lunch."

"So did I—another coincidence, by the way. Shall we take our usual little table in the corner?"

We seated ourselves at the table, and as we waited for our lunch to be brought, I ventured on a few inquiries into Jasper's professional affairs.

"You seem to take a good many days off," I remarked.

"I do. There is, so to speak, a distinctly marked 'off side' to my practice."

"And when you are away, what happens? Do you keep a clerk?"

Jasper grinned. "You over-estimate the magnitude of my practice. No; I have a simpler and more economical arrangement. I let my little front office to a law writer, at a peppercorn rent, subject to the condition that he shall interview my clients in my absence, furnish evasive answers to their questions, and supply ambiguous and confusing information."

"But don't the clients get rather dissatisfied?"

Again Jasper smiled. "That question," said he, "involves an important philosophic principle. A famous philosopher has proved his own existence by the formula 'cogito, ergo sum'—I think, therefore I am—implying that if he didn't exist he couldn't think. Now, that principle applies to my clients. Before they can be dissatisfied, they must exist. But they don't exist. Therefore they are not dissatisfied. Q.E.D."

"I don't believe you care whether they exist or not—but that is the worst of having an independent income."

"It is a misfortune, isn't it? But I bear up under it surprisingly. Will you have some of this stuff? It is called a pelion. I heard the waitress describing it as a pea-lion, apparently misled by the analogy of the pea-cock and the pea-hen. Evidently she is no zoologist."

At this moment Miss Tallboy-Smith entered the room and halted at our table to exchange greetings and remind me of my engagement.

"Tell Miss Finch not to forget," said she. "It's next Wednesday. I shall have my things back from here by then, and I understand that Mr. Hawkesley has secured the cases for a special exhibition of studio pottery. You must bring Miss Finch to that, too."

Like Jasper's proxy, I gave an evasive answer to this, for I knew that wild horses would not drag Peggy to an exhibition of her own work. But evidently Mr. Hawkesley had made no confidences so far.

"Have you ever seen the Diploma Gallery at the R.A.?" Jasper asked when Miss Tallboy-Smith had flitted away. "If you haven't, we might look in there for an hour this afternoon."

As I had never seen the diploma works, I fell in readily with the suggestion, and accordingly, when we had finished lunch, we strolled thither and spent a very pleasant hour examining and comparing the works of the different academicians, old and new. From Burlington House we drifted into the Green Park, and presently took possession of a couple of isolated and lonely-looking chairs. For some time we gossiped about the pictures at which we had been looking in the gallery; then our talk turned on to the affairs of my friend Peggy.

"Hawkesley seems to have appointed himself Miss Finch's advertising agent," Jasper remarked. "And he'll do the job well. He is an energetic man, and he knows all the pottery connoisseurs. I met him yesterday, and had to listen to Blue Bird ware by the yard."

"I like him for his enthusiasm," said I.

"So do I," agreed Jasper. "And it is quite a little romance. His admiration of the pottery is perfectly genuine, as we know; but there is something in what he calls 'the personality of the artist.' I think he is distinctly 'taken' with your pretty little friend. How does she like him?"

"I think she is decidedly prepossessed. At any rate, she is profoundly grateful to him for discovering her work, and especially for the interest that he took in the unknown worker."

"There you are, then," said Jasper. "There are the ingredients of a life-size romance. Fervid admiration on the one side, gratitude on the other, and good looks and good nature on both. We shall see what we shall see, Helen; and I, for one, shall look on with the green eyes of envy."

"Why will you? Do you want Peggy Finch for yourself?"

"I want Hawkesley's good fortune. If he loves this little maid and thinks she cares for him, he can ask her to marry him. That is what makes me envious."

I made no reply; indeed, there was nothing to say; and already the sound of the breakers was in my ears.

"I suppose, Helen," he said, after a long pause, "you realize that I love you very dearly?"

"I know that we are the best of friends, and very deeply attached to one another."

"We are much more than friends, Helen," said he; "at least, there is much more than friendship on my side. You are my all—all that matters to me in the world. You live in my thoughts every moment of my life. When we are apart I yearn for the sight of you—I reckon the hours that must pass before I shall see you again, and when we are together the happy minutes slip away like grains of golden sand. But I need not tell you this. You must have seen that I love you."

"I have feared it, Jasper—and that I might presently lose the dearest friend that I have in the world."

"That you will never do, Helen, dearest, if I have the happiness to be that friend. Why should you?"

"It seems that it has to be. Our friendship has been a sweet friendship to me—too sweet to last, as I feared; and if some might cavil at it, it was innocent and wronged no one. But if it has grown into—into what I had feared it might, then it has become impossible. More than friends we can never be, and yet we cannot remain friends."

We were both silent for more than a minute, and both were very grave. Then Jasper asked, with a trace of hesitation: "Helen, if we were as those other two are—if you were free—would you be willing to marry me?"

It was a difficult question to answer, in the circumstances and yet I felt it would be an unpardonable meanness to dissemble.

"Yes," I answered; "of course I should."

"Then," said he, "I don't see why we can never be more than friends."

"But, Jasper, how can we? I am a married woman."

"I don't admit that," said he. "Your marriage is a fiction. You are really a spinster with a technical impediment to the conventional form of marriage. Your so-called husband is a stranger to whom you have no ties. You don't like, or even respect him; and certainly you have no obligations of duty to him, seeing that he induced you by a mere fraudulent pretence to go through this form of marriage with him."

"I am not thinking of Mr. Otway," said I. "He is nothing to me. I owe him no duty or consideration, and I would not sacrifice a single hair of my head for him. But the fact remains that I am, legally, his wife; and while he lives I can contract no other marriage."

"But is that quite true, Helen?" he objected.

"Certainly it is; unless you consider a bigamous marriage as an exception, which it is not."

"Of course I do not. Bigamy is a futile and fraudulent attempt to secure the appearance of a legal sanction. No one but a fool entertains bigamy."

"Then I don't see the meaning of your objection."

"What I mean," said he, "is that a fictitious marriage does not exclude the possibility of a real marriage."

"Still I do not quite follow you. What do you mean by a real marriage?"

"A real marriage is a permanent, life-long partnership between a man and a woman. Ordinarily, such a partnership receives the formal endorsement of the State for certain reasons of public policy. But it is the partnership which is the marriage. The legal endorsement is an extrinsic and inessential addition. Now, in your case the State has accepted and endorsed a marriage which does not exist—which is a pure fiction. The result is that if you contract a real marriage, the State will withhold its endorsement. That is all. It cannot hinder the marriage."

"This is all very ingenious, Jasper," said I, "and it does credit to your legal training. But it is mere sophistry. The position, as it would appear to a plain person of ordinary common sense, is that a woman who is legally married to one man and is living as the wife of another, is a married woman who is living with a man who is not her husband."

"That is the conventional view, I admit," said he. "But it is a mistaken view. It confuses the legal sanction—which is not essential—with the covenant of life-long union, which is the essence of marriage—which, in fact, is the marriage."

"But what is the bearing of this, Jasper?" I asked. "We seem to be discussing a rather abstract question of public morals. Has it any application to our own affairs?"

"Yes, it has. At least, I think so, though I feel a little nervous about saying just what I mean."

"I don't think you need be. At any rate, there had better be a clear understanding between us. Tell me exactly what you do mean."

He considered awhile, apparently somewhat at a loss how to begin. At length, with evident embarrassment, he put his proposal before me.

"The position, Helen, is this: You and I have become deeply attached to one another; I may say—since you admit that you would be willing to marry me—that we love one another. It is no passing fancy, based on mere superficial attractions. We are both persons of character, and our love is founded on deep-seated sympathy. We have been friends for some years. We liked one another from the first, and as time has gone on we have liked one another better. Our friendship has grown. It has become more and more precious to both of us, and at last it has grown into love—on my side, into intense and passionate love.

"We are not likely to change. People of our type are not given to change. We love one another and we shall go on loving one another until the end.

"If our circumstances were normal, we should marry in the normal manner. That is to say, we should enter into contract publicly with certain formalities which would confer a definite legal status and render our contract enforceable in a court of law. But our circumstances are not normal. We are willing to comply with the formalities but we are not allowed to. We are not in the position of persons who, for their own purposes, lightly disregard the immemorial usages of society—who dispense with the formalities because they would avoid the responsibilities of formal marriage. We wish to enter into a lifelong partnership; we desire to undertake all responsibilities; we would welcome the formalities and the secure status. But the law refuses. There is a technical disability.

"We have, therefore, two alternatives. We may give up the marriage which we both desire, or we may marry and dispense with the formalities and the legal status. Supposing we give up the marriage. Just consider, Helen what it is that we give up. It is the happiness of a whole life-time. The abiding joy of the sweetest, the most sympathetic, companionship that is possible to a man and a woman. For though we are lovers, we are still friends, and friends we shall remain until death parts us. Our tastes, our interests, our sympathies make us prefer one another as companions to all other human beings. Of how many married couples can this be said? To us has been given that perfect comradeship that makes married life an enduring delight, a state of happiness without a cloud or a blemish. And this is what we give up if we let this disability, this technical impediment, hinder us from marrying.

"On the other hand, supposing we marry and dispense with the formalities, what do we give up? Virtually nothing. The legal security is of no value to us, for each of us is secure in the constancy of the other. If we enter into a covenant, we shall abide by it, not by compulsion, but because we shall never wish to break it. As to the legal status and the social recognition, is it conceivable that two sane persons should give up a life's happiness for such trumpery? Surely it is not. No, Helen, let us boldly take our destiny into our own hands. Let us publicly denounce this sham marriage and cancel it for ever. I ask you, dearest, to give me the woman of my heart for my mate, my friend, my wife, for ever; to take me, unworthy as I am, for your husband, who will try, as long as he draws the breath of life, to make up to you by love and worship for what you have sacrificed to make him happy."

As I listened to Jasper's appeal—delivered with quiet but impressive earnest—I think I was half disposed to yield. It was not only that I admired the skill with which he put his case and the virile, masterful way in which he trampled down the obstructing conventions; but deep down in my heart I felt that he was right—that his separation of the things that really mattered from those that were trivial and inessential was true and just. But there was this vital difference between us; that he was a man and I was a woman. Our estimates of the value of the conventions were not the same. Without the legal sanction I might be his wife in all that was real; but the world would call me his mistress.

"Jasper, dear," I said, "it is impossible. I admit the truth of all that you have said, and I wish—Oh! Jasper, how I wish, that I could accept the happiness that you offer me! You need not tell me that our companionship would be a delight for ever. I know it. But it cannot be. Even if I could accept it for myself, I could not accept it for you; I could not bear to think that, through me, you had been put outside the pale of decent society. For that is what it would mean. You—a gentleman of honour and reputation—would become a social outcast, a man who was living with another man's wife; who, if he were admitted at all to the society of his own class, would have to be introduced with explanations and excuses."

"I think you exaggerate the social consequences, Helen," said he. "I propose that we should write to Otway and formally repudiate the marriage. Then, if we were boldly, and openly to state our position and the exceptional circumstances that had driven us to it, I believe that we should receive sympathy rather than condemnation. I don't believe we should lose a friend; certainly not one whose loss would afflict us. And Otway could take his remedy, if he cared to."

"You mean he could divorce me," I said, with something like a shudder.

"Yes. But I am afraid he wouldn't."

"I don't think he would. But if he did, it would be an undefended suit, and the stigma of the Divorce Court would be on us for ever."

"It would be unpleasant, I admit," he replied. "But think of the compensations. Think of the joy of being, together always, of having our own home, of going abroad and seeing the world together."

"Don't, Jasper!" I entreated. "It is too tantalizing. And even all this would not compensate me for the knowledge that I had dragged you from your honourable estate to a condition of social infamy."

"You need not consider me," he rejoined. "I have thought the matter out and am satisfied that I should gain infinitely more than I should lose; for I should have you, who are much more to me than all the rest of the world."

"You haven't thought of everything, Jasper," said I. "You know of the folly I committed at the time of my father's death—in withholding facts at the inquest, I mean—and you have excused it and treated it lightly. But others would view it differently. And now there is this blackmailer of whom I have told you. At any moment, a serious scandal may arise; and in that scandal you would be implicated."

"It wouldn't matter to me," said he. "Nothing would matter to me if only I had you."

"So you think now. But, Jasper, think of the years to come. Think how it might be in those years when the social ostracism, the loss of position and reputation, had grown more and more irksome, if we should regret what we had done, if we should blame ourselves—even, perhaps, secretly blame one another—"

"We should never do that, Helen. We should always be loyal. And there wouldn't be any social ostracism. At any rate, I am quite clear as to my own position. I want you for my wife. To get you I would make any sacrifices and count them as nothing. But that is only my position. It isn't necessarily yours—or rather, I should say your sacrifices would be greater than mine. A woman's point of view is different from a man's."

"It is, Jasper. I realise fully how essentially reasonable your proposal is, and I am proud of, and grateful for, the love that has impelled you to make it. But to me the thing is impossible. That is the only answer I can give. What it costs me to give that answer—to refuse the happiness that you offer me, and that I crave for—I cannot tell you. But even if it breaks my heart to say 'no,' still, that must be my answer."

For a long time neither of us spoke. As I glanced furtively at Jasper, the dejection, the profound sadness that was written on his face wrung my heart and filled me with self-accusation. Why had I not foreseen this? Why had I, who had nothing to give in return, allowed his friendship to grow up into love under my eyes? Had I not acted towards this my dearest friend with the basest selfishness?

Presently he turned to me, and, speaking in quiet, even tones, said:

"It would not be fair for me to make an appeal on my own behalf. I may not urge you to accept a relation which your feeling and judgment reject. But one thing I will ask. I have told you what I want; and you are to remember that I shall always want you. I will ask you to reflect upon what we have said to-day, and if perchance you should come to think differently, remember that I am still wanting you, that I am still asking you, and tell me if you can give me a different answer. Will you promise me this, Helen?"

"Yes," I replied, "I promise you, Jasper."

"Thank you, Helen. And meanwhile we remain friends as we have been?"

"We can never be again as we have been," said I. "Friendship may turn to love, but love does not go back to friendship. That is as impossible as for the fruit to change back into blossom. No, dearest Jasper; this is the end of our friendship. When we part to-day it must be farewell."

"Must it be, Helen? Must we part for ever? Could we not go back to the old ways and try to forget to-day?"

"I shall never forget to-day, nor will you. For our own peace of mind we must remain apart and try to avoid meeting one another. It is the only way, Jasper, hard as it will be."

I think he agreed with me, for he made no further protest. "If you say it must be, Helen, then I suppose it must," he said, dejectedly. "But it is a hard saying. I don't dare to think of what life will be without you."

"Nor I, Jasper. I know that when I say 'good-bye' to: you, the sun will go out of my life and that I can look for no other dawn."

Again we fell silent for a while; and again I reproached myself for having let it come to this.

"Don't you think, Helen," he said at length, "that we might meet sometimes, say at fixed intervals—even long, intervals, if it must be so—just that we might feel that we had not really lost one another completely?"

"But that is what I should wish to avoid. For we have lost one another. As to me, it has no significance. I have nothing to give and nothing to lose. I am shackled for life to Mr. Otway. But you have your life before you, and it would only be fair that I should leave you free."

"Free!" he exclaimed. "I am not free and never shall be. Nor do I wish to be free. I am yours now and for ever. And so I would wish it to be. We may not be married in any outward form, but we are married in the most real sense. Our hearts are married. We belong to one another for ever while we live, and neither of us will ever wish to change. You know it is so,

dearest, don't you?"

What could I say? He had spoken my own thoughts, had expressed the wish that I had not dared to acknowledge. Weak and unjust it may have been, but the thought that in the dark days of our coming separation we should still be linked, if only by an invisible thread, came as something like a reprieve. It left just a faint spark of light to relieve the gloom of the all too sombre future. In the end we agreed to a monthly letter and a meeting once a year. And so, having fixed the terms of our sentence, we tried to put our troubles away and make the best of the few hours that remained before the dreaded farewell.

But despite our efforts to get back to our wonted cheerful companionship, the swiftly-passing hours were filled with sadness and heart-ache. Instinctively we went and looked at things and places that recalled the pleasant jaunts that were to be no more; but ever Black Care rode behind. It was like the journey of two lovers in a tumbril that rolled its relentless way towards the guillotine; for at the end of the day was the parting that would leave us desolate.

And at last the parting was upon us. At the corner of Cable Street we halted and faced one another. For a few moments we stood in the gathering gloom, hand clasped in hand. I dared not speak, for my heart was bursting. Hardly did I dare to look at the man whom I loved so passionately. And Jasper could but press my hand and murmur huskily a few broken words of love. And so we parted. With a last pressure of the hand I turned away and hurried along Cable Street. I did not dare to look back, though I knew that he was gazing after me; for the street swam before my eyes and I could barely hold back my sobs.

I did not go straight home. The tumult of emotion sent me hurrying forward—whither I have no recollection save that somewhere in Shadwell a pair of friendly policemen turned me back with the remark that it "was no place for the likes of me." At length, when the first storm of grief had passed, and I felt myself under control, I made my way to Wellclose Square, and pleading the conventional headache, retired at once to my room.

And there, in quiet and seclusion, with tears that no longer need be restrained, with solemn rites of grief, I buried my newborn happiness—the happiness that had died almost in the moment of its birth.

---

## XIX. — ILLUSIONS AND DISILLUSION

IT is a generally accepted belief that of all the remedies for an aching heart, the most effective is distraction of the mind from the subject of its affliction. And probably the belief is well founded. But it usually happens that the sufferer is the last to recognize the virtues of the remedy, preferring to nurse in solitude a secret grief and to savour again and yet again the bitterness of the Dead Sea fruit of sorrow.

So it was with me in these unhappy days. The seclusion of the workshop gave me the opportunity for long hours of meditation, in which I would trace and retrace the growth of my love for Jasper, would think with passionate regret of what might have been, and speculate vaguely upon the future. So far from seeking distraction in these first days of my trouble, I kept aloof from my comrades, so far as I could; shut myself in the workshop, or in my room, or wandered abroad alone, following the great eastern thoroughfares where I was secure from the chance of meeting a friend.

But the distractions which I would have avoided came unsought. First, there was the visit with Peggy to Miss Tallboy. It was due but a day or two after my parting with Jasper, and I loathed the thought of it; but it had to be; for who could say how much it might mean to Peggy? And as it turned out, I should never have forgiven myself if I had failed her. I had looked for a rather dull, social call flavoured with porcelain. But it was quite otherwise. Miss Tallboy-Smith had at length heard of Peggy's genius and had invited a few specially choice connoisseurs to meet her, including Mr. Hawkesley—unless he had invited himself. At any rate, there he was, reverential and admiring, but yet with a certain air of proprietorship which I noted with interest and not without approval. It was quite a triumph for Peggy, and she took it very modestly, though with very natural satisfaction. To me, however, there was a fly in the ointment, though quite a small one; for Mr. Hawkesley proposed an exploration of the Wallace Collection, which Peggy had never seen, and which I felt bound, for her sake, to agree to. But I looked forward with prospective relief to the time—not far distant, I suspected—when these two pottery enthusiasts would be intimate enough to dispense with a chaperon.

Then there came a distraction of another kind. One evening after tea, Lilith took me apart, and looking at me with some concern, said: "Our Sibyl has not been herself of late. I hope she is not being worried about anything."

"We all have our little troubles, Lilith," I replied, "and sometimes we don't take them so resignedly as we should."

"No," she rejoined. "Resignation is easier when the troubles are someone else's. But we are very concerned to see you looking so sad—not only Margaret and I, but all of us. We are all very fond of you, Sibyl, dear, and any of us would think it a privilege to be of help to you in any way. You know that, don't you?"

"I have good reason to. No woman could have found kinder or more helpful friends than I have in this house."

"Well," she said, "friends are for use as well as for companionship. Don't forget that, if there is any little service that any of us can render you."

I thanked her very warmly, and she then opened a fresh topic.

"Some time ago, Sibyl, we were speaking of psychical experiments, and I suggested that you might like to see some

carried out by my friend, Mr. Quecks, who is an authority on these subjects. Mr. Quecks was away from home at the time, on a lecturing tour in Kent; but he is home again now. I wrote to him about you and have had one or two talks with him, and he has asked me to invite you to a little demonstration that he is giving to some friends next Friday evening. Would you care to come with me?"

I would much rather not have gone, but I knew that a refusal would disappoint Lilith, who had set her heart on converting me. Accordingly, I accepted the invitation, and we were arranging details of the expedition when Peggy joined us. As soon as she heard what was afoot she was all agog.

"Oh, what fun!" she exclaimed. "You'll let me come, too, won't you, Lilith? I did so enjoy it last time."

Lilith, however, was by no means eager for her company, for the Titmouse was a rank unbeliever, and made no secret of it.

"What is the use of your coming, Peggy?" said she. "You don't believe in the super-normal. You would only come to scoff."

"Perhaps I should remain to pray," rejoined Peggy. "It is no use preaching to people who are already convinced. And I should just love it. That Quecks man is so frightfully amusing. He is the funniest little guffin you ever saw, Sibyl. Won't you let me come, Lilith?"

"Of course you can come if you really want to," Lilith replied with evident reluctance. "But you shouldn't speak of Mr. Quecks as if he were a mountebank or a buffoon. He may not be handsome, but he is a very learned man and very sincere."

"I beg your pardon, Lilith," said Peggy. "I won't call him a guffin any more. And thank you ever so much for letting me come."

The arrangements being thus settled, it is only fair to Peggy to say that she endeavoured, as far as possible, to treat the demonstration quite seriously. Even in our private conversations she made no further disparaging references to Mr. Quecks, though I did gather that her anxiety to be present at the séance was not unconnected with a desire to keep an eye on him to see that he did not impose on me.

Mr. Quecks' house was situated in a quiet street off Cromwell Road, Kensington, and the "demonstration" took place in a large room intermediate in character between a library and a drawing-room, lighted by three electric bulbs, all of which were encased in silk bags, so that the illumination was of a twilight dimness. The visitors were about a dozen in all, and while we were waiting for the late arrivals Mr. Quecks made a few observations on super normal phenomena in general.

To me he required no disparagement from Peggy or anyone else, his own appearance doing all that was necessary in that respect. The first glance at him impressed me disagreeably; but then he was a manifestly uncomely man, with a large, bald face and long, greasy black hair, which was brushed straight back and accumulated in an untidy bush at the nape of his neck. He spoke unctuously, and his manner was confident, persuasive, didactic and authoritative, and he gave me the impression of a man who was accustomed to dealing chiefly with women—his present audience was composed of them exclusively.

"In interpreting the results of the experiments which we are about to perform," he observed, "we have to bear in mind that psychical and super-normal phenomena, inasmuch as they are not concerned with material things, are not directly appreciable by the senses. We cannot see or touch the subliminal self, either our own or that of others. But neither can we see the electric current or the Hertzian waves. We know of their existence and properties indirectly, through their effects. Electricity can be transformed into heat, light or sound, and these can be perceived by means of the radiator, the electric lamp or the telephone, which act directly on our senses. So it is with the hidden subconscious self. Invisible itself, it can be made to produce effects which are perceptible to the conscious mind through the senses, and through those effects its own existence is revealed."

This sounds reasonable enough; but the experiments themselves were rather disappointing on the whole. Perhaps I expected too much; or perhaps the preoccupied state of my mind did not allow me to bring to them sufficient interest or attention. Moreover, Mr. Quecks had an assistant (I had almost said "confederate") whose appearance pleased me no more than his own; a wall-eyed, taciturn woman of about thirty-five, of the name of Morgan, who acted as the "percipient"—the word "medium," I noticed, was not used—and helped to prejudice me against the experiments.

We began with a demonstration of thought-transference, which I found dull, tiresome and unconvincing. Probably I was unreasonable; but the apparent triviality of the proceedings, which resembled a solemn and unspeakably dull drawing-room game, influenced my judgment. The percipient, Miss Morgan, being seated, blindfolded, in the middle of the room, a pack of playing cards and another pack of cards, each of which bore a single capital letter, were produced. A card was drawn out at random and held up behind the percipient and in view of everyone else, including Mr. Quecks, who held the percipient's hand. Miss Morgan then guessed the card or the letter. Sometimes she guessed correctly, sometimes nearly correctly, some times quite incorrectly. The proportion of correct guesses, Mr. Quecks informed us, was vastly greater than could be accounted for on the law of probabilities. And I dare say it was. But the exhibition left me cold, as did those of table-tilting and planchette writing which followed. Even the "pendule explorateur," which had so impressed me on a previous occasion, fell flat on this. For, since that rather startling experience, I had given some thought to the magic pendulum, and believed that I had found at least a partial explanation of its powers. Accordingly, when my turn came to try the "autoscope," I took the string in my fingers and shut my eyes; and when Mr. Quecks objected to this, I gazed fixedly



at the opposite wall, seeing neither the pendulum nor the clockwise alphabet. Under these conditions the pendulum was a complete failure; it would spell nothing. But when I looked steadily at the pendulum and the letters, the swinging ball spelled out clearly the word that I chose—Lilith.

I was thus in a decidedly sceptical frame of mind when the next set of experiments began; and even these produced, at first, no effect on me other than a slight tendency to yawn. Their object was to demonstrate the existence of a “psychometric” power or faculty; that is to say, a power to detect in certain material objects a permanent impression left by contact with some particular person. Such a faculty, Mr. Quecks explained to us, was possessed by certain exceptionally sensitive persons. He had it to some extent himself, but in Miss Morgan it was developed in a really remarkable degree, as the experiments which were to follow would convince us.

Hereupon Miss Morgan was once more blindfolded, all the lights but one were switched off, so that the room was almost in darkness, and the demonstration began. One of the visitors, at Mr. Quecks’ whispered request, slipped a ring from her finger and passed it to him. By him it was handed to Miss Morgan, who solemnly applied it to her forehead. Then followed an interval of expectant silence, in which I thought I heard a faint giggle from Peggy Finch, who sat in the row in front of me.

At length Miss Morgan opened her mouth and spoke. It seemed that she was seeing visions, and these she described in detail. Naturally I was unable to check them, nor could I judge whether they had any relation to the ring. The owner of that article stated, at the close of the experiment, that the visions, as described, corresponded closely to certain places and events which were known to her and to no one else. Which seemed conclusive enough; but yet it left me only with a feeling that the whole proceeding was ridiculous and trivial.

The next experiment was performed with a glove from the hand of another visitor, and when this was concluded, Mr. Quecks whispered to a lady in the front row, who whispered to Peggy, who turned to me.

“He wants your handkerchief, Sibyl,” she said in a low whisper.

I took my handkerchief from my pocket and gave it to Peggy, who squeezed it up into a ball and passed it to the lady in front, who passed it to Mr. Quecks, who handed it to Miss Morgan; who, in her turn, applied it to her forehead as if it had been an ice-bag, and assumed an attitude of intense mental concentration. And again the sound of a suppressed giggle came from the neighbourhood of the Titmouse.

Then Miss Morgan began to speak.

“I seem to be passing through the country—swiftly—very swiftly; past great, wide fields and woods. They are strange-looking woods. The trees are all in lines—in straight lines...But wait! Are they trees? No, they can’t be; they are too small. No—they are plants growing up poles—they must be vines. It is a vineyard—and yet they don’t look quite like vines. No, no! Of course, I see now; they are hops. It is a hop-garden. And now I am passing another. Now I have come out on to a road on the top of a hill. There are hills all round, and in the hollow there seems to be a town...and I seem to see water in the town...yes, it is water. It is a river...But I don’t see any ships...only some red things...Oh, yes! I see; the red things are sails—red sails. I thought sails were always white.”

She paused; and in the intense silence I leaned forward, listening eagerly. All my indifference and boredom had vanished. This was quite a different affair from the card-guessing and planchette-reading. She had described Maidstone vividly, accurately—or at least so it seemed to me; Maidstone as it would appear to one approaching the bridge from the west. Of course it might be mere guessing; but—

“I seem,” Miss Morgan resumed, “to be descending a hill by a broad street...What is that in front of me? Is it—yes I see it is a bridge. Yes I see it plainly now. I am coming towards it. But what on earth is this thing on my left hand? It seems to be a mass of gold and yet...and yet it looks like an elephant. That’s ridiculous, of course. It can’t be...But it certainly looks like gold...and yet it...it really does look like an elephant! Well, I can make nothing of it. And now it is gone and I am on the bridge.” Again she paused, and I sat gazing at her in blank astonishment. There could now be no question as to the reality of the visions, unless the whole exhibition was a fraud. The idea of skilful guessing could not be entertained for a moment. The description did not merely fit Maidstone; the detail of the golden elephant on the brewery by the bridge fixed the identity of the place I beyond the possibility of doubt. It was either a genuine—and most amazing—psychical phenomenon or an outrageous imposture. But an imposture, to which Lilith must have been a party, was more incredible than the supernatural itself.

As these thoughts passed swiftly through my mind, Miss Morgan resumed her description.

“I am standing on the bridge, but it is beginning to grow indistinct. By the riverside I can just see a great house, an old, old house, which seems to stand by the water’s edge, and beyond it trees and a church tower. Now it is gone and I can see nothing. Is this all?...No; I see, very, very faintly, a small crowd of people. They seem to be in a field. And I make out a number of white objects in the field. They look rather like sheep, but they are very still. Oh! they are not sheep at all; they are tombstones. And I see now that the people are all in black and that they are standing round an open grave. It must be a funeral...Yes; there is the clergyman in his surplice...But it is beginning to fade.

“Now I can only just see the dark shapes of the people and now they are gone too. This must be all, I think.” She paused for a few moments and then exclaimed:

“No it isn’t! Something else is coming. It is very dim, but it looks like a man sitting at a table. Yes! But I can’t see what he

is doing. He is not writing. He has something in his right hand, and keeps moving it up and down. Oh, I see now: it is a hammer. He seems to be hammering some bright object—a piece of metal, I think...Yes, it is quite clear now. But it isn't a man at all; it is a woman. I saw her distinctly for a moment, but she has grown dim again...Now she has gone and I can see nothing...I think that is all...Yes, that is all. Nothing else seems to come."

She removed the handkerchief from her forehead and held it out towards Mr. Queeks, who took it from her and tiptoed round to where I was sitting.

"Thank you, Mrs. Otway," he whispered. "It seemed a very successful experiment; but you can judge better than I can."

"It was, indeed, most successful," I replied, as he gave me back my handkerchief. "I am positively amazed at the detailed accuracy of the description."

"You think the correspondence is closer than could be accounted for by coincidence or chance guessing?" he asked.

"There can be no question of chance," I replied. "The descriptions were much too detailed and circumstantial."

"That is most interesting," said he. "For there can be no other explanation but that of genuine psychometric faculty. Miss Morgan is a stranger to you, and, moreover, she did not know whose handkerchief it was. The remarkable success of this experiment seems to support Miss Blake's estimate of your unusual psychic gifts. You evidently have the power of imprinting your personality on inanimate objects in an exceptional degree. I should almost think it likely that you would be a successful scryer. Have you made any experiments with the crystal?"

"Yes. But they are all complete failures. I could see nothing."

"That is not unusual in early experiments," said he. "There is a difficulty in concentrating. I wonder if you would care to make a trial now under my guidance. I think I could help you to visualize some simple scene. Will you try?"

The astonishing success of Miss Morgan's experiment had revived all my former curiosity, and I assented readily, much to Mr. Queeks' satisfaction. The nature of the new experiment was explained to the company, and the necessary preparations made. An easy chair was placed for me in the middle of the room, and the chairs for the others arranged behind it, so that I should not have my attention distracted by seeing them. As I passed Lilith on my way to the chair, I greeted her with a smile, and was a little surprised at the lack of response on her part. I thought she would be gratified to see me taking so active a part in the proceedings; but apparently she was not; indeed, I had never seen her look so ungenial.

When I had taken my seat, Mr. Queeks directed me to lean back and adopt a position of complete physical rest. A black, velvet cushion was then placed in my lap and on the cushion was laid the crystal globe, itself almost black in the dim twilight save for a single spark where it reflected the light of the one electric lamp.

"You will look fixedly at the bright spot of light," said Mr. Queeks, who had seated himself beside me; "concentrate your attention on it and think of nothing else. Don't let your mind wander, and don't move your eyes. Think of the bright spot and look at it. Soon a mist will come before your eyes; then you will feel a sort of drowsiness. You will grow more and more drowsy, but your eyes will keep open and you will still see the mist. You are seeing it now—" (this was quite correct); "it grows denser; now you are beginning to feel drowsy—just a little drowsy—but your eyes are wide open; still you are getting drowsy—rather more drowsy—"

He seemed to repeat these words over and over and over again like a sort of chant; and his voice, which had been at first soft and confidential, took on a peculiar sing-song quality, and at the same time began to grow more and more distant until it came to me thin and small like the voices that are borne from far-away ships on a calm day across the water of a quiet anchorage. And, meanwhile, a strange somnolence fell upon me. I felt as if I were in a dream. Yet my eyes were wide open, and before them floated the mist, out of which shone the single spark of light. And the little, thin voice went on chanting far away, but I could no longer make out what it said. Nor was I attending to it. I was gazing into the mist at the tiny spark—gazing fixedly, unwinkingly, without effort.

Presently the mist seemed to clear a little, and the spot of light began to grow larger. Now it looked like a hole in the shutter of a dark room; and now it was as though I were looking through an opera glass or a telescope; but I could make out nothing save a confused blur of light, in the middle of which was a vague, dark shape. But still the area of light grew larger, and now I could see that there were other shapes, all dim, vague and shadowy. Then in an instant it cleared up, as a magic-lantern picture sharpens when the lens is focussed. The dark shape was Mr. Otway. He stood, stooping forward, gazing at something on the floor—something that lay by the fireplace, motionless, with upturned waxen face. It was horribly distinct. I could see my father's face settling into the rigidity of death; I could see the crimson streak on his temple; I could even see the sparkle of the silver knob on the stick that Mr. Otway grasped.

The vision lasted, as it seemed, but for a few seconds. Then it grew dim and confused and quickly faded away into blank darkness; and I found myself sitting up in the chair, wide awake, but bewildered and a little frightened. The lights were full on, and the visitors were all gathered around my chair gazing at me with a very odd intentness.

"Did you see anything in the crystal?" Mr. Queeks asked, suavely.

"Yes," I answered, not quite so suavely. "How long have I been asleep?"

Mr. Queeks looked at his watch. "Just five and twenty minutes," he replied.

I got up from the chair, and, addressing Peggy, who was looking at me a little anxiously, asked: "What has been happening, Peggy? Have I been talking nonsense?"

"No," she answered. "You've been asleep, and you've been guessing cards and doing most extraordinary sums—multiplying and dividing fractions and all sorts of things. That's all. But," she added in a lower tone, "he'd no business to hypnotize you without your permission. You didn't give him permission, did you?"

"No, I didn't," I replied.

At this moment Lilith came up to us and put the same question.

"No," I answered. "I didn't understand that I was to be hypnotised."

"I thought not," said she in a tone of evident vexation. "It doesn't happen to matter as things have turned out, but it was quite improper. I shall speak to Mr. Quecks about it when you are gone."

"Aren't you coming with us, then?" asked Peggy.

"No," replied Lilith. "I have some matters to talk over with him, so I must stay a little while; but I shall follow you in about half an hour."

Shortly after this the meeting broke up, and Peggy and I took our departure. As we sat in the train, I tried to extract from my companion some details of what had happened, but I found her curiously unwilling to pursue the topic. I gathered, however, that, as soon as the hypnotic trance was completely established, Mr. Quecks suggested to me that I should have a distinct vision of some scene that I had witnessed "in the old town that Miss Morgan had seen and shortly before the funeral that she had described." Then, after an interval, he had put a number of problems in multiplication and division of large numbers and fractions, which I had solved with extraordinary ease and rapidity. As to the nature of my vision, Peggy displayed no interest, but turned the conversation on to subjects quite unconnected with Mr. Quecks or psychical science.

When we arrived home she followed me to my room and suggested that we should wait there for Lilith, which was what I had intended to do. And here again she showed a marked tendency to avoid the subject of Mr. Quecks and his experiments. But, as she sat in my chair gossiping, I caught her eye, from time to time, travelling almost furtively towards the clock on the mantelpiece, and I wondered if she was feeling anxious about Lilith, who had to make her way alone through the rather unsavoury neighbourhood of Ratcliff. Whatever she was feeling, however, she kept up a flow of conversation—which was, itself, a rather unusual phenomenon—and presently grew quite confidential about herself—which was more unusual still. It was clear that her friendship with Mr. Hawkesley was now quite firmly established, and they evidently saw a good deal of one another—but this I knew already. And it was clear that their sympathy in tastes was running parallel to a very strong liking of a more personal kind.

After a pause in this confidential gossip, Peggy suddenly looked down a little shyly, and, turning very pink, asked hesitatingly:

"Sibyl, dear, you haven't quarrelled with Mr. Davenant, have you?"

"Quarrelled, Peggy!" I exclaimed; "of course I haven't. Have we ever struck you as quarrelsome people?"

"No, indeed," she replied. "But you don't seem to have seen much of one another lately."

"No; I haven't seen Mr. Davenant for quite a long time," I said.

She was silent for a while, and I noticed that her cheeks were growing more and more pink.

"What is my little chameleon turning that colour for?" I asked.

She looked up at me with a shy smile. "Sibyl," she said, "don't think me inquisitive or impertinent. I am your friend, you know, and we are fond of one another, aren't we?"

"We are the very best of friends, Peggy, dear, so you needn't mind asking me anything that you want to know."

"Well, then, Sibyl; why don't you and Mr. Davenant marry? Anyone can see how fond he is of you, and I'm sure you care for him an awful lot, don't you, now?"

"My Titmouse is becoming an expert authority on these matters," said I, thereby converting poor Peggy to the semblance of a corn-popper.

"Perhaps I am," she admitted, defiantly. "But why don't you marry him, Sibyl?"

"My dear Peggy," said I, "there is a very substantial reason. Its name is Mr. Otway."

"Sibyl!" gasped Peggy. "I thought you were a widow!"

I shook my head. "No, Peggy. I am a widow in effect, but a married woman by law. I have a husband who is no husband; whom I married in error, whom I have never lived with and could never think of living with, but whom I can never get rid of. That is the position."

She flung her arms around my neck, and laid her cheek to mine.

"My poor, dear Sibyl," she exclaimed. "How dreadful for you! I am so frightfully sorry, dear. And is there no end to this?"

"There is death," said I. "That is all. And that is why I am not seeing much of Mr. Davenant nowadays."

"It is an awful thing, Sibyl," said she. "You and Mr. Davenant could make one another so perfectly happy.' And I don't see why you shouldn't, for that matter."

"Why, how could we, Peggy?"

Again she blushed scarlet, and with a defiant glance at me, replied:

"I wouldn't have my whole life wrecked. I should just go off with him, husband or no husband."

"You dreadful little reprobate. And what do you suppose the world would say about you?"

"It could say what it liked so long as I'd got the man I wanted. But it wouldn't really say anything. No one with any sense would think a penny the worse of me. Nor would they of you. Everyone would say that you had done the right thing, seeing that you had no choice. You couldn't be expected to be bound for life to a dummy husband."

At this moment I rose from my chair, and going over to the dressing-table, lit a candle. Then I put my hand in my pocket and drew out an unaddressed envelope and a piece of pencil. With the latter I wrote on the envelope my signature and the words "ten minutes to eleven." The whole proceeding seemed quite automatic. I did not know why I was doing it. I had not known that either the envelope or the pencil was in my pocket, for I had not put them there. But I carried out the train of action almost unconsciously and quite without surprise.

When I had written on the envelope, I opened it and drew out a piece of paper. On the paper was some writing in an unfamiliar hand. I held the paper near the candle and read as follows:

"At ten minutes to eleven you will light a candle, take this envelope and a pencil from your pocket; you will write on the envelope your signature and the time. Then you will open the envelope and read this message."

I stood for some seconds gazing at the paper in utter amazement. Then I looked round quickly at the clock. It was ten minutes to eleven. From the clock my glance turned to Peggy, who was sitting watching me with a very uncomfortable expression.

"Do you know anything about this, Peggy?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "That Quecks man told you to do it. He wrote the message and put the envelope and pencil in your pocket when you were in a deep sleep. He spoke the message into your ear, and, after about a minute, told you to wake up, and you woke up immediately. It was like his impudence to perform his beastly experiments without getting your permission first."

"It was. But the thing is rather uncanny. I don't like it at all."

"There's nothing in it," said Peggy, though she, too, was evidently not pleasantly impressed. "It's what they call post-hypnotic suggestion. It isn't in any way super-natural. The doctors know all about it."

"Still," said I, "it is a very strange affair. There is something extremely eerie in finding oneself turned into an unthinking automaton worked by somebody else's will. And some of the other experiments were rather startling: Miss Morgan's visions for instance."

"Mightn't they have been just clever guesses?"

"No, Peggy. That is quite impossible. Her descriptions applied to my case in detail and were correct every time. You heard her describe the view from Maidstone Bridge?"

"Yes. And I recognised it from that water-colour over your mantelpiece."

"Well, don't you think it very wonderful and incomprehensible?"

"No, I don't," said Peggy. "How do you suppose she did it?"

"I can only imagine that some influence that I don't understand passed to her from my handkerchief."

"Then you imagine wrong," said the Titmouse. "Your handkerchief was in my pocket all the time. It was my handkerchief that she was smelling at. And her descriptions didn't fit me the least little bit. I don't hammer my pottery, you know."

"But I don't understand. You passed her my handkerchief, didn't you?"

"No; I passed her mine. You see, I'd seen this handkerchief trick before and I had mine ready, rolled up into a ball in my hand. So it was quite easy to make the exchange. But we may as well change back now."

She took a handkerchief from her pocket and handed it to me; and when I had identified it as my own, I produced hers and restored it to her.

"You are a wicked little baggage, Peggy," said I, "though I must admit that the ruse was quite a fair one. But still, I don't quite see how it was done? It was evidently an imposture. But how was it worked? How did she get the information?"

"Why, she got it from Mr. Quecks, and he got it from Lilith."

"You surely don't suggest that Lilith was a party to this fraud?"

"Of course I don't," she replied, indignantly. "Lilith is a lady to the tips of her fingers. That's just where it is. She would never suspect. But we know that she wrote to Quecks about you, and she has talked to him about you, and no doubt he has

pumped out all that she knows about you. Then you will remember that he has just come back from a tour in Kent—he is almost certain to have been to Maidstone—and there are such things as picture postcards. There is no mystery as to how it was done; but I do wonder that he was such a fool as to do it before Lilith. I suspect she stayed behind to tell him what she thought of him.”

As we were speaking, Lilith came up the stairs, and I ran out to intercept her and bring her in.

“You needn’t have waited up for me,” said she, “though I am glad you have, for I want to apologise for Mr. Quecks’ very improper behaviour.”

“Don’t think any more about it, Lilith,” said I. “It didn’t do any harm, and it has enabled Peggy and me to have a little private séance to ourselves.”

“Did the post-hypnotic experiment work correctly?”

“Perfectly—and most uncannily.”

“Then,” said Lilith, “you have gained by that amount of experience. As to the rest of Mr. Quecks’ experiments—well, Sibyl, I am afraid we must consider them on the plane of public entertainment rather than on that of genuine research. But it is getting late. We had better go to bed now and talk things over to-morrow.”

This advice was forthwith acted on, as to its first half; and if I owed Mr. Quecks a grudge for trying to impose on me, I should have been grateful to him for giving me something to think about other than my own griefs and entanglements.

---

## XX.— CLOUD AND SUNSHINE

REVIEWING on the morrow my experiences at Mr. Quecks’ house, I was conscious of a rather definite change of outlook. Those experiences had made a very deep impression. The vision that I had seen was something outside ordinary, normal experience, and it still haunted me. And then, even more uncanny, there was that strange automatic action which I had carried out with such perfect unconsciousness and yet so exactly and punctually. It was all very well for Peggy to put it aside with the easy explanation that it was merely post-hypnotic suggestion, and that the doctors knew all about it. That explanation explained nothing. The fact remained that I had suddenly become aware that things which I had been accustomed to dismiss as delusions—as the mere superstitions of credulous people—were actual realities. And this discovery created for me a new standard of possibility and truth. Even Miss Morgan’s visions, though I knew them to be a rank imposture, had left an impression that was not to be completely effaced. The shock of amazement that they had produced at the time left a vague after-effect, due, no doubt, to the more real and equally mysterious experiences.

Concerning these latter I was somewhat puzzled. It was not quite clear to me how I had come to be hypnotized at all, and I took an early opportunity of questioning Lilith on the subject.

“There is no mystery about that,” she replied. “The orthodox method of producing the hypnotic trance is to cause the ‘subject’ to gaze steadily at some bright object—a metal button, a crystal, or even a small piece of white paper. He is told to gaze fixedly at this object, to concentrate his attention on it, and to think of nothing else. The purpose of this is to get rid, as far as possible, of the conscious self and to allow the subconscious self to act without disturbance. When this state of mental abstraction has been established, the ‘subject’ is ready to receive suggestions. If the operator suggests to him that he is drowsy, he becomes somnolent; and at the same time he becomes much more susceptible to suggestion. Now, if the operator suggests to him that he feels certain sensations, he feels those sensations. If it is suggested that he performs certain actions, he performs them. This is what happened to you. Mr. Quecks induced you to gaze steadily at the crystal, and when you were in the proper state of mental abstraction, he suggested the hypnotic trance. Then he suggested that you would see a vision of some scene that you had looked on shortly before the funeral, and I understand that you did see such a vision.”

“Yes, I did; and most astonishingly vivid it was. But, Lilith, when I lit that candle in my room I was not in the hypnotic trance.”

“No; that was a post-hypnotic phenomenon, and really a most interesting one. To understand it you must think of the two personalities, the conscious self and the subconscious, or subliminal self. Now the suggestions are made to the subconscious self, while the conscious is dormant or in abeyance. But when the conscious self returns or awakens, the subconscious mind continues to work, although unperceived by the conscious mind. If the suggestion refers, as in your case, to some action to be performed at an appointed time, the subconscious keeps account of the passing time and at the appointed moment sets the machinery in motion. The action itself is perceived by the conscious mind, but the train of subconscious thought has been unperceived, though it has really been quite continuous. It is very curious, though not particularly mysterious.”

“And it is only in the hypnotic trance that these suggestions take effect?”

“That,” replied Lilith, “is not quite clear. It seems that in ordinary sleep suggestions of the kind may sometimes take effect. And for the same reason. In sleep, the conscious self is in abeyance—is out of action; but the subconscious is active, as we see in the case of dreams and still more strikingly in the case of somnambulism. But the postponed effects of suggestions made during normal sleep need more investigation. I believe that sleep produced by drugs is much more like the hypnotic trance than natural sleep.”

"Well," I said, "it is all rather weird and uncanny," and so the subject dropped. But, as I have said, the influence of these strange experiences remained. My former scepticism of the occult and mystical gave place to a state of mind in which I was prepared to admit the possibility of things that I had once regarded as wildly incredible.

Nevertheless, I was but faintly interested in the wonders of psychical research. Indeed, I was not much interested in anything connected with my daily life. I had endeavoured to revive my enthusiasm for my work by setting myself an ambitious task—a silver candlestick of a semi-ecclesiastical design, worked in repoussé with enrichments in enamel. But all the pleasure in the work was gone. The various processes—skilfully enough executed, as I noticed with tepid satisfaction—which should have been a joy, were but the routine of industry; and through them all the never-ending heartache, the sense of loss, of bereavement, the feeling that the light had gone out of my life for ever. The passing time seemed to bring no mitigation. Rather did it seem to me that every day I missed my dear companion more.

Perhaps if my loss had been more final—if, for instance, Jasper had been taken from me by Death—I might have striven more determinedly to shape my life anew. But there was a certain inconclusiveness in our separation. Not that I ever, for a moment, considered the possibility of re-opening the question. But still I think there lurked in my mind the feeling that the door was not finally closed. Jasper's words, "Remember that I am still wanting you, that I am still asking you," would come to me unbidden, again and yet again, reminding me that the way was still open, that I could end the separation if and when I chose. And then Peggy's outspoken declaration was not without its effect. For the Titmouse was a very paragon of modesty and maidenly propriety; and when I recalled her robust contempt of conventional points of view I could not help asking myself sometimes if I had not been too prudish.

All of which was very disturbing. It left me with my resolution unchanged, and yet without that sense of finality that would have set me reconstructing my scheme of life.

So the weeks dragged by till the time for the first monthly letter drew nigh; and the passionate yearning with which I looked forward to it told me that that letter was a mistake. It ought never to have been. The chapter should have been ended and the volume shut irrevocably.

As the time for the letter approached, my unrest took me abroad more than usual, and one day, forsaking the sordid east, I took the train to South Kensington and made my way to the Museum, though with no special object in my mind. I had ascended the steps to the main entrance, and was approaching the doorway, when I came face to face with Miss Tallboy-Smith, who was just emerging. At the sight of me she halted with a dramatic gesture of astonishment.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "so you are really alive! I thought I was never going to see you again. Where have you been? It's ages—centuries—since I have seen you. And dear Miss Finch, too; whatever has become of her? Were you going into the Museum? I have just been wallowing in the Salting Collection. Delightful, isn't it? The very kernel of the Museum. Don't you think so?"

"I don't think I have ever seen the Salting Collection," said I.

"Never seen the Salting Collection!" she gasped. "My dear Mrs. Otway! How dreadful! And you a connoisseur, too. Why, it's a Paradise; the collectors' Heaven. Do you believe that people come back after death and frequent their old haunts? I hope it's true. If it is, I shall come to the Salting Collection. I shall divide my ghosthood between that and the Wallace. It will really be very jolly. Unlimited leisure, with all eternity at one's disposal. And no stuffy restrictions; no closing hours or students' days. So convenient, too! You just pass in through the closed door or the wall and float up the stairs. Why, you could even get inside the glass cases! I'm afraid you'll think me an awful old heathen; but I'm not really. And how are you? And how is Miss Finch? And why haven't you been to the club for such an age. And isn't it dreadful about poor Mr. Davenant?"

My heart seemed to stand still, and I think I must have turned pale, for Miss Tallboy-Smith said hastily: "I'm afraid I have startled you, Mrs. Otway; but surely—surely—do you mean to tell me that you haven't even heard about it?"

"I have heard nothing," I said, faintly. "Is he—tell me what has happened."

"I haven't had very full particulars," said she, "but it seems that a cart—or was it a wagon? No, I think it was a cart—and yet I'm not quite sure that it wasn't—but there! I'm not very dear as to the difference between a cart and a wagon. What is the difference?"

"It doesn't matter," I said impatiently. "Tell me what happened."

"No," she agreed, "I suppose it doesn't matter. Well, it seems that this wagon—but I think it was really a cart—yes, I'm sure it was—at least, I think so—but at any rate it appears that the wagon had run away—that is, of course, it was the horse that had run away, but as he was tied to the cart, it comes to the same thing. And he got on to the pavement—it was in the Strand, somewhere near that shop where they sell those absurd—now what do they call those things? I am getting so silly about names, and it's quite a common name, too—"

"Never mind what they are called," I entreated. "Do tell me what happened to Mr. Davenant."

"Well, what happened was this. When the wagon got on the pavement all the people scattered to get out of the way—all except a messenger boy, and he fell down right in front of the cart. Then Mr. Davenant ran out and tried to drag the boy dear of the wagon; and, in fact, he did drag him out of the way, but he wasn't quick enough to save himself, for the horse swerved and knocked him down violently on to some stone steps. He fell with his side on the stone steps, and I understand that his ribs were simply smashed to matchwood."

"And where is he now? Is he in a hospital?"

"He was. They took him to Charing Cross Hospital, but he wouldn't stay there. He insisted on going home directly they put on the splints or whatever the things were. And, will you believe me, Mrs. Otway, when I tell you that he has been living alone in those wretched chambers ever since! He wouldn't even have a nurse. Isn't that just like a man?"

"But who looks after him?"

"Nobody. Of course there is the charwoman, or laundress as they call them—though why they should be called laundresses I can't imagine. They look more like dustwomen—and the man from the office downstairs looks in sometimes. It's a perfectly scandalous state of affairs. I wish, Mrs. Otway, you would go and see him and make him have a nurse."

"I will certainly go and see him," said I. "I will go now," and I held out my hand to bring the interview to an end.

"How sweet of you, dear Mrs. Otway!" she explained, keeping a firm hold of my hand, which I endeavoured unobtrusively to withdraw. "I felt sure you would go to the rescue. And you will insist on his having a nurse, won't you? He will listen to you, but you will have to be firm. Promise me you will, now."

"I will see that he is properly looked after," I replied.

"Yes, but he must have a nurse, you know—a properly trained and certificated nurse. You can get excellent nurses at that place—now, what is its name? Cavendish—Cavendish something. I am getting so silly about names. Let me see, I did have a card in my purse; perhaps it is there still—" Here she released my hand to open her wrist-bag, and I took the opportunity to retreat down the steps.

"Don't trouble, please," I urged. "I shall manage quite well. Good-bye!" and with this I hurried away, somewhat unceremoniously, across the wide road, and, as soon as I had turned the corner, broke into a run. A couple of minutes later I arrived at the station, breathless, just in time to see a Circle train move out. I could have wept with vexation. It was but a few minutes before the next one would be due, but those minutes dragged like hours. With swift strides I paced up and down the platform in an agony of impatience, turning over and over again Miss Tallboy Smith's confused account of the accident and trying to construct by its aid some intelligible picture of Jasper's condition.

Even when I was in the train its progress seemed intolerably slow and the succession of stations interminable. It was an agony to sit still and passively await the leisurely arrival at my destination, and an unspeakable relief when, at last, I reached the Temple Station, to spring from the train, dash up the stairs and hurry along the embankment. My progress on foot might be slower, but I had the physical sensation of speed.

At the top of Middle Temple Lane I emerged into Fleet Street, and, crossing the road, entered Clifford's Inn Passage. I had never been there before, and, though I knew the number of Jasper's house, I thought it best to enquire as to its whereabouts. As I passed through the archway I saw a somewhat clerical-looking man standing at the door of the porter's lodge, and from him learned that No. 54 was in the inner court on the east side of the garden; with which direction I hurried on again. Clearly there came back to me the impressions that seemed so dim at the time: a sense of quiet and repose, of aloofness from the bustle of the city, an old-world, dignified shabbiness that was yet homely and pleasant withal. I crossed a little court, passed through a second archway, and came out into a second, larger court, where the gay foliage of plane trees found a foil in the dingy, red brick of the venerable houses. A glance showed me the narrow alley by the garden, and a dozen paces along its roughly-flagged pavement brought me to the entry of No. 54, on the side of which was painted "Mr. J. Davenant, Architect," and below, in smaller lettering, "Jonathan Weeble, Law Writer."

I stepped into the entry, and tapping on a door which, by its painted description, appeared to appertain to Mr. Weeble's premises, was bidden to "come in." Accordingly, I entered and was confronted by a somewhat unkempt, young man who was apparently engaged in engrossing a large document which was secured to a sort of evergrown lectern by means of a band of tape.

"I have called," I said, "to enquire about Mr. Davenant. Is he in a very serious condition?"

"He wasn't when I saw him about an hour ago," was the reply.

"Do you think he would be well enough to see me?" The young man, whom I assumed to be Mr. Weeble, inspected me critically, and then replied:

"I should say most emphatically that he would. But we needn't leave it at that. I can soon find out. Won't you sit down?"

He rose briskly and hurried out of the office, and it was only when I heard him ascending the uncovered stairs, two or three at a time, that I remembered that I had given no name.

Mr. Weeble's confident manner had lifted a load of anxiety from my mind, but my agitation was little abated. My fears were relieved, indeed, for evidently Jasper's condition was not such as to occasion alarm; but, as my anxiety subsided, other emotions made themselves felt. I was actually going to see him. Within a couple of minutes we should be together. The intolerable separation would be at an end. And the ecstasy of this thought—the almost painful joy of anticipation—brought home to me the intensity of my yearning to look on him again.

The sound of Mr. Weeble's footsteps descending the stairs set my heart throbbing, and as he bustled into the office I stood up, trembling with excitement.

"It's all right," said he. "Mr. Davenant will see you, if you'll go up. First floor, right hand side of the landing. I've left the

door open, and you'll see his name above it."

I did not go up the stairs at Mr. Weeble's pace, but I went as rapidly as the trembling of my knees would let me. On the first floor I saw a forbidding, iron-bound door standing ajar, and above it the well-beloved name, painted in white letters. I drew back the heavy door, disclosing a lighter one, also ajar, which I pushed open as I closed the massive "oak" after me. For a moment I stood on the threshold looking into the quaint, old-world room, with its panelled walls and the soft green light from the plane trees shimmering through the windows. He was reclining by the fire on a low, wooden settle, and held a book in his hand; and even in that instantaneous glance I could see how changed he was—how pale and thin and weary-looking. But as I stepped out from the shadow, the worn face lighted up; the book fell to the floor, and he flung his arms out towards me.

"Helen!"

"Jasper!"

In a moment I was on my knees by his side. His arms were around me and my cheek lay against his. And so for a while we rested with never a word spoken and no sound in the room but the ticking of the clock and the soft rustle of a swaying branch on the window panes. And so I could have rested for ever; for at last my heart was at peace.

"Jasper, dear," I said, at length, "how is it with you? Are you badly hurt?"

"Not a bit," he replied. "It is just a matter of a cracked rib and a few bruises; and I've nearly recovered from those."

"But why did you never send me a word? That wasn't friendly of you, Jasper."

"How could I, dearest?" he protested. "A bargain is a bargain. The month wasn't up."

"Jasper!" I exclaimed; "how could you be so silly? Of course you ought to have sent me a message, and I would have come to you instantly."

"I am sure you would, Helen," said he, "which was an additional reason for my keeping to our covenant. It would have seemed a shabby thing to do; for, badly as I wanted you, I was never really in any danger. By the way, how did you hear of my little mishap?"

I told him of my meeting with Miss Tallboy-Smith, and he chuckled softly. "She was an old goose to frighten you with those lurid stories, but I'm very grateful to her, all the same. I have wanted you, Helen."

He drew me closer to him and stroked my hair fondly; and again we were silent for a while. The clock ticked on impassively, the plane tree rustled gently on the window, and I was filled with a quiet, restful happiness that I was unwilling to interrupt even by speaking.

Presently Jasper bent down to my ear and whispered:

"Helen, darling, you haven't anything to tell me, have you?"

I knew what he meant, of course; and the strange thing is that, though the question came unexpectedly, and though I had not consciously given the subject a moment's thought, I found my mind completely and finally made up.

"Yes," I replied, "I have. Jasper, dear, I am your own. I can't live without you. The world must say what it will. I can do without the world, but I can't exist without you."

He drew me yet closer to him and kissed me reverently. "Dear heart," he said softly, "sweet wife, I would try to thank you if words could tell you what your precious gift means to me. But life is before us, and mine shall be one long thanksgiving. You have given me my heart's desire; if love and worship and faithful service can in any degree repay you, they shall be yours as long as our lives endure."

Thus in a few moments were the long weeks of misery and despair blotted out. We were reinstated, and, indeed, much more than reinstated; we were admitted and accepted lovers. And, just as my mind had, so to speak, made itself up without conscious thought on my part, so now that I had entered into this new covenant it seemed quite inevitable and satisfying. Its nonconformity with social conventions left me completely undisturbed.

Presently Jasper made me draw up a low, rush-bottomed chair that I might sit comfortably by his side while we talked. But, in fact, we talked little; for there is a sort of telepathy born of perfect sympathy that makes speech superfluous. We were both very happy and very deeply moved; and it seemed more companionable to sit, hand clasped in hand, and let our thoughts run on undisturbed by speech, knowing that the thoughts of each were but a reflection of the other's.

Anon came Mr. Weeble, stamping slowly up the stairs like an infirm coal-porter and making such a prolonged to-do about inserting the latch-key into the outer door that we both laughed. A very discreet man was Mr. Weeble.

"I've just come to see if I can do anything," said he, when Jasper had introduced me. "I generally make his tea and straighten out his bandages. Shall I make the tea now or are you taking charge, Mrs. Otway?"

"I will make the tea," said I, "but while you are tidying up the bandages I will run out and get some fresh cakes."

"Yes," said Mr. Weeble, "that would be a good idea. Our stock is rather low and a trifle old and fruity. And talking of cakes, that reminds me that an old rooster called a day or two ago and left one. I put it in a spare deed-box and forgot all about it. I'll go and fetch it up."



"A rooster, you say, Weeble," said Jasper. "May we assume that you are speaking figuratively?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Weeble. "Elderly party with an automatic smile and the rummiest name I ever heard. Now what was her name? Something double-barrelled—Bigboy-Jones, was it?"

"Tallboy-Smith, I expect," said Jasper.

"That was it. I sent her a letter of thanks the same day in your handwriting and signed it with your name. Are you starting now, Mrs. Otway? You'll find a very good cake-shop in Fetter Lane near the top on the left-hand side."

I took a brief bag of Jasper's and his latchkey and sallied forth into Fetter Lane by the postern gate; and as I walked up the quaint, old street I found myself looking into the homely shops and inspecting the ancient timber houses with a queer sort of proprietary air, as if I belonged to the neighbourhood. I found the cake-shop—it was really an old-fashioned baker's shop, such as one might find in a country town—and as I made a selection of the wares, based on experience of Jasper's tastes, I found myself almost unconsciously considering the merits of the establishment as a source of supply for a family of two. If the change in my mental state was sudden, it was certainly complete; as I sauntered back down Fetter Lane with my bag of provisions, care-free and filled with a delightful sense of emancipation, loitering to look into shop windows or to peer up strange courts and alleys that I might not return prematurely; I could not but contrast my condition with that in which I had set forth in the morning, hopeless, heart-weary, despondent. When I arrived at Jasper's chambers, Mr. Weeble had already gone; but he had filled the kettle and set it to boil on the gas-stove in the kitchen, where I found it murmuring placidly and breathing out little clouds of steam. The kitchen was a delightful absurdity. About the magnitude of a good-sized china cupboard, it suggested, with its range of shelves and little chemical sink, a doctor's dispensary or a chemist's laboratory. Yet it was very orderly and quite convenient, and it had the advantage that, while I was engaged in the preparations for the meal, my heart singing in unison with the kettle's song, I could look out of a tiny window on the moss-grown garden, or through the open door see Jasper watching me with a smile of ecstasy, and receive his instructions as to where the various articles were to be found. It was all very pleasant and intimate, and every little, homely detail helped to bring home to me the reality of my happiness.

During the very leisurely tea we gradually approached the subject of our future arrangements, which had evidently been very carefully thought out by Jasper.

"I'm not quite such a graven image as I look," said he. "I don't believe it's necessary for me to keep so immovable. But that is the doctor's business. I just do as I'm told. However, my bandages are coming off in a few days, and I understand that I shall be practically well in a fortnight. Until I am well, we had better let things remain as they are; and I think it would be better for you not to come and see me again in the interval."

"Do you mean that I am to leave you, a helpless invalid all alone and no one to look after you?"

"Yes," he replied. "Of course, I shall want you dreadfully, but as to my being alone and helpless, that is merely a sentimental view of the case. You can see for yourself that I am quite comfortable and well cared-for—Weeble never forgets me for an instant. And I think it most necessary that, until we are definitely married, we should have the most scrupulous regard for the conventions. We can't get the sanction either of the Law or the Church to our marriage; therefore, it is the more necessary for us to treat it ourselves with the utmost respect and seriousness. We are not going to enter into a casual and irresponsible relationship. We are going to contract a marriage; and I propose that we do so publicly and with proper formalities suited to the dignity and importance of the transaction."

"But," I asked, "what formalities are possible?"

"My proposal," he replied, "is this: we shall appoint a day and a time to meet here, and have two witnesses in attendance. Weeble could be one and the Inn porter, Mr. Duskin, the other. In the presence of those witnesses we shall formally agree to take one another as husband and wife. Each of us shall make a written declaration to the same effect, reciting the circumstances which render the unusual procedure necessary, and, in your case, denouncing and repudiating your marriage with Otway. These declarations we shall respectively read to the witnesses—who will also read them—and we shall each sign our declaration in the presence of the witnesses. I am not quite clear whether it would be legal for them to counter-sign as witnesses. If not, we shall add a note stating that the signatures were made in their presence. Then we shall exchange declarations and we shall notify Mr. Otway and whosoever else may be concerned, or whom we wish to inform, of what has taken place. Does that meet with your approval, Helen?"

"Entirely," I replied, "excepting the sentence of banishment. Don't you think I might just look in on you now and again to see if you want anything?"

"It is only a fortnight, dearest," said he, "and we can write as often as we please. Until we are married we can't be too careful to avoid provoking criticism."

I made no further objections, for I felt that he was right; and, moreover, I could not but perceive that this rather excessive primness, like the formalities which he had proposed, was simply an unconscious expression of chivalrous respect, a protest in advance against any unfavourable criticisms of me. And in accordance with what I felt he would consider prudent, I took leave of him comparatively early, so as to avoid a second meeting with Mr. Weeble, who, I learned, came in every night between eight and nine to help him to get to bed.

"I shall write to you every day," I said, as I drew on my gloves, "and you must promise that, if there is anything that I can do for you, you will let me know and never mind about Mrs. Grundy. Is that agreed?"

He gave the required promise, and when I had handed him back his latch-key, I stooped and kissed him; and as I looked back at him before closing the iron-bound door, I could not but contrast this parting with the miserable farewell of less than a month ago.

---

## XXI. — A DREADFUL INHERITANCE

IT has always been, and still is, somewhat of a puzzle to me to account for the sudden and complete change in my point of view in regard to my union with Jasper. Lilith would doubtless have explained it as a case of subconscious reflection, and probably she would have been right. My impression is that Peggy's matter-of-fact attitude toward marriage unsanctioned by law had a more profound effect, than I was aware of; that her words—which I had certainly recalled from time to time—had remained in my mind subconsciously exercising a continuous influence. Or it may be that I had found a life of separation impossible, and had realised it consciously only when I found myself once more in Jasper's presence.

But, however it may have happened, the fact remains that I accepted the new order without a qualm. The conditions that I had scouted as unthinkable now seemed entirely reasonable and acceptable. The only twinge of misgiving that I ever had, was produced by the draft of the declaration that Jasper sent for my approval and criticism. For that well-meant document, with its half-defiant, half-protesting phrases, did certainly bring home to me with uncomfortable vividness the fact that this marriage was not like any other marriage, and that I was not as other married women were. But I sent it back approved and tried to forget it, and quietly went on with my preparations for the new life.

Outwardly, however, I made no change in my habits, and even tried to suppress the gaiety and buoyancy of spirit that I felt, lest the sudden change from my recent depressed condition should attract notice. I still lived my life apart, only too happy in my solitude, and spent most of my time in the workshop conning over Jasper's letters, or meditating on the happy days that were drawing so near. For a time the candlestick was sadly neglected, until I had the sudden inspiration of finishing it as a wedding-gift to Jasper. And then all the joy of work revived and blossomed into unsuspected skill. Tracer and punch seemed to travel along their appointed paths unguided; the spindle-shanked chasing hammer became a familiar demon and appeared to develop a volition of its own, and the little enamel furnace roared with glee.

So the days sped by, each bringing me nearer to the golden gate of my enchanted garden, and each so filled with quiet happiness that I could not wish it shorter. About the end of the first week came a letter from Jasper saying that the bandages had been discarded, and that he had taken a walk and had appeared quite well and strong. A day or two later, came another fixing the date and time of our meeting. It was to be on the following Thursday—only five days ahead—at six o'clock in the evening. The formalities were to be carried out immediately on my arrival; we should then dine quietly at the club, spend the evening at a concert or the theatre, and take the boat train either to Flushing or Calais, which ever I preferred.

The arrival of this letter, though I had been daily expecting it, came as quite a shock, and turned my tranquil happiness into feverish excitement which I had some difficulty in concealing. The fixing of an actual date and the selection of a definite region in which to spend the honeymoon (I chose the north of France) gave a reality to this Great Adventure and brought it out of the undefined future into the present. For now I had to carry out the final preparations. Lightly as I might travel, I must take some luggage, and this would entail a conveyance; and this in its turn involved something in the nature of a public departure, so that, if I had desired to disappear secretly—which I did not—the thing would have been impossible. Yet I was, naturally, loath to say much about my immediate intentions, preparing to make my explanations by letter after the event; and this the prevailing good manners of the little community made quite easy. I notified Miss Polton and my more intimate friends that I was going away on a visit of uncertain duration, and, whatever curiosity they may have felt, no further particulars were asked for as I went about my immediate preparations—the packing of those few things that I must needs take away with me—unnoticed, or at least uncommented on, and then began unobtrusively to arrange the rest of my possessions for the final removal.

On Wednesday—the day before that of my departure—a letter arrived from Mr. Otway. It reached me just after lunch, and I glanced at it before rising from the table. The subject was the same as that of previous ones, but it was evident that something in the nature of a crisis was approaching. The extreme agitation of the writer was shown not only in the matter and the impassioned, rather incoherent manner, but even in the handwriting; which was ill-formed and slovenly, in great contrast to Mr. Otway's usual business-like neatness.

"My dear Helen," it began "I have not troubled you for quite a long time with my miserable affairs—which are, to some extent your affairs too. But they are going from bad to worse, and now I feel that I am coming to the limits of endurance. I cannot bear this much longer. My health is shattered, my peace of mind is wrecked, and my brain threatens to give way. Death would be a boon, a relief, and I feel that it is not far off. I cannot go on like this. Those wretches leave me no peace. Hardly a week passes but I get some new menace; and now—but I can't tell you in a letter. It is too horrible. Come to me, Helen, for the love of God! I am in torment. Have pity on me, even though you have never forgiven me. I cannot come to you, for I am now unable to leave my bed. I am a wreck, a ruin. Come to me just this once, and if you cannot help me, at least give me the comfort of your sympathy. You will not be troubled by me much longer.

"Your distracted husband,

"LEWIS OTWAY."

The emotions that this letter aroused were mixed and rather conflicting. Never had I felt a deeper loathing of Mr. Otway than now that I was being forced to accept what I knew in my heart to be but a counterfeit of marriage. I had been robbed of my birthright, and he had robbed me. Never was I less in a mood to offer him sympathy in the troubles that he had created for himself and me by his callous selfishness. And yet I decided to go to him. Whether the decision was due to some sort of compunction for the blow that I was going to strike on the morrow; or whether to curiosity, or to a desire to verify his foreboding of approaching death, I cannot say. Certainly the last consideration entered into the mixture of motives, and probably was the determining factor. At any rate, I decided to go. Dimly, I perceived that I ought to have consulted Jasper, though I was unaware of the possible legal significance that my visit might acquire. I formed my decision at once, and early in the afternoon set forth westward with the letter in my pocket.

I did not go direct to Mr. Otway's chambers. Promptly as I had made up my mind, I felt the necessity of thinking over the circumstances and forecasting the possibilities. On my way westward I made a halt at a tea-shop, and while I awaited the leisurely service I drew out the letter and read it through again. Clearly the blackmailers were becoming more urgent and possibly more definite. It seemed as though they had adopted some new tactics. But it was not the blackmailers who interested me. I found my eye travelling again and again to those two sentences that hinted at the possibility of Mr. Otway's death.

"I feel that it is not far off." And again, "You will not be troubled by me much longer." Had he any solid grounds for these forebodings? Or were they merely the offspring of abiding terror, or perchance simply rhetorical flourishes designed to arouse my sympathy? These were questions of no small moment to me, for Mr. Otway's death would set me free and in an instant unravel the tangled skein of my relations with Jasper.

As I drank my tea with reflective deliberation I turned these questions over in my mind, not disguising from myself the cool, impassive, egoism of my attitude. My feeling in respect of Mr. Otway was devoid of any trace of sentimentalism. I viewed him as the insurance director views the generalised "proposer,"—but inversely; for I was interested in his decease, not in his survival. I loathed him, but I did not hate him. I did not wish him ill. If I could have saved him from suffering I would have done so, even at the cost of some considerable effort. But if he had stood in the face of instant death, and I could have averted that peril by moving a finger, I would not have moved a finger.

That was my position. As I rose from the table and returned the letter to my pocket, what was in my mind was that Mr. Otway seemed to think that he was going to die, and I hoped that he was right.

When I reached Lyon's Inn Chambers the sun was already low and the gloom of the evening was beginning to settle on the closed-in block of buildings. I ascended the ill-lit stone stairs to the second floor, where the light on the landing was so dim that I had difficulty in deciphering Mr. Otway's name above the door of his "set" and as I did so I noted with surprise that the inscription was faded and obscure, and had the appearance of having been in existence for many years, whereas Mr. Otway had, as I believed, but recently entered on his tenancy.

The door was opened by Mrs. Gregg, who stood in the gloom of the entry confronting me without a word.

"Good evening, Mrs. Gregg," I said. "Mr. Otway has asked me to call on him—"

"Ye need make no excuses," she interrupted, "for coming to see your lawful husband."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gregg," I replied. "Is Mr. Otway disengaged?"

"No," she answered; "he is expecting a visitor."

"How very unfortunate," said I. "He wanted particularly to see me, I know."

"Perhaps you could look in some time to-morrow?" she suggested.

"No, I am afraid I can't. If Mr. Otway is unable to see me this evening I must write to him. I shall not have another opportunity to call for some considerable time."

She reflected for a few moments, and I gathered that she was unwilling to take the responsibility of cancelling the interview.

"Could you call again a little later?" she asked, at length. "He will have finished with his visitor by about half-past seven, or say a quarter to eight. Could you look in again at eight?"

I had not wanted to be out as late as this would make me, but if I was to see Mr. Otway at all, it would have to be to-night. Eventually I accepted the arrangement, some what, I think, to Mrs. Gregg's relief.

As I descended the stairs I heard the footsteps of two persons—apparently a man and a woman—ascending. On the first-floor landing I met the man, who turned out to be the lamplighter. Just as I had passed him he lit the landing lamp, and its light, which came from behind me, fell full on the woman who was coming up. It was only a momentary glimpse that I caught as she passed me on the stairs, but I recognised her instantly. She was Mrs. Campbell, the wife of the Ward Street dealer.

It was an odd meeting, and it gave me the material for a good deal of thought and speculation. Mr. Otway's chambers were the only ones on the second floor; from which it seemed probable that Mrs. Campbell was the visitor whom he was expecting. This was a rather queer coincidence; but it was not the only one. That sudden recognition of the face, thrown into strong relief against the dark background by the bright lamplight, had set my memory working. I remembered how,

when I had seen Mrs. Campbell in the shop and had heard her speak, her face had seemed to suggest something familiar, and her accent and the intonation of her voice had called up some accent and tone that I had heard before. It had been but a vague impression at the time; but now, in the new setting and aided by association, the impression became quite definite. The face that hers had suggested was Mr. Otway's face; but the really odd thing was that her voice and accent suggested not Mr. Otway's but Mrs. Gregg's. And this very queer resemblance was made yet more queer by a singular discrepancy. Mrs. Gregg spoke with a distinct Scottish accent. It was a peculiar one, different from that of any other Scots person whom I had ever heard speak; but it was quite pronounced. Mrs. Campbell, on the other hand, had no trace whatever of a Scottish accent; of that I was quite sure. But I was equally sure of the resemblance between the two, subtle and elusive as it was.

Here, then, was a problem the consideration of which gave me quite a considerable amount of occupation, and, helped me to while away the hour and a half that I had to wait. The almost fantastic oddity of the coincidence might have made me reject my impressions as mere delusions; but, on the one hand, there was Mrs. Campbell evidently making for Mr. Otway's chambers, and, on the other, was the fact that it was Mr. Otway who had introduced me to the shop in Wardour Street. However, I could get no farther than speculation; and, as speculation tends rapidly to exhaust its limited material, I presently dismissed the problem and returned to the consideration of Mr. Otway's health and its bearing on my own future.

The hour and a half I spent in a leisurely survey of Lincoln's Inn and the Temple. My perambulations with Jasper had brought home to me that London is an entertainment in itself; that no observant person need be dull who has access to its historic streets and picturesque backwaters. And now it was very pleasant to revisit the scenes of former rambles—to be repeated often in the future—and meanwhile to reflect on the happenings of the present and let my thoughts stray to the new life that was about to open; and the time slipped away so agreeably that when the three-quarter chime was struck in a polite undertone by the genteel clock in the Inner Temple, it came to me as quite a surprise.

On the stroke of eight I rang the bell of Mr. Otway's chambers, and was forthwith admitted by the taciturn Mrs. Gregg. In silence she conducted me along a narrow corridor that led from the entrance lobby, across a largish room furnished partly as a library, partly as a dining-room and by a communicating door into the bedroom, when—still without uttering a word departed, shutting the door after her.

Mr. Otway half rose in bed as I entered, and made a vague gesture of welcome, finally extending his hand, which I shook formally.

"This is really good of you, Helen," said he, "to come and see me, and to come so promptly. I am sorry Mrs. Gregg sent you away. There was no need. My other visitor could have been put off."

"It is of no consequence," said I. "My time was my own to-night. What is the new trouble—for I infer from your letter that there is some new development. Is there any definite threat?"

Again he half rose in bed, and looking at me with anxious intensity said, in a low, suppressed tone "Helen, just see that the door is properly shut."

I did so, and he then begged me to draw the chair, which had been placed for me, closer to him. This I also did, and, having seated myself, looked at him expectantly.

Still half raised in bed, he bent his head as near to me as he could, and in a whisper said, "Helen, I want to ask you a question. What became of your father's stick?"

The question, whispered with such strange secrecy, and accompanied by a singular look compounded of eagerness, fear and suspicion, somewhat startled me; for I remembered, even as he spoke, that the same question had been asked by Dr Thorndyke.

"I haven't the least idea," I replied. "Haven't you got it?"

"No. I never had it. I have never seen it since the—ah—the occasion when—ah—you remember—"

"Of course I remember. I have good reason to."

"Ah—no doubt. Yes. But are you quite sure—I thought you might have taken it away with you."

"But, Mr. Otway, you let me out of the house yourself. You saw me go, and you must have seen that I was not taking it. And you know that I never came to the house again."

He sank back on his pillow with a gesture of despair.

"Yes," he murmured, "that seems to be so. It must be so, I suppose."

"It is so," I said. There is no question about it. When I went away that morning the stick was in your house. But why are you asking me about it? Is it of any importance?"

He turned towards a table that stood by the opposite side of the bed, and taking up a bunch of keys, unlocked a deed-box that was on the table, and took from it a sheet of paper.

"Read that," said he, handing me the paper.

The document was a type-written letter of a similar character to the previous ones, and of about the same length. It ran thus:

"Mr. Lewis Otway,

"Some funny questions are being asked. What about Mr. Vardon's stick—the loaded stick with the silver, knob to hide the lead loading? Where is it? Somebody says they know where it is and who's got it. And they say there is a bruise on the silver top, and they say something about a smear of blood and a grey hair sticking to it. Do you know anything about it? If you don't, you'd better find out. Because I think you'll hear from that somebody before you are many weeks older or else from the police.

"A WELL-WISHER."

As I came to the end of this document I raised my eyes and met Mr. Otway's fixed on me with a very singular expression. But he quickly averted his gaze, possibly embarrassed by the steady intensity of my own. For this letter, together with Mr. Otway's agitated questionings, had revived the old doubts in my mind. Could there be any truth in this veiled accusation? Was it possible that I had really made a hideous mistake in shielding this man? As these doubts flashed through my mind, some reflection of them may have appeared in my expression as I steadily, looked Mr. Otway in the face. At any rate, he looked away as I have said; and when I handed him back the letter, he took it in a hand that shook like a dipsomaniac's, and replaced it in the deed-box without a word.

For a space we were both silent, and I sat looking at him and his surroundings with profound distaste. The close, stuffy air of the room aroused a faint disgust; the objects on the bedside table—the cigarette box—the large spirit decanter and siphon and a bottle of veronal tablets—conveyed a disagreeable impression of drinking and drug-taking. And the man himself, with his pasty face, his baggy eyelids, creased with multitudinous wrinkles, his drooping, tremulous underlip, was distinctly repellent. The whole atmosphere of the place and its occupant was unwholesome, sordid and abnormal.

Yet, unwholesome and unhealthy as he looked, there was no striking change in Mr. Otway's appearance; nothing new to justify, so far as I could judge, his alarming account of himself. His aspect supported the suggestions of the spirit-bottle, the cigarettes and the veronal; he looked distracted, terrified, nerve-shaken; but he did not, to my eye, look like a dying man. I inspected him critically during that interval of silence, and arrived, almost regretfully, I fear, at the conclusion that his forebodings were merely the result of a chronic state of fear—if they were real and not deliberately assumed to excite my sympathy.

I think he must have had a feeling that I was regarding him with disfavour, for presently he turned towards me with a deprecating air and sighed wearily.

"I am afraid, Helen," said he, "that you are very tired of me and my troubles. But you must try to be patient. It may not be for long."

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "Is your health really bad, apart from the worry of these letters?"

"My health gets worse from week to week," he replied. "Not that I am suffering from any definite disease. But the constant alarm and anxiety, the shocks which keep coming one on top of another, are breaking me up. I get no interval of peace in which to recover. I am in a constant state of worry and depression by day, which leads to that," and he pointed to the spirit-decanter, "and it is even worse at night unless I secure a little rest by those things," pointing to the veronal bottle; "and cigarettes, whisky and veronal don't make for a long life or robust health."

"Still," I said, "you mustn't exaggerate or alarm yourself unnecessarily. You are not in very good condition, I can see; but there is no reason to suppose that you are in a dangerous state. Couldn't you cut off these drugs and the whisky and go away for a change?"

He shook his head.

"I couldn't go away," he said. "They would find me out and follow me. And as to cutting off the stimulants and the sedatives, that is impossible. Bad as they are, they are the last bulwark against something worse."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He did not answer immediately, but seemed to be considering my question and debating whether he should make any further confidences. At length he turned to me somewhat abruptly with an expression which I had never seen on his face before: a wild expression strangely unlike his usual, heavy stolidity, suggesting excitement and terror, with yet a curious dash of exultation.

"Helen," he said with a singular intensity of voice and manner, "there are men who are born into this world under sentence of death. The black cap hangs over their cradles. Throughout their lives they have continually to watch—to evade the execution of the sentence if they can. But the time comes when they can escape no longer. They are tired of evasion, of the struggle to escape; and then they give themselves up; and that is the end.

"I am one of those men, Helen. My mother put an end to her own life. My only brother put an end to his life. My mother's father made away with himself. It is in the blood. My mother was found hanging from a tree in an orchard. My brother disappeared and was found a month later hanging from a peg in a disused wardrobe. My grandfather hanged himself from a beam in the loft. Perhaps there were others. At any rate, there it is. The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

He paused, and I sat looking with uneasy surprise at the unwonted animation in his face: the faint flush, the awakening light in his eyes, the suppressed eagerness of his manner. There was something weirdly unpleasant about this new phase.

"You mustn't allow these fancies to disturb you," I said feebly.

"They are not fancies," he retorted. "They are weighty realities. I thought for a long time that the inheritance had passed me by. But when the first of those letters came, I knew that the legacy had fallen in. And every new menace sets the impulse working. Whenever one of those letters comes I feel it; I find myself thinking of my mother and my brother, and wondering if they felt the same. Then I take a stiff whisky, and the feeling goes off. But I don't care, nowadays, to go to bed until I have taken a dose of veronal."

"Why not?" I asked.

He drew himself to the edge of the bed, and, thrusting his head out, peered into a shadowy corner of the room with a sort of half-terrified, half-exultant leer that seemed to stir the very marrow of my bones.

"What is it, Mr. Otway?" I asked, staring into the corner but seeing nothing.

"Do you see it, Helen?" he said, rolling his eyes at me and then looking back into the corner, which was in a line with the bed-head; "that great hook, or bent peg. I can't imagine what it was put there for; but there it is, like a great metal finger, beckoning, beckoning."

I looked at the object that he indicated—a massive curved peg or hook fixed to the wall about seven feet from the floor—and shivered slightly. Its appearance was horribly suggestive.

"When I used to lie awake," Mr. Otway continued, still gazing into the corner, "after the first letters came, I could lie on my left side, because then it was behind me and I seemed to feel it drawing me. I had to turn so that I could see it; and whenever I looked at it, it seemed to beckon. And so it does now."

"I should have it unscrewed and taken away," said I.

"Yes," he replied, reflectively, "perhaps it might be—and yet I don't know. Perhaps I might be more restless if it were not there. It is; in a way, a satisfaction to know that—ah—that I hold a trump card that I can play if—ah—if all the other cards are against me."

As he spoke, he looked at me with that same curious half-frightened, half-exultant expression that made me wonder whether perhaps his inheritance included a dash of insanity. Then he rolled back to the middle of the bed and lay staring at the ceiling; and by degrees the excitement faded out of his face and he recovered his usual stolid gravity of expression.

Presently he glanced at the little carriage clock that stood on the table, and, turning to me, said: "I usually take my veronal about this time. Would you mind giving me a glass of water and the tablets?"

I rose from my chair, and as I did so my little wrist-bag, which had been reposing, forgotten, on my lap, slipped to the floor. I picked it up and hung it on the knob of the chair-back, and then fetched the water-bottle and tumbler from the wash-stand. Having filled the tumbler and handed it to Mr. Otway, I picked up the veronal bottle, and seeing that it was a new one, broke the seal, withdrew the cork and pulled out the cotton-wool packing.

"Three tablets, please," said Mr. Otway.

I handed him the bottle, and as he took it and shook out the three tablets he smiled grimly.

"You are the most cautious woman I have ever met," he remarked. "But you are quite right to make me responsible for my own poison."

He took the tablets one at a time, crunching each between his teeth very thoroughly before washing it down, with water. Then he mixed what looked to me a very stiff allowance of whisky, with a very little soda water, and swallowed it at a draught.

"I find that the stimulant makes the veronal act more rapidly," he explained. "I shall be asleep in about half-an-hour. Do you mind staying with me until I drop off?"

I agreed to this, although it was getting late; but, conscious that it was probably the last service I should ever render him, I did not feel that I could refuse. So I sat down again in the chair and watched him, noting that already—probably as a result of the stimulant—he was quieter in manner and more peaceful in appearance. Even when he reverted to the subject that had occasioned my visit, his manner was quite calm.

"There is something very mysterious about that stick," he remarked. "Recalling the circumstances, I remember putting it down in the corner by the writing-table. I never saw it again, and never gave its whereabouts a thought. I assumed that you had taken it, but I now realise that I was mistaken. Apparently it has got into undesirable hands and we haven't heard the last of it, I fear."

"You had better not think any more about it, Mr. Otway," I said. "There is nothing to be done, and the less you worry the less harm these people will be able to do you."

"Yes," he agreed; "that is good advice, and I can follow it now. But if I should wake up in the small hours of the morning it will be very different. That is the worst time, Helen. Then this persecution seems beyond bearing. The horror of it makes me sweat with fear. I seem to hear the police on the stairs. I find myself listening for the sound of the bell. It is horrible—horrible! And then I think of that wardrobe, unnoticed all those weeks, and the figure inside in the dark. And then—"

He made a motion of his eyes towards the shadowy corner and involuntarily I glanced at the great peg high up on the

wall.

He did not speak again for some time, and I sat silently watching him and thinking—thinking of his dreadful heritage and all that it might mean. Was it a reality, this legacy of death that he saw coming to him? Was it true that even now the black cap hung over his bed? Supposing it were? Supposing that this very night, in the chilly middle watch, he should wake with all his terrors clutching at his heart! Should creep out of his bed and—Here my glance stole into the shadowy corner, and, as I looked, my mind seemed to picture a dim shape filling the wall space below the big, massive peg. There were no details and hardly any form; it was just a shape, vague and rather horrible. I shivered slightly, but I did not try to blot out the mental picture. It was a gruesome thing, that dim, elongated shape, but it did not disturb me much; for it set going other associated trains of thought. There was the ceremony to-morrow evening, the witnesses with their doubtful rights of attestation, protesting that all was in order—and protesting in vain. There were two Ishmaelites going forth hand-in-hand into the wilderness, ready to meet scorn with defiance—but still Ishmaelites. And at the thought, the shape upon the wall space below the peg seemed to grow less dim, to loom out more distinctly. That shape was Mr. Otway—dead. The late Mr. Otway. No longer a legal impediment, but just a fiction that had ceased to exist.

From the dark corner I turned my eyes on to the living man as he lay motionless, breathing softly with an occasional faint snore, and now and again puffing out his cheeks. He was not asleep, for I could see his eyes open and close at intervals; but he was evidently growing somnolent. I watched him with deep interest, almost with fascination, as one might look on a condemned man making his last journey in the hangman's cart. This was a condemned man, too: a potential suicide. At any moment he might set forth on his last journey; and his arrival at his destination would set the Ishmaelites free. He was ready to go; but he awaited the determining influence that would start him on his journey. What form would that final cause take? Would it be some sudden shock of alarm? Or the cumulative effect of prolonged, abiding fear?

I leaned forward and spoke softly to him.

"Do you know, Mr. Otway, what caused your brother—"

He opened his eyes and looked at me, dully. "What did you say, Helen?" he asked.

"I was wondering if you knew—if there was anything in particular that caused your brother to take his life."

He cogitated sleepily for a while before replying. At length he answered, in a drowsy voice: "I am not very clear about it. He had had a good deal of worry of one kind and another, financial and domestic. I don't know that anything unusual had occurred; but he had been in a nervous, depressed state for some time."

Having made this reply, Mr. Otway closed his eyes and took a deep breath; and I reflected on the significance of his answer. There had apparently been no specific cause of his brother's suicide, but just the accumulating effects of nervousness and depression, which exploded when they reached a certain degree of intensity. His condition, in fact, seemed to have been almost identical with Mr. Otway's present condition.

Once more my eyes wandered away to the shadowy corner; and again the wall space below the great hook-like peg became occupied by that elongated shape. Now I seemed to visualise it more completely. It was no longer a mere shape. It had parts—recognisable members. There were the limp-dangling arms, the downward-pointing toes, the shadowy head lolling sideways. It was very horrible, yet I found myself viewing it without horror, but rather with a certain detached interest. I was getting used to it, and was disposed to consider it in terms of its significance.

It was not a person. It was a thing which had replaced a person who had ceased to exist. That person had had a wife. But the wife had ceased to exist, too. In her place was a widow—a free, unattached woman in whom were vested all the rights and liberties of spinsterhood, including the power to contract a valid and regular marriage. The shape was an ugly and forbidding thing; but it held precious and desirable gifts.

From the shape projected by my own imagination my eyes turned to the actual man—the man who was convertible into such a shape. He was fast asleep now; lying on his back, breathing a little stertorously and blowing out his cheeks at each breath. He was an unpleasant spectacle, and the sound of his breathing was disagreeable. He ought not to be lying on his back; for sleepers who lie on their backs are apt to dream, and dreams are not good for men with a tendency to suicide. And sleepers who breathe stertorously are apt to dream ugly dreams.

This consideration set my thoughts working afresh. Supposing this man should have a dream presenting his waking terrors with all the added intensity and vividness of a nightmare; the heavy footfalls of the police upon the stairs, the hands groping in the darkness of the landing for the bell-pull! Or if his dream should show him that wardrobe with its dreadful occupant! What would happen? And even as I put the question to myself my imagination supplied with startling vividness the answering picture. I saw the affrighted sleeper suddenly awaken in uncontrollable panic, scramble from his bed and shuffle hurriedly towards the corner under the peg.

The mental construction of the scene was singularly complete and orderly. I even found myself filling in the details of the means. There, indeed, was the peg. But a man cannot hang himself without some means of suspension. And these must be immediately available or the impulse might die away before they were found. I glanced around the room to see what means were to hand; and at once my eye lighted on an old-fashioned bell-rope that hung beside the head of the bed. Its perfect suitability was evident at a glance—provided that it could be detached without ringing the bell. But the necessity for cutting it rather than pulling it down would be obvious, even to a suicide.

The means, then, were all ready to hand. And there was the man, charged with this self-destructive tendency, sleeping in

the very posture calculated to start it into action.

I sat still, watching him with absorbing interest, and as these thoughts shaped themselves with more and more distinctness, an impulse of which I was barely conscious formed itself and steadily grew in intensity. At length I leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

“Mr. Otway, you should not lie in that position.”

There was no answer, and he made no sign. The heavy breathing went on with uninterrupted regularity, the eyes remained closed. Again I spoke, this time more loudly, clearly and distinctly.

“Mr. Otway, can you hear me? If you lie as you are lying, you will probably dream. You may have bad, dangerous dreams. You may dream of your mother and your brother. You may dream that the peg on the wall is beckoning to you. And then you may wake in a panic and think that the peg is still beckoning. And then—”

I stopped suddenly. What was this that I was doing? Was it a warning to avert disaster? So the words were framed. But I knew it was nothing of the kind. It was suggestion, pure and almost undisguised. The dreadful truth struck me like a blow and seemed to turn me into stone. I sat rigid as a statue, still leaning forward with my lips parted as if to complete that awful sentence, every moment more appalled by this frightful thing that I had done. There came to me in a flash a vision of my own automatism after the séance; I heard Lilith telling me how the sleep of the drugged resembles the hypnotic trance; and again it came to me how I had been sitting looking at that terrible peg on the wall and—without conscious intention—creating by my will the awful shape beneath it.

How long I should have sat, bent forward as if frozen into rigid immobility by the horror of this hideous thing, it is impossible to say. The realization of what I had done, that had fallen on me like a thunderbolt, had petrified me in a posture of arrested action. It seemed to have deprived me of the power of movement.

The place was intensely silent. The monotonous breathing of the sleeping man—the snoring intake alternating with the soft, blowing expiration—made no impression on the profound quiet, and the rapid ticking of the little carriage clock on the table seemed only to make it more intense.

Suddenly something stirred in the outer room. I sprang to my feet with a gasp that had almost been a shriek. Probably it was only Mrs. Gregg, but in my overwrought state the sound was vaguely alarming. I stood for a few moments, my heart thumping and my breath coming short and fast; then I stole on tip-toe across the room and softly opening the door, peered into the outer room. It was in darkness except that a bright beam of moonlight poured in at the window; but this gave enough light to show that there was nobody in the room.

Still fearful of I knew not what, I stepped softly through the doorway and looked about me suspiciously. The moonlight struck on a large cupboard or wardrobe, which instantly suggested the lurking-place of some eavesdropper and at the same time aroused horrible associations connected with Mr. Otway's brother; so that, in spite of my alarm, I was impelled to pluck at the handle to satisfy myself that no figure was hidden within. But the cupboard was locked, or, at any rate, would not open.

Then I looked under the table and peered into the darker corners of the room, growing—naturally—more and more nervous every moment, and pausing from time to time to listen, or to look back through the doorway into the bedroom, where I could see Mr. Otway lying motionless like a sepulchral effigy.

Suddenly something stirred softly quite near to me—the sound seemed to come from the cupboard. I could have screamed with terror. The last vestige of my self-possession was gone, and in sheer panic I fled across the room and down the corridor to the entrance lobby. This place was in utter darkness, and as I frantically groped for the latch, I felt my skin creep and break out into a chilly sweat. At last I found the latch, dragged the door open and darted out; and as the clang of the closing door filled the building with hollow echoes, I ran swiftly down the stairs.

Once out in the inhabited streets, my alarm subsided somewhat; but still the image of that motionless figure in the bedroom, the sinister-looking peg on the wall and the recollection of those dreadful words that I had spoken into the sleeper's ears pursued me with an abiding horror. I walked quickly out into the Strand, and I was in the act of hailing a cab when I remembered that I had left my wrist-bag hanging on the chair-back by Mr. Otway's bedside. My purse was in that bag. But if it had contained my entire worldly possessions I could not have summoned up courage enough to go back for it.

The cab drew up by the kerb. I hesitated a moment, but reflecting that it was yet hardly ten o'clock, and that someone would be waiting up from whom I could borrow the fare, I gave the cabman the address, with the necessary explanations, entered the cab and shut the door. But as the crazy vehicle—it was an ancient four-wheeler—rattled over the uneven roadways of the side streets, the scene in that warm and stuffy bedroom was re-enacted again and again. And yet again I looked on that ill omened cupboard in the ghostly moonlight; speculated on the mysterious sounds in the living-room; wondered uncomfortably if there had been a watcher or a listener, and if so, whether that eavesdropper knew the meaning of silent willing and suggestion.

---

## XXII.— THE CATASTROPHE

VIEWED by the cheerful light of the morning sun as it streamed in through my bedroom window, the phantoms of the previous night dwindled to mere scarecrows. On the panic-stricken state in which I had fled from Mr. Otway's chambers I



was now disposed to look back with faint amusement. Even the words which I had spoken into Mr. Otway's ears as he slept had no longer any terrifying significance, though I had to admit that they were not susceptible of any satisfactory interpretation. They had been spoken under the influence of an impulse which I could not account for, and did not care to examine too closely, but which I vaguely connected with my excursions into psychical research—a subject which I decided to avoid as far as possible in the future.

As to Mr. Otway, if his account of his family was correct, it seemed quite probable that, sooner or later, he would make away with himself, though, seeing that he was now well past middle life, the propensity could hardly be as strong as he had represented it. On the other hand, he was now being subjected to a very excessive nervous strain, and was undoubtedly letting his mind run on the subject of suicide. If the blackmailers continued to keep up an increasing pressure, as they seemed inclined to do, the breaking-point might be reached quite soon. And I could not disguise from myself that the catastrophe, if and when it occurred, would not present itself to me as a personal misfortune.

With this I dismissed Mr. Otway and his affairs, and let my thoughts roam into more attractive regions. For this was the day of days. In a matter of a few hours my separation from Jasper would be at an end. We should be united, never again to part.

As I rose and dressed, this was the burden of my thoughts. The weeks of separation and loneliness were gone, and the hours that lay between the present and that final meeting were running out apace like the grains of sand in an hour glass that is nearly spent. I hurried over breakfast that I might the sooner escape to be alone with my happiness; and most of the morning I spent in the workshop, arranging my apparatus so that it might easily be packed, in case I should not come back to superintend the removal myself. The candlestick, which was finished and successful beyond my expectations, I took upstairs to place in my trunk that I might give it to Jasper this very day. And then I paid a visit to my friend Peggy, whom I found in her workshop chirruping gaily and very busy making a complicated set of plaster moulds from the dissected wax model of her masterpiece. But I did not stay long with her, for the making of piece-moulds is an engrossing occupation and one better followed in solitude.

As I entered the house from the garden I encountered our little housemaid with a telegram in her hand.

"This has just come for you, ma'am," said she, holding it out towards me. "The boy is waiting to see if there is any answer."

I suppose that to most persons unaccustomed to receiving telegrams, the appearance of the peremptory, orange-tinted envelope is a little portentous. Especially so was it to me at that moment, with the crisis of my life so near at hand; and my heart beat tumultuously as I tore open the envelope and unfolded the flimsy paper. It bore but a brief message; but when I had read that message, the joy of life, the half-timorous happiness that had come to me with the morning sunlight, went out in a moment, like a wind-blown taper, and left me desolate.

"CANCEL APPOINTMENT FOR TO-DAY AND DO NOT COME TO THE CLUB. LETTER  
FOLLOWS. JASPER."

That was all. There was really nothing very alarming in it. But to me it came as a dreadful anti-climax, strung up, as I was, to the highest pitch of nervous tension. With a trembling hand I refolded the paper, and, having told the maid that there was no answer, ran up to my room and bolted myself in.

It was a terrible blow. Only now, by the bitterness of the disappointment, did I realise the heart-hunger that I had endured, the intense yearning for the moment in which my beloved companion would be restored to me. And then, beyond this sudden collapse of my happiness, almost in the moment of its realisation, was the mystery, the suspense, the uncertainty. What could it be that had happened? Had Jasper's condition suddenly grown worse? That could hardly be, for he was practically well—at least, he had so regarded himself—and moreover there was that cryptic reference to the club. Why must I not go to the club?

There was something very mysterious in that prohibition! The more I reflected on the matter the more puzzling did it appear. On the other hand, the very mystery in which the affair was shrouded was itself a relief. For, of course, I never for one moment had the faintest doubt of Jasper's loyalty, nor could I entertain the possibility of his having changed his views on the subject of our marriage. Some thing had occurred to hinder it; but Jasper was my own and I was his, and that being so, the hindrance, whatever it might be, could be but temporary.

So I comforted myself and made believe that all was well, though when by chance my eye lighted on the trunk, packed and even provided with a blank label, I could hardly keep back the tears. At lunch I let Miss Polton know that my visit was postponed, and immediately after the meal I prepared to go out and seek relief in a long, sharp walk. By the time I returned, the letter from Jasper would probably have arrived and I should know how matters stood.

I had put on my outdoor clothes and was just about to start, when, opening the drawer in which I kept my wrist-bag, I suddenly remembered my loss of the night before. The bag contained, not only my purse, but my card-case and one or two other things I could not conveniently do without. The prohibition to go to the club could hardly, I reflected, extend to Lyon's Inn Chambers, though they were in the same neighbourhood. At any rate, I wanted the bag, and in my restless state a journey with a defined purpose offered more relief than an aimless walk through the streets.

During the short journey from Mark Lane to the Temple I turned over and over again the words of the telegram without obtaining any glimmer of enlightenment. If I had been less sure of Jasper, I should have been intensely wretched; but now,

as the shock subsided, my optimism revived and I found myself looking forward to Jasper's letter with a confident expectation of reassuring news.

Emerging from the Temple Station, I walked up Arundel Street, and, crossing the Strand, presently passed through Half-Moon Alley and cast a glance of friendly recognition at the old gilded sign, so pleasantly associated with the scarlet parasol that hung outside the umbrella-maker's shop in Bookseller's Row. The two signs recalled the old delightful explorations with Jasper, and put me in quite a cheerful frame of mind, which lasted until I found myself once more ascending the bare and rather sordid stone stairs of Lyon's Inn Chambers. Then there came a marked change. As I walked up the cold, gloomy staircase a feeling of depression settled on me. I passed the grimy lantern that had looked on my head-long, terror-stricken flight, and some of the forgotten qualms came back. I breathed again the close air of that unpleasant bedroom; I saw again the unwieldy figure in the bed, with its pasty face and puffy eyelids; and even the sinister-looking peg on the wall came forth with uncomfortable vividness from the recesses of memory. By the time I reached the landing, my distaste for the place had grown so strong that I was half inclined to turn back and complete the transaction by means of a letter.

This weakness, however, I overcame by an effort of will and resolutely rang the bell. There was a short interval and then the door opened, revealing the figure of Mrs. Gregg, who, according to her custom, stood and stared stonily at me without uttering a word.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Gregg," said I. "When I went away last night I left my wrist-bag behind."

"Ye did," she answered; "and ye left the bedroom door open and the gas full on. I found it so this morning."

"I am very sorry," I said.

"'Tis no matter," she rejoined, impassively, and continued to stare at me in a most singular and embarrassing fashion.

"Could I have my bag, please, Mrs. Gregg?" I asked.

"Ye could," she replied; but still she made no move nor any suggestion that I should enter; and still continued to look at me with the strangest, most enigmatic expression.

"I hope," said I, by way of relieving the extraordinarily uncomfortable situation, "that Mr. Otway is better today."

"Do ye?" said she; and then, after a pause, "Maybe ye'd wish to see him?"

"I don't think I will disturb him, thank you," I replied.

"Ye need have no fear," said she. "Ye'll no wake him."

"Well, I don't think I have time to see him to-day. I just called to get my bag."

"And is that all ye've come for?" she demanded, glowering at me in the most astonishing manner.

"What else should I have come for?" I asked.

She thrust her head forward and replied in a mysterious tone: "I thought maybe ye'd come to ask where your husband is."

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Gregg. Is Mr. Otway not at home?"

"He is not," she replied; and as I made no answer she asked: "Shall I tell you where he is?"

"It really isn't any business of mine, Mrs. Gregg," said I.

"Is it not?" she demanded. "Will it no interest ye if I tell ye that your husband is in St. Clement's Mortuary?"

"In the mortuary!" I gasped.

"Aye, in the mortuary." She glared at me in silence for a few moments, and then, suddenly grasping my arm, exclaimed: "Woman! do ye ken yon peg on the bedroom wall? Aye, ye may well turn pale. Ye'd ha' turned paler if ye'd seen what I saw by the gaslight this morn hangin' from yon peg."

I gazed at her for a few moments in speechless horror, until she seemed to sway and shimmer before my eyes. Then, for the first and only time in my life, I must have fainted, for I remember no more until I found myself lying on the floor of the lobby, with Mrs. Gregg kneeling beside me slapping my face with a wet towel.

I rose with difficulty, feeling very weak and shaken. Mrs. Gregg silently handed me my bag and preceded me towards the door, where, with her hand on the latch, she turned and faced me.

"Weel, mistress," said she, "'tis a fit ending, seeing how it began. Ye've been a poor wife, but ye'll make a bonny widow, though I doubt it will stay long at that."

To this insolent and brutal speech I made no reply. I was completely broken, physically and mentally. I tottered out on to the landing and slowly descended the stairs, holding on to the iron hand-rail, my horror of the place urging me to hasten away, my trembling limbs and lingering faintness bidding me go warily. As I walked unsteadily up Holywell Street, a newspaper boy, running down the narrow thoroughfare, halted and held out a paper.

"Here y'are, Miss, sooicide in Lyon's Inn. The housekeeper's story."

I hurried past him with averted face, but out in the Strand there were others, shouting aloud the dreadful tidings or

displaying posters on which the hideous fact was set forth in enormous type. And it seemed as if each and all of them were specially addressing themselves to me. I returned down Arundel Street, instinctively making for the station, but as I approached it a fresh group of newsboys made me swerve to the left and pursue my way along the Embankment on foot.

As I walked on, and the air and exercise helped me to recover physically from the shock, I began to collect my faculties. At first I had been utterly bewildered and overborne by a sense of horror and guilt. I had sent this wretched man to his death. I had ordained the means, the manner and the time of his death, and it had duly befallen according to my directions. Morally—and perhaps even legally—it amounted to murder. I had willed, I had suggested; and that which I had willed and suggested had come to pass. That was what had flashed into my mind in the very moment in which Mrs. Gregg had made her dreadful communication.

But now, as I walked on, I began to argue the case in my own favour. In the first place, I told myself, it was not certain that the act of the dead man had any connection with the willing or the suggestion. It might have been a mere coincidence. I tried to dwell on this view; but it would not do. The coincidence was too complete to be explained away by any such casuistry. I could not in this way escape the responsibility for Mr. Otway's death.

Then I considered the question of intention. I told myself—truthfully enough—that I had not consciously willed that Mr. Otway should kill himself. I had not even been conscious of any intention to suggest to him that he should kill himself. But though I did make some sort of point in my own defence, it was extremely unconvincing I had allowed my mind to dwell with hardly-disguised satisfaction on the possibility of his suicide (in a particular manner at a particular time), and between that and actual willing the distinction was not very obvious. And then there were those words, spoken to him in his sleep. It was not conscious, deliberate suggestion; but what was it? The impulse to speak those words was apparently evolved from the subconscious. But does no moral responsibility attach to subconscious intentions?

So I argued, back and forth, round and about; but always came back to the same conclusion. Mr. Otway was dead; and it was my act that sent him to his death. Locked up in my own breast this dreadful secret might remain; but it was my companion for life. There was no escape from it.

But would it remain locked up in my own breast? That was another question that began to loom up with a very real menace. How much did Mrs. Gregg know? She might easily have overheard our conversation and even those final, fatal words. And if she had, would she understand their significance? Now that I came to consider the circumstances, there was something rather alarming in the manner of this inscrutable woman; something threatening and accusatory which I had vaguely felt at the time. And as I reflected on this and the possibilities that it suggested, a fear of something more substantial than my own accusing conscience began to creep around my heart.

When I arrived home, Jasper's letter was awaiting me. But it contained nothing new. He had seen the posters, had bought an early paper and had immediately sent off the telegram. His tone was that of matter-of-fact satisfaction. The legal impediment to our marriage had now been removed. No declarations were necessary now. We could marry like other people. We were free.

That was the burden of the letter. All our troubles were at an end. Until everything was settled, we had better avoid meeting. But when the chapter was closed with all due formalities we could sing "Nunc dimittis," and thenceforth live only for one another.

I laid the letter down. All that it said was true. The picture that my imagination had drawn under the guidance of desire as I had sat looking into the shadowy corner of the bedroom in Lyon's Inn had become a reality. The fetters that I had forged and put on that fatal morning in the little church at Maidstone, had fallen off and given me back my freedom.

And even as I told myself this, some voice from within seemed to whisper a caveat, and my heart was sensible of a chill of fear.



### BOOK III. — CRIME

#### XXIII. — THE DEAD HAND

THE entry of Mr. Otway into my life inaugurated a long succession of disasters. The very first words that I heard him speak shattered the peace of a lifetime. Thence-forward, like the Ancient Mariner, I was haunted by a malign influence which seemed to exhale continuously from his ill-omened personality. And even now that he was dead that malignant spirit was not at rest. His very corpse, lying in the mortuary, was a centre whence radiated sinister influences that crept into my secret soul and enveloped me from without. During his life Mr. Otway had been my evil genius; and death had but transformed him into a malicious poltergeist.

His first, tentative appearance in this character was made on the very evening of my second visit to Lyon's Inn Chambers, when the coroner's officer called at Wellclose Square to serve the subpoena for the inquest. The announcement of his arrival caused me some qualms of vague alarm, which I knew in my heart to be nothing but the stirring of my own conscience. For the purpose of this inquest was to find an answer to the question, "How did Lewis Otway come by his death?" And that question I could have answered in four words—Silent Willing and Suggestion. But I had no intention of answering that question; and hence, as I entered the room into which the officer had been shown, I was consciously on the defensive.

I had, however, no occasion to be. The officer was a civil, fatherly man in a constable's uniform, sympathetic, deferential and not at all inquisitive.

"I have called, ma'am," he began, "on a very sad errand. I don't know whether you have heard the dreadful news—"

"Of Mr. Otway's death?" said I.

"Ah! then you have heard. That is a relief. Well, I have called to let you know that the inquest is arranged for the day after to-morrow, at 3 p.m. in the room adjoining the mortuary." He gave me a few explicit directions as to how to find the latter and then added: "If there is any information that you could give us that would guide us in starting the inquiry, we should be glad. Or the names of any witnesses that we ought to subpoena."

I reflected. The threatening letters must necessarily be referred to at the inquest. I should have to mention them myself, even if Mrs. Gregg knew nothing of them.

"I happen to know," I replied, "that Mr. Otway had received a number of anonymous letters and that he was greatly worried about them."

"Blackmailing letters?" he asked.

"I don't think any demands for money were made," I replied.

"Do you know what was their nature? Were they threatening letters?"

"Yes, indirectly. The two or three that I saw had reference to the death of my father, who died very suddenly and who was alone with Mr. Otway at the time. They suggested a suspicion that Mr. Otway was responsible for my father's death."

The officer looked at me quickly and then became deeply reflective.

"Will it be possible to produce those letters at the inquest?" he asked, after a cogitative pause.

"They are not in my possession," I answered; "but if the coroner will make an order for their production I will endeavour to have it carried out."

"Thank you, ma'am," said he; and then, as an after-thought, added: "If you could make it convenient to call at the coroner's office to-morrow, say at about two o'clock, I could give you the order and perhaps help you to carry it out."

The latter suggestion appealed to me strongly and I fell in with it at once. Thereupon the officer picked up his helmet with an air of satisfaction, and, having handed me the subpoena, moved towards the door. I accompanied him along the hall and let him out; and as I wished him good evening and launched him down the steps, another figure emerged from the darkness and passed him on the way up.

"Does Mrs. Otway live here?" the newcomer enquired. I glanced at him with faint suspicion, for the exact incidence in time of his arrival with the officer's departure suggested a connection between the two events.

"I am Mrs. Otway," said I.

"Oh, indeed! Could I have a few words with you on a matter of some importance? I will not detain you more than a few minutes."

I hesitated, eyeing my new visitor dubiously. But there were no reasonable grounds for a refusal; and I eventually ushered him into the little parlour that the officer had just left, and indicated the vacant chair.

"The matter concerning which I have taken the liberty of calling on you, Mrs. Otway," said he, "is connected with—er—with the painful occurrence—er—at Lyon's Inn Chambers. A most deplorable affair. Most distressing for you—most distressing! Pray accept my sincere sympathy."

"Thank you, Mr.—"

"Hyams is my name—you may have heard your late husband speak of me. We have been acquainted a good many years."

"He has never spoken of you to me, Mr. Hyams. But what can I do for you?"

"Well, I can put my business in a nut-shell. Your husband, at the time of his death, had certain valuable property of mine in his possession. I should like to get that property back without delay."

He had certainly wasted no time. Unsentimental as was my own attitude I felt this haste to be almost indecent.

"I should think you will have no difficulty," said I, "if you apply in the proper quarter."

"That is what I am doing," he retorted. "You are is widow. His property is in your hands."

"Not at all," I replied. "Pending probate of the will, the property is vested in his executors."

He looked at me in not unnatural astonishment. I suppose the phraseology that I had acquired from my father was unusual for a woman.

"Who are the executors?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied.

"But," said he, "I suppose you have seen the will."

"No, I don't know that there is a will. I am only assuming the existence of one from my knowledge of Mr. Otway's business-like habits."

"But this is very unsatisfactory," said Mr. Hyams. "There is portable property of mine worth several thousand pounds lying in his chambers for anyone to pick up, and those chambers in charge of a woman who probably has access to his keys. It really isn't business, you know."

"What is the nature of the property?" I asked.

"It is a collection of very valuable stones, the who lot contained in a little box that anyone could carry away in his pocket."

"Then," said I, "the probability is that he has deposited the box with his bankers."

"Who are his bankers?" he asked.

"I really don't know."

"You don't know!" he exclaimed. "But you must have seen his cheques. I presume he made you an allowance?"

"I accepted no allowance from him and I have never seen one of his cheques."

Mr. Hyams looked at me with undisguised incredulity, "A most extraordinary state of affairs," he commented. "Can you give me the address of his lawyers?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Hyams, that I cannot. I don't even know if he has a lawyer. I know nothing whatever about Mr. Otway's affairs."

Mr. Hyams' countenance took on an expression that was very much the reverse of pleasant. "I suppose, Mrs Otway," said he, "you realise that you are talking to a man of business and that you are telling a rather unlikely story."

"I realise it very clearly, Mr. Hyams," I replied, "and I realise also the difficulty of your position. What I recommend you to do is to go to Lyon's Inn and see the housekeeper, Mrs. Gregg. She has been with Mr. Otway many years and can probably tell you all that you want to know."

Mr. Hyams shut his mouth tightly, rose deliberately and picked up his hat.

"Then," said he, "the position, as I understand it, is this: You don't know whether there is or is not a will; you don't know the name of your husband's bankers; you don't know who his lawyer is; you don't know anything about his affairs; and you disclaim any responsibility in regard to property that was in his custody when he died."

"Yes," I agreed, "that is the position; a very unsatisfactory one for you, I must admit. Perhaps I may be able to help you later, when I know more about Mr. Otway's affairs. Will you leave me your address?"

He was on the point of refusing, but prudence triumphed over anger and he laid on the table a card on which I read the name, "David Hyams, Dealer in precious stones," and the address, "501, Hatton Garden."

"If I learn anything fresh I will write to you," I said; whereupon he thanked me curtly and gruffly and walked towards the door with pursed-up lips and a lowering, truculent expression and took his departure without another word.

When he was gone I reflected at some length on the significance of his visit. The interview had brought home to me very vividly my anomalous position. Mr. Otway had been a total stranger to me. Of his past, of his recent habits and mode of life, his friends, his occupation—if he had any—his family and social status, I knew nothing. My father had referred to him as a retired solicitor and as a collector of, or dealer in, precious stones. Vaguely, I had conceived him as a man of some means —perhaps a rich man. But I knew nothing of him and had given him and his affairs barely a thought. He was a

stranger who had come into my life for but a moment, and had straightway gone out again, leaving a trail of desolation to show where he had been.

That was the real position. But to strangers to the world at large, it would seem incredible. I was Mr. Otway's widow. I had been his wife in law if not in fact. And the world would hold me to the legal relationship. The dead man, lying in the mortuary, seemed about to make good the claims that the living man had been forced to abandon. My status as a wife had been a mere fiction: my status as a widow was an undeniable reality.

The clear perception of the extent to which I was involved in the dead man's affairs gave my visit to the coroner's office a new importance. For now, while seeking information for official use at the inquest, I must gather what knowledge I could for my own guidance under cover of the coroner's order. The address of the office—in Blackmoor Street, Drury Lane—was printed on the subpoena, and there, after a few enquiries, I made my appearance punctually on the following day.

My friend of the previous evening—whose name I discovered to be Smallwood—was in the office, looking over some documents with the aid of a pair of spectacles, which gave him a curiously unconstabulary aspect. He rose when I entered, and, opening a drawer, took out a sheet of paper.

"This is what you asked for, Mrs. Otway," said he (upon which a young man at a desk looked up quickly), "the coroner's request for the production of the letters that you told me about. Can I give you any other assistance?"

"If you could accompany me to the chambers and be present during the search for the letters, I should be glad," I replied. "You see," I added, seeing that he looked somewhat surprised, "I am almost a stranger to the housekeeper, I know nothing about the household or Mr. Otway's arrangements, and I shall be accountable to the executors if there are any, for any interference with the papers or their removal. I should very much prefer to have a reliable witness."

He saw the position at once, and, greatly to my relief, agreed to come with me, or rather to follow me in a few minutes. Thereupon I left the office and walking at a leisurely pace into Drury Lane presently made my way into the Strand by way of May-pole Alley and turned eastward towards Lyon's Inn Chambers.

At the entrance I waited for a minute or two and then slowly ascended the stairs to Mr. Otway's landing, growing more and more uncomfortable with every step. For the bare stone staircase set my memory working very unpleasantly, recalling again my headlong flight and the terrible episode that had preceded it—that episode that would so gladly have sponged out of my recollection for ever.

I stood at the door with my hand on the bell, listening for Mr. Smallwood's steps on the stair, and so might have remained until he arrived; but suddenly the door opened and Mrs. Gregg confronted me. Apparently she had some means of observing a visitor from within.

"What are ye standing there for?" she demanded. "Why did ye not ring?"

"I was just about to ring when you opened the door," I replied.

She smiled sourly and looked at me in that strange, inscrutable fashion of hers that I found so disconcerting.

"And what might your business be?" she demanded.

"I have come about some letters of Mr. Otway's—some anonymous letters that he has received from time to time. Perhaps you know about them?"

"You mean, perhaps I have been in the habit of reading his letters. Weel, mistress, I have not. I know nothing about his letters."

"Perhaps you can show me where his letters were kept."

"Indeed, I'll do no such thing. What! Do you think I'll have you scratching up in his chambers and pawing over his letters and papers and him not under-ground yet?"

At this moment I caught the welcome sound of footsteps on the stairs. Mrs. Gregg listened suspiciously, and as Mr. Smallwood came into sight there was a visible change in her demeanour.

"What does he want, I wonder?" she said.

"He has come to receive the letters and to be present at the search for them," I replied, producing the coroner's order. She glanced at the paper, and, as Mr. Smallwood stepped up to the door, she motioned us to enter.

"Come in," she said, gruffly. "'Tis no affair of mine, but I'll no hinder ye."

We were just about to enter when footsteps were again audible on the stairs, and we waited to see who this other visitor might be. Somewhat to my surprise it turned out to be Mr. Hyams, who certainly seemed to have a genius for coincidences.

"Now this is quite a lucky chance," said he, doing himself, as I suspected, less than justice. "I didn't expect to find you here, Mrs. Otway. I presume you are just having a look round."

"I have come to search for some documents that have to be put in evidence," said I. "The coroner has asked for them."

"Well," said Mr. Hyams, "you might, at the same time, see if you can find any trace of my property."

"What property is that?" demanded Mrs. Gregg.

"A parcel of stones—a very valuable collection—that Mr. Otway had from me on approval."

Mrs. Gregg snorted. "Man," said she, "ye're talkin' like a fool. Do you suppose Lewis Otway would have left a valuable parcel of stones lying about in his rooms like a packet of snuff? Ye'll find no stones here."

"That may or may not be," said Mr. Hyams. "At any rate, I'll stay and see if anything turns up."

During this dialogue we had gradually moved from the lobby down the corridor and now entered the living-room. As we crossed it I looked curiously at the large cupboard and wondered idly what I could have found so alarming in its appearance on the night of my visit. But if the living-room had, by the light of day, lost its disturbing qualities, it was otherwise with the bedroom. I opened the door with trepidation, and as I did so and was confronted by the disordered bed, the horror of the place began to come back to me. Nevertheless, I entered the room with a firm step and with my eyes on the bedside table, which appeared to be in the same condition as when I had last seen it. I had just noted this when I felt my arm grasped, and turning quickly found Mrs. Gregg at my side. Her eyes were fixed on me and with her disengaged hand she was pointing towards the corner by the bed-head. Involuntarily my gaze followed the direction in which she was pointing and lighted on the fatal peg, which now bore a loop of the red bell-rope with two free ends. Of course I had known it was there, but yet the sight of it made me turn sick and faint, and I must have shown this in the sudden pallor of my face; for when, controlling myself by an intense effort, I turned to speak to her she was looking at me with a leer of triumph.

"Can we have Mr. Otway's keys?" I asked.

"Ye'll find them in the right dressing-table drawer," she answered. "I'm no party to this, but I'll no hinder ye."

Mr. Smallwood opened the drawer and produced a bunch of keys which he handed to me. I looked them over and selecting the most likely-looking ones, tried them, one after the other, on the deed-box. The fourth key fitted the lock, and when I had turned it and raised the lid of the box, the letter which Mr. Otway had shown me lay in full view. I took it out and laid it on the table and then proceeded to lift out the remaining contents of the box. There was not much to remove: a cheque-book, a pass-book, a small journal, a memorandum book, a bundle of share-certificates, a canvas bag containing money, and at the bottom of the box a foolscap envelope endorsed, "Anonymous Letters."

I opened the unsealed envelope and drew out the letters which I glanced through one by one. There were seven in all, of which I had already seen three. When I had looked at them I returned them to the envelope, adding the last letter, and then began to replace the other things in the box.

"I see a cheque-book there, Mrs. Otway," said Mr. Hyams, who had followed my proceedings with intense interest. "May I make a note of the banker's address?"

I handed him the cheque-book and continued to replace the contents of the box. When I had finished I paused with the box open, waiting for him to return the cheque-book; and at this moment I became aware, with a start of surprise, that an addition had been made to our party.

The new-comer was a short, stout, middle-aged man, obviously a Jew of the swarthy, aquiline type, with a very large nose and rather prominent dark eyes. He stood in the open doorway of the bedroom watching us with a slightly unpleasant smile. As he noted my surprised look his smile became broader and more unpleasant.

"Make yourselves at home, ladies and gentlemen," said he. "These are public premises—at least I assume they are, as I found the door open."

Mr. Hyams looked round with a start—as, indeed, did the others.

"May I ask who you are, sir?" he enquired.

"You may," was the suave reply. "My name is Isaacs—of the firm of Isaacs and Cohen, solicitors. I am one of the executors of Mr. Lewis Otway's will. And having regard to my responsibilities in that capacity, I may, perhaps, venture to enquire as to the nature of these proceedings. You, sir, appear to be in possession of the testator's cheque-book. Did you happen to require the loan of a fountain pen?"

Mr. Hyams turned very red and hastily laid down the cheque-book.

"That," he exclaimed angrily, "is perfectly unwarranted. I was simply making a note of the banker's address."

"With what object?"

"With the object of enquiring whether certain property of mine, which was in Mr. Otway's custody, had been deposited in the bank."

"What is the nature and value of this property?" asked Mr. Isaacs.

"It is a collection of precious stones of the approximate value of four thousand pounds."

"Then," said Mr. Isaacs, "I can give you the information you want. No property, other than documents, has been deposited at the bank."

"In that case," said Mr. Hyams, "the stones must be in these rooms."

"It is quite probable," Mr. Isaacs agreed.

"Is there any objection to ascertaining, now, whether they are here?"

"Yes, there is," replied Mr. Isaacs. "The will has not been proved and no letters of administration have been issued. Pending probate of the will I propose to take possession of these premises and seal all receptacles that may contain valuable property. I shall interfere with nothing until I have letters of administration."

"And how soon will that be?" asked Mr. Hyams.

"Seven days must elapse before the will can be proved. Under the circumstances there may be some further delay. And now I should like to know what has been taking place. You, for instance, madam—"

"I am Mrs. Lewis Otway," said I, "and I have come here by the coroner's direction, to look for some letters that are to be put in evidence."

"Have you found them?"

"Yes," I answered, "they are here; and, as you are an executor, I had better hand them to you, and you can deliver them to the coroner's officer if you think fit."

I handed him the envelope and the coroner's letter, which he read, and then asked: "Did you have to make a very extensive search?"

"No, she didn't," said Mrs. Gregg. "She kenned fine where to look for them and she found them at the first cast."

On this I noticed that Mr. Hyams cast a quick, suspicious glance at me and I thought it wise to explain.

"I looked first in this box because I had seen Mr. Otway put one of these letters into it."

"Quite so," said Mr. Isaacs. "Very natural." But obvious as the explanation was, I could see that it had left Mr. Hyams unconvinced.

I now returned the cheque-book to the deed-box, locked the latter and handed the keys to Mr. Isaacs; who delivered the anonymous letters to the coroner's officer and took his receipt for them on a slip of paper. My business being now at an end, I offered my card to Mr. Isaacs, took his in return, and departed in company with Mr. Smallwood.

"A queer business, this, ma'am," the officer remarked as we descended the stairs. "Regular mix up. Seem to be a lot of Sheenies in it."

"Sheenies?" I repeated, interrogatively. "What are Sheenies?"

"Jews, ma'am," he replied, apparently a little surprised at my ignorance. "It's just a popular name, you know."

I reflected on Mr. Smallwood's remark, which seemed hardly justified by the facts—two Jews only having appeared in the case, so far as I knew. And yet I seemed to be aware of a sort of Semitic atmosphere surrounding Mr. Otway. There were, for instance, the Campbells; and then Mrs. Gregg, although a Scotswoman, might easily, but for her strong Scottish accent, have passed for a Jewess; while Mr. Otway, himself, had been distinctly Semitic in appearance.

At the entry, where we separated, Mr. Smallwood halted to give me a final injunction.

"You had better be in good time to-morrow, ma'am," said he, "because it will be necessary for you to view the body so that you can give evidence as to the identity of the deceased."

I thanked him for the reminder, but would much rather have been without it. For the prospect filled me with a vague alarm, and now the mental picture of the sleeping man, which had haunted me by night and by day, began to be replaced by one more dreadful, and one which I felt that my visit to the mortuary would attach to me for ever.

---

## XXIV.— THE GATHERING CLOUDS

THE distaste which I felt for my errand did not prevent me from following Mr. Smallwood's advice on the subject of punctuality. It was some minutes short of half-past two when I turned into the mean little street off Drury Lane in which the mortuary was situated. I had found the place without much difficulty and had still less in finding the mortuary itself, for, as I entered the street I observed a procession of about a dozen men passing in through a narrow gateway, watched attentively by a small crowd of loiterers. Assuming the former to be the jury, I walked slowly past on the opposite side and continued for the length of the short street. I had just turned to retrace my steps when the men filed out of the gateway and proceeded to enter a building a few yards up the street, and immediately afterwards Mr. Smallwood appeared at the gate. He saw me at once and waited for me to approach.

"I am glad you have come in good time, ma'am," said he. "The jury have just been in to view the body and the coroner will like to open the inquest punctually. This is the way."

He preceded me down a narrow passage, at the end of which he pushed open a door. Following him I entered the mortuary, a bare, stone-floored hall containing two large slate-topped tables, one of which was occupied by a recumbent figure covered by a sheet. Mr. Smallwood removed his helmet and together we advanced slowly towards the awesome, shrouded form, lying so still and lonely in its grim surroundings. Very quietly, the officer picked up the two upper corners of the sheet and drew it back, retiring then a couple of paces as if to avoid intruding on my meeting with the dead.

Strung up as I was, the first impression was less dreadful than I had anticipated. The face was pale and waxen, but it was



placid in expression and more peaceful than I had ever seen it in life. The hunted, terrified look was gone and had given place to an air of repose, almost of dignity. For a few moments I was sensible of a feeling of relief; but then my glance fell upon a contorted length of crimson rope that lay on the slate table, and instinctively my eye turned to the uncovered throat. And as I noted the shallow groove under the chin, faintly marked with an impression of the strands of the rope, the shocking reality came home to me with overwhelming horror. Before my eyes arose that awful shape upon the bedroom wall and the hardly less dreadful image of the sleeping man unconsciously receiving the message of his doom.

With a new horror—an incredulous horror of myself—I looked on the pale, placid face and seemed to read in it a gentle reproach. He had gone to his death at my bidding. He had stood unsteadily on the brink of the abyss, and I had pushed him over.

It seemed incredible. There had been no conscious intention; no guilty premeditation. I would have told myself that there was no connection other than mere coincidence. But there the plain, undeniable facts were. Unconsciously—or subconsciously—my will had created that premonitory shape upon the wall; the terrible words had formed themselves and issued from my lips. And straightway the thing that my thoughts and words had foreshadowed had come to pass. This waxen-faced effigy that lay on the stone table, as its living counterpart had lain that night in the bed, was its fulfilment, its realisation.

“Better not stay too long, ma’am,” said Mr. Smallwood. And as he spoke I became suddenly aware that I had reached the limits of endurance. My knees began to tremble and I breathed the tainted air with difficulty.

“Better come away now,” continued Mr. Smallwood. “It’s been rather too much for you. Good afternoon, Mrs. Gregg.”

I looked up quickly and perceived Mrs. Gregg, who must have come in without making a sound, standing at the foot of the table watching me intently. That penetrating stare and the singular, enigmatical expression would have been disturbing at any time. But now I was conscious of actual fear. As I tottered unsteadily along the passage to the street, the menace of that watchful, inscrutable gaze followed me. How much did this woman know? What had she heard? And if she had overheard those last words of mine, how much had she understood of their import? These were weighty questions, the answers to which I should doubtless hear within an hour or two.

When I was ushered by Mr. Smallwood into the room in which the inquest was to be held, the court was already assembled and ready to begin. The jurymen sat along one side of a long table and one or two reporters occupied a part of the other, while a row of chairs accommodated the witnesses and persons interested in the case, including Mr. Isaacs, Mr. Hyams, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, and a youngish man of a markedly Jewish type whom I did not recognise. I took my seat at the end of the row, and Mrs. Gregg, who had followed us in, seated herself near the middle.

As I took my seat the coroner addressed one of the reporters:

“Let me see, what paper do you represent?”

“I am not a pressman, sir,” was the reply. “I am commissioned to make a report for Dr. Thorndyke.”

“Dr. Thorndyke! But what is his connection with the case? I know nothing about him.”

“I only know that he has asked me to make a verbatim report of the evidence.”

“Hm,” grunted the coroner. “I’m not sure that it is quite in order for private individuals to send their reporters to an inquest.”

“It is an open court, sir,” the reporter observed.

“I know. But still—however, I suppose it doesn’t matter. Well, gentlemen, I think we are ready to begin. The witnesses are all present and it is on the stroke of three. I need not occupy your time with any preliminary statement. It seems quite a straightforward case and you will get the facts from the evidence of the witnesses. We are here, as you know, to inquire into the circumstances of the death of Lewis Otway, whose body you have just viewed, which occurred either on the night of the 18th instant or the morning of the 19th. The body was found hanging from a peg in his bedroom by his housekeeper, Mrs. Gregg, and it will be best to take her evidence first.”

Mrs. Gregg was accordingly called, and having taken a position near the head of the table, was sworn and proceeded to give her evidence.

“My name is Rachel Gregg, age 51. I was housekeeper to the deceased, Lewis Otway.”

“How long,” asked the coroner, “had you known the deceased?”

“Thirty-three years.”

“What was deceased’s occupation?”

“He was a retired solicitor; but he was a connoisseur in precious stones, and, I think, dealt in them to some extent.”

“Was he in financial difficulties of any kind, so far as you know?”

“No. I believe he was quite a well-to-do man.”

“Had you any reason to suspect him of an intention to take his life?”

“Yes. He used to say that he expected, if ever he had any trouble, that he would hang himself. The tendency to suicide

was in the family. His only brother hanged himself, his mother hanged herself and his mother's father hanged himself."

"But that was only a tendency that might not have affected him. Had you any reason to expect that he actually might commit suicide? Was there anything in his manner, in the state of his mind or in his circumstances that led you to believe that he might take his life?"

"Not until recently. He always used to be quite cheerful in a quiet way until he got married. After that he was never the same. His marriage seemed to bring all sorts of trouble into his life."

"Tell us exactly how this change came about."

"His marriage took place about eight months ago—on the 25th of last April when he was living at Maidstone. It was quite sudden. I knew nothing of it until the day before, when he told me he was going to marry a Miss Helen Vardon, and that the marriage was to take place secretly because the lady's father had refused his consent. On the morning of the marriage I saw Mr. Otway go out, and soon afterwards I went out myself to do some shopping. When I came back I found the new Mrs. Otway in the study and her father, Mr. Vardon, lying dead on the floor. Mr. Otway had gone to fetch a doctor. It appeared that Mr. Vardon had called directly after the newly-married couple had arrived home from the church and that there had been a quarrel and Mr. Vardon had fallen down dead. I understand that Mr. Vardon was alone with Mr. Otway at the time.

"Soon after I arrived, Mrs. Otway left the house and went back to her own home, and Mr. Otway told me that she refused to live with him. At any rate, she never did live with him, and she never came near him until the night of his death."

"Do you know if the deceased agreed to this separation?"

"Apparently she made him agree. But it was a great trouble to him, and I know that he tried more than once to get her to live with him."

"Do you know what was the cause of the separation?"

"No. Mr. Otway never mentioned it to me."

"You say that the separation was a great trouble to the deceased. Did it obviously affect his spirits?"

"Yes; he was very depressed after his wife went away, and he never recovered. He seemed to get more and more low-spirited."

"Do you know of any other reasons than the separation from his wife why he should have been depressed in spirits?"

"Yes. Mr. Vardon's sudden death was a great shock to him. He felt that he had been partly the cause of it, by quarrelling with Mr. Vardon. Then there was a great deal of talk in Maidstone about the affair and people blamed Mr. Otway for what had happened; and later rumours began to get about that there had been foul play—that Mr. Otway had actually killed Mr. Vardon. These rumours got on his nerves so badly that he gave up his house at Maidstone and moved to London."

"You have spoken of a quarrel between deceased and Mr. Vardon. Do you know what the quarrel was about?"

"I believe it was about the secret marriage, but I was not in the house at the time."

"Were there any other causes for the mental depression which you say the deceased suffered from?"

"I think so, but I can't say for certain. There were some letters that came about once a month which seemed to worry him a good deal. I used to see him reading them and looking very anxious and depressed; and after a time he began to get very nervous and fidgety and couldn't sleep at nights unless he took a dose of veronal. And I noticed that he was smoking much more than he used to, and taking much more whisky."

"Did you ever see any of the letters that you have spoken of?"

"I never read one, but I saw the outsides and I noticed that they all bore the post-mark of East London."

Here the coroner drew from the large envelope six of the letters which I had found in the deed-box, and handed them, in their envelopes, to Mrs. Gregg.

"Do you recognise any of these letters?"

Mrs. Gregg turned the envelopes over in her hand, looked closely at the post-marks and replied, as she returned them:

"Yes; these look like the letters that I spoke of."

The coroner laid the letters on the table, and after a few moments reflection said: "Now, Mrs. Gregg, we want you to tell us what you know of the circumstances of Mr. Otway's death. You spoke of a visit from Mrs. Otway."

"Yes. She came to Lyon's Inn Chambers on Wednesday night, about half-past six and told me that Mr. Otway had written to her asking her to come. As Mr. Otway was then expecting another visitor, I asked her to call again about eight, which she agreed to do. Mr. Otway had been rather poorly for the last few days—very nervous and despondent, and had been sleeping badly—and for three days had kept to his bed. I told him that Mrs. Otway was coming at eight o'clock and he then said that he had some private business to talk over with her and that I need not sit up. I gave him his supper at half-past seven and just after I had cleared it away Mrs. Otway came. I showed her into the bedroom and went to the kitchen to finish up my work. At half-past nine I went to bed—a little earlier than usual because I thought they would like the place quiet for their

talk. At a quarter to seven on Thursday morning I got up, and as soon as I was dressed, went into the living-room to tidy it up. Then, to my great surprise, I saw that the door of the bedroom, which opens out of the living-room, was wide open and that the gas in the bedroom was full on.

"Thinking that Mr. Otway might be worse, I called out to him to ask if he wanted anything; but there was no answer. I could see the bed from where I was and could see that he was not in it; so I called to him again, and as there was still no answer, I went into the bedroom. At first I thought he was not there; but suddenly I saw him in a corner of the room that was in deep shadow. He seemed to be standing against the wall, with his arms hanging down straight and his head on one side; but when I went nearer I saw that he was hanging from a large peg and that his feet were three or four inches off the floor. He had hanged himself with a length of bell-rope that he had cut off with his razor—at least that was what it looked like, for the razor was lying open on the bed. I picked up the razor and ran to him and cut the loop of rope, and as he fell, I let him down on the floor as gently as I could. He seemed to be quite dead and his skin felt cold, so I ran out to fetch a doctor. Just outside the buildings I met a policeman and told him what had happened, and he told me to go back to the chambers and wait, which I did. A few minutes later he arrived at the chambers with a doctor, who examined the body and said that Mr. Otway had been dead some hours."

"Did you see any means by which deceased could have raised himself to the peg from which he was hanging?"

"Yes. There was an overturned chair lying on the floor nearly underneath him. It looked as if he had stood on it to fix the loop of rope and then kicked it away. Mrs. Otway's bag was lying on the floor by the side of the chair."

"Mrs. Otway's bag! What bag was that?"

"A little wrist-bag such as ladies use to carry their purses and handkerchiefs. She called for it the same day and I gave it to her. She had not heard what had happened, and when I told her she fell down in a dead faint."

The coroner reflected for a while with wrinkled brows, and I caught the eyes of one or two of the jurymen regarding me furtively. After a somewhat lengthy pause, the coroner asked:

"Do you know what time Mrs. Otway left the chambers?"

"I heard the outer door slam about half an hour after I had gone to bed. That would be about ten o'clock."

"Did you see Mrs. Otway or deceased after you let her in?"

"No. I did not go into the bedroom again. I went into the living-room twice and could hear them talking."

"Could you hear what they were talking about?"

"I could hear a few words now and then. When I went into the living-room the first time they seemed to be talking about suicide. I heard Mr. Otway say something about a peg on the wall."

"And when you went in the second time?"

"They seemed still to be talking about suicide. I heard Mrs. Otway ask deceased what drove his brother to hang himself."

"You heard nothing suggesting a quarrel or disagreement?"

"No. They seemed to be talking in quite a friendly way."

"Do you know what kind of terms they were on?"

"No. I never saw them together before except for a few minutes on the wedding day."

"You spoke of a visitor who came to deceased earlier in the evening. Who was that visitor?"

"A Mrs. Campbell. Her husband is a jeweller and curio-dealer whom deceased had known for a good many years, and used to have business dealings with. I understand she came on business and she only stayed about ten minutes."

"Is that all you know about the case?"

"Yes, I think I have told you all I know about it."

The coroner glanced at the jury. "Do any of you gentlemen, wish to ask the witness any questions?" he inquired.

Apparently none of them did, and when the coroner had complimented Mrs. Gregg on the clear manner in which she had given her evidence, she was dismissed.

There was a short interval in which the coroner read over his notes and the jury conferred together in low under tones. Then the coroner observed: "We had better dispose of the police and medical evidence as they are merely formal and will not take much time. We will begin with the constable."

The policeman was then called and briefly corroborated Mrs. Gregg's evidence. When he had finished, the doctor, whom he had brought to the chambers, took his place, and having been duly sworn deposed as follows:

"My name is John Shelburn. I am a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, and am acting as locum tenens for the police surgeon of Saint Clement Danes. At seven twenty-eight a.m., on Thursday, the 18th of October, I was summoned by the last witness to accompany him to Lyon's Inn Chambers, where a man was reported to have hanged himself. I went with the constable to a set of chambers, over the door of which was painted the name of Mr. Lewis Otway. I went into the bedroom where the gas was alight, the blinds down and the curtains

drawn. There, lying on the floor near the wall, I found the dead body of a tall, heavily built man, about fifty or fifty-five years of age, dressed in a suit of pyjamas. The surface of the body was cold and rigor mortis was well established. I should say the man had been dead about eight hours. Around the neck was a double loop of red bell-rope and a portion of the same was hanging from a large peg on the wall about seven feet from the floor. The rope had apparently been cut down for the purpose as a portion was still attached to the bell-wire and the severed tassel lay on the bed, on which were impressions of feet, as if someone had stood on the bed to cut it off. The length of rope had been joined at the ends with the kind of knot known as a 'granny' and formed into what is known as a weaver's loop, which had been passed over the head and the standing part of the rope hitched over the peg. This would form a running loop, like this—"

Here the witness produced a piece of thick string and demonstrated the arrangement on his thumb and the knob of a chair-back.

"I released the double loop from the neck and found a shallow groove on the throat corresponding to the rope. The countenance of the deceased was calm—as it usually is in cases of hanging—and there were no signs of violence or anything remarkable about the body. A chair, on which the deceased had apparently stood to adjust the rope on the peg, was lying close by and near to it on the floor was a lady's hand-bag. The rope had been cut with some sharp instrument—probably a razor, as I was informed by the housekeeper. I looked round the room but saw nothing of any significance excepting a half-empty whisky decanter and a nearly-full bottle of veronal tablets on a table by the bed."

"Can you tell us at what time death took place?"

"Only approximately. I have said that the man appeared to have been dead about eight hours. That would give us eleven o'clock on the night of the 18th as the time at which death occurred. But I will not bind myself to that time exactly. It might have been an hour earlier or later."

"After hearing your evidence and that of the other witnesses which you have also heard, it is a mere formality to ask your opinion as to the cause of death."

"Yes. The cause of death was obviously suicidal hanging."

This concluded the surgeon's evidence, and when he had been dismissed, the coroner turned to the jury.

"We have now, gentlemen," said he, "established the fact of death and its immediate cause. Our next move is to seek to establish the contributory circumstances—the more remote causes. We have ascertained that this unfortunate man committed suicide. The question that we now have to consider is, Why did he commit suicide? Possibly the evidence of his widow may help us to answer that question. Helen Otway."

As I rose to take my place at the table I was dimly aware of a certain ill-defined movement on the part of the jury and the spectators such as one may notice in a church at the conclusion of a sermon. But in the present case the cause was evidently a concentration rather than a relaxation of attention. Clearly, my evidence was anticipated with considerable interest.

"Your name is—?"

"Helen Otway. My age is twenty-four and I live at 69, Wellclose Square."

"Have you viewed and do you identify the body now lying in St. Clement's mortuary?"

"Yes; it is the body of Lewis Otway, my late husband."

"When did you last see the deceased alive?"

"On the night of Wednesday, the 18th of October."

"Tell us, please, what took place on that occasion."

"I went to see deceased in consequence of a letter that I had received from him asking me to do so. I arrived at about half-past six and was informed by Mrs. Gregg that deceased was expecting another visitor."

"Did you know who that other visitor was?"

"No; but as I went down the stairs I met Mrs. Campbell coming up and assumed that she was the visitor."

"You know Mrs. Campbell, then?"

"Only by sight. I have seen her in her husband's shop. Mrs. Gregg asked me to call again at eight, and I agreed to do so, and did so. I was then admitted by Mrs. Gregg, who conducted me to the bedroom and left me there, shutting the door as she went out. I did not see her again that night. Deceased was in bed and had by his side a table on which were a spirit decanter, a siphon of soda water, a box of cigarettes, a bottle of veronal tablets and a deed-box."

"Did you notice anything peculiar in his appearance?"

"No. He was not looking well, but he seemed less ill than I had expected from his letter; which conveyed the impression that he was in a dangerous condition."

"Have you got that letter?"

"Yes," I replied, "I have it here." As I spoke, I drew the letter from my pocket and handed it to the coroner who glanced

through it and then laid it down with some other papers.

"We will consider this letter," said he, "with the others that you have handed to me, later. Will you now tell us what passed between you and the deceased?"

"At first we talked about an anonymous letter that he had received a day or two previously. He showed me the letter, and when I had read it, he locked it in the deed-box."

"We will deal with the anonymous letters presently. What else did you talk about?"

"Deceased repeated the statement that he had made in the letter, that he did not expect to live much longer. I asked him if he had any reason for saying this and he then told me that there was a strong family predisposition suicide; that his brother, his mother and his mother's father had all hanged themselves, and that since he had received the anonymous letters he had been conscious of an impulse to make away with himself in the same manner."

"Had you not known previously of this family tendency?"

"No. He had never mentioned it before, and I knew nothing of his family."

"Did deceased speak as if he actually intended to make away with himself?"

"No, but he spoke of an impulse which he found it difficult to resist; and he mentioned that a large peg on the bedroom wall seemed to fascinate him and to make the impulse stronger. I advised him to have it taken away."

"Previous to this conversation, had you ever thought it possible that the deceased might commit suicide?"

"No; the possibility never entered my mind."

The coroner considered these replies and made a few further notes; then he proceeded to open a fresh subject.

"Now, Mrs. Otway, with regard to your relations with deceased. Were you on friendly terms with him?"

"Not particularly. We were practically strangers."

"A witness has stated that you refused to live with deceased and that you never had lived with him. Is that true?"

"Yes, it is quite true."

"Had you quarrelled with deceased?"

"No, there was no quarrel. Our marriage was a business transaction and immediately after the ceremony I discovered that my consent had been obtained, as I considered, by misrepresentation."

"We don't want to be inquisitive, Mrs. Otway, but we wish to understand the position. Could you give us a few more particulars?"

"Do you wish me to describe the circumstances of my marriage and the separation from my husband?"

"If you please."

"My marriage with Mr. Lewis Otway took place under the following circumstances: I accidentally overheard a portion of a conversation between Mr. Otway and my father from which I gathered that Mr. Otway claimed the immediate payment of five thousand pounds held by my father—who was a solicitor—in trust. It appeared from the conversation that my father was unable immediately to produce the money, and Mr. Otway threatened to take criminal proceedings for misappropriation of trust funds. To this my father made no very definite reply. Then Mr. Otway offered to abstain from any proceedings and to allow the claim to remain in abeyance on condition that a marriage should take place between him and me. This my father refused very emphatically and angrily, and Mr. Otway left our house.

"Being greatly alarmed on my father's account, I communicated with Mr. Otway and informed him that I was prepared to accept his offer on the terms stated—namely, that he should release my father from the immediate claim and secure him from any proceedings in connection with it. Mr. Otway accepted the conditions, and as it was certain that my father would strongly object, we agreed not to inform him until after the marriage had taken place.

"In accordance with this arrangement we were married privately on the 25th April of the present year and we went together from the church to Mr. Otway's house. I had left a letter for my father informing him of what had been done, and very shortly after our return from the church he came to the house. From an upper window I saw him enter the garden and I was very much alarmed at his appearance. I had heard that he suffered from complaint of the heart and had been warned against undue excitement and exertion, and I could see that he was extremely excited and was looking very ill. Mr. Otway let him in and, in answer to a question, admitted that the marriage had taken place. Then I heard my father ask Mr. Otway if he had told me about a letter that he—my father—had sent, and when Mr. Otway gave an evasive reply my father called him a scoundrel and accused him of having tricked and swindled me.

"I heard no more of what was said, as the two men went into the study and shut the door; but a minute or two later I heard a heavy fall, and, running down to the study found my father lying on the floor and already dead. There was a small wound on his temple and Mr. Otway, who was stooping over the body, held my father's walking-stick—a thick Malacca cane with a loaded silver knob—in his hand. He stated that my father had threatened him with the stick and that he had taken it away from him and that during the struggle my father had fallen insensible, striking his head on the corner of the mantel-piece as he fell."

"Did you believe him?"

"I think, at the moment, I did not. But on reflection, remembering how ill my father had looked, I had no doubt he was speaking the truth."

"Was there an inquest on your father's death?"

"Yes. The jury found, in accordance with the medical evidence, that death was due to heart failure caused by excitement and anger."

"And after this you refused to live with deceased?"

"Yes. I asked him about my father's letter and he said he had not seen it. I went with him to the letter-box and there we found it. The postmark showed that it had come by the first post and my father's address was on the outside of the envelope. There were no other letters in the box. I had no doubt that Mr. Otway had seen the letter and put it back in the box."

"Was that why you refused to live with him?"

"Partly. The letter stated that my father was able to meet his liabilities and gave a date on which payment would be made. Consequently the threatened proceedings against my father were impossible and Mr. Otway had obtained my consent by false pretences. But further, Mr. Otway's action had been the cause of my father's death, and this alone would have made it impossible for me to live with him as his wife."

"Did deceased agree to the separation?"

"Yes. He saw that the position was impossible; but he hoped that the separation might be only temporary—that we might become reconciled at some future time."

"Did you consider this possible?"

"No. I held him accountable for my father's death and could never have overcome my repugnance to him."

The coroner noted down this answer and having glanced over his notes reflectively, looked up at the jury.

"Do any of you, gentlemen, wish to put any questions on this subject?" he asked.

The jurymen looked at one another and looked at me; and one of them remarked that, "This young lady seems to have rather easy-going ideas about the responsibilities of marriage."

"That," said the Coroner, "is hardly our concern. The next matter that we have to consider is that of certain letters received by the deceased from some unknown person or persons. There are seven of them and they seem by the postmarks to have been sent at intervals of about three weeks and to have been posted somewhere in the East end of London. We will begin with the first." He handed a letter to me and asked: "Have you seen that letter before?"

"Yes," I replied. "Deceased showed it to me one day last June when I met him by appointment at his request. He seemed to be extremely worried about it."

The coroner took the letter from me and read it aloud.

"Mr. Lewis Otway,

"The undersigned is writing to put you on your guard because Somebody knows something about how Mr Vardon came by his death and that somebody is not a friend, so you had better keep a sharp look-out for you enemy and see what they mean to do. I can't tell you any more at present.

"A WELL WISHER."

"Do you know," the coroner asked, "who wrote that letter?"

"No, I do not."

"Have you no idea at all? Is there no one whom you suspect?"

"I have not the least idea who sent that letter."

"You say that deceased was extremely worried about it. Do you know why he was worried?"

"I understand that there had been rumours in Maidstone that Mr. Otway had killed my father. Those rumour seemed to have preyed upon his mind and made him unreasonably nervous."

The coroner nodded gravely and opened another letter and as he read aloud the well-remembered phrases I realised that I should need all the courage and self-possession at my command.

"The writer of this warns you once more," the letter ran, "to look for trouble. The person that I spoke of knows that something was held back at the inquest at least they say so and that they know why your wife won't live with you and that she knows all about it too and that someone knows more than you think anybody knows. This is a friendly warning.

"FROM A WELL WISHER."

The coroner looked keenly at me as he finished reading.

"Can you explain the meaning of this letter?" asked. "It refers to something that was held back at the inquest. Was anything held back, so far as you know?"

"I remember that there was one omission in the evidence. Mr. Otway made no mention of my father's stick."

"Was it not mentioned at the inquest at all?"

"No."

"Did you not give evidence?"

"Yes; but I was merely asked if I confirmed Mr. Otway's evidence, which I did."

"You confirmed Mr. Otway's evidence! But that evidence was not correct. The duty of a witness is to state the whole truth; whereas Mr. Otway had withheld a highly material fact. How was it that you did not supply this very important fact?"

"It did not appear to me to be of any importance. The medical evidence showed that death was due to heart failure."

"Medical evidence!" the coroner exclaimed, testily. "There is too much of this medical evidence superstition in these courts. People speak as if doctors were infallible. It was your duty as a witness to state all that you knew, not to decide what was or was not of importance. And I cannot understand how you came to hold such an opinion. You found your father lying dead with a wound on his head and a man standing over him with a loaded stick, and you considered this fact of no consequence?"

"I see now that I ought to have mentioned it."

"What was the verdict?"

"The verdict was in accordance with the medical evidence—Death from natural causes."

"Did the medical witness or witnesses know that Mr. Otway had had a loaded stick in his hand?"

"No."

"Did anybody besides yourself and Mr. Otway know about the loaded stick?"

"Mrs. Gregg came into the room when Mr. Otway had gone for a doctor. She saw the stick in a corner and picked it up to examine it. She asked whose it was and remarked on its weight."

"Did she know it had been in Mr. Otway's hand at the time of your father's death?"

"I have no reason to suppose that she knew."

"Well," said the coroner, "it is a most extraordinary affair. You heard Mr. Otway give his evidence, you knew that that evidence was incomplete, and yet, though the dead man was your own father and you have declared an unconquerable repugnance to Mr. Otway, you allowed this garbled evidence to pass unchallenged. It is an amazing affair. However," he continued turning to the jury, "that is not our concern. But what is our concern, for the purposes of this inquiry, is that we now begin to see daylight. We can now understand the extraordinary effect these letters seem to have had on the man whose death we are investigating. Lewis Otway, when he gave his evidence at the inquest, suppressed a most important and damaging fact which he believed to be known only to himself and his wife. Thereby he obtained a verdict of Death from Natural Causes, which exonerated him from all blame. Had all the facts been known, the verdict might have been very different."

"Now the receipt of these letters must have destroyed his sense of security. Apparently someone else—and that someone evidently an enemy—knew of this damaging fact and knew of the further damaging fact that it had been suppressed at the inquest. In effect, these letters held out a threat of a charge of murder, or at least, manslaughter. It is no wonder that they alarmed him. But we had better take the rest of the evidence. There is this letter deceased wrote to his wife, which I will read. It is dated the 17th of October, and this is what it says:

"My dear Helen,

"I have not troubled you for quite a long time with my miserable affairs—which are to some extent your affairs too. But they are going from bad to worse, and now I feel that I am coming to the limits of endurance. I cannot bear this much longer. My health is shattered, my peace of mind is wrecked and my brain threatens to give way. Death would be a boon, a relief, and I feel that it is not far off. I cannot go on like this. Those wretches will not leave me in peace. Hardly a week passes but I get some new menace and now—but I can't tell you in a letter. It is too horrible, Come to me, Helen, for the love of God! I am in torment! Have pity on me, even though you have never forgiven me. I cannot come to you, for I am now unable to leave my bed. I am a wreck, a ruin. Come to me just this once, and if you cannot help me, at least give me the comfort of your sympathy. You will not be troubled by me much longer.

"Your distracted husband,

"LEWIS OTWAY."

When the coroner finished reading the letter (which evidently made a deep impression on the jury) he looked at me gravely.

"Before passing to the next letter, I must ask one or two questions about this one. What did you understand from the phrases 'I feel that it (death) is not far off. I cannot go on like this. You will not be troubled by me much longer.' Did they not suggest to you an intention to commit suicide?"

"No. I understood them as referring to his state of health."

"If you had known of the family tendency to suicide, how would you have understood these passages?"

"I should have suspected that he contemplated suicide."

"But you say you were not aware of this tendency?"

"No, I was not."

"He refers to his 'miserable affairs—which are to some extent your affairs too.' What did you understand him to mean by that?"

"I understood him to refer to the fact that I was partly responsible for the omission of certain details in the evidence at the inquest."

"When you received this pitiful letter, what did you do?"

"I went to him the same day to find out what the trouble was. He then showed me an anonymous letter that he had received."

"Is this the one?" the coroner asked, handing it to me; and when I had glanced at it and identified it, he proceeded to read it to the jury.

"Mr. Lewis Otway,

"Some funny questions are being asked. What about Mr. Vardon's stick?—the loaded stick with the silver knob to hide the lead loading? Where is it? Somebody says they know where it is and who's got it. And they say there is a bruise on the silver-top, and they say something about a smear of blood and a grey hair sticking to it. Do you know anything about that? If you don't you'd better find out. Because I think you will hear from that somebody before you are many weeks older or else from the police. A WELL WISHER."

As he laid down the letter, the coroner looked at me curiously.

"There are one or two important questions, Mrs. Otway," said he, "that arise out of this letter. The first is, What has become of this stick?"

"I don't know what has become of it. I saw Mrs. Gregg replace it in the corner by the writing table and never saw it again. The deceased asked me the same question when he showed me the letter; but I reminded him that I did not take the stick with me when I left his house and that I never went to the house again."

"It never occurred to you to ask what had become of your father's stick?"

"No. I always assumed that it was in Mr. Otway's possession."

"You have told us that Mrs. Gregg had seen the stick in Mr. Otway's house. Had anyone else seen it there?"

"I don't know of anyone else having seen it; but, of course, it may have been seen there by other persons. I know nothing of what went on in that house. I never entered it after my father's death."

"With the exception of Mr. Otway and yourself, did anyone know that you had seen that stick in Mr. Otway's hand on the occasion of your father's death?"

"So far as I am aware, no one else knew."

"There is a statement in that letter referring to a bruise on the silver knob and a smear of blood with a grey hair sticking to it. Is it possible, so far as you know, that that statement might be true?"

"I cannot say that it is impossible."

"After your father's death, did you examine the stick?"

"No. I saw it in Mrs. Gregg's hands, but I did not look at it closely."

At this point a police superintendent who had been sitting near to the coroner's table, rose, and, approaching the table, stooped over it and spoke to the coroner in a low voice. The latter listened attentively and nodded once or twice, and when the superintendent had returned to his seat he addressed me.

"I think that will do, Mrs. Otway—for the present, at any rate. We may have to ask you one or two questions later. Do any of the jury wish to ask anything before the witness sits down?"

As none of the jury responded, I returned to my seat, and the coroner then recalled Mrs. Gregg.

"You have heard the last witness state that she saw you take up Mr. Vardon's stick. What made you examine that stick?"

"I did not examine it. I noticed it standing in the corner and saw that it was a strange stick—that it was not Mr. Otway's. I took it out of the corner to look at it and then noticed that it was heavily loaded at the top."



"Can you say whether there was or was not a bruise or a blood smear on the knob?"

"I cannot. I did not look closely at the knob. I just picked the stick up, felt its weight and put it back in the corner."

"Did you know that Mr. Otway had had that stick in his hand when Mr. Vardon fell dead?"

"No. I never heard of that until to-day."

"Could anyone other than Mrs. Otway have known, so far as you are able to say?"

"I can't say. I should think not. I did not get back to the house until it was all over. But I thought, and believe, that there was no one in the house but those three—Mrs. Otway and her husband and her father."

"Do you know what became of that stick?"

"I do not. I put it back in the corner and never saw it again. It was not in the corner when I tidied up the room the next day."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gregg. That will do."

Having dismissed the witness, the coroner turned to the jury.

"I had hoped, gentlemen," said he, "to finish the case to-day, but, as you have seen, its apparent simplicity was rather illusory. Some rather curious issues have arisen which will have to be considered in detail. Moreover, there appears to be a suspicion that property of very great value has been removed from the premises—at least, it seems to be missing. Under these circumstances, the police authorities ask for an adjournment to enable them to make some enquiries; and I am sure you will agree with me that this, and certain other matters, should be cleared up before a verdict is returned. I therefore propose to adjourn the enquiry for fourteen days."

The court rose, and I rose with it. As I stood up and turned towards the door I saw Jasper standing at the back of the hall. He made no sign, nor did I; and as soon as our eyes had met, he turned and walked out. I did not attempt to follow, for I understood at once that he did not consider it desirable that we should recognise one another in this place. Moreover, I was detained for a minute or two by the coroner, who informed me, with a curious dry civility, that he wished me to attend at the adjourned meeting of the court, as further evidence from me might be required and after him, by Mr. Isaacs, who, as executor, was responsible for the funeral arrangements and who promise to inform me when the date had been fixed.

As I emerged from the gateway I glanced up the street with a wistfulness which I would hardly acknowledge to myself. But, of course, Jasper was already out of sight. Feeling very lonely, weary and exhausted, I walked slowly down Drury Lane considering what I should do next. And suddenly there came on me a longing for the quiet and comfort of the club. It was quite near; and once there I could wash, refresh and rest in peace, alone, or at least among civilised people. And it was even possible that Jasper might be there.

At this thought I must have unconsciously quickened my pace, for a few minutes later found me passing through the entrance hall, telling myself that, of course, Jasper would not have come there. Nevertheless as I opened the door to the large room my eye instantly sought the familiar table in the corner; and when I saw Jasper sitting by it with a wishful gaze fixed on the door, my weariness and loneliness seemed to drop from me like a garment.

---

## XXV. — SUSPENSE—AND A DISCOVERY

"I HAD hoped," said Jasper, as we met by the table, "that you would come on here. I had to take the chance. You understood why I made myself scarce as soon as you had seen me?"

"I assumed that you thought it better that we should not be seen together just at present."

"It is more than unadvisable," said he. "It is vitally important. We will talk about that letter—but not here. There is a lot that I have to say to you, but we had better have our talk where we cannot be seen, or possibly overheard. I propose that I run off now—nobody has seen us here yet—and wait for you at my chambers. You just have a wash to freshen you up and come along at once. Don't stop for tea; I will have some ready for you. And you had better come by the least frequented way. Go down the Embankment, up Middle Temple Lane, along Crown Office Row, cross King's Bench Walk to Mitre Court, come out into Fleet Street by Mitre Court Passage, cross to Fetter Lane and into Clifford's Inn by the postern gate."

"All this sounds very secret and mysterious," said I.

"It is necessary," he replied. "We mustn't be seen together if we can help it. Remember the jury and other interested parties are local men, and might easily run against us in the public thoroughfares. So I will run off now and you will come along as soon as you can."

To this arrangement I agreed, although the precautions seemed to me somewhat excessive, and he hurried away while I went in quest of hot water and the other means of ablution.

The process of purification did not take long, for the temptation to linger luxuriously over the ceremonial of the toilet was combated by curiosity and anxiety to rejoin Jasper. In a few minutes I emerged, greatly refreshed and sensible of a very healthy appetite, and set forth by the prescribed route towards Clifford's Inn, reflecting earnestly as I went on Jasper's

rather mysterious attitude. I did not have to ply the knocker, for as I reached the landing I found Jasper standing at his open door.

"Now," said he, when I had entered and he had softly closed both the massive "oak" and the inner door, "we are secure from observers and eavesdroppers, and we can pow-wow at any length we please."

"You are very secret and portentous," I remarked. "What is it all about?"

"The secrecy and portentosity," he replied, "are possibly by-products of a legal training. We will discuss that presently. Meanwhile, the need of the moment is to provide nourishment for a starving angel."

He placed an easy chair for me by the fire, and then retired to the little kitchen, from which issued a gentle din of crockery very grateful to my ear. Presently he emerged with a tray on which were a teapot and two covers, and having deposited it on a small table, placed the latter by my chair and removed the covers with a flourish.

"There is only one cup and one plate," said I, noting that the "nourishment" had been provided on a scale of opulence appropriate to masculine conceptions of appetite.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Jasper. "How many cups and plates do you generally use?"

"Go and get another plate and cup and saucer," I commanded, severely.

When he had made the necessary addition to the table appointments, he drew up a second armchair, and, as he poured out the tea, he said, gravely:

"We have had a long probation, Helen, dearest—at least, it seems so to me; and it is not over yet. But this little interlude should hearten us for what remains. To me it is a glimpse into a future of perfect happiness and comradeship. Do you realise, Helen, that we are now a normal, engaged couple, free to marry when we choose?"

Of course I had realised that we were free; but as I thought of the shrouded figure that even now reposed under its sheet in the mortuary, I doubted whether the word "normal" was fully applicable.

"It is perfect peace and happiness to be here with you, Jasper," I replied; "but I think I shall feel more normal when we can meet without all this secrecy. And even now I don't quite understand it. Why is it so important that we should not be seen together?"

"That is fairly obvious, I think," he replied. "I am going to be very frank with you, Helen, because I have complete confidence in your courage and strength of character. There is no use in blinking the fact that you are in a difficult situation. That coroner man thinks you wrote those anonymous letters; and he suspects that you knew about Otway's suicidal tendencies."

"But I distinctly said I did not."

"Yes, but, you see, the person who wrote those letters is not a person whose statements would carry any weight; and he thinks you are that person. He thinks you have tried to drive Otway to suicide, and he will be looking for a motive. There is a fairly obvious motive already, as you were encumbered with a husband whom you didn't want; but if you add another husband whom you did and do want, the motive for getting rid of the unwanted one becomes much more definite. That is the kind of motive he will be on the look-out for. Hence the necessity for the utmost caution on our part. If a witness could be produced who could depose to having seen us together, it might be possible for him to put some inconvenient questions."

"Could he not question me on the subject apart from any such witness?"

"I don't think it would be admissible for the coroner to suggest the existence of a lover if he had no facts. And that brings us to the point that I was going to raise. You ought to be represented either by counsel or by a solicitor; preferably by counsel, as a barrister is more agile—more accustomed to deal with the sudden exigencies that arise in court."

"You seem to suggest that I am charged with having brought about Mr. Otway's death."

"I wouldn't use the word 'charged' as I don't know that there is any such offence recognised by law. Morally, to cause a man to commit suicide would be much the same as to murder him, but I can't say off-hand what the legal position would be. My impression is that it would not be an offence that could be dealt with by law unless the act of murder could be proven. Nonetheless, I would be happier to see you with some reliable counsel we could trust."

It was then I thought of Dr Thorndyke. He had shown a kind interest in my affairs, even to the extent of having a shorthand reporter at the inquest. Surely he would be ideal, if I could persuade him to take up the role of my advocate. I broached the possibility to Jasper, explaining Dr. Thorndyke's interest in the case.

"The very man!" Jasper said enthusiastically. "You must see him, Helen, and soon. He is a local resident, luckily, and lives only a few moments' walk from here."

So fast did things seem to be moving that I was reluctant to take on another visit after my already busy day, but Jasper was insistent that I should seek out Dr. Thorndyke's help. "I wish I could accompany you," he said, "but it is best if we are not seen out together. Will you see him?"

"Perhaps." I temporised, still feeling that to take on the services—and the cost!—of such a distinguished advocate was an extreme reaction to my current situation.

We talked a little longer, and then I took my leave, getting directions to Dr. Thorndyke's rooms from Jasper.

"I suppose," said he, as he bade me farewell, "we had better not meet again until this affair is over. It is only a fortnight, and after that we shall be free. Meanwhile, we can write as often as we please."

I agreed to this the more readily as I saw that another meeting with Jasper would make it difficult for me to escape from his demand that I should invoke Dr. Thorndyke's help. Nevertheless, as I took my way through Clifford's Inn Passage into Fleet Street, I found myself looking forward somewhat gloomily to the lonely and anxious fortnight lay ahead.

For several days nothing out of the ordinary occurred. My friends at Wellclose Square, who knew approximately what my position was, were quietly sympathetic, but never referred to the matter; excepting the incorrigible Peggy, who frankly congratulated me on my newly-acquired freedom.

"It's horrid for you, Sibyl," said she, "but still it is for the best; though he might have managed it a little more decently—a level crossing, you know, or 'found drowned,' or something of that sort."

"You are a callous little wretch, Peggy," said I.

"I don't care," she replied, defiantly. "You know it is true. I am awfully sorry for you now. It must be perfectly beastly to have to answer all those impertinent questions, and have your answers printed in the news papers. But it will soon be over, and then you can forget it and have a good time. I shall dance at your wedding before I am six months older."

I had to pretend to be shocked, but the Titmouse's optimism did me good. For there was a bright side to the picture, and it was just as well to gather encouragement from an occasional glance at it.

About ten days after the first sitting of the inquest I received a letter from Mr. Isaacs. He had already written to me briefly to inform me that the funeral had been postponed by the coroner's direction until after the adjourned inquest, but had then said nothing about the will. The present letter supplied the omission, and its contents surprised me very much. It appeared that the will had been proved and that I was the principal beneficiary. "The testator," said Mr. Isaacs, "has bequeathed to you the bulk of his personalty—upwards of eight thousand pounds—and the lease of the premises in Lyon's Inn Chambers, together with the furniture and effects contained therein. You are also constituted the residuary legatee. The chambers have now been evacuated by Mrs. Gregg, and are at your disposal. They are at present locked up, and the keys are in my possession pending your instructions and advice as to whether you intend to occupy the premises, to let them or to dispose of the lease. A copy of the will can be seen at my office, and, of course, the original can be examined at Somerset House."

The provisions of this will caused me, as I have said, considerable surprise. I had regarded myself as having no pecuniary claim on Mr. Otway, and had not considered myself as concerned in his will at all. Now it was evident that, selfish as he had been during his life, he had been anxious at least to make some atonement after his death for the injury he had done me; and the fact did not tend to make my sense of guilt less acute.

Before I had replied to Mr. Isaacs' letter I received two other communications. One was from Jasper; and though it was written in a tone of quiet cheerfulness, its contents filled me with alarm. It appeared that Jasper, becoming uneasy at my continued neglect to take any measures to secure a counsel to represent me, had called on Dr. Thorndyke with the object of retaining him. "We have had rather bad luck," he continued, "though I don't suppose it will matter. Dr. Thorndyke would have been pleased to represent you, but unfortunately he has been commissioned at the last moment by the Home Office to make an independent investigation of the case. He gave me the name of a suitable counsel—a rising junior named Cawley—with whom I have made the necessary arrangements. So your interests will be looked after, and we can trust Thorndyke to clear up the obscurities of the case."

The other letter was from Dr. Thorndyke himself, and confirmed Jasper's account.

"Your friend, Mr. Davenant," it said, "called on me to-day to ask me to watch the proceedings of the inquest on your behalf, which I would have done with great pleasure if I had been at liberty. But I had just received instructions from the Home Office to look into the case and give evidence at the adjourned inquest; so I referred your friend to Mr. Cawley, who is an excellent counsel and will be able to do all that is necessary."

"Mr. Davenant expressed great disappointment that I should be, as he expressed it, 'retained by the other side.' But I pointed out to him that there is no 'other side.' I am not a 'witness advocate.' My evidence would be the same whichever side employed me. I never undertake to represent a particular interest, but merely to obtain what facts I can and give those facts impartially in my evidence and I always make it clear to clients that they employ me at their own risk—at the risk that the facts elicited may be unfavourable to them. So, although I am not retained by you, I shall act precisely as if I were. I shall find out all I can, and tell the court all I know. This will, presumably, be entirely in your interest."

"And now I am going to ask a favour of you. I wish to examine and make a plan of the premises at Lyon's Inn Chambers, and I understand that the tenancy of the Chambers is now vested in you. Will you be so kind as to lend me the keys and authorise me to make this survey? If you will, I shall be able to make my evidence more complete."

If Jasper's letter had alarmed me, Dr. Thorndyke's positively terrified me. The cool, relentless impartiality, the unhuman indifference to everything but the actual truth that the letter conveyed appalled me; and I even seemed to read a direct menace in its tone. If I had employed him, I should have done so at my own risk; so he seemed to hint. His intention was to "find out all he could and tell the court all he knew." How much would he find out? How much did he know already? He had a verbatim report of the evidence so far. He had Mrs. Gregg's statement that "they seemed to be talking about suicide."

He would know all about suggestion and silent willing. Was it possible that he already knew that I had sent that wretched man on his last journey? When I recalled all that my father had said of his amazing powers of inference; when I remembered how unerringly he had detected the reservations in Mr. Otway's evidence and mine; I could not but feel that my chance of keeping my guilty secret was infinitesimal. The probability was that it was discovered already.

As to his request, obviously I had no choice but to grant it, and I was on the point of writing to Mr. Isaacs to instruct him to hand the keys to Dr. Thorndyke when it occurred to me that it might be well to avoid unnecessarily taking the former gentleman into my confidence. I knew nothing about Mr. Isaacs, and was not particularly prepossessed by him; not did I know the object of the proposed survey of the premises, concerning which indeed I was somewhat mystified and rather uncomfortable. Eventually I decided to call at Mr. Isaacs' office for the keys and deliver them myself to Dr. Thorndyke.

Accordingly I wrote a short note to the latter informing him of my intentions, and on the following morning betook myself to Mr. Isaacs' office, which was situated in New Inn. I could see that my visit was somewhat unexpected, and evidently aroused the solicitor's curiosity.

"You will see," said he, "that the keys are all labelled, and I have made a rough inventory of the furniture and effects. Perhaps you would like me to come with you and check it."

"Thank you," said I, "but I don't think I will check the inventory to-day. We will postpone that until I take formal possession. At present I am merely going to take a look at the premises."

When I said this, I had, of course, no intention of going to the chambers at all, but as I walked down Wych Street with the keys in my bag, I reflected that, as I had said I was going, I had better go. Moreover, it was possible that the arrangement of the place had been disturbed and that some things might need to be replaced; for I assumed that Dr. Thorndyke would wish to see the premises as they were on the night of the tragedy. And then I was not without some curiosity concerning this place which had been the scene of events so momentous to me.

At the bottom of Wych Street I turned round by the "Rising Sun" and walked along Holywell Street to the entrance of Lyon's Inn Chambers; and as I, once again, ascended the gloomy stone stairs, the sinister atmosphere of the place enveloped me as it had done on previous occasions, and induced a vague sensation of fear. When I reached the landing and stood at the ill portal, the feeling had grown so pronounced that I hesitated for a while to enter the chambers. At length I summoned up courage to insert the key, and as the massive door swung open I stepped into the lobby.

But my nervousness by no means wore off. Leaving the outer door ajar, I walked quickly down the corridor, peered into the kitchen and the little, empty room that had presumably been occupied by Mrs. Gregg—apparently the furniture had belonged to her—crossed the living-room and entered the bedroom. Here nothing seemed to have been changed. Even the great peg—on which, of course, my eye lit instantly—still bore the end of crimson rope; the bed had been stripped, but the bedside table stood intact even to the bottle of veronal tablets. I looked about me quickly and nervously, noting the arrangement of the furniture and comparing it with my recollections of that unforgettable night; and when I had decided that it was unaltered, I turned to go.

As I crossed the living-room, the large, wardrobe-like cupboard attracted my attention, and I recalled the mysterious sounds that had seemed to issue from it. Was it possible, I wondered, that Mrs. Gregg could have been concealed in it that night and have overheard those last incriminating words of mine. She had not referred to them in her evidence, but the inquiry was not finished yet. I resolved to settle the question whether it was physically possible for her to have been concealed in the cupboard, and having tried the door and found it locked, I turned the keys over one by one until I found one labelled "cupboard in living-room." It was a rather unusual type of key, with a solid stem instead of the more usual barrel, and when I had inserted it and opened the door, I noticed that the key-hole passed right through the lock, so that the door could be locked from the inside as well as the outside. The cupboard itself was fitted like a wardrobe with a single shelf just above my eye level, beneath which a short woman like Mrs. Gregg could have easily stood upright. Thus the construction of the cupboard and the peculiar form of the lock made it at least possible that an eavesdropper might have been concealed that night; and that was all that I could say.

Before shutting the door I stood on tip-toe to see if there was anything on the shelf. In the semi-darkness of the interior I could see some kind of metallic object, and reaching in, took hold of it. As I drew it into the light of day I gave a gasp of astonishment. It was my father's stick. I took it down and turned it over curiously in my hands, marvelling how it should have got into this receptacle; and a turned it over, there came into view a flattened dent on the silver knob covered by a thick smear of blood to which two hairs had stuck. I looked at the hairs closely, but could come to no opinion as to whether or not they were my father's. One of these was white and the other a brownish grey. My father's hair had been iron grey as a whole, but I could not judge what the appearance of individual hairs might have been. If these were really his, then the man who had gone to his account was my father's murderer. It was a dreadful thought, but yet not without a certain compensation. As I looked at this relic of that day of wrath I felt my heart hardening. If the message that it bore was a true message, then I need have no more compunction for what I had done. If I had known with certainty that Mr. Otway had killed my father, those words which had slipped from me subconsciously would have been consciously uttered with full and deliberate intent and without a qualm.

I stood for a while with the stick in my hand considering what I should do with it. That its mysterious reappearance would create a complication I plainly foresaw, but to take it away and conceal it would be not only dishonest but very unsafe; for it was almost certain that someone knew of its existence. It must have been seen when the inventory was taken. Eventually I replaced it on the shelf and locked the cupboard; and having put the keys back in my bag made my way to the

door, which had been standing ajar all this time.

As I walked slowly to the Temple, I turned over in my mind the significance of this strange discovery. Someone must have known of the presence of this stick in the chambers, and that someone was either Mr. Otway or Mrs. Gregg. But both had declared positively that they had never seen it; and it was difficult to imagine why either of them should have kept it hidden away and disclaimed all knowledge of it. I could make nothing of the problem. Only one thing was clear to me. I must let Dr. Thorndyke know of my discovery; for it did not incriminate me in any way and might give him a clue to some of the elements of the mystery, the unravelment of which would be to my advantage.

The door of Dr. Thorndyke's chambers was opened by Mr. Polton, who greeted me with a friendly smile, all creases and wrinkles.

"I'm sorry to say that the Doctor is not at home, ma'am," said he; "and he will be sorry, too. He would have liked to see you, I am sure."

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Polton," said I. "I have only called to leave these keys. But I should like to leave a message. Will you ask him not to disturb things more than he can help, as the inventory has not been checked yet; and will you tell him that the stick is in the large cupboard in the living-room? You won't forget, will you?"

"I shan't forget," he replied, with a slight emphasis on the last word, "but I never trust my memory in important matters. Would you mind writing the Doctor a little note?"

He produced writing materials and placed a chair by the table, and I sat down and briefly put my message into writing. When I had given him the note—which he set in a conspicuous place on the mantel-piece—he looked at me as if he had something to say, and I waited to hear what it was.

"I have got an old verge watch to pieces upstairs," he said at length. "I don't know whether you would care to have a look at the movement. It's worth looking at. If you want to know what workmanship is, you should look at the inside of a good, old watch."

I was not, at the moment, much interested in watches or workmanship, but I could not resist his companionable enthusiasm—to say nothing of the implied compliment. So we went up together to the workshop, where he exhibited with a craftsman's delight the delicate wheels, the engraved plates and the little chased pillars, and even brought out a microscope that I might appreciate the finish bestowed on the links of a fusee-chain that was hardly thicker than a horse-hair.

As the day of the adjourned inquest drew near, my anxiety—intensified by the consciousness of my guilty secret—grew more acute. My position was, as Jasper had said, a difficult one in any case. But the really alarming element in it was the introduction of Dr. Thorndyke into the case. The suggestion factor in the suicide would probably remain unsuspected by the coroner and the jury. But would it escape Dr. Thorndyke's almost superhuman penetration? I could not believe that it would, for the hint of it was plain in Mrs. Gregg's evidence. And if it were detected, it would be revealed. Of that I had not the shadow of a doubt. Dr. Thorndyke was a kindly, even a genial man; but he was Justice personified. He would investigate the case with relentless accuracy and completeness; and he would tell the truth to the last word. Of that I felt certain. If he held my fate in his hands I was lost.

Of the view of the case taken by outsiders I had an unpleasant illustration the day before the adjourned sitting. It was furnished by an article in an evening paper that I had taken up to my room to read. Glancing over its pages, my eyes were caught by the words "Lyon's Inn," and I read as follows:

"The new Lyon's Inn seems to be emulating the reputation of the old. Within that ancient precinct occurred the famous Weare murder, forgotten of the present generation, but immortalised in those rather brutal verses of Tom Hood's:

"They cut his throat from ear to ear, His brains they battered in. His name was Mr. William Weare, He lived in Lyon's Inn."

"The drama of Lyon's Inn Chambers, however, is not a murder—at least we hope not. It is at present regarded as a suicide. But there are some queer features in the case. There is, for instance, a handsome young wife, who, it seems, flatly refused to live with her elderly husband from the very wedding day; there is a series of unaccountable anonymous letters; and there is a rumour of a hoard of precious gems spirited away from the chambers, apparently on the very night when Mr. Lewis Otway hanged himself from a peg on his bedroom wall. So the adjourned inquest, which opens at 11 a.m. to-morrow, may elicit some curious revelations."

As I laid the paper down, a cold hand seemed to settle on my heart. The writer had exaggerated nothing. He had not even stated all the accusing facts. But even so, put quite impartially, the article exhibited me as the central figure of the tragedy, as the visible agent of the sinister events that had befallen in those ill-omened chambers. And could I say that it misstated the case? Of the anonymous letters, indeed, and the stolen gems—if stolen they were—I knew nothing. But the central fact of the case was Mr. Otway's death. For that the coroner held me accountable. And, though he misjudged the evidence as to the means, I could not but admit that the coroner was right. The coming inquiry was, in effect, the trial of Helen Otway.

---

## XXVI. — THE ADJOURNED INQUIRY

THE second sitting of the inquest was a much more portentous affair than the first. The large room, or hall, in which it was

held was nearly full when I entered, and it was evident that a considerable proportion of the occupants were spectators, attracted hither, no doubt, by the picturesque comments of the newspapers. But besides these were a number of persons connected with the inquiry. Behind the coroner's chair sat a group of police officers. Mr. Isaacs and Mr. Hyams were again present; the witnesses now included Mr. and Mrs. Campbell and a youngish man of a pronouncedly Hebrew type, who sat next to them. The side of the long table allotted to the press was filled by reporters—among whom I noticed the gentleman employed by Dr. Thorndyke, and there was one or two men whom I judged to be lawyers representing the various parties interested.

My own counsel, Mr. Cawley, a shrewd-looking man of about thirty-five, introduced himself to me as I took the seat reserved for me, and gave me a few words of advice.

"I think," said he, "I have had all the necessary instructions from Mr. Davenant, who, I see, is here." (I had had an instantaneous glimpse of him as I entered the room.) "His impression is that the coroner is disposed to put a certain amount of blame on you for your husband's death. If that is so, you will have to be rather careful about answering questions, especially any questions that the jury may put. Don't be in a hurry to answer any doubtful questions. Give me time to object if they seem inclined to go beyond the evidence."

I promised to bear his advice in mind, and then asked:

"Do you know if Dr. Thorndyke is giving evidence to-day?"

"I presume he is," was the reply; "but I notice that he is not present and that his reporter is."

At this point the coroner laid down the papers which he had been looking over, and opened the proceedings with a short address to the jury.

"The adjournment of this inquiry, gentlemen," said he, "which was decided upon a fortnight ago, is amply justified by the mass of new facts which are now available. These new facts bear chiefly on the property which, as you heard at the last sitting, was believed to be missing; but in other directions they throw a very curious light on the case. The first witness will be Superintendent Miller, of the Criminal Investigation Department."

As his name was spoken, the officer rose and took his place by the table. He took the oath, and disposed of the preliminaries with professional facility, and then waited gravely for the coroner's next question.

"You had some knowledge of the deceased, Lewis Otway, and his affairs, I understand?" said the coroner.

"Yes. I have known of his existence for more than twenty years."

"Will you tell us what you know of him?"

"I first made his acquaintance about twenty-three years ago. He was then practising as a solicitor—chiefly as a police-court advocate—and was known by his real name, Lewis Levy, which he subsequently changed to Otway. After a time, he began to engage in business as a money lender, and it was at this time that he took the name of Otway. Presently he began to combine with money-lending a certain amount of trafficking in precious stones, and it was then that the police began to keep a somewhat close watch on him, with the idea that he might be also acting as a receiver. We never really had anything against him, but we always had the impression that he did some business as a middleman, or disposer of stolen jewels.

"When I first knew him, he had living with him a young woman, named Rachel Goldstein. She was nominally his housekeeper, but there were two children—a boy named Morris, and a girl named Judith—whom he admitted to be his. When he changed his name to Otway, Rachel Goldstein took the name of Gregg, and used to pass as a Scotch-woman. The children lived with their parents until they grew up, when Otway (or Levy) provided for them in a way that made the police watch still more closely. Judith married a David Samuels, who traded under the name of Campbell as a dealer in works of art, especially goldsmith's work and jewellery; and Morris Goldstein started as a dealer in antiques, with a shop in Hand Court, and some workshops in Mansell Street, Whitechapel, where most of the antiques were made.

"Now both these men were practical working jewellers. It was believed that Otway financed them both, and it was known that he was the lessee of the premises that they occupied. Moreover, as soon as they were established in business, Otway gradually abandoned the money-lending, and occupied himself almost exclusively in dealing in gem stones. He was an exceedingly good judge of stones, and was quite successful as a legitimate dealer; but the police had an impression that he did a considerable amount of business that was not legitimate. I want it to be quite clear that I am not making any accusations; I am referring merely to an impression that the police had; it may have been quite a mistaken impression, but I mention it because the matter bears directly on this enquiry.

"The idea of the police, then, was that Otway dealt to a considerable extent in stolen property. We supposed that he obtained this property—precious stones, without the mounts—not from the thieves, but from the receivers, and that he disposed of them with the aid of his son and son-in-law. Both those men did a fairly large trade in high-class jewellery. They did not touch commercial goods, but dealt exclusively in work produced individually by skilled goldsmiths and jewellers, some of whom they kept regularly employed. They also did a good deal of repairing and re-setting, and their transactions were always with private customers, not with the trade.

"Our idea of the way it was worked was this: We thought that when Otway had got a collection of stolen stones he would pass on some of them to these two men. They would then commission their craftsmen to make some articles of jewellery, and would provide them with stones which had been bought from the regular dealers, and the purchase of which could be

proved if necessary. Then, when the jewels were delivered—or even after they had been sold to a private buyer—Campbell or Goldstein would take the purchased stones out of their settings and replace them by stolen stones. And a similar method could have been employed when jewels were brought for alteration, repair or re-setting. This kind of substitution would be very difficult to trace, for it is not easy to identify particular stones and prove that they are not the ones referred to in the dealers' receipts. As a matter of fact we never did trace any stolen gems excepting on a single occasion; and then the evidence was not good enough for us to risk a prosecution.

"And now we come to the case that concerns this enquiry. About a year ago there was a burglary at the premises of Messrs. Middleburg, of New Bond Street, the well-known jewellers, and, among other things, a collection of valuable stones, worth about five thousand pounds, was carried off. It was a small collection, but all the stones were individually of considerable value, and several of them were remarkable, either in respect of size or other peculiarities. The collection has never been traced, and none of the stones has reappeared either here or abroad; and the police have reason to believe that the whole collection is still in this country.

"When these stones disappeared so completely, the police formed the opinion that they had passed into the possession of Otway, and that he was holding them up until an opportunity occurred to issue them one by one. At this time he was living at Maidstone—he had been there a year or two, but he had kept his old chambers at Lyon's Inn, and often stayed in them for a week or more at a time. Last May or June he left Maidstone and came back to his old chambers, and we then began to keep a closer watch on him.

"About a couple of months ago he bought—or rather took on approval—from Mr. Hyams, of Hatton Garden, a collection of stones of which I have seen the list. These stones were carefully selected by Otway, and the remarkable thing about them is that, taken as a whole, they are singularly like the stolen collection. Among the stolen stones, for instance, there were two large tourmalines, one green and one deep blue, both table stones with step-cut backs; four emeralds, two step-cut and two cut *en cabochon*; two large chrysoberyls, one brilliant-cut, green and one *en cabochon*, yellow; one pale-blue diamond; and one pale-pink. Now, the collection taken from Mr. Hyams includes tourmalines, emeralds, chrysoberyls, and diamonds, of almost exactly the same size, colour and cutting; and there are many other passable duplicates of the stolen stones.

"When I became aware of this I inferred that Otway was making arrangements to release the stolen stones, and I caused a still closer watch to be kept on him; but up to the present not one of the missing stones has been discovered. Now I understand that the Hyams collection has disappeared; and if that is so, it seems probable that the person who has taken it is also in possession of the stolen collection. But that, of course, is only a guess."

"Quite so!" said the coroner, "and it is a matter that is more in your province than in ours. Is there anything more that you have to tell us that is relevant to the enquiry?"

"No, I think that is all."

"You will be remaining here, in case we want to refer to you again?"

"Yes; I want to hear Dr. Thorndyke's evidence, and, of course, I want to hear the verdict."

"I am afraid you may have a long time to wait, for I have had a telegram from Dr. Thorndyke saying that he has been detained at Maidstone, and has missed his train. It is a great nuisance for us all. However, we will go on with the evidence. The next witness will be Mr. Samuel Isaacs."

As the superintendent retired to his seat and Mr. Isaacs approached the table, I reflected rapidly on what I had just heard. Dr. Thorndyke had apparently been down to Maidstone. Was his visit connected with the present enquiry? And if so, what was it that he had been investigating? The locality suggested some kind of research in which I was concerned, but at the nature of that research I could make no guess whatever. However, there was no time to speculate on the subject, for Mr. Isaacs had been sworn, and was ready to begin his evidence.

"You were solicitor to the deceased, I understand, Mr. Isaacs?"

"Yes; I am one of the executors of his will."

"In that capacity have you heard of any property said to be missing from the chambers which he occupied?"

"I have. Mr. Hyams has made a claim to have restored to him a parcel of precious stones, valued at about four thousand pounds, which, he states, was his property, and which he asserts the deceased had in his possession."

"Have you examined the premises with a view to discovering that property?"

"Yes, I have examined the premises very thoroughly, and have made a complete inventory of all the effects of the deceased. I have gone through the contents of the safe and all other receptacles, and have checked the property which he had deposited at his bank. I have made a most exhaustive search, but have failed to find any trace of the parcel referred to, or of any precious stones whatever."

"Is it possible that you may have overlooked the parcel?"

"I should say it is impossible. My opinion is that the parcel is not on the premises, and it certainly is not at the bank."

The coroner and a legal-looking gentleman at the table both noted down this reply. Then the former said: "You are, no doubt, in a position to tell us what was the state of the deceased man's affairs. Was there any kind of financial embarrassment?"

"I should say, certainly not. The gross value of the estate—which is entirely personal—is a little over seventeen thousand pounds: and the liabilities, so far as they are known to me, are quite trivial."

"Can you tell us roughly, what are the main provisions of the will, that is, if it has been proved?"

"It has been proved. The principal beneficiary is the widow, who receives eight thousand pounds, and the lease of the chambers in Lyon's Inn, with the furniture and effects, and is made residuary legatee. Rachel Gregg—or Goldstein—receives one thousand, and Morris and Judith, each two thousand pounds, and the lease of the premises in which they respectively carry on their business. There are a few small legacies—less than a thousand pounds in the aggregate; so that there will probably be a residue of about three thousand pounds, which will go to the widow."

"What is the date of this will?"

"It is dated the 10th June last."

"Do you know whether the provisions of the will were known to the widow, or the other beneficiaries?"

"I do not know. They were not disclosed by me until probate had been granted."

"Thank you," said the coroner. "I think we need not trouble you any further, unless the jury wish to ask any questions."

The jury did not; but the legal-looking gentleman at the table did, and springing up like a Jack-in-the-box, he addressed the coroner.

"As representing Mr. Hyams, sir," said he, "I should like to ask the witness whether, in the event of the missing gems not coming to light, their loss would be chargeable to the estate?"

The countenance of Mr. Isaacs hereupon assumed that peculiar expression known to students of sculpture as "the archaic smile."

"You are asking me to admit liability," he replied; "I can't do that, you know. There is a recognised procedure in these cases, with which I have no doubt you are acquainted."

The questioner sat down with a jerk, and Mr. Cawley stood up.

"May I ask the witness, sir, whether, in the event of this loss being adjudged to be chargeable to the estate, that loss would affect equally all the beneficiaries?"

"No," replied Mr. Isaacs, "it would not. It would fall, in the first place, on the residuary legatee. It would only affect the estate as a whole in so far as the amount of the charge exceeded that of the residue."

"Thank you," said Mr. Cawley. "There is one other question that I should like to ask. The present will is dated the 10th of last June. Did the execution of that will involve the revocation of a previously-existing will?"

"Yes, it did. After his marriage deceased re-acknowledged the existing will by a fresh signature and attestation, but he revoked this will when he made the new one."

"Could you tell us who were the beneficiaries under that will?"

Mr. Isaacs fixed a thoughtful (and somewhat beady) eye on the coroner's pewter ink-pot, and cogitated for a few moments.

"Is it necessary, sir, for me to answer that question?" he asked at length, looking up at the coroner.

"Is the point material?" the latter asked, looking at Mr. Cawley.

"I submit, sir, that it may become highly important," was the reply.

The coroner reflected with his eyes fixed on Mr. Cawley. Then he nodded. "Yes," he said, "I think you are right. We must ask you to answer the question, Mr. Isaacs."

Mr. Isaacs bowed. "The beneficiaries under that will were Rachel Goldstein, Morris Goldstein, and Judith Samuels."

"In what proportions was the property devised?"

"The bulk of the personalty was divided between Morris and Judith. Rachel Goldstein—or Gregg—received two thousand pounds, but she was also the residuary legatee."

"And the value of the estate?"

"I can't tell you that. I only know what it is now."

Mr. Cawley sat down, and Mr. Isaacs retired to his seat. Then the coroner pronounced the name of Mr. Hyams, and its owner took his place by the table.

"We have heard, Mr. Hyams," said the coroner, "of certain property of yours which was in the deceased man's custody. Will you give us a few particulars of the transaction. When, for instance, did it come into the possession of the deceased?"

"Two months ago—on the tenth of August, when the deceased called at my office, and asked me to let him have a selection of stones for a special purpose. He said that he had an opportunity of disposing of a number of pieces of jewellery to a wealthy American gentleman, and that he had discovered an extremely clever artist whom he proposed to commission



to make them. They were to be important pieces, chiefly pendants, brooches, and bracelets. The stones were to be exceptional in size and quality, and he wanted an assortment for Mr. Campbell—who was conducting the transaction—to show the intending purchaser. He had a list in his pocket-book, which he referred to as he made his selection from my stock. The stones which he selected were rather unusual—the sort of stones that appeal to collectors and connoisseurs, rather than ordinary wearers of jewels. And some of them were very valuable; one ruby alone that he took was worth fifteen hundred pounds. The total value of the parcel that he carried away with him was four thousand two hundred pounds.”

“I understand that he did not pay you for them?”

“No; he was not proposing to keep them all. They were a selection to show to the customer. I made out a full list, and he signed a receipt at the foot of it. I had known deceased for many years, and had often had similar dealings with him.”

“And did he never return these stones, or any part of the collection?”

“No. From the time that he left my office with the stones in his pocket I never saw him or heard from him again.”

This was the sum of Mr. Hyams’ evidence; and when he had retired the name of Judith Samuels was called. The new witness took her place at the table, and, after the usual preliminaries, proceeded to give her evidence.

“I am the wife of David Samuels who trades under the name of Donald Campbell. He is a dealer in works of art, principally goldsmith’s work and jewellery. He is a practical jeweller himself, but most of the alterations and repairs are put out. The new work that he sells, or which is commissioned by customers, is executed for him by independent goldsmiths, not by workmen employed by him.”

“You visited the deceased on the night preceding his death, I understand, is that so?”

“Yes. I came to his chambers about half-past six, and left about seven o’clock.”

“Did you notice anything unusual in his manner or appearance?”

“He was not looking very well, and he seemed rather depressed but he brightened up as we talked. He was very much interested in the business which I had come to discuss.”

“What was the nature of that business?”

“It was connected with a collection of stones that he had got on approval from Mr. Hyams to carry out a commission that he expected to get from a very wealthy American gentleman, to whom he had an introduction. He did not disclose the name of the gentleman, but it was understood that if he secured the commission, my husband should conduct the negotiations, and get the work executed.”

“Did you gather that he had the stones in his possession?”

“Yes; he showed them to me. They were in a small wooden box, the different kinds of stones wrapped up separately in little paper packets. He took the box from a deed-box on the table by his bed-side, and put it back there when he had shown me the stones.”

“Did you make any arrangements as to the disposal of these stones?”

“No final arrangements. He advised that we should get some of our artist goldsmiths to submit designs for the customer to see; and he suggested that my husband should ask Mrs. Otway to design and execute a pendant to take some of the finest stones.”

“Mrs. Otway!” exclaimed the coroner. “What Mrs. Otway do you refer to?”

“I mean Helen Otway, the wife of the deceased.”

“Are we to understand that Mrs. Otway is a designer of jewellery?”

“She is not only a designer; she is a practical goldsmith, and a very clever one too. My husband admires her work exceedingly and has paid her some very high prices. He paid her, for instance, twenty-five guineas for a set of silver teaspoons.”

The looks of astonishment that the coroner, the jury, and the press-men bestowed on me might, in other circumstances, have flattered my vanity. Now, I could see that Mrs. Campbell, without (so far as I knew) departing one single jot from the truth, was enveloping me in the most hideous entanglements.

After a pause—filled in with strenuous note-taking—the coroner again addressed the witness. “It has been given in evidence that the deceased had received a number of anonymous letters. Do you know anything about these letters?”

“I know nothing beyond what I heard when the evidence was given.”

“Have you any means of judging who wrote these letters?”

“I have heard the evidence, and I can make a pretty good guess who wrote them.”

“That is not quite what I mean. Have you any information about them other than what you gathered from the evidence?”

“No; I never heard of them until then.”

This concluded Mrs. Campbell's evidence. When she had retired Mrs. Gregg was recalled and questioned concerning the missing stones.

"Did you know that deceased had these stones in his possession?"

"Yes. He showed them to me on one occasion, and I often saw him looking at them. He was very fond of precious stones. He used to set them out on a small square of black velvet, and try them in different lights, and look at them through a magnifying glass."

"When did you last see these stones?"

"After Mrs. Campbell—that is the last witness—had left and just before Mrs. Otway arrived. Deceased was then sitting up in bed looking at a large green stone. I reminded him that Mrs. Otway was due at eight, and he then put the stones back in their box, and put the box away in the deed-box that was on the table."

"When did you first learn that the stones were missing?"

"The day after the discovery that the deceased had committed suicide, when Mrs. Otway came to the chambers with Mr. Hyams and the coroner's officer. She came to search for the anonymous letters, and she went straight to the deed-box, and there they were. But the stones were not there. I saw her take all the things out of the deed box for Mr. Hyams to see and there were no stones there."

"Thank you." said the coroner "That will do. We must now, gentlemen, see if Mrs Otway can give us any further information."

I once more took my place at the table and was again sensible of a generally heightened curiosity on the part of the jury and the spectators.

"We may as well dispose of the question of the missing stones," said the coroner; "for though it does not affect our enquiry directly but is rather the business of the police, it seems to have an important, indirect bearing. You have heard, Mrs. Otway, the evidence of Judith Samuels, and Rachel Goldstein—or Gregg. Can you throw any light on the disappearance of these stones?"

"No, I cannot."

"Did you know that deceased had these valuable stones in his possession?"

"No; I never heard of the stones until Mr. Hyams called on me on the evening of the day on which Mr. Otway's death was discovered."

"Do you know, or have you any idea, where those stones are now?"

"I do not know, and I have no idea where they are."

"Did you know that deceased was a dealer in precious stones?"

"No; my father told me that deceased collected gem-stones, and that he sometimes had dealings in them. But I supposed that he was merely a collector, not a professional dealer."

"How long had you known deceased when you married him?"

"I had known of his existence about a year, but I had hardly ever spoken to him. He was virtually a stranger to me."

"Had you never heard of the suicidal tendency in his family?"

"Never until the night preceding his death, when he told me."

"It has been stated that you are a practical goldsmith, and that you have executed work for Mr. Samuels, or Campbell. Is that true?"

"I work as a goldsmith and I have sold some of my productions to Mr. Campbell; but I have never been employed by him. I work as an independent artist."

"Has he ever supplied you with precious stones?"

"No. I purchase my own materials."

"Have you ever done any alterations or resettings for him?"

"No. I have done no work of any kind for him, or anyone else. I work on my own account, and sell what I make."

The coroner nodded, and glanced over his notes. After a pause he asked: "At what time on the night of your visit to deceased did you leave his chambers?"

"A little before ten o'clock."

"What was the condition of deceased when you left? Did he seem particularly depressed or worried?"

"He was asleep when I left."

"Asleep!" exclaimed the coroner, "How long had he been asleep?"

"Not very long; perhaps a quarter of an hour. When he took his usual dose of veronal he asked me to stay with him until he went to sleep, and I did so."

"I see that the housekeeper states that when she entered the living-room in the morning, the bedroom door was wide open, and the gas full on. What was the condition of affairs when you left?"

"The gas was full on, and I did not shut the bedroom door. I was not aware that the housekeeper had gone to bed and assumed that she would look in on deceased and make what arrangements were usual for the night."

"But if you had turned down the gas, and shut the bedroom door, that would have prevented the house keeper from going to deceased."

"No. It did not appear to matter either way."

"When you went away, did you leave your hand-bag behind?"

"Yes, I had hung it on the back of my chair, and when I got up to go, I forgot about it."

"When did you discover that you had left it behind?"

"I first remembered it when I hailed a cab at the corner of Holywell Street to take me home."

"Why did you not then go back for it?"

"I did not like to disturb Mrs. Gregg and deceased, as it was so late."

"Was your purse in the bag?"

"Yes; but that was of no consequence. I knew there would be someone sitting up who could pay the cabman."

"The housekeeper has told us that you came to fetch the bag on the following day."

"Yes, in the afternoon, about three. It was then that I first heard of Mr. Otway's death."

"The housekeeper states that, when she told you what had happened, you fell down in a dead faint. Is that so?"

"Yes. It gave me a great shock, especially as Mrs. Gregg told me the bad news so very abruptly."

"Were you expecting to hear that the deceased had committed suicide?"

"No; the subject was not in my mind."

"Is that not rather remarkable, having regard to your conversation with deceased on the previous night?"

"I don't think so. That conversation had certainly given me the impression that there was a danger that deceased might be driven to suicide if this persecution were continued. But I had not supposed that the danger was immediate."

"And that pitiful letter that you received from deceased? Did that convey no note of warning?"

"At the time when I received it I was not aware of any predisposition to suicide on the part of deceased. What he told me caused me some alarm, but he became so much calmer after our talk that I thought the danger was past, so far as the immediate future was concerned."

"And when you went to his chambers on the following day, you felt no uneasiness as to what might have happened?"

"No, the possibility that anything unusual might have happened was not in my mind at all."

"Well," said the coroner, "it seems to me rather remarkable that the possibility did not even occur to you. However, we are dealing with the facts, and if those are the facts, there is no more to be said. We will now pass on to the consideration of the will. When did you first learn that deceased had made a fresh will?"

"Four days ago, when I received a letter from Mr. Isaacs informing me of the fact that I was one of the beneficiaries."

"Had deceased never mentioned to you that he had made a will in your favour? Was there no stipulation on your part at the time of the marriage that he should make such a will?"

"No. Nothing ever passed between us on the subject."

"And had you no knowledge or belief that a will affecting you had been executed?"

"I had no knowledge or belief that such a will had been executed nor any expectation that it would be. I did not consider myself as having any pecuniary claim on the deceased."

"Did you not receive an allowance from deceased?"

"No. He wished to make me an allowance, but I declined to accept it."

"But you were entitled to an allowance for maintenance. Why did you refuse to accept it?"

"I did not consider that I had any claim on the deceased so long as I insisted on living apart."

"Then do we understand that you subsist entirely on your own means or earnings?"

"Yes, entirely."

"Would you kindly tell us what those means and earnings respectively amount to? And what are their sources?"

"I have a small private income—about sixty pounds a year—derived from the realisation of my father's estate. I cannot estimate my earnings very exactly, as I have been working only a few months. Probably I shall be able to earn from a hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds a year, when I am established. Up to the present I have sold all my work to Mr. Campbell."

"How did you first become acquainted with Mr Campbell—or Samuels, to give him his correct name?"

"Deceased recommended him to me when I first came to London. He stated that he had known him for many years."

"Did you know that Mr. Campbell was related to deceased?"

"Not until I heard it here to-day."

The coroner considered a while, turning over his notes reflectively. At length he said, "Before you sit down, Mrs. Otway, I should like to ask you again about those anonymous letters. You have stated that you have no idea who wrote them."

"That is so," I replied.

"When you discussed them with deceased, did neither of you arrive at any conclusion as to who might have written them?"

"Deceased assured me that he could make no guess as to who had sent them. Naturally, I could not, since all his acquaintances, whether friends or enemies, were unknown to me."

"And you adhere to your statement that you know nothing about these letters?"

"I know nothing about them whatever, excepting that deceased received them; and that I have only known by his telling me."

"And with regard to your father's stick? You have stated that you have no knowledge as to what became of it, or where it is now. Do you adhere to that statement too?"

"That statement was correct when I made it; but the stick has since come to light."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the coroner. "When and how did that happen?"

"It occurred three days ago, when I went to look over the chambers in Lyon's Inn. I chanced to open a large cupboard in the living room, and there, on the single shelf at the top, I saw the stick lying at the back, and hardly visible in the deep shadow."

"In-deed!" said the coroner, with a strong emphasis on the second syllable. It was perfectly evident that he did not believe me, and he made no secret of it. Nor were the jury any better impressed. In the silence that followed my statement they whispered together eagerly, and disbelief was writ large on the faces of them all.

"Had you any particular occasion to look over the chambers?" the coroner asked after an interval.

"Yes; I had received a letter from Dr. Thorndyke saying that he wished to make a survey of the premises and asking me to give him permission and the necessary facilities to do so. I accordingly went, on the following day, and fetched the keys from Mr. Isaacs to leave them at Dr. Thorndyke's chambers. On the way, I called in at Lyon's Inn to see what condition the chambers were in."

"And to plant the stick for Dr. Thorndyke to find, eh?" said one of the jurors, with a truculent leer.

Mr. Cawley rose instantly to protest, but he was anticipated by the coroner, who said severely: "That, sir, is quite out of order. Members of the jury must not suggest motives or actions on the part of witnesses which are not given in evidence. They may have their opinion but those opinions must not be expressed until all the evidence has been heard and the verdict has to be considered." Having administered this reproof, he again turned to me.

"When you looked over the chambers, did you examine the other furniture and receptacles. Did you, for instance look in the other cupboards and drawers?"

"No."

"Only this one cupboard? Now what made you look into this cupboard in particular?"

I saw the awkwardness of the question; but I also saw that a complete explanation of my motives would land me on much more dangerous ground. My immediate motive had been to ascertain what the inside of the cupboard was like, and this was as much as I dared tell.

"I wished to see what kind of a cupboard it was—whether it had shelves, drawers, or simply an open space."

"Did you take the stick out of the cupboard?"

"Yes, I took it out to examine it and see if the statement in the letter as to the bruise, the blood-smear and the hairs was correct."

"And was the statement correct?"

"Yes; there was a bruise on the silver knob, and a thick smear of what looked like dried blood, to which two hairs had

stuck.”

“Did those hairs look to you like hairs from your father’s head?”

“I could not say. They might have been. They were short and looked as if they had come from the head of a grey-haired man. My father’s hair was grey.”

“What did you do with the stick?”

“I put it back in the cupboard.”

“Why did you not bring it here?”

“I thought it best to leave it where I found it.”

“Are the keys of the chambers in your possession now?”

“No; I left them at Dr. Thorndyke’s chambers, and he has not yet returned them. I left a note informing him that the stick was in the cupboard.”

“May I ask why you did that?”

“Dr. Thorndyke mentioned in his letter that he was investigating the case on instructions from the Home Office, and I wished to give him any assistance that I could.”

“But,” the coroner exclaimed irritably, “don’t you understand that this court is investigating the case? That a coroner’s court is the proper authority to carry out such investigations? I don’t know why this medical specialist has been brought into the case at all. I have not asked for his assistance. It is quite irregular and most unnecessary. And how did this gentleman come to write to you?”

“He wanted to survey the premises, and someone—I don’t know who—had told him that I was the present lessee.”

The coroner grunted in evident displeasure. The importation of Dr. Thorndyke into the case was clearly a sore point, for he rejoined: “The whole affair is highly unsatisfactory. I am not clear that you had any right to give permission to any unofficial person to survey these premises without obtaining my consent; or that he had any right to ask you. The jury have surveyed the premises, and that ought to be enough. However, we shall see what comes of these mysterious investigations. Meanwhile, I think that is all we have to ask you, Mrs. Otway, unless the jury have any questions to put.”

The jury, warned, perhaps, by the result of the last question put by a juryman, had no question to ask; and I returned to my seat by Mr. Cawley, in time to hear Mr. Isaacs recalled.

“You have heard,” said the coroner, “the very remarkable evidence given by the last witness concerning the finding of a stick in a large cupboard in the living-room of the chambers in Lyon’s Inn?”

“I have.”

“In your previous evidence you stated that you had made a minute search of those chambers, and drawn up an inventory of their contents. Do you remember whether, when you made that search, you examined that particular cupboard?”

“Yes, I remember quite clearly that I examined it, and found it empty. I have marked it ‘empty’ in the inventory.”

“Are you sure that it was really empty? Is it not possible that this stick lying in the shade on the shelf might have been overlooked?”

“It is quite impossible. I made a most exhaustive search, and I used an electric torch for examining cupboard interiors. Moreover, the object that I was looking for a little parcel of precious stones—was much smaller, and less conspicuous than a walking stick. I could not have missed a large object like that. And I have quite a clear recollection of looking on that shelf—it was the only shelf in the cupboard—and throwing the light of the torch along it. I had to stand on tip-toe to see in distinctly, and so I suppose, had Mrs. Otway.”

“Do you swear that the cupboard was empty when you examined it?”

“I swear that it was absolutely empty.”

The coroner entered the reply in his notes, and then asked: “Did you receive any communication from Dr Thorndyke respecting his proposed survey of the chambers at Lyon’s Inn?”

“He called to enquire in whom the tenancy of the chambers was vested, but did not state why he wanted know. I told him that the widow was the lessee. I don’t know how he got her address. I didn’t give it to him. I may say that when I had finished the inventory I locked up the chambers, and kept the keys until I delivered them up to Mrs. Otway.”

“Thank you,” said the coroner. “That is all I wanted you to tell us. And that, gentlemen,” he continued, turning to the jury, “appears to be the whole of the evidence, with the exception of Dr. Thorndyke’s; and the question now arises, what are we to do? Let me explain the position, and then you can decide on our procedure.

“This enquiry was adjourned to enable the police to make some investigations in connection with it. On their application, Dr. John Thorndyke, who, I may inform you is an eminent medico-legal expert, was instructed by the Home Office to proceed to Maidstone to conduct an exhumation of the body of the late John Vardon, the father of Mrs. Otway. He was to make an examination of the body, and ascertain if possible, whether the cause of the said John Vardon’s death was as

stated at the inquest, or whether, as is hinted in these anonymous letters, he died from the effects of violence. The question is an important one, but it is more important to the police than to us. Then, it seems that the Home Office further instructed this gentleman to carry out an independent investigation into the facts of this case which we, in our humble and inefficient way, are trying to investigate. It is an extraordinary proceeding, and one that I do not in the least understand; but then I am not a medico-legal specialist. I am only a mere coroner, and you are only a mere coroner's jury. It is just as well that we should know our place.

"Well, I understand that Dr. Thorndyke has made an examination of the body of Lewis Otway, and, as you have heard, he has made a survey of the deceased man's chambers. We, also, have surveyed these chambers, but apparently our survey doesn't count; and Dr. Shelburn, whose evidence you have heard, examined the body within a few hours of death. It would seem as if medical evidence were the last thing we want. Meanwhile I have had a telegram from Dr. Thorndyke saying that he has been detained at Maidstone, and has missed his train. I don't know when he will arrive here. He may be here in a few minutes, or he may arrive in an hour or two. It is for you to decide what is to be done. We have a great deal of evidence to consider. We do not seem to need any more medical evidence, and the question of Mr. Vardon's death is not of vital importance to this enquiry.

"The question is shall we wait to hear Dr. Thorndyke's evidence or shall we proceed to consider the great mass of evidence that we already have? It is for you to decide, gentlemen."

The jury conferred for a couple of minutes, and then the foreman announced their decision. "The jury say, sir, that we are enquiring into the death of Lewis Otway, not John Vardon. They would like to proceed with the consideration of the evidence without waiting for Dr. Thorndyke."

"I am entirely with you, gentlemen," said the coroner. "I think that the evidence that we have heard will prove amply sufficient to guide us to our verdict; and we can still revise our opinions if the expert witness should have something fresh to tell us."

---

## XXVII.— THE INDICTMENT

DURING the short interval, in which the coroner took a final glance over his notes, there was a general stirring among the occupants and a suggestion of preparation for the next act. Jurymen re-settled themselves in their seats, reporters straightened their backs, and looked about them, the police officers and the spectators conversed in low undertones. At length the coroner laid on the table before him a single sheet of paper—probably an abstract of the evidence—sat back in his chair, and looked towards the jury; whereupon a deep silence fell upon the court, and he began his address:

"It is hardly necessary to remind you, gentlemen, that we are assembled for the purpose of ascertaining how, when, and by what means Lewis Otway came by his death; but it may be necessary to remark that our enquiry is not entirely concerned with the immediate causes of that death but is also—and in fact, principally—concerned with the more remote contributory circumstances. For in this case, the 'How, when, and by what means' are simple enough. We have the testimony of an eye-witness who saw the deceased hanging dead, from a peg on the wall, under conditions strongly suggestive—in fact characteristic—of suicide; and we have the testimony of the deputy-police surgeon that all the appearances were those of suicide; and we have his expert opinion that the cause of death was undoubtedly suicidal hanging. Indeed, we may say that the immediate cause of death is self-evident, and that the whole of our enquiry is concerned with the remote cause. We are not asking 'Did this man commit suicide?' for the evidence of the first two witnesses settled that question. We are asking ourselves, Why did he commit suicide? The questions that we have to answer are, Was that suicide the spontaneous act of the deceased, for which he alone is responsible? Or was deceased driven to suicide by the deliberate, purposive, and malicious acts of some other person, or persons? And if the latter appears to be the case, Who is, or are, that person or persons, and what degree of criminal responsibility attaches to such acts?

"Now we have at our disposal a considerable mass of rather miscellaneous evidence, and, I think the best way to deal with it will be to sketch out lightly the general course of events, and fill in the details later. The deceased, Lewis Otway, is the central figure of our picture, and the history that we have to trace, is his history. As to what we may call his past, that does not much concern us. Among the Ancient Egyptians the deceased was conceived as being brought before the tribunal of Osiris to answer for his conduct during his earthly life. We are not a tribunal of that kind. We are not trying Lewis Otway. If, as the police suspect, he had feathered his nest with a certain amount of illicit plumage, that is not our concern. Our interest in him is mainly confined to his connection with a particular series of events which began with his marriage and ended with his death. Let us now trace that succession of events, at first in outline, and then in more detail.

"Lewis Otway first comes into our view on the occasion of his marriage. As presented in the evidence of his widow, Helen Otway, that marriage offers us the spectacle of an act of the most amazing folly. We see an elderly man—and an unattractive one at that, as you must have observed—marrying by compulsion, under threats, and greatly against her wishes, a young woman, of very unusual physical attractions, of great talent, and of exceptional mental gifts, and strength of character. You have seen this lady, and have heard her give her evidence, and you can confirm my description of her.

"It was, I repeat, an act of amazing folly. For she must, in any case, have detested him. His conduct towards her was cruel and unscrupulous to the last degree, and in marrying her he could not fail to introduce a bitter enemy into his household. But there were added causes for that repugnance to him which she has freely admitted. In the first place, she believed that

her consent had been secured by actual fraud. And in the second place, Otway's action was the undoubted cause—whether directly or indirectly, we need not enquire at this stage—of John Vardon's death. So that our history opens with the tableau of an elderly man who has married a young, beautiful, and clever wife, who loathes him, and has abundant reason for loathing him.

“And now we pass on to the second scene—a scene almost more amazing than the first. Within an hour or two of the marriage ceremony, the young wife has repudiated the marriage, and demanded a separation for an indefinite period—practically a permanent separation. But it is not the demand that is so astonishing. The really astounding thing is that the husband seems to have agreed to this demand without demur. Consider the extraordinary inconsistency of his conduct. On the one hand we see this man, in his eagerness to possess this beautiful girl, trampling without scruple on her happiness, and her father's, oblivious of everything but his own desires; on the other, we see him meekly submitting to a demand which—natural as it may have been—the law would not have supported.

“Whence this sudden compliance? Why did he consent? He need not have consented. The marriage was quite regular. No suit for nullity could have been sustained, whereas he could have sued at once for restitution. Why did he agree in this incomprehensible manner to surrender his unquestionable rights?

“But this is not the only inconsistency. The conduct of the wife is even more inexplicable. When Otway gave evidence at the inquest on Mr. Vardon he omitted all reference to the loaded stick; which is not unnatural, seeing that it was a highly incriminating circumstance. But that suppression of a material fact made his evidence in effect, false evidence. For the truth is, according to the terms of the witnesses oath, the whole truth. Yet Helen Otway, when she gave evidence, confirmed this virtually false testimony; and she also suppressed—or, at least, omitted—the facts relating to the loaded stick. Her explanation is that, feeling convinced that her father died from a heart attack, she did not consider the stick incident of any importance. In estimating the credibility of that explanation you will bear in mind that the verdict was ‘Death from natural causes,’ but that the jury were not in possession of the facts. You will also bear in mind that this woman had seen her father lying dead, with a wound on his head, and this man, whom she loathed, and detested, standing over the body, grasping a formidable weapon. But whatever view you take of the explanation, the fact remains that at the inquest she not only refrained from accusing him, but she withheld a material fact which, if it had been disclosed, might have put Otway in the dock on a charge of murder.

“Here, then, are two cases of incomprehensible inconsistency of conduct. But they are only incomprehensible so long as they are considered separately. Consider them together and a perfectly intelligible suggestion emerges. The husband had the power to compel his wife to live with him—and he did not exercise it. The wife had the power to expose the husband to a suspicion of having committed a capital crime—and she did not exercise it. The appearance is that of a surrender by each of the power to injure the other; in short, of a bargain or agreement, involving collusion to suppress evidence.

“But this suggestion of collusion raises another question, which we shall consider later, but which we may note in passing. What was really the cause of Mr. Vardon's death? Did he die from natural causes as the coroner's jury believed and affirmed? Or was his death due to violence inflicted by Otway? It is by no means clear that Otway did not kill him, either inadvertently or with malice. And supposing Otway to have killed Mr. Vardon, was the fact known to Helen Otway? If it was, Otway's easy compliance is the more readily understood; for he would be absolutely in his wife's power. But we shall consider these points at more length presently, and perhaps we may get further light on them from the evidence of Dr. Thorndyke—if he should arrive before the verdict is agreed on.

“The next phase of this drama opens about two months after the marriage. On the 21st of June, the deceased received an anonymous letter, the first of a series of seven, which were sent thereafter at fairly regular intervals of about a fortnight. Now, let us consider those letters from various points of view in relation to their probable authorship. You have heard them read, and know their general purport. They all contain veiled threats to make certain exposures. Some are vague and some are more explicit, but there is a general crescendo note, culminating in the last letter, which pretty openly makes an accusation of murder and threatens criminal proceedings.

“First, what is the purpose of these letters? It is clearly not to levy blackmail. They hold out menaces, but there is no suggestion of an attempt to extort money. Those menaces are incomprehensible until we supply an explanatory fact. The man to whom these letters were sent suffered from a strong inherited predisposition to suicide. The very obvious inference to which we are forced, in the absence of any other explanation, is that the purpose of these letters was to convert that latent tendency into action—to produce a state of mind in which the deceased would be likely to take his own life.

“But that purpose implies knowledge on the part of the writer that this inherited tendency existed, and consequently limits the possible authorship to persons possessing such knowledge. The only persons known by us to possess such knowledge are deceased's own family. His widow has sworn that she had no knowledge of this tendency, and if you believe her statement to be true, you will tend to exclude her from the possible authorship of these letters.

“Next we have to consider the characters of the letters themselves. They all bear the East-London postmark, but there is not much in that. Anonymous letter-writers commonly post their letters in districts remote from their own residences. Still, we must take it into consideration. The two persons known to us who occupy premises in East London are Morris Goldstein and Helen Otway.

“Then as to the style of the letters. They are rather markedly uneducated in manner. The composition is ungrammatical and the phraseology vulgar. But that does not help us much; for, on the one hand, none of the persons known to us is grossly uneducated, and on the other it is usual for anonymous letter-writers to disguise their personality. Obviously, it is

easy enough for an educated person to write an apparently illiterate letter.

“The next point is a much more important one. We have decided that the purpose of these letters was to produce in the deceased a state of mind which would render his suicide probable. Now, what was the motive behind that purpose? Who could have wished deceased to commit suicide, and why should that person have wished it?

“The possible motives in this case are, in effect, the usual motives of murder, with full premeditation, viz revenge, or hatred; direct profit; and indirect profit by the elimination of an undesired person. Let us consider each of these motives in relation to the known facts of this case.

“First as to hatred or revenge. The only persons known to us are the family of deceased and his wife. His family certainly had a grievance against him, for the children were illegitimate, and the mother was unmarried. But it was an old grievance, and the family appeared to be on quite amicable terms. The children were quite well provided for, and their mother continued to live with deceased. There was, indeed, a new factor of possible discord. The deceased had married, and that marriage was manifestly to the disadvantage of his family; a fact of which it is necessary to take due account.

“When, however, we turn to the consideration of the wife, the facts are much more striking. She had suffered grievous injuries from deceased. He had ruined her life. He had virtually condemned her to perpetual spinsterhood, since she would not live with him and she could not marry anyone else. He had caused the death of her father; and she has admitted that she had an unconquerable repugnance to him. That is actually known to us; and there is a further possibility that he was actually her father’s murderer, though we must leave that out of consideration in the absence of positive evidence. But on the evidence which is before us, you will see that the motive of personal animosity is much more evident in the case of the wife than in that of the family.

“We now come to the motive of direct profit, and the question that we ask ourselves is, Who stood to benefit by the death of Lewis Otway? And as soon as we ask that question, a very striking fact comes into view. The first letter is dated by the postmark, the 21st of June. But on the 10th of that month—only eleven days previously—deceased had made a new will. By the provisions of that will Helen Otway stood to gain from eight to twelve thousand pounds by the death of her husband.

“But did anyone else stand to gain by Lewis Otway’s death? Observe that we are still dealing with the same group of persons—the only persons known to us in connection with the case. Well, the family of deceased stood to gain by his death, though to a much smaller extent; but the fact that must instantly impress us is the opposite effects of the new will on the family and the wife respectively. The execution of the new will involved the revocation of a previous will, which had left the bulk of the estate to the family. The position of affairs is consequently this: up to the 10th of June, the family, jointly, stood to benefit by Lewis Otway’s death to the extent of the bulk of his estate and the wife did not stand to benefit at all; after the 10th of June the wife stood to benefit by Otway’s death to the extent of the bulk of his estate, and the family to a relatively small extent.

“But the first of the anonymous letters was sent almost immediately after the 10th of June. That is to say, it was sent almost immediately after the family had ceased to be and the wife had become the principal beneficiary.

“From the motive of direct profit we turn to that of indirect profit, by the elimination of a person whose existence was a hindrance, a danger, or an inconvenience. Is there anyone known to us who could have regarded deceased in that light? We cannot attribute any such view to his family, for, as I have said, they appear to have been on quite amicable terms, and deceased seems to have maintained an interest in his children’s welfare to the last. But what are we to say with regard to the wife? She was married against her wishes to a man unsuitable in age, uncomely in appearance; a man whom she loathed—and had good reason to loathe—who, while she repudiated him as a husband yet held her chained to him for life; who stood inexorably between her, and any marriage which she might wish to contract; whose existence condemned her for life to the dubious position of a married woman who is not living with her husband. Think, gentlemen, of this woman—young, handsome, clever, accomplished, capable; think of what life might have been to her, and what it was with this millstone hung round her neck! And then ask yourselves whether—apart from all pecuniary considerations—she did not stand to gain incalculably by his death; whether his elimination from her life would not have opened to her the gates of a world of happiness and freedom.

“And it is here that the importance of that further evidence, which we unfortunately have not yet heard, appears. For if it should now transpire that Otway did actually kill John Vardon and that Helen Otway was privy to the homicide, then there would be yet another powerful reason why she should desire to be rid of him. But this evidence is not in our possession and we must, therefore, leave this aspect of the case out of our consideration. Nor is it essential. The facts within our knowledge are amply sufficient to enable us to answer the question whether Helen Otway’s position would or would not have been improved by the death of her husband.

“And now we come to something much more definite. Hitherto we have been dealing with the question: ‘Who might have written these letters?’ We shall now consider the more specific question, ‘Who could have written them?’

“There seems to be only one possible answer. The writer of those letters had knowledge that was possessed by only two persons—the deceased and his wife. One letter refers to something that was held back at the inquest. But who knew that anything had been held back at the inquest? No one, according to the evidence, but those two persons. Of course, it is possible that there may have been some watcher secreted in that house at Maidstone who knew that Lewis Otway had stood over the body of John Vardon with a loaded stick in his hand. But the evidence before us is to the effect that there was no one in the house but John Vardon, Lewis Otway, and Helen Otway. Consequently, unless Lewis Otway wrote these



letters to himself, there is nobody, so far as we know, who could have written them but Helen Otway.

“The last letter refers explicitly to the loaded stick, and even describes its condition minutely and, as it appears, correctly. The writer had, therefore, presumably seen the stick and very probably had possession of it. But where was that stick? Deceased certainly did not know where it was; the housekeeper states that she had never seen it since that fatal morning, and Helen Otway has denied all knowledge of its whereabouts. No one knew what had become of it.

“But if its disappearance was a mystery, its reappearance is a greater mystery still. The account given by Helen Otway is obviously unsatisfactory. She went to the chambers, for no very apparent reason. When there she did not examine the various cupboards, drawers, and other receptacles; but she went direct to this particular cupboard, unlocked it, stood on tiptoe and looked on the shelf. And behold! there was the missing stick. She took it out, examined it, and put it back. And she not only put it back, but she went out of her way to inform a person who is to give evidence on this enquiry that the stick was to be found in that cupboard.

“Now, how did that stick get into that cupboard, and when was it put there? You have heard Mr. Isaacs swear that it was not there when he made out the inventory, and you will probably agree that he could hardly be mistaken. A stick is a fairly large and conspicuous object, whereas he was searching for a small and inconspicuous one. Clearly the stick was put into the cupboard after his search was made. But when he had finished, the chambers were locked up, and the keys remained in his possession until he delivered them up to Helen Otway. Bearing these facts in mind, you have to consider whether you can accept Mrs. Otway’s statement, or whether it is more probable that she took the stick to the chambers, and put it into the cupboard herself.

“We now come to the incidents of that terrible night. What really happened in those chambers on that occasion will probably never be known. But the accounts that we have are full of sinister suggestions. We cannot, for instance, but note the fact that after this, the first and only visit from his wife, Lewis Otway made away with himself. Why he did the dreadful deed on this particular occasion, and at this particular time, is not clear. According to his wife’s account he was much calmer, and more cheerful after their talk, and she left him peacefully asleep. That is what she has told us. But what are the facts? Within an hour or two hours after she had left, his dead body was hanging from that peg. Nay! There is even a more dreadful possibility. The medical witness has told us that death took place about eleven, ‘But it might have been an hour later or earlier.’ So that it is physically possible—since Mrs. Otway left the chambers about ten—that the suicide may have actually taken place before she left. It is a horrible suggestion, and I should not have made it but for the fact that there are certain appearances which seem to support it.

“You must have been struck by the singular circumstance that when Mrs. Otway took her departure she left the gas full on, and the bedroom door open. You have heard her explanation, but we are not concerned with that for the moment. The remarkable thing is that in the morning, the gas was still full on, and the bedroom door still open. Now how could that have been? If deceased was asleep when his wife left, then he must have arisen, made his preparations, and finally hanged himself, not only with the gas full on—which might easily have been the case—but with the door open, which is improbable in the extreme. Men do not usually commit suicide coram publico. Commonly suicides lock themselves in their rooms or otherwise seek security from interruption. Yet this man, whose bedroom opened directly into the living-room and whose housekeeper might still have been about, cuts down the bell-rope, arranges the chair and hangs himself, all in a brightly-lighted room with the door open. It is certainly against common probabilities.

“But there are other suggestions of a similar tendency. If the fully-lighted gas and the open door suggest a hurried and agitated departure, so does the forgotten hand-bag containing the purse. And you will have noted that Mrs. Otway remembered that she had left her purse behind when she hailed a cab at the corner of Holywell Street. Now why did she not go back for it? She was quite near Lyon’s Inn. She could have left the cab waiting, or brought it to the gate. She says she did not like to disturb Mrs. Gregg. But she has also said that she thought that Mrs. Gregg was still up and about. The explanation is not convincing, but on the other hand there is a strong suggestion of dislike to the idea of going back—a dislike which we can understand well enough if we believe that the tragedy had already been enacted, and that the body was even then hanging on the wall.

“Then, too, the disappearance of the precious stones points in the same direction. They might have been taken when the deceased was asleep; but the theft would have been far easier if he was dead. But, of course, we cannot say with certainty that Helen Otway took the stones. We can only consider the evidence. That evidence, however, is almost overwhelmingly strong. It goes to show that the stones were in the deed-box within half-an-hour of Helen Otway’s arrival. There is no reason to suppose they were then removed. It is practically certain that they were there when she arrived, and they were never seen there or anywhere else after she left. And there is a further corroborative circumstance. To ordinary persons unmounted precious stones illicitly obtained are difficult to dispose of. But this woman is not an ordinary person; she is a working goldsmith and jeweller who buys her own materials and sells the finished works to individual buyers. She could easily dispose of stolen gems in a manner that would render them untraceable.

“The theft of these stones is not directly our business. It is that of the police. But indirectly it is of great importance. For it furnishes strong support to the suggestion that deceased was already dead when Helen Otway took her hurried departure. But what is the importance of that suggestion? The answer to that question will be found in the consideration of certain further facts and certain points of criminal law.

“First, we must notice that if deceased committed suicide while Helen Otway was in the chambers, he must have done so with her consent and connivance. But was it only a matter of consent? Is there not a suggestion that some direct means

may have been employed to induce or compel him to commit suicide? On this point we have very little information. But we have the evidence of Rachel Goldstein or Gregg that she overheard the conversation between Helen Otway and deceased on two separate occasions; and that on both occasions they seemed to be talking about suicide. There seems to be a strong suggestion that some active, direct, means were employed: persuasion, threats, or perhaps the mysterious agency of suggestion. We cannot say that it was so; but it would be in close agreement with the known circumstances and quite consistent with the course of action exhibited by the anonymous letters.

“Supposing such active, direct means to have been employed, what degree of criminal responsibility would their employment entail? With regard to the letters, though the moral responsibility for their effect is beyond question, I should hesitate to give an opinion as to the exact legal position. But in the case of direct means there is no doubt at all. The law on the subject is quite clear. Let us consider it for a moment.

“First as to the legal nature of suicide. In law, suicide is murder. It has been expressly laid down that a person cannot commit manslaughter on himself. But since suicide is necessarily murder, it follows that any person who is accessory to suicide is accessory to murder. If such person aids or abets any other person in so killing himself, that person is an accessory before the fact, or a principal in the second degree in the murder so committed; an accessory before the fact being defined as one who directly or indirectly counsels, procures, or commands any person to commit any felony or piracy which is committed in consequence of such counselling, procuring, or commandment.

“Here, then, is the importance of the matter. The criminal responsibility attaching to the anonymous letters may be involved in some obscurity; but if it can be proved that any person counselled, procured, or commanded the deceased to kill himself, that person can be dealt with as a principal in the second degree in the murder of deceased. It is for you to say whether, in your judgment, such action can be proved in the case of any person, and if so, who that person is.

“There is only one more item of evidence that I shall refer to, and that I shall touch upon only lightly. You have heard the witness Rachel Goldstein state that when she informed Helen Otway that deceased had hanged himself, Mrs. Otway fell down in a dead faint. You have heard the explanation that Mrs. Otway gave, and you must decide what weight you attach to it; whether you can regard this fainting as due to the shock of an unexpected tragedy, or as the culminating effect of prolonged and extreme nervous tension. In any case, its evidential value is but small.

“And now, as our expert witness has still not arrived, let us take a last look over the evidence to see what material we have for our verdict.” Here the coroner paused, a laying a number of sheets of paper in a row before him glanced rapidly through them.

I watched him with a dreadful fascination, even as a bird might watch the stealthy approach of a snake, terrified, but despairing of any hope of escape. So I had listened to this terrible summing-up—all false and erroneous in detail, but so horribly true in regard to the central fact. Through that dense fog of error and false appearances the coroner had seen the essential truth; that Lewis Otway had gone to his death at my bidding. Like some great spider he had wound around me a network of horrid entanglements; and now he was about to wind up the final turns.

At length he looked up, and laid his hand on one of the papers. Then he turned once more towards the jury and began his summary of the evidence. And at that moment, unnoticed, apparently, by anyone save myself, Dr. Thorndyke entered silently by a side door, and seated himself on a vacant chair.

---

## XXVIII. — THE VERDICT

THE arrival of Dr. Thorndyke seemed to me to close the last avenue of escape. The coroner had guessed at my guilty secret, but he only offered his guess as a speculative possibility on which no decisive opinion could be founded. But Dr. Thorndyke was not a guesser. If he had penetrated to that secret he would offer no speculative probabilities, but definite evidence, which would reduce the matter to certainty.

It was a terrible thought. Self-accusation—the denunciations of a guilty conscience—had been dreadful enough. But there is a world of difference between self-accusation in secret and a public criminal indictment; between calling oneself a murderess, and standing in the dock to answer the charge.

During the coroner's address I furtively watched Dr. Thorndyke. But I could gather nothing from his face. As he sat motionless, with his eyes steadily bent on the coroner, his expression denoted nothing but a grave and concentrated attention. After the first quick glance round the court, he never looked at me. What was in his mind I could not guess, though I felt that he held my fate in the hollow of his hand.

“There is no need, gentlemen,” the coroner began, “for us to go through the mass of evidence again. We have looked over it as a whole, and we have seen that certain striking suggestions emerge from it. In our last glance we have to bring those suggestions to a definite focus. Our inquiry deals with a man who committed suicide, but the appearances suggest that that suicide was not a voluntary, spontaneous act, but was the effect of a compelling force exerted by some other person.

“Who was that other person? The compelling force seems to have been exerted by means of certain menacing letters. The person who procured the suicide of deceased was therefore the writer of those letters. Now who was the writer of those letters? The question is best answered by asking certain other questions.

“First: Had deceased any enemies? Well, we know of one, and one only. His wife, Helen Otway, has confessed to a deep

repugnance to him. She had suffered grievous injuries at his hands, and she resented those injuries profoundly.

"Second: Who gained most by his death? Again, the answer is his wife, Helen Otway.

"Third: Did anyone stand to gain in any other way by his death? The answer again is yes; and the person who stood to gain—by liberation from an intolerable bondage—was Helen Otway.

"Fourth: Who could have written those letters? who possessed the secret knowledge that those letters exhibit? Only one such person is known to us besides deceased himself. That person is Helen Otway.

"Fifth: Who was the last person who was with him before his death? Again the answer is, Helen Otway.

"Sixth: Is there any evidence of the use of more direct means to procure or compel this act of suicide? And if so, by whom do those means appear to have been employed? The answer is that there is such evidence, and that the person who appears to have used those means is Helen Otway. There is evidence suggesting that she was actually present when the suicide took place; there is evidence of a hurried flight and unwillingness to return for the purse that she had left behind; there is the open door, the lighted gas, and the missing jewels, which were in the chambers when she arrived, and which were never seen after she left. And then there is the mysterious stick which had vanished, and which reappeared so strangely after her unexplained visit to the chambers.

"That, gentlemen, is in brief the whole of the evidence with the exception of that relating to John Vardon's death. That evidence is important to this enquiry; for if it should be proved that John Vardon was killed by Lewis Otway, and that Helen Otway was privy to the homicide, that would furnish a further motive for procuring the suicide of deceased—the motive of the removal of the sole accomplice in a serious crime. But that evidence is not vitally important, and it is for you to decide whether you will still await the arrival of Dr. Thorndyke, or whether you will proceed to consider your verdict on the evidence that you have heard."

As the coroner concluded, Dr. Thorndyke rose and advanced to the table, placing on an empty chair a small green-covered suit-case. The coroner looked up at him sharply and with somewhat definitely unfriendly recognition.

"How long have you been here, sir?" the former demanded.

"About seven minutes," Dr Thorndyke replied glancing at his watch. "You were just beginning your summary when I entered."

"You should have announced your arrival immediately," said the coroner. "However, as you are here, you had better take the oath, and give your evidence without further delay."

The coroner's brusque, and even rude manner, did not appear to disturb Dr. Thorndyke in the smallest degree. With the same impassive expression and quiet, composed demeanour, he took the oath and disposed of the usual preliminaries.

"We understand," said the coroner, "that you have made an examination of the body of the late John Vardon."

"Yes, I proceeded to Maidstone on instructions from the Home Office and conducted an exhumation of the body of John Vardon, of which I then made an examination. The object of the proceeding was to ascertain whether the cause of death had been correctly stated at the inquest."

"And what was the result of your examination—I don't think we want minute details."

"I found that the cause of death was, as stated at the inquest by the medical witnesses, failure of an extremely dilated heart. There was a small wound on the right side of the forehead adjoining the temple, which I examined very thoroughly. It was a glancing wound caused by a very oblique impact, and was such a wound as might have been produced in the manner described—by striking the corner of the mantelpiece in falling. There was no injury to the bone nor to the brain or its membranes. It was quite a trivial wound, and was not either wholly or partially the cause of death."

"Could that wound have been caused by a blow with a loaded stick?"

"I should say not. It was an oblique tear in the scalp and was apparently produced by some object more angular than the knob of a stick."

"Well," said the coroner, "that seems to dispose of the question of Mr. Vardon's death. It is a thousand pities that it was not cleared up more completely at the time. However, it is cleared up now; and that, really, is all, I think, that we want you to tell us, unless you have some other information. I understand that you had a sort of roving commission to investigate the matter of this enquiry?"

"I received instructions to make certain investigations with a view to my giving evidence at this inquest, and I have made such investigations as seemed to me to be necessary."

"Yes, you have, in fact, held a sort of one-man inquest on your own account. Well, the question is, do you suppose that you are in a position to tell us anything that we do not know already?"

"I am quite sure that I am. If you will allow me to present a summary of the facts in my possession—"

"I shall allow nothing of the kind. You will be good enough to answer questions like any other witness."

Dr. Thorndyke bowed with the same immovable serenity, and the coroner proceeded with his examination.

"Have you had much experience of cases of suicide?"

"I have."

"Have you had personal experience of any cases in which the suicidal act was procured, or brought about, by acts of persons other than the suicide, performed by them with deliberate intent?"

"Yes, I have had experience of several such cases."

"In those cases, what methods were used to procure the other person to commit suicide?"

"The majority were cases in which two persons agreed mutually to commit suicide together. In the less common cases in which the procurer did not propose to commit suicide, the method employed was usually some form of suggestion."

"Can you give us an instance of the employment of suggestion?"

"A very typical case occurred in my practice some years ago. A young man, who had a strong inherited predisposition to suicide, was caused by certain persons, who stood to benefit very considerably by his death, to make away with himself. The method adopted was this: The victim was made to believe that a certain Chinese jewel in his possession carried a curse; that all previous owners of it had hanged themselves, and that the appointed time for the suicide was made known by the apparition of a dead mandarin. When by frequent repetitions of this story the suitable state of mind had been produced, one of these persons dressed himself in a mandarin's costume and presented himself to the victim, with the result that, within an hour or two, the latter hanged himself."

"In that case," observed the coroner, "the suggestion seems to have been in two stages. Is that usual?"

"One could hardly call it usual, as the cases are so rare. But it is the most obvious and effective method—to produce a suicidal state of mind by preparatory suggestion, and then, as it were, to explode the mine by a definite determining suggestion."

"Are you acquainted with the evidence which has been given in this inquiry?"

"I have read a verbatim report of the first proceedings, and I have heard your summary of the whole case."

"You have, then, read the evidence relating to the anonymous letters. What opinion did you form as to the purpose of those letters?"

"I formed the opinion that their purpose was to impel deceased to commit suicide."

"Do you consider that, in the case of a person predisposed to suicide, they would be likely to produce that effect?"

"I should say that they would have a tendency to induce a suicidal state of mind."

"And suppose such a person, having received a series of such letters, and being greatly depressed by them, should be engaged—in his bedroom, the last thing at night—in a conversation on suicide, his own suicide, and that of relatives who had killed themselves, what would you expect to be the effect of such conversation?"

"It would not be possible to predict the effect, but the tendency would be to reinforce the influence of the letters."

"And what would be the condition of such a person in regard to his susceptibility to further suggestion?"

"His susceptibility to further suggestion would probably be increased."

"Looking at this case as a whole, by the light of your experience of suicide, do you regard the death of deceased as the result of his own spontaneous act or as due in part to the acts of some other person or persons?"

"I regard his death as due entirely to the acts of some other person or persons."

At these terrible words my heart seemed to stand still. There was a fearful certainty and confidence in Dr. Thorndyke's tone that chilled my very blood. He did not guess. He knew. In the short pause that followed, I set my teeth and waited for my condemnation.

"You consider that the suggestion conveyed in the letters and in that conversation and by other possible means operated so as to convert deceased into an automaton? Is that what you mean?"

"No. I do not consider that the letters or the conversation had any effect in causing his death."

The coroner frowned, perplexedly. "I don't think I quite understand," said he. "There seems to be—if you will pardon me—some self-contradiction. You state that the letters and the conversation would tend to produce a suicidal state of mind; but yet, though the letters were actually received and the conversation occurred, neither had any effect in causing the death which followed them. Do I state the case correctly?"

"Yes; quite correctly."

"Then I do not understand you in the least. You appear to be flatly contradicting yourself. I think you will agree that we are not making much progress."

"We are not making any progress at all. The examination has not elicited a single, relevant fact."

"Indeed, sir!" exclaimed the coroner. "And, pray, whose fault is that?"

"I suggest," Dr. Thorndyke replied, suavely, "that it is due to the method of examination."

The coroner turned purple. "This is insufferable!" he exclaimed; "that a witness should presume to instruct an experienced officer of justice in the duties of his office! But I suppose we must be humble in the presence of an expert. May I ask, sir, what you object to in my methods of examination?"

"The lack of result," Dr. Thorndyke replied, "is due to the fact that your examination has been conducted to support a particular theory; and that theory happens to be the wrong theory."

"Again, I don't understand you," the coroner said, angrily. "No theory has been advanced by me. Will you be good enough to explain what theory you are alluding to?"

"I allude to the theory, which you seem to have adopted, that the deceased Lewis Otway committed suicide by hanging himself from a peg on the bedroom wall. That theory is erroneous. It is practically certain that Lewis Otway did not commit suicide; and it is quite certain that he never hung from that peg on the bedroom wall."

"But," exclaimed the coroner, "we have the evidence of a witness who saw deceased hanging from that peg; and not only saw him, but cut him down and found him to be dead."

"As a witness," said Dr. Thorndyke, "I am not concerned with the testimony of other witnesses, but only with the facts as ascertained by me."

"No doubt," retorted the coroner. "But we are concerned with the testimony of all the witnesses; and the statement of this witness that she saw the body hanging from the peg, and that she cut it down from the peg, is a clear statement on a question of fact. If that statement is true, deceased hung from that peg. If he did not hang from that peg the statement is false. You say that he never hung from that peg. On what facts do you base that statement?"

"On the strength of the peg and the weight of the body of deceased. The strength of the peg—that is, the maximum weight it was capable of supporting—was under 175 pounds. But the body of deceased weighed 231 pounds—that is half a hundredweight in excess of the greatest weight that the peg was capable of supporting."

"What method did you employ to measure the strength of the peg?"

"I used simple weights, which I thought preferable to a dynamometer for purposes of evidence. These weights I had conveyed to the chambers, and I carried out the experiment in the presence of Mr. Anstey, K.C., and my assistant, Francis Polton. I hung from the peg a wooden tray, slung by a chain, the total weight of which was ten pounds. On this tray I placed—with great care to avoid shocks—two half-hundredweights. I then added weights, five pounds at a time, until the total weight, including that of the tray and chain, reached 170 pounds. This was evidently very near the limit of what the peg would bear, for it was bending noticeably under the weight; and when I added another five pounds the peg doubled under, breaking half-way through. I have brought it with me for your inspection." He opened the green suit-case and produced the peg, which he handed to the coroner.

"You see," he said, "that, in spite of its massive appearance, it had very little strength. It is merely a piece of thinnish, brass tube."

The coroner was impressed, but puzzled. "You consider," said he, as he handed the peg to the foreman of the jury, "that the test is conclusive?"

"Quite," replied Dr. Thorndyke. "Clearly, a peg which breaks under a weight of 175 pounds could not have supported a body weighing 231 pounds."

"Yes," agreed the coroner, "that appears to be undeniable." He again reflected for a few moments, and then said: "I notice that you went to the chambers provided with this apparatus. The suggestion is that you had already a definite suspicion in your mind. Is that the case?"

"Yes; I had already come to the conclusion that deceased had never hung from that peg."

"Will you tell us what led you to that conclusion?"

"When I received instructions to investigate the case I proceeded to make an inspection of the body, and it struck me, at once, that the appearances were not quite in agreement with the alleged facts, which I had learned from a verbatim report of the evidence. The amount of injury to the structures of the neck was much less than I should have expected in the case of so heavy a man, and the characteristic signs of death by hanging were absent. It is my invariable rule, in all cases of suspicious death, no matter what the apparent cause of the death may be, to examine the contents of the stomach and the secretions. In this case the procedure appeared to be necessary, and I made a careful examination of the contents of the stomach. The examination disclosed the presence of small quantities of veronal and alcohol, but when I tested for alkaloids, I obtained from the stomach and its contents no less than twenty-three minims of nicotine, the alkaloid of tobacco.

"Now nicotine—which differs from all other alkaloids but conein, the alkaloid of hemlock, in being a liquid—is an intensely poisonous substance. The fatal dose has not been exactly ascertained, but it may be stated at not more than five minims; that is, roughly, five drops. So that the quantity of this virulent poison actually obtained from the stomach of deceased was about four times the fatal dose. But this was only a part of the quantity that had been swallowed, for the examination was made ten days after death, by which time an appreciable amount of the poison would have been lost by post-mortem diffusion. I also examined the liver and other organs and the secretions, and in these I detected minute quantities of nicotine. The evidence afforded by these minute quantities is very important. Nicotine is a poison that acts

with great rapidity—in fact, with the exception of hydrocyanic acid (prussic acid) it is probably the most rapidly-acting poison known. The importance, therefore, of these minute traces of the poison in remote organs is this: their existence proves that the poison entered the stomach during life—while the blood was still circulating; and the minuteness of the quantity absorbed proves that death occurred very rapidly—practically instantaneously.

“But the very large quantity of the poison and the evidence of its almost instantaneous effect created this dilemma: a witness had stated that she saw deceased hanging from the peg; but since death was practically instantaneous, he could not have hanged himself after taking the poison; and obviously he could not have taken the poison after he had hanged himself. This discrepancy, coupled with the absence of appreciable injury to the neck, raised a doubt as to whether deceased had ever hung from the peg at all. That doubt was increased by certain other circumstances. There were, for instance, post-mortem lacerations of the hamstring muscles and other muscles of the thighs, which could not be accounted for in the case of a body which had hung vertically, fully extended. There were faint impressions below the knees of some coarse-textured fabric, not part of his clothing, and there was the condition of a length of red, worsted rope by which deceased was said to have been suspended. Both ends of this rope—which had formed part of a loop—had been cut through with a very sharp instrument; and both ends were cut cleanly right through. But this could not possibly have happened in the alleged circumstances. If a body of this great weight had been suspended by two thicknesses of a flimsy, woollen rope, and an attempt had been made to cut that rope, the cutting instrument would not have passed right through, but would have divided the rope until the remaining portion was too weak to sustain the weight, and then that portion would have broken, leaving a ragged end. Having regard to the great evidential importance of the question, I decided to clear up the doubt, if possible, by examining the peg itself. There are not many pegs which could carry this great weight without either bending, breaking or pulling out of the woodwork, and I thought it probable that an actual test with weights would settle the question. I accordingly obtained the keys from Mrs. Otway, went to the chambers and applied the tests as I have stated.”

“If the deceased was not suspended at all,” the coroner objected, “how do you account for the marks of the rope on his neck?”

“He was suspended—or rather partially suspended. I looked about the chambers for the probable means of suspension, and decided that this was the knob of the bedpost at the right-hand side of the head of the bed. On this side of the bed was a hard jute matting, the texture of which corresponded exactly with the impressions on the knees, the faintness of which is accounted for by the partial protection furnished by the pyjamas. The procedure seems to have been this: the rope was secured to the neck of deceased immediately after death, while he was lying on the bed. It was then hitched over the knob of the bedpost and the body drawn off the bed so that it was supported against the bedpost in a kneeling position. This would account for the shallowness of the marks on the neck, the impressions of the matting on the knees, and the post-mortem lacerations of the muscles. With regard to these latter, it is evident that the body was left suspended in an approximately kneeling position for a good many hours—probably for the purpose of producing as deep an indentation as possible on the neck—and that during that time cadaveric rigidity became well established; so that when the rope was cut and the body allowed to fall to the floor, the legs were found to have stiffened and to be firmly set in the kneeling posture. As deceased was to be represented as having hanged himself from the peg, it would be necessary to straighten out the legs by force; but as the muscles were already rigid, the forcible extension would tend to produce such lacerations as were found. These lacerations were, of course, under the skin and would not be noticeable excepting on close examination.”

“Is that the whole of your evidence?” the coroner asked, as Dr. Thorndyke paused.

“It is the whole of my evidence concerning the immediate circumstances of the death of Lewis Otway. I have certain other information, but you will probably not consider it of much importance to the enquiry. I have examined the two hairs that were found adhering to Mr. Vardon’s stick. They were not his hairs. As a matter of fact, the wound on his head was on a part in which there was no hair; but in any case, these were not his hairs. One of these was apparently a hair of Lewis Otway’s—probably taken from his hair brush. His hair was white, but was dyed with a stain containing sulphide of lead. This hair was of a similar character and stained with the same material. The other was white and appeared to be a woman’s hair. It was cut at both ends, and was evidently part of a much longer hair. I have also made some enquiries concerning the anonymous letters. Mrs. Otway consulted me about them a month or two back, and I promised her to look into the matter, and did so. I collected very few facts, but if I may look at the letters, I can tell you at once whether those facts throw any light on the authorship of these letters.”

“It really is not of much importance to us,” said the coroner, “though it may be important evidence in another place. Still, you may as well look at the letters.”

He handed the bundle of letters to Dr. Thorndyke, who examined each of them closely, holding them up to the light to inspect the watermark and comparing them with some other letters which he produced from his pocket.

“I think,” said he, as he returned the letters to the coroner, “there is no doubt that all these letters were written by Morris Goldstein. I have several letters which were received from and signed by him, which are identically similar in character. All are typed on the same foreign paper—made in Sweden—with an old Calligraph machine which had three type-bars slightly bent—the lower-case ‘g’ and ‘s’ and the capital ‘O.’ I have further evidence on the subject, if you care to hear it.”

The foreman of the jury interposed at this point. “We don’t want to hear any more about those letters. If deceased did not commit suicide, the letters don’t matter.”

“They will matter a good deal in another court,” said, the coroner, “but I agree with you that they do not affect our

probable verdict; but there is one question to which we may as well have a definite answer, and then we need not detain Dr. Thorndyke any longer. You have told us, sir, that the immediate cause of Lewis Otway's death was nicotine poisoning. Can you say whether the poison was taken by deceased himself, or whether it was administered by some other person?"

"The medical evidence proper furnishes no answer to that question, but from the attendant circumstances I infer that the poison was administered by some other person—probably while deceased was asleep. But that is only an opinion, based on the circumstantial evidence."

"Exactly. It is really a question for the jury. And now I don't think we need trouble you any further." The coroner bowed, a little stiffly, and as Dr. Thorndyke walked back to his chair, he once more faced the jury.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "you have heard Dr. Thorndyke's very remarkable evidence, and you will see that it compels us completely to revise our views of the case. The suicide by hanging, which we have been considering at such length, is seen to be an illusion, carefully, elaborately and ingeniously prepared. The question now is, was there a suicide at all? The cause of death was poisoning by nicotine, and death was almost instantaneous. Is this, then, a case of suicidal poisoning or of homicide?"

"It is unnecessary for me to dwell on the suggested probabilities. You have heard a witness swear, in the most circumstantial manner, that she saw deceased hanging from a peg, and that she cut the body down. You now know that deceased could never have hung from that peg. That statement was false. But what was the object of that false statement? Its object must be considered in conjunction with the illusory appearances produced by an elaborate set of preparations—the cord-marks on the neck, the overturned chair, the end of the rope fastened to the peg—a set of preparations, the only intelligible object of which seems to be the concealment of the real cause of death. And then there is a further series of preparations revealed by the anonymous letters. These we now have reason to believe were written and sent by Morris Goldstein. Our reason for connecting Mrs. Otway with those letters was based on Rachel Goldstein's statement that no one was in the house at Maidstone but Mrs. Otway, and her husband and father. But we can no longer accept that statement. The suggested probability is that she was in the house, and that she either saw, or heard enough to gather what had taken place. In that case we seem to detect a carefully-laid plan to procure the suicide of the deceased, and throw suspicion on his wife; and when the suicide failed to occur, the alternative of poison would seem to have been adopted.

"I must draw your attention to the circumstances existing at the time of the tragedy. In deceased's chambers were precious stones to the value of over four thousand pounds. Possibly there were stolen gems of a somewhat greater aggregate value. It is highly probable that Rachel Goldstein knew of the deceased's letter to his wife, for as he was bed-ridden at the time, the letter would have been posted by her, and could easily have been opened and read. The time of the interview was arranged by her so that Mrs. Otway should be the last visitor.

"Here then is a group of circumstances furnishing a perfect opportunity for the carrying out of the plan. The gems were within reach, and a visitor was expected on whom could be thrown the suspicion of the theft, and the responsibility of the apparent suicide.

"As to the motive, apart from the theft of the gems, we must remember that here was an illegitimate Jewish family into which had been introduced a legitimate Gentile wife. Her arrival had affected the interests of the family injuriously, and if a reconciliation between husband and wife should have occurred, those interests would have been still more unfavourably affected.

"But we are not called on to go deeply into the question of motive. This is a coroner's inquest, and our business is to decide how and by what means deceased met with his death. That decision is with you, gentlemen. You have heard the evidence, and I shall now leave you to consider your verdict."

As the coroner ceased speaking, and silence fell upon the court I allowed myself, for the first time, to think of my own position. Previously I had not dared; for when Dr. Thorndyke had made his dramatic statement, the revulsion of feeling had been so great that I had much ado to restrain myself from bursting into hysterical tears or laughter. But now I was more calm, and could think upon the change that a few magic words had wrought in my condition. I was free—free in body and soul. My imagined guilt had been a delusion; the silent willing and suggestion, a myth. I had never had any conscious intention to procure Lewis Otway's suicide; and no suicide had been procured. The death of that wretched man—my evil genius—had been brought about by no act of mine, conscious or unconscious. I was guiltless, I was free.

The jury took but a short time to consider their verdict. In a few minutes the foreman intimated that they had come to a unanimous decision. The coroner then formally put the question.

"Have you considered the evidence, gentlemen, and are you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are," replied the foreman. "Our verdict is that the deceased, Lewis Otway, met his death as the result of a poisonous dose of nicotine administered to him by Rachel Goldstein."

"Do you say that the poison was administered inadvertently or with malice?"

The foreman consulted his colleagues, and then replied; "With malice."

"That," said the coroner, "amounts to a verdict of wilful murder against Rachel Goldstein; and I may say, that I am entirely in agreement with you."

As the coroner concluded, I looked at Mrs. Gregg. Her face was set, and had turned a horrible, livid grey. Presently she rose slowly from her chair, and looked furtively over her shoulder; and as she did so she looked into the face of Superintendent Miller.

## EPILOGUE

THE history that I have set forth in the foregoing pages is the history of an episode. That episode opened with instantaneous abruptness; and in an instant it came to an abrupt end. The fatal words that I had overheard in my father's house had been as an incantation that had cast over me a malign spell. In the moment in which they were spoken the sinister shadow of Lewis Otway had fallen upon my life: and in the long months that followed it had never lifted. Even the death of the unhappy wizard had left the spell still working, the shadow deepening from hour to hour, until Dr. Thorndyke, like a benevolent magician, had spoken the counter-charm. Then, in an instant, the spell was broken; the shadow lifted and lifted for ever.

And with the breaking of the spell and the lifting of the shadow, the episode is at an end, and my tale is told. Yet I am loth to lay down my pen until the reader who has followed my pilgrimage through the valley of the shadow has been given at least one glimpse of me straying in the sunshine, "along the meads of asphodel." I would crave his attendance at the sombre, old church of St. Clement Danes, where, on a bright May morning, was spoken another incantation that opened to four faithful hearts the gates of a Paradise of life-long happiness and love. I would bid him admire sweet Peggy, tripping forth, all smiles and blushes, beside her stalwart husband to foregather with Jasper and me and our friends from Wellclose Square and the Temple in the ancient rooms in Clifford's Inn.

But my tale is told. The curtain is rung down; and I may not linger before it, babbling over the extinguished footlights on an empty stage—perchance to an empty house.

---

THE END



---

## I. — THE CASE OF THE WHITE FOOTPRINTS

“Well,” said my friend Foxton, pursuing a familiar and apparently inexhaustible topic, “I’d sooner have your job than my own.”

“I’ve no doubt you would,” was my unsympathetic reply. “I never met a man who wouldn’t. We all tend to consider other men’s jobs in terms of their advantages and our own in terms of their drawbacks. It is human nature.”

“Oh, it’s all very well for you to be so beastly philosophical,” retorted Foxton. “You wouldn’t be if you were in my place. Here, in Margate, it’s measles, chicken-pox and scarlatina all the summer, and bronchitis, colds and rheumatism an the winter. A deadly monotony. Whereas you and Thorndyke sit there in your chambers and let your clients feed you up with the raw material of romance. Why, your life is a sort of everlasting Adelphi drama.”

“You exaggerate, Foxton,” said I. “We, like you, have our routine work, only it is never heard of outside the Law Courts; and you, like every other doctor, must run up against mystery and romance from time to time.”

Foxton shook his head as he held out his hand for my cup. “I don’t,” said he. “My practice yields nothing but an endless

round of dull routine.”

And then, as if in commentary on this last statement, the housemaid burst into the room and, with hardly dissembled agitation, exclaimed:

“If you please, sir, the page from Beddingfield’s Boarding-house says that a lady has been found dead in her bed and would you go round there immediately.”

“Very well, Jane,” said Foxton, and as the maid retired, he deliberately helped himself to another fried egg and, looking across the table at me, exclaimed: “Isn’t that always the way? Come immediately—now—this very instant, although the patient may have been considering for a day or two whether he’ll send for you or not. But directly he decides you must spring out of bed, or jump up from your breakfast, and run.”

“That’s quite true,” I agreed; “but this really does seem to be an urgent case.”

“What’s the urgency?” demanded Foxton. “The woman is already dead. Anyone would think she was in imminent danger of coming to life again and that my instant arrival the only thing that could prevent such a catastrophe.”

“You’ve only a third-hand statement that she is dead,” said I. “It is just possible that she isn’t; and even if she is, as you will have to give evidence at the inquest, you do not want the police to get there first and turn out the room before you’ve made your inspection.”

“Gad!” exclaimed Foxton. “I hadn’t thought of that. Yes. You’re right. I’ll hop round at once.”

He swallowed the remainder of the egg at a single gulp rose from the table. Then he paused and stood for a few moments looking down at me irresolutely.

“I wonder, Jervis,” he said, “if you would mind coming round with me. You know all the medico-legal ropes, and I don’t. What do you say?”

I agreed instantly, having, in fact, been restrained only by delicacy from making the suggestion myself; and when I had fetched from my room my pocket camera and telescopic tripod, we set forth together without further delay.

Beddingfield’s Boarding-house was but a few minutes walk from Foxton’s residence being situated near the middle of Ethelred Road, Cliftonville, a quiet, suburban street which abounded in similar establishments, many of which, I noticed, were undergoing a spring-cleaning and renovation to prepare them for the approaching season.

“That’s the house,” said Foxton, “where that woman is standing at the front door. Look at the boarders, collected at the dining-room window. There’s a rare commotion in that house, I’ll warrant.”

Here, arriving at the house, he ran up the steps and accosted in sympathetic tones the elderly woman who stood by the open street door.

“What a dreadful thing this is, Mrs. Beddingfield! Terrible! Most distressing for you!”

“Ah, you’re right, Dr. Foxton,” she replied. “It’s an awful affair. Shocking. So bad for business, too. I do hope, and trust there won’t be any scandal.”

“I’m sure I hope not,” said Foxton. “There shan’t be if I can help it. And as my friend Dr. Jervis, who is staying with me for a few days, is a lawyer as well as a doctor, we shall have the best advice. When was the affair discovered?”

“Just before I sent for you, Dr. Foxton. The maid, noticed that Mrs. Toussaint—that is the poor creature’s name—had not taken in her hot water, so she knocked at the door. As she couldn’t get any answer, she tried the door and found it bolted on the inside, and then she came and told me. I went up and knocked loudly, and then, as I couldn’t get any reply, I told our boy, James, to force the door open with a case-opener, which he did quite easily as the bolt was only a small one. Then I went in, all of a tremble, for I had a presentiment that there was something wrong; and there she was lying stone dead, with a most ‘orrible stare on her face and an empty bottle in her hand.”

“A bottle, eh!” said Foxton.

“Yes. She’d made away with herself, poor thing; and all on account of some silly love affair—and it was hardly even that.”

“Ah,” said Foxton. “The usual thing. You must tell us about that later. Now we’d better go up and see the patient—at least the—er—perhaps you’ll show us the room, Mrs. Beddingfield.”

The landlady turned and preceded us up the stairs to the first-floor back, where she paused, and softly opening a door, peered nervously into the room. As we stepped past her and entered, she seemed inclined to follow, but, at a significant glance from me, Foxton persuasively ejected her and closed the door. Then we stood silent for a while and looked about us.

In the aspect of the room there was something strangely incongruous with the tragedy that had been enacted within its walls; a mingling of the commonplace and the terrible that almost amounted to anticlimax. Through the wide-open window the bright spring sunshine streamed in on the garish wallpaper and cheap furniture; from the street below, the periodic shouts of a man selling “sole and mack-ro!” broke into the brisk staccato of a barrel-organ and both sounds mingled with a raucous voice close at hand, cheerfully trolling a popular song, and accounted for by a linen-clad elbow that bobbed in front of the window and evidently appertained to a house-painter on an adjacent ladder.

It was all very commonplace and familiar and discordantly out of character with the stark figure that lay on the bed like a

waxen effigy symbolic of tragedy. Here was none of that gracious somnolence in which death often presents itself with a suggestion of eternal repose. This woman was dead; horribly, aggressively dead. The thin, sallow face was rigid as stone, the dark eyes stared into infinite space with a horrid fixity that was quite disturbing to look on. And yet the posture of the corpse was not uneasy, being, in fact, rather curiously symmetrical, with both arms outside the bedclothes and both hands closed, the right grasping, as Mrs. Beddingfield had said, an empty bottle.

"Well," said Foxton, as he stood looking down on the dead woman, "it seems a pretty clear case. She appears to have laid herself out and kept hold of the bottle so that there should be no mistake. How long do you suppose this woman has been dead, Jervis?"

I felt the rigid limbs and tested the temperature of the body surface.

"Not less than six hours," I replied. "Probably more. I should say that she died about two o'clock this morning."

"And that is about all we can say," said Foxton, "until the post-mortem has been made. Everything looks quite straightforward. No signs of a struggle or marks of violence. That blood on the mouth is probably due to her biting her lip when she drank from the bottle. Yes; here's a little cut on the inside of the lip, corresponding to the upper incisors. By the way, I wonder if there is anything left in the bottle."

As he spoke, he drew the small, unlabelled, green glass phial from the closed hand—out of which it slipped quite easily—and held it up to the light.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "there's more than a drachm left; quite enough for an analysis. But I don't recognize the smell. Do you?"

I sniffed at the bottle and was aware of a faint unfamiliar vegetable odour.

"No," I answered. "It appears to be a watery solution of some kind, but I can't give it a name. Where is the cork?"

"I haven't seen it," he replied. "Probably it is on the floor somewhere."

We both stooped to look for the missing cork and presently found it in the shadow, under the little bedside table. But, in the course of that brief search, I found something else, which had indeed been lying in full view all the time—a wax match. Now a wax match is a perfectly innocent and very commonplace object, but yet the presence of this one gave me pause. In the first place, women do not, as a rule, use wax matches, though there was not much in that. What was more to the point was that the candlestick by the bedside contained a box of safety matches, and that, as the burnt remains of one lay in the tray, it appeared to have been used to light the candle. Then why the wax match?

While I was turning over this problem Foxton had corked the bottle, wrapped it carefully in a piece of paper which he took from the dressing-table and bestowed it in his pocket.

"Well, Jervis," said he, "I think we've seen everything. The analysis and the post-mortem will complete the case. Shall we go down and hear what Mrs. Beddingfield has to say?"

But that wax match, slight as was its significance, taken alone, had presented itself to me as the last of a succession of phenomena each of which was susceptible of a sinister interpretation; and the cumulative effect of these slight suggestions began to impress me somewhat strongly.

"One moment, Foxton," said I. "Don't let us take anything for granted. We are here to collect evidence, and we must go warily. There is such a thing as homicidal poisoning, you know."

"Yes, of course," he replied, "but there is nothing to suggest it in this case; at least, I see nothing. Do you?"

"Nothing very positive," said I; "but there are some facts that seem to call for consideration. Let us go over what we have seen. In the first place, there is a distinct discrepancy in the appearance of the body. The general easy, symmetrical posture, like that of a figure on a tomb, suggests the effect of a slow, painless poison. But look at the face. There is nothing reposeful about that. It is very strongly suggestive of pain or terror or both."

"Yes," said Foxton, "that is so. But you can't draw any satisfactory conclusions from the facial expression of dead bodies. Why, men who have been hanged, or even, stabbed, often look as peaceful as babes."

"Still," I urged, "it is a fact to be noted. Then there is that cut on the lip. It may have been produced in the way you suggest; but it may equally well be the result of pressure on the mouth."

Foxton made no comment on this beyond a slight shrug of the shoulders, and I continued: "Then there is the state of the hand. It was closed, but, it did not really grasp the object it contained. You drew the bottle out without any resistance. It simply lay in the closed hand. But that is not a normal state of affairs. As you know, when a person dies grasping any object, either the hand relaxes and lets it drop, or the muscular action passes into cadaveric spasm and grasps the object firmly. And lastly, there is this wax match. Where did it come from? The dead woman apparently lit her candle with a safety match from the box. It is a small matter, but it wants explaining."

Foxton raised his eyebrows protestingly. "You're like all specialists, Jervis," said he. "You see your speciality in everything. And while you are straining these flimsy suggestions to turn a simple suicide into murder, you ignore the really conclusive fact that the door was bolted and had to be broken open before anyone could get in."

"You are not forgetting, I suppose," said I, "that the window was wide open and that there were house-painters about

and possibly a ladder left standing against the house.”

“As to the ladder,” said Foxton, “that is a pure assumption; but we can easily settle the question by asking that fellow out there if it was or was not left standing last night.”

Simultaneously we moved towards the window; but halfway we both stopped short. For the question of the ladder had in a moment become negligible. Staring up at us from the dull red linoleum which covered the floor were the impressions of a pair of bare feet, imprinted in white paint with the distinctness of a woodcut. There was no need to ask if they had been made by the dead woman: they were unmistakably the feet of a man, and large feet at that. Nor could there be any doubt as to whence those feet had come. Beginning with startling distinctness under the window, the tracks shed rapidly in intensity until they reached the carpeted portion of the room, where they vanished abruptly; and only by the closest scrutiny was it possible to detect the faint traces of the retiring tracks.

Foxton and I stood for some moments gazing in, silence at the sinister white shapes; then we looked at one another.

“You’ve saved me from a most horrible blunder, Jervis,” said Foxton. “Ladder or no ladder, that fellow came in at the window; and he came in last night, for I saw them painting these window-sills yesterday afternoon. Which side did he come from, I wonder?”

We moved to the window and looked out on the sill. A set of distinct, though smeared impressions on the new paint gave unneeded confirmation and showed that the intruder had approached from the left side, close to which was a cast-iron stack-pipe, now covered with fresh green paint.

“So,” said Foxton, “the presence or absence of the ladder is of no significance. The man got into the window somehow, and that’s all that matters.”

“On the contrary,” said I, “the point may be of considerable importance in identification. It isn’t everyone who could climb up a stack-pipe, whereas most people could make shift to climb a ladder, even if it were guarded by a plank. But the fact that the man took off his boots and socks suggests that he came up by the pipe. If he had merely aimed at silencing his footfalls, he would probably have removed his boots only.”

From the window we turned to examine more closely the footprints on the floor, and while I took a series of measurements with my spring tape Foxton entered them in my notebook.

“Doesn’t it strike you as rather odd, Jervis,” said he, “that neither of the little toes has made any mark?”

“It does indeed,” I replied. “The appearances suggest that the little toes were absent, but I have never met with such a condition. Have you?”

“Never. Of course one is acquainted with the supernumerary toe deformity, but I have never heard of congenitally deficient little toes.”

Once more we scrutinized the footprints, and even examined those on the window-sill, obscurely marked on the fresh paint; but, exquisitely distinct as were those on the linoleum, showing every wrinkle and minute skin-marking, not the faintest hint of a little toe was to be seen on either foot.

“It’s very extraordinary,” said Foxton. “He has certainly lost his little toes, if he ever had any. They couldn’t have failed to make some mark. But it’s a queer affair. Quite a windfall for the police, by the way; I mean for purposes of identification.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “and having regard to the importance of the footprints, I think it would be wise to get a photograph of them.”

“Oh, the police will see to that,” said Foxton. “Besides, we haven’t got a camera, unless you thought of using that little toy snapshotter of yours.”

As Foxton was no photographer I did not trouble to explain that my camera, though small, had been specially made for scientific purposes.

“Any photograph is better than none,” I said, and with this I opened the tripod and set it over one of the most distinct of the footprints, screwed the camera to the goose-neck, carefully framed the footprint in the finder and adjusted the focus, finally making the exposure by means of an Antinous release. This process I repeated four times, twice on a right footprint and twice on a left.

“Well,” Foxton remarked, “with all those photographs the police ought to be able to pick up the scent.”

“Yes, they’ve got something to go on; but they’ll have to catch their hare before they can cook him. He won’t be walking about barefooted, you know.”

“No. It’s a poor clue in that respect. And now we may as well be off as we’ve seen all there is to see. I think we won’t have much to say to Mrs. Beddingfield. This is a police case, and the less I’m mixed up in it the better it will be for my practice.”

I was faintly amused at Foxton’s caution when considered by the light of his utterances at the breakfast-table. Apparently his appetite for mystery and romance was easily satisfied. But that was no affair of mine. I waited on the doorstep while he said a few—probably evasive—words to the landlady and then, as we started off together in the direction of the police station, I began to turn over in my mind the salient features of the case. For some time we walked on in silence, and must have been pursuing a parallel train of thought for, when he at length spoke, he almost put my reflections into words.

"You know, Jervis," said he, "there ought to be a clue in those footprints. I realize that you can't tell how many toes a man has by looking at his booted feet. But those unusual footprints ought to give an expert a hint as to what sort of man to look for. Don't they convey any hint to you?"

I felt that Foxton was right; that if my brilliant colleague, Thorndyke, had been in my place he would have extracted from those footprints some leading fact that would have given the police a start along some definite line of inquiry; and that belief, coupled with Foxton's challenge, put me on my mettle.

"They offer no particular suggestions to me at this moment," said I, "but I think that, if we consider them systematically, we may be able to draw some useful deductions."

"Very well," said Foxton, "then let us consider them systematically. Fire away. I should like to hear how you work these things out."

Foxton's frankly spectatorial attitude was a little disconcerting, especially as it seemed to commit me to a result that I was by no means confident of attaining. I therefore began a little diffidently.

"We are assuming that both the feet that made those prints were from some cause devoid of little toes. That assumption—which is almost certainly correct—we treat as a fact, and, taking it as our starting point, the first step in the inquiry is to find some explanation of it. Now there are three possibilities, and only three: deformity, injury, and disease. The toes may have been absent from birth, they may have been lost as a result of mechanical injury, or they may have been lost by disease. Let us take those possibilities in order.

"Deformity we exclude since such a malformation is unknown to us.

"Mechanical injury seems to be excluded by the fact that the two little toes are on opposite sides of the body and could not conceivably be affected by any violence which left the intervening feet uninjured. This seems to narrow the possibilities down to disease; and the question that arises is, What diseases are there which might result in the loss of both little toes?"

I looked inquiringly at Foxton, but he merely nodded encouragingly. His rôle was that of listener.

"Well," I pursued, "the loss of both toes seems to exclude local disease, just as it excluded local injury; and as to general diseases, I can think only of three which might produce this condition—Raynaud's disease, ergotism, and frost-bite."

"You don't call frost-bite a general disease, do you?" objected Foxton.

"For our present purpose, I do. The effects are local, but the cause—low external temperature—affects the whole body and is a general cause. Well, now, taking the diseases in order. I think we can exclude Raynaud's disease. It does, it is true, occasionally cause the fingers or toes to die and drop off, and the little toes would be especially liable to be affected as being most remote from the heart. But in such a severe case the other toes would be affected. They would be shrivelled and tapered, whereas, if you remember, the toes of these feet were quite plump and full, to judge by the large impressions they made. So I think we may safely reject Raynaud's disease. There remain ergotism and frost-bite; and the choice between them is just a question of relative frequency. Frost-bite is more common; therefore frost-bite is more probable."

"Do they tend equally to affect the little toes?" asked Foxton.

"As a matter of probability, yes. The poison of ergot acting from within, and intense cold acting from without, contract the small blood-vessels and arrest the circulation. The feet, being the most distant parts of the body from the heart, are the first to feel the effects; and the little toes, which are the most distant parts of the feet, are the most susceptible of all."

Foxton reflected awhile, and then remarked:

"This is all very well, Jervis, but I don't see that you are much forrarder. This man has lost both his little toes and on your showing, the probabilities are that the loss was due either to chronic ergot poisoning or to frost-bite, with a balance of probability in favour of frost-bite. That's all. No proof, no verification, just the law of probability applied to a particular case, which is always unsatisfactory. He may have lost his toes in some totally different way. But even if the probabilities work out correctly, I don't see what use your conclusions would be to the police. They wouldn't tell them what sort of man to look for."

There was a good deal of truth in Foxton's objection. A man who has suffered from ergotism or frost-bite is not externally different from any other man. Still, we had not exhausted the case, as I ventured to point out.

"Don't be premature, Foxton," said I. "Let us pursue our argument a little farther. We have established a probability that this unknown man has suffered either from ergotism or frost-bite. That, as you say, is of no use by itself; but supposing we can show that these conditions tend to affect a particular class of persons, we shall have established a fact that will indicate a line of investigation. And I think we can. Let us take the case of ergotism first.

"Now how is chronic ergot poisoning caused? Not by the medicinal use of the drug, but, by the consumption of the diseased rye in which ergot occurs. It is therefore peculiar to countries in which rye is used extensively as food. Those countries, broadly speaking, are the countries of North-Eastern Europe, and especially Russia and Poland.

"Then take the case of frost-bite. Obviously, the most likely person to get frost-bitten is the inhabitant of a country with a cold climate. The most rigorous climates inhabited by white people are North America and North-Eastern Europe, especially Russia and Poland. So you see, the areas associated with ergotism and frost-bite overlap to some extent. In fact they do more than overlap; for a person even slightly affected by ergot would be specially liable to frost-bite, owing to the

impaired circulation. The conclusion is that, racially, in both ergotism and frost-bite, the balance of probability is in favour of a Russian, a Pole, or a Scandinavian.

"Then in the case of frost-bite there is the occupation factor. What class of men tend most to become frost-bitten? Well, beyond all doubt, the greatest sufferers from frost-bite are sailors, especially those on sailing ships, and, naturally, on ships trading to Arctic and sub-Arctic countries. But the bulk of such sailing ships are those engaged in the Baltic and Archangel trade; and the crews of those ships are almost exclusively Scandinavians, Finns, Russians and Poles. So that, again, the probabilities point to a native of North-Eastern Europe, and, taken as a whole, by the over-lapping of factors, to a Russian, a Pole, or a Scandinavian."

Foxton smiled sardonically. "Very ingenious, Jervis," said he. "Most ingenious. As an academic statement of probabilities, quite excellent. But for practical purposes absolutely useless. However, here we are at the police-station. I'll just run in and give them the facts and then go on to the coroner's office."

"I suppose I'd better not come in with you?" I said.

"Well, no," he replied. "You see, you have no official connection with the case, and they mightn't like it. You'd better go and amuse yourself while I get the morning's visits done. We can talk things over at lunch."

With this he disappeared into the police-station, and I turned away with a smile of grim amusement. Experience is apt to make us a trifle uncharitable, and experience had taught me that those who are the most scornful of academic reasoning are often not above retailing it with some reticence as to its original authorship. I had a shrewd suspicion that Foxton was at this very moment disgorging my despised "academic statement of probabilities" to an admiring police-inspector.

My way towards the sea lay through Ethelred Road, and I had traversed about half its length and was approaching the house of the tragedy when I observed Mrs. Beddingfield at the bay window. Evidently she recognized me, for a few moments later she appeared in outdoor clothes on the doorstep and advanced to meet me.

"Have you seen the police?" she asked, as we met.

I replied that Dr. Foxton was even now at the police-station.

"Ah!" she said, "it's a dreadful affair; most unfortunate, too, just at the beginning of the season. A scandal is absolute ruin to a boarding-house. What do you think of the case? Will it be possible to hush it up? Dr. Foxton said you were a lawyer, I think, Dr. Jervis?"

"Yes, I am a lawyer, but really I know nothing of the circumstances of this case. Did I understand that there had been something in the nature of a love affair?"

"Yes—at least—well, perhaps I oughtn't to have said that. But hadn't I better tell you the whole story?—that is, if I am not taking up too much of your time."

"I should be interested to hear what led to the disaster," said I.

"Then," she said, "I will tell you all about it. Will you come indoors, or shall I walk a little way with you?"

As I suspected that the police were at that moment on their way to the house, I chose the latter alternative and led her away seawards at a pretty brisk pace.

"Was this poor lady a widow?" I asked, as we started up the street.

"No, she wasn't," replied Mrs. Beddingfield, "and that was the trouble. Her husband was abroad—at least, he had been, and he was just coming home. A pretty home-coming it will be for him, poor man. He is an officer in the Civil Police at Sierra Leone, but he hasn't been there long. He went there for his health."

"What! To Sierra Leone!" I exclaimed, for the "White Man's Grave" seemed a queer health resort.

"Yes. You see, Mr. Toussaint is a French Canadian, and it seems that he has always been somewhat of a rolling stone. For some time he was in the Klondyke, but he suffered so much from the cold that he had to come away. It injured his health very severely; I don't quite know in what way, but I do know that he was quite a cripple for a time. When he got better he looked out for a post in a warm climate and eventually obtained the appointment of Inspector of Civil Police at Sierra Leone. That was about ten months ago, and when he sailed for Africa his wife came to stay with me, and has been here ever since."

"And this love affair that you spoke of?"

"Yes, but I oughtn't to have called it that. Let me explain what happened. About three months ago a Swedish gentleman—a Mr. Bergson—came to stay here, and he seemed to be very much smitten with Mrs. Toussaint."

"And she?"

"Oh, she liked him well enough. He is a tall, good-looking man—though for that matter he is no taller than her husband, nor any better-looking. Both men are over six feet. But there was no harm so far as she was concerned, excepting that she didn't see the position quite soon enough. She wasn't very discreet, in fact I thought it necessary to give her a little advice. However, Mr. Bergson left here and went to live at Ramsgate to superintend the unloading of the iceships (he came from Sweden in one), and I thought the trouble was at an end. But it wasn't, for he took to coming over to see Mrs. Toussaint, and of course I couldn't have that. So at last I had to tell him that he mustn't come to the house again. It was very

unfortunate, for on that occasion I think he had been “tasting”, as they say in Scotland. He wasn’t drunk, but he was excitable and noisy, and when I told him he mustn’t come again he made such a disturbance that two of the gentlemen boarders—Mr. Wardale and Mr. Macauley—had to interfere. And then he was most insulting to them, especially to Mr. Macauley, who is a coloured gentleman; called him a “buck nigger” and all sorts of offensive names.”

“And how did the coloured gentleman take it?”

“Not very well, I am sorry to say, considering that he is a gentleman—a law student with chambers in the Temple. In fact, his language was so objectionable that Mr. Wardale insisted on my giving him notice on the spot. But I managed to get him taken in next door but one; you see, Mr. Wardale had been a Commissioner at, Sierra Leone—it was through him that Mr. Toussaint got his appointment—so I suppose he was rather on his dignity with coloured people.”

“And was that the last you heard of Mr. Bergson?”

“He never came here again, but he wrote several times to Mrs. Toussaint, asking her to meet him. At last, only a few days ago, she wrote to him and told him that the acquaintance must cease.”

“And has it ceased?”

“As far as I know, it has.”

“Then, Mrs. Beddingfield,” said I, “what makes you connect the affair with—with what has happened?”

“Well, you see,” she explained, “there is the husband. He was coming home, and is probably in England already.”

“Indeed!” said I.

“Yes,” she continued. “He went up into the bush to arrest some natives belonging to one of these gangs of murderers—Leopard Societies, I think they are called—and he got seriously wounded. He wrote to his wife from hospital saying that he would be sent home as soon as he was fit to travel, and about ten days ago she got a letter from him saying that he was coming by the next ship.

“I noticed that she seemed very nervous and upset when she got the letters from hospital, and still more so when the last letter came. Of course, I don’t know what he said to her in those letters. It may be that he had heard something about Mr. Bergson, and threatened to take some action. Of course, I can’t say. I only know that she was very nervous and restless, and when we saw in the paper four days ago that the ship he would be coming by had arrived in Liverpool she seemed dreadfully upset. And she got worse and worse until—well, until last night.”

“Has anything been heard of the husband since the ship arrived?” I asked.

“Nothing whatever,” replied Mrs. Beddingfield, with a meaning look at me which I had no difficulty in interpreting. “No letter, no telegram, not a word. And you see, if he hadn’t come by that ship he would almost certainly have sent a letter to her. He must have arrived in England, but why hasn’t he turned up, or at least sent a wire? What is he doing? Why is he staying away? Can he have heard something? And what does he mean to do? That’s what kept the poor thing on wires, and that, I feel certain, is what drove her to make away with herself.”

It was not my business to contest Mrs. Beddingfield’s erroneous deductions. I was seeking information—it seemed that I had nearly exhausted the present source. But one point required amplifying.

“To return to Mr. Bergson, Mrs. Beddingfield,” said I. “Do I understand that he is a seafaring man?”

“He was,” she replied. “At present he is settled at Ramsgate as manager of a company in the ice trade, but formerly he was a sailor. I have heard him say that he was one of the crew of an exploring ship that went in search of the North Pole and that he was locked up in the ice for months and months. I should have thought he would have had enough of ice after that.”

With this view I expressed warm agreement, and having now obtained all the information that appeared to be available I proceeded to bring the interview to an end.

“Well, Mrs. Beddingfield,” I said, “it is a rather mysterious affair. Perhaps more light may be thrown on it at the inquest. Meanwhile, I should think that it will be wise of you to keep your own counsel as far as outsiders are concerned.”

The remainder of the morning I spent pacing the smooth stretch of sand that lies to the east of the jetty, and reflecting on the evidence that I had acquired in respect of this singular crime. Evidently there was no lack of clues in this case. On the contrary, there were two quite obvious lines of inquiry, for both the Swede and the missing husband presented the characters of the hypothetical murderer. Both had been exposed to the conditions which tend to produce frost-bite; one of them had probably been a consumer of rye meal, and both might be said to have a motive—though, to be sure, it was a very insufficient one—for committing the crime. Still in both cases the evidence was merely speculative; it suggested a line of investigation but it did nothing more.

When I met Foxton at lunch I was sensible of a curious change in his manner. His previous expansiveness had given place to marked reticence and a certain official secretiveness.

“I don’t think, you know, Jervis,” he said, when I opened the subject, “that we had better discuss this affair. You see, I am the principal witness, and while the case is sub judice—well, in fact the police don’t want the case talked about.”

“But surely I am a witness, too, and an expert witness, moreover—”

"That isn't the view of the police. They look on you as more or less of an amateur, and as you have no official connection with the case, I don't think they propose to subpoena you. Superintendent Platt, who is in charge of the case, wasn't very pleased at my having taken you to the house. Said it was quite irregular. Oh, and by the way, he says you must hand over those photographs."

"But isn't Platt going to have the footprints photographed on his own account?" I objected.

"Of course he is. He is going to have a set of proper photographs taken by an expert photographer—he was mightily amused when he heard about your little snapshot affair. Oh, you can trust Platt. He is a great man. He has had a course of instruction at the Fingerprint Department in London."

"I don't see how that is going to help him, as there aren't any fingerprints in this case."

This was a mere fly-cast on my part, but Foxton rose at once at the rather clumsy bait.

"Oh, aren't there?" he exclaimed. "You didn't happen to spot them, but they were there. Platt has got the prints of a complete right hand. This is in strict confidence, you know," he added, with somewhat belated caution.

Foxton's sudden reticence restrained me from uttering the obvious comment on the superintendent's achievement. I returned to the subject of the photographs.

"Supposing I decline to hand over my film?" said I.

"But I hope you won't—and in fact you mustn't. I am officially connected with the case, and I've got to live with these people. As the police-surgeon, I am responsible for the medical evidence, and Platt expects me to get those photographs from you. Obviously you can't keep them. It would be most irregular."

It was useless to argue. Evidently the police did not want me to be introduced into the case, and after all the superintendent was within his rights, if he chose to regard me, as a private individual and to demand the surrender of the film.

Nevertheless I was loath to give up the photographs, at least until I had carefully studied them. The case was within my own speciality of practice, and was a strange and interesting one. Moreover, it appeared to be in unskilful hands, judging from the fingerprint episode, and then experience had taught me to treasure up small scraps of chance evidence, since one never knew when one might be drawn into a case in a professional capacity. In effect, I decided not to give up the photographs, though that decision committed me to a ruse that I was not very willing to adopt. I would rather have acted quite straightforwardly.

"Well if you insist, Foxton," I said, "I will hand over the film or, if you like, I will destroy it in your presence."

"I think Platt would rather have the film uninjured," said Foxton. "Then he'll know, you know," he added, with a sly grin.

In my heart, I thanked Foxton for that grin. It made my own guileful proceedings so much easier; for a suspicious man invites you to get the better of him if you can.

After lunch I went up to my room, locked the door and took the little camera from my pocket. Having fully wound up the film, I extracted it, wrapped it up carefully and bestowed it in my inside breast-pocket. Then I inserted a fresh film, and going to the open window, took four successive snapshots of the sky. This done, I closed the camera, slipped it into my pocket and went downstairs. Foxton was in the hall, brushing his hat, as I descended, and at once renewed his demand.

"About those photographs, Jervis," said he; "I shall be looking in at the police-station presently, so if you wouldn't mind —"

"To be sure," said I. "I will give you the film now if you like."

Taking the camera from my pocket, I solemnly wound up the remainder of the film, extracted it, stuck down the loose end with ostentatious care, and handed it to him.

"Better not expose it to the light," I said, going the whole hog of deception, "or you may fog the exposures."

Foxton took the spool from me as if it were hot—he was not a photographer—and thrust it into his handbag. He was still thanking me the quite profusely when the front-door bell rang.

The visitor who stood revealed when Foxton opened the door was a small, spare gentleman with a complexion of peculiar brown-papery quality that suggests long residence the tropics. He stepped in briskly and introduced himself and his business without preamble.

"My name is Wardale—boarder at Beddingfield's. I called with reference to the tragic event which—"

Here Foxton interposed in his frostiest official tone. "I am afraid, Mr. Wardale, I can't give you any information about the case at present."

"I saw you two gentlemen at the house this morning—" Mr. Wardale continued, but Foxton again cut him short.

"You did. We were there—or at least, I was—as representative of the Law, and while the case is sub judice—"

"It isn't yet," interrupted Wardale.

"Well, I can't enter into any discussion of it—"



"I am not asking you to," said Wardale a little impatiently. "But I understand that one of you is Dr. Jervis."

"I am," said I.

"I must really warn you—" Foxton began again; but Mr. Wardale interrupted testily:

"My dear sir, I am a lawyer and a magistrate and understand perfectly well what is and what is not permissible. I have come simply to make a professional engagement with Dr. Jervis."

"In what way can I be of service to you?" I asked.

"I will tell you," said Mr. Wardale. "This poor lady, whose death has occurred in so mysterious a manner, was the wife of a man who was, like myself a servant of the Government of Sierra Leone. I was the friend of both of them, and in the absence of the husband I should like to have the inquiry into the circumstances of this lady's death watched by a competent lawyer with the necessary special knowledge of medical evidence. Will you or your colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, undertake to watch the case for me?"

Of course I was willing to undertake the case and said so.

"Then," said Mr. Wardale, "I will instruct my solicitor to write to you and formally retain you in the case. Here is my card. You will find my name in the Colonial Office List, and you know my address here."

He handed me his card, wished us both good afternoon, and then, with a stiff little bow, turned and took his departure.

"I think I had better run up to town and confer with Thorndyke," said I. "How do the trains run?"

"There is a good train in about three-quarters of an hour," replied Foxton.

"Then I will go by it, but I shall come down again to-morrow or the next day, and probably Thorndyke will come down with me."

"Very well," said Foxton. "Bring him in to lunch or dinner, but I can't put him up, I am afraid."

"It would be better not," said I. "Your friend Platt wouldn't like it. He won't want Thorndyke—or me either for that matter. And what about those photographs? Thorndyke will want them, you know."

"He can't have them," said Foxton doggedly, "unless Platt is willing to hand them back; which I don't suppose he will be."

I had private reasons for thinking otherwise, but I kept them to myself; and as Foxton went forth on his afternoon round, I returned upstairs to pack my suitcase and write the telegram to Thorndyke informing him of my movements.

It was only a quarter past five when I let myself into our chambers in King's Bench Walk. To my relief I found my colleague at home and our laboratory assistant, Polton, in the act of laying tea, for two.

"I gather," said Thorndyke, as we shook hands, "that my learned brother brings grist to the mill?"

"Yes," I replied. "Nominally a watching brief, but I think you will agree with me that it is a case for independent investigation."

"Will there be anything in my line, sir?" inquired Polton, who was always agog at the word 'investigation'.

"There is a film to be developed. Four exposures of white footprints on a dark ground."

"Ah!" said Polton, "you'll want good strong negatives, and they ought to be enlarged if they are, from the little camera. Can you give me the dimensions?"

I wrote out the measurements from my notebook and handed him the paper together with the spool of film, with which he retired gleefully to the laboratory.

"And now, Jervis," said Thorndyke, "while Polton is operating on the film and we are discussing our tea, let us have a sketch of the case."

I gave him more than a sketch, for the events were recent and I had carefully sorted out the facts during my journey to town, making rough notes, which I now consulted. To my rather lengthy recital he listened in his usual attentive manner, without any comment, excepting in regard to my manœuvre to retain possession of the exposed film.

"It's almost a pity you didn't refuse," said he. "They could hardly have enforced their demand, and my feeling is that it is more convenient as well as more dignified to avoid direct deception unless one is driven to it. But perhaps you considered that you were."

As a matter of fact I had at the time, but I had since come to Thorndyke's opinion. My little manœuvre was going to be a source of inconvenience presently.

"Well," said Thorndyke, when I had finished my recital, "I think we may take it that the police theory is, in the main, your own theory derived from Foxton."

"I think so, excepting that I learned from Foxton that Superintendent Platt has obtained the complete fingerprints of a right hand."

Thorndyke raised his eyebrows. "Fingerprints!" he exclaimed. "Why, the fellow must be a mere simpleton. But there," he added, "everybody—police, lawyers, judges, even Galton himself—seems to lose every vestige of common sense as soon as

the subject of fingerprints is raised. But it would be interesting to know how he got them and what they are like. We must try to find that out. However, to return to your case, since your theory and the police theory are probably the same, we may as well consider the value of your inferences.

"At present we are dealing with the case in the abstract. Our data are largely assumptions, and our inferences are largely derived from an application of the mathematical laws of probability. Thus we assume that a murder has been committed, whereas it may turn out to have been suicide. We assume the murder to have been committed by the person, who made the footprints, and we assume that that person has no little toes, whereas he may have retracted little toes which do not touch the ground and so leave no impression. Assuming the little toes to be absent, we account for their absence by considering known causes in the order of their probability. Excluding—quite properly, I think—Raynaud's disease, we arrive at frost-bite and ergotism.

"But two persons, both of whom are of a stature corresponding to the size of the footprints, may have had a motive—though a very inadequate one—for committing the crime, and both have been exposed to the conditions which tend to produce frost-bite, while one of them has, probably, been exposed to the conditions which tend to produce ergotism. The laws of probability point to both of these two men; and the chances in favour of the Swede being the murderer rather than the Canadian would be represented by the common factor—frost-bite—multiplied by the additional factor, ergotism. But this is purely speculative at present. There is no evidence that either man has ever been frost-bitten or has ever eaten spurred rye. Nevertheless, it is a perfectly sound method at this stage. It indicates a line of investigation. If it should transpire that either man has suffered from frost-bite or ergotism, a definite advance would have been made. But here is Polton with a couple of finished prints. How on earth did you manage it in the time, Polton?"

"Why, you see, sir, I just dried the film with spirit," replied Polton. "It saved a lot of time. I will let you have a pair of enlargements in about a quarter of an hour."

Handing us the two wet prints, each stuck on a glass plate, he retired to the laboratory, and Thorndyke and I proceeded to scrutinize the photographs with the aid of our pocket lenses. The promised enlargements were really hardly necessary excepting for the purpose of comparative measurements, for the image of the white footprint, fully two inches long, was so microscopically sharp that, with the assistance of the lens, the minutest detail could be clearly seen.

"There is certainly not a vestige of little toe," remarked Thorndyke, "and the plump appearance of the other toes supports your rejection of Raynaud's disease. Does the character of the footprint convey any other suggestion to you, Jervis?"

"It gives me the impression that the man had been accustomed to go bare-footed in early life and had only taken to boots comparatively recently. The position of the great toe suggests this, and the presence of a number of small scars on the toes and ball of the foot seems to confirm it. A person walking bare-foot would sustain innumerable small wounds from treading on small, sharp objects."

Thorndyke looked dissatisfied. "I agree with you," he said, "as to the suggestion offered by the undeformed state of the great toes; but those little pits do not convey to me the impression of scars produced as you suggest. Still, you may be right."

Here our conversation was interrupted by a knock on the outer oak. Thorndyke stepped out through the lobby and I heard him open the door. A moment or two later he re-entered, accompanied by a short, brown-faced gentleman whom I instantly recognized as Mr. Wardale.

"I must have come up by the same train as you," he remarked, as we shook hands, "and to a certain extent, I suspect, on the same errand. I thought I would like to put our arrangement on a business footing, as I am a stranger to both of you."

"What do you want us to do?" asked Thorndyke.

"I want you to watch the case, and, if necessary, to look into the facts independently."

"Can you give us any information that may help us?"

Mr. Wardale reflected. "I don't think I can," he said at length. "I have no facts that you have not, and any surmises of mine might be misleading. I had rather you kept an open mind. But perhaps we might go into the question of costs."

This, of course, was somewhat difficult, but Thorndyke contrived to indicate the probable liabilities involved, to Mr. Wardale's satisfaction.

"There is one other little matter," said Wardale, as he rose to depart. "I have got a suitcase here which Mrs. Beddingfield lent me to bring somethings up to town. It is one that Mr. Macauley left behind when he went away from the boarding-house. Mrs. Beddingfield suggested that I might leave it at his chambers when I had finished with it; but I don't know his address, excepting that it is somewhere in the Temple, and I don't want to meet the fellow if he should happen to have come up to town."

"Is it empty?" asked Thorndyke.

"Excepting for a suit of pyjamas and a pair of shocking old slippers." He opened the suitcase as he spoke and exhibited its contents with a grin.

"Characteristic of a negro, isn't it? Pink silk pyjamas and slippers about three sizes too small."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "I will get my man to find out the address and leave it there."

As Mr. Wardale went out, Polton entered with the enlarged photographs, which showed the footprints the natural size. Thorndyke handed them to me, and as I sat down to examine them he followed his assistant to the laboratory. He returned in a few minutes, and after a brief inspection of the photographs, remarked:

"They show us nothing more than we have seen, though they may be useful later. So your stock of facts is all we have to go on at present. Are you going home to-night?"

"Yes, I shall go back to Margate to-morrow."

"Then, as I have to call at Scotland Yard, we may as well walk to Charing Cross together."

As we walked down the Strand we gossiped on general topics, but before we separated at Charing Cross, Thorndyke reverted to the case.

"Let me know the date of the inquest," said he, "and try to find out what the poison was—if it was really a poison."

"The liquid that was left in the bottle seemed to be a watery solution of some kind," said I, "as I think I mentioned."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "Possibly a watery infusion of strophanthus."

"Why strophanthus?" I asked.

"Why not?" demanded Thorndyke. And with this and an inscrutable smile, he turned and walked down Whitehall.

Three days later I found myself at Margate—sitting beside Thorndyke in a room adjoining the Town Hall, in which the inquest on the death of Mrs. Toussaint was to be held. Already the coroner was in his chair, the jury were in their seats and the witnesses assembled in a group of chairs apart. These included Foxton, a stranger who sat by him—presumably the other medical witness—Mrs. Beddingfield, Mr. Wardale, the police superintendent and a well-dressed coloured man, whom I correctly assumed to be Mr. Macauley.

As I sat by my rather sphinx-like colleague my mind recurred for the hundredth time to his extraordinary powers of mental synthesis. That parting remark of his as to the possible nature of the poison had brought home to me in a flash the fact that he already had a definite theory of this crime, and that his theory was not mine nor that of the police. True, the poison might not be strophanthus, after all, but that would not alter the position. He had a theory of the crime, but yet he was in possession of no facts excepting those with which I had supplied him. Therefore those facts contained the material for a theory, whereas I had deduced from them nothing but the bald, ambiguous mathematical probabilities.

The first witness called was naturally Dr. Foxton, who described the circumstances already known to me. He further stated that he had been present at the autopsy, that he had found on the throat and limbs of the deceased bruises that suggested a struggle and violent restraint. The immediate cause of death was heart failure, but whether that failure was due to shock, terror, or the action of a poison he could not positively say.

The next witness was a Dr. Prescott, an expert pathologist and toxicologist. He had made the autopsy and agreed with Dr. Foxton as to the cause of death. He had examined the liquid contained in the bottle taken from the hand of the deceased and found it to be a watery infusion or decoction of strophanthus seeds. He had analysed the fluid contained in the stomach and found it to consist largely of the same infusion.

"Is infusion of strophanthus seeds used in medicine?" the coroner asked.

"No," was the reply. "The tincture is the form in which strophanthus is administered unless it is given in the form of strophanthine."

"Do you consider that the strophanthus caused or contributed to death?"

"It is difficult to say," replied Dr. Prescott. "Strophanthus is a heart poison, and there was a very large poisonous dose. But very little had been absorbed, and the appearances were not inconsistent with death from shock."

"Could death have been self-produced by the voluntary taking of the poison?" asked the coroner.

"I should say, decidedly not. Dr. Foxton's evidence shows that the bottle was almost certainly placed in the hands of the deceased after death, and this is in complete agreement with the enormous dose and small absorption."

"Would you say that appearances point to suicidal or homicidal poisoning?"

"I should say that they point to homicidal poisoning, but that death was probably due mainly to shock."

This concluded the expert's evidence. It was followed by that of Mrs. Beddingfield, which brought out nothing new to me but the fact that a trunk had been broken open and a small attaché-case belonging to the deceased abstracted and taken away.

"Do you know what the deceased kept in that case?" the coroner asked.

"I have seen her put her husband's letters into it. She had quite a number of them. I don't know what else she kept in it except, of course, her cheque-book."

"Had she any considerable balance at the bank?"

"I believe she had. Her husband used to send most of his pay home and she used to pay it in and leave it with the bank."

She might have two or three hundred pounds to her credit."

As Mrs. Beddingfield concluded Mr. Wardale was called, and he was followed by Mr. Macauley. The evidence of both was quite brief and concerned entirely with the disturbance made by Bergson, whose absence from the court I had already noted.

The last witness was the police superintendent, and he, as I had expected, was decidedly reticent. He did refer to the footprints, but, like Foxton—who presumably had his instructions—he abstained from describing their peculiarities. Nor did he say anything about fingerprints. As to the identity of the criminal, that had to be further inquired into. Suspicion had at first fastened upon Bergson, but it had since transpired that the Swede sailed from Ramsgate on an ice-ship two days before the occurrence of the tragedy. Then suspicion had pointed to the husband, who was known to have landed at Liverpool four days before the death of his wife and who had mysteriously disappeared. But he (the superintendent) had only that morning received a telegram from the Liverpool police informing him that the body of Toussaint had been found floating in the Mersey, and that it bore a number of wounds of an apparently homicidal character. Apparently he had been murdered and his corpse thrown into the river.

"This is very terrible," said the coroner. "Does this second murder throw any light on the case which we are investigating?"

"I think it does," replied the officer, without any great conviction, however; "but it is not advisable to go into details."

"Quite so," agreed the coroner. "Most inexpedient. But are we to understand that you have a clue to the perpetrator of this crime—assuming a crime to have been committed?"

"Yes," replied Platt. "We have several important clues."

"And do they point to any particular individual?"

The superintendent hesitated. "Well..." he began with some embarrassment, but the coroner interrupted him:

"Perhaps the question is indiscreet. We mustn't hamper the police, gentlemen, and the point is not really material to our inquiry. You would rather we waived that question, Superintendent?"

"If you please, sir," was the emphatic reply.

"Have any cheques from the deceased woman's cheque book been presented at the bank?"

"Not since her death. I inquired at the bank only this morning."

This concluded the evidence, and after a brief but capable summing-up by the coroner, the jury returned a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person unknown".

As the proceedings terminated, Thorndyke rose and turned round, and then to my surprise I perceived Superintendent Miller, of the Criminal Investigation Department, who had come in unperceived by me and was sitting immediately behind us.

"I have followed your instructions, sir," said he, addressing Thorndyke, "but before we take any definite action I should like to have a few words with you."

He led the way to an adjoining room and, as we entered we were followed by Superintendent Platt and Dr. Foxton.

"Now, Doctor," said Miller, carefully closing the door, "I have carried out your suggestions. Mr. Macauley is being detained, but before we commit ourselves to an arrest we must have something to go upon. I shall want you to make out a *prima facie* case."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, laying upon the table the small green suitcase that was his almost invariable companion.

"I've seen that *prima facie* case before," Miller remarked with a grin, as Thorndyke unlocked it and drew out a large envelope. "Now, what have you got there?"

As Thorndyke extracted from the envelope Polton's enlargements of my small photographs, Platt's eyes appeared to bulge, while Foxton gave me a quick glance of reproach.

"These," said Thorndyke "are the full-sized photographs of the footprints of the suspected murderer. Superintendent Platt can probably verify them."

Rather reluctantly Platt produced from his pocket a pair of whole-plate photographs, which he laid beside the enlargements.

"Yes," said Miller, after comparing them, "they are the same footprints. But you say, Doctor, that they are Macauley's footprints. Now, what evidence have you?"

Thorndyke again had recourse to the green case, from which he produced two copper plates mounted on wood and coated with printing ink.

"I propose," said he, lifting the plates out of their protecting frame, "that we take prints of Macauley's feet and compare them with the photographs."

"Yes," said Platt. "And then there are the fingerprints that we've got. We can test those, too."

"You don't want fingerprints if you've got a set of toeprints," objected Miller.

"With regard to those fingerprints," said Thorndyke. "May I ask if they were obtained from the bottle?"

"They were," Platt admitted.

"And were there any other fingerprints?"

"No," replied Platt. "These were the only ones."

As he spoke he laid on the table a photograph showing the prints of the thumb and fingers of a right hand.

Thorndyke glanced at the photograph and, turning to Miller, said:

"I suggest that those are Dr. Foxton's fingerprints."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Platt, and then suddenly fell silent.

"We can soon see," said Thorndyke, producing from the case a pad of white paper. "If Dr. Foxton will lay the finger-tips of his right hand first on this inked plate and then on the paper, we can compare the prints with the photograph."

Foxton placed his fingers on the blackened plate and then pressed them on the paper pad, leaving on the latter four beautifully clear, black fingerprints. These Superintendent Platt scrutinized eagerly, and as his glance travelled from the prints to the photographs he broke into a sheepish grin.

"Sold again!" he muttered. "They are the same prints."

"Well," said Miller, in a tone of disgust, "you must have been a mug not to have thought of that when you knew that Dr. Foxton had handled the bottle."

"The fact, however, is important," said Thorndyke. "The absence of any fingerprints but Dr. Foxton's not only suggests that the murderer took the precaution to wear gloves, but especially it proves that the bottle was not handled by the deceased during life. A suicide's hands will usually be pretty moist and would leave conspicuous, if not very clear, impressions."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "that is quite true. But with regard to these footprints. We can't compel this man to let us examine his feet without arresting him. Don't think, Dr. Thorndyke, that I suspect you of guessing. I've known you too long for that. You've got your facts all right, I don't doubt, but you must let us have enough to justify our arrest."

Thorndyke's answer was to plunge once more into the inexhaustible green case, from which he now produced two objects wrapped in tissue-paper. The paper being removed, there was revealed what looked like a model of an excessively shabby pair of brown shoes.

"These," said Thorndyke, exhibiting the "models" to Superintendent Miller—who viewed them with an undisguised grin—"are plaster casts of the interiors of a pair of slippers—very old and much too tight—belonging to Mr. Macauley. His name was written inside them. The casts have been waxed and painted with raw umber, which has been lightly rubbed off, thus accentuating the prominences and depressions. You will notice that the impressions of the toes on the soles and of the "knuckles" on the uppers appear as prominences; in fact we have in these casts a sketchy reproduction of the actual feet.

"Now, first as to dimensions. Dr. Jervis's measurements of the footprints give us ten inches and three-quarters as, the extreme length and four inches and five-eighths as the extreme width at the heads of the metatarsus. On these casts, as you see, the extreme length is ten inches and five-eighths—the loss of one-eighth being accounted for by the curve of the sole—and the extreme width is four inches and a quarter—three-eighths being accounted for by the lateral compression of a tight slipper. The agreement of the dimensions is remarkable, considering the unusual size. And now as to the peculiarities of the feet.

"You notice that each toe has made a perfectly distinct impression on the sole, excepting the little toe; of which there is no trace in either cast. And, turning to the uppers, you notice that the knuckles of the toes appear quite distinct and prominent—again excepting the little toes, which have made no impression at all. Thus it is not a case of retracted little toes, for they would appear as an extra prominence. Then, looking at the feet as a whole, it is evident that the little toes are absent; there is a distinct hollow, where there should be a prominence."

"M'yes," said Miller dubiously, "it's all very neat. But isn't it just a bit speculative?"

"Oh, come, Miller," protested Thorndyke; "just consider the facts. Here is a suspected murderer known to have feet of an unusual size and presenting a very rare deformity; and they are the feet of a man who had actually lived in the same house as the murdered woman and who, at the date of the crime, was living only two doors away. What more would you have?"

"Well, there is the question of motive," objected Miller.

"That hardly belongs to a *prima facie* case," said Thorndyke. "But even if it did, is there not ample matter for suspicion? Remember who the murdered woman was, what her husband was, and who this Sierra Leone gentleman is."

"Yes, yes; that's true," said Miller somewhat hastily, either perceiving the drift of Thorndyke's argument (which I did not), or being unwilling to admit that he was still in the dark. "Yes, we'll have the fellow in and get his actual footprints."

He went to the door and, putting his head out, made some sign, which was almost immediately followed by a trampling of feet, and Macauley entered the room, followed by two large plain-clothes policemen. The negro was evidently alarmed,

for he looked about him with the wild expression of a hunted animal. But his manner was aggressive and truculent.

"Why am I being interfered with in this impertinent manner?" he demanded in the deep buzzing voice characteristic of the male negro.

"We want to have a look at your feet, Mr. Macauley," said Miller. "Will you kindly take off your shoes and socks?"

"No," roared Macauley. "I'll see you damned first!"

"Then," said Miller, "I arrest you on a charge of having murdered—"

The rest of the sentence was drowned in a sudden uproar. The tall, powerful negro, bellowing like an angry bull, had whipped out a large, strangely-shaped knife and charged furiously at the Superintendent. But the two plain-clothes men had been watching him from behind and now sprang upon him, each seizing an arm. Two sharp, metallic clicks in quick succession, a thunderous crash and an ear-splitting yell, and the formidable barbarian lay prostrate on the floor with one massive constable sitting astride his chest and the other seated on his knees.

"Now's your chance, Doctor," said Miller. "I'll get his shoes and socks off."

As Thorndyke re-inked his plates, Miller and the local superintendent expertly removed the smart patent shoes and the green silk socks from the feet of the writhing, bellowing negro. Then Thorndyke rapidly and skilfully applied the inked plates to the soles of the feet—which I steadied for the purpose—and followed up with a dexterous pressure of the paper pad, first to one foot and then—having torn off the printed sheet—to the other. In spite of the difficulties occasioned by Macauley's struggles, each sheet presented a perfectly clear and sharp print of the sole of the foot, even the ridge-patterns of the toes and ball of the foot being quite distinct. Thorndyke laid each of the new prints on the table beside the corresponding large photograph, and invited the two superintendents to compare them.

"Yes," said Miller—and Superintendent Platt nodded his acquiescence—"there can't be a shadow of a doubt. The ink-prints and the photographs are identical, to every line and skin-marking. You've made out your case, Doctor, as you always do."

"So you see," said Thorndyke, as we smoked our evening pipes on the old stone pier, "your method was a perfectly sound one, only you didn't apply it properly. Like too many mathematicians, you started on your calculations before you had secured your data. If you had applied the simple laws of probability to the real data, they would have pointed straight to Macauley."

"How do you suppose he lost his little toes?" I asked.

"I don't suppose at all. Obviously it was a clear case of double ainhum."

"Ainhum!" I exclaimed with a sudden flash of recollection.

"Yes; that was what you overlooked, you compared the probabilities of three diseases either of which only very rarely causes the loss of even one little toe and infinitely rarely causes the loss of both, and none of which conditions is confined to any definite class of persons; and you ignored ainhum, a disease which attacks almost exclusively the little toe, causing it to drop off, and quite commonly destroys both little toes—a disease, moreover, which is confined to the black-skinned races. In European practice ainhum is unknown, but in Africa, and to a less extent in India, it is quite common.

"If you were to assemble all the men in the world who have lost both little toes more than nine-tenths of them would be suffering from ainhum; so that, by the laws of probability, your footprints were, by nine chances to one, those of a man who had suffered from ainhum, and therefore a black-skinned man. But as soon as you had established a black man as the probable criminal, you opened up a new field of corroborative evidence. There was a black man on the spot. That man was a native of Sierra Leone and almost certainly a man of importance there. But the victim's husband had deadly enemies in the native secret societies of Sierra Leone. The letters of the husband to the wife probably contained matter incriminating certain natives of Sierra Leone. The evidence became cumulative, you see. Taken as a whole, it pointed plainly to Macauley, apart from the new fact of the murder of Toussaint in Liverpool, a city with a considerable floating population of West Africans."

"And I gather from your reference to the African poison, strophanthus, that you fixed on Macauley at once when I gave you my sketch of the case?"

"Yes; especially when I saw your photographs of the footprints with the absent little toes and those characteristic chigger-scars on the toes that remained. But it was sheer luck that enabled me to fit the keystone into its place and turn mere probability into virtual certainty. I could have embraced the magician Wardale when he brought us the magic slippers. Still, it isn't an absolute certainty, even now, though I expect it will be by to-morrow."

And Thorndyke was right. That very evening the police entered Macauley's chambers in Tanfield Court, where they discovered the dead woman's attaché-case. It still contained Toussaint's letters to his wife, and one of those letters mentioned by name, as members of a dangerous secret society, several prominent Sierra Leone men, including the accused, David Macauley.

---

## II. — THE BLUE SCARAB

Medico-legal practice is largely concerned with crimes against the person, the details of which are often sordid, gruesome and unpleasant. Hence the curious and romantic case of the Blue Scarab (though really outside our speciality) came as somewhat of a relief. But to me it is of interest principally as illustrating two of the remarkable gifts which made my friend, Thorndyke, unique as an investigator: his uncanny power of picking out the one essential fact at a glance, and his capacity to produce, when required, inexhaustible stores of unexpected knowledge of the most out-of-the-way subjects.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. James Blowgrave arrived, by appointment, at our chambers, accompanied by his daughter, a rather strikingly pretty girl of about twenty-two; and when we had mutually introduced ourselves, the consultation began without preamble.

"I didn't give any details in my letter to you," said Mr. Blowgrave. "I thought it better not to, for fear you might decline the case. It is really a matter of a robbery, but not quite an ordinary robbery. There are some unusual and rather mysterious features in the case. And as the police hold out very little hope, I have come to ask if you will give me your opinion on the case and perhaps look into it for me. But first I had better tell you how the affair happened.

"The robbery occurred just a fortnight ago, about half-past nine o'clock in the evening. I was sitting in my study with my daughter, looking over some things that I had taken from a small deed-box, when a servant rushed in to tell us that one of the outbuildings was on fire. Now, my study opens by a French window on the garden at the back, and, as the outbuilding was in a meadow at the side of the garden, I went out that way, leaving the French window open; but before going I hastily put the things back in the deed-box and locked it.

"The building—which I used partly as a lumber store and partly as a workshop—was well alight and the whole household was already on the spot, the boy working the pump and the two maids carrying the buckets and throwing water on the fire. My daughter and I joined the party and helped to carry the buckets and take out what goods we could reach from the burning building. But it was nearly half an hour before we got the fire completely extinguished, and then my daughter and I went to our rooms to wash and tidy ourselves up. We returned to the study together, and when I had shut the French window my daughter proposed that we should resume our interrupted occupation. Thereupon I took out of my pocket the key of the deed-box and turned to the cabinet on which the box always stood.

"But there was no deed-box there.

"For a moment I thought I must have moved it, and cast my eyes round the room in search of it. But it was nowhere to be seen, and a moment's reflection reminded me that I had left it in its usual place. The only possible conclusion was that during our absence at the fire, somebody must have come in by the window and taken it. And it looked as if that somebody had deliberately set fire to the outbuilding for the express purpose of luring us all out of the house."

"That is what the appearances suggest," Thorndyke agreed. "Is the study window furnished with a blind, or curtains?"

"Curtains," replied Mr. Blowgrave. "But they were not drawn. Anyone in the garden could have seen into the room; and the garden is easily accessible to an active person who could climb over a low wall."

"So far, then," said Thorndyke, "the robbery might be the work of a casual prowler who had got into the garden and watched you through the window, and assuming that the things you had taken from the box were of value, seized an easy opportunity to make off with them. Were the things of any considerable value?"

"To a thief they were of no value at all. There were a number of share certificates, a lease, one or two agreements, some family photographs and a small box containing an old letter and a scarab. Nothing worth stealing, you see, for the certificates were made out in my name and were therefore unnegotiable."

"And the scarab?"

"That may have been lapis lazuli, but more probably it was a blue glass imitation. In any case it was of no considerable value. It was about an inch and a half long. But before you come to any conclusion, I had better finish the story. The robbery was on Tuesday, the 7th of June. I gave information to the police, with a description of the missing property, but nothing happened until Wednesday, the 15th, when I received a registered parcel bearing the Southampton postmark. On opening it I found, to my astonishment, the entire contents of the deed-box, with the exception of the scarab, and this rather mysterious communication."

He took from his pocket and handed to Thorndyke an ordinary envelope addressed in typewritten characters, and sealed with a large, elliptical seal, the face of which was covered with minute hieroglyphics.

"This," said Thorndyke, "I take to be an impression of the scarab; and an excellent impression it is."

"Yes," replied Mr. Blowgrave, "I have no doubt that it is the scarab. It is about the same size."

Thorndyke looked quickly at our client with an expression of surprise. "But," he asked, "don't you recognise the hieroglyphics on it?"

Mr. Blowgrave smiled deprecatingly. "The fact is," said he, "I don't know anything about hieroglyphics, but I should say, as far as I can judge, these look the same. What do you think, Nellie?"

Miss Blowgrave looked at the seal vaguely and replied, "I am in the same position. Hieroglyphics are to me just funny things that don't mean anything. But these look the same to me as those on our scarab, though I expect any other hieroglyphics would, for that matter."

Thorndyke made no comment on this statement, but examined the seal attentively through his lens. Then he drew out the contents of the envelope, consisting of two letters, one typewritten and the other in a faded brown handwriting. The former he read through and then inspected the paper closely, holding it up to the light to observe the watermark.

"The paper appears to be of Belgian manufacture," he remarked, passing it to me. I confirmed this observation and then read the letter, which was headed "Southampton" and ran thus:

DEAR OLD PAL,  
I am sending you back some trifles removed in error. The ancient document is enclosed with this, but the curio is at present in the custody of my respected uncle. Hope its temporary loss will not inconvenience you, and that I may be able to return it to you later. Meanwhile, believe me,  
Your ever affectionate,  
RUDOLPHO.

"Who is Rudolpho?" I asked.

"The Lord knows," replied Mr. Blowgrave. "A pseudonym of our absent friend, I presume. He seems to be a facetious sort of person."

"He does," agreed Thorndyke. "This letter and the seal appear to be what the schoolboys would call a leg-pull. But still, this is all quite normal. He has returned you the worthless things and has kept the one thing that has any sort of negotiable value. Are you quite clear that the scarab is not more valuable than you have assumed?"

"Well," said Mr. Blowgrave, "I have had an expert's opinion on it. I showed it to M. Fouquet, the Egyptologist, when he was over here from Brussels a few months ago, and his opinion was that it was a worthless imitation. Not only was it not a genuine scarab, but the inscription was a sham, too; just a collection of hieroglyphic characters jumbled together without sense or meaning."

"Then," said Thorndyke, taking another look at the seal through his lens, "it would seem that Rudolpho, or Rudolpho's uncle, has got a bad bargain. Which doesn't throw much light on the affair."

At this point Miss Blowgrave intervened. "I think, father," said she, "you have not given Dr. Thorndyke quite all the facts about the scarab. He ought to be told about its connection with Uncle Reuben."

As the girl spoke Thorndyke looked at her with curious expression of suddenly awakened interest. Later I understood the meaning of that look, but at the time there seemed to me nothing particularly arresting in her words.

"It is just a family tradition," Mr. Blowgrave said deprecatingly. "probably it is all nonsense."

"Well, let us have it, at any rate," said Thorndyke. "We may get some light from it."

Thus urged, Mr. Blowgrave hemmed a little shyly and began:

"The story concerns my great-grandfather Silas Blowgrave, and his doings during the war with France. It seems that he commanded a privateer of which he and his brother Reuben were the joint owners, and that in the course of their last cruise they acquired a very remarkable and valuable collection of jewels. Goodness knows how they got them; not very honestly, I suspect, for they appear to have been a pair of precious rascals. Something has been said about the loot from a South American church or cathedral, but there is really nothing known about the affair. There are no documents. It is mere oral tradition and very vague and sketchy. The story goes that when they had sold off the ship, they came down to live at Shawstead in Hertfordshire, Silas occupying the manor house—in which I live at present—and Reuben a farm adjoining. The bulk of the loot they shared out at the end of the cruise, but the jewels were kept apart to be dealt with later—perhaps when the circumstances under which they had been acquired had been forgotten. However, both men were inveterate gamblers and it seems—according to the testimony of a servant of Reuben's who overheard them—that on a certain night when they had been playing heavily, they decided to finish up by playing for the whole collection of jewels as a single stake. Silas, who had the jewels in his custody, was seen to go to the manor house and return to Reuben's house carrying a small, iron chest.

"Apparently they played late into the night, after everyone else but the servant had gone to bed, and the luck was with Reuben, though it seems probable that he gave luck some assistance. At any rate, when the play was finished and the chest handed over, Silas roundly accused him of cheating, and we may assume that a pretty serious quarrel took place. Exactly what happened is not clear, for when the quarrel began Reuben dismissed the servant, who retired to her bedroom in a distant part of the house. But in the morning it was discovered that Reuben and the chest of jewels had both disappeared, and there were distinct traces of blood in the room in which the two men had been playing. Silas professed to know nothing about the disappearance; but a strong—and probably just—suspicion arose that he had murdered his brother and made away with the jewels. The result was that Silas also disappeared, and for a long time his whereabouts was not known even by his wife.

"Later it transpired that he had taken up his abode under an assumed name, in Egypt, and that he had developed an enthusiastic interest in the then new science of Egyptology—the Rosetta Stone had been deciphered only a few years previously. After a time he resumed communication with his wife, but never made any statement as to the mystery of his brother's disappearance. A few months before his death he visited his home in disguise and he then handed to his wife a little sealed packet which was to be delivered to his only son, William, on his attaining the age of twenty-one. That packet



contained the scarab and the letter which you have taken from the envelope.”

“Am I to read it?” asked Thorndyke.

“Certainly, if you think it worth while,” was the reply. Thorndyke opened the yellow sheet of paper and, glancing through the brown and faded writing, read aloud:

*Cairo, 4 March, 1833.*

*MY DEAR SON,*

*I am sending you, as my last gift, a valuable scarab and a few words of counsel on which I would bid you meditate. Believe me, there is much wisdom in the lore of Old Egypt. Make it your own. Treasure the scarab as a precious inheritance. Handle it often but show it to none. Give your Uncle Reuben Christian burial. It is your duty, and you will have your reward. He robbed your father, but he shall make restitution.*

*Farewell!*

*Your affectionate father,*

*SILAS BLOWGRAVE.*

As Thorndyke laid down the letter he looked inquiringly at our client.

“Well,” he said, “here are some plain instructions. How have they been carried out?”

“They haven’t been carried out at all,” replied Mr. Blowgrave. “As to his son William, my grandfather, he was not disposed to meddle in the matter. This seemed to be a frank admission that Silas killed his brother and concealed the body, and William didn’t choose to reopen the scandal. Besides, the instructions are not so very plain. It is all very well to say, ‘Give your Uncle Reuben Christian burial,’ but where the deuce is Uncle Reuben?”

“It is plainly hinted,” said Thorndyke, “that whoever gives the body Christian burial will stand to benefit, and the word ‘restitution’ seems to suggest a clue to the whereabouts of the jewels. Has no one thought it worth while to find out where the body is deposited?”

“But how could they?” demanded Blowgrave. “He doesn’t give the faintest clue. He talks as if his son knew where the body was. And then, you know, even supposing Silas did not take the jewels with him, there was the question, whose property were they? To begin with, they were pretty certainly stolen property, though no one knows where they came from. Then Reuben apparently got them from Silas by fraud, and Silas got them back by robbery and murder. If William had discovered them he would have had to give them up to Reuben’s sons, and yet they weren’t strictly Reuben’s property. No one had an undeniable claim to them, even if they could have found them.”

“But that is not the case now,” said Miss Blowgrave.

“No,” said Mr. Blowgrave, in answer to Thorndyke’s look of inquiry. “The position is quite clear now. Reuben’s grandson, my cousin Arthur, has died recently, and as he had no children, he has dispersed his property. The old farm-house and the bulk of his estate he has left to a nephew, but he made a small bequest to my daughter and named her as the residuary legatee. So that what ever rights Reuben had to the jewels are now vested in her, and on my death she will be Silas’s heir, too. As a matter of fact,” Mr. Blowgrave continued, “we were discussing this very question on the night of the robbery. I may as well tell you that my girl will be left pretty poorly off when I go, for there is a heavy mortgage on our property and mighty little capital. Uncle Reuben’s jewels would have made the old home secure for her if we could have laid our hands on them. However, I mustn’t take up your time with our domestic affairs.”

“Your domestic affairs are not entirely irrelevant,” said Thorndyke. “But what is it that you want me to do in the matter?”

“Well,” said Blowgrave, “my house has been robbed and my premises set fire to. The police can apparently do nothing. They say there is no clue at all unless the robbery was committed by somebody in the house, which is absurd, seeing that the servants were all engaged in putting out the fire. But I want the robber traced punished, and I want to get the scarab back. It may be intrinsically valueless, as M. Fouquet said, but Silas’s testamentary letter seems to indicate that it had some value. At any rate, it is an heirloom, and I am loath to lose it. It seems a presumptuous thing to ask you to investigate a trumpery robbery, but I should take it as a great kindness if you would look into the matter.”

“Cases of robbery pure and simple,” replied Thorndyke, “are rather alien to my ordinary practice, but in this one there are certain curious features that seem to make an investigation worth while. Yes, Mr. Blowgrave, I will look into the case, and I have some hope that we may be able to lay our hands on the robber, in spite of the apparent absence of clues. I will ask you to leave both these letters for me to examine more minutely, and I shall probably want to make an inspection of the premises—perhaps to-morrow.”

“Whenever you like,” said Blowgrave. “I am delighted that you are willing to undertake the inquiry. I have heard so much about you from my friend Stalker, of the Griffin Life Assurance Company, for whom you have acted on several occasions.”

“Before you go,” said Thorndyke, “there is one point that we must clear up. Who is there besides yourselves that knows of the existence of the scarab and this letter and the history attaching to them?”

"I really can't say," replied Blowgrave. "No one has seen them but my cousin Arthur. I once showed them to him, and he may have talked about them in the family. I didn't treat the matter as a secret."

When our visitors had gone we discussed the bearings of the case.

"It is quite a romantic story," said I, "and the robbery has its points of interest, but I am rather inclined to agree with the police—there is mighty little to go on."

"There would have been less," said Thorndyke, "if our sporting friend hadn't been so pleased with himself. That typewritten letter was a piece of gratuitous impudence. Our gentleman overrated his security and crowed too loud."

"I don't see that there is much to be gleaned from the letter, all the same," said I.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Jervis," he exclaimed, "because I was proposing to hand the letter over to you to examine and report on."

"I was only referring to the superficial appearances," I said hastily. "No doubt a detailed examination will bring something more distinctive into view."

"I have no doubt it will," he said, "and as there are reasons for pushing on the investigation as quickly as possible, I suggest that you get to work at once. I will occupy myself with the old letter and the envelope."

On this I began my examination without delay, and as a preliminary I proceeded to take a facsimile photograph of the letter by putting it in a large printing frame with a sensitive plate and a plate of clear glass. The resulting negative showed not only the typewritten lettering, but also the watermark and wire lines of the paper, and a faint grease spot. Next I turned my attention to the lettering itself, and here I soon began to accumulate quite a number of identifiable peculiarities. The machine was apparently a Corona, fitted with the small "Elite" type, and the alignment was markedly defective. The "lower case"—or small—"a" was well below the line, although the capital "A" appeared to be correctly placed; the "u" was slightly above the line, and the small "m" was partly clogged with dirt.

Up to this point I had been careful to manipulate the letter with forceps (although it had been handled by at least three persons, to my knowledge), and I now proceeded to examine it for finger-prints. As I could detect none by mere inspection, I dusted the back of the paper with finely powdered fuchsin, and distributed the powder by tapping the paper lightly. This brought into view quite a number of finger-prints, especially round the edges of the letter, and though most of them were very faint and shadowy, it was possible to make out the ridge pattern well enough for our purpose. Having blown off the excess of powder, I took the letter to the room where the large copying camera was set up, to photograph it before developing the finger-prints on the front. But here I found our laboratory assistant, Polton, in possession, with the sealed envelope fixed to the copying easel. "I shan't be a minute, sir," said he. "The doctor wants an enlarged photograph of this seal. I've got the plate in."

I waited while he made his exposure and then proceeded to take the photograph of the letter, or rather of the finger-prints on the back of it. When I had developed the negative I powdered the front of the letter and brought out several more finger-prints—thumbs this time. They were a little difficult to see where they were imposed on the lettering, but, as the latter was bright blue and the fuchsin powder was red, this confusion disappeared in the photograph, in which the lettering was almost invisible while the finger-prints were more distinct than they had appeared to the eye. This completed my examination, and when I had verified the make of typewriter by reference to our album of specimens of typewriting, I left the negatives for Polton to dry and print and went down to the sitting-room to draw up my little report. I had just finished this and was speculating on what had become of Thorndyke, when I heard his quick step on the stair and a few moments later he entered with a roll of paper in his hand. This he unrolled on the table, fixing it open with one or two lead paper-weights, and I came round to inspect it, when I found it to be a sheet of the Ordnance map on the scale of twenty-five inches to the mile.

"Here is the Blowgraves' place," said Thorndyke, "nearly in the middle of the sheet. This is his house—Shawstead Manor—and that will probably be the out-building that was on fire. I take it that the house marked Dingle Farm is the one that Uncle Reuben occupied."

"Probably," I agreed. "But I don't see why you wanted this map if you are going down to the place itself to-morrow."

"The advantage of a map," said Thorndyke, "is that you can see all over it at once and get the lie of the land well into your mind; and you can measure all distances accurately and quickly with a scale and a pair of dividers. When we go down to-morrow, we shall know our way about as well as Blowgrave himself."

"And what use will that be?" I asked. "Where does the topography come into the case?"

"Well, Jervis," he replied, "there is the robber, for instance; he came from somewhere and he went somewhere. A study of the map may give us a hint as to his movements. But here comes Polton 'with the documents,' as poor Miss Flite would say. What have you got for us, Polton?"

"They aren't quite dry, sir," said Polton, laying four large bromide prints on the table. "There's the enlargement of the seal—ten by eight, mounted—and three unmounted prints of Dr. Jervis's."

Thorndyke looked at my photographs critically. "They're excellent, Jervis," said he. "The finger prints are perfectly legible, though faint. I only hope some of them are the right ones. That is my left thumb. I don't see yours. The small one is presumably Miss Blowgrave's. We must take her finger-prints to-morrow, and her father's, too. Then we shall know if we

have got any of the robber's." He ran his eye over my report and nodded approvingly. "There is plenty there to enable us to identify the typewriter if we can get hold of it, and the paper is very distinctive. What do you think of the seal?" he added, laying the enlarged photograph before me.

"It is magnificent," I replied, with a grin. "Perfectly monumental."

"What are you grinning at?" he demanded.

"I was thinking that you seem to be counting your chickens in pretty good time," said I. "You are making elaborate preparations to identify the scarab, but you are rather disregarding the classical advice of the prudent Mrs. Glasse."

"I have a presentiment that we shall get that scarab," said he. "At any rate we ought to be in a position to identify it instantly and certainly if we are able to get a sight of it."

"We are not likely to," said I. "Still, there is no harm in providing for the improbable."

This was evidently Thorndyke's view, and he certainly made ample provision for this most improbable contingency; for, having furnished himself with a drawing-board and a sheet of tracing-paper, he pinned the latter over the photograph on the board and proceeded, with a fine pen and hectograph ink, to make a careful and minute tracing of the intricate and bewildering hieroglyphic inscription on the seal. When he had finished it he transferred it to a clay duplicator and took off half-a-dozen copies, one of which he handed to me. I looked at it dubiously and remarked: "You have said that the medical jurist must make all knowledge his province. Has he got to be an Egyptologist, too?"

"He will be the better medical jurist if he is," was the reply, of which I made a mental note for my future guidance. But meanwhile Thorndyke's proceedings were, to me, perfectly incomprehensible. What was his object in making this minute tracing? The seal itself was sufficient for identification. I lingered, awhile hoping that some fresh development might throw a light on the mystery. But his next proceeding was like to have reduced me to stupefaction. I saw him go to the bookshelves and take down a book. As he laid it on the table I glanced at the title, and when I saw that it was Raper's Navigation Tables I stole softly out into the lobby, put on my hat and went for a walk.

When I returned the investigation was apparently concluded, for Thorndyke was seated in his easy chair, placidly reading *The Compleat Angler*. On the table lay a large circular protractor, a straight-edge, an architect's scale and a sheet of tracing-paper on which was a tracing in hectograph ink of Shawstead Manor.

"Why did you make this tracing?" I asked. "Why not take the map itself?"

"We don't want the whole of it," he replied, "and I dislike cutting up maps."

By taking an informal lunch in the train, we arrived at Shawstead Manor by half-past two. Our approach up the drive had evidently been observed, for Blowgrave and his daughter were waiting at the porch to receive us. The former came forward with outstretched hand, but a distinctly woebegone expression, and exclaimed:

"It is most kind of you to come down; but alas! you are too late."

"Too late for what?" demanded Thorndyke.

"I will show you," replied Blowgrave, and seizing my colleague by the arm, he strode off excitedly to a little wicket at the side of the house, and, passing through it, hurried along a narrow alley that skirted the garden wall and ended in a large meadow, at one end of which stood a dilapidated windmill. Across this meadow he bustled, dragging my colleague with him, until he reached a heap of freshly-turned earth, where he halted and pointed tragically to a spot where the turf had evidently been raised and untidily replaced.

"There!" he exclaimed, stooping to pull up the loose turfs and thereby exposing what was evidently a large hole, recently and hastily filled in. "That was done last night or early this morning, for I walked over this meadow only yesterday evening and there was no sign of disturbed ground then."

Thorndyke stood looking down at the hole with a faint smile. "And what do you infer from that?" he asked.

"Infer!" shrieked Blowgrave. "Why, I infer that whoever dug this hole was searching for Uncle Reuben and the lost jewels!"

"I am inclined to agree with you," Thorndyke said calmly. "He happened to search in the wrong place, but that is his affair."

"The wrong place!" Blowgrave and his daughter exclaimed in unison. "How do you know it is the wrong place?"

"Because," replied Thorndyke, "I believe I know the right place, and this is not it. But we can put the matter to the test, and we had better do so. Can you get a couple of men with picks and shovels? Or shall we handle the tools ourselves?"

"I think that would be better," said Blowgrave, who was quivering with excitement. "We don't want to take anyone into our confidence if we can help it."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "Then I suggest that you fetch the tools while I locate the spot."

Blowgrave assented eagerly and went off at a brisk trot, while the young lady remained with us and watched Thorndyke with intense curiosity.

"I mustn't interrupt you with questions," said she "but I can't imagine how you found out where Uncle Reuben was

buried."

"We will go into that later," he replied; "but first we have got to find Uncle Reuben." He laid his research case down on the ground, and opening it, took out three sheets of paper, each bearing a duplicate of his tracing of the map; and on each was marked a spot on this meadow from which a number of lines radiated like the spokes of a wheel.

"You see, Jervis," he said, exhibiting them to me, "the advantage of a map. I have been able to rule off these sets of bearings regardless of obstructions, such as those young trees, which have arisen since Silas's day, and mark the spot in its correct place. If the recent obstructions prevent us from taking the bearings, we can still find the spot by measurements with the land-chain or tape."

"Why have you got three plans?" I asked.

"Because there are three imaginable places. No. 1 is the most likely; No. 2 less likely, but possible; No. 3 is impossible. That is the one that our friend tried last night. No. 1 is among those young trees, and we will now see if we can pick up the bearings in spite of them."

We moved on to the clump of young trees, where Thorndyke took from the research-case a tall, folding camera-tripod and a large prismatic compass with an aluminium dial. With the latter he one or two trial bearings and then, setting up the tripod, fixed the compass on it. For some minutes Miss Blowgrave and I watched him as he shifted the tripod from spot to spot, peering through the sight-vane of the compass and glancing occasionally at the map. At length he turned to us and said: "We are in luck. None of these trees interferes with our bearings." He took from the research-case a surveyor's arrow, and sticking it in the ground under the tripod, added: "That is the spot. But we may have to dig a good way round it, for a compass is only a rough instrument."

At this moment Mr. Blowgrave staggered up, breathing hard, and flung down on the ground three picks, two shovels and a spade. "I won't hinder you, doctor, by asking for explanations," said he, "but I am utterly mystified. You must tell us what it all means when we have finished our work."

This Thorndyke promised to do, but meanwhile he took off his coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeves, seized the spade and began cutting out a large square of turf. As the soil was uncovered, Blowgrave and I attacked it with picks and Miss Blowgrave shovelled away the loose earth.

"Do you know how far down we have to go?" I asked.

"The body lies six feet below the surface," Thorndyke replied; and as he spoke he laid down his spade, and taking a telescope from the research-case, swept it round the margin of the meadow and finally pointed it at a farm house some six hundred yards distant, of which he made a somewhat prolonged inspection, after which he took the remaining pick and fell to work on the opposite corner of the exposed square of earth.

For nearly half-an-hour we worked on steadily, gradually eating our way downwards, plying pick and shovel alternately, while Miss Blowgrave cleared the loose earth away from the edges of the deepening pit. Then a halt was called and we came to the surface, wiping our faces.

"I think, Nellie," said Blowgrave, divesting himself of his waistcoat, "a jug of lemonade and four tumblers would be useful, unless our visitors would prefer beer."

We both gave our votes for lemonade, and Miss Nellie tripped away towards the house, while Thorndyke, taking up his telescope, once more inspected the farm house.

"You seem greatly interested in that house," I remarked.

"I am," he replied, handing me the telescope. "Just take a look at the window in the right-hand gable, but keep under the tree."

I pointed the telescope at the gable and there observed an open window at which a man was seated. He held a binocular glass to his eyes and the instrument appeared to be directed at us.

"We are being spied on, I fancy," said I, passing the telescope to Blowgrave, "but I suppose it doesn't matter. This is your land, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Blowgrave, "but still, we didn't want any spectators. That is Harold Bowker," he added steadying the telescope against a tree, "my cousin Arthur's nephew, whom I told you about as having inherited the farm-house. He seems mighty interested in us; but small things interest one in the country."

Here the appearance of Miss Nellie, advancing across the meadow with an inviting-looking basket, diverted our attention from our inquisitive watcher. Six thirsty eyes were riveted on that basket until it drew near and presently disgorged a great glass jug and four tumblers, when we each took off a long and delicious draught and then jumped down into the pit to resume our labours.

Another half-hour passed. We had excavated in some places to nearly the full depth and were just discussing the advisability of another short rest when Blowgrave, who was working in one corner, uttered a loud cry and stood up suddenly, holding something in his fingers. A glance at the object showed it to be a bone, brown and earth-stained, but evidently a bone. Evidently, too, a human bone, as Thorndyke decided when Blowgrave handed it to him triumphantly.

"We have been very fortunate," said he, "to get so near at the first trial. This is from the right great toe, so we may assume that the skeleton lies just outside this pit, but we had better excavate carefully in your corner and see exactly how the bones lie." This he proceeded to do himself, probing cautiously with the spade and clearing the earth away from the corner. Very soon the remaining bones of the right foot came into view and then the ends of the two leg-bones and a portion of the left foot.

"We can see now," said he, "how the skeleton lies, and all we have to do is to extend the excavation in that direction. But there is only room for one to work down here. I think you and Mr. Blowgrave had better dig down from the surface."

On this, I climbed out of the pit, followed reluctantly by Blowgrave, who still held the little brown bone in his hand and was in a state of wild excitement and exultation that somewhat scandalised his daughter.

"It seems rather ghoulish," she remarked, "to be gloating over poor Uncle Reuben's body in this way."

"I know," said Blowgrave, "it isn't reverent. But I didn't kill Uncle Reuben, you know, whereas—well it was a long time ago." With this rather inconsequent conclusion he took a draught of lemonade, seized his pick and fell to work with a will. I, too, indulged in a draught and passed a full tumbler down to Thorndyke. But before resuming my labours I picked up the telescope and once more inspected the farm-house. The window was still open, but the watcher had apparently become bored with the not very thrilling spectacle. At any rate he had disappeared.

From this time onward every few minutes brought some discovery. First, a pair of deeply rusted steel shoe buckles; then one or two buttons, and presently a fine gold watch with a fob-chain and a bunch of seals, looking uncannily new and fresh and seeming more fraught with tragedy than even the bones themselves. In his cautious digging, Thorndyke was careful not to disturb the skeleton; and looking down into the narrow trench that was growing from the corner of the pit, I could see both legs, with only the right foot missing, projecting from the miniature cliff. Meanwhile our of the trench was deepening rapidly, so that Thorndyke presently warned us to stop digging and bade us come down and shovel away the earth as he disengaged it.

At length the whole skeleton, excepting the head, was uncovered, though it lay undisturbed as it might have lain in its coffin. And now, as Thorndyke picked away the earth around the head, we could see that the skull was propped forward as if it rested on a high pillow. A little more careful probing with the pick-point served to explain this appearance. For as the earth fell away and disclosed the grinning skull, there came into view the edge and ironbound corners of a small chest.

It was an impressive spectacle; weird, solemn and rather dreadful. There for over a century the ill-fated gambler had lain, his mouldering head pillowed on the booty of unrecorded villainy, booty that had been won by fraud, retrieved by violence, and hidden at last by the final winner with the witness of his crime.

"Here is a fine text for a moralist who would preach on the vanity of riches," said Thorndyke.

We all stood silent for a while, gazing, not without awe, at the stark figure that lay guarding the ill-gotten treasure. Miss Blowgrave—who had been helped down when we descended—crept closer to her father and murmured that it was "rather awful;" while Blowgrave himself displayed a queer mixture of exultation and shuddering distaste.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a voice from above, and we all looked up with a start. A youngish man was standing on the brink of the pit, looking down on us with very evident disapproval.

"It seems that I have come just in the nick of time," observed the new-comer. "I shall have to take possession of that chest, you know, and of the remains, too, I suppose. That is my ancestor, Reuben Blowgrave."

"Well, Harold," said Blowgrave, "you can have Uncle Reuben if you want him. But the chest belongs to Nellie."

Here Mr. Harold Bowker—I recognised him now as the watcher from the window—dropped down into the pit and advanced with something of a swagger.

"I am Reuben's heir," said he, "through my Uncle Arthur, and I take possession of this property and the remains."

"Pardon me, Harold," said Blowgrave, "but Nellie is Arthur's residuary legatee, and this is the residue of the estate."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Bowker. "By the way, how did you find out where he was buried?"

"Oh, that was quite simple," replied Thorndyke with unexpected geniality. "I'll show you the plan." He climbed up to the surface and returned in a few moments with the three tracings and his letter-case. "This is how we located the spot." He handed the plan numbered 3 to Bowker, who took it from him and stood looking at it with a puzzled frown.

"But this isn't the place," he said at length.

"Isn't it?" queried Thorndyke. "No, of course; I've given you the wrong one. This is the plan." He handed Bowker the plan marked No. 1, and took the other from him, laying it down on a heap of earth. Then, as Bowker pored gloomily over No. 1, he took a knife and a pencil from his pocket, and with his back to our visitor; scraped the lead of the pencil, letting the black powder fall on the plan that he had just laid down. I watched him with some curiosity; and when I observed that the black scrapings fell on two spots near the edges of the paper, a sudden suspicion flashed into my mind, which was confirmed when I saw him tap the paper lightly with his pencil, gently blow away the powder, and quickly producing my photograph of the typewritten letter from his case, hold it for a moment beside the plan.

"This is all very well," said Bowker, looking up from the plan, "but how did you find out about these bearings?"

Thorndyke swiftly replaced the letter in his case, and turning round, replied, "I am afraid I can't give you any further information."

"Can't you, indeed!" Bowker exclaimed insolently. "Perhaps I shall compel you to. But, at any rate, I forbid any of you to lay hands on my property."

Thorndyke looked at him steadily and said in an ominously quiet tone: "Now, listen to me, Mr. Bowker. Let us have an end of this nonsense. You have played a risky game and you have lost. How much you have lost I can't say until I know whether Mr. Blowgrave intends to prosecute."

"To prosecute!" shouted Bowker. "What the deuce do you mean by prosecute?"

"I mean," said Thorndyke, "that on the 7th of June, after nine o'clock at night, you entered the dwelling-house of Mr. Blowgrave and stole and carried away certain of his goods and chattels. A part of them you have restored, but you are still in possession of some of the stolen property, to wit, a scarab and a deed-box."

As Thorndyke made this statement in his calm, level tones, Bowker's face blanched to a tallowy white, and he stood staring at my colleague, the very picture of astonishment and dismay. But he fired a last shot.

"This is sheer midsummer madness," he exclaimed huskily; "and you know it."

Thorndyke turned to our host. "It is for you to settle, Mr. Blowgrave," said he. "I hold conclusive evidence that Mr. Bowker stole your deed-box. If you decide to prosecute I shall produce that evidence in court and he will certainly be convicted."

Blowgrave and his daughter looked at the accused man with an embarrassment almost equal to his own.

"I am astounded," the former said at length; "but I don't want to be vindictive. Look here, Harold, hand over the scarab and we'll say no more about it."

"You can't do that," said Thorndyke. "The law doesn't allow you to compound a robbery. He can return the property if he pleases and you can do as you think best about prosecuting. But you can't make conditions."

There was silence for some seconds; then, without another word, the crestfallen adventurer turned, and scrambling up out of the pit, took a hasty departure.

It was nearly a couple of hours later that, after a leisurely wash and a hasty, nondescript meal, we carried the little chest from the dining-room to the study. Here, when he had closed the French window and drawn the curtains, Mr. Blowgrave produced a set of tools and we fell to work on the iron fastenings of the chest. It was no light task, though a century's rust had thinned the stout bands, but at length the lid yielded to the thrust of a long case-opener and rose with a protesting creak. The chest was lined with a double thickness of canvas, apparently part of a sail, and contained a number of small leathern bags, which, as we lifted them out, one by one, felt as if they were filled with pebbles. But when we untied the thongs of one and emptied its contents into a wooden bowl, Blowgrave heaved a sigh of ecstasy and Miss Nellie uttered a little scream of delight. They were all cut stones, and most of them of exceptional size; rubies, emeralds, sapphires and a few diamonds. As to their value, we could form but the vaguest guess; but Thorndyke, who was a fair judge of gem-stones, gave it as his opinion that they were fine specimens of their kind, though roughly cut, and that they had probably formed the enrichment of some shrine.

"The question is," said Blowgrave, gazing gloatingly on the bowl of sparkling gems, "what are we to do with them?"

"I suggest," said Thorndyke, "that Dr. Jervis stay here to-night to help you to guard them and that in the morning you take them up to London and deposit them, at your bank."

Blowgrave fell in eagerly with this suggestion, which I seconded. "But," said he, "that chest is a queer-looking package to be carrying abroad. Now, if we only had that confounded deed-box—"

"There's a deed-box on the cabinet behind you," said Thorndyke.

Blowgrave turned round sharply. "God bless us!" he exclaimed. "It has come back the way it went. Harold must have slipped in at the window while we were at tea. Well, I'm glad he has made restitution. When I look at that bowl and think what he must have narrowly missed, I don't feel inclined to be hard on him. I suppose the scarab is inside—not that it matters much now."

The scarab was inside in an envelope; and as Thorndyke turned it over in his hand and examined the hieroglyphics on it through his lens, Miss Blowgrave asked: "Is it of any value, Dr. Thorndyke? It can't have any connection with the secret of the hiding-place, because you found the jewels without it."

"By the way, doctor, I don't know whether it is permissible for me to ask, but how on earth did you find out where the jewels were hidden? To me it looks like black magic."

Thorndyke laughed in a quiet, inward fashion. "There is nothing magical about it," said he. "It was a perfectly simple, straightforward problem. But Miss Nellie is wrong. We had the scarab; that is to say we had the wax impression of it, which is the same thing. And the scarab was the key to the riddle. You see," he continued, "Silas's letter and the scarab formed together a sort of intelligence test."

"Did they?" said Blowgrave. "Then he drew a blank every time."

Thorndyke chuckled. "His descendants were certainly a little lacking in enterprise," he admitted. "Silas's instructions were perfectly plain and explicit. Whoever would find the treasure must first acquire some knowledge of Egyptian lore and must study the scarab attentively. It was the broadest of hints, but no one—excepting Harold Bowker, who must have heard about the scarab from his Uncle Arthur—seems to have paid any attention to it.

"Now it happens that I have just enough elementary knowledge of the hieroglyphic characters to enable me to spell them out when they are used alphabetically; and as soon as I saw the seal, I could see that these hieroglyphics formed English words. My attention was first attracted by the second group of signs, which spelled the word 'Reuben,' and then I saw that the first group spelled 'Uncle.' Of course, the instant I heard Miss Nellie speak of the connection between the scarab and Uncle Reuben, the murder was out. I saw at a glance that the scarab contained all the required information. Last night I made a careful tracing of the hieroglyphics and then rendered them into our own alphabet. This is the result."



Thorndyke's Tracing of the Impression of the Scarab



The Transliteration of the Hieroglyphics

He took from his letter-case and spread out on the table a duplicate of the tracing which I had seen him make, and of which he had given me a copy. But since I had last seen it, it had received an addition; under each group of signs the equivalents in modern Roman lettering had been written, and these made the following words:

"UNKL RUBN IS IN TH MILL FIELD SKS FT DOWN CHURCH SPIR NORTH TEN THIRTY EAST DINGL SOUTH GABL NORTH ATY FORTY FIF WEST GOD SAF KING JORJ."

Our two friends gazed at Thorndyke's transliteration in blank astonishment. At length Blowgrave remarked: "But this translation must have demanded a very profound knowledge of the Egyptian writing."

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "Any intelligent person could master the Egyptian alphabet in an hour. The language, of course, is quite another matter. The spelling of this is a little crude, but it is quite intelligible and does Silas great credit, considering how little was known in his time."

"How do you suppose M. Fouquet came to overlook this?" Blowgrave asked.

"Naturally enough," was the reply. "He was looking for an Egyptian inscription. But this is not an Egyptian inscription. Does he speak English?"

"Very little. Practically not at all."

"Then, as the words are English words and imperfectly spelt, the hieroglyphics must have appeared to him mere nonsense. And he was right as to the scarab being an imitation."

"There is another point," said Blowgrave. "How was it that Harold made that extraordinary mistake about the place? The directions are clear enough. All you had to do was to go out there with a compass and take the bearings just as they were given."

"But," said Thorndyke, "that is exactly what he did, and hence the mistake. He was apparently unaware of the phenomenon known as the Secular Variation of the Compass. As you know, the compass does not—usually—point to true

north, but to the Magnetic North; and the Magnetic North is continually changing its position. When Reuben was buried—about 1810—it was twenty-four degrees, twenty-six minutes west of true north; at the present time it is fourteen degrees, forty-eight minutes west of true north. So Harold's bearings would be no less than ten degrees out, which of course, gave him a totally wrong position. But Silas was a ship-master, a navigator, and of course knew all about the vagaries of the compass; and, as his directions were intended for use at some date unknown to him, I assumed that the bearings that he gave were true bearings—that when he said 'north' he meant true north, which is always the same; and this turned out to be the case. But I also prepared a plan with magnetic bearings corrected up to date. Here are the three plans: No. 1—the one we used—showing true bearings; No. 2, showing corrected magnetic bearings which might have given us the correct spot; and No. 3, with uncorrected magnetic bearings, giving us the spot where Harold dug, and which could not possibly have been the right spot."

On the following morning I escorted the deed-box, filled with the booty and tied up and sealed with the scarab, to Mr. Blowgrave's bank. And that ended our connection with the case; excepting that, a month or two later, we attended by request the unveiling in Shawstead churchyard of a fine monument to Reuben Blowgrave. This took the slightly inappropriate form of an obelisk, on which were cut the name and approximate dates, with the added inscription: "Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall return after many days;" concerning which Thorndyke remarked dryly that he supposed the exhortation applied equally even if the bread happened to belong to someone else.

---

### III. — THE NEW JERSEY SPHINX

"A rather curious neighbourhood this, Jervis," my friend Thorndyke remarked as we turned into Upper Bedford Place; "a sort of aviary for cosmopolitan birds of passage, especially those of the Oriental variety. The Asiatic and African faces that one sees at the windows of these Bloomsbury boarding houses almost suggest an overflow from the ethnographical galleries of the adjacent British Museum."

"Yes," I agreed, "there must be quite a considerable population of Africans, Japanese and Hindus in Bloomsbury; particularly Hindus."

As I spoke, and as if in illustration of my statement, a dark-skinned man rushed out of one of the houses farther down the street and began to advance towards us in a rapid, bewildered fashion, stopping to look at each street door as he came to it. His hatless condition—though he was exceedingly well dressed—and his agitated manner immediately attracted my attention, and Thorndyke's too, for the latter remarked, "Our friend seems to be in trouble. An accident, perhaps, or a case of sudden illness."

Here the stranger, observing our approach, ran forward to meet us and asked in an agitated tone, "Can you tell me, please, where I can find a doctor?"

"I am a medical man," replied Thorndyke, "and so is my friend."

Our acquaintance grasped Thorndyke's sleeve and exclaimed eagerly, "Come with me, then, quickly, if you please. A most dreadful thing has happened."

He hurried us along at something between a trot and a quick walk, and as we proceeded he continued excitedly, "I am quite confused and terrified; it is all so strange and sudden and terrible."

"Try," said Thorndyke, "to calm yourself a little and tell us what has happened."

"I will," was the agitated reply. "It is my cousin, Dinanath Byramji—his surname is the same as mine. Just now I went to his room and was horrified to find him lying on the floor, staring at the ceiling and blowing—like this," and he puffed out his cheeks with a soft blowing noise. "I spoke to him and shook his hand, but he was like a dead man. This is the house."

He darted up the steps to an open door at which a rather scared page-boy was on guard, and running along the hall, rapidly ascended the stairs. Following him closely, we reached a rather dark first-floor landing where, at a half-open door, a servant-maid stood listening with an expression of awe to a rhythmical snoring sound that issued from the room.

The unconscious man lay as Mr. Byramji had said staring fixedly at the ceiling with wide-open, glazy eyes, puffing out his cheeks slightly at each breath. But the breathing was shallow and slow, and it grew perceptibly slower, with lengthening pauses. And even as I was timing it with my watch while Thorndyke examined the pupils with the aid of a wax match, it stopped. I laid my finger on the wrist and caught one or two slow, flickering beats. Then the pulse stopped too.

"He is gone," said I. "He must have burst one of the large arteries."

"Apparently," said Thorndyke, "though one would not have expected it at his age. But wait! What is this?"

He pointed to the right ear, in the hollow of which a few drops of blood had collected, and as he spoke he drew his hand gently over the dead man's head and moved it slightly from side to side.

"There is a fracture of the base of the skull," said he, "and quite distinct signs of contusion of the scalp." He turned to Mr. Byramji, who stood wringing his hand and gazing incredulously at the dead man, and asked: "Can you throw any light on this?"

The Indian looked at him vacantly. The sudden tragedy seemed to have paralysed his brain. "I don't understand," said



he. "What does it mean?"

"It means," replied Thorndyke, "that he has received a heavy blow on the head."

For a few moments Mr. Byramji continued to stare vacantly at my colleague. Then he seemed suddenly to realise the import of Thorndyke's remark, for he started up excitedly and turned to the door, outside which the two servants were hovering.

"Where is the person gone who came in with my cousin?" he demanded.

"You saw him go out, Albert," said the maid. "Tell Mr. Byramji where he went to."

The page tiptoed into the room with a fearful eye fixed on the corpse, and replied falteringly, "I only see the back of him as he went out, and all I know is that he turned to the left. P'raps he's gone for a doctor."

"Can you give us any description of him?" asked Thorndyke.

"I only see the back of him," repeated the page. "He was a shortish gentleman and he had on a dark suit of clothes and a hard felt hat. That's all I know."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "We may want to ask you some more questions presently," and having conducted the page to the door, he shut it and turned to Mr. Byramji.

"Have you any idea who it was that was with your cousin?" he asked.

"None at all," was the reply. "I was sitting in my room opposite, writing, when I heard my cousin come up the stairs with another person, to whom he was talking. I could not hear what he was saying. They went into his room—this room—and I could occasionally catch the sound of their voices. In about a quarter of an hour I heard the door open and shut, and then someone went downstairs, softly and rather quickly. I finished the letter that I was writing, and when I had addressed it I came in here to ask my cousin who the visitor was. I thought it might be someone who had come to negotiate for the ruby."

"The ruby!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "What ruby do you refer to?"

"The great ruby," replied Byramji. "But of course you have not—" He broke off suddenly and stood for a few moments staring at Thorndyke with parted lips and wide-open eyes; then abruptly he turned, and kneeling beside the dead man he began, in a curious, caressing, half-apologetic manner, first to pass his hands gently over the body at the waist and then to unfasten the clothes. This brought into view a handsome, soft leather belt, evidently of native workmanship, worn next to the skin and furnished with three pockets. Mr. Byramji unbuttoned and explored them in quick succession, and it was evident that they were all empty.

"It is gone!" he exclaimed in low, intense tones, "Gone! Ah! But how little would it signify! But thou, dear Dinanath, my brother, my friend, thou art gone, too!"

He lifted the dead man's hand and pressed it to his cheek, murmuring endearments in his own tongue. Presently he laid it down reverently, and sprang up, and I was startled at the change in his aspect. The delicate, gentle, refined face had suddenly become the face of a Fury—fierce, sinister, vindictive.

"This wretch must die!" he exclaimed huskily. "This sordid brute who, without compunction, has crushed out a precious life as one would carelessly crush a fly, for the sake of a paltry crystal—he must die, if I have to follow him and strangle him with my own hands!"

Thorndyke laid his hand on Byramji's shoulder. "I sympathise with you most cordially," said he. "If it is as you think, and appearances suggest, that your cousin has been murdered as a mere incident of robbery, the murderer's life is forfeit, and Justice cries aloud for retribution. The fact of murder will be determined, for or against, by a proper inquiry. Meanwhile we have to ascertain who this unknown man is and what happened while he was with your cousin."

Byramji made a gesture of despair. "But the man has disappeared, and nobody has seen him! What can we do?"

"Let us look around us," plied Thorndyke, "and see if we can judge what has happened in this room. What, for instance, is this?"

He picked up from a corner near the door a small leather object, which he handed to Mr. Byramji. The Indian seized it eagerly, exclaiming: "Ah! It is the little bag in which my cousin used to carry the ruby. So he had taken it from his belt."

"It hasn't been dropped, by any chance?" I suggested.

In an instant Mr. Byramji was down on his knees, peering and groping about the floor, and Thorndyke and I joined in the search. But, as might have been expected there was no sign of the ruby, nor, indeed, of anything else, excepting a hat which I picked up from under the table.

"No," said Mr. Byramji, rising with a dejected air. "It is gone—of course it is gone, and the murderous villain—"

Here his glance fell on the hat, which I had laid on the table, and he bent forward to look at it.

"Whose hat is this?" he demanded, glancing at the chair on which Thorndyke's hat and mine had been placed.

"Is it not your cousin's?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, certainly not. His hat was like mine—we bought them both together. It had a white silk lining with his initials, D. B.,

in gold. This has no lining and is a much older hat. It must be the murderer's hat."

"If it is," said Thorndyke, "that is a most important fact—important in two respects. Could you let us see your hat?"

"Certainly," replied Byramji, walking quickly, but with a soft tread, to the door. As he went out, shutting the door silently behind him, Thorndyke picked up the derelict hat and swiftly tried it on the head of the dead man. As far as I could judge, it appeared to fit, and this Thorndyke confirmed as he replaced it on the table.

"As you see," said he, "it is at least a practical fit, which is a fact of some significance."

Here Mr. Byramji returned with his own hat, which he placed on the table by the side of the other, and thus placed, crown uppermost, the two hats were closely similar. Both were black, hard felts of the prevalent "bowler" shape, and of good quality, and the difference in their age and state of preservation was not striking; but when Byramji turned them over and exhibited their interiors it was seen that whereas the strange hat was unlined save for the leather head-band, Byramji's had a white silk lining and bore the owner's initials in embossed gilt letters.

"What happened," said Thorndyke, when he had carefully compared the two hats, "seems fairly obvious. The two men, on entering, placed their hats crown upwards on the table. In some way—perhaps during a struggle—the visitor's hat was knocked down and rolled under the table. Then the stranger, on leaving, picked up the only visible hat—almost identically similar to his own—and put it on."

"Is it not rather singular," I asked, "that he should not have noticed the different feel of a strange hat?"

"I think not," Thorndyke replied. "If he noticed anything unusual he would probably assume that he had put it on the wrong way round. Remember that he would be extremely hurried and agitated. And when once he had left the house he would not dare to take the risk of returning, though he would doubtless realise the gravity of the mistake. And now," he continued, "would you mind giving us a few particulars? You have spoken of a great ruby, which your cousin had, and which seems to be missing."

"Yes. You shall come to my room and I will tell you about it; but first let us lay my poor cousin decently on his bed."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "the body ought not to be moved until the police have seen it."

"Perhaps you are right," Byramji agreed reluctantly, "though it seems callous to leave him lying there." With a sigh he turned to the door, and Thorndyke followed, carrying the two hats.

"My cousin and I," said our host, when we were seated in his own large bed-sitting-room, "were both interested in gem-stones. I deal in all kinds of stones that are found in the East, but Dinanath dealt almost exclusively in rubies. He was a very fine judge of those beautiful gems, and he used to make periodical tours in Burma in search of uncut rubies of unusual size or quality. About four months ago he acquired at Mogok, in Upper Burma, a magnificent specimen over twenty-eight carats in weight, perfectly flawless and of the most gorgeous colour. It had been roughly cut, but my cousin was intending to have it recut unless he should receive an advantageous offer for it in the meantime."

"What would be the value of such a stone?" I asked.

"It is impossible to say. A really fine large ruby of perfect colour is far, far more valuable than the finest diamond of the same size. It is the most precious of all gems, with the possible exception of the emerald. A fine ruby of five carats is worth about three thousand pounds, but of course, the value rises out of all proportion with increasing size. Fifty thousand pounds would be a moderate price for Dinanath's ruby."

During this recital I noticed that Thorndyke, while listening attentively, was turning the stranger's hat over in his hands, narrowly scrutinising it both inside and outside. As Byramji concluded, he remarked:

"We shall have to let the police know what has happened, but, as my friend and I will be called as witnesses, I should like to examine this hat a little more closely before you hand it over to them. Could you let me have a small, hard brush? A dry nail-brush would do." Our host complied readily—in fact eagerly. Thorndyke's authoritative, purposeful manner had clearly impressed him, for he said as he handed my colleague a new nail-brush: "I thank you for your help and value it. We must not depend on the police only."

Accustomed as I was to Thorndyke's methods, his procedure was not unexpected, but Mr. Byramji watched him with breathless interest and no little surprise as, laying a sheet of notepaper on the table, he brought the hat close to it and brushed firmly but slowly, so that the dust dislodged should fall on it. As it was not a very well-kept hat, the yield was considerable, especially when the brush was drawn under the curl of the brim, and very soon the paper held quite a little heap. Then Thorndyke folded the paper into a small packet and having written "outside" on it, put it in his pocketbook.

"Why do you do that?" Mr. Byramji asked. "What will the dust tell you?"

"Probably nothing," Thorndyke replied. "But this hat is our only direct clue to the identity of the man who was with your cousin, and we must make the most of it. Dust, you know, is only a mass of fragments detached from surrounding objects. If the objects are unusual the dust may be quite distinctive. You could easily identify the hat of a miller or a cement worker." As he was speaking he reversed the hat and turned down the leather head-lining, whereupon a number of strips of folded paper fell down into the crown.

"Ah!" exclaimed Byramji, "perhaps we shall learn something now."

He picked out the folded slips and began eagerly to open them out, and we examined them systematically—one by one. But they were singularly disappointing and uninforming. Mostly they consisted of strips of newspaper, with one or two circulars, a leaf from a price list of gas stoves, a portion of a large envelope on which were the remains of an address which read “—n—don, W.C.,” and a piece of paper evidently cut down vertically and bearing the right-hand half of some kind of list. This read:

“—el 3 oz. 5 dwts.  
—eep 9½ oz.”

“Can you make anything of this?” I asked, handing the paper to Thorndyke.

He looked at it reflectively, and answered, as he copied it into his notebook: “It has, at least, some character. If we consider it with the other data we should get some sort of hint from it. But these scraps of paper don’t tell us much. Perhaps their most suggestive feature is their quantity and the way in which, as you have no doubt noticed, they were arranged at the sides of the hat. We had better replace them as we found them for the benefit of the police.”

The nature of the suggestion to which he referred was not very obvious to me, but the presence of Mr. Byramji rendered discussion inadvisable; nor was there any opportunity, for we had hardly reconstituted the hat when we became aware of a number of persons ascending the stairs, and then we heard the sound of rather peremptory rapping at the door of the dead man’s room.

Mr. Byramji opened the door and went out on to the landing, where several persons had collected, including the two servants and a constable.

“I understand,” said the policeman, “that there is something wrong here. Is that so?”

“A very terrible thing has happened,” replied Byramji. “But the doctors can tell you better than I can.” Here he looked appealingly at Thorndyke, and we both went out and joined him.

“A gentleman—Mr. Dinanath Byramji—has met with his death under somewhat suspicious circumstances,” said Thorndyke, and, glancing at the knot of naturally curious persons on the landing, he continued: “If you will come into the room where the death occurred, I will give you the facts so far as they are known to us.”

With this he opened the door and entered the room with Mr. Byramji, the constable, and me. As the door opened, the bystanders craned forward and a middle-aged woman uttered a cry of horror and followed us into the room.

“This is dreadful!” she exclaimed, with a shuddering glance at the corpse. “The servants told me about it when I came in just now and I sent Albert for the police at once. But what does it mean? You don’t think poor Mr. Dinanath has been murdered?”

“We had better get the facts, ma’am,” said the constable, drawing out a large black notebook and laying his helmet on the table. He turned to Mr. Byramji, who had sunk into a chair and sat, the picture of grief, gazing at his dead cousin. “Would you kindly tell me what you know about how it happened?”

Byramji repeated the substance of what he had told us, and when the constable had taken down his statement, Thorndyke and I gave the few medical particulars that we could furnish and handed the constable our cards. Then, having helped to lay the corpse on the bed and cover it with a sheet, we turned to take our leave.

“You have been very kind,” Mr. Byramji said as he shook our hands warmly. “I am more than grateful. Perhaps I may be permitted to call on you and hear if—if you have learned anything fresh,” he concluded discreetly.

“We shall be pleased to see you,” Thorndyke replied, “and to give you any help that we can;” and with this we took our departure, watched inquisitively down the stairs by the boarders and the servants who still lurked in the vicinity of the chamber of death.

“If the police have no more information than we have,” I remarked as we walked homeward, “they won’t have much to go on.”

“No,” said Thorndyke. “But you must remember that this crime—as we are justified in assuming it to be—is not an isolated one. It is the fourth of practically the same kind within the last six months. I understand that the police have some kind of information respecting the presumed criminal, though it can’t be worth much, seeing that no arrest has been made. But there is some new evidence this time. The exchange of hats may help the police considerably.”

“In what way? What evidence does it furnish?”

“In the first place it suggests a hurried departure, which seems to connect the missing man with the crime. Then, he is wearing the dead man’s hat, and though he is not likely to continue wearing it, it may be seen and furnish a clue. We know that that hat fits him fairly well and we know its size, so that we know the size of his head. Finally, we have the man’s own hat.”

“I don’t fancy the police will get much information from that,” said I.

“Probably not,” he agreed. “Yet it offered one or two interesting suggestions, as you probably observed.”

“It made no suggestions whatever to me,” said I.

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “I can only recommend you to recall our simple inspection and consider the significance of

what we found."

This I had to accept as closing the discussion for the time being, and as I had to make a call at my bookseller's concerning some reports that I had left to be bound, I parted from Thorndyke at the corner of Chichester Rents and left him to pursue his way alone. My business with the bookseller took me longer than I had expected, for I had to wait while the lettering on the backs was completed, and when I arrived at our chambers in King's Bench Walk, I found Thorndyke apparently at the final stage of some experiment evidently connected with our late adventure. The microscope stood on the table with one slide on the stage and a second one beside it; but Thorndyke had apparently finished his microscopical researches, for as I entered he held in his hand a test-tube filled with a smoky-coloured fluid.

"I see that you have been examining the dust from the hat," said I. "Does it throw any fresh light on the case?"

"Very little," he replied. "It is just common dust—assorted fibres and miscellaneous organic and mineral particles. But there are a couple of hairs from the inside of the hat—both lightish brown, and one of the atrophic, note-of-exclamation type that one finds at the margin of bald patches; and the outside dust shows minute traces of lead, apparently in the form of oxide. What do you make of that?"

"Perhaps the man is a plumber or a painter," I suggested.

"Either is possible and worth considering," he replied; but his tone made clear to me that this was not his own inference; and a row of five consecutive Post Office Directories, which I had already noticed ranged along the end of the table, told me that he had not only formed a hypothesis on the subject, but had probably either confirmed or disproved it. For the Post Office Directory was one of Thorndyke's favourite books of reference; and the amount of curious and recondite information that he succeeded in extracting from its matter-of-fact pages would have surprised no one more than it would the compilers of the work.

At this moment the sound of footsteps ascending our stairs became audible. It was late for business callers, but we were not unaccustomed to late visitors; and a familiar rat-tat of our little brass knocker seemed to explain the untimely visit.

"That sounds like Superintendent Miller's knock," said Thorndyke, as he strode across the room to open the door. And the superintendent it turned out to be. But not alone.

As the door opened the officer entered with two gentlemen, both natives of India, and one of whom was our friend Mr. Byramji.

"Perhaps," said Miller, "I had better look in a little later."

"Not on my account," said Byramji. "I have only a few words to say and there is nothing secret about my business. May I introduce my kinsman, Mr. Khambata, a student of the Inner Temple?"

Byramji's companion bowed ceremoniously. "Byramji came to my chambers just now," he explained, "to consult me about this dreadful affair, and he chanced to show me your card. He had not heard of you, but supposed you to be an ordinary medical practitioner. He did not realise that he had entertained an angel unawares. But I, who knew of your great reputation, advised him to put his affairs in your hands—without prejudice to the official investigations," Mr. Khambata added hastily, bowing to the superintendent.

"And I," said Mr. Byramji, "instantly decided to act on my kinsman's advice. I have come to beg you to leave no stone unturned to secure the punishment of my cousin's murderer. Spare no expense. I am a rich man and my poor cousin's property will come to me. As to the ruby, recover it if you can, but it is of no consequence. Vengeance—justice is what I seek. Deliver the wretch into my hands, or into the hands of justice, and I give you the ruby or its value, freely—gladly."

"There is no need," said Thorndyke, "of such extraordinary inducement. If you wish me to investigate this case, I will do so and will use every means at my disposal, without prejudice, as your friend says, to the proper claims of the officers of the law. But you understand that I can make no promises. I cannot guarantee success."

"We understand that," said Mr. Khambata. "But we know that if you undertake the case, everything that is possible will be done. And now we must leave you to your consultation."

As soon as our clients had gone, Miller rose from his chair with his hand in his breast pocket. "I dare say, doctor," said he, "you can guess what I have come about. I was sent for to look into this Byramji case and I heard from Mr. Byramji that you had been there and that you had made a minute examination of the missing man's hat. So have I; and I don't mind telling you that I could learn nothing from it."

"I haven't learnt much myself," said Thorndyke.

"But you've picked up something," urged Miller, "if it is only a hint; and we have just a little clue. There is very small doubt that this is the same man—'The New Jersey Sphinx,' as the papers call him—that committed those other robberies; and a very difficult type of criminal he is to get hold of. He is bold, he is wary, he plays a lone hand, and he sticks at nothing. He has no confederates, and he kills every time. The American police never got near him but once; and that once gives us the only clues we have."

"Finger-prints?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Yes, and very poor ones, too. So rough that you can hardly make out the pattern. And even those are not absolutely guaranteed to be his; but in any case, finger-prints are not much use until you've got the man. And there is a photograph of

the fellow himself, But it is only a snapshot, and a poor one at that. All it shows is that he has a mop of hair and a pointed beard—or at least he had when the photograph was taken. But for identification purposes it is practically worthless. Still, there it is; and what I propose is this: we want this man and so do you; we've worked together before and can trust one another. I am going to lay my cards on the table and ask you to do the same."

"But, my dear Miller," said Thorndyke, "I haven't any cards. I haven't a single solid fact."

The detective was visibly disappointed. Nevertheless, he laid two photographs on the table and pushed them towards Thorndyke, who inspected them through his lens and passed them to me.

"The pattern is very indistinct and broken up," he remarked.

"Yes," said Miller; "the prints must have been made on a very rough surface, though you get prints something like those from fitters or other men who use files and handle rough metal. And now, doctor, can't you give us a lead of any kind?"

Thorndyke reflected a few moments. "I really have not a single real fact," said he, "and I am unwilling to make merely speculative suggestions."

"Oh, that's all right," Miller replied cheerfully. "Give us a start. I shan't complain if it comes to nothing."

"Well," Thorndyke said reluctantly, "I was thinking of getting a few particulars as to the various tenants of No. 51 Clifford's Inn. Perhaps you could do it more easily and it might be worth your while."

"Good!" Miller exclaimed gleefully. "He 'gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.'"

"It is probably the wrong name," Thorndyke reminded him.

"I don't care," said Miller. "But why shouldn't we go together? It's too late to-night, and I can't manage to-morrow morning. But say to-morrow afternoon. Two heads are better than one, you know, especially when the second one is yours. Or perhaps," he added, with a glance at me, "three would be better still."

Thorndyke considered for a moment or two and then looked at me.

"What do you say, Jervis?" he asked.

As my afternoon was unoccupied, I agreed with enthusiasm, being as curious as the superintendent to know how Thorndyke had connected this particular locality with the vanished criminal, and Miller departed in high spirits with an appointment for the morrow three o'clock in the afternoon.

For some time after the superintendent's depart I sat wrapped in profound meditation. In some mysterious way the address, 51 Clifford's Inn, had emerged from the formless data yielded by the derelict hat. But what had been the connection? Apparently the fragment of the addressed envelope had furnished the clue. But how had Thorndyke extended "—n" into "51, Clifford's Inn"? It was to me a complete mystery.

Meanwhile, Thorndyke had seated himself at writing-table, and I noticed that of the two letters which he wrote, one was written on our headed paper and other on ordinary plain notepaper. I was speculating on the reason for this when he rose, and as he stuck on the stamps, said to me, "I am just going out to post these two letters. Do you care for a short stroll through the leafy shades of Fleet Street? The evening is still young."

"The rural solitudes of Fleet Street attract me at all hours," I replied, fetching my hat from the adjoining office, and we accordingly sallied forth together, strolling up King's Bench Walk and emerging into Fleet Street by way of Mitre Court. When Thorndyke had dropped his letters into the post office box he stood awhile gazing up at the tower of St. Dunstan's Church.

"Have you ever been in Clifford's Inn, Jervis?" he inquired.

"Never," I replied (we passed through it together on an average a dozen times a week), "but it is not too late for an exploratory visit."

We crossed the road, and entering Clifford's Inn Passage, passed through the still half-open gate, crossed the outer court and threaded the tunnel-like entry by the hall to the inner court, in the middle of which Thorndyke halted, and looked up at one of the ancient houses, remarked, "No. 51."

"So that is where our friend hangs out his flag," said I.

"Oh come, Jervis," he protested, "I am surprised at you; you are as bad as Miller. I have merely suggested a possible connection between these premises and the hat that was left at Bedford Place. As to the nature of that connection I have no idea, and there may be no connection at all. I assure you, Jervis, that I am on the thinnest possible ice. I am working on a hypothesis which is in the highest degree speculative, and I should not have given Miller a hint but that he was so eager and so willing to help—and also that I wanted his finger-prints. But we are really only at the beginning, and may never get any farther."

I looked up at the old house. It was all in darkness excepting the top floor, where a couple of lighted windows showed the shadow of a man moving rapidly about the room. We crossed to the entry and inspected the names painted on the door-posts. The ground floor was occupied by a firm of photo-engravers, the first floor by a Mr. Carrington, whose name stood out conspicuously on its oblong of comparatively fresh white paint, while the tenants of the second floor—old residents, to judge by the faded and discoloured paint in which their names were announced—were Messrs. Burt & Highley,

metallurgists.

"Burt has departed," said Thorndyke, as I read out the names; and he pointed to two red lines of erasure which I had not noticed in the dim light, "so the active gentleman above is presumably Mr. Highley, and we may take it that he has residential as well as business premises. I wonder who and what Mr. Carrington is—but I dare say we shall find out tomorrow."

With this he dismissed the professional aspects of Clifford's Inn, and, changing the subject to its history and associations, chatted in his inimitable, picturesque manner until our leisurely perambulations brought us at length to the Inner Temple Gate.

On the following morning we bustled through our work in order to leave the afternoon free, making several joint visits to solicitors from whom we were taking instructions. Returning from the last of these—a City lawyer—Thorndyke turned into St. Helen's Place and halted at a doorway bearing the brass plate of a firm of assayists and refiners. I followed him into the outer office, where, on his mentioning his name, an elderly man came to the counter.

"Mr. Grayson has put out some specimens for you, sir," said he. "They are about thirty grains to the ton—you said that the content was of no importance—I am to tell you that you need not return them. They are not worth treating." He went to a large safe from which he took a canvas bag, and returning to the counter, turned out on it the contents of the bag, consisting of about a dozen good-sized lumps of quartz and a glittering yellow fragment, which Thorndyke picked out and dropped in his pocket.

"Will that collection do?" our friend inquired.

"It will answer my purpose perfectly," Thorndyke replied, and when the specimens had been replaced the bag, and the latter deposited in Thorndyke's hand-bag, my colleague thanked the assistant and we went on our way.

"We extend our activities into the domain of mineralogy," I remarked.

Thorndyke smiled an inscrutable smile. "We also employ the suction pump as an instrument of research," he observed. "However, the strategic uses of chunks of quartz—otherwise than as missiles—will develop themselves in due course, and the interval may be used for reflection."

It was. But my reflection brought no solution. I noticed, however, that when at three o'clock we set forth in company with the superintendent, the bag went with us; and having offered to carry it and having had my offer accepted with a sly twinkle, its weight assured me that the quartz was still inside.

"Chambers and Offices to let," Thorndyke read aloud as we approached the porter's lodge. "That lets us in, I think. And the porter knows Dr. Jervis and me by sight, so he will talk more freely."

"He doesn't know me," said the superintendent, "but I'll keep in the background, all the same."

A pull at the bell brought out a clerical-looking man in a tall hat and a frock coat, who regarded Thorndyke and me through his spectacles with an amiable air of recognition.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Larkin," said Thorndyke. "I am asked to get particulars of vacant chambers. What have you got to let?"

Mr. Larkin reflected. "Let me see. There's a ground floor at No. 5—rather dark—and a small second-pair set at No. 12. And then there is—oh, yes, there is a good first-floor set at No. 51. They wouldn't have been vacant until Michaelmas, but Mr. Carrington, the tenant, has had to go abroad suddenly. I had a letter from him this morning, enclosing the key. Funny letter, too." He dived into his pocket, and hauling out a bundle of letters, selected one and handed it to Thorndyke with a broad smile.

Thorndyke glanced at the postmark ("London, E."), and having taken out the key, extracted the letter, which he opened and held so that Miller and I could see it. The paper bore the printed heading, "Baltic Shipping Company, Wapping," and the further written heading, "S.S. Gothenburg," and the letter was brief and to the point:

*DEAR SIR,*

*I am giving up my chambers at No. 51, as I have been suddenly called abroad. I enclose the key, but am not troubling you with the rent. The sale of my costly furniture will more than cover it, and the surplus can be expended on painting the garden railings,*

*Yours sincerely,*

*A. CARRINGTON.*

Thorndyke smilingly replaced the letter and the key in the envelope and asked: "What is the furniture like?"

"You'll see," chuckled the porter, "if you care to look at the rooms. And I think they might suit, They're a good set."

"Quiet?"

"Yes, pretty quiet. There's a metallurgist overhead—Highley—used to be Burt & Highley, but Burt has gone to the City, and I don't think Highley does much business now."

"Let me see," said Thorndyke, "I think I used to meet Highley sometimes—a tall, dark man, isn't he?"

"No, that would be Burt. Highley is a little, fairish man, rather bald, with a pretty rich complexion"—here Mr. Larkin tapped his nose knowingly and raised his little finger—"which may account for the falling off of business."

"Hadn't we better have a look at the rooms?" Miller interrupted a little impatiently.

"Can we see them, Mr. Larkin?" asked Thorndyke.

"Certainly," was the reply. "You've got the key. Let me have it when you've seen the rooms; and whatever ever you do," he added with a broad grin, "be careful of the furniture."

"It looks," the superintendent remarked as we crossed the inner court, "as if Mr. Carrington had done a mizzle. That's hopeful. And I see," he continued, glancing at the fresh paint on the door-post as we passed through the entry, "that he hasn't been here long. That's hopeful, too."

We ascended to the first floor, and as Thorndyke unlocked and threw open the door, Miller laughed aloud. The "costly furniture" consisted of a small kitchen table, a Windsor chair and a dilapidated deck-chair. The kitchen contained a gas ring, a small saucepan and a frying-pan, and the bedroom was furnished with a camp-bed devoid of bed-clothes, a wash-hand basin on a packing-case, and a water can.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the superintendent. "He's left a hat behind. Quite a good hat, too." He took it down from the peg, glanced at its exterior and then, turning it over, looked inside. And then his mouth opened with a jerk.

"Great Solomon Eagle!" he gasped. "Do you see, doctor? It's THE hat."

He held it out to us, and sure enough on the white silk lining of the crown were the embossed, gilt letters, D.B., just as Mr. Byramji had described them.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, as the superintendent snatched up a greengrocer's paper bag from the kitchen floor and persuaded the hat into it, "it is undoubtedly the missing link. But what are you going to do now?"

"Do!" exclaimed Miller. "Why, I am going to collar the man. These Baltic boats put in at Hull and Newcastle—perhaps he didn't know that—and they are pretty slow boats, too. I shall wire to Newcastle to have the ship detained and take Inspector Badger down to make the arrest. I'll leave you to explain to the porter, and I owe you a thousand thanks for your valuable tip."

With this he bustled away, clasping the precious hat and from the window we saw him hurry across the court and dart out through the postern into Fetter Lane.

"I think Miller was rather precipitate," said Thorndyke. "He should have got a description of the man and some further particulars."

"Yes," said I. "Miller had much better have waited until you had finished with Mr. Larkin. But you can get some more particulars when we take back the key."

"We shall get more information from the gentleman who lives on the floor above, and I think we will go up and interview him now. I wrote to him last night and made a metallurgical appointment, signing myself W. Polton. Your name, if he should ask, is Stevenson."

As we ascended the stairs to the next floor, I meditated on the rather tortuous proceedings of my usually straightforward colleague. The use of the lumps of quartz was now obvious; but why these mysterious tactics? And why, before knocking at the door, did Thorndyke carefully take the reading of the gas meter on the landing?

The door was opened in response to our knock—a shortish, alert-looking, clean-shaved man in a white overall, who looked at us keenly and rather forbiddingly. But Thorndyke was geniality personified.

"How do you do, Mr. Highley?" said he, holding out his hand, which the metallurgist shook coolly. "You got my letter, I suppose?"

"Yes. But I am not Mr. Highley. He's away and I am carrying on. I think of taking over his business if there is any to take over. My name is Sherwood. Have you got the samples?"

Thorndyke produced the canvas bag, which Mr. Sherwood took from him and emptied out on a bench, picking up the lumps of quartz one by one and examining them closely. Meanwhile Thorndyke took a rapid survey of the premises. Against the wall were two cupel furnaces and a third larger furnace like a small pottery kiln. On a set of narrow shelves were several rows of bone-ash cupels, looking like little white flower-pots, and near them was the cupel-press—an appliance into which powdered bone-ash was fed and compressed by a plunger to form the cupels—while by the side of the press was a tub of bone-ash—a good deal coarser, I noticed, than the usual fine powder. This coarseness was also observed by Thorndyke, who edged up to the tub and dipped his hand into the ash and then wiped his fingers on his handkerchief.

"This stuff doesn't seem to contain much gold," said Mr. Sherwood. "But we shall see when we make the assay."

"What do you think of this?" asked Thorndyke, taking from his pocket the small lump of glittering, golden-looking mineral that he had picked out at the assayer's. Mr. Sherwood took it from him and examined it closely. "This looks more hopeful," said he; "rather rich, in fact."

Thorndyke received this statement with an unmoved countenance; but as for me, I stared at Mr. Sherwood in amazement. For this lump of glittering mineral was simply a fragment of common iron pyrites! It would not have deceived a schoolboy, much less a metallurgist.

Still holding the specimen, and taking a watchmaker's lens from a shelf, Mr. Sherwood moved over to the window. Simultaneously, Thorndyke stepped softly to the cupel shelves and quickly ran his eye along the rows of cupels. Presently he paused at one, examined it more closely, and then, taking it from the shelf, began to pick at it with his finger-nail.

At this moment Mr. Sherwood turned and observed him; and instantly there flashed into the metallurgist's face an expression of mingled anger and alarm.

"Put that down!" he commanded peremptorily, and then, as Thorndyke continued to scrape with his finger nail, he shouted furiously, "Do you hear? Drop it!"

Thorndyke took him literally at his word and let the cupel fall on the floor, when it shattered into innumerable fragments, of which one of the largest separated itself from the rest. Thorndyke pounced upon it, and in an instantaneous glance, as he picked it up, I recognised it as a calcined tooth.

Then followed a few moments of weird, dramatic silence. Thorndyke, holding the tooth between his finger and thumb, looked steadily into the eyes of the metallurgist; and the latter, pallid as a corpse, glared at Thorndyke and furtively unbuttoned his overall.

Suddenly the silence broke into a tumult as bewildering as the crash of a railway collision. Sherwood's right hand darted under his overall. Instantly, Thorndyke snatched up another cupel and hurled it with such truth of aim that it shattered on the metallurgist's forehead. And as he flung the missile, he sprang forward, and delivered a swift upper-cut. There was a thunderous crash, a cloud of white dust, and an automatic pistol clattered along the floor.

I snatched up the pistol and rushed to my friend's assistance. But there was no need. With his great strength and his uncanny skill—to say nothing of the effects of the knock-out blow—Thorndyke had the man pinned down immovably.

"See if you can find some cord, Jervis," he said in a calm, quiet tone that seemed almost ridiculously out of character with the circumstances.

There was no difficulty about this, for several corded boxes stood in a corner of the laboratory. I cut off two lengths, with one of which I secured the prostrate man's arms, and with the other fastened his knees and ankles.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "if you will take charge of his hands, we will make a preliminary inspection. Let us first see if he wears a belt."

Unbuttoning the man's waistcoat, he drew up the shirt, disclosing a broad, webbing belt furnished with several leather pockets, the buttoned flaps of which he felt carefully, regardless of the stream of threats and imprecations that poured from our victim's swollen lips. From the front pockets he proceeded to the back, passing an exploratory hand under the writhing body.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, "just turn him over, and look out for his heels."

We rolled our captive over, and as Thorndyke "skinned the rabbit," a central pocket came into view, into which, when he had unbuttoned it, he inserted his fingers. "Yes," he continued, "I think this is what we are looking for." He withdrew his fingers, between which he held a small packet of Japanese paper, and with feverish excitement I watched him open out layer after layer of the soft wrapping. As he turned back the last fold a wonderful crimson sparkle told me that the "great ruby" was found.

"There, Jervis," said Thorndyke, holding the magnificent gem towards me in the palm of his hand, "look on this beautiful, sinister thing, charged with untold potentialities of evil—and thank the gods that it is not yours."

He wrapped it up again carefully and, having bestowed it in an inner pocket, said, "And now give me the pistol and run down to the telegraph office and see if you can stop Miller. I should like him to have the credit for this."

I handed him the pistol and made my way out into Fetter Lane and so down to Fleet Street, where at the post office my urgent message was sent off to Scotland Yard immediately. In a few minutes the reply came that Superintendent Miller had not yet left and that he was starting immediately for Clifford's Inn. A quarter of an hour later he drove up in a hansom to the Fettes Lane gate and I conducted him up to the second floor, where Thorndyke introduced him to his prisoner and witnessed the official arrest.

"You don't see how I arrived at it," said Thorndyke as we walked homeward after returning the key. "Well, I am not surprised. The initial evidence was of the weakest; it acquired significance only by cumulative effect. Let us reconstruct it as it developed.

"The derelict hat was, of course, the starting-point. Now, the first thing one noticed was that it appeared to have had more than one owner. No man would buy a new hat that fitted so badly as to need all that packing; and the arrangement of the packing suggested a long-headed man wearing a hat that had belonged to a man with a short head. Then there were the suggestions offered by the slips of paper. The fragmentary address referred to a place the name of which ended in 'n' and the remainder was evidently 'London, W.C.' Now what West Central place names end in 'n'? It was not a street, a square or a court, and Barbican is not in the W.C. district. It was almost certainly one of the half-dozen surviving Inns of Court or



Chancery. But, of course, it was not necessarily the address of the owner of the hat.

"The other slip of paper bore the end of a word ending in 'el,' and another word ending in 'eep,' and connected with these were quantities stated in ounces and pennyweights troy weight. But the only persons who use troy weight are those who deal in precious metals. I inferred therefore that the 'el' was part of 'lemel,' and that the 'eep' was part of 'floor-sweep,' an inference that was supported by the respective quantities, three ounces five pennyweights of lemel and nine and a half ounces of floor-sweep."

"What is lemel?" I asked.

"It is the trade name for the gold or silver filings that collect in the 'skin' of a jeweller's bench. Floor-sweep is, of course, the dust swept up on the floor of a jeweller's or goldsmith's workshop. The lemel is actual metal, though not of uniform fineness, but the sweep is a mixture of dirt and metal. Both are saved and sent to the refiners to have the gold and silver extracted.

"This paper, then, was connected either with a gold smith or a gold refiner—who might call himself an assayist or a metallurgist. The connection was supported by the leaf of a price list of gas stoves. A metallurgist would be kept well supplied with lists of gas stoves and furnaces. The traces of lead in the dust from the hat gave us another straw blowing the same direction, for gold assayed by the dry process is fused in the cupel furnace with lead; and as the lead oxidises and the oxide is volatile, traces of lead would tend to appear in the dust deposited in the laboratory.

"The next thing to do was to consult the directory; and when I did so, I found that there were no goldsmiths in any of the Inns and only one assayist—Mr. Highley, of Clifford's Inn. The probabilities therefore, slender as they were, pointed to some connection between this stray hat and Mr. Highley. And this was positively all the information that we had when we came out this afternoon.

"As soon as we got to Clifford's Inn, however, the evidence began to grow like a rolling snowball. First there was Larkin's contribution; and then there was the discovery of the missing hat. Now, as soon as I saw that hat my suspicions fell upon the man upstairs. I felt a conviction that the hat had been left there purposely and that the letter to Larkin was just a red herring to create a false trail. Nevertheless, the presence of that hat completely confirmed the other evidence. It showed that the apparent connection was a real connection."

"But," I asked, "what made you suspect the man upstairs?"

"My dear Jervis!" he exclaimed, "consider the facts. That hat was enough to hang the man who left it there. Can you imagine this astute, wary villain making such an idiot's mistake—going away and leaving the means of his conviction for anyone to find? But you are forgetting that whereas the missing hat was found on the first floor, the murderer's hat was connected with the second floor. The evidence suggested that it was Highley's hat. And now, before we go on to the next stage, let me remind you of those finger-prints. Miller thought that their rough appearance was due to the surface on which they had been made. But it was not. They were the prints of a person who was suffering from ichthyosis, palmar psoriasis or sonic dry dermatitis.

"There is one other point. The man we were looking for was a murderer. His life was already forfeit. To such a man another murder more or less is of no consequence. If this man, having laid the false trail, had determined to take sanctuary in Highley's rooms, it was probable that he had already got rid of Highley. And remember that a metallurgist has unrivalled means disposing of a body; for not only is each of his muffle furnaces a miniature crematorium, but the very residue of a cremated body—bone-ash—is one of the materials of his trade.

"When we went upstairs, I first took the reading of the gas meter and ascertained that a large amount of gas had been used recently. Then, when we entered I took the opportunity to shake hands with Mr. Sherwood, and immediately I became aware that he suffered from a rather extreme form of ichthyosis. That was the first point of verification. Then we discovered that he actually could not distinguish between iron pyrites and auriferous quartz. He was not a metallurgist at all. He was a masquerader. Then the bone-ash in the tub was mixed with fragments of calcined bone, and the cupels all showed similar fragments. In one of them I could see part of the crown of a tooth. That was pure luck. But observe that by that time I had enough evidence to justify an arrest. The tooth served only to bring the affair to a crisis; and his response to my unspoken accusation saved us the trouble of further search for confirmatory evidence."

"What is not quite clear to me," said I, "is when and why he made away with Highley. As the body has been completely reduced to bone-ash, Highley must have been dead at least some days."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke agreed. "I take it that the course of events was like this: The police have been searching eagerly for this man, and every new crime must have made his position more unsafe—for a criminal can never be sure that he has not dropped some clue. It began to be necessary for him to make some arrangements for leaving the country and meanwhile to have a retreat in case his whereabouts should chance to be discovered. Highley's chambers were admirable for both purposes. Here was a solitary man who seldom had a visitor, and who would probably not be missed for some considerable time; and in those chambers were the means of rapidly and completely disposing of the body. The mere murder would be a negligible detail to this ruffian.

"I imagine that Highley was done to death at least a week ago, and that the murderer did not take up his new tenancy until the body was reduced to ash. With that large furnace in addition to the small ones, this would not take long. When the new premises were ready, he could make a sham disappearance to cover his actual flight later; and you must see how

perfectly misleading that sham disappearance was. If the police had discovered that hat in the empty room only a week later, they would have been certain that he had escaped to one of the Baltic ports; and while they were following his supposed tracks, he could have gone off comfortably via Folkestone or Southampton."

"Then you think he had only just moved into Highley's rooms?"

"I should say he moved in last night. The murder of Byramji was probably planned on some information that the murderer had picked up, and as soon as it was accomplished he began forthwith to lay down the false tracks. When he reached his rooms yesterday afternoon, he must have written the letter to Larkin and gone off at once to the East End to post it. Then he probably had his bushy hair cut short and shaved off his beard and moustache—which would render him quite unrecognisable by Larkin—and moved into Highley's chambers, from which he would have quietly sallied forth in a few days' time to take his passage to the Continent. It was quite a good plan, and but for the accident of taking the wrong hat, would almost certainly have succeeded."

Once every year, on the second of August, there is delivered with unfailing regularity at No. 5A King's Bench Walk a large box of carved sandal-wood filled with the choicest Trichinopoly cheroots and accompanied by an affectionate letter from our late client, Mr. Byramji. For the second of August is the anniversary of the death (in the execution shed at Newgate) of Cornelius Barnett, otherwise known as the "New Jersey Sphinx."

---

#### IV. — THE TOUCHSTONE

It happened not uncommonly that the exigencies of practice committed my friend Thorndyke to investigations that lay more properly within the province of the police. For problems that had arisen as secondary consequences of a criminal act could usually not be solved until the circumstances of that act were fully elucidated and, incidentally, the identity of the actor established. Such a problem was that of the disappearance of James Harewood's will, a problem that was propounded to us by our old friend, Mr. Marchmont, when he called on us, by appointment, with the client of whom he had spoken in his note.

It was just four o'clock when the solicitor arrived at our chambers, and as I admitted him he ushered in a gentlemanly-looking man of about thirty-five, whom he introduced as Mr. William Crowhurst.

"I will just stay," said he with an approving glance at the tea-service on the table, "and have a cup of tea with you, and give you an outline of the case. Then I must run away and leave Mr. Crowhurst to fill in the details."

He seated himself in an easy chair within comfortable reach of the table, and as Thorndyke poured out the tea, he glanced over a few notes scribbled on a sheet of paper.

"I may say," he began, stirring his tea thoughtfully, "that this is a forlorn hope. I have brought the case to you, but I have not the slightest expectation that you will be able to help us."

"A very wholesome frame of mind," Thorndyke commented with a smile. "I hope it is that of your client also."

"It is indeed," said Mr. Crowhurst; "in fact, it seems to me a waste of your time to go into the matter. Probably you will think so too, when you have heard the particulars."

"Well, let us hear the particulars," said Thorndyke. "A forlorn hope has, at least, the stimulating quality of difficulty. Let us have your outline sketch, Marchmont."

The solicitor, having emptied his cup and pushed it towards the tray for replenishment, glanced at his notes and began: "The simplest way in which to present the problem is to give a brief recital of the events that have given rise to it, which are these: The day before yesterday—that is last Monday—at a quarter to two in the afternoon, Mr. James Harewood executed a will at his house at Merbridge, which is about two miles from Welsbury. There were present four persons: two of his servants, who signed as witnesses, and the two principal beneficiaries—Mr. Arthur Baxfield, a nephew of the testator, and our friend here, Mr. William Crowhurst. The will was a holograph written on the two pages of a sheet of letter-paper. When the witnesses signed, the will was covered by another sheet of paper so that only the space for the signatures was exposed. Neither of the witnesses read the will, nor did either of the beneficiaries; and so far as I am aware, no one but the testator knew what were its actual provisions, though, after the servants had left the room, Mr. Harewood explained its general purport to the beneficiaries."

"And what was its general purport?" Thorndyke asked.

"Broadly speaking," replied Marchmont, "it divided the estate in two very unequal portions between Mr. Baxfield and Mr. Crowhurst. There were certain small legacies of which neither the amounts nor the names of the legatees are known. Then, to Baxfield was given a thousand pounds to enable him either to buy a partnership or to start a small factory—he is a felt hat manufacturer by trade—and the remainder to Crowhurst, who was made executor and residuary legatee. But, of course, the residue of the estate is an unknown quantity, since we don't know either the number or the amounts of the legacies.

"Shortly after the signing of the will, the parties separated. Mr. Harewood folded up the will and put it in a leather wallet which he slipped into his pocket, stating his intention of taking the will forthwith to deposit with his lawyer at Welsbury. A few minutes after his guests had departed, he was seen by one of the servants to leave the house, and afterwards was seen by a neighbour walking along a footpath which, after passing through a small wood, joins the main road about a mile and a quarter from Welsbury. From that time, he was never again seen alive. He never visited the lawyer, nor did anyone see him at or near Welsbury or elsewhere else.

"As he did not return home that night, his housekeeper (he was a widower and childless) became extremely alarmed, and in the morning she communicated with the police. A search-party was organised, and, following the path on which he was last seen, explored the wood—which is known as Gilbert's Copse—and here, at the bottom of an old chalk-pit, they found him lying dead with a fractured skull and a dislocated neck. How he came by these injuries is not at present known; but as the body had been robbed of all valuables, including his watch, purse, diamond ring and the wallet containing the will, there is naturally a strong suspicion that he has been murdered. That, however, is not our immediate concern—at least not mine. I am concerned with the will, which, as you see, has disappeared, and as it has presumably been carried away by a thief who is under suspicion of murder, it is not likely to be returned."

"It is almost certainly destroyed by this time," said Mr. Crowhurst.

"That certainly seems probable," Thorndyke agreed. "But what do you want me to do? You haven't come for counsel's opinion?"

"No," replied Marchmont. "I am pretty clear about the legal position. I shall claim, as the will has presumably been

destroyed, to have the testator's wishes carried out in so far as they are known. But I am doubtful as to the view the court may take. It may decide that the testator's wishes are not known, that the provisions of the will are too uncertain to admit of administration."

"And what would be the effect of that decision?" asked Thorndyke.

"In that case," said Marchmont, "the entire estate would go to Baxfield, as he is the next of kin and there was no previous will."

"And what is it that you want me to do?"

Marchmont chuckled deprecatingly. "You have to pay the penalty of being a prodigy, Thorndyke. We are asking you to do an impossibility—but we don't really expect you to bring it off. We ask you to help us to recover the will."

"If the will has been completely destroyed, it can't be recovered," said Thorndyke. "But we don't know that it has been destroyed. The matter is, at least, worth investigating; and if you wish me to look into it, I will."

The solicitor rose with an air of evident relief.

"Thank you, Thorndyke," said he. "I expect nothing—at least, I tell myself that I do—but I can now feel that everything that is possible will be done. And now I must be off. Crowhurst can give you any details that you want."

When Marchmont had gone, Thorndyke turned to our client and asked, "What do you suppose Baxfield will do, if the will is irretrievably lost? Will he press his claim as next of kin?"

"I should say yes," replied Crowhurst. "He is a businessman and his natural claims are greater than mine. He is not likely to refuse what the law assigns to him as his right. As a matter of fact, I think he felt that his uncle had treated him unfairly in alienating the property."

"Was there any reason for this diversion of the estate?"

"Well," replied Crowhurst, "Harewood and I have been very good friends and he was under some obligations to me; and then Baxfield had not made himself very acceptable to his uncle. But the principal factor, I think, was a strong tendency of Baxfield's to gamble. He had lost quite a lot of money by backing horses, and a careful, thrifty man like James Harewood doesn't care to leave his savings to a gambler. The thousand pounds that he did leave to Baxfield was expressly for the purpose of investment in a business."

"Is Baxfield in business now?"

"Not on his own account. He is a sort of foreman or shop-manager in a factory just outside Welsbury, and I believe he is a good worker and knows his trade thoroughly."

"And now," said Thorndyke, "with regard to Mr Harewood's death. The injuries might, apparently, have been either accidental or homicidal. What are the probabilities of accident—disregarding the robbery?"

"Very considerable, I should say. It is a most dangerous place. The footpath runs close beside the edge of a disused chalk-pit with perpendicular or over hanging sides, and the edge is masked by bushes and brambles. A careless walker might easily fall over—or be pushed over, for that matter."

"Do you know when the inquest is to take place?"

"Yes. The day after to-morrow. I had the subpoena this morning for Friday afternoon at 2.30, at the Welsbury Town Hall."

At this moment footsteps were heard hurriedly ascending the stairs and then came a loud and peremptory rat-tat at our door. I sprang across to see who our visitor was, and as I flung open the door, Mr. Marchmont rushed in, breathing heavily and flourishing a newspaper.

"Here is a new development," he exclaimed. "It doesn't seem to help us much, but I thought you had better know about it at once." He sat down, and putting on his spectacles, read aloud as follows: "A new and curious light has been thrown on the mystery of the death of Mr. James Harewood, whose body was found yesterday in a disused chalk-pit near Merbridge. It appears that on Monday—the day on which Mr. Harewood almost certainly was killed—a passenger alighting from a train at Barwood Junction before it had stopped, slipped and fell between the train and the platform. He was quickly extricated, and as he had evidently sustained internal injuries, he was taken to the local hospital, where he was found to be suffering from a fractured pelvis. He gave his name as Thomas Fletcher, but refused to give any address, saying that he had no relatives. This morning he died, and on his clothes being searched for an address, a parcel, formed of two handkerchiefs tied up with string, was found in his pocket. When it was opened it was found to contain five watches, three watch-chains, a tie-pin and a number of bank-notes. Other pockets contained a quantity of loose money—gold and silver mixed—and a card of the Welsbury Races, which were held on Monday. Of the five watches, one has been identified as the one taken from Mr. Harewood; and the bank-notes have been identified as a batch handed to him by the cashier, of his bank at Welsbury last Thursday and presumably carried in the leather wallet which was stolen from his pocket. This wallet, by the way, has also been found. It was picked up—empty—last night on the railway embankment just outside Welsbury Station. Appearances thus suggest that the man, Fletcher, when on his way to the races, encountered Mr. Harewood in the lonely copse, and murdered and robbed him; or perhaps found him dead in the chalk-pit and robbed the body—a question that is now never likely to be solved."

As Marchmont finished reading, he looked up at Thorndyke. "It doesn't help us much, does it?" said he. "As the wallet was found empty, it is pretty certain that the will has been destroyed."

"Or perhaps merely thrown away," said Thorndyke. "In which case an advertisement offering a substantial reward may bring it to light."

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders sceptically, but agreed to publish the advertisement. Then, once more he turned to go; and as Mr. Crowhurst had no further information to give, he departed with his lawyer.

For some time after they had gone, Thorndyke sat with his brief notes before him, silent and deeply reflective. I, too, maintained a discreet silence, for I knew from long experience that the motionless pose and quiet, impassive face were the outward signs of a mind in swift and strenuous action. Instinctively, I gathered that this apparently chaotic case was being quietly sorted out and arranged in a logical order; that Thorndyke, like a skilful chess-player, was "trying over the moves" before he should lay his hand upon the pieces.

Presently he looked up. "Well?" he asked. "What do you think, Jervis? Is it worth while?"

"That," I replied, "depends on whether the will is or is not in existence. If it has been destroyed, an investigation would be a waste of our time and our client's money."

"Yes," he agreed. "But there is quite a good chance that it has not been destroyed. It was probably dropped loose into the wallet, and then might have been picked out and thrown away before the wallet was examined. But we mustn't concentrate too much on the will. If we take up the case—which I am inclined to do—we must ascertain the actual sequence of events. We have one clear day before the inquest. If we run down to Merbridge to-morrow and go thoroughly over the ground, and then go on to Barwood and find out all we can about the man Fletcher, we may get some new light from the evidence at the inquest."

I agreed readily to Thorndyke's proposal, not that I could see any way into the case, but I felt a conviction that my colleague had isolated some leading fact and had a definite line of research in his mind. And this conviction deepened when, later in the evening, he laid his research-case on the table, and rearranged its contents with evident purpose. I watched curiously the apparatus that he was packing in it and tried—not very successfully—to infer the nature of the proposed investigation. The box of powdered paraffin wax and the spirit blowpipe were obvious enough; but the "dust-aspirator"—a sort of miniature vacuum cleaner—the portable microscope, the coil of Manila line, with an eye spliced into one end, and especially the abundance of blank-labelled microscope slides, all of which I saw him pack in the case with deliberate care, defeated me utterly.

About ten o'clock on the following morning we stepped from the train in Welsbury Station, and having recovered our bicycles from the luggage van, wheeled them through the barrier and mounted. During the train journey we had both studied the one-inch Ordnance map to such purpose that we were virtually in familiar surroundings and immune from the necessity of seeking directions from the natives. As we cleared the town we glanced up the broad by-road to the left which led to the race-course; then we rode on briskly for a mile, which brought us to the spot where the footpath to Merbridge joined the road. Here we dismounted and, lifting our bicycles over the stile, followed the path towards a small wood which we could see ahead, crowning a low hill.

"For such a good path," Thorndyke remarked as we approached the wood, "it is singularly unfrequented. I haven't seen a soul since we left the road." He glanced at the map as the path entered the wood, and when we had walked on a couple of hundred yards, he halted and stood his bicycle against a tree. "The chalk-pit should be about here," said he, "though it is impossible to see. He grasped a stem of one of the small bushes that crowded on to the path and pulled it aside. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"Just look at that, Jervis. It is a positive scandal that a public path should be left in this condition."

Certainly Mr. Crowhurst had not exaggerated. It was a most dangerous place. The parted branches revealed a chasm some thirty feet deep, the brink of which, masked by the bushes, was but a matter of inches from the edge of the path.

"We had better go back," said Thorndyke, "and find the entrance to the pit, which seems to be to the right. The first thing is to ascertain exactly where Harewood fell. Then we can come back and examine the place from above."

We turned back, and presently found a faint track which we followed until, descending steeply, it brought us out into the middle of the pit. It was evidently an ancient pit, for the sides were blackened by age, and the floor was occupied by a trees of some of considerable size. Against one of these we leaned our bicycles and then walked slowly round at the foot of the frowning cliff.

"This seems to be below the path," said Thorndyke, glancing up at the grey wall which jutted out above in stages like an inverted flight of steps. "Somewhere hereabouts we should find some traces of the tragedy."

Even as he spoke my eye caught a spot of white on a block of chalk, and on the freshly fractured surface a significant brownish-red stain. The block lay opposite the mouth of an artificial cave—an old wagon-shelter but now empty and immediately under a markedly overhanging part of the cliff.

"This is undoubtedly the place where he fell," said Thorndyke. "You can see where the stretcher was placed—an old-pattern stretcher with wheel-runners—and there is a little spot of broken soil at the top where he came over. Well, apart from the robbery, a clear fall of over thirty feet is enough to account for a fractured skull. Will you stay here, Jervis, while I

run up and look at the path?"

He went off towards the entrance, and presently I heard him above, pulling aside the bushes, and after one or two trials, he appeared directly overhead.

"There are plenty of footprints on the path," said he, "but nothing abnormal. No trampling or signs of a struggle. I am going on a little farther."

He withdrew behind the bushes, and I proceeded to inspect the interior of the cave, noting the smoke-blackened roof and the remains of a recent fire, which, with a number of rabbit bones and a discarded tea-boiler of the kind used by the professional tramp, seemed not without a possible bearing on our investigation. I was thus engaged when I heard Thorndyke hail me from above and coming out of the cave, I saw his head thrust between the branches. He seemed to be lying down, for his face was nearly on a level with the top of the cliff.

"I want to take an impression," he called out. "Will you bring up the paraffin and the blower? And you might bring the coil of line, too."

I hurried away to the place where our bicycles were standing, and opening the research-case, took out the coil of line, the tin of paraffin wax and the spirit blowpipe, and having ascertained that the container of the latter was full, I ran up the incline and made my way along the path. Some distance along, I found my colleague nearly hidden in the bushes, lying prone, with his head over the edge of the cliff.

"You see, Jervis," he said, as I crawled alongside and looked over, "this is a possible way down, and someone has used it quite recently. He climbed down with his face to the cliff—you can see the clear impression of the toe of a boot in the loam of that projection, and you can even make out the shape of an iron toe-tip. Now the problem is how to get down to take the impression without, dislodging the earth above it. I think I will secure myself with the line."

"It is hardly worth the risk of a broken neck," said I. "Probably the print is that of some schoolboy."

"It is a man's foot," he replied. "Most likely it has no connection with our case. But it may have, and as a shower of rain would obliterate it we ought to secure it." As he spoke, he passed the end of the cord through eye and slipped the loop over his shoulders, drawing tight under his arms. Then, having made the line fast to the butt of a small tree, he cautiously lowered himself over the edge and climbed down to the projection. As soon as he had a secure footing, I passed the spare cord through the ring on the lid of the wax tin and lowered it to him, and when he had unfastened it, I drew up the cord and in the same way let down the blowpipe. Then I watched his neat, methodical procedure. First he took out a spoonful of the powdered, or grated, wax and very delicately sprinkled it on the toe-print until the latter was evenly but very thinly covered. Next he lit the blowlamp, and as soon as the blue flame began to roar from the pipe, he directed it on to the toe-print. Almost instantly the powder melted, glazing the impression like a coat of varnish. The flame was removed and the film of wax at once solidified and became dull and opaque. A second, heavier, sprinkling with the powder, followed by another application of the flame, thickened the film of wax, and this process, repeated four or five times, eventually produced a solid cake. Then Thorndyke extinguished the blowlamp, and securing it and the tin to the cord, directed me to pull them up. "And you might send me down the field-glasses," he added. "There is something farther down that I can't quite make out."

I slipped the glasses from my shoulder, and opening the case, tied the cord to the leather sling and lowered it down the cliff; and then I watched with some curiosity as Thorndyke stood on his insecure perch steadily gazing through the glasses (they were Zeiss 8-prismatics) at a clump of wallflowers that grew from a boss of chalk about half-way down. Presently he lowered the glasses and, slinging them round his neck by their lanyard, turned his attention to the cake of wax. It was by this time quite solid, and when he had tested it, he lifted it carefully, and placed it in the empty binocular case, when I drew it up.

"I want you, Jervis," Thorndyke called up, "to steady the line. I am going down to that wallflower clump."

It looked extremely unsafe, but I knew it was useless to protest, so I hitched the line around a massive stump and took a firm grip of the "fall."

"Ready," I sang out; and forthwith Thorndyke began to creep across the face of the cliff with feet and hands clinging to almost invisible projections. Fortunately, there was at this part no overhang, and though my heart was in my mouth as I watched, I saw him cross the perilous space in safety. Arrived at the clump, he drew an envelope from his pocket, stooped and picked up some small object, which he placed in the envelope, returning the latter to his pocket. Then he gave me another bad five minutes while he recrossed the nearly vertical surface to his starting-point; but at length this, too, was safely accomplished, and when he finally climbed up over the edge and stood beside me on solid earth, I drew a deep breath and turned to revile him.

"Well?" I demanded sarcastically, "what have you gathered at the risk of your neck? Is it samphire or edelweiss?"

He drew the envelope from his pocket, and dipping into it, produced a cigarette-holder—a cheap bone affair, black and clammy with long service and still holding the butt of a hand-made cigarette—and handed it to me. I turned it over, smelled it and hastily handed it back. "For my part," said I, "I wouldn't have risked the cervical vertebra of a yellow cat for it. What do you expect to learn from it?"

"Of course, I expect nothing. We are just collecting facts on the chance that they may turn out to be relevant. Here, for instance, we find that a man has descended, within a few yards of where Harewood fell, by this very inconvenient route,

instead of going round to the entrance to the pit. He must have had some reason for adopting this undesirable mode of descent. Possibly he was in a hurry, and probably he belonged to the district, since a stranger would not know of the existence of this short cut. Then it seems likely that this was his cigarette tube. If you look over, you will see by those vertical scrapes on the chalk that he slipped and must have nearly fallen. At that moment he probably dropped the tube, for you notice that the wallflower clump is directly under the marks of his toes."

"Why do you suppose he did not recover the tube?"

"Because the descent slopes away from the position of the clump, and he had no trusty Jervis with a stout cord to help him to cross the space. And if he went down this way because he was hurried, he would not have time to search for the tube. But if the tube was not his, still it belonged to somebody who has been here recently."

"Is there anything that leads you to connect this man with the crime?"

"Nothing but time and place," he replied. "The man has been down into the pit close to where Harewood was robbed and possibly murdered, and as the traces are quite recent, he must have been there near about the time of the robbery. That is all. I am considering the traces of this man in particular because there are no traces of any other. But we may as well have a look at the path, which, as you see, yields good impressions."

We walked slowly along the path towards Merbridge, keeping at the edges and scrutinising the surface closely. In the shady hollows, the soft loam bore prints of many feet, and among them we could distinguish one with an iron toe-tip, but it was nearly obliterated by another studded with hob-nails.

"We shan't get much information here," said Thorndyke as he turned about. "The search-party have trodden out the important prints. Let us see if we can find out where the man with the toe-tips went to."

We searched the path on the Welsbury side of the chalk-pit, but found no trace of him. Then we went into the pit, and having located the place where he descended, sought for some other exit than the track leading to the path. Presently, half-way up the slope, we found a second track, bearing away in the direction of Merbridge. Following this for some distance, we came to a small hollow at the bottom of which was a muddy space. And here we both halted abruptly, for in the damp ground were the clear imprints of a pair of boots which we could see had, in addition to the toe-tips, half-tips to the heels.

"We had better have wax casts of these," said Thorndyke, "to compare with the boots of the man Fletcher. I will do them while you go back for the bicycles."

By the time that I returned with the machines two of the footprints were covered with a cake each of wax, and Thorndyke had left the track, and was peering among the bushes. I inquired what he was looking for.

"It is a forlorn hope, as Marchmont would say," he replied, "but I am looking to see if the will has been thrown away here. It was quite probably jettisoned at once, and this is the most probable route for the robber to have taken, if he knew of it. You see by the map that it must lead nearly directly to the race-course, and it avoids both the path and the main road. While the wax is setting we might as well look round."

It seemed a hopeless enough proceeding and I agreed to it without enthusiasm. Leaving the track on the opposite side to that which Thorndyke was searching, I wandered among the bushes and the little open spaces, peering about me and reminding myself of that "aged, aged man" who

"Sometimes searched the grassy knolls,

For wheels of hansom cabs."

I had worked my way nearly back to where I could see Thorndyke, also returning, when my glance fell on a small, brown object caught among the branches of a bush. It was a man's pigskin purse; and as I picked it out of the bush I saw that it was open and empty.

With my prize in my hand, I hastened to the spot where Thorndyke was lifting the wax casts. He looked up and asked, "No luck, I suppose?"

I held out the purse, on which he pounced eagerly. "But this is most important, Jervis," he exclaimed. "It is almost certainly Harewood's purse. You see the initials, 'J. H.,' stamped on the flap. Then we were right as to the direction that the robber took. And it would pay to search this place exhaustively for the will, though we can't do that now, as we have to go to Barwood, I wrote to say we were coming. We had better get back to the path now and make for the road. Barwood is only half-an-hour's run."

We packed the casts in the research-case (which was strapped to Thorndyke's bicycle), and turning back, made our way to the path. As it was still deserted, we ventured to mount, and soon reached the road, along which we started at a good pace toward Barwood.

Half-an-hour's ride brought us into the main Street of the little town, and when we dismounted at the police station we found the Chief Constable himself waiting to receive us, courteously eager to assist us, but possessed by a devouring curiosity which was somewhat inconvenient.

"I have done as you asked me in your letter, sir," he said. "Fletcher's body is, of course, in the mortuary, but I have had all his clothes and effects brought here; and I have had them put in my private office, so that you can look them over in comfort."

"It is exceedingly good of you," said Thorndyke, "and most helpful." He unstrapped the research-case, and following the officer into his sanctum, looked round with deep approval. A large table had been cleared for the examination, and the dead pickpocket's clothes and effects neatly arranged at one end.

Thorndyke's first proceeding was to pick up the dead man's boots—a smart but flimsy pair of light brown leather, rather down at heel and in need of re-soleing. Neither toes nor heels bore any tips or even nails excepting the small fastening brads. Having exhibited them to me without remark, Thorndyke placed them on a sheet of white paper and made a careful tracing of the soles, a proceeding that seemed to surprise the Chief Constable, for he remarked, "I should hardly have thought that the question of footprints would arise in this case. You can't charge a dead man."

Thorndyke agreed that this seemed to be true; and then he proceeded to an operation that fairly made the officer's eyes bulge. Opening the research-case—into which the officer cast an inquisitive glance—he took out the dust-aspirator, the nozzle of which he inserted into one after another of the dead thief's pockets while I worked the pump. When he had gone through them all, he opened the receiver and extracted quite a considerable ball of dusty fluff. Placing this on a glass slide, he tore it in halves with a pair of mounted needles and passing one half to me, when we both fell to work "teasing", it out into an open mesh, portions of which we separated and laid—each in a tiny pool of glycerine—on blank labelled glass slides, applying to each slide its cover-glass and writing on the label, "Dust from Fletcher's pockets."

When the series was complete, Thorndyke brought out the microscope, and fitting on a one-inch objective, quickly examined the slides, one after another, and then pushed the microscope to me. So far as I could see, the dust was just ordinary dust—principally made up of broken cotton fibres with a few fibres of wool, linen, wood, jute, and others that I could not name and some undistinguishable mineral particles. But I made no comment, and resigning the microscope to the Chief Constable—who glared through it, breathing hard, and remarked that the dust was "rummy-looking stuff"—watched Thorndyke's further proceedings. And very odd proceedings they were.

First he laid the five stolen watches in a row, and with a Coddington lens minutely examined the dial of each, Then he opened the back of each in turn and copied into his notebook the watch-repairers' scratched inscriptions. Next he produced from the case a number of little vulcanite rods, and laying out five labelled slides, dropped a tiny drop of glycerine on each, covering it at once with a watch-glass to protect it from falling dust. Then he stuck a little label on each watch, wrote a number on it and similarly numbered the five slides. His next proceeding was to take out the glass of watch No. 1 and pick up one of the vulcanite rods, which he rubbed briskly on a silk handkerchief and passed across and around the dial of the watch, after which he held the rod close to the glycerine on slide No. 1 and tapped it sharply with the blade of his pocket-knife. Then he dropped a cover-glass on to the glycerine and made a rapid inspection of the specimen through the microscope.

This operation he repeated on the other four watches, using a fresh rod for each, and when he had finished he turned to the open-mouthed officer. "I take it," said he, "that the watch which has the chain attached to it is Mr. Harewood's watch?"

"Yes, sir. That helped us to identify it." Thorndyke looked at the watch reflectively. Attached to the bow by a short length of green tape was a small, rather elaborate key. This my friend picked up, and taking a fresh mounted needle, inserted it into the barrel of the key, from which he then withdrew it with a tiny ball of fluff on its point. I hastily prepared a slide and handed it to him, when, with a pair of dissecting scissors, he cut off a piece of the fluff and let it fall into the glycerine. He repeated this manoeuvre with two more slides and then labelled the three "Key, outside," "middle" and "inside," and in that order examined them under the microscope.

My own examination of the specimens yielded very little. They all seemed to be common dust, though that from the face of watch No. 3 contained a few broken fragments of what looked like animal hairs—possibly cat's—as also did the key-fluff marked "outside." But if this had any significance, I could not guess what it was. As to the Chief Constable, he clearly looked on the whole proceeding as a sort of legerdemain with no obvious purpose, for he remarked, as we were packing up to go, "I am glad I've seen how you do it, sir. But all the same, I think you are flogging a dead horse. We know who committed the crime and we know he's beyond the reach of the law."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "one must earn one's fee, you know. I shall put Fletcher's boots and the five watches in evidence at the inquest to-morrow, and I will ask you to leave the labels on the watches." With renewed thanks and a hearty handshake he bade the courteous officer adieu, and we rode off to catch the train to London.

That evening, after dinner, we brought out the specimens and went over them at our leisure; and Thorndyke added a further specimen by drawing a knotted piece of twine through the cigarette-holder that he had salvaged from the chalk-pit, and teasing out the unsavoury, black substance that came out on the string in glycerine on a slide. When he had examined it, he passed it to me, The dark, tarry liquid somewhat obscured the detail, but I could make out fragments of the same animal hairs that I had noted in the other specimens, only here they were much more numerous. I mentioned my observation to Thorndyke. "They are certainly parts of mammalian hairs," I said, "and they look like the hairs of a cat. Are they from a cat?"

"Rabbit," Thorndyke replied curtly; and even then, I am ashamed to admit, I did not perceive the drift of the investigation.

The room in the Welsbury Town Hall had filled up some minutes before the time fixed for the opening of the inquest, and in the interval, when the jury had retired to view the body in the adjacent mortuary, I looked round the assembly. Mr. Marchmont and Mr. Crowhurst were present, and a youngish, horsey-looking man in cord breeches and leggings, whom I



correctly guessed to be Arthur Baxfield. Our friend the Chief Constable of Barwood was also there, and with him Thorndyke exchanged a few words in a retired corner. The rest of the company were strangers.

As soon as the coroner and the jury had taken their places the medical witness was called. The cause of death, he stated, was dislocation of the neck, accompanied by a depressed fracture of the skull. The fracture have been produced by a blow with a heavy weapon, or by the deceased falling on his head. The witness adopted the latter view, as the dislocation showed that deceased had fallen in that manner.

The next witness was Mr. Crowhurst, who repeated to the court what he had told us, and further stated that on leaving deceased's house he went straight home, as he had an appointment with a friend. He was followed by Baxfield, who gave evidence to the same effect, and stated that on leaving the house of the deceased he went to his place of business at Welsbury. He was about to retire when Thorndyke rose to cross-examine.

"At what time did you reach your place of business?" he asked.

The witness hesitated for a few moments and then replied, "Half-past four."

"And what time did you leave deceased's house?"

"Two o'clock," was the reply.

"What is the distance?"

"In a direct line, about two miles. But I didn't go direct. I took a round in the country by Lenfield."

"That would take you near the race-course on the way back. Did you go to the races?"

"No. The races were just over when I returned."

There was a slight pause and then Thorndyke asked, "Do you smoke much, Mr. Baxfield?"

The witness looked surprised, and so did the jury, but the former replied, "A fair amount. About fifteen cigarettes a day."

"What brand of cigarettes do you smoke, and what kind of tobacco is it?"

"I make my own cigarettes. I make them of shag."

Here protesting murmurs arose from the jury, and the coroner remarked stiffly, "These questions do not appear to have much connection with the subject of this inquiry."

"You may take it, sir," replied Thorndyke, "that they have a very direct bearing on it." Then, turning to the witness he asked, "Do you use a cigarette-tube?"

"Sometimes I do," was the reply.

"Have you lost a cigarette-tube lately?"

The witness directed a startled glance at Thorndyke and replied after some hesitation, "I believe I mislaid one a little time ago."

"When and where did you lose that tube?" Thorndyke asked.

"I—I really couldn't say," replied Baxfield, turning perceptibly pale.

Thorndyke opened his dispatch-box, and taking out the tube that he had salved at so much risk, handed it to the witness. "Is that the tube that you lost?" he asked.

At this question Baxfield turned pale as death, and the hand in which he received the tube shook as if with a palsy. "It may be," he faltered. "I wouldn't swear to it. It is like the one I lost."

Thorndyke took it from him and passed it to the coroner. "I am putting this tube in evidence, sir," said he. Then addressing the witness, he said, "You stated that you did not go to the races. Did you go on the course or inside the grounds at all?"

Baxfield moistened his lips and replied, "I just went in for a minute or two, but I didn't stay. The races were over, and there was a very rough crowd."

"While you were in that crowd, Mr Baxfield, did you have your pocket picked?"

There was an expectant silence in the court as Baxfield replied in a low voice: "Yes. I lost my watch."

Again Thorndyke opened the dispatch-box, and taking out a watch (it was the one that had been labelled 3), handed it to the witness. "Is that the watch that you lost?" he asked.

Baxfield held the watch in his trembling hand and replied hesitatingly, "I believe it is, but I won't swear to it."

There was a pause. Then, in grave, impressive tones, Thorndyke said, "Now, Mr. Baxfield, I am going to ask you a question which you need not answer if you consider that by doing so you would prejudice your position in any way. That question is, When your pocket was picked, were any articles besides this watch taken from your person? Don't hurry. Consider your answer carefully."

For some moments Baxfield remained silent, regarding Thorndyke with a wild, affrighted stare. At length he began

falteringly, "I don't remember missing any thing—" and then stopped.

"Could the witness be allowed to sit down, sir?" Thorndyke asked. And when the permission had been given and a chair placed, Baxfield sat down heavily and cast a bewildered glance round the court. "I think," he said, addressing Thorndyke, "I had better tell you exactly what happened and take my chance of the consequences. When I left my uncle's house on Monday, I took a circuit through the fields and then entered Gilbert's Copse to wait for my uncle and tell him what I thought of his conduct in leaving the bulk of his property to a stranger. I struck the path that I knew my uncle would take and walked along it slowly to meet him. I did meet him—on the path, just above where he was found—and I began to say what was in my mind. But he wouldn't listen. He flew into a rage, and as I was standing in the middle of the path, he tried to push past me. In doing so he caught his foot in a bramble and staggered back, then he disappeared through the bushes and a few seconds after I heard a thud down below. I pulled the bushes aside and looked down into the chalk-pit, and there I saw him lying with his head all on one side. Now, I happened to know of a short cut down into the pit. It was rather a dangerous climb, but I took it to get down as quickly as possible. It was there that I dropped the cigarette-tube. When I got to my uncle I could see that he was dead. His skull was battered and his neck was broken. Then the devil put into my head the idea of making away with the will. But I knew that if I took the will only, suspicion would fall on me. So I took most of his valuables—the wallet, his watch and chain, his purse and his ring. The purse I emptied and threw away, and flung the ring after it. I took the will out of the wallet—it had just been dropped in loose—and put it in an inner pocket. Then I dropped the wallet and the watch and chain into my outside coat pocket.

"I struck across country, intending to make for the race-course and drop the things among the crowd, so that they might be picked up and safely carried away. But when I got there a gang of pickpockets saved me the trouble; they mobbed and hustled me and cleared my pockets of everything but my keys and the will."

"And what has become of the will?" asked Thorndyke.

"I have it here." He dipped into his breast pocket and produced a folded paper, which he handed to Thorndyke, who opened it, and having glanced at it, passed it to the coroner.

That was practically the end of the inquest. The jury decided to accept Baxfield's statement and recorded a verdict of "Death by Misadventure," leaving Baxfield to be dealt with by the proper authorities.

"An interesting and eminently satisfactory case," remarked Thorndyke, as we sat over a rather late dinner. "Essentially simple, too. The elucidation turned, as you probably noticed, on a single illuminating fact."

"I judged that it was so," said I, "though the illumination of that fact has not yet reached me."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "let us first take the general aspect of the case as it was presented by Marchmont. The first thing, of course, that struck one was that the loss of the will might easily have converted Baxfield from a minor beneficiary to the sole heir. But even if the court agreed to recognise the will, it would have to be guided by the statements of the only two men to whom its provisions were even approximately known, and Baxfield could have made any statement he pleased. It was impossible to ignore the fact that the loss of the will was very greatly to Baxfield's advantage.

"When the stolen property was discovered in Fletcher's possession it looked, at the first glance, as if the mystery of the crime were solved. But there were several serious inconsistencies. First, how came Fletcher to be in this solitary wood, remote from any railway or even road? He appeared to be a London pickpocket. When he was killed he was travelling to London by train. It seemed probable that he had come from London by train to ply his trade at the races. Then, as you know, criminological experience shows that the habitual criminal is a rigid specialist. The burglar, the coiner, the pickpocket, each keeps strictly to his own special line. Now, Fletcher was a pickpocket, and had evidently been picking pockets on the race-course. The probabilities were against his being the original robber and in favour of his having picked the pocket of the person who robbed Harewood. But if this were so, who was that person? Once more the probabilities suggested Baxfield. There was the motive, as I have said, and further, the pocket-picking had apparently taken place on the race-course, and Baxfield was known to be a frequenter of race-courses. But again, if Baxfield were the person robbed by Fletcher, then one of the five watches was probably Baxfield's watch. Whether it was so or not might have been very difficult to prove, but here came in the single illuminating fact that I have spoken of.

"You remember that when Marchmont opened the case he mentioned that Baxfield was a manufacturer of felt hats, and Crowhurst told us that he was a sort of foreman or manager of the factory."

"Yes, I remember, now you speak of it. But what is the bearing of the fact?"

"My dear Jervis!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "Don't you see that it gave us a touchstone? Consider, now. What is a felt hat? It is just a mass of agglutinated rabbits' hair. The process of manufacture consists in blowing a jet of the more or less disintegrated hair on to a revolving steel cone which is moistened by a spray of an alcoholic solution of shellac. But, of course, a quantity of the finer and more minute particles of the broken hairs miss the cone and float about in the air. The air of the factory is thus charged with the dust of broken rabbit hairs; and this dust settles on and penetrates the clothing of the workers. But when clothing becomes charged with dust, that dust tends to accumulate in the pockets and find its way into the hollows and interstices of any object carried in those pockets. Thus, if one of the five watches was Baxfield's it would almost certainly show traces where this characteristic dust had crept under the bezel and settled on the dial. And so it turned out to be. When I inspected those five watches through the Coddington lens, on the dial of No. 3 I saw a quantity of dust of this character. The electrified vulcanite rod picked it all up neatly and transferred it to the slide, and under the microscope its nature was obvious. The owner of this watch was therefore, almost certainly, employed in a felt hat factory.

But, of course, it was necessary to show not only the presence of rabbit hair in this watch but its absence in the others and in Fletcher's pockets; which I did.

"Then with regard to Harewood's watch. There was no rabbit hair on the dial, but there was a small quantity on the fluff from the key barrel. Now, if that rabbit hair had come from Harewood's pocket it would have been uniformly distributed through the fluff. But it was not. It was confined exclusively to the part of the fluff that was exposed. Thus it had come from some pocket other than Harewood's and the owner of that pocket was almost certainly employed in a felt hat factory, and was most probably the owner of watch No. 3. Then there was the cigarette-tube. Its bore was loaded with rabbit hair. But its owner had unquestionably been at the scene of the crime. There was a clear suggestion that his was the pocket in which the stolen watch had been carried and that he was the owner of watch No. 3. The problem was to piece this evidence together and prove definitely who this person was. And that I was able to do by means of a fresh item of evidence, which I acquired when I saw Baxfield at the inquest. I suppose you noticed his boots?"

"I am afraid I didn't," I had to admit.

"Well, I did. I watched his feet constantly, and when he crossed his legs I could see that he had iron toe-tips on his boots. That was what gave me confidence to push the cross-examination."

"It was certainly a rather daring cross-examination and rather irregular, too," said I.

"It was extremely irregular," Thorndyke agreed. "The coroner ought not to have permitted it. But it was all for the best. If the coroner had disallowed my questions we should have had to take criminal proceedings against Baxfield, whereas now that we have recovered the will, it is possible that no one will trouble to prosecute him."

Which, I subsequently ascertained, is what actually happened.

---

## V. — A FISHER OF MEN

"The man," observed Thorndyke, "who would successfully practise the scientific detection of crime must take all knowledge for his province. There is no single fact which may not, in particular circumstances, acquire a high degree of evidential value; and in such circumstances success or failure is determined by the possession or non-possession of the knowledge wherewith to interpret the significance of that fact."

This obiter dictum was thrown off apropos of our investigation of the case rather magniloquently referred to in the press as "The Blue Diamond Mystery;" and more particularly of an incident which occurred in the office of our old friend, Superintendent Miller, at Scotland Yard. Thorndyke had called to verify the few facts which had been communicated to him, and having put away his notebook and picked up his green canvas-covered research-case, had risen to take his leave, when his glance fell on a couple of objects on a side-table—a leather handbag and a walking-stick, lashed together with string, to which was attached a descriptive label.

He regarded them for a few moments reflectively and then glanced at the superintendent.

"Derelicts?" he inquired, "or jetsam?"

"Jetsam," the superintendent replied, "literally jetsam—thrown overboard to lighten the ship."

Here Inspector Badger, who had been a party to the conference, looked up eagerly.

"Yes," he broke in. "Perhaps the doctor wouldn't mind having a look at them. It's quite a nice little problem, doctor, and entirely in your line."

"What is the problem?" asked Thorndyke.

"It's just this," said Badger. "Here is a bag. Now the question is, whose bag is it? What sort of person is the owner? Where did he come from and where has he gone to?"

Thorndyke chuckled. "That seems quite simple," said he. "A cursory inspection ought to dispose of trivial details like those. But how did you come by the bag?"

"The history of the derelicts," said Miller, "is this: About four o'clock this morning, a constable on duty in King's Road, Chelsea, saw a man walking on the opposite side of the road, carrying a handbag. There was nothing particularly suspicious in this, but still the constable thought he would cross and have a closer look at him. As he did so the man quickened his pace and, of course, the constable quickened his. Then the man broke into a run, and so did the constable, and a fine, stern chase started. Suddenly the man shot down a by-street, and as the constable turned the corner he saw his quarry turn into a sort of alley. Following him into this, and gaining on him perceptibly, he saw that the alley ended in a rather high wall. When the fugitive reached the wall he dropped his bag and stick and went over like a harlequin. The constable went over after him, but not like a harlequin—he wasn't dressed for the part. By the time he got over, into a large garden with a lot of fruit trees in it, my nabs had disappeared. He traced him by his footprints across the garden to another wall, and when he climbed over that he found himself in by-street. But there was no sign of our agile friend. The constable ran up and down the street to the next crossings, blowing his whistle, but of course it was no go. So he went back across the garden and secured the bag and stick, which were at once sent here for examination."

"And no arrest has been made?"

"Well," replied Miller with a faint grin, "a constable in Oakley Street who had heard the whistle arrested a man who was carrying a suspicious-looking object. But he turned out to be a cornet player coming home from the theatre."

"Good," said Thorndyke. "And now let us have a look at the bag, which I take it has already been examined?"

"Yes, we've been through it," replied Miller, "but everything has been put back as we found it."

Thorndyke picked up the bag and proceeded to make a systematic inspection of its exterior.

"A good bag," he commented; "quite an expensive one originally, though it has seen a good deal of service. You noticed the muddy marks on the bottom?"

"Yes," said Miller. "Those were probably made when he dropped the bag to jump over the wall."

"Possibly," said Thorndyke, "though they don't look like street mud. But we shall probably get more information from the contents." He opened the bag, and after a glance at its interior, spread out on the table a couple of sheets of foolscap from the stationery rack, on which he began methodically to deposit the contents of the bag, accompanying the process with a sort of running commentary on their obvious characteristics.

"Item one: a small leather dressing-wallet. Rather shabby, but originally of excellent quality. It contains two Swedish razors, a little Washita hone, a diminutive strop, a folding shaving-brush, which is slightly damp to the fingers and has a scent similar to that of the stick of shaving soap. You notice that the hone is distinctly concave in the middle and that the inscription on the razors, 'Arensburg, Eskilstuna, Sweden,' is partly ground away. Then there is a box containing a very dry cake of soap, a little manicure set, a well-worn toothbrush, a nailbrush, dental-brush, button-hook, corn-razor, a small clothesbrush and a pair of small hairbrushes. It seems to me, Badger, that this wallet suggests—mind, I only say 'suggests'—a pretty complete answer to one of your questions."

"I don't see how," said the inspector. "Tell me what it suggests to you."

"It suggests to me," replied Thorndyke, laying down the lens through which he had been inspecting the hair-brushes, "a middle-aged or elderly man with a shaven upper lip and a beard; a well-preserved, healthy man, neat, orderly, provident and careful as to his appearance; a man long habituated to travelling, and—though I don't insist on this, but the appearances suggest that he had been living for some time in a particular household and that at the time when he lost the bag, he was changing his residence."

"He was that," cackled the inspector, "if the constable's account of the way he went over that wall is to be trusted. But still, I don't see how you have arrived at all those facts."

"Not facts, Badger," Thorndyke corrected. "I said suggestions. And those suggestions may be quite misleading. There may be some factor, such as change of ownership of the wallet, which we have not allowed for. But, taking the appearances at their face value, that is what they suggest. There is the wallet itself, for instance—strong, durable, but shabby with years of wear. And observe that it is a travelling-wallet and would be subjected to wear only during travel. Then further, as to the time factor, there are the hone and the razors. It takes a good many years to wear a Washita hone hollow or to wear away the blade of a Swedish razor until the maker's mark is encroached on. The state of health, and to some extent the age, are suggested by the tooth brush and the dental-brush. He has lost some teeth, since he wears a plate, but not many; and he is free from pyorrhoea and alveolar absorption. You don't wear a toothbrush down like this on half a dozen rickety survivors. But a man whose teeth will bear hard brushing is probably well-preserved and healthy."

"You say that he shaves his upper lip but wears a beard," said the inspector. "How do you arrive at that?"

"It is fairly obvious," replied Thorndyke. "We see that he has razors and uses them, and we also see that he has a beard."

"Do we?" exclaimed Badger. "How do we?"

Thorndyke delicately picked a hair from one of the hairbrushes and held it up. "That is not a scalp hair," said he. "I should say that it came from the side of the chin."

Badger regarded the hair with evident disfavour. "Looks to me," he remarked, "as if a small tooth-comb might have been useful."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed, "but the appearance is deceptive. This is what is called a moniliform hair—like a string of beads. But the bead-like swellings are really parts of the hair. It is a diseased, or perhaps we should say an abnormal, condition." He handed me the hair together with his lens, through which I examined it and easily recognised the characteristic swellings.

"Yes," said I, "it is an early case of trichlorrexia nodosa."

"Good Lord!" murmured the inspector. "Sounds like a Russian nobleman. Is it a common complaint?"

"It is not a rare disease—if you can call it a disease," I replied, "but it is a rare condition, taking the population as a whole."

"It is rather a remarkable coincidence that it should happen to occur in this particular case," the superintendent observed.

"My dear Miller," exclaimed Thorndyke, "surely your experience must have impressed on you the astonishing frequency of the unusual and the utter failure of the mathematical laws of probability in practice. Believe me, Miller, the bread-and-

butterfly was right. It is the exceptional that always happens.”

Having discharged this paradox, he once more dived into the bag, and this time handed out a singular and rather unsavoury-looking parcel, the outer investment of which was formed by what looked like an excessively dirty towel, but which, as Thorndyke delicately unrolled it, was seen to be only half a towel which was supplemented by a still dirtier and excessively ragged coloured handkerchief. This, too, being opened out, disclosed an extremely soiled and rather frayed collar (which, like the other articles, bore no name or mark), and a mass of grass, evidently used as packing material.

The inspector picked up the collar and quoted reflectively, “He is a man, neat, orderly and careful as to his appearance,” after which he dropped the collar and ostentatiously wiped his fingers.

Thorndyke smiled grimly but refrained from repartee as he carefully separated the grass from the contained objects, which turned out to be a small telescopic jemmy, a jointed auger, a screwdriver and a bunch of skeleton keys.

“One understands his unwillingness to encounter the constable with these rather significant objects in his possession,” Thorndyke remarked. “They would have been difficult to explain away.” He took up the heap of grass between his hands and gently compressed it to test its freshness. As he did so a tiny, cigar-shaped object dropped on the paper.

“What is that?” asked the superintendent. “It looks like a chrysalis.”

“It isn’t,” said Thorndyke. “It is a shell, a species of *Clausilia*, I think.” He picked up the little shell and closely examined its mouth through his lens. “Yes,” he continued, “it is a *Clausilia*. Do you study our British mollusca, Badger?”

“No, I don’t,” the inspector replied with emphasis.

“Pity,” murmured Thorndyke. “If you did, you would be interested to learn that the name of this little shell is *Clausilia biplicata*.”

“I don’t care what its beastly name is,” said Badger. “I want to know whose bag this is; what the owner is like; and where he came from and where he has gone to. Can you tell us that?”

Thorndyke regarded the inspector with wooden gravity. “It is all very obvious,” said he, “very obvious. But still, I think I should like to fill in a few details before making a definite statement. Yes, I think I will reserve my judgment until I have considered the matter a little further.”

The inspector received this statement with a dubious grin. He was in somewhat of a dilemma. My colleague was addicted to a certain dry facetiousness, and was probably pulling the inspector’s leg. But, on the other hand, I knew, and so did both the detectives, that it was perfectly conceivable that he had actually solved Badger’s problem, impossible as it seemed, and was holding back his knowledge until he had seen whither it led.

“Shall we take a glance at the stick?” said he, picking it up as he spoke and running his eye over its not very distinctive features. It was a common ash stick, with a crooked handle polished and darkened by prolonged contact with an apparently ungloved hand, and it was smeared for about three inches from the tip with a yellowish mud. The iron shoe of the ferrule was completely worn away and the deficiency had been made good by driving a steel boot-stud into the exposed end.

“A thrifty gentleman, this,” Thorndyke remarked, pointing to the stud as he measured the diameter of the ferrule with his pocket calliper-gauge. “Twenty-three thirty-seconds is the diameter,” he added, looking gravely at the inspector. “You had better make a note of that, Badger.”

The inspector smiled sourly as Thorndyke laid down the stick, and once more picking up the little green canvas case that contained his research outfit, prepared to depart.

“You will hear from us, Miller,” he said, “if we pick up anything that will be useful to you. And now, Jervis, we must really take ourselves off.”

As the tinkling hansom bore us down Whitehall towards Waterloo, I remarked, “Badger half suspects you of having withheld from him some valuable information in respect of that bag.”

“He does,” Thorndyke agreed with a mischievous smile; “and he doesn’t in the least suspect me of having given him a most illuminating hint.”

“But did you?” I asked, rapidly reviewing the conversation and deciding that the facts elicited from the dressing-wallet could hardly be described as hints.

“My learned friend,” he replied, “is pleased to counterfeit obtuseness. It won’t do, Jervis. I’ve known you too long.”

I grinned with vexation. Evidently I had missed the point of a subtle demonstration, and I knew that it was useless to ask further questions; and for the remainder of our journey, in the cab I struggled vainly to recover the “illuminating hint” that the detectives—and I—had failed to note. Indeed, so preoccupied was I with this problem that I rather overlooked the fact that the jettisoned bag was really no concern of ours, and that we were actually engaged in the investigation of a crime of which, at present, I knew practically nothing. It was not until we had secured an empty compartment and the train had begun to move that this suddenly dawned on me; whereupon I dismissed the bag problem and applied to Thorndyke for details of the “Brentford Train Mystery.”

“To call it a mystery,” said he, “is a misuse of words. It appears to be a simple train robbery. The identity of the robber is

unknown, but there is nothing very mysterious in that; and the crime otherwise is quite commonplace. The circumstances are these:

"Some time ago, Mr. Lionel Montague, of the firm, Lyons, Montague & Salaman, art dealers, bought from a Russian nobleman a very valuable diamond necklace and pendant. The peculiarity of this necklace was that the stones were all of a pale blue colour and pretty accurately matched, so that in addition to the aggregate value of the stones—which were all of large size and some very large—was the value of the piece as a whole due to this uniformity of colour. Mr. Montague gave £70,000 for it, and considered that he had made an excellent bargain. I should mention that Montague was the chief buyer for the firm, and that he spent most of his time travelling about the Continent in search of works of art and other objects suitable for the purposes of his firm, and that, naturally, he was an excellent judge of such things. Now, it seems that he was not satisfied with the settings of this necklace, and as soon as he had purchased it he handed it over to Messrs. Binks, of Old Bond Street, to have the settings replaced by others of better design. Yesterday morning he was notified by Binks that the resetting was completed, and in the afternoon he called to inspect the work and take the necklace away if it was satisfactory. The interview between Binks and Montague took place in a room behind the shop, but it appears that Montague came out into the shop to get a better light for his inspection and Mr. Binks states that as his customer stood facing the door, examining the new settings, he, Binks, noticed a man standing by the doorway furtively watching Mr. Montague."

"There is nothing very remarkable in that," said I. "If a man stands at a shop door with a necklace of blue diamonds in his hand, he is rather likely to attract attention."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "But the significance of an antecedent is apt to be more appreciated after the consequences have developed. Binks is now very emphatic about the furtive watcher. However, to continue: Mr. Montague, being satisfied with the new settings, replaced the necklace in its case, put the latter into his bag—which he had brought with him from the inner room—and a minute or so later left the shop. That was about 5 p.m.; and he seems to have gone direct to the flat of his partner, Mr. Salaman, with whom he had been staying for a fortnight, at Queen's Gate. There he remained until about half-past eight, when he came out accompanied by Mr. Salaman. The latter carried a small suit-case, while Montague carried a handbag in which was the necklace. It is not known whether it contained anything else."

"From Queen's Gate the two men proceeded to Waterloo, walking part of the way and covering the remainder by omnibus."

"By omnibus!" I exclaimed, "with seventy thousand pounds of diamonds about them!"

"Yes, it sounds odd. But people who habitually handle portable property of great value seem to resemble those who habitually handle explosives. They gradually become unconscious of the risks. At any rate, that is how they went, and they arrived safely at Waterloo in time to catch the 9.15 train for Isleworth. Mr. Salaman saw his partner established in an empty first-class compartment and stayed with him, chatting, until the train started."

"Mr. Montague's destination was Isleworth, in which rather unlikely neighbourhood Mr. Jacob Lowenstein, late of Chicago, and now of Berkeley Square, has a sort of river-side villa with a motor boat-house attached. Lowenstein had secured the option of purchasing the blue diamond necklace, and Montague was taking it down to exhibit it and carry out the deal. He was proposing to stay a few days with Lowenstein, and then he was proceeding to Brussels on one of his periodic tours. But he never reached Isleworth. When the train stopped at Brentford, a porter noticed a suit-case on the luggage-rack of an apparently empty first-class compartment. He immediately entered to take possession of it, and was in the act of reaching up to the rack when his foot came in contact with something soft under the seat. Considerably startled, he stooped and peered under, when, to his horror, he perceived the body of a man, quite motionless and apparently dead. Instantly he darted out and rushed up the platform in a state of wild panic until he, fortunately, ran against the station master, with whom and another porter he returned to the compartment. When they drew the body out from under the seat it was found to be still breathing, and they proceeded at once to apply such restoratives as cold water and fresh air, pending the arrival of the police and the doctor, who had been sent for."

"In a few minutes the police arrived accompanied by the police surgeon, and the latter, after a brief examination, decided that the unconscious man was suffering from the effects of a large dose of chloroform, violently and unskilfully administered, and ordered him to be carefully removed to a local nursing home. Meanwhile, the police had been able, by inspecting the contents of his pockets, to identify him as Mr. Lionel Montague."

"The diamonds had vanished, of course?" said I.

"Yes. The handbag was not in the compartment, and later an empty handbag was picked up on the permanent way between Barnes and Chiswick, which seems to indicate the locality where the robbery took place."

"And what is our present objective?"

"We are going, on instructions from Mr. Salaman, to the nursing home to see what information we can pick up. If Montague has recovered sufficiently to give an account of the robbery, the police will have a description of the robber, and there may not be much for us to do. But you will have noticed that they do not seem to have any information at Scotland Yard at present, beyond what I have given you. So there is a chance yet that we may earn our fees."

Thorndyke's narrative of this somewhat commonplace crime, with the discussion which followed it, occupied us until the train stopped at Brentford Station. A few minutes later we halted in one of the quiet by-streets of this old-world town, at a

soberly painted door on which was a brass plate inscribed "St. Agnes Nursing Home." Our arrival had apparently been observed, for the door was opened by a middle-aged lady in a nurse's uniform.

"Dr. Thorndyke?" she inquired; and as my colleague bowed assent she continued: "Mr. Salaman told me you would probably call. I am afraid I haven't very good news for you. The patient is still quite unconscious."

"That is rather remarkable," said Thorndyke.

"It is. Dr. Kingston, who is in charge of the case, is somewhat puzzled by this prolonged stupor. He is inclined to suspect a narcotic—possibly a large dose of morphine—in addition to the effects of the chloroform and the shock."

"He is probably right," said I; "and the marvel is that the man is alive at all after such outrageous treatment."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "He must be pretty tough. Shall we be able to see him?"

"Oh, yes," the matron replied. "I am instructed to give you every assistance. Dr. Kingston would like to have your opinion on the case."

With this she conducted us to a pleasant room on the first floor, where, in a bed placed opposite a large window—left uncurtained—with the strong light falling full on his face, a man lay with closed eyes, breathing quietly and showing no sign of consciousness when we somewhat noisily entered the room. For some time Thorndyke stood by the bedside, looking down at the unconscious man, listening to the breathing and noting its frequency by his watch. Then he felt the pulse, and raising both eyelids, compared the two pupils.

"His condition doesn't appear alarming," was his conclusion. "The breathing is rather shallow, but it is quite regular, and the pulse is not bad though slow. The contracted pupils strongly suggest opium, or more probably morphine. But that could easily be settled by a chemical test. Do you notice the state of the face, Jervis?"

"You mean the chloroform burns? Yes, the handkerchief or pad must have been saturated. But I was also noticing that he corresponds quite remarkably with the description you were giving Badger of the owner of the dressing-wallet. He is about the age you mentioned—roughly about fifty—and he has the same old-fashioned treatment of the beard, the shaven upper lip and the monkey-fringe under the chin. It is rather an odd coincidence."

Thorndyke looked at me keenly. "The coincidence is closer than that, Jervis. Look at the beard itself."

He handed me his lens, and, stooping down, I brought it to bear on the patient's beard. And then I started back in astonishment; for by the bright light I could see plainly that a considerable proportion of the hairs were distinctly moniliform. This man's beard, too, was affected by an early stage of trichorrexia nodosa!

"Well!" I exclaimed, "this is really an amazing coincidence. I wonder if it is anything more."

"I wonder," said Thorndyke. "Are those Mr. Montague's things, Matron?"

"Yes," she replied, turning to the side table on which the patient's effects were neatly arranged. "Those are his clothes and the things which were taken from his pockets, and that is his bag. It was found on the line and sent on here a couple of hours ago. There is nothing in it."

Thorndyke looked over the various objects—keys, card-case, pocket-book, etc.—that had been turned out of the patient's pockets, and then picked up the bag, which he turned over curiously and then opened to inspect the interior. There was nothing distinctive about it. It was just a plain, imitation leather bag, fairly new, though rather the worse for its late vicissitudes, lined with coarse linen to which two large, wash-leather pockets had been roughly stitched. As he laid the bag down and picked up his own canvas case, he asked: "What time did Mr. Salaman come to see the patient?"

"He came here about ten o'clock this morning, and he was not able to stay more than half an hour as he had an appointment. But he said he would look in again this evening. You can't stay to see him, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid not," Thorndyke replied; "in fact we must be off now, for both Dr. Jervis and I have some other matters to attend to."

"Are you going straight back to the chambers, Jervis?" Thorndyke asked, as we walked down the main street towards the station.

"Yes," I replied in some surprise. "Aren't you?"

"No. I have a little expedition in view."

"Oh, have you?" I exclaimed, and as I spoke it began to dawn on me that I had overestimated the importance of my other business.

"Yes," said Thorndyke "the fact is that—ha! excuse me one moment, Jervis." He had halted abruptly outside a fishing-tackle shop and now, after a brief glance in through the window, entered with an air of business. I immediately bolted in after him, and was just in time to hear him demand a fishing-rod of a light and inexpensive character. When this had been supplied he asked for a line and one or two hooks; and I was a little surprised—and the vendor was positively scandalised—at his indifference to the quality or character of these appliances. I believe he would have accepted cod-line and a shark-hook if they had been offered.

"And now I want a float," said he.

The shopkeeper produced a tray containing a varied assortment of floats over which Thorndyke ran a critical eye, and finally reduced the shopman to stupefaction by selecting a gigantic, pot-bellied scarlet-and-green atrocity that looked like a juvenile telegraph buoy.

I could not let this outrage pass without comment. "You must excuse me, Thorndyke," I said, "if I venture to point out that the Greenland whale no longer frequents the upper reaches of the Thames."

"You mind your own business," he retorted, stolidly pocketing the telegraph buoy when he had paid for his purchases. "I like a float that you can see."

Here the shopman, recovering somewhat from the shock of surprise, remarked deferentially that it was a long time since a really large pike had been caught in the neighbourhood; whereupon Thorndyke finished him off by replying: "Yes, I've no doubt. They don't use the right sort of floats, you know. Now, when the pike see my float, they will just come tumbling over one another to get on the hook." With this he tucked the rod under his arm and strolled out, leaving the shopman breathing hard and staring harder.

"But what on earth," I asked, as we walked down the street (watched by the shopman who had come out on the pavement to see the last of us), "do you want with such an enormous float? Why, it will be visible a quarter of a mile away."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "And what more could a fisher of men require?"

This rejoinder gave me pause. Evidently Thorndyke had something in hand of more than common interest; and again it occurred to me that my own business engagements were of no special urgency. I was about to mention this fact when Thorndyke again halted—at an oilshop this time.

"I think I will step in here and get a little burnt umber," said he.

I followed him into the shop, and while the powder-colour was being weighed and made up into a little packet I reflected profoundly. Fishing-tackle and burnt umber had no obvious associations. I began to be mystified and correspondingly inquisitive.

"What do you want the burnt umber for?" I asked as soon as we were outside.

"To mix with plaster," he replied readily.

"But why do you want to colour the plaster? And what are you going to do with it?"

"Now, Jervis," he admonished with mock severity, "you are not doing yourself justice. An investigator of your experience shouldn't ask for explanations of the obvious."

"And why," I continued, "did you want to know if I was going straight back to the chambers?"

"Because I may want some assistance later. Probably Polton will be able to do all that I want, but I wished to know that you would both be within reach of a telegram."

"But," I exclaimed, "what nonsense it is to talk of sending a telegram to me when I'm here!"

"But I may not want any assistance, after all."

"Well," I said doggedly, "you are going to have it whether you want it or not. You've got something on and I'm going to be in it."

"I like your enthusiasm, Jervis," he chuckled; "but it is quite possible that I shall merely find a mare's nest."

"Very well," said I. "Then I'll help you to find it. I've had plenty of experience in that line, to say nothing of my natural gifts. So lead on."

He led on, with a resigned smile, to the station, where we were fortunate enough to find a train just ready to start. But our journey was not a long one, for at Chiswick Thorndyke got out of the train, and on leaving the station struck out eastward with a very evident air of business. As we entered the outskirts of Hammersmith he turned into a by-street which presently brought us out into Bridge Road. Here he turned sharply to the right and, at the same brisk pace, crossed Hammersmith Bridge and made his way to the towing path. As he now slowed down perceptibly, I ventured to inquire whether this was the spot on which he proposed to exhibit his super-float.

"This, I think, will be our fishing-ground," he replied; "but we will look over it carefully and select a suitable pitch."

He continued to advance at an easy pace, and I noticed that, according to his constant habit, he was studying the peculiarities of the various feet that had trodden the path within the last day or two, keeping, for this purpose on the right-hand side, where the shade of a few pollard willows overhanging an indistinct dry ditch had kept the ground soft. We had walked on for nearly half a mile when he halted and looked round.

"I think we had better turn back a little way," said he. "We seem to have overshot our mark."

I made no comment on this rather mysterious observation, and we retraced our steps for a couple of hundred yards, Thorndyke still walking on the side farthest from the river and still keeping his eyes fixed on the ground. Presently he again halted, and looking up and down the path, of which we were at the moment the only occupants, placed the canvas case on the ground and unfastened its clasps.



"This, I think, will be our pitch," said he.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I am going to make one or two casts. And meanwhile you had better get the fishing-rod fixed together so as to divert the attention of any passers-by."

I proceeded to make ready the fishing-tackle, but at the same time kept a close watch on my colleague's proceedings. And very curious proceedings they were. First he dipped up a little water from the river in the rubber mixing bowl with which he mixed a bowlful of plaster, and into this he stirred a few pinches of burnt umber, whereby its dazzling white was changed to a muddy buff. Then, having looked up and down the path, he stooped and carefully poured the plaster into a couple of impressions of a walking-stick that were visible at the edge of the path and finished up by filling a deep impression of the same stick, at the margin of the ditch, where it had apparently been stuck in the soft, clayey ground.

As I watched this operation, a sudden suspicion flashed into my mind. Dropping the fishing-rod, I walked quickly along the path until I was able to pick up another impression of the stick. A very brief examination of it confirmed my suspicion. At the centre of the little shallow pit was a semicircular impression—clearly that of a half-worn boot-stud.

"Why!" I exclaimed, "this is the stick that we saw at Scotland Yard!"

"I should expect it to be and I believe it is," said Thorndyke. "But we shall be better able to judge from the casts. Pick up your rod. There are two men coming down the path."

He closed his "research-case" and drawing the fishing-line from his pocket, began meditatively to unwind it.

"I could wish," said I, "that our appearance was more in character with the part of the rustic angler; and for the Lord's sake keep the float out of sight, or we shall collect a crowd."

Thorndyke laughed softly. "The float," said he, "was intended for Polton. He would have loved it. And the crowd would have been rather an advantage—as you will appreciate when you come to use it."

The two men—builder's labourers, apparently—now passed us with a glance of faint interest at the fishing-tackle; and as they strolled by I appreciated the value of the burnt umber. If the casts had been made of the snow-white plaster they would have stared conspicuously from the ground and these men would almost certainly have stopped to examine them and see what we were doing. But the tinted plaster was practically invisible.

"You are a wonderful man, Thorndyke," I said, as I announced my discovery. "You foresee everything."

He bowed his acknowledgments, and having tenderly felt one of the casts and ascertained that the plaster had set hard, he lifted it with infinite care, exhibiting a perfect facsimile of the end of the stick, on which the worn boot-stud was plainly visible, even to the remains of the pattern. Any doubt that might have remained as to the identity of the stick was removed when Thorndyke produced his calliper-gauge.

"Twenty-three thirty-seconds was the diameter, I think," said he as he opened the jaws of the gauge and consulted his notes. He placed the cast between the jaws, and as they were gently slid into contact, the index marked twenty-three thirty-seconds.

"Good," said Thorndyke, picking up the other two casts and establishing their identity with the one which we had examined. "This completes the first act." Dropping one cast into his case and throwing the other two into the river, he continued: "Now we proceed to the next and hope for a like success. You notice that he stuck his stick into the ground. Why do you suppose he did that?"

"Presumably to leave his hands free."

"Yes. And now let us sit down here and consider why he wanted his hands free. Just look around and tell me what you see."

I gazed rather hopelessly at the very indistinctive surroundings and began a bald catalogue. "I see a shabby-looking pollard willow, an assortment of suburban vegetation, an obsolete tin saucepan—unserviceable—and a bald spot where somebody seems to have pulled up a small patch of turf."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "You will also notice a certain amount of dry, powdered earth distributed rather evenly over the bottom of the ditch. And your patch of turf was cut round with a large knife before it was pulled up. Why do you suppose it was pulled up?"

I shook my head. "It's of no use making mere guesses."

"Perhaps not," said he, "though the suggestion is fairly obvious when considered with the other appearances. Between the roots of the willow you notice a patch of grass that looks denser than one would expect from its position. I wonder—"

As he spoke, he reached forward with his stick and prised vigorously at the edge of the patch, with the result that the clump of grass lifted bodily; and when I picked it up and tried it on the bald spot, the nicety with which it fitted left no doubt as to its origin.

"Ha!" I exclaimed, looking at the obviously disturbed earth between the roots of the willow, which the little patch of turf had covered; "the plot thickens. Something seems to have been either buried or dug up there; more probably buried."

"I hope and believe that my learned friend is correct," said Thorndyke, opening his case to abstract a large, powerful spatula.

"What do you expect to find there?" I asked.

"I have a faint hope of finding something wrapped in the half of a very dirty towel," was the reply.

"Then you had better find it quickly," said I, "for there is a man coming along the path from the Putney direction."

He looked round at the distant figure, and driving the spatula into the loose earth stirred it up vigorously.

"I can feel something," he said, digging away with powerful thrusts and scooping the earth out with his hands. Once more he looked round at the approaching stranger—who seemed now to have quickened his pace but was still four or five hundred yards distant. Then, thrusting his hands into the hole, he gave a smart pull. Slowly there came forth a package, about ten inches by six, enveloped in a portion of a peculiarly filthy towel and loosely secured with string. Thorndyke rapidly cast off the string and opened out the towel, disclosing a handsome morocco case with an engraved gold plate.

I pounced on the case and, pressing the catch, raised the lid; and though I had expected no less, it was with something like a shock of surprise that I looked on the glittering row and the dazzling cluster of steely-blue diamonds.

As I closed the casket and deposited it in the green canvas case, Thorndyke, after a single glance at the treasure and another along the path, crammed the towel into the hole and began to sweep the loose earth in on top of it. The approaching stranger was for the moment hidden from us by a bend of the path and a near clump of bushes, and Thorndyke was evidently working to hide all traces before he should appear. Having filled the hole, he carefully replaced the sod of turf and then, moving over to the little bare patch from whence the turf had been removed, he began swiftly to dig it up.

"There," said he, flinging on the path a worm which he had just disinterred, "that will explain our activities. You had better continue the excavation with your pocket knife, and then proceed to the capture of the leviathans. I must run up to the police station and you must keep possession of this pitch. Don't move away from here on any account until I come back or send somebody to relieve you. I will hand you over the float; you'll want that." With a malicious smile he dropped the gaudy monstrosity on the path, and having wiped the spatula and replaced it in the case, picked up the latter and moved away towards Putney.

At this moment the stranger reappeared, walking as if for a wager, and I began to peck up the earth with my pocket-knife.

As the man approached he slowed down by degrees until he came up at something like a saunter. He was followed at a little distance by Thorndyke, who had turned as if he had changed his mind, and now passed me with the remark that "Perhaps Hammersmith would be better." The stranger cast a suspicious glance at him and then turned his attention to me.

"Lookin' for worms?" he inquired, halting and surveying me inquisitively.

I replied by picking one up (with secret distaste) and holding it aloft, and he continued, looking wistfully at Thorndyke's retreating figure: "Your pal seems to have had enough."

"He hadn't got a rod," said I; "but he'll be back presently."

"Ah!" said he, looking steadily over my shoulder in the direction of the willow. "Well, you won't do any good here. The place where they rises is a quarter of a mile farther down—just round the bend there. That's a prime pitch. You just come along with me and I'll show you."

"I must stay here until my friend comes back," said I. "But I'll tell him what you say."

With this I seated myself stolidly on the bank and, having flung the baited hook into the stream, sat and glared fixedly at the preposterous float. My acquaintance fidgeted about me uneasily, endeavouring from time to time to lure me away to the "prime pitch" round the bend. And so the time dragged on until three-quarters of an hour had passed.

Suddenly I observed two taxicabs crossing the bridge, followed by three cyclists. A minute or two later Thorndyke reappeared, accompanied by two other men, and then the cyclists came into view, approaching at a rapid pace.

"Seems to be a regular procession," my friend remarked, viewing the new arrivals with evident uneasiness. As he spoke, one of the cyclists halted and dismounted to examine his tyre, while the other two approached and shot past us. Then they, too, halted and dismounted, and having deposited their machines in the ditch, they came back towards us. By this time I was able—with a good deal of surprise—to identify Thorndyke's two companions as Inspector Badger and Superintendent Miller. Perhaps my acquaintance also recognised them, or possibly the proceedings of the third cyclist—who had also laid down his machine and was approaching on foot—disturbed him. At any rate he glanced quickly from the one group to the other and, selecting the smaller one, sprang suddenly between the two cyclists and sped away along the path like a hare.

In a moment there was a wild stampede. The three cyclists, remounting their machines, pedalled furiously after the fugitive, followed by Badger and Miller on foot. Then the fugitive, the cyclists, and finally the two officers disappeared round the bend of the path.

"How did you know that he was the man?" I asked, when my colleague and I were left alone.

"I didn't, though I had pretty strong grounds for suspicion. But I merely brought the police to set a watch on the place and arrange an ambush. Their encircling movement was just an experimental bluff; they might have been chary of arresting the fellow if he hadn't taken fright and bolted. We have been fortunate all round, for, by a lucky chance, Badger and Miller were at Chiswick making inquiries and I was able to telephone to them to meet me at the bridge."

At this moment the procession reappeared, advancing briskly; and my late adviser marched at the centre securely handcuffed. As he was conducted past me he glared savagely and made some impolite references to a "blooming nark."

"You can take him in one of the taxis," said Miller, "and put your bicycles on top." Then, as the procession moved on towards the bridge he turned to Thorndyke. "I suppose he's the right man, doctor, but he hasn't got any of the stuff on him."

"Of course he hasn't," said Thorndyke.

"Well, do you know where it is?"

Thorndyke opened his case and taking out the casket, handed it to the superintendent. "I shall want a receipt for it," said he.

Miller opened the casket, and at the sight of the glittering jewels both the detectives uttered an exclamation of amazement, and the superintendent demanded: "Where did you get this, sir?"

"I dug it up at the foot of that willow."

"But how did you know it was there?"

"I didn't," replied Thorndyke; "but I thought I might as well look, you know," and he bestowed a smile of exasperating blandness on the astonished officer.

The two detectives gazed at Thorndyke, then they looked at one another and then they looked at me; and Badger observed, with profound conviction, that it was a 'knock-out.'

"I believe the doctor keeps a tame clairvoyant," he added.

"And may I take it, sir," said Miller, "that you can establish a prima facie case against this man, so that we can get a remand until Mr. Montague is well enough to identify him?"

"You may," Thorndyke replied. "Let me know when and where he is to be charged and I will attend and give evidence."

On this Miller wrote out a receipt for the jewels and the two officers hurried off to their taxicab, leaving us, as Badger put it, "to our fishing."

As soon as they were out of sight, Thorndyke opened his case and mixed another bowlful of plaster. "We want two more casts," said he; "one of the right foot of the man who buried the jewels and one of the right foot of the prisoner. They are obviously identical, as you can see by the arrangement of the nails and the shape of the new patch on the sole. I shall put the casts in evidence and compare them with the prisoner's right boot."

I understood now why Thorndyke had walked away towards Putney and then returned in rear of the stranger. He had suspected the man and had wanted to get a look at his footprints. But there was a good deal in this case that I did not understand at all.

---

"There," said Thorndyke, as he deposited the casts, each with its pencilled identification, in his canvas case, "that is the end of the Blue Diamond Mystery."

"I beg your pardon," said I, "but it isn't. I want a full explanation. It is evident that from the house at Brentford you made a bee line to that willow. You knew then pretty exactly where the necklace was hidden. For all I know, you may have had that knowledge when we left Scotland Yard."

"As a matter of fact, I had," he replied. "I went to Brentford principally to verify the ownership of the wallet and the bag."

"But what was it that directed you with such certainty to the Hammersmith towing-path?"

It was then that he made the observation that I have quoted at the beginning of this narrative.

"In this case," he continued, "a curious fact, well known to naturalists, acquired vital evidential importance. It associated a bag, found in one locality, with another apparently unrelated locality. It was the link that joined up the two ends of a broken chain. I offered that fact to Inspector Badger, who, lacking the knowledge wherewith to interpret it, rejected it with scorn."

"I remember that you gave him the name of that little shell that dropped out of the handful of grass."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "That was the crucial fact. It told us where the handful of grass had been gathered."

"I can't imagine how," said I. "Surely you find shells all over the country?"

"That is, in general, quite true," he replied, "but *Clausilia biplicata* is one of the rare exceptions. There are four British species of these queer little univalves (which are so named from the little spring door with which the entrance of the shell is furnished): *Clausilia laminata*, *rolphii*, *rugosa* and *biplicata*. The first three species have what we may call a normal

distribution, whereas the distribution of *biplicata* is abnormal. This seems to be a dying species. It is in process of becoming extinct in this island. But when a species of animal or plant becomes extinct, it does not fade away evenly over the whole of its habitat, but it disappears in patches, which gradually extend, leaving, as it were, islands of survival. This is what has happened to *Clausilia biplicata*. It has disappeared from this country with the exception of two localities; one of these is in Wiltshire, and the other is the right bank of the Thames at Hammersmith. And this latter locality is extraordinarily restricted. Walk down a few hundred yards towards Putney, and you have walked out of its domain; walk up a few hundred yards towards the bridge, and again you have walked out of its territory. Yet within that little area it is fairly plentiful. If you know where to look—it lives on the bark or at the roots of willow trees—you can usually find one or two specimens. Thus, you see, the presence of that shell associated the handful of grass with a certain willow tree, and that willow was either in Wiltshire or by the Hammersmith towing-path. But there was nothing otherwise to connect it with Wiltshire, whereas there was something to connect it with Hammersmith. Let us for a moment dismiss the shell and consider the other suggestions offered by the bag and stick.

“The bag, as you saw, contained traces of two very different persons. One was a middle-class man, probably middle-aged or elderly, cleanly, careful as to his appearance and of orderly habits; the other, uncleanly, slovenly and apparently a professional criminal. The bag itself seemed to appertain to the former person. It was an expensive bag and showed signs of years of careful use. This, and the circumstances in which it was found, led us to suspect that it was a stolen bag. Now, we knew that the contents of a bag had been stolen. We knew that an empty bag had been picked up on the line between Barnes and Chiswick, and it was probable that the thief had left the train at the latter station. The empty bag had been assumed to be Mr. Montague’s, whereas the probabilities—as for instance, the fact of its having been thrown out on the line—suggested that it was the thief’s bag, and that Mr. Montague’s had been taken away with its contents.

“The point, then, that we had to settle when we left Scotland Yard was whether this apparently stolen bag had any connection with the train robbery. But as soon as we saw Mr. Montague it was evident that he corresponded exactly with the owner of the dressing-wallet; and when we saw the bag that had been found on the line—a shoddy, imitation leather bag—it was practically certain that it was not his, while the roughly-stitched leather pockets, exactly suited to the dimensions of house-breaking tools, strongly suggested that it was a burglar’s bag. But if this were so, then Mr. Montague’s bag had been stolen, and the robber’s effects stuffed into it.

“With this working hypothesis we were now able to take up the case from the other end. The Scotland Yard bag was Montague’s bag. It had been taken from Chiswick to the Hammersmith towpath, where—judging from the clay smears on the bottom—it had been laid on the ground, presumably close to a willow tree. The use of the grass as packing suggested that something had been removed from the bag at this place—something that had wedged the tools together and prevented them from rattling; and there appeared to be half a towel missing. Clearly, the towpath was our next field of exploration.

“But, small as this area was geographically, it would have taken a long time to examine in detail. Here, however, the stick gave us invaluable aid. It had a perfectly distinctive tip, and it showed traces of having been stuck about three inches into earth similar to that on the bag. What we had thus to look for was a hole in the ground about three inches deep, and having at the bottom the impression of a half-worn boot-stud. This hole would probably be close to a willow.

“The search turned out even easier than I had hoped. Directly we reached the towpath I picked up the track of the stick, and not one track only, but a double track, showing that our friend had returned to the bridge. All that remained was to follow the track until it came to an end and there we were pretty certain to find the hole in the ground, as, in fact, we did.”

“And why,” I asked, “do you suppose he buried the stuff?”

“Probably as a precaution, in case he had been seen and described. This morning’s papers will have told him that he had not been. Probably, also, he wanted to make arrangements with a fence and didn’t want to have the booty about him.”

There is little more to tell. When the case was heard on the following morning, Thorndyke’s uncannily precise and detailed description of the course of events, coupled with the production of the stolen property, so unnerved the prisoner that he pleaded guilty forthwith.

As to Mr. Montague, he recovered completely in a few days, and a handsome pair of Georgian silver candlesticks may even to this day be seen on our mantelpiece testifying to his gratitude and appreciation of Thorndyke’s brilliant conduct of the case.

---

## VI. — THE STOLEN INGOTS

“In medico-legal practice,” Thorndyke remarked, “one must be constantly on one’s guard against the effects of suggestion, whether intentional or unconscious. When the facts of a case are set forth by an informant, they are nearly always presented, consciously or unconsciously, in terms of inference. Certain facts, which appear to the narrator to be the leading facts, are given with emphasis and in detail, while other facts, which appear to be subordinate or trivial, are partially suppressed. But this assessment of evidential value must never be accepted. The whole case must be considered and each fact weighed separately, and then it will commonly happen that the leading fact turns out to be the one that had been passed over as negligible.”

The remark was made apropos of a case, the facts of which had just been stated to us by Mr. Halethorpe, of the Sphinx Assurance Company. I did not quite perceive its bearing at the time, but looking back when the case was concluded, I

realised that I had fallen into the very error against which Thorndyke's warning should have guarded me.

"I trust," said Mr. Halethorpe, "that I have not come at an inconvenient time. You are so tolerant of unusual hours—"

"My practice," interrupted Thorndyke, "is my recreation, and I welcome you as one who comes to furnish entertainment. Draw your chair up to the fire, light a cigar and tell us your story."

Mr. Halethorpe laughed, but adopted the procedure suggested, and having settled his toes upon the kerb and selected a cigar from the box, he opened the subject of his call.

"I don't quite know what you can do for us," he began, "as it is hardly your business to trace lost property, but I thought I would come and let you know about our difficulty. The fact is that our company looks like dropping some four thousand pounds, which the directors won't like. What has happened is this:

"About two months ago the London House of the Akropong Gold Fields Company applied to us to insure a parcel of gold bars that were to be consigned to Minton and Borwell, the big manufacturing jewellers. The bars were to be shipped at Accra and landed at Bellhaven, which is the nearest port to Minton and Borwell's works. Well, we agreed to underwrite the risk—we have done business with the Akropong people before—and the matter was settled. The bars were put on board the Labadi at Accra, and in due course were landed at Belhaven, where they were delivered to Minton's agents. So far, so good. Then came the catastrophe. The case of bars was put on the train at Belhaven, consigned to Anchester, where Minton's have their factory. But the line doesn't go to Anchester direct. The junction is at Garbridge, a small country station close to the river Crouch, and here the case was put out and locked up in the station-master's office to wait for the Anchester train. It seems that the station-master was called away and detained longer than he had expected, and when the train was signalled he hurried back in a mighty twitter. However, the case was there all right, and he personally superintended its removal to the guard's van and put it in the guard's charge. All went well for the rest of the journey. A member of the firm was waiting at Anchester station with a closed van. The case was put into it and taken direct to the factory, where it was opened in the private office—and found to be full of lead pipe."

"I presume," said Thorndyke, "that it was not the original case."

"No," replied Halethorpe, "but it was a very fair imitation. The label and the marks were correct, but the seals were just plain wax. Evidently the exchange had been made in the station office, and it transpires that although the door was securely locked there was an unfastened window which opened on to the garden, and there were plain marks of feet on the flower-bed outside."

"What time did this happen?" asked Thorndyke.

"The Anchester train came in at a quarter past seven, by which time, of course, it was quite dark."

"And when did it happen?"

"The day before yesterday. We heard of it yesterday morning."

"Are you contesting the claim?"

"We don't want to. Of course, we could plead negligence, but in that case I think we should make a claim on the railway company. But, naturally, we should much rather recover the property. After all, it can't be so very far away."

"I wouldn't say that," said Thorndyke. "This was no impromptu theft. The dummy case was prepared in advance, and evidently by somebody who knew what the real case was like, and how and when it was to be despatched from Belhaven. We must assume that the disposal of the stolen case has been provided for with similar completeness. How far is Garbridge from the river?"

"Less than half a mile across the marshes. The detective-inspector—Badger, I think you know him—asked the same question."

"Naturally," said Thorndyke. "A heavy object like this case is much more easily and inconspicuously conveyed by water than on land. And then, see what facilities for concealment a navigable river offers. The case could be easily stowed away on a small craft, or even in a boat; or the bars could be taken out and stowed amongst the ballast, or even, at a pinch, dropped over board at a marked spot and left until the hue and cry was over."

"You are not very encouraging," Halethorpe remarked gloomily. "I take it that you don't much expect that we shall recover those bars."

"We needn't despair," was the reply, "but I want you to understand the difficulties. The thieves have got away with the booty, and that booty is an imperishable material which retains its value even if broken up into unrecognisable fragments. Melted down into small ingots, it would be impossible to identify."

"Well," said Halethorpe, "the police have the matter in hand—Inspector Badger, of the C.I.D., is in charge of the case—but our directors would be more satisfied if you would look into it. Of course we would give you any help we could. What do you say?"

"I am willing to look into the case," said Thorndyke, "though I don't hold out much hope. Could you give me a note to the shipping company and another to the consignees, Minton and Borwell?"

"Of course I will. I'll write them now. I have some of our stationery in my attaché case. But, if you will pardon my saying

so, you seem to be starting your inquiry just where there is nothing to be learned. The case was stolen after it left the ship and before it reached the consignees—although their agent had received it from the ship.”

“The point is,” said Thorndyke, “that this was a preconcerted robbery, and that the thieves possessed special information. That information must have come either from the ship or from the factory. So, while we must try to pick up the track of the case itself, we must seek the beginning of the clue at the two ends—the ship and the factory one of which it must have started.”

“Yes, that’s true,” said Halethorpe. “Well, I’ll write those two notes and then I must run away; and we’ll hope for the best.”

He wrote the two letters asking for facilities from the respective parties, and then took his departure in a somewhat chastened frame of mind.

“Quite an interesting little problem,” Thorndyke remarked, as Halethorpe footsteps died away on the stairs, “but not much in our line. It is really a police case—a case for patient and intelligent inquiry. And that is what we shall have to do—make some careful inquiries on the spot.”

“Where do you propose to begin?” I asked.

“At the beginning,” he replied. “Belhaven. I propose that we go down there to-morrow morning and pick up the thread at that end.”

“What thread?” I demanded. “We know that the package started from there. What else do you expect to learn?”

“There are several curious possibilities in this case, as you must have noticed,” he replied “The question is, whether any of them are probabilities. That is what I want to settle before we begin a detailed investigation.”

“For my part,” said I, “I should have supposed that the investigation would start from the scene of the robbery. But I presume that you have seen some possibilities that I have overlooked.”

Which eventually turned out to be the case.

“I think,” said Thorndyke as we alighted at Belhaven on the following morning, “we had better go first to the Customs and make quite certain, if we can, that the bars were really in the case when it was delivered to the consignees’ agents. It won’t do to take it for granted that the substitution took place at Garbridge, although that is by far the most probable theory.” Accordingly we made our way to the harbour, where an obliging mariner directed us to our destination.

At the Custom House we were received by a genial officer, who, when Thorndyke had explained his connection with the robbery, entered into the matter with complete sympathy and a quick grasp of the situation.

“I see,” said he. “You want clear evidence that the bars were in the case when it left here. Well, I think we can satisfy you on that point. Bullion is not a customable commodity, but it has to be examined and reported. If it is consigned to the Bank of England or the Mint, the case is passed through with the seals unbroken, but as this was a private consignment, the seals will have been broken and the contents of the case examined. Jeffson, show these gentlemen the report on the case of gold bars from the Labadi.”

“Would it be possible,” Thorndyke asked, “for us to have a few words with the officer who opened the case? You know the legal partiality for personal testimony.”

“Of course it would. Jeffson, when these gentlemen have seen the report, find the officer who signed it and let them have a talk with him.”

We followed Mr. Jeffson into an adjoining office, where he produced the report and handed it to Thorndyke. The particulars that it gave were in effect those that would be furnished by the ship’s manifest and the bill of lading. The case was thirteen inches long by twelve wide and nine inches deep, outside measurement; and its gross weight was one hundred and seventeen pounds three ounces, and it contained four bars of the aggregate weight of one hundred and thirteen pounds two ounces.

“Thank you,” said Thorndyke, handing back the report. “And now can we see the officer—Mr. Byrne, I think—just to fill in the details?”

“If you will come with me,” replied Mr. Jeffson, “I’ll find him for you. I expect he is on the wharf.”

We followed our conductor out on to the quay among a litter of cases, crates and barrels, and eventually, amidst a battalion of Madeira wine casks, found the officer deep in problems of “content and ullage,” and other customs mysteries. As Jeffson introduced us, and then discreetly retired, Mr. Byrne confronted us, with a mahogany face and truculent blue eye.

“With reference to this bullion,” said Thorndyke, “I understand that you weighed the bars separately from the case?”

“Oi did,” replied Mr. Byrne.

“Did you weigh each bar separately?”

“Oi did not,” was the concise reply.

"What was the appearance of the bars—I mean as to shape and size? Were they of the usual type?"

"Oi've not had a great deal to do with bullion," said Mr. Byrne, "but Oi should say that they were just ordinary gold bars, about nine inches long by four wide and about two inches deep."

"Was there much packing material in the case?"

"Very little. The bars were wrapped in thick canvas and jammed into the case. There wouldn't be more than about half an inch clearance all round to allow for the canvas. The case was inch and half stuff strengthened with iron bands."

"Did you seal the case after you had closed it up?"

"Oi did. 'Twas all shipshape when it was passed back to the mate. And Oi saw him hand it over to the consignees' agent; so 'twas all in order when it left the wharf."

"That was what I wanted to make sure of," said Thorndyke; and, having pocketed his notebook and thanked the officer, he turned away among the wilderness of merchandise.

"So much for the Customs," said he. "I am glad we went there first. As you have no doubt observed, we have picked up some useful information."

"We have ascertained," I replied, "that the case was intact when it was handed over to the consignees' agents, so that our investigations at Garbridge will start from a solid basis. And that, I take it, is all you wanted to know."

"Not quite all," he rejoined. "There are one or two little details that I should like to fill in. I think we will look in on the shipping agents and present Halethorpe's note. We may as well learn all we can before we make our start from the scene of the robbery."

"Well," I said, "I don't see what more there is to learn here. But apparently you do. That seems to be the office, past those sheds."

The manager of the shipping agent's office looked us up and down as he sat at his littered desk with Halethorpe's letter in his hand.

"You've come about that bullion that was stolen," he said brusquely. "Well, it wasn't stolen here. Hadn't you better inquire at Garbridge, where it was?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Thorndyke. "But I am making certain preliminary inquiries. Now, first, as to the bill of lading, who has that—the original, I mean?"

"The captain has it at present, but I have a copy."

"Could I see it?" Thorndyke asked.

The manager raised his eyebrows protestingly, but produced the document from a file and handed it to Thorndyke, watching him inquisitively as he copied the particulars of the package into his notebook.

"I suppose," said Thorndyke as he returned the document, "you have a copy of the ship's manifest?"

"Yes," replied the manager, "but the entry in the manifest is merely a copy of the particulars given in the bill of lading."

"I should like to see the manifest, if it is not troubling you too much."

"But," the other protested impatiently, "the manifest contains no information respecting this parcel of bullion excepting the one entry, which, as I have told you, has been copied from the bill of lading."

"I realise that," said Thorndyke; "but I should like to look over it, all the same."

Our friend bounced into an inner office and presently returned with a voluminous document, which he slapped down on a side-table.

"There, sir," he said. "That is the manifest. This is the entry relating to the bullion that you are inquiring about. The rest of the document is concerned with the cargo, in which I presume you are not interested."

In this, however, he was mistaken; for Thorndyke, having verified the bullion entry, turned the leaves over and began systematically, though rapidly, to run his eye over the long list from the beginning, a proceeding that the manager viewed with frenzied impatience.

"If you are going to read it right through, sir," the latter observed, "I shall ask you to excuse me. Art is long but life is short," he added with a sour smile.

Nevertheless he hovered about uneasily, and when Thorndyke proceeded to copy some of the entries into his notebook, he craned over and read them without the least disguise, though not without comment.

"Good God, sir!" he exclaimed. "What possible bearing on this robbery can that parcel of scrivellos have? And do you realise that they are still in the ship's hold?"

"I inferred that they were, as they are consigned to London," Thorndyke replied, drawing his finger down the "description" column and rapidly scanning the entries in it. The manager watched that finger, and as it stopped successively at a bag of gum copal, a case of quartz specimens, a case of six-inch brass screw-bolts, a bag of beni-seed and a

package of kola nuts, he breathed hard and muttered like an angry parrot. But Thorndyke was quite unmoved. With calm deliberation he copied out each entry, conscientiously noting the marks, descriptions of packages and contents, gross and net weights, dimensions, names of consignors and consignees, ports of shipment and discharge, and, in fact, the entire particulars. It was certainly an amazing proceeding, and I could make no more of it than could our impatient friend.

At last Thorndyke closed and pocketed his notebook, and the manager heaved a slightly obtrusive sigh. "Is there nothing more, sir?" he asked. "You don't want to examine the ship, for instance?"

The next moment, I think, he regretted his sarcasm, for Thorndyke inquired, with evident interest: "Is the ship still here?"

"Yes," was the unwilling admission. "She finishes unloading here at midday to-day and will probably haul into the London Docks to-morrow morning."

"I don't think I need go on board," said Thorndyke, "but you might give me a card in case I find that I want to."

The card was somewhat grudgingly produced, and when Thorndyke had thanked our entertainer for his help, we took our leave and made our way towards the station.

"Well," I said, "you have collected a vast amount of curious information, but I am hanged if I can see that any of it has the slightest bearing on our inquiry."

Thorndyke cast on me a look of deep reproach. "Jervis!" he exclaimed, "you astonish me; you do, indeed. Why, my dear fellow, it stares you in the face!"

"When you say 'it,'" I said a little irritably, "you mean—?"

"I mean the leading fact from which we may deduce the *modus operandi* of this robbery. You shall look over my notes in the train and sort out the data that we have collected. I think you will find them extremely illuminating."

"I doubt it," said I. "But, meanwhile, aren't we wasting a good deal of time? Halethorpe wants to get the gold back; he doesn't want to know how the thieves contrived to steal it."

"That is a very just remark," answered Thorndyke. "My learned friend displays his customary robust common sense. Nevertheless, I think that a clear understanding of the mechanism of this robbery will prove very helpful to us, though I agree with you that we have spent enough time on securing our preliminary data. The important thing now is to pick up a trail from Garbridge. But I see our train is signalled. We had better hurry."

As the train rumbled into station, we looked out for an empty smoking compartment, and having been fortunate enough to secure one, we settled ourselves in opposite corners and lighted our pipes. Then Thorndyke handed me his notebook and as I studied, with wrinkled brows, the apparently disconnected entries, he sat and observed me thoughtfully and with the faintest suspicion of a smile. Again and again I read through those notes with ever-dwindling hopes of extracting the meaning that "stared me in the face." Vainly did I endeavour to connect gum copal, scivelloes or beni-seed with the methods of the unknown robbers. The entries in the notebook persisted obstinately in remaining totally disconnected and hopelessly irrelevant. At last I shut the book with a savage snap and handed it back to its owner.

"It's no use, Thorndyke," I said. "I can't see the faintest glimmer of light."

"Well," said he, "it isn't of much consequence. The practical part of our task is before us, and it may turn out a pretty difficult part. But we have got to recover those bars if it is humanly possible. And here we are at our jumping-off place. This is Garbridge Station—and I see an old acquaintance of ours on the platform."

I looked out, as the train slowed down, and there, sure enough, was no less a person than Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"We could have done very well without Badger," I remarked.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "but we shall have to take him into partnership, I expect. After all, we are on his territory and on the same errand. How do you do, inspector?" he continued, as the officer, having observed our descent from the carriage, hurried forward with unwonted cordiality.

"I rather expected to see you here, sir," said he. "We heard that Mr. Halethorpe had consulted you. But this isn't the London train."

"No," said Thorndyke. "We've been to Belhaven, just to make sure that the bullion was in the case when it started."

"I could have told you that two days ago," said Badger. "We got on to the Customs people at once. That was all plain sailing; but the rest of it isn't."

"No clue as to how the case was taken away?"

"Oh, yes; that is pretty clear. It was hoisted out, and the dummy hoisted in, through the window of the Station-master's office. And the same night, two men were seen carrying a heavy package, about the size of the bullion-case, towards the marshes. But there the clue ends. The stuff seems to have vanished into thin air. Of course our people are on the look-out for it in various likely directions, but I am staying here with a couple of plain-clothes men. I've a conviction that it is still somewhere in this neighbourhood, and I mean to stick here in the hope that I may spot somebody trying to move it."

As the inspector was speaking we had been walking slowly from the station towards the village, which was on the



opposite side of the river. On the bridge Thorndyke halted and looked down the river and over the wide expanse of marshy country.

"This is an ideal place for a bullion robbery," he remarked. "A tidal river near to the sea and a network of creeks, in any one of which one could hide a boat or sink the booty below tide-marks. Have you heard of any strange craft having put in here?"

"Yes. There's a little ramshackle bawley from Leigh—but her crew of two ragamuffins are not Leigh men. And they've made a mess of their visit—got their craft on the mud on the top of the spring tide. There here she'll be till next spring tide. But I've been over her carefully and I'll swear the stuff isn't aboard her. I had all the ballast out and emptied the lazarette and the chain locker."

"And what about the barge?"

"She's a regular trader here. Her crew—the skipper and his son—are quite respectable men and they belong here. There they go in that boat; I expect they are off on this tide. But they seem to be making for the bawley."

As he spoke the inspector produced a pair of glasses, through which he watched the movement of the barge's jolly, and a couple of elderly fishermen, who were crossing the bridge, halted to look on. The barge's boat ran alongside the stranded bawley, and one of the rowers hailed; whereupon two men tumbled up from the cabin and dropped into the boat, which immediately pushed off and headed for the barge.

"Them bawley blokes seems to be taking a passage along of old Bill Somers," one of the fishermen remarked, levelling a small telescope at the barge as the boat drew alongside and the four men climbed on board. "Going to work their passage, too," he added as the two passengers proceeded immediately to man the windlass while the crew let go the brails and hooked the main block to the traveller.

"Rum go," commented Badger, glaring at the barge through his glasses; "but they haven't taken anything aboard with them. I could see that."

"You have overhauled the barge, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. Went right through her. Nothing there. She's light. There was no place aboard her where you could hide a split-pea."

"Did you get her anchor up?"

"No," replied Badger. "I didn't. I suppose I ought to have done so. However, they're getting it up themselves now." As he spoke, the rapid clink of a windlass-pawl was borne across the water, and through my prismatic glasses I could see the two passengers working for all they were worth at the cranks. Presently the clink of the pawl began to slow down somewhat and the two bargemen, having got the sails set, joined the toilers at the windlass, but even then there was no great increase of speed.

"Anchor seems to come up uncommon heavy," one of the fishermen remarked.

"Aye," the other agreed. "Got foul of an old mooring, maybe."

"Look out for the anchor, Badger," Thorndyke said in a low voice, gazing steadily through his binocular. "It is out of the ground. The cable is up and down and the barge is drifting off on the tide."

Even as he spoke the ring and stock of the anchor rose slowly out of the water, and now I could see that a second chain was shackled loosely to the cable, down which it had slid until it was stopped by the ring of the anchor. Badger had evidently seen it too, for he ejaculated, "Hallo!" and added a few verbal flourishes which I need not repeat. A few more turns of the windlass brought the flukes of the anchor clear of the water, and dangling against them was an undeniable wooden case, securely slung with lashings of stout chain. Badger cursed volubly, and, turning to the fishermen, exclaimed in a rather offensively peremptory tone:

"I want a boat. Now. This instant."

The elder piscator regarded him doggedly and replied. "All right. I ain't got no objection."

"Where can I get a boat?" the inspector demanded, nearly purple with excitement and anxiety.

"Where do you think?" the mariner responded, evidently nettled by the inspector's masterful tone. "Pastrycook's? Or livery stables?"

"Look here," said Badger. "I'm a police officer and I want to board that barge, and I am prepared to pay handsomely. Now where can I get a boat?"

"We'll put you aboard of her," replied the fisherman, "that is, if we can catch her. But I doubt it. She's off, that's what she is. And there's something queer a-going on aboard of her," he added in a somewhat different tone.

There was. I had been observing it. The case had been, with some difficulty, hoisted on board, and then suddenly there had broken out an altercation between the two bargees and their passengers, and this had now developed into what look like a free fight. It was difficult to see exactly what was happening, for the barge was drifting rapidly down the river, and her sails, blowing out first on one side and then on the other, rather obscured the view. Presently, however, the sails filled and a man appeared at the wheel; then the barge jibed round, and with a strong ebb tide and a fresh breeze, very soon

began to grow small in the distance.

Meanwhile the fishermen had hustled off in search of a boat, and the inspector had raced to the bridge-head, where he stood gesticulating frantically and blowing his whistle, while Thorndyke continued placidly to watch the receding barge through his binocular.

"What are we going to do?" I asked, a little surprised at my colleague's inaction.

"What can we do?" he asked in reply. "Badger will follow the barge. He probably won't overtake her, but he will prevent her from making a landing until they get out into the estuary, and then he may possibly get assistance. The chase is in his hands."

"Are we going with him?"

"I am not. This looks like being an all-night expedition, and I must be at our chambers to-morrow morning. Besides, the chase is not our affair. But if you would like to join Badger there is no reason why you shouldn't. I can look after the practice."

"Well," I said, "I think I should rather like to be in at the death, if it won't inconvenience you. But it is possible that they may get away with the booty."

"Quite," he agreed; "and then it would be useful to know exactly how and where it disappears. Yes, go with them, by all means, and keep a sharp look-out."

At this moment Badger returned with the two plain clothes men whom his whistle had called from their posts, and simultaneously a boat was seen approaching the steps by the bridge, rowed by the two fishermen. The inspector looked at us inquiringly. "Are you coming to see the sport?" he asked.

"Doctor Jervis would like to come with you," Thorndyke replied. "I have to get back to London. But you will be a fair boat-load without me."

This appeared to be also the view of the two fishermen, as they brought up at the steps and observed the four passengers; but they made no demur beyond inquiring if there were not any more; and when we had taken our places in the stern sheets, they pushed off and pulled through the bridge and away down stream. Gradually, the village receded and the houses and the bridge grew small and more distant, though they remained visible for a long time over the marshy levels; and still, as I looked back through my glasses, I could see Thorndyke on the bridge, watching the pursuit with his binocular to his eyes.

Meanwhile the fugitive barge, having got some two miles start, seemed to be drawing ahead. But it was only at intervals that we could see her, for the tide was falling fast and we were mostly hemmed in by the high, muddy banks. Only when we entered a straight reach of the river could we see her sails over the land; and every time that she came into view, she appeared perceptibly smaller.

When the river grew wider, the mast was stepped and a good-sized lug-sail hoisted, though one of the fishermen continued to ply his oar on the weather side, while the other took the tiller. This improved our pace appreciably; but still, whenever we caught a glimpse of the barge, it was evident that she was still gaining.

On one of these occasions the man at the tiller, standing up to get a better view, surveyed our quarry intently for nearly a minute and then addressed the inspector.

"She's a-going to give us the go-by, mister," he observed with conviction.

"Still gaining?" asked Badger.

"Aye. She's a-going to slip across the tail of Foulness Sand into the deep channel. And that's the last we shall see of her."

"But can't we get into the channel the same way?" demanded Badger.

"Well, d'ye see," replied the fisherman, "'tis like this. Tide's a-running out, but there'll be enough for her. It'll just carry her out through the Whitaker Channel and across the spit. Then it'll turn, and up she'll go, London way, on the flood. But we shall catch the flood-tide in the Whitaker Channel, and a rare old job we'll have to get out; and when we do get out, that barge'll be miles away."

The inspector swore long and earnestly. He even alluded to himself as a "blithering idiot." But that helped matters not at all. The fisherman's dismal prophecy was fulfilled in every horrid detail. When we were approaching the Whitaker Channel the barge was just crossing the spit, and the last of the ebb-tide was trickling out. By the time we were fairly in the Channel the tide had turned and was already flowing in with a speed that increased every minute; while over the sand we could see the barge, already out in the open estuary, heading to the west on the flood-tide at a good six knots.

Poor Badger was frantic. With yearning eyes fixed on the dwindling barge, he cursed, entreated, encouraged and made extravagant offers. He even took an oar and pulled with such desperate energy that he caught a crab and turned a neat back somersault into the fisherman's lap. The two mariners pulled until their oars bent like canes; but still the sandy banks crept by, inch by inch, and ever the turbid water seemed to pour up the channel more and yet more swiftly. It was a fearful struggle and seemed to last for hours; and when, at last, the boat crawled out across the spit and the exhausted rowers rested on their oars, the sun was just setting and the barge had disappeared into the west.

I was really sorry for Badger. His oversight in respect of the anchor was a very natural one or a landsman, and he had evidently taken infinite pains over the case and shown excellent judgment in keeping a close watch on the neighbourhood of Garbridge; and now, after all his care, it looked as if both the robbers and their booty had slipped through his fingers. It was desperately bad luck.

"Well," said the elder fisherman, "they've give us a run for our money; but they've got clear away. What's to be done now, mister?"

Badger had nothing to suggest excepting that we should pull or sail up the river in the hope of getting some assistance on the way. He was in the lowest depths of despair and dejection. But now, when Fortune seemed to have deserted us utterly, and failure appeared to be an accomplished fact, Providence intervened.

A small steam vessel that had been approaching from the direction of the East Swin suddenly altered her course and bore down as if to speak us. The fisherman who had last spoken looked at her attentively for a few moments and then slapped his thigh. "Saved by gum!" he exclaimed. "This'll do your trick, mister. Here comes a Customs cruiser."

Instantly the two fishermen bent to their oars to meet the oncoming craft, and in a few minutes we were alongside, Badger hailing like a bull of Bashan. A brief explanation to the officer in charge secured a highly sympathetic promise of help. We all scrambled up on deck; the boat was dropped astern at the scope of her painter; the engine-room bell jangled merrily, and the smart, yacht-like vessel began to forge ahead.

"Now then," said the officer, as his craft gathered way, "give us a description of this barge. What is she like?"

"She's a small stumpy," the senior fisherman explained, "flying light; wants paint badly; steers with a wheel; green transom with Bluebell, Maldon, cut in and gilded. Seemed to be keeping along the north shore."

With these particulars in his mind, the officer explored the western horizon with a pair of night-glasses, although it was still broad daylight. Presently he reported: "There's a stumpy in a line with the Blacktail Spit buoy. Just take a look at her." He handed his glasses to the fisherman, who, after a careful inspection of the stranger, gave it as his opinion that she was our quarry. "Probably makin' for Southend or Leigh," said he, and added: "I'll bet she's bound for Benfleet Creek. Nice quiet place, that, to land the stuff."

Our recent painful experience was now reversed, for as our swift little vessel devoured the miles of water, the barge, which we were all watching eagerly, loomed up larger every minute. By the time we were abreast of the Mouse Lightship, she was but a few hundred yards ahead, and even through my glasses, the name Bluebell was clearly legible. Badger nearly wept with delight; the officer in charge smiled an anticipatory smile; the deck-hands girded up their loins for the coming capture and the plain-clothes men each furtively polished a pair of handcuffs.

At length the little cruiser came fairly abreast of the barge—not unobserved by the two men on her deck. Then she sheered in suddenly and swept alongside. One hand neatly hooked a shroud with a grappling iron and made fast while a couple of preventive officers, the plain men and the inspector jumped down simultaneously on to the barge's deck. For a moment, the two bawley men were inclined to show fight; but the odds were too great. After a perfunctory scuffle they both submitted to be handcuffed and were at once hauled up on board the cruiser and lodged in the fore-peak under guard. Then the chief officer, the two fishermen and I jumped on board the barge and followed Badger down the companion hatch to the cabin.

It was a curious scene that was revealed in that little cupboard-like apartment by the light of Badger's electric torch. On each of the two lockers was stretched a man, securely lashed with lead-line and having drawn over his face a knitted stocking cap, while on the little triangular fixed table rested an iron-bound box which I instantly identified by my recollection of the description of the bullion-case in the ship's manifest. It was but the work of a minute to liberate the skipper and his son and send them up, wrathful but substantially uninjured, to refresh on the cruiser; and then the ponderous treasure-chest was borne in triumph by two muscular deck-hands, up the narrow steps, to be hoisted to the Government vessel.

"Well, well," said the inspector, mopping his face with his handkerchief, "all's well that ends well, but I thought I had lost the men and the stuff that time. What are you going to do? I shall stay on board as this boat is going right up to the Custom House in London; but if you want to get home sooner, I dare say the chief officer will put you ashore at Southend."

I decided to adopt this course, and I was accordingly landed at Southend Pier with a telegram from Badger to his headquarters; and at Southend I was fortunate enough to catch an express train which brought me to Fenchurch Street while the night was still young.

When I reached our chambers, I found Thorndyke seated by the fire, serenely studying a brief. He stood up as I entered and, laying aside the brief, remarked: "You are back sooner than I expected. How sped the chase? Did you catch the barge?"

"Yes. We've got the men and we've got the bullion. But we very nearly lost both;" and here I gave him an account of the pursuit and the capture, to which he listened with the liveliest interest. "That Customs cruiser was a piece of sheer luck," said he, when I had concluded. "I am delighted. This capture simplifies the case for us enormously."

"It seems to me to dispose of the case altogether," said I. "The property is recovered and the thieves are in custody. But I think most of the credit belongs to Badger."

Thorndyke smiled enigmatically. "I should let him have it all, Jervis," he said; and then, after a reflective pause, he continued: "We will go round to Scotland Yard in the morning to verify the capture. If the package agrees with the description in the bill of lading, the case, as you say, is disposed of."

"It is hardly necessary," said I. "The marks were all correct and the Customs seals were unbroken—but still, I know you won't be satisfied until you have verified everything for yourself. And I suppose you are right."

It was past eleven in the following forenoon when we invaded Superintendent Miller's office at Scotland Yard. That genial officer looked up from his desk as we entered and laughed joyously. "I told you so, Badger," he chuckled, turning to the inspector, who had also looked up and was regarding us with a foxy smile. "I knew the doctor wouldn't be satisfied until he had seen it with his own eyes. I suppose that is what you have come for, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply. "It is a mere formality, of course, but, if you don't mind—"

"Not in the least," replied Miller. "Come along, Badger, and show the doctor your prize."

The two officers conducted us to a room, which the superintendent unlocked, and which contained a small table, a measuring standard, a weighing machine, a set of Snellen's test-types, and the now historic case of bullion. The latter Thorndyke inspected closely, checking the marks and dimensions by his notes.

"I see you haven't opened it," he remarked.

"No," replied Miller. "Why should we? The Customs seals are intact."

"I thought you might like to know what was inside," Thorndyke explained.

The two officers looked at him quickly and the inspector exclaimed:

"But we do know. It was opened and checked at the Customs."

"What do you suppose is inside?" Thorndyke asked.

"I don't suppose," Badger replied testily. "I know. There are four bars of gold inside."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "as the representative of the Insurance Company, I should like to see the contents of that case."

The two officers stared at him in amazement, as also, I must admit, did I. The implied doubt seemed utterly contrary to reason.

"This is scepticism with a vengeance!" said Miller. "How on earth is it possible—but there, I suppose if you are not satisfied, we should be justified—"

He glanced at his subordinate, who snorted impatiently: "Oh, open it and let him see the bars. And then, I suppose, he will want us to make an assay of the metal."

The superintendent retired with wrinkled brows and presently returned with a screwdriver, a hammer and a case-opener. Very deftly he broke the seals, extracted the screws and prised up the lid of the case, inside which were one or two folds of thick canvas. Lifting these with something of a flourish, he displayed the upper pair of dull, yellow bars.

"Are you satisfied now, sir?" demanded Badger. "Or do you want to see the other two?"

Thorndyke looked reflectively at the two bars, and the two officers looked inquiringly at him (but one might as profitably have watched the expression on the face of a ship's figure). Then he took from his pocket a folding foot-rule and quickly measured the three dimensions of one of the bars.

"Is that weighing machine reliable?" he asked.

"It is correct to an ounce," the superintendent replied, gazing at my colleague with a slightly uneasy expression. "Why?"

By way of reply Thorndyke lifted out the bar that he had measured and carrying it across to the machine, laid it on the platform and carefully adjusted the weights.

"Well?" the superintendent queried anxiously, as Thorndyke took the reading from the scale.

"Twenty-nine pounds, three ounces," replied Thorndyke.

"Well?" repeated the superintendent. "What about it?"

Thorndyke looked at him impassively for a moment, and then, in the same quiet tone, answered: "Lead."

"What!" the two officers shrieked in unison, darting across to the scale and glaring at the bar of metal. Then Badger recovered himself and expostulated, not without temper, "Nonsense, sir. Look at it. Can't you see that it is gold?"

"I can see that it is gilded," replied Thorndyke.

"But," protested Miller, "the thing is impossible! What makes you think it is lead?"

"It is just a question of specific gravity," was the reply. "This bar contains seventy-two cubic inches of metal and it weighs twenty pounds, three ounces. Therefore it is a bar of lead. But if you are still doubtful, it is quite easy to settle the matter. May I cut a small piece off the bar?"

The superintendent gasped and looked at his subordinate. "I suppose," said he, "under the circumstances, eh, Badger?"

Yes. Very well, doctor."

Thorndyke produced a strong pocket-knife and, having lifted the bar to the table, applied the knife to one corner and tapped it smartly with the hammer. The blade passed easily through the soft metal, and as the detached piece fell to the floor, the two officers and I craned forward eagerly. And then all possible doubts were set at rest. There was no mistaking the white, silvery lustre of the freshly-cut surface.

"Snakes!" exclaimed the superintendent. "This is a fair knock-out! Why, the blighters have got away with the stuff, after all! Unless," he added, with a quizzical look at Thorndyke, "you know where it is, doctor. I expect you do."

"I believe I do," said Thorndyke, "and if you care to come down with me to the London Docks, I think I can hand it over to you."

The superintendent's face brightened appreciably. Not so Badger's. That afflicted officer flung down the chip of metal that he had been examining, and turning to Thorndyke, demanded sourly: "Why didn't you tell us this before, sir? You let me go off chivvying that damn barge, and you knew all the time that the stuff wasn't on board."

"My dear Badger," Thorndyke expostulated, "don't you see that these lead bars are essential to our case? They prove that the gold bars were never landed and that they are consequently still on the ship. Which empowers us to detain any gold that we may find on her."

"There, now, Badger," said the superintendent, "it's no use for you to argue with the doctor. He's like a giraffe. He can see all round him at once. Let us get on to the Docks."

Having locked the room, we all sallied forth, and, taking a train at Charing Cross Station, made our way by Mark Lane and Fenchurch Street to Wapping, where, following Thorndyke, we entered the Docks and proceeded straight to a wharf near the Wapping entrance. Here Thorndyke exchanged a few words with a Customs official, who hurried away and presently returned, accompanied by an officer of higher rank. The latter, having saluted Thorndyke and cast a slightly amused glance at our little party, said: "They've landed that package that you spoke about. I've had it put in my office for the present. Will you come and have a look at it?"

We followed him to his office behind a long row of sheds, where, on a table, was a strong wooden case, somewhat larger than the "bullion"-case, while on the desk a large, many-leaved document lay open.

"This is your case, I think," said the official; "but you had better check it by the manifest. Here is the entry: 'One case containing seventeen and three-quarter dozen brass six-inch by three-eighths screw-bolts with nuts. Dimensions, sixteen inches by thirteen by nine. Gross weight a hundred and nineteen pounds; net weight a hundred and thirteen pounds.' Consigned to 'Jackson and Walker, 593 Great Alie Street, London, E.' Is that the one?"

"That is the one," Thorndyke replied.

"Then," said our friend, "we'll get it open and have a look at those brass screw-bolts."

With a dexterity surprising in an official of such high degree, he had the screws out in a twinkling, and prising up the lid, displayed a fold of coarse canvas. As he lifted this the two police officers peered eagerly into the case; and suddenly the eager expression on Badger's face changed to one of bitter disappointment.

"You've missed fire this time, sir," he snapped. "This is just a case of brass bolts."

"Gold bolts, inspector," Thorndyke corrected, placidly. He picked out one and handed it to the astonished detective. "Did you ever feel a brass bolt of that weight?" he asked.

"Well, it certainly is devilish heavy," the inspector admitted, weighing it in his hand and passing it on to Miller.

"Its weight, as stated on the manifest," said Thorndyke, "works out at well over eight and a half ounces, but we may as well check it." He produced from his pocket a little spring balance, to which he slung the bolt. "You see," he said, "it weighs eight ounces and two-thirds. But a brass bolt of the same size would weigh only three ounces and four-fifths. There is not the least doubt that these bolts are gold; and as you see that their aggregate weight is a hundred and thirteen while the weight of the four missing bars is a hundred and thirteen pounds, two ounces, it is a reasonable inference that these bolts represent those bars; and an uncommonly good job they made of the melting to lose only two ounces. Has the consignee's agent turned up yet?"

"He is waiting outside," replied the officer, with a pleased smile, "hopping about like a pea in a frying-pan. I'll call him in."

He did so, and a small, seedy man of strongly Semitic aspect approached the door with nervous caution and a rather pale face. But when his beady eye fell on the open case and the portentous assembly in the office, he turned about and fled along the wharf as if the hosts of the Philistines were at his heels.

"Of course it is all perfectly simple, as you say," I replied to Thorndyke as we strolled back up Nightingale Lane, "but I don't see where you got your start. What made you think that the stolen case was a dummy?"

"At first," Thorndyke replied, "it was just a matter of alternative hypotheses. It was purely speculative. The robbery described by Halethorpe was a very crude affair. It was planned in quite the wrong way. Noting this, I naturally asked myself: What is the right way to steal a case of gold ingots? Now, the outstanding difficulty in such a robbery arises from

the ponderous nature of the thing stolen, and the way to overcome that difficulty is to get away with the booty at leisure before the robbery is discovered—the longer the better. It is also obvious that if you can delude someone into stealing your dummy you will have covered up your tracks most completely; for if that someone is caught, the issues are extremely confused, and if he is not caught, all the tracks lead away from you. Of course, he will discover the fraud when he tries to dispose of the swag, but his lips are sealed by the fact that he has, himself, committed a felony. So that is the proper strategical plan and, though it was wildly improbable, and there was nothing whatever to suggest it, still, the possibility that this crude robbery might cover a more subtle one had to be borne in mind. It was necessary to make absolutely certain that the gold bars were really in the case when it left Belhaven. I had practically no doubt that they were. Our visit to the Custom House was little more than a formality, just to give us an undeniable datum from which to make our start. We had to find somebody who had actually seen the case open and verified the contents, and when we found that man—Mr. Byrne—it instantly became obvious that the wildly improbable thing had really happened. The gold bars had already disappeared. I had calculated the approximate size of the real bars. They would contain forty-two cubic inches, and would be about seven inches by three by two. The dimensions given by Byrne—evidently correct, as shown by those of the case, which the bars fitted pretty closely—were impossible. If those bars had been gold, they would have weighed two hundred pounds, instead of the hundred and thirteen pounds shown on his report. The astonishing thing is that Byrne did not observe the discrepancy. There are not many Customs officers who would have let it pass.”

“Isn’t it rather odd,” I asked, “that the thieves should have gambled on such a remote chance?”

“It is pretty certain,” he replied, “that they were unaware of the risk they were taking. Probably they assumed—as most persons would have done—that a case of bullion would be merely inspected and passed. Few persons realise the rigorous methods of the Customs officers. But to resume: It was obvious that the ‘gold’ bars that Byrne had examined were dummies. The next question was, where were the real bars? Had they been made away with, or were they still on the ship? To settle this question I decided to go through the manifest and especially through the column of net weights. And there, presently, I came upon a package the net weight of which was within two ounces of the weight of stolen bars. And that package was a parcel of brass screw-bolts—on a homeward-bound ship! But who on earth sends brass bolts from Africa to London? The anomaly was so striking that I examined the entry more closely, and then I found—by dividing the net weight by the number of bolts—that each of these little bolts weighed over half a pound. But, if this were so, those bolts could be of no other metal than gold or platinum, and were almost certainly gold. Also, their aggregate weight was exactly that of the stolen bars, less two ounces, which probably represented loss in melting.”

“And the scrivelloes,” said I, “and the gum copal and the kola nuts; what was their bearing on the inquiry? I can’t, even now, trace any connection.”

Thorndyke cast an astonished glance at me, and then replied with a quiet chuckle: “There wasn’t any. Those notes were for the benefit of the shipping gentleman. As he would look over my shoulder, I had to give him something to read and think about. If I had noted only the brass bolts, I should have virtually informed him of the nature of my suspicions.”

“Then, really, you had the case complete when we left Belhaven?”

“Theoretically, yes. But we had to recover the stolen case, for without those lead ingots we could not prove that the gold bolts were stolen property, any more than one could prove a murder without evidence of the death of the victim.”

“And how do you suppose the robbery was carried out? How was the gold got out of the ship’s strong-room?”

“I should say it was never there. The robbers, I suspect, are the ship’s mate, the chief engineer and possibly the purser. The mate controls the stowage of cargo, and the chief engineer controls the repair shop and has the necessary skill and knowledge to deal with the metal. On receiving the advice of the bullion consignment, I imagine they prepared the dummy case in agreement with the description. When the bullion arrived, the dummy case would be concealed on deck and the exchange made as soon as the bullion was put on board. The dummy would be sent to the strong-room and the real case carried to a prepared hiding place. Then the engineer would cut up the bars, melt them piecemeal and cast them into bolts in an ordinary casting flask, using an iron bolt as a model, and touching up the screw-threads with a die. The mate could enter the case on the manifest when he pleased, and send the bill of lading by post to the nominal consignee. That is what I imagine to have been the procedure.”

Thorndyke’s solution turned out to be literally correct. The consignee, pursued by Inspector Badger along the quay, was arrested at the dock gates and immediately volunteered King’s evidence. Thereupon the mate, the chief engineer and the purser of the steamship Labadi were arrested and brought to trial; when they severally entered a plea of guilty and described the method of the robbery almost in Thorndyke’s words.

## VII. — THE FUNERAL PYRE

Thorndyke did not often indulge in an evening paper, and was even disposed to view that modern institution with some disfavour; whence it happened that when I entered our chambers shortly before dinner time with a copy of the Evening Gazette in my hand, he fixed upon the folded news-sheet an inquiring and slightly disapproving eye.

“Orrible discovery near Dartford,” I announced, quoting the juvenile vendor.

The disapproval faded from his face, but the inquiring expression remained.

“What is it?” he asked.

"I don't know," I replied; "but it seems to be something in our line."

"My learned friend does us an injustice," he rejoined, with his eye riveted on the paper. "Still, if you are going to make my flesh creep, I will try to endure it."

Thus invited, I opened the paper and read out as follows:

"A shocking tragedy has come to light in a meadow about a mile from Dartford. About two o'clock this morning, a rural constable observed a rick on fire out on the marshes near the creek. By the time he reached it the upper half of the rick was burning fiercely in the strong wind, and as he could do nothing alone, he went to the adjacent farm-house and gave the alarm. The farmer and two of his sons accompanied the constable to the scene of the conflagration, but the rick was now a blazing mass, roaring in the wind and giving out an intense heat. As it was obviously impossible to save any part of it, and as there were no other ricks near, the farmer decided to abandon it to its fate and went home.

"At eight o'clock he returned to the spot and found the rick still burning, though reduced to a heap of glowing cinders and ashes, and approaching it, he was horrified to perceive a human skull grinning out from the cindery mass. Closer examination showed other bones—all calcined white and chalky—and close to the skull a stumpy clay pipe. The explanation of this dreadful occurrence seems quite simple. The rick was not quite finished, and when the farm hands knocked off work they left the ladder in position. It is assumed that some tramp, in search of a night's lodging, observed the ladder, and climbing up it, made himself comfortable in the loose hay at the top of the rick, where he fell asleep with his lighted pipe in his mouth. This ignited the hay and the man must have been suffocated by the fumes without awakening from his sleep."

"A reasonable explanation," was Thorndyke's comment, "and quite probable; but of course it is pure hypothesis. As a matter of fact, any one of the three conceivable causes of violent death is possible in this case—accident, suicide or homicide."

"I should have supposed," said I, "that we could almost exclude suicide. It is difficult to imagine a man electing to roast himself to death."

"I cannot agree with my learned friend," Thorndyke rejoined. "I can imagine a case—and one of great medico-legal interest—that would exactly fit the present circumstances. Let us suppose a man, hopelessly insolvent, desperate and disgusted with life, who decides to provide for his family by investing the few pounds that he has left in insuring his life heavily and then making away with himself. How would he proceed? If he should commit suicide by any of the orthodox methods he would simply invalidate his policy. But now, suppose he knows of a likely rick; that he provides himself with some rapidly-acting poison, such as potassium cyanide—he could even use prussic acid if he carried it in a rubber or celluloid bottle, which would be consumed in the fire; that he climbs on to the rick; sets fire to it, and as soon as it is fairly alight, takes his dose of poison and falls back dead among the hay. Who is to contest his family's claim? The fire will have destroyed all traces of the poison, even if they should be sought for. But it is practically certain that the question would never be raised. The claim would be paid without demur."

I could not help smiling at this calm exposition of a practicable crime. "It is a mercy, Thorndyke," I remarked, "that you are an honest man. If you were not—"

"I think," he retorted, "that I should find some better means of livelihood than suicide. But with regard to this case: it will be worth watching. The tramp hypothesis is certainly the most probable; but its very probability makes an alternative hypothesis at least possible. No one is likely to suspect fraudulent suicide; but that immunity from suspicion is a factor that increases the probability of fraudulent suicide. And so, to a less extent, with homicide. We must watch the case and see if there are any further developments."

Further developments were not very long in appearing. The report in the morning paper disposed effectually of the tramp theory without offering any other.

"The tragedy of the burning rick," it said, "is taking a somewhat mysterious turn. It is now clear that the unknown man, who was assumed to have been a tramp, must have been a person of some social position, for careful examination of the ashes by the police have brought to light various articles which would have been carried only by a man of fair means. The clay pipe was evidently one of a pair—of which the second one has been recovered—probably silver-mounted and carried in a case, the steel frame of which has been found. Both pipes are of the 'Burns Cutty' pattern and have neatly scratched on the bowls the initials 'R. R.' The following articles have also been found:— "Remains of a watch, probably gold, and a rather singular watch-chain, having alternate links of platinum and gold. The gold links have partly disappeared, but numerous beads of gold have been found, derived apparently from the watch and chain. The platinum links are intact and are fashioned of twisted square wire. A bunch of keys, partly fused; a rock crystal seal, apparently from a ring; a little porcelain mascot figure, with a hole for suspension—possibly from the watch-chain—and a number of artificial teeth. In connection with the latter, a puzzling and slightly sinister aspect has been given to the case by the finding of an upper dental plate by a ditch some two hundred yards from the rick. The plate has two gaps and, on comparison with the skull of the unknown man, these have been found by the police surgeon to correspond with two groups of remaining teeth. Moreover, the artificial teeth found in the ashes all seem to belong to a lower plate. The presence of this plate, so far from the scene of the man's death, is extremely difficult to account for."

As Thorndyke finished reading the extract he looked at me as if inviting some comment.

"It is a most remarkable and mysterious affair," said I, "and naturally recalls to my mind the hypothetical case that you suggested yesterday. If that case was possible then, it is actually probable now. It fits these new facts perfectly not only in respect of the abundant means of identification but even to this dental plate—if we assume that he took the poison as he was approaching the rick, and that the poison was of an acrid or irritating character which caused him to cough or retch. And I can think of no other plausible explanation."

"There are other possibilities," said Thorndyke, "but fraudulent suicide is certainly the most probable theory on the known facts. But we shall see. As you say, the body can hardly fail to be identified at a pretty early date."

As a matter of fact it was identified in the course of that same day. Both Thorndyke and I were busily engaged until evening in the courts and elsewhere and had not had time to give this curious case any consideration. But as we walked home together, we encountered Mr. Stalker of the Griffin Life Assurance Company pacing up and down King's Bench Walk near the entry of our chambers.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, striding forward to meet us near the Mitre Court gateway, "you are just the very men I wanted to see. There is a little matter that I want to consult you about. I shan't detain you long."

"It won't matter much if you do," said Thorndyke. "We have finished our routine work for the day and our time is now our own." He led the way up to our chambers, where, having given the fire a stir, he drew up three arm-chairs.

"Now, Stalker," said he. "Warm your toes and tell us your troubles."

Mr. Stalker spread out his hands to the blaze began reflectively:

"It will be enough, I think, if I give you the facts—and most of them you probably know already. You have heard about this man whose remains were found in the ashes of a burnt rick? Well, it turns out that he was a certain Mr. Reginald Reed, an outside broker, as I understand; but what is of more interest to us is that he was a client of ours. We have issued a policy on his life for three thousand pounds. I thought I remembered the name when I saw it in the paper this afternoon, so I looked up our files and there it was, sure enough."

"When was the policy issued?" Thorndyke asked.

"Ah!" exclaimed Stalker. "That's the exasperating feature of the case. The policy was issued less than a year ago. He has only paid a single premium. So we stand to drop practically the whole three thousand. Of course, we have to take the fat with the lean, but we don't like to take it in such precious large lumps."

"Of course you don't," agreed Thorndyke. "But now you have come to consult me—about what?"

"Well," replied Stalker, "I put it to you: isn't there something obviously fishy about the case? Are the circumstances normal? For instance, how the devil came a respectable city gentleman to be smoking his pipe in a haystack out in a lonely meadow at two o'clock in the morning, or thereabouts?"

"I agree," said Thorndyke, "that the circumstances are highly abnormal. But there is no doubt that the man is dead. Extremely dead, if I may use the expression. What is the point that you wish to raise?"

"I am not raising any point," replied Stalker. "We should like you to attend the inquest and watch the case for us. Of course, in our policies, as you know, suicide is expressly ruled out; and if this should turn out to have been a case of suicide —"

"What is there to suggest that it was?" asked Thorndyke.

"What is there to suggest that it wasn't?" retorted Stalker.

"Nothing," rejoined Thorndyke. "But a negative plea is of no use to you. You will have to furnish positive proof of suicide, or else pay the claim."

"Yes, I realise that," said Stalker, "and I am not suggesting—But there, it is of no use discussing the matter while we know so little. I leave the case in your hands. Can you attend the inquest?"

"I shall make it my business to do so," replied Thorndyke.

"Very well," said Stalker, rising and putting on his gloves, "then we will leave it at that; and we couldn't leave it in better case."

When our visitor had gone I remarked to Thorndyke: "Stalker seems to have conceived the same idea as my learned senior—fraudulent suicide."

"It is not surprising," he replied. "Stalker is a shrewd man and he perceives that when an abnormal thing has happened we may look for an abnormal explanation. Fraudulent suicide was a speculative possibility yesterday: to-day, in the light of these new facts, it is the most probable theory. But mere probabilities won't help Stalker. If there is no direct evidence of suicide—and there is not likely to be any—the verdict will be Death by Misadventure, and the Griffin Company will have to pay."

"I suppose you won't do anything until you have heard what transpires at the inquest?"

"Yes," he replied. "I think we should do well to go down and just go over the ground. At present we have the facts at third hand, and we don't know what may have been overlooked. As to-morrow is fairly free I propose that we make an early start



and see the place ourselves.”

“Is there any particular point that you want to clear up?”

“No; I have nothing definite in view. The circumstances are compatible with either accident, suicide or homicide, with an undoubted leaning towards suicide. But, at present, I have a completely open mind. I am, in fact, going down to Dartford in the hope of getting a lead in some definite direction.”

When we alighted at Dartford Station on the following morning, Thorndyke looked inquiringly up and down the platform until he espied an inspector, when he approached the official and asked for a direction to the site of the burnt rick.

The official glanced at Thorndyke’s canvas-covered research-case and at my binocular and camera as he replied with a smile: “You are not the first, by a long way, that has asked that question. There has been a regular procession of Press gentlemen that way this morning. The place is about a mile from here. You take the foot-path to Joyce Green and turn off towards the creek opposite Temple Farm. This is about where the rick stood,” he added, as Thorndyke produced his one-inch Ordnance map and a pencil, “a few yards from that dyke.”

With this direction and the open map we set forth from the station, and taking our way along the unfrequented path soon left the town behind. As we crossed the second stile, where the path rejoined the road, Thorndyke paused to survey the prospect.

“Stalker’s question,” he remarked, “was not unreasonable. This road leads nowhere but to the river, and one does rather wonder what a city man can have been doing out on these marshes in the small hours of the morning. I think that will be our objective, where you see those men at work by the shepherd’s hut, or whatever it is.”

We struck off across the level meadows, out of which arose the red sails of a couple of barges, creeping down the invisible creek; and as we approached our objective the shepherd’s hut resolved itself into a contractor’s office van, and the men were seen to be working with shovels and sieves on the ashes of the rick. A police inspector was superintending the operations, and when we drew near he accosted us with a civil inquiry as to our business.

Thorndyke presented his card and explained that he was watching the case in the interests of the Griffin Insurance Company. “I suppose,” he added, “I shall be given the necessary facilities?”

“Certainly,” replied the officer, glancing at my colleague with an odd mixture of respect and suspicion, “and if you can spot anything that we’ve overlooked, you are very welcome. It’s all for the public good. Is there anything in particular that you want to see?”

“I should like to see everything that has been recovered so far. The remains of the body have been removed, I suppose?”

“Yes, sir. To the mortuary. But I have got all the effects here.”

He led the way to the office—a wooden hut on low wheels—and unlocking the door, invited us to enter. “Here are the things that we have salvaged,” he said, indicating a table covered with white paper on which the various articles were neatly set out, “and I think it’s about the lot. We haven’t come on anything fresh for the last hour or so.”

Thorndyke looked over the collection thoughtfully; picked up and examined successively the two clay pipes—each with the initials “R. R.” neatly incised on the bowl—the absurd little mascot figure, so incongruous with its grim surroundings and the tragic circumstances, the distorted keys, the platinum chain-links to several of which shapeless blobs of gold adhered, and the crystal seal; and then, collecting the artificial teeth, arranged them in what appeared to be their correct order and compared them with the dental plate.

“I think,” said he, holding the latter in his fingers, “that as the body is not here, I should like to secure the means of comparison of these teeth with the skull. There will be no objection to that, I presume?”

“What did you wish to do?” the inspector asked.

“I should like to take a cast of the plate and a wax impression of the loose teeth. No damage will be done to the originals, of course.”

The inspector hesitated, his natural, official tendency to refuse permission apparently contending with a desire to see with his own eyes how the famous expert carried out his mysterious methods of research. In the end the latter prevailed and the official sanction was given, subject to a proviso. “You won’t mind my looking on while you do it?”

“Of course not,” replied Thorndyke. “Why should I?”

“I thought that perhaps your methods were a sort of trade secret.”

Thorndyke laughed softly as he opened the research case. “My dear inspector,” said he, “the people who have trade secrets are those who make a profound mystery of simple processes that any schoolboy could carry out with once showing. That is the necessity for the secrecy.”

As he was speaking he half-filled a tiny aluminium saucepan with water, and having dropped into it a couple of cakes of dentist’s moulding composition, put it to heat over a spirit-lamp. While it was heating he greased the dental plate and the loose teeth, and prepared the little rubber basin and the other appliances for mixing the plaster.

The inspector was deeply interested. With almost ravenous attention he followed these proceedings, and eagerly watched

Thorndyke roll the softened composition into the semblance of a small sausage and press it firmly on the teeth of the plate; peered into the plaster tin, and when the liquid plaster was mixed and applied, first to the top and then to the lower surface of the plate, not only observed the process closely but put a number of very pertinent questions.

While the plaster and composition were setting Thorndyke renewed his inspection of the salvage from the rick, picking out a number of iron boot protectors which he placed apart in a little heap.

Then he proceeded to roll out two flat strips of softened composition, into one of which he pressed the loose teeth in what appeared to be their proper order, and into the other the boot protectors—eight in number—after first dusting the surface with powdered French chalk. By this time the plaster had set hard enough to allow of the mould being opened and the dental plate taken out. Then Thorndyke, having painted the surfaces of the plaster pieces with knotting, put the mould together again and tied it firmly with string, mixed a fresh bowl of plaster and poured it into the mould.

While this was setting Thorndyke made a careful inventory, with my assistance, of the articles found in the ashes and put a few discreet questions to the inspector. But the latter knew very little about the case. His duty was merely to examine and report on the rick for the information of the coroner. The investigation of the case was evidently being conducted from headquarters. There being no information to be gleaned from the officer, we went out and inspected the site of the rick. But here, also, there was nothing to be learned; the surface of the ground was now laid bare and the men who were working with the sieves reported no further discoveries. We accordingly returned to the hut, and as the plaster had now set hard Thorndyke proceeded with infinite care to open the mould. The operation was a complete success, and as my colleague extracted the cast—a perfect replica, in plaster, of the dental plate—the inspector's admiration was unbounded. "Why," he exclaimed, "excepting for the colour you couldn't tell one from the other; but all the same, I don't quite see what you want it for."

"I want it to compare with the skull," replied Thorndyke, "if I have time to call at the mortuary. As I can't take the original plate with me, I shall need this copy to make the comparison. Obviously, it is important to make sure that this is Reed's plate and not that of some other person. By the way, can you show us the spot where the plate was picked up?"

"Yes," replied the inspector. "You can see the place from here. It was just by that gate at the crossing of the ditch."

"Thank you, inspector," said Thorndyke. "I think we will walk down and have a look at the place." He wrapped the new cast in a soft cloth, and having repacked his research-case, shook hands with the officer and prepared to depart.

"You will notice, Jervis," he remarked as we walked towards the gate, "that this denture was picked up at a spot beyond the rick—farther from the town, I mean. Consequently, if the plate is Reed's, he must have dropped it while he was approaching the rick from the direction of the river. It will be worthwhile to see if we can find out whence he came."

"Yes," I agreed. "But the dropping of the plate is a rather mysterious affair. It must have happened when he took the poison—assuming that he really did poison himself; but one would have expected that he would wait until he got to the rick to take his dose."

"We had better not make too many assumptions while we have so few facts," said Thorndyke. He put down his case beside the gate, which guarded a bridge across a broad ditch, or drainage dyke, and opened his map.

"The question is," said he, "did he come through this gate or was he only passing it? This dyke, you see, opens into the creek about three-quarters of a mile farther down. The probability is, therefore, that if he came up from the river across the marshes he would be on this side of the ditch and would pass the gate. But we had better try both sides. Let us leave our things by the gate and explore the ground for a few hundred yards, one on either side of the ditch. Which side will you take?"

I elected to take the side nearer the creek, and, having put my camera down by the research-case, climbed over the padlocked gate and began to walk slowly along by the side of the ditch, scanning the ground for footprints showing the impression of boot-protectors. At first the surface was far from favourable for imprints of any kind, being, like that immediately around the gate, covered with thick turf. About a hundred and fifty yards down, however, I came upon a heap of worm-casts on which was plainly visible the print of a heel with a clear impression of a kidney-shaped protector such as I had seen in the hut. Thereupon I hailed Thorndyke and, having stuck my stick in the ground beside the heel-print, went back to meet him at the gate.

"This is rather interesting, Jervis," he remarked, when I had described my find. "The inference seems to be that he came from the creek—unless there is another gate farther down. We had better have our compo impressions handy for comparison." He opened his case and taking from it the strip of composition—now as hard as bone—on which were the impressions of the boot-protectors, slipped it into his outer pocket. We then took up the case and the camera and proceeded to the spot marked by my stick.

"Well," said Thorndyke, "it is not very conclusive, seeing that so many people use boot-protectors, but it is probably Reed's foot-print. Let us hope that we shall find something more distinctive farther on."

We resumed our march, keeping a few yards apart and examining the ground closely as we went. For a full quarter of a mile we went on without detecting any trace of a foot-print on the thick turf. Suddenly we perceived ahead of us a stretch of yellow mud occupying a slight hollow, across which the creek had apparently overflowed at the last spring tide. When we reached it we found that the mud was nearly dry, but still soft enough to take an impression; and the surface was covered with a maze of foot-prints.

We halted at the edge of the patch and surveyed the complicated pattern; and then it became evident that the whole group of prints had been produced by two pairs of feet, with the addition of a row of sheep-tracks.

"This seems to raise an entirely new issue," I remarked.

"It does," Thorndyke agreed. "I think we now begin to see a definite light on the case. But we must go cautiously. Here are two sets of foot-prints of which one is apparently Reed's—to judge by the boot-protectors—while the other prints have been made by a man, whom we will call X, who wore boots or shoes with rubber soles and heels. We had better begin by verifying Reed's." He produced the composition strip from his pocket, and, stooping over one pair of footprints, continued: "I think we may assume that these are Reed's feet. We have on the compo strip impressions of eight protectors from the rick, and on each foot-print there are four protectors. Moreover, the individual protectors are the same on the compo and on the foot-prints. Thus the compo shows two pairs of half-protectors, two single edge-pieces, and two kidney-shaped protectors; while each foot-print shows a pair of half-protectors on the outside of the sole, a single one on the inside and a kidney-shaped piece on the heel. Furthermore, in both cases the protectors are nearly new and show no appreciable signs of wear. The agreement is complete."

"Don't you think," said I, "that we ought to take plaster records of them?"

"I do," he replied, "seeing that a heavy shower or a high tide would obliterate them. If you will make the casts I will, meanwhile, make a careful drawing of the whole group to show the order of imposition."

We fell to work forthwith upon our respective tasks, and by the time I had filled four of the clearest of the foot-prints with plaster, Thorndyke had completed his drawing with the aid of a set of coloured pencils from the research-case. While the plaster was setting he exhibited and explained the drawing.

"You see, Jervis, that there are four lines of prints and a set of sheep-tracks. The first in order of time are these prints of X, drawn in blue. Then come the sheep, which trod on X's foot-prints. Next comes Reed, alone and after some interval, for he has trodden both on the sheep-tracks and on the tracks of X. Both men were going towards the river. Then we have the tracks of the two men coming back. This time they were together, for their tracks are parallel and neither treads into the prints of the other. Both tracks are rather sinuous as if the men were walking unsteadily, and both have trodden on the sheep-tracks and on the preceding tracks. Next, we have the tracks of X going alone towards the river and treading on all the others excepting number four, which is the tracks of X coming from the river and turning off towards that gate, which opens on to the road. The sequence of events is therefore pretty clear.

"First, X came along here alone to some destination which we have yet to discover. Later—how much later we cannot judge—came Reed, alone. The two men seem to have met, and later returned together, apparently the worse for drink. That is the last we see of Reed. Next comes X, walking back—quite steadily, you notice—towards the river. Later, he returns; but this time, for some reason—perhaps to avoid the neighbourhood of the rick—he crosses the ditch at that gate, apparently to get on the road, though you see by the map that the road is much the longer route to the town. And now we had better get on and see if we can discover the rendezvous to and from which these two men went and came."

As the plaster had now set quite hard I picked up the casts, and when I had carefully packed them in the case we resumed our progress riverwards. I had already noticed, some distance ahead, the mast of what looked like a small cutter yacht standing up above the marshes, and I now drew Thorndyke's attention to it. But he had already observed it and, like me, had marked it as the probable rendezvous of the two men. In a few minutes the probability became a certainty, for a bend in the creek showed us the little vessel—with the name Moonbeam newly painted on the bow—made fast alongside a small wooden staging; and when we reached this the bare earth opposite the gangway was seen to be covered with the foot-prints of both men.

"I wonder," said I, "which of them was the owner of the yacht."

"It is pretty obvious, I think," said Thorndyke, "that X was the owner if either of them was. He came to the yacht alone, and he wore rubber-soled shoes such as yachtsmen favour; whereas Reed came when the other man was there, and he wore iron boot-protectors, which no yacht owner would do if he had any respect for his deck-planks. But they may have had a joint interest; appearances suggest that they were painting the woodwork when they were here together, as some of the paint is fresh and some of it old and shabby." He gazed at the yacht reflectively for some time and then remarked: "It would be interesting—and perhaps instructive—to have a look at the inside."

"It would be a flagrant trespass, to put it mildly," said I.

"It would be more than trespass if that padlock is locked," he replied. "But we need not take a pedantic view of the legal position. My learned friend has a serviceable pair of glasses and commands an unobstructed view of a mile or so; and if he maintains an observant attitude while I make an inspection of the premises any trifling irregularity will be of no consequence." As he spoke he felt in his pocket and produced the instrument which our laboratory assistant, Polton, had made from a few pieces of stiff steel wire, and which was euphemistically known as a smoker's companion. With this appliance in his hand he dropped down on to the yacht's deck, and after a quick look round, tried the padlock. Finding it locked he proceeded to operate on it with the smoker's companion, and in a few moments it fell open, when he pushed back the sliding hatch and stepped down into the little cabin.

His exploration did not take long. In a few minutes he reappeared and climbed the short ladder to the staging. "There isn't much to see," he reported, "but what there is is highly suggestive. If you slip down and have a look round, I think you

will have no difficulty in forming a plausible reconstruction of the recent events. You had better take the camera. There is light enough for a time exposure."

I handed him the glasses, and dropping on to the deck, stepped down through the open hatch into the cabin. It was an absurd little cave, barely four feet high from the floor to the coach-roof, open to the fore-peak and lighted by a little skylight and two portholes. Of the two sleeping berths, one had evidently been used as a seat, while the other appeared to have been slept in, to judge by the indented pillow and the tumbled blankets, left just as the occupant had crawled out of them. But the whole interior was in a state of squalid disorder. Paint-pots and unwashed brushes lay about the floor, in company with a couple of whisky-bottles—one empty and one half-full—two tumblers, a pair of empty siphons and a litter of playing cards scattered broadcast and evidently derived from two packs. It was, as Thorndyke had said, easy to reconstruct the scene of sordid debauchery that the light of the two candles—each in its congealed pool of grease—must have displayed on that night of horror whose dreadful secret had been disclosed by the ashes of the rick. But I could see nothing that would enable me to give a name to the dead man's mysterious companion.

When I had completed my inspection and taken a photograph of the interior, I rejoined Thorndyke, who then descended and replaced the padlock on the closed hatch, relocking it with the invaluable smoker's companion.

"Well, Jervis," said he, as we turned our faces towards the town, "it seems as if we had accomplished our task, so far as Stalker is concerned. It is still possible that this was a case of suicide, but it is no longer probable. All the appearances point to homicide. I think my learned friend will agree with me in that."

"Undoubtedly," I replied. "And to me there is a strong suggestion of premeditation. I take it that X, the owner of the yacht, enticed Reed out here, possibly to prepare for a cruise; that the two men worked at the repainting while the daylight lasted and then spent the evening drinking and gambling. The fact that they used several packs of cards suggests that they played for pretty heavy stakes. Then, I think, Reed became drunk and X offered to see him safely off the marshes. It is evident that X was not drunk, because, although both tracks appear unsteady when the men were walking together, the tracks of X returning to the yacht are quite steady and straight. I should say that the actual murder took place just after they had got over the gate; that Reed's false teeth fell out while his body was being dragged to the rick, and that this was unnoticed by X owing to the darkness. Then X dragged the body up the ladder and laid it in the middle of the rick at the top, set fire to the rick—probably on the lee side—and at once made off back to the yacht. There he passed the night, and in the morning he returned to the town along the road, giving the neighbourhood of the rick a wide berth. That is my reading of the evidence."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that seems to be the interpretation of the facts. And now all that remains is to give a name to the mysterious X, and I should think that will present no difficulties."

"Are you proposing to inspect the remains at the mortuary?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "It would be interesting, but it is not necessary. We have all the available data for identification, and our concern is now not with Reed but with X. We had better get back to London."

On our arrival at the station, we found the bookstall keeper in the act of sticking up a placard of the evening paper on which was the legend: "Rick tragedy; Sensational development."

We immediately provided ourselves each with a copy of the paper, and sitting down on a seat, proceeded to read the heavily-leaded report.

"A new and startling aspect has been given to the rick tragedy by some further inquiries that the police have made. It seems that the dead man, Reed, was a member of the firm of Reed and Jarman, outside brokers, and it now transpires that his partner, Walter Jarman, is also missing. There has been no one at the office this week, but the caretaker states that on Monday evening at about eight o'clock, he saw Mr. Jarman let himself into the office with his key (the rick was first seen to be on fire at two o'clock on Monday morning). It appears that three cheques, payable to the firm and endorsed by Jarman, were paid into the bank—Patmore's—by the first post on Tuesday morning, and that, also on Tuesday morning, Jarman purchased a parcel of diamonds of just over a thousand pounds in value from a diamond merchant in Hatton Garden, who accepted a cheque in payment after telephoning to the bank. It further appears that on the previous Saturday morning, Reed and Jarman visited the bank together and drew out in cash practically their whole balance, leaving only thirty-two pounds. The diamond merchant's cheque was met by the cheques that had just been paid in. It is premature to make any comments, but we may expect some strange disclosures at the inquest, which will be held at Dartford the day after tomorrow."

"I assume," said I, "that the identity of X is no longer a mystery. It looks as if these two men had agreed to realise their assets and abscond, and had then spent the night gambling for the swag, and, oddly enough, Reed appears to have been the winner, for otherwise there would have been no need to murder him."

"That is so," Thorndyke agreed, "assuming that X is Jarman, which is probable, though not certain. But we mustn't go beyond our facts, and we mustn't construct theories from newspaper reports. I think we had better call at Scotland Yard on our way home and verify those particulars."

The report and our own observations occupied us during the journey to London, though our discussion produced no further conclusions. As soon as we arrived at Charing Cross, Thorndyke sprang out of the train, and emerging from the station, walked swiftly towards Whitehall.

Our visit was fortunately timed, for as we approached the entrance to the head-quarters, our old friend, Superintendent Miller, came out. He smiled as he saw us and halted to utter the laconic query:

“Rick Case?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke. “We have come to verify the particulars given in the evening paper. Have you seen the report?”

“Yes; and you may take it as correct. Anything else?”

“I should have liked to look over a series of the cheques drawn by the firm. The last two, I suppose, are inaccessible?”

“Yes. They will be at the bank, and we couldn’t inspect them without an order of the court. But, as to the others, if they are at the office, I think you could see them. I’ll come along with you now if you like, and have a look round myself. Our people are in possession.”

We at once closed with the superintendent’s offer and proceeded with him by the Underground Railway to the Mansion House, from whence we made our way to Queen Victoria Street, where Reed and Jarman had their offices. A sergeant was in charge at the moment, and to him the superintendent addressed himself.

“Have you found any returned cheques?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the sergeant; “lots of ‘em. We’ve been through them all.”

As he spoke he produced several bundles of cheques and laid them on a desk, the drawers of which all stood open.

“Well,” said Miller, “there they are, doctor. I don’t know what you want to find out, but I expect you do.” He placed a chair by the desk, and as Thorndyke sat down and proceeded to turn the cheques over, he watched him with politely-suppressed curiosity.

“It appears,” said Thorndyke, “as if these two men had mixed up their private affairs with the business account. Here, for instance, is a cheque drawn by Reed for the Picardy Wine Company. But that company could hardly have been a client. And this one of Jarman’s for the Secretary of the St. John’s Nursing Home must be a private cheque, and so I should say are these two for F. Waller, Esq., F.R.C.S., and for Andrew Darton, Esq., L.D.S. They are drawn for professional men and both are—like the Nursing Home cheque—stated in even amounts of guineas, whereas the business cheques are in uneven amounts of pounds, shillings and pence.”

“I think you are right, sir,” said Miller. “The business seems to have been conducted in a very casual manner. And just look at those signatures! Never twice alike. The banks hate that sort of thing, naturally. When a customer signs in the signature book he has given a specimen for reference and he ought to keep to it strictly. A man who varies his signature is asking for trouble.”

“He is,” Thorndyke agreed, as he rapidly entered a few particulars of the cheques in his notebook; “particularly in the case of a firm with a staff of clerks.”

He stood up, and having pocketed his notebook, held out his hand.

“I am very much obliged to you, superintendent,” he said.

“Seen all that you wanted to see?” Miller asked.

“Thank you, yes,” Thorndyke replied.

“I should very much like to know what you have seen,” Miller rejoined; to which my colleague replied by waving his hand towards the cheques, as he turned to go.

“I don’t quite see the bearing of those cheques on our inquiry,” I said, as we took our way homeward along Cheapside.

“It is not very direct,” Thorndyke replied, “but the cheques help us to understand the characters of these two men and their relations with one another; which may be very necessary when we come to the inquest.”

During the following day I saw very little of Thorndyke, for our excursion to Dartford had put our work somewhat in arrear and we had to secure a free day for the inquest on the morrow. We met at dinner after the day’s work, but, beyond settling the programme for the next day nothing of importance passed with reference to the “Rick Case.”

The opening phases of the inquest, though of thrilling interest to the numerous spectators and Press men, did not particularly concern us. The evidence of the rural constable, the farmer and the police inspector—with whom Thorndyke had a little confidential talk and apparently surprised the officer considerably—merely amplified what we knew already. Of more interest was that of a local dentist who testified to having examined the dental plate and to having compared it with the skull of the dead man. “The plate and the jaw of deceased,” he said, “agree completely. The jaw contains five natural teeth in two groups, and the plate has two spaces which exactly correspond to those two groups of teeth. I have tried the plate on the jaw and have no doubt whatever that it belonged to deceased.”

“That is a very important fact,” Thorndyke remarked to me as the witness retired. “It is the indispensable link in the chain.”

“But surely it was obvious?” said I.

“No doubt,” he replied. “But now it is proved and in evidence.”

I was somewhat puzzled by Thorndyke's remark, but the appearance of a new witness forbade discussion. Mr. Arthur Gerrard was an alert-looking, rather tall man, with bushy, Mephistophelian eyebrows and a small, dark moustache, who wore a pair of large bifocal spectacles, and to whom a small mole at the corner of the mouth imparted the effect of a permanent one-sided smile.

"It was on your information," said the coroner, "that the identity of the deceased was established."

"Yes," replied the witness, who spoke with a slight, but perceptible, Irish accent. "I saw the description in the papers of the things that had been found in the rick and at once recognised them as Reed's. I knew deceased intimately and had often noticed his peculiar watch-chain and the little china mascot and seen him smoking the clay pipe with his initials scratched on it; and I knew that he wore false teeth."

"Did you meet him frequently?"

"Oh, yes. For more than a year he was my partner in business, and we remained friends after I had dissolved the partnership."

"Why did you dissolve the partnership?"

"I had to. Reed was impossible in a business sense. He gambled incessantly in stocks and I had to pay his losses. I lent him, for this purpose, at one time and another, over two thousand pounds. He gave me bills for the loans, but he was never able to meet them, and in the end, when we dissolved, I got him to insure his life for three thousand pounds and to draw up a document making his debt to me the first charge on his estate in the event of his death."

"Had you ever any reason to suppose that he contemplated suicide?"

"None whatever. After he left me, he entered into partnership with a Mr. Walter Jarman, and whenever I met him, he seemed to be quite happy and contented, though I gathered that he was still gambling a good deal. I saw him a week ago to-day and he then told me that he proposed to take a short yachting holiday with his partner, who owned a small cutter. That was the last time that I saw him alive."

As the witness was about to retire, Thorndyke rose, and having obtained the coroner's permission to cross-examine, asked: "You have spoken of a yacht. Do you know what her name is and where she has been kept lately?"

"Her name is the Moonbeam, and I believe Jarman kept her somewhere in the Thames, but I don't know where."

"And as to Jarman himself: what do you know about him, as to his character, for instance?"

"I knew him very slightly. He appeared to be rather a dissipated man. Drank a good deal, I should say, and I think he was a bit of a gambler."

"Do you know if he was a heavy smoker?"

"He didn't smoke at all, but he was an inveterate snuff-taker."

At this point the foreman of the jury interposed with the audible remark that "he didn't see what this had to do with the inquiry," and the coroner looked dubiously at Thorndyke; but as my colleague sat down, the objection was not pursued.

The next witness was the caretaker of the building in which Reed and Jarman's office was situated. His evidence was to the effect that on the previous Monday evening at about eight o'clock, he saw Mr. Jarman let himself into the office with his key. "I don't know how long he stayed there," he continued, in reply to the coroner's question. "I had finished my work and was going up to my rooms at the top of the building. I didn't see him again."

"Did you notice anything unusual in his appearance?" asked Thorndyke, rising to cross-examine. "Was his face at all flushed, for instance?"

"I couldn't say. I was going up the stairs and I just looked back over my shoulder when I heard him. His face was turned away from me."

"But you had no difficulty in recognising him?"

"No: I should have known him a mile off. He had his overcoat on, and it is a very peculiar overcoat—light brown with a sort of greenish check. You couldn't possibly mistake it."

"What should you say was Mr. Jarman's height?"

"About five feet nine or ten, I should say."

Here the foreman of the jury again interposed. "Aren't we wasting time, sir?" he inquired impatiently. "These details about Jarman may be very important to the police, but they don't concern us. We are inquiring into the death of Mr. Reginald Reed."

The coroner looked deprecatingly at Thorndyke and remarked, "There is some truth in what the foreman says."

"I submit, sir," replied Thorndyke, "that there is no truth in it at all. We are not inquiring into the death of Reginald Reed, but into that of a man whose remains were found in a burned rick."

"But the body has been identified as that of Reginald Reed."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I submit that it has been wrongly identified. I suggest that the body is that of Walter Jarman"

and I am prepared to produce witnesses who will prove that it is."

"But," exclaimed the coroner, "we have just heard the evidence of a witness who states that he saw Jarman alive eighteen hours after the rick was fired."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Thorndyke. "We have heard the witness say that he saw Jarman's overcoat. He expressly stated that he did not see the man's face."

The coroner hastily conferred with the jury—who openly scoffed at Thorndyke's suggestion—and then said: "I find what you say perfectly incredible and so do the jury. It is utterly irreconcilable with the facts. You had better call your witnesses and let us dispose of this extraordinary suggestion."

Thorndyke bowed to the coroner and called Mr. Andrew Darton; whereupon a middle-aged man of markedly professional aspect came forward and, having been sworn, gave evidence as follows: "I am a dental surgeon. A little over two years ago, Mr. Walter Jarman was under my care. I extracted some loose teeth from both jaws and made him two plates—an upper and a lower."

"Could you identify those plates?"

"Yes. I have with me the plaster model on which those plates were made." He opened a bag and produced a plaster cast of a pair of jaws fitted with a brass hinge so that the jaws could be opened and shut. On the upper jaw were two groups of teeth separated by a space of bare gums, while the lower jaw bore a single group of four front teeth.

"This model," the witness explained, "is an exact replica of the patient's jaws, and the two plates were actually moulded on it." He picked up the dental plate from the table and, amidst a hush of breathless expectancy, opened the mouth of the model and applied the plate to the upper jaw. At a glance, it was obvious that it fitted perfectly. The two groups of the plaster teeth slipped exactly into the spaces on the plate, making a complete row of teeth. Then the witness covered the lower gums with strips of plastic wax, and taking the loose teeth from the table, attached them to the wax; and again the correspondence was evident. The teeth thus applied exactly filled the vacant spaces.

"Can you now identify that plate?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "I am quite certain that this is the plate I made for Mr. Jarman and that those loose teeth are from his lower plate."

Thorndyke looked at the coroner, who nodded emphatically. "This evidence seems perfectly conclusive," he admitted. "What do you say, gentlemen?" he added, turning to the jury.

There was no doubt as to their sentiments. With one voice they declared their complete conviction. Had they not seen the demonstration with their own eyes?

"And now, sir," said the coroner, "as you appear to know more than anyone else about this case, and as it is perfectly incomprehensible to me, and probably also to the jury, I suggest that you give us an explanation. And you had better make it a sworn statement, so that it can go into the depositions."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "especially as I have some evidence to give." He was accordingly sworn and then proceeded to make the following statement:

"The first thing that struck me on reading the report of this case was the very remarkable character of the objects found in the ashes of the rick. They included objects composed of platinum, of pipe-clay, of iron and of porcelain—all substances practically indestructible by fire. And these imperishable objects were all highly distinctive and easily identifiable, and two of them actually bore the initials of their owner. There was almost a suggestion of the body having been prepared for identification after burning. This mere suggestion, however, gave place to definite suspicion when I saw the dental plate. That plate presented a most striking discrepancy. Here it is, sir, and you see that it is a clean polished plate of red vulcanite, with not a trace of stain or discoloration. But associated with that plate were two clay pipes. Now, the man who smokes a clay pipe is not only—as a rule—a heavy smoker, but he smokes strong and dark-coloured tobacco. And if he wears a dental plate, that plate becomes encrusted with a black deposit which is very difficult to remove. There is, as you see, no trace of any such deposit, or of any tobacco stain in the interstices of the teeth. It appeared to be almost certainly the plate of a non-smoker. But if that were so, it could not be Reed's. But it had been ascertained by the police surgeon that it fitted the jaw of the skull and undoubtedly belonged to the burned body. Consequently if the plate was not Reed's plate, the skull was not Reed's skull, and the body was not Reed's body. But the watch-chain was Reed's, the pipes were his and the mascot was his. That is to say that the very identifiable and fire-proof property of Reed was associated with the burned body of some other person; that, in other words, the body of some unknown person had been deliberately prepared to counterfeit the body of Reed. This offered a further suggestion and raised a question. The suggestion was that the unknown person had been murdered—presumably somewhere near the spot where the dental plate was found. The question was—What was the object of causing the body to counterfeit that of Reed?

"Now, I knew, from the insurance company, that Reed had insured his life for three thousand pounds. Therefore, somebody stood to gain three thousand pounds by his death. The question was—Who was that somebody? I proceeded to make certain investigations on the spot;"—and here Thorndyke gave a summary of our discoveries on the marsh and on the yacht. "It thus appeared," he continued, "that there were two men on the marshes that night, going towards the rick. One of them was the person whose body was found in the ashes; the other, who went back alone to the yacht, was presumably the person who stood to gain three thousand pounds by Reed's death."

"Have you formed any opinion as to who that person was?" the coroner asked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I have very little doubt that he was Reginald Reed."

"But," exclaimed the coroner, "we have heard in evidence that it was Mr. Arthur Gerrard who stood to gain the three thousand pounds!"

"Precisely," said Thorndyke; and for a while he and the coroner looked at one another without speaking.

Suddenly the latter cast a searching look around the court. "Where is Mr. Gerrard?" he demanded.

"He left the court about ten minutes ago," said Thorndyke; "and a police inspector left immediately afterwards. I had advised him not to lose sight of Mr. Gerrard."

"Then I take it that you suspect Gerrard of being in collusion with Reed?"

"I suspect that Arthur Gerrard and Reginald Reed are one and the same person."

As Thorndyke made this statement, a murmur of astonishment arose from the jurymen and the spectators. The coroner, after a few moments' puzzled reflection, remarked: "You are not forgetting that Reed's caretaker was present while Gerrard was giving his evidence?" Then, turning to the caretaker, he asked: "What do you say? Was that Mr. Reed who gave evidence under the name of Gerrard?"

The caretaker, who had evidently been thinking furiously, was by no means confident. "I should say not," he replied, "unless he was made up a good deal. He was certainly about the same height and build and colour; but he had a moustache, whereas Mr. Reed was clean-shaved; he had a mole on his face, which Mr. Reed hadn't; he had bushy eyebrows, whereas Mr. Reed had hardly any eyebrows to speak of; and he wore spectacles, which Mr. Reed didn't, and he spoke like an Irishman, whereas Mr. Reed was English. Still it is possible—"

Before he could finish, the door rattled to a heavy concussion. Then it flew open, and Mr. Gerrard staggered into the room, thrust forward by the police inspector. His appearance was marvellously changed, for he had lost his spectacles, and one of his eyebrows had disappeared, as had also the mole and a portion of the built-up moustache. The caretaker started up with an exclamation, but at this moment Gerrard, with a violent effort, wrenched himself free. The inspector sprang forward to recapture him. But he was too late. The prisoner's hand flew upwards; there was a ringing report; and Arthur Gerrard—or Reginald Reed—fell back across a bench with a trickle of blood on his temple and a pistol still clutched in his hand.

"And so," said Stalker, when he called on us the next day for details, "it was a suicide after all. Very lucky, too, seeing that there was no provision in the policy for death by judicial hanging."

---

THE END



## THE EYE OF THE CAT

### I. — IN THE MIDST OF LIFE

I am not a superstitious man. Indeed superstition, which is inseparably bound up with ignorance or disregard of evidence, would ill accord with the silken gown of a King's Counsel. And still less am I tainted with that particular form of superstition in which the fetishism of barbarous and primitive man is incongruously revived in a population of, at least nominally, educated persons, by the use of charms, amulets, mascots and the like.

Had it been otherwise; had I been the subject of this curious atavistic tendency, I should surely have been led to believe that from the simple gem whose name I have used to give a title to this chronicle, some subtle influence exhaled whereby the whole course of my life was directed into new channels. But I do not believe anything of the kind; and therefore, though it did actually happen that the appearance of the Cat's Eye was coincident with a radical change in the course and manner of my life, and even, as it seemed, with my very personality; and though with the Cat's Eye the unfolding of the new life seemed constantly associated; still I would have it understood that I use the name merely as a label to docket together a succession of events that form a consistent and natural group.

The particular train of events with which this history deals began on a certain evening near the end of the long vacation. It was a cloudy evening, I remember, and very dark, for it was past eight o'clock and the days were drawing in rapidly. I was returning across Hampstead Heath towards my lodgings in the village, and was crossing the broken, gorse-covered and wooded hollow to the west of the Spaniards Road, when I heard the footsteps of someone running, and running swiftly, as I could judge by the rapid rhythm of the footfalls and the sound of scattering gravel. I halted to listen, noting that the rhythm of the footsteps was slightly irregular, like the ticking of an ill-adjusted clock; and even as I halted, I saw the runner. But only for a moment, and then but dimly. The vague shape of a man came out of the gloom, passed swiftly across my field of vision, and was gone. I could not see what he was like. The dim shape appeared and vanished into the darkness, leaving me standing motionless, listening with vague suspicion to the now faint footfalls and wondering what I ought to do.

Suddenly the silence was rent by a piercing cry, the cry of a woman calling for help. And, strangely enough, it came from the opposite direction to that towards which the fugitive was running. In an instant I turned and raced across the rugged hollow towards the spot from whence the sound seemed to come, and as I scrambled up a gravelly hillock I saw, faintly silhouetted on the murky skyline of some rising ground ahead, the figures of a man and a woman struggling together; and I had just noted that the man seemed to be trying to escape when I saw him deal the woman a blow, on which she uttered a shriek and fell, while the man, having wrenched himself free, darted down the farther slope and vanished into the encompassing darkness.

When I reached the woman she was sitting up with her right hand pressed to her side, and as I approached she called out sharply:

'Follow him! Follow that man! Never mind me!'

I stood for a moment irresolute, for on the hand that was pressed to her side I had noticed a smear of blood. But as I hesitated, she repeated: 'Follow him! Don't let him escape! He has just committed a dreadful murder!'

On this I ran down the slope in the direction that the man had taken and stumbled on over the rugged, gravelly hillocks and hollows, among the furze bushes and the birches and other small trees. But it was a hopeless pursuit. The man had vanished utterly, and from the dark heath not a sound came to give a hint as to the direction in which he had gone. There was no definite path, nor was it likely that he would have followed one; and as I ran forward, tripping over roots and sandy hummocks, the futility of the pursuit became every moment more obvious, while I felt a growing uneasiness as to the condition of the woman I had left sitting on the ground and apparently bleeding from a wound. At length I gave up the chase and began to retrace my steps, now full of anxiety lest I should be unable to find the spot where I had left her, and speculating on the possibility that the victim of the murder of which she had spoken might yet be alive and in urgent need of help.

I returned as quickly as I could, watching the direction anxiously and trying vainly to pick up landmarks. But the uneven, gorse-covered ground was a mere formless expanse intersected in all directions by indistinct tracks, confused by the numbers of birch-trees and stunted oaks, and shut in on all sides by a wall of darkness. Presently I halted with a despairing conviction that I had lost my way hopelessly, and at that moment I discerned dimly through the gloom the shape of a piece of rising ground lying away to the right. Instantly I hurried towards it, and as I climbed the slope, I thought I recognised it as the place from which I had started. A moment later, the identity of the place was confirmed beyond all doubt, for I perceived lying on the ground a shawl or scarf which I now remembered to have seen lying near the woman as she sat with her hand pressed to her side, urging me to follow her assailant.

But the woman herself had disappeared. I picked up the shawl, and throwing it over my arm, stood for a few moments, peering about me and listening intently. Not a sound could I distinguish, however, nor could I perceive any trace of the vanished woman. Then I noticed, a few yards away, a defined path leading towards a patch of deeper darkness that looked like a copse or plantation, and following this, I presently came upon her, standing by a fence and clinging to it for support.

'The man has got away,' said I. 'There is no sign of him. But what about you? Are you hurt much?'

'I don't think so,' she answered faintly. 'The wretch tried to stab me, but I don't think—' Here her voice faded away, as

she fell forward against the fence and seemed about to collapse. I caught her, and lifting her bodily, carried her along the path, which appeared to lead to a house. Presently I came to an open gate, and entering the enclosed grounds, saw before me an old-fashioned house, the door of which stood ajar, showing a faint light from within. As I approached the door, a telephone bell rang and a woman's voice, harsh and terrified, smote my ear:

'Are you there? This is Rowan Lodge. Send to the police immediately! Mr Drayton has been robbed and murdered! Yes, Mr Drayton. He is lying dead in his room. I am his housekeeper. Send the police and a doctor!'

At this moment I pushed open the door and entered; and at my appearance, with the insensible woman in my arms, the housekeeper shrieked aloud, and dropping the receiver, started back with a gesture of wild terror.

'My God!' she exclaimed, 'What is this? Not another!'

'I hope not,' I replied, not, however, without misgivings. 'This lady tried to hold the man as he was escaping and the villain stabbed her. Where can I lay her down?'

The whimpering housekeeper flung open a door, and snatching a match-box from the hall table, struck a match and preceded me into a room where, by the light of the match that flickered in her shaking hand, I made out a sofa and laid my burden on it, rolling up the shawl and placing it under her head. Then the housekeeper lit the gas and came and stood by the sofa, wringing her hands and gazing down with horrified pity at the corpse-like figure.

'Poor dear!' she sobbed. 'Such a pretty creature, too, and quite a lady! God help us! What can we do for her? She may be bleeding to death!'

The same thought was in my mind, and the same question, but as I answered that we could do nothing until the doctor arrived, the woman—or rather girl, for she was not more than twenty-six—opened her eyes and asked in a faint voice: 'Is Mr Drayton dead?'

The housekeeper sobbed an indistinct affirmative and then added:

'But try not to think about it, my dear. Just keep yourself quite quiet until the doctor comes.'

'Are you sure he is dead?' I asked in a low voice.

'I wish I were not,' she sobbed. Then, with an earnest look at the young lady—who seemed now to be reviving somewhat—she added:

'Come with me and see; and do you lie quite still until I come back, my dear.'

With this she led me out of the room, and turning from the hall into a short corridor, passed quickly along it and stopped at a door. 'He is in there,' she said in a shaky voice that was half a sob. She opened the door softly, peered in, and then, with a shuddering cry, turned and ran back to the room that we had just left.

When she had gone I entered the room half-reluctantly, for the atmosphere of tragedy and horror was affecting me most profoundly. It was a smallish room, almost unfurnished save for a range of cabinets such as insect collectors use; and opposite one of these a man lay motionless on the floor, looking, with his set, marble-white face and fixed, staring eyes, like some horrible waxwork figure. I stooped over him to see if there were any sign of life. But even to a layman's eye the fixity, the utter immobility was unmistakable. The man was dead beyond all doubt. I listened with my ear at his mouth and laid my finger on the chilly wrist. But the first glance had told me all. The man was dead.

As I stood up, still with my eyes riveted on the face, set in that ghastly stare, I became conscious of a certain dim sense of recognition. It was a strong, resolute face, and even in death, the fixed expression spoke rather of anger than of fear. Where had I seen that face? And then in a flash I recalled the name that the housekeeper had called through the telephone—Mr Drayton. Of course. This was the brother of my neighbour in the Temple, Sir Lawrence Drayton, the famous Chancery lawyer. He had spoken to me of a brother who lived at Hampstead, and there could be no doubt that this was he. The likeness was unmistakable.

But, as I realised this, I realised also the certainty that this crime would become my professional concern. Sir Lawrence would undoubtedly put the case in the hands of my friend John Thorndyke—the highest medico-legal authority and the greatest criminal lawyer of our time—and my association with Thorndyke would make me a party to the investigation. And that being so, it behoved me to gather what data I could before the police arrived and took possession.

The mechanism of the crime was obvious enough, though there were one or two mysterious features. Of the cabinet opposite which the body lay, one drawer was pulled out, and its loose glass cover had been removed and lay shattered on the floor beside the corpse. The contents of this drawer explained the motive of the crime, for they consisted of specimens of jewellery, all more or less antique, and many of them quite simple and rustic in character, but still jewels. A number had evidently been taken, to judge by the empty trays, but the greater part of the contents of the drawer remained intact.

The rifled drawer was the second from the top. Having turned up the gas and lit a second burner, I drew out the top drawer. The contents of this were untouched, though the drawer appeared to have been opened, for the cover-glass was marked by a number of rather conspicuous fingerprints. Of course these were not necessarily the prints of the robber's fingers, but they probably were, for their extreme distinctness suggested a dirty and sweaty hand such as would naturally appertain to a professional thief in a state of some bodily fear. Moreover the reason why this drawer should have been passed over was quite obvious. Its contents were of no intrinsic value, consisting chiefly of Buckinghamshire lace bobbins

with carved inscriptions and similar simple objects.

I next drew out the third drawer, which I found quite untouched, and the absence of any fingerprints on the cover-glass confirmed the probable identity of those on the glass of the top drawer. By way of further settling this question, I picked up the fragments of the broken glass and looked them over carefully; and when I found several of them marked with similar distinct fingerprints, the probability that they were those of the murderer became so great as nearly to amount to certainty.

I did not suppose that these fingerprints would be of much interest to Thorndyke. They were rather the concern of the police and the Habitual Criminals Registry. But still I knew that if he had been in my place he would have secured specimens, on the chance of their being of use hereafter, and I could do no less than take the opportunity that offered. Looking over the broken fragments again, I selected two pieces, each about four inches square, both of which bore several fingerprints. I placed them carefully face to face in a large envelope from my pocket, having first wrapped their corners in paper to prevent the surfaces from touching.

I had just bestowed the envelope in my letter-case and slipped the latter into my pocket when I heard a man's voice in the hall. I opened the door, and walking along the corridor, found a police inspector and a sergeant in earnest conversation with the housekeeper, while an elderly man, whom I judged to be the doctor, stood behind, listening attentively.

'Well,' said the inspector 'we'd better see to the lady. Will you have a look at her, doctor, and when you've attended to her, perhaps you will let us know whether she is in a fit state to answer questions. But you might just take a look at the body first.' Here he observed me and inquired: 'Let me see, who is this gentleman?'

I explained briefly my connection with the case as we walked down the corridor, and the inspector made no comment at the moment. We all entered the room, and the doctor stooped over the body and made a rapid inspection.

'Yes,' he said, rising and shaking his head, 'there's no doubt that he is dead, poor fellow. A shocking affair. But I had better go and see to this poor lady before I make any detailed examination.'

With this he bustled away, and the inspector and the sergeant knelt down beside the corpse but refrained from touching it.

'Knife wound, apparently,' said the inspector, nodding gloomily at a small pool of blood that appeared between the outstretched right arm and the side. 'Seems to have been a left-handed man, too, unless he struck from behind, which he pretty evidently did not.' He stood up, and once more looking at me, somewhat inquisitively, said: 'I had better have your name and address, sir.'

'My name is Anstey—Robert Anstey, KC, and my address is 8A Kings Bench Walk, Inner Temple.'

'Oh, I know you, sir,' said the inspector with a sudden change of manner. 'You are Dr. Thorndyke's leading counsel. Well, well. What an odd thing that you should happen to come upon this affair by mere chance. It's quite in your own line.'

'I don't know about that,' said I. 'It looks to me rather more in yours. If they have got these fingerprints in the files at Scotland Yard you won't have much trouble in finding your man or getting a conviction.'

As I spoke, I drew his attention to the fingerprints on the broken glass, saying nothing, however, about those on the upper drawer.

The two officers examined the incriminating marks with deep interest, and the inspector proceeded carefully and skilfully to pack several of the fragments for subsequent examination, remarking, as he laid them tenderly on the top of a cabinet: 'This looks like a regular windfall, but it's almost too good to be true. The professional crook, nowadays, knows too much to go dabbling his trade-marks about in this fashion. These prints and the knife rather suggest a casual or amateur of some kind. The fellow not only didn't wear gloves, he didn't even trouble to wipe his hands. And they wanted wiping pretty badly. Are all these cabinets full of jewellery?'

'I really don't know what they contain, but they are pretty insecure if their contents are valuable.'

'Yes,' he agreed. 'A single locked batten to each cabinet. One wrench of a jemmy and the whole cabinet is open. Well, we'd better have a few words with the housekeeper before we go over the room in detail. And she won't want to talk to us in here.'

With this he led the way back to the hall, and I could not but admire the diplomatic way in which he managed to get me away from the scene of his intended investigation.

As we entered the hall, we met the doctor, who was repacking his emergency bag at the door of the room.

'I think,' said he, 'my patient is well enough to give you a few necessary particulars. But don't tire her with needless questions.'

'She is not seriously hurt, then?' said I, with considerable relief.

'No. But she has had a mighty narrow escape. The brute must have aimed badly, for he struck viciously enough, but the point of the knife glanced off a rib and came out farther back, just transfixing a fold of skin and muscle. It is a nasty wound, but quite superficial and not at all dangerous.'

'Well, I'm glad it's no worse than that,' said the inspector, and with this he pushed open the door of the room and we all entered, though I noticed that the sergeant regarded me with a somewhat dubious eye. And now, for the first time, I

observed the injured lady with some attention, which I was able to do at my leisure while the examination was proceeding. And a very remarkable-looking girl she was. Whether she would have been considered beautiful by the majority of persons I cannot say; she certainly appeared so to me. But I have always felt a great admiration of the pictures of Burne-Jones and of the peculiar type of womanhood that he loved to paint; and this girl, with her soft aureole of reddish-gold hair, her earnest grey eyes, her clear, blonde skin—now pale as marble—the characteristic mouth and cast of features, might have been the model whose presentment gave those pictures, to me, their peculiar charm. She seemed not of the common, everyday world, but like some visitor from the regions of legend and romance. And the distinction of her appearance was supported by her speech—by a singularly sweet voice, an accent of notable refinement, and a manner at once gentle, grave, and dignified.

'Do you feel able to tell us what you know of this terrible affair, Madam?' the inspector asked.

'Oh yes,' she replied. 'I am quite recovered now.'

'Was Mr Drayton a friend of yours?'

'No. I never met him until this evening. But perhaps I had better tell you how I came to be here and exactly what happened.'

'Yes,' the inspector agreed, 'that will be the shortest way.'

'Mr Drayton,' she began, 'was, as you probably know, the owner of a collection of what he called "inscribed objects"—jewels, ornaments, and small personal effects bearing inscriptions connecting them with some person or event or period. I saw a description of the collection in the Connoisseur a short time ago, and as I am greatly interested in inscribed jewels, I wrote to Mr Drayton asking if I could be allowed to see the collection; and I asked, since I am occupied all day, if he could make it convenient to show me the collection one evening. I also asked him some questions about the specimens of jewellery. In reply he wrote me a most kind letter—I have it in my pocket if you would like to see it—answering my questions and not only inviting me most cordially to come and look at his treasures, but offering to meet me at the station and show me the way to the house. Of course I accepted his very kind offer and gave him a few particulars of my appearance so that he should be able to identify me, and this evening he met me at the station and we walked up here together. There was no one in the house when we arrived—at least he thought there was not, for he mentioned to me that his housekeeper had gone out for an hour or so. He let himself in with a key and showed me into this room. Then he went away, leaving the door ajar. I heard him walk down the corridor and I heard a door open. Almost at the same moment, he called out loudly and angrily. Then I heard the report of a pistol, followed immediately by a heavy fall.'

'A pistol!' exclaimed the inspector 'I thought it was a knife wound. But I mustn't interrupt you.'

'When I heard the report I ran out into the hall and down the corridor. As I went, I heard a sound as of a scuffle, and when I reached the door of the museum, which was wide open, I saw Mr Drayton lying on the floor, quite still, and a man climbing out of the window. I ran to the window to try to stop him, but before I could get there he was gone. I waited an instant to look at Mr Drayton, and noticed that he seemed to be already dead and that the room was full of the reek from the pistol, then I ran back to the hall and out through the garden and along the fence to where I supposed the window to be. But for a few moments I could not see any one. Then, suddenly, a man sprang over the fence and dropped quite near me, and before he could recover his balance, I had run to him and seized him by both wrists. He struggled violently, though he did not seem very strong, but he dragged me quite a long way before he got free.'

'Did he say anything to you?' the inspector asked.

'Yes. He used most horrible language, and more than once he said:

"Let go, you fool. The man who did it has got away."

'That might possibly be true,' I interposed, 'for, just before I heard this lady call for help, a man passed me at a little distance, running so hard that I was half inclined to follow him.'

'Did you see what he was like?' the inspector demanded eagerly.

'No. I hardly saw him at all. He passed me at a distance of about thirty yards and was gone in an instant. Then I heard this lady call out and, of course, ran towards her.'

'Yes,' said the inspector, 'naturally. But it's a pity you didn't see what the man was like. 'Then, once more addressing the lady, he asked:

'Did this man stab you without warning, Miss—'

'Blake is my name,' she replied. 'No. He threatened several times to "knife" me if I didn't let go. At last he managed to get his left hand free. I think he was holding something in it, but he must have dropped it, whatever it was, for the next moment I saw him draw a knife from under his coat. Then I got hold of his arm again, and that is probably the reason that he wounded me so slightly. But when he stabbed me I suddenly went quite faint and fell down, and then he escaped.'

'He held the knife in his left hand, then?' the inspector asked. 'You are sure of that?'

'Quite sure. Of course it happened to be the free hand, but—'

'But if he had been a right-handed man he would probably have got his right hand free. Did you see which side he carried

his knife?

'Yes. He drew it from under his coat on the left side.'

'Can you give us any description of the man?'

'I am afraid I can't. I am sure I should recognise him if I were to see him again, but I can't describe him. It was all very confused, and, of course, it was very dark. I should say that he was a smallish man, rather slightly built. He wore a cloth cap and his hair seemed rather short but bushy. He had a thin face, with a very peculiar expression—but, of course, he was extremely excited and furious—and large, staring eyes, and a rather pronounced, curved nose.'

'Oh, come,' said the inspector approvingly, 'that isn't such a bad description. Can you say whether he was dark or fair, clean shaved or bearded?'

'He was clean shaved, and I should say decidedly dark.'

'And how was he dressed?'

'He wore a cloth cap, and, I think, a tweed suit. Oh, and he wore gloves—thin, smooth gloves—very thin kid, I should say —'

'Gloves!' exclaimed the inspector. 'Then the fingerprints must be the other man's. Are you sure he had gloves on both hands?'

'Yes, perfectly sure. I saw them and felt them.'

'Well,' said the inspector, 'this is a facer. It looks as if the other man had really done the job while this fellow kept watch outside. It's a mysterious affair altogether. There's the extraordinary time they chose to break into the house. Eight o'clock in the evening. It would almost seem as if they had known about Mr Drayton's movements.'

'They must have done,' said the housekeeper. 'Mr Drayton went out regularly every evening a little after seven. He went down to the village to play chess at the club, and he usually came back between half-past nine and ten. And I generally sat and worked in the kitchen on the other side of the house from the museum.'

'And did he take no sort of precautions against robbery?'

'He used to lock the museum when he went out. That was all. He was not at all a nervous man, and he used to say that there was no danger of robbery because the things in the museum were not the kind of things that burglars go for. They wouldn't be of any value to melt or sell.'

'We must just look over the museum presently and see what the collection consists of,' said the inspector. 'And we must see how they got in and what they have taken. I suppose there is a catalogue?'

'No, there isn't,' replied the housekeeper. 'I did suggest to Mr Drayton that he ought to draw up a list of the things, but he said it was not a public collection, and as he knew all the specimens himself, there was no need to number them or keep a catalogue.'

'That is unfortunate,' said the inspector. 'We shan't be able to find out what is missing or circulate any descriptions unless you can remember what was in the cabinets. By the way, did Mr Drayton ever show his collection to visitors other than his personal friends?'

'Occasionally. After the Connoisseur article that Miss Blake was speaking of, two or three strangers wrote to Mr Drayton asking to be allowed to see the jewellery, and he invited them to come and showed them everything.'

'Did Mr Drayton keep a visitors' book, or record of any kind?'

'No. I don't remember any of the visitors, excepting a Mr Halliburton, who wrote from the Baltic Hotel in the Marylebone Road. I remember him because Mr Drayton was so annoyed about him. He put himself to great inconvenience to meet Mr Halliburton and show him the jewellery that he had asked to see, and then, he told me, when he came, it was quite obvious that he didn't know anything at all about jewellery, either ancient or modern. He must have come just from idle curiosity.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said the inspector. 'Looks a bit suspicious. We shall have to make some inquiries at the Baltic. And now we had better go and have a look at the museum, and perhaps, doctor, you would like to make a preliminary examination of the body before it is moved.'

On this we all rose, and the inspector was just moving towards the hall when there came a sharp sound of knocking at the outer door, followed by a loud peal of the bell.

---

## II. — SIR LAWRENCE DECLARES A VENDETTA

At the first stroke of the knocker we all stood stock still, and so remained until the harsh jangling of the bell gradually died away. There was nothing abnormal in either sound, but I suppose we were all somewhat overstrung, for there seemed in the clamorous summons, which shattered the silence so abruptly, something ominous and threatening. Especially did this appear in the case of the housekeeper, who threw up her hands and whimpered audibly.

'Dear Lord!' she ejaculated. 'It is Sir Lawrence—his brother! I know his knock. Who is to tell him?'

As no one answered, she crept reluctantly across the room, murmuring and shaking her head, and went out into the hall. I heard the door open and caught the sound of voices, though not very distinctly. Then the housekeeper re-entered the room quickly, and a man who was following her said in a brisk, somewhat bantering tone:

'You are very mysterious, Mrs Benham.' The next moment the speaker came into view; and instantly he stopped dead and stood staring into the room with a frown of stern surprise.

'What the devil is this?' he demanded, glaring first at the two officers and then at me. 'What is going on, Anstey?'

For a few moments I was tongue-tied. But an appealing glance from the housekeeper seemed to put the duty on me.

'A dreadful thing has happened, Drayton,' I replied. 'The house has been broken into and your brother has been killed.'

Sir Lawrence turned deathly pale and his face set hard and rigid, until it seemed the very counterpart of that white, set face that I had looked on but a few minutes ago. For a while he stared at me frowningly, neither moving nor uttering a word. Then he asked gruffly: 'Where is he?'

'He is lying where he fell, in the museum,' I replied.

On this he turned abruptly and walked out of the room. I heard him pass quickly down the corridor and then I heard the museum door shut. We all looked at one another uncomfortably, but no one spoke. The housekeeper sobbed almost inaudibly and now and again uttered a low moan. Miss Blake wept silently, and the two officers and the doctor stood looking gloomily at the floor.

Presently Sir Lawrence came back. He was still very pale. But though his eyes were red, and indeed were still humid, there was no softness of grief in his face. With its clenched jaw and frowning brows, it was grim and stern and inexorable as Fate.

'Tell me,' he said, in a quiet voice, looking from me to the inspector, 'exactly how this happened.'

'I don't think any one knows yet,' I replied. 'This lady, Miss Blake, is the only person who saw the murderer. She tried to detain him and held on to him until he stabbed her.'

'Stabbed her!' he exclaimed, casting a glance of intense apprehension at the recumbent figure on the sofa and stepping softly across the room.

'I am not really hurt,' Miss Blake hastened to assure him. 'It is only quite a trifling wound.'

He bent over her with a strange softening of the grim face, touching her hand with his and tenderly adjusting the rug that the housekeeper had spread over her.

'I pray to God that it is as you say,' he replied. Then, turning to me, he asked: 'Has this brave young lady been properly attended to?'

'Yes,' I answered. 'The doctor here—Dr—'

'Nichols,' said the medicus. 'I have examined the wound thoroughly and dressed it, and I think I can assure you that no danger is to be apprehended from it. But, having regard to the shock she has sustained, I think she ought to be got home as soon as possible.'

'Yes,' Sir Lawrence agreed, 'and if she is fit to be moved, I will convey her to her home. My car is waiting in the road. And I will ask you, Anstey, to come with me, if you can.'

Of course I assented, and he continued, addressing the inspector:

'When I have taken this lady home I shall go straight to Dr Thorndyke and ask him to assist the police in investigating this crime. Probably he will return here with me at once, and I will ask you to see that nothing—not even the body—is disturbed until he has made his inspection.'

At this the officer looked a little dubious, but he answered courteously enough: 'So far as I am concerned. Sir Lawrence, your wishes shall certainly be attended to. But I notified Scotland Yard before I came on here, and this case will probably be dealt with by the Criminal Investigation Department, and, of course, I can enter into no undertakings on their behalf.'

'No,' Sir Lawrence rejoined, 'of course you can't. I will deal with the Scotland Yard people myself. And now we had better start. Is Miss Blake able to walk to the car, Doctor? It is only a few yards to the road.'

'I am quite able to walk,' said Miss Blake; and as Dr Nichols assented, we assisted her to rise, and Sir Lawrence carefully wrapped her in the rug that Mrs Benham had thrown over her. Then I picked up the shawl, and tucking it under my arm,

followed her as she walked slowly out supported by Sir Lawrence.

At the garden gate we turned to the left, and passing along the path, came very shortly to a road on which two cars were standing, a large closed car, which I recognised as Sir Lawrence's, and a smaller one, presumably Dr Nichols'. Into the former Miss Blake was assisted, and when the carriage rug had been wrapped around her, I entered and took the opposite seat.

'What address shall I tell the driver, Miss Blake?' Sir Lawrence asked.

'Sixty-three Jacob Street, Hampstead Road,' she replied; and then, as neither the driver nor either of us could locate the street, she added:

'It is two or three turnings past Mornington Crescent on the same side of the road.'

Having given this direction to the driver, Sir Lawrence entered and took the vacant seat and the car moved off smoothly, silently, and with unperceived swiftness.

During the journey hardly a word was spoken. The darkness of the heath gave place to the passing lights of the streets, the rural quiet to the clamour of traffic. In a few minutes, as it seemed, we were at the wide crossing by the Mother Red-Cap, and in a few more were turning into a narrow, dingy, and rather sordid by-street. Up this the car travelled slowly as the driver threw the light of a powerful lamp on the shabby doors, and at length drew up opposite a wide, wooden gate on which the number sixty-three was exhibited in large brass figures. I got out of the car and approached the gate in no little surprise, for its appearance and the paved truckway that led through it suggested the entrance to a factory or builders yard. However, there was no doubt that it was the right house, for the evidence of the number was confirmed by a small brass plate at the side, legibly inscribed 'Miss Blake' and surmounted by a bell-pull. At the latter I gave a vigorous tug and was immediately aware of the far-away jangling of a large bell, which sounded as if it were ringing in an open yard.

In a few moments I detected quick footsteps which seemed to be approaching along a paved passage; then a wicket in the gate opened and a boy of about twelve looked out.

'Whom did you want, please?' he asked in a pleasant, refined voice and with a courteous, self-possessed manner which 'placed' him instantly in a social sense. Before I had time to reply, he had looked past me and observed Miss Blake, who, having been helped out of the car, was now approaching the gate; on which he sprang through the wicket and ran to meet her.

'You needn't be alarmed, Percy,' she said in a cheerful voice. 'I have had a little accident and these gentlemen have very kindly brought me home. But it is nothing to worry about.'

'You look awfully white and tired, Winnie,' he replied; and then, addressing me, he asked: 'Is my sister hurt much, sir?'

'No,' I answered. 'The doctor who attended to her thought that she would soon be quite well again, and I hope she will. Is there anything that we can do for you, Miss Blake?'

'Thank you, no,' she replied. 'My brother and a friend will look after me now, but I can't thank you enough for all your kindness.'

'It is I,' said Sir Lawrence, 'who am in your debt—deeply in your debt. And I do pray that you may suffer no ill consequences from your heroism. But we mustn't keep you standing here. Goodbye, dear Miss Blake, and God bless you.'

He shook her hand warmly and her brother's with old-fashioned courtesy. I handed the boy the folded shawl, and having shaken hands with both, followed my friend to the car.

'Do you think Thorndyke will be at home?' he asked as the car turned round and returned to the Hampstead Road.

'I expect so,' I replied. 'But I don't suppose there will be very much for him to do. There were plenty of fingerprints in evidence. I should think the police will be able to trace the man without difficulty.'

'Police be damned!' he retorted gruffly. 'I want Thorndyke. And as to fingerprints, weren't you the leading counsel in that Hornby case?'

'Yes, but that was exceptional. You can't assume—'

'That case,' he interrupted, 'knocked the bottom out of fingerprint evidence. And these fingerprints may not be on the files at the registry, and if they are not, the police have no clue to this man's identity, and are not likely to get any.'

It seemed to me that he was hardly doing the police justice, but there was no use in discussing the matter, as we were, in fact, going to put the case in Thorndyke's hands. I accordingly gave a colourless assent, and for the rest of the short journey we sat in silence, each busy with his own reflections.

At length the car drew up at the Inner Temple gate. Drayton sprang out, and signing to the driver to wait, passed through the wicket and strode swiftly down the narrow lane. As we came out at the end of Crown Office Row, he looked eagerly across at King's Bench Walk.

'There's a light in Thorndyke's chambers,' he said, and quickening his pace almost to a run, he crossed the wide space, and plunging into the entry of number 5A, ascended the stairs two at a time. I followed, not without effort, and as I reached the landing the door opened in response to his peremptory knock and Thorndyke appeared in the opening.

'My dear Drayton!' he exclaimed, 'you really ought not, at your age—' he stopped short, and looking anxiously at our friend, asked: 'Is anything amiss?'

'Yes,' Drayton replied quietly, though breathlessly. 'My brother Andrew—you remember him, I expect—has been murdered by some accursed housebreaker. He is lying on the floor of his room now. I told them to leave him there until you had seen him. Can you come?'

'I will come with you immediately,' was the reply; and as with grave face and quick but unhurried movements, he made the necessary preparations, I noticed that—characteristically—he asked no questions, but concentrated his attention on providing for all contingencies. He had laid a small, green, canvas-covered case upon the table, and opening it, was making a rapid inspection of the apparatus that it contained, when suddenly I bethought me of the pieces of glass in my pocket.

'Before we start,' said I, 'I had better give you these. The fingerprints on them are almost certainly those of the murderer. As I spoke, I carefully unwrapped the two pieces of glass and handed them to Thorndyke, who took them from me, holding them daintily by their edges, and scrutinising them closely.

'I am glad you brought these, Anstey,' he said. 'They make us to some extent independent of the police. Do they know you have them?'

'No,' I replied. 'I took possession of them before the police arrived.'

'Then, in that case,' said he 'it will be as well to say nothing about them.' He held the pieces of glass up against the light, examining them closely and comparing them, first with the naked eye and then with the aid of a lens. Finally he lifted the microscope from its shelf, and placing it on the table, laid one of the pieces of glass on the stage and examined it through the instrument. His inspection occupied only a few seconds, then he rose, and turning to Drayton, who had been watching him eagerly, said: 'It may be highly important for us to have these fingerprints with us. But we can't produce the originals before the police, and besides, they are too valuable to carry about at the risk of spoiling them. But I could make rough, temporary photographs of them in five minutes if you will consent to the delay.'

'I am in your hands, Thorndyke,' replied Drayton. 'Do whatever you think is necessary.'

'Then let us go to the laboratory at once,' said Thorndyke; and taking the two pieces of glass, he led the way across the landing and up the stairs to the upper floor on which the laboratory and workshop were situated. And as we went, I could not but appreciate Thorndyke's tact and sympathy in taking Drayton up with him, so that the tedium of delay might be relieved by the sense of purposeful action.

The laboratory and its methods were characteristic of Thorndyke. Everything was ready and all procedure was prearranged. As we entered, the assistant, Polton, put down the work on which he was engaged, and at a word, took up the present task without either hesitation or hurry. While Thorndyke fixed the pieces of glass in the copying frame of the great standing camera, Polton arranged the light and the condensers and produced a dark-slide loaded with bromide paper. In less than a minute the exposure was made; in another three minutes the print had been developed, roughly fixed, rinsed, squeezed, soaked in spirit, cut in two, and trimmed with scissors, and the damp but rapidly drying halves attached with drawing pins to a small hinged board specially designed for carrying wet prints in the pocket.

'Now,' said Thorndyke, slipping the folded board into his pocket and taking from a shelf a powerful electric inspection lamp, 'I think we are ready to start. These few minutes have not been wasted.'

We returned to the lower room, where Thorndyke, having bestowed the lamp in the canvas-covered 'research-case,' put on his hat and overcoat and took up the case, and we all set forth, walking quickly and in silence up Inner Temple Lane to the gate, and taking our seats in the waiting car when Drayton had given a few laconic instructions to the driver.

Up to this point Thorndyke had asked not a single question about the crime. Now, as the car started, he said to Drayton: 'We had better be ready to begin the investigation as soon as we arrive. Could you give me a short account of what has happened?'

'Anstey knows more about it than I do,' was the reply. 'He was there within a few minutes of the murder.'

The question being thus referred to me, I gave an account of all that I had seen and heard, to which Thorndyke listened with deep attention, interrupting me only once or twice to elucidate some point that was not quite clear.

'I understand,' said he when I had finished, 'that there is no catalogue or record of the collection and no written description of the specimens?'

'No,' replied Drayton. 'But I have looked over the cabinets a good many times, and taken the pieces out to examine them, so I think I shall be able to tell roughly what is missing, and give a working description of the pieces. And I could certainly identify most of them if they should be produced.'

'They are not very likely to be traced,' said Thorndyke. 'It is highly improbable that the murderer will attempt to dispose of things stolen in such circumstances. Still, the possibility of identifying them may be of the greatest importance, for the folly of criminals is often beyond belief.'

---



### III. — THORNDYKE TAKES UP THE INQUIRY

The outer door of the house was shut, although the lower rooms were all lighted up, but at the first sound of the bell it was opened by a uniformed constable who regarded us stolidly and inquired as to our business. Before there was time to answer, however, a man whom I at once recognised as Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department came out into the hall and asked sharply: 'Who is that, Martin?'

'It is Sir Lawrence Drayton, Dr Thorndyke, and Mr Anstey,' I replied; and as the constable backed out of the way we all entered.

'This is a terrible catastrophe, Sir Lawrence,' said Badger 'Dreadful, dreadful. If sincere sympathy would be any consolation—'

'It wouldn't,' interrupted Drayton, 'though I thank you all the same. The only thing that would console me—and that little enough—would be the sight of the ruffian who did it dangling at the end of a rope. The local officer told you, I suppose, that I was asking Dr Thorndyke to lend his valuable aid in investigating the crime?'

'Yes, Sir Lawrence,' replied Badger, 'but I don't know that I am in a position to authorise any unofficial—'

'Tut, tut, man!' Drayton broke in impatiently, 'I am not asking you to authorise anything. I am the murdered man's sole executor and his only brother. In the one capacity his entire estate is vested in me until it has been disposed of in accordance with the will; in the other capacity, the duty devolves on me of seeing that his murderer is brought to account. I give you every liberty and facility to examine these premises, but I am not going to surrender possession of them. Has any discovery been made?'

'No, sir.' Badger replied a little sulkily. 'We have only been here a few minutes. I was taking some particulars from the housekeeper.'

'Possibly I can give you some information while Dr Thorndyke is making his inspection of my poor brother's body,' said Drayton. 'When he has finished and the body has been laid decently in his bedroom, I will come with you to the museum and we will see if anything is missing.'

Badger assented, with evident unwillingness, to this arrangement. He and Drayton entered the drawing-room, from which the inspector had just come, while I conducted Thorndyke to the museum.

The room was just as I had seen it last, excepting that the open drawer had been closed. The stark, rigid figure still lay on the floor, the set, white face still stared with stern fixity at the ceiling. As I looked, the events of the interval faded from my mind and all the horror of the sudden tragedy came back.

Just inside the door Thorndyke halted and slowly ran his eye round the room, taking in its arrangement, and no doubt fixing it in his memory. Presently he stepped over to where the body lay, and stood a while looking down on the dead man. Then he stopped and closely examined a spot on the right breast.

'Isn't there more bleeding than is usual in the case of a bullet-wound?' I asked.

'Yes,' he replied, 'but that blood hasn't come from the wound in front. There must be another at the back, possibly a wound of exit. As he spoke, he stood up and again looked searchingly round the room, more especially at the side in which the door opened. Suddenly his glance became fixed and he strode quickly across to a cabinet that stood beside the door; and as I followed him, I perceived a ragged hole in the front of one of the drawers.

'Do you mean, Thorndyke,' I exclaimed, 'that the bullet passed right through him?'

That is what it looks like,' he replied. 'But we shall be able to judge better when we get the drawer open—which we can't do until Badger comes. But there is one thing that we had better do at once.' Stepping over to the table on which he had placed the research-case, he opened the latter, and taking from it a stick of blackboard chalk, went back to the body. 'We must assume,' said he, 'that he fell where he was standing when he was struck, and if that is so he would have been standing here.' He marked on the carpet two-rough outlines to indicate the position of the feet when the murdered man fell, and having put the chalk back in the case, continued: 'The next thing is to verify the existence of the wound at the back. Will you help me to turn him over?'

We turned the body gently on to its right side, and immediately there came into view a large, blood-stained patch under the left shoulder, and at the centre of it a ragged burst in the fabric of the coat.

'That will do,' said Thorndyke. 'It is an unmistakable exit wound. The bullet probably missed the ribs both in entering and emerging, and passed through the heart or the great vessels. The appearances suggest almost instantaneous death. The face is set, the eyes wide open, and both the hands tightly clenched in a cadaveric spasm. And the right hand seems to be grasping something, but we had better leave that until Badger has seen it.'

At this moment footsteps became audible coming along the corridor, and Badger entered the room accompanied by the local inspector. The two officers looked inquiringly at Thorndyke, who proceeded at once to give them a brief statement of the facts that he had observed.

'There can't be much doubt,' said Badger when he had examined the hole in the drawer front, 'that this was made by a

spent bullet. But we may as well settle the question now. We shall want the keys in any case.'

He passed his hand over the dead man's clothes, and having located the pocket which contained the keys, drew out a good-sized bunch, with which he went over to the cabinet. A few trials with likely-looking keys resulted in the discovery of the right one, and when this had been turned and the hinged batten swung back, all the drawers of the cabinet were released. The inspector pulled out the one with the damaged front and looked in inquisitively. Its contents consisted principally of latten and pewter spoons, now evidently disarranged and mingled with a litter of splinters of wood; and in the bowl of a spoon near the back of the drawer lay a distorted bullet, which Badger picked up and examined critically.

'Browning automatic, I should say,' was his comment, 'and if so we ought to find the cartridge case somewhere on the floor. We must look for it presently, but we'd better get the body moved first, if you have finished your inspection, Doctor.'

'There is something grasped in the right hand,' said Thorndyke. 'It looks like a wisp of hair. Perhaps we had better look at that before the body is moved, in case it should fall out.'

We returned to the body, and the two officers stooped and watched eagerly as Thorndyke, with some difficulty, opened the rigid hand sufficiently to draw from it a small tuft of hair.

'The spasm is very marked,' he observed as he scrutinised the hair and felt in his pocket for a lens; and when, with the aid of the latter, he had made a further examination, he continued: 'The state of the root-bulbs shows that the hair was actually plucked out—which, of course, is what we should expect.'

'Can you form any opinion as to what sort of man he was?' Badger asked.

'No,' replied Thorndyke, 'excepting that he was not a recently released convict. But the appearance of the hair agrees with Miss Blake's description of the man who stabbed her. I understand that she described him as a having rather short but bushy hair. This hair is rather short, though we can't say whether it was bushy or not. Perhaps more complete examination of it may tell us something further.'

'Possibly,' Badger agreed. 'I will have it thoroughly examined, and get a report on it. Shall I take charge of it?' he added, holding out his hand.

'Yes, you had better,' replied Thorndyke, 'but I will take a small sample for further examination, if you don't mind.'

'There is no need for that,' protested Badger. 'You can always have access to what we've got if you want to refer to it.'

'I know,' said Thorndyke, 'and it is very good of you to offer. Still this will save time and trouble.' And without more ado he separated a third of the tuft and handed the remainder to the inspector, who wrapped it in a sheet of note-paper that he had taken from his pocket and sourly watched Thorndyke bestow his portion in a seed-envelope from his pocket-book, and after writing on it a brief description, return it to the latter receptacle.

'You were saying,' said Badger, 'that this hair agrees with Miss Blake's description. But it was suggested that it was the other man who really committed the murder. Isn't that rather a contradiction?'

'I don't think so,' replied Thorndyke. 'The probabilities seem to me to point to the other man as the murderer.'

'But how can that be?' objected Badger. 'You say that this hair agrees with Miss Blake's description of the man. But this hair is obviously the hair of the murderer. And that man was left-handed and the wound is on the right breast, suggesting that the murderer held his pistol in his left hand.'

'Not at all,' said Thorndyke. 'I submit that this hair is obviously not the hair of the murderer. Look at those chalk marks that I have made on the floor. They mark the spot on which the deceased was standing when the bullet struck him. Now go back to the cabinet and look at the chalk marks and see what is in a direct line with them.'

The inspector did so. 'I see,' said he. 'You mean the window.'

'Yes, it was open, since the robber evidently came in by it, and the sill is barely five feet from the ground. I suggest—but merely as a probability, since the bullet may have been deflected—that the other man was keeping guard outside, and that when he heard a noise from this room he looked in through the window and saw his confederate on the point of being captured by the deceased, that he then fired, and when he saw deceased fall, he made his escape. That would account for the man who was seen by Miss Blake making his appearance after the other man had gone. He may have had to extricate himself from the dead man's grasp, and then he had to climb out of the window. But the position of the empty cartridge-case—if we find it—will settle the question. If the pistol was fired into the room through the window, the cartridge-case will be on the ground outside.'

He opened his research-case, and taking from it the electric lamp, walked slowly to the window, throwing the bright light on the floor as he went. The two officers followed, and all scrutinised the floor closely, but in vain. Then Thorndyke leaned out of the window and threw the light of his lamp on the ground outside, moving the bright beam slowly to and fro while the inspector craned forward eagerly. Suddenly Badger uttered an exclamation.

'There it is, Doctor! Don't move the light. Keep it there while I go out and pick the case up.'

'One moment, Badger,' said Thorndyke. 'We mustn't be impetuous. There are some other things out there more important than the cartridge-case. I can see two distinct sets of footprints, and it is above all things necessary that they should not be confused by being trodden into. Let us get the body moved first. Then we can take some mats out and

examine the footprints systematically and recover the cartridge-case at the same time. If we are careful we can leave the ground in such a condition that it will be possible to go over it again by daylight.'

The wisdom of this suggestion was obvious, and the inspector proceeded at once to act on it. The sergeant and the constable were sent for, and by them the body of the murdered man was carried, under the inspector's supervision, to the bedroom above. Then a couple of large mats were procured from Mrs Benham and we all issued from the front door into the garden. Here, however, a halt was called, and at Thorndyke's suggestion, the party was separated into two, he and Badger to explore the grounds inside the fence, while the local inspector and the others endeavoured to follow the tracks outside.

I did not join either party, nor did Sir Lawrence. We both realised the futility of any attempt to trace the fugitives, and recognised that the suggestion was made by Thorndyke merely to get rid of the unwanted supernumeraries. Accordingly we took up a position outside the fence, which we could just look over, and watched the proceedings of Thorndyke and Inspector Badger, as they passed slowly along the side of the house, each with the light of his lantern thrown full on the ground.

They had gone but a few paces when they picked up on the soft, loamy path the fairly clear impressions of two pairs of feet going towards the back of the house. Both the investigators paused and stooped to examine them, and Badger remarked: 'So they came in at the front gate-naturally, as it was the easiest way. But they must have been pretty sure that there was no one in the house to see them. And that suggests that they knew the ways of the household and that they had lurked about to watch Mr Drayton and Mrs Benham off the premises.'

'Is it possible to distinguish one man from the other?' Drayton asked.

'Yes, quite easily,' Badger replied. 'One of them is a biggish man—close on six feet, I should say—while the other is quite a small man. That will be the one that Miss Blake saw.'

They followed the tracks to the back of the house, and as we followed on our side of the fence Thorndyke called out: 'Be careful, Anstey, not to tread in the tracks where they came over the fence. We ought to get specially clear prints of their feet where they jumped down. Could you get a light?'

'I'll go and get one of the acetylene lamps from the car,' said Drayton. 'You stay where you are until I come back.'

He was but a short time absent, and when he returned he was provided with a powerful lamp and a couple of small mats. 'I have brought these,' he explained 'to lay on any particularly clear footprints to protect them from chance injury. We mustn't lose the faintest shadow of a clue.'

With the aid of the brilliant light Drayton and I explored the ground at the foot of the fence. Suddenly Sir Lawrence exclaimed:

'Why, these look like a woman's footprints!' and he pointed to a set of rather indistinct impressions running parallel to the fence.

They will be Miss Blake's,' said I. 'She ran round this way. Yes, here is the place where the man came over. What extraordinarily clear impressions this ground takes. It shows the very brads in the heels.'

'Yes,' he agreed; 'this is the Hampstead sand, you know; one of the finest foundry-sands in the country.'

He laid one of the mats carefully on the pair of footprints, and we continued our explorations towards the back of the house. Here we saw Thorndyke and the inspector, each kneeling on a mat, examining a confused mass of footprints on the ground between the museum window and the fence.

'Have you found the cartridge-case?' I asked.

'Yes,' replied Thorndyke. 'Badger has it. It is a "Baby Browning." And I think we have seen all there is to see here by this light. Can you see where the big man came down from the fence? He went over where I am throwing the light.'

We approached the spot cautiously, and at the place indicated perceived the very clear and deep impression of a large right foot with a much less distinct print of a left foot, both having the heels towards the fence; and a short distance in front of them the soft, loamy earth bore a clear impression of a left hand with the fingers spread out, and a fainter print of a right hand.

I reported these facts to Thorndyke, who at once decided to come over and examine the prints. Handing his lamp over a few paces farther along the fence, he climbed up and dropped lightly by my side, followed almost immediately by Inspector Badger.

'This,' said the inspector, gazing down at the foot and hand-prints, 'bears out what we saw from the inside. He wasn't any too active, this chappie. Probably fat—a big, heavy, awkward man. Had to pull the garden seat up to the fence to enable him to get over, though it was an easy fence to climb with those big cross-rails; and here, you see, he comes down all of a heap on his hands and knees. However, that doesn't help us a great deal. He isn't the only fat man in the world. We had better go indoors now and have a look at the room and see if we can find out what has been taken.'

We turned to retrace our steps towards the gate, pausing on our way to lift the mats and inspect the footprints of the smaller man; and as we went Drayton asked if anything of interest had been discovered.

'No,' replied Badger. 'They got in without any difficulty by forcing back the catch of the window—unless the window was open already. It isn't quite clear whether they both got in. The big man walked part of the way round the house and along the fence in both directions, and he pulled a garden seat up to the fence to help himself up. The small man came out of the window last, if they were both inside, and I expect it was he who dropped this—must have had it in his hand when he climbed out'—and here the inspector produced from his pocket a ring, set with a single round stone, which he handed to Sir Lawrence.

'Ah,' said the latter, 'a posy-ring, one of the cat's eye series. There were several of these and a set of moonstone rings in the same drawer.'

'You know the collection pretty well, then. Sir Lawrence?'

'Fairly well. I often used to look over the things with my poor brother. But, of course, I can't remember all the specimens, though I think I can show you the drawer that this came from.'

By this time we had entered the house and were making our way to the museum. On entering the room, Drayton walked straight to the cabinet which I remembered to have seen open, and pulled out the second drawer from the top.

'This is the one,' said he. 'They have taken out the glass top—I suppose those are the pieces of it on the floor.'

'Yes,' said Badger. 'We found it open, and it seems to be the only drawer that has been tampered with.'

Drayton pulled out the top drawer, and having looked closely at the glass cover, remarked: 'They have had this one open, too. There are distinct fingerprints on the glass; and they have had the cover off for there are finger-marks on the inside of the glass. I wonder why they did that.'

'I can't imagine,' said Badger. 'They don't seem to have taken anything—there wasn't anything worth taking, for that matter. But they could see that without lifting off the glass. However, it is all for the best. We'll hand this glass cover to the Fingerprint Department and hope they will be able to spot the man that the fingers belong to.'

As he spoke, he made as if he would lift off the cover, but he was anticipated by Thorndyke, who carefully raised the glass by its leather tab, and taking it up by the edges, held it against the light and examined the fingerprints minutely both on the upper and under surfaces.

'The thumbs are on the upper surface,' he remarked, 'and the fingers underneath; so the glass was lifted right out and held with both hands.'

He handed the glass to the inspector, who had been watching him uneasily, and now took the cover from him with evident relief; and as Badger proceeded to deposit it in a safe place, he pushed in the top drawer and returned to the consideration of the second.

'There are evidently several pieces missing from this drawer,' said he, 'and it may be important to know what they are, though it is rather unlikely that the thieves will try to dispose of them. Can you tell us what they are, Drayton?'

'I can tell you roughly,' was the reply. 'This drawer contained the collection of posy-rings, and most of them are there still, as you can see. The front row were rings set with moonstone and cat's eye, and most of those are gone. Then there was a group of moonstone and cat's eye ornaments, mostly brooches and earrings, and one pendant. Those have all disappeared. And there is another thing that was in this drawer that has apparently been taken; a locket. It was shaped like a book and had a Greek inscription on the front.'

'So far as you can see, Sir Lawrence,' said Badger, 'has anything of value been taken—of real value, I mean?'

'Of negotiable value, you mean,' Drayton corrected. 'No. Most of the things were of gold, though not all, but the stones were probably worth no more than a few shillings each. The value was principally in the associations and individual character of the pieces. All of them had inscriptions, and several of them had recorded histories. But that would be of no use to a thief.'

'Exactly,' said Badger. 'That was what was in my mind. There is something rather amateurish about this robbery. It isn't quite like the work of a regular hand. The time was foolish, and then all this shooting and stabbing is more like the work of some stray foreign crooks than of a regular tradesman; and as you say, the stuff wasn't worth the risk—unless there's something else of more value. Perhaps we had better go through the other cabinets.'

He produced the bunch of keys from his pocket and had just inserted one into the lock of the next cabinet when Drayton interposed.

'There is no need for that, Inspector. If the cabinets are locked and have not been broken open, their contents are intact; and I can tell you that those contents are of no considerable intrinsic value.'

With this he drew the key from the lock and dropped the bunch in his pocket, a proceeding whereat the inspector smiled sourly and remarked: 'Then in that case, I think I have finished for the present. I'll just pack up this glass cover and see if those others were able to follow the tracks of either of these men. And I'll wish you gentlemen goodnight.'

Sir Lawrence accompanied him to the drawing-room, and as I learned later, provided the official party with refreshment, and when we were alone I turned to Thorndyke.

'I suppose we have finished, too?'

'Not quite,' he replied. 'There are one or two little matters to be attended to, but we will wait until the police are clear of the premises. They will keep their own counsel and I propose to keep mine, unless I can give them a straight lead.' He opened his research-case and was thoughtfully looking over its contents when Drayton returned and announced that the police had departed.

'Is there anything more that you want to do, Thorndyke?' he asked.

'Yes,' was the reply. 'For one thing, I should like to see if there are any more fingerprints.' As he spoke, he pulled out the drawers of the cabinet one after the other, and examined the glass covers. But apparently they had not been touched. At any rate, there were no marks on any of the glasses.

'They must have been disturbed soon after they got to work,' said Drayton 'as they opened only two drawers.'

'Probably,' Thorndyke agreed, taking from his case a little glass-jar filled with a yellowish powder and fitted with two glass tubes and a rubber bulb. With this apparatus he blew a cloud of the fine powder over the woodwork of the rifled cabinet, and when a thin coating had settled on the polished surface, he tapped the wood gently with the handle of his pocket-knife. At each tap a portion of the coating of powder was jarred on the surface, and then there appeared several oval spots to which it still adhered. Then he gently blew away the rest of the powder, when the oval spots were revealed as fingerprints, standing out white and distinct against the dark wood. Thorndyke now produced from his pocket the hinged board, and opening it, compared the photographs with these new fingerprints, while Drayton and I looked over his shoulder.

'They are undoubtedly the same,' said I, a little surprised at the ease with which I identified these curious markings. 'Absolutely the same—which is rather odd, seeing that there are the marks of only two digits of the left hand and four of the right. It almost looks as if those particular fingers had got soiled with some greasy material and that the other fingers were clean and had left no mark.'

'An admirable suggestion, Anstey,' said Thorndyke. 'The same idea had occurred to me, for the prints of these particular fingers are certainly abnormally distinct. Let us see if we can get any confirmation.' He blew upon each of the fingerprints in turn until most of the powder was dislodged and the markings had become almost invisible. Then, taking my handkerchief, which was of soft silk, and rolling it into a ball, he began to wipe the woodwork with a circular motion, at first very lightly but gradually increasing the pressure until he was rubbing quite vigorously. The result seemed to justify my suggestion, for as the rubbing proceeded, I could see, by the light of Drayton's lamp, thrown on at various angles, that the fingerprints seemed to have spread out into oval, glistening patches, having a lustre somewhat different from that of the polished wood.

Sir Lawrence looked on with keen interest, and as Thorndyke paused to examine the woodwork, he asked: 'What is the exact purpose of this experiment?'

'The point is,' replied Thorndyke, 'that whereas the fingerprint of the mathematical theorists is a mere abstraction of form devoid of any other properties, the actual or real fingerprint is a material thing which has physical and chemical properties, and these properties may have considerable evidential significance. These fingerprints, for instance, contain some substance other than the natural secretions of the skin. The questions then arise, What is that substance? How came it here? And is it usually associated with any particular kind of person or activity? The specimens that Anstey so judiciously captured may help us to answer the first question, and our native wits may enable us to answer the others. So we have some data for consideration. And that reminds me that there are some other data that we must secure.'

'What are they?' Drayton asked eagerly.

'There are those impressions in the sand outside the fence. I must have permanent records of them. Shall we go and do them now? I shall want a jug of water and a light.'

While Drayton went to fetch the water Thorndyke and I took our way out through the garden to the outside of the fence, he carrying his research-case, and I bearing Drayton's lamp. At the spot where we had laid down the mat we halted, and Thorndyke, having set down his case, once more lifted the mat.

'They are small feet,' he remarked, glancing at the footprints before stooping to open the case. 'A striking contrast to the other man's.'

He took from his case a tin of plaster of Paris, and dipping up a small quantity in a spoon, proceeded very carefully to dust the footprints with the fine, white powder until they were covered with a thin, even coating. Then he produced a bottle of water fitted with a rubber ball-spray diffuser, and with this blew a copious spray of water over the footprints. As a result, the white powder gradually shrank until the footprints looked as if they had received a thin coat of whitewash.

'Why not fill the footprints up with liquid plaster?' asked Drayton, who came up at this moment carrying a large jug.

'It would probably disturb the sand,' was the reply, 'and moreover, the water would soak in at once and leave the plaster a crumbling mass. But when this thin layer has set it will be possible to fill up and get a solid cast.'

He repeated the application of the spray once or twice, and then we went on to the place where the other man had come over. Here the same process was carried out, not only with the footprints but also with those of the hands. Then we went back to the first place, and when Thorndyke had gently touched the edge of the footprints and ascertained that the thin coating of plaster had set into a solid shell, he produced a small rubber basin, and having half filled it with water, added a

quantity of plaster and stirred it until it assumed the consistency of cream; when he carefully poured it into the white-coated footprints until they were full and slightly overflowing.

'You see the advantage of this?' said Thorndyke as he cleaned out the basin and started to walk slowly back to the site of the second set of prints.

'I do, indeed,' replied Drayton, 'and I am astonished that Badger did not take a permanent record. These casts will enable you to put the actual feet of the accused in evidence if need be.'

'Precisely; besides giving us the opportunity to study them at our leisure, and refer to them if any fresh evidence should become available.'

The second set of footprints and the impressions of the hands received similar treatment, and when they had been filled, Thorndyke proceeded to pack up his appliances.

'We ought to give the casts a good twenty minutes to set hard,' he said, 'though it is the best plaster and quite fresh and has a little powdered alum mixed with it to accelerate setting and make the cast harder. But we mustn't be impatient.'

'I am in no hurry,' said Drayton. 'I shall stay here tonight—one couldn't leave Mrs Benham in the house all alone. The car can take you back to your chambers and drop Anstey at his lodgings.'

'Tomorrow we must make some arrangements of a more permanent kind. But the great thing is to get on the track of these two villains. Nothing else seems to matter. There is my poor brother's corpse, crying aloud to Heaven for justice, and I shall never rest until his murderers have paid their debt.'

'I sympathise with you most cordially, Drayton,' said Thorndyke, 'and it is no mere verbal sympathy. I promise you that every resource at my disposal shall be called in to aid, that no stone shall be left unturned. It is not only the office of friendship; it is a public duty to ensure that an inexcusable crime of this kind shall be visited with the most complete retribution.'

'Thank you. Thorndyke,' Sir Lawrence said with gruff earnestness. And then after a short pause, he continued: 'I suppose it is premature to ask you, but do you see any glimmer of hope? Is there anything to lay hold of? I can see for myself that it is a very difficult and obscure case.'

'It is,' Thorndyke agreed. 'Of course the fingerprints may dispose of the whole difficulty, if they happen to be on the files at the Habitual Criminals Registry. Otherwise there is very little evidence. Still, there is some, and we may build up more by inference. I have seen more unpromising cases come to a successful issue.'

By this time the stipulated twenty minutes had expired, and we proceeded to the first set of footprints. The plaster, on being tested, was found to be quite firm and hard, and Thorndyke was able, with great care, to lift the two chalky-looking plates from their bed in the ground. And even in the rather unfavourable light of the lamp their appearance was somewhat startling, for, as Thorndyke turned them over, each cast presented the semblance of a white foot, surprisingly complete in detail so far as the sole was concerned.

But if the appearance of these casts was striking, much more so was that of the second set; for the latter included casts of the handprints, the aspect of which was positively uncanny, especially in the case of the deeper impression, the effect of which was that of a snowy hand with outspread, crooked, clutching fingers. And here again the fine loam had yielded an unexpected amount of detail. The creases and markings of the palm were all perfectly clear and distinct, and I even thought that I could perceive a trace of the ridges of the fingertips.

Before leaving the spot we carefully removed all traces of plaster, for it was certain that the footprints would be examined by daylight, and Thorndyke considered it better that the existence of these casts should be known only to ourselves. The footprints were left practically intact, and it was open to the police to make casts if they saw fit.

'I think,' said Thorndyke when we had re-entered the house and were inspecting the casts afresh as they lay on the table, 'it would be a wise precaution to attach our signatures to each of them, in case it should be necessary at any time to put them in evidence. Their genuineness would then be attested beyond any possibility of dispute.'

To this Drayton and I agreed most emphatically, and accordingly each of us wrote his name, with the date, on the smooth back of each cast. Then the 'records' were carefully packed and bestowed in the research-case, and Thorndyke and I shook our host's hand and went forth to the car.



#### IV. — THE LADY OF SHALOTT

The modern London suburb seems to have an inherent incapacity for attaining a decent old age. City streets and those of country towns contrive to gather from the passing years some quality of mellowness that does but add to their charm. But with suburbs it is otherwise. Whatever charm they have appertains to their garish youth and shares its ephemeral character. Cities and towns grow venerable with age, the suburb merely grows shabby.

The above profound reflections were occasioned by my approach to the vicinity of Jacob Street, Hampstead Road, and by a growing sense of the drab—not to say sordid—atmosphere that enveloped it, and its incongruity with the appearance and manner of the lady whose residence I was approaching. However, I consoled myself with the consideration that if 'Honesty lives in a poor house, like your fair pearl in your foul oyster,' perhaps Beauty might make shift with no better lodging; and these cogitations having brought me to the factory-like gateway, I gave a brisk tug at the bell above the brass plate.

After a short interval the wicket was opened by my young acquaintance of the previous night, who greeted me with a sedate smile of recognition.

'Good afternoon,' I said, holding out my hand. 'I have just called to learn how your sister is. I hope she is not much the worse for her rather terrifying experiences last night.'

'Thank you,' he replied with quaint politeness, 'she seems to be all right today. But the doctor won't let her do any work. He's fixed her arm in a sling. But won't you come in and see her, sir?'

I hesitated, dubious as to whether she would care to receive a stranger of her own class in these rather mean surroundings, but when he added: 'She would like to see you, I am sure, sir,' my scruples gave way to my very definite inclination and I stepped through the wicket.

My young friend—who wore a blue linen smock—conducted me down a paved passage, the walls of which bore each a long shelf on which was a row of plaster busts and statuettes, into an open yard in which a small, elderly man was working with chisel and mallet on a somewhat ornate marble tombstone, amidst a sort of miniature Avebury of blocks and slabs of stone and marble. Across the yard rose a great barn-like building with one enormous window high up the wall, a great double door, and a small side door. Into the latter my conductor entered and held it open for me, and as I passed in, I found myself in total darkness. Only for a moment, however, for my young host, having shut the door, drew aside a heavy curtain and gave me a view of huge, bare hall with lofty, whitewashed walls, an open timber roof, and a plank floor relieved from absolute nakedness by one or two rugs. A couple of studio easels stood opposite the window, and in a corner I observed a spectral lay-figure shrouded in what looked like a sheet. At the farther end, by a large, open fireplace, Miss Blake sat in an easy-chair with a book in her hand. She looked up as I entered, and then rose and advanced to meet me, holding out her left hand.

'How kind of you, Mr Anstey, to come and see me!' she exclaimed. 'And how good it was of you to take such care of me last night!'

'Not at all,' I replied. 'But I hope you are not very much the worse for your adventures. Are you suffering much pain?'

'I have no pain at all,' she replied with a smile, 'and I don't believe this sling is in the least necessary. But one must obey the doctor's orders.'

'Yes,' interposed her brother, 'and that is what the sling is for. To prevent you from getting into mischief, Winnie.'

'It prevents me from doing any work, if that is what you mean, Percy,' said she, 'and I suppose the doctor is right in that.'

'I am sure he is,' said I. 'Rest is most essential to enable the wound to heal quickly. What sort of night did you have?'

'I didn't sleep much,' she replied. 'It kept coming back to me, you know—that awful moment when I went into the museum and saw that poor man lying on the floor. It was a dreadful experience. So horribly sudden, too. One moment I saw him go away, full of life and energy, and the next I was looking on his corpse. Do you think those wretches will really escape?'

'It is difficult to say. The police have the fingerprints of one of them, and if that person is a regular criminal, they will be able to identify him.'

'Will they really?' she exclaimed. 'It sounds very wonderful. How are they able to do it?'

'It is really quite simple. When a man is convicted of a crime, a complete set of his fingerprints is taken at the prison by pressing his fingers on an inked slab and putting them down on a sheet of paper—there is a special form for the purpose with a space for each finger. This form is deposited, with photographs of the prisoner, in one of the files of the Habitual Criminals Registry at Scotland Yard. Then, when a strange fingerprint turns up, it is compared with those in the files, and if one is found that is an exact facsimile, the name attached to it is the name of the man who is wanted.'

'But how are they ever able to find the facsimile in such a huge collection, for the numbers in the files must be enormous?'

'That also is more simple than it looks. The lines on fingertips form very definite patterns—spirals, or whorls, closed loops like the end grain of wood, open curves, or arches, and so on. Now each fingerprint is filed under its particular heading—

whorl, loop, arch, etc.—and also in accordance with the particular finger that bears the pattern, so the inquiry is narrowed down to a comparatively small number from the start. Let us take an instance. Suppose we have found some fingerprints of which the left little finger has a spiral pattern and the ring finger adjoining has a closed loop. Then we look in the file which contains the spiral left little fingers and in the file of looped left ring fingers, and we glance through the lists of names. There will be certain names that will appear in both lists, and one of those will be the name of the man that we want. All that remains is to compare our prints with each of them in turn until we come to the one that is an exact facsimile. The name attached to that one is the name of our man. Of course, in practice, the process is more elaborate, but that is the principle.'

'It is wonderfully ingenious,' said Miss Blake, 'and really simple, as you say, and it sounds as if it were perfectly infallible.'

'That is the claim that the police make. But, as you see, the utility of the system for the detection of crime is limited to the cases of those criminals whose fingerprints have been registered. That is what our chance depends on now. The man who murdered Mr Drayton left prints of his fingers on the glass of the cabinet, and the police have taken the glass away to examine. If they find facsimiles of those fingerprints in the register, then they will know who murdered Mr Drayton. But if those fingerprints are not in the register, they won't help us at all. And as far as I know, there is no other clue to the identity of the murderer.'

Miss Blake appeared to reflect earnestly on what I had said, and in the ensuing silence I continued my somewhat furtive observation of the great studio and its occupants. Particularly did I notice a number of paintings, apparently executed in tempera on huge sheets of brown paper, pinned on the walls somewhat above the level of the eye; figure subjects of an allegorical character, strongly recalling the manner of Burne-Jones, and painted with something considerably beyond ordinary competence. And from the paintings my eye strayed to the painter—as I assumed and hoped her to be—and a very striking and picturesque figure she appeared, with her waxen complexion, delicately tinged with pink, her earnest grey eyes, a short, slightly retrousse nose, the soft mass of red-gold hair and the lissom form, actually full and plump though with the deceptive appearance of slimness that one notes in the figures of the artist whose style she followed. I noted with pleasure—not wholly aesthetic, I suspect—the graceful pose into which she seemed naturally to fall, and when my roving eye took in a 'planchette' hanging on the wall and a crystal ball reposing on a black velvet cushion on a little altar-like table in a corner, I forbore to scoff inwardly as I should have done in other circumstances, for somehow the hint of occultism, even of superstition, seemed not out of character. She reminded me of the Lady of Shalott, and the whispered suggestion of Merlinesque magic gave a note of harmony that sounded pleasantly.

While we had been talking, her brother had been pursuing his own affairs with silent concentration, though I had noticed that he had paused to listen to my exposition on the subject of fingerprints. In the middle of the studio floor was a massive stone slab—a relic of some former sculptor tenant—and on this the boy was erecting, very methodically, a model of some sort of building with toy bricks of a kind that I had not seen before. I was watching him and noting the marked difference between him and his sister—for he was a somewhat dark lad with a strong, aquiline face—when Miss Blake spoke again.

'Did you find out what had been stolen?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'approximately. There was nothing missing of any considerable value. Only a few pieces had been taken, and those were mostly simple jewels set with moonstones or cat's eyes.'

'Cat's eyes!' she exclaimed.

'Yes, a few posy-rings, some earrings, and I think, one pendant.'

'Was the pendant stolen?'

'Yes, apparently. Sir Lawrence mentioned a cat's-eye pendant as one of the things that he missed from the drawer. Does the pendant interest you specially?'

'Yes,' she answered thoughtfully, 'it was this pendant that I went there to see. It was illustrated in the Connoisseur article, and I wrote to poor Mr Drayton because I wanted to examine it. And so,' she added in a lower tone and with an expression of deep sadness, 'the pendant became, through me, the cause of his death. But for it and me, he would not have gone to the house at that time.'

'It is impossible to say whether he would or not,' said I, and then, to change the subject, as this seemed to distress her, I continued: 'there was another thing missing that was figured in the Connoisseur—a locket—'

'Of course!' she exclaimed. 'How silly of me to forget it.' She rose hastily, and stepping over to an old walnut bureau that stood under the window, pulled out one of the little drawers and picked some small object out of it.

'There,' she said, holding out her hand, in which lay a small gold locket, 'this is the one. I recognised it instantly. And now see if you can guess how it came into my possession.'

I was completely mystified, and said so, though I hazarded a guess that it had in some way caught in her clothing.

'Yes,' said she, 'it was in my shawl. You remember I said that the man whom I was trying to hold had something in his hand and that he must have dropped it when he drew his knife. Now it happened that my shawl had just then slipped off in the struggle and that he was standing on it. The locket must have dropped on the shawl, and this little brass hook, which some one has fastened to the ring of the locket, must have hooked itself into the meshes of the shawl—which is of



crocheted silk, you will remember. Then you picked the shawl up and rolled it into a bundle, and it was never unrolled until this morning. When I shook it out to hang it up, the locket fell out, and most unfortunately, as it fell it opened and the glass inside got broken. I am most vexed about it, for it is such an extremely charming little thing. Don't you think so?

I took the little bauble in my hand, and, to speak the literal truth, was not deeply smitten with its appearance. But policy, and the desire to make myself agreeable, bade me dissemble. 'It is a quaint and curious little object,' I admitted.

'It is a perfectly fascinating little thing,' she exclaimed enthusiastically. 'And so secret and mysterious, too. I am sure there is some hidden meaning in those references inside, and then there is something delightfully cabalistic and magical about that weird-looking inscription on the front.'

'Yes,' I agreed, 'Greek capitals make picturesque inscriptions, especially this uncial form of lettering, but there is nothing very recondite in the matter; in fact it is rather hackneyed. "Life is short but Art is long. "'

'So that is what it means. Percy couldn't quite make it out, and I don't know any Greek at all. But it is a beautiful motto, though I am not sure that I don't prefer the more usual form, "Art is long but Life is short. "'

'That is the Latin version, "Ars longa, Vita brevis". Yes, I think I agree with you. The Latin form is rather more epigrammatic. But what other inscription were you referring to?'

'There are some references to passages of Scripture inside. I have looked them out, all but one. Shall I get my notes and let you see what the references are?' She looked at me so expectantly and with such charming animation that I assented eagerly. Not that I cared particularly what the references were, but the occupation of looking them out promised to put us on a delightfully companionable footing. And if I was not profoundly interested in the locket, I found myself very deeply interested in the Lady of Shalott.

While she was searching for her notes, I examined the little bauble more closely. It was a simple trinket, well made and neatly finished. The workmanship was plain, though very solid, and I judged it to be of some considerable age, though not what one would call antique. It was fashioned in the form of a tiny book with a hinge at the back and a strong loop of gold on each half, the two loops forming a double suspension ring. To one of the loops a small brass hook had been attached, probably to hang it in a show-case. On the front was engraved in bold Greek uncials 'O BIOG BPAXYO H AE TEXNH MAKPH' without any other ornament, and on turning the locket over I found the back—or under-side as a bookbinder would say—quite plain save for the hallmark near the top. Then I opened the little volume. In the back half was a circular cell, framed with a border of small pearls and containing a tiny plait of black hair coiled into a close spiral. It had been enclosed by a glass cover, but this was broken and only a few fragments remained. The interior of the front half was covered with extremely minute engraved lettering which, on close inspection, appeared to be references to certain passages of Holy Scripture, the titles of the books being given in Latin.

I had just concluded these observations when Miss Blake returned with a manuscript book, a Bible, and a small reading-glass.

'This,' she said, handing me the latter, 'will help you to make out the tiny lettering. If you will read out the references one at a time, I will read out the passages that they refer to. And if any of them suggest to you any meaning beyond what is apparent, do, please, tell me, for I can make nothing of them.'

I promised to do so, and focusing the glass on the microscopic writing, read out the first reference: "Leviticus 25. 41."

'That verse,' she said, 'reads: "And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. "'

'The next reference,' said I, 'is "Psalms 121. 1. "'

'The reading is: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." What do you make of that?'

'Nothing,' I replied, 'unless one can regard it as a pious exhortation, and it is extraordinarily indefinite at that.'

'Yes, it does seem vague, but I feel convinced that it means more than it seems to, if we could only fathom its significance.'

'It might easily do that,' said I, and as I spoke I caught the eye of her brother, who had paused in his work and was watching us with an indulgent smile, and I wondered egotistically if he was writing me down a consummate ass.

'The next,' said I, 'is "Acts 10. 5. "'

'The reading is: "And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter. "'

'I begin to think you must be right,' said I, 'for that passage is sheer nonsense unless it covers something in the nature of a code. Taken by itself, it has not the faintest bearing on either doctrine or morals. Let us try the next one, "Nehemiah 8. 4. "'

'That one is just as cryptic as the others,' said she. 'It reads: "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiiah, and Urijahi, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiiah, and Mishad, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. "'

At this point an audible snigger proceeding from the direction of the builder revived my misgivings. There is something

slightly alarming about a schoolboy with an acute perception of the ridiculous.

'What is the joke, Percy?' his sister asked.

'Those fellows' names, Winnie. Do you suppose there really was a chap called Hashed Banana?'

'Hashbadana, Percy,' she corrected.

'Very well. Hashed Badada then. But that only makes it worse. Sounds as if you'd got a cold.'

'What an absurd boy you are, Percy,' exclaimed Miss Blake, regarding her brother with a fond smile. Then, reverting to her notes, she said: 'The next reference appears to be a mistake, at least I don't understand it. It says "3 Kings 7. 41." Isn't that so?'

'Yes. "3 Lib. Regum 7. 41." But what is wrong with it?'

'Why, there are only two Books of Kings.'

'Oh, I see. But it isn't a mistake. In the Authorised Version the two books of Samuel have the alternative title of the First and Second Books of Kings, and the First Book of Kings has the subtitle "Commonly called the Third Book of the Kings." But at the present day the books are invariably referred to as the First and Second Books of Samuel and the First and Second Books of Kings. Shall we look it up?'

She opened the Bible and turned over the leaves to the First Book of Kings.

'Yes,' she said, 'it is as you say. How odd that I should never have noticed it, or at any rate, not have remembered it. Then this reference is really "1 Kings 7. 41." And yet it can't be. What sense can you possibly make of this: "The two pillars, and the two bowls of the chapters that were on the top of the two pillars; and the two networks, to cover the two bowls of the chapters which were upon the top of the pillars." It seems quite meaningless, separated from its context.'

'It certainly is rather enigmatical,' I agreed. 'This is an excerpt from what was virtually an inventory of Solomon's Temple. If the purpose of this collection of Scripture texts was to inculcate some religious or moral truths, I don't see the bearing of this quotation at all. But we may take it that these passages had some meaning to the original owner of the locket.'

'They must have had,' she replied earnestly. 'Perhaps we may be able to find the key to the riddle if we consider the whole series together.'

'Possibly,' I agreed, not very enthusiastically. 'The next reference is "Psalms 31. 7."'

'The verse is: "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities."'

'That doesn't throw much light on the subject,' said I. 'The last reference is "2 Timothy 4. 13."'

'It reads: "The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments." She laid down her notes, and looking at me with the most intense gravity, exclaimed: 'Isn't that extraordinary? It is the most astonishing of them all. You see, it is perfectly trivial, just a message from St Paul to Timothy on a purely personal matter of no importance to anybody but himself. But the whole collection of texts is very odd. They seem utterly unconnected with one another, and, as you say, without any significance in respect of either faith or morals. What is your opinion of them?'

'I don't know what to think,' I replied. 'They may have had some significance to the original owner of the locket only, something personal and reminiscent. Or they may have been addressed to some other person in terms previously agreed on. That is to say, they may have formed something in the nature of a code.'

'Exactly,' she agreed eagerly. 'That is what I think. And I am just devoured by curiosity as to what the message was that they were meant to convey. I shan't rest until I have solved the mystery.'

I smiled, and again my glance wandered to the planchette on the wall and the crystal ball on the table. Evidently my new and charming friend was an inveterate mystic, an enthusiastic explorer of the dubious regions of the occult and the supernatural. And though my own matter-of-fact temperament engendered little sympathy with such matters, I found in this very mysticism an additional charm. It seemed entirely congruous with her eminently picturesque personality.

But at this moment I became suddenly aware that I had made a most outrageously long visit and rose with profuse apologies for my disregard of time.

'There is no need to apologise,' she assured me cordially. 'It is most kind of you to have given so much time to a mere counterfeit invalid. But won't you stay and have tea with us? Can't you really? Well, I hope you will come and see us again when you can spare an hour. Oh, and hadn't I better give you this locket to hand to Sir Lawrence Drayton?'

'Certainly not,' I replied. 'You had better keep it until you see him, and perhaps in the interval you may be able to extract its secret. But I will tell him that it is in safe hands.' I shook her hand warmly, and when I had made a brief inspection of Master Percy's building, that promising architect piloted me across the yard and finally launched me, with a hearty farewell and a cordial invitation to 'come again soon,' into the desert expanse of Jacob Street.

---

## V. — MR HALLIBURTON'S MASCOT

Emerging into the grey and cheerless street I sauntered towards the Hampstead Road, and having reached that thoroughfare, halted at the corner and looked at my watch. It was barely four o'clock, and as I had arranged to meet Thorndyke at the Euston Road corner at half-past four, I had half an hour in which to cover something less than half a mile. I began to be regretful that I had refused the proffered tea, and when my leisurely progress brought me to the door of an establishment in which that beverage was dispensed, I entered and called for refreshment.

And as I sat by the shabby little marble-topped table, my thoughts strayed back to the great bare studio in Jacob Street and the strange, enigmatical but decidedly alluring personality of its tenant. To say that I had been favourably impressed by her would be to understate the case. I found myself considering her with a degree of interest and admiration that no other woman had ever aroused in me. She was—or, at least, she appeared to me—a strikingly beautiful girl, but that was not the whole, or even the main, attraction. Her courage and strength of character, as shown in the tragic circumstances of the previous night; her refinement of manner and easy, well-bred courtesy, her intelligence and evident amiability, and her frank friendliness, without any sacrifice of dignity, had all combined to make her personality gracious and pleasant. Then there were the paintings. If they were her work, she was an artist of some talent. I had meant cautiously to inquire into that, but the investigation of the locket had excluded everything else. And the thought of the locket and the almost childish eagerness that she had shown to extract its (assumed) secret, led naturally to the planchette and the crystal globe. In general I was disposed to scoff at such things, but on her the mysticism and occultism—I would not call it superstition—seemed to settle naturally and to add a certain piquancy to her mediaeval grace. And so reflecting, I suddenly bethought me of the cat's eye pendant. What was the nature of her interest in that? At first I had assumed that she was a connoisseur in jewels, and possibly I was right. But her curious interest in the locket suggested other possibilities, and into these I determined to inquire on my next visit—for I had already decided that the friendly invitations should not find me unresponsive. In short, the Lady of Shalott had awakened in me a very lively curiosity.

My speculations and reflections very effectively filled out the spare half-hour and brought me on the stroke of half-past four to the corner of the Euston Road; and I had barely arrived when I perceived the tall, upright figure of my colleague swinging easily up Tottenham Court Road. In a few moments he joined me, and we both turned our faces westward.

'We needn't hurry,' said he. 'I said I would be there at five.'

'I don't quite understand what you are going for,' said I. 'This man, Halliburton, seems to have been no more than a chance stranger. What do you expect to get out of him?'

'I have nothing definite in my mind,' he replied. 'The whole case is in the air at present. The position is this: a murder has been committed and the murderers have got away almost without leaving a trace. If the fingerprint people cannot identify the one man, we may say that we have no clue to the identity of either. But that murder had certain antecedents. Halliburton's visit was one of them, though there was probably no causal relation.'

'You don't suspect Halliburton?'

'My dear fellow, I suspect nobody. We haven't got as far as that. But we have to investigate every thing, person, or circumstance that makes the smallest contact with the crime. But here is our destination, and I need not remark, Anstey, that our purpose is to acquire information, not to give it.'

The 'Baltic' Hotel was a large private house not far from the Great Central Station, distinguished from other private houses only by an open street door and by the name inconspicuously inscribed on the fanlight. As we ascended the steps and entered the hall, a short, pleasant-faced man emerged from an office and looked inquiringly from one of us to the other. 'Dr Thorndyke?' he asked.

'Yes,' replied my colleague, 'and I assume that you are the manager, Mr Simpson. I must thank you for making the appointment and hope I am not inconveniencing you.'

'Not at all,' rejoined the other. 'I know your name very well, sir, and shall be delighted to give you any assistance that I can. I understand that you want Mr Halliburton's address.'

'If you have no objection, I should like to have it. I want to write to him.'

'I can give it to you off-hand,' said the manager. 'It is "Oscar Halliburton, Esquire, Wimbledon."'

'That doesn't seem a very sufficient address,' remarked Thorndyke.

'It is not,' said the manager. 'I had occasion to write to him myself and my letter was returned, marked "insufficiently addressed."'

'Then, in effect, you have not got his address?'

'That is what it amounts to. Would you like to see the visitors' book? If you will step into my private office I will bring it to you.'

He showed us into his office, and in a few moments entered with the book, which he laid on the table and opened at the page on which the signature appeared.

'This does not appear to have been written with the hotel pen,' Thorndyke remarked when he had glanced at the adjoining signatures.

'No,' the manager agreed. 'Apparently he used his own fountain pen.'

'I see that this entry is dated the 13th of September. How long did he stay?'

'He left on the 16th of September—five days ago.'

'And he received at least one letter while he was here?'

'Yes, one only, I believe. It came on the morning of the 16th, I remember, and he left in the evening.'

'Do you know if he went out much while he was here?'

'No, he stayed indoors nearly all day, and he spent most of his time in the billiard-room practising fancy strokes.'

'What sort of man was he—in appearance, for instance?'

'Well,' said Simpson rather hesitatingly, 'I didn't see much of him, and I see a good many people. I should say he was a bigish man, medium colour and rather sunburnt.'

'Any beard or moustache?'

'No, clean shaved and a good deal of hair—rather long, wanted a crop.'

'Any distinctive accent or peculiarity of voice?'

'I didn't have much talk with him—nor did anybody else, I think. He was a gruffish, taciturn man. Nothing peculiar about his voice, and as to his accent, well, it was just ordinary, very ordinary, with perhaps just a trace of the cockney, but only a trace. It wasn't exactly the accent of an English gentleman.'

'And that is all that you remember about him?'

'That is all.'

'Would you have any objection to my taking a photograph of this signature?'

The manager looked rather dubious. 'It would hardly do for it to be known—' he began, when Thorndyke interrupted:

'I suggest, Mr Simpson, that whatever passes between us shall be regarded as strictly confidential on both sides. The least said, the soonest mended, you know.'

'There's a good deal of truth in that; said the manager with a smile, 'especially in the hotel business. Well, if that is understood, I don't know that I have any objection to your taking a photograph. But how are you going to manage it?'

'I have a camera; replied Thorndyke, 'and I see that your table lamp is a sixty Watt. It won't take an unreasonably long exposure.'

He propped the book up in a suitable position, and having arranged the lamp so as to illuminate the page obliquely, produced from his pocket a small folding camera and a leather case of dark slides, at which Mr Simpson gazed in astonishment. 'You'll never get a useful photograph with a toy like that,' said he.

'Not such a toy as you think,' replied Thorndyke as he opened the little instrument. 'This lens is specially constructed for close range work, and will give me the signature the full size of the original.' He laid a measuring tape on the table, and having adjusted the camera by its engraved scale, inserted the dark slide, looked at his watch, and opened the shutter.

'You were saying just now, Mr Simpson,' he resumed as we sat round the table watching the camera, 'that you had occasion to write to Mr Halliburton. Should I be indiscreet if I were to ask what the occasion was?'

'Not at all,' replied the manager. 'It was a ridiculous affair. It seems that Mr Halliburton had a sort of charm or mascot which he wore suspended by a gold ring from a cord under his waistcoat; a silly little bone thing, of no value whatever, though he appears to have set great store by it. Well, after he had left the hotel he missed it. The ring had broken and the thing had dropped off the cord—presumably, he supposed, when he was undressing. So a couple of days later—on the eighteenth—back he came in a rare twitter to know if it had been picked up. I asked the chambermaids if any of them had found the mascot in his room or elsewhere, but none of them had. Then he was frightfully upset and begged me to ask them again and to say that he would give ten pounds to any one who should have found it and would hand it to him. Ten pounds!' Mr Simpson repeated with contemptuous emphasis. 'Just think of it! The price of a gold watch for a thing that looked like a common rabbit bone! Why, a man like that oughtn't to be at large.'

I could see that my colleague was deeply interested, though his impassive face suggested nothing but close attention. He put away his watch, closed the lens-shutter and the dark slide, and finally bestowed the little apparatus in his pocket. Then he asked the manager: 'Can you give us anything like a detailed description of this mascot?'

'I can show you the thing itself,' replied Simpson. 'That is the irony of the affair. Mr Halliburton hadn't been out of the house half an hour when the boy who looks after the billiard-room came bursting into my office in the devil's own excitement. He had heard of the ten pounds reward and had proceeded at once to take up all the rugs and mats in the billiard-room, and there, under the edge of a strip of cocoa-nut matting, he had found the precious thing. No doubt the ring had broken when Halliburton was leaning over the table to make a long shot. So I took it from the boy and put it in the

safe, and I wrote forthwith to the address given in the book to say that the mascot had come to light, but, as I told you just now, the letter was returned marked "insufficiently addressed." So there it is, and unless he calls again, or writes, he won't get his mascot, and the boy won't get his ten pounds. Would you like to see the treasure?'

'I should, very much,' replied Thorndyke; whereupon the manager stepped over to a safe in the corner of the room, and having unlocked it, came back to the table holding a small object in the palm of his hand.

'There it is,' said he, dropping it on the table before Thorndyke, 'and I think you will agree with me that it is a mighty dear ten pounds' worth.'

I looked curiously at the little object as my colleague turned it about in his hand. It was evidently a bone of some kind, roughly triangular in shape and perforated by three holes, one large and two smaller. In addition to these, a fourth hole had been drilled through near the apex to take a gold suspension ring, and this was still in position, though it was broken, having chafed quite thin with wear in one part and apparently given way under some sudden strain. The surface of the bone was covered with minute incised carving of a simple and rather barbaric type, and the whole bone had been stained a deep, yellowish brown, which had worn lighter in the parts most exposed to friction; and the entire surface had that unmistakable polish and patina that comes with years of handling and wear.

'What do you make of it, sir?' asked Mr Simpson.

'It is the neck bone of some small animal,' Thorndyke replied. 'But not a rabbit. And, of course, the markings on it give it an individual character.'

'Would you give ten pounds for it?' the manager asked with a grin.

'I am not sure that I wouldn't,' Thorndyke replied 'though not for its intrinsic value. But yours is not a "firm offer." You are not a vendor. But I should like very much to borrow it for a few hours.'

'I don't quite see how I could agree to that,' said Simpson. 'You see, the thing isn't mine. I'm just a trustee. And Mr Halliburton might call and ask for it at any moment.'

'I would give you a receipt for it and undertake to let you have it back by ten o'clock tomorrow morning,' said Thorndyke.

'M'yes,' said Simpson reflectively and with evident signs of weakening. 'Of course, I could say I had deposited it at my bank. But is it of any importance? Would you mind telling me why you want to borrow the thing?'

'I want to compare it carefully with some similar objects, the existence of which is known to me. I could do that tonight, and, if necessary, send the specimen back forthwith. As to the importance of the comparison, who can say? If Halliburton should turn up and give a practicable address there would be nothing in it. But if he should never reappear and it should become necessary to trace him, the information gathered from an exhaustive examination of this object might be of great value.'

'I see,' said Simpson. 'In a sense it is a matter of public policy. Of course that puts a different complexion on the affair. And having regard to your position and character, I don't see why I shouldn't agree to your having a short loan of the thing. But I should like to have it back by nine o'clock tomorrow morning, if you could manage it.'

'I promise you that it shall be delivered into your hand by a responsible person not later than nine o'clock,' said Thorndyke. 'I will now give you a receipt, which I will ask you to hand to my messenger in exchange for your property; and again, Mr Simpson, I would suggest that we make no confidences to anyone concerning this transaction.'

To this the manager assented with decided emphasis, and our business being now concluded, we thanked Mr Simpson warmly for his courtesy and his very helpful attitude and took our departure.

'You seem extraordinarily keen about that precious bone, Thorndyke,' I remarked as we walked back along the Marylebone Road, 'but I'm hanged if I see why. It won't tell you much about Halliburton. And if it would, I don't quite see what you want to know. He is obviously a fool. You don't need much investigation to ascertain that, and like most fools, he seems easily parted from his money. What more do you want to know?'

'My learned friend,' replied Thorndyke, 'is not profiting sufficiently by his legal experience. One of the most vital principles that years of practice have impressed on me is that in the early stages of an inquiry, no fact, relevant or irrelevant, that is in any way connected with the subject of the inquiry should be neglected or ignored. Indeed, no such fact can be regarded as irrelevant, since, until all the data are assembled and collated, it is impossible to judge the bearing or value of any one of them.'

'Take the present case. Who is Mr Halliburton? We don't know. Why did he want to examine Mr Drayton's collection? We don't know. What passed between him and Mr Drayton when he made his visit? Again we don't know. Perhaps there is nothing of any significance to know. The probability is that Halliburton has no connection with this case at all. But there is no denying that he is in the picture.'

'Yes, as a background figure. His name has been mentioned as one of the visitors who had come to see the collection. There were other visitors, you remember.'

'Yes, and if we knew who they were we should want to know something about them, too. But Halliburton is the only one known to us. And your presentation of his position in relation to what has happened does not state the case fairly at all. The position is really this: Halliburton—a complete stranger to Drayton—took considerable trouble to obtain an

opportunity to examine the collection. Why did he do this? You have quoted Mrs Benham as saying that he apparently knew nothing about jewellery, either ancient or modern. He was not a connoisseur. Then, why did he want to see the collection? Again, he wrote for the appointment, not from his own residence but from an hotel; and when we come to that hotel we find that he has left no verifiable address, and the vague locality that he gave may quite possibly be a false address. And further, that this apparent concealment of his place of abode coincides with a very excellent reason for giving a correct address, the fact that he has lost—and lost in the hotel, as he believes—certain property on which he sets a high value. And if you add to this the facts that within four days of his visit to Drayton the collection was robbed; that the robbers clearly knew exactly where it was kept and had some knowledge of the inmates of the house and their habits, you must admit that Halliburton is something more than a background figure in the picture.'

I was secretly impressed by the way in which Thorndyke had 'placed' Mr Halliburton in respect of the inquiry, but, of course, it wouldn't do to say so. It was necessary to assert my position.

'That,' I replied, 'is the case for the prosecution, and very persuasively stated. On the other hand it might be said for the defence: "Here is a gentleman who lives in the country and who comes up to spend a few days in town—"'

'For the apparent purpose,' Thorndyke interrupted, 'of practising the art of billiards, a sport peculiar to London.'

'Exactly. And while he is in London he takes the opportunity of inspecting a collection which has been described in the Press. A few days after his visit the collection is robbed by some persons who have probably also seen the published description. There is no positive fact of any kind that connects him with those persons, and I assert that the assumption that any such connection exists is entirely gratuitous.'

Thorndyke smiled indulgently. 'It seems a pity,' he remarked, 'that my learned friend should waste the sweetness of his jury flourishes on the desert air of Marylebone Road. But we needn't fash ourselves, as I believe they say in the North. There was a lady named Mrs Glasse whose advice to cooks seems to be applicable to the present case. We had better catch our hare before we proceed to jug him—the word "jug" being used without any malicious intent to perpetrate a pun.'

'And do I understand that the capture is to be accomplished by the agency of the rabbit-bone that my learned senior carries in his reverend pocket?'

'If you do,' replied Thorndyke, 'your understanding is a good deal in advance of mine. I am taking this little object to examine merely on the remote chance that it may yield some information as to this man's antecedents, habits, and perhaps even his identity. The chance is not so remote as it looks. There are very few things which have been habitually carried on a man's person which will not tell you something about the person who has carried them. And this object, as you probably noticed, is in many respects highly characteristic.'

'I can't say that I found the thing itself particularly characteristic. The fact that the man should have carried it and have set such a ridiculous value on it is illuminating. That writes him down a superstitious ass. But superstitious asses form a fairly large class. In what respects do you find this thing so highly characteristic, and what kind of information do you expect to extract from it?'

'As to the latter question,' he replied, 'an investigator doesn't form expectations in advance; and as to the former, you will have an opportunity of examining the object for yourself and of forming your own conclusions.'

I determined to make a minute and exhaustive inspection of our treasure trove as soon as we arrived home. For obviously I had missed something. It was clear to me that Thorndyke attached more importance to this object than would have been warranted by anything that I had observed. There was some point that I had overlooked and I meant to find out what it was.

But the opportunity did not offer immediately, for, on our arrival at his chambers, Thorndyke proceeded straight up to the laboratory, where we found his assistant, Polton, seated at a jeweller's bench, making some structural alterations in a somewhat elaborate form of pedometer.

'I've got a job for you, Polton,' said Thorndyke, laying the mascot on the bench. 'Quite a nice, delicate little job, after your own heart. I want a replica of this thing—as perfect as you can make it. And I have to return the original before nine o'clock tomorrow morning. And,' he added, taking the camera and dark slides from his pocket, 'there is a photograph to be developed, but there is no particular hurry for that.'

Polton picked the mascot up daintily, and laying it in the palm of his hand, stuck a watchmaker's glass in his eye and inspected it minutely.

'It's a queer little thing, sir,' he remarked. 'Seems to have been made out of a small cervical vertebra. I suppose you want the copy of the same colour as this and as hard as possible?'

'I want as faithful a copy as you can make, similar in all respects, excepting that the reproduction can scarcely be as hard as the original. Will there be time to make a gelatine mould?'

'There'll have to be, sir. It couldn't be done any other way, with these undercuttings. But I shan't lose any time on that. If I have to match the colour I shall have to make some experiments, and I can do those while the gelatine is setting.'

'Very well, Polton,' said Thorndyke. 'Then I'll leave the thing in your hands and consider it as good as done. Of course the original must not be damaged in any way.'

'Oh, certainly not, sir'; and forthwith the little man, having carefully deposited the mascot in a small, glass-topped box on the bench, fell to work on his preparations beaming with happiness. I have never seen a man who enjoyed his work so thoroughly as Polton did.

'I am going round to the College of Surgeons now,' said Thorndyke. 'No callers are expected, I think, but if any one should come and want to see me, I shall be back in about an hour. Are you coming with me, Anstey?'

'Why not? I've nothing to do, and if I keep an eye on you I may pick up a crumb or two of information.'

Here I caught Polton's eye, and a queer, crinkly smile overspread that artificer's countenance. 'A good many people try to do that, sir,' he remarked. 'I hope you will have better luck than most of them have.'

'It occurs to me' Thorndyke observed as we descended the stairs, 'that if the scribe who wrote the Book of Genesis had happened to look in on Polton he would have come to the conclusion that he had grossly overestimated the curse of labour.'

'He was not much different from most other scribes,' said I. 'A bookish man—like myself, for instance—constantly fails to appreciate the joy of manual work. I find Polton an invaluable object lesson.'

'So do I,' said Thorndyke. 'He is a shining example of the social virtues—industry, loyalty, integrity, and contentment—and as an artificer he is a positive genius.' With this warm appreciation of his faithful follower he swung round into Fleet Street and crossed towards the Law Courts.



## VI. — INTRODUCES AN ANT-EATER AND A DETECTIVE

As we entered the hall of the College of Surgeons Thorndyke glanced at the board on which the names of the staff were painted and gave a little grunt of satisfaction.

'I see,' he said, addressing the porter, 'that Mr Saltwood hasn't gone yet.'

'No, sir,' was the reply. 'He is working up at the top tonight. Shall I take you up to him?'

'If you please,' answered Thorndyke, and the porter accordingly took us in charge and led the way to the lift. From the latter we emerged into a region tenanted by great earthenware pans and jars and pervaded by a curious aroma, half spirituous, half cadaveric, on which I commented unfavourably.

'Yes,' said Thorndyke, sniffing appreciatively, 'the good old museum bouquet. You smell it in all curators' rooms, and though, I suppose, it is not physically agreeable, I find it by no means unpleasant. The effects of odours are largely a matter of association.'

'The present odour,' said I, 'seems to suggest the association of a very overripe Duke of Clarence and a butt of shockingly bad malmsey.'

Thorndyke smiled tolerantly as we ascended a flight of stairs that led to a yet higher storey, and abandoned the discussion. At the top, we passed through several long galleries, past ranges of tables piled up with incredible numbers of bones, apparently awaiting disposal, until we were finally led by our conductor to a room in which two men were working at a long bench, on which were several partially articulated skeletons of animals. They both looked up as we entered, and one of them, a keen-faced, middle-aged man, exclaimed: 'Well, this is an unexpected pleasure. I haven't seen you for donkey's years, Thorndyke. Thought you had deserted the old shop. And I wonder what brings you here now.'

'The usual thing, Saltwood. Self-interest. I have come to negotiate a loan. Have you got any loose bones of the Echidna?'

Saltwood stroked his chin and turned interrogatively to his assistant. 'Do you know if there are any, Robson?' he asked.

'There is a set waiting to be articulated, sir. Shall I fetch them?'

'If you would, please, Robson,' replied Saltwood. Then turning to my colleague, he asked: 'What bones do you want, Thorndyke?'

'The middle cervical vertebrae—about the third or fourth,' was the reply, at which I pricked up my ears.

In a few minutes Robson returned carrying a cardboard box on which was a label inscribed 'Echidna hystrix.'

Saltwood lifted the lid, disclosing a collection of small bones, including a queer little elongated skull.

'Here you are,' said he, picking out a sort of necklace formed of the joints of the backbone; 'here is the whole vertebral column, minus the tail, strung together. Will you take it as it is?'

'No,' replied Thorndyke, 'I will just take the three vertebrae that I want—the third, fourth, and fifth cervical, and if I let you have them back in the course of the week, will that do?'

'Perfectly. I wouldn't bother you to return them at all if it were not for spoiling the set.' He separated the three little bones from the string, and having wrapped them in tissue paper and handed them to Thorndyke, asked; 'How is Jervis? I haven't seen him very lately, either.'

'Jervis,' replied Thorndyke, 'is at present enjoying a sort of professional holiday in New York. He is retained, in an advisory capacity, in the Rosenbaum case, of which you may have read in the papers. My friend Anstey here is very kindly filling his place during his absence.'

'I'm glad to hear that I'm filling it,' said I, as Saltwood bowed and shook hands. 'I was afraid I was only half filling it, being but a mere lawyer destitute of medical knowledge.'

'Well,' said Saltwood, 'medical knowledge is important, of course, but you've always got Thorndyke to help you out. Oh—and that reminds me, Thorndyke, that I've got some new preparations that I should like you to see, a series of tumours from wild animals. Will you come and have a look at them? They are in the next room.'

Thorndyke assented with enthusiasm, and the two men went out of the room, leaving me to the society of Robson and the box of bones. Into the latter I peered curiously, again noting the odd shape of the skull; then I proceeded to improve the occasion by a discreet question or two.

'What sort of beast is an Echidna?' I asked.

'Echidna hystrix,' replied Robson in a somewhat pompously didactic tone, 'is the zoological name of the porcupine ant-eater.'

'Indeed,' said I, and then tempted by his owlish solemnity to ask foolish questions, I inquired: 'Does that mean that he is an eater of porcupine ants?'

'No, sir,' he replied gravely (he was evidently a little slow in the uptake). 'It is not the ants which are porcupines. It is the ant-eater.'



'But,' I objected, 'how can an ant-eater be a porcupine? It is a contradiction in terms.'

This seemed to floor him for a moment, but he pulled himself together and explained: 'The name signifies a porcupine which resembles an ant-eater, or perhaps one should say, an ant-eater, which resembles a porcupine. It is a very peculiar animal.'

'It must be,' I agreed. 'And what is there peculiar about its cervical vertebrae?'

He pondered profoundly, and I judged that he did not know but was not going to give himself away, a suspicion that his rather ambiguous explanation tended to confirm.

'The cervical vertebrae,' he expounded, 'are very much alike in most animals. There are exceptions, of course, as in the case of the porpoise, which has no neck, and the giraffe, which has a good deal of neck. But in general, cervical vertebrae seem to be turned out pretty much to one pattern, whereas the tail vertebrae present great differences. Now, if you look at this animal's tail—' here he fished a second necklace out of the box and proceeded to expound the peculiarities of its constituent bones, to which exposition I am afraid I turned an inattentive ear. The Echidna's tail had no bearing on the identity of Mr Halliburton.

The rather windy discourse had just come to an end when my two friends reappeared and Saltwood conducted us down to the hall. As we stepped out of the lift he shook our hands heartily, and with a cheery adieu, pressed the button and soared aloft like a stage fairy.

From the great portico of the College we turned eastward and walked homewards across Lincoln's Inn, each of us wrapped in his own reflections. Presently I asked:

'Supposing this mascot of Halliburton's to be the neck bone of an Echidna, what is the significance of the fact?'

'Ah!' he replied. 'There you have me, Anstey. At present I am concerning myself only with the fact, hoping that its significance may appear later. To us it may have no significance at all. Of course there is some reason why this particular bone should have been used rather than some other kind of bone, but that set of circumstances may have—probably has—no connection with our inquiry. It is quite probable that Halliburton himself has no such connection. On the other hand, the circumstances which determined the use of an Echidna's vertebra as a mascot may have an important bearing on the case. So we can only secure the fact and wait for time and further knowledge to show whether it is or is not a relevant fact.'

'And do you mean to say that you are taking all this trouble on the mere chance that this apparently trivial and meaningless circumstance may possibly have some bearing?'

'That is so. But your question, Anstey, exhibits the difference between the legal and the scientific outlook. The lawyer's investigations tend to proceed along the line of information wanted: the scientists tend to proceed along the line of information available. The business of the man of science is impartially to acquire all the knowledge that is obtainable; the lawyer tends to concern himself only with that which is material to the issue.'

'Then the scientist must accumulate a vast number of irrelevant facts.'

'Every fact,' replied Thorndyke, 'is relevant to something, and if you accumulate a great mass of facts, inspection of the mass shows that the facts can be sorted out into related groups from which certain general truths can be inferred. The difference between the lawyer and the scientist is that one is seeking to establish some particular truth while the other seeks to establish any truth that emerges from the available facts.'

'But,' I objected 'surely even a scientist must select his facts to some extent. Every science has its own province. The chemist, for instance, is not concerned with the metamorphoses of insects.'

'That is true; he admitted. 'But then, are we not keeping within our own province? We are not collecting facts indiscriminately, but are selecting those facts which make some sort of contact with the circumstances of this crime and which may therefore conceivably be relevant to our inquiry. But methinks I perceive another collector. Isn't that our friend Superintendent Miller crossing to King's Bench Walk and apparently bearing down on our chambers?'

I looked at the tall figure, indistinctly seen by the light of a lamp, and even as I looked, it ascended the steps and vanished into our entry; and when, a couple of minutes later, we arrived on our landing, we found Polton in the act of admitting the Superintendent.

'Well, gentlemen,' the officer said genially, as he subsided into an armchair and selected a cigar from the box which Thorndyke handed to him 'I've just dropped in to give you the news—about this Drayton case, you know. I thought you'd be interested to hear what our people are doing. Well, I don't think you need trouble yourselves about it any more. We've got one of the men, at any rate.'

'In custody?' asked Thorndyke.

'No, we haven't actually made the arrest, but there will be no difficulty about that. We know who he is. I just passed those fingerprints in to Mr Singleton and he gave me the name straight away. And who do you think it is? It is our old friend, Moakey—Joe Hedges, you know.'

'Is it really!' said Thorndyke.

'Yes, Moakey it is. You're surprised. So was I. I really did think he had learned a little sense at last, especially as he

seemed to be taking some reasonable precautions last time. But he always was a fool. Do you remember the asinine thing that he did on that last job?

'No,' replied Thorndyke, 'I don't remember that case.'

'It was a small country house job, and Moakey did it all on his own. And it did look as if he had learned his lesson, for he undoubtedly wore gloves. We found them in his bag and there was not a trace at the house. But would you believe it, when he'd finished up, all neat and ship-shape, he must stop somewhere in the grounds to repack the swag—after he had taken his gloves off. Just then the alarm was raised and a dog let loose, and away went Moakey, like a hare, for the place in the fence where he had hidden his bicycle. He nipped over the fence, mounted his bike, and got clear away, and all trace of him seemed to be lost. But in the morning, when the local police came to search the grounds, they found a silver tray that Moakey had evidently had to drop when he heard the dog, with a most beautiful set of fingerprints on it. The police got a pair of photographs at once—there happened to be a dark room and a set of apparatus in the house—and sent a special messenger with them to Scotland Yard. And then the murder was out. They were Moakey's prints, and Moakey was arrested the same day with all the stuff in his possession. He hadn't had time to go to a fence with it. So the fingerprints didn't have to be put in evidence.'

'Did Moakey ever hear about the fingerprints?' Thorndyke asked.

'Yes. Some fool of a warder told him. And that's what makes this case so odd; to think that after coming a cropper twice he should have gone dabbling his trademarks over the furniture as he has, is perfectly incredible. And that isn't the only queer feature in the case. There's the stuff. I got Sir Lawrence to show it to me this morning, and I assure you that when I saw what it was, you could have knocked me down with a feather. To say nothing of the crockery and wineglasses and rubbish of that sort and the pewter spoons and brass spoons and bone bobbins, the jewellery was a fair knockout. There was only one cabinet of it, and you'll hardly believe me. Doctor, when I tell you that the greater part of it was silver, and even pinchbeck and brass—or latten, as Sir Lawrence calls it—set with the sort of stones that you can buy in Poland Street for ten bob a dozen. You never saw such trash!'

'Oh come. Miller,' Thorndyke protested, 'don't call it trash. It is one of the most interesting and reasonable collections that I have ever seen.'

'So it may be,' said the Superintendent, 'but I am looking at it from the trade point of view. Why, there isn't a fence outside Bedlam who'd give a fiver for the whole boiling. It's perfectly astonishing to me that an experienced tradesman like Moakey should have wasted his time on it. He might just as well have cracked an ironmonger's.'

'I expect,' said I, 'he embarked on the job under a mistake. Probably he saw, or heard of, that article in the Connoisseur and thought that this was a great collection of jewels.'

'That seems likely,' Miller agreed. 'And that may account for his having worked with a chum this time instead of doing the job single-handed as he usually does. But it doesn't account for his having used a pistol. That wasn't his way at all. There has never been a charge of violence against him before. I always took him for the good old-fashioned, sporting crook who played the game with us and expected us to play the game with him.'

'Is it clear that it was Moakey who fired the shot?' asked Thorndyke.

'Well, no, I don't know that it is. But he'll have to stand the racket unless he can prove that somebody else did it. And that won't be so very easy, for even if he gives us the name of the other man—the small man—and Miss Blake can identify him, still it will be difficult for Moakey to prove that the other man fired the shot, and the other chap isn't likely to be boastful about it.'

'No,' said Thorndyke, 'he will pretty certainly put it on to Moakey, But between the two we may get at the truth as to what happened.'

'We will hope so,' said Miller, rising and picking up his hat. 'At any rate, that is how the matter stands. I understand that Sir Lawrence wants you to keep an eye on the case, but there's really no need. It isn't in your line at all. We shall arrest Moakey and he will be committed for trial. If he likes to make a statement we may get the other man, but in any case there is nothing for you to do.'

For some minutes after the Superintendent's departure, Thorndyke sat looking into the fire with an air of deep reflection. Presently he looked up as if he had disposed of some question that he had been propounding to himself and remarked: 'It's a curious affair, isn't it?'

'Very,' I agreed. 'It seems as if this man, Moakey, had thrown all precaution to the winds. By the way, do you suppose those fingerprint people ever make mistakes? They seem pretty cocksure.'

'They would be more than human if they never made a mistake,' Thorndyke replied. 'But, on the other hand, the identification of a whole set of fingerprints doesn't leave much room for error. You might get two prints that were similar enough to admit of a mistake, but you would hardly get two sets that could be mistaken for one another.'

'No, I suppose not. So the mystery remains unexplained.'

'It remains unexplained in any case,' said Thorndyke.

'How do you mean?' I asked. 'If they had made a mistake and these were really the fingerprints of some unknown person,

that person might be a novice and there would be no mystery about his having taken no precautions.'

'Yes, but that is not the mystery. The real mystery is the presence of a third man who has left no other traces.'

'A third man!' I exclaimed. 'What evidence is there of the presence of a third man?'

'It is very obvious,' replied Thorndyke. 'These fingerprints are not those of the small man, because he wore gloves. And they are not the fingerprints of the tall man.'

'How do you know that?' I asked.

Thorndyke rose, and opening a cabinet, took out the plaster cast of the tall man's left hand, which he had made on the previous night, and the pair of photographs.

'Now,' said he, 'look at the print of the left forefinger in the photograph. You see that the pattern is quite clear and unbroken. Now look at the cast of the forefinger. Do you see what I mean?'

'You mean that pit or dent in the bulb of the finger. But isn't that due to an irregularity of the ground on which the finger was pressed?'

'No, it is the puckered scar of an old whitlow or deep wound of some kind. It is quite characteristic. And the print of this finger would show a blank white space in the middle of the pattern. So it is certain that those fingerprints did not belong to either of these two men.'

'Then, really,' said I, 'the fact that these are Moakey's fingerprints serves to explain this other mystery.'

'To some extent. But you see, Anstey, that it introduces a further mystery. If there were three men in that room, or on the premises, how comes it that there were only two sets of footprints?'

'Yes, that is rather extraordinary. Can you suggest any explanation?'

'The only explanation that occurs to me is that one of these men may have let Moakey into the house by the front door, that he may have been in the room when Miss Blake entered—he might, for instance, have been behind the door—and have slipped out when she ran to the window. He could then have to run into the drawing-room and waited until she rushed out of the house, when it would be easy for him to slip out at the front door and escape.'

'Yes,' I said dubiously, 'I suppose that is possible, but it doesn't sound very probable.'

'It doesn't,' he agreed. 'But it is the only solution that I can think of at the moment. Of course there must be some explanation, for there are the facts. Inside the house are traces of three men. Outside are traces of only two. Have you any suggestion to offer?'

I shook my head. 'It is beyond me, Thorndyke. Why didn't you ask Miller?'

'Because I am not proposing to take the police into my confidence until I have evidence that they are prepared to do the same by me. They will probably assume that the tall man was Moakey—he is about the same height. The information that we obtain from the cast of that man's hand is not, you must remember, in their possession.'

'No, I had forgotten that. And now I begin to appreciate my learned senior's foresight in taking a permanent record of that handprint.'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke. 'A permanent record is invaluable. It allows of reference at one's leisure and in connection with fresh evidence, as in the present case. And, moreover, it allows of study under the most favourable conditions. That scar on the finger was not noticeable in the impression in the sand, especially by the imperfect light of the lamp. But on the cast, which we can examine at our ease, by daylight if necessary, it is plainly visible. And we have it here to compare with the finger, if ever that finger should be forthcoming. I now make a rule of securing a plaster cast of any object that I cannot retain in my possession.'

Here, as if in illustration of this last statement, Polton entered the room bearing a small tray lined with blotting paper, on which lay three objects—a diminutive glass negative and two mascots. He laid the tray on the table and invited us to inspect his works, tendering a watchmakers eyeglass to assist the inspection.

Thorndyke picked up the two mascots and examined them separately through the glass, then with a faint smile, but without remark, he passed the tray to me. I stuck the glass in my eye and scrutinised first one and then the other of the mascots, and finally looked up at Polton, who was watching me with a smile that covered his face with wrinkles of satisfaction.

'I suppose, Polton,' I said, 'You have some means of telling which is which, but I'm hanged if I can see a particle of difference.'

'I can tell 'em by the feel, sir,' he replied 'but I took the precaution to weigh the original in the chemical balance before I made the copy. I think the colour matches pretty well.'

'It is a perfect reproduction, Polton,' said Thorndyke. 'If we were to show it to Superintendent Miller he would want to take your fingerprints right away. He would say that you were not a safe person to be at large.'

At this commendation Polton's countenance crinkled until he looked like a species of human walnut, and when the photograph of the signature had been examined and pronounced fit for the making of an enlargement, he departed,

chuckling audibly.

When he had gone, I picked up one of the mascots and again examined it closely while Thorndyke made a similar inspection of its twin.

'Had you any definite purpose in your mind,' I asked 'when you instructed Polton to make this indistinguishable copy?'

'No,' he replied. 'I thought it wise to preserve a record of the thing, but, for my own information, a plain plaster cast would have answered quite well. Still, as it would not take much more trouble to imitate the colour and texture, I decided that there might be some advantage in having a perfect replica. There are certain imaginable circumstances in which it might be useful. I shall get Polton to make a cast of the Echidna's vertebra, so that we may have the means of demonstrating the nature of the object to others, if necessary; and by the way, we may as well make the comparison now and confirm my opinion that the animal really was an Echidna.'

He produced the little packet that Saltwood had given him, and laying the little bones on the table, compared them carefully with the mascot.

'Yes,' he said at length, 'I was right. Mr Halliburton's treasure is the third cervical vertebra of a young but full-grown Echidna.'

'How did you recognise this as an Echidna's vertebra?' I asked, recalling Mr Robson's rather obscure exposition on the subject. 'Aren't neck vertebrae a good deal alike in most animals?'

'In animals of the same class they are usually very much alike. But the Echidna is a transitional form. Although it is a mammal, it has many well-marked reptilian characters. This vertebra shows one of them. If you look at those corner-pieces—the transverse processes—you will see that they are separate from the rest of the bone, that they are joined to it by a seam or suture. But in all other mammals, with a single exception, the transverse processes are fused with the rest of the bone. There is no separating line. That suture was the distinguishing feature which attracted my attention.'

'And does the fact of its being an Echidna's bone suggest any particular significance to your mind?'

'Well,' he replied, 'the Echidna is far from a common animal. And this particular bone seems to have been worked on by some barbarian artist, which suggests that it may have been originally a barbaric ornament or charm or fetish, which again suggests personal connections and a traceable history. You will notice that the two letters seem to have been impressed on the ornament and have no connection with it, which suggests that the bone was already covered with these decorations when it came into the late owner's possession.'

I took up the glass and once more examined the mascot. The whole surface of the little bone, on both sides, was covered with an intricate mass of ornament consisting principally of scrolls or spirals, crude and barbaric in design but very minutely and delicately executed. In the centre of the solid part of the bone an extremely small 'o' had been indented on one side and on the same spot on the reverse side an equally minute 'h'. And through the glass I could see that the letters cut into the pattern, whereas the hole for the suspension ring was part of the original work and was incorporated into the design.

'I wonder why he used small letters for his initials instead of capitals,' said I.

'For the reason, I imagine, that they were small letters. He wanted them merely for identification, and no doubt wished them to be as inconspicuous as possible. Any letters are a disfigurement when they are not part of the design, and capitals would have been much worse than small letters.'

'These seem to have been punched, on with printer's types,' I remarked.

'They have been punched, not cut, but not, I should say, with printer's types. Type metal—even the hard variety which would be used for casting these little "Pearl" or "Diamond" types—is comparatively soft, and the harder varieties are brittle. It would scarcely be strong enough to bear hammering into bone. I should say these letters were indented with steel punches.'

'Well,' I said 'we have got a vast amount of entertainment out of Mr Halliburton and his mascot. But it looks rather as if that were going to be the end of it, for if Moakey is one of the robbers, we may take it that the others are just professional crooks. And thereupon Mr Halliburton recedes once more into the background. Isn't that the position?'

'Apparently it is,' replied Thorndyke. 'But we shall see what happens at the inquest. Possibly some further evidence may be forthcoming when the witnesses give their accounts in detail. And possibly Moakey himself may be able to throw some further light on the matter. They will probably have him in custody within a day or two.'

'By the way,' I said, 'have you examined the hair that poor Drayton had grasped in his hand?'

'Yes. There is nothing very characteristic about it. It is dark in colour and the hairs are rather small in diameter. But there was one slightly odd circumstance. Among the tuft of dark hairs there was one light one—not white—a blonde hair. It had no root and no tip. It was just a broken fragment. What do you make of that?'

'I don't know that I make anything of it. I understand that a man may sometimes find a woman's hair sticking to his coat in the neighbourhood of the shoulder or chest, though I have no personal experience of such things. But if on the coat, why not on the head? My learned senior's powerful constructive imagination might conceive circumstances in which such a transfer of hair might occur. Or has he some more recondite explanation?'

'There are other possible explanations,' Thorndyke replied. 'And as the hour seems to preclude a return to Hampstead tonight, and seems to suggest a temporary tenancy of Jervis's bedroom, I would recommend the problem for my learned friend's consideration while awaiting the approach of Morpheus or Hypnos, whichever deity he elects to patronize.'

This gentle hint, enforced by a glance at my watch, brought our discussion to an end, and very shortly afterwards we betook ourselves to our respective sleeping apartments.

---

## VII. — THE VANISHED HEIRLOOM

The tragic events at 'The Rowans' had excited a considerable amount of public interest, and naturally that interest was manifested in a specially intense form by the residents in the locality. I realised this when, in obedience to the summons which had been left at my lodgings, I made my way to the premises adjoining the High Street in which the inquest was to be held. As I approached the building I observed that quite a considerable crowd had gathered round the doors awaiting their opening, and noticed with some surprise the proportion of well-dressed women composing it.

Observing that the crowd contained no one whom I knew, I began to suspect that there was some other entrance reserved for authorised visitors, and was just looking round in search of it when the doors were opened and the crowd began to surge in; and at that moment I saw Miss Blake approaching. I waited for her to arrive, and when we had exchanged greetings I proceeded to pilot her through the crowd, which passed in with increasing slowness, suggesting that the accommodation was already being somewhat taxed.

I was not the only person who observed the symptoms of a 'full house.' A woman whom I had already noticed making her way through the throng with more skill and energy than politeness, came abreast of me just as I had struggled to the door and made a determined effort to squeeze past. Perhaps if she had been a different type of woman I might have accepted the customary masculine defeat, but her bad manners, combined with her unprepossessing appearance, banished any scruples of chivalry. She was a kind of woman that I dislike most cordially; loudly dressed, flashy, scented like a civet cat; with glaring golden hair—manifestly peroxided, as was evident by her dark eyebrows—pencilled eyelids, and a coat of powder that stared even through her spotted veil. My gorge rose at her, and as she stuck her elbow in my ribs and made a final burst to get in before me, I maintained a stolid resistance.

'You must excuse me,' I said, 'but I am a witness, and so is this lady.'

She cast a quick glance at me, and from me to Miss Blake; then—with a bad enough grace and without replying—she withdrew to let us pass, and ostentatiously turned her back on us.

The room was already crowded, but that was no concern of ours. We were present, and when our names should be called, the coroner's officer would do all that was necessary.

'I suppose,' said Miss Blake, 'we ought to have come in by another door. I see Sir Lawrence and Mrs Benham are sitting by the table; and isn't that Dr Thorndyke next to Sir Lawrence?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'I don't think he has been summoned, but, of course, he would be here to watch the case. I see Inspector Badger, too. I wonder if he is going to give evidence. Ah! You were right. There is another door. Here come the coroner and the jury. They will probably call you first as you are the principal witness, unless they begin with the medical evidence or Sir Lawrence. I see Dr Nichols has just come in.'

As the coroner and the jury took their seats at the table, the loud hum of conversation died away and an air of silent expectancy settled on the closely-packed audience. The coroner looked over a sheaf of type-written papers, and then opened the proceedings with a short address to the jury in which he recited the general facts of the case.

'And now, gentlemen,' he said in conclusion, 'we will proceed to take the evidence, and we had better begin with that of the medical witness.'

Hereupon Dr Nichols was called, and having been sworn, described the circumstances under which he was summoned to 'The Rowans' on the night of the 20th of September, and the result of his subsequent examination of the body of the deceased. 'The cause of death,' he stated, 'was a bullet-wound of the chest. The bullet entered on the right side between the third and fourth ribs, and passed completely through the chest, emerging on the left side of the back between the fourth and fifth ribs. In its passage it perforated the aorta—the greater central artery—and this injury might have produced almost instantaneous death.'

'Could the wound have been self-inflicted?' the coroner asked.

'Under the circumstances, it could not, for although death was practically instantaneous, no weapon was discovered. If the injury had been self-inflicted, the weapon would have been found either grasped in the hand or lying by the body.'

'Was the weapon fired at close quarters?'

'Apparently not. At any rate there was no singeing of the clothes or any other sign indicating a very close range.'

That was the sum of Dr Nichols' evidence, and on its conclusion the local inspector was called. His evidence, however, was of merely formal character, setting forth the time at which he received the alarm call from Mrs Benham and the conditions existing when he arrived. When it was finished there was a short pause. Then the next witness was called. This was Sir Lawrence Drayton, who, after giving evidence as to the identity of the deceased, answered a few questions respecting the collection and his brother's manner of life, and the articles which had been stolen.

'The report, then,' said the coroner, 'that this was a collection of valuable jewellery was erroneous?'

'Quite erroneous. Deceased never desired, nor could he afford, to accumulate things of great intrinsic value.'

'Do you know if many strangers came to see the collection?'

'Very few. In fact I never heard of any excepting those who came after an article on the collection had appeared in the Connoisseur.'

'Do you know how many came then?'

'There was a small party of Americans who came by appointment and were introduced by one of the staff of the South Kensington Museum. And there was a Mr Halliburton who wrote from some hotel for an appointment. All I know about him is that he was apparently not specially interested in anything in the collection excepting the pieces that were illustrated in the magazine. I believe he wanted to buy one of those, but I don't remember which it was.'

That was the substance of Drayton's evidence, and when he had returned to his seat, the next witness was called.

'Winifred Blake.'

Miss Blake rose, and having made her way to the table, took the oath and proceeded to give her evidence. After one or two preliminary questions, the coroner allowed her to make her statement without interruption, while the jury and the audience listened with absorbed interest to her clear and vivid account of the events connected with the crime. When she had finished her narration—which was substantially the same as that which I had heard from her on the night of the tragedy—the coroner thanked her for the very lucid manner in which she had given her evidence and then proceeded to enlarge upon one or two points relating to the possible antecedents of the tragedy.

'You have mentioned, Miss Blake, that you were led to communicate with deceased by a certain article which appeared in the Connoisseur. Did that article give you the impression that the collection described was an important collection of valuable jewellery?'

'No. The article explicitly stated that the chief value of the pieces was in their history and associations.'

'Are you an expert or connoisseur in jewellery?'

'No. As an artist I am, of course, interested in goldsmith's and jewellers work, but I have no special knowledge of it. My interest in this collection was purely personal. I wished to examine one of the pieces that was illustrated.'

'Would you tell us exactly what you mean by a personal interest?'

'The Connoisseur article was illustrated with two photographs, one of a locket and the other of a pendant. The pendant appeared to me to resemble one which was an heirloom in my own family and which disappeared about a hundred and fifty years ago and has never been seen since. I wanted to examine that pendant and see if it really was the missing jewel.'

'Was the missing pendant of any considerable value?'

'No. It was a small, plain gold pendant set with a single cat's eye, and the pendant shown in the photograph appeared to answer the description exactly so far as I could judge. Its actual value would be quite small.'

'You say that the actual, or intrinsic, value of this jewel would be trifling. Had it, so far as you know, any special value?'

'Yes. It appears to have been greatly prized in the family, and I believe a good many efforts have been made to trace it. There was a tradition, or superstition, connected with it which gave it its value to members of the family.'

'Can you tell us what was the nature of that tradition?'

'It connected the possession of the jewel with the succession to the estates. The custom had been for the head of the family to wear the jewel, usually under the clothing, and the belief was that so long as he wore the jewel, or at any rate had it in his possession, the estates would remain in the possession of the branch of the family to which he belonged; but if the jewel passed into the possession of a member of some other branch of the family, then the estates would also pass into the possession of that branch.'

The coroner smiled. 'Your ancestors,' he remarked, 'appear to have taken small account of property law. But you say that efforts have been made to trace this jewel and that a good deal of value was set on it. Now, do you suppose that this tradition was taken at all seriously by any of the members of your family?'

'I cannot say very positively, but I should suppose that any one who might have a claim in the event of the failure of the existing line, would be glad to have the jewel in his possession.'

'Is there, so far as you know, any probability of a change in the succession to this property?'

'I believe that the present tenant is unmarried and that if he should die there would be several claimants from other branches of the family.'

'And then,' said the coroner with a smile, 'the one who possessed the cat's eye pendant would be the successful claimant. Is that the position?'

'It is possible that some of them entertain that belief.'

'Have you any expectations yourself?'

'Personally I have not. But my brother Percival is, properly speaking, the direct heir to this estate.'

'Then why is he not in possession? And what do you mean exactly by the "direct heir"?''

'I mean that he is the direct descendant of the head of the senior branch of the family. Our ancestor disappeared at the

same time as the jewel—he took it with him, in fact. The reason that my brother is not in possession is that we cannot prove the legality of our ancestor's marriage. But it is always possible that the documents may be discovered—they are known to exist; and then, if a change in the succession should occur, my brother's claim would certainly take precedence of the others.'

'This is very interesting,' said the coroner, 'and not without importance to this inquiry. Now tell us, Miss Blake, would you yourself attach any significance to the possession of this jewel?'

Miss Blake coloured slightly as she replied: 'I don't suppose it would affect the succession to the property, but I should like to know that the jewel was in my brother's possession.'

'In case there might be some truth in the belief, h'm? Well, it's not unnatural. And now, to return for a moment to the man whom you tried so pluckily to detain. You have given us a very clear description of him. Do you think you would be able to recognise him?'

'I feel no doubt that I could. As an artist with some experience as a portrait painter I have been accustomed to study faces closely and quickly and to remember them. I can form quite a clear mental picture of this man's face.'

'Do you think you could make. I drawing of it from memory?'

'I don't think my drawing would be reliable for identification. It is principally the man's expression that I remember so clearly. I might be wrong as to the details of the features, but if I were to see the man again I am sure I should know him.'

'I hope you will have an opportunity,' said the coroner. Then, turning to the jury, he asked: 'Do you wish to ask this witness any questions, gentlemen?' and on receiving a negative reply, he thanked Miss Blake and dismissed her with a bow.

My own evidence was taken next, but I need not repeat it since it was concerned only with those experiences which I have already related in detail. I was followed by Mrs Benham, who, like the preceding witnesses, was allowed to begin with a statement describing her experiences.

'How did it happen,' the coroner asked when she had finished her statement, 'that there was no one in the house when the thieves broke in?'

'I had to take a message for Mr Drayton to a gentleman who lives at North End. It is quite a short distance, but I was detained there more than a quarter of an hour.'

'Was the house often left?'

'No, very seldom. During the day I had a maid to help me. She went home at six, and after that I hardly ever went out.'

'Were you alone in the house in the evenings when Mr Drayton was at the club?'

'Yes. From about seven to between half-past nine and ten. Mr Drayton used to lock the museum and take the key with him.'

'Did many persons know that deceased was away from the house every evening?'

'A good many must have known, as he was a regular chess-player. And anybody who cared to know could have seen him go out and come back.'

'On the night of the murder did he go out at his usual time?'

'Yes, a little after seven. But, unfortunately, he came back nearly two hours earlier than usual. That was the cause of the disaster.'

'Exactly. And now, Mrs Benham, I want you to tell us all you know about the visitors who came to see the collection after the article had appeared in the Connoisseur. There were some Americans, I believe?'

'Yes. A small party—four or five—who came together in a large car. They sent a letter of introduction, and I think Mr Drayton knew pretty well who they were. Then about a week later Mr Halliburton wrote from the Baltic Hotel to ask if he might look over the collection, and naming a particular day—the sixteenth of this month—and Mr Drayton made the appointment, although it was very inconvenient.'

'Was Mr Halliburton known to deceased?'

'No, he was a complete stranger.'

'And did he come and inspect the collection?'

'Yes; he came, and Mr Drayton spent a long time with him showing him all the things and telling him all about them. I remember it very well because Mr Drayton was so very vexed that he should have put himself to so much inconvenience for nothing.'

'Why "for nothing"? ' asked the coroner.

'He said that Mr Halliburton didn't seem to know anything about jewellery nor to care about any of the things but the two that had been shown in the photographs. He seemed to have come from mere idle curiosity. And then he rather offended Mr Drayton by offering to buy one of the pieces. He said that he wanted to give it for a wedding present.'



'Do you know which piece it was that he wanted to buy?'

'The pendant. The other piece—the locket—didn't seem to interest him at all.'

'Did you see Mr Halliburton?'

'I only saw his back as he went out. Mr Drayton let him in and took him to the museum. I could see that he was rather a big man, but I couldn't see what he was like.'

'And are these the only strangers that have been to the house lately?'

'Yes; the only ones for quite a long time.'

The coroner reflected for a few moments, then, as the jury had no questions to ask, he thanked the witness and dismissed her.

The next witness was Inspector Badger, and a very cautious witness he was, and like his namesake, very unwilling to be drawn. To me, who knew pretty well what information he held, his evasive manoeuvres and his portentous secrecy were decidedly amusing, and the foxy glances that he occasionally cast in Thorndyke's direction made me suspect that he was unaware of Superintendent Miller's visit to our chambers. He began by setting forth that, in consequence of a telephone message from the local police, he proceeded on the evening of the twentieth instant to 'The Rowans' to examine the premises and obtain particulars of the crime. He had obtained a rough list of the stolen property from Sir Lawrence Drayton. It included the pendant and the locket which had been illustrated in the article referred to.

'Should you say there was any evidence of selection as to the articles stolen?' the coroner asked.

'No. Only two drawers had been opened, and they were the two upper ones. The top drawer contained nothing of any value, and I infer that the thieves had only just got the second drawer open when they were disturbed.'

'Did you ascertain how many men were on the premises?'

'There were two men. We found their footprints in the grounds, and moreover, both of them were seen. And certain other traces were found.'

'Dr Nichols has mentioned that some hair was found grasped in the hand of deceased. Has that been examined?'

'I believe it has, but hair isn't much use until you have got the man to compare it with.'

'I suppose not. And with regard to the other traces. What were they?'

The inspector pursed up his lips and assumed a portentous expression.

'I hope, sir,' said he, 'that you will not press that question. It is not desirable in the interests of justice that the information that is in our possession should become public property.'

'I quite agree with you,' said the coroner. 'But may we take it that you have some clue to the identity of these two men?'

'We have several very promising clues,' the inspector replied with some disregard, I suspected, for the exact wording of the oath that he had just taken.

'Well,' said the coroner, 'that is all that really concerns us'; and I could not but reflect that it was all that really concerned Mr Joseph Hedges, alias Moakey, and that the inspector's secrecy was somewhat pointless when the cat had been let out of the bag to this extent. 'I suppose,' he continued, 'it would be indiscreet to ask if any information is available about the Mr Halliburton whose name has been mentioned.'

'I should rather not make any detailed statement on the subject,' replied Badger, 'but I may say that our information is of a very definite kind and points very clearly in a particular direction.'

'That is very satisfactory,' said the coroner. 'This is a peculiarly atrocious crime, and I am sure that all law-abiding persons will be glad to hear that there is a good prospect of the wrongdoers being brought to justice. And I think if you have nothing more to tell us, Inspector, that we need not trouble you any further.' He paused, and as Badger resumed his seat, he took a final glance over his notes; then, turning to the jury, he said: 'You have now, gentlemen, heard all the evidence, excepting those details which the police have very properly reserved and which really do not concern us. For I may remind you that this is not a criminal court. It is not our object to fix the guilt on any particular persons but to ascertain how this poor gentlemen met with his most deplorable death; and I am sure that the evidence which you have heard will be sufficient to enable you, without difficulty, to arrive at a verdict.'

On the conclusion of the coroner's address, the jury rapidly conferred for a few moments; then the foreman rose and announced that they had agreed unanimously on a verdict of wilful murder committed by some person or persons unknown, and they desired to express their deep sympathy with the brother of the deceased, Sir Lawrence Drayton; and when the latter had briefly thanked the jury, through the coroner, the proceedings terminated and the court rose.

As the audience were slowly filing out, Sir Lawrence approached Miss Blake, and having shaken hands cordially and inquired as to her convalescence, said: 'That was a very remarkable story that you told in your evidence; I mean the simultaneous disappearance of your ancestor and this curious heirloom. As a Chancery barrister, unusual circumstances affecting the devolution of landed property naturally interest me. In the court in which I practise one sees, from time to time, some very odd turns of the wheel of Fortune. May I ask if any claim has ever been advanced by your branch of the

family?'

'Yes. My father began some proceedings soon after my brother was born, but his counsel advised him not to go on with the case. He considered that without documentary evidence of my ancestor's marriage, it was useless to take the case into court.'

'Probably he was right,' said Drayton. 'Still, as a matter of professional interest—to say nothing of the interest that one naturally feels in the welfare of one's friends—I should like to know more about this quaint piece of family history. What do you think, Anstey?'

'I think it would be interesting to know just at what point the evidence of the relationship breaks off, and how large the gap is.'

'Precisely,' said Drayton. 'And one would like to know how the other parties are placed. What, for instance, would be the position if the present tenant were to die without issue, who are the heirs, and so on.'

'If it would interest you,' said Miss Blake, 'I could give you fairly full particulars of all that is known. My grandfather, who was a lawyer, wrote out an abstract for the guidance of his descendants; quite a full and very clear narrative. I could let you have that or a copy of it, if I didn't feel ashamed to take up your time with it.'

'Let me have the copy,' said Drayton. 'I don't suppose anything will come of it from your point of view, but it strikes me as an interesting case which is at least worth elucidating. Do you know Dr Thorndyke?'

'We know one another by repute,' said Thorndyke. 'Miss Blake used to board with Polton's sister. You were speaking of the curious circumstances that Miss Blake mentioned in reference to the cat's eye pendant.'

'Yes,' said Drayton. 'I was saying that it would be worth while to get the facts of the case sorted out.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Thorndyke. 'The same idea had occurred to me when Miss Blake was giving her evidence. Do I understand that there are documents available?'

'I have a full resume of the facts relating to the change in the succession,' said Miss Blake, 'and a copy which I am going to hand to Sir Lawrence.'

'Then,' said Thorndyke, 'I shall crave your kind permission to look through that copy. I am not much of an authority on property law, but—'

'Nihil quod tetigit non ornavit,' I murmured, quoting Johnson's famous epitaph on the versatile 'Goldie.'

'Quite right, Anstey,' Drayton agreed warmly. 'All knowledge is Thorndyke's province. Then you will let me have that copy at your convenience, Miss Blake?'

'Thank you, yes, Sir Lawrence,' she replied. 'You shall have it by tomorrow. Oh, and there is something else that I have to give you, and I may as well give it to you now. Did Mr Anstey tell you that I had found the missing locket? I have brought it tied round my neck for safety. Has any one got a knife?' As she spoke she unfastened the top button of her dress and drew out the little gold volume which was attached to a silken cord.

'Don't cut the cord,' said Drayton. 'I want you to keep the locket as a souvenir of my poor brother. Now don't raise objections. Anstey has told me that the little bauble has found favour in your eyes, and I very much wish you to have it. It was a great favourite of my brother's. He used to call it "the little Sphinx" because it always seemed to be propounding a riddle; and it will be a great satisfaction to me to feel that it has passed into friendly and sympathetic hands instead of going to a museum with the other things.'

'It is exceedingly kind of you, Sir Lawrence,' she began, but he interrupted: 'It is nothing of the kind. I am doing myself a kindness in finding a good home for poor Andrew's little favourite. Are you going by train or tram?'

'I shall wait for the tram,' she replied.

'Then we part here. Dr Thorndyke and I are taking the train to Broad Street. Goodbye! Don't forget to send me that copy of the documents.'

The two men swung off down the road to the station, and as a tram appeared in the offing, a resolution which had been forming in my mind took definite shape.

'I don't see,' said I, 'why I should be left out in the cold in regard to this family romance of yours. Why shouldn't I come and collect the copy to deliver to Sir Lawrence and have a surreptitious read at it myself?'

'It would be very nice of you if you could spare the time,' she replied. 'I will even offer special inducements. I will give you some tea, which you must be wanting by this time, I should think, and I will show you not only the copy but the original documents. One of them is quite curious.'

'That settles it then,' said I. 'Tea and documents, combined with your society and that of your ingenious brother, form what the theatrical people would call a galaxy of attractions. Here is our tram. Do we go inside or outside?'

'Oh, outside, please. There is quite a crowd waiting.'

I was relieved at this decision, for I was hankering for a smoke; and as soon as we had taken our places in a front seat on the roof, I began secretly to feel in the pocket where the friendly pipe reposed and to debate within myself whether I might

crave permission to bring it forth. At length the tobacco-hunger conquered my scruples and I ventured to make the request.

'Oh, of course,' she replied. 'Do smoke. I love the smell of tobacco, especially from a pipe.'

Thus encouraged, I joyfully produced the calumet and felt in my pocket for my pouch. And then came a dreadful disappointment. The pouch was there, sure enough, but its lean sides announced the hideous fact that it was empty. There were not even a few grains wherewith to stave off imminent starvation.

'How provoking!' my companion exclaimed tragically. 'I am sorry. But you shan't be deprived for long. You must get down at a tobacconist's and restock your pouch, and then after tea you shall smoke your pipe while I show you the documents, as you call them.'

'Then I am comforted,' said I. 'The galaxy of attractions has received a further addition.' Resignedly I put away the pipe and pouch, and reverting to a question that had occurred to me while she was giving her evidence, I said: 'There was one statement of yours that I did not quite follow. It was with regard to the man whom you were trying to hold. You said that you were quite confident that you would recognise him and that you could call up quite a clear and vivid mental picture of his face, but yet you thought that, if you were to draw a memory portrait of him, that portrait might be misleading. How could that be? You would know whether your portrait was like your recollection of the man, and if it was, surely it would be like the man himself?'

'I suppose it would,' she replied thoughtfully. 'But there might be some false details which wouldn't matter to me but which might mislead others who might take those details for the essential characters.'

'But if the details were wrong, wouldn't that destroy the likeness?'

'Not necessarily, I think. Of course, a likeness is ultimately dependent on the features, particularly on their proportion and the spaces between them. But you must have noticed that when children and beginners draw portraits, although they produce the most frightful caricatures—all wrong and all out of drawing—yet those portraits are often unmistakable likenesses.'

'Yes, I have noticed that. But don't you think the likeness is probably due to the caricature? To the exaggeration of some one or two characteristic peculiarities?'

'Very likely. But that rather bears out what I said. For those caricatures, though easily recognisable, are mostly false; and if one of them got into the hands of a stranger who had never seen the subject of the portrait, for purposes of identification, he would as probably as not look for some one having those characteristics which had been quite falsely represented.'

'Yes; and then he would be looking for the wrong kind of person altogether.'

'Exactly. And then my drawing would probably be far from a correct representation of my recollection of the face. It isn't as if one could take a photograph of a mental image. So I am afraid that the idea of a memory drawing for the purpose of identification must be abandoned. Besides, it would be of no use unless we could get hold of the man.'

'No. But that is not impossible. The police have apparently identified one of the men and expect to have him in custody at any moment. He may give information as to the other, but even if he does not, the police may be able to find out who his associates were, and in that case a memory drawing which was far from accurate might help them to pick out the particular man.'

'That is possible,' she agreed. 'But then if the police could get hold of this man's associates and let me see them, I could pick out the particular man with certainty and without any drawing at all. Isn't that a tobacconist's shop that we are approaching?'

'It is. I think I will get off and make my purchase and then come along to the studio.'

'Do,' she said, 'and I will run on ahead and see that the preparations for tea are started.'

I ran down the steps and dropped off the tram without stopping it, but by this time we had passed the shop by some little distance and I had to walk back. I secured the new supply, and having stuffed it into my pouch, came out of the shop just in time to see the tram stop nearly a quarter of a mile ahead and Miss Blake get off, followed by a couple of other passengers, and walk quickly into Jacob Street. I strode forward at a brisk pace in the same direction, but when I reached the corner of the street she had already disappeared. I was just about to cross to the side on which the studio was situated when my attention was attracted by a woman who was walking slowly up the street on my side. At the first glance I was struck by something familiar in her appearance and a second glance confirmed the impression. She was smartly—and something more than smartly—dressed, and in particular I noted a rather large, elaborate, and gaudy hat. In short, she was very singularly like the woman who had jostled me in the doorway of the hall in which the inquest was held.

I slowed down to avoid overtaking her, and as I did so she crossed the road and walked straight up to the gate of the studio. For an instant I thought she was going to ring the bell, for after a glance at the number on the gate she turned to the side and read the little nameplate, leaning forward and putting her face close to it as if she were near-sighted. At that moment the wicket opened and Master Percy stepped out on to the threshold; whereupon the woman, after one swift, intense glance at the boy, turned away and walked quickly up the street. I was half disposed to follow her and confirm my suspicion as to her identity; but Master Percy had already observed me, and it seemed, perhaps, more expedient to get out of sight myself than to reveal my presence in attempting to verify a suspicion of which I had practically no doubt, and which, even if confirmed, had no obvious significance. Accordingly I crossed the road, and having greeted my host, was by him conducted down the passage to the studio.

## VIII. — A JACOBITE ROMANCE

In the minds of many of us, including myself, there appears to be a natural association between the ideas of tea and tobacco. Whether it is that both substances are exotic products, adopted from alien races, or that each is connected with a confirmed and accepted drug habit, I am not quite clear. But there seems to be no doubt that the association exists and that the realisation of the one idea begets an imperative impulse to realise the other. In conformity with which natural law, when the tea-things had been, by the joint efforts of Miss Blake and her brother, removed to the curtained repository—where also dwelt a gas ring and a kettle—I proceeded complacently to bring forth my pipe and the bulging tobacco-pouch and to transfer some of the contents of the latter to the former.

'I am glad to see you smoking,' said Miss Blake as the first cloud of incense ascended. 'It gives me the feeling that you are provided with an antidote to the documents. I shall have less compunction about the reading.'

'You think that the "tuneless pipe" is similar to the tuneful one in its effects on the "savage breast." But I don't want any antidote. I am all agog to hear your romance of a cat's eye, that is, if you are going to read out the documents.'

'I thought I would read the copy aloud and get you to check it by the originals. Then you can assure Sir Lawrence that it is a true copy.'

'Yes. I think that is quite a good plan. It is always well to have a copy checked and certified correct.'

'Then I will get the books and we will begin at once. Do you want to hear the reading, Percy, or are you going on with your building?'

'I should like to come and listen, if you don't mind, Winnie,' he replied; and as his sister unlocked the cabinet under the window, he seated himself on a chair by the now vacant table. Miss Blake took from the cabinet three books, one of which—an ordinary school exercise-book—she placed on the table by her chair.

'That,' she said, 'is the copy of both originals. This'—handing to me a little leather-covered book, the pages of which were filled with small, clearly-written, though faded, handwriting—'is the abstract of which I spoke. This other little book is the fragmentary original which is referred to in the abstract. If you are ready I will begin. We will take the abstract first.'

I provided myself with a pencil with which to mark any errors, and having opened the little book announced that I was ready.

'The abstract,' said she, 'was written in 1821, and reads as follows:

"A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BLAKES OF BEAUCHAMP BLAKE NEAR WENDOVER IN THE COUNTY OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, FROM THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1708."

"This history has been written by me for the purpose of preserving a record of certain events for the information of my descendants, to whom a knowledge of those events may prove of great importance; and its writing has become necessary by the circumstance that, whereas the only existing written record has been reduced by Time and ill-usage to a collection of disconnected fragments, the traditions passed on orally from generation to generation become year by year more indistinct and unreliable.

"I shall begin with the year 1708, at which time the estate of Beauchamp Blake was held by Harold Blake. In this year was born Percival Blake, the only son of Harold aforesaid. Seven years later occurred a rising in favour of the Royal House of the Stuarts, in which act of rebellion the said Harold Blake was suspected (but never accused) of having taken part. In the year 1743, Harold Blake died and his only son, Percival, succeeded to the property.

"In or about the year 1742, Percival Blake married a lady named Judith Weston (or Western). For some unknown reason this marriage took place secretly, and was, for a time at least, kept secret. Possibly the marriage would not have been acceptable to Percival's father, or the lady may have been a Papist. This latter seems the more probable, inasmuch as the marriage was solemnised, not at the church of St Margaret at Beauchamp Blake, but at a little church in London near to Aldgate, called St Peter by the Shambles, the rector of which, the Reverend Stephen Rumbold, an intimate friend of Percival's, became subsequently not only a Papist but a Jesuit. In the next year, 1743, a son was born and was christened James. No entry of this birth appears in the registers of St Margaret's, so it is probable that it was registered at the London church. Unfortunately, this register is incomplete. Several pages have been torn out, and as these missing pages belong to the years 1742 and 1743, it is to be presumed that they contained the records of the marriage and the birth.

"About the year 1725 Percival came to London to study medicine; and about 1729 or 1730 he completed his studies and took his degree at Cambridge, of which University he was already a Bachelor of Arts. From this time onwards he appears to have practised in London as a physician, and it was probably at this period that he made the acquaintance of Judith Western and Stephen Rumbold. Even after the death of his father and his own succession to the property, he continued to practise his profession, making only occasional visits to his estate in Buckinghamshire.

"Like his father, Percival Blake was an ardent supporter of the Stuarts, and it is believed that he took an active part in the various Jacobite plots that were heard of about this time; and when, in 1745, the great rising took place, Percival was one of those who hastened to join the forces of the young Pretender, a disastrous act, to which all the subsequent misfortunes of the family are due.

"On the collapse of the Jacobite cause, Percival took immediate measures to avert the consequences of his ill-judged action from his own family; and in these he displayed a degree of foresight that might well have been exhibited earlier. From Scotland he made his way to Beauchamp Blake and there, in one of the numerous hiding-places of the old mansion, concealed certain important documents connected with the property. It is not quite clear what these documents were. Among them appear to have been some of the title-deeds, and there is no doubt that they included documents proving the validity of his marriage with Judith and the legitimacy of his son James. Meanwhile, he had sent his wife and child, with a servant named Jenifer Gray, to Hamburg, where they were to wait until he joined them. He himself made his way to a port on the East Coast, believed to have been King's Lynn, where he embarked, under a false name, on a small vessel bound for Hamburg; but while he was waiting for the vessel to sail, he circulated a very circumstantial account of his own death by drowning while attempting to escape in an open boat.

"This was at once a fortunate and unfortunate act; fortunate inasmuch as it completely achieved his purpose of preventing the confiscation of the property; unfortunate inasmuch as it effectually shut out his own descendants from the succession. On the report of his death (unmarried, as was believed, and so without issue) a distant cousin, of unquestionable loyalty to the reigning house, took possession of the estate without opposition and without any suggestion of confiscation.

"One thing only, appertaining to the inheritance, Percival took with him. Among the family heirlooms was a jewel consisting of a small pendant set with a single cymophane (vulgarly known as a cat's eye) and bearing an inscription, of which the actual words are unknown, but of which the purport was that whosoever should possess the jewel should also possess the Blake estate; a foolish statement that seems to have been generally believed in the family and to which Percival evidently attached incredible weight. For not only did he take the jewel with him but, as will presently appear, he made careful provision for its disposal.

"From this time onward the history becomes more and more vague. It seems that Percival joined his wife and child at Hamburg, and thereafter travelled about Germany, plying his profession as a physician. But soon he was overtaken by a terrible misfortune. It appears that a robbery had been committed by a woman who was said to be a foreigner, and suspicion fell upon Judith. She was arrested, and on false evidence, convicted and sent, as a punishment, to labour in the mines somewhere in the Harz Mountains. Percival made unceasing efforts to obtain her release, but it was three years before his efforts were crowned with success. But then, alas, it was too late. The poor lady came back to him aged by privation and broken by long-standing sickness, only to linger on a few months and then to die in his arms. On her release he carried her away to France, and there, at Paris, about the year 1751, she passed away and is believed to have been buried in the cemetery of Pere Lachaise.

"The death of his wife, to whom he seems to have been devotedly attached, left Percival a broken man; and about eighteen months later, he himself died, and is believed to have been buried beside Judith. But in these sad months he occupied himself in making provision for the recovery of the family inheritance by his posterity when circumstances should have become more favourable. To this end he wrote a summary of the events connected with and following the Jacobite rising and had it sewn into a little illustrated Book of Hours, which, together with the cymophane jewel, he gave into the keeping of Jenifer Gray, to be by her given to the child James when he should be old enough to be trusted with them. The exact contents of the little book we can only surmise from the fragments that remain, but they seem to have been a short account of his own actions and vicissitudes, and no doubt gave at least a clue to the place in which the documents were hidden. Nor can we tell what the exact form of the jewel was or the nature of the inscription, for Percival's references to the latter as 'a guide' to his descendants are not clearly understandable. At any rate, the jewel has disappeared and the written record is reduced to a few fragments. Jenifer Gray (who seems to have been an illiterate and foolish woman) apparently gave the little book to the child to play with, for the few leaves that remain are covered with childish scrawls; and she may have sold the jewel to buy the necessities of life, for she and the boy were evidently but poorly provided for.

"On reaching the age of fourteen, James was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker in Paris and apparently became very skilful workman. When he was out of his time (Jenifer Gray having died in the meantime) he came to England and settled in London, where, in time, he established an excellent business.

"Into this his son William (my father), was taken, first as an apprentice, then as partner and finally as principal. By my father the prosperity of the house was so well maintained that he was able to article me to an attorney, to whom I am chief clerk at this time of writing.

"This record, together with what remains of Percival Blake's manuscript, will, I trust, be preserved by my descendants in the hope that it may be the instrument by which Providence may hereafter reinstate them in the inheritance of their forefathers.

"JOHN BLAKE.

"16 SYMOND'S INN, LONDON,

"20th June 1821."

As she finished reading, Miss Blake let the book fall into her lap and looked at me as if inviting criticism. I closed the little original, and laying it on the table, remarked: 'A very singular and romantic history, and a very valuable record. The detailed narrative presents a much more convincing case than one would have expected from the bare statement that you gave in your evidence. Your great-grandfather was a wise man to commit the facts to writing while the memory of the

events was comparatively recent. How much is there left of Percival's manuscript?'

'Very little, I am sorry to say,' she replied, picking up the remaining volume and handing it to me; 'but I have made a copy of these fragments, too. It follows the copy of John Blake's abstract, and I will read it out to you if you will check it by the original.'

I turned the little book over in my hand and examined it curiously. It was a tiny volume, bound in gold-tooled calf, now rusty and worn and badly broken at the joints. The title-page showed it to be a Book of Hours—*Horae Beatae Mariae Virginis*—printed at Antwerp by Bakhasar Moretus and dated 1634, and on turning over the leaves I perceived that it was illustrated with a number of quaint but decorative woodcuts. The inside of the cover seemed to have been used as a sort of unofficial birth register. At the top, in very faded writing, was inscribed 'Judith Weston,' and underneath a succession of names beginning with 'James, son of Percival and Judith Blake, born 3 April 1743,' and ending with Winifred and Percival, the daughter and son of Peter and Agnes Blake. Between the cover and the title-page a number of fly-leaves of very thin paper had been stitched in, and those that remained were covered with minute writing of a pale, ghostly brown, largely defaced by spots, smears, scribbings and childish drawings. But most of them had disappeared, and the few that were left hung insecurely to the loosened stitches.

When I had completed my inspection, I opened the book at the first fly-leaf, and adjusting the reading-glass which Miss Blake had placed on the table, announced that I was ready; whereupon she resumed her reading.

'The first page reads: "...to my cousin Leonard, who, as the heir-at-law, would, I knew, be watching the course of events. Indeed, I doubt not that if he had known of my marriage, he would have used his influence at the Court to oust me. But the news of my death I felt sure would bring him forward at once, and his loyalty to the German King would make him secure to the succession. So he and his brood should keep the nest warm until the clouds had passed and the present troubles should be forgotten. Only to my own posterity, the true heirs, must be provided a key wherewith to re-enter on their inheritance, and to this end I searched the muniment chest and took therefrom all the—"'

This was the end of the page, and as she broke off. Miss Blake looked up.

'Isn't it exasperating?' said she. 'There seems to be only one page missing in this place, but it is the one that contains the vital information.'

'It is not very difficult to guess what he took,' said I. 'Evidently he abstracted the title-deeds. But the question is, what did he do with them?'

'Yes,' said Miss Blake, 'that is the important question, and unfortunately we cannot answer it. That he hid them in a secure hiding-place is evident from the next two pages. The first reads: "Will Bateman, the plumber, made me a tall leaden jar like a black-jack to hold the documents, with a close-fitting lid, which we luted on with wax when we had put the documents into it. And this jar I set in the hiding-place, and on top of it the great two-handled posset-pot that old Martin, the potter, made for my mother when I was born; which I prize dearly and would not have it fall into the hands of strangers. When all was ready, we sent for the carpenter, who is a safe man and loyal to the Prince, and bade him close the chamber, which he did so that no eye could detect the opening. So the writings shall be safe until such time—"

'The next page reads: "...and the other documents which I obtained from Mr Halford, the attorney. I had feared that their absence might be a bar to the succession, but he assured me it was not so, but only that it would hinder the sale of the property. So I am satisfied; and I am confident that Leonard will never guess the hiding-place in which they are bestowed, nor will he ever dream what that hiding-place conceals."

"When I had done this I began forthwith to spread the report of my death among strangers, both in the coffee-houses and at the inn whereat I lodged while I was waiting for the ship to sail from—" There the page ends, and there seems to be quite a lot missing, for the next one speaks of the disaster as having already occurred.

"Nor, indeed, would they listen to her protestations (spoken, as they were, in a strange tongue), and still less to my entreaties. And so she was borne away from my sight, brave, cheerful, and dignified to the last, as befitted an English gentlewoman, though it seemed then as if we should never look on one another again. So I left with the child and Jenifer and must needs continue to live at Eisenach (that I might be near my darling, though I could never see her) and must minister for my daily bread to the wretches who people that accursed land—"

'There seems to be only one or two pages missing here, for the next page runs: "...this joyful day (as I had hoped it would be) and set forth from Eisenach with the child and Jenifer to meet my poor darling on the road. A few miles out we saw the cart approaching, filled with the prisoners released from the mines. I looked among them, but at first saw her not. Then a haggard old woman held out her arms to me and I looked again. The old woman was Judith, my wife! But, O God, what a wreck! She was wasted to a very skeleton, her skin was like old parchment, her hair, that had been like spun gold, was turned to a strange black and her whole aspect—" Miss Blake paused and said in a low voice: 'It is a dreadful picture. Poor Judith! And poor Percival! And the rest of the story is just as sad. The next page takes up the thread just after Judith's death.'

"And when it was over and I saw them shovel in the earth, I felt moved to beg them not to fill the grave but to leave room for me. I went away through the snow with Jenifer and the boy. But I was alone. Judith had been all to me, and my heart was under the new-turned sods. Yet I bethought me, if it should please God to take me, I must not go without leaving some chart to guide my son back to our home, should such return be possible in his lifetime, or to guide his children or his

children's children. Therefore, that same sad day I began to write this history on the fly-leaves that my dear wife had had sewn into her little book of—"

"There seems to be only one page missing before the next, but it was an important one, so far as we can judge. Indeed, it almost appears as if all the most significant pages were lost. The next page reads:

"...gave me a string from his bass viol, which he says will be the best of all. So that matter is as secure as care and judgement can make it. This book and the precious bauble I purpose to hold until I feel the hand of death upon me, and then I shall give both into the keeping of Jenifer, bidding her guard them jealously as treasures beyond price, until my son attains the age of fourteen. Then she shall give them to him, adjuring him to preserve the book in a safe place and never to lend or show it to any person whatsoever, and to wear the trinket hung around his neck under his clothing so that none shall know—"

"That is the last complete page. There remains a half-page, which seems to have been the concluding one. It reads: "...and that is all that I can do, since one cannot look into the future. When the time is ripe, my son, or his descendants, can go forward with open eyes. This history and the trinket shall guide them. Wherefore I pray that both may be treasured by them to whom I thus pass on the inheritance. '"

As Miss Blake finished her reading she closed the book and sat looking thoughtfully at her brother, who had listened with rapt attention to the pathetic story. Half-reluctantly I shut the little Book of Hours and laid it on the table.

'It is a tragic little history,' I said, 'and these soiled and tattered leaves and the faded writing and the old-fashioned phraseology make it somehow very real and vivid. I wonder what became of the cat's eye pendant. Is nothing at all known of the way in which it was lost?'

'Nothing,' she replied. 'The boy James was only seven years old when his father died, so he would hardly have remembered, even if he knew of the existence of the jewel. It may have been lost or stolen, or, more probably, Jenifer sold it to buy the necessities of life. She must have been pretty hard pressed at times.'

'She must have been a duffer,' said Percy, 'if she sold it after what she had been told. Couldn't she have popped it and kept up the interest?'

'You seem to know a good deal about these matters, Percy,' his sister remarked with a smile.

'Well,' said he, 'I should think everybody knows how to raise the wind if they are hard up. There's no need to sell things when you've got an uncle.'

'We don't know that she did sell it,' said Miss Blake. 'She may even have "popped" it, to use your elegant expression. All that we know is that it disappeared. And now it has disappeared again, if this pendant that was stolen was really the Blake pendant.'

'Is there any reason to suppose that it was?' I asked.

Only that it agreed with what little we know of the missing jewel, and cat's eye pendants must be very rare. Unfortunately, the Connoisseur article doesn't help us much. It gives a photograph, from which we could identify the pendant if we knew exactly what it was like, but the description fails just at the vital point. It doesn't say anything about the inscription on the back. It was in order to find out what that inscription was that I asked poor Mr Drayton to let me see the jewel. Would you like to see the photograph?'

'I should, very much, if you have a copy.'

She fetched from the cabinet a copy of the Connoisseur, and having found the article, handed the open magazine to me. There were two photographs on the page, one of the little book-locket and the other of a simple, lozenge-shaped pendant of somewhat plain design, set with a single, rather large stone, smooth-cut and nearly circular. The letterpress gave no particulars and did not even mention the inscription.

'I suppose,' said I, 'there is no doubt that this pendant did bear an inscription of some kind. There is no reference to it here.'

'No particular reference, unfortunately. But this was a collection of inscribed objects. Every specimen bore an inscription if it was only a name and a date. The article, you will see, says so, and Mr Drayton told me so himself.'

'You didn't ask him what was written on this pendant?'

'No; I didn't want to tell him about our family tradition unless I found that it really was the Blake pendant. Perhaps I might not have told him even then, for the inscription might have told us all we wanted to know; though I must confess to a certain superstitious hankering to possess the jewel, or, at least, to see it in Percy's possession.'

'You were telling Sir Lawrence that proceedings to establish a claim were actually begun by your father.'

'Yes, but our solicitor was not at all hopeful, and the counsel whom he retained very strongly advised my father not to go on. He thought that, with the apparently well-founded belief in Percival's death and the absence of any real evidence of his marriage and survival, we had no case. So the action was settled out of court and the tenant at the time agreed to pay most of the costs.'

'Do you remember who was the solicitor for the tenant?'

'Yes. His name was Brodribb, and my father thought he treated us very fairly.'

'He probably did. I know Mr Brodribb very well, and I have the highest opinion of him as a lawyer and as a man. I have often been retained by him, and I have usually been very well satisfied to be associated with him. Do you know what the position was when your father began his action? I mean as to the possible heirs. Was the present tenant then in possession?'

'No; he was a Mr Arnold Blake, a widower with no surviving children. But he knew the present tenant, Arthur Blake, although they were not very near relatives, and was prepared to contest the claim on his behalf. Arthur Blake was then, I think, in Australia.'

'And I gather that you don't know much about him?'

'No, excepting that I understand that he is unmarried, which is all that really matters to us.'

'And did Brodribb know about this little book and John Blake's abstract?'

'I think my father must have told him that we had some authentic details of the family history, but I don't know whether he actually showed him the originals.'

'And with regard to the pedigree since Percival. Have the marriages and births all been proved?'

'Yes. My father had them investigated, and obtained certificates of all of them, and I have those certificates, though I am afraid they are never likely to be called for.'

'Well,' I said, 'as a lawyer, I shouldn't like to hold out any hopes even if the death of the present tenant without issue should seem to create a favourable situation. But, of course, if it should ever become possible to prove the marriage of Percival and Judith and the birth of James, that would alter the position very materially. And now I must tear myself away. I have been most keenly interested in hearing your romance, and I have no doubt that Sir Lawrence will be equally so. If you will give me the copy, I will leave it at his chambers tonight or tomorrow morning.'

She gave me the manuscript book, which I slipped into my pocket, and then she and Percy escorted me across the yard and let me out at the wicket.





## IX. — EXIT MOAKEY

From Jacob Street I made my way to the Temple with the intention of letting Thorndyke look through Miss Blake's manuscript—since he had expressed a wish to see it—before delivering it to Drayton. And as I sat on the omnibus roof I reflected on the events of the afternoon. In spite of my legal training and experience the romance of the lost inheritance had taken a strong hold on me. The two narratives, and especially the older one, diffused an atmosphere of reality that was very convincing. It was practically certain that the two manuscripts were genuine, and if they were, there could be no doubt that my young friend Percy was the direct descendant of the Jacobite fugitive, Percival Blake. Nor could there be much reasonable doubt that the descent was legitimate. Percival plainly referred to Judith as his wife and there seemed to be no reason for supposing that the marriage had not taken place at the time stated in John Blake's abstract. In short, I found myself wondering whether Mr Peter Blake's counsel had not been a little over-cautious, or whether he might not have been influenced by a possible financial straitness on the part of the said Peter unfavourable to a warmly-contested action at law.

If he had been over-cautious, it was unfortunate, for he had missed an opportunity. The death of Arnold Blake without a direct successor would have made things comparatively easy for a new claimant with a good case, whereas now, with Arthur Blake in possession, the difficulties would be much greater. It is one thing to maintain a claim against other claimants, but quite another to oust a tenant who has established a title by actual possession. And, to judge by their surroundings and mode of life, my friends were but poorly equipped for any action at all.

From the manuscripts and their story my thoughts strayed to the woman whom I had seen examining Miss Blake's nameplate. I did not like that incident at all. It might mean nothing. The woman might happen to live in the neighbourhood and have made her inspection from mere idle curiosity. But that was not what the appearances suggested. The woman had been at the inquest, and from Hampstead she must have travelled in the same tramcar that had conveyed Miss Blake and me. Then she had seemed to have followed Miss Blake, at some distance, on the opposite side of the road. There was a suggestion of purpose in the whole proceeding that I found disquieting and rather sinister, and it was not made less so by the very unprepossessing appearance of the woman herself.

When I let myself into our chambers with my key—or rather Jervis—I found the sitting-room vacant; but as an inspection of the hat-rack in the lobby suggested that Thorndyke was somewhere on the premises, I went up to the laboratory, and there I found him in company with Polton and an uncanny-looking apparatus consisting of a microscope with an attachment of miniature hot-water pipes.

'This is a new form of magic,' said I, 'at least it is new to me. What is going on?'

'This is just a microscope with a warm stage,' Thorndyke explained. 'We are making it a hot stage for the purposes of the present experiment.'

'And what is the experiment?' I asked with sudden curiosity, for I had just observed that the object on the microscope stage was an irregular-shaped piece of glass on which I could distinguish a very clear fingerprint.

'The experiment is connected with the fingerprints on the piece of glass that you so very fortunately secured at "The Rowans." This is a portion of it which I have cut off with a glazier's diamond and which bears a duplicate print. You remember my pointing out to you that a real fingerprint—as distinguished from a statistical or mathematical fingerprint—has chemical and physical properties. Well, we are endeavouring to determine the chemical nature of the substance of which this fingerprint is composed by inference from its physical properties. We are now ascertaining its melting-point; in fact I may say that we have ascertained it. It is fifty-three degrees centigrade. And this fact, in conjunction with its other observed physical properties, tells us that it is Japanese wax.'

'Indeed,' said I. 'Then that goes to show that the man who made these fingerprints had been handling Japanese wax.'

'That is the obvious inference.'

'Does that throw any light on the man's personality or occupation? What is Japanese wax used for?'

'For a variety of purposes. Very largely for the manufacture of wax polishes for boots and furniture, for the preparation of foundry wax and the various waxes used by jewellers, engravers, and lapidaries. It is also used in pharmacy in the making of certain plasters and cerates.'

'Do you think,' I asked, 'that this man could have got it on his fingers by touching the furniture?'

'No,' replied Thorndyke. 'The cabinets were French-polished, and I saw no trace of wax polish on them. Besides, there is more wax than would have been taken up in that way.'

'Does the presence of this wax suggest anything to you?'

'Well,' replied Thorndyke, 'of course there are possibilities. But one mustn't expect to apply a fact as soon as it is discovered. We have ascertained what this substance is. Let us put this item of knowledge in its proper mental pigeon-hole and hope that we shall find a use for it presently.'

'I have a strong suspicion, Thorndyke,' said I, 'that you have found a use for it already. However, I won't press you. I know my place. The mantle of Jervis is on me—and trailing a few yards along the ground. I am not permitted to cross-examine my reverend senior.'

'There really isn't any need for you to do so,' said he. 'I have no exclusive information. You are in possession of all the facts that are known to me.'

That is not strictly true, you know, Thorndyke,' I objected. 'We share the mere observed facts of this case, I admit; but you have a body of general knowledge which I have not, and which gives many of these observed facts a significance that is hidden from me. However, we will let that pass. You are the investigating wizard, I am only a sort of familiar demon. Which reminds me that I have been devilling for you this afternoon. I think you said that you would like to look over the documents relating to Miss Blake's claim.'

'Yes, I should be interested to see them.'

'Well, I've got a copy, which I have compared with the originals, and which I am to hand over Drayton. Would you like to have it now?'

'Yes; I have finished up here. Let us go downstairs and look over the documents together.'

'You had better take the copy down with you and run through it while I am having a wash. Then I will come down and hear your reverend pronouncements on the case.' I produced the manuscript book from my pocket and having handed it to him, retired to the bedroom of which I was tenant ex officio, while he descended to the sitting-room with the manuscript in his hand.

When I came down after a leisurely wash and brush up, I found Thorndyke sitting with the open book before him and a slip of paper and a pencil in his hand. Apparently he had finished the reading and was jotting down a few dates and other particulars.

'This is a singularly interesting story, Anstey,' said he, 'and extraordinarily picturesque in its setting. It enables us to understand Miss Blake's view as to her brother's claim, which sounded a little extravagant when baldly stated in her evidence. And, in fact, it looks as if that claim were a perfectly sound one. If it were only possible to produce satisfactory evidence of the marriage of Percival and Judith Blake and of the legitimacy of James, I should take the case into Court with perfect confidence—under suitable conditions, of course.'

'You mean, if there were any question as to the succession.'

'Yes. And such a question may arise at any moment if the present tenant is unmarried. It seems to me a matter of vital importance to find out as much as possible about this present tenant, Arthur Blake; I mean as to his heir, his relatives and connections generally, and the chances of his marrying. Miss Blake's brother is but a child, and many things may happen before he is a middle-aged man.'

'Yes,' I agreed. 'It would be a good deal more to the point than fussing about this ridiculous cat's eye. Miss Blake's keenness about that is a mystery to me.'

'Don't forget,' said Thorndyke, 'that the pendant is believed to bear an inscription that might be helpful to the possessor, though it is difficult to imagine in what way it could be.'

'Very difficult,' said I. 'But it isn't the inscription that she is so keen on, it is the thing itself. She has a sort of half-belief in some occult quality inherent in this jewel, in fact she is infected by the family superstition. It is incomprehensible to me.'

'It is always difficult for one temperament to understand another,' said he. 'But this state of mind is quite a common one. That absurd little bone of Halliburton's is a case in point, and quite a representative instance. It was obviously a mascot—that is to say, an object credited with occult properties and the power to influence events; and how many people are there who, openly or secretly, cherish similar charms or fetishes. The Stock Exchange, the Stage, and the Sporting Clubs are full of them.'

'Yes,' that is true,' I agreed; and then, suddenly remembering the mysterious woman, I said: 'By the way, a rather queer thing happened this afternoon. I accompanied Miss Blake home from Hampstead, but I got off the tram to get some tobacco and let her go on ahead. She had gone indoors before I arrived at the studio, and as I was approaching her house, I saw a woman cross the road and go deliberately up to the door and read the name on the plate.'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke, looking at me interrogatively.

'Well, the point is that that woman had followed us from Hampstead.'

'Indeed!' he exclaimed with sudden gravity. 'You are sure of that?'

'Yes. I recognised her before she crossed. You may have noticed her at the inquest, a brassy-haired baggage with a spotted veil and a face powdered like a clown's.'

'Yes, I noticed her. She was sitting near to you, by the door. I took particular note of her because she stood up while Miss Blake was giving her evidence, and seemed deeply interested in her and in you.'

'Well, that is the woman.'

'But this is very serious, Anstey. What a pity you didn't follow her and find out where she went to!'

'I had half a mind to, but Master Percy—Miss Blake's brother—came to the door at that moment and saw me, so it was hardly possible.'

'It is very unfortunate,' said Thorndyke. 'You see the importance of the matter? Miss Blake stood up in open Court and swore that she was confident she could identify the man who stabbed her. Now that man is not only a robber. He is, at least, an accessory to the murder of Andrew Drayton, and his apprehension would probably reveal the identity of the actual murderer—if he is not the murderer himself—to say nothing of the charge against him of wounding with intent. Of course, if the police are right about those fingerprints, there is not so much in it. They will arrest Moakey and probably get the other man as well. But if the police clue should fail—and I should not be surprised if it does—Miss Blake represents the whole of the evidence against these two men. Apart from her, a conviction would be impossible unless the men were taken with the stolen property in their possession, which they are not likely to be. Even if the men were arrested they could not be identified, excepting by her, and would have to be released. I consider that her position is one of extreme danger. Did you tell her of this incident?'

'No; I thought there was no use in making her uneasy.'

'She ought to be warned, Anstey. And she ought to be most cautious about exposing herself to the possibility of an attack of any kind. I am expecting a visit from Superintendent Miller—he sent me a note asking for an interview at seven o'clock, so he will be here in a few minutes. When we have seen him, we shall know how the case stands, but the fact of his wanting an interview suggests that the police bark has got into shoal water.'

Punctually at seven o'clock the Superintendent's characteristic official rat-tat announced his arrival, and as I let him in, a subtle something in his manner seemed to confirm Thorndyke's surmises.

'I suppose,' said he as he took the armchair and lighted the customary cigar, 'you've guessed what I wanted to talk to you about? It's this Drayton case, you know.'

Thorndyke nodded. 'Any new developments?' he asked.

'Well, yes, there are. We've got a bit of a setback. It seems that the fingerprint people made a mistake. Never known them to do such a thing before, but I suppose nobody is infallible. It turns out that those fingerprints are not Moakey's after all.'

As the Superintendent made this statement, he fixed a stony gaze on the opposite wall. Glancing at Thorndyke, I noted that my colleague's countenance had taken on that peculiar woodenness that I had learned to associate with intense attention not unmingled with suspicion.

'I can't think how they came to make such a stupid mistake,' the Superintendent continued, still staring fixedly at the wall. 'Might have got us into a horrid mess.'

'I should have thought,' said Thorndyke, 'that mistakes might easily be made with such multitudes of records. Whose fingerprints are they?'

'Ah!' said Miller, 'there you are. We don't know. They don't seem to have 'em at the registry. So our only clue is gone.'

'Haven't you opened up in any other direction?' Thorndyke asked.

'We've notified all the likely fences, of course, but that's no good. These coveys are not likely to try to plant the stuff with a murder charge hanging over them. Then we made some inquiries about that man Halliburton. But they turned out a frost. The chap has disappeared and left no address. We've got his signature, and we've got a dam silly rabbit bone that some fool has taken the trouble to cut a pattern on, that he left behind at the hotel; and as he seemed to value the thing, we put an advertisement in the papers saying that it had been found. But there are no answers up to the present, and not likely to be. And then Halliburton probably had nothing to do with the affair. So we're rather up a tree. And it's annoying, after thinking it was all plain sailing, and letting the papers give out that we were in full cry. Of course, they are all agog for the next act—and, by the way, one of them has got a portrait of you—I think I've got it. Yes, here it is.'

He produced from his pocket a copy of the Evening Courier and opened it out. On the front page was an excellent portrait of my colleague, with the descriptive title: 'Dr John Thorndyke, the famous criminal expert, whose services are being retained in the case.'

'That ought to help you, sir,' said the Superintendent with a grin. 'You won't be a stranger to our friends if you should happen to meet them. It is a pity their photographs can't be given, too.'

'Yes, it would be more to the point. But now, Miller, what is it that you want me to do? I assume that you have come to suggest some sort of co-operation?'

'Well,' said Miller, 'you are retained in the case, and I rather suspect that Sir Lawrence would like you to carry on independently. But there is no sense in our getting at cross-purposes.'

'Not the least,' Thorndyke agreed. 'It is a criminal case, and our objects are identical—to secure the offenders and recover the property. Do I understand that you are prepared to offer me facilities?'

'What facilities do you want?'

'At this moment I am not wanting any, excepting that I should like to look at the fingerprints. There would be no objection to that. I suppose?'

The Superintendent looked uncomfortable. 'I don't know why there should be,' said he, 'but you know what Singleton and his crowd are. They don't like unofficial investigators in their department. And,' Miller added with a grin, 'they aren't

very fond of you, and no wonder; they haven't forgotten that Hornby case. But it wouldn't help you a bit if you did look at the prints. You can take it from me that Moakey is not the man. There's no mistake this time. They have checked the fingerprints quite carefully, and you can rely on what they say. So it would be no use your examining them—unless,' he added with a shrewd look at Thorndyke, 'you've got a fingerprint registry of your own.'

As a matter of fact it was known to me that Thorndyke had a collection in a card-index file, but it was a mere appendix to the reports of cases dealt with, which had no bearing on the present case.

'I daresay you are right,' Thorndyke agreed 'One doesn't learn much from stray fingerprints. And you've nothing more to tell us?'

'Nothing,' was the reply. 'And you, sir? I suppose you haven't struck anything that would give us a lead?'

'I have not begun to work at the case,' said Thorndyke. 'I have been waiting for your report, to see if the case was as simple as it appeared.'

'Yes,' said Miller, 'it did look simple. Seemed as if there was nothing to do but make the arrest. And now we have nothing to go on at all. Well,' here he rose and began to move towards the door, 'if we can help you in anyway I hope you will let us know, and, of course, if you can put us on to anything we shall thank you kindly.'

As our visitor's footsteps died away on the stairs, Thorndyke softly closed the door and moved to the window, where he stood meditatively regarding the retreating officer as the latter crossed to Crown Office Row.

'That was a queer interview,' said he.

'Yes,' I agreed 'I don't see why he made the appointment. He hadn't much to tell us.'

'I am not quite sure of that,' said Thorndyke. 'I have a sort of feeling that he came here to tell us something and didn't tell it—at least he thinks he didn't.'

'It seemed to me that he told us nothing,' said I.

'It probably seemed so to him,' replied Thorndyke. 'Whereas, if I am not mistaken, he has made us a free gift of a really valuable piece of information.'

'Well, it may be so,' said I, 'but for my part, I can't see that he gave us a particle of information excepting that the case against Moakey has fallen through. Perhaps it is a technical point that is outside my range.'

'Not at all,' he replied. 'It is just a matter of observation and comparison. You were present when Miller called last time and you have been present today. You have heard all that passed and have had the privilege of observing the Superintendent's by no means unexpressive countenance. Just recall the conversation and consider it by the light of all the known circumstances and see if it does not yield a very interesting suggestion.'

I recalled without difficulty the brief conversation and reflected on it in connection with the Superintendent's rather aggressively nonchalant air. But from that reflection nothing emerged but wonder at my colleague's amazing power of rapid inference. Finally I resolved to write down the conversation and think it over at my leisure.

'I take it,' said I, 'that you don't believe Miller is in such a fog as he professes to be?'

'On the contrary,' Thorndyke replied, 'I think that he is not only in a fog but hard aground. The fact that he meant to conceal and in effect disclosed (as I believe) is a leading fact. But I don't think he realises whither it leads. And, of course, it may not be a fact, after all. I may have drawn an erroneous inference. Obviously, the first thing to do is to test my hypothesis rigorously. In twenty-four hours I shall know whether it is true or false, since the means of verification are quite simple.'

'I am glad of that,' I said sourly, 'for the fog in which you assume that Miller is enveloped is clear daylight compared to that which surrounds me.'

'I think you will find that the fog will clear up under the influence of a little reflection,' said Thorndyke. 'But we are forgetting Miss Blake. You see the bearing of Miller's tidings on her position. Moakey is out of the case. The fingerprints are unknown, and therefore practically valueless. The police evidently have no clue at all. Miss Blake represents the only danger that threatens these men, and we may be pretty sure that they know it. If she could be eliminated their position would be absolutely secure. And, remember, these are desperate men to whom a human life is of no account when set against their own safety. It is an unseemly hour at which to call on a lady, but I think she ought to be warned without delay.'

'I entirely agree with you,' said I. 'We can't stand on ceremony; and after all, it is barely eight o'clock. A taxi will take us there in quarter of an hour.'

'Then let us start at once,' said he, stepping into the lobby for his hat and stick. Leaving a slip of paper on the table for Polton's information, we set forth together and walked rapidly up Inner Temple Lane to the gate. As we emerged, a taxi-cab drew up to deposit a passenger and we hurried forward to secure the reversion when the present tenant should give up possession. A few moments later we had taken our seats and were bowling up Chancery Lane to the soft hum of the taxi's engine.



## X. — A TIMELY WARNING

As the cab rolled swiftly through the quietening streets I turned over once more the two statements that had been made by Superintendent Miller and compared them. Together they had yielded to the amazingly quick intelligence of my friend Thorndyke something that the speaker had not intended to convey. What was the something? The first statement had set forth that the fingerprints were those of Joseph Hedges—or Moakey, as his associates had nicknamed him; the second had set forth that the fingerprints were not his but those of some person who had yet to be identified. The two statements contradicted one another, of course, but the first was admittedly based upon a mistake. What was the fact that emerged from the contradiction?

I revolved the question again and again without seeing any glimmer of light. And then, suddenly, the simple explanation burst upon me. Of course! The prints were those of fingers smeared with Japanese wax. But Japanese wax is used for making furniture polish. There was the solution of this profound mystery. They were Mrs Benham's fingerprints—or perhaps those of the murdered man—made in the process of applying furniture polish to the cabinet. This, the only clue, evaporated into a myth and left Miss Blake's identification the only link with the vanished murderer.

'I think I have found the solution to the fingerprint problem, Thorndyke,' said I.

'Ah!' said he, 'I thought you would if you reflected on it. What is it?'

'They are Mrs Benham's fingerprints, or else Drayton's. They were made in the course of polishing the furniture.'

'An excellent suggestion, Anstey,' he replied, 'which doesn't seem to have occurred to the police. I suspected it as soon as I saw the waxy material of the fingerprints. It doesn't happen to be the correct explanation, I am glad to say, for it would be a singularly unilluminating one. I took the fingerprints both of Mrs. Benham and the deceased this morning before the inquest, but I didn't think it necessary to mention the matter to the police. It is quite clear to me that they are not laying their cards on the table. In point of fact, they have only one card, and my impression is that they are mistaking the back of that for the face. But here we are at our destination.'

We sprang out of the cab, and having dismissed it, gave a pull at the studio bell. The wicket was opened by Miss Blake herself, and I hastened to make the necessary apologies.

'I have come back again, you see, Miss Blake, and with reinforcements. It is an unholy time for making a call, but we have come on a matter of business. Dr. Thorndyke thought it advisable that you should be told something and given certain advice without delay.'

'Well,' she said graciously, 'you are both very welcome, business or no business. Won't you come in?'

'Is Percy in the studio?'

'Yes. He has finished his home lessons and is doing a little building before going to bed.'

'Then we had better say what we have to say here, or perhaps in the passage.'

We stepped through the wicket and closed it, and as we stood in the dark entry, Miss Blake remarked: This is very secret and portentous. You are filling me with curiosity.'

'Then we will proceed to satisfy it. To begin with, do you remember a woman who jostled us rather rudely at the door when we were going in to the inquest?'

'Yes, I remember the incident, but I didn't notice the woman particularly, except that she gave me a rather impertinent stare and that she was a horrid-looking woman.'

'Well, she either lives about here or she followed us deliberately from Hampstead. She must have come on the same car as we did; for when I turned into Jacob Street I saw her prowling up the opposite side of the road, and when she came opposite this house, she crossed and looked at the number on the door—and the name on your plate.'

'That was very inquisitive of her,' said Miss Blake. 'But does it matter?'

'It may be of no significance at all,' said Thorndyke. 'But under the special circumstances it would be unwise to ignore the warning that it may convey.'

'What are the special circumstances?' she asked.

'They are these,' he replied. 'You heard Inspector Badger say in his evidence this morning that the police have a very promising clue? Well, that clue has broken off short. I believe the police have now no clue at all, and the murderers pretty certainly know it. But you stated publicly that you are confident that you could identify the man whom you saw. That statement is certain to be known, or to become known, to these men; and they will consequently know that you are a serious menace to their safety, and the only one; that your ability to recognise one of them is the only circumstance that stands between them and absolute, perfect security. But for this one fact they could walk abroad, safe from any possible recognition. They could stand outside Scotland Yard and snap their fingers at the police. Now, I don't want to be an alarmist. But it is necessary to recognise a danger and take the necessary means to guard against it. You see what I mean?'

'I think so. You mean that if I were out of the way these men would be safe from any possibility of discovery, and that it is

consequently to their interest to put me out of the way.'

'Yes, stated bluntly, that is the position. And you know what the characters of these men are.'

'They are certainly not persons who would stick at trifles. Yes, I must admit that your view of the position seems a reasonable one, though I hope things are not as bad as you fear. But what precautions could I take?'

'I suggest that, for the present, you don't go out after dark—at any rate, not alone; that you avoid going about alone as far as is possible, that you especially shun all unfrequented places where you might be suddenly attacked, and that, on all occasions, you bear this danger in mind in considering any unusual circumstances.'

'All this sounds rather alarming,' she said uneasily.

'It is alarming,' Thorndyke agreed, 'and I am extremely sorry to have to impress it on you. But I would further impress on you that you have friends—two of them are now present—who are deeply concerned as to your safety and who would consider it a privilege to be called upon at any time for help or advice. I am always at your service, and I am sure Mr. Anstey is too, as well as Sir Lawrence Drayton.'

'Then,' said Miss Blake, 'the compensations are greater than the evil for which they compensate. I welcome the danger if it brings me such kind friends. And now you really must come in for a little while, or Percy will accuse me of gossiping with "followers" at the gate.'

She led the way down the paved passage and I steered Thorndyke with an expert hand past the scattered monoliths and the unfinished tombstone until we reached the door, where Miss Blake stopped to hold aside the curtain. As we entered Percy looked up from his work and then, in his quaint, self-possessed way came forward to welcome us.

'How do you like my tower now it's finished, Mr. Anstey?' he asked, regarding his work complacently, with his head on one side.

We stood by him looking at the building—a model of a church tower some three feet in height—and I observed with a sort of proprietary pride that Thorndyke was deeply impressed.

'This is really a remarkable piece of work,' said he. 'Where do you get your bricks?'

'I make them of clay,' replied Percy, 'and let them dry hard. I make one as a model and make a plaster mould of it. Then all the rest are just squeezes from the mould. So I can get any shaped bricks that I like, and as many of them as I want. It's much cheaper than buying them, and besides, the bought bricks are no use for serious work.'

'No,' Thorndyke agreed, 'you couldn't build a tower like that with ready-made bricks, at least with none that I have ever seen. Are you going to be an architect?'

'Yes,' the boy replied gravely, 'if we can afford it. If not I shall be a mason. Mr Wingrave—out in the yard, you know—lets me do a bit of stone-cutting sometimes. I shouldn't mind being a mason, but I should like to work on buildings, not on tombstones. I love buildings.'

Thorndyke looked at the boy with keen and sympathetic interest. 'It is a good thing,' said he, 'to know what you want and to have a definite bent and purpose in life. I should think you ought to be a happy man and a useful one if you keep up your enthusiasm. Don't you think so, Miss Blake?'

'I do indeed,' she replied. 'Percy has a real passion for buildings and he knows quite a lot about them. His copy of Parker is nearly worn out. And I don't see why he shouldn't be an architect and make his hobby his living.'

As she was speaking, I looked at her and noticed that she was wearing the locket suspended from a bead necklace.

'I see you have taken your new acquisition into wear,' I remarked.

'Yes,' she replied. 'I have just hooked it to this necklace, but I must get some more secure attachment. Have you seen this locket, Dr Thorndyke?'

'No,' he answered, and as she unhooked it and gave it to him to inspect, he continued: 'This is what poor Mr Drayton used to call his "little Sphinx," isn't it?'

'Yes, because it seemed always to be propounding riddles. But the riddles are inside.'

'One of them is outside,' said Thorndyke, 'though it is not a very difficult one. I mean the peculiar construction and workmanship.'

'What is there unusual about that?' she asked eagerly.

'Well,' he replied, 'it is not ordinary jeweller's construction. The normal way to make a locket is to build it up of sheet metal. The sides would be made first by bending a stout strip into a hoop of the proper shape—nearly square, in this case—and joining the ends with solder. Then the back and front would be soldered on to the hoop and the latter cut through vertically with a fine saw, dividing the locket into two exactly similar halves. Then the hinge and the suspension ring would be soldered on, and the flange fastened in with solder. But in this case the method has been quite different. Each half of the locket was a single casting, which included half a hinge and one suspension ring. Probably both halves were cast from a single half-model and the superfluous part of the hinge filed off. Then each half was worked on the stake and pitch-block to harden the metal and the final finishing and fitting done with the file and stone. The engraving must have been done after

everything but the hinge was finished.'

'It must have been very awkward to engrave that small writing inside, with the edges projecting,' said Miss Blake.

Thorndyke opened the locket, and taking his Coddington lens from his pocket, examined the writing closely. 'If you look at it through the lens,' said he, 'you will see that it is not engraved. It is etched, which would have disposed of the difficulty to a great extent.'

Miss Blake and I examined the minute writing, and through the lens it was easy to see that the delicate lines were bitten, not engraved.

'You were saying,' said Miss Blake, as the locket and lens were passed to Percy (who, having examined the inscription, extended his investigations to his fingertips and various other objects before reluctantly surrendering the lens) 'that the riddle of the construction is not a difficult one. What is the answer to it?'

'I think,' he replied, 'the inscription inside supplies the answer. That inscription was clearly put there for some purpose to which the original owner attached some importance. It apparently conveyed some kind of admonition or instruction which was hardly likely to be addressed to himself. But if the message was of importance it was worth while to take measures to ensure its permanence. And that is what has been done. There are no loose or separable parts, no soldered joints to break away. Each half of the locket is a single piece of solid metal, including the hinge and suspension ring. And you notice that the hinge is unusually massive, and that each half of the locket has its own suspension ring, so that if the hinge should break, both halves would still be securely suspended. And there was no loose ring to chafe through and break.'

'Don't you think,' she asked, 'that there was originally a loose ring passing through both of the eyes?'

'No,' he answered. 'If you look carefully at the two eyes you will see that the holes through them have been most carefully smoothed and rounded. Evidently the locket was meant to be suspended by a cord or thong, and the position of the eyes with a hole through from back to front shows that the cord was intended to be tied in a single knot where it passed through—a much more secure arrangement than a chain, any one link of which may, unnoticed, wear thin and break at any unusual strain.'

'And you think that the message or whatever it was that the inscription conveyed was really something of importance?' As she asked the question, Miss Blake looked at Thorndyke with a suppressed eagerness at which I inwardly smiled. The Lady of Shallot evidently had hopes of Merlin.

'That is what the precautions suggest,' was his reply. 'It appeared important to the person who took the precautions.'

'And do you suppose that it would be possible to guess what the nature of the message was?'

'One could judge better,' he replied 'if one knew what passages the reader is referred to.'

'I can show you the passages,' she said. 'I have looked them up, and Mr Anstey and I went over them together and could make nothing of them.'

'That doesn't sound very encouraging,' said Thorndyke as she ran to the cabinet and brought out her book of notes. 'However, we shall see if a further opinion is of any help.' He took the note-book from her and read through the entries slowly and with close attention. Then he handed the book back to her.

'One thing is fairly evident,' said he. 'The purpose of the writer was not pious instruction. Whatever was intended to be conveyed did not lie on the surface, for the individual passages are singularly barren of meaning, while the collection as a whole is a mere jumble of quotations without any apparent sequence or connection. The passages must have had some meaning previously agreed on, or, more probably, they formed the key of a code or cipher used for secret correspondence.'

'If they form the key of a cipher,' said Miss Blake, 'do you think it would be possible to work out the cipher by studying them?'

'I suppose it would be possible,' he replied, 'since a cipher must work by some sort of rule. But people who make ciphers do not take great pains to make them easily decipherable to the uninitiated. And then we are only guessing that they are the key to a cipher. They may be something quite different; some form of cryptogram that would be utterly unintelligible without some key or counterpart that we haven't got. Do you think of trying to decipher them or extract the hidden meaning?'

'I am rather curious about them,' she admitted, 'and rather interested in ciphers and cryptograms.'

'Well,' said Thorndyke, 'you may succeed. More probably you will draw a blank—but in any case I think you will get a run for your money.'

Once more with his lens he examined the locket inside and out, not omitting the hallmark on the back, on which he dwelt for some time. Then, still holding the locket in his hand, he said: 'You ought to have this cover-glass replaced. The hair is part of the relic and ought not to be exposed to loss or injury.'

'Yes,' said she, 'I ought to get it done, but I don't much like trusting it to an unknown jeweller.'

'Would you like Polton to do it for you?' Thorndyke asked. 'He is not a stranger, and you know he is a first-class workman.'

'Oh, if Mr Polton would do it I should be delighted and most grateful. Do you think he would?'

'I think he would be highly flattered at being asked,' said Thorndyke. 'I will take it back with me if you like, and get him to put in the fresh glass at once.'

Miss Blake accepted this offer joyfully, and taking the locket from Thorndyke, she proceeded, with great care and a quantity of tissue paper, to make it into a little packet. While she was thus engaged, the bell in the yard rang loudly and Percy ran out to open the gate. In less than a minute he re-entered the studio carrying a brown-paper parcel.

'Miss Winifred Blake,' he announced. 'Shall I see what's in it, Winnie?'

'I suppose you won't be happy till you do,' she replied, whereupon he gleefully cut the string and removed the paper, exposing a cardboard box, of which he lifted the lid.

'My eye, Winnie!' he exclaimed. 'It's tuck. I wonder who it's from. And it's for us both. "To Winifred and Percival Blake, with love." Whose love, I wonder. Can you spot the handwriting?' He passed a slip of paper to his sister and exhibited a shallow box filled with large chocolate sweets on which he gazed gloatingly.

Thorndyke, who had just received the little packet from Miss Blake and was putting it into his pocket, watched the boy attentively, interested, as I supposed, by the sudden descent from the heights of architectural design to frank, boyish gluttony.

'I don't recognise the writing at all,' said Miss Blake, 'and I can't imagine who can have sent this.'

'Well, it doesn't matter,' said Percy. 'Let's sample them.' He passed the box to his sister—still closely watched by Thorndyke, I noticed—and as she put out her hand to pick up one of the sweets, my colleague asked in a significant tone: 'Are you sure that you don't know the handwriting?'

The tone in which the question was asked was so emphatic that she looked at him in surprise. 'No,' she answered, 'the writing is quite strange to me.'

'Then,' said he, 'the writer is possibly a stranger.'

She looked at him with a puzzled expression, and I noticed that he was gazing at her with a strange fixity. After a pause he continued:

'We were speaking just now of unusual circumstances. Would not a gift of food from a stranger be an unusual circumstance?'

In an instant his meaning flashed upon me, and upon her too, for she took the box quickly from her brother and her face became deathly pale.

'I think, Percy dear,' she said, 'if you don't mind very much, we won't touch these tonight. Do you mind?'

'Of course I don't,' he replied, 'if you would rather keep 'em till tomorrow.'

Nevertheless the boy looked curiously at his sister, and it was clear to me that he saw that there was 'something in the wind'. But he asked no questions and made no comment, sauntering back to his tower and looking it over critically.

'It's really time you went to bed, Percy,' Miss Blake said after a pause.

'Is it?' he asked. 'What's the time?'

'It is getting on for ten, and you have to be up at half-past six.'

'It's always "getting on" for ten, you know,' said he. 'The question is, how far has it got? But there! It's no good arguing. I suppose I shall get chucked out if I don't go peaceably.' He offered a friendly hand to me and Thorndyke in succession, and having given his sister a hug and a kiss, took his departure. And again I thought I detected in his manner a perception of something below the surface that accounted for his sudden dismissal.

'I suspect Master Percy smells a fox,' said I, 'but is too polite to mention it.'

'It is very likely,' said Miss Blake. 'He is wonderfully quick and observant, and he is extraordinarily discreet. In most respects he is quite a normal boy, but in others he is more like a man.'

'And a very well-bred man, too,' said I.

'Yes, he is nice boy and the best of brothers. But now, Dr Thorndyke, about these sweets. Do you really think there is anything wrong with them?'

'I don't say that,' replied Thorndyke, 'but, of course, when you have swallowed one, it is too late to inquire. May I look at that paper?'

Miss Blake took the slip of paper from the box and handed it to him, and once more the lens came into requisition.

'Yes,' he said, after somewhat prolonged examination of the writing, 'this is not reassuring. It is quite clear that this writing was traced over a previous writing in lead pencil. A hard rubber has been used to take out the pencil marks, but the ink has fixed them in several places. If you look at the writing carefully through the lens you can see the fine, dark pencil line forming a sort of core to the broader ink line. And you can also distinguish several minute crumbs of blackened rubber—little black rolls with pointed ends.'



'But why should it have been written first in pencil?' Miss Blake asked.

'For the purpose of disguising the handwriting,' replied Thorndyke. 'It is a common practice. Of course, in the case of a forger copying a signature, its purpose is obvious. He takes a pencil tracing of the original signature, goes over it in ink and rubs out the pencil—if he can. But it is used in producing feigned handwriting as well. It is difficult to write direct with a pen in a hand which is quite different from one's own. But if a preliminary trial sketch is done in pencil, and touched up if necessary, and then traced over deliberately with the pen, the result may be quite unlike one's own handwriting. But, in any case, this underlying pencil writing is manifestly abnormal and therefore suspicious. Shall we see if there is anything unusual in the appearance of the sweets?'

She passed him the box, which he placed on the table under the gaslight and looked over systematically. Then he turned the sweets, one after the other, on their sides, and when they were all in this position, he again looked them over.

'It seems hardly possible,' said I, 'that the woman—if it is she whom you suspect—could have prepared a set of poisoned sweets in such a short time. It was past four o'clock when she came and looked at the plate, and it is not ten yet. There doesn't seem to have been time.'

'There has been about five hours,' said Thorndyke, 'and I see by the postmark on the wrapper that the parcel was posted in this neighbourhood barely two hours ago. That leaves three hours, which would have been sufficient. But she might have had the things prepared in advance, and merely waited for the inquest to get the name and particulars. And the sender may not be this woman at all. And again, there may be no poison in the sweets. We are only taking precautions against a possibility. But looking at these things all together, there seems to me to be a suggestion of their having been patched with liquid chocolate round the sides. If that is so, they will have been cut open horizontally and the halves fitted together again, and the purpose of the patching will have been to hide the join. Here is a very well-marked specimen. I think we will take it as a test case.'

He picked out the sweet, and with his pocket-knife, began very delicately to scrape away the outer coat of chocolate all round the sides, while we drew up our chairs and watched him anxiously. Presently he paused and silently held the sweet towards us, indicating a spot with the point of his knife; and looking at that spot where the outer coating had been scraped away, I could clearly make out an indented line. He then resumed his scraping, following the line, until he had worked round the whole circumference. And now it was quite obvious that the sweet had been divided into an upper and a lower half and the two parts rejoined.

'I am afraid it is a true bill, Thorndyke,' said I.

'I think so,' he agreed, 'but we shall soon see.' He inserted his knife into the encircling crevice, and giving it a gentle turn, raised the top half, which he then lifted off. At once I could see that the exposed surfaces of the white interior of the sweet were coated with a glistening white powder, worked into the soft material of the filling. Thorndyke produced his lens, and through it examined the cut surface for a few moments. Then he passed the half sweet and the lens to me.

'What do you suppose this stuff is, Thorndyke?' I asked, when I had inspected the sweet, and then passed it and the lens to Miss Blake. 'It looks like finely powdered china or white enamel.'

'It looks like—and I have no doubt is—arsenious acid, or white arsenic, as it is commonly called; and I should say there is rather more than two grains in this sweet. It is a heavy substance.'

'Is that a fatal dose?' I asked.

'Yes. And it is extremely unlikely that only one sweet would have been eaten. Two or three would contain a dose that would produce death very rapidly.'

We were silent for a few moments. Suddenly Miss Blake burst into tears and buried her face in her hands, sobbing almost hysterically. Thorndyke looked at her with a curious expression, stern and even wrathful, and yet with a certain softness of compassion, but he said nothing. As to me, I was filled with fury against the wretch who had done this unspeakable thing, but, like Thorndyke, I could find no words that were adequate.

Presently Miss Blake recovered her self-possession somewhat, and as she wiped her eyes, she apologised for her outburst.

'Pray forgive me!' she exclaimed. 'But it is horrible—horrible! Just think! But for the infinitely unlikely chance of your coming in tonight Percy would have eaten at least two or three of those sweets. By now he would have been dead, or dying in agony, and I unable to help him! It is a frightful thought. Nobody would have known anything until Mrs Wingrave came in the morning and found our bodies! And the wretch may try again.'

'That won't matter much,' said Thorndyke. 'You are now on your guard. It will be best to think as little of this episode as you can. It has been a narrow escape, but it is past. You must fix your attention on the future.'

'But what can we do?' she asked despairingly.

'You must walk warily and never for one moment forget this implacable, ruthless enemy. No opportunity must be given. Do not go out after dark without efficient protection, and avoid going abroad alone at any time. You had better not go to the gate after nightfall, neither you nor Percy. Can you not arrange for some one to answer the bell for you?'

'I could ask Mrs Wingrave, the sculptor's wife. Their rooms open on the yard. But what could I tell her?'

'You will have to tell her as much as is necessary. And, of course, Percy must be told. It is very unfortunate, but we can take no risks. You must impress upon him that under no circumstances whatever must he eat or drink anything that is given or sent to him by strangers or of which he does not know the antecedents. Does he go to school?'

'Yes. He goes to the Elizabeth Woodville Grammar School, near Regents Park. He usually gets home about five o'clock. Sometimes I go and meet him, but he has some school-fellows who live near here and who generally walk home with him.'

'Then let him come home with them. There is no reason to suppose that he is in any danger apart from you. And let me impress upon you again that Mr Anstey and I are always at your service. While this danger lasts—I hope it will soon pass—don't scruple to make any use of us that circumstances may require. If you have to go anywhere at night, we can always arrange for you to have an escort. At a pinch, we could secure the help of the police, but we don't want to do that unless we are compelled. And—it seems contradictory advice to give you—but having taken all precautions, try not to think about this incident of tonight, or to dwell on the danger more than is necessary to keep your attention on the alert. And now we must wish you good night, Miss Blake. I will take these sweets with me for more complete examination.'

'I can never thank you enough for all your kindness,' she said, as he wrapped the box in its original paper, 'and I shall have no hesitation in treating you as the good and generous friends that you have proved tonight. I feel that Percy and I are in your hands, and we shouldn't wish to be in better.' She walked out with us to the gate, and at the wicket shook our hands warmly, and indeed with no little emotion. And when we had seen the wicket safely closed on her, and taken a look up and down the street, we turned westward and started on our way home.

---

## XI. — THE BLUE HAIR

'What are you going to do, Anstey?' Thorndyke asked as we reached the corner of Jacob Street. 'Are you going to Hampstead or are you coming home with me?'

'What are you going to do tonight?' I asked in return.

'I shall make a rough qualitative test of the substance in that sweet,' he replied, 'just to settle definitely whether it is or is not arsenic.'

'Have you any doubt on the subject?' I asked.

'No,' he answered. 'But still it is not a matter of fact until it has been verified by analysis. My own conviction on the subject is only a state of mind, which is not transferable as evidence. A chemical demonstration is a fact which can be deposited in sworn testimony.'

'Then,' said I, 'I shall come home with you and hear the result of your analysis, although your certainty would be good enough for me.'

We walked down to the bottom of Hampstead Road where we boarded an omnibus bound for Charing Cross. For some time nothing more was said, each of us being immersed in reflection on the events of the evening.

'It is a horrible affair,' I said at length, assuming that we were still thinking on the same subject, 'and a terrible thing to reflect that the world we live in should contain such wretches.'

'It is,' he agreed. 'But the mitigating circumstance is that these wretches are nearly always fools. That is the reassuring element in the present case.'

'In what way reassuring?' I asked.

'I mean,' said he, 'the palpable folly of the whole proceeding. We have here no subtle, wary criminal who works with considered strategy under secure cover, but just the common arsenic fool who delivers himself into your hands by his own stupidity.'

'But what is the evidence of the stupidity?'

'My dear Anstey!' he exclaimed. 'Look at the crudity of method. The discharge, broadcast, of a boxful of poisoned food under manifestly suspicious circumstances, with the poison barely concealed; the faked writing, which a common policeman would have detected, the absence of any plausible origin of the gift, and the nature of the poison itself. That alone is diagnostic. Arsenic is typically a fool's poison. No competent poisoner would dream of using such a material.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because its properties are exactly the reverse of those which would make a poison safe to use. The fatal dose is relatively large—not less than two grains and for security, considerably more. The effects are extremely variable and uncertain, making necessary the use of really large doses. The material is rather conspicuous, it is only slightly soluble in water and still less so in tea or coffee; it is easily recognised by simple chemical tests, even in the minutest quantities. It is practically indestructible, and its strong preservative effects on the dead body make it easy to demonstrate its presence years after death. A man who poisons a person with arsenic creates a record of the fact which will last, at least, for the term of his own lifetime.'

'That isn't much benefit to the person who has been poisoned,' I remarked.

'No,' he admitted. 'But we are considering the poisoner's point of view. It is not enough for him to succeed in killing his victim. He has to avoid killing himself at the same time. A poisoner sets out to commit a secret murder, and the secrecy is the test of his efficiency. If his methods are easily detectable, and if he leaves a record which stands against him in perpetuity, he is an inefficient poisoner. And that is the case of the arsenic practitioner. He runs a great present risk, since the symptoms of arsenic poisoning are conspicuous and fairly characteristic; and he leaves traces of his crime which nothing but cremation will destroy.'

Our discussion had brought us to our chambers, where Thorndyke proceeded straight up to the laboratory, breaking in upon Polton, who was seated at his bench, putting the finishing touches to the large and elaborate pedometer.

'We need not disturb you, Polton,' said Thorndyke. 'I am just going to make a rough qualitative test for arsenic.'

Polton instantly laid down his watchmaker's glass and unlocked a cupboard on the chemical side of the laboratory. 'You will want a Marsh's apparatus and the materials for Reinsch's test, I suppose, sir?' said he.

'Yes. But we will begin with the liquid tests. I shall want a glass mortar and some hydrochloric acid.'

Polton put the necessary appliances on the bench and added a large bottle labelled 'Distilled Water,' while I seated myself on a stool and watched the analysis with a slightly vague though highly interested recognition of the processes that I had so often expounded to juries. I saw Thorndyke open the box, take from it the two halves of the divided sweet, and drop them into the little glass mortar, and having poured on them some distilled water and a little acid, rub them with the glass pestle until they were reduced to a muddy-looking liquid. This liquid he carefully filtered into a beaker, when it became

clear and practically colourless, like water, and this watery-looking fluid formed the material for the succeeding tests.

Of these the first three were performed in test-tubes into each of which a small quantity of the clear solution was poured, and then to each was added a few drops of certain other clear liquids. The result was very striking. In two of the tubes the clear liquid instantly turned to a dense, opaque yellow, somewhat like yolk of egg, while in the third it changed to a bright, opaque emerald green.

'What are those precipitates?' I asked.

'The two yellow ones,' he replied, 'are arsenite of silver and arsenic sulphide. The green one is arsenite of copper. As there is sugar and some other organic matter in this solution, I shall not carry these tests any farther, but they are pretty conclusive. How are you getting on, Polton?'

'I think we are ready, sir,' was the reply; on which I crossed to the bench on which he had been at work. Here on a tripod over a Bunsen gas-burner, was a beaker containing a number of little pieces of copper foil and a clear, watery liquid which was boiling briskly.

'This is Reinsch's test,' Thorndyke explained. 'You see that this copper-foil remains bright in the dilute acid, showing that both the metal and the acid are free from arsenic. I shall now introduce a few drops of the suspected liquid, and if it contains arsenic the copper-foil will become grey or black according to the amount of arsenic present.' As he spoke, he took the beaker containing the filtered liquid from the mortar and poured about a tablespoonful into that containing the copper-foil. I watched eagerly for the result, and very soon a change began to appear. The ruddy lustre of the copper gradually turned to a steely grey and from that to a glistening black.

'You see,' said Thorndyke, 'that the reaction is very distinct. The quantity of arsenic present is, in an analytical sense, quite large. And now we will try the most definite and conclusive test of all—Marsh's.' He turned to the other apparatus which Polton had made ready, which consisted of a squat bottle with two short necks, through one of which passed a tall glass funnel, and through the other a glass tube fitted with a tap and terminating in a fine jet. The contents of the bottle—lumps of zinc immersed in sulphuric acid—were effervescing briskly, and the tap was turned on to allow the gas to escape through the jet. To the latter Polton now applied a lighted match, and immediately there appeared a little pale violet flame. Picking up a white tile which had been placed in readiness, Thorndyke held it for a moment in the flame and then looked at it.

'You see,' said he, 'that the tile is quite unsoiled. If there had been the smallest trace of arsenic in the bottle, a dark spot would have appeared on the tile. So we may take it that our chemicals are free from arsenic. Now let us try the solution of the sweet.'

He took up the beaker containing the solution of the disintegrated chocolate, and poured very slowly, drop by drop, about a teaspoonful into the funnel of the bottle. Then, after having given it time to mix thoroughly with the other contents, he once more picked up the tile and held it for an instant in the flame. The result was, to me, most striking. In the very moment when the tile touched the flame, there appeared on the white surface a circular spot, black, lustrous, and metallic.

'That,' said Thorndyke, 'might be either antimony or arsenic. By its appearance it is obviously metallic arsenic, but still we will make the differential test. If it is arsenic it will dissolve in a solution of chlorinated lime; if it is antimony it will not.' He removed the stopper from a bottle labelled 'Chlorinated Lime,' and poured a little pool of the solution on the tile. Almost immediately the black spot began to fade at the edges, and to grow smaller and fainter until at length it disappeared altogether.

'That completes our inquiry,' said Thorndyke as he laid down the tile. 'For the purposes of evidence in a court of law, a more searching and detailed analysis would be necessary. To produce conviction in the minds of a jury we should have to be able to say exactly how much arsenic was in each of the sweets. That, however, is no concern of ours. The criminal intention is all that matters to us. And now, Anstey, I must leave you for a while to entertain yourself with a book. I have to do some work in the office on another case. But we will take this ill-omened box down and put it in a safe place.'

He took the box of sweets, with its original wrapper, and when we descended to the sitting-room, he closed it up, sealed it, and signed and dated it; and having made a note of the particulars of the postmark, deposited it in the safe. Then he retired to the office, where I assumed that he had in hand some work of compilation or reference, for the 'office' was in fact rather a miniature law library, in which was stored a singularly complete collection of works bearing upon our special branch of legal practice.

When he had gone, I ran my eye vaguely along the book-shelves in search of a likely volume with which to pass the time. But the box of poisoned sweets haunted me and refused to be ejected from my thoughts. Eventually I brought out Miss Blake's manuscript from the drawer in which I had put it when Miller had arrived, and drawing an easy-chair up to the fire, sat listlessly glancing over the well-remembered pages, but actually thinking of the writer; of the brave, sweet-faced girl and the fine, manly boy to whom she was at once sister and mother. What, I wondered uncomfortably, was to be the end of this? Only by the merest hairbreadth had she and the boy, this very night, escaped a dreadful death. Soon the wretches who had contrived this diabolical crime would discover that their plot had miscarried in some way. What would they do next? It was hardly likely that they would try poison again, but there are plenty of other ways of committing murder. It was all very well to say that they were fools. So they might be. But they were unknown fools. That was the trouble. They could make their preparations unwatched, and approach unsuspected within striking distance. If your enemy is unknown it is almost

impossible to be on your guard against him. In one direction only safety lay—in detection. In the moment when the identity of the criminals should become known, the danger would be at an end.

But when would that moment arrive? So far as the position was known to me, it was not even in sight. The police admitted that their clue had broken off short and apparently they had no other; at least that was Thorndyke's opinion. But what of Thorndyke himself? Had he any clue? My feeling was that he had not. It seemed impossible that he could have, for these two men had, as it were, dropped down out of the sky and then vanished into space. No one knew who they were, whence they had come, or whither they had gone. And they seemed to have left not a trace for the imagination to work on.

On the other hand, Thorndyke was Thorndyke; an inscrutable man; silent, self-contained, and even secretive, in spite of his genial exterior. I thought of him, at this very moment, sitting calmly in the office with all his faculties quietly transferred to a fresh case, unmoved by the thrilling events of the evening, though it was he who had instantly seen the danger, he who had immediately suspected the 'Greek Gift.' And as I thought of him poring over his reports, and marvelled at his detachment, I recalled the many instances of his wonderful power of inference from almost invisible data, and found myself hoping that even now, when to me all seemed dark, some glimmer of light was visible to him.

It had turned half-past eleven when I heard a light but deliberate step ascending the stair. Instantly I stole on tiptoe to the office, and had just opened the door when a tapping—apparently with the handle of a stick or umbrella—on our 'oak' announced the arrival of a visitor.

'Shall I open the door, Thorndyke?' I whispered.

'Yes,' he answered. 'It is Brodribb. I know his knock. Tell him I shall have finished in a few minutes. And you might run up and tell Polton that he is here. He will know what to do.'

I accordingly went out and threw open the 'oak,' and there, sure enough, was Mr Brodribb, looking with his fine, rich complexion, his silky white hair, and his sumptuous, old-fashioned raiment, as if he had stepped out of the frame of some Georgian portrait.

'Good evening, Anstey,' said he, 'might even say "good night." It's a devil of a time to come stirring you up, but I saw a light in your windows, and I rather particularly wanted to have a word or two with Thorndyke. Is he in?'

'Yes. He is in the office surrounded by a sort of landslide of reports—assizes, Central Criminal, and various assorted. He will have finished in a few minutes. Meanwhile I will run up and let Polton know you are here.'

At the mention of Polton's name methought his bright blue eye grew brighter, and by the way in which he murmured 'Ha!' and smiled as he subsided into an armchair, I judged that—as our American cousins would say—he 'had been there before;' and this impression was confirmed when I made my announcement in the laboratory, where I found Polton dancing his pedometer up and down and listening ecstatically to its measured tick.

'Mr Brodribb,' said he. 'Let me see, it is the sixty-three that he likes. Yes; and Lord, he does like it! It's a pleasure to see him drink it!'

'Well, Polton,' said I, 'it is an altruistic pleasure, and if it would add to your enjoyment to see me drink some, too, I am prepared to make an effort.'

'You couldn't do it as Mr Brodribb does,' said Polton, 'and you haven't got the complexion. Still—I'll bring it down in a minute or two, when I've got it filtered into the decanter.'

On this I descended and rejoined Mr Brodribb, and having offered him a cigar, which he declined—no doubt with a view to preserving his gustatory sense unimpaired—sat down and filled my pipe.

'I looked in,' said Mr Brodribb, 'on my way home to ask Thorndyke a question. I met Drayton today—only saw him for a few moments—and he said something about wanting some information respecting Arthur Blake of Beauchamp Blake. I understood him to say that the matter arose out of the inquest on his brother; can't see how the devil it could, but that is what I gathered. Now, before I tell him anything, I should like to know what's in the wind. What's he after? Do you happen to know?'

'I think I do, to some extent,' said I, and I gave him a brief account of the circumstances and a summary of Miss Blake's evidence.

'I see,' said he. 'Then this young lady will be Peter Blake's daughter. But what does Drayton want to know? And why does he want to know it? He said something about Thorndyke, too. Now, where does Thorndyke come in?'

As if in answer to the question, my colleague emerged at this moment from the office, slipping a large note-book into his pocket. As he greeted our visitor, I found myself speculating on the contents of that note-book and wondering what kind of information he had been disinterring from those piles of arid-looking reports of assizes, quarter-sessions, and the Central Criminal Court. The greetings were hardly finished when Polton entered with a tray on which were a decanter, three glasses, and a biscuit jar; and having placed a small table adjacent to Mr Brodribb's chair, deposited the tray thereon with a crinkly smile of satisfaction, and departed after an instantaneous glance of profound significance in my direction.

Thorndyke filled the three glasses, and drawing a chair nearer to the fire, sat down and began to fill his pipe; while Brodribb lifted his glass, looked at it reflectively, took an experimental sip, savoured it with grave attention, and again looked at the glass.

'A noble wine, Thorndyke,' he pronounced solemnly. 'I don't deserve this after coming and routing you out at close upon midnight. But I haven't come for mere gossip. I've just been putting my case to Anstey,' and here he repeated what he had told me of his interview with Sir Lawrence. 'Now, what I want to know,' he concluded, 'is, what is Drayton after? He seems disposed to interest himself in Peter Blake's daughter—and his son, too, I suppose.'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke, 'and for that matter, I may say that I feel a benevolent interest in the young people myself, and so, I think, does Anstey.'

'Then,' said Brodribb, 'I'm going to ask you a plain question. Is there any idea of contesting the title of the present tenant of the Blake property—Arthur Blake?'

'I should say certainly not,' replied Thorndyke. 'Drayton's object is, I think, to ascertain whether there is any prospect of circumstances becoming favourable in the future for the revival of Peter Blake's claim—or rather Percival Blake's, as it would now be. He wants to know who the present heir is, what is his relation to the present tenant, and he would like to know as much as possible about Arthur Blake himself, particularly in regard to the probability of his marrying. And, as I said, Anstey and I are not uninterested in the matter.'

'Well, if that is all,' said Brodribb, 'I can answer you without any breach of confidence to my client. As to the heir, his name is Charles Templeton, but what his relationship to Arthur Blake is, I can't say at the moment. He is a pretty distant relative, I know. With regard to Arthur Blake, I can tell you all about him, for I have made some inquiries on my own account. And I can tell you something that will interest you more than the probability of his marrying—he is trying to sell the property.'

'The deuce he is!' exclaimed Thorndyke. 'I suppose I mustn't ask why he wants to sell?'

'I don't know that there is any secret about it. His own explanation is that he doesn't care for England and would like to get back to Australia, where he has lived nearly all his life; and I daresay there is some truth in that, for he is like a fish out of water—doesn't understand the ways of an English landowner at all. But I don't think that's the whole of it. He knows about this claim of Peter Blake's, and he knows that Peter Blake's son is living; and then—you know about the title-deeds, I suppose?'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke. 'Miss Blake has told us the whole story.'

'Well, I suspect that, with this claim in the air and the mystery of the whereabouts of the title-deeds, he feels that his tenure of the property is a little insecure. So he would like to sell it and clear off with the money. And, mind you, he is not entirely wrong. Peter Blake's claim was a bona fide claim. It broke down from the lack of documentary evidence. But it is always possible for documents to reappear, and if these documents ever should, the position would be very different. And, to tell the honest truth, I shouldn't be particularly afflicted if they did reappear.'

'Why wouldn't you?' I asked.

'Well,' Brodribb replied, 'you know, one gets a sort of sentimental interest in a historic estate which one has known all one's life. I am Arthur Blake's solicitor, it is true. But I feel that I have responsibilities towards the whole family and the estate itself. I have much more sentiment about the old house and its lands than Blake himself has. I hate the idea of selling an old place like that, which has been in one family since the time of Henry the Eighth, as if it were a mere speculative builder's estate. Besides, it isn't playing the game. An inherited estate belongs to the family, and a man who has received it from his ancestors has no right to dispossess his posterity. I told him so, and he didn't like it a bit.'

'What sort of man is he?' I asked.

'He's a colonial, and not a good type of colonial. Gruff and short and none too well-mannered, and, of course, he doesn't know anybody in the county. And I should think he is a confirmed bachelor, for he lives—when he is at home—in the new part of the house, with three servants and his man, as if he were in a bachelor flat.'

'How did you manage to dig him up?' Thorndyke asked.

'I began to make inquiries as soon as it was certain that he would be Arnold Blake's successor. That was years ago. I ascertained his whereabouts and got into touch with him pretty easily, but I really never knew much about him until a few weeks back, when I came across a man who had just retired from the Australian Police. He knew all about Blake, so I took the opportunity to get a pretty full history of him and make out a little dossier to keep by me. You never know when a trifle of information may come in useful.'

'No,' Thorndyke agreed as he refilled our visitor's glass. 'Knowledge is power.'

'Quite so,' said Brodribb, 'and it is well to know whom you are dealing with. But, in fact, this fellow Blake is quite an interesting character.'

'So the police seem to have thought,' I remarked.

'Oh, I don't think there was anything against Blake,' said he, 'excepting that he kept rather queer company at times. My friend first heard of him at a mining camp, where the society was not exactly select, and where he ran a saloon or liquor bar. But he gave that up and took to digging, and he seems to have had quite good luck for a time. Then his claim petered out and he moved off to a new district and started a sawmill with some of his mining pals. There, I think, some of his partners had trouble with the police—I don't know exactly what it was, but he moved off again and rambled about doing all

sorts of odd jobs—boat-building, farming, working as deck hand on a coaster, carpentering—he seems to have been able to turn his hand to anything—and finally he came across his last partner, a man named Owen, a fellow of his own type, who seemed to be able to do anything but stick to one kind of job. Owen was a colonial—he was born at Hobart—and by trade he was a photo-engraver, but he had worked a small type-foundry, run a local newspaper, and done some other jobs that weren't quite so respectable. Blake ran across him at a new town in a mining district, and the circumstances were characteristic of the two men. Owen had started a pottery, but he had just met with an accident and broken his knee-cap. Thereupon Blake took him in hand and fixed his knee-cap up in splints, and as it happened to be the left knee, so that Owen would not be able to work the potter's wheel for a long time, Blake took over the job, worked the wheel, and turned out the pots and pans, while a woman who was associated with Owen—I don't know what their relations were—helped with the kiln and sold the stuff in the town.'

'Why can't you work a potter's wheel with your right foot?' I asked.

'I don't know,' replied Brodribb, 'but I understand that you can't.'

'In an ordinary "kick-wheel,"' said Thorndyke, 'the "kick-bar," or treadle, is on the left side, and has to be if the potter is right-handed, to enable him to steady himself with the right foot.'

'I see,' said I. 'And how long did the pottery last?'

'Not long,' replied Brodribb. 'When Owen got about again, as he couldn't work the wheel, it seems that he got restless and began to hanker for something fresh. Then Blake got a tip from some prospector about some traces of gold in the hills in an outlying district, so they sold the pottery and the three of them went off prospecting; and I think they were engaged in some tentative digging when Blake got my letter telling him that Arnold Blake was dead and that he had come into the property. A deuce of a time he was, too, in getting that letter, for, of course, there was no post out there and they only rode into the town at long intervals.'

'And now,' said Thorndyke, 'he wants to sell the property and get back to his cronies. I should think they would be very glad to see him.'

'I don't know that he wants to join his pals again,' said Brodribb. 'As a man of property, I should think he would keep clear of people of that sort. But in any case, he couldn't. Owen is dead. He must have died soon after Blake left; must have met with an accident when he was alone, for his body was found only a few months ago at the foot of a cliff—just a heap of more or less damaged bones that must have been lying there for several years. The skeleton was found by the merest chance by another prospector.'

'How did he know it was Owen's body?' I asked.

'Well, he knew that Owen had been there and had not been seen for a long time, and he found a signet-ring—a rough affair that Owen had made himself and engraved with a representation of a yew-tree. That was recognised as his.'

'Why a yew-tree?' I asked.

'That was his private mark, a sort of rebus or pun on his Christian name, Hugh.'

'But how was it,' Thorndyke asked, 'that the woman hadn't reported his death?'

'Oh, she had left him quite soon after Blake's departure. The police had an idea that she had gone off with Owen to the South Sea Islands on one of the schooners. At any rate, she disappeared, and they weren't sorry to see the last of her. She was a shady character—and so, apparently, was Owen, for that matter.'

'What was there against her?' I asked.

'Well, I don't know that there was anything very definite, though there may have been. But she turned up rather mysteriously at Melbourne on a Russian tramp steamer, and the police surmised that she had left her country for her country's good and her own. So they entered her name—Laura Levinsky—on their books and kept an eye on her until she went. But, God bless me, what a damned old chatterbox I am! Here am I babbling away at past midnight, and giving you a lot of gossip that is no more your business than it is mine.'

'I think,' said Thorndyke, 'we have all enjoyed the gossip, and as to its irrelevancy, who can tell? At any rate, we gather that there is no immediate prospect of Blake's marrying, which really does concern us.'

'No,' said Brodribb, 'nor of his selling the property, though he has put it into the hands of Lee and Robey, the estate agents. But he won't sell it. Of course there's no magic in title-deeds, and his title is good enough, but no one would buy an important property like that with the title-deeds missing and liable to turn up in the wrong hands. And now I must really be off. You've squeezed me dry if you were out for information, and I've squeezed you dry,' he added with a complacent glance at the decanter, 'and a devilish good bottle of port it was. You can pass on what I've told you to Drayton, and I'll see if I can let you know what relation the heir, Charles Templeton, is to Arthur Blake. So goodnight and good luck, and my best respects to your wine merchant.'

When Brodribb had gone, I stretched myself and yawned slightly.

'Well,' I said, 'I don't feel sleepy, but I think I will turn in. One must go to bed some time.'

'I don't feel sleepy either,' said Thorndyke, 'and I shall not turn in. I think I will just jot down a few notes of what

Brodribb has told us and then have another look at Miss Blake's manuscript before handing it over to Drayton.'

'Old Brodribb enjoyed the wine, didn't he?' I remarked. 'And, by Jove, it did set his old chin wagging. But he didn't tell us much, after all. Excepting the proposed sale, it was just mere personal gossip.'

'Yes. But the sale question is really important. We shall have to think over that. He mustn't be allowed to sell the property.'

'Can we prevent him?' I asked.

'I think,' replied Thorndyke, 'from what Brodribb said, that a threat to apply for an injunction pending an investigation of the title would make him draw in his horns. But we shall see. Goodnight, if you are off.'

By the time I had undressed, washed, and turned into bed, I began to suspect that Thorndyke had taken the wiser course. And as I lay in the dark, at first quietly but then with increasing restlessness, the suspicion deepened. The disturbing—indeed, alarming—events of the evening came crowding back into my mind and grew, minute by minute, more vivid. The scene in the studio arose before me with fearful reality, and worse still, the horrible catastrophe, barely averted by Thorndyke's watchfulness and wonderful prevision, actually seemed to befall before my eyes. The dreadful picture that Miss Blake had drawn in a few words, painted itself in my consciousness with the most frightful realism. I saw the sculptor's wife peering into the dim and silent studio in the early morning, and heard her shriek of horror as her glance fell on the brother and sister, lying there stark and dead, and Thorndyke's analysis in the laboratory took on a new and fearful significance. At last, after tossing in bed for over an hour, I could bear it no longer, and rose to go down to the sitting-room for a book.

As I entered the room, Thorndyke looked up from the note-book in which he was writing. 'You had better have stayed up a little longer,' he remarked. 'Now you are going to read yourself to sleep, I suppose.'

'Yes, I hope so,' I replied, and turned to the book-shelves to search for a work of a calm and cheerful tendency. The Compleat Angler appearing to fulfil these requirements most perfectly, I picked it out and was just about to move away when my glance lighted on the rather curious collection of objects on the table. They had made their appearance since I retired, and were presumably connected with some kind of investigation which my colleague had been pursuing while I was wooing Hypnos in vain. I looked at them curiously, and speculated on the nature of the inquiry. There was a microscope, and beside it lay the locket, opened and showing the broken glass, and a little, fat, greasy volume which examination showed to be a Latin Vulgate Bible.

I laid down the volume and glanced at Thorndyke, whom I found watching me with a faint smile. Then I peered through the microscope and perceived what looked like a thread of blue glass.

'Is this a thread of silk, Thorndyke?' I asked.

'No,' he replied, 'it is a hair. Apparently a woman's hair.'

'But,' I expostulated, 'it is blue—bright blue! Where on earth did you get it?'

'Out of the locket,' he replied.

I stared at him in amazement. 'What an extraordinary thing!' I exclaimed. 'A blue hair! I never heard of blue hair before.'

'Then,' said Thorndyke, 'my learned friend has made an addition to his already vast store of knowledge.'

'I suppose it was dyed?' said I.

'I think,' he replied, 'we may assume that the blue colour is adventitious.'

'But why, in the name of Fortune, should a woman dye her hair blue?' I demanded.

He shook his head. 'A curious question that, Anstey, a very curious question. I suggest that when my learned friend has satisfied himself as to the correct method of "daping or doping with a grasshopper for the chavender or chub," he might with advantage bring his colossal intellect to bear on it.'

'You are an aggravating old devil, Thorndyke,' I said with conviction. 'You know perfectly well what this thing means, and yet, when you are asked a civil question, you sit there wagging your exasperating old head like some confounded secretive effigy. I'd like to paint your cranium with Stephen's blue-black ink and then put it under the microscope.'

He shook the threatened head conclusively. 'It would be futile, Anstey,' he replied 'As a method of producing blue hair it would be a complete failure. The effect of the tannate of iron—on exposure to oxygen—would entirely mask that of the indigo-carmin. No, my friend. Physical experiment is outside the range of a King's Counsel. Reflection is your proper province. And now take your book and go to bed. Consider the chavender or chub and also the possible connection between a blue hair and a gold locket; shun needless and inky strenuosities, and "be quiet and go a-angling."'

With this he returned to his note-book, and there being evidently nothing more to be got out of him, I picked up my book, and having shaken my fist at the impassive figure by the table, once more betook myself to bed, there to meditate fruitlessly upon this new and curious problem.

---



## XII. — FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

On the following morning it seemed natural that my steps should stray in the direction of Jacob Street, not only that I might relieve my anxiety as to my friend whom I had left overnight in so distressed a state, but also to ascertain whether any services that I could render were at the moment in request. As to the former, my mind was completely set at rest as soon as I entered the studio (to which I was conducted by Mrs Wingrave, who opened the wicket), for I found Miss Blake hard at work and looking as cheerful and interested as if poisoned sweets and brazen-haired Jezebels were things unheard of.

I explained, half-apologetically, the purpose of my visit, and was preparing a strategic retreat when she interrupted me.

'Now, Mr Anstey, I will not have these formalities. We aren't strangers. You have been, and are, the best and kindest of friends to me and Percy, and we are not only grateful but we value your friendship very much indeed. As to Percy, he loves you.'

'Does he?' said I, with an inward glow of satisfaction. 'I am proud to know that. And Percy's sister—?'

She coloured very prettily and smilingly avoided the pitfall. 'Percy's sister,' she replied, 'takes an indulgent view of her brother's infatuation. But I am going to treat you as a friend. I am going on with my work, because it has to be done, even if I didn't like doing it; but it would be very nice and companionable if you would sit down and smoke a pipe and talk to me, that is, of course, if you can spare the time.'

'If I could spare the time!' Why, the whole Appeal Court, with the House of Lords thrown in, might have sat and twiddled their thumbs for all I cared. But, in fact, I had nothing to do at all.

'You are sure I shan't hinder you?' I said, feeling for my pipe.

'Perfectly,' she answered. 'I have done all the troublesome part, you see—posing and draping the model,' and she pointed with her pencil to a lay figure (it was an elaborate, 'stuffed' figure with real hair and a wax face and hands), dressed in the very height of fashion, which stood, posed in what Lewis Carroll would have called an 'Anglo-Saxon attitude,' simpering at us idiotically.

'That is a very magnificent costume,' I remarked. 'I suppose it is one of your own? Or do you keep a wardrobe for the models?'

'It isn't costume at all,' she replied with a laugh. 'It is just dress material draped on and tacked or pinned in position. You will see if you go round to the other side.'

I went round to the 'off-side,' and having thus discovered the fraud, asked: 'Is this a figure for a subject picture?'

She laughed softly. 'Bless your innocent heart, Mr Anstey, I don't paint pictures. I draw fashion-plates. I have to earn a living, you know, and give Percy a start.'

'What a horrid waste of talent!' I exclaimed. 'But I had no idea that fashion-plate artists took all this trouble'; and I pointed to the smooth card on her easel which bore a masterly, though rather attenuated, nude figure—in the Anglo-Saxon attitude—lightly drawn in pencil, and looking almost like a silver point.

'Most of them don't,' she replied, 'and perhaps it isn't really necessary. But I like to make a finished pencil drawing, though it has all to be rubbed out when the pen work has been done over it.'

'And the preliminary nude figure,' said I; 'you do that from a model, I suppose?'

'No,' she answered. 'I can draw a nude figure well enough for this purpose out of my head. You see, I worked from the model for a long time at the Slade School, and I never threw away a drawing. I have them all bound in books, and I have copied them and drawn them from memory over and over again. In practice, one must be able to rough out a figure out of one's head.'

As she talked, her pencil travelled easily and lightly over the smooth fashion-plate board, gradually clothing the nude figure in transparent habiliments, and I sat smoking with infinite contentment and watching her. And a very dainty, picturesque figure she made in her long blue pinafore, with her red-gold hair and waxen skin, as she stood gracefully poised before her easel, hand on hip and the drawing arm flung out straight and swinging easily from the shoulder. I contrasted her lithe form, in which every curve was full of life and grace, with the absurd rigidity of the lay-figure, her simple, dignified garments with the fussy exuberance of the fashionable costume (though, to be sure, that costume was her own creation), and was moved to comments on the effigy that might have lacerated its feelings if it had had any.

'How long will this drawing take you?' I asked presently.

'I shall have it done by this evening,' she replied, 'and tomorrow morning I shall take it to the office and deliver it to the Art editor.'

'Couldn't I take it for you?' said I.

'I am afraid not,' she answered. 'I must go myself to see that it is all right and to get instructions for the next drawings. Besides, why should you?'

'Didn't we agree that you were to keep indoors out of harm's way? Or at least not to go abroad without an escort? If you must take the drawing yourself, you had better let me come with you to see you safely there and back. Do you mind?'

'Of course I should like your company, Mr Anstey,' she replied, 'but it seems such a tax on you.'

'I wish all taxes were as acceptable,' said I. 'But I understand that you agree; so, if you will fix a time, the escort will assemble at the gate and the bugles will sound "fall in" with military punctuality.'

After a few more half-hearted protests she fixed the hour of half-past ten for the following morning, and I then took my leave, very well satisfied with the progress of this friendship that was becoming so dear to me, and even sensible of a dawning hope that a yet closer intimacy might some day become possible.

Punctually at the appointed time the Hampstead tram set me down at the end of Jacob Street, when I proceeded to collect the convoy and make sail for Bedford Street, Covent Garden, which was the abiding-place of the Art editor to whom the drawing was consigned. But if the outward voyage was characterised by business-like directness, it was quite otherwise with the homeward; which was marked by so many circumnavigations and interrupted by so many ports of call—including the National Gallery—that it was well on in the afternoon when the convoy shortened sail at sixty-three Jacob Street, and it became necessary for the escort to put into port and take in stores in the form of tea and biscuits. And even then, so satisfactory had the voyage turned out that (to pursue the metaphor to a finish) the charter-party was renewed and further voyages projected.

Expeditions abroad, however, could only be occasional, and even then on a plausible business pretext, for my fair friend was a steady worker and spent long days at her easel and drawing-desk; nor was I entirely without occupation, though Thorndyke made but the smallest demands upon my vacation leisure. In effect, not a day passed without a visit to Jacob Street, and whether my time was spent placidly watching the growth of a new drawing, in executing shopping commissions, or in escort duties, it was all equally pleasant to me, and day by day more firmly established my position as the indispensable friend of the little household.

Affairs had been on this footing for about a week when early on a certain afternoon I set forth from the Temple for my daily call, but with a more definite purpose than usual, for I bore with me the locket, in which Polton had fixed a new glass. I rang the studio bell with the customary pleasurable anticipation of the warm and evidently sincere welcome, and listened complacently to Mrs Wingrave's footsteps as she came along the paved passage, and as the wicket opened I prepared to step jauntily through. But the first words that the worthy lady spoke scattered in an instant all my pleasant thoughts and filled me with alarm.

'Miss Blake has just gone out,' she said. 'A most sad thing has happened. Poor Master Percy has had an accident. He has broken his leg.'

'Where did this happen, and when?' I asked.

'It must have happened about an hour ago,' she replied. 'I don't know where, but they have taken him into a house near Chalk Farm.'

'Who brought the news?' I demanded breathlessly; for, seeing that Percy would be at school at the time mentioned, the story was, on the face of it, highly suspicious.

'It was a lady who brought the message,' said Mrs Wingrave. 'She wouldn't come in, but she handed me a note, written in pencil and marked "urgent". Miss Blake showed it to me. It didn't give any particulars beyond what I have told you, and the address of the house.'

'What was the lady like?' I asked.

'Well,' Mrs Wingrave replied, 'I call her a lady, but she was really rather a common-looking woman; painted and powdered and very vulgarly dressed.'

'Did you notice her hair?'

'Yes; you couldn't help noticing it. Brassy-looking, golden stuff, frizzed out like a mop—and her eyebrows were as black as mine are.'

'Do you know where the note is?' I asked.

'I expect Miss Blake took it with her, but she may have left it in the studio. Shall we go and see?'

We hurried together across the yard and into the studio, where for a minute or so we searched the tables and the unfastened bureau. But there was no sign of the note.

'She must have taken it with her,' said Mrs Wingrave. 'But I think I can give you the address, if that is what you want. You don't think there's anything wrong, do you?'

'I am extremely uneasy, Mrs Wingrave,' said I, producing my notebook and a pencil, 'and I shall go straight to the house, if I can find it. What is the address? For Heaven's sake don't give me a wrong one!'

'I remember it quite clearly,' she replied, 'and I think I know the place. It is number twenty-nine Scoresby Terrace, a corner house; and the terrace turns out of Sackett's Road on the left side going up from here.'

I wrote this down in my note-book and then asked: 'How long has Miss Blake been gone?'

'She started less than ten minutes before you came,' was the reply. 'If you hurry you may possibly over-take her.'

We came out of the studio, and as we crossed the yard she gave me very full and clear directions as to how to find the place, some of which I jotted down. Passing a marble tombstone on which her husband had been working, I noticed a number of his tools lying on a sack, and among them a long chisel, almost like a small crowbar. 'May I borrow this, Mrs Wingrave?' I said, picking it up. 'Certainly, if you want to,' she replied with a look of surprise.

'Thank you,' I said, slipping it up my sleeve. 'I may have to force a door, you know,' and with this I let myself out at the wicket and strode away swiftly up the street.

I am habitually a rapid walker, and now I covered the ground at a pace that made other pedestrians stare. For Winifred, I felt sure, would have flown to her brother on the wings of terror, and hurry as I might, I should be hard put to it to overtake her. But her terror could have been nothing compared with mine. As I raced along the shabby streets, swinging the chisel openly in my hand—for its presence in my sleeve was a sensible hindrance—the sinister possibilities—nay, probabilities—that, unsought, suggested themselves one after another, kept me in a state of sickening dread. Supposing I failed to find the place after all! It was quite possible, for the neighbourhood was strange and rather intricate. Or suppose I should lose time in searching for the house and arrive at last, only to find—Here I set my teeth and fairly broke into a run, regardless of the inquisitive stares of idlers at doors and street corners. But, for all my terror and horrible forebodings, I kept my wits and held my attention firmly to Mrs Wingrave's directions, and I derived a faint encouragement from the fact that I had never lost touch of the landmarks and that every hurried step was bringing me nearer to my goal. At length, want of breath compelled me to drop into a walk, but a couple of minutes later, with a gasp of relief, I reached the corner of Sackett's Road; and even as I swung round into the long, straight, dreary street, I caught a glimpse of a woman, at the far end, hurrying forward in the same direction. It was only a momentary glimpse, for in the instant when I saw her she turned swiftly into a by-street to the left. But brief as was the vision, and far away as she was, no doubt was possible to me. It was Winifred.

I drew a deep breath. Surely I should be in time. And perhaps my fears might be groundless after all. The plot might be but the creation of my own uneasy suspicion. At any rate, I was nearly there, and it was hardly possible that in a few short minutes anything could happen—but here all my terrors came crowding on me again, and, breathless as I was, I again broke into a run.

As I reached the corner of Scoresby Terrace and looked at the corner house, my heart seemed to stand still. A single glance showed that it was an empty house, and the horrible desolation of its aspect was made more dreadful by the silence and the total absence of any sign of life. I flew across the road, and barely glancing at the number-twenty-nine-raced up the garden path and tugged furiously at the bell.

Instantly the hollow shell reverberated with a hideous jangling that sounded more ominous and dreadful from the vacancy that the discordant echoes bespoke. But it slowly died away and was succeeded by no answering sound. A deadly silence enveloped the ill-omened place. Not a creak upon the stair, not a sign of life or movement could I detect, though I held my breath to listen. Yet this was the house, and she was in it—and that other! Again I wrenched at the bell, and again the horrible jangling filled the place with echoes, like some infernal peal rung by a company of ghouls. And still there was no answer.

In a frenzy of terror I rushed down the side passage, and bursting open the flimsy gate, ran into the back garden and tried the back door. But it was locked and bolted. Then I darted to the back parlour window, and springing on the sill, shattered, with a stroke of the chisel, the pane above the catch. Passing my hand in through the hole, I drew back the catch and slid up the lower sash. I had noticed that the wooden shutters were not quite closed, but at the moment that I slid up the window-sash, the shutters closed and I heard the cross-bar snap into its socket.

For a moment I had a thought of running round to the front and breaking in the street door. But only for a moment. Rescue, not capture, was my purpose. A glance at the flimsy, decrepit shutters showed me the way in. Thrusting the edge of the long, powerful chisel into the crack close to the lower hinge, I gave a violent wrench, and forthwith the hinge came away from the jamb, the screws drawing easily from the rotten woodwork. Another thrust and another wrench at the upper hinge brought that away too; at a push the whole shutter swung inward and I sprang down into the room. And at that moment I heard the street door shut.

I ran across the room to the door. Of course it was locked and the key was outside. But I was not a criminal lawyer for nothing. In a moment I had the chisel driven in beside the lock, and pressing on the long handle, drove the door back on its hinges, when the lock-bolt and latch disengaged from the striking-plate and the door came open at once.

I ran out into the hall, unlocked the front room, and looked in, but it was empty. Then I flew up the stairs and was about to unlock the door of the first room that I came to, when I became aware of a soft, shuffling sound proceeding apparently from the next room. Instantly I ran to that door, and turning the key, flung it open.

The sight that met my eyes as I darted into the room was but the vision of a moment, but in that moment it imprinted itself upon my memory for ever. Even now, as I write, it rises before me, vivid and horrible, with such dreadful remembrance that my hand falters as it guides the pen. In a corner near the wall she lay—my sweet, gracious Winifred—lay huddled, writhing feebly and fumbling with her hands at her throat. Her face was of the colour of slate, her lips black, her eyes wide and protruding.

It was, I say, but the vision of a moment, a frightful, unforgettable moment. The next, I was on my knees beside her, my

open knife was in my hand, its keen edge eating through the knot at the back of her neck that secured the band that was strangling her. A moment of agonised impatience and then the knot was divided and the band hastily unwound—it was a narrow silken scarf—revealing a livid groove in the plump neck.

As I took away the scarf she drew a deep, gasping breath with a hoarse, distressful sound like the breathing of a croup-stricken child. Again and again it was repeated, growing quicker and more irregular, and with each succeeding gasp the horrible purple of face and lips faded away, leaving a pallor as of marble; the dreadfully protruding eyes sank back until they looked almost normal, though wild and frightened.

I watched these changes with a sense of utter helplessness, though not without relief—for they were clearly changes for the better. But I longed to help her, to do something active to advance her recovery. If only I had had Thorndyke's knowledge I might have been of some use. He would have known what to do. But perhaps there was nothing to be done but wait for her natural recovery. At any rate, that was all that I could do. And so I remained kneeling by her side with her head resting on my arm, holding her hand, and looking with infinite pity and affection into the frightened, trustful eyes that sought my own with such pathetic appeal.

Presently, as her breathing grew easier, the gasps began to be mingled with sobs; and then, suddenly, she burst into tears and wept passionately, almost hysterically, with her face buried against my shoulder. I was profoundly moved, indeed I was almost ready to weep myself, so intense was the revulsion now that the danger was past. In the tumult of my emotions I forgot everything but that she was saved, and that I loved her. As I sought to comfort her, to coax away her terrors, to soothe and reassure her, I cannot tell what words of tenderness I murmured into her ear, by what endearing names I addressed her. Stirred as I was to the very depths of my soul, I was aware of nothing but the great realities. In the stress of terror but now barely past and the joy and relief of the hardly hoped for recovery, the world of everyday was forgotten. All I knew was that she was here, safe in my arms, and that she was all in all to me.

By degrees her emotion expended its force and she grew calmer. Presently she sat up, and having wiped her eyes, looked nervously about the empty room.

'Let us go away from this dreadful place,' she said in a low, frightened voice, laying her hand entreatingly on my arm.

'We will,' said I, 'if you are well enough yet to walk. Let us see.'

I stood up and lifted her to her feet, but she was very unsteady and weak. I doubt if she could have stood without support, for I could feel her trembling as she leaned on me heavily. Still, with my help, she tottered to the door and crossed the landing, and then, very slowly, we descended the stairs. At the open door of the room which I had entered, we paused to adjust her hat and remove any traces of the struggle before we should emerge into the street. I was still holding the silken scarf, and now put it into my pocket to free my hands that I might assist her in settling her hat and the crumpled collar of her dress. As I looked her over to see that all was in order, I noticed three or four conspicuous golden hairs sticking to her right sleeve. I picked them off and was in the act of dropping them when it occurred to me that Thorndyke might be able to extract some information from them, whereupon I brought out my pocket-book and slipped them between the leaves.

'That is how I got into the house,' I said, pointing to the shattered window and the hanging shutter.

She peered fearfully into the empty room and said: 'I heard the crash of the glass. It was that which saved me, I think, for that brute heard it too, and rushed away downstairs instantly. How did you break open the shutter?'

'I did it with a chisel of Mr Wingrave's—and that reminds me that I have left the chisel upstairs. I must take it back to him.'

I bounded up the stairs, and running into the room, snatched up the chisel from the floor and ran out again. As I turned the corner of the staircase, I met her beginning to ascend the stair, clinging to the handrail and sobbing hysterically. I cursed myself for having left her, even for a few moments, and putting my arm around her, led her back into the hall.

'Oh, pray forgive me!' she sobbed. 'I am all unstrung. I couldn't bear to be alone.'

'Of course you couldn't,' said I, drawing her head to my shoulder and stroking her pale cheek. 'I oughtn't to have left you. But try, Winnie dear, to realise that it is now over and gone. And let us get out of this house.'

She wiped her eyes again, and as her sobs died away into an occasional moan, I opened the street door. The sight of the open street and the sunlight seemed to calm her at once. She put away her handkerchief, and clinging to my arm, walked slowly and a little unsteadily by my side down the garden path and out at the gate.

'I wonder where we can get a cab,' said I.

'There is a station not very far away, I believe,' said she. 'Perhaps some one can direct us.'

We walked slowly down Sackett's Road, looking about that curiously deserted thoroughfare for some likely person from whom to make inquiries, when I saw a taxi-cab draw up at a house and discharge its passengers. I managed to attract the notice of the driver, and a minute later we were seated in the vehicle travelling swiftly homeward.

During the short journey hardly a word was exchanged. She was quite composed now, but she was still deathly pale and lay back in her seat with an air of intense fatigue and exhaustion. When we reached the studio I helped her out of the cab, and having dismissed it, led her to the gate and rang the bell.

Instantly I heard hurried steps in the passage, the wicket was flung open, and Mrs Wingrave looked out eagerly. When she saw us, she burst into tears.

'Thank God!' she exclaimed. 'I've been in an agony of suspense. Directly Percy came home, I knew that Mr Anstey must be right—that the message about him was a trap of some sort. What has happened?'

'I'll tell you later, Mrs Wingrave,' Winifred replied. 'I don't want to talk about it now. Is Percy at home?'

'No. The two Wallingford boys were with him. He has gone home to tea with them. I thought it best to say nothing, and let him go. They live quite near here.'

'I am glad you did,' said Winifred, as we crossed the yard—where I replaced the invaluable chisel. 'Perhaps we needn't tell him anything about this.'

'It might be better not to,' said Mrs Wingrave. 'And now go and sit down quietly in the studio and I will bring you some tea. You both look as if you wanted some rest and refreshment.' She bustled away towards her own residence and Winifred and I entered the studio.

As I held the curtain aside to let her pass, my companion halted and looked round the great, bare hall with an air of deep reflection—almost of curiosity. 'I never thought to look upon this place again,' she said gravely; 'and I never should but for you. My life is your gift, Mr Anstey.'

'It is a very precious life to me, Winifred,' said I. And then I added: 'I can't call you Miss Blake.'

'I am glad of that,' she said, looking at me with a smile. 'It would sound very cool and formal now when you have held my life in your hands, and my heart is bursting with gratitude to you.' She laid her hand on my arm for a moment, and then, as if afraid of saying too much, returned abruptly to the subject of her brother. 'It is fortunate Percy was not at home. I don't think we need tell him, at least not just now. Do you think so?'

'I don't see any necessity,' I replied. 'He knows the general position and the precautions that have to be taken. Perhaps he can be told later. And now you must just sit on the settee and rest quietly, for you are as pale as a ghost still. I wonder you have not collapsed altogether.'

In a few minutes Mrs Wingrave brought in the tea and placed it on a table by Winifred's settee. I drew up a chair and performed the presidential functions in respect of the teapot, and under the influence of the homely ceremony and the reviving stimulant my patient began to recover something like her normal appearance and manner. I kept up a flow of more or less commonplace talk, avoiding, for the present, any reference to the terrible events of the afternoon, the details of which I decided to elucidate later when the effect of the shock had passed off.

The postponement, however, was shorter than I had intended, for when we had finished tea and I had carried the tray across the yard and restored it to Mrs Wingrave, Winifred opened the subject herself.

'You haven't asked me how this thing happened,' she said, as I re-entered the studio and sat down beside her in the vacant place on the settee.

'No. I thought you wouldn't want to talk about it just now.'

'I don't want to talk about it to Mrs Wingrave,' said she. 'But you are my deliverer. I don't mind telling you—besides you ought to know. And I want to know, too, by what extraordinary chance you came to be in that place at that critical moment. When I saw you come into the room, it seemed as if a miracle had happened.'

'There was nothing very miraculous about it,' said I, 'except that I happened to arrive at the studio a little earlier than usual.' And here I gave her an account of my arrival and my interview with Mrs Wingrave and my efforts to overtake her.

'It was very clever of Mrs Wingrave to remember the address so clearly,' said Winifred.

'It is a mercy that she did,' said I. 'If she had not—but there, we won't think of that. What happened when you got to the house?'

'I rang the bell and a woman opened the door. I hardly saw her until I had entered the hall and she had shut the door, and then—you know how dark the hall was—I couldn't see her very distinctly. But I noticed that she was a good deal powdered and that she had bright, unreal-looking golden hair, though that didn't show much as she had a handkerchief tied over her head and under her chin. And I also noticed that her face seemed in some way familiar to me.

'As soon as she had shut the door the woman said in a rather peculiar voice: "You must excuse the state of the house, we haven't properly moved in yet. The little man is with the nurse on the first floor, the second room you come to. Will you go up?"

'I ran up the stairs and she followed close behind me. When I came to the second room, I asked: "Is this the one?" and when she answered "Yes," I opened the door and stepped in. Then, of course, I saw it was an empty room, and instantly I suspected that it was a trap. But at that moment the woman threw the scarf over my head and pulled it tight. I turned round quickly, but she dodged behind me and pulled me into the room, and there we struggled and kept turning round and round for hours, as it seemed to me, she trying to get behind me to tie the scarf, and I struggling to keep her in front of me. She still held both ends of the scarf, and though she was not able to pull it quite tight, it was tight enough to make my breathing difficult and to prevent me from calling out. At last I managed to turn quickly and seize her by the hair and the

handkerchief that was tied over her head. But the handkerchief came away in my hand and the hair with it. It was a wig. And then, to my horror, I saw that this was not a woman at all. It was a man! The man who stabbed me that night at Hampstead! I recognised him instantly, and the shock was so awful that I nearly fainted. For a moment I felt perfectly helpless, and in that moment he got behind me and tied the scarf and pulled it tight.

'Then there came a tremendous pealing of the bell. The man started violently, and I could feel his hands trembling as he tried to finish tying the knot while I struggled to get hold of his wrists. But, of course, I could not struggle long, for the scarf was so tight that it almost completely stopped my breathing, and the horror of the thing took away all my strength. When the bell rang the second time, he broke into a torrent of curses mixed with a curious sort of whimpering, and flung me violently on the floor. He was just finishing the knot when I heard a crash of glass down below, and at that he sprang to his feet, snatched up the wig and handkerchief, and flew down the stairs.

'After this there seemed a long, long interval. Of course it was only a matter of seconds, I suppose, but it was agonising—that horrible feeling of suffocation. At last I heard a bursting sound down below. Then the street door shut, and then—just as I seemed to be losing consciousness—you came into the room, and I knew that I was saved.' She paused, and then, laying her hand on mine, she continued: 'I haven't thanked you for saving me from that horrible death. I can't. No words are enough. Any talk of gratitude would be mere anticlimax.'

There is no question of gratitude, Winnie,' said I. 'Your life is more to me than my own, so there is no virtue in my cherishing it. But I needn't tell you that, for I suspect that my secret has slipped out unawares already.'

'Your secret?' she repeated.

'That I love you, Winnie dearest. You must know it by now. I suppose I ought not to speak of it just at this time. And yet—well, perhaps I might ask you if you would take time to consider whether we might not, some day, be more to one another than we are now.'

She looked down gravely though a little shyly, but she answered without hesitation: 'I don't need to take time to consider. I can tell you at once that I am proud to be loved by such a man as you. And it is not a case of gratitude. I should have said the same if you had asked me yesterday—or even longer ago than that.'

'Thank you for telling me that, Winnie,' said I. 'It would have been an unworthy thing if I had seemed to presume on any small service—'

'It would have been an absurd thing to have any such idea, Mr Anstey.'

'Mr Anstey?' I repeated. 'May I humbly mention that I also have a Christian name?'

'I always suspected that you had,' she retorted with a smile, 'and I must confess to having speculated as to what it might be.'

'It takes the prosaic form of Robert, commonly perverted by my own family to Robin.'

'And a very pretty name, too,' said she. 'But you are a foolish Robin to speak in that way about yourself. The mistake you are making,' she continued, holding up an admonitory forefinger, 'is that you don't realise what an exceedingly nice person you are. But we realise it. Mrs Wingrave is quite fond of you; Percy loves you; and as for Percy's sister, well, she lost her heart longer ago than she is prepared to admit. So let us hear no more ridiculous self-deprecations.'

'There shall be no more, sweetheart,' said I. 'You have taken away the occasion and the excuse. A man who has won the heart of the sweetest and loveliest girl in the whole world would be a fool to undervalue himself. But it is a wonderful thing, Winnie. I can hardly believe in my good fortune. When I saw you that night at Hampstead, I thought you were the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. And now I know I was right. But how little did I dream that that lovely girl would one day be my own!'

'I say again that you are a foolish Robin,' said she, resting her cheek against my shoulder. 'You think your goose is a swan. But go on thinking it, and she will be as near a swan as she can manage, or failing that, a very faithful, affectionate goose.'

She looked up at me with a smile, half-shy but wholly endearing, and noting how her marble-white cheeks had grown pink and rosy, I kissed her; whereupon they grew pinker still.

It was all for our good that Percy lingered with his friends and left us to the undisturbed possession of our new happiness. For me the golden minutes slipped away unnumbered—sullenly and relentlessly checked, however, by my unconsulted watch—as we sat, side by side and hand clasped in hand. We talked little; not that we were, as Rosalind would say, 'Gravelled for lack of matter' (and even if we had been, Rosalind's admirable expedient was always available). But perfect companionship is independent of mere verbal converse. There is no need for speech when two hearts are singing in unison.

At last there came the expected peal of the bell. I might, I suppose, have gone out to open the wicket, but, in fact, I left that office to Mrs Wingrave.

'I don't think Percy will notice anything unusual,' said I. 'You look perfectly recovered now.'

'I suppose I do,' she answered with a smile. 'There have been restoratives, you see.'

'So there have,' I agreed, and *ex abundantia cautelarum*, as we lawyers say, I added a sort of restorative codicil even as the quick footsteps pattered across the yard.

Whether Percy observed anything unusual I cannot say with certainty. He was a born diplomatist and a very model of discretion. But I have a strong suspicion that he detected some new note in the harmony of our little society. Particularly when I addressed his sister as Winnie did he seem to cock an attentive ear; and when she addressed me as Robin he cocked both ears. But he made no sign. He was a jewel of a boy. No lover could have asked for anything more perfect in the way of a prospective brother-in-law.

But my suspicion of that juvenile diplomat was confirmed—and my admiration of his judgment reached a climax—when the time arrived for me to go, and Winifred rose to accompany me to the gate. This had always been Percy's office. But now he shook hands with me without turning a hair and without even a glance at the studio door. It was a marvellous instance of precocious intelligence.

We had left the studio and were just crossing the yard when suddenly I bethought me of the locket which Thorndyke had entrusted to me for delivery, and which I had, up to this moment, completely forgotten.

'Here is another narrow escape,' said I. 'The special errand which, to the uninitiated, appeared to be the occasion of my visit here today, has never been discharged. I was to give you your locket, which the ingenious Polton has made as good as new, and had forgotten all about it. However, it is not too late,' and here I took the little bauble from my pocket and handed it to her.

'I am glad it came today, of all days,' she said as she took it from me. 'Now I can wear it as a sort of memento. If we had only known, Robin, we could have got Mr Polton to engrave the date on the back.'

'He can do that later,' said I. 'It is engraved on my heart already. I can never forget a single moment of this day. And what a wonderful day it has been! What a day of wild extremes! Within a few hours I have suffered the most intense misery and dread that I have ever experienced, and been blessed with the greatest happiness that I have ever known. And as to you, my poor darling—'

'Not a poor darling at all,' she interrupted, 'but a very rich and proud and happy one. A day of storm and sunshine it has indeed been, but the storm came first, and "in the evening there was light." And after all, Robin dear, you can't have a rainbow without rain.'

By this time we had reached the gate; and when I had taken her in my arms and kissed her, I opened the wicket and passed out. As it closed behind me I looked up and down the dreary street, but it was dreary to me no longer. I don't know who Jacob was—I mean this particular Jacob—but as I stopped to look back fondly at the factory-like gate, I felt that I was in some sort under an obligation to him as the (presumptive) creator of the sacred thoroughfare.

---

### XIII. — THORNDYKE STATES HIS POSITION

Recalling the events of the evening after leaving the studio, I am sensible of a somewhat hazy interval between the moment when I turned the corner of Jacob Street and my arrival at the familiar precincts of the Temple. After the fashion of the aboriginal Londoner, I had simply set my face in the desired direction and walked, unconscious of particular streets, instinctively or subconsciously heading for my destination by the shortest route. And meanwhile my mind was busy with the stirring incidents of this most eventful day, with its swift alternations of storm and sunshine, its terror, its despair, and its golden reward. So my thoughts now alternated between joy at the attainment of a happiness scarcely hoped for and apprehension of the dangers that lurked unseen, ready to spring forth and wreck the life that was more to me than my own.

Thus meditating, I sped through by-streets innumerable and unnoted, crossing quiet squares and traversing narrow courts and obscure passages, but always shunning the main thoroughfares with their disturbing glare and noise, until I came, as it were, to the surface at the end of Chichester Rents, and turned into Chancery Lane. There the familiar surroundings brought me back to my everyday world, and my thoughts took a new direction. What would Thorndyke have to say to my news? Had he any resources unknown to me for staving off this very imminent danger? And would the terrible episode of the empty house convey any enlightenment to him that I had missed?

Still revolving these questions, I dived down Middle Temple Lane and presently became aware of a tall figure some little distance ahead, walking in the same direction as my own. I had nearly overtaken him when he turned at the entrance to Pump Court and looked back, whereupon a mutual recognition brought us both to a halt.

'I expect we are bound for the same port, Anstey,' said he as we shook hands. 'I am going to call on Thorndyke. You are still helping him, aren't you?'

'He says I am, and I hope it is true. At any rate, Jervis has not come back yet, if that is what you mean. I suppose, Drayton, you haven't any fresh information for us?'

Sir Lawrence shook his head gloomily. 'No,' he answered, 'I have learned nothing new, nor, I fear, are any of us likely to. Those brutes seem to have got away without leaving a trace that it is possible to make anything of. We can't expect impossibilities even of Thorndyke. But I am not calling on him with reference to the murder case. I want him to come down with me to Aylesbury to help me with an interview. A question of survivorship has arisen, and he knows more about that subject than I do, so I should like him to elicit the facts, if possible.'

As we walked through Pump Court and the Cloisters, I debated with myself whether I should tell Drayton of the horror that this day had witnessed. He was an interested party in more than one sense, for he had the warmest regard for Winifred. But I knew that he would be profoundly shocked, and as he continued to talk of the case on which he wanted Thorndyke's advice, I said nothing for the present.

When I let myself and Drayton in with my latch-key, we found Thorndyke seated at the table with a microscope and a tray of reagents and mounting materials, preparing slides of animal hairs to add to his already extensive collection.

'I am ashamed to disturb you at this hour,' Drayton began.

But Thorndyke interrupted him. 'You are not disturbing me at all. This kind of work can be taken up and put down at any moment.'

'It is very good of you to say so,' said Drayton, 'and I will take you at your word.' And thereupon he opened the matter of which he had spoken to me.

'When do you want me to come down to Aylesbury?' Thorndyke asked.

'The day after tomorrow, if you can manage it.'

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments as he picked up with his forceps a newly-cleaned cover-glass, and delicately dropped it on the specimen that floated in its little pool of balsam.

'Yes,' he said at length, 'I think we can arrange that. There isn't very much doing just now.'

'Very well,' said Sir Lawrence. 'Then I will call for you at ten o'clock, and I needn't trouble you with any details now. We can talk the case over on the way down.' He rose as if to depart, but as he turned towards the door, he stopped and looked back at Thorndyke.

'I am afraid,' said he, 'that I have rather neglected our friend Miss Blake. Has either of you seen her lately?'

Thorndyke gave me a quick look, and in the short interval before replying, I could see that he was rapidly debating how much he should tell Sir Lawrence. Apparently he reached the same conclusion as I had, that we could hardly conceal material facts from him, for he replied:

'Yes, we have both seen her quite lately; in fact, I think Anstey has just come from her studio. And I am sorry to say, we are both rather anxious about her.'

'Indeed,' said Drayton, laying down his hat and seating himself. 'What is amiss with her?'

'The trouble is,' replied Thorndyke, 'that she is the sole witness to the identity of the murderers, and they realise it, and



they have determined, accordingly, to get rid of her.' And here he gave Sir Lawrence an account of the incident of the poisoned chocolates and the circumstances that had led up to it.

Drayton was thunderstruck. As he listened to Thorndyke's vivid and precise narration, he sat motionless, with parted lips and his hands on his knees, the very picture of amazement and horror.

'But, good God!' he exclaimed, when Thorndyke had finished 'this is perfectly frightful! It is a horrible state of things. Something must be done, you know. It is practically certain that they will make some further attempt.'

'They have already,' said I. And as the two men turned to me with looks of startled inquiry, I recounted—not without discomfort in recalling them—the terrible events of that afternoon.

My two friends listened with rapt attention as I told the hideous story, and on each it produced characteristic effects. Sir Lawrence glared at me with a scowl of suppressed fury, while Thorndyke's face settled into a rigid immobility like that of a stone mask.

When I had concluded, Drayton sprang to his feet and began to pace the room in uncontrollable agitation, muttering and cursing under his breath. Suddenly he halted opposite Thorndyke, and gazing frowningly into his set face, demanded: 'Is it not possible to do something? Something radical and effective, I mean? I don't know what cards you hold, Thorndyke, and I am not going to embarrass you by asking for details, but are you in a position to make any kind of move?'

Thorndyke, who had also risen, and now stood with his back to the fire, looked down reflectively for a few moments. At length he replied:

'The difficulty is, Drayton, that if we move prematurely, we run a serious risk of failing, and we can't afford to fail.'

'Do I understand, then, that you are in a position to take action?'

'Yes. But it would be extremely unsafe, for if we fail once we fail finally. It would be a gamble, and we should quite probably lose. Whereas, if we can wait, we shall have these men to a certainty. We have taken their measure and we know now exactly what kind of persons we are dealing with. You see, Drayton,' he continued after a brief pause, 'secret crime most commonly comes to light through the efforts of the criminal to cover his tracks. That is so in the present case. All that I know as to the identity of these men I have learned from their struggles to conceal it. But for their multitudinous precautions I should have known nothing about them. And you see for yourself that they are criminals of the usual kind who will not let well alone. They keep making fresh efforts to secure their safety, and each time they make a move we learn something more about them. If only we can wait, they will surely deliver themselves into our hands.'

There was a brief silence. Then Sir Lawrence gave utterance to the thought that was in my own mind.

'That is all very well, Thorndyke, and as a lawyer I fully understand your desire to get a conclusive case before making a move. But can we afford to wait? Are we justified in using this poor young lady as a bait to enable us to catch these villains?'

'If that were the position,' replied Thorndyke, 'there could be but one answer. But we must remember that the capture of these men is the condition on which her safety depends. If we fail, we fail for her as well as for ourselves.'

'Then,' asked Drayton, 'what do you suggest? You don't propose to stand by passively until they make some fresh attempt to murder her?'

'No. I suggest that more complete precautions be taken to secure Miss Blake's safety, and meanwhile I hope to fill in one or two blanks in my collection of evidential facts and perhaps induce these men to make a move in a new direction. I think I can promise to bring the affair to a climax in one way or another, and that pretty soon.'

'Very well,' said Drayton, once more taking up his hat. 'But who is going to look after Miss Blake?'

'Anstey has taken that duty on himself,' replied Thorndyke, 'and I don't think any one could do it better. If he wants assistance or advice, he has only to call upon us.'

With this arrangement Drayton appeared to be satisfied, though he still appeared uneasy—as, indeed, we all were. But he made no further suggestion, and very shortly took his leave.

For some time after his departure not a word was spoken. The conversation that had just taken place had given me abundant food for reflection, while Thorndyke, who still stood with his back to the fire, maintained a grim silence. Evidently he was thinking hard, and a glance at his face—stern, rigid, inexorable—assured me that his cogitations boded ill for those who had aroused his righteous anger. At length he looked up and asked:

'What measures can you suggest for Miss Blake's protection?'

'I have told her that, for the present, she must not go out of doors on any occasion whatever unless accompanied by me—or, of course, by you or Drayton. She has promised to abide absolutely by that rule and to make no exception to it. She has also promised to keep the studio door locked and to inspect any visitors from the window of the bedroom adjoining before unlocking it.'

'If she keeps to those rules she should be quite safe,' said Thorndyke. 'They are not likely to try to break in. There is a man living on the premises, I think?'

'Yes. Mr Wingrave is about the place at his work most of the day, and, of course, he is always there at night.'

'Then, I think we may feel reasonably secure for the present; and I am glad you have made such complete arrangements, for I was going to suggest that you come down with us to Aylesbury.'

'With what object?' I asked. 'Drayton won't want me at the conference.'

'No. But it just occurred to me that, as we shall be within a mile or two of Beauchamp Blake and can easily take it on our way back, we might go and have a look at the place and see if we can pick up any information on the spot. I believe the question of the sale of the property is more or less in abeyance, but it would be just as well to make a few inquiries locally.'

I received the suggestion with some surprise but no enthusiasm.

'Doesn't it seem rather inopportune,' I said, 'with these imminent dangers impending, to be occupying ourselves in prosecuting this shadowy claim? Surely this is no time for building castles in the air. The chance of young Percival's ever coming into this property is infinitely remote, and we can attend to it when we have done with more urgent matters.'

'If we attend to it at all,' he replied 'we must do so when we have the opportunity. Should the property be sold, Percy's chance will be gone for good. And the conflict between our two purposes is only in your mind. The fact of our keeping an eye on Percy's interests will not hinder our pursuit of the wretches who murdered poor Drayton and would now murder Percy's sister. You can trust me for that.'

'No, I suppose it won't,' I admitted. 'And you seem to take Percy's claim to this estate quite seriously.'

'It is impossible to do otherwise,' said he. 'It may be impossible to prove it, even if an opportunity should arise. But it is a real claim, and what little chance he has ought to be preserved. It mustn't be lost by our negligence.'

I was not keen on the expedition, but I knew what Winifred's sentiments would have been, and loyalty to her bade me assent, though in my own mind, I felt it to be a fruitless and somewhat foolish errand. Accordingly I agreed to form one of the party on the day after the morrow, a decision which Thorndyke received with more satisfaction than the occasion seemed to warrant.



#### XIV. — BEAUCHAMP BLAKE

'Can there be any more pleasant place of human habitation than an English country town?' I asked myself the question as I strolled round the market square of the little town of Aylesbury, gazing about me with a Londoner's pleasure in the restful, old-world aspect of the place I had still more than half an hour to wait, but I had no feeling of impatience. I could spend that time agreeably enough, sauntering around, wrapped in pleasurable idleness provocative of reflection, looking at the handsome market-place with its clock-tower and its statues immortalising in bronze the worthies of more stirring times, or at the carriers' carts that rested unhorsed in the square and told of villages and hamlets nestling amidst their trees but a few miles away down the leafy lanes.

Presently my leisurely perambulations brought me opposite a shop of more than common smartness, and here—perhaps because the crowd of market folk was a little more dense—I paused and gazed somewhat absently into the window. I have no idea why I looked into that particular shop window. The wares exposed in it—ladies' hats—have no special attraction to the masculine eye—at least in the state in which they are presented by the milliner, bereft of the principal ornament which should be found underneath them. Nevertheless, I was not the only male observer. Another man had stopped and stood, nearer to the window than I, inspecting the gaily-flowered and feathered headgear with undeniable interest.

The incongruity of this eager scrutiny of things so characteristically feminine struck me with amused curiosity, and I watched the man with a half-suppressed smile. He was a small, slight man, neatly dressed in a suit of tweeds and a tweed hat, and the trouser-clips at his ankles suggested that he had cycled in from the country. I could not see his face, as I was standing nearly behind him, but apparently he became aware, after a time, of my presence—perhaps he saw my reflection in the window—and of the fact that I was observing him somewhat curiously, for he turned away with some suddenness, glancing up at me as he passed and then half pausing to look at me again before he bustled away and disappeared up an alley.

There was something very odd in that second look. The first had been a mere casual glance, but the second—quick, searching, even startled—suggested recognition, and something more than recognition. What could it have been? And who could he be? The face—a clean-shaved, thin, sallow face, not very young, seen only for a moment, left a clear mental image that still remained. And as I visualised it afresh I was conscious of a faint sense of familiarity. I had seen this man before. Where had I seen him; and who was he? And why did he look at me with that singular expression?

I stood where he had left me, cudgelling my brains for an answer to these questions. And even as I stood there, a cyclist passed swiftly across the end of the square and disappeared in the direction of the London Road. He was too far off for his face to be clearly recognisable: but he was a small man, he wore a tweed suit and hat, and trouser-clips, and I had no doubt that he was the same man.

Now who was he? The more I recalled the face, the more convinced I was that I had seen it before. But the identity of its owner eluded me completely. I couldn't place the fellow at all. Probably it didn't matter in the least who he was. But still it was exasperating to be baffled in this way. Unconsciously, I turned and stared into the milliner's window. And then, in a flash it came. The middle of the window was occupied by an enormous hat—a huge, bloated, fungous structure overrun with counterfeit vegetation and bristling with feathers; such a hat as might have adorned the cranium of a Hottentot queen. A glance at that grisly head-dress supplied the missing link in the chain of association. The face that had looked into mine was the face of the woman who had shadowed Winifred and me from Hampstead; who had lured her to the empty house, and had there revealed herself as a man in disguise. In short, this was the murderer of poor Drayton, and the would-be murderer of Winifred!

And I had held this wretch in the hollow of my hand and I had let him go! It was an infuriating thought. If my quickness of observation had only been equal to his, I should have had him by now safely under lock and key. No wonder he had looked startled. But he must have a remarkably good memory for faces to have recognised me in that instantaneous glance. For he had seen me only once—at the inquest at Hampstead—and then but for a moment. Unless he had got a glimpse of me at the empty house, or—which seemed more probable—had shadowed and watched me when I had been acting as Winifred's escort. At any rate he knew me, better than I knew him, and had managed very adroitly to slip through my fingers.

But what on earth was he doing at Aylesbury? Was it possible that he lived in this neighbourhood? If so, a description given to the police might even yet secure his arrest. I was turning over this possibility when the chiming of a clock recalled my appointment. I glanced up at the dial on the clock-tower and had just noted that the appointed hour had struck when I observed Thorndyke ascending the steps to the platform at the base. This was our rendezvous, and I forthwith hurried across the cobbled square and presented myself, bursting with my news and discharging them in a volley as soon as I arrived.

Thorndyke was deeply interested, but yet I found in his manner something slightly disappointing. He was an impassive man, difficult to surprise or move to any outward manifestation of emotion. Still, knowing this, I was a little chilled by the almost academic view that he took of the incident, and especially by his firm rejection of my plan for invoking the aid of the police.

'It sounds tempting,' he admitted, 'to swoop down on this man and put an end forthwith to all our dangers and complications, but it would be a bad move. Quite probably the police would decline to take any action. And then what sort

of description could you give them? For the purposes of a search it is far too general, and a change of clothing would make it entirely inapplicable. And we must admit the possibility of your being mistaken. And finally, if we gave this information, we should almost certainly lose one man—whom none of us has ever seen, but who is probably the principal. We should have let the cat out of the bag, and all our carefully-laid plans would come to nought.'

'I didn't know that we had any carefully-laid plans,' said I.

'You know that we are engaged in investigating a murder; that our aim is to secure the two or more murderers and to elucidate the causes and circumstances of the crime, and that we have accumulated a certain number of data to that end.'

'You have,' I objected. 'I have practically no data at all. May I ask if you know who this sallow-faced little devil is?'

'I have a strong suspicion,' he replied. 'But suspicion isn't quite what one wants to take into a court of law. I want to verify my suspicions and turn them into conclusive evidence. So that when I play my card it shall be a trump card.'

To this I had no reply to make. I knew Thorndyke's methods. For years I had acted as his leading counsel, and always when I had gone into court I had taken with me a case complete to the last detail. Now, for the first time, I was realising the amount of patience and self-restraint that went to the making of a case of unassailable conclusiveness, and I found myself with difficulty overcoming the temptation to make a premature move.

While we had been talking, we had been making our way at an easy pace out of the town on to the London Road, and now Thorndyke, with the one-inch ordnance map in his hand, indicated our route.

'Beauchamp Blake,' said he, 'lies just off the Lower Icknield Way, on the left of the London Road. But there is no need for us to take the shortest way. The by-road through Stoke Mandeville looks more entertaining than the main road, and we can pick up the Lower Icknield Way at the crossroads below the village.'

Our route being thus settled, we set forth, turning off presently into the quiet, shady by-road. And as we swung along between the thinning hedgerows, with the majestic elms—now sprinkled with yellow—towering above us and casting athwart the road streaks of cool shadow, we chatted sporadically with long intervals of silence, for we were Londoners on holiday to whom the beauty of this fair countryside was reinforced by a certain pleasant strangeness.

'I have wondered from time to time,' I said, after one of the long pauses, 'what can be the significance—if it has any—of that blue-dyed hair that you extracted from Winifred's locket' (I had confided to Thorndyke the new relations that had grown up between our fair client and me).

'Ah,' he replied. 'A very interesting problem, Anstey.'

'I have also wondered what made you take the hair out of the locket to examine it under the microscope.'

'The answer to that question is perfectly simple,' said he. 'I took it out to see if it was blue. In the mass the hair looked black.'

'But do I understand that you thought it might be blue?'

'I expected to find it blue. The examination was a measure of verification.'

'But why, in the name of Fortune, should you expect to find blue hair in a locket? I had no idea that hair ever was dyed blue—except,' I added with a sudden flash of recollection, 'in the case of ancient Egyptian wigs, and I had an idea that they were not hair at all.'

'Some of them, I believe, were not. However, this was not ancient Egyptian hair. It was modern.'

'Then, will you tell me what it was that made you expect to find the hair in the locket dyed blue?'

'The expectation,' he replied, 'arose out of an inspection of the locket itself.'

'Do you mean those mysterious and obscure Biblical references engraved inside?'

'No; I mean the external characters, the peculiar construction, the motto engraved on the front, and the hallmark on the back.'

'But what,' I asked, 'was the connection between those external characters and this most extraordinary peculiarity of the hair inside?'

He looked at me with the exasperating smile that I knew so well (and was, in fact, expecting).

'Now, you know, Anstey,' said he, 'you are trying to pump me; to suck my brains instead of using your own. I am not going to encourage you in any such mental indolence. The proper satisfaction of a discovery is in having made it yourself. You have seen and handled the locket, you have heard my comments on it, and you have access to it for further examination. Try to recall what it is like, and if necessary, examine it afresh. Consider its peculiarities one by one and then in relation to one another. If you do this attentively and thoughtfully you will find that those peculiarities will yield some most curious and interesting suggestions, including the suggestion that the hair inside is probably blue.'

'I shan't find anything of the kind, you old devil,' I exclaimed wrathfully, 'and you know perfectly well that I shan't. Still, I will take an early opportunity to put the "little Sphinx" under cross-examination.'

While we had been talking we had passed through the village of Stoke Mandeville, and we now arrived at the crossroads,

where we turned to the left into the ancient Icknield Way.

'A mile and a half farther on,' said Thorndyke, again consulting the map, 'we cross the London Road. Then we turn out of the Icknield Way into this lane, leaving Weston Turville on our left. I note there is an inn opposite the gates of Beauchamp Blake. Does that topographical feature interest you?'

'I think,' said I, 'that after another couple of miles, we shall be ready for what the British workman calls a "breaver." But it is probably only a wayside beerhouse.'

Another half-hour's walking brought us to the London Road, crossing which we followed a side road—apparently part of the Icknield Way—which skirted the lake-like reservoir and presently gave off as a branch a pleasant, elm-bordered lane on the right-hand side of which was a tall oak paling.

'This,' said Thorndyke, whose stature enabled him easily to look over the fence, 'is the little park of Beauchamp Blake. I don't see the house, but I see the roof of a gatekeeper's lodge. And here is the inn.'

A turn of the lane had brought into view a gatekeeper's lodge by the main gates of the park, and nearly opposite, the looked-for hostelry. And a very remarkable-looking hostelry it was, considering its secluded position; an antique, half-timbered house with a high, crinkly roof in which was a row of dormer windows, and a larger, overhanging gabled bay supported below by an immense carved corner-post. But the most singular feature of the house was the sign, which swung at the top of a tall post by a horse-trough in the little forecourt, on which was the head of a gentleman wearing a crown and a full-bottomed wig, apparently suspended in mid-air over a brown stone pitcher.

'It seems to me,' said I, as we approached the inn, 'that the sign needs an explanatory inscription. The association of a king and a brown jug may be natural enough, but it is unusual as an inn-sign.'

'Now, Anstey,' Thorndyke exclaimed protestingly, 'don't tell me that that ancient joke has missed its mark on your superlative intellect. The inscription on the parlour window tells us that the sign is the King's Head, and the pitcher under that portrait explains that the king is James the Second or Third—His Majesty over the water. This is evidently a Jacobite house. Does the sedition shock you? Or shall we enter and refresh? If the landlord's ale is as old as his politics we ought to find quite exceptional entertainment within, and perhaps pick up a trifle of local gossip that may interest us.'

I assented readily, secretly denouncing my slowness in the 'uptake'. Thorndyke's explanations were always so ridiculously simple—when you had heard them.

The landlord, who looked like a retired butler, received us with old-fashioned deference and inducted us into the parlour, drawing a couple of Wycombe armchairs up to the table.

'What can I do for you, gentlemen?' he inquired.

'Well, what can you do for us?' asked Thorndyke. 'Is it to be bread and cheese and beer?'

'I can let you have a cold fowl and a cut of boiled bacon,' said the landlord with the air of one who lays down the ace of trumps.

'Can you really!' exclaimed Thorndyke. 'That is a repast fit for a king—even for the king over the water.'

The landlord smiled slyly. 'Ah, you're alluding to my old sign, sir,' said he. 'T'wouldn't have done to have had him swingin' up there time back. Some others would have been swingin' too. In those days he used to hang in this room over the fireplace, only there was a portrait of King George fixed over him with concealed hinges. When strangers came to the house there was King George—God bless him!—the same as the sign that used to hang outside; but when the villagers or the people from the Hall opposite sat in the room, then George was swung back on his hinges to bring James into view and a pitcher of water was put on the table to drink the toasts over. This was a thriving house in those days. They say that Percival Blake—he was the last of the old family and a rare plotter by all accounts—used to meet some of his political cronies in this very room, and I've no doubt a lot of business was plotted here that never came to anything.'

'Who has the place now?' asked Thorndyke.

'The present squire is Mr Arthur Blake, and a queerish sort of squire he is.'

'In what way queer?' I asked.

'Well, you see, sir, he's a Colonial—lived in Australia all his life, I understand. And he looks it—a big, roughish-looking man, and very short spoken. But he can ride, I'll say that for him. There isn't a better horseman in the county. Mounts from the off-side, too. I suppose that's their way out there, though it don't suit our rule of the road.'

As the landlord gave these particulars, he proceeded, with swift dexterity, to lay the table and furnish it with the materials for the feast, aided and abetted by an unseen female who lurked in the background. When he had put the final touch with a 'foam-crowned jug of nut-brown,' he showed a tendency to withdraw and leave us to our meal; but Thorndyke was in a conversational mood and induced him, without difficulty, to fetch another tumbler and proceed with his output of local lore.

'Is it true that the place is going to be sold?' Thorndyke inquired.

'So they say,' replied the landlord. 'And the best thing the squire could do if the lawyers will let him. The place is no good to him.'

'Why not?'

'Well, sir, he's a bachelor, and like to remain one it seems. Then he's a stranger to the place and don't appear to take to English ways. He keeps no company and he makes no visits; he don't know any of his neighbours and doesn't seem to want to. He has only kept on one or two of the servants, and he lives with his man—foreign-looking chap named Meyer—in a corner of the house and never uses the rest. He'd be more comfortable in a little farm house.'

'And how does he spend his time?' asked Thorndyke.

'I don't know, sir,' was the answer. 'Mostly loafing about, I should say. He takes photographs, I hear; quite clever at it, too, it seems. And he goes out for a ride every afternoon—you'll see him come out of the gate at three o'clock almost to the minute—and sometimes he goes out in the morning, too.'

'And as to visitors? Are strangers allowed to look over the house?'

'No, sir. The squire won't have any strangers about the place at all. I fancy what made him so particular was a burglary that occurred there about a couple of years ago. Not that there was much in it, for they got all the things back and they caught the burglar the very next day.'

'That was smart work,' I remarked.

'Yes,' our friend agreed, 'they did the thief very neatly. It was a one-man job and the burglar seems to have been a downy bird, for he worked in gloves so that he shouldn't leave any marks behind. But he took those gloves off a bit too soon, for, when they heard him making off and let the dogs loose, he had to do a bolt, and he dropped one of the things in the park—a silver salver it was, I think—and the police found it the next morning and found some finger-marks on it. They wanted to take the salver up to Scotland Yard to have it examined, but the squire wouldn't have that. He took a photograph of the fingermarks and gave it to the police, and they took it up to Scotland Yard, and the people there were able to tell them at once whose fingermarks they were, and they got the burglar that very evening with all the stolen goods in his possession. Wonderful smart, I call it.'

'Do you think,' Thorndyke asked, 'that we should be able to get a look at the house? Just the outside, I mean?'

'I'll see what can be done, sir,' the landlord replied 'I'll have a few words with the lodge-keeper. I was butler to the last squire but one, so they know me pretty well. I'll just run across while you are finishing your lunch. But you'd better wait until the squire has gone out, because, if he sees you on the drive, like as not he'll order you out, and that wouldn't be pleasant for gentlemen like you.'

'I think we'll take the risk,' said Thorndyke. 'If he tells us to go, we can go, but I don't like sneaking in behind his back.'

'No, sir, perhaps you are right,' the landlord agreed, a little dubiously, and departed on his errand, leaving us to finish our lunch—which, in fact, we had practically done already.

In this long conversation I had taken no part. But I had been an interested listener. Not that I cared two straws for the small beer that our host had been retailing. What had interested, and a good deal puzzled me was Thorndyke's amazing inquisitiveness respecting the private and domestic affairs of a man whom neither of us knew and with whom we really had no concern. For the question of the succession to the property was a purely legal one—and pretty shadowy at that—on which the personal qualities and habits of the present tenant had no bearing whatever. And yet my experience of Thorndyke told me that he certainly had not been asking these trivial and impertinent questions without some reasonable motive. No man was less inquisitive about things that did not concern him.

But the discrepancy between his character and his conduct did not end here. As soon as the landlord had gone and we had filled and lit our pipes, he began to explore his waistcoat pockets and presently produced therefrom Polton's reproduction of Mr Halliburton's ridiculous mascot, which he laid on the table and regarded fondly.

'Do you usually carry that thing in your pocket, Thorndyke?' I asked.

'Not usually,' he replied, 'but this is a special occasion. We are on holiday, and moreover, we are seeking our fortune, or at least, hoping that something may turn up.'

'Are we?' I said. 'I am not conscious of any such hope, and I don't know what you expect.'

'Neither do I,' he replied. 'But I feel in an optimistic mood. Perhaps it is the beer,' and with this he picked up the mascot, and opening the split gold ring with a knife-blade, attached it to his watch-chain, closing the ring with a squeeze of his finger and thumb.

It was a singular proceeding. What made it especially so was Thorndyke's openly-expressed contempt of the superstition which finds expression in the use of charms, mascots and other fetishistic objects and practices. However, we were on holiday, as he had said, and perhaps it was admissible to mark the occasion by playing the fool a little.

In a few minutes the landlord returned and announced that he had secured the consent of the lodge-keeper to our making an inspection of the house, with the proviso that we were not to go more than a couple of hundred yards down the drive. 'I'll just step across with you,' he added, 'so that he can see that you are the right parties.'

Accordingly, when we had paid the modest reckoning, we picked up our hats and sticks and as our host held open the parlour door, we passed out into the courtyard, glancing up with renewed interest at the historic sign which creaked in the

breeze. Crossing the road, we passed through the wicket of the closed gate, under the detached observation of the lodge-keeper; and here our host wished us adieu and returned to the inn.

A short walk down the drive brought us to a turn of the road where we came in sight of the house across a stretch of meadows in which a small herd of cows made spots of vivid colour. It was not a large mansion, but what it lacked in size it made up for in character and interest. The two parts were clearly distinct, the newer portion being a Jacobean brick building with stone dressings and quaint corbie-step gables, while the older part—not later than the sixteenth century—was a comparatively low structure showing massive timbers with pargetted plaster fillings, a high roof with wide-spreading eaves and a long row of picturesque dormer windows and large, clustered chimneys.

'It is a grand old house,' I said. 'What a pity it is that Blake is such a curmudgeon. The inside ought to be even more interesting than the outside.'

'Yes,' Thorndyke agreed, 'it is a splendid specimen of domestic architecture, and absolutely thrown away, if our host was not exaggerating. One could wish for a more appreciative tenant—such as our young friend Percy, for instance.'

I glanced at Thorndyke, surprised, not for the first time, at the way in which he tended to harp on this very unresonant string. To me, Percy's claim to this estate was simply a romantic instance of the might-have-been, and none too clear at that. His chance of ever inheriting Beauchamp Blake was a wild dream that I found myself unable to take seriously. But this was apparently not Thorndyke's view, for it was evident that he had considered the matter worth inquiring into, and his last words showed that it still hovered in his mind. I was on the point of reopening the discussion when two men appeared round the corner of the house, each leading a saddled horse. Opposite the main doorway they halted and one of them proceeded to mount—from the off-side, as I noticed. Then they apparently became aware of our presence, for they both looked in our direction; indeed they continued to stare at us with extraordinary attention, and by their movements appeared to be discussing us anxiously.

Thorndyke chuckled softly. 'There must be something uncommonly suspicious in your appearance, Anstey,' he remarked. 'They seem to be in a deuce of a twitter about you.'

'Why my appearance?' I demanded. 'They are looking at us both. In fact I think it is you who are the real object of suspicion. I expect they think you have come back for that silver plate.'

As we spoke, the discussion came to an end. The one man remained, holding his horse and still looking at us, while the other turned and advanced up the drive at a brisk trot, sitting his mount with that unconscious ease that distinguishes the lifelong, habitual equestrian. As he approached, he looked at us inquisitively and with undissembled disapproval, but seemed as if he were going to pass without further notice. Suddenly, however, his attention became more intense. He slowed down to a walk, and as he drew near to us he pulled up and dismounted. And again I noticed that he dismounted from the off-side.



## XV. — THE SQUIRE AND THE SLEUTH-HOUND

As Mr Blake approached with the evident intention of addressing us, it was not unnatural that I should look at him with some interest. Not that such interest was in any way justified by his appearance, which was quite commonplace. He was a tall man, strongly built, and apparently active and muscular. His features were somewhat coarse, but his expression was resolute and energetic, though not suggestive of more than average intelligence. But at the moment, as he bore down on us, leading his horse by the bridle-rein, with his eyes fixed on Thorndyke's face, suspicion and a certain dim suggestion of surprise were what I principally gathered from his countenance.

'May I ask what your business is?' he demanded somewhat brusquely, but not rudely, addressing Thorndyke and looking at him with something more than common attention.

'We really haven't any business at all,' my colleague replied. 'We were walking through the district and thought we should like to have a glance at your very picturesque and interesting house. That is all.'

'Is there anything in particular that you want to know about the house?' Mr Blake asked, still addressing Thorndyke.

'No,' the latter replied. 'Our interest in the place is merely antiquarian, and not very profound at that.'

'I see,' said Mr Blake. He appeared to reflect for a few moments and seemed to be on the point of moving away when he stopped suddenly and a quick change passed over his face. At the same moment I noticed that his eyes were fixed intently on Thorndyke's ridiculous mascot.

'I take it,' said he, 'that you had the lodge-keeper's permission to come inside the gates?'

'Yes,' Thorndyke replied. 'He gave us permission—through the inn-keeper, who asked him—to come in far enough to see the house. As far as we have come, in fact.'

Mr Blake nodded, and again his eyes wandered to the object attached to Thorndyke's watch-chain.

'You are looking at my mascot,' the latter said genially. 'It is a curious thing, isn't it?'

'Very,' Blake agreed gruffly. 'What is it?'

Thorndyke pulled the soft wire ring open, and detaching it from his chain, handed the little object to the other, who examined it curiously and remarked:

'It seems to be made out of a bone.'

'Yes; the bone of a porcupine ant-eater.'

'Ha. You got it somewhere abroad. I suppose?'

'No,' replied Thorndyke. 'I found it in London, and, of course, it isn't really mine. It belongs to a man named Halliburton. But I don't happen to have his address at the moment, so I can't return it.'

Mr Blake listened to this explanation with a sort of puzzled frown, wondering, perhaps, at my colleague's uncalled-for expansiveness to an utter stranger. But his wonder was nothing to mine, as I heard the usually secretive Thorndyke babbling in this garrulously confidential fashion.

When he had examined the mascot, Mr Blake handed it back to Thorndyke with an inarticulate grunt, and as my colleague hooked the ring on his watch-chain, he turned away, walked round his horse to the off-side, mounted lightly to the saddle and started the horse forward at a trot. As he disappeared round a bend of the tree-bordered road, I glanced at Thorndyke, who was once more gazing calmly at the house.

'Mine host was right; I observed. 'Squire Blake is a pretty considerable boor.'

'His manners are certainly not engaging,' Thorndyke agreed.

'I didn't notice that he had any manners,' said I, 'and it seemed to me that you were most unnecessarily civil, not to say confidential.'

'Well, you know,' he replied, 'we are on his premises, and not only uninvited, but contrary to his expressed wishes. We could hardly be otherwise than civil. And after all, he didn't eject us. But I suppose we may as well retire now.'

'Yes,' I agreed, 'he is probably waiting to see us off his confounded land, and possibly speaking his mind to the lodge-keeper.'

Both these surmises appeared to be correct, for when we came round the clump of trees at the turn of the road, I saw the squire in earnest conversation with the keeper, who was standing at attention, holding the gate open, and, I thought, looking somewhat abashed. We passed out through the wicket, which was still unfastened, but though the lodge-keeper looked at us attentively, and even a little curiously, Blake gave no sign of being aware of our existence.

'Well,' said I, 'he is an unmannerly hog. But he has one redeeming feature. He is a man of taste. He did admire you, Thorndyke. While you were talking he couldn't keep his eyes off you.'

'Possibly he was trying to memorise my features in case I should turn out to be a swell cracksman.'



I laughed at the idea of even such a barbarian as this mistaking my distinguished-looking colleague for a member of the swell mob. But it was not impossible. And certainly the squire had scrutinised my friend's features with an intensity that nothing but suspicion could justify.

'Perhaps,' said I, 'he suffers from an obsession on the subject of burglars. Our host's remarks seemed to suggest something of the kind. I wonder what he was saying to the lodge-keeper. It looked to me as if the custodian was receiving a slight dressing-down on our account.'

'Probably he was,' replied Thorndyke. 'But I think that, if my learned friend had happened to be furnished with eyes in the back of his head—'

'As my learned senior appears to be,' I interjected.

'—he would already have formed a more definite opinion as to what took place. In the absence of the retrocephalic arrangement, I suggest that we slip through this opening in the hedge and sit down under the bank.'

Stooping to avoid the thick upper foliage, he dived through the opening and I followed, with no small curiosity as to what it was that my extraordinarily observant colleague had seen. Presumably some one was following us, and if so, as the opening occurred at a sharp bend of the road, our disappearance would have been unobserved.

'It is my belief, Thorndyke,' I said, as we sat down under the bank, 'that your optical arrangements are like those of the giraffe. I believe you can see all round the horizon at once.'

Thorndyke laughed softly. 'The human field of vision, Anstey,' said he, 'as measured by the perimeter, is well over a hundred and eighty degrees. It doesn't take much lateral movement of the head to convert it into three hundred and sixty. The really important factor is not optical but mental. That earnest conversation with the gatekeeper suggested a possibility, though a rather remote one. Ordinary human eyesight, used with the necessary attention, was quite sufficient to show that the improbable had happened, as it often does. Hush! Look through that chink in the hedge.'

As he concluded in a whisper, rapid footfalls became audible. Nearer and nearer they approached, and then, through my spy-hole, I saw a man in cord breeches and leggings and a velveteen coat walk swiftly past. The gatekeeper had been dressed thus, and presumably the man was he, though I had not observed him closely enough to be able to recognise him with certainty.

'Now, why is he following us?' I asked, taking the identity for granted.

'We mustn't assume that he is following us at all with a definite intent, though I suspect he is. But he may be merely going the same way. He may have business in Wendover.'

'It would be rather amusing to dodge him once or twice and see what his game is,' I said with the schoolboy instinct that lingers on, if atavistically, in the adult male.

'It would be highly amusing,' Thorndyke agreed, 'but it wouldn't serve our purpose, which is to ascertain his purpose and keep our knowledge to ourselves. We had better move on now if he is out of sight.'

He was out of sight, having reached and turned down the Tring Road. We followed at a sharp walk, and as we came out into the Tring Road, behold him standing in the footway a couple of hundred yards towards Wendover, looking about him with a rather foolish air of bewilderment. As soon as he saw us, he lifted his foot to the bank and proceeded to attend to his bootlace.

'We won't notice him,' said Thorndyke. 'He is evidently an artless soul and probably believes that he has not been recognised. Let us encourage that eminently desirable belief.'

We passed him with an almost aggressive appearance of unconsciousness on both sides, and pursued our way along the undulating road.

'I don't think there is much doubt now that he is following us,' said I, 'and the question is, why is he doing it?'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke, 'that is the question. He may have had instructions to see us safely out of the district, or he may have had further instructions. We shall see when we get to the station. Meanwhile I am tempted to try a new invention of Polton's. It is slightly fantastic, but he made me promise to carry it in my pocket and try it when I had a chance. Now, here is the chance, and here is the instrument.'

He took from his pocket a leather case from which he extracted a rather solidly-made pair of spectacles. 'You see,' he said, 'Polton has long had the idea that I ought to be provided with some means of observing what is going on behind me, and he has devised this apparatus for the purpose. Like all Polton's inventions, it is quite simple and practicable. As you see, it consists of a rigid spectacle-frame fitted with dummy glasses—clear, plain glass—at the outer edge of which is fixed a little disc of speculum-metal worked to an optically true plane surface and set at a minute angle to the glass. As the disc is quite close to the eye, it enables the wearer, by the very slightest turn of the head, to get a clear view directly behind him. Would you like to try it?'

I took the spectacles from him and put them on, and was amazed at their efficiency. Although the discs were hardly bigger than split peas, they gave me a perfectly clear view along the road behind us—as if I had been looking through a small, round hole—and this with a scarcely appreciable turn of the head. Viewed from behind, I must have appeared to be looking straight before me.

'But,' I exclaimed, 'it seems a most practical device, and I shall insist on Polton making me a pair.'

'That will please him,' said Thorndyke, and he added, reflectively 'if only there were a few thousand more Poltons—men who found their satisfaction in being useful and giving pleasure to their fellows—what a delightful place this world would be!'

I continued to wear the magic spectacles all the way to Wendover, finding a childish pleasure in watching the unconscious gatekeeper who was dogging our footsteps and taking ludicrous precautions to keep—as he thought—out of sight. Only as we descended the long hill into the beautiful little town did I take them off, the better to enjoy the charm of the picturesque approach with its row of thatched cottages and the modest clock-turret, standing up against the background of the wooded heights that soared above Ellesborough. At the station we had the good fortune to find a train due and already signalled, but we delayed taking our tickets until our follower arrived, which he did, in evident haste, a couple of minutes later, being, no doubt, acquainted with the times of the trains. As soon as he appeared, Thorndyke sauntered to the booking-office wicket and gave him time to approach before demanding in clear, audible tones, two firsts to Marylebone. The gatekeeper followed, and thrusting his head and shoulders deep into the opening, as if he were about to crawl through, made his demand in a muffled undertone.

'We need not trouble ourselves about him any more,' said Thorndyke, 'until we get to London. Then we shall know whether he is or is not trying to shadow us.'

When we had settled ourselves in an empty compartment and began to charge our pipes as the train moved off, I returned to the question of our tactics.

'What do you propose to do, Thorndyke, if this fellow tries to follow us home? Shall we let him run us to earth, or shall we lose him?'

'I see no reason why we should make a secret of who we are and where we live. That is apparently what Blake wants to know—that is, if this man is really shadowing us.'

'But,' I urged, 'isn't it generally wiser to withhold information until you know what use is going to be made of it?'

'As a rule, it is,' he admitted. 'But it may happen that the use made of information by one party may be highly illuminating to the other. We may assume that Blake wants to know who we are simply because he suffers from an obsession of suspicion and thinks that we were in his grounds for some unlawful purpose. But he may have some other object, and if he has, I should like to know what it is; and the best way to find out is to let him have our names and address.'

To this I assented, though I was a little mystified. The man Blake was no concern of ours, and it did not seem to matter in the least what suspicions of us had got into his thick head. However Thorndyke probably knew his own business—and meanwhile the presence of this sleuth-hound provided an element of comedy of which I was far from unappreciative, and which my sedate colleague enjoyed without disguise.

When we alighted at Marylebone, we walked quickly to the barrier, but having passed through, we sauntered slowly to the main exit.

'Do you think Polton's spectacles would be very conspicuous?' I asked.

My colleague smiled indulgently. 'The new toy has caught on,' said he, 'and it would be undeniably useful at the present moment. No, put the spectacles on. The discs are hardly noticeable to a casual observer.'

Accordingly I slipped the appliance on as we strolled out into the Marylebone Road and was able, almost immediately, to report progress.

'He is watching us from the exit. Which way are we going?'

'I think,' replied Thorndyke, 'as he is a country cousin, we will make things easy for him and give him a little exercise after the confinement of the train. The Euston Road route is less crowded than Oxford Street.'

We turned eastward and started at an easy pace along the Marylebone Road and Euston Road, keeping on the less-frequented side of the street. I was a little self-conscious in regard to the spectacles, but apparently no one noticed them; and by their aid I was able to watch with astonishing ease our artless follower and to amuse myself by noting his conflicting anxieties to keep us in view and himself out of sight. We turned down Woburn Place, crossed Queen Square to Great Ormond Street and proceeding by Lamb's-Conduit Street, Red Lion Street, Great Turnstile, Lincoln's Inn, and Chancery Lane, crossed Fleet Street to Middle Temple Lane. Here we slowed down, lest the sleuth-hound should lose us, and as we were now in our own neighbourhood, I removed the spectacles and restored them to their owner.

At the entrance to Pump Court we separated, Thorndyke proceeding at a leisurely pace towards Crown Office Row while I hurried through the court; and having halted in the Cloisters to make sure that the sleuth was not pursuing me, I darted through Fig-Tree Court and across King's Bench Walk to our chambers, where I found Polton laying a sort of hybrid tea and supper.

To our trusty assistant I rapidly communicated the state of affairs (including the triumphant success of the magic spectacles, at which his face became a positive labyrinth of ecstatic wrinkles); and having provided ourselves with field-glasses, we stationed ourselves at the laboratory window, from whence we had the gratification of watching Thorndyke

emerge majestically from Crown Office Row, followed shortly by the man in the velveteen coat, whose efforts to make himself invisible brought Polton to the verge of apoplexy.

'Hadn't I better follow him and see where he goes to, sir?' the latter suggested.

The suggestion was put to Thorndyke when he entered, but was rejected.

'I don't think we want to know where he goes from here,' said he. 'But still, seeing that he has come so far, it might be kind of you, Polton, to go down and give him a chance of obtaining any information that he wants.'

Polton needed no second bidding. Clapping on his hat, he set forth gleefully down the stairs. But in a minute or two he was back again, somewhat crestfallen.

'It's no go, sir,' he reported. 'I found him copying the names on the door-post in the entry, and I think he must have got them all down, for when he saw me, he was off like a lamplighter.'

Thorndyke chuckled. 'And to think,' said he, 'that our friend, the squire, could have got all the information he wanted by the simple expedient of asking for our cards. Verily, suspicious folk give themselves a deal of unnecessary trouble.'

---

## XVI. — MR BRODRIBB'S EMBASSY

There is a certain psychological phenomenon known to those financial navigators who have business on the deep and perilous waters of the Stock Exchange as 'jobbing backwards.' It is not their monopoly, however. To ordinary mortals—who describe it as 'prophesying after the event'—it has been familiar from time immemorial, and has always been associated with a degree of wisdom and certainty strangely lacking in prophecy of a more hasty and premature kind.

Reviewing the curious case of which this narrative is the record, I am tempted to embark on this eminently satisfying form of mental exercise. But when I do so, I am disposed to look with some surprise at the very conspicuous deficiency in the power of 'jobbing forward' which I displayed while the events which I am chronicling were in progress. Now, I can see that all the striking and significant facts (only they then appeared neither striking nor significant) which enabled Thorndyke, from the very first, to pursue a steady advance along a visible trail, were in my possession as much as they were in his. But, whereas in his hands they became connected so as to form a continuous clue, in mine they remained separate, and apparently unrelated fragments. At the time, I thought that Thorndyke was hiding from me what material evidence he had. Now it is obvious to me (as also to the acute reader, who has, no doubt, already pieced the evidence together) that he not only concealed nothing, but actually gave me several of the very broadest hints.

So, despite the knowledge that I really possessed, if I had only realised it, I remained utterly in the dark. All that I knew for certain was that Winifred was encompassed by dangers; that human wolves prowled about her habitation and dogged her footsteps when she went abroad.

But even these perils had their compensations, for they gave an appearance of necessity to the constant companionship that my inclinations prompted. It was not a mere pilgrim of love that wended his way daily to Jacob Street, but an appointed guardian with duties to discharge. In the personally-conducted tours through the town, on business connected with the drawings that Winifred continued to produce with unabated industry, I was carrying out an indispensable function, since she was not permitted to go abroad without an efficient escort; and thus duty marched with pleasure.

Intimate, however, as my relations with Winifred had become, and recognised now even by Percy, I abstained from any confidences on the subject of our investigation of the murder. That was Thorndyke's affair, and although he had made no stipulation on the subject, I had the feeling that he expected me to keep my own counsel, as he certainly did himself. Accordingly, in describing our visit to Beauchamp Blake—in which both she and Percy were intensely interested—I said nothing about the man whom I had seen in Aylesbury.

One exception I had nearly made, but thought better of it. The occasion arose one afternoon when we were examining and criticising her latest drawing. As we stood before the easel, a shaft of sunlight, coming in through the great window, struck a part of the drawing and totally altered the character of the colouring. I remarked on the change of colour produced by the more intense illumination.

'Yes,' said she, 'and that reminds me of a very odd discovery that I made the other day and that I meant to tell you about.' She unfastened the silken cord by which she wore the mysterious locket suspended from her neck, and opening the little gold volume, held it in the sunbeam so that the light fell upon the coil of hair that it enclosed.

'Do you see?' she asked, looking at me expectantly.

'Yes,' I answered. 'In the sunlight the hair seems to have quite a distinct blue tint.'

'Exactly!' she exclaimed. 'Now isn't that very remarkable? I have often heard of blue-black hair, but I thought it was just a phrase expressing intense blackness without any tinge of brown. But this is really blue, quite a clear, rich blue, like the colour of deeply-toned stained glass. Do you suppose it is natural? It can hardly be a dye.'

It was then that I had nearly told her of Thorndyke's discovery and his strange and cryptic utterances on the subject. But a principle is a principle. The fact had been communicated to me by him, and I did not feel at liberty to disclose it without his sanction, though, to be sure, there was nothing confidential about it. His examination of the locket had been, apparently, a matter of mere curiosity. For Thorndyke was so constituted that he could not bring himself willingly to leave a problem unsolved, even though its solution promised no useful result. To him the solution was an end in itself, undertaken for the pleasure of the mental exercise. And this locket evidently held a secret. To what extent he had mastered that secret, I could not guess. Nor did I particularly care. It was not my secret, and I had no taste for working out irrelevant puzzles.

'I should hardly think the blue colour can be natural,' said I, and then, by way of compromise, I added: 'but I expect Thorndyke could tell you. When you come to see us again you had better show it to him and hear what he says about it.'

I took the locket from her hand and looked it over with half-impatient curiosity, remembering Thorndyke's exasperating advice, and recalling his reference to the hallmark on the back, I turned it over and scrutinised the minute device.

'You are looking at the hallmark, or the goldsmith's "touch," or whatever it is,' said Winifred. 'It is rather curious. I have never seen one like it before. It certainly is not an ordinary English hallmark. Let me get you a magnifying-glass.'

She fetched a strong reading-glass, and through this I examined the mark more minutely. But I could make nothing of it. It consisted of four punch-marks, of which the first was a capital A surmounted by a small crown and bearing two palm-leaves, the second a kind of escutcheon bearing the initials AH surmounted by a crown, and over that a fleur-de-lis; the

third bore simply a capital L, and the fourth the head of some animal which looked like a horse.

'It is a curious and unusual mark,' said I, handing back to her the locket and the glass, 'but it conveys no information to me beyond the suggestion that the locket is apparently of foreign workmanship, probably French or Italian. But,' I added, with a malicious hope of seeing my reverend senior cornered, 'you had better ask Thorndyke about it when you come. He is sure to be able to tell you all about it.'

'He seems to be a sort of human encyclopaedia,' Winifred remarked as she refastened the locket. 'I shall adopt your advice and consult him about that hair, but I shan't be able to come this week. There is quite a big batch of drawings to be done, and that means some long working days. Perhaps you can arrange an afternoon in the latter part of next week for the oracular tea-party.'

I promised to ascertain my colleague's arrangements and to fix a day, but the promise was left unredeemed and the 'oracular tea-party' was thrust into the background by new and more stirring events, which began to cast their shadows before them that very evening. For, when I entered our chambers, behold Mr Brodribb and Sir Lawrence Drayton settled in armchairs by the fire, in company with the small table and the inevitable decanter. Evidently some kind of conference was in progress.

'Ha!' said Brodribb. 'Here is the fourth conspirator. Now we are complete. I have been devilling for your respected senior, Anstey, and I have called to report progress. Also, as you see, I have captured Sir Lawrence and brought him along as he seemed to be an interested party.'

'He is a somewhat mystified party at present,' said Drayton, 'but probably some explanations are contemplated.'

'They are going to begin as soon as Anstey has filled his glass,' said Brodribb, bearing in mind, no doubt, the laws of conviviality as expounded by Mrs Gamp; and as the stipulated condition was complied with, he proceeded: 'It was suggested to me by Thorndyke a short time ago that the tenure of the Beauchamp Blake property would be put on a more satisfactory footing if the missing title-deeds could be recovered.'

'More satisfactory to the present tenant, you mean,' said Drayton.

'More satisfactory to everybody,' said Brodribb.

'That would depend on the nature of the documents recovered,' Sir Lawrence remarked. 'But let us hear the rest of the suggestion.'

'The suggestion of our learned and Machiavellian friend was that, since the documents are believed to be hidden somewhere in the house, it would be a good plan to have a systematic survey of the premises carried out by some person who has an expert knowledge of secret chambers and hiding-places.'

'Do you know of any such person?' Drayton asked.

Brodribb smiled a fat smile and replenished his glass. 'I do,' he replied 'and so do you. Thorndyke himself is quite an authority on the subject; and, of course, the suggestion was that the survey should be made and the search conducted by him. Naturally. You can guess why, I suppose?'

'I can't,' said Drayton, 'if you are suggesting any reason other than the one you have given.'

'My dear Drayton,' chuckled Brodribb, 'can you imagine Thorndyke embarking on a search of this kind without some definite leading facts? No, no. Our friend has got something up his sleeve. I've no doubt that he knows exactly where to put his hand on those documents before he begins.'

'Do you, Thorndyke?' Sir Lawrence asked, with an inquisitive glance at my colleague.

'Now,' the latter replied, 'I put it to you, Drayton, whether it is likely that I, who have never been in this house in my life, have never seen a plan of it, and have no knowledge whatever of its internal construction or arrangement, can possibly know where these documents are hidden.'

'It certainly doesn't seem very probable,' Drayton admitted, and it certainly did not. But still I noted that Thorndyke's answer contained no specific denial, a circumstance that apparently did not escape Brodribb's observation, for that astute practitioner received the reply with an unabashed wink and wagged his head knowingly as he savoured his wine.

'You can think what you like,' said he, 'and so can I. However, to proceed: the suggestion was that I should put the proposal to the present tenant, Arthur Blake, and expound its advantages, but, of course, say nothing as to the source of the inspiration. Well, I did so. I wrote to him, pointing out the desirability of getting possession of the deeds, and suggesting that he should call at my office and talk the matter over.'

'And how did he take it?' asked Drayton.

'Very calmly—at first. He called at my office yesterday and opened the subject. But he didn't seem at all keen on it; thought it sounded rather like a wild-goose chase—until I mentioned Thorndyke. Then his interest woke up at once. The mention of a real, tangible expert put the matter on a different plane; gave it an air of reality. And he had heard of Thorndyke—read about him in the papers, I suppose—and, of course, I cracked him up. So in the end he became as keen as mustard and anxious to get a start made as soon as possible. And not only keen on his own account. To my surprise, he raised the question of the other claimant, Peter Blake's son. Of course he knew about Peter Blake's claim, although it was

before his time, and it seems that he read the newspaper report of the curious statement that Miss Blake—Peter's daughter—made at the inquest on Sir Lawrence's brother. Well, in effect, he suggested—very properly, as I thought—that Miss Blake might like to be present when the search was made.'

'I certainly think,' said Drayton, 'she should be, if not actually present, at least represented. There might be some documents affecting her brother directly.'

'That was his point, and he authorised me to invite her to be present and to make all necessary arrangements. So the question is, Thorndyke, when can you go down and find the documents?'

'I am prepared to begin the search the day after tomorrow.'

'And with regard to Miss Blake? You are acquainted with her, I think?'

'Yes,' replied Thorndyke. 'We can communicate with her. But my feeling is that it would hardly be desirable for her to be present while the actual survey is being made. It may be a tedious affair, and we shall get on with it better without spectators. Of course I shall know if anything is found and shall probably ascertain its nature; and in that case she can be informed.'

Drayton nodded, but he did not seem quite satisfied. 'I suppose that will do,' said he, 'though I would rather that she were directly represented. You see, Thorndyke, you are acting for Blake, and if Anstey goes with you, he is your coadjutor. I wonder if Blake would object to my looking in later in the day. I could, as I have to go down to Aylesbury the day after tomorrow. What do you say, Brodribb?'

'I see no objection,' was the reply, 'in fact, I will take the responsibility of inviting you to call and see what progress has been made.'

'Very well, then,' said Drayton, 'I will come about four. I shall go down by car, and when I have finished with my client, I can easily take Beauchamp Blake on my way home. And for that matter,' he added, 'I don't see why Miss Blake shouldn't come with me. My client's wife could entertain her while I am transacting the business, and then she could come on with me to the house. How does that strike you, Thorndyke?'

'It seems quite an admirable arrangement,' my colleague replied. 'She will be saved the tedium of waiting about and she will have the advantage of your advice if any delicate inquiries have to be made.'

Drayton's suggestion was accordingly adopted, subject to Winifred's consent—which I did not doubt she would give readily, notwithstanding the pressure of her work—and shortly afterwards our two friends took their departure, leaving me a little puzzled as to the origin and purpose of the conference and the projected expedition.

It had been a rather curious transaction. There were several points that I failed to understand. In the first place, what interest had Thorndyke in these title-deeds? Assuming him to take Percy's rather indefinite claim seriously—which he apparently did—was the establishment of the title desirable from his point of view? I should have thought not. It had appeared that Blake was anxious to sell the property and had been restrained only by the insecurity of the title. But if the title were made secure, he would almost certainly sell the estate, which was the last thing that Percy's advisers could wish. Then could it be that our shrewd old friend Brodribb was right? That Thorndyke had actually ascertained or inferred the whereabouts of the missing deeds? In the case of any other person the supposition would have seemed ridiculous. But Thorndyke's power of reasoning from apparently unilluminating facts was so extraordinary that the possibility had to be admitted, and his evasive reply to Drayton's direct question seemed to make it even probable.

'I don't see,' said I, with a faint hope of extracting some trifle of information from Thorndyke, 'why you are so keen on these title-deeds.'

'That,' he replied, 'is because you persist in thinking in sections. If you would take a larger view of the subject this proposed search would appear to you in a rather different light.'

'I wonder if there is really going to be a search,' I said craftily, 'or whether old Brodribb was right. I am inclined to suspect that he was.'

'I commend your respect for Brodribb's opinions,' he replied. 'Our friend is an uncommonly wide-awake old gentleman. But he was only guessing. Whatever we find at Beauchamp Blake—if we find anything—will be discovered by bonafide research and experiment. And that raises another question. Are you going down with Drayton or did you propose to come with me?'

'I don't want to be in your way,' I replied, a little piqued at the question. 'Otherwise I should, of course, have liked to come with you.'

'Your help would be very valuable,' said he, 'if you are willing to sacrifice the other attractions. But if you are going to help me, we had better take a little preliminary practice together. There is a set of empty chambers next door. Tomorrow I will get the keys from the treasurer's office, and we can put in some spare time making careful measured plans. The whole art of discovering secret chambers is in the making of plans so exact as to account for every inch of space, and showing accurately the precise thickness of every wall and floor. And a little practice in the art of opening locked doors without the aid of keys will not be amiss.'

This programme was duly carried out. On the morrow we conveyed into the empty chambers a plane table covered with

drawing-paper, a surveyor's tape, and a measuring-rod; and with these appliances, I proceeded, under Thorndyke's direction, to make a scaled plan of the set of rooms, showing the exact thickness of all the walls and the spaces occupied by chimneys, cupboards, and all kinds of projections and irregularities. It was a longer business than I had expected; indeed I did not get it completed until the evening was closing in, and when at last I had filled in the final details and took the completed plan to our chambers for Thorndyke's inspection, I found my colleague busily engaged in preparations for the morrow's adventure.

'Well!' I exclaimed, when my plan had been examined and replaced by a fresh sheet of paper, 'this is an extraordinary outfit! I hope we shan't have to carry this case home after dark.'

It was certainly a most sinister collection of appliances that Thorndyke had assembled in the suitcase. There was a brace and bits, and auger, a bunch of skeleton keys, an electric lantern, a pair of telescopic jemmies, and two automatic pistols.

'What on earth are the pistols for?' I demanded.

'Those,' he replied, 'are just an extra precaution. Many of these hiding-holes are fitted with snap locks, and it is quite possible to find oneself caught in a trap. Then, if there should be no room to use a jemmy, it might be necessary to blow the lock to pieces.'

'Well,' I remarked, 'it is as well to take all necessary precautions, but if Blake sees those pistols they will need a good deal of explaining, especially as he will certainly recognise us as the two suspicious visitors.'

'We need not exhibit them ostentatiously,' said Thorndyke. 'We can carry them in our pockets, and the jemmies as well. Then if the necessity to use them arises, they will explain themselves.'

The rest of the evening we spent in a course of instruction in the arrangement and design of the various kinds of secret chambers, hiding-holes, aumbries, and receptacles for documents, sacred vessels, and other objects that, in times of political upheaval, might need to be concealed. On this subject Thorndyke was a mine of information, and he produced a note-book filled with descriptions, plans, sections, and photographs of most of the examples that had been examined, which we went over together and studied in the minutest detail. By the end of the evening, I had not only acquired an immense amount of knowledge on an obscure out-of-the-way subject, but I had become in so far infected with Thorndyke's enthusiasm that I found myself looking forward almost eagerly to the romantic quest on which the following day was to see us launched.



## XVII. — THE SECRET CHAMBER

It was close on half-past eleven when our train drew up in Wendover Station. We had just finished our rather premature lunch and had packed up the luncheon baskets and placed them on the seats; and now, lifting down the suitcase and the plane table with its folding tripod, stepped out on to the platform.

'I wonder,' said I, 'if Blake has sent any kind of conveyance for us. I don't suppose he has.'

My surmise turned out to be correct. When we went out into the station approach, the only vehicle in sight was a closed fly, which we decided to charter; and having stowed our impedimenta on the front seat and given the driver the necessary directions, we entered and took possession of the back seat. The coachman climbed to the box and started the horse at a quiet jog-trot, turning into the Aylesbury, or London Road to avoid the steep hill down which we had come to the station on the last occasion. As we passed the fine, brick-towered windmill and came out on the country road, Thorndyke leaned forward and opened the suitcase.

'We had better put the more suspicious-looking objects in our pockets,' said he. 'We may not want them at all, and then they won't have been seen, whereas if they are wanted, the necessity will explain our having provided ourselves with them.'

He took out the bunch of skeleton keys and slipped them into his coat pocket, and then picked out the two telescopic jemmies, one of which he handed to me while he bestowed the other in some kind of interior pocket—into which, I noticed, it disappeared with singular completeness, suggesting a suspicious suitability of the receptacle. Finally he took out the two automatic pistols, and having pocketed one, handed me the other after a careful and detailed explanation of its mechanism and the proper way to hold and fire it. I took the weapon from him and stowed it in my hip-pocket, very gingerly and with some reluctance, for I detest firearms; and as I placed it carefully with the muzzle pointed as far as possible away from my own person, I reflected once more with dim surprise on the circumstance that Thorndyke, whose dislike of these weapons was as great as my own, should have adopted this clumsy and dangerous means of dealing with a somewhat remote contingency. It seemed an excessive precaution, and I found creeping into my mind a faint suspicion that my colleague might possibly have had something more in his mind than he had disclosed, though that was even more incomprehensible, considering the very peaceful nature of our quest.

I was still turning these matters over in my mind when the fly reached the crossroads and entered the lane. Here the appearance of the inn just ahead recalled me to our immediate business, and old Brodribb's observation recurred to me.

'How are you going to start, Thorndyke?' I asked. 'I presume you have got some definite programme?'

'I shall be guided by what Blake has to tell us,' he replied. 'He may have a good plan of the house, and it is possible that he has made some explorations of his own which will give us a start. There is our old friend, the lodge-keeper, mightily surprised to see us.'

I caught a passing glimpse of the sleuth, staring at us in undisguised astonishment; then we swung round into the drive, and the old house came into view. We were evidently expected, for as we approached the house a man came out of the main entrance and stood on the wide threshold awaiting our arrival. Just as the fly was about to draw up opposite the portico, Thorndyke said in a low voice:

'If we are offered any refreshments, Anstey, we had better decline them. We have had lunch, you know.'

I glanced at him in amazement. It was a most astonishing remark. But there was no time to ask for any explanation, for at that moment the fly drew up, the driver jumped down from his seat, and the squire came forward to receive us.

'We have met before, I think,' said the latter as we shook hands. 'If I had known who you were I should have invited you to look at the house then. However, it isn't too late. I see you have brought your traps with you,' he added, with a glance at the plane table and its tripod.

'Yes,' said Thorndyke, 'we are prepared to make a regular survey, if necessary. But perhaps you have a plan of the house?'

'There is a plan,' replied Blake, 'though I fancy it is not very exact. I will show it to you. Probably it will give you a hint where to begin.'

As I had now settled with the fly-man, we entered the house, and Blake conducted us into a large room, furnished as a library and containing a considerable collection of books. On a table by one of the windows was a plan spread out and held open by paperweights.

'You see,' said Blake, 'this is an architect's plan, made, I think, when some repairs were contemplated. It is little more than a sketch, and doesn't give much detail. But it will help you to take a preliminary look round before lunch.'

'We have had lunch,' said Thorndyke. 'We got that over in the train so that we should have a clear day before us. Time is precious, and we ought to get to work at once. I suppose you have not made any sort of investigation on your own account?'

As Thorndyke mentioned our premature meal, the squire gave him a quick glance and seemed to look a little resentful. But he made no comment beyond answering the question.

'I have not made any regular examination of the house, but I have poked about a little in the old part and I have found one secret chamber, which I have utilised as a photographic dark-room. Perhaps you would like to see that first. There may



be some other hiding-places connected with it which I have overlooked. There is a tall cupboard in it which I have used to store my chemicals.'

'We may have to empty that cupboard to see if there is anything behind it,' said Thorndyke. 'At any rate, we had better begin by overhauling it.'

He opened the suitcase and took from it the surveyor's tape, which he put in his pocket.

'Hadh't we better take the lamp?' said I.

'You won't want that,' said Blake. 'There is a portable lamp in the room.'

I was half-inclined to take it, nevertheless, but as Thorndyke shut the suitcase and prepared to follow our host, I let the matter rest.

From the library we passed out into a long gallery, one side of which was hung with portraits, presumably of members of the family, and some of them of considerable antiquity, to judge by the style of the painting and the ancient costumes. Then we crossed several rooms—fine, stately apartments with florid, moulded ceilings and walls of oaken panelling, on which I noticed a very respectable display of pictures. The rooms were fully furnished—very largely, I noticed, with the oak and walnut furniture that must have been put in when the new wing was built. But they were all pervaded by a sense of desolation and neglect; they were dusty and looked faded, unused, and forgotten. Nowhere was there a sign of human occupation, nor, I noticed, did we meet, in the whole course of our journey across this part of the house, a single servant or retainer, or, indeed, any living creature whatever.

A door at the end of a short passage, on being unlocked and opened, revealed a short flight of wooden stairs, and when we had descended these we found ourselves in a totally different atmosphere. This was the old timber house, and as we crossed its deserted rooms and trod its uncarpeted oaken floors, our footsteps resounded with dismal echoes among the empty chambers and corridors, conveying a singular sense of remoteness and desolation. The gloomy old rooms with their dirt-encrusted casements, the massive beams in their ceilings, the blackened wainscoting, rich with carved ornament but shrouded with the dust and grime of years of neglect, the gouty-legged Elizabethan tables and ponderous oaken chairs and settles; all these dusty and forgotten appurtenances of a vanished generation of men seemed to have died with their long-departed human associates and to be silently awaiting their final decay and dissolution. It was an eerie place, dead and desolate as an Egyptian tomb.

And yet, strangely enough, it was here that I saw the one solitary sign of human life. We were passing along a narrow gallery or corridor when I noticed, high up in the panelled wall, one of those small interior windows which one sees in old houses, placed opposite an exterior window to light an inner chamber. Looking up at this little window, I saw the face of some person looking down on us. It was the merest glimpse that I caught, for the window was coated with dust and the room behind it in darkness. But there was the face of some human creature, man, woman, or child, and its appearance in this remote, sepulchral place, so far from the domain of the living household, smote upon me strangely and seemed to make even more intense the uncanny solitude of the empty mansion.

I was still speculating curiously on who this watcher might be, when our host halted by the wall of a smallish room.

'This is the place,' said he, pointing to the wall. 'I wonder if you can find the door.'

The wainscoting in this room was nearly plain, the only ornament being a range of very flat pilasters and a dado moulding, enriched by a row of hemispherical bosses. Thorndyke ran his eye over the wainscoting, noting more particularly the way in which the pilasters were joined to the intervening panels.

'I suppose,' said he, 'we had better try the most obvious probabilities first. The natural thing would be to use one of these bosses to cover the release of the lock.'

Blake assented (or dissented) with an inarticulate grunt, and Thorndyke then proceeded to pass along the row of bosses, pressing each one firmly in turn. After about a dozen trials, he came to one in the middle of a pilaster which yielded to the pressure of his thumb, sinking in some two inches, in the fashion of a large electric-bell push. Holding the 'push' in with his thumb, he pressed vigorously against the adjoining panel, first on one side of the pilaster and then on the other, but in neither case was there any sign of the panel moving, though I added my weight to his.

'You haven't quite hit it off yet,' Blake informed us.

Thorndyke reflected for a few seconds. Then, keeping the boss pressed in, he put his other thumb on the next one of the series, which was at the edge of the panel, and gave a sharp push, whereupon this boss also sank in with an audible click and then the whole panel swung inward, disclosing a narrow and wonderfully well-concealed doorway.

'Good,' said Blake. 'You've solved the problem more quickly than I did. Just hold the door open a moment. It has rather a strong spring, and I generally prop it open with this block.' As he spoke he fetched a small block of wood from under an adjacent table and set it against the foot of the door.

'I had better go first,' said he, 'as I know where to find the lamp.' With this he entered before us, striking a wax match and shading it with his hand. The dim illumination showed a narrow, passage-like room, apparently a good deal more lofty than the low-ceiled room from which we had entered it, and dimly revealed a very high cupboard near the farther end. We had groped our way after him a few paces when he turned suddenly. 'How stupid of me!' he exclaimed. 'I had forgotten that I had left the lamp in the next room. Excuse me one moment.'

He slipped past us, and kicking the block away, ran out, pulling the door sharply after him, when it slammed to with a loud click of the latch.

'What the deuce did he kick that block away for,' I exclaimed, 'and leave us all in the dark?'

'We shall probably find out presently,' replied Thorndyke. 'Meanwhile, stand perfectly still. Don't move hand or foot.'

'Why do you say that?' I demanded with something like a thrill of alarm, for there was something rather disturbing in the tone of Thorndyke's sharply-spoken command. And standing there in the pitchy darkness, locked in a secret chamber in the very heart of this great, empty mansion, there came to me a flash of sudden suspicion. I recalled Thorndyke's mysterious warning to take no food in this house; I remembered the loaded pistol that he had put into my hand, and I saw again that unaccountable face at the window, watching us as Blake led us—whither? 'You don't think Blake is up to any mischief, do you?' I asked.

'I can't say,' he replied. 'Perhaps he will come with the lamp presently. But we may as well see where we are while we are waiting.'

I heard a rustling as if he were searching his pockets. Then, suddenly, there broke out a bright light that flooded the little room and rendered all the objects in it plainly visible.

It was a queer-looking room, almost more like a rather irregularly-shaped passage, for none of the walls were straight, and the ceiling sloped up from a height of about eight feet at one end to nearly twelve at the other. Near the farther end was a very high wall-cupboard, and at the extreme end, facing us, was a small door, about three feet above the floor level and approached by a flight of five wooden stairs.

The appearance of the light was reassuring, and still more so was the evidence that it afforded of Thorndyke's foresight in having provided himself with this supplementary lamp. But much less reassuring was his next observation after having flashed his light all over the room.

'I suspect we have seen the last of our host—for the present, at any rate. Look at the top of the cupboard, Anstey.'

I looked at the cupboard. It was between eight and nine feet high, and was fitted with folding doors, of which the leaf nearest to us was half open; and on the top of the half-open door, near the free corner, a little board had been placed with one end resting on the door and the other insecurely supported by the moulding at the top of the cupboard; and on the board, delicately balanced over the door, was a large chemical flask, filled with what looked like water and fitted with a cork.

'What do you make of it?' Thorndyke asked, keeping his powerful inspection-lamp focused on the flask as I gazed at it.

'It looks like some sort of booby-trap,' said I. 'It is a wonder that flask wasn't shaken down when Blake slammed the door.'

'He probably expected that it would be, and it very nearly was, for you can see that it has jarred to the extreme edge. But failing the slam of the door, he no doubt assumes that we, being as he imagines in total darkness, shall grope our way along the wall until we come to the cupboard. Then, the instant we touch the door, down will come the flask. It is quite an ingenious plan.'

'But what is the purpose of it?' I demanded. 'It can't be a practical joke.'

'It isn't,' said he. 'Far from it. I should say it is very deadly earnest. Unless I am mistaken, that flask is filled with some volatile poison. The instant that it falls and breaks, this room will become a lethal chamber.'

At these words, uttered by Thorndyke in tones as calm and emotionless as if he were giving a demonstration to his students, a chill of horror crept over me. My very hair seemed to stir. It was an appalling situation. I stared in dismay and terror at the flask, poised aloft and ready, as it seemed, at the slightest movement, or even a loudly-spoken word, to come crashing down and stifle us with its deadly fumes.

'Great God!' I gasped. 'Then we are in a trap! But is there nothing that we can do? The flask is too high up for us to reach it.'

'It would be sheer insanity to go near it; said Thorndyke. 'But I don't think we need be very disturbed. There must be some way of getting out of this chamber. Let us go and reconnoitre the door, though I daresay our friend has attended to that.'

We tiptoed cautiously back to the door and examined its construction. The mechanism was very simple, but like most old locksmith's work, extremely massive. The two bosses outside evidently were the ends of two sliding bars and bolts of wood. The one which Thorndyke had pressed first apparently had a slot which, when it was brought opposite the massive latch, allowed the latter to rise. That at least was what Thorndyke inferred, for, as the latch was in the thickness of the great oaken doorpost (which had a slot to let it escape, when raised) the actual mechanism could not be seen. The second sliding bar, when pushed in, raised the latch itself by means of an inclined plane. Both the sliding bars had been provided with knobs on their inner ends, so that they could be pulled in from inside as well as pushed in from without; but whereas the knob still remained on the bar which raised the latch, that of the bar which released the latch and allowed it to rise had been removed. The end of the bar could be seen, nearly flush with the surface of the doorpost, and in it a small hole in which the knob had evidently been screwed.

'Would it be possible to hook anything, such as a skeleton key, into that hole?' I asked when we had examined it thoroughly.

'I think we can do better than that,' said he, hooking the bulls-eye of his inspection-lamp in a button-hole of his coat and feeling in his pocket. 'This is a more workmanlike appliance.'

He exhibited an appliance that looked like a kind of clasp-knife, but was actually a pocket set of screw-taps, such as are carried by engineers and plumbers. Drawing out the smallest tap, he tried it in the hole, but the latter was too small to admit it. Then, from the same appliance, he drew out a taper reamer, and on trying this in the hole he found that the point entered easily. He accordingly drove it in lightly, rotating it as he pressed, and continued to turn it until the sharp-cutting tool had broached out the hole to a size that would admit the nose of the tap, when he withdrew the reamer, and inserting the tap, gave it a few vigorous turns. Now, on pulling gently at the handle of the tap, it was seen to be fast in the hole, and the sliding bar began to move forward.

'I wonder if our host is hanging about outside,' said he.

'What does it matter whether he is or not?' I asked.

'Because I want to try whether we can open the door, and I don't want him to hear.'

'But, confound it,' said I, 'he will see us when we come out.'

'We are not going to come out that way if we can find any other.'

'Why not?' I demanded. 'We want to get clear of that infernal flask, and the sooner we are out the better.'

'Not at all,' said Thorndyke. 'If we come out and show ourselves, the game is up, and there will probably be trouble. Whereas if we can get out another way, we shall put him in a very pretty dilemma. Hearing no sound from us, he will probably assume that his plan has succeeded. And if Drayton should arrive before he has taken the risk of verifying our decease, his explanations should be rather interesting. At any rate, I should like to see what his next move will be, but we must make our retreat secure in case of accidents. I think we can raise the latch without making any noticeable sound. You observe that the pivot has been oiled—and also that the door-spring is new and has apparently been fixed on quite recently.'

In my heart I cursed his inquiring spirit, for I wanted to get out of this horrible trap. But I offered no objection, standing by sullenly while he proceeded with calm interest to complete his experiment. Grasping the tap-handle with one hand and the knob with the other, he pulled steadily at the former until the sliding bar was drawn inwards to its full extent, and then at the knob, which came in with similar ease and silence. But when I saw the latch rise and the door begin to swing inwards, I could hardly restrain myself from dragging it open and making a burst for freedom.

The next moment the opportunity was gone. With the same silent care Thorndyke reclosed the door, let the latch down, and slid back the release bar.

'Now,' said he, turning away but leaving the tap jammed in the hole, 'we can pursue our investigations at our ease. If there is no other exit, we can come out this way, and we have got a clear retreat in case of accidents. What does the appearance of this place suggest to you? I mean as to an exit.'

'Well,' I answered, 'there is a door at the top of those steps. Presumably its function is the ordinary function of a door.'

'I doubt it,' said he. 'It is too blatantly innocent. More probably its function was to occupy pursuers while the fugitive was gaining a start. Still, we will have a thorough look at it, as I expect our host has already done. We had better go one at a time, and for Heaven's sake step lightly, and remember that if that flask should come down, you make a bee-line for the door and get outside instantly.'

Lighted by Thorndyke's lamp, I crept cautiously along the room with my eyes riveted on the flask and my heart in my mouth. Then Thorndyke followed, and together we ascended the steps to the door, and proceeded to examine it minutely. It was provided with plainly visible hinges but had no ostensible latch or lock. Around it were a number of projecting ends of tree-nails, but pressure on them, one after the other, produced no result, nor did the door itself show any sign of yielding; indeed, the form of the hinges suggested that it opened inwards—towards the room—if it would open at all.

'We are wasting time, Anstey,' Thorndyke said at length. 'The thing is a dummy, as we might have expected. Let us try something more likely. Now, from what I know of these secret chambers, I should say that the most probable exits are the cupboard and the stairs. Both, you notice, seem to be functionless. There is no reason for that great cupboard having been built in here, and these stairs simply lead to a dummy door. And cupboards with sliding shelves and concealed doors in the back, and stairs with movable treads were very favourite devices. The cupboard is unfortunately not practicable while that flask is balanced overhead, so we had better give our attention to the stairs. I suspect that there are two exits, in different directions, but either will do for us.'

We stole softly down the stairs, and stooping on hands and knees, brought the light to bear on the joints of the treads and risers; but the dirt of ages had settled on them and filled up any tell-tale cracks that might have been visible. To my eye, the steps looked all alike, and all seemed to be solid oak planks immovably fixed in their positions.

Suddenly Thorndyke dived into his inner pocket and brought forth the telescopic jemmy, which he pulled out to its full length. Then, laying the chisel end on the tread of the bottom stair, he drove its edge forcibly against the angle where the

tread and the riser met. To my surprise, the edge entered fully half an inch into the joint, which the dirt had filled and concealed.

'Get your jemmy, Anstey, and push it in by the side of mine,' said he.

I produced the tool from my breast pocket, where it had been reposing to my great discomfort, and opening it out, I inserted its edge close to that of Thorndyke's.

'Now,' said he, 'both together. Push!'

We both bore heavily on the ends of the jemmies, and the sharp chisel ends entered fully an inch; and simultaneously a visible crack appeared along the foot of the riser. We now withdrew the jemmies and reinserted them at the two ends of the tread. Again we drove in together, and the crack widened perceptibly. On this, Thorndyke rose and closely examined the angle of the step above and then that of the third, and here, as he brought the bulls-eye close to the surface of the step, I could see that a narrow crack had opened between the step and the riser.

'It looks,' said I, 'as if the two steps had shifted.'

'Yes,' he agreed, 'and apparently the pivot, if there is one, is above. Let us get to work again.'

We reinserted the jemmies several times in different places, thrusting together and as forcibly as we dared with that horrible flask insecurely balanced above our heads; and at each thrust there was an appreciable widening of the crack, which had now opened fully a quarter of an inch, making it evident that the stairs were really movable.

'Now,' said Thorndyke, 'I think we might venture to prise.'

He reversed his jemmy and inserted the 'crow' end into the crack near one extremity, while I inserted mine near the opposite end. Then, at a word from him, we bore on the ends of the levers, and with a protesting groan, the step rose another inch. Thorndyke now laid aside his jemmy, and standing on the bottom step, thrust his fingers into the gaping crack; I did the same, and when we had got a fair grasp, he gave the word.

'Now, both together. Up she comes!'

We both heaved steadily but not too violently. There was a grinding creak as the long-disused joint moved; then suddenly the two steps swung up and stood nearly upright on their pivot, disclosing a yawning hole in which the light showed a narrow flight of brick steps.

Thorndyke immediately stepped in through the opening, and descending a few steps, turned and held the light for me, when I followed.

The steps fell away steeply down a kind of well with walls of brickwork, which was thickly encrusted with slimy growths of algae and fungi, and the steps themselves were slippery with a similar coating and were almost hidden, in places, by great fungous masses which sprouted from the joints of the brickwork. After descending about eight feet, we reached a level floor and proceeded along a narrow brick tunnel, stooping to clear the slime-covered roof. This extended some fifteen yards and ended in what at first looked like a blank wall. On coming close, however, and throwing on it the light of the lantern, I perceived an oblong space of planking about five feet long by three high and three feet above the floor, forming a rude door, very massive and clumsy and furnished with a simple, roughly-fashioned iron latch.

'I don't see any hinges,' observed Thorndyke, 'so there is probably an internal pivot. Let us prise up the latch first and then see how the door moves.'

He slipped the end of his jemmy under the latch, taking a bearing on the brickwork, and levered the great latch up without much difficulty in spite of the rust that had locked it in position. Then, inserting the chisel end into the crack between the door and the jamb, he gave a tentative wrench, when the door moved perceptibly, inwards at one end and outwards at the other.

'It is evidently pivoted in the middle,' said he. 'If you will prise the other end while I work at this, we shall get it open easily.'

We accordingly inserted our jemmies at the respective ends and gave a steady thrust; on which the door, with a deep groan and a loud screech from the rusty pivots, swung round on its centre, letting in a flood of cheerful daylight and fresh air, which I inhaled with profound relief. A vigorous pull on the edge brought the door fully open and disclosed a mass of foliage which blocked the view from within and no doubt concealed the door from outside. But in any case it would have been very inconspicuous, for we could now see that the solid planking was covered externally with counterfeit brickwork, very convincingly executed with slices of brick.

Thorndyke reached out and pulled aside a branch of the tree that obscured the view 'This door,' said he, 'seems to open on the edge of the moat, so it was probably made at a time when the moat was full of water. However, we have found our way out, and it is a better one than the cupboard would have given us, for, if that has an exit in the back, it probably leads up to the garrets or the chimneys. Now all we have to do is to remove our traces from the chamber above and make our way out. But there is no need for you to come up.'

'I am coming up all the same,' said I, and as he turned to re-enter the tunnel, I followed, though I admit, with infinite reluctance. But I did not actually re-enter the chamber. I stood with my head out of the opening and a terrified eye on the accursed flask, while Thorndyke tiptoed across the room to the door. Here he withdrew the tap from the hole, and folding

it, dropped it into his pocket. Then he stooped and blew away the wood-dust that had fallen from the reamer on to the floor, and having thus removed every trace (excepting the broached-out hole in the sliding bar), he stepped lightly back and re-entered the opening.

'The problem now,' said he, 'is to get these stairs back in their place without shaking down the flask.'

'Does it matter,' I asked, 'now that we have a means of escape?'

'Not very much,' he answered, 'but I would rather leave it there in evidence.'

The movable stairs were furnished with a rough wooden handle on the underside to enable a fugitive to replace them from below. This Thorndyke grasped, and with a steady pull, drew the stairs down into their original position, giving a final tug to bring the joints close together. Then once more we began to descend the slippery steps.

We were about half-way down when Thorndyke stopped.

'Listen, Anstey,' said he, switching off the light. And as he spoke, I caught the sound of footsteps somewhere overhead. Then I heard the door of the secret chamber open slowly—I could recognise it by the sound of the door-spring—and after a little interval, Blake's voice called out:

'Dr Thorndyke! Mr Anstey! Where are you?'

Again there was a short pause. The door slowly opened a little farther, the floor above creaked under a stealthy tread, and then I seemed to catch faintly another voice, apparently more distant.

'They are not here,' said Blake. 'They seem to have got out somehow. Here, catch hold of the lamp. Mind the door! Mind the—'

The door-spring creaked. There was a heavy thud, and an instant later the sound of shattering glass, followed by a startled shout and a hurried trampling of feet.

'The knob! The knob! Quick!' a high-pitched voice shrieked; and at that the very marrow in my bones seemed to creep. For the knob was useless now. Thorndyke's reamer had destroyed the screw-hole.

With the sweat streaming down my face and my heart thumping with sickening violence, I listened to the torrent of curses, rising to yells of terror and anguish and mingled with strange, whimpering cries. I could see it all with horrible distinctness: the two trapped wretches above, frantically turning the knob in the broached-out hole while the poisonous fumes rose remorselessly and encompassed them.

The cries grew thicker and more muffled, and mingled with dreadful coughs and gasps. Then there was a sound of a heavy body falling on the floor and a horrible husky screech broke out, whereat I felt the hair of my scalp stir like the fur of a frightened cat. Three times that appalling screech came through the floor to our pitch-dark lurking-place, the last time dying away into a hideous, quavering wail. Then, once more, there was the thud of a heavy body falling on the floor, and after that an awful silence.

'God Almighty!' I gasped. 'Can't we do anything, Thorndyke?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'we can get out of this. It is time we did.'

Even as he spoke I became aware of a faint odour of bitter almonds which seemed every moment to grow more distinct. It was undoubtedly time for us to be gone; and when, once more, the light of his lamp flashed down the stairway, I responded readily to a gentle push and began to descend the steps as rapidly as my trembling knees would let me.

The faint, sinister odour pursued us even to the tunnel and it was with a sigh of relief that I reached the open doorway and looked again on the sky-lit foliage and breathed the wholesome air. We crept out together through the long, low doorway, and grasping the branches of the trees and bushes outside, scrambled down the sloping bank to the dry floor of the moat.



## XVIII. — THE CAT'S EYE

When we stood up at the bottom of the bank, I turned to Thorndyke and asked:

'What are we going to do now? We must make some effort to let those poor devils out.'

That,' he replied, 'is an impossibility. In the first place they are certainly dead by now, and in the second it would be certain death to attempt to open that door. The chamber is full of the vapour of hydrocyanic acid.'

'But,' I expostulated, 'we ought to do something. Humanity demands that we should, at least, make a show of trying to save them.'

'I don't see why,' he replied coldly. 'They are certainly dead, and if they were not, I would not risk a single hair of my head to save their lives. Still, if you have any feeling on the matter, we can go and reconnoitre. But we must look to our own safety.'

He struck out along the floor of the moat at a brisk pace, and I kept up with him as well as my trembling knees would let me, for I was horribly shaken by the shocking experiences of the last few minutes, and still felt sick and faint. Thorndyke, on the other hand, was perfectly unmoved, and as he strode along at my side, I glanced at his calm face and found in his quiet, unconcerned manner something inhuman and repelling. It is true that those two wretches who now lay stark and dead on the floor of that dreadful chamber deserved no sympathy. They had dug a pit for us and fallen into it themselves. But still, they were human beings, and their lives were human lives, but Thorndyke seemed to value them no more than if they had been a couple of rats.

About a hundred yards farther along the moat, we came to a cross path, at each end of which was a flight of rough steps up the bank. We ascended the steps on the house side, and these brought us to a small door with a Tudor arch in the head. A modern night-latch had been added to the ancient lock, but it was a simple affair which Thorndyke's picklock opened in a few moments, and the door then yielded to a push. It opened into a corridor which I recognised as the one which we had passed through and where I had seen the face at the window—a dead face it was now, I suspected. We turned and walked along it in the direction in which Blake had led us, and as we neared the end I began to be sensible of a faint odour in the musty air; an attenuated scent of bitter almonds.

'We must go warily,' said Thorndyke. 'The next room, I think, is the one out of which the secret chamber opens.'

He paused and stood looking dubiously at the door; and as he stood hesitating, I pushed past him, and seizing the handle, flung the door open and looked into the room. But it was only an instantaneous glance, showing me the uninterrupted wall, the wooden block lying where Blake had kicked it, and close by, a dead rat. The sight of that little corpse and the sickening smell of bitter almonds that suddenly grew strong in the air as the door opened, produced an instant revulsion. My concern for our would-be murderers was extinguished by a thrill of alarm for my own safety. I drew the door to hurriedly and followed Thorndyke, who was walking quickly away.

'It is no use, Anstey,' he said, a little impatiently. 'It is mere sentiment, and a silly one at that. All we can do is to open these windows and clear off until the gas has diffused out. It won't take so very long with all the gaping joints in this old woodwork.'

'And what are we going to do meanwhile?'

'We must find the housekeeper, if there is one, and let her know the state of affairs. Then we must send information to the police at Aylesbury, and before they arrive, I think it would be well to prepare a written statement, which we can sign in their presence and which should contain all that we are prepared to say about the matter before the inquest.'

'Yes,' I agreed 'that seems to be the best course'; and with this we proceeded to open the rusty casements of the corridor and then made our way back to the new wing of the house.

The inn-keeper had certainly been right. Squire Blake had been very far from lavish in the matter of retainers. One after another of the great, dusty rooms we crossed or peered into without encountering a single serving-man or maid. The house seemed to be utterly deserted. At last we came to the entrance hall, and here, as we stood commenting on this extraordinary solitude, a door opened and a faded and shabby elderly woman, looking like a rather superior charwoman, emerged. She looked at us curiously and then asked:

'Can you tell me, sir, if Mr Blake is ready for lunch?'

'I am sorry to say,' replied Thorndyke, 'that Mr Blake has met with a mishap. He has locked himself in his dark room and has poisoned himself accidentally with some chemicals.'

'Oh dear!' exclaimed the woman, looking at Thorndyke with a sort of stupefied dismay. 'Hadn't some one better go and fetch him out?'

'That is not possible at present,' said Thorndyke. 'The room is full of poison gas.'

'But,' the woman protested, 'he may die if no one goes to his assistance.'

'He is dead already,' said Thorndyke, 'and there is another person in the room with him, who is also dead'.

'That will be Mr Meyer, his valet,' said the woman, staring at Thorndyke with a sort of bewildered horror, puzzled, no doubt, by the incongruity between his tragic tidings and his calm, matter-of-fact demeanour. 'And you say they have both killed themselves! Lord! Lord! What a dreadful thing!' She clasped her hands, and gazing helplessly from one of us to the other, asked: 'What are we to do? Oh! what are we to do?'

'Is there any one whom we could send into Aylesbury?' asked Thorndyke, 'We ought to let the police know of the accident, and we ought to get a doctor.'

There is only the lodge-keeper,' she whimpered shakily 'He could go on Mr Meyer's bicycle. Dear, dear! what an awful thing it is!'

'If you will have the bicycle brought to the door,' said Thorndyke, 'I will write a note and take it up to the lodge-keeper myself. There are writing materials in the library I suppose?'

She supposed there were, and showed us into the room, where we found some notepaper and envelopes. Then she departed, wringing her hands and muttering, to fetch the bicycle.

'I shall not give any details in this note,' Thorndyke said as he sat down at the table and uncapped his fountain pen, 'I shall just tell them that Mr Blake and his valet have met their deaths—presumably—by poisoning, that it is a police case, and that the Divisional Surgeon had better accompany the police officer.'

With this he wrote the note, addressing it to the Superintendent or Chief Constable, and he had just closed and sealed it when the woman reappeared to announce the arrival of the bicycle, which had been brought to the door by a young woman, apparently a housemaid. Thorndyke mounted the machine and rode away swiftly up the drive, and I turned back into the house, followed by the two women, who, now that the first shock had spent itself, were devoured by curiosity and eager to extract information.

Their efforts in this direction, however, were not very successful, for, although the facts must very soon become public property, it seemed desirable at present to say as little as possible, while, as for any explanation of this extraordinary affair, I was as much in the dark as they were. So I maintained a discreet, though difficult, reticence until Thorndyke reappeared, when the two women retired and left us in possession of the room.

'I sent our friend off with the note,' said my colleague 'and I told him enough to make sure that he will put on the pace. It is only about four miles, and as the police probably have a car, we may expect them pretty soon. I will just draft out a statement of the actual occurrences, and you had better write, on the same paper, a confirmatory declaration. We can read them to the officer and sign them in his presence.'

He proceeded to write out a concise, but fairly full, narrative of what had befallen us in this house, with a brief statement of the nature of our business here, and when I had read it through, I wrote at the foot a paragraph confirming the statement and accepting it as my own. This occupied some considerable time, and we had not long finished when there was a somewhat peremptory ring at the bell, and a minute later, the elderly woman—whom I assumed to be the housekeeper—entered, accompanied by a police officer and a gentleman in civilian clothes. The former introduced himself briefly and got to business without preamble.

'Concerning this note, sir,' said he, 'you have given no particulars. I suppose there is no doubt that Mr Blake and his valet are really dead?'

'I should say there is no doubt at all,' replied Thorndyke. 'But I have written out a statement of the particulars, from which you will be able to judge. Shall I read it to you?'

'I think the doctor had better see the bodies first,' was the reply.

'Certainly,' agreed the doctor. 'We don't want to waste precious time on statements. Where are they?'

'I will take you to them,' said Thorndyke, 'but I must tell you that they are shut in a room which is filled with the vapour of hydrocyanic acid.'

The two men gave a startled look at Thorndyke, and as he led the way out into the hall and across the new wing, they followed, talking together earnestly but in low tones. Presently they overtook us, and the officer remarked:

'This is a very extraordinary affair, sir. Has no attempt been made to get these men out of that room?'

'No,' replied Thorndyke.

'But why not?'

'I think you will see when you get there.'

'But,' exclaimed the doctor, 'surely some effort ought to have been made to save them! You don't mean to say that you have left them in that poisoned air and made no attempt even to open the doors and windows?'

'We have opened some of the neighbouring windows,' said Thorndyke; and he proceeded to give a description of the secret chamber and its surroundings, to which the doctor listened with pursed-up lips.

'Well,' he remarked dryly, 'you seem to have been very careful. Is it much farther?'

'It opens out of the next room but one,' replied Thorndyke, and as he spoke I detected in the air a very faint odour of

bitter almonds. I fancy the doctor noticed it, too, but he made no remark, and when we reached the end of the corridor and Thorndyke indicated the door that gave access to the room, both men hurried forward. The doctor turned the handle and flung the door open, and he and the officer stepped briskly across the threshold. And then they both stopped short, and I guessed that they had seen the dead rat. The next moment they both backed out hastily and the doctor slammed the door behind him and followed us to the discreet distance at which we had halted.

'The vapour is as you say,' said the latter, visibly crestfallen, 'in an extreme state of concentration.'

'Yes,' agreed Thorndyke, 'but it is much less than it was. If you will go a little farther away, I will throw the door open and we can then retire and let the vapour diffuse out.'

'Do you think it safe, sir?' queried the officer. 'There's a fearful reek in there'; then, as Thorndyke approached the door, he and the doctor (and I) walked away quickly up the corridor; and looking back, I saw my colleague, pinching his nostrils together, fling the door wide open and hurry after us.

When we had retired to a safe distance, the officer halted and said:

'You were saying something about a statement, sir. Shall we have it now? I don't understand this affair in the least.'

Thorndyke produced the statement from his pocket and proceeded to read it aloud; and as he read, the two men listened with growing astonishment and not very completely concealed incredulity. When he had finished, I read out my statement, and then we both signed the document, the officer adding his signature as the witness.

'Well,' he said, as he put the paper in his pocket-book, 'this is a most extraordinary story. Can you give any kind of explanation?'

'At the moment,' replied Thorndyke, 'I am not proposing to go beyond the actual occurrence—certainly not until I have seen the bodies.'

The officer looked dissatisfied, and naturally enough. On the facts presented, he would have been quite justified in arresting us both on a suspicion of murder; and indeed, but for Thorndyke's eminent position and my own status as a King's Counsel, he would probably have done so. As it was, he contented himself with the expression of a hope that we should presently be able to throw some light on the mystery, on which remark my colleague offered no comment.

When about half an hour had passed, Thorndyke suggested that the vapour had probably cleared off from the room out of which the secret chamber opened and that it might now be possible to open the door of the chamber itself. Our friends were somewhat dubious, however. The sight of the dead rat had effectually dissipated the doctor's enthusiasm and engendered a very wholesome caution.

'Perhaps,' said Thorndyke, 'as my friend and I know where to find the concealed fastenings of the door, we could open it more safely. What do you say, Anstey?'

I was not much more eager than the doctor, but as Thorndyke would certainly have gone alone if I had refused, I assented with assumed readiness, and we started down the corridor, followed at a little distance by the other two. On entering the room, in which the odour of the poison had now become quite faint, Thorndyke opened both the casements wide and then slid the block of wood close up to the foot of the door.

'Now,' said he, 'when I say "ready," take a deep breath, close your mouth, pinch your nostrils, and then push in the right-hand boss. I will press the other one and open and fix the door. Ready!'

I pushed in the boss, and immediately afterwards Thorndyke pressed in the other one. The door yielded, and as we pushed it wide open, he thrust the block in after it. Glancing in, I had a momentary glimpse of the dark chamber with the two dead men lying huddled on the floor and an extinguished lantern by the side of the nearer one. It was but the vision of an instant, for almost as the door opened, I turned with Thorndyke and ran out of the room; but in that instant it was imprinted on my memory for ever. Even as I write, I can see with horrible vividness that dark, gloomy hold and the two sprawling corpses stretched towards the door that had cut them off in the moment of their crime from the land of the living.

The first breath that I took, as I came out of the room, made me aware that the poisonous vapour was pouring out of the chamber of death. Our two friends had also noticed it and were already in full retreat, and we all made our way out of the old wing back to the library, there to wait until the poison should have become dissipated. The officer made one or two ineffectual efforts to extract from Thorndyke some explanation of the amazing events set forth in his statement, and then we settled down to a somewhat desultory conversation on subjects criminal and medical.

We had been in the library rather more than half an hour and were beginning to discuss the possibility of removing the bodies, when the doorbell rang, and a few moments later the housekeeper entered, followed by Sir Lawrence Drayton, Winifred, and Mr Brodribb. The latter came in with a genial and knowing smile, which faded with remarkable suddenness as his eye lighted on the police officer.

'Why, what the deuce is the matter?' exclaimed Sir Lawrence as he also observed the officer.

'The matter is,' replied Thorndyke, 'that there has been a tragedy. Mr Blake is dead.'

'Dead!' exclaimed Drayton and Brodribb in unison.



'And what,' asked the former, 'do you mean by a tragedy?'

'Perhaps,' said Thorndyke, 'the officer would allow me to read you the written statement that I have given him. I may say,' he added, addressing the officer 'that this lady and these gentlemen are interested parties and that they will all be called as witnesses at the inquest.'

This latter statement, utterly incomprehensible to me, seemed to be equally so to every one else present. Sir Lawrence and Brodribb stared in astonishment at Thorndyke, while the officer, with a frown of perplexity, slowly took the statement from his pocket-book and handed it to my colleague without a word. Thereupon the latter, having waited for the housekeeper to withdraw, read the statement aloud, and I watched the amazement growing on the faces of the listeners as he read.

'But, my dear Thorndyke!' Sir Lawrence exclaimed, when he had finished, 'this is a most astounding affair. It looks as if this search had been a mere pretext to get you here and murder you!'

'That, I have no doubt, is the case,' said Thorndyke, 'and that I suspected to be the object when Brodribb conveyed the invitation to me.'

'The devil you did!' said Brodribb. 'But why should you suspect that Blake wanted to murder you?'

'I think,' replied Thorndyke, 'that when we have seen the bodies you will be able to answer that question yourself. And I should say,' he added, turning to the doctor, 'that it would now be possible to get the bodies out. Most of the fumes will have blown away by this time.'

'Yes,' the doctor agreed, evidently all agog to see and hear the explanation of this mystery. 'We had better get a sheet from the housekeeper and then go and see if we can get those poor wretches out.'

He set forth in company with the officer, and as soon as the two strangers had left the room, Brodribb attacked my colleague.

'You are a most inscrutable fellow, Thorndyke. Do you mean to tell me that when you proposed this search, you were just planning to give this man, Blake, an opportunity to murder you?'

'To try to murder me,' Thorndyke corrected.

'And me,' I added. 'It begins to dawn on me that the post of junior to Thorndyke is no sinecure.'

Brodribb smiled appreciatively, and Sir Lawrence remarked:

'We seem to be navigating in deep waters. I must confess that I am completely out of my depth, but I suppose it is useless to make any appeal.'

'I should rather say nothing more at present,' Thorndyke replied. 'In a few minutes I shall be able to make the crucial test which I expect will render explanations unnecessary.'

I speculated on the meaning of this statement, but could make nothing of it, and I gathered from the perplexed expressions of the two lawyers that they were in a similar condition. But there was not much time to turn the matter over, for, very shortly, the police officer reappeared to announce that the bodies had been removed from the chamber and were ready for inspection and identification.

'It will not be necessary, I suppose,' said Drayton, as we rose to accompany the officer, 'for Miss Blake to come with us?'

'I think,' answered Thorndyke, 'that it is desirable and, in fact, necessary, that Miss Blake should see the bodies. I am sorry,' he added, 'that she should be subjected to the unpleasantness, but the matter is really important.'

'I can't imagine in what respect,' said Drayton, 'but if you say that it is, that settles the matter.'

On this we set forth, Thorndyke and the officer leading the way, and as we crossed the great, desolate rooms I talked to Winifred about the old house and the secret chamber to divert her attention from our rather gruesome errand. At the end of the long corridor, as we entered the large room, we saw the doctor standing by two shrouded figures that lay on the floor near a window, with their feet towards us. We halted beside them in solemn silence, and the doctor stooped, and taking the two corners of the sheet, drew it away, with his eyes fixed on Thorndyke.

For a moment we all stood looking down on the two still and ghastly figures without speaking a word; but suddenly Winifred uttered a cry of horror and started back, clutching my arm.

'What is it?' demanded Drayton.

'The man!' she exclaimed breathlessly, pointing to the body of the valet, which I had already recognised. 'The man who tried to murder me in the empty house!'

'And who stabbed you that night at Hampstead?' said Thorndyke.

'Yes, yes,' she gasped. 'It is he, I am certain of it.'

Sir Lawrence turned a look of eager inquiry on my colleague.

'This is an amazing thing,' he exclaimed. 'How on earth did this fellow come to be associated with Mr Blake?'

Thorndyke stooped over the dead squire, and unfastening the collar and neckband, drew the shirt open at the throat.

There came into sight a stout, silken cord encircling the neck, which Thorndyke gently pulled up, when I saw that there was suspended from it a small gold pendant with a single large stone. As the little jewel was drawn out from its hiding-place, Winifred stooped forward eagerly.

'It is the Cat's Eye!' she exclaimed.

'Impossible!' Sir Lawrence ejaculated. 'Let me look at it.'

Thorndyke cut the cord and handed the pendant to Drayton, who turned it over in his hand, gazing at it with an expression of amazement and incredulity.

'It is,' he said at length. 'This is certainly the pendant that was stolen from my poor brother's house. I recognise it without doubt by the shape and colour of the stone, and there is the inscription on the back, "Dulce Domum," which I remember now. It is unquestionably the stolen pendant. But what does it mean, Thorndyke? You seemed to know that this man was wearing it.'

'The meaning of it is, Sir Lawrence,' replied Thorndyke, 'that this man'—he pointed down at the dead squire—'is the man who murdered your brother. It was he who fired the pistol.'

Sir Lawrence looked down at the dead man with a frown of disgust.

'Do you mean to tell me, Thorndyke,' said he, 'that this man murdered poor Andrew just to get possession of this trumpery toy?'

'I do,' replied Thorndyke, 'though, of course, the murder was not a part of the original plan. But he carried the pistol with him to use if necessary.'

'He has got a pistol in his pocket now,' said the officer. 'I felt it as I was dragging him out of the secret room.'

He plunged his hand into the dead man's coat pocket and drew out a small automatic pistol, which he handed to Thorndyke.

This seems to be the very weapon,' said the latter; 'a Baby Browning. You remember that we identified the pattern from the empty cartridge-case.'

I had noticed a peculiar expression of perplexity gathering on Mr Brodribb's face. Now the old solicitor turned to Thorndyke and said:

'This is a very unaccountable affair, Thorndyke. We didn't know a great deal about Arthur Blake, but it always appeared that he was quite a decent sort of man, whereas this robbery and murder that he actually did commit, and the murder that he was attempting when he met his death, are cases of sheer ruffianism. I don't understand it.'

Thorndyke turned to the doctor. 'Would you mind telling us,' said he, 'if there is anything abnormal in the condition of this man's left knee-cap?'

The doctor stared at Thorndyke in astonishment. 'Have you any reason to suppose that there is?' he asked.

'I have an impression,' was the reply, 'that there is an old fracture with imperfect ligamentous union.'

The doctor stooped, and drawing up the trouser on the left side, placed his hand on the knee.

'You are quite right,' he said, looking up at Thorndyke with an expression of surprise. There is a transverse fracture with a gap of fully two inches between the fragments.'

Suddenly Mr Brodribb broke out eagerly with a look of intense curiosity at my colleague: 'It can't be! What is it that you are suggesting, Thorndyke?'

'I am suggesting that this man was not Arthur Blake. I suggest that he was an Australian adventurer named Hugh Owen.'

'But,' objected Brodribb, 'Owen was reported to have died some years ago. His body was found and identified.'

'A mutilated skeleton was found,' retorted Thorndyke, 'and was identified as that of Hugh Owen by means of a ring which was known to have belonged to Owen. I suggest that the remains were those of Arthur Blake; that he had been murdered by Owen, and that the ring had been put on the body for the purpose of ensuring a false identification.'

That is perfectly possible,' Brodribb admitted. Then who do you suggest that this other man is?'

'I suggest that this other person is a woman named Laura Levinsky.'

'Well,' said Brodribb, 'that need not be left a matter of guesswork. I don't think I mentioned it to you, but that Australian police official told me that Levinsky had a tattoo-mark on the right forearm—the letters H and L with a heart between. Let us see if this person has such a mark.'

The police officer bent down over the dead valet, and unfastening the right wristband, drew the sleeve up above the elbow.

'Ha!' exclaimed Brodribb as there were revealed, standing out on the greenish-white skin as if painted in blue ink, the letters H and L with a small, misshapen heart between them, 'you are right, Thorndyke, as you always are. And I suppose she was a party to the murder?'

'I take it,' said Thorndyke, 'that these two wretches murdered Arthur Blake, removed all identifiable objects from the corpse, put Owen's ring on its finger, and tumbled it over the cliff, shooting down a mass of rocks and stones on top of it. Then they took possession of all Blake's papers and money and separated, coming to England on different ships. I assume that no measures were ever taken to verify Blake's identity?'

'No,' replied Brodribb. There was no one who could identify him. He sent a letter, in answer to mine, saying when he would arrive. He arrived about the date mentioned, and presented all the necessary credentials. The question of identity was never raised.'

For some moments we all stood looking down on the bodies of the two adventures in silence. Presently Drayton asked, holding out the pendant:

'What is to be done with this? It was stolen from my brother, but it seems that, as it is an heirloom, it should be handed to Miss Blake.'

'For the present,' said Thorndyke 'it must remain in the custody of the police, as it will have to be put in evidence at the inquest. We will take a receipt for it. But as to its being the missing heirloom, I doubt that very much. It does not agree with the description, and I should suppose that the original jewel will have been hidden with the title-deeds.'

'That could hardly be,' said Winifred, 'though I agree with you that the inscription "Dulce domum" doesn't seem to be the right one. But you will remember that Percival's manuscript distinctly says that the jewel was taken away and given to Jenifer to keep for the child James.'

'That is not my reading of the manuscript,' said Thorndyke. 'But we can discuss that on another occasion. If we give our respective names and addresses to the officer, we shall have concluded our business here.'

At this hint, the officer produced a large, official notebook in which he entered the names and addresses of all the witnesses in the case, and when the doctor had once more covered the corpses with the sheet, we turned to retrace our steps to the library. As I walked along the corridor at Winifred's side, I glanced at her a little anxiously, for it had been a rather terrible experience. She met my glance, and resting her hand on my arm for a moment, she said in a low voice:

'It was a gruesome sight, Robin, that poor little wretch lying there with that awful, fixed stare of horror on her face. But I couldn't feel sorry for her, nor even for the man, though there was something very dreadful—almost pitiful—in the way in which his dead hand clutched that little brass knob. It must have been a frightful moment when he found that the knob was useless and that he and his companion were caught in their own hideous trap. But I can't be sorry for them. I can only think of the relief to know that you are safe and that I am free.'

'Yes,' said I, 'it is an unspeakable relief to feel that you can now go abroad in safety—that that continual menace is a thing of the past, thanks to Thorndyke's uncanny power of seeing through a stone wall.'

'I am not sure 'said she 'that I am not disposed to quarrel with Dr Thorndyke for calmly walking you into this murderer's den.'

'I don't think there was ever any real danger,' I replied. 'They couldn't have murdered us by overt methods, and as to the other methods, I have no doubt that Thorndyke had got them all calculated out in advance and provided for. He seems to foresee everything.'

When we reached the library, and Thorndyke and I had replaced our pistols and jemmies in the suitcase (a proceeding which the police officer watched with bulging eyes and open mouth), Drayton asked:

'Have you two got any sort of conveyance? Because, if you haven't, and you don't mind a pretty tight squeeze, I can give you a lift to the station.'

We accepted the offer gladly; and having made our adieux to the officer and the doctor, we went out and packed ourselves and our impedimenta into the car as soon as the lawful occupants had taken their seats. As we moved off, I observed the housekeeper and two other women watching us with concentrated interest; and at the gate, as we swept past the lodge, I had an instantaneous glimpse of the keeper's face at the window, with another countenance that seemed reminiscent of the 'King's Head.'

The swiftly-gliding car devoured the mile or two of road to the station in a few minutes. We drew up in the station yard, and while the chauffeur was handing out our luggage, Drayton stood up, and laying his hand on Thorndyke's shoulder, said earnestly:

'I have spoken no word of thanks to you, Thorndyke, for what you have done, but I hope you understand that I am your debtor for life. Your management of this case is beyond my wildest expectations, and how you did it, I cannot imagine. Some day you must give me the intellectual satisfaction of hearing how the investigation was carried out. Now I can only congratulate you on your brilliant success.'

'I should like to second that,' said Brodribb; 'and talking of success, I suppose you didn't find those deeds after all?'

'No,' replied Thorndyke. 'They are not there.'

'Oh, aren't they?' Brodribb. 'Then, if you are so certain where they are not, you probably know where they are?'

'That seems a sound inference,' replied Thorndyke. 'But we can't discuss the matter here. If you care to come to my

chambers tomorrow, at two o'clock, we might go into it further, and, in fact, conduct an exploration.'

'Does that invitation include me?' Winifred asked.

'Most undoubtedly,' he replied. 'You are the principal party to the transaction. And perhaps you might bring the Book of Hours with you.'

'I believe he has got the deeds stowed away in his chambers,' said Brodribb; and although my colleague shook his head, I felt no certainty that the old lawyer was not right.

When the car had moved off, we carried our cases into the station and were relieved to find that we had but a few minutes to wait for a train. I postponed my attack on my secretive colleague until we were snugly established in a compartment by ourselves. Not that I had any expectations. Thorndyke's reticence had conveyed to me the impression that the time for explanations had not yet come; and so it turned out when I proceeded to put my questions.

'Wait till we have finished the case, Anstey,' said he. 'Then, if you have not worked out the scheme of the investigation in the interval, we can review and discuss it.'

'But surely,' said I, 'we have finished with the case of the murder of Andrew Drayton?'

'Not entirely,' he replied. 'What you have never realised, I think, is the connection between the problem of the murder and the problem of the missing documents. This is a very curious and interesting case, and those two problems have a very strange connection. But for Owen's determination to possess the cat's eye pendant at all costs, those documents might have lain in their hiding-place, unsuspected, for centuries.'

This statement, while it explained Thorndyke's hitherto unaccountable interest in Percy Blake's claim, only plunged the other problem into deeper obscurity. During the remainder of the journey I tried to reconstitute the train of events to see if I could trace the alleged connection between the two problems. But not a glimmer of light could I see in any direction; and in the end I gave it up, consoling myself with the reflection that the morrow would probably see the last act played out and that then I might hope for a final elucidation.

---

## XIX. — A RELIC OF THE '45

At two o'clock punctually, on the following afternoon, our visitors made their appearance; and at the very moment when the last of them—Mr Brodribb—emerged from Crown Office Row, I observed from the window two taxi-cabs, which had entered successively by the Tudor Street gate, draw up before our door. I hailed their arrival with deep satisfaction, for the strange events of the previous day, together with Thorndyke's rather mysterious observations thereon, had made me impatient to see the end of this intricate case and intensely curious to hear how my inscrutable colleague had managed to fit together the apparently unrelated fragments of this extraordinarily complex puzzle. Throughout the morning—while Thorndyke was absent, and, as I suspected, arranging details of the afternoon's adventure—I had turned over the facts again and again, but always with the same result. There were the pieces of the puzzle, and no doubt a complete set; but separate pieces they remained, and obstinately refused to join up into anything resembling an intelligible whole.

'I see, Thorndyke,' said Mr Brodribb as he entered, smiling, rosy, and looking as if he had just come out of a bandbox, 'that I did you an injustice. You have not been sitting on the deeds. The chariots are at the door waiting, I suppose, for the band or the stavebearers. We shall be quite an imposing procession.'

'We won't wait for the band,' said Thorndyke. 'As we are all here, we may as well start. Will you conduct Miss Blake down, Anstey?'

'Do I give any directions to the driver?' I asked.

'Yes. You can tell him to put you down at the north-east corner of the Minories.'

Accordingly I led the way with Winifred, and having given the destination to the driver, bestowed my charge and myself in the cab. The driver started the engine, and as the cab made a sweep round to the Tudor Street gate, I heard the door of the other cab slam.

'Have you any idea where we are going, Robin?' Winifred asked as the cab whirled round into New Bridge Street.

'None beyond what I have communicated to the driver,' I replied. 'Apparently we are going to explore the Minories or Aldgate or Whitechapel. It is an ancient neighbourhood, and in the days of Percival Blake it was somewhat more aristocratic than it is now. There are good many old houses still standing about there. You may have seen that picturesque group of timber houses looking on Whitechapel High Street. They are nearly all butchers' shops, and have been, at least, since the days of Charles the Second; in fact, the group is known as Butcher Row, though I think there is an old tavern among them.'

'Perhaps we are going to the tavern,' said Winifred. 'It is quite likely. Many of the old inns had secret hiding-places and must have been the favourite rendezvous of the conspirators of those times.'

She continued to speculate on the possibilities of the ancient tavern, which had evidently captured her romantic fancy, and as I looked at her pink-cheeked, bright-eyed, and full of pleasurable excitement over our adventurous quest—I once more breathed a sigh of thankfulness that the dark days of ever-impending peril were over.

It seemed but a few minutes before the cab drew up at the corner of the Minories; and we had hardly alighted when the other vehicle arrived and disgorged its occupants at our side. The drivers having been paid (and having thereafter compared notes and settled themselves to watch our further proceedings), Thorndyke turned his face eastward and we started together along Whitechapel High Street. I noticed that, now, no one asked any questions. Probably each of us was busy with his own speculations; and in any case, Thorndyke maintained a sphinx-like reticence.

'Are those delightful old houses the ones you were speaking of?' Winifred asked as the ancient, plaster-fronted buildings came in sight.

'Yes,' I answered. 'That is Butcher Row.'

'Or,' said Thorndyke, 'to give it what is, I believe, its official title, "The Shambles", though the shambles proper are at the back.'

'The Shambles!' exclaimed Winifred, looking at Thorndyke with a startled expression. She appeared to be about to ask him some question, but at this moment he turned sharply into a narrow alley, into which we followed him. I glanced up at the name as we entered and read it aloud—'Harrow Alley.'

'Yes,' said Thorndyke, 'quite a historic little thoroughfare. Defoe gives a very vivid description of its appearance during the Plague, with the dead-cart waiting at the entrance and the procession of bearers carrying the corpses down the narrow court. Here is the old "Star and Still" tavern, and round the corner there are the shambles, very little changed since the seventeenth century.'

He turned the corner towards the shambles, and then, crossing the narrow road, dived through an archway into a narrow paved court, along which we had to go in single file. This court presently opened into a squalid-looking little square, surrounded on three sides by tall, ancient, timber and plaster houses, the fourth side being occupied by a rather mean, but quaint little church with a low brick tower. Thorndyke made his way directly to the west door of the church, and taking from his pocket a key of portentous size, inserted it into the lock. As he did so I glanced at the board that was fixed beside the doorway, from which I learned that this was the church of St Peter by the Minories.

As the door swung open Thorndyke motioned to us to enter. We filed in, and then he drew the door to after us and locked it from the inside. We stood for a few moments in the dim porch under the tower, looking in through the half-opened inner door; and as we stood there, Winifred grasped my arm nervously, and I could feel that her hand was trembling. But there was no time for speech, for as Thorndyke locked the door and withdrew the key, the inner door opened wide and two men—one tall and one short—appeared silhouetted against the east window.

These are my friends, of whom I spoke to you,' said Thorndyke. 'Miss Blake, Sir Lawrence Drayton, Mr Brodribb, Mr Anstey—the Reverend James Yersbury. I think you have met this other gentleman.'

We came out into the body of the church, and having made my bow to the clergyman, I turned to the smaller man.

'Why, it's Mr Polton!' exclaimed Winifred, shaking hands heartily with my colleague's familiar; who greeted us with a smile of such ecstatic crinkliness, that I instantly suspected him of preparing some necromantic surprise for us.

'This is quite a remarkable building,' said Sir Lawrence, looking about him with lively interest, 'and it appears the more striking by contrast with the shabby, commonplace exterior.'

'Yes,' agreed the clergyman, 'that is rather characteristic of old London churches. But this is rather an ancient structure; it was only partially destroyed by the Great Fire and was almost immediately rebuilt, at the personal cost, it is said, of the Duke of York, afterwards James the Second. Perhaps that accounts for the strong Jacobite leanings of some of the later clergy, such as this good gentleman, for instance.'

He led us to a space between two of the windows where a good-sized tablet of alabaster had been let into the wall.

'That tablet,' said he, 'encloses a cavity which is filled with bones piously collected from the field of Culloden, and the inscription leaves one in no doubt as to the sentiments of the collector. But I believe it was covered with plaster soon after it was put up, to preserve it from destruction, by the authorities, and it was only discovered about fifty years ago.'

I read the brief inscription with growing curiosity:

PRO PATRIA—PRO REGE 1745

'This Tablet was raised to the Memory of the Faithful by Stephen Rumbold, sometime Rector of this Church.'

'But,' said Winifred, 'I thought Stephen Rumbold was rector of St Peter by the Shambles.'

'This is St Peter by the Shambles,' replied Mr Yersbury. 'The name has only been changed within the last forty years.'

Winifred faced me and looked with eager delight into my eyes, and I knew that the same thought was in both our minds. Here, during all the slowly-passing years, the missing deeds had rested, securely hidden with the bones of those patriots at whose side Percival Blake had fought on the fatal field of Culloden. I looked round at Thorndyke, expecting to see some preparations to open this curious little burial-place. But he had already turned away and was moving towards the east end of the church. We followed him slowly until he halted before the pulpit, where he stood for a few moments looking at it reflectively. It was a very remarkable pulpit. I have never seen another at all resembling it. In shape it was an elongated octagon, the panels and mouldings of deep brown oak enriched with magnificent carving. But the most singular feature was the manner in which it was supported. The oblong super-structure rested on twin pillars of oak, each pillar being furnished with a handsome, floridly-ornamented bronze capital and a bronze base of somewhat similar character. But fine as the workmanship was, the design was more unusual than pleasing. The oblong body and the twin pillars had, in fact, a rather ungainly appearance.

'Here,' said Thorndyke, pointing to the pulpit, 'is another relic of the Reverend Stephen Rumbold, and one of more personal interest to us than the other. You notice these twin pillars. Aesthetically, they are not all that might be desired, but they serve a useful purpose besides supporting the upper structure, for each of them forms an aumbry, originally designed, no doubt, to conceal the sacred vessels and other objects used in celebrating Mass or Vespers or in administering Communion in accordance with the rites of the Church of Rome. One of them is still discharging this function. This pillar—here he tapped the northern one of the pair—'contains a chalice and paten, a thurible and a small pyx. This other pillar contains—well, Polton will show us what it contains, so I need not go into particulars.'

'Do I understand,' Drayton asked, 'that you have opened the aumbries already and verified the existence and nature of the contents?'

'We have not yet opened the aumbries,' Thorndyke replied, 'but we have ascertained that the things are there untouched. Polton and I made an examination some days ago with an X-ray apparatus and a fluorescent screen. It was then that we discovered the plate in the second pillar. I wished Miss Blake to be present at the actual opening.'

At these words, like an actor taking up a cue, Polton appeared from somewhere behind the pulpit bearing a good-sized leather handbag. This he deposited on the floor, and as we gathered round, he took from it a small, rounded mallet, apparently of lead, covered with leather, and a tool of hard wood, somewhat, in shape, like a caulking chisel.

'Which pillar shall I begin on, sir?' he inquired, looking round with a sly smile. 'The one with church plate or—'

'Oh, hang the church plate!' interposed Brodribb, adding hastily: 'I beg your pardon, Mr Yersbury, but you know—'

'Exactly,' interrupted the clergyman, 'I quite agree with you. The church plate will keep for another half hour.'

Thereupon Polton fell to work, and we crowded up close to watch. The capitals of the pillars presented each two parts, a

lower member, covered with ornament, and above this a plain, cylindrical space extending up to the abacus. It was to the lower part that Polton directed his attention. Having mounted on a chair, he placed the edge of the hardwood chisel against the lower edge of the ornamented member and struck it gently with the leaden mallet. Then he shifted the chisel half an inch to the right and struck another blow, and in this way he continued, moving the chisel half an inch after each stroke, until he had travelled a third of the way round the pillar, when Thorndyke placed another chair for him to step on.

'Have you oiled the surface?' my colleague asked.

'Yes, sir,' replied Polton, tapping away like Old Mortality; 'I flooded it with a mixture of paraffin and clock oil, and it is moving all right.'

We were soon able to verify this statement, for when Polton had made a complete circuit of the pillar, the plain space above had grown perceptibly narrower and a ring of lighter-coloured wood began to appear below. Still, the leaden mallet continued to deliver its dull sounding taps, and still Polton continued to creep round the pillar.

By the time the second circuit was completed, the sliding part of the capital had risen half-way to the top of the plain space, as was shown by the width of paler, newly-uncovered wood below. And now the sliding member was evidently moving more freely, for there was a perceptible upward movement at each stroke, so that, by the end of the third circuit, the upper, plain space had disappeared altogether and a narrow ring of metal appeared below; and in this ring I perceived a notch about half an inch wide.

'I think she's all clear now, sir,' said Polton.

'Very well,' said Thorndyke. 'We are all ready.'

He relieved Polton of the mallet and chisel and handed him a tool which looked somewhat like a rather slender jemmy with a long, narrow beak. This beak Polton inserted carefully into the notch, when it evidently entered a cavity in the top of the woodwork. Then he began cautiously to prise at the end of the lever.

For a moment or two nothing happened. Suddenly there was a grating sound; the end of the lever rose, and at the same instant about a quarter of the pillar began to separate from the rest and come forward, showing a joint which had been cunningly hidden by the deep fluting. Polton grasped the top of the loose panel, and with a sharp pull, drew it right out and lifted it clear, but as he was in front of the opening, none of us could see what was within. Then he stepped down from the chair, and Winifred uttered a little cry and clasped her hands.

It was certainly a dramatic moment, especially to those of us who had read the manuscript in the little Book of Hours. The pillar was a great shell enclosing a considerable cavity, and in this cavity, standing on the floor, was a tall leaden jar with a close-fitting, flat lid; and on the lid stood a great, two-handled posset-pot. It was all exactly as Percival Blake had described it, and to us, who had formed a mental picture from that description, there was something very moving in being thus confronted with those strangely familiar objects, which had been waiting in their hiding-place for more than a century and a half—waiting for the visit of Percival's dispossessed posterity.

For some time we stood looking at them in silence. At length Thorndyke said: 'You notice, Miss Blake, that there is an inscription on the jar.'

I had not observed it, nor had Winifred; but we now advanced, and looking closely at the jar, made out with some difficulty on the whitened surface an inscription which had apparently been punched into the metal letter by letter, and which read:

'The Contents hereof are the Property of Percival Blake, MD of Beauchamp Blake in Buckinghamshire, or the Heirs of his Body AD 1746.'

'That,' said Sir Lawrence, as Winifred read the inscription aloud, 'settles the ownership of the documents. You can take possession of the jar and its contents with perfect confidence. And now perhaps it would be as well to see what is inside the jar.'

Polton, who had apparently been waiting for this cue, now lit a small spirit blow-pipe. The posset-pot was tenderly lifted out by Winifred and deposited on a pew-bench, and Polton, having hoisted out the jar and placed it on a chair, began cautiously to let the flame of the blow-pipe play on the joint of the lid, which had been thickly coated with wax. When the wax began to liquefy, he introduced the edge of the jemmy into the joint, and with a deft turn of the wrist, raised the lid, which he then took off.

Winifred peered into the jar and announced: 'It seems to be full of rolled-up parchments; a statement which we all verified in turn.'

'I would suggest,' said Mr Yersbury, 'that we carry the jar into the vestry. There is a good-sized table there, which will be a convenience if you are going to examine the documents.'

This suggestion was instantly agreed to. Polton took up the rather ponderous jar and made his way to the vestry under the guidance of the clergyman, and the rest of us followed, Winifred carrying the precious posset-pot. Arrived at the vestry, Polton set down the jar on the table, and Sir Lawrence proceeded at once to extract the roll of stiff and yellow parchment and vellum documents. Unrolling them carefully—for they were set into a rigid cylinder—he glanced over them quickly with the air of one looking for some particular thing.

'These are undoubtedly the title-deeds,' he said, still turning over the pages quickly with but a cursory glance at their contents, 'but—ha! Yes. These are what we really wanted. I had hoped that we should find them here.'

He drew out from between the leaves of the deeds two small squares of parchment which he exhibited triumphantly and then read aloud:

'I hereby certify and declare that on the thirteenth day of June in the Year of Our Lord seventeen hundred and forty-two, at the church of St Peter by the Shambles, near by Aldgate, the following persons were by me joined together in Holy Matrimony to wit PERCIVAL BLAKE of Beauchamp Blake in the County of Buckinghamshire, Bachelor and JUDITH WESTERN of Cricklewood in the County of Middlesex, Spinster.

'STEPHEN RUMBOLD, MA, Rector of the said Church of St Peter by the Shambles. 20th May 1746.'

'That,' said Sir Lawrence, 'is what principally matters, but this second certificate clenches the proof. I will read it out:

'I hereby certify and declare that James the Son of Percival and Judith Blake of Beauchamp Blake in the County of Buckinghamshire was baptized by me according to the rites of Holy Church on the thirtieth of May in the Year of Our Lord seventeen hundred and forty-three at the Church of St Peter by the Shambles near by Aldgate.

STEPHEN RUMBOLD, MA, Rector of the said Church of St Peter by the Shambles. 20th May 1746.'

'That,' continued Drayton, 'with the other certificates, which I understand you have, establishes a direct descent. And seeing that the estate is at present without an owner, this is a peculiarly opportune moment for putting forward a claim. What do you say, Brodribb?'

'I should like,' said Brodribb, 'to have fuller particulars before giving a definite opinion.'

'Oh, come, Brodribb,' Sir Lawrence protested, 'you needn't be so infernally cautious. We're all friends, you know. Would you be prepared to act for Miss Blake?'

'I don't see why not,' replied Brodribb. 'I am not committed to any other claimant. Yes, I should be very happy to act for her.'

'Then,' said Drayton, 'we must arrange a consultation and find out exactly how we stand. I will call at your office for a preliminary talk tomorrow, if that will suit you.'

'Very well,' agreed Brodribb, 'come in at one o'clock, and we can lunch together and talk over the preliminaries.'

While this conversation was proceeding, I had observed Thorndyke peering inquisitively into the now empty jar. From this he transferred his attention to the posset-pot which Winifred was guarding jealously. It was a fine specimen of its kind, a comparatively large vessel of many-coloured slip-ware. On the front was a sort of escutcheon, on which was a heart surmounted by a B with the letters H and M on either side and the date 1708 below. Just under the rim was a broad band bearing the following quaint inscription:

'Here is the Gest of the Barly Korne, Glad Ham I the child is Borne.—JM'

'Isn't it a lovely old thing?' murmured Winifred. 'So human and personal and so charming too.'

'Yes,' Thorndyke agreed 'it is a fine piece of work. Old Martin was something more than a common village potter. Have you looked inside it?'

'No,' replied Winifred. She took the knob in her fingers and delicately lifted off the cover; and then she uttered a cry of surprise.

'Why,' she exclaimed, 'it is the Cat's Eye—the real cat's eye this time. And what a beauty!'

She lifted out of the pot a small pendant, curiously like the other one—so much so, in fact, as to suggest that the latter had been a copy. But, whereas the stone in the counterfeit had been a rather dull grey, this one was of a beautiful deep yellow with a brilliant streak of golden light. Attached to the pendant was a slender gold chain and a clasp, which, like the pendant itself, was smooth and rounded with years of wear. After gazing for a while at the flashing stone, Winifred turned the pendant over and looked at the back. The inscription was half-obliterated by wear, but we read without difficulty:

'God's Providence is Mine Inheritance.'

'It is extremely appropriate,' she commented when she had read it aloud, 'though it isn't quite what one expected. But what I don't understand is how it comes to be here. Percival distinctly says that he had the jewel and that he intended to give it to Jenifer to keep for the child.'

'Not the jewel,' Thorndyke corrected. 'He speaks of "the bauble" and "the trinket," never of "the jewel."'

'You think he was referring to some other trinket?'

'Obviously,' replied Thorndyke. And then, looking at Winifred with a smile, he exclaimed: 'O blind generation! Don't you see. Miss Blake, that events have shaped themselves precisely as Percival designed? Here is his descendant, the child of his children's children, coming to the hiding-place wearing the precious bauble around her neck and guided by it to the possessions of her fathers. Could anything be more complete?'

Winifred was thunderstruck. For a while she sat, motionless as a statue, gazing at Thorndyke in speechless amazement.



At length she exclaimed: 'But this is astounding, Dr Thorndyke! Do you mean that this little locket is the trinket that was given to Jenifer and which she lost?'

'Undoubtedly,' he replied, 'and the really strange and romantic circumstance is that it was given into your hand by the very impostor who was seeking to rob you for ever of your inheritance.'

'Then,' exclaimed Sir Lawrence, who was almost as overcome as Winifred herself, 'it was actually poor Andrew's "little Sphinx" that gave you the clue to this hiding-place?'

'Yes,' replied Thorndyke, 'only the sphinx was really an oracle, just waiting for the question to be asked.'

Winifred's eyes filled. Impulsively she grasped my colleague's hand, murmuring shakily: 'What can I say to you, Dr Thorndyke? How can I ever thank you for all that you have done for my brother and me?'

'You need say nothing,' he replied 'but that which is written on the back of the cat's eye.'

Our business being now concluded, Sir Lawrence carefully returned the precious documents to the jar and replaced the cover. From without, a dull tapping that had been audible for some time past, had told us that Polton was at work on the second pillar. But that was no concern of ours.

'What are we going to do now?' asked Sir Lawrence. 'It seems as if we should mark the occasion in some way.'

'I agree with you, Drayton,' said Thorndyke, 'and I have, in fact, arranged a little festival at my chambers; just a simple tavern dinner, since Polton was otherwise engaged. Will that satisfy the requirements?'

'It will satisfy mine,' replied Drayton, 'and I think I can answer for Brodribb.'

'Then,' said Thorndyke, 'if Miss Blake will consent to combine the function of hostess with that of principal guest, we will capture Polton and betake ourselves to the Temple.'

We strolled out into the church, where Polton and the rector were gloatingly examining the newly-recovered sacred vessels, and having thanked the friendly clergyman and bidden him a warm farewell, we went forth in search of conveyances. Polton heading the procession with the heavy jar under his arm, and Winifred tenderly carrying the posset-pot swathed in her silken shawl.

In Whitechapel High Street we had the unexpected good fortune to encounter an unoccupied taxi-cab, which was by universal consent assigned to Winifred, Polton, and me. In this we bestowed ourselves and were forthwith spirited away, leaving our companions to follow as best they could. But they were not far behind, for we had barely arrived in the chambers and disposed of our treasure-trove, when a second cab drew up in King's Bench Walk and our three friends made their appearance at the rendezvous.



## XX. — QED

To an enthusiastic and truly efficient gourmet it might be difficult to assess the respective merits of the different stages of a really good dinner; to compare the satisfactions yielded, for instance, by the first tentative approaches—the little affairs of outposts—with the voracious joy of the grand onslaught on tangible and manducable solids; or again with the placid diminuendo, the half-hearted rear-guard actions, concerned with the unsubstantial trifles on which defeated appetite delivers its expiring kick. For my own part, I can offer no opinion—at any rate, without refreshing my memory as to the successive sensations; but I recall that as our dinner drew to a close, signs of expectancy began to manifest themselves (in Mr Brodribb's case they seemed to be associated with the advent of the port decanter), and when Polton had evacuated the casualties to an aid-post established in the adjacent office, Sir Lawrence gave expression to the prevailing state of mind.

'I suppose, Thorndyke, you know what is expected of you?'

Thorndyke turned an impassive face towards his guest. 'On these triumphal occasions,' said he, 'I usually smoke a Trichinopoly cigar. On this occasion, I presume, I am expected to refrain.'

'Not at all,' replied Drayton. 'I think we can endure the Trichy with reasonable fortitude; what we can't endure is the agony of curiosity. We demand enlightenment.'

'You want to know how the "little Sphinx" answered its own riddle. Is that your demand?'

'I understood you to say,' said I, 'that the problem of the crime and that of the missing deeds were one and the same.'

'I said that they were closely connected. But if you want an exposition of the unravelment, it will be more convenient to take them separately and in the order in which they were presented. In which case we begin with the crime.'

He paused, and I saw him glance with an indulgent smile towards the office door which was incompletely closed, and from which issued faint sounds of furtive movement which informed us that Polton had elected to take his dinner within earshot of the exposition.

'We had better begin,' he proceeded, 'with the facts presented to us on the night of the tragedy. First as to the criminals. There were traces of two men, and only two. One of these was a tall man, as shown by the size of his feet. He appeared to suffer from some weakness of the left leg. The sound of his footsteps, as heard by Anstey, suggested a slightly lame man, but as he ran away rapidly he could not have been very lame. Yet there was some distinct disability, since he had to draw up a garden seat to enable him to get over a fence which we climbed easily; and the faint impression of the left foot under the fence showed that, when he jumped down, the weight was taken principally by the right. Examination of the cast of his left hand showed a depressed scar on the tip of the forefinger. We also gathered that he carried a Baby Browning pistol and appeared to be a skilful pistol shot.

'Of the other man we learned less. He was noticeably small and slight; he was left-handed; he had dark hair, and at the time of the robbery he was wearing gloves, apparently of kid or thin leather. But later, when examining the tuft of his hair that was found grasped by the deceased, we made an important discovery. Among those dark hairs was a single blonde hair—not white, but golden—which could not have come from his own head. Of its presence there seemed to be only two possible explanations: either it had been rubbed off, or had fallen from the head of some other person, or it had become detached from the inside of a wig. But the first explanation was ruled out—'

'How?' demanded Brodribb.

'By its appearance under the microscope. When you find an alien hair, on your coat-sleeve, for instance—'

'I don't,' said Brodribb, 'at my time of life.'

'—If you examine it under the microscope, or even with a strong lens, you will invariably find it to be a dead hair—a hair which has completed its growth and dropped out of its sheath. You can identify it by the presence of the complete bulb and the absence of the inner root-sheath (which would be adherent to it if it had been pulled out while growing). Well, this blonde hair had no bulb. It had both ends broken, which suggested unusual brittleness, as if it had been treated with some bleach, such as chlorine or hydrogen peroxide. But the hair of wigs shows absence of bulbs and is commonly so treated and is usually somewhat brittle. Thus the probability was that this man had recently worn a wig of artificially bleached hair.

'These were our initial data concerning these two men. There were also some fingerprints, but we will consider those separately. The initial data included the character of the things stolen. These were of insignificant intrinsic value and were very easily identifiable. They were thus quite unacceptable to the ordinary professional thief, yet the evidence (of the suspicious visitor) suggested that they knew what they were stealing. One of the things stolen—the cat's eye pendant—was known to have an extrinsic value and to have been eagerly sought by other persons, and there was thus the bare suggestion that this pendant might have been the object of the robbery.

'We now come to the fingerprints. These presented some very remarkable anomalies. In the first place, they were not the fingerprints of either of the robbers. That was certain. The small man wore gloves, so they could not have been his; and the tall man had a depressed scar on the tip of his left forefinger, whereas there was no trace of any such scar on the corresponding fingerprint. But if they were not the fingerprints of either of the robbers, whose fingerprints were they? There was no trace of any third person, and it was practically certain that no third person was present.

'But there was another striking anomaly. Although there were numerous impressions, only six digits were represented—the forefinger and thumb of the left hand and the thumb and the first three fingers of the right. Every impression of the right hand showed the same four digits, every impression of the left showed the same two.

'Now what could be the explanation of this curious repetition? Anstey's very reasonable suggestion was that the man had soiled these particular digits with some foreign substance and that, consequently, the soiled digits alone had made prints. This suggestion received a certain amount of support from the fact that a foreign substance actually was present—it proved, on examination, to be Japanese wax. But though the presence of the wax accounted for the distinctness of the fingerprints that were there, it did not explain why the other fingers had made no mark at all. I examined the glass which bore the fingerprints with the utmost minuteness, but in no case was there the faintest trace of the other fingers. Yet those fingers, if they had existed, must have touched the glass, and if they had touched it they would have made marks. The only explanation seemed to be that there were no other fingers; that the prints were not real fingerprints at all, but counterfeits made by means of facsimile stamps of rubber, roller-composition, or—more probably—chrome gelatine.

'It seemed a far-fetched hypothesis. But it fitted all the facts, and there seemed to be no other explanation. Thus the use of a set of stamps would explain the existence of a set of fingerprints which were not those of either of the parties present; it would explain the repetition of the same group of digits (on the assumption that only six stamps were available which might easily be the case if these stamps were copies of a particular group of fingerprints); and lastly, it would explain the presence of the Japanese wax.'

'How would it?' I asked.

'Well, some foreign substance would be necessary. In a real fingerprint—on glass, for instance—the mark is produced by the natural grease of the fingers. But a rubber or gelatine stamp has no natural grease. It is quite dry, and would make no mark at all unless it were charged with some sticky or greasy material. Now Japanese wax is an ideal material for the purpose. It is markedly sticky and would consequently develop up splendidly with dusting powder; it has no tendency to spread or run, so that it gives very clear impressions; and it might easily be mistaken for natural skin-grease.

'The counterfeit fingerprints hypothesis was, therefore, the only one that explained the facts, and I adopted it provisionally, assuming that the stamps were probably thin plates of rubber or gelatine cemented on the finger tips of the gloves worn by the short man.

'A few days later I received a visit from Detective-Superintendent Miller who informed me that the fingerprints had been identified at the registry as those of a well-known "habitual" named Hedges, more commonly known as Moakey. Of course this did not alter the position since there was no evidence that Moakey had ever been on the premises. However, I decided to wait until he was arrested and hear what he had to say. But he never was arrested. A day or two later, the Superintendent called on me again, and this time he settled the matter finally. My impression was, and is, that he came intending to make a clean breast of the matter, but that at the last moment he shied at the responsibility of giving away official secrets. What he actually said was that there had been a mistake; that the fingerprints were not Moakey's after all.

'Of course this was absurd. A mistake might occur with a single fingerprint, but with a set of six it was incredible. What had happened appeared to me quite obvious. The fingerprints had been submitted to the experts, who had at once identified them as Moakey's. Then the executive had set out to arrest Moakey—and had discovered that he was in prison. If that was really what had happened, it furnished conclusive proof that the fingerprints were forgeries.

'At once I set to work to ascertain if it were so. I searched the lists of convictions at assizes, quarter-sessions, and so forth, and eventually ran Moakey to earth. He had been convicted six months previously and sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. So, at the date of the murder, he had been in prison about six months.

'We were now on solid ground. We knew that the fingerprints were forgeries. But we knew more than this. The forgery of a fingerprint, unlike that of a signature, is a purely mechanical operation, carried out either by photography or by some other reproductive process. The forged print is necessarily a mechanical copy of an existing real print. Whence it follows that the existence of a forgery is evidence of the existence of an original. And more than that, it is evidence that the forger had access to that original. Now these forgeries were copies of Moakey's fingerprints. It followed that we had to look for somebody who had had access to Moakey's fingerprints.

'Fortunately we had not far to look. At the first interview the Superintendent had referred to a previous exploit of Moakey's; a burglary at a country house, when that artist was apprehended and convicted on the evidence of his fingerprints, which were found on a silver salver. A photograph of these fingerprints was immediately taken by the owner of the house and given to the police, who took them straight to Scotland Yard. I looked up the report of that case and had the good fortune to find that the fingerprints were described. There were six of them, the thumb and first three fingers of the right hand, and the forefinger and thumb of the left hand.

'This was extremely interesting. But still more so was the fact that the house which was broken into was Beauchamp Blake, and the further fact that the owner who photographed the fingerprints was Mr Arthur Blake.

'I need not point out the importance of the discovery. It told us that Arthur Blake had had, and presumably still had, in his possession, a set of negatives with which it was possible to make the stamps of these very fingerprints. It did not, however, follow that he had made the stamps, for that would demand an amount of technical knowledge and skill far beyond that of an ordinary photographer; knowledge ordinarily possessed only by professional photo-engravers. He might have such knowledge or he might have employed some one else. At any rate, he had the negatives and had made them

himself.

'But Blake was not only associated with the fingerprints. He was also associated with the stolen property. Of all the persons known to us, he was the most likely to wish to acquire the cat's eye pendant. So, you see, the investigation, which started with a certain connection with Beauchamp Blake, led us straight to Beauchamp Blake again. And there we will leave it for the moment and approach the problem from one or two different directions.

'First we will consider the mysterious woman who came into view on the day of the inquest and who presumably sent the poisoned chocolates. Who was she? And what was her connection with the case? Now, the first thing that struck me in the description of her was her hair. It was of that brassy, golden tint that one associates with bleaches such as hydrogen peroxide. I recalled the stray hair from the small man's head which had suggested that he had worn a wig of precisely this character. The obvious suggestion was that this woman and that small man were one and the same person. They appeared to be similar in stature, there were good reasons why they should be the same, and no reasons why they should not. But, assuming them to be the same (it was afterwards proved that they were) the question arose, is this woman a disguised man or was that man a disguised woman? The latter view was clearly the more probable, for whereas a woman, if she cuts her hair short, will pass easily for a clean-shaved man, a clean-shaved man does not pass so easily for a woman, especially if he is dark, as this person was. It seemed probable, therefore, that this was really a woman—a dark woman wearing a fair wig. But who she was, and what—if any—was her relation to Blake, remained for the present a mystery.

'We now come to the man Halliburton. Obviously he was an object of deep suspicion. His only known address was an hotel. He visited Andrew Drayton without any reasonable purpose. He tried unsuccessfully to purchase the cat's eye pendant, and within four days of his failure the jewel was stolen. Then he disappeared, leaving no trace.

'Anstey and I called at his hotel to make enquiries about him. There we obtained a photograph of his signature, which we have not used, but which will be produced at the inquest, and we acquired some information which has been invaluable. He had lost, and left behind, a mascot which he valued so highly that he offered ten pounds reward for its recovery. We got the loan of it, and Polton made this indistinguishable facsimile.' Here Thorndyke passed round Polton's masterpiece for inspection. 'Now,' he continued, 'in connection with this mascot, two very important facts emerged. One was that, as Anstey expressed it, this man was a superstitious ass, a man who believed in the occult properties of mascots and charms. The importance of that becomes evident when we remember that the cat's eye was, in effect, a mascot—an object credited with occult powers affecting the fortunes of its owner. It enables us to understand his anxiety to possess the cat's eye.

'The other important fact emerges from the nature of the thing itself. It is a neck vertebra of an Echidna, or porcupine ant-eater, decorated with aboriginal ornament. The Echidna is an animal peculiar to Tasmania and Australia, and the ornament is distinctive of the locality. This mascot, therefore, established some connection between Halliburton and Australasia. But Blake had lived most of his adult life in Australia. There was, however, a difficulty. Punched on the mascot—apparently with typefounder's steel punches—were the letters o and h. The name signed in the hotel register was Oscar Halliburton, and these letters seemed to be his initials. But if that was so, Oscar Halliburton would appear to be a real person and consequently could not be Arthur Blake.

'Thus, at this stage of the inquiry, on the hypothesis that the robbery had been committed by Blake, we had two persons whom we could not account for—the unknown woman (possibly a man) and Mr Oscar Halliburton.

'But just as we appeared to have reached an impasse, Mr Brodribb threw a flood of light on the problem. For different reasons, Sir Lawrence and I were anxious to obtain some particulars of Arthur Blake and his affairs, and these particulars Mr Brodribb was fortunately in a position to supply. The information that he furnished amounted to this:

'Arthur Blake appeared to be a decent, industrious man with nothing against him but the rather queer company that he had kept. He had been associated in Australia with a man named Hugh Owen, who was a person of shady antecedents, and who, on his side, was associated with a woman named Laura Levinsky who appeared to be definitely a bad character, and who, like Owen, was under police observation. These two persons seem to have separated immediately after Blake's departure for England, and both disappeared. Levinsky was lost sight of for good, but Owen's body—or rather unrecognisable remains—came to light some years later and was identified by a ring which was known to have belonged to Owen.

'Certain particulars that Mr Brodribb gave concerning Owen made a considerable impression on me. For instance, it appeared that Owen was originally a photo-engraver by trade and that he had later owned a small type-foundry. Also that he had fractured his left kneecap and that this injury was certainly never completely repaired. But the first thing that struck me on looking at this party of three was that whereas Blake appears to have been a respectable man and most unlikely to have committed an atrocious crime such as the one we were investigating, the same could not be said of his two companions, and inevitably I found the question creeping into my mind: Is it certain that those remains were really the remains of Owen? Or may it have been that they were those of Arthur Blake? That these two criminals had murdered Blake when Brodribb's letter arrived: that Owen had taken the papers and credentials and come to England personating Blake, and that Levinsky had come by another route?

'It seemed, perhaps, a rather violent supposition; but it was quite possible; and the instant it was adopted as a working hypothesis, all the difficulties of the case vanished as if by magic. We could now account for the mysterious woman. We could also account for Halliburton, for the letters on the mascot could be read either way—o h for Oscar Halliburton or h o for Hugh Owen; and Owen had possessed and used in his type-foundry steel punches exactly like those with which the letters had been made; and further, Owen was a native of Tasmania and had lived many years in Australia. He fitted the

mascot perfectly.

'Then Owen had been a photo-engraver; that is to say, he possessed the very kind of knowledge and skill that was necessary to make the stamps for the fingerprints; and he agreed with the taller of the two criminals in that he had a marked weakness of the left leg. In short, the agreements were so striking as to leave little doubt in my mind that our two criminals were Owen and Levinsky, and that the former was in possession of Beauchamp Blake, personating the murdered owner.

'One point only remained to be verified in order to complete this aspect of the case. We had to ascertain whether the man who was posing as Arthur Blake had, in fact, fractured a knee-cap. I was casting about for some means of getting this information when the third attempt was made on Miss Blake's life, and it became evident that the danger to her was too great to admit of further delay. Just then Sir Lawrence asked me to go down with him to Aylesbury, and that proposal suggested to me the plan of visiting Beauchamp Blake and making an unmistakable demonstration. I had learned from Mr Brodribb something of the squire's habits, and I got further details from the landlord of the "King's Head." With the help of the latter I obtained access to the park at the time when the squire would be coming out, and I planted myself, with Anstey, where we were bound to be noticed.

'My object was twofold. First, I wanted to ascertain, if possible, whether the squire had any abnormal condition of the left leg, and if so, whether that condition was probably due to a fractured knee-cap, and secondly, I proposed to make such a demonstration as would convince him (if he were really Owen) that it was useless to murder Miss Blake until he had settled with me, and that it would be highly unsafe to make any further attempts. To this latter end I attached Polton's facsimile of the mascot to my watch-guard, where it could hardly fail to be seen, and then, as I have said, I planted myself on the road leading to the gate.

'Both purposes were achieved. I was able to verify with my own eyes the landlord's statement that the squire habitually mounted his horse from the off-side, a most inconvenient method of mounting, but one that would be rendered absolutely necessary by a fractured left knee-cap. Then, as I had expected, he recognised me instantly—no doubt from the portrait published in the newspapers—and dismounted to examine me more closely; and when he came near, he saw the mascot and it was obvious that he recognised it. I detached it and handed it to him, giving him such details as must have made clear to him that I knew its history and knew of his connection with it. His manner left me in no doubt that he fully understood the hint and that he accepted my challenge, and further proof was furnished by the fact that he sent a man to shadow us home and ascertain for certain who we were. So that matters were now on a perfectly definite footing, and I may add that further verification, if it had been needed, was supplied by the circumstance that, on this very day, Anstey caught a glimpse of Levinsky, disguised as a man, in the market square at Aylesbury. The rest of the story I think you all know.'

'Yes,' said Drayton, 'we gathered that from your written statement. But what is not clear to me is why you considered it necessary to thrust your head into the lion's jaws. You seem to have had a complete case against these two wretches. Why couldn't you have lodged an information and had them arrested?'

'I was afraid to take the risk,' replied Thorndyke. 'To us the case looks complete. But how would it have looked to the police? or to a possibly unimaginative magistrate? or, especially to a jury of ordinary, and perhaps thick-headed, tradesmen and artisans? Juries like direct evidence, and that was what I was trying to produce. I had no doubt that these two persons would try to murder me and Anstey, and that we should prevent them from succeeding. Then we could charge them with the attempt and prove it by direct evidence, after which we could have proceeded confidently with the second charge of the murder of Andrew Drayton.'

'I think Thorndyke was right,' said I, seeing that Sir Lawrence still looked doubtful. 'From my large experience of juries in criminal cases, I feel that this intricate train of inferential evidence would have been rather unconvincing by itself, but that it would have been quite effective if it had come after a charge supported by the testimony of eye-witnesses, such as we should have been.'

'Well,' said Drayton, 'we will agree that the circumstances justified the risk, and certainly the unravelment of this case by means of such almost invisible data is a most remarkable achievement. This exposition has whetted my appetite for the explanation of the other mystery.'

'Yes,' said Winifred. 'I am on tenterhooks to hear how you made the "little Sphinx" answer its own riddle. Shall I hand you the locket?'

'If you please; and the Book of Hours. And if we can get Polton to put the microscope on the table with the slide that is on the stage, we shall have all that we want for the demonstration.'

At this Polton emerged unblushingly from the office, and having put the microscope on the table, carefully adjusted the mirror and then, with brazen effrontery, took a long and intent look through the instrument, under the pretence of seeing that the specimen was properly lighted.

'There is no need for you to go back to the office, Polton,' my colleague said with a smile at his familiar. 'We shall want your help with the microscope presently. Draw up a chair for yourself.'

Polton seated himself opposite the instrument with a smile of intense gratification, and Thorndyke then resumed:

'This investigation was a much simpler affair than the other. You may remember, Miss Blake, showing me the locket that night when I called with Anstey at your studio, and you will remember that we noted the very unusual construction; the

evident purpose of the maker to render it as strong and durable as workmanship could make it. This curious construction—which I pointed out at the time—caused me to examine it rather closely. And then I made a rather strange discovery.'

Winifred leaned forward and gazed at him with breathless expectancy.

'It was concerned with the hallmark,' he continued. 'There are, as you see, four punch-marks. The first is a capital A with two palm-leaves surmounted by a crown. The second is an escutcheon or shape with the initials AH surmounted by a crown and over that a fleur-de-lis. The third is a capital L, and the fourth is the head of an animal which looks like a horse. This grouping shows that the piece is French. The first mark is the town mark, the second the maker's mark, the third is the date letter, and the fourth is the mark of the Farmer of the Duty. Now, I happened to have had occasion to give some attention to the marks on old French plate, and I happened to have read, only an hour or two previously, the fragmentary narrative of Percival Blake. Accordingly, when I examined the hallmark and learned from it that this locket had been made in Paris in the year 1751, that fact at once arrested my attention.'

'How did you learn that from the hallmark?' Winifred asked.

'It is the function of the hallmark to give that information,' he replied. 'The town-mark of Paris is a capital A surmounted by a crown, but it varies in style from year to year. This one is a Roman capital with two palm-leaves and a very small crown. That is the form used in the middle of the eighteenth century, but the date is definitely fixed by the date-letter—in this case a capital L, which indicates the year 1751.

'It was, of course, a very remarkable coincidence that this locket should have been made at the place and in the year of Judith Blake's death, and it naturally caused me to look at the little trinket more narrowly. Hitherto I had assumed, as you did, that the object that Percival referred to was the cat's eye pendant. But I now recalled that he had not specifically mentioned the pendant, and that he had spoken of it as "the bauble" or "the trinket," never as "the jewel." It was thus just barely conceivable that this mysterious little object might be the one to which he was referring; and the instant the question was raised, the evidence supporting it began to run together like drops of water.

'First, there was the inscription, "O BIOC BPAXYO H AE TEXNH MAKPH," "Life is short but Art is long." It was the motto of the practitioner of some art or craft. But artists and craftsmen almost invariably use the Latin form, "Ars longa, Vita brevis—Art is long. Life is short." But there is one body of craftsmen who use the Greek form. It is the motto of the London College of Physicians, and moreover it is written by them in the same uncial characters, with the round, C-shaped sigma. Now Percival was a physician and a fellow of this very college, and he was an enthusiast who originally practised his profession for love and not from necessity or for a livelihood. What more natural than that he should use the motto of his own college?

'Then there was the construction of the locket—everything sacrificed to permanence and durability. It fitted the circumstances perfectly. And there were the unusual suspension rings, specially adapted to take a cord or thong. I recalled the enigmatic words "gave me a string from his bass viol, which he says will be the best of all." Remembering that the bass viol would be a viol da gamba or violoncello, not a double-bass, we see that this was true; the stout gut string would last for a century or more.

'Then again there were the scripture references which you showed me. The first was "And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return." That was a most striking passage. It was an exact statement of Percival's aim—incidentally illustrating the way in which the other passages were to be treated; and when I noted that the principal word in the last reference was "parchments," I felt that a prima facie case had been made out. I had little doubt that this locket was the "precious bauble" that was handed to—and presumably lost by—Jenifer.

'But after all this was only guesswork. We had to get down to certainties. And, fortunately, there was available an excellent and conclusive test. If the locket was Percival's, the hair in it was almost certainly Judith's. Now there was something very unusual about Judith's hair. During her imprisonment it had undergone a most extraordinary change. Percival tells us that when she was released, "her hair, that had been like spun gold, was turned to a strange black." This was very remarkable. Judith was evidently a true blonde, and when she was arrested, she must have been getting on for thirty years of age. But the hair of a blonde adult does not turn black from ill-health and grief. It tends rather to turn white. What could be the explanation of the change?

'It is a very curious one. Judith had been labouring in the mines in the Harz Mountains. These mines yield a number of different metals, and some of them are extremely poisonous. They are ancient mines, and in the Middle Ages, when the properties of metals were less understood, the terrible condition to which persons who worked in them were reduced by chronic poisoning was put down to the influence of a race of malignant gnomes who were believed to inhabit the mines and who were known as kobolds. In particular, the influence of the kobolds came to be associated with a particular, uncanny ore from which no metal could be—in those days—extracted, and in the end this ore came to be known by the name of these mine-gnomes or kobolds, and that name it bears this day, in the slightly altered form of cobalt.

'Now, the metal, cobalt, has one or two very distinctive properties. One is that of imparting a powerful and beautiful blue colour to substances with which it combines. This was the value of the ore, and for this it has been prized from quite ancient times. We find it in use everywhere. The blue of all the Chinese porcelain is cobalt. The blue of the old Delft pottery is cobalt. The blue in all the old stained-glass windows—and modern ones too—is cobalt.

'Then this metal has another curious property which it shares with arsenic and one or two other metals. It is capable of

being absorbed into the body and producing poisonous effects, and when so absorbed, it becomes deposited in the skin, or, more correctly speaking, in the epidermis and its appendages—the fingernails and the hair. But whereas the outer skin and the nails wear away and are cast off, the hair—especially a woman's hair—remains attached for long periods. Consequently, in chronic cobalt poisoning, the hair becomes charged with a cobalt compound—probably an oxide—and is stained blue.

'Bearing these facts in mind, we can now understand what had happened to Judith. She had been sent to labour in a mine which yielded cobalt, and probably nickel. Her hair had not turned black, it had turned blue, though, in the mass, it would appear black—a strange, unnatural black, as Percival tells us. Thus, if the hair in this locket was the hair of Judith Blake, it would appear blue when properly examined. I took an opportunity to get possession of the locket, and that very night I removed the remains of the cover-glass and picked out a single hair, which I mounted in Canada balsam and examined under the microscope. That hair is on the stage of the microscope now. Polton will bring it round and let you see it.'

Our assistant tenderly carried the microscope round and set it before Winifred, and having adjusted the light and the focus, stepped back to watch the effect.

'But how extraordinary!' she exclaimed as she looked into the eyepiece. 'It looks like a thread of blue glass! And how strange and romantic!'

Brodribb and Drayton rose from their chairs and came round, all agog to see this prodigy. In succession they gazed at it with murmurs of astonishment and then went back to their seats, still muttering.

'The appearance of that hair,' Thorndyke resumed, 'settled the question conclusively. This was Percival's trinket beyond a doubt, and all that remained was to read the message inside. As we now knew what to look for, this presented no difficulty at all. It was no cipher or cryptogram. It was simply a collection of texts, from each of which, as the first one showed, the instructed reader would have no difficulty in picking out the significant word or phrase. We may as well just run through them and see what they tell us.

'Number one, Leviticus 25. 41, we have already considered. It is the preamble which indicates the purport of the remainder. I see you have your notebook. Will you read us out the next?'

'Number two,' said Winifred, 'is Psalms 121, 1: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help!" That is the passage, but it doesn't convey any intelligible meaning to me.'

'No,' said Thorndyke, 'it doesn't, because you have got the wrong Psalm. You looked up your reference in the English Authorised Version, overlooking the fact that Percival was probably a Catholic and certainly a resident in France, and also that the references were given with Latin titles, suggesting that he used the Latin Vulgate. This happens to be matter of vital importance in this case, as the Psalms are not numbered quite alike in the two Bibles. Psalm 121 in the Vulgate is 122 in the Authorised Version. Here is the Douay Bible, which is the official translation of the Vulgate, and if we refer to Psalm 121.1 in it, we find "I rejoiced at the things that were said to me; We shall go into the house of the Lord." That is quite illuminating. It tells us that we are concerned with a church, and the next reference tells us what church. It is Actus Apostolorum 10.5'

'Yes,' said Winifred, ' "And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter."'

'That,' said Thorndyke, 'gives us the church of St Peter. The next,' he continued, glancing at the notebook which Winifred had handed to him, 'is Nehemias 8. 4. "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood"—we need not complete the passage. The pulpit of wood is obviously the significant part. Then we come to 3 Lib. Regum 7. 41—by the way, that third book of Kings might have given you a hint that you were not dealing with the Authorised Version. It reads: "The two pillars, and the two bowls of the chapters that were on the top of the two pillars," etc. The meaning of this passage was not very clear. It had some connection with the pulpit of St Peter's Church, but what the connection was, it was not easy to guess. Of course, directly one saw the pulpit, the meaning was obvious.

'The next reference is to Psalm 31. 7, and again you have taken the Authorised Version and got the wrong Psalm. Psalm 31 in the Vulgate is Psalm 32 in the Authorised Version. Your reading is "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities." This, as you say, seems quite irrelevant, but if you had turned forward to Psalm 32. 7, you would have read: "Thou art my hiding-place" or "refuge," as the Vulgate has it, which is very relevant indeed. The last reference is 2 Epist. ad Tim. "The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments."

'Thus, taking the references together, they suggest to us the ideas of parchments, a hiding-place, and the two pillars (and their capitals) of the wooden pulpit of the church of St Peter. It was perfectly plain and simple to a reader who knew the kind of information that was being given and who knew of the existence of this particular church. To a stranger, on the other hand, it was perfectly meaningless and undecipherable.'

'It certainly looks very simple now that we have heard the explanation,' said Winifred, 'but it didn't seem so when I was trying to work it out myself. There didn't seem to be anything to go on.'

'No,' agreed Sir Lawrence, 'there didn't seem to be anything to go on in either case. The clues were perfectly invisible, and I don't believe any one but our friend would have discovered a particle of evidence.'

Brodribb chuckled and reached out for the decanter. 'I agree with you, Drayton,' said he. 'Thorndyke reminds me of that, probably fabulous, kind of Indian juggler who throws a rope into the air and proceeds to climb up it and pull it up after

him. He can work without any visible means of support. However, he has conducted our various affairs to a highly satisfactory conclusion, and I propose that we charge our glasses in his honour and invite him to light the Trichinopoly, which, I believe, is his disgusting habit on occasions of this kind.'

Accordingly the glasses were filled, the toast pledged, and the virulent little cheroot duly lighted; with which mystical rite the case of the Cat's Eye was formally closed and dismissed into the domain of memory.

There is little more to tell. I am finishing this narrative in a pleasant, panelled room in the old mansion of Beauchamp Blake, one of a suite assigned by Percy to Winifred and me, in which we commonly spend our weekends—for our normal abiding-place is still the Temple. Percy is growing apace, and like his ancestor and namesake, refuses to abandon his professional ambitions. At present he is engaged, under the direction of a famous architect, in restoring the old house to its former comeliness, and only this morning I saw them together superintending the replacement of a perished fascia with a sturdy oaken plank, enriched with fine carving and bearing in raised letters the legend: 'God's Providence is Mine Inheritance.'





## THE MYSTERY OF ANGELINA FROOD

### CHAPTER I. — THE DOPER'S WIFE

It takes a good deal to surprise a really seasoned medical practitioner, and still more to arouse in him an abiding curiosity. But at the time when I took charge of Dr. Humphrey's practice in Osnaburgh-street, Regent's Park, I was far from being a seasoned practitioner, having, in fact, been qualified little more than a year, in which short period I had not yet developed the professional immunity from either of the above mental states. Hence the singular experience which I am about to relate not only made a deep impression on me at the time, but remained with me for long after as a matter of curious speculation.

It was close upon midnight, indeed an adjacent church clock had already struck the third quarter, when I laid aside my book and yawned profoundly, without prejudice to the author who had kept me so long from my bed. Then I rose and stretched myself, and was in the act of knocking the long-extinct ashes out of my pipe when the bell rang. As the servants had gone to bed, I went out to the door, congratulating myself on having stayed up beyond my usual bedtime, but wishing the visitor at the devil all the same. The opening of the door gave me a view of a wet street with a drizzle of rain falling, a large closed car by the kerb, and a tallish man on the doorstep, apparently about to renew his attack on the bell.

"Dr. Pumphrey?" he asked; and by that token I gathered that he was a stranger.

"No," I answered; "he is out of town, but I am looking after his practice."

"Very well," he said, somewhat brusquely. "I want you to come and see a lady who has been suddenly taken ill. She has had a rather severe shock."

"Do you mean a mental or a physical shock?" I asked.

"Well, I should say mental," he replied, but so inconclusively that I pressed him for more definite particulars.

"Has she sustained any injuries?" I inquired.

"No," he answered, but still indecisively. "No; that is, so far as I know. I think not."

"No wound, for instance?"

"No," he replied, promptly and very definitely, from which I was disposed to suspect that there was an injury of some other kind. But it was of no use guessing. I hurried back into the surgery, and, having snatched up the emergency bag and my stethoscope, rejoined my visitor, who forthwith hustled me into the car. The door slammed, and the vehicle moved off with the silent, easy motion of a powerful engine.

We started towards Marylebone-road and swept round into Albany-street, but after that I lost my bearings: for the fine rain had settled on the windows so that it was difficult to see through them, and I was not very familiar with the neighbourhood. It seemed quite a short journey, but a big car is very deceptive as to distance. At any rate, it occupied but a few minutes, and during that time my companion and I exchanged hardly a word. As the car slowed down I asked:

"What is this lady's name?"

"Her name," he replied, in a somewhat hesitating manner, "is—she is a Mrs. Johnson."

The manner of the reply suggested a not very intimate acquaintance, which seemed odd under the circumstances, and I reflected on it rapidly as I got out of the car and followed my conductor. We seemed to be in a quiet bystreet of the better class, but it was very dark, and I had but a glimpse as I stepped from the car to the gate of the house. Of the latter, all that I was able to note was that it appeared to be of a decent, rather old-fashioned type, standing behind a small front garden, that the windows were fitted with jalousie shutters, and that the number on the door was 43.

As we ascended the steps the door opened, and a woman was dimly discernible behind it. A lighted candle was on the hall table, and this my conductor picked up, requesting me to follow him up the stairs. When we arrived at the first floor landing, he halted and indicated a door which was slightly ajar.

"That is the room," said he; and with that he turned and retired down the stairs.

I stood for a few moments on the dark landing, deeply impressed by the oddity of the whole affair, and sensible of a growing suspicion, which was not lessened when, by the thin line of light from within the room, I observed on the door-jamb one or two bruises as if the door had been forced from without. However, this was none of my business, and thus reflecting, I was about to knock at the door when four fingers appeared round the edge of it and drew it further open, and a man's head became visible in the opening.

The fingers and the head were alike such as instantly to rivet the attention of a doctor. The former were of the kind known as "clubbed fingers," fingers with bulbous ends, of which the nails curved over like nut-shells. The head, in form like a great William pear, presented a long, coffin-shaped face with high cheek-bones, deep-set eyes with narrow, slanting eye-slits, and a lofty, square forehead surmounted by a most singular mop of mouse-coloured hair which stood straight up like the fur of a mole.

"I am the doctor," said I, having taken in these particulars in an instantaneous glance, and having further noted that the man's eyes were reddened and wet. He made no reply, but drew the door open and retired, whereupon I entered the room, closing the door behind me, and thereby becoming aware that there was something amiss with the latch.

The room was a bed-room, and on the bed lay a woman, fully clothed, and apparently in evening dress, though the upper part of her person was concealed by a cloak which was drawn up to her chin. She was a young woman—about twenty-eight, I judged—comely, and, in fact, rather handsome, but deadly pale. She was not, however, unconscious, for she looked at me listlessly, though with a certain attention. In some slight embarrassment, I approached the bed, and, as the man had subsided into a chair in a corner of the room, I addressed myself to the patient.

“Good evening, Mrs. Johnson. I am sorry to see you looking so ill. What is the matter? I understand that you have had some kind of shock.”

As I addressed her, I seemed to detect a faint expression of surprise, but she replied at once, in a weak voice that was little more than a whisper: “Yes. I have had rather an upset. That is all. They need not really have troubled you.”

“Well, you don’t look very flourishing,” said I, taking the wrist that was uncovered by her mantle, “and your hand is as cold as a fish.”

I felt her pulse, checking it by my watch, and meanwhile looking her over critically. And not her alone. For on the wall opposite me was a mirror in which, by a little judicious adjustment of position, I was able to observe the other occupant of the room while keeping my back towards him; and what I observed was that he was sitting with his elbows on his knees, and his face buried in his hands.

“Might one inquire,” I asked, as I put away my watch, “what kind of shock it is that you are suffering from?”

The faintest trace of a smile stole across her pale face as she answered: “That isn’t really a medical question, Doctor, is it?”

“Perhaps it isn’t,” I replied, though, of course, it was.

But I thought it best to waive the question, as there seemed to be some reservation; and, noting this latter fact, I again considered her attentively. Whatever her condition was, and whatever it might be due to, I had to form my opinion unassisted, for I could see that no information would be furnished; and the question that I had to settle was whether her state was purely mental, or whether it was complicated by any kind of physical injury. The waxen pallor of her face made me uneasy, and I found it difficult to interpret the expression of the set features. Some strong emotion had left its traces; but whether that emotion was grief, horror, or fear, or whether the expression denoted bodily pain, I could not determine. She had closed her eyes, and her face was like a death mask, save that it lacked the serenity of a dead face.

“Are you in any pain!” I asked, with my fingers still on the thready pulse. But she merely shook her head wearily, without opening her eyes.

It was very unsatisfactory. Her appearance was consistent with all kinds of unpleasant possibilities, as was also the strange atmosphere of secrecy about the whole affair. Nor was the attitude of that ill-favoured man whom I could see in the glass, still sitting hunched up with his face buried in his hands, at all reassuring. And gradually my attention began to focus itself upon the cloak which covered the woman’s body and was drawn around her neck up to her chin. Did that cloak conceal anything? It seemed incredible, seeing that they had sent for a doctor. But the behaviour of everybody concerned was incredibly irrational. I produced my stethoscope, which was fitted with a diaphragm that enabled one to hear through the clothing, and, drawing the cloak partly aside, applied the chest-piece over the heart. On this the patient opened her eyes and made a movement of her hand towards the upper part of the cloak. I listened carefully to her heart—which was organically sound, though a good deal disordered in action—and moved the stethoscope once or twice, drawing aside the cloak by degrees. Finally, with a somewhat quick movement, I turned it back completely.

“Why,” I exclaimed, “what on earth have you been doing to your neck?”

“That mark?” she said in a half-whisper. “It is nothing. It was made by a gold collar that I wore yesterday. It was rather tight.”

“I see,” said I, truthfully enough; for the explanation of her condition was now pretty clear up to a certain point.

Of course, I did not believe her. I did not suppose that she expected me to. But it was evidently useless to dispute her statement or make any comment. The mark upon her neck was a livid bruise made by some cord or band that had been drawn tight with considerable force; and it was not more than an hour old. How or by whom the injury had been inflicted was not, in a medical sense, my concern. But I was by no means clear that I had not some responsibilities in the case other than the professional ones.

At this moment the man in the corner uttered a deep groan and exclaimed in low, intense tones, “My God! My God!” Then, to my extreme embarrassment, he began to sob audibly.

It was excessively uncomfortable. I looked from the woman—into whose ghastly face an expression of something like disgust and contempt had stolen—to the huddled figure in the glass. And as I looked, the man plunged one hand into his pocket and dragged out a handkerchief, bringing with it a little paper packet that fell to the floor. Something in the appearance of that packet, and especially in the hasty grab to recover it and the quick, furtive glance towards me that accompanied the action, made a new and sinister suggestion—a suggestion that the man’s emotional, almost hysterical state supported, and that lent a certain unpleasant congruity to the otherwise inexplicable circumstances. That packet, I had little doubt, contained cocaine. The question was how did that fact—if it were a fact—bear on my patient’s condition.

I inspected her afresh, and felt her pulse again. In the man’s case the appearances were distinctive enough. His nerves

were in rags, and even across the room I could see that the hand that held the handkerchief shook as if with a palsy. But in the woman's condition there was no positive suggestion of drugs; and something in her face—a strong, resolute face despite its expression of suffering—and her quiet, composed manner when she spoke, seemed to exclude the idea. However, there was no use in speculating. I had got all the information I was likely to get, and all that remained for me to do was to administer such treatment as my imperfect understanding of the case indicated. Accordingly I opened my emergency bag, and, taking out a couple of little bottles and a measure-glass, went over to the washstand and mixed a draught in the tumbler, diluting it from the water-bottle.

In crossing the room, I passed the fire-place, where, on and above the mantelpiece, I observed a number of signed photographs, apparently of actors and actresses, including two of my patient, both of which were in character costume and unsigned. From which it seemed probable that my patient was an actress; a probability that was strengthened by the hour at which I had been summoned and by certain other appearances in the room with which Dr. Pumphrey's largely theatrical practice had made me familiar. But, as my patient would have remarked, this was not a medical question.

"Now, Mrs. Johnson," I said, when I had prepared the draught—and as I spoke she opened her eyes and looked at me with a slightly puzzled expression—"I want you to drink this."

She allowed me to sit her up enough to enable her to swallow the draught; and as her head was raised, I took the opportunity to glance at the back of her neck, where I thought I could distinctly trace the crossing of the cord or band that had been drawn round it. She sank back with a sigh, but remained with her eyes open, looking at me as I repacked my bag.

"I shall send you some medicine," I said, "which you must take regularly. It is unnecessary for me to say," I added, addressing the man, "that Mrs. Johnson must be kept very quiet, and in no way agitated."

He bowed, but made no reply; and I then took my leave.

"Good night, Mrs. Johnson," I said, shaking her cold hand gently. "I hope you will be very much better in an hour or two. I think you will if you keep quite quiet and take your medicine."

She thanked me in a few softly spoken words and with a very sweet smile, of which the sad wistfulness went to my heart. I was loath to leave her, in her weak and helpless state, to the care of her unprepossessing companion, encompassed by I knew not what perils. But I was only a passing stranger, and could do no more than my professional office.

As I approached the door—with an inquisitive eye on its disordered lock and loosened striking-box—the man rose, and made as if to let me out. I wished him good-night, and he returned the salutation in a pleasant voice, and with a distinctly refined accent, quite out of character with his uncouth appearance. Feeling my way down the dark staircase, I presently encountered my first acquaintance, who came to the foot of the stairs with the candle.

"Well," he said, in his brusque way, "how is she?"

"She is very weak and shaken," I replied. "I want to send her some medicine. Shall I take the address, or are you driving me back?"

"I will take you back in the car," said he, "and you can give me the medicine."

The car was waiting at the gate, and we went out together. As I turned to close the gate after me, I cast a quick glance at the house and its surroundings, searching for some distinctive feature in case recognition of the place should be necessary later. But it was a dark night, though the rain had now ceased, and I could see no more than that the adjoining house seemed to have a sort of corner turret, crowned with a small cupola, and surmounted by a weather-vane.

During the short journey home not a word was spoken, and when the car drew up at Dr. Pumphrey's door and I let myself in with the key, my companion silently followed me in. I prepared the medicine at once, and handed it to him with a few brief instructions. He took it from me, and then asked what my fee was.

"Do I understand that I am not required to continue the attendance?" I asked.

"They will send for you, I suppose, if they want you," he replied. "But I had better pay your fee for this visit as I came for you."

I named the fee, and, when he had paid it, I said: "You understand that she will require very careful and tender treatment while she is so weak?"

"I do," he answered; "but I am not a member of the household. Did you make it clear to Mr.—her husband?"

I noted the significant hesitation, and replied: "I told him, but as to making it clear to him, I can't say. His mental condition was none of the most lucid. I hope she has someone more responsible to look after her."

"She has," he replied; and then he asked: "You don't think she is in any danger, I hope?"

"In a medical sense," I answered, "I think not. In other respects you know better than I do."

He gave me a quick look, and nodded slightly. Then, with a curt "good-night," he turned and went out to the car.

When he was gone, I made a brief record of the visit in the day-book, and entered the fee in the cash column. In the case of the experienced Dr. Pumphrey, this would have been the end of the transaction. But, new as I was to medical practice, I was unable to take this matter-of-fact view of its incidents. My mind still surged with surprise, curiosity, and a deep concern for my fair patient. Filling my pipe, I sat down before the gas fire to think over the mystery to which I had

suddenly become a party.

What was it that had happened in that house? Obviously, something scandalous and sinister. The secrecy alone made that manifest. Not only had the whereabouts of the house been withheld from me, but a false name had been given. I realized that when my late visitor stumbled over the name and substituted "her husband," He had forgotten what name it was that he had given on the spur of the moment. I understood, too, the look of surprise that my patient had given when I addressed her by that false name. Clearly, something had happened which had to be hushed up if possible.

What was it? The elements of the problem, and the material for solving it, were the mark on the woman's neck, the condition of the door, and a packet which I felt morally certain contained cocaine. I considered these three factors separately and together.

The mark on the neck was quite recent. Its character was unmistakable. A cord or band had been drawn tight and with considerable violence, either by the woman herself, or by some other person: that is to say, it was a case either of attempted suicide or attempted murder. To which of these alternatives did the circumstances point?

There was the door. It had been broken in, and had therefore been locked on the inside. That was consistent with suicide, but not inconsistent with murder. Then, by whom had it been broken in? By a murderer to get at his victim? Or by a rescuer? And if the latter, was it to avert suicide or murder?

Again, there was the drug—assumed, but almost certain.

What was the bearing of that? Could these three persons be a party of "dopers," and the tragedy the outcome of an orgy of drug-taking? I rejected this possibility at once. It was not consistent with the patient's condition nor with her appearance or manner; and the man who had fetched me and brought me back was a robust, sane-looking man who seemed quite beyond suspicion.

I next considered the persons. There were three of them: two men and a woman. Of the men, one was a virile, fairly good-looking man of perhaps forty; the other—the husband—was conspicuously unprepossessing, physically degenerate and mentally, as I judged, a hysterical poltroon. Here there seemed to be the making of trouble, especially when one considered the personal attractiveness of the woman.

I recalled her appearance very vividly. A handsome woman, not, perhaps, actually beautiful—though she might have been that if the roses of youth and health had bloomed in those cheeks that I had seen blanched with that ghastly pallor. But apart from mere comeliness, there was a suggestion of a pleasing, gracious personality. I don't know how it had been conveyed to me, excepting by the smile with which she had thanked me and bidden me farewell: a smile that had imparted a singular sweetness to her face. But I had received that impression, and also that she was a woman of decided character and intelligence.

Her appearance was rather striking. She had a great mass of dark hair, parted in the middle, and drawn down over the temples, nearly covering the ears; darkish grey eyes, and unusually strong, black, level eyebrows, that almost met above the straight, shapely nose. Perhaps it was those eyebrows that gave the strength and intensity to her expression, aided by the compressed lips—though this was probably a passing condition due to her mental state.

My cogitations were prolonged well into the small hours, but they led to nothing but an open verdict. At length I rose with a slight shiver, and, dismissing the topic from my mind, crept up to bed.

But both the persons and the incident refused to accept their dismissal. For many days afterwards I was haunted by two faces; the one, ugly, coffin-shaped, surmounted by a shock of soft, furry, mouse-coloured hair; the other, sweet, appealing, mutely eloquent of tragedy and sorrow. Of course, I received no further summons; and the whereabouts of the house of mystery remained a secret until almost the end of my stay in Osnaburgh-street. Indeed, it was on the very day before Dr. Pumphrey's return that I made the discovery.

I had been making a visit to a patient who lived near Regent's Park, and on my way back had taken what I assumed to be a short cut. This led me into a quiet, old fashioned residential street, of which the houses stood back behind small front gardens. As I walked along the street I seemed to be aware of a faint sense of familiarity which caused me to observe the houses with more than usual attention. Presently I observed a little way ahead on the opposite side a house with a corner turret topped by a cupola, which bore above it a weather-vane. I crossed the road as I approached it, and looked eagerly at the next house. Its identity was unmistakable. My attention was immediately attracted by the jealousies with which the windows were fitted, and on looking at the front door I observed that the number was forty-three.

This, then, was the house of mystery, perhaps of crime.

But whatever that tragedy had been, its actors were there no longer. The windows were curtainless and blank; an air of Spring-cleaning and preparation pervaded the premises, and a bill on a little notice-board announced a furnished house to let, and invited inquiries. For a moment, I was tempted to accept that invitation. But I was restrained by a feeling that it would be in a way a breach of confidence. The names of those persons had been purposely withheld from me, doubtless for excellent reasons, and professional ethics seemed to forbid any unauthorized prying into their private affairs. Wherefore, with a valedictory glance at the first-floor window, which I assumed to be that of the room that I had entered, I went on my way, telling myself that, now, the incident was really closed, and that I had looked my last on the persons who had enacted their parts in it.

In which, however, I was mistaken. The curtain was down on the first act, but the play was not over. Only the succeeding acts were yet in the unfathomed future. "Coming events cast their shadows before them"; but who can interpret those shadows, until the shapes which cast them loom up, plain and palpable, to mock at their own unheeded premonitions?

## CHAPTER II. — RE-ENTER “MR. JOHNSON”

It was a good many months before the curtain rose on the second act of the drama of which this narrative is the record. Rather more than a year had passed, and in that time certain changes had taken place in my condition, of which I need refer only to the one that, indirectly, operated as the cause of my becoming once more a party to the drama aforesaid. I had come into a small property, just barely sufficient to render me independent, and to enable me to live in idleness, if idleness had been my hobby. As it was not, I betook myself to Adam-street, Adelphi, to confer with my trusty medical agent, Mr. Turcival, and from that conference was born my connexion with the strange events which will be hereafter related.

Mr. Turcival had several practices to sell, but only one that he thought quite suitable. “It is a death vacancy,” said he, “at Rochester. A very small practice, and you won’t get much out of it, as the late incumbent was an old man and you are a young man—and you look ten years younger since you shaved off that fine beard and moustache. But it is going for a song, and you can afford to wait; and you couldn’t have a more pleasant place to wait in than Rochester. Better go down and have a look at it. I’ll write to the local agents, Japp and Bundy, and they will show you the house and effects. What do you say?”

I said “yes”; and so favourably was I impressed that the very next day found me in a first-class compartment en route for Rochester, with a substantial portmanteau in the guard’s van.

At Dartford it became necessary to change, and as I sauntered on the platform, waiting for the Rochester train, my attention was attracted to a man who sat, somewhat wearily and dejectedly, on a bench, rolling a cigarette. I was impressed by the swift dexterity with which he handled the paper and tobacco, a dexterity that was explained by the colour of his fingers, which were stained to the hue of mahogany. But my attention was quickly diverted from the colour of the fingers to their shape. They were clubbed fingers. At the moment when I observed the fact I was looking over his shoulder from behind, and could not see his face. But I could see that he had a large, pear-shaped head, surmounted by an enormous cap, from beneath which a mass of mouse-coloured hair stuck out like untidy thatch.

I suppose I must have halted unconsciously, for he suddenly looked round, casting at me a curious, quick, furtive, suspicious glance. He evidently did not recognize me—naturally, since my appearance was so much changed; but I recognized him instantly. He was “Mr.—, her husband.” And his appearance was not improved since I had last seen him. Inspecting him from the front, I observed that he was sordidly shabby and none too clean, and that his large, rough boots were white with dust as if from a long tramp on the chalky Kentish roads.

When the train came in, I watched him saunter to a compartment a few doors from my own, rolling a fresh cigarette as he went: and at each station when we stopped, I looked out of the window to see where he got out. But he made no appearance until the train slowed down at Rochester when I alighted quickly and strolled towards his compartment. It had evidently been well filled, for a number of passengers emerged before he appeared, contesting the narrow doorway with a stout workman. As he squeezed past, the skirt of his coat caught and was drawn back, revealing a sheath-knife of the kind known to seamen as “Green River,” attached to a narrow leather belt. I did not like the look of that knife. No landsman has any legitimate use for such a weapon. And the fact that this man habitually carried about him the means of inflicting lethal injuries—for it had no other purpose—threw a fresh light, if any were needed, on the sinister events of that memorable night in the quiet house near Regent’s Park.

As I had to look after my luggage, I lost sight of him; and when having deposited my portmanteau in the cloak room, I walked out across the station approach and looked up and down the street, he was nowhere to be seen. Dimly wondering what this man might be doing in Rochester, and whether his handsome wife were here, too—assuming her to be still in existence—I turned and began to saunter slowly westward. I had walked but two or three hundred yards when the door of a tavern which I was approaching opened, and a man emerged, licking his lips with uncommon satisfaction, and rolling a cigarette. It was my late fellow-traveller. He stood by the tavern door, looking about him, and glancing at the people on the footway. Just as I was passing him, he approached me and spoke.

“I wonder,” said he, “if you happen to know a Mrs. Frood who lives somewhere about here.”

“I am afraid I don’t,” I replied, thankful to be able to tell the truth—for I should have denied knowledge of her in any case. “I am a stranger to the town at present.”

He thanked me and turned away, and I walked on, but no longer at a saunter, wondering who Mrs. Frood might be and keeping an eye on the numbers of the houses on the opposite side of the street.

A few minutes walk brought into view the number I was seeking, painted in the tympanum of a handsome Georgian portico appertaining to one of a pair of pleasant old redbrick houses. I halted to inspect these architectural twins before crossing the road. Old houses always interest me, and these two were particularly engaging, as their owners apparently realized, for they were in the pink of condition, and the harmony of the quiet green woodwork and the sober red brick was no chance effect. Moreover they were painted alike to carry out the intention of the architect, who had evidently designed them to form a single composition; to which end he had very effectively placed, between the twin porticoes, a central door which gave access to a passage common to the two houses and leading, no doubt, to the back premises.

Having noted these particulars, I crossed the road and approached the twin which bore beside its doorway a brass plate, inscribed “Japp and Bundy, Architects and Surveyors.” In the adjoining bay window, in front of a green curtain, was a list of houses to let; and as I paused for a moment to glance at this, a face decorated with a pair of colossal tortoiseshell-

rimmed spectacles, rose slowly above the curtain, and then, catching my eye, popped down again with some suddenness.

I ascended the short flight of steps to the open street door, and entering the hall, opened the office door and walked in. The owner of the spectacles was perched on a high stool at a higher desk with his back to me, writing in a large book. The other occupant of the office was a small, spare, elderly man, with a pleasant wrinkly face and a cockatoo-like crest of white hair, who confronted me across a large table on which a plan was spread out. He looked up interrogatively as I entered, and I proceeded at once to announce myself.

"I am Dr. Strangeways," said I, drawing a bundle of papers from my pocket. "Mr. Turcival—the medical agent, you know—thought I had better come down and settle things up on the spot. So here I am."

"Precisely," said my new acquaintance, motioning me to a chair—it was a shield-back Heppelwhite, I noticed—"I agree with Mr. Turcival. It is all quite plain sailing. The position is this: Old Dr. Partridge died about three weeks ago, and the executor of his will, who lives in Northumberland, has instructed us to realize his estate. We have valued the furniture, fittings, and effects, have added a small amount to cover the drugs and instruments and the goodwill of the practice, and this is the premium. It is practically just the value of the effects."

"And the lease of the house?"

"Expired some years ago and we allowed Dr. Partridge to remain as a yearly tenant, which he preferred. You could do the same or you could have a lease, if you wished."

"Is the house your property?" I asked.

"No; but we manage it for the owner, a Mrs. Frood."

"Oh, it belongs to Mrs. Frood, does it?"

He looked up at me quickly, and I noticed that the gentleman at the desk had stopped writing. "Do you know Mrs. Frood?" he asked.

"No; but it happens that a man who came down by my train asked me a few minutes ago if I could give him her address. Fortunately I couldn't."

"Why fortunately?"

The question brought me, up short. My prejudice against the man was due to my knowledge of his antecedents, which I was not prepared to disclose. I therefore replied evasively:

"Well, I wasn't very favourably impressed by his appearance. He was a shabby-looking customer. I suspected that he was a cadger of some kind."

"Indeed! Now, what sort of a person was he? Could you describe him?"

"He was a youngish man—from thirty-five to forty, I should say—apparently well educated but very seedy and not particularly clean. A queer-looking man, with a big, pear-shaped head and a mop of hair like the fur of a Persian cat. His fingers are clubbed at the ends, and stained with tobacco to the knuckles. Do you know him?"

"I rather suspect I do. What do you say, Bundy?"

Mr. Bundy grunted. "Hubby, I ween," said he.

"You don't mean Mrs. Frood's husband?" I exclaimed.

"I do. And it is, as you said, very fortunate that you were not able to give him her address, as she is unable to live with him and is at present unwilling to let him know her whereabouts. It is an unfortunate affair. However, to return to your business; you had better go up and have a look at the house and see what you think of it. You might just walk up with Dr. Strangeways, Bundy."

Mr. Bundy swung round on his stool, and, taking off his spectacles, stuck in his right eye a gold-rimmed monocle, through which he inspected me critically. Then he hopped off the stool, and, lifting the lid of the desk, took out a velour hat and a pair of chamois gloves, the former of which he adjusted carefully on his head before a small mirror, and, having taken down a labelled key from a key-board and provided himself with a smart, silver-mounted cane, announced that he was ready.

As I walked along the picturesque old street at Mr. Bundy's side, I reverted to my late fellow passenger and my prospective landlady.

"I gather," said I, "that Mrs. Frood's matrimonial affairs are somewhat involved."

"So do I," said Bundy. "Seems to have made a regular mucker of it. I don't know much about her, myself, but Japp knows the whole story. He's some sort of relative of hers; uncle or second cousin or something of the kind. But Japp is a bit like the sailor's parrot: he doesn't let on unnecessarily."

"What sort of a woman is Mrs. Frood?" I asked.

"Oh, quite a tidy sort of body. I've only seen her once or twice; haven't been here long myself: tallish woman, lot of black hair; thick eye-brows; rather squeaky voice. Not exactly my idea of a beauty, but Frood seems quite keen on her."

"By the way, how comes it that he doesn't know her address? She's a Rochester woman, isn't she?"

"No. I don't know where she comes from. London, I think. This property was left to her by an aunt who lived here: a cousin of Japp's. Angelina came down here a few weeks ago on the q.t. to get away from hubby, and I fancy she's been keeping pretty close."

"She's living in lodgings, then, I suppose?"

"Yes; at least she lives in a set of offices that Japp furnished for her, and the lady who rents the rest of the house looks after her. As a matter of fact, the offices are next door to ours; but you had better consider that information as confidential, at any rate while hubby is in the neighbourhood. This is your shanty."

He halted at the door of a rather small, red brick house, and while I was examining the half-obliterated inscription on the brass plate, he thrust the key into the lock and made ineffectual efforts to turn it. Suddenly there was a loud click from within, followed by the clanking of a chain and the drawing of bolts. Then the door opened slowly, and a long-faced, heavy-browed, elderly woman surveyed us with a gloomy stare.

"Why didn't you ring the bell?" she demanded, gruffly.

"Had a key," replied Bundy, extracting it, and flourishing it before her face.

"And what's the good of a key when the door was bolted and chained?"

"But, naturally, I couldn't see that the door was bolted and chained."

"I suppose you couldn't with that thing stuck in your eye. Well, what do you want?"

"I have brought this gentleman, Dr. Strangeways, to see you. He has seen your portraits in the shop windows and wished to be introduced. Also he wants to look over the house. He thinks of taking the practice."

"Well, why couldn't you say that before?" she demanded.

"Before what?" he inquired blandly.

She made no reply other than a low growl, and Bundy continued:

"This lady, Dr. Strangeways, is the renowned Mrs. Dunk, more familiarly known as La Giaconda, who administered the domestic affairs of the late Dr. Partridge, and is at present functioning as custodian of the premises." He concluded the presentation by a ceremonious bow and a sweep of his hat, which Mrs. Dunk acknowledged by turning her back on him and producing a large bunch of keys, with which she proceeded to unlock the doors that opened on the hall.

"The upstairs rooms are unlocked," she said, adding: "If you want me you can ring the bell," and with this she retired to the basement stairs and vanished.

My examination of the rooms was rather perfunctory, for I had made up my mind already. The premium was absurdly small, and I could see that the house was furnished well enough for my immediate needs. As to the practice, I had no particular expectations.

"Better have a look at the books," said Bundy when we went into the little surgery, "though Mr. Turcival has been through them, and I daresay he has told you all about the practice."

"Yes," I answered, "he told me that the practice was very small and that I probably shouldn't get much of it, as Partridge was an old man and I am a young one. Still, I may as well glance through the books."

Bundy laid the day book and ledger on the desk and placed a stool by the latter, and I seated myself and began to turn over the leaves and note down a few figures on a slip of paper, while my companion beguiled the time by browsing round the surgery, taking down bottles and sniffing at their contents, pulling out drawers and inspecting the instruments and appliances. A very brief examination of the books served to confirm Mr. Turcival's modest estimate of the practice, and when I had finished, I closed them and turned round to report to Mr. Bundy, who was, at the moment, engaged in "sounding" the surgery clock with the late Dr. Partridge's stethoscope.

"I think it will do," said I. "The practice is negligible, but the furniture and fittings are worth the money, and I daresay I shall get some patients in time. At any rate, the premises are all in going order."

"You are not dependent on the practice, then?" said he.

"No. I have enough just barely to exist on until the patients begin to arrive. But what about the house?"

"You can have a lease if you like, or you can go on with the arrangement that Partridge had. If I were you, I should take the house on a three years' agreement with the option of a lease later if you find that the venture turns out satisfactorily."

"Yes," I agreed, "that seems a good arrangement. And when could I have possession?"

"You've got possession now if you agree to the terms. Say yes, and I'll draft out the agreement when I get back. You and Mrs. Frood can sign it this evening. You give us a cheque and we give you your copy of the document, and the thing is d-u-n, done."

"And what about this old woman?"

"La Giaconda Dunkibus? I should keep her if I were you. She looks an old devil, but she's a good servant. Partridge had a

great opinion of her, so Japp tells me, and you can see for yourself that the house is in apple-pie order and as clean as a new pin."

"You think she would be willing to stay?"

Bundy grinned (he was a good deal given to grinning, and he certainly had a magnificent set of teeth). "Willing?" he exclaimed. "She's going to stay whether you want her or not. She has been here the best part of her life and nothing short of a torpedo would shift her. You'll have to take her with the fixtures, but I don't think you'll regret it."

As Bundy was speaking, I had been, half-unconsciously, looking him over, interested in the queer contrast between his almost boyish appearance and gay irresponsible manner on the one hand, and, on the other, his shrewdness, his business capacity, and his quick, decisive, evidently forceful character.

To look at, he was just a young "nut," small, spruce, dandified, and apparently not displeased with himself. His age I judged to be about twenty-five, his height about five feet six. In figure, he was slight, but well set-up, and he seemed active and full of life and energy. He was extraordinarily well turned-out. From his close-cropped head, with the fore-lock "smarmed" back in the correct "nuttish" fashion, so that his cranium resembled a large black-topped filbert, to his immaculately polished and remarkably small shoes, there was not an inch of his person that had not received the most careful attention. He was clean-shaved; so clean that on the smooth skin nothing but the faint blue tinge on cheek and chin remained to suggest the coarse and horrid possibilities of whiskers. And his hands had evidently received the same careful attention as his face; indeed, even as he was talking to me, he produced from his pocket some kind of ridiculous little instrument with which he proceeded to polish his finger-nails.

"Shall I ring the bell?" he asked after a short pause, "and call up the spirit of the Dunklett from the vasty deep? May as well let her know her luck."

As I assented he pressed the bell-push, and in less than a minute Mrs. Dunk made her appearance and stood in the doorway, looking inquiringly at Bundy, but uttering no sound.

"Dr. Strangeways is going to take the practice, Mrs. Dunk," said Bundy, "inclusive of the house, furniture, and all effects, and he is also prepared to take you at a valuation."

As the light of battle began to gleam in Mrs. Dunk's eyes, I thought it best to intervene and conduct the negotiations myself.

"I understand from Mr. Bundy," said I, "that you were Dr. Partridge's housekeeper for many years, and it occurred to me that you might be willing to act in the same capacity for me. What do you say?"

"Very well," she replied. "When do you want to move in?"

"I propose to move in at once. My luggage is at the station."

"Have you checked the inventory?" she asked.

"No, I haven't, but I suppose nothing has been taken away?"

"No," she answered. "Everything is as it was when Dr. Partridge died."

"Then we can go over the inventory later. I will have my things sent up from the station, and I shall come in during the afternoon to unpack."

She agreed concisely to this arrangement, and, when we had settled a few minor details, I departed with Bundy to make my way to the station and thereafter to go in search of lunch.

"You think," said I, as we halted opposite the station approach, "that we can get everything completed today?"

"Yes," he replied, "I will get the agreement drawn up in the terms that we have just settled on, and will make an appointment with Mrs. Frood. You had better look in at the office about half-past six."

He turned away with a friendly nod and a flash of his white teeth, and bustled off up the street, swinging his smart cane jauntily, and looking, with his trim, well-cut clothes, his primrose-coloured gloves, and his glistening shoes, the very type of cheerful, prosperous, self-respecting and self-satisfied youth.

---



### CHAPTER III. — ANGELINA FROOD

Punctually at half-past six I presented myself at the office of Messrs. Japp and Bundy. The senior partner was seated at a writing-table covered with legal-looking documents, and, as I entered, he looked up with a genial, wrinkly smile of recognition, and then turned to his junior.

"You've got Dr. Strangeways's agreement ready, haven't you, Bundy?" he asked.

"Just finished it five minutes ago," was the reply. "Here you are."

Bundy swung round on his stool and held out the two copies. "Would you mind going through it with Dr. Strangeways?" said Japp. "And then you might go with him to Mrs. Frood's and witness the signatures. I told her you were coming."

Bundy pulled out his watch, and glared at it through his great spectacles.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'm afraid I can't. There's old Baldwin, you know. I've got to be there at a quarter to seven."

"So you have," said Japp, "I had forgotten that. You had better be off now. I'll see to Dr. Strangeways, if he isn't in a hurry for a minute or two."

"I'm not in a hurry at all," said I. "Don't put yourself out for me."

"Well, if you really are not," said Japp, "I'll just finish what I am doing, and then I'll run in with you and get the agreement completed. You might look through it while you are waiting and see that it is all in order."

Bundy handed me the agreement, and, as I sat down to study it, he removed his spectacles, stuck his eye-glass in his eye, hopped off his perch, brought forth his hat, gloves, and stick, and, having presented his teeth for my inspection, took his departure.

I read through the agreement carefully to ascertain that it embodied the terms agreed on verbally and compared the two copies. Then, while Mr. Japp continued to turn over the leaves of his documents, I let my thoughts stray from the trim, orderly office to the house of mystery in London and the strange events that had befallen there on that rainy night more than a year ago. Once more I called up before the eyes of memory the face of my mysterious patient, sweet and gracious in spite of its deathly pallor. Many a time, in the months that had passed, had I recalled it: so often that it seemed, in a way, to have become familiar. In a few minutes I was going to look upon that face again—for there could be no reasonable doubt that my prospective landlady was she. I looked forward expectantly, almost with excitement, to the meeting. Would she recognize me? I wondered. And if she did not, should I make myself known? This was a difficult question, and I had come to no decision upon it when I was aroused from my reverie by a movement on the part of Mr. Japp, whose labours had apparently come to an end. Folding up the documents and securing them in little bundles with red tape, he deposited them in a cupboard with his notes, and from the same receptacle took out his hat.

"Now," said he, "if you find the agreement in order, we will proceed to execute it. Are you going to pay the premium now?"

"I have my cheque-book with me," I replied. "When we have signed the agreement, I will settle up for everything."

"Thank you," said he. "I have prepared a receipt which is, practically, an assignment of the furniture and effects and of all rights in the practice."

He held the door open and I passed out. We descended the steps, and passing the central door common to the two houses, ascended to that of the adjoining house, where Mr. Japp executed a flourish on a handsome brass knocker. In a few moments the door was opened by a woman whom I couldn't see very distinctly in the dim hall, especially as she turned about and retired up the stairs. Mr. Japp advanced to the door of the front room and rapped with his knuckles, whereupon a high, clear, feminine voice bade him come in. He accordingly entered, and I followed.

The first glance disposed of any doubts that I might have had. The lady who stood up to receive us was unquestionably my late patient, though she looked taller than I had expected. But it was the well-remembered face, less changed, indeed, than I could have wished, for it was still pale, drawn, and weary, as I could see plainly enough in spite of the rather dim light; for, although it was not yet quite dark, the curtains were drawn and a lamp lighted on a small table, beside which was a low easy-chair, on which some needlework had been thrown down.

Mr. Japp introduced me to my future landlady, who bowed, and having invited us to be seated, took up her needlework and sat down in the easy-chair.

"You are not looking quite up to the mark," Japp observed, regarding her critically, as he turned over the papers.

"No," she admitted, "I think I am a little run down."

"H'm," said Japp. "Oughtn't to get run down at your age. Why, you are only just wound up. However, you've got a doctor for a tenant, so you will be able to take out some of the rent in medical advice. Let me see, I told you what the terms of the agreement were, but you had better look through it before you sign."

He handed her one of the documents, which she took from him, and, dropping her needlework in her lap, leaned back in her chair to read it. Meanwhile, I examined her with a good deal of interest and curiosity, wondering how she had fared

and what had happened to her in the months that had elapsed since I had last seen her. The light was not very favourable for a minute inspection, for the lamp on the table was the sole luminary, and that was covered by a red silk shade. But I was confirmed in my original impression of her. She was more than ordinarily good-looking, and rather striking in appearance, and I judged that under happier conditions she might have appeared even more attractive. As, it was, the formally parted dark hair, the strongly marked, straight eyebrows, the firm mouth, rather compressed and a little drawn down at the corners, and the pale complexion imparted to her face a character that was somewhat intense, sombre, and even troubled. But, for this I could fully account from my knowledge of her circumstances, and I was conscious of looking on her with a very sympathetic and friendly eye.

"This is quite satisfactory to me," she said at length, in the clear, high-pitched voice to which Bundy had objected, "and if it is equally so to Dr. Strangeways, I suppose I had better sign."

She laid the paper on the table, and, taking the fountain-pen that Japp proffered, signed her name, Angelina Frood, in a bold, legible hand, and then returned the pen to its owner; who forthwith affixed his signature as witness and spread out the duplicate for me to sign. When this also was completed, he handed me the copy signed by Mrs. Frood and the receipt for the premium, and I drew a cheque for the amount and delivered it to him.

"Many thanks," said he, slipping it into a wallet and pocketing it. "That concludes our business and puts you finally in possession. I wish you every success in your practice. By the way, I mentioned to Mrs. Frood that you had seen her husband and that you know how she is placed; and she agreed with me that it was best that you should understand the position in case you should meet him again."

"Certainly," Mrs. Frood agreed. "There is no use in trying to make a secret of it. He came down with you from London, Mr. Japp tells me."

"Not from London," said I. "He got in at Dartford." Here Mr. Japp rose and stole towards the door. "Don't let me interrupt you," said he, "but I must get back to the office and hear what Bundy has to report. Don't get up. I can let myself out."

He made his exit quietly, shutting the door after him, and as soon as he was gone Mrs. Frood asked:

"Do you mean that he changed into your train at Dartford?"

"No," I answered. "I think he came to Dartford on foot. He looked tired and his boots were covered with white dust."

"You are very observant, Dr. Strangeways," she said.

"I wonder what made you notice him so particularly?"

"He is rather a noticeable man," I said, and then, deciding that it was better to be quite frank, I added: "But the fact is I had seen him before."

"Indeed!" said she. "Would you think me very inquisitive if I asked where you had seen him?"

"Not at all," I answered. "It was a little more than a year ago, about twelve o'clock at night, in a house near Regent's Park, to which I was taken in a closed car to see a lady."

As I spoke she dropped her needlework and sat up, gazing at me with a startled and rather puzzled expression. "But," she said, "you are not the doctor who came to see me that night?"

"I am, indeed," said I.

"Now," she exclaimed, "isn't that an extraordinary thing? I had a feeling that I had seen you somewhere before. I seemed to recognize your voice. But you don't look the same. Hadn't you a beard then?"

"Yes, I am but the shaven and shorn remnant of my former self, but I am your late medical attendant."

She looked at me with an odd, reflective, questioning expression, but without making any further comment. Presently she said:

"You were very kind and sympathetic though you were so quiet. I wonder what you thought of it all."

"I hadn't much to go on beyond the medical facts," I replied evasively.

"Oh, you needn't be so cautious," said she, "now that the cat is out of the bag."

"Well," I said, "it was pretty obvious that there had been trouble of some kind. The door had been broken open, there was one man in a state of hysterics, another man considerably upset and rather angry, and a woman with the mark on her neck of a cord or band—"

"It was a knitted silk neck-tie, to be accurate. But you put the matter in a nut-shell very neatly; and I see that you diagnosed what novelists call 'the eternal triangle.' And to a certain extent you were right; only the triangle was imaginary. If you don't mind, I will tell you just what did happen. The gentleman who came for you was a Mr. Fordyce, the lessee of one or two provincial theatres—I was on the stage then; but perhaps you guessed that."

"As a matter of fact, I did."

"Well, Mr. Fordyce had an idea of producing a play at one of his houses, and was going to give me a leading part. He had

been to our house once or twice to talk the matter over with Nicholas (my husband) and me, and we were more or less friendly. He was quite a nice, sober kind of man, and perfectly proper and respectful. On this night he had been at the theatre where I had an engagement, and, as it was a wet night, he drove me home in his car, and was coming in to have a few words with us about our business. He wanted to see a photograph of me in a particular costume, and when we arrived home I ran upstairs to fetch it. There I found Nicholas, who had seen our arrival from the window, and was in a state of furious jealousy. Directly I entered the room, he locked the door and flew at me like a wild beast. As to what followed, I think you know as much as I do, for I fainted, and when I recovered Nicholas was sobbing in a corner, and Mr. Fordyce was standing by the door, looking as black as thunder."

"Had your husband been jealous of Mr. Fordyce previously?"

"Not a bit. But on this occasion he was in a very queer state. I think he had been drinking, and taking some other things that were bad for him—"

"Such as cocaine," I suggested.

"Yes. But, dear me! What a very noticing person you are, Dr. Strangeways! But you are quite right. It was the cocaine that was the cause of the trouble. He was always a difficult man; emotional, excitable, eccentric, and not very temperate, but after he had acquired the drug habit he went to the bad completely. He became slovenly, and even dirty in his person, frightfully emotional, and gave up work of all kind, so that but for my tiny income and my small earnings we should have starved."

"So you actually supported him?"

"Latterly I did. And I daresay, if I had remained on the stage, we should have done fairly well, as I was supposed to have some talent, though I didn't like the life. But, of course, after this affair, I didn't dare to live with him. He wasn't safe. I should have been constantly in fear of my life."

"Had he ever been violent before?"

"Not seriously. He had often threatened horrible things, and I had looked on his threats as mere vapourings, but this was a different affair. I must have had a really narrow escape. So the very next day, I went into lodgings. But that didn't answer. He wouldn't agree to the separation, and was continually dogging me and making a disturbance. In the end, I had to give up my engagement and go off, leaving no address."

"I suppose you went back to your people?"

"No," she replied. "As a matter of fact, I haven't any people. My mother died when I was quite a child, and I lost my father when I was about seventeen. He died on the Gold Coast, where he held an appointment as District Commissioner."

"Ah," said I, "I thought you were in some way connected with West Africa. I noticed the zodiac ring on your finger when you were signing the agreement. When I was newly qualified I took a trip down the West Coast as a ship's surgeon, and bought one of those rings at Cape Coast."

"They are quaint little things, aren't they?" she remarked, slipping the ring off her finger and handing it to me. "I don't often wear it, though. It is rather clumsy, and it doesn't fit very well; and I don't care much for rings."

I turned the little trinket over in my hand and examined it with reminiscent interest. It was a roughly wrought band of yellow native gold, with the conventional signs of the zodiac worked round it in raised figures. Inside I noticed that the letters A. C. had been engraved.

"It was given to you before you were married, I presume," said I, as I returned it to her.

"Yes," she replied, "those are the initials of my maiden name—Angelina Carthew." She took the ring from me, but instead of replacing it on her finger, dropped it into a little pouch-like purse with metal jaws, which she had taken from her pocket.

"Your position is a very disagreeable one," said I, reverting to the main topic. "I wonder that you haven't applied for a judicial separation. There are ample grounds for making the application."

"I suppose there are. But it wouldn't help me really, even if it were granted. I shouldn't get rid of him."

"You could apply to the police if he molested you."

"No doubt. But that doesn't sound very restful, does it?"

"I am afraid it doesn't. But it would be better than being constantly molested without having any remedy or refuge."

"Perhaps it would," she agreed doubtfully, and then, with a faint smile, she added: "I suppose you are wondering what on earth made me marry him?"

"Well," I replied, "it appears to me that his good fortune was more remarkable than his personal attractions."

"He wasn't always like he is now," said she. "I married him nearly ten years ago, and he was fairly presentable then. His manners were quite nice and he had certain accomplishments that rather appealed to a young girl—I was only eighteen and rather impressionable. He was then getting a living by writing magazine stories—love stories, they were, of a highly emotional type—and occasional verses. They were second-rate stuff, really, but to me he seemed a budding genius. It was not until after we were married that the disillusionment came, and then only gradually as his bad habits developed."

"By the way, what do you suppose he has come down here for? What does he want? I suppose he wishes you to go back to him?"

"I suppose he does. But, primarily, I expect he wants money. It is a horrible position," she added, with sudden passion. "I hate the idea of hiding away from him when I suspect that the poor wretch has come down to his last few shillings. After all, he is my husband; and I am not so deadly poor now."

"He seemed to have the wherewith to provide a fair supply of tobacco, to say nothing of the cocaine and a 'modest quencher' at the tavern," I remarked drily. "At any rate, I hope he won't succeed in finding out where you live."

"I hope not," said she. "If he does, I shall have to move on, as I have had to do several times already, and I don't want to do that. I have only been here a little over two months, and it has been very pleasant and peaceful. But you see, Dr. Strangeways, that, if I am to follow Mr. Japp's advice, I shall inflict on you a very unpromising patient. There is no medical treatment for matrimonial troubles."

"No," I agreed, rising and taking up my hat, "but the physical effects may be dealt with. If I am appointed your medical advisor, I shall send you a tonic, and if I may look in now and again to see how you are getting on, I may be able to help you over some of your difficulties."

"It is very kind of you," she said, rising and shaking my hand warmly; and, accepting my suggestion that she had better not come to the street door, she showed me out into the hall and dismissed me with a smile and a little bow.

When I reached the bottom of the steps, I stood irresolutely for a few moments and then, instead of making my way homeward, turned up the street towards the cathedral and the bridge, walking slowly and reflecting profoundly on the story I had just heard. It was a pitiful story; and the quiet, restrained manner of the telling made it the more impressive. All that was masculine in me rose in revolt against the useless, inexcusable wrecking of this poor woman's life. As to the man, he was, no doubt, to be pitied for being the miserable, degenerate wretch that he was. But he was doomed beyond any hope of salvation. Such wretches as he are condemned in the moment of their birth; they are born to an inheritance of misery and dishonour. But it is infamous that in their inevitable descent into the abyss—from which no one can save them—they should have the power to drag down with them sane and healthy human beings who were destined by nature to a life of happiness, of usefulness, and honour. I thought of the woman I had just left—comely, dignified, energetic, probably even talented. What was her future to be? So far as I could see, the upas shadow of this drug-sodden wastrel had fallen upon her, never to be lifted until merciful death should dissolve the ill-omened union.

This last reflection gave my thoughts a new turn. What was this man's purpose in pursuing her? Was he bent merely on extorting money or on sharing her modest income? Or was there some more sinister motive? I recalled his face; an evil, sly, vindictive face. I considered what I knew of him; that he had undoubtedly made one attempt to murder this woman, and that, to my knowledge, he carried about his person the means of committing murder. For what purpose could he have provided himself with that formidable weapon? It might be merely as a means of coercion, or it might be as a means of revenge.

Thus meditating, I had proceeded some distance along the street when I observed, on the opposite side, an old, three-gabled house which looked like some kind of institution. A lamp above the doorway threw its light on a stone tablet on which I could see an inscription of some length, and, judging this to be an ancient almshouse, I crossed the road to inspect it more closely. A glance at the tablet told me that this was the famous rest-house established in the sixteenth century by worthy Richard Watts, to give a night's lodging and entertainment to six poor travellers, with the express proviso that the said travellers must be neither rogues nor proctors. I had read through the quaint inscription and was speculating, as many others have speculated, on the nature of Richard Watts's grievance against proctors as a class, when the door opened suddenly and a man rushed out with such impetuosity that he nearly collided with me. I had moved out of his way when he halted and addressed me excitedly.

"I say, governor, can you tell me where I can find a doctor?"

"You have found one," I replied. "I am a doctor. What is the matter?"

"There's a bloke in here throwing a fit," he answered, backing into the doorway and holding the door open for me. I entered, and followed him down a passage to a largish, barely furnished room, where I found four men and a woman, who looked like a hospital nurse, standing around and watching anxiously a man who lay on the floor.

"Here's a doctor, matron," said my conductor, as he ushered me in.

"Well, Simmonds," said the matron, "you haven't wasted much time."

"No, mum," replied Simmonds, "I struck it lucky. Caught him just outside."

Meanwhile I had stepped up to the prostrate man, and at the first glance I recognized him. He was Mrs. Frood's husband. And, whatever he might be "throwing," it was not a fit—in the ordinary medical sense; that is to say, it was not epilepsy or apoplexy; nor was it a fainting fit of an orthodox kind. If the patient had been a woman one would have called it a hysterical seizure, and I could give it no other name, though I was not unmindful of the paper packet that I had seen on that former occasion. But the emotional element was obvious. The man purported to be insensible, and manifestly was not. The tightly closed eyes, the everted lips—showing a row of blackened teeth—the clutching movements of the clawlike hands—all were suggestive of at least half-conscious simulation. I stood for a while, stooping over him and watching him intently, and as I did so the bystanders watched me. Then I felt his pulse, and found it, as I had expected, quick, feeble, and

irregular; and finally, producing my stethoscope, listened to his heart with as little disturbance of his clothing as possible.

"Well, doctor," said the matron, "what do you think of him?"

"He is decidedly ill," I replied. "His heart is rather jumpy, and not very strong. Too much tobacco, I fancy, and perhaps some other things that are not very good, and possibly insufficient food."

"He told me, when he came in," said the matron, "that he was practically destitute."

"Ah," murmured Simmonds, "I expect he's been blowing all his money on Turkish baths," whereupon the other poor travellers sniggered softly, and were immediately extinguished by a reproving glance from the matron.

"Do you know what brought this attack on?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied; "he had a little dispute with Simmonds, here, and suddenly became violently excited, and then he fell down insensible, as you see him. It was all about nothing."

"I jest arsked 'im," said Simmonds, "if 'e could give me the name of the cove what done 'is 'air, 'cos I thought I'd like to 'ave mine done in the same fashionable style. That seemed to give 'im the fair pip. 'E jawed me something chronic, until I got shirty and told 'im if 'e didn't shut 'is face I'd give 'im a wipe acrost the snout. Then blow me if 'e didn't start to throw a fit."

While this lucid explanation was proceeding I noticed that the patient was evidently listening intently, though he continued to twitch his face, exhibit his unlovely teeth, and wriggle his fingers. He was apparently waiting for my verdict with some anxiety.

"The question is," said the matron, "what is to be done with him? Do you think he is in any danger?"

As she spoke, we drifted towards the door, and when we were in the passage, out of earshot, I said:

"The best place for that man is the infirmary. There is nothing much the matter with him but dope. He has been dosing himself with cocaine, and he has probably got some more of the stuff about him. He is in no danger now, but if he takes any more he may upset himself badly."

"It is rather late to send him to the infirmary," she said, "and I don't quite like to do it. Poor fellow, he seems fearfully down on his luck, and he is quite a superior kind of man. Do you think it would be safe for him to stay here for the night if he had a little medicine of some kind?"

"It would be safe enough," I replied, "if you could get possession of his coat and waistcoat and lock them up until the morning."

"Oh, I'll manage that," said she; "and about the medicine?"

"Let Simmonds walk up with me—I have taken Dr. Partridge's practice—and I will give it to him."

We re-entered the supper-room and found the conditions somewhat changed. Whether it was that the word "infirmary" had been wafted to the patient's attentive ears, I cannot say; but there were evident signs of recovery. Our friend was sitting up, glaring wildly about him, and inquiring where he was; to which questions Simmonds was furnishing answers of a luridly inaccurate character. When I had taken another look at the patient, and received a vacant stare of almost aggressive unrecognition, I took possession of the facetious Simmonds, and, having promised to look in in the morning, wished the matron good-night and departed with my escort; who entertained me on the way home with picturesque, unflattering, and remarkably shrewd comments on the sufferer.

I had made up a stimulant mixture, and handed it to Simmonds when I remembered Mrs. Frood and that Simmonds would pass her house on his way back. For an instant, I thought of asking him to deliver her medicine for me; and then, with quite a shock, I realized what a hideous blunder it would have been. Evidently, the poor travellers gave their names, and if the man, Frood, had given his correctly, the coincidence of the names would have impressed Simmonds instantly, and then the murder would have been out, and the fat would have been in the fire properly. It was a narrow escape, and it made me realize how insecure was that unfortunate lady's position with this man lurking in the town. And, realizing this, I determined to trust the addressed bottle to nobody, but to leave it at the house myself. Accordingly, having made up the medicine and wrapped it neatly in paper, I thrust it into my pocket, and, calling out to Mrs. Dunk that I should be back to supper in about half an hour, I set forth, and in a few minutes arrived at the little Georgian doorway and plied the elegant brass knocker. The door was opened—rather incautiously, I thought—by Mrs. Frood herself.

"I am my own bottle-boy, you see, Mrs. Frood," said I, handing her the medicine. "I thought it safer not to send an addressed packet under the circumstances."

"But how good of you!" she exclaimed. "How kind and thoughtful! But you shouldn't have troubled about it tonight."

"It was only a matter of five minutes' walk," said I, "and besides, there was something that I thought you had better know," and hereupon I proceeded to give her a brief account of my recent adventures and the condition of her precious husband. "Is he subject to attacks of this kind?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered. "When he is put out about anything in some ways he is rather like a hysterical woman. But, you see, I was right. He is penniless. And that—now I come to think of it—makes it rather odd that he should be here. But won't you come in for a moment?"

I entered and shut the door. "Why is it odd?" I asked.

"Because he would be getting some money tomorrow. I make him a small allowance; it is very little, but it is as much as I can possibly manage; and it is paid monthly, on the fifteenth of the month. But he has to apply for it personally at the bank or send an accredited messenger with a receipt; and as tomorrow is the fifteenth, the question is, why on earth is he down here now? I mean that it is odd that he should not have waited to collect the allowance before coming to hunt me up."

"If he is in communication with your banker," said I, "he could, I suppose, get a letter forwarded to you?"

"No," she replied; "the banker who pays him is the London agent of Mr. Japp's banker, and he doesn't know on whose behalf the payments are made. I had to make that arrangement, or he would have bombarded me with letters."

"Well," I said, "you had better keep close for a day or two. If his search for you is unsuccessful, he may get discouraged and raise the siege. I will let you know what his movements are, so far as I can."

She thanked me once more with most evident sincerity, and as I made my way to the door, she let me out with a cordial and friendly shake of the hand.



## CHAPTER IV. — DEALS WITH CHARITY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Immediately after breakfast on the following morning I made my way to Mr. Richard Watts's establishment, where I learned that all the poor travellers had departed with the exception of my patient, who had been allowed to stay pending my report on him.

"I shall be glad to see the back of him, poor fellow," said the matron, "for, of course, we have no arrangements for dealing with sick men."

"Do you often get cases of illness here?" I asked.

"I really don't know," she answered. "You see, I am only doing temporary duty here while the regular matron is away. But I should think not, though little ailments are apt to occur in the case of a poor man who has been on the road for a week or so."

"This man is on tramp, is he?" said I.

"Well, no," she replied. "It seems, from what he tells me, that his wife has left him, and he had reason to believe that she was staying in this town. So he came down here to try to find her. He supposed that Rochester was a little place where everybody knew everybody else, and that he would have no difficulty in discovering her whereabouts. But all his inquiries have come to nothing. Nobody seems to have heard of her. I suppose you don't happen to know the name—Frood?"

"I only came here yesterday, myself," was my evasive reply. "I am a stranger to the town. But is he certain that she is here?"

"I don't think he is. At any rate, he seems inclined to give up the search for the present, and he is very anxious to get back to London. But I don't know how he is going to manage it. He isn't fit to walk."

"Well," I said, "if it is only the railway fare that stands in the way, that difficulty can be got over. I will pay for his ticket; but I should like to be sure that he really goes."

"Oh, I'll see to that," she said, with evident relief. "I will go with him to the station, and get his ticket and see him into the train. But you had better just have a look at him, and see that he is fit to go."

She conducted me to the supper-room, where our friend was sitting in a Windsor armchair, looking the very picture of misery and dejection.

"Here is the doctor come to see you, Mr. Frood," the matron said cheerfully, "and he is kind enough to say that, if you are well enough to travel, he will pay your fare to London. So there's an end of your difficulties."

The poor devil glanced at me for an instant, and then looked away; and, to my intense discomfort, I saw that his eyes were filling.

"It is indeed good of you, Sir," he murmured, shakily, but in a very pleasant voice and with a refined accent; "most good and kind to help a lame dog over a stile in this way. I don't know how to thank you."

Here, as he showed a distinct tendency to weep, I replied hastily:

"Not at all. We've all got to help one another in this world. And how are you feeling? Hand is still a little bit shaky, I see."

I put my finger on his wrist and then looked him over generally. He was a miserable wreck, but I judged that he was as well as he was ever likely to be.

"Well," I said, "you are not in first-class form, but you are up to a short railway journey. I suppose you have somewhere to go to in London?"

"Yes," he replied, dismally, "I have a room. It isn't in the Albany, but it is a shelter from the weather."

"Never mind," said I. "We must hope for better times. The matron is going to see you safely to the station and comfortably settled in the train—and"—here I handed her a ten shilling note—"you will get Mr. Frood's ticket, matron, and you had better give him the change. He may want a cab when he gets to town."

He glowered sulkily at this arrangement—I suspect he had run out of cigarettes—but he thanked me again, and, when I had privately ascertained the time of the train which was to bear him away, I wished him adieu.

"I suppose," said I, "there is no likelihood of his hopping out at Strood to get a drink and losing the train?"

The matron smiled knowingly. "He will start from Strood," said she. "I shall take him over the bridge in the tram and put him into the London express there. We don't want him back here tonight."

Much relieved by the good lady's evident grasp of the situation, I turned away up the street and began to consider my next move. I had nothing to do this morning, for at present there was not a single patient on my books with the exception of Mrs. Frood; and it may have been in accordance with the prevailing belief that to persons in my condition, an individual, familiarly known as "the old gentleman," obligingly functions as employment agent, that my thoughts turned to that solitary patient. At any rate they did. Suddenly, it was borne in on me that I ought, without delay, to convey to her the glad tidings of her husband's departure. Whether the necessity would have appeared as urgent if her personal attractions had

been less, I will not presume to say; nor whether had I been more self-critical, I should not have looked with some suspicion on this intense concern respecting the welfare of a woman who was almost a stranger to me. As it was, it appeared to me that I was but discharging a neighbourly duty when I executed an insinuating rat-tat on the handsome brass knocker which was adorned—somewhat inappropriately, under the circumstances—with a mask of Hypnos.

After a short interval, the door was opened by a spare, middle-aged woman of melancholic aspect, with tow-coloured hair and a somewhat anemic complexion, who regarded me inquiringly with a faded blue eye.

“Is Mrs. Frood at home?” I asked briskly.

“I am afraid she is not,” was the reply, uttered in a dejected tone. “I saw her go out some time ago, and I haven’t heard her come back. But I’ll just see, if you will come in a moment.”

I entered the hall and listened with an unaccountable feeling of disappointment as she rapped on the door first of the front room, and then of the back.

“She isn’t in her rooms there,” was the dispirited report, “but she may be in the basement. I’ll call out and ask.”

She retired to the inner hall and gave utterance to a wail like that of an afflicted sea-gull. But there was no response; and I began to feel myself infected by her melancholy.

“I am sorry you have missed her, Sir,” said she; and then she asked: “Are you her doctor, Sir?”

I felt myself justified in affirming that I was, whereupon she exclaimed:

“Ah, poor thing! It is a comfort to know that she has someone to look after her. She has been looking very sadly of late. Very sadly, she has.”

I began to back cautiously towards the door, but she followed me up and continued: “I am afraid she has had a deal of trouble; a deal of trouble, poor dear. Not that she ever speaks of it to me. But I know. I can see the lines of grief and sorrow—like a worm in the bud, so to speak, Sir—and it makes my heart ache. It does, indeed.”

I mumbled sympathetically and continued to back towards the door.

“I don’t see very much of her,” she continued in a plaintive tone. “She keeps herself very close. Too close, I think. You see, she does for herself entirely. Now and again, when she asks me, which is very seldom, I put a bit of supper in her room. That is all. And I do think that it isn’t good for a young woman to live so solitary; and I do hope you’ll make her take a little more change.”

“I suppose she goes out sometimes,” said I, noting that she was out at the present moment.

“Oh, yes,” was the reply. “She goes out a good deal. But always alone. She never has any society.”

“And what time does she usually come in?” I asked, with a view to a later call.

“About six; or between that and seven. Then she has her supper and puts the things out on the hall table. And that is the last I usually see of her.”

By this time I had reached the door and softly unfastened the latch.

“If you should see her,” I said, “you might tell her that I shall look in this evening about half-past seven.”

“Certainly, Sir,” she replied. “I shall see her at lunch-time, and I will give her your message.”

I thanked her, and, having now got the door open, I wished her good morning, and retreated down the steps.

As I was in the act of turning away, my eye lighted on the adjacent bay window, appertaining to the office of Messrs. Japp and Bundy, and I then perceived above the green curtain the upper half of a human face, including a pair of tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles; an apparition which informed me that Mr. Bundy had been—to use Sam Weller’s expression—“a-twigging of me.” On catching my eye, the face rose higher, disclosing a broad grin; whereupon, without any apparent reason, I felt myself turning somewhat red. However, I mounted the official steps, and, opening the office door, confronted the smiler and his more sedate partner.

“Ha!” said the former, “you drew a blank, doctor. I saw the lovely Angelina go out about an hour ago. Whom did you see?”

“The lady of the house, I presume; a pale, depressed female.”

“I know,” said Bundy. “Looks like an undertaker’s widow. That’s Mrs. Gillow. Rhymes with willow—very appropriate, too,” and he began to chant in an absurd, Punch-like voice: “Oh, all round my hat I’ll wear the green—”

“Be quiet, Bundy,” said Mr. Japp, regarding his partner with a wrinkly and indulgent smile.

Bundy clapped his hand over his mouth and blew out his cheeks, and I took the opportunity to explain: “I called on Mrs. Frood to let her know that her husband is leaving the town.”

“Leaving the town, is he?” said Mr. Japp, elevating his eyebrows and thereby causing his forehead to resemble a small Venetian blind. “Do you know when?”

“He goes this morning by the ten-thirty express to London.”



"Hooray!" ejaculated Bundy, with a flourish of his arms that nearly capsized his stool. He recovered himself with an effort, and then, fixing his eyes on me, proceeded to whistle the opening bars of "O! Thou that tellest good tidings to Zion!"

"That'll do, Bundy," said Mr. Japp. Then turning to me, he asked: "Where did you learn these good tidings, Doctor?"

I gave them a brief account of the happenings of the previous night and this morning's sequel, to which they listened with deep attention. When I had finished Mr. Japp said: "You have done a very great kindness to my friend Mrs. Frood. It will be an immense relief to her to know that she can walk abroad without the danger of encountering this man. Besides, if he had stayed here he would probably have found her out."

"He might even have found her at home," said Bundy, "and that would have been worse. So I propose a vote of thanks to the doctor—with musical honours. For-hor he's a jolly good fell—"

"There, that'll do, Bundy, that'll do," said Mr. Japp. "I never saw such a fellow. You'll have the neighbours complaining."

Bundy leaned towards me confidentially and remarked in a stage whisper, glancing at his partner: "Fidgetty old cove; regular old killjoy." Then, with a sudden change of manner, he asked: "What about that wall job, Japp? Are you going to have a look at them?"

"I can't go at present," said Japp. "Bulford will be coming in presently and I must see him. Have you got anything special to do?"

"Only old Jeff'son's lease, and that can wait. Shall I trot over and see what sort of mess they are making of things?"

"I wish you would," said Japp; whereupon Mr. Bundy removed his spectacles, stuck in his eye-glass, extracted from the desk his hat and gloves which he assumed with the aid of the looking-glass, and took his stick from the corner. Then he looked at me reflectively and asked:

"Are you interested in archaeology, Doctor?"

"Somewhat," I replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Because we are putting some patches in the remains of the city wall. It isn't much to look at, and there isn't a great deal of the original Roman work left; but if you would care to have a look at it you might walk up there with me."

I agreed readily, being, as I have said, somewhat at a loose end, and we set forth together, Bundy babbling cheerfully as we went.

"I have often thought," said he, "that there must have been something rather pleasant and restful about the old walled cities, particularly after curfew when the gates were shut—that is, provided you were inside at the time."

"Yes," said I. "An enclosed precinct has a certain agreeable quality of seclusion that you can't get in an open town or village. When I was a student, I lived for a time in chambers in Staple Inn, and it was, as you say, rather pleasant, when one came home at night, and the porter had let one in at the wicket, to enter and find the gates closed, the courts all quiet and empty, and to know that all traffic was stopped and all strangers shut out until the morning. But it doesn't appear to be in accordance with modern taste, for those old Chancery Inns have nearly all gone, and there is no tendency to replace them with anything similar."

"No," Bundy agreed, stopping to look up at an old timber house, "taste in regard to buildings, if there is any—Japp says there isn't—has changed completely in the last hundred years or so. Look at this alley we are in now. Every house has got a physiognomy of its own. But when we rebuild it, we shall fill it up with houses that will look as if they had been bought in packets like match-boxes."

Gossiping thus, we threaded our way through all sorts of queer little alleys and passages. At length Bundy stopped at a wooden gate in a high fence, and, pushing it open, motioned for me to enter; and as I did so he drew out the key which was in the lock and put it in his pocket.

The place which we had entered was a space of waste land, littered with the remains of some old houses that had been demolished and enclosed on three sides by high fences. The fourth side was formed by a great mass of crumbling rubble, patched in places with rough masonry and brickwork, and showing in its lower part the remains of courses of Roman bricks. It rose to a considerable height, and was evidently of enormous thickness, as could be seen where large areas of the face had crumbled away, exposing great cavities, in which wall-flowers, valerian and other rock-haunting plants, had taken up their abode. On one of these a small gang of men were at work, and it was evident that repairs on a considerable scale were contemplated, for there were several large heaps of rough stone and old bricks, and in a cart-shed in a corner of the space were a large number of barrels of lime.

As we entered, the foreman came forward to meet us, and Bundy handed him the key from the gate.

"Better keep it in your pocket," said he. "Mr. Japp is rather particular about keys that he has charge of. He doesn't like them left in doors or gates. How are the men getting on?"

"As well as you can expect of a lot of casuals like these," was the reply. "There isn't a mason or a bricklayer among them, excepting that old chap that's mixing the mortar. However, it's only a rough job."

We walked over to the part of the old wall where the men were at work, and the appearances certainly justified the foreman's last remark. It was a very rough job. The method appeared to consist in building up outside the cavity a

primitive wall of unhewn stone with plenty of mortar, and, when it had risen a foot or two, filling up the cavity inside with loose bricks, lumps of stone, shovelfuls of liquid mortar, and chunks of lime.

I ventured to remark that it did not look a very secure method of building, upon which Bundy turned his eyeglass on me and smiled knowingly.

"My dear Doctor," said he, "you don't appear to appreciate the subtlety of the method. The purpose of these activities is to create employment. That has been clearly stated by the town council. But if you want to create employment you build a wall that will tumble down and give somebody else the job of putting it up again."

Here, as a man suddenly bore down on us with a bucket of mortar, Bundy hopped back to avoid the unclean contact, and nearly sat down on a heap of smoking lime.

"You had a narrow escape that time, mister," remarked the old gentleman who presided over the mortar department, as Bundy carefully dusted his delicate shoes with his handkerchief; "that stuff would 'ave made short work of them fine clothes of yours."

"Would it?" said Bundy, dusting his shoes yet more carefully and wiping the soles on the turf.

"Ah," rejoined the old man; "terrible stuff is quicklime. Eats up everything same as what fire does." He rested his hands on his shovel, and, assuming a reminiscent air, continued: "There was a pal o' mine what was skipper of a barge. A iron barge, she was, and he had to take on a lading of lime from some kilns. The stuff was put aboard with a shoot. Well, my pal, he gets 'is barge under the shoot and then 'e goes off, leavin' 'is mate to see the lime shot into the hold. Well, it seems the mate had been takin' some stuff aboard, too. Beer, or p'raps whisky. At any rate, he'd got a skinful. Well, presently the skipper comes back, and he sees 'em a-tippin' the trucks of lime on to the shoot, and he sees the barge's hold beginning to fill, but 'e don't see 'is mate nowhere. He goes aboard, down to the cabin, but there ain't no signs of the mate there, nor yet anywheres else. Well, they gets the barge loaded and the hatch-covers on, and everything ready for sea; and still there ain't no signs of the mate. So my pal, rememberin' that the mate—his name was Bill—rememberin' that Bill seemed a bit squiffy, supposed he must 'ave gone overboard. So 'e takes on a fresh hand temporary and off 'e goes on 'is trip.

"Well, they makes their port all right and brings up alongside the wharf, but owing to a strike among the transport men they can't unload for about three weeks. However, when the strike is over, they rigs a whip and a basket and begins to get the stuff out. All goes well until they get down to the bottom tier. Then one of the men brings up a bone on his shovel. 'Hallo!' says the skipper, 'what's bones a-doin' in a cargo of fresh lime?' He rakes over the stuff on the floor and up comes a skull with a hole in the top of it. 'Why, blow me,' says the skipper, 'if that don't look like Bill. He warn't as thin in the face as all that, but I seem to know them teeth.' Just then one of the men finds a clay pipe—a nigger's head, it was—and the skipper reckernizes it at once. 'That there's Bill's pipe,' sez he, 'and them bones is Bill's bones,' 'e sez. And so they were. They found 'is belt-buckle and 'is knife, and 'is trouser buttons and the nails out of 'is boots. And that's all there was left of Bill. He must have tumbled down into the hold and cracked his nut, and then the first truckful of lime must 'ave covered 'im up. So, if you sets any value on them 'andsome shoes o' yours, don't you go a-treadin' in quick lime."

Bundy looked down anxiously at his shoes, and, having given them an additional wipe, he moved away from the dangerous neighbourhood of the lime and we went together to examine the ancient wall.

"That was rather a tall yarn of the old man's," remarked Bundy. "Is it a fact that lime is as corrosive as he made out?"

"I don't really know very much about it," I replied. "There is a general belief that it will consume almost anything but metal. How true that is I can't say, but I remember that at the Crippen trial one of the medical experts—I think it was Pepper—said that if the body had been buried in quicklime it would have been entirely consumed—excepting the bones, of course. But it is difficult to believe that a body could disappear completely in three weeks, or thereabouts, as our friend said. How fine this old wall looks with those clumps of valerian and wallflowers growing on it! I suppose it encircled the town completely at one time?"

"Yes," he replied, "and it is a pity there isn't more of it left, or at least one or two of the gateways. A city gate is such a magnificent adornment. Think of the gates of Canterbury and Rye, and especially at Sandwich, where you actually enter the town through the barbican; and think of what Rochester must have been before all the gates were pulled down. But you must hear Japp on the subject. He's a regular architectural Jeremiah. By the way, what did you think of Mrs. Frood? You saw her last night, didn't you?"

"Yes. I was rather taken with her. She is very nice and friendly and unaffected, and good-looking, too. I thought her distinctly handsome."

"She isn't bad-looking," Bundy admitted. "But I can't stand her voice. It gets on my nerves. I hate a squeaky voice."

"I shouldn't call it squeaky," said I. "It is a high voice, and rather sing-song; and it isn't, somehow, quite in keeping with her appearance and manner."

"No," said Bundy, "that's what it is. She's too big for a voice like that."

I laughed at the quaint expression. "People's voices," said I, "are not like steamers' whistles, graduated in pitch according to their tonnage. Besides, Mrs. Frood is not such a very big woman."

"She is a good size," said he. "I should call her rather tall. At any rate, she is taller than I am. But I suppose you will say that she might be that without competing with the late Mrs. Bates."

"Comparisons between the heights of men and women," I said cautiously, "are rather misleading," and here I changed the subject, though I judged that Bundy was not sensitive in regard to his stature, for while he was cleaning the lime from his shoes I had noticed that he wore unusually low heels. Nor need he have been, for though on a small scale, he was quite an important-looking person.

"Don't you think," he asked, after a pause, "that it is rather queer that the man Frood should have gone off so soon? He only came down yesterday, and he can't have made much of a search for Madame."

"The queer thing is that he should have come down on that particular day," I replied. "It seems that he draws a monthly allowance on the fifteenth. That was what made him so anxious to get back; but it is odd that he didn't put off his visit here until he had collected the money."

"If he had run his wife to earth, he could have collected it from her," said Bundy. "I wonder how he found out that she was here."

"He evidently hadn't very exact information," I said, "nor did he seem quite certain that she really was here. And his failure to get any news of her appears to have discouraged him considerably. It is just possible that he has gone back to get more precise information if he can, when he has drawn his allowance."

"That is very likely," Bundy agreed; "and it is probable that we haven't seen the last of him yet."

"I have a strong suspicion that we haven't," said I.

"If he is sure she is here, and can get enough money together to come and spend a week here, he will be pretty certain to discover her whereabouts. It is a dreadful position for her. She ought to get a judicial separation."

"I doubt if she could," said he. "You may be sure he would contest that application pretty strongly, and what case would she have in support of it? He is an unclean blighter; he doesn't work; he smokes and drinks too much, and you say he takes drugs. But he doesn't seem to be violent or dangerous or threatening, or to be on questionable terms with other women—at least, I have never heard anything to that effect. Have you?"

"No," I answered—I had said nothing to him or Japp about the London incident. "He seems to have married the only woman in the world who would look at him."

Bundy grinned. "An unkind cut, that, Doctor," said he; "but I believe you're right. And here we are, back at the official premises. Are you coming in?"

I declined the invitation, and as he skipped up the steps I turned my face homewards.

---

## CHAPTER V. — JOHN THORNDYKE

The sexual preferences or affinities of men and women have always impressed me as very mysterious and inexplicable. I am referring to the selective choice of individuals, not to the general attraction of the sexes for one another. Why should a particular pair of human beings single one another out from the mass of their fellows as preferable to all others? Why to one particular man does one particular woman and no other become the exciting cause of the emotion of love? It is not a matter of mere physical beauty or mental excellence, for if it were men and women would be simply classifiable into the attractive and the non-attractive; whereas we find in practice that a woman who may be to the majority of men an object of indifference, is to some one man an object of passionate love; and vice-versa. Nor is love necessarily accompanied by any delusions as to the worth of its object, for it will persist in spite of the clear recognition of personal defects and in conscious conflict with judgment and reason.

The above reflections, with others equally profound, occupied my mind as I sat on a rather uncomfortable little rush-seated chair in the nave of Rochester Cathedral; whither I had proceeded in obedience to orders from Mrs. Dunk, to attend the choral afternoon service; and they were occasioned by the sudden recognition—not without surprise—of the very deep impression that had been made on me by my patient, Mrs. Frood. For the intensity of that impression I could not satisfactorily account. It is true that her circumstances were interesting and provocative of sympathy. But that was no reason for the haunting of my thoughts by her, of which I was conscious. She was not a really beautiful woman, though I thought her more than commonly good-looking; and she had evidently made no particular impression on Bundy. Yet, though I had seen her but three times, including my first meeting with her a year ago, I had to recognize that she had hardly been out of my thoughts since, and I was aware of looking forward with ridiculous expectancy to my proposed visit to her this evening.

Thus, speculations on the meaning of this preoccupation mingled themselves with other speculations, as, for instance, on the abrupt changes of intention suggested by half of an Early English arch clapped up against a Norman pier; and as my thoughts rambled on, undisturbed by a pleasant voice, intoning with soothing unintelligibility somewhere beyond the stone screen, I watched with languid curiosity the strangers who entered and stole on tiptoe to the nearest vacant chair. Presently, however, as the intoning voice gave place to the deep, pervading hum of the organ, a visitor entered who instantly attracted my attention.

He was obviously a personage—a real personage; not one of those who have achieved greatness by the free use of their elbows, or have had it thrust upon them by influential friends. This was an unmistakable thoroughbred. He was a tall man, very erect and dignified in carriage, and in spite of his iron-grey hair, evidently strong, active, and athletic. But it was his face that specially riveted my attention: not merely by reason that it was a handsome, symmetrical face, inclining to the Greek type, with level brows, a fine, straight nose, and a shapely mouth, but rather on account of its suggestion of commanding strength and intelligence. It was a strangely calm—even immobile—face; but yet it conveyed a feeling of attentiveness and concentration, and especially of power.

I watched the stranger curiously as he stepped quietly to a seat not far from me, noting how he seemed to stand out from the ordinary men who surrounded him, and wondering who he was. But I was not left to wonder very long. A few moments later another visitor arrived, but not a stranger this time; for in this newcomer I recognized an old acquaintance, a Dr. Jervis, whom I had known when I was a student and when he had taken temporary charge of my uncle's practice. Since then, as I had learned, he had qualified as a barrister and specialized in legal medicine as the coadjutor of the famous medical jurist, Dr. John Thorndyke.

For a few moments Jervis stood near the entrance looking about the nave, as if in search of someone. Then, suddenly, his eye lighted on the distinguished stranger, and he walked straight over to him and sat down by his side; from which, and from the smile of recognition with which he was greeted, I inferred that the stranger was none other than Dr. Thorndyke himself.

Jervis had apparently not seen, or at least not recognized me, but, as I observed that there was a vacant chair by his side, I determined to renew our acquaintance and secure, if possible, a presentation to his eminent colleague. Accordingly, I crossed the nave, and, taking the vacant chair, introduced myself, and was greeted with a cordial hand-shake.

The circumstances did not admit of conversation, but presently, when the anthem appeared to be drawing to a close, Jervis glanced at his watch and whispered to me: "I want to hear all your news, Strangeways, and to introduce you to Thorndyke; and we must get some tea before we go to the station. Shall we clear out now?"

As I assented he whispered to Thorndyke, and we all rose and filed silently towards the door, our exit covered by the concluding strains of the anthem. As soon as we were outside Jervis presented me to his colleague, and suggested an immediate adjournment to some place of refreshment. I proposed that they should come and have tea with me, but Jervis replied: "I'm afraid we haven't time today. There is a very comfortable teashop close to the Jasperian gate-house. You had better come there and then perhaps you can walk to the station with us."

We adopted this plan, and when we had established ourselves on a settle by the window of the ancient, low-ceiled room and given our orders to a young lady in a becoming brown costume, Jervis proceeded to interrogate.

"And what might you be doing in Rochester, Strangeways?"

"Nominally," I replied, "I am engaged in medical practice. Actually, I am a gentleman at large. I have taken a death vacancy here, and I arrived yesterday morning."

"Any patients?" he inquired.

"Two at present," I answered. "One I brought down with me and returned empty this morning. The other is his wife."

"Ha," said Jervis, "a concise statement, but obscure. It seems to require amplification."

I accordingly proceeded to amplify, describing in detail my journey from town and my subsequent dealings with my fellow-traveller. The circumstances of Mrs. Frood, being matters of professional confidence, I was at first disposed to suppress; but then, reflecting that my two friends were in a position to give expert opinions and advice, I put them in possession of all the facts that were known to me, excepting the Regent's Park incident, which I felt hardly at liberty to disclose.

"Well," said Jervis, when I had finished, "if the rest of your practice develops on similar lines, we shall have to set up a branch establishment in your neighbourhood. There are all sorts of possibilities in this case. Don't you think so, Thorndyke?"

"I should hardly say 'all sorts,'" was the reply. "The possibilities seem to me to be principally of one sort; extremely disagreeable for the poor lady. She has the alternatives of allowing herself to be associated with this man—which seems to be impossible—or of spending the remainder of her life in a perpetual effort to escape from him; which is an appalling prospect for a young woman."

"Yes," agreed Jervis, "it is bad enough. But there seems to me worse possibilities with a fellow of this kind; a drinking, drug-swallowing, hysterical degenerate. You never know what a man of that type will do."

"You always hope that he will commit suicide," said Thorndyke; "and to do him justice, he does fairly often show that much perception of his proper place in nature. But, as you say, the actions of a mentally and morally abnormal man are incalculable. He may kill himself or he may kill somebody else, or he may join with other abnormals to commit incomprehensible and apparently motiveless political crimes. But we will hope that Mr. Frood will limit his activities to sponging on his wife."

The conversation now turned from my affairs to those of my friends, and I ventured to inquire what had brought them to Rochester.

"We came down," said Jervis, "to watch an inquest for one of our insurance clients. But after all it has had to be adjourned for a fortnight. So we may have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"We won't leave it to chance," said I. "Let us settle that you come to lunch with me, if that will be convenient. You can fix your own time."

My two friends consulted, and, having referred to their time-table, accepted the invitation for one o'clock on that day fortnight; and when I had "booked the appointment," we finished our tea and sallied forth, making our way over the bridge to Strood Station, at the main entrance to which I wished them adieu.

As I turned away from the station and sauntered slowly along the shore before recrossing the bridge, I recalled the conversation of my two colleagues with a certain vague discomfort. To both of them, it was evident, the relations of my fair patient and her husband presented sinister possibilities, although I had not informed them of the actual murderous attack; and though the more cautious reticent Thorndyke had seemed to minimize them, his remarks had expressed what was already in my own mind, accentuated by what I knew. These nervy, abnormal men are never safe to deal with. Their unstable emotions may be upset in a moment and then no one can tell what will happen. It was quite possible that Frood had come to Rochester with the perfectly peaceable intention of inducing his wife to return to him. But this was far from certain, and I shuddered to think of what might follow a refusal on her part. I did not like that knife. I have a sane man's dislike of lethal weapons of all kinds; but especially do I dislike them in the hands of those whose self-control is liable to break down suddenly.

It was true that this man had not succeeded in finding his wife, and even seemed to have given up the search. But I felt pretty certain that he had not. Somehow, he had discovered that she was in the town, and from the same source he might get further information; and, in any case, I felt no doubt that he would renew the pursuit, and that, in the end, he would find her. And then—but at this point I found myself opposite the house and observed Mrs. Gillow standing on the doorstep, fumbling in her pocket for the latch-key. She had just extracted it, and was in the act of inserting it into the latch when I crossed the road and made my presence known. She greeted me with a wan smile as I ascended the steps, and, having by this time got the door open, admitted me to the hall.

"I gave Mrs. Frood your message at lunch-time, sir," said she, in a depressed tone, "and I believe she has come in." Here, having closed the street door, she rapped softly with her knuckles at that of the front room, whereupon the voice to which Bundy objected so much called out: "Come in, Mrs. Gillow."

The latter threw the door open. "It is the doctor, Madam," said she; and on this announcement, I walked in.

"I didn't hear you knock," said Mrs. Frood, rising, and holding out her hand.

"I didn't knock," I replied. "I sneaked in under cover of Mrs. Gillow."

"That was very secret and cautious of you," said she.

"You make me feel like a sort of feminine Prince Charlie, lying perdu in the robbers' cavern; whereas, I have actually been taking my walks abroad and brazenly looking in the shop windows. But I have kept a sharp lookout, all the same."

"There really wasn't any need," said I. "The siege is raised."

"You don't mean that my husband has gone?" she exclaimed.

"I do, indeed," I answered; and I gave her a brief account of the events of the morning, suppressing my unofficial part in the transaction.

"Do you think," she asked, "that the matron paid his fare out of her own pocket?"

"I am sure she didn't," I answered hastily. "She touched some local altruist for the amount; it was only a few shillings, you know."

"Still," she said, "I feel that I ought to refund those few shillings. They were really expended for my benefit."

"Well, you can't," I said with some emphasis. "You couldn't do it without disclosing your identity, and then you would have some philanthropist trying to effect a reconciliation. Your cue is to keep yourself to yourself for the present."

"For the present!" she echoed. "It seems to me that I have got to be a fugitive for the rest of my natural life. It is a horrible position, to have to live in a state of perpetual concealment, like a criminal, and never dare to make an acquaintance."

"Don't you know anyone in Rochester?" I asked.

"Not a soul," she replied, "excepting Mr. Japp, who is a relative by marriage—he was my aunt's brother-in-law—his partner, and Mrs. Gillow and you. And you all know my position."

"Does Mrs. Gillow know the state of affairs?" I asked in some surprise.

"Yes," she answered, "I thought it best to tell her, in confidence, so that she should understand that I want to live a quiet life."

"I suppose you haven't cut yourself off completely from all your friends?" said I.

"Very nearly. I haven't many friends that I really care about much, but I keep in touch with one or two of my old comrades. But I have had to swear them to secrecy—though it looks as if the secret had leaked out in some way. Of course they all know Nicholas—my husband."

"And I suppose you have been able to learn from them how your husband views the separation?"

"Yes. Of course he thinks I have treated him abominably, and he evidently suspects that I have some motive for leaving him other than mere dislike of his unpleasant habits. The usual motive, in fact."

"What Sam Weller would call a 'priory attachment'?" I suggested.

"Yes. He is a jealous and suspicious man by nature. I had quite a lot of trouble with him in that way before that final outbreak, though I have always been most circumspect in my relations with other men. Still, a woman doesn't complain of a little jealousy. Within reason, it is a natural, masculine failing."

"I should consider a tendency to use a knitted silk necktie for purposes which I need not specify as going rather beyond ordinary masculine failings," I remarked drily; on which she laughed and admitted that perhaps it was so. There was a short pause; then, turning to a fresh subject, she asked: "Do you think you will get any of Dr. Partridge's practice?"

"I suspect not, or at any rate very little; and that reminds me that I have not yet inquired as to my patient's condition. Are you any better?"

As I asked the question, I looked at her attentively, and noted that she was still rather pale and haggard, so far as I could judge by the subdued light of the shaded lamp, and that the darkness under the eyes remained undiminished.

"I am afraid I am not doing you much credit," she replied, with a faint smile. "But you can't expect any improvement while these unsettled conditions exist. If you could induce my respected husband to elope with another woman you would effect an immediate cure."

"I am afraid," said I, "that is beyond my powers, to say nothing of the inhumanity to the other woman. But we must persevere. You must let me look in on you from time to time, just to keep an eye on you."

"I hope you will," she replied, energetically. "If it doesn't weary you to listen to my complaints and gossip a little, please keep me on your visiting list. With the exception of Mr. Japp, you are the only human creature that I hold converse with. Mrs. Gillow is a dear, good creature, but instinct warns me not to get on conversational terms with her. She's rather lonely, too."

"Yes; you might find it difficult to turn the tap off. I am always very cautious with housekeepers and landladies."

She darted a mischievous glance at me. "Even if your landlady happens to be your patient?" she asked.

I chuckled as I remembered our dual relationship.

“That,” said I “is an exceptional case. The landlady becomes merged in the patient, and the patient tends to become a friend.”

“The doctor,” she retorted, “tends very strongly to become a friend, and a very kind and helpful friend. I think you have been exceedingly good to me—a mere waif who has drifted across your horizon.”

“Well,” I said, “if you think so, far be it from me to contradict you. One may as well pick up gratefully a stray crumb of commendation that one doesn’t deserve to set off against the deserved credit that one doesn’t get. But I should like to think that all my good deeds in the future will be as agreeable in the doing.”

She gave me a prim little smile. “We are getting monstrously polite,” she remarked, upon which we both laughed.

“However,” said I, “the moral of it all is that you ought to have a friendly medical eye kept on you, and, as mine is the eye that happens to be available, and as you are kind enough to accept the optical supervision, I shall give myself the pleasure of looking in on you from time to time to see how you are and to hear how the world wags. What is the best time to find you at home?”

“I am nearly always at home after seven o’clock, but perhaps that is not very convenient for you. I don’t know how you manage your practice.”

“The fact is,” said I, “that at present you are my practice, so I shall adapt my visiting round to your circumstances, and make my call at, or after, seven. I suppose you get some exercise?”

“Oh, yes. Quite a lot. I walk out in the country, and wander about Chatham and Gillingham and out to Frindsbury. I have been along the Watling Street as far as Cobham. Rochester itself I rather avoid for fear of making acquaintances, though it is a pleasant old town in spite of the improvements.”

As she spoke of these solitary rambles the idea floated into my mind that, later on, I might perchance offer to diminish their solitude. But I quickly dismissed it. Her position was, in any case, one of some delicacy—that of a young woman living apart from her husband. It would be an act the very reverse of friendly to compromise her in any way; nor would it tend at all to my own professional credit. A doctor’s reputation is nearly as tender as a woman’s.

Our conversation had occupied nearly three quarters of an hour, and, although I would willingly have lingered, it appeared to me that I had made as long a visit as was permissible. I accordingly rose, and, having given a few words of somewhat perfunctory professional advice, shook hands with my patient and let myself out.



## CHAPTER VI. — THE SHADOWS DEEPEN

The coming events, whose premonitory shadows had been falling upon me unnoted since I came to Rochester, were daily drawing nearer. Perhaps it may have been that the deepening shadows began dimly to make themselves felt; that some indistinct sense of instability and insecurity had begun to steal into my consciousness. It may have been so. But, nevertheless, looking back, I can see that when the catastrophe burst upon me it found me all unsuspecting and unprepared.

Nearly a fortnight had passed since my meeting with my two friends in the Cathedral, and I was looking forward with some eagerness to their impending visit. During that fortnight little seemed to have happened, though the trivial daily occurrences were beginning to acquire a cumulative significance not entirely unperceived by me. My promise to Mrs. Frood had been carried out very thoroughly: for at least every alternate evening had found me seated by the little table with the red-shaded lamp, making the best pretence I could of being there in a professional capacity.

It was unquestionably indiscreet. The instant liking that I had taken to this woman should have warned me that here was one of those unaccountable "affinities" that are charged with such immense potentialities of blessing or disaster. The first impression should have made it clear to me that I could not safely spend much time in her society. But unfortunately the very circumstance that should have warned me to keep away was the magnet that drew me to her side.

However, there was one consoling fact: if the indiscretion was mine, so by me alone were the consequences supported. Our relations were of the most unexceptionable kind; indeed, she was not the sort of woman with whom any man would have taken a liberty. As to my feelings towards her, I could not pretend to deceive myself, but similarly, I had no delusions as to her feelings towards me. She welcomed my visits with that frank simplicity that is delightful to a friend and hopeless to a lover. It was plain to me that the bare possibility of anything beyond straightforward, honest friendship never entered her head. But this very innocence and purity, while at once a rebuke and a reassurance, but riveted my fetters the more firmly.

Such as our friendship was (and disregarding the secret reservation on my side), it grew apace; indeed, it sprang into existence at our first meeting. There was between us that ease and absence of reserve that distinguishes the intercourse of those who like and understand one another. I never had any fear of unwittingly giving offence. In our long talks and discussions, we had no need of choosing our words or phrases or of making allowances for possible prejudices. We could say plainly what we meant with the perfect assurance that it would be neither misunderstood nor resented. In short, if my feelings towards her could only have been kept at the same level as hers towards me, our friendship would have been perfect.

In the course of these long and pleasant gossiping visits, I observed my patient somewhat closely, and, quite apart from the personal affinity, I became more and more favourably impressed. She was a clever woman, quick and alert in mind, and evidently well informed. She seemed to be kindly, and was certainly amiable and even-tempered, though not in the least weak or deficient in character. Probably, in happier circumstances, she would have been more gay and vivacious, for, though she was habitually rather grave and even sombre, there were occasional flashes of wit that suggested a naturally lively temperament.

As to her appearance—to repeat in more detail what I have already said—she was a rather large woman, very erect and somewhat stately in bearing; distinctly good-looking (though of this I was not, perhaps, a very good judge). Her features were regular, but not in any way striking. Her expression was, as I have said, a little sombre and severe, the mouth firmly set and slightly depressed at the corners, the eyebrows black, straight, and unusually well-marked and nearly meeting above the nose. She had an abundance of black, or nearly black, hair, parted low on the forehead and drawn back loosely, covering the ears and temples, and she wore a largish coil nearly on the top of the head; a formal, matronly style that accentuated the gravity of her expression.

Such was Angelina Frood as I looked on her in those never-to-be-forgotten evenings; as she rises before the eyes of memory as I write, and as she will remain in my recollection so long as I live.

In this fortnight one really arresting incident had occurred. It was just a week after my meeting with Dr. Thorndyke, when, returning from a walk along the London Road as far as Gad's Hill, I stopped on Rochester Bridge to watch a barge which had just passed under, and was rehoisting her lowered mast. As I was leaning on the parapet, a man brushed past me, and I turned my head idly to look at him. Then, in an instant, I started up; for though the man's back was towards me, there was something unmistakably familiar in the gaunt figure, the seedy clothes, the great cloth cap, the shock of mouse-coloured hair, and the thick oaken stick that he swung in his hand. But I was not going to leave myself in any doubt on the subject. Cautiously I began to retrace my steps, keeping him in view but avoiding overtaking him, until he reached the western end of the bridge, when he halted and looked back. Then any possible doubt was set at rest. The man was Nicholas Frood. I don't know whether he saw me; he made no sign of recognition; and when he turned and walked on, I continued to follow, determined to make sure of his destination.

As I had hoped and expected, he took the road to the right, leading to the river bank and the station. Still following him, I noted that he walked at a fairly brisk pace and seemed to have recovered completely from his debility—if that debility had not been entirely counterfeit. Opposite the pier he turned into the station approach, and when from the corner I had watched him enter the station, I gave up the pursuit, assuming that he was returning to London.



But how long had he been in Rochester? What had he been doing, and what success had he had in his search? These were the questions that I asked myself as I walked back over the bridge. Probably he had come down for the day; and since he was returning, it was reasonable to infer that he had had no luck. As I entered the town and glanced up at the great clock that hangs out across the street from the Corn Exchange, like a sort of horological warming-pan, I saw that it was close upon eight. It was a good deal after my usual time for calling on Mrs. Frood, but the circumstances were exceptional and I felt that it was necessary to ascertain whether anything untoward had occurred. I was still debating what I should do when, as I came opposite the house, I saw Mrs. Gillow coming out of the door. Immediately I crossed the road and accosted her.

"Have you seen Mrs. Frood this evening, Mrs. Gillow?" I asked, after passing the usual compliments.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "I left her only a few minutes ago working at one of the drawings that she does for Mr. Japp. She seems better this evening—brighter and more cheerful. I think your visits have done her good, sir. It is a lonely life for a young woman—having no one to talk to all through the long evenings. I'm always glad to hear your knock, and so, I think, is she."

"I'm pleased to hear you say so, Mrs. Gillow," said I. "However, as it is rather late, and she has something to occupy her, I don't think I will call this evening."

With this I took my leave and went on my way in better spirits. Evidently all was well so far. Nevertheless, the reappearance of this man was an uncomfortable incident. It was clear that he had not given up the pursuit, and, seeing that Rochester was only some thirty miles from London, it would be quite easy for him to make periodical descents on the place to continue the search. There was no denying that Mrs. Frood's position was extremely insecure, and I could think of no plan for making it less so, excepting that of leaving Rochester, for a time at least, a solution which ought to have commended itself to me, but did not.

Perhaps it was this fact that decided me not to say anything about the incident. The obvious thing was to have told her and put her on her guard. But I persuaded myself that it would only make her anxious to no purpose; that she could not prevent him from coming nor could she take any further measures for concealment. And then there was the possibility that he might never come again.

So far as I know, he never did. During the rest of the week I perambulated the town hour after hour, looking into the shops, scanning the faces of the wayfarers in the streets and even visiting the stations at the times when the London trains were due; but never a glimpse did I catch of that ill-omened figure.

And all the time, the shadows were deepening, and that which cast them was drawing nearer.

It was nearly a week after my meeting with Nicholas Frood that an event befell at which I looked askance at the time and which was, as it turned out, the opening scene of a new act. It was on the Saturday. I am able to fix the date by an incident, trivial enough in itself, but important by reason of its forming thus a definite point of departure. My visitors were due on the following Monday, and it had occurred to me that I had better lay in a little stock of wine; and as Mr. Japp was an old resident who knew everybody in the town, I decided to consult him as to the choice of a wine merchant.

It was a little past mid-day when I arrived at the office, and as I entered I observed that some kind of conference was in progress. A man, whom I recognized as the foreman of the gang who were working on the old wall, was standing sheepishly with his knuckles resting on the table; Bundy had swung round on his stool and was glaring owlishly through his great spectacles, while Mr. Japp was sitting bolt upright, his forehead in a state of extreme corrugation and his eyes fixed severely on the foreman.

"I suppose," said Bundy, "you left it in the gate?"

"I expect Evans did," replied the foreman. "You see, I had to call in at the office, so I gave the key to Evans and told him to go on with the other men and let them in. When I got there the gate was open and the men were at work, and I forgot all about the key until it was time to come away and lock up. Then I asked Evans for it, and he said he'd left it in the gate. But when I went to look for it it wasn't there. Someone must have took it out."

"Doesn't seem very likely," said Bundy. "However, I suppose it will turn up. It had one of our wooden labels tied to it. Shall I give him the duplicate to lock up the place?"

"You must, I suppose," said Japp; "but it must be brought straight back and given to me. You understand, Smith? Bring it back at once, and deliver it to me or to Mr. Bundy. And look here, Smith. I shall offer ten shillings reward for that key; and if it is brought back and I have to pay the reward you will have to make it up among you. You understand that?"

Smith indicated grumpily that he understood; and when Bundy had handed him the duplicate key, he took his departure in dudgeon.

When he had gone I stated my business, and Bundy pricked up his ears.

"Wine, hey?" said he, removing his spectacles and assuming his eyeglass. "Tucker will be the man for him, won't he, Japp? Very superior wine merchant is Tucker. Old and crusted; round and soft; rare and curious. I'd better pop round with him and introduce him, hadn't I? You'll want to taste a few samples, I presume, Doctor?"

"I'm not giving a wholesale order," said I, smiling at his enthusiasm. "A dozen or so of claret and one or two bottles of port is all I want."

"Still," said Bundy, "you want to know what the stuff's like. Not going to buy a pig in a poke. You'll have to taste it, of course. I'll help you. Two heads are better than one. Come on. You said Tucker, didn't you, Japp?"

"As a matter of fact," said Japp, wrinkling his face up into an appreciative smile, "I didn't say anything. But Tucker will do; only he won't let you taste anything until you have bought it."

"Won't he!" said Bundy. "We shall see. Come along, Doctor."

He dragged me out of the office and down the steps, and we set forth towards the bridge; but we had not walked more than a couple of hundred yards when he suddenly shot up a narrow alley and beckoned to me mysteriously. I followed him up the alley, and as he halted I asked:

"What have you come here for?"

"I want you," he replied impressively, "to take a look at this wall."

I scrutinized the wall with minute attention but failed to discover any noteworthy peculiarities in it.

"Well," I said, at length, "I don't see anything unusual about this wall."

"Neither do I," he replied, looking furtively down the alley.

"Then, what the deuce—" I began.

"It's all right," said he. "She's gone. That damsel in the pink hat. I just popped up here to let her pass. The fact is," he explained, as he emerged cautiously into the High-street, glancing up and down like an Indian on the war-path, "these women are the plague of my life; always trying to hook me for teas or bazaars or garden fetes or some sort of confounded foolishness; and that pink-hatted lady is a regular sleuth-hound."

We walked quickly along the narrow pavement, Bundy looking about him warily, until we reached the wine-merchant's premises, into which my companion dived like a harlequin and forthwith proceeded to introduce me and my requirements. Mr. Tucker was a small, elderly man; old and crusted and as dry as his own Amontillado; but he was not proof against Bundy's blandishments. Before I had had time to utter a protest, I found myself in a dark cavern at the rear of the shop, watching Mr. Tucker fill a couple of glasses from a mouldy-looking cask.

"Ha!" said Bundy, sipping the wine with a judicial air. "H'm. Yes. Not so bad. Slightly corked, perhaps."

"Corked!" exclaimed Tucker, staring at Bundy in amazement. "How can it be corked when it is just out of the cask?"

"Well, bunged, then," Bundy corrected.

"I never heard of wine being bunged," said Tucker. "There's no such thing."

"Isn't there? Well, then, it can't be. Must be my fancy. What do you think of it, Doctor?"

"It seems quite a sound claret," said I, inwardly wishing my volatile friend at the devil, for I felt compelled, by way of soothing the wine merchant's wounded feelings, to order twice the quantity that I had intended. We had just completed the transaction, and were crossing the outer shop when the doorway became occluded by two female figures, and Bundy uttered a half-suppressed groan. I drew aside to make way for the newcomers—two ladies whom polite persons would have described as middle-aged, on the assumption that they contemplated a somewhat extreme degree of longevity—and I was aware that Bundy was endeavouring to take cover behind me. But it was of no use. One of them espied him instantly and announced her discovery with a little squeak of ecstasy.

"Why, it's Mr. Bundy. I do declare! Now, where *have* you been all this long time? It's ages and ages and ages since you came to see us, isn't it, Martha? Let me see, now, when was it?" She fixed a reflective eye on her companion, while Bundy smiled a sickly smile and glanced wistfully at the open door.

"I know," she exclaimed, triumphantly. "It was when we had the feeble-minded children to tea, and Mr. Blote showed them the gold fish trick—at least he tried to, but the glass bowl stuck in the bag under his coat-tails and wouldn't come out; and when he tried to pull it out it broke—"

"I think you are mistaken, Marian," the other lady interrupted. "It wasn't the feeble-minded tea. It was after that, when we helped the Jewbury-Browns to get up that rumble sale—"

"Jumble sale, you mean, dear," her companion corrected.

"I mean rummage sale," the lady called Martha insisted, severely. "If you will try to recall the circumstances, you will remember that the jumble sale took place after—"

"Not after," the other lady corrected. "It was before—several days before, I should say, speaking from a somewhat imperfect memory. If you will try to recollect, Martha, dear—"

"I recollect quite distinctly," the lady called Martha interposed, a little haughtily. "There was the feeble-minded tea—that was on a Tuesday—or was it a Thursday—no, it was a Tuesday, or at least—well, at any rate, it was some days before the jum—rum—"

"Not at all," the other lady dissented emphatically. At this point, catching the eye of the lady called Marian, I crept by slow degrees out on the threshold and turned an expectant eye on Bundy. The rather broad hint took immediate effect, for

the lady said to her companion: "I am afraid, Martha, dear, you are detaining Mr. Bundy and his friend. *Good-bye*, Mr. Bundy. Shall we see you next Friday evening? We are giving a little entertainment to the barge-boys. We are inviting them to come and bring their mouth-organs and get up a little informal concert. *Do* come if you can. We shall be so delighted. *Good-bye*."

Bundy shook hands effusively with the two ladies and darted out after me, seizing my arm and hurrying me along the pavement.

"Bit of luck for me, Doctor, having you with me. If I had been alone and unprotected I shouldn't have escaped for half-an-hour; and I should have been definitely booked for the barge-boys' pandemonium. Hallo! What's Japp up to? Oh, I see. He's sticking up the notice about that key. I ought to have done that. Japp writes a shocking fist. I must see if it is possible to make it out."

As we approached the office I glanced at the sheet of paper which Mr. Japp had just affixed to the window, and was able to read the rather crabbed heading, "Ten Shillings Reward." The rest of the inscription being of no interest to me, I wished Bundy adieu and went on my way, leaving him engaged in a critical inspection of the notice. Happening to look back a few moments later, I saw him still gazing earnestly at the paper, all unconscious of a lady in a pink hat who was tripping lightly across the road and bearing down on him with an alluring smile.

Threading my way among the foot-passengers who filled the narrow pavements, I let my thoughts ramble idly from subject to subject; from the expected visit of my two friends on the following Monday to the alarming character of the local feminine population. But always they tended to come back to my patient, Mrs. Frood. I had seen her on the preceding night and had been very ill-satisfied with her appearance. She had been paler than usual—more heavy-eyed and weary-looking; and she had impressed me as being decidedly low-spirited. It seemed as though the continual uncertainty and unrest, the abiding threat of some intolerable action on the part of her worthless husband, were becoming more than she could endure; and unwillingly I was beginning to recognize that it was my duty, both as her doctor and as her friend, to advise her to move, at least for a time, to some locality where she would be free from the constant fear of molestation.

The question was: when should I broach the subject?

And that involved the further question: when should I make my next visit? Inclination suggested the present evening, but discretion hinted that I ought to allow a decent interval between my calls; and thus oscillating between the two, I found myself in a state of indecision which lasted for the rest of the day. Eventually discretion conquered, and I decided to postpone the visit and the proposal until the following evening.

The decision was reached about the time I should have been setting forth to make the visit, and no sooner had that time definitely passed than I began to regret my resolution and to be possessed by a causeless anxiety. Restlessly I wandered from room to room; taking up books, opening them and putting them down again, and generally displaying the typical symptoms of an acute attack of fidgets until Mrs. Dunk proceeded with a determined air to lay the supper, and drew my attention to it with an emphasis which it was impossible to disregard.

I had just drawn the cork of a bottle of Mr. Tucker's claret when the door-bell rang, an event without precedent in my experience. Silently I replaced the newly-extracted cork and listened. Apparently it was a patient, for I heard the street door close and footsteps proceed to the consulting-room. A minute later Mrs. Dunk opened the dining-room door and announced:

"Mrs. Frood to see you, sir."

With a slight thrill of anxiety at this unexpected visit, I strode out, and, crossing the hall, entered the somewhat dingy and ill-lighted consulting-room. Mrs. Frood was seated in the patients' chair, but she rose as I entered and held out her hand; and as I grasped it, I noticed how tall she looked in her outdoor clothes. But I also noticed that she was looking even more pale and haggard than when I had seen her last.

"There is nothing the matter, I hope?" said I.

"No," she answered; "nothing much more than usual; but I have come to present a petition."

I looked at her inquiringly, and she continued:

"I have been sleeping very badly, as you know. Last night I had practically no sleep at all, and very little the night before; and I feel that I really can't face the prospect of another sleepless night. Would you think it very immoral if I were to ask you for something that would give me a few hours' rest?"

"Certainly not," I answered, though with no great enthusiasm, for I am disposed to take hypnotics somewhat seriously. "You can't go on without sleep. I will give you one or two tablets to take before you go to bed. They will secure you a decent night's rest, and then I hope you will feel a little brighter."

"I hope so," she said, with a weary sigh.

I looked at her critically. She was, as I have said, pale and haggard; but there seemed to be something more; a certain wildness in her eyes and a suggestion of fear.

"You are not looking yourself at all to-night," I said. "What is it?"

"I don't know," she answered. "The same old thing, I suppose. But I do feel rather miserable. I seem to have come to the

end of my endurance. I look into the future and it all seems dark. I am afraid of it. In fact, I seem to have—you'll think me very silly, I know—but I have a sort of presentiment of evil. Of course, it's all nonsense. But that is what I feel."

"Is there any reason for this presentiment?" I asked uneasily; for my thoughts flew at once to that ill-omened figure that I had seen on the bridge. "Has anything happened to occasion these forebodings?"

"Oh, nothing in particular," she replied. But she spoke without looking at me—an unusual thing for her to do—and I found in her answer something ambiguous and rather evasive. Could it be that she had seen her husband on that day when I had followed him? Or had he been in the town again—this very day, perhaps? Or was there something yet more significant, something even more menacing? That this deep depression of spirits, these forebodings, were not without some exciting cause I felt the strongest suspicion. But whatever the cause might be, she was evidently unwilling to speak about it.

While I was speculating thus, I found myself looking her over with a minute attention of which I was not conscious at the time; noting little trivial details of her appearance and belongings with an odd exactness of observation. My eyes travelled over the little hand-bag, stamped with her initials, that rested on her lap; her dainty, high-heeled shoes with their little oval buckles of darkened bronze; the small brooch at her throat with the large opal in the middle and the surrounding circle of little pearls, and even noted that one of the pearls was missing and that the vacant place corresponded to the figure three on a clock-dial. And then they would come back to her face; to the set mouth and the downcast eyes with their expression of gloomy reverie.

I was profoundly uneasy and was on the point of opening the subject of her leaving the town. Then I decided that I would see her on the morrow and would go into the matter then. Accordingly I went into the surgery and put a few tablets of sulphonal into a little box, and having stuck one of Dr. Partridge's labels on it, wrote the directions and then wrapped it up and sealed it.

"There," I said, giving it to her, "take a couple of those tablets and go to bed early, and let me find you looking a little more cheerful to-morrow."

She took the packet and dropped it into her bag. "It is very good of you," she said warmly. "I know you don't like doing it, and that makes it the more kind. But I will do as you tell me. I have just to go in to Chatham, but when I get back I will go to bed quite early."

I walked with her to the door, and when I had opened it she stopped and held out her hand. "Good night," she said, "and thank you so very much. I expect you will find me a great deal better to-morrow." She pressed my hand slightly, made me a little bow, smiled, and, turning away, passed out; and I now noticed that the haze which had hung over the town all the afternoon had thickened into a definite fog. I stepped out on to the threshold and watched her as she walked quickly down the street, following the erect, dignified figure wistfully with my eyes as it grew more and more shadowy and unsubstantial until it faded into the fog and vanished. Then I went in to my solitary supper, with an unwonted sense of loneliness; and throughout the long evening I turned over again and again our unsatisfying talk and wondered afresh whether that presentiment of evil was but the product of insomnia and mental fatigue, or whether behind it was some sinister reality.

---

## CHAPTER VII. — MRS. GILLOW SOUNDS THE ALARM

Nine o'clock on the following morning found me still seated at the breakfast table, with the debris of the meal before me and the Sunday paper propped up against the coffee-pot. It was a pleasant, sunny morning at the end of April. The birds were twittering joyously in the trees at the back of the house, a premature bluebottle perambulated the window-pane, after an unsuccessful attempt to crawl under the dish-cover, and somewhere in the town an optimistic bell-ringer was endeavouring to lure unwary loiterers out of the sunshine into the shadow of the sanctuary.

It was all very agreeable and soothing. The birds were delightful in the exuberance of their spirits; even the bluebottle was a harbinger of summer; and the solo of the bellringer, softened by distance, impinged gently on the appreciative ear, awakening a grateful sense of immunity. The sunshine and the placid sounds were favourable to reflection, which the Sunday paper was powerless to disturb. As my eye roamed inattentively down the inconsequent column of printers' errors, my mind flitted, beelike, from topic to topic; from my vague professional prospects to the visitors whom I was expecting on the morrow and from them to the rather disturbing incident of the previous evening. But here my thoughts had a tendency to stick; and I was just considering whether the proprieties admitted of my making a morning call on Mrs. Frood, with a view to clearing up the obscurity, when the street-door bell rang. The unusual sound at such an unlikely time caused me to sit up and listen with just a tinge of uneasy expectancy. A few moments later Mrs. Dunk opened the door, and having stated concisely and impassively, "Mrs. Gillow," retired, leaving the door ajar. I started up in something approaching alarm, and hurried across to the consulting-room, where I found Mrs. Gillow standing by the chair with anxiety writ large on her melancholy face.

"There's nothing amiss, I hope, Mrs. Gillow?" said I.

"I am sorry to say there is, sir," she replied. "I hope you'll excuse me for disturbing you on a Sunday morning, but I thought, as you were her doctor, and a friend, too, and I may say—"

"But what has happened?" I interrupted impatiently.

"Why, sir, the fact is that she went out last night and she hasn't come back."

"You are quite sure she hasn't come back?"

"Perfectly. I saw her just before she went out, and she said she was coming to see you, to get something to make her sleep, and then she was just going into Chatham, and that she would be back soon, so that she could go to bed early. I sat up quite late listening for her, and before I went to bed I went down and knocked at both her doors, and as I didn't get any answer, I looked into both rooms. But she wasn't in either, and her little supper was untouched on the table in the sitting-room. I couldn't sleep a wink all night for worrying about her, and the first thing this morning I went down, and, when I found the door unbolted and unchained, I went into her rooms again. But there was no sign of her. Her supper was still there, untouched, and her bed had not been slept in."

"Did you look downstairs?" I asked.

"Yes. She usually kept the door of the basement stairs locked, I think, but it was unlocked this morning, so I went down and searched all over the basement; but she wasn't there."

"It is very extraordinary, Mrs. Gillow," I said, "and rather alarming. I certainly understood that she was going home as soon as she had been to Chatham. By the way, do you know what she was going to Chatham for?"

"I don't, sir. She might have been going there to do some shopping, but it was rather late, though it was Saturday night."

"You don't know, I suppose, whether she took any things with her—though she couldn't have taken much, as she had only a little handbag with her when she came here."

"She hasn't taken any of her toilet things," said Mrs. Gillow, "because I looked over her dressing-table, and all her brushes and things were there; and, as you say, she couldn't have taken much in that little bag. What do you think we had better do, sir?"

"I think," said I, "that, in the first place, I will go and see Mr. Japp. He is a relative and knows more about her than we do, and, of course, it will be for him to take any measures that may seem necessary. At any rate, I will see him and hear what he says."

"Don't you think we ought to let the police know?" she asked.

"Well, Mrs. Gillow," I said, "we mustn't be too hasty. Mrs. Frood had reasons for avoiding publicity. Perhaps we had better not busy ourselves too much until we are quite certain that she has gone. She may possibly return in the course of the day."

"I am sure I hope so," she replied despondently. "But I am very much afraid she won't. I have a presentiment that something dreadful has happened to her."

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "Have you any reason for thinking so?"

"I have no actual reason," she answered, "but I have always thought that there was something behind her fear of meeting her husband."

Having no desire to discuss speculative opinions, I made no direct reply to this. Apparently Mrs. Gillow had no more to tell, and as I was anxious to see Mr. Japp and hear if he could throw any light on the mystery, I adjourned the discussion on which she would have embarked and piloted her persuasively towards the door. "I shall see you again later, Mrs. Gillow," I said, "and will let you know if I hear anything. Meanwhile, I think you had better not speak of the matter to anybody."

As soon as she was gone I made rapid preparations to go forth on my errand, and a couple of minutes later was speeding down the street at a pace dictated rather by the agitation of my mind than by any urgency of purpose. Although, by an effort of will, I had preserved a quiet, matter-of-fact demeanour while I was talking to Mrs. Gillow, her alarming news had fallen on me like a thunderbolt; and even now, as I strode forward swiftly, my thoughts seemed numbed by the suddenness of the catastrophe. That something terrible had happened I had little more doubt than had Mrs. Gillow, and a good deal more reason for my fears; for that last interview with the missing woman, looked back upon by the light of her unaccountable disappearance, now appeared full of dreadful suggestions. I had thought that she looked frightened, and she admitted to a presentiment of evil. Of whom or of what was she afraid? And what did she mean by a presentiment? Reasonable people do not have gratuitous presentiments; and I recalled her evasive reply when I asked if she had any reasons for her foreboding of evil. Now, there was little doubt that she had; that the shadow of some impending danger had fallen on her and that she knew it.

As I approached the premises of Japp and Bundy, I was assailed by a sudden doubt as to whether Mr. Japp lived there; and this doubt increased when I had executed two loud knocks at the door without eliciting any response. I was just raising my hand to make a third attack when I became aware of Bundy's head rising above the curtain of the office window; and even in my agitation I could not but notice its extremely dishevelled state. His hair—usually "smarmed" back neatly from the forehead and brushed over the crown of his head—now hung down untidily over his face like a bunch of rat's tails, and the unusualness of his appearance was increased by the fact that he wore neither spectacles nor the indispensable eyeglass. The apparition, however, was visible but for a moment, for even as I glanced at him he made a sign to me to wait and forthwith vanished.

There followed an interval of about a minute, at the end of which the door opened and I entered, discovering Bundy behind it in a dressing-gown and pyjamas, but with his hair neatly brushed and his eye-glass duly adjusted.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Doc," said he. "Fact is, your knock woke me. The early bird catches the worm in his pyjamas."

"I apologize for disturbing your slumbers," said I, "but I wanted to see Japp. Isn't he in?"

"Japp doesn't live here," said Bundy, motioning to me to follow him upstairs. "He used to, but the house began to fill up with the business stuff and we had to make a drawing office and a store-room, so he moved off to a house on Boley Hill, and now I live here like Robinson Crusoe."

"Do you mean that you do your own cooking and housework?"

"Lord, no," he replied. "I get most of my meals at Japp's place. Prepare my own breakfast sometimes—I'm going to now; and I make tea for us both. Got a little gas-stove in the kitchen. And a charlady comes in every day to wash up and do my rooms. If you are not in a hurry, I'll walk round with you to Japp's house."

"I am in rather a hurry," said I; "at least—well, I don't know why I should be; but I am rather upset. The fact is, a very alarming thing has happened. I have just heard of it from Mrs. Gillow. It seems that Mrs. Frood went out last evening and has not come back."

Bundy whistled. "She's done a bolt," said he. "I wonder why. Do you think she can have run up against hubby in the town?"

"I don't believe for a moment that she has gone away voluntarily," said I. "She came to see me last night to get a sedative because she couldn't sleep, and she said that she was going home as soon as she had been to Chatham, and that she was going to take her medicine and go to bed early."

"That might have been a blind," suggested Bundy; "or she might have run up against her husband in Chatham."

I shook my head impatiently. "That is all nonsense, Bundy. A woman doesn't walk off into space in that fashion. Something has happened to her, I feel sure. I only hope it isn't something horrible; one doesn't dare to think of the possibilities that the circumstances suggest."

"No," said Bundy, "and it's better not to. Great mistake to let your imagination run away with you. Don't you worry, Doc. She'll probably turn up all right, or send Japp a line to say where she has gone to."

"Devil take it, Bundy!" I exclaimed irritably, "you are talking as if she were just a cat that had strayed away. If you don't care a hang what becomes of her, I do. I am extremely alarmed about her. How soon will you be ready?"

"I'll run and get on my things at once," he replied, with a sudden change of manner. "You must excuse me, old chap. I didn't realize that you were so upset. I'll be with you in a few minutes and then we will start. Japp will be able to give me some breakfast."

He bustled off—to the next room, as I gathered from the sound—and left me to work off my impatience by gazing out of the window and pacing restlessly up and down the barely-furnished sitting-room. But, impatient as I was, the rapidity with which he made his toilet surprised me, for in less than ten minutes he reappeared, spick and span, complete with hat,

gloves, and stick, and announced that he was ready.

"I am not usually such a sluggard," he said, as we walked quickly along the street, "but yesterday evening I got a novel. I ought not to read novels. When I do, I am apt to make a single mouthful of it; and that is what I did last night. I started the book at nine and finished it at two this morning; and the result is that I am as sleepy as an owl even now."

In illustration of this statement he gave a prodigious yawn and then turned up the steep little thoroughfare, where he presently halted at the door of a small, old-fashioned house and rang the bell. The door was opened by a middle-aged servant, from whom he learned that Mr. Japp was at home, and to whom Bundy communicated his needs in the matter of breakfast. We found Mr. Japp seated by the dining-room window, studying a newspaper with the aid of a large pipe, and Bundy proceeded to introduce me and the occasion of my visit in a few crisp sentences.

Mr. Japp's reception of the news was very different from his partner's. Starting up from his chair and taking his pipe from his mouth, he gazed at me for some seconds in silent dismay.

"I suppose," he said at length, "there is no mistake. It is really certain that she did not come back last night?"

"I am afraid there is no doubt of the fact," I replied, and I gave him the details with which Mrs. Gillow had furnished me.

"Dear! dear!" he exclaimed. "I don't like the look of this at all. What the deuce can have happened to her?"

Here Bundy repeated the suggestion that he had made to me, but Japp shook his head. "She wouldn't have gone off without letting me or the doctor know. Why should she? We are friends, and she knew she could trust us. Besides, the thing isn't possible. A middle-class woman can't set out like a tramp without any luggage or common necessities. There's only one possibility," he added after a pause. "She might have seen Nicholas prowling about and gone straight to the station and taken a train to London. One of her woman friends would have been able to put her up for the night."

"Or," suggested Bundy, "she might even have gone up to town with Nick himself if he met her and threatened to make a scene."

"Yes," said Japp doubtfully, "that is, I suppose, possible. But it isn't in the least likely. For that matter, nothing is likely. It is a most mysterious affair, and very disturbing, very disturbing, indeed."

"The question is," said I, "what is to be done? Do you think we ought to communicate with the police?"

"Well, no," he replied; "not immediately. If we don't hear anything, say to-morrow, I suppose we shall have to. But we had better not be precipitate. If we go to the police, we shall have to tell them everything. Let us give her time to communicate, in case she has had to make a sudden retirement—a clear forty-eight hours, as it is a week-end. But we had better make some cautious inquiries meanwhile. I suggest that we walk up to the hospital. They know me pretty well there, and I could just informally ascertain whether any accidents had been admitted, without giving any detailed reasons for the inquiry. Are you coming with us, Bundy?"

"Yes," replied Bundy, who, having been provided with a light breakfast, was despatching it with lightning speed; "I shall be ready by the time you have got your boots on."

A few minutes later we set forth together, and made our way straight to the hospital. Bundy and I waited outside while Japp went in to make his inquiries; and, as we walked up and down, my imagination busied itself in picturing the hideous possibilities suggested by a somewhat extensive experience of the casualty department of a general hospital. Presently Japp emerged, shaking his head.

"She is not there," said he. "There were no casualties of any kind admitted last night or since."

"Is there no other hospital?" I asked.

"None but the military hospital," he replied. "All the casualties from the district would be brought here. So we seem to be at the end of our resources, short of inquiring at the police-station; and even if that were advisable, it would be useless, for if—anything had happened—anything, I mean, that we hope has not happened—Mrs. Gillow would have heard. She will be sure to have had something about her by which she could have been identified."

"She had," said I. "The little box that I gave her had her name and my address on it."

"Then," said Japp. "I don't see that we can do anything more. We can only wait until to-morrow evening or Tuesday morning, and if we don't get any news of her by then, notify the police."

Unwillingly I had to admit that this was so; and when I had walked back with the partners to Mr. Japp's house, I left them and proceeded to report to Mrs. Gillow and to ascertain whether, in the meantime, she had received any tidings of her missing tenant.

It was with more of fear than hope that I plied the familiar knocker, but the eager, expectant face that greeted me when the door opened, while it relieved the one, banished the other. She had heard nothing, and when I had communicated my own unsatisfactory report she groaned and shook her head.

"You are quite sure," I said, after an interval of silence, "that she did not return from Chatham?"

"I don't see how she could have done," was the reply.

"You see, it was like this: I was going to see my sister at Frindsbury, and as I came down to the hall, Mrs. Frood opened

her door and spoke to me. She had her hat on then, and she told me she was coming to you, and then going on to Chatham, but that she would be back pretty soon, and was going to bed early. I went out, leaving her at her room door, and took the tram to Frindsbury, and I got back home about a quarter to ten. Her sitting-room door was open, and I could see that she hadn't gone to bed, because her lamp was alight and her supper tray was on the table and hadn't been touched. I knocked at her bedroom door, but there was no answer, so I went upstairs and sat up listening for her, and before I went to bed I went down again, as I told you."

"What time was it when you went out?" I asked.

"About a quarter past eight. I told her I was going to Frindsbury, and that I should be home before ten, and I asked her not to bolt the door if she came in before me."

"Then," said I, "she must have gone out directly after you, because it was only a little after half-past eight when she called on me; and presumably she went straight on to Chatham. If we only knew what she was going there for we might be able to trace her. Did she know anybody at Chatham?"

"So far as I know," replied Mrs. Gillow, "she didn't know anybody here but you and Mr. Japp. I can't imagine what she could have been going to Chatham for."

After a little further talk, I took my leave and walked homeward in a very wretched frame of mind. Tormented as I was with a gnawing anxiety, inaction was intolerable. Yet there was nothing to be done; nothing but to wait in the feeble hope that the morning might bring some message of relief, and with a heavy foreboding that the tidings, when they came, would be evil tidings. But I found it impossible to wait passively at home. At intervals during the day I went forth to wander up and down the streets; and some impulse which I hardly dared to recognize directed my steps again and again to the wharves and foreshore that lie by the bend of the river between Rochester and Chatham.

On the following morning I betook myself as early as I decently could to the office of Japp and Bundy. No letter had arrived by the early post, nor, when I repeated my visit later, was there any news, either by post or telegram, or from Mrs. Gillow. I paid a furtive visit to the police-station and glanced nervously over the bills on the notice-board, and I made another perambulation of the waterside districts, which occupied me until it was time for me to repair to the station to meet the train by which my friends were expected to arrive, and did, in fact, arrive.

As we walked from the station to my house Jervis looked at me critically from time to time. After one of these inspections he remarked:

"I don't know whether it is my fancy, Strangeways, but it seems to me that the cares of medical practice are affecting your spirits. You look worried."

"I am worried," I replied. "There has been a very disturbing development of that case that I was telling you about."

"The doper, you mean?"

"His wife. She has disappeared. She went out on Saturday night and has not been seen since."

"That sounds rather ominous," said Jervis. "I presume the circumstances—if you know them—could be communicated without any breach of confidence."

"They will have to be made fully public if she doesn't turn up by this evening," I replied, "and I am only too glad of the chance to talk the matter over with you," and forthwith I proceeded to give a circumstantial account of the events connected with the disappearance, not omitting any detail that seemed to have the slightest bearing. And I now felt justified in relating my experience when I was acting for Dr. Pumphrey. The narrative was interrupted by our arrival at my house, but when we had taken our places at the table it was continued and listened to with intense interest by my two friends.

"Well," said Jervis, when I had finished, "it has an ugly look, especially when one considers it in connexion with that affair in London. But there is something to be said for your friend Bundy's suggestion. Don't you think so, Thorndyke?"

"Something, perhaps," Thorndyke agreed, "but not much; and if no letter arrives to-night or to-morrow morning, I should say it is excluded. This lady seems to have had complete confidence in Strangeways and in Mr. Japp. She could depend on their secrecy if she had to move suddenly to a fresh locality; and she seems to have been a responsible person who would not unnecessarily expose them to anxiety about her safety. Moreover, she would know that, if she kept them in the dark, they must unavoidably put the police on her track, which would be the last thing that she would wish."

"Can you make any suggestion as to what has probably happened?" I asked.

"It is not of much use to speculate," replied Thorndyke.

"If we exclude a voluntary disappearance, an accident or sudden illness, as we apparently can, there seems to remain only the possibility of crime. But to the theory of crime—of murder, to put it bluntly—there is a manifest objection. So far as the circumstances are known to us, a murder, if it had occurred, would have been an impromptu murder, committed in a more or less public place. But the first indication of a murder of that kind is usually—the discovery of the body. Here, however, thirty-six hours have elapsed, and no body has come to light. On the other hand, we have to bear in mind that there is a large, tidal river skirting the town. Into that river the missing lady might have fallen accidentally, or have been thrown, dead or alive. But it is not very profitable to speculate. We can neither form any opinion nor take any action until



we have some further facts.”

I must confess that, as I listened to Thorndyke thus calmly comparing the horrible possibilities, I experienced a dreadful sinking of the heart, but yet I realized that this passionless consideration of the essential evidence was more to the point, and promised more result than any amount of unskilful groping under the urge of emotion and personal feeling. And, realizing this, I formed the bold resolution of enlisting Thorndyke’s aid in a regular, professional capacity, and began to cast about for the means of introducing the rather delicate subject. But while I was reflecting the opportunity, was gone, at least for the present. Lunch had virtually come to an end, for Mrs. Dunk had silently and with iron visage just placed the port and the coffee on the table and retired, when, Jervis, who had observed her with evident interest, inquired: “Does that old Sphinx do the cooking, Strangeways?”

“She does everything,” I answered. “I have suggested that she should get some help, but she just growled and ignored the suggestion.”

“Well,” said Jervis, “she doesn’t give you much excuse for growling. She has turned out a lunch that would have done credit to Delmonico’s. Are you coming to the inquest with us? We shall have to be starting in a few minutes.”

“I may as well,” said I. “Then I can bring you back to tea. And I want to make a proposal, which we can discuss as we go along. It is with regard to the case of Mrs. Frood.”

As my two friends looked at me inquiringly but made no remark, I poured out the coffee and continued: “You see, Mrs. Frood was my patient, and, in a way, my friend; in fact, with the exception of Japp, I was the only friend she had in the place. Consequently I take it as my duty to ascertain what has happened to her, and, if she has come to any harm, to see that the wrongdoers are brought to account. Of course, I am not competent to investigate the case myself, but I am in the position to bear any costs that the investigation would entail.”

“Lucky man,” said Jervis. “And what is the proposal?”

“I was wondering,” I replied, a little nervously, “whether I could prevail on you to undertake the case.”

Jervis glanced at his senior, and the latter replied:

“It is just a little premature to speak of a ‘case.’ The missing lady may return or communicate with her friends. If she does not, the inquiry will fall into the hands of the police; and there is no reason to suppose that they will not be fully competent to deal with it. They have more means and facilities than we have. But if the inquiry should become necessary, and the police should be unsuccessful, Jervis and I would be prepared to render you any assistance that we could.”

“On professional terms,” I stipulated.

Thorndyke smiled. “The financial aspects of the case,” said he, “can be considered when they arise. Now, I think, it is time for us to start.”

As we walked down to the building where the inquest was to be held, we pursued the topic, and Thorndyke pointed out my position in the case.

“You notice, Strangeways,” said he, “that you are the principal witness. You are the last person who saw Mrs. Frood before her disappearance, you heard her state her intended movements, you knew her circumstances, you saw and examined her husband, and you alone can give an exact description of her as she was at the time when she disappeared. I would suggest that, during the inquest, which will not interest you, you might usefully try to reconstitute that last interview and make full notes in writing of all that occurred with a very careful and detailed description of the person, clothing, and belongings of the missing lady. The police will want this information, and so shall I, if I am to give any consideration to the case.”

On this suggestion I proceeded to act as soon as we had taken our places at the foot of the long table occupied by the coroner and the jury, detaching myself as well as I could from the matter of the inquest; and by the time that the deliberations were at an end and the verdict agreed upon, I had drafted out a complete set of notes and made two copies, one for the police and one for Thorndyke.

As soon as we were outside the court I presented the latter copy, which Thorndyke read through.

“This is *admirable*, Strangeways,” said he, as he placed it in his note-case. “I must compliment you upon your powers of observation. The description of the missing lady is remarkably clear and exhaustive. And now I would suggest that you call in at Mr. Japp’s office on our way back, and ascertain whether any letter has been received. If there has been no communication we shall have to regard the appearances as suspicious, and calling for investigation.”

Secretly gratified at the interest which Thorndyke seemed to be developing in the mystery, I conducted my friends up the High-street until we reached the office, which I entered, leaving my colleagues outside. Mr. Japp looked up from a letter which he was writing, and Bundy, who had been peeping over the curtain, revolved on his stool and faced me.

“Any news?” I asked.

Japp shook his head gloomily. “Not a sign,” said he.

“I shall wait until the first post is in to-morrow morning, and then, if there are no tidings of her, I shall go across to the police station. Perhaps you had better come with me, as you are able to give the particulars that they will want.”

"Very well," I said, "I will look in at half-past nine"; and with this I was turning away when Bundy inquired: "Are those two toffs outside friends of yours?" and, on my replying in the affirmative, he continued: "They seem to be taking a deuce of an interest in Japp's proclamation. You might tell them that if they happen to have found that key, the money is quite safe. I will see that Japp pays up."

I promised to deliver the message, and, as Bundy craned up to make a further inspection of my colleagues, I departed to join the latter.

"There is no news up to the present," I said, "but Japp proposes to wait until to-morrow morning for a last chance before applying to the police."

"Was that Japp who was inspecting us through that preposterous pair of barnacles?" Jervis asked.

"No," I answered. "That was Bundy. He suspects you of having found that key and of holding on to it until you are sure of the reward."

"What key is it?" asked Jervis. "The key of the strong-room? They seem to be in a rare twitter about it."

"No; it is just a gate-key belonging to a piece of waste land where they are doing some repairs to the old city wall. And, by the way, thereby hangs a tale; a horrible and tragic tale of a convivial bargee, which ought to have a special interest for a pair of medical jurists"—and here I related to them the gruesome story that was told to Bundy and me by the old mortar-mixer.

They both chuckled appreciatively at the denouement, and Jervis remarked:

"It would seem that the late Bill was a rather inflammable gentleman. The yarn recalls the tragic end of Mr. Krook in 'Bleak House,' only that Krook went one better than Bill, for he managed to combust himself in an hour or two without any lime at all."

The story and the comment brought us to my house, which we had no sooner entered than Mrs. Dunk, who seemed to have been lying in wait for us, made her appearance with the tea; and while we were disposing of this refreshment Thorndyke reverted to the case of my missing patient.

"As I am to keep an eye on this case," said he, "I shall want to be kept in touch with it. Of course, the actual investigation—if there has to be one—will need to be conducted on the spot, which is not possible to me. What I suggest is that you write out a detailed account of everything that is known to you in connexion with it. Don't select your facts. Put down everything in any way connected with the case and say all you know about the person concerned—Mrs. Frood herself and everybody who was acquainted with her. Send this statement to me and keep a copy. Then, if any new fact becomes known, let me have it and make a note of it for your own information. You are on the spot and I shall look to you for the data; and if I want any of them amplified or confirmed I shall communicate with you."

"There is one other matter. Do not confide to anyone that you have consulted me or that I am interested in the case; neither to Mr. Japp, to the police, nor to anybody else whatsoever; and I advise you to keep your own interest in the mystery to yourself as far as possible."

"What is the need of this secrecy?" I asked, in some surprise.

"The point is," replied Thorndyke, "that when you are investigating a crime you are playing against the criminal. But if the criminal is unknown to you, you are playing against an unseen adversary. If you are visible to him he can watch your moves and reply to them. Obviously your policy is to keep out of sight and make your moves unseen. And remember that as long as you do not know who the criminal is, you don't know who he is not. Anyone may be the criminal, or may be his unconscious agent or coadjutor. If you make confidences they may be innocently passed on to the guilty parties. So keep your own counsel rigorously. If there has been a crime, that crime has local connexions and probably a local origin. The solution of the mystery will probably be discovered here. And if you intend to take a hand in the solution let it be a lone hand; and keep me informed of everything that you do or observe; and for my part, I will give you all the help I can."

By the time we had finished our tea and our discussion the hour of my friends' departure was drawing nigh. I walked with them to the station, and when I bade them farewell I received a warm invitation to visit them at their chambers in the Temple; an invitation of which I determined to avail myself on the first favourable opportunity.

---

## CHAPTER VIII.— SERGEANT COBBLEDICK TAKES A HAND

Punctually at half-past nine on the following morning I presented myself at the office, and, if I had indulged in any hopes of favourable news—which I had not—they would have been dispelled by a glance at Mr. Japp's troubled face.

"I suppose you have heard nothing?" I said, when we had exchanged brief greetings.

He shook his head gloomily as he opened the cupboard and took out his hat.

"No," he answered, "and I am afraid we never shall."

He sighed heavily, and, putting on his hat, walked slowly to the door. "It is a dreadful affair," he continued, as we went out together. "How she would have hated the idea of it, poor girl! All the horrid publicity, the posters, the sensational newspaper paragraphs, the descriptions of her person and belongings. And then, at the end of it all, God knows what horror may come to light. It won't bear thinking of."

He trudged along at my side with bent head and eyes cast down, and for the remainder of the short journey neither of us spoke. On reaching the police-station we made our way into a small, quiet office, the only tenant of which was a benevolent-looking, bald-headed sergeant, who was seated at a high desk, and, who presented that peculiar, decapitated aspect that appertains to a police officer minus his helmet. As we entered the sergeant laid down his pen and turned to us with a benign smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Japp," said he. "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"I am sorry to say, Sergeant," replied Japp, "that I have come here on very unpleasant business," and he proceeded to give the officer a concise summary of the facts, to which our friend listened with close attention. When it was finished, the sergeant produced a sheet of blue foolscap, and, having folded a wide margin on it, dipped his pen in the ink and began his examination.

"I'd better take the doctor's statement first," said he. "The lady's name is Angelina Frood, married, living apart from husband—I shall want his address presently—last seen alive by—"

"John Strangeways, M.D.," said I, "of Maidstone-road, Rochester."

The sergeant wrote this down, and continued: "Last seen at about 8.30 P.M. on Saturday, 26th April, proceeding towards Chatham, on unknown business. Can you give me a description of her?"

I described her person, assisted by Japp, and the sergeant, having committed the particulars to writing, read them out:

"Age 28, height 5 ft. 7 in., complexion medium, hazel eyes, abundant dark brown hair, strongly marked black eyebrows, nearly meeting over nose."

"No special marks that you know of?"

"No."

"Now, doctor, can you tell us how she was dressed?"

"She was wearing a snuff-brown coat and skirt," I replied, "and a straw hat of the same colour with a broad, dull green band. The hat was fixed on by two hat-pins with silver heads shaped like poppy-capsules. The coat had six buttons, smallish, bronze buttons—about half an inch in diameter—with a Tudor rose embossed on each. Brown suede gloves with fasteners—no buttons—brown silk stockings, and brown suede shoes with small, oval bronze buckles. She had a narrow silk scarf, dull green, with three purple bands at each end—one broad band and two narrow—and knotted fringe at the ends. She wore a small circular brooch with a largish opal in the centre and a border of small pearls, of which one was missing. The missing pearl was in the position of the figure three on a clock dial. She carried a small morocco hand-bag with the initials A. F. stamped on it, which contained a little cardboard box, in which were six white tablets; the box was labelled with one of Dr. Partridge's labels, on which her name was written, and it was wrapped in white paper and sealed with sealing-wax. That is all I can say for certain. But she always wore a wedding-ring, and occasionally an African Zodiac ring; but sometimes she carried this ring in a small purse with metal jaws and a ball fastening. I believe she always carried the purse."

As I gave this description, the sergeant wrote furiously, glancing at me from time to time with an expression of surprise, while Japp sat and stared at me open-mouthed.

"Well, doctor," said the sergeant, when he had taken down my statement and read it out, "if I find myself ailing I'm going to pop along and consult you. I reckon there isn't much that escapes your notice. With regard to that African ring now, I daresay you can't tell us what it is like."

I was, of course, able to describe it in detail, including the initials A. C. inside, and even to give a rough sketch of some of the signs embossed on it, upon which the sergeant chuckled admiringly and wagged his head as he wrote down the description and pinned the sketch on the margin of his paper. The rest of my statement dealt with the last interview and the incidents connected with Nicholas Frood's visits to Rochester, all of which the sergeant listened to with deep interest and committed to writing.

Finally, I recounted the sinister incident—now more sinister than ever—of the murderous assault in the house near Regent's Park, whereat the sergeant looked uncommonly serious and took down the statement verbatim.

"Did you know about this, Mr. Japp?" he asked.

"I knew that something unpleasant had happened," was the reply, "but I didn't know that it was as bad as this."

"Well," said the sergeant, "it gives the present affair rather an ugly look. We shall have to make some inquiries about that gentleman."

Having squeezed me dry, he turned his attention to Japp, from whom he extracted a variety of information, including the address of the banker who paid the allowance to Nicholas Frood, and that of a lady who had formerly been a theatrical colleague of Mrs. Frood's, and with whom Mr. Japp believed the latter had kept up a correspondence.

"You haven't a photograph of the missing lady, I suppose?" said the sergeant.

With evident reluctance Japp drew from his pocket an envelope and produced from it a cabinet photograph, which he looked at sadly for a few moments and then handed to me.

"I brought this photograph with me," he said, "as I knew you would want it, but I rather hope that you won't want to publish it."

"Now, why do you hope that?" the sergeant asked in a soothing and persuasive tone. "You want this lady found—or, at any rate, traced. But what better means can you suggest than publishing her portrait?"

"I suppose you are right," said Japp; "but it is a horrible thing to think of the poor girl's face looking out from posters and newspaper pages."

"It is," the sergeant agreed. "But, you see, if she is alive it is her own doing, and if she is dead it won't affect her."

While they were talking I had been looking earnestly at the beloved face, which I now felt I should never look upon again. It was an excellent likeness, showing her just as I had known her, excepting that it was free from the cloud of trouble that had saddened her expression in these latter days. As the sergeant held out his hand for it, I turned it over and read the photographer's name and address and the register number, and, having made a mental note of them, I surrendered it with a sigh.

Our business was now practically concluded. When we had each read over the statements and added our respective signatures, the sergeant attested them and, having added the date, placed the documents in his desk and rose.

"I am much obliged to you, gentlemen," said he as he escorted us to the door. "If I hear anything that will interest you I will let you know, and if I should want any further information I shall take the liberty of calling on you."

"Well," said Japp, as we turned to walk back, "the fat's in the fire now. I mean to say," he added quickly, "that we've fairly committed ourselves. I hope we haven't been too precipitate. We should catch it if she came back and found that we had raised the hue and cry and set the whole town agog."

"I am afraid there is no hope of that," said I. "At any rate, we had no choice or discretion in the matter. A suspected crime is the business of the police."

Mr. Japp agreed that this was so; and having by this time arrived at the office, we separated, he to enter his premises and I to betake myself to Chatham with no very defined purpose, but lured thither by a vague attraction.

As I walked along the High-street, making occasional digressions into narrow alleys to explore wharves and water-side premises, I turned over the statements that had been given to the police and wondered what they conveyed to our friend, the sergeant, with his presumably extensive experience of obscure crime. To me they seemed to furnish no means whatever of starting an investigation, excepting by inquiring as to the movements of Nicholas Frood, by communicating with Angelina's late colleague or by publishing the photograph. And here I halted to write down in my notebook before I should forget them the name and address of that lady—Miss Cumbers—and of the photographers, together with the number of the photograph; for I had decided to obtain a copy of the latter for myself, and it now occurred to me that I had better get one also for Thorndyke. And this latter reflection reminded me that I had to prepare my précis of the facts for him, and that I should do well to get this done at once while the matter of the two statements was fresh in my mind. Accordingly, as I paced the deck of the Sun Pier, looking up and down the busy river, with its endless procession of barges, bawleys, tugs, and cargo boats, striving ineffectually to banish the dreadful thought that, perchance, somewhere, at this very moment there was floating on its turbid waters the corpse of my dear, lost friend: I tried to recall and write down the substance of Japp's statement, as I had heard it made and had afterwards read it. At length, finding the neighbourhood of the river too disturbing, I left the pier and took my way homewards, calling in at a stationer's on the way to provide myself with a packet of sermon paper on which to write out my summary.

When Thorndyke had given me my instructions, they had appeared to me a little pedantic. The full narrative which he asked for of all the events, without selection as to relevancy, and the account of what I knew of all the persons concerned in the case, seemed an excessive formality. But when I came to write the case out the excellence of his method became apparent in two respects. In the first place, the ordered narrative put the events in their proper sequence and exhibited their connexions; and in the second, the endeavour to state all that I knew, particularly of the persons, showed me how very little that was. Of the persons in any way concerned in the case there were but five: Angelina herself, her husband,

Mrs. Gillow, Mr. Japp, and Bundy. Of the first two I knew no more than what I had observed myself and what Angelina had told me; of the last three I knew practically nothing. Not that this appeared to me of the slightest importance, but I had my instructions, and in compliance with them I determined to make such cautious inquiries as would enable me to give Thorndyke at least a few particulars of them. And this during the next few days I did; and I may as well set down here the scanty and rather trivial information that my inquiries elicited, and which I duly sent on to Thorndyke in a supplementary report.

Mrs. Gillow was the wife of a mariner who was the second mate of a sailing ship that plied to Australia, who had now been away about four months and was expected home shortly. She was a native of the locality and had known Mr. Japp for several years. She occupied the part of the house above the ground floor and kept no servant or dependent, living quite alone when her husband was at sea. She had no children. Her acquaintance with Angelina began when the latter became the tenant of the ground floor and basement; it was but a slight acquaintance, and she knew nothing of Angelina's antecedents or affairs excepting that she had left her husband.

Mr. Japp was a native of Rochester and had lived in the town all his life, having taken over his business establishment from his late partner, a Mr. Borden. He was a bachelor and was related to Angelina by marriage, his brother—now deceased—having married Angelina's aunt.

As to Bundy, he was hardly connected with the case at all, since he had seen Angelina only once or twice and had scarcely exchanged a dozen words with her. Moreover, he had but recently come to Rochester—about six weeks ago, I gathered—having answered an advertisement of Japp's for an assistant with a view to partnership; and the actual deed had not yet been executed, though the two partners were evidently quite well satisfied with one another.

That was all the information that I had to give Thorndyke; and with the exception of the London incident it amounted to nothing. Nevertheless, it was as well to have established the fact that if anyone were concerned in Angelina's disappearance, that person would have to be sought elsewhere than in Rochester.

Having sent off my summary and read over again and again the copy which I had kept, I began to realize the justice of Thorndyke's observation that the inquiry was essentially a matter for the police, who had both the experience and the necessary facilities; for whenever I tried to think of some plan for tracing my lost friend, I was brought up against the facts that I had nothing whatever to go on and no idea how to make a start. As to Thorndyke, he had no data but those that I had given him, and I realized clearly that these were utterly insufficient to form the basis of any investigation; and I found myself looking expectantly to the police to produce some new facts that might throw at least a glimmer of light on this dreadful and baffling mystery.

I had not very long to wait. On the Friday after our call on the sergeant, I was sitting after lunch in my dining-room with a book in my hand, while my thoughts strayed back to those memorable evenings of pleasant converse with the sweet friend who, I felt, had gone from me forever, when the door bell rang, and Mrs. Dunk presently announced:

"Sergeant Cobbledick."

"Show him in here, Mrs. Dunk," said I, laying aside my book, and rising to receive my visitor; who proved to be, as I had expected, the officer who had taken our statements. He entered with his helmet in his hand, and greeted me with a smile of concentrated benevolence.

"Sit down, Sergeant," said I, offering him an easy chair. "I hope you have some news for us."

"Yes," he replied, beaming on me. "I am glad to say we are getting on as well as we can expect. We have made quite a nice little start."

He spoke as if he had something particularly gratifying to communicate, and, having carefully placed his helmet on the table, he drew from his pocket a small paper packet, which he opened with great deliberation, extracting from it a small object, which he held out in the palm of his hand.

"There, Doctor," said he, complacently; "what do you say to that?"

I looked at the object, and my heart seemed to stand still. It was Angelina's brooch! I stared at it in speechless dismay for some moments. At length I asked, huskily:

"Where did you get it?"

"I found it," said the sergeant, gazing fondly at the little trinket, "where I hardly hoped to find it—in a pawnbroker's shop in Chatham."

"Did you discover who pawned it?" I asked.

"In a sense, yes," the sergeant replied with a bland smile.

"How do you mean—in a sense?" I inquired.

"I mean that his name was John Smith—only, of course, it wasn't; and that his address was 26, Swoffer's-alley, Chatham—only he didn't live there, because there is no such number. You see, Doctor, John Smith is the name of nearly every man who gives a false description of himself; and I went straight off to Swoffer's-alley—it was close by—and found that there wasn't any number 26."

"Then you really don't know who pawned it?"

"We won't exactly say that," he replied. "I got a fair description of the man from the pawnbroker's wife, who made out the ticket and says she could swear to the man if she saw him. He was a seafaring man, dressed in sailor's clothes—a peaked cap and pea-jacket—a shortish fellow, rather sunburnt, with a small, stubby, dark moustache and dark hair, and a mole or wart on the left side of his nose, near the tip. She asked him where he had got the brooch, and he said it had belonged to his old woman. I should say he probably picked it up."

"Why do you think so?" I asked.

"Well, if he had—er—got it in any other way, he would hardly have popped it in Chatham forty-eight hours after the—after it was lost, with the chance that the pawnbrokers had already been notified—he pawned it on Monday night."

"Then," said I, "if he picked it up, he isn't of much importance; and in any case you don't know who he is."

"Oh, but he is of a good deal of importance," said the sergeant. "I've no doubt he picked it up, but that is only a guess. He may have got it the other way. But at any rate, he had it in his possession and he will have to give an account of how he obtained it. The importance of it is this: taken with the disappearance, the finding of this brooch raises a strong suspicion that a crime has been committed, and if we could find out where it was picked up, we should have a clue to the place where the affair took place. I want that man very badly, and I'm going to have a good try to get him."

"I don't quite see how," said I. "You haven't much to go on."

"I've got his nose to go on," replied the sergeant.

"But there must be plenty of other men with moles on their noses."

"That's their look-out," he retorted. "If I come across a man who answers the description, I shall hang on to him until Mrs. Pawnbroker has had a look at him. Of course, if she says he's not the man, he'll be released."

"But she won't," said I. "If he has a mole on his nose, she will be perfectly certain that he is the man."

The sergeant smiled benignly. "There's something in that," he admitted. "Ladies are a bit cock-sure when it comes to identification. But you can generally check 'em by other evidence. And if this chap picked the brooch up, he would be pretty certain to tell us all about it when he heard where it came from. Still, we haven't got him yet."

For a while we sat, without speaking, each pursuing his own thoughts. To me, this dreadful discovery, though it did but materialize the vague fears that had been surging through my mind, had fallen like a thunderbolt. For, behind those fears, I now realized that there had lurked a hope that the mystery might presently be resolved by the return of the lost one. Now that hope had suddenly become extinct. I knew that she had gone out of my life forever. She was dead. This poor little waif that had drifted back into our hands brought the unmistakable message of her death, with horrible suggestions of hideous and sordid tragedy. I shuddered at the thought; and in that moment, from the grief and horror that possessed my soul, there was born a passion of hatred for the wretch who had done this thing and a craving for revenge.

"There's another queer thing that has come to light," the sergeant resumed at length. "There may be nothing in it, but it's a little queer. About the husband, Nicholas Frood."

"What about him?" I asked, eagerly.

"Why, he seems to have disappeared, too. Of course, you understand, Doctor, that what I'm telling you is confidential. We are not talking about this affair outside, and we aren't telling the Press much, at present."

"Naturally," said I. "You can trust me to keep my own counsel, and yours, too."

"I'm sure I can. Well, about this man, Frood. It seems that last Friday he went away from his lodgings for a couple of days; but he hasn't come back, and nobody knows what has become of him. He was supposed to be going to Brighton, where he has some relatives from whom he gets a little assistance occasionally, but they have seen or heard nothing of him. Quaint, isn't it? You said you saw him here on the Monday."

"Yes, and I haven't seen him since, though I have kept a look-out for him. But he may have been here, all the same. It looks decidedly suspicious."

"It is queer," the sergeant agreed, "but we've no evidence that he has been in this neighbourhood."

"Have you made any other inquiries?" I asked.

"We looked up that lady, Miss Cumbers, but we got nothing out of her. She had had a letter from Mrs. Frood on the 24th—yesterday week—quite an ordinary letter, giving no hint of any intention to go away from Rochester. So there you are. The mystery seems to be concerned entirely with this neighbourhood, and I expect we shall have to solve it on the spot."

This last observation impressed me strongly. The sergeant's view of the case was the same as Thorndyke's, and expressed in almost the same words.

"Have you any theory as to what has actually happened?" I asked.

The sergeant smiled in his benignant fashion. "It isn't much use inventing theories," said he. "We've got to get the facts before we can do anything. Still, looking at the case as we find it, there are two or three things that hit us in the face. There is a strong suspicion of murder, there is no trace of the body, and there is a big tidal river close at hand. On Saturday night

it was high water at half-past eleven, so there wouldn't have been much of the shore uncovered at, say, half-past nine, and there would have been plenty of water at any of the piers or causeways."

"Then you think it probable that she was murdered and her body flung into the river?"

"It is the likeliest thing, so far as we can judge. There is the river, and there is no sign of the body on shore. But, as I say, it is no use guessing. We've got people watching the river from Allington Lock to Sheerness, and that's all we can do in that line. The body is pretty certain to turn up, sooner or later. Of course, until it does, there is no real criminal case; and even when we've got the body, we may not be much nearer getting the murderer. Excepting the man Frood, there is no one who seems to have had any motive for making away with her; and if it was just a casual robbery with murder it is unlikely that we shall ever spot the man at all."

Having given expression to this rather pessimistic view, the sergeant rose, and, picking up his helmet, took his departure, after promising to let me know of any further developments.

As soon as he was gone, I wrote down the substance of what he had said, and then embodied it in a report for Thorndyke. While I was thus occupied, the afternoon post was delivered, and included a packet from the London photographer, to whom I had written, enclosing two copies of the photograph of Angelina that Mr. Japp had handed to the sergeant. Of these, I enclosed one copy in my communication to Thorndyke, on the bare chance that it might be of some assistance to him, and, having closed up the large envelope and stamped it, I went forth to drop it into the post-box.



## CHAPTER IX. — JETSAM

That portion of Chatham High-street which lies adjacent to the River Medway presents a feature that is characteristic of old riverside towns in the multitude of communications between the street and the shore. Some of these are undisguised entrances to wharves, some are courts or small thoroughfares lined with houses and leading to landing-stages, while others are mere passages or flights of steps, opening obscurely and inconspicuously on the street by narrow apertures, unnoticed by the ordinary wayfarer and suggesting the burrows of some kind of human water-rat.

In the days that followed the sergeant's visit to me I made the acquaintance of all of them. Now I would wander down the cobbled cartway that led to a wharf, there to cast a searching eye over the muddy fore-shore or scan the turbid water at high tide as it eddied between the barges and around the piles. Or I would dive into the mouths of the burrows, creeping down slimy steps and pursuing the tortuous passages through a world of uncleanness until I came out upon the shore, where the fresh smell of seaweed mingled with odours indescribable. I began to be an object of curiosity—and perhaps of some suspicion—to the denizens of the little, ruinous, timber houses that lined these alleys, and of frank interest to the children who played around the rubbish heaps or dabbled in the grey mud. But never did my roving eye light upon that which it sought with such dreadful expectation.

One afternoon, about a week after the sergeant's visit, when I was returning home from one of these explorations, I observed a man on my doorstep as I approached the house. His appearance instantly aroused my attention, for he was dressed in the amphibious style adopted by waterside dwellers, and he held something in his hand at which he looked from time to time. Before I reached the door it had opened and admitted him, and when I arrived I found him in the hall nervously explaining his business to Mrs. Dunk.

"Here is the doctor," said the latter; "you'd better tell him about it."

The man turned to me and held out an amazingly dirty fist. "I've got something here, sir," said he, "what belongs to you, I think." Here he unclosed his hand and exhibited a little cardboard box bearing one of Dr. Partridge's labels. It was smeared with mud and grime, but I recognized it instantly; indeed, when I took it with trembling fingers from his palm and looked at it closely, the name, "Mrs. Frood," was still decipherable under the smears of dirt.

"Where did you find this?" I asked.

"I picked it up on the strand," he replied, "about halfway betwixt the Sun Pier and the end of Ship Alley, and just below spring tide high-water mark. Is it any good?"

"Yes," I answered; "it is very important. I will get you to walk along with me to the police station."

"What for?" he demanded suspiciously. "I don't want no police stations. If it's any good, give us what you think it's worth, and have done with it."

I gave him half-a-crown to allay his suspicions, and then said: "You had better come with me to the station. I expect the police will want you to show them exactly where you found this box and help them to search the place; and I will see that you are paid for your trouble."

"But look 'ere, mister," he objected; "what's the police got to do with this 'ere box?"

I explained the position to him briefly, and then, suddenly, his face lit up. "I know," he said excitedly. "I seen the bills stuck up on the dead-'ouse door. And d'you mean to say as this 'ere box was 'ers? Cos if it was it's worth more 'n 'arf-a-crown."

"Perhaps it is," said I. "We will hear what the sergeant thinks," and with this I opened the door and went out, and my new acquaintance now followed with the greatest alacrity, taking the opportunity, as we walked along, to remind me of my promise and to offer tentative suggestions as to the scale of remuneration for his services.

Our progress along the High-street was not unnoticed. Doubtless, we appeared a somewhat ill-assorted pair, for I observed a good many persons turn to look at us curiously, and when we passed the office, on the opposite side of the road, I saw Bundy's face rise above the curtain with an expression of undissembled curiosity.

On arriving at the station, I inquired for Sergeant Cobbledick, and was fortunate enough to find him in his office. As I entered with my companion, he bestowed on the latter a quick glance of professional interest and then greeted me with a genial smile. It was hardly necessary for me to state my business, for the single quick glance of his experienced eye at my companion had furnished the diagnosis. I had only to produce the box and indicate the finder.

"This looks like a lead," said he, reaching his helmet down from a peg. "What's your name, sonny, and where do you live?"

Sonny affirmed, with apparent reluctance, that his name was Samuel Hooper and that his abode was situated in Foul Anchor Alley; and when these facts had been committed to writing by the sergeant, the latter put on his helmet and invited the said Hooper to "come along," evidently assuming that I was to form one of the party.

As we approached the office this time I saw Bundy from afar off; and by the time we were abreast of the house he was joined by Japp, who must have stood upon tip-toe to bring his eyes above the curtain. Both men watched us with intense interest, and we had barely passed the house when Bundy's head suddenly disappeared, and a few moments later its owner



emerged from the doorway and hurriedly crossed the road.

"What is in the wind, Doctor?" he asked, as he came up with us. "Japp is in a rare twitter. Have they found the body?"

"No," I answered; "only the little box that was in her hand-bag. We are going to have a look at the place where it was found."

"To see if the bag is there, too?" said he. "It probably is, unless it has been picked up already. I think I'll come along with you, if you don't object. Then I can give Japp all the news."

I did not object, nor did the sergeant—verbally; but his expression conveyed to me that he would willingly have dispensed with Mr. Bundy's society. However, he was a suave and tactful man, and he made the best of the unwelcome addition to the party, even going so far as to offer the box for Bundy's inspection.

"It is pretty dirty," the latter observed, holding it delicately in his fingers. "Wasn't it wrapped in paper when you gave it to her, Doctor?"

"It was wrapped up in paper when I found it," said Hooper, "but I took off the paper to see what was inside, and, yer see, my 'ands wasn't very clean, a-grubbin' about in the mud." In conclusive confirmation of this statement, he exhibited them to us, and then gave them a perfunctory wipe on his trousers.

"What struck me," said Bundy, "was that it doesn't seem to have been in the water."

"It hadn't," said Hooper. "The outside paper was quite clean when I picked it up."

"It looks," observed the sergeant, "as if they had turned out the bag and thrown away what they didn't want; and then they probably threw away the bag, too. It is ten chances to one that it has been picked up, but if it hasn't it will probably be somewhere along the high-water mark. How are the tides, Hooper?"

"Just past the bottom of the nips," was the reply; and a few moments later our guide added; "It's down here," and plunged into what looked like an open doorway. We followed, one at a time, cautiously descending a flight of very filthy stone steps and stooping to avoid knocking our heads against the overhanging story of an ancient timber house. At the bottom we proceeded, still in single file, along a narrow, crooked passage between grimy walls and ruinous tarred fences until, after many twistings and turnings, we came to a flight of rough wooden steps, thickly coated with yellow mud and slimy sea-grass, which led down to the shore.

"Now," said the sergeant, turning up the bottoms of his trousers, "show us exactly where you picked the box up."

"It was just oppersight that there schooner," said our guide, taking his way along the muddy streak between the two lines of jetsam that corresponded to the springtide and neap-tide high-water marks; "betwixt her and the wharf."

We followed him, picking our way daintly, and, having inspected the spot that he indicated, squeezed in between the schooner's bilge and the piles and raked over the rubbish that the tide had deposited on the shore.

"Was you looking for anything in partickler?" Hooper asked.

"We are looking for a small leather handbag," replied the sergeant, "or anything else we can find."

"A 'and-bag wouldn't 'ave been 'ere long," Hooper remarked. "Somebody would 'ave twigged it pretty quick, unless it got hidden under something big." He straightened himself up and gave a searching look up and down the shore; and then suddenly he started off with an air of definite purpose. Glancing in the direction towards which he was shaping his course, I observed, in the corner of a stage that jutted out from the quay, a heap of miscellaneous rubbish surmounted by the mortal remains of a large hamper. It looked a likely spot and we all followed, though not at his pace, being somewhat more fastidious as to where we stepped. Consequently he arrived considerably before us, and having flung away the hamper, began eagerly to grub among the underlying raffle. Just as we had come within a dozen yards of him, anxiously making the perilous passage over a stretch of peculiarly slimy mud, he stood up with a howl of triumph, and we all stopped to look at him. His arm was raised above his head, and from his hand hung by its handle a little morocco bag.

"There's no need to ask you to identify it, Doctor," said the sergeant, as he despoiled the water-rat of his prize. "It fits your description to a T."

Nevertheless, he handed it to me, drawing my attention to the initials "A. F." stamped on the leather. I turned it over gloomily, noting that it showed signs of having been in the water—though not, apparently, for any considerable time—and that none of its contents remained excepting a handkerchief tucked into an inner pocket, and returned it to him without remark.

"Now, look here, Hooper," said he, "I want you to stay down here and keep an eye on this shore until I send some of our men up, and then you can stay and help them, if you like. And remember that anything that you find—no matter what it is—you keep and hand over to me or my men; and you will be paid the full value and a reward for finding it as well. Do you understand that?"

"I do," replied Hooper. "That's a fair offer, and you can depend on me to do the square thing. I'll stay down here until your men come."

Thereupon we left him, pursuing our way along the shore and keeping an attentive eye on all the rubbish and litter that we passed, until we came to a set of rough wooden steps by the Ship Pier.

"I had no authority to offer to pay that chap," said the sergeant, as we walked up Ship Alley, "but the superintendent has put me on to work at this case, and I'm not going to lose any chances for the sake of a few shillings. It is well to keep in with these waterside people."

"Have you published a list of things that are likely to turn up?" Bundy asked.

"We've posted up a description of the missing woman with full details of her dress and belongings," replied the sergeant. "But perhaps a list of the things that might be washed up would be useful. People are such fools. Yes, it's a good idea. I'll have a list printed of everything that might get loose and be picked up, and stick it up on the wharves and waterside premises. Then there will be nothing left to their imagination."

At the top of Ship Alley he halted, and having thanked me warmly for my prompt and timely information, turned towards Chatham Town, leaving me and Bundy to retrace our steps westward.

"That was a bit of luck," the latter remarked, "finding that bag; and he hardly deserved it. He ought to have had that piece of shore under observation from the first. But he was wise to make an acceptable offer to that bodysnatcher, Hooper. I expect he lives on the shore, watching for derelict corpses and any unconsidered trifles that the river may throw up. I see there is a reward of two pounds for the body."

"You have seen the bills, then?"

"Yes. We have got one to stick up in the office window. Rather gruesome, isn't it?"

"Horrible," I said; and for a while we walked on in silence. Presently Bundy exclaimed: "By Jove! I had nearly forgotten. I have a message for you. It is from Japp. He is taking a distinguished American archaeologist for a personally conducted tour round the town to show him the antiquities, and he thought you might like to join the party."

"That is very good of him," said I. "It sounds as if it should be rather interesting."

"It will be," said Bundy. "Japp is an enthusiast in regard to architecture and ancient buildings, and he is quite an authority on the antiquities of this town. You'd better come. The American—his name is Willard—is going to charter a photographer to come round with us and take records of all the objects of interest, and we shall be able to get copies of any photographs that we want. What do you say?"

"When does the demonstration take place?"

"The day after tomorrow. We shall do the Cathedral in the morning and the castle and the town in the afternoon. Shall I tell Japp you will join the merry throng?"

"Yes, please; and convey my very warm thanks for the invitation."

"I will," said he, halting as we arrived at the office, "unless you would like to come in and convey the joyful tidings yourself."

"No," he replied, "I won't come in now. I will get home and change my boots."

"Yes, by Jingo!" Bundy agreed, with a rueful glance at his own delicate shoes. "Mudlarking calls for a special outfit. And I clean my own shoes; but I'd rather do that than face Mrs. Dunk."

With this he retired up the steps, and I turned homeward, deciding to profit by his last remark and forestall unfavourable comment by shedding my boots on the doormat.

---

## CHAPTER X. — WHICH DEALS WITH ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND A BLUE BOAR

On arriving home, I found awaiting me a letter from Dr. Thorndyke suggesting—in response to a general invitation that I had given him some time previously—that he should come down on Saturday to spend the week-end with me. Of course, I adopted the suggestion with very great pleasure, not a little flattered at receiving so distinguished a guest; and now I was somewhat disposed to regret my engagement to attend Mr. Japp's demonstration. However, as Thorndyke was not due until lunch time, I should have an opportunity of modifying my arrangement, if necessary.

But, as events turned out, I congratulated myself warmly on not having missed the morning visit to the Cathedral. It was a really remarkable experience; and not the least interesting part of it to me was the revelation of the inner personality of my friend, Mr. Japp. That usually dry and taciturn man of business was transfigured in the presence of the things that he really loved. He glowed with enthusiasm; he exhaled the very spirit of mediaeval romance; at every pore he exuded strange and recondite knowledge. Obedient to his behest, the ancient building told the vivid story of its venerable past, presented itself in its rude and simple beginnings; exhibited the transformations that had marked the passing centuries; peopled itself with the illustrious departed, whose heirs we were and whose resting-places we looked upon; and became to us a living thing whose birth and growth we could watch, whose vicissitudes and changing conditions we could trace until they brought us to its august old age. Under his guidance we looked down the long vista of the past, from the time when simple masons scalloped the Norman capitals within, while illustrious craftsmen fashioned the wonderful west doorway, to that last upheaval that swept away the modern shoddy and restored to the old fabric its modest comeliness.

Architectural antiquities, however, are not the especial concern of this history, though they were not without a certain influence in its unfolding. Accordingly, I shall not follow our progress—attended by the indispensable photographic recording angel—through nave and aisles, form choir to transepts, and from tower to undercroft. At the close of a delightful morning I betook myself homeward, charged with new and varied knowledge, and with a cordial invitation to my guest to join the afternoon's expedition if he were archaeologically inclined.

Apparently he was, for when, shortly after his arrival, I conveyed the invitation to him he accepted at once.

"I always take the opportunity," said he, "of getting what is practically first-hand information. Your friend, Mr. Japp, is evidently an enthusiast; he has expert technical knowledge, and he has apparently filled in his detail by personal investigation. A man like that can tell you more in an hour than guide-books could tell you in a lifetime. We had better get a large-scale map of the town to enable us to follow the description, unless you have one."

"I haven't," said I, "but we can get one on the way to the rendezvous. You got my report, I suppose?"

"Yes," he replied, "I got it yesterday. That, in fact, was what determined me to come down. The discovery of that bag upon the shore dispels to some extent the ambiguity of our data. The finding of the brooch did not enlighten us much. It might simply have been dropped and picked up by some casual wayfarer. In fact, that is what the appearances suggested, for it is manifestly improbable that a person who had committed a crime would take the risk of pawning the product of robbery with violence in the very neighbourhood where the crime had been committed, and after an interval of time which would allow of the hue and cry having already been raised. Your sergeant is probably right in assuming that the man with the mole had nothing to do with the affair. But the finding of this bag is a different matter. It connects that disappearance with the river and it offers a strong suggestion of crime."

"Don't you think it possible that she might have fallen into the river accidentally?" I asked.

"It is possible," he admitted. "But that is where the significance of the brooch comes in. If she had fallen into the river from some wharf or pier, there does not seem to be any reason why the brooch should have become detached and fallen on land—as it apparently did. The finding of the bag where it had been thrown up by the river, and of the brooch on shore, suggests a struggle on land previous to the fall into the water. You don't happen, I suppose, to know what the bag contained?"

"I don't—excepting the packet of tablets that I gave her. When the bag was found, it was empty; at least, it contained only the handkerchief, as I mentioned in my report."

"Yes," he said reflectively. "By the way, I must compliment you on those reports. They are excellent, and with regard to this one, there are two or three rather curious circumstances. First, as to the packet of tablets. You mention that it had not been unwrapped and that, when it was found, the paper was quite clean. Therefore it had never been in the water. Therefore it had been taken out of the bag—by somebody with moderately clean hands—before the latter was dropped into the river; and it must have been thrown away on the shore above highwater mark. Incidentally, since the disappearance occurred—presumably—on the evening of the 26th of April, and the packet was found on the 7th of May, it had been lying on the shore for a full ten days. Perhaps there is nothing very remarkable in that; but the point is that Mrs. Frood was carrying the bag in her hand and she would almost certainly have dropped it if there had been any struggle. How, then, did the bag come to be in the river, and how came some of its contents to be found on the shore clean and free from any traces of submersion?"

"We can only suppose," said I, with an inward shudder—for the discussion of these hideous details made my very flesh creep—"that the murderer picked up the bag when he had thrown the body into the river, took out any articles of value, if

there were any, and threw the rest on the shore.”

“Yes,” agreed Thorndyke, a little doubtfully, “that would seem to be what happened. And in that case, we should have to assume that the place where the packet was found was, approximately, the place where the crime was committed. For, as the packet was never immersed, it could not have been carried to that place by the tide, and one cannot think of any other agency by which it could have been moved. Its clean and unopened condition seems to exclude human agency. The question then naturally arises, Is the place where the packet was found, a place at, or near, which the tragedy could conceivably have occurred? What do you say to that?”

I considered for a few moments, recalling the intricate and obscure approach of the shore and the absence of anything in the nature of a public highway.

“I can only say,” I replied at length, “that it seems perfectly inconceivable that Mrs. Frood could have been at that place, or even near it, unless she went there for some specific purpose—unless, for instance, she were lured there in some way. It is a place that is, I should say, unknown to any but the waterside people.”

“We must go there and examine the place carefully,” said he, “for if it is, as you say, a place to which no one could imaginably have strayed by chance, that fact has an important evidential bearing.”

“Do you think it quite impossible that the package could have been carried to that place and dropped there?”

“Not impossible, of course,” he replied, “but I can think of no reasonably probable way in which it could have happened, supposing the murderer to have pocketed it, and afterwards to have thrown it away. That would be a considered and deliberate act; and it is almost inconceivable that he should not have opened the packet to see what was inside, and that he should have dropped it on the dry beach when the river was close at hand. Remember that the bag was found quite near, and that it had been in the water.”

“And assuming the crime to have been committed at that place, what would it prove?”

“In the first place,” he replied, “it would pretty definitely exclude the theory of accidental death. Then it would suggest at least a certain amount of premeditation, since the victim would have had, as you say, to be enticed to that unlikely spot. And it would suggest that the murderer was a person acquainted with the locality.”

“One of the waterside people,” said I. “They are a pretty shady lot, but I don’t see why any of them should want to murder her.”

“It is not impossible,” said he. “She was said to be shopping in Chatham, and she might have had a well-filled purse and allowed it to be seen. But that is mere speculation. The fact is that we have no data at present. We know practically nothing about Mrs. Frood. We can’t say if she had any secret enemies, or if there was anyone who might have profited by her death or have had any motive for making away with her.”

“We know something about her husband,” said I, “and that he has disappeared in a rather mysterious fashion; and that his disappearance coincides with that of his wife.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed, “those are significant facts. But we mustn’t lose sight of the legal position. Until the body is recovered, there is no evidence of death. Until the death is proved, no charge of murder can be sustained. When the body is found it will probably furnish some evidence as to how the death occurred, if it is recovered within a reasonable time. As a matter of fact, it is rather remarkable that it has not yet been found. The death occurred—presumably—nearly a fortnight ago. Considering how very much frequented this river is, it is really rather unaccountable that the body has not come to light. But I suppose it is time that we started for the rendezvous.”

I looked at my watch and decided that it was, and we accordingly set forth in the direction of the office, which was the appointed meeting-place, calling at a stationer’s to provide ourselves each with a map. We chose the six inch town plan, which contained the whole urban area, including the winding reaches of the river, folding them so as to show at an opening the peninsula on which the city of Rochester is built.

“A curious loop of the river, this,” said Thorndyke, scanning the map as we went along. “Rather like that of the Thames at the Isle of Dogs. You notice that there are quite a number of creeks on the low shore at both sides. Those will be places to watch. A floating body has rather a tendency to get carried into shallow creeks and to stay there. But I have no doubt the longshoremen are keeping an eye on them as a reward has been offered. Perhaps we might be able to go down and have a look at the shore when we have finished our perambulation of the town.”

“I don’t see why not,” I replied, though, to tell the truth, I was not very keen on this particular exploration. To Thorndyke this quest was just an investigation to be pursued with passionless care and method. To me it was a tragedy that would colour my whole life. To him, Angelina was but a missing woman whose disappearance had to be explained by patient inquiry. To me she was a beloved friend whose loss would leave me with a life-long sorrow. Of course, he was not aware of this; he had no suspicion of the shuddering horror that his calm, impersonal examination of the evidential details produced in me. Nor did I intend that he should. It was my duty and my privilege to give him what assistance I could, and keep my emotions to myself.

“You will bear in mind,” said he, as we approached the office, “that my connexion with the case of Mrs. Frood is not to be referred to. I am simply a friend staying with you for a day or two.”

“I won’t forget,” said I, “though I don’t quite see why it should matter.”

"It probably doesn't matter at all," he replied. "But one never knows. Facts which might readily be spoken of before a presumably disinterested person might be withheld from one who was known to be collecting evidence for professional purposes. At any rate, I make it a rule to keep out of sight as far as possible."

These observations brought us to the office, where we found our three friends together with a young man, who was apparently acting as deputy during the absence of the partners, and the photographer. I presented Thorndyke to my friends, and when the introduction had been made Mr. Japp picked up his hat, and turned to the deputy.

"You know where to find me, Stevens," he said, "if I should be really wanted—really, you understand. But I don't particularly want to be found. Shall we start now? I propose to begin at the bridge, follow the Highstreet as far as Eastgate House, visit Restoration House, trace the city wall on the southwest side, and look over the castle. By that time we shall be ready for tea. After tea we can trace the north-east part of the wall and the gates that opened through it, and that will finish our tour of inspection."

Hereupon the procession started, Mr. Japp and his guest leading, Thorndyke, Bundy, and I following, and the photographer bringing up the rear.

"Let me see," said Bundy, looking up at Thorndyke with a sort of pert shyness, "weren't you down here a week or two ago?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "and I think I had the honour of being inspected by you while I was reading your proclamation respecting a certain lost key."

"You had," said Bundy; "in fact, I may say that you raised false hopes in my partner and me. We thought you were going to find it."

"What, for ten shillings!" exclaimed Thorndyke.

"We would have raised the fee if you had made a firm offer," said Bundy, removing his eyeglass to polish it with his handkerchief. "It was a valuable key. Belonged to a gate that encloses part of the city wall."

"Indeed!" said Thorndyke. "I don't wonder you were anxious about it considering what numbers of dishonest persons there are about. Ha! Here is the bridge. Let us hear what Mr. Japp has to say about it."

Mr. Japp's observations were concise. Having cast a venomous glance at the unlovely structure, he turned his back on it and remarked acidly: "That is the new bridge. It is, as you see, composed of iron girders. It is not an antiquity, and I hope it never will be. Let us forget it and go on to the Guildhall." He strode forward doggedly and Bundy turned to us with a grin.

"Poor old Japp," said he, "he does hate that bridge. He has an engraving of the old stone one in his rooms, and I've seen him stand in front of it and groan. And really you can't wonder. It is an awful come-down. Just think what the town must have looked like from across the river when that stone bridge was standing."

Here we halted opposite the Guildhall, and when we had read the inscription, admired the magnificent ship weathercock—said to be a model of the Rodney—and listened to Japp's observations on the architectural features of the building, the photographer was instructed to operate on its exterior while we entered to explore the Justice Room and examine the portraits. From the Guildhall we passed on to the Corn Exchange, the quaint and handsome overhanging clock of which had evidently captured Mr. Willard's fancy.

"That clock," said he, "is a stroke of genius. It gives a character to the whole street. But what in creation induced your City Fathers to allow that charming little building to be turned into a picture theatre?"

Japp shook his head and groaned. "You may well ask that," said he, glaring viciously at the inane posters and the doorway, decorated in the film taste. "If good Sir Cloudesley Shovel, who gave it to the town, could rise from his grave and look at it, now he'd—bah! The crying need of this age is some means of protecting historic buildings from town councils. To these men an ancient building is just old-fashioned—out-of-date; a thing to be pulled down and replaced by something smart and up-to-date in the corrugated iron line." He snorted fiercely, and as the photographer dismounted his camera, he turned and led the way up the street. I lingered to help the photographer with his repacking, and meanwhile Thorndyke and Bundy walked on together, chatting amicably and suggesting to my fancy an amiable mastiff accompanied by a particularly well-groomed fox terrier.

"Do you usually give your patients a week-end holiday?" Bundy was inquiring as I overtook them.

"I haven't any patients," replied Thorndyke. "My medical practice is conducted mostly in the Law Courts."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Bundy. "Do you mean that you live by resuscitating moribund jurymen and fattening up murderers for execution, and that sort of thing?"

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "Nothing so harmless. I am what is known as a Medical Expert. I give opinions on medical questions that affect legal issues."

"Then you are really a sort of lawyer?"

"Yes. A medico-legal hybrid; a sort of centaur or merman, with a doctor's head and a lawyer's tail."

"Well," said Bundy, "there are some queer professions; I once knew a chap in the furniture trade who described himself as a 'worm-eater'—drilled worm-holes in faked antiques, you know."

"And what," asked Thorndyke, "might be the analogy that you are suggesting? You don't propose to associate me with the diet of worms, I hope."

"Certainly not," said Bundy, "though I suppose your practice is sometimes connected with exhumations. But I was thinking that you must know quite a lot about crime."

"A good deal of my practice is concerned with criminal cases," Thorndyke admitted.

"Then you will be rather interested in our local mystery. Has the doctor told you about it?"

"You mean the mystery of the disappearing lady? But of what interest should it be to me? I was not acquainted with her."

"I meant a professional interest. But I suppose you are not taking a 'bus-man's holiday': don't want to be bothered with mysteries that don't concern you. Still, I should like to hear your expert opinion on the case."

"You mistake my functions," said Thorndyke. "A common witness testifies to facts known to himself. An expert witness interprets facts presented to him by others. Present me your facts, and I will try to give you an interpretation of them."

"But there are no facts. That is what constitutes the mystery."

"Then there is nothing to interpret. It is a case for the police, and not for the scientific expert."

Here our conversation was interrupted by our arrival at the House of the Six Poor Travellers, and by a learned disquisition by Japp on the connotation of the word Proctor—which, it appeared, was sometimes used in the Middle Ages in the sense of a cadger or swindler. Thence we proceeded to Eastgate House, where Japp mounted his hobby and discoursed impressively on the subject of ceilings, taking as his text a specimen modelled *in situ*, and bearing the date 1590.

"The fellow who put up that ceiling," said he, "took his time about it, no doubt. But his work has lasted three hundred and fifty years. That is the best way to save time. Your modern plasterer will have his ceiling up in a jiffy; and it will be down in a jiffy, and to do all over again. And never worth looking at at all."

Mr. Willard nodded. "It is very true," said he. "What is striking me in looking at all this old work is the great economy of time that is effected by taking pains and using good material, to say nothing of the beauty of the things created."

"If he goes on talking like that," whispered Bundy, "Japp'll kiss him. We must get them out of this."

Mercifully—if such a catastrophe was imminent—the ceiling discourse brought our inspection here to an end. From Eastgate House we went back to the Maidstone-road, and when we had inspected Restoration House, began to trace out the site of the city wall, which Thorndyke carefully marked on his map, to Japp's intense gratification. This perambulation brought us to the castle—which was dealt with rather summarily, as Mr. Willard had already examined it—and we then returned to the office for tea, which Bundy prepared and served with great success in his own sitting-room, while Japp dotted in with red ink on Thorndyke's map the entire city wall, including the part which we had yet to trace; and ridiculously small the ancient city looked when thus marked out on the modern town.

After tea we retraced our steps to the site of the East Gate, and, having inspected a large fragment of the wall at the end of an alley, traced its line across the Highstreet, and then proceeded down Free School-lane to the fine angle-bastion at the northern corner of the lane. Thence we followed the scanty indications as far as the site of the North Gate, and thereafter through a confused and rather unlovely neighbourhood until, on the edge of the marshes, we struck into a narrow lane, enclosed by a dilapidated tarred fence, a short distance along which we came to a closed gate, which I recognized as the one through which I had passed with Bundy on the day when we were made acquainted with the tragic history of Bill the Bargee. As Japp unlocked the gate and admitted us to the space of waste land, Bundy remarked to Thorndyke: "That is the gate that the missing key belonged to. You see there is no harm done so far. The wall is still there."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "and not much improved in appearance by your builders' attentions. Those patches suggest the first attempts of an untalented dental student at conservation."

"They are rather a disfigurement," said Japp. "But the men had to have a job found for them, and that is the result. Perhaps they won't show so much in the photograph."

While the photographer was setting up his camera and making the exposure, Japp explained the relation of this piece of wall to the North Gate and the Gate that faced the bridge, and marked its position on Thorndyke's map.

"And that," he continued, "concludes our perambulation. The photographer is chartered by Mr. Willard, but I understand that we are at liberty to secure copies of the photographs, if we want them. Is that not so, Mr. Willard?"

"Surely," was the cordial reply; "only I stipulate that they shall be a gift from me, and I shall ask a favour in return. If there is a plate left, I should like to have a commemorative group taken, so that when I recall this pleasant day, I can also recall the pleasant society in which I spent it."

We all acknowledged the kindly compliment with a bow, and as the photographer announced that he had a spare plate, we grouped ourselves against a portion of undisfigured wall, removed our hats, and took up easy and graceful postures on either side of Mr. Willard. When the exposure had been made, and the photographer proceeded to pack up his apparatus, Thorndyke tendered his very hearty thanks to Mr. Japp and his friend for their hospitality.

"It has been a great privilege," said he, "to be allowed to share in the products of so much study and research, and I

assure you it is far from being unappreciated. Whenever I revisit Rochester—which I hope to do before long—I shall think of you gratefully, and of your very kind and generous friend, Mr. Willard.”

Our two hosts made suitable acknowledgments; and while these compliments were passing, I turned to Bundy.

“Can we get down to the shore from here?” I asked. “Thorndyke was saying that he would like to have a look at the river. If it is accessible from here we might take it on the way home.”

“It isn’t difficult to get at,” replied Bundy. “If he wants to get a typical view of the river with the below-bridge traffic, by far the best place is Blue Boar Pier. It isn’t very far, and it is on your way home—more or less. I’ll show you the way there if you like. Japp is dining with Willard, so he won’t want me.”

I accepted the offer gladly, and as the exchange of compliments seemed to be completed and our party was moving towards the gate, I tendered my thanks for the day’s entertainment and bade my hosts farewell, explaining that we were going riverwards. Accordingly we parted at the gate, Japp and Willard turning towards the town, while Thorndyke, Bundy, and I retraced our steps towards the marshes.

At the bottom of the lane Bundy paused to explain the topography. “That path,” said he, “leads to Gas House-road and the marshes by the North Shore. But there isn’t much to see there. If we take this other track we shall strike Blue Boar-lane, which will take us to the pier. From there we can get a view of the whole bend of the river right across to Chatham.”

Thorndyke followed the description closely with the aid of his map, marking off our present position with a pencil. Then we struck into a rough cart-track, with the wide stretch of the marshes on our left, and, following this, we presently came out into the lower part of Blue Boar-lane and turned our faces towards the river. We had not gone far when I observed a man approaching whose appearance seemed to be familiar. Bundy also observed him, for he exclaimed: “Why, that is old Cobbledick! Out of uniform, too. Very irregular. I shall have to remonstrate with him. I wonder what he has been up to. Prowling about the river bank in search of clues, I expect. And he’ll suspect us of being on the same errand.”

Bundy’s surmise appeared to be correct, for as the sergeant drew nearer and recognized us, his face took on an expression of shrewd inquiry. But I noticed with some surprise that his curiosity seemed to be principally concerned with Thorndyke, at whom he gazed with something more than common attention. Under the circumstances I should have passed him with a friendly greeting, but he stopped, and, having wished me “Good evening,” said: “Could I have a few words with you, Doctor?” upon which I halted, and Thorndyke and Bundy walked on slowly. The sergeant looked after them, and, turning his back to them, drew from his pocket with a mysterious air a small dirty brown bundle, which he handed to me.

“I wanted you just to have a look at that,” he said.

I opened out the bundle, though I had already tentatively recognized it. But when it was unrolled it was unmistakable. It was poor Angelina’s scarf.

“I thought there couldn’t be any doubt about it,” the sergeant said cheerfully when I had announced the identification. “Your description was so clear and exact. Well, this gives us a pretty fair kick-off. You can see that it has been in the water—some time, too. So we know where to look for the body. The mysterious thing is, though, that we’ve still got to look for it. It ought to have come up on the shore days ago. And it hasn’t. There isn’t a longshoreman for miles up and down that isn’t on the look-out for it. You can see them prowling along the seawalls and searching the creeks in their boats. I can’t think how they can have missed it. The thing is getting serious.”

“Serious?” I repeated.

“Well,” he explained, “there’s no need for me to point out to a medical gentleman like you that bodies don’t last forever, especially in mild weather such as we’ve been having, and in a river where the shore swarms with rats and shore-crabs. Every day that passes is making the identification more difficult.”

The horrible suggestions that emerged from his explanation gave me a sensation of physical sickness. I fidgeted uneasily, but still I managed to rejoin huskily: “There’s the clothing, you know.”

“So there is,” he agreed; “and very good means of identification in an ordinary case—accidental drowning, for instance. But this is a criminal case. I don’t want to have to depend on the clothing.”

“Was the scarf found floating?” I asked, a little anxious to change the subject to one less gruesome.

“No,” he replied. “It was on the shore by the small creek just below Blue Boar Pier, under an empty fish-trunk. One of the Customs men from the watch-house found it. He noticed the trunk lying out on the shore as he was walking along and went out to see if there was anything in it. Then, when he found it was empty, he turned it over, and there was the scarf. He recognized it at once—there’s a list of the articles stuck up on the watch-house—and kept it to bring to me. But it happened that I came down here—as I do every day—just after he’d found it. But I mustn’t keep you here talking, though I’m glad I met you and got your confirmation about this scarf.”

He smiled benignly and raised his hat, whereupon I wished him “Good evening” and went on my way with a sigh of relief. He was a pleasant, genial man, but his matter-of-fact way of looking at this tragedy that had eaten so deeply into my peace of mind, was to me positively harrowing. But, of course, he did not understand my position in the case.

“Well,” said Bundy, when I hurried up, “what’s the news? Old Cobbledick was looking mighty mysterious. And wasn’t he

interested in us? Why he's gazing after us still. Has he had a bite? Because if he hasn't, I have. Some beastly mosquito."

"Don't rub it," said Thorndyke, as Bundy clapped his hand to his cheek. "Leave it alone. We'll put a spot of ammonia or iodine on it presently."

"Very well," replied Bundy, with a grimace expressive of resignation. "I am in the hands of the Faculty. What sort of fish was it that Isaak Walton Cobbledick had hooked? Or is it a secret?"

"I don't think there is any secrecy about it," said I. "One of the Customs men has found Mrs. Frood's scarf," and I repeated what the sergeant had told me as to the circumstances.

"It is a gruesome affair," said Bundy, "this search for these ghastly relics. Look at those ghouls down on the shore there. I suppose that is the fish-trunk."

As he spoke, we came out on the shore to the right of the pier and halted to survey the rather unlovely prospect. Outside the stunted sea-wall a level stretch of grey-green grass extended to the spring high-water mark, beyond which a smooth sheet of mud—now dry and covered with multitudinous cracks—spread out to the slimy domain of the ordinary tides. At the edge of the dry mud lay a derelict fish-trunk around which a group of bare-legged boys had gathered—and all along the shore, on the faded grass, on the dry mud and wading in the soft slime, the human water-rats were to be seen, turning over drift-rubbish, prying under stranded boats or grubbing in the soft mud. Hard by, on the grass near the sea-wall, an old ship's long-boat had been hauled up above tide-marks to a permanent berth and turned into a habitation by the erection in it of a small house. A short ladder gave access to it from without and the resident had laid down a little causeway of flat stones leading to the wall.

"Mr. Noah seems to be at home," observed Bundy, as we approached the little amphibious residence to inspect it. He pointed to a thin wisp of smoke that issued from the iron chimney; and, almost as he spoke, the door opened and an old man came out into the open stern-sheets of the boat with a steaming tin pannikin in his hand. His appearance fitted his residence to a nicety; for whereas the latter appeared to have been constructed chiefly from driftwood and wreckage, his costume suggested a collection of assorted marine salvage, with a leaning towards oil-skin.

"Mr. Noah" cast a malevolent glance at the searchers; then, having fortified himself with a pull at the pannikin, he turned a filmy blue eye on us.

"Good evening," said Thorndyke. "There seems to be a lot of business-doing here," and he indicated the fish-trunk and the eager searchers.

The old man grunted contemptuously. "Parcel of fules," said he, "a-busyin' theirselves with what don't concern 'em, and lookin' in the wrong place at that."

"Still," said Bundy, "they have found something here."

"Yes," the old man admitted, "they have. And that's why they ain't goin' to find anything more." He refreshed himself with a drink of—presumably—tea, and continued: "But the things is a-beginning to come up. It's about time she come up. But she won't come up here."

"Where do you suppose she will come up?" asked Bundy.

The old man regarded him with a cunning leer. "Never you mind where she'll come up," said he. "It ain't no consarn o' yourn."

"But how do you know where she'll come up?" Bundy persisted.

"I knows," the old scarecrow replied conclusively, "becos I do. Becos I gets my livin' along-shore, and it's my business for to know."

Having made this pronouncement, Mr. Noah looked inquiringly into the pannikin, emptied it at a draught, and, turning abruptly, retired into the ark, shutting the door after him with a care suited to its evident physical infirmity.

"I wonder if he really does know," said Bundy, as we walked away past the Customs watch-house.

"We can fairly take it that he doesn't," said Thorndyke, "seeing that the matter is beyond human calculation. But I have no doubt that he knows the places where bodies and other floating objects are most commonly washed ashore, and we may assume that he is proposing to devote his probably extensive leisure to the exploration of those places. It wouldn't be amiss to put the sergeant in communication with him."

"Probably the sergeant knows him," said I, "but I will mention the matter the next time I see him."

At the top of Blue Boar-lane Bundy halted and held out his hand to Thorndyke. "This is the parting of the ways," said he.

"Oh, no, it isn't," replied Thorndyke. "You've got to have your mosquito-bite treated. Never neglect an insect-bite, especially on the face."

"As a matter of fact," said I, "you have got to come and have dinner with us. We can't let you break up the party in this way."

"It's very nice of you to ask me," he began, hesitatingly, a little shy, as I guessed, of intruding on me and my visitor; but I cut him short, and, hooking my arm through his, led him off, an obviously willing captive. And if his presence hindered me



from discussing with Thorndyke the problem that had occasioned his visit, that was of no consequence, since we should have the following day to ourselves; and he certainly contributed not a little to the cheerfulness of the proceedings. Indeed, I seemed to find in his high spirits something a little pathetic; a suggestion that the company of two live men—one of them a man of outstanding intellect—was an unusual treat, and that his life with old Japp and the predatory females might be a trifle dull. He took to Thorndyke amazingly, treating him with a sort of respectful cheekiness, like a schoolboy dining with a favourite head-master; while Thorndyke, fully appreciative of his irresponsible gaiety, developed a quiet humour and playfulness which rather took me by surprise. The solemn farce of the diagnosis and treatment of the mosquito bite was an instance; when Thorndyke, having seated the patient in the surgery chair and invested him with a large towel, covered the table with an assortment of preposterous instruments and bottles of reagents, and proceeded gravely to examine the bite through a lens until Bundy was as nervous as a cat, and then to apply the remedy with meticulous precision on the point of a fine sable brush.

It was a pleasant evening, pervaded by a sense of frivolous gaiety that was felt gratefully by the two elder revellers and was even viewed indulgently by Mrs. Dunk. As to Bundy, his high spirits flowed unceasingly—but, I may add, with faultless good manners—and when, at length, he took his departure, he shook our hands with a warmth which, again, I found slightly pathetic.

“*I have* had a jolly evening!” he exclaimed, looking at me with a queer sort of wistfulness. “It has been a red-letter day”; and with this he turned abruptly and walked away.

We watched him from the threshold, bustling jauntily along the pavement; and as I looked at him, there came unbidden to my mind the recollection of that other figure that I had watched from this same threshold, walking away in the fading light—walking into the fog that was to swallow her up and hide her from my sight forever.

From these gloomy reflections I was recalled by Thorndyke’s voice.

“A nice youngster, that, Strangeways. Gay and sprightly, but not in the least shallow. I often think that there was a great deal of wisdom in that observation of Spencer’s, that happy people are the greatest benefactors to mankind. Your friend, Bundy, has helped me to renew my youth; and who could have done one a greater service?”



## CHAPTER XI. — THE MAN WITH THE MOLE

When I had seen my guest off by the last train on Saturday night, I walked homeward slowly, cogitating on the results of his visit. It seemed to me that they were very insignificant. In the morning we had explored the piece of shore on which the bag and the box of tablets had been found, making our way to it by the narrow and intricate alleys which seemed to be the only approach; and we had reached the same conclusion. It was an impossible place.

"If we assume," said Thorndyke, "as we must, on the apparent probabilities, that the tragedy occurred here, we must assume that there are some significant circumstances that are unknown to us. Mrs. Frood could not have strayed here by chance. We can think of no business that could have brought her here; and since she was neither a child nor a fool, she could not have been enticed into such an obviously sinister locality without some plausible pretext. There is evidently something more than meets the eye."

"Something, you mean, connected with her past life and the people she knew?"

"Exactly. I am having careful inquiries made on the subject in likely quarters, including the various theatrical photographers. They form quite a promising source of information, as they are not only able to give addresses but they can furnish us with photographs of members of the companies who would have been colleagues, and, at least, acquaintances."

"If you come across any photographs of Mrs. Frood," I said, "I should like to see them."

"You shall," he replied. "I shall certainly collect all I can get, on the chance that they may help us with the identification of the body; which may possibly present some difficulty."

Here I was reminded of Cobbledick's observations, and, distasteful as they were, I repeated them to Thorndyke.

"The sergeant is quite right," said he. "This is apparently a criminal case, involving a charge of wilful murder. To sustain that charge, the prosecution will have to produce incontestable evidence as to the identity of the deceased. Clothing alone would not be sufficient to secure a conviction. The body would have to be identified. And the sergeant's anxiety is quite justified. Have you had any experiences of bodies recovered from the water?"

"Yes," I replied; "and I don't like to think of them." I shuddered as I spoke, for his question had recalled to my memory the incidents of a professional visit to Poplar Mortuary. There rose before my eyes the picture of a long black box with a small glass window in the lid, and of a thing that appeared at that window; a huge, bloated, green and purple thing, with groups or radiating wrinkles, and in the middle a button-like object that looked like the tip of a nose. It was a frightful picture; and yet I knew that when the river that we stood by should give up its dead—

I put the thought away with a shiver and asked faintly: "About the man Frood. Don't you think that his disappearance throws some light on the mystery?"

"It doesn't throw much light," replied Thorndyke, "because nothing is known about it. Obviously the coincidence in time of the disappearance, added to the known character of the man and his relations with his wife, make him an object of deep suspicion. His whereabouts will have to be traced and his time accounted for. But I have ascertained that the police know nothing about him, and my own inquiries have come to nothing, so far. He seems to have disappeared without leaving a trace. But I shall persevere. Your object—and mine—is to clear up the mystery, and if a crime has been committed, to bring the criminal to justice."

So that was how the matter stood; and it did not appear to me that much progress had been made towards the elucidation of the mystery. As to the perpetrator or that crime, he remained a totally unknown quantity, unless the deed could be fixed on the missing man, Frood. And so matters remained for some days. Then an event occurred which seemed to promise some illumination of the darkness; a promise that it failed to fulfil.

It was about a week after Thorndyke's visit. I had gone out after lunch to post off to him the set of photographs which had been delivered to me by the photographer with my own set. I went into the post-office to register the package, and here I found Bundy in the act of sending off a parcel. When we had transacted our business we strolled out together, and he asked: "What are you going to do now, Doctor?"

"I was going to walk down to Blue Boar Pier," said I, "to see if anything further has been discovered."

"Should I be in the way if I walked there with you?" he asked. "I've got nothing to do at the moment. But perhaps you would rather go alone. You've had a good deal of my society lately."

"Not more than I wanted, Bundy," I answered. "You are my only chum here, and you are not unappreciated, I can assure you."

"It's nice of you to say that," he rejoined, with some emotion. "I've sometimes felt that I was rather thrusting my friendship on you."

"Then don't ever feel it again," said I. "It has been a bit of luck for me to find a man here whom I could like and chum in with."

He murmured a few words of thanks, and we walked on for a while without speaking. Presently, as we turned into the lane by the Blue Boar Inn, he said, a little hesitatingly. "Don't you think, Doc, that it is rather a mistake to let your mind

run so much on this dreadful affair? It seems to be always in your thoughts. And it isn't good for you to think so much about it. I've noticed you quite a lot, and you haven't been the same since—since it happened. You have looked worried and depressed."

"I haven't felt the same," said I. "It has been a great grief to me."

"But," he urged, "don't you think you should try to forget it? After all, she was little more than an acquaintance."

"She was a great deal more than that, Bundy," said I. "While she was alive, I would not admit even to myself that my feeling towards her was anything more than ordinary friendship. But it was; and now that she is gone, there can be no harm in recognizing the fact, or even in confessing it to you, as we are friends."

"Do you mean, Doc," he said in a low voice, "that you were in love with her?"

"That is what it comes to, I suppose," I answered. "She was the only woman I had ever really cared for."

"And did she know it?" he asked.

"Of course she didn't," I replied indignantly. "She was a lady and a woman of honour. Of course she never dreamed that I cared for her, or she would never have let me visit her."

For a few moments he walked at my side in silence. Then he slipped his arm through mine, and pressing it gently with his hand, said softly and very earnestly: "I'm awfully sorry, Doc. It is frightfully hard luck for you, though it couldn't have been much better even if—but it's no use talking of that. I *am* sorry, old chap. But still, you know, you ought to try to put it away. *She* wouldn't have wished you to make yourself unhappy about her."

"I know," said I. "But I feel that the office belongs to me, who cared most for her, to see that the mystery of her death is cleared up and that whoever wronged her is brought to justice."

He made no reply to this but walked at my side with his arm linked in mine, meditating with an air of unwonted gravity.

When we reached the head of the pier the place was deserted excepting for one man; a sea-faring person, apparently, who was standing with his back to us, studying intently the bills that were stuck on the wall of the lookout. As we were passing, my eye caught the word "Wanted" on a new bill, and pausing to read it over the man's shoulder, I found that it was a description of the unknown man—"with a mole on the left side of his nose"—who had pawned the opal brooch. Bundy read it, too, and as we walked away he remarked: "They are rather late in putting out those bills. I should think that gentleman will have left the locality long ago, unless he was a local person"; an opinion with which I was disposed to agree.

After a glance round the shore and at "the Ark"—which was closed but of which the chimney emitted a cheerful smoke suggestive of culinary activities on the part of "Mr. Noah"—we sauntered up past the head of the creek, along the rough path by the foundry, and out upon the upper shore.

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Bundy, glancing back at the watch-house, "that chap is still reading that bill. He must be a mighty slow reader, or he must find it more thrilling than I did. Perhaps he knows somebody with a mole on his nose."

I looked back at the motionless figure; and at that moment another figure appeared and advanced, as we had done, to look over the reader's shoulder.

"Why, that looks like old Cobbledick—come to admire his own literary productions. There's vanity for you. Hallo! What's up now?"

As Bundy spoke, the reader had turned to move away and had come face to face with the sergeant. For a moment both men had stood stock still; then there was a sudden, confused movement on both sides, with the final result that the sergeant fell, or was knocked, down and that the stranger raced off, apparently in our direction. He disappeared at once, being hidden from us by the foundry buildings, and we advanced towards the end of the fenced lane by which we had come, to intercept him, waiting by the edge of a trench or dry ditch.

"Here he comes," said Bundy, a trifle nervously, as rapid footfalls became audible in the narrow, crooked lane. Suddenly the man appeared, running furiously, and as he caught sight of us, he whipped out a large knife, and, flourishing it with a menacing air, charged straight at us. I watched an opportunity to trip him up; but as he approached Bundy pulled me back with such energy that he and I staggered on the brink of the ditch, capsized, and rolled together to the bottom. By the time we had managed to scramble up, the man had disappeared into the wilderness of sheds, scrap-heaps, derelict boilers, and stray railway-waggons that filled the area of land between the foundry and the coal-wharves and jetties.

"Come on, Bundy," said I, as my companion stood tenderly rubbing various projecting portions of his person; "we mustn't lose sight of him."

But Bundy showed no enthusiasm; and at this moment a rapid crescendo of heavy foot-falls was followed by the emergence of the sergeant, purple-faced and panting, from the end of the lane.

"Which way did he go?" gasped Cobbledick.

I indicated the wilderness, briefly explaining how the fugitive had escaped us, whereupon the sergeant started forward at a lumbering trot and we followed. But it was an unfavourable hunting-ground, for the bulky litter—the heaps of coal-dust, the wagons, the cranes, the piles of condemned machinery, mingled with clumps of bushes—gave the fugitive every opportunity to disappear. And, in fact, he had disappeared without leaving a trace. Presently we came out on a wharf

beside which a schooner was berthed; a trim-looking little craft with a white under-body and black top-sides, bearing a single big yard on her fore-mast and the name Anna on her counter. She was all ready for sea and was apparently waiting for high water, for her deck was all clear and a man on it was engaged in placidly coiling a rope on the battened hatch while another watched him from the door of the deckhouse. On this peaceful scene the sergeant burst suddenly and hailing the rope-coiler demanded:

"Have you seen a man run past here?"

The mariner dropped the rope, and looking up drowsily, repeated: "Have I seen a mahn?"

"Yes, a sea-faring man with a mole on his nose."

The mariner brightened up perceptibly. "Please?" said he.

"A sailor-man with a mole on his nose."

"Ach!" exclaimed the mariner. "Vos it tied on?"

"Tied on!" the sergeant snorted impatiently. "Of course it wasn't. It grew there."

Here the second mariner apparently asked some question, for our friend turned to him and replied: "*Ja. Maulwurf*"; on which I heard Bundy snigger softly.

"No, no," I interposed; "not that sort of mole. A kind of wart, you know. *Das Mal*."

On this the second mariner fell out of the deckhouse door, and the pair burst into yells of laughter, rolling about the deck in agonies of mirth, wiping their eyes, muttering *Maulwurf, Maulwurf*, and screeching like demented hyenas.

"Well," Cobbledick demanded impatiently, "have you seen him?"

The mariner shook his head. "No," he replied, shakily. "I have not any mahn seen."

"Well, why couldn't you say so at first," the sergeant growled.

"I vos zo zubbraised," the mariner explained, glancing at his shipmate; and the pair burst out into fresh howls of laughter.

The sergeant turned away with a sort of benevolent contempt and ran his eye despairingly over the wilderness. "I suppose we had better search this place," said he, "though he is pretty certain to have got away."

At his suggestion we separated and examined the possible hiding-places systematically, but, of course, with no result. Once only I had a momentary hope that we had not lost our quarry, when the sergeant suddenly stooped and began cautiously to stalk an abandoned boiler surrounded by a clump of bushes; but when the grinning countenance of Bundy appeared at the opposite end and that reprobate crept out stealthily and proceeded to stalk the sergeant, the last hope faded.

"I certainly thought I saw someone moving in those bushes," said Cobbledick, with a disappointed air.

"So did Mr. Bundy," said I "You must have seen one another."

The sergeant glanced suspiciously at our colleague, but made no remark; and we continued our rather perfunctory search. At length we gave it up and slowly returned to the neighbourhood of the pier. By this time the tide had turned, and a few loiterers were standing about watching the procession of barges moving downstream on the ebb. Among them was a grave-looking, sandy-haired man who leaned against the watch-house, smoking reflectively as he surveyed the river. To this philosopher Cobbledick addressed himself, explaining, as he was in plain clothes:

"Good afternoon. I am a police officer and I am looking for a man who is described on that bill." Here he indicated the poster.

The philosopher turned a pale grey, and somewhat suspicious eye on him, and having removed his pipe, expectorated thoughtfully but made no comment on the statement.

"A sea-faring man," continued the sergeant, "with a mole on the left side of his nose." He looked enquiringly at the philosopher, who replied impassively:

"Nhm—nhm."

"Do you happen to have seen a man answering that description?"

"Nhm—nhm," was the slightly ambiguous reply.

"You *have* seen him?" the sergeant asked, eagerly.

"Aye."

"Do you know if he belongs to any of the craft that trade here?"

"Nhm—nhm."

"Do you happen to know which particular vessel he belongs to?"

"Aye," was the answer, accompanied by a grave nod.

"Can you tell me," the sergeant asked patiently, "which vessel that is, and where she is at present?"

Our friend replaced his pipe and took a long draw at it, gazing meditatively at a schooner which was moving swiftly down the river under the power of an auxiliary motor, and setting her sails as she went. I had noticed her already, and observed that she had a white underbody and black top-sides, and that she carried a single long yard on her fore-mast. At length our friend removed his pipe, expectorated, and nodded gravely at the schooner.

"Yon," said he, and replaced his pipe, as a precaution, I supposed, against unnecessary loquacity.

Cobbledick gazed wistfully at the receding schooner. "Pity," said he. "I should have liked to have a look at that fellow."

"You could get the schooner held up at Sheerness, couldn't you?" I asked.

"Yes; I could send a 'phone message to Garrison Point Fort. But, you see, she's a foreigner. Might make trouble. And he is probably not the man we want. After all, it's only a matter of a mole."

"Maulwurf," murmured Bundy.

"Yes," said the sergeant, with a faint grin; "those beggars were laughing at us. Well, it can't be helped."

We stood for a moment or two watching the schooner set one sail after another. Presently Bundy observed:

"Methinks, Sergeant, that Mr. Noah is trying to attract your attention."

We glanced towards the Ark, the tenant of which was seated in the stern-sheets, scrubbing a length of rusty chain. As he caught the sergeant's eye, he beckoned mysteriously, whereupon we descended the bank, and, picking our way across the muddy grass by his little causeway of stepping-stones, approached the foot of the short ladder.

"Well, Israel," said the sergeant, resting his hands on the gunwale of the old boat as he made a rapid survey of the interior, "giving the family plate a bit of a polish, eh?"

"Plate!" exclaimed the old man, holding up the chain, which, as I now saw, had a number of double hooks linked to it, "this ain't plate. 'Tis what we calls a creeper."

"A creeper," repeated the sergeant, looking at it with renewed interest. "Ha, yes, hm. A creeper, hey? Well, Israel, what's a-doing? Have you got something to show us?"

The old man laid down the creeper and the scrubbing-brush—which had a strong suggestion of salvage in its appearance—and moved towards the door of the Ark. "Come along inside," said he.

Cobbledick mounted the ladder and motioned me to follow, which I did, while Bundy discretely sauntered away and sat down on the bank. On entering, I observed that the Ark followed closely the constructional traditions. Like its classical prototype, it was "pitched with pitch, within and without," and was furnished with a single small window, let into the door and hermetically sealed.

Seeing that our host looked at me with some disfavour, the tactful sergeant hastened to make us known to one another.

"This is Dr. Strangeways, Israel. He was Mrs. Frood's doctor, and he knows all about this affair. This, Doctor, is Mr. Israel Bangs, the eminent long-shoreman, a sort of hereditary Grand Duke of the Rochester foreshore."

I bowed ceremoniously, and the Grand Duke acknowledged the introduction with a sour grin. Then, lifting the greasy lid of a locker, he dived into it and came to the surface, as it were, with a small shoe in his hand.

"What do you say to that?" he demanded, holding the shoe under the sergeant's nose. The sergeant said nothing, but looked at me; and I, suddenly conscious of the familiar sickening sensation, could do no more than nod in reply. Soiled, muddy and sodden as it was, the poor little relic instantly and vividly recalled the occasion when I had last seen it, then all trim and smart, peeping coyly beneath the hem of the neat brown skirt.

"Where did you find it, Israel?" asked Cobbledick.

"Ah," said Bangs, with a sly leer, "that's tellin', that is. Never you mind where I found it. There's the shoe."

"Don't be a fool, Israel," said the sergeant. "What use do you suppose the shoe is to me if I don't know where you found it? I've got to put it in evidence, you know."

"You can put it where you like, so long as you pays for it," the old rascal replied, doggedly. "The findin' of it's my business."

There ensued a lengthy wrangle, but the sergeant, though patient and polite, was firm. Eventually Israel gave way.

"Well," he said, "if you undertakes not to let on to Sam Hooper or any of his lot, I'll tell you. I found it on the mud, side of the long crik betwixt Blue Boar Head and Gas-'us Point."

The sergeant made a note of the locality, and, after having sworn not to divulge the secret to Sam Hooper or any other of the shore-rat fraternity, and having ascertained that Israel had no further information to dispose of, rose to depart; and, I noticed that, as we passed out towards the ladder, he seemed to bestow a glance of friendly recognition on the creeper.

"Well," said Bundy, when we rejoined him, "what had Mr. Noah to say? I hope you remembered me kindly to my old friends, Shem, Ham, and Japhet."

"He has found one of Mrs. Frood's shoes," answered the sergeant, producing it from his pocket and offering it for inspection. Bundy glanced at it indifferently, and then remarked: "It seems to answer the description, but, for my part, I don't quite see the use of all this searching and prying. It only proves what we all know. There's no doubt that she fell into the river. The question is, how did she get there? It is not likely that it was an accident, and, if it wasn't, it must have been a crime. What we want to know is, who is the criminal?"

Cobbledick pocketed the shoe with an impatient gesture. "That's the way they always talk," said he. "They will always begin at the wrong end. The question, 'Who is the murderer?' does not arise until it is certain that there has been a murder; and it can't be certain that there has been a murder until it is certain that the missing person is dead. And that certainty can hardly be established until the body is found. But, in the meantime, these articles are evidence enough to justify us in making other inquiries, and they may give us a hint where to look for the body. They do, in fact. They suggest that the body is probably not very far away, and more likely to be up-stream than down."

"I don't see how they do," said Bundy.

"I do," retorted the sergeant, "and that's enough for me."

Bundy, with his customary discretion, took this as closing the discussion, and further—as I guessed—surmising that the sergeant might wish to have a few words with me alone, took his leave of us when we reached the vicinity of the office.

"That is not a bad idea of old Israel's," said Cobbledick, when Bundy had gone. "The creeper, I mean."

"What about it?" I asked.

"You know what a creeper is used for, I suppose," said he. "In the old days, the revenue boats used to trail them along over the bottom in shallow water where they suspected that the smugglers had sunk their tubs. You see they couldn't always get a chance to land the stuff. Then they used to fill the spirits into a lot of little ankers or tubs, lash them together into a sort of raft and sink the raft close in-shore, on a dark night, in a marked place where their pals could go some other night and fish them up. Well the revenue cutters knew most of those places and used to go there and drift over them trailing creepers. Of course, if there were any tubs there, the creepers hooked on to the lashings and up they came."

"But what do you suppose is Israel's idea?" I asked.

"Why, as the body ought to have come up long before this, and it hasn't, he thinks it has been sunk. It might have been taken up the river in a boat, and sunk in mid-stream with a weight of some sort. Or it might have got caught by a lost anchor or on some old moorings. That would account for its not coming up and for these oddments getting detached and drifting ashore. So old Israel is going to get to work with a creeper. I expect he spends his nights creeping over the likely spots, and that is what makes him so deuced secret about the place where he found that shoe. He reckons that the body is somewhere thereabouts."

I made no comment on this rather horrible communication. Of course, it was necessary that the body should be searched for, since its discovery was the indispensable condition of the search for the murderer. But I did not want to hear more of the dreadful details than was absolutely unavoidable.

When we reached the Guildhall, I halted and was about to take leave of the sergeant when he said, somewhat hesitatingly:

"Do you remember, Doctor, when you met me last Saturday, you had a gentleman with you?"

"I remember," said I.

"Now, I wonder if you would think I was taking a liberty if I were to ask what that gentleman's name was. I had an idea that I knew his face."

"Of course it wouldn't be a liberty," I replied. "His name is Thorndyke; Dr. John Thorndyke."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cobbledick, "I thought I couldn't be mistaken. It isn't the sort of face that one would forget. I once heard him give evidence at the Old Bailey. Wonderful evidence it was, too. Since then I've read reports of his investigations from time to time. He's a marvellous man. The way he has of raking up evidence from nowhere is perfectly astonishing. Did you happen to talk to him about this case at all?"

"Well, you see, Sergeant," I answered, rather evasively, "he had come down here for the week-end as my guest—"

"Exactly, exactly," Cobbledick interrupted, unconsciously helping me to avoid answering his question, "he came down for a rest and a change, and wouldn't want to be bothered with professional matters. Still, you know, I think he would be interested in this case. It is quite in his own line. It is a queer case; a very queer case in some respects."

"In what respects?" I asked.

It was Cobbledick's turn to be evasive. He had apparently said more than he had intended, and now drew in his horns perceptibly.

"Why," he replied, "when you come to think of—the—er—the character of the lady, for instance. Why should anyone want to do her any harm? And then there is the mystery as to how it happened, and the place, and—in fact, there are a number of things that are difficult to understand. But I mustn't keep you standing here. If you should happen to see Dr. Thorndyke again, it might be as well to tell him about the case. It would be sure to interest him; and if he should, by any

chance, want to know anything that you are not in a position to tell him, why, you know where I am to be found. I shouldn't want to make any secrets with him. And he might spot something that we haven't noticed."

I promised to follow the sergeant's advice, and, having bid him adieu, turned back, and walked slowly homeward. As I went I reflected profoundly on my conversation with Cobbledick; from which, as it seemed to me, two conclusions emerged. First, there were elements in this mystery that were unknown to me. I had supposed that the essence of the mystery was the mere absence of data. But it now appeared from the sergeant's utterances, and still more from his evasions, that he saw farther into the affair than I did; either because he had more facts, or because, by reason of his greater experience, the facts meant more to him than they did to me. The second conclusion was that he was in some way in difficulties; that he was conscious of an inability to interpret satisfactorily the facts that were known to him. His evident eagerness to get into touch with Thorndyke made this pretty clear; and the two conclusions together suggested a further question. How much did Thorndyke know? Did he know all that the sergeant knew? Did he perchance know more? From the scanty data with which I had supplied him, might he possibly have drawn some illuminating inferences that had carried his understanding of the case beyond either mine or Cobbledick's? It was quite possible. Thorndyke's great reputation rested upon his extraordinary power of inference and constructive reasoning from apparently unilluminating facts. The facts in this case seemed unilluminating enough. But they might not be so to him. And again I recalled how both he and the sergeant seemed to look to the finding of the body as probably furnishing the solution of the mystery.

---

## CHAPTER XII. — THE PRINTS OF A VANISHED HAND

Mr. Bundy's opinion that no particular significance attached to the finding of further relics of the missing woman was one that I was myself disposed to adopt. The disappearance of poor Angelina was an undeniable fact, and there seemed to be no doubt that her body had fallen, or been cast, into the river. On these facts, the recovery of further articles belonging to her, and presumably detached from the body, shed no additional light. From the body itself, whenever it should be surrendered by the river, one hoped that something fresh might be learned. But all that anyone could say was that Angelina Frood had disappeared, that her disappearance was almost certainly connected with a crime, and that the agents of that crime and their motives for committing it were alike an impenetrable mystery, a mystery that the finding of further detached articles tended in no way to solve.

I shall, therefore, pass somewhat lightly over the incidents of the succeeding discoveries, notwithstanding the keen interest in them displayed by Sergeant Cobbledick and even by Thorndyke. On Monday, the 25th of May, the second shoe was found (to Israel Bangs' unspeakable indignation) by Samuel Hooper of Foul Anchor Alley, who discovered it shortly after high-water, lying on the gridiron close to Gas-house Point, and brought it in triumph to the police station.

After this, there followed a long interval, occupied by a feverish contest between Israel Bangs and Samuel Hooper. But the luck fell to the experienced Israel. On Saturday, the 20th of June, that investigator, having grounded his boat below a wharf between Gas-house Point and the bridge, discovered a silver-headed hat-pin lying on the shore between two of the piles of the wharf. Its identity was unmistakable. The silver poppy-head that crowned the pin was no trade production that might have had thousands of indistinguishable fellows. It was an individual work wrought by an artist in metal, and excepting its fellow, there was probably not another like it in the world.

The discovery of this object roused a positive frenzy of search. The stretch of muddy shore between Gas-house Point and the bridge literally swarmed with human shore-rats, male and female, adult and juvenile. Every day, and all the day, excepting at high-water, Israel Bangs hovered in his oozy little basket of a boat on the extreme edge of the mud, scanning every inch of slime, and glowering fiercely at the poachers ashore who were raking over his preserves. But nothing came of it. Day after day passed. The black and odorous mud was churned up by countless feet; the pebbles were sorted out severally by innumerable filthy hands; every derelict pot, pan, box, or meat-tin was picked up again and again, and explored to its inmost recesses. But in vain. Not a single relic of any kind was brought to light by all those searchings and grubblings in the mud. Presently the searchers began to grow discouraged. Some of them gave up the search; others migrated to the shore beyond the bridge, and were to be seen wading in the mud below the Esplanade, the cricket-ground, or the boat-building yards. So the month of June ran out, and the third month began. And still there was no sign of the body.

Meanwhile I watched the two professional investigators, and noted a certain similarity in their outlook and methods. Both were keenly interested in the discoveries; and both, I observed, personally examined the localities of the finds. The sergeant conducted me to each spot in turn, making appropriate, but not very illuminating, comments; and I perceived that he was keeping a careful account of time and place. So, too, with Thorndyke, who had now taken to coming down regularly each week-end. He visited each spot where anything had been found, marking it carefully on his map, together with a reference number, and inquiring minutely as to the character of the object, its condition, and the state of the tide and the hour of the day when it was discovered; all of which particulars he entered in his note-book under the appropriate reference number.

Both of my friends, too, expressed increasing surprise and uneasiness at the non-appearance of the body. The sergeant was really worried, and he expressed his sentiments in a tone of complaint as if he felt that he was not being fairly treated.

"It's getting very serious, Doctor," he protested.

"Nearly three months gone—three summer months, mind you—and not a sign of it. I don't like the look of things at all. This case means a lot to me. It's my chance. It's a detective-inspector's job, and if I bring it off it'll be a big feather in my cap. I want to get a conviction, and so far I haven't got the material for a coroner's verdict. I've half a mind to do a bit of creeping myself."

Thorndyke's observations on the case were much to the same effect. Discussing it one Saturday afternoon at the beginning of July, when I had met him at Strood Station and was walking with him into Rochester, he said:

"My feeling is that the crux of this case is going to be the question of identity—if the body ever comes to light. Of course, if it doesn't, there is no case: it is simply an unexplained disappearance. But if the body is found and is unrecognizable excepting by clothing and other extrinsic evidence, it will be hard to get a conviction even if the unrecognizable corpse should give some clue to the circumstances of death."

"I suppose," said I, "the police are searching for Nicholas Frood."

"I doubt it," he replied. "They are not likely to be wasting efforts to find a murderer when there is no evidence that a murder has been committed. What could they do if they did find him? The woman was not in his custody or even living with him. And his previous conduct is not relevant in the absence of evidence of his wife's death."

"You said you were making some inquiries yourself."



"So I am. And I am not without hopes of picking up his tracks. But that is a secondary matter. What we have to settle beyond the shadow of a doubt is the question, 'What has become of Angelina Frood?' Is she dead? And, if she is, what was the cause and what were the circumstances of her death?' The evidence in our possession points to the conclusion that she is dead, and that she met her death by foul means. That is the belief that the known facts produce. But we have got to turn that belief into certainty. Then it will be time to inquire as to the identity of the criminal."

"Do you suppose the body would be unrecognizable now?"

"I feel no doubt that it would be quite unrecognizable by ordinary means if it has been in the water all this time. But it would still be identifiable in the scientific sense, if we could only obtain the necessary data. It could, for instance, be tested by the Bertillon measurements, if we had them; and it would probably yield finger-prints, clear enough to recognize, long after the disappearance of all facial character or bodily traits."

"Would it really?" I exclaimed.

"Certainly," he replied. "Even if the whole outer skin of the hand had come off bodily, like a glove, as it commonly does in long-submerged bodies, that glove-like cast would yield fairly clear finger-prints if properly treated—with dilute formalin, for instance. And then the fingers from which the outer skin had become detached would still yield recognizable finger-prints, if similarly treated; for you must remember that the papillary ridges which form the finger-print pattern, are in the true skin. The outer skin is merely moulded on them. But, unfortunately, the question is one of merely academic interest to us as we have no original finger-prints of Mrs. Frood's by which to test the body. The only method of scientific identification that seems to be available is that of anthropometric measurements, as employed by Bertillon."

"But," I objected, "the Bertillon system is based on the existence of a record of the measurements of the person to be identified. We have no record of the measurements of Mrs. Frood."

"True," he agreed. "But you may remember that Dr. George Bertillon was accustomed to apply his system, not only to suspected persons who had been arrested, but also to stray garments, hat, gloves, shoes, and so forth, that came into the possession of the police. But it is clear that, if such garments can be compared with a table of recorded measurements, they can be used as standards of comparison to determine the identity of a dead body. Of course, the measurements would have to be taken, both of the garments and of the body, by someone having an expert knowledge of anthropometrical methods."

"Of course," I agreed. "But it seems a sound method. I must mention it to Cobbledick. He has the undoubted shoes, and I have no doubt that he could get a supply of worn garments from Mrs. Gillow."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "And, speaking of Mrs. Gillow reminds me of another point that I have been intending to inquire into. You mentioned to me that Mrs. Gillow told you, at the time of the disappearance, that she had been expecting a tragedy of some kind. She must have had some grounds for that expectation."

"She said it was nothing but a vague, general impression."

"Still, there must have been something that gave her that impression. Don't you think it would be well to question her a little more closely?"

"Perhaps it might," said I, not very enthusiastically. "We are close to the house now. We can call in and see her, if you like."

"I think we ought to leave no stone unturned," said he; and a minute or two later, when we arrived opposite the office, he remarked, looking across attentively at the two houses: "I don't see our friend Bundy's face at the window."

"No," I replied, "he is playing tennis somewhere up at the Vines. But here is Mrs. Gillow, herself, all dressed up and evidently going out visiting."

The landlady had appeared at the door just as we were crossing the road. Perceiving that we were bearing down on her, she paused, holding the door ajar. I ran up the steps, and having wished her "good afternoon" asked if she had time to answer one or two questions.

"Certainly," she replied, "though I mustn't stay long because I have promised to go to tea with my sister at Frinsbury. I usually go there on a Saturday. Perhaps we had better go into poor Mrs. Frood's room."

She opened the door of the sitting-room, and we all went in and sat down.

"I have been talking over this mysterious affair, Mrs. Gillow," said I, "with my friend, Dr. Thorndyke, who is a lawyer, and he suggested that you might be able to throw some light on it. You remember that you had had some forebodings of some sort of trouble or disaster."

"I had," she replied, dismally, "but that was only because she always seemed so worried and depressed, poor dear. And, of course, I knew about that good-for-nothing husband of hers. That was all. Sergeant Cobbledick asked me the same question, but I had nothing to tell him."

"Did the sergeant examine the rooms?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, he looked over the place, and he opened her little davenport—it isn't locked—and read through one or two letters that he found there, but he didn't take them away. All he took with him was a few torn-up letters that he found in the waste-paper basket."

"If those other letters are still in the davenport," said Thorndyke, "I think it would be well for us to look through them carefully, if you don't mind, Mrs. Gillow."

"I don't see that there could be any harm in it," she replied. "I've never touched anything in her rooms, myself, since she went away. I thought it better not to. I haven't even washed up her tea-things. There they are, just as she left them, poor lamb. But if you are going to look through those letters, I will ask you to excuse me, or I shall keep my sister waiting for tea."

"Certainly, Mrs. Gillow," said I. "Don't let us detain you. And, by the way," I added, as I walked with her to the door, "it would be as well not to say anything to anybody about my having come here with my friend."

"Very well, sir," she replied. "I think you are right. The least said, the soonest mended"; and with this profound generalization she went out and I shut the street door after her.

When I returned to the sitting-room I found Thorndyke engaged in a minute examination of the tea-things, and in particular of the spoon. I proceeded at once to the davenport, and, finding it unlocked, lifted the desk-lid and peered into the interior. It contained a supply of papers and envelopes, neatly stacked, and one or two letters, which I took out. They all appeared to be from the same person—the Miss Cumbers, of whom I had heard—and a rapid glance at the contents showed that they were of no use as a source of information. I passed them to Thorndyke—who had laid down the spoon and was now looking inquisitively about the room—who scanned them rapidly and returned them to me.

"There is nothing in them," said he. "Possibly the contents of the waste-paper basket were more illuminating. But I suspect not, as the sergeant appears to be as much in the dark as we are. Shall we have a look at the bedroom before we go?"

I saw no particular reason for doing so, but, assuming that he knew best, I made no objection. Going out into the hall, we entered the deserted bed-room, the door of which was locked, though the key had not been removed. At the threshold Thorndyke paused and stood for nearly half a minute looking about the room in the same queer, inquisitive way that I had noticed in the other room, as if he were trying to fix a mental picture of it. Meanwhile, full of the Bertillon system, I had walked across to the wardrobe to see what garments were available for measurement. I had my hand on the knob of the door when my glance fell on two objects on the dressing-table; an empty tumbler and a small water-bottle, half-full. There was nothing very remarkable about these objects, taken by themselves, but, even from where I stood, I could see that both bore a number of finger-marks which stood out conspicuously on the plain glass.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "Here is the very thing that you were speaking of. Do you see what it is?"

Apparently he had, for he had already taken his gloves out of his pocket and was putting them on.

"Don't touch them, Strangeways," said he, as I was approaching to inspect them more closely. "If these are Mrs. Frood's finger-prints they may be invaluable. We mustn't confuse them by adding our own."

"Whose else could they be?" I asked.

"They might be Sergeant Cobbledick's," he replied. "The sergeant has been in here." He drew a chair up to the table, and, taking a lens from his pocket, began systematically to examine the markings.

"They are a remarkably fine set," he remarked, "and a complete set—the whole ten digits. Whoever made them held the bottle in the right hand and the tumbler in the left. And I don't think they are the sergeant's. They are too small and too clear and delicate."

"No," I agreed, "and the probabilities are against their being his. There is no reason why he should have wanted to take a drink of water during the few minutes that he spent here. It would have been different if it had been a beer bottle. But it would have been quite natural for Mrs. Frood to drink a glass of water while she was dressing or before she started out."

"Yes," said he. "Those are the obvious probabilities. But we must turn them into certainties if we can. Probabilities are not good data to work from. But the question is now, what are we to do? I have a small camera with me, but it would not be very convenient to take the photographs here, and it would occupy a good deal of time. On the other hand, these things would be difficult to pack without smearing the finger-prints. We want a couple of small boxes."

"Perhaps," said I, "we may find something that will do if we take a look round."

"Yes," he agreed, "we must explore the place. Meanwhile, I think I will develop up these prints for our immediate information, as we have to try to find some others to verify them."

He went back to the sitting-room, where he had put down the two cases that he always brought with him: a small suitcase that contained his toilet necessities and a similar-sized case covered with green canvas which had been rather a mystery to me. I had never seen it open, and had occasionally speculated on the nature of its contents. My curiosity was now to be satisfied, for, when he returned with it in his hand he explained: "This is what I call my research-case. It contains the materials and appliances for nearly every kind of medico-legal investigation, and I hardly ever travel without it."

He placed it on a chair and opened it, when I saw that it formed a complete portable laboratory, containing, among other things a diminutive microscope, a little folding camera, and an insufflator, or powder-spray. The latter he now took from its compartment, and, lifting the tumbler with his gloved hand, stood it on a corner of the mantelpiece and blew over it with the insufflator a cloud of impalpably fine white powder, which settled evenly on the surface of the glass. He then

tapped the tumbler gently once or twice with a lead pencil, when most of the powder coating either jarred off or crept down the surface. Finally, he blew at it lightly, which removed the rest of the powder, leaving the finger-prints standing out on the clear glass as if they had been painted on with Chinese white.

While he was operating in the same manner on the water-bottle—having first emptied it into the ewer—I examined the tumbler with the aid of his lens. The markings were amazingly clear and distinct. Through the lens I could see, not only the whole of the curious, complicated ridge-pattern, but even the rows of little round spots that marked the orifices of the sweat glands. For the first time, I realized what a perfect means of identification these remarkable imprints furnished.

“Now,” said Thorndyke, when he had finished with the bottle, “the two questions are, where shall we look for confirmatory finger-prints, and where are we to get the boxes that we want for packing these things? You said that Mrs. Frood had a kitchen.”

“Yes. But won’t you try the furniture here; the wardrobe door, for instance. The dark, polished mahogany ought to give good prints.”

“An excellent suggestion, Strangeways,” said he. “We might even find the sergeant’s finger-prints, as he has probably had the wardrobe open.”

He sprayed the three doors of the wardrobe, and when he had tapped them and blown away the surplus powder, there appeared near the edge of each a number of finger-marks, mostly rather indistinct, and none of them nearly so clear as those on the glass.

“This is very satisfactory,” said Thorndyke. “They are poor prints, but you can see quite plainly that there are two pairs of hands, one pair much larger than the other; and the prints of the larger hands are evidently not the same pattern as those on the glass, whereas those of the smaller ones are quite recognizable as the same, in spite of their indistinctness. As the large ones are almost certainly Cobbledick’s, the small ones are pretty certainly Mrs. Frood’s. But we mustn’t take anything for granted. Let us go down to the kitchen. We shall have a better chance there.”

The door of the basement staircase was still unlocked, as Mrs. Gillow had described it. I threw it open, and we descended together, I carrying the insufflator and he bearing the tumbler and bottle in his gloved hands. When he had put the two articles down on the kitchen table, he proceeded to powder first the kitchen door and then the side-door that gave on to the passage between the two houses. Both of them were painted a dark green and both yielded obvious finger-marks, and though these were mere oval smudges, devoid of any trace of pattern, their size and their groupings showed clearly enough that they appertained to a small hand. But we got more conclusive confirmation from a small aluminium frying-pan that had been left on the gas stove; for, on powdering the handle, Thorndyke brought into view a remarkably clear thumbprint, which was obviously identical with that on the water-bottle.

“I think,” said he, “that settles the question. If Mrs. Gillow has not touched anything in these premises—as she assures us that she has not—then we can safely assume that these are Mrs. Frood’s finger-prints.”

“Are you going to annex the frying-pan to produce in evidence?” I asked.

“No,” he replied. “This verification is for our own information: to secure us against the chance of producing Cobbledick’s finger-prints to identify the body. I propose, for the present, to say nothing to anyone as to our possessing this knowledge. When the time comes we can tell what we know. Until then we shall keep our own counsel.”

Once more I found myself dimly surprised at my friend’s apparently unnecessary secrecy, but, assuming that he knew best, I made no comment, but watched with somewhat puzzled curiosity his further proceedings. His interest in the place was extraordinary. In a queer, catlike fashion he prowled about the premises, examining the most trivial objects with almost ludicrous attention. He went carefully through the cooking appliances and the glass and china; he peered into cupboards, particularly into a large, deep cupboard in which spare crockery was stored, and which was, oddly enough, provided with a Yale lock; he sorted out the meagre contents of the refuse-bin, and incidentally salvaged from it a couple of cardboard boxes that had originally contained groceries, and he explored the now somewhat unsavoury, larder.

“I suppose,” he said reflectively, “the dustman must have used the side door. Do you happen to know?”

“I don’t,” said I, inwardly wondering what the deuce the dustman had to do with the case. “I understand that the door of the passage was not used.”

“But she couldn’t have had the dust-bin carried up the stairs and out at the front door,” he objected.

“I should think not,” said I. “Perhaps we could judge better if we had a look at the passage.”

He adopted the suggestion and we opened the side-door—which had a Yale night-latch—and went out into the covered passage that was common to the two houses. The door that opened on to the street was bolted on the inside, but the bolts were in good working order, as we ascertained by drawing them gently; so this gave no evidence one way or the other. Then Thorndyke carefully examined the hard gravel floor of the passage, apparently searching for dropped fragments, or the dustman’s foot-prints; but though there were traces suggesting that the side-doors had been used, there were no perceptible tracks leading to the street or in any way specifically suggestive of dustmen.

“Japp seems fond of Yale locks,” observed Thorndyke, indicating the second side-door, which was also fitted with one. “I wonder where he keeps his dust-bin.”

"Would it be worth while to ask him?" said I, more and more mystified by this extraordinary investigation.

"No," he replied, very definitely. "A question often gives more information than it elicits."

"It might easily do that in my case," I remarked with a grin; upon which he laughed softly and led the way back into the house. There I gathered up the two boxes and the insufflator and made my way up to the bed-room, he following with the tumbler and the water-bottle. Then came the critical business of packing these two precious objects in the boxes in such a way as to protect the finger-prints from contact with the sides; which was accomplished very neatly with the aid of a number of balls or plasticine from the inexhaustible research-case.

"This is a little disappointing," said Thorndyke, looking at the hair-brush and comb as he took off his gloves. "I had hoped to collect a useful sample of hair. But her excessive tidiness defeats us. There seems to be only one or two short hairs and one full length. However, we may as well have them. They won't be of much use for comparison with the naked eye, but even a single hair can be used as a colour control under the microscope."

He combed the brush until the last hair was extracted from it, and then drew the little collection from the comb and arranged it on a sheet of paper. There were six short hairs, from two to four inches long, and one long hair, which seemed to have been broken off, as it had no bulb.

"Many ladies keep a combing-bag," he remarked, as; he bestowed the collection in a seed-envelope from the research-case; "but I gather from your description that Mrs. Frood's hair was luxuriant enough to render that economy unnecessary. At any rate, there doesn't seem to be such a bag. And now I think we have finished, and we haven't done so badly."

"We have certainly got an excellent set of fingerprints," said I. "But it seems rather doubtful whether there will ever be an opportunity of using them; and if there isn't, we shan't be much more forward for our exploration. Of course, there is the hair."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "there is the hair. That may be quite valuable. And perhaps there are some other matters—but time will show."

With this somewhat cryptic conclusion he proceeded with great care to pack the two boxes in his suit-case, wedging them with his pyjamas so that they should not get shaken in transit.

As we walked home I reflected on Thorndyke's last remark. It seemed to contain a suggestion that the mystery of Angelina's death was not so complete to him as it was to me. For my own part, I could see no glimmer of light in any direction. She seemed to have vanished without leaving a trace excepting those few derelict objects which had been washed ashore and which told us nothing. But was it possible that those objects bore some significance that I had overlooked? That they were charged with some message that I had failed to decipher? I recalled a certain reticence on the part of Cobbledick which had made me suspect him of concealing from me some knowledge that he held or some inferences that he had drawn; and now there was this cryptic remark of Thorndyke's, offering the same suggestion. Might it possibly be that the profound obscurity was only in my own mind, the product of my inexperience, and that to these skilled investigators the problem presented a more intelligible aspect? It might easily be. I determined cautiously to approach the question.

"You seemed," said I, "to imply, just now, that there are certain data for forming hypotheses as to the solution of this mystery that envelops the disappearance of Mrs. Frood. But I am not aware of any such data. Are you?"

"Your question, Strangeways," he replied, "turns on the meaning of the word 'aware.' If two men, one literate and the other illiterate, look at a page of a printed book, both may be said to be aware of it; that is to say that in both it produces a retinal image which makes them conscious of it as a visible object having certain optical properties. In the case of the illiterate man the perception of the optical properties is the total effect. But the literate man has something in his consciousness already, and this something combines, as it were, with the optical perception, and makes him aware of certain secondary properties of the printed characters. To both, the page yields a visual impression; but to one only does it yield what we may call a psychical impression. Are they both aware of the page?"

"I appreciate your point," said I, with a sour smile, "and I seem to be aware of a rather skilful evasion of my question."

He smiled in his turn and rejoined: "Your question was a little indirect. Shall we have it in a more direct form?"

"What I wanted to know," said I, "though I suppose I have no right to ask, is whether there appears to you to be any prospect whatever of finding any solution of the mystery of Mrs. Frood's death."

"The answer to that question," he replied, "is furnished by my own proceedings. I am not a communicative man, as you may have noticed, but I will say this much: that I have taken, and am taking, a good deal of trouble with this case, and am prepared to take more, and that I do not usually waste my efforts on problems that appear to be unsolvable. I am not disposed to say more than that, excepting to refer you again to the instance of the printed page and to remind you that whatever I know I have either learned from you or from the observation, in your company, of objects equally visible to both of us."

This reply, if not very illuminating, at least answered my question, as it conveyed to me that I was not likely to get much more information out of my secretive friend. Nevertheless, I asked: "About the man Frood: you were saying that you had some hopes of running him to earth."

"Yes, I have made a start. I have ascertained that he did apparently set out for Brighton the day before Mrs. Frood's disappearance, but he never arrived there. That is all I know at present. He was seen getting into the Brighton train, but he

did not appear at the Brighton barrier—my informant had the curiosity to watch all the passengers go through—and he never made the visit which was the ostensible object of his journey. So he must have got out at an intermediate station. It may be difficult to trace him, but I am not without hope of succeeding eventually. Obviously, his whereabouts on the fatal day is a matter that has to be settled. At present he is the obvious suspect; but if an alibi should be proved in his case, a search would have to be initiated in some other direction.”

This conversation brought us to my house in time to relieve Mrs. Dunk’s anxieties on the subject of dinner; and as the daylight was already gone, the photographic operations were postponed until the following morning. Indeed, Thorndyke had thought of taking the objects to his chambers, where a more efficient outfit was available, but, on reflection, he decided to take the photographs in my presence so that I could, if necessary, attest their genuineness on oath. Accordingly, on the following morning, we very carefully extracted the tumbler and the bottle from their respective boxes and set them up, with a black coat of mine for a background, at the end of a table. Then Thorndyke produced his small folding camera—which pulled out to a surprising length—and, having fitted it with a short-focus objective, made the exposures, and developed the plates in a dark cupboard by the light of a little red lamp from the research case. When the plates were dry we inspected them through a lens, and found them microscopically sharp. Finally, at Thorndyke’s suggestion, I scratched my initials with a needle in the corner of each plate.

“Well,” I said, when he had finished, “you have got the evidence that you wanted, and in a very complete form. It remains to be seen now whether you will ever get an opportunity to use it.”

“Don’t be pessimistic, Strangeways,” said he. “We have had exceptional luck in getting this splendid series of fingerprints. Let us hope that Fortune will not desert us after making us these gifts.”

“What is to be done with the originals?” I asked.

“Shall I put them back where we found them?”

“I think not,” he replied. “If you have a safe or a secure lock-up cupboard, where they could be put away, out of sight, and from whence they could be produced if necessary, I will ask you to take charge of them.”

There was a cupboard with a good lock in the old bureau that I had found in my bedroom, and to this I conveyed the precious objects and locked them in. And so ended—at least, for the present—the episode of our raid on poor Angelina’s abode.



### CHAPTER XIII. — THE DISCOVERY IN BLACK BOY-LANE

On a fine, sunny afternoon, about ten days after our raid on Angelina's rooms (it was Tuesday, the 14th of July, to be exact), I was sitting in my dining-room, from which the traces of lunch had just been removed, idly glancing over the paper, and considering the advisability of taking a walk, when I heard the door-bell ring. There was a short interval; then the door was opened, and the sounds of strife and wrangling that followed this phenomenon informed me that the visitor was Mr. Bundy, between whom and Mrs. Dunk there existed a state of chronic warfare. Presently the dining-room door opened—in time for me to catch a concluding growl of defiance from Mrs. Dunk—and that lady announced gruffly: "Mr. Bundy."

My visitor tripped in smilingly, "all teeth and eyeglass," as his inveterate enemy had once expressed it, holding a Panama hat, which had temporarily superseded the velour.

"Well, John," said he, "coming out to play?" He had lately taken to calling me John; in fact, a very close and pleasant intimacy had sprung up between us. It dated from the occasion when I had confided to him my unfortunate passion for poor Angelina. That confidence he had evidently taken as a great compliment, and the matter of it had struck a sympathetic chord in his kindly nature. From that moment there had been a sensible change in his manner towards me. Beneath his habitual flippancy there was an undertone of gentleness and sympathy, and even of affection. Nor had I been unresponsive. Like Thorndyke, I found in his sunny temperament, his invariable cheerfulness and high spirits, a communicable quality that took effect on my own state of mind. And then I had early recognized that, in spite of his apparent giddiness, Bundy was a man of excellent intelligence and considerable strength of character. So the friendship had ripened naturally enough.

I rose from my chair and, dropping the paper, stretched myself. "You are an idle young dog," said I. "Why aren't you at work?"

"Nothing doing at the office except some specifications. Japp is doing them. Come out and have a roll round."

"Well, Jimmy," said I. "Your name is Jimmy, isn't it?"

"No, it is not," he replied with dignity. "I am called Peter—like the Bishop of Rumbold, and, by a curious coincidence, for the very same reason."

"Let me see," said I, falling instantly into the trap, "what was that reason?"

"Why, you see," he replied impressively, "the Bishop was called Peter because that was his name."

"Look here, young fellow my lad," said I, "you'll get yourself into trouble if you come up here pulling your elder's legs."

"It was only a gentle tweak, old chap," said he. "Besides, you aren't so blooming senile, after all. You are only cutting your first crop of whiskers. Are you coming out? I saw old Cobbledick just now, turning down Blue Boar Lane and looking as miserable as a wet cat."

"What was he looking miserable about?"

"The slump in relics, I expect. He is making no headway with his investigation. I fancy he had reckoned on getting an inspectorship out of this case, whereas, if he doesn't reach some sort of conclusion, he is likely to get his ripples knucked, as old Miss Barman would say. I suspect he was on his way to the Ark to confer with Mr. Noah. What do you say to a stroll in the direction of Mount Ararat?"

It was a cunning suggestion on the part of Bundy, for it drew me instantly. Repulsive as old Israel's activities were to me, the presence of those finger-prints, securely locked up in my bureau, had created in me a fresh anxiety to see the first state of the investigation completed so that the search for the murderer could be commenced in earnest. Not that my presence would help the sergeant, but that I was eager to hear the tidings of any new discovery.

Bundy's inference had been quite correct. We arrived at the head of the Blue Boar pier just in time to see the sergeant slowly descending the ladder, watched gloomily by Israel Bangs. As the former reached terra firma he turned round and then observed us.

"Any news, Sergeant?" I asked, as he approached across the grass.

He shook his head discontentedly. "No," he replied, "not a sign; not a vestige. It's a most mysterious affair. The things seemed to be coming up quite regularly until that hat-pin was found. Then everything came to an end. Not a trace of anything for nigh upon a month. And what, in the name of Fortune, can have become of the body? That's what I can't make out. If this goes on much longer, there won't be any body: and then we shall be done. The case will have to be dropped."

He took off his hat (he was in plain clothes as usual) and wiped his forehead, looking blankly first at me and then at Bundy. The latter also took off his hat and whisked out his handkerchief, bringing with it a little telescope which fell to the ground and was immediately picked up by the sergeant. "Neat little glass, this," he remarked, dusting it with his handkerchief. "It's lucky it fell on the turf." He took off the cap, and pulling out the tubes, peered vaguely through it up and down the river. Presently he handed it to me. "Look at those craft down below the dockyard," said he.

I took the little instrument from him and pointed it at the group of small, cutter-rigged vessels that he had indicated, of

which the telescope, small as it was, gave a brilliantly sharp picture.

"What are they?" I asked. "Oyster dredgers?"

"No," he replied. "They are bawleys with their shrimp-trawls down. But there are plenty of oyster dredgers in the lower river and out in the estuary, and what beats me is why none of them ever brings up anything in the trawls or dredges—anything in our line, I mean."

"What did you expect them to bring up?" Bundy asked.

"Well, there are the things that have washed ashore, and there are the other things that haven't washed ashore yet. And then there is the body."

"Mr. Noah would have something to say if they brought that up," said Bundy. "By the way, what had he got to say when you called on him?"

"Old Bangs? Why he is getting a bit shirty. Wants me to pay him for all the time he has lost on creeping and searching. Of course, I can't do that, I didn't employ him."

"Did he find the hat-pin that you spoke of?" Bundy asked.

"Yes; and he has been grubbing round the place where he found it ever since, as if he thought hat-pins grew there."

"Still," said Bundy, "it is not so unreasonable. A hat-pin couldn't have floated ashore. If the hat came off, the two hat-pins must have fallen out at pretty much the same time and place."

"Yes," the sergeant agreed, reflectively, "that seems to be common sense; and, if it is, the other hat-pin ought to be lying somewhere close by. I must go and have a look there myself." He again reflected for a few moments and then asked: "Would you like to see the place where Israel found the pin?"

As I had seen the place already and had shown it to Thorndyke, I left Bundy to answer.

"Why not?" he assented, rather, I suspected, to humour the sergeant than because he felt any particular interest in the place. Thereupon Cobbledick, whose enthusiasm appeared to have been revived by Bundy's remark, led the way briskly towards the wilderness by the coal-wharves, through that desolate region and along a cart-track that skirted the marshes until we came out into a sort of lesser wilderness to the west of Gas-House Road. Here the sergeant slipped through a large hole in a corrugated iron fence which gave access to a wharf littered with the unpresentable debris resulting from the activities of a firm of ship-knackers. Advancing to the edge of the wharf, Cobbledick stood for a while looking down wistfully at the expanse of unspeakable mud that the receding tide had uncovered.

"I suppose it is too dirty to go down," he said in a regretful tone.

Bundy's assent to this proposition was most emphatic and unqualified, and the sergeant had to content himself with a bird's-eye view. But he made a very thorough inspection, walking along the edge of the wharf, scrutinizing its base, pile by pile, and giving separate attention to each pot, tin, or scrap of driftwood on the slimy surface. He even borrowed Bundy's telescope to enable him to examine the more distant parts of the mud, until the owner of the instrument was reduced to the necessity of standing behind him, for politeness' sake, to get a comfortable yawn.

"Well," said Cobbledick, at long last, handing back the telescope, "I suppose we must give it up. But it's disappointing."

"I don't quite see why," said Bundy. "You have found enough to prove that the body is in the river, and no number of further relics would prove any more."

"No, there's some truth in that," Cobbledick agreed. "But I don't like the way that everything seems to have come to a stop." He crawled dejectedly through the hole in the fence and walked on for a minute or two without speaking. Presently he halted and looked about him. "I suppose Black Boy-lane will be our best way," he remarked.

"Which is Black Boy-lane?" I asked.

"It is the lane we came down after we left Japp and Willard that day," Bundy explained.

"I remember," said I, "but I didn't know it had a name."

"It was named after a little inn that used to stand somewhere near the top; but it was pulled down years ago. Here's the lane."

We entered the little, tortuous alley that wound between the high, tarred fences, and as it was too narrow for us to walk abreast, Bundy dropped behind. A little way up the lane I noticed an old hat lying on the high grass at the foot of the fence. Bundy apparently noticed it, too, for just after we had passed it I heard the sound of a kick, and the hat flew over my shoulder. At the same moment, and impelled by the same kick, a small object, which I at first thought to be a pebble, hopped swiftly along the ground in front of us, then rolled a little way, and finally came to rest, when I saw that it was a button. I should probably have passed it without further notice, having no use for stray buttons. But the more thrifty sergeant stooped and picked it up; and the instant that he looked at it he stopped dead.

"My God! Doctor," he exclaimed, holding it out towards me. "Look at this!"

I took it from him, though I had recognized it at a glance. It was a small bronze button with a Tudor Rose embossed on it.

"This is a most amazing thing," said Cobbledick.

"There can't be any doubt as to what it is."

"Not the slightest," I agreed. "It is certainly one of the buttons from Mrs. Frood's coat. The question is, how on earth did it get here?"

"Yes," said the sergeant, "that is the question; and a very difficult question, too."

"Aren't you taking rather a lot for granted?" suggested Bundy, to whom I had passed the little object for inspection. "It doesn't do to jump at conclusions too much. Mrs. Frood isn't likely to have had her buttons made to order. She must have bought them somewhere. She might even have bought them in Rochester. In any case, there must be thousands of others like them."

"I suppose there must be," I admitted, "though I have never seen any buttons like them."

"Neither have I," said Cobbledick, "and I am going to stick to the obvious probabilities. The missing woman wore buttons like this, and I shall assume that this is one of her buttons unless someone can prove that it isn't."

"But how do you account for one of her buttons being here?" Bundy objected.

"I don't account for it," retorted Cobbledick. "It's a regular puzzle. Of course, someone—a child, for instance—might have picked it up on the shore and dropped it here. But that is a mere guess, and not a very likely one. The obvious thing to do is to search this lane thoroughly and see if there are any other traces; and that is what I am going to do now. But don't let me detain you two gentlemen if you had rather not stay."

"I shall certainly stay and help you, Sergeant," said I; and Bundy, assuming the virtue of enthusiasm, if he had it not, elected also to stay and join in the search.

"We had better go back to the bottom of the lane," said Cobbledick, "and go through the grass at the foot of the fence from end to end. I will take the right hand side and you take the left."

We retraced our steps to the bottom of the lane and began a systematic search, turning over the grass and weeds and exposing the earth inch by inch. It was a slow process and would have appeared a singular proceeding had any wayfarer passed through and observed us, but fortunately it was an unfrequented place, and no one came to spy upon us. We had traversed nearly half the lane when Bundy stood up and stretched himself. "I don't know what your back is made of, John," said he. "Mine feels as if it was made of broken bottles. How much more have we got to do?"

"We haven't done half yet," I replied, also standing up and rubbing my lumbar region; and at this moment the sergeant, who was a few yards ahead, hailed us with a triumphant shout. We both turned quickly and beheld him standing with one arm raised aloft and the hand grasping a silver-topped hat-pin.

"What do you say to that, Mr. Bundy?" he demanded as we hurried forward to examine the new 'find.' "Shall we be jumping at conclusions if we say that this hat-pin is Mrs. Frood's?"

"No," Bundy admitted after a glance at the silver poppy-head. "This seems quite distinctive, and, of course, it confirms the button. But I don't understand it in the least. How can they have come here?"

"We won't go into that," said the sergeant, in a tone of suppressed excitement that showed me pretty clearly that he had already gone into it. "They are here. And now the question arises, what became of the hat? It couldn't have dropped off down at the wharf, or this hat-pin wouldn't be here; but it must have fallen off when both hat-pins were gone. Now what can have become of it?"

"It might have been picked up and taken possession of by some woman," I suggested. "It was a good hat, and if the body was brought here soon after the crime, as it must have been, it wouldn't have been much damaged. But why trouble about the hat? Appearances suggest that the body was either brought up or taken down this lane. That is the new and astonishing fact that needs explaining."

"We don't want to do any explaining now," said Cobbledick. "We are here to collect facts. If we can find out what became of the hat, that may help us when we come to consider the explanations."

"Well, it obviously isn't here," said I.

"No," he agreed, "and it wouldn't have been left here. A murderer mightn't have noticed the button, or even the hat-pin, on a dark, foggy night. But he'd have noticed the hat; and he wouldn't have left it where it must have been seen, and probably led to inquiries. He might have taken it with him, or he might have got rid of it. I should say he would have got rid of it. What is on the other side of these fences?"

We all hitched ourselves up the respective fences far enough to look over. On the one side was a space of bare, gravelly ground with thin patches of grass and numerous heaps of cinder; on the other was an area of old waste land thickly covered with thistles, ragwort, and other weeds. The sergeant elected to begin with the latter, as the less frequented and therefore more probably undisturbed. Setting his foot on the buttress of a post, he went over the fence with surprising agility, considering his figure, and was lost to view; but we could hear him raking about among the herbage close to the fence, and from time to time I stood on the buttress and was able to witness his proceedings. First he went to the bottom of the lane and from that point returned by the fence, searching eagerly among the high weeds. I saw him thus proceed,



apparently to the top of the lane in the neighbourhood of the remains of the city wall. Thence he came back, but now at a greater distance from the fence, and as he was still eagerly peering and probing amongst the weeds, it was evident that he had had no success. Suddenly, when he was but a few yards away, he uttered an exclamation and ran forward. Then I saw him stoop, and the next moment he fairly ran towards me holding the unmistakable brown straw hat with the dull green ribbon.

"That tells us what we wanted to know," he said breathlessly, handing the hat to me as he climbed over the fence; "at least, I think it does. I'll tell you what I mean—but not now," he added in a lower tone, though not unheard by Bundy, as I inferred later.

"I suppose we need hardly go on with the search any further?" I suggested, having had enough of groping amongst the grass.

"Well, no," he replied. "I shall go over it again later on, but we've got enough to think about for the present. By the way, Mr. Bundy, I've found something belonging to you. Isn't this your property?"

He produced from his pocket a largish key, to which was attached a wooden label legibly inscribed "Japp and Bundy, High-street, Rochester."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bundy, "it is Japp's precious key! Where on earth did you find it, Sergeant?"

"Right up at the top," was the reply. "Close to the old wall."

"Now, I wonder how the deuce it got there," said Bundy. "Some fool must have thrown it over the fence from pure mischief. However, here it is. You know there was a reward of ten shillings for finding it, Sergeant. I had better settle up at once. You needn't make any difficulties about it," he added, as the sergeant seemed disposed to decline the payment. "It won't come out of my pocket. It is the firm's business."

On this understanding Cobbledick pocketed the proffered note and we walked on up the lane, the sergeant slightly embarrassed, as we approached the town, by the palpably unconcealable hat. Very little was said by any of us, for these new discoveries, with the amazing inferences that they suggested, gave us all abundant material for thought. The sergeant walked with eyes bent on the ground, evidently cogitating profoundly; my mind surged with new speculations and hypotheses, while Bundy, if not similarly preoccupied, refrained from breaking in on our meditations.

When, at length, by devious ways, we reached the Highstreet in the neighbourhood of the Corn Exchange, we halted, and the sergeant looked at me as if framing a question. Bundy glanced up at the quaint old clock, and remarked:

"It is about time I got back to the office. Mustn't leave poor old Japp to do all the work, though he never grumbles. So I will leave you here."

I realized that this was only a polite excuse to enable the sergeant to have a few words with me alone, and I accepted it as such.

"Good-bye, then," said I, "if you must be off, and in case I don't see you before, I shall expect you to dinner on Saturday if you've got the evening free. Dr. Thorndyke is coming down for the week-end, and I know you enjoy ragging him."

"He is pretty difficult to get a rise out of, all the same," said Bundy, brightening up perceptibly at the invitation. "But I shall turn up with very great pleasure." He bestowed a mock ceremonious salute on me and the sergeant, and, turning away, bustled off in the direction of the office. As soon as he was out of earshot Cobbledick opened the subject of the new discoveries.

"This is an extraordinary development of our case, Doctor," said he. "I didn't want to discuss it before Mr. Bundy, though he is really quite a discreet gentleman, and pretty much on the spot, too. But he isn't a party to the case, and it is better not to talk too freely. You see the points that these fresh finds raise?"

"I see that they put a new complexion on the affair, but to me they only make the mystery deeper and more incomprehensible."

"In a way they do," Cobbledick agreed, "but, on the other hand, they put the case on a more satisfactory footing. For instance, we understand now why the body has never come to light. It was never in the river at all. Then as to the perpetrator; he was a local man—or, at least, there was a local man in it; a man who knew the town and the waterside neighbourhood thoroughly. No stranger would have found Black Boy-lane. Very few Rochester people know it."

"But," I asked, "what does the finding of these things suggest to you?"

"Well," he replied, "it suggests several questions. Let me just put these things away in my office, and then we can talk the matter over." He went into his office, and shortly returned relieved—very much relieved—of the conspicuous hat. We turned towards the bridge, and he resumed: "The first question and the most important one is, which way was the body travelling? It is obvious that it was carried through Black Boy-lane. But in which direction? Towards the town or towards the river? When you think of the circumstances; when you recall that it was a foggy night when she disappeared; it seems at first more probable that the crime might have been committed in, or near, the lane, and the body carried down to the river. But when you consider all the facts, that doesn't seem possible. There is that box of tablets, picked up dry and clean on Chatham Hard. That seems to fix the locality where the crime occurred."

"And there is the brooch," said I.

"I don't attach much importance to that," he replied. "It might have been picked up anywhere. But the box of tablets couldn't have got from Black Boy-lane to Chatham except by the river, and it hadn't been in the river. But the hat seems to me to settle the question. You see, one hat-pin was found on the shore and the other in the lane near the hat. Now, one hat-pin might have dropped out and left the hat still fixed on the head. But when the hat came off, the pins must have come off with it. The hat came off near the top of the lane. If both the pins had been in it they would both have come out there.

"But one pin was found on the shore; therefore when the body was at the shore the hat must have been still on the head, though it had probably got loosened by all the dragging about in the boat and in landing the body. You agree to that, Doctor?"

"Yes, it seems undeniable," I answered.

"Very well," said he. "Then the body was being carried up the lane. The next question is: was it being carried by one person or by more than one? Well, I think you will agree with me, Doctor, that it could hardly have been done by one man. It is quite a considerable distance from the shore to the top of the lane. She was a goodsized woman, and a dead body is a mighty awkward thing to carry at the best of times. I should say there must have been at least two men."

"It certainly does seem probable," I admitted.

"I think so," said he. "Then we come to another question. Was it really a dead body? Or might the woman have been merely insensible?"

"Good God, Sergeant!" I exclaimed. "You don't think it possible that it could have been a case of forcible abduction, and that Mrs. Frood is still alive?"

"I wouldn't say it was impossible," he replied, "but I certainly don't think it is the case. You see, nearly three months have passed and there is no sign of her. But in modern England you can't hide a full-grown, able-bodied woman who has got all her wits about her. No, Doctor, I am afraid we must take the view that the woman who was carried up Black Boy-lane was a dead woman. All I want to point out is that the other view is a bare possibility, and that we mustn't forget it."

"But," I urged, "don't you think that the fact that she was being carried towards the town strongly suggests that she was alive? Why on earth should a murderer bring a body, at great risk of discovery, from the river, where it could easily have been disposed of, up into the town? It seems incredible."

"It does," he agreed. "It's a regular facer. But, on the other hand, suppose she was alive. What could they have done with her? How could they have kept her out of sight all this time? And why should they have done it?"

"As to the motive," said I, "that is incomprehensible in any case. But what do you suppose actually happened?"

"My theory of it is," he replied, "that two men, at least, did the job. Both may have been local waterside men, or there may have been a stranger with a water-rat in his pay. I imagine the crime was committed at Chatham, somewhere near the Sun Pier, and that the body was put in a boat and brought up here. It was a densely foggy night, you remember, so there would have been no great difficulty; and there wouldn't be many people about. The part of it that beats me is what they meant to do with the body. They seem to have brought it deliberately from Chatham right up into Rochester Town; and they have got rid of it somehow. They must have had some place ready to stow it in, but what that place can have been, I can't form the ghost of a guess. It's a fair knock-out."

"You don't suppose old Israel Bangs knows anything about it?" I suggested.

The sergeant shook his head. "I've no reason to suppose he does," he replied. "And it is a bad plan to make guesses and name names."

We walked up and down the Esplanade for nearly an hour, discussing various possibilities; but we could make nothing of the incredible thing that seemed to have happened in spite of its incredibility. At last we gave it up and returned to the Guildhall, where, as we parted, he said a little hesitatingly: "I heard you tell Mr. Bundy that Dr. Thorndyke was coming down for the week-end. It wouldn't be amiss if you were to put the facts of the case before him. It's quite in his line, and I think he would be interested to hear about it; and he might see something that I have missed. But, of course, it must be in strict confidence."

I promised to try to find an opportunity to get Thorndyke's opinion on the case, and with this we separated, the sergeant retiring to his office and I making my way homeward to prepare a report for dispatch by the last post.

---

## CHAPTER XIV. — SERGEANT COBBLEDICK IS ENLIGHTENED

The custom which had grown upon my part of meeting Thorndyke at the station on the occasion of his visits was duly honoured on the present occasion, for the surprising discoveries in Black Boy-lane, which I had described in my report to him, made me eager to hear his comments. Unfortunately, on this occasion, he had come down by an unusually late train, and the opportunity for discussion was limited to the time occupied by the short walk from Rochester Station to my house. For it was close upon dinner time, and I rather expected to find Bundy awaiting us.

"Your report was quite a thrilling document," he remarked, as we came out of the station approach. "These new discoveries seem to launch us on a fresh phase of the investigation."

"Do they seem to you to offer any intelligible suggestions?" I asked.

"There is no lack of suggestions," he replied. "To a person of ordinary powers of imagination, a number of hypotheses must present themselves. But, of course, the first thing to consider is not what might have happened, but what did happen, and what we can safely infer from those happenings. We can apparently take it as proved that the body was carried through the lane; and everything goes to show that it was carried from the river towards the town. The first clear inference is that we can completely exclude accident, pure and simple. The body—living or dead—may be assumed to have been carried by some person or persons. We can dismiss the idea that the woman walked up the lane. But if someone carried the body, someone is definitely implicated. The affair comes unquestionably into the category of crime."

"That doesn't carry us very far," I said, with a sense of disappointment.

"It carries us a stage farther than our previous data did, for it excludes accident, which they did not. Then it suggests not only premeditation, but arrangement. If the body was brought up from the river, there must have been some place known to, and probably prepared by, those who brought it, in which it could be deposited; and that place must have been more secure than the river from which it was brought. But the river, itself, was a very secure hiding-place, especially if the body had been sunk with weights. Now, this is all very remarkable. If you consider the extraordinary procedure; the seizure of the victim at Chatham; the conveyance of the body from thence to this considerable distance; the landing of it at the wharf; the conveyance of it by an apparently selected route—at enormous risk of discovery, in spite of the fog to an appointed destination: I say, Strangeways, that if you consider this astounding procedure, you cannot fail to be convinced that there was some definite purpose behind it."

"Yes," I agreed, "that seems to be so. But what could the purpose be? It appears perfectly incomprehensible. It only makes the mystery more unsolvable than ever."

"Not at all," he rejoined. "There is nothing so hopeless to investigate as the perfectly obvious and commonplace. As soon as an apparently incomprehensible motive appears, we are within sight of a solution. There may be innumerable explanations of a common-place action; but an outrageously unreasonable action; pursued with definite and considered purpose, can admit of but one or two. The action, with its underlying purpose, must be adjusted to some unusual conditions. We have only to consider to what conditions it could be adjusted, and which, if any, of those conditions actually exist, and the explanation of the apparently incomprehensible action comes into view. But here we are at our destination, and there is our friend, Bundy, standing on the doorstep. By the way, I have brought one or two photographs of Mrs. Frood for you to look at."

We arrived in time to intervene and put an end to a preliminary skirmish between the irrepressible Bundy and Mrs. Dunk, and when greetings had been exchanged, Thorndyke went up to his room to wash and deposit his luggage.

"Well, John," said Bundy, when he had hung up his hat, "it is very pleasant to see my old friend after this long separation. Very good of him, too, to invite an insignificant outsider like me to meet his distinguished colleague. You are a benefactor to me, John."

"Don't talk nonsense, Peterkin," said I. "You know we are always glad to see you. I invite you for my own pleasure and Thorndyke's, not for yours."

Bundy gave my arm a grateful squeeze. "Good old John," said he. "Nothing like doing it handsomely. But here is the great man himself," he added, as Thorndyke entered the dining-room, carrying a cardboard box, "with instruments of magic. He's going to do a conjuring trick."

Thorndyke opened the box and delicately picked out four photographs, all mounted and all of cabinet size, which he stood up in a row on the mantelpiece. Two of them were from the same negative, one being printed in red carbon, the other in sepia. The remaining two were ordinary silver prints of the conventional trade type.

Bundy looked at the collection with not unnatural surprise.

"Where did these, things come from?" he asked.

"They came from London," replied Thorndyke, "where things of this kind grow. Strangeways asked me to get him some samples. How do you like them? My own preference is for the carbons, and of the two I think I like the red chalk print the better."

I ran my eye along the row and found myself in strong agreement with Thorndyke. It was not only that the carbon prints

had the advantage of the finer medium. The treatment was altogether more artistic, and the likeness seemed better, in spite of a rather over-strong top-lighting.

"Yes," I said, "the carbons are infinitely superior to the silver prints, and of the two I think the red is the better because it emphasises the shadows less."

"Is the likeness as good as in the silver prints?" Thorndyke asked.

"Better, I think. The expression is more natural and spontaneous. What do you say, Peter?"

As I spoke I looked at him, not for the first time, for I had already been struck by the intense concentration with which he had been examining the two carbons. And it was not only concentration. There was a curious expression of surprise, as if something in the appearance of the portraits puzzled him.

He looked up with a perplexed frown. "As to the likeness," said he, "I don't know that I am a particularly good judge. I only saw her once or twice. But, as far as I remember, it seems to be quite a good likeness, and there can be no question as to the superiority, in an artistic sense, of the carbons. And I agree with you that the shadows are less harsh in the red than in the sepia. Who is the photographer?"

He picked up the red print and, turning it over, looked at the back. Then, finding that the back of the card was blank, he picked up the sepia print and inspected it in the same way, but with the same result. There was no photographer's name either on the back or front.

"I have an impression," said Thorndyke, "that the carbons were done a City photographer. But my man will know. He got them for me."

Bundy set the two photographs back in their places, still, as it seemed to me, with the air of a man who is trying vainly to remember something. But, at this moment, Mrs. Dunk entered with the soup tureen, and we forthwith took our places at the table.

We had finished our soup, and I was proceeding to effect the dismemberment of an enormous sole, when Bundy, having fortified himself with a sip of Chablis, cast a malignant glance at Thorndyke.

"I have got some bad news for you, Doctor," said he.

"Which doctor are you addressing?" Thorndyke asked. "There's only one now," replied Bundy. "The other one has been degraded to the rank of John."

"That happens to be my rank, too," observed Thorndyke.

"Oh, but I couldn't think of taking such a liberty," Bundy protested, "though it is very gracious and condescending of you to suggest it. No, your rank and tine will continue to be that of doctor."

"And what is your bad news?"

"It is a case of a lost opportunity," said Bundy. "'Of all the sad words of tongue or pen,' and so on. It might have been ten shillings. But it never will now. Cobbledick has got your ten bob."

"Do you mean that Cobbledick has found the missing key?"

"Even so, alackaday! The chance is gone forever."

"Where did he find it?" Thorndyke asked.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bundy. "There it is again. The tragedy of it! He wasn't looking for it at all. He just fell over it in a field where he was searching for relics of Mrs. Frood."

"Your description," said Thorndyke "is deficient in geographical exactitude. Could you bring your ideas of locality to a somewhat sharper focus? There are probably several fields in the neighbourhood of Rochester."

"So there are," said Bundy. "Quite a lot. But this particular field lies on the right, or starboard, side of a small thoroughfare called Black Boy-lane."

"Let me see," said Thorndyke. "Isn't that the lane that we went down after leaving our friends on the day of the Great Perambulation?"

"Yes," replied Bundy, looking at him in astonishment, "but how did you know its name?" (He was, of course, not aware of my report to Thorndyke describing the discoveries and the place.)

"That," said Thorndyke "is an irrelevant question. Now when you say 'the right-hand side'—"

"I mean the right-hand side looking towards the town, of course. As a matter of fact, Cobbledick found the key among the thistles near to the fence, and quite close to the outside of the city wall."

"How do you suppose it got there?" Thorndyke asked.

"I've no idea. Someone must have taken it out of the gate and thrown it over the fence. That is obvious. But who could have done it I can't imagine. Of course, you suspect Cobbledick, but that is only jealousy."

The exchange of schoolboy repartee continued without a sensible pause on either side. But yet I seemed to detect in

Thorndyke's manner a certain reflectiveness underlying the levity of his verbal conflict with Bundy; a reflectiveness that seemed to have had its origin in the "news" that the latter had communicated. Of course, I had said nothing, in my report, about the finding of the key. Why *should* I? Those reports referred exclusively to matters connected with the disappearance of poor Angelina. The loss and the recovery of the key were items of mere local gossip with which Thorndyke could have no concern excepting in connexion with Bundy's facetious fiction. And yet it had seemed to me that Thorndyke showed quite a serious interest in the announcement. However, he made no further reference to the matter, and the conversation drifted to other topics.

It was almost inevitable that, sooner or later, some reference should be made to the discoveries in the lane. It was Bundy, of course, who introduced the subject; and I was amazed by the adroit way in which Thorndyke conveyed the impression of complete ignorance, without making any statement, and the patient manner in which he listened to the account of the adventure, and even elicited amplified details by judicious questions. But he eluded all Bundy's efforts to extract an opinion on the significance of the discoveries.

"But," the latter protested, "you said that if I would give you the facts, you would give me the explanation."

"The explanation is obvious," said Thorndyke. "If you found these objects in the lane, they must have been dropped there."

"Well, of course they must," said Bundy. "That is quite obvious."

"Exactly," agreed Thorndyke. "That is what I am pointing out."

"But why was the body being carried up the lane? And where was it being carried to?"

"Ah," protested Thorndyke, "but now you are going beyond your facts. You haven't proved that there was any body there at all."

"But there must have been, or the things couldn't have dropped off it."

"But you haven't proved that they did drop off it. They may have, or they may not. That is a question of fact; and as I impressed on you on a previous occasion, evidence as to fact is the function of the common witness. The expert witness explains the significance of facts furnished by others. I have explained the facts that you have produced, and now you ask me to explain something that isn't a fact at all. But that is not my function. I am an expert."

"I see," said Bundy; "and now I understand why judges are so down on expert witnesses. It is my belief that they are a parcel of impostors. Wasn't Captain Bunsby an expert witness? Or was he only an oracle?"

"It is a distinction without a difference," replied Thorndyke. "Captain Bunsby is the classical instance of oracular safety. It was impossible to dispute the correctness of his pronouncements."

"Principally," said I, "because no one could make head or tail of them."

"But that was the subtlety of the method," said Thorndyke. "A statement cannot be contested until it is understood. From which it follows that if you would deliver a judgment that cannot be disputed, you must take proper precautions against the risk of being understood."

Bundy adjusted his eye-glass and fixed on Thorndyke a glare of counterfeit defiance. "I am going to take an early opportunity of seeing you in the witness-box," said he. "It will be the treat of my life."

"I must try to give you that treat," replied Thorndyke. "I am sure you will be highly entertained, but I don't think you will be able to dispute my evidence."

"I don't suppose I shall," Bundy retorted with a grin, "if it is of the same brand as the sample that I have heard."

Here the arrival of Mrs. Dunk with the coffee ushered in a truce between the disputants, and when I had filled the cups Thorndyke changed the subject by recalling the incidents of our perambulation with Japp and Mr. Willard; and Bundy, apparently considering that enough chaff had been cut for one evening, entered into a discussion on the conditions of life in mediaeval Rochester with a zest and earnestness that came as a refreshing change, after so much frivolity. So the evening passed pleasantly away until ten o'clock, when Bundy rose to depart.

"Shall we see him home, Thorndyke?" said I. "We can do with a walk after our pow-wow."

"Somebody ought to see him home," said Thorndyke. "He looks comparatively sober now, but wait till he gets out into the air." (Bundy's almost ascetic abstemiousness in respect of wine, I should explain, had become a mild joke between us.) "But I think I won't join the bacchanalian procession. I have a letter to write, and I can get it done and posted by the time you come back."

As we walked towards the office arm-in-arm—Bundy keeping up the fiction of a slight unsteadiness of gait—my guest once more expressed enjoyment of our little festivals.

"I suppose," said he, "Dr. Thorndyke is really quite a big bug in his way."

"Yes," I replied; "he is in the very front rank; in fact, I should say that he is the greatest living authority on his subject."

"Yes," said Bundy, thoughtfully, "one feels that he is a great man, although he is so friendly and so perfectly free from side. I hope I don't cheek him too much."

"He doesn't seem to resent it," I answered, "and he certainly doesn't object to your society. He expressly said, when he wrote last, that he hoped to see something of you."

"That was awfully nice of him," Bundy said with very evident gratification; and he added, after a pause: "Lord! John, what a windfall it was for me when you came down with that letter from old Turcival. It has made life a different thing for me."

"I am glad to hear it, Peter," said I; "but you haven't got all the benefit. It was a bit of luck for me to strike a live bishop in my new habitat, and a Rumtifooflish one at that. But here we are at the episcopal palace. Shall I assist your lordship up the steps?"

We carried out the farce to its foolish end, staggering together up the steps, at the top of which I propped him securely against the door and rang the bell, with the comfortable certainty that there was no one in the house to disturb.

"Good night, John, old chap," he said cordially, as I retired.

"Good night, Peter, my child," I responded; and so took my way homeward to my other guest.

I arrived at my house in time to meet Thorndyke returning from the adjacent pillar-box, and we went in together.

"Well," said he, "I suppose we had better turn in, according to what is, I believe, the custom of this household, and turn out betimes in the morning, for a visit, perhaps, to Black Boy-lane."

"Yes," I replied, "we may as well turn in now. You are not going to leave these photographs there, are you?"

"They are your photographs," he replied; "that is, if you care to have them. I brought them down for you."

I thanked him very warmly for the gift, and gathered up the portraits carefully, replacing them, for the present, in their box. Then we turned out the lights and made our way up to our respective bedrooms.

At breakfast on the following morning Thorndyke opened the subject of our investigation by cross-examining me on the matter of my report, and the more detailed account that Bundy had given.

"What does Sergeant Cobbledick think of the new developments?" he asked, when I had given him all the detail that I could.

"In a way he is encouraged. He is glad to get something more definite to work on. But for the present he seems to be high and dry. He gave me quite a learned exposition of the possibilities of the case, but he had to admit when he had finished that he was still in the dark so far as any final conclusion was concerned. He even suggested that I should put the facts before you—he recognized you when we met him on the road near Blue Boar Pier—and ask if you could make any suggestion."

"Can you recall the sergeant's exposition of the case?"

"I think so. It made rather an impression on me at the time," and here I repeated, as well as I could remember them, the various inferences that Cobbledick had drawn from the presence in the lane of the things that we had found. Thorndyke listened with deep attention, nodding his head approvingly as each point was made.

"A very admirable analysis, Strangeways," he said when I had finished. "It does the sergeant great credit. So far as it goes, it is an excellent interpretation of the facts that are in his possession. There are, perhaps, one or two points that he has overlooked."

"If there are," said I, "it would be a great kindness to draw his attention to them. He is naturally anxious to get on with the case, and he has taken endless trouble over it."

"I shall be very glad to give him a hint or two," said Thorndyke. "After breakfast I should like to go over the ground with you, and then we might go along to the station and see if he is in his office."

I agreed to this program, and as soon as we had finished our breakfast we went forth, making our way by Free School-lane and The Common to the marshes west of Gas House-road. From there we entered Black Boy-lane at the lower end, and slowly followed its windings, Thorndyke looking about him attentively, and occasionally peering over the fences, which his stature enabled him to do without climbing. At the top of the lane, where it opened into a paved thoroughfare, we observed no less a personage than Sergeant Cobbledick, standing on the pavement and looking at the few adjacent houses with an expression of profound speculation. His speculative attitude changed suddenly to one of eager interest when he saw us; and on my presenting him to Thorndyke, he stood stiffly at "attention" and raised his hat with an air that I can only describe as reverent.

"Dr. Strangeways was telling me, just now," said Thorndyke, "of your very interesting observations on these new developments. He also said that you would like to talk the matter over with me."

"I should, indeed, sir," the sergeant said, earnestly; "and if I might suggest it, my office will be very quiet, being Sunday, and I could show you the things that have been found, if you would like to see them."

"As to the things that have been found," said Thorndyke, "I am prepared to take them as read. They have been properly identified. But we could certainly talk more conveniently in your office."

In a few minutes we turned into a narrow street which brought us to the side of the Guildhall, and the sergeant, having

shown us into his office and given some instructions to a constable, entered and locked the door.

"Now, Sergeant," said Thorndyke, "tell us what your difficulty is."

"I've got several difficulties, Sir," replied Cobbledick. "In the first place, here is a body being carried up the lane. You agree with me, Sir, that it was going up and not down?"

"Yes; your reasons seem quite conclusive."

"Well, then, Sir, the next question is, was this a dead body, or was the woman drugged or insensible? The fact that she was being taken from the river towards the town suggests that she was alive and being taken to some house where she could be hidden; but, of course, a dead body might be taken to a house to be destroyed by burning or to be dismembered or even buried, say under the cellar. I must say my own feeling is that it was a dead body."

"The reasons you gave Dr. Strangeways for thinking so seem to be quite sound. Let us proceed on the assumption that it was a dead body."

"Well, Sir," said Cobbledick, gloomily, "there you are. That's all. We have got a body brought up from the river. We can trace it up to near the top of the lane. But there we lose it. It seems to have vanished into smoke. It was being taken up into the town; but where? There's nothing to show. We come out into the paved streets, and, of course, there isn't a trace. We seem to have come to the end of our clues; and I am very much afraid that we shan't get any more."

"There," said Thorndyke, "I am inclined to agree with you, Sergeant. You won't get any more clues for the simple reason that you have got them all."

"Got them all!" exclaimed Cobbledick, staring in amazement at Thorndyke.

"Yes," was the calm reply; "at least, that is how it appears to me. Your business now is not to search for more clues but to extract the meaning from the facts that you possess. Come, now, Sergeant," he continued, "let us take a bird's-eye view of the case, as it were, reconstructing the investigation in a sort of synopsis. I will read the entries from my note-book."

"On Saturday, the 26th of April, Mrs. Frood disappeared. On the 1st of May the brooch was found at the pawn-brokers. On the 7th of May the box of tablets and the bag were found on the shore at Chatham, apparently fixing the place of the crime. On the 9th of May the scarf was found at Blue Boar Head. On the 15th of May a shoe was found in the creek between Blue Boar Head and Gas House Point. On the 25th of May the second shoe was found on the gridiron near Gas House Point. On the 20th of June a hat-pin was found on the shore a little west of the last spot; always creeping steadily up the river, you notice."

"Yes," said Cobbledick, "I noticed that, and I'm hanged if I can account for it in any way."

"Never mind," said Thorndyke. "Just note the fact. Then on the 14th of July four articles were found; near the bottom of the lane a button; near the middle of the lane a hat-pin, and, abreast of it in the field, the hat, itself. Finally, at the top of the lane, in the field, you found the missing key."

"I don't see what the key has got to do with it," said the sergeant. "It don't seem to me to be in the picture."

"Doesn't it?" said Thorndyke. "Just consider a moment, Sergeant. But perhaps you have forgotten the date on which the key disappeared?"

"I don't know that I ever noticed when it was lost."

"It wasn't lost," said Thorndyke. "It was taken away—probably out of the gate—and afterwards thrown over the fence. But I daresay Dr. Strangeways can give you the date."

I reflected for a few moments. "Let me see," said I. "It was a good while ago, and I remember that it was a Saturday, because the men who were filling the holes in the city wall had knocked off at noon for a week-end. Now when was it? I went to the wine merchant's that day, and—". I paused with a sudden shock of recollection. "Why!" I exclaimed. "It was *the* Saturday; the day Mrs. Frood disappeared!"

Cobbledick seemed to stiffen in his chair as he suddenly turned a startled look at Thorndyke.

"Yes," agreed the latter; "the key disappeared during the morning of the 26th of April and Mrs. Frood disappeared on the evening of the same day. That is a coincidence in time. And if you consider what gate it was that this key unlocked; that it gave entrance—and also excluded entrance—to an isolated, enclosed area of waste land in which excavations and fillings-in are actually taking place; I think you will agree that there is matter for investigation."

As Thorndyke was speaking Cobbledick's eyes opened wider and wider, and his mouth exhibited a like change.

"Good Lord, Sir!" he exclaimed at length, "you mean to say—"

"No, I don't," Thorndyke interrupted with a smile. "I am merely drawing your attention to certain facts which seem to have escaped it. You said that there was no hint of a place to which the body could have been conveyed. I point out a hint which you have overlooked. That is all."

"It is a pretty broad hint, too," said Cobbledick, "and I am going to lose no time in acting on it. Do you happen to know, Doctor, who employed the workmen?"

"I gathered that Japp and Bundy had the contract to repair the wall. At any rate, they were supervising the work, and

they will be able to tell you where to find the foreman. Probably they have a complete record of the progress of the work. You know Mr. Japp's address on Boley Hill, I suppose, and Mr. Bundy lives over the office."

"I'll call on him at once," said Cobbledick, "and see if he can give me the particulars, and I'll get him to lend me the key. I suppose you two gentlemen wouldn't care to come and have a look at the place with me?"

"I don't see why not," said Thorndyke. "But I particularly wish not to appear in connexion with the case, so I will ask you to say nothing to anyone of your having spoken to me about it, and, of course, we go to the place alone."

"Certainly," the sergeant agreed emphatically. "We don't want any outsiders with us. Then if you will wait for me here I will get back as quickly as I can. I hope Mr. Bundy is at home."

He snatched up his hat and darted out of the office, full of hope and high spirits. Thorndyke's suggestion had rejuvenated him.

"It seems to me," I said, when he had gone, "a rather remarkable thing that you should have remembered all the circumstances of the loss of this key."

"It isn't really remarkable at all," he replied. "I heard of it after the woman had disappeared. But as soon as she had disappeared, the loss of this particular key at this particular time became a fact of possible evidential importance. It was a fact that had to be noted and remembered. The connexion of the tragedy with the river seemed to exclude it for a time; but the discoveries in the lane at once revived its importance. The fundamental rule, Strangeways, of all criminal investigation is to note everything, relevant or irrelevant, and forget nothing."

"It is an excellent rule," said I, "but it must be a mighty difficult one to carry out"; and for a while we sat, each immersed in his own reflections.

The sergeant returned in an incredibly short space of time, and he burst into the office with a beaming face, flourishing the key. "I found him at home," said he, "and I've got all the necessary particulars, so we can take a preliminary look round." He held the door open, and when we had passed out, he led the way down the little street at a pace that would have done credit to a sporting lamp-lighter. A very few minutes brought us to the gate, and when he had opened it and locked it behind us, he stood looking round the weed-grown enclosure as if doubtful where to begin.

"Which patch in the wall is the one they were working at when the key disappeared?" Thorndyke asked.

"The last but one to the left," was the reply.

"Then we had better have a look at that, first," said Thorndyke. "It was a ready-made excavation."

We advanced towards the ragged patch in the wall, and as we drew near I looked at it with a tumult of emotions that swamped mere anxiety and expectation. I could see what Thorndyke thought, and that perception amounted almost to conviction. Meanwhile, my colleague and the sergeant stepped close up to the patch and minutely examined the rough and slovenly joints of the stonework.

"There is no trace of its having been opened," said Thorndyke. "But there wouldn't be. I think we had better scrape up the earth at the foot of the wall. Something might easily have been dropped and trodden in in the darkness." He looked towards the shed, in which a couple of empty lime barrels still remained, and, perceiving there a decrepit shovel, he went and fetched it. Returning with it, he proceeded to turn up the surface of the ground at the foot of the wall, depositing each shovelful of earth on a bare spot, and spreading it out carefully. For some time there was no result, but he continued methodically, working from one end of the patch towards the other. Suddenly Cobbledick uttered an exclamation and stooped over a freshly deposited shovelful.

"By the Lord!" he ejaculated, "it is a true bill! You were quite right, sir." He stood up, holding out between his finger and thumb a small bronze button bearing an embossed Tudor Rose. Thorndyke glanced at me as I took the button from the sergeant and examined it.

"Yes," I said, "it is unquestionably one of her buttons."

"Then," said he, "we have got our answer. The solution of the mystery is contained in that patch of new rubble."

The sergeant's delight and gratitude were quite pathetic. Again and again he reiterated his thanks, regardless of Thorndyke's disclaimers and commendations of the officer's own skilful and patient investigation.

"All the same," said Cobbledick, as he locked the gate and pocketed the key, "we haven't solved the whole problem. We may say that we have found the body; but the problem of the crime and the criminal remains. I suppose, sir, you don't see any glimmer of light in that direction?"

"A glimmer, perhaps," replied Thorndyke, "but it may turn out to be but a mirage. Let us see the body. It may have a clearer message for us than we expect."

Beyond this rather cryptic suggestion he refused to commit himself; nor, when we had parted from the sergeant, could I get anything more definite out of him.

"It is useless to speculate," he said, by way of closing the subject. "We think that we know what is inside that wall. We may be right, but we may possibly be wrong. A few hours will settle our doubts. If the body is there, it may tell us all that we want to know."



This last observation left me more puzzled than ever.

The condition of the body might, and probably would, reveal the cause of death and the nature of the crime; but it was difficult to see how it could point out the identity of the murderer. However, the subject was closed for the time being, and Thorndyke resolutely refused to reopen it until the fresh data were available.

---

## CHAPTER XV. — THE END OF THE TRAIL

Shortly after breakfast on the following morning Sergeant Cobbledick made his appearance at my house. I found him in the consulting-room, walking about on tip-toe with his hat balanced in his hands, and evidently in a state of extreme nervous tension.

"I have got everything in train, Doctor," said he, declining a seat. "I dug up the foreman yesterday evening and he dug up one of his mates to give him a hand, if necessary; and I have the authority to open the wall. So we are all ready to begin. The two men have gone down to the place with their tools, and Mr. Bundy has gone with them to let them in. He didn't much want to go, but I thought it best that either he or Mr. Japp should be present. It is their wall, so to speak. I suppose you are coming to see the job done."

"Is there any need for me to be there?" I asked. Cobbledick looked at me in surprise. He had evidently assumed that I should be eager to see what happened.

"Well," he replied, "you are the principal witness to the identity of the remains. You saw her last, you know. What is your objection, Doctor?"

I was not in a position to answer this question. I could not tell him what this last and most horrible search meant to me; and apart from my personal feelings in regard to poor Angelina, there was no objection at all, but, on the contrary, every reason why I should be present.

"It isn't a very pleasant affair," I replied, "seeing that I knew the lady rather well. However, if you think I had better be there, I will come down with you."

"I certainly think your presence would be a help," said he. "We don't know what may turn up, and you know more about her than anybody else."

Accordingly, I walked down with him, and when he had admitted me with his key—Bundy had presumably used the duplicate—he closed the gate and locked it from within. The actual operations had not yet commenced, but the foreman and his mate were standing by the wall, conversing affably with Bundy, who looked nervous and uncomfortable, evidently relishing his position no more than I did mine.

"This is a gruesome affair, John, isn't it?" he said in a low voice. "I don't see why old Cobbledick wanted to drag us into it. It will be an awful moment when they uncover her, if she is really there. I'm frightfully sorry for you, old chap."

"I should have had to see the body in any case," said I; "and this is less horrible than the river."

Here my attention was attracted by the foreman, who had just drawn a long, horizontal chalk line across the patch of new rubble, a little below the middle.

"That's about the place where we left off that Saturday, so far as I remember," he said. "We had built up the outer case, and we filled in the hollow with loose bricks and stones, but we didn't put any mortar to them until Monday morning. Then we mixed up a lot of mortar, quite thin, so that it would run, and poured it on top of the loose stuff."

"Rum way of building a wall isn't it?" observed Cobbledick.

The foreman grinned. "It ain't what you'd call the highest class of masonry," he admitted. "But what can you expect to do with a gang of corner-boys who've never done a job of real work in their lives?"

"No, that's true," said the Sergeant. "But you made a soft job for the grave-diggers, didn't you? Why they'd only got to pick out the loose stuff and then dump it back on top when they'd put the body in. Then you came along on Monday morning and finished the job for them with one or two bucketsful of liquid mortar. How long would it have taken to pick out that loose stuff?"

"Lord bless yer," was the answer, "one man who meant business could have picked the whole lot out by hand in an hour; and he could have chucked it back in less. As you say, Sergeant, it was a soft job."

While they had been talking, the foreman's familiar demon had been making a tentative attack on the outer casing with a great, chisel-ended steel bar and a mason's hammer. The foreman now came to his aid with a sledge hammer, the first stroke of which caused the shoddy masonry to crack in all directions like pie-crust. Then the fractured pieces of the outer shell were prised off, revealing the "loose stuff" within. And uncommonly loose it was; so loose that the unjoined bricks and stones, with their adherent gouts of mortar, came away at the lightest touch of the great crow-bar.

As soon as a breach had been made at the top of the patch, the labourer climbed up and began flinging out the separated bricks and stones. Then he attacked a fresh course of the outer shell with a pick, and so exposed a fresh layer of the loose filling.

"There'll be a fresh job for the unemployed to build this up again," the sergeant observed with a sardonic smile.

"Ah," replied the foreman, "there generally is a fresh job when you take on a crowd of casuals. Wonderful provident men are casuals. Don't they take no thought for the morrow! What O!"

At this moment the labourer stood upright on his perch and laid down his pick. "Well, I'm blowed!" he exclaimed. "This

is a rum go, this is."

"What's a rum go?" demanded the foreman.

"Why, here's a whole bed of dry quick-lime," was the reply.

"Ha!" exclaimed the sergeant, knitting his brows anxiously.

The foreman scrambled up, and after a brief inspection confirmed the man's statement. "Quick-lime it is, sure enough. Just hand me up that shovel, Sergeant."

"Be careful," Cobbledick admonished, as he passed the shovel up. "Don't forget what there probably is underneath."

The foreman took the shovel and began very cautiously to scrape away the surface, flinging the scrapings of lime out on to the ground, where they were eagerly scrutinized by the sergeant, while the labourer picked out the larger lumps and cast them down. Thus the work went on for about a quarter of an hour, without any result beyond the accumulation on the ground below of a small heap of lime. At length I noticed the foreman pause and look attentively at the lime that he had just scraped up in his shovel.

"Here's something that I don't fancy any of our men put in," he said, picking the object out and handing it down to the Sergeant. The latter took it from him and held it out for me to see. It was another of Angelina's coat buttons.

In the course of the next few minutes two more buttons came to light, and almost immediately afterwards I saw the labourer stoop suddenly and stare down at the lime with an expression that made my flesh creep, as he pointed something out to the foreman.

"Ah!" the latter exclaimed. "Here she is! But, my word! There ain't much left of her. Look at this, Sergeant."

Very gingerly, and with an air of shuddering distaste, he picked something out of the lime and held it up; and even at that distance I could see that it was a human ulna. Cobbledick took it from him with the same distasteful and almost fearful manner, and held it towards me for inspection. I glanced at it and looked away. "Yes," I said. "It is a human arm bone."

On this, Cobbledick beckoned for the labourer to come down, and, taking out his official note-book, wrote something in pencil and tore out the leaf.

"Take this down to the station and give it to Sergeant Brown. He will tell you what else to do." He gave the paper to the man, and having let him out of the gate, came back and climbed up to the exposed surface of the excavation, where I saw him draw on a pair of gloves and then stoop and begin to pick over the lime.

"This is a horrid business, isn't it?" said Bundy. "Why the deuce couldn't Cobbledick carry on by himself? I don't see that it is our affair. Do you think we need stay?"

"I don't see why you need. You have finished your part of the business. You have seen the wall opened. I am afraid I must stay a little longer, as Cobbledick may want me to identify some of the other objects that may be found. But I shan't stay very long. There is really no question of the identity of the body, and there is no doubt now that the body is there. Detailed identification is a matter for the coroner."

As we were speaking, we walked slowly away from the wall among the mounds of rubbish, now beginning to be hidden under a dense growth of nettles, ragwort and thistles. It was a desolate, neglected place, sordid of aspect and contrasting unpleasantly in its modern squalor with the dignified decay of the ancient wall. We had reached the further fence and were just turning about, when the sergeant hailed me with a note of excitement in his voice. I hurried across and found him standing up with his eyes fixed on something that lay in the palm of his gloved hand.

"This seems to be the ring that you described to me, Doctor," said he. "Will you just take a look at it?"

He reached down and I received in my hand the little trinket of deep-toned, yellow gold that I remembered so well. I turned it over in my palm, and as I looked on its mystical signs, its crude, barbaric workmanship and the initials "A. C." scratched inside, the scene in that dimly lighted room—years ago, it seemed to me now—rose before me like a vision. I saw the gracious figure in the red glow of the lamp and heard the voice that was never again to sound in my ears, telling the story of the little bauble, and for a few moments, the dreadful present faded into the irredeemable past.

"There isn't any doubt about it, is there, Doctor?" the sergeant asked anxiously.

"None, whatever," I replied. "It is unquestionably Mrs. Frood's ring."

"That's a mercy," said Cobbledick; "because we shall want every atom of identification that we can get. The body isn't going to help us much. This lime has done its work to a finish. There's nothing left, so far as I can see, but the skeleton and the bits of metal belonging to the clothing. Would you like to come up and have a look, Doctor? There isn't much to see yet, but I have uncovered some of the bones."

"I don't think I will come up, Sergeant, thank you," said I. "When you have finished, I shall have to look over what has been found, as I shall have to give evidence at the inquest. And I think I need hardly stay any longer. There is no doubt now about the identity, so far as we are concerned, at any rate."

"No," he agreed. "There is no doubt in my mind, so I need not keep you any longer if you want to be off. But, before you go, there is one little matter that I should like to speak to you about." He climbed down to the ground, and, walking away with me a little distance, continued:

"You see, Doctor, some medical man will have to examine the remains, so as to give evidence before the coroner. If it is impossible to identify them as the remains of Mrs. Frood, it will have to be given in evidence that they are the remains of a person who might have been Mrs. Frood; that they are the remains of a woman of about her size and age, I mean. Of course, the choice of the medical witness doesn't rest with the police, but if you would care to take on the job, our recommendation would have weight with the coroner. You see, you are the most suitable person to make the examination, as you actually knew her."

I shook my head emphatically. "For that very reason, Sergeant, I couldn't possibly undertake the duty. Even doctors have feelings, you know. Just imagine how you would feel, yourself, pawing over the bones of a woman who had once been your friend."

Cobbledick looked disappointed. "Yes," he admitted, "I suppose there is something in what you say. But I didn't think doctors troubled about such things very much; and you have got such an eye for detail—and such a memory. However, if you'd rather not, there is an end of the matter."

He climbed back regretfully to the opening in the wall, and I rejoined Bundy. "I have finished here now," said I. "That was a ring of hers that Cobbledick had found. Are you staying any longer?"

"Not if you are going away," he replied. "I am not wanted now, and I can't stick this charnel-house atmosphere; it is getting on my nerves. Let us clear out."

We walked towards the entrance with a feeling of relief at escaping from the gruesome place, and had arrived within a few yards of it when there came a loud knocking at the gate, at which Bundy started visibly.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "it's like Macbeth. Here, take my key and let the beggars in, whoever they are."

I unlocked the gate and threw it open, when I saw, standing in the lane, two men, bearing on their shoulders a rough, unpainted coffin, and accompanied by the labourer, who carried a large sieve. I stood aside to let them pass in, and when they had entered, Bundy and I walked out, shutting and locking the gate after us. We made our way up the lane in silence, for there was little to say but much to think about; indeed, I would sooner have been alone, but the gruesome atmosphere of the place we had come from seemed to have affected Bundy's spirits so much that I thought it only kind to ask him to come back to lunch with me; an invitation that he accepted with avidity.

During lunch we discussed the tragic discovery, and Bundy, now that he had escaped from physical contact with the relics of mortality, showed his usual shrewd common sense.

"Well," he said, "the mystery of poor Angelina Frood is solved at last—at least, so far as it is ever likely to be."

"I hope not," I replied, "for the essential point of the mystery is not solved at all. It has only just been completely propounded. We now know beyond a doubt that she was murdered, and that the murder was a deliberate crime, planned in advance. What we want to know—at least, what I want to know, and shall never rest until I do know—is, who committed this diabolical crime?"

"I am afraid you never will know, John," said he. "There doesn't seem to be the faintest clue."

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "You seem to have forgotten Nicholas Frood."

Bundy shook his head. "You are deluding yourself, John. Nicholas seems, from your account of him, to be quite capable of having murdered his wife. But is there anything to connect him with the crime? If there is, you have never told me of it. And the law demands positive evidence. You can't charge a man with murder because he seems a likely person and you don't know of anybody else. What have you got against him in connexion with this present affair?"

"Well, for instance, I know that he was prowling about this town, and that he was trying to find out where she lived."

"But why not?" demanded Bundy. "She was a runaway wife, and he was her husband."

"Then I happen to have noticed that he carried a sheath-knife."

"But do you know that she was killed with a sheath-knife?"

"No, I don't," I answered savagely. "But I say again that I shall never rest until the price of her death has been paid. There must be some clue. The murder could not have been committed without a motive, and it must be possible to discover what that motive was. Somebody must have stood to benefit in some way by her death; and I am going to find that person, or those persons, if I give up the rest of my life to the search."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, John," he said as he rose to depart. "It sounds as if you were prepared to spend the rest of your life chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. But we are premature. The inquest may bring to light some new evidence that will put the police on the murderer's track. You must remember that they have been engaged in tracing the body up to now. When the inquest has been held and the facts are known they will be able to begin the search for the murderers. And I wish them and you good luck."

I was rather glad when he was gone, for his dispassionate estimate of the difficulties of the case only served to confirm my own secret hopelessness. For I could not deny that these wretches seemed to have covered up their tracks completely. In the three months that had passed no whisper of any suspicious circumstance had been heard.

From the moment when poor Angelina had faded from my sight into the fog to that of her dreadful reappearance in the

old wall, no human eye seemed to have seen her. And now that she had come back, what had she to tell us of the events of that awful night? The very body, on which Thorndyke had relied for evidence, at least, of the manner of the crime, had dwindled to a mere skeleton such as might have been exhumed from some ancient tomb. The cunning of the murderer had outwitted even Thorndyke.

The thought of my friend reminded me that I had to report to him the results of the opening of the wall; results very different from what he had anticipated when he had given the sergeant the too-fruitful hint. I accordingly wrote out a detailed report, so far as my information went; but I held it back until the last post in case anything further should come to my knowledge. And it was just as well that I did; for about eight o'clock, Cobbledick called to give me the latest tidings.

"Well, Doctor," he said, with a smile of concentrated benevolence, "I have got everything in going order. I have seen the coroner and made out a list of witnesses. You are one of them, of course; in fact, you are the star witness. You were the last person to see her alive, and you were present at the exhumation. Dr. Baines—he's rather a scientific gentleman—is to make the post-mortem examination, and tell us the cause of death, if he can. He won't have much to go on. The lime has eaten up everything—it would, naturally, after three months—but the bones look quite uninjured, so far as I could judge."

"When does the inquest open?" I asked.

"The day after to-morrow. I've got your summons with me, and I may as well give it to you now."

I looked at the little blue paper and put it in my pocketbook. "Do you think the coroner will get through the case in one day?" I asked.

"No, I am sure he won't," replied Cobbledick. "It is an important case, and there will be a lot of witnesses. There will be the evidence as to the building of the wall; then the opening of it and the description of what we found in it; then the identification of the remains—that is you, principally; and then there will be all the other evidence, the pawnbroker, Israel Bangs, Hooper, and the others. And then, of course, there will be the question as to the guilty parties. That is the most important of all."

"I didn't know you had any evidence on that subject," said I.

"I haven't much," he replied. "From the time when she disappeared nobody saw her alive or dead, and, of course, nothing has ever been heard of any occurrence that might indicate a crime. All we have to go on—and it is mighty little—is the fact that she was hiding from her husband, and that he was trying to find her. Also that he had made one attempt on her life. That is where your evidence will come in, and that of the matron at the 'Poor Travellers.' I've had a talk with her."

"Do you know anything of Frood's movements about the time of the disappearance?"

"Practically nothing, excepting that he went away from his lodgings the day before. You see, we were not in a position to start tracing possible criminals. We had no real evidence of any crime. We knew that the woman had disappeared, and she appeared to have got into the river. But there was nothing to show how. It looked suspicious, but it wasn't a case. So long as no body was forthcoming there was no evidence of death, and nobody could have been charged. Even if we had found the body in the river, unless there had been distinct traces of violence, it would have been merely a case of 'found dead,' or 'found drowned.' But now the affair is on a different footing entirely. The body has been discovered under conditions which furnish prima facie evidence of murder, whatever the cause of death may turn out to have been. There is sure to be a verdict of wilful murder—not that the police are dependent on the coroner's verdict. So now we can get a move on and look for the murderer."

"What chance do you think there is of finding him?" I asked.

"Well," said Cobbledick with a benevolent smile, "we mustn't be too cock-sure. But, leaving the husband out of the question and taking the broad facts, it doesn't look so unpromising. This wasn't a casual crime—fortunately. There's nothing so hopeless as a casual crime, done for mere petty robbery. But this crime was thought out. The place of burial was selected in advance. The key of the place was obtained, so that the murderer could not only get in but could lock himself—or more probably themselves—in and work secure from chance disturbance. And the time seems to have been selected; a week-end, with two whole nights to do the job in. All this points to very definite premeditation; and that points to a very definite motive. The person who planned this crime had something considerable to gain by Mrs. Frood's death; it may have been profit or it may have been the satisfaction of revenge.

"Well, that is a pretty good start. When we know what property she had, who comes into it at her death, if any of it is missing, and if so, what has become of it; we can judge concerning the first case. And if we find that she had any enemies besides her husband; anyone whom she had injured or who owed her a grudge; then we can judge of the second case.

"Then there is another set of facts. This murderer couldn't have been a complete stranger to the place. He knew about the wall and what was going on there. He knew the river and he possessed, or had command of, a boat. He knew the waterside premises and he knew his way—or had someone to show him the way—across the marshes and up Black Boy-lane. One, at least, of the persons concerned in this affair was a local man who knew the place well. So you see, Doctor, we have got something to go on, after all."

I listened to the sergeant's exposition with deep interest and no little revival of my drooping hopes. It was a most able summary of the case, and I felt that I should have liked Thorndyke to hear it; in fact, I determined to embody it in the amplification of my report. With the facts thus fully and lucidly collated, it did really seem as though the perpetrator of this foul crime must inevitably fall into our hands. Having refreshed the sergeant with a couple of glasses of port, I shook his

hand warmly and wished him the best of success in the investigation that he was conducting with so much ability.

When he had gone I wrote a full account of our interview to add to my previous report, and expressed the hope that Thorndyke would be able to be present at the inquest, when I myself should "be and appear" at the appointed place to give evidence on the day after the morrow.



## CHAPTER XVI. — THE INQUIRY AND A SURPRISE

On the morning of the inquest I started from my house well in advance of time, and in a distinctly uncomfortable frame of mind. Perhaps it was that the formal inquiry brought home to me with extra vividness the certainty that my beloved friend was gone from me forever, and that she had died in circumstances of tragedy and horror. Not that I had ever had any doubt, but now the realization was more intense. Again, I should have to give evidence. I should have to reconstitute for the information of strangers scenes and events that had for me a certain sacred intimacy. And then, above all, I should have to view—and that not cursorily—the decayed remains of the woman who had been so much to me. That would be naturally expected from a medical man and no one would guess at what it would cost me to bring myself to this last dreadful meeting.

Walking down the High-street thus wrapped in gloomy reflections, it was with mixed feelings that I observed Bundy advancing slowly towards me, having evidently awaited my arrival. In some respects I would sooner have been alone, and yet his kindly, sympathetic companionship was not altogether unwelcome.

“Good morning, John,” said he. “I hope I am not *de trop*. It is a melancholy errand for you, poor old chap, and I can’t do much to make it less so, but I thought we might walk down together. You know how sorry I am for you, John.”

“Yes, I know and appreciate, and I am always glad to see you, Peter. But why are you going there! Have you had a summons?”

“No, I have no information to give. But I am interested in the case, of course, so I am going to attend as a spectator. So is Japp, though he is really a legitimately interested party. In fact, I am rather surprised they didn’t summon him as a witness.”

“So am I. He really knows more about the poor girl than I do. But, of course, he knows nothing of the circumstances of her death.”

By this time we had arrived at the Guildhall, and here we encountered Sergeant Cobbledick, who was evidently on the look-out for me.

“I am glad you came early, Doctor,” said he. “I want you just to pop round to the mortuary. You know the way. There’s a tray by the side of the coffin with all her belongings on it. I’ll get you to take a careful look at them, so that you can tell the jury that they are really her things. And you had better run your eye over the remains. You might be able to spot something of importance. At any rate, they will expect you to have viewed the body, as you are the principal witness to its identity. I’ve told the constable on duty to let you in. And, of course, you can go in, too, Mr. Bundy, if you want to.”

“I don’t think I do, thank you,” replied Bundy. But he walked round with me to the mortuary, where the constable unlocked the door as he saw us approaching. I mentioned my name to the officer, but he knew me by sight, and now held the door open and followed me in, while Bundy halted at the threshold, and stood, rather pale and awe-stricken, looking in at the long table and its gruesome burden.

The tray of which Cobbledick had spoken was covered with a white table-cloth, and on this the various objects were arranged symmetrically like the exhibits in a museum. At the top was the hat, flanked on either side by a silver-headed hat-pin. The carefully smoothed scarf was spread across horizontally, the six coat-buttons were arranged in a straight vertical line, and the two shoes were placed at the bottom centre. At one side was the hand-bag, and at the other, to balance it, the handkerchief with its neatly embroidered initials; and on this were placed the Zodiac ring, the wedding ring, the box of tablets, and the brooch. On the lateral spaces the various other objects were arranged with the same meticulous care for symmetrical effect: a neat row of hair pins, a row of hooks and eyes, one or two rows of buttons from the dress and under garments, the little metal jaws of the purse, two rows of coins, silver and bronze, a pair of glove-fasteners with scorched fragments of leather adhering, a little pearl handled knife, a number of metal clasps and fastenings and other small metallic objects derived from the various garments, and a few fragments of textiles, scorched as if by fire; a couple of brown shreds, apparently from the stockings, a cindery fragment of the brown coat, and a few charred and brittle tatters of linen.

I looked over the pitiful collection while the constable stood near the door and probably watched me. There was something unspeakably pathetic in the spectacle of these poor fragments of wreckage, thus laid out, and seeming, in the almost grotesque symmetry of their disposal, to make a mute appeal for remembrance and justice. This was all that was left of her; this and what was in the coffin.

So moved was I by the sight of these relics, thus assembled and presented in a sort of tragic synopsis, that it was some time before I could summon the resolution to look upon her very self, or at least upon such vestiges of her as had survived the touch of “decay’s effacing fingers.” But the time was passing, and it had to be. At last I turned to the coffin, and, lifting the unfastened lid, looked in.

It could have been no different from what I had expected; but yet the shock of its appearance seemed to strike me a palpable blow. Someone had arranged the bones in their anatomical order; and there the skeleton lay on the bottom of the coffin, dry, dusty, whitened with the powder of lime, such a relic as might have been brought to light by the spade of some excavator in an ancient barrow or prehistoric tomb. And yet this thing was she—Angelina! That grisly skull had once been clothed by her rich, abundant hair! That grinning range of long white teeth had once sustained the sweet, pensive mouth

that I remembered so well. It was incredible. It was horrible. And yet it was true.

For some moments I stood as if petrified, holding up the coffin lid and gazing at the fearful shape in a trance of horror. And then suddenly I felt, as it were, a clutching at my throat and the vision faded into a blur as my eyes filled. Hastily I clapped down the coffin lid and strode towards the door with the tears streaming down my face.

Vaguely I was aware of Bundy taking my arm and pressing it to his side, of his voice as he murmured shakily, "Poor old John!" Passively I allowed him to lead me to a quiet corner above a flight of steps leading down to the river, where I halted to wipe my eyes, faintly surprised to note that he was wiping his eyes too; and that his face was pale and troubled. But if I was surprised, I was grateful, too; and never had my heart inclined more affectionately towards him than in this moment of trial that had been lightened by his unobtrusive sympathy and perfect understanding.

We stayed for a few minutes, looking down on the river and talking of the dead woman and the sad and troubled life from which this hideous crime had snatched her; then, as the appointed time approached, we made our way to the room in which the inquiry was to be held. As we entered, a pleasant-looking, shrewd-faced man, who looked like a barrister and who had been standing by a constable, approached and accosted me.

"Dr. Strangeways? My name is Anstey. I do most of the court work in connexion with Thorndyke's cases, and I am representing him here to-day. He had hoped to come down, himself, but he had to go into the country on some important business, so I have to come to keep the nest warm—to watch the proceedings and make a summary of the evidence. You mentioned to him that the case would take more than one day."

"Yes," I answered, "that is what I understand. Will Dr. Thorndyke be here to-morrow?"

"Yes; he has arranged definitely to attend to-morrow. And I think he expects by then to have some information of importance to communicate."

"Indeed!" I said eagerly. "Do you happen to know the nature of it?"

Anstey laughed. "My dear Doctor," said he, "you have met Thorndyke, and you must know by now that he is about as communicative as a Whitstable native. No one ever knows what cards he holds."

"Yes," I agreed, "he is extraordinarily secretive. Unnecessarily so, it has seemed to me."

Anstey shook his head. "He is perfectly right, Doctor. He knows his own peculiar job to a finish. He is, in a way, like some highly-specialized animal, such as the three-toed sloth, for instance, which seems an abnormal sort of beast until you see it doing, with unapproachable perfection, the thing that nature intended it to do. Thorndyke is a case of perfect adaptation to a special environment."

"Still," I objected, "I don't see the use of such extreme secrecy."

"You would if you followed his cases. A secret move is a move against which the other player—if there is one—can make no provision or defence or counter-move. Thorndyke plays with a wooden face and without speaking. No one knows what his next move will be. But when it comes, he puts down his piece and says 'check'; and you'll find it is mate."

"But," I still objected, "you are talking of an adversary and of counter-moves. Is there any adversary in this case?"

"Well, isn't there?" said he. "There has been a crime committed. Someone has committed it; and that someone is not advertising his identity. But you can take it that he has been keeping a watchful eye on his pursuers, ready, if necessary, to give them a lead in the wrong direction. But it is time for us to take our places. I see the jury have come back from viewing the body."

We took our places at the long table, one side of which was allocated to the jury and the other to witnesses in waiting, the police officers, the press-men, and other persons interested in the case. A few minutes later, the coroner opened the proceedings by giving a very brief statement of the circumstances which had occasioned the inquiry, and then proceeded to call the witnesses.

The first witness was Sergeant Cobbledick, whose evidence took the form of a statement covering the whole history of the case, beginning with Mr. Japp's notification of the disappearance of Mrs. Frood and ending with the opening of the wall and the discovery of the remains. The latter part of the evidence was given in minute detail and included a complete list of the objects found with the remains.

"Does any juryman wish to ask the witness any questions?" the Coroner inquired when the lengthy statement was concluded. He looked from one to the other, and when nobody answered he called the next witness. This was Dr. Baines, a somewhat dry-looking gentleman, who gave his evidence clearly, concisely, and with due scientific caution.

"You have examined the remains which form the subject of this inquiry?" the coroner asked.

"Yes. I have examined the skeleton which is now lying in the mortuary. It is that of a rather strongly-built woman, five feet seven inches in height, and about thirty years of age."

"Were you able to form any opinion as to the cause of death?"

"No; there were no signs of any injury nor of disease."

"Are we to understand," asked one of the jurymen, "that you consider deceased to have died a natural death?"



"I have no means of forming any opinion on the subject."

"But if she died from violence, wouldn't there be some signs of it?"

"That would depend on the nature of the violence."

"Supposing she had been shot with a revolver?"

"In that case there might be a fracture of one or more bones, but there might be no fracture at all. Of course, there would be a bullet."

"Did you find a bullet?"

"No. I did not see the bones until they had been brought to the mortuary."

"There has been no mention of a bullet having been found," the coroner interposed, "and you heard Sergeant Cobbledick say that the lime had all been sifted through a fine sieve. We must take it that there was no bullet. But," he continued, addressing the witness, "the conditions that you found would not exclude violence, I presume?"

"Not at all. Only violence that would cause injury to the bones."

"What kinds of violence would be unaccompanied by injury to the bones?"

"Drowning, hanging, strangling, suffocation, stabbing; and, of course, poisoning usually leaves no traces on the bones."

"Can you give us no suggestion as to the cause of death?"

"None whatever," was the firm reply.

"You have heard the description of the missing woman, Mrs. Frood. Do these remains correspond with that description?"

"They are the remains of a woman of similar stature and age to Mrs. Frood, so far as I can judge. I can't say more than that. The description of Mrs. Frood was only approximate; and the estimate of the stature, and especially the age, of a skeleton can only be approximate."

This being all that could be got out of the witness, who was concerned only with the skeleton, and naturally refused to budge from that position, the coroner glanced at his list and then called my name. I rose and took my place at the top corner of the table, when I was duly sworn, and gave my name and description.

"You heard Sergeant Cobbledick's description of the articles which have been found, and which are now lying in the mortuary?" the coroner began.

I replied "Yes," and he continued: "Have you examined those articles, and, if so, can you tell us anything about them?"

"I have examined the articles in the mortuary, and I recognized them as things I know to have been the property of Mrs. Angelina Frood."

Here I described the articles in detail, and stated when and where I had seen them in her possession.

"You have inspected the remains of deceased in the mortuary. Can you identify them as the remains of any particular person?"

"No. They are quite unrecognizable."

"Have you any doubt as to whose remains they are?" asked the juryman who had spoken before.

"That question, Mr. Pilley," said the coroner "is not quite in order. The witness has said that he was not able to identify the remains. Inferences as to the identity of deceased, drawn from the evidence, are for the jury. We must not ask witnesses to interpret the evidence. When did you last see Mrs. Frood alive, Doctor?"

"On the 26th of April," I replied; and here I described that last interview, recalling our conversation almost verbatim. When I came to her expressions of uneasiness and foreboding, the attention of the listeners became more and more intense, and it was evident that they were deeply impressed. Particularly attentive was the foreman of the jury, a keen-faced, alert-looking man, who kept his eyes riveted on me, and, when I had finished this part of my evidence, asked: "So far as you know, Doctor, had Mrs. Frood any enemies? Was there anyone whom she had reason to be afraid of?"

This was a rather awkward question. It is one thing to entertain a suspicion privately, but quite another thing to give public expression to it. Besides, I was giving sworn evidence as to facts actually within my knowledge.

"I can't say, positively," I replied after some hesitation, "that I know of any enemy or anyone whom she had reason to fear."

The coroner saw the difficulty, and interposed with a discreet question.

"What do you know of her domestic affairs, of her relations with her husband, for instance?"

This put the matter on the basis of fact, and I was able to state what I knew of her unhappy married life in Rochester and previously in London; and further questions elicited my personal observations as to the character and personality of her husband. My meeting with him at Dartford Station, the incidents in the Poor Travellers' rest-house, the meeting with him on the bridge; all were given in full detail and devoured eagerly by the jury. And from their questions and their demeanour

it became clear to me that they were in full cry after Nicholas Frood.

The conclusion of my evidence brought us to the luncheon hour. I had, of course, to take Mr. Anstey back to lunch with me, and a certain wistfulness in Bundy's face made me feel that I ought to ask him, too. I accordingly presented them to one another and issued the invitation.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Bundy," Anstey said heartily. "I have heard of you from my friend Thorndyke, who regards you with respectful admiration."

"Does he?" said Bundy, blushing with pleasure, but looking somewhat surprised. "I can't imagine why. But are you an expert, too?"

"Bless you, no," laughed Anstey. "I am a mere lawyer, and, on this occasion, what is known technically as a devil—technically, you understand. I am watching this case for Thorndyke."

"But I didn't know that Dr. Thorndyke was interested in the case," said Bundy, in evident perplexity.

"He is interested in everything of a criminal and horrid nature," replied Anstey. "He never lets a really juicy crime mystery pass without getting all the details, if possible. You see, they are his stock in trade."

"But he never would discuss this case—not seriously," objected Bundy.

"Probably not," said Anstey. "Perhaps there wasn't much to discuss. But wait till the case is finished. Then he will tell you all about it."

"I see," said Bundy. "He is one of those prophets who predict after the event."

"And the proper time, too," retorted Anstey. "It is no use being premature."

The conversation proceeded on this plane of playful repartee until we arrived at my house, where Mrs. Dunk, having bestowed a wooden glance of curiosity at Anstey and a glare of defiance at Bundy, handed me a telegram addressed to R. Anstey, K.C., care of Dr. Strangeways. I passed it to Anstey, who opened it and glanced through it.

"What shall I say in answer?" he asked, placing it in my hand.

I read the message and was not a little puzzled by it.

"Ask Strangeways come back with you to-night. Very urgent. Reply time and place."

"What do you suppose he wants me for?" I asked.

"I never suppose in regard to Thorndyke," he replied.

"But if he says it is urgent, it is urgent. Can you come up with me?"

"Yes, if it is necessary."

"It is. Then I'll say yes. And you had better arrange to stay the night—there is a spare bedroom at his chambers—and come down with him in the morning. Can you manage that?"

"Yes," I replied; "and you can say that we shall be at Charing Cross by seven-fifteen."

I could see that this transaction was as surprising to Bundy as it was to me. But, of course, he asked no questions, nor could I have answered them if he had. Moreover, there was not much time for discussion as we had to be back in the court room by two o'clock, and what talk there was consisted mainly of humorous comments by Anstey on the witnesses and the jury.

Having sent off the telegram on our way down, we took our places once more, and the proceedings were resumed punctually by the calling of the foreman of the repairing gang; who deposed to the date on which the particular patch of rubble was commenced and finished and its condition when the men knocked off work on Saturday, the 26th of April. He also mentioned the loss of the key, but could give no particulars. The cross-examination elicited the facts that he had communicated to Cobbledick and me as to the state of the loose filling.

"How many men," the coroner asked, "would it have taken to bury the body in the way in which it was buried; and how long?"

"One man could have done it easily in one night, if he could have got the body there. The stuff in the wall was all loose, and it was small stuff, easy to handle. No building had to be done. It was just a matter of shovelling the lime in and then chucking the loose stuff in on top. And the lime was handy to get at in the shed, and one of the barrels was open."

"Can you say certainly when the body was buried?"

"It must have been buried on the night of the 26th of April or on the 27th, because on Monday morning, the 28th, we ran the mortar in, and by that evening we had got the patch finished."

The next witness was the labourer, Thomas Evans, who had lost the key. His account of the affair was as follows:

"On the morning of Saturday, the 26th of April, the foreman gave me the key, because he had to go to the office. I took the key and opened the gate, and I left the key in the lock for him to take when he came. Then I forgot all about it, and I suppose he did, too, because he didn't say anything about it until we had knocked off work and were going out. Then he

asks me where the key was, and I said it was in the gate. Then he went and looked but it wasn't there. So we searched about a bit in the grounds and out in the lane; but we couldn't see nothing of it nowhere."

"When you let yourself in, did you leave the gate open or shut it?"

"I shut the gate, but, of course, it was unlocked. The key was outside."

"So that anyone passing up the lane could have taken it out without your noticing?"

"Yes. We was working the other side of the grounds, so we shouldn't have heard anything if anybody had took it."

That completed the evidence as to the key, and when Evans was dismissed the matron of the Poor Travellers was called. As she took her place, a general straightening of backs and air of expectancy on the part of the jury suggested that her evidence was looked forward to with more than common interest. And so it turned out to be. Her admirably clear and vivid presentment of the man, Nicholas Frood; his quarrelsome, emotional temperament, his shabby condition, his abnormal appearance, the evidences of his addiction to drink and drugs, his apparently destitute state, and, above all, the formidable sheath-knife that he wore under his coat; were listened to with breathless attention, and followed by a fusilade of eager, and often highly improper, questions. But the coroner was a wise and tactful man, and he unobtrusively intervened to prevent any irregularities; as, for instance, "It is not permissible," he observed, blandly, "to ask a witness if a certain individual seemed to be a likely person to commit a crime. And a coroner's court is not a criminal court. It is not our function to establish any person's guilt, but to ascertain how deceased met with her death. If the evidence shows that she was murdered, we shall say so in our verdict. If the evidence points clearly to a particular person as the murderer, we shall name that person in the verdict. But we are not primarily investigating a crime; we are investigating a death. The criminal investigation is for the police."

This reminder cooled the ardour of the criminal investigators somewhat, but there were signs of a fresh outbreak when Mrs. Gillow gave her evidence, for that lady having a somewhat more lively imagination than the matron, tended to lure enterprising jurymen on to fresh indiscretions. She certainly enjoyed herself amazingly, and occupied a most unnecessary amount of time before she at length retired, dejected but triumphant, to the manifest relief of the coroner.

This brought the day's proceedings to a close. There were a few more witnesses on the list, and the coroner hoped to take their evidence and complete the inquiry on the following day. As soon as the court rose, Anstey and I with Bundy proceeded to a tea-shop hard by and, having refreshed ourselves with a light tea, set forth to catch our train at Strood Station. Thither Bundy accompanied us at my invitation, but though I suspected that he was bursting with curiosity as to the object of my mysterious journey, he made no reference to it, nor did I or Anstey.

At the barrier at Charing Cross we found Thorndyke awaiting us, and Anstey, having delivered me into his custody and seen us into a taxi-cab that had already been chartered, wished us success and took his leave. Then the driver, who apparently had his instructions, started and moved out of the station.

"I don't know," said I, "whether I may now ask what I am wanted for."

"I should rather not go into particulars," he replied. "I want your opinion on something that I am going to show you, and I especially want it to be an impromptu opinion. Previous consideration might create a bias which would detract from the conclusiveness of your decision. However, you have only a few minutes to wait."

In those few minutes I could not refrain from cudgelling my brains, even at the risk of creating a bias, and was still doing so—quite unproductively—when the cab approached the hospital of St. Barnabas and gave me a hint. But it swept past the main entrance, and, turning up a side street, slowed down and stopped opposite the entrance of the medical school. Here we got out, and, leaving the cab waiting, entered the hall, where Thorndyke inquired for a person of the name of Farrow. In a minute or two this individual made his appearance in the form of a somewhat frowsy, elderly man, whom, from the multitude of warts on his hands, I inferred to be the post-mortem porter or dissecting-room attendant. He appeared to be a taciturn man, and he, too, evidently had his instructions, for he merely looked at us and then walked away slowly, leaving us to follow. Thus silently he conducted us down a long corridor, across a quadrangle beyond which rose the conical roof of a theatre, along a curved passage which followed the wall of the circular building and down a flight of stone steps which let into a dim, cement-floored basement, lighted by sparse electric bulbs and pervaded by a faint, distinctive odour that memory associated with the science of anatomy. From the main basement room Farrow turned into a short passage, where he stopped at a door, and, having unlocked it, threw it open and switched on the light, when we entered and I looked around. It was a large, cellar-like room, lighted by a single powerful electric bulb fitted with a basin-like metal reflector and attached to a long, movable arm. The activities usually carried on in it were evident from the great tins of red lead on the shelves, from a large brass syringe fitted with a stop-cock and smeared with red paint, and from a range of oblong slate tanks or coffers furnished with massive wooden lids.

Still without uttering a word, the taciturn Farrow swung the powerful lamp over one of the coffers, and then drew off the lid. I stepped forward and looked in. The coffer was occupied by the body of a man, evidently—from the shaven head and the traces of red paint—prepared as an anatomical "subject." I looked at it curiously, thinking how unhuman, how artificial it seemed; how like to a somewhat dingy waxwork figure. But as I looked I was dimly conscious of some sense of familiarity stealing into my mind. Some chord of memory seemed to be touched. I stooped and looked more closely; and then, suddenly, I started up.

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "It is Nicholas Frood!"

"Are you sure?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, quite," I answered. "It was the shaved head that put me off: the absence of that mop of hair. I have no doubt at all. Still—let us have a look at the hands."

Farrow lifted up the hands one after the other; and then, if there could have been any doubt, it was set at rest. The mahogany-coloured stain was still visible; but much more conclusive were the bulbous finger-tips and the misshapen, nutshell-like nails. There could be no possible doubt.

"This is certainly the man I saw at Rochester," said I. "I am fully prepared to swear to that. But oughtn't he to have been identified by somebody who knew him better?"

"The body has been identified this afternoon by his late landlady," replied Thorndyke, "but I wanted your confirmation, and I wanted you as a witness at the inquest. The identification is important in relation to the inquiry and the possible verdict."

"Yes, by Jove!" I agreed, with a vivid recollection of the questions put to Mrs. Gillow. "This will come as a thunder-bolt to the jury. But how, in the name of Fortune, did he come here?"

"I'll tell you about that presently," replied Thorndyke.

He tendered a fee to the exhibitor, and when the latter had replaced the lid of the coffer, he conducted us back to our starting-point, and saw us into the waiting cab.

"5A, King's Bench Walk," Thorndyke instructed the driver, and as the cab started, he began his explanation.

"This has been a long and weary search, with a stroke of unexpected good luck at the end. We have had to go through endless records of hospitals, police-courts, poorhouses, infirmaries, and inquests. It was the records of an inquest that put us at last on the track; an inquest on an unknown man, supposed to be a tramp. Roughly, the history of the affair is this:

"Frood seems to have started for Brighton on the 25th of April, but for some unexplained reason, he broke his journey and got out at Horwell. What happened to him there is not clear. He may have over-dosed himself with cocaine; but at any rate, he was found dead in a meadow, close to a hedge, on the morning of the 26th. He was therefore dead before his wife disappeared. The body was taken to the mortuary and there carefully examined. But there was not the faintest clue to his identity. His pockets were searched, but there was not a vestige of property of any kind about him, not even the knife of which you have spoken. The probability is that he had been robbed by some tramp of everything that he had about him, either while he was insensible or after he was dead. In any case he appeared to be completely destitute, and this fact, together with his decidedly dirty and neglected condition, led naturally to the conclusion that he was a tramp. An inquest was held, but of course, no expensive and troublesome measures were taken to trace his identity. Examinations showed that he had not died from the effects of violence, so it was assumed that he had died from exposure, and a verdict to that effect was returned. He was about to be given a pauper's funeral when Providence intervened on our behalf. It happened that the Demonstrator of Anatomy at St. Barnabas resides at Horwell; and it happened that the presence of an unclaimed body in the mortuary came to his knowledge. Thereupon he applied to the authorities, on behalf of his school, for the use of it as an anatomical subject. His application was granted and the body was conveyed to St. Barnabas, where it was at once embalmed and prepared and then put aside for use during the next winter session."

"Was that quite in order—legally, I mean?"

"That is not for us to ask," he replied. "It was not in any way contrary to public policy, and it has been our salvation in respect of our particular inquiry."

"I suppose it has," I said, not, however, quite seeing it in that light. "Of course, it disposes of the question of his guilt."

"It does a good deal more than that as matters have turned out," said he. "However, here we are in the precincts of the Temple. Let us dismiss Nicholas Frood from our minds for the time being, and turn our attention to the more attractive subject of dinner."

The cab stopped opposite a tall house with a fine carved-brick portico, and, when Thorndyke had paid the driver, we ascended the steps and made our way up a couple of flights of oaken stairs to the first floor. Here, at the door of my friend's chambers, we encountered a small, clerical-looking gentleman with an extremely wrinkly, smiling face, who reminded me somewhat of Mr. Japp. "This is Mr. Polton, Strangeways," said Thorndyke, presenting him to me, "who relieves me of all the physical labour of laboratory work. He is a specialist in everything, including cookery, and if my nose does not mislead me—ha! Does it, Polton?"

"That depends, sir, on which way you follow it," replied Polton, with a smile of labyrinthine wrinkliness. "But you will want to wash, and Dr. Strangeways's room is ready for him."

On this hint, Thorndyke conducted me to an upper floor, and to a pleasant bedroom with an outlook on plane trees and ancient, red-tiled roofs, where I washed and brushed up, and from whence I presently descended to the sitting-room, whither Thorndyke's nose had already led him—and to good purpose, too.

"Mr. Polton has missed his vocation," I remarked, as I attacked his productions with appreciative gusto. "He ought to have been the manager of a West End club or a high-class restaurant."

Thorndyke regarded me severely. "I am shocked at you, Strangeways," he said. "Do you suggest that a man who can

make anything from an astronomical clock to a microscope objective, who is an expert in every branch of photographic technique, a fair analytical chemist, a microscopist, and general handicraftsman, should be degraded to the office of a mere superintendent cook? It is a dreadful thought!"

"I didn't understand that he was a man of so many talents and accomplishments," I said apologetically.

"He is a most remarkable man," said Thorndyke, "and I take it as a great condescension that he is willing to prepare my meals. It is his own choice—an expression of personal devotion. He doesn't like me to take my food at restaurants or clubs. And, of course, he does it well because he is incapable of doing anything otherwise than well. You must come up and see the laboratories and workshop after dinner."

We went up when we had finished our meal and discovered Polton in the act of cutting transverse sections of hairs and mounting them to add to the great collection of microscopic objects that Thorndyke had accumulated. He left this occupation to show me the great standing camera for copying, enlarging, reducing and microphotography, to demonstrate the capabilities of a fine back-gear lathe and to exhibit the elaborate outfit for analysis and assay work.

"I had no idea," said I, as we returned to the sitting room, "that medico-legal practice involved the use of all these complicated appliances."

"The truth is," Thorndyke replied, "that Medical Jurisprudence is not a single subject, concerned with one order of knowledge. It represents the application of every kind of knowledge to the solution of an infinite variety of legal problems. And that reminds me that I haven't yet looked through Anstey's abstract of the evidence at the inquest, which I saw that he had left for me. Shall we go through it now? It won't take us very long. Then we can have a stroll round the Temple or on the Embankment before we turn in."

"You are coming down to Rochester to-morrow?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "The facts concerning Nicholas Frood will have to be communicated to the coroner; and it is possible that some other points may arise."

"Now that Frood is definitely out of the picture," said I, "do you see any possibility of solving the mystery of this crime? I mean as to the identity of the guilty parties?"

He reflected awhile. "I am inclined to think," he replied, at length, "that I may be able to offer a suggestion. But, of course, I have not yet seen the remains."

"There isn't much to be gleaned from them, I am afraid," said I.

"Perhaps not," he answered. "But we shall be able to judge better when we have read the evidence of the medical witness."

"He wasn't able to offer any opinion as to the cause of death," I said.

"Then," he replied, "we may take it that there are no obvious signs. However, it is useless to speculate. We must suspend our judgment until to-morrow"; and with this he opened Anstey's summary, and read through it rapidly, asking me a question now and again to amplify some point. When he had finished the abstract—which appeared to be very brief and condensed—he put it in his pocket and suggested that we should start for our proposed walk; and, though I made one or two attempts to reopen the subject of the inquiry, he was not to be drawn into any further statements. Apparently there was some point that he hoped to clear up by personal observation, and meanwhile he held his judgment in suspense.



## CHAPTER XVII. — THORNDYKE PUTS DOWN HIS PIECE

The journey down to Rochester would have been more agreeable and interesting under different circumstances. Thorndyke kept up a flow of lively conversation to which I should ordinarily have listened with the keenest pleasure. But he persistently avoided any reference to the object of our journey; and as this was the subject that engrossed my thoughts and from which I was unable to detach them, his conversational efforts were expended on somewhat inattentive ears. In common politeness I tried to make a show of listening and even of some sort of response; but the instant a pause occurred, my thoughts flew back to the engrossing subject and the round of fruitless speculation begun again.

What was it that Thorndyke had in his mind? He was not making this journey to inform the coroner of Frood's death. That could have been done by letter; and, moreover, I was the actual witness to the dead man's identity. There was some point that he expected to be able to elucidate; some evidence that had been overlooked. And that evidence seemed to be connected with that dreadful, pitiful thing that lay in the coffin—crying out, indeed, to Heaven for retribution, but crying in a voice all inarticulate. But would it be inarticulate to him? He had seemed to imply an expectation of being able to infer from the appearance of those mouldering bones the cause and manner of death, and even—so it had appeared to me—the very identity of the murderer. But how could this be possible? Dr. Baines had said that the bones showed no signs of injury. The soft structures of the body had disappeared utterly. What suggestion as to the cause of death could the bones offer? Chronic mineral poisoning might be ascertainable from examination of the skeleton, but not from a mere ocular inspection; and the question of chronic poisoning did not arise. Angelina was alive on the Saturday evening; before the Monday morning her body was in the wall. Again and again I dismissed the problem as an impenetrable mystery; and still it presented itself afresh for consideration.

A few words of explanation to the constable on duty at the mortuary secured our admission, or, rather Thorndyke's; for I did not go in, but stood in the doorway, watching him inquisitively. He looked over the objects set out on the tray and seemed to be mentally checking them. Then he put on a pair of pince-nez and examined some of them more closely. From the tray he presently turned to the coffin, and, lifting off the lid, stood for a while, with his pince-nez in his hand, looking intently at the awful relics of the dead woman. From his face I could gather nothing. It was at all times a rather immobile face, in accordance with his calm, even temperament. Now it expressed nothing but interest and close attention. He inspected the whole skeleton methodically, as I could see by the way his eyes travelled slowly from the head to the foot of the coffin. Then, once more, he put on his reading-glasses, and stooped to examine more closely something in the upper part of the coffin—I judged it to be the skull. At length he stood up, put away his I glasses, replaced the coffin-lid, and rejoined me.

"Has the sitting of the Court begun yet?" he asked the constable.

"They began about five minutes ago, sir," was the reply; on which we made our way to the court-room, where Thorndyke, having secured a place at the table, beckoned to the coroner's officer.

"Will you hand that to the coroner, please?" said he, producing from his pocket a note in an official-looking blue envelope. The officer took the note and laid it down before the coroner, who glanced at it and nodded and then looked with sudden interest at Thorndyke. The witness who was being examined at the moment was the pawnbroker's daughter, and her account of the mysterious man with the mole on his nose was engaging the attention of the jury. While the examination was proceeding, the coroner glanced from time to time at the note. Presently he took it up and opened the envelope, and in a pause in the evidence, took out the note and turned it over to look at the signature. Then he ran his eyes over the contents, and I saw his eyebrows go up. But at that moment one of the jurymen asked a question and the note was laid down while the answer was entered in the depositions. At length the evidence of this witness was completed, and the witness dismissed, when the coroner took up the note and read it through carefully.

"Before we take the evidence of Israel Bangs, gentlemen," said he, "we had better consider some new facts which I think you will regard as highly important. I have just received a communication from Dr. John Thorndyke, who is a very eminent authority on medico-legal evidence. He informs me that the husband of the deceased, Nicholas Frood, is dead. It appears that he died about three months ago, but his body was not identified until yesterday, when it was seen by Frood's landlady and by Dr. Strangeways, who is here and can give evidence as to the identity. I propose that we first recall Dr. Strangeways and then ask Dr. Thorndyke, who is also present, to give us the further particulars."

The jury agreed warmly to the suggestion, and I was at once recalled, and as I took my place at the coroner's left hand I felt that I was fully justifying Cobbledick's description of me as the "star witness," for not only was I the object of eager interest on the part of the jury and the sergeant himself, but also of Bundy, whose eyes were riveted on me with devouring curiosity.

There is no need for me to repeat my evidence. It was quite short. I just briefly described the body and its situation. As to how it came to the hospital, I had no personal knowledge, but I affirmed that it was undoubtedly the body of Nicholas Frood. Of that I was quite certain.

No questions were asked. There was a good deal of whispered comment, and one indiscreet jurymen remarked audibly that "this fellow seemed to have cheated the hangman." Then the coroner deferentially requested Thorndyke to give the Court any information that was available, and my friend advanced to the head of the table, where the coroner's officer placed a chair for him, and took the oath.

"What a perfectly awful thing this is about poor old Nicholas!" whispered Bundy, who had crept into the chair that Thorndyke had just vacated. "It makes one's flesh creep to think of it."

"It *was* rather horrible," I agreed, noting that my description of the scene had evidently made *his* flesh creep, for he was as pale as a ghost. But there was no time to discuss the matter further, for Thorndyke, having been sworn, and started by a general question from the coroner, now began to give his evidence, in the form of a narrative similar to that which I had heard from him, and accompanied by the production of documents relating to the inquest and the transfer of the body of the unknown deceased to the medical school.

"There is no doubt, I suppose, as to the date of this man's death?" the coroner asked.

"Practically none. He was seen alive on the 25th of April, and he was found dead on the morning of the 26th. I have put in a copy of the depositions at the inquest, which give the date and time of the finding of the body."

"Then, as his death occurred before the disappearance of his wife, this inquiry is not concerned with him any further."

Here the foreman of the jury interposed with a question. "It seems that Dr. Thorndyke took a great deal of trouble to trace this man, Frood. Was he acting for the police?"

"I don't know that that is strictly our concern," said the coroner, looking at Thorndyke, nevertheless, with a somewhat inquiring expression.

"I was acting," said Thorndyke, "in pursuance of instructions from a private client to investigate the circumstances of Mrs. Frood's disappearance, to ascertain whether a crime had been committed and, if so, to endeavour to find the guilty party or parties."

"He never told us that," murmured Bundy; "at least—did you know, John?"

"I did, as a matter of fact, but I was sworn to secrecy." Bundy looked at me a little reproachfully, I thought, and I caught a queer glance from Cobbledick. But just then the coroner spoke again.

"Have you seen the evidence that was given yesterday?"

"Yes, I have a summary of it, which I have read."

"Can you, from your investigations, tell us anything that was not disclosed by that evidence?"

"Yes. I have just examined the remains of the deceased and the articles which have been found from time to time. I think I can give some additional information concerning them."

"From your examination of the remains," the coroner said somewhat eagerly, "can you give any opinion as to the cause of death?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "My examination had reference chiefly to the identity of the remains."

The coroner looked disappointed. "The identity of the remains," said he, "is not in question. They have been clearly identified as those of Angelina Frood."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "they have been wrongly identified. I can swear positively that they are not the remains of Angelina Frood."

At this statement a sudden hush fell on the Court, broken incongruously by an audible whistle from Sergeant Cobbledick. On me the declaration fell like a thunderbolt, and, on looking round at Bundy, I could see that he was petrified with astonishment. There was a silence of some seconds' duration. Then the coroner said, with a distinctly puzzled air: "This is a very remarkable statement, Dr. Thorndyke. It seems to be quite at variance with all the facts: and it appears almost incredible that you should be able to speak with such certainty, having regard to the condition of the remains and in spite of the extraordinary effect of the lime."

"It is on account of the effect of the lime that I am able to speak with so much certainty and confidence," Thorndyke replied.

"I don't quite follow that," said the coroner. "Would you kindly tell us how you were able to determine that these remains are not those of Angelina Frood?"

"It is a matter of simple inference," replied Thorndyke. "On the 26th of April last Mrs. Frood is known to have been alive. It has been assumed that on that night or the next her body was built up in the wall. If that had really happened, when the wall was opened on the 20th of July, the body would have been found intact and perfectly recognizable!"

"You are not overlooking the circumstance that it was buried in a bed of quick-lime?" said the coroner.

"No," replied Thorndyke; "in fact that is the circumstance that makes it quite certain that these remains are not those of Angelina Frood. There is," he continued, "a widely prevalent belief that quick-lime has the property of completely consuming and destroying organic substances such as a dead human body. But that belief is quite erroneous. Quick-lime has no such properties. On the contrary, it has a strongly preservative effect on organic matter. Putrefaction is a change in organic matter which occurs only when that matter is more or less moist. If such matter is completely dried, putrefaction is prevented or arrested, and such dried, or mummified, matter will remain undecomposed almost indefinitely, as we see in the case of Egyptian mummies. But quick-lime has the property of abstracting the water from organic substances with

which it is in contact; of rendering them completely dry. It thus acts as a very efficient preservative. If Mrs. Frood's body had been buried, when recently dead, three months ago in fresh quick-lime, it would by now have been reduced more or less to the condition of a mummy. It would not have been even partially destroyed, and it would have been easily recognizable."

To this statement everyone present listened with profound attention and equally profound surprise; and a glance at the faces of the jurymen was sufficient to show that it had failed utterly to produce conviction. Even the coroner was evidently not satisfied, and, after a few moments' reflection with knitted brows, he stated his objection.

"The belief in the destructive properties of lime," he said, "can hardly be accepted as a mere popular error. In the Crippen trial, you may remember that the question was raised, and one of the expert witnesses—no less an authority than Professor Pepper—gave it as his considered opinion that quick-lime has these destructive properties, and that if a body were buried in a sufficient quantity of quick-lime, that body would be entirely destroyed. You will agree, I think, that great weight attaches to the opinion of a man of Professor Pepper's great reputation."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke agreed. "He was one of our greatest medico-legal authorities, though, on this subject, I think, his views differed from those generally held by medical jurists. But the point is that this was an opinion, and that no undeniable facts were then available. But since that time, the matter has been put to the test of actual experiment, and the results of those experiments are definite facts. It is no longer a matter of opinion but one of incontestable fact."

"What are the experiments that you refer to?"

"The first practical investigation was carried out by Mr. A. Lucas, the Director of the Government Analytical Laboratory and Assay Office at Cairo. He felt that the question was one of great medico-legal importance, and that it ought to be settled definitely. He accordingly carried out a number of experiments, of which he published the particulars in his treatise on 'Forensic Chemistry.' I produce a copy of this book, with your permission."

"Is this evidence admissible?" the foreman asked. "The witness can't swear to another man's experiments."

"It is admissible in a coroner's court," was the reply.

"We are not bound as rigidly by the rules of evidence as a criminal court, for instance. It is relevant to the inquiry, and I think we had better hear it."

"I may say," said Thorndyke, "that I have repeated and confirmed these experiments; but I suggest that, as the published cases are the recognized authority, I be allowed to quote them before describing my confirmatory experiments."

The coroner having agreed to this course, he continued: "The tests were made with the fresh bodies of young pigeons, which were plucked but not opened, and which were buried in boxes with loosely-fitted covers, filled respectively with dry earth, slaked lime, chlorinated lime, quick-lime, and quick-lime suddenly slaked with water. These bodies were left thus buried for six months, the boxes being placed on the laboratory roof at Cairo. At the end of that period the bodies were disinterred and examined with the following results: The body which had been buried in dry earth was found to be in a very bad condition. There was a considerable smell of putrefaction and a large part of the flesh had disappeared. The body which had been buried in quick-lime was found to be in good condition; it was dry and hard, the skin was unbroken, but the body was naturally shrunken. The other three bodies do not concern us, but I may say that none of them was as completely preserved as the one that was buried in quick-lime."

"On reading the account of these experiments I decided to repeat them, partly for confirmation and partly to enable me to give direct evidence as to the effect of lime on dead bodies. I used freshly-killed rabbits from which the fur was removed by shaving, and buried them in roomy boxes in the same materials as were used in the published experiments. They were left undisturbed during the six summer months, and were then exhumed and examined. The rabbit which had been buried in dry earth was in an advanced stage of putrefaction; the one which had been buried in quick-lime was free from any odour of decomposition, the skin was intact, and the body unaltered excepting that it was dry and rather shrivelled—mummified, in fact. It was more completely preserved than any of the others."

The conclusion of this statement was followed by a slightly uncomfortable silence. The coroner stroked his chin reflectively, and the jurymen looked at one another with obvious doubt and distrust. At length Mr. Pilley gave voice to the collective sentiments.

"It's all very well, sir, for this learned gentleman to explain to us that the lime couldn't have eaten up the body of the deceased. But it has. We've seen the bare bones with our own eyes. What's the use of saying a thing is impossible when it has happened?"

Here Thorndyke produced from his pocket a sheet of notepaper and a fountain pen, and began to write rapidly, noting down, as I supposed, the jurymen's objections; which, however, the coroner proceeded to answer.

"Dr. Thorndyke's statement was that these bones are not the bones of Angelina Frood. That the body was not her body."

"Still," said the foreman, "it was somebody's body, you know. And the lime seems to have eaten it up pretty clean, possible or impossible."

"Exactly," said the coroner. "The destruction of this particular body appears to be an undeniable fact; and we may assume that one body is very much like another—in a chemical sense, at least. What do you say, doctor?"



"My statement," replied Thorndyke, "had reference to Angelina Frood, who is known to have been alive on a certain date. Of the condition of the unknown body that was buried in the wall, I can give no opinion."

Again there was an uncomfortable silence, during which Thorndyke, having finished writing, folded the sheet of notepaper, tucked the end in securely, and wrote an address on the back. Then he handed it to his neighbour, who passed it on until it reached me. I was on the point of opening it when I observed with astonishment that it was addressed to Peter Bundy, Esq., to whom I immediately handed it. But my astonishment was nothing to Bundy's. He seemed positively thunderstruck. Indeed, his aspect was so extraordinary as he sat gazing wildly at the opened note, that I forgot my manners and frankly stared at him. First he turned scarlet; then he grew deathly pale; and then he turned scarlet again. And, for the first and only time in my life, I saw him look really angry. But this was only a passing manifestation. For a few moments his eyes flashed and his mouth set hard. Then, quite suddenly, the wrath faded from his face and gave place to a whimsical smile. He tore off the fly-leaf of the note, and, scribbling a few words on it, folded it up small, addressed it to Dr. Thorndyke, and handed it to me for transmission by the return route.

When it reached Thorndyke, he opened it, and, having read the brief message, nodded gravely to Bundy, and once more turned his attention to the foreman, who was addressing the coroner at greater length.

"The jury wish to say, sir, that this evidence is not satisfactory. It can't be reconciled with the other evidence. The facts before the jury are these: On the 26th of April Angelina Frood disappeared, and was never afterwards seen alive. On the night that she disappeared, or on the next night, a dead body was buried in the wall. Three months later that body was found in the wall, packed in quick-lime, and eaten away to a skeleton. That skeleton has been examined by an expert, and found to be that of a woman of similar size and age to Angelina Frood. With that skeleton were found articles of clothing, jewellery, and ornaments which have been proved to have been the clothing and property of Angelina Frood. Other articles of clothing have been recovered from the river; and those articles were missing from the body when it was found in the wall. On these facts, the jury feel that it is impossible to doubt that the remains found in the wall are the remains of Angelina Frood."

As the foreman concluded the coroner turned to Thorndyke with a slightly puzzled smile. "Of course, Doctor," said he, "you have considered those facts that the foreman has summarized so admirably. What do you say to his conclusion?"

"I must still contest it," replied Thorndyke. "The foreman's summary of the evidence, masterly as it was, furnishes no answer to the objection—based on established chemical facts—that the condition of the remains when found is irreconcilable with the alleged circumstances of the burial."

The coroner raised his eyebrows and pursed up his lips.

"I appreciate your point, Doctor," said he. "But we are on the horns of a dilemma. We are between the Devil of observed fact and the Deep Sea of scientific demonstration. Can you suggest any way out of the difficulty?"

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that if you were to call Mr. Bundy, he might be able to help you out of your dilemma."

"Mr. Bundy!" exclaimed the coroner. "I didn't know he was concerned in the case. Can you give us any information, Mr. Bundy?"

"Yes," replied Bundy, looking somewhat shy and nervous. "I think I could throw a little light on the case."

"I wish to goodness you had said so before. However, better late than never. We will take your evidence at once."

On this Thorndyke returned to his seat at the table and Bundy took his place, standing by the chair which Thorndyke had resigned.

"Let me see, Mr. Bundy," said the coroner, "your Christian name is—"

"The witness has not been sworn," interrupted Thorndyke.

The coroner smiled. "We are in the hands of the regular practitioners," he chuckled. "We must mind our p's and q's. Still you are quite right, Doctor. The name is part of the evidence."

The witness was accordingly sworn, and the coroner then proceeded, smilingly: "Now, Mr. Bundy, be very careful. You are making a sworn statement, remember. What is your Christian name?"

"Angelina," was the astounding reply.

"Angelina!" bawled Pilley. "It can't be. Why, it's a woman's name."

"We must presume that the witness knows his own name," said the coroner, writing it down. "Angelina Bundy."

"No, Sir," said the witness. "Angelina Frood."

The coroner suddenly stiffened with the upraised pen poised in the air; and so everyone in the room, including myself, underwent an instantaneous arrest of movement as if we had been turned into stone; and I noticed that the process of petrification had caught us all with our mouths open. But whereas the fixed faces on which I looked, expressed amazement qualified by incredulity, my own astonishment was coupled with conviction. Astounding as the statement was, the moment that it was made I knew that it was true. In spite of the discrepancies of appearance, I realized in a flash of enlightenment, the nature of that subtle influence that had drawn me to Bundy with a tenderness hardly congruous with mere male friendship. Outwardly I had been deceived, but my sub-conscious self had recognized Angelina all the time.

The interval of breathless silence, during which the witness calmly surveyed the court through his—or rather her—eyeglass, was at length broken by the coroner, who asked gravely: “This is not a joke? You affirm seriously that you are Angelina Frood?”

“Yes; I am Angelina Frood,” was the reply.

Here Mr. Pilley recovered himself and demanded excitedly: “Do we understand this gentleman to say that he is the deceased?”

“Well,” replied the coroner, “he is obviously not deceased, and he states that he is not a gentleman. He has declared that he is a lady.”

“But,” protested Pilley, “he says that she—at least she says that he—”

“You are getting mixed, Pilley,” interrupted the foreman. “This appears to be a woman masquerading as a man and playing practical jokes on a coroner’s jury. I suggest, sir, that we ought to have evidence of identity.”

“I agree with you, emphatically,” said the coroner.

“The identification is indispensable. Is there anyone present who can swear to the identity of this—er—person! Mr. Japp, for instance?”

“I’d rather you didn’t bring Mr. Japp into it,” said Angelina, hastily. “It isn’t really necessary. If you will allow me to run home and change my clothes, Mrs. Gillow and Dr. Strangeways will be able to identify me. And I can bring some photographs to show the jury.”

“That seems quite a good suggestion,” said the coroner. “Don’t you think so, gentlemen?”

“It is a very proper suggestion,” said the foreman, severely. “Let her go away and clothe herself decently. How long will she be gone?”

“I shall be back in less than half an hour,” said Angelina; and on this understanding she was given permission to retire. I watched her with a tumult of mixed emotions as she took up her hat, gloves, and stick, and strolled jauntily towards the door. There she paused for an instant and shot at me a single, swift, whimsical glance through her monocle. Then she went out; and with her disappeared forever the familiar figure of Peter Bundy.



## CHAPTER XVIII. — THE UNCONTRITE PENITENT

As the door closed on Angelina, a buzz of excited talk broke out. The astonished jurymen put their heads together and eagerly discussed the new turn of events, while the coroner sat with a deeply cogitative expression, evidently thinking hard and casting an occasional speculative glance in Thorndyke's direction. Meanwhile Cobbledick edged up to my side and presented his views in a soft undertone.

"This is a facer, Doctor, isn't it? Regular do. My word! Just think of the artfulness of that young woman, toting us round and helping us to find the things that she had just popped down for us to find. I call it a masterpiece." He chuckled admiringly, and added in a lower tone, "I hope she hasn't got herself into any kind of mess."

I looked at Cobbledick with renewed appreciation. I had always liked the sergeant. He was a capable man and a kindly one; and now he was showing a largeness of soul that won my respect and my gratitude, too. A small man would have been furious with Angelina, but Cobbledick took her performances in a proper sporting spirit. He was only amused and admiring. Not for nothing had Nature imprinted on his face that benevolent smile.

Presently Mr. Pilley, who seemed to have a special gift for the expression of erroneous opinions, addressed himself to the coroner.

"Well, Mr. Chairman," he said cheerfully, "I suppose we can consider the inquest practically over."

"Over!" exclaimed the astonished coroner.

"Yes. We were inquiring into the death of Angelina Frood. But if Mrs. Frood is alive after all, why, there's an end to the matter."

"What about the body in the mortuary?" demanded the foreman.

"Oh, ah," said Pilley. "I had forgotten about that." He looked owlishly at the coroner and then exclaimed:

"But that is the body of Mrs. Frood!"

"It can't be if Mrs. Frood is alive," the coroner reminded him.

"But it must be," persisted Pilley. "It has been identified as her, and it had her clothes and ring on. Mr. Bundy must have been pulling our legs."

"There is certainly something very mysterious about that body," said the coroner. "It was dressed in Mrs. Frood's clothes, as Mr. Pilley points out, and it appears that Mrs. Frood must be in some way connected with it."

"There's no doubt about that," agreed the foreman.

"She must know who that dead person is and how the body came to be in the place where it was found, and she will have to give an account of it."

"Yes," said the coroner. "But it is a mysterious affair. I wonder if Dr. Thorndyke could enlighten us. He seems to know more about the matter than anybody else."

But Thorndyke was not to be drawn into any statement.

"It would be merely a conjecture on my part," he said. "Presumably Mrs. Frood knows how the remains got into the wall, and I must leave her to give the necessary explanations."

"I don't see what explanations she can give," said the foreman. "It looks like a clear case of wilful murder. And it is against her."

To this view the coroner gave a guarded assent; and indeed it was the obvious view. There was the body, in Angelina's clothing, and everything pointed clearly to Angelina's complicity in the crime, if there had really been a crime committed. And what other explanation was possible?

As I reflected on the foreman's ominous words, I was sensible of a growing alarm. What if Angelina had been, as it were, snatched from the grave only to be placed in the dock on a charge of murder? That she could possibly be guilty of a crime did not enter my mind. But there was evidently some sort of criminal entanglement from which she might find it hard to escape. The appearances were sinister in the extreme; her simulated disappearance, her disguise, her suspicious silence during the inquiry; to any eye but mine they were conclusive evidence of her guilt. And the more I thought about it, the more deadly did the sum of that evidence appear, until, as the time ran on, I became positively sick with terror.

The opening of a door and a sudden murmur of surprise caused me to turn; and there was Angelina herself. But not quite the Angelina that I remembered. Gone were the pallid complexion, the weary, dark-circled eyes, the down-cast mouth, the sad and pensive countenance, the dark, strong eye-brows. Rosy-cheeked, smiling, confident, and looking strangely tall and imposing, she stepped composedly over to the head of the table, and stood there gazing with calm self-possession, and the trace of a smile at the stupefied jurymen.

"Your name is—?" said the coroner, gazing at her in astonishment.

"Angelina Frood," was the quiet reply; and the voice was Bundy's voice.

Here Pilley rose, bubbling with excitement. "This isn't the same person!" he exclaimed. "Why, he was a little man, and she's a tall woman. And his hair was short, and just look at hers! You can't grow a head of hair like that in twenty minutes."

"No," Angelina agreed, suavely. "I wish you could."

"The objection is not relevant, Mr. Pilley," said the coroner, suppressing a smile. "We are not concerned with the identity of Mr. Bundy but with that of Angelina Frood. Can anyone identify this lady?"

"I can," said I. "I swear that she is Angelina Frood."

"And Mrs. Gillow?"

Mrs. Gillow could and did identify her late lodger, and furthermore, burst into tears and filled the court-room with "yoops" of hysterical joy. When she had been pacified and gently restrained by the coroner's officer from an attempt to embrace the witness, the coroner proceeded:

"Now, Mrs. Frood, the jury require certain explanations from you, in regard to the body of a woman which is at present lying in the mortuary and which was found buried in the city wall with certain articles of clothing and jewellery which have been identified as your property. Did you know that that body had been buried in the wall?"

"Yes," replied Angelina.

"Do you know how it came to be in the wall?"

"Yes. I put it there."

"You put it there!" roared Pilley, amidst a chorus of exclamations from the jurymen. The coroner held up his hand to enjoin silence and asked, as he gazed in astonishment at Angelina.

"Can you tell us who this deceased person was?"

"I'm afraid I can't," Angelina replied, apologetically. "I don't think her name was known."

"But—er—" the astounded coroner inquired, "how did she come by her death?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that either," replied Angelina. "The fact is, I never asked."

"You never asked!" the coroner repeated, in a tone of bewilderment. "But—er—are we to understand that in short, did you or did you not cause the death of this person by your own act? Of course," he added hastily, "you are not bound to answer that question."

Angelina smiled at him engagingly. "I will answer with pleasure. I did not cause the death of this person."

"Then are we to understand that she was already dead when you found her?"

"I didn't find her. I bought her; at a shop in Great St. Andrew-street. I gave four pounds, fourteen and three-pence for her, including two and three-pence to Carter Paterson's. I've brought the bill with me."

She produced the bill from her pocket and handed it to the coroner, who read it with a portentous frown and a perceptible twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"I will read this document to you, gentlemen," he said in a slightly unsteady voice. "It is dated the 19th of April, and reads: 'Bought of Oscar Hammerstein, Dealer in Human and Comparative Osteology, Great St. Andrew-street, London, W. C., one complete set superfine human osteology, disarticulated and unbleached (female), as selected by purchaser, four pounds eight shillings and sixpence. Replacing and cementing missing teeth, one shilling and sixpence. Packing case, two shillings. Carriage, two and three pence. Total, four pounds, fourteen and three-pence. Received with thanks, O. Hammerstein.' Perhaps you would like to see the bill, yourselves, gentlemen."

He passed it to the foreman, taking a quick glance out of the corners of his eyes at the bland and impassive Angelina, and the jury studied it in a deep silence, which was broken only by a soft, gurgling sound, from somewhere behind me, which, I discovered, on looking round, to proceed from Sergeant Cobbledick, whose crimsoned face was partly hidden by a large handkerchief and whose shoulders moved convulsively.

Presently the coroner addressed Thorndyke. "In continuation of your evidence, Doctor, does Mrs. Frood's explanation agree with any conclusions that you had arrived at from your inspection of the remains?"

"It agrees with them completely," Thorndyke replied with a grim smile.

The coroner entered the answer in the depositions, and then turned once more to Angelina.

"With regard to the objects that were found with the skeleton; did you put them there?"

"Yes. I put in the metal things and a few pieces of scorched rag to give a realistic effect—on account of the lime, you know."

"And the articles that were recovered from the river, too, I suppose?"

"Yes, I put them down—with proper precautions, of course."

"What do you mean by proper precautions?"

"Well, I couldn't afford to waste any of the things, so I used to keep a lookout with a telescope, and then, when I saw a likely person coming along, I put one of the things down where it could be seen."

"And were they always seen?"

"No. Some people are very unobservant. In that case I picked it up when the coast was clear and saved it for another time."

The coroner chuckled. "It was all very ingenious and complete. But now, Mrs. Frood, we have to ask you what was the object of these extraordinary proceedings. It was not a joke, I presume?"

"Oh, not at all," replied Angelina. "It was a perfectly serious affair. You have heard what sort of husband I had. I couldn't possibly live with him. I made several attempts to get away and live by myself, but he always followed me and found me out. So I determined to disappear altogether."

"You could have applied for a separation," said the coroner.

"I shouldn't have got it," replied Angelina, "and even if I had, of what use would it have been? I should have been bound to him for life. I couldn't have married anyone else. My whole life would have been spoilt. So I decided to disappear completely and for good, and start life afresh in a new place and under a new name. And in order that there should be no mistake about it, I thought I would leave the—er—the material for a coroner's inquest and a will directing that a suitable monument should be put up over my grave. Then, if I had ever married again, there would have been no danger of a charge of bigamy. If anyone had made any such suggestion, I could have referred them to the registrar of deaths and to the tombstone of Angelina Frood in Rochester churchyard."

"And as to a birth certificate under your new name?" the coroner asked with a twinkle of his eye.

Angelina smiled a prim little smile. "I think that could have been managed," she said.

"Well," said the coroner, "it was an ingenious scheme. But apparently Dr. Thorndyke knew who Mr. Bundy was. How do you suppose he discovered your identity?"

"That is just what I should like to know," she replied.

"So should I," said the coroner, with a broad smile; "but, of course, it isn't my affair or that of the jury. We are concerned with this skeleton that you have planted on us. I suppose you can give us no idea as to where it came from originally?"

"The dealer said it had been found in a barrow—not a wheel-barrow, you know; an ancient burial-place. Of course, I don't know whether he was speaking the truth."

"What do you think, Dr. Thorndyke?" the coroner asked.

"I think it is an ancient skeleton, though very well preserved. Some of the teeth—the original ones—show more wear than one expects to find in a modern skull. But I only made a cursory inspection."

"I think the evidence is sufficient for our purpose," said the coroner; "and that really concludes the case, so we need not detain you any longer, Mrs. Frood. I don't know exactly what your legal position is; whether you have committed any legal offence. If you have, it is not our business; and I think I am expressing the sentiments of the jury if I say that I hope that the authorities will not make it their business. No one has been injured, and no action seems to be called for."

With these sentiments the jury concurred warmly, as also did Sergeant Cobbledick, who was heard, very audibly and regardless of the proprieties, to murmur "Hear, hear." We waited to learn the nature of the verdict, and when this had been pronounced (to the effect that the skeleton was that of an unknown woman, concerning the circumstances of whose death no evidence was available), the court rose and we prepared to depart.

"You are coming back to lunch with us, Angelina?" said I.

"I should love to," she replied, "but there is Mr. Japp. Do you think you could ask him, too?"

"Of course," I replied, with a sudden perception of the advantage of even numbers. "We shouldn't be complete without him."

Japp accepted with enthusiasm, and, after a hasty farewell to Cobbledick, we went forth into the High-street, by no means unobserved of the populace. As we approached the neighbourhood of the office Angelina said:

"I must run into my rooms for a few moments just to tidy myself up a little. It was such a very hurried toilette. I won't be more than a few minutes. You needn't wait for me."

"I suggest," said Thorndyke, "that Mr. Japp and I go on and break the news to Mrs. Dunk that there is a lady guest, and that Strangeways remains behind to escort the prisoner."

I fell in readily with this admirable suggestion, and as the two men walked on, I followed Angelina up the steps and waited while she plied her latch-key. We entered the hall together and then went into the sitting-room, where she stood for a moment, looking round with deep satisfaction.

"It's nice to be home again," she said, "and to feel that all that fuss is over."

"I daresay it is," said I. "But now that you are home, what have you got to say for yourself? You are a nice little baggage,

aren't you?"

"I am a little beast, John," she replied. "I've been a perfect pig to you. But I didn't mean to be, and I really couldn't help it. You'll try to forgive me, won't you?"

"The fact is, Angelina," I said, "I am afraid I am in love with you."

"Oh, I hope to goodness you are, John," she exclaimed. "If I thought you weren't I should wish myself a skeleton again. Do you think you really are?"

She crept closer to me with such a sweet, wheedlesome air that I suddenly caught her in my arms and kissed her.

"It does seem as if you were," she admitted with a roguish smile; and then—such unaccountable creatures are women—she laid her head on my shoulder and began to sob. But this was only a passing shower. Another kiss brought back the sunshine and then she tripped away to spread fresh entanglements for the masculine heart.

In a few minutes she returned, further adorned and looking to my eyes the very picture of womanly sweetness and grace. When I had given confirmatory evidence of my sentiments towards her, we went out, just in time to encounter Mrs. Gillow and acquaint her with the program.

"I suppose," said Angelina, glancing furtively at a little party of women who were glancing, not at all furtively, at her, "one should be gratified at the interest shown by one's fellow towns-people; but don't you think the back streets would be preferable to the High-street?"

"It is no use, my dear," I replied. "We've got to face it. Take no notice. Regard these bipeds that infest the footways as mere samples of the local fauna. Let them stare and ignore them. For my part, I rather like them. They impress on me the admirable bargain that I have made in swapping Peter Bundy for a beautiful lady."

"Poor Peter," she said, pensively. "He was a sad boy sometimes when he looked at his big, handsome John and thought that mere friendship was all that he could hope for when his poor little heart was starving for love. Your deal isn't the only successful one, John, so you needn't be so conceited. But here we are home—really home, this time, for this has been my real home, John, dear. And there—Oh! Moses I—there is Mrs. Dunk, waiting to receive us!"

"What used you to do to Mrs. Dunk," I asked, "to make her so furious?"

"I only used to inquire after her health," Angelina replied plaintively. "But mum's the word. She'll spot my voice as soon as I speak."

Mrs. Dunk held the door open ceremoniously and curtsied as we entered. She was a gruff old woman, but she had a deep respect for "gentlefolk," as is apt to be the way with old servants. Angelina acknowledged her salutation with a gracious smile and followed her meekly up the stairs to the room that Mrs. Dunk had allotted to her.

I found Thorndyke and Japp established in the library—Dr. Partridge had dispensed with a drawing-room and I followed his excellent example—and here presently Angelina joined us, sailing majestically into the room and marching up to Thorndyke with an air at once hostile and defiant.

"Serpent," said Angelina.

"Not at all," Thorndyke dissented with a smile. "You should be grateful to me for having rescued you from your own barbed-wire entanglements."

"Serpent, I repeat," persisted Angelina. "To let me sit in that court-room watching all the innocents walking into my trap one after another, and then, just as I thought they were all inside, to hand me a thing like that!" and she produced, dramatically, a small sheet of paper, which I recognized as the remainder of Thorndyke's note. I took it from her, and read: "You see whither the evidence is leading. The deception cannot be maintained, nor is there any need, now that your husband is dead. Explanations must be given either by you or by me. For your own sake I urge you to explain everything and clear yourself. Let me know what you will do."

"This is an extraordinary document," I said, passing it to Japp. "How in the name of Fortune did you know that Bundy was Angelina?"

"Yes, how did you?" the latter demanded. "It is for you to give an explanation now."

"We will have the explanations after lunch," said he; "mutual explanations. I want to hear how far I was correct in details."

"Very well," agreed Angelina, "we will both explain. But you will have the first innings. You are not going to listen to my explanation and then say you knew all about it. And that reminds me, John, that you had better tell Mrs. Dunk. She is sure to recognize my voice."

I quite agreed with Angelina and hurried away to intercept Mrs. Dunk and let her know the position. She was at first decidedly shocked, but a vivid and detailed description of the late Mr. Frood produced a complete revulsion; so complete, in fact, as to lead me to speculate on the personal characteristics of the late Mr. Dunk. But her curiosity was aroused to such an extent that, while waiting at table, she hardly removed her eyes from Angelina, until the latter, finding the scrutiny unbearable, suddenly produced the hated eye-glass, and, sticking it in her eye, directed a stern glance at the old woman, who instantly backed towards the door with a growl of alarm, and then sniggered hoarsely.

It was a festive occasion, for we were all in exuberant spirits, including Mr. Japp, who, if he said little, made up the deficiency in smiles of forty-wrinkle power, which, together with his upstanding tuft of white hair, made him look like a convivial cockatoo.

"Do you remember our last meeting at this table?" said Angelina, "when I jeered at the famous expert and pulled his reverend leg, thinking what a smart young fellow I was, and how beautifully I was bamboozling him? And all the while he knew! He knew! And 'Not a word said the hard-boiled egg.' Oh, serpent! serpent!"

Thorndyke chuckled. "You didn't leave the hardboiled egg much to say," he observed.

"No. But why were you so secret? Why didn't you let on, just a little, to give poor Bundy a hint as to where he was plunging?"

"My dear Mrs. Frood—"

"Oh, call me Angelina," she interrupted.

"Thank you," said he. "Well, my dear Angelina, you are forgetting that I didn't know what was in the wall."

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "I had overlooked that. Of course, it might have been—Good gracious! How awful!" She paused with her eyes fixed on Thorndyke, and then asked: "Supposing it had been?"

"I refuse to suppose anything of the kind," he replied. "My explanations will deal with the actual, not with the hypothetical."

There was silence for a minute or two. Like Angelina, I was speculating on what Thorndyke would have done if the remains had been real remains—and those of a man. He had evidently sympathized warmly with the hunted wife; but if her defence had taken the form of a crime, would he have exposed her? It was useless to ask him. I have often thought about it since, but have never reached a conclusion.

"You will have to answer questions better than that presently," said Angelina; "but I won't ask you any more now. You shall finish your lunch in peace, and then—into the witness-box you go. I am going to have satisfaction for that note."

The little festival went on, unhurried, with an abundance of cheerful and rather frivolous talk. But at last, like all fugitive things, it came to an end. The table was cleared, and garnished with the port decanter and the coffee service, and Mrs. Dunk, with a final glower, half-defiant and half-admiring, at Angelina, took her departure.

"Now," said Angelina, as I poured out the coffee, "the time has come to talk of many things, but especially of expert investigations into the identity of Peter Bundy. Your lead, Sir."



## CHAPTER XIX. — EXPLANATIONS

"The investigation of this case," Thorndyke began, "falls naturally into two separate inquiries: that relating to the crime and that which is concerned with what we may conveniently call the personation. They make certain contacts, but they are best considered separately. Let us begin with the crime.

"Now, to a person having experience of real crime, there was, in this case, from the very beginning, something rather abnormal. A woman of good social position had disappeared. There was a suggestion that she had been murdered; and the murder had apparently been committed in some public place, that is to say, not in a house. But in such cases, normally, the first evidence of the crime is furnished by the discovery of the body. It is true that, in this case, there was a suggestion that the body had been flung into the river, and this, at first, masked the abnormality to some extent. But even then there was the discrepancy that the brooch, which was attached to the person, appeared to have been found on land, while the bag, which was not attached to the person, was picked up at the water's edge. The bag itself, and the box which had been in it, presented several inconsistencies.

"They had apparently been lying unnoticed for eleven days on a piece of shore that was crowded with small craft and frequently by numbers of seamen and labourers, and that formed a play-ground for the waterside children. The clean state of the box when found showed that it had neither been handled nor immersed, and as the wrapping-paper was intact, the person who had taken it out of the bag must have thrown it away without opening it to see what it contained. The bag was found under some light rubbish. That rubbish had not been thrown on it by the water, or the bag would have been soaked; and no one could have thrown the rubbish on it without seeing the bag, which was an article of some value. Again, the bag had not been carried to this place by the water, as was proved by its condition.

"Therefore, either this was the place where the crime had been committed, or someone had brought the bag to this place and thrown it away. But neither supposition was reasonably probable. It was inconceivable that a person like Mrs. Frood should have been in this remote, inaccessible, disreputable place at such an hour. The bag could not have been brought here by an innocent person, for no such person would have thrown it away. It was quite a valuable bag. And a guilty person would have thrown it in the river, and probably put a stone in it to sink it. So you see that these first clues were strikingly abnormal. They prepared one to consider the possibility of false tracks. Even the brooch incident had a faint suggestion of the same kind when considered with the other clues. The man who pawned the brooch had a mole on his nose. Such an adornment can be easily produced artificially. It is highly distinctive of the person who possesses it, and it is equally distinctive—negatively—of the person who does not possess it. Then there was the character of the person who had disappeared. She was a woman who was seeking to escape from her husband; and hitherto she had not succeeded because she had not hidden herself securely enough. She was a person of a somewhat disappearing tendency. She had an understandable motive for disappearing.

"From the very beginning, therefore, the possibility of voluntary disappearance had to be borne in mind. And when it was, each new clue seemed to support it. There was the scarf, for instance. It was found under a fish-trunk; an unlikely place for it to have got by chance, but an excellent one for a 'plant.' The scarf was not baldly exposed, but someone was sure to turn the trunk over and find it. And at this point another peculiarity began to develop. There was a noticeable tendency for the successive 'finds' to creep up the river from Chatham towards Rochester Bridge. It was not yet very remarkable, but I noticed it, as I entered each find on my map. The brooch was associated with Chatham, the bag and box with the Chatham shore a little farther up, the scarf with the Rochester shore at Blue Boar Head. As I say, it attracted my attention; and when the first shoe was found above Blue Boar Head, the second shoe farther up still, and the hat-pin yet farther up towards the bridge, it became impossible to ignore it. There was no natural explanation. Whether the body were floating or stationary, the constancy of direction was inexplicable; for the tide sweeps up and down twice daily, and objects detached from the body would be carried up or down stream, according to the direction of the tide when they became detached. This regular order was a most suspicious circumstance. Later, when the objects were found in Black Boy-lane, it became absurd. It was a mere paper-chase. Just look at my map."

He exhibited the large-scale map, on which each "find" was marked by a small circle. The series of circles, joined by a connecting line, proceeded directly from near Sun Pier, Chatham, along the shore, and up Black Boy-lane to the gate of the waste ground, and across it to the wall.

Angelina giggled. "You can't say I didn't make it as easy as I could for poor old Cobbledick," she said. "Of course, I never reckoned on anyone bringing up the heavy guns. By the way, I wonder who your private client was. Do you know, John?" she added, with a sudden glance of suspicion; and, as I grinned sheepishly, she exclaimed: "Well! I wouldn't have believed it. It was a regular conspiracy. But I am interrupting the expert. Proceed, my lord."

"Well," Thorndyke resumed, "we have considered the aspect of the crime problem taken by itself, as it appeared to an experienced investigator. From the first there was a suspicion that the clues were counterfeit, and with each new clue this suspicion deepened. And you will notice an important corollary. If the case was a fraud, that fraud was being worked by someone on the spot. Keep that point in mind, for it has a most significant bearing on the other problem, that of the personation, to which we will now turn our attention. But before we go into details, there are certain general considerations that we ought to note, in order that we may understand more clearly how the deception became possible.

"The subject of personation and disguise is often misunderstood. It is apt to be supposed that a disguise effects a



complete transformation resulting in a complete resemblance to the individual personated—or, as in this case, a complete disappearance of the identity of the disguised person. But no such transformation is possible. All disguise is a form of bluff. It acts by suggestion. And the suggestion is effected by a set of misleading circumstances which produce in the dupe a state of mind in which a very imperfect disguise serves to produce conviction. That is the psychology of personation, and I can only express my admiration of the way in which Angelina had grasped it. Her conduct of this delicate deception was really masterly. Let us consider it in more detail.

“Mr. Bundy was ostensibly a man. But if he had been put in a room with a dozen moderately intelligent persons, and those persons had been asked, ‘Is this individual a man? or is he a woman with short hair and dressed in man’s clothing?’ they would probably have decided unanimously that he was a woman. But the question never was asked. The issue was never raised. He was Mr. Bundy. One doesn’t look at young men to see if they are women in disguise.

“Then consider the position of Strangeways—the chosen victim. He comes to a strange town to transact business with a firm of land agents. He goes into the office, and finds the partners—whose names are on the plate outside, and to whom he has been sent by his London agent—engaged in their normal avocations. He transacts his business with them in a normal way, and Mr. Bundy seems to be an ordinary, capable young man. He goes back later and interviews Mr. Bundy, who is just on the point of taking him to introduce him to Mrs. Frood, when he is called away. Then, within a few minutes, he is taken to Mrs. Frood’s house, where he finds that lady calmly engaged in needlework. Supposing Mrs. Frood had been extremely like Bundy, could it possibly have entered Strangeways’s head that they might be one and the same person? Remember that he had left Bundy in another place only a few minutes before; and here was Mrs. Frood in her own apartments, with the appearance of having been there for hours. Obviously no such thought could have occurred to any man. There was nothing to suggest it.

“But, in fact, Angelina was not perceptibly like Bundy on cursory inspection. They were markedly different in size. A woman always looks bigger than a man of the same height. Bundy was a little man and looked smaller than he was by reason of his very low heels; Angelina was a biggish woman and looked taller than she was by reason of her high heels and her hair. Disregarding her hair, she was fully two inches taller than Bundy.

“Then the facial resemblance must have been slight. Angelina had a mass of hair and wore it low down on her brows and temples; Bundy’s hair was short and was brushed back from his forehead. Angelina had strong, black eyebrows; Bundy’s eyebrows were thin, or rather, cut off short. Angelina was pale, careworn, dark under the eyes, with drooping mouth, melancholy expression and depressed in manner; Bundy was fresh-coloured, smiling, gay and sprightly in manner and he wore an eye-glass—which has a surprising effect on facial expression. Their voices and intonation were strikingly different. Finally, Strangeways never saw Angelina excepting in a very subdued light in which any small resemblances in features would be unnoticeable.

“And now observe another effect of suggestion. Strangeways had made the acquaintance of Mr. Bundy. Then he had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Frood. They were two separate persons; they were practically strangers to one another; they belonged to different sets of surroundings. He would never think of them in connexion with one another. They were two of his friends, mutually unacquainted. In this condition of separateness they would become established in his mind, and the conception of them as different persons would become confirmed by habit. It would be a permanent suggestion that would offer an obstacle to any future suggestion that they were the same. That was the advantage of introducing Bundy first, for if he had appeared only after Angelina had disappeared, there would have been no such opposing suggestion. The resemblances might have been noticed, and he might have been detected.

“In passing I may remark upon the tact and judgment that were shown in the disguise. The troublesome makeup, the wig, the false eyebrows, the grease-paint, the false voice, all were concentrated on the temporary Mrs. Frood, who was to disappear. Bundy was not disguised at all, excepting for the eye-glass. He was simply Angelina with her hair cut short and dressed as a man. He hadn’t even an assumed voice; for as Angelina is a contralto, and habitually speaks in the lower register, her voice would pass quite well as a light tenor, so long as she kept off the ‘head notes.’

“So much for the general aspects of the case. And now as to my own position. As I had never seen Angelina, I naturally should not perceive any resemblance to her in Bundy; but, equally with Strangeways, I was subject to the suggestion that Bundy was a man. The personal equation, however, was different. It is my professional habit to reject all mental suggestion so far as is possible; to sift out the facts and consider them with an open mind regardless of what they appear to suggest. And then you are to remember that when I first met Mr. Bundy, there was already in my mind a faint suspicion that this was not a genuine crime; that things were not quite what they appeared; and that if this were the case, the clues were being manipulated by somebody on the spot.

“When I met Mr. Bundy, I looked him over as I look over every person whom I meet for the first time; and that inspection yielded one or two rather remarkable facts. I noticed that he wore exceptionally low heels and that he had several physical characteristics that were distinctively feminine. The very low heels puzzled me somewhat. If they had been exceptionally high there would have been nothing in it. But why should a noticeably short man wear almost abnormally low heels? I could think of no reason, unless he wore them for greater comfort, but I noted the fact and reserved it for further consideration.

“Of his physical peculiarities, the first that attracted my attention was the shape of his hands. They were quite of the feminine type. Of course, hands vary, but still it was a fact to be noted, and the observation caused me to look him over a little more critically; and then I discovered a number of other feminine characteristics.

"Perhaps it may be useful to consider briefly the less obvious differences between the sexes—the more obvious ones would, of course, be provided for by the disguise. There are two principal groups of such differences; the one has reference to the distribution of bulk, the other to the direction of certain lines. Let us take the distribution of bulk. This exhibits opposite tendencies in the two sexes. In the female, the great mass is central—the hip region; and from this the form diminishes in both directions. The whole figure, including the arms, is contained in an elongated ellipse. And the tendency affects the individual members. The limbs are bulky where they join the trunk, they taper pretty regularly towards the extremities, and they terminate in relatively small hands and feet. The hands themselves taper as a whole, and the individual fingers taper markedly from a comparatively thick base to a pointed tip.

"In the male figure the opposite condition prevails; it tends to be acromegalous. The central mass is relatively small, the peripheral masses is relatively large. The hip region is narrow, and there is a great widening towards the shoulders. The limbs taper much less towards the extremities, and they terminate in relatively large hands and feet. So, too, with the hands; they tend to be square in shape, and the individual fingers—excepting the index finger—are nearly as broad at the tips as at the base.

"Of the second group of differences we need consider only one or two instances. The general rule is that certain contour lines tend in the male to be vertical or horizontal in direction and in the female to be oblique. A man's neck, at the back, is nearly straight and vertical; a woman's shows a sweeping oblique curve. The angle of a man's lower jaw is nearly a right angle; there is a vertical and a horizontal ramus. A woman's lower jaw has an open angle and its contour forms an oblique line from the ear to the chin. But the most distinctive difference is in the ear itself. A man's ear has its long diameter vertical; a woman's has the long diameter oblique; and the obliquity is usually very marked.

"Bearing these differences in mind, and remembering that they are subject to variation in individual cases, let us now return to Mr. Bundy. His hands, as I have said, had the feminine character. His feet were small even for a small man; his ears were set obliquely and the line of his jaw was oblique with an open angle. His shoulders had evidently been made up by the tailor, and he seemed rather wide across the hips for a man. In short, all those bodily characteristics which were not concealed or disguised by the clothing were feminine. It was a rather remarkable fact; so much so that I began to ask myself if it were possible that he might actually be a woman in disguise.

"I watched him narrowly. There was nothing distinctive in his walk, but there was in the movements of the arms. He flourished his stick jauntily enough, but he had not that 'nice conduct of a clouded cane' that is as much a social cachet in our day as it was in the days of good Queen Anne. It needs a skill born of years of practice to manage a stick properly, as one realizes when one sees the working man taking his Malacca for its Sunday morning walk. Mr. Bundy had not that skill. His stick was a thing consciously carried; it was not a part of himself. Then the movement of the free arm was feminine. When a woman swings her arm she swings it through a large arc, especially in the backward direction—probably to avoid her hip—and the palm of the hand tends to be turned backward. A man's free arm either hangs motionless or swings slightly, unless he is walking very fast; it swings principally forward, and the palm of his hand inclines inwards. These are small matters, but their cumulative significance is great.

"Further, there was the mental habit. Bundy was jocose and playfully ironic. But a gentleman of twenty-five doesn't 'pull the leg' of a gentleman of fifty whom he knows but slightly; whereas a lady of twenty-five does. And very properly," he added, seeing that Angelina had turned rather pink. "That is a compliment in a young lady which would be an impertinence in a young man. No doubt, when the equality of the sexes is an accomplished fact, things will be different."

"It will never be an accomplished fact," said Angelina. "The equality of the sexes is like the equality of the classes. The people who roar for social equality are the under-dogs; and the women who shout for sex equality are the under-cats. Normal women are satisfied with things as they are."

"Hearken unto the wisdom of Angelina," said Thorndyke, with a smile. "But perhaps she is right. It may be that the women who are so eager to compete with men are those who can't compete with women. I can't say. I have never been a woman; whereas Angelina has the advantage of being able to view the question from both sides.

"The *prima facie* evidence, then, suggested that Mr. Bundy was a woman. But as this was a *prima facie* improbability, the matter had to be gone into further. On Mr. Bundy's cheeks and chin was a faint blue colouration, suggestive of such a growth of whiskers and beard as would be appropriate to his age. Now if those whiskers and that beard were genuine, the other signs were fallacious. Mr. Bundy must be a man. But his cheeks looked perfectly smooth and clean; and it was about seven o'clock in the evening. My own cheeks and Strangeways' were by this time visibly prickly; and as he had been with us all day, Mr. Bundy could not have shaved since the morning. I tried vainly to get a closer view, and was considering how it could be managed when Providence intervened."

"I know," said Angelina; "It was that beastly mosquito."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke. "But even then I could not get a chance to look at the skin closely. But when we got Mr. Bundy into the surgery, and examined the bite through a lens, the murder was out."

"You could see there were no whiskers?" said Angelina.

"It wasn't that," replied Thorndyke. "It was something much more conclusive. You may know that the whole of the human body excepting the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, and the eyelids, is covered with a fine down, technically called the lanugo. It consists of minute, nearly colourless hairs set quite closely together, and may be seen as a sort of halo on the face of a woman or child when the edge of the contour is against the light. On the face of a clean-shaved man it is, of

course, absent, as it is shaved off with the whiskers. Now on Mr. Bundy's face the lanugo was intact all over the blue area. It followed that he had never been shaved. It further followed that the blue colouration was an artificial stain. But this made it practically a certainty that Mr. Bundy was a woman.

"The question now was: If Mr. Bundy was a woman, what woman was he? The obvious answer seemed to be, Angelina Frood. She was missing; but if the disappearance was an imposture, someone on the spot was planting the clues. That someone would most probably be Mrs. Frood, herself. But if she were lurking in the neighbourhood, she must be disguised; and here was a disguised woman. Nevertheless, obvious as the suggestion was, the thing suggested seemed to be impossible. Strangeways knew both Angelina and Bundy and he had not recognized the latter; and I had a vague impression that he had seen them together, which, of course, would absolutely exclude their identity. A little judicious conversation with him, however, showed that neither objection had any weight. He had never seen them both at one time; and his description of Mrs. Frood made it clear that she had appeared to him totally unlike Bundy.

"The next thing was to ascertain definitely if this woman really was Mrs. Frood, and fortunately I had the means of making a very simple test. Strangeways had given me a photograph of Angelina bearing the address of a theatrical photographer, and from him I obtained seven different photographs in various poses. Then I received from Strangeways the group-photograph that was taken of us by the city wall, which contained an excellent portrait of Mr. Bundy. Out of this photograph I cut a small square containing Bundy's head, soaked it in oil of bergamot, and mounted it in Canada balsam on a glass plate. This made the paper quite transparent, so I now had a transparent positive. I selected from the photographs of Angelina one that was in a pose exactly similar to the portrait, of Bundy—practically full face—and treated it in the same way. Then I handed the two transparencies to my assistant, and he, by means of our big copying camera, produced two life-sized negatives, exactly alike in dimensions. With prints from these negatives we were able to perform some experiments. From Angelina's portrait I carefully cut out the face, leaving the hair and neck, and slipped Bundy's portrait behind it, so that his face appeared through the hole. We could now see how Bundy looked with Angelina's hair, and, on putting it beside an untouched portrait of Angelina, it was obvious, in spite of the eye-glass, that it was the same face. For you must remember that the Angelina that we had was the real person, not the made-up Angelina whom Strangeways had seen.

"This success encouraged us to take a little more trouble. My man, Polton, made some black paper masks, with the aid of which he produced two composite photographs, one of which had Bundy's face and Angelina's hair, neck, and bust, while the other had Angelina's face and Bundy's hair, forehead, neck, and bust. The eye-glass was the disturbing factor, though it showed very little, and Bundy managed it so skilfully that it hardly affected the shape of the eye and the set of the brow. Still, it was necessary to eliminate it, and as painting was out of our province, we invoked the aid of Mrs. Anstey, who is a very talented portrait painter and miniaturist. She touched out the joins in the composites, painted out the eye-glass in the one and painted an eye-glass into the other. And now the identity was complete. The Bundy-Angelina portrait was identical with the photographer's portrait, and the Angelina-Bundy photograph was Mr. Bundy to the life.

"However, we made a final test. Polton reduced the Bundy-Angelina portrait to cabinet size, and made a couple of carbon prints, which I brought down here and exhibited; and as Strangeways accepted them as portraits of Angelina, I considered the proof complete."

Here Angelina interrupted: "But what about that brooch? I never had a brooch like that."

Thorndyke smiled a grim smile. "I asked Mrs. Anstey to paint in a brooch of a characteristic design."

"What for?" asked Angelina.

"Ah!" said Thorndyke, "thereby hangs a tale."

"Oh! a serpent's tail, I suppose," said Angelina.

"You will be able to judge presently," he replied. "The brooch had its uses. Well, to continue: The identity of Mr. Bundy was now established as a moral certainty. But it was not certain enough for legal purposes. I wanted conclusive evidence; and I wanted to ascertain exactly how the transformation effects were worked. I had noted that Bundy and Angelina occupied adjoining houses which were virtually the two moieties of a double house with a common covered passageway. I assumed that the two houses communicated, but it was necessary to ascertain if they really did. The only way to establish the facts was to inspect the house in which Angelina had lived, and this I determined to do, in the very faint hope that I might be able, at the same time, to get one or more of Angelina's finger-prints. I made a pretext for visiting the house with Strangeways, and we had the extraordinary good luck to find Mrs. Gillow just going out, so we had the house to ourselves. But this was not the only piece of luck, for we found that Angelina had taken a drink from the bedroom tumbler and water-bottle before going out, and had left on them a complete set of beautiful fingerprints, of which I secured a number of admirable photographs.

"Examination of the basement showed that I was right as to the communication. Both houses had a side door opening into the passage-way, and both doors were fitted with Yale latches which looked as if they were opened with the same key. The passage was little used, but the gravel between the two doors was a good deal trodden, and there were numerous finger-prints on Angelina's side-door. In the kitchen was a large cupboard fitted with a Yale lock on the door and pegs inside. I assumed that when Angelina was at home that cupboard contained a suit of Mr. Bundy's clothes, and that when Mr. Bundy was in the office it contained a wig and a dress and a pair of lady's shoes.

"Well, that made the evidence fairly complete with one exception. We had to get a set of Bundy's finger-prints to

compare with Angelina's. That was where the brooch came in. I knew that when Mr. Bundy saw a portrait of his former self with a brooch that he had never possessed, his curiosity would be aroused, and he would examine that portrait closely. And so he did. And on my asking him to compare the two prints, he took the opportunity to pick them both up, one in each hand, to scrutinize them more minutely, and find out who the photographer was. When he put them down, they bore a complete, though invisible, set of his finger-prints. Later, Mr. Bundy went home, escorted by Strangeways. As soon as they were gone, I took the photographs up to my room, developed up the finger-prints with powder, and compared them minutely, line by line, with the photographs of those on the tumbler and bottle. They were identical. The finger-prints of Bundy were the finger-prints of Angelina Frood.

"That completed the case; and if I had known what Angelina's intentions were I should have notified Bundy that 'the game was up.' But I was in the dark. I could do nothing until I knew whether she was going to produce a body, and if so, whose body it would be. The City wall was in my mind as a possibility, since I had noted the curious disappearance of the gate-key on that significant date and I had heard of the story of Bill the bargee and knew that Bundy had heard it, and apparently taken it seriously. But one can't act on conjecture. I could only watch Angelina play her game and try to follow the moves. When the paper-chase turned up Black Boy-lane, I knew that the wall-burial was intended to be discovered. But I didn't know what was in the wall, and I may say that I was rather alarmed. For if Angelina had taken the story of Bill as a reliable precedent and had buried a real body in quicklime, there was going to be a catastrophe. It was an immense relief to me when I got Strangeways' report that only a skeleton had been found; for I knew then that only a skeleton had been buried and that no crime had been committed. That is all I have to tell; and now it is Angelina's turn to enter the confessional."

"You haven't left me much to tell," said Angelina. "I feel as if I had been doing the thimble and pea trick with glass thimbles. However, I will fill in a few details. This scheme first occurred to me when I came down here to take over the property that had been left to me. I put it confidentially to Uncle Japp, but he was so shocked that he has never been able to get his hair to lie down since. He wouldn't hear of it. So I asked him to lunch with poor Nicholas; and after that he was ready to agree to anything. Accordingly I made my preparations. I got a theatrical wig-maker to cut off my hair and make it into a wig (I told him I had a man's part and it was expected to be a long run), got a suit made by a theatrical costumier, and down I came as Mr. Bundy. Uncle J. had already had the new plate put up. The next door offices and basement were empty, so we got them furnished for Angelina, and as soon as the wig was ready, down she came and took possession.

"Up to this time the third act was a bit sketchy. I had arranged the disappearance, and the recovery of the clues from the river, and I had a plan of buying a mummy, dressing it in my clothes, and burying it in the marshes close to the shore, where I could discover it when it had matured sufficiently. But I didn't much like the plan. I didn't know enough about mummies, and some other people might know too much. It looked as if I should have to do without a body, and leave my death to mere rumour; which would be unsatisfactory. I did want a tombstone.

"About this time an angel of the name of Turcival—he lives in Adam and Eve-street, Adelphi, bless him!—sent a Dr. Strangeways down here. He was a regular windfall—a new doctor—and I gave him my entire attention. I took him to his own proposed premises, and kept him in conversation, to let my personality soak well in. That evening I interviewed him in the office, and let him suppose that I was going to take him to Mrs. Frood's house and introduce him to her. Then, when I suddenly remembered an engagement elsewhere, I went out, and as soon as the office door was shut, down I darted into our basement, out at the side door, in at the other side door, and into Mrs. Frood's kitchen. There I did a lightning change; slipped on my dress and wig, stuck on my eyebrows, and made up my complexion; flew up the stairs, lighted the lamp in the sitting-room, and spread myself out with my needle-work. But I hadn't been settled more than two or three minutes when Uncle Japp arrived, leading the lamb to the slaughter.

"Then it turned out that I had struck a bit of luck that I hadn't bargained for. John had attended me in London and knew something of my affairs; so I appointed him my physician in ordinary on the spot. It was rare sport. The concern poor old John showed for my grease-paint was quite touching. I sat there squeaking complaints to him and receiving his sympathy until I was ready to screech with laughter. But I felt rather a pig all the same, for John was so sweet, and he was such a man and such a gentleman. However, I had to go on when once I had begun.

"But it was a troublesome business, worse than any stage job I ever had, to keep these two people going. I had to rush through from the office into the kitchen and cook things that I didn't want, just to make a noise and a smell of cooking, and listen to Mrs. Gillow so that I could pop up the stairs at the psychological moment and remind her that I lived there; and then to fly down and change and dart through into the office, so that people could see that I was occupied there. It was frightfully hard work, and anxious, too. I can tell you, it was a relief when I heard from Miss Cumbers that Nicholas was starting for Brighton, and that I could disappear without implicating him. However, there is no need for me to go into any more details. Your imaginations can fill those in."

"The man with the mole, I take it," said Thorndyke, "was—"

"Yes. I got a suit of slops in the Minories. The mole, of course, was built up, with toupee-paste."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "was there any necessity for Bundy at all?"

"Well, I had to be somebody, you know, and I had to stay on the spot to work the clues and keep an eye on the developments. I couldn't be a woman because that would have required a heavy make-up that would almost certainly have been spotted, and would have been an intolerable bore; whereas Bundy, as you have pointed out, was not a disguise at all. When once I had got my hair cut and had provided myself with the clothes and eye-glass, there was no further trouble. I

could have lived comfortably as Bundy for the rest of my life.

“So that is my story,” Angelina concluded. “And,” she added, with a sudden change of manner, “I am your grateful debtor forever. You have done far more for me even than you know. Only this morning, poor Peter Bundy was a forlorn little wretch, miserably anxious about the present and looking to a future that had nothing but empty freedom to offer. And now I am the happiest of women—for I should be a hypocrite if I pretended to have any regrets for poor Nicholas. I will say good-bye to him in his coffin and give him a decent funeral, and try to think of him as he was before he sank into the depths. But I am frankly glad that he is gone out of his own miserable life and out of mine. And his going, which would never have been known but for the wisdom of the benevolent serpent, has left me free, With a promise of a happiness that even he does not guess.”

“I am not so sure of that,” said Thorndyke, with a sly smile.

“Well, neither am I, now you come to mention it,” said she, smiling at him in return. “He is an inquiring and observant serpent, with a way of nosing out all sorts of things that he is not supposed to be aware of. And, after all, perhaps he has a right to know. It is proper that the giver should have the satisfaction of realizing the preciousness of that which he has given.”

Here endeth the Mystery of Angelina Frood. And yet it is not quite the end. Indeed, the end is not yet; for the blessed consequences still continue to develop like the growth of a fair tree. The story has dwindled to a legend, whose harmless whispers call but a mischievous smile to that face that, like the dial in our garden, acknowledges only the sunshine. Mrs. Dunk, it is true, still wages public war, but it is tempered by private adoration; and almost daily baskets of flowers, and even tomatoes and summer cabbages, arrive at our house accompanied by the beaming smile and portly person of Inspector Cobbledick.

---

THE END

## I. — THE PUZZLE LOCK

I DO not remember what was the occasion of my dining with Thorndyke at Giamborini's on the particular evening that is now in my mind. Doubtless, some piece of work completed had seemed to justify the modest festival. At any rate, there we were, seated at a somewhat retired table, selected by Thorndyke, with our backs to the large window through which the late June sunlight streamed. We had made our preliminary arrangements, including a bottle of Barsac, and were inspecting dubiously a collection of semi-edible hors d'oeuvres, when a man entered and took possession of a table just in front of ours, which had apparently been reserved for him, since he walked directly to it and drew away the single chair that had been set aslant against it.

I watched with amused interest his methodical procedure, for he was clearly a man who took his dinner seriously. A regular customer, too, I judged by the waiter's manner and the reserved table with its single chair. But the man himself interested me. He was out of the common and there was a suggestion of character, with perhaps a spice of oddity, in his appearance. He appeared to be about sixty years of age, small and spare, with a much-wrinkled, mobile and rather whimsical face, surmounted by a crop of white, upstanding hair. From his waistcoat pocket protruded the ends of a fountain-pen, a pencil and a miniature electric torch such as surgeons use; a silver-mounted Coddington lens hung from his watch-guard and the middle finger of his left hand bore the largest seal ring that I have ever seen.

"Well," said Thorndyke, who had been following my glance, "what do you make of him?"

"I don't quite know," I replied. "The Coddington suggests a naturalist or a scientist of some kind, but that blatant ring doesn't. Perhaps he is an antiquary or a numismatist or even a philatelist. He deals with small objects of some kind."

At this moment a man who had just entered strode up to our friend's table and held out his hand, which the other shook, with no great enthusiasm, as I thought. Then the newcomer fetched a chair, and setting

it by the table, seated himself and picked up the menu card, while the other observed him with a shade of disapproval. I judged that he would rather have dined alone, and that the personality of the new arrival—a flashy, bustling, obtrusive type of man—did not commend him.

From this couple my eye was attracted to a tall man who had halted near the door and stood looking about the room as if seeking someone. Suddenly he spied an empty, single table, and, bearing down on it, seated himself and began anxiously to study the menu under the supervision of a waiter. I glanced at him with slight disfavour. One makes allowances for the exuberance of youth, but when a middle-aged man presents the combination of heavily-greased hair parted in the middle, a waxed moustache of a suspiciously intense black, a pointed imperial and a single eye-glass, evidently ornamental in function, one views him with less tolerance. However, his get-up was not my concern, whereas my dinner was, and I had given this my undivided attention for some minutes when I heard Thorndyke emit a soft chuckle.

"Not bad," he remarked, setting down his glass.

"Not at all," I agreed, "for a restaurant wine."

"I was not alluding to the wine," said he "but to our friend Badger."

"The inspector!" I exclaimed. "He isn't here, is he? I don't see him."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Jervis," said he. "It is a better effort than I thought. Still, he might manage his properties a little better. That is the second time his eye-glass has been in the soup."

Following, the direction of his glance, I observed the man with the waxed moustache furtively wiping his eye-glass; and the temporary absence of the monocular grimace enabled me to note a resemblance to the familiar features of the detective officer.

"If you say that is Badger, I suppose it is," said I. "He is certainly a little like our friend. But I shouldn't have recognised him."

"I don't know that I should," said Thorndyke, "but for the little unconscious tricks of movement. You know the habit he has of stroking the back of his head, and of opening his mouth and scratching the side of his chin. I saw him do it just now. He had forgotten his imperial until he

touched it, and then the sudden arrest of movement was very striking. It doesn't do to forget a false beard."

"I wonder what his game is," said I. "The disguise suggests that he is on the look-out for somebody who might know him; but apparently that somebody has not turned up yet. At any rate, he doesn't seem to be watching anybody in particular."

"No," said Thorndyke. "But there is somebody whom he seems rather to avoid watching. Those two men at the table in front of ours are in his direct line of vision, but he hasn't looked at them once since he sat down, though I noticed that he gave them one quick glance before he selected his table. I wonder if he has observed us. Probably not, as we have the strong light of the window behind us and his attention is otherwise occupied."

I looked at the two men and from them to the detective, and I judged that my friend was right. On the inspector's table was a good-sized fern in an ornamental pot, and this he had moved so that it was directly between him and the two strangers, to whom he must have been practically invisible; and now I could see that he did, in fact, steal an occasional glance at them over the edge of the menu card. Moreover, as their meal drew to an end, he hastily finished his own and beckoned to the waiter to bring the bill.

"We may as well wait and see them off," said Thorndyke, who had already settled our account. "Badger always interests me. He is so ingenious and he has such shockingly bad luck."

We had not long to wait. The two men rose from the table and walked slowly to the door, where they paused to light their cigars before going out. Then Badger rose, with his back towards them and his eyes on the mirror opposite; and as they went out, he snatched up his hat and stick and followed. Thorndyke looked at me inquiringly.

"Do we indulge in the pleasures of the chase?" he asked, and as I replied in the affirmative, we, too, made our way out and started in the wake of the inspector.

As we followed Badger at a discreet distance, we caught an occasional glimpse of the quarry ahead, whose proceedings evidently caused the



inspector some embarrassment, for they had a way of stopping suddenly to elaborate some point that they were discussing, whereby it became necessary for the detective to drop farther in the rear than was quite safe, in view of the rather crowded state of the pavement. On one of these occasions, when the older man was apparently delivering himself of some excruciating joke, they both turned suddenly and looked back, the joker pointing to some object on the opposite side of the road. Several people turned to see what was being pointed at, and, of course, the inspector had to turn, too, to avoid being recognised. At this moment the two men popped into an entry, and when the inspector once more turned they were gone.

As soon as he missed them, Badger started forward almost at a run, and presently halted at the large entry of the Celestial Bank Chambers, into which he peered eagerly. Then, apparently sighting his quarry, he darted in, and we quickened our pace and followed. Half-way down the long hall we saw him standing at the door of a lift, frantically pressing the call-button.

"Poor Badger!" chuckled Thorndyke, as we walked past him unobserved. "His usual luck! He will hardly run them to earth now in this enormous building. We may as well go through to the Blenheim Street entrance."

We pursued our way along the winding corridor and were close to the entrance when I noticed two men coming down the staircase that led to the ball.

"By Jingo! Here they are!" I exclaimed. "Shall we run back and give Badger the tip?"

Thorndyke hesitated. But it was too late. A taxi had just driven up and was discharging its fare. The younger man, catching the driver's eye, ran out and seized the door-handle; and when his companion had entered the cab, he gave an address to the driver, and, stepping in quickly, slammed the door. As the cab moved off, Thorndyke pulled out his notebook and pencil and jotted down the number of the vehicle. Then we turned and retraced our steps; but when we reached the lift-door, the inspector had disappeared. Presumably, like the incomparable Tom Bowling, he had gone aloft.

"We must give it up, Jervis," said Thorndyke. "I will send him anonymously the number of the cab, and that is all we can do. But I am sorry for Badger."

With this we dismissed the incident from our minds—at least, I did; assuming that I had seen the last of the two strangers. Little did I suspect how soon and under what strange and tragic circumstances I should meet with them again!

It was about a week later that we received a visit from our old friend, Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department. The passing years had put us on a footing of mutual trust and esteem, and the capable, straightforward detective officer was always a welcome visitor.

"I've just dropped in," said Miller, cutting off the end of the inevitable cigar, "to tell you about a rather queer case that we've got in hand. I know you are always interested in queer cases."

Thorndyke smiled blandly. He had heard that kind of preamble before, and he knew, as did I, that when Miller became communicative we could safely infer that the Millerian bark was in shoal water.

"It is a case," the superintendent continued, "of a very special brand of crook. Actually there is a gang, but it is the managing director that we have particularly got our eye on."

"Is he a regular 'habitual,' then?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well," replied Miller, "as to that, I can't positively say. The fact is that we haven't actually seen the man to be sure of him."

"I see," said Thorndyke, with a grim smile. "You mean to say that you have got your eye on the place where he isn't."

"At the present moment," Miller admitted, "that is the literal fact. We have lost sight of the man we suspected, but we hope to pick him up again presently. We want him badly, and his pals too. It is probably quite a small gang, but they are mighty fly; a lot too smart to be at large. And they'll take some catching, for there is someone running the concern with a good deal more brains than crooks usually have."

"What is their lay?" I asked.

"Burglary," he replied. "Jewels and plate, but principally jewels; and the special feature of their work is that the swag disappears completely every time. None of the stuff has ever been traced. That is what drew our attention to them. After each robbery we made a round of all the fences, but there was not a sign. The stuff seemed to have vanished into smoke. Now that is very awkward. If you never see the men and you can't trace the stuff, where are you? You've got nothing to go on."

"But you seem to have got a clue of some kind." I said.

"Yes. There isn't a lot in it; but it seemed worth following up. One of our men happened to travel down to Colchester with a certain man, and when he came back two days later, he noticed this same man on the platform at Colchester and saw him get out at Liverpool Street. In the interval there had been a jewel robbery at Colchester. Then there was a robbery at Southampton, and our man went at once to Waterloo and saw all the trains in. On the second day, behold! the Colchester sportsman turns up at the barrier, so our man, who had a special taxi waiting, managed to track him home and afterwards got some particulars about him. He is a chap named Shemmonds; belongs to a firm of outside brokers. But nobody seems to know much about him and he doesn't put in much time at the office.

"Well, then, Badger took him over and shadowed him for a day or two, but just as things were looking interesting, he slipped off the hook. Badger followed him to a restaurant, and, through the glass door, saw him go up to an elderly man at a table and shake hands with him. Then he took a chair at the table himself, so Badger popped in and took a seat near them where he could keep them in view. They went out together and Badger followed them, but he lost them in the Celestial Bank Chambers. They went up in the lift just before he could get to the door and that was the last he saw of them. But we have ascertained that they left the building in a taxi and that the taxi set them down at Great Turnstile."

"It was rather smart of you to trace the cab," Thorndyke remarked.

"You've got to keep your eyes skinned in our line of business," said Miller. "But now we come to the real twister. From the time those two men went down Great Turnstile, nobody has set eyes on either of them. They seem to have vanished into thin air."

"You found out who the other man was, then?" said I.

"Yes. The restaurant manager knew him; an old chap named Luttrell. And we knew him, too, because he has a thumping burglary insurance, and when he goes out of town he notifies his company, and they make arrangements with us to have the premises watched."

"What is Luttrell?" I asked.

"Well, he is a bit of a mug, I should say, at least that's his character in the trade. Goes in for being a dealer in jewels and antiques, but he'll buy anything—furniture, pictures, plate, any blooming thing. Does it for a hobby, the regular dealers say. Likes the sport of bidding at the sales. But the knock-out men hate him; never know what he's going to do. Must have private means, for though he doesn't often drop money, he can't make much. He's no salesman. It is the buying that he seems to like. But he is a regular character, full of cranks and oddities. His rooms in Thavies Inn look like the British Museum gone mad. He has got electric alarms from all the doors up to his bedroom and the strong-room in his office is fitted with a puzzle lock instead of keys."

"That doesn't seem very safe," I remarked.

"It is," said Miller. "This one has fifteen alphabets. One of our men has calculated that it has about forty billion changes. No one is going to work that out, and there are no keys to get lost. But it is that strong-room that is worrying us, as well as the old joker himself. The Lord knows how much valuable stuff there is in it. What we are afraid of is that Shemmonds may have made away with the old chap and be lying low, waiting to swoop down on that strong-room."

"But you said that Luttrell goes away sometimes," said I.

"Yes; but then he always notifies his insurance company and he seals up his strong-room with a tape round the door-handle and a great seal on the door-post. This time he hasn't notified the company and the door isn't sealed. There's a seal on the door-post—left from last time, I expect—but only the cut ends of tape. I got the caretaker to let me see the place this morning; and, by the way, doctor, I have taken a leaf out of your book. I always carry a bit of squeezing wax in my pocket now and a little box of French chalk. Very handy they are, too. As I had 'em with me this

morning, I took a squeeze of the seal. May want it presently for identification."

He brought out of his pocket a small tin box from which he carefully extracted an object wrapped in tissue paper. When the paper had been tenderly removed there was revealed a lump of moulding wax, one side of which was flattened and bore a sunk design.

"It's quite a good squeeze," said Miller, handing it to Thorndyke. "I dusted the seal with French chalk so that the wax shouldn't stick to it."

My colleague examined the "squeeze" through his lens, and passing it and the lens to me, asked: "Has this been photographed, Miller?"

"No," was the reply, "but it ought to be before it gets damaged."

"It ought, certainly," said Thorndyke, "if you value it. Shall I get Polton to do it now?"

The superintendent accepted the offer gratefully and Thorndyke accordingly took the squeeze up to the laboratory, where he left it for our assistant to deal with. When he returned, Miller remarked: "It is a baffling case, this. Now that Shemmonds has dropped out of sight, there is nothing to go on and nothing to do but wait for something else to happen; another burglary or an attempt on the strong-room."

"Is it clear that the strong-room has not been opened?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, it isn't," replied Miller. "That's part of the trouble. Luttrell has disappeared and he may be dead. If he is, Shemmonds will probably have been through his pockets. Of course there is no strong-room key. That is one of the advantages of a puzzle lock. But it is quite possible that Luttrell may have kept a note of the combination and carried it about him. It would have been risky to trust entirely to memory. And he would have had the keys of the office about him. Any one who had those could have slipped in during business hours without much difficulty. Luttrell's premises are empty, but there are people in and out all day going to the other offices. Our man can't follow them all in. I suppose you can't make any suggestion, doctor?"

"I am afraid I can't," answered Thorndyke. "The case is so very much in

the air. There is nothing against Shemmonds but bare suspicion. He has disappeared only in the sense that you have lost sight of him, and the same is true of Luttrell—though there is an abnormal element in his case. Still, you could hardly get a search-warrant on the facts that are known at present."

"No," Miller agreed, "they certainly would not authorise us to break open the strong-room, and nothing short of that would be much use."

Here Polton made his appearance with the wax squeeze in a neat little box such as jewellers use.

"I've got two enlarged negatives," said he; "nice clear ones. How many prints shall I make for Mr. Miller?"

"Oh, one will do, Mr. Polton," said the superintendent. "If I want any more I'll ask you." He took up the little box, and, slipping it in his pocket, rose to depart. "I'll let you know, doctor, how the case goes on, and perhaps you wouldn't mind turning it over a bit in the interval. Something might occur to you."

Thorndyke promised to think over the case, and when we had seen the superintendent launched down the stairs, we followed Polton up to the laboratory, where we each picked up one of the negatives and examined it against the light. I had already identified the seal by its shape—a vesica piscis or boat-shape—with the one that I had seen on Mr. Luttrell's finger. Now, in the photograph, enlarged three diameters, I could clearly make out the details. The design was distinctive and curious rather than elegant. The two triangular spaces at the ends were occupied respectively by a memento mori and a winged hour-glass and the central portion was filled by a long inscription in Roman capitals, of which I could at first make nothing.

"Do you suppose this is some kind of cryptogram?" I asked.

"No," Thorndyke replied. "I imagine the words were run together merely to economise space. This is what I make of it."

He held the negative in his left hand, and with his right wrote down in pencil on a slip of paper the following four lines of doggerel verse:

*"Eheu alas how fast the dam fugaces*

*Labuntur anni especially in the cases  
Of poor old blokes like you and me Posthumus  
Who only wait for vermes to consume us."*

"Well," I exclaimed, "it is a choice specimen; one of old Luttrell's merry conceited jests, I take it. But the joke was hardly worth the labour of engraving on a seal."

"It is certainly a rather mild jest," Thorndyke admitted. "But there may be something more in it than meets the eye."

He looked at the inscription reflectively and appeared to read it through once or twice. Then he replaced the negative in the drying rack, and, picking up the paper, slipped it into his pocket-book.

"I don't quite see," said I, "why Miller brought this case to us or what he wants you to think over. In fact, I don't see that there is a case at all."

"It is a very shadowy case," Thorndyke admitted. "Miller has done a good deal of guessing, and so has Badger; and it may easily turn out that they have found a mare's nest. Nevertheless there is something to think about."

"As, for instance—?"

"Well, Jervis, you saw the men; you saw how they behaved; you have heard Miller's story and you have seen Mr. Luttrell's seal. Put all those data together and you have the material for some very interesting speculation, to say the least. You might even carry it beyond speculation."

I did not pursue the subject, for I knew that when Thorndyke used the word "speculation," nothing would induce him to commit himself to an opinion. But later, bearing in mind the attention that he had seemed to bestow on Mr. Luttrell's schoolboy verses, I got a print from the negative and studied the foolish lines exhaustively. But if it had any hidden meaning—and I could imagine no reason for supposing that it had—that meaning remained hidden; and the only conclusion at which I could arrive was that a man of Luttrell's age might have known better than to write such nonsense.

The superintendent did not leave the matter long in suspense. Three days later he paid us another visit. and half-apologetically reopened the

subject.

"I am ashamed to come badgering you like this," he said, "but I can't get this case out of my head. I've a feeling that we ought to get a move of some kind on. And, by the way—though that is nothing to do with it—I've copied out the stuff on that seal and I can't make any sense of it. What the deuce are fugaces? I suppose 'vermes' are worms, though I don't see why he spelt it that way."

"The verses," said Thorndyke, "are apparently a travesty of a Latin poem; one of the odes of Horace which begins:

*"Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume, Labuntur anni,"*

"which means, in effect, 'Alas! Postume, the flying years slip by.'"

"Well," said Miller, "any fool knows that—any middle-aged fool, at any rate. No need to put it into Latin. However, it's of no consequence. To return to this case; I've got an authority to look over Luttrell's premises—not to pull anything about, you know, just to look round. I called in on my way here to let the caretaker know that I should be coming in later. I thought that perhaps you might like to come with me. I wish you would, doctor. You've got such a knack of spotting things that other people overlook."

He looked wistfully at Thorndyke, and as the latter was considering the proposal, he added: "The caretaker mentioned a rather odd circumstance. It seems that he keeps an eye on the electric meters in the building and that he has noticed a leakage of current in Mr. Luttrell's. It is only a small leak; about thirty watts an hour. But he can't account for it in any way. He has been right through the premises to see if any lamp has been left on in any of the rooms. But all the switches are off everywhere, and it can't be a short circuit. Funny, isn't it?"

It was certainly odd, but there seemed to me nothing in it to account for the expression of suddenly awakened interest that I detected in Thorndyke's face. However, it evidently had some special significance for him, for he asked almost eagerly "When are you making your inspection?"

"I am going there now," replied Miller, and he added coaxingly, "Couldn't you manage to run round with me?"



Thorndyke stood up. "Very well," said he. "Let us go together. You may as well come, too, Jervis, if you can spare an hour."

I agreed readily, for my colleague's hardly disguised interest in the inspection suggested a definite problem in his mind; and we at once issued forth and made our way by Mitre Court and Fetter Lane to the abode of the missing dealer, an old-fashioned house near the end of Thavies Inn.

"I've been over the premises once," said Miller, as the caretaker appeared with the keys, "and I think we had better begin the regular inspection with the offices. We can examine the stores and living-rooms afterwards."

We accordingly entered the outer office, and as this was little more than a waiting-room, we passed through into the private office, which had the appearance of having been used also as a sitting-room or study. It was furnished with an easy-chair, a range of book-shelves and a handsome bureau book-case, while in the end wall was the massive iron door of the strong-room. On this, as the chief object of interest, we all bore down, and the superintendent expounded its peculiarities.

"It is quite a good idea," said he, "this letter-lock. There's no keyhole—though a safe-lock is pretty hopeless to pick even if there was a keyhole—and no keys to get lost. As to guessing what the 'open sesame' may be—well, just look at it. You could spend a lifetime on it and be no forrader."

The puzzle lock was contained in the solid iron door post, through a slot in which a row of fifteen A's seemed to grin defiance on the would-be safe-robber. I put my finger on the milled edges of one or two of the letters and rotated the discs, noticing how easily and smoothly they turned.

"Well," said Miller, "it's no use fumbling with that. I'm just going to have a look through his ledger and see who his customers were. The book-case is unlocked. I tried it last time. And we'd better leave this as we found it."

He put back the letters that I had moved, and turned away to explore the book-case; and as the letter-lock appeared to present nothing but an insoluble riddle, I followed him, leaving Thorndyke earnestly gazing at

the meaningless row of letters.

The superintendent glanced back at him with an indulgent smile.

"The doctor is going to work out the combination," he chuckled. "Well, well. There are only forty billion changes and he's a young man for his age."

With this encouraging comment, he opened the glass door of the book-case, and reaching down the ledger, laid it on the desk-like slope of the bureau.

"It is a poor chance," said he, opening the ledger at the index, "but some of these people may be able to give us a hint where to look for Mr. Luttrell, and it is worth while to know what sort of business he did."

He ran his finger down the list of names and had just turned to the account of one of the customers when we were startled by a loud click from the direction of the strong-room. We both turned sharply and beheld Thorndyke grasping the handle of the strong-room door, and I saw with amazement that the door was now slightly ajar.

"God!" exclaimed Miller, shutting the ledger and starting forward, "he's got it open!" He strode over to the door, and directing an eager look at the indicator of the lock, burst into a laugh. "Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed. "Why, it was unlocked all the time! To think that none of us had the sense to tug the handle! But isn't it just like old Luttrell to have a fool's answer like that to the blessed puzzle!"

I looked at the indicator, not a little astonished to observe the row of fifteen A's, which apparently formed the key combination. It may have been a very amusing joke on Mr. Luttrell's part, but it did not look very secure. Thorndyke regarded us with an inscrutable glance and still grasped the handle, holding the door a bare half-inch open.

"There is something pushing against the door," said he. "Shall I open it?"

"May as well have a look at the inside," replied Miller. Thereupon Thorndyke released the handle and quickly stepped aside. The door swung slowly open and the dead body of a man fell out into the room and rolled over on to its back.

"Mercy on us!" gasped Miller, springing back hastily and staring with horror and amazement at the grim apparition. "That is not Luttrell." Then, suddenly starting forward and stooping over the dead man, he exclaimed "Why, it is Shemmonds. So that is where he disappeared to. I wonder what became of Luttrell?"

"There is somebody else in the strong-room," said Thorndyke; and now, peering in through the doorway, I perceived a dim light, which seemed to come from a hidden recess, and by which I could see a pair of feet projecting round the corner. In a moment Miller had sprung in, and I followed. The strong-room was L shaped in plan, the arm of the L formed by a narrow passage at right angles to the main room. At the end of this a single small electric bulb was burning, the light of which showed the body of an elderly man stretched on the floor of the passage. I recognised him instantly in spite of the dimness of the light and the disfigurement caused by a ragged wound on the forehead.

"We had better get him out of this," said Miller, speaking in a flurried tone, partly due to the shock of the horrible discovery and partly to the accompanying physical unpleasantness, "and then we will have a look round, This wasn't just a mere robbery. We are going to find things out."

With my help he lifted Luttrell's corpse and together we carried it out, laying it on the floor of the room at the farther end, to which we also dragged the body of Shemmonds.

"There is no mystery as to how it happened," I said, after a brief inspection of the two corpses. "Shemmonds evidently shot the old man from behind with the pistol close to the back of the head. The hair is all scorched round the wound of entry and the bullet came out at the forehead."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "that is all clear enough. But the mystery is why on earth Shemmonds didn't let himself out. He must have known that the door was unlocked. Yet instead of turning the handle, he must have stood there like a fool, battering at the door with his fists. Just look at his hands."

"The further mystery," said Thorndyke who, all this time, had been making a minute examination of the lock both front without and within, "is how the door came to be shut. That is quite a curious problem."

"Quite," agreed Miller. "But it will keep. And there is a still more curious problem inside there. There is nearly all the swag from that Colchester robbery. Looks as if Luttrell was in it."

Half reluctantly he re-entered the strong-room and Thorndyke and I followed. Near the angle of the passage he stooped to pick up an automatic pistol and a small, leather book, which he opened and looked into by the light of the lamp. At the first glance he uttered an exclamation and shut the book with a snap.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked, holding it out to us. "It is the nominal roll, address book and journal of the gang. We've got them in the hollow of our hand; and it is dawning upon me that old Luttrell was the managing director whom I have been looking for so long. Just run your eyes along those shelves. That's loot; every bit of it. I can identify the articles from the lists that I made out."

He stood looking gloatingly along the shelves with their burden of jewellery, plate and other valuables. Then his eye lighted on a drawer in the end wall just under the lamp; an iron drawer with a disproportionately large handle and bearing a very legible label inscribed "unmounted stones."

"We'll have a look at his stock of unmounted gems," said Miller; and with that he bore down on the drawer, and seizing the handle, gave a vigorous pull. "Funny," said he. "It isn't locked, but something seems to be holding it back."

He planted his foot on the wall and took a fresh purchase on the handle. "Wait a moment, Miller," said Thorndyke; but even as he spoke, the superintendent gave a mighty heave; the drawer came out a full two feet; there was a loud click, and a moment later the strong-room door slammed.

"Good God!" exclaimed Miller, letting go the drawer, which immediately slid in with another click. "What was that?"

"That was the door shutting," replied Thorndyke. "Quite a clever arrangement; like the mechanism of a repeater watch. Pulling out the drawer wound up and released a spring that shut the door. Very ingenious."

"But," gasped Miller, turning an ashen face to my colleague, "we're shut in."

"You are forgetting," said I—a little nervously, I must admit—"that the lock is as we left it."

The superintendent laughed, somewhat hysterically. "What a fool I am!" said he. "As bad as Shemmonds. Still we may as well—" Here he started along the passage and I heard him groping his way to the door, and later heard the handle turn. Suddenly the deep silence of the tomb-like chamber was rent by a yell of terror.

"The door won't move! It's locked fast!"

On this I rushed along the passage with a sickening fear at my heart. And even as I ran, there rose before my eyes the horrible vision of the corpse with the battered hands that had fallen out when we opened the door of this awful trap. He had been caught as we were caught. How soon might it not be that some stranger would be looking in on our corpses.

In the dim twilight by the door I found Miller clutching the handle and shaking it like a madman. His self-possession was completely shattered. Nor was my own condition much better. I flung my whole weight on the door in the faint hope that the lock was not really closed, but the massive iron structure was as immovable as a stone wall. I was nevertheless, gathering myself up for a second charge when I heard Thorndyke's voice close behind me.

"That is no use, Jervis. The door is locked. But there is nothing to worry about."

As he spoke, there suddenly appeared a bright circle of light from the little electric lamp that he always carried in his pocket. Within the circle, and now clearly visible, was a second indicator of the puzzle lock on the inside of the door-post. Its appearance was vaguely reassuring, especially in conjunction with Thorndyke's calm voice; and it evidently appeared so to Miller, for he remarked, almost in his natural tones:

"But it seems to be unlocked still. There is the same AAAAAA that it showed when we came in."

It was perfectly true. The slot of the letter-lock still showed the range of

fifteen A's, just as it had when the door was open. Could it be that the lock was a dummy and that there was some other means of opening the door? I was about to put this question to Thorndyke when he put the lamp into my hand, and, gently pushing me aside, stepped up to the indicator.

"Keep the light steady, Jervis," said he, and forthwith he began to manipulate the milled edges of the letter discs, beginnings as I noticed, at the right or reverse end of the slot and working backwards. I watched him with feverish interest and curiosity, as also did Miller, looking to see some word of fifteen letters develop in the slot. Instead of which, I saw, to my amazement and bewilderment my colleague's finger transforming the row of A's into a succession of M's, which, however, were presently followed by an L and some X's. When the row was completed it looked like some remote, antediluvian date set down in Roman numerals.

"Try the handle now, Miller," said Thorndyke.

The superintendent needed no second bidding. Snatching at the handle, he turned it and bore heavily on the door. Almost instantly a thin line of light appeared at the edge; there was a sharp click, and the door swung right open. We fell out immediately—at least the superintendent and I did—thankful to find ourselves outside and alive. But, as we emerged, we both became aware of a man, white-faced and horror-stricken of aspect, stooping over the two corpses at the other end of the room. Our appearance was so sudden and unexpected—for the massive solidity of the safe-door had rendered our movements inaudible outside—that, for a moment or two, he stood immovable, staring at us, wild-eyed and open-mouthed. Then, suddenly, he sprang up erect, and, darting to the door, opened it and rushed out with Miller close on his heels.

He did not get very far. Following the superintendent, I saw the fugitive wriggling in the embrace of a tall man on the pavement, who, with Miller's assistance, soon had a pair of handcuffs snapped on the man's wrists and then departed with his captive in search of a cab.

"That's one of 'em, I expect," said Miller, as we returned to the office; then, as his glance fell on the open strong-room door, he mopped his face with his handkerchief. "That door gives me the creeps to look at it," said he. "Lord I what a shake-up that was! I've never had such a scare in my life. When I heard that door shut and I remembered how that poor devil,

Shemmonds, came tumbling out—phoo!" He wiped his brow again, and, walking towards the strong-room door, asked: "By the way, what was the magic word after all?" He stepped up to the indicator, and, after a quick glance, looked round at me in surprise. "Why!" he exclaimed, "blow me if it isn't AAAA still! But the doctor altered it, didn't he?"

At this moment Thorndyke appeared from the strong-room, where he had apparently been conducting some explorations, and to him the superintendent turned for an explanation.

"It is an ingenious device," said he; "in fact, the whole strong-room is a monument of ingenuity, somewhat misapplied, but perfectly effective, as Mr. Shemmonds's corpse testifies. The key-combination is a number expressed in Roman numerals, but the lock has a fly-back mechanism which acts as soon as the door begins to open. That was how Shemmonds was caught. He, no doubt purposely, avoided watching Luttrell set the lock—or else Luttrell didn't let him—but as he went in with his intended victim, he looked at the indicator and saw the row of A's, which he naturally assumed to be the key. Then, when he tried to let himself out, of course, the lock wouldn't open."

"It is rather odd that he didn't try some other combinations," said I.

"He probably did," replied Thorndyke, "but when they failed he would naturally come back to the A's, which he had seen when the door was open. This is how it works."

He shut the door, and then, closely watched by the superintendent and me, turned the milled rims of the letter-discs until the indicator showed a row of numerals thus: MMMMMMMCCCLXXXV. Grasping the handle, he turned it and gave a gentle pull, when the door began to open. But the instant it started from its bed, there was a loud click and all the letters of the indicator flew back to A.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Miller. "It must have been an awful suck-in for that poor blighter, Shemmonds. Took me in, too. I saw those A's and the door open, and I thought I knew all about it. But what beats me, doctor, is how you managed to work it out. I can't see what you had to go on. Would it be allowable to ask how it was done?"

"Certainly," replied Thorndyke "but we had better defer the

explanation. You have got those two bodies to dispose of and some other matters, and we must get back to our chambers. I will write down the key-combination, in case you want it, and then you must come and see us and let us know what luck you have had."

He wrote the numerals on a slip of paper, and when he had handed it to the superintendent, we took our leave.

"I find myself," said I, as we walked home, "in much the same position as Miller. I don't see what you had to go on. It is clear to me that you not only worked out the lock-combination—from the seal inscription, as I assume—but that you identified Luttrell as the director of the gang. I don't, in the least, understand how you did it."

"And yet, Jervis," said he, "it was an essentially simple case. If you review it and cast up the items of evidence, you will see that we really had all the facts. The problem was merely to co-ordinate them and extract their significance. Take first the character of Luttrell. We saw the man in company with another, evidently a fairly intimate acquaintance. They were being shadowed by a detective, and it is pretty clear that they detected the sleuth, for they shook him off quite neatly. Later, we learn from Miller that one of these men is suspected to be a member of a firm of swell burglars and that the other is a well-to-do, rather eccentric and very miscellaneous dealer, who has a strong-room fitted with a puzzle lock. I am astonished that the usually acute Miller did not notice how well Luttrell fitted the part of the managing director whom he was looking for. Here was a dealer who bought and sold all sorts of queer but valuable things, who must have had unlimited facilities for getting rid of stones, bullion and silver, and who used a puzzle lock. Now, who uses a puzzle lock? No one, certainly, who can conveniently use a key. But to the manager of a gang of thieves it would be a valuable safeguard, for he might at any moment be robbed of his keys, and perhaps made away with. But he could not be robbed of the secret passwords and his possession of it would be a security against murder. So you see that the simple probabilities pointed to Luttrell as the head of the gang.

"And now consider the problem of the lock. First, we saw that Luttrell wore on his left hand a huge, cumbrous seal ring, that he carried a Coddington lens on his watch-guard, and a small electric lamp in his



pocket. That told us very, little. But when Miller told us about the lock and showed us the squeeze of the seal, and when we saw that the seal bore a long inscription in minute lettering, a connection began to appear. As Miller justly observed, no man—especially no elderly man—could trust the key combination exclusively to his memory. He would carry about him some record to which he could refer in case his memory failed him. But that record would hardly be one that anybody could read, or the secrecy and safety of the lock would be gone. It would probably be some kind of cryptogram; and when we saw this inscription and considered it in conjunction with the lens and the lamp, it seemed highly probable that the key-combination was contained in the inscription; and that probability was further increased when we saw the nonsensical doggerel of which the inscription was made up. The suggestion was that the verses had been made for some purpose independent of their sense. Accordingly I gave the inscription very careful consideration.

"Now we learned from Miller that the puzzle lock had fifteen letters. The key might be one long word, such as 'superlativeness', a number of short words, or some chemical or other formula. Or it was possible that it might be of the nature of a chronogram. I have never heard of chronograms being used for secret records or messages, but it has often occurred to me that they would be extremely suitable. And this was an exceptionally suitable case."

"Chronogram," said I. "Isn't that something connected with medals?"

"They have often been used on medals," he replied. "In effect, a chronogram is an inscription some of the letters of which form a date connected with the subject of the inscription. Usually the date letters are cut larger than the others for convenience in reading, but, of course, this is not essential. The principle of a chronogram is this. The letters of the Roman alphabet are of two kinds: those that are simply letters and nothing else, and those that are numerals as well as letters. The numeral letters are M = a thousand, D = five hundred, C = one hundred, L = fifty, X = ten, V = five, and I = one. Now, in deciphering a chronogram, you pick out all the numeral letters and add them up without regard to their order. The total gives you the date.

"Well, as I said, it occurred to me that this might be of the nature of a

chronogram; but as the lock had letters and not figures, the number, if there was one, would have to be expressed in Roman numerals, and it would have to form a number of fifteen numeral letters. As it was thus quite easy to put my hypothesis to the test, I proceeded to treat the inscription as a chronogram and decipher it; and behold! it yielded a number of fifteen letters, which, of course, was as near certainty as was possible, short of actual experiment."

"Let us see how you did the decipherment," I said, as we entered our chambers and shut the door. I procured a large note-block and pencil, and, laying them on the table, drew up two chairs.

"Now," said I, "fire away."

"Very well," he said. "We will begin by writing the inscription in proper chronogram form with the numeral letters double size and treating the U's as V's and the W's as double V's according to the rules."

Here he wrote out the inscription in Roman capitals thus:

"eHeV aLas hoVV fast the DaM fVgaCes LabVntVr annI espeCIaLLy In the Cases of poor oLD bLokes LIke yoV and Me posthVMVs VVho onLy VVaIt for VerMes to ConsVMe Vs."

[Compiler's note: I have replaced the small caps in the original with lower-case letters.]

"Now," said he, "let us make a column of each line and add them up, thus:

1. V=5, L=50, VV=10, D=500, M=1000, V=5, C=100—Total 1670
2. L=50, V=5, V=5, I=1, C=100, I=1, L=50, L=50, I=1, C=100—Total 363
3. L=50, D=500, L=50, L=50, I=1, V=5, D=500, M=1000, V=5, M=1000, V=5—Total 3166
4. VV=10, L=50, VV=10, I=1, V=5, M=1000, C=100, V=5, M=1000, V=5—Total 2186

"Now," he continued "we take the four totals and add them together, thus:

$$1670+363+3166+2186 = 7385$$

and we get the grand total of seven thousand three hundred and eighty-five and this, expressed in Roman numerals, is MMMMMMMCCCLXXXV. Here, then, is a number consisting of fifteen letters, the exact number of spaces in the indicator of the puzzle lock; and I repeat that this striking coincidence, added to, or rather multiplied into, the other probabilities, made it practically certain that this was the key-combination. It remained only to test it by actual experiment."

"By the way," said I, "I noticed that you perked up rather suddenly when Miller mentioned the electric meter."

"Naturally," he replied. "It seemed that there must be a small lamp switched on somewhere in the building, and the only place that had not been examined was the strong-room. But if there was a lamp alight there, someone had been in the strong-room. And, as, the only person who was known to be able to get in was missing, it seemed probable that he was in there still. But if he was, he was pretty certainly dead; and there was quite a considerable probability that some one else was in there with him, since his companion was missing, too, and both had disappeared at the same time. But I must confess that that spring drawer was beyond my expectations, though I suspected it as soon as I saw Miller pulling at it. Luttrell was an ingenious old rascal; he almost deserved a better fate. However, I expect his death will have delivered the gang into the hands of the police."

Events fell out as Thorndyke surmised. Mr. Luttrell's little journal, in conjunction with the confession of the spy who had been captured on the premises, enabled the police to swoop down on the disconcerted gang before any breath of suspicion had reached them; with the result that they are now secured in strong-rooms of another kind whereof the doors are fitted with appliances as effective as, though less ingenious than, Mr. Luttrell's puzzle lock.



## II. — THE GREEN CHECK JACKET

THE visits of our old friend, Mr. Brodribb, even when strictly professional, usually took the outward form of a friendly call. On the present occasion there was no such pretence. The old solicitor entered our chambers carrying a small suit-case (the stamped initials on which, "R.M.," I noticed, instantly attracted an inquisitive glance from Thorndyke, being obviously not Mr. Brodribb's own) which he placed on the table and then shook hands with an evident air of business.

"I have come, Thorndyke," he said, with unusual directness, "to ask your advice on a matter which is causing me some uneasiness. Do you know Reginald Merrill?"

"Slightly," was the reply. "I meet him occasionally in court; and, of course, I know him as the author of that interesting book on Prehistoric Flint-mines."

"Well," said Brodribb, "he has disappeared. He is missing. I don't like to use the expression; but when a responsible man is absent from his usual places of resort, when he apparently had no expectation of being so absent, and when he has made no provision for such absence, I think we may regard him as having disappeared in a legal sense. His absence calls for active inquiry."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Thorndyke; "and I take it that you are the person on whom the duty devolves?"

"I think so. I am his solicitor and the executor of his will—at least I believe so; and the only near relative of his whom I know is his nephew and heir, Ethelbert Crick, his sister's son. But Crick seems to have disappeared, too; and about the same time as Merrill. It is an extraordinary affair."

"You say that you believe you are Merrill's executor. Haven't you seen the will?"

"I have seen a will. I have it in my safe. But Merrill said he was going to draw up another, and he may have done so. But if he has, he will almost certainly have appointed me his executor, and I shall assume that he has

and act accordingly."

"Was there any special reason for making a new will?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes," replied Brodribb. "He has just come into quite a considerable fortune, and he was pretty well off before. Under the old will, practically the whole of his property went to Crick. There was a small bequest to a man named Samuel Horder, his cousin's son; and Horder was the alternative legatee if Crick should die before Merrill. Now, I understood Merrill to say that, in view of this extra fortune, he wished to do rather more for Horder, and I gathered that he proposed to divide the estate more or less equally between the two men. The whole estate was more than he thought necessary for Crick. And now, as we have cleared up the preliminaries, I will give you the circumstances of the disappearance.

"Last Wednesday, the 5th, I had a note from him saying that he would have some reports ready for me on the following day, but that he would be away from his office from 10.30 a.m. to about 6.30, and suggesting that I should send round in the evening if I wanted the papers particularly. Now it happened that my clerk, Page, had to go to a place near London Bridge on Thursday morning, and, oddly enough, he saw Mr. Merrill come out of Edginton's, the ship-fitters, with a man who was carrying a largish hand-bag. There was nothing in it, of course, but Page is an observant man and he noticed Merrill's companion so far as to observe that he was wearing a Norfolk jacket of a greenish shepherd's plaid and a grey tweed hat. He also noted the time by the big clock in the street near to Edginton's—11.46—and that Merrill looked up at it, and that the two men then walked off rather quickly in the direction of the station. Well, in the evening, I sent Page round to Merrill's chambers in Fig-tree Court to get the papers. He arrived there just after 6.30, but he found the door shut, and though he rapped at the door on the chance that Merrill might have come in—he lives in the chambers adjoining the office—there was no answer. So he went for a walk round the Temple, deciding to return a little later.

"Well, he had gone as far as the cloisters and was loitering there to look in the window of the wig shop when he saw a man in a greenish shepherd's plaid jacket and a tweed hat coming up Pump Court. As the

man approached Page thought he recognised him; in fact, he felt so sure that he stopped him and asked him if he knew what time Mr. Merrill would be home. But the man looked at him in astonishment. 'Merrill?' said he. 'I don't know anyone of that name.' Thereupon Page apologised and explained how he had been misled by the pattern and colour of the jacket.

"After walking about for nearly half an hour, Page went back to Merrill's chambers; but the door was shut and he could get no answer by rapping with his stick, so he scribbled a note and dropped it into the letter-box and came away. The next morning I sent him round again, but the chambers were still shut up, and they have been shut up ever since; and nothing what ever has been seen or heard of Merrill.

"On Saturday, thinking it possible that Crick might be able to give me some news of his uncle, I called at his lodgings; and then, to my astonishment, I learned that he also was missing. He had gone away early on Thursday morning, saying that he had to go on business to Rochester, and that he might not be home to dinner. But he never came home at all. I called again on Sunday evening, and, as he had still not returned, I decided to take more active measures.

"This afternoon, immediately after lunch, I called at the Porter's Lodge, and, having briefly explained the circumstances and who I was, asked the porter to bring the duplicate key—which he had for the laundress—and accompany me to Mr. Merrill's chambers to see if, by chance, the tenant might be lying in them dead or insensible. He assured me that this could not be the case, since he had given the key every morning to the laundress, who had, in fact, returned it to him only a couple of hours previously. Nevertheless, he took the key and looked up the laundress, who had rooms near the lodge, who was fortunately at home and who turned out to be a most respectable and intelligent elderly woman; and we went together to Merrill's chambers. The porter admitted us, and when we had been right through the set and ascertained definitely that Merrill was not there, he handed the key to the laundress, Mrs. Butler, and went away.

"When he was gone, I had a talk with Mrs. Butler, from which some rather startling facts transpired. It seemed that on Thursday, as Merrill

was going to be out all day, she took the opportunity to have a grand clean-up of the chambers, to tidy up the lobby, and to look over the chests of drawers and the wardrobe and shake out and brush the clothes and see that no moths had got in. 'When I had finished,' she said, 'the place was like the inside of a band-box; just as he liked to see it.'

"And, after all, Mrs. Butler,' said I, 'he never did see it.'

"Oh, yes, he did,' says she. 'I don't know when he came in, but when I let myself in the next morning, I could see that he had been in since I left.'

"How did you know that?' I asked.

"Well,' says she, 'I left the carpet-sweeper standing against the wardrobe door. I remembered it after I left and would have gone back and moved it, but I had already handed the key in at the Porter's Lodge. But when I went in next morning it wasn't there. It had been moved into the corner by the fireplace. Then the looking-glass had been moved. I could see that, because, before I went away, I had tidied my hair by it, and being short, I had to tilt it to see my face in it. Now it was tilted to suit a tall person and I could not see myself in it. Then I saw that the shaving soap had been moved, and when I put it back in its place, I found it was damp. It wouldn't have kept damp for twenty-four hours at this time of year.' That was perfectly true, you know, Thorndyke."

"Perfectly," agreed Thorndyke, "that woman is an excellent observer."

"Well," continued Brodribb, "on this she examined the shaving soap and the sponge and found them both perceptibly damp. It appeared practically certain that Merrill had been in on the preceding evening and had shaved; but by way of confirmation, I suggested that she should look over his clothes and see whether he had changed any of his garments. She did so, beginning with those that were hanging in the wardrobe, which she took down one at a time. Suddenly she gave a cry of surprise, and I got a bit of a start myself when she handed out a greenish shepherd's plaid Norfolk jacket.

"That,' she said, 'was not here when I brushed these clothes,' and it was obvious from its dusty condition that it could not have been; 'and,' she added, 'I have never seen it before to my knowledge, and I think I should have remembered it.' I asked her if there was any coat missing and she

answered that she had brushed a grey tweed jacket that seemed to have disappeared.

"Well, it was a queer affair. The first thing to be done was to ascertain, if possible whether that jacket was or was not Merrill's. That, I thought, you would be able to judge better than I; so I borrowed his suit-case and popped the jacket into it, together with another jacket that was undoubtedly his, for comparison. Here is the suit-case and the two jackets are inside."

"It is really a question that could be better decided by a tailor," said Thorndyke. "The differences of measurement can't be great if they could both be worn by the same person. But we shall see." He rose, and having spread some sheets of newspaper over the table, opened the suit-case and took out the two jackets, which he laid out side by side. Then, with his spring-tape, he proceeded systematically to measure the two garments, entering each pair of measurements on a slip of paper divided into two columns. Mr. Brodribb and I watched him expectantly and compared the two sets of figures as they were written down; and very soon it became evident that they were, at least, not identical. At length Thorndyke laid down the tape, and picking up the paper, studied it closely.

"I think," he said, "we may conclude that these two jackets were not made for the same person. The differences are not great, but they are consistent. The elbow creases, for instance, agree with the total length of the sleeves. The owner of the green jacket has longer arms and a bigger span than Merrill, but his chest measurement is nearly two inches greater and he has much more sloping shoulders. He could hardly have buttoned Merrill's jacket."

"Then," said Brodribb, "the next question is, did Merrill come home in some other man's coat or did some other man enter his chambers? From what Page has told us it seems pretty evident that a stranger must have got into those chambers. But if that is so, the questions arise: What the deuce was the fellow's object in changing into Merrill's clothes and shaving? How did he get into Merrill's chambers? What was he doing there? What has become of Merrill? And what is the meaning of the whole affair?"

"To some of those questions," said Thorndyke, "the answers are fairly



obvious. If we assume, as I do, that the owner of the green jacket is the man whom Page saw at London Bridge and afterwards in the cloisters, the reason for the change of garments becomes plain enough. Page told the man that he had identified him by this very distinctive jacket as the person with whom Merrill was last seen alive. Evidently that man's safety demanded that he should get rid of the incriminating jacket without delay. Then, as to his having shaved: did Page give you any description of the man?"

"Yes; he was a tallish man, about thirty-five, with a large dark moustache and a torpedo beard."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "then we may say that the man who went into Merrill's chambers was a moustached bearded man in a green jacket and that the man who came out was a clean-shaved man in a grey jacket, whom Page himself would probably have passed without a second glance. That is clear enough. And as to how he got into the chambers, evidently he let himself in with Merrill's key; and if he did, I am afraid we can make a pretty shrewd guess as to what has become of Merrill, and only hope that we are guessing wrong. As to what this man was doing in those chambers and what is the meaning of the whole affair, that is a more difficult question. If the man had Merrill's latchkey, we may assume that he had the rest of Merrill's keys; that he had, in fact, free access to any locked receptacles in those chambers. The circumstances suggest that he entered the chambers for the purpose of getting possession of some valuable objects contained in them. Do you happen to know whether Merrill had any property of considerable value on the premises?"

"I don't," replied Brodribb. "He had a safe, but I don't know what he kept in it. Principally documents, I should think. Certainly not money, in any considerable amounts. The only thing of value that I actually know of is the new will; and that would only be valuable in certain circumstances."

The abrupt and rather ambiguous conclusion of Mr. Brodribb's statement was not lost either on Thorndyke or on me. Apparently the cautious old lawyer had suddenly realised, as I had, that if anything had happened to Merrill, those "certain circumstances" had already come into being. From what he had told us it appeared that, under the new will, Crick stood to inherit a half of Mr. Merrill's fortune, whereas under the

old will he stood to inherit nearly the whole. And it was a great fortune. The loss or destruction of the new will would be worth a good many thousand pounds to Mr. Crick.

"Well," said Brodribb, after a pause, "what is to be done? I suppose I ought to communicate with the police."

"You will have to, sooner or later," said Thorndyke; "but meanwhile, leave these two jackets—or, at least, the green one—with me for the present and let me see if I can extract any further information from it."

"You won't find anything in the pockets but dirt. I've tried them."

"I hope you left the dirt," said Thorndyke.

"I did," replied Brodribb, "excepting what came out on my fingers. Very well; I'll leave the coats with you for to-day, and I will see if I can get any further news of Crick from his landlady."

With this the old solicitor shook hands and went off with such an evident air of purpose that I remarked: "Brodribb is off to find out whether Mr. Crick was the proprietor of a green plaid Norfolk jacket."

Thorndyke smiled. "It was rather quaint," said he, "to see the sudden way in which he drew in his horns when the inwardness of the affair dawned on him. But we mustn't start with a preconceived theory. Our business is to get hold of some more facts. There is little enough to go on at present. Let us begin by having a good look at this green jacket."

He picked it up and carried it to the window, where we both looked it over critically.

"It is rather dusty," I remarked, "especially on the front, and there is a white mark on the middle button."

"Yes. Chalk, apparently; and if you look closely, there are white traces on the other buttons and on the front of the coat. The back is much less dusty."

As he spoke, Thorndyke turned the garment round, and then, from the side of the skirt, picked a small, hair-like object which he felt between his finger and thumb, looked at closely and handed to me.

"A bit of barley beard," said I, "and there are two more on the other

side. He must have walked along a narrow path through a barley field—the state of the front of his coat almost suggests that he had crawled."

"Yes; it is earthy dust; but Polton's extractor will give us more information about that. We had better hand it over to him; but first we will go through the pockets in spite of Brodribb's discouragement."

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, as I thrust my hand into one of the side pockets, "he was right about the dirt. Look at this." I drew out my hand with a quite considerable pinch of dry earth and one or two little fragments of chalk. "It looks as if he had been crawling in loose earth."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed, inspecting his own "catch"—a pinch of reddish earth and a fragment of chalk of the size of a large pea. "The earth is very characteristic, this red-brown loam that you find overlying the chalk. All his outside pockets seem to have caught more or less of it. However, we can leave Polton to collect it and prepare it for examination. I'll take the coat up to him now, and while he is working at it I think I will walk round to Edginton's and see if I can pick up any further particulars."

He went up to the laboratory floor, where our assistant, Polton, carried on his curious and varied activities, and when he returned we sallied forth together. In Fleet Street we picked up a disengaged taxicab, by which we were whisked across Blackfriars Bridge and a few minutes later set down at the corner of Tooley Street. We made our way to the ship-chandler's shop, where Thorndyke proceeded to put a few discreet questions to the manager, who listened politely and with sympathetic interest.

"The difficulty is," said he, "that there were a good many gentlemen in here last Thursday. You say they came about 11.45. If you could tell me what they bought, we could look at the bill-duplicate book and that might help us."

"I don't actually know what they bought," said Thorndyke. "It might have been a length of rope; a rope, perhaps, say twelve or fourteen fathoms or perhaps more. But I may be wrong."

I stared at Thorndyke in amazement. Long as I known him, this extraordinary faculty of instantaneous induction always came on me as a fresh surprise. I had supposed that in this case we had absolutely nothing

to go on; and yet here he was with at least a tentative suggestion before the inquiry appeared to have begun. And that suggestion was clear evidence that he had already arrived at a hypothetical solution of the mystery. I was still pondering on this astonishing fact when the manager approached with an open book and accompanied by an assistant.

"I see," said he, "that there is an entry, apparently about mid-day on Thursday, of the sale of a fifteen-fathom length of deep-sea lead-line, and my friend, here, remembers selling it."

"Yes," the assistant confirmed, "I remember it because he wanted to get it into his hand-bag, and it took the three of us to stuff it in. Thick lead-line is pretty stiff when it's new."

"Do you remember what these gentlemen were like and how they were dressed?"

"One was a rather elderly gentleman, clean-shaved, I think. The other I remember better because he had rather queer-looking eyes—very pale grey. He had a pointed beard and he wore a greenish check coat and a cloth hat. That's all I remember about him."

"It is more than most people would have remembered," said Thorndyke. "I am very much obliged to you; and I think I will ask you to let me have a fifteen-fathom length of that same lead-line."

By this time my capacity for astonishment was exhausted. What on earth could my colleague want with a deep-sea lead-line? But, after all, why not? If he had then and there purchased a Trotman's anchor, a shark-hook and a set of International code signals, I should have been prepared to accept the proceeding without comment. Thorndyke was a law unto himself.

Nevertheless, as I walked homeward by his side, carrying the coil of rope, I continued to speculate on this singular case. Thorndyke had arrived at a hypothetical solution of Mr. Brodribb's problem; and it was evidently correct, so far, as the entry in the bill-book proved. But what was the connection between a dusty jacket and a length of thin rope? And why this particular length? I could make nothing of it. But I determined, as soon as we got home, to see what new facts Polton's activities had brought to light.

The results were disappointing. Polton's dust extractor had been busy, and the products in the form of tiny heaps of dust, were methodically set out on a sheet of white paper, each little heap covered with a watch-glass and accompanied by its written particulars as to the part of the garment from which it had come. I examined a few samples under the microscope, but though curious and interesting, as all dust is, they showed nothing very distinctive. The dust might have come from anyone's coat. There was, of course, a good deal of yellowish sandy loam, a few particles of chalk, a quantity of fine ash, clinker and particles of coal—railway dust from a locomotive—ordinary town and house dust and some oddments such as pollen grains, including those of the sow-thistle, mallow, poppy and valerian, and in one sample I found two scales from the wing of the common blue butterfly. That was all; and it told me nothing but that the owner of the coat had recently been in a chalk district and that he had taken a railway journey.

While I was working with the microscope, Polton was busy with an occupation that I did not understand. He had cemented the little pieces of chalk that we had found in the pockets to a plate of glass by means of pitch, and he was now brushing them under water with a soft brush and from time to time decanting the milky water into a tall sediment glass. Now, as most people know, chalk is largely composed of microscopic shells—foraminifera—which can be detached by gently brushing the chalk under water. But what was the object? There was no doubt that the material was chalk, and we knew that foraminifera were there. Why trouble to prove what is common knowledge? I questioned Polton, but he knew nothing of the purpose of the investigation. He merely beamed on me like a crinkly old graven image and went on brushing. I dipped up a sample of the white sediment and examined it under the microscope. Of course there were foraminifera, and very beautiful they were. But what about it? The whole proceeding looked purposeless. And yet I knew that it was not. Thorndyke was the last man in the world to expend his energies in flogging a dead horse.

Presently he came up to the laboratory, and, when he had looked at the dust specimens and confirmed my opinion of them, he fell to work on the chalk sediment. Having prepared a number of slides, he sat down at the microscope with a sharp pencil and a block of smooth paper with the

apparent purpose of cataloguing and making drawings of the foraminifera. And at this task I left him while I went forth to collect some books that I had ordered from a bookseller in the Charing Cross Road.

When I returned with my purchases about an hour later I found him putting back in a press a portfolio of large-scale Ordnance maps of Kent which he had apparently been consulting, and I noticed on the table his sheet of drawings and a monograph of the fossil foraminifera.

"Well, Thorndyke," I said cheerfully, "I suppose this time, you know exactly what has become of Merrill."

"I can guess," he replied, "and so can you. But the actual data are distressingly vague. We have certain indications, as you will have noticed. The trouble will be to bring them to a focus. It is a case for constructive imagination on the one hand and the method of exclusion on the other. I shall make a preliminary circle-round to-morrow."

"Meaning by that?"

"I have a hypothesis. It is probably wrong. If it is, we must try another, and yet another. Every time we fail we shall narrow the field of inquiry until by eliminating one possibility after another, we may hope to arrive at the solution. My first essay will take me down into Kent."

"You are not going into those wild regions alone, Thorndyke," said I. "You will need my protection and support to say nothing of my invaluable advice. I presume you realise that?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied gravely. "I was reckoning on a two-man expedition. Besides, you are as much interested in the case as I am. And now, let us go forth and dine and fortify ourselves for the perils of to-morrow."

In the course of dinner I led the conversation to the products of Polton's labours and remarked upon their very indefinite significance; but Thorndyke was more indefinite still, as he usually was in cases of a highly speculative character.

"You are expecting too much from Polton," he said with a smile. "This is not a matter of foraminifera or pollen or butterfly-scales; they are only items of circumstantial evidence. What we have to do is to consider the

whole body of facts in our possession; what Brodribb has told us, what we know for ourselves and what we have ascertained by investigation. The case is still very much in the air, but it is not so vague as you seem to imply."

This was all I could get out of him; and as the "whole body of facts" yielded no suggestion at all to me, I could only possess my soul in patience and hope for some enlightenment on the morrow.

About a quarter to eleven on the following morning, while Thorndyke was giving final instructions to Polton and I was speculating on the contents of the suit-case that was going to accompany us, footsteps became audible on our stairs. Their crescendo terminated in a flourish on our little brass knocker which I recognised as Brodribb's knock. I accordingly opened the door, and in walked our old friend. His keen blue eye took in at once our informal raiment and the suit-case and lighted up with something like curiosity.

"Off on an expedition?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "A little trip down into Kent. Gravesend, in fact."

"Gravesend," repeated Brodribb with further awakened interest. "That was rather a favourite resort of poor Merrill's. By the way, your expedition is not connected with his disappearance, I suppose?"

"As a matter of fact it is," replied Thorndyke. "Just a tentative exploration, you know."

"I know," said Brodribb, all agog now, "and I'm coming with you. I've got a clear day and I'm not going to take a refusal."

"No refusal was contemplated," rejoined Thorndyke. "You'll probably waste a day, but we shall benefit by your society. Polton will let your clerk know that you haven't absconded, or you can look in at the office yourself. We have plenty of time."

Brodribb chose the latter plan, which enabled him to exchange his tall hat and morning coat for a soft hat and jacket, and we accordingly made our way to Charing Cross via Lincoln's Inn, where Brodribb's office was situated. I noticed that Brodribb, with his customary discretion, asked no

questions, though he must have observed, as I had, the striking fact that Thorndyke had in some way connected Merrill with Gravesend; and in fact with the exception of Brodribb's account of his failure to get any news of Mr. Crick, no reference was made to the nature of our expedition until we alighted at our destination.

On emerging from the station, Thorndyke turned to the left and led the way out of the approach into a street, on the opposite side of which a rather grimy statue of Queen Victoria greeted us with a supercilious stare. Here we turned to the south along a prosperous thoroughfare, and presently crossing a main road, followed its rather sordid continuation until the urban squalor began to be tempered by traces of rusticity, and the suburb became a village. Passing a pleasant looking inn and a smithy, which seemed to have an out-patient department for invalid carts, we came into a quiet lane offering a leafy vista with glimpses of thatched and tiled cottages whose gardens were gay with summer flowers. Opposite these, some rough stone steps led up to a stile by the side of an open gate which gave access to a wide cart-track. Here Thorndyke halted, and producing his pocket map-case, compared the surroundings with the map. At length he pocketed the case, and turning towards the cart-track, said: "This is our way, for better or worse. In a few minutes we shall probably know whether we have found a clue or a mare's nest."

We followed the track up a rise until, reaching the crest of the hill, we saw stretching away below us a wide, fertile valley with wooded heights beyond, over the brow of which peeped the square tower of some village church.

"Well," said Brodribb, taking off his hat to enjoy the light breeze, "clue or no clue, this is perfectly delightful and well worth the journey. Just look at those charming little blue butterflies fluttering round that mallow. What a magnificent prospect And where, but in Kent, will you see such a barley field as that?"

It was, indeed, a beautiful landscape. But as my eye travelled over the enormous barley field, its tawny surface rippling, in golden waves before the summer breeze, it was not the beauty of the scene that occupied my mind. I was thinking of those three ends of barley beard that we had picked from the skirts of the green jacket. The cart-track had now



contracted to a foot path; but it was a broader path than I should have looked for, running straight across the great field to a far-away stile; and half way along it on the left hand side I could see, rising above the barley, the top of a rough fence around a small, square enclosure that looked like a pound—though it was in an unlikely situation.

We pursued the broad path across the field until we were nearly abreast of the pound, and I was about to draw Thorndyke's attention to it, when I perceived a narrow lane through the barley—hardly a path, but rather a track, trodden through the crop by some persons who had gone to the enclosure. Into this track Thorndyke turned as if he had been looking for it, and walked towards the enclosure, closely scrutinising the ground as he went. Brodribb and I, of course, followed in single file, brushing through the barley as we went; and as we drew nearer we could see that there was an opening in the enclosing fence and that inside was a deep hollow the edges of which were fringed with clumps of pink valerian. At the opening of the fence Thorndyke halted and looked back.

"Well," said Brodribb, "is it going to be a mare's nest?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "It is a clue, and something more!"

As he spoke, he pointed to the foot of one of the principal posts of the fence, to which was secured a short length of rope, the frayed ends of which suggested that it had broken under a heavy strain. And now I could see what the enclosure was. Inside it was a deep pit, and at the bottom of the pit, to one side, was a circular hole, black as night, and apparently leading down into the bowels of the earth.

"That must be a dene hole," said I, looking at the yawning cavity.

"It is," Thorndyke replied.

"Ha," said Brodribb, "so that is a dene hole, is it? Damned unpleasant looking place. Dene holes were one of poor Merrill's hobbies. He used to go down to explore them. I hope you are not suggesting that he went down this one."

"I am afraid that is what has happened, Brodribb," was the reply. "That end of rope looks like his. It is deep-sea lead-line. I have a length of it here, bought at the same place as he bought his, and probably cut from the same sample." He opened the suit-case, and taking out the coil of line

that we had bought, flung it down by the foot of the post. Obviously it was identical with the broken end. "However," he added, "we shall see."

"We are going down, are we?" asked Brodribb.

"We?" repeated Thorndyke. "I am going down if it is practicable. Not otherwise. If it is an ordinary seventy-foot shaft with perpendicular sides, we shall have to get proper appliances. But you had better stay above, in any case."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Brodribb. "I am not such a back number as you think. I have been a mountain-climber in my time and I'm not a bit nervous. I can get down all right if there is any foothold, and I've got a rope to hang on to. And you can see for yourself that somebody has been down with a rope only."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "but I don't see that that somebody has come up again."

"No," Brodribb admitted; "that's true. The rope seems to have broken; and you say your rope is the same stuff?"

Thorndyke looked at me inquiringly as I stooped and examined the frayed end of the strange rope.

"What do you say, Jervis?" he asked.

"That rope didn't break," I replied. "It has been, chafed or sawn through. It is quite different in appearance from a broken end."

"That was what I decided as soon as I saw it," said Thorndyke. "Besides, a new rope of this size and quality couldn't possibly break under the weight of a man."

Brodribb gazed at the frayed end with an expression of horror.

"What a diabolical thing!" he exclaimed. "You mean that some wretch deliberately cut the rope and let another man drop down the shaft! But it can't be. I really think you must be mistaken. It must have been a defective rope."

"Well, that is what it looks like," replied Thorndyke. He made a 'running bowline' at the end of our rope and slipped the loop over his shoulders, drawing it tight under his arms. Then he turned towards the

pit. "You had better take a couple of turns round the foot of the post, Jervis," said he, "and pay out just enough to keep the rope taut."

He took an electric inspection-lamp from the suit case, slipped the battery in his pocket and hooked the bull's-eye to a button-hole, and when all was ready, he climbed down into the pit, crossed the sloping floor, and crouching down, peered into the forbidding hole, throwing down it a beam of light from his bull's-eye. Then he stood up and grasped the rope.

"It is quite practicable," said he; "only about twenty feet deep, and good foothold all the way." With this he crouched once more, backed into the hole and disappeared from view. He evidently descended pretty quickly, to judge by the rate at which I had to pay out the rope, and in quite a short time I felt the tension slacken and began to haul up the line. As the loop came out of the hole, Mr. Brodribb took possession of it, and regardless of my protests, proceeded to secure it under his arms.

"But how the deuce am I going to get down?" I demanded.

"That's all right, Jervis," he replied persuasively. "I'll just have a look round and then come up and let you down."

It being obviously useless to argue, I adjusted the rope and made ready to pay out. He climbed down into the pit with astonishing agility, backed into the hole and disappeared; and the tension of the rope informed me that he was making quite a rapid descent. He had nearly reached the bottom when there were borne to my ears the hollow reverberations of what sounded like a cry of alarm. But all was apparently well, for the rope continued to draw out steadily, and when at last its tension relaxed, I felt an unmistakable signal shake, and at once drew it up.

As my curiosity made me unwilling to remain passively waiting for Brodribb's return, I secured the end of the rope to the post with a "fisherman's bend" and let myself down into the pit. Advancing to the hole, I lay down and put my head over the edge. A dim light from Thorndyke's lamp came up the shaft and showed me that we were by no means the first explorers, for there were foot-holes cut in the chalk all the way down, apparently of some considerable age. With the aid of these and the rope, it appeared quite easy to descend and I decided to go down forthwith. Accordingly I backed towards the shaft, found the first of the

foot-holes, and grasping the rope with one hand and using the other to hang on to the upper cavities, easily let myself down the well-like shaft. As I neared the bottom the light of the lamp was thrown full on the shaft-wall; a pair of hands grasped me and I heard Thorndyke's voice saying: "Look where you are treading, Jervis;" on which I looked down and saw immediately below me a man lying on his face by an irregular coil of rope.

I stepped down carefully on to the chalk floor and looked round. We were in a small chamber in one side of which was the black opening of a low tunnel. Thorndyke and Brodribb were standing at the feet of the prostrate figure examining a revolver which the solicitor held.

"It has certainly been fired," said the latter. "One chamber is empty and the barrel is foul."

"That may be," replied Thorndyke; "but there is no bullet wound. This man died from a knife wound in the chest." He threw the light of his lamp on the corpse and as I turned it partly over to verify his statement, he added: "This is poor Mr. Merrill. We found the revolver lying by his side."

"The cause of death is clear enough," said I, "and it certainly wasn't suicide. The question is—" At this moment Thorndyke stooped and threw a beam of light down the tunnel, and Brodribb and I simultaneously uttered an exclamation. At the extreme end, about forty feet away, the body of another man lay. Instantly Brodribb started forward, and stooping to clear the low roof—it was about four feet six inches high—hurried along the tunnel. Thorndyke and I followed close behind. As we reached the body, which was lying supine with a small electric torch by its side, and the light of Thorndyke's lamp fell on the upturned face, Brodribb gasped: "God save us! it's Crick! And here is the knife." He was about to pick up the weapon when Thorndyke put out his hand.

"That knife," said he, "must be touched by no hand but the one that dealt the blow. It may be crucial evidence."

"Evidence of what?" demanded Brodribb. "There is Merrill with a knife wound in his chest and a pistol by his side. Here is Crick with a bullet wound in his breast, a knife by his side and the empty sheath secured round his waist. What more evidence do you want?"

"That depends on what you seek to prove," said Thorndyke. "What is

your interpretation of the facts that you have stated?

"Why, it is as plain as daylight," answered Brodribb, "incredible as the affair seems, having regard to the characters of the two men. Crick stabbed Merrill and Merrill shot him dead. Then Merrill tried to escape, but the rope broke, he was trapped and he bled to death at the foot of the shaft."

"And who do you say died first?" Thorndyke asked.

It was a curious question and it caused me to look inquisitively at my colleague. But Brodribb answered promptly: "Why, Crick, of course. Here he lies where he fell. There is a track of blood along the floor of the tunnel, as you can see, and there is Merrill at the entrance, dead in the act of trying to escape."

Thorndyke nodded in a rather mysterious way and there was a brief silence. Then I ventured to remark: "You seem to be losing sight of the man with the green jacket."

Brodribb started and looked at me with a frown of surprise.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "so I am. I had clean forgotten him in these horrors. But what is your point? Is there any evidence that he has been here?"

"I don't know," said I. "He bought the rope and he was seen with Merrill apparently going towards London Bridge Station. And I gather that it was the green jacket that piloted Thorndyke to this place."

"In a sense," Thorndyke admitted, "that is so. But we will talk about that later. Meanwhile there are one or two facts that I will draw your attention to. First as to the wounds; they are almost identical in position. Each is on the left side, just below the nipple; a vital spot, which would be fully exposed by a man who was climbing down holding on to a rope. Then, if you look along the floor where I am throwing the light, you can see a distinct trace of something having been dragged along, although there seems to have been an effort to obliterate it; and the blood marks are more in the nature of smears than drops." He gently turned the body over and pointed to the back, which was thickly covered with chalk. "This corpse has obviously been dragged along the floor," he continued. "It wouldn't have been marked in that way by merely falling. Further, the

rope, when last seen, was being stuffed into a hand-bag. The rope is here, but where is the hand-bag? Finally, the rope was cut by some one outside, and evidently after the murders had been committed."

As he concluded, he spread his handkerchief over the knife, and wrapping it up carefully without touching it with his fingers, placed it in his outside breast-pocket. Then we went back towards the shaft, where Thorndyke knelt down by the body of Merrill and systematically emptied the pockets.

"What are you searching for?" asked Brodribb.

"Keys," was the reply; "and there aren't any. It is a vital point, seeing that the man with the green jacket evidently let himself into Merrill's chambers that same day."

"Yes," Brodribb agreed with a reflective frown; "it is. But tell us, Thorndyke, how you reconstruct this horrible crime."

"My theory," said Thorndyke, "is that the three men came here together. They made the rope fast to the post. The stranger in the green jacket came down first and waited at the foot of the shaft. Merrill came down next, and the stranger stabbed him just as he reached the bottom, while his arms were still up hanging on to the rope. Crick followed and was shot in the same place and the same manner. Then the stranger dragged Crick's body along the tunnel, swept away the marks as well as he could, put the knife and the lamp by the body, dropped the revolver by Merrill's corpse, took the keys and went up, sawed through the rope—probably with a pocket saw—and threw the end down the shaft. Then he took the next train to London and went straight to Merrill's chambers, where he opened the safe or other receptacles and took possession of what he wanted."

Brodribb nodded. "It was a diabolically clever scheme," said he.

"The scheme was ingenious enough," Thorndyke agreed, "but the execution was contemptible. He has left traces at every turn. Otherwise we shouldn't be here. He has acted on the assumption that the world contains no one but fools. But that is a fool's assumption."

When we had ascended, in the reverse order of our descent, Thorndyke detached our rope and also the frayed end, which we took with us, and we

then took our way back towards the town; and I noted that as we stood by the dene hole, there was not a human creature in sight; nor did we meet a single person until we were close to the village. It was an ideal spot for a murder.

"I suppose you will notify the police?" said Brodribb.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I shall call on the Chief Constable and give him the facts and advise him to keep some of them to himself for the present, and also to arrange for an adjournment of the inquest. Our friend with the green jacket must be made to think that he has played a trump card."

Apparently the Chief Constable was a man who knew all the moves of criminal investigation, for at the inquest the discovery was attributed to the local police acting on information received from somebody who had "noticed the broken rope."

None of us was summoned to give evidence nor were our names mentioned, but the inquest was adjourned for three weeks, for further inquiries.

But in those three weeks there were some singular developments, of which the scene was the clerks' office at Mr. Brodribb's premises in Lincoln's Inn. There late on a certain forenoon, Thorndyke and I arrived, each provided with a bag and a sheaf of documents, and were duly admitted by Mr. Page.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "are you quite confident, Mr. Page, that you would recognise this man, even if he had shaved off his beard and moustache?"

"Quite confident," replied Page. "I should know him by his eyes. Very queer eyes they were; light, greenish grey. And I should know his voice, too."

"Good," said Thorndyke; and as Page disappeared into the private office, we sat down and examined our documents, eyed furtively by the junior clerk. Some ten minutes later the door opened and a man entered; and the first glance at him brought my nerves to concert pitch. He was a thick-set, muscular man, clean-shaved and rather dark. But my attention was instantly arrested by his eyes—singularly pale eyes which gave an

almost unhuman character to his face. He reminded me of a certain species of lemur that I once saw.

"I have got an appointment with Mr. Brodribb," he said, addressing the clerk. "My name is Horder."

The clerk slipped off his stool and moved towards the door of the private office, but at that moment Page came out. As his eyes met Horder's, he stopped dead; and instantly the two men seemed to stiffen like a couple of dogs that have suddenly met at a street corner. I watched Horder narrowly. He had been rather pale when he came in. Now he was ghastly, and his whole aspect indicated extreme nervous tension.

"Did you wish to see Mr. Brodribb?" asked Page, still gazing intently at the other.

"Yes," was the irritable reply; "I have given my name once—Horder."

Mr. Page turned and re-entered the private office, leaving the door ajar.

"Mr. Horder to see you, sir," I heard him say. He came out and shut the door. "If you will sit down, Mr. Brodribb will see you in a minute or two," he said, offering a chair; he then took his hat from a peg, glanced at his watch and went out.

A couple of minutes passed. Once, I thought I heard stealthy footsteps out in the entry; but no one came in or knocked. Presently the door of the private office opened and a tall gentleman came out. And then, once more, my nerves sprang to attention. The tall gentleman was Detective-Superintendent Miller.

The superintendent walked across the office, opened the door, looked out, and then, leaving it ajar, came back to where Horder was sitting.

"You are Mr. Samuel Horder, I think," said he.

"Yes, I am," was the reply. "What about it?"

"I am a police officer, and I arrest you on a charge of having unlawfully entered the premises of the late Reginald Merrill; and it is my duty to caution you—"

Here Horder, who had risen to his feet, and slipped his right hand under the skirt of his coat, made a sudden spring at the officer. But in



that instant Thorndyke had gripped his right arm at the elbow and wrist and swung him round; the superintendent seized his left arm while I pounced upon the revolver in his right hand and kept its muzzle pointed to the floor. But it was an uncomfortable affair. Our prisoner was a strong man and he fought like a wild beast; and he had his finger hooked round the trigger of the revolver. The four of us, locked together, gyrated round the office, knocking over chairs and bumping against the walls, the junior clerk skipped round the room with his eyes glued on the pistol and old Brodribb charged out of his sanctum, flourishing a long ruler. However, it did not last long. In the midst of the uproar, two massive constables stole in and joined the fray. There was a yell from the prisoner, the revolver rattled to the floor and then I heard two successive metallic clicks.

"He'll be all right now," murmured the constable who had fixed on the handcuffs, with the manner of one who has administered a soothing remedy.

"I notice," said Thorndyke, when the prisoner had been removed, "that you charged him only with unlawful entry."

"Yes," replied Miller, "until we have taken his finger-prints. Mr. Singleton has developed up three fingers and a thumb, beautifully clear, on that knife that you gave us. If they prove to be Horder's finger prints, of course, it is a true bill for the murder."

The finger-prints on the knife proved undoubtedly to be Horder's. But the case did not rest on them alone. When his rooms were searched, there were found not only Mr. Merrill's keys but also Mr. Merrill's second will, which had been missed from the safe when it was opened by the maker's locksmith; thus illustrating afresh the perverse stupidity of the criminal mind.

"A satisfactory case," remarked Thorndyke, "in respect of the result; but there was too much luck for us to take much credit from it. On Brodribb's opening statement, it was pretty clear that a crime had been committed. Merrill was missing and someone had possession of his keys and had entered his premises. It also appeared nearly certain that the thing stolen must be the second will, since there was nothing else of value to steal; and the will was of very great value to two persons, Crick and Horder, to each of whom its destruction was worth many thousands of

pounds. To both of them its value was conditional on the immediate death of Merrill, before another will could be made; and to Horder it was further conditional on the death of Crick and that he should die before Merrill—for otherwise the estate would go to Crick's heirs or next of kin. The *prima facie* suspicion therefore fell on these two men. But Crick was missing; and the question was, had he absconded or was he dead?

"And now as to the investigation. The green jacket showed earthy dust and chalk on the front and chalk-marks on the buttons. The indication was that the wearer had either crawled on chalky ground or climbed up a chalky face. But the marks on the buttons suggested climbing; for a horizontal surface is usually covered by soil, whereas on a vertical surface the chalk is exposed. But the time factor showed us that this man could not have travelled far from London. He was seen going towards London Bridge Station about the time when a train was due to go down to Kent. That train went to Maidstone and Gillingham, calling at Gravesend, Strood, Snodland, Rochester, Chatham and other places abounding in chalk and connected with the cement industry. In that district there were no true cliffs, but there were numerous chalk-pits, railway embankments and other excavations. The evidence pointed to one of these excavations. Then Crick was known to have gone to Rochester—earlier in the day—which further suggested the district, though Rochester is the least chalky part of it.

"The question was, what kind of excavation had been climbed into? And for what purpose had the climbing been performed? But here the personality of the missing man gave us a hint. Merrill had written a book to prove that dene holes were simply prehistoric flint-mines. He had explored a number of dene holes and described them in his book. Now the district through which this train had passed was peculiarly rich in dene holes; and then there was the suggestive fact that Merrill had been last seen coming out of a rope-seller's shop. This latter fact was so important that I followed it up at once by calling at Edginton's. There I ascertained that Merrill or his companion had bought a fifteen-fathom length of deep-sea lead-line. Now this was profoundly significant. The maximum depth of a dene hole is about seventy feet. Fifteen fathoms—ninety feet—is therefore the exact length required, allowing for loops and fastenings. This new fact converted the dene-hole hypothesis into what

was virtually a certainty, especially when one considered how readily these dangerous pits lent themselves either to fatal accidents or to murder. I accordingly adopted the dene-hole suggestion as a working hypothesis.

"The next question was, 'Where was this dene-hole?' And an uncommonly difficult question it was. I began to fear that the inquiry would fail from the impossibility of solving it. But at this point I got some help from a new quarter. I had given the coat to Polton to extract the dust and I had told him to wash the little lumps of chalk for foraminifera."

"What are foraminifera?" asked Brodribb.

"They are minute sea shells. Chalk is largely composed of them; and although chalk is in no sense a local rock, there is nevertheless a good deal of variation in the species of foraminifera found in different localities. So I had the chalk washed out as a matter of routine. Well, the dust was confirmatory but not illuminating. There was railway dust, of the South Eastern type—I expect you know it—chalk, loam dust, pollen-grains of the mallow and valerian (which grows in chalk-pits and railway cuttings) and some wing scales of the common blue butterfly, which haunts the chalk—I expect he had touched a dead butterfly. But all this would have answered for a good part of Kent. Then I examined the foraminifera and identified the species by the plates in Warnford's Monograph. The result was most encouraging. There were nine species in all, and of these five were marked as 'found in the Gravesend chalk,' two more 'from the Kentish chalk' and the other two 'from the English chalk.' This was a very striking result. More than half the contained foraminifera were from the Gravesend chalk.

"The problem now was to determine the geologic meaning of the term Gravesend. I ruled out Rochester, as I had heard of no dene holes in that neighbourhood, and I consulted Merrill's book and the large-scale Ordnance map. Merrill had worked in the Gravesend district and the adjacent part of Essex and he gave a list of the dene holes that he had explored, including the Clapper Napper Hole in Swanscombe Wood. But, checking his list by the Ordnance map, I found that there was one dene hole marked on the map which was not in his list. As it was evidently necessary to search all the dene holes in the district, I determined to

begin with the one that he seemed to have missed. And there luck favoured us. It turned out to be the right one."

"I don't see that there was much luck in it," said Brodribb. "You calculated the probabilities and adopted the greatest."

"At any rate," said Thorndyke, "there was Merrill and there was Crick; and as soon as I saw them I knew that Horder was the murderer. For the whole tableau had obviously been arranged to demonstrate that Crick died before Merrill and establish Horder as Merrill's heir."

"A diabolical plot," commented Brodribb. "Horribly ingenious, too. By the way—which of them did die first in your opinion?"

"Merrill, I should say, undoubtedly," replied Thorndyke.

"That will be good hearing for Crick's next of kin," said Brodribb. "And you haven't done with this case yet, Thorndyke. I shall retain you on the question of survivorship."

---

### III. — THE SEAL OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

"I SUPPOSE, Thorndyke," said I, "footprints yield quite a lot of information if you think about them enough?"

The question was called forth by the circumstance of my friend halting and stooping to examine the little pit made in the loamy soil of the path by the walking stick of some unknown wayfarer. Ever since we had entered this path—to which we had been directed by the station-master of Pinwell Junction as a short cut to our destination—I had noticed my friend scanning its surface, marked with numerous footprints, as if he were mentally reconstructing the personalities of the various travellers who had trodden it before us. This I knew to be a habit of his, almost unconsciously pursued; and the present conditions certainly favoured it, for here, as the path traversed a small wood, the slightly moist, plastic surface took impressions with the sharpness of moulding wax.

"Yes," he answered, "but you must do more than think. You need to train your eyes to observe in conspicuous characteristics."

"Such as these, for instance," said I, with a grin, pointing to a blatant print of a Cox's "Invicta" rubber sole with its prancing-horse trade-mark.

Thorndyke smiled. "A man," said he, "who wears a sole like that is a mere advertising agent. He who runs may read those characteristics, but as there are thousands of persons wearing 'Invicta' soles, the observation merely identifies the wearer as a member of a large genus. It has to be carried a good deal further to identify him as an individual; otherwise, a standardised sole is apt to be rather misleading than helpful. Its gross distinctiveness tends to divert the novice's attention from the more specific characteristics which he would seek in a plain footprint like that of this man's companion."

"Why companion?" I asked. "The two men were walking the same way, but what evidence is there that they were companions?"

"A good deal, if you follow the series of tracks, as I have been doing. In the first place, there is the stride. Both men were rather tall, as shown by the size of their feet, but both have a distinctly short stride. Now the

leather-soled man's short stride is accounted for by the way in which he put down his stick. He held it stiffly, leaning upon it to some extent and helping himself with it. There is one impression of the stick to every two paces; every impression of his left foot has a stick impression opposite to it. The suggestion is that he was old, weak or infirm. But the rubber-soled man walked with his stick in the ordinary way—one stick impression to every four paces. His abnormally short stride is not to be accounted for excepting by the assumption that he stepped short to keep pace with the other man.

"Then the two sets of footprints are usually separate. Neither man has trodden nor set his stick on the other man's tracks, excepting in those places where the path is too narrow for them to walk abreast, and there, in the one case I noticed the rubber soles treading on the prints of the leather soles, whereas at this spot the prints of the leather soles are imposed on those of the rubber soles. That, of course, is conclusive evidence that the two men were here at the same time."

"Yes," I agreed, "that settles the question without troubling about the stride. But after all, Thorndyke, this is a matter of reasoning, as I said; of thinking about the footprints and their meaning. No special acuteness of observation or training of vision comes into it. The mere facts are obvious enough; it is their interpretation that yields the knowledge."

"That is true so far," said he, "but we haven't exhausted our material. Look carefully at the impressions of the two sticks and tell me if you see anything remarkable in either of them?"

I stooped and examined the little pits that the two sticks had made in the path, and, to tell the truth, found them extremely unilluminating.

"They seem very much alike," I said. "The rubber-soled man's stick is rather larger than the other and the leather-soled man's stick has made deeper holes—probably because it was smaller and he was leaning on it more heavily."

Thorndyke shook his head. "You've missed the point, Anstey, and you've missed it because you have failed to observe the visible facts. It is quite a neat point, too, and might in certain circumstances be a very important one."

"Indeed," said I. "What is the point?"

"That," said he, "I shall leave you to infer from the visible facts, which are these: first, the impressions of the smaller stick are on the right-hand side of the man who made them, and second, that each impression is shallowest towards the front and the right-hand side."

I examined the impressions carefully and verified Thorndyke's statement.

"Well," I said, "what about it? What does it prove?"

Thorndyke smiled in his exasperating fashion. "The proof," said he, "is arrived at by reasoning from the facts. My learned friend has the facts. If he will consider them, the conclusion will emerge."

"But," said I, "I don't see your drift. The impression is shallower on one side, I suppose, because the ferrule of the stick was worn away on that side. But I repeat, what about it? Do you expect me to infer why the fool that it belonged to wore his stick away all at one side?"

"Now, don't get irritable, Anstey," said he. "Preserve a philosophic calm. I assure you that this is quite an interesting problem."

"So it may be," I replied. "But I'm hanged if I can imagine why he wore his stick down in that way. However, it doesn't really matter. It isn't my stick—and by Jingo, here is old Brodribb—caught us in the act of wasting our time on academic chin-wags and delaying his business. The debate is adjourned."

Our discussion had brought us to the opening of the wood, which now framed the figure of the solicitor. As he caught sight of us, he hurried forward, holding out his hand.

"Good men and true!" he exclaimed. "I thought you would probably come this way, and it is very good of you to have come at all, especially as it is a mere formality."

"What is?" asked Thorndyke. "Your telegram spoke of an 'alleged suicide.' I take it that there is some ground for inquiry?"

"I don't know that there is," replied Brodribb. "But the deceased was insured for three thousand pounds, which will be lost to the estate if the

suicide is confirmed. So I put it to my fellow that it was worth an expert's fee to make sure whether or not things are what they seem. A verdict of death by misadventure will save us three thousand pounds. Verbum sap."

As he concluded, the old lawyer winked with exaggerated cunning and stuck his elbow into my ribs.

Thorndyke ignored the facetious suggestion of bribery and corruption and inquired dryly: "What are the circumstances of the case?"

"I'd better give you a sketch of them before we get to the house," replied Brodribb. "The dead man is Martin Rowlands, the brother of my neighbour in New Square, Tom Rowlands. Poor old Tom found the telegram waiting when he got to his office this morning and immediately rushed into my office with it and begged me to come down here with him. So I came. Couldn't refuse a brother solicitor. He's waiting at the house now.

"The circumstances are these. Last evening, when he had finished dinner, Rowlands went out for a walk. That is his usual habit in the summer months—it is light until nearly half-past nine nowadays. Well, that is the last time he was seen alive by the servants. No one saw him come in. But there was nothing unusual in that, for he had a private entrance to the annexe in which his library, museum and workrooms were situated, and when he returned from his walk, he usually entered the house that way and went straight to his study or workroom and spent the evening there. So the servants very seldom saw him after dinner.

"Last night he evidently followed his usual custom. But, this morning, when the housemaid went to his bedroom with his morning tea, she was astonished to find the room empty and the bed undisturbed. She at once reported to the housekeeper, and the pair made their way to the annexe. There they found the study door locked, and as there was no answer after repeated knockings, they went out into the grounds to reconnoitre. The study window was closed and fastened, but the workroom window was unbolted, so that they were able to open it from outside. Then the housemaid climbed in and went to the side door, which she opened and admitted the housekeeper. The two went to the workroom, and as the door which communicated with the study was open, they were able to enter the latter, and there they found Martin Rowlands, sitting in an arm-



chair by the table, stone-dead, cold and stiff. On the table were a whisky decanter, a siphon of soda water, a box of cigars, an ash-bowl with the stump of a cigar in it, and a bottle of photographic tabloids of cyanide of potassium.

"The housekeeper immediately sent off for a doctor and dispatched a telegram to Tom Rowlands at his office. The doctor arrived about nine and decided that the deceased had been dead about twelve hours. The cause of death was apparently cyanide poisoning, but, of course, that will be ascertained or disproved by the post-mortem. Those are all the known facts at present. The doctor helped the servants to place the body on a sofa, but as it is as stiff as a frozen sheep, they might as well have left it where it was."

"Have the police been communicated with?" I asked.

"No," replied Brodribb. "There were no suspicious circumstances, so far as any of us could see, and I don't know that I should have felt justified in sending for you—though I always like to have Thorndyke's opinion in a case of sudden death—if it had not been for the insurance."

Thorndyke nodded. "It looks like a straightforward case of suicide," said he. "As to the state of deceased's affairs, his brother will be able to give us any necessary information, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Brodribb. "As a matter of fact, I think Martin has been a bit worried just lately; but Tom will tell you about that. This is the place."

We turned in at a gateway that opened into the grounds of a substantial though unpretentious house, and as we approached the front door, it was opened by a fresh-coloured, white-haired man whom we both knew pretty well in our professional capacities. He greeted us cordially, and though he was evidently deeply shocked by the tragedy, struggled to maintain a calm, business-like manner.

"It is good of you to come down," said he; "but I am afraid we have troubled you rather unnecessarily. Still, Brodribb thought it best—*ex abundanti cautela*, you know—to have the circumstances reviewed by a competent authority. There is nothing abnormal in the affair excepting its having happened. My poor brother was the sanest of men, I should say, and we are not a suicidal family. I suppose you had better see the body

first?"

As Thorndyke assented, he conducted us to the end of the hall and into the annexe, where we entered the study, the door of which was now open, though the key was still in the lock. The table still bore the things that Brodribb had described, but the chair was empty, and its late occupant lay on a sofa, covered with a large table-cloth. Thorndyke advanced to the sofa and gently drew away the cloth, revealing the body of a man, fully dressed, lying stiffly and awkwardly on its back with the feet raised and the stiffened limbs extended. There was something strangely and horribly artificial in the aspect of the corpse, for, though it was lying down, it had the posture of a seated figure, and thus bore the semblance of a hideously realistic effigy which had been picked up from a chair and laid down. I stood looking at it from a little distance with a layman's distaste for the presence of a dead body, but still regarding it with attention and some curiosity. Presently my glance fell on the soles of the shoes—which were, indeed, exhibited plainly enough—and I noted, as an odd coincidence that they were "Invicta" rubber soles, like those which we had just been discussing in the wood; that it was even possible that those very footprints had been made by the feet of this grisly figure.

"I expect, Thorndyke," Brodribb said tactfully, "you would rather make your inspection alone. If you should want us, you will find us in the dining room," and with this he retired, taking Mr. Rowlands with him.

As soon as they were gone I drew Thorndyke's attention to the rubber soles.

"It is a queer thing," said I, "but we may have actually been discussing this poor fellow's own prints."

"As a matter of fact, we were," he replied, pointing to a drawing-pin that had been trodden on and had stuck into one of the rubber heels. "I noticed this at the time, and apparently you did not, which illustrates what I was saying about the tendency of these very distinctive types of sole to distract attention from those individual peculiarities which are the ones that really matter."

"Then," said I, "if they were his footprints, the man with the remarkable stick was with him. I wonder who he was. Some neighbour who was walking home from the station with him, I expect."

"Probably," said Thorndyke, "and as the prints were quite recent—they might even have been made last night—that person may be wanted as a witness at the inquest as the last person who saw deceased alive. That depends on the time the prints were made."

He walked back to the sofa and inspected the corpse very methodically, giving close attention to the mouth and hands. Then he made a general inspection of the room, examined the objects on the table and the floor under it, strayed into the adjoining workshop, where he peered into the deep laboratory sink, took an empty tumbler from a shelf, held it up to the light and inspected the shelf—where a damp ring showed that the tumbler had been put there to drain—and from the workshop wandered into a little lobby and from thence out at the side door, down the flagged path to the side gate and back again.

"It is all very negative," he remarked discontentedly, as we returned to the study, "except that bottle of tabloids, which is pretty positive evidence of premeditation. That looks like a fresh box of cigars. Two missing. One stump in the ash-tray and more ash than one cigar would account for. However, let us go into the dining and hear what Rowlands has to tell us," and with this he walked out and crossed the hall and I followed him.

As we entered the dining the two men looked at us and Brodribb asked: "Well, what is the verdict?"

"At present," Thorndyke replied, "it is an open verdict. Nothing has come to light that disagrees with the obvious appearances. But I should like to hear more of the antecedents of the tragedy. You were saying that deceased had been somewhat worried lately. What does that amount to?"

"It amounts to nothing," said Rowlands "at least, I should have thought so, in the case of a level-headed man like my brother. Still as it is all there is, so far as I know, to account for what has happened, I had better give you the story. It seems trivial enough.

"Some short time ago, a Major Cohen, who had just come home from Mesopotamia, sold to a dealer named Lyon a small gold cylinder seal that he had picked up in the neighbourhood of Baghdad. The Lord knows how he came by it, but he had it and he showed it to Lyon, who bought it of him for a matter of twenty pounds. Cohen, of course, knew nothing about the thing, and Lyon didn't know much more, for although he is a dealer,

he is no expert. But he is a very clever faker—or rather, I should say, restorer, for he does quite a legitimate trade. He was a jeweller and watch-jobber originally, a most ingenious workman, and his line is to buy up damaged antiques and restore them. Then he sells them to minor collectors, though quite honestly as restorations, so I oughtn't to call him a faker. But, as I said, he has no real knowledge of antiques, and all he saw in Cohen's seal was a gold cylinder seal, apparently ancient and genuine, and on that he bought it for about twice the value of the gold and thought no more about it.

"About a fortnight later, my brother Martin went to his shop in Petty France, Westminster, to get some repairs done, and Lyon, knowing that my brother was a collector of Babylonian antiquities, showed him the seal; and Martin, seeing at once that it was genuine and a thing of some interest and value, bought it straight-way for forty pounds without examining it at all minutely, as it was obviously worth that much in any case. But when he got home and took a rolled impression of it on moulding wax, he made a most astonishing discovery. The impression showed a mass of minute cuneiformic characters, and on deciphering these he learned with amazement and delight that this was none other than the seal of Nebuchadnezzar.

"Hardly able to believe in his good fortune, he hurried off to the British Museum and showed his treasure to the Keeper of the Babylonian Antiquities, who fully confirmed the identity of the seal and was naturally eager to acquire it for the Museum. Of course, Martin wouldn't sell it, but he allowed the keeper to take a record of its weight and measurements and to make an impression on clay to exhibit in the case of seal-rollings.

"Meanwhile, it seems that Cohen, before disposing of the seal, had amused himself by making a number of rolled impressions on clay. Some of these he took to Lyon, who bought them for a few shillings and put one of them in his shop window as a curio. There it was seen and recognised by an American Assyriologist, who went in and bought it and then began to question Lyon closely as to whence he had obtained it. The dealer made no secret of the matter, but gave Cohen's name and address, saying nothing, however, about the seal. In fact, he was unaware of the connection between the seal and the rollings as Cohen had sold him the latter as genuine clay tablets which he said he had found in Mesopotamia.

But, of course, the expert saw that it was a recent rolling and that someone must have the seal.

"Accordingly, off he went to Cohen and questioned him closely, whereupon Cohen began to smell a rat. He admitted that he had had the seal, but refused to say what had become of it until the expert told him what it was and how much it was worth. This the expert did, very reluctantly and in strict confidence, and when Cohen learned that it was the seal of Nebuchadnezzar and that it was worth anything up to ten thousand pounds, he nearly fainted; and then he and the expert together bustled off to Lyon's shop.

"But now Lyon smelt a rat, too. He refused absolutely to disclose the whereabouts of the seal; and having, by now, guessed that the seal-rollings were those of the seal, he took one of them to the British Museum, and then, of course, the murder was out. And further to complicate the matter, the Assyriologist, Professor Bateman, seems to have talked freely to his American friends at his hotel, with the result that Lyon's shop was besieged by wealthy American collectors, all roaring for the seal and all perfectly regardless of cost. Finally, as they could get no change out of Lyon, they went to the British Museum, where they learned that my brother had the seal and got his address—or rather mine, for he had, fortunately for himself, given my office as his address. Then they proceeded to bombard him with letters, as also did Cohen and Lyon.

"It was an uncomfortable situation. Cohen was like a madman. He swore that Lyon had swindled him and he demanded to have the seal returned or the proper price paid. Lyon, for his part, went about like a roaring lion of Judah, making a similar demand; and the millionaire collectors offered wild sums for the seal. Poor Martin was very much worried about it. He was particularly unhappy about Cohen, who had actually found the seal and who was a disabled soldier—he had been wounded in both legs and was permanently lame. As to Lyon, he had no grievance, for he was a dealer and it was his business to know the value of his own stock; but still it was hard luck even on him. And then there were the collectors, pestering him daily with entreaties and extravagant offers. It was very worrying for him. They would probably have come down here to see him, but he kept his private address a close secret.

"I don't know what he meant to do about it. What he did was to arrange with me for the loan of my private office and have a field day, interviewing the whole lot of them—Lyon, the Professor and the assorted millionaires. That was three days ago, and the whole boiling of them turned up; and by the same token one of them was the kind of pestilent fool that walks off with the wrong hat or umbrella."

"Did he walk off with your hat?" asked Brodribb.

"No, but he took my stick; a nice old stick that belonged to my father."

"What sort of stick did he leave in its place?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well," replied Rowlands, "I must admit that there was some excuse, for the stick that he left was almost a facsimile of my own. I don't think I should have noticed it but for the feel. When I began to walk with it, I was aware of something unusual in the feel of it."

"Perhaps it was not quite the same length as yours," Thorndyke suggested.

"No, it wasn't that," said Rowlands. "The length was all right, but there was some more subtle difference. Possibly, as I am left-handed and carry my stick on the left side, it may in the course of years have acquired a left-handed bias, if such a thing is possible. I'll go and get the stick for you to see."

He went out of the room and returned in a few moments with an old-fashioned Malacca cane, the ivory handle of which was secured by a broad silver band. Thorndyke took it from him and looked it over with a degree of interest and attention that rather surprised me. For the loss of Rowlands' stick was a trivial incident and no concern of ours. Nevertheless, my colleague inspected it most methodically, handle, silver band and ferrule; especially the ferrule, which he examined as if it were quite a rare and curious object.

"You needn't worry about your stick, Tom," said Brodribb with a mischievous smile. "Thorndyke will get it back if you ask him nicely."

"It oughtn't to be very difficult," said Thorndyke, handing back the stick, "if you have a list of the visitors who called that day."

"Their names will be in the appointments book," said Rowlands. "I

must look them up. Some of them I remember—Cohen, Lyon, Bateman and two or three of the collectors. But to return to our history. I don't know what passed at the interviews or what Martin intended to do, but I have no doubt he made some notes on the subject. I must search for them, for, of course, we shall have to dispose of the seal."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "where is the seal?"

"Why, it is here in the safe," replied Rowlands; "and it oughtn't to be. It should have been taken to the bank."

"I suppose there is no doubt that it is in the safe?" said Thorndyke.

"No," replied Rowlands; "at least—" He stood up suddenly. "I haven't seen it," he said. "Perhaps we had better make sure."

He led the way quickly to the study, where he halted and stood looking at the shrouded corpse. "The key will be in his pocket," he said, almost in a whisper. Then, slowly and reluctantly, he approached the sofa, and gently drawing away the cover from the body, began to search the dead man's pockets.

"Here it is," he said at length, producing a bunch of keys and separating one, which he apparently knew. He crossed to the safe, and inserting the key, threw open the door.

"Ha!" he exclaimed with evident relief, "it is all right.. Your question gave me quite a start. Is it necessary to open the packet?"

He held out a little sealed parcel on which was written "The Seal of Nebuchadnezzar," and looked inquiringly at Thorndyke.

"You spoke of making sure," the latter replied with a faint smile.

"Yes, I suppose it would be best," said Rowlands; and with that, he cut the thread with which it was fastened, broke the seal and opened the package, disclosing a small cardboard box in which lay a cylindrical object rolled up in a slip of paper.

Rowlands picked it out, and removing the paper, displayed a little cylinder of gold pitted all over with minute cuneiform characters. It was about an inch and a quarter long by half an inch thick and had a hole bored through its axis from end to end.

"This paper, I see," said Rowlands, "contains a copy of the keeper's description of the seal—its weight, dimensions and so on. We may as well take care of that."

He handed the little cylinder to Thorndyke, who held it delicately in his fingers and looked at it with a gravely reflective air. Indeed, small as it was, there was something very impressive in its appearance and in the thought that it had been handled by and probably worn on the person of the great king in those remote, almost mythical times, so familiar and yet so immeasurably far away. So I reflected as I watched Thorndyke inspecting the venerable little object in his queer, exact, scientific way, examining the minute characters through his lens, scrutinising the ends and even peering through the central hole.

"I notice," he said, glancing at the paper which Rowlands held, "that the keeper has given only one transverse diameter, apparently assuming that it is a true cylinder. But it isn't. The diameter varies. It is not quite circular in section and the sides are not perfectly parallel."

He produced his pocket calliper-gauge, and, closing the jaws on the cylinder, took the reading of the vernier. Then he turned the cylinder, on which the gauge became visibly out of contact.

"There is a difference of nearly two millimetres," he said when he had again closed the gauge and taken the reading.

"Ah, Thorndyke," said Brodribb, "that keeper hadn't got your mathematically exact eye; and, in fact, the precise measurements don't seem to matter much."

"On the other hand," retorted Thorndyke, "inexact measurements are of no use at all."

When we had all handled and inspected the seal, Rowlands repacked it and returned it to the safe, and we went back to the dining-room.

"Well, Thorndyke," said Brodribb, "how does the insurance question stand? What is our position?"

"I think," Thorndyke replied, "that we will leave the question open until the inquest has been held. You must insist on an expert analysis, and perhaps that may throw fresh light on the matter. And now we must be



off to the station. I expect you have plenty to do."

"We have," said Brodribb, "so I won't offer to walk with you. You know the way."

Politely but firmly declining Rowlands' offer of material hospitality, Thorndyke took up his research-case, and having shaken hands with our hosts, we followed them to the door and took our departure.

"Not a very satisfactory case," I remarked as we set forth along the road, "but you can't make a bull's-eye every time."

"No," he agreed; "you can only observe and note the facts. Which reminds me that we have some data to collect in the wood. I shall take casts of those footprints in case they should turn out to be of importance. It is always a useful precaution, seeing that footprints are fugitive."

It seemed to me an excessive precaution, but I made no comment; and when we arrived at the footpath through the wood and he had selected the sharpest footprints, I watched him take out from his case the plaster-tin, water-bottle, spoon and little rubber bowl, and wondered what was in his mind. The "Invicta" footprints were obviously those of the dead man. But what if they were? And of what use were the casts of the other man's feet? The man was unknown, and as far as I could see, there was nothing suspicious in his presence here. But when Thorndyke had poured the liquid plaster into the two pairs of footprints, he went on to a still more incomprehensible proceeding. Mixing some fresh plaster, he filled up with it two adjoining impressions of the strange man's stick. Then, taking a reel of thread from the case, he cut off about two yards, and stretching it taut, held it exactly across the middle of the two holes, until the plaster set and fixed it in position. After waiting for the plaster to set hard, and having, meanwhile, taken up and packed the casts of the footprints, he gently raised, first the one and then the other cast; each of which was a snowy-white facsimile of the tip of the stick which had made the impression the two casts, being joined by a length of thread which gave the exact distance apart of the two impressions.

"I suppose," said I, as he made a pencil mark on one of the casts, "the thread is to show the length of the stride?"

"No," he answered. "It is to show the exact direction in which the man

was walking and to mark the front and back of the stick."

I could make nothing of this. It was highly ingenious, but what on earth was the use of it? What could it possibly prove?

I put a few tentative questions, but could get no explanation beyond the obvious truth that it was of no use to postpone the collection of evidence until after the event. What event he was referring to, I did not gather; nor was I any further enlightened when, on arriving at Victoria, he hailed a taxicab and directed the driver to set him down at Scotland Yard.

"You had better not wait," he said, as he got out. "I have some business to talk over with Miller or the Assistant Commissioner and may be detained some time. But I shall be at home all the evening."

Taking this as an invitation to drop in at his chambers, I did so after dinner and made another ineffectual attempt to pump him.

"I am sorry to be so evasive," said he, "but this case is so extremely speculative that I cannot come to any definite conclusion until I have more data. I may have been theorising in the air. But I am going forth tomorrow morning at half-past eight in the hope of putting some of my inferences to the test. If my learned friend would care to lend his distinguished support to the expedition, his society would be appreciated. But it will be a case of passive observation and quite possibly nothing will happen."

"Well, I will come and look on," said I. "Passive observation is my speciality;" and with this I took my departure, rather more mystified than ever.

Punctually, next morning at half-past eight, I arrived at the entry of Thorndyke's chambers. A taxicab was already waiting at the kerb, and, as I stepped on the threshold, my colleague appeared on the stairs. Together we entered the cab which at once moved off, and proceeding down Middle Temple Lane to the Embankment, headed westward. Our first stopping-place was New Scotland Yard, but there Thorndyke remained only a minute or two. Our further progress was in the direction of Westminster, and in a few minutes we drew up at the corner of Petty France, where we alighted and paid off the taxi. Sauntering slowly westward and passing a large, covered car that was drawn up by the

pavement, we presently encountered no less a person than Mr. Superintendent Miller, dressed in the height of fashion and smoking a cigar. The meeting was not, apparently, unexpected, for Miller began, without preamble: "It's all right, so far, doctor, unless we are too late. It will be an awful suck-in if we are. Two plain-clothes men have been here ever since you called yesterday evening, and nothing has happened yet."

"You mustn't treat it as a certainty, Miller," said Thorndyke. "We are only acting on reasonable probabilities. But it may be a false shot, after all."

Miller smiled indulgently. "I know, sir. I've heard you say that sort of thing before. At any rate, he's there at present; I saw him just now through the shop window—and, by gum! here he is!"

I followed the superintendent's glance and saw a tallish, elderly man advancing on the opposite side of the street. He walked stiffly with the aid of a stick and with a pronounced stoop as if suffering from some weakness of the back, and he carried in his free hand a small wooden case suspended by a rug-strap. But what instantly attracted my attention was his walking-stick, which appeared, so far as I could remember, to be an exact replica of the one that Tom Rowlands had shown us.

We continued to walk westward, allowing Mr. Lyon—as I assumed him to be—to pass us. Then we turned back and followed at a little distance; and I noticed that two tall, military-looking men whom we had met kept close behind us. At the corner of Petty France Mr. Lyon hailed a taxicab; and Miller quickened his pace and bore down on the big covered car.

"Jump in," he said, opening the door as Lyon entered the cab. "We mustn't lose sight of him," and with this he fairly shoved Thorndyke and me into the car, and having spoken a word to the driver, stepped in himself and was followed by the two plain-clothes men. The car started forward, and having made a spurt which brought it within a few yards of the taxi, slowed down to the pace of the latter and followed it through the increasing traffic until we turned into Whitehall, where our driver allowed the taxi to draw ahead somewhat. At Charing Cross, however, we closed up and kept immediately behind our quarry in the dense traffic of the Strand; and when it turned to cross opposite the Acropolis Hotel, we still followed and swept past it in the hotel courtyard so that we reached

the main entrance first. By the time that Mr. Lyon had paid his fare we had already entered and were waiting in the hall of the hotel.

As he followed us in, he paused and looked about him until his glance fell on a stoutish, clean-shaved man who was sitting in a wicker chair, who, on catching his eye, rose and advanced towards him. At this moment Superintendent Miller touched him on the shoulder, causing him to spin round with an expression of very distinct alarm.

"Mr. Maurice Lyon, I think," said Miller. "I am a detective officer." He paused and looked hard at the dealer, who had turned deathly pale. Then he continued: "You are carrying a walking-stick which I believe is not your property."

Lyon gave a gasp of relief. "You are quite right," said he. "But I don't know whose property it is. If you do, I shall be pleased to return it in exchange for my own, which I left by mistake."

He held it out in an irresolute fashion, and Miller took it from him and handed it to Thorndyke.

"Is that the stick?" he asked.

Thorndyke looked the stick over quickly, and then, inverting it, made a minute examination of the ferrule, finishing up by taking its dimensions in two diameters and comparing the results with some written notes.

Mr. Lyon fidgeted impatiently. "There's no need for all this fuss," said he. "I have told you that the stick is not mine."

"Quite so," said Miller, "but we must have a few words privately about that stick."

Here he turned to an hotel official, who had just arrived under the guidance of one of the plain-clothes men, and who suggested rather anxiously that our business would be better transacted in a private room at the back of the building than in the public hall. He was just moving off to show us the way when the clean-shaved stranger edged up to Lyon and extended his hand towards the wooden case.

"Shall I take this?" he asked suavely.

"Not just now, sir," said Miller, firmly fending him off. "Mr. Lyon will

talk to you presently."

"But that case is my property," the other objected truculently; "and who are you, anyway?"

"I am a police officer," replied Miller. "But if that is your property, you had better come with us and keep an eye on it."

I have never seen a man look more uncomfortable than did the owner of that case—with the exception of Mr. Lyon; whose complexion had once more taken on a tallowy whiteness. But as the manager led the way to the back of the hall the two men followed silently, shepherded by the superintendent and the rest of our party, until we reached a small, marble-floored lobby or ante-room, when our conductor shut us in and retired.

"Now," said Miller, "I want to know what is in that case."

"I can tell you," said the stranger. "It is a piece of sculpture, and it belongs to me."

Miller nodded. "Let us have a look at it," said he.

There being no table, Lyon sat down on a chair, and resting the case on his knees, unfastened the straps with trembling fingers on which a drop of sweat fell now and again from his forehead. When the case was free, he opened the lid and displayed the head of a small plaster bust, a miniature copy of Donatello's "St. Cecilia," the shoulders of which were wedged in with balls of paper. These Lyon picked out clumsily, and when he had removed the last of them, he lifted out the bust with infinite care and held it out for Miller's inspection. The officer took it from him tenderly—after an eager glance into the empty case—and holding it with both hands, looked at it rather blankly.

"Feels rather damp," he remarked with a some what nonplussed air; and then he cast an obviously inquiring glance at Thorndyke, who took the bust from him, and holding it poised in the palm of his hand, appeared to be estimating its weight. Glancing past him at Lyon, I noticed with astonishment that the dealer was watching him with a ghastly stare of manifest terror, while the stranger was hardly less disturbed.

"For God's sake, man, be careful!" the latter exclaimed, starting

forward. "You'll drop it!"

The prediction was hardly uttered before it was verified. Drop it he did; and in a perfectly deliberate, purposeful manner, so that the bust fell on its back on the marble floor and was instantly shattered into a hundred fragments. It was an amazing affair. But what followed was still more amazing. For, as the snowy fragments scattered to right and left, from one of them a little yellow metal cylinder detached itself and rolled slowly along the floor. The stranger darted forward and stooped to seize it; but Miller stooped, too, and I judged that the superintendent's cranium was the harder, for he rose, rubbing his head with one hand and with the other holding out the cylinder to Thorndyke.

"Can you tell us what this is, doctor?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "It is the seal of Nebuchadnezzar, and it is the property of the executors of the late Martin Rowlands, who was murdered the night before last."

As he finished speaking, Lyon slithered from his chair and lay upon the floor insensible, while the stranger made a sudden burst for the door, where he was instantly folded in the embrace of a massive plain-clothes man, who held him immovable while his colleague clicked on the handcuffs.

"So," I remarked, as we walked home, "your casts of the stick and the footprints were not wanted after all."

"On the contrary," he replied, "they are wanted very much. If the seal should fail to hang Mr. Lyon, the casts will assuredly fit the rope round his neck." (This, by the way, actually happened. The defence that Lyon received the seal from some unknown person was countered by the unexpected production in court of the casts of Lyon's feet and the stick, which proved that the prisoner had been at Pinwell, and in the company of the deceased at or about the date of the murder, and secured his conviction.)

"By the way," said I, "how did you fix this crime on Lyon? It began, I think, with those stick impressions in the wood. What was there peculiar about those impressions?"

"Their peculiarity was that they were the impressions of a stick which

apparently did not belong to the person who was carrying it."

"Good Lord, Thorndyke!" I exclaimed, "is that possible? How could an impression on the ground suggest ownership?"

"It is a curious point," he replied, "though essentially simple, which turns on the way in which the ferrule of a stick becomes worn. In a plain, symmetrical stick with out a handle, the ferrule wears evenly all round; but in a stick with a crook or other definite handle, which is grasped in a particular way and always put down in the same position, the ferrule becomes worn on one side—the side opposite the handle, or the front of the stick. But the important point is that the bevel of wear is not exactly opposite the handle. It is slightly to one side, for this reason. A man puts his stick down with the handle fore and aft; but as he steps forward, his hand swings away from his body, rotating the stick slightly outward. Consequently, the wear on the ferrule is slightly inward. That is to say, that in a right-handed man's stick the wear is slightly to the left and in a left-handed man's stick the wear is slightly to the right. But if a right-handed man walks with a left-handed stick, the impression on the ground will show the bevel of wear on the right side—which is the wrong side; and the right-handed rotation will throw it still farther to the right. Now in this case, the impressions showed a shallow part, corresponding to the bevel of wear, on the right side. Therefore it was a left-handed stick. But it was being carried in the right hand. Therefore it—apparently—did not belong to the person who was carrying it.

"Of course, as the person was unknown, the point was merely curious and did not concern us. But see how quickly circumstantial evidence mounts up. When we saw the feet of deceased, we knew that the footprints in the wood were his. Consequently the man with the stick was in his company; and that man at once came into the picture. Then Tom Rowlands told us that he had lost his stick and that he was left-handed; and he showed us the stick that he had got in exchange, and behold! that is a right-handed stick, as I ascertained by examining the ferrule. Here, then, is a left-handed man who has lost a stick and got a right-handed one in exchange; and there, in the wood, was a right-handed man who was carrying a left-handed stick and who was in company with the deceased. It was a striking coincidence. But further, the suggestion was that this unknown man was one of those who had called at Tom's office, and

therefore one who wanted to get possession of the seal. This instantly suggested the question, Did he succeed in getting possession of the seal? We went to the safe and at once it became obvious that he did."

"The seal in the safe was a forgery, of course?"

"Yes; and a bad forgery, though skilfully done. It was an electrotpe; it was unsymmetrical; it did not agree with the keeper's measurements; and the perforation, though soiled at the ends, was bright in the middle from the boring tool."

"But how did you know that Lyon had made it?"

"I didn't. But he was by far the most probable person. He had a seal-rolling, from which an electro could be made, and he had the great skill that was necessary to turn a flat electro into a cylinder. He was an experienced faker of antiques, and he was a dealer who would have facilities for getting rid of the stolen seal. But it was only a probability, though, as time pressed, we had to act on it. Of course, when we saw him with the stick in his hand, it became virtually a certainty."

"And how did you guess that the seal was in the bust?"

"I had expected to find it enclosed in some plaster object, that being the safest way to hide it and smuggle it out of this country and into the United States. When I saw the bust, it was obvious. It was a hastily-made copy of one of Brucciani's busts. The plaster was damp—Brucciani's bake theirs dry—and had evidently been made only a few hours. So I broke it. If I had been mistaken I could have replaced it for five shillings, but the whole circumstances made it practically a certainty."

"Have you any idea as to how Lyon administered the poison?"

"We can only surmise," he replied. "Probably he took with him some solution of cyanide—if that was what was used—and poured it into Rowlands' whisky when his attention was otherwise occupied. It would be quite easy; and a single gulp of a quick-acting poison like that would finish the business in a minute or two. But we are not likely ever to know the details."

The evidence at the inquest showed that Thorndyke was probably right, and his evidence at the trial clinched the case against Lyon. As to the



other man—who proved to be an American dealer well known to the New York Customs officials—the case against him broke down from lack of evidence that he was privy either to the murder or the theft. And so ended the case of Nebuchadnezzar's seal: a case that left Mr. Brodribb more than ever convinced that Thorndyke was either gifted with a sixth sense which enabled him to smell out evidence or was in league with some familiar demon who did it for him.



## IV. — PHYLLIS ANNESLEY'S PERIL

"ONE is sometimes disposed to regret," said Thorndyke, as we sat waiting for the arrival of Mr. Mayfield, the solicitor, "that our practice is so largely concerned with the sordid and the unpleasant."

"Yes," I agreed. "Medical Jurisprudence is not always a particularly delicate subject. But it is our line of practice and we have got to take it as we find it."

"A philosophic conclusion, Jervis," he rejoined, "and worthy of my learned friend. It happens that the most intimate contact of Law and Medicine is in crimes against the person and consequently the proper study of the Medical Jurist is crime of that type. It is a regrettable fact, but we must accept it."

"At the same time," said I, "there don't seem to be any Medico-legal issues in this Bland case. The woman was obviously murdered. The only question is, who murdered her? And the answer to that question seems pretty obvious."

"It does," said Thorndyke. "But we shall be better able to judge when we have heard what Mayfield has to tell us. And I think I hear him coming up the stairs now."

I rose to open the door for our visitor, and, as he entered, I looked at him curiously. Mr. Mayfield was quite a young man, and the mixture of deference and nervousness in his manner as he entered the room suggested no great professional experience.

"I am afraid, sir," said he, taking the easy-chair that Thorndyke offered him, "that I ought to have come to you sooner, for the inquest, or, at least, the police court proceedings."

"You reserved your defence, I think?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes," replied the solicitor, with a wry smile. "I had to. There seemed to be nothing to say. So I put in a plea of Not Guilty and reserved the defence in the hope that something might turn up. But I am gravelled completely. It looks a perfectly hopeless case. I don't know how it strikes

you, sir."

"I have seen only the newspaper reports," said Thorndyke. "They are certainly not encouraging. But let us disregard them. I suggest that you recite the facts of the case and I can ask any questions that are necessary to elucidate it further."

"Very well, sir," said Mayfield. "Then I will begin with the disappearance of Mrs. Lucy Bland. That occurred about the eighteenth of last May. At that time she was living, apart from her husband, at Wimbledon, in furnished lodgings. After lunch on the eighteenth she went out, saying that she should not be home until night. She was seen by someone who knew her at Wimbledon Station on the down side about three o'clock. At shortly after six probably on the same day, she went to the Post Office at Lower Ditton to buy some stamps. The postmistress, who knew her by sight, is certain that she called there, but cannot swear to the exact date. At any rate, she did not go home that night and was never seen alive again. Her landlady communicated with her husband and he at once applied to the police. But all the inquiries that were made led to nothing. She had disappeared without leaving a trace.

"The discovery was made four months later, on the sixteenth of September. On that day some workmen went to 'The Larches,' a smallish, old-fashioned, riverside house just outside Lower Ditton, to examine the electric wiring. The house was let to a new tenant, and as the meter had shown an unaccountable leakage of current during the previous quarter, they went to see what was wrong.

"To get at the main, they had to take up part of the floor of the dining-room; and when they got the boards up, they were horrified to discover a pair of feet—evidently a woman's feet—projecting from under the next board. They immediately went to the police station and reported what they had seen, whereupon the inspector and a sergeant accompanied them back to the house and directed them to take up several more boards—which they did; and there, jammed in between the joists, was the body of a woman who was subsequently identified as Mrs. Lucy Bland. The corpse appeared to be perfectly fresh and only quite recently dead; but at the post mortem it was discovered that it had been embalmed or preserved by injecting a solution of formaldehyde and might have been

dead three or four months. The cause of death was given at the inquest as suffocation, probably preceded by the forcible administration of chloroform."

"The house, I understand," said Thorndyke, "belongs to one of the accused?"

"Yes. Miss Phyllis Annesley. It is her freehold, and she lived in it until recently. Last autumn, however, she took to travelling about and then partly dismantle the house and stored most of the furniture; but she kept two bedrooms furnished and the kitchen and dining, room in just usable condition, and she used to put up there for a day or two in the intervals of her journeys, either alone or with her maid."

"And as to Miss Annesley's relations with the Blands?"

"She had known them both for some years. With Leonard Bland she was admittedly on affectionate terms, though there is no suggestion of improper relations between them. But Bland used to visit her when she lived there and they used to go for picnics on the river in the boat belonging to the house. Mrs. Bland also occasionally visited Miss Annesley, and they seem to have been on quite civil terms. Of course, she knew about her husband's affection for the lady, but she doesn't seem to have had any strong feeling about it."

"And what were the relations of the husband and wife?" asked Thorndyke.

"Rather queer. They didn't suit one another, so they simply agreed to go their own ways. But they don't seem to have been unfriendly, and Mr. Bland was most scrupulous in regard to his financial obligations to his wife. He not only allowed her liberal maintenance but went out of his way to make provision for her. I will give you an instance, which impressed me very much.

"An old acquaintance of his, a Mr. Julius Wicks, who had been working for some years in the film studio at Los Angeles, came to England about a year ago and proposed to Bland that they should start one or two picture theatres in the provinces, Bland to find the money—which he was able to do—and Wicks to provide the technical knowledge and do the actual management. Bland agreed, and a partnership was arranged on the basis

of two-thirds of the profits to Bland and one-third to Wicks; with the proviso that if Bland should die, all his rights as partner should be vested in his wife."

"And supposing Wicks should die?"

"Well, Wicks was not married, though he was engaged to a film actress. On his death, his share would go to Bland, and similarly, on Bland's death, if he should die after his wife, his share would go to his partner."

"Bland seems to have been a fairly good business man," said I.

"Yes," Mayfield agreed. "The arrangement was all in his favour. But he was the capitalist, you see. However, the point is that Bland was quite mindful of his wife's interests. There was nothing like enmity."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "one motive is excluded. Was the question of divorce ever raised?"

"It couldn't be," said Mayfield. "There were no grounds on either side. But it seems to have been recognised and admitted that if Bland had been free he would have married Miss Annesley. They were greatly attached to one another."

"That seems a fairly solid motive," said I.

"It appears to be," Mayfield admitted. "But to me, who have known these people for years and have always had the highest opinion of them, it seems—Well, I can't associate this atrocious crime with them at all. However, that is not to the point. I must get on with the facts."

"Very soon after the discovery at 'The Larches,' the police learned that there had been rumours in Lower Ditton for some time past of strange happenings at the house and that two labourers named Brodie and Stanton knew something definite. They accordingly looked up these two men and examined them separately, when both men made substantially identical statements, which were to this effect:

"About the middle of May—neither of them was able to give an exact date—between nine and ten in the evening, they were walking together along the lane in which 'The Larches' is situated when they saw a man lurking in the front garden of the house. As they were passing, he came to the gate and beckoned to them, and when they approached he whispered:

'I say, mates, there's something rummy going on in this house.'

"How do you know?" asked Brodie.

"I've been looking in through a hole in the shutter," the man replied. 'They seem to be hiding something under the floor. Come and have a look.'

"The two men followed him up the garden to the back of the house, where he took them to one of the windows of a ground-floor room and pointed to two holes in the outside shutters.

"Just take a peep in through them," said he.

"Each of the men put an eye to one of the holes and looked in; and this is what they both saw: There were two rooms, communicating, with a wide arch between them. Through the arch and at the far end of the second room were two persons, a man and a woman. They were on their hands and knees, apparently doing something to the floor. Presently the man, who had on a painter's white blouse, rose and picked up a board which he stood on end against the wall. Then he stooped again and seemed to lay hold of something that lay on the floor—something that looked like a large bundle or a roll of carpet. At this moment something passed across in front of the holes and shut out the view—so that there must have been a third person in the room. When the obstructing body moved away again, the man was kneeling on the floor looking down at the bundle and the woman had come forward and was standing just in the arch with a pair of pincers in her hand. She was dressed in a spotted pinafore with a white sailor collar, and both the men recognised her at once as Miss Annesley."

"They knew her by sight, then?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. They were Ditton men. It is a small place and everybody in it must have known Miss Annesley and Bland, too, for that matter. Well, they saw her standing in the archway quite distinctly. Neither of the men has the least doubt as to her identity. They watched her for perhaps half a minute. Then the invisible person inside moved in front of the peepholes and shut out the scene.

"When the obstruction moved away, the woman was back in the farther room, kneeling on the floor. The bundle had disappeared and the man

was in the act of taking the board, which he had rested against the wall, and laying it in its place in the floor. After this, the obstruction kept coming and going, so that the watchers only got occasional glimpses of what was going on. They saw the man apparently hammering nails into the floor and they heard faint sounds of knocking. On one occasion, towards the end of the proceedings, they saw the man standing in the archway with his face towards them, apparently looking at something in his hand. They couldn't see what the thing was, but they clearly recognised the man as Mr. Bland, whom they both knew well by sight. Then the view was shut out again, and when they next saw Mr. Bland, he was standing by Miss Annesley in the farther room, looking down at the floor and taking off his blouse. As it seemed that the business was over and that Bland and Miss Annesley would probably be coming out, the men thought it best to clear off, lest they should be seen.

"As they walked up the lane, they discussed the mysterious proceedings that they had witnessed, but could make nothing of them. The stranger suggested that perhaps Miss Annesley was hiding her plate or valuables to keep them safe while she was travelling, and hinted that it might be worth someone's while to take the floor up later on and see what was there. But this suggestion Brodie and Stanton, who are most respectable men, condemned strongly, and they agreed that, as the affair was no concern of theirs, they had better say nothing about it. But they evidently must have talked to some extent, for the affair got to be spoken about in the village, and, of course, when the body was discovered under the floor, the gossip soon reached the ears of the police."

"Has the third man come forward to give evidence?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, he has not been found yet. He was a stranger to both the men; apparently a labourer or farm-hand or tramp. But nothing is known about him. So that is the case; and it is about as hopeless as it is possible to be. Of course, there is the known character of the accused; but against that is a perfectly intelligible motive and the evidence of two eye-witnesses. Do you think you would be disposed to undertake the defence, sir? I realise that it is asking a great deal of you."

"I should like to think the matter over," said Thorndyke, "and make a few preliminary inquiries. And I should want to read over the depositions

in full detail. Can you let me have them?"

"I have a verbatim report of the police court proceedings and of the inquest. I will leave them with you now. And when may I hope to have your decision?"

"By the day after to-morrow at the latest," was the reply, on which the young solicitor produced a bundle of papers from his bag, and having laid them on the table, thanked us both and took his leave.

"Well, Thorndyke," I said when Mayfield had gone, "I am fairly mystified. I know you would not undertake a merely formal defence, but what else you could do is, I must confess, beyond my imagination. It seems to me that the prosecution have only to call the witnesses and the verdict of 'Guilty' follows automatically."

"That is how it appears to me," said Thorndyke. "And if it still appears so when I have read the reports and made my preliminary investigations, I shall decline the brief. But appearances are sometimes misleading."

With this he took the reports and the notebook, in which he had made a few brief memoranda of Mayfield's summary of the case, and drawing a chair to the table, proceeded, with quiet concentration, to read through and make notes on the evidence. When he had finished, he passed the reports to me and rose, pocketing his note book and glancing at his watch.

"Read the evidence through carefully, Jervis," said he, "and tell me if you see any possible way out. I have one or two calls to make, but I shall not be more than an hour. When I come back, I should like to hear your views on the case."

During his absence I read the reports through with the closest attention. Something in Thorndyke's tone had seemed to hint at a possible flaw in the case for the prosecution. But I could find no escape from the conviction that these two persons were guilty. The reports merely amplified what Mayfield had told us; and the added detail, especially in the case of the eye witnesses, only made the evidence more conclusive. I could not see the material for even a formal defence.

In less than an hour my colleague re-entered the room, and I was about to give him my impressions of the evidence when he said, "It is rather



early, Jervis, but I think we had better go and get some lunch. I have arranged to go down to Ditton this afternoon and have a look at the house. Mayfield has given me a note to the police sergeant, who has the key and is virtually in possession."

"I don't see what you will gain by looking at the house," said I.

"Neither do I," he replied. "But it is a good rule always to inspect the scene of a crime and all the evidence as far as possible."

"Well," I said, "it is a forlorn hope. I have read through the evidence and it seems to me that the accused are as good as convicted. I can see no line of defence at all. Can you?"

"At present I cannot," he replied. "But there are one or two points that I should like to clear up before I decide whether or not to undertake the defence. And I have a great belief in first-hand observation."

We consumed a simplified lunch at one of our regular haunts in Fleet Street and from thence were conveyed by a taxi to Waterloo, where we caught the selected train to Lower Ditton. I had put the reports in my pocket, and during our journey I read them over again, to see if I could discover any point that would be cleared up by an inspection of the premises.

For, in spite of the rather vague purpose implied by Thorndyke's explanation, something in my colleague's manner, coupled with long experience of his method made me suspect that he had some definite object in view. But nothing was said by either of us during the journey, nor did we discuss the case; indeed, so far as I could see, there was nothing to discuss.

Our reception at the Lower Ditton Police Station was something more than cordial. The sergeant recognised Thorndyke instantly—it appeared that he was an enthusiastic admirer of my colleague—and after a brief glance at Mayfield's note, took a key from his desk and put on his helmet.

"Lord bless you, sir," said he, "I don't need to be told who you are. I've seen you in court, and heard you. I'll come along with you to the house myself."

I suspected that Thorndyke would have gladly dispensed with this

attention, but he accepted it with genial courtesy, and we went forth through the village and along the quiet lane in which the ill-omened house was situated. And as we went, the sergeant commented on the case with curiously unofficial freedom.

"You've got your work cut out, sir, if you are going to conduct the defence. But I wish you luck. I've known Miss Annesley for some years—she was well known in the village here—and a nicer, gentler, more pleasant lady you wouldn't wish to meet. To think of her in connection with a murder—and such a murder, too—such a brutal, callous affair! Well, it's beyond me. And yet there it is, unless those two men are lying."

"Is there any reason to suppose that they are?" I asked.

"Well, no; there isn't. They are good, sober, decent men. And it would be such an atrociously wicked lie. And they both knew the prisoners, and liked them. Everybody liked Mr. Bland and Miss Annesley, though their friendship for one another may not have been quite in order. But I can tell you, sir, these two men are frightfully cut up at having to give evidence. This is the house!"

He opened a gate and we entered the garden, beyond which was a smallish, old-fashioned house, of which the ground-floor windows were protected by outside shutters. We walked round to the back of the house, where was another garden with a lawn and a path leading down to the river.

"Is that a boat-house?" Thorndyke asked, pointing to a small gable that appeared above a clump of lilac bushes.

"Yes," replied the sergeant. "And there is a boat in it; a good, beamy, comfortable tub that Miss Annesley and her friend used to go out picnicking in. This is the window that the men peeped in at, but you can't see much now because the room is all dark."

I looked at the two French windows, which opened on to the lawn, and reflected on this new instance of the folly of wrong-doers. Each window was fitted with a pair of strong shutters, which bolted on the inside, and each shutter was pierced, about five feet from the sill, by a circular hole a little over an inch in diameter. It seemed incredible that two sane persons, engaged in the concealment of a murdered body, should have

left those four holes uncovered for any chance eavesdropper to spy on their doings.

But my astonishment at this lack of precaution was still greater when the sergeant admitted us and we stood inside the room, for both the windows, as well as the pair in the farther room, were furnished with heavy curtains.

"Yes," said the sergeant, in answer to my comment, "it's a queer thing how people overlook matters of vital importance. You see, they drew the drawing-room curtains all right, but they forgot these. Is there anything in particular that you want to see, sir?"

"I should like to see where the body was hidden," said Thorndyke, "but I will just look round the rooms first."

He walked slowly to and fro, looking about him and evidently fixing the appearance of the rooms on his memory. Not that there was much to see or remember. The two nearly square rooms communicated through a wide arch, once closed by curtains, as shown by the brass curtain-rod. The back room had been completely dismantled with the exception of the window curtains, but the front room, although the floor and the walls, were bare, was not entirely unfurnished. The sideboard was still in position and bore at each end a tall electric light standard, as did also the mantelpiece. There were three dining chairs and a good-sized gate-leg table stood closed against the wall.

"I see you have not had the floor-boards nailed down," said Thorndyke.

"No, sir; not yet. So we can see where the body was hidden and where the electric main is. The electricians took up the wrong board at first—that is how they came to discover the body. And one of them said that the boards over the main had been raised recently, and he thought that the—er—the accused had meant to hide the body there, but when they got the floor up they struck the main and had to choose a fresh place."

He stooped, and lifting the loose boards, which he stood on end against the mantelpiece, exposed the joists and the earth floor about a foot below them. In one of the spaces the electric main ran and in the adjoining one the apparently disused gas main.

"This is where we found poor Mrs. Bland," said the sergeant, pointing

to an empty space. "It was an awful sight. Gave me quite a turn. The poor lady was lying on her side jammed down between the joists and her nose flattened up against one of the timbers. They must have been brutes that did it, and I can't—I really can't believe that Miss Annesley was one of them."

"It looks a narrow place for a body to lie in," said I.

"The joists are sixteen inches apart," said Thorndyke, laying his pocket rule across the space, "and two and a half inches thick. Heavy timber and wide spaces."

He stood up, and turning round, looked towards the windows of the back room. I followed his glance and noted, almost with a start, the two holes in the shutter of the left-hand window (the right-hand window, of course, from outside) glaring into the darkened room like a pair of inquisitive, accusing eyes. The holes in the other window were hardly visible, and the reason for the difference was obvious. The one window had small panes and thick muntins, or sash-bars, whereas the other was glazed, with large sheets of plate glass and had no muntins.

"Of course it would be dark at the time," I said in response to his unspoken comment, "and this room would be lighted up, more or less."

"Not so very dark in May," he replied. "There is a furnished bedroom, isn't there, sergeant?"

"Two, sir," was the reply; and the sergeant forthwith opened the door and led the way across the hall and up the stairs.

"This is Miss Annesley's room," he said, opening a door gingerly and peering in.

We entered the room and looked about us with vague curiosity. It was a simply-furnished room, but dainty and tasteful, with its small four-post bedstead, light easy-chair and little, ladylike writing-table.

"That's Mr. Bland," said the sergeant, pointing to a double photograph-frame on the table, "and the lady is Miss Annesley herself."

I took up the frame and looked curiosity at the two portraits. For a pair of murderers they were certainly uncommonly prepossessing. The man, who looked about thirty-five, was a typical good-looking, middle-class

Englishman, while the woman was distinctly handsome, with a thoughtful, refined and gentle cast of face.

"She has something of a Japanese air," said I, "with that coil on the top of the head and the big ivory hairpin stuck through it."

I passed the frame to Thorndyke, who regarded each portrait attentively, and then, taking both photographs out of the frame, closely examined each in turn, back and front, before replacing them.

"The other bedroom," said the sergeant as Thorndyke laid down the frame, "is the spare room. There's nothing to see in it."

Nevertheless he conducted us into it, and when we had verified his statement we returned downstairs.

"Before we go," said Thorndyke, "I will just see what is opposite those holes."

He walked to the window and was just looking out through one of the holes when the sergeant, who had followed him closely, suddenly slid along the floor and nearly fell.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed, recovering himself and stooping to pick up some small object. "There's a dangerous thing to leave lying about the floor. Bit of slate pencil—at least, that is what it looks like."

He handed it to Thorndyke, who glanced at it and remarked, "Yes, things that roll under the foot are apt to produce broken bones; but I think you had better take care of it. I may have to ask you something about it at the trial."

We bade the sergeant farewell at the bottom of the lane, and as we turned into the footpath to the station I said: "We don't seem to have picked up very much more than Mayfield told us—excepting that bit of slate pencil. By the way, why did you tell the sergeant to keep it?"

"On the broad principle of keeping everything, relevant or irrelevant. But it wasn't slate pencil; it was a fragment of a small carbon rod."

"Presumably dropped by the electricians who had been working in the room," said I, and then asked, "Have you come to any decision about this case?"

"Yes; I shall undertake the defence."

"Well," I said, "I can't imagine what line you will take. Strong suspicion would have fallen on these two persons even if there had been no witnesses; but the evidence of those two eye-witnesses seems to clench the matter."

"Precisely," said Thorndyke. "That is my position. I rest my case on the evidence of those two men—as I hope it will appear under cross-examination."

This statement of Thorndyke's gave me much food for reflection during the days that followed. But it was not very nourishing food, for the case still remained perfectly incomprehensible. To be sure, if the evidence of the two eye-witnesses could be shown to be false, the case against the prisoners would break down, since it would bring another suspected person into view. But their evidence was clearly not false. They were men of known respectability and no one doubted the truth of their statements.

Nor was the obscurity of the case lightened in any way by Thorndyke's proceedings. We called together on the two prisoners, but from neither did we elicit any fresh facts. Neither could establish a clear alibi or suggest any explanation of the eye-witnesses' statements. They gave a simple denial of having been in the house at that time or of having ever taken up the floor.

Both prisoners, however, impressed me favourably. Bland, whom we interviewed at Brixton, seemed a pleasant, manly fellow, frank and straightforward though quite shrewd and business-like; while Miss Annesley, whom we saw at Holloway, was a really charming young lady—sweet-faced, dignified and very gracious and gentle in manner. In one respect, indeed, I found her disappointing. The picturesque coil had disappeared from the top of her head and her hair had been shortened ("bobbed" is, I believe, the correct term) into a mere fringe. Thorndyke also noticed the change, and in fact commented on it.

"Yes," she admitted, "it is a disimprovement in my case. It doesn't suit me. But I really had no choice. When I was in Paris in the spring I had an accident. I was having my hair cleaned with petrol when it caught fire. It was most alarming. The hairdresser had the presence of mind to throw a damp towel over my head, and that saved my life. But my hair was nearly

all burnt. There was nothing for it but to have it trimmed as evenly as possible. But it looked horrid at first. I had my photograph taken by Barton soon after I came home, just as a record, you know, and it looks awfully odd. I look like a Bluecoat boy."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "when did you return?"

"I landed in England about the middle of April and went straight to my little flat at Paddington, where I have been living ever since."

"You don't remember where you were on the eighteenth of May?"

"I was living at my flat, but I can't remember what I did on that day. You don't, as a rule, unless you keep a diary, which I do not."

This was not very promising. As we came away from the prison, I felt, on the one hand, a conviction that this sweet, gracious lady could have had no hand in this horrible crime, and on the other an utter despair of extricating her from the web of circumstances in which she had become enmeshed.

From Thorndyke I could gather nothing, except that he was going on with his investigations—a significant fact, in his case. To my artfully disguised questions he had one invariable reply: "My dear Jervis, you have read the evidence, you have seen the house, you have all the facts. Think the case over and consider the possibilities of cross-examination." And that was all I could get out of him.

He was certainly very busy, but his activities only increased my bewilderment. He sent a well-known architect down to make a scale-plan of the house and grounds; and he dispatched Polton to take photographs of the place from every possible point of view. The latter, indeed, was up to his eyes in work, and enjoying himself amazingly, but as secret as an oyster. As he went about, beaming with happiness and crinkling with self-complacency, he exasperated me to that extent that I could have banged his little head against the wall. In short, though I had watched the development of the case from the beginning, I was still without a glimmer of understanding of it even when I took my seat in court on the morning of the trial.

It was a memorable occasion, and every incident in it is still vivid in my memory. Particularly do I remember looking with a sort of horrified

fascination at the female prisoner, standing by her friend in the dock, pale but composed and looking the very type and picture of womanly beauty and dignity; and reflecting with a shudder that the graceful neck—looking longer and more slender from the shortness of the hair—might very probably be, within a matter of days, encircled by the hangman's rope. These lugubrious reflections were interrupted by the entrance of two persons, a man and a woman, who were apparently connected with the case, since as they took their seats they both looked towards the dock and exchanged silent greetings with the prisoners.

"Do you know who those people are, Mayfield?" I asked.

"That is Mr. Julius Wicks, Mr. Bland's partner, and his fiancée, Miss Eugenia Kropp, the film actress," he replied.

I was about to ask him if they were here to give evidence when, the preliminaries having come to an end, the counsel for the Crown, Sir John Turville, rose and began his opening speech.

It was a good speech and eminently correct; but its very moderation made it the more damaging. It began with an outline of the facts, almost identical with Mayfield's summary, and a statement of the evidence which would presently be given by the principal witnesses.

"And now," said Sir John, when he had finished his recital, "let us bring these facts to a focus. Considered as a related group, this is what they show us. On the sixteenth of September there is found, concealed under the floor of a certain room in a certain house, the body of a woman who has evidently been murdered. That woman is the separated wife of a man who is on affectionate terms with another woman whom he would admittedly wish to marry and who would be willing to marry him. This murdered woman is, in short, the obstacle to the marriage desired by these two persons. Now the house in which the corpse is concealed is the property of one of those two persons, and both of them have access to it; and no other person has access to it. Here, then, to begin with, is a set of profoundly suspicious circumstances.

"But there are others far more significant. That unfortunate lady, the unwanted wife of the prisoner, Bland, disappeared mysteriously on the eighteenth of last May; and witnesses will prove that the body was deposited under the floor on or about that date. Now, on or about that



same date, in that same house, in that same room, in the same part of that room, those two persons, the prisoners at the bar, were seen by two eminently respectable witnesses in the act of concealing some large object under the floor. What could that object have been? The floor of the room has been taken up and nothing whatever but the corpse of this poor murdered lady has been found under it. The irresistible conclusion is that those two persons were then and there engaged in concealing that corpse.

"To sum up, then, the reasons or believing that the prisoners are guilty of the crime with which they are charged are threefold. They had an intelligible and strong motive to commit that crime; they had the opportunity to commit it; and we have evidence from two eye-witnesses which makes it practically an observed fact that the prisoners did actually commit that crime."

As the Crown counsel sat down, pending the swearing of the first witness, I turned to Thorndyke and said anxiously: "I can't imagine what you are going to reply to that."

"My reply," he answered quietly, "will be largely governed by what I am able to elicit in cross-examination." Here the first witness was called—the electrician who discovered the body—and gave his evidence, but Thorndyke made no cross-examination. He was followed by the sergeant, who described the discovery in more detail. As the Crown counsel sat down, Thorndyke rose, and I pricked up my ears.

"Have you mentioned everything that you saw or found in this room?" he asked.

"Yes, at that time. Later—on the second of October—I found a small piece of a carbon pencil on the floor of the front room near the window."

He produced from his pocket an envelope from which he extracted the fragment of the alleged "slate pencil" and passed it to Thorndyke, who, having passed to the judge with the intimation that he wished it to be put in evidence, sat down. The judge inspected the fragment curiously and then cast an inquisitive glance at Thorndyke—as he had done once or twice before. For my colleague's appearance in the role of counsel was a rare event, and one usually productive of surprises.

To the long succession of witnesses who followed Thorndyke listened

attentively but did not cross-examine, I saw the judge look at him curiously from time to time and my own curiosity grew more and more intense. Evidently he was saving himself up for the crucial witnesses. At length the name of James Brodie was called, and a serious-looking elderly workman entered the box. He gave his evidence clearly and confidently, though with manifest reluctance, and I could see that his vivid description of that sinister scene made a great impression on the jury. When the examination in chief was finished, Thorndyke rose, and the judge settled himself to listen with an air of close attention.

"Have you ever been inside 'The Larches'?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, sir. I've passed the house twice every day for years, but I've never been inside it."

"When you looked in through the shutter, was the room well lighted?"

"No, 'twas very dim. I could only just see what the people were doing."

"Yet you recognised Miss Annesley quite clearly?"

"Not at first, I didn't. Not until she came and stood in the archway. The light seemed quite good there."

"Did you see her come out of the front room and walk to the arch?"

"No. I saw her in the front room and then something must have stopped up the hole, for 'twas all dark. Then the hole got clear again and I saw her standing in the arch. But I only saw her for a moment or two. Then the hole got stopped again and when it opened she was back in the front room."

"How did you know that the woman in the front room was Miss Annesley? Could you see her face in that dim light?"

"No, but I could tell her by her dress. She wore a striped pinafore with a big, white sailor-collar. Besides, there wasn't nobody else there."

"And with regard to Mr. Bland. Did you see him walk out of the front room and up to the arch?"

"No. 'Twas the same as with Miss Annesley. Something kept passing across the hole. I see him in the front room; then I see him in the arch and then I see him in the front room again."

"When they were in the archway, were they moving or standing still?"

"They both seemed to be standing quite still."

"Was Miss Annesley looking straight towards you?"

"No. Her face was turned away a little."

"I want you to look at these photographs and tell us if any of them shows the head in the position in which you saw it."

He handed a bundle of photographs to the witness, who looked at them, one after another, and at length picked out one.

"That is exactly how she looked," said he. "She might have been standing for this very picture."

He passed the photograph to Thorndyke, who noted the number written on it and passed it to the judge, who also noted the number and laid it on his desk. Thorndyke then resumed: "You say the light was very dim in the front room. Were the electric lamps alight?"

"None that I could see were alight."

"How many electric lamps could you see?"

"Well, there was three hanging from the ceiling and there was two standards on the mantelpiece and one on the sideboard. None of them was alight."

"Was there only one standard on the sideboard?"

"There may have been more, but I couldn't see 'em because I could only see just one corner of the sideboard."

"Could you see the whole of the mantelpiece?"

"Yes. There was a standard lamp at each end."

"Could you see anything on the near side of the mantelpiece?"

"There was a table there: a folding table with twisted legs. But I could only see part of that. The side of the arch cut it off."

"You have said that you could see Miss Annesley quite clearly and could see how she was dressed. Could you see how her hair was arranged?"

"Yes. 'Twas done up on the top of her head in what they calls a bun and

there was a sort of a skewer stuck through it."

As the witness gave this answer, a light broke on me. Not a very clear light, for the mystery was still unsolved. But I could see that Thorndyke had a very definite strategic plan. And, glancing at the dock, I was immediately aware that the prisoners had seen the light, too.

"You have described what looked like a hole in the floor," Thorndyke resumed, "where some boards had been raised, near the middle of the room. Was that hole nearer the sideboard or nearer the mantelpiece?"

"It was nearer the mantelpiece," the witness replied; on which Thorndyke sat down, the witness left the box, and both the judge and the counsel for the prosecution rapidly turned over their notes with evident surprise.

The next witness was Albert Stanton and his evidence was virtually a repetition of Brodie's; and when, in cross Thorndyke put over again the same series of questions, he elicited precisely the same answers even to the recognition of the same photograph. And again I began to see a glimmer of light. But only a glimmer.

Stanton being the last of the witnesses for the Crown, his brief re-examination by Sir John Turville completed the case for the prosecution. Thereupon Thorndyke rose and announced that he called witnesses, and forthwith the first of them appeared in the box. This was Frederick Stokes, A.R.I.B.A., architect, and he deposed that he had made a careful survey of the house called "The Larches" at Lower Ditton and prepared a plan on the scale of half an inch to a foot. He swore that the plan—of which he produced the original and a number of lithographed duplicates—was true and exact in every respect. Thorndyke took the plans from him and passing them to the judge asked that the original should be put in evidence and the duplicates handed to the jury.

The next witness was Joseph Barton of Kensington, photographer. He deposed to having taken photographs of Miss Annesley on various occasions, the last being on the twenty-third of last April. He produced copies of them all with the date written on each. He swore that the dates written were the correct dates. The photographs were handed up to the judge, who looked them over, one by one. Suddenly he seemed, as it were, to stiffen and turned quickly from the photographs to his notes; and I

knew that he had struck the last portrait—the one with the short hair.

As the photographer left the box, his place was taken by no less a person than our ingenious laboratory assistant; who, having taken his place, beamed on the judge, the jury and the court in general, with a face wreathed in crinkly smiles. Nathaniel Polton, being sworn, deposed that, on the fifteenth of October, he proceeded to "The Larches" at Lower Ditton and took three photographs of the ground-floor rooms. The first was taken through the right-hand hole of the shutter marked A in the plan; the second through the left-hand hole, and the third from a point inside the back room between the windows and nearer to the window marked B. He produced those photographs with the particulars written on each. He had also made some composite photographs showing the two prisoners dressed as the witnesses, Brodie and Stanton, had described them. The bodies in those photographs were the bodies of Miss Winifred Blake and Mr. Robert Anstey, K.C., respectively. On these bodies the heads of the prisoners had been printed; and here Polton described the method of substitution in detail. The purpose of the photographs was to show that a photograph could be produced with the head of one person and the body of another. He also deposed to having seen and taken possession of two photographs, one of each of the two prisoners, which he found in the bedroom and which he now produced and passed to the judge. And this completed his evidence.

Thorndyke now called the prisoner, Bland, and having elicited from him a sworn denial of the charge, proceeded to examine him respecting the profits from his three picture theatres; which, it appeared, amount to over six thousand pounds per annum.

"In the event of your death, what becomes of this valuable property?"

"If my wife had been alive it would have gone to her, but as she is dead, it goes to my partner and manager, Mr. Julius Wicks."

"In whose custody was the house at Ditton while Miss Annesley was in France?"

"In mine. The keys were in my possession."

"Were the keys ever out of your possession?"

"Only for one day. My partner, Mr. Wicks, asked to be allowed to use

the boat for a trip on the river and to take a meal in the house. So I lent him the keys, which he returned the next day."

After a short cross-examination, Bland returned to the dock and was succeeded by Miss Annesley, who, having given a sworn denial of the charge, described her movements in France and in London about the period of the crime. She also described, in answer to a question, the circumstances under which she had lost her hair.

"Can you remember the date on which this accident happened?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes. It was on the thirtieth of March. I made a note of the date, so that I could see how long my hair took to grow."

As Thorndyke sat down, the counsel for the prosecution rose and made a somewhat searching cross-examination, but without in any way shaking the prisoner's evidence. When this was concluded and Miss Annesley had returned to the dock, Thorndyke rose to address the court for the defence.

"I shall not occupy your time, gentlemen," he began, "by examining the whole mass of evidence nor by arguing the question of motive. The guilt or innocence of the prisoners turns on the accuracy or inaccuracy of the evidence of the two witnesses, Brodie and Stanton; and to the examination of that evidence I shall confine myself.

"Now that evidence, as you may have noticed, presents some remarkable discrepancies. In the first place, both witnesses describe what they saw in identical terms. They saw exactly the same things in exactly the same relative positions. But this is a physical impossibility, if they were really looking into a room; for they were looking in from different points of view; through different holes, which were two feet six inches apart. But there is another much more striking discrepancy. Both these men have described, most intelligently, fully and clearly, a number of objects in that room which were totally invisible to both of them; and they have described as only partly visible other objects which were in full view. Both witnesses, for instance, have described the mantelpiece with its two standard lamps and a table with twisted legs on the near side of it; and both saw one corner only of the sideboard. But if you look at the architect's plan and test it with a straight-edge, you will see that neither the mantelpiece nor the table could possibly be seen by either. The whole

of that side of the room was hidden from them by the jamb of the arch. While as to the sideboard, the whole of it, with its two standards, was visible to Brodie, and to Stanton the whole of it excepting a small portion of the near side. But further, if you lay the straight-edge on the point marked C and test it against the sides of the arch, you will see that a person standing at that spot would get the exact view described by both the witnesses. I pass round duplicate plans with pencil lines ruled on them; but in case you find any difficulty in following the plans, I have put in the photographs of the room taken by Polton. The first photograph was taken through the hole used by Brodie, and shows exactly what he would have seen on looking through that hole; and you see that it agrees completely with the plan but disagrees totally with his description. The second photograph shows what was visible to Stanton; and the third photograph, taken from the point marked C, shows exactly the view described by both the witnesses, but which neither of them could possibly have seen under the circumstances stated.

"Now what is the explanation of these extraordinary discrepancies? No one, I suppose, doubts the honesty of, these witnesses. I certainly do not. I have no doubt whatever that they were telling the truth to the best of their belief. Yet they have stated that they saw things which it is physically impossible that they could have seen. How can these amazing contradictions be reconciled?"

He paused, and in the breathless silence, I noticed that the judge was gazing at him with an expression of intense expectancy; an expression that was reflected on the jury and indeed on every person present.

"Well, gentlemen," he resumed, "there is one explanation which completely reconciles these contradictions; and that explanation also reconciles all the other strange contradictions and discrepancies which you may have noticed. If we assume that these two men, instead of looking through an arch into a room, as they believed, were really looking at a moving picture thrown on a screen stretched across the arch, all the contradictions vanish. Everything becomes perfectly plain, consistent and understandable."



"Thus both men, from two different points of view, saw exactly the same scene; naturally, if they were both looking at the same picture, but otherwise quite impossible. Again, both men, from the point A, saw a view which was visible only from the point C. Perfectly natural if they were both looking at a picture taken from the point C; for a picture is the same picture from whatever point of view it is seen. But otherwise a physical impossibility.

"You may object that these men would have seen the difference between a picture and a real room. Perhaps they would, even in that dim light—if they had looked at the scene with both eyes. But each man was looking with only one eye—through a small hole. Now it requires the use of both eyes to distinguish between a solid object and a flat picture. To a one-eyed man there is no difference—which is probably the reason that one-eyed artists are such accurate draughtsmen—they see the world around them as a flat picture, just as they draw it, whereas a two-eyed artist has to turn the solid into the flat. For the same reason, if you look at a picture with one eye shut it tends to look solid, really because the frame and the solid objects around it have gone flat. So that, if this picture was coloured, as it must have been, it would have been indistinguishable, to these one-eyed observers, from the solid reality.

"Then, let us see how the other contradictions disappear. There is the appearance of the prisoner Annesley. She was seen—on or after the eighteenth of May—with her long hair coiled on the top of her head. But at that date her hair was quite short. You have heard the evidence and you have the photograph taken on the twenty-third of April showing her with short hair, like a man's. Here is a contradiction which vanishes at once if you realise that these men were not looking at Miss Annesley at all, but at a photograph of her taken more than a year previously.

"And everything agrees with this assumption. The appearance of Miss Annesley has been declared by the witnesses to be identical with that photograph—a copy of which was in the house and could have been copied by anyone who had access to the house. Her figure was perfectly stationary. She appeared suddenly in the arch and then disappeared; she was not seen to come or to go. And the light kept coming and going, with intervals of darkness which are inexplicable, but that exactly fitted these appearances and disappearances. Then the figure was well lighted,



though the room was nearly dark. Of course it was well lighted. It had to be recognised. And of course the rest of the room was dimly lighted, because the film-actors in the background had to be unrecognised.

"Then there is the extraordinary dress; the striped pinafore with the great white collar and the painter's blouse worn by Bland. Why this ridiculous masquerade? Its purpose is obvious. It was to make these observers believe that the portraits in the arch—which they mistook for real people—were the same persons as the film-actors in the background, whose features they could not distinguish. And Mr. Polton has shown us how the clothing of the portraits was managed.

"Then there is the lighting of the room. How was it lighted? None of the electric lamps was alight. But—a piece of a carbon pencil from an arc lamp, such as kinematographers use, has been found near the point C, from which spot the picture would have been taken and exhibited; and the electric light meter showed, about this date, an unaccountable leakage of current such as would be explained by the use of an arc lamp.

"Then the evidence of the witnesses shows the hole in the floor in the wrong place. Of course it could not have been a real hole, for the gas and electric mains were just underneath. It was probably an oblong of black paper. But why was it in the wrong place? The explanation, I suggest, is that the picture was taken before the murder (and probably shown before the murder, too); that the spot shown was the one in which it was intended to bury the body, but that when the floor was taken up after the murder, the mains were found underneath and a new spot had to be chosen.

"Finally—as to the discrepancies—what has become of the third spectator? The mysterious man who came to the gate and called in these two men from the lane—along which they were known to pass every day at about the same time? Who is this mysterious individual? And where is he? Can we give him a name? Can we say that he is at this moment in this court, sitting amongst the spectators, listening to the pleadings in defence of his innocent victims, the prisoners who stand at the bar on their deliverance? I affirm, gentlemen, that we can. And more than that it is not permitted to me to say."

He paused, and a strange, impressive hush fell on the court. Men and

women furtively looked about them; the jury stared openly into the body of the court, and the judge, looking up from his notes, cast a searching glance among the spectators. Suddenly my eye lighted on Mr. Wicks and his fiancée. The man was wiping away the sweat that streamed down his ashen, ghastly face; the woman had rested her head in her hands, and was trembling as if in an ague-fit.

I was not the only observer. One after another—spectators, ushers, jurymen, counsel, judge—noticed the terror-stricken pair, until every eye in the court was turned on them. And the silence that fell on the place was like the silence of the grave.

It was a dramatic moment. The air was electric; the crowded court tense with emotion. And Thorndyke, looking, with his commanding figure and severe impassive face, like a personification of Fate and Justices stood awhile motionless and silent, letting emotion set the coping-stone on reason.

At length he resumed his address. "Before concluding," he began, "I have to say a few words on another aspect of the case. The learned counsel for the prosecution, referring to the motive for this crime, has suggested a desire on the part of the prisoners to remove the obstacle to their marriage. But it has been given in evidence that there are other persons who had a yet stronger and more definite motive for getting rid of the deceased Lucy Bland. You have heard that in the event of Bland's death, his partner, Julius Wicks, stood to inherit property of the value of six thousand pounds per annum, provided that Bland's wife was already dead. Now, the murder of Lucy Bland has fulfilled one of the conditions for the devolution of this property; and if you should convict and his lordship should sentence the prisoner, Bland, then his death on the gallows would fulfil the other condition and this great property would pass to his partner, Julius Wicks—This is a material point; as is also the fact that Wicks is, as you have heard, an expert film-producer and kinema operator; that he has been proved to have had access to the house at Ditton, and that he is engaged to a film-actress.

"In conclusion, I submit that the evidence of Brodie and Stanton makes it certain that they were looking at a moving picture, and that all the other evidence confirms that certainty. But the evidence of this moving

picture is the evidence of a conspiracy to throw suspicion on the prisoners. But a conspiracy implies conspirators. And there can be no doubt that those conspirators were the actual murderers of Lucy Bland. But if this be so, and I affirm that there can be no possible doubt that it is so, then it follows that the prisoners are innocent of the crime with which they are charged, and I accordingly ask you for a verdict of 'Not Guilty.'"

As Thorndyke sat down a faint hum arose in the court; but still all eyes were turned towards Wicks and Eugenia Kropp. A moment later the pair rose and walked unsteadily towards the door. But here, I noticed, Superintendent Miller had suddenly appeared and stood at the portal with a uniformed constable. As Wicks and Miss Kropp reached the door, I saw the constable shake his head. With, or without authority, he was refusing to let them leave the court. There was a brief pause. Suddenly there broke out a confused uproar; a scuffle, a loud shriek, the report of a pistol and the shattering of glass; and then I saw Miller grasping the man's wrists and pinning him to the wall, while the shrieking woman struggled with the constable to get to the door.

After the removal of the disturbers—in custody—events moved swiftly. The Crown counsel's reply was brief and colourless, practically abandoning the charge, while the judge's summing-up was a mere précis of Thorndyke's argument with a plain direction for an acquittal. But nothing more was needed; for the jury had so clearly made up their minds that the clerk had hardly uttered his challenge when the foreman replied with the verdict of "Not Guilty." A minute later, when the applause had subsided and after brief congratulations by the judge, the prisoners came down from the dock, into the court, moist-eyed but smiling, to wring Thorndyke's hands and thank him for this wonderful deliverance.

"Yes," agreed Mayfield—himself disposed furtively to wipe his eyes—"that is the word. It was wonderful And yet it was all so obvious—when you knew."



## V. — A SOWER OF PESTILENCE

THE affectionate relations that existed between Thorndyke and his devoted follower, Polton, were probably due, at least in part, to certain similarities in their characters. Polton was an accomplished and versatile craftsman, a man who could do anything, and do it well; and Thorndyke has often said that if he had not been a man of science, he would, by choice, have been a skilled craftsman. Even as things were, he was a masterly manipulator of all instruments of research, and a good enough workman to devise new appliances and processes and to collaborate with his assistant in carrying them out.

Such a collaboration was taking place when the present case opened. It had occurred to Thorndyke that lithography might be usefully applied to medico-legal research, and on this particular morning he and Polton were experimenting in the art of printing from the stone. In the midst of their labours the bell from our chambers below was heard to ring, and Polton, reluctantly laying down the inking roller and wiping his hands on the southern aspect of his trousers, departed to open the door.

"It's a Mr. Rabbage," he reported on his return. "Says he has an appointment with you, sir."

"So he has," said Thorndyke. "And, as I understand that he is going to offer us a profound mystery for solution, you had better come down with me, Jervis, and hear what he has to say."

Mr. Rabbage turned out to be a elderly gentleman who, as we entered, peered at us through a pair of deep, concave spectacles and greeted us "with a smile that was childlike and bland." Thorndyke looked him over and adroitly brought him to the point.

"Yes," said Mr. Rabbage, "it is really a most mysterious affair that has brought me here. I have already laid it before a very talented detective officer whom I know slightly—a Mr. Badger; but he frankly admitted that it was beyond him and strongly advised me to consult you."

"Inspector Badger was kind enough to pay me a very handsome compliment," said Thorndyke.

"Yes. He said that you would certainly be able to solve this mystery without any difficulty. So here I am. And perhaps I had better explain who I am, in case you don't happen to know my name. I am the director of the St. Francis Home of Rest for aged, invalid and destitute cats: an institution where these deserving animals are enabled to convert the autumn of their troubled lives into a sort of Indian summer of comfort and repose. The home is, I may say, my own venture. I support it out of my own means. But I am open to receive contributions; and to that end there is secured to the garden railings a large box with a wide slit and an inscription inviting donations of money, of articles of value, or of food or delicacies for the inmates."

"And do you get much?" I asked.

"Of money," he replied, "very little. Of articles of value, none at all. As to gifts of food, they are numerous, but they often display a strange ignorance of the habits of the domestic cat. Such things, for instance, as pickles and banana-skins, though doubtless kindly meant, are quite unsuitable as diet. But the most singular donation that I have ever received was that which I found in the box the day before yesterday. There were a number of articles, but all apparently from the same donor; and their character was so mysterious that I showed them to Mr. Badger, as I have told you, who was as puzzled as I was and referred me to you. The collection comprised three ladies' purses, a morocco-leather wallet and a small aluminium case. I have brought them with me to show you."

"What did the purses contain?" Thorndyke asked.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Rabbage, gazing at us with wide-open eyes. "They were perfectly empty. That is the astonishing circumstance."

"And the leather wallet?"

"Empty, too, excepting for a few odd papers."

"And the aluminium case?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Rabbage, "that was the most amazing of all. It contained a number of glass tubes! and those tubes contained—now, what do you suppose?" He paused impressively, and then, as neither of us offered a suggestion, he answered his own question. "Fleas and lice! Yes, actually! Fleas and lice! Isn't that an extraordinary donation?"

"It is certainly," Thorndyke agreed. "Anyone might have known that, with a houseful of cats, you could produce your own fleas."

"Exactly," said Mr. Rabbage. "That is what instantly occurred to me, and also, I may say, to Mr. Badger. But let me show you the things."

He produced from a hand-bag and spread out on the table a collection of articles which were, evidently, the "husks" of the gleanings of some facetious pickpocket, to whom Mr. Rabbage's donation-box must have appeared as a perfect God-send. Thorndyke picked up the purses, one after the other, and having glanced at their empty interiors, put them aside. The letter-wallet he looked through more attentively, but without disturbing its contents, and then he took up and opened the aluminium case. This certainly was a rather mysterious affair. It opened like a cigarette case. One side was fitted with six glass specimen-tubes, each provided with a well-fitting parchment cap, perforated with a number of needle-holes; and of the six tubes, four contained fleas—about a dozen in each tube—some of which were dead, but others still alive, and the remaining two lice, all of which were dead. In the opposite side of the case, secured with a catch, was a thin celluloid note-tablet on which some numbers had been written in pencil.

"Well," said Mr. Rabbage, when the examination was finished, "can you offer any solution of the mystery?"

Thorndyke shook his head gravely. "Not offhand," he replied. "This is a matter which will require careful consideration. Leave these things with me for further examination and I will let you know, in the course of a few days, what conclusion we arrive at."

"Thank you," said Mr. Rabbage, rising and holding out his hand. "You have my address, I think."

He glanced at his watch, snatched up his hand-bag and darted to the door; and a moment later we heard him bustling down the stairs in the hurried, strenuous manner that is characteristic of persons who spend most of their lives doing nothing.

"I'm surprised at you, Thorndyke," I said when he had gone, "encouraging that ass, Badger, in his silly practical jokes. Why didn't you tell this old nincompoop that he had just got a pick-pocket's leavings and

have done with it?"

"For the reason, my learned brother, that I haven't done with it. I am a little curious as to whose pocket has been picked, and what that person was doing with a collection of fleas and lice."

"I don't see that it is any business of yours," said I. "And as to the vermin, I should suggest that the owner of the case is an entomologist who specialises in epizoa. Probably he is collecting varieties and races."

"And how," asked Thorndyke, opening the case and handing it to me, "does my learned friend account for the faint scent of aniseed that exhales from this collection?"

"I don't account for it at all," said I. "It is a nasty smell. I noticed it when you first opened the case. I can only suppose that the flea-merchant likes it, or thinks that the fleas do."

"The latter seems the more probable," said Thorndyke, "for you notice that the odour seems to principally from the parchment caps of the four tubes that contain fleas. The caps of the louse tubes don't seem to be scented. And now let us have a little closer look at the letter-wallet."

He opened the wallet and took out its contents, which were unilluminating enough. Apparently it had been gutted by the pickpocket and only the manifestly valueless articles left. One or two bills, recording purchases at shops, a time-table, a brief letter in French, without its envelope and bearing neither address, date, nor signature, and a set of small maps mounted on thin card: this was the whole collection, and not one of the articles appeared to furnish the slightest clue to the identity of the owner.

Thorndyke looked at the letter curiously and read it aloud.

"It is just a little singular," he remarked, "that this note should be addressed to nobody by name, should bear neither address, date, nor signature, and should have had its envelope removed. There is almost an appearance of avoiding the means of identification. Yet the matter is simple and innocent enough: just an appointment to meet at the Mile End Picture Palace. But these maps are more interesting; in fact, they are quite curious."

He took them out of the wallet—lifting them carefully by the edges, I noticed—and laid them out on the table. There were seven cards, and each had a map, or rather a section, pasted on both sides. The sections had been cut out of a street map of London, and as each card was three inches by four and a half, each section represented an area of one mile by a mile and a half. They had been very carefully prepared neatly stuck on the cards and varnished, and every section bore a distinguishing letter. But the most curious feature was a number of small circles drawn in pencil on various parts of the maps, each circle enclosing a number.

"What do you make of those circles, Thorndyke?" I asked.

"One can only make a speculative hypothesis," he replied. "I am disposed to associate them with the fleas and lice. You notice that the maps all represent the most squalid parts of East London—Spitalfields, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, and so forth, where the material would be plentiful; and you also notice that the celluloid tablet in the insect case bears a number of pencilled jottings that might refer to these maps. Here, for instance, is a note, 'B 21 a + b—,' and you observe that each entry has an a and a b with either a plus or a minus sign. Now, if we assume that a means fleas and b lice, or vice versa, the maps and the notes together might form a record of collections or experiments with a geographical basis."

"They might," I agreed, "but there isn't a particle of evidence that they do. It is a most fantastic hypothesis. We don't know, and we have no reason to suppose, that the insect-case and the wallet were the property of the same person. And we have no means of finding out whether they were or were not."

"There I think you do us an injustice, Jervis," said he. "Are we not lithographers?"

"I don't see where the lithography comes in," said I.

"Then you ought to. This is a test case. These maps are varnished, and are thus virtually lithographic transfer paper; and the celluloid tablet also has a non-absorbent surface. Now, if you handle transfer paper carelessly when drawing on it, you are apt to find, when you have transferred to the stone, that your finger prints ink up, as well as the drawing. So it is possible that if we put these maps and the note-tablet on the stone, we



may be able to ink up the prints of the fingers that have handled them and so prove whether they were or were not the same fingers."

"That would be interesting as an experiment," said I, "though I don't see that it matters two straws whether they were the same or not."

"Probably it doesn't," he replied, "though it may. But we have a new method and we may as well try it."

We took the things up to the laboratory and explained the problem to Polton, who entered into the inquiry with enthusiasm. Producing from a cupboard a fresh stone, he picked the maps out of the wallet one by one (with a pair of watchmaker's tweezers) and fell to work forthwith on the task of transferring the invisible—and possibly non-existent—fingerprints from the maps and the note-tablet to the stone. I watched him go through the various processes in his neat, careful, dexterous fashion and hoped that all his trouble would not be in vain. Nor was it; for when he began cautiously ink up the stone, it was evident that something was there, though it was not so evident what that something was. Presently, however, the vague markings took more definite shape, and now could be recognised eight rather confused masses of finger-prints, badly smeared, some incomplete, and all mixed up and superimposed so as to make the identification of any one print almost an impossibility.

Thorndyke looked them over dubiously. "It is a dreadful muddle," said he, "but I think we can pick out the prints well enough for identification if that should be necessary. Which of these is the notes tablet, Polton?"

"The one in the right-hand top corner, sir," was the reply.

"Ah!" said Thorndyke, "then that answers our question. Confused as the impressions are, you can see quite plainly that the left thumb is the same thumb as that on the maps."

"Yes," I agreed after making the comparison, "there is not much doubt that they are the same. And now the question is, what about it?"

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "that is the question." And with this we retired from the laboratory, leaving Polton joyfully pulling off proofs.

During the next few days I had a vague impression that my colleague was working at this case, though with what object I could not imagine.

Mr. Rabbage's problem was too absurd to take seriously, and Thorndyke was beyond working out cases, as he used to at one time, for the sake of mere experience. However, a day or two later, a genuine case turned up and occupied our attention to some purpose.

It was about six in the evening when Mr. Nicholas Balcombe called on us by appointment, and proceeded, in a business-like fashion, to state his case.

"I was advised by my friend Stalker, of the Griffin Life Assurance Office, to consult you," said he. "Stalker tells me that you have got him out of endless difficulties, and I am hoping that you will be able to help me out of mine, though they are not so clearly within your province as Stalker's. But you will know about that better than I do.

"I am the manager of Rutherford's Bank—the Cornhill Branch—and I have just had a very alarming experience. The day before yesterday, about three in the afternoon, a deed-box was handed in with a note from one of our customers—Mr. Pilcher, the solicitor, of Pilcher, Markham and Sudburys—asking us to deposit it in our strong-room and give the bearer a receipt for it. Of course this was done, in the ordinary way of business; but there was one exceptional circumstance that turns out to have been, as it would appear, providential. Owing to the increase of business our strong-room had become insufficient for our needs, and we have lately had a second one built on the most modern lines and perfectly fire-proof. This had not been taken into use when Pilcher's deed-box arrived, but as the old room was very full, I opened the new room and saw the deed-box deposited in it.

"Well, nothing happened up to the time that I left the bank, but about two o'clock in the morning the night watchman noticed a smell of burning, and on investigating, located the smell as apparently proceeding from the door of the new strong-room. He at once reported to the senior clerk, whose turn it was to sleep on the premises, and the latter at once telephoned to the police station. In a few minutes a police officer arrived with a couple of firemen and a hand-extinguisher. The clerk took them down to the strong-room and unlocked the door. As soon as it was opened, a volume of smoke and fumes burst out, and then they saw the deed-box—or rather the distorted remains of it—lying on the floor. The

police took possession of what was left, but a very cursory examination on the spot showed that the box was, in effect, an incendiary bomb, with a slow time fuse or some similar arrangement."

"Was any damage done?" Thorndyke asked.

"Mercifully, no," replied Mr. Balcombe. "But just think of what might have happened! If I had put the box in the old strong-room it is certain that thousands of pounds' worth of valuable property would have been destroyed. Or again, if instead of an incendiary bomb the box had contained a high explosive, the whole building would probably have been blown to pieces."

"What explanation does Pilcher give?"

"A very simple one. He knows nothing about it. The note was a forgery; and on the firm's headed paper, or a perfect imitation of it. And mind you," Mr. Balcombe continued, "my experience is not a solitary one. I have made private inquiries of other bank managers, and I find that several of them have been subjected to similar outrages, some with serious results. And probably there are more. They don't talk about these things, you know. Then there are those fires: the great timber fire at Stepney, and those big warehouse fires near the London Docks; there is something queer about them. It looks as if some gang was at work for purposes of pure mischief and destruction."

"You have consulted the police, of course?"

"Yes. And they know something, I feel sure. But they are extremely reticent; so I suppose they don't know enough. At any rate, I should like you to investigate the case independently and so would my directors. The position is most alarming."

"Could you let me see Pilcher's letter?" Thorndyke asked.

"I have brought it with me," said Balcombe. "Thought you would probably want to examine it. I will leave it with you; and if we can give you any other information or assistance, we shall be only too glad."

"Was the box brought by hand?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Yes," replied Balcombe, "but I didn't see the bearer. I can get you a description from the man who received the package, if that would be any

use."

"We may as well have it," said Thorndyke, "and the name and address of the person giving it, in case he is wanted as a witness."

"You shall have it," said Balcombe, rising and picking up his hat. "I will see to it myself. And you will let me know, in due course, if any information comes to hand?"

Thorndyke gave the required promise and our client took his leave.

"Well," I said with a laugh, as the brisk footsteps died away on the stairs, "you have had a very handsome compliment paid you. Our friend seems to think that you are one of those master craftsmen who can make bricks, not only without straw, but without clay. There's absolutely nothing to go on."

"It is certainly rather in the air," Thorndyke agreed. "There is this letter and the description of the man who left the packet, when we get it, and neither of them is likely to help us much."

He looked over the letter and its envelope, held the former up to the light and then handed them to me.

"We ought to find out whether this is Pilcher's own paper or an imitation," said I, when I had examined the letter and envelope without finding anything in the least degree distinctive or characteristic; "because, if it is their paper, the unknown man must have had some sort of connection with their establishment or staff."

"There must have been some sort of connection in any case," said Thorndyke. "Even an imitation implies possession of an original. But you are quite right. It is a line of inquiry, and practically the only one that offers."

The inquiry was made on the following day, and the fact clearly established that the paper was Pitcher's paper, but the ink was not their ink. The handwriting appeared to be disguised, and no one connected with the firm was able to recognise it. The staff, even to the caretaker, were all eminently respectable and beyond suspicion of being implicated in an affair of the kind.

"But after all," said Mr. Pitcher, "there are a hundred ways in which a

sheet of paper may go astray if anyone wants it: at the printer's, the stationer's, or even in this office—for the paper is always in the letter-rack on the table."

Thus our only clue—if so it could be called—came to an end, and I waited with some curiosity to see what Thorndyke would do next. But so far as I could see, he did nothing, nor did he make any reference to this obscure case during the next few days. We had a good deal of other work on hand, and I assumed that this fully occupied his attention.

One evening, about a week later, he made the first reference to the case and a very mysterious communication it seemed to me.

"I have projected a little expedition for to-morrow," said he. "I am proposing to spend the day, or part of it, in the pastoral region of Bethnal Green."

"In connection with any of our cases?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Balcombe's. I have been making some cautious inquiries with Polton's assistance, principally among hawkers and coffee-shop keepers, and I think I have struck a promising track."

"What kind of inquiries have you been making?" said I.

"I have been looking for a man, or men, engaged in giving street entertainments. That is what our data seemed to suggest, among other possibilities."

"Our data!" I exclaimed. "I didn't know we had any."

"We had Balcombe's account of the attempt to burn the bank. That gave us some hint as to the kind of man to look for. And there were certain other data, which my learned friend may recall."

"I don't recall anything suggesting a street entertainer," said I.

"Not directly," he replied. "It was one of several hypotheses, but it is probably the correct one, as I have heard of such a person as I had assumed, and have ascertained where he is likely to be found on certain days. To-morrow I propose to go over his beat in the hope of getting a glimpse of him. If you think of coming with me, I may remind you that it is not a dressy neighbourhood."

On the following morning we set forth about ten o'clock, and as raiment which is inconspicuous at Bethnal Green may be rather noticeable in the Temple, we slipped out by the Tudor Street gate and made our way to Blackfriars Station. In place of the usual "research-case," I noticed that Thorndyke was carrying a somewhat shabby wood-fibre attaché case, and that he had no walking-stick. We got out at Aldgate and presently struck up Vallance Street in the direction of Bethnal Green; and by the brisk pace and the direct route adopted, I judged that Thorndyke had a definite objective. However, when we entered the maze of small streets adjoining the Bethnal Green Road, our pace was reduced to a saunter, and at corners and crossroads Thorndyke halted from time to time to look along the streets; and occasionally he referred to a card which he produced from his pocket, on which were written the names of streets and days of the week.

A couple of hours passed in this apparently aimless perambulation of the back streets.

"It doesn't look as if you were going to have much luck," I remarked, suppressing a yawn. "And I am not sure that we are not, in our turn, being 'spotted'. I have noted a man—a small, shabby-looking fellow, apparently keeping us in view from a distance, though I don't see him at the moment."

"It is quite likely," said Thorndyke. "This is a shady neighbourhood, and any native could see that we don't belong to it. Good morning! Taking a little fresh air?"

The latter question was addressed to a man who was standing at the door of a small coffee-shop, having apparently come to the surface for a "breather."

"Dunno about fresh," was the reply, "but it's the best there is. By the by, I saw one of them blokes what I was a-tellin' you about go by just now. Foreigner with the rats. If you want to see him give a show, I expect you'll find him in that bit of waste ground off Bolter's Rents."

"Bolter's Rents?" Thorndyke repeated. "Is that a turning out of Salcombe Street?"

"Quite right," was the reply. "Half-way up on the right-hand side."

Thanking our informant, Thorndyke strode off up the street, and as we turned the next corner I glanced back. At the moment, the small man whom I had noticed before stepped out of a doorway and came after us at a pace suggesting anxiety not to lose sight of us.

Bolter's Rents turned out to be a wide paved alley, one side of which opened into a patch of waste ground where a number of old houses had been demolished. This space had an unspeakably squalid appearance; for not only had the debris of the demolished houses been left in unsavoury heaps, but the place had evidently been adopted by the neighbourhood as a general dumping-ground for household refuse. The earth was strewn with vegetable, and even animal, leavings; flies and bluebottles hummed around and settled in hundreds on the garbage, and the air was pervaded by an odour like that of an old-fashioned brick dust-bin.

But in spite of these trifling disadvantages, a considerable crowd had collected, mainly composed of women and children; and at the centre of the crowd a man was giving an entertainment with a troupe of performing rats. We had sauntered slowly up the Rents and now halted to look on. At the moment, a white rat was climbing a pole at the top of which a little flag was stuck in a socket. We watched him rapidly climb the pole, seize the flagstaff in his teeth, lift it out of the socket, climb down the pole and deliver the flag to his master. Then a little carriage was produced and the rat harnessed into it, another white rat being dressed in a cloak and placed in the seat, and the latter—introduced to the audience as Lady Murphy—was taken for a drive round the stage.

While the entertainment was proceeding I inspected the establishment and its owner. The stage was composed of light hinged boards opened out on a small four-wheeled hand-cart, apparently home-made. At one end was a largish cage, divided by a wire partition into two parts, one of which contained a number of white and piebald rats, while the inmates of the other compartment were all wild rats; but not, I noted, the common brown or Norway rat, but the old-fashioned British black rat. I remarked upon the circumstance to Thorndyke.

"Yes," he said, "they were probably caught locally. The sewers here will be inhabited by brown rats, but the houses, in an old neighbourhood like this, will be infested principally by the black rat. What do you make of the

exhibitor?"

I had already noticed him, and now unobtrusively examined him again. He was a medium-sized man with a sallow complexion, dark, restless eyes—which frequently wandered in our direction—a crop of stiff, bushy, upstanding hair—he wore no hat—and a ragged beard.

"A Slav of some kind, I should think," was my reply; "a Russian, or perhaps a Lett. But that beard is not perfectly convincing."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "but it is a good make up. Perhaps we had better move on now; we have a deputy, you observe."

As he spoke, the small man whom I had observed following us strolled up the Rents; and as he drew nearer, revealed to my astonished gaze no less a person than our ingenious laboratory assistant, Polton. Strangely altered, indeed, was our usually neat and spruce artificer with his seedy clothing and grubby hands; but as he sauntered up, profoundly unaware of our existence, a faint reminiscence of the familiar crinkly smile stole across his face.

We were just moving off when a chorus of shrieks mingled with laughter arose from the spectators, who hastily scattered right and left, and I had a momentary glimpse of a big black rat bounding across the space, to disappear into one of the many heaps of debris. It seemed that the exhibitor had just opened the cage to take out a black rat when one of the waiting performers—presumably a new recruit—had seized the opportunity to spring out and escape.

"Well," a grinning woman remarked to me, genially, "there's plenty more where that one came from. You should see this place on a moonlight night! Fair alive with 'em it is."

We sauntered up the Rents and along the cross street at the top; and as we went, I reflected on the very singular inquiry in which Thorndyke seemed to be engaged. The rat-tamer's appearance was suspicious. He didn't quite look the part, and his beard was almost certainly a make-up—and a skilful one, too, for it was no mere "property" beard; and the restless, furtive eyes, and a certain suppressed excitement in his bearing, hinted at something more than met the eye. But if this was Mr. Balcombe's incendiary, how had Thorndyke arrived at his identity, and,



above all, by what process of reasoning had he contrived to associate the bank outrage with performing rats? That he had done so, his systematic procedure made quite clear. But how? It had seemed to me that we had not a single fact on which to start an investigation.

We had walked the length of the cross street, and had halted before turning, when a troop of children emerged from the Rents. Then came the exhibitor, towing his cart, with the cage shrouded in a cloth, then more children, and finally, at a little distance, Polton, slouching along idly but keeping the cart in view.

"I think," said Thorndyke, "it would be instructive, as a study in urban sanitation, to have a look round the scene of the late exhibition."

We retraced our steps down Bolter's Rents, now practically deserted, and wandered around the patch of waste land and in among the piles of bricks and rotting timber where the houses had been pulled down.

"Your lady friend was right," said Thorndyke. "This is a perfect Paradise for rats. Convenient residences among the ruins and unlimited provisions to be had for the mere picking up."

"Apparently you were right, too," said I, "as to the species inhabiting these eligible premises. That seems to be a black rat," and I pointed to a deceased specimen that lay near the entrance to a burrow.

Thorndyke stooped over the little corpse, and after a brief inspection, drew a glove on his right hand.

"Yes," he said, "this is a typical specimen of *Mus rattus*, though it is unusually light in colour. I think it will be worth taking away to examine at our leisure."

Glancing round to see that we were unobserved, he opened his attaché case and took from it a largish tin canister and removed the lid—which, I noted, was anointed at the joint with vaseline. Stooping, he picked up the dead rat by the tail with his gloved fingers dropped it into the canister, clapped on the lid, and replaced it in the attache case. Then he pulled off the glove and threw it on a rubbish heap.

"You are mighty particular," said I.

"A dead rat is a dirty thing," said he, "and it was only an old glove."

On our way home I made various cautious attempt to extract from Thorndyke some hint as to the purpose of his investigation and his mode of procedure. But I could extract nothing from him beyond certain generalities.

"When a man," said he, "introduces an incendiary bomb into the strong-room of a bank, we may reasonably inquire as to his motives. And when we have reached the fairly obvious conclusion as to what those motives must be, we may ask ourselves what kind of conduct such motives will probably generate; that is, what sort of activities will be likely to be associated with such motives and with the appropriate state of mind. And when we have decided on that, too, we may look for a person engaged in those activities; and if we find such a person we may consider that we have a *prima facie* case. The rest is a matter of verification."

"That is all very well, Thorndyke," I objected, "but if I find a man trying to set fire to a bank, I don't immediately infer that his customary occupation is exhibiting performing rats in a back street of Bethnal Green."

Thorndyke laughed quietly. "My learned friend's observation is perfectly just. It is not a universal rule. But we are dealing with a specific case in which certain other facts are known to us. Still, the connection, if there is one, has yet to be established. This exhibitor may turn out not to be Balcombe's man after all."

"And if he is not?"

"I think we shall want him all the same; but I shall know better in a couple of hours' time."

What transpired during those two hours I did not discover at the time, for I had an engagement to dine with some legal friends and must needs hurry away as soon as I had purified myself from the effects of our travel in the unclean East. When I returned to our chambers, about half-past ten, I found Thorndyke seated in his easy chair immersed in a treatise on old musical instruments. Apparently he had finished with the case.

"How did Polton get on?" I asked.

"Admirably," replied Thorndyke. "He shadowed our entertaining friend from Bethnal Green to a by street in Ratcliff, where he apparently resides.

But he did more than that. We had made up a little book of a dozen leaves of transfer paper in which I wrote in French some infallible rules for taming rats. Just as the man was going into his house, Polton accosted him and asked him for an expert opinion on these directions. The foreign gentleman was at first impatient and huffy, but when he had glanced at the book, he became interested, and a good deal amused, and finally read the whole set of rules through attentively. Then he handed the book back to Polton and recommended him to follow the rules carefully, offering to supply him with a few rats to experiment on, an offer which Polton asked him to hold over for a day or two.

"As soon as he got home, Polton dismembered the book and put the leaves down on the stone, with this result."

He took from his pocket-book a number of small pieces of paper, each of which was marked more or less distinctly with lithographed reproductions of fingerprints, and laid them on the table. I looked through them attentively, and with a faint sense of familiarity.

"Isn't that left thumb," said I, "rather similar to the print on the maps from Mr. Rabbage's letter wallet?"

"It is identical," he replied. "Here are the proofs of the map-prints and the note-tablet. If you compare them you can see that not only the left thumb but the other prints are the same in all."

Careful comparison showed that this was so.

"But," I exclaimed, "I don't understand this at all. These are the fingerprints of Mr. Rabbage's mysterious entomologist. I thought you were looking for Balcombe's man."

"My impression," he replied "is that they are the same person, though the evidence is far from conclusive. But we shall soon know. I have sworn an information against the foreign gent, and Miller has arranged to raid the house at Ratcliff early to-morrow and as it promises to be a highly interesting event, I propose to be present. Shall I have the pleasure of my learned friend's company?"

"Most undoubtedly," I replied, "though I am absolutely in the dark as to the meaning of the whole affair."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I recommend you to go over the history of both cases systematically in the interval."

Six o'clock on the following morning found us in an empty house in Old Gravel Lane, Ratcliff, in company with Superintendent Miller and three stalwart plain clothes men, awaiting the report of a patrol. We were all dressed in engineers' overalls, reeking with naphthalin. Our trousers were tucked into our socks, and socks and boots were thickly smeared with vaseline, as were our wrists, around which our sleeves were bound closely with tape. These preparations, together with an automatic pistol served out to each of us, gave me some faint inkling of the nature of the case, though it was still very confused in my mind.

About a quarter-past six a messenger arrived and reported that the house which was to be raided was open. Thereupon Miller and one of his men set forth, and the rest of us followed at short intervals. On arriving at the house, which was but a short distance from our rendezvous, we found a stolid plain-clothes man guarding the open door and a frowsy-looking woman, who carried a jug of milk, angrily demanding in very imperfect English to be allowed to pass into her house. Pushing past the protesting housekeeper, we entered the grimy passage, where Miller was just emerging from a ground-floor room.

"That is the woman's quarters," said he, "and the kitchen seems to be a sort of rat-menagerie. We'd better try the first-floor."

He led the way up the stairs, and when he reached the landing he tried the handle of the front room. Finding the door locked or bolted, he passed on to the back room and tried the door of that, with the same result. Then, holding up a warning finger, he proceeded to whistle a popular air in a fine, penetrating tone, and to perform a double shuffle on the bare floor. Almost immediately an angry voice was heard in the front room, and slippered feet padded quickly across the floor. Then a bolt was drawn noisily, the door flew open, and for an instant I had a view of the rat-show man, clothed in a suit of very soiled pyjamas. But it was only for an instant. Even as our eyes met, he tried to slam the door to, and failing—in consequence of an intruding constabulary foot—he sprang back, leaped over a bed and darted through a communicating doorway into the back room and shut and bolted the door.

"That's unfortunate," said Miller. "Now we're going to have trouble."

The superintendent was right. On the first attempt to force the door, a pistol-shot from within blew a hole in the top panel and made a notch in the ear of the would-be invader. The latter replied through the hole, and there followed a sort of snarl and the sound of a shattered bottle. Then, as the constable stood aside and shot after shot came from within, the door became studded with ragged holes. Meanwhile Miller, Thorndyke and I tiptoed out on the landing, and taking as long a run as was possible, flung ourselves, simultaneously on the back-room door. The weight of three large men was too much for the crazy woodwork. As we fell on it together, there was a bursting crash, the hinges tore away, the door flew inwards, and we staggered into the room.

It was a narrow shave for some of us. Before we could recover our footing, the showman had turned with his pistol pointing straight at Miller's head. A bare instant before it exploded, Thorndyke, whose momentum had carried him half-way across the room, caught it with an upward snatch, and its report was followed by a harmless shower of plaster from the ceiling. Immediately our quarry changed his tactics. Leaving the pistol in Thorndyke's grasp, he darted across the room towards a work-bench on which stood a row of upright, cylindrical tins. He was in the act of reaching out for one of these when Thorndyke grasped his pyjamas between the shoulders and dragged him back, while Miller rushed forward and seized him. For a few moments there was a frantic and furious struggle, for the fellow fought with hands and feet and teeth with the ferocity of a wild cat, and, overpowered as he was, still strove to drag his captors towards the bench. Suddenly, once more, a pistol-shot rang out, and then all was still. By accident or design the struggling man had got hold of the pistol that Thorndyke still grasped and pressed the trigger, and the bullet had entered his own head just above the ear.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Miller, rising and wiping his forehead, "that was a near one. If you hadn't stopped him, doctor, we'd all have gone up like rockets."

"You think those things are bombs, then?" said I.

"Think!" he repeated. "I removed two exactly like them from the

General Post Office, and they turned out to be charged with T.N.T. And those square ones on the shelf are twin brothers of the one that went off in Rutherford's Bank."

As we were speaking, I happened to glance round at the doorway, and there, to my surprise, was the woman whom we had seen below, still holding the jug of milk and staring in with an expression of horror at the dead revolutionary. Thorndyke also observed her, and stepping across to where she stood, asked: "Can you tell me if there has been, or is now, anyone sick in this house?"

"Yes," the woman replied, without removing her eyes from the dead man. "Dere is a chentleman sick upstairs. I haf not seen him. He used to look after him," and she nodded to the dead body of the showman.

"I think we will go up and have a look at this sick gentleman," said Thorndyke. "You had better not come, Miller."

We started together up the stairs, and as we went I asked: "Do you suppose this is a case of plague?"

"No," he replied. "I fancy the plague department is in the kitchen; but we shall see."

He looked round the landing which we had now reached and then opened the door of the front room, Immediately I was aware of a strange, intensely fetid odour, and glancing into the room, I perceived a man lying, apparently in a state of stupor, in a bed covered with indescribably filthy bed-clothes. Thorndyke entered and approached the bed, and I followed. The light was rather dim, and it was not until we were quite close that I suddenly recognised the disease.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, "it is typhus!"

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "and look at the bed clothes, and look at the poor devil's neck. We can see now how that villain collected his specimens."

I stooped over the poor, muttering, unconscious wretch and was filled with horror. Bed-clothes, pillow and patient were all alike crawling with vermin.



"Of course," I said as we walked homewards, "I see the general drift of this case, but what I can't understand is how you connected up the facts."

"Well," replied Thorndyke, "let us set out the argument and trace the connections. The starting-point was the aluminium case that Mr. Rabbage brought us. Those tubes of fleas and lice were clearly an abnormal phenomenon. They might, as you suggested, have belonged to a scientific collector; but that was not probable. The fleas were alive, and were meant to remain alive, as the perforated caps of the tubes proved. And the lice had merely died, as lice quickly do if they are not fed. They did not appear to have been killed. But against your view there were two very striking facts, one of which I fancy you did not observe. The fleas were not the common human flea; they were Asiatic rat-fleas."

"You are quite right," I admitted. "I did not notice that."

"Then," he continued, "there was the aniseed with which the parchment caps of the tubes were scented. Now aniseed is irresistible to rats. It is an infallible bait. But it is not specially attractive to fleas. What then was the purpose of the scent? The answer, fantastic as it was, had to be provisionally accepted because it was the only one that suggested itself. If one of these tubes had been exposed to rats—dropped down a rat-hole, for instance—it is certain that the rats would have gnawed off the parchment cap. Then the fleas would have been liberated, and as they were rat-fleas, they would have immediately fastened upon the rats. The tubes, therefore, appeared to be an apparatus for disseminating rat-fleas.

"But why should anyone want to disseminate rat-fleas? That question at once brought into view another striking fact. Here, in these tubes, were rat-fleas and body-lice: both carriers of deadly disease. The rat-flea is a carrier of plague; the body-louse is a carrier of typhus. It was an impressive coincidence. It suggested that the dissemination of rat-fleas might be really the dissemination of plague; and if the lice were distributed, too, that might mean the distribution of typhus.

"And now consider the maps. The circles on them all marked old slum-areas tenanted by low-class aliens. But old slums abound in rats; and low-class aliens abound in body-lice. Here was another coincidence. Then there was the note-tablet bearing numbers associated with the letters a and b and plus and minus signs. The letters a and b might mean rat and

louse or plague and typhus, and the plus and minus might mean a success or a failure to produce an outbreak of disease. That was merely speculative, but it was quite consistent.

"So far we were dealing with a hypothesis based on simple observation. But that hypothesis could be proved or disproved. The question was: Were these insects infected insects, or were they not? To settle this I took one flea from each of the four tubes and 'sowed' it on agar, with the result that from each flea I got a typical culture of plague bacillus, which I verified with Haffkine's 'Stalactite test.' I also examined one louse from each of the two tubes, and in each case got a definite typhus reaction. So the insects were infected and the hypothesis was confirmed.

"The next thing was to find the owner of the tubes. Now the circles on the maps indicated some sort of activity, presumably connected with rats and carried on in these areas.

"I visited those areas and got into conversation with the inhabitants on the subject of rats, rat-catchers, rat pits, sewermen, and everything bearing on rats; and at length I heard of an exhibitor of performing rats. You know the rest. We found the man, we observe that all his rats, excepting the tame white ones, were black rats—the special plague-carrying species—and we found on this spot a dead rat, which I ascertained on examining the body, had died of plague. Finally there was Polton's little book giving us the finger prints of the owner of the aluminium case. That completed the identification; and inquiries at the Local Government Board showed that cases of plague and typhus had occurred in the marked areas."

"Had not the authorities taken any steps in the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "They had carried out an energetic rat campaign in the London Docks, the likeliest source of infection. Naturally, they would not think of a criminal lunatic industriously sowing plague broadcast."

"Then how did you connect this man with the bank outrage?"

"I never did, very conclusively," he replied. "It was mostly a matter of inference. You see, the two crimes were essentially similar. They were varieties of the same type. Both were cases of idiotic destructiveness, and



the agent in each was evidently a moral imbecile who was a professed enemy of society. Such persons are rare in this country, and when they occur are usually foreigners, most commonly Russians, or East Europeans of some kind. The only actual clue was the date on Pilcher's letter, the rather peculiar figures of which were extraordinarily like those on the maps and the note-tablet. Still, it was little more than a guess, though it happens to have turned out correct."

"And how do you suppose this fellow avoided getting plague and typhus himself?"

"It was quite likely that he had had both. But he could easily avoid the typhus by keeping himself clean and his clothing disinfected; and as to the plague, he could have used Haffkine's plague-prophylactic and given it to the woman. Clearly it would not have suited him to have a case of plague in the house and have the health officer inspecting the premises."

That was the end of the case, unless I should include in the history a very handsome fee sent to my colleague by the President of the Local Government Board.

"I think we have earned it," said Thorndyke; "and yet I am not sure that Mr. Rabbage is not entitled to a share."

And in fact, when that benevolent person called a few days later to receive a slightly ambiguous report and tender his fee, he departed beaming, bearing a donation wherewith to endow an additional bed, cot, or basket, in the St. Francis Home of Rest.



## VI. — REX V. BURNABY

IT is a normal incident in general medical practice that the family doctor soon drifts into the position of a family friend. The Burnabys had been among my earliest patients, and mutual sympathies had quickly brought about the more intimate relationship. It was a pleasant household, pervaded by a quiet geniality and a particularly attractive homely, unaffected culture. It was an interesting household, too, for the disparity in age between the husband and wife made the domestic conditions a little unusual and invited speculative observation. And there were other matters, to be referred to presently.

Frank Burnaby was a somewhat delicate man of about fifty: quiet, rather shy, gentle, kindly, and singularly innocent and trustful. He held a post at the Records Office, and was full of quaint and curious lore derived from the ancient documents on which he worked: selections from which he would retail in the family circle with a picturesque imagination and a fund of quiet, dry humour that made them delightful to listen to. I have never met a more attractive man, or one whom I liked better or respected more.

Equally attractive, in an entirely different way, was his wife: an extremely charming and really beautiful woman of under thirty—little more than a girl, in fact: amiable, high-spirited and full of fun and frolic, but nevertheless an accomplished, cultivated woman with a strong interest in her husband's pursuits. They appeared to me an exceedingly happy and united couple deeply attached to one another and in perfect sympathy. There were four children—three boys and a girl—of Burnaby's by his first wife; and their devotion to their young stepmother spoke volumes for her care of them.

But there was a fly in the domestic ointment: at least, that was what I felt. There was another family friend, a youngish man named Cyril Parker. Not that I had anything against him, personally, but I was not quite happy about the relationship. He was a markedly good-looking man, pleasant, witty, and extremely well informed; for he was a partner in a publishing house and acted as reader for the firm; whence it

happened that he, like Mr. Burnaby, gathered stores of interesting matter from his professional reading. But I could not disguise from myself that his admiration and affection for Mrs. Burnaby were definitely inside the danger zone, and that the intimacy—on his side, at any rate—was growing rather ominously. On her side there seemed nothing more than frank, though very pronounced, friendship. But I looked at the relationship askance. She was a woman whom any man might have fallen in love with, and I did not like the expression that I sometimes detected in Parker's eyes when he was looking at her. Still, there was nothing in the conduct of either to which the slightest exception could have been taken or which in any way foreshadowed the terrible disaster which was so shortly to befall.

The starting-point of the tragedy was a comparatively trivial event. By much poring over crabbed manuscripts, Mr. Burnaby developed symptoms of eye-strain which caused me to send him to an oculist for an opinion and a prescription for suitable spectacles. On the evening of the day on which he had consulted the oculist, I received an urgent summons from Mrs. Burnaby, and, on arriving at the house, found her husband somewhat seriously ill. His symptoms were rather puzzling, for they corresponded to no known disease. His face was flushed, his temperature slightly raised, his pulse rapid, though the breathing was slow, his throat was excessively dry, and his pupils widely dilated. It was an extraordinary condition, resembling nothing within my knowledge excepting atropine poisoning.

"Has he been taking medicine of any kind?" I asked.

Mrs. Burnaby shook her head. "He never takes any drugs or medicine but what you prescribe; and it couldn't be anything that he has taken, because the attack came on quite soon after he came home, before he had either food or drink."

It was very mysterious and the patient himself could throw no light on the origin of the attack. While I was reflecting on the matter, I happened to glance at the mantelpiece, on which I noticed a drop labelled "The Eye Drops" and a prescription envelope. Opening the latter I found the oculist's prescription for the drops—a very weak solution of atropine sulphate.

"Has he had any of these drops?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Burnaby. "I dropped some into his eyes as soon as he came in; two drops in each eye, according to the directions."

It was very odd. The amount of atropine in those four drops was less than a hundredth of a grain; an impossibly small dose to produce the symptoms. Yet he had all the appearance of having taken a poisonous dose, which he obviously had not, since the drop-bottle was nearly full. I could make nothing of it. However, I treated it as a case of atropine poisoning; and as the treatment produced marked improvement, I went home, more mystified than ever.

When I called on the following morning, I learned that he was practically well, and had gone to his office. But that evening I had another urgent message, and on hurrying round to Burnaby's house, found him suffering from an attack similar to, but even more severe than, the one on the previous day. I immediately administered an injection of pilocarpine and other appropriate remedies, and had the satisfaction of seeing a rapid improvement in his condition. But whereas the efficacy of the treatment proved that the symptoms were really due to atropine, no atropine appeared to have been taken excepting the minute quantity contained in the eye-drops.

It was very mysterious. The most exhaustive inquiries failed to suggest any possible source of the poison excepting the drops; and as each attack had occurred a short time after the use of them, it was impossible to ignore the apparent connection, in spite of the absurdly minute dose.

"I can only suppose," said I, addressing Mrs. Burnaby and Mr. Parker, who had called to make inquiries, "that Burnaby is the subject of an idiosyncrasy—that he is abnormally sensitive to this drug."

"Is that a known condition?" asked Parker.

"Oh, yes," I replied. "People vary enormously in the way in which they react to drugs. Some are so intolerant of particular drugs—iodine, for instance—that ordinary medicinal doses produce poisonous effects, while others have the most extraordinary tolerance. Christisori, in his Treatise on Poisons, gives a case of a man, unaccustomed to opium, who took nearly an ounce of laudanum without any effect—a dose that would have killed an ordinary man. These drugs are terrible pitfalls for the doctor who doesn't know his patient. Just think what might have happened to

Burnaby if someone had given him a full medicinal dose of belladonna."

"Does belladonna have the same effect as atropine?" asked Mrs. Burnaby.

"It is the same," I replied. "Atropine is the active principle of belladonna."

"What a mercy," she exclaimed, "that we discovered this idiosyncrasy in time. I suppose he had better discontinue the drops?"

"Yes," I answered, "most emphatically; and I will write to Mr. Haines and let him know that the atropine is impracticable."

I accordingly wrote to the oculist, who was politely sceptical as to the connection between the drops and the attacks. However, Burnaby settled the matter by refusing point-blank to have any further dealings with atropine; and his decision was so far justified that, for the time being, the attacks did not recur.

A couple of months passed. The incident had, to a great extent, faded from my mind. But then it was revived in a way that not only filled me with astonishment but caused me very grave anxiety. I was just about to set out on my morning round when Burnaby's housemaid met me at my door, breathing quickly and carrying a note. It was from Mrs. Burnaby, begging me to call at once and telling me that her husband had been seized by an attack similar to the previous ones. I ran back for my emergency bag and then hurried round to the house, where I found Burnaby lying on a sofa, very flushed, rather alarmed, and exhibiting well-marked symptoms of atropine poisoning. The attack, however, was not a very severe one, and the application of the appropriate remedies soon produced a change for the better.

"Now, Burnaby," I said, as he sat up with a sigh of relief, "what have you been up to? Haven't been tinkering with those drops again?"

"No," he replied. "Why should I? Haines has finished with my eyes."

"Well, you've been taking something with atropine in it."

"I suppose I have, but I can't imagine what. I have had no medicine of any kind."

"No pills, lozenges, liniment, plaster, or ointment?"

"Nothing medicinal of any sort," he replied. "In fact, I have swallowed nothing to-day but my breakfast; and the attack came on directly after, though it was a simple enough meal, goodness knows—just a couple of pigeon's eggs and some toast and tea."

"Pigeon's eggs," said I, with a grin, "why not sparrow's?"

"Cyril sent them—as a joke, I think," Mrs. Burnaby explained (Cyril, of course, was Mr. Parker), "but I must say Frank enjoyed them. You see, Cyril has taken lately to keeping pigeons and rabbits and other edible beasts, and I think he has done it principally for Frank's sake, as you have ordered him a special diet. We are constantly getting things from Cyril now—pigeons and rabbits especially; and much younger than we can buy them at the shops."

"Yes," said Burnaby, "he is most generous. I should think he supplies more than half my diet. I hardly like to accept so much from him."

"It gives him pleasure to send these gifts," said Mrs. Burnaby; "but I wish it gave him pleasure to slaughter the creatures first. He always brings or sends them alive, and the cook hates killing them. As to me, I couldn't do it, though I deal with the corpses afterwards. I prepare nearly all Frank's food myself."

"Yes," said Burnaby, with a glance of deep affection at his wife, "Margaret is an artist in kickshaws and I consume the works of art. I can tell you, doctor, I live like a fighting cock."

This was all very well, but it was beside the question; which was, where did the atropine come from? If Burnaby had swallowed nothing but his breakfast, it would seem that the atropine must have been in that. I pointed this out.

"But you know, doctor," said Burnaby, "that isn't possible. We can write the eggs off. You can't get poison into an egg without making a hole in the shell, and these eggs were intact. And as to the bread and butter, and the tea, we all had the same, and none of the others seem any the worse."

"That isn't very conclusive," said I. "A dose of atropine that would be

poisonous to you would probably have no appreciable effect on the others. But, of course, the real mystery is how on earth atropine could have got into any of the food."

"It couldn't," said Burnaby and that really was my own conviction. But it was an unsatisfactory conclusion, for it left the mystery unexplained; and when at length I took my leave, to continue my rounds of visits, it was with the uncomfortable feeling that I had failed to trace the origin of the danger or to secure my patient against its recurrence.

Nor was my uneasiness unjustified. Little more than a week had passed when a fresh summons brought me to Burnaby's house, full of bewilderment and apprehension. And indeed there was good cause for apprehension; for when I arrived, to find Burnaby lying speechless and sightless his blue eyes turned to blank discs of black, glittering with the unnatural "belladonna sparkle,"—when I felt his racing pulse and watched his vain efforts to swallow a sip of water,—I began to ask myself whether he was not beyond recall. The same question was asked mutely by the terrified eyes of his wife, who rose like a ghost from his bedside as I entered the room. But once more he responded to the remedies, though more slowly this time, and at the end of an hour I was relieved to see that the urgent danger was past, although he still remained very ill.

Meanwhile, inquiries failed utterly to elicit any explanation of the attack. The symptoms had set in shortly after dinner; a simple meal, consisting of a pigeon cooked en casserole by Mrs. Burnaby herself, vegetables and a light pudding which had been shared by the rest of the family, and a little Chablis from a bottle that had been unsealed and opened in the dining-room. Nothing else had been taken and no medicaments of any kind used. On the other hand, any doubts as to the nature of the attack were set at rest by a chemical test made by me and confirmed by the Clinical Research Association, Atropine was demonstrably present, though the amount was comparatively small. But its source remained an impenetrable mystery.

It was a profoundly disturbing state of affairs. The last attack had narrowly missed a fatal termination and the poison was still untraced. From the same unknown source a fresh charge might be delivered at any moment, and who could say what the result would be? Poor Burnaby was

in a state of chronic terror and his wife began to look haggard and worn with constant anxiety and apprehension. Nor was I in much better case myself, for, whatever should befall, the responsibility was mine. I racked my brains for some possible explanation, but could think of none, though there were times when a horrible thought would creep into my mind, only to be indignantly cast out.

One evening a few days after the last attack, I received a visit from Burnaby's brother, a pathologist attached to one of the London hospitals, but not in practice. Very different was Dr. Burnaby from his gentle, amiable brother; a strong, resolute, energetic man and none too suave in manner. We were already acquainted, so no introductions were necessary, and he came to the point with characteristic directness.

"You can guess what I have come about, Jardine—this atropine business. What is being done in the matter?"

"I don't know that anything is being done," I answered lamely. "I can make nothing of it."

"Waiting for the next attack and the inquest, h'm? Well, that won't do, you know. This affair has got to be stopped before it is too late. If you don't know where the poison comes from, somebody does. H'm! And it is time to find out who that somebody is. There aren't many to choose from. I am going there now to have a look round and make a few inquiries. You'd better come with me."

"Are they expecting you?" I asked.

"No," he answered gruffly; "but I'm not a stranger and neither are you."

I decided to go round with him, though I didn't much like his manner. This was evidently meant to be a surprise visit, and I had no great difficulty in guessing at what was in his mind. On the other hand, I was not sorry to share the responsibility with a man of his position and a relative of the patient. Accordingly, I set forth with him willingly enough; and it is significant of my state of mind at this time, that I took my emergency bag with me.

When we arrived Burnaby and his wife were just sitting down to dinner—the children took their evening meal by themselves—and they welcomed us with the ready hospitality that made this such a pleasant



household. Dr. Burnaby's place was laid opposite mine, and I was faintly amused to note his eye furtively travelling over the table, evidently assessing each article of food as a possible vehicle of atropine. "If you had only let us know you were coming, Jim," said Mrs. Burnaby when the joint made its appearance, "we would have had something better than saddle of mutton. As it is, you must take pot-luck."

"Saddle of mutton is good enough for me," replied Dr. Burnaby. "But what on earth is that stuff that Frank has got?" he added, as Burnaby lifted the lid from a little casserole.

"That," she answered, "is a fricassee of rabbit. Such a tiny creature it was; a mere infant. Cook nearly wept at having to kill it."

"Kill it!" exclaimed the doctor; "do you buy your rabbits alive?"

"We didn't buy this one," she replied. "It was brought by Cyril—Mr. Parker, you know," she added hastily and with a slight flush, as she caught a grim glance of interrogation. "He sends quite a lot of poultry and rabbits and things for Frank from his little farm."

"Ha!" said the doctor with a reflective eye on the casserole. "H'm! Breeds them himself, hey? Whereabouts is his farm?"

"At Eltham. But it isn't really a farm. He just keeps rabbits and fowls and pigeons in a place at the back of his garden."

"Is your cook English?" Dr. Burnaby asked, glancing again at the casserole. "That affair of Frank's has rather a French look."

"Bless you, Jim," said Burnaby, "I am not dependent on mere cooks. I am a pampered gourmet. Margaret prepares most of my food with her own sacred hands. Cooks can't do this sort of thing;" and he helped himself afresh from the casserole.

Dr. Burnaby seemed to reflect profoundly upon this explanation. Then he abruptly changed the subject from cookery to the Lindisfarne Gospels and thereby set his brother's chin wagging to a new tune. For Burnaby's affections as a scholar were set on seventh- and eighth-century manuscripts and his knowledge of them was as great as his enthusiasm.

"Oh, get on with your dinner, Frank, you old windbag," exclaimed Mrs. Burnaby. "You are letting everything get cold."

"So I am, dear," he admitted, "but—I won't be a minute. I just want Jim to see those collotypes of the Durham Book. Excuse me."

He sprang up from the table and darted into the adjoining library, whence he returned almost immediately carrying a small portfolio.

"These are the plates," he said, handing the portfolio to his brother. "Have a look at them while I dispose of the arrears."

He took up his knife and fork and made as if to resume his meal. Then he laid them down and leaned back in his chair. "I don't think I want any more, after all," he said.

The tone in which he spoke caused me to look at him critically; for my talk with his brother had made me a little nervous and apprehensive of further trouble. What I now saw was by no means reassuring. A slight flush and a trace of anxiety in his expression made me ask, with outward composure but inward alarm: "You are feeling quite fit, I hope, Burnaby?"

"Well, not so very," he replied. "My eyes are going a bit misty and my throat—" Here he worked his lips and swallowed as if with some effort.

I rose hastily, and, catching a terrified glance from his wife, went to him and looked into his eyes. And thereupon my heart sank. For already his pupils were twice their natural size and the darkened eyes exhibited the too-familiar sparkle. I was sensible of a thrill of terror, and, as I looked into Burnaby's now distinctly alarmed face, his brother's ominous words echoed in my ears. Had I waited "for the next attack and the inquest"?

The symptoms, once started, developed apace. From moment to moment he grew worse, and the rapid enlargement of the pupils gave an alarming hint as to the intensity of the poisoning. I darted out into the hall for my bag, and as I re-entered, I saw him rise, groping blindly with his hands, until his wife, ashen-faced and trembling, took his arm and led him to the door.

"I had better give him a dose of pilocarpine at once," I said, getting out my hypodermic syringe and glancing at Dr. Burnaby, who watched me with stony composure.

"Yes," he agreed, "and a little morphine, too! and he will probably need some stimulant. I won't come up; only be in the way."

I followed the patient up to the bedroom and administered the antidotes forthwith. Then, while he was getting partially undressed with his wife's help, I went downstairs in search of brandy and hot water, I was about to enter the dining-room when, through the partly-open door, I saw Dr. Burnaby standing by the fireplace with his open hand-bag—which he had fetched in from the hall—on the table before him, and in his hand a little Bohemian glass jar from the mantelpiece. Involuntarily, I halted for a moment; and as I did so, he carefully deposited the little ornament in the bag and closed the latter, locking it with a small key which he then put in his pocket.

It was an excessively odd proceeding, but, of course, it was no concern of mine. Nevertheless, instead of entering the dining-room, I stole softly towards the kitchen and fetched the hot water myself. When I returned, the bag was back on the hall table and I found Dr. Burnaby grimly pacing up and down the dining room. He asked me a few questions while I was looking for the brandy, and then, somewhat to my surprise, proposed to come up and lend a hand with the patient.

On entering the bedroom, we found poor Burnaby lying half-undressed on the bed and in a very pitiable state; terrified, physically distressed and inclined to ramble mentally. His wife knelt by the bed, white-faced, red-eyed and evidently panic-stricken, though she was quite quiet and self-restrained. As we entered, she rose to make way for us, and while we were examining the patient's pulse and listening to his racing heart, she silently busied herself with the preparations for administering the stimulants.

"You don't think he is going to die, do you?" she whispered, as Dr. Burnaby handed me back my stethoscope.

"It is no use thinking," he replied dryly—and I thought rather callously—"we shall see;" and with this he turned his back to her and looked at his brother with a gloomy frown.

For more than an hour that question was an open one. From moment to moment I expected to feel the wildly-racing pulse flicker out; to hear the troubled breathing die away in an expiring rattle. From time to time

we cautiously increased the antidotes and administered restoratives, but I must confess that I had little hope. Dr. Burnaby was undisguisedly pessimistic. And as the weary minutes dragged on, and I looked momentarily for the arrival of the dread messenger, there would keep stealing into my mind a question that I hardly dared to entertain. What was the meaning of it all? Whence had the poison come? And why, in this household, had it found its way to Burnaby alone—the one inmate to whom it was specially deadly?

At last—at long last—there came a change; hardly perceptible at first, and viewed with little confidence. But after a time it became more pronounced; and then, quite rapidly, the symptoms began to clear up. The patient swallowed with ease, and great relish, a cup of coffee; the heart slowed down, the breathing became natural, and presently, as the morphine began to take effect, he sank into a doze which passed by degrees into a quiet sleep.

"I think he will do now," said Dr. Burnaby, "so I won't stay any longer. But it was a near thing, Jardine; most uncomfortably near."

He walked to the door, where, as he went out, he turned and bowed stiffly to his sister-in-law. I followed him down the stairs, rather expecting him to revert to the subject of his visit to me. But he made no reference to it, nor, indeed, did he say anything until he stood on the doorstep with his bag in his hand. Then he made a somewhat cryptic remark: "Well, Jardine," he said, "the Durham Book saved him. But for those collotypes, he would be a dead man;" and with that he walked away, leaving me to interpret as best I could this decidedly obscure remark.

A quarter of an hour later, as Burnaby was peacefully asleep and apparently out of all danger, I took my own departure, and as soon as I was outside the house, I proceeded to put into execution a plan that had been forming in my mind during the last hour. There was some mystery in this case that was evidently beyond my powers to solve. But solved it had to be, if Burnaby's life was to be saved, to say nothing of my own reputation; so I had decided to put the facts before my friend and former teacher, Dr. Thorndyke, and seek his advice, and if necessary, his assistance.

It was now past ten o'clock, but I determined to take my chance of

finding him at his chambers, and accordingly, having found a taxi, I directed the driver to set me down at the gate of Inner Temple Lane. My former experience of Thorndyke's habits led me to be hopeful, and my hopes were not unjustified on this occasion, for when I had mounted to the first pair landing of No. 5A King's Bench Walk, and assaulted the knocker of the inner door, I was relieved to find him not only at home, but alone and disengaged. "It's a deuce of a time to come knocking you up," I said, as he shook my hand, "but I am in rather a hole, and the matter is urgent, so—"

"So you paid me the compliment of treating me as a friend," said he. "Very proper of you. What is the nature of your difficulty?"

"Why, I've got a case of recurrent atropine poisoning and I can make absolutely nothing of it."

Here I began to give a brief outline sketch of the facts, but after a minute or two he stopped me.

"It is of no use being sketchy, Jardine," said he. "The night is young. Let us have a complete history of the case, with particulars of all the persons concerned and their mutual relations. And don't spare detail."

He seated himself with a notebook on his knee, and when he had lighted his pipe, I plunged into the narrative of the case, beginning with the eye-drop incident and finishing with the alarming events of the present evening.

He listened with close attention, refraining from interrupting me excepting occasionally to ask for a date, which he jotted down with a few other notes. When I had finished, he laid aside his notebook, and, as he knocked out his pipe, observed: "A very remarkable case, Jardine, and interesting by reason of the unusual nature of the poison."

"Oh, hang the interest!" I exclaimed. "I am not a toxicologist. I am a general practitioner; and I want to know what the deuce I ought to do."

"I think," said he, "that your duty is perfectly obvious. You ought to communicate with the police, either alone or in conjunction with some member of the family."

I looked at him in dismay. "But," I faltered, "what have I got to tell the

police?"

"What you have told me," he replied; "which, put in a nutshell, amounts to this: Frank Burnaby has had three attacks of atropine poisoning, disregarding the eye-drops. Each attack has appeared to be associated with some article of food prepared by Mrs. Burnaby and supplied by Mr. Cyril Parker."

"But, good God!" I exclaimed, "you don't suspect Mrs. Burnaby?"

"I suspect nobody," he replied. "It may not be criminal poisoning at all. But Mr. Burnaby has to be protected, and the case certainly needs investigation."

"You don't think I could make a few inquiries myself first?" I suggested.

He shook his head. "The risk is too great," he replied. "The man might die before you reached a conclusion; whereas a few inquiries made by the police would probably put a stop to the affair, unless the poisoning is in some inconceivable way inadvertent."

That was what his advice amounted to, and I felt that he was right. But it put on me a horribly unpleasant duty; and as I wended homewards I tried to devise some means of mitigating its unpleasantness. Finally I decided to try to persuade Mrs. Burnaby to make a joint communication with me.

But the necessity never arose. When I made my morning visit, I found a taxicab drawn up opposite the door and the housemaid who admitted me looked as if she had seen a ghost.

"Why, what is the matter, Mabel?" I asked, as she ushered me funereally into the drawing-room.

She shook her head. "I don't know, sir. Something awful, I'm afraid. I'll tell them you are here." With this she shut the door and departed.

The housemaid's manner and the unusually formal reception filled me with vague forebodings. But even as I was wondering what could have happened, the question was answered by the entry of a tall man who looked like a guardsman in mufti.

"Dr. Jardine?" he asked; and as I nodded, he explained, presenting his

card, "I am Detective Lane. I have been instructed to make some inquiries in respect of certain information which we have received. It is stated that Mr. Frank Burnaby is suffering from the effects of poison. So far as you know, is that true?"

"I hope he is recovered now," I replied, "but he was suffering last night from what appeared to be atropine poisoning."

"Have there been any previous attacks of the same kind?" the sergeant asked.

"Yes," I answered. "This was the fifth attack; but the first two were evidently due to some eye-drops that he had used."

"And in the case of the other three; have you any idea as to how the poison came to be taken? Whether it was in the food, for instance?"

"I have no idea, sergeant. I know nothing more than what I have told you; and, of course, I am not going to make any guesses. Is it admissible to ask who gave the information?"

"I am afraid not, sir," he replied. "But you will soon know. There is a definite charge against Mrs. Burnaby—I have just made the arrest—and we shall want your evidence for the prosecution."

I stared at him in utter consternation. "Do you mean," I gasped, "that you have arrested Mrs. Burnaby?"

"Yes," he replied; "on a charge of having administered poison to her husband."

I was absolutely thunderstruck. And yet, when I remembered Thorndyke's words and recalled my own dim and hastily-dismissed surmises, there was nothing so very surprising in this shocking turn of events.

"Could I have a few words with Mrs. Burnaby?" I asked.

"Not alone," he replied, "and better not at all. Still, if you have any business—"

"I have," said I; whereupon he led the way to the dining-room, where I found Mrs. Burnaby seated rigidly in a chair, pale as death, but quite calm though rather dazed. Opposite her a military-looking man sat stiffly

by the table with an air of being unconscious of her presence, and he took no notice as I walked over to his prisoner and silently pressed her hand.

"I've come, Mrs. Burnaby," said I, "to ask if there is anything that you want me to do. Does Burnaby know about this horrible affair?"

"No," she answered. "You will have to tell him if he is fit to hear it; and if not, I want you to let my father know as soon as you can. That is all; and you had better go now, as we mustn't detain these gentlemen. Good-bye."

She shook my hand unemotionally, and when I had faltered a few words of vague encouragement and sympathy, I went out of the room, but waited in the hall to see the last of her.

The police officers were most polite and considerate. When she came out, they attended her in quite a deferential manner. As the sergeant was in the act of opening the street door, the bell rang; and when the door opened it disclosed Mr. Parker standing on threshold. He was about to address Mrs. Burnaby but she passed him with a slight bow, and descended the steps, preceded by the sergeant and followed by the detective. The former held the door of the cab open while she entered, when he entered also and shut the door. The detective took his seat beside the driver and the cab moved off.

"What is in the wind, Jardine?" Parker asked looking at me with a distinctly alarmed expression. "Those fellows look like plain-clothes policemen."

"They are," said I. "They have just arrest Mrs. Burnaby on a charge of having attempted to poison her husband."

I thought Parker would have fallen. As it was, he staggered to a hall chair and dropped on it in a state of collapse. "Good God!" he gasped. "What a frightful thing! But there can't possibly be any evidence—any real grounds for suspecting her. It must be just a wild guess. I wonder who started it."

On this subject I had pretty strong suspicions, but I did not mention them; and when I had seen Parker into the dining-room and explained matters a little further I went upstairs, bracing myself for my very disagreeable task.



Burnaby was quite recovered, though rather torpid from the effects of the morphine. But my news roused him most effectually. In a moment he was out of bed, hurriedly preparing to dress; and though his pale, set face told how deeply the catastrophe had shocked him, he was quite collected and had all his wits about him.

"It's of no use letting our emotions loose, doctor," said he, in reply to my expressions of sympathy. "Margaret is in a very dangerous position. You have only to consider what she is—a young, beautiful woman—and what I am, to realise that. We must act promptly. I shall go and see her father; he is a very capable lawyer; and we must get a first-class counsel."

This seemed to be an opportunity for mentioning Thorndyke's peculiar qualifications in a case of this kind, and I did so. Burnaby listened attentively, apparently not unimpressed; but he replied cautiously: "We shall have to leave the choice of the counsel to Harratt; but if you care, meanwhile, to consult with Dr. Thorndyke, you have my authority. I will tell Harratt."

On this I took my departure, not a little relieved at the way he had taken the evil tidings; and as soon as I had disposed of the more urgent part of my work, I betook myself to Thorndyke's chambers, just in time to catch him on his return from the Courts.

"Well, Jardine," he said, when I had brought the history up to date, "what is it that you want me to do?"

"I want you to do what you can to establish Mrs. Burnaby's innocence," I replied.

He looked at me reflectively for a few moments; then he said, quietly but rather significantly: "It is not my practice to give *ex parte* evidence. An expert witness cannot act as an advocate. If I investigate the evidence in this case, it will have to be at your risk, as representing the accused, since any fact, no matter how damaging, which is in the possession of the witness must be disclosed in accordance with the terms of the oath, to say nothing of the obvious duty of every person to further the ends of justice. Speaking as a lawyer, and taking the known facts at their face value, I do not advise you to employ me to investigate the case at large. You might find that you had merely strengthened the hand of the prosecution.

"But I will make a suggestion. There seems to me to be in this case a very curious and interesting possibility. Let me investigate that independently. If my inquiries yield a positive result, I will let you know and you can call me as a witness. If they yield a negative result, you had better leave me out of the case."

To this suggestion I necessarily agreed; but when I took my leave of Thorndyke I went away with a sense of discouragement and failure. His reference to "the face value of the known facts" clearly implied that those facts were adverse to the accused; while the "curious possibility" suggested nothing but a forlorn hope from which he had no great expectations.

I need not follow the weary business in detail. At the first hearing before the magistrate the police merely stated the charge and gave evidence of arrest, both they and the defence asking for a remand and neither apparently desiring to show their hand. Accordingly the case was adjourned for seven days, and as bail was refused, the prisoner was detained in custody.

During those seven dreary days I spent as much time as I could with Burnaby, and though I was filled with admiration of his fortitude and self his drawn and pallid face wrung my heart. In those few days he seemed to have changed into an old man. At his house I also met Mr. Harratt, Mrs. Burnaby's father, a fine, dignified man and a typical old lawyer; and it was unspeakably pathetic to see the father and the husband of the accused woman each trying to support the courage of the other while both were torn with anxiety and apprehension. On one occasion Mr. Parker was present and looked more haggard and depressed than either. But Mr. Harratt's manner towards him was so frigid and forbidding that he did not repeat his visit. At these meetings we discussed the case freely, which was a further affliction to me. For even I could not fail to see that any evidence that I could give directly supported the case for the prosecution.

So six of the seven days ran out, and all the time there was no word from Thorndyke. But on the evening of the sixth day I received a letter from him, curt and dry, but still giving out a ray of hope. This was the brief message:

"I have gone into the question of which I spoke to you and consider that the point is worth raising. I have accordingly written to Mr. Harratt advising him to that effect."

It was a somewhat colourless communication. But I knew Thorndyke well enough to realise that his promises usually understated his intentions. And when, on the following morning, I met Mr. Harratt and Burnaby at the court, something in their manner—a new vivacity and expectancy—suggested that Thorndyke had been more explicit in his communication to the lawyer. But, all the same, their anxiety, for all their outward courage, was enough to have touched a heart of stone.

The spectacle that that court presented when the case was called forms a tableau that is painted on my memory in indelible colours. The mingling of squalor and tragedy, of frivolity and dread solemnity—the grave magistrate on the bench, the stolid policemen, the busy, preoccupied lawyers, and the gibbering crowd of spectators, greedy for sensation, with eager eyes riveted on the figure in the dock—offered such a medley of contrasts as I hope never to look upon again.

As to the prisoner herself, her appearance brought my heart into my mouth. Rigid as a marble statue and nearly as void of colour, she stood in the dock, guarded by two constables, looking with stony bewilderment on the motley scene, outwardly calm, but with the calm of one who looks death in the face; and when the prosecuting counsel rose to open the case for the police, she looked at him as a victim on the scaffold might look upon the executioner.

As I listened to the brief opening address, my heart sank, though the counsel, Sir Harold Layton, K.C., presented his case with that scrupulous fairness to the accused that makes an English court of justice a thing without parallel in the world. But the mere facts, baldly stated without comment, were appalling. No persuasive rhetoric was needed to show that they led direct to the damning conclusion.

Frank Burnaby, an elderly man, married to a young and beautiful woman, had on three separate occasions had administered to him a certain deadly poison, to wit, atropine. It would be proved that he had suffered from the effects of that poison; that the symptoms followed the taking of certain articles of food of which he alone had partaken; that the

said food did actually contain the said poison; and that the food which contained the poison was specially prepared for his sole consumption by his wife, the accused, with her own hands. No evidence was at present available as to how the accused obtained the poison or that she had any such poison in her possession, nor would any suggestion be offered as to the motive of the crime. But, on the evidence of the actual administration of the poison, he would ask that the prisoner be committed for trial. He then proceeded to call the witnesses, of whom I was naturally the first. When I had been sworn and given my description, the counsel asked a few questions which elicited the history of the case and which I need not repeat. He then continued:

"Have you any doubt as to the cause of Mr. Burnaby's symptoms?"

"No. They were certainly due to atropine poisoning."

"Has Mr. Burnaby any constitutional peculiarity in respect of atropine?"

"Yes. He is abnormally susceptible to the effects of atropine."

"Was this peculiar susceptibility known to the accused?"

"Yes. It was communicated to her by me."

"Was it known, so far as you are aware, to any other persons?"

"Mr. Parker was present when I told her, and Mr. Burnaby and his brother, Dr. Burnaby, were also informed."

"Is there any way, so far as you know, in which the accused could have obtained possession of atropine?"

"Only by having the oculist's prescription for the eye-drops made up."

"Do you know of any medium, other than the food, by which atropine might have been taken by Mr. Burnaby?"

"I do not," I replied; and this concluded my evidence. But as I stepped out of the witness-box, I reflected gloomily that every word that I had spoken was a rivet in the fetters of the silent figure in the dock.

The next witness was the cook. She testified that she had killed and skinned the rabbit and had then handed it to the accused, who made it into a fricassee and prepared it for the table. Witness took no part in the

preparation and she was absent from the kitchen on one occasion for several minutes, leaving the accused there alone.

When the cook had concluded her evidence, the name of James Burnaby was called, and the doctor entered the witness-box, looking distinctly uncomfortable, but grim and resolute. The first few questions elicited the circumstances of his visit to his brother's house and of the sudden attack of illness. That illness he had at once recognised as acute atropine poisoning, and had assumed that the poison was in the specially prepared food.

"Did you take any measures to verify this opinion?" counsel asked.

"Yes. As soon as I was alone, I took part of the remainder of the rabbit and put it in a glass jar which I found on the mantelpiece and which I first rinsed out with water. Later, I carried the sample of food to Professor Berry, who analysed it in my presence and found it to contain atropine. He obtained from it a thirtieth of a grain of atropine sulphate."

"Is that a poisonous dose?"

"Not to an ordinary person, though it is considerably beyond the medicinal dose. But it would have been a poisonous dose to Frank Burnaby. If he had swallowed this, in addition to what he had already taken, I feel no doubt that it would have killed him."

This concluded the case for the prosecution, and a black case it undoubtedly looked. There was no cross-examination; and as Thorndyke had arrived some time previously and conferred with Mr. Harratt and his counsel, I concluded that the defence would take the form of a counter-attack by the raising of a fresh issue. And so it turned out. When Thorndyke entered the witness-box and had disposed of the preliminaries, the counsel for the defence "gave him his head."

"You have made certain investigations in regard to this case, I believe?" Thorndyke assented, and the counsel continued: "I will not ask you specific questions, but will request you to describe your investigations and their result, and tell us what caused you to make them."

"This case," Thorndyke began, "was brought to my notice by Dr. Jardine, who gave me all the facts known to him. These facts were very remarkable, and, taken together, they suggested a possible explanation of

the poisoning. There were four striking points in the case. First, there was the very unusual nature of the poison. Second, the abnormal susceptibility of Mr. Burnaby to this particular poison. Third, the fact that all the food in which the poison appeared to have been conveyed came from the same source: it was sent by Mr. Cyril Parker. Fourth, that food consisted of pigeon's eggs, pigeon's flesh, and rabbit's flesh."

"What is there remarkable about that?" the counsel asked.

"The remarkable point is that the pigeon and the rabbit have an extraordinary immunity to atropine. Most vegetable-feeding birds and animals are more or less immune to vegetable poisons. Many birds and animals are largely immune to atropine; but among birds the pigeon is exceptionally immune, while the rabbit is the most extreme instance among animals. A single rabbit can take without the slightest harm more than a hundred times the quantity of atropine that would kill a man; and rabbits habitually feed freely on the leaves and berries of the belladonna or deadly nightshade."

"Does the deadly nightshade contain atropine?" the counsel asked.

"Yes. Atropine is the active principle of the belladonna plant and gives to it its poisonous properties."

"And if an animal, such as a rabbit, were to feed on the nightshade plant, would its flesh be poisonous?"

"Yes. Cases of belladonna poisoning from eating rabbit have been recorded—by Firth and Bentley, for instance."

"And you suspected that the poison in this case had been contained in the pigeon and the rabbit themselves?"

"Yes. It was a striking coincidence that the poisoning should follow the consumption of these two specially immune animals. But there was a further reason for connecting them. The symptoms were strictly proportionate to the probable amount of poison in each case. Thus the symptoms were only slight after eating the pigeon's eggs. But the eggs of a poisoned pigeon could contain only a minute quantity of the poison. After eating the pigeon the symptoms were much more severe, and the body of a pigeon which had fed on belladonna would contain much more atropine than could be contained in an egg. Finally, after eating the rabbit, the

symptoms were extremely violent; but a rabbit has the greatest immunity and is the most likely to have eaten large quantities of belladonna leaves."

"Did you take any measures to put your theory to the test?"

"Yes. Last Monday I went to Eltham, where I had ascertained that Mr. Cyril Parker lives, and inspected his premises from the outside. At the end of his garden is a small paddock enclosed by a wall. Approaching this across a meadow and looking over the wall, I saw that the enclosure was provided with small fowl-houses, pigeon-cotes, and rabbit hutches. All these were open and their inmates were roaming about the paddock. On one side of the enclosure, by the wall was a dense mass of deadly nightshade plants, extending the whole length of the wall and about a couple of yards in width. At one part of this was a ring fence of wire netting, and inside it were five half-grown rabbits. There was a basket containing a small quantity of cabbage leaves and other green stuff, but as I watched, I saw the young rabbits browsing freely on the nightshade plants in preference to the food provided for them.

"On the following day I went to Eltham again taking with me an assistant who carried a young rabbit in a small hamper. We watched the paddock until the coast was clear. Then my assistant got over the wall and abstracted a young rabbit from inside the ring fence and handed it to me. He then took the rabbit from the hamper and dropped it inside the fence. As soon as we were clear of the meadow, we killed the captured rabbit—to prevent any possible elimination of any poison that it might have swallowed. On arriving in London, I at once took the dead rabbit to St. Margaret's Hospital, where, in the chemical laboratory, and in the presence of Dr. Woodford, the Professor of Chemistry, I skinned it and prepared it as if for cooking by removing the viscera. I then separated the flesh from the bones and handed the former to Dr. Woodford, who, in my presence, carried out an exhaustive chemical test for atropine. The result was that atropine was found to be present in all the muscles; and, on making a quantitative test, the muscles alone yielded no less than .93 grain."

"Is that a poisonous dose?" the counsel asked.

"Yes; it is a poisonous dose for a normal man. In the case of an abnormally susceptible person like Mr. Burnaby it would certainly be a

fatal dose."

This completed Thorndyke's evidence. There was no cross and the magistrate put no questions. When Dr. Woodford had been called and had given confirmatory evidence, Mrs. Burnaby's counsel proceeded to address the bench. But the magistrate cut him short.

"There is really no case to argue," said he. "The evidence of the expert witnesses makes it perfectly clear that the poison was already in the food when it came into the hands of the accused. Consequently the charge against her of introducing the poison falls to the ground and the case must be dismissed. I am sure everyone will sympathise with the unfortunate lady who has been the victim of these extraordinary circumstances, and will rejoice, as I do, at the clearing up of the mystery. The prisoner is discharged."

It was a dramatic moment when, amidst the applause of the spectators, Mrs. Burnaby stepped down from the dock and clasped her husband's outstretched hand. But, overwhelmed as they both were by the sudden relief, I thought it best not to linger, but, after congratulations, to take myself off with Thorndyke. But one pleasant incident I witnessed before I went. Dr. Burnaby had been standing apart, evidently somewhat embarrassed, when suddenly Mrs. Burnaby ran to him and held out her hand.

"I suppose, Margaret," he said gruffly, "you think I'm an old beast?"

"Indeed I don't," she replied. "You acted quite properly, and I respect you for having the moral courage to do it. And don't forget, Jim, that your action has saved Frank's life. But for you, there would have been no Dr. Thorndyke; and but for Dr. Thorndyke, there would have been another poisoned rabbit."

"What do you make of this case?" I asked, as Thorndyke and I walked away from the court. "Do you suppose the poisoning was accidental?"

He shook his head. "No, Jardine," he replied. "There are too many coincidences. You notice that the poisoned animals did not appear until after Mr. Parker had learned from you that Burnaby was abnormally sensitive to atropine and could consequently be poisoned by an ordinary medicinal dose. Then the sending of the animals alive looks like a



precaution divert suspicion from himself and confuse the issue. Again, that ring fence among the belladonna plants has a fishy look, and the plants themselves were not only abnormally numerous but many of them very young and looked as if they had been planted. Further, I happen to know that Parker's firm published, only last year, a book on toxicology in which the immunity of pigeons and rabbits was mentioned and which Parker probably read."

"Then do you believe that he intended to let Mrs. Burnaby—the woman with whom he was in love—bear the brunt of his crime? It seems incredibly villainous and cowardly."

"I do not," he replied. "I imagine that the rabbit that I captured, or one of the others, would have been sent to Burnaby in a few days' time. The cook would probably have prepared it for him and it would almost certainly have killed him; and his death would have been proof of Mrs. Burnaby's innocence. Suspicion would have been transferred to the cook. But I don't suppose any action will be taken against him, for it is practically certain that no jury would convict him on my evidence."

Thorndyke was right in his opinion. No proceedings were taken against Parker. But the house of the Burnabys knew him no more.

---

## VII. — A MYSTERY OF THE SAND-HILLS

I HAVE occasionally wondered how often Mystery and Romance present themselves to us ordinary men of affairs only to be passed by without recognition. More often, I suspect than most of us imagine. The uncanny tendency of my talented friend John Thorndyke to become involved in strange, mysterious and abnormal circumstances has almost become a joke against him. But yet, on reflection, I am disposed to think that his experiences have not differed essentially from those of other men, but that his extraordinary powers of observation and rapid inference have enabled him to detect abnormal elements in what, to ordinary men, appeared to be quite commonplace occurrences. Certainly this was so in the singular Roscoff case, in which, if I had been alone, I should assuredly have seen nothing to merit more than a passing attention.

It happened that on a certain summer morning—it was the fourteenth of August, to be exact—we were discussing this very subject as we walked across the golf-links from Sandwich towards the sea. I was spending a holiday in the old town with my wife, in order that she might paint the ancient streets, and we had induced Thorndyke to come down and stay with us for a few days. This was his last morning, and we had come forth betimes to stroll across the sand-hills to Shellness.

It was a solitary place in those days. When we came off the sand-hills on to the smooth, sandy beach, there was not a soul in sight, and our own footprints were the first to mark the firm strip of sand between high-water mark and the edge of the quiet surf.

We had walked a hundred yards or so when Thorndyke stopped and looked down at the dry sand above tide-marks and then along the wet beach.

"Would that be a shrimper?" he cogitated, referring to some impressions of bare feet in the sand. "If so, he couldn't have come from Pegwell, for the River Stour bars the way. But he came out of the sea and seems to have made straight for the sand-hills."

"Then he probably was a shrimper," said I, not deeply interested.

"Yet," said Thorndyke, "it was an odd time for a shrimper to be at work."

"What was an odd time?" I demanded. "When was he at work?"

"He came out of the sea at this place," Thorndyke replied, glancing at his watch, "at about half-past eleven last night, or from that to twelve."

"Good Lord, Thorndyke!" I exclaimed, "how on earth do you know that?"

"But it is obvious, Anstey," he replied. "It is now half-past nine, and it will be high-water at eleven, as we ascertained before we came out. Now, if you look at those footprints on the sand, you see that they stop short—or rather begin—about two-thirds of the distance from high-water mark to the edge of the surf. Since they are visible and distinct, they must have been made after last high-water. But since they do not extend to the water's edge, they must have been made when the tide was going out; and the place where they begin is the place where the edge of the surf was when the footprints were made. But the place is, as we see, about an hour below the high-water mark. Therefore, when the man came out of the sea, the tide had been going down for an hour, roughly. As it is high-water at eleven this morning, it was high-water at about ten-forty last night; and as the man came out of the sea about an hour after high-water, he must have come out at, or about, eleven-forty. Isn't that obvious?"

"Perfectly," I replied, laughing. "It is as simple as sucking eggs when you think it out. But how the deuce do you manage always to spot these obvious things at a glance? Most men would have just glanced at those footprints and passed them without a second thought."

"That", he replied, "is a mere matter of habit; the habit of trying to extract the significance of simple appearances. It has become almost automatic with me."

During our discussion we had been walking forward slowly, straying on to the edge of the sand-hills. Suddenly, in a hollow between the hills, my eye lighted upon a heap of clothes, apparently, to judge by their orderly disposal, those of a bather. Thorndyke also had observed them and we approached together and looked down on them curiously.

"Here is another problem for you," said I. "Find the bather. I don't see

him anywhere."

"You won't find him here," said Thorndyke. "These clothes have been out all night. Do you see the little spider's web on the boots with a few dewdrops still clinging to it? There has been no dew forming for a good many hours. Let us have a look at the beach."

We strode out through the loose sand and stiff, reedy grass to the smooth beach, and here we could plainly see a line of prints of naked feet leading straight down to the sea, but ending abruptly about two-thirds of the way to the water's edge.

"This looks like our nocturnal shrimper," said I. "He seems to have gone into the sea here and come out at the other place. But if they are the same footprints, he must have forgotten to dress before he went home. It is a quaint affair."

"It is a most remarkable affair," Thorndyke agreed; "and if the footprints are not the same it will be still more inexplicable."

He produced from his pocket a small spring tape-measure with which he carefully took the lengths of two of the most distinct footprints and the length of the stride. Then we walked back along the beach to the other set of tracks, two of which he measured in the same manner.

"Apparently they are the same," he said, putting away his tape; "indeed, they could hardly be otherwise. But the mystery is, what has become of the man? He couldn't have gone away without his clothes, unless he is a lunatic, which his proceedings rather suggest. There is just the possibility that he went into the sea again and was drowned. Shall we walk along towards Shellness and see if we can find any further traces?"

We walked nearly half a mile along the beach, but the smooth surface of the sand was everywhere unbroken. At length we turned to retrace our steps; and at this moment I observed two men advancing across the sand-hills. By the time we had reached the mysterious heap of garments they were quite near, and, attracted no doubt by the intentness with which we were regarding the clothes, they altered their course to see what we were looking at. As they approached, I recognized one of them as a barrister named Hallet, a neighbour of mine in the Temple, whom I had already met in the town, and we exchanged greetings.

"What is the excitement?" he asked, looking at the heap of clothes and then glancing along the deserted beach; "and where is the owner of the togs? I don't see him anywhere."

"That is the problem," said I. "He seems to have disappeared."

"Gad!" exclaimed Hallett, "if he has gone home without his clothes, He'll create a sensation in the town! What?"

Here the other man, who carried a set of golf clubs, stooped over the clothes with a look of keen interest.

"I believe I recognize these things, Hallett; in fact, I am sure I do. That waistcoat, for instance. You must have noticed that waistcoat. I saw you playing with the chap a couple of days ago. Tall, clean-shaven, dark fellow. Temporary member, you know. What was his name? Popoff, or something like that?"

"Roscoff," said Hallett. "Yes, by Jove, I believe you are right. And now I come to think of it, he mentioned to me that he sometimes came up here for a swim. He said he particularly liked a paddle by moonlight, and I told him he was a fool to run the risk of bathing in a lonely place like this, especially at night."

"Well, that is what he seems to have done," said Thorndyke, "for these clothes have certainly been here all night, as you can see by that spider's web."

"Then he has come to grief, poor beggar!" said Hallett; "probably got carried away by the current. There is a devil of a tide here on the flood."

He started to walk towards the beach, and the other man, dropping his clubs, followed.

"Yes," said Hallett, "that is what has happened. You can see his footprints plainly enough going down to the sea; but there are no tracks coming back."

"There are some tracks of bare feet coming out of the sea farther up the beach," said I, "which seem to be his."

Hallett shook his head. "They can't be his," he said, "for it is obvious that he never did come back. Probably they are the tracks of some

shrimper. The question is, what are we to do! Better take his things to the dormy-house and then let the police know what has happened."

We went back and began to gather up the clothes, each of us taking one or two articles.

"You were right, Morris," said Hallett, as he picked up the shirt. "Here's his name, 'P. Roscoff', and I see it is on the vest and the shorts, too. And I recognize the stick now not that that matters, as the clothes are marked."

On our way across the links to the dormy-house mutual introductions took place. Morris was a London solicitor, and both he and Hallett knew Thorndyke by name.

"The coroner will have an expert witness," Hallett remarked as we entered the house. "Rather a waste in a simple case like this. We had better put the things in here."

He opened the door of a small room furnished with a good-sized table and a set of lockers, into one of which he inserted a key.

"Before we lock them up," said Thorndyke, "I suggest that we make and sign a list of them and of the contents of the pockets to put with them."

"Very well," agreed Hallett. "You know the ropes in these cases. I'll write down the descriptions, if you will call them out."

Thorndyke looked over the collection and first enumerated the articles: a tweed jacket and trousers, light, knitted wool waistcoat, black and yellow stripes, blue cotton shirt, net vest and shorts, marked in ink "P. Roscoff", brown merino socks, brown shoes, tweed cap, and a walking-stick—a mottled Malacca cane with a horn crooked handle. When Hallett had written down this list, Thorndyke laid the clothes on the table and began to empty the pockets, one at a time, dictating the descriptions of the articles to Hallett while Morris took them from him and laid them on a sheet of newspaper. In the jacket pockets were a handkerchief, marked "P.R.;" a letter-case containing a few stamps, one or two hotel bills and local tradesmen's receipts, and some visiting cards inscribed "Mr. Peter Roscoff, Bell Hotel, Sandwich;" a leather cigarette-case, a 3B pencil fitted with a point-protector, and a fragment of what Thorndyke decided to be vine charcoal.

"That lot is not very illuminating," remarked Morris, peering into the pockets of the letter-case. "No letter or anything indicating his permanent address. However, that isn't our concern." He laid aside the letter-case, and picking up a pocket-knife that Thorndyke had just taken from the trousers pocket, examined it curiously. "Queer knife, that," he remarked, "steel blade—mighty sharp, too—nail file and an ivory blade. Silly arrangement, it seems. A paperknife is more convenient carried loose, and you don't want a handle to it."

"Perhaps it was meant for a fruit-knife," suggested Hallett, adding it to the list and glancing at a little heap of silver coins that Thorndyke had just laid down. "I wonder," he added, "what has made that money turn so black. Looks! as if he had been taking some medicine containing sulphur. What do you think, doctor?"

"It is quite a probable explanation," replied Thorndyke, "though we haven't the means of testing it. But you notice that this vesta-box from the other pocket is quite bright, which is rather against your theory."

He held out a little silver box bearing the engraved monogram "P.R.", the burnished surface of which contrasted strongly with the dull brownish-black of the coins. Hallett looked at it with an affirmative grunt, and having entered it in his list and added a bunch of keys and a watch from the waistcoat pocket, laid down his pen.

"That's the lot, is it?" said he, rising and beginning to gather up the clothes. "My word! Look at the sand on the table! Isn't it astonishing how saturated with sand one's clothes become after a day on the links here? When I undress at night, the bathroom floor is like the bottom of a bird-cage. Shall I put the things in the locker now?"

"I think", said Thorndyke, "that, as I may have to give evidence, I should like to look them over before you put them away."

Hallett grinned. "There's going to be some expert evidence after all," he said. "Well, fire away, and let me know when you have finished. I am going to smoke a cigarette outside."

With this, he and Morris sauntered out, and I thought it best to go with them, though I was a little curious as to my colleague's object in examining these derelicts. However, my curiosity was not entirely

balked, for my friends went no farther than the little garden that surrounded the house, and from the place where we stood I was able to look in through the window and observe Thorndyke's proceedings.

Very methodical they were. First he laid on the table a sheet of newspaper and on this deposited the jacket, which he examined carefully all over, picking some small object off the inside near the front, and giving special attention to a thick smear of paint which I had noticed on the left cuff. Then, with his spring tape he measured the sleeves and other principal dimensions. Finally, holding the jacket upside down, he beat it gently with his stick, causing a shower of sand to fall on the paper. He then laid the jacket aside, and, taking from his pocket one or two seed envelopes (which I believe he always carried), very carefully shot the sand from the paper into one of them and wrote a few words on it—presumably the source of the sand—and similarly disposing of the small object that he had picked off the surface.

This rather odd procedure was repeated with the other garments—a fresh sheet of newspaper being used for each and with the socks, shoes, and cap. The latter he examined minutely, especially as to the inside, from which he picked out two or three small objects, which I could not see, but assumed to be hairs. Even the walking-stick was inspected and measured, and the articles from the pockets scrutinized afresh, particularly the curious pocket-knife, the ivory blade of which he examined on both sides through his lens.

Hallett and Morris glanced in at him from time to time with indulgent smiles, and the former remarked:

"I like the hopeful enthusiasm of the real pukka expert, and the way he refuses to admit the existence of the ordinary and commonplace. I wonder what he has found out from those things. But here he is. Well, doctor, what's the verdict? Was it temporary insanity or misadventure?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "The inquiry is adjourned pending the production of fresh evidence," he replied, adding: "I have folded the clothes up and put all the effects together in a paper parcel, excepting the stick."

When Hallett had deposited the derelicts in the locker, he came out and looked across the links with an air of indecision.



"I suppose," said he, "we ought to notify the police. I'll do that. When do you think the body is likely to wash up, and where?"

"It is impossible to say," replied Thorndyke. "The set of the current is towards the Thames, but the body might wash up anywhere along the coast. A case is recorded of a bather drowned off Brighton whose body came up six weeks later at Walton-on-the-Naze. But that was quite exceptional. I shall send the coroner and the Chief Constable a note with my address, and I should think you had better do the same. And that is all that we can do, until we get the summons for the inquest, if there ever is one."

To this we all agreed; and as the morning was now spent we walked back together across the links to the town, where we encountered my wife returning homeward with her sketching kit. This Thorndyke and I took possession of and having parted from Hallett and Morris opposite the Barbican, we made our way to our lodgings in quest of lunch. Naturally, the events of the morning were related to my wife and discussed by us all, but I noted that Thorndyke made no reference to his inspection of the clothes, and accordingly I said nothing about the matter before my wife; and no opportunity of opening the subject occurred until the evening, when I accompanied him to the station. Then, as we paced the platform while waiting for his train, I put my question:

"By the way, did you extract any information from those garments? I saw you going through them very thoroughly."

"I got a suggestion from them," he replied, "but it is such an odd one that I hardly like to mention it. Taking the appearances at their face value, the suggestion was that the clothes were not all those of the same man. There seemed to be traces of two men, one of whom appeared to belong to this district, while the other would seem to have been associated with the eastern coast of Thanet between Ramsgate and Margate, and by preference, on the scale of probabilities, to Dumpton or Broadstairs."

"How on earth did you arrive at the localities?" I asked.

"Principally," he replied, "by the peculiarities of the sand which fell from the garments and which was not the same in all of them. You see, Anstey," he continued, "sand is analogous to dust. Both consist of minute

fragments detached from larger masses; and just as, by examining microscopically the dust of a room, you can ascertain the colour and material of the carpets, curtains, furniture coverings, and other textiles, detached particles of which form the dust of that room, so, by examining sand, you can judge of the character of the cliffs, rocks, and other large masses that occur in the locality, fragments of which become ground off by the surf and incorporated in the sand of the beach. Some of the sand from these clothes is very characteristic and will probably be still more so when I examine it under the microscope."

"But", I objected, "isn't there a fallacy in that line of reasoning? Might not one man have worn the different garments at different times and in different places?"

"That is certainly a possibility that has to be borne in mind," he replied. "But here comes my train. We shall have to adjourn this discussion until you come back to the mill."

As a matter of fact, the discussion was never resumed, for, by the time that I came back to "the mill", the affair had faded from my mind, and the accumulations of grist monopolized my attention; and it is probable that it would have passed into complete oblivion but for the circumstance of its being revived in a very singular manner, which was as follows.

One afternoon about the middle of October my old friend, Mr. Brodribb, a well-known solicitor, called to give me some verbal instructions. When he had finished our business, he said:

"I've got a client waiting outside, whom I am taking up to introduce to Thorndyke. You'd better come along with us."

"What is the nature of your client's case?" I asked.

"Hanged if I know," chuckled Brodribb. "He won't say. That's why I am taking him to our friend. I've never seen Thorndyke stumped yet, but I think this case will put the lid on him. Are you coming?"

"I am, most emphatically," said I, "if your client doesn't object."

"He's not going to be asked," said Brodribb. "He'll think you are part of the show. Here he is."

In my outer office we found a gentlemanly, middle-aged man to whom

Brodrigg introduced me, and whom he hustled down the stairs and up King's Bench Walk to Thorndyke's chambers. There we found my colleague earnestly studying a will with the aid of a watchmaker's eyeglass, and Brodrigg opened the proceedings without ceremony.

"I've brought a client of mine, Mr. Capes, to see you, Thorndyke. He has a little problem that he wants you to solve."

Thorndyke bowed to the client and then asked:

"What is the nature of the problem?"

"Ah!" said Brodrigg, with a mischievous twinkle, "that's what you've got to find out. Mr. Capes is a somewhat reticent gentleman."

Thorndyke cast a quick look at the client and from him to the solicitor. It was not the first time that old Brodrigg's high spirits had overflowed in the form of a "leg-pull", though Thorndyke had no more whole-hearted admirer than the shrewd, facetious old lawyer.

Mr. Capes smiled a deprecating smile. "It isn't quite so bad as that," he said. "But I really can't give you much information. It isn't mine to give. I am afraid of telling someone else's secrets, if I say very much."

"Of course you mustn't do that," said Thorndyke. "But, I suppose you can indicate in general terms the nature of your difficulty and the kind of help you want from us."

"I think I can," Mr. Capes replied. "At any rate, I will try. My difficulty is that a certain person with whom I wish to communicate has disappeared in what appears to me to be a rather remarkable manner. When I last heard from him, he was staying at a certain seaside resort and he stated in his letter that he was returning on the following day to his rooms in London. A few days later, I called at his rooms and found that he had not yet returned. But his luggage, which he had sent on independently, had arrived on the day which he had mentioned. So it is evident that he must have left his seaside lodgings. But from that day to this I have had no communication from him, and he has never returned to his rooms nor written to his landlady."

"About how long ago was this?" Thorndyke asked.

"It is just about two months since I heard from him."

"You don't wish to give the name of the seaside resort where he was staying."

"I think I had better not," answered Mr. Capes. "There are circumstances—they don't concern me, but they do concern him very much—which seem to make it necessary for me to say as little as possible."

"And there is nothing further that you can tell us?"

"I am afraid not, excepting that, if I could get into communication with him, I could tell him of something very much to his advantage and which might prevent him from doing something which it would be much better that he should not do."

Thorndyke cogitated profoundly while Brodribb watched him with undisguised enjoyment. Presently my colleague looked up and addressed our secretive client.

"Did you ever play the game of 'Clump', Mr. Capes? It is a somewhat legal form of game in which one player asks questions of the others, who are required to answer 'yes' or 'no' in the proper witness-box style."

"I know the game," said Capes, looking a little puzzled, "but—"

"Shall we try a round or two?" asked Thorndyke, with an unmoved countenance. "You don't wish to make any statements, but if I ask you certain specific questions, will you answer 'yes or no?'"

Mr. Capes reflected awhile. At length he said: "I am afraid I can't commit myself to a promise. Still, if you like to ask a question or two, I will answer them if I can."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "then, as a start, supposing I suggest that the date of the letter that you received was the thirteenth of August? What do you say? Yes or no?"

Mr. Capes sat bolt upright and stared at Thorndyke open-mouthed.

"How on earth did you guess that?" he exclaimed in an astonished tone. "It's most extraordinary! But you are right. It was dated the thirteenth."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "as we have fixed the time we will have a try at the place. What do you say if I suggest that the seaside resort was in the

neighbourhood of Broadstairs?"

Mr. Capes was positively thunderstruck. As he sat gazing at Thorndyke he looked like amazement personified.

"But," he exclaimed, "you can't be guessing! You know! You know that he was at Broadstairs. And yet, how could you? I haven't even hinted at who he is."

"I have a certain man in my mind," said Thorndyke, "who may have disappeared from Broadstairs. Shall I suggest a few personal characteristics?"

Mr. Capes nodded eagerly and Thorndyke continued:

"If I suggest, for instance, that he was an artist—a painter in oil"—Capes nodded again—"that he was somewhat fastidious as to his pigments?"

"Yes," said Capes. "Unnecessarily so in my opinion, and I am an artist myself. What else?"

"That he worked with his palette in his right hand and held his brush with his left?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Capes, half-rising from his chair; "and what was he like?"

"By gum," murmured Brodribb, "we haven't stumped him after all."

Evidently we had not, for he proceeded:

"As to his physical characteristics, I suggest that he was a shortish man—about five feet seven—rather stout, fair hair, slightly bald and wearing a rather large and ragged moustache."

Mr. Capes was astounded—and so was I, for that matter—and for some moments there was a silence, broken only by old Brodribb, who sat chuckling softly and rubbing his hands. At length Mr. Capes said:

"You have described him exactly, but I needn't tell you that. What I do not understand at all is how you knew that I was referring to this particular man, seeing that I mentioned no name. By the way, sir, may I ask when you saw him last?"

"I have no reason to suppose," replied Thorndyke, "that I have ever seen him at all;" an answer that reduced Mr. Capes to a state of stupefaction and brought our old friend Brodribb to the verge of apoplexy. "This man," Thorndyke continued, "is a purely hypothetical individual whom I have described from certain traces left by him. I have reason to believe that he left Broadstairs on the fourteenth of August and I have certain opinions as to what became of him thereafter. But a few more details would be useful, and I shall continue my interrogation. Now this man sent his luggage on separately. That suggests a possible intention of breaking his journey to London. What do you say?"

"I don't know," replied Capes, "but I think it probable."

"I suggest that he broke his journey for the purpose of holding an interview with some other person."

"I cannot say," answered Capes, "but if he did break his journey it would probably be for that purpose."

"And supposing that interview to have taken place, would it be likely to be an amicable interview?"

"I am afraid not. I suspect that my—er—acquaintance might have made certain proposals which would have been unacceptable, but which he might have been able to enforce. However, that is only surmise," Capes added hastily. "I really know nothing more than I have told you, except the missing man's name, and that I would rather not mention."

"It is not material," said Thorndyke, "at least, not at present. If it should become essential, I will let you know."

"M—yes," said Mr. Capes. "But you were saying that you had certain opinions as to what has become of this person."

"Yes," Thorndyke replied; "speculative opinions. But they will have to be verified. If they turn out to be correct—or incorrect either—I will let you know in the course of a few days. Has Mr. Brodribb your address?"

"He has; but you had better have it, too."

He produced his card, and, after an ineffectual effort to extract a statement from Thorndyke, took his departure.

The third act of this singular drama opened in the same setting as the first, for the following Sunday morning found my colleague and me following the path from Sandwich to the sea. But we were not alone this time. At our side marched Major Robertson, the eminent dog trainer, and behind him trotted one of his superlatively educated fox-hounds.

We came out on the shore at the same point as on the former occasion, and turning towards Shellness, walked along the smooth sand with a careful eye on the not very distinctive landmarks. At length Thorndyke halted.

"This is the place," said he. "I fixed it in my mind by that distant tree, which coincides with the chimney of that cottage on the marshes. The clothes lay in that hollow between the two big sand-hills."

We advanced to the spot, but, as a hollow is useless as a landmark, Thorndyke ascended the nearest sand-hill and stuck his stick in the summit and tied his handkerchief to the handle.

"That," he said, "will serve as a centre which we can keep in sight, and if we describe a series of gradually widening concentric circles round it, we shall cover the whole ground completely."

"How far do you propose to go?" asked the major.

"We must be guided by the appearance of the ground," replied Thorndyke. "But the circumstances suggest that if there is anything buried, it can't be very far from where the clothes were laid. And it is pretty certain to be in a hollow."

The major nodded; and when he had attached a long leash to the dog's collar, we started, at first skirting the base of the sand-hill, and then, guided by our own footmarks in the loose sand, gradually increasing the distance from the high mound, above which Thorndyke's handkerchief fluttered in the light breeze. Thus we continued, walking slowly, keeping close to the previously made circle of footprints and watching the dog; who certainly did a vast amount of sniffing, but appeared to let his mind run unduly on the subject of rabbits.

In this way half an hour was consumed, and I was beginning to wonder whether we were going after all to draw a blank, when the dog's demeanour underwent a sudden change. At the moment we were crossing

a range of high sand-hills, covered with stiff, reedy grass and stunted gorse, and before us lay a deep hollow, naked of vegetation and presenting a bare, smooth surface of the characteristic greyish-yellow sand. On the side of the hill the dog checked, and, with upraised muzzle, began to sniff the air with a curiously suspicious expression, clearly unconnected with the rabbit question. On this, the major unfastened the leash, and the dog, left to his own devices, put his nose to the ground and began rapidly to cast to and fro, zig-zagging down the side of the hill and growing every moment more excited. In the same sinuous manner he proceeded across the hollow until he reached a spot near the middle; and here he came to a sudden stop and began to scratch up the sand with furious eagerness.

"It's a find, sure enough!" exclaimed the major, nearly as excited as his pupil; and, as he spoke, he ran down the hillside, followed by me and Thorndyke, who, as he reached the bottom, drew from his "poacher's pocket" a large fern-trowel in a leather sheath. It was not a very efficient digging implement, but it threw up the loose sand faster than the scratchings of the dog.

It was easy ground to excavate. Working at the spot that the dog had located, Thorndyke had soon hollowed out a small cavity some eighteen inches deep. Into the bottom of this he thrust the pointed blade of the big trowel. Then he paused and looked round at the major and me, who were craning eagerly over the little pit.

"There is something there," said he. "Feel the handle of the trowel."

I grasped the wooden handle, and, working it gently up and down, was aware of a definite but somewhat soft resistance. The major verified my observation, and then Thorndyke resumed his digging, widening the pit and working with increased caution. Ten minutes more careful excavation brought into view a recognizable shape—a shoulder and upper arm; and following the lines of this, further diggings disclosed the form of a head and shoulders plainly discernable though still shrouded in sand. Finally, with the point of the trowel and a borrowed handkerchief—mine—the adhering sand was cleared away; and then, from the bottom of the deep, funnel-shaped hole, there looked up at us, with a most weird and horrible effect, the discoloured face of a man.



In that face, the passing weeks had wrought inevitable changes, on which I need not dwell. But the features were easily recognizable, and I could see at once that the man corresponded completely with Thorndyke's description. The cheeks were full; the hair on the temples was of a pale, yellowish brown; a straggling, fair moustache covered the mouth; and, when the sand had been sufficiently cleared away, I could see a small, tonsure-like bald patch near the back of the crown. But I could see something more than this. On the left temple, just behind the eyebrow, was a ragged, shapeless wound such as might have been made by a hammer.

"That turns into certainty what we have already surmised," said Thorndyke, gently pressing the scalp around the wound. "It must have killed him instantly. The skull is smashed in like an egg-shell. And this is undoubtedly the weapon," he added, drawing out of the sand beside the body a big, hexagon-headed screw-bolt, "very prudently buried with the body. And that is all that really concerns us. We can leave the police to finish the disinterment; but you notice, Anstey, that the corpse is nude with the exception of the vest and probably the pants. The shirt has disappeared. Which is exactly what we should have expected."

Slowly, but with the feeling of something accomplished, we took our way back to the town, having collected Thorndyke's stick on the way. Presently, the major left us, to look up a friend at the clubhouse on the links. As soon as we were alone, I put in a demand for an elucidation.

"I see the general trend of your investigations," said I "but I can't imagine how they yielded so much detail; as to the personal appearance of this man, for instance."

"The evidence in this case," he replied, "was analogous to circumstantial evidence. It depended on the cumulative effect of a number of facts, each separately inconclusive, but all pointing to the same conclusion. Shall I run over the data in their order and in accordance with their connections?"

I gave an emphatic affirmative, and he continued:

"We begin, naturally, with the first fact, which is, of course, the most interesting and important; the fact which arrests attention, which shows that something has to be explained and possibly suggests a line of

inquiry. You remember that I measured the footprints in the sand for comparison with the other footprints. Then I had the dimensions of the feet of the presumed bather. But as soon as I looked at the shoes which purported to be those of that bather, I felt a conviction that his feet would never go into them.

"Now, that was a very striking fact—if it really was a fact—and it came on top of another fact hardly less striking, The bather had gone into the sea; and at a considerable distance he had unquestionably come out again. There could be no possible doubt. In foot-measurement and length of stride the two sets of tracks were identical; and there were no other tracks. That man had come ashore and he had remained ashore. But yet he had not put on his clothes. He couldn't have gone away naked; but obviously he was not there. As a criminal lawyer, you must admit that there was *prima facie* evidence of something very abnormal and probably criminal.

"On our way to the dormy-house, I carried the stick in the same hand as my own and noted that it was very little shorter. Therefore it was a tall man's stick. Apparently, then, the stick did not belong to the shoes, but to the man who had made the footprints. Then, when we came to the dormy-house, another striking fact presented itself. You remember that Hallett commented on the quantity of sand that fell from the clothes on to the table. I am astonished that he did not notice the very peculiar character of that sand. It was perfectly unlike the sand which would fall from his own clothes. The sand on the sand-hills is dune sand—wind-borne sand, or, as the legal term has it, *æolian* sand; and it is perfectly characteristic. As it has been carried by the wind, it is necessarily fine. The grains are small; and as the action of the wind sorts them out, they are extremely uniform in size. Moreover, by being continually blown about and rubbed together, they become rounded by mutual attrition. And then dune sand is nearly pure sand, composed of grains of silica unmixed with other substances.

"Beach sand is quite different. Much of it is half-formed, freshly broken down silica and is often very coarse; and, as I pointed out at the time, it is mixed with all sorts of foreign substances derived from masses in the neighbourhood. This particular sand was loaded with black and white particles, of which the white were mostly chalk, and the black particles of

coal. Now there is very little chalk in the Shellness sand, as there are no cliffs quite near, and chalk rapidly disappears from sand by reason of its softness; and there is no coal."

"Where does the coal come from?" I asked.

"Principally from the Goodwins," he replied. "It is derived from the cargoes of colliers whose wrecks are embedded in those sands, and from the bunkers of wrecked steamers. This coal sinks down through the seventy odd feet of sand and at last works out at the bottom, where it drifts slowly across the floor of the sea in a north-westerly direction until some easterly gale throws it up on the Thanet shore between Ramsgate and Foreness Point. Most of it comes up at Dumpton and Broadstairs, there you may see the poor people, in the winter, gathering coal pebbles to feed their fires.

"This sand, then, almost certainly came from the Thanet coast; but the missing man, Roscoff, had been staying in Sandwich, playing golf on the sand-hills. This was another striking discrepancy, and it made me decide to examine the clothes exhaustively, garment by garment. I did so; and this is what I found.

"The jacket, trousers, socks and shoes were those of a shortish, rather stout man, as shown by measurements, and the cap was his, since it was made of the same cloth as the jacket and trousers.

"The waistcoat, shirt, underclothes and stick were those of a tall man.

"The garments, socks and shoes of the short man were charged with Thanet beach sand, and contained no dune sand, excepting the cap, which might have fallen off on the sand-hills.

"The waistcoat was saturated with dune sand and contained no beach sand, and a little dune sand was obtained from the shirt and undergarments. That is to say, that the short man's clothes contained beach sand only, while the tall man's clothes contained only dune sand.

"The short man's clothes were all unmarked; the tall man's clothes were either marked or conspicuously recognizable, as the waistcoat and also the stick.

"The garments of the short man which had been left were those that

could not have been worn by a tall man without attracting instant attention and the shoes could not have been put on at all; whereas the garments of the short man which had disappeared—the waistcoat, shirt and underclothes—were those that could have been worn by a tall man without attracting attention. The obvious suggestion was that the tall man had gone off in the short man's shirt and waistcoat but otherwise in his own clothes.

"And now as to the personal characteristics of the short man. From the cap I obtained five hairs. They were all blond, and two of them were of the peculiar, atrophic, "point of exclamation" type that grow at the margin of a bald area. Therefore he was a fair man and partially bald. On the inside of the jacket, clinging to the rough tweed, I found a single long, thin, fair moustache hair, which suggested a long, soft moustache. The edge of the left cuff was thickly marked with oil-paint—not a single smear, but an accumulation such as a painter picks up when he reaches with his brush hand across a loaded palette. The suggestion—not very conclusive—was that he was an oil-painter and left-handed. But there was strong confirmation. There was an artist's pencil—3B—and a stump of vine charcoal such as an oil-painter might carry. The silver coins in his pocket were blackened with sulphide as they would be if a piece of artist's soft, vulcanized rubber has been in the pocket with them. And there was the pocket-knife. It contained a sharp steel pencil-blade, a charcoal file and an ivory palette-blade; and that palette-blade had been used by a left-handed man."

"How did you arrive at that?" I asked.

"By the bevels worn at the edges," he replied. "An old palette-knife used by a right-handed man shows a bevel of wear on the under side of the left-hand edge and the upper side of the right-hand edge; in the case of a left handed man the wear shows on the under side of the right hand edge and the upper side of the left-hand edge. This being an ivory blade, showed the wear very distinctly and proved conclusively that the user was left-handed; and as an ivory palette-knife is used only by fastidiously careful painters for such pigments as the cadmiums, which might be discoloured by a steel blade, one was justified in assuing that he was somewhat fastidious as to his pigments."

As I listened to Thorndyke's exposition I was profoundly impressed. His conclusions, which had sounded like mere speculative guesses, were, I now realized, based upon an analysis of the evidence as careful and as impartial as the summing up of a judge. And these conclusions he had drawn instantaneously from the appearances of things that had been before my eyes all the time and from which I had learned nothing.

"What do you suppose is the meaning of the affair?" I asked presently. "What was the motive of the murder?"

"We can only guess," he replied. "But, interpreting Capes' hints, I should suspect that our artist friend was a blackmailer; that he had come over here to squeeze Roscoff—perhaps not for the first time—and that his victim lured him out on the sand-hills for a private talk and then took the only effective means of ridding himself of his persecutor. That is my view of the case; but, of course, it is only surmise."

Surmise as it was, however, it turned out to be literally correct. At the inquest Capes had to tell all that he knew, which was uncommonly little, though no one was able to add to it. The murdered man, Joseph Bertrand, had fastened on Roscoff and made a regular income by blackmailing him. That much Capes knew; and he knew that the victim had been in prison and that that was the secret. But who Roscoff was and what was his real name—for Roscoff was apparently a nom de guerre—he had no idea. So he could not help the police. The murderer had got clear away and there was no hint as to where to look for him; and so far as I know, nothing has ever been heard of him since.



## VIII. — THE APPARITION OF BURLING COURT

THORNDYKE seldom took a formal holiday. He did not seem to need one. As he himself put it, "A holiday implies the exchange of a less pleasurable occupation for one more pleasurable. But there is no occupation more pleasurable than the practice of Medical Jurisprudence." Moreover, his work was less affected by terms and vacations than that of an ordinary barrister, and the Long Vacation often found him with his hands full. Even when he did appear to take a holiday the appearance tended to be misleading, and it was apt to turn out that his disappearance from his usual haunts was associated with a case of unusual interest at a distance.

Thus it was on the occasion when our old friend, Mr. Brodribb, of Lincoln's Inn, beguiled him into a fortnight's change at St. David's-at-Cliffe, a seaside hamlet on the Kentish coast. There was a case in the background, and a very curious case it turned out to be, though at first it appeared to me quite a commonplace affair; and the manner of its introduction was as follows.

One hot afternoon in the early part of the Long Vacation the old solicitor dropped in for a cup of tea and a chat. That, at least, was how he explained his visit; but my experience of Mr. Brodribb led me to suspect some ulterior purpose in the call, and as he sat by the open window, teacup in hand, looking, with his fine pink complexion, his silky white hair and his faultless "turn out," the very type of the courtly, old-fashioned lawyer, I waited expectantly for the matter of his visit to transpire. And, presently, out it came.

"I am going to take a little holiday down at St. David's," said he. "Just a quiet spell by the sea, you know. Delightful place. So quiet and restful and so breezy and fresh. Ever been there?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "I only just know the name."

"Well, why shouldn't you come down for a week or so? Both of you. I shall stay at Burling Court, the Lumleys' place. I can't invite you there as

I'm only a guest, but I know of some comfortable rooms in the village that I could get for you. I wish you would come down, Thorndyke," he added after a pause. "I'm rather unhappy about young Lumley—I'm the family lawyer, you know, and so was my father and my grandfather, so I feel almost as if the Lumleys were my own kin—and I should like to have your advice and help."

"Why not have it now?" suggested Thorndyke.

"I will," he replied; "but I should like your help on the spot too. I'd like you to see Lumley have a talk with him and tell me what you think of him."

"What is amiss with him?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well," answered Brodribb, "it looks uncomfortably like insanity. He has delusions—sees apparitions and that sort of thing. And there is some insanity in the family. But I had better give you the facts in their natural order.

"About four months ago Giles Lumley of Burling Court died; and as he was a widower without issue, the estate passed to his nearest male relative, my present client, Frank Lumley, who was also the principal beneficiary under the will. At the time of Giles' death Frank was abroad, but a cousin of his, Lewis Price, was staying at the house with his wife as a more or less permanent guest; and as Price's circumstances were not very flourishing, and as he is the next heir to the estate, Frank—who is a bachelor—wrote to him at once telling him to look upon Burling Court as his home for as long as he pleased."

"That was extremely generous of him," I remarked

"Yes," Brodribb agreed; "Frank is a good fellow; a very high-minded gentleman and a very sweet man but a little queer—very queer just now. Well, Frank came back from abroad and took up his abode at the house; and for a time all went well. Then, one day, Price called on me and gave me some very unpleasant news. It seemed that Frank, who had always been rather neurotic and imaginative, had been interesting himself a good deal in psychical research and—and balderdash of that kind, you know. Well, there was no great harm in that, perhaps. But just lately he had taken to seeing visions and—what was worse—talking about them; so

much so that Price got uneasy and privately invited a mental specialist down to lunch; and the specialist, having had a longish talk with Frank Price confidentially that he (Frank) was obviously suffering from insane delusions. Thereupon Price called me and begged me to see Frank myself and what ought to be done; so I made an occasion for him to come and see me at the office."

"And what did you think of him?" asked Thorndyke.

"I was horrified—horrified," said Mr. Brodribb. "I assure you, Thorndyke, that that poor young man sat in my office and talked like a stark lunatic. Quite quietly, you know. No excitement, though he was evidently anxious and unhappy. But there he sat gravely talking the damndest nonsense you ever heard."

"As, for instance—?"

"Well, his infernal visions. Luminous birds flying about in the dark, and a human head suspended in mid air—upside down, too. But I had better give you his story as he told it. I made full shorthand notes as he was talking, and I've brought them with me, though I hardly need them.

"His trouble seems to have begun soon after he took up his quarters at Burling Court. Being a bookish sort of fellow, he started to go through his library systematically; and presently he came across a small manuscript book, which turned out to be a sort of family history, or rather a collection of episodes. It was rather a lurid little book, for it apparently dwelt chiefly on the family crime, the family spectre and the family madness."

"Did you know about these heirlooms?" Thorndyke asked.

"No; it was the first I'd heard of 'em. Price knew there was some soft of family superstition, but he didn't know what it was; and Giles knew about it—so Price tells me—but didn't care to talk about it. He never mentioned it to me."

"What is the nature of the tradition?" inquired Thorndyke.

"I'll tell you," said Brodribb, taking out his notes. "I've got it all down, and poor Frank reeled the stuff off as if he had learned it by heart. The book, which is dated 1819, was apparently written by a Walter Lumley



and the story of the crime and the spook runs thus:

"About 1720 the property passed to a Gilbert Lumley, a naval officer, who then gave up the sea, married and settled down at Burling Court. A year or two later some trouble arose about his wife and a man named Glynn, a neighbouring squire. With or without cause, Lumley became violently jealous, and the end of it was that he lured Glynn to a large cavern in the cliffs and there murdered him. It was a most ferocious and vindictive crime. The cavern, which was then used by smugglers, had a beam across the roof bearing a tackle for hoisting out boat cargoes, and this tackle Lumley fastened to Glynn's ankles—having first pinioned him—and hoisted him up so that he hung head downwards a foot or so clear of the floor of the cave. And there he left him hanging until the rising tide flowed into the cave and drowned him.

"The very next day the murder was discovered, and as Lumley was the nearest justice of the peace, the discoverers reported to him and took him to the cave to the body. When he entered the cave the corpse was stilt hanging as he had left the living man, and a bat was flittering round and round the dead man's head. He had the body taken down and carried to Glynn's house and took the necessary measures for the inquest. Of course, everyone suspected him of the murder, but there was no evidence against him. The verdict was murder by some person unknown, and as Gilbert Lumley was not sensitive, everything seemed to have gone quite satisfactorily.

"But it hadn't. One night, exactly a month after murder, Gilbert retired to his bedroom in the dark. He was in the act of feeling along the mantelpiece for the tinder-box, when he became aware of a dim light moving about the room. He turned round quickly and then saw that it was a bat—a most uncanny and abnormal bat that seemed to give out a greenish ghostly light—flitting round and round his bed. On this, remembering the bat in the cavern, he rushed out of the room in the very devil of a fright. Presently he returned with one of the servants and a couple of candles; but the bat had disappeared.

"From that time onward, the luminous bat haunted Gilbert, appearing in dark rooms, on staircases and passages and corridors, until his nerves were all on end and he did not dare to move about the house at night

without a candle or a lantern. But that was not the worst. Exactly two months after the murder the next stage of the haunting began. He had retired to his bedroom and was just about to get into bed when he remembered that he had left his watch in the little dressing-room that adjoined his chamber. With a candle in his hand he went to the dressing-room and flung open the door. And then he stopped dead and stood as if turned into stone; for, within a couple of yards of him, suspended in mid-air, was a man's head hanging upside down.

"For some seconds he stood rooted to the spot, unable to move. Then he uttered a cry of horror and rushed back to his room and down to the hall. There was no doubt whose head it was, strange and horrible as it looked in that unnatural, inverted position; for he had seen it twice before in that very position hanging in the cavern. Evidently he had not got rid of Glynn.

"That night, and every night henceforward, he slept in his wife's room. And all through the night he was conscious of a strange and dreadful impulse to rise and go down to the shore; to steal into the cavern and wait for the flowing tide. He lay awake, fighting against the invisible power that seemed to be drawing him to destruction, and by the morning the horrid impulse began to weaken. But he went about in terror, not daring to go near the shore and afraid to trust himself alone.

"A month passed. The effect of the apparition grew daily weaker and an abundance of lights in the house protected him from the visitation of the bat. Then, exactly three months after the murder, he saw the head again. This time it was in the library, where he had gone to fetch a book. He was standing by the book shelves and had just taken out a volume, when, as he turned away, there the hideous thing was hanging in that awful, grotesque posture, chin upwards and the scanty hair dropping down like wet fringe. Gilbert dropped the book that he was holding and fled from the room with a shriek; and all that night invisible hands seemed to be plucking at him to draw him away to where the voices of the waves were reverberating in the cavern.

"This second visitation affected him profoundly. He could not shake off that sinister impulse to steal away to the shore. He was a broken man, the victim of an abiding terror, clinging for protection to the very servants,

creeping abroad with shaking limbs and an apprehensive eye towards the sea. And ever in his ears was the murmur of the surf and the hollow echoes of the cavern.

"Already he had sought forgetfulness in drink; and sought it in vain. Now he took refuge in opiates. Every night, before retiring to the dreaded bed, he mingled laudanum with the brandy that brought him stupor if not repose. And brandy and opium began to leave their traces in the tremulous hand, the sallow cheek and the bloodshot eye. And so another month passed.

"As the day approached that would mark the fourth month, his terror of the visitation that he now anticipated reduced him to a state of utter prostration. Sleep—even drugged sleep—appeared that night to be out of the question, and he decided to sit up with his family, hoping by that means to escape the dreaded visitor. But it was a vain hope. Hour after hour he sat in his elbow chair by the fire, while his wife dozed in her chair opposite, until the clock in the hall struck twelve. He listened and counted the strokes of the bell, leaning back with his eyes closed. Half the weary night was gone. As the last stroke sounded and a deep silence fell on the house, he opened his eyes—and looked into the face of Glynn within a few inches of his own.

"For some moments he sat with dropped jaw and dilated eyes staring in silent horror at this awful thing; then with an agonised screech he slid from his chair into a heap on the floor.

"At noon on the following day he was missed from the house. A search was made in the grounds and in the neighbourhood, but he was nowhere to be found. At last someone thought of the cavern, of which he had spoken in his wild mutterings and a party of searchers made their way thither. And there they found him when the tide went out, lying on the wet sand with the brown sea-tangle wreathed about his limbs and the laudanum bottle—now full of sea water—by his side.

"With the death of Gilbert Lumley it seemed that the murdered man's spirit was appeased. During the lifetime of Gilbert's son, Thomas, the departed Glynn made no sign. But on his death and the succession of his son Arthur—then a middle-aged man—the visitations began again, and in the same order. At the end of the first month the luminous bat appeared;

at the end of the second, the inverted head made its entry, and again at the third and the fourth months; and within twenty-four hours of the last visitation, the body of Arthur Lumley was found in the cavern. And so it has been from that time onward. One generation escapes untouched by the curse; but in the next, Glynn and the sea claim their own."

"Is that true, so far as you know?" asked Thorndyke.

"I can't say," answered Brodribb. "I am now only quoting Walter Lumley's infernal little book. But I remember that, in fact, Giles' father was drowned. I understood that his boat capsized, but that may have been only a story to cover the suicide.

"Well now, I have given you the gruesome history from this book that poor Frank had the misfortune to find. You see that he had it all off by heart and had evidently read it again and again. Now I come to his own story, which he told me very quietly but with intense conviction and very evident forebodings.

"He found this damned book a few days after his arrival at Burling Court, and it was clear to him that, if the story was true, he was the next victim, since his predecessor, Giles, had been left in peace. And so it turned out. Exactly a month after his arrival, going up to his bedroom in the dark—no doubt expecting this apparition—as soon as he opened the door he saw a thing like a big glow-worm or firefly flitting round the room. It is evident that he was a good deal upset, for he rushed downstairs in a state of great agitation and fetched Price up to see it. But the strange thing was—though perhaps not so very strange, after all—that, although the thing was still there, flitting about the room, Price could see nothing. However, he pulled up the blind—the window was wide open—and the bat flopped out and disappeared.

"During the next month the bat reappeared several times, in the bedroom, in corridors and once in a garret, when it flew out as Frank opened the door."

"What was he doing in the garret?" asked Thorndyke.

"He went up to fetch an ancient coffin-stool that Mrs. Price had seen there and was telling him about. Well, this went on until the end of the second month. And then came the second act. It seems that by some

infernally stupid, he was occupying the bedroom that had been used by Gilbert. Now on this night, as soon as he had gone up, he must needs pay a visit to the little dressing-room, which is now known as 'Gilbert's cabin'—so he tells me, for I was not aware of it—and where Gilbert's cutlass, telescope, quadrant and the old navigator's watch are kept."

"Did he take a light with him?" inquired Thorndyke.

"I think not. There is a gas jet in the corridor and presumably he lit that. Then he opened the door of the cabin; and immediately he saw, a few feet in front of him, a man's head, upside down, apparently hanging in mid-air. It gave him a fearful shock—the more so, perhaps, because he half expected it—and, as before, he ran downstairs, all of a tremble. Price had gone to bed but Mrs. Price came up with him, and he showed her the horrible thing which was still hanging in the middle of the dark room.

"But Mrs. Price could see nothing. She assured him that it was all his imagination; and in proof of it, she walked into the room, right through the head, as it seemed, and when she had found the matches, she lit the gas. Of course, there was nothing whatever in the room.

"Another month passed. The bat appeared at intervals and kept poor Frank's nerves in a state of constant tension. On the night of the appointed day, as you will anticipate, Frank went again to Gilbert's cabin, drawn there by an attraction that one can quite understand. And there, of course, was the confounded head as before. That was a fortnight ago. So, you see, the affair is getting urgent. Either there is some truth in this weird story—which I don't believe for a moment—or poor old Frank is ripe for the asylum. But in any case something will have to be done."

"You spoke just now," said Thorndyke, "of some insanity in the family. What does it amount to, leaving these apparitions out of the question?"

"Well, a cousin of Frank's committed suicide in an asylum."

"And Frank's parents?"

"They were quite sane. The cousin was the son of Frank's mother's sister; and she was all right, too. But the boy's father had to be put away."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "the insanity doesn't seem to be in Frank's family at all, in a medical sense. Legal inheritance and physiological

inheritance do not follow the same lines. If his mother's sister married a lunatic, he might inherit that lunatic's property, but he could not inherit his insanity. There was no blood relationship."

"No, that's true," Brodribb admitted, "though Frank certainly seems as mad as a hatter. But now, to come back to the holiday question, what do you say to a week or so at St. David's?"

Thorndyke looked at me interrogatively. "What says my learned friend?" he asked.

"I say: Let us put up the shutters and leave Polton in charge," I replied; and Thorndyke assented without a murmur.

Less than a week later, we were installed in the very comfortable rooms that Mr. Brodribb had found for us in the hamlet of St. David's, within five minutes' walk of the steep gap-way that led down to the beach. Thorndyke entered into the holiday with an enthusiasm that would have astonished the denizens of King Bench Walk. He explored the village, he examined the church, inside and out, he sampled all the footpaths with the aid of the Ordnance map, he foregathered with the fishermen on the beach and renewed his acquaintance with boat-craft, and he made a pilgrimage to the historic cavern—it was less than a mile along the shore—and inspected its dark and chilly interior with the most lively curiosity.

We had not been at St. David's twenty-four hours before we made the acquaintance of Frank Lumley. Mr. Brodribb saw to that. For the old solicitor was profoundly anxious about his client—he took his responsibilities very seriously, did Mr. Brodribb. His "family" clients were to him as his own kin, and their interests his own interests—and his confidence in Thorndyke's wisdom was unbounded. We were very favourably impressed by the quiet, gentle, rather frail young man, and for my part, I found him, for a certifiable lunatic, a singularly reasonable and intelligent person. Indeed, apart from his delusions—or rather hallucinations—he seemed perfectly sane; for a somewhat eager interest in psychical and supernormal phenomena (of which he made no secret) is hardly enough to create a suspicion of a man's sanity.

But he was clearly uneasy about his own mental condition. He realised that the apparitions might be the products of a disordered brain, though that was not his own view of them; and he discussed them with us in the

most open and ingenuous manner.

"You don't think," Thorndyke suggested, "that these apparitions may possibly be natural appearances which you have misinterpreted or exaggerated in consequence of having read that very circumstantial story?"

Lumley shook his head emphatically. "It is impossible," said he. "How could I? Take the case of the bat. I have seen it on several occasions quite distinctly. It was obviously a bat; but yet it seemed full of a ghostly, greenish light like that of a glow-worm. If it was not what it appeared, what was it? And then the head. There it was, perfectly clear and solid and real, hanging in mid-air within three or four feet of me. I could have touched it if I had dared."

"What size did it appear?" asked Thorndyke.

Lumley reflected. "It was not quite life-size. I should say about two-thirds the size of an ordinary head."

"Should you recognise the face if you saw it again?"

"I can't say," replied Lumley. "You see, it was upside down. I haven't a very clear picture of it—I mean as to what the face would have been like the right way up."

"Was the room quite dark on both occasions?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, quite. The gas jet in the corridor is just above the door and does not any light into the room."

"And what is there opposite the door?"

"There is a small window, but that is usually kept shuttered nowadays. Under the window is a small folding dressing-table that belonged to Gilbert Lumley. He had it made when he came home from sea."

Thus Lumley was quite lucid and coherent in his answers. His manner was perfectly sane; it was only the matter that was abnormal. Of the reality of the apparitions he had not the slightest doubt, and he never varied in the smallest degree in his description of their appearance. The fact that they had been invisible both to Mr. Price and his wife he explained by pointing out that the curse applied only to the direct

descendants of Gilbert Lumley, and to those only in alternate generations.

After one of our conversations, Thorndyke expressed a wish to see the little manuscript book that had been the cause of all the trouble—or at least had been the forerunner; and Lumley promised to bring it to our rooms on the following afternoon. But then came an interruption to our holiday, not entirely unexpected; an urgent telegram from one of our solicitor friends asking consultation on an important and intricate case that had just been put into his hands, and making it necessary for us to go up to town by an early train on the following morning.

We sent a note to Brodribb, telling him that we should be away from St. David's for perhaps a day or two, and on our way to the station he overtook us.

"I am sorry you have had to break your holiday," he said; "but I hope you will be back before Thursday."

"Why Thursday, in particular?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Because Thursday is the day on which that damned head is due to make its third appearance. It will be an anxious time. Frank hasn't said anything, but I know his nerves are strung up to concert pitch."

"You must watch him," said Thorndyke. "Don't let him out of your sight if you can help it."

"That's all very well," said Brodribb, "but he isn't a child, and I am not his keeper. He is the master of the house and I am just his guest. I can't follow him about if he wants to be alone."

"You mustn't stand on politeness, Brodribb," rejoined Thorndyke. "It will be a critical time and you must keep him in sight."

"I shall do my best," Brodribb said anxiously, "but I do hope you will be back by then."

He accompanied us dejectedly to the platform and stayed with us until our train came in. Suddenly, just as we were entering our carriage, he thrust his hand into his pocket.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed, "I had nearly forgotten this book. Frank



asked me to give it to you." As he spoke, he drew out a little rusty calf-bound volume and handed it to Thorndyke. "You can look through it at your leisure," said he, "and if you think it best to chuck the infernal thing out of the window, do so. I suspect poor Frank is none the better for conning it over perpetually as he does."

I thought there was a good deal of reason in Brodribb's opinion. If Lumley's illusions were, as I suspected, the result of suggestion produced by reading the narrative, that suggestion would certainly tend to be reinforced by conning it over and over again. But the old lawyer's proposal was hardly practicable.

As soon as the train had fairly started, Thorndyke proceeded to inspect the little volume; and his manner of doing so was highly characteristic. An ordinary person would have opened the book and looked through the contents, probably seeking out at once the sinister history of Gilbert Lumley.

Not so Thorndyke. His inspection began at the very beginning and proceeded systematically to deal with every fact that the book had to disclose. First he made an exhaustive examination of the cover; scrutinised the corners; inspected the bottom edges and compared them with the top edges; and compared the top and bottom head-caps. Then he brought out his lens and examined the tooling, which was simple in character and worked in "blind"—i.e. not gilt. He also inspected the head-bands through the glass, and then he turned his attention to the interior. He looked carefully at both end-papers, he opened the sections and examined the sewing-thread, he held the leaves up to the light and tested the paper by eye and by touch and he viewed the writing in several places through his lens. Finally he handed the book and the lens to me without remark.

It was a quaint little volume, with a curiously antique air, though it was but a century old. The cover was of rusty calf, a good deal rubbed, but not in bad condition; for the joints were perfectly sound; but then it had probably had comparatively little use. The paper—a laid paper with very distinct wire-lines but no watermark—had turned with age to a pale, creamy buff; the writing had faded to a warm brown, but was easily legible and very clearly and carefully written. Having noted these points, I

turned over the leaves until I came to the story of Gilbert Lumley and the ill-fated Glynn, which I read through attentively, observing that Mr. Brodribb's notes had given the whole substance of the narrative with singular completeness.

"This story," I said, as I handed the book back to Thorndyke, "strikes me as rather unreal and unconvincing. One doesn't see how Walter Lumley got his information."

"No," agreed Thorndyke. "It is on the plane of fiction. The narrator speaks in the manner of a novelist with complete knowledge of events and actions which were apparently known only to the actors."

"Do you think it possible that Walter Lumley was simply romancing?"

"I think it quite possible, and in fact very probable that the whole narrative is fictitious," he replied. "We shall have to go into that question later on. For the present, I suppose, we had better give our attention to the case that we have in hand at the moment."

The little volume was accordingly put away, and for the rest of the journey our conversation was occupied with the matter of the consultation that formed our immediate business. As this, however, had no connection with the present history, I need make no further reference to it beyond stating that it kept us both busy for three days and that we finished with it on the evening of the third.

"Do you propose to go down to St. David's to-night or to-morrow?" I asked, as we let ourselves into our chambers.

"To-night," replied Thorndyke. "This is Thursday, you know, and Brodribb was anxious that we should be back some time to-day. I have sent him a telegram saying that we shall go down by the train that arrives about ten o'clock. So if he wants us, he can meet us at the station or send a message."

"I wonder," said I, "if the apparition of Glynn's head will make its expected visitation to-night."

"It probably will if there is an opportunity," Thorndyke replied. "But I hope that Brodribb will manage to prevent the opportunity from occurring. And, talking of Lumley, as we have an hour to spare, we may as

well finish our inspection of his book. I snipped off a corner of one of the leaves and gave it to Polton to boil up in weak caustic soda. It will be ready for examination by now."

"You don't suspect that the book has been faked, do you?" said I.

"I view that book with the deepest suspicion," he replied, opening a drawer and producing the little volume. "Just look at it, Jervis. Look at the cover, for instance."

"Well," I said, turning the book over in my hand, "the cover looks ancient enough to me; typical old, rusty calf with a century's wear on it."

"Oh, there's no doubt that it is old calf," said he; "just the sort of leather that you could skin off the cover of an old quarto or folio. But don't you see that the signs of wear are all in the wrong places? How does a book wear in use? Well, first there are the bottom edges, which rub on the shelf. Then the corners, which are the thinnest leather and the most exposed. Then the top head-cap, which the finger hooks into in pulling the book from the shelf. Then the joint or hinge, which wears through from frequent opening and shutting. The sides get the least wear of all. But in this book, the bottom edges, the corners, the top head-cap and the joints are perfectly sound. They are not more worn than the sides; and the tooling is modern in character. It looks quite fresh and the tool-marks are impressed on the marks of wear instead of being themselves worn. The appearances suggest to me a new binding with old leather."

"Then look at the paper. It professes to be discoloured by age. But the discoloration of the leaves of an old book occurs principally at the edges, where the paper has become oxidised by exposure to the air. The leaves of this book are equally discoloured all over. To me they suggest a bath of weak tea rather than old age."

"Again, there is the writing. Its appearance is that of faded writing done with the old-fashioned writing ink—made with iron sulphate and oak-galls. But it doesn't look quite the right colour. However, we can easily test that. If it is old iron-gall ink, a drop of ammonium sulphide will turn it black. Let us take the book up to the laboratory and try it—and we had better have a "control" to compare it with."

He ran his eye along the book-shelves and took down a rusty-looking

volume of Humphry Clinker, the end-paper of which bore several brown and faded signatures.

"Here is a signature dated 1803," said he. "That will be near enough;" and with the two books in his hand he led the way upstairs to the laboratory. Here he took down the ammonium sulphide bottle, and dipping up a little of the liquid in a fine glass tube, opened the cover of Humphry Clinker and carefully deposited a tiny drop on the figure 3 in the date. Almost immediately the ghostly brown began to darken until it at length became jet black. Then, in the same way, he opened Walter Lumley's manuscript book and on the 9th of the date, 1819, he deposited a drop of the solution. But this time there was no darkening of the pale brown writing; on the contrary, it faded rapidly to a faint and muddy violet.

"It is not an iron ink," said Thorndyke, "and it looks suspiciously like an aniline brown. But let us see what the paper is made of. Have you boiled up that fragment, Polton?"

"Yes, sir," answered our laboratory assistant, "and I've washed the soda out of it, so it's all ready."

He produced a labelled test-tube containing a tiny corner of paper floating in water, which he carefully emptied into a large watch-glass. From this Thorndyke transferred the little pulpy fragment to a microscope slide and, with a pair of mounted needles, broke it up into its constituent fibres. Then he dropped on it a drop of aniline stain, removed the surplus with blotting-paper, added a drop of glycerine and put on it a large cover-slip.

"There, Jervis," said he, handing me the slide, "let us have your opinion on Walter Lumley's paper."

I placed the slide on the stage of the microscope and proceeded to inspect the specimen. But no exhaustive examination was necessary. The first glance settled the matter.

"It is nearly all wood," I said. "Mechanical wood fibre, with some esparto, a little cotton and a few linen fibres."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "it is a modern paper. Mechanical wood-pulp—prepared by Keller's process—was first used in paper-making in 1840.

'Chemical wood-pulp' came in later; and esparto was not used until 1860. So we can say with confidence that this paper was not made until more than twenty years after the date that is written on it. Probably it is of quite recent manufacture."

"In that case," said I, "this book is a counterfeit—presumably fraudulent."

"Yes. In effect it is a forgery."

"But that seems to suggest a conspiracy."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed; "especially if it is considered in conjunction with the apparitions. The suggestion is that this book was prepared for the purpose of inducing a state of mind favourable to the acceptance of supernatural appearances. The obvious inference is that the apparitions themselves were an imposture produced for fraudulent purposes. But it is time for us to go."

We shook hands with Polton, and, having collected our suit-cases from the sitting-room, set forth for the station.

During the journey down I reflected on the new turn that Frank Lumley's affairs had taken. Apparently, Brodribb had done his client an injustice. Lumley was not so mad as the old lawyer had supposed. He was merely credulous and highly suggestible. The "hallucinations" were real phenomena which he had simply misinterpreted. But who was behind these sham illusions? And what was it all about? I tried to open the question with Thorndyke; but though he was willing to discuss the sham manuscript book and the technique of its production, he would commit himself to nothing further.

On our arrival at St. David's, Thorndyke looked up and down the platform and again up the station approach. "No sign of Brodribb or any messenger," he remarked, "so we may assume that all is well at Burling Court up to the present. Let us hope that Brodribb's presence has had an inhibitory effect on the apparitions."

Nevertheless, it was evident that he was not quite easy in his mind. During supper he appeared watchful and preoccupied, and when, after the meal, he proposed a stroll down to the beach, he left word with our landlady as to where he was to be found if he should be wanted.

It was about a quarter to eleven when we arrived at the shore, and the tide was beginning to run out. The beach was deserted with the exception of a couple of fishermen who had apparently come in with the tide and who were making their boat secure for the night before going home. Thorndyke approached them, and addressing the older fisherman, remarked: "That is a big, powerful boat. Pretty fast, too, isn't she?"

"Ay, sir," was the reply; "fast and weatherly, she is. What we calls a galley-punt. Built at Deal for the hovelling trade—salvage, you know, sir—but there ain't no hovelling nowadays, not to speak of."

"Are you going out to-morrow?" asked Thorndyke.

"Not as I knows of, sir. Was you thinking of a bit of fishing?"

"If you are free," said Thorndyke, "I should like to charter the boat for to-morrow. I don't know what time I shall be able to start, but if you will stand by ready to put off at once when I come down we can count the waiting as sailing."

"Very well, sir," said the fisherman; "the boat's yours for the day to-morrow. Any time after six, or earlier, if you like, if you come down here you'll find me and my mate standing by with a stock of bait and the boat ready to push off."

"That will do admirably," said Thorndyke; and the morrow's programme being thus settled, we wished the fishermen good-night and walked slowly back to our lodgings, where, after a final pipe, we turned in.

On the following morning, just as we were finishing a rather leisurely breakfast, we saw from our window our friend Mr. Brodribb hurrying down the street towards our house. I ran out and opened the door, and as he entered I conducted him into our sitting-room. From his anxious and flustered manner it was obvious that something had gone wrong, and his first words confirmed the sinister impression.

"I'm afraid we're in for trouble, Thorndyke," said he. "Frank is missing."

"Since when?" asked Thorndyke.

"Since about eight o'clock this morning. He is nowhere about the house

and he hasn't had any breakfast."

"When was he last seen?" Thorndyke asked. "And where?"

"About eight o'clock, in the breakfast-room. Apparently he went in there to say "good-bye" to the Prices—they have gone on a visit for the day to Folkestone and were having an early breakfast so as to catch the eight-thirty train. But he didn't have breakfast with them. He just went in and wished them a pleasant journey and then it appears that he went out for a stroll in the grounds. When I came down to breakfast at half-past eight, the Prices had gone and Frank hadn't come in. The maid sounded the gong, and as Frank still did not appear, she went out into the grounds to look for him; and presently I went out myself. But he wasn't there and he wasn't anywhere in the house. I don't like the look of it at all. He is usually very regular and punctual at meals. What do you think we had better do, Thorndyke?"

My colleague looked at his watch and rang the bell.

"I think, Brodribb," said he, "that we must act on the obvious probabilities and provide against the one great danger that is known to us. Mrs. Robinson," he added, addressing the landlady, who, had answered the bell in person, "can you let us have a jug of strong coffee at once?"

Mrs. Robinson could, and bustled away to prepare it, while Thorndyke produced from a cupboard a large vacuum flask.

"I don't quite follow you, Thorndyke," said Mr. Brodribb. "What probabilities and what danger do you mean?"

"I mean that, up to the present, Frank Lumley has exactly reproduced in his experiences and his actions the experiences and actions of Gilbert Lumley as set forth in Walter Lumley's narrative. The overwhelming probability is that he will continue to reproduce the story of Gilbert to the end. He probably saw the apparition for the third time last night, and is even now preparing for the final act."

"Good God!" gasped Brodribb. "What a fool I am! You mean the cave? But we can never get there now. It will be high water in an hour and the beach at St. David's Head will be covered already. Unless we can get a boat," he added despairingly.

"We have got a boat," said Thorndyke. "I chartered one last night."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Brodribb. "But you always think of everything—though I don't know what you want that coffee for."

"We may not want it at all," said Thorndyke, as he poured the coffee, which the landlady had just brought, into the vacuum flask, "but on the other hand we may."

He deposited the flask in a hand-bag, in which I observed a small emergency-case, and then turned to Brodribb.

"We had better get down to the beach now," said he.

As we emerged from the bottom of the gap-way we saw our friends of the previous night laying a double line of planks across the beach from the boat to the margin of the surf; for the long galley-punt, with her load of ballast, was too heavy, over the shingle. They had just got the last plank laid as we reached the boat, and as they observed us they came running back with half a dozen of their mates.

"Jump aboard, gentlemen," said our skipper, with a slightly dubious eye on Mr. Brodribb—for the boat's gunwale was a good four feet above the beach. "We'll have her afloat in a jiffy."

We climbed in and hauled Mr. Brodribb in after us. The tall mast was already stepped—against the middle thwart in the odd fashion of galley-punts—and the great sail was hooked to the traveller and the tack-hook ready for hoisting. The party of boatmen gathered round and each took a tenacious hold of gunwale or thole. The skipper gave time with a jovial "Yo-ho!" His mates joined in with a responsive howl and heaved as one man. The great boat moved forward, and gathering way, slid swiftly along the greased planks towards the edge of the surf. Then her nose splashed into the sea; the skipper and his mate sprang in over the transom; the tall lug-sail soared up the mast and filled and the skipper let the rudder slide down its pintles and grasped the tiller.

"Did you want to go anywheres in particklar?" he inquired.

"We want to make for the big cave round St. David's Head," said Thorndyke, "and we want to get there well before high water."

"We'll do that easy enough, sir," said the skipper "with this breeze. 'Tis



but about a mile and we've got three-quarters of an hour to do it in."

He took a pull at the main sheet and, putting the helm down, brought the boat on a course parallel to the coast. Quietly but swiftly the water slipped past, one after another fresh headlands opened out till, in about a quarter of an hour, we were abreast of St. David's Head with the sinister black shape of the cavern in full view over the port bow. Shortly afterwards the sail was lowered and our crew, reinforced by Thorndyke and me, took to the oars, pulling straight towards the shore with the cavern directly ahead.

As the boat grounded on the beach Thorndyke, Brodribb and I sprang out and hurried across the sand and shingle to the gloomy and forbidding hole in white cliff. At first, coming out of the bright sunlight we seemed to be plunged in absolute darkness, and groped our way insecurely over the heaps of slippery sea-tangle that littered the floor. Presently our eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, and we could trace faintly the narrow, tunnel-like passage with its slimy green and the jagged roof nearly black with age. At the farther end it grew higher; and here I could see the small, dark bodies of bats hanging from the roof and clinging to the walls, and one or two fluttering blindly and noiselessly like large moths in the hollows of the vault above. But it was not the bats that engrossed my attention. Far away, at the extreme end, I could dimly discern the prostrate figure of a man lying motionless on a patch of smooth sand; a dreadful shape that seemed to sound the final note of tragedy to which the darkness, the clammy chill of the cavern and the ghostly forms of the bats had been a fitting prelude.

"My God!" gasped Brodribb, "we're too late!" He broke into a shambling run and Thorndyke and I darted on ahead. The man was Frank Lumley, of course, and a glance at him gave us at least a ray of hope. He was lying in an easy posture with closed eyes and was still breathing, though his respiration was shallow and slow. Beside him on the sand lay a little bottle and near it a cork. I picked up the former and read on the label "Laudanum: Poison" and a local druggist's name and address. But it was empty save for a few drops, the appearance and smell of which confirmed the label.

Thorndyke, who had been examining the unconscious man's eyes with

a little electric lamp, glanced at the bottle.

"Well," said he, "we know the worst. That is a two-drachm phial, so if he took the lot his condition is not hopeless."

As he spoke he opened the hand-bag, and taking out the emergency-case, produced from it a hypodermic syringe and a tiny bottle of atropine solution. I drew up Lumley's sleeve while the syringe was filled and Thorndyke then administered the injection.

"It is opium poisoning, I suppose?" said I.

"Yes," was the answer. "His pupils are like pin points; but his pulse is not so bad. I think we can safely move him down to the boat."

Thereupon we lifted him, and with Brodribb supporting his feet, we moved in melancholy procession down the cave. Already the waves were lapping the beach at the entrance and even trickling in amongst the seaweed; and the boat, following the rising tide, had her bows within the cavern. The two fishermen, who were steadying the boat with their oars, greeted our appearance, carrying the body, with exclamations of astonishment. But they asked no questions, simply taking the unconscious man from us and laying him gently on the grating in the stern-sheets.

"Why, 'tis Mr. Lumley!" exclaimed the skipper.

"Yes," said Thorndyke; and having given them a few words of explanation, he added: "I look to you to keep this affair to yourselves."

To this the two men agreed heartily, and the boat having been pushed off and the sail hoisted, the skipper asked: "Do we sail straight back, sir?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "but we won't land yet. Stand on and off opposite the gap-way."

Already, as a result of the movement, the patient's stupor appeared less profound. And now Thorndyke took definite measures to rouse him, shaking him gently and constantly changing his position. Presently Lumley drew a deep sighing breath, and opened his eyes for a moment. Then Thorndyke sat him up, and producing the vacuum-flask, made him swallow a few teaspoonful of coffee. This procedure was continued for over an hour while the boat cruised up and down opposite the landing-

place half a mile or so from the shore. Constantly our patient relapsed into stuporous sleep, only to be roused again and given a sip of coffee.

At length he recovered so far as to be able to sit up—lurching from side to side as the boat rolled—and drowsily answer questions spoken loudly in his ears. A quarter of an hour later, as he still continued to improve, Thorndyke ordered the skipper to bring the boat to the landing-place.

"I think he could walk now," said he, "and the exercise will rouse him more completely."

The boat was accordingly beached and Lumley assisted to climb out; and though at first he staggered as if he would fall, after a few paces he was able to walk fairly steadily, supported on either side by me and Thorndyke. The effort of ascending the steep gap-way revived him further; and by the time we reached the gate of Burling Court—half a mile across the fields—he was almost able to stand alone.

But even when he had arrived home he was not allowed to rest, earnestly as he begged to be left in peace. First Thorndyke insisted on his taking a light meal, and then proceeded to question him as to the events of the previous night.

"I presume, Lumley," said he, "that you saw the apparition of Glynn's head?"

"Yes. After Mr. Brodribb had seen me to bed, I got up and went to Gilbert's cabin. Something seemed to draw me to it. And as soon as I opened the door, there was the head hanging in the air within three feet of me. Then I knew that Glynn was calling me, and—well, you know the rest."

"I understand," said Thorndyke. "But now I want you to come to Gilbert's cabin with me and show me exactly where you were and where the head was."

Lumley was profoundly reluctant and tried to postpone the demonstration. But Thorndyke would listen to no refusal, and at last Lumley rose wearily and conducted his tormentor up the stairs, followed by Brodribb and me.

We went first to Lumley's bedroom and from that into a corridor, into

which some other bedrooms opened. The corridor was dimly lighted by a single window, and when Thorndyke had drawn the thick curtain over this, the place was almost completely dark. At one end of the corridor was the small, narrow door of the "cabin," over which was a gas bracket. Thorndyke lighted the gas and opened the door and we then saw that the room was in total darkness, its only window being closely shuttered and the curtains drawn. Thorndyke struck a match and lit the gas and we then looked curiously about the little room.

It was a quaint little apartment, to which its antique furniture and contents gave an old-world air. An ancient hanger, quadrant and spy-glass hung on the wall, a large, dropsical-looking watch, inscribed "Thomas Tompion, Londini fecit," reposed on a little velvet cushion in the middle of a small, black mahogany table by the window, and a couple of Cromwellian chairs stood against the wall. Thorndyke looked curiously at the table, which was raised on wooden blocks, and Lumley explained: "That was Gilbert's dressing-table. He had it made for his cabin on board ship."

"Indeed," said Thorndyke. "Then Gilbert was a rather up-to-date gentleman. There wasn't much mahogany furniture before 1720. Let us have a look I at the interior arrangements."

He lifted the watch, and having placed it on a chair, raised the lid of the table, disclosing a small wash basin, a little squat ewer and other toilet appliances. The table lid, which was held upright by a brass strut, held a rather large dressing-mirror enclosed in a projecting case.

"I wonder," said I, "why the table was stood on those blocks."

"Apparently," said Thorndyke, "for the purpose of bringing the mirror to the eye-level of a person standing up."

The answer gave Brodribb an idea. "I suppose, Frank," said he, "it was not your own reflection in the mirror that you saw?"

"How could it be?" demanded Lumley. "The head was upside down, and besides, it was quite near to me."

"No, that's true," said Brodribb; and turning away from the table he picked up the old navigator's watch. "A queer old timepiece, this," he remarked.

"Yes," said Lumley; "but it's beautifully made. Let me show you the inside."

He took off the outer case and opened the inner one, exhibiting the delicate workmanship of the interior to Brodribb and me, while Thorndyke continued to pore over the inner fittings of the table. Suddenly my colleague said: "Just go outside, you three, and shut the door. I want to try an experiment."

Obediently we all filed out and closed the door, waiting expectantly in the corridor. In a couple of minutes Thorndyke came out and before he shut the door I noticed that the little room was now in darkness. He walked us a short distance down the corridor and then, halting, said:

"Now, Lumley, I want you to go into the cabin and tell us what you see."

Lumley appeared a little reluctant to go in alone, but eventually he walked towards the cabin and opened the door. Instantly he uttered a cry of horror, and closing the door, ran back to us, trembling, agitated, wild-eyed.

"It is there now!" he exclaimed. "I saw it distinctly."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "Now you go and look, Brodribb."

Mr. Brodribb showed no eagerness. With very obvious trepidation he advanced to the door and threw it open with a jerk. Then, with a sharp exclamation, he slammed it to, and came hurrying back, his usually pink complexion paled down to a delicate mauve.

"Horrible! Horrible!" he exclaimed. "What the devil is it, Thorndyke?"

A sudden suspicion flashed into my mind. I strode forward, and turning the handle of the door, pulled it open. And then I was not surprised that Brodribb had been startled. Within a yard of my face, clear, distinct and solid, was an inverted head, floating in mid-air in the pitch-dark room. Of course, being prepared for it, I saw at a glance what it was; recognised my own features, strangely and horribly altered as they were by their inverted position. But even now that I knew what it was, the thing had a most appalling, uncanny aspect.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "let us go in and explode the mystery. Just

stand outside the door, Jervis, while I demonstrate."

He produced a sheet of white paper from his pocket, and smoothing it out, let our two friends into the room.

First," said he, holding the paper out flat at the eye-level, "you see on this paper a picture of Dr. Jervis's head upside down."

"So there is," said Brodribb; "like a magic-lantern picture."

"Exactly like," agreed Thorndyke; "and of exactly the same nature. Now let us see how it is produced."

He struck a match and lit the gas; and instantly all our eyes turned towards the open dressing-table.

"But that is not the same mirror that we saw just now," said Brodribb.

"No," replied Thorndyke. "The frame is reversible on a sliding hinge and I have turned it round. On one side is the ordinary flat looking-glass which you saw before; on the other is this concave shaving-mirror. You observe that, if you stand close to it, you see your face the right way up and magnified; if you go back to the door, you see your head upside down and smaller."

"But," objected Lumley, "the head looked quite solid and seemed to be right out in the room."

"So it was, and is still. But the effect of reality is destroyed by the fact that you can now see the frame of the mirror enclosing the image, so that the head appears to be in the mirror. But in the dark, you could only see the image. The mirror was invisible."

Brodribb reflected on this explanation. Presently he said: "I don't think I quite understand it now."

Thorndyke took a pencil from his pocket and began to draw a diagram on the sheet of paper that he still held.



"The figure that you see in an ordinary flat looking glass," he explained, "is what is called a 'virtual image.' It appears to be behind the mirror, but of course it is not there. It is an optical illusion. But the image from a concave mirror is in front of the mirror and is a real image like that of a

magic-lantern or a camera, and, like them, inverted. This diagram will explain matters. Here is Lumley standing at the open door of the room. His figure is well lighted by the gas over the door (which, however, throws no light into the room) and is clearly reflected by the mirror, which throws forward a bright inverted image. But, as the room is dark and the mirror invisible, he sees only the image, which looks like—and in fact is—a real object standing in mid-air."

"But why did I see only the head?" asked Lumley.

"Because the head occupied the whole of the mirror. If the mirror had been large enough you would have seen the full-length figure."

Lumley reflected for a moment. "It almost looks if this had been arranged," he said at length.

"Of course it has been arranged," said Thorndyke "and very cleverly arranged, too. And now let us go and see if anything else has been arranged. Which is Mr. Price's room?"

"He has three rooms, which open out of this corridor," said Lumley; and he conducted us to a door at the farther end, which Thorndyke tried and found locked.

"It is a case for the smoker's companion," said he, producing from his pocket an instrument that went by that name, but which looked suspiciously like a lock-pick. At any rate, after one or two trials—which Mr Brodribb watched with an appreciative smile—the bolt shot back and the door opened.

We entered what was evidently the bedroom, around which Thorndyke cast a rapid glance and then asked: "What are the other rooms?"

"I think he uses them to tinker in," said Lumley, "but I don't quite know what he does in them. All three rooms communicate."

We advanced to the door of communication and, finding it unlocked, passed through into the next room. Here, on a large table by the window, was a litter of various tools and appliances.

"What is that thing with the wooden screws?" Brodribb asked.

"A bookbinder's sewing-press," replied Thorndyke. "And here are some

boxes of finishing tools. Let us look over them."

He took up the boxes one after the other and inspected the ends of the tools—brass stamps for impressing the ornaments on book covers. Presently he lifted out two, a leaf and a flower. Then he produced from his coat pocket the little manuscript book, and laying it on the table, picked up from the floor a little fragment of leather. Placing this also on the table, he pressed two of the tools on it, leaving a clear impression of a leaf and a flower. Finally he laid the scrap of leather on the book, when it was obvious that the leaf and flower were identical replicas of the leaves and flowers which formed the decoration of the book cover.

"This is very curious," said Lumley. "They seem to be exactly alike."

"They are exactly alike," said Thorndyke. "I affirm that the tooling on that book was done with these tools, and the leaves sewn on that press."

"But the book is a hundred years old," objected Lumley.

Thorndyke shook his head. "The leather is old," said he, "but the book is new. We have tested the paper and found it to be of recent manufacture. But now let us see what is in that little cupboard. There seem to be some bottles there."

He ran his eye along the shelves, crowded with bottles and jars of varnish, glair, oil, cement and other material.

"Here," he said, taking down a small bottle of dark-coloured powder, "is some aniline brown. That probably produced the ancient and faded writing. But this is more illuminating—in more senses than one." He picked out a little, wide-mouthed bottle labelled "Radium Paint for the hands and figures of luminous watches."

"Ha!" exclaimed Brodribb; "a very illuminating discovery, as you say."

"And that," said Thorndyke, looking keenly round the room, "seems to be all there is here. Shall we take a glance at the third room?"

We passed through the communicating doorway and found ourselves in a small apartment practically unfurnished and littered with trunks, bags and various lumber. As we stood looking about us, Thorndyke sniffed suspiciously.



"I seem to detect a sort of mousy odour," said he, glancing round inquisitively. "Do you notice it, Jervis?"

I did; and with the obvious idea in my mind began I to prowl round the room in search of the source, Suddenly my eye lighted on a smallish box, in the top of which a number of gimlet-holes had been bored. I raised the lid and peered in. The interior was covered with filth and on the bottom lay a dead bat.

We all stood for a few seconds looking in silence at the little corpse. Then Thorndyke closed the box and tucked it under his arm.

"This completes the case, I think," said he. "What time does Price return?"

"He is expected home about seven o'clock," said Lumley. Then he added with a troubled expression: "I don't understand all this. What does it mean?"

"It is very simple," replied Thorndyke. "You have a sham ancient book containing an evidently fabulous story of supernatural events; and you have a series of appliances and arrangements for producing illusions which seem to repeat those events. The book was planted where it was certain to be found and read, and the illusions began after it was known that it actually had been read. It is a conspiracy."

"But why?" demanded Lumley. "What was the object?"

"My dear Frank," said Brodribb, "you seem forget that Price is the next of kin and the heir to your estate on your death."

Lumley's eyes filled. He seemed overcome with grief and disgust. "It is incredible," he murmured huskily. "The baseness of it is beyond belief."

Price and his wife arrived home at about seven o'clock, A meal had been prepared for them, and when they had finished, a servant was sent in to ask Mr. Price to speak with Mr. Brodribb in the study. There we all awaited him, Lumley being present by his own wish; and on the table were deposited the little book, the scrap of leather, the two finishing tools, the pot of radium paint and the box containing the dead bat. Presently Price entered, accompanied by his wife; and at the sight of the objects on the table they both turned deathly pale. Mr. Brodribb placed

chairs for them, and when they were seated he began in a dry, stern voice:

"I have sent for you, Mr. Price, to give you certain information. These two gentlemen, Dr. Thorndyke and Dr. Jervis, are eminent criminal lawyers whom I have commissioned to make investigations and to advise me in this matter. Their investigations have disclosed the existence of a forged manuscript, a dead bat, a pot of luminous paint and a concave mirror. I need not enlarge on those discoveries. My intention is to prosecute you and your wife for conspiracy to procure the suicide of Mr. Frank Lumley. But, at Mr. Lumley's request, I have consented to delay the proceedings for forty-eight hours. During that period you will be at liberty to act as you think best."

For some seconds there was a tense silence. The two crestfallen conspirators sat with their eyes fixed on the floor, and Mrs. Price choked down a half-hysterical sob. Then they rose; and Price, without looking at any of us, said in a low voice: "Very well. Then I suppose we had better clear out."

"And the best thing, too," remarked Brodribb, when they had gone; "for I doubt if we could have carried our bluff into court."

On the wall of our sitting-room in the Temple there hang, to this day, two keys. One is that of the postern gate of Burling Court, and the other belongs to the suite of rooms that were once occupied by Mr. Lewis Price; and they hang there, by Frank Lumley's wish, as a token that Burling Court is a country home to which we have access at all hours and seasons as tenants in virtue of an inalienable right.

---

## IX. — THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

"SO," said Thorndyke, looking at me reflectively, "you are a full-blown medical practitioner with a practice of your own. How the years slip by! It seems but the other day that you were a student, gaping at me from the front bench of the lecture theatre."

"Did I gape?" I asked incredulously.

"I use the word metaphorically," said he, "to denote ostentatious attention. You always took my lecture very seriously. May I ask if you have ever found them of use in your practice?"

"I can't say that I have ever had any very thrilling medico-legal experiences since that extraordinary cremation case that you investigated—the case of Septimus Maddock, you know. But that reminds me that there is a little matter that I meant to speak to you about. It is of no interest, but I just wanted your advice, though it isn't even my business, strictly speaking. It concerns a patient of mine, a man named Crofton, who has disappeared rather unaccountably."

"And do you call that a case of no medico-legal interest?" demanded Thorndyke.

"Oh, there's nothing in it. He just went away for a holiday and he hasn't communicated with his friends very recently. That is all. What makes me a little uneasy is that there is a departure from his usual habits—he is generally a fairly regular correspondent—that seems a little significant in view of his personality. He is markedly neurotic and his family history is by no means what one would wish."

"That is an admirable thumb-nail sketch, Jardine," said Thorndyke "but it lacks detail. Let us have a full-size picture."

"Very well," said I, "but you mustn't let me bore you. To begin with Crofton: he is a nervous, anxious, worrying sort of fellow, everlastingly fussing about money affairs, and latterly this tendency has been getting worse. He fairly got the jumps about his financial position; felt that he was steadily drifting into bankruptcy and couldn't get that out of his mind. It was all bunkum. I am more or less a friend of the family, and I

know that there was nothing to worry about. Mrs. Crofton assured me that, although they were a trifle hard up, they could rub along quite safely.

"As he seemed to be getting the hump worse and worse, I advised him to go away for a change and stay in a boarding-house where he would see some fresh faces. Instead of that, he elected to go down to a bungalow that he has at Seasalter, near Whitstable, and lets out in the season. He proposed to stay by himself and spend his time in sea-bathing and country walks. I wasn't very keen on this, for solitude was the last thing that he wanted. There was a strong family history of melancholia and some unpleasant rumours of suicide. I didn't like his being alone at all. However, another friend of the family, Mrs. Crofton's brother in fact, a chap named Ambrose, offered to go down and spend a week-end with him to give him a start, and afterwards to run down for an afternoon whenever he was able. So off he went with Ambrose on Friday, the sixteenth of June, and for a time all went well. He seemed to be improving in health and spirits and wrote to his wife regularly two or three times a week. Ambrose went down as often as he could to cheer him up, and the last time brought back the news that Crofton thought of moving on to Margate for a further change. So, of course, he didn't go down to the bungalow again.

"Well, in due course, a letter came from Margate; it had been written at the bungalow, but the postmark was Margate and bore the same date—the sixteenth of July—as the letter itself. I have it with me. Mrs. Crofton sent it for me to see and I haven't returned it yet. But there is nothing of interest in it beyond the statement that he was going on to Margate by the next train and would write again when he had found rooms there. That was the last that was heard of him. He never wrote and nothing is known of his movements excepting that he left Seasalter and arrived at Margate. This is the letter."

I handed it to Thorndyke, who glanced at the mark and then laid it on the table for examination later. "Have any inquiries been made?" he asked.

"Yes. His photograph has been sent to the Margate police, but, of course—well, you know what Margate like in July. Thousands of

strangers coming and going every day. It is hopeless to look for him in that crowd and it is quite possible that he isn't there now. But his disappearance is most inopportune, for a big legacy has just fallen in, and, naturally, Mrs. Crofton is frantically anxious to let him know. It is a matter of about thirty thousand pounds."

"Was this legacy expected?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. The Croftons knew nothing about it. They didn't know that the old lady—Miss Shuler—had made a will or that she had very much to leave; and they didn't know that she was likely to die, or even that she was ill. Which is rather odd; for she was ill for a month or two and, as she suffered from a malignant abdominal tumour, it was known that she couldn't recover."

"When did she die?"

"On the thirteenth of July."

Thorndyke raised his eyebrows. "Just three days before the date of this letter," he remarked; "so that if he should never reappear, this letter will be the sole evidence that he survived her. It is an important document. It may come to represent a value of a thousand pounds."

"It isn't so important as it looks," said I. "Miss Shuler's will provides that if Crofton should die before the testatrix, the legacy should go to his wife. So whether he is alive or not, the legacy is quite safe. But we must hope that he is alive, though I must confess to some little anxiety on his account."

Thorndyke reflected a while on this statement. Presently he asked: "Do you know if Crofton has made a will?"

"Yes, he has," I replied; "quite recently. I was one of the witnesses and I read it through at Crofton's request. It was full of the usual legal verbiage, but it might have been stated in a dozen words. He leaves practically everything to his wife, but instead of saying so it enumerates the property item by item."

"It was drafted, I suppose, by the solicitor?"

"Yes; another friend of the family named Jobson, and he is the executor and residuary legatee."

Thorndyke nodded and again became deeply reflective. Still meditating, he took up the letter, and as he inspected it, I watched him curiously and not without a certain secret amusement. First he looked over the envelope, back and front. Then he took from his pocket a powerful Coddington lens and with this examined the flap and the postmark. Next, he drew out the letter, held it up to the light, then read it through and finally examined various parts of the writing through his lens. "Well," I asked, with an irreverent grin, "I should think you have extracted the last grain of meaning from it."

He smiled as he put away his lens and handed the letter back to me.

"As this may have to be produced in proof of survival," said he, "it had better be put in a place of safety. I notice that he speaks of returning later to the bungalow. I take it that it has been ascertained that he did not return there?"

"I don't think so. You see, they have been waiting for him to write. You think that someone ought—"

I paused; for it began to be borne in on me that Thorndyke was taking a somewhat gloomy view of the case.

"My dear Jardine," said he, "I am merely following your own suggestion. Here is a man with an inherited tendency to melancholia and suicide who has suddenly disappeared. He went away from an empty house and announced his intention of returning to it later. As that house is the only known locality in which he could be sought, it is obvious that it ought to have been examined. And even if he never came back there, the house might contain some clues to his present whereabouts."

This last sentence put an idea into my mind which I was a little shy of broaching. What was a clue to Thorndyke might be perfectly meaningless to an ordinary person. I recalled his amazing interpretations of most commonplace facts in the mysterious Maddock case and the idea took fuller possession. At length I said tentatively: "I would go down myself if I felt competent. To-morrow is Saturday, and I could get a colleague to look after my practice; there isn't much doing just now. But when you speak of clues, and when I remember what duffer I was last time—I wish it were possible for you to have a look at the place."

To my surprise, he assented almost with enthusiasm.

"Why not?" said he. "It is a week-end. We can put up at the bungalow, I suppose, and have a little gipsy holiday. And there are undoubtedly points of interest in the case. Let us go down to-morrow. We can lunch in the train and have the afternoon before us. You had better get a key from Mrs. Crofton, or, if she hasn't got one, an authority to visit the house. We may want that if we have to enter without a key. And we go alone, of course."

I assented joyfully. Not that I had any expectations as to what we might learn from our inspection. But something in Thorndyke's manner gave me the impression that he had extracted from my account of the case some significance that was not apparent to me.

The bungalow stood on a space of rough ground a little way behind the sea-wall, along which we walked towards it from Whitstable, passing on our way a ship-builder's yard and a slipway, on which a collier brigantine was hauled up for repairs. There were one or two other bungalows adjacent, but a considerable distance apart, and we looked at them as we approached to make out the names painted on the gates.

"That will probably be the one," said Thorndyke, indicating a small building enclosed within a wooden fence and provided, like the others, with a bathing hut just above high-water mark. Its solitary, deserted aspect and lowered blinds supported his opinion, and when we reached the gate, the name "Middlewick" painted on it settled the matter.

"The next question is," said I, "how the deuce we are going to get in? The gate is locked, and there is no bell. Is it worth while to hammer at the fence?"

"I wouldn't do that," replied Thorndyke. "The place is pretty certainly empty or the gate wouldn't be locked. We shall have to climb over unless there is a back gate unlocked, so the less noise we make the better."

We walked round the enclosure, but there was no other gate, nor was there any tree or other cover to disguise our rather suspicious proceedings.

"There's no help for it, Jardine," said Thorndyke, "so here goes."

He put his green canvas suit-case on the ground, grasped the top of the fence with both hands and went over like a harlequin. I picked up the case and handed it over to him, and, having taken a quick glance round, followed my leader.

"Well," I said, "here we are. And now, how are we to get into the house?"

"We shall have to pick a lock if there is no door open, or else go in by a window. Let us take a look round."—We walked round the house to the back door, but found it not only locked, but bolted top and bottom, as Thorndyke ascertained with his knifeblade. The windows were all casements and all fastened with their catches.

"The front door will be the best," said Thorndyke. "It can't be bolted unless he got out by the chimney and I think my 'smoker's companion' will be able to cope with an ordinary door-lock. It looked like a common builder's fitting."

As he spoke, we returned to the front of the house and he produced the 'smoker's companion' from his pocket (I don't know what kind of smoker it was designed to accompany). The lock was apparently a simple affair, for the second trial with the 'companion' shot back the bolt, and when I turned the handle, the door opened. As a precaution, I called out to inquire if there was anybody within, and then, as there was no answer, we entered, walking straight into the living-room, as there was no hall or lobby.

A couple of paces from the threshold we halted to look round the room, and on me the aspect of the place produced a vague sense of discomfort. Though it was early in a bright afternoon, the room was almost completely dark, for not only were the blinds lowered, but the curtains were drawn as well.

"It looks," said I, peering about the dim and gloomy apartment with sun-dazzled eyes, "as if he had gone away at night. He wouldn't have drawn the curtains in the daytime."

"One would think not," Thorndyke agreed; "but it doesn't follow."

He stepped to the front window and drawing back the curtains pulled up the blind, revealing a half-curtain of green serge over the lower part of



the window. As the bright daylight flooded the room, he stood with his back to the window looking about with deep attention, letting his eyes travel slowly over the walls, the furniture, and especially the floor. Presently he stooped to pick up a short match-end which lay just under the table opposite the door, and as he looked at it thoughtfully, he pointed to a couple of spots of candle grease on the linoleum near the table. Then he glanced at the mantelpiece and from that to an ash-bowl on the table.

"These are only trifling discrepancies," said he, "but they are worth noting. You see," he continued in response to my look of inquiry, "that this room is severely trim and orderly. Everything seems to be in place. The match-box, for instance, has its fixed receptacle above the mantelpiece, and there is a bowl for the burnt matches, regularly used, as its contents show. Yet there is a burnt match thrown on the floor, although the bowl is on the table quite handy. And the match, you notice, is not of the same kind as those in the box over the mantelpiece, which is a large Bryant and May, or as the burnt matches in the bowl which have evidently come from it. But if you look in the bowl," he continued, picking it up, "you will see two burnt matches of this same kind—apparently the small size Bryant and May—one burnt quite short and one only half burnt. The suggestion is fairly obvious, but, as I say, there is a slight discrepancy."

"I don't know," said I, "that either the suggestion or the discrepancy is very obvious to me."

He walked over to the mantelpiece and took the match box from its case.

"You see," said he, opening it, "that this box is nearly full. It has an appointed place and it was in that place. We find a small match, burnt right out, under the table opposite the door, and two more in the bowl under the hanging lamp. A reasonable inference is that someone came in in the dark and struck a match as he entered. That match must have come from a box that he brought with him in his pocket. It burned out and he struck another, which also burned out while he was raising the chimney of the lamp, and he struck a third to light the lamp. But if that person was Crofton, why did he need to strike a match to light the room when the

match-box was in its usual place; and why did he throw the match-end on the floor?"

"You mean that the suggestion is that the person was not Crofton; and I think you are right. Crofton doesn't carry matches in his pocket. He uses wax vestas and carries them in a silver case."

"It might possibly have been Ambrose," Thorndyke suggested.

"I don't think so," said I. "Ambrose uses a petrol lighter."

Thorndyke nodded. "There may be nothing in it," said he, "but it offers a suggestion. Shall we look over the rest of the premises?"

He paused for a moment to glance at a small key board on the wall on which one or two keys were hanging, each distinguished by a little ivory label and by the name written underneath the peg; then he opened a door in the corner of the room. As this led into the kitchen, I closed it and opened an adjoining one which gave access to a bedroom.

"This is probably the extra bedroom," he remarked as we entered. "The blinds have not been drawn down, and there is a general air of trimness that suggests the tidy up of an unoccupied room. And the bed looks if it had been out of use."

After an attentive look round, he returned to the living room and crossed to the remaining door. As he opened it, we looked into a nearly dark room, both the windows being covered by thick serge curtains.

"Well," he observed, when he had drawn back the curtains and raised the blinds, "there is nothing painfully tidy here. That is a very roughly-made bed, and the blanket is outside the counterpane."

He looked critically about the room and especially the bedside table.

"Here are some more discrepancies," said he. "There are two candlesticks, in one of which the candle has burned itself right out, leaving a fragment of wick. There are five burnt matches in it, two large ones from the box by its side and three small ones, of which two are mere stumps. The second candle is very much guttered, and I think"—he lifted it out of the socket—"yes, it has been used out of the candlestick. You see that the grease has run down right to the bottom and there is a distinct impression of a thumb—apparently a left thumb—made while the grease

was warm. Then you notice the mark on the table of a tumbler which had contained some liquid that was not water, but there is no tumbler. However, it may be an old mark, though it looks fresh."

"It is hardly like Crofton to leave an old mark on the table," said I. "He is a regular old maid. We had better see if the tumbler is in the kitchen."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke. "But I wonder what he was doing with that candle. Apparently he took it out-of-doors, as there is a spot on the floor of the living-room; and you see that there are one or two spots on the floor here." He walked over to a chest of drawers near the door and was looking into a drawer which he had pulled out, and which I could see was full of clothes, when I observed a faint smile spreading over his face. "Come round here, Jardine," he said in a low voice, "and take a peep through the crack of the door."

I walked round, and, applying my eye to the crack, looked across the living-room at the end window. Above the half-curtain I could distinguish the unmistakable top of a constabulary helmet.

"Listen," said Thorndyke. "They are in force."

As he spoke, there came from the neighbourhood of the kitchen a furtive scraping sound, suggestive of a pocket knife persuading a window-catch. It was followed by the sound of an opening window and then of a stealthy entry. Finally, the kitchen door opened softly, someone tip-toed across the living-room and a burly police-sergeant appeared, framed in the bedroom doorway.

"Good afternoon, sergeant," said Thorndyke, with a genial smile.

"Yes, that's all very well," was the response, "but the question is, who might you be, and what might you be doing in this house?"

Thorndyke briefly explained our business, and, when, we had presented our cards and Mrs. Crofton's written authority, the sergeant's professional stiffness vanished like magic.

"It's all right, Tomkins," he sang out to an invisible myrmidon. "You had better shut the window and go out by the front door. You must excuse me, gentlemen," he added; "but the tenant of the next bungalow cycled down and gave us the tip. He watched you through his glasses and

saw you pick the front-door lock. It did look a bit queer, you must admit."

Thorndyke admitted it freely with a faint chuckle, and we walked across the living-room to the kitchen. Here, the sergeant's presence seemed to inhibit comments, but I noticed that my colleague cast a significant glance at a frying-pan that rested on a Primus stove. The congealed fat in it presented another "discrepancy;" for I could hardly imagine the fastidious Crofton going away and leaving it in that condition.

Noting that there was no unwashed tumbler in evidence, I followed my friend back to the living-room, where he paused with his eye on the key-board.

"Well," remarked the sergeant, "if he ever did come back here, it's pretty clear that he isn't here now. You've been all over the premises, I think?"

"All excepting the bathing-hut," replied Thorndyke; and, as he spoke, he lifted the key so labelled from its hook.

The sergeant laughed softly. "He's not very likely to have taken up quarters there," said he. "Still, there nothing like being thorough. But you notice that the key of the front door and that of the gate have both been taken away, so we can assume that he has taken himself away too."

"That is a reasonable inference," Thorndyke admitted; "but we may as well make our survey complete."

With this he led the way out into the garden and to the gate, where he unblushingly produced the 'smoker's companion' and insinuated its prongs into the keyhole.

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed the sergeant as the lock clicked and the gate opened. "That's a funny sort of tool; and you seem quite handy with it, too. Might I have a look at it?"

He looked at it so very long and attentively, when Thorndyke handed it to him, that I suspected him of an intention to infringe the patent. By the time he had finished his inspection we were at the bottom of the bank below the sea-wall and Thorndyke had inserted the key into the lock of the bathing-hut. As the sergeant returned the 'companion' Thorndyke

took it and pocketed it then he turned the key and pushed the door open; and the officer started back with a shout of amazement.

It was certainly a grim spectacle that we looked in on. The hut was a small building about six feet square, devoid of any furniture or fittings, excepting one or two pegs high up the wall. The single, unglazed window was closely shuttered, and on the bare floor in the farther corner a man was sitting, leaning back into the corner, with his head dropped forward on his breast. The man was undoubtedly Arthur Crofton. That much I could say with certainty, notwithstanding the horrible changes wrought by death and the lapse of time. "But," I added when I had identified the body, "I should have said that he had been dead more than a fortnight. He must have come straight back from Margate and done this. And that will probably be the missing tumbler," I concluded, pointing to one that stood on the floor close to the right hand of the corpse.

"No doubt," replied Thorndyke, somewhat abstractedly. He had been looking critically about the interior of the hut, and now remarked: "I wonder why he did not shoot the bolt instead of locking himself in; and what has become of the key? He must have taken it out of the lock and put it in his pocket."

He looked interrogatively at the sergeant, who having no option but to take the hint, advanced with an expression of horrified disgust and proceeded very gingerly to explore the dead man's clothing.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at length, "here we are." He drew from the waistcoat pocket a key with a small ivory label attached to it. "Yes, this is the one. You see, it is marked 'Bathing-hut.'"

He handed it to Thorndyke, who looked at it attentively, and even with an appearance of surprise, and then, producing an indelible pencil from his pocket, wrote on the label, "Found on body."

"The first thing," said he, "is to ascertain it fits the lock."

"Why, it must," said the sergeant, "if he locked himself in with it."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke agreed, "but that is the point. It doesn't look quite similar to the other one."

He drew out the key which we had brought from the house and gave it

to me to hold. Then he tried the key from the dead man's pocket; but it not only did not fit, it would not even enter the keyhole.

The sceptical indifference faded suddenly from the sergeant's face. He took the key from Thorndyke, having tried it with the same result, stood up and stared, round-eyed, at my colleague.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "This is a facer! It's the wrong key!"

"There may be another key on the body," said Thorndyke. "It isn't likely, but, you had better make sure."

The sergeant showed no reluctance this time. He searched the dead man's pockets thoroughly and produced a bunch of keys. But they were all quite small keys, none of them in the least resembling that of the hut door. Nor, I noticed, did they include those of the bungalow door or the garden gate. Once more the officer drew himself up and stared at Thorndyke.

"There's something rather fishy about this affair," said he.

"There is," Thorndyke agreed. "The door was certainly locked; and as it was not locked from within, it must have been locked from without. Then that key—the wrong key—was presumably placed in the dead man's pocket by some other person. And there are some other suspicious facts. A tumbler has disappeared from the bedside table, and there is a tumbler here. You notice one or two spots of candle-grease on the floor here, and it looks as if a candle had been stood in that corner near the door. There is no candle here now; but in the bedroom there is a candle which has been carried without a candle stick and which, by the way, bears an excellent impression of a thumb. The first thing to do will be to take the deceased's finger-prints. Would you mind fetching my case from the bedroom, Jardine?"

I ran back to the house (not unobserved by the gentleman in the next bungalow) and, catching up the case, carried it down to the hut. When I arrived there I found Thorndyke holding the tumbler delicately in his gloved left hand while he examined it against the light with the aid of his lens. He handed the latter to me and observed.

"If you look at this carefully, Jardine, you will see a very interesting thing. There are the prints of two different thumbs—both left hands, and

therefore of different persons. You will remember that the tumbler stood by the right hand of the body and that the table, which bore the mark of a tumbler, was at the left-hand side of the bed."

When I had examined the thumb-prints he placed the tumbler carefully on the floor and opened his "research-case," which was fitted as a sort of portable laboratory. From this he took a little brass box containing an ink-tube, a tiny roller and some small cards, and, using the box-lid as an inking plate, he proceeded methodically to take the dead man's finger-prints, writing the particulars on each card.

"I don't quite see what you want with Crofton's finger-prints," said I. "The other man's would be more to the point."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke replied. "But we have to prove that they are another man's—that they are not Crofton's. And there is that print on the candle. That is a very important point to settle; and as we have finished here, we had better go and settle it at once."

He closed his case, and, taking up the tumbler with his gloved hand, led the way back to the house, the sergeant following when he had locked the door. We proceeded directly to the bedroom, where Thorndyke took the candle from its socket and, with the aid of his lens, compared it carefully with the two thumb-prints on the card, and then with the tumbler.

"It is perfectly clear," said he. "This is a mark of a left thumb. It is totally unlike Crofton's and it appears to be identical with the strange thumb-print on the tumbler. From which it seems to follow that the stranger took the candle from this room to the hut and brought it back. But he probably blew it out before leaving the house and lit it again in the hut."

The sergeant and I examined the cards, the candle and the tumbler, and then the former asked: "I suppose you have no idea whose thumb-print that might be? You don't know, for instance, of anyone who might have had any motive for making away with Mr. Crofton?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "is rather a question for the coroner's jury."

"So it is," the sergeant agreed. "But there won't be much question about their verdict. It is a pretty clear case of wilful murder."

To this Thorndyke made no reply excepting to give some directions as to the safe-keeping of the candle and tumbler; and our proposed "gipsy holiday" being now evidently impossible, we took our leave of the sergeant—who already had our cards—and wended back to the station.

"I suppose," said I, "we shall have to break the news to Mrs. Crofton."

"That is hardly our business," he replied. "We can leave that to the solicitor or to Ambrose. If you know the lawyer's address, you might send him a telegram, arranging a meeting at eight o'clock to-night. Give no particulars. Just say "Crofton found," but mark the telegram "urgent" so that he will keep the appointment."

On reaching the station, I sent off the telegram, and very soon afterwards the London train was signalled. It turned out to be a slow train, which gave us ample time to discuss the case and me ample time for reflection. And, in fact, I reflected a good deal; for there was a rather uncomfortable question in my mind—the very question that the sergeant had raised and that Thorndyke had obviously evaded. Was there anyone who might have had a motive for making away with Crofton? It was an awkward question when one remembered the great legacy that had just fallen in and the terms of Miss Shuler's will; which expressly provided that, if Crofton died before his wife, the legacy should go to her. Now, Ambrose was the wife's brother; and Ambrose had been in the bungalow alone with Crofton, and nobody else was known to have been there at all. I meditated on these facts uncomfortably and would have liked to put the case to Thorndyke; but his reticence, his evasion of the sergeant's question and his decision to communicate with the solicitor rather than with the family showed pretty clearly what was in his mind and that he did not wish to discuss the matter.

Promptly at eight o'clock, having dined at a restaurant, we presented ourselves at the solicitor's house and were shown into the study, where we found Mr. Jobson seated at a writing-table. He looked at Thorndyke with some surprise, and when the introductions had been made, said somewhat dryly: "We may take it that Dr. Thorndyke is in some way connected with our rather confidential business?"

"Certainly," I replied. "That is why he is here."

Jobson nodded. "And how is Crofton?" he asked, "and where did you



dig him up?"

"I am sorry to say," I replied, "that he is dead. It is a dreadful affair. We found his body locked in the bathing-hut. He was sitting in a corner with a tumbler on the floor by his side."

"Horrible! horrible!" exclaimed the solicitor. "He ought never to have gone there alone. I said so at the time. And it is most unfortunate on account of the insurance, though that is not a large amount. Still the suicide clause, you know—"

"I doubt whether the insurance will be affected," said Thorndyke. "The coroner's finding will almost certainly be wilful murder."

Jobson was thunderstruck. In a moment his face grew livid and he gazed at Thorndyke with an expression of horrified amazement.

"Murder!" he repeated incredulously. "But you said he was locked in the hut. Surely that is clear proof of suicide."

"He hadn't locked himself in, you know. There was no key inside."

"Ah!" The solicitor spoke almost in a tone relief. "But, perhaps—did you examine his pockets?"

"Yes; and we found a key labelled 'Bathing hut.' But it was the wrong key. It wouldn't go into the lock. There is no doubt whatever that the door was locked from the outside."

"Good God!" exclaimed Jobson, in a faint voice. "It does look suspicious. But still, I can't believe—It seems quite incredible."

"That may be," said Thorndyke, "but it is all perfectly clear. There is evidence that a stranger entered the bungalow at night and that the affair took place in the bedroom. From thence the stranger carried the body down to the hut and he also took a tumbler and a candle from the bedside table. By the light of the candle—which was stood on the floor of the hut in a corner—he arranged the body, having put into its pocket a key from the board in the living-room. Then he locked the hut, went back to the house, put the key on its peg and the candle in its candlestick. Then he locked up the house and the garden gate and took the keys away with him."

The solicitor listened to this recital in speechless amazement. At length he asked: "How long ago do you suppose this happened?"

"Apparently on the night of the fifteenth of this month," was the reply.

"But," objected Jobson, "he wrote home on the sixteenth."

"He wrote," said Thorndyke, "on the sixth. Somebody put a one in front of the six and posted the letter at Margate on the sixteenth. I shall give evidence to that effect at the inquest."

I was becoming somewhat mystified. Thorndyke's dry, stern manner—so different from his usual suavity—and the solicitor's uncalled-for agitation, seemed to hint at something more than met the eye. I watched Jobson as he lit a cigarette—with a small Bryant and May match, which he threw on the floor—and listened expectantly for his next question. At length he asked: "Was there any sort of—er—clue as to who this stranger might be?"

"The man who will be charged with the murder? Oh, yes. The police have the means of identifying him with absolute certainty."

"That is, if they can find him," said Jobson.

"Naturally. But when all the very remarkable facts have transpired at the inquest, that individual will probably come pretty clearly into view."

Jobson continued to smoke furiously with his eyes fixed on the floor, as if he were thinking hard. Presently he asked, without looking up: "Supposing they do find this man. What then? What evidence is there that he murdered Crofton?"

"You mean direct evidence?" said Thorndyke. "I can't say, as I did not examine the body; but the circumstantial evidence that I have given you would be enough to convict unless there were some convincing explanation other than murder. And I may say," he added, "that if the suspected person has a plausible explanation to offer, he would be well advised to produce it before he is charged. A voluntary statement has a good deal more weight than the same statement made by a prisoner in answer to a charge."

There was an interval of silence, in which I looked bewilderment from Thorndyke's stern visage to the pale face of the solicitor. At length the

latter rose abruptly and, after one or two quick strides up and down the room, halted by the fireplace, and, still avoiding Thorndyke's eye, said, somewhat brusquely, though in a low, husky voice: "I will tell you how it happened. I went down to Seasalter, as you said, on the night of the fifteenth, on the chance of finding Crofton at the bungalow. I wanted to tell him of Miss Shuler's death and of the provisions her will."

"You had some private information on that subject, I presume?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. My cousin was her solicitor and he kept me informed about the will."

"And about the state of her health?"

"Yes. Well, when I arrived at the bungalow, it was in darkness. The gate and the front door were unlocked, so I entered, calling out Crofton's name. As no one answered, I struck a match and lit the lamp. Then I went into the bedroom and struck a match there; and by its light I could see Crofton lying on the bed, quite still. I spoke to him, but he did not answer or move. Then I lighted a candle on his table; and now I could see what I had already guessed, that he was dead, and that he had been dead some time—probably more than a week.

"It was an awful shock to find a dead man in this solitary house, and my first impulse was to rush out and give the alarm. But when I went into the living-room, I happened to see a letter lying on writing-table and noticed that it was in his own hand and addressed to his wife. Unfortunately, I had the curiosity to take it out of the unsealed envelope and read it. It was dated the sixth and stated his intention of going to Margate for a time and then coming back to the bungalow.

"Now, the reading of that letter exposed me to an enormous temptation. By simply putting a one in front of the six and thus altering the date from the sixth to the sixteenth and posting the letter at Margate, I stood to gain thirty thousand pounds. I saw that at a glance. But I did not decide immediately to do it. I pulled down the blinds, drew the curtains and locked up the house while I thought it over. There seemed to be practically no risk, unless someone should come to the bungalow and notice that the state of the body did not agree with the altered date on the letter. I went back and looked at the dead man. There was a burnt-out

candle by his side and a tumbler containing the dried-up remains of some brown liquid. He had evidently poisoned himself. Then it occurred to me that, if I put the body and the tumbler in some place where they were not likely to be found for some time, the discrepancy between the condition of the body and the date of the letter would not be noticed.

"For some time I could think of no suitable place, but at last I remembered the bathing-hut. No one would look there for him. If they came to the bungalow and didn't find him there, they would merely conclude that he had not come back from Margate. I took the candle and the key from the key-board and went down to the hut; but there was a key in the door already, so I brought the other key back and put it in Crofton's pocket, never dreaming that it might not be the duplicate. Of course, I ought to have tried it in the door.

"Well, you know the rest. I took the body down about two in the morning, locked up the hut, brought away the key and hung it on the board, took the counterpane off the bed, as it had some marks on it, and re-made the bed with the blanket outside. In the morning I took the train to Margate, posted the letter, after altering the date, and threw the gate-key and that of the front door into the sea.

"That is what really happened. You may not believe me; but I think you will as you have seen the body and will realise that I had no motive for killing Crofton before the fifteenth, whereas Crofton evidently died before that date."

"I would not say 'evidently,'" said Thorndyke; "but, as the date of his death is the vital point in your defence, you would be wise to notify the coroner of the importance of the issue."

---

"I don't understand this case," I said, as we walked homewards (I was spending the evening with Thorndyke). "You seemed to smell a rat from the very first. And I don't see how you spotted Jobson. It is a mystery to me."

"It wouldn't be if you were a lawyer," he replied. "The case against Jobson was contained in what you told me at our first interview. You yourself commented on the peculiarity of the will that he drafted for Crofton. The intention of the latter was to leave all his property to his

wife. But instead of saying so, the will specified each item of property, and appointed a residuary legatee, which was Jobson himself. This might have appeared like mere legal verbiage; but when Miss Shuler's legacy was announced, the transaction took on a rather different aspect. For this legacy was not among the items specified in the will. Therefore it did not go to Mrs. Crofton. It would be included in the residue of the estate and would go to the residuary legatee."

"The deuce it would!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly; until Crofton revoked his will or made a fresh one. This was rather suspicious. It suggested that Jobson had private information as to Miss Shuler's will and had drafted Crofton's will in accordance with it; and as she died of malignant disease, her doctor must have known for some time that she was dying and it looked as if Jobson had information on that point, too. Now the position of affairs that you described to me was this:

"Crofton, a possible suicide, had disappeared, and had made no fresh will.

"Miss Shuler died on the thirteenth, leaving thirty thousand pounds to Crofton, if he survived her, or if he did not, then to Mrs. Crofton. The important question then was whether Crofton was alive or dead; and if he was dead, whether he had died before or after the thirteenth. For if he died before the thirteenth the legacy went to Mrs. Crofton, but if he died after that date the legacy went to Jobson.

"Then you showed me that extraordinarily opportune letter dated the sixteenth. Now, seeing that that date was worth thirty thousand pounds to Jobson, I naturally scrutinised it narrowly. The letter was written with ordinary blue-black ink. But this ink, even in the open, takes about a fortnight to blacken completely. In a closed envelope it takes considerably longer. On examining this date through a lens, the one was very perceptibly bluer than the six. It had therefore been added later. But for what reason? And by whom?

"The only possible reason was that Crofton was dead and had died before the thirteenth. The only person who had any motive for making the alteration was Jobson. Therefore, when we started for Seasalter I already felt sure that Crofton was dead and that the letter had been

posted at Margate by Jobson. I had further no doubt that Crofton's body was concealed somewhere on the premises of the bungalow. All that I had to do was to verify those conclusions."

"Then you believe that Jobson has told us the truth?"

"Yes. But I suspect that he went down there with the deliberate intention of making away with Crofton before he could make a fresh will. The finding of Crofton's body must have been a fearful disappointment, but I must admit that he showed considerable resource in dealing with the situation; and he failed only by the merest chance. I think his defence against the murder charge will be admitted; but, of course, it will involve plea of guilty to the charge of fraud in connection with the legacy."

Thorndyke's forecast turned out to be correct. Jobson was acquitted of the murder of Arthur Crofton, but is at present "doing time" in respect of the forged letter and the rest of his too-ingenuous scheme.

---

THE END

## The DEAD HAND

### I. How it Happened

ABOUT HALF-PAST EIGHT on a fine, sunny June morning, a small yacht crept out of Sennen Cove, near the Land's End, and headed for the open sea. On the shelving beach of the cove two women and a man, evidently visitors (or "foreigners," to use the local term), stood watching her departure with valedictory waving of cap or handkerchief, and the boatman who had put the crew on board, aided by two of his comrades, was hauling his boat up above the tide-mark.

A light, northerly breeze filled the yacht's sails and drew her gradually seaward. The figures of her crew dwindled to the size of dolls, shrank with the increasing distance to the magnitude of insects, and at last, losing all individuality, became mere specks merged in the form of the fabric that bore them.

On board the receding craft two men sat in the little cockpit. They formed the entire crew, for the *Sandhopper* was only a ship's lifeboat, timbered and decked, of light draught and, in the matter of spars and canvas, what the art critics would call "reticent."

Both men, despite the fineness of the weather, wore yellow oilskins and sou'westers, and that was about all they had in common. In other respects they made a curious contrast—the one small, slender, sharp-featured, dark almost to swarthinness, and restless and quick in his movements; the other large, massive, red-faced, blue-eyed, with the rounded outlines suggestive of ponderous strength; a great ox of a man, heavy, stolid, but much less unwieldy than he looked.

The conversation incidental to getting the yacht under way had ceased, and silence had fallen on the occupants of the cockpit. The big man grasped the tiller and looked sulky, which was probably his usual aspect, and the small man watched him furtively.

The land was nearly two miles distant when the latter broke the silence. "Joan Haygarth has come on wonderfully the last few months; getting quite a fine-looking girl. Don't you think so, Purcell?"

"Yes," answered Purcell, "and so does Phil Rodney."

"You're right," agreed the other. "She isn't a patch on her sister, though, and never will be. I was looking at Maggie as we came down the beach this morning and thinking what a handsome girl she is. Don't you agree with me?"

Purcell stooped to look under the boom, and answered without turning his head:

"Yes, she's all right."

"All right!" exclaimed the other. "Is that the way—"

"Look here, Varney," interrupted Purcell. "I don't want to discuss my wife's looks with you or any other man. She'll do for me or I shouldn't have married her."

A deep, coppery flush stole into Varney's cheeks. But he had brought the rather brutal snub on himself and apparently had the fairness to recognise the fact, for he mumbled an apology and relapsed into silence.

When next he spoke he did so with a manner diffident and uneasy, as though approaching a disagreeable or difficult subject.

"There's a little matter, Dan, that I've been wanting to speak to you about when we got a chance of a private talk."

He glanced rather anxiously at his stolid companion, who grunted, and then, without removing his gaze from the horizon ahead, replied: "You've a pretty fair chance now, seeing that we shall be bottled up together for another five or six hours. And it's fairly private unless you bawl loud enough to be heard at the Longships."

It was not a gracious invitation. But if Varney resented the rebuff he showed no sign of annoyance, for reasons which appeared when he opened his subject.

"What I wanted to say," he resumed, "was this. We're both doing pretty well now on the square. You must be positively piling up the shekels, and I can earn a decent living, which is all I want. Why shouldn't we drop this flash note business?"

Purcell kept his blue eye fixed on the horizon and appeared to ignore the question; but after an interval and without moving a muscle he said gruffly: "Go on," and Varney continued:

"The lay isn't what it was, you know. At first it was all plain sailing. The notes were 1st-class copies and not a soul suspected anything until they were presented at the bank. Then the murder was out, and the next little trip that I made was a very different affair. Two or three of the notes were queried quite soon after I had changed them, and I had to be precious fly, I can tell you, to avoid complications. And now that the second batch has come in to the Bank, the planting of fresh specimens is going to be harder still. There isn't a money-changer on the Continent of Europe that isn't keeping his weather eyeball peeled, to say nothing of the detectives that the Bank people have sent abroad."

He paused and looked appealingly at his companion. But Purcell, still minding his helm, only growled "Well?"

"Well, I want to chuck it, Dan. When you've had a run of luck and pocketed your winnings it is time to stop play."

"You've come into some money, then, I take it?" said Purcell.

"No, I haven't. But I can make a living now by safe and respectable means, and I'm sick of all this scheming and dodging with the gaol everlastingly under my lee."

"The reason I asked," said Purcell, "is that there is a trifle outstanding. You hadn't forgotten that, I suppose?"

"No, I hadn't forgotten it, but I thought that perhaps you might be willing to let me down a bit easily."

The other man pursed up his thick lips and continued to gaze stonily over the bow.

"Oh, that's what you thought?" he said; and then, after a pause: "I fancy you must have lost sight of some of the facts when you thought that. Let me just remind you how the case stands. To begin with, you start your career with a little playful embezzlement, you blue the proceeds and you are mug enough to be found out. Then I come in. I compound the affair with old Marston for a couple of thousand, and practically clean myself out of every penny I possess, and he consents to regard your temporary absence in the light of a holiday.

"Now, why do I do this? Am I a philanthropist? Devil a bit. I'm a man of business. Before I ladle out that two thousand, I make a business contract with you. I have discovered how to make a passable imitation of the Bank of England paper; you are a skilled engraver and a plausible scamp. I am to supply you with paper blanks, you are to engrave plates, print the notes, and get them changed. I am to take two-thirds of the proceeds; and, although I have done the most difficult part of the work, I agree to regard my share of the profits as constituting repayment of the loan.

"Our contract amounts to this: I lend you two thousand without security—with an infernal amount of insecurity, in fact—you 'promise, covenant, and agree,' as the lawyers say, to hand me back ten thousand in instalments, being the products of our joint industry. It is a verbal contract which I have no means of enforcing, but I trust you to keep your word, and up to the present you have kept it. You have paid me a little over four thousand. Now you want to cry off and leave the balance unpaid. Isn't that the position?"

"Not exactly," said Varney. "I'm not crying off the debt; I only want time. Look here, Dan; I'm making about three fifty a year now. That isn't much, but I'll manage to let you have a hundred a year out of it. What do you say to that?"

Purcell laughed scornfully. "A hundred a year to pay off six thousand! That'll take just sixty years: and as I'm now forty-three, I shall be exactly a hundred and three years of age when the last instalment is paid. I think, Varney, you'll admit that a man of a hundred and three is getting past his prime."

"Well, I'll pay you something down to start. I've saved about eighteen hundred pounds out of the note business. You can have that now, and I'll pay off as much I can at a time until I'm clear. Remember, that if I should happen to get clapped in chow for twenty years or so, you won't get anything. And, I tell you, it's getting a risky business."

"I'm willing to take the risk," said Purcell.

"I daresay you are," Varney retorted passionately, "because it's my risk. If I am grabbed, it's my racket. You sit out. It's I who passed the notes, and I'm known to be a skilled engraver. That'll be good enough for them. They won't trouble about who made the paper." "I hope not," said Purcell.

"Of course they wouldn't; and you know I shouldn't give you away."

"Naturally. Why should you? Wouldn't do you any good."

"Well, give me a chance, Dan," Varney pleaded. "This business is getting on my nerves. I want to be quit of it. You've had four thousand; that's a hundred per cent. You haven't done so badly."

"I didn't expect to do badly. I took a big risk. I gambled two thousand for ten."

"Yes; and you got me out of the way while you put the screw on poor old Haygarth to make his daughter marry you."

It was an indiscreet thing to say, but Purcell's stolid indifference to his danger and distress had ruffled Varney's

~~Purcell~~, however, was unmoved. "I don't know," he said, "what you mean by getting you out of the way. You were never in the way. You were always hankering after Maggie, but I could never see that she wanted you."

"Well, she certainly didn't want you," Varney retorted. "And, for that matter, I don't much think she wants you now."

For the first time Purcell withdrew his eye from the horizon to turn it on his companion. And an evil eye it was, set in the great, sensual face, now purple with anger.

"What the devil do you mean?" he exclaimed furiously; "you infernal, sallow-faced, little whipper-snapper! If you mention my wife's name again I'll knock you on the head and pitch you overboard."

Varney's face flushed darkly, and for a moment he was inclined to try the wager a battle. But the odds were impossible, and if Varney was not a coward, neither was he a fool. But the discussion was at an end. Nothing was to be hoped for now. These indiscreet words had rendered further pleading impossible.

The silence that settled down in the yacht and the aloofness that encompassed the two men were conducive to reflection. Each ignored the presence of the other. When the course was altered southerly, Purcell slacked out the sheets with his own hand as he put up the helm. He might have been sailing singlehanded. And Varney watched him askance, but made no move; sitting hunched up on the locker, nursing a slowly-matured hatred and thinking his thoughts.

Very queer thoughts they were. He was following out the train of events that might have happened, pursuing them to their possible consequences. Supposing Purcell had carried out his threat? Well, there would have been a pretty tough struggle, for Varney was no weakling. But a struggle with that solid fifteen stone of flesh could end only one way. No, there was no doubt; he would have gone overboard.

And what then? Would Purcell have gone back to Sennen Cove, or sailed alone into Penzance? In either case, he would have had to make up some sort of story; and no one could have contradicted him whether the story was believed or not. But it would have been



awkward for Purcell.

Then there was the body. That would have been washed up sooner or later, as much of it as the lobsters had left. Well, lobsters don't eat clothes or bones, and a dent in the skull might take some accounting for. Very awkward this—for Purcell. He would probably have had to clear out; to make a bolt for it, in short.

The mental picture of this great bully fleeing in terror from the vengeance of the law gave Varney appreciable pleasure. Most of his life he had been borne down by the moral and physical weight of this domineering brute. At school, Purcell had fagged him; he had even bullied him up at Cambridge; and now he had fastened on for ever, like the Old Man of the Sea. And Purcell always got the best of it. When he, Varney, had come back from Italy after that unfortunate little affair, behold! the girl whom they had both wanted (and who had wanted neither of them) had changed from Maggie Haygarth into Maggie Purcell. And so it was even unto this day. Purcell, a prosperous stockjobber now, spent a part of his secret leisure making, in absolute safety, these accursed paper blanks; which he, Varney, must risk his liberty to change into money. Yes, it was quite pleasant to think of Purcell sneaking from town to town, from country to country, with the police at his heels.

But in these days of telegraphs and extradition there isn't much chance for a fugitive. Purcell would have been caught to a certainty; and he would have been hanged; no doubt of it. The imagined picture of the execution gave him quite a lengthy entertainment. Then his errant thoughts began to spread out in search of other possibilities. For, after all, it was not an absolute certainty that Purcell could have got him overboard. There was just the chance that Purcell might have gone overboard himself. That would have been a very different affair.

Varney settled himself composedly to consider the new and interesting train of consequences that would thus have been set going. They were more agreeable to contemplate than the others, because they did not include his own demise. The execution scene made no appearance in this version. The salient fact was that his oppressor would have vanished; that the intolerable burden of his servitude would have been lifted for ever; that he would have been free.

It was mere idle speculation to while away a dull hour with an uncongenial companion, and he let his thoughts ramble at large. One moment he was dreamily wondering whether Maggie would ever have listened to him, ever have come to care for him; the next, he was back in the yacht's cabin, where hung from a hook on the bulkhead the revolver that the Rodneys used to practise at floating bottles. It was usually loaded, he knew, but, if not, there was a canvas bag full of cartridges in the starboard locker. Again, he found himself dreaming of the home that he would have had, a home very different from the cheerless lodgings in which he moped at present; and then his thoughts had flitted back to the yacht's hold, and were busying themselves with the row of half-hundredweights that rested on the timbers on either side of the keelson.

When Varney had thus brought his mental picture, so to speak, to a finish, its completeness surprised him. It was so simple, so secure. He had actually planned out the scheme of a murder, and he found himself wondering whether many murders passed undetected. They well might if murders were as easy and as safe as this—a dangerous reflection for an injured and angry man. And at this critical point his meditations were interrupted by Purcell, continuing the conversation as if there had been no pause:

"So you can take it from me, Varney, that I expect you to stick to your bargain. I paid down my money, and I'm going to have my pound of flesh."

It was a brutal thing to say, and it was brutally said. But more than that, it was inopportune—or opportune, as you will; for it came as a sort of infernal doxology to the devil's anthem that had been, all unknown, ringing in Varney's soul.

Purcell had spoken without looking round. That was his unpleasant habit. Had he looked at his companion, he might have been startled. A change in Varney's face might have given him pause; a warm flush, a sparkle of the eye, a look of elation, of settled purpose, deadly, inexorable—the look of a man who has made a fateful resolution.

It was so simple, so secure! That was the burden of the song that echoed in Varney's brain.

He glanced over the sea. They had opened the south coast now, and he could see, afar off, a fleet of black-sailed luggers heading east. They wouldn't be in his way. Nor would the big four-master that was creeping away to the west, for she was hull down already, and other ships there were none.

There was one hindrance, though. Dead ahead the Wolf Rock Lighthouse rose from the blue water, its red-and-white ringed tower looking like some gaudily painted toy. The keepers of lonely lighthouses have a natural habit of watching the passing shipping through their glasses, and it was possible that one of their telescopes might be pointed at the yacht at this very moment. That was a complication.

Suddenly there came down the wind a sharp report like the firing of a gun, quickly followed by a second. It was the explosive signal from the Longships Lighthouse; but when they looked round there was no lighthouse to be seen—the dark-blue, heaving water faded away at the foot of an advancing wall of vapour.

Purcell cursed fluently. A pretty place, this, to be caught in, in a fog! And then, as his eye lighted on his companion, he demanded angrily: "What the devil are you grinning at?"

For Varney, drunk with suppressed excitement, snapped his fingers at rocks and shoals; he was thinking only of the lighthouse keeper's telescope and of the revolver that hung on the bulkhead. He must make some excuse presently to go below and secure that revolver.

But no excuse was necessary. The opportunity came of itself. After a hasty glance at the vanishing land and another at the compass, Purcell put up the helm to gybe the yacht round on to an easterly course.

As she came round, the single headsail that she carried in place of jib and foresail shivered for a few seconds, and then filled suddenly on the opposite tack. And at this moment the halyards parted with a loud snap; the end of the rope flew through the blocks, and, in an instant, the sail was down and its upper half trailing in the water alongside.

Purcell swore volubly, but kept an eye to business. "Run below, Varney," said he, "and fetch up that coil of new rope out of the starboard locker while I had the sail on board. And look alive. We don't want to drift down on to the Wolf."

Varney obeyed with silent alacrity and a curious feeling of elation. It was going to be even easier and safer than he had thought. He slipped through the hatch into the cabin, quietly took the revolver from its hook, and examined the chambers.

Finding them all loaded, he cocked the hammer and slipped the weapon carefully into the inside breast pocket of his oilskin coat. Then he took the coil of rope from the locker and went on deck.

As he emerged from the hatch, he perceived that the yacht was already enveloped in fog, which drifted past in steamy clouds, and that she had come up head to wind. Purcell was kneeling on the forecastle, tugging at the sail, which had caught under the forefoot, and punctuating his efforts with deep-voiced curses.

Varney stole silently along the deck, steadying himself by mast and shroud, softly laid down the coil of rope, and approached. Purcell was quite engrossed with his task; his back was towards Varney, his face over the side, intent on the entangled sail. It was a chance in a thousand.

With scarcely a moment's hesitation, Varney stooped forward, steadying himself with a hand on the little windlass, and softly drawing forth the revolver, pointed it at the back of Purcell's head at the spot where the back seam of his sou'wester met the brim.

The report rang out but weak and flat in that open space, and a cloud of smoke mingled with the fog; but it blew away immediately, and showed Purcell almost unchanged in posture, crouching on the sail, with his chin resting on the little rim of bulwark, while behind him his murderer, as if turned into bronze, still stood stooping forward, one hand grasping the windlass, the other still pointing the revolver.

Thus the two figures remained for some seconds motionless like some horrible waxworks, until the little yacht, lifting to the swell, gave a more than usually lively curvet; when Purcell rolled over on to his back, and Varney relaxed the rigidity of his posture like a golf-player who has watched his ball drop.

Purcell was dead. That was the salient fact. The head wagged to and fro as the yacht pitched and rolled, the limp arms and legs seemed to twitch, the limp body to writhe uneasily. But Varney was not disturbed. Lifeless things will move on an unsteady deck. He was only interested to notice how the passive movements produced the illusion of life. But it was only illusion. Purcell was dead. There was no doubt of that.

The double report from the Longships came down the wind, and then, as if in answer, a prolonged, deep bellow. That was the fog-horn of the lighthouse on the Wolf Rock, and it sounded surprisingly near. But, of course, these signals were meant to be heard at a distance. Then a stream of hot sunshine, pouring down on deck, startled him, and made him hurry. The body must be got overboard before the fog lifted.

With an uneasy glance at the clear sky overhead, he hastily cast off the broken halyard from its cleat and cut off a couple of fathoms. Then he hurried below, and, lifting the trap in the cabin floor, hoisted out one of the iron half-hundredweights with which the yacht was ballasted.

As he stepped on deck with the weight in his hand, the sun was shining overhead; but the fog was still thick below, and the horn sounded once more from the Wolf. And again it struck him as surprisingly near.

He passed the length of rope that he had cut off twice round Purcell's body, hauled it tight, and secured it with a knot. Then he made the ends fast to the handle of the iron weight.

Not much fear of Purcell drifting ashore now. That weight would hold him as long as there was anything to hold. But it had taken some time to do, and the warning bellow from the Wolf seemed to draw nearer and nearer. He was about to heave the body over when his eye fell on the dead man's sou'wester, which had fallen off when the body rolled over.

That hat must be got rid of, for Purcell's name was worked in silk on the lining and there was an unmistakeable bullet-hole through the back. It must be destroyed, or, which would be simpler and quicker, lashed securely on the dead man's head.

Hurriedly, Varney ran aft and descended to the cabin. He had noticed a new ball of spunyarn in the locker when he had fetched the rope. This would be the very thing.

He was back again in a few moments with the ball in his hand, unwinding it as he came, and without wasting time he knelt down by the body and fell to work.

And every half minute the deep-voiced growl of the Wolf came to him out of the fog, and each time it sounded nearer and yet nearer.

By the time he had made the sou'wester secure the dead man's face and chin were encased in a web of spunyarn that made him look like some old-time, grotesque-vizored Samurai warrior.

Varney rose to his feet. But his task was not finished yet. There was Purcell's suitcase. That must be sunk, too, and there was something in it that had figured in the detailed picture that his imagination had drawn. He ran to the cockpit where the suit-case lay, and having tried its fastenings and found it unlocked, he opened it and took out a letter that lay on top of the other contents. This he tossed through the hatch into the cabin, and, having closed and fastened the suit-case, he carried it forward and made it fast to the iron

weight with half a dozen turns of spunyarn.

That was really all, and indeed it was time. As he rose once more to his feet the growl of the foghorn burst out, as it seemed, right over the stern of the yacht, and she was drifting stern foremost, who could say how fast. Now, too, he caught a more ominous sound, which he might have heard sooner had he listened—the wash of water, the boom of breakers bursting on a rock.

A sudden revulsion came over him. He burst into a wild, sardonic laugh. And had it come to this, after all? Had he schemed and laboured only to leave himself alone on an unmanageable craft drifting down to shipwreck and certain death? Had he taken all this thought and care to secure Purcell's body, when his own might be resting beside it on the sea-bottom within an hour?

But the reverie was brief. Suddenly, from the white void over his very head, as it seemed, there issued a stunning, thunderous roar that shook the deck under his feet. The water around him boiled into a foamy chaos, the din of bursting waves was in his ears, the yacht plunged and wallowed amidst clouds of spray, and for an instant a dim, gigantic shadow loomed through the fog and was gone. In that moment his nerve had come back. Holding on with one hand to the windlass he dragged the body to the edge of the forecastle, hoisted the weight outboard, and then, taking advantage of a heavy lurch, gave the corpse a vigorous shove. There was a rattle and a hollow splash, and corpse and weight and suit-case had vanished into the seething water.

He clung to the swinging mast and waited. Breathlessly he told out the allotted seconds until once again the invisible Titan belched forth his thunderous warning. But this time the roar came over the yacht's bow. She had drifted past the rock then. The danger was over, and Purcell would have to go down to Davy Jones' locker companionless after all.

Very soon the water around ceased to boil and tumble, and as the yacht's wild plunging settled down once more into the normal rise and fall on the long swell, Varney turned his attention to the refitting of the halyard. But what was this on the creamy, duck sail? A pool of blood and two gory imprints of his own left hand! That wouldn't do at all. He would have to clear that away before he could hoist the sail, which was annoying, as the yacht was helpless without her headsail, and was evidently drifting out to sea.

He fetched a bucket, a swab, and a scrubbing-brush, and set to work. The bulk of the large bloodstain cleared off pretty completely after he had drenched the sail with a bucketfull or two and given it a good scrubbing. But the edge of the stain where the heat of the deck had dried it remained like a painted boundary on a map, and the two hand-prints—which had also dried, though they faded to a pale buff—continued clearly visible.

Varney began to grow uneasy. If those stains would not come out—especially the hand-prints—it would be very awkward, they would take so much explaining. He decided to try the effect of marine soap, and fetched a cake from the cabin; but even this did not obliterate the stains completely, though it turned them a faint, greenish brown, very unlike the colour of blood. So he scrubbed on until at last the hand-prints faded away entirely, and the large stain was reduced to a faint green, wavy line, and that was the best he could do—and quite good enough, for if that faint line should ever be noticed no one would suspect its origin.

He put away the bucket and proceeded with the refitting. The sea had disengaged the sail from the forefoot, and he hauled it on board without difficulty. Then there was the reeving of the new halyard, a trouble-some business involving the necessity of his going aloft, where his weight—small man as he was—made the yacht roll most infernally, and set him swinging to and fro like the bob of a metronome. But he was a smart yachtsman and active, though not powerful, and a few minutes' strenuous exertion ended in his sliding down the shrouds with the new halyard running fairly through the upper block. A vigorous haul or two at the new, hairy rope sent the head of the dripping sail aloft, and the yacht was once more under control.

The rig of the *Sandhopper* was not smart, but it was handy. She carried a short bow-sprit to accommodate the single headsail and a relatively large mizzen, of which the advantage was, that by judicious management of the mizzen-sheet the yacht would sail with very little attention to the helm. Of this advantage Varney was keenly appreciative just now, for he had several things to do before entering port. He wanted refreshment, he wanted a wash, and the various traces of recent events had to be removed. Also, there was that letter to be attended to. So that it was convenient to be able to leave the helm in charge of a lashing for a minute now and again.

When he had washed, he put the kettle on the spirit stove, and while it was heating busied himself in cleaning the revolver, flinging the empty cartridge-case overboard, and replacing it with a cartridge from the bag in the locker. Then he picked up the letter that he had taken from Purcell's suit-case and examined it. It was addressed to "Joseph Penfield, Esq., George Yard, Lombard Street," and was unstamped, though the envelope was fastened up. He affixed a stamp from his pocket-book, and when the kettle began to boil, he held the envelope in the steam that issued from the spout. Very soon the flap of the envelope loosened and curled back, when he laid it aside to mix himself a mug of hot grog, which, together with the letter and a biscuit-tin, he took out into the cockpit. The fog was still dense, and the hoot of a steamer's whistle from somewhere to the westward caused him to reach the foghorn out of the locker, and blow a long blast on it. As if in answer to his treble squeak came the deep bass note from the Wolf, and unconsciously he looked round. He turned automatically, as one does towards a sudden noise, not expecting to see anything but fog, and what he did see startled him not a little.

For there was the lighthouse—or half of it, rather—standing up above the fog-bank, clear, distinct, and hardly a mile away. The gilded vane, the sparkling lantern, the gallery, and the upper half of the red and white ringed tower, stood sharp against the pallid sky; but the lower half was invisible. It was a strange apparition—like half a lighthouse suspended in mid-air—and uncommonly disturbing, too. It raised a very awkward question. If he could see the lantern, the light-keepers could see him. But how long had the lantern been clear of the fog?

Thus he meditated as, with one hand on the tiller, he munched his biscuit and sipped his grog. Presently he picked up the stamped envelope and drew from it a letter and a folded document, both of which he tore into fragments and dropped overboard. Then, from his pocket-book, he took a similar but unaddressed envelope from which he drew out the contents, and very curious those contents were.

There was a letter, brief and laconic, which he read over thoughtfully. "These," it ran, "are all I have by me, but they will do for the present, and when you have planted them I will let you have a fresh supply." There was no date and no signature, but the rather peculiar hand-writing was similar to that on the envelope addressed to Joseph Penfield, Esq.

The other contents consisted of a dozen sheets of blank paper, each of the size of a Bank of England note. But they were not quite blank, for each bore an elaborate water-mark, identical with that of a twenty-pound banknote. They were, in fact, the "paper blanks" of which Purcell had spoken. The envelope with its contents had been slipped into his hand by Purcell, without remark, only three days ago.

Varney refolded the "blanks," enclosed them within the letter, and slipped letter and "blanks" together into the stamped envelope, the flap of which he licked and reclosed.

"I should like to see old Penfield's face when he opens that envelope," was his reflection as, with a grim smile, he put it away in his pocket-book. "And I wonder what he will do," he added, mentally; "however, I shall see before many days are over."

Varney looked at his watch. He was to meet Jack Rodney on Penzance Pier at a quarter to three. He would never do it at this rate, for when he opened Mount's Bay, Penzance would be right in the wind's eye. That would mean a long beat to windward. Then Rodney would be there first, waiting for him. Deuced awkward, this. He would have to account for his being alone on board; would have to invent some lie about having put Purcell ashore at Mousehole or Newlyn. But a lie is a very pernicious thing. Its effects are cumulative. You never know when you have done with it. Now, if he had reached Penzance before Rodney he need have said nothing about Purcell—for the present, at any rate, and that would have been so much safer.

When the yacht was about abreast of Lamorna Cove, though some seven miles to the south, the breeze began to draw ahead and the fog cleared off quite suddenly. The change of wind was unfavourable for the moment, but when it veered round yet a little more until it blew from east-north-east, Varney brightened up considerably. There was still a chance of reaching Penzance before Rodney arrived; for now, as soon as he had fairly opened Mount's Bay, he could head straight for his destination and make it on a single board.

Between two and three hours later the *Sandhopper* entered Penzance Harbour, and, threading her way among an assemblage of luggers and small coasters, brought up alongside the Albert Pier at the foot of a vacant ladder. Having made the yacht fast to a couple of rings, Varney divested himself of his oilskins, locked the cabin scuttle, and climbed the ladder. The change of wind had saved him after all, and, as he strode away along the pier, he glanced complacently at his watch. He still had nearly half an hour to the good.

He seemed to know the place well and to have a definite objective, for he struck out briskly from the foot of the pier into Market Jew Street, and from thence by a somewhat zig-zag route to a road which eventually brought him out about the middle of the Esplanade. Continuing westward, he entered the Newlyn Road along which he walked rapidly for about a third of a mile, when he drew up opposite a small letter-box which was let into a wall. Here he stopped to read the tablet on which was printed the hours of collection, and then, having glanced at his watch, he walked on again, but at a less rapid pace.

When he reached the outskirts of Newlyn he turned and began slowly to retrace his steps, looking at his watch from time to time with a certain air of impatience. Presently a quick step behind him caused him to look round. The newcomer was a postman, striding along, bag on shoulder, with the noisy tread of a heavily-shod man, and evidently collecting letters. Varney let him pass; watched him halt at the little letter-box, unlock the door, gather up the letters and stow them in his bag; heard the clang of the iron door, and finally saw the man set forth again on his pilgrimage. Then he brought forth his pocket-book and, drawing from it the letter addressed to Joseph Penfield, Esq., stepped up to the letter-box. The tablet now announced that the next collection would be at 8.30 p.m. Varney read the announcement with a faint smile, glanced again at his watch, which indicated two minutes past four, and dropped the letter into the box.

As he walked up the pier, with a large paper bag under his arm, he became aware of a tall man, who was doing sentry-go before a Gladstone bag, that stood on the coping opposite the ladder, and who, observing his approach, came forward to meet him.

"Here you are, then, Rodney," was Varney's rather unoriginal greeting.

"Yes," replied Rodney, "and here I've been for nearly half an hour. Purcell gone?"

"Bless you, yes; long ago," answered Varney.

"I didn't see him at the station. What train was he going by?"

"I don't know. He said something about taking Falmouth on the way; had some business or other there. But I expect he's gone to have a feed at one of the hotels. We got hung up in a fog—that's why I'm so late; I've been up to buy some prog."

"Well," said Rodney, "bring it on board. It's time we were under way. As soon as we are outside, I'll take charge and you can go below and stoke up at your ease."

The two men descended the ladder and proceeded at once to hoist the sails and cast off the shore-ropes. A few strokes of an oar sent them clear of the lee of the pier, and in five minutes the yacht *Sandhopper* was once more outside, heading south with a steady breeze from east-north-east.

## II. The Unravelling of the Mystery

Romance lurks in unsuspected places. We walk abroad amidst scenes made dull by familiarity, and let our thoughts ramble far away beyond the commonplace. In fancy we thread the ghostly aisles of some tropical forest; we linger on the white beach of some lonely coral island, where the cocoa-nut palms, shivering in the sea-breeze, patter a refrain to the song of the surf; we wander by moonlight through the narrow streets of some southern city, and hear the thrum of the guitar rise to the shrouded balcony; and behold! all the time Romance is at our very doors.



It was on a bright afternoon early in March, that I sat beside my friend Thorndyke on one of the lower benches of the lecture theatre of the Royal College of Surgeons. Not a likely place this to encounter Romance, and yet there it was, if we had only known it, lying unnoticed at present on the green baize cover of the lecturer's table. But, for the moment, we were thinking of nothing but the lecture.

The theatre was nearly full. It usually was when Professor D'Arcy lectured; for that genial *savant* had the magnetic gift of infusing his own enthusiasm into the lecture, and so into his audience, even when, as on this occasion, his subject lay on the outside edge of medical science. To-day he was lecturing on marine worms, standing before the great blackboard with a bunch of coloured chalks in either hand, talking with easy eloquence—mostly over his shoulder—while he covered the black surface with those delightful drawings that added so much to the charm of his lectures.

I watched his flying fingers with fascination, dividing my attention between him and a young man on the bench below me, who was frantically copying the diagrams in a large note-book, assisted by an older friend, who sat by him and handed him the coloured pencils as he needed them.

The latter part of the lecture dealt with those beautiful sea-worms that build themselves tubes to live in; worms like the *Serpula*, that make their shelly or stony tubes by secretion from their own bodies; or, like the *Sabella* or *Terbella*, build them up with sand-grains, little stones, or fragments of shell.

When the lecture came to an end, we trooped down into the arena to look at the exhibits and exchange a few words with the genial professor. Thorndyke knew him very well, and was welcomed with a warm handshake and a facetious question.

"What are you doing here, Thorndyke?" asked Professor D'Arcy. "Is it possible that there are medico-legal possibilities even in a marine worm?"

"Oh, come!" protested Thorndyke, "don't make me such a hidebound specialist. May I have no rational interest in life? Must I live for ever in the witness-box, like a marine worm in its tube?"

"I suspect you don't get very far out of your tube," said the professor, with a smile at my colleague. "And that reminds me that I have something in your line. What do you make of this? Let us hear you extract its history."

Here, with a mischievous twinkle, he handed Thorndyke a small, round object, which my friend inspected curiously as it lay in the palm of his hand.

"In the first place," said he, "it is a cork; the cork of a small jar."

"Right," said the professor—"full marks. What else?"

"The cork has been saturated with paraffin wax."

"Right again."

"Then some Robinson Crusoe seems to have used it as a button, judging by the two holes in it, and an end of what looks like cat-gut."

"Yes."

"Finally, a marine worm of some kind—a *Terebella*, I think—has built a tube on it."

"Quite right. And now tell us the history of the cork or button."

"I should like to know something more about the worm first," said Thorndyke.

"The worm," said Professor D'Arcy, "is *Terebella Rufescens*. It lives, unlike most other species, on a rocky bottom, and in a depth of water of not less than ten fathoms."

It was at this point that Romance stepped in. The young man whom I had noticed working so strenuously at his notes had edged up alongside, and was staring at the object in Thorndyke's hand, not with mere interest or curiosity, but with the utmost amazement and horror. His expression was so remarkable that we all, with one accord, dropped our conversation to look at him.

"Might I be allowed to examine that specimen?" he asked; and when Thorndyke handed it to him, he held it close to his eyes, scrutinising it with frowning astonishment, turned it over and over, and felt the frayed ends of cat-gut between his fingers. Finally, he beckoned to his friend, and the two whispered together for a while, and watching them I saw the second man's eyebrows lift, and the same expression of horrified surprise appear on his face. Then the younger man addressed the professor.

"Would you mind telling me where you got this specimen, sir?"

The professor was quite interested. "It was sent to me," he said, "by a friend, who picked it up on the beach at Morte Hoe, on the coast of North Cornwall."

The two young men looked significantly at one another, and, after a brief pause, the older one asked: "Is this specimen of much value, sir?"

"No," replied the professor; "it is only a curiosity. There are several specimens of the worm in our collection. But why do you ask?"

"Because I should like to acquire it. I can't give you particulars—I am a lawyer, I may explain—but, from what my brother tells me it appears that this object has a bearing on—er—on a case in which we are both interested. A very important bearing, I may add, on a very important case."

The professor was delighted. "There, now, Thorndyke," he chuckled. "What did I tell you? The medico-legal worm has arrived. I told you in was something in your line, and now you've been forestalled. Of course," he added, turning to the lawyer, "you are very welcome to this specimen. I'll give you a box to carry it in, with some cotton wool."

The specimen was duly packed in its box, and the latter deposited in the lawyer's pocket; but the two brothers did not immediately leave the theatre. They stood apart, talking earnestly together, until Thorndyke and I had taken our leave of the professor, when the lawyer advanced and addressed my colleague.

"I don't suppose you remember me, Dr. Thorndyke," he began; but my friend interrupted him.

"Yes, I do. You are Mr. Rodney. You were junior to Brooke in *Jelks v. Partington*. Can I be of any assistance to you?"

"If you would be so kind," replied Rodney. "My brother and I have been talking this over, and we think we should like to have your opinion on the case. The fact is, we both jumped to a conclusion at once, and now we've got what the Yankees call 'cold feet.' We think that we may have jumped too soon. Let me introduce my brother, Dr. Philip Rodney."

We shook hands, and, making our way out of the theatre, presently emerged from the big portico into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"If you will come and take a cup of tea at my chambers in Old Buildings," said Rodney, "we can give you the necessary particulars. There isn't so very much to tell, after all. My brother identifies the cork or button, and that seems to be the only plain fact that we have. Tell Dr. Thorndyke how you identified it, Phil."

"It is a simple matter," said Philip Rodney. "I went out in a boat to do some dredging with a friend named Purcell. We both wore our oilskins as the sea was choppy and there was a good deal of spray blowing about; but Purcell had lost the top button of his, so that the collar kept blowing open and letting the spray down his neck. We had no spare buttons or needles or thread on board, but it occurred to me that I could rig up a jury button with a cork from one of my little collecting jars; so I took one out, bored a couple of holes through it with a pipe-cleaner, and threaded a piece of cat-gut through the holes."

"Why cat-gut?" asked Thorndyke.

"Because I happened to have it. I play the fiddle, and I generally have a bit of a broken string in my pocket; usually an E string—the E strings are always breaking, you know. Well, I had the end of an E string in my pocket then, so I fastened the button on with it. I bored two holes in the coat, passed the ends of the string through, and tied a reef-knot. It was as strong as a house."

"You have no doubt that it is the same cork?"

"None at all. First there is the size, which I know from having ordered the corks separately from the jars. Then I paraffined them myself after sticking on the blank labels. The label is there still, protected by the wax. And lastly there is the cat-gut; the bit that is left is obviously part of an E string."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "the identification seems to be unimpeachable. Now let us have the story."

"We'll have some tea first," said Rodney. "This is my burrow." As he spoke, he dived into the dark entry of one of the ancient buildings on the south side of the little square, and we followed him up the crabbed, time-worn stairs, so different from our own lordly staircase in King's Bench Walk. He let us into his chambers, and, having offered us each an armchair, said: "My brother will spin you the yarn while I make the tea. When you have heard him you can begin the examination-in-chief. You understand that this is a confidential matter and that we are dealing with it professionally?"

"Certainly," replied Thorndyke, "we quite understand that." And thereupon Philip Rodney began his story.

"One morning last June two men started from Sennen Cove, on the west coast of Cornwall, to sail to Penzance in a little yacht that belongs to my brother and me. One of them was Purcell, of whom I spoke just now, and the other was a man named Varney. When they started, Purcell was wearing the oilskin coat with this button on it. The yacht arrived at Penzance at about four in the afternoon. Purcell went ashore alone to take the train to London or Falmouth, and was never seen again dead or alive. The following day Purcell's solicitor, a Mr. Penfield, received a letter from him bearing the Penzance postmark and the hour 8.45 p.m. The letter was evidently sent by mistake—put into the wrong envelope—and it appears to have been a highly compromising document. Penfield refuses to give any particulars, but thinks that the letter fully accounts for Purcell's disappearance—thinks, in fact, that Purcell has bolted.

"It was understood that Purcell was going to London from Penzance, but he seems to have told Varney that he intended to call in at Falmouth. Whether or not he went to Falmouth we don't know. Varney saw him go up the ladder on to the pier, and there all traces of him vanished. Varney thinks he may have discovered the mistake about the letter and got on board some outward-bound ship at Falmouth; but that is only surmise. Still, it is highly probable; and when my brother and I saw that button at the museum, we remembered the suggestion and instantly jumped to the conclusion that poor Purcell had gone overboard."

"And then," said Rodney, handing us our tea-cups, "when we came to talk it over we rather tended to revise our conclusion."

"Why?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well, there are several other possibilities. Purcell may have found a proper button on the yacht and cut off the cork and thrown it overboard—we must ask Varney if he did—or the coat itself may have gone over or been lost or given away, and so on."

On this Thorndyke made no comment, stirring his tea slowly with an air of deep preoccupation. Presently he looked up and asked, "Who saw the yacht start?"

"I did," said Philip. "I and Mrs. Purcell and her sister and some fishermen on the beach. Purcell was steering, and he took the yacht right out to sea, outside the Longships. A sea fog came down soon after, and we were rather anxious, because the Wolf Rock lay right to leeward of the yacht."

"Did anyone besides Varney see Purcell at Penzance?"

"Apparently not. But we haven't asked. Varney's statement seemed to settle that question. He couldn't very well have been mistaken, you know," Philip added with a smile.

"Besides," said Rodney, "if there were any doubt, there is the letter. It was posted in Penzance after eight o'clock at night. Now I met Varney on the pier at a quarter-past four, and we sailed out of Penzance a few minutes later to return to Sennen."

"Had Varney been ashore?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, he had been up to the town buying some provisions."

"But you said Purcell went ashore alone."

"Yes, but there's nothing in that. Purcell was not a genial man. It was the sort of thing he would do."

"And that is all that you know of the matter?" Thorndyke asked, after a few moments' reflection.

"Yes. But we might see if Varney can remember anything more, and we might try if we can squeeze any more information out of old Penfield."

"You won't," said Thorndyke. "I know Penfield and I never trouble to ask him questions. Besides, there is nothing to ask at present. We have an item of evidence that we have not fully examined. I suggest that we exhaust that, and meanwhile keep our own counsel most completely."

Rodney looked dissatisfied. "If," said he, "the item of evidence that you refer to is the button, it seems to me that we have got all that we are likely to get out of it. We have identified it, and we know that it has been thrown up on the beach at Morte Hoe. What more can we learn from it?"

"That remains to be seen," replied Thorndyke. "We may learn nothing, but, on the other hand, we may be able to trace the course of its travels and learn its recent history. It may give us a hint as to where to start a fresh inquiry."

Rodney laughed sceptically. "You talk like a clairvoyant, as if you had the power to make this bit of cork break out into fluent discourse. Of course, you can look at the thing and speculate and guess, but surely the common sense of the matter is to ask a plain question of the man who probably knows. If it turns out that Varney saw Purcell throw the button overboard, or can tell us how it got into the sea, all your speculations will have been useless. I say, let us ask Varney first, and if he knows nothing, it will be time to start guessing."

But Thorndyke was calmly obdurate. "We are not going to guess, Rodney; we are going to investigate. Let me have the button for a couple of days. If I learn nothing from it, I will return it to you, and you can then refresh your legal soul with verbal testimony. But give scientific methods a chance first."

With evident reluctance Rodney handed him the little box. "I have asked your advice," he said rather ungraciously, "so I suppose I must take it; but your methods appeal more to the sporting than the business instincts."

"We shall see," said Thorndyke, rising with a satisfied air. "But, meanwhile, I stipulate that you make no communication to anybody."

"Very well," said Rodney; and we took leave of the two brothers.

"As walked down Chancery Lane, I looked at Thorndyke, and detected in him an air of purpose for which I could not quite account. Clearly, he had something in view.

"It seems to me," I said tentatively, "that there was something in what Rodney said. Why shouldn't the button just have been thrown overboard?"

He stopped and looked at me with humorous reproach. "Jervis!" he exclaimed, "I am ashamed of you. You are as bad as Rodney. You have utterly lost sight of the main fact, which is a most impressive one. Here is a cork button. Now an ordinary cork, if immersed long enough, will soak up water until it is water-logged, and then sink to the bottom. But this one is impregnated with paraffin wax. It can't get water-logged, and it can't sink. It would float for ever."

"Well?"

"But it *has* sunk. It has been lying at the bottom of the sea for months, long enough for a *Terebella* to build a tube on it. And we have D'Arcy's statement that it has been lying in not less than ten fathoms of water. Then, at last, it has broken loose and risen to the surface

and drifted ashore. Now, I ask you, what has held it down at the bottom of the sea? Of course, it may have been only the coat, weighted by something in the pocket; but there is a much more probable suggestion."

"Yes, I see," said I.

"I suspect you don't—altogether," he rejoined, with a malicious smile. And in the end it turned out that he was right.

The air of purpose that I noted was not deceptive. No sooner had we reached our chambers, then he fell to work as if with a definite object. Standing by the window, he scrutinised the button, first with the naked eye, and then with a lens, and finally laying it on the stage of the microscope, examined the worm-tube by the light of a condenser with a two-inch objective. And the result seemed to please him amazingly.

His next proceeding was to detach, with a fine pair of forceps, the largest of the tiny fragments of stone of which the worm-tube was built. This fragment he cemented on a slide with Canada balsam; and, fetching from the laboratory a slip of Turkey stone, he proceeded to grind the little fragment to a flat surface. Then he melted the balsam, turned the fragment over, and repeated the grinding process until the little fragment was ground down to a thin film or plate, when he applied fresh balsam and a cover-glass. The specimen was now ready for examination; and it was at this point that I suddenly remembered I had an appointment at six o'clock.

It had struck half-past seven when I returned, and a glance round the room told me that the battle was over—and won. The table was littered with trays of mineralogical sections and open books of reference relating to geology and petrology, and one end was occupied by an outspread geological chart of the British Isles. Thorndyke sat in his armchair, smiling with a bland contentment, and smoking a Trichinopoly cheroot.

"Well," I said cheerfully, "what's the news?"

"He removed the cheroot, blew out a cloud of smoke, and replied in a single word:

"Phonolite."

"Thank you," I said. "Brevity is the soul of wit. But would you mind amplifying the joke to the dimensions of intelligibility?"

"Certainly," he replied gravely. "I will endeavour to temper the wind to the shorn lamb. You noticed, I suppose, that the fragments of rock of which that worm-tube was built are all alike?"

"All the same kind of rock? No, I did not."

"Well, they are, and I have spent a strenuous hour identifying that rock. It is the peculiar, resonant, volcanic rock known as phonolite or clink-stone."

"That is very interesting," said I. "And now I see the object of your researches. You hope to get a hint as to the locality where the button has been lying."

"I hoped, as you say, to get a hint, but I have succeeded beyond my expectations. I have been able to fix the locality exactly."

"Have you really?" I exclaimed. "How on earth did you manage that?"

"By a very singular chance," he replied. "It happens that phonolite occurs in two places only in the neighbourhood of the British Isles. One is inland and may be disregarded. The other is the Wolf Rock."

"The rock of which Philip Rodney was speaking?"

"Yes. He said, you remember, that he was afraid that the yacht might drift down on it in the fog. Well, this Wolf Rock is a very remarkable structure. It is what is called a 'volcanic neck,' that is, it is a mass of altered lava that once filled the funnel of a volcano. The volcano has disappeared, but this cast of the funnel remains standing up from the bottom of the sea like a great column. It is a single mass of phonolite, and thus entirely different in composition from the seabed around or anywhere near these islands. But, of course, immediately at its base, the sea-bottom must be covered with decomposed fragments which have fallen from its sides, and it is from these fragments that our *Terebella* has built its tube. So, you see, we can fix the exact locality in which that button has been lying all the months that the tube was building, and we now have a point of departure for fresh investigations."

"But," I said, "this is a very significant discovery, Thorndyke. Shall you tell Rodney?"

"Certainly I shall. But there are one or two questions that I shall ask him first. I have sent him a note inviting him to drop in to-night with his brother, so we had better run round to the club and get some dinner. I said nine o'clock."

It was a quarter to nine when we had finished dinner, and ten minutes later we were back in our chambers. Thorndyke made up the fire, placed the chairs hospitably round the hearth, and laid on the table the notes that he had taken at the late interview. Then the Treasury clock struck nine, and within less than a minute our two guests arrived.

"I should apologise," said Thorndyke, as we shook hands, "for my rather peremptory message, but I thought it best to waste no time."

"You certainly have wasted no time," said Rodney, "if you have already extracted its history from the button. Do you keep a tame medium on the premises, or are you a clairvoyant yourself?"

"There is our medium," replied Thorndyke, indicating the microscope standing on a side-table under its bell glass. "The man who uses it becomes to some extent a clairvoyant. But I should like to ask you one or two questions if I may."

Rodney made no secret of his disappointment. "We had hoped," said he, "to hear answers rather than questions. However, as you



please.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, quite unmoved by Rodney’s manner, “I will proceed; and I will begin with the yacht in which Purcell and Varney travelled from Sennen to Penzance. I understand that the yacht belongs to you and was lent by you to these two men?”

Rodney nodded, and Thorndyke then asked: “Has the yacht ever been out of your custody on any other occasion?”

“No,” replied Rodney, “excepting on this occasion, one or both of us have always been on board.”

Thorndyke made a note of the answer and proceeded: “When you resumed possession of the yacht, did you find her in all respects as you had left her?”

“My dear sir,” Rodney exclaimed impatiently, “may I remind you that we are inquiring—if we are inquiring about anything—into the disappearance of a man who was seen to go ashore from this yacht and who certainly never came on board again? The yacht is out of it altogether.”

“Nevertheless,” said Thorndyke, “I should be glad if you would answer my question.”

“Oh, very well,” Rodney replied irritably. “Then we found her substantially as we had left her.”

“Meaning by ‘substantially’?—”

“Well, they had had to rig a new jib halyard. The old one had parted.”

“Did you find the old one on board?”

“Yes; in two pieces, of course.”

“Was the whole of it there?”

“I suppose so. We never measured the pieces. But really, sir, these questions seem extraordinarily irrelevant.”

“They are not,” said Thorndyke. “You will see that presently. I want to know if you missed any rope, cordage, or chain.”

Here Philip interposed. “There was some spun-yarn missing. They opened a new ball and used up several yards. I meant to ask Varney what they used it for.”

Thorndyke jotted down a note and asked: “Was there any of the ironwork missing? Any anchor, chain, or any other heavy object?”

Rodney shook his head impatiently, but again Philip broke in.

“You are forgetting the ballast-weight, Jack. You see,” he continued, addressing Thorndyke, “the yacht is ballasted with half-hundredweights, and, when we came to take out the ballast to lay her up for the winter, we found one of the weights missing. I have no idea when it disappeared, but there was certainly one short, and neither of us had taken it out.”

“Can you,” asked Thorndyke, “fix any date on which all the ballast-weights were in place?”

“Yes, I think I can. A few days before Purcell went to Penzance we beached the yacht—she is only a little boat—to give her a scrape. Of course, we had to take out the ballast, and when we launched her again I helped to put it back. I am certain all the weights were there then.”

Here Jack Rodney, who had been listening with ill-concealed impatience, remarked: “This is all very interesting, sir, but I cannot conceive what bearing it has on the movements of Purcell after he left the yacht.”

“It has a most direct and important bearing,” said Thorndyke. “Perhaps I had better explain before we go any further. Let me begin by pointing out that this button has been lying for many months at the bottom of the sea at a depth of not less than ten fathoms. That is proved by the worm-tube which has been built on it. Now, as this button is a waterproofed cork, it could not have sunk by itself; it has been sunk by some body to which it was attached, and there is evidence that that body was a very heavy one.”

“What evidence is there of that?” asked Rodney.

“There is the fact that it has been lying continuously in one place. A body of moderate weight, as you know, moves about the sea-bottom impelled by currents and tide-streams, but this button has been lying unmoved in one place.”

“Indeed,” said Rodney with manifest scepticism. “Perhaps you can point out the spot where it has been lying.”

“I can,” Thorndyke replied. “That button, Mr. Rodney, has been lying all these months at the base of the Wolf Rock.”

The two brothers started very perceptibly. They stared at Thorndyke, they looked at one another, and then the lawyer challenged the statement.

“You make this assertion very confidently,” he said. “Can you give us any evidence to support it?”

Thorndyke’s reply was to produce the button, the section, the test-specimens, the microscope, and the geological chart. In great detail, and with his incomparable lucidity, he assembled the facts, and explained their connection, evolving the unavoidable conclusion.

The different effect of the demonstration on the two men interested me greatly. To the lawyer, accustomed to dealing with verbal and documentary evidence, it manifestly appeared as a far-fetched, rather fantastic argument, ingenious, amusing, and entirely unconvincing. On Philip, the doctor, it made a profound impression. Accustomed to acting on inferences from facts of his own observing, he gave full weight to each item of evidence, and I could see that his mind was already stretching out to the, as yet unstated,

corollaries.

The lawyer was the first to speak. "What inference," he asked, "do you wish us to draw from this very ingenious theory of yours?"

"The inference," Thorndyke replied impassively, "I leave to you; but perhaps it would help you if I recapitulate the facts."

"Perhaps it would," said Rodney.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I will take them in order. This is the case of a man who was seen to start on a voyage for a given destination in company with one other person. His start out to sea was witnessed by a number of persons. From that moment he was never seen again by any person excepting his one companion. He is said to have reached his destination, but his arrival there rests upon the unsupported verbal testimony of one person, the said companion. Thereafter he vanished utterly, and since then has made no sign of being alive, although there are several persons with whom he could have safely communicated.

"Some eight months later a portion of this man's clothing is found. It bears evidence of having been lying at the bottom of the sea for many months, so that it must have sunk to its resting place within a very short time of the man's disappearance. The place where it has been lying is one over, or near, which the man must have sailed in the yacht. It has been moored to the bottom by some very heavy object; and a very heavy object has disappeared from the yacht. That heavy object had apparently not disappeared when the yacht started, and was not seen on the yacht afterwards. The evidence goes to show that the disappearance of that object coincided in time with the disappearance of the man; and a quantity of cordage disappeared, certainly, on that day. Those are the facts in our possession at present, Mr. Rodney, and I think the inference emerges automatically."

There was a brief silence, during which the two brothers cogitated profoundly and with very disturbed expressions. Then Rodney spoke.

"I am bound to admit, Dr. Thorndyke, that, as a scheme of circumstantial evidence, this is extremely ingenious and complete. It is impossible to mistake your meaning. But you would hardly expect us to charge a highly respectable gentleman of our acquaintance with having murdered his friend and made away with the body, on a—well—a rather far-fetched theory."

"Certainly not," replied Thorndyke. "But, on the other hand, with this body of circumstantial evidence before us, it is clearly imperative that some further investigations should be made before we speak of the matter to any human soul."

Rodney agreed somewhat grudgingly. "What do you suggest?" he asked.

"I suggest that we thoroughly overhaul the yacht in the first place. Where is she now?"

"Under a tarpaulin in a yard at Battersea. The gear and stores are in a disused workshop in the yard."

"When could we look over her?"

"To-morrow morning, if you like," said Rodney.

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "We will call for you at nine, if that will suit."

It suited perfectly, and the arrangement was accordingly made. A few minutes later the two brothers took their leave, but as they were shaking hands, Philip said suddenly:

"There is one little matter that occurs to me. I have only just remembered it, and I don't suppose it is of any consequence, but it is as well to mention everything. You remember my brother saying that one of the jib halyards broke that day?"

"Yes."

"Well, of course, the jib came down and went partly overboard. Now, the next time I hoisted the sail, I noticed a small stain on it; a greenish stain like that of mud, only it wouldn't wash out, and it is there still. I meant to ask Varney about it. Stains of that kind on the jib usually come from a bit of mud on the fluke of the anchor, but the anchor was quite clean when I examined it, and besides, it hadn't been down on that day. I thought I'd better tell you about it."

"I'm glad you did," said Thorndyke. "We will have a look at that stain to-morrow. Good-night." Once more he shook hands, and then, reentering the room, stood for quite a long time with his back to the fire, thoughtfully examining the toes of his boots.

We started forth next morning for our rendezvous considerably earlier than seemed necessary. But I made no comment, for Thorndyke was in that state of extreme taciturnity which characterised him whenever he was engaged on an absorbing case with an insufficiency of evidence. I knew that he was turning over and over the facts that he had, and searching for new openings; but I had no clue to the trend of his thoughts until, passing the gateway of Lincoln's Inn, he walked briskly up Chancery Lane into Holborn, and finally halted outside a wholesale druggist's.

"I shan't be more than a few minutes," said he; "are you coming in?"

I was, most emphatically. Questions were forbidden at this stage, but there was no harm in keeping one's ears open; and when I heard his order I was the richer by a distinct clue to his next movements. Tincture of Guaiacum and Ozonic Ether formed a familiar combination, and the size of the bottles indicated the field of investigation.

We found the brothers waiting for us at Lincoln's Inn. They both looked rather hard at the parcel that I was now carrying, and especially at Thorndyke's green canvas-covered research case; but they made no comment, and we set forth at once on the rather awkward cross-country journey to Battersea. Very little was said on the way, but I noticed that both men took our quest more seriously than I had expected, and I judged that they had been talking the case over.

Our journey terminated at a large wooden gate on which Rodney knocked loudly with his stick; whereupon a wicket was opened,

and, after a few words of explanation, we passed through into a large yard. Crossing this, we came to a wharf, beyond which was a small stretch of unreclaimed shore, and here, drawn well above high-water mark, a small, double-ended yacht stood on chocks under a tarpaulin cover.

"This is the yacht," said Rodney. "The gear and loose fittings are stored in the workshop behind us. Which will you see first?"

"Let us look at the gear," said Thorndyke, and we turned to the disused workshop into which Rodney admitted us with a key from his pocket. I looked curiously about the long, narrow interior with its prosaic contents, so little suggestive of tragedy or romance. Overhead the yacht's spars rested on the tie-beams, from which hung bunches of blocks; on the floor a long row of neatly-painted half-hundredweights, a pile of chain-cable, two anchors, a stove, and other oddments such as water breakers, buckets, mops, etc., and on the long benches at the side, folded sails, locker cushions, side-light lanterns, the binnacle, the cabin lamp, and other more delicate fittings. Thorndyke, too, glanced round inquisitively, and, depositing his case on the bench, asked, "Have you still got the broken jib halyard of which you were telling me?"

"Yes," said Rodney, "it is here under the bench." He drew out a coil of rope, and flinging it on the floor, began to uncoil it, when it separated into two lengths.

"Which are the broken ends?" Thorndyke asked.

"It broke near the middle," said Rodney, "where it chafed on the cleat when the sail was hoisted. This is the one end, you see, frayed out like a brush in breaking, and the other——" He picked up the second half and, passing it rapidly through his hands, held up the end. He did not finish the sentence, but stood with a frown of surprise staring at the rope in his hands.

"This is queer," he said, after a pause, "The broken end has been cut off. Did you cut it off, Phil?"

"No," replied Philip. "It is just as I took it from the locker, where, I suppose, you or Varney stowed it."

"The question is," said Thorndyke, "how much has it been cut off? Do you know the original length of the rope?"

"Yes. Forty-two feet. It is not down in the inventory, but I remember working it out. Let us see how much there is here."

He laid the two lengths of rope along the floor and we measured them with Thorndyke's spring tape. The combined length was exactly thirty-one feet.

"So," said Thorndyke, "there are eleven feet missing, without allowing for the lengthening of the rope by stretching. That is a very important fact."

"What made you suspect that part of the halyard might be missing as well as the spunyarn?" Philip asked.

"I did not think," replied Thorndyke, "that a yachtsman would use spunyarn to lash a half-handredweight to a corpse. I suspected that the spunyarn was used for something else. By the way, I see you have a revolver there. Was that on board at the time?"

"Yes," said Rodney. "It was hanging on the cabin bulkhead. Be careful. I don't think it has been unloaded."

Thorndyke opened the breech of the revolver, and dropping the cartridges into his hand, peered down the barrel and into each chamber separately.

"It is quite clean inside," he remarked. Then, glancing at the ammunition in his hand, "I notice," said he, "that these cartridges are not all alike. There is one Curtis and Harvey, and five Eleys."

Philip looked with a distinctly startled expression at the little heap of cartridges in Thorndyke's hand, and picking out the odd one, examined it with knitted brows.

"When did you fire the revolver last, Jack?" he asked, looking up at his brother.

"On the day when we potted at those champagne bottles," was the reply.

Philip raised his eyebrows. "Then," said he, "this is a very remarkable affair. I distinctly remember on that occasion, when we had sunk all the bottles, reloading the revolver with Eleys, and that there were then three cartridges left over in the bag. When I had loaded I opened the new box of Curtis and Harvey's, upped them into the bag and threw the box overboard."

"Did you clean the revolver?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, I didn't. I mean to do it later, but forgot to."

"But," said Thorndyke, "it has undoubtedly been cleaned, and very thoroughly. Shall we check the cartridges in the bag? There ought to be forty-nine Curtis and Harvey's and three Eley's if what you tell us is correct."

Philip searched among the raffle on the bench and produced a small linen bag. Untying the string, he shot out on the bench a heap of cartridges which he counted one by one. There were fifty-two in all, and three of them were Eley's.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "it comes to this: since you used that revolver it has been used by someone else. That someone fired only a single shot, after which he carefully cleaned the barrel and reloaded. Incidentally, he seems to have known where the cartridge bag was kept, but did not know about the change in the make of the cartridges. You notice," he added, looking at Rodney, "that the circumstantial evidence accumulates."

"I do, indeed," Rodney replied gloomily. "Is there anything else that you wish to examine?"

"Yes. There is the sail. You spoke of a stain on the jib. Shall we see if we can make anything of that?"

"I don't think you will make much of it," said Philip. "It is very faint. However, you shall see it." He picked out one of the bundles of white duck, and, while he was unfolding it, Thorndyke dragged an empty bench into the middle of the floor under the skylight. Over this the sail was spread so that the mysterious mark was in the middle of the bench. It was very inconspicuous; just a faint, grey-green, wavy line like the representation of an island on a map. We all looked at it attentively for a few moments, and then Thorndyke said, "Would you mind if I made a further stain on the sail? I should like to apply some re-agents."

"Of course, you must do what is necessary," said Rodney. "The evidence is more important than the sail."

Accordingly Thorndyke unpacked our parcel, and as the two bottles emerged, Philip read the labels with evident surprise, remarking:

"I shouldn't have thought the Guaiacum test would have been of any use after all these months."

"It will act, I think, if the pigment is there," said Thorndyke; and as he spoke he poured a quantity of the tincture—which he had ordered diluted to our usual working strength—on the middle of the stained area. The pool of liquid rapidly spread considerably beyond the limits of the stain, growing paler as it extended. Then Thorndyke cautiously dropped small quantities of the Ether at various points around the stained area and watched closely as the two liquids mingled in the fabric of the sail. Gradually the Ether spread towards the stain, and, first at one point and then at another, approached and finally crossed the wavy grey line, and at each point the same change occurred; first, the faint grey line turned into a strong blue line, and then the colour extended to the enclosed space, until the entire area of the stain stood out, a conspicuous blue patch.

Philip and Thorndyke looked at one another significantly, and the latter said, "You understand the meaning of this reaction, Mr. Rodney; this is a bloodstain, and a very carefully washed bloodstain."

"So I supposed," Rodney replied, and for a while we were all silent.

There was something very dramatic and solemn in the sudden appearance of this staring blue patch on the sail, with the sinister message that it brought. But what followed was more dramatic still. As we stood silently regarding the blue stain, the mingled liquids continued to spread: and suddenly, at the extreme edge of the wet area, we became aware of a new spot of blue. At first a mere speck, it grew slowly as the liquid spread over the canvas into a small oval, and then a second spot appeared by its side.

At this point Thorndyke poured out a fresh charge of the tincture, and when it had soaked into the cloth, cautiously applied a sprinkling of Ether. Instantly the blue spots began to elongate, fresh spots and patches appeared, and as they ran together there sprang out of the blank surface the clear impression of a hand—a left hand, complete in all its details excepting the third finger, which was represented by an oval spot at some two-thirds of its length.

The dreaded significance of this apparition and the uncanny and mysterious manner of its emergence from the white surface impressed us so that for a while none of us spoke. At length I ventured to remark on the absence of the impression of the third finger.

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that the impression is there. That spot looks like the mark of a finger-tip, and its position rather suggests a finger with a stiff joint."

As he made this statement, both brothers simultaneously uttered a smothered exclamation.

Thorndyke looked up at them sharply. "What is it?" he asked.

The two men looked at one another with an expression of awe. Then Rodney said in a hushed voice, hardly above a whisper, "Varney, the man who was with Purcell on the yacht—he has a stiff joint on the third finger of his left hand."

There was nothing more to say. The case was complete. The keystone had been laid in the edifice of circumstantial evidence. The investigation was at an end.

After an interval of silence, during which Thorndyke was busily writing up his notes, Rodney asked, "What is to be done now? Shall I swear an information?"

Thorndyke shook his head. No man was more expert in accumulating circumstantial evidence; none was more loth to rely on it.

"A murder charge," said he, "should be supported by proof of death and, if possible, by production of the body."

"But the body is at the bottom of the sea!"

"True. But we know its whereabouts. It is a small area, with the lighthouse as a landmark. If that area were systematically worked over with a trawl or dredge, or better still, with a creper, there should be a very good chance of recovering the body, or, at least, the clothing and the weight."

Rodney reflected for a few moments. "I think you are right," he said at length. "The thing is practicable, and it is our duty to do it. I suppose you couldn't come down and help us?"

"Not now. But in a few days the spring vacation will commence, and then Jervis and I could join you, if the weather were suitable." "Thank you both," replied Rodney. "We will make the arrangements, and let you know when we are ready."

\* \* \*

It was quite early on a bright April morning when the two Rodneys, Thorndyke, and I steamed out of Penzance Harbour in a small open launch. The sea was very calm for the time of year, the sky was of a warm blue, and a gentle breeze stole out of the north-east. Over the launch's side hung a long spar, secured to a tow-rope by a bridle, and to the spar were attached a number of creepers—lengths

of chain fitted with rows of hooks. The outfit further included a spirit compass, provided with sights, a sextant, and a hand-lead.

"It's lucky we didn't run up against Varney in the town," Philip remarked, as the harbour dwindled in the distance.

"Varney!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "Do you mean that he lives at Penzance?"

"He keeps rooms there, and spends most of his spare time down in this part. He was always keen on sea-fishing, and he's keener than ever now. He keeps a boat of his own, too. It's queer, isn't it, if what we think is true?"

"Very," said Thorndyke; and by his meditative manner I judge that circumstances afforded him matter for curious speculation.

As we passed abreast of the Land's End, and the solitary lighthouse rose ahead on the verge of the horizon, we began to overtake the scattered members of a fleet of luggers, home with lowered mainsails and hand-lines down, others with their black sails set, heading for a more distant fishing-ground. Threading our way among them, we suddenly became aware that one of the smaller luggers was heading so as to close in on us. Rodney, observing this, was putting over the helm to avoid her when a seafaring voice from the little craft hailed us.

"Launch ahoy there! Gentleman aboard wants to speak to you."

We looked at one another significantly and in some confusion; and meanwhile our solitary "hand"—seaman, engineer, and fireman combined—without waiting for orders, shut off steam. The lugger closed in rapidly and of a sudden there appeared, holding on by the mainstay, a small dark fellow who hailed us cheerfully: "Hullo, you fellows! Whither away? What's your game?"

"God!" exclaimed Philip. "It's Varney. Sheer off, Jack! Don't let him come alongside."

"But it was too late. The launch had lost way and failed to answer the helm. The lugger sheered in, sweeping abreast of us within a foot; and, as she crept past, Varney sprang lightly from her gunwale and dropped neatly on the side bench in our stern sheets.

"Where are you off to?" he asked. "You can't be going out to fish in this baked-potato can?"

"No," faltered Rodney, "we're not. We're going to do some dredging—or rather——"

Here Thorndyke came to his assistance. "Marine worms," said he, "are the occasion of this little voyage. There seem to be some very uncommon ones on the bottom at the base of the Wolf Rock. I have seen some in a collection, and I want to get a few more if I can."

It was a skillfully-worded explanation, and I could see that, for the time, Varney accepted it. But from the moment when the Wolf Rock was mentioned all his vivacity of manner died out. In an instant he had become grave, thoughtful, and a trifle uneasy.

The introductions over, he reverted to the subject. He questioned us closely, especially as to our proposed methods. And it was impossible to evade his questions. There were the creepers in full view; there was the compass and the sextant; and presently these appliances would have to be put in use. Gradually, as the nature of our operations dawned on him, his manner changed more and more. A horrible pallor overspread his face, and a terrible restlessness took possession of him.

Rodney, who was navigating, brought the launch to within a quarter of a mile of the rock, and then, taking cross-bearings on the lighthouse and a point of land, directed us to lower the creepers.

It was a most disagreeable experience for us all. Varney, pale and clammy, fidgeted about the boat, now silent and moody, now almost hysterically boisterous. Thorndyke watched him furtively and, I think, judged by his manner how near we were to the object of our search.

Calm as the day was, the sea was breaking heavily over the rock, and as we worked in closer the water around boiled and eddied in an unpleasant and even dangerous manner. The three keepers in the gallery of the lighthouse watched us through their glasses, and one of them bellowed to us through a megaphone to keep further away.

"What do you say?" asked Rodney. "It's a bit risky here, with the rock right under our lee. Shall we try another side?"

"Better try one more cast this side," said Thorndyke; and he spoke so definitely that we all, including Varney, looked at him curiously. But no one answered, and the creepers were dropped for a fresh cast still nearer the rock. We were then north of the lighthouse, and headed south so as to pass the rock on its east side. As we approached, the man with the megaphone bawled out fresh warnings, and continued to roar at us until we were abreast of the rock in a wild tumble of confused waves.

At this moment Philip, who held the towline with a single turn round a cleat, said that he felt a pull, but that it seemed as if the creepers had broken away. As soon, therefore, as we were out of the backwash into smooth water, we hauled in the linen to examine the creepers.

I looked over the side eagerly, for something new in Thorndyke's manner impressed me. Varney, too, who had hitherto taken little notice of the creepers, now knelt on the side bench, gazing earnestly into the clear water, when the tow-rope was rising.

At length the beam came in sight, and below it, on one of the creepers, a yellowish object, dimly seen through the wavering water.

"There's somethin' on this time," said the engineer, craning over the side. He shut off steam, and, with the rest of us, watched the incoming creeper. I looked at Varney, kneeling on the bench apart from us, not fidgeting now, but still rigid, pale as wax, and staring with dreadful fascination at the slowly-rising object.

Suddenly the engineer uttered an exclamation. "Why, 'tis a sou'wester, and all laced about wi' spuny'n. Surely 'tis—Hi! steady, sir! My God!"

There was a heavy splash, and as Rodney rushed forward for the boat-hook I saw Varney rapidly sinking head first through the clear, blue-green water, dragged down by the hand-lead that he had hitched to his waist. By the time Rodney was back he was far out of reach; but for a long time, as it seemed, we could see him sinking, sinking, growing paler, more shadowy, more shapeless, but always steadily following the lead sinker, until at last he faded from our sight into the darkness of the ocean.

Not until he had vanished did we haul on board the creeper with its dreadful burden. Indeed, we never hauled it on board; for as Philip, with an unsteady hand, unhooked the sou'wester hat from the creeper, the encircling coils of spunyarn slipped, and from inside the hat a skull dropped into the water and sank. We watched it grow green and pallid and small, until it vanished, as Varney had vanished. Then Philip turned and flung the hat down in the bottom of the boat. Thorndyke picked it up and unwound the spunyarn.

"Do you identify it?" he asked, and then, as he turned it over, he added, "But I see it identifies itself." He held it towards me, and I read in embroidered letters on the silk lining, "Dan Purcell."

## THE SHADOW OF THE WOLF

### I. — IN WHICH TWO MEN GO FORTH AND ONE ARRIVES

ABOUT half-past eight on a fine, sunny June morning a small yacht crept out of Sennen Cove, near the Land's End, and headed for the open sea. On the shelving beach of the Cove two women and a man, evidently visitors (or "foreigners," to use the local term), stood watching her departure with valedictory waving of cap or handkerchief; and the boatman who had put the crew on board, aided by two of his comrades, was hauling his boat up above the tide-mark.

A light northerly breeze filled the yacht's sails and drew her gradually seaward. The figures of her crew dwindled to the size of a doll's, shrank with the increasing distance to the magnitude of insects, and at last, losing all individuality, became mere specks merged in the form of the fabric that bore them. At this point the visitors turned their faces inland and walked away up the beach, and the boatman, having opined that "she be fetchin' a tidy offing," dismissed the yacht from his mind and reverted to the consideration of a heap of netting and some invalid lobster-pots.

On board the receding craft two men sat in the little cockpit. They formed the entire crew, for the Sandhopper was only a ship's lifeboat, timber and decked, of light draught, and, in the matter of spars and canvas, what the art critics would call "reticent."

Both men, despite the fineness of the weather, wore yellow oilskins and sou'westers, and that was about all they had in common. In other respects they made a curious contrast: the one small, slender, sharp-featured, dark almost to swarthinness, and restless and quick in his movements; the other large, massive, red-faced, blue-eyed, with the rounded outlines suggestive of ponderous strength—a great ox of a man, heavy, stolid, but much less unwieldy than he looked.

The conversation incidental to getting the yacht under way had ceased, and silence had fallen on the occupants of the cockpit. The big man grasped the tiller and looked sulky, which was probably his usual aspect, and the small man watched him furtively. The land was nearly two miles distant when the latter broke the silence with a remark very similar to that of the boatman on the beach.

"You're not going to take the shore on board, Purcell. Where are we supposed to be going to?"

"I am going outside the Longships," was the stolid answer.

"So I see," rejoined the other. "It's hardly the shortest course for Penzance, though."

"I like to keep an offing on this coast," said Purcell; and once more the conversation languished.

Presently the smaller man spoke again, this time in a more cheerful and friendly tone.

"Joan Haygarth has come on wonderfully the last few months; getting quite a fine-looking girl. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," answered Purcell, "and so does Phil Rodney."

"You're right," agreed the other. "But she isn't a patch on her sister, though, and never will be. I was looking at Maggie as we came down the beach this morning and thinking what a handsome girl she is. Don't you agree with me?"

Purcell stooped to look under the boom, and answered without turning his head:

"Yes, she's all right."

"All right!" exclaimed the other. "Is that the way?"

"Look here, Varney," interrupted Purcell, "I don't want to discuss my wife's looks with you or any other man. She'll do for me, or I shouldn't have married her."

A deep coppery flush stole into Varney's cheeks. But he had brought the rather brutal snub on himself, and apparently had the fairness to recognize the fact, for he mumbled an apology and relapsed into silence.

When he next spoke he did so with a manner diffident and uneasy, as though approaching a disagreeable or difficult subject.

"There's a little matter, Dan, that I've been wanting to speak to you about when we got a chance of a private talk." He glanced a little anxiously at his stolid companion, who grunted, and then, without removing his gaze from the horizon ahead, replied: "You've a pretty fair chance now, seeing that we shall be bottled up together for another five or six hours. And it's private enough, unless you bawl loud enough to be heard at the Longships."

It was not a gracious invitation. But that Varney had hardly expected; and if he resented the rebuff he showed no signs of annoyance, for reasons which appeared when he opened his subject.

"What I wanted to say," he resumed, "was this. We're both doing pretty well now on the square. You must be positively piling up the shekels, and I can earn a decent living, which is all I want. Why shouldn't we drop this flash note business?"

Purcell kept his blue eye fixed on the horizon, and appeared to ignore the question; but after an interval, and without moving a muscle, he said gruffly, "Go on," and Varney continued:

"The lay isn't what it was, you know. At first it was all plain sailing. The notes were first-class copies, and not a soul suspected anything until they were presented at the bank. Then the murder was out, and the next little trip that I made was a very different affair. Two or three of the notes were suspected quite soon after I had changed them, and I had to be

precious fly, I can tell you, to avoid complications. And now that the second batch has come into the bank, the planting of fresh specimens is no sinecure. There isn't a money changer on the Continent of Europe that isn't keeping his weather eyeball peeled, to say nothing of the detectives that the bank people have sent abroad."

He paused and looked appealingly at his companion. But Purcell, still minding his helm, only growled: "Well?"

"Well, I want to chuck it, Dan. When you've had a run of luck and pocketed your winnings is the time to stop play."

"You've come into some money then, I take it," said Purcell.

"No, I haven't. But I can make a living now by safe and respectable means, and I'm sick of all this scheming and dodging with the gaol everlastingly under my lee."

"The reason I asked," said Purcell, "is that there is a trifle outstanding. You hadn't forgotten that, I suppose?"

"No, I hadn't forgotten it, but I thought that perhaps you might be willing to let me down a bit easily."

The other man pursed up his thick lips, but continued to gaze stonily over the bow.

"Oh, that's what you thought, hey?" he said; and then, after a pause, he continued: "I fancy you must have lost sight of some of the facts when you thought that. Let me just remind you how the case stands. To begin with, you start your career with a little playful forgery and embezzlement; you blue the proceeds, and you are mug enough to be found out. Then I come in. I compound the affair with old Marston for a couple of thousand, and practically clean myself out of every penny I possess, and he consents to regard your temporary absence in the light of a holiday.

"Now why do I do this? Am I a philanthropist? Devil a bit. I'm a man of business. Before I ladle out that two thousand, I make a business contract with you. I happen to possess the means of making and the skill to make a passable imitation of the Bank of England paper; you are a skilled engraver and a plausible scamp. I am to supply you with paper blanks; you are to engrave plates, print the notes, and get them changed. I am to take two-thirds of the proceeds, and, although I have done the most difficult part of the work, I agree to regard my share of the profits as constituting repayment of the loan. Our contract amounts to this: I lend you two thousand without security—with an infernal amount of insecurity, in fact—you 'promise, covenant, and agree,' as the lawyers say, to hand me back ten thousand in instalments, being the products of our joint industry. It is a verbal contract which I have no means of enforcing; but I trust you to keep your word, and up to the present you have kept it. You have paid me a little over four thousand. Now you want to cry off and leave the balance unpaid. Isn't that the position?"

"Not exactly," said Varney. "I'm not crying off the debt; I only want time. Look here, Dan: I'm making about five-fifty a year now. That isn't much, but I'll manage to let you have a hundred a year out of it. What do you say to that?"

Purcell laughed scornfully. "A hundred a year to pay off six thousand! That'll take just sixty years, and as I'm now forty-three, I shall be exactly a hundred and three years of age when the last instalment is paid. I think, Varney, you'll admit that a man of a hundred and three is getting a bit past his prime."

"Well, I'll pay you something down to start. I've saved about eighteen hundred pounds out of the note business. You can have that now, and I'll pay off as much as I can at a time until I'm clear. Remember that if I should happen to get clapped in chokee for twenty years or so you won't get anything. And, I tell you, it's getting a risky business."

"I'm willing to take the risk," said Purcell.

"I dare say you are!" Varney retorted passionately, "because it's my risk. If I am grabbed, it's my racket. You sit out. It's I who passed the notes, and I'm known to be a skilled engraver. That'll be good enough for them. They won't trouble about who made the paper."

"I hope not," said Purcell.

"Of course they wouldn't, and you know I shouldn't give you away."

"Naturally. Why should you? Wouldn't do you any good."

"Well, give me a chance, Dan," Varney pleaded. "This business is getting on my nerves. I want to be quit of it. You've had four thousand; that's a hundred per cent. You haven't done so badly."

"I didn't expect to do badly. I took a big risk. I gambled two thousand for ten."

"Yes, and you got me out of the way while you put the screw on to poor old Haygarth to make his daughter marry you."

It was an indiscreet thing to say, but Purcell's stolid indifference to his danger and distress had ruffled Varney's temper somewhat.

Purcell, however, was unmoved. "I don't know," he said, "what you mean by getting you out of the way. You were never in the way. You were always hankering after Maggie, but I could never see that she wanted you."

"Well, she certainly didn't want you," Varney retorted, "and, for that matter, I don't much think she wants you now."

For the first time Purcell withdrew his eye from the horizon to turn it on his companion. And an evil eye it was, set in the great sensual face, now purple with anger.

"What the devil do you mean?" he exclaimed furiously, "you infernal sallow-faced little whipper snapper! If you mention



my wife's name again I'll knock you on the head and pitch you over board."

Varney's face flushed darkly, and for a moment he was inclined to try the wager of battle. But the odds were impossible, and if Varney was not a coward, neither was he a fool. But the discussion was at an end. Nothing was to be hoped for now. Those indiscreet words of provocation had rendered further pleading impossible; and as Varney relapsed into sullen silence, it was with the knowledge that, for weary years to come, he was doomed, at best, to tread the perilous path of crime, or, more probably, to waste the brightest years of his life in a convict prison. For it is a strange fact, and a curious commentary on our current ethical notions, that neither of these rascals even contemplated as a possibility the breach of a merely verbal covenant. A promise had been given. That was enough. Without a specific release, the terms of that promise must be fulfilled to the letter. How many righteous men—prim lawyers or strait-laced, church-going men of business—would have looked at the matter in the same way?

The silence that settled down on the yacht and the aloofness that encompassed the two men were conducive to reflection. Each of the men ignored the presence of the other. When the course was altered southerly, Purcell slacked out the sheets with his own hand as he put up the helm. He might have been sailing single-handed. And Varney watched him askance, but made no move, sitting hunched up on the locker, nursing a slowly matured hatred and thinking his thoughts.

Very queer thoughts they were, rambling, but yet connected and very vivid. He was following out the train of events that might have happened, pursuing them to their possible consequences. Supposing Purcell had carried out his threat? Well, there would have been a pretty tough struggle, for Varney was no weakling. But a struggle with that solid fifteen stone of flesh could end only in one way. He glanced at the great purple, shiny hand that grasped the knob of the tiller. Not the sort of hand that you would want at your throat! No, there was no doubt; he would have gone overboard.

And what then? Would Purcell have gone back to Sennen Cove, or sailed alone into Penzance? In either case, he would have had to make up some sort of story, and no one could have contradicted him, whether the story was believed or not. But it would have been awkward for Purcell.

Then there was the body: That would have washed up sooner or later, as much of it as the lobsters had left. Well, lobsters don't eat clothes or bones, and a dent in the skull might take some accounting for. Very awkward, this, for Purcell. He would probably have had to clear out—to make a bolt for it, in short.

The mental picture of this great bully fleeing in terror from the vengeance of the law gave Varney appreciable pleasure. Most of his life he had been borne down by the moral and physical weight of this domineering brute. At school Purcell had fagged him; he had even bullied him up at Cambridge; and now he had fastened on for ever like the Old Man of the Sea. And Purcell always got the best of it. When he, Varney, had come back from Italy after that unfortunate little affair, behold! the girl whom they had both wanted (and who had wanted neither of them) had changed from Maggie Haygarth into Maggie Purcell. And so it was even unto this day. Purcell, once a book-keeper in a paper-mill, now a prosperous "financier"—a money-lender, as Varney more than suspected—spent a part of his secret leisure making, in absolute safety, those paper blanks, which he, Varney, must risk his liberty to change into money. Yes, it was quite pleasant to think of Purcell sneaking from town to town, from country to country, with the police at his heels.

But in these days of telegraphs and extradition there isn't much chance for a fugitive. Purcell would have been caught to a certainty, and he would have been hanged; no doubt of it. And, passing lightly over less attractive details, Varney considered luxuriously the circumstances of the execution. What a figure he would have made, that great human ox, turning round and round at the end of a taut rope, like a baron of beef on a colossal roasting-jack! Varney looked gloatingly at his companion, considered his large sullen face, and thought how it would swell and grow purple as the rope tightened round the thick crimson neck.

A disagreeable picture, perhaps, but not to Varney, who saw it through the distorting medium of years of accumulated dislike. Then, too, there was the consideration that in the very moment that those brawny limbs had ceased to twitch Maggie would have been free—would have been a widow. Not that that would have concerned him, Varney: he would have been in some Cornish churchyard, with a dent in his skull. Still, it was a pleasant reflection.

The imagined picture of the execution gave him quite a lengthy entertainment. Then his errant thoughts began to spread out in search of other possibilities. For, after all, it was not an absolute certainty that Purcell could have got him overboard. There was just the chance that he might have gone overboard himself. That would have been a very different affair.

Varney settled himself composedly to consider the new and interesting train of consequences that would thus have been set going. They were more agreeable to contemplate than the others, because they did not include his own demise. The execution scene made no appearance in this version. The salient fact was that his oppressor would have vanished; that the intolerable burden of his servitude would have been lifted for ever; that he would have been free.

The thought of his regained freedom set him dreaming of the future—the future that might have been if he could have been rid of this monstrous parasite; the future that might even have held a place for Maggie—for she would have been free, too. It was all very pleasant to think about, though rather tantalizing. He almost wished he had let Purcell try to put him over.

Of course, some explanation would have to be given, some sort of story told, and people might not have believed him. Well, they could have pleased themselves about that. To be sure, there would have been the body; but if there were no marks of violence, what of it? Besides, it really need never have washed ashore: that could easily have been prevented, and if the body had never been found, who was to say that the man had gone overboard at all?

This, again, was a new view of the case, and it set his thoughts revolving afresh. He found himself roughly sketching out the conditions under which the body might have vanished for ever. It was mere idle speculation to while away a dull hour with an uncongenial companion, and he let his thoughts ramble at large. Now he was away in the imagined future, a future of peace and prosperity and honourable effort; and now his thoughts came back unbidden to fill in some forgotten detail. One moment he was dreamily wondering whether Maggie would ever have listened to him, ever have come to care for him; the next, he was back in the yacht's cabin, where hung from a hook on the bulkhead the revolver that the Rodneys used to practise at floating bottles. It was usually loaded, he knew, but if not, there was a canvas bag full of cartridges in the starboard locker. Again he found himself dreaming of the home that he would have had, a home very different from the cheerless lodgings in which he moped at present; and then his thoughts had flitted back to the yacht's hold, and were busying themselves with the row, of half-hundredweights that rested on the on either side of the kelson.

It was a curious mental state, rambling, seemingly incoherent, yet quite purposeful, the attention oscillating between the great general idea and its various component details. He was like a painter roughing the preliminary sketch of a picture, at first carelessly smearing in the general effect, then pausing from time to time to sharpen an edge, to touch in a crisp light, to define the shape of a shadow, but never losing sight of the central motive. And as in the sketch definable shapes begin to grow out of the formless expanse, and a vague suggestion crystallizes into an intelligible composition, so in Varney's mind a process of gradual integration turned a vague and general idea into a clear picture, sharp, vivid, complete.

When Varney had thus brought his mental picture, so to speak, to a finish, its completeness surprised him. It was so simple, so secure. He had actually planned out the scheme of a murder; and behold! there was nothing in it. Anyone could have done it, and no one could have been any the wiser. Here he found himself wondering whether many murders passed undetected. They well might if murders were as easy and as safe as this. A dangerous reflection for an injured and angry man. And at this critical point his meditations were broken in on by Purcell, continuing the conversation as if there had been no pause.

"So you can take it from me, Varney, that I expect you to stick to your bargain. I paid down my money, and I'm going to have my pound of flesh."

"You won't agree to any sort of compromise?"

"No. There are six thousand pounds owing. If you've got the money you can hand it over. If you haven't, you'll have to go on the lay and get it. That's all I've got to say. So now you know."

It was a brutal thing to say, and it was brutally said. But more than that: it was inopportune—or opportune, as you will. For it came as a sort of infernal doxology to the devil's anthem that had been, all unknown, ringing in Varney's soul.

Purcell had spoken without looking round. That was his unpleasant habit. Had he looked at his companion, he might have been startled. A change in Varney's face might have given him pause: a warm flush, a sparkle of the eye, a look of elation, of settled purpose, deadly, inexorable. The look of a man who has made a fateful resolution. But he never looked, and the warning of the uplifted axe passed him by.

It was so simple, so secure! That was the burden of the song that echoed in Varney's brain. So safe! And there abroad were the watchful money-changers waiting for the clever forger to come once too often. There were the detectives lurking in ambush for him. No safety there! Rather the certainty of swift disaster, with the sequel of judge and jury, the clang of an iron door, and thereafter the dreary prison eating up the years of his life.

He glanced over the sea. They had opened the South Coast now, and he could see, afar off, a fleet of black-sailed luggers heading east. They wouldn't be in his way. Nor would the big four-master that was creeping away to the west, for she was hull down already; and other ships there were none. There was one hindrance, though. Dead ahead the Wolf Rock lighthouse rose from the blue water, its red-and-white-ringed tower looking like some gaudily painted toy. The keepers of lonely light houses have a natural habit of watching the passing shipping through their glasses, and it was possible that one of their telescopes might be pointed at the yacht at this very moment. That was a complication.

Suddenly there came down the wind a sharp report like the firing of a gun, quickly followed by a second. Both men recognized the duplicate report and both looked round. It was the explosive signal from the Longships lighthouse; but when they looked there was no lighthouse to be seen, and the dark blue heaving water faded away at the foot of an advancing wall of vapour.

Purcell cursed volubly. A pretty place, this, to be caught in a fog! And then, as his eye lighted on his companion, he demanded angrily: "What the devil are you grinning at?" For Varney, drunk with suppressed excitement, snapped his fingers at rocks and shoals; he was thinking only of the light-keeper's telescope and of the revolver that hung on the bulkhead. He must make some excuse presently to go below and secure that revolver.

But no excuse was necessary. The opportunity came of itself. After a hasty glance at the vanishing land and another at the compass, Purcell put up the helm to jibe the yacht round on to an easterly course. As she came round, the single headsail that she carried in place of jib and foresail shivered for a few seconds and then filled suddenly on the opposite tack. And at this moment the halyard parted with a loud snap, the end of the rope flew through the blocks, and, in an instant, the sail was down and its upper half trailing in the water alongside.

Purcell swore furiously, but kept an eye to business. "Run below, Varney," said he, "and fetch up that coil of new rope out of the starboard locker while I haul the sail on board. And look alive. We don't want to drift down on to the Wolf."

Varney obeyed with silent alacrity and a curious feeling of elation. It was going to be even easier and safer than he had thought. He slipped through the hatch into the cabin, and, as he heard Purcell scrambling along the side-deck overhead, he quietly took the revolver from its hook and examined the chambers. Finding them all loaded, he cocked the hammer and slipped the weapon carefully into the inside breast-pocket of his oilskin coat. Then he took the coil of rope from the locker and went on deck.

As he emerged from the hatch he perceived that the yacht was already enveloped in fog, which drifted past in steamy clouds and swirling streamers, and that she had come up head to wind. Purcell was kneeling on the forecastle, tugging at the sail, which had caught under the forefoot, and punctuating his efforts with deep-voiced curses.

Varney stole silently along the deck, steadying himself by mast and shroud, softly laid down the coil of rope, and approached. Purcell was quite engrossed with his task; his back was towards Varney, his face over the side, intent on the entangled sail. It was a chance in a thousand.

With scarcely a moment's hesitation Varney stooped forward, steadying himself with a hand on the little windlass, and, softly drawing forth the revolver, pointed it at the back of Purcell's head, at the spot where the back seam of his sou'wester met the brim. The report rang out, but weak and flat in that open space, and a cloud of smoke mingled with the fog; but it blew away immediately, and showed Purcell almost unchanged in posture, crouching on the sail with his chin resting on the little rim of bulwark, while behind him his murderer, as if turned into bronze, still stood stooping forward, one hand grasping the windlass, the other still pointing the revolver.

Thus the two figures remained for some seconds motionless like some horrible waxworks, until the little yacht, lifting to the swell, gave a more than usually lively curvet, when Purcell rolled over on to his back, and Varney relaxed the rigidity of his posture like a golf player who has watched his ball drop. He bent over the prostrate figure with no emotion but curiosity. Looked into the wide-open, clear blue eyes, noted how the great red face had faded to a pallid mauve, against which the blood on lips and chin stood out like the painted patches on a clown's face; but he felt not a single twinge of compunction.

Purcell was dead. That was the salient fact. The head wagged to and fro as the yacht pitched and rolled, the limp arms and legs seemed to twitch, the limp body to writhe uneasily. But Varney was not disturbed. Lifeless things will move on an unsteady deck. He was only interested to notice how the passive movements produced the illusion of life. But it was only illusion. Purcell was dead. There was no doubt of that.

The double report from the Longships came down the wind, and then, as if in answer, a prolonged deep bellow. That was the fog-horn of the lighthouse on the Wolf Rock, and it sounded surprisingly near. But, of course, these signals were meant to be heard at a distance. Then a stream of hot sunshine, pouring down on deck, startled him and made him hurry. The body must be got overboard before the fog lifted. With an uneasy glance at the clear sky over head, he hastily cast off the broken halyard from its cleat and cut off a couple of fathoms. Then he hurried below and, lifting the trap in the cabin floor, hoisted out one of the iron half-hundredweights with which the yacht was ballasted. As he stepped on deck with the weight in his hand the sun was shining overhead; but the fog was still thick below, and the horn sounded once more from the Wolf. And again it struck him as surprisingly near. He passed the length of rope that he had cut off twice round Purcell's body, hauled it tight, and secured it with a knot. Then he made the ends fast to the handle of the iron weight.

Not much fear of Purcell drifting ashore now! That weight would hold him as long as there was anything to hold. But it had taken some time to do, and the warning bellow from the Wolf seemed to draw nearer and nearer. He was about to heave the body over when his eye fell on the dead man's sou' wester, which had fallen off when the body rolled over. That hat must be got rid of, for Purcell's name was worked in silk on the lining, and there was an unmistakable bullet-hole through the back. It must be destroyed, or, which would be simpler and quicker, lashed securely on the dead man's head.

Hurriedly, Varney ran aft and descended to the cabin. He had noticed a new ball of spun-yarn in the locker when he had fetched the rope. This would be the very thing.

He was back again in a few moments with the ball in his hand, unwinding it as he came, and without wasting time he knelt down by the body and fell to work. There was a curious absence of repugnance in his manner, horrible as his task would have seemed. He had to raise the dead man's head to fit on the hat, and in so doing covered his left hand with blood. But he appeared to mind no more than if he had been handling a seal that he had shot or a large and dirty fish. Quite composedly, and with that deftness in the handling of cordage that marks the sailor-man, whether amateur or professional, he proceeded with his task, intent only on making the lashing secure and getting it done quickly.

And every half minute the deep-voiced growl of the Wolf came to him out of the fog, and each time it sounded nearer and yet nearer.

By the time he had made the sou'wester secure, the dead man's face and chin were encaged in a web of spun-yarn that made him look like some old-time, grotesque-vizored Samurai warrior. But the hat was now immovable. Long after that burly corpse had dwindled to a mere skeleton it would hold, would still cling to the dead head when the face that looked through the lacing of cords was the face of a bare and grinning skull.

Varney rose to his feet. But his task was not finished yet. There was Purcell's suitcase. That must be sunk, too; and there was something in it that had figured in the detailed picture that his imagination had drawn. He ran to the cockpit, where the suitcase lay, and having tried its fastenings and found it unlocked, he opened it and took out with his right hand—the clean one—a letter that lay on top of the other contents. This he tossed through the hatch into the cabin. Then his eye

caught Purcell's fountain-pen, slipped neatly through a loop in the lid. It was filled, he knew, with the peculiar black ink that Purcell always used. The thought passed swiftly through his mind that perchance it might be of use to him. In a moment he had drawn it from its loop and slipped it into his pocket. Then, having closed and fastened the suit case, he carried it forward and made it fast to the iron weight with a half-dozen turns of spun-yarn.

That was really all, and, indeed, it was time. As he rose, once more, to his feet, the growl of the fog horn burst out, as it seemed, right over the stern of the yacht, and she was drifting stern foremost, who could say how fast? Now, too, he caught a more ominous sound, which he might have heard sooner had he listened—the wash of water, the boom of breakers bursting on a rock.

A revulsion came over him. He burst into a wild sardonic laugh. And had it come to this, after all? Had he schemed and laboured only to leave himself alone on an unmanageable craft drifting down to shipwreck and certain death? Had he taken all this thought and care to secure Purcell's body, when his own might be resting beside it on the sea bottom within an hour?

But his reverie was brief. Suddenly from the white void over his very head, as it seemed, there issued a stunning, thunderous roar that shook the very deck-under his feet. The water around him boiled into a foamy chaos, the din of bursting waves was in his ears, the yacht plunged and wallowed amidst clouds of spray, and, for an instant, a dim, gigantic shadow loomed through the fog and was gone.

In that moment his nerve had come back. Holding on, with one hand, to the windlass, he dragged the body to the edge of the forecandle, hoisted the weight out-board, and then, taking advantage of a heavy lurch, gave the corpse a vigorous shove. There was a rattle and a hollow splash, and corpse and weight and suitcase had vanished into the seething water.

He clung to the swinging mast and waited. Breathlessly he told out the allotted seconds until, once again, the invisible Titan belched forth his thunderous warning. But this time the roar came over the yacht's bow. She had drifted past the Rock, then. The danger was over, and Purcell would have to go down to Davy Jones's Locker companionless after all.

Very soon the water around ceased to boil and tumble, and as the yacht's wild plunging settled down once more into the normal rise and fall on the long swell, Varney turned his attention to the refitting of the halyard. But what was this on the creamy duck sail? A pool of blood and a gory imprint of his own hand! That wouldn't do at all. He would have to clear that away before he could hoist the sail, which was annoying, as the yacht was helpless without her head-sail and was evidently drifting out to sea.

He fetched a bucket, a swab, and a scrubbing brush, and set to work. The bulk of the large blood stain cleared off pretty completely after he had drenched the sail with a bucketful or two and given it a good scrubbing. But the edge of the stain, where the heat of the deck had dried it, remained like the painted boundary on a map; and the hand-print, which had also dried, though it faded to a pale buff, continued clearly visible.

Varney began to grow uneasy. If those stains would not come out, especially the hand-print, it would be very awkward; they would take such a deal of explaining. He decided to try the effect of marine soap, and fetched a cake from the cabin; but even this did not obliterate the stains completely, though it turned them a faint greenish brown, very unlike the colour of blood. Still he scrubbed on, until at last the hand-print faded away entirely and the large stain was reduced to a faint green wavy line, and that was the best he could do; and quite good enough, for if that faint line should ever be noticed, no one would ever suspect its origin.

He put away the bucket and proceeded with the refitting. The sea had disengaged the sail from the forefoot, and he hauled it on board without difficulty. Then there was the reeving of the new halyard—a troublesome business, involving the necessity of his going aloft, where his weight, small man as he was, made the yacht roll most infernally, and set him swinging to and fro like the bob of a metronome. But he was a smart yachtsman and active, though not powerful, and a few minutes' strenuous exertion ended in his sliding down the shrouds with the new halyard running fairly through the upper block. A vigorous haul or two at the new hairy rope sent the head of the dripping sail aloft, and the yacht was once more under control.

The rig of the Sandhopper was not smart, but it was handy. She carried a short bowsprit to accommodate the single head-sail and a relatively large mizzen, of which the advantage was that by judicious management of the mizzen-sheet the yacht would sail with very little attention to the helm. Of this advantage Varney was keenly appreciative just now, for he had several things to do before entering port. The excitement of the last hour and the bodily exertions had left him shaky and faint. He wanted refreshment, he wanted a wash, and the various traces of recent events had to be removed. Also, there was that letter to be attended to. So that it was convenient to be able to leave the helm in charge of a lashing for a minute now and again.

When he had washed he put the kettle on the spirit-stove, and, while it was heating, busied himself in cleaning the revolver, flinging the empty cartridge-case overboard, and replacing it with a cartridge from the bag in the locker. Then he picked up the letter that he had taken from Purcell's suitcase and examined it. It was addressed to "Joseph Penfield, Esq., George Yard, Lombard Street," and was unstamped, though the envelope was fastened up. He affixed a stamp from his pocket-book, and, when the kettle began to boil, he held the envelope in the steam that issued from spout. Very soon the flap of the envelope loosened and curled back, when he laid it aside to mix himself a mug of hot grog, which, together with the letter and a biscuit-tin, he took out into the cockpit. The fog was still dense, and the hoot of a steamer's whistle from somewhere to the westward caused him to reach the fog-horn out of the locker and blow a long blast on it. As if in answer

to his treble squeak came the deep bass note from the Wolf, and, unconsciously, he looked round. He turned automatically, as one does towards a sudden noise, not expecting to see anything but fog, and what he did see startled him not a little.

For there was the lighthouse—or half of it, rather—standing up above the fogbank, clear, distinct, and hardly a mile away. The gilded vane, the sparkling lantern, the gallery, and the upper half of the red-and-white-ringed tower, stood sharp against the pallid sky, but the lower half was invisible. It was a strange apparition—like half a lighthouse suspended in mid-air—and uncommonly disturbing, too. It raised a very awkward question. If he could see the lantern the light-keepers could see him. But how long had the lantern been clear of the fog? That was the question, and the answer to it might come in a highly disagreeable form.

Thus he meditated as, with one hand on the tiller, he munched his biscuit and sipped his grog. Presently he picked up the stamped envelope and drew from it a letter, which he tore into fragments and dropped overboard. Then, from his pocket-book, he took a similar but unaddressed envelope, from which he drew out its contents, and very curious those contents were. There was a letter, brief and laconic, which he read thoughtfully. "These," it ran, "are all I have by me, but they will do for the present, and when you have planted them I will let you have a fresh supply." There was no date and no signature, but the rather peculiar handwriting, in jet-black ink, was similar to that on the envelope addressed to Joseph Penfield, Esq.

The other contents consisted of a dozen sheets of blank paper, each of the size of a Bank of England note. But they were not quite blank, for each bore an elaborate water-mark, identical with that of a twenty-pound banknote. They were, in fact, the "paper blanks" of which Purcell had spoken. The envelope with its contents had been slipped into his hand by Purcell, without remark, only three days ago.

Varney refolded the "blanks," enclosed them within the letter, and slipped letter and "blanks" together into the stamped envelope, the flap of which he licked and reclosed.

"I should like to see old Penfield's face when he opens that envelope," was his reflection as, with a grim smile, he put it away in his pocket-book "And I wonder what he will do," he added mentally; "however, I shall see before many days are over."

Varney looked at his watch. He was to meet Jack Rodney on Penzance Pier at a quarter to three. He would never do it at this rate, for when he opened Mount's Bay, Penzance would be right in the wind's eye. That would mean a long beat to windward. Then Rodney would be there first, waiting for him. Deuced awkward, this. He would have to account for his being alone on board, would have to invent some lie about having put Purcell ashore at Mousehole or Newlyn. But a lie is a very pernicious thing. Its effects are cumulative. You never know when you have done with it. Apart from moral considerations, lies should be avoided at all cost of present inconvenience; that is, unless they are absolutely unavoidable, and then they should be as probable as can be managed, and not calculated to provoke inquiry. Now, if he had reached Penzance before Rodney, he need have said nothing about Purcell—for the present, at any rate, and that would have been so much safer.

When the yacht was about abreast of Lamorna Cove, though some seven miles to the south, the breeze began to draw ahead, and the fog cleared off quite suddenly. The change of wind was unfavourable for the moment, but when it veered round yet a little more until it blew from east-north-east, Varney brightened up considerably. There was still a chance of reaching Penzance before Rodney arrived; for now, as soon as he had fairly opened Mount's Bay, he could head straight for his destination and make it on a single board.

Between two and three hours later the Sandhopper entered Penzance Harbour, and, threading her way among an assemblage of luggers and small coasters, brought up alongside the Albert Pier, at the foot of a vacant ladder.

Having made the yacht fast to a couple of rings, Varney divested himself of his oilskins, locked the cabin scuttle, and climbed the ladder. The change of wind had saved him after all, and as he strode away along the pier he glanced complacently at his watch. He still had nearly half an hour to the good.

He seemed to know the place well and to have a definite objective, for he struck out briskly from the foot of the pier into Market Jew Street, and from thence, by a somewhat zigzag route, to a road which eventually brought him out about the middle of the esplanade. Continuing westward, he entered the Newlyn Road, along which he walked rapidly for about a third of a mile, when he drew up opposite a small letter-box, which was let into a wall. Here he stopped to read the tablet, on which was printed the hours of collection, and then, having glanced at his watch, he walked on again, but at a less rapid pace.

When he reached the outskirts of Newlyn, he turned and began slowly to retrace his steps, looking at his watch from time to time with a certain air of impatience. Presently a quick step behind him caused him to look round. The newcomer was a postman, striding along, bag on shoulder, with the noisy tread of a heavily shod man and evidently collecting letters. Varney let him pass, watched him halt at the little letter-box, unlock the door, gather up the letters, and stow them in his bag, heard the clang of the iron door, and finally saw the man set forth again on his pilgrimage. Then he brought forth his pocket-book, and drawing from it the letter addressed to Joseph Penfield, Esq., stepped up to the letter-box. The tablet now announced that the next collection would be at 8.30 p.m. Varney read the announcement with a faint smile, glanced again at his watch, which stood at two minutes past four, and dropped the letter into the box.

As he walked up the pier with a large paper bag under his arm, he became aware of a tall man who was doing sentry-go before a Gladstone bag that stood on the coping opposite the ladder, and who, observing his approach, came forward to

meet him.

"Here you are, then, Rodney," was Varney's rather unoriginal greeting.

"Yes," replied Rodney, "and here I've been for nearly half an hour. Purcell gone?"

"Bless you! yes, long ago," answered Varney.

"I didn't see him at the station. What train was he going by?"

"I don't know. He said something about taking Falmouth on the way; had some business or other there. But I expect he's gone to have a feed at one of the hotels. We got hung up in a fog; that's why I'm so late. I've been up to buy some grog."

"Well," said Rodney, "bring it on board. It's time we were under way. As soon as we are outside I'll take charge, and you can go below and stoke up at your ease."

The two men descended the ladder and proceeded at once to hoist the sails and cast off the shore ropes. A few strokes of an oar sent them clear of the lee of the pier, and in a few minutes the yacht Sandhopper was once more outside, heading south with a steady breeze from east-north-east.



## II. — IN WHICH MARGARET PURCELL RECEIVES A LETTER

DAYLIGHT dies hard in the month of June, and Night comes but tardily into her scanty reversion. The clock on the mantelpiece stood at half-past nine, and candles twinkled on the supper table, but even now the slaty-grey band of twilight was only just stealing up behind the horizon to veil the fading glories of the western sky.

Varney sat at the old-fashioned, oval, gate-legged table with an air of placid contentment, listening to and joining in the rather disconnected talk (for hungry people are poor conversationalists) with quiet geniality but with a certain remoteness and abstraction. From where he sat he could see out through the open window the great ocean stretching away to the south and west, the glittering horizon, and the gorgeous evening sky. With quiet pleasure he had watched the changing scene—the crimson disc of the setting sun, the flaming gold softening down into the sober tints of the afterglow—and now, as the grey herald of the night spread upwards, his eye dwelt steadily on one spot away in the south-west. At first faintly visible, then waxing as the daylight waned, a momentary spark flashed in the heart of the twilight grey, now white like the sparkle of a diamond, now crimson like the flash of a ruby. It was the light on the Wolf Rock.

He watched it thoughtfully as he talked: white—red, white—red, diamond—ruby, so it would go on every fifteen seconds through the short summer night—to mariners a warning and a guide; to him, a message of release; for another, a memorial.

As he looked at the changing light, he thought of his enemy lying out there in the chilly depths on the bed of the sea. It was strange how often he thought of Purcell. For the man was dead; had gone out of his life utterly. And yet, in the two days that had passed, every trivial incident had seemed to connect itself and him with the man who was gone. And so it was now. All roads seemed to lead to Purcell. If he looked out seaward, there was the lighthouse flashing its secret message, as if it should say, "We know, you and I; he is down here." If he looked around the table, still everything spoke of the dead man. There was Philip Rodney—Purcell and he had talked of him on the yacht. There was Jack Rodney, who had waited on the pier for the man who had not come. There, at the hostess's right hand, was the quiet, keen-faced stranger whom Purcell, for some reason, had not wished to meet; and there, at the head of the table, was Margaret herself, the determining cause of it all. Even the very lobsters on the table (lobsters are plentiful at the Land's End) set him thinking of dark crawling shapes down in that dim underworld, groping around a larger shape tethered to an iron weight.

He turned his face resolutely away from the sea. He would think no more of Purcell. The fellow had dogged him through life, but now he was gone. Enough of Purcell. Let him think of something more pleasant.

The most agreeable object of contemplation within his field of vision was the woman who sat at the head of the table, his hostess. And, in fact, Margaret Purcell was very pleasant to look upon, not only for her comeliness—though she was undoubtedly a pretty, almost a beautiful, woman—but because she was sweet-faced and gracious, and what men compliment the sex by calling "womanly." She was evidently under thirty, though she carried a certain matronly sedateness and an air of being older than she either looked or was, which was accentuated by the fashion in which she wore her hair, primly parted in the middle; a rather big woman, quiet and reposeful, as big women often are.

Varney looked at her with a kind of wonder. He had always thought her lovely, and now she seemed lovelier than ever. And she was a widow, little as she suspected it, little as anyone but he suspected it. But it was a fact. She was free to marry, if she only knew it.

He hugged himself at the thought and listened dreamily to the mellow tones of her voice. She was talking to her guest and the elder Rodney, but he had only a dim idea of what she was saying; he was enjoying the music of her speech rather than attending to the matter. Suddenly she turned to him and asked:

"Don't you agree with me, Mr. Varney?"

He pulled himself together, and, after a momentarily vacant look, answered:

"I always agree with you, Mrs. Purcell."

"And so," said Jack Rodney, "as the greater includes the less, he agrees with you now. I am admiring your self-possession, Varney; you haven't the least idea what we were talking about."

Varney laughed and reddened, and Margaret looked at him with playful reproach.

"Haven't you?" she asked. "But how deceitful of you to answer so readily! I was remarking that lawyers have a way of making a solemn parade of exactness and secrecy when there is no occasion. That was my statement."

"And it is perfectly correct," said Varney. "You know it is, Rodney. You're always doing it. I've noticed it constantly."

"Oh, this is mere vindictiveness, because he unmasked your deceit. I wasn't alluding to Mr. Rodney or anyone in particular. I was just speaking generally."

"But," said Varney, "something must have suggested the reflection."

"Certainly. Something did: a letter that I have just received from Mr. Penfield; a most portentous document, and all about nothing."

At the mention of the lawyer's name Varney's attention came to a sharp focus.

"It seems," Margaret continued, "that Dan, when he wrote to Mr. Penfield the other day, put the wrong letter in the envelope—a silly thing to do, but we all do silly things sometimes."

"I don't," said Rodney.

"Well, ordinary persons, I mean. Then Mr. Penfield, instead of simply stating the fact and returning the letter, becomes mysterious and alarming. He informs me that the envelope was addressed in Dan's handwriting, that the letter was posted at Penzance at eight-thirty p.m., that it was opened by him in person, and that the contents, which have been seen by no one but himself, are at present reposing in his private safe, of which he alone has the key. What he does not tell us is what the contents of the envelope were, which is the only thing that matters. It is most extraordinary. From the tone of his letter one would think that the envelope had contained something dreadful and incriminating."

"Perhaps it did," said Varney. "Dan's political views are distinctly revolutionary, and he is as secret as a whole barrel of oysters. That letter may have contained particulars of some sort of Guy Fawkes conspiracy, enclosing samples of suitable explosives. Who knows?"

Margaret was about to reply, when her glance happened to light on Jack Rodney, and something in that gentleman's expressive and handsome face gave her pause. Had she been chattering indiscreetly? And might Mr. Penfield have meant something after all? There were some curious points about his letter. She smilingly accepted the Guy Fawkes theory and then adroitly changed the subject.

"Speaking of Penzance, Mr. Varney, reminds me that you haven't told us what sort of voyage you had. There was quite a thick fog wasn't there?"

"Yes. It delayed us a lot. Purcell would steer right out to sea for fear of going ashore. Then the breeze failed for a time, and then it veered round easterly and headed us, and, as a wind up to the chapter of accidents, the jib-halyards carried away and we had to reeve a new one. Nice crazy gear you keep on your craft, Rodney."

"I suspected that rope," said Rodney—"in fact, I had meant to fit a new halyard before I went up to town. But I should have liked to see Purcell shinning up aloft."

"So should I—from the shore," said Varney. "He'd have carried away the mast or capsized the yacht. No, my friend; I left him below as a counterpoise and went aloft myself."

"Did Dan go straight off to the station?" Margaret asked.

"I should say not," replied Varney. "He was in a mighty hurry to be off—said he had some things to see to; I fancy one of them was a grilled steak and a bottle of Bass. We were both pretty ravenous."

"But why didn't you go with him if you were ravenous too?"

"I had to snug up the yacht and he wouldn't wait. He was up the ladder like a lamplighter almost before we had made fast. I can see him now, with that great suitcase in his hand, going up as light as a feather. He is wonderfully active for his size."

"Isn't he?" said Rodney. "But these big men often are. Look at the way those great lumping pilots will drop down into a boat: as light as cats."

"He is a big fellow, too," said Varney. "I was looking at him as he stopped at the top of the ladder to sing out 'So long.' He looked quite gigantic in his oilskins."

"He actually went up into town in his oilskins, did he?" exclaimed Margaret. "He must have been impatient for his meal! Oh, how silly of me! I never sewed on that button that had come off the collar of his oilskin coat. I hope you didn't have a wet passage."

"You need not reproach yourself, Mrs. Purcell," interposed Philip Rodney. "Your neglect was made good by my providence. I sewed on that button when I borrowed the coat on Friday evening to go to my diggings in."

"You told me you hadn't a spare oilskin button," said Margaret.

"I hadn't, but I made one—out of a cork."

"A cork?" Margaret exclaimed, with an incredulous laugh.

"Not a common cork, you know," Philip explained. "It was a flat circular cork from one of my collecting jars, waterproofed with paraffin wax; a most superior affair, with a beautiful round label—also waterproofed by the wax—on which was typed 'Marine Worms.' The label was very decorative. It's my own invention, and I'm rather proud of it."

"You may well be. And I suppose you sewed it on with rope-yarn and a sail-needle?" Margaret suggested.

"Not at all. It was secured with catgut, the fag end of an E string that I happened to have in my pocket. You see, I had no needle or thread, so I made two holes in the cork with the marlin-spike in my pocket-knife, two similar holes in the coat, poked the ends of the fiddlestring through, tied a reef-knot inside, and there it was, tight as wax—paraffin wax."

"It was very ingenious and resourceful of you," Varney commented, "but the product wasn't very happily disposed of on Dan's coat—I mean as to your decorative label. I take it that Dan's interest in marine worms is limited to their use as bait. Now if you could have fitted out Dr. Thorndyke with a set there would have been some appropriateness in it, since marine



worms are the objects of his devotion—at least, so I understand," and he looked interrogatively at Margaret's guest.

Dr. Thorndyke smiled. "You are draping me in the mantle of my friend, Professor D'Arcy," he said. "He is the real devotee. I have merely come down for a few days to stay with him and be an interested spectator of the chase. It is he who should have the buttons."

"Still," said Varney, "you aid and abet him. I suppose you help him to dig them up."

Philip laughed scornfully. "Why, you are as bad as Dan, Varney. You are thinking in terms of bait. Do you imagine Dr. Thorndyke and the professor go a-worming with a bully-beef tin and a garden fork as you do when you are getting ready for a fishing jaunt?"

"Well, how was I to know?" retorted Varney. "I am not a naturalist. What do they do? Set traps for 'em with bits of cheese inside?"

"Of course they don't," laughed Margaret. "How absurd you are, Mr. Varney! They go out with a boat and a dredge, and very interesting it must be to bring up all those curious creatures from the bottom of the sea."

She spoke rather absently, for her thoughts had gone back to Mr. Penfield's letter. There was certainly something a little cryptic in its tone, which she had taken for mere professional pedantry, but which she now recalled with vague uneasiness. Could the old lawyer have stumbled on something discreditable and written this ambiguously worded letter as a warning? Her husband was not a communicative man, and she could not pretend to herself that she had an exalted opinion of his moral character. It was all very disquieting.

The housekeeper, who had been retained with the furnished house, brought in the coffee, and as Margaret poured it out she continued her reflections, watching Varney with unconscious curiosity as he rolled a cigarette. The ring-finger of his left hand had a stiff joint, the result of an old injury, and was permanently bent at a sharp angle. It gave his hand an appearance of awkwardness, but she noted that he rolled his cigarette as quickly and neatly as if all his fingers were sound. The stiff finger had become normal to him. And she also noted that Dr. Thorndyke appeared quite interested in the contrast between the appearance of awkwardness and the actual efficiency of the maimed finger.

From Varney her attention—or inattention—wandered to her guest. Absently she dwelt on his powerful, intellectual face, his bold, clean-cut features, his shapely mouth, firm almost to severity; and all the time she was thinking of Mr. Penfield's letter.

"Have we all finished?" she asked at length; "and if so, where are we going to smoke our pipes and cigars?"

"I propose that we go into the garden," said Philip. "It is a lovely evening, and we can look at the moonlight on the sea while we smoke."

"Yes," Margaret agreed, "it will be more pleasant out there. Don't wait for me. I will join you in a few minutes, but I want first to have a few words with Mr. Rodney."

Philip, who, like the others, understood that this was a consultation on the subject of Mr. Penfield's letter, rose and playfully shepherded Varney out of the door which his brother held invitingly open. "Now then, Varney, out you go. No lagging behind and eavesdropping. The pronouncements of the oracle are not for the likes of you and me."

Varney took his dismissal with a smile and followed Dr. Thorndyke out, though, as he looked at the barrister's commanding figure and handsome face, he could not repress a twinge of jealousy. Why could not Maggie have consulted him? He was an old friend, and he knew more about old Penfield's letter than Rodney did. But, of course, she had no idea of that.

As soon as they were alone, Margaret and Rodney resumed their seats, and the former opened the subject without preamble.

"What do you really think of Mr. Penfield's letter?" she asked.

"Could you give me, in general terms, the substance of what he says?" Rodney answered cautiously.

"I had better show you the letter itself," said Margaret.

She rose and left the room, returning almost immediately with an official-looking envelope, which she handed to Rodney. The letter, which he extracted from it and spread out on the table, was not remarkably legible; an elderly solicitor's autograph letters seldom are. But barristers, like old-fashioned druggists, are usually expert decipherers, and Rodney read the letter without difficulty. It ran thus:

"GEORGE YARD,  
"LOMBARD STREET, E.C.  
"2 June, 1911.  
"DEAR MRS. PURCELL,

*"I have just received from your husband a letter with certain enclosures, which have caused me some surprise. The envelope is addressed to me in his handwriting, and the letter, which is unsigned, is also in his hand; but neither the letter nor the other contents could possibly have been intended for me, and it is manifest that they have been placed in the wrong envelope.*

*"The postmark shows that the letter was posted at Penzance at 8.30 p.m. on the 23rd instant. It was opened by me, and the contents, which have been seen by no one but me, have been deposited in my private safe, of which I alone have the key.*

*"Will you very kindly acquaint your husband with these facts and request him to call on me at his early convenience?"*

*"I am,*

*"Dear Mrs. Purcell,*

*"Yours sincerely,  
"JOSEPH PENFIELD."*

*"MRS. DANIEL PURCELL,  
"SENNEN,  
"CORNWALL."*

Rodney read the solicitor's letter through twice, refolded it, replaced it in its envelope, and returned it to Margaret.

"Well, what do you think of it?" the latter asked.

Rodney reflected for some moments.

"It's a very careful letter," he replied at length.

"Yes, I know; and that is a very careful answer, but not very helpful. Now do drop the lawyer and tell me just what you think like a good friend."

Rodney looked at her quickly with a faint smile and yet very earnestly. He found it strangely pleasant to be called a good friend by Margaret Purcell.

"I gather," he said slowly, "from the tone of Mr. Penfield's letter, that he found something in that envelope that your husband would not have wished him to see—something that he had reasons for wishing no one to see but the person for whom it was meant."

"Do you mean something discreditable or compromising?"

"We mustn't jump at conclusions. Mr. Penfield is very reticent, so, presumably, he has some reasons for reticence, otherwise he would have said plainly what the envelope contained. But why does he write to you? Doesn't he know your husband's address?"

"No, but he could have got it from Dan's office. I have been wondering myself why he wrote to me."

"Has your husband arrived at Oulton yet?"

"Heavens! Yes. It doesn't take two days and a half to get to Norfolk."

"Oh, then he wasn't staying at Falmouth?"

Margaret stared at him. "Falmouth!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"I understood Varney to say that he was going to call at Falmouth."

"No, certainly not. He was going straight to London and so on to Oulton the same night. I wonder what Mr. Varney can have meant."

"We must find out presently. Have you heard from your husband since he left?"

"No. Oddly enough, he hasn't written, which is unlike him. He generally sends me a line as soon as he arrives anywhere."

"You had better send him a telegram in the morning to make sure of his whereabouts, and then let him have a copy of Mr. Penfield's letter at once. And I think I wouldn't refer to the subject before any of our friends if I were you."

"No. I oughtn't to have said what I did. But, of course, I didn't dream that Mr. Penfield really meant anything. Shall we go out into the garden?"

Rodney opened the door for her, and they passed out to where their three companions sat in deck-chairs facing the sea. Two chairs had been placed for them, and, as they seated themselves, Varney remarked:

"I take it that the oracle has spoken, and I hope he was more explicit than oracles are usually."

"He was explicit and discreet—especially discreet," Margaret replied.

"Oh, they are always that," said Varney; "discretion is the oracular speciality. The explicitness is exceptional."

"I believe it is," replied Margaret, "and I am glad you set so much value on it because I am coming to you now for information. Mr. Rodney tells me that Dan said something to you about Falmouth. What was it?"

"He said he was going to call in there—at least, so I understood."

"But he wasn't, you know. He was going direct to London and straight on to Oulton the same night. You must have misunderstood him."

"I may have done, but I don't think I did. Still, he only mentioned the matter casually, and I wasn't paying particular attention."

Margaret made no rejoinder, and the party became somewhat silent. Philip, realizing Margaret's uneasy preoccupation, engaged Dr. Thorndyke in an animated conversation respecting the natural history of the Cornish coast and the pleasures of dredging.

The other three became profoundly thoughtful. To each the solicitor's letter had its special message, though to one only was that message clearly intelligible. Rodney was puzzled and deeply suspicious. To him the letter had read like that of a man washing his hands of a disagreeable responsibility. The curious reticence as to the nature of the enclosures and the reference to the private safe sounded ominous. He knew little of Purcell—he had been a friend of the Haygarths'—and had no great opinion of him. Purcell was a financier, and financiers sometimes did queer things. At any rate, Penfield's excessive caution suggested something fishy—possibly something illicit. In fact, to speak colloquially, Rodney smelt a rat.

Margaret also was puzzled and suspicious, but, womanlike, she allowed her suspicions to take a more special form. She, too, smelt a rat, but it was a feminine rat. The lawyer's silence as to the contents of that mysterious envelope seemed to admit of no other interpretation. It was so pointed. Of course he could not tell her, though he was an old friend and her trustee, so he had said nothing.

She reflected on the matter with lukewarm displeasure. Her relations with her husband were not such as to admit of jealousy in the ordinary sense; but still, she was married to him, and any affair on his part with another woman would be very disagreeable and humiliating to her. It might lead to a scandal, too, and from that her ingrained delicacy revolted.

Varney, meanwhile, sat with his head thrown back wrapped in thought of a more dreamy quality. He knew all about the letter, and his mind was occupying itself with speculation as to its effects. Rodney's view of it he gauged pretty accurately, but what did she think of it? Was she anxious—worried at the prospect of some unpleasant disclosure? He hoped not. At any rate, it could not be helped. And she was free, if she only knew it.

He had smoked out his cigarette, and now, as he abstractedly filled his pipe, his eye insensibly sought the spot where the diamond and ruby flashed out alternately from the bosom of the night. A cloud had crept over the moon, and the transitory golden and crimson gleam shone out bright and clear amidst the encompassing darkness, white—red, white—red, diamond—ruby, a message in a secret code from the tall, unseen sentinel on that solitary, wave-washed rock, bidding him be of good cheer, reminding him again and again of the freedom that was his—and hers, made everlastingly secure by a friendly iron sinker.

The cloud turned silvery at the edge and the moon sailed out into the open. Margaret looked up at it thoughtfully.

"I wonder where Dan is to-night," she said; and in the pause that followed a crimson spark from the dim horizon seemed to Varney to signal, "Here," and instantly fade into discreet darkness.

"Perhaps," suggested Philip, "he is having a moonlight sail on the Broad, or, more probably, taking a whisky-and-soda with Bradford in the inn parlour where the stuffed pike is. You remember that stuffed pike, Jack?"

His brother nodded. "Can I ever forget it, or the landlord's interminable story of its capture? I wonder why people become so intolerably boresome about their fishing exploits. The angler is nearly as bad as the golfer."

"Still," said Varney, "he has more excuse. It is more of an achievement to catch a pike or a salmon than merely to whack a ball with a stick."

"Isn't that rather a crude description of the game?" asked Margaret. "It is to be hoped that Dr. Thorndyke is not an enthusiast."

"I am not," he assured her—"in fact, I was admiring Mr. Varney's simplification. His definition of the game is worthy of Dr. Johnson. But I must tear myself away. My host is an early bird, and I expect you are, too. Good-night, Mrs. Purcell. It has been very delightful to meet you again. I am only sorry that I should have missed your husband."

"So am I," said Margaret, shaking his hand warmly, "but I think it most kind of you to have remembered me after all these years."

As Dr. Thorndyke rose, the other three men stood up. "It is time for us to go, too," said Rodney, "so we will see you to the end of the road, Thorndyke. Good-night, Mrs. Purcell."

"Good-night, gentlemen all," she replied. "Eight o'clock breakfast, remember."

The four men went into the house to fetch their hats and took their departure, walking together as far as the cross-roads, where Thorndyke wished the other three "good-night" and left them to pursue their way to the village.

The lodging accommodation in this neighbourhood was not sumptuous, but our three friends were not soft or fastidious. Besides, they only slept at their "diggings," taking their meals and making their home at the house which Purcell had hired, furnished, for the holiday. It was a somewhat unconventional arrangement, now that Purcell had gone, and spoke

eloquently of his confidence in the discretion of his attractive wife.

The three men were not in the same lodgings. Varney was "putting up" at the "First and Last" inn in the adjoining village—or "church-town," to give it its local title—of Sennen, while the Rodneys shared a room at the "Ship" down in Sennen Cove, more than a mile away. They proceeded together as far as Varney's hostel, when, having wished him "good-night," the two brothers strode away along, the moonlit road towards the Cove.

For a while neither spoke, though the thoughts of both were occupied by the same subject, the solicitor's letter. Philip had fully taken in the situation, although he had made no remark on it, and the fact that his brother had been consulted quasi-professionally on the subject made him hesitate to refer to it. For in spite of his gay, almost frivolous, manner, Philip Rodney was a responsible medical practitioner, and really a man of sound judgment and discretion.

Presently his scruples yielded to the consideration that his brother was not likely to divulge any confidence, and he remarked:

"I hope Purcell hasn't been doing anything shady. It sounded to me as if there was a touch of Pontius Pilate in the tone of Penfield's letter."

"Yes, a very guarded tone, with a certain note of preparation for unpleasant possibilities. So it struck me. I do sincerely hope there isn't anything in it."

"So do I, by Jove! but I shouldn't be so very astonished. Of course we don't know anything against Purcell—at least, I don't—but somehow he doesn't strike me as a very scrupulous man. His outlook on life jars a bit; don't you feel that some times?"

"The commercial standard isn't quite the same as the professional, you know," Jack Rodney answered evasively, "and financial circles are not exactly of the higher morality. But I know of nothing to Purcell's discredit."

"No, of course not. But he isn't the same class as his wife; she's a lot too good for a coarse, bucolic fellow like that. I wonder why the deuce she married him. I used to think she rather liked you."

"A woman can't marry every man she rather likes, you know, Phil, unless she happens to live in Ladak; and even there I believe there are limits. But to come back to Purcell, we may be worrying ourselves about nothing. To-morrow we shall get into touch with him by telegraph, and then we may hear something from him."

Here the consideration of Purcell and his affairs dropped so far as conversation went; but in the elder man's mind certain memories had been revived by his brother's remark and occupied it during the remainder of the walk. For he, too, had once thought that Maggie Haygarth rather liked him, and he now recalled the shock of disagreeable surprise with which he had heard of her marriage. But that was over and done with long ago, and the question now was, how was the Sandhopper, at present moored in Whitesand Bay, to be got from the Land's End to her moorings above Westminster Bridge?—a problem that engaged the attention of the two brothers until they turned into their respective beds and the laggard, according to immemorial custom, blew out the light.

In spite of Mrs. Purcell's admonition they were some minutes late on the following morning. Their two friends were already seated at the breakfast table, and it needed no extraordinary powers of observation to see that something had happened. Their hostess was pale and looked worried and some what frightened, and Varney was preternaturally grave. A telegram lay open on the table by Margaret's place, and as Rodney advanced to shake hands, she held it out to him without a word. He took the paper and read the brief but ominous message that confirmed but too plainly his misgivings of the previous night.

**"WHERE IS DAN? EXPECTED HIM HERE TUESDAY NIGHT. HOPE NOTHING WRONG.—  
BRADFORD, ANGLER'S HOTEL, OULTON."**

Rodney laid down the telegram and looked at Margaret. "This is a queer business," said he. "Have you done anything?"

"No," she replied. "What can we do?" Rodney took a slip of paper and a pencil from his pocket. "If you will write down the name of the partner or clerk who is attending at the office and address, and that of the caretaker of your flat, I will go and send off reply-paid telegrams to them asking for information as to your husband's whereabouts, and I will also reply to Mr Bradford. It is just possible that Purcell may have gone home after all."

"It's very unlikely," said Margaret. "The flat is shut up, and he would surely have written. Still, we may as well make sure, if you will be so kind. But won't you have your breakfast first?"

"We'd better waste no time," he answered, and, pocketing the paper, strode away on his errand.

Little was said until he returned, and even then the breakfast proceeded in a gloomy silence that contrasted strangely with the usual vivacity of the gatherings around that hospitable table. A feeling of tense expectation pervaded the party and a vivid sense of impending disaster. Dreary efforts were made to keep some kind of conversation going, but the talk was colourless and disjointed with long and awkward pauses.

Varney especially was wrapped in deep meditation. Outwardly he preserved an appearance of sympathetic anxiety, but inwardly he was conscious of a strange, rather agreeable excitement, almost of elation. When he looked at Margaret's troubled face he felt a pang of regret, of contrition; but principally he was sensible of a feeling of power, of knowledge. He

sat apart, as it were, Godlike, omniscient. He knew all the facts that were hidden from the others. The past lay clear before him to the smallest detail; the involved present was as an open book which he read with ease, and he could even peer confidently into the future.

And these men and the woman before him, and those others afar off—the men at the office, the caretaker, Penfield the lawyer, and Bradford at his inn in Norfolk—what were they but so many puppets, moving feverishly hither and thither as he, the unseen master-spirit, directed them by a pull at the strings? It was he who had wound them up and set them going; and here he sat, motionless and quiet, watching them do his bidding. He was reminded of an occasion when he had been permitted for a short time to steer a five-thousand-ton steamer. What a sense of power it had given him to watch the stupendous consequences of his own trifling movements! A touch of the little wheel, the movement of a spoke or two to right or left, and what a commotion followed! How the steam gear had clanked with furious haste to obey, and the great ship had presently swerved round, responsive to the pressure of his fingers! What a wonderful thing it had been! There was that colossal structure with its enormous burden of merchandise, its teeming population sweating in the stokehold or sleeping in the dark fore-castle, its unconscious passengers chatting on the decks, reading, writing, or playing cards in saloon or smoking-room; and he had had it all in the grasp of one hand, had moved it and turned it about with the mere touch of a finger.

And so it was now. The magical pressure of his finger on the trigger, a few turns of a rope, the hoisting of an iron weight, and behold! the whole course of a human life—probably of several human lives—was changed utterly.

It was a tremendous thought.

In a little over an hour the replies to Rodney's discreetly worded inquiries had come in. Mr. Purcell had not been home nor had he been heard of at the office. Mr. Penfield had been inquiring as to his whereabouts and so had Mr. Bradford. That was all. And what it amounted to was that Daniel Purcell had disappeared.

"Can't you remember exactly what Dan said about going to Falmouth, Mr. Varney?" Margaret asked.

"I am sorry to say I can't," replied Varney. "You see, he just threw the remark off casually, and I didn't ask any questions. He isn't very fond of being questioned, you know."

"I wonder what he could have been going to Falmouth for," she mused. In reality she did not wonder at all. She felt pretty certain that she knew. But pride would not allow her publicly to adopt that explanation until it was forced on her. "It seems to me that there is only one course," she continued. "I must go up to town and see Mr. Penfield. Don't you think so, Mr. Rodney?"

"Certainly. He is the only one who knows anything and is able to advise." He hesitated a moment, and then added: "Hadh't we better come up with you?"

"Yes," said Varney eagerly; "let us all go up."

Margaret considered for a few moments. "It is excessively kind and sympathetic of you all, and I am glad you offered, because it makes me feel that I have good loyal friends, which is a great deal to know just now. But, really, there would be no use in breaking up your holidays. What could you do? We can't make a search in person. Why not take over the house and stay on here?"

"We don't want the house if you're not in it," said Philip.

"No," agreed Jack Rodney; "if we can't be of use to you we shall get afloat and begin to crawl round the coast homewards."

"I think I shall run over to Falmouth and see if I can pick up any news," said Varney.

"Thank you," said Margaret. "I think that would be really useful," and Rodney agreed heartily, adding: "Why not come round in the yacht, Varney? We shall probably get there to-morrow night."

Varney reflected. And suddenly it was borne in upon him that he felt an unspeakable repugnance to the idea of going on board the yacht, and especially to making the voyage from Sennen to Penzance. The feeling came to him as an utter surprise, but there was no doubt of its reality.

"I think I'll go over by train," he said. "It will save a day, you know."

"Then we will meet you there," said Rodney; "and, Mrs. Purcell, will you send us a letter to the Green Banks Hotel, Falmouth, and let us know what Mr. Penfield says, and if you would like us to come up to town to help you?"

"Thank you, yes, I will," Margaret replied heartily. "And I promise that, if I want your help, I will ask for it."

"That is a solemn promise, mind," said Rodney.

"Yes, I mean it—a solemn promise."

So the matter was arranged. By twelve o'clock, the weather being calm, the yacht was got under way for Penzance. And even as on that other occasion, she headed seaward with her crew of two, watched from the shore by a woman and a man.

---

### III. — IN WHICH MARGARET PURCELL CONSULTS MR. PENFIELD

MR. JOSEPH PENFIELD was undeniably in a rather awkward dilemma. For he had hooked the wrong fish. His letter to Maggie Purcell had been designed to put him immediately in touch with Purcell himself, whereas it had evoked an urgent telegram from Maggie announcing her intention of calling on him "on important business" and entreating him to arrange an interview.

It was really most unfortunate. There was no one in the world whom he had less desire to see, at the present moment, than Margaret Purcell. And yet there was no possible escape; for not only was he her solicitor and her trustee, but he was an old family friend, and not a little attached to her in his dry way. But he didn't want her just now. He wanted Purcell, and he wanted him very badly.

For a solicitor of irreproachable character and spotless reputation his position was highly unpleasant. As soon as he had opened the letter from Penzance he had recognised the nature of the enclosures, and had instantly connected them with the forgeries of Bank of England notes of which he had heard. The intricate water-marks on the "blanks" were unmistakable. But so was the handwriting of the accompanying letter. It was Daniel Purcell's beyond a doubt, and the peculiar, intensely black ink was equally characteristic. And, short as the note was, it made perfectly clear its connection with the incriminating enclosures. It wrote down Daniel Purcell a banknote forger.

Now Mr. Penfield was, as we have said, a man of irreproachable character. But he was a very secretive and rather casuistical old gentleman; and his regard for Margaret had led him to apply his casuistry to the present case, pretending to himself that his discovery of the illicit blanks came within the category of "clients' secrets," which he need not divulge. But in his heart he knew that he was conniving at a felony, that he ought to give information to the police or to the Bank, and that he wasn't going to. His plan was to get hold of Purcell, make him destroy the blanks in his presence, and deliver such a warning as would put a stop to the forgeries.

But if he did not propose to give Purcell away, neither did he intend to give himself away. He would share his compromising secret with no one—especially with a lady. And this consideration raised the difficult question, What on earth was he to say to Margaret Purcell when she arrived? A question which he was still debating, with her telegram spread out before him and his silver snuff-box in his hand, when a clerk entered his private office to announce the unwelcome visitor.

Fortifying himself with a pinch of snuff, he rose and advanced towards the door to receive her, and as she entered he made a quick mental note of her anxious and troubled expression.

"How do you do, Mrs. Purcell?" said he, with a ceremonious bow. "You have had a long journey and rather an early one. How very unfortunate that this business, to which you refer in your telegram, should have arisen while you were on holiday so far away!"

"You have guessed what the business is, I suppose?" said Margaret.

Mr. Penfield smiled deprecatingly. "We lawyers," said he, "are not much addicted to guessing, especially when definite information is available. Pray be seated. And now," he continued, as Margaret subsided into the clients' chair and he resumed his own, resting his elbows on the arms and placing his finger-tips together, "let us hear what this new and important business is."

"It is about that mysterious letter that you had from my husband," said Margaret.

"Dear, dear!" said Mr. Penfield. "What a pity that you should have taken this long journey for such a trifling affair! And I thought I gave you all the particulars."

"You didn't mention whom the letter was from."

"For several excellent reasons," replied Mr. Penfield, checking them off on his fingers. "First, I don't know; second, it is not my business; third, your husband, whose business it is, does know. My object in writing to you was to get into touch with him so that I could hand back to him this letter, which should never have come into my possession. Shall I take down his address now?"

"I haven't it myself," Margaret replied with a faint flush. "I have no idea where he is at present. He left Sennen on the 2nd to go to Oulton via Penzance. But he never arrived at Oulton. He has not been home, he has not been to the office, and he has not written. It is rather alarming, especially in connection with your mysterious letter."

"Was my letter mysterious?" said Mr. Penfield, rapidly considering this new but not very surprising development. "I hardly think so. It was not intended to be. What was there mysterious about it?"

"Everything," she replied, producing the letter from her bag and glancing at it as she spoke. "You emphasise that Dan's letter and the other contents have been seen by no eye but yours, and that they are in a receptacle to which no one has access but yourself. There is a strong hint of something secret and compromising in the nature of Dan's letter and enclosures."

"I would rather say 'confidential,'" murmured Mr. Penfield.

"And," Margaret continued, "you must see that there is an evident connection between this misdirected letter and Dan's

disappearance."

Mr. Penfield saw the connection very plainly, but he was admitting nothing. He did, indeed, allow that "it was a coincidence," but would not agree to "a necessary connection."

"Probably you will hear from your husband in a day or two, and then the letter can be returned."

"Is there any reason why you should not show me Dan's letter?" Margaret demanded. "Surely I am entitled, as his wife, to see it."

Mr. Penfield pursed up his lips and took a deliberate pinch of snuff.

"We must not confuse," said he, "the theological relations of married people with their legal relations. Theologically they are one; legally they are separate persons subject to a mutual contract. As to this letter, it is not mine, and consequently I can show it to no one; and I must assume that if your husband had desired you to see it he would have shown it to you himself."

"But," Margaret protested impatiently, "are not my husband's secrets my secrets?"

"That," replied the lawyer, "is a delicate question which we need not consider. There is the question of the secrets of a third party. If I had the felicity to be a married man, which unfortunately I have not, you would hardly expect me to communicate your private, and perhaps secret, affairs to my wife. Now would you?"

Margaret had to admit that she would not. But she instantly countered the lawyer by inquiring:

"Then I was apparently right in inferring that this letter and the enclosures contained matter of a secret and compromising character?"

"I have said nothing to that effect," replied Mr Penfield uncomfortably; and then, seeing that he had no choice between a downright lie and a flat refusal to answer any questions, he continued "The fact is that it is not admissible for me to make any statement. This letter came to me by an error, and my position must be as if I had not seen it."

"But it can't be," Margaret persisted, "because you have seen it. I want to know if Dan's letter was addressed to anyone whom I know. You could tell me that, surely?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot," replied the lawyer, glad to be able to tell the literal truth for once. "The letter was without any formal opening. There was nothing to indicate the identity or even the sex of the person to whom it was addressed."

Margaret noted this curious fact and then asked:

"With regard to the enclosures. Did they consist of money?"

"They did not," was the reply, "nor cheques." A brief silence followed, during which Margaret reflected rapidly on what she had learned and what she had not learned. At length she looked up with a somewhat wry smile and said: "Well, Mr. Penfield, I suppose that is all I shall get out of you?"

"I am afraid it is," he replied. "The necessity of so much reservation is most distasteful, I assure you; but it is the plain duty of a lawyer to keep not only his own counsel but other people's."

"Yes, of course, I quite understand that. And now, as we have finished with the letter, there is the writer to consider. What had I better do about Dan?"

"Why do anything? It is only four days since he left Sennen."

"Yes, but something has evidently happened. He may have met with an accident and be in some hospital. Do you think that I ought to notify the police that he is missing?"

"No; certainly not," Mr. Penfield replied emphatically, for, in his mind, Purcell's disappearance was quite simply explained. He had discovered the mistake of the transposed letter, and knew that Penfield held the means of convicting him of a felony, and he had gone into hiding until he should discover what the lawyer meant to do. To put the police on his track would be to convince him of his danger and drive him hopelessly out of reach. But Mr. Penfield could not explain this to Margaret, and to cover his emphatic rejection of police assistance he continued: "You see, he can hardly be said to be missing; he may merely have altered his plans and neglected to write. Have patience for a day or two, and if you still hear no tidings of him, send me a line, and I will take what measures seem advisable for trying to get into touch with him."

"Thank you," said Margaret, not very enthusiastically, rising to take her departure. She was in the act of shaking Mr. Penfield's hand when, with a sudden afterthought, she asked: "By the way, was there anything in Dan's letter that might account for his disappearance in this fashion?"

This was rather a facer for Mr. Penfield, who, like many casuists, hated telling a direct lie. For the answer was clearly "Yes," whereas the sense that he was compelled to convey was "No."

"You are forgetting that the letter was not addressed to me," he said. "And that reminds me that there must have been another letter—the one that was addressed to me and that must have been put into the other person's envelope. May I ask if that letter has been returned?"

"No, it has not," replied Margaret.

"Ha!" said Mr. Penfield. "But it probably will be in the course of a day or two. Then we shall know what he was writing to me about and who is the other correspondent. Good-day, good-day, Mrs. Purcell."

He shook her hand warmly, and hastened to open the door for her in the hope, justified by the result, that she would not realize until she had left that her very significant question had not been answered.

Indeed, she did not realize how adroitly the old solicitor had evaded that question until she was too far away to return and put it afresh, even if that had seemed worth while; for her attention was occupied by the other issue that he had so artfully raised. She had overlooked the presumable existence of the second transposed letter, the one that should have been in Mr. Penfield's envelope. It ought to have been returned at once. Possibly it was even now waiting at Sennen to be forwarded. If it arrived, it would probably disclose the identity of the mysterious correspondent. On the other hand, it might not; and if it were not returned at all, that would confirm the suspicion that there was something gravely wrong. And it was at this point that Margaret became conscious of Mr. Penfield's last evasion.

Its effect was to confirm the generally disagreeable impression that she had received from the interview. She was a little resentful of the lawyer's elaborate reticence, which, coupled with the strange precautionary terms of his letter to her, convinced her that her husband had embarked on some questionable transaction, and that Mr. Penfield knew it and knew the nature of that transaction. His instant rejection of the suggestion that an accident might have occurred and that the police should be notified seemed to imply that he had some inkling of Purcell's proceedings, and his final evasion of her question strongly suggested that the letter, or the enclosures, or both, contained some clue to the disappearance.

Thus, as she took her way home, Margaret turned over again and again the puzzling elements of the mystery, and at each reshuffling of the scanty facts the same conclusion emerged: her husband had absconded, and he had not absconded alone. The secret that Mr. Penfield was guarding was such a secret as might, if divulged, have pointed the way to the divorce court. And with this conclusion and a frown of disgust, she turned into the entry of her flat and ascended the stairs.

As she let herself in, the maid met her in the hall. "Mr. Varney is in the drawing-room, ma'am," she said. "He came about ten minutes ago. I am getting tea for him."

"Thank you, Nellie," said Margaret, "and you might get me some, too."

She passed on to her bedroom for a hasty wash and change, and then joined her visitor in time to pour out the tea.

"How good of you, Mr. Varney," she said warmly, as they shook hands, "to come to me so quickly! You must have only just arrived."

"Yes," he replied, "I came straight on from the station. I thought you would be anxious to know if I had heard anything."

"And have you?"

"Well," Varney replied, hesitatingly, "I'm rather afraid not. I seem to have drawn a blank."

Margaret looked at him critically. There was something in his manner suggestive of doubt and reservation.

"Do you mean an absolute blank? Did you find out nothing at all?"

Again Varney seemed to hesitate, and Margaret's attention sharpened.

"There isn't much use in making guesses," said he. "I found no definite traces of Dan. He hadn't been at the 'Ship,' where I put up and where he used to stay when he went to Falmouth, and of course I couldn't go round the other hotels making inquiries. But I went down the quay-side and asked a few discreet questions about the craft that had left the port since Monday, especially the odd craft, bound for small ports. I felt that if Dan had any reason for slipping off quietly he wouldn't go by a passenger boat to a regular passenger port. He would go on a cargo boat bound to some out-of-the-way place. So I found out what I could about the cargo boats that had put out of Falmouth; but I didn't have much luck."

Again he paused irresolutely, and Margaret asked, with a shade of impatience:

"Did you find out anything at all?"

"Well, no; I can't say that I did," Varney replied, in the same slow, inconclusive manner. "It's disappointing in a way, especially as I really thought at one time that I had got on his track. But that turned out a mistake after all."

"You are sure it was a mistake," said Margaret eagerly. "Tell me about it."

"I picked up the clue when I was asking about a Swedish steamer that had put out on Tuesday morning. She had a lading of china clay and was bound for Malmo, but she was calling at Ipswich to pick up some other cargo. I learned that she took one or two passengers on board, and one of them was described to me as a big red-faced man of about forty, who looked like a pilot or a ship's officer. That sounded rather like Dan, and when I heard that he was carrying a biggish suitcase and had a yellow oilskin coat on his arm, I made pretty sure that it was."

"And how do you know that it was not Dan?"

"Why," replied Varney, "it turned out that this man had a woman with him."

"I see," said Margaret hastily, flushing scarlet and turning her head away. For a while she could think of nothing further to say. To her, of course, the alleged disproof of the passenger's identity was "confirmation strong as Holy Writ." But her pride would not allow her to confess this—at any rate to Varney—and she was in difficulties as to how to pursue the inquiry



without making the admission. At length she ventured: "Do you think that is quite conclusive? I mean, is it certain that the woman belonged to the man? There is the possibility that she may have been merely a fellow-passenger whom he had casually accompanied to the ship. Or did you ascertain that they were actually—er—companions?"

"No, by Jove!" exclaimed Varney. "I never thought of any other possibilities. I heard that the man went on board with a woman, and at once decided that he couldn't be Dan. But you are quite right. They may have just met at the hotel or elsewhere and walked down to the ship together. I wonder if it's worth while to make any further inquiries about the ship—I mean at Ipswich, or, if necessary, at Malmo."

"Do you remember the ship's name?"

"Yes; the Hedwig of Hernosand. She left Falmouth early on Tuesday morning, so she will probably have got to Ipswich some time yesterday. She may be there now, or, of course, she may have picked up her stuff and gone to sea the same day. Would you like me to run down to Ipswich and see if I can find out anything?"

Margaret turned on him with a look that set his heart thumping and his pulses throbbing.

"Mr. Varney," she said, in a low, unsteady voice, "you make me ashamed and proud—proud to have such a loyal, devoted friend, and ashamed to be such a tax on him."

"Not at all," he replied. "After all"—here his voice, too, became a little unsteady—"Dan was my pal, is my pal still," he added huskily. He paused for a moment, and then concluded: "I'll go down to-night and try to pick up the scent while it is fresh."

"It is good of you!" she exclaimed; and as she spoke her eyes filled, but she still looked at him frankly as she continued: "Your faithful friendship is no little compensation for"—she was going to say "his unfaithfulness," but altered the words to "the worry and anxiety of this horrid mystery. But I am ashamed to let you take so much trouble, though I must confess that it would be an immense relief to me to get some news of Dan. I don't hope for good news, but it is terrible to be so completely in the dark."

"Yes, that is the worst part of it," Varney agreed; and then, setting his cup on the table, he rose. "I had better be getting along now," he said, "so that I can catch the earliest possible train. Good-bye, Mrs. Purcell, and good luck to us both."

The leave-taking almost shattered Varney's self possession, for Margaret, in the excess of her gratitude, impulsively grasped both his hands and pressed them warmly as she poured out her thanks. Her touch made him tingle to the finger-ends. Heavens! how beautiful she looked, this lovely, unconscious young widow! And to think that she might in time be his own! A wild impulse surged through him to clasp her in his arms, to tell her that she was free and that he worshipped her. Of course, that was a mere impulse that interfered not at all with his decorous, deferential manner. And yet a sudden, almost insensible change in her made him suspect that his eyes had told her more than he had meant to disclose. Nevertheless, she followed him to the lobby to speed him on his errand, and when he looked back from the foot of the stairs, she was standing at the open door, smiling down on him.

The thoughts of these two persons, when each was alone, were strangely different. In Margaret's mind there was no doubt that the man on the steamer was her unworthy husband. But what did Varney think? That a man of the world should have failed to perceive that an unexplained disappearance was most probably an elopement seemed to her incredible. Varney could not be such an innocent as that. The only alternative was that he, like Mr. Penfield, was trying to shield Dan; to hush up the disreputable elements of the escapade. But whereas the lawyer's obstinate reticence had aroused some slight resentment, she felt no resentment towards Varney. For he was Dan's friend first of all, and it was proper that he should try to shield his "pal." And he was really serving husband and wife equally. To hush things up would be the best for both. She wanted no scandal. Loyal and faithful wife as she had been, her feelings towards her husband were of that some what tepid quality that would have allowed her to receive him back without reproaches, and to accept the lamest explanations without question or comment. Varney's assumed policy was as much to her interest as to Dan's, and he was certainly playing the part of a devoted friend to them both.

One thing did, indeed, rather puzzle her. Her marriage had been, on her husband's side, undoubtedly a love-match. It was for no mercenary reasons that he had forced the marriage on her and her father, and up to the last he had seemed to be, in his rather brutal way, genuinely in love with her. Why, then, had he suddenly gone off with another woman? To her constant, faithful nature the thing was inexplicable.

Varney's reflections were more complex. A vague consciousness of the cumulative effects of actions was beginning to steal into his mind, a faint perception that he was being borne along on the current of circumstance. He had gone to Falmouth with the express purpose of losing Purcell. But it seemed necessary to pick up some trace of the imaginary fugitive; for the one essential to Varney's safety was that Purcell's disappearance must appear to date from the landing at Penzance. That landing must be taken as an established fact. There must be no inquiry into or discussion of the incidents of that tragic voyage. But to that end it was necessary that Purcell should make some reappearance on shore, must leave some traces for possible pursuers to follow. So Varney had gone to Falmouth to find such traces—and to lose them. That was to have been the end of the business so far as he was concerned.

But it was not the end; and as he noted this, he noted, too, with a curious interest unmixed with any uneasiness, how one event generates others. He had invented Purcell's proposed visit to Falmouth to give a plausible colour to the disappearance and to carry the field of inquiry beyond the landing at Penzance. Then the Falmouth story had seemed to

commit him to a visit to Falmouth to confirm it. That visit had committed him to the fabrication of the required confirmatory traces, which were to be found and then lost. But he had not quite succeeded in losing them. Margaret's question had seemed to commit him to tracing them further, and now he had got to find and lose Purcell at Ipswich. That, however, would be the end. From Ipswich Purcell would have to disappear for good.

The account that he had given Margaret was founded on facts. The ship that he had described was a real ship, which had sailed when he had said that she sailed and for the ports that he had named. Moreover, she had carried one or two passengers. But the red-faced man with the suitcase and his female companion were creatures of Varney's imagination.

Thus we see Varney already treading the well-worn trail left by multitudes of wrong-doers; weaving around him a defensive web of illusory appearances, laying down false tracks that lead always away from himself, never suspecting that the web may at last become as the fowler's snare, that the false tracks may point the way to the hounds of destiny. It is true that, as he fared on his way to Ipswich, he was conscious that the tide of circumstance was bearing him farther than he had meant to travel; but not yet did he recognize in this hardly perceived compulsion the abiding menace of accumulating consequences that encompasses the murderer.

---

#### IV. — IN WHICH MARGARET CONFERS WITH DR. THORNDYKE

THE sun was shining pleasantly on the trees of King's Bench Walk, Inner Temple, when Margaret approached the handsome brick portico of No. 5A and read upon the jamb of the doorway the name of Dr. John Thorndyke under the explanatory heading "First Pair." She was a little nervous of the coming interview, partly because she had met the famous criminal lawyer only twice before, but more especially by reason of a vague fear that her uneasy suspicions of her husband might presently be turned into something more definite and disagreeable. Her nervousness on the first score was soon dispelled, for her gentle summons on the little brass knocker of the inner door—the "oak" was open—was answered by Dr. Thorndyke himself, who greeted her as an old friend and led her into the sitting-room, where tea-things were set out on a small table between two armchairs. The homely informality of the reception, so different from the official stiffness of Mr. Penfield, instantly put her at her ease; and when the teapot arrived in the custody of a small gentleman of archidiaconal aspect and surprising crinkliness of feature, she felt as if she were merely paying some rather unusual kind of afternoon call.

Dr. Thorndyke had what would, in his medical capacity, have been called a fine bedside manner—pleasant, genial, sympathetic, but never losing touch with the business on hand. Insensibly a conversation of pleasing generality slipped into a consultation, and Margaret found herself stating her case, apparently of her own initiative. Having described her interview with Mr. Penfield and commented on the old lawyer's very unhelpful attitude, she continued:

"It was Mr. Rodney who advised me to consult you. As a civil lawyer with no experience of criminal practice, he felt hardly competent to deal with the case. That was what he said. It sounds rather ominous—as if he thought there might be some criminal element in the affair."

"Not necessarily," said Thorndyke. "But your husband is missing, and a missing man is certainly more in my province than in Rodney's. What did he suggest that you should ask me to do?"

"I should wish, of course," replied Margaret, "to get into communication with my husband. But if that is not possible, I should at least like to know what has become of him. Matters can't be left in their present uncertain state. There is the future to think of."

"Precisely," agreed Thorndyke, "and as the future must be based upon the present and the past, we had better begin by setting out what we actually know and can prove. First, I understand that on the 23rd of June your husband left Sennen, and was seen by several persons to leave, on a yacht in company with Mr. Varney, and that there was no one else on board. The yacht reached Penzance at about half-past two in the afternoon, and your husband went ashore at once. He was seen by Mr. Varney to land on the pier and go towards the town. Did anyone besides Mr. Varney see him go ashore?"

"No—at least, I have not heard of anyone. Of course, he may have been seen by some fishermen or strangers on the pier. But does it matter? Mr. Varney saw him land, and he certainly was not on the yacht when Mr. Rodney arrived half an hour later. There can't be any possible doubt that he did land at Penzance."

"No," Thorndyke agreed; "but as that is the last time that he was certainly seen alive, and as the fact that he landed may have to be proved in a court of law, additional evidence would be worth securing."

"But that was not the last time that he was seen alive," said Margaret; and here she gave him an account of Varney's expedition to Falmouth, explaining why he went and giving full particulars respecting the steamer, all of which Thorndyke noted down on the note-book which lay by his side on the table.

"This is very important," said he, when she had finished. "But you see that it is on a different plane of certainty. It is hearsay at the best, and there is no real identification. What luck did Mr. Varney have at Ipswich?"

"He went down there on the evening of the 27th, the day after his visit to Falmouth. He went straight to the quay-side and made inquiries about the steamer Hedwig, which he learned had left about noon, having come in about nine o'clock on the previous night. He talked to various quay-loafers, and from one of them ascertained that a single passenger had landed—a big man, carrying a large bag or portmanteau in his hand and a coat of some kind on his arm. The passenger landed alone. Nothing was seen of any woman."

"Did Mr. Varney take the name and address of his informant at Ipswich or the one at Falmouth?"

"I am afraid not. He said nothing about it."

"That is unfortunate," said Thorndyke, "because these witnesses may be wanted, as they might be able to identify a photograph of your husband. We must find out from Mr. Varney what he did in the matter."

Margaret looked at Dr. Thorndyke with a slightly puzzled expression. "You speak of witnesses and evidence," said she, "as if you had something definite in your mind. Some legal proceedings, I mean."

"I have," he replied. "If your husband makes no sign and if he does not presently appear, certain legal proceedings will become inevitable." He paused for a few moments and then continued:

"You must understand, Mrs. Purcell, that when a man of any position—and especially a married man—disappears from 'his usual places of resort,' as the phrase goes, he upsets all the social adjustments that connect him with his surroundings, and, sooner or later, those adjustments have to be made good. If he disappears completely, it becomes uncertain whether

he is alive or dead, and this uncertainty communicates itself to his property and to his dependents and relatives. If he is alive, his property is vested in himself; if he is dead, it is vested in his executors or in his heirs or next of kin. Should he be named as a beneficiary in a will, and the person who has made that will die after his disappearance, the question immediately arises whether he was dead or alive at the time of the testator's death—a vitally important question, since it affects not only himself and his heirs, but also the other persons who benefit under the will. And then there is the status of the wife, if the missing man is married: the question whether she is a married woman or a widow has, in justice to her, to be settled if and when possible. So you see that the disappearance of a man like your husband sets going a process that generates all sorts of legal problems. You cannot simply write him off and treat him as non-existent. His life must be properly wound up so that his estate may be disposed of, and this will involve the necessity of presuming his death; and presumption of death may raise difficult questions of survivorship, although these may arise at any moment."

"What is meant by a question of survivorship?" Margaret asked.

"It is a question which arises in respect of two persons, both of whom are dead and concerning one or both of whom the exact date of death is unknown. One of them must have died before the other, unless they both died at the same instant. The question is, Which survived the other? Which of them died first? It is a question on which may turn the succession to an estate, a title, or even a kingdom."

"Well," said Margaret, "it is not likely to arise in respect of Dan."

"On the contrary," Thorndyke dissented, "it may arise to-morrow. If some person who has left him a legacy should die to-day, that person's will could not be administered until it had been decided whether your husband was or was not alive at the time the testator died; that is, whether or not he survived the testator. But, as matters stand, we can give no answer to that question. We can prove that he was alive at half-past two on the 2 of June. Thenceforward we have no knowledge of him."

"Excepting what Mr. Varney has told us."

"Mr. Varney's information is legally worthless unless he can produce the witnesses, and unless they can identify a photograph or otherwise prove that the man whom they saw was actually Mr. Purcell. You must ask Mr. Varney about it. However, at the moment you are more concerned to find out what has become of your husband. I suppose I may ask a few necessary questions?"

"Oh, certainly," she replied. "Pray don't have any scruples of delicacy. Ask anything you want to know."

"Thank you, Mrs. Purcell," said Thorndyke. "And to begin with the inevitable question, Do you know of, or suspect, any kind of entanglement with any woman?"

The direct, straightforward question came rather as a relief to Margaret, and she answered without embarrassment:

"Naturally, I suspect, because I can think of no other reason for his leaving me in this way. But to be honest, I have never had the slightest grounds of complaint in regard to his behaviour with other women. He married me because he fell in love with me, and he has never seemed to change. Whatever he has been to other people, to me he has always appeared, in his rough, taciturn way, as devoted as his nature allowed him to be. This affair is an utter surprise to me."

Thorndyke made no comment on this, but, following the hint that Margaret had dropped, asked:

"As to his character in general, what sort of a man is he? Is he popular, for instance?"

"No," replied Margaret, "he is not very much liked—in fact, with the exception of Mr. Varney he has no really intimate friends, and I have often wondered how poor Mr. Varney put up with the way he treated him. The truth is that Dan is rather a bully; he is strong, big, and pugnacious, and used to having his own way and somewhat brutal, at times, in his manner of getting it. He is a very self-contained, taciturn, rather secretive man, and—well, perhaps he is not very scrupulous. I am not painting a very flattering picture, I am afraid."

"It sounds like a good portrait, though," said Thorndyke. "When you say that he is not very scrupulous, are you referring to his business transactions?"

"Well, yes, and to his dealings with people generally."

"By the way," asked Thorndyke, "what is his occupation?"

Margaret uttered a little apologetic laugh. "It sounds absurd, but I really don't quite know what his business is. He is so very uncommunicative. I have always understood that he is a financier, whatever that may be. I believe he negotiates loans and buys and sells stocks and shares, but he is not on the Stock Exchange. He has an office in Coleman Street, in the premises of a firm of outside brokers, and he keeps a clerk, a man named Levy. It seems to be quite a small establishment, though it appears to yield a fair income. That is all I can tell you, but I dare say Mr. Levy could give you other particulars if you wanted them."

"I will make a note of the address, at any rate," said Thorndyke; and having done so, he asked:

"As to your husband's banking account: do you happen to know if any considerable sum has been drawn out quite lately, or if any cheques have been presented since he disappeared?"

"His current account is intact," she replied. "I have an account at the same bank, and I saw the manager a couple of days

ago. Of course, he was not very expansive, but he did tell me that no unusual amounts had been withdrawn, and that no cheque has been presented since the 21st of June, when Dan drew a cheque for me. It is really rather odd, especially as the balance is somewhat above the average. Don't you think so?"

"I do," he answered. "It suggests that your husband's disappearance was unpremeditated, and that extreme precautions are being taken to conceal his present whereabouts. But the mystery is what he is living on if he took no considerable sum with him and has drawn no cheques since. However, we had better finish with the general questions. You don't appear to know much about your husband's present affairs: what do you know of his past?"

"Not a great deal, and I can think of nothing that throws any light on his extraordinary conduct in taking himself off as he has done. I met him at Maidstone about six years ago. He was then employed in the office of a large paper mill—Whichboy's mill, I think it was—as a clerk or accountant. He had then recently come down from Cambridge, and seemed in rather low water. After a time, he left Whichboy's and went to London, and very shortly his circumstances began to improve in a remarkable way. It was then that he began his present business, which I know included the making of loans, because he lent my father money—in fact, it was through these transactions and his visits on business to my father that the intimacy grew which resulted finally in our marriage. He then seemed, as he always has, to be a keen business man, very attentive to the main chance, not at all sentimental in his dealings, and, as I have said, not over-scrupulous as to his methods."

Thorndyke nodded gravely but made no comment. The association of loans to the father with marriage with an evidently not infatuated daughter seemed to throw a sufficiently suggestive light on Daniel Purcell's methods.

"And as to his personal habits and tastes?" he asked.

"He has always been reasonably temperate, though he likes good living and has a robust appetite; and he really has no vices beyond a rather unpleasant temper and excessive keenness on money. His principal interest is in boating, yachting, and fishing; he does not bet or gamble, and his relations with women have always seemed to be perfectly correct."

"You spoke of his exceptional intimacy with Mr. Varney. Is the friendship of long standing?"

"Yes, quite. They were schoolfellows, they were at Cambridge together, and they both came down about the same time and for a similar reason. Both their fathers got suddenly into financial difficulties. Dan's father was a stockbroker, and he failed suddenly, either through some unlucky speculations or through the default of a client. Mr. Varney's father was a clergyman, and he, too, lost all his money, and at about the same time. I have always suspected that there was some connection between the two failures, but I have never heard that there actually was. Dan is as close as an oyster, and, of course, Mr. Varney has never referred to the affair."

"Mr. Varney is not associated with your husband in business?"

"No. He is an artist, principally an etcher, and a very clever one, too. I think he is doing quite well now, but he had a hard struggle when he first came down from Cambridge. For a couple of years he worked for an engraver doing ordinary copperplate work for the trade, and I understand that he is remarkably skilful at engraving. But now he does nothing but etchings and mezzotints."

"Then his activities are entirely concerned with art?"

"I believe so—now, at any rate. After he left the engraver he went to a merchant in the City as a clerk. But he was only there quite a short time, and I fancy he left on account of some sort of unpleasantness, but I know nothing about it. After that he went abroad and travelled about for a time, making sketches and drawings of the towns to do his etchings from—in fact, he only came back from Belgium a couple of months ago. But I am afraid I am wasting your time with a lot of irrelevant gossip."

"It is my fault if you are," said Thorndyke, "since I put the questions. But the fact is that nothing is irrelevant. Your husband has vanished into space in a perfectly unaccountable manner, and we have to find, if we can, something in his known circumstances which may give us a clue to the motive and the manner of his disappearance and his probable whereabouts at present. Has he any favourite haunts abroad or at home?"

"He is very partial to the Eastern Counties, especially the Broads and rivers of Norfolk. You remember he was on his way to Oulton Broad when he disappeared?"

"Yes; and one must admit that the waterways of Norfolk and Suffolk, with all their endless communications, would form an admirable hiding-place. In a small yacht or covered boat a man might lose himself in that network of rivers and lakes and lie hidden for months, creeping from end to end of the county without leaving a trace. We must bear that possibility in mind. By the way, have you brought me a copy of that very cautious letter of Mr. Penfield's?"

"I have brought the letter itself," she replied, producing it and laying it on the table.

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "I will make a copy of it and let you have the original back. And there is another question. Has the letter which Mr. Penfield ought to have received been returned to you?"

"No," replied Margaret.

"Ha!" said Thorndyke, "that is important, because it is undoubtedly a remarkable circumstance and rather significant. A letter in the wrong envelope practically always implies another letter in another wrong envelope. Now a letter was almost

certainly written to Mr. Penfield and almost certainly sent. It was presumably a business letter and of some importance. It ought certainly to have been returned to the sender, and under ordinary circumstances would have been. Why has it not been returned? The person to whom it was sent was the person to whom the mysterious communication that Mr. Penfield received was addressed. That communication, we judge from Mr. Penfield's letter, contained some highly confidential matter. But that implies some person who was in highly confidential relations with your husband. The suggestion seems to be that your husband discovered his mistake after he had posted the letter or letters, and that he went at once to this other person and informed him of what had happened."

"Informed her," Margaret corrected.

"I must admit," said Thorndyke, "that the circumstances give colour to your inference, but we must remember that they would apply equally to a man. They certainly point to an associate of some kind. The character of that associate and the nature of the association are questions that turn on the contents of that letter that Mr. Penfield received."

"Do you think," asked Margaret, "that Mr. Penfield would be more confidential with you than he was with me?"

"I doubt it," was the reply. "If the contents of that letter were of a secret nature, he will keep them to himself; and quite right, too. But I shall give him a trial all the same, and you had better let him know that you have consulted me."

This brought the conference to an end, and shortly afterwards Margaret went on her way, now more than ever convinced that the inevitable woman was at the bottom of the mystery. For some time after she had gone Thorndyke sat with his notes before him, wrapped in profound thought and deeply interested in the problem that he was called upon to solve. He did not share Margaret's suspicions, though he had not strongly contested them. To his experienced eye, the whole group of circumstances, with certain points which he had not thought fit to enlarge on, suggested something more sinister than a mere elopement.

There was Purcell's behaviour, for instance. It had all the appearances of an unpremeditated flight. No preparations seemed to have been made, no attempt to wind up his affairs. His banking account was left intact, though no one but he could touch it during his lifetime. He had left or sent no letter of farewell, explanation, or apology to his wife; and now that he was gone, he was maintaining a secrecy as to his whereabouts so profound that, apparently, he did not even dare to draw a cheque.

But even more significant was the conduct of Mr. Penfield. Taking from its envelope the mysterious letter that had come to Sennen and exploded the mine, Thorndyke spread it out and slowly read it though; and his interpretation of it now was the same as on the occasion when he heard Margaret's epitome of it at Sennen. It was a message to Purcell through his wife, telling him that something which had been discovered was not going to be divulged. What could that something be? The answer, in general terms, seemed to be given by Penfield's subsequent conduct. He had been absolutely uncommunicative to Margaret. Yet Margaret, as the missing man's wife, was a proper person to receive any information that could be given. Apparently, then, the information that Penfield possessed was of a kind that could not be imparted to anyone. Even its very nature could not be hinted at.

Now what kind of information could that be? The obvious inference was that the letter which had come to Penfield contained incriminating matter. That would explain everything. For if Penfield had thus stumbled on evidence of a crime, either committed or contemplated, he would have to choose between denouncing the criminal or keeping the matter to himself. But he was not entitled to keep it to himself; for, other considerations apart, this was not properly a client's secret. It had not been communicated to him: he had discovered it by accident. He was therefore not bound to secrecy, and he could not, consequently, claim a lawyer's privilege. In short, if he had discovered a crime and chose to suppress his discovery, he was, in effect, an accessory, before or after the fact, as the case might be; and he would necessarily keep the secret because he would not dare to divulge it.

This view was strongly supported by Purcell's conduct. The disappearance of the latter coincided exactly with the delivery of the mysterious letter to Penfield. The inference was that Purcell, having discovered his fatal mistake, and assuming that Penfield would immediately denounce him to the police, had fled instantly and was now in hiding. Purcell's and Penfield's conduct were both in complete agreement with this theory.

But there was a further consideration. If the contents of that letter were incriminating, they incriminated someone besides Purcell. The person for whom the letter was intended must have been a party to any unlawful proceedings referred to in it. He—or she—must, in fact, have been a confederate. Now, who could that confederate be? Someone, apparently, who was unknown to Margaret, unless it might be the somewhat shadowy Mr. Levy. And that raised yet a further question: What was Purcell? How did he get his living? His wife evidently did not know, which was a striking and rather suspicious fact. He had been described as a financier. But that meant nothing. The word "financier" covered a multitude of sins; the question was, What sins did it cover in the present instance? And the answer to that question seemed to involve a visit of exploration to Coleman Street.

As Thorndyke collected his notes to form the nucleus of a dossier of the Purcell Case, he foresaw that his investigations might well unearth some very unlovely skeletons. But that was no fault of his, nor need the disclosures be unnecessarily paraded. But Margaret Purcell's position must be secured and made regular. Her missing husband must either be found and brought back, or he must be written off and disposed of in a proper and legal fashion.

---

## V. — IN WHICH THORNDYKE MAKES A FEW INQUIRIES

IF Mr. Penfield had been reluctant to arrange an interview with Margaret Purcell, he was yet more unwilling to accept one with Dr. John Thorndyke. It is true that, as a lawyer of the old school, he regarded Thorndyke with a certain indulgent contempt, as a dabbler in law, an amateur, a mere doctor masquerading as a lawyer. But coupled with this contempt was an unacknowledged fear. For it was not unknown to him that this medico-legal hermaphrodite had strange and disconcerting methods; that he had a habit of driving his chariot through well-established legal conventions, and of using his eyes and ears in a fashion not recognized by orthodox legal precedents.

Accordingly, when he received a note from Thorndyke announcing the intention of the writer to call on him, he would have liked to decline the encounter. A less courageous man would have absented himself. But Mr. Penfield was a sportsman to the backbone, and having got himself into difficulties by that very quality, elected to "face the music" like a man; and so it happened that when Thorndyke arrived in the clerks' office, he was informed that Mr. Penfield was at liberty, and was duly announced and ushered into the sanctum.

The old solicitor received him with a sort of stiff cordiality, helped himself to a pinch of snuff, and awaited the opening of the offensive.

"You have heard from Mrs. Purcell, I presume," said Thorndyke.

"Yes. I understand that you are commissioned by her to ascertain the whereabouts of her husband—a very desirable thing to do, and I wish you every success."

"I am sure you do," said Thorndyke, "and it is with that conviction that I have called on you to enable you to give effect to your good wishes."

Mr. Penfield paused, with his snuff-box open and an infinitesimal particle between his finger and thumb, to steal a quick glance at Thorndyke.

"In what way?" he asked.

"You received a certain communication, concerning which you wrote to Mrs. Purcell at—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Penfield, "but I received no communication. A communication was no doubt dispatched by Mr. Purcell, but it never reached me."

"I am referring to a letter which did reach you—a letter with certain enclosures, apparently put into the wrong envelope."

"And which," said Penfield, "is consequently no concern of mine, or, if you will pardon my saying so, of yours."

"Of that," said Thorndyke, "you are doubtless a better judge than I am, since you have read the letter and I have not. But I am instructed to investigate the disappearance of Mr. Purcell, and as this letter appears to be connected with this disappearance, it naturally becomes an object of interest to me."

"Why do you assume that it is connected with the disappearance?" Penfield demanded.

"Because of the striking coincidence of the time of its arrival and the time of the disappearance," replied Thorndyke.

"That seems a very insufficient reason," said Penfield.

"Not, I think," rejoined Thorndyke, "if taken in conjunction with the terms of your own letter to Mrs. Purcell. But do I understand you to say that there was no connection?"

"I did not say that. What I say is that I have inadvertently seen a letter which was not addressed to me and which I was not intended to see. You will agree with me that it would be entirely inadmissible for me to divulge or discuss its contents."

"I am not sure that I do agree with you, seeing that the writer of the letter is the husband of our client and the consignee is a person unknown to us both. But you will naturally act on your own convictions. Would it be admissible for you to indicate the nature of the enclosures?"

"It would be entirely inadmissible," replied Mr. Penfield.

There was a short silence, during which Mr. Penfield refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff and Thorndyke rapidly turned over the situation. Obviously, the old solicitor did not intend to give any information whatever, possibly for very good reasons. At any rate, his decision had to be accepted and this Thorndyke proceeded to acknowledge.

"Well, Mr. Penfield," he said, "I mustn't urge you to act against your professional conscience. I am sure you would help me if you could. By the way, I assume that there would be no objection to my inspecting the envelope in which that letter was contained?"

"The envelope!" exclaimed Penfield, considerably startled. "Why, what information could you possibly gather from the envelope?"

"That is impossible to say until I have seen it," was the reply.

"However," said Penfield, "I am afraid that the same objection applies, sorry as I am to refuse."

"But," persisted Thorndyke, "why should you refuse? The letter, as you say, was not addressed to you, but the envelope was. It is your own envelope, and is entirely at your disposal."

Mr. Penfield was cornered, and he had the wisdom to recognize the fact. Reluctant as he was to let Thorndyke examine even the envelope in which those incriminating blanks were enclosed, he saw that a refusal might arouse suspicion, and suspicion was what he must avoid at all costs. Nevertheless, he made a last effort to temporize.

"Was there any point on which I could enlighten you—in respect of the envelope? Can I give you any information?" he asked.

"I am afraid not," replied Thorndyke. "My experience has taught me always to examine the envelope of letters closely. By doing so one often picks up unexpected crumbs of evidence; but, naturally, one cannot tell in advance what there may be to observe."

"No," agreed Penfield. "Quite so. It is like cross-examination. Well, I am afraid you won't pick up much this time, but if you really wish to inspect the envelope, I suppose, as you say, I need not scruple to place it in your hands."

With this he rose and walked over to the safe, opened it, opened an inner drawer, and, keeping his back towards Thorndyke, took out the envelope, which he carefully emptied of its contents. Thorndyke sat motionless, not looking at the lawyer's back but listening intently. Not a sound, however, reached his ears until the iron drawer slid back into its case, when Penfield turned and, without a word, laid the empty envelope on the table before him.

For a few moments Thorndyke looked at the envelope as it lay, noting that, although empty, it retained the bulge caused by its late contents, and that those contents must have been somewhat bulky. Then he picked it up and inspected it methodically, committing his observations to memory, since written notes seemed unadvisable under the circumstances. It was an oblong, "commercial" envelope, about six inches long by three and three-quarters wide. The address was written with a pen of medium width and unusually black ink in a rather small, fluent, legible hand, with elegant capitals of a distinctly uncial type. The post-mark was that of Penzance, dated the 23rd of June, 8.30 p.m. But of more interest to Thorndyke than the date, which he already knew, was an impression which the postmark stamp had made by striking the corner of the enclosure and thus defining its position in the envelope. From this he was able to judge that the object enclosed was oblong in shape, about five inches long or a little more, and somewhat less than three inches wide, and that it consisted of some soft material, presumably folded paper, since the blow of the metal stamp had left but a blunt impression of the corner. He next examined the edge of the flap, first with the naked eye and then with his pocket lens, and finally, turning back the flap from the place where the envelope had been neatly cut open, he closely scrutinized its inner surface.

"Have you examined this envelope, Mr. Penfield?" he asked.

"Not in that exhaustive and minute manner," replied the solicitor, who had been watching the process with profound disfavour. "Why do you ask?"

"Because there appears to me a suggestion of its having been opened by moistening the flap and then reclosed. Just look at it through the glass, especially at the inside, where the gum seems to have spread more than one would expect from a single closing, and where there is a slight cockling of the paper."

He handed the envelope and the lens to Penfield, who seemed to find some difficulty in managing the latter, and after a brief inspection returned both the articles to Thorndyke.

"I have not your experience and skill," he said. "You may be right, but all the probabilities are against your suggestion. If Purcell had reopened the letter, it would surely have been to correct an error rather than to make one. And the letter certainly belonged to the enclosures."

"On the other hand," said Thorndyke, "when an envelope has been steamed or damped open, it will be laid down flap uppermost, with the addressed side hidden, and a mistake might occur in that way. However, there is probably nothing in it. That, I gather, is your opinion?"

Unfortunately it was. Very glad would Penfield have been to believe that the envelope had been opened and the blanks put in by another hand. But he had read Purcell's letter, and knew its connection with the enclosures.

"May I ask if you were expecting a letter from Purcell?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes. I had written to him, and was expecting a reply."

"And would that letter have contained enclosures of about the same size as those which were sent?"

"I have no reason to suppose that it would have contained any enclosures," Penfield replied. "None were asked for."

Thorndyke made a mental note of this reply and of the fact that Penfield did not seem to perceive its bearing, and rose to depart.

"I am sorry to have had to be so reticent," said Penfield, as they shook hands, "but I hope your visit has not been entirely unfruitful, and I speed you on your quest with hearty good wishes."

Thorndyke replied in similarly polite terms and went on his way, leaving Mr. Penfield in a state of profound relief at having got rid of him, not entirely unmingled with twinges of apprehension lest some incriminating fact should have



leaked out unnoticed by him. Meanwhile Thorndyke, as soon as he emerged into Lombard Street, halted and made a detailed memorandum in his pocket-book of the few facts that he had gleaned.

Having thus disposed of Mr. Penfield, he turned his steps in the direction of Coleman Street with the purpose of calling on Mr. Levy, not, indeed, with the expectation of extracting much information from him, but rather to ascertain, if possible, how Purcell got his living. Arrived at the number that Margaret had given him, he read through the list of occupants in the hall, but without finding among them the name of Purcell. There was, however, on the second floor a firm entitled Honeyball Brothers, who were described as "financial agents," and as this description was the only one that seemed to meet the case, he ascended the stairs and entered a small, well-furnished office bearing on its door the Honeyball superscription. The only occupant was a spectacled youth, who was busily directing envelopes.

"Is Mr. Levy in?" Thorndyke inquired.

"I'll see," was the cautious reply. "What name?"

Thorndyke gave his name, and the youth crossed to a door marked "Private," which he opened, and having passed through closed it behind him. His investigations in the sanctum resulted in the discovery that Mr. Levy was there, a fact which he announced when he reappeared, holding the door open and inviting Thorndyke to enter. The latter accordingly walked through into the private office, when the door immediately closed behind him, and a smartly dressed, middle-aged man rose from a writing-chair and received him with an outstretched hand.

"You are Mr. Levy?" inquired Thorndyke.

"I am Mr. Levy," was the answer, accompanied by an almost affectionate handshake and a smile of the most intense benevolence; "at your entire service, Dr. Thorndyke. Won't you sit down? This is the more comfortable chair and is nearer to my desk, and so more convenient for conversation. Ahem. We are always delighted to meet members of your profession, Doctor. We do business with quite a number of them, and I may say that we find them peculiarly appreciative of the delicacy with which our transactions are conducted. Ahem. Now, in what way can I have the pleasure of being of service to you?"

"The fact is," replied Thorndyke, "I have just called to make one or two inquiries."

"Quite so," interrupted Mr. Levy. "You are perfectly right. The wisdom of our ancestors, Dr. Thorndyke, expresses itself admirably in the old adage 'Look before you leap.' Don't be diffident, sir. The more inquiries you make the better we shall be pleased. Now, what is the first point?"

"Well," Thorndyke replied, "I suppose the first point to dispose of is whether I have or have not come to the right office. My business is concerned with Mr. Daniel Purcell."

"Then," said Mr. Levy, "I should say that you have come to the right office. Mr. Purcell is not here at the moment, but that is of no consequence. I am his authorized deputy. What is the nature of your business, Doctor?"

"I am acting for Mrs. Purcell, who has asked me to ascertain her husband's whereabouts, if possible."

"I see," said Levy. "Family doctor, hey? Well, I hope you'll find out where he is, because then you can tell me. But isn't Mr. Penfield looking into the matter?"

"Possibly. But Mr. Penfield is not very communicative, and it is not clear that he is taking any steps to locate Purcell. May I take it that you are willing to help us, so far as you can?"

"Certainly," replied Levy; "I'm willing enough. But if you want information you are in the same position as myself. All I know is that I haven't got his present address, but I have no doubt I shall hear from him in due course. He is away on holiday, you must remember."

"You know of no reason for supposing that he has gone away for good?"

"Lord bless you, no," replied Levy. "The first I heard of anything unusual was when old Penfield came round to ask if he had been to the office. Of course he hadn't, but I gave Penfield his address at Oulton and I wrote to Oulton myself. Then it turned out that he hadn't gone to Oulton after all. I admit that it is queer he hasn't written, seeing how methodical he usually is; but there is nothing to make a fuss about. Purcell isn't the sort of man to go off on a jaunt that would involve his dropping money; I can tell you that."

"And meanwhile his absence is not causing any embarrassment in a business sense?"

Mr. Levy rose with a somewhat foxy smile. "Do I look embarrassed?" he asked. "Try me. I should like to do a bit of business with you. No? Well, then, I will wish you good-morning and good luck; and don't worry too much about the lost sheep. He is very well able to take care of himself."

He shook hands once more with undiminished cordiality, and personally escorted Thorndyke out on to the landing.

There was one other matter that had to be looked into. Mr. Varney's rather vague report of the voyage from Falmouth to Ipswich required to be brought into the region of ascertained fact. Accordingly, from Purcell's office Thorndyke took his way to Lloyd's, where a brief investigation put him in possession of the name and address of the owner of the steamship Hedwig of Hernosand. With this in his notebook he turned homewards to the Temple with the immediate purpose of writing to the owner and the captain of the ship asking for a list of the passengers from Falmouth and of those who

disembarked at Ipswich, and further giving a description of Purcell in case he should have travelled, as was highly probable, under an assumed name.

With these particulars it would be possible at least to attempt to trace the missing man, while if it should turn out that Varney had been misinformed, the trouble and expense of a search in the wrong place would be avoided.

---

## VI. — IN WHICH MR. VARNEY PREPARES A DECEPTION

VARNEY'S domestic arrangements were of the simplest. Unlike the majority of those who engage in dishonest transactions, he was frugal, thrifty, and content with little. Of what he earned, honestly or otherwise, he saved as much as he could; and now that he was free of the parasite who had clung to him for so long and had a future to look forward to, he was more than ever encouraged to live providently well within his modest means. For residence he occupied a couple of furnished rooms in Amphil Square, Camden Town; but he spent little of his time in them, for he had a little studio in a quiet turning off the High Street, which he held on lease, and which contained his few household gods and formed his actual home. Thither he usually repaired as soon as he had breakfasted, buying a newspaper on the way and sitting in the Windsor armchair by the gas fire—alight or not, according to the season—to smoke his morning pipe and glance over the news before beginning work.

Following his usual custom, on a bright, sunny morning near the end of October, he arrived at the studio with a copy of *The Times* under his arm, and, letting himself in with his latch-key, laid the paper on the work-bench, hung up his hat, and put a match to the gas fire. Then, having drawn a chair up to the fire, he drew forth his pipe and pouch and sauntered over to the bench, where he stood, filling his pipe and gazing absently at the bench whereon the paper lay, while his thoughts travelled along a well-worn if somewhat vague track into a pleasant and tranquil future. Not for him alone was that future pleasant and tranquil. It held another figure—a sweet and gracious figure that lived in all his countless daydreams. She should be happy, too, freed, like himself, from that bloated parasite who had fastened upon her. Indeed, she was free now, if only she could be made to know it.

Again, for the thousandth time, he wondered, did she care for him? It was impossible to guess. She seemed always pleased to see him; she was warmly appreciative of his attentiveness and his efforts to help her, and her manner towards him was cordial and friendly. There was no doubt that she liked him, and what more could he ask until such time as the veil should be lifted and her freedom revealed to her? For Maggie Purcell was not only a pure-minded and innocent woman: she was the very soul of loyalty, even to the surly brute who had intruded unbidden into her life. And for this Varney loved her the more. But it left his question unanswered and unanswerable. For while her husband lived, in her belief, no thought of love for any other could be consciously admitted to that loyal heart.

He had filled his pipe, and taken a matchbox from his pocket, and was in the act of striking a match when, in an instant, his movement was arrested, and he stood, rigid and still, with the match poised in his hand and his eyes fixed on the newspaper. But no longer absently, for his wandering glance, travelling unheedingly over the printed page, had lighted by chance upon the name Purcell, printed in small capitals. For a few moments he stood with his eyes riveted on the familiar name; then he picked up the paper and read eagerly.

It was an advertisement in the "Personal" column, and read thus: "PURCELL (D.) is requested to communicate at once with Mr. J. Penfield, who has important information to impart to him in re Catford, deceased. The matter is urgent, as the will has been proved and must now be administered."

Varney read the advertisement through twice, and as he read it he smiled grimly, not, however, without a certain vague discomfort. There was nothing in the paragraph which affected him, but yet he found it, in some indefinable way, disquieting. And the more he reflected on the matter the more disturbing did it appear. Confound Purcell! The fellow was dead, and there was an end of it—at least, that was what he had intended and what he wished. But it seemed that it was not the end of it. Ever since that tragic voyage, when he had boldly cut the Gordian knot of his entanglements, Purcell had continued to reappear in one way or another, still, as ever, seeming to dominate his life. From his unknown and unsuspected grave, fathoms deep in the ocean, mysterious and disturbing influences seemed to issue, as though, even in death, his malice was still active. When would it be possible to shake him off for good?

Varney laid down the paper, and, flinging himself into the chair, set himself to consider the bearings of this new incident. How did it affect him? At the first glance it appeared not to affect him at all. Penfield would get no reply, and after one or two more trials he would have to give it up. That was all. The affair was no concern of his.

But was that all? And was it no concern of his? Reflection did not by any means confirm these assumption. Varney knew little about the law, but he realized that a will which had been proved was a thing that had to be dealt with in some conclusive manner. When Penfield failed to get into touch with Purcell, what would he do? The matter, as he had said, was urgent. Something would have to be done. Quite probably Penfield would set some inquiries on foot. He would learn from Maggie, if he did not already know, of Purcell's supposed visit to Falmouth and the mythical voyage to Ipswich. Supposing he followed up those false tracks systematically? That might lead to complications. Those inventions had been improvised rather hastily, principally for Maggie's benefit. They might not stand such investigation as a lawyer might bring to bear on them. There was the ship, for instance. It would be possible to ascertain definitely what passengers she carried from Falmouth. And when it became certain that Purcell was not one of them, at the best the inquiry would draw a blank, at the worst there might be some suspicion of a fabrication of evidence on his part. In any case, the inquiry would be brought back to Penzance.

That would not do at all. Inquiries must be kept away from Penzance. He was the only witness of that mythical landing on the pier, and hitherto no one had thought of questioning his testimony. He believed that his own arrival on the pier had been unnoticed. But who could say? A vessel entering a harbour is always an object of interest to every nautical eye that

beholds her. Who could say that some unseen watcher had not observed the yacht's arrival and noted that she was worked single-handed, and that one man only had gone ashore? It was quite possible, though he had seen no such watcher, and the risk was too great to be thought of. At all costs the inquiry must be kept away from Penzance.

How was that to be managed? The obvious way was to fabricate some sort of reply to the advertisement purporting to come from Purcell—a telegram, for instance, from France or Belgium, or even from some place in the Eastern Counties. The former was hardly possible, however. He could not afford the time or expense of a journey abroad, and, more over, his absence from England would be known, and its coincidence with the arrival of the telegram might easily be noticed. Coincidences of that kind were much better avoided.

On reflection, the telegram did not commend itself. Penfield would naturally ask himself: "Why a telegram when a letter would have been equally safe and so much more efficient?" For both would reveal, approximately, the whereabouts of the sender. No, a telegram would not answer the purpose. It would not be quite safe, for telegrams, like typewritten letters, are always open to suspicion as to their genuineness. Such suspicions may lead to inquiries at the telegraph office. On the other hand, a letter, if it could be properly managed, would have quite the contrary effect. It would be accepted as convincing evidence, not only of the existence of the writer, but of his whereabouts at the time of writing—if only it could be properly managed. But could it be?

He struck a match and lit his pipe—to little purpose, for it went out and was forgotten in the course of a minute. Could he produce a letter from Purcell—a practicable letter which would pass with out suspicion the scrutiny, not only of Penfield himself, who was familiar with Purcell's handwriting, but also of Maggie, to whom it would almost certainly be shown? It was a serious question, and he gave it very serious consideration, balancing the chances of detection against the chances of success, and especially dwelling upon the improbability of any question arising as to its authenticity.

Now, Varney was endowed in a remarkable degree with the dangerous gift of imitating handwriting; indeed, it was this gift, and its untimely exercise, that had been the cause of all his troubles. And the natural facility in this respect had been reinforced by the steadiness of hand and perfect control of line that had come from his years of practice as a copperplate engraver. In that craft his work had largely consisted of minute and accurate imitation of writing and other linear forms, and he was now capable of reproducing his "copy" with microscopic precision and fidelity. Reflecting on this, and, further, that he was in possession of Purcell's own fountain pen with its distinctive ink, he decided confidently that he could produce a letter which would not merely pass muster but would even defy critical examination, to which it was not likely to be subjected.

Having decided that the letter could be produced, the next question was that of ways and means. It would have been best for it to be sent from some place abroad, but that could not very well be managed. However, it would answer quite well if it could be sent from one of the towns or villages of East Anglia—in fact, that would perhaps be the best plan, as it would tend to confirm the Falmouth and Ipswich stories and be, in its turn, supported by them. But there was the problem of getting the letter posted. That would involve a journey down to Suffolk or Norfolk, and to this there were several objections. In the first place, he could ill spare the time, for he had a good deal of work on hand: he had an engagement with a dealer on the present evening, he had to arrange about an exhibition on the following day, and in the evening he was to dine with Maggie and Philip Rodney. None of these engagements, but especially the last, was he willing to cancel; and yet, if the letter was to be sent, there ought not to be much delay. But the most serious objection was the one that had occurred to him in relation to the telegram. His absence from town would probably be known and he might even be seen, either at his East Anglian destination or on his way thither or returning, and the coincidence of those movements with the arrival of the letter could hardly fail to be noticed. Indeed, if he were seen in the locality from whence the letter came, or going or returning, that would be a perilously striking coincidence.

What, then, was the alternative? He reflected awhile, and presently he had an idea. How would it answer if he should not post the letter at all, but simply drop it into Penfield's letter-box? There was something to be said for that. It would go to prove that Purcell must be lurking somewhere in London—not an unlikely thing in itself, for London is so large that it is hardly a locality at all, and it is admittedly one of the safest of hiding-places. But, for that matter, why not post the letter, say, in Limehouse or Ratcliff, and thus suggest a lurking-place in the squalid and nautical east? That did not seem a bad idea. But still his preferences leaned towards the Eastern Counties—somewhere in the neighbourhood of Ipswich, which would give consistency to the account of the voyage from Falmouth. It was something of a dilemma, and he turned over the alternative plans for some time without coming to any conclusion.

As he sat thus meditating, his eye roamed idly about the bare but homely studio, and presently it encountered an object that started a new and interesting train of thought. Pushed away in a corner was a small lithographic press, now mostly disused, for the little "auto-lithographs" that he used to produce had ceased to be profitable now that there was a fair demand for his etchings and mezzotints. But the press was in going order, and he was a moderately expert lithographer—quite expert enough to produce a perfectly convincing post-mark on a forged letter, especially if that post-mark were carefully indented after printing, to disguise the process by which it had been produced.

It was a brilliant idea. In his pleased excitement he started up from his chair and began rapidly to pace up and down the studio. A most admirable plan! For it not only disposed of all the difficulties but actually turned them into advantages. He would get the letter prepared; he would keep his engagement with Maggie; then, after leaving her, he would make his way to George Yard and there drop the letter into Penfield's letter-box. It would be found on the following morning, and would appear to have been posted the previous evening and delivered by the first post. He would actually be present in Maggie's

flat at the very moment when the letter was (apparently) being posted in Suffolk. A most excellent scheme!

Chuckling with satisfaction, he set himself forth with to carry it out. The means and appliances were in a cupboard that filled a recess—just a plain wall cupboard, but fitted with a Chubb lock of the highest class. Unlocking this, he cast his eye over the orderly shelves. Here, standing upright in an empty ink-bottle, was the thick-barrelled fountain pen that had once been Purcell's. Varney took out the pen in its container and stood it on the table. Next, from the back of the cupboard, he reached out an expanding letter-file, and, opening it, took from the compartment marked "P" a small bundle of letters docketed "Purcell," which he also laid on the table. They were all harmless unimportant letters (saved for that very reason), and if one should have asked why Varney had kept them, the answer, applicable to most of the other contents of the file, would have been that they had been preserved in obedience to the forger's instinct to keep a few originals in stock on the chance that they might come in handy one day.

He drew a chair up to the table and began methodically to look through the letters, underlining with a lead pencil the words that he would probably want to copy. In the third letter that he read he had an unexpected stroke of luck, for it contained a reference to Mr. Penfield, to whom some enclosed document was to be sent, and it actually gave his full name and address. This was a windfall indeed! As he circled the address with a pencil mark, Varney smiled complacently, and felt that Fortune was backing him up handsomely.

Having secured the "copy" for the handwriting, the next thing was to get the post-mark drawn and printed. The letters in the file had no envelopes, but he had in his pocket a letter that he had received that morning from an innkeeper at Tenterden, to whom he had written for particulars as to accommodation. It was probably a typical country letter, and its post-mark would serve as well as any other. He took it from his pocket, and, laying it on a small drawing board, pinned a piece of tracing paper over it and made a very careful tracing of the post-mark. Then he drew away the letter, and slipped in its place a small piece of lithographic transfer paper with a piece of black lead transfer paper over it, and went over the tracing carefully with a hard pencil. He now had a complete tracing of the post-mark on the lithographic paper, including the name "Tenterden" and the date and time, which he had included to give the dimensions and style of the lettering. But he now partially erased them, excepting the year date, and replaced them, in the same style and size, with the inscription "Woodbridge, Oct. 28, 4.30 P.M.," drawn firmly with a rather soft pencil.

He now fetched his lithographic ink and pens from the cupboard, and, with the original before him, inked in the tracing, being careful to imitate all the accidental characters of the actual post mark, such as the unequal thickness of the lines due to the uneven pressure of the marking stamp. When he had finished, he turned the envelope over and repeated the procedure with the London post mark, only here he made an exact facsimile excepting as to the date and time, which he altered to "Oct. 29, 11.20 P.M."

The next proceeding was to transfer the inked tracings to a lithographic stone. He used a smallish stone, placing the two post-marks a convenient distance apart, so that they could be printed separately. When the transfer and the subsequent "etching" processes were completed and the stone was ready for printing, he inked up and took a trial proof of the two post-marks on a sheet of paper. The result was perfectly convincing. Ridiculously so. As he held the paper in his hand and looked at those absurd post-marks, he chuckled aloud. With a little ingenuity, how easy it was to sprinkle salt on the forensic tail of the inscrutable Penfield! He was disposed to linger and picture to himself the probable proceedings of that astute gentleman when he received the letter. But there was a good deal to do yet, and he must not waste time. There was the problem of printing the Woodbridge post-mark fairly on the stamp, and then there was the addressing and writing of the letter.

The first problem he solved by tracing the outline of an envelope on the sheet that he had printed, with the post-mark in the correct place for the stamp, cutting this piece out and using it to make register marks on the stone. Then he affixed a stamp exactly to the correct spot on the envelope, inked up the stone, laid the envelope against the register marks, and passed the stone under the roller. When he picked up the envelope, the stamp bore the Woodbridge post-mark with just that slight inaccuracy of imposition that made it perfectly convincing. The London post-mark presented no difficulty, as it did not matter to half an inch where it was placed. Another ink-up and another turn of the crank-handle, and the envelope was ready for the penmanship.

Although Varney was so expert a copyist, he decided to take no unnecessary risks. Accordingly, he made a careful tracing of Penfield's name and address from the original letter and transferred this in black lead to the envelope. Then with Purcell's pen, charged with its special black ink, and with the original before him, he inked in the tracing with a free and steady hand and quickly enough to avoid any tell-tale wavering or tremor of the line. It was certainly a masterly performance, and when it was done it would have puzzled a much greater expert than Penfield to distinguish between the copy and the original.

Varney regarded it with deep satisfaction. He was about to put it aside to dry, before he should rub out the tracing marks, when it occurred to him that Purcell would almost certainly have marked it "confidential" or "personal." It was, in fact, rather desirable that this missive should be opened by Penfield himself. The fewer hands it passed through the better; and then, of course, it was not worthwhile to let any of the clerks into the secret of Purcell's disappearance. Accordingly, with the original letter still before him, he wrote at the top of the envelope, in bold and rather large characters, the word "personal." That ought to make it safe.

He put the envelope aside and began to think out the text of the letter that he was going to write. As he did so, his eyes rested gloatingly on the work that he had done, and done to such a perfect finish. It was really a masterpiece of deception.

Even a post-office sorter would have been taken in by it. He took it up and again regarded it admiringly. Then he began to consider whether "confidential" would not have been better than "personal." It was certainly most desirable that this letter should not be opened even by the chief clerk, for it would let the cat out of the bag rather completely. He held the envelope irresolutely for a full minute, turning the question over. Finally, he picked up the pen, and, laying the envelope before him, turned the full stop into an "and" and followed this with the word "confidential." There was not as much space as he would have liked, and in his anxiety to preserve the character of the handwriting while compressing the letters, the tail of the final L strayed on to the edge of the stamp, which to his critical eye looked a little untidy; but that was of no consequence—in fact, it was rather an additional realistic touch.

He now set to work upon the letter itself. It was to be but a short letter, and it took him only a few minutes to draft out the matter in pencil. Then, spreading Purcell's letter before him, he studied it word by word and letter by letter. When he had got the character of the writing well into his mind, he took a sheet of notepaper, and with a well-sharpened H pencil made a very careful copy of his draft, constantly referring to Purcell's original and even making tracings of important words and of the signature. Having compared the lightly pencilled copy with Purcell's letter and made one or two corrections, he picked up the pen and traced over the pencil writing with the sureness and steadiness that his training as an engraver made possible.

The letter being finished with a perfect facsimile of the signature, he made a final comparison of the handwriting with Purcell's, and, finding it beyond criticism, read through the letter again, speculating on Mr. Penfield's probable proceedings when he received it. The text of the letter ran thus:

"DEAR MR. PENFIELD,

*"I have just seen your advertisement in The Times, and am writing to let you know that circumstances render it impossible for me to call on you, and for the same reason I am unable to give you my present address. If there is anything connected with the Catford business that you wish me to know, perhaps you could put it briefly in another advertisement, to which I could reply if necessary. Sorry to give you this trouble.*

*"Yours sincerely,  
"DANIEL PURCELL."*

Laying down the letter, Varney once more turned to the envelope. First, with a piece of artist's soft rubber he removed the pencil marks of the tracing. Then, placing the envelope on a sheet of blotting-paper, he carefully traced over the post-marks with an agate tracing-style, following the two concentric circles of each with their enclosed letters and figures with minute accuracy and pressing somewhat firmly. The result was that each of the two post-marks was visibly indented, as if made by a sharply-struck marking stamp. It only remained to erase the pencil marks from the letter, to place it in the envelope, and close the latter; and when this was done, Varney rose and, having once more lit his pipe, began to replace the materials in the cupboard, where also he bestowed the letter for the present.

He was in the act of closing the cupboard door, when his glance fell on a small deed-box on the top shelf. He looked at it thoughtfully for a few moments, then lifted it down, placed it on the table, and unlocked it. The contents were three paper packets, each sealed with his ring-seal. He broke the seals of all three and opened the packets. Two of them contained engraved copper plates, of a twenty-pound and a five-pound note respectively. The third contained a sheaf of paper blanks. Varney took out the latter and counted them, holding each one up to the light to examine the water-mark. There were twelve of them, all five-pound notes. He laid them down and cogitated profoundly; and unconsciously his eyes turned to the etching press at the end of the bench. A few minutes' work, a smear of ink, and a turn of the press, would convert those blanks into actual notes, so good that they could be passed with perfect safety. Twelve fives—sixty pounds. It was handsome pay for half an hour's work, and five-pound notes were so easy to get rid of.

It was a severe temptation to a comparatively poor man whose ethical standards were none of the highest. Prosperous as he now thought himself with the growing demand for his etchings, sixty pounds represented the product of nearly two months' legitimate work. It was a great temptation. There were the blanks, all ready for the magic change. It seemed a pity to waste them. There were only a dozen, and there would be no more. This would really be the end of the lay. After this he could go straight and live a perfectly reputable life.

The gambler's lure, the attraction of easily won wealth, was beginning to take effect. He had actually picked up the five-pound plate, and was moving towards the bench, when something in his mind brought him suddenly to a stop. In that moment there had risen before his mental vision the sweet and gracious figure of Margaret Purcell. Instantly his feelings underwent a revulsion. That which, but a minute ago, had seemed natural and reasonable now looked unspeakably sordid and base. No compulsion now urged him on unwillingly to crime. It would be his own choice—the choice of mere greed. Was it for this that he had set her and himself free? Could he stand in her presence and cherish thoughts of honourable love with this mean crime, committed of his own free-will, on his conscience? Assuredly not. The very corpse of Purcell cried out from its dark tomb beneath the Wolf on this voluntary resumption of the chains which he had broken at the cost of murder.

Once more he turned towards the bench, but now with a different purpose. Hurriedly, as if fearful of another backsliding, he caught up a large graver and drove its point across the plate from corner to corner, ploughing up the copper in a deep score. That finished the matter. Never again could that plate be printed from. But he did not leave it at that. With

a shaving scraper he pared off the surface of the plate until the engraving on it was totally obliterated. He fetched the other plate and treated it in a similar manner. Then he flung both plates into a porcelain dish and filled it with strong nitric acid mordant. Finally, as the malodorous red fumes began to rise from the dish, he took up the sheaf of blanks and held them in the flame of the gas-stove. When the last blackened fragments had fallen to the hearth, he drew a deep breath. Now at last he was free. Really free. Free even from the peril of his own weakness.

His labours had consumed the best part of the morning, but, in any case, he was in no mood for his ordinary work. Opening the window a little wider to let the fumes escape, he took his hat from the peg and went forth, turning his steps in the direction of Regent's Park.



## VII. — THE FLASH NOTE FACTORY

To the lover of quiet and the admirer of urban comeliness, the ever-increasing noise and turmoil of London and its ever-decreasing architectural interest and charm give daily an added value to the Inns of Court, in whose peaceful precincts quiet and comeliness yet survive. And of the Inns of Court, if we except Old Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, the Temple with its cloisters, its fountain, and its ancient church, makes the strongest appeal to the affections of that almost extinct creature the Londoner; of which class the last surviving genuine specimens are to be found in its obsolete chambers, living on amidst the amenities of a bygone age.

But it was neither the quiet nor the architectural charm of the old domestic buildings that had caused Mr. Superintendent Miller, of the Criminal Investigation Department, to take the Temple on his way from Scotland Yard to Fleet Street (though it was as short a way as any); nor was it a desire to contemplate the houses attributed to Wren that made him slow down when he reached King's Bench Walk and glance hesitatingly up and down that pleasant thoroughfare—if a thoroughfare it can be called. The fact is that Mr. Miller was engaged in certain investigations, which had led him, as investigations sometimes do, into a blind alley; and it was in his mind to see if the keen vision of Dr. John Thorndyke could detect a way out. But he did not want a formal consultation. Rather, he desired to let the matter arise, as it were, by chance, and he did not quite see how to manage it.

Here, as he stood hesitating opposite Thorndyke's chambers, Providence came to his aid; for at this moment a tall figure emerged from the shadow of the covered passage from Mitre Court and came with an easy, long-legged swing down the tree-shaded footway. Instantly the Superintendent strode forward to intercept the newcomer, and the two met halfway up the Walk.

"You were not coming to see me, by any chance?" Thorndyke asked, when the preliminary greetings had been exchanged.

"No," replied Miller, "though I had half a mind to look in on you, just to pass the time of day. I am on my way to Clifford's Inn to look into a rather queer discovery that has been made there."

Here the Superintendent paused with an attentive eye on Thorndyke's face, though experience should have told him that he might as well study the expression of a wigmaker's block. As Thorndyke showed no sign of rising to the bait, he continued:

"A remarkably queer affair. Mysterious, in fact. Our people are rather stuck, so I am going to have a look round the chambers to see if I can pick up any traces."

"That is always a useful thing to do," said Thorndyke. "Rooms, like clothes, tend to take certain impressions from those who live in them. Careful inspection, eked out by some imagination, will usually yield something of interest."

"Precisely," agreed Miller. "I realized that long ago from watching your own methods. You were always rather fond of poking about in empty houses and abandoned premises. By the way," he added, forced into the open by Thorndyke's impassiveness, "I wonder if you would care to stroll up with me and have a look at these chambers?"

"Are the facts of the case available?" asked Thorndyke.

"Certainly," replied Miller, "to you—so far as they are known. If you care to walk up with me, I'll tell you about the case as we go along."

Thereupon Thorndyke (to whom the insoluble mystery and especially the untenanted chambers were as a hot scent to an eager fox-hound) turned and retraced his steps in company with the Superintendent.

"The history of the affair," the latter began, "is this: At No. 92, Clifford's Inn a man named Bromeswell had chambers on the second floor. He had been there several years, and was an excellent tenant, paying his rent and other liabilities with clock work regularity on, or immediately after, quarter day. He had never been known to be even a week in arrear with rent, gas, or anything else. But at Midsummer he failed to pay up in his usual prompt manner, and, after a fortnight had passed, a polite reminder was dropped into his letter-box. But still nothing was done beyond dropping in another reminder. Once or twice the porter went to the door of the chambers but he always found the 'oak' shut, and when he hammered on it with a stick, he got no answer.

"Well, the time ran on, and the porter began to think that things looked a bit queer, but still nothing was done. Then one day the postman brought a batch of letters, or, rather, circulars, to the lodge addressed to Bromeswell. He had tried to get them into Bromeswell's letter-box, but couldn't get them in, as the box was choke-full. Now this made it pretty clear that Bromeswell had not been in his chambers for some considerable time, unless he was dead and his body shut up in them, so the porter acquainted the treasurer with the state of affairs and consulted with him as to what was to be done. There were no means of getting into the chambers without breaking in, for the tenant had at some time fixed a new patent lock on the outer door, and the porter had no duplicate key. But the chambers couldn't be left indefinitely, especially at there was possibly a dead man inside, so the treasurer decided to send a man up a ladder to break a window and let himself in. As a matter of fact, the porter went up himself, and as soon as he got into the chambers and had a look round, he began to smell a rat.

"The appearance of the place, and especially the even coating of dust that covered everything, showed that no one had



been in those rooms for two or three months at least; but what particularly attracted the attention of the porter, who is a retired police sergeant, was a rather queer-looking set of apparatus that suggested to him the outfit of a maker of flash notes. On this he began to make some inquiries, and then it transpired that nobody knew anything about Bromeswell. Mr. Duskin, the late porter, must have known him, since he must have let him the chambers; but Duskin left the Inn some years ago, and the present porter has never met this tenant. It seems an incredible thing, but it appears to be a fact that no one even knows Bromeswell by sight."

"That does really seem incredible," said Thorndyke, "in the case of a man living in a place like Clifford's Inn."

"Ah, but he wasn't really living there. That was known, because no milk or bread was ever left there and no laundress ever called for washing. There are no resident chambers in No. 92. The porter had an idea that Bromeswell was a press artist or something of that kind, and used the premises to work in. But of course it wasn't any concern of his."

"How was the rent paid?"

"By post, in notes and cash. And the gas was paid in the same way; never by cheque. But to go on with the history: The porter's suspicions were aroused, and he communicated them to the treasurer, who agreed with him that the police ought to be informed. Accordingly, they sent us a note, and we instructed Inspector Monk, who is a first-class expert on flash notes, to go to Clifford's Inn and investigate, but to leave things undisturbed as far as possible. So Monk went to the chambers and had a look at the apparatus, and what he saw made him pretty certain that the porter was right. The apparatus was a complete paper-maker's plant in miniature, all except the moulds. There were no moulds to be seen, and until they were found it was impossible to say that the paper was not being made for some lawful purpose, though the size of the pressing plates—eighteen inches by seven—gave a pretty broad hint. However, there was an iron safe in the room, one of Wilkins' make, and Monk decided that the moulds were probably locked up in it. He also guessed what the moulds were like. You may have heard of a long series of most excellent forgeries of Bank of England notes."

"I have," said Thorndyke. "They were five-pound and twenty-pound notes, mostly passed in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Holland."

"That's the lot," said Miller, "and first-class forgeries they were; and for a very good reason. They were made with the genuine moulds. Some six years ago two moulds were lost or stolen from the works at Maidstone, where the Bank of England makes its paper. They were the moulds for five-pound and twenty-pound notes respectively, and each mould would make a sheet that would cut into two notes—a long narrow sheet sixteen and three-quarter inches by five and five thirty-seconds in the case of a five-pound note. Well, we have been on the lookout for those forgers for years, but, naturally, they were difficult to trace, for the forgeries were so good that no one could tell them from the real thing but the experts at the Bank. You see, it is the paper that the forger usually comes a cropper over. The engraving is much easier to imitate. But this paper was not only made in the proper moulds with all the proper water-marks, but it seemed to be made by a man who knew his job. So you can reckon that Monk was as keen as mustard on getting those moulds."

"And get them he did. On our authority Wilkins made him a duplicate key—as we didn't want to blow the safe open—and sure enough, as soon as he opened the door, there were the two moulds. So that's that. There is an end of those forgeries. But the question is, Who and where the devil is this fellow Bromeswell? And there is another question. This only accounts for the paper. The engraving and printing were done somewhere else and by some other artist. We should like to find out who he is. But, for the present, he is a bird in the bush. Bromeswell is our immediate quarry."

"He seems to be pretty much in the bush, too," remarked Thorndyke. "Is there no trace of him at all? What about his agreement and his references?"

"Gone," replied Miller. "When the Inn was sold most of the old papers were destroyed. They were of no use."

"It is astonishing," said Thorndyke, "that a man should have been in occupation of those chambers for years and remain completely unknown. And yet one sees how it can have happened with the change of porters. Duskin was the only link that we have with Bromeswell, and Duskin is gone. As to his not being known by sight, he probably came to the chambers only occasionally to make a batch of paper, and if there were no residents in his block, no one would be likely to notice him."

"No," Miller agreed; "Londoners are not inquisitive about their neighbours, especially in a business quarter. This is the place, and those are his rooms on the second floor."

As he paused by an ancient lamp-post near the postern gate that opens on Fetter Lane, the Superintendent indicated a small, dark entry, and then nodded at a range of dull windows at the top of the old house. Then he crossed a tiny courtyard, plunged into the dark entry, and led the way up the narrow stairs, groping with his hands along the unseen handrail, and closely followed by Thorndyke.

At the first floor they emerged for a moment into modified daylight, and then ascended another flight of dark and narrow stairs, which opened on a grimy landing, whose only ornaments were an iron dust-bin and a gas-meter, and which displayed a single iron-bound door, above which appeared in faded white lettering the inscription "Mr. Bromeswell."

The Superintendent unlocked the massive outer door, which opened with a rusty creak, revealing an inner door fitted with a knocker. This Miller pushed open, and the two men entered the outer room of the "set" of chambers, halting just inside the door to make a general survey of the room, of which the most striking feature was its bareness. And this was really a remarkable feature when the duration of the tenancy was considered. In the course of some years of occupation the mysterious tenant had accumulated no more furniture than a small kitchen table, a Windsor chair, a canvas seated camp

armchair, a military camp bedstead with a sleeping-bag, and a couple of rugs and a small iron safe.

"It is obvious," said Thorndyke, "that Bromeswell never lived here. Apparently he visited the place only at intervals, but when he came he stayed until he had finished what he had come to do. Probably he brought a supply of food, and never went out between his arrival and departure."

He strolled into the tiny kitchen, where a gas ring, a teapot, a cup and saucer, one or two plates, a tin of milk-powder, one of sugar, another of tea, and a biscuit-tin containing an unrecognizable mildewy mass, bore out his suggestion. With a glance at the loaded letter-box, he crossed the room, and, opening the door, entered what was intended to be the bedroom, but had been made into a workshop. And very complete it was, being fitted with a roomy sink and tap, a small boiler—apparently a dentist's vulcanizer—and a mixer or beater worked by a little electric motor, driven by a bichromate battery, there being no electric light in the premises. By the window was a strong bench, on which was a powerful office press, a stack of long, narrow copper plates, and a pile of pieces of felt of a similar shape but somewhat larger. Close to the bench was a trough made from a stout wooden box, lined with zinc and mounted on four legs, in which was a folded newspaper containing a number of neat coils of cow-hair cord, each coil having an eye-splice at either end, evidently to fit on the hooks which had been fixed in the walls.

"Those cords," Miller explained, as Thorndyke took them from the paper to examine them, "were used as drying lines to hang the damp sheets of paper on. They are always made of cow hair, because that is the only material that doesn't mark the paper. But I expect you know all about that. Is there anything that catches your eye in particular? You seem interested in those cords."

"I was looking at these two," said Thorndyke, holding out two cords which he had uncoiled. "This one, you see, was too long; it had been cut the wrong length, or, more probably, was the remainder of a long piece. But instead of cutting off the excess, our friend has thriftily shortened this rather expensive cord by working a sheep-shank on it. Now it isn't everyone who knows how to make a sheep-shank, and the persons who do are not usually papermakers."

"That's perfectly true, Doctor," assented Miller. "I'm one of the people who don't know how to make that particular kind of knot. What is the other point?"

"This other cord," replied Thorndyke, "which looks new, has an eye-splice at one end only, but it is, as you see, about five inches longer than the other; just about the amount that would be taken up by working the eye-splice. That looks as if Bromeswell had worked the splices himself, and if you consider the matter you will see that is probably the case. The length of these cords is roughly the width of this room. They have been cut to a particular measure, but the cord was most probably bought in a single length, as this extra long piece suggests."

"Yes," agreed Miller. "They wouldn't have been sold with the eye-splices worked on them, and, in fact, I don't see what he wanted with the eye-splices at all. A simple knotted loop would have answered the purpose quite as well."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "They were not necessary. They were a luxury, a refinement; and that emphasizes the point that they suggest, which is that Bromeswell is a man who has some technical knowledge of cordage, is probably a sailor, or in some way connected with the sea. As you say, a common knotted loop, such as a bowline knot, would have answered the purpose perfectly. But that is true of most of the cases in which a sailor uses an eye-splice. Then why does he take the trouble to work the splice? Principally for the sake of neatness of appearance, because, to an expert eye, a tied loop with its projecting end looks slovenly."

"Now this man will have had quite a lot of time on his hands. He will have had to wait about for hours while the pulp was boiling and while it was being beaten up. A sailor would very naturally spend a part of his idle time in tidying up the cordage."

The Superintendent nodded reflectively.

"Yes," he said, "I think you are right, Doctor, and it is an important point. This fellow was a fairly expert papermaker. He wasn't a mere amateur, like most of the note forgers. If he was some kind of sailor man as well, that would make him a lot easier to identify if we should get on his track. But that is just what we can't do. There is nothing to start from. He is a mere name, and pretty certainly a false name at that."

As he spoke, Miller looked about him discontentedly, running his eye over the bench and its contents. Suddenly he stepped over to the press, and, diving into the shadowed space between it and the wall, brought up his hand grasping a silver-mounted briar pipe.

"Now, Doctor," he said with a grin, handing it to Thorndyke when he had inspected it, "here is something in your line. Just run your eye over that pipe and tell me what the man is like."

Thorndyke laughed as he took the pipe in his hand. "You are thinking of the mythical anatomist and the fossil bone," said he. "I am afraid this relic will not tell us much. It is a good pipe; it must have cost half a guinea, which would have meant more if its owner had been honest. The maker's name tells us that it was bought in Cheapside, near the Bank, its weight and the marks on the mouthpiece tell us that the owner has a strong jaw and a good set of teeth; its good condition suggests a careful, orderly man, and its presence here makes it likely that the owner was Mr. Bromeswell. That isn't much, but it confirms the other appearances."

"What other appearances?" demanded Miller.

"Those of the bed, the chair, the bench, the hooks, and the trough. They all point to a big, heavy man. The bedstead is about six feet six inches long, but the heel-marks are near the foot and the pillow is right at the head. This bench and the trough have been put up for this man's use—they were apparently knocked up by himself—and they are both of a suitable height for you or me. A short man couldn't work at either. The hooks are over seven feet from the floor. The canvas seat of the chair is deeply sagged, although the woodwork looks in nearly new condition, and the canvas of the bed is in the same condition. Add this massive, hard-bitten pipe to those indications, and you have the picture of a tall, burly, powerful man. We must have a look at his pillow and rugs to see if we can pick up a stray hair or two and get an idea of his complexion. What did he make the pulp from? I don't see any traces of rags."

"He didn't use rags. He used Whatman's water-colour paper, which is a pure linen paper. Apparently he tore it up into tiny fragments and boiled it in soda lye until it was ready to go into the beater. Monk found a supply of the paper in a cupboard and some half-cooked stuff in the boiler." As he spoke, Miller unscrewed and raised the lid of the boiler, which was then seen to be half filled with a clear liquid, at the bottom of which was a mass of sodden fragments of shredded paper. From the boiler he turned to a small cupboard and opened the door. "That seems to be his stock of material," he said, indicating a large roll of thick white paper. He took out a sheet and handed it to Thorndyke, who held it up to the light and read the name "Whatman," which formed the water-mark.

"Yes," said Thorndyke, as he returned the sheet. "His method of work seems clear enough, but that is not of much interest, as you have the moulds. What we want is the man himself. You have no description of him, I suppose?"

"Not if your description of him is correct," replied Miller. "The suspected person, according to the Belgian police, is a smallish, slight, dark man. They may be on the wrong track, or there may be a confederate. There must have been a confederate, perhaps more than one. But Bromeswell only made the paper. Someone else must have done the engraving and printing. As to planting the notes, that may have been done by some other parties, or by either or both of these two artists. I should think they probably kept the game to themselves, judging by what we have seen here. This seems to be a one man show, and it looks as if even the engraver didn't know where the paper was made, or the moulds wouldn't have been left in this way. Shall we go and look for those hairs that you spoke of?"

They returned to the outer room, where they both subjected the little pillow of the camp bed to a searching scrutiny. But though they examined both sides and even took off the dusty pillow-case, not a single hair was to be found. Then they turned their attention to the rugs, which had been folded neatly and placed on the canvas—there was no mattress—unfolding them carefully and going over them inch by inch. Here, too, they seemed to have drawn a blank, for they had almost completed their examination, when the Superintendent uttered an exclamation, and delicately picked a small object from near the edge of the rug.

"This seems to be a hair, Doctor," said he, holding it up between his finger and thumb. "Looks like a moustache hair, but it's a mighty short one."

Thorndyke produced his pocket lens and a sheet of notepaper, and holding the latter while Miller cautiously dropped the hair on it, he inspected the find through his lens.

"Yes," he said, "it is a moustache hair, about half an inch long, decidedly thick, cleanly cut, and of a lightish red-brown colour. Somehow it seems to fit the other characters. A closely-cropped, bristly, sandy moustache appears to go appropriately with the stature and weight of the man and that massive pipe. There is a tendency for racial characters to go together, and the blond races run to height and weight. Well, we have a fairly complete picture of the man, unless we have made some erroneous inferences, and we seem to have finished our inspection. Have you been through the stuff in the letter-box?"

"Monk went through it, but we may as well have a look at it to make sure that he hasn't missed anything. I'll hand the things out if you will put them on the table and check them."

As Miller took out the letters in handfuls, Thorndyke received them from him and laid them out on the table. Then he and Miller examined the collection systematically.

"You see, Doctor," said the latter, "they are all circulars; not a private letter among them excepting the two notes from the treasurer about the rent. And they are quite a miscellaneous lot. None of these people knew anything about Bromeswell, apparently; they just copied the address out of the directory. Here's one from a money-lender. Bromeswell could have given him a tip or two. The earliest post-mark is the eleventh of June, so we may take it that he wasn't here after the tenth or the morning of the eleventh."

"There is a slight suggestion that he left at night," said Thorndyke, as he made a note of the date. "The place where you found the pipe would be in deep shadow by gaslight, but not by daylight. Certainly the blind was up, but he would probably have drawn it up after he had turned the gas out, as its being down during the day might attract attention."

"Yes," said Miller, "you are probably right about the time; and that reminds me that Monk found a small piece of paper under the bench—I've got it in my pocket—which seems to bear out your suggestion." He took from his pocket a bulky letter-case, from an inner recess of which he extracted a little scrap of Whatman paper. "Here it is," he said, handing it to Thorndyke. "He seems to have just jotted down the times of two trains, and, as you say, they were probably night trains."

Thorndyke looked with deep attention at the fragment, on which was written, hastily but legibly in very black ink, "8.15 and 11.15," and remarked:

"Quite a valuable find in its way. The writing is very characteristic, and so is the ink. Probably it would be more so when seen through the microscope. Magnification brings out shades of colour that are invisible to the naked eye.

"Well, Doctor," said Miller, "if you can spare the time to have a look at it through the microscope, I wish you would, and let us know if you discover anything worth noting. And perhaps you wouldn't mind taking a glance at the hair, too, to settle the colour more exactly."

He transferred the latter, which he had carefully folded in paper and put in his pocket-book, to Thorndyke, who deposited it, with the scrap of paper, in his letter-case, after pencilling on the wrapper a note of the nature and source of the object.

"And that," said the Superintendent, "seems to be the lot. We haven't done so badly, after all. If you are right—and I expect you are—we have got quite a serviceable description of the man Bromeswell. But it is a most mysterious affair. I can't imagine what the deuce can have happened. It is pretty clear that he came here about the tenth of June, and probably made a batch of paper, which we shall hear of later. But what can have happened to the man? Something out of the common, evidently. He would never have stayed away voluntarily with the certainty that the premises would be entered, his precious moulds found, and the whole thing blown upon. If he had intended to clear out he would certainly have taken the moulds with him, or at least destroyed them if he thought that the game was up. What do you think, Doctor?"

"It seems to me," replied Thorndyke, "that there are three possibilities. He may be dead, and if so he probably died suddenly, before he was able to make any arrangements; he may be in prison on some other charge; or he may have got a scare that we know nothing of and had to keep out of sight. You said that the Belgian police were taking some action."

"Yes, they have got an officer over here, by agreement with us, who is making inquiries about the man who planted the notes in Belgium. But he isn't after Bromeswell. He is looking for quite a different man, as I told you. But he doesn't pretend that he could recognize him."

"It doesn't follow that Bromeswell knows that. If the confederate has discovered that inquiries are being made, he may have given his friend a hint and the pair of them may have absconded. But that is a mere speculation. As you say, something extraordinary must have happened, and it must have been something sudden and unforeseen. And that is all that we can say at present."

By the time that this conclusion was reached, they had emerged from Clifford's Inn Passage into Fleet Street; and here they parted, the Superintendent setting a course westward and Thorndyke crossing the road to the gateway of Inner Temple Lane.



## VIII. — IN WHICH THORNDYKE TRIES OVER THE MOVES

IT was in a deeply meditative frame of mind that Thorndyke pursued his way towards his chambers after parting with the Superintendent. For the inspection which he had just made had developed points of interest other than those which he had discussed with the detective officer. To his acute mind, habituated to rapid inference, the case of the mysterious Mr. Bromeswell had inevitably presented a parallelism with that of Daniel Purcell. Bromeswell had disappeared without leaving a trace. If he had absconded, he had done so without premeditation or preparation, apparently under the compulsion of some unforeseen but imperative necessity. But that was precisely Purcell's case; and the instant the mere comparison was made, other points of agreement began to appear and multiply in the most startling manner.

The physical resemblance between Purcell and the hypothetical Bromeswell was striking but not conclusive. Both were big, heavy men; but such men are not uncommon, and the resemblance in the matter of the moustache had to be verified—or disproved. But the other points of agreement were very impressive—impressive alike by their completeness and by their number. Both men were connected with the making of paper and of the same kind—handmade paper. The banknote moulds had been stolen or lost at Maidstone about six years ago. But at that very time Purcell was at Maidstone, and was then engaged in the paper industry. Bromeswell appeared to have a sailor's knowledge and skill in respect of cordage. But Purcell was a yachtsman and had such knowledge and skill. Then the dates of the two disappearances coincided very strikingly. Bromeswell disappeared from London about the tenth of June; Purcell disappeared from Penzance on the twenty-third of June. Even in trivial circumstances there was curious agreement. For instance, it was a noticeable coincidence that Bromeswell's pipe should have been bought at a shop within a minute's walk of Purcell's office.

But there was another coincidence that Thorndyke had noted even while he was examining the premises at Clifford's Inn. Those premises were concerned exclusively with the making of the paper blanks on which the notes would later be printed. Of the engraving and printing activities there was no trace. Bromeswell was a papermaker pure and simple; but somewhere in the background there must have been a confederate, who was an engraver and a printer, to whom Bromeswell supplied the paper blanks and who engraved the plates and printed the notes. But Purcell had one intimate friend; and that friend was a skilful engraver, who was able to print from engraved plates. Moreover, the rather vague description given by the Belgian police of the man who uttered the forged notes, while it obviously could not apply to Purcell, agreed very completely with Purcell's intimate friend.

And there was yet another agreement, perhaps more striking than any. If it were assumed that Bromeswell and Purcell were one and the same person, the whole of the mystery connected with Mr. Penfield's letter was resolved. Every thing became consistent and intelligible—up to a certain point. If the mysterious "enclosures," were a batch of paper blanks with the Bank of England water-mark on them, it was easy to understand Mr. Penfield's reticence; for he had made himself an accessory to a felony, to say nothing of the offence that he was committing by having these things in his possession. It would also account completely for Purcell's sudden flight and his silence as to his whereabouts; for he would, naturally, assume that no lawyer would be such an imbecile as to accept the position of an accessory to a crime that he had no connection with. He would take it for granted that Penfield would forthwith hand the letter and the enclosures to the police.

But there were one or two difficulties. In the first place, the theory implied an incredible lack of caution on the part of Penfield, who was a lawyer of experience, and would fully appreciate the risk he was running. Then it assumed an equally amazing lack of care and caution in the case of Purcell—a carelessness quite at variance with the scrupulous caution and well-maintained secrecy of the establishment at Clifford's Inn. But the most serious discrepancy was the presence of the paper blanks in a letter. The letter into which they ought to have been put would be addressed to the confederate, and that confederate was assumed to be Varney. But why should they have been sent in a letter to Varney? On the very day on which the letter was posted, Varney and Purcell had been alone together for some hours on the yacht. The blanks could have been handed to Varney then, and naturally would have been. The discrepancy seemed to render the hypothesis untenable, or at any rate to rule out Varney as the possible confederate.

But it was impossible to dismiss the hypothesis as untenable. The agreement with the observed facts were too numerous; and as soon as the inquiry was transferred to a new field, a fresh set of agreements came into view. Very methodically Thorndyke considered the theory of the identity of Purcell with Bromeswell in connection with his interviews with Mr. Penfield and Mr. Levy.

Taking the latter first, what had it disclosed? It had shown that Purcell was a common money lender; not an incriminating fact, for the business of a money-lender is not in itself unlawful. But it is a vocation to which little credit attaches, and its practice is frequently associated with very unethical conduct. It is rather on the outside edge of lawful industry.

But what of Levy? Apparently he was not a mere employee. He appeared to be able to get on quite well without Purcell, and seemed to have the status of a partner. Was it possible that he was a partner in the other concern, too? It was not impossible. A money-lender has excellent opportunities for getting rid of good flash notes. His customers usually want notes in preference to cheques, and he could even get batches of notes from the Bank and number his forgeries to correspond, thus protecting himself in case of discovery. But even if Levy were a confederate he would not exclude Varney, for there was no reason to suppose that he was an engraver, whereas Varney was both an engraver and an old and constant associate of Purcell's. In short, Levy was not very obviously in the picture at all, and, for the time being, Thorndyke

dismissed him and passed on to the other case. Taking now the interview with Penfield, there were the facts elicited by the examination of the envelope. That envelope had contained a rather bulky mass, apparently of folded paper, about five inches long or a little more, and somewhat less than three inches wide. Thorndyke rose, and, taking from the bookshelves a manuscript book labelled "Dimensions," found in the index the entry "Banknotes" and turned to the page indicated. Here the dimensions of a five-pound note were given as eight inches and three-eighths long by five inches and five thirty-seconds wide. Folded lengthwise into three, it would thus be five inches and five thirty-seconds, or say five and an eighth long by two and three-quarters wide, if folded quite accurately, or a fraction more if folded less exactly. The enclosure in Penfield's envelope was therefore exactly the size of a small batch of notes folded into three. It did not follow that the enclosures actually were banknotes. They might have been papers of some other kind but of similar size. But the observed facts were in complete agreement with the supposition that they were banknotes, and taken in conjunction with Penfield's extraordinary secrecy and the wording of his letter to Margaret Purcell, they strongly supported that supposition.

Then there was the suggestion that the envelope had been steamed open and reclosed. It was only a suggestion, not a certainty. The appearances might be misleading. But to Thorndyke's expert eye the suggestion had been very strong. The gum had smeared upwards on the inside, which seemed impossible if the envelope had been closed once for all; and the paper showed traces of cockling, as if it had been damped. Mr. Penfield had rejected the suggestion, partly for the excellent reasons that he had given, but also, perhaps, because Purcell's flight implied that he had discovered the mistake, and that therefore the mistake was presumably his own.

But there was one important point that Penfield seemed to have overlooked. The letter that he expected to receive would (presumably) have contained no enclosures. The letter that he did receive contained a bulky enclosure which bulged the envelope. The two letters must therefore have been very different in appearance. Now, ordinarily, when two letters are put each into the envelope of the other, when once the envelopes are closed the mistake is covered up. There is nothing in their exterior to suggest that any mistake has occurred. But in the present case the error was blatantly advertised by the appearance of the closed letters. Penfield's envelope, which should have been flat, bulged with its contents. The other envelope—if there was one, as there almost certainly must have been—which should have bulged, was conspicuously flat. Of course, Penfield may have been wrong in assuming that no enclosures were to be sent to him. Both letters may have held enclosures. But taking the evidence as it was presented, it was to the effect that there were enclosures in only one of the letters. And if that were the case, the mistake appeared incredible. It became impossible to understand how Purcell could have handled the two letters and finally put them into the post without seeing that the enclosures were in the wrong envelope.

What was the significance of the point? Well, it raised the question whether Purcell could possibly have posted this letter himself; and this question involved the further question whether the envelope had been opened and reclosed. For if it had, the transposition of the contents must have taken place after the letters left Purcell's hands. Against this was the fact of Purcell's flight, which made it practically certain that he had become aware of the transposition. But it was not conclusive, and having noted the objection, Thorndyke proceeded to follow out the alternative theory. Accepting, for the moment, the hypothesis that the letter had been opened and the transposition made intentionally, certain other questions arose. First, who had the opportunity? Second, what could have been the purpose of the act? And, third, who could have had such a purpose? Thorndyke considered these questions in the same methodical fashion, taking them one by one and in the order stated.

Who had the opportunity? That depended, among other things, on the time at which the letter was posted. Penfield had stated that the letter had been posted at 8.30 p.m. If that were true, it put Varney out of the problem, for he had left Penzance some hours before that time. But it was not true. The time shown by the post-mark was not the time at which the letter was posted, but that at which it was sorted at the post office. It might have been posted at a pillar-box some hours previously. It was therefore not impossible that it might have been posted by Varney. And if it was physically possible, it at once became the most probable assumption, since there was no reasonable alternative. It was inconceivable that Purcell should have handed the letters to a stranger to post; and if he had, it was inconceivable that that stranger should have opened the letters and transposed their contents. There was, indeed, the possibility that Purcell had met a confederate at Penzance and had handed him the letters—one of which would be addressed to himself—to post, and that this confederate might have made the transposition. But this was pure speculation, without a particle of evidence to support it; whereas Varney, as an intimate friend, even if not a confederate, might conceivably have had the letters handed to him to post, though this was profoundly improbable, seeing that Purcell was going ashore and Varney was in charge of the yacht. In effect, there was no positive evidence that anybody had had the opportunity to make the transposition; but if it had not been done by Purcell, himself, then Varney appeared to be the only possible agent.

From this vague and unsatisfactory conclusion Thorndyke proceeded to the second question:

Assuming the transposition to have been made intentionally, what could have been the purpose of the act? To this question, so far as the immediate purpose was concerned, the answer was obvious enough, since only one was possible. The blanks must have been put into Mr. Penfield's envelope for the express purpose of notifying the solicitor that Purcell was a banknote forger—in short, for the purpose of exposing Purcell. This led at once to the third question: Who could have had such a purpose? But to this also the answer was obvious. The only person who could have had such a purpose would be a confederate, for no one else would have been in possession of the knowledge that would make such a purpose possible. The transposition could have been made only by someone who knew what the contents of the envelope were.

But why should any confederate have done this? The exposure of Purcell involved at least a risk of the exposure of his

confederate; and it could be assumed that if Purcell suspected that he had been betrayed, he would certainly denounce his betrayer. The object, therefore, could not have been to secure the arrest of Purcell—a conclusion that was confirmed by the fact that Purcell had become aware of the transposition, and, if he had not done it himself, must apparently have been informed in time to allow of his escaping.

But what other object could there be? Was it possible that the confederate wished to get rid of Purcell, and made this exposure with the express purpose of compelling him to disappear? That raised the question: When did Purcell become aware that the transposition had been made? And the answer was somewhat perplexing. He could not have become aware of it immediately, or he would have telegraphed to Penfield and stopped the letter; and yet he seemed to have absconded at once, before the letter could have been delivered to Penfield. He was due at Oulton the following day, and he never arrived there. He was stated to have gone from Penzance to Falmouth. That might or might not be true, but the voyage to Ipswich was evidently a myth. The answer that he had received from the owners of the *Hedwig*, enclosing a report from the captain of the ship, showed that the only passengers who embarked at Falmouth were three distressed Swedish sailors, who travelled with the ship to Malmö, and that no one went ashore at Ipswich. It followed that Varney had either been misinformed or had invented the incidents; but when it was considered that he must, if he was telling the truth, have been misinformed in the same manner on both separate occasions, it seemed more probable that the story of the voyage was a fabrication. In that case the journey to Falmouth, of which no one but Varney had heard, was probably a fabrication, too. This left Penzance as the apparent starting-point of the flight. Purcell had certainly landed at Penzance and had forthwith disappeared from view. What became of him thereafter it was impossible to guess. He seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Arrived at this point, Thorndyke's quietly reflective attitude suddenly gave place to one of intense attention. For a new and somewhat startling question had presented itself. With an expression of deep concentration he set himself to consider it.

Hitherto he had accepted Purcell's landing at Penzance as an undeniable fact, from which a secure departure could be taken. But was it an undeniable fact? The only witness of that landing was Varney, and Varney had shown himself a very unreliable witness. Apparently he had lied about the Ipswich voyage, probably, too, about the visit to Falmouth. What if the landing at Penzance were a fabrication, too? It seemed a wild suggestion, but it was a possibility; and Thorndyke proceeded carefully to develop the consequences that would follow if it were true.

Suppose that Purcell had never landed at Penzance at all. Then several circumstances hitherto incomprehensible became understandable. The fables of Purcell's appearance at Falmouth and Ipswich, which had seemed to be motiveless falsehoods, now showed a clear purpose; which was to create a certainty that Purcell had landed from the yacht as stated and to shift the search for the missing man from Penzance to Ipswich. Again, if Purcell had never landed at Penzance, the letter could not have been posted by him, and it became practically certain that it must have been posted there by Varney and the transposition made by him. And this made the transposition understandable by developing a very evident purpose. When Penfield opened the letter, and when, later, he heard of Purcell's disappearance, he would at once assume that Purcell had absconded to avoid being arrested. The purpose of the transposition, then, was to furnish a reasonable explanation of a disappearance that had already occurred.

But what had become of Purcell? If he had not landed at Penzance he certainly had not landed anywhere else, for there had not been time for the yacht to touch at any other port. Nor could it be supposed that he had trans-shipped on to another vessel during the voyage. There was no reason why he should. The letter had not been posted, and until it had been posted there was no reason for flight. The only reasonable inference from the facts, including Varney's false statements, was that something had happened during the voyage from Sennen; that Purcell had disappeared, presumably overboard; and that Varney had reasons for concealing the circumstances of his disappearance. In short, that Purcell was dead, and that Varney was responsible for his death.

It was an appalling theory. Thorndyke hardly dared even to propound it to himself. But there was no denying that it fitted the facts with the most surprising completeness. Once assume it to be true, and all the perplexing features of the case became consistent and understandable. Not only did it explain Varney's otherwise inexplicable anxiety to prove that Purcell had been seen alive at a date subsequent to that of the alleged landing at Penzance; it accounted for the facts that Purcell had taken no measures to provide himself with a stock of cash before disappearing, and that he had made no communication of any sort to his wife since his departure, though he could have done so with perfect safety. It was in perfect agreement with all the known facts and in disagreement with none. It was a complete solution of the mystery; and there was no other.

When Thorndyke reached this conclusion, he roused himself from his reverie, and, filling his pipe, took an impartial survey of the scheme of circumstantial evidence that he had been engaged in constructing. It was all very complete and consistent. There were, so far, no discrepancies or contradictions. All the evidence pointed in the one direction. The assumed actions of Varney were in complete agreement with the circumstances that were known and the others that were inferred, as well as with the assumed motives. But it was largely hypothetical, and might turn out to be entirely illusory. If only one of the assumed facts should prove to be untrue, the whole structure of inference would come tumbling down. He took out of his pocket-book the folded paper containing the single moustache hair that the Superintendent had found in the Clifford's Inn rooms. Laying it on a sheet of white paper, he once more examined it, first through his lens, then under the microscope, noting the length, thickness, and colour, and mentally visualizing the kind of moustache from which it had come. Here was an indispensable link in the chain of evidence. If Purcell had had such a moustache, that would not prove

that he and Bromeswell were one and the same person, but it would be consistent with their identity. But if Purcell had no such moustache, then it was probable—indeed, nearly certain—that he and Bromeswell were different persons. And if they were, the whole hypothetical scheme that he had been working out collapsed. Both Purcell and Varney ceased to have any connection with the forged notes, the mysterious "enclosures" could not be of the nature that he had assumed, and all the deductions from those assumed facts ceased to be valid. It was necessary without delay to test this essential link, to ascertain whether this derelict hair could have been derived from Daniel Purcell.

Enclosed with it was the slip of paper with the notes of the trains, which he had, for the moment, forgotten. He now examined it minutely, and was once more struck by the intense blackness of the ink; and he recalled that a similar intensity of blackness had been noticeable in the address on Mr. Penfield's envelope. It had appeared almost like the black of a carbon ink, but he had decided that it was not. So it was with the present specimen, but now he had the means of deciding definitely. Fetching the microscope, he laid the paper on the stage and examined it, first by reflected, then by transmitted, light. The examination made it clear that this was an iron-tannin ink of unusual concentration, with a "provisional" blue pigment, probably methyl blue. There was only one letter, P. and this he tried to compare with the P on Mr. Penfield's envelope, so far as he could remember it; but he could not get beyond a belief that there was a resemblance—a belief that would have to be tested by a specimen of Purcell's handwriting.

Having finished with the paper he returned to the hair. He decided to write to Margaret, asking for a description of her missing husband, and had just reached out to the stationery case, when an elaborate and formal tattoo on the small brass knocker of the inner door arrested him. Rising, he crossed the room and threw the door open, thereby disclosing the dorsal aspect of a small elderly gentleman. As the door opened the visitor turned about, and Thorndyke immediately, not without surprise, recognized him. It was Mr. Penfield.

---



## IX. — IN WHICH MR. PENFIELD RECEIVES A SHOCK

MR. PENFIELD greeted Thorndyke with a little stiff bow, and bestowed upon the extended hand a formal and somewhat rheumatic shake. "I must apologize," he said, as his host ushered him into the room, "for disturbing you by this visit, but I had a little matter to communicate to you, and thought it better to make that communication personally rather than by correspondence."

"You are not disturbing me at all," Thorndyke replied. "On the contrary, I expect that your visit will save me the necessity of writing a letter."

"To me?" asked Penfield.

"No; to Mrs. Purcell. I was on the point of writing to her to ask for a description of her husband. As I have never met him I thought it as well that I should get from her such details of his appearance as might be necessary for purposes of identification."

"Quite so," said Mr. Penfield. "Very desirable indeed. Well, I think I can tell you all you want to know, unless you want very minute details. And it happens that your inquiry comes rather opportunely in respect of the matter that I have to communicate. Shall we dispose of your question first?"

"If you please," replied Thorndyke. He took from a drawer a pad of ruled paper, and, uncapping his fountain pen, looked at Mr. Penfield, whom he had inducted into an easy chair. "May I offer you a cigar, Mr. Penfield?" he asked.

"I thank you," was the reply, "but I am not a smoker. Perhaps—" Here he held out his snuff-box tentatively. "No? Well, it is an obsolete vice, but I am a survivor from an obsolete age." He refreshed himself with a substantial pinch, and continued: "With regard to Purcell: his person is easy to describe and should be easy to identify. He is a big lump of a man, about six feet or a fraction over. Massive, heavy, but not fat; just elephantine. Rather slow in his movements, but strong, active, and not at all clumsy. As to his face, I would call it beefy—a full red face with thick, bright-red, crinkly ears and full lips. Eyes, pale blue; hair, yellowish or light brown, cropped short. No beard or whiskers, but a little, bristly, pale-reddish moustache, cut short like a sandy toothbrush. Expression, surly; manner, short, brusque, taciturn, and rather morose. Big, thick, purple hands that look, in spite of their size, capable, neat, and useful hands. In fact, the hands are an epitome of Purcell: a combination of massive strength and weight with remarkable bodily efficiency. How will that do for you?"

"Admirably," replied Thorndyke, inwardly some what surprised at the old solicitor's powers of observation. "It is a very distinctive picture, and quite enough for what we may call *prima facie* identification. I take it that you know him pretty well?"

"I have seen a good deal of him since his marriage, when his wife introduced him to me, and I have managed his legal business for some years. But I know very little of his private affairs. Very few people do, I imagine. I never met a less communicative man. And now, if we have done with his appearance, let us come to the question of his present whereabouts. Have you any information on the subject?"

"There is a vague report that he was seen some months ago at Ipswich. It is quite unconfirmed, and I attach no importance to it."

"It is probably correct, though," said Penfield. "I have just had a letter from him, and the post mark shows that it came from that very locality."

"There is no address on the letter, then?"

"No; and I am invited to reply by advertisement. The occasion of the letter was this: a client of mine, a Mrs. Catford, who is a relative of Mrs. Purcell's, had recently died, leaving a will of which I am the executor and residuary legatee. By the terms of that will Mrs. Purcell and her husband each benefits to the extent of a thousand pounds. Now, as Mrs. Catford's death occurred subsequently to Purcell's disappearance, it became necessary to establish his survival of the testatrix or the contrary—in order that the will might be administered. As his whereabouts were unknown, the only method that I could think of was to put an advertisement in the 'Personal' column of *The Times*, on the bare chance that he might see it, asking him to communicate with me. By a lucky chance he did see it and did communicate with me. But he gave no address, and any further communication from me will have to be by advertisement, as he suggests. That, however, is of no importance to me. His letter tells me all I want to know; that he is alive at a date subsequent to the death of the testatrix, and that the bequest in his favour can consequently take effect. I am not concerned with his exact whereabouts. That matter is in your province."

As he concluded, punctuating his conclusion with a pinch of snuff, the old lawyer looked at Thorndyke with a sly and slightly ironical smile.

Thorndyke reflected rapidly on Mr. Penfield's statement. The appearance of this letter was very remarkable, and the more so coming as it did on top of the confirmatory evidence respecting the moustache hair. It was now highly probable—almost certain—that Bromeswell and Purcell were one and the same person. But if that were so, all the probabilities went to show that Purcell must be dead. And yet here was a letter from him, not to a stranger, but to one who knew his handwriting well. It was very remarkable.

Again, the report of Purcell's voyage from Falmouth to Ipswich was certainly untrue. But if it was untrue there was no reason for supposing that Purcell had ever been at Ipswich at all. Yet here was a letter sent by Purcell from that very locality. That was very remarkable, too. Clearly, the matter called for further investigation, and that involved, in the first place, an examination of this letter that had come so mysteriously to confirm a report that was certainly untrue. He returned Mr. Penfield's smile, and then asked:

"You accept this letter, then, as evidence of survival?"

Mr. Penfield looked astonished. "But, my dear sir, what else could I do? I may be insufficiently critical, and I have not your great special knowledge of this subject, but to my untrained intelligence it would appear that the circumstance of a man's having written a letter affords good presumptive evidence that he was alive at the date when it was written. That is my own view, and I propose to administer the will in accordance with it. Do I understand that you dissent from it?"

Thorndyke smiled blandly. He was beginning rather to like Mr. Penfield.

"As you state the problem," said he, "you are probably right. At any rate, the administration of the will is your concern and not mine. As you were good enough to remark, my concern is with the person and the whereabouts of Mr. Purcell and not with his affairs. Were you proposing to allow me to inspect the envelope of this letter?"

"It was for that very purpose that I came," replied Penfield, with a smile and a twinkle of mischief in his eyes; "but I will not restrict you to the envelope this time. You shall inspect the letter as well, if a mere letter will not be superfluous when the envelope has given up its secrets."

He produced a wallet from his pocket and, opening it, took out a letter, which he gravely handed to Thorndyke. The latter took it from him, and as he glanced at the jet-black writing of the address said, "I take it that you are satisfied that the hand writing is Purcell's?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "But whose else should it be? The question does not seem to arise. However, I may assure you that it is undoubtedly Purcell's writing and also Purcell's ink, though that is less conclusive. Still, it is a peculiar ink. I have never seen any quite like it. My impression is that he prepares it himself."

As Penfield was speaking, Thorndyke examined the envelope narrowly. Presently he rose, and, taking a reading-glass from the mantelshelf, went over to the window, where, with the aid of the glass, he scrutinized the envelope inch by inch on both sides. Then, laying down the reading-glass, he took from his pocket a powerful doublet lens, through which he examined certain parts of the envelope, particularly the stamp and the London postmark. Finally, he took out the letter, opened the envelope, and carefully examined its interior, and then inspected the letter itself before unfolding it, holding it so that the light fell on it obliquely and scrutinizing each of the four corners in succession. At length he opened the letter, read it through, again examined the corners, and compared some portions of the writing with that on the envelope.

These proceedings were closely observed by Mr. Penfield, who watched them with an indulgent smile. He was better able than on the last occasion to appreciate the humour of Thorndyke's methods. There was nothing about this letter that he had need to conceal. He could afford to let the expert find out what he could this time; and Mr. Penfield, from a large and unfavourable experience of expert witnesses, suspected that the discovery would probably take the form of a mare's nest.

"Well," he said, as Thorndyke returned to his chair with the letter in his hand, "has the oracle spoken? Have we made any startling discoveries?"

"I wouldn't use the word 'discoveries,'" replied Thorndyke, "which seems to imply facts definitely ascertained, but there are certain appearances which suggest a rather startling inference."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Penfield, taking snuff with great enjoyment. "I somehow expected that they would when I decided to show you the letter. What is the inference that is suggested?"

"The inference is," replied Thorndyke, "that this letter has never been through the post."

Mr. Penfield paused with his hand uplifted, holding a minute pinch of snuff, and regarded Thorndyke in silent astonishment.

"That," he said, at length, "is certainly a startling inference, and it would be still more startling if there were any possibility that it could be true. Unfortunately, the letter bears a postmark showing that it was posted at Woodbridge, and another showing that it was sorted at the London office. But no doubt you have observed and allowed for those facts."

"The appearances," said Thorndyke, "suggest that when the post-marks were made the envelope was empty and probably unaddressed."

"But, my dear sir," protested Penfield, "that is a manifest impossibility. You must see that for yourself. How could such a thing possibly have happened?"

"That is a separate question," replied Thorndyke. "I am now dealing only with the appearances. Let me point them out to you. First, you will notice that the words 'personal and confidential' have been written at the top of the envelope. Apparently the word 'personal' was first written alone and the words 'and confidential' added as an after thought. That is suggested by the change in the writing and the increasingly condensed form of the letters towards the end, due to the want of space. But in spite of the squeezing up of the letters the tail of the final L has been forced on to the stamp, and actually touches the circle of the post-mark; and if you examine it through this lens you can see plainly that the written line is on

top of the post mark. Therefore the post-mark was already there when that word was written."

He handed the envelope and the lens to Mr. Penfield, who, after some ineffectual struggles, rejected the lens and had recourse to his spectacles.

"It has somewhat the appearance that you suggest," he said at length; "but I have not your expert eye, and therefore not your confidence. I should suppose it to be impossible to say with certainty whether one written mark was on top of or underneath another."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "then we will proceed to the next point. You will notice that both of the post-marks are deeply indented; unusually so. As a matter of fact, post-marks are usually not visibly indented at all, and it is a noticeable coincidence that this envelope should bear two different post-marks, each unusually indented."

"Still," said Penfield, "that might easily have happened. The laws of chance are not applicable to individual cases."

"Quite so," Thorndyke agreed. "But now observe another point. These post-marks are so deeply indented that, in both cases, the impression is clearly visible on the opposite side of the envelope, especially inside. That is rather remarkable, seeing that, if the letter was inside, the impression must have penetrated four thicknesses of paper."

"Still," said Penfield, "it is not impossible."

"Perhaps not," Thorndyke admitted. "But what does seem impossible is that it should have done so without leaving any trace on the letter itself. But that is what has happened. If you will examine the letter you will see that there is not a vestige of an indentation on any part of it. From which you must agree with me that the only reasonable inference is that when the indentations were made the letter was not in the envelope."

Mr. Penfield took the letter and the envelope and compared them carefully. There was no denying the obvious facts. There was the envelope with the deeply indented post-marks showing plainly on the reverse sides, and there was the letter with never a sign of any mark at all. It was certainly very odd. Mr. Penfield was a good deal puzzled and slightly annoyed. To his orthodox legal mind this prying into concrete facts and physical properties was rather distasteful. He was accustomed to sworn testimony, which might be true or might be untrue (but that was the witnesses' lookout), but which could be accepted as admitted evidence. He could not deny that the facts were apparently as Thorndyke had stated. But that unwilling admission produced no conviction. He was a lawyer, not a scientific observer.

"Yes," he agreed reluctantly, "the appearances are as you say. But they must be in some way illusory. Perhaps some difference in the properties of the paper may be the explanation. At any rate, I cannot accept your inference, for the simple reason that it predicates an impossibility. It assumes that this man, or some other, posted a blank, empty envelope, got it back, put a letter in it, addressed it, and then delivered it by hand, having travelled up from Woodbridge to do so. That would be an impossibility, unless the person were a post office official; and then, what on earth could be the object of such an insane proceeding? Have you asked yourself that question?"

As a matter of fact, Thorndyke had, and he had deduced a completely sufficient answer. But he did not feel called upon to explain this. It was not his concern to convince Mr. Penfield. That gentleman's beliefs were a matter of perfect indifference to him. He had considered it fair to draw Mr. Penfield's attention to the observed facts and even to point out the inferences that they suggested. But if Mr. Penfield chose to shut his eyes to the facts, or to reject the obvious inferences, that was his affair.

"At the moment," he replied, "I am concerned with the appearances and the immediate inferences from them. When I am sure of my facts I shall go on to consider their bearing—those questions of motive, for instance, to which you have referred. That would be premature until I have verified the facts by a more searching examination. Would it be convenient for you to leave this letter with me for a few hours, that I might examine it more completely?"

Mr. Penfield would have liked to refuse. But there was no pretext for such refusal. He therefore made a virtue of necessity, and replied graciously: "Certainly, certainly. By all means. I will just take a copy, and then you can do as you please with the original, short of destroying it. But don't, pray don't let it lead you astray."

"In what respect?"

"Well," said Mr. Penfield, taking a deprecating pinch of snuff, "it has sometimes seemed to me that the specialist has a tendency—just a tendency, mark you—to mislead himself. He looks for a certain thing, which might be there, and—well, he finds it. I cannot but remark your own unexpected successes in your search for the—ha—the unusual, shall we say. On two occasions I have shown you an envelope. On both occasions you have made most surprising discoveries, involving the strangest aberrations of conduct on the part of Purcell and others. To-day you have found unheard-of anomalies in the post-marks, from which you infer that Purcell or another has exerted immense ingenuity and overcome insuperable obstacles in order to behave like a fool. On the previous occasion you discovered that Purcell had been at the trouble of ungumming the envelope, which he had undoubtedly addressed with his own hand, for the express purpose of taking out the right contents, which were already in it, and putting in the wrong ones. Perhaps you made some other discoveries which you did not mention," Mr. Penfield added, after a slight pause; and as Thorndyke only bowed slightly, which was not very explicit, he further added: "Would it be indiscreet or impertinent to inquire whether you did, in fact, make any further discoveries? Whether, for instance, you arrived at any opinion as to the nature of the enclosures, which were, I think, the objects of your investigations?"

Thorndyke hesitated. For a moment he was disposed to take the old solicitor into his confidence. But experience had

taught him, as it teaches most of us, that when the making or withholding of confidences are alternatives, he chooses the better part who keeps his own counsel. Nevertheless, he gave Penfield a cautionary hint.

"Those enclosures," said he, "have ceased to interest me. Any opinions that I formed as to their nature had better be left unstated. I seek no verification of them. Opinions held but not disclosed commit the holder to nothing, whereas actual knowledge has its responsibilities. I do not know what those enclosures were and I do not want to know."

For some moments after Thorndyke finished speaking there was a slightly uncomfortable silence. Mr. Penfield's dry facetiousness evaporated rather suddenly, and he found himself reading a somewhat alarming significance into Thorndyke's ambiguous and even cryptic reply. "He did not know and he did not want to know." Now, Mr. Penfield did know, and would have given a good deal to be without that knowledge, for to possess the knowledge was to be an accessory. Was that what Thorndyke meant? Mr. Penfield had a dark suspicion that it was.

"Probably you are right," he said presently. "You know what opinions you formed and I do not. But there is one point that I should like to have made clear. We are both acting in Mrs. Purcell's interest, but her husband is also my client. Is there any conflict in our purposes with regard to him?"

"I think not," replied Thorndyke. "At any rate, I will say this much: that I should under no circumstances take any action that might be prejudicial to him without your concurrence, or at least without placing you in possession of all the facts. But I feel confident that no such necessity will arise. We are dealing with separate aspects of the case, but it would be foolish for us to get at cross-purposes."

"Exactly," said Mr. Penfield. "That is my own feeling. And with regard to this letter: if it should yield any further suggestions and you should consider them as being of any interest to me, perhaps you would be so good as to inform me of them."

"I will, certainly," Thorndyke replied; "and, by the way, what are you going to do? Shall you issue any further advertisement?"

"I had not intended to," said Mr. Penfield; "but perhaps it would be well to try to elicit a further reply. I might ask Purcell to send a receipt for the legacy, which I shall pay into his bank. He knows the amount, so that I need not state it."

"I think that would be advisable," said Thorndyke, "but my impression is that there will be no reply."

"Well, we shall see," said Penfield, rising and drawing on his gloves. "If an answer comes, you shall see it; and if there is no answer, I will advise you to that effect. You will agree with me that we keep our own counsel about the matters that we have discussed," and as Thorndyke assented, he added: "of course the actual receipt of the letter is no secret."

With this and a stiff handshake Mr. Penfield took his departure, cogitating profoundly as he wended his way eastward, wondering how much Thorndyke really knew about those unfortunate enclosures and how he came by his knowledge.

Meanwhile Thorndyke, as soon as he was alone, resumed his examination of the letter, calling in now the aid of more exact methods. Placing on the table a microscope specially constructed for examining documents, he laid the envelope on the stage and inspected the post-mark at the point where the tail of the L touched it. The higher magnification at once resolved any possible uncertainty. The written line was on top of the post mark beyond all doubt. But it also brought another anomaly into view. It was now evident that the indentation of the post-mark did not coincide exactly with the whole width of the printed line. The indented line was somewhat narrower. It consisted of a furrow, deepest in the middle, which followed the printed line but did not completely occupy it, and in one or two places strayed slightly outside it. On turning the envelope over and testing the other post-mark, the same peculiarity was observable. The indentation was a thing separate from the printed mark, and had been produced by a separate operation, apparently with a bluntly pointed tool, which would account for its excessive depth.

It was an important discovery in two respects. First, it confirmed the other evidence that the letter had never been posted; and, secondly, it threw some light on the means by which the postmark had been produced. What was the object of the indentation? Evidently to imitate the impression of metal types and disguise the method that had actually been used.

What was that method? It was not photography, for the marks were in printers' ink. It was not copperplate, for the engraved plate throws up a line in relief, whereas these lines were flat, like the lines of a lithograph. In fact, lithography appeared to be the only alternative; and with this view the appearances agreed completely, particularly the thick black ink, quite different from the rather fluid ink used by the post office.

From the post-marks Thorndyke now transferred his attention to the writing. He had been struck by the exact resemblance of the name "Penfield" on the envelope to the same name in the letter. Each was a perfect facsimile of the other. Placing them together, he could not see a single point of difference or variation between them. With a delicate caliper gauge he measured the two words, taking the total length, the height of each letter, and the distance between various points. In all cases the measurements were practically identical. Now such perfect repetition as this does not happen in natural writing. It is virtually diagnostic of forgery—of a forgery by means of a careful tracing from an original. And Thorndyke had no doubt that this was such a forgery.

Confirmation was soon forthcoming. An exploration with the microscope of the surfaces of the envelope and the letter showed in both a number of minute spindle-shaped fragments of rubber. Something had been rubbed out. Then, on examining the words by transmitted light powerful enough to turn the jet-black writing into a deep purple, there could be seen through the ink a broken grey line, the remains of a pencil line, which the ink had partly protected from the rubber.

Similar remains of a pencil tracing were to be seen in other parts of the letter, especially in the signature. In short, there was no possible doubt that the whole production, letter and post-marks alike, was a forgery.

The next question was, Who was the forger? But the answer to that seemed to be contained in the further question, What was the purpose of the forgery? For the evident purpose of this letter was to furnish evidence that Purcell was still alive, and as such it had been accepted by Mr. Penfield. That distinctly pointed to Varney, who had already made two false, or at least incorrect, statements, apparently with the same object. The skill with which the forgery had been executed also pointed to him, for an engraver must needs be a skilful copyist. There was only one doubtful point. Whoever had prepared this letter was a lithographer; not a mere draughtsman, but a printer as well. Now was Varney a lithographer? It was extremely probable. Many etchers and mezzotinters work also on the stone. But until it had been ascertained that he was, the authorship of the letter must be left in suspense. But assuming the letter to be Varney's work, it was evident that Mr. Penfield's visit had added materially to the body of circumstantial evidence. It had established that Purcell had worn a moustache apparently identical in character with that of the missing Bromeswell, which, taken in conjunction with all the other known facts, made it nearly a certainty that Bromeswell and Purcell were one and the same person. But that assumption had been seen to lead to the inference that Purcell was dead, and that Varney was responsible for, or implicated in, the circumstances of his death.

Then there was this letter. It was a forged letter, and its purpose was to prove that Purcell was alive. But the fact that it was necessary to forge a letter to prove that he was alive was in itself presumptive evidence that he was not alive. Subject to proof that Varney was a lithographer and therefore capable of producing this forgery, the evidence that Mr. Penfield had brought furnished striking confirmation of the hypothesis that Thorndyke had formed as to what had become of Daniel Purcell.



## X. — IN WHICH THORNDYKE SEES A NEW LIGHT

"WE shall only be three at dinner, after all," said Margaret. "Mr. Rodney will be detained somewhere, but he is coming in for a chat later in the evening."

Varney received the news without emotion. He could do without Rodney. He would not have been desolated if the other guest had been a defaulter, too. At any rate, he hoped that he would not be needlessly punctual, and thus shorten unduly the tête-à-tête with Margaret which he, Varney, had secured by exercising the privilege of an old friend to arrive considerably before his time.

"You have only met Dr. Thorndyke once before, I think?" said Margaret.

"Yes; at Sennen, you know, the day that queer letter came from Mr. Penfield, and I didn't see much of him then. I remember that I was a little mystified about him; couldn't quite make out whether he was a lawyer, a doctor, or a man of science."

"As a matter of fact, he is all three. He is what is called a medical jurist—a sort of lawyer who deals with legal cases that involve medical questions. I understand that he is a great authority on medical evidence."

"What legal cases do involve medical questions?"

"I don't know much about it," replied Margaret, "but I believe they include questions of survivor-ship and cases of presumption of death."

"Presumption of death!" repeated Varney. "What on earth does that mean?"

"I am not very clear about it myself," she replied, "but from what I am told I gather that it is a sort of legal proceeding that takes place when a person disappears permanently and there is uncertainty as to whether he or she is dead or alive. An application is made to the court for permission to presume that the person is dead, and if the court gives the permission the person is then legally presumed to be dead, and his will can be administered and his affairs wound up. That is an instance of the kind of case that Dr. Thorndyke undertakes. He must have had quite a lot of experience of persons who have disappeared, and for that reason Mr. Rodney advised me to consult him about Dan."

"Do you mean with a view to presuming his death?" asked Varney, inwardly anathematizing Dan for thus making his inevitable appearance in the conversation, but keenly interested nevertheless.

"No," replied Margaret. "I consulted him quite soon after Dan went away. What I asked him to do was to find out, if possible, what had become of him, and if he could discover his whereabouts to get into touch with him."

"Well," said Varney, "he doesn't seem to have had much luck up to the present. He hasn't been able to trace Dan, has he?"

"No," she replied—"at least, I suppose not. But we know where the lost sheep is now. Had you heard about the letter?"

"The letter?"

"Yes. From Dan. He wrote to Mr. Penfield a few days ago."

"Did he, though?" said Varney, with well-simulated surprise. "From somewhere abroad, I suppose?"

"No. The post-mark was Woodbridge—there was no address," and here Margaret briefly explained the circumstances.

"It sounds rather as if he were afloat," said Varney. "That is an ideal coast for lurking about in a smallish yacht. There is endless cover in the rivers and the creeks off the Come, the Roach, the Crouch, and the Blackwater. But it looks as if he had made more preparation for the flitting than we thought at the time. He hasn't written to you?"

Margaret shook her head. The affront was too gross for comment.

"It was beastly of him," said Varney. "He might have sent you just a line. However, Dr. Thorndyke will have something to go on now. He will know whereabouts to look for him."

"As far as I am concerned," Margaret said coldly, "the affair is finished. This insult was the last straw. I have no further interest in him, and I hope I may never see him again. But," she added earnestly, after a brief pause, "I should like to be rid of him completely. I want my freedom."

As she spoke—with unusual emphasis and energy—she looked, for a moment, straight into Varney's eyes. Then suddenly she flushed scarlet and turned her head away.

Varney was literally overwhelmed. He felt the blood rush to his head and tingle in the tips of his fingers. After one swift glance he, too, turned away his head. He did not dare to look at her. Nor, for some seconds, did he dare to trust his voice. At last it had come! In the twinkling of an eye his dim hopes, more than half distrusted, had changed into realities. For there could be no doubt. That look into his eyes, that sudden blush, what could they be but an unpremeditated, unintended confession? She wanted her freedom. That unguarded glance told him why; and then her mantling cheeks, while they rebuked the glance, but served to interpret its significance.

With an effort he regained his normal manner. His natural delicacy told him that he must not be too discerning. He must

take no cognizance of this confidence that was never intended. She must still think that her secret was locked up in her own breast, secure from every eye, even from his.

And yet what a pitiful game of cross-purposes they were playing! She wanted her freedom! And behold! she was free, and he knew it and could not tell her. What a tangle it was! And how was it ever going to be straightened out? In life, Purcell had stood between him and liberty; and now the ghost—nay, less than the ghost, the mere unsubstantial name—of Purcell stood between him and a lifelong happiness that Fortune was actually holding out to him.

It was clear that, sooner or later, the ghost of Purcell would have to be laid. But how? And here it began to dawn upon him that the ingenious letter, on which he had been congratulating himself, had been a tactical mistake. He had not known about Dr. Thorndyke, and he had never heard before of the possibility of presuming a person's death. He had been busying himself to produce convincing evidence that Purcell was alive, whereas it was possible that Thorndyke had been considering the chances of being able to presume his death. It was rather a pity, for Purcell had got to be disposed of before he could openly declare himself to Maggie; and this method of legal presumption of death appeared to be the very one that suited the conditions. He wished he had known about it before.

These reflections flashed through his mind in the silence that had followed Margaret's unguarded utterance. For the moment Varney had been too overcome to reply. And Margaret suddenly fell silent with an air of some confusion. Recovering himself, Varney now replied in a tone of conventional sympathy: "Of course you do. The bargain is off on the one side, and it is not reasonable that it should hold on the other. You don't want to be shackled for ever to a man who has gone out of your life. But I don't quite see what is to be done."

"Neither do I," said Margaret. "Perhaps the lawyers will be able to make some suggestion—and I think I hear one of them arriving."

A moment or two later the door opened and the housemaid announced "Dr. Thorndyke." Varney stood up, and as the guest was ushered in he looked with deep curiosity, not entirely unmingled with awe, at this tall, imposing man, who held in his mind so much recondite knowledge and doubtless so many strange secrets.

"I think you know Mr. Varney," said Margaret, as she shook hands, "though you hadn't much opportunity to improve his acquaintance at Sennen."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "Mr. Penfield's bombshell rather distracted our attention from the social aspects of that gathering. However, we are free from his malign influence this evening."

"I am not sure that we are," said Varney. "Mrs. Purcell tells me that he has just produced another mysterious letter."

"I shouldn't call it 'mysterious,'" said Thorndyke. "On the contrary, it resolves the mystery. We now know, approximately, where Mr. Purcell is."

"Yes, it ought to be easy to get on his track now. That, I understand, is what you have been trying to do. Do you propose to locate him more exactly?"

"I see no reason for doing so," replied Thorndyke. "His letter answers Mr. Penfield's purpose, which was to produce evidence that he is alive. But his letter does raise certain questions that will have to be considered. We shall hear what Mr. Rodney has to say on the subject. He is coming to-night, isn't he?"

"He is not coming to dinner," said Margaret, "but he is going to drop in later. There goes the gong. Shall we go into the dining-room?"

Thorndyke held the door open, and they crossed the corridor to the pleasant little room beyond. As soon as they had taken their places at the table, Margaret led off the conversation with a rather definite change of subject.

"Have you brought any of your work to show us, Mr. Varney?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied; "I have brought one or two etchings that I don't think you have seen and a couple of aquatints."

"Aquatints," said Margaret. "Isn't that a new departure?"

"No. It is only a revival. I used to do a good deal of aquatint work, but I have not done any for quite a long time until I attacked these two. I like a change of method now and again. But I always come back to etchings."

"Do you work much with the dry point?" asked Thorndyke.

"Not the pure dry point," was the reply. "Of course, I use it to do finishing work on my etchings, but that is a different thing. I have done very few dry points proper. I like the bitten line."

"I suppose," said Thorndyke, "an etcher rather looks down on lithography?"

"I don't think so," replied Varney. "I don't certainly. It is a fine process and an autograph process, like etching and mezzotint. The finished print is the artist's own work, every bit of it, as much as an oil painting."

"Doesn't the printer take some of the credit?" Thorndyke asked.

"I am assuming that the artist does his own printing. If he doesn't, I should not call him a lithographer. He is only a lithographic draughtsman. When I used to work at lithography I always did my own printing. It is more than half the fun. I have the little press still."

"Then perhaps you will revive that process, too, one day?"

"I don't think so," Varney replied. "The flat surface of a lithograph is rather unsatisfying after the rich raised lines of an etching. I shall never go back to lithography, except, perhaps, for some odd jobs;" and here a spirit of mischievous defiance impelled him to add: "I did a little lithograph only the other day, but I didn't keep it. It was a crude little thing."

Thorndyke noted the statement with a certain grim appreciation. In spite of himself, he could not but like Varney; and this playful, sporting attitude in respect of a capital crime appealed to him as a new experience. It established him and Varney as opposing players in a sort of grim and tragic game, and it confirmed him in certain opinions that he had formed as to the antecedents and motives of the crime. For as to the reality of the crime he now had no doubt. The statement that Varney had just made in all the insolence of his fancied security had set the keystone on the edifice that Thorndyke had built up. Circumstantial evidence has a cumulative quality. It advances by a sort of geometrical progression, in which each new fact multiplies the weight of all the others. The theory that Varney had made away with Purcell involved the assumption that Varney was a lithographer who was able to print. It was now established that Varney was a lithographer and that he owned a press. Thus the train of circumstantial evidence was complete.

It was a most singular situation. In the long pauses which tend to occur when good appetites coincide with a good dinner, the two men, confronting one another across the table, sat, each busy with his thoughts behind the closed shutters of his mind, each covertly observant of the other, and each the object of the other's meditations. To Varney had come once more that queer feeling of power that he had experienced at Sennen when Mr. Penfield's letter had arrived; the sense of an almost godlike superiority and omniscience. Here were these simple mortals, full of wonder, perplexity, and speculation as to the vanished Purcell. And they were all wrong. But he knew everything. And he was the motive power behind all their ineffectual movements. It was he who, by the pressure of a finger, had set this puppet-show in motion, and he had but to tweak a string in his quiet studio and they were all set dancing again. Every one of them was obedient to his touch: Maggie, Penfield, Rodney, even this strong-faced, inscrutable man whose eye he had just met—all of them were the puppets whose movements, joint or separate, were directed by his guiding hand.

Thorndyke's reflections were more complex. From time to time he glanced at Varney—he was too good an observer to need to stare—profoundly interested in his appearance. No man could look less like a murderer than this typical artist with his refined face, dreamy yet vivacious, and his suave, gentle manners. Yet that, apparently, was what he was. Moreover, he was a forger of bank notes—perhaps of other things, too, as suggested by the very expert production of this letter—and had almost certainly uttered the forged notes. That was, so to speak, the debit side of his moral account, and there was no denying that it was a pretty heavy one.

On the other hand, he was evidently making a serious effort to earn an honest living. His steady industry was clear proof of that. It was totally unlike a genuine criminal to work hard and with enthusiasm for a modest income. Yet that was what he was evidently, doing. It was a very singular contradiction. His present mode of life, which was evidently adapted to his temperament, seemed totally irreconcilable with his lurid past. There seemed to be two Varneys: the criminal Varney, practising felonies and not stopping short of murder, and the industrious, artistic Varney, absorbed in his art and content with the modest returns that it yielded.

Which of them was the real Varney? As he debated this question, Thorndyke turned to the consideration of the other partner in the criminal firm. And this seemed to throw an appreciable light on the question. Purcell had clearly been the senior partner. The initiative must have been his. The starting-point of the banknote adventure must have been the theft of the note-moulds at Maidstone. That had been Purcell's exploit, probably a lucky chance of which he had taken instant advantage. But the moulds were of no use to him without an engraver, so he had enlisted Varney's help. Now, to what extent had that help been willingly given?

It was, of course, impossible to say. But it was possible to form a reasonable opinion by considering the characters of the two men. On the one hand, Varney, a gentle, amiable, probably pliable man. On the other, Purcell, a strong, masterful bully, brutal, selfish, unscrupulous, ready to trample ruthlessly on any rights or interests that conflicted with his own desires. That was, in effect, the picture of him that his wife had painted—the wife whom he had married, apparently against her inclination, by putting pressure on her father, who was his debtor. Purcell was a money-lender, a usurer; and even at that a hard case, as Mr. Levy's observations seemed to hint. Now, a usurer has certain affinities with a blackmailer. Their methods are somewhat similar. Both tend to fasten on their victim and bleed him continuously. Both act by getting a hold on the victim and putting on the screw when necessary, and both are characterized by a remorseless egoism.

Now, Purcell was clearly of the stuff of which blackmailers are made. Was it possible that there was an element of blackmail in his relations with Varney? The appearances strongly suggested it. Here were two men jointly engaged in habitual crime. Suddenly one of them is eliminated by the act of the other, and forthwith the survivor rids himself of the means of repeating the crime and settles down to a life of lawful industry. That was what had happened. The instant Varney had got rid of Purcell he had proceeded to get rid of the paper blanks by sending them to Mr. Penfield instead of printing them and turning them into money; and by thus denouncing the firm had made it impossible, in any case, to continue the frauds. Then he had settled down to regular work in his studio. That seemed to be the course of events.

It was extremely suggestive. Purcell's disappearance coincided with the end of the criminal adventure and the beginning of a reputable mode of life. That seemed to supply the motive for the murder—if it had been a murder. It suggested that no escape from the life of crime had been possible so long as Purcell was alive, that Purcell had obtained some kind of hold on Varney which enabled him to compel the latter to continue in the criminal partnership; and that Varney had taken the only



means that were possible to rid himself of his parasite. That was what it looked like.

Of course, this was mere guesswork. No proof was possible. But it agreed with all the facts, and it made Varney's apparent dual personality understandable. The real and essential Varney appeared to be the artist, not the criminal. He appeared to be a normal man, who had committed a murder under exceptional circumstances. With the bank-note business Thorndyke was not concerned, and he had no knowledge of its circumstances. But the murder was his concern, and he set himself to consider it.

The hypothesis was that Purcell had been, in effect, a blackmailer, and that Varney had been his victim. Now, it must be admitted that Thorndyke held somewhat unconventional views on the subject of blackmail. He considered that a blackmailer acts entirely at his own risk, and that the victim (since the law can afford him but a very imperfect protection) is entitled to take any available measures for his own defence, including the elimination of the blackmailer. But if the blackmailer acts at his own risk, so does the victim who elects to make away with him. Morally, the killing of a blackmailer may be justifiable homicide, but it has no such legal status. In law self-defence means defence against bodily injury; it does not include defence against moral injury. Whoever elects to rid himself of a blackmailer by killing him accepts the risk of a conviction on a charge of murder. But that appeared to be Varney's position. He had accepted the risk. It was for him to avoid the consequences if he could. As to Thorndyke himself, though he might, like the Clerk of Arraignment at the Old Bailey, wish the offender "a good deliverance," his part was to lay bare the hidden facts. He and Varney were players on opposite sides. He would play impersonally, without malice and with a certain good will to his opponent. But he must play his own hand and leave his opponent to do the same.

These reflections passed swiftly through his mind in the intervals of a very desultory conversation. As he reached his conclusion, he once more looked up at Varney. And then he received something like a shock. At the moment no one was speaking, and Varney was sitting with his eyes somewhat furtively fixed on Margaret's downcast face. Now, to an experienced observer there is something perfectly unmistakable in the expression with which a man looks at a woman with whom he is deeply in love. And such was the expression that Thorndyke surprised on Varney's face. It was one of concentrated passion, of adoration.

Thorndyke was completely taken aback. This was an entirely new situation, calling for a considerable revision of his conclusions and also of his sympathies. An eliminated blackmailer is one thing; Uriah's wife is another and a very different one. Thorndyke was rather puzzled, for though the previous hypothesis hung fairly together, it was now weakened by the possibility that the murder had been committed merely to remove a superfluous husband. Not that it made any practical difference. He was concerned with the fact of Purcell's murder. The motives were no affair of his.

His reflections were interrupted by a question from Margaret.

"You haven't been down to Cornwall, I suppose, since you came to see us at Sennen in the summer?"

"No, I have not; but Professor D'Arcy has, and he is starting for another trip at the end of next month."

"Is he still in search of worms? It was worms that you were going to look for, wasn't it?"

"Yes, marine worms. But he is not fanatical on the subject. All marine animals are fish that come to his net."

"You are using the word 'net' in a metaphorical sense, I presume," said Varney. "Or does he actually use a net?"

"Sometimes," replied Thorndyke. "A good many specimens can be picked up by searching the shore at low tide, but the most productive work is done with the dredge. Many species are found only below low-water mark."

"Is there anything particularly interesting about marine worms?" Margaret asked. "There always seems something rather disgusting about a worm, but I suppose that is only vulgar prejudice."

"It is principally unacquaintance with worms," replied Thorndyke. "They are a highly interesting group of animals, both in regard to structure and habits. You ought to read Darwin's fascinating book on earthworms and learn what an important part they play in the fashioning of the earth's surface. But the marine worms are not only interesting, some of them are extraordinarily beautiful creatures."

"That was what Philip Rodney used to say," said Margaret, "but we didn't believe him, and he never showed us any specimens."

"I don't know that he ever got any," said Varney. "He made great preparations in the way of bottles and jars, and then he spent most of his time sailing his yacht or line-fishing from a lugger. The only tangible result of his preparations was that remarkable jury button that he fixed on Dan's oil-skin coat. You remember that button, Mrs. Purcell?"

"I remember something about a button, but I have forgotten the details. What was it?"

"Why, Dan lost the top button from his oiler and never got it replaced. One day he lent the coat to Philip to go home in the wet, and as Phil was going out line-fishing the next day and his own oilers were on the yacht, he thought he would take Dan's. So he proceeded to fix on a temporary button, and a most remarkable job he made of it. It seems that he hadn't got either a button or a needle and thread, so he extemporized. He took the cork out of one of his little collecting bottles—it was a flat cork, waterproofed with paraffin wax and it had a round label inscribed 'Marine Worms.' Well, as he hadn't a needle or thread he bored two holes through the cork with the little marlinspike in his pocket-knife, passed through them the remains of a fiddle-string that he had in his pocket, made two holes in the oilskin, threaded the catgut through them, and tied a reef-knot on the inside."

"And did it answer?" asked Margaret. "It sounds rather clumsy."

"It answered perfectly. So well that it never got changed. It was on the coat when Dan went up the ladder at Penzance, and it is probably on it still. Dan seemed quite satisfied with it."

There was a brief silence, during which Thorndyke looked down thoughtfully at his plate. Presently he asked: "Was the label over the wax or under it?"

Varney looked at him in surprise, as also did Margaret. What on earth could it matter whether the label were over or under the wax?

"The label was under the wax," the former replied. "I remember Philip mentioning the fact that the label was waterproofed as well as the cork. He made quite a point of it, though I didn't see why. Do you?"

"If he regarded the label as a decorative adjunct," replied Thorndyke, "he would naturally make a point of the impossibility of its getting washed off, which was the object of the waxing."

"I suppose he would," Varney agreed in an absent tone, and still looking curiously at Thorndyke. He had a feeling that the latter's mildly facetious reply was not quite "in key" with the very definite question. Why had that question been asked? Had Thorndyke anything in his mind? Probably not. What could he have? At any rate, it was of no consequence to him, Varney.

In which he was, perhaps, mistaken. Thorndyke had been deeply interested in the history of the button. Here was one of those queer, incalculable trivialities which so often crop up in the course of a criminal trial. By this time, no doubt, that quaint button was detached and drifting about in the sea, or lying unnoticed on some lonely beach among the high-water jetsam. The mere cork would be hardly recognizable, but if the label had been protected by the wax it would be identifiable with absolute certainty. And if ever it should be identified, its testimony would go to prove the improbability that Daniel Purcell ever went ashore at Penzance.



## XI. — IN WHICH VARNEY HAS AN INSPIRATION

THE adjournment to the drawing-room was the signal for Varney to fetch his portfolio and exhibit his little collection, which he did with a frank interest and pleasure in his works that was yet entirely free from any appearance of vanity. Thorndyke examined the proofs with a curiosity that was not wholly artistic. Varney interested him profoundly. There was about him a certain reminiscence of Benvenuto Cellini: a combination of the thoroughgoing rascal with the sincere and enthusiastic artist. But Thorndyke could not make up his mind how close the parallel was. From Cellini's grossness Varney appeared to be free; but how about the other vices? Had Varney been forced into wrongdoing by the pressure of circumstances on a weak will? Or was he a criminal by choice and temperament? That was what Thorndyke could not decide.

An artist's work may show only one side of his character, but it shows that truthfully and unmistakably. A glance through Varney's works made it clear that he was an artist of no mean talent. There was not only skill, which Thorndyke had looked for, but a vein of poetry, which he noted with appreciation and almost with regret.

"You don't seem to value your aquatints," he said, "but I find them very charming. This sea cape with the fleet of luggers half hidden in the mist, and the lighthouse peeping over the top of the fogbank, is really wonderful. You couldn't have done that with the point."

"No," Varney agreed; "every process has its powers and its limitations."

"The lighthouse, I suppose, is no lighthouse in particular?"

"Well, no; but I had the Wolf in my mind when I planned this plate. As a matter of fact, I saw a scene very like this when I was sailing round with Purcell to Penzance the day he vanished. The lighthouse looked awfully ghostly with its head out of the fog and its body invisible."

"Wasn't that the time you had to climb up the mast?" asked Margaret.

"Yes; when the jib halyard parted and the jib went overboard. It was rather a thrilling experience, for the yacht was out of control for the moment and the Wolf rock was close under our lee. Dan angled for the sail while I went aloft."

Thorndyke looked thoughtfully at the little picture, and Varney watched him with outward unconcern but with secret amusement and a sort of elfish mischief.

And again he was conscious of a sense of power, of omniscience. Here was this learned, acute lawyer and scientist looking in all innocence at the very scene on which he, Varney, had looked as he was washing the stain of Purcell's blood from the sail. Little did he dream of the event which this aquatint commemorated! For all his learning and his acuteness, he, Varney, held him in the hollow of his hand.

To Thorndyke the state of mind revealed by this picture was as surprising as it was illuminating. This was, in effect, a souvenir of that mysterious and tragic voyage. Whatever had happened on that voyage was clearly the occasion of no remorse. There was no shrinking from the memory of that day, but rather evidence that it was recalled with a certain satisfaction. In that there seemed a most singular callousness. But what did that callous indifference, or even satisfaction, suggest? A man who had made away with a friend with the express purpose of getting possession of that friend's wife would surely look back on the transaction with some discomfort; indeed, would avoid looking back on it at all. Whereas one who had secured his liberty by eliminating his oppressor could hardly be expected to feel either remorse or regrets. It looked as if the blackmail theory were the true one, after all.

"That will be Mr. Rodney," Margaret said, looking expectantly at the door.

"I didn't hear the bell," said Varney. Neither had Thorndyke heard it; but he had not been listening, whereas Margaret apparently had, which perhaps accounted for the slightly preoccupied yet attentive air that he had noticed once or twice when he had looked at her.

A few moments later John Rodney entered the room unannounced, and Margaret went forward quickly to welcome him. And for the second time that evening Thorndyke found himself looking, all unsuspected, into the secret chamber of a human heart.

As Margaret had advanced towards the door, he and Varney stood up. They were thus both behind her when Rodney entered the room. But on the wall by the door was a small mirror, and in this Thorndyke had caught an instantaneous glimpse of her face as she met Rodney. That glimpse had told him what, perhaps, she had hardly guessed herself; but the face which appeared for a moment in the mirror and was gone was a face transfigured. Not, indeed, with the expression of passionate adoration that he had seen on Varney's face. That meant passion consciously recognized and accepted. What Thorndyke saw on Margaret's face was a softening, a tender, joyful welcome such as a mother might bestow on a beloved child. It spoke of affection rather than passion. But it was unmistakable. Margaret Purcell loved John Rodney. Nor, so far as Thorndyke could judge, was the affection only on one side. Rodney, facing the room, naturally made no demonstration; but still, his greeting had in it something beyond mere cordiality.

It was an extraordinarily complex situation, and there was in it a bitter irony such as De Maupassant would have loved. Thorndyke glanced at Varney, from whom Margaret's face had been hidden, with a new interest. Here was a man who had

made away with an unwanted husband, perhaps with the sole purpose of securing the reversion of the wife; and behold! he had only created a vacancy for another man.

"This is a great pleasure, Thorndyke," said Rodney, shaking hands heartily. "Quite an interesting experience, too, to see you in evening clothes, looking almost human. I am sorry I couldn't get here to dinner. I should like to have seen you taking food like an ordinary mortal."

"You shall see him take some coffee presently," said Margaret. "But doesn't Dr. Thorndyke usually look human?"

"Well," replied Rodney, "I won't say that there isn't a certain specious resemblance to a human being. But it is illusory. He is really a sort of legal abstraction like John Doe or Richard Roe. Apart from the practice of the law there is no such person."

"That sounds to me like a libel," said Margaret.

"Yes," agreed Varney. "You've done it now, Rodney. It must be actionable to brand a man as a mere hallucination. There will be wigs on the green—barrister's wigs—when Dr. Thorndyke begins to deal out writs."

"Then I shall plead justification," said Rodney, "and I shall cite the present instance. For what do these pretences of customary raiment and food consumption amount to? They are mere camouflage, designed to cover a legal inquiry into the disappearances from his usual places of resort of one Daniel Purcell."

"Now you are only making it worse," said Margaret, "for you are implicating me. You are implying that my little dinner party is nothing more than a camouflaged legal inquisition."

"And you are implicating me, too," interposed Varney, "as an accessory before, during, and after the fact. You had better be careful, Rodney. It will be a joint action, and Dr. Thorndyke will produce scientific witnesses who will prove anything he tells them to."

"I call this intimidation," said Rodney. "The circumstances seem to call for the aid of tobacco—I see that permission has been given to smoke."

"And perhaps a cup of coffee might help," said Margaret, as the maid entered with the tray.

"Yes, that will clear my brain for the consideration of my defence. But still, I must maintain that this is essentially a legal inquisition. We have assembled primarily to consider the position which is created by this letter that Penfield has received."

"Nothing of the kind," said Margaret. "I asked you primarily that I might enjoy the pleasure of your society, and, secondly, that you might enjoy the pleasure of one another's."

"And yours."

"Thank you. But as to the letter, I don't see that there is anything to discuss. We now know where Dan is, but that doesn't seem to alter the situation."

"I don't agree with you in either respect," said Rodney. "There seems to me a good deal to discuss; and our knowledge as to Dan's whereabouts alters the situation to this extent: that we can get into touch with him if we want to—or at least Dr. Thorndyke can, I presume."

"I am not so sure of that," said Thorndyke. "But we could consider the possibility if the necessity should arise. Had you anything in your mind that would suggest such a necessity?"

"What I have in my mind," replied Rodney, "is this. Purcell has left his wife for reasons known only to himself. He has never sent a word of excuse, apology, or regret. Until this letter arrived it was possible to suppose that he might be dead, or have lost his memory, or in some other way be incapable of communicating with his friends. Now we know that he is alive, that he has all his faculties—except the faculty of behaving like a decent and responsible man—and that he has gone away and is staying away of his own free will and choice. If there was ever any question as to his coming back, there is none now; and if there could ever have been any excuse or extenuation of his conduct, there is now none. We see that although he has never sent a message of any kind to his wife, yet, when the question of a sum of money arises, he writes to his solicitor with the greatest promptitude. That letter is a gross and callous insult to his wife."

Thorndyke nodded. "That seems to be a fair statement of the position," said he. "And I gather that you consider it possible to take some action?"

"My position is this," said Rodney. "Purcell has deserted his wife. He has shaken off all his responsibilities as a husband. But he has left her with all the responsibilities and disabilities of a wife. He has taken to himself the privileges of a bachelor, but she remains a married woman. That is an intolerable position. My contention is that, since he has gone for good, the tow-rope ought to be cut. He should be set adrift finally and completely and she should be liberated."

"I agree with you entirely and emphatically," said Thorndyke. "A woman whose husband has left her should, if she wishes it, revert to the status of a spinster."

"And she does wish it," interposed Margaret.

"Naturally," said Thorndyke. "The difficulty is in respect of ways and means. Have you considered the question of procedure, Rodney?"

"It seems to me," was the reply, "that the ways and means are provided by the letter itself. I suggest that the terms of that letter and the circumstances in which it was written afford evidence of desertion, or at least good grounds of action."

"You may be right," said Thorndyke, "but I doubt if it would be accepted as evidence of an intention not to return. It seems to me that a court would require something more definite. I suppose an action for restitution, as a preliminary, would not be practicable?"

Rodney shook his head emphatically, and Margaret pronounced a most decided refusal.

"I don't want restitution," she exclaimed, "and I would not agree to it. I would not receive him back on any terms."

"He wouldn't be likely to come back," said Thorndyke, "and if he did not, his failure to comply with the order of the court would furnish definite grounds for further action."

"But he might come back, at least temporarily," objected Margaret, "if only by way of retaliation."

"Yes," agreed Rodney, "it is perfectly possible; in fact, it is rather the sort of thing that Purcell would do—come back, make himself unpleasant, and then go off again. No; I am afraid that cat won't jump."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "we are in difficulties. We want the marriage dissolved, but we haven't as much evidence as the court would require."

"Probably more evidence could be obtained," suggested Rodney, "and of a different kind. Didn't Penfield say something about an associate or companion? Well, that is where our knowledge of Purcell's whereabouts should help us. If it were possible to locate him exactly and keep him under observation, evidence of the existence of that companion might be forthcoming, and then the case would be all plain sailing."

Thorndyke had been expecting this suggestion and considering how he should deal with it. He could not undertake to search the Eastern Counties for a man who was not there, nor could he give his reasons for not undertaking that search. Until his case against Varney was complete he would make no confidences to anybody. And as he reflected he watched Varney (who had been a keenly interested listener to the discussion), wondering what he was thinking about it all, and noting idly how neatly and quickly he rolled his cigarettes and how little he was inconvenienced by his contracted finger, the third finger of his left hand.

"I think, Rodney," he said, "that you overestimate the ease with which we could locate Purcell. The Eastern Counties offer a large area in which to search for a man—who may not be there, after all. The post-mark on the letter tells us nothing of his permanent abiding-place, if he has one. Varney suggests that he may be afloat, and if he is, he will be very mobile and difficult to trace. And it would be possible for him to change his appearance—by growing a beard, for instance, to make a circulated description useless."

Rodney listened to these objections with hardly veiled impatience. He had supposed that Thorndyke's special practice involved the capacity to trace missing persons, yet as soon as a case calling for this special knowledge arose, he raised difficulties. That was always the way with these confounded experts. Now, to him—though, to be sure, it was out of his line—the thing presented no difficulties at all. To no man does a difficult thing look so easy as to one who is totally unable to do it.

Meanwhile Thorndyke continued to observe Varney, who was evidently reflecting profoundly on the impasse that had arisen. He, of course, could see the futility of Rodney's scheme. He, moreover, since he was in love with Margaret, would be at least as keen on the dissolution of this marriage as Rodney. Thorndyke, watching his eager face, began to hope that he might make some useful suggestion. Nor was he disappointed. Suddenly Varney looked up, and, addressing himself to Rodney, said:

"I've got an idea. You may think it bosh, but it is really worth considering. It is this. There is no doubt that Dan has cleared out for good, and it is rather probable that he has made some domestic arrangements of a temporary kind. You know what I mean. And he might be willing to have the chance of making them permanent, because he is not free in that respect any more than his wife is. Now what I propose is that we put in an advertisement asking him to write to his wife, or to Penfield, stating what his intentions are. It is quite possible that he might, in his own interests, send a letter that would enable you to get a divorce without any other evidence. It is really worth trying."

Rodney laughed scornfully. "You've missed your vocation, Varney," said he. "You oughtn't to be tinkering about with etchings. You ought to be in the Law. But I'm afraid the mackerel wouldn't rise to your sprat."

Thorndyke could have laughed aloud. But he did not. On the contrary, he made a show of giving earnest consideration to Varney's suggestion, and finally said:

"I am not sure that I agree with you, Rodney. It doesn't seem such a bad plan."

In this he spoke quite sincerely. But then he knew, which Rodney did not, that if the advertisement were issued there would certainly be a reply from Purcell; and, moreover, that the reply would be of precisely the kind that would be most suitable for their purpose.

"Well," said Rodney, "it seems to me rather a wild-cat scheme. You are proposing to ask Purcell to give himself away completely. If you knew him as well as I do you would know that no man could be less likely to comply. Purcell is one of the most secretive men I have ever known, and you can see for yourself that he has been pretty secret over this business."

"Still," Thorndyke persisted, "it is possible, as Varney suggests, that it might suit him to have the tow-rope cut, as you express it. What do you think, Mrs. Purcell?"

"I am afraid I agree with Mr. Rodney. Dan is as secret as an oyster, and he hasn't shown himself at all well disposed. He wouldn't make a statement for my benefit. As to the question of another woman, I have no doubt that there is one, but my feeling is that Dan would prefer to have a pretext for not marrying her."

"That is exactly my view," said Rodney. "Purcell is the sort of man who will get as much as he can and give as little in exchange."

"I don't deny that," said Varney, "but I still think that it would be worth trying. If nothing came of it we should be no worse off."

"Exactly," agreed Thorndyke. "It is quite a simple proceeding. It commits us to nothing and it is very little trouble, and if by any chance it succeeded, see how it would simplify matters. In place of a crowd of witnesses collected at immense trouble and cost you would have a letter which could be put in evidence, and which would settle the whole case in a few minutes."

Rodney shrugged his shoulders and secretly marvelled how Thorndyke had got his great reputation.

"There is no answering a determined optimist," said he. "Of course, Purcell may rise to your bait. He may even volunteer to go into the witness-box and make a full confession and offer to pay our costs. But I don't think he will."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "But it is bad practice to reject a plan because you think it probably will not succeed when it is possible and easy to give it a trial. Have you any objection to our carrying out Mr. Varney's suggestion?"

"I have no objection to your carrying it out," replied Rodney, "and I don't suppose Mrs. Purcell has, but I don't feel inclined to act on it myself."

Thorndyke looked interrogatively at Margaret. "What do you say, Mrs. Purcell?" he asked.

"I am entirely in your hands," she replied. "It is very good of you to take so much trouble, but I fear you will have your trouble for nothing."

"We shan't lose much on the transaction even then," Thorndyke rejoined, "so we will leave it that I insert the advertisement in the most alluring terms that I can devise. If anything comes of it you will hear before I shall."

This brought the discussion to an end. If Rodney had any further ideas on the subject he reserved them for the benefit of Margaret or Mr. Penfield, having reached the conclusion that Thorndyke was a pure specialist—and probably overrated at that—whose opinions and judgment on general law were not worth having. The conversation thus drifted into other channels, but with no great vivacity, for each of the four persons was occupied inwardly with the subject that had been outwardly dismissed.

Presently Varney, who had been showing signs of restlessness, began to collect his etchings in preparation for departure. Thereupon Thorndyke also rose to make his farewell.

"I have had a most enjoyable evening, Mrs. Purcell," he said, as he shook his hostess's hand. And he spoke quite sincerely. He had had an extremely enjoyable evening, and he hoped that the entertainment was even now not quite at an end. "May we hope that our plottings and schemings will not be entirely unfruitful?"

"You can hope as much as you like," said Rodney, "if hopefulness is your speciality, but if anything comes of this plan of Varney's, I shall be the most surprised man in London."

"And I hope you will give the author of the plan all the credit he deserves," said Thorndyke.

"He has got that now," Rodney replied with a grin.

"I doubt if he has," retorted Thorndyke. "But we shall see. Are we walking the same way, Varney?"

"I think so," replied Varney, who had already decided, for his own special reasons, that they were; in which he was in complete, though unconscious, agreement with Thorndyke.

"Rodney seems a bit cocksure," the former remarked, as they made their way towards the Brompton Road, "but it is no use taking things for granted. I think it quite possible that Purcell may be willing to cut his cable. At any rate, it is reasonable to give him the chance."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Thorndyke. "There is no greater folly than to take failure for granted and reject an opportunity. Now, if this plan of yours should by any chance succeed, Mrs. Purcell's emancipation is as good as accomplished."

"Is it really?" Varney exclaimed eagerly.

"Certainly," replied Thorndyke. "That is, if Purcell should send a letter the contents of which should disclose a state of affairs which would entitle his wife to a divorce. But that is too much to hope for unless Purcell also would like to have the marriage dissolved."

"I think it quite possible that he would, you know," said Varney. "He must have had strong reasons for going off in this way, and we know what those strong reasons usually amount to. But would a simple letter, without any witnesses, be sufficient to satisfy the court?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Thorndyke. "A properly attested letter is good evidence enough. It is just a question of what it contains. Let us suppose that we have a suitable letter. Then our procedure is perfectly simple. We produce it in court, and it is read and put in evidence. We say to the judge: 'Here is a letter from the respondent to the petitioner, or her solicitor, as the case may be. It is in answer to an advertisement, also read and put in evidence; the handwriting has been examined by the petitioner, by her solicitor, and by the respondent's banker, and each of them swears that the writing and the signature are those of the respondent. In that letter the respondent clearly and definitely states that, he has left his wife for good; that under no circumstances will he ever return to her; that he refuses hereafter to contribute to her support; and that he has transferred his affections to another woman, who is now living with him as his wife.' On that evidence I think we should have no difficulty in obtaining a decree."

Varney listened eagerly. He would have liked to make a few notes, but that would hardly do, though Thorndyke seemed to be a singularly simple-minded and confiding man. And he was amazingly easy to pump.

"I don't suppose Purcell would give himself away to that extent," he remarked, "unless he was really keen on a divorce."

"It is extremely unlikely in any case," Thorndyke agreed. "But we have to bear in mind that if he writes at all it will be with the object of stating his intentions as to the future and making his position clear. I shall draft the advertisement in such a way as to elicit this information, if possible. If he is not prepared to furnish the information he will not reply. If he replies it will be because, for his own purposes, he is willing to furnish the information."

"Yes, that is true. So that he may really give more information than one might expect. I wonder if he will write. What do you think?"

"It is mere speculation," replied Thorndyke. "But if I hadn't some hopes of his writing I shouldn't be at the trouble of putting in the advertisement. But perhaps Rodney is right: I may be unreasonably optimistic."

At Piccadilly Circus they parted and went their respective ways, each greatly pleased with the other and both highly amused. As soon as Thorndyke was out of sight, Varney whipped out his notebook, and by the light of a street lamp made a careful note of the necessary points of the required letter. That letter also occupied Thorndyke's mind, and he only hoped that the corresponding agent of Daniel Purcell, deceased, would not allow his enthusiasm to carry him to the extent of producing a letter the contents of which would stamp the case as one of rank collusion. For in this letter Thorndyke saw a way, and the only way, out for Margaret Purcell. He knew, or at least was fully convinced, that her husband was dead. But he had no evidence that he could take into court, nor did he expect that he ever would have. It would be years before it would be possible to apply to presume Purcell's death, and throughout those years Margaret's life would be spoiled. This letter was a fiction. The erring husband was a fiction. But it would be better that Margaret should be liberated by a fiction than that she should drag out a ruined life shackled to a husband who was himself a fiction.

---

## XII. — IN WHICH VARNEY ONCE MORE PULLS THE STRINGS

FOR the second time, in connection with the death of Daniel Purcell, Mr. Varney found it necessary to give an attentive eye to the movements of the postman. He had ascertained from the post office the times at which letters were delivered in the neighbourhood of Margaret's flat; and now, in the gloom of a December evening, he lurked in the vicinity until he saw the postman approaching down the street and delivering letters at the other flats on his way. Then he entered the now familiar portals, and made his way quietly up the stairs until he reached Margaret's outer door. Here he paused for a few moments, standing quite still and listening intently. If he had been discovered he would have simply come to pay a call. But he was not, and the silence from within suggested that there was nobody in the hall. With a furtive look round, he drew a letter from his pocket and silently slipped it into the letter-box, catching the flap on his finger as it fell to prevent it from making any sound. Then he turned and softly stole down the stairs; and as he reached the ground floor the postman walked into the entry.

It was not without reluctance that he came away. For she was behind that door, almost certainly—she, his darling, for whose freedom from the imaginary shackles that she wore he was carrying out this particular deception. But his own guilty conscience made it seem to him that he had better not be present when the fabricated letter arrived. So he tore himself from the beloved precincts and went his way, thinking his thoughts and dreaming his dreams.

Varney's surmise was correct. Margaret was within. But it was perhaps as well that he had refrained from paying a call, for she was not alone, and his visit would not have been entirely welcome. About half an hour before his arrival Jack Rodney had ascended those stairs, and had been admitted in time to join Margaret at a somewhat belated tea.

"My excuse for coming to see you," said Rodney, "is in my pocket—the front page of *The Times*."

"I don't know what you mean by an excuse," Margaret replied. "You know perfectly well that I am always delighted to see you. But perhaps you mean an excuse to yourself for wasting your time in gossiping with me."

"Indeed, I don't," said he. "I count no time so profitably employed as that which I spend here."

"I don't quite see what profit you get," she rejoined, "unless it is the moral benefit of doing a kindness to a lonely woman."

"I should like to take that view if I honestly could. But the fact is that I come here for the very great pleasure of seeing you and talking to you, and the profit that I get is that very great pleasure. I only wish the proprieties allowed me to come oftener."

"So do I," she said frankly. "But you know that, too. And now tell me what there is in the front page of *The Times* that gave you this sorely needed excuse."

Rodney laughed in a boisterous, schoolboy fashion as he drew from his pocket a folded leaf of the newspaper. "It's the great advertisement," said he. "The Thorndyke-Varney or Varney-Thorndyke advertisement. It came out yesterday morning. Compose yourself to listen, and I'll read it out to you."

He opened the paper out, refolded it into a convenient size, and with a portentous preliminary "Ahem!" read aloud in a solemn sing-song:

"PURCELL, D., is earnestly requested to communicate to M. or her solicitor his intentions with regard to the future. If his present arrangements are permanent, she would be grateful if he would notify her to that effect, in order that she may make the necessary modifications in her own."

As he finished, he looked up at her and laughed contemptuously.

"Well, Maggie," said he, "what do you think of it?"

She laughed merrily, and looked at him with hardly disguised fondness and admiration. "What a schoolboy you are, John!" she exclaimed. "How annoyed Dr. Thorndyke would be if he could hear you! But it is rather funny. I can imagine Dan's face when he reads it—if he ever does read it."

"So can I," chuckled Rodney. "I can see him pulling down his lower lip and saying, 'Gur!' in that pleasant way that he has. But isn't it a perfectly preposterous exhibition? Just imagine a man of Thorndyke's position doing a thing like this! Why, it is beneath the dignity of a country attorney's office-boy. I can't conceive how he got his reputation. He seems to be an absolute greenhorn."

"Probably he is quite good at his own speciality," suggested Margaret.

"But this is his own speciality. The truth is that the ordinary lawyer's prejudice against experts is to a great extent justified. They are really humbugs and pretenders. You saw what his attitude was when I suggested that he should get Dan under observation. Of course, it was the obvious thing to do, and one would suppose that it would be quite in his line. Yet as soon as I made the suggestion he raised all sorts of difficulties; whereas a common private inquiry agent would have made no difficulty about it at all."

"Do you think not?" Margaret asked, a little eagerly. "Perhaps it might be worth while to employ one. It would be such a blessed thing to get rid of Dan for good."



"It would, indeed," Rodney agreed heartily. "But perhaps we had better see if, Thorndyke gets a bite. If he fails we can try the other plan."

Margaret was slightly disappointed. She wanted to see some progress made, and was a little impatient of the law's delays. But the truth is that Rodney had been speaking rather at random. When he came to consider what information he had to give to a private detective, the affair did not look quite such plain sailing.

"Perhaps," said Margaret, "Dr. Thorndyke was right in giving Mr. Varney's plan a trial. We are no worse off if it fails; and if it were by any chance to succeed, oh, what a relief it would be! Not that there is the slightest chance that it will."

"Not a dog's chance," agreed Rodney, "and Thorndyke was an ass to have anything to do with the advertisement. He should have let Varney put it in. No one expects an artist to show any particular legal acumen."

"Poor Mr. Varney!" murmured Margaret with a faint smile; and at this moment the housemaid entered the room with a couple of letters on a salver. Margaret took the letters, and, having thanked the maid, laid them on the table by her side.

"Won't you read your letters?" said Rodney. "You are not going to make a stranger of me, I hope."

"Thank you," she replied. "If you will excuse me I will just see whom they are from."

She took up the top letter, opened it, glanced through it, and laid it down. Then she picked up the second letter, and as her glance fell on the address she uttered a little cry of amazement.

"What is it?" asked Rodney.

She held the envelope out for him to see. "It's from Dan!" she exclaimed; and forthwith she tore it open and eagerly took out the letter.

As she read it, Rodney watched her with mingled amusement, vexation, and astonishment. The utterly inconceivable thing had happened. Thorndyke had taken odds of a million to one against and it had come off. That was just a piece of pure luck. It reflected no particular credit on Thorndyke's judgment; but still, Rodney rather wished he had been less dogmatic.

When she had quickly read through the letter, Margaret handed it to him without comment. He took it from her and rapidly ran through the contents.

"DEAR MAGGIE (it ran),

"I have just seen your quaint advertisement, and send you a few lines, as requested. I don't know what you mean by 'modifying your arrangements,' but I can guess. However, that is no concern of mine, and whatever your plans may be, I don't want to stand in your way. So I will give you a plain statement, and you can do what you like.

"My present arrangements are quite permanent. You have seen the last of yours truly. I have no intention of ever coming back—and I don't suppose you particularly want me. It may interest you to know that I have made fresh domestic arrangements—necessarily a little unorthodox, but also quite permanent.

"With regard to financial questions, I am afraid I can't contribute to your 'arrangements,' what ever they may be. You have enough to live on, and I have new responsibilities; but if you can get anything out of Levy you are welcome to it. You will be the first person who ever has. You can also try Penfield, and I wish you the best of luck. And that is all I have got to say on the subject.

"With best wishes,

"Yours sincerely,  
"DANIEL PURCELL."

Rodney returned the letter with an expression of disgust. "It is a brutal, hoggish letter," said he, "typical of the writer. Where does he write from?"

"The post-mark is Wivenhoe. It was posted last night at seven-thirty."

"That looks as if Varney were right and he were afloat; but it is a queer time of year for yachting on the East Coast. Well, I suppose you are not much afflicted by the tone of that letter?"

"Not at all. The more brutal the better. I shall have no qualms now. But the question is, will the letter do? What do you think?"

"It ought to do well enough—if it isn't a little too good to be true."

"I don't quite understand. You don't doubt the truth of what he says, do you?"

"Not at all. What I mean is this: Divorce judges are pretty wary customers. They have to be. The law doesn't allow married people, who are tired of one another and would like to try a fresh throw of the dice, to make nice little mutual arrangements to get their marriage dissolved. That is called collusion. And then there is a mischievous devil called the King's Proctor, whose function is to 'prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings' and to trip up poor wretches who have got a

decree and think they have escaped, and to send them back to cat-and-dog matrimony until death do them part. Now, the only pitfall about this letter of Dan's is that it is so very complete. He makes things so remarkably easy for us. He leaves us nothing to prove. He admits everything in advance, and covers the whole of our case in our favour. That letter might have been dictated by a lawyer in our interest."

Margaret looked deeply disappointed. "You don't mean to say that we shan't be able to act on it!" she exclaimed in dismay.

"I don't say that," he replied, "and I certainly think it will be worth trying. But I do wish that we could produce evidence that he is living with some woman, as he appears to state. That would be so much more convincing. However, I will get an opinion from a counsel who has had extensive experience of divorce practice—a man like Barnby, for instance. I could show him a copy of the letter and hear what he thinks."

"Why not Dr. Thorndyke?" said Margaret. "He was really right, after all, and we shall have to show him the letter."

"Yes, and he must see the original. But as to taking his opinion—well, we shall have to do that as a matter of courtesy, but I don't set much value on his judgment. You see, he chose to go double Nap on this letter, and he happened to win. Events prove that he was right to take the chance, but it was primitive strategy. It doesn't impress me."

Margaret made no immediate rejoinder. She was not a lawyer, and to her the fact that the plan had succeeded was evidence that it was a good plan. Accordingly, her waning faith in Thorndyke was strongly revived.

"I can't help hoping," she said presently, "that this letter will secure a decision in our favour. It really ought to. You see, there is no question of arrangement or collusion on my side. Our relations were perfectly normal and pleasant up to the moment of Dan's disappearance. There were no quarrels, no differences, nothing to hint at any desire for a change in our relations; and I have waited six months for him to come back, and have taken no action until he made it clear that he had gone for good. Don't you think that I have a fair chance of getting my freedom?"

"Perhaps you are right, Maggie," he replied. "I may be looking out for snags that aren't there. Of course, you could call me and Philip and Varney to prove that all was normal up to the last, and Penfield and Thorndyke to give evidence of your efforts to trace Dan. Yes, perhaps it is a better case than I thought. But all the same, I will show the letter to Barnby when Thorndyke has seen it and get his opinion without prejudice."

He paused and reflected profoundly for a while. Suddenly he looked up at Margaret, and in his eyes there was a new light.

"Supposing, Maggie," he said in a low, earnest voice, "you were to get this marriage dissolved. Then you would be free—free to marry. You know that years ago, when you were free, I loved you. You know that, because I told you; and I thought, and I still think, that you cared for me then. The fates were against us at that time, but in the years that have passed there has been no change in me. You are the only woman I have ever wanted, Of course, I have kept my feelings to myself. That had to be. But if we can win back your freedom, I shall ask you to be my wife, unless you forbid me. What shall you say to me, Maggie?"

Margaret sat with downcast eyes as Rodney was speaking. For a few moments she had appeared pale and agitated, but she was now quite composed, and nothing but a heightened colour hinted at any confusion. At the final question she raised her head and looked Rodney frankly in the face.

"At present, John," she said quietly, "I am the wife of Daniel Purcell, and as such have no right to contemplate any other marriage. But I will be honest with you. There is no reason why I should not be. You are quite right, John. I loved you in those days that you speak of, and if I never told you, you know why. You know how I came to marry Dan. It seemed to me then that I had no choice. Perhaps I was wrong, but I did what I thought was my duty to my father."

"In the years that have passed since then—the long, grey years—I have kept my covenant with Dan loyally in every respect. If I have ever looked back with regret, it has been in secret. But through those years you have been a faithful friend to me, and of all my friends the best beloved. And so you are now. That is all I can say, John."

"It is enough, Maggie," he said, "and I thank you from my heart for saying so much. Whatever your answer might have been, I would have done everything in my power to set you free. But now I shall venture to have a hope that I hold a stake in your freedom."

She made no answer to this, and for some time both sat silently engrossed with their own thoughts, and each thinking much the same thoughts as the other. The silence was at length broken by Rodney.

"It was an awful blow to me when I came home from my travels and found you married. Of course, I guessed what had happened, though I never actually knew. I assumed that Dan had put the screw on your father in some way."

"Yes. He had lent my father money, and the bills could not be met."

"What a Juggernaut the fellow is!" exclaimed Rodney. "An absolutely ruthless egoist. By the way, was he in the habit of lending money? I notice that he refers in this letter to a person named Levy. Who is Levy? And what does Dan do for a livelihood? He is out of the paper trade, isn't he?"

"I think so. The truth is, I have never known what his occupation is. I have suspected that he is principally a money-lender. As to Mr. Levy, I have always thought he was a clerk or manager, but it rather looks as if he were a partner."

"We must find out," said Rodney. "And there is another thing that we must look into—that mysterious letter that Penfield received from Dan. Did you ever learn what was in it?"

"Never. Mr. Penfield refused to divulge the slightest hint of its contents. But I feel convinced that it was in some way connected with Dan's disappearance. You remember it arrived on the very day that Dan went away. I think Dr. Thorndyke called on Mr. Penfield to see if he could glean any information, but I assume that he didn't succeed."

"We can take that for granted," said Rodney. "I don't think Thorndyke would get much out of a wary old bird like Penfield. But we must find out what was in that letter. Penfield will have to produce it if we put him in the witness-box, though he will be a mighty slippery witness. However, I will see Thorndyke and ask him about it when I have consulted Barnby. Perhaps I had better take charge of the letter."

Margaret handed him the letter, which he put securely in his wallet, and the plan of action being now settled, he stayed only for a little further gossip, and then took his leave.

On the following afternoon he called by appointment on Thorndyke, who, having admitted him, closed the "oak" and connected the bell with the laboratory upstairs, where his assistant, Polton, was at work.

"So," he said, "our fish has risen to the tin minnow, as I gather from your note."

"Yes. You have had better luck than I expected."

"Or than I deserved, you might have added if you had been less polite. Well, I don't know that I should agree. I consider it bad practice to treat an improbability as an impossibility. But what does he say?"

"All that we could wish—and perhaps a little more. That is the only difficulty. He makes things a little too easy for us—at least, that is my feeling. But you had better see the letter."

He took it from his wallet and passed it to Thorndyke, who glanced at the post-mark, and when he had taken out the letter looked quickly into the interior of the envelope.

"Wivenhoe," he remarked. "Some distance from Woodbridge, but in the same district."

He read carefully through the text, noting at the same time the peculiarities that he had observed in the former letter. In this case, too, the postmarks had been made when the envelope was empty—a curious oversight on the part of Varney in view of the care and ingenuity otherwise displayed. Indeed, as he read through the letter, Thorndyke's opinion of that cunning artificer rose considerably. It was a most skilful and tactful production. It did certainly make things almost suspiciously easy, but then that was its function. The whole case for the petition rested on it. But the brutal attitude of the imaginary truant was admirably rendered, and, so far as he could judge, the personality of the missing man convincingly represented.

"It is not a courteous epistle," he remarked tentatively.

"No," agreed Rodney, "but it is exactly the sort of letter that one would expect from Purcell. It gives you his character in a nutshell."

This was highly satisfactory and very creditable to Varney.

"You mentioned in your note that you were going to take Barnby's opinion on it. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, and he thinks the same as I do: that it would be a little risky to base a petition on this letter alone. The judge might smell a rat. He considers that if we could produce evidence that Purcell is actually living with another woman, this letter would be good evidence of desertion. He suggested putting a private inquiry agent on Purcell's tracks. What do you say to that?"

"In the abstract it is an excellent suggestion. But how are you going to carry it out? You speak of putting the agent on Purcell's tracks. But there are no tracks. There is no place in which he is known to have been staying; there is no person known to us who has seen him since he landed at Penzance. You would start your sleuth without a scent to wander about Essex and Suffolk looking for a man whom he had never seen and would probably not recognize if he met him, and who is possibly not in either of those counties at all. It really is not a practicable scheme."

Rodney emitted a discontented grunt. "Doesn't sound very encouraging certainly," he admitted. "But how do the police manage in a case of the kind?"

"By having, not one agent but a thousand, and all in communication through a central office. And even the police fail if they haven't enough data. But with regard to Barnby, of course his opinion has great weight. He knows the difficulties of these cases, and his outlook will probably be the judge's outlook. But did you make clear to him the peculiarities of this case?—the character of the petitioner, her excellent relations with her husband, the sudden, unforeseen manner of the disappearance, and the total absence of any grounds for a suspicion of collusion? Did you present these points to him?"

"No, I didn't. We merely discussed the letter."

"Well, see him again and put the whole case to him. My feeling is that a petition would probably succeed."

"I hope you are right," said Rodney, more encouraged than he would have liked to admit. "I'll see Barnby again. Oh, and there is another point. That letter that Purcell sent to Penfield by mistake in June. It probably throws some light on the disappearance, and might be important as evidence on our side. I suppose Penfield did not tell you what was in it or show

it to you?"

"No, he would say nothing about it; but he allowed me, at my request, to examine the envelope."

Rodney grinned. "He might also have shown you the postman who delivered the letter. But if he won't tell us anything, we might put him in the witness-box and make him disgorge his secret."

"Yes, and you may have to if the court demands to have the letter produced. But I strongly advise you to avoid doing so if you can. I have the impression that the production of that letter would be very much the reverse of helpful—might, in fact, be fatal to the success of the case and would in addition be very disagreeable to Mrs. Purcell."

Rodney looked at him in astonishment. "Then you know what was in the letter?" said he.

"No, but I have formed certain opinions which I have no doubt are correct, but which I do not feel at liberty to communicate. I advise you to leave Mr. Penfield alone. Remember that he is a lawyer, that he is Mrs. Purcell's friend, that he does know what is in the letter, and that he thinks it best to keep his knowledge to himself. But he will have to be approached on the question as to whether he is willing to act for Mrs. Purcell against her husband. If you undertake that office you can raise the question of the letter with him, but I would urge you most strongly not to force his hand."

Rodney listened to this advice with a slightly puzzled expression. Like Mr. Penfield, he viewed Thorndyke with mixed feelings, now thinking of him as an amateur, a doctor who dabbled ineffectively in law, and now considering the possibility that he might command some means of acquiring knowledge that were not available to the orthodox legal practitioner. Here was a case in point. He had examined the envelope of that mysterious letter "at his own request" and evidently for a specific purpose, and from that inspection he had in some unaccountable way formed a very definite opinion as to what the envelope had contained. That was very curious. Of course, he might be wrong; but he seemed to be pretty confident. Then there was the present transaction. Rodney himself had rejected Varney's suggestion with scorn. But Thorndyke had adopted it quite hopefully, and the plan had succeeded in the face of all probabilities. Could it be that Thorndyke had some odd means of gauging those probabilities? It looked rather like it.

"You are only guessing at the nature of that letter," he said tentatively, "and you may have got it wrong."

"That is quite possible," Thorndyke agreed. "But Penfield isn't guessing. Put the case to him, hear what he says, and follow his advice. And if you see Barnby again it would be better to say nothing about that letter. Penfield will advise you to keep it out of the case if you can, and that is my advice, too."

When Rodney took his departure, which he did a few minutes later, he carried with him a growing suspicion that he had under-estimated Thorndyke; that the latter, perhaps, played a deeper game than at first sight appeared; and that he played with pieces unknown to traditional legal practice.

For some time after his visitor had left Thorndyke remained wrapped in profound thought. In his heart he was sensible of a deep distaste for this case that he was promoting. If it were to succeed, it could only be by misleading the court. It is true that the parties were acting in good faith, that the falsities which they would present were falsities that they believed to be true. But the whole case was based on a fiction, and Thorndyke detested fictions. Nor was he satisfied with his own position in an ethical sense. He knew that the case was fictitious, that the respondent was a dead man, and that the documents to be produced in evidence were forgeries. He was, in fact, an accessory to those forgeries. He did not like it at all. And he was not so optimistic as to the success of the petition as he had led Rodney to believe, though he was not very uneasy on that score. What troubled him was that this was, in effect, a bogus case, and that he was lending it his support.

But what was the alternative? His thoughts turned to Margaret, sweet-faced, sweet-natured, gracious-mannered, the perfect type of an English gentlewoman; and he thought of the fine, handsome, high-minded gentleman who had just gone away. These two loved one another—loved as only persons of character can love. Their marriage, if it could be achieved, would secure to them a lifelong happiness, in so far as such happiness is attainable by mortals. But between them and their happiness stood the fiction of Daniel Purcell. In order that they might marry, Purcell must either be proved to be dead or assumed to be alive.

Could he be proved to be dead? If he could, that were the better way, because it would demonstrate the truth. But was it possible? In a scientific sense it probably was. Science can accept a conclusion with reservations. But the law has to say "yes" or "no" without any reservations at all. This was not a case of death merely presumed. It was a death alleged to have occurred at a specific time and place and in a specific manner; and inseparably bound up with it was a charge of murder. If Purcell was dead, Varney had murdered him, and the murder was the issue that would be tried. But no jury would entertain for a moment the guilt of the accused on such evidence as Thorndyke could offer. And an acquittal would amount to a legal decision that Purcell was not dead. On that decision Margaret's marriage to Rodney would be impossible.

Thus Thorndyke's reflections led him back, as they always did, to the conclusion that Purcell's death was incapable of legal proof, and must ever remain so, unless by some miracle new and conclusive evidence should come to light. But to wait for a miracle to happen was an unsatisfactory policy. If Purcell could not be proved to be dead, and if such failure of proof must wreck the happiness of two estimable persons, then it would appear that it might be allowable to accept what was the actual legal position and assume that he was alive.

So, once again, Thorndyke decided that he had no choice but to continue to share with Varney the secret of Purcell's death and to hold his peace.

And if this must be, the petition must take its course, aided and abetted, if necessary, by him. After all, nobody would be

injured and nothing done which was contrary either to public policy or private morals. There were only two alternatives, as matters stood. The fiction of Purcell as a living man would either keep Margaret and Rodney apart, as it was doing now, or it would be employed (with other fictions) to enable them to be united. And it was better that they should be united.

---

### XIII. — IN WHICH THE MEDICO-LEGAL WORM ARRIVES

ROMANCE lurks in unsuspected places. As we go our daily round, we are apt to look distastefully upon the scenes made dull by familiarity, and to seek distraction by letting our thoughts ramble far away into time and space, to ages and regions in which life seems more full of colour. In fancy, perchance, we thread the ghostly aisles of some tropical forest, or linger on the white beach of some lonely coral island, where the coconut palms, shivering in the sea breeze, patter a refrain to the song of the surf; or we wander by moonlight through the narrow streets of some Southern city and hear the thrum of the guitar serenading to the shrouded balcony; and behold! all Romance is at our very doors.

It was on a bright afternoon early in March that Thorndyke sat, with Philip Rodney by his side, on one of the lower benches of the lecture theatre of the Royal College of Surgeons. Not a likely place, this, to encounter Romance. Yet there it was—and Tragedy, too—lying unnoticed at present on the green baize cover of the lecturer's table, its very existence unsuspected.

Meanwhile Thorndyke and Philip conversed in quiet undertones, for it still wanted some minutes to the hour at which the lecture would commence.

"I suppose," said Philip, "you have had no report from that private detective fellow—I forget his name?"

"Bagwell. No, excepting the usual weekly note stating that he is still unable to pick up any trace of Purcell."

"Ah," commented Philip, "that doesn't sound encouraging. Must be costing a lot of money, too. I fancy my brother and Maggie Purcell are both beginning to wish they had taken your advice and relied on the letter by itself. But Jack was overborne by Barnby's insistence on corroborative evidence, and Maggie let him decide. And now they are sorry they listened to Barnby. They hadn't bargained for all this delay."

"Barnby was quite right as to the value of the additional evidence," said Thorndyke. "What he didn't grasp was the very great difficulty of getting it. But I think I hear the big-wigs approaching."

As he spoke, the usher threw open the lecturer's door. The audience stood up, the president entered, preceded by the mace-bearer and followed by the officers and the lecturer, and took his seat; the audience sat down, and the lecture began without further formalities.

The theatre was nearly full. It usually was when Professor D'Arcy lectured; for that genial savant had the magnetic gift of infusing his own enthusiasm into the lecture and so into his audience, even when, as on this occasion, his subject lay on the outside edge of medical science. To-day he was lecturing on the epidermic appendages of the marine worms, and from the opening sentence he held his audience as by a spell, standing before the great blackboard with a bunch of coloured chalks in either hand, talking with easy eloquence—mostly over his shoulder—while he covered the black surface with those delightful drawings that added so much to the charm of his lectures. Philip watched his flying fingers with fascination, and struggled frantically to copy the diagrams into a large notebook with the aid of a handful of coloured pencils; while Thorndyke, not much addicted to note-taking, listened and watched with concentrated attention, mentally docketing and pigeon-holing any new or significant facts in what was to him a fairly familiar subject.

The latter part of the lecture dealt with those beautiful sea worms that build themselves tubes to live in—worms like the Serpula, that make their shelly or stony tubes by secretion from their own bodies, or, like the Sabella or Terebella, build them up with sand-grains, little stones or fragments of shell. Each, in turn, appeared in lively portraiture on the blackboard, and the trays on the table were full of specimens which were exhibited by the lecturer, and which the audience were invited to inspect more closely after the lecture.

Accordingly, when the last words of the peroration had been pronounced, the occupants of the benches trooped down into the arena to look at the exhibits and seek further details from the genial Professor. Thorndyke and Philip held back for a while on the outskirts of the crowd; but the Professor had seen them on their bench, and now approached, greeting them with a hearty hand shake and a facetious question.

"What are you doing here, Thorndyke? Is it possible that there are medico-legal possibilities even in a marine worm?"

"Oh, come, D'Arcy!" protested Thorndyke, "don't make me such a hidebound specialist. May I have no rational interests in life? Must I live for ever in the witness-box like a marine worm in its tube?"

"I suspect you don't get very far out of your tube," said the Professor, with a chuckle and a sly glance at Philip.

"I got far enough out last summer," retorted Thorndyke, "to come and aid and abet you in your worm-hunting. Have you forgotten Cornwall?"

"No, to be sure," was the reply. "But that was only a momentary lapse, and I expect you had ulterior motives. However, the association of Cornwall, worm-hunting, and medical jurisprudence reminds me that I have something in your line. A friend of mine, who was wintering in Cornwall, picked it up on the beach at Morte Hoe and sent it to me. Now, where is it? It is on this table somewhere. It is a ridiculous thing—a small, flat cork, evidently from a zoologist's collecting-bottle, for it has a label stuck on it with the inscription 'Marine Worms.' It seems that our zoologist was a sort of Robinson Crusoe, for he had bored a couple of holes through it and evidently used it as a button. But the most ludicrous thing about it is that a Terebella has built its tube on it, as if the worm had been prowling about, looking for lodgings, and had read the label and

forthwith had engaged the apartments. Ah! here it is."

He pounced on a little cardboard box, and, opening it, took out the cork button and laid it in Thorndyke's palm.

As the Professor was describing the object, Philip looked at him with a distinctly startled expression, and uttered a smothered exclamation. He was about to speak, but suddenly checked himself and looked at Thorndyke, who flashed at him a quick glance of understanding.

"Isn't that a quaint coincidence?" chuckled the Professor—"I mean that the worm should have taken up its abode and actually built his tube on the label?"

"Very quaint," replied Thorndyke, still looking with deep interest at the object that lay in his hand.

"You realize," Philip said in a low voice, as the Professor turned away to answer a question, "that this button came from Purcell's oilskin coat?"

"Yes, I remember the incident. I realized what it was as soon as D'Arcy described the button."

He glanced curiously at Philip, wondering whether he, too, realized exactly what this queer piece of jetsam was. For to Thorndyke its message had been conveyed even before the Professor had finished speaking. In that moment it had been borne to him that the unlooked-for miracle had happened, and that Margaret Purcell's petition need never be filed.

"Well, Thorndyke," said the Professor, "my friend's treasure trove seems to interest you. I thought it would as an instance of the possibilities of coincidence. Quite a useful lesson to a lawyer, by the way."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "In fact, I was going to ask you to allow me to borrow it to examine at my leisure."

The Professor was delighted. "There, now," he chuckled, with a mischievous twinkle at Philip, "what did I tell you? He hasn't come here for the comparative anatomy at all. He has just come to grub for legal data. And now, you see, the medico-legal worm has arrived, and is instantly collared by the medical jurist. Take him, by all means, Thorndyke. You needn't borrow him. I present him as a gift to your black museum. You needn't return him."

Thorndyke thanked the Professor, and, having packed the specimen with infinite tenderness in its cotton wool, bestowed the box in his waistcoat pocket. A few minutes later he and Philip took their leave of the Professor and departed, making their way through Lincoln's Inn to Chancery Lane.

"That button gave me quite a shock for a moment," said Philip, "appearing out of the sea on the Cornish coast; for, of course, it was on Purcell's coat when he went ashore—at least, I suppose it was. I understood Varney to say so."

"He did," said Thorndyke. "He mentioned the incident at dinner one evening, and he then said definitely that the cork button was on the coat when Purcell went up the ladder."

"Yes, and it seemed rather mysterious at first, as Purcell went right away from Cornwall. But there is probably quite a simple explanation. Purcell went to the East Coast by sea, and it is most likely that, when he got on board the steamer, he obtained a proper button from the steward, cut off the jury button, and chucked it overboard. But it is a queer chance that it should have come back to us in this way."

Thorndyke nodded. "A very queer chance," he agreed.

As he spoke, he looked at Philip with a somewhat puzzled expression. He was, in fact, rather surprised. Philip Rodney was a doctor, a man of science, and an unquestionably intelligent person. He knew all the circumstances that were known, and he had seen and examined the button; and yet he had failed to observe the one vitally important fact that stared him in the face.

"What made you want to borrow the button?" Philip asked presently. "Was it that you wanted to keep it as a relic of the Purcell case?"

"I want to examine the worm-tube," replied Thorndyke. "It is a rather unusual one; very uniform in composition. Mostly, Terebella tubes are very miscellaneous as to their materials—sand, shell, little pebbles, and so forth. The material of this one seems to be all alike."

"Probably the stuff that the worm was able to pick up in the neighbourhood of Morte Hoe."

"That is possible," said Thorndyke; and the conversation dropped for a moment, each man occupying himself with reflections on the other.

To Philip it seemed rather surprising that a man like Thorndyke, full of important business, should find time, or even inclination, to occupy himself with trivialities like this. For, after all, what did it matter whether this worm-tube was composed of miscellaneous gatherings or of a number of similar particles? No scientific interest attached to the question. It seemed rather a silly quest. And yet Thorndyke had thought it worth while to borrow the specimen for this very purpose.

Thorndyke, for his part, was more than ever astonished at the mental obtuseness of this usually acute and intelligent man. Not only had he failed in the first place to observe a most striking and significant fact: he could not see that fact even when his nose was rubbed hard on it.

As they passed through Old Buildings and approached the main gateway, Philip slowed down.

"I am going into my brother's chambers here to have tea with him. Do you care to join us? He will be glad to see you."

Thorndyke, however, was in no mood for tea and gossip. He had got a first-class clue—a piece of really conclusive evidence. How conclusive it was and how far its conclusiveness went he could not tell at present; and he was eager to get to work on the assay of this specimen in an evidential sense—to see exactly what was the amount and kind of evidence that the sea had cast up on the shore of Morte Hoe. He therefore excused himself, and having bidden Philip adieu, he strode out into Chancery Lane and bore south towards the Temple.

On entering his chambers, he discovered his assistant, Polton, in the act of transferring boiling water from a copper kettle to a small silver teapot; whereby he was able to infer that his approach had been observed by the said Polton from his lookout in the laboratory above. The two men, master and man, exchanged friendly greetings, and Thorndyke then observed:

"I have got a job to do later on, Polton, when I have finished up the evening's work. I shall want to grind some small sections of a mineral that I wish to identify. Would you put out one or two small hones and the other things that I shall need?"

"Yes, sir," replied Polton. "I will put the mineral section outfit on a tray and bring it down after tea. But can't I grind the sections? It seems a pity for you to be wasting your time on a mechanical job like that."

"Thank you, Polton," replied Thorndyke. "Of course you could cut the sections as well as, or better than, I can. But it is possible that I may have to produce the sections in evidence, and in that case it will be better if I can say that I cut them myself and that they were never out of my own hands. The courts don't know you as I do, you see, Polton."

Polton acknowledged the compliment with a gratified smile, and departed to the laboratory. As soon as he was gone, Thorndyke brought forth the little cardboard box, and, having taken out the button, carried it over to the window, where, with the aid of his pocket lens, he made a long and careful examination of the worm-tube, the result of which was to confirm his original observation. The mineral particles of which the tube was built up were of various shapes and sizes, from mere sand-grains up to quite respectable little pebbles. But, so far as he could see, they were all of a similar material. What that material was an expert mineralogist would have been able, no doubt, to say offhand, and an expert opinion would probably have to be obtained. But in the meantime his own knowledge was enough to enable him to form a fairly reliable opinion when he had made the necessary investigations.

As he drank his tea, he reflected on this extraordinary windfall. Circumstances had conspired in the most singular manner against Varney. How much they had conspired remained to be seen. That depended on how much the worm-tube had to tell. But even if no further light were thrown on the matter by the nature of the mineral, there was evidence enough that Purcell had never landed at Penzance. The Terebella had already given that much testimony. And the cross-examination was yet to come.

Having finished tea, he fell to work on the reports and written opinions which had to be completed and sent off by the last post; and it was characteristic of the man that, though the button and its as yet half-read message lurked in the sub-conscious part of his mind as the engrossing object of interest, he was yet able to concentrate the whole of his conscious attention on the matters with which he was outwardly occupied. Twice during the evening Polton stole silently into the room, once to deposit on a side-table the little tray containing the mineral section appliances, and the second time to place on a small table near the fire a large tray bearing the kind of frugal, informal supper that Thorndyke usually consumed when alone and at work.

"If you wait a few moments, Polton, I shall have these letters ready for the post. Then we shall both be free. I don't want to see anybody to-night unless it is something urgent."

"Very well, sir," replied Polton. "I will switch the bell on to the laboratory, and I'll see that you are not disturbed unnecessarily."

With this he took up the letters which Thorndyke had sealed and stamped and reluctantly withdrew, not without a last wistful glance at the apparatus on the tray.

As the door closed behind him, Thorndyke rose, and, bringing forth the button from the drawer in which he had bestowed it, began operations at once. First, with a pair of fine forceps he carefully picked off the worm-tube half a dozen of the largest fragments and laid them on a glass slide. This he placed on the stage of the microscope, and, having fitted on a two inch objective, made a preliminary inspection under various conditions of light, both transmitted and reflected. When he had got clearly into his mind the general character of the unknown rock, he fetched from a store cabinet in the office a number of shallow drawers filled with labelled specimens of rocks and minerals, and he also placed on the table in readiness for reference one or two standard works on geology and petrology. But before examining either the books or the specimens in the drawers, he opened out a geological chart of the British Isles and closely scrutinized the comparatively small area with which the button was concerned—the Land's End and the north and south coast of Cornwall. A very brief scrutiny of the map showed him that the inquiry could now be narrowed down to a quite small group of rocks, the majority of which he could exclude at once by his own knowledge of the more familiar types; which was highly satisfactory. But there was evidently something more than this. Anyone who should have been observing him as he pored over the chart would have seen, by a suddenly increased attention, with a certain repressed eagerness, that some really illuminating fact had come into view; and his next proceedings would make clear to such an observer that the problem had already changed from one of search to a definite and particular identification.

From the chart he turned to the drawers of specimens, running his eye quickly over their contents, as if looking for some



specific object; and this object he presently found in a little cardboard tray—a single fragment of a grey, compact rock, which he pounced upon at once, and, picking it out of its tray, laid it on the slide with the fragment from the worm-tube. Careful comparison gave the impression that they were identical in character, but the great difference in the size of the fragments compared was a source of possible error. Accordingly, he wrapped the specimen lightly in paper, and with a hammer from the tool drawer struck it a sharp blow, which broke it into a number of smaller fragments, some of them quite minute. Picking out one or two of the smallest from the paper and carefully noting the "conchoidal" character of the fracture, he placed them on a separate slide, which he at once labelled "stock specimen," labelling the other slide "worm-tube." Having taken this precaution against possible confusion, he laid the two slides on the stage of the microscope and once more made a minute comparison. And again the conclusion emerged that the fragments from the worm-tube were identical in all their characters with the fragment of the stock specimen.

It now remained to test this conclusion by more exact methods. Two more labelled slides having been prepared, Thorndyke laid them, label downwards, on the table and dropped on each a large drop of melted Canada balsam. In one drop, while it was still soft, he immersed two or three fragments from the worm-tube; in the other a like number of fragments of the stock specimen. Then he heated both slides over a spirit-lamp to liquefy the balsam and completely immerse the fragments, and laid them aside to cool while he prepared the appliances for grinding the sections.

This process was, as Polton had hinted, a rather tedious one. It consisted in rubbing the two slides backwards and forwards upon a wetted Turkey stone until the fragments of rock were ground to a flat surface. The flattened surfaces had then to be polished upon a smoother stone, and when this had been done the slides were once more heated over a spirit-lamp, the balsam liquefied, and each of the fragments neatly turned over with a needle on to its flat side. When the balsam was cool and set hard, the grinding process was repeated until each of the fragments was worn down to a thin plate or film with parallel sides. Then the slides were again heated, a fresh drop of balsam applied, and a cover-glass laid on top. The specimens were now finished and ready for examination.

On this, the final stage of the investigation, he bestowed the utmost care and attention. The two specimens were examined exhaustively and compared again and again by every possible method, including the use of the polariscope and the spectroscope, and the results of each observation were at once written down. Finally, Thorndyke turned to the books of reference, and, selecting a highly technical work on petrology, checked his written notes by the very detailed descriptions that it furnished of rocks of volcanic origin. And once again the results were entirely confirmatory of the opinion that he had at first formed. No doubt whatever was left in his mind as to the nature of the particles of rock of which the worm had built its tube. But if his opinion was correct, he held evidence producible in a court of law that Daniel Purcell had never landed at Penzance; that, in fact, his dead body was even now lying at the bottom of the sea.

As he consumed his frugal supper, Thorndyke turned over the situation in his mind. He had no doubts at all. But it would be necessary to get his identification of the rock confirmed by a recognized authority who could be called as a witness, and whose statement would be accepted by the court as establishing the facts. There was no difficulty about that. He had a friend who was connected with the Geological Museum, and who was recognized throughout the world as a first-class authority on everything relating to the physical and chemical properties of rocks and minerals. He would take the specimens tomorrow to this expert, and ask him to examine them; and when the authoritative opinion had been pronounced, he would consider what procedure he should adopt. Already there was growing up in his mind a doubt as to the expediency of taking action on purely scientific evidence, and in answer to that doubt a new scheme began to suggest itself.

But for the moment he put it aside. The important thing was to get the expert identification of the rock, and so put his evidence on the basis of established fact. The conversion of scientific into legal evidence was a separate matter that could be dealt with later. And having reached this conclusion, he took a sheet of notepaper from the rack and wrote a short letter to his friend at the Museum, making an appointment for the following afternoon. A few minutes later he dropped it into the box of the Fleet Street post office, and for the time being dismissed the case from his mind.

---

#### XIV. — IN WHICH MR. VARNEY IS DISILLUSIONED

THORNDYKE'S visit to the Geological Museum was not a protracted affair, for his friend, Mr. Burston, made short work of the investigation.

"You say you have examined the specimens yourself," said he. "Well, I expect you know what they are; just come to me for an official confirmation, h'm? However, don't tell me what your conclusion was. I may as well start with an open mind. Write it down on this slip of paper and lay it on the table face downwards. And now let us have the specimens."

Thorndyke produced from his pocket a cigar-case, from which he extracted a pill-box and the labelled microscope-slide.

"There are two little water-worn fragments in the pill-box," he explained, "and three similar ones which I have ground into sections. I am sorry the specimens are so small, but they are the largest I had."

Mr. Burston took the pill-box, and, tipping the two tiny pebbles into the palm of his hand, inspected them through a Coddington lens.

"Yes," said he; "I don't think it will be very difficult to decide what this is. I think I could tell you offhand. But I won't. I'll put it through the regular tests and make quite sure of it; and meanwhile you had better have a browse round the Museum."

He hustled off to some inner sanctum of the curator's domain, and Thorndyke adopted his advice by straying out into the galleries. But he had little opportunity to study the contents of the cases, for in a few minutes Mr. Burston returned with a slip of paper in his hand.

"Now," he said facetiously, as they re-entered the room, "you see there's no deception."

He laid his slip of paper on the table beside Thorndyke's, and invited the latter to "turn up the cards." Thorndyke accordingly turned over the two slips of paper. Each bore the single word "phonolite."

"I knew you had spotted it," said Burston. "However, you have now got corroborative evidence, and I suppose you are happy. I only hope I haven't helped to send some poor devil to chokee or worse. Good-bye. Glad you brought the things to me."

He restored the pill-box and slide, and having shaken hands heartily returned to his lair, while Thorndyke went forth into Jermyn Street and took his way thoughtfully eastward.

In a scientific sense the Purcell case was now complete. But the more he thought about it the more did he feel the necessity for bringing the scheme of evidence into closer conformity with traditional legal practice. Even to a judge a purely theoretical train of evidence might seem inconclusive; to a jury, who had been well pounded by a persuasive counsel, it would probably appear quite unconvincing. It would be necessary to obtain corroboration along different lines and in a new direction; and the direction in which it would be well to explore in the first place was the ancient precinct of Lincoln's Inn, where, at 62, Old Buildings, Mr. John Rodney had his professional chambers.

Now, at the very moment when Thorndyke was proceeding with swift strides from the neighbourhood of Jermyn Street towards Lincoln's Inn on business of the most critical importance to Mr. Varney, it was decreed by the irony of Fate that the latter gentleman should be engaged in bringing his affairs to a crisis of another kind. For some time past he had been watching with growing impatience the dilatory proceedings of the lawyers in regard to Margaret's petition. Especially had he chafed at the farce of the private detective, searching, as he knew, for a man whose body was lying on the bed of the sea hundreds of miles away from the area of the search. He was deeply disappointed, too. For when his advertisement scheme had been adopted by Thorndyke, he had supposed that all was plain sailing; he had but to send the necessary letter, and the dissolution of the marriage could be proceeded with at once. That was how it had appeared to him. And as soon as the marriage was dissolved he would make his declaration, and in due course his heart's desire would be accomplished.

Very differently had things turned out. Months had passed, and not a sign of progress had been made. The ridiculous search for the missing man—ridiculous to him only, however—dragged on interminably, and made him gnash his teeth in secret. His omniscience was now a sheer aggravation; for it condemned him to look on at the futile activities that Barnby had suggested and Rodney initiated, recognizing all their futility, but unable to utter a protest. To a man of his temperament it was maddening.

But there was another source of trouble. His confidence in Margaret's feelings towards him had been somewhat shaken of late. It had seemed to him there had been a change in her bearing towards him—a slight change, subtle and indefinable, but a change. She seemed as friendly, as cordial as ever; she welcomed his visits and appeared always glad to see him, and yet there was a something guarded, so he felt, as if she were consciously restraining any further increase of intimacy.

The thought of it troubled him profoundly. Of course, it might be nothing more than a little extra carefulness, due to her equivocal position. She had need to keep clear of anything in the slightest degree compromising; that he realized clearly. But still, the feeling lurked in his mind that she had changed, at least in manner, and sometimes he was aware of a horrible suspicion that he might have been over-confident. More than once he had been on the point of saying something indiscreet, and as time went on he felt ever growing a yearning to have his doubts set at rest.

On this present occasion he was taking tea with Margaret by invitation, with the ostensible object of showing her a set of

etchings of some of the picturesque corners of Maidstone. He always enjoyed showing her his works, because he could see that she enjoyed looking at them; and these etchings of her native town would, he knew, have a double appeal.

"What a lovely old place it is!" she exclaimed, as she sipped her tea with her eyes fixed on the etchings that Varney had placed before her on a music-stand. "Why is it, Mr. Varney, that an etching or a drawing of any kind is so much more like the place than a photograph? It can't be a question of accuracy, for the photograph is at least as accurate as a drawing, and contains a great deal more detail."

"Yes," agreed Varney, "and that is probably the explanation. An artist puts down what he sees and what anyone else would see and recognize. A photograph puts down what is there, regardless of how the scene would look to a spectator. Consequently, it is full of irrelevant detail, which gets in the way of the real effect as the eye would see it; and it may show appearances that the eye never sees at all, as in the case of Muybridge's instantaneous photographs of galloping horses. A photograph of a Dutch clock might catch the pendulum in the middle of its swing, and then the clock would appear to have stopped. But an artist would always draw it at the end of its swing, where it pauses for an instant, and that is where the eye sees it when the clock is going."

"Yes, of course," said Margaret; "and now I understand why your etchings of the old streets and lanes show just the streets and lanes that I remember, whereas the photographs that I have all look more or less strange and unfamiliar. I suppose they are full of details that I never noticed; but your etchings pick out and emphasize the things that I used to look at with pleasure and which live in my memory. It is a long time since I have been to Maidstone. I should like to see it again; indeed, I am not sure that, if I were free to choose, I shouldn't like to live there again. It is a dear old town."

"Yes; isn't it? But you say 'if you were free to choose.' Aren't you free to choose where you will live?"

"In a sense I am, I suppose," she replied; "but I don't feel that I can make any definite arrangements for the future until—well, until I know what my own future is to be."

"But surely you know that now. You have got that letter of Dan's. That practically releases you. The rest is only a matter of time and legal formalities. If Jack Rodney had only got Penfield or some other solicitor to get the case started as soon as you had that letter, you would have had your decree by now and have been your own mistress. At least, that is my feeling on the subject. Of course, I am not a lawyer, and I may be wrong."

"I don't think you are," said Margaret. "I have thought the same all along, and I fancy Mr. Rodney is beginning to regret that he did not follow Dr. Thorndyke's advice and rely on the letter only. But he felt that he could hardly go against Mr. Barnby, who has had so much experience in this kind of practice. And Mr. Barnby was very positive that the letter was not enough."

"Yes, Barnby has crabbed the whole business; and now after all these months you are just where you were, excepting that you have dropped a lot of money on this ridiculous private detective. Can't you get Rodney to send the fellow packing and get the case started in earnest?"

"I am inclined to think that he is seriously considering that line of action, and I hope he is. Of course, I have not tried to influence him in the matter. It is silly for a lay person to embarrass a lawyer by urging him to do this or that against his judgment. But I must say that I have grown rather despondent as the time has dragged on and nothing has been done, and I shall be very relieved when a definite move is made. I have an impression that it will be quite soon."

"That is good hearing," exclaimed Varney, "because when a move is made it can't fail to be successful. How can it? On that letter Dan could offer no defence, and it is pretty obvious that he has no intention of offering any. And if there is no defence the case must go in your favour."

"Unless the judge suspects collusion, as Mr. Barnby seems to think he may."

"But," protested Varney, "judges don't give their decisions on what they suspect, do they? I thought they decided on the evidence. Surely collusion would have to be proved like anything else; and it couldn't be, because there has been no collusion. And I don't see why anyone should suspect that there has been."

"I agree with you entirely, Mr. Varney," said Margaret, "and I do hope you are right. You are making me feel quite encouraged."

"I am glad of that," said he, "and I am encouraging myself at the same time. This delay has been frightfully disappointing. I had hoped that by this time the affair would have been over and you would have been free. However, we may hope that it won't be so very long now."

"It will take some months, in any case," said Margaret.

"Yes, of course," he admitted; "but that is a mere matter of waiting. We can wait patiently when we see the end definitely in view. And what a relief it will be when it is over! Just think of it! When the words are spoken and the shackles are struck off! Won't that be a joyful day?"

As Varney was speaking, Margaret watched him furtively and a little uneasily. For there had come into his face an expression that she had seen more than once of late—an expression that filled her gentle soul with forebodings of trouble for this impulsive, warm-hearted friend. And now the note of danger was heightened by something significant in the words that he had used—something that expressed more than mere friendly solicitude.

"It will certainly be a relief when the whole business is over," she said quietly; "and it is most kind and sympathetic of you to take such a warm interest in my future."

"It isn't kind at all," he replied, "nor particularly sympathetic. I feel that I am an interested party. In a sense, your future is my future."

He paused for a few moments, and she looked at him in something like dismay. Vainly she cast about for some means of changing the current of the conversation, of escaping to some less perilous topic. Before she had time to recover from her confusion, he looked up at her and burst out passionately:

"Maggie, I want to ask you a question. I know I oughtn't to ask it, but you must try to forgive me. I can't bear the suspense any longer. I think about it day and night, and it is eating my heart out. What I want to ask you is this: When it is all over—when that blessed day comes and you are free, will you—can I hope that you may be willing to listen to me if I ask you to let me be your devoted servant, your humble worshipper, and to try to make up to you by love and faithful service all that has been missing from your life in the past? For years—for many years, Maggie—I have been your friend—a friend far more loving and devoted than you have ever guessed, for in those days I hardly dared to dream even of intimate friendship. But now the barrier between us is no longer immovable. Soon it will be cast down for ever. And then—can it be, Maggie, that my dream will come true? That you will grant me a lifelong joy by letting me be the guardian of your happiness and peace?"

For a moment there had risen to Margaret's face a flush of resentment, but it faded almost instantly and was gone, extinguished by a deep sense of the tragedy of this unfortunate but real and great passion. She had always liked Varney, and she had recognized and valued his quiet, unobtrusive friendship and the chivalrous deference with which he had been used to treat her. And now she was going to make him miserable, to destroy his cherished hopes of a future made happy in the realization of his great love for her. The sadness of it left no room for resentment, and her eyes filled as she answered unsteadily:

"You know, Mr. Varney, that, as a married woman, I have no right to speak or think of the making of a new marriage. But I feel that your question must be answered; and I wish, dear Mr. Varney, I wish from my heart that it could be answered differently. I have always valued your friendship—with very good reason; and I value your love, and am proud to have been thought worthy of it. But I cannot accept it. I can never accept it. It is dreadful to me, dear friend, to make you unhappy—you whom I like and admire so much. But it must be so. I have nothing but friendship to offer you, and I shall never have."

"Why do you say you will never have, Maggie?" he urged. "May it not be that you will change? That the other will come if I wait long enough? And I will wait patiently—wait until I am an old man if need be, so that only the door is not shut. I will never weary you with importunities, but just wait your pleasure. Will you not let me wait and hope, Maggie?"

She shook her head sadly. "No, Mr. Varney," she answered. "Believe me, it can never be. There is nothing to wait for. There will be no change. The future is certain so far as that. I am so sorry, dear generous friend. It grieves me to the heart to make you unhappy. But what I have said is final. I can never say anything different."

Varney looked at her in incredulous despair. He could not believe in this sudden collapse of all his hopes; for his doubts of her had been but vague misgivings, born of impatience and unrest. But suddenly a new thought flashed into his mind.

"How do you know that?" he asked. "Why are you so certain? Is there anything now that you know of that—that must keep us apart for ever? You know what I mean, Maggie. Is there anything?"

She was silent for a few moments. Naturally, she was reluctant to disclose to another the secret that she had held so long locked in her own heart, and that even now she dared but to whisper to herself. But she felt that to this man, whose love she must reject and whose happiness she must shatter, she owed a sacred duty. He must not be allowed to wreck his life if a knowledge of the truth would save him.

"I will tell you, Mr. Varney," she said. "You know how I came to marry Dan?"

"I think so," he replied. "He never told me, but I guessed."

"Well, if I had not married Dan I should have married John Rodney. There was no engagement and nothing was said; but we were deeply attached to one another, and we both understood. Then circumstances compelled me to marry Dan. Mr. Rodney knew what those circumstances were. He cherished no resentment against me. He did not even blame me. He has remained my friend ever since, and he has formed no other attachment. I know that he has never forgotten what might have been, and neither have I. Need I say any more?"

Varney shook his head. "No," he replied gruffly. "I understand."

For some moments there was a deep silence in the room. Margaret glanced timidly at her companion, shocked at the sudden change in his appearance. In a moment all the enthusiasm, the eager vivacity, had died out of his face, leaving it aged, drawn, and haggard. He had understood, and his heart was filled with black despair. At a word all his glorious dream-castles had come crashing down, leaving the world that had been so sunny a waste of dust and ashes. So he sat for a while silent, motionless, stunned by the suddenness of the calamity. At length he rose and began, in a dull, automatic way, to collect his etchings and bestow them in his portfolio. When he had secured them and tied the ribbons of the portfolio, he turned to Margaret and, standing before her, looked earnestly in her face.

"Good-bye, Maggie," he said in a strange, muffled voice; "I expect I shan't see you again for some time."

She stood up, and with a little smothered sob held out her hand. He took it in both of his and, stooping, kissed it reverently. "Good-bye again," he said, still holding her hand. "Don't be unhappy about me. It couldn't be helped. I shall often think of you and of how sweet you have been to me to-day; and I shall hope to hear soon that you have got your freedom. And I do hope to God that Rodney will make you happy. I think he will. He is a good fellow, an honest man, and a gentleman. He is worthy of you, and I wish you both long years of happiness."

He kissed her hand once more, and then, releasing it, made his way gropingly out into the hail and to the door. She followed him with the tears streaming down her face, and watched him, as she had watched him once before, descending the stairs. At the landing he turned and waved his hand, and even as she returned his greeting he was gone. She went back to the drawing-room still weeping silently, very sad at heart at this half-foreseen tragedy. For the time being, she could see, Varney was a broken man. He had come full of hope and he had gone away in despair; and something seemed to hint—it may have been the valedictory tone of his last words—that she had looked on him for the last time, that the final wave of his hand was a last farewell.

Meanwhile Varney, possessed by a wild unrest, hurried through the streets, yearning, like a wounded animal, for the solitude of his lair. He wanted to shut himself in his studio and be alone with his misery. Presently he hailed a taxicab, and from its window gazed out impatiently to measure its progress. Soon it drew up at the familiar entry, and when he had paid the driver he darted in and shut the door; but hardly had he attained the sanctuary that he had longed for than the same unrest began to engender a longing to escape. Up and down the studio he paced, letting the unbidden thoughts surge chaotically through his mind, mingling the troubled past with the future of his dreams—the sunny future that might have been—and this with the empty reality that lay before him.

On the wall he had pinned an early proof of the aquatint that Thorndyke had liked and that he himself rather liked. He had done it partly from bravado and partly as a memorial of the event that had set both him and Maggie free. Presently he halted before it and let it set the tune to his meditations. There was the lighthouse looking over the fog-bank just as it had looked on him when he was washing the bloodstain from the deck. By that time Purcell was overboard, at the bottom of the sea. His oppressor was gone. His life was now his own, and her life was her own.

He looked at the memorial picture, and in a moment it seemed to him to have become futile. The murder itself was futile, so far as he was concerned, though it had set Maggie free. To what purpose had he killed Purcell? It had been to ensure a future for himself; and behold! there was to be no future for him after all. Thus in the bitterness of his disappointment he saw everything out of proportion and in false perspective. He forgot that it was not to win Margaret but to escape from the clutches of his parasite that he had pulled the trigger on that sunny day in June. He forgot that he had achieved the very object that was in his mind when he fired the shot: freedom to live a reputable life safe from the menace of the law. His passion for Margaret had become so absorbing that it had obscured all the other purposes of his life; and now that it was gone, it seemed to him that nothing was left.

As he stood thus gloomily reflecting with his eyes fixed on the little picture, he began to be aware of a new impulse. The lighthouse, the black-sailed luggers, the open sea, seemed to take on an unwonted friendliness. They were the setting of something besides tragedy. There, in Cornwall, he had been happy in a way despite the abiding menace of Purcell's domination. There, at Sennen, he had lived under the same roof with her, had sat at her table, had been her guest and her accepted friend. It had not really been a happy period, but memory, like the sundial, numbers only the sunny hours, and Varney looked back on it with wistful eyes. At least his dream had not been shattered then. So, as he looked at the picture, he felt stirring within him a desire to go back and look upon those scenes again. Falmouth and Penzance and Sennen—especially Sennen—seemed to draw him. He wanted to look out across the sea to the Longships, and in the gathering gloom of the horizon to see the diamond and the ruby sparkle as they did that evening when he and the distant lighthouse seemed to hold secret converse.

It was, perhaps, a strange impulse. Whence it came he neither knew nor asked. It may have been the effect of memory and association. It may have been mere unrest. Or it may have been that a dead hand beckoned to him to come. Who shall say? He only knew that he was sensible of the impulse, and that it grew from moment to moment.

To a man in his condition, to feel an impulse is to act on it. No sooner was he conscious of the urge to go back and look upon the well-remembered scenes than he began to make his simple preparations for the journey. Like most experienced travellers he travelled light. Most of his kit, including his little case of sketching materials, was in the studio. The rest could be picked up at his lodgings en route for Paddington. Within ten minutes of his having formed the resolve to go, he stood on the threshold, locking the studio door from without with the extra key that he used when he was absent for more than a day. At the outer gate he paused to pocket the key, and stood for a few moments with his portmanteau in his hand, looking back at the studio with a curiously reflective air. Then, at last, he turned and went on his way. But if he could have looked, as the clairvoyant claims to look, through the bricks and mortar of London, he might at this very time have seen Dr. John Thorndyke striding up Chancery Lane from Fleet Street; might have followed him to the great gateway of Lincoln's Inn (on the masonry whereof tradition has it that Ben Jonson worked as a bricklayer), and seen him pass through into the little square beyond, and finally plunge into the dark and narrow entry of one of the ancient red brick houses that have looked down upon the square for some three or four centuries—an entry on the jamb of which was painted the name of Mr. John Rodney.

But Varney was not a clairvoyant, and neither was Thorndyke. And so it befell that each of them went his way unconscious of the movements of the other.

---

## XV. — IN WHICH THORNDYKE OPENS THE ATTACK

As Thorndyke turned the corner at the head of the stairs, he encountered Philip Rodney with a kettle in his hand, which he had apparently been filling at some hidden source of water.

"This is a bit of luck," said Philip, holding out his disengaged hand—"for me, at least; not, perhaps, for you. I have only just arrived, and Jack hasn't come over from the courts yet. I hope this isn't a business call."

"In a sense it is," replied Thorndyke, "as I am seeking information. But I think you can probably tell me all I want to know."

"That's all right," said Philip. "I'll just plant 'Polly' on the gas-stove, and while she is boiling we can smoke a preparatory pipe and you can get on with the examination-in-chief. Go in and take the presidential chair."

Thorndyke entered the pleasant, homely room, half office, half sitting-room, and seating himself in the big armchair began to fill his pipe. In a few moments Philip entered, and sat down on a chair which commanded a view of the tiny kitchen and of "Polly," seated on a gas-ring.

"Now," said he, "fire away. What do you want to know?"

"I want," replied Thorndyke, "to ask you one or two questions about your yacht."

"The deuce you do!" exclaimed Philip. "Are you thinking of going in for a yacht yourself?"

"Not at present," was the reply. "My questions have reference to that last trip that Purcell made in her, and the first one is: When you took over the yacht after that trip, did you find her in every respect as she was before? Was there anything missing that you could not account for, or any change in her condition, or anything about her that was not quite as you expected it to be?"

Philip looked at his visitor with undissembled surprise. "Now I wonder what makes you ask that. Have you any reason to expect that I should have found any change in her condition?"

"If you don't mind," said Thorndyke, "we will leave that question unanswered for the moment. I would rather not say, just now, what my object is in seeking this information. We can go into that later. Meanwhile, do you mind just answering my questions as if you were in the witness-box?"

A shade of annoyance crossed Philip's face. He could not imagine what possible concern Thorndyke could have with his yacht, and he was inclined to resent the rather cryptic attitude of his questioner. Nevertheless, he answered readily:

"Of course I don't mind. But, in fact, there is nothing to tell. I don't remember noticing any thing unusual about the yacht, and there was nothing missing, so far as I know."

"No rope or cordage of any kind, for instance?"

"No—at least, nothing to speak of. A new ball of spun-yarn had been broached. I noticed that, and I meant to ask Varney what he used it for. But there wasn't a great deal of it gone, and I know of nothing else. Oh, wait! If I am in the witness-box I must tell the whole truth, be it never so trivial. There was a mark or stain or dirty smear of some kind on the jib. Is that any good to you?"

"Are you sure it wasn't there before that day?"

"Quite. I sailed the yacht myself the day before, and I will swear that the jib was spotlessly clean then. So the mark must have been made by Purcell or Varney, because I noticed it the very next day."

"What was the mark like?"

"It was just a faint wavy line, as if some dirty water had been spilt on the sail and allowed to dry partly before it was washed off."

"Did you form any opinion as to how the mark might have been caused?"

Philip struggled, not quite successfully, to suppress a smile. To him there seemed something extremely ludicrous in this solemn interrogation concerning these meaningless trifles. But he answered as gravely as he could:

"I could only make a vague guess. I assumed that it was caused in some way by the accident that occurred. You may remember that the jib-halyard broke, and the sail went overboard and got caught under the yacht's forefoot. That is when it must have happened. Perhaps the sail may have picked some dirt off the keel. Usually a dirty mark on the jib means mud on the fluke of the anchor, but it wasn't that. The anchor hadn't been down since it was scrubbed. The yacht rode at moorings in Sennen Cove. However, there was the mark; how it came there you are as well able to judge as I am."

"And that is all you know; this mark on the sail and the spun-yarn? There is no other cordage missing?"

"No, not so far as I know."

"And there is nothing else missing? No iron fittings or heavy objects of any kind?"

"Good Lord, no! How should there be? You don't suspect Purcell of having hooked off with one of the anchors in his

pocket, do you?"

Thorndyke smiled indulgently, but persisted in his questions.

"Do you mean that you know there was nothing missing, or only that you are not aware of any thing being missing?"

The persistence of the questions impressed Philip with a sudden suspicion that Thorndyke had something definite in his mind, that he had some reason for believing that something had been removed from the yacht. He ventured to suggest this to Thorndyke, who answered frankly enough:

"You are so far right, Philip, that I am not asking these questions at random. I would rather not say more than that just now."

"Very well," said Philip; "I won't press you for an explanation. But I may say that we dismantled the yacht in rather a hurry, and hadn't time to check the inventory, so I can't really say whether there was anything missing or not. But you have come at a most opportune time, for it happens that we had arranged to go over to the place where she is laid up, at Battersea, to-morrow afternoon for the very purpose of checking the inventory and generally overhauling the boat and the gear. If you care to come over with us, or meet us there, we can settle your questions quite definitely. How will that suit you?"

"It will suit me perfectly," replied Thorndyke. "If you will give me the address and fix a time, I will meet you there."

"It is a disused wharf with some empty work shops," said Philip. "I will write down the directions, and if you will be at the gate at three o'clock to-morrow, we can go through the gear and fittings together."

Thorndyke made a note of the whereabouts of the wharf, and having thus despatched the business on which he had come, he took an early opportunity to depart, not having any great desire to meet John Rodney and be subjected to the inevitable cross-examination. He could see that Philip was, naturally enough, extremely curious as to the object of his inquiries, and he preferred to leave the two brothers to discuss the matter. On the morrow his actions would be guided by the results, if any, of the survey of the yacht.

Three o'clock on the following afternoon found him waiting at a large wooden gate in a narrow thoroughfare close to the river. On the pavement by his side stood the green canvas-covered "research case," which was his constant companion whenever he went abroad on professional business. It contained a very complete outfit of such reagents and apparatus as he might require in a preliminary investigation; but on the present occasion its usual contents had been reinforced by two large bottles, to obtain which Polton had that morning made a special visit to a wholesale chemist's in the Borough. A church clock somewhere across the river struck the hour, and almost at the same moment John and Philip Rodney emerged from a tributary alley and advanced towards the gate.

"You are here first, then," said Philip, "but we are not late. I heard a clock strike a moment ago."

He produced a key from his pocket, with which he unlocked a wicket in the gate, and, having pushed it open, invited Thorndyke to enter. The latter passed through, and the two brothers followed, locking the wicket after them, and conducted Thorndyke across a large yard to a desolate looking wharf, beyond which was a stretch of unreclaimed shore. Here, drawn up well above high-water mark, a small, sharp-sterned yacht stood on chocks under a tarpaulin cover.

"This is the yacht," said Philip, "but there is nothing on board of her. All the stores and gear and loose fittings are in the workshop behind us. Which will you see first?"

"Let us look at the gear," replied Thorndyke; and they accordingly turned towards a large disused workshop at the rear of the wharf.

"Phil was telling me about your visit last night," said Rodney, with an inquisitive eye on the research case, "and we are both fairly flummoxed. He gathered that these inquiries of yours are in some way connected with Purcell."

"Yes, that is so. I want to ascertain whether, when you resumed possession of the yacht after Purcell left her, you found her in the same condition as before, and whether her stores, gear, and fittings were intact."

"Did you suppose that Purcell might have taken some of them away with him?"

"I thought it not impossible," Thorndyke replied.

"Now, I wonder why on earth you should think that," said Rodney, "and what concern it should be of yours if he had."

Thorndyke smiled evasively. "Everything is my concern," he replied. "I am an Autolycus of the Law, a collector of miscellaneous trifles of evidence and unclassifiable scraps of information."

"Well," said Rodney, with a somewhat sour smile, "I have no experience of legal curiosity shops and oddment repositories. But I don't know what you mean by 'evidence.' Evidence of what?"

"Of whatever it may chance to prove," Thorndyke replied blandly.

"What did you suppose Purcell might have taken with him?" Rodney asked, with a trace of irritability in his tone.

"I had thought it possible that there might be some cordage missing and perhaps some iron fittings or other heavy objects. But, of course, that is mere surmise. My object is, as I have said, to ascertain whether the yacht was in all respects in the same condition when Purcell left her as when he came on board."

Rodney gave a grunt of impatience; but at this moment Philip, who had been wrestling with a slightly rusty lock, threw open the door of the workshop, and they all entered. Thorndyke looked curiously about the long, narrow interior with its prosaic contents, so little suggestive of the tragedy which his thoughts associated with them. Over head the yacht's spars rested on the tie-beams, from which hung bunches of blocks; on the floor reposed a long row of neatly painted half-hundred weights, a pile of chain cable, two anchors, a stove, and other oddments such as water-breakers, buckets, mops, etc.; and on the long benches at the side folded sails, locker cushions, sidelight lanterns, the binnacle, the cabin lamp, and other more delicate fittings. After a long look round, in the course of which his eye travelled along the row of ballast-weights, Thorndyke deposited his case on a bench and asked:

"Have you still got the broken jib-halyard that Philip was telling me about last night?"

"Yes," answered Rodney; "it is here under the bench."

He drew out a coil of rope, and, flinging it on the floor, began to uncoil it, when it separated into two lengths.

"Which are the broken ends?" asked Thorndyke.

"It broke near the middle," replied Rodney, "where it chafed on the cleat when the sail was hoisted. This is the one end, you see, frayed out, like a brush in breaking, and the other—" He picked up the second half, and passing it rapidly through his hands held up the end. He did not finish the sentence, but stood, with a frown of surprise, staring at the rope in his hand.

"This is queer," he said, after a pause. "The broken end has been cut off. Did you cut it off, Phil?"

"No," replied Philip; "it is just as I took it from the locker, where, I suppose, you or Varney stowed it."

"I wonder," said Thorndyke, "how much has been cut off. Do you know what the original length of the rope was?"

"Yes," replied Rodney; "forty-two feet. It is down in the inventory, but I remember working it out. Let us see how much there is here."

He laid the two lengths of rope along the floor, and with Thorndyke's spring tape care fully measured them. The combined length was exactly thirty-one feet.

"So," said Thorndyke, "there are eleven feet missing without allowing for the lengthening of the rope by stretching."

The two brothers glanced at one another, and both looked at Thorndyke with very evident surprise.

"Well," said Philip, "you seem to be right about the cordage. But what made you go for the jib-halyard in particular?"

"Because if any cordage had been cut off it would naturally be taken from a broken rope in preference to a whole one."

"Yes, of course. But I can't understand how you came to suspect that any rope was missing at all."

"We will talk about that presently," said Thorndyke. "The next question is as to the iron fittings, chain, and so forth."

"I don't think any of those can be missing," said Rodney. "You can't very well cut a length of chain off with your pocket-knife."

"No," agreed Thorndyke, "but I thought you might have some odd piece of chain among the ballast."

"We have no chain except the cable. Our only ballast is in the form of half-hundredweights. They are handier to stow than odd stuff."

"How many half-hundredweights have you?"

"Twenty-four," replied Rodney.

"There are only twenty-three in that row," said Thorndyke. "I counted them as we came in and noted the odd number."

The two brothers simultaneously checked Thorndyke's statement and confirmed it. Then they glanced about the floor of the workshop, under the benches, and by the walls; but the missing weight was nowhere to be seen, nor was there any place in which an object of this size could have got hidden.

"It is very extraordinary," said Philip. "There is certainly one weight missing. And no one has handled them but Jack and I. We hired a barrow and brought up all the gear ourselves."

"There is just the chance," said Thorndyke, "that one of them may have been overlooked and left in the yacht's hold."

"It is very unlikely," replied Philip, "seeing that we took out the floor-boards, so that you can see the whole of the bilges from end to end. But I will run down and make sure."

He ran out, literally, and crossing the wharf disappeared over the edge. In a couple of minutes he was back, breathing fast, and evidently not a little excited.

"It isn't there," he said. "Of course it couldn't be. But the question is, what has become of it? It is a most mysterious affair."

"It is," agreed Rodney. "And what is still more mysterious is that Thorndyke seemed to suspect that it was missing even before he came here. Now didn't you, Thorndyke?"



"I suspected that some heavy object was missing, as I mentioned," was the reply, "and a ballast-weight was a likely object. By the way, can you fix a date on which you know that all the ballast-weights were in place?"

"Yes, I think I can," replied Philip. "A few days before Purcell went to Penzance we beached the yacht to give her a scrape. Of course we had to take out the ballast, and when we launched her again I helped to put it back. I am certain that all the weights were there then, because I counted them after they were stowed in their places."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "it is virtually certain that they were all on board when Purcell and Varney started from Sennen."

"I should say it is absolutely certain," said Philip.

Thorndyke nodded gravely and appeared to reflect a while. But his reflections were broken in upon by John Rodney.

"Look here, Thorndyke, we have answered your questions and given you facilities for verifying certain opinions that you held, and now it is time that you were a little less reserved with us. You evidently connected the disappearance of this rope and this weight in some way with Purcell. Now, we are all interested in Purcell. You have got something up your sleeve, and we should like to know what that something is. It is perfectly obvious that you don't imagine that Purcell, when he went up the pier ladder at Penzance, had a couple of fathoms of rope and a half-hundred weight concealed about his person."

"As a matter of fact," said Thorndyke, "I don't imagine that Purcell ever went up the ladder at Penzance at all."

"But Varney saw him go up," protested Philip.

"Varney says he saw him go up," Thorndyke corrected. "I do not accept Mr. Varney's statement."

"Then what on earth do you suggest?" demanded Philip. "And why should Varney say what isn't true?"

"Let us sit down on this bench," said Thorndyke, "and thrash the matter out. I will put my case to you, and you can give me your criticisms on it. I will begin by stating that some months ago I came to the conclusion that Purcell was dead."

Both the brothers started and gazed at Thorndyke in utter astonishment. Then Rodney said:

"You say 'some months ago.' You must mean within the last three months."

"No," replied Thorndyke. "I decided that he died on the 2nd of last June, before the yacht reached Penzance."

An exclamation burst simultaneously from both of his hearers, and Rodney protested impatiently:

"But this is sheer nonsense, if you will pardon me for saying so. Have you forgotten that two persons have received letters from him less than four months ago?"

"I suggest that we waive those letters and consider the other evidence."

"But we can't waive them!" exclaimed Rodney. "They are material evidence of the most conclusive kind."

"I may say that I have ascertained that both those letters were forgeries. The evidence can be produced, if necessary, as both the letters are in existence, but I don't propose to produce it now. I ask you to accept my statement for the time being and to leave the letters out of the discussion."

"It is leaving out a good deal," said Rodney. "I find it very difficult to believe that they were forgeries or to imagine who on earth could have forged them. However, we won't contest the matter now. When did you come to this extra ordinary conclusion?"

"A little over four months ago," replied Thorndyke.

"And you never said anything to any of us on the subject," said Rodney, "and, what is more astonishing, you actually put in an advertisement, addressed to a man whom you believed to be dead."

"And got an answer from him," added Philip, with a derisive smile.

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "It was an experiment, and it was justified by the result. But let us get back to the matter that we have been investigating. I came to the conclusion, as I have said, that Purcell met his death during that voyage from Sennen to Penzance, and that Varney, for some reason, had thought it necessary to conceal the occurrence; but I decided that the evidence in my possession would not be convincing in a court of law."

"I have no doubt that you were perfectly right in that," Rodney remarked dryly.

"I further considered it very unlikely that any fresh evidence would ever be forthcoming, and that, since the death could not be proved, it was, for many reasons, undesirable that the question should ever be raised. Accordingly, I never communicated my belief to anybody."

"Then," said Rodney, "are we to understand that some new evidence has come to light, after all?"

"Yes. It came to light the other day at the College of Surgeons. I dare say Philip told you about it."

"He told me that, by an extraordinary coincidence, that quaint button of Purcell's had turned up, and that some sort of sea-worm had built a tube on it. But if that is what you mean, I don't see the bearing of it as evidence."

"Neither do I," said Philip.

"You remember that Varney distinctly stated that when Purcell went up the ladder at Penzance he was wearing his oilskin coat, and that the button was then on it?"

"Yes. But I don't see anything in that. Purcell went ashore, it is true, and he went away from Cornwall. But he seems to have gone by sea, and, as I suggested the other day, he probably got a fresh button when he went on board the steamer and chucked this cork one overboard."

"I remember your making that suggestion," said Thorndyke, "and very much astonished I was to hear you make it. I may say that I have ascertained that Purcell was never on board that steamer."

"Well, he might have thrown it into the sea somewhere else. There is no particular mystery about its having got into the sea. But what was there about my suggestion that astonished you so much?"

"It was," replied Thorndyke, "that you completely overlooked a most impressive fact which was staring you in the face and shouting aloud for recognition."

"Indeed!" said Philip. "What fact was it that I overlooked?"

"Just consider," replied Thorndyke, "what it was that Professor D'Arcy showed us. It was a cork button with a Terebella tube on it. Now an ordinary cork, if immersed long enough, will soak up water until it is waterlogged and then sink to the bottom. But this one was impregnated with paraffin wax. It could not get waterlogged and it could not sink. It would float for ever."

"Well?" queried Philip.

"But it had sunk. It had been lying at the bottom of the sea for months—long enough for a Terebella to build a tube on it. Then at last it had broken loose, risen to the surface and drifted ashore."

"You are taking the worm-tube as evidence," said John Rodney, "that the button had sunk to bottom. Is it impossible—I am no naturalist—but is it impossible that the worm could have built its tube while the button was floating about in the sea?"

"It is quite impossible," replied Thorndyke, "in the case of this particular worm, since the tube is built up of particles of rock gathered by the worm from the sea bottom. You will bear me out in that, Philip?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Philip. "There is no doubt that the button has been at the bottom for a good many months. The question is how the deuce it can have got there, and what was holding it down."

"You are not overlooking the fact that it is a button," said Thorndyke—"I mean that it was attached to a garment?"

Both men looked at Thorndyke a little uncomfortably. Then Rodney replied:

"Your suggestion obviously is that the button was attached to a garment and that the garment contained a body. I am disposed to concede the garment, since I can think of no other means by which the button could have been held down, but I see no reason for assuming the body. I admit that I do not quite understand how Purcell's oilskin coat could have got to the bottom of the sea, but still less can I imagine how Purcell's body could have got to the bottom of the sea. What do you say, Phil?"

"I agree with you," answered Philip. "Something must have held the button down, and I can think of nothing but the coat to which it was attached. But as to the body, it seems a gratuitous assumption, to say nothing of the various reasons for believing that Purcell is still alive. There is nothing wildly improbable in the supposition that the coat might have blown overboard and been sunk by something heavy in the pocket. As a matter of fact, it would have sunk by itself as soon as it got thoroughly soaked. You must admit, Thorndyke, that that is so."

But Thorndyke shook his head. "We are not dealing with general probabilities," said he. "We are dealing with a specific case. An empty oilskin coat, even if sunk by some object in the pocket, would have been comparatively light, and, like all moderately light bodies, would have drifted about the sea bottom, impelled by currents and tide-streams. But that is not the condition in the present case. There is evidence that this button was moored immovably to some very heavy object."

"What evidence is there of that?" demanded Rodney.

"There is the conclusive fact that it has been all these months lying continuously in one place."

"Indeed!" said Rodney, with hardly concealed scepticism. "That seems a bold thing to say. But if you know that it has been lying all the time in one place, perhaps you can point out the spot where it has been lying."

"As a matter of fact I can," said Thorndyke. "That button, Rodney, has been lying all these months on the sea bottom at the base of the Wolf Rock."

The two brothers started very perceptibly. They stared at Thorndyke, then looked at one another, and then Rodney challenged the statement.

"You make this assertion very confidently," he said. "Can you produce any evidence to support it?"

"I can produce perfectly convincing and conclusive evidence," replied Thorndyke. "A very singular conjunction of circumstances enables us to fix with absolute certainty the place where that button has been lying. Do you happen to be acquainted with the peculiar resonant volcanic rock known as phonolite or clink-stone?"

Rodney shook his head a little impatiently. "No," he answered; "I have never heard of it before."

"It is not a very rare rock," said Thorndyke, "but in the neighbourhood of the British Isles it occurs in only two places. One is inland in the North, and may be disregarded. The other is the Wolf Rock."

Neither of his hearers made any comment on this statement, though it was evident that both were deeply impressed, and he continued:

"This Wolf Rock is a very remarkable structure. It is what is called a 'volcanic neck'—that is, it is a mass of altered lava that once filled the funnel of a volcano. The volcano has disappeared, but this cast of the funnel remains standing up from the bottom of the sea like a great column. It is a single mass of phonolite, and thus entirely different in composition from the sea bed around or anywhere near these islands. But, of course, immediately at its base the sea bottom must be covered with decomposed fragments which have fallen from its sides, and it is with these fragments that our Terebella has built its tube. You remember, Philip, my pointing out to you, as we walked home from the College, that the worm-tube appeared to be built of fragments that were all alike. Now, that was a very striking and significant fact. It furnished *prima facie* evidence that the button had been moored in one place, and that it had therefore been attached to some very heavy object. That night I made an exhaustive examination of the material of the tube, and then the further fact emerged that the material was phonolite. This, as I have said, fixed the locality with exactness and certainty. And I may add that, in view of the importance of the matter in an evidential sense, I submitted the fragments yesterday to one of the greatest living authorities on petrology, who recognized them at once as phonolite."

For some time after Thorndyke had finished speaking the two brothers sat wrapped in silent reflection. Both were deeply impressed, but each in a markedly different way. To John Rodney, the lawyer, accustomed to sworn testimony and documentary evidence, this scientific demonstration appeared amazingly ingenious but some what fantastic and unconvincing. In the case of Philip, the doctor, it was quite otherwise. Accustomed to acting on inferences from facts of his own observing, he gave full weight to each item of evidence, and his thoughts were already stretching out to the as yet unstated corollaries.

John Rodney was the first to speak. "What inference," he asked, "do you wish us to draw from this very ingenious theory of yours?"

"It is rather more than a theory," said Thorndyke, "but we will let that pass. The inference I leave to you; but perhaps it would help you if I were to recapitulate the facts."

"Perhaps it would," said Rodney.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I will take them in their order. This is the case of a man who was seen to start on a voyage for a given destination in company with one other man. His start out to sea was witnessed by a number of persons. From that moment he was never seen again by any person excepting his one companion. He is said to have reached his destination, but his arrival there rests upon the unsupported verbal testimony of one person, the said companion. Thereafter he vanished utterly, and since then has made no sign of being alive; he has drawn no cheques, though he has a considerable balance at his bank; he has communicated with no one, and he has never been seen by anybody who could recognize him."

"Is that quite correct?" interposed Philip. "He is said to have been seen at Falmouth and Ipswich, and then there are those letters."

"His alleged appearance, embarking at Falmouth and disembarking at Ipswich," replied Thorndyke, "rest, like his arrival at Penzance, upon the unsupported testimony of one person, his sole companion on the voyage. That statement I can prove to be untrue. He was never seen either at Falmouth or at Ipswich. As to the letters. I can prove them both to be forgeries and for the present I ask you to admit them as such pending the production of proof. But if we exclude the alleged appearances and the letters, what I have said is correct: from the time when this man put out to sea from Sennen he has never been seen by anyone but Varney, and there has never been any corroboration of Varney's statement that he landed at Penzance."

"Some eight months later a portion of this man's clothing is found. It bears evidence of having been lying at the bottom of the sea for many months, so that it must have sunk to its resting-place within a very short time of the man's disappearance. The place where it has been lying is one over, or near, which the man must have sailed in the yacht. It has been moored to the bottom by some very heavy object, and a very heavy object has disappeared from the yacht. That heavy object had apparently not disappeared when the yacht started, and it is not known to have been on the yacht afterwards. The evidence goes to show that the disappearance of that object coincided in time with the disappearance of the man, and a quantity of cordage disappeared certainly on that day."

"Those are the facts at present in our possession with regard to the disappearance of Daniel Purcell, to which we may add that the disappearance was totally unexpected, that it has never been explained or accounted for excepting in a letter which is a manifest forgery, and that even in the latter, apart from the fictitious nature of the letter, the explanation is utterly inconsistent with all that is known of the missing man in respect of his character, his habits, his intentions, and his circumstances."

---

## XVI. — IN WHICH JOHN RODNEY IS CONVINCED

ONCE more, as Thorndyke concluded, there was a long, uncomfortable silence, during which the two brothers cogitated profoundly and with a very disturbed expression. At length John Rodney spoke.

"There is no denying, Thorndyke, that the body of circumstantial evidence that you have produced and expounded so skilfully and lucidly is extra ordinarily complete. Of course, it is subject to your being able to prove that Varney's reports as to Purcell's appearance at Falmouth and Ipswich were false reports, and that the letters which purported to be written and sent by Purcell were in fact not written or sent by him. If you can prove those assertions, there will undoubtedly be a very formidable case against Varney, because those reports and those letters would then be evidence that someone was endeavouring to prove, falsely, that Purcell is alive. But this would amount to presumptive evidence that he is not alive, and that someone has reasons for concealing the fact of his death. But we must look to you to prove what you have asserted. You could hardly suggest that we should charge a highly respectable gentleman of our acquaintance with having murdered his friend and made away with the body—for that is obviously your meaning—on a mass of circumstantial evidence, which is, you must admit, rather highly theoretical."

"I agree with you completely," replied Thorndyke. "The evidence respecting the reports and the letters is obviously essential. But in the meantime it is of the first importance that we carry this investigation to an absolute finish. It is not merely a question of justice or our duty on grounds of public policy to uncover a crime and secure the punishment of the criminal. There are individual rights and interests to be guarded—those, I mean, of the missing man's wife. If her husband is dead, common justice to her demands that his death should be proved and placed on public record."

"Yes, indeed," Rodney agreed heartily. "If Purcell is dead, then she is a widow, and the petition becomes unnecessary. By the way, I understand now why you were always so set against the private detective, but what I don't understand is why you put in that advertisement."

"It is quite simple," was the reply. "I wanted another forged letter, written in terms dictated by myself—and I got it."

"Ha!" exclaimed Rodney. And now, for the first time, he began to understand how Thorndyke had got his great reputation.

"You spoke just now," Rodney continued, "of carrying this investigation to a finish. Haven't you done so? Is there anything more to investigate?"

"We have not yet completed our examination of the yacht," replied Thorndyke. "The facts that we have elicited enable us to make certain inferences concerning the circumstances of Purcell's death—assuming his death to have occurred. We infer, for instance, that he did not fall overboard, nor was he pushed overboard. He met his death on the yacht, and it was his dead body which was cast into the sea with the sinker attached to it. That we may fairly infer. But we have, at present, no evidence as to the way in which he came by his death. Possibly a further examination of the yacht may show some traces from which we may form an opinion. By the way, I have been looking at that revolver that is hanging from the beam. Was that on board at the time?"

"Yes," answered Rodney. "It was hanging on the cabin bulkhead. Be careful," he added, as Thorndyke lifted it from its hook. "I don't think it has been unloaded."

Thorndyke opened the breech of the revolver, and, turning out the cartridges into his hand, peered down the barrel and into each chamber separately. Then he looked at the cartridges in his hand.

"This seems a little odd," he remarked. "The barrel is quite clean and so is one chamber, but the other five chambers are extremely foul. And I notice that the cartridges are not all alike. There are five Eleys and one Curtis and Harvey. That is quite a suggestive coincidence."

Philip looked with a distinctly startled expression at the little heap of cartridges in Thorndyke's hand, and, picking out the odd one, examined it with knitted brows.

"When did you fire the revolver last, Jack?" he asked, looking up at his brother.

"On the day when we potted at those champagne bottles," was the reply.

Philip raised his eyebrows. "Then," said he, "this is a very remarkable affair. I distinctly remember on that occasion, when we had sunk all the bottles, reloading the revolver with Eleys, and that there were then three cartridges left over in the bag. When I had loaded I opened the new box of Curtis and Harvey's, tipped them into the bag, and threw the box overboard."

"Did you clean the revolver?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, I didn't. I meant to clean it later, but forgot to."

"But," said Thorndyke, "it has undoubtedly been cleaned, and very thoroughly as to the barrel and one chamber. Shall we check the cartridges in the bag? There ought to be forty-nine Curtis and Harveys and three Eleys if what you have told us is correct."

Philip searched among the raffle on the bench, and presently unearthed a small linen bag. Untying the string, he shot out

on the bench a heap of cartridges, which he counted one by one. There were fifty-two in all, and three of them were Eleys.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "it comes to this: since you used that revolver it has been used by someone else. That someone fired only a single shot, after which he carefully cleaned the barrel and the empty chamber and reloaded. Incidentally, he seems to have known where the cartridge-bag was kept, but he did not know about the change in the make of cartridges or that the revolver had not been cleaned. You notice, Rodney," he added, "that the circumstantial evidence accumulates."

"I do, indeed," Rodney replied gloomily. "Is there anything else that you wish to examine?"

"Yes; there is the sail. Philip mentioned a stain on the jib. Shall we see if we can make any thing of that?"

"I don't think you will make much of it," said Philip. "It is very faint. However, you shall see it and judge for yourself."

He picked out one of the bundles of white duck, and while he was unfolding it Thorndyke dragged an empty bench into the middle of the floor under the skylight. Over this the sail was spread so that the mysterious mark was in the middle of the bench. It was very inconspicuous—just a faint grey-green, wavy line, like the representation of an island on a map. The three men looked at it curiously for a few moments, then Thorndyke asked:

"Would you mind if I made a further stain on the sail? I should like to apply some reagents."

"Of course you must do what is necessary," said Rodney. "The evidence is more important than the sail."

On this Thorndyke opened his research case and brought forth the two bottles that Polton had procured from the Borough, of which one was labelled "Tinct. Guaiaci Dil." and the other "Ozon." As they emerged from the case, Philip commented, "I shouldn't have thought that the guaiacum test would be of any use after all these months, especially as the sail seems to have been scrubbed."

"It will act, I think, if the pigment or its derivatives is there," said Thorndyke; and as he spoke he poured a quantity of the tincture on the middle of the stained area. The pool of liquid rapidly spread considerably beyond the limits of the stain, growing paler as it extended. Then Thorndyke cautiously dropped small quantities of the ozonic ether at various points around the stained area, and watched closely as the two liquids mingled in the fabric of the sail. Gradually the ether spread towards the stain, and, first at one point and then at another, approached and finally crossed the wavy grey line; and at each point the same change occurred: first the faint grey line turned into a strong blue line, and then the colour extended to the enclosed space until the entire area of the stain stood out a conspicuous blue patch. Philip and Thorndyke looked at one another significantly, and the latter said: "You understand the meaning of this reaction, Rodney; this is a bloodstain, and a very carefully washed bloodstain."

"So I supposed," Rodney replied; and for a while no one spoke.

There was something very dramatic and solemn, they all felt, in the sudden appearance of this staring blue patch on the sail with the sinister message that it brought. But what followed was more dramatic still. As they stood silently regarding the blue stain, the mingled liquids continued to spread; and suddenly, at the extreme edge of the wet area, they became aware of a new spot of blue. At first a mere speck, it grew slowly, as the liquid spread over the canvas, into a small oval, and then a second spot appeared by its side. At this point Thorndyke poured out a fresh charge of the tincture, and when it had soaked into the cloth cautiously applied a sprinkling of ether. Instantly the blue spots began to elongate; fresh spots and patches appeared, and as they ran together there sprang out of the blank surface the clear impression of a hand—a left hand, complete in all its details excepting the third finger, which was represented by a round spot at some two-thirds of its length.

The dreadful significance of this apparition, and the uncanny and mysterious manner of its emergence from the white surface, produced a most profound impression on all the observers, but especially on Rodney, who stared at it with an expression of the utmost horror, but spoke not a word. His brother was hardly less appalled, and when he at length spoke it was in a hushed voice that was little above a whisper.

"It is horrible," he murmured. "It seems almost supernatural, that accusing hand springing into existence out of the blank surface after all this time. I wonder," he added, after a pause, "why the third finger made no mark, seeing that the others are so distinct."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that the impression is there. That small round spot looks like the mark of a finger-tip, and its position rather suggests a finger with a stiff joint."

As he made this statement, both brothers simultaneously uttered a smothered exclamation.

"It is Varney's hand!" gasped Philip. "You recognize it, Jack, don't you? That is just where the tip of his stiff finger would come. Have you ever noticed Varney's left hand, Thorndyke?"

"You mean the ankylosed third finger? Yes; and I agree with you that this is undoubtedly the print of Varney's hand."

"Then," said Rodney, "the case is complete. There is no need for any further investigation. On the evidence that is before us, to say nothing of the additional evidence that you can produce, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt that Purcell was murdered by Varney and his body sunk in the sea. You agree with me, I am sure, Thorndyke?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "I consider the evidence so far conclusive that I have not the slightest doubt on the subject."

"Very well," said Rodney. "Then the next question is, what is to be done? Shall I lay a sworn information or will you? Or

had we better go to the police together and make a joint statement?"

"Whatever we do," replied Thorndyke, "don't let us be premature. The evidence, as you say, is perfectly convincing. It leaves us with no doubt as to what happened on that day last June. It would probably be, in an intellectual sense, quite convincing to a judge. It might even be to a jury. But would it be sufficient to secure a conviction? I think it extremely doubtful."

"Do you really?" exclaimed Philip. "I should have thought it impossible that anyone who had heard the evidence could fail to come to the inevitable conclusion."

"You are probably right," said Thorndyke. "But a jury who are trying an accused person on a capital charge have got to arrive at something more than a belief that the accused is guilty. They have got to be convinced that there is, humanly speaking, no possible doubt as to the prisoner's guilt. No jury would give an adverse verdict on a balance of probabilities, nor would any judge encourage them to do so."

"But surely," said Philip, "this is something more than a mere balance of probabilities. The evidence all points in the same direction, and there is nothing to suggest a contrary conclusion."

Thorndyke smiled dryly. "You might think differently after you have heard a capable counsel for the defence. But the position is this: we are dealing with a charge of murder. Now, in order to prove that a particular person is guilty of murder it is necessary first to establish the *corpus delicti*, as the phrase goes—that is, to prove that a murder has been committed by someone. But the proof that a person has been murdered involves the antecedent proof that he is dead. If there is any doubt that the alleged deceased is dead, no murder charge can be sustained. But proof of death usually involves the production of the body or of some identifiable part of it, or at least the evidence of some person who has seen it and can swear to its identity. There are exceptional cases, of course, and this might be accepted as one. But you can take it that the inability of the prosecution to produce the body or any part of it, or any witness who can testify to having seen it, or any direct evidence that the person alleged to have been murdered is actually dead, would make it extremely difficult to secure the conviction of the accused."

"Yes, I see that," said Philip. "But, after all, that is not our concern. If we give the authorities all the information that we possess, we shall have done our duty as citizens. As to the rest, we must leave the court to convict or acquit, according to its judgment."

"Not at all," Thorndyke dissented. "You are losing sight of our position in the case. There are two different issues, which are, however, inseparably connected. One is the fact of Purcell's death, the other is Varney's part in compassing it. Now it is the first issue that concerns us, or at least concerns me. If we could prove that Purcell is dead without bringing Varney into it at all, I should be willing to do so; for I strongly suspect that there were extenuating circumstances."

"So do I," said Rodney. "Purcell was a brute, whereas Varney has always seemed to be a perfectly decent, gentlemanly fellow."

"That is the impression that I have received," said Thorndyke, "and I feel no satisfaction in proceeding against Varney. My purpose all along has been, not to convict Varney but to prove that Purcell is dead. And that is what we have to do now, for Margaret Purcell's sake. But we cannot leave Varney out of the case. For if Purcell is dead, he is dead because Varney killed him; and our only means of proving his death is to charge Varney with having murdered him. But if we charge Varney we must secure a conviction. We cannot afford to fail. If the court is convinced that Purcell is dead, it will convict Varney, for the evidence of his death is evidence of his murder; but if the court acquits Varney, it can do so only on the ground that there is no conclusive evidence that Purcell is dead. Varney's acquittal would therefore leave Margaret Purcell still bound by law to a hypothetical husband, with the insecure chance of obtaining her release at some future time either by divorce or presumption of death. That would not be fair to her. She is a widow, and she is entitled to have her status acknowledged."

Rodney nodded gloomily. A consciousness of what he stood to gain by Varney's conviction lent an uncomfortable significance to Thorndyke's words.

"Yes," he agreed, half reluctantly, "there is no denying the truth of what you say, but I wish it might have been the other way about. If Purcell had murdered Varney I could have raised the hue and cry with a good deal more enthusiasm. I knew both the men well, and I liked Varney but detested Purcell. Still, one has to accept the facts."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke, who had realized and sympathized with Rodney's qualms. "The position is not of our creating, and whatever our private sentiments may be, the fact remains that a man who elects to take the life of another must accept the consequences. That is Varney's position so far as we can see, and if he is innocent it is for him to clear himself."

"Yes, of course," Rodney agreed; "but I wish the accusation had come through different channels."

"So do I," said Philip. "It is horrible to have to denounce a man with whom one has been on terms of intimate friendship. But apparently Thorndyke considers that we should not denounce him at present. That is what I don't quite understand. You seemed to imply, Thorndyke, that the case was not complete enough to warrant our taking action, and that some further evidence ought to be obtained in order to make sure of a conviction. But what further evidence is it possible to obtain?"

"My feeling," replied Thorndyke, "is that the case is at present, as your brother expressed it just now, somewhat theoretical, or, rather, hypothetical. The evidence is circumstantial from beginning to end. There is not a single item of

direct evidence to furnish a starting-point. It would be insisted by the defence that Purcell's death is a matter of mere inference, and that you cannot convict a man of the murder of another who may conceivably be still alive. We ought, if possible, to put Purcell's death on the basis of demonstrable fact."

"But how is that possible?" demanded Philip.

"The conclusive method of proving the death of a person is, as I have said, to produce that person's body or some recognizable part of it."

"But Purcell's body is at the bottom of the sea."

"True. But we know its whereabouts. It is a small area, with the lighthouse as a landmark. If that area were systematically worked over with a trawl or dredge, or, better still, with a set of creepers attached to a good-sized spar, there should be a very fair chance of recovering the body, or at least the clothing and the weight."

Philip reflected for a few moments. "I think you are right," he said at length. "The body appears, from what you say, to be quite close to the Wolf Rock, and almost certainly on the east side. With a good compass and the lighthouse as a sailing mark, it would be possible to ply up and down and search every inch of the bottom in the neighbourhood of the Rock."

"There is only one difficulty," said Rodney. "Your worm-tube was composed entirely of fragments of the Rock. But how large an area of the sea bottom is covered with those fragments? We should have to ascertain that if we are to work over the whole of it."

"It would not be difficult to ascertain," replied Thorndyke. "If we take soundings with a hand-lead as we approach the Rock, the samples that come up on the arming of the lead will tell us when we are over a bottom covered with phonolite debris."

"Yes," Rodney agreed, "that will answer if the depth is within the range of a hand-lead. If it isn't we shall have to rig the tackle for a deep-sea lead. It will be rather a gruesome quest. Do I gather that you are prepared to come down with us and lend a hand? I hope you are."

"So do I!" exclaimed Philip. "We shall be quite at home with the navigation, but if—er—if anything comes up on the creepers, it will be a good deal more in your line than ours."

"I should certainly wish to come," said Thorndyke, "and, in fact, I think it rather desirable that I should, as Philip suggests. But I can't get away from town just at present, nor, I imagine, can you. We had better postpone the expedition for a week or so until the commencement of the spring vacation. That will give us time to make the necessary arrangements, to charter a suitable boat, and so forth. And, in any case, we shall have to pick our weather, having regard to the sort of sea that one may encounter in the neighbourhood of the Wolf."

"Yes," agreed Philip, "it will have to be a reasonably calm day when we make the attempt, so I suggest that we put it off until you and Jack are free; and meanwhile I will get on with the preliminary arrangements, the hiring of the boat and getting together the necessary gear."

While they had been talking the evening had closed in, and the workshop was now almost in darkness. It being too late for the brothers to carry out the business that had brought them to the wharf, even if they had been in a state of mind suitable to the checking of inventories, they postponed the survey to a later date, locked up the workshop, and in company with Thorndyke made their way homeward.

---

## XVII. — IN WHICH THERE IS A MEETING AND A FAREWELL

IT was quite early on a bright morning at the beginning of April when Thorndyke and the two Rodneys took their way from their hotel towards the harbour of Penzance. Philip had been in the town for a day or two, completing the arrangements for the voyage of exploration; the other two had come down from London only on the preceding evening.

"I hope the skipper will be punctual," said Philip. "I told him to meet us on the pier at eight o'clock sharp. We want to get off as early as possible, for it is a longish run out to the Rock, and we may have to make a long day of it."

"We probably shall," said Rodney. "The Wolf Rock is a good departure for purposes of navigation, but when it comes to finding a spot of sea bottom only a foot or two in extent, our landmark isn't very exact. It will take us a good many hours to search the whole area."

"I wonder," said Thorndyke, "what took them out there. According to Varney's description and the evidence of the button, they must have had the Rock close aboard. But it was a good deal out of their way from Sennen to Penzance."

"It was," agreed Philip. "But you can't make a bee-line in a sailing craft. That's why I chartered a motor-boat for this job. Under canvas you can only keep as near to your course as the wind will let you. But Purcell was a deuce of a fellow for sea room. He always liked to keep a good offing. I remember that on that occasion he headed straight out to sea and got well outside the Longships before he turned south. I watched the yacht from the shore, and wondered how much longer he was going to hold on. It looked as if he were heading for America. Then, you remember, the fog came down, and they may have lost their bearings a bit; and the tides are pretty strong about here."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "and as we may take it that the trouble, whatever it was, came to a head while they were enveloped in fog, it is likely that the yacht was left to take care of herself for a time, and may have drifted a good deal off her course. At any rate, it is clear that at one time she had the Rock right under her lee, and must have drifted past within a few feet."

"It would have been a quaint position," said Philip, "if she had bumped on to it and gone to the bottom. Then they would have kept one another company in Davy Jones's locker."

"It would have saved a lot of trouble if they had gone down together," his brother remarked. "But from what you have just said, Thorndyke, it seems that you have a more definite idea as to the position of the body than I thought. Where do you suppose it to be?"

"Judging from all the facts taken together," replied Thorndyke, "I should say that it is lying close to the base of the Rock on the east side. We have it from Varney that the yacht drifted down towards the Rock during the fog, and I gathered that she drifted past close to the east side. And we also learned from him that the jib had then come down, which was, in fact, the cause of her being adrift. But the bloodstains on the sail prove that the tragedy occurred either before the halyard broke or while the sail was down—almost certainly the latter. And we may take it that it occurred during the fog; that the fog created the opportunity; for we must remember that they were close to the lighthouse, and therefore, apart from the fog, easily within sight of it. For the same reason we may assume that the body was put overboard before the fog lifted. All these circumstances point to the body being close to the Rock, and the worm-tube emphatically confirms that inference."

"Then," said Philip, "in that case there is no great point in taking soundings."

"Not in the first instance," Thorndyke agreed. "But if we get no result close to the Rock, we may have to sample the bottom to see how far from the base the conditions indicated by the worm-tube extend."

They walked on in silence for some time.

Presently Rodney remarked: "This reminds me of the last time I came down to a rendezvous on Penzance pier, when I expected to find Varney waiting for me and he wasn't there. I wonder where he was, by the way."

"He had probably gone to post a letter to Mr. Penfield at some remote pillar-box, where collections were not too frequent," said Thorndyke.

Rodney looked at him quickly, once more astonished at his intimate knowledge of the details of the case. He was about to remark on it when Thorndyke asked:

"Have you seen much of Varney lately?"

"I haven't seen him at all," replied Rodney. "Have you, Phil?"

"No," replied Philip; "not for quite a long time. Which is rather odd, for he used to look in at Maggie's flat pretty often to have tea and show her his latest work. But he hasn't been there for weeks, I know, because I was speaking to her about him only a day or two ago. She seemed to have an idea that he might have gone away on a sketching tour, though I don't think she had anything to go on."

"He can't have smelt a rat and cleared out," mused Rodney. "I don't see how he could, though I shouldn't be altogether sorry if he had. It will be a horrid business when we have to charge him and give evidence against him. But it isn't possible that he can have seen or heard anything."

This was also Thorndyke's opinion, but he was deeply interested in the report of Varney's disappearance. Nor was he



entirely without a clue to it. His observations of Margaret and Varney suggested a possible explanation, which he did not think it necessary to refer to. And, in fact, the conversation was here interrupted by their arrival at the pier, where an elderly fisherman, who had been watching their approach, came forward and saluted them.

"Here you are then, skipper," said Philip; "Punctual to the minute. We've got a fine day for our trip, haven't we?"

"Ay, sir," replied the skipper; "'tis a wonderful calm day for the time of year. And glad I am to see it, if we are to work close into the Wolf, for it's a lumpy bit of water at the best of times around the Rock."

"Is everything ready?" asked Philip.

"Ay, sir. We are all ready to cast off this moment," and in confirmation he preceded the party to the head of the ladder, and indicated the craft lying alongside the pier beneath it—a small converted Penzance lugger with a large open cock pit, in the fore part of which was the engine.

The four men descended the ladder, and while the skipper and the second fisherman, who constituted the crew, were preparing to cast off the shore ropes, Philip took a last look round to see that all was in order. Then the crew, who was named Joe Tregenna, pushed off and started the engine, the skipper took the tiller, and the boat got under way.

"You see," said Philip, as the boat headed out to sea, "we have got good strong tackle for the creeping operations."

He pointed over the boat's side to a long stout spar which was slung outside the bulwarks. It was secured by a chain bridle to a trawl-rope, and to it were attached a number of creepers—lengths of chain fitted with rows of hooks—which hung down into the water and trailed alongside. The equipment also included a spirit-compass, fitted with sight-vanes; a sextant; a hand-lead, which lay on the cockpit floor, with its line neatly coiled round it; and a deep-sea lead, stowed away forward with its long line and the block for lowering and hoisting it.

The occupants of the cockpit were strangely silent. It was a beautiful spring day, bright and sunny, with a warm blue sky overhead and a tranquil sea, heaving quietly to the long swell from the Atlantic, showing a sunlit sparkle on the surface and clear sapphire in the depths. "Nature painted all things gay," excepting the three men who sat on the side benches of the cockpit, whose countenances were expressive of the deepest gravity and even, in the case of the two Rodneys, of profound gloom.

"I shall be glad when this business is over," said Philip. "I feel as nervous as a cat."

"So do I," his brother agreed. "It is a gruesome affair. I find myself almost hoping that nothing will come of it. And yet that would only leave us worse off than ever."

"We mustn't be prepared to accept failure," said Thorndyke. "The thing is there, and we have got to find it; if not to-day, then to-morrow or some other day."

The two brothers looked at Thorndyke, a little daunted by his resolute attitude. "Yes, of course you are right," the elder admitted, "and it is only cowardice that makes me shrink from what we have to do. But when I think of what may come up, hanging from those creepers, I—bah! It is too horrible to think of! But I suppose it doesn't make that sort of impression on you? You don't find anything repulsive in the quest that we are engaged in?"

"No," Thorndyke admitted. "My attention is occupied by the scientific and legal interest of the search. But I can fully sympathize with your feelings on the matter. To you Purcell is a real person, whom you have known and talked with; to me he is a mere abstraction connected with a very curious and interesting case. The really unpleasant part of that case—to me—will come when we have completed our evidence, if we are so fortunate—I mean when we have to set the criminal law in motion."

"Yes," said Philip, "that will be perfectly beastly."

Once more silence fell upon the boat, broken only by the throb of the engine and the murmur of the water as it was cloven by the boat's stern. And meanwhile the distant coast slipped past until they were abreast of the Land's End, and far away to the south-west the solitary lighthouse rose on the verge of the horizon. Soon afterwards they began to overtake the scattered members of a fleet of luggers, some with lowered mainsails and hand-lines down, others with their black sails set, heading for some distant fishing-ground. Through the midst of them the boat was threading her way, when her occupants suddenly became aware that one of the smaller luggers was steering so as to close in. Observing this, the skipper was putting over the helm to avoid her, when a seafaring voice from the little craft was heard to hail.

"Motor-boat ahoy! Gentleman aboard wants to speak to you!"

The two Rodneys looked at one another in surprise and then at the approaching lugger.

"Who the deuce can it be?" exclaimed Rodney. "But perhaps it is a stranger who wants a passage. If it is we shall have to refuse. We can't take anyone on board."

The boat slowed down, for at a word from the skipper Joe Tregenna had reversed the propeller. The lugger closed in rapidly, watched anxiously by the two Rodneys and Thorndyke. Suddenly a man appeared standing on the bulwark rail and holding on by the mast stay, while with his free hand he held a binocular to his eyes. Nearer and nearer the lugger approached, and still the two Rodneys gazed with growing anxiety at the figure on the bulwark. At length the man removed the glasses from his eyes and waved them above his head, and as his face became visible both brothers uttered a cry of amazement.

"God!" exclaimed Philip. "It's Varney! Sheer off, skipper! Don't let him come along side."

But it was too late. The boat had lost way and failed to answer her helm. The lugger sheered in, sweeping abreast within a foot, and as she crept past Varney sprang lightly from her gunwale and dropped on the side bench beside Jack Rodney.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "this is a queer meeting. I couldn't believe my eyes when I first spotted you through the glasses. Motor-boat, too! Rather a come down, isn't it, for seasoned yachtsmen?"

He looked curiously at his hosts, evidently a little perplexed by their silence and their unresponsive bearing. The Rodneys were, in fact, stricken dumb with dismay, and even Thorndyke was for the moment disconcerted. The lugger which had brought Varney had already gone about and was standing out to sea, leaving to them the alternative of accepting this most unwelcome passenger or of pursuing the lugger and insisting on his returning on board of her. But the Rodneys were too paralyzed to do anything but gaze at Varney in silent consternation, and Thorndyke did not feel that his position on the boat entitled him to take any action. Indeed, no action seemed to be practicable.

"This is an odd show," said Varney, looking inquisitively about the boat. "What is the lay? You can't be going out to fish in this craft. And you seem to be setting a course for the Scillies. What is it? Dredging? I see you've got a trawl-rope."

As the Rodneys were still almost stupefied by the horror of the situation, Thorndyke took upon himself to reply.

"The occasion of this little voyage was a rather remarkable marine worm that was sent to Professor D'Arcy, and which came from the locality to which we are bound. We are going to explore the bottom there."

Varney nodded. "You seem mighty keen on marine worms. I remember when I met you down here before you were in search of them, and so was Phil, though I don't fancy he got many. He had the bottles labelled ready for them, and that was about as far as he went. Do you remember that button you made, Phil, from the cork of one?"

"Yes," Philip replied huskily, "I remember."

During this conversation Thorndyke had been observing Varney with close attention, and he noted a very appreciable change in his appearance. He looked aged and worn, and there was in his expression a weariness and dejection that seemed to confirm certain opinions that Thorndyke had formed as to the reasons for his sudden disappearance from surroundings which had certainly not been without their attractions to him. And, not for the first time, a feeling of compunction and of some distaste for this quest contended with the professional interest and the sense of duty that had been the impelling force behind the long, patient investigation.

Philip's curt reply was followed by a rather long, uncomfortable silence. Varney, quick and sensitive by nature, perceived that there was something amiss, that in some way his presence was a source of embarrassment. He sat on the side bench by Jack Rodney, gazing with a far-away look over the sea towards the Longships, wishing that he had stayed on board the lugger or that there were some means of escaping from this glum and silent company. And as he meditated he brought forth from his pocket his tobacco-pouch and cigarette-book, and half unconsciously, with a dexterity born of long practice, rolled a cigarette, all unaware that three pairs of eyes were riveted on his strangely efficient maimed finger, that three minds were conjuring up the vivid picture of a blue handprint on a white sail.

When he had lit the cigarette, Varney once more looked about the boat, and again his eye lighted on the big coil of trawl-rope, with its end passed out through a fair-lead. He rose, and, crossing the cockpit, looked over the side.

"Why," he exclaimed, "you've got a set of creepers! I thought you were going dredging. You won't pick up much with creepers, will you?"

"They will pick up anything with weeds attached to it," said Thorndyke.

Varney went back to his seat with a thoughtful, somewhat puzzled expression. He smoked in silence for a minute or two, and then suddenly asked: "Where is the place that you are going to explore for these worms?"

"Professor D'Arcy's specimen," replied Thorndyke, "came from the neighbourhood of the Wolf Rock. That is where we are going to work."

Varney made no comment on this answer. He looked long and steadily at Thorndyke; then he turned away his head, and once more gazed out to sea. Evidently he was thinking hard, and his companions, who watched him furtively, could have little doubt as to the trend of his thoughts. Gradually, as the nature of the exploration dawned on him, his manner changed more and more. A horrible pallor overspread his face, and a terrible restlessness took possession of him. He smoked furiously cigarette after cigarette. He brought various articles out of his pockets, fidgeted with them awhile, and put them back. He picked up the hand-lead, looking at its arming, ran the line through his fingers, and made fancy knots on the bight. And ever and anon his glance strayed to the tall lighthouse, standing out of the sea with its red and white ringed tower, and drawing inexorably nearer and nearer.

So the voyage went on until the boat was within half a mile of the Rock, when Philip, having caught a glance and a nod from Thorndyke, gave the order to stop the engine and lower the creepers. The spar was cast loose and dropped into the water with a heavy splash, the trawl-rope ran out through the fair-lead, and meanwhile Jack Rodney took a pair of cross-bearings on the lighthouse and a point of the distant land. Then the engine was restarted, the boat moved forward at half-speed, and the search began.

It was an intensely disagreeable experience for all excepting the puzzled but discreet skipper and the unconscious Joe.

Varney, pale, haggard, and wild in aspect, fidgeted about the boat, now silent and moody, now making miserable efforts to appear interested or unconcerned, picking up and handling loose objects or portions of the gear, but constantly returning to the hand-lead, counting up the "marks" on the line, or making and pulling out various knots with his restless but curiously skilful fingers. And as his mood changed, Thorndyke watched him furtively, as if to judge by his manner how near they were to the object of the search.

It was a long and wearisome quest. Slowly the boat plied up and down on the eastern side of the Rock, gradually approaching it nearer and nearer at each return. From time to time the creepers caught on the rocky bottom, and had to be eased off; from time to time the dripping trawl-rope was hauled in and the creepers brought to the surface, offering to the anxious eyes that peered over the side nothing on the hooks but, perchance, a wisp of *Zostera* or a clinging spider-crab.

Calm as the day was and quiet as was the ocean, stirred only by the slumberous echoes of the great Atlantic swell, the sea was breaking heavily over the Rock; and as the boat closed in nearer and nearer, the water around boiled and eddied in an unpleasant and even dangerous manner. The lighthouse keepers, who had for some time past been watching from the gallery the movements of the boat, now began to make warning signs, and one of them bellowed through a megaphone to the searchers to keep farther away.

"What do you say?" Rodney asked in a low voice. "We can't go any nearer? We shall be swamped or stove in? Shall we try another side?"

"Better try one more cast this side," said Thorndyke; and he spoke so definitely that all the others, including Varney, looked at him curiously. But no one answered, and as the skipper made no demur the creepers were dropped for a fresh cast still nearer the Rock. The boat was then to the north of the lighthouse, and the course set was to the south, so as to pass the Rock again on the east side. As they approached, the man with the megaphone bawled out fresh warnings and continued to roar at them and flourish his arm until they were abreast of the Rock in a wild tumble of confused waves. At this moment, Philip, who had his hand on the trawl-rope between the bollard and the fair-lead, reported that he had felt a pull, but that it seemed as if the creepers had broken away. As soon, therefore, as the boat was clear of the backwash and in comparatively smooth water, the order was passed to haul in the trawl-rope and examine the creepers.

The two Rodneys looked over the side eagerly but fearfully, for both had noticed something new—a definite expectancy—in Thorndyke's manner. Varney, too, who had hitherto taken but little notice of the creepers, now knelt on the side bench, gazing earnestly into the clear water whence the trawl-rope was rising. And still he toyed with the hand-lead, and absently made clove-hitches on the line and slipped them over his arm.

At length the spar came into view, and below it, on one of the creepers, a yellowish object, dimly visible through the wavering water.

"There's somethin' on this time," said the skipper, craning over the side and steadying himself by the tiller, which he still held. All eyes were riveted on the half-seen yellowish shape, moving up and down to the rise and fall of the boat. Apart from the others, Varney knelt on the bench, not fidgeting now, but still, rigid, pale as wax, staring with dreadful fascination at the slowly rising object. Suddenly the skipper uttered an exclamation.

"Why, 'tis a sou 'wester! And all laced about wi' spun-y'n! Surely 'tis—Steady, sir; you'll be overboard! My God!"

The others looked round quickly, and even as they looked Varney fell, with a heavy splash, into the water alongside. There was a tumultuous rush to the place whence he had fallen, and arms were thrust into the water in vain efforts to grasp the sinking figure. Rodney darted forward for the boat-hook, but by the time he was back with it the doomed man was far out of reach; yet for a long time, as it seemed, the horror-stricken onlookers could see him through the clear, blue-green water, sinking, sinking, growing paler, more shadowy, more shapeless, but always steadily following the lead sinker, until at last he faded from their sight into the darkness of the ocean.

Not until some time after he had vanished did they haul on board the creeper with its dreadful burden. Indeed, that burden, in its entirety, was never hauled on board. As it reached the surface, Tregenna stopped hauling and held the rope steady; and for a sensible time all eyes were fixed upon a skull, with a great jagged hole above the brows, that looked up at them beneath the peak of the sou'wester, through the web of spun-yarn, like the face of some phantom warrior looking out through the bars of his helmet. Then as Philip, reaching out an unsteady hand, unhooked the sou'wester from the creeper, the encircling coils of spun-yarn slipped, and the skull dropped into the water. Still the fascinated eyes watched it as it sank, turning slowly over and over, and seeming to cast back glances of horrid valediction; watched it grow green and pallid and small, until it vanished into the darkness, even as Varney had vanished.

When it was quite invisible, Philip turned, and, flinging the hat down on the floor of the cockpit, sank on the bench with a groan. Thorndyke picked up the hat and unwound the spun-yarn.

"Do you identify it?" he asked; and then, as he turned it over, he added: "But I see it identifies itself."

He held it towards Rodney, who was able to read in embroidered, lettering on the silk lining "Dan Purcell."

Rodney nodded. "Yes," he said, "but, of course, there was no doubt. Is it necessary for us to do anything more?" He indicated the creepers with a gesture of weariness and disgust.

"No," replied Thorndyke. "We have seen the body and can swear to its identity, and I can certify as to the cause of death. We can produce this hat, with a bullet-hole, as I perceive, in the back, corresponding to the injury that we observed in the skull. I can also certify as to the death of Varney, and can furnish a sworn declaration of the facts that are within my

knowledge. That may possibly be accepted by the authorities, having regard to the circumstances, as rendering any further inquiry unnecessary. But that is no concern of ours. We have established the fact that Daniel Purcell is dead, and our task is accomplished.

"Yes," said Rodney, "our quest has been successful beyond my expectations. But it has been an awful experience. I can't get the thought of poor Varney out of my mind."

"Nor I," said Philip. "And yet it was the best that could have happened. And there is a certain congruity in it, too. They are down there together. They had been companions, in a way, friends, the best part of their lives, and in death they are not divided."

---

THE END

## **THE D'ARBLAY MYSTERY**

---

### **I. — THE POOL IN THE WOOD**

THERE are certain days in our lives which, as we recall them, seem to detach themselves from the general sequence as forming the starting-point of a new epoch. Doubtless, if we examined them critically, we should find them to be but links in a connected chain. But in a retrospective glance their continuity with the past is unperceived, and we see them in relation to the events which followed them rather than to those which went before.

Such a day is that on which I look back through a vista of some twenty years; for on that day I was, suddenly and without warning, plunged into the very heart of a drama so strange and incredible that in the recital of its events I am conscious of a certain diffidence and hesitation.

The picture that rises before me as I write is very clear and vivid. I see myself, a youngster of twenty-five, the owner of a brand-new medical diploma, wending my way gaily down Wood Lane, Highgate, at about eight o'clock on a sunny morning in early autumn. I was taking a day's holiday, the last I was likely to enjoy for some time, for on the morrow I was to enter on the duties of my first professional appointment. I had nothing in view to-day but sheer, delightful idleness. It is true that a sketch-book in one pocket and a box of collecting-tubes in another suggested a bare hint of purpose in the

expedition; but primarily it was a holiday, a pleasure jaunt, to which art and science were no more than possible sources of contributory satisfaction.

At the lower end of the Lane was the entrance to Churchyard Bottom Wood, then open and unguarded save by a few hurdles (it has since been enclosed and renamed 'Queen's Wood'). I entered and took my way along the broad, rough path, pleasantly conscious of the deep silence and seeming remoteness of this surviving remnant of the primeval forest of Britain, and letting my thoughts stray to the great plague-pit in the haunted bottom that gave the wood its name. The foliage of the oaks was still unchanged, despite the waning of the year. The low-slanting sunlight spangled it with gold and made rosy patterns on the path, where lay a few prematurely-fallen leaves; but in the hollows among the undergrowth traces of the night-mists lingered, shrouding tree-bole, bush and fern in a mystery of gauzy blue.

A turn of the path brought me suddenly within a few paces of a girl who was stooping at the entrance to a side track and seemed to be peering into the undergrowth as if looking for something. As I appeared, she stood up and looked round at me with a startled, apprehensive manner that caused me to look away and pass as if I had not seen her. But the single glance had shown me that she was a strikingly handsome girl—indeed, I should have used the word 'beautiful'—that she seemed to be about my own age, and that she was evidently a lady.

The apparition, pleasant as it was, set me speculating as I strode forward. It was early for a girl like this to be afoot in the woods, and alone, too. Not so very safe, either, as she had seemed to realize, judging by the start that my approach seemed to have given her. And what could it be that she was looking for? Had she lost something at some previous time and come to search for it before anyone was about? It might be so. Certainly she was not a poacher, for there was nothing to poach, and she hardly had the manner or appearance of a naturalist.

A little farther on I struck into a side-path which led, as I knew, in the direction of a small pond. That pond I had had in my mind when I put the box of collecting-tubes in my pocket, and I now made my way to it as directly as the winding track would let me; but still, it was not the pond or its inmates that occupied my thoughts, but the mysterious maiden whom I had left peering into the undergrowth. Perhaps if she had been less attractive I might have given her less consideration. But I was twenty-five; and if a man at twenty-five has not a keen and appreciative eye for a pretty girl, there must be something radically wrong with his mental make-up.

In the midst of my reflections I came out into a largish opening in the wood, at the centre of which, in a slight hollow, was the pond—a small oval piece of water, fed by the trickle of a tiny stream, the continuation of which carried away the overflow towards the invisible valley. Approaching the margin, I brought out my box of tubes, and uncorking one, stooped and took a trial dip. When I held the glass tube against the light and examined its contents through my pocket-lens, I found that I was in luck. The 'catch' included a green hydra, clinging to a rootlet of duckweed, several active water-fleas, a scarlet water-mite and a beautiful sessile rotifer. Evidently this pond was a rich hunting-ground.

Delighted with my success, I corked the tube, put it away and brought out another, with which I took a fresh dip. This was less successful; but the naturalist's ardour and the collector's cupidity being thoroughly aroused, I persevered, gradually enriching my collection and working my way slowly round the margin of the pond, forgetful of everything—even of the mysterious maiden—but the objects of my search: indeed, so engrossed was I with my pursuit of the minute denizens of this watery world that I failed to observe a much larger object which must have been in view most of the time. Actually, I did not see it until I was right over it. Then, as I was stooping to clear away the duckweed for a fresh dip, I found myself confronted by a human face; just below the surface and half-concealed by the pondweed.

It was a truly appalling experience. Utterly unprepared for this awful apparition, I was so overcome by astonishment and horror that I remained stooping, with motion arrested, as if petrified, staring at the thing in silence and hardly breathing. The face was that of a man of about fifty or a little more; a handsome, refined, rather intellectual face with a moustache and Vandyke beard and surmounted by a thickish growth of iron-grey hair. Of the rest of the body little was to be seen, for the duckweed and water-crowfoot had drifted over it, and I had no inclination to disturb them. Recovering somewhat from the shock of this sudden and fearful encounter, I stood up and rapidly considered what I had better do. It was clearly not for me to make any examination or meddle with the corpse in any way; indeed, when I considered the early hour and the remoteness of this solitary place, it seemed prudent to avoid the possibility of being seen there by any chance stranger. Thus reflecting, with my eyes still riveted on the pallid, impassive face, so strangely sleeping below the glassy surface and conveying to me somehow a dim sense of familiarity, I pocketed my tubes and, turning back, stole away along the woodland track, treading lightly, almost stealthily, as one escaping from the scene of a crime.

Very different was my mood, as I retraced my steps, from that in which I had come. Gone was all my gaiety and holiday spirit. The dread meeting had brought me into an atmosphere of tragedy, perchance even of something more than tragedy. With death I was familiar enough—death as it comes to men, prefaced by sickness or even by injury. But the dead man who lay in that still and silent pool in the heart of the wood had come there by none of the ordinary chances of normal life. It seemed barely possible that he could have fallen in by mere misadventure, for the pond was too shallow and its bottom shelved too gently for accidental drowning to be conceivable. Nor was the strange, sequestered spot without significance. It was just such a spot as might well be chosen by one who sought to end his life—or another's.

I had nearly reached the main path when an abrupt turn of the narrow track brought me once more face to face with the girl whose existence I had till now forgotten. She was still peering into the dense undergrowth as if searching for something; and again, on my sudden appearance, she turned a startled face towards me. But this time I did not look away. Something in her face struck me with a nameless fear. It was not only that she was pale and haggard, that her expression

betokened anxiety and even terror. As I looked at her I understood in a flash the dim sense of familiarity of which I had been conscious in the pallid face beneath the water. It was her face that it had recalled.

With my heart in my mouth, I halted, and, taking off my cap, addressed her.

"Pray pardon me; you seem to be searching for something. Can I help you in any way or give you any information?"

She looked at me a little shyly and, as I thought, with slight distrust, but she answered civilly enough though rather stiffly: "Thank you, but I am afraid you can't help me. I am not in need of any assistance."

This, under ordinary circumstances, would have brought the interview to an abrupt end. But the circumstances were not ordinary, and, as she made as if to pass me, I ventured to persist.

"Please," I urged, "don't think me impertinent, but would you mind telling me what you are looking for? I have a reason for asking, and it isn't curiosity."

She reflected for a few moments before replying and I feared that she was about to administer another snub. Then, without looking at me, she replied:

"I am looking for my father." (and at these words my heart sank). "He did not come home last night. He left Hornsey to come home and he would ordinarily have come by the path through the wood. He always came that way from Hornsey. So I am looking through the wood in case he missed his way, or was taken ill, or—"

Here the poor girl suddenly broke off, and, letting her dignity go, burst into tears. I huskily murmured a few indistinct words of condolence, but, in truth, I was little less affected than she was. It was a terrible position, but there was no escape from it. The corpse that I had just seen was almost certainly her father's corpse. At any rate, the question whether it was or was not had to be settled now, and settled by me—and her. That was quite clear; but yet I could not screw my courage up to the point of telling her. While I was hesitating, however, she forced the position by a direct question.

"You said just now that you had a reason for asking what I was searching for. Would it be—?" She paused and looked at me inquiringly as she wiped her eyes.

I made a last, frantic search for some means of breaking the horrid news to her. Of course there was none. Eventually I stammered:

"The reason I asked was—er—the fact is that I have just seen the body of a man lying—"

"Where?" she demanded. "Show me the place!"

Without replying, I turned and began quickly to retrace my steps along the narrow track. A few minutes brought me to the opening in which the pond was situated, and I was just beginning to skirt the margin, closely followed by my companion, when I heard her utter a low, gasping cry. The next moment she had passed me and was running along the bank towards a spot where I could now see the toe of a boot just showing through the duckweed. I stopped short and watched her with my heart in my throat. Straight to the fatal spot she ran, and for a moment stood on the brink, stooping over the weedy surface. Then, with a terrible, wailing cry she stepped into the water.

Instantly, I ran forward and waded into the pond to her side. Already she had her arms round the dead man's neck and was raising the face above the surface. I saw that she meant to bring the body ashore, and, useless as it was, it seemed a natural thing to do. Silently I passed my arms under the corpse and lifted it; and as she supported the head, we bore it through the shallows and up the bank, where I laid it down gently in the high grass.

Not a word had been spoken, nor was there any question that need be asked. The pitiful tale told itself only too plainly. As I stood looking with swimming eyes at the tragic group, a whole history seemed to unfold itself—a history of love and companionship, of a happy, peaceful past made sunny by mutual affection, shattered in an instant by the hideous present, with its portent of a sad and lonely future. She had sat down on the grass and taken the dead head on her lap, tenderly wiping the face with her handkerchief, smoothing the grizzled hair and crooning or moaning words of endearment into the insensible ears. She had forgotten my presence; indeed, she was oblivious of everything but the still form that bore the outward semblance of her father.

Some minutes passed thus. I stood a little apart, cap in hand, more moved than I had ever been in my life, and, naturally enough, unwilling to break in upon a grief so overwhelming and, as it seemed to me, so sacred. But presently it began to be borne in on me that something had to be done. The body would have to be removed from this place, and the proper authorities ought to be notified. Still, it was some time before I could gather courage to intrude on her sorrow, to profane her grief with the sordid realities of everyday life. At last I braced myself up for the effort and addressed her.

"Your father," I said gently—I could not refer to him as 'the body'—"will have to be taken away from here; and the proper persons will have to be informed of what has happened. Shall I go alone, or will you come with me? I don't like to leave you here."

She looked up at me and, to my relief, answered me with quiet composure: "I can't leave him here all alone. I must stay with him until he is taken away. Do you mind telling whoever ought to be told,"—like me, she instinctively avoided the word 'police'—"and making what arrangements are necessary?"

There was nothing more to be said, and loath as I was to leave her alone with the dead, my heart assented to her decision. In her place, I should have had the same feeling. Accordingly, with a promise to return as quickly as I could, I

stole away along the woodland track. When I turned to take a last glance at her before plunging into the wood, she was once more leaning over the head that lay in her lap, looking with fond grief into the impassive face and stroking the dank hair.

My intention had been to go straight to the police-station, when I had ascertained its whereabouts, and make my report to the officer in charge. But a fortunate chance rendered this proceeding unnecessary, for, at the moment when I emerged from the top of Wood Lane, I saw a police officer, mounted on a bicycle—a road patrol, as I assumed him to be—approaching along the Archway Road. I hailed him to stop, and as he dismounted and stepped on to the footway, I gave him a brief account of the finding of the body and my meeting with the daughter of the dead man. He listened with calm, businesslike interest, and, when I had finished, said: “We had better get the body removed as quickly as possible. I will run along to the station and get the wheeled stretcher. There is no need for you to come. If you will go back and wait for us at the entrance to the wood, that will save time. We shall be there within a quarter of an hour.”

I agreed gladly to this arrangement, and when I had seen him mount his machine and shoot away along the road, I turned back down the Lane and re-entered the wood. Before taking up my post, I walked quickly down the path and along the track to the opening by the pond. My new friend was sitting just as I had left her, but she looked up as I emerged from the track and advanced towards her. I told her briefly what had happened, and was about to retire when she asked: “Will they take him to our house?”

“I am afraid not,” I replied. “There will have to be an inquiry by the coroner, and until that is finished, his body will have to remain in the mortuary.”

“I was afraid it might be so,” she said with quiet resignation; and as she spoke she looked down with infinite sadness at the waxen face in her lap. A good deal relieved by her reasonable acceptance of the painful necessities, I turned back and made my way to the rendezvous at the entrance to the wood.

As I paced to and fro on the shady path, keeping a lookout up the Lane, my mind was busy with the tragedy to which I had become a party. It was a grievous affair. The passionate grief which I had witnessed spoke of no common affection. On one life at least this disaster had inflicted irreparable loss, and there were probably others on whom the blow had yet to fall. But it was not only a grievous affair; it was highly mysterious. The dead man had apparently been returning home at night in a customary manner and by a familiar way. That he could have strayed by chance from the open, well-worn path into the recesses of the wood was inconceivable, while the hour and the circumstances made it almost as incredible that he should have been wandering in the wood by choice. And again, the water in which he had been lying was quite shallow, so shallow as to rule out accidental drowning as an impossibility.

What could the explanation be? There seemed to be but three possibilities, and two of them could hardly be entertained. The idea of intoxication I rejected at once. The girl was evidently a lady, and her father was presumably a gentleman who would not be likely to be wandering abroad drunk; nor could a man who was sober enough to have reached the pond have been so helpless as to be drowned in its shallow waters. To suppose that he might have fallen into the water in a fit was to leave unexplained the circumstance of his being in that remote place at such an hour. The only possibility that remained was that of suicide, and I could not but admit that some of the appearances seemed to support that view. The solitary place—more solitary still at night—was precisely such as an intending suicide might be expected to seek; the shallow water presented no inconsistency; and when I recalled how I had found his daughter searching the wood with evident foreboding of evil, I could not escape the feeling that the dreadful possibility had not been entirely unforeseen.

My meditations had reached this point when, as I turned once more towards the entrance and looked up the Lane, I saw two constables approaching, trundling a wheeled stretcher, while a third man, apparently an inspector, walked by its side. As the little procession reached the entrance and I turned back to show the way, the latter joined me and began at once to interrogate me. I gave him my name, address and occupation, and followed this with a rapid sketch of the facts as known to me, which he jotted down in a large note-book, and he then said:

“As you are a doctor, you can probably tell me how long the man had been dead when you first saw him.”

“By the appearance and the rigidity,” I replied, “I should say about nine or ten hours; which agrees pretty well with the account his daughter gave of his movements.”

The inspector nodded. “The man and the young lady,” said he, “are strangers to you, I understand. I suppose you haven’t picked up anything that would throw any light on the affair?”

“No,” I answered; “I know nothing but what I have told you.”

“Well,” he remarked, “it’s a queer business. It is a queer place for a man to be in at night, and he must have gone there of his own accord. But there, it is no use guessing. It will all be thrashed out at the inquest.”

As he reached this discreet conclusion, we came out into the opening and I heard him murmur very feelingly, “Dear, dear! Poor thing!” The girl seemed hardly to have changed her position since I had last seen her, but she now tenderly laid the dead head on the grass and rose as we approached; and I saw with great concern that her skirts were soaked almost from the waist downwards.

The officer took off his cap and as he drew near looked down gravely but with an inquisitive eye at the dead man. Then he turned to the girl and said in a singularly gentle and deferential manner:

“This is a very terrible thing, miss. A dreadful thing. I assure you that I am more sorry for you than I can tell; and I hope



you will forgive me for having to intrude on your sorrow by asking questions. I won't trouble you more than I can help."

"Thank you," she replied quietly. "Of course I realize your position. What do you want me to tell you?"

"I understand," replied the inspector, "that this poor gentleman was your father. Would you mind telling me who he was and where he lived and giving me your own name and address?"

"My father's name," she answered, "was Julius D'Arblay. His private address was Ivy Cottage, North Grove, Highgate. His studio and workshop, where he carried on the profession of a modeller, is in Abbey Road, Hornsey. My name is Marion D'Arblay and I lived with my father. He was a widower and I was his only child."

As she concluded, with a slight break in her voice, the inspector shook his head and again murmured, "Dear, dear!" as he rapidly entered her answers in his note-book. Then, in a deeply apologetic tone, he asked:

"Would you mind telling what you know as to how this happened?"

"I know very little," she replied. "As he did not come home last night, I went to the studio quite early this morning to see if he was there. He sometimes stayed there all night when he was working very late. The woman who lives in the adjoining house and looks after the studio, told me that he had been working late last night, but that he left to come home soon after ten. He always used to come through the wood, because it was the shortest way and the most pleasant. So when I learned that he had started to come home, I came to the wood to see if I could find any traces of him. Then I met this gentleman and he told me that he had seen a dead man in the wood and—" Here she suddenly broke down and, sobbing passionately, flung out her hand towards the corpse.

The inspector shut his note-book, and murmuring some indistinct words of sympathy, nodded to the constables, who had drawn up the stretcher a few paces away and lifted off the cover. On this silent instruction, they approached the body and, with the inspector's assistance and mine, lifted it on to the stretcher without removing the latter from its carriage. As they picked up the cover, the inspector turned to Miss D'Arblay and said gently but finally: "You had better not come with us. We must take him to the mortuary, but you will see him again after the inquest, when he will be brought to your house if you wish it."

She made no objection; but as the constables approached with the cover, she stooped over the stretcher and kissed the dead man on the forehead.

Then she turned away, the cover was placed in position, the inspector and the constables saluted reverently, and the stretcher was wheeled away along the narrow track.

For some time after it had gone, we stood in silence at the margin of the pond with our eyes fixed on the place where it had disappeared. I considered in no little embarrassment what was to be done next. It was most desirable that Miss D'Arblay should be got home as soon as possible, and I did not at all like the idea of her going alone, for her appearance, with her drenched skirts and her dazed and rather wild expression, was such as to attract unpleasant attention. But I was a total stranger to her and I felt a little shy of pressing my company on her. However, it seemed a plain duty, and, as I saw her shiver slightly, I said: "You had better go home now and change your clothes. They are very wet. And you have some distance to go."

She looked down at her soaked dress and then she looked at me.

"You are rather wet, too," she said. "I am afraid I have given you a great deal of trouble."

"It is little enough that I have been able to do," I replied. "But you must really go home now; and if you will let me walk with you and see you safely to your house, I shall be much more easy in my mind."

"Thank you," she replied. "It is kind of you to offer to see me home, and I am glad not to have to go alone."

With this, we walked together to the edge of the opening and proceeded in single file along the track to the main path, and so out into Wood Lane, at the top of which we crossed the Archway Road into Southwood Lane. We walked mostly in silence, for I was unwilling to disturb her meditations with attempts at conversation, which could only have seemed banal or impertinent. For her part, she appeared to be absorbed in reflections the nature of which I could easily guess, and her grief was too fresh for any thought of distraction. But I found myself speculating with profound discomfort on what might be awaiting her at home. It is true that her own desolate state as an orphan without brothers or sisters had its compensation in that there was no wife to whom the dreadful tidings had to be imparted, nor any fellow-orphans to have their bereavement broken to them. But there must be someone who cared; or if there were not, what a terrible loneliness would reign in that house!

"I hope," I said as we approached our destination, "that there is someone at home to share your grief and comfort you a little."

"There is," she replied. "I was thinking of her and how grievous it will be to have to tell her—an old servant and a dear friend. She was my mother's nurse when the one was a child and the other but a young girl. She came to our house when my mother married and has managed our home ever since. This will be a terrible shock to her, for she loved my father dearly—everyone loved him who knew him. And she has been like a mother to me since my own mother died. I don't know how I shall break it to her."

Her voice trembled as she concluded and I was deeply troubled to think of the painful homecoming that loomed before

her; but still it was a comfort to know that her sorrow would be softened by sympathy and loving companionship, not heightened by the empty desolation that I had feared.

A few minutes more brought us to the little square—which, by the way, was triangular—and to a pleasant little old-fashioned house, on the gate of which was painted the name, 'Ivy Cottage'. In the bay window on the ground-floor I observed a formidable-looking elderly woman, who was watching our approach with evident curiosity; which, as we drew nearer and the state of our clothing became visible, gave place to anxiety and alarm. Then she disappeared suddenly, to reappear a few moments later at the open door, where she stood viewing us both with consternation and me in particular with profound disfavour.

At the gate Miss D'Arblay halted and held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said. "I must thank you some other time for all your kindness," and with this she turned abruptly and, opening the gate, walked up the little paved path to the door where the old woman was waiting.

---

## II. — A CONFERENCE WITH DR. THORNDYKE

THE sound of the closing door seemed, as it were, to punctuate my experiences and to mark the end of a particular phase. So long as Miss D'Arblay was present, my attention was entirely taken up by her grief and distress, but now that I was alone I found myself considering at large the events of this memorable morning. What was the meaning of this tragedy? How came this man to be lying dead in that pool? No common misadventure seemed to fit the case. A man may easily fall into deep water and be drowned; may step over a quay-side in the dark or trip on a mooring-rope or ring-bolt. But here there was nothing to suggest any possible accident. The water was hardly two feet deep where the body was lying and much less close to the edge. If he had walked in in the dark, he would simply have walked out again. Besides, how came he there at all? The only explanation that was intelligible was that he went there with the deliberate purpose of making away with himself.

I pondered this explanation and found myself unwilling to accept it, notwithstanding that his daughter's presence in the wood, her obvious apprehension and her terrified searching among the underwood, seemed to hint at a definite expectation on her part. But yet that possibility was discounted by what his daughter had told me of him. Little as she had said, it was clear that he was a man universally beloved. Such men, in making the world a pleasant place for others, make it pleasant for themselves. They are usually happy men; and happy men do not commit suicide. Yet, if the idea of suicide were rejected, what was left? Nothing but an insoluble mystery.

I turned the problem over again and again as I sat on the top of the tram (where I could keep my wet trousers out of sight), not as a matter of mere curiosity but as one in which I was personally concerned. Friendships spring up into sudden maturity under great emotional stress. I had known Marion D'Arblay but an hour or two, but they were hours which neither of us would ever forget; and in that brief space she had become to me a friend who was entitled, as of right, to sympathy and service. So, as I revolved in my mind the mystery of this man's death, I found myself thinking of him not as a chance stranger but as the father of a friend; and thus it seemed to devolve upon me to elucidate the mystery, if possible.

It is true that I had no special qualifications for investigating an obscure case of this kind, but yet I was better equipped than most young medical men. For my hospital, St. Margaret's, though its medical school was but a small one, had one great distinction; the chair of Medical Jurisprudence was occupied by one of the greatest living authorities on the subject. Dr. John Thorndyke. To him and his fascinating lectures my mind naturally turned as I ruminated on the problem; and presently, when I found myself unable to evolve any reasonable suggestion, the idea occurred to me to go and lay the facts before the great man himself.

Once started, the idea took full possession of me, and I decided to waste no time but to seek him at once. This was not his day for lecturing at the hospital, but I could find his address in our school calendar; and as my means, though modest, allowed of my retaining him in a regular way, I need have no scruples as to occupying his time. I looked at my watch. It was even now but a little past noon. I had time to change and get an early lunch and still make my visit while the day was young.

A couple of hours later found me walking slowly down the pleasant, tree-shaded footway of King's Bench Walk in the Inner Temple, looking up at the numbers above the entries. Dr. Thorndyke's number was 5A, which I presently discovered inscribed on the keystone of a fine, dignified brick portico of the seventeenth century, on the jamb whereof was painted his name as the occupant of the '1st pair.' I accordingly ascended the first pair and was relieved to find that my teacher was apparently at home; for a massive outer door, above which his name was painted, stood wide open, revealing an inner door, furnished with a small, brilliantly-burnished brass knocker, on which I ventured to execute a modest rat-tat. Almost immediately the door was opened by a small, clerical-looking gentleman who wore a black linen apron—and ought, from his appearance, to have had black gaiters to match—and who regarded me with a look of polite inquiry.

"I wanted to see Dr. Thorndyke," said I, adding discreetly, "on a matter of professional business."

The little gentleman beamed on me benevolently. "The doctor," said he, "has gone to lunch at his club, but he will be coming in quite shortly. Would you like to wait for him?"

"Thank you," I replied, "I should, if you think I shall not be disturbing him."

The little gentleman smiled—that is to say, the multitudinous wrinkles that covered his face arranged themselves into a sort of diagram of geniality. It was the crinkliest smile that I have ever seen, but a singularly pleasant one.

“The doctor,” said he, “is never disturbed by professional business. No man is ever disturbed by having to do what he enjoys doing.”

As he spoke, his eyes turned unconsciously to the table, on which stood a microscope, a tray of slides and mounting material and a small heap of what looked like dressmaker’s cuttings.

“Well,” I said, “don’t let me disturb you, if you are busy.”

He thanked me very graciously, and, having installed me in an easy-chair, sat down at the table and resumed his occupation, which apparently consisted in isolating fibres from the various samples of cloth and mounting them as microscopic specimens. I watched him as he worked, admiring his neat, precise, unhurried methods and speculating on the purpose of his proceedings: whether he was preparing what one might call museum specimens, to be kept for reference, or whether these preparations were related to some particular case. I was considering whether it would be admissible for me to ask a question on the subject when he paused in his work, assuming a listening attitude, with one hand—holding a mounting-needle—raised and motionless.

“Here comes the doctor,” said he.

I listened intently and became aware of footsteps, very faint and far away, and only barely perceptible. But my clerical friend—who must have had the auditory powers of a watch-dog—had no doubts as to their identity, for he began quietly to pack all his material on the tray. Meanwhile the footsteps drew nearer, they turned in at the entry and ascended the ‘first pair,’ by which time my crinkly-faced acquaintance had the door open. The next moment Dr. Thorndyke entered and was duly informed that ‘a gentleman was waiting to see’ him.

“You under-estimate my powers of observation, Polton,” he informed his subordinate, with a smile. “I can see the gentleman distinctly with my naked eye. How do you do, Gray?” and he shook my hand cordially.

“I hope I haven’t come at the wrong time, sir,” said I. “If I have, you must adjourn me. But I want to consult you about a rather queer case.”

“Good,” said Thorndyke. “There is no wrong time for a queer case. Let me hang up my hat and fill my pipe and then you can proceed to make my flesh creep.”

He disposed of his hat, and when Mr. Polton had departed with his tray of material, he filled his pipe, laid a note-block on the table and invited me to begin; whereupon I gave him a detailed account of what had befallen me in the course of the morning, to which he listened with close attention, jotting down an occasional note, but not interrupting my narrative. When I had finished, he read through his notes and then said:

“It is, of course, evident to you that all the appearances point to suicide. Have you any reasons, other than those you have mentioned, for rejecting that view?”

“I am afraid not,” I replied gloomily. “But you have always taught us to beware of too ready acceptance of the theory of suicide in doubtful cases.”

He nodded approvingly. “Yes,” he said, “that is a cardinal principle in medico-legal practice. All other possibilities should be explored before suicide is accepted. But our difficulty in this case is that we have hardly any of the relevant facts. The evidence at the inquest may make everything clear. On the other hand, it may leave things obscure. But what is your concern with the case? You are merely a witness to the finding of the body. The parties are all strangers to you, are they not?”

“They were,” I replied. “But I feel that someone ought to keep an eye on things for Miss D’Arblay’s sake, and circumstances seem to have put the duty on me. So, as I can afford to pay any costs that are likely to be incurred, I proposed to ask you to undertake the case—on a strict business footing, you know, sir.”

“When you speak of my undertaking the case,” said he, “what is it that is in your mind? What do you want me to do in the matter?”

“I want you to take any measures that you may think necessary,” I replied, “to ascertain definitely, if possible, how this man came by his death.”

He reflected a while before answering. At length he said: “The examination of the body will be conducted by the person whom the coroner appoints, probably the police surgeon. I will write to the coroner for permission to be present at the post-mortem examination. He will certainly make no difficulties. I will also write to the police surgeon, who is sure to be quite helpful. If the post-mortem throws no light on the case—in fact, in any event—I will instruct a first-class shorthand writer to attend at the inquest and make a verbatim report of the evidence, and you, of course, will be present as a witness. That, I think, is about all that we can do at present. When we have heard all the evidence, including that furnished by the body itself, we shall be able to judge whether the case calls for further investigation. How will that do?”

“It is all that I could wish,” I answered, “and I am most grateful to you, sir, for giving your time to the case. I hope you don’t think I have been unduly meddlesome.”

“Not in the least,” he replied warmly. “I think you have shown a very proper spirit in the way you have interpreted your

neighbourly duties to this poor, bereaved girl, who, apparently, has no one else to watch over her interests. And I take it as a compliment from an old pupil that you should seek my help."

I thanked him again, very sincerely, and had risen to take my leave, when he held up his hand.

"Sit down, Gray, if you are not in a hurry," said he. "I hear the pleasant clink of crockery. Let us follow the example of the eminent Mr. Pepys—though it isn't always a safe thing to do—and taste of the 'China drinke called Tee' while you tell me what you have been doing since you went forth from the fold."

It struck me that the sense of hearing was uncommonly well developed in this establishment, for I had heard nothing; but a few moments later the door opened very quietly and Mr. Polton entered with a tray on which was a very trim, and even dainty, tea-service, which he set out, noiselessly and with a curious neatness of hand, on a small table placed conveniently between our chairs.

"Thank you, Polton," said Thorndyke. "I see you diagnosed my visitor as a professional brother."

Polton crinkled benevolently and admitted that he 'thought the gentleman looked like one of us', and with this he melted away, closing the door behind him without a sound.

"Well," said Thorndyke, as he handed me my tea-cup, "what have you been doing with yourself since you left the hospital?"

"Principally looking for a job," I replied; "and now I've found one—a temporary job, though I don't know how temporary. To-morrow I take over the practice of a man named Cornish in Mecklenburgh Square. Cornish is a good deal run down and wants to take a quiet holiday on the East Coast. He doesn't know how long he will be away. It depends on his health; but I have told him that I am prepared to stay as long as he wants me to. I hope I shan't make a mess of the job, but I know nothing of general practice."

"You will soon pick it up," said Thorndyke; "but you had better get your principal to show you the ropes before he goes, particularly the dispensing and book-keeping. The essentials of practice you know, but the little practical details have to be learnt, and you are doing well to make your first plunge into professional life in a practice that is a going concern. The experience will be valuable when you make a start on your own account."

On this plane of advice and comment our talk proceeded until I thought that I had stayed long enough, when I once more rose to depart. Then, as we were shaking hands, Thorndyke reverted to the object of my visit.

"I shall not appear in this case unless the coroner wishes me to," said he. "I shall consult with the official medical witness and he will probably give our joint conclusions in his evidence—unless we should fail to agree, which is very unlikely. But you will be present, and you had better attend closely to the evidence of all the witnesses and let me have your account of the inquest as well as the shorthand writer's report. Good-bye, Gray. You won't be far away if you should want my help or advice."

I left the precincts of the temple in a much more satisfied frame of mind. The mystery which seemed to me to surround the death of Julius D'Arblay would be investigated by a supremely competent observer, and I need not further concern myself with it. Perhaps there was no mystery at all. Possibly the evidence at the inquest would supply a simple explanation. At any rate, it was out of my hands and into those of one immeasurably more capable, and I could now give my undivided attention to the new chapter of my life that was to open on the morrow.

---

### III. — THE DOCTOR'S REVELATIONS

IT was in the evening of the very day on which I took up my duties at number 61 Mecklenburgh Square that the little blue paper was delivered summoning me to attend at the inquest on the following day. Fortunately, Dr. Cornish's practice was not of a highly strenuous type, and the time of year tended to a small visiting-list, so that I had no difficulty in making the necessary arrangements. In fact, I made them so well that I was the first to arrive at the little building in which the inquiry was to be held and was admitted by the caretaker to the empty room. A few minutes later, however, the inspector made his appearance, and while I was exchanging a few words with him, the jury began to straggle in, followed by the reporters, a few spectators and witnesses, and finally the coroner, who immediately took his place at the head of the table and prepared to open the proceedings.

At this moment I observed Miss D'Arblay standing hesitatingly in the doorway and looking into the room as if reluctant to enter. I at once rose and went to her, and as I approached, she greeted me with a friendly smile and held out her hand; and then I perceived, lurking just outside, a tall, black-apparelled woman, whose face I recognized as that which I had seen at the window.

"This," said Miss D'Arblay, presenting me, "is my friend Miss Boler, of whom I spoke to you. This, Arabella, dear, is the gentleman who was so kind to me on that dreadful day."

I bowed deferentially and Miss Boler recognized my existence by a majestic inclination, remarking that she remembered me. As the coroner now began his preliminary address to the jury, I hastened to find three chairs near the table, and having inducted the ladies into two of them, took the third myself, next to Miss D'Arblay. The coroner and the jury now rose and went out to the adjacent mortuary to view the body, and during their absence I stole an occasional critical glance at my fair

friend.

Marion D'Arblay was, as I have said, a strikingly handsome girl. The fact seemed now to dawn on me afresh, as a new discovery; for the harrowing circumstances of our former meeting had so preoccupied me that I had given little attention to her personality. But now, as I looked her over anxiously to see how the grievous days had dealt with her, it was with a sort of surprised admiration that I noted the beautiful, thoughtful face, the fine features and the wealth of dark, gracefully disposed hair. I was relieved, too, to see the change that a couple of days had wrought. The wild, dazed look was gone. Though she was pale and heavy-eyed and looked tired and infinitely sad, her manner was calm, quiet and perfectly self-possessed.

"I am afraid," said I, "that this is going to be rather a painful ordeal for you."

"Yes," she agreed, "it is all very dreadful. But it is a dreadful thing in any case to be bereft in a moment of the one whom one loves best in all the world. The circumstances of the loss cannot make very much difference. It is the loss itself that matters. The worst moment was when the blow fell—when we found him. This inquiry and the funeral are just the drab accompaniments that bring home the reality of what has happened."

"Has the inspector called on you?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "He had to, to get the particulars, and he was so kind and delicate that I am not in the least afraid of the examination by the coroner. Everyone has been kind to me, but none so kind as you were on that terrible morning."

I could not see that I had done anything to call for so much gratitude, and I was about to enter a modest disclaimer when the coroner and the jury returned and the inspector approached somewhat hurriedly.

"It will be necessary," said he, "for Miss D'Arblay to see the body—just to identify deceased, a glance will be enough. And, as you are a witness, Doctor, you had better go with her to the mortuary. I will show you the way."

Miss D'Arblay rose without any comment or apparent reluctance and we followed the inspector to the adjoining mortuary, where, having admitted us, he stood outside awaiting us. The body lay on the slate-topped table, covered with a sheet excepting the face, which was exposed and was undisfigured by any traces of the examination. I watched my friend a little nervously as we entered the grim chamber, fearful that this additional trial might be too much for her self-control. But she kept command of herself, though she wept quietly as she stood beside the table looking down on the still, waxen-faced figure. After standing thus for a few moments, she turned away with a smothered sob, wiped her eyes and walked out of the mortuary.

When we re-entered the court-room, we found our chairs moved up to the table and the coroner waiting to call the witnesses. As I had expected, my name was the first on the list, and on being called, I took my place by the table near to the coroner and was duly sworn.

"Will you give us your name, occupation and address?" the coroner asked.

"My name is Stephen Gray," I replied. "I am a medical practitioner and my temporary address is 61 Mecklenburgh Square, London."

"When you say your 'temporary address' you mean—?"

"I am taking charge of a medical practice at that address. I shall be there six weeks or more."

"Then that will be your address for our purposes. Have you viewed the body that is now lying in the mortuary, and, if so, do you recognize it?"

"Yes. It is the body which I saw lying in a pond in Churchyard Bottom Wood on the morning of the 16th instant—last Tuesday."

"Can you tell us how long deceased had been dead when you first saw the body?"

"I should say he had been dead nine or ten hours."

"Will you relate the circumstances under which you discovered the body?"

I gave a circumstantial account of the manner in which I made the tragic discovery, to which not only the jury but also the spectators listened with eager interest. When I had finished my narrative, the coroner asked: "Did you observe anything which led you, as a medical man, to form any opinion as to the cause of death?"

"No," I replied. "I saw no injuries or marks of violence or anything which was not consistent with death by drowning."

This concluded my evidence, and when I had resumed my seat, the name of Marion D'Arblay was called by the coroner, who directed that a chair should be placed for the witness. When she had taken her seat, he conveyed to her, briefly but feelingly, his own and the jury's sympathy.

"It has been a terrible experience for you," he said, "and we are most sorry to have to trouble you in your great affliction, but you will understand that it is unavoidable."

"I quite understand that," she replied, "and I wish to thank you and the jury for your kind sympathy."

She was then sworn, and having given her name and address, proceeded to answer the questions addressed to her, which elicited a narrative of the events substantially identical with that which she had given to the inspector and which I have

already recorded.

"You have told us," said the coroner, "that when Dr. Gray spoke to you, you were searching among the bushes. Will you tell us what was in your mind—what you were searching for and what induced you to make that search?"

"I was very uneasy about my father," she replied. "He had not been home that night and he had not told me that he intended to stay at the studio—as he sometimes did when he was working very late. So, in the morning I went to the studio in Abbey Road to see if he was there; but the caretaker told me that he had started for home about ten o'clock. Then I began to fear that something had happened to him, and as he always came home by the path through the wood, I went there to see if—if anything had happened to him."

"Had you in your mind any definite idea as to what might have happened to him?"

"I thought he might have been taken ill or have fallen down dead. He once told me that he would probably die quite suddenly. I believe that he suffered from some affection of the heart, but he did not like speaking about his health."

"Are you sure that there was nothing more than this in your mind?"

"There was nothing more. I thought that his heart might have failed and that he might have wandered, in a half-conscious state, away from the main path and fallen dead in one of the thickets."

The coroner pondered this reply for some time. I could not see why, for it was plain and straightforward enough. At length he said, very gravely and with what seemed to me unnecessary emphasis: "I want you to be quite frank and open with us. Miss D'Arblay. Can you swear that there was no other possibility in your mind than that of sudden illness?"

She looked at him in surprise, apparently not understanding the drift of the question. As to me, I assumed that he was endeavouring delicately to ascertain whether deceased was addicted to drink. "I have told you exactly what was in my mind," she replied.

"Have you ever had any reason to suppose, or to entertain the possibility, that your father might take his own life?"

"Never," she answered emphatically. "He was a happy, even-tempered man, always interested in his work and always in good spirits. I am sure he would never have taken his own life."

The coroner nodded with a rather curious air of satisfaction, as if he were concurring with the witness's statement. Then he asked in the same grave, emphatic manner:

"So far as you know, had your father any enemies?"

"No," she replied confidently. "He was a kindly, amiable man who disliked nobody, and everyone who knew him loved him."

As she uttered this panegyric (and what prouder testimony could a daughter have given?), her eyes filled, and the coroner looked at her with deep sympathy but yet with a somewhat puzzled expression.

"You are sure," he said gently, "that there was no one whom he might have injured—even inadvertently—or who bore him any grudge or ill-will?"

"I am sure," she answered, "that he never injured or gave offence to anyone, and I do not believe that there was any person in the whole world who bore him anything but goodwill."

The coroner noted this reply, and as he entered it in the depositions, his face bore the same curious puzzled or doubtful expression. When he had written the answer down, he asked: "By the way, what was the deceased's occupation?"

"He was a sculptor by profession, but in late years he worked principally as a modeller for various trades—pottery manufacturers, picture-frame makers, carvers and the makers of high-class wax figures for shop windows."

"Had he any assistants or subordinates?"

"No. He worked alone. Occasionally I helped him with his moulds when he was very busy or had a very large work on hand; but usually he did everything himself. Of course, he occasionally employed models."

"Do you know who those models were?"

"They were professional models. The men, I think, were all Italians and some of the women were, too. I believe my father kept a list of them in his address book."

"Was he working from a model on the night of his death?"

"No. He was making the moulds for a porcelain statuette."

"Did you ever hear that he had any kind of trouble with his models?"

"Never. He seemed always on the best of terms with them and he used to speak of them most appreciatively."

"What sort of persons are professional models? Should you say they are a decent, well-conducted class?"

"Yes. They are usually most respectable, hard-working people; and, of course, they are sober and decent in their habits or they would be of no use for their professional duties."

The coroner meditated on these replies with a speculative eye on the witness. After a short pause, he began along

another line.

“Did deceased ever carry about with him property of any considerable value?”

“Never, to my knowledge.”

“No jewellery, plate or valuable material?”

“No. His work was practically all in plaster or wax. He did no goldsmith’s work and he used no precious material.”

“Did he ever have any considerable sums of money about him?”

“No. He received all his payments by cheque and he made his payments in the same way. His habit was to carry very little money on his person—usually not more than one or two pounds.”

Once more the coroner reflected profoundly. It seemed to me that he was trying to elicit some fact—I could not imagine what—and was failing utterly. At length, after another puzzled look at the witness, he turned to the jury and inquired if any of them wished to put any questions; and when they had severally shaken their heads, he thanked Miss D’Arblay for the clear and straightforward way in which she had given her evidence and released her.

While the examination had been proceeding, I had allowed my eyes to wander round the room with some curiosity, for this was the first time that I had ever been present at an inquest. From the jury, the witnesses in waiting and the reporters—among whom I tried to identify Dr. Thorndyke’s stenographer—my attention was presently transferred to the spectators. There were only a few of them, but I found myself wondering why there should be any. What kind of person attends as a spectator at an ordinary inquest such as this appeared to be? The newspaper reports of the finding of the body were quite unsensational and promised no startling developments. Finally, I decided that they were probably local residents who had some knowledge of the deceased and were just indulging their neighbourly curiosity.

Among them my attention was particularly attracted by a middle-aged woman who sat near me—at least I judged her to be middle-aged, though the rather dense black veil that she wore obscured her face to a great extent. Apparently she was a widow, and advertised the fact by the orthodox, old-fashioned ‘weeds’. But I could see that she had white hair and wore spectacles. She held a folded newspaper on her knee, apparently dividing her attention between the printed matter and the proceedings of the court. She gave me the impression of having come in to spend an idle hour, combining a somewhat perfunctory reading of the paper with a still more perfunctory attention to the rather gruesome entertainment that the inquest afforded.

The next witness called was the doctor who had made the official examination of the body; on whom the—presumed—widow bestowed a listless, incurious glance and then returned to her newspaper. He was a youngish man, though his hair was turning grey, with a quiet but firm and confident manner and a very clear, pleasant voice. The preliminaries having been disposed of, the coroner led off with the question:

“You have made an examination of the body of the deceased?”

“Yes. It is that of a well-proportioned, fairly muscular man of about sixty, quite healthy with the exception of the heart one of the valves of which—the mitral valve—was incompetent and allowed some leakage of blood to take place.”

“Was the heart affection sufficient to account for the death of deceased?”

“No. It was quite a serviceable heart. There was good compensation—that is to say, there was extra growth of muscle to make up for the leaky valve. So far as his heart was concerned, deceased might have lived for another twenty years.”

“Were you able to ascertain what actually was the cause of death?”

“Yes. The cause of death was aconitine poisoning.”

At this reply a murmur of astonishment arose from the jury, and I heard Miss D’Arblay suddenly draw in her breath. The spectators sat up on their benches, and even the veiled lady was so far interested as to look up from her paper.

“How had the poison been administered?” the coroner asked.

“It had been injected under the skin by means of a hypodermic syringe.”

“Can you give an opinion as to whether the poison was administered to deceased by himself or by some other person?”

“It could not have been injected by deceased himself,” the witness replied. “The needle-puncture was in the back, just below the left shoulder-blade. It is, in my opinion, physically impossible for anyone to inject with a hypodermic syringe into his own body in that spot. And, of course, a person who was administering an injection to himself would select the most convenient spot—such as the front of the thigh. But apart from the question of convenience, the place in which the needle-puncture was found was actually out of reach.” Here the witness produced a hypodermic syringe, the action of which he demonstrated with the aid of a glass of water; and having shown the impossibility of applying it to the spot that he had described, passed the syringe round for the jury’s inspection.

“Have you formed any opinion as to the purpose for which this drug was administered in this manner?”

“I have no doubt that it was administered for the purpose of causing the death of deceased.”

“Might it not have been administered for medicinal purposes?”

"That is quite inconceivable. Leaving out of consideration the circumstances—the time and place where the administration occurred—the dose excludes the possibility of medicinal purposes. It was a lethal dose. From the tissues round the needle—puncture we recovered the twelfth of a grain of aconitine. That alone was more than enough to cause death. But a quantity of the poison had been absorbed, as was shown by the fact that we recovered a recognizable trace from the liver."

"What is the medicinal dose of aconitine?"

"The maximum medicinal dose is about the four-hundredth of a grain, and even that is not very safe. As a matter of fact, aconitine is very seldom used in medical practice. It is a dangerous drug and of no particular value."

"How much aconitine do you suppose was injected?"

"Not less than the tenth of a grain—that is, about forty times the maximum medicinal dose. Probably more."

"There can, I suppose, be no doubt as to the accuracy of the facts that you have stated as to the nature and quantity of the poison?"

"There can be no doubt whatever. The analysis was made in my presence by Professor Woodford of St. Margaret's Hospital after I had removed the tissues from the body in his presence. He has not been called because, in accordance with the procedure under Coroners Law, I am responsible for the analysis and the conclusions drawn from it."

"Taking the medical facts as known to you, are you able to form an opinion as to what took place when the poison was administered?"

"That," the witness replied, "is a matter of inference or conjecture. I infer that the person who administered the poison thrust the needle violently into the back of the deceased, intending to inject the poison into the chest. Actually, the needle struck a rib and bent up sharply, so that the contents of the syringe were delivered just under the skin. Then I take it that the assailant ran away—probably towards the pond—and deceased pursued him. Very soon the poison would take effect, and then deceased would have fallen. He may have fallen into the pond, or more probably was thrown in. He was alive when he fell into the pond, as is proved by the presence of water in the lungs; but he must then have been insensible and in a dying condition, for there was no water in the stomach, which proves that the swallowing reflex had already ceased."

"Your considered opinion, then, based on the medical facts ascertained by you, is, I understand, that deceased died from the effects of a poison injected into his body by some other person with homicidal intent?"

"Yes; that is my considered opinion, and I affirm that the facts do not admit of any other interpretation."

The coroner looked towards the jury. "Do any of you gentlemen wish to ask the witness any questions?" he inquired; and when the foreman had replied that the jury were entirely satisfied with the doctor's explanations, he thanked the witness, who thereupon retired. The medical witness was succeeded by the inspector, who made a short statement respecting the effects found on the person of deceased. They comprised a small sum of money—under two pounds—a watch, keys and other articles, none of them of any appreciable value, but such as they were, furnishing evidence that at least petty robbery had not been the object of the attack.

When the last witness had been heard, the coroner glanced at his notes and then proceeded to address the jury.

"There is little, gentlemen," he began, "that I need say to you. The facts are before you and they seem to admit of only one interpretation. I remind you that, by the terms of your oath, your finding must be 'according to the evidence.' Now, the medical evidence is quite clear and definite. It is to the effect that deceased met his death by poison administered violently by some other person; that is, by homicide. Homicide is the killing of a human being, and it may or may not be criminal. But if the homicidal act is done with the intent to kill, if that intention has been deliberately formed—that is to say, if the homicidal act has been premeditated—then that homicide is wilful murder.

"Now, the person who killed the deceased came to the place where the act was done provided with a solution of a very powerful and uncommon vegetable poison. He was also provided with a very special appliance—to wit, a hypodermic syringe—for injecting it into the body. The fact that he was furnished with the poison and the appliance creates a strong presumption that he came to this place with the deliberate intention of killing the deceased. That is to say, this fact constitutes strong evidence of premeditation.

"As to the motive for this act, we are completely in the dark; nor have we any evidence pointing to the identity of the person who committed that act. But a coroner's inquest is not necessarily concerned with motives, nor is it our business to fix the act on any particular person. We have to find how and by what means the deceased met his death; and for that purpose we have clear and sufficient evidence. I need say no more, but will leave you to agree upon your finding."

There was a brief interval of silence when the coroner had finished speaking. The jury whispered together for a few seconds; then the foreman announced that they had agreed upon their verdict.

"And what is your decision, gentlemen?" the coroner asked.

"We find," was the reply, "that deceased met his death by wilful murder, committed by some person unknown."

The coroner bowed. "I am in entire agreement with you, gentlemen," said he. "No other verdict was possible; and I am sure you will join with me in the hope that the wretch who committed this dastardly crime may be identified and in due course brought to justice."



This brought the proceedings to an end. As the court rose, the spectators filed out of the building and the coroner approached Miss D'Arblay to express once more his deep sympathy with her in her tragic bereavement. I stood apart with Miss Boler, whose rugged face was wet with tears, but set in a grim and wrathful scowl.

"Things have taken a terrible turn," I ventured to observe.

She shook her head and uttered a sort of low growl. "It won't bear thinking of," she said gruffly. "There is no possible retribution that would meet the case. One has thought that some of the old punishments were cruel and barbarous; but if I could lay my hands on the villain that did this—" She broke off, leaving the conclusion to my imagination, and in an extraordinarily different voice, said: "Come, Miss Marion; let us get out of this awful place."

As we walked away slowly and in silence, I looked at Miss D'Arblay, not without anxiety. She was very pale, and the dazed expression that her face had borne on the fatal day of the discovery had, to some extent, reappeared. But now the signs of bewilderment and grief were mingled with something new. The rigid face, the compressed lips and lowered brows spoke of a deep and abiding wrath.

Suddenly she turned to me and said, abruptly, almost harshly: "I was wrong in what I said to you before the inquiry. You remember that I said the circumstances of the loss could make no difference; but they make a whole world of difference. I had supposed that my dear father had died as he had thought he would die; that it was the course of Nature, which we cannot rebel against. Now I know, from what the doctor said, that he might have lived on happily for the full span of human life but for the malice of this unknown wretch. His life was not lost; it was stolen—from him and from me."

"Yes," I said somewhat lamely. "It is a horrible affair."

"It is beyond bearing!" she exclaimed. "If his death had been natural, I would have tried to resign myself to it. I would have tried to put my grief away. But to think that his happy, useful life has been snatched from him, that he has been torn from us who loved him, by the deliberate act of this murderer—it is unendurable. It will be with me every hour of my life until I die. And every hour I shall call on God for justice against this wretch."

I looked at her with a sort of admiring surprise. A quiet, gentle girl as I believed her to be at ordinary times, now, with her flushed cheeks, her flashing eyes and ominous brows, she reminded me of one of the heroines of the French Revolution. Her grief seemed to be merged in a longing for vengeance.

While she had been speaking, Miss Boler had kept up a running accompaniment in a deep, humming bass. I could not catch the words—if there were any—but was aware only of a low, continuous bourdon. She now said with grim decision: "God will not let him escape. He shall pay the debt to the uttermost farthing." Then, with sudden fierceness, she added: "If I should ever meet with him, I could kill him with my own hand."

After this, both women relapsed into silence, which I was loath to interrupt. The circumstances were too tragic for conversation. When we reached their gate, Miss D'Arblay held out her hand and once again thanked me for my help and sympathy.

"I have done nothing," said I, "that any stranger would not have done, and I deserve no thanks. But I should like to think that you will look on me as a friend, and if you should need any help will let me have the privilege of being of use to you."

"I look on you as a friend already," she replied; "and I hope you will come and see us sometimes—when we have settled down to our new conditions of life."

As Miss Boler seemed to confirm this invitation, I thanked them both and took my leave, glad to think that I had now a recognized status as a friend and might pursue a project which had formed in my mind even before we had left the court-house.

The evidence of the murder, which had fallen like a thunderbolt on us all, had a special significance for me; for I knew that Dr. Thorndyke was behind this discovery, though to what extent I could not judge. The medical witness was an obviously capable man, and it might be that he would have made the discovery without assistance. But a needle-puncture in the back is a very inconspicuous thing. Ninety-nine doctors in a hundred would almost certainly have overlooked it, especially in the case of a body apparently 'found drowned' and seeming to call for no special examination beyond the search for gross injuries. The revelation was very characteristic of Thorndyke's methods and principles. It illustrated in a most striking manner the truth which he was never tired of insisting on: that it is never safe to accept obvious appearances, and that every case, no matter how apparently simple and commonplace, should be approached with suspicion and scepticism and subjected to the most rigorous scrutiny. That was precisely what had been done in this case; and thereby an obvious suicide had been resolved into a cunningly-planned and skilfully-executed murder. It was quite possible that, but for my visit to Thorndyke, those cunning plans would have succeeded and the murderer have secured the cover of a verdict of 'death by misadventure' or 'suicide while temporarily insane.' At any rate, the results had justified me in invoking Dr. Thorndyke's aid; and the question now arose whether it would be possible to retain him for the further investigation of the case.

This was the project that had occurred to me as I listened to the evidence and realized how completely the unknown murderer had covered up his tracks. But there were difficulties. Thorndyke might consider such an investigation outside his province. Again, the costs involved might be on a scale entirely beyond my means. The only thing to be done was to call on Thorndyke and hear what he had to say on the subject, and this I determined to do on the first opportunity. And having formed this resolution, I made my way back by the shortest route to Mecklenburgh Square, where the evening

consultations were now nearly due.

---

#### IV. — MR. BENDELOW

THERE are certain districts in London the appearance of which conveys to the observer the impression that the houses, and indeed the entire streets, have been picked up second-hand. There is in their aspect a grey, colourless, mouldy quality, reminiscent, not of the antique shop, but rather of the marine-store dealers; a quality which even communicates itself to the inhabitants, so that one gathers the impression that the whole neighbourhood was taken as a going concern.

It was on such a district that I found myself looking down from the top of an omnibus a few days after the inquest (Dr. Cornish's brougham being at the moment under repairs and his horse 'out to grass' during the slack season), being bound for a street in the neighbourhood of Hoxton—Market Street by name—which abutted, as I had noticed when making out my route, on the Regent's Canal. The said route I had written out, and now, in the intervals of my surveys of the unlovely prospect, I divided my attention between it and the note which had summoned me to these remote regions.

Concerning the latter I was somewhat curious, for the envelope was addressed, not to Dr. Cornish but to 'Dr. Stephen Gray'. This was really quite an odd circumstance. Either the writer knew me personally or was aware that I was acting as locum tenens for Cornish. But the name—James Morris—was unknown to me, and a careful inspection of the index of the ledger had failed to bring to light anyone answering to the description. So Mr. Morris was presumably a stranger to my principal also. The note, which had been left by hand in the morning, requested me to call 'as early in the forenoon as possible,' which seemed to hint at some degree of urgency. Naturally, as a young practitioner, I speculated with interest, not entirely unmingled with anxiety, on the possible nature of the case, and also on the patient's reason for selecting a medical attendant whose residence was so inconveniently far away.

In accordance with my written route, I got off the omnibus at the corner of Shepherdess Walk, and pursuing that pastoral thoroughfare for some distance, presently plunged into a labyrinth of streets adjoining it and succeeded most effectually in losing myself. However, inquiries addressed to an intelligent fish-vendor elicited a most lucid direction and I soon found myself in a little, drab street which justified its name by giving accommodation to a row of stationary barrows loaded with what looked like the 'throw-outs' from a colossal spring-clean. Passing along this kerb-side market and reflecting (like Diogenes, in similar circumstances) how many things there were in the world that I did not want, I walked slowly up the street looking for number 23—my patient's number—and the canal which I had seen on the map. I located them both at the same instant, for number 23 turned out to be the last house on the opposite side, and a few yards beyond it the street was barred by a low wall, over which, as I looked, the mast of a sailing-barge came into view and slowly crept past. I stepped up to the wall and looked over. Immediately beneath me was the towing-path, alongside which the barge was now bringing up and beginning to lower her mast, apparently to pass under a bridge that spanned the canal a couple of hundred yards farther along.

From these nautical manoeuvres I transferred my attention to my patient's house—or at least, so much of it as I could see, for number 23 appeared to consist of a shop with nothing over it. There was, however, in a wall which extended to the canal wall, a side door with a bell and knocker, so I inferred that the house was behind the shop and that the latter had been built on a formerly existing front garden. The shop itself was somewhat reminiscent of the stalls down the street, for though the fascia was newly painted (with the inscription J. Morris, Dealer in Antiques), the stock-in-trade exhibited in the window was in the last stage of senile decay. It included, I remember, a cracked Toby jug, a mariner's sextant of an obsolete type, a Dutch clock without hands, a snuff-box, one or two planter statuettes, an invalid punchbowl, a shiny, dark and inscrutable oil-painting and a plaster mask, presumably the death-mask of some celebrity whose face was unknown to me.

My examination of this collection was brought to a sudden end by the apparition of a face above the half-blind of the glazed shop-door, the face of a middle-aged woman who seemed to be inspecting me with malevolent interest. Assuming—rather too late—a brisk, professional manner, I opened the shop-door, thereby setting a bell jangling within, and confronted the owner of the face.

"I am Dr. Gray," I began to explain.

"Side-door," she interrupted brusquely. "Ring the bell and knock."

I backed out hastily and proceeded to follow the directions, giving a tug at the bell and delivering a flourish on the knocker. The hollow reverberations of the latter almost suggested an empty house, but my vigorous pull at the bell-handle produced no audible result, from which I inferred—wrongly, as afterwards appeared—that it was out of repair.

After waiting quite a considerable time, I was about to repeat the performance when I heard sounds within; and then the door was opened, to my surprise, by the identical sour-faced woman whom I had seen in the shop. As her appearance and manner did not invite conversation, and as she uttered no word, I followed her in silence through a long passage, or covered way, which ran parallel to the side of the shop and presumably crossed the site of the garden. It ended at a door which opened into the hall proper; a largish square space into which the doors of the ground-floor rooms opened. It contained the main staircase and was closed in at the farther end by a heavy curtain which extended from wall to wall.

We proceeded in this funereal manner up the stairs to the first floor on the landing of which my conductress halted and for the first time broke the silence.

"You will probably find Mr. Bendelow asleep or dozing," she said in a rather gruff voice. "If he is, there is no need for you to disturb him."

"Mr. Bendelow!" I exclaimed. "I understood that his name was Morris."

"Well, it isn't," she retorted. "It is Bendelow. My name is Morris and so is my husband's. It was he who wrote to you."

"By the way," said I, "how did he know my name? I am acting for Dr. Cornish, you know."

"I didn't know," said she, "and I don't suppose he did. Probably the servant told him. But it doesn't matter. Here you are, and you will do as well as another. I was telling you about Mr. Bendelow. He is in a pretty bad way. The specialist whom Mr. Morris took him to—Dr. Artemus Cropper—said he had cancer of the bilorus, whatever that is—"

"Pylorus," I corrected.

"Well, pylorus, then, if you prefer it," she corrected impatiently. "At any rate, whatever it is, he's got cancer of it; and as I said before, he is in a pretty bad way. Dr. Cropper told us what to do, and we are doing it. He wrote out full directions as to diet—I will show them to you presently—and he said that Mr. Bendelow was to have a dose of morphia if he complained of pain—which he does, of course; and that, as there was no chance of his getting better, it didn't matter how much morphia he had. The great thing was to keep him out of pain. So we give it to him twice a day—at least, my husband does—and that keeps him fairly comfortable. In fact he sleeps most of the time and is probably dozing now; so you are not likely to get much out of him, especially as he is rather hard of hearing even when he is awake. And now you had better come in and have a look at him."

She advanced to the door of a room and opened it softly, and I followed in a somewhat uncomfortable frame of mind. It seemed to me that I had no function but that of a mere figure-head. Dr. Cropper, whom I knew by name as a physician of some reputation, had made the diagnosis and prescribed the treatment, neither of which I, as a mere beginner, would think of contesting. It was an unsatisfactory, even an ignominious position, from which my professional pride revolted, but apparently it had to be accepted.

Mr. Bendelow was a most remarkable-looking man. Probably he had always been, but now the frightful emaciation (which strongly confirmed Cropper's diagnosis) had so accentuated his original peculiarities that he had the appearance of some dreadful, mirthless caricature. Under the influence of the remorseless disease, every shrinkable structure had shrunk to the vanishing-point, leaving the unshrinkable skeleton jutting out with a most horrible and grotesque effect. His great hooked nose, which must always have been strikingly prominent, stuck out now, thin and sharp, like the beak of some bird of prey. His heavy beetling brows, which must always have given to his face a frowning sullenness, now overhung sockets which had shrunk away into mere caverns. His naturally-high cheek-bones were now not only prominent but exhibited the details of their structure as one sees them in a dry skull. Altogether, his aspect was at once pitiable and forbidding. Of his age I could form no estimate. He might have been a hundred. The wonder was that he was still alive; that there was yet left in that shrivelled body enough material to enable its mechanism to continue its functions.

He was not asleep, but was in that somnolent, lethargic state that is characteristic of the effects of morphia. He took no notice of me when I approached the bed, nor even when I spoke his name somewhat loudly.

"I told you you wouldn't get much out of him," said Mrs. Morris, looking at me with a sort of grim satisfaction. "He doesn't have a great deal to say to any of us nowadays."

"Well," said I, "there is no need to rouse him, but I had better just examine him, if only as a matter of form. I can't take the case entirely on hearsay."

"I suppose not," she agreed. "You know best. Do what you think necessary, but don't disturb him more than you can help."

It was not a prolonged examination. The first touch of my fingers on the shrunken abdomen made me aware of the unmistakable hard mass and rendered further exploration needless. There could be no doubt as to the nature of the case or of what the future held in store. It was only a question of time, and a short time at that.

The patient submitted to the examination quite passively, but he seemed to be fully aware of what was going on, for he looked at me in a sort of drunken, dreamy fashion but without any sign of interest in my proceedings. When I had finished, I looked him over again, trying to reconstitute him as he might have been before this deadly disease fastened on him. I observed that he seemed to have a fair crop of hair of a darkish iron-grey. I say seemed because the greater part of his head was covered by a skull-cap of black silk; but a fringe of hair straying from under it on to the forehead suggested that he was not bald. His teeth, too, which were rather conspicuous, were natural teeth and in good preservation. In order to confirm this fact, I stooped and raised his lip the better to examine them. But at this point Mrs. Morris intervened.

"There, that will do," she said impatiently. "You are not a dentist, and his teeth will last as long as he will want them. If you have finished, you had better come with me and I will show you Dr. Cropper's prescriptions. Then you can tell me if you have any further directions to give."

She led the way out of the room, and when I had made a farewell gesture to the patient (of which he took no notice) I followed her down the stairs to the ground-floor, where she ushered me into a small, rather elegantly furnished room. Here she opened the top of a bureau and from one of the little drawers took an open envelope, which she handed to me. It contained one or two prescriptions for occasional medicines and a sheet of directions relative to the diet and general

management of the patient, including the administration of morphia. The latter read, under the general heading, 'Simon Bendelow, Esq.':

'As the case progresses, it will probably be necessary to administer morphine regularly, but the amount given should, if possible, be restricted to 14 gr. Morph. Sulph. not more than twice a day, but, of course, the hopeless prognosis and probable early termination of the case make some latitude admissible.'

Although I was in complete agreement with the writer, I was a little puzzled by these documents. They were signed 'Artemus Cropper, MD,' but they were not addressed to any person by name. They appeared to have been given to Mr. Morris, in whose possession they now were; but the use of the word 'morphine' instead of the more familiar 'morphia' and the general technical phraseology seemed inappropriate to directions addressed to lay persons. As I returned them I remarked:

"These directions read as if they had been intended for the information of a medical man."

"They were," she replied. "They were meant for the doctor who was attending Mr. Bendelow at the time. When we moved to this place, I got them from him to show to the new doctor. You are the new doctor."

"Then you haven't been here very long?"

"No," she replied. "We have only just moved in. And that reminds me that our stock of morphia is running out. Could you bring a fresh tube of the tabloids next time you call? My husband left an empty tube for me to give you to remind you what size the tabloids are. He gives Mr. Bendelow the injections."

"Thank you," said I, "but I don't want the empty tube. I read the prescription and shan't forget the dose. I will bring a new tube to-morrow—that is, if you want me to call every day. It seems hardly necessary."

"No, it doesn't," she agreed. "I should think twice a week would be quite enough. Monday and Thursday would suit me best; if you could manage to come about this time I should be sure to be in. My time is rather taken up, as I haven't a servant at present."

It was a bad arrangement. Fixed appointments are things to avoid in medical practice. Nevertheless I agreed to it—subject to unforeseen obstacles—and was forthwith conducted back along the covered way and launched into the outer world with a farewell which it would be inadequate to describe as unemotional.

As I turned away from the door I cast a passing glance at the shop-window; and once again I perceived a face above the half-blind. It was a man's face this time; presumably the face of Mr. Morris. And like his wife, he seemed to be 'taking stock of me.' I returned the attention and carried away with me the instantaneous mental photograph of a man in that unprepossessing transitional state between being clean-shaved and wearing a beard which is characterized by a sort of grubby prickliness that disfigures the features without obscuring them. His stubble was barely a week old, but as his complexion and hair were dark the effect was very untidy and disreputable. And yet, as I have said, it did not obscure the features. I was even able, in that momentary glance, to note a detail which would probably have escaped a non-medical eye: the scar of a hare-lip which had been very neatly and skilfully mended and which a moustache would probably have concealed altogether.

I did not, however, give much thought to Mr. Morris. It was his dour-faced wife with her gruff, overbearing manner who principally occupied my reflections. She seemed to have divined in some way that I was but a beginner—perhaps my youthful appearance gave her the hint—and to have treated me with almost open contempt. In truth, my position was not a very dignified one. The diagnosis of the case had been made for me, the treatment had been prescribed for me and was being carried out by other hands than mine. My function was to support a kind of legal fiction that I was conducting the case, but principally to supply the morphia (which a chemist might have refused to do) and, when the time came, to sign the death-certificate. It was an ignominious role for a young and ambitious practitioner and my pride was disposed to boggle at it. But yet there was nothing to which I could object. The diagnosis was undoubtedly correct and the treatment and management of the case exactly such as I should have prescribed. Finally, I decided that my dissatisfaction was principally due to the unattractive personality of Mrs. Morris; and with this conclusion I dismissed the case from my mind and let my thoughts wander into more agreeable channels.

---

## V. — INSPECTOR FOLLETT'S DISCOVERY

TO a man whose mind is working actively, walking is a more acceptable mode of progression than riding in a vehicle. There is a sort of reciprocity between the muscles and the brain—possibly due to the close association of the motor and psychical centres—whereby the activity of the one appears to act as a stimulus to the other. A sharp walk sets the mind working; and, conversely, a state of lively reflection begets an impulse to bodily movement.

Hence, when I had emerged from Market Street and set my face homewards, I let the omnibuses rumble past unheeded. I knew my way now. I had but to retrace the route by which I had come and, preserving my isolation amidst the changing crowd, let my thoughts keep pace with my feet. And I had, in fact, a good deal to think about—a general subject for reflection which arranged itself around two personalities, Miss D'Arblay and Dr. Thorndyke.

To the former I had written suggesting a call on her, 'subject to the exigencies of the service,' on Sunday afternoon, and had received a short but cordial note definitely inviting me to tea. So that matter was settled and really required no further

consideration, though it did actually occupy my thoughts for an appreciable part of my walk. But that was mere self-indulgence, the preliminary savouring of an anticipated pleasure. My cogitations respecting Dr. Thorndyke were, on the other hand, somewhat troubled. I was eager to invoke his aid in solving the hideous mystery which his acuteness had (I felt convinced) brought into view. But it would probably be a costly business and my pecuniary resources were not great. To apply to him for services of which I could not meet the cost was not to be thought of. The too-common meanness of sponging on a professional man was totally abhorrent to me.

But what was the alternative? The murder of Julius D'Arblay was one of those crimes which offer the police no opportunity; at least, so it seemed to me. Out of the darkness this fiend had stolen to commit this unspeakable atrocity, and into the darkness he had straightway vanished, leaving no trace of his identity nor any hint of his diabolical motive. It might well be that he had vanished for ever; that the mystery of the crime was beyond solution. But if any solution was possible, the one man who seemed capable of discovering it was John Thorndyke.

This conclusion, to which my reflections led again and again, committed me to the dilemma that either this villain must be allowed to go his way unmolested, if the police could find no clue to his identity—a position that I utterly refused to accept—or that the one supremely skilful investigator should be induced, if possible, to take up the inquiry. In the end I decided to call on Thorndyke and frankly lay the facts before him, but to postpone the interview until I had seen Miss D'Arblay and ascertained what view the police took of the case and whether any new facts had transpired.

The train of reflection which brought me to this conclusion had brought me also, by way of Pentonville, to the more familiar neighbourhood of Clerkenwell; and I had just turned into a somewhat squalid by-street which seemed to bear in the right direction, when my attention was arrested by a brass plate affixed to the door of one of those hybrid establishments, intermediate between a shop and a private house, known by the generic name of open surgery. The name upon the plate—Dr. Solomon Usher—awakened certain reminiscences. In my freshman days there had been a student of that name at our hospital; a middle-aged man (elderly, we considered him, seeing that he was near upon forty) who, after years of servitude as an unqualified assistant, had scraped together the means of completing his curriculum. I remembered him very well: a facetious, seedy, slightly bibulous but entirely good-natured man, invincibly amiable (as he had need to be), and always in the best of spirits. I recalled the quaint figure that furnished such rich material for our school-boy wit: the solemn spectacles, the ridiculous side-whiskers, the chimney-pot hat, the formal frock-coat (too often decorated with a label secretly pinned to the coat-tail and bearing some such inscription as 'This style 10s. 6d.' or other scintillations of freshman humour), and, looking over the establishment, decided that it seemed to present a complete congruity with that well-remembered personality. But the identification was not left to mere surmise, for even as my eye roamed along a range of stoppered bottles that peeped over the wire blind, the door opened and there he was, spectacles, side-whiskers, top-hat and frock-coat, all complete, plus an oedematous-looking umbrella.

He did not recognise me at first—naturally, for I had changed a good deal more than he had in the five or six years that had slipped away—but inquired gravely if I wished to see him. I replied that it had been the dearest wish of my heart, now at length gratified. Then, as I grinned in his face, my identity suddenly dawned on him.

"Why, it's Gray!" he exclaimed, seizing my hand. "God bless me, what a surprise! I didn't know you. Getting quite a man. Well, I am delighted to see you. Come in and have a drink."

He held the door open invitingly, but I shook my head.

"No, thanks," I replied. "Not at this time in the day."

"Nonsense," he urged. "Do you good. I've just had one myself. Can't say more than that, excepting that I am ready to have another. Won't you really? Pity. Should never waste an opportunity. Which way are you going?"

It seemed that we were going the same way for some distance and we accordingly set off together.

"So you've flopped out of the nest," he remarked, looking me over—"at least, so I judge by the adult clothes that you are wearing. Are you in practice in these parts?"

"No," I replied; "I am doing a locum. Only just qualified, you know."

"Good," said he. "A locum's the way to begin. Try your prentice hand on somebody else's patients and pick up the art of general practice, which they don't teach you at the hospital."

"You mean book-keeping and dispensing and the general routine of the day's work?" I suggested.

"No, I don't," he replied. "I mean practice; the art of pleasing your patients and keeping your end up. You've got a lot to learn, my boy. *Experientia* does it. Scientific stuff is all very well at the hospital, but in practice it is experience, gumption, tact, knowledge of human nature, that counts."

"I suppose a little knowledge of diagnosis and treatment is useful?" I suggested.

"For your own satisfaction, yes," he admitted; "but for practical purposes, a little knowledge of men and women is a good deal better. It isn't your scientific learning that brings you kudos, nor is it out-of-the-way cases. It is just common sense brought to bear on common ailments. Take the case of an aurist. You think that he lives by dealing with obscure and difficult middle and internal ear cases. Nothing of the kind. He lives on wax. Wax is the foundation of his practice. Patient comes to him as deaf as a post. He does all the proper jugglery—tuning-fork, otoscope, speculum and so on, for the moral effect. Then he hikes out a good old plug of cerumen and the patient hears perfectly. Of course, he is delighted. Thinks a

miracle has been performed. Goes away convinced that the aurist is a genius; and so he is if he has managed the case properly. I made my reputation here on a fish-bone."

"Well, a fish-bone isn't always so very easy to extract," said I.

"It isn't," he agreed. "Especially if it isn't there."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'll tell you about it," he replied. "A chappie here got a fish-bone stuck in his throat. Of course it didn't stay there. They never do. But the prick in his soft palate did, and he was convinced that the bone was still there. So he sent for a doctor. Doctor came, looked in his throat. Couldn't see any fish-bone and, like a fool, said so. Tried to persuade the patient that there was no bone there. But the chappie said it was his throat and he knew better. He could feel it there. So he sent for another doctor and the same thing happened. No go. He had four different doctors and they hadn't the sense of an infant among them. Then he sent for me.

"Now, as soon as I heard how the land lay, I nipped into the surgery and got a fish-bone that I keep there in a pillbox for emergencies, stuck it into the jaws of a pair of throat-forceps, and off I went. 'Show me whereabouts it is,' says I, handing him a probe to point with. He showed me the spot and nearly swallowed the probe. 'All right,' said I. 'I can see it. Just shut your eyes and open your mouth wide and I will have it out in a jiffy.' I popped the forceps into his mouth, gave a gentle prod with the point on the soft palate, patient hollered out, 'Hoo!' I whisked out the forceps and held them up before his eyes with the fish-bone grasped in their jaws.

"'Ha!' says he. 'Thank Gawd! What a relief! I can swallow quite well now.' And so he could. It was a case of suggestion and counter-suggestion. Imaginary fish-bone cured by imaginary extraction. And it made my local reputation. Well, good-bye, old chap. I've got a visit to make here. Come in one evening and smoke a pipe with me. You know where to find me. And take my advice to heart. Never go to extract a fish-bone without one in your pocket; and it isn't a bad thing to keep a dried earwig by you. I do. People will persist in thinking they've got one in their ears. So long. Look me up soon," and with a farewell flourish of the umbrella, he turned to a shabby street-door and began to work the top bell-pull as if it were the handle of an air-pump.

I went on my way, not a little amused by my friend's genial cynicism, nor entirely uninstructed. For 'there is a soul of truth in things erroneous,' as the philosopher reminds us; and if the precepts of Solomon Usher did not sound the highest note of professional ethics, they were based on a very solid foundation of worldly wisdom.

When, having finished my short round of visits, I arrived at my temporary home, I was informed by the housemaid in a mysterious whisper that a police officer was waiting to see me. "Name of Follett," she added. "He's waiting in the consulting-room."

Proceeding thither, I found my friend, the Highgate inspector, standing with one eye closed before a card of test-types that hung on the wall. We greeted one another cordially and then, as I looked at him inquiringly, he produced from his pocket without remark an official envelope, from which he extracted a coin, a silver pencil-case and a button. These objects he laid on the writing-table and silently directed my attention to them. A little puzzled by his manner, I picked up the coin and examined it attentively. It was a Charles the Second guinea, dated 1663, very clean and bright and in remarkably perfect preservation. But I could not see that it was any concern of mine.

"It is a beautiful coin," I remarked; "but what about it?"

"It doesn't belong to you, then?" he asked.

"No. I wish it did."

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"What about the pencil-case?"

I picked it up and turned it over in my fingers. "No," I said, "it is not mine and I have no recollection of ever having seen it before."

"And the button?"

"It is apparently a waistcoat button," I said after having inspected it, "which seems to belong to a tweed waistcoat; and judging by the appearance of the thread and the wisp of cloth that it still holds, it must have been pulled off with some violence. But it isn't off my waistcoat, if that is what you want to know."

"I didn't much think it was," he replied, "but I thought it best to make sure. And it didn't come from poor Mr. D'Arblay's waistcoat, because I have examined that and there is no button missing. I showed these things to Miss D'Arblay and she is sure that none of them belonged to her father. He never used a pencil-case—artists don't, as a rule—and as to the guinea, she knew nothing about it. If it was her father's, he must have come by it immediately before his death; otherwise she felt sure he would have shown it to her, seeing that they were both interested in anything in the nature of sculpture."

"Where did you get these things?" I asked.

"From the pond in the wood," he replied. "I will tell you how I came to find them—that is, if I am not taking up too much

of your time.”

“Not at all,” I assured him; and even as I spoke, I thought of Solomon Usher. He wouldn’t have said that. He would have anxiously consulted his engagement-book to see how many minutes he could spare. However, Inspector Follett was not a patient, and I wanted to hear his story. So having established him in the easy-chair, I sat down to listen.

“The morning after the inquest,” he began, “an officer of the CID came up to get particulars of the case and see what was to be done. Well, as soon as I had told him all I knew and shown him our copy of the depositions, it was pretty clear to me that he didn’t think there was anything to be done but wait for some fresh evidence. Mind you, Doctor, this is in strict confidence.”

“I understand that. But if the Criminal Investigation Department doesn’t investigate crime, what the deuce is the good of it?”

“That is hardly a fair way of putting it,” he protested. “The people at Scotland Yard have got their hands pretty full and they can’t spend their time in speculating about cases in which there is no evidence. They can’t create evidence; and you can see for yourself that there isn’t the ghost of a clue to the identity of the man who committed this murder. But they are keeping the case in mind, and meanwhile we have got to report any new facts that may turn up. Those were our instructions, and when I heard them I decided to do a bit of investigating on my own, with the superintendent’s permission, of course.

“Well, I began by searching the wood thoroughly, but I got nothing out of that excepting Mr. D’Arblay’s hat, which I found in the undergrowth not far from the main path.

“Then I thought of dragging the pond; but I decided that, as it was only a small pond and shallow, it would be best to empty it and expose the bottom completely. So I dammed up the little stream that feeds it and deepened the outflow, and very soon I had it quite empty excepting a few small puddles. And I think it was well worth the trouble. These things don’t tell us much, but they may be useful one day for identification. And they do tell us something. They suggest that this man was a collector of coins; and they make it fairly clear that there was a struggle in the pond before Mr. D’Arblay fell down.”

“That is, assuming that the things belonged to the murderer,” I interposed. “There is no evidence that they did.”

“No, there isn’t,” he admitted; “but if you consider the three things together, they suggest a very strong probability. Here is a waistcoat button violently pulled off, and here are two things such as would be carried in a waistcoat pocket and might fall out if the waistcoat were dragged at violently when the wearer was stooping over a fallen man and struggling to avoid being pulled down with him. And then there is this coin. Its face-value is a guinea, but it must be worth a good deal more than that. Do you suppose anybody would leave a thing of that kind in a shallow pond from which it could be easily recovered with a common landing-net? Why, it would have paid to have had the pond dragged or even emptied. But, as I say, that wouldn’t have been necessary.”

“I am inclined to think you are right. Inspector,” said I, rather impressed by the way in which he had reasoned the matter out; “but even so, it doesn’t seem to me that we are much more forward. The things don’t point to any particular person.”

“Not at present,” he rejoined. “But a fact is a fact and you can never tell in advance what you may get out of it. If we should get a hint of any other kind pointing to some particular person, these things might furnish invaluable evidence connecting that person with the crime. They may even give a clue now to the people at the CID, though that isn’t very likely.”

“Then you are going to hand them over to the Scotland Yard people?”

“Certainly. The CID are the lions, you know. I’m only a jackal.”

I was rather sorry to hear this, for the idea had floated into my mind that I should have liked Thorndyke to see these waifs, which, could they have spoken, would have had much to tell. To me they conveyed nothing that threw any light on the ghastly events of that night of horror. But to my teacher, with his vast experience and his wonderful power of analysing evidence, they might convey some quite important significance.

I reflected rapidly on the matter. It would not be wise to say anything to the inspector about Thorndyke, and it was quite certain that a loan of the articles would not be entertained. Probably a description of them would be enough for the purpose; but still I had a feeling that an inspection of them would be better. Suddenly I had a bright idea and proceeded cautiously to broach it.

“I should rather like to have a record of these things,” said I, “particularly of the coin. Would you object to my taking an impression of it in sealing-wax?”

Inspector Follett looked doubtful. “It would be a bit irregular,” he said. “It is a bit irregular for me to have shown it to you, but you are interested in the case, and you are a responsible person. What did you want the impression for?”

“Well,” I said, “we don’t know much about that coin. I thought I might be able to pick up some further information. Of course, I understand that what you have told me is strictly confidential. I shouldn’t go showing the thing about, or talking. But I should like to have the impression to refer to, if necessary.”

“Very well,” said he. “On that understanding, I have no objection. But see that you don’t leave any wax on the coin, or the CID people will be asking questions.”

With this permission, I set about the business gleefully, determined to get as good an impression as possible. From the surgery I fetched an ointment slab, a spirit-lamp, a stick of sealing-wax, a tea-spoon, some powder-papers, a bowl of water and a jar of vaseline. Laying a paper on the slab, I put the coin on it and traced its outline with a pencil. Then I broke off a piece of sealing-wax, melted it in the tea-spoon and poured it out carefully into the marked circle so that it formed a round, convex button of the right size. While the wax was cooling to the proper consistency, I smeared the coin with vaseline and wiped the excess off with my handkerchief. Then I carefully laid it on the stiffening wax and made steady pressure. After a few moments, I cautiously lifted the paper and dropped it into the water, leaving it to cool completely. When, finally, I turned it over under water, the coin dropped away by its own weight.

"It is a beautiful impression," the inspector remarked, as he examined it with the aid of my pocket-lens, while I prepared to operate on the reverse of the coin. "As good as the original. You seem rather a dab at this sort of thing, Doctor. I wonder if you would mind doing another pair for me?"

Of course, I complied gladly; and when the inspector departed a few minutes later he took with him a couple of excellent wax impressions to console him for the necessity of parting with the original.

As soon as he was gone, I proceeded to execute a plan that had already formed in my mind. First, I packed the two wax impressions very carefully in lint and bestowed them in a tin tobacco-box, which I made up into a neat parcel and addressed it to Dr. Thorndyke. Then I wrote him a short letter giving him the substance of my talk with Inspector Follett and asking for an appointment early in the following week to discuss the situation with him. I did not suppose that the wax impressions would convey, even to him, anything that would throw fresh light on this extraordinarily obscure crime. But one never knew. And the mere finding of the coin might suggest to him some significance that I had overlooked. In any case, the new incident gave me an excuse for reopening the matter with him.

I did not trust the precious missive to the maid, but as soon as the letter was written I took it and the parcel in my own hands to the post, dropping the letter into the box but giving the parcel the added security of registration. This business being thus dispatched, my mind was free to occupy itself with pleasurable anticipations of the projected visit to Highgate on the morrow and to deal with whatever exigencies might arise in the course of the Saturday-evening consultations.

---

## VI. — MARION D'ARBLAY AT HOME

MOST of us have, I imagine, been conscious at times of certain misgivings as to whether the Progress of which we hear so much has done for us all that it is assumed to have done, whether the undoubted gain of advancing knowledge has not a somewhat heavy counterpoise of loss. We moderns are accustomed to look upon a world filled with objects that would have made our forefathers gasp with admiring astonishment, and we are accordingly a little puffed up by our superiority. But the museums and galleries and ancient buildings sometimes tell a different tale. By them we are made aware that the same 'rude forefathers' were endowed with certain powers and aptitudes that seem to be denied to the present generation.

Some such reflections as these passed through my mind as I sauntered about the ancient village of Highgate, having arrived in the neighbourhood nearly an hour too early. Very delightful the old village was to look upon, and so it had been even when the mellow red brick was new and the plaster on the timber houses was but freshly laid; when the great elms were saplings and the stage-wagon with its procession of horses rumbled along the road which now resounds to the thunder of the electric tram. It was not Time that had made beautiful its charming old houses and pleasant streets and closes, but fine workmanship guided by unerring taste.

At four o'clock precisely, by the chime of the church dock, I pushed open the gate of Ivy Cottage, and as I walked up the flagged path, read the date, 1709, on a stone tablet let into the brickwork. I had no occasion to knock, for my approach had been observed, and as I mounted the threshold the door opened and Miss D'Arblay stood in the opening.

"Miss Boler saw you coming up the Grove," she explained, as we shook hands. "It is surprising how much of the outer world you can see from a bay window. It is as good as a watch-tower." She disposed of my hat and then preceded me into the room to which the window appertained, where, beside a bright fire, Miss Boler was at the moment occupied with a brilliantly-burnished copper kettle and a silver teapot. She greeted me with an affable smile and as much of a bow as was possible under the circumstances, and then proceeded to make the tea with an expression of deep concentration.

"I do like punctual people," she remarked, placing the teapot on a carved wooden stand. "You know where you are with them. At the very moment when you turned the corner, sir, Miss Marion finished buttering the last muffin and the kettle boiled over. So you won't have to wait a moment."

Miss D'Arblay laughed softly. "You speak as if Dr. Gray had staggered into the house in a famished condition, roaring for food," said she.

"Well," retorted Miss Boler, "you said 'tea at four o'clock,' and at four o'clock the tea was ready and Dr. Gray was here. If he hadn't been, he would have had to eat leathery muffins, that's all."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Miss D'Arblay. "One doesn't like to think of it; and there is no need to as it hasn't happened. Remember that this is a gate-legged table, Dr. Gray, when you sit down. They are delightfully picturesque, but exceedingly bad for the knees of the unwary."

I thanked her for the warning and took my seat with due caution. Then Miss Boler poured out the tea and uncovered the



muffins with the grave and attentive air of one performing some ceremonial rite.

As the homely, simple meal proceeded, to an accompaniment of desultory conversation on everyday topics, I found myself looking at the two women with a certain ill-defined surprise. Both were garbed in unobtrusive black, and both, in moments of repose, looked somewhat tired and worn. But in their manner and the subjects of their conversation they were astonishingly ordinary and normal. No stranger, looking at them and listening to their talk, would have dreamed of the tragedy that overshadowed their lives. But so it constantly happens. We go into a house of mourning and are almost scandalized by its cheerfulness, forgetting that whereas to us the bereavement is the one salient fact, to the bereaved there is the necessity of taking up afresh the threads of their lives. Food must be prepared even while the corpse lies under the roof, and the common daily round of duty stands still for no human affliction.

But, as I have said, in the pauses of the conversation when their faces were in repose, both women looked strained and tired. Especially was this so in the case of Miss D'Arblay. She was not only pale, but she had a nervous, shaken manner which I did not like. And as I looked anxiously at the delicate, pallid face, I noticed, not for the first time, several linear scratches on the cheek and a small cut on the temple.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" I asked. "You look as if you have had a fall."

"She has," said Miss Boler in an indignant tone. "It is a marvel that she is here to tell the tale. The wretches!"

I looked at Miss D'Arblay in consternation. "What wretches?" I asked.

"Ah! indeed!" growled Miss Boler. "I wish I knew. Tell him about it. Miss Marion."

"It was really rather a terrifying experience," said Miss D'Arblay, "and most mysterious. You know Southwood Lane and the long, steep hill at the bottom of it?" I nodded, and she continued: "I have been going down to the studio every day on my bicycle, just to tidy up, and of course I went by Southwood Lane. It is really the only way. But I always put on the brake at the top of the hill and go down quite slowly because of the cross-roads at the bottom. Well, three days ago I started as usual and ran down the Lane pretty fast until I got on the hill. Then I put on the brake; and I could feel at once that it wasn't working."

"Has your bicycle only one brake?" I asked.

"It had. I am having a second one fixed now. Well, when I found that the brake wasn't acting, I was terrified. I was already going too fast to jump off, and the speed increased every moment. I simply flew down the hill, faster and faster, with the wind whistling about my ears and the trees and houses whirling past like express trains. Of course, I could do nothing but steer straight down the hill; but at the bottom there was the Archway Road with the trams and buses and wagons. I knew that if a tram crossed the bottom of the Lane as I reached the road, it was practically certain death. I was horribly frightened.

"However, mercifully the Archway Road was clear when I flew across it, and I steered to run on down Muswell Hill Road, which is nearly in a line with the Lane. But suddenly I saw a steam roller and a heavy cart, side by side and taking up the whole of the road. There was no room to pass. The only possible thing was to swerve round, if I could, into Wood Lane. And I just managed it. But Wood Lane is pretty steep, and I flew down it faster than ever. That nearly broke down my nerve; for at the bottom of the Lane is the wood—the horrible wood that I can never even think of without a shudder. And there I seemed to be rushing towards it to my death."

She paused and drew a deep breath, and her hand shook so that the cup which it held rattled on the saucer.

"Well," she continued, "down the Lane I flew with my heart in my mouth and the entrance to the wood rushing to meet me. I could see that the opening in the hurdles was just wide enough for me to pass through, and I steered for it. I whizzed through into the wood and the bicycle went bounding down the steep, rough path at a fearful pace until it came to a sharp turn; and then I don't quite know what happened. There was a crash of snapping branches and a violent shock, but I must have been partly stunned, for the next thing that I remember is opening my eyes and looking stupidly at a lady who was stooping over me. She had seen me fly down the Lane and had followed me into the wood to see what happened to me. She lived in the Lane and she very kindly took me to her house and cared for me until I was quite recovered; and then she saw me home and wheeled the bicycle."

"It is a wonder you were not killed outright!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," she agreed, "it was a narrow escape. But the odd thing is that, with the exception of these scratches and a few slight bruises, I was not hurt at all; only very much shaken. And the bicycle was not damaged a bit."

"By the way," said I, "what had happened to the brake?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Boler. "There you are. The villains!"

Miss D'Arblay laughed softly. "Ferocious Arabella!" said she. "But it is really a most mysterious affair: Naturally, I thought that the wire of the brake had snapped. But it hadn't. It had been cut."

"Are you quite sure of that?" I asked.

"Oh, there is no doubt at all," she replied. "The man at the repair shop showed it to me. It wasn't merely cut in one place. A length of it had been cut right out. And I can tell within a few minutes when it was done; for I had been riding the machine in the morning and I know the brake was all right then. But I left it for a few minutes outside the gate while I went

into the house to change my shoes, and when I came out, I started on my adventurous journey. In those few minutes someone must have come along and just snipped the wire through in two places and taken away the piece."

"Scoundrel!" muttered Miss Boler; and I agreed with her most cordially.

"It was an infamous thing to do," I exclaimed, "and the act of an abject fool. I suppose you have no idea or suspicion as to who the idiot might be?"

"Not the slightest," Miss D'Arblay replied. "I can't even guess at the kind of person who would do such a thing. Boys are sometimes very mischievous, but this is hardly like a boy's mischief."

"No," I agreed; "it is more like the mischief of a mentally defective adult; the sort of half-baked larrikin who sets fire to a rick if he gets the chance."

Miss Boler sniffed. "Looks to me more like deliberate malice," said she.

"Mischievous acts usually do," I rejoined; "but yet they are mostly the outcome of stupidity that is indifferent to consequences."

"And it is of no use arguing about it," said Miss D'Arblay, "because we don't know who did it or why he did it, and we have no means of finding out. But I shall have two brakes in future and I shall test them both every time I take the machine out."

"I hope you will," said Miss Boler; and this closed the topic so far as conversation went, though I suspect that, in the interval of silence that followed, we all continued to pursue it in our thoughts. And to all of us, doubtless, the mention of Churchyard Bottom Wood had awakened memories of that fatal morning when the pool gave up its dead. No reference to the tragedy had yet been made, but it was inevitable that the thoughts which were at the back of all our minds should sooner or later come to the surface. They were in fact brought there by me, though unintentionally; for, as I sat at the table, my eyes had strayed more than once to a bust—or rather a head, for there were no shoulders—which occupied the centre of the mantelpiece. It was apparently of lead and was a portrait, and a very good one, of Miss D'Arblay's father. At the first glance I had recognized the face which I had first seen through the water of the pool. Miss D'Arblay, who was sitting facing it, caught my glance and said: "You are looking at that head of my dear father. I suppose you recognized it?"

"Yes, instantly. I should take it to be an excellent likeness."

"It is," she replied; "and that is something of an achievement in a self-portrait in the round."

"Then he modelled it himself?"

"Yes, with the aid of one or two photographs and a couple of mirrors. I helped him by taking the dimensions with callipers and drawing out a scale. Then he made a wax cast and a fireproof mould and we cast it together in type-metal, as we had no means of melting bronze. Poor Daddy! How proud he was when we broke away the mould and found the casting quite perfect!"

She sighed as she gazed fondly on the beloved features, and her eyes filled. Then, after a brief silence, she turned to me and asked:

"Did Inspector Follett call on you? He said he was going to."

"Yes; he called yesterday to show me the things that he had found in the pond. Of course they were not mine, and he seemed to have no doubt—and I think he is right—that they belonged to the—to the—"

"Murderer," said Miss Boler.

"Yes. He seemed to think that they might furnish some kind of clue, but I am afraid he had nothing very clear in his mind. I suppose that coin suggested nothing to you?"

Miss D'Arblay shook her head. "Nothing," she replied. "As it is an ancient coin, the man may be a collector or a dealer—"

"Or a forger," interposed Miss Boler.

"Or a forger. But no such person is known to us. And even that is mere guess-work."

"Your father was not interested in coins, then?"

"As a sculptor, yes, and more especially in medals and plaquettes. But not as a collector. He had no desire to possess; only to create. And so far as I know, he was not acquainted with any collectors. So this discovery of the inspector's, so far from solving the mystery, only adds a fresh problem."

She reflected for a few moments with knitted brows; then, turning to me quickly, she asked: "Did the inspector take you into his confidence at all? He was very reticent with me, though most kind and sympathetic. But do you think that he, or the others, are taking any active measures?"

"My impression," I answered reluctantly, "is that the police are not in a position to do anything. The truth is that this villain seems to have got away without leaving a trace."

"That is what I feared," she sighed. Then with sudden passion, though in a quiet, suppressed voice, she exclaimed: "But he must not escape! It would be too hideous an injustice. Nothing can bring back my dear father from the grave; but if

there is a God of Justice, this murderous wretch must be called to account and made to pay the penalty of his crime.”

“He must,” Miss Boler assented in deep, ominous tones, “and he shall; though God knows how it is to be done.”

“For the present,” said I, “there is nothing to be done but to wait and see if the police are able to obtain any fresh information; and meanwhile to turn over every circumstance that you can think of; to recall the way your father spent his time, the people he knew and the possibility in each case that some cause of enmity may have arisen.”

“That is what I have done,” said Miss D’Arblay. “Every night I lie awake, thinking, thinking; but nothing comes of it. The thing is incomprehensible. This man must have been a deadly enemy of my father’s. He must have hated him with the most intense hatred; or he must have had some strong reason, other than mere hatred, for making away with him. But I cannot imagine any person hating my father and I certainly have no knowledge of any such person; nor can I conceive of any reason that any human creature could have had for wishing for my father’s death. I cannot begin to understand the meaning of what has happened.”

“But yet,” said I, “there must be a meaning. This man—unless he was a lunatic, which he apparently was not—must have had a motive for committing the murder. That motive must have had some background, some connexion with circumstances of which somebody has knowledge. Sooner or later those circumstances will almost certainly come to light and then the motive for the murder will come into view. But, once the motive is known, it should not be difficult to discover who could be influenced by such a motive. Let us, for the present, be patient and see how events shape; but let us also keep a constant watch for any glimmer of light, for any fact that may bear on either the motive or the person.”

The two women looked at me earnestly and with an expression of respectful confidence of which I knew myself to be wholly undeserving.

“It gives me new courage,” said Miss D’Arblay, “to hear you speak in that reasonable, confident tone. I was in despair, but I feel that you are right. There must be some explanation of this awful thing; and if there is, it must be possible to discover it. But we ought not to put the burden of our troubles on you, though you have been so kind.”

“You have done me the honour,” said I, “to allow me to consider myself your friend. Surely friends should help to bear one another’s burdens.”

“Yes,” she replied, “in reason; and you have given most generous help already. But we must not put too much on you. When my father was alive, he was my great interest and chief concern. Now that he is gone, the great purpose of my life is to find the wretch who murdered him and to see that justice is done. That is all that seems to matter to me. But it is my own affair. I ought not to involve my friends in it.”

“I can’t admit that,” said I. “The foundation of friendship is sympathy and service. If I am your friend, then what matters to you matters to me; and I may say that in the very moment when I first knew that your father had been murdered, I made the resolve to devote myself to the discovery and punishment of his murderer by any means that lay in my power. So you must count me as your ally as well as your friend.”

As I made this declaration—to an accompaniment of approving growls from Miss Boler—Marion D’Arblay gave me one quick glance and then looked down, and once more her eyes filled. For a few moments she made no reply, and when, at length, she spoke, her voice trembled.

“You leave me nothing to say,” she murmured, “but to thank you from my heart. But you little know what it means to us, who felt so helpless, to know that we have a friend so much wiser and stronger than ourselves.”

I was a little abashed, knowing my own weakness and helplessness, to find her putting so much reliance on me. However, there was Thorndyke in the background, and now I was resolved that, if the thing was in any way to be compassed, his help must be secured without delay.

A longish pause followed; and as it seemed to me that there was nothing more to say on this subject until I had seen Thorndyke, I ventured to open a fresh topic.

“What will happen to your father’s practice?” I asked. “Will you be able to get anyone to carry it on for you?”

“I am glad you asked that,” said Miss D’Arblay, “because, now that you are our counsellor, we can take your opinion. I have already talked the matter over with Arabella—with Miss Boler.”

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony,” the latter lady interposed. “Arabella is good enough for me.”

“Arabella is good enough for anyone,” said Miss D’Arblay. “Well, the position is this. The part of my father’s practice that was concerned with original work—pottery figures and reliefs and models for goldsmith’s work—will have to go. No one but a sculptor of his own class could carry that on. But the wax figures for the shop-windows are different. When he first started, he used to model the heads and limbs in clay and make plaster casts from which to make the gelatine moulds for the waxwork. But as time went on, these casts accumulated and he very seldom had need to model fresh heads or limbs. The old casts could be used over and over again. Now there is a large collection of plaster models in the studio—heads, arms, legs and faces, especially faces—and as I have a fair knowledge of the waxwork, from watching my father and sometimes helping him, it seemed that I might be able to carry on that part of the practice.”

“You think you could make the wax figures yourself?” I asked.

“Of course she could,” exclaimed Miss Boler. “She’s her father’s daughter. Julius D’Arblay was a man who could do

anything he turned his hand to and do it well. And Miss Marion is just like him. She is quite a good modeller—so her father said; and she wouldn't have to make the figures. Only the wax parts."

"Then they are not wax all over?" said I.

"No," answered Miss D'Arblay. "They are just dummies; wooden frameworks covered with stuffed canvas, with wax heads, busts and arms and shaped legs. That was just what poor Daddy used to hate about them. He would have liked to model complete figures."

"And as to the business side. Could you dispose of them?"

"Yes, if I could do them satisfactorily. The agent who dealt with my father's work has already written to me asking if I could carry on. I know he will help me so far as he can. He was quite fond of my father."

"And you have nothing else in view?"

"Nothing by which I could earn a real living. For the last year or two I have worked at writing and illuminating—addresses, testimonials and church services when I could get them—and filled in the time writing special window-tickets. But that isn't very remunerative, whereas the wax figures would yield quite a good living. And then," she added, after a pause, "I have the feeling that Daddy would have liked me to carry on his work, and I should like it myself. He taught me quite a lot and I think he meant me to join him when he got old."

As she had evidently made up her mind, and as her decision seemed quite a wise one, I concurred with as much enthusiasm as I could muster.

"I am glad you agree," said she, "and I know Arabella does. So that is settled, subject to my being able to carry out the plan. And now, if we have finished, I should like to show you some of my father's works. The house is full of them and so, even, is the garden. Perhaps we had better go there first before the light fails."

As the treasures of this singularly interesting home were presented, one after another, for my inspection, I began to realize the truth of Miss Boler's statement. Julius D'Arblay had been a remarkably versatile man. He had worked in all sorts of mediums and in all equally well. From the carved stone sundial and the leaden garden figures to the clock-case decorated with gilded gesso and enriched with delicate bronze plaquettes, all his works were eloquent of masterly skill and a fresh, graceful fancy. It seems to me little short of a tragedy that an artist of his ability should have spent the greater part of his time in fabricating those absurd, posturing effigies that simper and smirk so grotesquely in the enormous windows of Vanity Fair.

I had intended, in compliance with the polite conventions, to make this, my first visit, a rather short one; but a tentative movement to depart only elicited protests and I was easily persuaded to stay until the exigencies of Dr. Cornish's practice seemed to call me. When at last I shut the gate of Ivy Cottage behind me and glanced back at the two figures standing in the lighted doorway, I had the feeling of turning away from a house with which, and its inmates, I had been familiar for years.

On my arrival at Mecklenburgh Square I found a note which had been left by hand earlier in the evening. It was from Dr. Thorndyke, asking me, if possible, to lunch with him at his chambers on the morrow. I looked over my visiting-list, and finding that Monday would be a light day—most of my days here were light days—I wrote a short letter accepting the invitation and posted it forthwith.

---

## VII. — THORNDYKE ENLARGES HIS KNOWLEDGE

"I AM glad you were able to come," said Thorndyke, as we took our places at the table. "Your letter was a shade ambiguous. You spoke of discussing the D'Arblay case, but I think you had something more than discussion in your mind."

"You are quite right," I replied. "I had it in my mind to ask if it would be possible for me to retain you—I believe that is the correct expression—to investigate the case, as the police seem to think there is nothing to go on; and if the costs would be likely to be within my means."

"As to the costs," said he, "we can dismiss them. I see no reason to suppose that there would be any costs."

"But your time, sir—" I began.

He laughed derisively. "Do you propose to pay me for indulging in my pet hobby? No, my dear fellow, it is I who should pay you for bringing a most interesting and intriguing case to my notice. So your questions are answered. I shall be delighted to look into this case, and there will be no costs unless we have to pay for some special services. If we do, I will let you know."

I was about to utter a protest, but he continued:

"And now, having disposed of the preliminaries, let us consider the case itself. Your very shrewd and capable inspector believes that the Scotland Yard people will take no active measures unless some new facts turn up. I have no doubt he is right, and I think they are right, too. They can't spend a lot of time—which means public money—on a case in which hardly any data are available and which holds out no promise of any result. But we mustn't forget that we are in the same boat. Our chances of success are infinitesimal. This investigation is a forlorn hope. That, I may say, is what commends it to me;

but I want you to understand clearly that failure is what we have to expect.”

“I understand that,” I answered gloomily, but nevertheless rather disappointed at this pessimistic view. “There seems to be nothing whatever to go upon.”

“Oh, it isn’t so bad as that,” he rejoined. “Let us just run over the data that we have. Our object is to fix the identity of the man who killed Julius D’Arblay. Let us see what we know about him. We will begin with the evidence at the inquest. From that we learned: One. That he is a man of some education, ingenious, subtle, resourceful. This murder was planned with extraordinary ingenuity and foresight. The body was found in the pond with no tell-tale mark on it but an almost invisible pin-prick in the back. The chances were a thousand to one, or more, against that tiny puncture ever being observed; and if it had not been observed, the verdict would have been ‘found drowned’ or ‘found dead’ and the fact of the murder would never have been discovered.

“Two. We also learned that he has some knowledge of poisons. The common, vulgar poisoner is reduced to flypapers, weed-killer or rat-poison—arsenic or strychnine. But this man selects the most suitable of all poisons for his purpose and administers it in the most effective manner—with a hypodermic syringe.

“Three. We learned further that he must have had some extraordinarily strong reason for making away with D’Arblay. He made most elaborate plans, he took endless trouble—for instance, it must have been no easy matter to get possession of that quantity of aconitine (unless he were a doctor, which God forbid!). That strong reason—the motive, in fact—is the key of the problem. It is the murderer’s one vulnerable point, for it can hardly be beyond discovery; and its discovery must be our principal objective.”

I nodded, not without some self-congratulation as I recalled how I had made this very point in my talk with Miss D’Arblay.

“Those,” Thorndyke continued, “are the data that the inquest furnished. Now we come to those added by Inspector Follett.”

“I don’t see that they help us at all,” said I. “The ancient coin was a curious find, but it doesn’t appear to tell us anything new excepting that this man may have been a collector or a dealer. On the other hand, he may not. It doesn’t seem to me that the coin has any significance.”

“Doesn’t it really?” said Thorndyke, as he refilled my glass. “You are surely overlooking the very curious coincidence that it presents?”

“What coincidence is that?” I asked, in some surprise.

“The coincidence,” he replied, “that both the murderer and the victim should be, to a certain extent, connected with a particular form of activity. Here is a man who commits a murder and who at the time of committing it appears to have been in possession of a coin, which is not a current coin but a collector’s piece; and behold! the murdered man is a sculptor—a man who, presumably, was capable of making a coin, or at least the working model.”

“There is no evidence,” I objected, “that D’Arblay was capable of cutting a die. He was not a die-sinker.”

“There was no need for him to be,” Thorndyke rejoined. “Formerly, the medallist who designed the coin cut the die himself. But that is not the modern practice. Nowadays, the designer makes the model, first in wax and then in plaster, on a comparatively large scale. The model of a shilling may be three inches or more in diameter. The actual die-sinking is done by a copying machine which produces a die of the required size by mechanical reduction. I think there can be no doubt that D’Arblay could have modelled the design for a coin on the usual scale, say three or four inches in diameter.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “he certainly could, for I have seen some of his small relief work, some little plaquettes, not more than two inches long and most delicately and beautifully modelled. But still I don’t see the connexion, otherwise than as a rather odd coincidence.”

“There may be nothing more,” said he. “There may be nothing in it at all. But odd coincidences should always be noted with very special attention.”

“Yes, I realize that. But I can’t imagine what significance there could be in the coincidence.”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “let us take an imaginary case, just as an illustration. Suppose this man to have been a fraudulent dealer in antiquities, and suppose him to have obtained enlarged photographs of a medal or coin of extreme rarity and of great value, which was in some museum or private collection. Suppose him to have taken the photographs to D’Arblay and commissioned him to model from them a pair of exact replicas in hardened plaster. From those plaster models he could, with a copying machine, produce a pair of dies with which he could strike replicas in the proper metal and of the exact size; and these could be sold for large sums to judiciously-chosen collectors.”

“I don’t believe D’Arblay would have accepted such a commission,” I exclaimed indignantly.

“We may assume that he would not, if the fraudulent intent had been known to him. But it would not have been, and there is no reason why he should have refused a commission merely to make a copy. Still, I am not suggesting that anything of the kind really happened. I am simply giving you an illustration of one of the innumerable ways in which a perfectly honest sculptor might be made use of by a fraudulent dealer. In that case, his honesty would be a source of danger to him, for if a really great fraud were perpetrated by means of his work, it would clearly be to the interest of the

perpetrator to get rid of him. An honest and unconscious collaborator in a crime is apt to be a dangerous witness if questions arise."

I was a good deal impressed by this demonstration. Here, it seemed to me, was something very like a tangible clue. But at this point Thorndyke again applied a cold douche.

"Still," he said, "we are only dealing with generalities, and rather speculative ones. Our assumptions are subject to all sorts of qualifications. It is possible, for instance, though very improbable, that D'Arblay may have been murdered in error by a perfect stranger; that he may have walked into an ambush prepared for someone else. Again, the coin may not have belonged to the murderer at all, though that is also most improbable. But there are numerous possibilities of error; and we can eliminate them only by following up each suggested clue and seeking verification or disproof. Every new fact that we learn is a multiple gain. For as money makes money, so knowledge begets knowledge."

"That is very true," I answered dejectedly—for it sounded rather like a platitude; "but I don't see any means of following up any of these clues."

"We are going to follow up one of them after lunch, if you have time," said he. As he spoke, he took from the table-drawer a paper packet and a jeweller's leather case. "This," he said, handing me the packet, "contains your sealing-wax moulds. You had better take care of them and keep the box with the marked side up to prevent the wax from warping. Here are a pair of casts in hardened plaster-'fictile ivory' as it is called—which my assistant, Polton, has made."

He opened the case and passed it to me, when I saw that it was lined with purple velvet and contained what looked like two old ivory replicas of the mysterious coin.

"Mr. Polton is quite an artist," I said, regarding them admiringly. "But what are you going to do with these?"

"I had intended to take them round to the British Museum and show them to the Keeper of the Coins and Medals, or one of his colleagues. But I think I will just ask a few questions and hear what he says before I produce the casts. Have you time to come round with me?"

"I shall make time. But what do you want to know about the coin?"

"It is just a matter of verification," he replied. "My books on the British coinage describe the Charles the Second guinea as having a tiny elephant under the bust on the obverse, to show that the gold from which it was minted came from the Guinea Coast."

"Yes," said I. "Well, there is a little elephant under the bust in this coin."

"True," he replied. "But this elephant has a castle on his back and would ordinarily be described as an elephant and castle, to distinguish him from the plain elephant which appeared on some coins. What I want to ascertain is whether there were two different types of guinea. The books make no mention of a second variety."

"Surely they would have referred to it if there had been," said I.

"So I thought," he replied; "but it is better to make sure than to think."

"I suppose it is," I agreed without much conviction, "though I don't see that, even if there were two varieties, that fact would have any bearing on what we want to know."

"Neither do I," he admitted. "But then you can never tell what a fact will prove until you are in possession of the fact. And now, as we seem to have finished, perhaps we had better make our way to the Museum."

The Department of Coins and Medals is associated in my mind with an impassive-looking Chinese person in bronze who presides over the upper landing of the main staircase. In fact, we halted for a moment before him to exchange a final word.

"It will probably be best," said Thorndyke, "to say nothing about this coin, or, indeed, about anything else. We don't want to enter into any explanations."

"No," I agreed. "It is best to keep one's own counsel," and with this we entered the hall, where Thorndyke led the way to a small door and pressed the electric bell-push. An attendant admitted us, and when we had signed our names in the visitors' book, he ushered us into the keeper's room. As we entered, a keen-faced, middle-aged man who was seated at a table inspected us over his spectacles, and apparently recognizing Thorndyke, rose and held out his hand.

"Quite a long time since I have seen you," he remarked after the preliminary greetings. "I wonder what your quest is this time."

"It is a very simple one," said Thorndyke. "I am going to ask you if you can let me look at a Charles the Second guinea dated 1663."

"Certainly I can," was the reply, accompanied by an inquisitive glance at my friend. "It is not a rarity, you know."

He crossed the room to a large cabinet, and having run his eye over the multitudinous labels, drew out a small, very shallow drawer. With this in his hand, he returned, and picking a coin out of its circular pit, held it out to Thorndyke, who took it from him, holding it delicately by the edges. He looked at it attentively for a few moments, and then silently presented the obverse for my inspection. Naturally my eye at once sought the little elephant under the bust, and there it was, but there was no castle on its back.

"Is this the only type of guinea issued at that date?" Thorndyke asked.

"The only type—with or without the elephant, according to the source of the gold."

"There was no variation or alternative form?"

"No."

"I notice that this coin has a plain elephant under the bust; but I seem to have heard of a guinea, bearing this date, which had an elephant and castle under the bust. You are sure there was no such guinea?"

Our official friend shook his head as he took the coin from Thorndyke and replaced it in its cell. "As sure," he replied, "as one can be of a universal negative." He picked up the drawer and was just moving away towards the cabinet when there came a sudden change in his manner.

"Wait!" he exclaimed, stopping and putting down the drawer. "You are quite right. Only it was not an issue; it was a trial piece, and only a single coin was struck. I will tell you about it. There is a rather curious story hanging to that piece."

"This guinea, as you probably know, was struck from dies cut by John Roettier and was one of the first coined by the mill-and-screw process in place of the old hammer-and-pile method. Now, when Roettier had finished the dies, a trial piece was struck; and in striking that piece, the obverse die cracked right across, but apparently only at the last turn of the screw, for the trial piece was quite perfect. Of course Roettier had to cut a new die; and for some reason he made a slight alteration. The first die had an elephant and castle under the bust. In the second one he changed this to a plain elephant. So your impression was, so far, correct; but the coin, if it still exists, is absolutely unique."

"Is it not known, then, what became of that trial piece?"

"Oh, yes—up to a point. That is the queerest part of the story. For a time it remained in the possession of the Slingsby family—Slingsby was the Master of the Mint when it was struck. Then it passed through the hands of various collectors and finally was bought by an American collector named Van Zellen. Now, Van Zellen was a millionaire and his collection was a typical millionaire's collection. It consisted entirely of things of enormous value which no ordinary man could afford or of unique things of which nobody could possibly have a duplicate. It seems that he was a rather solitary man and that he spent most of his evenings alone in his museum, gloating over his possessions."

"One morning Van Zellen was found dead in the little study attached to the museum. That was about eighteen months ago. There was an empty champagne bottle on the table and a half-emptied glass, which smelt of bitter almonds, and in his pocket was an empty phial labelled Hydrocyanic Acid. At first it was assumed that he had committed suicide; but when, later, the collection was examined, it was found that a considerable part of it was missing. A clean sweep had been made of the gems, jewels and other portable objects of value, and, among other things, this unique trial guinea had vanished. Surely you remember the case?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I do, now you mention it; but I never heard what was stolen. Do you happen to know what the later developments were?"

"There were none. The identity of the murderer was never discovered, and not a single item of the stolen property has ever been traced. To this day the crime remains an impenetrable mystery—unless you know something about it?"; and again our friend cast an inquisitive glance at Thorndyke.

"My practice," the latter, plied, "does not extend to the United States. Their own very efficient investigators seem to be able to do all that is necessary. But I am very much obliged to you for having given us so much of your time, to say nothing of this extremely interesting information. I shall make a note of it; for American crime occasionally has its repercussions on this side."

I secretly admired the adroit way in which Thorndyke had evaded the rather pointed question without making any actual misstatement. But the motive for the evasion was not very obvious to me. I was about to put a question on the subject, but he anticipated it, for, as soon as we were outside, he remarked with a chuckle: "It is just as well that we didn't begin by exhibiting the casts. We could hardly have sworn our friend to secrecy, seeing that the original is undoubtedly stolen property."

"But aren't you going to draw the attention of the police to the fact?"

"I think not," he replied. "They have got the original, and no doubt they have a list of the stolen property. We must assume that they will make use of their knowledge; but if they don't, it may be all the better for us. The police are very discreet; but they do sometimes give the Press more information than I should. And what is told to the Press is told to the criminal."

"And why not?" I asked. "What is the harm of his knowing?"

"My dear Gray!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "You surprise me. Just consider the position. This man aimed at being entirely unsuspected. That failed. But still his identity is unknown, and he is probably confident that it will never be ascertained. Then he is, so far, off his guard. There is no need for him to disappear or go into hiding. But let him know that he is being tracked and he will almost certainly take fresh precautions against discovery. Probably he will slip away beyond our reach. Our aim must be to encourage him in a feeling of perfect security; and that aim commits us to the strictest secrecy. No one must know what cards we hold or that we hold any; or even that we are taking a hand."

"What about Miss D'Arblay?" I asked anxiously. "May I not tell her that you are working on her behalf?"

He looked at me somewhat dubiously. "It would obviously be better not to," he said, "but that might seem a little unfriendly and unsympathetic."

"It would be an immense relief to her to know that you are trying to help her, and I think you could trust her to keep your secrets."

"Very well," he conceded. "But warn her very thoroughly. Remember that our antagonist is hidden from us. Let us remain hidden from him, so far as our activities are concerned."

"I will make her promise absolute secrecy," I agreed; and then, with a slight sense of anti-climax, I added: "But we don't seem to have so very much to conceal. This curious story of the stolen coin is interesting, but it doesn't appear to get us any more forward."

"Doesn't it?" he asked. "Now, I was just congratulating myself on the progress that we had made; on the way in which we are narrowing down the field of inquiry. Let us trace our progress. When you found the body, there was no evidence as to the cause of death, no suspicion of any agent whatever. Then came the inquest demonstrating the cause of death and bringing into view a person of unknown identity but having certain distinguishing characteristics. Then Follett's discovery added some further characteristics and suggested certain possible motives for the crime. But still there was no hint as to the person's identity or position in life. Now we have good evidence that he is a professional criminal of a dangerous type, that he is connected with another crime and with a quantity of easily-identified stolen property. We also know that he was in America about eighteen months ago, and we can easily get exact information as to dates and locality. This man is no longer a mere formless shadow. He is in a definite category of possible persons."

"But," I objected, "the fact that he had the coin in his possession does not prove that he is the man who stole it."

"Not by itself," Thorndyke agreed. "But taken in conjunction with the crime, it is almost conclusive. You appear to be overlooking the striking similarity of the two crimes. Each was a violent murder committed by means of poison; and in each case the poison selected was the most suitable one for the purpose. The one, aconitine, was calculated to escape detection; the other, hydrocyanic acid—the most rapidly-acting of all poisons—was calculated to produce almost instant death in a man who was probably struggling and might have raised an alarm. I think we are fairly justified in assuming that the murderer of Van Zellen was the murderer of D'Arblay. If that is so, we have two groups of circumstances to investigate, two tracks by which to follow him; and sooner or later, I feel confident, we shall be able to give him a name. Then, if we have kept our own counsel, and he is unconscious of the pursuit, we shall be able to lay our hands on him. But here we are at the Foundling Hospital. It is time for each of us to get back to the routine of duty."

---



## VIII. — SIMON BENDELOW, DECEASED

IT was near the close of my incumbency of Dr. Cornish's practice—indeed, Cornish had returned on the previous evening—that my unsatisfactory attendance on Mr. Simon Bendelow came to an end. It had been a wearisome affair. In medical practice, perhaps even more than in most human activities, continuous effort calls for the sustenance of achievement. A patient who cannot be cured or even substantially relieved is of all patients the most depressing. Week after week I had made my fruitless visits, had watched the silent, torpid sufferer grow yet more shrivelled and wasted, speculating even a little impatiently on the possible duration of his long-drawn-out passage to the grave. But at last the end came.

"Good morning, Mrs. Morris," I said as that grim female opened the door and surveyed me impassively, "and how is our patient to-day?"

"He isn't our patient any longer," she replied. "He's dead."

"Ha!" I exclaimed. "Well, it had to be, sooner or later. Poor Mr. Bendelow! When did he die?"

"Yesterday afternoon, about five," she answered.

"H'm! If you had sent me a note, I could have brought the certificate. However, I can post it to you. Shall I go up and have a look at him?"

"You can if you like," she replied. "But the ordinary certificate won't be enough in his case. He is going to be cremated."

"Oh, indeed," said I, once more unpleasantly conscious of my inexperience. "What sort of certificate is required for cremation?"

"Oh, all sorts of formalities have to be gone through," she answered. "Just come into the drawing-room and I will tell you what has to be done."

She preceded me along the passage and I followed meekly, anathematizing myself for my ignorance, and my instructors for having sent me forth crammed with academic knowledge but with the practical business of my profession all to learn.

"Why are you having him cremated?" I asked, as we entered the room and shut the door.

"Because it is one of the provisions of his will," she answered. "I may as well let you see it."

She opened a bureau and took from it a foolscap envelope from which she drew out a folded document. This she first unfolded and then re-folded so that its concluding clauses were visible, and laid it on the flap of the bureau. Placing her finger on it, she said: "That is the cremation clause. You had better read it."

I ran my eye over the clause, which read: "I desire that my body shall be cremated and I appoint Sarah Elizabeth Morris the wife of the aforesaid James Morris to be the residuary legatee and sole executrix of this my will." Then followed the attestation clause, underneath which was the shaky but characteristic signature of Simon Bendelow, and opposite this the signatures of the witnesses, Anne Dewsnepe and Martha Bonnington, both described as spinsters and both of a joint address which was hidden by the folding of the document.

"So much for that," said Mrs. Morris, returning the will to its envelope; "and now as to the certificate. There is a special form for cremation which has to be signed by two doctors, and one of them must be a hospital doctor or a consultant. So I wrote off at once to Dr. Cropper, as he knew the patient, and I have had a telegram from him this morning saying that he will be here this evening at eight o'clock to examine the body and sign the certificate. Can you manage to meet him at that time?"

"Yes," I replied, "fortunately I can, as Dr. Cornish is back."

"Very well," said she; "then in that case you needn't go up now. You will be able to make the examination together. Eight o'clock, sharp, remember."

With this she re-conducted me along the passage and—I had almost said ejected me; but she sped the parting guest with a business-like directness that was perhaps accounted for by the presence opposite the door of one of those grim parcels-delivery vans in which undertakers distribute their wares, and from which a rough-looking coffin was at the moment being hoisted out by two men.

The extraordinary promptitude of this proceeding so impressed me that I remarked: "They haven't been long making the coffin."

"They didn't have to make it," she replied. "I ordered it a month ago. It's no use leaving things to the last moment."

I turned away with somewhat mixed feelings. There was certainly a horrible efficiency about this woman. Executrix indeed! Her promptness in carrying out the provisions of the will was positively appalling. She must have written to Cropper before the breath was fairly out of poor Bendelow's body, but her forethought in the matter of the coffin fairly made my flesh creep.

Dr. Cornish made no difficulty about taking over the evening consultations, in fact he had intended to do so in any case. Accordingly, after a rather early dinner, I made my way in leisurely fashion back to Hoxton, where, after all, I arrived fully ten minutes too soon. I realized my prematureness when I halted at the corner of Market Street to look at my watch; and as

ten additional minutes of Mrs. Morris's society offered no allurements, I was about to turn back and fill up the time with short walk when my attention was arrested by a mast which had just appeared above the wall at the end of the street. With its black-painted truck and halyard blocks and its long tricolour pennant, it looked like the mast of a Dutch schuyt or galliot, but I could hardly believe it possible that such a craft could make its appearance in the heart of London. All agog with curiosity, I hurried up the street and looked over the wall at the canal below; and there, sure enough, she was—a big Dutch sloop, broad-bosomed, massive and mediaeval, just such a craft as one may see in the pictures of old Vandervelde, painted when Charles the Second was king.

I leaned on the low wall and watched her with delighted interest as she crawled forward slowly to her berth, bringing with her, as it seemed, a breath of the distant sea and the echo of the surf murmuring on sandy beaches. I noted appreciatively her old-world air, her antique build, her gay and spotless paint and the muslin curtains in the little windows of her deck-house, and was, in fact, so absorbed in watching her that the late Simon Bendelow had passed completely out of my mind. Suddenly, however, the chiming of a clock recalled me to my present business. With a hasty glance at my watch, I tore myself away reluctantly, darted across the street and gave a vigorous pull at the bell.

Dr. Cropper had not yet arrived, but the deceased had not been entirely neglected, for when I had spent some five minutes staring inquisitively about the drawing-room into which Mrs. Morris had shown me, that lady returned, accompanied by two other ladies whom she introduced to me somewhat informally by the names of Miss Dewsnepe and Miss Bonnington respectively. I recognized the names as those of the two witnesses to the will and inspected them with furtive curiosity, though, indeed, they were quite unremarkable excepting as typical specimens of the genus elderly spinster.

"Poor Mr. Bendelow!" murmured Miss Dewsnepe, shaking her head and causing an artificial cherry on her bonnet to waggle idiotically. "How beautiful he looks in his coffin!"

She looked at me as if for confirmation, so that I was fain to admit that his beauty in this new setting had not yet been revealed to me.

"So peaceful," she added, with another shake of her head, and Miss Bonnington chimed in with the comment, "Peaceful and restful." Then they both looked at me and I mumbled indistinctly that I had no doubt he did; the fact being that the inmates of coffins are not in general much addicted to boisterous activity.

"Ah!" Miss Dewsnepe resumed, "how little did I think when I first saw him, sitting up in bed so cheerful in that nice, sunny room in the house at—"

"Why not?" interrupted Mrs. Morris. "Did you think he was going to live for ever?"

"No, Mrs. Morris, ma'am," was the dignified reply, "I did not. No such idea ever entered my head. I know too well that we mortals are all born to be gathered in at last as the—er—as the—"

"Sparks fly upwards," murmured Miss Bonnington. "As the corn is gathered in at harvest-time," Miss Dewsnepe continued with slight emphasis. "But not to be cast into a burning fiery furnace. When I first saw him in the other house at —"

"I don't see what objection you need have to cremation," interrupted Mrs. Morris. "It was his own choice, and a good one, too. Look at those great cemeteries. What sense is there in letting the dead occupy the space that is wanted for the living?"

"Well," said Miss Dewsnepe, "I may be old-fashioned, but it does seem to me that a nice quiet funeral with plenty of flowers and a proper, decent grave in a churchyard is the natural end to a human life. That is what I look forward to, myself."

"Then you are not likely to be disappointed," said Mrs. Morris; "though I don't quite see what satisfaction you expect to get out of your own funeral."

Miss Dewsnepe made no reply, and an interval of dismal silence followed. Mrs. Morris was evidently impatient of Dr. Cropper's unpunctuality. I could see that she was listening intently for the sound of the bell, as she had been even while the conversation was in progress; indeed I had been dimly conscious all the while of a sense of tension and anxiety on her part. She had seemed to me to watch her two friends with a sort of uneasiness and to give a quite uncalled-for attention to their rather trivial utterances.

At length her suspense was relieved by a loud ringing of the bell. She started up and opened the door, but she had barely crossed the threshold when she suddenly turned back and addressed me.

"That will be Dr. Cropper. Perhaps you had better come out with me and meet him."

It struck me as an odd suggestion, but I rose without comment and followed her along the passage to the street door, which we reached just as another loud peal of the bell sounded in the house behind us. She flung the door wide open and a small, spectacled man charged in and seized my hand, which he shook with violent cordiality.

"How do you do, Mr. Morris?" he exclaimed. "So sorry to keep you waiting, but I was unfortunately detained at a consultation."

Here Mrs. Morris sourly intervened to explain who I was; upon which he shook my hand again and expressed his joy at

making my acquaintance. He also made polite inquiries as to our hostess's health, which she acknowledged gruffly over her shoulder as she preceded us along the passage; which was now pitch-dark and where Cropper dropped his hat and trod on it, finally bumping his head against the unseen wall in a frantic effort to recover it.

When we emerged into the dimly-lighted hall, I observed the two ladies peering inquisitively out of the drawing-room door. But Mrs. Morris took no notice of them, leading the way directly up the stairs to the room with which I was already familiar. It was poorly illuminated by a single gasbracket over the fireplace, but the light was enough to show us a coffin resting on three chairs and beyond it the shadowy figure of a man whom I recognized as Mr. Morris.

We crossed the room to the coffin, which was plainly finished with zinc fastenings, in accordance with the regulations of the crematorium authorities, and had let into the top what I first took to be a pane of glass, but which turned out to be a plate of clear celluloid. When we had made our salutations to Mr. Morris, Cropper and I looked in through the celluloid window. The yellow, shrunken face of the dead man, surmounted by the skull-cap which he had always worn, looked so little changed that he might still have been in the drowsy, torpid state in which I had been accustomed to see him. He had always looked so like a dead man that the final transition was hardly noticeable.

"I suppose," said Morris, "you would like to have the coffin-lid taken off?"

"God bless my soul, yes!" exclaimed Cropper. "What are we here for? We shall want him out of the coffin, too."

"Are you proposing to make a post-mortem?" I asked, observing that Dr. Cropper had brought a good-sized handbag. "It seems hardly necessary, as we both know what he died of."

Cropper shook his head. "That won't do," said he. "You mustn't treat a cremation certificate as a mere formality. We have got to certify that we have verified the cause of death. Looking at a body through a window is not verifying the cause of death. We should cut a pretty figure in a court of law if any question arose and we had to admit that we had certified without any examination at all. But we needn't do much, you know. Just get the body out on the bed and a single small incision will settle the nature of the growth. Then everything will be regular and in order. I hope you don't mind, Mrs. Morris," he added suavely, turning to that lady.

"You must do what you think necessary," she replied indifferently. "It is no affair of mine;" and with this she went out of the room and shut the door.

While we had been speaking, Mr. Morris, who apparently had kept a screw-driver in readiness for the possible contingency, had been neatly extracting the screws and now lifted off the coffin-lid. Then the three of us raised the shrivelled body—it was as light as a child's—and laid it on the bed. I left Cropper to do what he thought necessary, and while he was unpacking his instruments I took the opportunity to have a good look at Mr. Morris, for it is a singular fact that in all the weeks of my attendance at this house I had never come into contact with him since that first morning when I had caught a momentary glimpse of him as he looked out over the blind through the glazed shop-door. In the interval his appearance had changed considerably for the better. He was no longer a merely unshaved man; his beard had grown to respectable length, and, so far as I could judge in the uncertain light, the hare-lip scar was completely concealed by his moustache.

"Let me see," said Cropper, as he polished a scalpel on the palm of his hand, "when did you say Mr. Bendelow died?"

"Yesterday afternoon at about five o'clock," replied Mr. Morris.

"Did he really?" said Cropper, lifting one of the limp arms and letting it drop on the bed. "Yesterday afternoon! Now, Gray, doesn't that show how careful one should be in giving opinions as to the time that has elapsed since death? If I had been shown this body and asked how long the man had been dead, I should have said three or four days. There isn't the least trace of rigor mortis left; and the other appearances—but there it is. You are never safe in giving dogmatic opinions."

"No," I agreed. "I should have said he had been dead more than twenty-four hours. But I suppose there is a good deal of variation."

"There is," he replied. "You can't apply 'averages to particular cases.'"

I did not consider it necessary to take any active part in the proceedings. It was his diagnosis and it was for him to verify it. At his request Mr. Morris fetched a candle and held it as he was directed; and while these preparations were in progress I looked out of the window, which commanded a partial view of the canal. The moon had now risen and its light fell on the white-painted hull of the Dutch sloop, which had come to rest and made fast alongside a small wharf. It was quite a pleasant picture, strangely at variance with the squalid neighbourhood around. As I looked down on the little vessel, with the ruddy light glowing from the deck-house windows and casting shimmering reflections in the quiet water, the sight seemed to carry me far away from the sordid streets around into the fellowship of the breezy ocean and the far-away shores whence the little craft had sailed, and I determined, as soon as our business was finished, to seek some access to the canal and indulge myself with a quiet stroll in the moonlight along the deserted towing-path.

"Well, Gray," said Cropper, standing up with the scalpel and forceps in his hands, "there it is, if you want to see it. Typical carcinoma. Now we can sign the certificates with a clear conscience. I'll just put in a stitch or two and then we can put him back in his coffin. I suppose you have got the forms?"

"They are downstairs," said Mr. Morris. "When we have got him back, I will show you the way down."

This, however, was unnecessary, as there was only one staircase and I was not a stranger. Accordingly, when we had

replaced the body, we took our leave of Mr. Morris and departed, and glancing back as I passed out of the door, I saw him driving in the screws with the ready skill of a cabinet-maker.

The filling up of the forms was a portentous business which was carried out in the drawing-room under the superintendence of Mrs. Morris and was watched with respectful interest by the two spinsters. When it was finished and I had handed the registration certificate to Mrs. Morris, Cropper gathered up the forms B and C and slipped them into a long envelope on which the Medical Referee's address was printed.

"I will post this off to-night," said he; "and you will send in Form A, Mrs. Morris, when you have filled it in."

"I have sent it off already," she replied.

"Good," said Dr. Cropper. "Then that is all; and now I must run away. Can I put you down anywhere. Gray?"

"Thank you, no," I replied. "I thought of taking a walk along the tow-path, if you can tell me how to get down to it, Mrs. Morris."

"I can't," she replied. "But when Dr. Cropper has gone, I will run up and ask my husband. I daresay he knows."

We escorted Cropper along the passage to the door, which he reached without mishap, and having seen him into his brougham, turned back to the hall, where Mrs. Morris ascended the stairs and I went into the drawing-room; where the two spinsters appeared to be preparing for departure. In a couple of minutes Mrs. Morris returned, and seeing both the ladies standing, said: "You are not going yet. Miss Dewsnepe. You must have some refreshment before you go. Besides, I thought you wanted to see Mr. Bendelow again."

"So we should," said Miss Dewsnepe. "Just a little peep, to see how he looks after—"

"I will take you up in a minute," interrupted Mrs. Morris. "When Dr. Gray has gone." Then addressing me, she said: "My husband says that you can get down to the tow-path through that alley nearly opposite. There is a flight of steps at the end which come right out on the path."

I thanked her for the direction, and, having bidden farewell to the spinsters, was once more escorted along the passage and finally launched into the outer world.

---

## IX. — A STRANGE MISADVENTURE

ALTHOUGH I had been in harness but a few weeks, it was with a pleasant sense of freedom that I turned from the door and crossed the road towards the alley. My time was practically my own, for, though I was remaining with Dr. Cornish until the end of the week, he was now in charge and my responsibilities were at an end.

The alley was entered by an arched opening so narrow that I had never suspected it of being a public thoroughfare, and I now threaded it with my shoulders almost touching the walls. Whither it finally led I have no idea, for when I reached another arched opening in the left-hand wall and saw that this gave on a flight of stone steps, I descended the latter and found myself on the tow-path. At the foot of the steps I stood awhile and looked about me. The moon was nearly full and shone brightly on the opposite side of the canal, but the tow-path was in deep shadow, being flanked by a high wall, behind which were the houses of the adjoining streets. Looking back—that is, to my left—I could just make out the bridge and the adjoining buildings, all their unlovely details blotted out by the thin night-haze, which reduced them to mere flat shapes of grey. A little nearer, one or two spots of ruddy light with wavering reflections beneath them marked the cabin windows of the sloop, and her mast, rising above the grey obscurity, was clearly visible against the sky.

Naturally, I turned in that direction, sauntering luxuriously and filling my pipe as I went. Doubtless, by day the place was sordid enough in aspect—though it is hard to vulgarize a navigable waterway—but now, in the moonlit haze, the scene was almost romantic. And it was astonishingly quiet and peaceful. From above, beyond the high wall, the noises of the streets came subdued and distant like sounds from another world; but here there was neither sound nor movement. The tow-path was utterly deserted, and the only sign of human life was the glimmer of light from the sloop.

It was delightfully restful. I found myself treading the gravel lightly, not to disturb the grateful silence; and as I strolled along, enjoying my pipe, I let my thoughts ramble idly from one topic to another. Somewhere above me, in that rather mysterious house, Simon Bendelow was lying in his narrow bed, the wasted, yellow face looking out into the darkness through that queer little celluloid window, or perhaps Miss Dewsnepe and her friend were even now taking their farewell peep at him. I looked up, but, of course, the house was not visible from the tow-path, nor was I now able to guess at its position.

A little farther and the hull of the sloop came clearly into view, and nearly opposite to it, on the tow-path, I could see some kind of shed or hut against the wall, with a derrick in front of it overhanging a little quay. When I had nearly reached the shed, I passed a door in the wall, which apparently communicated with some house in one of the streets above. Then I came to the shed, a small wooden building which probably served as a lighterman's office, and I noticed that the derrick swung from one of the corner-posts. But at this moment my attention was attracted by sounds of mild revelry from across the canal. Someone in the sloop's deck-house had burst into song.

I stepped out on to the little quay and stood at the edge, looking across at the homely curtained windows and wondering what the interior of the deck-house looked like at this moment. Suddenly my ear caught an audible creak from behind me.

I was in the act of turning to see whence it came when something struck me a heavy, glancing blow on the arm, crashed to the ground and sent me flying over the edge of the quay.

Fortunately the water here was not more than four feet deep, and as I had plunged in feet first and am a good swimmer, I never lost control of myself. In a moment I was standing up with my head and shoulders out of water, not particularly alarmed, though a good deal annoyed and much puzzled as to what had happened. My first care was to recover my hat, which was floating forlornly close by, and the next was to consider how I should get ashore. My left arm was numb from the blow and was evidently useless for climbing. Moreover, the face of the quay was of smooth concrete, as was also the wall below the tow-path. But I remembered having passed a pair of boat-steps some fifty yards back and decided to make for them. I had thought of hailing the sloop, but as the droning song still came from the deck-house, it was clear that the Dutchmen had heard nothing, and I did not think it worth while to disturb them. Accordingly I set forth for the steps, walking with little difficulty over the soft, muddy bottom, keeping close to the side and steadying myself with my right hand, with which I could just reach the edge of the coping.

It seemed a long journey, for one cannot progress very fast over soft mud with the water up to one's armpits; but at last I reached the steps and managed to scramble up on to the tow-path. There I stood for a moment or two irresolute. My first impulse was to hurry back as fast as I could and seek the Morris's hospitality, for I was already chilled to the bone and felt as physically wretched as the proverbial cat in similar circumstances. But I was devoured by curiosity as to what had happened, and, moreover, I believed that I had dropped my stick on the quay. The latter consideration decided me, for it was a favourite stick, and I set out for the quay at a very different pace from that at which I had approached it the first time.

The mystery was solved long, before I arrived at the quay; at least it was solved in part. For the derrick, which had overhung the quay, now lay on the ground. Obviously it had fallen—and missed my head only by a matter of inches. But how had it come to fall? Again, obviously, the guy-rope had given way. As it could not have broken, seeing that the derrick was unloaded and the rope must have been strong enough to bear the last load, I was a good deal puzzled as to how the accident could have befallen. Nor was I much less puzzled when I had made my inspection. The rope was, of course, unbroken and its 'fall'—the part below the pulley-blocks—passed into the shed through a window-like hole. This I could see as I approached, and also that a door in the end of the shed nearest to me was ajar. Opening it, I plunged into the dark interior, and partly by touch and partly by the faint glimmer that came in at the window, I was able to make out the state of affairs. Just below the hole through which the rope entered was a large cleat, on which the fall must have been belayed. But the cleat was vacant, the rope hung down from the hole and its end lay in an untidy raffle on the floor. It looked as if it had been cast off the cleat; but as there had apparently been no one in the shed, the only possible supposition was that the rope had been badly secured, that it had gradually worked loose and had at last slipped off the cleat. But it was difficult to understand how it had slipped right off.

I found my stick lying at the edge of the quay and close by it my pipe. Having recovered these treasures, I set off to retrace my steps along the tow-path, sped on my way by a jovial chorus from the sloop. A very few minutes brought me to the steps, which I ascended two at a time, and then, having traversed the alley, I came out sheepishly into Market Street. To my relief, I saw a light in Mr. Morris's shop and could even make out a moving figure in the background. I hurried across, and, opening the glazed door, entered the shop, at the back of which Mr. Morris was seated at a bench filing some small object which was fixed in a vice. He looked round at me with no great cordiality, but suddenly observing my condition, he dropped his file on the bench and exclaimed:

"Good Lord, Doctor! What on earth have you been doing?"

"Nothing on earth," I replied with a feeble grin, "but something in the water. I've been into the canal."

"But what for?" he demanded.

"Oh, I didn't go in intentionally," I replied; and then I gave him a sketch of the incident, as short as I could make it, for my teeth were chattering and explanations were chilly work. However, he rose nobly to the occasion. "You'll catch your death of cold!" he exclaimed, starting up. "Come in here and slip off your things at once while I go for some blankets."

He led me into a little den behind the shop, and, having lighted a gas fire, went out by a back door. I lost no time in peeling off my dripping clothes, and by the time that he returned I was in the state in which I ought to have been when I took my plunge.

"Here you are," said he. "Put on this dressing-gown and wrap yourself in the blankets. We'll draw this chair up to the fire and then you will be all right for the present."

I followed his directions, pouring out my thanks as well as my chattering teeth would let me.

"Oh, that's all right," said he. "If you will empty your pockets, the missus can put some of the things through the wringer and then they'll soon dry. There happens to be a good fire in the kitchen, some advance cooking on account of the funeral. You can dry your hat and boots here. If anyone comes to the shop, you might just press that electric bell-push."

When he had gone, I drew the Windsor arm-chair close to the fire and made myself as comfortable as I could, dividing my attention between my hat and my boots, which called for careful roasting, and the contents of the room. The latter appeared to be a sort of store for the reserve stock-in-trade and certainly this was a most amazing collection. I could not see a single article for which I would have given sixpence. The array on the shelves suggested that the shop had been

stocked with the sweepings of all the stalls in Market Street, with those of Shoreditch High Street thrown in. As I ran my eye along the ranks of dial-less clocks, cracked fiddles, stopperless decanters and tattered theological volumes, I found myself speculating profoundly on how Mr. Morris made a livelihood. He professed to be a 'dealer in antiques' and there was assuredly no question as to the antiquity of the goods in this room. But there is little pecuniary value in the kind of antiquity that is unearthed from a dust-bin.

It was really rather mysterious. Mr. Morris was a somewhat superior man and he did not appear to be poor. Yet this shop did not seem capable of yielding an income that would have been acceptable to a rag-picker. And during the whole of the time in which I sat warming myself, there was not a single visitor to the shop. However, it was no concern of mine; and I had just reached this sage conclusion when Mr. Morris returned with my clothes.

"There," he said, "they are very creased and disreputable but they are quite dry. They would have had to be cleaned and pressed in any case."

With this he went out into the shop and resumed his filing while I put on the stiff and crumpled garments. When I was dressed, I followed him and thanked him effusively for his kind offices, leaving also a grateful message for his wife. He took my thanks rather stolidly, and having wished me 'good night,' picked up his file and fell to work again.

I decided to walk home; principally, I think, to avoid exhibiting myself in a public vehicle. But my self-consciousness soon wore off, and when, in the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell, I perceived Dr. Usher on the opposite side of the street, I crossed the road and touched his arm. He looked round quickly, and recognizing me, shook hands cordially. "What are you doing on my beat at this time of night?" he asked. "You are not still at Cornish's, are you?"

"Yes," I answered, "but not for long. I have just made my last visit and signed the death certificate."

"Good man," said he. "Very methodical. Nothing like finishing a case up neatly. They didn't invite you to the funeral, I suppose?"

"No," I replied, "and I shouldn't have gone if they had."

"Quite right," he agreed. "Funerals are rather outside medical practice. But you have to go sometimes. Policy, you know. I had to go to one a couple of days ago. Beastly nuisance it was. Chappie would insist on putting me down at my own door in the mourning coach. Meant well, of course, but it was very awkward. All the neighbours came to their shop-doors and grinned as I got out. Felt an awful fool, couldn't grin back, you see. Had to keep up the farce to the end."

"I don't see that it was exactly a farce," I objected.

"That is because you weren't there," he retorted. "It was the silliest exhibition you ever saw. Just think of it! The parson who ran the show actually got a lot of school-children to stand round the grave and sing a blooming hymn: something about gathering at the river—I expect you know the confounded doggerel."

"Well, why not?" I protested. "I daresay the friends of the deceased liked it."

"No doubt," said he. "I expect they put the parson up to it. But it was sickening to hear those kids bleating that stuff. How did they know where he was?—an old rip with malignant disease of the pancreas, too!"

"Really, Usher," I exclaimed, laughing at his quaint cynicism, "you are unreasonable. There are no pathological disqualifications for the better land, I hope."

"I suppose not," he agreed with a grin. "Don't have to show a clean bill of health before they let you in. But it was a trying business, you must admit. I hate cant of that sort; and yet one had to pull a long face and join in the beastly chorus."

The picture that his last words suggested was too much for my gravity. I laughed long and joyously. However, Usher was not offended; indeed I suspect that he appreciated the humour of the situation as much as I did. But he had trained himself to an outward solemnity of manner that was doubtless a valuable asset in his particular class of practice and he walked at my side with unmoved gravity, taking an occasional quick, critical look at me. When we came to the parting of our ways, he once more shook my hand warmly and delivered a little farewell speech.

"You've never been to see me. Gray. Haven't had time, I suppose. But when you are free you might look me up one evening to have a smoke and a glass and talk over old times. There's always a bit of grub going, you know."

I promised to drop in before long, and he then added:

"I gave you one or two tips when I saw you last. Now I'm going to give you another. Never neglect your appearance. It's a great mistake. Treat yourself with respect and the world will respect you. No need to be a dandy. But just keep an eye on your tailor and your laundress, especially your laundress. Clean collars don't cost much, and they pay; and so does a trousers-press. People expect a doctor to be well turned out. Now, you mustn't think me impertinent. We are old pals and I want you to get on. So long, old chap. Look me up as soon as you can," and without giving me the opportunity to reply, he turned about and bustled off, swinging his umbrella and offering, perhaps, a not very impressive illustration of his own excellent precepts. But his words served as a reminder which caused me to pursue the remainder of my journey by way of side-streets neither too well lighted nor too much frequented.

As I let myself in with my key and closed the street-door, Cornish stepped out of the dining-room.

"I thought you were lost. Gray," said he. "Where the deuce have you been all this time?" Then, as I came into the light of

the hall-lamp, he exclaimed: "And what in the name of Fortune have you been up to?"

"I have had a wetting," I explained. "I'll tell you all about it presently."

"Dr. Thorndyke is in the dining-room," said he; "came in a few minutes ago to see you." He seized me by the arm and ran me into the room, where I found Thorndyke methodically filling his pipe. He looked up as I entered and regarded me with raised eyebrows.

"Why, my dear fellow, you've been in the water!" he exclaimed. "But yet your clothes are not wet. What has been happening to you?"

"If you can wait a few minutes," I replied, "while I wash and change, I will relate my adventures. But perhaps you haven't time."

"I want to hear all about it," he replied, "so run along and be as quick as you can."

I bustled up to my room, and having washed and executed a lightning change, came down to the dining-room, where I found Cornish in the act of setting out decanters and glasses.

"I've told Dr. Thorndyke what took you to Hoxton," said he, "and he wants a full account of everything that happened. He is always suspicious of cremation cases, as you know from his lectures."

"Yes, I remember his warnings," said I. "But this was a perfectly commonplace, straightforward affair."

"Did you go for your swim before or after the examination?" Thorndyke asked.

"Oh, after," I replied.

"Then let us hear about the examination first," said he.

On this I plunged into a detailed account of all that had befallen since my arrival at Market Street, to which Thorndyke listened, not only patiently but with the closest attention and even cross-examined me to elicit further details. Everything seemed to interest him, from the construction of the coffin to the contents of Mr. Morris's shop. When I had finished, Cornish remarked:

"Well, it is a queer affair. I don't understand that rope at all. Ropes don't uncleat themselves. They may slip, but they don't come right off the cleat. It looks more as if some mischievous fool had cast it off for a joke."

"But there was no one there," said I. "The shed was empty when I examined it and there was not a soul in sight on the tow-path."

"Could you see the shed when you were in the water?" Thorndyke asked.

"No. My head was below the level of the tow-path. But if anyone had run out and made off, I must have seen him on the path when I came out. He couldn't have got out of sight in the time. Besides, it is incredible that even a fool should play such a trick as that."

"It is," he agreed. "But every explanation seems incredible. The only plain fact is that it happened. It is a queer business altogether; and not the least queer feature in the case is your friend Morris. Hoxton is an unlikely place for a dealer in antiques, unless he should happen to deal in other things as well—things, I mean, of ambiguous ownership."

"Just what I was thinking," said Cornish. "Sounds uncommonly like a fence. However, that is no business of ours."

"No," agreed Thorndyke, rising and knocking out his pipe. "And now I must be going. Do you care to walk with me to the bottom of Doughty Street, Gray?"

I assented at once, suspecting that he had something to say to me that he did not wish to say before Cornish. And so it turned out; for as soon as we were outside he said:

"What I really called about was this: it seems that we have done the police an injustice. They were more on the spot than we gave them credit for. I have learned—and this is in the strictest confidence—that they took that coin round to the British Museum for the expert's report. Then a very curious fact came to light. That coin is not the original which was stolen. It is an electrotype in gold, made in two halves very neatly soldered together and carefully worked on the milled edge to hide the join. That is extremely important in several respects. In the first place it suggests an explanation of the otherwise incredible circumstance that it was being carried loose in the waistcoat pocket. It had probably been recently obtained from the electrotyper. That suggests the question, is it possible that D'Arblay might have been that electrotyper? Did he ever work the electrotype process? We must ascertain whether he did."

"There is no need," said I. "It is known to me as a fact that he did. The little plaquettes that I took for castings are electrotypes, made by himself. He worked the process quite a lot and was very skilful in finishing. For instance, he did a small bust of his daughter in two parts and brazed them together."

"Then, you see, Gray," said Thorndyke, "that advances us considerably. We now have a plausible suggestion as to the motive and a new field of investigation. Let us suppose that this man employed D'Arblay to make electrotype copies of certain unique objects with the intention of disposing of them to collectors. The originals, being stolen property, would be almost impossible to dispose of with safety, but a copy would not necessarily incriminate the owner. But when D'Arblay had made the copies, he would be a dangerous person, for he would know who had the originals. Here, to a man whom we

know to be a callous murderer, would be a sufficient reason for making away with D'Arblay."

"But do you think that D'Arblay would have undertaken such a decidedly fishy job? It seems hardly like him."

"Why not?" demanded Thorndyke. "There was nothing suspicious about the transaction. The man who wanted the copies was the owner of the originals, and D'Arblay would not know or suspect that they were stolen."

"That is true," I admitted. "But you were speaking of a new field of investigation."

"Yes. If a number of copies of different objects have been made, there is a fair chance that some of them have been disposed of. If they have and can be traced, they will give us a start along a new line which may bring us in sight of the man himself. Do you ever see Miss D'Arblay now?"

"Oh, yes," I replied. "I am quite one of the family at Highgate. I have been there every Sunday lately."

"Have you!" he exclaimed with a smile. "You are a pretty locum tenens. However, if you are quite at home there you can make a few discreet inquiries. Find out, if you can, whether any electros had been made recently and, if so, what they were and who was the client. Will you do that?"

I agreed readily, only too glad to take an active part in the investigation; and having by this time reached the end of Doughty Street, I took leave of Thorndyke and made my way back to Cornish's house.

---

## X. — MARION'S PERIL

THE mist, which had been gathering since the early afternoon, began to thicken ominously as I approached Abbey Road, Hornsey, from Crouch End station, causing me to quicken my pace so that I might make my destination before the fog closed in; for this was my first visit to Marion D'Arblay's studio and the neighbourhood was strange to me. And in fact I was none too soon; for hardly had I set my hand on the quaint bronze knocker above the plate inscribed Mr. J. D'Arblay,—when the adjoining houses grew pale and shadowy and then vanished altogether.

My elaborate knock—in keeping with the distinguished knocker—was followed by soft, quick footsteps, the sound whereof set my heart ticking in double-quick time; the door opened and there stood Miss D'Arblay, garbed in a most alluring blue smock or pinafore, with sleeves rolled up to the elbow, with a smile of friendly welcome on her comely face and looking so sweet and charming that I yearned then and there to take her in my arms and kiss her. This, however, being inadmissible, I shook her hand warmly and was forthwith conducted through the outer lobby into the main studio, where I stood looking about me with amused surprise. She looked at me inquiringly as I emitted an audible chuckle.

"It is a queer-looking place," said I; "something between a miracle-shrine hung with votive offerings from sufferers who have been cured of sore heads and arms and legs and a meat emporium in a cannibal district."

"It is nothing of the kind!" she exclaimed indignantly. "I don't mind the votive offerings, but I reject the cannibal meat-market as a gross and libellous fiction. But I suppose it does look rather queer to a stranger."

"To a what?" I demanded fiercely.

"Oh, I only meant a stranger to the place, of course, and you know I did. So you needn't be cantankerous."

She glanced smilingly round the studio and for the first time, apparently, the oddity of its appearance dawned on her, for she laughed softly and then turned a mischievous eye on me as I gaped about me like a bumpkin at a fair. The studio was a very large and lofty room or hall with a partially-glazed roof and a single large window just below the skylight. The walls were fitted partly with rows of large shelves and the remainder with ranks of pegs. From the latter hung row after row of casts of arms, hands, legs and faces—especially faces—while the shelves supported a weird succession of heads, busts and a few half-length but armless figures. The general effect was very strange and uncanny, and what made it more so was the fact that all the heads presented perfectly smooth, bare craniums.

"Are artists' models usually bald?" I inquired, as I noted this latter phenomenon.

"Now you are being foolish," she replied—"wilfully and deliberately foolish. You know very well that all these heads have got to be fitted with wigs, and you couldn't fit a wig to a head that already had a fine covering of plaster curls. But I must admit that it rather detracts from the beauty of a girl's head if you represent it without hair. The models used to hate it when they were shown with heads like old gentlemen's, and so did poor Dad—in fact he usually rendered the hair in the clay, just sketchily, for the sake of the model's feelings and his own and took it off afterwards with a wire tool. But there is the kettle boiling over. I must make the tea."

While this ceremony was being performed, I strolled round the studio and inspected the casts, more particularly the heads and faces. Of these latter the majority were obviously modelled, but I noticed quite a number with closed eyes, having very much the appearance of death-masks. When we had taken our places at the little table near the great gas-ring, I inquired what they were.

"They do look rather cadaverous, don't they?" she said as she poured out the tea, "but they are not death-masks. They are casts from living faces, mostly from the faces of models, but my father always used to take a cast from anyone who would let him. They are quite useful to work from, though, of course, the eyes have to be put in from another cast or from life."

"It must be rather an unpleasant operation:" I said "having the plaster poured all over the face. How does the victim



manage to breathe?"

"The usual plan is to put little quills or tubes into the nostrils. But my father could keep the nostrils free without any tubes. He was a very skilful moulder; and then he always used the best plaster, which sets very quickly, so that it only took a few minutes."

"And how are you getting on; and what were you doing when I came in?"

"I am getting on quite well," she replied. "My work has been passed as satisfactory and I have three new commissions. When you came in I was just getting ready to make a mould for a head and shoulders. After tea I shall go on with it and you shall help me. But tell me about yourself. You have finished with Dr. Cornish, haven't you?"

"Yes, I am a gentleman at large for the time being; but that won't do. I shall have to look out for another job."

"I hope it will be a London job," she said. "Arabella and I would feel quite lonely if you went away, even for a week or two. We both look forward so much to our little family gathering on Sunday afternoon."

"You don't look forward to it as much as I do," I said warmly. "It is difficult for me to realize that there was ever a time when you were not a part of my life. And yet we are quite new friends."

"Yes," she said; "only a few weeks old. But I have the same feeling. I seem to have known you for years; and as for Arabella, she speaks of you as if she had nursed you from infancy. You have a very insinuating way with you."

"Oh, don't spoil it by calling me insinuating!" I protested.

"No, I won't," she replied. "It was the wrong word. I meant sympathetic. You have the gift of entering into other people's troubles and feeling them as if they were your own; which is a very precious gift—to the other people."

"Your troubles are my own," said I, "since I have the privilege to be your friend. But I have been a happier man since I shared them."

"It is very nice of you to say that," she murmured with a quick glance at me and just a faint heightening of colour; and then for a while neither of us spoke.

"Have you seen Dr. Thorndyke lately?" she asked, when she had refilled our cups, and thereby, as it were, punctuated our silence.

"Yes," I answered. "I saw him only a night or two ago. And that reminds me that I was commissioned to make some inquiries. Can you tell me if your father ever did any electrottype work for outsiders?"

"I don't know," she answered. "He used latterly to electrottype most of his own work instead of sending it to the bronze-founders, but it is hardly likely that he would do electros for outsiders. There are firms who do nothing else, and I know that, when he was busy, he used to send his own work to them. But why do you ask?"

I related to her what Thorndyke had told me and pointed out the importance of ascertaining the facts, which she saw at once.

"As soon as we have finished tea," she said, "we will go and look over the cupboard where the electro moulds were kept—that is, the permanent ones. The gelatine moulds for works in the round couldn't be kept. They were melted down again. But the water-proofed-plaster moulds were stored away in this cupboard, and the gutta-percha ones too until they were wanted to soften down to make new moulds. And even if the moulds were destroyed. Father usually kept a cast."

"Would you be able to tell by looking through the cupboard?" I asked.

"Yes. I should know a strange mould, of course, as I saw all the original work that he did. Have we finished? Then let us go and settle the question now."

She produced a bunch of keys from her pocket and crossed the studio to a large, tall cupboard in a corner. Selecting a key, she inserted it and was trying vainly to turn it when the door came open. She looked at it in surprise and then turned to me with a somewhat puzzled expression.

"This is really very curious," she said. "When I came here this morning I found the outer door unlocked. Naturally I thought I must have forgotten to lock it, though that would have been an extraordinary oversight. And now I find this door unlocked. But I distinctly remember locking it before going away last night, when I had put back the box of modelling wax. What do you make of that?"

"It looks as if someone had entered the studio last night with false keys or by picking the lock. But why should they? Perhaps the cupboard will tell. You will know if it has been disturbed."

She ran her eyes along the shelves and said at once: "It has been. The things are all in disorder and one of the moulds is broken. We had better take them all out and see if anything is missing—so far as I can judge, that is, for the moulds were just as my father left them."

We dragged a small work-table to the cupboard and emptied the shelves one by one. She examined each mould as we took it out, and I jotted down a rough list at her dictation. When we had been through the whole collection and rearranged the moulds on the shelves—they were mostly plaques and medallions—she slowly read through the list and reflected for a few moments. At length she said:

"I don't miss anything that I can remember. But the question is, were there any moulds or casts that I did not know about? I am thinking of Dr. Thorndyke's question. If there were any, they have gone, so that question cannot be answered."

We looked at one another gravely and in both our minds was the same unspoken question: 'Who was it that had entered the studio last night?'

We had just closed the cupboard and were moving away when my eye caught a small object half-hidden in the darkness under the cupboard itself—the bottom of which was raised by low feet about an inch and a half from the floor. I knelt down and passed my hand into the shallow space and was just able to hook it out. It proved to be a fragment of a small plaster mould, saturated with wax and black-leaded on the inside. Miss D'Arblay stooped over it eagerly and exclaimed: "I don't know that one. What a pity it is such a small piece. But it is certainly part of a coin."

"It is part of the coin," said I. "There can be no doubt of that. I examined the cast that Mr. Polton made and I recognize this as the same. There is the lower part of the bust, the letters CA—the first two letters of Carolus—and the tiny elephant and castle. That is conclusive. This is the mould from which that electrotype was made. But I had better hand it to Dr. Thorndyke to compare with the cast that he has."

I carefully bestowed the fragment in my tobacco pouch, as the safest place for the time being, and meanwhile Miss D'Arblay looked fixedly at me with a very singular expression.

"You realize," she said in a hushed voice, "what this means. He was in here last night."

I nodded. The same conclusion had instantly occurred to me, and a very uncomfortable one it was. There was something very sinister and horrid in the thought of that murderous villain quietly letting himself into this studio and ransacking its hiding-places in the dead of the night. So unpleasantly suggestive was it that, for a time, neither of us spoke a word, but stood looking blankly at one another in silent dismay. And in the midst of the tense silence there came a knock at the door.

We both started as if we had been struck. Then Miss D'Arblay, recovering herself quickly, said, "I had better go," and hurried down the studio to the lobby.

I listened nervously, for I was a little unstrung. I heard her go into the lobby and open the outer door. I heard a low voice, apparently asking a question; the outer door closed and then came a sudden scuffling sound and a piercing shriek. With a shout of alarm, I raced down the studio, knocking over a chair as I ran, and darted into the lobby just as the outer door slammed.

For a moment I hesitated. Miss D'Arblay had shrunk into a corner and stood in the semi-darkness with both her hands pressed tightly to her breast. But she called out excitedly, "Follow him! I am not hurt!"; and on this I wrenched open the door and stepped out.

But the first glance showed me that pursuit was hopeless. The fog had now become so dense that I could hardly see my own feet. I dared not leave the threshold for fear of not being able to find my way back. Then she would be alone—and he was probably lurking close by even now.

I stood irresolutely, stock-still, listening intently. The silence was profound. All the natural noises of a populous neighbourhood seemed to be smothered by the dense blanket of dark yellow vapour. Not a sound came to my ear, no stealthy foot—fall, no rustle of movement. Nothing but stark silence.

Uneasily I crept back until the open doorway showed as a dim rectangle of shadow; crept back and peered fearfully into the darkness of the lobby. She was still standing in the corner—an upright smudge of deeper darkness in the obscurity. But even as I looked the shadowy figure collapsed and slid noiselessly to the floor.

In an instant the pursuit was forgotten and I darted into the lobby, shutting the outer door behind me, and dropped on my knees at her side. Where she had fallen a streak of light came in from the studio, and the sight that it revealed turned me sick with terror. The whole front of her smock, from the breast downwards, was saturated with blood, both her hands were crimson and gory, and her face was dead-white to the lips.

For an instant I was paralysed with horror. I could see no movement of breathing, and the white face with its parted lips and half-closed eyes was as the face of the dead. But when I dared to search for the wound, I was a little reassured, for, closely as I scrutinized it, the gory smock showed no sign of a cut excepting on the blood-stained right sleeve. And now I noticed a deep gash on the left hand, which was still bleeding freely, and was probably the source of the blood which had soaked the smock. There seemed to be no vital wound.

With a deep breath of relief, I hastily tore my handkerchief into strips and applied the improvised bandage tightly enough to control the bleeding. Then with the scissors from my pocket-case, which I now carried from habit, I laid open the blood-stained sleeve. The wound on the arm, just above the elbow was quite shallow; a glancing wound which tailed off upwards into a scratch. A turn of the remaining strip of bandage secured it for the time being, and this done, I once more explored the front of the smock, pulling its folds tightly apart in search of the dreaded cut. But there was none; and now, the bleeding being controlled, it was safe to take measures of restoration. Tenderly—and not without effort—I lifted her and carried her into the studio, where was a shabby but roomy couch, on which poor D'Arblay had been accustomed to rest when he stayed for the night. On this I laid her, and fetching some water and a towel, dabbed her face and neck. Presently she opened her eyes and heaved a deep sigh, looking at me with a troubled, bewildered expression and evidently only half-conscious. Suddenly her eye caught the great blood-stain on her smock and her expression grew wild and terrified. For a few moments she gazed at me with eyes full of horror; then, as the memory of other dreadful experience rushed back on her,

she uttered a little cry and burst into tears, moaning and sobbing almost hysterically.

I rested her head on my shoulder, and tried to comfort her; and she, poor girl, weak and shaken by the awful shock, clung to me, trembling, and wept passionately with her face buried in my breast. As for me, I was almost ready to weep, too, if only from sheer relief and revulsion from my late terrors.

"Marion darling!" I murmured into her ear as I stroked her damp hair. "Poor dear little woman! It was horrible. But you mustn't cry any more now. Try to forget it, dearest."

She shook her head passionately. "I can never do that," she sobbed. "It will haunt me as long as I live. Oh! and I am so frightened, even now. What a coward I am!"

"Indeed you are not!" I exclaimed. "You are just weak from loss of blood. Why did you let me leave you, Marion?"

"I didn't think I was hurt, and I wasn't particularly frightened then, and I hoped that if you followed him, he might be caught. Did you see him?"

"No. There is a thick fog outside. I didn't dare to leave the threshold. Were you able to see what he was like?"

She shuddered and choked down a sob. "He is a dreadful-looking man," she said; "I loathed him at the first glance—a beetle-browed, hook-nosed wretch with a face like that of some horrible bird of prey. But I couldn't see him very distinctly, for it is rather dark in the lobby and he wore a wide-brimmed hat, pulled down over his brows."

"Would you know him again? And can you give a description of him that would be of use to the police?"

"I am sure I should know him again," she said with a shudder. "It was a face that one could never forget. A hideous face! The face of a demon! I can see it now and it will haunt me, sleeping and waking, until I die."

Her words ended with a catch of the breath and she looked piteously into my face with wide, terrified eyes. I took her trembling hand and once more drew her head to my shoulder.

"You mustn't think that, dear," said I. "You are all unstrung now, but these terrors will pass. Try to tell me quietly just what this man was like. What was his height for instance?"

"He was not very tall. Not much taller than me. And he was rather slightly built."

"Could you see whether he was dark or fair?"

"He was rather dark. I could see a shock of hair sticking out from under his hat and he had a moustache with turned-up ends and a beard—a rather short beard."

"And now as to his face. You say he had a hooked nose?"

"Yes, a great, high-bridged nose like the beak of some horrible bird. And his eyes seemed to be deep-set under heavy brows with bushy eyebrows. The face was rather thin with high cheek-bones—a fierce, scowling, repulsive face."

"And the voice? Should you know that again?"

"I don't know," she answered. "He spoke in quite a low tone, rather indistinctly. And he said only a few words—something about having come to make some inquiries about the cost of a wax model. Then he stepped into the lobby and shut the outer door, and immediately, without another word, he seized my right arm and struck at me. But I saw the knife in his hand and, as I called out, I snatched at it with my left hand, so that it missed my body and I felt it cut my right arm. Then I got hold of his wrist. But he had heard you coming and wrenched himself free. The next moment he had opened the door and rushed out, shutting it behind him."

She paused and then added in a shaking voice: "If you had not been here—if I had been alone—"

"We won't think of that, Marion. You were not alone; and you will never be again in this place. I shall see to that."

At this she gave a little sigh of satisfaction, and looked into my face with the pallid ghost of a smile. "Then I shan't be frightened any more," she murmured; and closing her eyes she lay for a while, breathing quietly as if asleep. She looked very delicate and frail with her waxen cheeks and the dark shadows under her eyes, but still I noted a faint tinge of colour stealing back into her lips. I gazed down at her with fond anxiety, as a mother might look at a sleeping child that had just passed the crisis of a dangerous illness. Of the bare chance that had snatched her from imminent death I would not allow myself to think. The horror of that moment is too fresh for the thought to be endurable. Instead I began to occupy myself with the practical question as to how she was to be got home. It was a long way to North Grove—some two miles, I reckoned—too far for her to walk in her present weak state; and then there was the fog. Unless it lifted it would be impossible for her to find her way; and I could give her no help, as I was a stranger to this locality. Nor was it by any means safe; for our enemy might still be lurking near, waiting for the opportunity that the fog would offer.

I was still turning over these difficulties when she opened her eyes and looked up at me a little shyly.

"I'm afraid I've been rather a baby," she said, "but I am much better now. Hadn't I better get up?"

"No," I answered. "Lie quiet and rest. I am trying to think how you are to be got home. Didn't you say something about a caretaker?"

"Yes; a woman in the little house next door, which really belongs to the studio. Daddy used to leave the key with her at

night so that she could clean up. But I just fetch her in when I want her help. Why do you ask?"

"Do you think she could get a cab us?"

"I am afraid not. There is no cab-stand anywhere near here. But I think I could walk, unless the fog is too thick. Shall we go and see what it is like?"

"I will go," said I, rising. But she clung to my arm.

"You are not to go alone," she said, in sudden alarm. "He may be there still."

I thought it best to humour her and accordingly helped her to rise. For a few moments she seemed rather unsteady on her feet, but soon she was able to walk, supported by my arm, to the studio door, which I opened, and through which wreaths of vapour drifted in. But the fog was perceptibly thinner; and even as I was looking across the road at the now faintly visible houses, two spots of dull yellow light appeared up the road and my ear caught the muffled sound of wheels. Gradually the lights grew brighter and at length there stole out of the fog the shadowy form of a cab with a man leading the horse at a slow walk. Here seemed a chance to escape from our dilemma.

"Go in and shut the door while I speak to the cabman," said I. "He may be able to take us. I shall give four knocks when I come back."

She was unwilling to let me go, but I gently pushed her in and shut the door and then advanced to meet the cab. A few words set my anxieties at rest, for it appeared that the cabman had to set down a fare a little way along the street and was very willing to take a return fare, on suitable terms. As any terms would have been suitable to me under the circumstances, the cabman was able to make a good bargain and we parted with mutual satisfaction and a cordial *au revoir*. Then I steered back along the fence to the studio door, on which I struck four distinct knocks and announced myself vocally by name. Immediately the door opened and a hand drew me in by the sleeve.

"I am so glad you have come back," she whispered. "It was horrid to be alone in the lobby even for a few minutes. What did the cabman say?"

I told her the joyful tidings and we at once made ready for our departure. In a minute or two the welcome glare of the cab-lamps reappeared, and when I had locked up the studio and pocketed the key I helped her into the rather ramshackle vehicle.

I don't mind admitting that the cabman's charges were extortionate; but I grudged him never a penny. It was probably the slowest journey that I had ever made, but yet the funereal pace was all too swift. Half-ashamed as I was to admit it to myself, this horrible adventure was bearing sweet fruit to me in the unquestioned intimacy that had been born in the troubled hour. Little enough was said; but I sat happily by her side, holding her uninjured hand in mine (on the pretence of keeping it warm), blissfully conscious that our sympathy and friendship had grown to something sweeter and more precious.

"What are we to say to Arabella?" I asked. "I suppose she will have to be told?"

"Of course she will," replied Marion; "you shall tell her. But," she added in a lower tone, "you needn't tell her everything—I mean what a baby I was and how you had to comfort and soothe me. She is as brave as a lion and she thinks I am, too. So you needn't undeceive her too much."

"I needn't undeceive her at all," said I, "because you are;" and we were still arguing this weighty question when the cab drew up at Ivy Cottage. I sent the cabman off rejoicing, and then escorted Marion up the path to the door, where Miss Boler was waiting, having apparently heard the cab arrive.

"Thank goodness!" she exclaimed. "I was wondering how on earth you would manage to get home." Then she suddenly observed Marion's bandaged hand and uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"Miss Marion has cut her hand rather badly," I explained. "We won't talk about it just now. I will tell you everything presently when you have put her to bed. Now I want some stuff to make dressings and bandages."

Miss Boler looked at me suspiciously, but made no comment. With extraordinary promptitude she produced a supply of linen, warm water and other necessities, and then stood by to watch the operation and give assistance.

"It is a nasty wound," I said, as I removed the extemporized dressing, "but not so bad as I feared. There will be no lasting injury."

I put on the permanent dressing and then exposed the wound on the arm, at the sight of which Miss Boler's eyebrows went up. But she made no remark, and when a dressing had been put on this, too, she took charge of the patient to conduct her up to the bedroom.

"I shall come up and see that she is all right before I go," said I; "and meanwhile, no questions, Arabella."

She cast a significant look at me over her shoulder and departed with her arm about the patient's waist.

The rites and ceremonies above-stairs were briefer than I had expected—perhaps the promised explanations had accelerated matters. At any rate, in a very few minutes Miss Boler bustled into the room and said: "You can go up now, but don't stop to gossip. I am bursting with curiosity."

Thereupon, I ascended to my lady's chamber, which I entered as diffidently and reverently as though such visits were not

the commonplace of my professional life. As I approached the bed, she heaved a little sigh of content and murmured:

"What a fortunate girl I am! To be petted and cared for and pampered in this way! Arabella is a perfect angel; and you, Dr. Gray—"

"Oh, Marion!" I protested. "Not Dr. Gray."

"Well, then, Stephen," she corrected with a faint blush.

"That is better. And what am I?"

"Never mind," she replied, very pink and smiling. "I expect you know. If you don't, ask Arabella when you go down."

"I expect she will do most of the asking," said I. "And I have strict orders not to stop to gossip, so let me see the bandages and then I must go."

I made my inspection, without undue hurry, and having seen that all was well, I took her hand.

"You are to stay here until I have seen you to-morrow morning, and you are to be a good girl and try not to think of unpleasant things."

"Yes; I will do everything that you tell me."

"Then I can go away happy. Good night, Marion."

"Good night, Stephen."

I pressed her hand and felt her fingers close on mine. Then I turned away and, with only a moment's pause at the door for a last look at the sweet, smiling face, descended the stairs to confront the formidable Arabella.

Of my cautious statement and her keen cross-examination I will say nothing. I made the proceedings as short as was decent, for I wanted, if possible, to take counsel with Thorndyke. On my explaining this, the brevity of my account was condoned, and even my refusal of food.

"But remember, Arabella," I said as she escorted me to the gate, "she has had a very severe shock. The less you say to her about the affair for the present, the quicker will be her recovery."

With this warning I set forth through the rapidly-thinning fog to catch the first conveyance that I could find to bear me southward.

---

## XI. — ARMS AND THE MAN

THE fog had thinned to a mere haze when the porter admitted me at the Inner Temple Gate, so that, as I passed the Cloisters and looked through into Pump Court, I could see the lighted windows of the residents' chambers at the far end. The sight of them encouraged me to hope that the chambers in King's Bench Walk might throw out a similar hopeful gleam. Nor was I disappointed; and the warm glow from the windows of number 5A sent me tripping up the stairs profoundly relieved though a trifle abashed at the untimely hour of my visit.

The door was opened by Thorndyke, himself, who instantly cut short my apologies.

"Nonsense, Gray!" he exclaimed, shaking my hand. "It is no interruption at all. On the contrary: how beautiful upon the staircase are the feet of him that bringeth—well, what sort of tidings?"

"Not good, I am afraid, sir."

"Well, let us have them. Come and sit by the fire." He drew up an easy-chair, and having installed me in it and taken a critical look at me, invited me to proceed. I accordingly proceeded bluntly to inform him that an attempt had been made to murder Miss D'Arblay.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "These are bad tidings indeed! I hope she is not injured in any way."

I reassured him on this point and gave him the details as to the patient's condition, and he then asked:

"When did the attempt occur and how did you hear of it?"

"It happened this evening and I was present."

"You were present!" he repeated, gazing at me in the utmost astonishment. "And what became of the assailant?"

"He vanished into the fog," I replied.

"Ah, yes. The fog. I had forgotten that. But now let us drop this question and answer method. Give me a narrative from the beginning with the events in their proper sequence. And omit nothing, no matter how trivial."

I took him at his word—up to a certain point. I described my arrival at the studio, the search in the cupboard, the sinister interruption, the attack and the unavailing attempt at pursuit. As to what befell thereafter I gave him a substantially complete account—with certain reservations—up to my departure from Ivy Cottage.

"Then you never saw the man at all?"

"No; but Miss D'Arblay did;" and here I gave him such details of the man's appearance as I had been able to gather from Marion.

"It is quite a vivid description," he said as he wrote down the details; "and now shall we have a look at that piece of the mould?"

I disinterred it from my tobacco-pouch and handed it to him. He glanced at it and then went to a cabinet, from a drawer in which he produced the little case containing Polton's casts of the guinea and a box which he placed on the table and opened. From it he took a lump of moulding-wax and a bottle of powdered French chalk. Pinching off a piece of the wax, he rolled it into a ball, dusted it lightly with the chalk powder and pressed it with his thumb into the mould. It came away on his thumb bearing a perfect impression of the inside of the mould.

"That settles it," said he, taking the obverse cast from the case and laying it on the table beside the wax 'squeeze.' "The squeeze and the cast are identical. There is now no possible doubt that the electrotpe guinea that was found in the pond was made by Julius D'Arblay. Probably it had been delivered by him to the murderer on the very evening of his death. So we are undoubtedly dealing with that same man. It is a most alarming situation."

"It would be alarming if it were any other man," I remarked.

"No doubt," he agreed. "But there is something very special about this man. He is a criminal of a type that is almost unknown here, but is not uncommon in South European and Slav countries. You find him, too, in the United States, principally among the foreign-born or alien population. He is not a normal human being. He is an inveterate murderer, to whom a human life does not count at all. And this type of man continually grows more and more dangerous, for two reasons: first, the murder habit becomes more confirmed with each crime; second, there is virtually no penalty for the succeeding murders, for the first one entails the death-sentence and fifty murders can involve no more. This man killed Van Zellen as a mere incident of a robbery. Then he appears to have killed D'Arblay to secure his own safety, and he is now attempting to kill Miss D'Arblay, apparently for the same reason. And he will kill you and he will kill me if our existence is inconvenient or dangerous to him. We must bear that in mind and take the necessary measures."

"I can't imagine," said I, "what motive he can have for wanting to kill Miss D'Arblay."

"Probably he believes that she knows something that would be dangerous to him—something connected with those moulds, or perhaps something else. We are rather in the dark. We don't know for certain what it was he came to look for when he entered the studio, or whether or not he found what he wanted. But to return to the danger. It is obvious that he knows the Abbey Road district well, for he found his way to the studio in the fog. He may be living close by. There is no reason why he should not be. His identity is quite unknown."

"That is a horrid thought!" I exclaimed.

"It is," he agreed; "but it is the assumption that we have to act upon. We must not leave a loophole unwatched. He mustn't get another chance."

"No," I concurred warmly; "he certainly must not—if we can help it. But it is an awful position. We carry that poor girl's life in our hands, and there is always the possibility that we may be caught off our guard, just for a moment."

He nodded gravely. "You are quite right. Gray. An awful responsibility rests on us. I am very unhappy about this poor young lady. Of course, there is the other side—but at present we are concerned with Miss D'Arblay's safety."

"What other side is there?" I demanded.

"I mean," he replied, "that if we can hold out, this man is going to deliver himself into our hands."

"What makes you think that?" I asked eagerly.

"I recognize a familiar phenomenon," he replied. "My large experience and extensive study of crimes against the person have shown me that in the overwhelming majority of cases of obscure crime the discovery has been brought about by the criminal's own efforts to make himself safe. He is constantly trying to hide his tracks—and making fresh ones. Now, this man is one of those criminals who won't let well alone. He kills Van Zellen and disappears, leaving no trace. He seems to be quite safe. But he is not satisfied. He can't keep quiet. He kills D'Arblay; he enters the studio, he tries to kill Miss D'Arblay: all to make himself more safe. And every time he moves, he tells us something fresh about himself. If we can only wait and watch, we shall have him."

"What has he told us about himself this time?" I asked. "We won't go into that now, Gray. We have other business on hand. But you know all that I know as to the facts. If you will turn over those facts at your leisure, you will find that they yield some very curious and striking inferences."

I was about to press the question when the door opened and Mr. Polton appeared on the threshold. Observing me, he crinkled benevolently and then, in answer to Thorndyke's inquiring glance, said: "I thought I had better remind you, sir, that you have not had any supper."

"Dear me, Polton," Thorndyke exclaimed, "now you mention it, I believe you are right. And I suspect that Dr. Gray is in the same case. So we place ourselves in your hands. Supper and pistols are what we want."

"Pistols, sir!" exclaimed Polton, opening his eyes to an unusual extent and looking at us suspiciously.

"Don't be alarmed, Polton," Thorndyke chuckled. "It isn't a duel. I just want you to go over our stock of pistols and ammunition."

At this I thought I detected a belligerent gleam in Polton's eye, but even as I looked, he was gone. Not for long, however. In a couple of minutes he was back with a large hand-bag, which he placed on the table and again retired. Thorndyke opened the bag and took out quite a considerable assortment of weapons—single pistols, revolvers and automatics—which he laid out on the table, each with its box of appropriate cartridges.

"I hate fire-arms!" he exclaimed as he viewed the collection distastefully. "They are dangerous things, and when it comes to business they are scurvy weapons. Any poltroon can pull a trigger. But we must put ourselves on equal terms with our opponent, who is certain to be provided. Which will you have? I recommend this Baby Browning for portability. Have you had any practice?"

"Only target practice. But I am a fair shot with a revolver. I have never used an automatic."

"We will go over the mechanism after supper," said he. "Meanwhile, I hear the approach of Polton and am conscious of a voracious interest in what he is bringing. When did you feed last?"

"I had tea at the studio about half past four."

"My poor Gray!" he exclaimed, "you must be starving. I ought to have asked you sooner. However, here comes relief." He opened a folding table by the fire just as Polton entered with the tray, on which I was gratified to observe a good-sized dish-cover and a claret-jug. Polton rapidly laid the little table and then, whisking off the cover, retired with a triumphant crinkle.

"You have a regular kitchen upstairs, I presume," said I as we took our seats at the table, "as well as a laboratory? And a pretty good cook, too, to judge by the results."

Thorndyke chuckled. "The kitchen and the laboratory are one," he replied, "and Polton is the cook. An uncommonly good cook, as you suggest, but his methods are weird. These cutlets were probably grilled in the cupel furnace, but I have known him to do a steak with the brazing-jet. There is nothing conventional about Polton. But whatever he does, he does to a finish, which is fortunate, because I thought of calling in his aid in our present difficulty."

I looked at him inquiringly and he continued: "If Miss D'Arblay is to go on with her work, which she ought to, as it is her livelihood, she must be guarded constantly. I had considered applying to Inspector Follett, and we may have to later; but for the present it will be better for us to keep our own counsel and play our own hand. We have two objects in view. First—and paramount—is the necessity of securing Miss D'Arblay's safety. But, second, we want to lay our hands on this man, not to frighten him away, as we might do if we put the police on his track. When once we have him, her safety is secured for ever; whereas if he were merely scared away he would be an abiding menace. We have got to catch him, and at present he is catchable. Secure in his unknown identity, he is lurking within reach, ready to strike, but also ready to be pounced upon when we are ready to pounce. Let us keep him confident of his safety while we are gathering up the clues."

"Hm! yes," I assented, without much enthusiasm. "What is it that you propose to do?"

"Somebody," he replied, "must keep watch over Miss D'Arblay from the moment when she leaves her house until she returns to it. How much time—if any—can you give up to this duty?"

"My whole time," I answered promptly. "I shall let everything else go."

"Then," said he, "I propose that you and Polton relieve one another on duty. It will be better than for you to be there all the time."

I saw what he meant and agreed at once. The conventions must be respected as far as possible.

"But," I suggested, "isn't Polton rather a light-weight—if it should come to a scrap, I mean?"

"Don't undervalue small men, even physically," he replied. "They are commonly better built than big men and more enduring and energetic. Polton is remarkably strong and he has the pluck of a bulldog. But we must see how he is placed as regards work."

The question was put to him and the position of affairs explained when he came down to clear the table; whereupon it appeared (from his own account) that he was absolutely without occupation of any kind and pining for something to do. Thorndyke laughed incredulously but did not contest this outrageous and barefaced untruth, merely remarking:

"I am afraid it will be rather an idle time for you."

"Oh, no, it won't, sir," Polton assured him emphatically. "I've always wanted to learn something about sculptor's moulding and wax-casting, but I've never had a chance. Now I shall have. And that opportunity isn't going to be wasted."

Thorndyke regarded his assistant with a twinkling eye. "So it was mere self-seeking that made you so enthusiastic," said he. "But you are quite a good moulder already."

"Not a sculptor's moulder, sir," replied Polton; "and I know nothing about waxwork. But I shall, before I have been there many days."

"I am sure you will," said Thorndyke. "Miss D'Arblay will have an apprentice and journeyman in one. You will be able to give her quite a lot of help; which will be valuable just now while her hand is disabled. When do you think she will be able

to go back to work, Gray?"

"I can't say. Not to-morrow certainly. Shall I send you a report when I have seen her?"

"Do," he replied; "or better still, come in to-morrow evening and give me the news. So, Polton, we shall want you for another day or so."

"Ah!" said Polton, "then I shall be able to finish that recording-clock before I go;" upon which Thorndyke and I laughed aloud and Polton, his mendacity thus unmasked, retired with the tray, crinkling but unabashed.

The short remainder of the evening—or rather, of the night—was spent in the study of the mechanism and mode of use of automatic pistol. When I finally bestowed the 'Baby,' fully loaded, in my hip-pocket and rose to go, Thorndyke sped me on my way with a few words of warning and advice.

"Be constantly on your guard. Gray. You are going to make a bitter enemy of a man who knows no scruples; indeed, you have done so already, and something tells me that he is aware of it. Avoid all solitary or unfrequented places. Keep to main thoroughfares and well-lighted streets and maintain a vigilant look-out for any suspicious appearances. You have said truly that we carry Miss D'Arblay's life in our hands. But to preserve her life we must preserve our own; which we should probably prefer to do in any case. Don't get jumpy—I don't much think you will; but keep your attention alert and your weather eyelid lifting."

With these encouraging words and a hearty handshake, he let me out and stood watching me as I descended the stairs.

---

## XII. — A DRAMATIC DISCOVERY

ABOUT eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the third day after the terrible events of that unforgettable night of the great fog, Marion and I drew up on our bicycles opposite the studio door. She was now outwardly quite recovered, excepting as to her left hand, but I noticed that, as I inserted the key into the door, she cast a quick, nervous glance up and down the road; and as we passed through the lobby, she looked down for one moment at the great bloodstain on the floor and then hastily averted her face.

"Now," I said, assuming a brisk, cheerful tone, "we must get to work. Mr. Polton will be here in half an hour and we must be ready to put his nose on the grindstone at once."

"Then your nose will have to go on first," she replied with a smile, "and so will mine, with two raw apprentices to teach and an important job waiting to be done. But, dear me! what a lot of trouble I am giving!"

"Nothing of the kind, Marion," I exclaimed; "you are a public benefactor. Polton is delighted at the chance to come here and enlarge his experience, and as for me—"

"Well? As for you?" She looked at me half-shyly, half-mischievously. "Go on. You've stopped at the most interesting point."

"I think I had better not," said I. "We don't want the forewoman to get too uppish."

She laughed softly, and when I had helped her out of her overcoat and rolled up the sleeve of her one serviceable arm, I went out to the lobby to stow away the bicycles and lock the outer door. When I returned, she had got out from the cupboard a large box of flaked gelatine and a massive spouted bucket which she was filling at the sink.

"Hadn't you better explain to me what we are going to do?" I asked.

"Oh, explanations are of no use," she replied. "You just do as I tell you and then you will know all about it. This isn't a school; it's a workshop. When we have got the gelatine in to soak, I will show you how to make a plaster case."

"It seems to me," I retorted, "that my instructress has graduated in the academy of Squeers. 'W-i-n-d-e-r, winder; now go and clean one. Isn't that the method?'"

"Apprentices are not allowed to waste time in wrangling," she rejoined severely. "Go and put on one of Daddy's blouses and I will set you to work."

This practical method of instruction justified itself abundantly. The reasons for each process emerged at once as soon as the process was completed. And it was withal a pleasant method, for there is no comradeship so sympathetic as the comradeship of work, nor any which begets so wholesome and friendly an intimacy. But though there were playful and frivolous interludes—as when the forewoman's working hand became encrusted with clay and had to be cleansed with a sponge by the apprentice—we worked to such purpose that by the time Mr. Polton was due, the plaster bust (of which a wax replica had to be made) was firmly fixed on the work-table on a clay foundation and surrounded by a carefully-levelled platform of clay, in which it was embedded to half its thickness. I had just finished smoothing the surface when there came a knock at the outer door; on which Marion started violently and clutched my arm. But she recovered in a moment and exclaimed in a tone of vexation:

"How silly I am! Of course it is Mr. Polton."

It was. I found him on the threshold in rapt contemplation of the knocker and looking rather like an archdeacon on tour. He greeted me with a friendly crinkle, and I then conducted him into the studio and presented him to Marion, who shook



his hand warmly and thanked him so profusely for coming to her aid that he was quite abashed. However, he did not waste time in compliments, but, producing an apron from his hand-bag, took off his coat, donned the apron, rolled up his sleeves and beamed inquiringly at the bust.

"We are going to make a plaster case for the gelatine mould, Mr. Polton," Marion explained, and proceeded to a few preliminary directions, to which the new apprentice listened with respectful attention. But she had hardly finished when he fell to work with a quiet, unhurried facility that filled her with envy. He seemed to know where to find everything. He discovered the waste paper with which to cover the model to prevent the clay from sticking to it, he pounced on the clay-bin at the first shot, and when he had built up the shape for the case, found the plaster-bin, mixing-bowl and spoon as if he had been born and bred in the workshop, stopping only for a moment to test the condition of the gelatine in the bucket.

"Mr. Polton," Marion said after watching him for a while, "you are an impostor—a dreadful impostor. You pretend to come here as an improver, but you really know all about gelatine moulding; now, don't you?"

Polton admitted apologetically that he "had done a little in that way. But," he added, in extenuation, "I have never done any work in wax. And talking of wax, the doctor will be here presently."

"Dr. Thorndyke?" Marion asked.

"Yes, miss. He had some business in Holloway, so he thought he would come on here to make your acquaintance and take a look at the premises."

"All the same," Mr. Polton said, "I don't quite see the connexion between Dr. Thorndyke and wax."

He crinkled with a slightly embarrassed air and explained that he must have been thinking of something that the doctor had said to him; but his explanations were cut short by a knock at the door.

"That is his knock," said Polton; and he and I together proceeded to open the door, when I inducted the distinguished visitor into the studio and presented him to the presiding goddess. I noticed that each of them inspected the other with some curiosity and that the first impressions appeared to be mutually satisfactory, though Marion was at first a little overawed by Thorndyke's impressive personality.

"You mustn't let me interrupt your work," the latter said, when the preliminary politenesses had been exchanged. "I have just come to fill in Dr. Gray's outline sketches with details of my own observing. I wanted to see you—to convert a name into an actual person, to see the studio for the same reason, and to get as precise a description as possible of the man whom we are trying to identify. Will it distress you to recall his appearance?"

She had turned a little pale at the mention of her late assailant, but she answered stoutly enough: "Not at all; besides, it is necessary."

"Thank you," said he; "then I will read out the description that I had from Dr. Gray and we will see if you can add anything to it."

He produced a note-book from which he read out the particulars that I had given him, at the conclusion of which he looked at her inquiringly.

"I think that is all that I remember," she said. "There was very little light and I really only glanced at him."

Thorndyke looked at her reflectively. "It is a fairly full description," said he. "Perhaps the nose is a little sketchy. You speak of a hooked nose with a high bridge. Was it a curved nose of the Jewish type, or a squarer Roman nose?"

"It was rather square in profile; a Wellington nose, but with a rather broad base. Like a vulture's beak, and very large."

"Was it actually a hook-nose—I mean, had it a drooping tip?"

"Yes; the tip projected downwards and it was rather sharp—not bulbous."

"And the chin? Should you call it a pronounced or a retreating chin?"

"Oh, it was quite a projecting chin, rather of the Wellington type."

Thorndyke reflected once more, then, having jotted down the answers to his questions, he closed the book and returned it to his pocket.

"It is a great thing to have a trained eye," he remarked. "In your one glance you saw more than an ordinary person would have noted in a leisurely inspection in a good light. You have no doubt that you would know this man again if you should meet him?"

"Not the slightest," she replied with a shudder. "I can see him now, if I shut my eyes."

"Well," he rejoined, with a smile, "I wouldn't recall that unpleasant vision too often, if I were you. And now, may I, without disturbing you further, just take a look round the premises?"

"But, of course. Dr. Thorndyke," she replied. "Do exactly what you please."

With this permission he drew away and stood for some moments letting a very reflective eye travel round the interior; and meanwhile I watched him curiously and wondered what he had really come for. His first proceeding was to walk slowly round the studio and examine closely, one by one, all the casts which hung on pegs. Next, in the same systematic manner,

he inspected all the shelves, mounting a chair to examine the upper ones. It was after scrutinizing one of the latter that he turned towards Marion and asked:

"Have you moved these casts lately. Miss D'Arblay?"

"No," she replied, "so far as I know, they have not been touched for months."

"Someone has moved them within the last day or two," said he. "Apparently the nocturnal explorer went over the shelves as well as the cupboard."

"I wonder why?" said Marion. "There were no moulds on the shelves."

Thorndyke made no rejoinder, but as he stood on the chair he once more ran his eye round the studio. Suddenly he stepped down from the chair, picked it up, carried it over to the tall cupboard and once more mounted it. His stature enabled him easily to look over the cornice on to the top of the cupboard and it was evident that something there had attracted his attention.

"Here is a derelict of some sort," he announced, "which certainly has not been moved for some months." As he spoke, he reached over the cornice into the enclosed space and lilted out an excessively grimy plaster mask, from which he blew the thick coating of dust, and then stood for a while looking at it thoughtfully.

"A striking face, this," he remarked, "but not attractive. It rather suggests a Russian or Polish Jew. Do you recognize the person, Miss D'Arblay?"

He stepped down from the chair and handed the mask to Marion, who had advanced to look at it and who now held it in her hand, regarding it with a frown of perplexity.

"This is very curious," she said. "I thought I knew all the casts that have been made here. But I have never seen this one before, and I don't know the face. I wonder who he was. It doesn't look like an English face, but I should hardly have taken it for the face of a Jew, with that rather small and nearly straight nose."

"The East-European Jews are not a very pure breed," said Thorndyke. "You will see many a face of that type in Whitechapel High Street and the Jewish quarters hard by."

At this point, deserting the work-table, I came and looked over Marion's shoulder at the mask which she was holding at arm's length. And then I got a surprise of the most singular kind, for I recognized the face at a glance.

"What is it, Gray?" asked Thorndyke, who had apparently observed my astonishment.

"This is a most extraordinary coincidence!" I exclaimed. "Do you remember my speaking to you about a certain Mr. Morris?"

"The dealer in antiques?" he queried.

"Yes. Well, this is his face."

He regarded me for some moments with a strangely intent expression. Then he asked: "When you say that this is Morris's face, do you mean that it resembles his face or that you identify it positively?"

"I identify it positively. I can swear to the identity. It isn't a face that one would forget. And if any doubt were possible, there is this hare-lip scar, which you can see quite plainly on the cast."

"Yes, I noticed that. And Morris has a hare-lip scar, has he?"

"Yes; and in the same position and of the same character. I think you can take it as a fact that this cast was undoubtedly taken from Morris's face."

"Which," said Thorndyke, "is a really important fact and one that is worth looking into."

"In what way is it important?" I asked.

"In this respect," he answered. "This man, Morris, is unknown to Miss D'Arblay; but he was not unknown to her father. Here we have evidence that Mr. D'Arblay had dealings with people of whom his daughter had no knowledge. The circumstances of the murder made it clear that there must be such people; but here we have proof of their existence and we can give to one of them a local habitation and a name. And you will notice that this particular person is a dealer in curios and possibly in more questionable things. There is just a hint that he may have had some rather queer acquaintances."

"He seemed to have had rather a fancy for plaster masks," I remarked. "I remember that he had one in his shop window."

"Did your father make many life or death-masks as commissions, Miss D'Arblay?" Thorndyke asked.

"Only one or two, so far as I know," she replied. "There is very little demand for portrait masks nowadays. Photography has superseded them."

"That is what I should have supposed," said he. "This would be just a chance commission. However, as it establishes the fact that this man Morris was in some way connected with your father, I think I should like to have a record of his appearance. May I take this mask away with me to get a photograph of it made? I will take great care of it and let you have it back safely."

"Certainly," replied Marion; "but why not keep it, if it is of any interest to you? I have no use for it."

"That is very good of you," said he, "and if you will give me some rag and paper to wrap it in, I will take myself off and leave you to finish your work in peace."

Marion took the cast from him and, having procured some rag and paper, began very carefully to wrap it up. While she was thus engaged, Thorndyke stood letting his eye travel once more round the studio.

"I see," he remarked, "that you have quite a number of masks moulded from life or death. Do I understand that they were not commissions?"

"Very few of them were," Marion replied. "Most of them were taken from professional models, but some from acquaintances whom my father bribed with the gift of a duplicate mask."

"But why did he make them? They could not have been used for producing wax faces for the show figures, for you could hardly turn a shop-window into a waxwork exhibition with lifelike portraits of real persons."

"No," Marion agreed; "that wouldn't do at all. These masks were principally used for reference as to details of features when my father was modelling a head in clay. But he did sometimes make moulds for the wax from these masks, only he obliterated the likeness, so that the wax face was not a portrait."

"By working on the wax, I suppose?"

"Yes; or more usually by altering the mask before making the mould. It is quite easy to alter a face. Let me show you."

She lifted one of the masks from its peg and laid it on the table.

"You see," she said, "that this is the face of a young girl—one of my father's models. It is a round, smooth, smiling face with a very short, weak chin and a projecting upper lip. We can change all that in a moment."

She took up a lump of clay, and pinching off a pellet, laid it on the right cheek-bone and spread it out. Having treated the other side in the same manner, she rolled an elongated pellet with which she built up the lower lip. Then, with a larger pellet, she enlarged the chin downwards and forwards, and having added a small touch to each of the eyebrows, she dipped a sponge in thick clay-water, or 'slip', and dabbed the mask all over to bring it to a uniform colour.

"There," she said, "it is very rough, but you see what I mean."

The result was truly astonishing. The weak, chubby, girlish face had been changed by these few touches into the strong, coarse face of a middle-aged woman.

"It really is amazing!" I exclaimed. "It is a perfectly different face. I wouldn't have believed that such a thing was possible."

"It is a most striking and interesting demonstration," said Thorndyke. "But yet I don't know that we need be so surprised. If we consider that of all the millions of persons in this island alone, each one has a face which is different from any other and yet that all those faces are made up of the same anatomical parts, we realize that the differences which distinguish one face from another must be excessively subtle and minute."

"We do," agreed Marion, "especially when we are modelling a portrait bust and the likeness won't come, although every part appears to be correct and all the measurements seem to agree. A true likeness is an extraordinarily subtle and exact piece of work."

"So I have always thought," said Thorndyke. "But I mustn't delay you any longer. May I have my precious parcel?"

Marion hastily put the finishing touches to the not very presentable bundle and handed it to him with a smile and a bow. He then took his leave of her and I escorted him to the door, where he paused for a moment as we shook hands.

"You are bearing my advice in mind, I hope. Gray," he said.

"As to keeping clear of unfrequented places? Yes, I have been very careful in that respect, and I never go abroad without the pistol. It is in my hip-pocket now. But I have seen no sign of anything to justify so much caution. I doubt if our friend is even aware of my existence, and in any case, I don't see that he has anything against me, excepting as Miss D'Arblay's watch-dog."

"Don't be too sure, Gray," he rejoined earnestly. "There may be certain little matters that you have overlooked. At any rate, don't relax your caution. Give all unfrequented places a wide berth and keep a bright look-out."

With this final warning, he turned away and strode off down the road, while I re-entered the studio just in time to see Polton mix the first bowl of plaster, as Marion, having washed the clay from the transformed mask, dried it and rehung it on its peg.

---

### XIII. — A NARROW ESCAPE

THE statement that I had made to Thorndyke was perfectly true in substance; but it was hardly as significant in fact as the words implied. I had, it is true, in my journeyings abroad, restricted myself to well-beaten thoroughfares. But then I had had no occasion to do otherwise. Until Polton's arrival on the scene my time had been wholly taken up in keeping a watch

on Marion; and so it would have continued if I had followed my own inclination. But at the end of the first day's work she intervened resolutely.

"I am perfectly ashamed," she said, "to occupy the time of two men, both of whom have their own affairs to attend to, though I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for sacrificing yourselves."

"We are acting under the doctor's orders, miss," said Polton, thereby, in his opinion, closing the subject.

"You mean Dr. Thorndyke's?" said Marion, not realizing—or not choosing to realize—that, to Polton, there was no other doctor in the world who counted.

"Yes, miss. The doctor's orders must be carried out."

"Of course they must," she agreed warmly, "since he has been so very good as to take all this trouble about my safety. But there is no need for both of you to be here together. Couldn't you arrange to take turns on duty—alternate days or a half-day each? I hate the thought that I am wasting the whole of both your times."

I did not look on the suggestion with favour, for I was reluctant to yield up to any man—even to Polton—the privilege of watching over the safety of one who was so infinitely dear to me. Nor was Polton much less unwilling to agree, for he loathed to leave a piece of work uncompleted. However, Marion refused to accept our denials (as is the way of women), and the end of it was that Polton and I had to arrange our duties in half-day shifts, changing over at the end of each week, the first spell allotting the mornings to me and the latter half of the day—with the duty of seeing Marion home—to him.

Thus, during each of the following six working days, I found myself with the entire afternoon and evening free. The former I usually spent at the hospital, but in the evenings, feeling too unsettled for study, I occupied myself very pleasantly with long walks through the inexhaustible streets, extending my knowledge of the town and making systematic explorations of such distant regions as Mile End, Kingsland, Dalston, Wapping and the Borough.

One evening I bethought me of my promise to look in on Usher. I did not find myself yearning for his society, but a promise is a promise. Accordingly, when I had finished my solitary dinner, I set forth from my lodgings in Camden Square and made a bee-line for Clerkenwell; so far, that is to say, as was possible, while keeping to the wider streets. For in this respect, I followed Thorndyke's instructions to the letter, though, as to the other matter—that of keeping a bright look-out—I was less attentive, my mind being much more occupied with thoughts of Marion (who would, just now, be on her way home under Polton's escort) than with any considerations of my own personal safety. Indeed, to tell the truth, I was inclined to be more than a little sceptical as to the need for these extraordinary precautions.

I found Usher in the act of bowing out the last of the 'evening consultations' and was welcomed by him with enthusiasm.

"Delighted to see you, old chap!" he exclaimed, shaking my hand warmly. "It is good of you to drop in on an old fossil like me. Didn't much think you would. I suppose you don't often come this way?"

"No," I replied. "It is rather off my beat. I've finished with Hoxton—for the present, at any rate."

"So have I," said Usher, "since poor old Crile went off to the better land."

"Crile?" I repeated. "Who was he?"

"Don't you remember me telling you about his funeral, when they had those Sunday-school kids yowling hymns round the grave? That was Mr. Crile—Christian name, Jonathan."

"I remember, but I didn't realize that he was a Hoxton aristocrat."

"Well, he was. Fifty-two Field Street was his earthly abode. I used to remember it by the number of weeks in the year. And glad enough I was when he hopped off his perch, for his confounded landlady, a Mrs. Pepper, would insist on fixing the times for my visits, and deuced inconvenient times, too. Between four and six on Tuesdays and Fridays. I hate patients who turn your visits into appointments. Upsets your whole visiting-list."

"It seems to be the fashion in Hoxton," I remarked. "I had to make my visits at appointed times, too. It would have been frightfully inconvenient if I had been busy. Is it often done?"

"They will always do it if you let 'em. Of course it is a convenience to a woman who doesn't keep a servant, to know what time the doctor is going to call; but it doesn't do to give way to 'em."

I assented to this excellent principle, noting, however, that he seemed to have "given way to 'em" all the same.

As we had been talking, we had gradually drifted from the surgery up a flight of stairs to a shabby, cosy little room on the first floor, where a cheerful fire was burning and a copper kettle on a trivet purred contentedly and breathed forth little clouds of steam. Usher inducted me into a large easy-chair, the depressed seat of which suggested its customary use by an elephant of sedentary habits, and produced from a cupboard a spirit-decanter, a high-shouldered Dutch gin-bottle, a sugar-basin and a couple of tumblers and sugar-crushers.

"Whisky or Hollands?" he demanded, and as curiosity led me to select the latter, he commented: "That's right, Gray. Good stuff, Hollands. Touches up the cubical epithelium—what! I am rather partial to a drop of Hollands."

It was no empty profession. The initial dose made me open my eyes; and that was only a beginning. In a twinkling, as it seemed, his tumbler was empty and the collaboration of the bottle and the copper kettle was repeated. And so it went on for nearly an hour, until I began to grow quite uneasy, though without any visible cause, so far as Usher was concerned. He

did not turn a hair (he hadn't very many to turn for that matter, but I speak figuratively). The only effect that I could observe was an increasing fluency of speech with a tendency to discursiveness; and I must admit that his conversation was highly entertaining. But his evident intention to 'make a night of it' set me planning to make my escape without appearing to slight his hospitality. How I should have managed it, unaided by the direct interposition of Providence, I cannot guess; for his conversation had now taken the form of an interminable sentence punctuated by indistinguishable commas; but in the midst of this steadily-flowing stream of eloquence the outer silence was rent by the sudden jangling of a bell.

Usher stopped short, stared at me solemnly, deliberately emptied his tumbler and stood up.

"Night bell, ol' chappie," he explained. "Got to go out. But don't you disturb yourself. Be back in a few minutes. Soon polish 'em off."

"I'll walk round with you as far as your patient's house," said I, "and then I shall have to get home. It is past ten and I have a longish walk to Camden Square."

He was disposed to argue the point, but another violent jangling cut his protests short and lent him hurrying down the stairs with me close at his heels. A couple of minutes later we were out in the street, following in the wake of a hurrying figure; and, looking at Usher as he walked sedately at my side, with his top-hat, his whiskers and his inevitable umbrella, I had the feeling that all those jorums of Hollands had been consumed in vain. In appearance, in manner, in speech and in gait he was just his normal self, with never a hint of any change from the status quo ante bellum.

Our course led us into the purlieu of St. John Street Road, where we presently turned into a narrow, winding and curiously desolate little street, along which we proceeded for a few hundred yards, when our 'fore-runner' halted at a door into which he inserted a latch-key. When we arrived at the open door, inside which a shadowy figure was lurking, Usher stopped and held out his hand.

"Good night, old chap," he said. "Sorry you can't come back with me. If you keep straight on and turn to the left at the cross-roads, you will come out presently into the King's Cross Road. Then you'll know your way. So long."

He turned into the dark passage, the door was closed and I went on my way.

The little meandering street was singularly silent and deserted; and its windings cut off the light from the scanty street-lamps, so that stretches of it were in almost total darkness. As I strode forward the echoes of my foot-falls resounded with hollow reverberations which smote my ear—and ought have smitten my conscience—causing me to wonder, with grim amusement, what Thorndyke would have said if he could have seen me thus setting his instructions at defiance. Indeed, I was so far sensible of the impropriety of my being in such a place at such an hour that I was about to turn to take a look back along the street; but at the very moment that I halted within a few feet of a street-lamp, something struck the brim of my hat with a sharp, weighty blow like the stroke of a hammer, and I heard a dull thud from the lamp-post.

In an instant I spun round, mighty fierce, whipping out my pistol, cocking it and pointing it down the street as I raced back towards the spot from whence the missile had appeared to come. There was not a soul in sight nor any sound of movement, and the shallow doorways seemed to offer no possible hiding-place. But some thirty yards back I came suddenly on a narrow opening like an empty doorway but actually the entrance to a covered alley not more than three feet wide and as dark as a pocket. This was evidently the ambush (which I had passed, like a fool, without observing it), and I halted beside it, with my pistol still pointed, listening intently and considering what I had better do. My first impulse had been to charge into the alley, but a moment's reflection showed the futility of such a proceeding. Probably my assailant had made off by some well-known outlet; but in any case it would be sheer insanity for me to plunge into that pitch-dark passage. For if he were still lurking there, he would be invisible to me, whereas I should be a clear silhouette against the dim light of the street. Moreover, I had seen no one and I could not shoot at any chance stranger whom I might find there. Reluctantly, I recognized that there was nothing for it but to retreat cautiously and be more careful in future.

My retirement would have looked an odd proceeding to an observer, if there had been one, for I had to retreat crab-wise in order that I might keep the entrance of the alley covered with my pistol and yet see where I was going. When I reached the lamp-post, I scanned the area of lighted ground beneath it, and, almost at the first glance, perceived an object like a largish marble lying in the road. It proved, when I picked it up, to be a leaden ball, like an old-fashioned musket-ball, with one flattened side, which had prevented it from rolling away from the spot where it had fallen. I dropped it into my pocket and resumed my masterly retreat until, at length, the cross-roads came into view. Then I quickened my pace, and as I reached the corner, put away my pistol after slipping in the safety-catch.

Once more out in the lighted and frequented main streets, my thoughts were free to turn over this extraordinary experience. But I did not allow them to divert me from a very careful look-out. All my scepticism was gone now. I realized that Thorndyke had not been making mere vague guesses, but that he had clearly foreseen that something of this kind would probably happen. That was, to me, the most perplexing feature of this incomprehensible affair.

I turned it over in my mind again and again and could make nothing of it. I could see no adequate reason why this man should want to make away with me. True, I was Marion's protector, but that—even if he were aware of it—did not seem an adequate reason. Indeed, I could not see why he was seeking to make away with her—nor, even, was it clear to me that there had been a reasonable motive for murdering her father. But as to myself, I seemed to be out of the picture altogether. The man had nothing to fear from me or to gain by my death.

That was how it appeared to me; and yet I saw plainly that I must be mistaken. There must be something behind all this

—something that was unknown to me but was known to Thorndyke. What could it be? I found myself unable to make any sort of guess. In the end, I decided to call on Thorndyke the following evening, report the incident and see if I could get any enlightenment from him.

The first part of this programme I carried out successfully enough, but the second presented more difficulties.

Thorndyke was not a very communicative man, and a perfectly impossible one to pump. What he chose to tell, he told freely; and beyond that, no amount of ingenuity could extract the faintest shadow of a hint.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you, sir," I said in some alarm, as I noted a portentous heap of documents on the table.

"No," he replied. "I have nearly finished, and I shall treat you as a friend and keep you waiting while I do the little that is left." He turned to his papers and took up his pen, but paused to cast one of his quick, penetrating glances at me.

"Has anything fresh happened?" he asked.

"Our unknown friend has had a pot at me," I answered. "That is all."

He laid down his pen and, leaning back in his chair, demanded particulars. I gave him an account of what had happened on the preceding night, and taking the leaden ball from my pocket, laid it on the table. He picked it up, examined it curiously and then placed it on the letter-balance.

"Just over half an ounce," he said. "It is a mercy it missed your head. With that weight and the velocity indicated by the flattening, it would have dropped you insensible with a fractured skull."

"And then he would have come along and put the finishing touches, I suppose. But I wonder how he shot the thing. Could he have used an air-gun?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "An air-gun that would discharge a ball of that weight would make quite a loud report, and you say you heard nothing. You are quite sure of that, by the way?"

"Perfectly. The place was as silent as the grave."

"Then he must have used a catapult; and an uncommonly efficient weapon it is in skilful hands, and as portable as a pistol. You mustn't give him another chance, Gray."

"I am not going to if I can help it. But what the deuce does the fellow want to pot at me for? It is a most mysterious thing. Do you understand what it is all about, sir?"

"I do not," he replied. "My knowledge of the facts of this case is nearly all second-hand knowledge, derived from you. You know all that I know and probably more."

"That is all very well, sir," said I; "but you foresaw that this was likely to happen. I didn't. Therefore you must know more about the case than I do."

He chuckled softly. "You are confusing knowledge and inference," said he. "We had the same facts, but our inferences were not the same. It is just a matter of experience. You haven't squeezed out of the facts as much as they are capable of yielding. Come, now, Gray; while I am finishing my work, you shall look over my notes of this case, and then you should take a sort of bird's-eye view of the whole case and see if anything new occurs to you. And you must add to those notes that this man has been at the enormous trouble of stalking you continuously, that he shadowed you to Usher's, that he waited patiently for you to come out, that he followed you most skillfully and took instant advantage of the first opportunity that you gave him. You might also note that he did not elect to overtake you and make a direct attack on you as he did on Miss D'Arblay. Note those facts and consider what their significance may be. And now just go through this little dossier. It won't take you many minutes."

He took out of a drawer a small portfolio, on the cover of which was written 'J. D'Arblay, decd.' and, passing it to me, returned to his documents. I opened it and found it to contain a number of separate abstracts, each duly headed with its descriptive title, and an envelope marked "Photographs." Glancing over the abstracts, I saw that they dealt respectively with J. D'Arblay, the Inquest, the Van Zellen Case, Miss D'Arblay, Dr. Gray and Mr. Morris; the last containing, somewhat to my surprise, all the details that I had given Thorndyke respecting that rather mysterious person together with an account of my dealings with him and cross-references to the abstract bearing my name. It was all very complete and methodical, but none of the abstracts contained any information that was new to me. If this represented all the facts at were known to Thorndyke, then he was no better informed than I was. But he had evidently got a great deal more out of the information than I had.

Returning the abstracts with some disappointment to the portfolio, I turned to the photographs, and then I got a very thorough surprise. There were only three, and the first two were of no great interest, one representing the two casts of the guinea and the other the plaster mask of Morris. But the third fairly took away my breath. It was a very bad photograph, apparently an enlargement from a rather poor snap-shot portrait; but, bad as it was, it gave a very vivid presentment of one of the most evil-looking faces that I have ever looked on: a lean, bearded face with high cheekbones, with heavy, frowning brows that overhung deep-shadowed, hollow eye-sockets and an almost grotesquely large nose, thin, curved and sharp, that jutted out like a great predatory beak.

I stared at the photograph in speechless amazement. At the first glance I had been struck by the perfect way in which this crude portrait realized Marion's description of the man who had tried to murder her. But that was not all. There was

another resemblance which I now perceived with even more astonishment; indeed it was so incredible that the perception of it reduced me to something like stupefaction. I sat for fully a minute with the portrait in my hand and my thoughts surging confusedly in a vain effort to grasp the meaning of this extraordinary likeness; then, happening to glance up at Thorndyke, I found him quietly regarding me with undisguised interest.

"Well?" he said, as he caught my eye.

"Who is he?" I demanded, holding up the photograph.

"That is what I want to know," he replied. "The photograph came to me without any description. The identity of the subject is unknown. Who do you think he is?"

"To begin with," I answered, "he exactly corresponds in appearance with Miss D'Arbly's description of her would-be murderer. Don't you think so?"

"I do," he replied. "The correspondence seems complete in every detail, so far as I can judge. That was why I secured the photograph. But the actual resemblance will have to be settled by her. I suggest that you take the portrait and let her see it; but you had better not show it to her pointedly for identification. It would be better to put it in some place where she will see it without previous suggestion or preparation. But you said just now 'to begin with'. Was there anything else that struck you about this photograph?"

"Yes," I answered, "there was—a most amazing thing. You remember my telling you about the patient I attended in Morris's house?"

"The man who died of gastric cancer and was eventually cremated?"

"Yes. His name was Bendelow. Well, this photograph might have been a portrait of Bendelow, taken with a beard and moustache before the disease got hold of him. Excepting for the emaciation and the beard—Bendelow was clean-shaved—I should think it would be quite an excellent likeness of him."

Thorndyke made no immediate reply or comment, but sat quite still, looking at me with a very singular expression. I could see that he was thinking rapidly and intensely, but I suspected that his thoughts were in a good deal less confusion than mine had been.

"It is," he remarked at length, "as you say, a most amazing affair. The face is no ordinary face. It would be difficult to mistake it, and one would have to go far to find another with which it could be confused. Still, one must not forget the possibility of a chance resemblance. Nature doesn't take out letters-patent even for a human face. But I will ask you, Gray, to write down and send to me all that you know about the late Mr. Bendelow, including all the details of your attendance on him, dead and alive."

"I will," said I, "though it is difficult to imagine what connexion he could have had with the D'Arbly case."

"It seems incredible that he could have had any," Thorndyke agreed. "But at present we are collecting facts, and we must note everything impartially. It is a fatal mistake to select your facts in accordance with the apparent probabilities. By the way, if Bendelow was like this photograph, he must have corresponded pretty exactly with Miss D'Arbly's very complete and lucid description. I wonder why you did not realize that at the time."

"That is what I have been wondering. But I suppose it was the beard and the absence of any kind of association between Bendelow and the D'Arblys."

"Probably," he agreed. "A beard and moustache alter very greatly even a striking face like this. Incidentally, it illustrates the superiority of a picture over a verbal description for purposes of identification. No mere description will enable you to visualize correctly a face which you have never seen. I shall be curious to hear what Miss D'Arbly has to say about this photograph."

"I will let you know without delay," said I; and then, as he seemed to have completed his work and put the documents aside, I made a final effort to extract some definite information from him.

"It is evident," I said, "that the body of facts in your notes has conveyed a good deal more to you than it has to me."

"Probably," he agreed. "If it had not, I should seem to have profited little by years of professional practice."

"Then," I said persuasively, "may I ask, if you have formed a really satisfactory theory as to who this man is and why he murdered D'Arbly?"

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments and then replied:

"My position. Gray, is this: I have arrived at a very definite theory as to the motive of the murder, and a most extraordinary motive it is. But there are one or two points that I do not understand. There are some links missing from the chain of evidence. So with the identity of the man. We know pretty certainly that he is the murderer of Van Zellen and we know what he is like to look at; but we can't give him a name and a definite personality. There are links missing there, too. But I have great hopes of finding those missing links. If I find them, I shall have a complete case against this man and I shall forthwith set the law in motion. I can't tell you more than that at present; but I repeat that you are in possession of all the facts and that if you think over all that has happened and ask yourself what it can mean, though you will not arrive at a complete solution any more than I have, you will at least begin to see the light."

This was all that I could get out of him, and as it was growing late I presently rose to take my departure. He walked with me as far as the Middle Temple Gate and stood outside the wicket watching me as I strode away westward.

---

#### XIV. — THE HAUNTED MAN

WHEN I arrived at the studio on the following afternoon I found the door open and Polton waiting just inside with his hat and overcoat on and his bag in his hand.

"I am glad you are punctual, sir," he said, with his benevolent smile. "I wanted to get back to the chambers in good time to-day. It won't matter to-morrow, which is fortunate, as you may be late."

"Why may I be late to-morrow?" I asked.

"I have a message for you from the doctor," he replied. "It is about what you were discussing last night. He told me to tell you that he is expecting a visit from an officer of the Criminal Investigation Department and he would like you to be present, if it would be convenient. About half past ten, sir."

"I will certainly be there," said I.

"Thank you, sir," said he. "And the doctor told me to warn you, in case you should arrive after the officer, not to make any comment on anything that may be said, or to seem to know anything about the subject of the interview."

"This is very mysterious, Polton," I remarked.

"Why, not particularly, sir," he replied. "You see, the officer is coming to give certain information, but he will try to get some for himself if he can. But he won't get anything out of the doctor, and the only way for you to prevent his pumping you is to say nothing and appear to know nothing."

I laughed at his ingenuous wiliness. "Why," I exclaimed, "you are as bad as the doctor, Polton. A regular Machiavelli."

"I never heard of him," said Polton, "but most Scotchmen are pretty close. Oh, and there is another little matter that I wanted to speak to you about—on my own account this time. I gathered from the doctor, in confidence, that someone has been following you about. Now, sir, don't you think it would be very useful to be able to see behind you without turning your head?"

"By jove!" I exclaimed. "It would indeed! Capital! I never thought of it. I will have a supplementary eye fixed in the back of my head without delay."

Polton crinkled deprecatingly. "No need for that, sir," said he. "I have invented quite a lot of different appliances for enabling you to see behind you—reflecting spectacles and walking-sticks with prisms in the handle and so on. But for use at night I think this will answer your purpose best."

He produced from his pocket an object somewhat like a watchmaker's eye-glass, and having fixed it in his eye to show me how it worked, handed it to me with the request that I would try it. I did so and was considerably surprised at the efficiency of the appliance; for it gave me a perfectly dear view of the street almost directly behind me.

"I am very much obliged to you, Polton," I said enthusiastically. "This is a most valuable gift, especially under the present circumstances."

He was profoundly gratified "I think you will find it useful, sir," he said. "The doctor uses these things sometimes, and so do I if the occasion arises. You see, sir, if you are being shadowed, it is a fatal thing to turn round and look behind you. You never get a chance of seeing what the stalker is like, and you put him on his guard."

I saw this clearly enough and once more thanked him for his timely gift. Then, having shaken his hand and sped him on his way, I entered the lobby and shut the outer door, at the same time transferring Thorndyke's photograph from my letter-case to my jacket-pocket. When I passed through into the studio, I found Marion putting the finishing touches to a plaster case. She greeted me with a smile as I entered and then plunged her hand once more into the bowl of rapidly-thickening plaster, whereupon I took the opportunity to lay the photograph on a side-bench as I walked towards the table on which she was working.

"Good afternoon, Marion," said I.

"Good afternoon, Stephen," she responded, adding, "I can't shake hands until I have washed," and held out her emplastered hands in evidence.

"That will be too late," said I, and as she looked up at me inquiringly, I stooped and kissed her.

"You are very resourceful," she remarked with a smile and a warm blush, as she scooped up another handful of plaster; and then, as if to cover her slight confusion, she asked: "What was all that solemn pow-wow about with Mr. Polton? And why did he wait for you at the door in that suspicious manner? Had he some secret message for you?"

"I don't know whether it was intended to be secret," I answered, "but it isn't going to be so far as you are concerned;" and I repeated to her the substance of Thorndyke's message, to which she listened with an eagerness that rather surprised me, until her further inquiries explained it.



"This sounds rather encouraging," she said; "as if Dr. Thorndyke had been making some progress in his investigations. I wonder if he has. Do you think he really knows much more than we do?"

"I am sure he does," I replied, "but how much more, I cannot guess. He is extraordinarily close. But I have a feeling that the end is not so very far off. He seems to be quite hopeful of laying his hand on this villain."

"Oh! I hope you are right, Stephen," she exclaimed. "I have been getting so anxious. There has seemed to be no end to this deadlock. And yet it can't go on indefinitely."

"What do you mean, Marion?" I asked.

"I mean," she answered, "that you can't go on wasting your time here and letting your career go. Of course, it is delightful to have you here. I don't dare to think what the place will be like without you. But it makes me wretched to think how much you are sacrificing for me."

"I am not really sacrificing anything," said I. "On the contrary, I am spending my time most profitably in the pursuit of knowledge and most happily in a sweet companionship which I wouldn't exchange for anything in the world."

"It is very nice of you to say that," she said, "but still, I shall be very relieved when the danger is over and you are free."

"Free!" I exclaimed. "I don't want to be free. When my apprenticeship has run out I am coming on as journeyman. And now I had better get my blouse on and start work."

I went to the further end of the studio, and taking the blouse down from its peg; proceeded to exchange it for my coat. Suddenly I was startled by a sharp cry, and turning round, beheld Marion stooping over the photograph with an expression of the utmost horror.

"Where did this come from?" she demanded, turning a white, terror-stricken face on me.

"I put it there, Marion," I answered somewhat sheepishly, hurrying to her side. "But what is the matter? Do you know the man?"

"Do I know him?" she repeated. "Of course I do. It is he—the man who came here that night."

"Are you quite sure?" I asked. "Are you certain that it is not just a chance resemblance?"

She shook her head emphatically. "It is he, Stephen. I can swear to him. It is no mere resemblance. It is a likeness, and a perfect one, though it is such a bad photograph. But where did you get it? And why didn't you show it to me when you came in?"

I told her how I came by it and explained Thorndyke's instructions. "Then," she said, "Dr. Thorndyke knows who the man is."

"He says he doesn't, and he was very close and rather obscure as to how the photograph came into his possession."

"It is very mysterious," said she, with another terrified glance at the photograph. Then suddenly she snatched it up and, with averted face, held it out to me. "Put it away, Stephen," she entreated. "I can't bear the sight of that horrible face. It brings back afresh all the terrors of that awful night."

I hastily returned the photograph to my letter-case, and taking her arm, led her back to the work-table. "Now," I said, "let us forget it and get on with our work;" and I proceeded to turn the case over and fix it in the new position with lumps of clay. For a little while she watched me in silence, and I could see by her pallor that she was still suffering from the shock of that unexpected encounter. But presently she picked up a scraper and joined me in trimming up the edges of the case, cutting out the 'key-ways' and making ready for the second half; and by degrees her colour came back and the interest of the work banished her terrors.

We were, in fact, extremely industrious. We not only finished the case—it was an arm from the shoulder which was to be made—cut the pouring-holes and varnished the inside with knotting, but we filled one half with the melted gelatine which was to form the actual mould in which the wax would be cast. This brought the day's work to an end, for nothing more could be done until the gelatine had set—a matter of at least twelve hours.

"It is too late to begin anything fresh," said Marion. "You had better come and have supper with me and Arabella."

I agreed readily enough to this proposal, and when we had tidied up in readiness for the morning's work, we set forth at a brisk pace—for it was a cold evening—towards Highgate, gossiping cheerfully as we went. By the time we reached Ivy Cottage eight o'clock was striking and 'the village' was beginning to settle down for the night. The premature quiet reminded me that the adjacent town would presently be settling down, too, and that I should do well to start for home before the streets had become too deserted.

Nevertheless, so pleasantly did the time slip away in the cosy sitting-room with my two companions that it was close upon half past ten when I rose to take my departure. Marion escorted me to the door, and as I stood in the hall buttoning up my overcoat she said:

"You needn't worry if you are detained to-morrow. We shall be making the wax cast of the bust and I am certain Mr. Polton won't leave the studio until it is finished, whether you are there or not. He is perfectly mad on waxwork. He wormed all the secrets of the trade out of me the very first time we were alone and he is extraordinarily quick at learning. But I can't imagine what use the knowledge will be to him."

"Perhaps he thinks of starting an opposition establishment," I suggested, "or he may have an eye to a partnership. But if he has, he will have a competitor, and one with a prior claim. Good night, dear child. Save some of the waxwork for me tomorrow."

She promised to restrain Polton's enthusiasm as far as possible and, wishing me 'good night,' held out her hand, but submitted without demur to being kissed; and I took my departure in high spirits, more engrossed with the pleasant leave-taking than with the necessity of keeping a bright look-out.

I was nearing the bottom of the High Street when the prevailing quiet recalled me to the grim realities of my position, and I was on the point of stopping to take a look round when I bethought me of Polton's appliance and also of that cunning artificer's advice not to put a possible Stalker on his guard. I accordingly felt in my pocket, and having found the appliance carefully fixed it in my eye without altering my pace. The first result was a collision with a lamp—post, which served to remind me of the necessity of keeping both eyes open. The instrument was, in fact, not very easy to use while walking and it took me a minute or two to learn how to manage it. Presently, however, I found myself able to divide my attention between the pathway in front and the view behind, and then it was that I became aware of a man following me at a distance of about a hundred yards. Of course, there was nothing remarkable or suspicious in this, for it was a main thoroughfare and by no means deserted at this comparatively early hour. Nevertheless, I kept the man in view, noting that he wore a cloth cap and a monkey-jacket, that he carried no stick or umbrella and that when I slightly slackened my pace he did not seem to overtake me. As this suggested that he was accommodating his pace to mine, I decided to put the matter to the test by giving him an opportunity to pass me at the next side-turning.

At this moment the Roman Catholic church came into view and I recalled that at its side a narrow lane—Dartmouth Park Hill—ran down steeply between high fences towards Kentish Town. Instantly I decided to turn into the lane—which bent sharply to the left behind the church—walk a few yards down it and then return slowly. If my follower were a harmless stranger, he would then have passed on down Highgate Hill, whereas if he were stalking me I should meet him at the entrance to the lane and could then see what he was like.

But I was not very well satisfied with this plan, for the obvious manoeuvre would show him that he was suspected, and as I approached the church, a better plan suggested itself.

On one side by the entrance to the lane were some low railings and a gate with large brick piers. In a moment I had vaulted over the railings and taken up a position behind one of the piers, where I stood motionless, listening intently. Very soon I caught the sound of distinctly rapid footsteps, which suddenly grew louder as my follower came opposite the entrance to the lane, and louder still as, without a moment's hesitation, he turned into it.

From my hiding-place in the deep shadow of the pier I could safely peep out into the wide space at the entrance of the lane, and as this space was well lighted by a lamp I was able to get an excellent view of my follower. And very much puzzled I was therewith. Naturally I had expected to recognize the man whose photograph I had in my pocket. But this was quite a different type of man. It is true that he was shortish and rather slightly built and that he had a beard: but there the resemblance ended. His face, which I could see plainly by the lamp-light, so far from being of an aquiline or vulturine cast, was rather of the blunt and bibulous type. The short, though rather bulbous nose made up in colour what it lacked in size, and its florid tint extended into the cheek on either side in the form of what dermatologists call *acne rosacea*.

I say that his appearance puzzled me; but it was not his appearance alone. For the latter showed that he was a stranger to me and suggested that he was going down the lane on his lawful occasions; but his movements did not support that suggestion. He had turned into the lane and passed my hiding-place at a very quick walk. But just as he reached the sharp turn he slackened his pace, stepping lightly, and then stopped for a moment, listening intently and peering forward into the darkness of the lane. At length he started again and disappeared round the corner, and by the sound of his retreating footsteps I could tell that he was once more putting on the pace.

I listened until these sounds had nearly died away and was just about to emerge from my shelter when I became aware of footsteps approaching from the opposite direction, and as I did not choose to be seen in the act of climbing the railings, I decided to remain perdu until this person had passed. These footsteps, too, had a distinctly hurried sound, a fact which I noted with some surprise; but I was a good deal more surprised when the new-comer turned sharply into the entrance, walked swiftly past my ambush, and then, as he approached the corner, suddenly slowed down, advancing cautiously on tip-toe, and finally halted to listen and stare into the obscurity of the lane.

I peered out at this new arrival with an amazement that I cannot describe. Like the first man, he was a complete stranger to me: a tallish, athletic-looking man of about thirty-five, not ill-looking and having something of a military air; fair-complexioned with a sandy moustache but otherwise clean-shaved, and dressed in a suit of thick tweed with no overcoat. I could see these details clearly by the light of the lamp; and even as I was noting them, he disappeared round the corner and I could hear him walking quickly but lightly down the lane.

As soon as he was gone I looked out from my hiding-place and listened attentively. There was no one in sight nor could I hear anyone approaching. I accordingly came forth and, quickly climbing over the railings, stood for a few moments irresolute. The obviously reasonable thing to do was to make off down Highgate Hill as fast as I could and take the first conveyance that I could get homeward. But the appearance of that second man had inflamed me with curiosity. What was he here for? Was he shadowing me or was he in pursuit of the other man? Either supposition was incredible, but one of them must be true. The end of it was that curiosity got the better of discretion and I, too, started down the lane, walking as fast as I could and treading as lightly as circumstances permitted.

The second man was some considerable distance ahead, for his footsteps came to me but faintly, and I did not seem to be gaining on him; and I took it that his speed was a fair measure of that of the man in front. Keeping thus within hearing of my quarry, I sped on, turning over the amazing situation in my bewildered mind. The first man was a mystery to me, though apparently not to Thorndyke. Who could he be, and why on earth was he taking this prodigious amount of trouble to get rid of a harmless person like myself? For there could be no mistake as to the magnitude of the efforts that he was making. He must have waited outside the studio, followed Marion and me to her home and there kept a patient vigil of over two hours, waiting for me to come out. It was a stupendous labour. And what was it all about? I could not form the most shadowy guess; while as to the other man, the very thought of him reduced me to a state of hopeless bewilderment.

As my reflections petered out to this rather nebulous conclusion, I halted for a moment to listen for the footsteps ahead. They were still audible, though they sounded somewhat farther away. But now I caught the sound of other footsteps, approaching from behind. Someone else was coming down the lane. Of course, there was nothing surprising in that circumstance, for, after all, this was a public thoroughfare, little frequented as it was, especially after dark. Nevertheless, something in the character of those footsteps put me on the qui vive. For this man, too, was walking quickly—very quickly—and with a certain stealthiness, as if he had rubber-soled boots and, like the rest of us, were making as little noise as possible.

I walked on at my previous rapid pace, keeping my ears cocked now both fore and aft; and as I went, my mind surged with wild speculations. Could it be that I had yet another follower? The thing was becoming grotesque. My bewilderment began to mingle with a spice of grim amusement; but still I listened, not without anxiety, to those foot-steps from behind, which seemed to be growing rapidly more distinct. Whoever this newcomer might be, he was no mean walker, for he was overtaking me apace; and this fact gave a pretty broad hint as to his size and strength.

I looked back from time to time, but without stopping or slackening my pace, trying to pierce the deep obscurity of the narrow, closed-in lane. But it was a dark winter's night, and the high fences shut out even the glimmer from the murky sky. It was not until the approaching footfalls sounded quite near that I was able, at length, to make out a smear of deeper darkness on the general obscurity. Then I drew out my pistol and, withdrawing the safety-catch, put my hand, grasping it, into my overcoat pocket. Having thus made ready for possible contingencies, I watched the black shape emerge from the darkness until it developed into a tall, portly man, bearing down on me with long, swinging strides, when I halted and drew back against the fence to let him pass.

But he had no intention of passing. As he came up to me, he, too, halted, and, looking into my face with undissembled curiosity, he addressed me in a brusque though not uncivil tone.

"Now, sir, I must ask you to explain what is going on."

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"I'll tell you," he replied. "I saw you, a little time ago, climb over the railings and hide behind a gate-post. Then I saw a man come up in a deuce of a hurry, and turn into the lane. I saw him stop and listen for a moment and then bustle off down the hill. Close on this fellow's heels comes another man, also in a devil of a hurry. He turns into the lane, too, and suddenly he pulls up and creeps forward on tip-toe like a cat on hot bricks. He stops and listens, too; and then off he goes down the lane like a lamplighter. Then out you come from behind the gate-post, over the railings you climb, and then you creep up to the corner and listen, and then off you go down the lane like another lamplighter. Now, sir, what's it all about?"

"I assume," said I, repressing a strong tendency to giggle, "that you have some authority for making these inquiries?"

"I have, sir," he replied. "I am a police officer on plain-clothes duty. I happened to be at the corner of Hornsey Lane when I saw you coming down the High Street walking in a queer sort of way as if you couldn't see where you were going. So I drew back into the shadow and had a look at you. Then I saw you nip into the lane and climb over the railings, so I waited to see what was going to happen next. And then those other two came along. Well, now, I ask you again, sir, what's going on? What is it all about?"

"The fact is," I said a little sheepishly, "I thought the first man was following me, so I hid just to see what he was up to."

"What about the second man?"

"I don't know anything about him."

"What do you know about the first man?"

"Nothing, except that he certainly was following me."

"Why should he be following you?"

"I can't imagine. He is a stranger to me and so is the other man."

"Hm!" said the officer, regarding me with a distrustful eye. "Damn funny affair. I think you had better walk up to the station with me and give us a few particulars about yourself."

"I will with pleasure," said I. "But I am not altogether a stranger there. Inspector Follett knows me quite well. My name is Gray—Dr. Gray."

The officer did not reply for a few moments. He seemed to be listening to something. And now my ear caught the sound of footsteps approaching hurriedly from down the lane. As they drew near, my friend peered into the darkness and

muttered in an undertone:

"Will that be one of 'em coming back?" He listened again for a moment or two and then, resuming his inquiries, said aloud: "You say Inspector Follett knows you. Well, perhaps you had better come and see Inspector Follett."

As he finished speaking, he again listened intently, and his mouth opened slightly. I suspect my own did, too. For the footsteps had ceased. There was now a dead silence in the lane.

"That chap has stopped to listen," my new friend remarked in a low voice. "We had better see what his game is. Come along, sir;" and with this he strode off at a pace that taxed my powers to keep up with him.

But at the very moment that he started, the footsteps became audible again, only now they were obviously retreating; and straining my ears I caught the faint sound of other and more distant foot-falls, also retreating, so far as I could judge, and in the same hurried fashion.

For a couple of minutes the officer swung along like a professional pedestrian and I struggled on just behind him, perspiring freely and wishing that I could shed my overcoat. Still, despite our efforts, there was no sign of our gaining on the men ahead. My friend evidently realized this, for he presently growled over his shoulder: "This won't do," and forthwith broke into a run.

Instantly this acceleration communicated itself to the men in front. The rhythm of both sets of foot-falls showed that our fore-runners were literally justifying that description of them; and as both had necessarily given up any attempt to move silently, the sounds of their retreat were borne to us quite distinctly. And from those sounds, the unsatisfactory conclusion emerged that they were drawing ahead pretty rapidly. My friend the officer was, as I have said, an uncommonly fine walker. But he was no runner. His figure was against him. He was fully six feet in height and he had a presence. He could have walked me off my legs; but when it came to running I found myself ambling behind him with such ease that I was able to get out my pistol and, after replacing the safety-catch, stow the weapon in my hip-pocket out of harm's way.

However, if my friend was no sprinter he was certainly a stayer, for he lumbered on doggedly until the lane entered the new neighbourhood of Dartmouth Park; and here it was that the next act opened. We had just passed the end of the first of the streets when I saw a surprisingly agile policeman dart out from a shady corner and follow on in our wake in proper Lilliebridge style. I immediately put on a spurt and shot past my companion, and a few moments later, sounds of objurgation arose from behind. I stopped at once and turned back just in time to hear an apologetic voice exclaim:

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Mr. Plonk. I didn't reckernize you in the dark."

"No, of course you wouldn't," replied the plain-clothes officer. "Did you see two men run past here just now?"

"I did," answered the constable; "one after the other, and both running as if the devil was after them. I was halfway up the street, but I popped down to have a look at them, and when I got to the corner I heard you coming. So I just kept out of sight and waited for you."

"Quite right too," said Mr. Plonk. "Well, I don't see or hear anything of those chaps now."

"No," agreed the constable, "and you are not likely to. There's a regular maze of new streets about here. You can take it that they've got clear away."

"Yes, I'm afraid they have," said Plonk. "Well, it can't be helped and there's nothing much in it. Good night, constable."

He moved off briskly, not wishing, apparently, to discuss the affair, and in a few minutes we came to the wide crossroads. Here he halted and looked me over by the light of a street-lamp. Apparently the result was satisfactory, for he said: "It's hardly worth while to take you all the way back to the station at this time of night. Where do you live?"

I told him Camden Square and offered a card in corroboration.

"Then you are pretty close home," said he, inspecting my card. "Very well, doctor. I'll speak to Inspector Follett about this affair, and if you have any further trouble of this sort you had better let us know. And you had better let us have a description of the men in any case."

I promised to send him the particulars on the following day, and we then parted with mutual good wishes, he making his way towards Holloway Road and I setting my face homeward by way of the Brecknock Road and keeping an uncommonly sharp look-out as I went.

---

## XV. — THORNDYKE PROPOSES A NEW MOVE

ON the following morning, in order to make sure of arriving before the detective officer, I presented myself at King's Bench Walk a good half-hour before I was due. The door was opened by Thorndyke himself, and as we shook hands, he said: "I am glad you have come early. Gray. No doubt Polton explained the programme to you, but I should like to make our position quite clear. The officer who is coming here presently is Detective-Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department. He is quite an old friend and he is coming at my request to give me certain information. But, of course, he is a detective officer, with his own duties to his department, and an exceedingly shrewd, capable man. Naturally, if he can pick up any crumbs of information from us, he will, and I don't want him to learn more, at present, than I choose to tell him."

"Why do you want to keep him in the dark?" I asked.

"Because," he replied, "we are doing quite well, and I want to get the case complete before I call in the police. If I were to tell him all I know and all I think, he might get too busy and scare our man away before we have enough evidence to justify an arrest. As soon as the investigation is finished and we have such evidence as will secure a conviction, I shall turn the case over to him; meanwhile, we keep our own counsel. Your role this morning will be that of listener. Whatever happens, make no comment. Act as if you knew nothing that is not of public knowledge."

I promised to follow his directions to the letter, though I could not get rid of the feeling that all this secrecy was somewhat futile. Then I began to tell him of my experiences of the previous night, to which he listened at first with grave interest, but with growing amusement as the story developed. When I came to the final chase and the pursuing policeman, he leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Why," he exclaimed, wiping his eyes, "it was a regular procession! It only wanted a string of sausages and a harlequin to bring it up to pantomime form."

"Yes," I admitted with a grin, "It was a ludicrous affair. But it was a mighty mysterious affair too. You see, neither of the men was the man I had expected. There must be more people in this business than we had supposed. Have you any idea who these men can be?"

"It isn't much use making vague guesses," he replied. "The important point to note is that this incident, farcical as it turned out, might easily have taken a tragical turn; and the moral is that, for the present, you can't be too careful in keeping out of harm's way."

It was obvious to me that he was evading my question; that those two sinister strangers were not the mystery to him that they were to me, and I was about to return to the charge with a more definitely pointed question when an elaborate flourish on the little brass knocker of the inner door announced a visitor.

The tall, military-looking man whom Thorndyke admitted was evidently the superintendent, as I gathered from the mutual greetings. He looked rather hard at me until Thorndyke introduced me, which he did with characteristic reticence.

"This is Dr. Gray, Miller, you may remember his name. It was he who discovered the body of Mr. D'Arblay."

"Yes, I remember," said the superintendent, shaking my hand unemotionally and still looking at me with a slightly dubious air.

"He is a good deal interested in the case," Thorndyke continued, "not only professionally, but as a friend of the family—since the catastrophe."

"I see," said the superintendent, taking a final inquisitive look at me and obviously wondering why the deuce I was there. "Well, there is nothing of a very secret nature in what I have to tell you, and I suppose you can rely on Dr. Gray to keep his own counsel and ours."

"Certainly," replied Thorndyke. "He quite understands that our talk is confidential, even if it is not secret."

The officer nodded, and having been inducted into an easy-chair, by the side of which a decanter, a siphon and a box of cigars had been placed, settled himself comfortably, lit a cigar, mixed himself a modest refresher and drew from his pocket a bundle of papers secured with red tape.

"You asked me, Doctor," he began, "to give you all particulars up to date of the Van Zellen case. Well, I can do that without difficulty, as the case—or at least what is left of it—is in my hands. The circumstances of the actual crime I think you know already, so I will take up the story from that point.

"Van Zellen, as you know, was found dead in his room, poisoned with prussic acid, and a quantity of very valuable portable property was missing. It was not dear whether the murderer had let himself in with false keys or whether Van Zellen had let him in; but the place hadn't been broken into. The job had been done with remarkable skill, so that not a trace of the murderer was left. Consequently, all that was left for the police to do was to consider whether they knew of anyone whose methods agreed with those of this murderer.

"Well, they did know of such a person, but they had nothing against him but suspicion. He had never been convicted of any serious crime, though he had been in choker once or twice for receiving. But there had been a number of cases of robbery with murder—or rather murder with robbery; for this man seemed to have committed the murder as a preliminary precaution—and they were all of this kind: a solitary crime, very skilfully carried out by means of poison. There was never any trace of the criminal; but gradually the suspicions of the police settled down on a rather mysterious individual of the name of Bendelow—Simon Bendelow. Consequently, when the Van Zellen crime came to light, they were inclined to put it on this man Bendelow, and they began making fresh inquiries about him. But presently it transpired that someone had seen a man, on the morning of the crime, coming away from the neighbourhood of Van Zellen's house just about the time when the murder must have been committed."

"Was there anything to connect him with the crime?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well, there was the time—the small hours of the morning—and the man was carrying a good-sized handbag which seemed to be pretty heavy and which would have held the stuff that was missing. But the most important point was the man's appearance. He was described as a smallish man, clean-shaven, with a big hooked nose and very heavy eyebrows set

close down over his eyes.

"Now, this put Bendelow out of it as the principal suspect, because the description didn't fit him at all," (here I caught Thorndyke's eye for an instant and was warned afresh, and not unnecessarily, to make no comment); "but," continued the superintendent, "it didn't put him out altogether. For the man whom the description did fit—and it fitted him to a T—was a fellow named Crile—Jonathan Crile—who was a pal of Bendelow's and was known to have worked with him as a confederate in the receiving business and had been in prison once or twice. So the police started to make inquiries about Crile, and before long they were able to run him to earth. But that didn't do them much good, for it turned out that Crile wasn't in New York at all. He was in Philadelphia; and it was clearly proved that he had been there on the day of the murder, on the day before and the day after. So they seemed to have drawn a blank; but they were still a bit suspicious of Mr. Crile, who seems to have been as downy a bird as his friend Bendelow, and of the other chappie, too. But they hadn't a crumb of evidence against either.

"So there the matter stands. A complete deadlock. There was nothing to be done; for you can't arrest a man on mere suspicion with not a single fact to support it. But the police kept their eye on both gents, so far as they could, and presently they got a chance. Bendelow made a slip—or at any rate they said he did. It was a little trumpery affair, something in the receiving line, and of no importance at all. Probably a faked charge, too. But they thought that if they could get him arrested they might be able to squeeze something out of him—the police in America can do things that we aren't allowed to. So they tried to pounce on him. But Mr. Bendelow was a slippery customer and he got wind of their intentions just in time. When they got into his rooms they found that he had left—in a deuce of a hurry, too, and only a few minutes before they arrived. They searched the place, but found nothing incriminating, and they tried to get on Bendelow's track, but they didn't succeed. He had managed to get dear away, and Crile seemed to have disappeared, too.

"Well, that seemed to be the end of the affair. Both of these crooks had made off without leaving a trace, and the police—having no evidence—didn't worry any more about them. And so things went on for about a year, until the Van Zellen case had been given up and nearly forgotten. Then something happened quite recently that gave the police a fresh start.

"It appears that there was a fire in the house in which Bendelow's rooms were and a good deal of damage was done, so that they had to do some rebuilding; and in the course of the repairs the builder's men found, hidden under the floor-boards, a small parcel containing part of the Van Zellen swag. There was nothing of real value; just coins and medals and seal-rings and truck of that kind. But the things were all identified by means of Van Zellen's catalogue, and, of course, the finding of them in what had been Bendelow's rooms put the murder pretty clearly on to him.

"On this, as you can guess, the police and the detective agencies got busy. They searched high and low for the missing man, but for a long time they could pick up no traces of him. At last they discovered that he and Crile had taken a passage, nearly a year ago, on a tramp-steamer bound for England. Thereupon they sent a very smart, experienced detective over to work at the case in conjunction with our own detective department.

"But we didn't have much to do with it. The American—Wilson was his name—had all the particulars, with the prison photographs and finger-prints of both the men, and he made most of the inquiries himself. However, there were two things that we did for him. We handed over to him the Van Zellen guinea and the particulars of the D'Arblay murder; and we were able to inform him that his friend Bendelow was dead."

"How did you find that out?" Thorndyke asked.

"Oh, quite by chance. One of our men happened to be at Somerset House looking up some details of a will when in the list of wills he came across the name of Simon Bendelow, which he had heard from Wilson himself. He at once got out the will, copied out the address of the executrix and the names and addresses of the witnesses and handed them over to Wilson, who was mightily taken aback, as you may suppose. However, he wasn't taking anything for granted. He set off instantly to look up the executrix—a Mrs. Morris. But there he got another disappointment; for the Morris had gone away and no one knew where they had gone."

"I take it," said Thorndyke, "that probate of the will had been granted."

"Yes; everything in that way had been finished up. Well, on this, Wilson set off in search of the witnesses, and he had better luck this time. They were two elderly spinsters who lived together in a house in Turnpike Lane, Hornsey. They didn't know much about Bendelow, for they had only made his acquaintance after he had taken to his bed. They were introduced to him by his friend and landlady, Mrs. Morris, who used to take them up to his room to talk to him and cheer him up a bit. However, they knew all about his death, for they had seen him in his coffin and they followed him to the Ilford Crematorium."

"Ha!" said Thorndyke. "So he was cremated."

"Yes," chuckled the superintendent with a sly look at Thorndyke. "I thought that would make you prick up your ears, Doctor. Yes, there were no half-measures for Mr. Bendelow. He had gone literally to ashes. But it was all right, you know. There couldn't have been any hanky-panky. These two ladies had not only seen him in his coffin; they actually had a last look at him through a little celluloid window in the coffin-lid, just before the coffin was passed through into the cremation furnace."

"And there was no doubt as to his identity?"

"None whatever. Wilson showed the old ladies his photograph and they recognized him instantly; picked his photograph

out of a dozen others.”

“Where was Bendelow living when they made his acquaintance?”

“Not far from their house: in Abbey Road, Hornsey. But the Morriszes moved afterwards to Market Street, Hoxton, and that is where he died and where the will was signed.”

“I suppose Wilson ascertained the cause of death?”

“Oh, yes. The old ladies told him that. But he went to Somerset House and got a copy of the death-certificate. I haven’t got that, as he took it back with him; but the cause of death was cancer of the pylorus—that’s some part of the gizzard, I believe, but you’ll know all about it. At any rate, there was no doubt on the subject, as the two doctors made a post-mortem before they signed the death-certificate. It was all perfectly plain and straightforward.

“Well, so much for Mr. Bendelow. When Wilson had done with him, he turned his attention to Crile. And then he really did get a proper shake-up. When he was at Somerset House, looking up Bendelow’s death-certificate, it occurred to him just to run his eye down the list and make sure that Crile was still in the land of the living. And there, to his astonishment, he found Crile’s name. He was dead, too! And not only was he dead: he, also, had died of cancer—it was the pancreas this time, another part of the gizzard—and he had died at Hoxton, too, and he had died just four days before Bendelow. The thing was ridiculous. It looked like a conspiracy. But here again everything was plain and above-board. Wilson got a copy of the certificate and called on the doctor who had signed it, a man named Usher. Of course, Dr. Usher remembered all about the case as it had occurred quite recently. There was not a shadow of doubt that Crile was dead. Usher had helped to put him in his coffin and had attended at his funeral; and he, too, had no difficulty in picking out Crile’s photograph, and he had no doubt at all as to what Crile died of. So there it was. Queer as it was, there was no denying the plain facts. Those two crooks had slipped through the fingers of the law, so far as it was possible to see.

“But I must admit that I was not quite satisfied; the circumstances were so remarkably odd. I told Wilson so, and I advised him to look further into the matter. I reminded him of the D’Arblay murder and the finding of that guinea, but he said that the murder was our affair; that the men he had come to look for were dead and that was all that concerned him. So back he went to New York, taking with him the death-certificates and the two photographs with the certificates of recognition on the backs of them. But he left the notes of the case with me, on the chance that they might be useful to me, and the two sets of finger-prints, which certainly don’t seem likely to be of much use under the circumstances.”

“You never know,” said Thorndyke, with an enigmatical smile.

The superintendent gave him a quick, inquisitive look and agreed. “No, you don’t; especially when you are dealing with Dr. John Thorndyke.” He pulled out his watch and, staring at it anxiously, exclaimed: “What a confounded nuisance! I’ve got an appointment at the Law Courts in five minutes. It is quite a small matter. Won’t take me more than half an hour. May I come back when I have finished? I should like to hear what you think of this extraordinary story.”

“Come back, by all means,” said Thorndyke, “and I will turn over the facts in my mind while you are gone. Probably some suggestion may present itself in the interval.”

He let the officer out, and when the hurried footsteps had died away on the stairs, he dosed the door and turned to me with a smile.

“Well, Gray,” he said, “what do you think of that? Isn’t it a very pretty puzzle for a medical jurist?”

“It is a hopeless tangle to me,” I replied. “My brain is in a whirl. You can’t dispute the facts and yet you can’t believe them. I don’t know what to make of the affair.”

“You note the fact that, whoever may be dead, there is somebody alive—very much alive; and that that somebody is the murderer of Julius D’Arblay.”

“Yes, I realize that. But obviously he can’t be either Crile or Bendelow. The question is, who is he?”

“You note the link between him and the Van Zellen murder—I mean the electrotube guinea?”

“Yes; there is evidently some connexion, but I can’t imagine what it can be. By the way, you noticed that the American police had got muddled about the personal appearance of these two men. The description of that man who was seen coming away from Van Zellen’s house, and who was said to be quite unlike Bendelow, actually fitted him perfectly. They had evidently made a mistake of some kind.”

“Yes, I noticed that. But the description may have fitted Crile better. We must get into touch with this man Usher. I wonder if he will be the Usher who used to attend at St. Margaret’s.”

“He is; and I am in touch with him already. In fact, he was telling me about this very patient, Jonathan Crile.”

“Indeed! Can you remember the substance of what he told you?”

“I think so. It wasn’t very thrilling;” and here I gave him, as well as I could remember them, the details with which Usher had entertained me of his attendance on the late Jonathan Crile, his dealings with the landlady, Mrs. Pepper, and the incidents of the funeral, including Usher’s triumphant return in the mourning-coach. It seemed a dull and trivial story, but Thorndyke listened to it with the keenest interest, and when I had finished, he asked:

“He didn’t happen to mention where Crile lived, I suppose?”

"Yes, curiously enough, he did. The address, I remember, was 52 Field Street, Hoxton."

"Ha!" said Thorndyke. "You are a mine of information, Gray."

He rose, and taking down from the bookshelves Philip's Atlas of London, opened it and pored over one of the maps. Then, replacing the atlas, he took out his notes of the D'Arblay case and searched for a particular entry. It was evidently quite a short one, for when he had found it he gave it but a single glance and closed the portfolio. Then, returning to the bookshelves, he took out the Post Office Directory and opened it at the 'Streets' section. Here, also, his search was but a short one, though it appeared to be concerned with two separate items; for having examined one, he turned to a different part of the section to find the other. Finally he closed the unwieldy volume, and having replaced it on the shelf, turned and once more looked at me inquiringly.

"Reflecting on what Miller has told us," he said, "does anything suggest itself to you? Any sort of hypothesis as to what the real facts may be?"

"Nothing whatever," I replied. "The confusion that was already in my mind is only the worse confounded. But that is not your case, I take it?"

"Not entirely," he admitted. "The fact is that I had already formed a hypothesis as to the motives and circumstances which lay behind the murder of Julius D'Arblay and I find this new matter not inconsistent with it. But that hypothesis may, nevertheless, turn out to be quite wrong when we put it to the test of further investigation."

"You have some further investigation in view, then?"

"Yes. I am going to make a proposal to Superintendent Miller—and here he comes, before his time; by which I judge that he, also, is keen on the solution of this puzzle."

Thorndyke's opinion seemed to be justified, for the superintendent entered all agog and opened the subject at once.

"Well, Doctor, I suppose you have been thinking over Wilson's story? How does it strike you? Have you come to any conclusion?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I have come to the conclusion that I can't accept that story at its face-value as representing the actual facts."

Miller laughed with an air of mingled amusement and vexation. "That is just my position," said he. "The story seems incredible, but yet you can't raise any objection. The evidence in support of it is absolutely conclusive at every point. There isn't a single weak spot in it—at least I haven't found one. Perhaps you have?" And here he looked at Thorndyke with eager inquiry in his eyes.

"I won't say that," Thorndyke replied. "But I put it to you, Miller, that the alleged facts that are offered are too abnormal to be entertained. We cannot accept that string of coincidences. It must be obvious to you that there is a fallacy somewhere and that the actual facts are not what they seem."

"Yes, I feel that myself," rejoined Miller. "But what are we to do? How are we to find the flaw in the evidence, if there is one? Can you see where to look for it? I believe you can."

"I think there is one point which ought to be verified," said Thorndyke. "The identification of Crile doesn't strike me as perfectly convincing."

"How does his case differ from Bendelow's?" Miller demanded.

"In two respects," was the reply. "First, Bendelow was identified by two persons who had known him well for some time and who gave a circumstantial account of his illness, his death and the disposal of his body; and second, Bendelow's remains have been cremated and are therefore, presumably, beyond our reach for purposes of identification."

"Well," Miller objected, "Crile isn't so very accessible, being some few feet under ground."

"Still, he is there; and he has been buried only a few weeks. It would be possible to exhume the body and settle the question of his identity once for all."

"Then you are not satisfied with Dr. Usher's identification?"

"No. Usher saw him only after a long, wasting illness, which must have altered his appearance very greatly; whereas the photograph was taken when Crile was in his normal health. It couldn't have been so very like Usher's patient."

"That's true," said Miller; "and I remember that Usher wasn't so very positive, according to Wilson. But he agreed that it seemed to be the same man, and all the other facts seemed to point to the certainty that it was really Crile. Still, you are not satisfied? It's a pity Wilson took the photograph back with him."

"The photograph is of no consequence," said Thorndyke. "You have the finger-prints—properly authenticated finger-prints, actually taken from the man in the presence of witnesses. After this short time it will be possible to get perfectly recognizable finger-prints from the body, and those finger-prints will settle the identity of Usher's patient beyond any possible doubt."

The superintendent scratched his chin thoughtfully. "It's a bit of a job to get an exhumation order," said he. "Before I raise the question with the Commissioner, I should like to have a rather more definite opinion from you. Do you seriously



doubt that the man in that coffin is Jonathan Crile?’

“It is my opinion,” replied Thorndyke—“of course, I may be wrong, but it is my considered opinion that the Crile who is in that coffin is not the Crile whose fingerprints are in your possession.”

“Very well. Doctor,” said Miller, rising and picking up his hat, “that is good enough for me. I won’t ask you for your reasons, because I know you won’t give them. But I have known you long enough to be sure that you wouldn’t give a definite opinion like that unless you had got something pretty solid to go on. And I don’t think we shall have any difficulty about the exhumation order after what you have said.”

With this the superintendent took his leave, and very shortly afterwards Thorndyke carried me off to lunch at his club before dismissing me to take up my duties at the studio.

---

## XVI. — A SURPRISE FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT

IT appeared that Thorndyke was correct in his estimate of the superintendent’s state of mind, for that officer managed to dispose in a very short time of the formalities necessary for the obtaining of an exhumation licence from the Home Office. It was less than a week after the interview that I have recorded when I received a note from Thorndyke asking me to join him and Miller at King’s Bench Walk on the following morning at the unholy hour of half past six. He offered to put me up for the night at his chambers, but I declined this hospitality, not wishing to trouble him unnecessarily; and after a perfunctory breakfast by gaslight, a ride on an early tram and a walk through the dim, lamplit streets, I entered the Temple just as the subdued notes of an invisible clock-bell announced a quarter past six. On my arrival at Thorndyke’s chambers, I observed a roomy hired carriage drawn up at the entry, and ascending the stairs, found the Doctor and Miller ready to start, each provided with a good-sized handbag.

“This is a queer sort of function,” I remarked, as we took our way down the stairs—“a sort of funeral the wrong way about.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed; “it is what Lewis Carroll would have called an unfuneral—and very appropriately too. I didn’t give you any particulars in my note, but you understand the object of this expedition?”

“I assume that we are going to resurrect the late Jonathan Crile,” I replied. “It isn’t very dear to me what I have to do with the business, as I never knew Mr. Crile, though I am delighted to have this rather uncommon experience. But I should have thought that Usher would be the proper person to accompany you.”

“So the superintendent thought,” said Thorndyke, “and quite rightly; so I have arranged to pick up Usher and take him with us. He will be able to identify the body as that of his late patient, and you and I will help the superintendent to take the finger-prints.”

“I am taking your word for it, Doctor,” said Miller, “that the finger-prints will be recognizable; and that they will be the wrong ones.”

“I don’t guarantee that,” Thorndyke replied; “but still, I shall be surprised if you get the right ones.”

Miller nodded with an air of satisfaction, and nothing more was said on the subject until we drew up before Dr. Usher’s surgery. That discreet practitioner was already waiting at the open door and at once took his place in the carriage, watched curiously by observers from adjacent windows.

“This is a rum go,” he remarked, diffusing a vinous aroma into the atmosphere of the carriage. “I really did think I had paid my last visit to Mr. Crile. But there’s no such thing as certainty in this world.” He chuckled softly and continued: “A bit different this journey from the last. No hat-bands this time and no Sunday-school children. Lord! when I think of those kids piping round the open grave, and that our dear departed brother was wanted by the police so badly that they are actually going to dig him up, it makes me smile—it does indeed.”

In effect, it made him cackle; and as Miller had not heard the account of the funeral, it was repeated for his benefit in great detail. Then the anecdotal ball was set rolling in a fresh direction by one or two questions from Thorndyke, with the result that the entire history of Usher’s attendance on the deceased, including the misdeeds of Mrs. Pepper, was retailed with such a wealth of circumstance that the narration lasted until we stopped at the cemetery gate.

Our arrival was not unexpected, for, as we got out of the carriage, two gentlemen approached the entrance and one of them unlocked a gate to admit us. He appeared to be the official in charge of the cemetery, while the other, to whom he introduced us, was no less a person than Dr. Garroll, the Medical Officer of Health.

“The Home Office licence,” the latter explained, “directs that the removal shall be carried out under my supervision and to my satisfaction—very necessary in a populous neighbourhood like this.”

“Very necessary,” Thorndyke agreed gravely.

“I have provided a supply of fresh ground-lime, according to the directions,” Dr. Garroll continued, “and as a further precaution, I have brought with me a large formalin spray. That, I think, would satisfy all sanitary requirements.”

“It certainly should be sufficient,” Thorndyke agreed, “to meet the requirements of the present case. Has the excavation been commenced yet?”

"Oh, yes," replied the cemetery official. "It was started quite early and has been carried down nearly to the full depth; but I thought that the coffin had better not be uncovered until you arrived. I have had a canvas screen put up round the grave so that the proceedings may be quite private. We can send the labourers outside before we unscrew the coffin-lid. You said, Superintendent, that you were anxious to avoid any kind of publicity; and I have warned the men to say nothing to anyone about the affair."

"Quite right," said Miller. "We don't want this to get into the papers, in case—well, in any case."

"Exactly, sir," agreed the official, who was evidently bursting with curiosity himself. "Exactly. Here is the screen. If you will step inside, the excavation can be proceeded with."

We passed inside the screen, where we found four men reposefully contemplating a coil of stout rope, a basket, attached to another rope, and a couple of spades. The grave yawned in the middle of the enclosure, flanked on one side by the mound of newly-dug earth and on the other by a tub of lime and a Winchester quart bottle fitted with a spray nozzle and large rubber bellows.

"You can get on with the digging now," said the official; whereupon one of the men was let down into the grave, together with a spade and the basket, and set to work briskly. Then Dr. Garroll directed one of the other men to sprinkle in a little lime; which he did, with a pleased smile and so little discretion that the man below was seen to stop digging, and after looking up indignantly, take off his cap, shake it violently and ostentatiously dust his shoulders with it.

When about a dozen basketfuls of earth had been hoisted up, a hollow, woody sound accompanying the thrusts of the spade announced that the coffin had been reached. Thereupon more lime was sprinkled in, and Dr. Garroll, picking up the formalin bottle, sprayed vigorously into the cavity until a plaintive voice from below—accompanied by an unnaturally loud sneeze—was heard to declare that "he'd 'ave brought his umbrella if he'd knowed he was goin' to be squirted at." A few minutes' more work exposed the coffin and enabled us to read the confirmatory inscription on the plate. Then the rope slings were let down and with some difficulty worked into position by the excavator below; who, when he had completed his task, climbed to the surface and grasped one end of a sling in readiness to haul on it.

"It's a good deal easier letting 'em down than hoisting 'em up," Usher remarked, as a final shower of lime descended and the men began to haul; "but poor old Crile oughtn't to take much lifting. There was nothing of him but skin and bone."

However this might be, it took the united efforts of the four men to draw the coffin up to the surface and slew it round clear of the yawning grave. But at last this was accomplished and it was lifted, for convenience of inspection, on to one of the mounds of newly-dug earth.

"Now," said the presiding official, "you men had better go outside and wait down at the end of the path until you are wanted again,"—an order that was received with evident disfavour and complied with rather sulkily. As soon as they were gone, our friend produced a couple of screw-drivers, with which he and Miller proceeded in a very workmanlike manner to extract the screws, while Dr. Garroll enveloped them in a cloud of spray and Thorndyke, Usher and I stood apart to keep out of range. It was not a long process; indeed, it came to an end sooner than I had expected, for the first intimation that I received of its completion was a loud exclamation (consisting of the single word "Snakes!") in the voice of Superintendent Miller. I turned quickly and saw that officer standing with the raised coffin-lid in his hand, staring into the interior with a look of perfectly indescribable amazement. Instantly I rushed forward and looked into the coffin; and then I was no less amazed. For in place of the mortal remains of the late Jonathan Crile was a portly sack oozing sawdust from a hole in its side, through which coily peeped a length of thick lead pipe.

For a sensible time we all stood in breathless silence gazing down at that incredible sack. Suddenly Miller looked up eagerly at Thorndyke, whose sphinx-like countenance showed the faintest shadow of a smile. "You knew this coffin was empty. Doctor," said he.

Thorndyke shook his head. "If I had known," he replied, "I should have told you."

"Well, you suspected that it was empty."

"Yes," Thorndyke admitted; "I don't deny that."

"I wonder why you did and why it never occurred to me."

"It did not occur to you, perhaps, because you were not in possession of certain suggestive facts which are known to me. Still, if you consider that the circumstances surrounding the alleged deaths of these two men were so incredible as to make us both feel certain that there was some fallacy or deception in regard to the apparent facts, you will see that this was a very obvious possibility. Two men were alleged to have died, and one of them was certainly cremated. It followed that either the other man had died, as alleged, or that his funeral was a mock funeral. There was no other alternative. You must admit that, Miller."

"I do, I do," the superintendent replied ruefully. "It is always like this. Your explanations are so obvious when you have given them, and yet no one thinks of them but yourself. All the same, this isn't so very obvious, even now. There are some extraordinary discrepancies that have yet to be explained. But we can discuss them on the way back. The question now is, what is to be done with this coffin?"

"The first thing to be done," replied Thorndyke, "is to screw on the lid. Then we can leave the cemetery authorities to deal with it. But those men must be sworn to absolute secrecy. That is vitally important, for if this exhumation should get

reported in the press, we should probably lose the whole advantage of this discovery.”

“Yes, by Jove!” the superintendent agreed emphatically. “It would be a disaster. At present the late Mr. Crile is at large, perfectly happy and secure and entirely off his guard. We can just follow him up at our leisure and take him unawares. But if he got wind of this, he would be out of reach in a twinkling—that is, if he is alive, which I suppose—” And here the superintendent suddenly paused, with knitted brows.

“Exactly,” said Thorndyke. “The advantage of surprise is with us and we must keep it at all costs. You realize the position,” he added, addressing the cemetery official and the Medical Officer.

“Perfectly,” the latter replied—a little glumly, I thought, “and you may rely on us both to do everything that we can to keep the affair secret.”

With this we all emerged from the screen and walked back slowly towards the gate, and as we went, I strove vainly to get my ideas into some kind of order. But the more I considered the astonishing event which had just happened, the more incomprehensible did it appear. And yet I saw plainly that it could not really be incomprehensible since Thorndyke had actually arrived at its probability in advance. The glaring discrepancies and inconsistencies which chased one another through my mind could not be real. They must be susceptible of reconciliation with the observed facts. But by no effort was I able to reconcile them.

Nor, evidently, was I alone the subject of these difficulties and bewilderments. The superintendent walked with corrugated brows and an air of profound cogitation, and even Usher—when he could detach his thoughts from the juvenile choir at the funeral—was obviously puzzled. In fact it was he who opened the discussion as the carriage moved off.

“This job,” he observed with conviction, “is what the sporting men would call a fair knock-out. I can’t make head nor tail of it. You talk of the late Mr. Crile being at large and perfectly happy. But the late Mr. Crile died of cancer of the pancreas. I attended him in his illness. There was no doubt about the cancer, though I wouldn’t swear to the pancreas. But he died of cancer all right. I saw him dead; and what is more, I helped to put him into that coffin. What do you say to that, Dr. Thorndyke?”

“What is there to say?” was the elusive reply, “You are a competent observer and your facts are beyond dispute. But inasmuch as Mr. Crile was not in that coffin when we opened it, the unavoidable inference is that after you had put him in, somebody else must have taken him out.”

“Yes, that is clear enough,” rejoined Usher. “But what has become of him? The man was dead, that I am ready to swear to. But where is he?”

“Yes,” said Miller. “That is what is bothering me. There has evidently been some hanky-panky. But I can’t follow it. It isn’t as though we were dealing with a supposititious body. There was a real dead man. That isn’t disputed—at least, I take it that it isn’t.”

“It certainly is not disputed by me,” said Thorndyke.

“Then what the deuce became of him? And why, in the name of blazes, was he taken out of the coffin? That’s what I want to know. Can you tell me. Doctor? But there! What is the good of asking you? Of course you know all about it! You always do. But it is the old story. You have got the ace of trumps up your sleeve, but you won’t bring it out until it is time to take the trick. Now, isn’t that the position, Doctor?”

Thorndyke’s impassive face softened with a faint, inscrutable smile.

“We hold a promising hand. Miller,” he replied quietly; “but if the ace is there, it is you who will have the satisfaction of playing it. And I hope to see you put it down quite soon.”

Miller grunted. “Very well,” said he. “I can see that I am not going to get any more out of you than that; so I must wait for you to develop your plans. Meanwhile I am going to ask Dr. Usher for a signed statement.”

“Yes, that is very necessary,” said Thorndyke. “You two had better go on together and set down Gray and me in the Kingsland Road, where he and I have some other business to transact.”

I glanced at him quickly as he made this astonishing statement, for we had no business there, or anywhere else that I knew of. But I said nothing. My recent training had not been in vain.

A few minutes later, near to Dalston Junction, he stopped the carriage, and having made our adieux, we got out. Then Thorndyke strode off down the Kingsland Road, but presently struck off westward through a bewildering maze of seedy suburban streets and shabby squares in which I was as completely lost as if I had been dropped into the midst of the Sahara.

“What is the nature of the business that we are going to transact?” I ventured to ask as we turned yet another corner.

“In the first place,” he replied, “I wanted to hear what conclusions you had reached in view of this discovery at the cemetery.”

“Well, that won’t take long,” I said, with a grin. “They can be summed up in half a dozen words: I have come to the conclusion that I am a fool.”

He laughed good-humouredly. “There is no harm in thinking that,” he said, “provided you are not right—which you are

not. But did that empty coffin suggest no new ideas to you?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "it scattered the few ideas that I had. I am in the same condition as Superintendent Miller—an inextricable muddle."

"But," he objected, "you are not in the same position as the superintendent. If he knew all that you and I know, he wouldn't be in a muddle at all. What is your difficulty?"

"Primarily the discrepancies about this man Crile. There seems to be no possible doubt that he died. But apparently he was never buried; and you and Miller seem to believe that he is still alive. Further, I don't see what business Crile is of ours at all."

"You will see that presently," said he, "and meanwhile you must not confuse Miller's beliefs with mine. However," he added as we crossed a bridge over a canal—presumably the Regent's Canal—"we will adjourn the discussion for the moment. Do you know what street that is ahead of us?"

"No," I answered; "I have never been here before, so far as I know."

"That is Field Street," said he.

"The street that the late Mr. Crile lived in?"

"Yes," he answered; and as we passed on into the street from the foot of the bridge, he added, pointing to a house on our left hand, "And that is the residence of the late Mr. Crile—empty, and to let, as you observe."

As we walked past I looked curiously at the house, with its shabby front and its blank, sightless windows, its desolate condition emphasized by the bills which announced it; but I made no remark until we came to the bottom of the street, when I recognized the cross-roads as the one along which I used to pass on my way to the Morris's house. I mentioned the fact to Thorndyke, and he replied: "Yes. That is where we are going now. We are going to take a look over the premises. That house also is empty, and I have got a permit from the agent to view it and have been entrusted with the keys."

In a few minutes we turned into the familiar little thoroughfare, and as we took our way past its multitudinous stalls and barrows I speculated on the object of this exploration. But it was futile to ask questions, seeing that I had but to wait a matter of minutes or the answer to declare itself. Soon we reached the house and halted for a moment to look through the glazed door into the empty shop. Then Thorndyke inserted the key into the side-door and pushed it open.

There is always something a little melancholy in the sight of an empty house which one has known in its occupied state. Nothing, indeed, could be more cheerless than the Morris household; yet it was with a certain feeling of depression that I looked down the long passage (where Cropper had bumped his head in the dark) and heard the clang of the closing door. This was a dead house—a mere empty shell. The feeble life that I had known in it was no more. So I reflected as I walked slowly down the passage at Thorndyke's side, recalling the ungracious personalities of Mrs. Morris and her husband and the pathetic figure of poor Mr. Bendelow.

When from the passage we came out into the hall, the sense of desolation was intensified; for here not only the bare floor and vacant walls proclaimed the untenanted state of the house. The big curtain that had closed in the end of the hall and to a great extent furnished it was gone, leaving the place very naked and chill. Incidentally, its disappearance revealed a feature of whose existence I had been unaware.

"Why," I exclaimed, "they had a second street-door. I never saw that. It was hidden by a curtain. But it can't open into Market Street."

"It doesn't," replied Thorndyke. "It opens on Field Street."

"On Field Street!" I repeated in surprise. "I wonder why they didn't let me in that way. It is really the front of the house."

"I think," answered Thorndyke, "that if you open the door and look out, you will understand why you were admitted at the back."

I unbolted the door and, opening it, stepped out on the wide threshold and looked up and down the street. Thorndyke was right. The thoroughfare was undoubtedly Field Street, down which we had passed only a few minutes ago, and close by, on the right hand, was the canal bridge. Strongly impressed with the oddity of the affair, I turned to re-enter, and as I turned I glanced up at the number on the door. As my eye lighted on it, I uttered a cry of astonishment. For the number was fifty-two!

"But this is amazing!" I exclaimed, re-entering the hall—where Thorndyke stood watching me with quiet amusement—and shutting the door. "It seems that Usher and I were actually visiting at the same house!"

"Evidently," said he.

"But it almost looks as if we were visiting the same patient!"

"There can be practically no doubt that you were," he agreed. "It was on that assumption that I induced Miller to apply for the exhumation order; and the empty coffin seems to confirm it completely."

I was thunderstruck; not only by the incredible thing that had happened, but by Thorndyke's uncanny knowledge of all the circumstances.

"Then," I said, after a pause, "if Usher and I were attending the same man, we were both attending Bendelow."

"That is certainly what the appearances suggest," he agreed.

"It was undoubtedly Bendelow who was cremated," said I.

"All the circumstances seem to point to that conclusion," he admitted, "unless you can think of any that point in the opposite direction."

"I cannot," I replied. "Everything points in the same direction. The dead man was seen and identified as Bendelow by those two ladies. Miss Dewsnepe and Miss Bonnington; and they not only saw him here, but they actually saw him in his coffin just before it was passed through into the crematorium. And there is no doubt that they knew Bendelow by sight, for you remember that they recognized the photograph of him that the American detective showed them."

"Yes," he admitted, "that is so. But their identification is a point that requires further investigation. And it is a vitally important point. I have my own hypothesis as to what took place, but that hypothesis will have to be tested; and that test will be what the logicians would call the Experimentum Crucis. It will settle one way or the other whether my theory of this case is correct. If my hypothesis as to their identification is true, there will be nothing left to investigate. The case will be complete and ready to turn over to Miller."

I listened to this statement in complete bewilderment. Thorndyke's reference to the case conveyed nothing definite to me. It was all so involved that I had almost lost count of the subjects of our investigation.

"When you speak of 'the case'," said I, "what case are you referring to?"

"My dear Gray!" he protested. "Do you not realize that we are trying to discover who murdered Julius D'Arblay?"

"I thought you were," I answered; "but I can't connect this new mystery with his death in any way."

"Never mind," said he. "When the case is completed, we will have a general elucidation. Meanwhile there is something else that I have to show you before we go. It is through this side-door."

He led me out into a large neglected garden and along a wide path that was all overgrown with weeds. As we went I tried to collect and arrange my confused ideas, and suddenly a new discrepancy occurred to me. I proceeded to propound it.

"By the way, you are not forgetting that the two alleged deaths were some days apart? I saw Bendelow dead on a Monday. He had died on the preceding afternoon. But Crile's funeral had already taken place a day or two previously."

"I see no difficulty in that," Thorndyke replied. "Crile's funeral occurred, as I have ascertained, on a Saturday. You saw Bendelow alive for the last time on Thursday morning. Usher was sent for and saw Crile dead on Thursday evening, he having evidently died—with or without assistance—soon after you left. Of course, the date of death given to you was false, and you mention in your notes of the case that both you and Cropper were surprised at the condition of the body. The previous funeral offers no difficulty, seeing that we know that the coffin was empty. This is what I thought you might be interested to see."

He pointed to a flight of stone steps, at the bottom of which was a wooden gate set in the wall that enclosed the garden. I looked at the steps—a little vacantly, I am afraid—and inquired what there was about them that I was expected to find of interest.

"Perhaps," he replied, "you will see better if we open the gate."

We descended the steps and he inserted a key into the gate, drawing my attention to the fact that the lock had been oiled at no very distant date and was in quite good condition. Then he threw the gate open and we both stepped out on to the tow-path of the canal. I looked about me in considerable surprise, for we were within a few yards of the hut with the derrick and the little wharf from which I had been flung into the canal.

"I remember this gate," said I—"in fact, I think I mentioned it to you in my account of my adventure here. But I little imagined that it belonged to the Morris'es' house. It would have been a short way in, if I had known. But I expect it was locked at the time."

"I expect it was," Thorndyke agreed, and thereupon turned and re-entered. We passed once more down the long passage, and came out into Market Street, when Thorndyke locked the door and pocketed the key.

"That is an extraordinary arrangement," I remarked; "one house having two frontages on separate streets."

"It is not a very uncommon one," Thorndyke replied. "You see how it comes about. A house fronting on one street has a long back garden extending to another street which is not yet fully built on. As the new street fills up, a shop is built at the end of the garden. A small house may be built in connexion with it and cut off from the garden or the shop may be connected with the original house, as in this instance. But in either case, the shop belongs to the new street and has its own number. What are you going to do now?"

"I am going straight on to the studio," I replied.

"You had better come and have an early lunch with me first," said he. "There is no occasion to hurry. Polton is there and you won't easily get rid of him, for I understand that Miss D'Arblay is doing the finishing work on a wax bust."

"I ought to see that, too," said I.

He looked at me with a mischievous smile. "I expect you will have plenty of opportunities in the future," said he, "whereas Polton must make hay while the sun shines. And, by the way, he may have something to tell you. I have instructed him to make arrangements with those two ladies, Miss Dewsnepe and her friend, to go into the question of their identification of Bendelow. I want you to be present at the interview, but I have left him to fix the date. Possibly he has made the arrangement by now. You had better ask him."

At this moment an eligible omnibus making its appearance, we both climbed on board and were duly conveyed to King's Cross, where we alighted and lunched at a modest restaurant, thereafter separating to go our respective ways north and south.



## XVII. — A CHAPTER OF SURPRISE

IN answer to my knock, the studio door was opened by Polton; and as I met his eyes for a moment I was conscious of something unusual in his appearance. I had scanty opportunity to examine him, for he seemed to be in a hurry, bustling away after a few hasty words of apology and returning whence he had come. Following close on his heels, I saw what was the occasion of his hurry. He was engaged with a brush and a pot of melted wax in painting a layer of the latter on the insides of the moulds of a pair of arms, while Marion, seated on a high stool, was working at a wax bust, which was placed on a revolving modelling-stand, obliterating the seams and other irregularities with a steel tool which she heated from time to time at a small spirit-lamp.

When I had made my salutations, I offered my help to Polton, which he declined—without looking up from his work—saying that he wanted to carry the job through by himself. I sympathized with this natural desire, but it left me without occupation, for the work which Marion was doing was essentially a one-person job, and in any case was far beyond the capabilities of either of the apprentices. For a minute or two I stood idly looking on at Polton's proceedings, but noticing that my presence seemed to worry him, I presently moved away—again with a vague impression that there was something unusual in his appearance—and drawing up another high stool beside Marion's, settled myself to take a lesson in the delicate and difficult technique of surface finishing.

We were all very silent. My two companions were engrossed by their respective occupations and I must needs refrain from distracting them by untimely conversation; so I sat, well content to watch the magical tool stealing caressingly over the wax surface, causing the disfiguring seams to vanish miraculously into an unbroken contour. But my own attention was somewhat divided; for even as I watched the growing perfection of the bust there would float into my mind now and again an idle speculation as to the change in Polton's appearance. What could it be? It was something that seemed to have altered, to some extent, his facial expression. It couldn't be that he had shaved off his moustache or whiskers, for he had none to shave. Could he have parted his hair in a new way? It seemed hardly sufficient to account for the change; and looking round at him cautiously, I could detect nothing unfamiliar about his hair.

At this point he picked up his wax-pot and carried it away to the farther end of the studio, to exchange it for another which was heating in a water-bath. I took the opportunity to lean towards Marion and ask in a whisper:

"Have you noticed anything unusual about Polton?"

She nodded emphatically and cast a furtive glance over her shoulder in his direction.

"What is it?" I asked in the same low tone.

She took another precautionary glance and then, leaning towards me with an expression of exaggerated mystery, whispered:

"He has cut his eyelashes off."

I gazed at her in amazement, and was about to put a further question, but she held up a warning fore-finger and turned again to her work. However, my curiosity was now at boiling-point. As soon as Polton returned to his bench, I slipped off my stool and sauntered over to it on the pretence of seeing how his wax cast was progressing.

Marion's report was perfectly correct. His eyelids were as bare of lashes as those of a marble bust. And this was not all. Now that I came to look at him critically, his eyebrows had a distinctly moth-eaten appearance. He had been doing something to them, too.

It was an amazing affair. For one moment I was on the point of demanding an explanation, but good sense and good manners conquered the inquisitive impulse in time. Returning to my stool I cast an inquiring glance at Marion, from whom, however, I got no enlightenment but such as I could gather from a most alluring dimple that hovered about the corner of her mouth and that speedily diverted my thoughts into other channels.

My two companions continued for some time to work silently, leaving me to my meditations—which concerned themselves alternately with Polton's eyelashes and the dimple aforesaid. Suddenly Marion turned to me and asked:

"Has Mr. Polton told you that we are all to have a holiday to-morrow?"

"No," I answered; "but Dr. Thorndyke mentioned that Mr. Polton might have something to tell us. Why are we all to have a holiday?"

"Why, you see, sir," said Polton, standing up and forgetting all about his eyelashes, "the Doctor instructed me to make an appointment with those two ladies. Miss Dewsnepe and Miss Bonnington, to come to our chambers on a matter of identification. I have made the appointment for ten o'clock to-morrow morning; and as the Doctor wants you to be present at the interview and wants me to be in attendance, and we can't leave Miss D'Arblay here alone, we have arranged to shut up the studio for to-morrow."

"Yes," said Marion; "and Arabella and I are going to spend the morning looking at the shops in Regent Street, and then we are coming to lunch with you and Dr. Thorndyke. It will be quite a red-letter day."

"I don't quite see what these ladies are coming to the chambers for," said I.

"You will see, all in good time, sir," replied Polton; and as if to head me off from any further questions, he added: "I forgot to ask how your little party went off this morning."

"It went off with a bang," I answered. "We got the coffin up all right, but Mr. Fox wasn't at home. The coffin was empty."

"I rather think that was what the Doctor expected," said Polton.

Marion looked at me with eager curiosity. "This sounds rather thrilling," she said. "May one ask who it was that you expected to find in that coffin?"

"My impression is," I replied, "that the missing tenant was a person who bore a strong resemblance to that photograph that I showed you."

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "What a pity! I wish that coffin hadn't been empty. But, of course, it could hardly have been occupied, under the circumstances. I suppose I mustn't ask for fuller details?"

"I don't imagine that there is any secrecy about the affair, so far as you are concerned," I answered; "but I would rather that you had the details from Dr. Thorndyke, or at least with his express authority. He is conducting the investigations, and what I know has been imparted to me in confidence."

This view was warmly endorsed by Polton (who had by now either forgotten his eyelashes or abandoned concealment as hopeless). The subject was accordingly dropped and the two workers resumed their occupations. When Polton had painted a complete skin of wax over the interior of both pairs of moulds, I helped him to put the latter together and fasten them with cords. Then into each completed mould we poured enough melted wax to fill it, and after a few seconds poured it out again, leaving a solid layer to thicken the skin and unite the two halves of the wax cast. This finished Polton's job, and shortly afterwards he took his departure. Nor did we remain very much longer, for the final stages of the surface finishing were too subtle to be carried out by artificial light and had to be postponed until daylight was available.

As we walked homewards we discussed the situation so far as was possible without infringing Thorndyke's confidences.

"I am very confused and puzzled about it all," she said. "It seems that Dr. Thorndyke is trying to get on the track of the man who murdered my father. But whenever I hear any details of his investigations, they always seem to be concerned with somebody else or with something that has no apparent connexion with the crime."

"That is exactly my condition," said I. "He seems to be busily working at problems that are totally irrelevant. As far as I can make out, the murderer has never once come into sight, excepting when he appeared at the studio that terrible night. The people in whom Thorndyke has interested himself are mere outsiders—suspicious characters, no doubt, but not suspected of the murder. This man, Crile, for instance, whose empty coffin was dug up, was certainly a shady character. But he was not the murderer, though he seems to have been associated with the murderer at one time. Then there is that Morris, whose mask was found at the studio. He is another queer customer. But he is certainly not the murderer, though he was also probably an associate. Thorndyke has taken an immense interest in him. But I can't see why. He doesn't seem to me to be in the picture, or at any rate, not in the foreground of it. Of the actual murderer we seem to know nothing at all—at least that is my position."

"Do you think Dr. Thorndyke has really got anything to go on?" she asked.

"My dear Marion!" I exclaimed, "I am confident that he has the whole case cut and dried and perfectly clear in his mind. What I was saying referred only to myself. My ideas are all in confusion, but his are not. He can see quite clearly who is in the picture and in what part of it. The blindness is mine. But let us wait and see what to-morrow brings forth. I have a sort of feeling—in fact he hinted—that this interview is the final move. He may have something to tell you when you arrive."

"I do hope he may," she said earnestly, and with this we dismissed the subject. A few minutes later we parted at the gate of Ivy Cottage and I took my way (by the main thoroughfares) home to my lodgings.

On the following morning I made a point of presenting myself at Thorndyke's chambers well in advance of the appointed time in order that I might have a few words with him before the two ladies arrived. With the same purpose, no doubt, Superintendent Miller took a similar course, the result being that we converged simultaneously on the entry and ascended the stairs together. The 'oak' was already open and the inner door was opened by Thorndyke, who smilingly remarked that he seemed thereby to have killed two early birds with one stone.

"So you have, Doctor," assented the superintendent; "two early birds who have come betimes to catch the elusive worm—and I suspect they won't catch him."

"Don't be pessimistic. Miller," said Thorndyke with a quiet chuckle. "He isn't such a slippery worm as that. I suppose you want to know something of the programme?"

"Naturally, I do; and so, I suppose, does Dr. Gray."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "I am not going to tell you much—"

"I knew it," groaned Miller.

"Because it will be better for everyone to have an open mind—"

"Well," interposed Miller, "mine is open enough, wide open; and nothing inside."

"And then," pursued Thorndyke, "there is the possibility that we shall not get the result we hope for; and in that case, the



less you expect the less you will be disappointed.”

“But,” persisted Miller, “in general terms, what are we here for? I understand that those two ladies, the witnesses to Bendelow’s will, are coming presently. What are they coming for? Do you expect to get any information out of them?”

“I have some hopes,” he replied, “of learning something from them. In particular I want to test them in respect of their identification of Bendelow.”

“Ha! Then you have got a photograph of him?”

Thorndyke shook his head. “No,” he replied. “I have not been able to get a photograph of him.”

“Then you have an exact description of him?”

“No,” was the reply. “I have no description of him at all.”

The superintendent banged his hat on the table. “Then what the deuce have you got, sir?” he demanded distractedly. “You must have something, you know, if you are going to test these witnesses on the question of identification. You haven’t got a photograph, you haven’t got a description, and you can’t have the man himself because he is at present reposing in a little terra-cotta pot in the form of bone-ash. Now, what have you got?”

Thorndyke regarded the exasperated superintendent with an inscrutable smile and then glanced at Polton, who had just stolen into the room and was now listening with an expression of such excessive crinkliness that I wrote him down an accomplice on the spot.

“You had better ask Polton,” said Thorndyke. “He is the stage manager on this occasion.”

The superintendent turned sharply to confront my fellow-apprentice, whose eyes thereupon disappeared into a labyrinth of crow’s feet.

“It’s no use asking me, sir,” said he. “I’m only an accessory before the fact, so to speak. But you’ll know all about it when the ladies arrive—and I rather think I hear ‘em coming now.”

In corroboration, light footsteps and feminine voices became audible, apparently ascending the stairs. We hastily seated ourselves while Polton took his station by the door and Thorndyke said to me in a low voice: “Remember, Gray, no comments of any kind. These witnesses must act without any sort of suggestion from anybody.”

I gave a quick assent, and at that moment Polton threw open the door with a flourish and announced majestically:

“Miss Dewsnepe, Miss Bonnington.”

We all rose, and Thorndyke advanced to receive his visitors while Polton placed chairs for them.

“It is exceedingly good of you to take all this trouble to help us,” said Thorndyke. “I hope it was not in any way inconvenient for you to come here this morning.”

“Oh, not at all,” replied Miss Dewsnepe; “only we are not quite clear as to what it is that you want us to do.”

“We will go into that question presently,” said Thorndyke. “Meanwhile, may I introduce to you these two gentlemen, who are interested in our little business: Mr. Miller and Dr. Gray.”

The two ladies bowed, and Miss Dewsnepe remarked:

“We are already acquainted with Dr. Gray. We had the melancholy pleasure of meeting him at Mrs. Morris’s house on the sad occasion when he came to examine the mortal remains of poor Mr. Bendelow, who is now with the angels.”

“And no doubt,” added Miss Bonnington, “in extremely congenial society.”

At this statement of Miss Dewsnepe’s the superintendent turned and looked at me sharply with an expression of enlightenment; but he made no remark, and the latter lady returned to her original inquiry. “You were going to tell us what it is that you want us to do.”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke. “It is quite a simple matter. We want you to look at the face of a certain person who will be shown to you and to tell us if you recognize and can give a name to that person.”

“Not an insane person, I hope!” exclaimed Miss Dewsnepe.

“No,” Thorndyke assured her, “not an insane person.”

“Nor a criminal person in custody, I trust,” added Miss Bonnington.

“Certainly not,” replied Thorndyke. “In short, let me assure you that the inspection of this person need not cause you the slightest embarrassment. It will be a perfectly simple affair, as you will see. But perhaps we had better proceed at once. If you two gentlemen will follow Polton, I will conduct the ladies upstairs myself.”

On this we rose, and Miller and I followed Polton out on to the landing, where he turned and began to ascend the stairs at a slow and solemn pace, as if he were conducting a funeral. The superintendent walked at my side and muttered as he went, being evidently in a state of bewilderment fully equal to my own.

“Now, what the blazes,” he growled, “can the doctor be up to now? I never saw such a man for springing surprises on one. But who the deuce can he have up there?”

At the top of the second flight we came on to a landing and, proceeding along it, reached a door which Polton unlocked and opened.

"You understand, gentlemen," he said, halting in the doorway, "that no remarks or comments are to be made until the witnesses have gone. Those were my instructions."

With this he entered the room, closely followed by Miller, who, as he crossed the threshold, set at naught Polton's instructions by exclaiming in a startled voice:

"Snakes!" I followed quickly, all agog with curiosity; but whatever I had expected to see—if I had expected anything—I was totally unprepared for what I did see.

The room was a smallish room, completely bare and empty of furniture save for four chairs—on two of which Polton firmly seated us; and in the middle of the floor, raised on a pair of trestles, was a coffin covered with a black linen cloth. At this gruesome object Miller and I gazed in speechless astonishment, but, apart from Polton's injunction, there was no opportunity for an exchange of sentiments; for we had hardly taken our seats when we heard the sound of ascending footsteps mingled with Thorndyke's bland and persuasive accents. A few moments later the party reached the door, and as the two ladies came in sight of the coffin, both started back with a cry of alarm.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Miss Dewsnepe, "it's a dead person! Who is it, sir? Is it anyone we know?"

"That is what we want you to tell us," Thorndyke replied.

"How mysterious!" exclaimed Miss Bonnington, in a hushed voice. "How dreadful! Some poor creature who has been found dead, I suppose? I hope it won't be very—er—you know what I mean, sir—when the coffin is opened."

"There will be no need to open the coffin," Thorndyke reassured her. "There is an inspection window in the coffin-lid through which you can see the face. All you have to do is to look through the window and tell us if the face that you see is the face of anyone who is known to you. Are you ready, Polton?"

Polton replied that he was, having taken up his position at the head of the coffin with an air of profound gravity, approaching to gloom. The two ladies shuddered audibly, but their nervousness being now overcome by a devouring curiosity, they advanced, one on either side of the coffin, and taking up a position close to Polton, gazed eagerly at the covered coffin. There was a solemn pause as Polton carefully gathered up the two corners of the linen pall. Then, with a quick movement, he threw it back. The two witnesses simultaneously stooped and peered in at the window. Simultaneously their mouths opened and they sprang back with a shriek.

"Why, it's Mr. Bendelow!"

"You are quite sure it is Mr. Bendelow?" Thorndyke asked.

"Perfectly," replied Miss Dewsnepe. "And yet," she continued with a mystified look, "it can't be; for I saw him pass through the bronze doors into the cremation furnace. I saw him with my own eyes," she added, somewhat unnecessarily. "And what's more, I saw his ashes in the casket."

She gazed with wide-open eyes at Thorndyke and then at her friend, and the two women tip-toed forward and once more stared in at the window with starting eyes and dropped chins.

"It is Mr. Bendelow," said Miss Bonnington, in an awe-stricken voice.

"But it can't be," Miss Dewsnepe protested in tremulous tones. "You saw him put through those doors yourself, Susan, and you saw his ashes afterwards."

"I can't help that, Sarah," the other lady retorted. "This is Mr. Bendelow. You can't deny that it is."

"Our eyes must be deceived," said Miss Dewsnepe, the said eyes being still riveted on the face behind the window. "It can't be—and yet it is—but yet it is impossible—"

She paused suddenly and raised a distinctly alarmed face to her friend.

"Susan," she said, in a low, rather shaky voice, "there is something here with which we, as Christian women, are better not concerned. Something against nature. The dead has been recalled from a burning fiery furnace by some means which we may not inquire into. It were better, Susan, that we should now depart from this place."

This was evidently Susan's opinion, too, for she assented with uncommon alacrity and with a distinctly uncomfortable air; and the pair moved with one accord towards the door. But Thorndyke gently detained them.

"Do we understand," he asked, "that, apart from the apparently impossible circumstances, the body in that coffin is, in your opinion, the body of the late Simon Bendelow?"

"You do," Miss Dewsnepe replied in a resentfully nervous tone and regarding Thorndyke with very evident alarm. "If it were possible that it could be, I would swear that those unnatural remains were those of my poor friend Mr. Bendelow. As it is not possible, it cannot be."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke, with the most extreme suavity of manner. "You have done us a great service by coming here to-day, and a great service to humanity—how great a service you will learn later. I am afraid it has been a disagreeable experience to both of you, for which I am sincerely sorry; but you must let me assure you that there is nothing unlawful or

supernatural in what you have seen. Later, I hope you will be able to realize that. And now I trust you will allow Mr. Polton to accompany you to the dining-room and offer you a little refreshment.”

As neither of the ladies raised any objection to this programme, we all took our leave of them and they departed down the stairs, escorted by Polton. When they had gone, Miller stepped across to the coffin and cast a curious glance in at the window.

“So that is Mr. Bendelow,” said he. “I don’t think much of him, and I don’t see how he is going to help us. But you have given those two old girls a rare shake-up, and I don’t wonder. Of course, this can’t be a dead body that you have got in this coffin, but it is a most life-like representation of one, and it took in those poor old Judies properly. What have you got to tell us about this affair, Doctor? I can see that your scheme, whatever it was, has come off. They always do. But what about it? What has this experiment proved?”

“It has turned a mere name into an actual person,” was the reply.

“Yes, I know,” rejoined Miller, “Very interesting, too. Now we know exactly what he looked like. But what about it? And what is the next move?”

“The next move on my part is to lay a sworn information against him as the murderer of Julius D’Arblay; which I will do now, if you will administer the oath and witness my signature.” As he spoke, Thorndyke produced a paper from his pocket and laid it on the coffin.

The superintendent looked at the paper with a surprised grin.

“A little late, isn’t it,” he said, “to be swearing an information? Of course you can if you like, but when you’ve done it, what then?”

“Then,” replied Thorndyke, “it will be for you to arrest him and bring him to trial.”

At this reply the superintendent’s eyes opened until his face might have been a symbolic mask of astonishment. Grasping his hair with both hands, he rose slowly from his chair, staring at Thorndyke as if at some alarming apparition.

“You’ll be the death of me. Doctor!” he exclaimed. “You really will. I am not fit for these shocks at my time of life. What is it you ask me to do? I am to arrest this man! What man? Here is a waxwork gentleman in a coffin—at least, I suppose that is what he is—that might have come straight from Madame Tussaud’s. Am I to arrest him? And there is a casket full of ashes somewhere. Am I to arrest those? Or am I off my head or dreaming?”

Thorndyke smiled at him indulgently. “Now, Miller,” said he, “don’t pretend to be foolish, because you are not. The man whom you are to arrest is a live man, and what is more, he is easily accessible whenever you choose to lay your hands on him.”

“Do you know where to find him?”

“Yes,” Thorndyke replied. “I, myself, will conduct you to his house, which is in Abbey Road, Hornsey, nearly opposite Miss D’Arblay’s studio.”

I gave a gasp of amazement on hearing this, which directed the superintendent’s attention to me.

“Very well. Doctor,” he said, “I will take your information, but you needn’t swear to it; just sign your name. I must be off now, but I will look in to-night about nine, if that will do, to get the necessary particulars and settle the arrangements with you. Probably to-morrow afternoon will be a good time to make the arrest. What do you think?”

“I should think it would be an excellent time,” Thorndyke replied, “but we can settle definitely to-night.”

With this, the superintendent, having taken the signed paper from Thorndyke, shook both our hands and bustled away with the traces of his late surprise still visible on his countenance.

The recognition of the tenant of the coffin as Simon Bendelow had come on me with almost as great a shock as it had on the two witnesses, but for a different reason. My late experiences enabled me to guess at once that the mysterious tenant was a waxwork figure, presumably of Polton’s creation. But what I found utterly inexplicable was that such a waxwork should have been produced in the likeness of a man whom neither Polton nor Thorndyke had ever seen. The astonishing conversation between the latter and Miller had, for the moment, driven this mystery out of my mind; but as soon as the superintendent had gone, I stepped over to the coffin and looked in at the window. And then I was more amazed than ever. For the face that I saw was not the face that I had expected to see. There, it is true, was the old familiar skull-cap, which Bendelow had worn, pulled down over the temples above the jaw-bandage. But it was the wrong face. (Incidentally I now understood what had become of Polton’s eyelashes. That conscientious realist had evidently taken no risks.)

“But,” I protested, “this is not Bendelow. This is Morris.”

Thorndyke nodded. “You have just heard two competent witnesses declare with complete conviction and certainty that this is Simon Bendelow; and, as you yourself pointed out, there can be no doubt as to their knowledge of Bendelow, since they recognized the photograph of him that was shown to them by the American detective.”

“That is perfectly true,” I admitted. “But it is a most incomprehensible affair. This is not the man who was cremated.”

“Evidently not, since he is still alive.”

"But these two women saw Bendelow cremated—at least they saw him pass through into the crematorium, which is near enough. And they had seen him in the coffin a few minutes before I saw him in the coffin, and they saw him again a few minutes after Cropper and Morris and I had put him back in the coffin. And the man whom we put into the coffin was certainly not this man."

"Obviously not, since he helped you to put the corpse in."

"And again," I urged, "if the body that we put into the coffin was not the body that was cremated, what has become of it? It wasn't buried, for the other coffin was empty. Those women must have made some mistake."

He shook his head. "The solution of the mystery is staring you in the face," said he. "It is perfectly obvious, and I am not going to give you any further hints now. When we have made the arrest, you shall have a full exposition of the case. But tell me, now; did those two women ever meet Morris?"

I considered for a few moments and then replied: "I have no evidence that they ever met him. They certainly never did in my presence. But even if they had, they would hardly have recognized him as the person they have identified to-day. He had grown a beard and moustache, you will remember, and his appearance was very much altered from what it was when I first saw him."

Thorndyke nodded. "It would be," he agreed. Then, turning to another subject, he said: "I am afraid it will be necessary for you to be present at the arrest. I would much rather that you were not, for he is a dangerous brute and will probably fight like a wild cat; but you are the only one of us who really knows him by sight in his present state."

"I should like to be in at the death," I said eagerly.

"That is well enough," said he, "so long as it is his death. You must bring your pistol and don't be afraid to use it."

"And how shall I know when I am wanted?" I asked.

"You had better go to the studio to-morrow morning," he replied. "I will send a note by Polton giving you particulars of the time when we shall call for you. And now we may as well help Polton to prepare for our other visitors, and I think Gray, that we will say as little as possible about this morning's proceedings or those of to-morrow. Explanations will come better after the event."

With this, we went down to the dining-room, where we found Polton sedately laying the table, having just got rid of the two ladies. We made a show of assisting him and I ventured to inquire:

"Who is doing the cooking to-day, Polton? Or is it to be a cold lunch?"

He looked at me almost reproachfully as he replied: "It is to be a hot lunch, and I am doing the cooking, of course."

"But," I protested, "you have been up to your eyes in other affairs all the morning."

He regarded me with a patronizing crinkle. "You can do a good deal," said he, "with one or two casseroles, a hay-box and a four-storey cooker on a gas stove. Things don't cook any better for your standing and staring at them."

Events went to prove the soundness of Polton's culinary principles; and the brilliant success of their application in practice gave a direction to the conversation which led it comfortably away from other and less discussable topics.

---

## XVIII. — THE LAST ACT

SHORTLY before leaving Thorndyke's chambers with Marion and Miss Boler, I managed to secure his permission to confide to them, in general terms, what was to happen on the morrow; and very relieved I was thereat, for I had little doubt that questions would be asked which it would seem ungracious to evade. Events proved that I was not mistaken; indeed, we were hardly clear of the precincts of the Temple when Marion opened the inquisition.

"You said yesterday," she began, "that Dr. Thorndyke might have something to tell us to-day, and I hoped that he might. I even tried to pluck up courage to ask him, but then I was afraid that it might seem intrusive. He isn't the sort of man that you can take liberties with. So I suppose that whatever it was that happened this morning is a dead secret?"

"Not entirely," I replied. "I mustn't go into details at present, but I am allowed to give you the most important item of information. There is going to be an arrest tomorrow."

"Do you mean that Dr. Thorndyke has discovered the man?" Marion demanded incredulously.

"He says that he has, and I take it that he knows. What is more, he offered to conduct the police to the house. He has actually given them the address."

"I would give all that I possess," exclaimed Miss Boler, "to be there and see the villain taken."

"Well," I said, "you won't be far away, for the man lives in Abbey Road, nearly opposite the studio."

Marion stopped and looked at me aghast. "What a horrible thing to think of!" she gasped. "Oh, I am glad I didn't know! I could never have gone to the studio if I had. But now we can understand how he managed to find his way to the place that foggy night, and to escape so easily."

"Oh, but it is not that man," I interposed, with a sudden ease of hopeless bewilderment. For I had forgotten this absolute discrepancy when I was talking to Thorndyke about the identification.

"Not that man!" she repeated, gazing at me in wild astonishment. "But that man was my father's murderer. I feel certain of it."

"So do I," was my rather lame rejoinder.

"Besides," she persisted, "if he was not the murderer, who was he, and why should he want to kill me?"

"Exactly," I agreed. "It seems conclusive. But apparently it isn't. At any rate, the man they are going to arrest is the man whose mask Thorndyke found at the studio."

"Then they are going to arrest the wrong man," said she, looking at me with a deeply troubled face. I was uncomfortable, too, for I saw what was in her mind. The memory of the ruffian who had made that murderous attack on her still lingered in her mind as a thing of horror. The thought that he was still at large and might at any moment reappear made it impossible for her ever to work alone in the studio, or even to walk abroad without protection. She had looked, as I had, to the discovery of the murderer to rid her of this abiding menace. But now it seemed that even after the arrest of the murderer this terrible menace would remain.

"I can't understand it," she said dejectedly. "When you showed me that photograph of the man who tried to kill me, I naturally hoped that Dr. Thorndyke had discovered who he was. But now it appears that he is at large and still untraced, yet I am convinced that he is the man who ought to have been followed."

"Never mind, my dear," I said cheerfully. "Let us see the affair out. You don't understand it and neither do I. But Thorndyke does. I have absolute faith in him, and so, I can see, have the police."

She assented without much conviction, and then Miss Boler began to press for further particulars. I mentioned the probable time of the arrest and the part that I was required to play in identifying the accused.

"You don't mean that you are asked to be present when the actual arrest is made, do you?" Marion asked anxiously.

"Yes," I answered. "You see, I am the only person who really knows the man by sight."

"But," she urged, "you are not a policeman. Suppose this man should be violent, like that other man; and he probably will be."

"Oh," I answered airily, "that will be provided for. Besides, I am not asked to arrest him; only to point him out to the police."

"I wish," she said, "you would stay in the studio until they have secured him. Then you could go and identify him. It would be much safer."

"No doubt," I agreed. "But it might lead to their arresting the wrong man and letting the right one slip. No, Marion, we must make sure of him if we can. Surely you are at least as anxious as any of us that he should be caught and made to pay the penalty?"

"Yes," she answered, "if he is really the right man—which I can hardly believe. But still, punishing him will not bring poor Daddy back, whereas if anything were to happen to you, Stephen—Oh! I don't dare to think of it!"

"You needn't think of it, Marion," I rejoined, cheerfully. "I shall be all right. And you wouldn't have your—apprentice hang back when the bobbies are taking the affair as a mere every-day job."

She made no reply beyond another anxious glance; and I was glad enough to let the subject drop, bearing in mind Thorndyke's words with regard to the pistol. As a diversion, I suggested a visit to the National Gallery, which we were now approaching, and the suggestion being adopted, without acclamation, we drifted in and rather listlessly perambulated the galleries, gazing vacantly at the exhibits and exchanging tepid comments. It was a spiritless proceeding, of which I remember very little but some rather severe observations by Miss Boler concerning a certain 'hussy' (by one Bronzino) in the great room. But we soon gave up this hollow pretence and went forth to board a yellow bus which was bound for the Archway Tavern; and so home to an early supper.

On the following morning I made my appearance betimes at Ivy Cottage, but it was later than usual when Marion and I started to walk in leisurely fashion to the studio.

"I don't know why we are going at all," said she. "I don't feel like doing any work."

"Let us forget the arrest for the moment," said I. "There is plenty to do. Those arms of Polton's have got to be taken out of the moulds and worked. It will be much better to keep ourselves occupied."

"I suppose it will," she agreed; and then, as we turned a corner and came in sight of the studio, she exclaimed:

"Why, what on earth is this? There are some painters at work on the studio! I wonder who sent them. I haven't given any orders. There must be some extraordinary mistake."

There was not, however. As we came up, one of the two linen-coated operators advanced, brush in hand, to meet us and briefly explained that he and his mate had been instructed by Superintendent Miller to wash down the paint-work and keep an eye on the premises opposite. They were, in fact, 'plain-clothes' men on special duty.

"We have been here since seven o'clock," our friend informed us, as we made a pretence of examining the window-sashes, "and we took over from a man who had been watching the house all night. My nabs is there all right. He came home early yesterday evening and he hasn't come out since."

"Then you know the man by sight?" Marion asked eagerly.

"Well, miss," was the reply, "we have a description of him, and the man who went into the house seemed to agree with it; and, as far as we know, there isn't any other man living there. But I understand that we are relying on Dr. Gray to establish the identity. Could I have a look at the inside woodwork?"

Marion unlocked the door and we entered, followed by the detective, whose interest seemed to be concerned exclusively with the woodwork of windows; and from windows in general finally became concentrated on a small window in the lobby which commanded a view of the houses opposite. Having examined the sashes of this, with his eye cocked on one of the houses aforesaid, he proceeded to operate on it with his brush, which, being wet and dirty and used with a singular lack of care, soon covered the glass so completely with a mass of opaque smears that it was impossible to see through it at all. Then he cautiously raised the sash about an inch, and whipping out a prism binocular from under his apron, stood back a couple of feet and took a leisurely survey through the narrow opening of one of the opposite houses.

"Hallo!" said he. "There is a woman visible at the first-floor window. Just have a look at her, sir. She can't see us through this narrow crack."

He handed me the glass, indicating the house, and I put the instrument to my eyes. It was a powerful glass, and seemed to bring the window and the figure of the woman within a dozen feet of me. But at the moment she had turned her head away, apparently to speak to someone inside the room, and all that I could see was that she seemed to be an elderly woman who wore what looked like an old-fashioned widow's cap. Suddenly she turned and looked out over the half-curtain, giving me a perfectly clear view of her face; and then I felt myself lapsing into the old sense of confusion and bewilderment.

I had, of course, expected to recognize Mrs. Morris. But this was evidently not she, although not such a very different-looking woman, an elderly, white-haired widow in a crape cap and spectacles—reading-spectacles they must be, since she was looking over and not through them. She seemed to be a stranger—and yet not quite a stranger; for as I looked at her some chord of memory stirred. But the cup of my confusion was not yet full. As I stared at her, trying vainly to sound a clearer note on that chord of memory, a man slowly emerged from the darkness of the room behind and stood beside her; and him I recognized instantly as the bottle-nosed person whom I had watched from my ambush at the top of Dartmouth Park Hill.

"Well, sir," said the detective, as the man and woman turned away from the window and vanished, "what do you make of 'em? Do you recognize 'em?"

"I recognize the man," I replied, "and I believe I have seen the woman before, but they aren't the people I expected to see."

"Oh, dear!" said he. "That's a bad look-out. Because I don't think there is anybody else there."

"Then," I said, "we have made a false shot; and yet—well, I don't know. I had better think this over and see if I can make anything of it."

I turned into the studio, where I found Marion—who had been listening attentively to this dialogue—in markedly better spirits.

"It seems a regular muddle," she remarked cheerfully. "They have come to arrest the wrong man and now it appears that he isn't there."

"Don't talk to me for a few minutes, Marion, dear," said I. "There is something behind this and I want to think what it can be. I have seen that woman somewhere, I feel certain. Now, where was it?"

I cudgelled my brains for some time without succeeding in recovering the recollections connected with her. I re-visualized the face that I had seen through the glass, with its deep-set, hollow eyes and strong, sharply sloping eyebrows, and tried to connect it with some person whom I had seen, but in vain. And then in a flash it came to me. She was the widow whom I had noticed at the inquest. The identification, indeed, was not very complete, for the veil that she had worn on that occasion had considerably obscured her features. But I had no doubt that I was right, for her present appearance agreed in all that I could see with that of the woman at the inquest.

The next question was, who could she be? Her association with the bottle-nosed man connected her in some way with what Thorndyke would have called 'the case'; for that man, whoever he was, had certainly been shadowing me. Then her presence at the inquest had now a sinister suggestiveness. She would seem to have been there to watch developments on behalf of others. Could she be a relative of Mrs. Morris? A certain faint resemblance seemed to support this idea. As to the man, I gave him up. Evidently there were several persons concerned in this crime, but I knew too little about the circumstances to be able to make even a profitable guess. Having reached this unsatisfactory conclusion, I turned, a little irritably, to Marion, exclaiming:

"I can make nothing of it. Let us get on with some work to pass the time."

Accordingly we began, in a half-hearted way, upon Polton's two moulds. But the presence of the two detectives was disturbing, especially when, having finished the exterior, they brought their pails and ladders inside and took up their

station at the lobby window. We struggled on for a time; but when, about noon. Miss Boler made her appearance with a basket of provisions and a couple of bottles of wine, we abandoned the attempt and occupied ourselves in tidying up and laying a table.

“Don’t you think, Marion,” I said, as we sat down to lunch (having provided for the needs of the two ‘painters,’ who lunched in the lobby), “that it would be best for you and Arabella to go home before any fuss begins?”

“Whatever Miss Marion thinks,” Arabella interposed firmly, “I am not going home. I came down expressly to see this villain captured, and here I stay until he is safely in custody.”

“And I,” said Marion, “am going to stay with Arabella. You know why, Stephen. I couldn’t bear to go away and leave you here after what you have told me. We shall be quite safe in here.”

“Well,” I temporised, seeing plainly that they had made up their minds, “you must keep the door bolted until the business is over.”

“As to that,” said Miss Boler, “we shall be guided by circumstances,” and from this ambiguous position neither she nor Marion would budge.

Shortly after lunch I received a farther shock of surprise. In answer to a loud single knock, I hurried out to open the door. A tradesman’s van had drawn up at the kerb and two men stood on the threshold, one of them holding a good-sized parcel. I stared at the latter in astonishment, for I recognized him instantly as the second shadower of the Dartmouth Park Hill adventure; but before I could make any comment, both men entered—with the curt explanation ‘police business’—and the last—comer shut the door, when I heard the van drive off.

“I am Detective-Sergeant Porter,” the stranger explained. “You know what I am here for, of course.”

“Yes,” I replied; and turning to the other man, I said:

“I think I have seen you before. Are you a police-officer, too?”

My acquaintance grinned. “Retired Detective-Sergeant,” he explained, “name of Barber. At present employed by Dr. Thorndyke. I think I have seen you before, sir,” and he grinned again, somewhat more broadly.

“I should like to know how you were employed when I saw you last,” said I. But here Sergeant Porter interposed:

“Better leave explanations till later, sir. You’ve got a back gate, I think.”

“Yes,” said one of the ‘painters’. “At the bottom of the garden. It opens on an alley that leads into the next road—Chilton Road.”

“Can we get into the garden through the studio?” the sergeant asked, and on my answering in the affirmative, he requested permission to inspect the rear premises. I conducted both men to the back door and let them out into the garden, where they passed out at the back gate to reconnoitre the alley. In a minute or two they returned; and they had hardly re-entered the studio when another knock at the door announced more visitors. They turned out to be Thorndyke and Superintendent Miller; of whom the latter inquired of the senior painter:

“Is everything in going order, Jenks?”

“Yes, sir,” was the reply. “The man is there all right. Dr. Gray saw him; but I should mention, sir, that he doesn’t think it’s the right man.”

“The devil he doesn’t!” exclaimed Miller, looking at me uneasily and then glancing Thorndyke.

“That man isn’t Morris,” said I. “He is that red-nosed man whom I told you about. You remember.”

“I remember,” Thorndyke replied calmly. “Well, I suppose we shall have to content ourselves with the red-nosed man;” upon which ex-Sergeant Barber’s countenance became wreathed in smiles and the superintendent looked relieved.

“Are all the arrangements complete, Sergeant?” Miller inquired, turning to Sergeant Porter.

“Yes, sir,” the latter replied. “Inspector Follett has got some local men, who know the neighbourhood well, posted in the rear watching the back garden, and there are some uniformed men waiting round both the corners to stop him, in case he slips past us. Everything is ready, sir.”

“Then,” said the superintendent, “we may as well open the ball at once. I hope it will go off quietly. It ought to. We have got enough men on the job.”

He nodded to Sergeant Porter, who at once picked up his parcel and went out into the garden, accompanied by Barber. Miller, Thorndyke and I now adjourned to the lobby window, where, with the two painter-detectives, we established a look-out. Presently we saw the sergeant and Barber advancing separately on the opposite side of the road, the latter leading and carrying the parcel. Arrived at the house, he entered the front garden and knocked a loud single knock. Immediately, the mysterious woman appeared at the ground-floor window—it was a bay-window—and took a long, inquisitive look at ex-Sergeant Barber. There ensued a longish pause, during which Sergeant Porter walked slowly past the house. Then the door opened a very short distance—being evidently chained—and the woman appeared in the narrow opening. Barber offered the parcel, which was much too large to go through the opening without unchaining the door, and appeared to be giving explanations. But the woman evidently denied all knowledge of it, and having refused to receive it, tried to shut the door,

into the opening of which Barber had inserted his foot; but he withdrew it somewhat hastily as a coal-hammer descended, and before he could recover himself the door shut with a bang and was immediately bolted.

The ball was opened, as Miller had expressed it, and the developments followed with a bewildering rapidity that far outpaced any possible description.

The sergeant returning and joining Barber, the two men were about to force the ground-floor window, when pistol-shots and police whistles from the rear announced a new field of operations. At once Miller opened the studio door and sallied forth, with the two detectives and Thorndyke; and when I had called out to Marion to bolt the door, I followed, shutting it after me. Meanwhile, from the rear of the opposite houses came a confused noise of police-whistles, barking dogs and women's voices, with an occasional report. Following three rapid pistol-shots there came a brief interval, then, suddenly, the door of a house farther down the street burst open and the fugitive rushed out, wild-eyed and terrified, his white face contrasting most singularly with his vividly-red nose. Instantly, the two detectives and Miller started in pursuit, followed by the sergeant and Barber; but the man ran like a hare and was speedily drawing ahead when suddenly a party of constables appeared from a side-turning and blocked the road. The fugitive zigzagged and made as if he would try to dodge between them, flinging away his empty pistol and drawing out another. The detectives and Miller were close on him, when in an instant he turned and, with extraordinary agility, avoided them. Then, as the two sergeants bore down on him, he fired at them at close range, stopping them both, though neither actually fell. Again he out-ran his pursuers, racing down the road towards us, yelling like a maniac and firing his pistol wildly at Thorndyke and me. And suddenly my left leg doubled up and I fell heavily to the ground nearly opposite the studio door.

The fall confused me for a moment and as I lay, half-dazed, I was horrified to see Marion dart out of the studio. In an instant she was kneeling by my side with her arm around my neck. "Stephen! Oh, Stephen, darling!" she sobbed and gazed into my face with eyes full of terror and affection, oblivious of everything but my peril. I besought her to go back, and struggled to get out my pistol, for the man, still gaining on his pursuers, was now rapidly approaching. He had flung away his second pistol and had drawn a large knife, and as bore down on us, mad with rage and terror, he gibbered and grinned like a wild cat.

When he was but a couple of dozen paces away, I saw Thorndyke raise his pistol and take a careful aim. But before he had time to fire, a most singular diversion occurred. From the open door of the studio Miss Boler emerged, swinging a massive stool with amazing ease. The man, whose eyes were fixed on me and Marion, did not observe her until she was within a few paces of him; when, gathering all her strength, she hurled the heavy stool with almost incredible force. It struck him below the knees, knocking his feet from under him, and he fell with a sort of dive or half-somersault, falling with the hand that grasped the knife under him.

He made no attempt to rise, but lay with slightly twitching limbs but otherwise motionless. Miss Boler stalked up to him and stood looking down on him with grim interest until Thorndyke, still holding his pistol, stooped and, grasping one arm, gently turned him over. Then we could see the handle of the knife sticking out from his chest near the right shoulder.

"Ha!" said Thorndyke. "Bad luck to the last. It must have gone through the arch of the aorta. But perhaps it is just as well."

He rose and, stepping across to where I sat, supported by Marion and still nursing my pistol, bent over me with an anxious face.

"What is it, Gray?" he asked. "Not a fracture, I hope?"

"I don't think so," I replied. "Damaged muscle and perhaps nerve. It is all numb at present, but it doesn't seem to be bleeding much. I think I could hobble if you would help me up."

He shook his head and beckoned to a couple of constables, with whose aid he carried me into the studio and deposited me on the sofa. Immediately afterwards the two wounded officers were brought in, and I was relieved to hear that neither of them was dangerously hurt, though the sergeant had a fractured arm and Barber a flesh-wound of the chest and a cracked rib. The ladies having been politely ejected into the garden, Thorndyke examined the various injuries and applied temporary dressings, producing the materials from a very business-like-looking bag which he had providently brought with him. While he was thus engaged, three constables entered carrying the corpse, which, with a few words of apology, they deposited on the floor by the side of the sofa.

I looked down on the ill-omened figure with lively curiosity; and especially was I impressed and puzzled by the very singular appearance of the face. Its general colour was of that waxen pallor characteristic of the faces of the dead, particularly of those who have died from haemorrhage. But the nose and the acne patches remained unchanged. Indeed, their colour seemed intensified, for their vivid red 'stared' from the surrounding white like the painted patches on a clown's face. The mystery was solved when, the surgical business being concluded, Barber came and seated himself on the edge of the sofa.

"Masterly make-up, that," said he, nodding at the corpse. "Looks queer enough now; but when he was alive you couldn't spot it, even in daylight."

"Make-up!" I exclaimed. "I didn't know you could make-up off the stage."

"You can't wear a celluloid nose off the stage, or a tie-on beard," he replied. "But when it is done as well as this—a touch or two of nose-paste or toupee-paste, tinted carefully with grease-paint and finished up with powder—it's bard to spot."



These experts in make-up are a holy terror to the police.”

“Did you know that he was made up? I asked, looking at Thorndyke.

“I inferred that he was,” the latter replied, “and so did Sergeant Barber. But now we had better see what his natural appearance is.”

He stooped over the corpse and with a small ivory paper-knife scraped from the end of the nose and the parts adjacent a layer of coloured plastic material about the consistency of modelling—wax. Then with vaseline and cotton-wool he cleaned away the red pigment until the pallid skin showed unsullied.

“Why, it is Morris after all!” I exclaimed. “It is perfectly incredible; and you seemed to remove such a very small quantity of paste, too! I wouldn’t have believed that it would make such a change.”

“Not after that very instructive demonstration that Miss D’Arblay gave us with the day and the plaster mask?” he asked with a smile.

I smiled sheepishly in return. “I told you I was a fool, sir,” and then, as a new idea burst upon me, I asked: “And that other man—the hook-nosed man?”

“Morris—that is to say, Bendelow,” he replied, “with a different, more exaggerated make-up.”

I was pondering with profound relief on this answer when one of the painter-detectives entered in search of the superintendent.

“We got into the house from the back, sir,” he reported. “The woman is dead. We found her lying on the bed in the first-floor front; and we found a tumbler half-full of water and this by the bedside.”

He exhibited a small, wide-mouthed bottle labelled ‘Potassium Cyanide’, which the superintendent took from him.

“I will come and look over the house presently,” the latter said. “Don’t let anybody in; and let me know when the cabs are here.”

“There are two here now, sir,” the detective announced, “and they have sent down three wheeled stretchers.”

“One cab will carry our two casualties and I expect the Doctor will want the other. The bodies can be put on two of the stretchers, but you had better send the woman here for Dr. Gray to see.”

The detective saluted and retired, and in a few minutes a stretcher dismounted from its carriage was borne in by two constables and placed on the floor beside Morris’s corpse. But even now, prepared as I was, and knowing who the new arrival must be, I looked doubtfully at the pitiful effigy that lay before me so limp and passive, that but an hour since had been a strong, courageous, resourceful woman. Not until the white wig, the cap and the spectacles had been removed, the heavy eyebrows detached with spirit and the dark pigment cleaned away from the eyelids, could I say with certainty that this was the corpse of Mrs. Morris.

“Well, Doctor,” said the superintendent, when the wounded and the dead had been borne away and we were alone in the studio, “you have done your part to a finish, as usual, but ours is a bit of a failure. I should have liked to bring that fellow to trial.”

“I sympathize with you, Miller,” replied Thorndyke. “The gallows ought to have had him. But yet I am not sure that what has happened is not all for the best. The evidence in both cases—the D’Arblay and the Van Zellen murders—is entirely circumstantial and extremely intricate. That is not good evidence for a jury. A conviction would not have been a certainty either here or in America; and an acquittal would have been a disaster that I don’t dare to think of. No, Miller, I think that, on the whole, I am satisfied, and I think that you ought to be, too.”

“I suppose I ought,” Miller conceded, “but it would have been a triumph to put him in the dock, after he had been written off as dead and cremated. However, we must take things as we find them, and now I had better go and look over that house.”

With a friendly nod to me, he took himself off, and Thorndyke went off to notify the ladies that the intruders had departed.

As he returned with them I heard Marion cross-examining him with regard to my injuries and listened anxiously for his report.

“So far as I can see. Miss D’Arblay,” he answered, “the damage is confined to one or two muscles. If so, there will be no permanent disablement and he should soon be quite well again. But he will want proper surgical treatment without delay. I propose to take him straight to our hospital, if he agrees.”

“Miss Boler and I were hoping,” said Marion, “that we might have the privilege of nursing him at our house.”

“That is very good of you,” said Thorndyke, “and perhaps you might look after him during his convalescence. But for the present he needs skilled surgical treatment. If it should not be necessary for him to stay in the hospital after the wound has been attended to, it would be best for him to occupy one of the spare bedrooms at my chambers, where he can be seen daily—the surgeon and I can keep an eye on him. Come,” he added coaxingly, “let us make a compromise. You or Miss Boler shall come to the Temple every day for as long as you please and do what nursing is necessary. There is a spare room of which you can take possession; and as to your work here, Polton will give you any help that he can. How will that do?”

Marion accepted the offer gratefully (with my concurrence), but begged to be allowed to accompany me to the hospital.

"That was what I was going to suggest," said Thorndyke. "The cab will hold the four of us, and the sooner we start the better."

Our preparations were very soon made. Then the door was opened, I was assisted out through a lane of hungry-eyed spectators, held at bay by two constables, and deposited in the cab; and when the studio had been locked up, we drove off, leaving the neighbourhood to settle down to its normal condition.

---

## XIX. — THORNDYKE DISENTANGLES THE THREADS

THE days of my captivity at Number 5A Kings Bench Walk passed with a tranquillity that made me realize the weight of the incubus that had been lifted. Now, in the mornings, when Polton ministered to me—until Arabella arrived and was ungrudgingly installed in office—I could let my untroubled thoughts stray to Marion, working alone in the studio with restored security, free for ever from the hideous menace which hung over her. And later, when she herself, released by her faithful apprentice, came to take her spell of nursing, what a joy it was to see her looking so fresh and rosy, so youthful and buoyant!

Of Thorndyke—the giver of these gifts—I saw little in the first few days, for he had heavy arrears of work to make up. However, he paid me visits from time to time, especially in the mornings and at night, when I was alone, and very delightful those visits were. For he had now dropped the investigator and there had come into his manner something new, something fatherly or elder-brotherly; and he managed to convey to me that my presence in his chambers was a source of pleasure to him—a refinement of hospitality that filled up the cup of my gratitude to him.

It was on the fifth day, when I was allowed to sit up in bed—for my injury was no more than a perforating wound of the outer side of the calf, which had missed every important structure—that I sat watching Marion making somewhat premature preparations for tea, and observed with interest that a third cup had been placed on the tray.

"Yes," Marion replied to my inquiry, "the Doctor' is coming to tea with us to-day. Mr. Polton gave me the message when he arrived." She gave a few further touches to the tea-set and continued: "How sweet Dr. Thorndyke has been to us, Stephen! He treats me as if I were his daughter, and however busy he is, he always walks with me to the Temple gate and puts me into a cab. I am infinitely grateful to him—almost as grateful as I am to you."

"I don't see what you have got to be grateful to me for," I remarked.

"Don't you?" said she. "Is it nothing to me, do you suppose, that in the moment of my terrible grief and desolation, I found a noble chivalrous friend whom I trusted instantly, that I have been guarded through all the dangers that threatened me, and that at last I have been rescued from them and set free to go my ways in peace and security? Surely, Stephen, dear, all this is abundant matter for gratitude. And I owe it all to you."

"To me!" I exclaimed in astonishment, recalling secretly what a consummate donkey I had been. "But there, I suppose it is the way of a woman to imagine that her particular gander is a swan."

She smiled a superior smile. "Women," said she, "are very intelligent creatures. They are able to distinguish between swans and ganders, whereas the swans themselves are apt to be muddle-headed and self-depreciatory."

"I agree to the muddle-headed factor," I rejoined, "and I won't be unduly ostentatious as to the ganderism. But to return to Thorndyke, it is extraordinarily good of him to allow himself to be burdened with me."

"With us," she corrected.

"It is the same thing, sweetheart. Do you know if he is going to give us a long visit?"

"I hope so," she replied. "Mr. Polton said that he had got through his arrears of work and had this afternoon free."

"Then," said I, "perhaps he will give us the elucidation that he promised me some time ago. I am devoured by curiosity as to how he unravelled the web of mystification that the villain, Bendelow, spun round himself."

"So am I," said she; "and I believe I can hear his footsteps on the stair."

A few moments later Thorndyke entered the room and, having greeted us with quiet geniality, seated himself in the easy-chair by the table and regarded us with a benevolent smile.

"We were just saying, sir," said I, "how very kind it is of you to allow your chambers to be invaded by a stray cripple and his—his belongings."

"I believe you were going to say 'baggage';" Marion murmured.

"Well," said Thorndyke, smiling at the interpolation, "I may tell you both in confidence that you were talking nonsense. It is I who am the beneficiary."

"It is a part of your goodness to say so, sir," I said.

"But," he rejoined, "it is the simple truth. You enable me to combine the undoubted economic advantages of bachelordom with the satisfaction of having a family under my roof, and you even allow me to participate in a way, as a

sort of supercargo, in a certain voyage of discovery which is to be undertaken by two young adventurers in the near future—in the very near future, as I hope.”

“As I hope, too,” said I, glancing at Marion, who had become a little more rosy than usual and who now adroitly diverted the current of the conversation.

“We were also wondering,” said she, “if we might hope for some enlightenment on things which have puzzled us so much lately.”

“That,” he replied, “was in my mind when I arranged to keep this afternoon and evening free. I wanted to give Stephen—who is my professional offspring, so to speak—a full exposition of this very intricate and remarkable case. If you, my dear, will keep my cup charged as occasion arises, I will begin forthwith. I will address myself to Stephen, who has all the facts first-hand; and if, in my exposition, I should seem somewhat callously to ignore the human aspects of this tragic story—aspects which have meant so much in irreparable loss and bereavement to you, poor child—remember that it is an exposition of evidence, and necessarily passionless and impersonal.”

“I quite realize that,” said Marion, “and you may trust me to understand.”

He bowed gravely, and, after a brief pause, began: “I propose to treat the subject historically, so to speak; to take you over the ground that I traversed myself, recounting my observations and inferences in the order in which they occurred. The inquiry falls naturally into certain successive stages, corresponding to the emergence of new facts, of which the first was concerned with the data elicited at the inquest. Let us begin with them.

“First, as to the crime itself. It was a murder of a very distinctive type. There was evidence, not only of premeditation in the bare legal sense, but of careful preparation and planning. It was a considered act and not a crime of impulse or passion. What could be the motive for such a crime? There appeared to be only two alternative possibilities: either it was a crime of revenge or a crime of expediency. The hypothesis of revenge could not be explored, because there were no data excepting the evidence of the victim’s daughter, which was to the effect that deceased had no enemies, actual or potential; and this evidence was supported by the very deliberate character of the crime.

“We were therefore thrown back on the hypothesis of expediency, which was, in fact, the more probable one, and which became still more probable as the circumstances were further examined. But having assumed, as a working hypothesis, that this crime had been committed in pursuit of a definite purpose which was not revenge, the next question was. What could that purpose have been? And that question could be answered only by a careful consideration of all that was known of the parties to the crime—the criminal and the victim and their possible relations to one another.

“As to the former, the circumstances indicated that he was a person of some education, that he had an unusual acquaintance with poisons and such social position and personal qualities as would enable him to get possession of them; that he was subtle, ingenious and resourceful, but not far-sighted, since he took risks that could have been avoided. His mentality appeared to be that of the gambler, whose attention tends to be riveted on the winning chances and who makes insufficient provision for possible failure. He staked everything on the chance of the needle-puncture being overlooked and the presence of the poison being undiscovered.

“But the outstanding and most significant quality was his profound criminality. Premeditated murder is the most atrocious of crimes; and murder for expediency is the most atrocious form of murder. This man, then, was of a profoundly criminal type and was, most probably, a practising criminal.

“Turning now to the victim, the evidence showed that he was a man of high moral qualities; honest, industrious, thrifty, kindly and amiable and of good reputation—the exact reverse of the other. Any illicit association between these two men was therefore excluded; and yet there must have been an association of some kind. Of what kind could it have been?

“Now, in the case of this man, as in that of the other, there was one outstanding fact. He was a sculptor. And not only a sculptor but an artist in the highest class of waxwork. And not only this. He was probably the only artist of this kind practising in this country. For waxwork is almost exclusively a French art. So far as I know, all the wax figures and high-class lay figures that are made are produced in France. This man, therefore, appeared to be the unique English practitioner of this very curious art.

“The fact impressed me profoundly. To realize its significance we must realize the unique character of the art. Waxwork is a fine art, but it differs from all other fine arts in that its main purpose is one that is expressly rejected by all those other arts. An ordinary work of sculpture, no matter how realistic, is frankly an object of metal, stone or pottery. Its realism is restricted to truth of form. No deception is aimed at, but, on the contrary, is expressly avoided. But the aim of waxwork is complete deception; and its perfection is measured by the completeness of the deception achieved. How complete that may be can be judged by incidents that have occurred at Madame Tussaud’s. When that exhibition was at the old Baker Street Bazaar, the snuff-taker—whose arms, head and eyes were moved by clock-work—used to be seated on an open bench; and it is recorded that, quite frequently, visitors would sit down by him on the bench and try to open conversation with him. So, too, the waxwork policeman near the door was occasionally accosted with questions by arriving visitors.

“Bearing this fact in mind, it is obvious that this art is peculiarly adapted to employment in certain kinds of fraud, such as personation, false alibi and the like; and it is probable that the only reason why it is not so employed is the great difficulty of obtaining first-class waxworks.

“Naturally, then, when I observed this connexion of a criminal with a waxwork artist, I asked myself whether the motive

of the murder was not to be sought in that artist's unique powers. Could it be that an attempt had been made to employ the deceased on some work designed for a fraudulent purpose? If such an attempt had been made, whether it had or had not been successful, the deceased would be in possession of knowledge which would be highly dangerous to the criminal; but especially if a work had actually been executed and used as an instrument of fraud.

"But there were other possibilities in the case of a sculptor who was also a medallist. He might have been employed to produce—quite innocently—copies of valuable works which were intended for fraudulent use: and the second stage of the investigation was concerned with these possibilities. That stage was ushered in by Follett's discovery of the guinea, the additional facts that we obtained at the Museum, and later, when we learned that the guinea that had been found was an electrotype copy, and that deceased was an expert electrotyper, all seemed to point to the production of forgeries as the crime in which Julius D'Arblay had been implicated. That was the view to which we seemed to be committed; but it did not seem to me satisfactory, for several reasons. First, the motive was insufficient—there was really nothing to conceal. When the forgeries were offered for sale, it would be obvious that someone had made them and that someone could be traced by the purchaser through the vendor. The killing of the actual maker would give no security to the man who sold the forgeries and who would have to appear in the transaction. And then, although deceased was unique as a waxworker, he was not as a copyist or electrotyper. For those purposes, much more suitable accomplices might have been found. The execution of copies by deceased appeared to be a fact; but my own feeling was that they had been a mere by-product—that they had been used as a means of introduction to deceased for some other purpose connected with waxwork.

"At the end of this stage we had made some progress. We had identified this unknown man with another unknown man, who was undoubtedly a professional criminal. We had found, in the forged guinea, a possible motive for the murder. But, as I have said, that explanation did not satisfy me, and I still kept a look-out for new evidence connected with the waxworks.

"The next stage opened on that night when you arrived at Cornish's, looking like a resuscitated 'found drowned'. Your account of your fall into the canal and the immediately antecedent events made a deep impression on me, though I did not, at the time, connect them with the crime that we were investigating. But the whole affair was so abnormal that it seemed to call for very careful consideration; and the more I considered it, the more abnormal did it appear.

"The theory of an accident could not be entertained, nor could the dropping of that derrick have been a practical joke. Your objection that no one was in sight had no weight, since there was a gate in the wall by which a person could have made his escape. Someone had attempted to murder you; and that attempt had been made immediately after you had signed a cremation certificate. That was a very impressive fact. As you know, it is my habit to look very narrowly at cremation cases, for the reason that cremation offers great facilities for certain kinds of crime. Poisoners—and particularly arsenic and antimony poisoners—have repeatedly been convicted on evidence furnished by an exhumed body. If such poisoners can get the corpse of the victim cremated, they are virtually safe; for whatever suspicions may thereafter arise, no conviction is possible, since the means of proving the administration have been destroyed.

"Accordingly, I considered very carefully your account of the proceedings, and as I did so, strong suggestions of fraud arose in all directions. There was, for instance, the inspection window in the coffin. What was its object? Inspection windows are usually provided only in cases where the condition of the body is such that it has to be enclosed in a hermetically sealed coffin. But no such condition existed in this case. There was no reason why the friends should not have viewed the body in the usual manner in an open coffin. Again, there was the curious alternation of you and the two witnesses. First they went up and viewed deceased—through the window. Then, after a considerable interval, you and Cropper went up and viewed deceased—through the window. Then you took out the body, examined it and put it back. Again, after a considerable interval, the witnesses went up a second time and viewed the deceased—through the window.

"It was all rather queer and suspicious, especially when considered in conjunction with the attempt on your life. Reflecting on the latter, the question of the gate in the wall by the canal arose in my mind, and I examined the map to see if I could locate it. It was not marked, but the wharf was; and from this and your description it appeared certain that the gate must be in the wall of the garden of Morris's house. Here was another suspicious fact. For Morris—who could have let you out by this side-gate—sent you by a long, roundabout route to the tow-path. He knew which way you must be going—westward—and could have slipped out of the gate and waited for you in the hut by the wharf. It was possible, and there seemed to be no other explanation of what had happened to you. Incidentally, I made another discovery. The map showed that Morris's house had two frontages—one on Field Street and one on Market Street—and that you appeared to have been admitted by the back entrance. Which was another slightly abnormal circumstance.

"I was very much puzzled by the affair. There was a distinct suggestion that some fraud—some deception—had been practised, that what the spinsters saw through the coffin window was not the same thing as that which you saw. And yet, what could the deception have been? There was no question about the body. It was a real body. The disease was undoubtedly genuine and was, at least, the effective cause of death. And the cremation was necessarily genuine; for though you can bury an empty coffin, you can't cremate one. The absence of calcined bone would expose the fraud instantly.

"I considered the possibility of a second body; that of a murdered person, for instance. But that would not do. For if a substitution had been effected, there would still have been a redundant body to dispose of and account for. Nothing would have been gained by the substitution.

"But there was another possibility to which no such objection applied. Assuming a fraud to have been perpetrated, here was a case adapted in the most perfect manner to the use of a waxwork. Of course, a full-length figure would have been

impossible because it would have left no calcined bones. But the inspection window would have made it unnecessary. A wax head would have done; or better still, a wax mask, which could have been simply placed over the face of the real corpse. The more I thought about it the more was I impressed by the singular suitability of the arrangements to the use of a wax mask. The inspection window seemed to be designed for the very purpose—to restrict the view to a mere face and to prevent the mask from being touched and the fraud thus discovered—and the alternate inspections by you and the spinsters were quite in keeping with a deception of that kind.

“There was another very queer feature in the case. These people, living at Hoxton, elected to employ a doctor who lived miles away at Bloomsbury. Why did they not call in a neighbouring practitioner? Also, they arranged the days and even the hours at which the visits were to be made. Why? There was an evident suggestion of something that the doctor was not to know—something or somebody that he was not desired to see, that some preparations had to be made for his visits.

“Again, the note was addressed to Dr. Stephen Gray, not to Dr. Cornish. They knew your name and address, although you had only just come there, and they did not know Dr. Cornish, who was an old resident. How was this? The only explanation seemed to be that they had read the report of the inquest, or even been present at it. You there stated publicly that your temporary address was at 61 Mecklenburgh Square; that you were, in fact, a bird of passage; and you gave your full name and your age. Now, if any fraud was being carried out, a bird of passage, who might be difficult to find later, and a young one at that, was just the most suitable kind of doctor.

“To sum up the evidence at this stage: The circumstances, taken as a whole, suggested in the strongest possible manner that there was something fraudulent about this Cremation. That fraud must be some kind of substitution or personation with the purpose of obtaining a certificate that some person had been cremated, who in fact had not been cremated. In that case it was nearly certain that the dead man was not Simon Bendelow, for the certificates would be required to agree with false appearances, not true. There was a suggestion—but only a speculative one—that the deception might have been effected by means of a wax mask.

“There were, however two objections. As to the wax mask, there was the great difficulty of obtaining one. A perfect portrait mask could have been obtained only either from an artist in Paris or from Julius D’Arblay. The objection to the substitution theory was that there was a real body—the body of a real person. If the cremation was in a name which was not the name of that person, then the disappearance of that person would remain unaccounted for.

“So you see that the whole theory of the fraud was purely conjectural. There was not a single particle of direct evidence. You also see that at two points there was a faint hint of a connexion between this case and the murder of Mr. D’Arblay. These people seemed to have read of, or attended at, the inquest, and if a wax mask existed, it was quite probably made by him.

“The next stage opens with the discovery of the mask at the studio. But there are certain antecedent matters that must first be glanced at. When the attempt was made to murder Marion, I asked myself the questions: ‘1. Why did this man want to kill Marion; 2. What did he come to the studio on the preceding night to search for? 3. Did he find it, whatever it was? 4. Why had he delayed so long to make the search?’

“Let us begin with the second question. What had he come to look for? The obvious suggestion was that he had come to get possession of some incriminating object. But what was that object? Could it be the mould of some forged coin or medal? I did not believe that it was. For since the forgery or forgeries were extant, the moulds had no particular significance; and what little significance they had, applied to Mr. D’Arblay, who was, technically, the forger. My feeling was that the object was in some way connected with waxwork, and in all probability with a wax portrait mask, as the most likely thing to be used for a fraudulent purpose. And I need hardly say that the cremation case lurked in the back of my mind.

“This view was supported by consideration of the third question. Did he find what he came to seek? If he came for moulds of coins or medals, he must have found them, for none remained. But the fact that he came the next night and attempted to murder Marion—believing her to be alone—suggested that his search had failed. And consideration of the fourth question led—less decisively—to the same conclusion as to the nature of the object sought.

“Why had he waited all this time to make the search? Why had he not entered the studio immediately after the murder, when the place was mostly unoccupied? The most probable explanation appeared to me to be that he had only recently become aware that there was any incriminating object in existence. Proceeding on the hypothesis that he had commissioned Mr. D’Arblay to make a wax portrait mask, I further assumed that he knew little of the process, and—perhaps misunderstanding Mr. D’Arblay—confused the technique of wax with that of plaster. In making a plaster mask from life—as you probably know by this time—you have to destroy the mould to get the mask out. So when the mask has been delivered to the client, there is nothing left.

“But to make a wax mask, you must first make one of plaster to serve as a matrix from which to make the gelatine mould for the wax. Then, when the wax mask has been delivered to the client, the plaster matrix remains in the possession of the artist.

“The suggestion, then, was that this man had supposed that the mould had been destroyed in making the mask, and that only some time after the murder had he, in some way, discovered his mistake. When he did discover it, he would see what an appalling blunder he had made; for the plaster matrix was the likeness of his own face.

“You see that all this was highly speculative. It was all hypothetical and it might all have been totally fallacious. We still had not a single solid fact; but all the hypothetical matter was consistent, and each inference seemed to support the

others.”

“And what,” I asked, “did you suppose was his motive for trying to make away with Marion?”

“In the first place,” he replied, “I inferred that he looked on her as a dangerous person who might have some knowledge of his transactions with her father. This was probably the explanation of his attempt when he cut the brake-wire of her bicycle. But the second, more desperate attack, was made, I assume, when he had realized the existence of the plaster mask, and supposed that she knew of it, too. If he had killed her, he would probably have made another search with the studio fully lighted up.

“To return to our inquiry. You see that I had a mass of hypothesis but not a single real fact. But I still had a firm belief that a wax mask had been made and that—if it had not been destroyed—there must be a plaster mask somewhere in the studio. That was what I came to look for that morning; and as it happens that I am some six inches taller than Bendelow was, I was able to see what had been invisible to him. When I discovered that mask, and when Marion had disclaimed all knowledge of it, my hopes began to rise. But when you identified the face as that of Morris, I felt that our problem was solved. In an instant my card-house of speculative hypothesis was changed into a solid edifice. What had been but bare possibilities had now become so highly probable that they were almost certainties.

“Let us consider what the finding of this mask proved—subject, of course, to verification. It proved that a wax mask of Morris had been made—for here was the matrix, varnished, as you will remember, in readiness for the gelatine mould; and that mask was obviously obtained for the purpose of a fraudulent cremation. And that mask was made by Julius D’Arblay.

“What was the purpose of the fraud? It was perfectly obvious. Morris was clearly the real Simon Bendelow, and the purpose of the fraud was to create undeniable evidence that he was dead. But why did he want to prove that he was dead? Well, we knew that he was the murderer of Van Zellen, for whom the American police were searching, and he might be in more danger than we knew. At any rate, a death-certificate would make him absolutely secure—on one condition: that the body was cremated. Mere burial would not be enough; for an exhumation would discover the fraud. But perfect security could be secured only by destruction of all evidence of the fraud. Julius D’Arblay held such evidence. Therefore Julius D’Arblay must be got rid of. Here, then, was an amply sufficient motive for the murder. The only point which remained obscure was the identity of your patient and the means by which his disappearance had been accounted for.

“My hypothesis, then, had been changed into highly probable theory. The next stage was the necessary verification. I began with a rather curious experiment. The man who tried to murder Marion could have been no other than her father’s murderer. Then he must have been Morris. But it seemed that he was totally unlike Morris, and the mask evidently suggested to her no resemblance. But yet it was probable that the man was Morris, for the striking features—the hook nose and the heavy brows—would be easily ‘made up’, especially at night. The question was whether the face was Morris’s with these additions. I determined to put that question to the test. And here Polton’s new accomplishment came to our aid.

“First, with a pinch of clay, we built up on Morris’s mask a nose of the shape described and slightly thickened the brows. Then Polton made a gelatine mould and from this produced a wax mask. He fitted it with glass eyes and attached it to a rough plaster head, with ears which were casts of my own painted. We then fixed on a moustache, beard and wig, and put on a shirt, collar and jacket. It was an extraordinarily crude affair, suggestive of the fifth of November. But it answered the purpose, which was to produce a photograph; for we made the photograph so bad—so confused and ill-focused—that the crudities disappeared, while the essential likeness remained. As you know, that photograph was instantly recognized, without any sort of suggestion. So the first test gave a positive result. Marion’s assailant was pretty certainly Morris.”

“I should like to have seen Mr. Polton’s prentice effort,” said Marion, who had been listening, enthralled by this description.

“You shall see it now,” Thorndyke replied with a smile. “It is in the next room, concealed in a cupboard.”

He went out, and presently returned, carrying what looked like an excessively crude hair-dresser’s dummy, but a most extraordinarily horrible and repulsive one. As he turned the face towards us, Marion gave a little cry of horror and then tried to laugh—without very striking success.

“It is a dreadful-looking thing!” she exclaimed, “and so hideously like that fiend.” She gazed at it with the most extreme repugnance for a while and then said, apologetically: “I hope you won’t think me very silly, but—”

“Of course I don’t,” Thorndyke interrupted. “It is going back to its cupboard at once,” and with this he bore it away, returning in a few moments with a smaller object, wrapped in a cloth, which he laid on the table. “Another ‘exhibit’, as they say in the courts,” he explained, “which we shall want presently. Meanwhile we resume the thread of our argument.”

“The photograph of this waxwork, then, furnished corroboration of the theory that Morris was the man whom we were seeking. My next move was to inquire at Scotland Yard if there were any fresh developments of the Van Zellen case. The answer was that there were; and Superintendent Miller arranged to come and tell me all about them. You were present at the interview and will remember what passed. His information was highly important, not only by confirming my inference that Bendelow was the murderer, but especially by disposing of the difficulty connected with the disappearance of your patient. For now there came into view a second man—Crile—who had died at Hoxton of an abdominal cancer and had been duly buried; and when you were able to give me this man’s address, a glance at the map and at the Post Office Directory showed that the two men had died in the same house. This fact, with the farther facts that they had died of virtually the same disease and within a day or two of the same date, left no reasonable doubt that we were really dealing with one man

who had died and for whom two death certificates, in different names, and two corresponding burial orders had been obtained. There was only one body, and that was cremated in the name of Bendelow. It followed that the coffin which was buried at Mr. Crile's funeral must have been an empty coffin. I was so confident that this must be so that I induced Miller to apply for an exhumation, with the results that you know.

"There now remained only a single point requiring verification: the question as to what face it was that those two ladies saw when they looked into the coffin of Simon Bendelow. Here again Polton's new accomplishment came to our aid. From the plaster mask your apprentice made a most realistic wax mask, which I offer for your critical inspection."

He unfolded the cloth and produced a mask of thin, yellowish wax and of a most cadaverous aspect, which he handed to Marion.

"Yes," she said approvingly, "it is an excellent piece of work; and what beautiful eyelashes. They look exactly like real ones."

"They are real ones," Thorndyke explained with a chuckle.

She looked up at him inquiringly, and then, breaking into a ripple of laughter, exclaimed: "Of course! They are his own! Oh! how like Mr. Polton! But he was quite right, you know. He couldn't have got the effect any other way."

"So he declared," said Thorndyke. "Well, we hired a coffin and had an inspection window put in the lid, and we got a black skull-cap. We put a dummy head in the coffin with a wig on it; we laid the mask where the face should have been and we adjusted the jaw-bandage and the skull-cap so as to cover up the edges of the mask, and we got the two ladies here and showed them the coffin. When they had identified the tenant as Mr. Bendelow, the verification was complete, the hypothesis was now converted into ascertained fact, and all that remained to be done was to lay hands on the murderer."

"How did you find out where Morris was living?" I asked.

"Barber did that," he replied. "When I learned that you were being stalked, I employed Barber to shadow you. He, of course, observed Morris on your track and followed him home."

"That was what I supposed," said I; and for a while we were all silent. Presently Marion said: "It is all very involved and confusing. Would you mind telling us exactly what happened?"

"In a direct narrative, you mean?" said he. "Yes; I will try to reconstruct the events in the order of their occurrence. It began with the murder of Van Zellen by Bendelow. There was no evidence against him at the time, but he had to fly from America for other reasons and he left behind him incriminating traces which he knew must presently be discovered and which would fix the murder on him. His friend Crile, who fled with him, developed gastric cancer and only had a month or two to live. Then Bendelow decided that when Crile should die, he would make believe to die at that same time. To this end, he commissioned your father to make a wax mask—a portrait mask of himself with his eyes closed. His wife must then have persuaded the two spinsters to visit him—he, of course, taking to his bed when they called and being represented as a mortally sick man. Then they moved from Hornsey to Hoxton, taking Crile with him. There he engaged two doctors—Usher and Gray, both of whom lived at a distance—to attend Crile and to visit him on alternate days. Crile seems to have been deaf, or at least, hard of hearing, and was kept continuously under the influence of morphia. Usher, who was employed by Mrs. Bendelow—whom he knew as Mrs. Pepper—came to the front of the house in Field Street to visit Mr. Crile, while Stephen, who was employed by the Bendelows—whom he knew by the name of Morris—entered at the rear of the house in Market Street to visit the same man under the name of Bendelow. About the time of the move, Bendelow committed the murder in order to destroy all evidence of the making of the wax mask.

"Eventually Crile died—or was finished off with an extra dose of morphia—on a Thursday. Usher gave the certificate and the funeral took place on the Saturday. But previously—probably on the Friday night—the coffin-lid was unscrewed by Bendelow, the body taken out and replaced by a sack of sawdust with some lead pipe in it.

"On the Monday the body was again produced; this time as that of Simon Bendelow, who was represented as having died on the Sunday afternoon. It was put in a cremation coffin with a celluloid window in the lid. The wax mask was placed over the face; the jaw-bandage and the skull-cap adjusted to hide the place where the wax face joined the real face; and the two spinsters were brought up to see Mr. Bendelow in his coffin. They looked in through the window and, of course, saw the wax mask of Bendelow. Then they retired. The coffin-lid was taken off, the wax mask removed, the coffin-lid screwed on again, and then the two doctors were brought up. They removed the body from the coffin, examined it and put it back; and Bendelow—or Morris—put on the coffin-lid.

"As soon as the doctors were gone, the coffin-lid was taken off again, the wax mask was put back and adjusted and the coffin-lid replaced and screwed down finally. Then the two ladies were brought up again to take a last look at poor Mr. Bendelow; not actually the last look, for, at the funeral, they peeped in at the window and saw the wax face just before the coffin was passed through into the crematorium."

"It was a diabolically clever scheme," said I.

"It was," he agreed. "It was perfectly convincing and consistent. If you and those two ladies had been put in the witness-box, your testimony and theirs would have been in complete agreement. They had seen Simon Bendelow (whom they knew quite well) in his coffin. A few minutes later, you had seen Simon Bendelow in his coffin, had taken the body out, examined it thoroughly and put it back, and had seen the coffin-lid screwed down; and again a few minutes later they had looked in through the coffin-window and had again seen Simon Bendelow. The evidence would appear to be beyond the possibility of

a doubt. Simon Bendelow was proved conclusively to be dead and cremated and was doubly certified to have died from natural causes. Nothing could be more complete.

“And yet,” he continued, after a pause, “while we are impressed by the astonishing subtlety and ingenuity displayed, we are almost more impressed by the fundamental stupidity exhibited along with it—a stupidity that seems to be characteristic of this type of criminal. For all the security that was gained by one part of the scheme was destroyed by the idiotic efforts to guard against dangers that had no existence. The murder was not only a foul crime; it was a tactical blunder of the most elementary kind. But for that murder, Bendelow would now be alive and in unchallenged security. The cremation scheme was completely successful. It deceived everybody. Even the two detectives, though they felt vague suspicions, saw no loophole. They had to accept the appearances at their face value.

“But it was the old story. The wrong-doer could not keep quiet. He must be for ever making himself safer and yet more safe. At each move he laid down fresh tracks. And so, in the end, he delivered himself into our hands.”

He paused and for a while seemed to be absorbed in reflection on what he had been telling us. Presently he looked up, and, addressing Marion, said in quiet, grave tones:

“We have ended our quest and we have secured retribution. Justice was beyond our reach; for complete justice implies restitution; and to attain that, the dead must have been recalled from beyond the grave. But, at least sometimes, out of evil cometh good. Surely it will seem to you when, in the happy years which I trust and confidently believe lie before you, your thoughts turn back to the days of your mourning and grief, that the beloved father, who, when living, made your happiness his chief concern, even in dying bequeathed to you a blessing.”

---

THE END



**A CERTAIN DOCTOR**  
**BOOK I. — THE ISHMAELITE**  
**I. — THE FUGITIVE**

THE tropic moon shone brightly on the village of Adaffia in the Bight of Benin as a fishing-canoe steered warily through the relatively quiet surf of the dry season towards the steep beach. Out in the roadstead an anchored barque stood up sharply against the moonlit sky, the yellow spark of her riding light glimmering warmly, and a white shape dimly discernible in the approaching canoe hinted of a visitor from the sea. Soon the little craft, hidden for a while in the white smother of a breaking wave, emerged triumphant and pushed her pointed nose up the beach; the occupants leaped out and, seizing her by her inturned gunwales, hauled her forthwith out of reach of the following wave.

"You know where to go?" the Englishman demanded, turning a grim, hatchet face towards the 'headman'. "Don't take me to the wrong house."

The headman grinned. "Only one white man live for Adaffia. Me sabby him proper." He twisted a rag of cotton cloth into a kind of turban, clapped it on his woolly pate and, poising on top a battered cabin-trunk, strode off easily across the waste of blown sand that separated the beach from a forest of coconut palms that hid the village. The Englishman followed less easily, his shod feet sinking into the loose sand; and as he went, he peered with a stranger's curiosity along the deserted beach and into the solemn gloom beneath the palms, whence came the rhythmical clamour of drums and the sound of many voices joining in a strange, monotonous chant.

Through the ghostly colonnade of palm trunks, out into the narrow, tortuous alleys that served for streets, between rows of mud-built hovels roofed with unkempt grass thatch, where all was inky blackness in the shadow and silvery grey in the light, the stranger followed his guide; and ever the noise of the drums and the melancholy chant drew nearer. Suddenly the two men emerged from an alley into a large open space and in an instant passed from the stillness of the empty streets into a scene of the strangest bustle and uproar. In the middle of the space was a group of men, seated on low stools, who held between their knees drums of various sizes, which they were beating noisily, though by no means unskillfully, some with crooked sticks, others with the flat of the hand. Around the musicians a circle of dancers moved in an endless procession, the men and the women forming separate groups; and while the former danced furiously, writhing with starting muscles and streaming skins, in gestures grotesque and obscene, the latter undulated languorously with half-closed eyes and rhythmically moving arms.

The Englishman had halted in the black shadow to look on at this singular scene and to listen to the strange chant that rang out at intervals from dancers and spectators alike, when his guide touched him on the arm and pointed.

"Look, Mastah!" said he; "dem white man live. You look um?"

The stranger looked over the heads of the dancers, and, sure enough, in the very midst of the revellers, he espied a fellow-countryman seated on a green-painted gin-case, the sides of which he was pounding with his fists in unsuccessful emulation of the drummers. He was not a spectacle to engender undue pride of race. To begin with, he was obviously drunk, and as he drummed on the case and bellowed discordantly at intervals, he was not dignified. Perhaps to be drunk and dignified at one and the same time is not easy, and assuredly the task is made no easier by a costume consisting of a suit of ragged pyjamas, the legs tucked into scarlet socks, gaudy carpet slippers, and a skullcap of plaited grass. But such was the garb of this representative of a superior race, and the final touch was given to a raffish ensemble by an unlit cigar that wagged from the corner of his mouth.

The stranger stood for a minute or more watching, in silence and with grim disapproval, this unedifying spectacle, when a sudden interruption occurred. One of the dancers, a big, powerful ruffian, in giving an extra flourish to his performance, struck his foot against the gin-case and staggered on to the seated white man, who, with a loud, foolish laugh, caught him playfully by the ankle. As a result, the big negro toppled over and fell sprawling amongst the drummers. In an instant all was confusion and uproar. The drummers pummelled the fallen man, the women howled, the men shouted, and the drunken white man yelled with idiotic laughter. Then the big negro leaped to his feet with a roar of fury, and rushing at the white man, closed with him. The gin-case turned turtle at the first onset, the two combatants flew off gyrating amongst the legs of the crowd, mowing down a little lane as they went; and for some moments nothing could be distinguished save a miscellaneous heap of black bodies and limbs with a pair of carpet slippers kicking wildly in the air. But the white man, if lacking in dignity and discretion, was not deficient in valour. He was soon on his feet and hitting out right and left with uncommon liveliness and spirit. This, however, could not, and did not, last long; a simultaneous rush of angry negroes soon bore him to the ground and there seemed every prospect of his being very severely mauled.

It was at this moment that the stranger abandoned his role of a neutral spectator. Taking off his helmet and depositing it carefully in the angle of a mud wall, he lowered his head, thrust forward his shoulder, and charged heavily into the midst of the shouting mob. Now, the Slave Coast native is a sturdy, courageous fellow and truculent withal; but he does not play the Rugby game and he is a stranger alike to the subtler aspects of pugilism and the gentle art of ju-jitsu. Consequently the tactics of the new assailant created quite a sensation among the Adaffia men. Their heels flew up unaccountably, their heads banged together from unknown causes, mysterious thumps, proceeding from nowhere in particular with the weight of a pile-monkey, stretched them gasping on the earth; and when they would have replied in kind, behold! the enemy was not there! They rushed at him with outstretched hands and straightway fell upon their stomachs; they grabbed at his head

and caught nothing but a pain in the shoulder or a tap under the chin; and the sledge hammer blow that was to have annihilated him either spent itself on empty air or, impinging upon the countenance of an ally, led to misunderstanding and confusion. Hampered by their own numbers and baffled by the incredible quickness of their elusive adversary, they began to view his strange manoeuvres as feats of magic. The fire of battle died down, giving place to doubt, bewilderment, and superstitious fear. The space widened round the white, silent, swiftly-moving figure; the more faint-hearted made off with their hands clapped to their mouths, screeching forth the hideous Efé alarm cry; the panic spread, and the remainder first backed away and then fairly broke into a run. A minute later the place was deserted save or the two Europeans and the headman.

The stranger had pursued the retreating mob for some distance, tripping up the stragglers or accelerating their movements by vigorous hammerings from behind, and he now returned, straightening out his drill jacket and dusting the grimy sand from his pipe-clayed shoes with a silk handkerchief. The other white man had by this time returned to the gin-case, on which he was once more enthroned with one of the abandoned drums between his knees, and, as his compatriot approached, he executed a martial roll and would have burst into song but that the cigar, which had been driven into his mouth during the conflict, now dropped into his throat and reduced him temporarily to the verge of suffocation.

"Many thanks, dear chappie," said he, when he had removed the obstruction; "moral s'pport most valuable; uphold dignity of white man; congratulate you on your style; do credit to Richardsons. Excuse my not rising; reasons excellent; will appear when I do." In fact his clothing had suffered severely in the combat.

The stranger looked down at the seated figure silently and with tolerant contempt. A stern-faced, grim-looking man was this new-comer, heavy-browed, square-jawed, and hatchet-faced, and his high-shouldered, powerful figure set itself in a characteristic pose, with the feet wide apart and the hands clasped behind the back as he stood looking down on his new acquaintance.

"I suppose," he said, at length, "you realize that you're as drunk as an owl?"

"I s'pected it," returned the other gravely. "Not's an owl, though; owls very temp'rate in these parts."

At this moment the headman rose from the cabin-trunk, on which he had seated himself to view the conflict, and, picking up the stranger's helmet, brought it to him.

"Mastah," said he, earnestly, "you go for house one time. Dis place no good. Dem people be angry too much; he go fetch gun."

"You hear that?" said the stranger. "You'd better clear off home."

"Ver' well, dear boy," replied the other, suavely. "Call hansom; we'll both go."

"Whereabouts do you live?" demanded the stranger.

The other man looked up with a bland smile. "Grosvenor Square, ol' fellow, A1; brass knocker 'stinguishers on doorstep. Tell cabby knock three times and ring bottom bell." He picked up the cigar and began carefully to wipe the sand from it.

"Do you know where he lives?" asked the stranger, turning to the headman.

"Yass; me sabby. He live for factory. You make him come one time, Mastah. You hear dat?"

The sound of the strange and dismal Efé alarm cry (produced by shouting or screaming continuously and patting the mouth quickly with the flat of the hand) was borne down from the farther end of the village. The headman caught up the trunk and started off up the street, while the stranger, having hoisted the seated man off the gin-case with such energy that he staggered round in a half-circle, grasped him from behind by both arms and urged him forward at a brisk trot.

"Here, I say!" protested the latter, "nosso fast, d'ye hear? I've dropped my slipper. Lemme pick up my slipper."

To these protests the stranger paid no attention, but continued to hustle his captive forward with undiminished energy.

"Lemme go, confound you! You're shaking me all to bits!" exclaimed the captive; and, as the other continued to shove silently, he continued: "Now I un'stand why you boosted those niggers so neatly. You're a bobby, that's what you are. I know the professional touch. A blooming escaped bobby. Well, I'm jiggered!" He lapsed, after this, into gloomy silence, and a few minutes' more rapid travelling brought the party to a high palm-leaf fence. A primitive gate was unfastened, by the simple process of withdrawing a skewer from a loop of cord, and they entered a compound in the middle of which stood a long, low house. The latter was mud-built and thatched with grass like the houses in the village, from which, indeed, it differed only in that its mud walls were whitewashed and pierced for several windows.

"Lemme welcome you to my humble cot," said the proprietor, following the headman, who had unceremoniously walked into the house and dumped down the cabin-trunk. The stranger entered a small, untidy room lighted by a hurricane-lamp, and, having dismissed the headman with a substantial 'dash', or present, turned to face his host.

"Siddown," said the latter, dropping into a dilapidated Madeira chair and waving his hand towards another. "Less' have a talk. Don't know your name, but you seem to be a decent feller—for a bobby. My name's Larkom, John Larkom, agent for Foster Brothers. This is Fosters' factory."

The stranger looked curiously round the room—so little suggestive of a factory in the European sense—and then, as he seated himself, said: "You probably know me by name: I am John Walker, of whom you have—"

He was interrupted by a screech of laughter from Larkom, who flung himself back in his chair with such violence as to bring that piece of furniture to the verge of dissolution.

"Johnny Walker!" he howled. "My immortal scissors! Sh'd think I do know you; more senses than one. I've got a letter about you—I'll show it to you. Where is that blamed letter?" He dragged out a table-drawer and rooted among a litter of papers, from which he at length extracted a crumpled sheet of paper. "Here we are. Letter from Hepburn. You 'member Hepburn? He and I at Oxford together. Merton, y'know. Less see what he says. Ah! here you are; I'll read it: 'And now I want you to do me a little favour. You will receive a visit from a pal of mine who, in consequence of certain little indiscretions, is for the moment under a cloud, and I want you, if you can, to put him up and keep him out of sight. His fame I am not permitted to disclose, since being, as I have said, 'sub nube', just at present, and consequently not in search of fame or notoriety he elects to travel under the modest and appropriate name of Walker.'" At this point Larkom once more burst into a screech of laughter. "Funny devil, Hepburn! awful rum devil," he mumbled, leering idiotically at the letter that shook in his hand; then, wiping his eyes on the gaudy 'trade' tablecloth, he resumed his reading. "'He need not cause you any inconvenience, and you won't mind his company as he is quite a decent fellow—he entered at Merton just after you went down—and he won't be any expense to you; in fact, with judicious management, he may be made to yield a profit, since he will have some money with him and is, between ourselves, somewhat of a mug.' Rum devil, awful rum devil," sniggered Larkom. "Doncher think so?" he added, grinning foolishly in the other man's face.

"Very," replied the stranger, stolidly. But he did not look particularly amused.

"I think that is all I have to tell you," Larkom continued, reading from the letter. "'I hope you will be able to put the poor devil up, and, by the way, you need not let on that I have told you about his little misfortunes.'" Larkom looked up with a ridiculous air of vexation. "There now," he exclaimed, "I've given old Hepburn away like a silly fool. But no, it was he that was a silly fool. He shouldn't have told me."

"No, he should not," agreed Walker.

"Course not," said Larkom with drunken gravity. "Breach o' confidence. However, 's all right. 'Pend on me. Close as a lock-jawed oyster. What'll you drink?"

He waved his hand towards the table, on which a plate of limes, a stone gin jar, a bottle of bitters with a quill stuck through the cork, and a swizzle-stick, stained purple by long service, invited to conviviality.

"Have a cocktail," said Larkom. "Wine of the country. Good old swizzle-stick. I'll mix it. Or p'rhaps," he sniggered, slyly, "p'raps you'd rather have a drop of Johnny Walker—ha! ha! Hallo! Here they are. D'ye hear 'em?" A confused noise of angry voices was audible outside the compound and isolated shouts separated themselves now and again from the general hubbub.

"They're callin' us names," chuckled Larkom. "Good thing you don't un'stand the language. The nigger can be rude. Personal abuse as a fine art. Have a cocktail."

"Hadn't I better go out and send them about their business?" asked Walker.

"Lor' bless you, they haven't got any business," was the reply. "No, siddown. Lerrum alone and they'll go home. Have a cocktail." He compounded one for himself, swizzling up the pink mixture with deliberate care and pouring it down his throat with the skill of a juggler; and when Walker had declined the refreshment and lit his pipe, the pair sat and listened to the threats and challenges from the outer darkness. The attitude of masterly inactivity was justified by its results, for the noise subsided by degrees, and presently the rumble of drums and the sound of chanting voices told them that the interrupted revels had been resumed.

After the third application to the stone bottle Larkom began to grow sleepy and subsided into silence, broken at intervals by an abortive snore. Walker meanwhile smoked his pipe and regarded his host with an air of gloomy meditation. At length, as the latter became more and more somnolent, he ventured to rouse him up.

"You haven't said what you are going to do, Larkom," said he. "Are you going to put me up for a time?"

Larkom sat up in the squeaking chair and stared at him owlshly. "Put you up, ol' f'ler?" said he. "Lor bless you, yes. Wodjer think? Bed been ready for you for mor'n a week. Come'n look at it. Gettin' dam late. Less' turn in." He took up the lamp and walked with unsteady steps through a doorway into a small, bare room, the whitewashed walls of which were tastefully decorated with the mud-built nests of solitary wasps. It contained two bedsteads, each fitted with a mosquito net and furnished with a mattress, composed of bundles of rushes lashed together, and covered with a grass mat.

"Thash your doss, ol' f'ler," said Larkom, placing the lamp on the packing-case that served for a table, "this is mine. Goo' night!" He lifted the mosquito-curtain, crept inside, tucked the curtain under the mattress, and forthwith began to snore softly.

Walker fetched in his trunk from the outer room, and, as he exchanged his drill clothes (which he folded carefully as he removed them) for a suit of pyjamas, he looked curiously round the room. A huge, hairy spider was spread out on the wall as if displayed in a collector's cabinet, and above him a brown cockroach of colossal proportions twirled his long antennae thoughtfully. The low, bumpy ceiling formed a promenade for two pallid, goggle-eyed lizards, who strolled about, defiant of the laws of gravity, picking up an occasional moth or soft-shelled beetle as they went. When he was half undressed an enormous fruit-bat, with a head like that of a fox-terrier, blundered in through the open window and flopped about the room in noisy panic for several minutes before it could find its way out again.

At length he put out the lamp, and creeping inside his curtain, tucked it in securely; and soon, despite the hollow boom of the surf, the whistle of multitudinous bats, the piping of the mosquitoes, and the sounds of revelry from the village, he fell asleep and slept until the sun streamed in on to the whitewashed wall.



## II. — THE LEGATEE

LARKOM appeared to have that tolerance of alcohol that is often to be observed in the confirmed soaker. As he sat with his guest in the living-room, taking his early tea, although he looked frail and broken in health, there was nothing in his appearance to suggest that he had quite recently been very drunk. Nor, on the other hand, was his manner very different from that of the previous night, save that his articulation and his wits were both clearer.

"What made you pick out this particular health-resort for your little holiday?" he asked. "It isn't what you would call a fashionable watering-place."

"No," replied Walker. "That was the attraction. I had heard about you from Hepburn—he is my brother-in-law, you know—and as it seemed, from what he said, that your abode was on the very outside edge of the world, I marked it down as a good place to disappear in."

Larkom grinned. "You are not a bad judge, old chappie. Disappearing is our speciality. We are famous for it. Always have been. How does the old mariners' ditty run? You remember it? 'Oh, the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Benin, One comes out where three go in.' But perhaps that wasn't exactly what was in your mind?"

"It wasn't. I could have managed that sort of disappearance without coming so far. But look here, Larkom, let us have a clear understanding. I came here on spec, not having much time to make arrangements, on the chance that you might be willing to put me up and give me a job. But I haven't come to fasten on to you. If my presence here will be in any way a hindrance to you, you've only got to say so and I will move on. And I shan't take it as unfriendly. I quite understand that you have your principals to consider."

"Principals be blowed!" said Larkom. "They don't come into it; and as to me, I can assure you, J. W., that this is the first stroke of luck I've had for years. After vegetating in this God-forgotten hole with nobody but buck-niggers to speak to, you can imagine what it is to me to have a pukka white man—and a gentleman at that—under my roof. I feel like chanting 'Domine, non sum dignus'; but if you can put up with me, stay as long as you care to, and understand that you are doing me a favour by staying."

"It is very handsome of you, Larkom, to put it in that way," said Walker, a little huskily. "Of course, I understand the position and I accept your offer gratefully. But we must put the arrangement on a business footing. I'm not going to sponge on you. I must pay my share of the expenses, and if I can give you any help in working the factory—"

"Don't you be afraid, old chappie," interrupted Larkom. "I'll keep your nose on the grindstone; and as to sharing up, we can see to that later when we cast up the accounts. As soon as we have lapped up our tea, we will go out to the store and I will show you the ropes. They aren't very complicated, though they are in a bit of a tangle just now. But that is where you will come in, dear boy."

Larkom's statement as to the 'tangle' was certainly no exaggeration. The spectacle of muddle and disorder that the store presented filled Walker at once with joy and exasperation. After a brief tour of the premises, during which he listened in grim silence to Larkom's explanations, he deliberately peeled off his jacket—which he folded up neatly and put in a place of safety—and fell to work on the shelves and lockers with a concentrated energy that reduced the native helper to gibbering astonishment and Larkom to indulgent sniggers.

"Don't overdo it, old chap," the latter admonished. "Remember the climate. And there's no hurry. Plenty of spare time in these parts. Leave yourself a bit for to-morrow." To all of which advice Walker paid no attention whatever, but slogged away at the confused raffle of stock-in-trade without a pause until close upon noon, when the cook came out to announce that "chop live for table." And even this was but a temporary pause; for soon after breakfast—or tiffin, as the Anglo-Indian calls it—when Larkom showed a tendency to doze in his chair with a tumbler of gin toddy, he stole away to renew his onslaught while the native assistant attended to the 'trade'.

During the next few days he was kept pretty fully occupied. Not that there was much business doing at the factory, but Larkom's hand having become of late so tremulous that writing was impossible, the posting of books and answering of letters had automatically ceased.

"You're a perfect godsend to me, old chappie," said Larkom, when, by dint of two days' continuous labour, the books had been brought up to date, and Walker attacked the arrears of correspondence. "The firm wouldn't have stood it much longer. They've complained of my handwriting already. If you hadn't come I should have got the order of the boot to a certainty. Now they'll think I've got a native clerk from somewhere at my own expense."

"How about the signature?" Walker asked. "Can you manage that?"

"That's all right, dear boy," said Larkom cheerfully. "You sign slowly while I kick the table. They'll never twig the difference."

By means of this novel aid to calligraphy the letter was completed and duly dispatched by a messenger to catch the land post at Quittah. Then Walker had leisure to look about him and study the methods of West Coast trade and the manners and customs of his host. Larkom sober was not very different from Larkom drunk—amiable, easy-going, irresponsible, and only a little less cheerful. Perhaps he was better drunk. At any rate, that was his own opinion, and he acted up to it consistently. What would have happened had there had been any appreciable trade at Adaffia it is impossible to guess. As it

was, the traffic was never beyond the capacity of Larkom even at his drunkest. Once or twice during the day a party of bush natives would stroll into the compound with a demijohn of palm oil or a calabash full of kernels, or a man from a neighbouring village would bring in a bushel or so of copra, and then the premises would hum with business. The demijohn would be emptied into a puncheon or the kernels stowed in bags ready for shipment, and the vendors would receive their little dole of threepenny pieces—the ordinary currency of the coast. Then the vendors would change into purchasers. A length of baft or calico, a long flint-lock gun with red-painted stock, a keg of powder, or a case of gin would replace the produce they had brought; the threepenny pieces would drift back into the chest whence they had come, and the deal would be completed.

At these functions Walker, owing to his ignorance of the language, appeared chiefly in the role of onlooker, though he took a hand at the scales, when he was about, and helped to fill the canvas bags with kernels. But he found plenty of time to wander about the village and acknowledge the appreciative grins of the men whom he had hammered on the night of his arrival or the courteous salutations of the women. Frequently in the afternoons he would stroll out to sit on the dry sand at high-water mark and, as the feathery leaves of the sea-washed palms pattered above him in the breeze, would gaze wistfully across the blue and empty ocean. One day a homeward-bound steamer came into the bay to anchor in Quittah roads; and then his gaze grew more wistful and the stern face softened into sadness.

Presently Larkom hove in sight under the palms, carolling huskily and filling a gaudy trade pipe. He came and sat down by Walker, and having struck some two dozen Swedish matches without producing a single spark, gazed solemnly at the steamer.

"Yellow funnel boat," he observed; "that'll be the Niger, old Rattray's boat. She's going home, dear boy, home to England, where hansom cabs and green peas and fair ladies and lamb chops—."

"Oh, shut up, Larkom!" exclaimed the other, gruffly.

"Right, dear boy. Mum's the word," was the bland reply, as Larkom resumed his fruitless attack on the matches. "But there's one thing I've been going to say to you," he continued after a pause, "and it's this—confound these damstinkers; I've used up a whole box for nothing—I was going to say that you'd better not show yourself out on the beach unnecessarily. I don't know what your little affair amounts to, but I should say that, if it was worth your while to cut away from home, it's worth your while to stop away."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are still within the jurisdiction of the English courts; and if you should have been traced to the ship and you let yourself be seen, say, by any of the Germans who pass up and down from Quittah to Lomé or Bagidá, why, some fine day you may see an officer of the Gold Coast bearing down on you with a file of Hausas, and then it would be ho! for England, home, and beauty. You sabby?"

"I must take that risk," growled Walker. "I can't stay skulking in the house, and I'm not going to."

"As you please, dear boy," said Larkom. "I only mentioned the matter. Verbum sap. No offence, I hope."

"Of course not," replied Walker.

"I don't think you are in any immediate danger," pursued Larkom. "Old chief Akolatchi looked in on me just now and he tells me that there are no white officers at Quittah. The doctor died of blackwater fever two days ago, and the commissioner is sick and is off to Madeira by this steamer. Still, you had better keep your weather eyelid lifting."

"I mean to," said Walker; and knocking out his pipe on the heel of his shoe, he rose and shook the sand from his clothes.

"If you'll excuse my harping on a disagreeable topic, old chappie," said Larkom, as they strolled homewards along the beach, "I think you would be wise to take some elementary precautions."

"What sort?" asked Walker.

"Well, supposing you were traced to that barque, the Sappho, it would be easy to communicate with her skipper when she comes to her station at Half-Jack. Then they might ascertain that a gent named Johnny Walker with a golden beard and a Wellington nose had been put ashore at Adaffia. You're a fairly easy chappie to describe, with that Romanesque boko, and fairly easy to recognize from a description."

"But, damn it, Larkom! You're not suggesting that I should cut off my nose, are you?"

"God forbid, dear boy! But you might cut off your beard and drop Johnny Walker. A clean shave and a new name would make a world of difference. No native would recognize you without your beard."

"Perhaps not. But a white police officer would spot me all right. A clean shave and a different name wouldn't deceive him."

"Not if he really meant business. But the local officials here will be pretty willing to turn a blind eye. They are not keen on arresting a white man with a parcel of niggers looking on. Lowers the prestige of the race. If a constabulary officer came down here to arrest a bearded man named Walker and found only a clean-shaved covey of the name of Cook, he'd probably say that there was no one here answering the description and go back perfectly satisfied with his tongue in his cheek."

"Do you think he really would?"

"I do. At any rate, you may as well give the authorities a chance; meet 'em half-way. Don't you think so?"

"I suppose it is the reasonable thing to do. Very well, Larkom, I will take your advice and turn myself into a bald-faced stag—I noticed that you have some razors in the store. And as to the name, well, I will adopt your suggestion in that, too. 'Cook' will do as well as any other."

"Better, old chap. Distinguished name. Great man, James Cook. Circumnavigator; all round my hat."

"All the same," said Walker, alias Cook, "I fancy you are a trifle over-optimistic. If an officer were sent down here with a warrant, I think he would have to execute it if he could. He would be running a biggish risk if he let himself be bamboozled."

"Well, dear boy," replied Larkom, "you do the transformation trick and trust in Providence. It's quite likely that the local authorities will make no move; and if a G.C.C. officer should turn up and insist on mistaking James Cook for Johnny Walker, I daresay we could find some way of dealing with him."

The other man smiled grimly. "Yes," he agreed. "I don't think he'd mistake James Cook for Mary's little lamb."

As they entered the compound a quarter of an hour later, a native rose from the kernel bag on which he had been seated, and disengaging from the folds of his cloth a soiled and crumpled letter, held it out to Larkom. The latter opened it with tremulous haste and, having glanced through it quickly, emitted a long, low whistle.

"Sacked, by jiggers!" he exclaimed, and handed the letter to his guest. It was a brief document and came to the point without circumlocution. The Adaffia factory was a financial failure, "whatever it might have been under other management," and the firm hereby dispensed with Mr. Larkom's services. "But," the letter concluded, "as we are unwilling to leave a white man stranded on the Coast, we hereby make over to you, in lieu of notice, the factory and such stock as remains in it, the same to be your own property; and we hope that you will be able to carry on the trade to more advantage for yourself than you have for us."

"Devilish liberal of them," groaned Larkom, "for I've been a rotten bad servant to the firm. But I shall never make anything of it. I'm a regular waster, old chappie, and the sooner the land-crabs have me, the better it will be for everyone." He lifted the lid of a gin-case and dejectedly hoisted out a high-shouldered, square-faced Dutch bottle.

"Stop this boozing, Larkom," said Cook, late Walker. "Pull yourself together, man, and let us see if we can't make a do of it." He spoke gently enough, with his hand on the other man's shoulder, for the thought of his own wrecked life had helped him to understand. It was not the mere loss of employment that had hit Larkom so hard. It was the realization, sudden and complete, of his utter futility; of his final irrevocable failure in the battle of life.

"It's awfully good of you, old chap," he said dismally; "but I tell you, I'm beyond redemption." He paused irresolutely and then added: "However, we'll stow the lush for the present and talk things over," and he let the bottle slip back into its compartment and, shut down the lid.

But he was in no mood for talking things over, at present. The sense of utter failure appeared to have overwhelmed him completely, and, though he made no further attempt upon the gin-case that evening, his spirits seemed to sink lower and lower until, about ten o'clock, he rose from his chair and silently tottered off to bed, looking pitifully frail and broken.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when Cook awoke to the consciousness of a very singular noise. He sat up in bed to listen. A strange, quick rattle, like the chatter of a jigsaw, came from the rickety bed on which Larkom slept, and with it was mingled a confused puffing that came and went in quick gusts.

"Anything the matter, Larkom?" he asked anxiously; and then, as a broken mumble and a loud chattering of teeth came in reply, he sprang from the bed and struck a match. A single glance made everything clear. The huddled body, shaking from head to foot, the white, pinched face, the bloodless hands with blue finger-nails, clutching the scanty bed-coverings to the trembling chin, presented a picture of African fever that even a newcomer could recognize. Hastily he lit a candle, and, gathering up every rag that he could lay hands on, from his own travelling-rug to the sitting-room table-cloth, piled them on to his shivering comrade until the sick man looked like a gigantic caddis worm.

After an hour or so the violence of the shivering fit abated; gradually the colour returned to the white face until its late pallor gave place to a deep flush. The heaped coverings were thrown on the floor, the sufferer fidgeted restlessly about the bed, his breathing became hurried, and presently he began to babble at intervals. This state of affairs lasted for upwards of an hour. Then a few beads of perspiration appeared on the sick man's forehead; the chatterings and mumbings and broken snatches of song died away, and, as the parched skin broke out into dewy moisture, a look of intelligence came back to the vacant face.

"Cover me up, old chappie," said Larkom, turning over with a deep sigh. "Air strikes chilly. Thanks, old fellow; let's have the table-cloth, too. That's ripping. Now you turn in and get a bit of sleep. Sorry to have routed you up like this." He closed his eyes and at once began to doze, and Cook, creeping back to bed, lay and watched him by the light of the flickering candle. Then he, too, fell asleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, and through the open door he could see Larkom standing by the table in the sitting-room, wrapped in the rug. The Fanti cook was seated at the table and the solitary Kroo boy, who formed the staff of the factory, stood by his supplementary chair, his eyes a-goggle with curiosity.

"Now, Kwaku," Larkom was saying, "you see that pencil mark. Well, you take this pen and make a mark on top of it—so."

He handed the pen to the cook, who evidently followed the instructions, for his tongue protruded several inches, and he presently rose, wiping his brow. The Kroo boy took his place and the ceremony was repeated, after which the two natives retired grinning with pride.

"Gad, Larkom," exclaimed Cook, when he came out and joined his host; "that dose of fever has taken the starch out of you. You oughtn't to be up, surely?" He looked earnestly at his comrade, shocked at the aspect of the pitiful wreck before him and a little alarmed at the strange, greenish-yellow tint that showed through the waxen pallor of the face.

"Shan't be up long, dear boy," said Larkom. "Just setting things straight before I turn in for good. Now, just cast your eye over this document—devil of a scrawl, but I expect you can make it out." He took up a sheet of paper and handed it to Cook. The writing was so tremulous as to be almost illegible, but with difficulty Cook deciphered it; and its purport filled him with astonishment. It read thus:

"This is the last will and testament of me John Larkom of Adaffia in the Gold Coast Colony, West Africa. I give and devise all my estate and effects, real and personal, which I may die possessed of or be entitled to, unto James Cook absolutely, and I appoint him the executor of this my will.

'Dated this thirteenth day of November one thousand eight hundred and ninety-seven.

'Signed by the testator in the presence of us, who thereupon made our marks in his and each other's presence.

'JOHN LARKOM.

'Kwaku Mensah of Cape Coast. His + mark

'Pea Soup of Half-Jack. His + mark.'

"I've given you your new name, you see," Larkom explained. "Take charge of this precious document and keep that letter from the firm. Burn all other papers."

"But," exclaimed Cook, "why are you talking as if you expected to snuff out? You've had fever before, I suppose?"

"Rather," said Larkom. "But you're a new-comer; you don't sabby. I'm an old coaster, and I sabby proper. Look at that, dear boy. Do you know what that means?" He held out a shaking, lemon-coloured hand, and as his companion regarded it silently, he continued:

"That means blackwater fever; and when a Johnny like me goes in for that luxury, it's a job for the gardener. And talking of that, you'd better plant me in the far corner of the compound where the empty casks are kept, by the prickly-pea hedge; I shall be out of the way of traffic there, though graves are a damned nuisance in business premises, anyhow."

"Oh, dry up, Larkom, and get to bed," growled Cook; "and, I say, aren't there any doctors in this accursed place?"

Larkom grinned. "In the fossil state, dear boy, they are quite numerous. Otherwise scarce. The medico up at Quittah died three days ago, as I told you, and there are no others on tap just now. No good to me if they were. Remember what I've told you. Burn all papers and, when you've planted me, take over the factory and make things hum. There's a living to be made here and you'll make it. Leave the swizzle-stick alone, old chappie, and if ever you should chance to meet Hepburn again, give him my love and kick him—kick him hard. Now I'm going to turn in."

Larkom's forecast of the probable course of his illness bid fair to turn out correct. In the intervals of business—which, perversely enough, was unusually brisk on this day—Cook looked in on the invalid and at each visit found him visibly changed for the worse. The pale-lemon tint of his skin gave place to a horrible dusky yellow; his voice grew weaker and his mind more clouded, until at last he sank into a partial stupor from which it was almost impossible to rouse him. He wanted nothing, save an occasional sip of water, and nothing could be done to stay the march of the fell disease.

So the day passed on, a day of miserable suspense for Cook; the little caravans filed into the compound, the kernels and copra and knobs of rubber rolled out of the calabashes on to the ground, the oil gurgled softly into the puncheon, the bush people chattered vivaciously in the store and presently departed gleefully with their purchases; and still Larkom lay silent and apathetic and ever drawing nearer to the frontier between the known and the unknown. The evening fell, the store was locked up, the compound gate was shut, and Cook betook himself with a shaded lamp to sit by the sick man's bed.

But presently the sight of that yellow face, grown suddenly so strangely small and pinched, the sharpened nose, and the sunken eyes with the yellow gleam of the half-seen eyeballs between the lids, was more than he could bear, and he stole softly through into the sitting-room, there to continue his vigil. So hour after weary hour passed. The village sank to rest (for it was a moonless night) and the sounds that came in through the open window were those of beast and bird and insect. Bats whistled out in the darkness, cicadas and crickets chirred and chirruped, the bark of the genet and the snuffling mutter of prowling civets came from without the compound, while far away the long-drawn, melancholy cry of a hyena could be heard in the intervals of the booming surf.

And all the while the sick man slowly drew nearer to the dread frontier.

It wanted but an hour to dawn when a change came. The feeble babblings and mumblings, the little snatches of forgotten songs chanted in a weak, quavering treble, had ceased for some time, and now through the open door came a new sound—the sound of slow breathing mingled with a soft, moist rattling. The watcher rose from his chair and once again crept, lamp in hand, into the dimly-lighted room, there to stand looking down gloomily at the one friend that Fate had left him. Larkom was now unconscious and lay quite still, save the heaving chest and the rise and fall of the chin with each breath.



Cook took put down the lamp, and, sitting down, gently took the damp and chilly hand in his, while he listened, in agony at his own helplessness, to the monotonous, rattling murmur that went on and on, to and fro, like the escapement of some horrible clock.

By and by it stopped, and Cook fumbled at the tepid wrist; then, after a pause, it began again with an altered rhythm and presently paused again, and again went on; and so the weary, harrowing minutes passed, the pauses growing ever longer and the rattling murmur more and more shallow. At last there came a pause so long that Cook leaned over the bed to listen. A little whispering sigh was borne to his ear, then all was still; and when, after waiting yet several minutes more, he had reverently drawn the gaudy table-cloth over the silent figure, he went back to his chair in the sitting room, there to wait, with grim face and lonely heart, for the coming of the day.

The late afternoon sun was slanting eagerly over the palm-tops as he took his way to the far corner of the compound that faced towards the western beach. The empty barrels had been rolled away and, in the clear space, close to the low prickly-pear hedge, a smooth mound of yellow sand and a rough wooden cross marked the spot where Larkom, stitched up in sacking in lieu of a coffin, had been laid to rest. The cross had occupied most of Cook's scanty leisure since the hurried burial in the morning (for trade was still perversely brisk, despite the ragged house-flag half-mast on the little flag-pole), and he was now going to put the finishing touches to it.

It was a rude enough memorial, the upright from a board from one of the long gun-crates, and the cross-piece formed by a new barrel stave cut to the requisite length; and the lack of paint left it naked and staring.

Cook laid down on the sand a box containing his materials—a set of zinc stencil plates, used for marking barrels and cases, a stencil brush, and a pot of thin black paint—and sketched out lightly in pencil the words of the inscription:

#### **JOHN LARKOM 14TH NOVEMBER 1897**

Then he picked out a J from the set of stencil plates, dipped the brush in the pot, and made the first letter, following it in order with O, H, and N. Something in the look of the familiar name—his own name as well as Larkom's—made him pause and gaze at it thoughtfully, and his air was still meditative and abstracted as he stooped and picked up the L to commence the following word. Rising with the fresh plate in his hand, he happened to glance over the low hedge along the stretch of beach that meandered away to a distant, palm-clad headland; and then he noticed for the first time a little group of figures that stood out sharply against the yellow background. They were about half a mile distant and were evidently coming towards the village; and there was something in their appearance that caused him to examine them narrowly. Four of the figures walked together and carried some large object that he guessed to be a travelling hammock; four others straggled some little distance behind; and yet three more, who walked ahead of the hammock, seemed to carry guns or rifles on their shoulders.

Still holding the plate and brush, Cook stood motionless, watching with grim attention the approach of the little procession. On it came, at a rapid pace, each step bringing it more clearly into view. The hammock was now quite distinct and the passenger could be seen lying in the sagging cloth; eight of the figures were evidently ordinary natives while the other three were plainly black men dressed in a blue uniform, wearing red caps and carrying rifles and bayonets.

Cook stooped and dropped the plate back into the box, picking out, in place of it, a plate pierced with the letter O. Dipping his brush into the paint, he laid the plate over the pencilled L on the cross and brushed in the letter. Quietly and without hurry, he followed the O with an S, M, O, N, and D; and he had just finished the last letter when an English voice hailed him from over the hedge.

He turned and saw, a little distance away, a fresh-faced Englishman in a quiet undress uniform and a cheese-cutter cap, peering at him curiously from the top a sand-hill, at the base of which stood the group of hammockmen and the three Hausas.

"There's a gate farther down," said Cook; and, as the officer turned away, he dropped the plate that he was holding back into the box, laid down the brush, and took up a camel's-hair pencil. Dipping this into the paint-pot, he proceeded deliberately and with no little skill to write the date in small letters under the name. Presently the sound of footsteps was audible from behind. Cook continued his writing with deliberate care and the footsteps drew nearer, slowing as they approached. Close behind him they halted, and a cheery voice exclaimed: "Good Lord! What a let-off!" and then added, "Poor beggar! When did he die?"

"This morning, just before dawn," replied Cook.

"Phew!" whistled the officer. "He wasn't long getting his ticket. But, I say, how did you know his name? I thought he called himself Walker."

"So he did. But he wished his name to be put on his grave."

"Naturally," said the officer. "It's no use giving an alias at the last muster. Well, poor devil! He's had rough luck, but perhaps it's best, after all. It's certainly best for me."

"Why for you?" asked Cook.

"Because I've got a warrant in my pocket to arrest him for some trouble at home—signed the wrong cheque or something of that kind—and I wasn't very sweet on the job, as you may guess. Blood's thicker than water, you know, and the poor

chap was an English gentleman after all. However, those black devils of mine don't know what I have come for, so now nothing need be said."

"No." He looked round into the bluff, rosy face and clear blue eyes of the officer and asked: "How did you manage to run him to earth?"

"He was traced to Bristol and to the barque Sappho after she had sailed. Then the Sappho was seen from Quittah to bring up here, right off her station—she trades to Half-Jack—and, as we were on the look-out, we made inquiries and found that a white man had come ashore here. Good thing we didn't find out sooner. Well, I'll be getting back to Quittah. I've just come down with a new doctor to take over there. My name's Cockeram, assistant inspector G.C.C. You're Mr. Larkom, I suppose?"

"Won't you stop and have a cocktail?" asked Cook, ignoring the question.

"No, thanks. Don't take 'em. H<sub>2</sub>O is the drink for this country."

He touched his cap and sauntered to the gate, and Cook saw him walk slowly up and down behind the hedge, apparently gathering something. Presently he sauntered back into the compound looking a little sheepish, and, as he came, twisting some blossoming twigs of wild cotton into a kind of grommet and shelling the little 'prayer-beads' out of some Jequirity pods that he had gathered. He walked up the sandy mound and, sprinkling the scarlet seeds in the form of a cross, laid the loop of cotton-blossoms above it.

"It's a scurvy wreath," he said, gruffly, without looking at Cook, "but it's a scurvy country. So long." He walked briskly out of the compound and, flinging himself into the hammock, gave the word to march.

The other looked after him with an unwonted softening of the grim face—yet grimmer and more lean now that the beard was gone—only resuming his writing when the little procession was growing small in the distance. The date was completed now, but, dipping his brush afresh, he wrote below in still smaller letters: 'Now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.'

Then he picked up the box and went back into the house.

---

### III. — THE MUTINY ON THE *SPEEDWELL*

For a man in search of quiet and retirement, the village of Adaffia would seem to be an ideally eligible spot; especially if the man in question should happen be under a rather heavy cloud. Situated in a little known part of the Slave Coast, many miles distant from any town or settlement where white men had their abodes, it offered a haven of security to the Ishmaelite if it offered little else.

Thus reflected John Osmond, late John Walker, and now 'Mr. James Cook', if the need for a surname should arise. But hitherto it had not arisen; for, to the natives, he was simply 'the white man' or 'mastah', and no other European had passed along the coast since the day on which he had buried Larkom—and his own identity—and entered into his inheritance.

He reviewed the short interval with its tale of eventless and monotonous days as he sat smoking a thoughtful pipe in the shady coconut grove that encompassed the hamlet, letting his thoughts travel back anon to a more distant and eventful past, and all the while keeping an attentive eye on a shabby-looking brigantine that was creeping up from the south. It was not, perhaps, a very thrilling spectacle, but yet Osmond watched the approaching vessel with lively interest. For though, on that deserted coast, ships may be seen to pass up and down on the rim of the horizon, two or three, perhaps, in a month, this was the first vessel that had headed for the land since the day on which he had become the owner of the factory and the sole representative of European civilization in Adaffia. It was natural, then, that he should watch her with interest and curiosity, not only as a visitor from the world which he had left, but as one with which he was personally concerned; for if her people had business ashore, that business was pretty certainly with him.

At a distance of about a mile and a half from the shore the brigantine luffed up, fired a gun, hoisted a dirty red ensign, let go her anchor, scandalized her mainsail, lowered her head-sails, and roughly dewed up the square-sails. A fishing canoe, which had paddled out to meet her, ran alongside and presently returned shoreward with a couple of white men on board. And still Osmond made no move. Business considerations should have led him to go down to the beach and meet the white men, since they were almost certainly bound for his factory; but other considerations restrained him. The fewer white men that he met, the safer he would be: for, to the Ishmaelite, every stranger is a possible enemy or, worse still, a possible acquaintance. And then, although he felt no distaste for the ordinary trade with the natives, he did not much fancy himself standing behind a counter selling gin and tobacco to a party of British shell-backs. So he loitered under the coconuts and determined to leave the business transactions to his native assistant, Kwaku Mensah.

The canoe landed safely through the surf; the two white men stepped ashore and disappeared towards the village. Osmond refilled his pipe and walked a little farther away. Presently a file of natives appeared moving towards the shore, each carrying on his head a green-painted gin-case. Osmond counted them—there were six in all—and watched them stow the cases in the canoe. Then, suddenly, the two white men appeared, running furiously. They made straight for the canoe and jumped in; the canoe men pushed off and the little craft began to wriggle its way cautiously through the surf. And at this moment another figure made its appearance on the beach and began to make unmistakable demonstrations of hostility to the receding canoe.

Now, a man who wears a scarlet flannelette coat, green cotton trousers, yellow carpet slippers, and a gold-laced smoking-cap is not difficult to identify even at some little distance. Osmond instantly recognized his assistant and strode away to make inquiries.

There was no need to ask what was the matter. As Osmond crossed the stretch of blown sand that lay between the palm-grove and the beach, his retainer came running towards him, flourishing his arms wildly and fairly gibbering with excitement.

"Dem sailor man, sah!" he gasped, when he had come within earshot, "he dam tief, sah! He tief six case gin!"

"Do you mean that those fellows didn't pay for that gin?" Osmond demanded.

"No, sah. No pay nutting. Dey send de case down for beach and dey tell me find some country cloth. I go into store to look dem cloth, den dey run away for deir canoe. Dey no pay nutting."

"Very well, Mensah. We'll go on board and collect the money or bring back the gin. Can you get a canoe?"

"All canoe go out fishing excepting dat one," said Mensah.

"Then we must wait for that one to come back," was the reply; and Osmond seated himself on the edge of dry sand that overhung the beach and fixed a steady gaze on the dwindling canoe. Mensah sat down likewise and glanced dubiously at his grim-faced employer; but whatever doubts he had as to the wisdom of the proposed expedition, he kept them to himself. For John Osmond—like Father O'Flynn—had a 'wonderful way with him'; a way that induced unruly intruders to leave the compound hurriedly and rub themselves a good deal when they got outside. So Mensah kept his own counsel.

The canoe ran alongside the brigantine, and, having discharged its passengers and freight, put off for its return shorewards. Then a new phase in the proceedings began. The brigantine's head-sails, which lay loose on the jib-boom, began to slide up the stays; the untidy bunches of canvas aloft began to flatten out to the pull of the sheets. The brigantine, in fact, was preparing to get under way. But it was all done in a very leisurely fashion; so deliberately that the last of the square-sails was barely sheeted home when the canoe grounded on the beach.

Osmond wasted no time. While Mensah was giving the necessary explanations, he set his shoulder to the peak of the

canoe and shoved her round head to sea, regardless of the cloud of spray that burst over him.

The canoe-men were nothing loath, for the African is keenly appreciative of a humorous situation. Moreover, they had some experience of the white man's peculiar methods of persuasion and felt a natural desire to see them exercised on persons of his own colour—especially as those persons had been none too civil. Accordingly they pushed off gleefully and plunged once more into the breakers, digging their massive, trident-shaped paddles into the water to the accompaniment of those uncanny hisses, groans, and snatches of song with which the African canoe-man sweetens his labour.

Meanwhile their passenger sat in the bow of the canoe, wiping the sea water from his face and fixing a baleful glance on the brigantine, as she wallowed drunkenly on the heavy swell. Slowly the tack of the mainsail descended, and then, to a series of squeaks from the halyard-blocks, the peak of the sail rose by stow jerks. The canoe bounded forward over the great rollers, the hull of the vessel rose and began to loom large above the waters, and Osmond had just read the name '*Speedwell, Bristol*' on her broad counter, when his ear caught a new sound—the 'clink, clink' of the windlass-pawl. The anchor was being hove up.

But the canoe-men had heard the sound, too, and, with a loud groan, dug their paddles into the water with furious energy. The canoe shot forward under the swaying counter and swept alongside, the brigantine rolled over as if she would annihilate the little craft, and Osmond, grasping a chain-plate, swung himself up into the channel, whence he climbed to the bulwark rail and dropped down on the deck.

The windlass was manned by six of the crew, who bobbed up and down slowly at the ends of the long levers; a seventh man was seated on the deck, with one of the gin cases open before him, in the act of uncorking a bottle. The other five cases were ranged along by the bulwark.

"Good afternoon," said Osmond, whose arrival had been unnoticed by the preoccupied crew; "you forgot to pay for that gin."

The seated man looked up with a start, first at Osmond and then at Mensah, who now sat astride the rail in a strategic position that admitted of advance or retreat as circumstances might suggest. The clink of the windlass ceased, and the six men came sauntering aft with expectant grins.

"What are you doin' aboard this ship?" demanded the first man.

"I've come to collect my dues," replied Osmond.

"Have yer?" said the sailor. "You'll be the factory bug, I reckon?"

"I'm the owner of that gin."

"Now that's where you make a mistake, young feller. I'm the owner of this here gin."

"Then you've got to pay me one pound four."

The sailor set the bottle down on the deck and rose to his feet.

"Look here, young feller," said he, "I'm goin' to give you a valuable tip—gratis. You git overboard. Sharp. D'ye hear?"

"I want one pound four," said Osmond, in a misleadingly quiet tone.

"Pitch 'im overboard, Dhooty," one of the other sailors counselled. "Send 'im for a swim, mate."

"I'm a-goin' to," said Dhooty, "if he don't clear out," and he began to advance, crabwise, across the deck in the manner of a wrestler attacking.

Osmond stood motionless in a characteristic attitude, with his long legs wide apart, his hands clasped behind him, his gaunt shoulders hunched up, and his chin thrust forward, swaying regularly to the heave of the deck, and with his grim, hatchet face turned impassively towards his adversary, presented a decidedly uninviting aspect. Perhaps Dhooty appreciated this fact; at any rate, he advanced with an ostentatious show of strategy and much intimidating air-clawing. But he made a bad choice of the moment for the actual attack, for he elected to rush in just as the farther side of the deck was rising. In an instant Osmond's statuesque immobility changed to bewilderingly rapid movement. There was a resounding "Smack, smack"; Dhooty flew backwards, capsizing two men behind him, staggered down the sloping deck, closely followed by Osmond (executing a continuous series of 'postman's knocks' on the Dhootian countenance), and finally fell sprawling in the scuppers, with his head jammed against a stanchion. The two capsized men scrambled to their feet, and, with their four comrades, closed in on Osmond with evidently hostile intentions. But the latter did not wait to be attacked. Acting on the advice of the Duke of Wellington—whom, by the way, he somewhat resembled in appearance—to 'hit first and keep on hitting', he charged the group of seamen like an extremely self-possessed bull, hammering right and left, regardless of the unskilful thumps that he got in return, and gradually drove them, bewildered by his extraordinary quickness and the weight of his well-directed blows, through the space between the fore mast and the bulwark. Slowly they backed away before his continuous battering, hitting out at him ineffectively, hampered by their numbers and the confined space, until one man, who had had the bad luck to catch two upper cuts in succession, uttered a howl of rage and whipped out his sheath-knife. Osmond's quick eye caught the dull glint of the steel just as he was passing the fife-rail. Instantly he whisked out an unoccupied iron belaying-pin, whirled it over and brought it down on the man's head. The fellow dropped like a pole-axed ox, and as the belaying-pin rose aloft once more, the other five men sprang back out of range.

How the combat might have ended under other circumstances it is impossible to say. Dhooty had disappeared—with a

bloody scalp and an obliterated eye; the man with the knife lay unconscious on the deck with a little red pool collecting by his head; the other five men had scattered and were hastily searching for weapons and missiles, so far as was possible with this bloodthirsty Bedlamite of a 'factory bug' flying up and down the deck flourishing a belaying-pin. Their principal occupation, in fact, was in keeping out of reach; and they did not always succeed.

Suddenly a shot rang out. A little cloud of splinters flew from the side of the mainmast, and the five seamen ducked simultaneously. Glancing quickly forward, Osmond beheld his late antagonist, Dhooty, emerging from the fore-castle hatch and taking aim at him with a still smoking revolver. Now, the 'factory bug' was a pugnacious man and perhaps over-confident, too. But he had some idea of his limitations. You can't walk up twenty yards of deck to punch the head of a man who is covering you with a revolver. At the moment, Osmond was abreast of the uncovered main hatch. A passing glance had shown him a tier of kernel bags covering the floor of the hold. Without a moment's hesitation he stooped with his hands on the coaming, and, vaulting over, dropped plump on the bags, and then, picking himself up, scrambled forward under the shelter of the deck.

The hold of the *Speedwell*, like that of most vessels of her class, was a simple cavity, extending from the fore-castle bulkhead to that of the after-cabin. Of this the forward part still contained a portion of the out ward cargo, while the homeward lading was stowed abaft the main hatch. But the hold was two-thirds empty and afforded plenty of room to move about.

Osmond took up a position behind some bales of Manchester goods and waited for the next move on the part of the enemy. He had not long to wait. Voices from above told him that the crew had gathered round the hatch; indeed, from his retreat, he could see some of them craning over the coamings, peering into the dark recesses of the hold.

"What are yer goin' to do, Dhooty?" one of the men asked.

"I'm goin' below to finish the beggar off," was the reply in a tone of savage determination.

The place of a ladder was supplied by wooden footholds nailed to the massive stanchion that supported the deck and rested on the keelson. Osmond kept a sharp eye on the top foothold, clambering quickly on the closely packed bales to get within reach; and as a booted foot appeared below the beam and settled on the projection, he brought down his belaying-pin on the toe with a rap that elicited a yell of agony and caused the hasty withdrawal of the foot. For a minute or more the air was thick with execrations, and, as Osmond crept back into shelter, an irregular stamping on the deck above suggested some person hopping actively on one leg.

But the retreat was not premature. Hardly had Osmond squeezed himself behind the stack of bales when a succession of shots rang out from above, and bullet after bullet embedded itself in the rolls of cotton cloth. Osmond counted five shots and when there came an interval—presumably to reload—he ventured to peer between the bales, and was able to see Dhooty frantically emptying the discharged chambers of the revolver and ramming in fresh cartridges, while the five sailors stared curiously into the hold.

"Now then," said Dhooty, when he had re-loaded, "you just nip down, Sam Winter, and see if I've hit him, and I'll stand by here to shoot if he goes for yer."

"Not me," replied Sam. "You 'and me the gun and just pop down yerself. I'll see as he don't hurt yer."

"How can I?" roared Dhooty, "with me fut hammered into a jelly?"

"Well," retorted Sam, "what about my feet? D'ye think I can fly?"

"Oh," said Dhooty, contemptuously, "if you funk the job, I won't press yer. Bob Simmons ain't afraid, I know. He'll go."

"Will he?" said Simmons. "I'm jiggered if he will! That bloke's too handy with that pin for my taste. But I'll hold the gun while you go, Dhooty."

Dhooty cursed the whole ship's company collectively and individually for a pack of chicken-livered curs. But not one of them would budge. Each was quite willing, and even eager, to do the shooting from above; but no one was disposed to go below and 'draw the badger'. The proceedings seemed to have come to a deadlock when one of the sailors was inspired with a new idea.

"Look 'ere, mates," he said, oracularly; "'Tis like this 'ere: 'ere's this 'ere bloomin' ship with a nomicidal maniac in 'er 'old. Now, none of us ain't a-goin' down there for to fetch 'im out. We don't want our 'eds broke same as what 'e's broke Jim Darker's 'ed. Contrarywise, so long as 'e's loose on this ship, no man's life ain't worth a brass farden. Wherefore I says, bottle 'im up, I says; clap on the hatch-covers and batten down. Then we've got 'im, and then we can sleep in our bunks in peace."

"That's right enough, Bill," another voice broke in, "but you're forgettin' that we've got a little job to do down below there."

"Not yet, we ain't," the other rejoined; "not afore we gets down Ambriz way, and he'll be quiet enough by then."

This seemed to satisfy all parties, including even the ferocious Dhooty, and a general movement warned Osmond that his incarceration was imminent. For one moment he was disposed to make a last, desperate sortie, but the certainty that he would be a dead man before he reached the deck decided him to lie low. Many things might happen before the brigantine reached Ambriz.

As the hatchcovers grated over the coaming and dropped into their beds, the prisoner took a rapid survey of his surroundings before the last glimmer of daylight should be shut out. But he had scarcely time to memorize the geographical features of the hold before the last of the hatch-covers was dropped into its place. Then he heard the tarpaulin drag over the hatch, shutting out the last gleams of light that had filtered through the joints of the covers; the battens were dropped into their catches, the wedges driven home, and he sat, in a darkness like that of the tomb.

The hold was intolerably hot and close. The roasting deck above was like the roof of an oven. A greasy reek arose from the bags of kernels, a strange, mixed effluvium from the bales of cotton cloth. And the place was full of strange noises. At every roll of the ship, as the strain of the rigging changed sides, a universal groan arose; bulkheads squeaked, timbers grated, the masts creaked noisily in their housings, and unctuous gurgles issued from the tier of oil puncheons. It was clear to Osmond that this was no place for a prolonged residence. The sweat that already trickled down his face meant thirst in the near future, and death if he failed to discover the tank or water-casks. A diet of palm kernels did not commend itself; and, now that the hatch was covered, the water in the bilge made its peculiar properties manifest. The obvious necessity was to get out; but the method of escape was not obvious at all.

From his own position Osmond's thoughts turned to the state of the vessel. From the first, it had been evident to him that there was something very abnormal about this ship. Apart from the lawless behaviour of the crew, there was the fact that since he had come on board he had seen no vestige of an officer. Dhooty had seemed to have some sort of authority, but the manner in which the men addressed him showed that he had no superior status. Then, where was the 'afterguard'? They had not gone ashore. And there had been enough uproar to bring them on deck if they had been on board. There was only one reasonable conclusion from these facts, and it was confirmed by Dhooty's proprietary air and by a certain brown stain that Osmond had noticed on the deck. There had been a mutiny on the *Speedwell*.

The inveterate smoker invokes the aid of tobacco in all cases where concentrated thought is required. Osmond made shift to fill his pipe in the dark, and, noting that his tobacco was low, struck a match. The flame lighted up the corner into which he had crept and rendered visible some objects that he had not noticed before; and, at the first glance, any lingering uncertainty as to the state of affairs on the *Speedwell* vanished in an instant. For the objects that he had seen comprised a shipwright's auger, a caulking mallet, and a dozen or more large wooden pegs cut to a taper at one end.

The purpose of these appliances was unmistakable, and very clearly explained the nature of the 'little job' that the sailors had to do down below. Those rascals intended to scuttle the ship. Holes were to be bored in the bottom with the auger and the plugs driven into them. Then, when the mutineers were ready to leave, the plugs would be pulled out, and the ship abandoned with the water pouring into her hold. It was a pretty scheme, if not a novel one, and it again suggested the question: Where were the officers?

Turning over this question, Osmond remembered that Dhooty had gone to the forecabin to fetch his revolver. Then the crew would appear to be still occupying their own quarters; whence it followed that, if the officers were on board, they were probably secured in their berths aft.

This consideration suggested a new idea. Osmond lit another match and explored the immediate neighbourhood in the hope of finding more tools; but there were only the auger and the mallet, the pegs having probably been tapered with a sheath-knife. As the match went out, Osmond quenched the glowing tip, and, picking up the auger and mallet, though for the latter he had no present use, began to grope his way aft. The part of the hold abaft the main hatch had a ground tier of oil-puncheons, above which was stowed a quantity of produce, principally copra and kernels in bags. Climbing on top of this, Osmond crawled aft until he brought up against the bulkhead that separated the cabin from the hold. Here he commenced operations without delay. Rapping with his knuckles to make sure of the absence of obstructing stanchions, he set the point of the auger against the bulkhead, and, grasping the cross lever, fell to work vigorously. It was a big tool, boring an inch and a half hole, and correspondingly heavy to turn; but Osmond drove it with a will, and was soon rewarded by feeling it give with a jerk, and when he withdrew it, there was a circular hole through which streamed the welcome daylight.

He applied his eye to the hole (which, in spite of the thickness of the planking, afforded a fairly wide view) and looked into what was evidently the cuddy or cabin. He could see a small, nearly triangular table fitted with 'fiddles', or safety rims, between which a big water-bottle slid backwards and forwards as the ship rolled, pursued by a dozen or more green limes and an empty tumbler—a sight which made his mouth water. Opposite was the companion-ladder and at each side of it a door—probably those of the captain's and mate's cabins. Above the table would be the sky light, though he could not see it; but he could make out some pieces of broken glass on the floor and one or two on the table; and he now recalled that he had noticed, when on deck, that the skylight glass was smashed.

Having made this survey, he returned to his task. Above the hole that he had bored, he proceeded to bore another, slightly intersecting it, and above this another, and so on; tracing a continuous curved row of holes, each hole encroaching a little on the next, and the entire series looking, from the dark hold, like a luminous silhouette of a string of beads. It was arduous work, and monotonous, but Osmond kept at it with only an occasional pause to wipe his streaming face and steal a wistful look at the water-bottle on the cabin table. No sign did he perceive there of either officers or crew; indeed the latter were busy on deck, for he had heard the clink of the windlass, and when that had ceased, the rattle of running gear as the sails were trimmed. And meanwhile the curved line of holes extended along the bulkhead and began to define an ellipse some eighteen inches by twelve.

By the time he had made the twenty-fourth hole, a sudden weakening of the light that came through informed him that

the sun was setting. He took a last peep into the cabin before the brief tropic twilight should have faded, and was surprised to note that the tumbler seemed to have vanished and that there appeared to be less water in the bottle. Speculating vaguely on the possible explanation of this, he fell to work again, adding hole after hole to the series, guiding himself by the sense of touch when the light failed completely.

The thirty-eighth hole nearly completed the ellipse, and was within an inch of the first one bored. Standing back from the bulkhead, Osmond gave a vigorous kick on the space enclosed by the line of holes, and sent the oval piece of planking flying through into the cabin. Passing his head through the opening, he listened awhile. Sounds of revelry from the deck, now plainly audible, told him that the gin was doing its work and that the crew were fully occupied. He slipped easily through the opening, and, groping his way to the table, found the water-bottle and refreshed himself with a long and delicious draught. Then, feeling his way to the companion-ladders he knocked with his knuckles on the door at its port side.

No one answered; and yet he had a feeling of some soft and stealthy movement within. Accordingly he knocked again, a little more sharply, and as there was still no answer, he turned the handle and pushed gently at the door, which was, however, bolted or locked. But the effort was not in vain, for as he gave a second, harder push, a woman's voice—which sounded quite near, as if the speaker were close to the door—demanded "Who is there?"

Considerably taken aback by the discovery of this unexpected denizen of the mutiny-ridden ship, Osmond was for a few moments at a loss for a reply. At length, putting his mouth near to the keyhole (for the skylight was open and the steersman, at least, not far away), he answered softly: "A friend."

The reply did not appear to have the desired effect, for the woman—also speaking into the keyhole—demanded sharply:

"But who are you? And what do you want?"

These were difficult questions. Addressing himself to the first, and boggling awkwardly at the unaccustomed lie, Osmond stammered:

"My name is—er—is Cook, but you don't know me. I am not one of the crew. If you wouldn't mind opening the door, I could explain matters."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," was the reply.

"There's really no occasion for you to be afraid," Osmond urged.

"Isn't there?" she retorted. "And who said I was afraid? Let me tell you that I've got a pistol, and I shall shoot if I have any of your nonsense. So you'd better be off."

Osmond grinned appreciatively but decided to abandon the parley.

"Is there anyone aft here besides you?" he asked.

"Never you mind," was the tart reply. "You had better go back where you came from."

Osmond rose with a grim smile and began cautiously to feel his way towards the companion-steps and past them to the other door that he had seen. Having found it and located the handle, he rapped sharply but not too loudly.

"Well?" demanded a gruff voice from within.

Osmond turned the handle, and, as a stream of light issued from the opening door, he entered hastily and closed it behind him. He found himself in a small cabin lighted by a candle-lamp that swung in gimbals from the bulkhead. One side was occupied by a bunk in which reclined a small, elderly man, who appeared to have been reading, for he held an open volume, which Osmond observed with some surprise to be Applin's Commentary On the Book of Job. His head was roughly bandaged and he wore his left arm in a primitive sling.

"Well," he repeated, taking off his spectacles to look at Osmond.

"You are the captain, I presume?" said Osmond.

"Yes. Name of Hartup. Who are you?"

Osmond briefly explained the circumstances of his arrival on board.

"Ah!" said the captain. "I wondered who was boring those holes when I went into the cabin just now. Well, you've put your head into a hornet's nest, young man."

"Yes," said Osmond "and I'm going to keep it there until I'm paid to take it out."

The captain smiled sourly. "You are like my mate, Will Redford; very like him you are to look at, and the same quarrelsome disposition, apparently."

"Where is the mate now?"

"Overboard," replied the captain. "He got flourishing a revolver and the second mate stabbed him."

"Is the second mate's name Dhooody?"

"Yes. But he's only a substitute. The proper second mate died up at Sherbro, so I promoted Dhooody from before the mast."

"I take it that your crew have mutinied?"

"Yes," said the captain, placidly. "There is over a ton of ivory on board and two hundred ounces of gold dust in that chest that you are sitting on. It was a great temptation. Dhooty began it and Redford made it worse by bullying."

"Dhooty seems to be a tough customer."

"Very," said the captain. "A violent man. A man of wrath. I am surprised that he didn't make an end of you."

"So is he, I expect," Osmond replied with a grin; "and I hope to give him one or two more surprises before we part. What are you going to do?"

The captain sighed. "We are in the hands of Providence," said he.

"You'll be in the hands of Davy Jones if you don't look out," said Osmond. "They are going to scuttle the ship when they get to Ambriz. Can I get anything to eat?"

"There is corned pork and biscuit in that locker," said the captain "and water and limes on the cabin table. No intoxicants. This is a temperance ship."

Osmond smiled grimly as a wild chorus from above burst out as if in commentary on the captain's statement. But he made no remark. Corned pork was better than discussion just now.

"You seem to have been in the wars," he remarked, glancing at the skipper's bandaged head and arm.

"Yes. Fell down the companion; at least, Dhooty shoved me down. I'll get you to fix a new dressing on my arm when you've finished eating. You'll find some lint and rubber plaster in the medicine chest there."

"By the way," said Osmond, as he cracked a biscuit on his knee, "there's a woman in the next berth. Sounded like quite a ladylike person, too. Who is she?"

The captain shook his head. "Yes," he groaned, "there's another complication. She is a Miss Burleigh; daughter of Sir Hector Burleigh, the Administrator or Acting Governor, or something of the sort, of the Gold Coast."

"But what the deuce is she doing on an old rattle trap of a windjammer like this?"

The captain sat up with a jerk. "I'll trouble you, young man," he said, severely, "to express yourself with more decorum. I am the owner of this vessel, and if she is good enough for me she will have to be good enough for you. Nobody asked you to come aboard, you know."

"I beg your pardon," said Osmond. "Didn't mean to give offence. But you'll admit that she isn't cut out for the high-class passenger trade."

"She is not," Captain Hartup agreed, "and that is what I pointed out to the young woman when she asked for a passage from Axim to Accra. I told her we had no accommodation for females, but she just giggled and said that didn't matter. She is a very self-willed young woman."

"But why didn't she take a passage on a steamer?"

"There was no steamer due for the Leeward Coast. Her father, Sir Hector, tried to put her off; but she would have her own way. Said it would be a bit of an adventure; travelling on a sailing ship."

"Gad! She was right there," remarked Osmond.

"She was, indeed. Well, she came aboard and Redford gave her his berth, he moving into the second mate's berth, as Dhooty remained in the forecabin. And there she is; and I wish she was at Jericho."

"I expect she does, too. What happened to her when the mutiny broke out?"

"I told her to go to her berth and lock herself in. But no one attempted to molest her."

"I am glad to hear that," said Osmond, and as he broke another biscuit, he asked: "Did you secure the companion-hatch?"

"Miss Burleigh did. She fixed the bar across the inside of the doors. But it wasn't necessary, for they had barricaded the doors outside. They didn't want to come down to us, they only wanted to prevent us from going up on deck."

"She was wise to bolt the doors, all the same," said Osmond; and for a time there was silence in the cabin, broken only by the vigorous mastication of stony biscuit.

---



#### IV. — THE PHANTOM MATE

WHEN he had finished his rough and hasty meal, Osmond attended to his host's injuries, securing a pad of lint on the lacerated arm with strips cut from a broad roll of the sticky rubber plaster. Then he went out into the cabin to reconnoitre and take a drink of water, closing the door of the captain's berth so that the light should not be seen from above.

The hubbub on deck had now subsided into occasional snatches of indistinct melody. The men had had a pretty long bout and were—to judge by the tone of the songs—getting drowsy. Osmond climbed on to the table and began carefully to pick the remainder of the glass out of the skylight frame. The skylight had a fixed top—there being a separate ventilator for the cabin—and, instead of the usual guard-bars, had loose wood shutters for use in bad weather. Hence the present catastrophe; and hence, when Osmond had picked away the remains of the glass, there was a clear opening through which he could, by hoisting himself up, thrust out his head and shoulders. To avoid this fatiguing position, however, he descended and placed on the table a case that he had noticed by daylight on a side-locker; then, mounting, he was able, by standing on this, to look out at his ease, and yet pop down out of sight if necessary.

When he cautiously thrust out his head to look up and down the deck, he was able at first to see very little, though there was now a moderate starlight. Forward, whence drowsy mumblings mingled with snores came from the neighbourhood of the caboose, he could see only a projecting pair of feet; and aft, where a single voice carolled huskily intervals, his view was cut off by the boat—which lay at the side of the deck—and by the hood of the companion-hatch. He craned out farther; and now he could catch a glimpse of the man at the wheel. The fellow was not taking his duties very seriously, for he was seated on the grating unhandily filling his pipe and letting the ship steer herself; which she did well enough, if direction was of no consequence, the light breeze being a couple of points free and the main-sheet well slacked out. Osmond watched the man light his pipe, recognizing then the flat, shaven face—which he had punched earlier in the day—and as he watched he rapidly reviewed the strategic position and considered its possibilities. The flat, shaven face, with its wide mouth, offered a vague suggestion. He considered; looked out again; listened awhile; and then descended with a distinctly purposeful air. First he crept silently up the steps of the companion and softly removed the bar from the inside of the doors. Then he made his way to the skipper's cabin.

As he entered, the "old man" looked up from his book inquiringly.

"I've come down for a bit of rubber plaster," said Osmond.

The skipper nodded towards the medicine-chest and resumed his studies, while Osmond cut off a strip of plaster some seven inches by four.

"You haven't got any thin rope or small-stuff in here, I suppose?" said Osmond.

"There's a coil of rope-yarn on the peg under those oilskins—those smart yellow ones; those were poor Redford's. He was too much of a dandy to wear common black oilies like the rest of us. What do you want the stuff for?"

"I want to try a little experiment," replied Osmond. "But I'll tell you about it afterwards."; and he took down the oilskins and the coil of line, the latter of which he carried away with him to the main cabin together with the roll of plaster and the scissors. Here, by the faint starlight that now mitigated the darkness, he cut off a couple of lengths of the line and, having pocketed one and made a bowline-knot or fixed loop in the end of the other, ascended the table and once more looked out on deck. Save for some resonant snoring from forward, all was quiet and the ship seemed to have settled down for the night. The helmsman, however, was still awake, for Osmond heard him yawn wearily; but he had left the wheel with a rope hitched round one of the spokes, and was now leaning over the quarter-rail, apparently contemplating the passing water.

It was an ideal opportunity. Grasping the frame of the skylight, Osmond gave a light spring and came through the opening like a very stealthy harlequin. Then, creeping along the deck in the shelter of the boat and that of the companion-hood, he rose and stole noiselessly on the toes of his rubber-soled shoes towards the preoccupied seaman. Nearer and nearer he crept, grasping an end of the line between the fingers of either hand, and holding the strip of plaster spread out on the palm of the left, until he stood close behind his quarry. Then, as the sailor removed his pipe to emit another enormous yawn, he slipped his left hand round, clapped the plaster over the open mouth, and instantly pinioned the man's arms by clasping him tightly round the chest. The fellow struggled furiously and would have shouted, but was only able to utter muffled grunts and snorts through his nose. His arms were gripped to his sides as if in a vice and his efforts to kick were all foreseen and adroitly frustrated. He had been taken by surprise by a man who was his superior in mere strength and who was an expert wrestler into the bargain; and he was further handicapped by superstitious terror and lack of breath.

The struggle went on with surprisingly little noise—since the sailor could not cry out—and meanwhile Osmond contrived to pass the end of the line through the loop of the bowline and draw it inch by inch until it was ready for the final pull. Then, with a skilful throw, he let the man down softly, face downwards, on the deck; jerked the line tight and sat on his prisoner's legs. He was now master of the situation. Taking another turn with the line round the man's body, he secured it with a knot in the middle of the back, and with the other length of line, which he had in his pocket, he lashed his captive's ankles together.

The almost noiseless struggle had passed unnoticed by the sleepers forward. No watch or look-out had been set and it had apparently been left to the helmsman to rouse up his relief when he guessed his "trick" at the wheel to have expired.

Osmond listened for a few moments, and then, removing the batten with which the doors of the companion had been secured on the outside, opened the hatch, slid his helpless prisoner down the ladder; closed the doors again, replaced the batten, and, creeping through the opening of the sky light, let himself down into the cabin. Here he seized his writhing captive, and, dragging him across the cabin, thrust him head-first through the hole in the bulkhead and followed him into the hold, where he finally deposited him as comfortably as possible on the kernel bags under the main hatch.

"Now, listen," he said, sternly. "I'm going to take that plaster off your mouth; but if you utter a sound, I shall stick it on again and fix it with a lashing." He peeled the plaster off, and, as the man drew a long breath, he demanded: "Do you hear what I say?"

"Yes," was the reply; "I hear. You've got me, governor, fair on the hop, you have. You won't hear no more of me. And if you can cop that there Dhooody the same way, there won't be no more trouble on this ship."

"I'll see what can be done," said Osmond; and with this he returned into the cabin, and, cutting off two fresh lengths of rope-yarn and another piece of plaster, prepared for a fresh capture.

But, at present, there was no one to capture. The wheel jerked to and fro in its lashing, the brigantine walloped along quietly before the soft breeze, the crew slumbered peacefully forward, and Osmond looked out of the skylight on an empty deck, listening impatiently to the chorus of snores and wondering if he would get another chance.

It is impossible to say how long this state of affairs would have lasted if nothing had happened to disturb it. As it was, a sudden accident dispelled the universal repose. The unsteered vessel, yawing from side to side, lifted her stern to a following sea and yawed so far that her mainsail got by the lee. The long boom swung inboard and the big sail jibed over with a slam that shook the entire fabric. The vessel immediately broached to with all her square-sails aback, and heeled over until the water bubbled up through her scupper holes.

The noise and the jar roused some of the sleepers forward and a hoarse voice bawled out angrily: "Now you, Sam! What the devil are you up to? You'll have the masts overboard if you don't look out."

Immediately after, Dhooody came staggering aft along the sloping deck, followed by one or two bewildered sailors. The group stood gazing in muddled surprise at the untended wheel, and Dhooody exclaimed:

"Where's the beggar gone to? Here, you Sam! Where are you?"

"P'raps he's gone down to the cabin," one of the men suggested.

"No, he ain't," said Dhooody. "The companion's fastened up."

"So it is, mate," agreed the other with a glance at the battened doors; and the party rambled slowly round the poop, peering out into the darkness astern and speculating vaguely on the strange disappearance.

"He's gone overboard," said Dhooody; "that's what he's done. So you'd better take the wheel now, Bob Simmons; and you just mind yer helm, or you'll be goin' overboard, too, with all that lush in yer 'ed."

Accordingly Simmons, protesting sleepily that it "wasn't his trick yet," took his place at the wheel. The vessel was put once more on her course, and the men, with the exception of Dhooody, crawled forward to the shelter of the caboose. The second mate remained awhile, yawning drearily and impressing on the somnolent Simmons the responsibilities of his position. Then, at last, he too went forward, and the ship settled down to its former quiet.

Osmond waited for some time in case Dhooody should return to see that the new helmsman was attending to his instructions; but as he made no reappearance and was now probably asleep, it seemed safe to resume operations. Osmond thrust his head and shoulders out through the opening, but, though he could see that the wheel was already deserted, the unfaithful Simmons was invisible. Presently, however, a soft snore from somewhere close by invited him to further investigation, and as he crept out on deck, the enormity of Simmons's conduct was revealed. He had not sunk overpowered at his post, but had deliberately seated himself on the deck in a comfortable position with his back against the doors of the companion, where he now reclined at his ease, wrapped in alcoholic slumber. If only Dhooody would keep out of the way, the capture was as good as made.

Osmond stole up to the sleeping seaman and softly encircled his arms with the noose, leaving it slack with the end handy for the final pull. Then he put the man's feet together, and passing the lashing round the ankles, secured it firmly. This aroused the sleeper, who began to mumble protests. Instantly, Osmond slapped the plaster on his mouth, jerked the arm-lashing tight and secured it with a knot; unbattened the doors, and, opening them, slid the wriggling captive down the ladder on to the cabin floor. Then he came up, closed and re-battened the doors, slipped down through the skylight, and, dragging his prisoner to the bulkhead, bundled him neck and crop through the opening and finally deposited him on the kernel-bags beside the other man, who was now slumbering peacefully. Having removed the plaster, he remained awhile, for Simmons was in no condition to give promises of good behaviour; but in a few minutes he gave what was more reassuring, a good healthy snore; on which Osmond departed, leaving him to sleep the sleep of the drunk.

The capture had been made none too soon. As Osmond came through into the cabin, he was aware of voices on deck, and, climbing on to the table, put his head up to listen, but keeping carefully out of sight.

"It's a dam rum go," a hoarse voice exclaimed. "Seems as if there was somethink queer about this bloomin' ship. First of all this factory devil comes aboard like a roarin' lion seekin' who he can bash on the 'ed; then Sam goes overboard; then Bob Simmons goes overboard. 'Tain't nateral, I tell yer. There's somethink queer, and it's my belief as it's all along o' this

mutiny."

"Oh, shut up, Bill," growled Dhooody.

"Bill's right, though," said another voice. "We ain't 'ad no luck since we broke out. I'm for chuckin' this Ambriz job and lettin' the old man out."

"And what about Redford?" demanded Dhooody.

"Redford ain't no affair of mine," was the sulky reply; to which Dhooody rejoined in terms that cannot, in the interests of public morality, be literally recorded; concluding with the remark that 'if he'd got to swing, it wouldn't be for Redford only'.

"Then," said the first speaker, "you'd better take the wheel yerself. I ain't goin' to."

"More ain't I," said another. "I don't want to go overboard."

A prolonged wrangle ensued, the upshot of which was that the men drifted away forward, leaving Dhooody to steer the ship.

Osmond quietly renewed his preparations, though he realized that a considerably tougher encounter loomed ahead. Dhooody was not only less drunk than the others; he was a good deal more alert and intelligent and he probably had a revolver in his pocket. And the other men would now be more easily roused after this second catastrophe. He peeped out from time to time, always finding Dhooody wide awake at his post, and sensible of drowsy conversation from the sailors forward.

It was fully an hour before a chance seemed to present itself; and Osmond was too wary to attack blindly without a chance. By that time the mumblings from forward had subsided into snores and the ship was once more wrapped in repose. Looking out at that moment, he saw Dhooody staring critically aloft, as if dissatisfied with the trim of the sails. Presently the second mate stepped away from the wheel, and, casting off one of the lee braces, took a long pull at the rope. Now was the time for action. Slipping out through the skylight, Osmond stole quickly along in the shelter of the boat, and, emerging behind Dhooody, stood up just as the latter stooped to belay the rope. He waited until his quarry had set a half-hitch on the last turn and rose to go back to the wheel; then he sprang at him, clapped the plaster on his mouth, and encircled him with his arms.

But Dhooody was a tough adversary. He was stronger, more sober, and less nervous than the others. And he had a moustache, which interfered with the set of the plaster, so that his breathing was less hampered. In fact, Osmond had to clap his hand on it to prevent the man from calling out; and thus it was that the catastrophe befell. For as Osmond relaxed his bear-hug with one arm, Dhooody wriggled himself partly free. In a moment his hand flew to his pocket, and Osmond grabbed his wrist only just in time to prevent him from pointing the revolver. Then followed a struggle at the utmost tension of two strong men; a struggle, on Osmond's side, at least, for dear life. Gripping the other man's wrists, he watched the revolver, all his strength concentrated on the effort to prevent its muzzle from being turned on him. And so the two men stood for a space, nearly motionless, quite silent, trembling with the intensity of muscular strain.

Suddenly Dhooody took a quick step backwards. A fatal step; for the manoeuvre failed, and Osmond followed him up, pressing him farther backward. The bulwark on the poop was comparatively low. As Dhooody staggered against it with accumulated momentum, his body swung outboard and his feet rose from the deck. It was impossible to save him without releasing the pistol hand. He remained poised for an instant on the rail and then toppled over; and as he slithered down the side and his wrist slipped from Osmond's grasp, the revolver discharged, blowing a ragged hole in the bulwark and waking the echoes in the sails with the din of the explosion.

Osmond sprang back to the companion-hatch and crouched behind the hood. There was no time for him to get back to the skylight; indeed he hardly had time to unfasten the doors and drop on to the ladder before the men came shambling aft, muttering and rubbing their eyes. Quietly closing the doors, he descended to the cabin and took up his old post of observation on the table.

"He's gone, right enough," said an awe-stricken voice, "and I reckon it'll be our turn next. This is a bad look-out, mates."

There was a brief and dismal silence; then a distant report was heard, followed quickly by two more.

"That's Dhooody," exclaimed another voice. "He's a-swimmin' and makin' signals. What's to be done? We can't let 'im drown without doin' nothin'."

"No," agreed the first man, "we must have a try at pickin' 'im up. You and me, Tom, will put off in the dinghy, while Joe keeps the ship hove-to."

"What!" protested Joe. "Am I to be left alone on the ship with no one but Jim Darker, and him below in his bunk?"

"Well, yer can't let a shipmate drown, can yer?" demanded the other. "And look here, Joe Bradley, as soon as you've got the ship hove-to, you just fetch up the fo'c'sle lamp and show us a glim, or we shall be goners, too. Now hard down with the helm, mate!"

Very soon the loud flapping of canvas announced that the ship had come up into the wind, and immediately after the squeal of tackle-blocks was heard. The *Speedwell* carried a dinghy, slung from davits at the taffrail, in addition to the larger boat on deck, and it was in this that the two men were putting out on their rather hopeless quest.

Osmond rapidly reviewed the situation. Of the original seven men one was overboard, two were in the hold, one was below in his bunk, and two were away in the boat. There remained only Joe Bradley. It would be pretty easy to overpower him and stow him in the hold; but a yet easier plan suggested itself. Joe was evidently in a state of extreme superstitious funk and the other two were in little better case. He recalled the captain's remark as to his resemblance to the dead mate and also the fact that Redford's oilskins were different from any others on board. These circumstances seemed to group themselves naturally and indicate a course of action.

He made his way to the captain's berth and, knocking softly and receiving no answer, entered. The skipper had fallen asleep over his book and lay in his bunk, a living commentary on the Book of Job. Osmond took the oilskins from the peg, and, stealing back silently to the cabin, invested himself in the borrowed raiment. Presently a passing gleam of light from above told him that Joe was carrying the fore castle lamp aft to 'show a glim' from the taffrail. Remembering that he had left the companion hatch unfastened, he ascended the ladder, and, softly opening one door, looked out. At the moment, Joe was engaged in hanging the lamp from a fair-lead over the stern, and, as his back was towards the deck, Osmond stepped out of the hatch and silently approached him.

Having secured the lamp, Joe took a long look over the dark sea and then turned towards the deck; and as his eyes fell on the tall, oilskinned figure, obscurely visible in the gloom—for the lamp was below the bulwark—he uttered a gasp of horror and began rapidly to shuffle away backwards. Osmond stood motionless, watching him from under the deep shade of his sou'-wester as he continued to edge away backwards. Suddenly his heel caught on a ring-bolt and he staggered and fell on the deck with a howl of terror; but in another instant he had scrambled to his feet and raced away forward, whence the slam of the fore-castle scuttle announced his retirement to the sanctuary of his berth.

More than a quarter of an hour elapsed before a hoarse hail from the sea heralded the return of the boat.

"Joe ahoy! It's no go, mate. He's gone." There was a pause. Then came the splash of oars, a bump under the counter, the sound of the hooking on of tackles, and another hail.

"Joe ahoy! Is all well aboard?"

Osmond stepped away into the shadow of the main sail, whence he watched the taffrail. Soon the two men came actively up the tackle-ropes, their heads appeared above the rail, and they swung themselves on board simultaneously.

"Joe ahoy!" one of them sang out huskily, as he looked blankly round the deck. "Where are yer, Joe?" There was a brief silence; then, in an awe-stricken voice, he exclaimed: "Gawd-amighty, Tom! If he ain't gone overboard, too!"

At this moment the other man caught sight of Osmond, and, silently touching his companion on the shoulder, pointed to the motionless figure. Osmond moved a little out of the shadow and began to pace aft, treading without a sound. For one instant the two men watched as if petrified; then, with one accord, they stampeded forward, and once more the fore-castle scuttle slammed. Osmond followed, and quietly thrusting a belaying-pin through the staple of the scuttle, secured them in their retreat.



## V. — THE NEW AFTERGUARD

WHEN Captain Hartup, brusquely aroused from his slumbers, opened his eyes and beheld a tall, yellow oilskinned figure in his berth, the Book of Job faded instantly from his memory and he scrambled from his bunk with a yell of terror. Then, when Osmond took off his sou'-wester, he recognized his visitor and became distinctly uncivil.

"What the devil do you mean by masquerading in this idiotic fashion?" he demanded angrily. "I don't want any of your silly schoolboy jokes on this ship, so you please understand that."

"I came down," said Osmond, smothering a grin and ignoring the reproaches, "to report progress. I have hove the ship to, but there is no one at the wheel and no look-out."

The skipper stared at him in bewilderment as he crawled back into his bunk. "What do you mean?" he asked. "You've hove the ship to? Isn't there anybody on deck?"

"No. The ship is taking care of herself at the moment."

"Queer," said the skipper. "I wonder what Dhooody's up to."

"Dhooody is overboard," said Osmond.

"Overboard!" exclaimed the skipper, staring harder than ever at Osmond. Then, after an interval of silent astonishment, he said severely:

"You are talking in riddles, young man. Just try to explain yourself a little more clearly. Do I understand that you have hove my second mate overboard?"

"No," replied Osmond. "He went overboard by accident. But it was all for the best;" and hereupon he proceeded to give the skipper a somewhat sketchy account of the stirring events of the last few hours, to which the latter listened with sour disapproval.

"I don't hold with deeds of violence," he said when the story was finished, "but what you have done is on your own head. Where do you say the crew are?"

"Two are in the hold and the other four in the fo'c'sle, bolted in. They are all pretty drunk, but you'll find them as quiet as lambs when they've slept off their tippie. But the question is, what is to be done now. The men won't be any good for an hour or two, but there ought to be someone at the wheel and some sort of watch on deck. And I can't take it on until I have had a sleep. I've been hard at it ever since I came on board yesterday."

"Yes," Captain Hartup agreed, sarcastically, "I daresay you found it fatiguing, chucking your fellow-creatures overboard and breaking their heads. Well, you had better take the second mate's berth—the one Redford had—and I will go on deck and keep a look out. But I can't do much with my arm in a sling."

"What about the lady?" asked Osmond. "Couldn't she hold on to the wheel if you stood by and told her what to do?"

"Ha!" exclaimed the skipper. "I had forgotten her. Yes, she knows how to steer—in a fashion. She used to wheedle Redford into letting her take a trick in his watch while he stood by and instructed her; a parcel of silly philandering, really, but it wasn't any affair of mine. I'd better go and rouse her up."

"Wait till I've turned in," said Osmond. "I am not fit to meet a lady until I have had a sleep and a wash. If you will show me my berth, I will go and cast the lashings off those two beggars in the hold and then turn in for an hour or two."

The captain smiled sardonically but made no comment; and when Osmond, furnished with a lantern, had visited the hold and removed the lashings from the still slumbering seamen, he entered the tiny berth that the skipper pointed out to him, closed the door, and, having taken off his jacket and folded it carefully, and wound his watch, blew out the candle in the lantern, stretched himself in the bunk and instantly fell asleep.

When he awoke, the gleam from the deck-light over his head—the berth had no port-hole—informed him that it was day. Reference to his watch showed the hour to be about half-past eight; and the clink of crockery and a murmur of voices—one very distinctly feminine—suggested that breakfast was in progress.

Which, again, suggested that the conditions of life on board had returned to the more or less normal.

Osmond sprang out of the bunk, and, impelled by hunger and curiosity, made a lightning toilet with the aid of Redford's razor, sponge, and brushes. There was, of course, no bath; but a 'dry' rub-down in the oven-like cabin was a fair substitute. In a surprisingly short time, with the imperfect means at hand, he had made himself almost incredibly presentable and after a final 'look over' in Redford's minute shaving-glass, he opened the door and entered the cuddy.

The little table, roughly laid for breakfast, was occupied by Captain Hartup and a lady, and a flat-faced seaman with a black eye officiated as cabin steward. They all looked up as Osmond emerged from his door and the sailor grinned a little sheepishly.

"Had a short night, haven't you?" said the captain. "Didn't expect you to turn out yet. Let me present you to our passenger. Miss Burleigh, this is Mr.—Mr.—"

"Cook," said Osmond, ready for the question this time.

"Mr. Cook, the young man I was telling you about."

Miss Burleigh acknowledged Osmond's bow, gazing at him with devouring curiosity and marvelling at his cool, trim, well appearance.

"I think," she said, "we had a brief interview last night, if you can call it an interview when there was a locked door between us. I am afraid I wasn't very civil. But you must try to forgive me. I've been sorry since."

"There is no need to be," replied Osmond. "It was perfectly natural."

"Oh, but it isn't mere remorse. I am so mad with myself for having missed all the excitements. If I had only known! But, you see, I had happened to look out of my door in the evening, hearing a peculiar sort of noise, and then I saw somebody boring holes in the partition, and of course I thought it was those wretches trying to get into the cabin. Then, when I heard your voice, I made sure it was Dhooty or one of those other ruffians, trying to entice me out. And so I missed all the fun."

"Just as well that you did," said the captain. "Females are out of place in scenes of violence and disorder. What are you going to have, Mr. Cook? There's corned pork and biscuit and I think there's some lobscouse or sea-pie in the galley, if the men haven't eaten it all."

Osmond turned suddenly to the sailor, who instantly came to 'attention'.

"You're Sam Winter, aren't you?"

"Aye, sir," the man replied, considerably taken aback by the 'factory bug's' uncanny omniscience. "Sam Winter it is, sir."

"How is Jim Darker?"

"He's a-doin' nicely, sir," replied Sam, regarding Osmond with secret awe. "Eat a rare breakfast of lobscouse, he did."

"Is there any left?"

"I think there is, sir."

"Then I'll have some;" and, as the man saluted and bustled away up the companion-steps, he seated himself on the fixed bench by the table.

Captain Hartup smiled sourly, while Miss Burleigh regarded Osmond with delighted amusement.

"Seem quite intimate with 'em all," the former remarked. "Regular friend of the family. I suppose it was you who gave Winter that black eye?"

"I expect so," replied Osmond. "He probably caught it in the scrub when I first came on board. Did you have any trouble in getting the men to go back to duty?"

"The men in the fo'c'sle wouldn't come out till daylight, and the two men in the hold took a lot of rousing from their drunken sleep. Of course, I couldn't get through that hole with my arm in this sling, so I had to prod them with a boat-hook. It's a pity you made that hole. Lets the smell of the cargo and the bilge through into the cabin."

He looked distastefully at the dark aperture in the bulkhead and sniffed—quite unnecessarily, for the air of the cuddy was charged with the mingled aroma of bilge and kernels.

"Well, it had to be," said Osmond; "and it will be easy to cover it up. After all, a smell in the cuddy is better than seawater."

Here Sam Winter was seen unsteadily descending the companion-steps with a large enamelled-iron plate in his hands; which plate, being deferentially placed on the table before Osmond, was seen to be loaded with a repulsive-looking mixture of 'salt horse', shreds of fat pork and soaked biscuit floating in a greasy brown liquid.

"That's all there was left, sir," said he, transferring a small surplus from his hands to the dorsal aspect of his trousers.

Osmond made no comment on this statement but fell-to on the unsavoury mess with wolfish voracity, while the captain filled a mug with alleged coffee and passed it to him.

"Who is at the wheel, Winter?" the captain asked.

"Simmons, sir," was the reply. "I woke him up again as I come aft."

"Well, you'd better go up and take it from him. Carry on till I come up."

As Winter disappeared up the companionway Miss Burleigh uttered a little gurgle of enjoyment. "Aren't they funny?" she exclaimed. "Fancy waking up the man at the wheel! It's like a comic opera."

The captain looked at her sourly as he tapped the table with a piece of biscuit for the purpose of evicting a couple of fat weevils; but he made no comment, and for a time the meal proceeded in silence. The skipper was fully occupied with cutting up his corned pork with one hand and in breaking the hard biscuit and knocking out the weevils, while Osmond doggedly worked his way through the lobscouse with the silent concentration of a famished man, all unconscious of the interest and curiosity with which he was being observed by the girl opposite him.

However, the lobscouse came to an end—all too soon—and as he reached out to the bread-barge for a handful of biscuit he met her eyes; and fine, clear, bright blue eyes they were, sparkling with vivacity and humour. She greeted his glance

with an affable smile and hoped that he was feeling revived.

"That looked rather awful stuff," she added.

"It was all right," said he, "only there wasn't enough of it. But I hope you had something more suitable."

"She has had what the ship's stores provide, like the rest of us," snapped the captain. "This is not a floating hotel."

"No, it isn't," Osmond agreed, "and that's a fact. But it is something that she still floats; and it would be just as well to keep her floating."

"What do you mean?" demanded the skipper.

Osmond thoughtfully extracted a weevil with the prong of his fork as he replied: "You've got a crew of six, three to a watch, and one of them has got to do the cooking. But you have got no officers."

"Well, I know that," said the captain. "What about it?"

"You can't carry on without officers."

"I can and I shall. I shall appoint one of the men to be mate and take the other watch myself."

"That won't answer," said Osmond. "There isn't a man among them who could be trusted or who is up to the job; and you are not in a fit state to stand regular watches."

Captain Hartup snorted. "Don't you lay down the law to me, young man. I am the master of this ship." And then he added, a little inconsistently "Perhaps you can tell me how I am to get a couple of officers."

"I can," replied Osmond. "There will have to be some responsible person on deck with each watch."

"Well?

"Well, there are two responsible persons sitting at this table with you."

For a few moments the captain stared at Osmond in speechless astonishment (while Miss Burleigh murmured "Hear, hear!" and rapped the table with the handle of her knife). At length he burst out: "What! Do I understand you to suggest that I should navigate this vessel with a landsman and a female as my mates?"

"I am not exactly a landsman," Osmond replied. "I am an experienced yachtsman and I have made a voyage in a sailing ship."

"Pah!" exclaimed the skipper. "Fresh-water sailor and a passenger! Don't talk nonsense. And a female, too!"

"What I am suggesting," Osmond persisted calmly, "is that you should be about as much as is possible in your condition and that Miss Burleigh and I should keep an eye on the men when you are below. I could take all the night watches and Miss Burleigh could be on deck during the day."

"That's just rank foolishness," said the skipper. "Talk of a comic opera! Why, you are wanting to turn the ship into a Punch and Judy show! I've no patience to listen to you," and the captain rose in dudgeon and crawled—not without difficulty—up the companion-steps. Miss Burleigh watched him with a mischievous smile, and as his stumbling feet disappeared she turned to Osmond.

"What a lark it would be!" she exclaimed, gleefully. "Do you think you will be able to persuade him? He is rather an obstinate little man."

"The best way with obstinate people," replied Osmond, "is to assume that they have agreed, and carry on. Can you steer—not that you need, being an officer. But you ought to know how to."

"I can steer by the compass. But I don't know much about the sails excepting that you have to keep the wind on the right side of them."

"Yes, that is important with a square vessel. But you will soon learn the essentials—enough to enable you to keep the crew out of mischief. We will go on deck presently and then I will show you the ropes and explain how the gear works."

"That will be jolly," said she. "But there's another thing that I want you to explain: about this mutiny, you know. Captain Hartup was awfully muddled about it. I want to know all that happened while I was locked in my berth."

"I expect you know all about it now," Osmond replied evasively. "There was a bit of a rumpus, of course, but as soon as Dhooody was overboard it was all plain sailing."

"Now, you are not going to put me off like that," she said, in a resolute tone. "I want the whole story in detail, if you please, sir. Does a second mate say 'sir' when he, or she, addresses the first mate?"

"Not as a rule," Osmond replied, with a grin.

"Then I won't. But I want the story. Now." Osmond looked uneasily into the delicately fair, slightly freckled face and thought it, with its crown of red-gold hair, the prettiest face that he had ever seen. But it was an uncommonly determined little face, all the same.

"There really isn't any story," he began. But she interrupted sharply:

"Now listen to me. Yesterday there were seven ferocious men going about this ship like roaring and swearing lions. To-day there are six meek and rather sleepy lambs—I saw them just before breakfast. It is you who have produced this miraculous change, and I want to know how you did it. No sketchy evasions, you know. I want a clear, intelligible narrative."

"It isn't a very suitable occasion for a long yarn," he objected. "Don't you think we ought to go on deck and keep an eye on the old man?"

"Perhaps we ought," she agreed. "But I'm not going to let you off the story, you know. That is understood, isn't it?"

He gave a reluctant assent, and when she had fetched her pith helmet from her cabin and he had borrowed a Panama hat of Redford's, they ascended together to the deck.

The scene was reminiscent of 'The Ancient Mariner'. The blazing sun shone down on a sea that seemed to be composed of oil, so smooth and unruffled was its surface. The air was absolutely still, and the old brigantine wallowed foolishly as the great, glassy rollers swept under her, her sails alternately filling and backing with loud, explosive flaps as the masts swung from side to side, and her long main-boom banging across with a heavy jar at each roll. Sam Winter stood at the wheel in a posture of easy negligence (but he straightened up with a jerk as Osmond's head rose out of the companion-hood); the rest of the crew, excepting Jim Darker, lounged about drowsily forward; and the skipper appeared to be doing sentry-go before a row of green gin-cases that were ranged along the side of the caboose. He looked round as the new-comers arrived on deck, and pointing to the cases, addressed Osmond.

"These boxes of poison belong to you, I understand. I can't have them lying about here."

"Better stow them in the lazarette when I've checked the contents," replied Osmond.

"I can't have intoxicating liquors in my lazarette. This is a temperance ship. I've a good mind to chuck 'em overboard."

"All right," said Osmond. "You pay me one pound four, and then you can do what you like with them."

"Pay!" shrieked the captain. "I pay for this devil's elixir! I traffic in strong drink that steals away men's reason and turns them into fiends! Never! Not a farthing!"

"Very well," said Osmond, "then they had better go below. Here, you, Simmons and Bradley, bear a hand with those cases. Will you see them stowed away in the lazarette, Miss Burleigh?"

"Aye, aye, sir," the latter replied, touching her helmet smartly; whereupon the two men, with delighted grins, pounced upon two of the cases, while Miss Burleigh edged up close to Osmond.

"What on earth is the lazarette?" she whispered, "and where shall I find it?"

"Under the cuddy floor," he whispered in reply. "The trap is under the table."

As the two seamen picked up their respective loads and went off beaming, followed by Miss Burleigh, the captain stood gazing open-mouthed. "Well, I'm—I'm—sure!" he exclaimed, at length. "What do you mean by giving orders to my crew? And I said I wouldn't have that gin in my lazarette."

"Can't leave it about for the men to pinch. You'll have them all drunk again. And what about the watches? We can't have the regular port and starboard watches until you are fit again. Better do as I suggested. Let me keep on deck during the night, and you take charge during the day. Miss Burleigh can relieve you if you want to go below."

"I'll have no women playing the fool on my ship," snapped the skipper; "but as to you, I don't mind your staying on deck at night if you undertake to call me up when you get into a mess—as you certainly will."

"Very well," said Osmond, "we'll leave it at that. And now you'd better come below and let me attend to your bandages. There's nothing to do on deck while this calm lasts."

The skipper complied, not unwillingly; and when Osmond had very gently and skilfully renewed the dressings and rebandaged the injured arm and head—the captain reclining in his bunk for the purpose—he retired, leaving his patient to rest awhile with the aid of the Commentary On the Book of Job.

As soon as he arrived on deck, he proceeded definitely to take charge. The stowage of the gin was now completed and the crew were once more collected forward, gossiping idly but evidently watchful and expectant of further developments from the 'after-guard.' Osmond hailed them in a masterful tone. "Here, you men, get a pull on the main-sheet and stop the boom from slamming. Haul her in as taut as she'll go."

The men came aft with ready cheerfulness, and as Osmond cast off the fall of the rope and gave them a lead, they tailed on and hauled with a will until the sheet-blocks were as close as they could be brought. Then, when the rope had been belayed, Osmond turned to the crew and briefly explained the arrangements for working the ship in her present, short-handed state.

"So you understand," he concluded, "I am the mate for the time being, and Miss Burleigh is taking the duties of the second mate. Is that clear?"

"Aye, aye, sir," was the reply, accompanied by the broadest of grins, "we understands, sir."

"Who is the cook?" inquired Osmond.



"Bill Foat 'as been a-doin' the cookin', sir," Simmons explained.

"Then he'd better get on with it. Whose watch on deck is it?"

"Starboard watch, sir," replied Simmons; "that's me and Winter and Darker."

"I must have a look at Darker," said Osmond. "Meanwhile you take the wheel, and you, Winter, keep a look-out forward. I haven't heard the ship's bell sounded this morning."

"No, sir," Winter explained. "The clock in the companion has stopped and none of us haven't got the time."

"Very well," said Osmond. "I'll wind it up and start it when I make eight bells."

The routine of the duties being thus set going, Osmond went forward and paid a visit to the invalid in the forecabin, with the result that Jim Darker presently appeared on deck with a clean bandage and a somewhat sheepish grin. Then the chief officer turned his attention to the education of his subordinate, observed intently by six pairs of inquisitive eyes.

"I think, Miss Burleigh," he said, "you had better begin by learning how to take an observation. Then you will be able to do something that the men can't, as an officer should. Do you know anything about mathematics?"

"As much as is necessary, I expect. I took second class honours in maths. Will that do?"

"Of course it will. By the way, where did you take your degree?"

"Oxford—Somerville, you know."

"Oh," said Osmond, rather taken aback. "When were you up at Oxford?"

She regarded him with a mischievous smile as she replied: "After your time, I should say. I only came down a year ago."

It was, of course, but a chance shot. Nevertheless, Osmond hastily reverted to the subject of observations. "It is quite a simple matter to take the altitude of the sun, and you work out your results almost entirely from tables. You will do it easily the first time. I'll go and get Redford's sextant, or better still, we might go below and I can show you how to use a sextant and how to work out your latitude."

"Yes," she agreed eagerly, "I would sooner have my first lesson below. Our friends here are so very interested in us."

She bustled away down to the cabin, and Osmond, following, went into his berth, whence he presently emerged with two mahogany cases and a portly volume, inscribed 'Norie's Navigation'.

"I've found the second mate's sextant as well as Redford's, so we can have one each," he said, laying them on the table with the volume. "And now let us get to work. We mustn't stay here too long or we shall miss the transit."

The two mates seated themselves side by side at the table, and Osmond, taking one of the sextants out of its case, explained its construction and demonstrated its use. Then the volume was opened, the tables explained, the mysteries of 'dip' refraction and 'parallax' expounded, and finally an imaginary observation was worked out on the back of an envelope.

"I had no idea," said Miss Burleigh, as she triumphantly finished the calculation, "that the science of navigation was so simple."

"It isn't," replied Osmond. "Latitude by the meridian altitude of the sun is the A B C of navigation. Some of it, such as longitude by lunar distance, is fairly tough. But it is time we got on deck. It is past eleven by my watch and the Lord knows what the time actually is. The chronometer has stopped. The skipper bumped against it when he staggered into his berth on the day when the mutiny broke out."

"Then how shall we get the longitude?" Miss Burleigh asked.

"We shan't. But it doesn't matter much. We must keep on a westerly course. There is nothing, in that direction, between us and America."

The appearance on deck of the two officers, each armed with a sextant, created a profound impression. It is true that, so far as the 'second mate' was concerned, the attitude of the crew was merely that of respectful amusement. But the effect, in the case of Osmond, was very different. The evidence that he was able to 'shoot the sun' established him in their eyes as a pukka navigator, and added to the awe with which they regarded this uncannily capable 'factory bug'. And there was plenty of time for the impression to soak in; for the first glance through the sextant showed that the sun was still rising fairly fast; that there was yet some considerable time to run before noon. In fact, more than half an hour passed before the retardation of the sun's motion heralded the critical phase. And at this moment the skipper's head rose slowly above the hood of the companion-hatch.

At first his back was towards the observers, but when he emerged and, turning forward, became aware of them, he stopped short as if petrified. The men ceased their gossip to watch him with ecstatic grins, and Sam Winter edged stealthily towards the ship's bell.

"What is the meaning of this play-acting and tom foolery?" the skipper demanded, sourly. "Women and landmen monkeying about with nautical instruments."

Osmond held up an admonitory hand, keeping his eye glued to the eyepiece of the sextant.

"I'm asking you a question," the captain persisted. There was another brief silence. Then, suddenly, Osmond sang out

"Eight bells!" and looked at his watch. Winter, seizing the lanyard that hung from the clapper of the bell, struck the eight strokes, and the second mate—prompted in a hoarse whisper—called out: "Port watch, there! Bradley will take the first trick at the wheel."

"Aye, aye, sir—Miss, I means," responded Bradley, and proceeded purple-faced and chuckling aloud, to relieve the gratified Simmons.

At these proceedings the captain looked on in helpless bewilderment. He watched Osmond wind and set the clock in the companion and saw him disappear below, followed by his accomplice, to work out the reckoning, and shook his head with mute disapproval. But yet to him, as to the rest of the ship's company, there came a certain sense of relief. Osmond's brisk, confident voice, the cheerful sound of the ship's bell, and the orderly setting of the watch, seemed definitely to mark the end of the mutiny and the return to a reign of law and order.

---

## VI. — BETTY MAKES A DISCOVERY

For reasons best known to herself, Miss Burleigh made no further attempt that day to satisfy her curiosity as to the quelling of the mutiny. There was, in fact, little opportunity. For shortly after the mid-day meal—sea-pie and corned pork with biscuit—Osmond turned in regardless of the heat, to get a few hours' sleep before beginning his long night vigil. But on the following day the captain was so far recovered as to be able to take the alternate watches—relieved to some extent in the daytime by the second mate—and this left ample time for Osmond to continue the education of his junior, which now extended from theoretical navigation to practical seamanship.

It was during the afternoon watch, when the two mates were seated on a couple of spare cases in the shadow of the main-sail, practising the working of splices on some oddments of rope, that the 'examination-in-chief' began; and Osmond, recognizing the hopelessness of further evasion, was fain to tell the story of his adventure, dryly enough, indeed, but in fairly satisfying detail. And as he narrated, in jerky, colourless sentences, with his eyes riveted on the splice that he was working, his spellbound listener let her rope's-end and marlinspike lie idle on her lap while she watched his impassive face with something more than mere attention.

"I wonder," she said when the tale was told, "whether the men realize who the spectre mate really was."

"I don't think they can quite make out what happened. But I fancy they look upon me as something rather uncanny; which is all for the best, seeing how short we are and what a helpless worm the skipper is."

"Yes, they certainly have a holy fear of you," she agreed, smiling at the grim, preoccupied face. She reflected awhile and then continued: "But I don't quite understand what brought you on board. You say that Dhooody had stolen those cases of gin. But what business was that of yours?"

"It was my gin."

"Your gin? But you don't drink gin."

"No, I sell it. I am a trader. I run a store, or factory, as they call it out here."

As Osmond made this statement, her look of undisguised admiration changed to one of amazement. She smothered an exclamation and managed to convert it at short notice into an unconcerned "I see"; but her astonishment extinguished her powers of conversation for the time being. She could only gaze at him and marvel at the incongruity of his personality with his vocation. She had encountered a good many traders, and though she had realized that the 'palm-oil ruffian' was largely the invention of the missionary and the official snob and that West African traders are a singularly heterogeneous body, still that body did not ordinarily include men of Osmond's class. And her sly suggestion of his connection with Oxford had been something more than a mere random shot. There are certain little tricks of speech and manner by which members of the ancient universities can usually be recognized, especially by their contemporaries and though Osmond was entirely free from the deliberate affectations of a certain type of 'varsity' man, her quick ear had detected one or two turns of phrase that seemed familiar. And he had not repudiated the suggestion.

"I wonder," she said, after an interval of some what uncomfortable silence, "what made you take to trading. The métier doesn't seem to fit you very well."

"No," he admitted with a grim smile; "I am a bit of a mug at a business deal."

"I didn't mean that," she rejoined hastily. "But there are such a lot of things that would suit you better. It is a sin for a man of your class and attainments to be keeping a shop—for that is what it amounts to."

"That is what it actually is," said he.

"Yes. But why on earth do you do it?"

"Must do something, you know," he replied, lamely.

"Of course you must, but it should be something suitable, and selling gin is not a suitable occupation for a gentleman. And it isn't as if you were a 'lost dog.' You are really extremely capable."

"Yes," he admitted with a grin, "I'm pretty handy in a scrum."

"Don't be silly," she admonished, severely. "I don't undervalue your courage and strength—I shouldn't be a natural woman if I did—but I am thinking of your resourcefulness and ingenuity. It wasn't by mere thumping that you got your ascendancy over the men. You beat them by sheer brains."

"Jim Darker thinks it was an iron belying-pin."

"Now don't quibble and prevaricate. You know as well as I do that, if it had been a matter of mere strength and courage, you would never have got out of the hold, and we should have been at the bottom of the sea by now. It was your mental alertness that saved us all."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Osmond. "But you aren't getting on very fast with that splice. Have you been watching me?"

"Oh! bother the splices!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "I want you to tell me why you are throwing yourself away on this ridiculous factory."

"It isn't a bad sort of life," he protested. "I don't think I mind it."

"Then you ought to," she retorted. "You ought to have some ambition. Think of all the things that you might have done—that you still might do with, your abilities and initiative."

She looked at him earnestly as she spoke; and some thing that she saw in his face as she uttered those last words gave her pause. Suddenly it was borne in on her that she had met other men who seemed to be out of their element; men who, report whispered, had been driven by social misadventure—by debt, entanglements, or drink—to seek sanctuary on the remote West Coast. Was it possible that he might be one of these refugees? He was obviously not a drinker and he did not look like a wastrel of any kind. Still, there might be a skeleton in his cupboard. At any rate, he was extraordinarily reticent about himself.

She changed the subject rather abruptly. "Is your factory in the British Protectorate?"

"Yes. At Adaffia, a little, out-of-the-way place about a dozen miles east of Quittah."

"I know it—at least I have heard of it. Isn't it the place where that poor fellow Osmond died?"

"Yes," he replied, a little startled by the question.

"What was he like? I suppose you saw him?"

"Yes. A biggish man. Short moustache and Vandyke beard."

"Quite a gentlemanly man, wasn't he?"

"He seemed to be. But he didn't have a great deal to say to anybody."

"It was rather pathetic, his dying in that way, like a hunted ox that has run into a trap."

"Well," said Osmond, "there wasn't much to choose. If the climate hadn't had him, the police would."

"I am not so sure," she replied. "We all hoped he would get away, especially the officer who was detailed to arrest him. I think he meant to make a fussy search of all the wrong houses in the village by way of giving notice that he was there and scaring the fugitive away. Still, I think he was rather relieved when he found that trader man—what was his name?—Larkin or Larkom?—painting the poor fellow's name on the cross above his grave. You heard about that, I suppose?"

"Yes. Queer coincidence, wasn't it?"

"Don't be so callous. I think it was a most pathetic incident."

"I suppose it was," Osmond agreed. "And now, don't you think you had better have another try at that splice?"

With a little grimace she took up the piece of rope and began obediently to unlay its ends and the interrupted course of practical seamanship was resumed, with intervals of desultory conversation, until eight bells, when the teapot was brought forth from the galley and conveyed below to the cabin. After tea, through what was left of the first dog-watch, there was another spell of knots and splices; and then, when the sun set and darkness fell on the sea, more desultory talk, in which Osmond mostly played the role of listener, which—with an interval for dinner—lasted until it was time for the second mate to turn in.

So life went on aboard the *Speedwell* day after day.

The calm persisted as calms are apt to do in the Doldrums, with nothing to suggest any promise of a change. Now and again, at long intervals, the oily surface of the sea would be dimmed by a little draught of air—just enough to 'put the sails asleep' and give momentary life to the steering-wheel. But in a few minutes it would die away, leaving the sails to back and fill as the vessel rolled inertly on the glassy swell. The first observation had shown the ship's position to be about four degrees north of the equator, with the coast of the Bight of Benin some eighty miles away to the north; and subsequent observations revealed a slow southerly drift. It was pretty certain that she had a more rapid easterly drift on the Guinea current, but as the chronometer was out of action, there was no means of ascertaining this or of determining her longitude. Sooner or later, if the calm continued, she would drift into the Bight of Biafra, where she might pick up the land and sea breezes or find an anchorage where she could bring up and get the chronometer rated.

To a seaman there is nothing more exasperating than a prolonged calm. The crew of the *Speedwell* were not sailors of a strenuous type, but the inaction and monotony that prevailed on the idly ship bored them—if not to tears, at least to bad language and chronic grumbling. They lounged about with sulkily looks and yawned over the odd jobs that Osmond found for them, whistling vainly for a breeze and crawling up the rigging from time to time to see if anything—land or another ship—was in sight. As to the captain, he grew daily more sour and taciturn as he saw his stores of provisions dwindling with nothing to show for the expenditure.

But by two of the ship company the calm was accepted with something more than resignation. The two mates had no complaint whatever to make. They were, indeed, cut off from all the world; marooned on a stationary ship in an unfrequented sea. But they had one another and asked for nothing better; and the longer the calm lasted the more secure were they of the continuance of this happy condition. For the inevitable thing had happened. They had fallen in love.

It was very natural. Both were more than commonly attractive, and circumstances had thrown them together in the closest and most intimate companionship through every hour of the long days. They had worked together, though the work was more than half play; they had a common interest which kept them apart from the others. Together they had sat,

talking endlessly, in little patches of shadow when the sun was high in the heavens, or leaned upon the bulwark rail and watched the porpoises playing round the idle ship or the Portuguese men-of-war gliding imperceptibly past on their rainbow-tinted floats. They had paced the heaving deck together when the daylight was gone and earnestly studied the constellations 'that blazed in the velvet blue', or peered down into the dark water alongside where the Nautilus shone like submarine stars and shoals of fish darted away before the pursuing dolphin lurid flashes of phosphorescent light. No more perfect setting for a romance could be imagined.

And then the personality of each was such as to make a special appeal to the other. In the eyes of the girl, Osmond was a hero, a paladin. His commanding stature, his strength, his mastery of other men, and above all his indomitable courage, had captured her imagination from the first. And in his rugged way he was a handsome man; and if he could be a little brutal on occasion, he had always been, to her, the soul of courtesy and chivalry. As to the 'past' of which she had a strong suspicion, that was no concern of hers; perhaps it even invested him with an added interest.

As to Osmond, he had been captivated at once, and, to do him justice he had instantly perceived the danger that loomed ahead. But he could do nothing to avoid it. Flight was impossible from this little self-contained world, so pleasantly cut off from the unfriendly world without; nor could he, even if he had tried, help being thrown constantly into the society of this fascinating little lady. And if, during the long, solitary night-watches, or in his stifling berth, he gnashed his teeth over the perverseness of Fate and thought bitterly of what might have been, that did not prevent him from succumbing during the day to the charm of her frank, unconcealed friendliness.

It was in the forenoon of the eighth day of the calm that the two cronies were leaning on the rail, each holding a stout line. The previous day Osmond had discovered a quantity of fishing tackle among Redford's effects, and a trial cast had provided not only excellent sport, but a very welcome addition to the ship's meagre diet. Thereupon an epidemic of sea-angling had broken out on board, and Bill Foat, the cook, had been kept busy with the preparation of snappers, horse and other deep-sea fish.

"I wonder," the girl mused as she peered over the side, "how much longer this calm is going to last."

"It may last for weeks," Osmond replied. "I hope it won't for your sake. You must be getting frightfully bored."

"Indeed, I'm not," she rejoined. "It is the jolliest holiday I have ever had. The only fly in the ointment is the fear that my father may be a little anxious about me. But I don't suppose he is really worrying. He is like me—not much given to fussing and he knows that I am fairly well able to take care of myself, though he doesn't know that I have got a Captain James Cook to stand by me. But I expect you are getting pretty sick of this monotonous life, aren't you, Captain J.?"

Osmond shook his head. "Not a bit," he replied. "It has been a delightful interlude for me. I should be perfectly satisfied for it to go on for the rest of my life."

She looked at him thoughtfully, speculating on the inward meaning of this statement and noting a certain grave wistfulness that softened the grim face.

"That sounds rather as if Adaffia were not a perfect Paradise, for it has been a dull life for you since the mutiny collapsed and the calm set in, with no one to talk to but me."

"Adaffia would be all right under the same conditions," said he.

"What do you mean by the same conditions?" she asked, flushing slightly; and as he did not immediately answer, she continued: "Do you mean that life would be more pleasant there if you had your second mate to gossip with?"

"Yes," he answered, reluctantly, almost gruffly. "Of course that is what I mean."

"It is very nice of you, Jim, to say that, but you needn't have spoiled it by speaking in that crabby tone. It is nothing to be ashamed of. I don't mind admitting that I shall miss you most awfully if we have to separate when this voyage is over. You have been the best of chums to me."

She flushed again as she said this and then looked at him a little shyly. For nearly a minute he made no response, but continued to gaze intently and rather gloomily at the water below. At length he said, gravely, still looking steadily at the water:

"There is something, Miss Burleigh, that I feel I ought to tell you; that I wouldn't tell any one else in the world."

"Thank you, Jim," she said. "But please don't call me Miss Burleigh. It is so ridiculously stiff between old chums like us. And, Jim, you are not to tell me anything that it might be better for you that I should not know. I am not in the least inquisitive about your affairs."

"I know that," he replied. "But this is a thing that I feel you ought to know. It has been on my mind to tell you for some days past." He paused for a few seconds and then continued: "You remember, Betty, that man Osmond that you spoke about?"

"Yes; but don't call him 'that man Osmond.' Poor fellow! I don't suppose he had done anything very dreadful, and at any rate we can afford to speak kindly of him now that he is dead."

"Yes, but that is just the point. He isn't dead."

"Isn't dead?" she repeated. "But Captain Cockram saw that other man, Larkom, painting the name on his grave. Was it

a dummy grave?"

"No. But it was Larkom who died. The man Cockeram saw was Osmond."

"Are you sure? But of course you would be. Oh, Jim! You won't tell anybody else, will you?"

"I am not very likely to," he replied with a grim smile, "as I happen to be the said John Osmond."

"Jim!" she gasped, gazing at him with wide eyes and parted lips. "I am astounded! I can't believe it."

"I expect it is a bit of a shock," he said bitterly, "to find that you have been socialising for more than a week with a man who is wanted by the police."

"I didn't mean that," she exclaimed, turning scarlet. "You know I didn't. But it is so astonishing. I can't understand how it happened. It seems so extraordinary, and so—so opportune."

Osmond chuckled grimly. "It does," he agreed. "Remarkably opportune. Almost as if I had polished Larkom off ad hoc. Well, I didn't."

"Of course you didn't. Who supposed for a moment that you did? But do tell me exactly how it happened."

"Well, it was quite simple. Poor old Larkom died of blackwater fever. He was a good fellow. One of the very best, and the only friend I had. He knew all about me—or nearly all—and he did everything he could to help me. It was an awful blow to me when he died. But he never had a chance when once the fever took hold of him. He was an absolute wreck and he went out like the snuff of a candle, though he managed to make a will before he died, leaving the factory and all his effects to his friend James Cook. It was he who invented that name for me."

"Well, of course, when he was dead, I had to bury him and stick up a cross over his grave. And—then I just painted the wrong name on it. That's all."

She nodded without looking at him and a shadow seemed to fall on her face. "I see," she said, a little coldly. "It was a tempting opportunity; and events have justified you in taking it."

Something in her tone arrested his attention. He looked at her sharply and with a somewhat puzzled expression. Suddenly he burst out: "Good Lord, Betty! You don't think I did this thing in cold blood, do you?"

"Didn't you?" she asked. "Then how did you come to do it?"

"I'll tell you. Poor old Larkom's name was John, like mine. I had painted in the 'John' and was just going to begin the 'Larkom' when I happened to look along the beach. And there I saw Cockeram with his armed party bearing down on Adaffia. Of course, I guessed instantly what his business was, and I saw that there was only one thing to be done. There was the blank space on the cross. I had only to fill it in with my own name and the situation would be saved. So I did."

Her face cleared at this explanation. "I am glad," she said, "that it was only done on the spur of the moment. It did seem a little callous."

"I should think so," he agreed, "if you thought of me sitting by the poor old fellow's bedside and calmly planning to use his corpse to cover my retreat. As it was, I hated doing it; but necessity knows no law. I have thought more than once of making a dummy grave for myself and shifting the cross to it and of setting up a proper memorial to Larkom. And I will do it when I get back."

She made no comment on this; and as, at the moment her line tightened, she hauled it in, and impassively detaching a big red snapper from the hook, re-baited and cast the line overboard with a curiously detached, preoccupied air. Apparently, she was reflecting profoundly on what she had just learned, and Osmond, glancing at her furtively from time to time, abstained from interrupting her meditations. After a considerable interval she turned towards him and said in a low, earnest tone: "There is one thing that I want to ask you. Just now you said that you felt you ought to tell me this; that I ought to know. I don't quite see why."

"There was a very good reason," he replied, "and I may as well make a clean breast of it. To put it bluntly, I fell in love with you almost as soon as I saw you, and naturally, I have grown to love you more with every day that has passed."

She flushed deeply, and glancing at him for an instant, turned her eyes once more on her line.

"Still," she said in a low voice, "I don't see why you thought I ought to know."

"Don't you?" he rejoined. "But surely it is obvious. You accepted me as your chum and you seemed to like me well enough. But you had no inkling as to who or what I was. It was my clear duty to tell you."

"You mean that there was the possibility that I might come to care for you and that you felt it your duty to warn me off?"

"Yes. It wasn't very likely that there would be anything more than friendship on your side; but still it was not impossible. Women fall in love with the most unlikely men."

At this she smiled and looked him squarely in the face, "I thought you meant that," she said, softly, "and, of course, you were quite right. But if your intention was to put me on my guard and prevent me from caring for you, your warning has come too late. You would have had to tell me before I had seen you—and I don't believe it would have made a scrap of difference even then. At any rate, I don't care a fig what you have done—I know it was nothing mean. But all the same, I am glad you told me. I should have hated to find it out afterwards by myself."

He gazed at her in dismay. "But, Betty," he protested, "you don't seem to grasp the position. There is a warrant out for my arrest."

"Who cares?" she responded. "Besides, there isn't. John Osmond is dead and there is no warrant out for Captain James Cook. It is you who don't grasp the position."

"But," he expostulated, "don't you realize that I can never go home? That I can't even show my face in Europe?"

"Very well," said she. "So much the worse for Europe. But there are plenty of other places; and what is good enough for you is good enough for me. Now, Jim, dear," she added, coaxingly, "don't create difficulties. You have said that you love me—I think I knew it before you told me—and that is all that matters to me. Everything else is trivial. You are the man to whom I have given my heart, and I am not going to have you crying off."

"Good God, Betty!" he groaned, "don't talk about 'crying off'. If you only know what it means to me to look into Paradise and be forced to turn away! But, my dearest love, it has to be. I would give my life for you gladly, joyfully. I am giving more than my life in refusing the sacrifice that you, in the nobleness of your heart, are willing to make. But I could never accept it. I could never stoop to the mean selfishness of spoiling the life of the woman who is more to me than all the world."

"I am offering no sacrifice," she said. "I am only asking to share the life of the man I love. What more does a woman want?"

"Not to share such a life as mine," he replied, bitterly. "Think of it, Betty, darling! For the rest of my days I must sneak about the world under a false name, hiding in obscure places, scanning the face of every stranger with fear and suspicion lest he should discover my secret and drag me from my sham grave. I am an outcast, an Ishmaelite. Every man's hand is against me. Could I allow a woman—a beautiful girl, a lady of position—to share such a sordid existence as mine? I should be a poor lover if I could think of such contemptible selfishness."

"It isn't so bad as that, Jim, dear," she pleaded. "We could go abroad—to America—and make a fresh start. You would be sure to do well there with your abilities, and we could just shake off the old world and forget it."

He shook his head, sadly. "It is no use, darling, to delude ourselves. We must face realities. Mine is a wrecked life. It would be a crime, even if it were possible, for me to take you from the surroundings of an English lady and involve you in the wreckage. It was a misfortune, at least for you, that we ever met, and there is only one remedy. When we separate, we must try to forget one another."

"We shan't, Jim," she exclaimed, passionately. "You know we shan't. We aren't, either of us, of the kind that forgets. And we could be so happy together! Don't let us lose everything for a mere scruple."

At this moment all on deck were startled by a loud hail from aloft. One of the men had climbed up into the swaying foretop and stood there holding on to the topmast shrouds and with his free hand pointing to the north. Osmond stepped forward and hailed him.

"Foretop there! What is it?"

"A steamer, sir. Seems to be headin' straight on to us."

Osmond ran below, and having fetched Redford's binocular from the berth, climbed the main rigging to just below the cross-tree. There, securing himself with one arm passed round a shroud, he scanned the northern horizon intently for a minute or two and then descended slowly with a grave, set face. From his loftier station he had been able to make out the vessel's hull; and the character of the approaching ship had left him in little doubt as to her mission. His comrade met him with an anxious, inquiring face as he jumped down from the rail.

"Small man-o'-war," he reported in response to the unspoken question; "barquentine-rigged, buff funnel, white hull. Looks like a gun-boat."

"Ha!" she exclaimed. "That will be the Widgeon. She was lying off Accra."

The two looked at one another in silence for a while as they look who have heard bad tidings. At length Osmond said, grimly: "Well, this is the end of it, Betty. She has been sent out to search for you. It will be 'good-bye' in less than an hour."

"Not 'good-bye,' Jim," she urged. "You will come, too, won't you?"

"No," he replied; "I can't leave the old man in this muddle."

"But you'll have to leave him sooner or later."

"Yes; but I must give him the chance to get another mate, or at least to ship one or two native hands."

"Oh, let him muddle on as he did before. My father will be wild to see you when he hears of all that has happened. Don't forget, Jim, that you saved my life."

"I saved my own," said he, "and you chanced to benefit. But I couldn't come with you in any case, Betty. You are forgetting that I have to keep out of sight. There may be men up at head-quarters who know me. There may be even on this gun-boat."

She gazed at him despairingly and her eyes filled. "Oh, Jim," she moaned, "how dreadful it is. Of course I must go. But I feel that we shall never see one another again."

"It will be better if we don't," said he.

"Oh, don't say that!" she pleaded. "Think of what we have been to one another and what we could still be for ever and ever if only you could forget what is past and done with. Think of what perfect chums we have been and how fond we are of one another. For we are, Jim. I love you with my whole heart and I know that you are just as devoted to me. It is a tragedy that we should have to part."

"It is," he agreed, gloomily, "and the tragedy is of my making."

"It isn't," she dissented, indignantly; and then, softly and coaxingly, she continued: "But we won't lose sight of each other altogether, Jim, will we? You will write to me as soon as you get ashore. Promise me that you will."

"Much better not," he replied; but with so little decision that she persisted until, in the end, and much against his judgment, he yielded and gave the required promise.

"That makes it a little easier," she said, with a sigh. "It leaves me something to look forward to."

She took the glasses from him and searched the rim of the horizon, over which the masts of the approaching ship had begun to appear.

"I suppose I ought to report to the old man," said Osmond, and he was just turning towards the companion when Captain Hartup's head emerged slowly and was in due course followed by the remainder of his person. His left arm was now emancipated from the sling and in his right hand he carried a sextant.

"Gun-boat in sight, sir," said Osmond. "Seems to be coming our way."

The captain nodded, and stepping to the taffrail, applied his eye to the eyepiece of the sextant.

"It has gone seven bells," said he. "Isn't it about time you got ready to take the latitude—you and the other officer?" he added, with a sour grin.

In the agitating circumstances, Osmond had nearly forgotten the daily ceremony—a source of perennial joy to the crew. He now ran below and presently returned with the two sextants, one of which he handed to 'the other officer'.

"For the last time, little comrade," he whispered.

"And we'll work the reckoning together. Norie's Navigation will be a sacred book to me after this."

She took the instrument from him and advanced with him to the bulwark. But if the truth must be told, her observation was a mere matter of form, and twice before the skipper called "eight bells" she had furtively to wipe a tear from the eyepiece. But she went below to the cuddy and resolutely worked out the latitude (from the reading on Osmond's sextant), and when the brief calculation was finished, she silently picked up the scrap of paper on which Osmond had worked out the reckoning and laid hers in its place. He took it up without a word and slipped it into his pocket.

"They are queer keepsakes," she said in a half-whisper as the door of the captain's cabin opened, "but they will tell us exactly when and where we parted. Who knows when and where we shall meet again—if we ever do?"

"If we ever do," he repeated in the same tone; and then, as the captain came out and looked at them inquiringly, he reported the latitude that they had found, and followed him up the companion-steps.

When they arrived on deck they found the crew ranged along the bulwark watching the gun-boat, which was now fully in view, end-on to the brigantine, and approaching rapidly, her bare masts swinging like pendulums as she rolled along over the big swell.

"I suppose we shall make our number, sir," said Osmond; and as the skipper vouchsafed no reply beyond an unintelligible grunt, he added: "The flag locker is in your cabin, isn't it?"

"Never you mind about the flag locker," was the sour reply. "Our name is painted legibly on the bows and the counter, and I suppose they've got glasses if they want to know who we are." He took the binocular from Osmond, and after a leisurely inspection of the gun-boat, continued: "Looks like the Widgeon. Coming to pick up a passenger, I reckon. About time, too. I suppose you are both going—if they'll take you?"

"I am not," said Osmond. "I am going to stay and see you into port."

The skipper nodded and emitted an ambiguous grunt, which he amplified with the addition: "Well, you can please yourself," and resumed his inspection of the approaching stranger.

His forecast turned out to be correct, for the gunboat made no signal, but, sweeping past the *Speedwell's* stern at a distance of less than a quarter of a mile, slowed down and brought-to on the port side, when she proceeded to lower a boat; whereupon Captain Hartup ordered a rope ladder to be dropped over the port quarter. These preparations Miss Burleigh watched anxiously and with an assumption of cheerful interest, and when the boat ran alongside, she joined the skipper at the head of the ladder, while Osmond, lurking discreetly in the background, kept a watchful eye on the officer who sat in the stern-sheets until the lessening distance rendered him distinguishable as an undoubted stranger, when he also joined the skipper.

As the new-comer—a pleasant-faced, clean-shaved man in a lieutenant's uniform—reached the top of the ladder, he exchanged salutes with the skipper and the lady, who advanced and held out her hand.



"Well, Miss Burleigh," said the lieutenant as he shook her hand, heartily, "this is a relief to find you safe and sound and looking in the very pink of health. But you have given us all a rare fright. We were afraid the ship had been lost."

"So she was," replied Betty. "Lost and found. I think I have earned a fatted calf, don't you, Captain Darley?"

"I don't know," rejoined the lieutenant (the honorary rank was in acknowledgment of his position as commander of the gun-boat); "we must leave that to His Excellency. But it doesn't sound very complimentary to your shipmates or to your recent diet. I needn't ask if you are coming back with us. My cabin has been made ready for you."

"But how kind of you, Captain Darley. Yes, I suppose I must come with you, though I have been having quite a good time here; mutinies, fishing, and all sorts of entertainments."

"Mutinies, hey!" exclaimed Darley, with a quick glance at the captain. "Well, I am sorry to tear you away from these entertainments, but orders are orders. Perhaps you will get your traps packed up while I have a few words with the captain. I shall have to make a report of what has happened."

On this there was a general move towards the companion. Betty retired—somewhat precipitately—to her berth and the lieutenant followed Captain Hartup to his cabin.

Both parties were absent for some time. The first to reappear was Betty, slightly red about the eyes and carrying a small hand-bag. Having dispatched Sam Winter below to fetch up her portmanteau, she drew Osmond away to the starboard side.

"Jack," she said, in a low, earnest tone—"I may call you by your own name just for once, mayn't I?—you have made me a promise. You won't go back on it, will you, Jack?"

"Of course I shan't, Betty," he replied.

"I want you to have my cabin when I've gone," she continued. "It is a better one than yours and it has a tiny port-hole. And if you open the locker, you will find a little note for you. That is all. Here they come. Good-bye, Jack, darling!"

She turned away abruptly as he murmured a husky farewell, and having shaken hands with Captain Hartup and thanked him for his hospitality, was stepping on to the ladder when she paused suddenly and turned back.

"I had nearly forgotten," said she. "I haven't paid my passage."

"There is no passage-money to pay," the skipper said, gruffly. "My contract was to deliver you at Accra, and I haven't done it. Besides," he added, with a sour grin, "you've worked your passage."

"Worked her passage!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "What do you mean?"

"She has been taking the second mate's duties," the skipper explained.

Darley stared open-mouthed from the skipper to the lady. Then, with a fine, hearty British guffaw, he assisted the latter down to the boat.



## VII. — THE MATE TAKES HIS DISCHARGE

As an instance of the malicious perversity which the forces of nature often appear to display, the calm which had for so many days cut off Miss Betty from any communication with the world at large seemed unable to survive her departure. Before the gun-boat was fairly hull down on the horizon, a dark line on the glassy sea announced the approach of a breeze, and a few minutes later the brigantine's sails filled, her wallowings subsided, and a visible wake began to stream out astern.

The change in the vessel's motion brought the captain promptly on deck, and Osmond listened somewhat anxiously for the orders as to the course which was to be set. But he knew his commander too well to make any suggestions.

"Breeze seems to be about sou'-sou'-west," the skipper remarked with one eye on the compass-dial and the other on the upper sails. "Looks as if it was going to hold, too. Put her head west-nor'-west."

"Did the lieutenant give you our position?" Osmond inquired.

"No, he didn't," the skipper snapped. "He wasn't asked. I don't want any of your brass-bound dandies teaching me my business. The continent of Africa is big enough for me to find without their help."

Osmond smothered a grin as he thought of the chronometer, re-started and ticking away aimlessly in the captain's cabin, its error and rate alike unknown. But again he made no comment, and presently the skipper resumed: "I suppose you will be wanting to get back to Adaffia?"

"I'm not going to leave you in the lurch."

"Well, you can't stay with me for good excepting as a seaman, as you haven't got a ticket—at least, I suppose you haven't."

"No. I hold a master's certificate entitling me to navigate my own yacht, but, of course, that is no use on a merchant vessel, excepting in an emergency. But I don't quite see what you are going to do."

"It is a bit of a problem," the skipper admitted. "I shall take on one or two native hands to help while we are on the Coast, and appoint Winter and Simmons to act as mates. Then perhaps I shall be able to pick up an officer from one of the steamers for the homeward trip."

"I will stay with you until you are fixed up, if you like," said Osmond; but the captain shook his head.

"No," he replied. "I shall put you ashore at Adaffia. I can manage all right on the Coast, and I must have a regular mate for the homeward voyage."

Thus the programme was settled, and, on the whole, satisfactorily to Osmond. It is true that, if there had been no such person as Elizabeth Burleigh, he would have held on to his position, even with the rating of ordinary seaman, for the homeward voyage, on the chance of transferring later to some ship bound for South America or the Pacific Islands. But although he had renounced all claim to her and all hope of any future connected with her, he still clung to the ill omened land that was made glorious to him by her beloved presence.

The captain's forecast was justified by the event. The breeze held steadily and seemed inclined to freshen rather than to fail. The old brigantine heeled over gently and forged ahead with a pleasant murmur in her sails and quite a fine wake trailing astern. It was a great relief to everybody after the long calm, with its monotony and inaction and the incessant rolling of the ship and flapping of the sails. The captain was almost pleasant and the crew were cheerful and contented, though they had little to do, for when once the course was set there was no need to touch sheet or brace, and the trick at the wheel was the only active duty apart from the cook's activities.

To Osmond alone the change brought no obvious satisfaction. All that had recently happened had been, as he could not but recognize, for the best. The parting had to come, and every day that it was delayed forged his fetters only the more firmly. But this reflection offered little consolation. He loved this sweet, frank, open-hearted girl with an intensity possible only to a man of his strength of will and constancy of purpose. And now she was gone; gone out of his life for ever. It was a final parting. There was no future to look forward to; not even the most distant and shadowy. The vision of a great happiness had floated before him and had passed, leaving him to take up again the burden of his joyless life, haunted for ever by the ghost of the might-have-been.

Nevertheless, he went about his duties briskly enough, finding jobs for the men and for himself, overhauling the cordage, doing small repairs on the rigging, and even, with his own hands, putting a patch on a weak spot on the bottom of the long-boat and lining it inside and out with scraps of sheet copper. And if he was a little grimmer and more silent than before, the men understood and in their rough way sympathized, merely remarking that "Pore old Cook do seem cut up along o' losin' his Judy."

At dawn on the third day the land was in sight; that is to say to the north there was an appearance as if a number of small entomological pins had been stuck into the sea-horizon in irregular groups. Viewed from the fore-top, however, through Redford's glasses, this phenomenon resolved itself into a narrow band of low-lying shore, dotted with coconut palms, the characteristic aspect of the Bight of Benin.

As the day wore on, the brigantine gradually closed in with the land. Before noon, the captain was able, through his telescope, to identify a group of white buildings as the German factories at the village of Bagidá. Then the neighbouring

village of Lomé came in sight and slowly crept past; and as the *Speedwell* drew yet nearer to the land, Osmond was able to recognize, among a large grove of coconuts, the white-washed bungalow at Denu, and, a few miles ahead, the dark mass of palms that he knew to be Adaffia.

"Well, Mr. Cook," said the captain, "you'll soon be back by your own fireside. If the breeze holds, we ought to be in Adaffia roads by four at the latest. I suppose you have got all your portmanteaux packed?"

"I'm all ready to go ashore, if you are still of the same mind."

"I never change my mind," replied the skipper; and Osmond believed him.

"Are you making any stay at Adaffia?" he asked.

"I am going to put you ashore," the captain answered. "What I shall do after that is my business."

"I asked," said Osmond, "because I thought I might be able to get you one or two native hands. However, you can let me know about that later. Now, as it is your watch on deck, I will go below and take a bit of a rest."

He went down to the berth, into which he had moved when Betty departed, and, shutting the door, looked thoughtfully round the little apartment. Nothing had been altered since she left. All the little feminine tidinesses had been piously preserved. It was still, to the eye, a woman's cabin, and everything in its aspect spoke to him of the late tenant. Presently he lay down on the bunk—the bunk in which she had slept—and for the hundredth time drew from his pocket the letter which she had left in the locker. It was quite short—just a little note hastily written at the last moment when the boat was waiting. But to him it was inexhaustible; and though by now he knew it by heart, he read it again as eagerly as when he had first opened it.

*'My DEAREST JIM,' it ran.*

*'I am writing you a few words of farewell (since we must say 'good-bye' in public) to tell you that when you read them I shall be thinking of you. I shall think of you, best and dearest comrade, every day of my life, and I shall go on hoping that somehow we shall meet again and be as we have been on this dear old ship. And Jim, dearest, I want you to understand that I am always yours. Whenever you want me—no, I don't mean that; I know you want me now—but whenever you can cast away things that ought to be forgotten, remember that I am waiting for you. Try, dear, to forget every thing but your love and mine.*

*'Au revoir!*

*'Your faithful and loving*

*'BETTY.'*

It was a sweet letter, written in all sincerity; and even though Osmond never wavered in the renunciation that honour demanded, still it told him in convincing terms that the door was not shut. The gate of Paradise was still ajar. If he could forget all justice and generosity; if he, who had nothing to give, could bring himself to accept the gift so generously held out to him, he still had the option to enter. He realized that—and never, for an instant, entertained the thought. Perhaps there were other ways out. But if there were, he dismissed them, too. Like Captain Hartup, he was not given to altering his mind. Free as he was from the captain's petty obstinacy, he was a man of inflexible purpose, even though the purpose might have been ill-considered.

His long reverie was at length interrupted by a voice which came in through the little port-hole. "No soundings!"

He glanced up at the tell-tale compass which formed a rather unusual fitting to the mate's bunk and noted that the ship's course had been altered three points to the north. She was now heading almost directly for the land and was presumably nearly opposite Adaffia. He re-folded the letter and put it away, but his thoughts went back to its message and to the beloved writer. Presently the voice of the man in the channel who was heaving the lead was heard again; and this time it told of a nearer approach to that dreary shore.

"By the deep, eighteen!"

He noted the depth with faint interest and began to think of the immediate future. As soon as he got ashore he must write to her. It was quite wrong, but he had promised, and he could not but be glad that she had exacted the promise. It would be a joy to write to her, and yet he could feel that he was doing it under compulsion. But it must be a careful letter. There must be in it no sign of weakening or wavering that might mislead her. She must be free and she must fully realize it; must realize that he belonged to her past and had no part in her future. It would be a difficult letter to write; and here he set himself to consider what he should say. And meanwhile the leads-man's voice came in from time to time, recording the gradual approach to the land.

"By the deep, ele-vern!" "By the mark, ten!" "By the deep, eight!"

At this point he was aware of sounds in the cuddy as if some heavy objects were being moved, and he surmised that the gin-cases were being disinterred from the lazarette. Then he heard the trap fall and heavy footsteps stumbled up the companion-stairs. A moment later the leadsman sang out: "By the mark, sev-ern!" and as Osmond rose from the bunk there came a thumping at his door and a voice sang out:

"The captain wants you on deck, sir, and there's a canoe a-comin' alongside."

Osmond cast a farewell glance round the little cabin and followed the man up on deck, where he found the captain waiting on the poop, standing guard, apparently, over two leathern bags and one of canvas. Looking forward, he saw the crew gathered at the open gangway, regarding with sheepish grins four unopened gin-cases, while a canoe, bearing a scarlet-coated grandee, was just running alongside. As he stepped out of the companion, the captain picked up the three bags, and walking with him slowly towards the gangway, addressed him in a gruff tone and a somewhat aggressive manner.

"According to law," said he, "I believe you are entitled to a third of the ship's value for salvage services. There are nearly two hundred ounces of gold-dust in these two leather bags—that is, roughly, eight hundred pounds—and there is forty-eight pounds ten in sovereigns and half-sovereigns, in the canvas bag. Will that satisfy you?"

"Rubbish," said Osmond. "I want eight shillings for two cases of gin broached by your men."

"You won't get it from me," snapped the skipper. "I'll have nothing to do with intoxicating liquor."

"If you don't pay, I'll sue you," said Osmond.

"I haven't had the gin," retorted the skipper. "It was brought on board without my authority. You must recover from the men who had it. But what do you say about the question of salvage?"

"Hang the salvage!" replied Osmond. "I want to be paid for my gin."

"You won't get a ha'penny from me for your confounded poison," exclaimed the skipper, hotly. "I hold very strict views on the liquor traffic. There are the men who drank the stuff. Make them pay. It's no concern of mine. But about this salvage question: are you satisfied with what I offer?"

Osmond glanced through the gangway. The gin-cases were all stowed in the canoe; Mensah was beaming up at him with an expectant grin and the canoe-men grasped their paddles. He felt in his pocket, and then, taking the canvas bag from the skipper, thrust his hand in and brought out a handful of coins. From these he selected a half-sovereign, and returning the others, dropped in a couple of shillings from his pocket.

"Two shillings change," he remarked. He threw the bag down on the deck, and pocketing the half sovereign, dropped down into the canoe. But he had hardly taken his seat on the tie-tie thwart when two heavy thumps on the floor of the canoe, followed by a jingling impact, announced the arrival of the two bags of gold-dust and the bag of specie.

Osmond stood up in the dancing canoe with a leather bag in each hand.

"Now, Mensah," he sang out, "tell the boys to get away one time."

The paddles dug into the blue water; the canoe bounded forward. Aiming skilfully at the open gang way, Osmond sent the heavy leathern bags, one after the other, skimming along the deck, and the little bag of specie after them. The skipper grabbed them up and rushed to the gangway. But he was too late. The canoe was twenty yards away and leaping forward to the thud of the paddles. Looking back at the brigantine with a satisfied smile, Osmond saw a row of six grinning faces at the rail, and at the gangway a small figure that shook its fist at the receding canoe with valedictory fury.

His homecoming was the occasion of a pleasant surprise. At intervals during his absence he had given a passing thought to his factory and the little solitary house by the beach and had wondered how they would fare while their master was away. Now he found that in Kwaku Mensah he had a really faithful steward, and not only faithful but strangely competent in his simple way. The house was in apple-pie order and the store was neatly kept and evidently a going concern, for when he arrived, Mensah's pretty Fanti wife was behind the counter, chaffering persuasively with a party of 'bush' people from Agotimé, and a glance into the compound showed a good pile of produce, awaiting removal to the produce store. Accounts, of course, there were none, since Mensah 'no sabby book', but nevertheless that artless merchantman had kept an exact record of all the transactions with that uncanny precision of memory that one often observes in the intelligent illiterate.

So Osmond settled down at once, with a satisfaction that rather surprised him, into the old surroundings; and as he sat that evening at the table, consuming with uncommon relish a dinner of okro soup, 'chickum cotrecks', and 'banana flitters', the product of Mrs. Mensah's skill (her name was Ekua Bochiwi, from which one learned that she had been born on Wednesday and was the eighth child of her parents), he was inclined to congratulate himself on Captain Hartup's refusal to retain him as the provisional mate of the *Speedwell*.

But in spite of the triumphant way in which he had out-manoeuvred the skipper, Osmond had a suspicion that he had not seen the last of his late commander. For the brigantine, which he had left hove-to and apparently ready to proceed on her voyage, had presently let go her anchor and stowed her sails as if the captain contemplated a stay at Adaffia. And the event justified his suspicions. On the following morning, while he was seated at the breakfast-table, with a fair copy of his letter to Betty before him, he became aware of shod feet on the gravelled compound, and a few moments later the doorway framed the figure of Captain Hartup, while in the background lurked Sam Winter, grinning joy and carrying two leathern bags.

The captain entered, and regarding his quondam mate with an expression that almost approached geniality, wished him "good morning" and even held out his hand. Osmond grasped it cordially, and drawing up a second chair, pressed his visitor to join him.

"A little fresh food," he remarked, untactfully, with his eye on the leathern bags, "and a cup of real coffee will do you good."

"I don't know what you mean by that," snorted the skipper. "I'm not starving, and neither are you. The ship's grub hasn't killed you. Still," he added, "as I see you are breakfasting like a Christian and not in the beastly Coast fashion, I don't mind if I do try a bit of shore tack with you. And you needn't look at those bags like that. I am not going to force anything on you. I am not an obstinate man" (which was a most outrageous untruth).

"What have you brought them here for?" Osmond demanded stolidly.

"I'll tell you presently," replied the skipper. "Bring 'em in, Winter, and dump 'em on that sideboard."

Winter deposited the two bags on the stack of empty cases thus politely designated and then backed to the doorway, where he was encountered by Kwaku, who was directed to take him to the store and feed him.

"I've come ashore," the captain explained when they were alone, "to see if I can make one or two little arrangements with you."

Osmond nodded as he helped his guest to stuffed okros and fried eggs (eggs are usually served, on the Coast, fried or poached or in some other overt form, as a precaution against embryological surprises).

"To begin with," continued the skipper, "I want about half a dozen niggers—a cook, a cabin-boy, and a few hands to do the rough work. Do you think you can manage that for me?"

"I've no doubt I can," was the reply.

"Good. Well, then, there is this gold-dust. If you care to change your mind, say so, and the stuff is yours."

Osmond shook his head. "I came on board for my own purposes," said he, "and I am not going to take any payment for looking after my own business."

"Very well," the skipper rejoined: "then if you won't have it, I may as well keep it; and I shan't if it remains on board. It was that gold-dust that tempted Dhooty and the others. Now I understood from you that you have got a safe. Is it a pretty strong one?"

"It's strong enough. There are no skilled burglars out here."

"Then I'm going to ask you to take charge of this stuff for me. You see that both bags are sealed up, and there is a paper inside each giving particulars of the contents and full directions as to how they are to be disposed of if anything should happen to me. Will you do this for me—as a matter of business, of course?"

"Not as a matter of business," replied Osmond. "That would make me responsible for the safe custody of the bags, which I can't be, as I may have to be absent from Adaffia and leave my man, Mensah, in charge of the factory. I will put the stuff in my safe with pleasure, and I think it will be perfectly secure there; but I won't take any payment or accept any responsibility beyond exercising reasonable care. Will that do?"

"Yes," replied the captain, "that will do. What is good enough for your own property is good enough for mine. So I will ask you to lock the stuff up for me and keep it till I ask for it; but if you should hear that anything has happened to me—that I am dead, in fact—then you will open the bags and read the papers inside and dispose of the property according to the directions written in those papers. Will you do that? It will be a weight off my mind if you will."

"Certainly I will," said Osmond. "But have you any reason to expect that anything will happen to you?"

"Nothing immediate," the captain replied. "But, you see, I am not as young as I was, and I am not what you would call a very sound man. I am subject to occasional attacks of giddiness and faintness. I don't know how much they mean, but my doctor at Bristol warned me not to treat them too lightly. He gave me a supply of medicine, which I keep in the chest, and when I feel an attack coming on, I turn in and take some. But still, 'in the midst of life we are in death,' you know; and I'm ready to answer to my name when the call comes."

"Well," said Osmond, "let us hope it won't come until you have got your goods safely home to Bristol. But in any case, you can depend on me to carry out your instructions."

"Thank you, Mr. Cook," said the captain. "I am glad to get that little matter settled. The only anxiety that is left now is the ivory. I had thought of asking you to take charge of that, too, but it would be awkward for you to store. And, after all, it's fairly safe in the hold. A man can't nip off with a dozen eighty-pound tusks in his pocket. So I think we will leave that where it is, ready stowed for the homeward voyage. By the way, have you got any produce that you want to dispose of?"

"Yes, I have a ton or two of copra and a couple of puncheons of oil; and I can let you have some kernels and rubber. Perhaps you would like to take some of the produce in exchange for trade goods."

The arrangement suited Captain Hartup exactly, and accordingly, when they had finished breakfast and stowed the gold-dust in the safe, they adjourned to the produce store to settle the details of the exchange. Then half a dozen canoes were chartered, the new hands mustered by Kwaku, and for the rest of the day the little factory compound and the usually quiet beach were scenes of unwonted bustle and activity. Sam Winter (secretly fortified with a substantial 'tot' of gin) was sent on board to superintend the stowage and breaking-out of cargo, while the skipper remained ashore to check off the goods landed and embarked.

The sun was getting low when the two white men set forth to follow the last consignment down to the beach. When they had seen it loaded into the canoes and watched its passage through the surf, Captain Hartup turned to Osmond, and

having shaken his hand with almost unnatural cordiality, said, gruffly but not without emotion:

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Cook. I've a good deal to thank you for, and I don't forget it. Providence brought us together when I badly needed a friend, and He will bring us together again, no doubt, in His own good time. But how or when, no one can foresee."

He shook Osmond's hand again and, stepping into the waiting canoe, took his seat on a parcel of rubber. The incoming breaker surged up and spent its last energy in a burst of spray on the canoe's beak. The little craft lifted and, impelled by a hearty shove from the canoe-men, slid down the beach on the backwash and charged into the surf. For a few minutes Osmond stood at the brink of the sea watching the canoe as it hovered amidst clouds of spray, dodging the great combers and waiting for its chance to slip through the 'shouting seas' to the quiet rollers outside. At length the periodical 'lull' came; the paddles drummed furiously on the green-blue water; the canoe leaped at the following wave, disappeared in a burst of snowy froth, and reappeared prancing wildly but safely outside the line of surf. A little figure in the canoe turned and waved its hand; and Osmond, after a responsive flourish of his hat and a glance at the anchored brigantine, turned away from the beach with an odd feeling of regret and walked slowly back to the factory, pondering on the captain's curious and rather cryptic farewell.



## VIII. — THE LAST OF THE 'SPEEDWELL'

FOR a couple of months Osmond's life at Adaffia drifted on monotonously enough, yet not at all drearily to a man of his somewhat solitary habits and self-contained nature. The factory prospered in a modest way with very little attention on his part, causing him often to reflect regretfully on poor Larkom's melancholy and unnecessary failure. That kindly wastrel was now secured—for a time—from oblivion by a neatly-made wooden cross, painted white and inscribed with his name, a date, and a few appreciative words, which had been set above his grave when the other cross had been removed to grace an elongated heap of sand which represented the resting-place of the late John Osmond.

Moreover, there were breaks in the monotony which had not existed before the adventure of the *Speedwell*. His letter to Betty (in which, among other matters, he had related with naive satisfaction the incident of the leathern bags and the defeat of Captain Hartup) had evoked a lengthy reply with a demand for a further letter; and so, much against his judgment, he had been drawn into a regular correspondence which was the occasion of alternate and conflicting emotions. Every letter that he wrote racked his conscience and filled him with self-contempt. But the arrival of the inevitable and always prompt reply was a delight which he accepted and enjoyed without a qualm. It was very inconsistent. To the half-naked native who acted as the semi-official postman, he would hand his letter shamefacedly, with a growl of disapproval, admonishing himself that "this sort of thing has got to stop." And then, on the day when the reply was expected, he would take a telescope out on the sand-hills and remain for hours watching the beach for the appearance in the remote distance of that same native postman.

These letters, mostly written from head-quarters, kept him informed respecting events of local interest, and, what was much more to the point, of Betty's own doings and movements. He learned, for instance, that there were rumours of a native rising in Anglôh (officially spelt Awuna), the region at the back of Adaffia; and that—regardless of this fact—Betty was trying to get her father's permission for a little journey of exploration into this very district.

This latter item of news set his emotional see-saw going at double speed. His judgment denounced the project violently. First, there was the danger—obvious, though not so very great; for the African is essentially a gentlemanly fighter, if rather heavy-handed, and would avoid injuring a white woman. But he is a shockingly bad marksman and uses slugs and gravel for ammunition, so that accidents are very liable to happen. But apart from the danger, this expedition was highly undesirable, for it would bring Betty into his neighbourhood, and of course they would meet—she would see to that. And that meeting ought not to take place. It would only prolong a state of affairs that was disturbing to him and ruinous to her future prospects. He felt this very sincerely, and was foolish enough to say so in his reply to her letter.

From time to time his thoughts wandered to Captain Hartup, and always with a tendency to speculate on the meaning—if there were any—of the note of foreboding which he thought he had detected in the captain's last words as they said "good-bye" on the beach. Those words—together with something final and testamentary in his manner when he had deposited the bags of gold-dust in the safe—seemed to hint at an uncertainty of life and distrust of the future on the captain's part, on which Osmond reflected uneasily. And at last, there came a day on which the skipper's meaning was made clear.

One morning, in the short interval between the night and the dawn, he awoke suddenly and became aware of a dusky figure between his bed and the window.

"Mastah!" the voice of Mensah exclaimed, excitedly, "dat ship, *Speedwell*! I look um. He fit for come on de beach."

Osmond lifted the mosquito-curtain and, springing out of bed, dropped into his slippers, snatched up the telescope, and followed Mensah out to the end of the compound whence there was a clear view of the sea. And there she was looming up sharp and clear against the grey dawn; and the first glance of a nautical eye read tragedy and disaster in every detail of her aspect. No telescope was needed. She was close in shore, within a couple of cable-lengths of the surf, with her square-sails aback and head-sails shivering, drifting slowly but surely to the destruction that roared under her lee. Obviously, there was no one at the wheel, nor was there any sign of life on board. She was a perfect picture of a derelict.

For a few moments Osmond stared at her in horrified amazement. Then, with a sharp command to Mensah to "get canoe one time," he ran out of the compound and made his way to the beach.

But his order had been anticipated. As he and Mensah came out on the shore, they found a group of excited fishermen dragging a canoe down to the water's edge, while another party were already afloat and paddling out through the surf towards the derelict brigantine. Osmond and his henchman at once joined the fishermen, and though the latter looked askance at the white man—for the accommodation of the little craft was rather limited—they made no demur, experience having taught them that he would have his own way—and pay for it. Accordingly they hauled and shoved with a will, and in a very few moments got the canoe down to the water's edge. Osmond and Mensah stepped in and took their seats, the fishermen grasped the gunwales, and when a big wave swept in and lifted the canoe, they shoved off and went sliding down on the backwash and charged into the surf.

Meanwhile the brigantine continued to drift by the wind and current nearly parallel to the shore, but slowly approached the latter. At the moment she was turning sluggishly and beginning to 'pay off' on the star board tack. Her sails filled and she began to move ahead. If anyone had been on board she might even now have been saved, for there was still room for her to 'claw off' the lee shore. Osmond gazed at her with his heart in his mouth and urged the canoe-men to greater efforts; though they wanted little urging, seeing that their friends in the other canoe were now quite near to the receding ship.

Moment by moment his hopes rose as the brigantine gathered way, though she was now less easy to overtake. Breathlessly he watched the leading canoe approach her nearer and nearer until at last the fishermen were able to lay hold of the vacant tackles that hung down from the stern davits and swarm up them to the poop. And even as they disappeared over the taffrail, the flicker of life that the old brigantine had displayed faded out. Under the pressure of the mainsail she began slowly to turn to windward. The head-sails shivered, the square-sails blew back against the mast; she ceased to move ahead, and then began once more to drift stern-foremost towards the white line of surf.

As Osmond's canoe ran alongside, where the other canoe was now towing, the first arrivals came tumbling over the side in a state of wild excitement, jabbering as only an excited African can jabber. Mensah proceeded hastily to interpret.

"Dose fishermen say dis ship no good. Dead man live inside him."

Osmond acknowledged the information with an inarticulate growl, and grasping a chain-plate, hauled himself up into the channel, whence he climbed over the rail and dropped on deck.

His first act was to run to the wheel, jam it hard over to port and fix it with a lashing. Then he ran forward to look at the anchors; but both of them were stowed securely and—for the present purposes—useless. He looked up despairingly at the sails, and for a moment thought of trying to swing the yards; but a glance over the stern at the snowy line of surf showed him that the time for manoeuvring was past. For an instant he stood scanning the deck; noting the absence of both boats and the yawning main hatch. Then he ran aft and scrambled down the companion-steps.

The door of the captain's cabin was open—had been left open by the fishermen—and was swinging idly as the ship rolled. But though the whereabouts of the dead man was evident enough before he reached it, he entered without hesitation, intent only on learning exactly what had happened on that ill-omened ship.

The little cabin was just as he had last seen it—with certain differences. And in the bunk lay something that had once been Captain Hartup. It was a dreadful thing to look upon, for the Tropics deal not kindly with the unsepulchred dead. But as Osmond stood looking down on the bunk, mere physical repulsion was swallowed up in a profound feeling of pity for the poor, cross-grained, honest-hearted little shipmaster. There he lay—all that was left of him. There, in the bunk, still lightly held by the blackened, puffy hand, was the inexhaustible Commentary, and on the deck, by the bunk-side, an open box containing a tumbler and a large medicine-bottle the label of which bore written directions and a Bristol address.

Osmond picked up the bottle and read the minute directions with a sense of profound relief. Its presence suggested what his inspection of the dead man confirmed; that at least death had come to Captain Hartup peaceably and decently. The traces of a murderous attack which he had feared to find were not there. Everything tended to show that the captain had died, as he had seemed to expect, from the effects of some long-standing malady.

From the dead man Osmond turned a swift attention to the cabin. He had noticed, when he entered, that the chronometer was not in its place on the little chart-table. He now observed that other things had disappeared—the telescope, the marine glasses, the sextant, and the mathematical instrument case. In short, as he looked round, he perceived that the little cabin had been gutted. Every portable thing of value had been taken away.

His observations were interrupted by the voice of Mensah calling to him urgently to come away "one time," and at the same moment he felt the ship give a heavy lurch followed by a quick recovery. He backed out of the cabin and was about to run up the companion-steps when his glance fell on the door of the adjoining berth, which had been his own and Betty's, and he was moved irresistibly to take a last, farewell look at the little hutch which held so many and so dearly prized memories. He thrust the door open and looked in; and even as he looked, a flash of dazzling white came through the tiny porthole, and a moment later a thunderous crash resounded and the ship trembled as if struck by a thousand monstrous hammers.

He waited no more, but, springing up the steps, thrust his head cautiously out of the companion-hatch. Glancing seaward, he saw a great, sparkling green mass sweeping down on the ship. In another instant, its sharp, tremulous crest whitened; a hissing sound was borne to his ears and quickly rose to a hoarse roar which ended in a crash that nearly shook him off his feet. Then sea and sky, masts and deck, were swallowed up in a cloud of blinding white; there was another roar, and the snowy cataract descended, filling the deck with a seething torrent of foaming water.

Osmond sprang out of the hatch and took a quick glance round. The two canoes were hovering on the outside edge of the surf and obviously unable to approach the ship. Towards the land, the sea was an unbroken expanse of white, while to seaward the long ranks of sharp-crested waves were turning over and breaking as they approached. Warned by a hissing roar from the nearest wave, he stepped back into the shelter of the companion. Again the ship staggered to the crashing impact. Again the visible world was blotted out by the white cloud of spray and foam; and then, as the deluge fell, came a sickening jar with loud cracking noises as the ship struck heavily on the ground. Twice she lifted and struck again, but the third time, rending sounds from below told that her timbers had given way and she lifted no more. Then, under the hammering of the surf, which filled her lower sails with green water, she heeled over towards the shore until the deck was at an angle of nearly forty-five.

Osmond looked out from his shelter and rapidly considered what he should do. There was not much time to consider, for the ship would soon begin to break up. He thought of dropping overboard on the land side and swimming ashore; but it was not a very safe plan, for at any moment the masts might go over the side, and it would not do for him to be underneath when they fell.



Still, he had to act quickly if he were to escape from the impending collapse of the whole fabric, and he looked about eagerly to find the least perilous method. Suddenly his glance fell upon a large cork fender which was washing about in the lee scuppers. The way in which it floated showed that it was dry and buoyant, and it appeared to him that with its aid he might venture into the surf beyond the shelter of the ship and wash safely ashore.

He watched for an opportunity to secure it. Waiting for the brief interval between the descent of the deluge and the bursting of the next wave, he slipped out, and grasping the end of the main sheet, which had washed partly loose from the cleat, ran down to the scupper, seized the fender, and hauling himself up again, crept into his shelter just in time to escape the next wave. When this had burst on the ship and the cataract had fallen, he kicked off his slippers, darted out, and clawing his way past the wheel, reached the taffrail. Holding on firmly to the fender with one hand, with the other he grasped the lee davit-tackle, and springing out, let the tackle slip through his hand.

Just as he reached the water, the next wave burst on the ship; and for the next few moments he was conscious of nothing but a roaring in his ears, a sudden plunge into darkness, and a sense of violent movement. But he still clung tenaciously to the fender, and presently his head rose above the seething water. He took a deep breath, shook the water from his eyes, and began to strike out with his feet, waiting anxiously for the next wave and wondering how much submersion he could stand without drowning. But when the next wave came, its behaviour rather surprised him. The advancing wall of hissing foam seemed simply to take hold of the fender and bear it away swiftly shoreward, leaving him to hold on and follow with his head comfortably above the surface.

In this way, amidst a roar like that of steam from an engine's escape-valve, he was borne steadily and swiftly for about a quarter of a mile. Then the spent wave left him and he could see it travelling away towards the shore. But the following wave overtook him after a very short interval and carried him forward another stage. And so he was borne along with surprising ease and speed until he was at last flung roughly on the beach and forthwith smothered in foaming water. He clawed frantically at the wet sand and strove to rise. But the beach was steep and the undertow would have dragged him back but for the help of a couple of fishermen, who, holding on to a grass rope that was held by their companions, waded into the surf, and grabbing him by the arms, dragged him up on to the dry sand beyond the reach of the waves.

As he rose to his feet, he turned to look at the ship. But she was a ship no longer. The short time occupied by his passage ashore had turned her into a mere wreck. Her masts lay flat on the water and her deck had been burst through from below; and through the yawning spaces where the planks had been driven out, daylight could be seen in several places where her side was stove in. The two canoes had already come ashore, and their crews stood at the water's edge, watching the flotsam that was even now beginning to drift shoreward on the surf. Osmond, too, watched it with interest, for he now recalled that the instantaneous glance that he had cast through the open main hatch had shown an unexpectedly empty condition of the hold. And this impression was confirmed when Mensah joined him (apparently quite unmoved by the proceedings of his eccentric employer) and remarked:

"Dose fishermen say only small-small cargo live in side dat ship. Dey say de sailor-man tief de cargo and go away in de boats."

Osmond made no comment on this. Obviously the cargo could not have been taken away in two small boats. But equally obviously it was not there, nor were the boats. It was clear that the ship had been abandoned—probably after the skipper's death—and she had been abandoned at sea. The suggestion was that the crew had transhipped on to some passing vessel and that the cargo had been transferred with them. It might be a perfectly legitimate transaction. But the presence in the cabin of the unburied body of the captain, and the open main hatch, hinted at hurried proceedings of not very scrupulous agents. A responsible shipmaster would certainly have buried the dead captain. Altogether it was a mysterious affair, on which it was possible only to speculate.

The spot where the brigantine had come ashore was about halfway between Adaffia and the adjoining village of Denu. Osmond decided to walk the three or four miles into Adaffia, and when he had washed, dressed, and breakfasted, to return and examine the wreckage. Meanwhile, he left Mensah on guard to see that nothing was taken away—or at any rate, to keep account of anything that was removed by the natives, who were now beginning to flock in from the two villages. Accordingly, having borrowed from the fishermen a large, shallow calabash to put over his head—for the sun was now well up and making itself felt—he strode away westward along the beach, walking as far as was possible on the wet sand to avoid delivering his bare feet to the attacks of the chiggers—sand-fleas—which infested the 'Aeolian sands' above the tide-marks.

When he returned some three hours later all that was left of the *Speedwell* was a litter of wreckage and flotsam strewn along the margin of the sea or on the blown sand, to which some of the more valuable portions had been carried. The vessel's keel, with the stem and stern-posts and a few of the main timbers still attached, lay some distance out, but even this melancholy skeleton was gradually creeping shoreward under the incessant pounding of the surf. The masts, spars, and sails were still in the water, but they, too, were slowly creeping up the beach as the spent waves struck them every few seconds. As to the rest, the ship seemed almost to have decomposed into her constituent planks and beams. There is no ship-breaker like an Atlantic surf.

Osmond cast a pensive glance over the disorderly frame that had once been a stout little ship, and as Mensah observed him and approached, he asked:

"How much cargo has come ashore, Kwaku?"

Mensah flung out his hands and pointed to the litter on the shore. "Small, small cargo come," said he. "One, two puncheons of oil, two or tree dozen bags kernels, some bags copra, two, tree bales Manchester goods—finish."

"I don't see any Manchester goods," said Osmond.

"No, sah. Dem country people. Dey darn tief. Dey take eberyting. Dey no leave nutting"; and in confirmation he pointed to sundry little caravans of men, women, and children, all heavily laden and all hurrying homeward, which were visible, mostly in the distance. Indeed, Osmond had met several of them on his way.

"You have not seen any ivory?"

"No, sah. I look for um proper but I no see um."

"Nor any big crates or cases?"

"No, sah. Only de bales and crates of Manchester goods, and de country people break dem up."

"Has the captain—the dead man—come ashore?"

"Yas, sah. He live for dat place," and Mensah pointed to a spot at the eastern end of the beach where a clump of coconut palms grew almost at high-water mark. Thither Osmond proceeded with Mensah, and there, at the spot indicated, he found the uncomely corpse of the little skipper lying amidst a litter of loose planks and small flotsam, on the wet sand in the wash of the sea, and seeming to wince as the spent waves alternately pushed it forward and drew it back.

"Mensah," said Osmond, looking down gravely at the body, "this man my countryman, my friend. You sabby?"

"Yas, sah. I sabby he be your brudder."

"Well, I am going to bury him in the compound with Mr. Larkom and Mr. Osmond."

"Yas, sah," said Mensah, with a somewhat puzzled expression. That second grave was a mystery that had caused him much secret cogitation. But discretion had restrained him from asking questions.

"You think," pursued Osmond, "these people fit for bring the dead man to Adaffia?"

"Dey fit," replied Mensah, "s'pose you dash um plenty money."

"Very well," said Osmond, with characteristic incaution, "see that he is brought in and I will pay them what they ask."

"I go look dem people one time," said Mensah, who had instantly decided that, on these advantageous terms, he would undertake the contract himself.

Before starting to walk back, Osmond took another glance at the wreckage and at the crowd of natives who were, even now, carrying it away piecemeal. For a moment he had a thought of constituting himself Lloyd's agent and taking possession of what was left. But he had no authority, and as the mere wreckage was of no realizable value, and as the little cargo there had been was already carried away, he dismissed the idea and set out homeward, leaving the delighted natives in undisputed possession.

His first proceeding on arriving home was to unlock the safe and break open the leathern bags to see what directions Captain Hartup had given as to the disposal of his property. He was not entirely unprepared to find that the captain had formally transferred the gold-dust to him. But he was totally unprepared for the contents of the bulky paper which he drew out of the second bag, and as he opened and read it he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyesight. The paper was a regularly-drawn will, witnessed by Winter and Simmons, which made 'my friend and temporary mate, Mr. James Cook', sole executor and legatee.

It began with a preamble, setting forth that 'I, Nicholas Hartup, being a widower without offspring, dependants, or near relations, give and bequeath my worldly possessions to the man who has dealt with me honestly, faithfully, and without thought of material profit or reward' and then went on to make the specific bequests, describing each of the items clearly and in detail. These included the gold-dust, giving the exact weight, a consignment of ivory consisting of 'thirty-nine large tusks in three large crates, at present in the hold of the brigantine *Speedwell*, and fifty-one scribellos in a large canvas bag wired up and sealed, also in the hold' also the vessel herself, and, most astonishing of all, 'my freehold house in Bristol, known as number sixty-five Garlic Street' and a sum of about three thousand pounds, a part invested in certain named securities and the remainder lying on deposit at a specified bank in Bristol. It was an amazing document. As Osmond read and re-read it he found himself wondering at the perverseness of the little shipmaster in hiding his kindly, appreciative feelings under so forbidding an exterior; but, to judge by the wording of the preamble, his experience of men would seem not to have been happy. Osmond, having put back the will in the bag, tied up that and the other and replaced them in the safe. As he locked the door and pocketed the key, he reflected on the irony of his present position. In all the years during which he had lived amidst his friends and relatives, no one had ever bequeathed to him a single penny. Yet in the course of a few months, in this unfrequented and forgotten corner of the world, he had twice been made the sole legatee of almost complete strangers. And now he had become a man of modest substance, an owner of landed property; and that in a country which prudence insisted that he must never revisit.

---

## IX. — ARMS AND THE MAN

SPEAKING in general terms, Welshmen cannot be fairly described as excessively rare creatures; in fact, there are some parts of the world—Wales, for instance—in which they are quite common. But circumstances alter cases. When Jack Osmond, busily engaged in posting up his account-books, lifted his eyes and beheld a specimen of this well-known type of mammal, he was quite startled; not merely because he had never before heard anyone say "Good morning" with an accent on the "ning"—which the present example did, although it was actually three in the afternoon—but because no ship had called in the neighbourhood quite lately and he had not known of the presence of any European in the village.

The stranger introduced himself by the name of Jones, which being not entirely without precedent was accepted without difficulty. He had an additional name, but as Osmond failed to assimilate it, and it could be expressed in writing only by an extravagant expenditure of l's and double d's, it is omitted from this merely Saxon chronicle. He shook Osmond's hand exuberantly and smiled until his face—particularly the left side—was as full of lines as a ground-plan of Willesden Junction.

"I come to you, Mr. Larkom," said the visitor, retaining Osmond's unwilling hand and apparently adopting the name that remained unaltered over the door of the factory, "as a fellow-countryman in distress, craving a charitable judgment and a helping hand."

He would have been well advised to leave it at that; for Osmond's natural generosity needed no spur, and the memory of his own misfortunes was enough to ensure his charity to others. But Mr. Jones continued, smiling harder than ever: "I come to you confidently for this help because of the many instances of your kindness and generosity and good-fellowship that I have heard—"

"From whom?" interrupted Osmond.

"From—er—from—well, I may say, from every one on the Coast who knows you."

"Oh," said Osmond; and his face relaxed into a grim smile. Jones saw that he had made a mistake and wondered what the deuce it was.

"Come into my room," said Osmond, "and tell me what you want me to do. Have a cocktail?"

Mr. Jones would have a cocktail, thank you; and while Osmond twirled the swizzle-stick and raised a pink froth in the tumbler, he cautiously opened his business.

"I am taking some risk in telling you of my little affair, but I am sure I can trust you not to give me away."

"Certainly you can," Osmond replied, incautiously.

"You promise on your honour as a gentleman not to give me away?"

"I have," said Osmond, handing him the cocktail.

Jones still hesitated somewhat, as if desirous of further formalities, but at length plunged into the matter in a persuasive whisper, with much gesticulation and a craftily watchful eye on Osmond's face.

It was not an encouraging face. A portrait of the 'Iron Duke' at the age of thirty, executed in very hard wood by a heavy-handed artist with a large chisel and mallet, would give you the kind of face that Mr. Jones looked upon; and as the 'little affair' unfolded itself, that face grew more and more wooden. For Osmond's charity in respect of errors of conduct did not extend to those that were merely in contemplation.

It transpired gradually that Mr. Jones's sufferings and distress were occasioned by a little cargo that he had been unable to land; which cargo happened to include—er—in fact, to be quite candid, consisted largely of Mauser rifles, together with some miscellaneous knick-knacks—such as Mauser cartridges, for instance—all of which were at present rolling in the hold of a privately-chartered vessel (name not mentioned). It also appeared that the Colonial Government had most unreasonably prohibited the importation of arms and ammunition on account of the silly little insurrection that had broken out inland; which very circumstance created an exceptional opportunity—don't you understand?—for disposing of munitions of war on profitable terms. It appeared, finally, that Mr. Larkom's factory was an ideal place in which to conceal the goods and from which to distribute them among local sportsmen interested in target-practice or partridge-shooting.

"To put it in a nutshell," said Osmond, "you're doing a bit of gun-running and you want to use me as a cat's paw; and to put it in another nutshell, I'll see you damned first."

"But," protested Jones, "you sell arms yourself, don't you?"

"Not while this row is on. Besides, the niggers don't buy my gas-pipes for war-palaver. My customers are mostly hunters from the bush."

Mr. Jones lingered a while to ply the arts of persuasion and consume two more cocktails; and when at last he departed, more in sorrow than in anger, he paused on the threshold to remark:

"You have promised, on your honour, not to give me away."

"I know I have, like a fool," replied Osmond "Wish I hadn't. Know better next time. Good day." And he followed his

departing guest to the compound gate and shut it after him.

From that moment Mr. Jones seemed to vanish into thin air. He was seen no more in the village, and no whispers as to his movements came from outside. But a few nights later Osmond had a rather curious experience that somehow recalled his absent acquaintance. He had gone out, according to his common custom, to take a quiet stroll on the beach before turning in, and think of his future movements and of the everlasting might-have-been. Half a mile west of the village he came on a fishing canoe, drawn up above tide-marks, and as he had just filled his pipe he crept under the lee of the canoe to light it—for one learns to husband one's matches in West Africa. Having lighted his pipe, he sat down to think over a trading expedition that he had projected, but, finding himself annoyed by the crabs, which at nightfall pour out of their burrows in myriads, he shifted to the interior of the canoe. Here he sat, looking over the spectral breakers out into the dark void which was the sea, and immersed in his thoughts until he was startled by the sudden appearance of a light. He watched it curiously and not without suspicion. It was not a ship's anchor-light, nor was it a flare-lamp in a fishing-canoe. By the constant variation in its brightness Osmond judged it to be a bull's-eye lantern which was being flashed to and fro along the coast from some vessel in the offing to signal to someone ashore.

He looked up and down the dark beach for the answering signal, and presently caught a dull glimmer, as of a bull's-eye lantern seen from one side, proceeding from the beach a short distance farther west. Watching this spot, he soon made out a patch of deeper darkness which grew in extent, indicating that a crowd of natives had gathered at the water's edge; and, after a considerable interval a momentary flash of the lantern fell on a boat dashing towards the beach in a smother of spray.

Soon after this a number of dark shapes began to separate themselves from the mass and move in single file across the low sand-dunes, passing within a few dozen yards of the canoe. Osmond could see them distinctly, though himself unseen; a long procession of carriers, each bearing a load on his head; and whereas some of these loads were of an oblong shape, like small gun-crates—about the length of a Mauser rifle—the others were more nearly cubical and quite small, though obviously heavy. Osmond watched the file of carriers and counted upwards of forty loads. Perhaps it was none of his business. But as those parcels of death and destruction were borne silently away into the darkness to swell the tale of slaughter in the inland villages, he cursed Mr. Jones and his own folly in giving that unconsidered promise.

The last of the carriers had vanished and he had just risen from the canoe to return up the now deserted beach when a new phenomenon presented itself. The clouds which had hidden the rising moon, thinned for a few moments, leaving a patch of coppery light in the eastern sky; and against this, sharp and distinct as if cut out of black paper, stood the shape of a schooner. But not an ordinary trading schooner. Brief as was the gleam that rendered her visible, her character was perfectly obvious to a yachtsman's eye. She was a large yacht of the type that was fashionable when the America Cup was new; when spoon bows and bulb keels were things as yet undreamed of. Osmond stared at her in astonishment; and even as he looked, the clouds closed up, the sky drew dark, and she was lost in the blackness of the night.

He was up betimes on the following morning and out on the beach in the grey dawn to see if any confirmatory traces of these mysterious proceedings were visible. But his questioning eye ranged over the grey sea in vain. The schooner had vanished as if she had never been. There were, however, multitudinous tracks of bare feet leading up from the shore to the sand-hills, where they were lost; deep footprints such as would be made by heavily-laden men. And there was something else, even more significant. Just at high-water mark, hardly clear of the wash of the sea, was a ship's boat, badly battered, broken-backed, and with one bilge stove in. Some fool, who knew not the West Coast surf, had evidently landed a heavy lading in her with this inevitable result.

But it was not her condition alone that caused Osmond to stride so eagerly towards her. There was something in her size and build that he seemed to recognize. As he reached her, he walked round to examine her stern. There had, of course, been a name painted on her transom, but it had been scraped out and the stern re-painted. Then Osmond stepped in and lifted one of the bottom-boards; and there, on the starboard side close to the keel, was a patch covered with sheet-copper, while inspection from without showed an external covering of copper. There was no mistaking that patch. It was his own handiwork. This poor battered wreck was the *Speedwell's* long-boat; and as he realized this, he realized, too, what had become of the *Speedwell's* cargo.

The discovery gave Osmond considerable food for thought for the remainder of the morning. But about mid-day an unlooked-for letter from Betty arrived and for the time being occupied his attention to the exclusion of all other matters. And not entirely without reason. For it conveyed tidings of a somewhat disturbing kind. The message was, indeed, smuggled in inconsequently, as important messages often are in ladies' letters, at the end. But there it was; and Osmond read it with deep disapproval and no small uneasiness.

"You will probably not hear from me again for a week or two as I am going for a little trip inland and may not have a chance to send a letter. I shall let you know directly I get back, and until you hear from me you had better not write—or, at least, you can write, and make it a nice long letter, but don't send it until you get mine."

That was the message. She did not give a hint as to the region into which the 'little trip' would take her. But Osmond had a strong and uncomfortable suspicion that her route would take her into the country at the back of the great lagoon and would bring her finally to Adaffia.

He pondered the situation at length. As to the danger of such a journey, it was probably negligible—if the reports were correct. The disturbed area was far away to the north, on the borders of Krepi. The country at the back of the lagoon was believed to be quite peaceful and safe. But one never knew. These Efé peoples were naturally warlike and turbulent. At any

moment they might break out in support of their inland relatives. Even now they might have provided themselves with some of Mr. Jones's knick-knacks and be preparing for "war-palaver."

The result of his cogitations was somewhat curious and not very easy to understand. For some time past he had been turning over in his mind a project which had really been held up by the regular arrival of Betty's letters. That project was concerned with a trading expedition to the interior—to the country at the back of the lagoon. But that 'little trip' would have taken him out of the region in which the receipt of letters was possible, and he had accordingly put it off to some more opportune time. Now that more opportune time seemed to have arrived. There would be no more letters for a week or two, so there was nothing to prevent him from starting. That was how he put it to himself. What was actually in his mind it is impossible to guess. Whether his purpose was to be absent from Adaffia when Betty should make her inevitable visit, to avoid the meeting for which he had yearned but which he felt to be so undesirable; or whether he had some vague hopes of a possible encounter on the road: who can say? Certainly not the present chronicler, and probably not Osmond himself. At any rate, the upshot of it was that he decided on the journey, and with characteristic promptitude set about his preparations forthwith; and as they were far from elaborate and had been well considered before hand, a single day's work saw everything ready for the start.

On the following morning he set forth, leaving the faithful Mensah in charge of the factory. A dozen carriers bore the loads of goods for the trading venture, and his recently engaged servant, Koffi Kuma, carried his simple necessities in a light box. In spite of his anxieties and haunting regrets, he was in high spirits at the promised change from the monotony of Adaffia, which, but for the infinitely precious letters, would have been intolerably wearisome. The universal sand, varied only by the black lagoon mud, the everlasting coconut palms chattering incessantly in the breeze, and the bald horizon of the unpeopled sea, had begotten in him an intense yearning for a change of scene; for the sight of veritable trees with leaves, growing in actual earth, and of living things other than the sea-birds and the amphibious denizens of the beach.

A couple of hours' steady marching carried him and his little party across the bare plain of dry mud that had once been part of the great lagoon and brought him to the mainland and the little nine-inch trail that did duty as a road. Gleefully he strode along in the rear of his little caravan, refreshing his eyes and ears with the novel sights and sounds. The tiresome boom of the surf had faded into a distant murmur that mingled with the stirring of leaves; strange birds, unseen in the bush, piped queer little Gregorian chants, while others, silent, but gorgeous of plumage—scarlet cardinals and rainbow-hued sun-birds—disported themselves visibly among the foliage. Little striped Barbary mice gambolled beside the track, and great, blue-bodied lizards with scarlet heads and tails perched on the tall ant-hills that rose on all sides like pink monuments, and nodded their heads defiantly at the passing strangers. It was a new world to Osmond. The bright pink soil, the crowded bush, the buttressed forest trees, the uncouth baobabs, with their colossal trunks and absurdly dwarfed branches—all were new and delightful after the monotony of the beach village, and so fully occupied his attention that when they entered a hamlet of pink-walled houses, he was content to leave the trading to Koffi, while he watched a troop of dog-faced monkeys who seemed to have established a sort of *modus vivendi* with the villagers.

Thus, with occasional halts for rest or barter, the caravan worked its way through the bush until about four o'clock in the afternoon; when Osmond, who had lagged behind to avoid the chatter of his carriers, rounded a sharp turn in the road and found himself entering the main street of a village. But he was not the only visitor. An instantaneous glance showed him a couple of stands of piled arms, by the side of which some half-dozen bare-footed native soldiers were seated on the ground eating from a large calabash; a fierce and sullen looking native, secured with manacles and a leading-rope and guarded by two more of the Hausa soldiers as he was fed by some of the villagers; and two white officers, seated under the village shade tree and engaged at the moment in conversation with Koffi, who seemed to have been captured by a Hausa sergeant.

As Osmond came in sight the two officers looked at one another and rose with a rather stiff salutation.

"You are Mr. Cook of Adaffia, I understand?" one of them said.

"Yes," Osmond replied; and as the two officers again looked at one another with an air of some embarrassment, he continued, bluntly: "I suppose you want to know if I have got any contraband of war?"

"Well, you know," was the half-apologetic reply, "someone has been selling rifles and ammunition to the natives, so we have to make inquiries."

"Of course you do," said Osmond; "and you'd better have a look at my goods. Koffi, tell the carriers to bring their loads here and open them."

A very perfunctory inspection was enough to satisfy the constabulary officers of the harmless character of the trade goods, and having made it, they introduced themselves by the respective names of Stockbridge and Westall and invited Osmond to join them in their interrupted tea under the shade tree.

"Troublesome affair this rising," said Westall, as he handed Osmond a mug of tea; "there'll be wigs on the green before it's over. Now that the beggars have got rifles, they are ready to stand up to the constabulary. Think they're as good as we are; and they're not so far wrong, either."

"Where are you bound for now?" Osmond asked.

"We are going back to Quittah with some prisoners from Agotimé." Westall nodded at the manacled native and added: "That's one of the ring-leaders—a rascal named Zippah; a devil of a fellow, vicious as a bush-cat and plucky, too. Stockbridge and I are keeping him with us, in case of a rescue, but there are over a dozen other prisoners with the main

body of Hausas. They marched out of the village just before you turned up."

"And we'd better be marching out, too," said Stockbridge, "or we shan't catch them up. Will you have any more tea, Cook? If not, we'd better get on the road. There's only a native sergeant-major with those men ahead. Are you coming our way?"

"Yes," replied Osmond, "I'll come with you as far as Affieringba, and then work my way home along the north shore of the lagoon."

The three Englishmen rose, and, as Westall's servant repacked the tea apparatus, the little procession formed up. The six Hausas led with fixed bayonets; then came Westall followed by the prisoner, Zippah, and his guard; next came half a dozen carriers loaded with bundles of confiscated muskets and powder then Osmond and Stockbridge; and the rear was brought up by Osmond's carriers and the three servants.

The road, or path, after leaving the village, passed through a number of yam and cassava plantations and then entered a forest of fan-palms; a dim and ghostly place now that the sun was getting low, pervaded by a universal rustling from the broad, ragged leaves above and a noisy crackling from the dry branches underfoot. For nearly an hour the party threaded its way through the gloomy aisles, then the palms gradually thinned out, giving place to ordinary forest trees and bush.

"Quite pleasant to get a look at the sky again," Osmond remarked as they came out into the thin forest.

"Yes," said Stockbridge; "but you won't see it for long. There's a bamboo thicket just ahead."

Even as he spoke there loomed up before them an immense, cloudy mass of soft, blue-green foliage; then appeared a triangular black hole like the entrance to a tunnel, into which the Hausas, the prisoners, and the carriers successively vanished. A moment later and Osmond himself had entered through that strange portal and was groping his way in almost total darkness through a narrow passage, enclosed and roofed in by solid masses of bamboo stalks. Ahead, he could dimly make out the vague shapes of the carriers, while all around the huge clusters of bamboos rose like enormous piers, widening out until they met overhead to form a kind of groined roof. It was an uncanny place; a place in which voices echoed weirdly, mingling with strange, unexplained noises and with the unceasing, distant murmur of the soft foliage far away over head.

Osmond stumbled on over the crackling canes that formed the floor, gradually growing accustomed to the darkness until there appeared ahead a triangular spot of light that grew slowly larger, framing the figures of the Hausas and carriers; and then, quite suddenly, he emerged, blinking, into broad daylight on the margin of a smallish but deep and rapid river, which at this spot was spanned by a primitive bridge.

Now a native bridge is an excellent contrivance—for natives; for the booted European it is much less suitable. The present one was formed of the slender trunk of a young silk-cotton tree, barkless and polished by years of wear, and Osmond watched enviously as the Hausas strolled across, grasping the cylindrical surface handily with their bare feet, and wondered if he had not better take off his boots. However, Westall had no false pride. Recognizing the disabilities involved by boots, he stooped, and, getting astride the slender log, crossed the river with ease and safety, if without much dignity; and the other two white men were not too proud to follow his example.

Beyond the river the path, after crossing a narrow belt of forest, entered a valley bordered by hills covered with dense bush, which rose steeply on either side. Osmond looked at the little party ahead, straggling in single file along the bottom of the valley, and inwardly wondered where Westall had picked up his strategy.

"It's to be hoped, Stockbridge," he remarked, "that there are none of Mr. Zippah's friends hanging about here. You couldn't want a prettier spot for an ambush."

He had hardly spoken when a tall man, wearing a hunter's lionskin cap and carrying a musket, stepped quietly out of the bush on to the track just in front of Westall. The prisoner, Zippah, uttered a yell of recognition and held up his manacled hands. The deep, cannon-like report of the musket rang out and the narrow gorge was filled with a dense cloud of smoke.

There was an instant's silence. Then a scattering volley was heard from the Hausas ahead, the panic-stricken carriers came flying back along the trail, shouting with terror, and the two white men plunged forward into the stinking smoke. Leaping over the prostrate Zippah, who was being held down by two Hausas, they came upon Westall, lying across the path, limp and motionless. A great ragged patch on his breast, all scorched and bloody, told the tale that his pinched, grey face and glazing eyes confirmed. Indeed, even as they stooped over him, heedless of the bellowing muskets and the slugs that shrieked past, he drew one shallow breath and was gone.

There was no time for sentiment. With set faces the two men turned from the dead officer and ran forward to where the shadowy forms of the Hausas appeared through the smoke, holding their ground doggedly and firing right and left into the bush. But a single glance showed the hopelessness of the position. Two of the Hausas were down, and of the remaining four, three, including the sergeant, were more or less wounded. Not a man of the enemy was to be seen, but from the wooded slope on either hand came jets of flame and smoke, accompanied by the thunderous reports of the muskets and the whistle of flying slugs, while a thick cloud of smoke rolled down the hillsides and filled the bottom of the valley as with a dense fog.

Osmond snatched up the rifle of one of the fallen Hausas and, clearing out the man's cartridge-pouch, began firing into likely spots in the bush when Stockbridge interposed. "It's no go, Cook. We must fall back across the bridge. You clear out while you've got a whole skin. Hallo! did you hear that? Those weren't trade guns."

As he spoke there were heard, mingling with the noisy explosions of the muskets, a succession of sharp, woody reports, each followed by the musical hum of a high-speed bullet.

"Back you go, Cook," he urged. "This is no place for—"

He stopped short, staggered back a few paces, and fell, cursing volubly, with a bloody hand clasped on his leg just below the knee.

Osmond stooped over him, and, finding that the bone was not broken, quickly tied his handkerchief over the wound to restrain the bleeding. "That will do for the present," said he. "Now you tell the men to fall back, and I'll bring the prisoner."

"Never mind the prisoner," said Stockbridge. "Get the wounded back and get back yourself."

"Not at all," said Osmond. "The prisoner is going to cover our retreat. Put your arm round the sergeant's neck and hop along on your sound leg."

In spite of the galling fire, the retreat was carried out quickly and in good order. Stockbridge was hustled away by the sergeant—who was only disabled in one arm—and the two helpless men and the dead officer were borne off by the three native servants. Meanwhile Osmond took possession of the prisoner—just as one of his guards was preparing to cut his throat with a large and very unofficial-looking knife—and, rapidly pinioning his arms with the leading-rope, held him up with his face towards the enemy; in which position he served as excellent cover, not only for Osmond but also for the two Hausas, who were able to keep up a brisk fire over his shoulders.

In this fashion Osmond and his two supporters slowly backed after the retreating party. The firing from the bush practically ceased, since the enemy had now no mark to fire at but their own chief; and though they continued to follow up, as the moving bushes showed, their wholesome respect for the Snider rifle—with which the Hausas were armed—prevented them from coming out of cover or approaching dangerously near.

In less than a quarter of an hour the open space by the river was reached; and here Osmond's retreat was covered by the rest of the party, who had crossed the river and had taken up a safe position in the bamboo thicket, whence they could, without exposing themselves, command the approaches to the bridge. The two Hausas were turning to run across the log when Osmond noticed a large basket of produce—containing among other things, a number of balls of shea butter—which one of his carriers had dropped in retreat.

"Hi!" he sang out, "pick up that basket and take him across,"; and then, as a new idea suggested itself: "Put those balls of shea tulu in my pocket."

The astonished Hausa hesitated, especially as a Mauser bullet had just hummed past his head, but when Osmond repeated the order impatiently he hurriedly grabbed up the unsavoury-looking balls of grease and emptied them into Osmond's pocket. Then he turned and ran across the bridge.

Osmond continued to back towards the river, still holding the struggling Zippah close before him as a shield. Arriving at the end of the bridge, he cautiously sat down and got astride the log, pulling his captive, with some difficulty, into the same position, and began to wriggle across. Once started, Zippah was docile enough; for, with his pinioned arms, he could not afford to fall into the swirling water. He even assisted his captor so far as he was able, being evidently anxious to get the perilous passage over as quickly as possible. When they had crept about a third of the way across, Osmond took one of the balls of shea butter from his pocket and, reaching past his prisoner, smeared the mass thickly on the smooth surface of the log; and this proceeding he repeated at intervals as he retired, leaving a thick trail of the solid grease behind him. Zippah was at first profoundly mystified by the white man's manoeuvres, which he probably regarded as some kind of fetish ceremonial or magic; but when its purpose suddenly dawned on him, his sullen face relaxed into a broad and appreciative grin, and as he was at length dragged backwards from the head of the bridge, through the opening into the dark bamboo thicket, he astonished the besieged party (and no doubt the besiegers also) by letting off a peal of honest African guffaws.

---

## X. — BETTY'S APPEAL

As the prisoner was withdrawn by his guard into the dark opening of the thicket, Osmond halted for a moment to look back across the river. Not a sign of the enemy was to be seen excepting the pall of smoke that hung over the wooded shore. But the reports of unseen muskets and rifles and the hum of slugs and bullets warned him of the danger of exposing himself—though he, too, was probably hidden from the enemy by the dense smoke of the black powder. Accordingly he turned quickly and, plunging into the dark tunnel-like passage, groped his way forward, unable, at first, to distinguish anything in the all-pervading gloom. Presently he perceived a little distance ahead a cluster of the great bamboo stalks faintly lighted as if by a hidden fire or torch, and a moment later, a turn of the passage brought him in view of the light itself, which seemed to be a rough shea-butter candle or lamp, set on the ground and lighting up dimly the forlorn little band whose retreat he had covered.

This much he took in at the first glance. But suddenly he became aware of a new presence at the sight of which he stopped short with a smothered exclamation. Stockbridge, sitting beside his dead comrade, had uncovered his wounded leg; and kneeling by him as she applied a dressing to the wound was a woman. He could not see her face, which was partly turned away from him and concealed by a wide pith helmet; but the figure was—to him—unmistakable, as were the little, dainty, capable hands on which the flickering light shone. He approached slowly, and as Stockbridge greeted him with a wry grin, she turned her head quickly and looked up at him. "Good evening, Mr. Cook," she said, quietly. "What a fortunate chance it is that you should be here."

"Yes, by Jove," agreed Stockbridge; "at least a fortunate chance for us. He is a born tactician."

Osmond briefly acknowledged the greeting, and in the ensuing silence, as Betty methodically applied the bandage, he looked about him and rapidly assessed the situation. Stockbridge looked weak and spent and was evidently in considerable pain, though he uttered no complaint; the wounded Hausas lay hard by, patiently awaiting their turn to have their injuries attended to, and the carriers crouched disconsolately in gloomy corners out of the way of chance missiles. A continuous firing was being kept up from the other side of the river, and slugs and Mauser bullets ploughed noisily through the bamboo, though none came near the fugitives. The position of the latter, indeed, was one of great natural strength, for the river made a horse-shoe bend at this spot and the little peninsula enclosed by it was entirely occupied by the bamboo. An attack was possible in only two directions; by the bridge, or by the path that entered the thicket at the other end.

"Well," said Osmond, as Betty, having finished the dressing, transferred her attention to one of the wounded Hausas, "here we are, safe for the moment. They can't get at us in here."

"No," agreed Stockbridge. "It's a strong position, if we could stay here, though they will probably try to rush the bridge when it's dark."

Osmond shook his head with a grim smile. "They won't do that," said he. "I've taken the precaution to grease the log; so they'll have to crawl across carefully, which they won't care to do with the Hausas potting at them from shelter. But we can't stay here. We'd better clear out as soon as it is dark; and the question is, which way?"

"We must follow the river, I suppose," said Stockbridge, in a faint voice. "But you'd better arrange with the sergeant. I'm no good now. Tell him he's to take your orders. Our carriers know the country."

The sergeant, who had witnessed Osmond's masterly retreat, accepted the new command without demur. A guard was posted to watch the bridge from safe cover, and the carriers were assembled to discuss the route.

"Now," said Osmond, "where is the next bridge?" There was apparently no other bridge, but there was a ford some miles farther up, and a couple of miles below there was a village which possessed one or two of the large, punt-shaped canoes that were used for trading across the lagoon.

"S'pose dey no fit to pass de bridge," said the head carrier, "dey go and fetch canoe for carry um across de river."

"I see," said Osmond. "Then they'd attack us from the rear and we should be bottled up from both sides. That won't do. You must get ready to march out as soon as it is dark, sergeant. Your carriers can take Mr. Westall's body and some of the wounded and the sound men must carry the rest. And send my carriers back the way they came. There are too many of us as it is."

"And dem muskets and powder, dat we bring in from the villages?" said the sergeant. "What we do wid dem?"

"We must leave them here or throw them in the river. Anyhow, you get off as quickly as you can."

The sergeant set about his preparations without delay and Osmond's carriers departed gleefully towards the safe part of the country. Meanwhile Osmond considered the situation. If the enemy obtained canoes from the lower river, they would probably ferry a party across and attack the bamboo fortress from front and rear simultaneously. Then they would find the nest empty, and naturally would start in pursuit; which would be unpleasant for the helpless fugitives, crawling painfully along the river bank. He turned the position over again and again with deep dissatisfaction, while Stockbridge watched him anxiously and Betty silently continued her operations on the wounded. If they were pursued, they were lost. In their helpless condition they could make no sort of stand against a large body attacking from the cover of the bush. And the pursuit would probably commence before they had travelled a couple of miles towards safety.



Suddenly his eye fell on the heap of captured muskets and powder-kegs that, were to be left behind or destroyed. He looked at them meditatively, and, as he looked, there began to shape itself in his mind a plan by which the fugitives might at least increase their start by a mile or so. A fantastic scheme, perhaps, but yet, in the absence of any better, worth trying.

With characteristic energy, he set to work at once, while the carriers hastily fashioned rough litters of bamboo for the dead and wounded. Broaching one of the powder-kegs, he proceeded to load all but two of the muskets—of which there were twenty-three in all—cramming the barrels with powder and filling up each with a heavy charge of gravel. Six of the loaded and primed muskets he laid on the ground about fifty yards from the bridge end of the long passage, with their muzzles pointing towards the bridge; the remaining fifteen he laid in batches of five about the same distance from the opposite entrance, towards which their muzzles pointed. Then, taking a length of the plaited cord with which the muskets had been lashed into bundles, he tied one end to the stock of one of the unloaded guns and the other to the trigger of one of the wounded Hausas' rifles. Fixing the rifle upright against the bamboo with its muzzle stuck in the half-empty powder-keg, of which he broke out two or three staves, he carried the cord—well greased with shea butter—through a loop tied to one of the slanting bamboos. Then he propped the musket in a standing position on two bamboo sticks, to one of which he attached another length of cord. It was the mechanism of the common sieve bird-trap. When the cord was pulled, the stick would be dislodged, the musket would fall, and in falling jerk the other cord and fire the rifle.

Broaching another keg, he carried a large train of powder from the first keg to the row of loaded muskets, over the pans of which he poured a considerable heap. Leaving the tripping-cord loose, he next proceeded to the opposite end of the thicket and set up a similar trap near the landward entrance, connecting it by a large powder train with the three batches of loaded muskets.

"You seemed to be deuced busy, Cook," Stockbridge remarked as Osmond passed the hammock in which he was now reclining.

"Yes," Osmond replied; "I am arranging a little entertainment to keep our friends amused while we are getting a start. Now, sergeant, if you are ready, you had better gag the prisoner and move outside the bamboos. It will be dark in a few minutes. And give me Mr. Westall's revolver and pouch."

At this moment, Betty, having applied such "first aid" as was possible to the wounded Hausas, came to him and said in a low voice:

"Jim, dear, you will let me help you, if I can, won't you?"

"Certainly I will, dearest," he replied, "though I wish to God you weren't here."

"I don't," said she. "If it comes to the worst, we shall go out together. But it won't. I am not a bit frightened now you are with me."

"I see you have given Stockbridge your hammock," said he. "How far do you think you can walk?"

"Twenty miles, easily, or more at night. Now, Jim, don't worry about me. Just tell me what I am to do and forget me. You have plenty to think about."

"Well, then, I want you and Stockbridge to keep in the middle of the column. The carrier who knows the way will lead, and the sergeant and I will march at the rear to look out for the pursuers. And you must get along as fast as you can."

"Aye, aye, sir," she replied, smiling in his face and raising her hand smartly to the peak of her helmet; and without another word she turned away to take her place in the retiring column.

As the little procession moved towards the opening, Osmond ran back to the bridge end of the track to clear out the guard before he set his traps. A brisk fusillade was proceeding from the concealed enemy when he arrived, to which the guards were replying from their cover.

"I tink dey fit for come across de bridge," one of the Hausas remarked as Osmond gave them the orders to retire.

"Very well," he replied; "you be off one time. I stop to send them back."

The two Hausas accordingly retired, reluctant and protesting, and Osmond took their place behind the screen of bamboo, from which he looked out across the river. It was evident by the constant stirring of the bush and the occasional appearance of men in the openings that some sort of move was in progress, and in fact the footsteps of the two Hausas had hardly died away when it took definite shape. The attack opened with a thundering volley which sent the leaves and splinters of bamboo flying in all directions; then, out of the bush, a compact body of warriors each armed with a Mauser rifle, emerged in single file and advanced towards the bridge at a smart trot. Osmond watched them with a grim smile. Down the narrow track they came in perfect order and on to the foot of the bridge, stepping along the smooth log with perfect security they reached the greased portion. Then came the catastrophe. As the leading warrior stepped on the greasy surface, his feet flew from under him and down he slithered, grabbing frantically at the legs of the next man, who instantly clawed hold of his neighbour and thus passed on the disturbance. In a moment the whole file was capsized like a row of ninepins, and as each man's rifle exploded as he fell and the whole body broke out into simultaneous yells of rage and terror, the orderly dignity of the attack was destroyed utterly.

The cause of the disaster was not immediately perceived, and as soon as the struggling warriors had been rescued from the river or had drifted down stream, the attack was renewed, to end in another wholesale capsize. After the third attempt, however, it apparently began to dawn on the warriors that there was something unnatural about the bridge. A noisy

consultation followed, and when Osmond opened a smart fire with his revolver, the entire body retreated hastily into the bush.

As it was pretty certain that there would be no further attempt to rush the bridge at present, and as the darkness was fast closing in, Osmond proceeded to finish his arrangements before evacuating the fortress. Having set the tripping-cord across the path about six inches from the ground, he loaded and cocked the rifle. The trap was now set. If the warriors should presently manage to crawl across the bridge and enter the thicket, the first comer would certainly strike the cord; and the musket volley and the flying gravel, though they would probably do little harm, would send the attacking party back to the cover of the bush.

Having set the trap, Osmond knocked in the heads of the remaining powder-kegs and spread the powder about among the dry dead bamboo stalks that covered the ground. Then he retired to the landward end of the thicket, and, having set the second trap, started in pursuit of his friends.

The fugitives had evidently travelled at a good pace despite their encumbrances, for he had walked nearly a mile along the riverside track before he overtook them. As he turned a sharp bend he came on them quite suddenly, crouching down in the undergrowth as if in hiding; and, as he appeared, the two Hausas who formed the rear-guard motioned to him to crouch down too.

"What is it?" he whispered, kneeling beside the last Hausa.

"S't! Someone live for river. You no hear um, sah?"

Osmond listened attentively. From somewhere down the river came a sound of muffled voices and the rhythmical swish of something moving through water. He crept nearer to the brink and cautiously peered through the bushes across the dark river. The sounds drew nearer, and soon he could dimly make out the shapes of two long canoes poling up-stream in the shallows on the other side. Each canoe held only three or four men, just enough to drive it swiftly against the stream; but in spite of this, there could be little doubt as to the business on which these stealthily-moving craft were bent. As they faded into the darkness, Osmond touched the Hausa on the shoulder, and, whispering to him to follow, began softly to retrace his steps. His experience of the happy-go-lucky native had inspired him with a new hope.

Attended by the puzzled but obedient Hausa, he followed the sound of the retreating canoes until it suddenly ceased. Then he crept forward still more cautiously and presently caught sight of the two craft, brought up under the opposite bank and filling rapidly with men. He crouched down among the bushes and watched. Very soon the canoes, now crowded with men, put out, one after the other, and swiftly crossing the river, grounded on a small beach or hard under the high bank; when the men, each of whom, as Osmond could now see, carried a gun or rifle, landed and crept up a sloping path. The canoe immediately put off and returned to the other side, whence, having taken up a fresh batch of passengers they crossed to the hard. This manoeuvre was repeated six times, and, as each canoe carried over a dozen men, there were now assembled on the near bank about a hundred and fifty warriors, who remained in a mass, talking in hoarse undertones and waiting for the word to advance.

The last load apparently completed the contingent, for, this time, all the passengers landed and crept up the path, leaving the two canoes drawn up on the hard. This was what Osmond had hoped for and half expected. Feverishly he watched the mob of warriors form up and move off in orderly single file, each shouldering his musket or rifle and no one making a sound. As the silent procession vanished towards the lately evacuated fortress, he craned forward to see if any guards had been posted. But not a soul was in sight. Then he stole along the track until he was above the hard, when he turned to the Hausa.

"Wait," he whispered, "until I get the canoes. Then go back quickly and tell the sergeant I come."

He crept down the path to the hard, and, stepping into one of the canoes, walked to the stern, holding on to the second canoe. As his weight depressed the stern, the bow lifted from the ground and he was able to push off, walking slowly forward as the craft went astern. Then, from the bow, he threw his weight on the stern of the second canoe, which lifted free of the ground in the same manner, and the two craft began silently to drift away down stream on the swift current.

Osmond waved his free hand to the Hausa, and, when he had seen the man steal away to carry the good tidings to the fugitives, he set himself to secure the two canoes together. Each had a primitive painter of grass rope rove through a hole in the bluff bow and a small thwart or cross-band of the same material close to the stern to strengthen the long sides. By making fast the painter of the second canoe to the stern thwart of the one he was in, he secured them together and left himself free to ply the pole; which he began to do as noiselessly as possible, when he had drifted down about a quarter of a mile from the hard, steering the canoes close along the side on which his friends would be waiting. Presently there came a soft hail from the bank; on which, checking their way with the pole, he brought the two canoes up on a spit of sandy mud close underneath.

As he stepped ashore, holding on to the painter of the leading canoe, a little, white-skirted figure came scrambling down the bank, and running to him, seized both his hands.

"Jim!" she whispered, "you are a wonder! You have saved us all! Of course you have! I knew you would!" She gave his hands a final squeeze and then abruptly returned to business. "I will see to the wounded if you tell me where they are to go."

Osmond indicated the larger of the two canoes, and she at once climbed up the bank to arrange the embarkation, while

Osmond, having drawn both canoes up on the spit, called to two of the Hausas to take charge of the painters so that the craft should not get adrift while loading. Then he went up to superintend. The first problem, that of canoe-men, was easily solved, for the carriers, who were natives of the lagoon country, all had some skill in the use of the pole and cheerfully volunteered for duty.

But it was not without some difficulty that the three rough litters—one of them containing the body of poor Westall—were lowered down the steep bank and the wounded men helped down to the spit; but when once they were there, the roomy, punt-like canoes afforded ample and comfortable accommodation for the whole party. The sound men, with three canoe-men and the prisoner, were packed into the smaller canoe, leaving plenty of space in the other for the wounded to lie at their ease. Stockbridge's hammock was stowed in the bows, so that he should not be disturbed by the movements of the canoe-men, the body of Westall came next, decently covered with a country cloth, and then the rest of the wounded. When all was ready, Betty and Osmond stepped on board and took their places side by side in the stern.

As they pushed off into the river Stockbridge settled himself comfortably on his pillow with a sigh of relief at exchanging the jolting of the bush road for the easy motion of the canoe.

"By Jove, Cook!" he exclaimed, "it was a stroke of luck for us that you happened to overtake us. But for your wits they would have made a clean sweep of us. Hallo! What the deuce is that?"

From up the river came three thunderous volleys in quick succession, followed by a confused noise of shouting and the reports of muskets and rifles; then the sound of another volley, more shouts and rattling reports; and as they looked back, the sky was lighted for a few moments by a red glare. Osmond briefly explained the nature of his 'little arrangements', while the alarmed carriers poled along the shallows for dear life.

"But," said Stockbridge, after listening awhile, "what are the beggars going on firing for? Just hark at them! They're blazing away like billy-oh!"

"I take it," replied Osmond, "that they have gorged the bait. Apparently, a party has managed to crawl across the bridge to attack the bamboo thicket from the front while the other force, which ferried across the river, attacked from the rear, and that each party is mistaking the other for us. The trifling error ought to keep them amused for quite a long time; in fact until we are beyond reach of pursuit."

Stockbridge chuckled softly. "You are an ingenious beggar, Cook," he declared with conviction; "and how you managed to keep your wits about you in that hurly-burly, I can't imagine. However, I think we are safe enough now." With this comfortable conclusion, he snuggled down into his hammock and settled himself for a night's rest.

"Oh, Jim, dear," whispered Betty, "how like you! To think out your plans calmly with the bullets flying around and everybody else in a hopeless twitter. It reminds me of the 'phantom mate' on the dear old *Speedwell*. By the way, how did you happen to be there in that miraculously opportune fashion?"

Osmond chuckled. "Well," he exclaimed, "you are a pretty cool little fish, Betty. You drop down from the clouds and then inquire how I happened to be there. How did you happen to be there?"

"Oh, that is quite simple," she replied. "I got Daddy's permission to take a trip from Accra across the Akwapim Mountains to Akuse; and when I got there I thought I should like to have a look at the Country where the bobbery was going on. So I crossed the river and was starting off gaily towards the Krepi border when an interfering though well-meaning old chief stopped me and said I mustn't go any farther because of war-palaver. I wanted to go on, but my carriers wouldn't budge; so back I came, taking the road for Quittah, and by good luck dropped into a little war-palaver after all."

"Why were you going to Quittah?"

"Now, Jim, don't ask silly questions. You know perfectly well. Of course I was going to run over to Adaffia to call on my friend Captain J.; and by the same token, I shouldn't have found him there. Now tell me how you came to be in the bush at this particular time."

Osmond stated baldly the ostensible purpose of his expedition, to which Betty listened without comment. She had her suspicions as to the ultimate motive, but she asked no questions. The less said on that subject, the better.

This was evidently Osmond's view, for he at once plunged into an account of the loss of the *Speedwell* and of Captain Hartup's testamentary arrangements. Betty was deeply affected, both by the loss of the ship and the death of the worthy but cross-grained little skipper.

"How awfully sad!" she exclaimed, almost in tears. "The dear old ship, where I spent the happiest days of my life! And poor Captain Hartup! I always liked him, really. He was quite nice to me, in spite of his gruff manner. I used to feel that he was just a little human porcupine with india-rubber quills. And now I love him because, in his perverse little heart, he understood and appreciated my Captain Jim. May I come, one day, and put a wreath on his grave?"

"Yes, do, Betty," he replied. "I buried him next to Osmond's new grave, and I put up an oaken cross which I made out of some of the planking of the old *Speedwell*. He was very fond of his ship. And I have kept a couple of her beams—thought you might like to have something made out of one of them."

"How sweet of you, Jim, to think of it!" she exclaimed, nestling close to him and slipping her hand round his arm, "and to know exactly what I should like! But we do understand each other, don't we, Jim, dear?"

"I think we do, Betty, darling," he replied, pressing the little hand that had stolen into his own.

For a long time nothing more was said. After the turmoil and the alarms of the escape, it was very peaceful to sit in the gently-swaying canoe and listen to the voices of the night; the continuous "chirr" of countless cicadas, punctuated by the soft swish of the canoe-poles as they were drawn forward for another stroke; the deep-toned, hollow whistle of the great fox-bats, flapping slowly across the river; the long drawn cry, or staccato titter, of far-away hyenas, and now and again, the startling shriek of a potto in one of the lofty trees by the river-bank. It was more soothing than absolute silence. The sounds seemed so remote and unreal, so eloquent of utter solitude; of a vast, unseen wilderness with its mysterious population of bird and beast, living on its strange, primeval life unchanged from the days when the world was young.

After a long interval, Betty spoke again. "It seems," she said, reflectively, "dreadfully callous to be so perfectly happy. I wonder if it is."

"Why should it be?" her companion asked.

"I mean," she explained, "with poor Mr. Westall lying there dead, only a few feet away."

Osmond felt inwardly that Westall had not only thrown away his own life but jeopardized the lives of the others which were in his custody. But he forbore to express what he felt and answered, simply: "I don't suppose the poor chap would grudge us our happiness. It won't last very long."

"Why shouldn't it, Jim?" she exclaimed. "Why should we part again and be miserable for the want of one another? Oh, Jim, darling, my own mate, won't you try to put away your scruples—your needless scruples, though I love and respect you for having them? But don't let them spoil our lives. Forget John Osmond. He is dead and buried. Let him rest. I am yours, Jim, and you know it; and you are mine, and I know it. Those are the realities, which we could never change if we should live for a century. Let us accept them and forget what is past and done with. Life is short enough, dear, and our youth is slipping away. If we make a false move, we shall never get another chance. Oh, say it, Jim. Say you will put away the little things that don't matter and hold fast to the reality of our great love and the happiness that is within our reach. Won't you, Jim?"

He was silent for a while. This was what he had dreaded. To have freely offered, yet again, the gift beside which all the treasures of the earth were to him as nothing; and, even worse, to be made to feel that he, himself, had something to give which he must yet withhold; it was an agony. The temptation to yield—to shut his eyes to the future and snatch at the golden present—was almost irresistible. He knew that Betty was absolutely sincere. He knew quite well that whatever might befall in the future, she would hold him blameless and accept all mischances as the consequences of her own considered choice. His confidence in her generosity was absolute, nor did he undervalue her judgment. He even admitted that she was probably right. John Osmond was dead. The pursuit was at an end and the danger of discovery negligible. In a new country and in a new character he was sure that he could make her life all that she hoped. Then why not forget the past and say "yes"?

It was a great temptation. One little word, and they would possess all that they wished for, all that mattered to either of them. And yet—"Betty," he said at length, in a tone of the deepest gravity, "you have said that we understand one another. We do; perfectly; absolutely. There is no need for me to tell you that I love you, or that if there were any sacrifice that I could make for you, I would make it joyfully and think it an honour and a privilege. You know that as well as I do. But there is one thing that I cannot do. Whatever I may be or may have done, I cannot behave like a cad to the woman I love. And that is what I should do if I married you. I should accept your sterling gold and give you base metal in exchange. You would be the wife of an outlaw, you would live under the continual menace of scandal and disaster. Your children would be the children of a nameless man and would grow up to the inheritance of an ancestry that could not be spoken of.

"Those are the realities, Betty. I realize, and I reverence, your great and noble love for me, unworthy as I am. But I should be a selfish brute if I accepted what you offer to me with such incredible generosity. I can't do it, Betty. It was a disaster that you ever met me, but that we cannot help. We can only limit its effects."

She listened silently while he pronounced the doom of her newly-born hopes, holding his hand tightly grasped in hers and scarcely seeming to breathe. She did not reply immediately when he ceased speaking, but sat a while, her head resting against his shoulder and her hand still clasped in his. Once she smothered a little sob and furtively wiped her eyes. But she was very quiet, and, at length, in a composed, steady voice, though sadly enough, she rejoined: "Very well, Jim, dear. It must be as you think best, and I won't tease you with any more appeals. At any rate, we can go on loving each other, and that will be something. The gift of real love doesn't come to everyone."

For a long time they sat without further speech, thinking each their own thoughts. To Betty the position was a little puzzling. She understood Osmond's point of view and respected it, for she knew that the sacrifice was as great to him as to her. And though, woman-like, she felt their mutual devotion to be a full answer to all his objections, yet—again, woman-like—she approved, though reluctantly, of his rigid adherence to a masculine standard of conduct.

But here came another puzzle. What was it that he had done? What could it possibly be that a man like this should have done? He had said plainly—and she knew that it was true—that there had been a warrant for his arrest. He had been, and in a sense still was, a fugitive from justice. Yet his standard of honour was of the most scrupulous delicacy. It had compelled him quite unnecessarily to disclose his identity. It compelled him now to put away what she knew was his dearest wish. Nothing could be more unlike a criminal; who, surely, is above all things self-indulgent. Yet he was an offender against the law. Now, what, in the name of Heaven, is the kind of offence against the law of which a man of this

type could be guilty? He had never given a hint upon the subject, and of course she had never sought to find out. She was not in the least inquisitive now. But the incongruity, the discrepancy between his character and his circumstances, perplexed her profoundly.

Finally, she gave up the puzzle and began to talk to him about Captain Hartup and the pleasant old times on board the *Speedwell*. He responded with evident relief at having passed the dreaded crisis; and so, by degrees, they got back to cheerful talk and frank enjoyment of one another's society, letting the past, the future, and the might-have-been sink into temporary oblivion.



## XI. — THE ORDER OF RELEASE

IT was a long journey down the winding river and across the great lagoon. How long Osmond never knew; for, as hour after hour passed and the canoe sped on noiselessly through the encompassing darkness, the fatigues of the day began to take effect, not only on him, but on his companion too. Gradually the conversation slackened, the intervals of silence grew longer and longer, merging into periods of restful unconsciousness and punctuated by little smothered yawns on the part of Betty; until, at length, silence fell upon the canoe, unbroken save by the sounds of sleeping men and the rhythmical 'swish' of the poles.

At the sound of a distant bugle Osmond opened his eyes and became aware that the day was breaking and that the journey was nearly at an end. Also that his head was very comfortably pillowed on the shoulder of his companion, who now slumbered peacefully at his side. Very softly he raised himself and looked down at the sleeping girl, almost holding his breath lest he should disturb her. How dainty and frail she looked, this brave, hardy little maid! How delicate, almost childlike, she seemed as she lay, breathing softly, in the easy posture of graceful youth! And how lovely she was! He gazed adoringly at the sweet face, so charmingly wreathed with its golden aureole, at the peacefully-closed eyes with their fringes of long, dark lashes, and thought half-bitterly, half-proudly, that she was his own for the asking; and even as he looked, she opened her eyes and greeted him with a smile.

"What are you looking so solemn about, Jim?" she asked, as she sat up and reached for her helmet.

"Was I looking solemn? I expect it was only foolishness. Most fools are solemn animals."

"Don't be a guffin, Jim," she commanded, reprovingly.

"What is a guffin?" he asked.

"It is a thing with a big, Roman nose and most abnormal amount of obstinacy, which makes disparaging comments on my Captain Jim."

"A horrid sort of beast it must be. Well, I won't, then. Is that Quittah, where all those canoes are?"

"I suppose it is, but I've never been there. Yes, it must be. I can see Fort Firminger—that thing like a Martello tower out in the lagoon opposite the landing-place. Mr. Cockeram says it is an awfully strong fort. You couldn't knock it down with a croquet mallet."

Osmond looked about him with the interest of a traveller arriving at a place which he has heard of but never seen. Behind and on both sides, the waste of water extended as far as the eye could see. Before them was a line of low land with occasional clumps of coconut palms that marked the position of beach villages. Ahead was a larger mass of palms, before which was a wide 'hard' or landing-place, already thronged with market people, towards which numbers of trading canoes were converging from all parts of the lagoon.

As they drew nearer, an opening in the palms revealed a whitewashed fort above which a flag was just being hoisted; and now, over the sandy shore, the masts of two vessels came into view.

"There is the Widgeon," said Betty, pointing to the masts of a barquentine, "and there is another vessel, a schooner. I wonder who she is."

Osmond had observed and was also wondering who she was; for he had a suspicion that he had seen her before. Something in the appearance of the tall, slim masts seemed to recall the mysterious yacht-like craft that he had seen one night at Adaffia revealed for a moment in 'the glimpses of the moon'.

They were now rapidly approaching the landing-place. The other canoe had already arrived, and its disembarked crew could be seen on the hard surrounded by a crowd of natives.

"That looks like a naval officer waiting on the beach," said Osmond, looking at a white-clad figure which had separated itself from the crowd and appeared to be awaiting their arrival.

"It is," replied Betty. "I believe it is Captain Darley. And there is a constabulary officer coming down, too. I expect they have heard the news. You'll get a great reception when they hear Mr. Stockbridge's story—and mine. But they will be awfully upset about poor Mr. Westall. You are coming up to the fort with me, of course?"

Osmond had intended to go straight on to Adaffia, but he now saw that this would be impossible. Besides, there was the schooner. "Yes," he replied, "I will see you to your destination."

"It isn't my destination," said she. "I shall rest here for a day—the German deaconesses will give me a bed, I expect—and then I am coming on with you to Adaffia to put a wreath on Captain Hartup's grave. You can put up either at the fort or with one of the German traders or missionaries. There are no English people here excepting the two officers at the fort."

Osmond made no comment on this, for they were now close inshore. The canoe slid into the shallows and in a few moments more was hauled up by a crowd of willing natives until her bows were high and dry on the hard.

The officer who had joined Darley turned out to be the doctor, under whose superintendence Stockbridge's hammock was carefully landed and the rest of the wounded brought ashore. Then the litter containing the body of the dead officer was lifted out and slowly borne away, while Darley and the native soldiers stood at the salute, and the doctor, having

mustered the wounded, led the way towards the little hospital. As the melancholy procession moved off, Darley turned to greet Betty and Osmond, who had stepped ashore last.

"How do you do, Miss Burleigh? None the worse for your adventures, I hope. Been having rather a strenuous time, haven't you?"

"We have rather," she replied. "Isn't it a dreadful thing to have lost poor Mr. Westall?"

"Yes," he replied, as they turned away from the lagoon and began to walk towards the fort. "Shocking affair. Still, fortune of war, you know. Can't make omelettes without breaking eggs. And here is Mr. Cook, in the thick of the bobbery, as usual. What a fellow you are, Cook! Always in hot water."

As he shook Osmond's hand heartily, the latter replied: "Well, the bobbery wasn't of my making, this time. I found it ready made and just bore a hand. By the way, what schooner is that out in the roads?"

"That," replied Darley, "is an ancient yacht named the Primula—a lovely old craft—sails like a witch. But she has come down in the world now. We met her coming up from the leeward coast and brought her in here."

"Brought her in? Is she in custody, then?"

"Well, we brought her in to overhaul her and make some inquiries. There is just a suspicion that she has been concerned in the gun-running that has been going on. But we haven't found anything up to the present. She seems to be full up with ordinary, legitimate cargo."

"Ha!" exclaimed Osmond.

"Why 'ha'?" demanded Darley with a quick look at Osmond. "Do you know anything about her?"

"Let us hear some more," said Osmond. "Is there a Welshman named Jones on board?"

"There is. He's the skipper, purser, and super cargo all combined."

"Have you looked through her manifest?"

"I have; and I've jotted down some notes of the items of her lading."

"Is there any ivory on board?"

"Yes," replied Darley, with growing excitement.

"Three large crates and a big canvas bag?"

"Yes!"

"Containing in all, thirty-nine large tusks and fifty-one scribellos?"

Darley dragged a pocket-book out of his pocket and feverishly turned over the leaves. "Yes, by Jove!" he fairly shouted. "The very numbers. Now, what have you got to tell us?"

"I think you can take it that the ivory and probably the rest of the lading, too, is stolen property."

"Why," exclaimed Betty, "that must be your ivory, Jim."

Darley flashed an astonished glance at her and then looked inquiringly at Osmond. "Is that so?" he asked.

"I have no doubt that it is," the latter replied. "But if it should happen that there is a man on board named Sam Winter—"

"There is," interrupted Darley.

"And another named Simmons and others named Foat, Bradley, and Darker, I think, if you introduce me to them, that we shall get the whole story. And as to the gun-running, I can't make a voluntary statement, but if you were to put me in the witness-box, I should have to tell you all that I know; and I may say that I know a good deal. Will that do, for the present?"

Darley smiled complacently. "It seems like a pretty straight tip," said he. "I will just skip on board, now, and take possession of the manifest; and if you will give me that list of names again, I will see if those men are on board, and bring them ashore, if they are. You will be staying at the fort, I suppose? There are only Cockeram and the doctor there."

"Yes," said Betty, "I shall ask Mr. Cockeram to put him up, for to-night, at any rate."

"Very well," said Darley, "then I shall see you again later. And now I will be off and lay the train."

He touched his cap, and as they emerged into an open space before the gateway of the fort, he turned and walked away briskly down a long, shady avenue of wild fig-trees that led towards the shore.

Quittah fort was a shabby-looking, antique structure adapted to the conditions of primitive warfare. It was entered by an arched gateway graced by two ancient cannon set up as posts and guarded by a Hausa sentry in a blue serge uniform and a scarlet fez. Towards the gateway Osmond and Betty directed their steps, and as they approached, the sentry sprang smartly to attention and presented arms; whereupon Betty marched in with impressive dignity and two tiny fingers raised to the peak of her helmet.

"This seems to be the way up," she said, turning towards a mouldering wooden staircase, as a supercilious-looking

pelican waddled towards them and a fish-eagle on a perch in a corner uttered a loud yell. "What a queer place it is! It looks like a menagerie. I wonder if there is anyone at home."

She tripped up the stairs, followed by Osmond and watched suspiciously by an assemblage of storks, coots, rails, and other birds which were strolling about at large in the quadrangle, and came out on an open space at the top of a corner bastion. Just as they reached this spot a man came hurrying out of a shabby building which occupied one side of the square; and at the first glance Osmond recognized him as the officer who had come to Adaffia to execute the warrant on the day when he had buried poor Larkom. The recognition was mutual, for as soon as he had saluted Betty, the officer turned to him and held out his hand.

"Larkom, by Jove!" said he.

"My name is Cook," Osmond corrected.

"Oh," said the other; "glad you set me right, because I have been going to send you a note. You remember me—Cockeram. I came down to Adaffia, you know, about that poor chap, Osmond."

"I remember. You said you had been going to write to me."

"Yes. I was going to send you something that I thought would interest you. I may as well give it to you now." He began to rummage in his pockets and eventually brought forth a bulging letter-case, the very miscellaneous contents of which he proceeded to sort out. "It's about poor Osmond," he continued, disjointedly, and still turning over a litter of papers. "I felt that you would like to see it. Poor chap! It was such awfully rough luck."

"What was?" asked Osmond.

"Why, you remember," replied Cockeram, suspending his search to look up, "that I had a warrant to arrest him. It seemed that he was wanted for some sort of jewel robbery and there had been a regular hue-and-cry after him. Then he managed to slip away to sea and had just contrived to get into hiding at Adaffia when the fever got him. Frightful hard lines!"

"Why hard lines?" demanded Osmond.

"Why? Because he was innocent."

"Innocent!" exclaimed Osmond, staring at the officer in amazement.

"Yes, innocent. Had nothing whatever to do with the robbery. No one can make out why on earth he scooted."

As Cockeram made his astounding statement, Betty turned deathly pale. "Is it quite certain that he was innocent?" she asked in a low, eager tone.

"Perfectly," he replied, turning an astonished blue eye on the white-faced girl and then hastily averting it. "Where is that confounded paper—newspaper cutting? I cut it out to send to Lark—Cook. There is no doubt whatever. It seems that they employed a criminal lawyer chap—a certain Dr. Thorndyke—to work up the case against Osmond. So this lawyer fellow got to work. And the upshot of it was that he proved conclusively that Osmond couldn't possibly be the guilty party."

"How did he prove that?" Osmond demanded.

"In the simplest and most satisfactory way possible," replied Cockeram. "He followed up the tracks until he had spotted the actual robber and held all the clues in his hand. Then he gave the police the tip; and they swooped down on my nabs—caught him fairly on the hop with all the stolen property in his possession. There isn't the shadow of a doubt about it."

"What was the name of the man who stole the gems?" Osmond asked anxiously.

"I don't remember," Cockeram replied. "What interested me was the name of the man who didn't steal them."

Betty, still white-faced and trembling, stood gazing rather wildly at Osmond. For his face bore a very singular expression—an expression that made her feel sick at heart. He did not look relieved or joyful. Surprised he certainly was. But it was not joyous surprise. Rather was it suggestive of alarm and dismay. And meanwhile Cockeram continued to turn over the accumulations in his letter-case. Suddenly he drew forth a crumpled and much-worn envelope from which he triumphantly extracted a long newspaper cutting.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he handed it to Osmond, "here we are. You will find full particulars in this. You needn't send it back to me. I have done with it. And now I must hook off to the court-house. You will take possession of the mess-room, Miss Burleigh, won't you? and order whatever you want. Of course, Mr. Cook is my guest." With a formal salute he turned, ran down the rickety stairs and out at the gate, pursued closely as far as the wicket by the pelican.

But Betty's whole attention was focussed on Osmond; and as he fastened hungrily on the newspaper cutting, she took his arm and drew him gently through a ramshackle lattice porch into the shabby little white washed mess-room, where she stood watching with mingled hope and terror the strange, enigmatical expression on his face as he devoured the printed lines.

Suddenly—in the twinkling of an eye—That expression changed. Anxiety, even consternation, gave place to the wildest astonishment; his jaw fell, and the hand which held the newspaper cutting dropped to his side. And then he laughed aloud; a weird, sardonic laugh that made poor Betty's flesh creep.



"What is it, Jim, dear?" she asked nervously.

He looked in her face and laughed again.

"My name," said he, "is not Jim. It is John. John Osmond."

"Very well, John," she replied, meekly. "But why did you laugh?"

He placed his hands on her shoulders and looked down at her with a smile.

"Betty, darling," said he, "do I understand that you are willing to marry me?"

"Willing indeed!" she exclaimed. "I am going to marry you."

"Then, my darling," said he, "you are going to marry a fool."

---

## BOOK II. — THE INVESTIGATOR

### XII. — THE INDICTMENT

MR. JOSEPH PENFIELD sat behind his writing-table in a posture of calm attention, allowing his keen grey eyes to travel back and forth from the silver snuff box which lay on the note-pad before him to the two visitors who confronted him from their respective chairs. One of these, an elderly hard-faced man, square of jaw and truculent of eye, was delivering some sort of statement, while the other, a considerably younger man, listened critically, with his eyes cast down, but stealing, from time to time, a quick, furtive glance either at the speaker or at Mr. Penfield. He was evidently following the statement closely; and to an observer there might have appeared in his concentrated attention something more than mere interest; something inscrutable, with, perhaps, the faintest suggestion of irony.

As the speaker came, somewhat abruptly, to an end, Mr. Penfield opened his snuff-box and took a pinch delicately between finger and thumb.

"It is not quite clear to me, Mr. Woodstock," said he, "why you are consulting me in this matter. You are an experienced practitioner, and the issue is a fairly simple one. What is there against your dealing with the case according to your own judgment?"

"A good deal," Mr. Woodstock replied. "In the first place, I am one of the interested parties—the principal one, in fact. In the second, I practise in a country town, whereas you are here in the very heart of the legal world; and in the third, I have no experience whatever of criminal practice; I am a conveyancer pure and simple."

"But," objected Mr. Penfield, "this is not a matter of criminal practice. It is just a question of your liability as a bailee."

"Yes, true. But that question is closely connected with the robbery. Since no charge was made for depositing this property in my strong-room, obviously, I am not liable unless it can be shown that the loss was due to negligence. But the question of negligence turns on the robbery."

"Which I understand was committed by one of your own staff?"

"Yes, the man Osmond, whom I mentioned; one of my confidential clerks—Hepburn, here, is the other—who had access to the strong-room and who absconded as soon as the robbery was discovered."

"When you say he had access," said Mr. Penfield, "you mean—"

"That he had access to the key during office hours. As a matter of fact, it hangs on the wall beside my desk, and when I am there the strong-room is usually kept open—the door is in my private office and opposite to my desk. Of course, when I leave at the end of the day, I lock up the strong-room and take the key away with me."

"Yes. But in the interval—hm? It almost looks as if a claim might be—hm? But you have given me only an outline of the affair. Perhaps a more detailed account might enable us better to form an opinion on the position. Would it be troubling you too much?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Woodstock; "but it is rather a long story. However, I will cut it as short as I can. We will take the events in the order in which they occurred; and you must pull me up, Hepburn, if I overlook anything."

"The missing valuables are the property of a client of mine named Hollis; a retired soap manufacturer, as rich as Croesus, and like most of these over-rich men, having made a fortune was at his wit's end what to do with it. Eventually, he adopted the usual plan. He became a collector. And having decided to burden himself with a lot of things that he didn't want, he put the lid on it by specializing in goldsmith's work, jewellery and precious stones. Wanted a valuable collection, he said, that could be kept in an ordinary dwelling-house."

"Well, of course, the acquisitive mania, once started, grew by what it fed on. The desire to possess this stuff became an obsession. He was constantly planning expeditions in search of new rarities, scouring the Continent for fresh loot, flitting from town to town and from dealer to dealer like an idiotic bee. And whenever he went off on one of these expeditions he would bring the pick of his confounded collection to me to have it deposited in my strong-room. I urged him to take it to the bank; but he doesn't keep an account with any of the local branches and didn't want to take the stuff to London. Moreover, he had inspected my strong-room and was a good deal impressed by it."

"It is really strong, is it?" asked Mr. Penfield.

"Very. Thick reinforced concrete lined with steel. Very large, too. Not that the strength is material as it was not broken into. Well, eventually I agreed to deposit the things in the strong-room—couldn't refuse an important client—but I resolutely declined to make any charge or accept any sort of consideration for the service. I wasn't going to make myself responsible for the safety of things of that value. And I explained my position to Hollis; but he said that a strong-room that was good enough for my valuable documents was good enough for his jewels. Which was talking like a fool. Burglars don't break into safes to steal leases."

"Well, this business began about six years ago, and—so far as I can tell—nothing amiss occurred until quite lately. I say so far as I can tell, for of course we can't date the robbery. We only know when it was discovered. But I assume that the theft was committed pretty recently or it would surely have been discovered sooner."

"And when was it first ascertained that a robbery had been committed?" asked Mr. Penfield, dipping a quill into the ink.

"On the fourth of October," replied Mr. Woodstock; and having paused while Mr. Penfield noted the date, he continued: "On that day Hollis took a great ruby up to South Kensington, where it had been accepted for a loan exhibition. He delivered it himself to the keeper of the precious stones, and was a little taken aback when that gentleman, after a preliminary inspection, began to pore over it with a magnifying-glass and then sent for one of his colleagues. The second expert raised his eyebrows when he had looked at the gem, and he, too, made a careful scrutiny with the lens. Finally, they sent for a third official; and the upshot of it was that the three experts agreed that the stone was not a ruby at all but only a first-class imitation.

"Of course Hollis didn't believe them, and said so. He had bought the stone for four thousand pounds from a well-known dealer and had shown it to a number of connoisseurs, who had all been enthusiastic about the colour and lustre of the gem. There had never been any question that it was not merely a genuine ruby, but a ruby of the highest class. However, when he had heard the verdict of the experts, he pocketed his treasure and went straight off to Cawley's in Piccadilly. But when Mr. Cawley shook his head over the gem and pronounced it an unquestionable counterfeit, he became alarmed and danced off in a deuce of a twitter to the dealer from whom he had bought it.

"That interview settled the matter. The dealer remembered the transaction quite well and knew all about the stone, for he had full records of the circumstances under which he had acquired it. Moreover, he recognized the setting—a pendant with a surround of small diamonds—but he was quite clear that the stone in it was not the stone that he had sold to Hollis. In fact it was not a stone at all; it was just a good-class paste ruby. The original had been picked out of the setting and the counterfeit put in its place; and the person who had done the job was apparently not a skilled jeweller, for there were traces on the setting of some rather amateurish work."

"There is no doubt, I suppose," said Mr. Penfield, "of the bona-fides of the dealer?"

"Not the slightest," was the reply. "He is a man of the highest reputation; and as a matter of fact, no regular dealer would palm off a counterfeit. It wouldn't be business. But the question doesn't really arise, as you will see when I proceed with the story.

"As soon as Hollis was convinced that a substitution had been effected, he commissioned an independent expert to come down and make a critical survey of his collection; and it was then ascertained that practically every important gem in his cabinets was a counterfeit. And in every case in which the stone was a false one, the same traces of clumsy workmanship were discoverable by an expert eye.

"The conclusion was obvious. Since the original gems had come from all sorts of different sources, there could be no question of fraud on the part of the various vendors; to say nothing of the fact that Hollis—who has practically no knowledge of stones himself—always obtained an expert opinion before concluding a deal. It was obvious that a systematic robbery had been carried out, and the question that arose was, who could the robber be?

"But that question involved certain others; as, for instance, when had the robbery been committed? where were the jewels at that time? and who had access to the place in which they were?

"These were difficult questions. At first it seemed as if they were unanswerable, and perhaps some of them would have been if the robber had not lost his nerve. But I am anticipating. Let us take the questions in their order.

"First as to the date of the robbery. It happens that a little less than two years ago Professor Eccles came down by invitation and made a careful inspection of Hollis's collection with a view to a proposed bequest to the nation, and marked off what he considered to be the most valuable specimens. Now, I need not say that if Professor Eccles detected no counterfeit stones, we may take it that no counterfeits were there. Consequently, the collection was then intact and the robbery must have been committed since that date. But it happens that that date coincides almost exactly with the arrival of Osmond at my office. Just two years ago Hepburn introduced him to me; and as he is Hepburn's brother-in-law, I accepted him with perfect confidence.

"The other questions seemed more difficult. As to Hollis's own premises, the jewel-room had a Chubb detector lock on its only door, the cabinets have similar locks, the windows are always kept securely fastened, and no attempt has ever been made to break into the place. Besides, burglars would simply have taken the jewels away. They would not have left substitutes. The personnel of his household—a lady secretary, a housekeeper, and two maids—appear beyond suspicion. Moreover, they had all been with him many years before the robbery occurred. In short, I think we may consider Hollis's premises as outside the field of inquiry."

"Do you really?" said Mr. Penfield, in a tone which clearly indicated that he did not.

"Certainly; and so will you when you have heard the rest of the story. We now come to the various occasions on which the more valuable parts of this collection were deposited in my strong-room. Let me describe the procedure. In the first place, Hollis himself packed the jewels in a number of wooden boxes which he had had made specially for the purpose, each about fourteen inches by nine by about five inches deep. Every box had a good lock with a sunk disc on each side of the keyhole for the seals. When the boxes were packed they were locked and a strip of tape put across the keyhole and secured at each end with a seal. They were then wrapped in strong paper and sealed at all the joints with Hollis's seal—an antique Greek seal set in a ring which he always wears on his finger. On the outside of the cover was written a list of the contents in Hollis's own handwriting and signed by him, and each box bore in addition a number. The boxes were brought

to my office by Hollis and by him delivered personally to me; and I gave him a receipt, roughly describing and enumerating the boxes, but, of course, not committing myself in respect of the contents. I then carried them myself into the strong-room and placed them on an upper shelf which I reserved for them; and there they remained until Hollis fetched them away, when he used to give me a receipt in the same terms as my own. That concluded the particular transaction.

"Now, it happened that at the time when the robbery was discovered, several of the boxes which Hollis had taken back from me about a month previously still remained packed and in their paper wrappings. And it further happened that one of these—there were eight in all—contained an emerald which Hollis had bought only a few days before he packed it. There was no question as to the genuineness of this stone; and when the box was opened, there was no question as to the fact that it had been replaced by a counterfeit. Even Hollis was able to spot the change. So that seemed to fix the date of the robbery to the period during which the box had been in my strong-room."

"Apparently," Mr. Penfield agreed. "But you speak of the box as being still in its paper wrapping. What of the seals?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Woodstock, "that is the most mysterious feature of the affair. The seals were unbroken and, so far as Hollis could see, the package was absolutely intact, just as it had been handed to me."

Mr. Penfield pursed up his lips and took snuff to the verge of intemperance.

"If the seals were unbroken," said he, "and the package was in all other respects intact, that would seem to be incontestable proof that it had never been opened since it was closed and sealed."

"That was what I pointed out," interposed Hepburn, "when Mr. Woodstock talked the matter over with Osmond and me. The unbroken seals seemed a conclusive answer to any suggestion that the robbery took place in our office."

"So they did," Woodstock agreed, "and so they would still if Osmond had kept his head. But he didn't. He had evidently reckoned on the question of a robbery from our strong-room never being raised, and I imagine that it was that emerald that upset his nerve. At any rate, within a week of our discussion he bolted, and then, of course, the murder was out."

Mr. Penfield nodded gravely and asked, after a short pause: "And how is Mr. Hollis taking it? Is he putting any pressure on you?"

"Oh, not at all—up to the present. He has not suggested any claim against me; he merely wants to lay his hand on the robber and, if possible, get his jewels back. He entirely approves of what I have done."

"What have you done?" Mr. Penfield asked.

"I have done the obvious thing," was the reply, delivered in a slightly truculent tone. "As soon as it was clear that Osmond had absconded, I communicated with the police. I laid an information and gave them the leading facts."

"And do they propose to take any action?"

"Most undoubtedly; in fact I may say that they have been most commendably prompt. They have already traced Osmond to Bristol, and I have every hope that in due course they will run him to earth and arrest him."

"That is quite probable," said Mr. Penfield. "And when they have arrested him—?"

"He will be brought back and charged before a magistrate, when we may take it that he will be committed for trial."

"It is possible," Mr. Penfield assented, doubtfully. "And then—"

"Then," replied Woodstock, reddening and raising his voice, "he will be put on his trial and, I make no doubt, sent to penal servitude."

Mr. Penfield took snuff deprecatingly and shook his head. "I think not," said he; "but perhaps there is some item of evidence which you have omitted to mention?"

"Evidence!" Woodstock repeated impatiently. "What evidence do you want? The property has been stolen and the man who had an opportunity to steal it has absconded. What more do you want?"

Mr. Penfield looked at his brother solicitor with mild surprise.

"The judge," he replied, "and I should think the magistrate, too, would want some positive evidence that the accused stole the jewels. There appears to be no such evidence. The unexplained disappearance of this man is a suspicious circumstance; but it is useless to take suspicions into court. You have got to make out a case, and at present you have no case. If the charge were not dismissed by the magistrate, the bill would certainly be thrown out by the Grand Jury."

Mr. Woodstock glowered sullenly at the old lawyer, but he made no reply, while Hepburn sat with down cast eyes and the faintest trace of an ironical smile.

"Consider," Mr. Penfield resumed, "what would be the inevitable answer of the defence. They would point out that there is not a particle of evidence that the robbery—if there has really been a robbery—occurred in your office at all, and that there are excellent reasons for believing that it did not."

"What reasons are there?"

"There are the unbroken seals. Until you can show how the jewels could have been abstracted without breaking the seals, you have not even a prima-facie case. Then there is the method of the alleged robbery. It would have required not merely

access but undisturbed possession for a considerable time. It was not just a matter of picking out the stones. They were replaced by plausible counterfeits which had to be made or procured. Take the case of the ruby that you mentioned. It deceived Hollis completely. Then it must have been very like the original in size, form, and colour. It could not have been picked up casually at a theatrical property dealer's; it must have been made ad hoc by careful comparison with the original. But all this and the subsequent setting and finishing would take time. It would be quite possible while the jewels were lying quietly in Hollis's cabinets, but it would seem utterly impossible under the alleged circumstances. In short," Mr. Penfield concluded, "I am astounded that you ever admitted the possibility of the robbery having occurred on your premises. What do you say, Mr. Hepburn?"

"I agree with you entirely," the latter replied. "My position would have been that we had received certain sealed packages and that we had handed them back in the same condition as we received them. I should have left Hollis to prove the contrary."

"And I think he could have done it," said Woodstock doggedly. "You seem to be forgetting that emerald. But in any case I have accepted the suggestion and I am not going to draw back, especially as my confidential clerk has absconded and virtually admitted the theft. The question is, what is to be done? Hollis is mad to get hold of the robber and recover his gems, and he is prepared to stand the racket financially."

"In that case," said Mr. Penfield, taking a final pinch and pocketing his snuff-box, "I will venture to make a suggestion. This case is out of your depth and out of mine. I suggest that you allow me to take counsel's opinion; and the counsel I should select would be Dr. John Thorndyke."

"Thorndyke—hm!" grunted Woodstock. "Isn't he an irregular practitioner of some sort?"

"Not at all," Mr. Penfield dissented warmly. "He is a scientific expert with an unrivalled knowledge and experience of criminal practice. If it is possible for anyone to unravel this tangle, I am confident that he is the man; and I know of no other."

"Then," exclaimed Woodstock, "for God's sake get hold of him, and let me know what he says, so that I can report to Hollis. And let him know that there will be no trouble about costs."

With this Mr. Woodstock rose and, after an unemotional leave-taking, made his way out of the office, followed by Hepburn.



### XIII. — THORNDYKE TAKES UP THE INQUIRY

MR. PENFIELD'S visit to Dr. Thorndyke's chambers in King's Bench Walk, Inner Temple, was productive of some little surprise, as such visits were rather apt to be. For the old solicitor had definitely made up his mind that Woodstock's theory of the robbery was untenable and that the burden of proof ought to be cast on Hollis; and he was therefore not a little disconcerted to find Thorndyke tending to favour the view that the probabilities pointed to the strong-room as the scene of the robbery.

"After all," the latter said, "we must not ignore the obvious. It is undeniable that Osmond's disappearance—which has the strongest suggestion of flight—is a very suspicious circumstance. It occurred almost immediately after the discovery of the thefts and the suggestion that the gems had been stolen from the strong-room. Osmond had access to the strong-room—though I admit that a good many other persons had, too. Then there is the striking fact that the period of the robberies coincides exactly with the period of Osmond's presence at the office. During the four years which preceded his arrival no robbery appears to have occurred, although all the other conditions seem to have been the same. So far as we can see, the robberies must have commenced very shortly after his arrival. These are significant facts which, as I have said, we cannot ignore."

"I am entirely with you," Mr. Penfield replied, "when you say that we must not ignore the obvious. But are you not doing so? These packages were most carefully and elaborately sealed; and it is admitted that they were returned to the owner with the seals unbroken. Now, it seems to me obvious that if the seals were unbroken, the packages could not have been opened. But apparently you think otherwise. Possibly you attach less importance to seals than I do?"

"Probably," Thorndyke admitted. "It is easy to exaggerate their significance. For what is a seal, when all is said? It is an artificial thing which some artist or workman has made and which another artist or workman could copy if necessary. There is no magic in seals."

"Dear, dear!" Mr. Penfield exclaimed with a wry smile. "Another illusion shattered! But I think a Court of Law would share my erroneous view of the matter. However, we will let that pass. I understand that you look upon Osmond as the probable delinquent?"

"The balance of probabilities is in favour of that view. But I am keeping an open mind. There are other possibilities, and they will have to be explored. We must take nothing for granted."

Mr. Penfield nodded approvingly. "And suppose," he asked, "the police should arrest Osmond?"

"Then," replied Thorndyke, "Mr. Woodstock would be in difficulties, and so would the police—who have shown less than their usual discretion—unless the prisoner should get in a panic and plead 'guilty.' There is not even a *prima-facie* case. They can't call upon Osmond to prove that he did not steal the gems."

"Exactly," Mr. Penfield agreed. "That is what I tried to impress on Woodstock—who is really a most extraordinarily unlegal lawyer. But have you any suggestion to offer?"

"I can only suggest that, as we are practically without data, we should endeavour to obtain some. The only fact that we have is that the stones have been removed from their settings and replaced by imitations. There seems to be no doubt about that. As to how they came to be removed, there are evidently four possibilities. First, they may have been taken from Hollis's cabinets by some person unknown. Second, the substitution may have been effected by Hollis himself, for reasons unknown to us and by no means easy to imagine. Third, they may have been stolen from the strong-room by some person other than Osmond. Fourth, they may have been stolen from the strong-room by Osmond. The last is, I think, the most probable. But all of the four hypotheses must be impartially considered. Do I understand that Hollis is prepared to offer facilities?"

"He agrees to give every assistance, financial or other."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I suggest that we make a beginning by inspecting the boxes. I understand that there are still some unopened."

"Yes; six. Hollis reserved them to be opened in the presence of witnesses."

"Let Hollis bring those six boxes together with those that have been opened, with their packings and wrappings, if he has them. If we can fix a day, I will arrange for an expert to be present to witness the opening of the six boxes and give an opinion on the stones in them. If it appears that any robbery has been committed, I shall ask Hollis to leave the boxes and the counterfeit jewels that I may examine them at my leisure."

Mr. Penfield chuckled softly and helped himself to a pinch of snuff.

"Your methods, Dr. Thorndyke," said he, "are a perennial source of wonder to me. May I ask what kind of information you expect to extract from the empty boxes?"

"I have no specific expectations at all," was the reply; "but it will be strange indeed if we learn nothing from them. They will probably have little enough to tell us; but, seeing that we have, at present, hardly a single fact beyond that of the substitution—and that is not of our own observing—a very small addition to our knowledge would be all to the good."

"Very true, very true," agreed Mr. Penfield. "A single definite fact might enable us to decide which of those four

possibilities is to be adopted and pursued; though how you propose to extract such a fact from an empty box, or even a full one, I am unable to imagine. However, I leave that problem in your hands. As soon as you have secured your expert, perhaps you will kindly advise me and I will then make the necessary arrangements with Mr. Hollis."

With this Mr. Penfield rose and took his departure, leaving Thorndyke to read over and amplify the notes that he had taken during the consultation.

As matters turned out, he was able to advise Mr. Penfield within twenty-four hours that he had secured the services of an expert who was probably the greatest living authority on gem stones; with the result that a telegram arrived from Mr. Hollis accepting the appointment for the following day at eleven in the forenoon, that time having been mentioned by the expert as the most suitable on account of the light.

It wanted several minutes to the appointed hour when the first visitor arrived; for the Treasury clock had hardly struck the third quarter when, in response to a smart rat-tat on the little brass knocker, Thorndyke opened the door and admitted Professor Eccles.

"I am a little before my time," the latter remarked as he shook hands, "but I wanted to have a few words with you before Mr. Hollis arrived. I understand that you want me to give an opinion on some doubtful stones of his. Are they new ones? Because I may say that I looked over his collection very carefully less than two years ago and I can state confidently that it contained no gems that were not unquestionably genuine. But I have heard some rumours of a robbery—unfounded, I hope, seeing that Hollis proposes to bequeath his treasures to the national collection."

"I am afraid," replied Thorndyke, "that the rumours are correct; but that is what you are going to help us to decide. It is not a case of simple robbery. The stolen stones seem to have been replaced by imitations; and as you examined the collection when it was undoubtedly intact, you will see at once if there has been any substitution."

He proceeded to give the professor a brief account of the case and the curious problem that it presented, and he had barely finished when a cab was heard to draw up below. A minute later, as the two men stood at the open door, the visitor made his appearance, followed by the cabman, each carrying a bulky but apparently light wooden case.

Mr. Hollis was a typical business man—dry, brisk, and shrewd-looking. Having shaken hands with the professor and introduced himself to Thorndyke, he dismissed the cabman and came to the point without preamble.

"This case, marked A, contains the full boxes. The other, marked B, contains the empties. I will leave you to deal with that at your convenience. My concern and Professor Eccles's is with the other, which I will open at once and then we can get to work."

He thrust the despised case B into a corner, and hoisting the other on to the table, unbuckled the straps, unlocked it, threw open the lid, and took out six sealed packages, which he placed side by side on the table.

"Shall I open them?" he asked, producing a pocket knife, "or will you?"

"Before we disturb them," said Thorndyke, "we had better examine the exteriors very carefully."

"I've done that," said Hollis. "I've been over each one most thoroughly and, so far as I can see, they are in exactly the same condition as they were when I handed them to Woodstock. The writing on them is certainly my writing and the seals are impressions of my seal, which, as you see, I carry on my finger in this ring."

"In that case," said Thorndyke, "we may as well open them forthwith. Perhaps I had better take off the wrappings, as I should like to preserve them and the seals intact."

He took up the first package and turned it over in his hands, examining each surface closely. And as he did so, his two visitors watched him—the professor with slightly amused curiosity, the other with a dry, rather impatient manner not without a trace of scepticism. The package was about fourteen inches in length by nine wide and five inches deep. It was very neatly covered with a strong, smooth white paper bearing a number—thirteen—and a written and signed list of the contents, and sealed at each end in the middle. The paper was further secured by a string, tied tightly and skilfully, of which the knot was embedded in a mass of wax on which was an excellent impression of the seal.

"You see," Hollis pointed out, "that the parcel has been made as secure as human care could make it. I should have said that it was perfectly impossible to open it without breaking the seals."

"But surely," exclaimed the professor, "it would be an absolute impossibility! Don't you agree, Dr. Thorndyke?"

"We shall be better able to judge when we have seen the inside," the latter replied. With a small pair of scissors he cut the string, which he placed on one side, and then, with great care, cut round each of the seals, removing them with the portions of paper on which they were fixed and putting them aside with the string. The rest of the paper was now taken off, disclosing a plain, white-wood box, the keyhole of which was covered by a strip of tape secured at each end by a seal seated in a small circular pit. Thorndyke cut the tape and held the box towards Hollis, who already held the key in readiness. This having been inserted and turned, Thorndyke raised the lid and laid the box on the table.

"There, Professor," said he; "you can now answer your own question. The list of contents is on the cover. It is for you to say whether that list correctly describes the things which are inside."

Professor Eccles drew a chair up to the table, and lifting from the inside of the box a thick pad of tissue paper (which Thorndyke took from him and placed with the string and the seals), ran his eye quickly over the neatly-arranged

assemblage of jewels that reposed on a second layer of tissue. Very soon a slight frown began to wrinkle his forehead. He bent more closely over the box, looked narrowly first at one gem, then at another, and at length picked out a small, plain pendant set with a single oval green stone about half an inch in diameter.

"Leaf-green jargoon," said he, reading from the list as he produced a Coddington lens from his pocket; "that is the one, isn't it?"

Hollis grunted an assent as he watched the professor inspecting the gem through his lens.

"I remember the stone," said the professor. "It was one of the finest of the kind that I have ever seen. Well, this isn't it. This is not a jargoon at all. It is just a lump of green glass—flint glass, in fact. But it is quite well cut. The lapidary knew his job better than the jeweller. There has been some very rough work on the setting."

"How much was the stone worth?" Thorndyke asked.

"The original? Not more than thirty pounds, I should say. It was a beautiful and interesting stone, but rather a collector's specimen than a jeweller's piece. The public won't give big prices for out-of-the-way stones. They like diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds."

"Is this counterfeit a true facsimile of the original? I mean as to size and style of cutting?"

Professor Eccles took from his pocket a small leather case, from which he extracted a calliper gauge. Applying this delicately to the exposed edges of the "girdle" between the claws, he read the vernier and then reapplied it in the other diameter.

"Seven-twelfths by three-quarters of an inch, brilliant cut," he announced. "Do you happen to remember the dimensions, Mr. Hollis? These can't be far out, as the stone fits the setting."

"I've brought my catalogue," said Hollis, producing a small, fat volume from his pocket. "Thought we might want it. What's the number? Three-sixty-three. Here we are. 'Jargoon. Full leaf-green. Brilliant cut. Seven-twelfths by three-quarters.'"

"Then," said the professor, "this would seem to be a perfect replica. Queer, isn't it? I see your point, Doctor. This fellow has been to endless pains and some expense in lapidary's charges—unless he is a lapidary himself—to say nothing of the risk; and all to get possession of a stone worth only about thirty pounds, and not easily marketable at that."

"Some of the other stones are worth more, though," remarked Hollis.

"True, true," agreed the professor. "Let us look at some of the others. Ha! Here is one that looks a little suspicious, if my memory serves."

He picked out a gold ornament set with a large cat's-eye bordered with small diamonds and exhibited it to Hollis, who bent down to inspect it.

"Cat's-eye," he commented, after a long and anxious inspection. "Well, it looks all right to me. What's the matter with it?"

"Oh, it is a cat's-eye, sure enough, but not the right kind, I think. What does the catalogue say?"

Hollis turned over a page and read out: "Chrysoberyl. Cymophane or cat's-eye. Brown, oval, cut en cabochon. Five-eighths by half an inch. Bordered by twelve diamonds."

"I thought so," said the professor. "This is a cat's-eye, but not a chrysoberyl. It is a quartz cat's-eye. But I should hardly have thought it would have been worth the trouble and expense of making the exchange. You see," he added, taking the dimensions with his gauge, "this stone is apparently a facsimile of the missing one in size and shape and not a bad match in colour. The diamonds don't appear to have been tampered with."

"What about that emerald?" Hollis asked anxiously, indicating a massive ring set with a large, square stone bordered with diamonds. Professor Eccles picked up the ring, and at the first glance he pursed up his lips, dubiously. But he examined it carefully through his lens, nevertheless.

"Well?" demanded Hollis.

The professor shook his head sadly. "Paste," he replied. "A good imitation as such things go, but unmistakable glass. Will you read out the description?"

Hollis did so; and once again the correspondence in dimensions and cutting showed the forgery to be a carefully-executed facsimile.

"This fellow was a conscientious rascal," said the professor. "He did the thing thoroughly—excepting the settings."

"Yes, damn him!" Hollis agreed, savagely. "That ring cost me close on twelve hundred pounds. It came from Lord Pycroft's collection."

Professor Eccles was deeply concerned; naturally enough, for any robbery of precious things involves a wicked waste. And then there was the depressing fact that the valuable "Hollis bequest" was melting away before his eyes. Gloomily, he picked out one after another of the inmates of the box and regretfully added them to the growing heap of the rejected.



When the first box had been emptied, the second was attacked with similar procedure, and so on with the remainder, until the last box had been probed to the bottom, when the professor sat back in his chair and drew a deep breath. "Well," he exclaimed, "it is a terrible disaster and profoundly mysterious. In effect, the collection has been skimmed of everything of real value. Even the moonstones have been exchanged for cheap specimens with the rough native cutting untouched. I have never heard of anything like it. But I don't understand why the fellow took all this trouble. He couldn't have supposed that the robbery would pass undetected."

"It might easily have remained undetected long enough to confuse the issues," said Thorndyke. "If the jewels had been returned to the cabinets and lain there undisturbed for a few months, it would have been very difficult to determine exactly when, or where, or how the robbery had been carried out."

"Yes," growled Hollis. "The scoundrel must have known that I am no expert and reckoned on my not spotting the change. And I don't suppose I should, for that matter. However, the cat slipped out of the bag sooner than he expected and now the police are close on his heels. I'll have my pound of flesh out of him yet."

As he snapped out this expression of his benevolent intentions, Mr. Hollis gathered up the remnant of unrifled jewels and was about to deposit them in one of the empty boxes when Thorndyke interposed.

"May I lend you a deed-box with some fresh packing? I think we agreed that the empty boxes and the packing should be left with me, that I might examine them thoroughly before returning them."

"Very well," said Hollis, "though it seems a pretty futile thing to do. But I suppose you know your own business. What about those sham stones?"

"I should like to examine them too, as they are facsimile imitations; and we may possibly learn some thing from the settings."

"What do you expect to learn?" Hollis inquired in a tone which pretty plainly conveyed his expectations.

"Very little," Thorndyke replied (on which Hollis nodded a somewhat emphatic agreement). "But," he continued, "this case will depend on circumstantial evidence—unless the robber confesses—and that evidence has yet to be discovered. We can do no more than use our eyes to the best advantage in the hope that we may light on some trace that may give us a lead."

Hollis nodded again. "Sounds pretty hopeless," said he. "However, Mr. Penfield advised me to put the affair in your hands, so I have done so. If you should discover anything that will help us with the prosecution, I suppose you will let me know."

"I shall keep Mr. Penfield informed as to what evidence, if any, is available, and he will, no doubt, communicate with you."

With this rather vague promise Mr. Hollis appeared to be satisfied, for he pursued the subject no farther, but, having packed the poor remainder of his treasures in the deed-box, prepared to depart.

"Before you go," said Thorndyke, "I should like to take a trial impression of your seal, if you would allow me."

Hollis stared at him in amazement. "My seal!" he exclaimed. "Why, good God, sir, you have already got some seventy impressions—six from each of these boxes and all those from the empties!"

"The seals that I have," Thorndyke replied, "are the questioned seals. I should like to have what scientists call a 'control.'"

"I don't know what you mean by 'questioned seals,'" Hollis retorted. "I haven't questioned them, I have acknowledged them as my own seals."

"I think," Thorndyke rejoined with a faint smile, "that Mr. Penfield would advise you to acknowledge nothing. But, furthermore, none of these seals is a really perfect impression such as one would require for purposes of comparison."

"Comparison!" exclaimed Hollis. "Comparison with what? But there," he concluded with a sour smile, "it's no use arguing. Have it your own way. I suppose you know what you are about."

With this, he drew off the ring, and, laying it on the table, bestowed a glance of defiance on Thorndyke. The latter had, apparently, made his preparations, for he promptly produced from a drawer a small box, the opening of which revealed a supply of sealing-wax, a spirit-lamp, a metal plate, a little crucible or melting-ladle with a wooden handle, a bottle of oil, a camel's-hair brush, and a number of small squares of white paper. While he was setting out this apparatus the professor examined the seal through his lens.

"A fine example," he pronounced. "Syracusan, I should say, fourth or fifth century B.C. Not unlike the decadrachm of that period—the racing Quadriga with the winged Victory above and the panoply of armour below seem to recall that coin. The stone seems to be green chalcedony. It is a beautiful work. Seems almost a pity to employ it in common use."

He surrendered it regretfully to Thorndyke, who, having taken an infinitesimal drop of oil on the point of the brush and wiped it off on the palm of his hand, delicately brushed the surface of the seal. Then he laid a square of paper on the metal plate, broke off a piece from one of the sticks of sealing-wax and melted it in the crucible over the lamp. When it was completely liquefied, he poured it slowly on the centre of the square of paper, where it formed a circular, convex pool. Having given this a few seconds to cool, he took the ring and pressed it steadily on the soft wax. When he raised it—which

he did with extreme care, steadying the paper with his fingers—the wax bore an exquisitely perfect impression of the seal.

Hollis was visibly impressed by the careful manipulation and the fine result; and when Thorndyke had repeated the procedure, he requested that a third impression might be made for his own use. This having been made and bestowed in the deed-box, he replaced the ring on his finger, bade the professor and Thorndyke a curt farewell, and made his way down to the waiting cab.

As the door closed behind him, the professor turned to Thorndyke with a somewhat odd expression on his face.

"This is a very mysterious affair, Doctor," said he.

The curiously significant tone caused Thorndyke to cast a quick, inquiring glance at the speaker. But he merely repeated the latter's remark.

"A very mysterious affair, indeed."

"As I understand it," the professor continued, "Hollis claims that these gems were stolen from the boxes while they were in the solicitor's strong-room; and that they were taken without breaking the seals. But that sounds like sheer nonsense. And yet the solicitor appears to accept the suggestion."

"Yes. Hollis claims that the gems that were put into the boxes were the real gems; and both he and the solicitor, Woodstock, base their beliefs on the fact that Woodstock's confidential clerk appears to have absconded immediately after the discovery of the robbery."

"H'm!" grunted the professor. "Is it quite clear that the clerk has really absconded?"

"He has disappeared for no known reason."

"H'm. Not quite the same thing, is it? But has it been established that the real stones were actually in the boxes when they were handed to the solicitor?"

"I wouldn't use the word 'established,'" Thorndyke admitted. "There is evidence that one stone, at least, was intact a day or two before the boxes were deposited; and that stone—a large emerald—was found to have been changed when the box was opened."

The professor grunted dubiously and reflected awhile. Then he looked hard at Thorndyke and appeared to be about to make some observation; and then he seemed to alter his mind, for he concluded with the somewhat colourless remark: "Well, I daresay you are quite alive to all the possibilities"; and with this he prepared to take his departure.

"Do you happen," asked Thorndyke, "to know the addresses of any lapidaries who specialize in imitation stones?"

Professor Eccles reflected. "Imitations are rather out of my province," he replied. "Of course any lapidary could cut a paste gem or make a doublet or triplet, and would if paid for the job. I will write down the addresses of one or two men who have worked for me and they will probably be able to give you any further information." He wrote down two or three addresses, and as he put away his pencil, he asked: "How is your colleague, Jervis? He is still with you, I suppose?"

"Jervis," was the reply, "is at present an independent practitioner. He accepted, on my advice, a whole-time appointment at the 'Griffin' Life Assurance Office. But he drops in from time to time to lend me a hand. I will tell him you asked after him. And let me tender you my very warmest thanks for your invaluable help to-day."

"Tut, tut," said the professor, "you need not thank me. I am an interested party. If Hollis doesn't recover his gems, the national collection is going to lose a valuable bequest. Bear that in mind as an additional spur to your endeavours. Good-bye, and good luck!"

With a hearty handshake and a valedictory smile, Professor Eccles let himself out and went his way, apparently in a deeply thoughtful frame of mind, as Thorndyke judged by observing his receding figure from the window.

---

#### XIV. — THORNDYKE MAKES A BEGINNING

THE profound cogitations of Professor Eccles set up in the mind of Thorndyke a sort of induced psychic current. As he turned from the window and began to occupy himself in sorting his material preparatory to examining it, his thoughts were busy with his late visitor. The professor had been about to say something and had suddenly thought better of it. Now, what could it have been that he was about to say? And why had he not said it? And what was the meaning of that strangely intent look that he had bestowed on Thorndyke, and that rather odd expression that his face had borne? And, finally, what were those 'possibilities' at which he had hinted?

These were the questions that Thorndyke asked himself as he carried out, quietly and methodically, the preliminaries to his later investigations; with the further questions: Did the professor know anything that bore on the mystery? and if so, what was it that he knew? He evidently had no knowledge either of Woodstock or of Osmond, but he was fairly well acquainted with Hollis. It was manifest that he rejected utterly the alleged robbery from the strong-room; which implied a conviction that the exchange of stones had been made either before the boxes were handed to Woodstock or after they had been received back from him.

It was a perfectly natural and reasonable belief. Mr. Penfield had been of the same opinion. But Mr. Penfield had no special knowledge of the matter. His opinion had been based exclusively on the integrity of the seals. Was this the professor's case, too? Or was he in possession of some significant facts which he had not disclosed? His manner rather suggested that he was. Perhaps it might be expedient, later, to sound him cautiously. But this would depend on the amount and kind of information that was yielded by other sources.

By the time he reached this conclusion the sorting process was completed. The six boxes with their contents replaced were set out in order, the empties put together as well as was possible, and the seals from the wrapping of each box put into a separate envelope on which the number and description was written. A supply of white paper was laid on the table together with a number of new paper bags, and a little simple microscope which consisted of a watchmaker's compound eye-glass mounted on a small wooden stand. Thorndyke ran his eye over the collection to see that everything was in order; then, dismissing the professor from his mind, he drew a chair up to the table and fell to work.

He began with the seals. Opening one of the envelopes, he took out the four seals—including that on the knot, which he had cut off—and laying them out on the table, examined them quickly, one after the other. Then he picked up one of them, laid it on a card and placed the card on the stage of the magnifier, through which he made a more prolonged examination, turning the card from time to time to alter the incidence of the light, and jotting down on a note-block a few brief memoranda. The same procedure was followed with the other three seals, and when they had all been examined they were returned to their envelope, the top sheet of the note-block was detached and put in with them, the envelope was put aside and a fresh one opened. Finally he came to the envelope which contained the two impressions that he had, himself, taken from Hollis's seal, but these were not subjected to the minute scrutiny that the others had received. They were merely laid on the card, slipped under the magnifier, and after a single, brief glance, returned to their envelope and put aside. Next, the seals in the recesses by the keyholes of the boxes were scrutinized, the eyeglass being swung clear of its stand for the purpose, and when this had been done, the fresh set of notes was detached and slipped into one of the envelopes.

But this did not conclude the examination. Apparently there was some further point to be elucidated. Rising from his chair, Thorndyke fetched from a cabinet a microscope of the kind used for examining documents—a heavy-based instrument with a long, pivoted arm and a bull's-eye condenser. With this he re-examined the seals in succession, beginning with the two impressions that he had, himself, taken; and it might have been noticed that this examination concerned itself exclusively with a particular spot on the seal—a portion of the background just in front of the chariot and above the back of the near horse.

He had just finished and was replacing the microscope in the cabinet when the door opened silently and a small, clerical-looking man entered the room and regarded him benevolently.

"I have laid a cold lunch, sir, in the small room upstairs," he announced, "and I have put everything ready in your laboratory. Can I help you to carry anything up?" As he spoke, he ran an obviously inquisitive eye over the row of boxes and the numbered envelopes.

"Thank you, Polton," Thorndyke replied. "I think we will take these things up out of harm's way and I will just look them over before lunch. But meanwhile there is a small job that you might get on with. I have here a collection of seals of which I want enlarged photographs made—four diameters magnification and each set on a separate negative and numbered similarly to the envelopes."

He exhibited the collection to his trusty coadjutor with a few words of explanation, when Polton tenderly gathered together the seven envelopes, and master and man betook themselves to the upper regions, each laden with a consignment of Mr. Hollis's boxes, full and empty.

The laboratory of which Polton had spoken was a smallish room which Thorndyke reserved for his own use, and which was on the same floor as the large laboratory and the workshop over which Polton presided. Its principal features were a long work-bench, covered with polished linoleum and at present occupied by a microscope and a tray of slides, needles, forceps, and other accessories, a side-table, a cupboard, and several sets of shelves.

"Is there anything more, sir?" Polton asked when the boxes had been stacked on the side-table. He looked at them wistfully as he spoke, but accepted with resignation the polite negative and stole out, shutting the door silently behind him. As soon as he had gone, Thorndyke fell to work with a rapid but unhurried method suggestive of a fixed purpose and a considered plan. He began by putting on a pair of thin rubber gloves. Then, spreading on the bench a sheet of white demy paper such as chemists use for wrapping bottles, he took one of the boxes, detached its wrapping paper, opened the box, and taking out the jewels and the pads of tissue paper, deposited the former at one end of the bench and the latter at the other, together with the empty box. First he dealt with the pads of tissue paper, one of which he placed on the sheet of white paper, and having opened it out and smoothed it with an ivory paper-knife, examined it closely on both sides with the aid of a reading glass. Then he took from a drawer a large tuning-fork, and holding the packing paper vertically over the middle of the sheet on the bench, he struck the tuning-fork sharply, and while it was vibrating, lightly applied its tip to the centre of the suspended paper, causing it to hum like a gigantic bumble-bee and to vibrate visibly at its edges. Having repeated this proceeding two or three times, he laid the paper aside and with the reading glass inspected the sheet of demy, on which a quite considerable number of minute specks of dust were now to be seen. This procedure he repeated with the other pads of tissue paper from the box, and as he worked, the sheet of white paper on the bench became more and more conspicuously sprinkled with particles of dust until, by the time all the pads had been treated, a quite appreciable quantity of dust had accumulated. Finally, Thorndyke took the box itself and, having opened it, placed its bottom on the sheet of paper and with a small mallet tapped it lightly but sharply all over the bottom and sides. When he lifted it from the paper, the further contribution of dust could be plainly seen in a speckling of the surface corresponding to the shape of the box.

For some moments Thorndyke stood by the bench looking down on this powdering of grey that occupied the middle of the sheet of white paper. Some of the particles, such as vegetable fibres, were easily recognizable by the unaided eye; and there were two hairs, evidently moustache hairs, both quite short and of a tawny brown colour. But he made no detailed examination of the deposit. Taking from the cupboard a largish flat pill-box, he wrote on its lid the number of the box, and then, having lightly folded the sheet of paper, carefully assembled the dust into a tiny heap in the middle and transferred it to the pill-box, applying the tuning-fork to the sheet to propel the last few grains to their destination. Then, having put the box aside and deposited the sheets of tissue paper—neatly folded—in a numbered envelope, he spread a fresh sheet of demy on the bench, and taking up another box from the side-table, subjected it to similar treatment; and so, carefully and methodically, he dealt with the entire collection of boxes, never pausing for more than a rapid glance at the sprinkling of dust that each one yielded.

He was just shooting the 'catch' from the last package into the pill-box when a quick step was audible on the stairs, and after a short interval Polton let himself in silently.

"Here's Dr. Jervis, sir," said he, "and he says he hasn't had lunch yet. It is past three o'clock, sir."

"A very delicate hint, Polton," said Thorndyke. "I will join him immediately—but here he is, guided by instinct at the very psychological moment."

As he spoke, Dr. Jervis entered the room and looked about him inquisitively. From the row of pill-boxes his glance travelled to the little heaps of jewellery, each on a numbered sheet of paper.

"This is a quaint collection, Thorndyke," said he, stooping to inspect the jewels. "What is the meaning of it? I trust that my learned senior has not, at last, succumbed to temptation; but it is a suspicious looking lot."

"It does look a little like a fence's stock-in-trade or the product of a super-burglary," Thorndyke admitted. "However, I think Polton will be able to reassure you, when he has looked over the swag. But let us go and feed; and I will give you an outline sketch of the case in the intervals of mastication. It is quite a curious problem."

"And I take it," said Jervis, "that those pill-boxes contain the solution. There is a necromantic look about them that I seem to recognize. You must tell me about them when you have propounded the problem."

He followed Thorndyke into the little breakfast-room, and when they had taken their seats at the table and fairly embarked on their immediate business, the story of the gem robbery was allowed to transpire gradually. Jervis followed the narrative with close attention and an occasional chuckle of amusement.

"It is an odd problem," he commented when the whole story had been told. "There doesn't seem to be any doubt as to who committed the robbery; and yet if you were to put this man Osmond into the dock, although the jury would be convinced to a man of his guilt, they would have to acquit him. I wonder what the deuce made him bolt."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that is what I have been asking myself. He may be a nervous, panicky man, but that does not look like the explanation. The suggestion is rather that he knew of some highly incriminating fact which he expected to come to light, but which has not come to light. As it is, the only incriminating fact is his own disappearance, which is evidentially worthless by itself."

"Perfectly. And you are now searching for corroborative facts in the dust from those boxes. It doesn't look a very hopeful quest."

"It doesn't," Thorndyke agreed. "But still, circumstantial evidence gains weight very rapidly. A grain of positive evidence would give quite a new importance to the disappearance. For instance, no less than seven of those boxes have yielded moustache hairs, all apparently from the same person—a fair man with a rather closely cropped moustache of a tawny colour. Now, if it should turn out that Osmond has a moustache of that kind and that no other person connected with those

boxes has a moustache of precisely that character, this would be a really important item of evidence, especially coupled with the disappearance."

"It would, indeed; and even the number might be illuminating. I mean that, although moustache hairs are shed pretty freely, one would not have expected to find so many. But if the man had the not uncommon habit of stroking or rubbing his moustache, that would account for the number that had got detached."

Thorndyke nodded approvingly. "Quite a good point, Jervis. I will make a note of it for verification. And now, as we seem to have finished, shall we take a look at one or two of the samples."

"Exactly what I was going to propose," replied Jervis; and as they rose and repaired to the small laboratory, he added: "It's quite like old times to be pursuing a mysterious unknown quantity with you. I sometimes feel like chucking the insurance job and coming back."

"It is better to come back occasionally and keep the insurance job," Thorndyke rejoined as he placed two microscopes on the bench facing the window and drew up a couple of chairs. "You had better note the number of each box that you examine, though it is probably of no consequence."

He took up the collection of pill-boxes, and having placed them between the two microscopes, sat down, and the two friends then fell to work, each carefully tipping the contents of a box on to a large glass slip and laying the latter on the stage of the microscope.

For some time they worked on in silence, each jotting down on a note-book brief comments on the specimens examined. When about half of the boxes had been dealt with—and their contents very carefully returned to them—Jervis leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtfully at his colleague.

"This is very commonplace, uncharacteristic dust in most respects," said he, "but there is one queer feature in it that I don't quite make out. I have found in every specimen a number of irregularly oval bodies, some of them with pointed ends. They are about a hundredth of an inch long by a little more than a two hundredth wide; a dull pink in colour and apparently of a granular homogeneous substance. I took them at first for insect eggs, but they are evidently not, as they have no skin or shell. I don't remember having seen anything exactly like them before. Have you found any of them?"

"Yes. Like you, I have found some in every box."

"And what do you make of them? Do you recognize them?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "They are the castings of a wood-boring beetle; particles of that fine dust that you see in the worm-holes of worm-eaten wood. Quite an interesting find."

"Quite; unless they come from the boxes that the jewels were packed in."

"I don't think they do. Those boxes are white wood, whereas these castings are from a red wood. But we may as well make sure."

He rose and took up the empty boxes one by one, turning each one over and examining it closely on all sides.

"You see, Jervis," he said as he laid down the last of them, "there is not a trace of a worm-hole in any of them. No, that worm-dust came from an outside source."

"But," exclaimed Jervis, "it is very extraordinary. Don't you think so? I mean," he continued in response to an inquiring glance from his colleague, "that the quantity is so astonishing. Just think of it. In every one of these boxes we have found an appreciable number of these castings—quite a large quantity in the aggregate. But the amount of dust that will fall from a piece of worm-eaten furniture must be infinitesimal."

"I would hardly agree to that, Jervis. A really badly wormed piece—say an old walnut chair or armoire—may, in the course of time, shed a surprisingly large amount of dust. But, nevertheless, my learned friend has, with his usual perspicacity, laid his finger on the point that is of real evidential importance—the remarkable quantity of this dust and its more or less even distribution among all these boxes. And now you realize the truth of what I was saying just now as to the cumulative quality of circumstantial evidence. Here we have a number of boxes which have undoubtedly been tampered with by some person. That person is believed to be the man Osmond on the ground that he has absconded. But his disappearance, by itself, furnishes no evidence of his guilt. It merely offers a suggestion. He may have gone away for some entirely different reason."

"Then we find in these boxes certain moustache hairs. If it should turn out that Osmond has a moustache composed of similar hairs, that fact alone would not implicate him, since there are thousands of other men with similar moustaches. But taken in conjunction with the disappearance, the similarity of the hairs would constitute an item of positive evidence."

"Then we find some dust derived from worm-eaten wood. Its presence in these boxes, its character, and its abundance offer certain suggestions as to the kind of wood, the nature of the wooden object, and the circumstances attending its deposition in the boxes. Now, if it should be possible to ascertain the existence of a wooden object of the kind suggested and associated with the suggested circumstances, and if that object were the property of, or definitely associated with, the man Osmond, that fact, together with the hairs and the disappearance, would form a really weighty mass of evidence against him."

"Yes, I see that," said Jervis; "but what I don't see is how you arrive at your inferences as to the object from which the

dust was derived."

"It is a question of probabilities," replied Thorndyke. "First, as to the kind of wood. It is a red wood. It is pretty certainly not mahogany, as it is too light in colour and mahogany is very little liable to 'the worm.' But the abundance of dust suggests one of those woods which are specially liable to be worm eaten. Of these the fruit woods—walnut, cherry, apple, and pear—are the most extreme cases, cherry being, perhaps, the worst of all and therefore usually avoided by the cabinet-maker. But this dust is obviously not walnut. It is the wrong colour. But it might be either cherry, apple, or pear, and the probabilities are rather in favour of cherry; though, of course, it might be some other relatively soft and sappy red wood."

"But how do you infer the nature of the object?"

"Again, by the presence of the dust in these boxes, by the properties of that dust and the large quantity of it. Consider the case of ordinary room dust. You find it on all sorts of surfaces, even high up on the walls or on the ceiling. There is no mystery as to how it gets there. It consists of minute particles, mostly of fibres from textiles, so small and light that they float freely in the air. But this wood consists of relatively large and heavy bodies—over a hundredth of an inch long. From the worm-holes it will fall to the floor; and there it will remain even when the floor is being swept. It cannot rise in the air and become deposited like ordinary dust, and it must therefore have made its way into these boxes in some other manner."

"Yes, I realize that; but still I don't see how that fact throws any light on the nature of the wooden object."

"It is merely a suggestion," replied Thorndyke; "and the inference may be quite wrong. But it is a perfectly obvious one. Come now, Jervis, don't let your intellectual joints get stiff. Keep them lissom by exercise. Consider the problem of this dust. How did it get into these boxes and why is there so much of it? If you reason out the probabilities, you must inevitably reach a conclusion as to the nature of the wooden object. That conclusion may turn out to be wrong; but it will be logically justifiable."

"Well, that is all that matters," Jervis retorted with a sour smile, as he rose and glanced at his watch. "The mere fact of its being wrong we should ignore as an irrelevant triviality; just as the French surgeon, undisturbed by the death of the patient, proceeded with his operation and finally brought it to a brilliantly successful conclusion. I will practise your logical dumbbell exercise, and if I reach no conclusion after all I shall still be comforted by the mental vision of my learned senior scouring the country in search of a hypothetical worm-eaten chest of drawers."

Thorndyke chuckled softly. "My learned friend is pleased to be ironical. But nevertheless his unerring judgement leads him to a perfectly correct forecast of my proceedings. The next stage of the inquiry will consist in tracing this dust to its sources, and the goal of my endeavours will be the discovery and identification of this wooden object. If I succeed in that, there will be, I imagine, very little more left to discover."

"No," Jervis agreed, "especially if the owner of the antique should happen to be the elusive Mr. Osmond. So I wish you success in your quest, and only hope it may not resemble too closely that of the legendary blind man, searching in a dark room for a black hat—that isn't there."

With this parting shot and a defiant grin, Jervis took his departure, leaving Thorndyke to complete the examination of the remaining material.



## XV. — MR. WAMPOLE IS HIGHLY AMUSED

ON a certain Saturday afternoon at a few minutes to three the door of Mr. Woodstock's office in High Street, Burchester, opened somewhat abruptly and disclosed the figures of the solicitor himself and his chief clerk.

"Confounded nuisance all this fuss and foolery," growled the former, pulling out his watch and casting an impatient glance up the street. "I hope he is not going to keep us waiting."

"He is not due till three," Hepburn remarked, soothingly; and then, stepping out and peering up the nearly empty street, he added: "Perhaps that may be he—that tall man with the little clerical-looking person."

"If it is, he seems to be bringing his luggage with him," said Mr. Woodstock, regarding the pair, and especially the suit-cases that they carried, with evident disfavour; "but you are right. They are coming here."

He put away his watch, and as the two men crossed the road, he assumed an expression of polite hostility.

"Dr. Thorndyke?" he inquired as the new-comers halted opposite the doorway; and having received confirmation of his surmise, he continued: "I am Mr. Woodstock, and this is my colleague, Mr. Hepburn. May I take it that this gentleman is concerned in our present business?" As he spoke he fixed a truculent blue eye on Thorndyke's companion, who crinkled apologetically.

"This is Mr. Polton, my laboratory assistant," Thorndyke explained, "who has come with me to give me any help that I may need."

"Indeed," said Woodstock, glaring inquisitively at the large suit-case which Polton carried. "Help? I gathered from Mr. Penfield's letter that you wished to inspect the office, and I must confess that I found myself utterly unable to imagine why. May I ask what you expect to learn from an inspection of the premises?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "is a rather difficult question to answer. But as all my information as to what has occurred here is second-or third-hand, I thought it best to see the place myself and make a few inquiries on the spot. That is my routine practice."

"Ah, I see," said Woodstock. "Your visit is just a matter of form, a demonstration of activity. Well, I am sorry I can't be present at the ceremony. My colleague and I have an engagement elsewhere; but my office-keeper, Mr. Wampole, will be able to tell you anything that you may wish to know and show you all there is to see excepting the strong-room. If you want to see that, as I suppose you do, I had better show it to you now, as I must take the key away with me."

He led the way along the narrow hall, half-way down which he opened a door inscribed 'Clerks' Office', and entered a large room, now unoccupied save by an elderly man who sat at a table with the parts of a dismembered electric bell spread out before him. Through this Mr. Woodstock passed into a somewhat smaller room furnished with a large writing-table, one or two nests of deed-boxes, and a set of book-shelves. Nearly opposite the table was the massive door of the strong-room, standing wide open with the key in the lock.

"This is my private office," said Mr. Woodstock, "and here is the strong-room. Perhaps you would like to step inside. I am rather proud of this room. You don't often see one of this size. And it is absolutely fire-proof; thick steel lining, concrete outside that, and then brick. It is practically indestructible. Those confounded boxes occupied that long upper shelf."

Thorndyke did not appear to be specially interested in the strong-room. He walked in, looked round at the steel walls with their ranks of steel shelves, loaded with bundles of documents, and then walked out.

"Yes," he said, "it is a fine room, as strong and secure as one could wish; though, of course, its security has no bearing on our case, since it must have been entered either with its own key or a duplicate. May I look at the key?"

Mr. Woodstock withdrew it from the lock and handed it to him without comment, watching him with undisguised impatience as he turned it over and examined its blade.

"Not a difficult type of key to duplicate," he remarked as he handed it back, "though these wardless pin-keys are more subtle than they look."

"I suppose they are," Woodstock assented indifferently. "But really, these investigations appear to me rather pointless, seeing that the identity of the thief is known. And now I must be off; but first let me introduce you to my deputy, Mr. Wampole."

He led the way back to the clerks' office, where his subordinate was busily engaged in assembling the parts of the bell.

"This is Dr. Thorndyke, Wampole, who has come with his assistant, Mr.—er—Bolton, to inspect the premises and make a few inquiries. You can show him anything that he wants to see and give him all the assistance that you can in the way of answering questions. And," concluded Mr. Woodstock, shaking hands stiffly with Thorndyke, "I wish you a successful issue to your labours."

As Mr. Woodstock and his colleague departed, closing the outer door after them, Mr. Wampole laid down his screw-driver and looked at Thorndyke with a slightly puzzled expression.

"I don't quite understand, sir, what you want to do," said he, "or what sort of inspection you want to make; but I am

entirely at your service, if you will kindly instruct me. What would you like me to show you first?"

"I don't think we need interrupt your work just at present, Mr. Wampole. The first thing to be done is to make a rough plan of the premises, and while my assistant is doing that, perhaps I might ask you a few questions if it will not distract you too much."

"It will not distract me at all," Mr. Wampole replied, picking up his screw-driver. "I am accustomed to doing odd jobs about the office—I am the handy man of the establishment—and I am not easily put out of my stride."

Evidently he was not; for even as he was speaking his fingers were busy in a neat, purposive way that showed clearly that his attention was not wandering from his task. Thorndyke watched him curiously, not quite able to 'place' him. His hands were the skilful, capable hands of a mechanic, and this agreed with Woodstock's description of him and his own. But his speech was that of a passably educated man and his manner was quite dignified and self-possessed.

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "Mr. Woodstock referred to you as the office-keeper. Does that mean that you are the custodian of the premises?"

"Nominally," replied Wampole. "I am a law-writer by profession; but when I first came here, some twenty years ago, I came as a caretaker and used to live upstairs. But for many years past the upstairs rooms have been used for storage—obsolete books, documents, and all sorts of accumulations. Nobody lives in the house now. We lock the place up when we go away at night. As for me, I am, as I said, the handy man of the establishment. I do whatever comes along—copy letters, engross leases, keep an eye on the state of the premises, and so on."

"I see. Then you probably know as much of the affairs of this office as anybody."

"Probably, sir. I am the oldest member of the staff, and I am usually the first to arrive in the morning and the last to leave at night. I expect I can tell you anything that you want to know."

"Then I will ask you one or two questions, if I may. You probably know that my visit here is connected with the robbery of Mr. Hollis's gems?"

"The alleged robbery," Mr. Wampole corrected. "Yes, sir. Mr. Woodstock told me that."

"You appear to be somewhat doubtful about the robbery."

"I am not doubtful at all," Wampole replied in a tone of great decision. "I am convinced that the whole thing is a mare's nest. The gems may have been stolen. I suppose they were as Mr. Hollis says they were. But they weren't stolen from here."

"You put complete trust in the strong-room?"

"Oh no, I don't, sir. This is a solicitor's strong-room, not a banker's. It is secure against fire, not against robbery. It was designed for the custody of things such as documents, of great value to their owners but of no value to a thief. It was no proper receptacle for jewels. They should have gone to a bank."

"Do I understand, then, that unauthorized persons might have obtained access to the strong-room?"

"They might, during business hours. Mr. Woodstock unlocks it when he arrives and it is usually open all day; or if it is shut, the key is left hanging on the wall. But it has never been taken seriously as a bank strong-room is. Mr. Hepburn and Mr. Osmond kept their cricket-bags and other things in it, and we have all been in the habit of putting things in there if we were leaving them here over-night."

"Then, really, any member of the staff had the opportunity to make away with Mr. Hollis's property?"

"I wouldn't put it as strongly as that," replied Wampole, with somewhat belated caution. "Any of us could have gone into the strong-room; but not without being seen by some of the others. Still, one must admit that a robbery might have been possible; the point is that it didn't happen. I checked those boxes when I helped to put them in, and I checked them when we took them out. They were all there in their original wrappings with Mr. Hollis's handwriting on them and all the seals intact. It is nonsense to talk of a robbery in the face of those facts."

"And you attach no significance to Mr. Osmond's disappearance?"

"No, sir. He was a bachelor and could go when and where he pleased. It was odd of him, I admit, but he sometimes did odd things; a hasty, impulsive gentleman, quick to jump at conclusions and make decisions and quick to act. Not a discreet gentleman at all; rather an unreasonable gentleman, perhaps, but I should say highly scrupulous. I can't imagine him committing a theft."

"Should you describe him as a nervous or timid man?"

Mr. Wampole emitted a sound as if he had clock work in his inside and was about to strike. "I never met a less nervous man," he replied with emphasis. "No, sir. Bold to rashness would be my description of Mr. John Osmond. A buccaneering type of man. A yachtsman, a boxer, a wrestler, a footballer, and a cricketer. A regular hard nut, sir. He should never have been in an office. He ought to have been a sailor, an explorer, or a big-game hunter."

"What was he like to look at?"

"Just what you would expect—a big, lean, square-built man, hatchet-faced, Roman-nosed, with blue eyes, light-brown hair, and a close-cropped beard and moustache. Looked like a naval officer."



"Do you happen to know if his residence has been examined?"

"Mr. Woodstock and the Chief Constable searched his rooms, but of course they didn't find anything. He had only two small rooms, as he took his meals and spent a good deal of his time with Mr. Hepburn, his brother-in-law. He seemed very fond of his sister and her two little boys."

"Would it be possible for me to see those rooms?"

"I don't see why not, sir. They are locked up now, but the keys are here and the rooms are only a few doors down the street."

Here occurred a slight interruption, for Mr. Wampole, having completed his operations on the bell, now connected it with the battery—which had also been under repair—when it emitted a loud and cheerful peal. At the same moment, as if summoned by the sound, Polton entered holding a small drawing-board on which was a neatly executed plan of the premises.

"Dear me, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Wampole, casting an astonished glance at the plan. "You are very thorough in your methods. I see you have even put in the furniture."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, with a faint smile; "we must needs be thorough even if we reach no result."

Mr. Wampole regarded him with a sly smile. "Very true, sir," he chuckled—"very true, indeed. A bill of costs needs something to explain the total. But, God bless us! what is this?"

"This" was, in effect, a diminutive vacuum cleaner, fitted with a little revolving brush and driven by means of a large dry battery, which Polton was at the moment disinterring from his suit-case. Thorndyke briefly explained the nature of the apparatus while Mr. Wampole stared at it with an expression of stupefaction.

"But why have you brought it here, sir?" he exclaimed. "The premises would certainly be the better for a thorough cleaning, but surely—"

"Oh, we are not going to 'vacuum clean' you," Thorndyke reassured him. "We are going to take samples of dust from the different parts of the premises."

"Are you, indeed, sir? And, if I may take the liberty of asking, what do you propose to do with them?"

"I shall examine them carefully when I get home," Thorndyke replied, "and I may then possibly be able to judge whether the robbery took place here or elsewhere."

As Thorndyke furnished this explanation, Mr. Wampole stood gazing at him as if petrified. Once he opened his mouth, but shut it again tightly as if not trusting himself to speak. At length he rejoined: "Wonderful! wonderful!" and then, after an interval, he continued meditatively: "I seem to have read somewhere of a wise woman of the East who was able, by merely examining a hair from the beard of a man who had fallen downstairs, to tell exactly how many stairs he had fallen down. But I never imagined that it was actually possible."

"It does sound incredible," Thorndyke admitted, gravely. "She must have had remarkable powers of deduction. And now, if Mr. Polton is ready, we will begin our perambulation. Which was Mr. Osmond's office?"

"I will show you," replied Mr. Wampole, recovering from his trance of astonishment. He led the way out into the hall and thence into a smallish room in which were a writing-table and a large, old-fashioned, flap-top desk.

"This table," he explained, "is Mr. Hepburn's. The desk was used by Mr. Osmond and his belongings are still in it. That second door opens into Mr. Woodstock's office."

"Is it usually kept open or closed?" Thorndyke asked.

"It is nearly always open; and as it is, as you see"—here he threw it open—"exactly opposite the door of the strong-room, no one could go in there unobserved unless Mr. Woodstock, Mr. Hepburn, and Mr. Osmond had all been out at the same time."

Thorndyke made a note of this statement and then asked: "Would it be permissible to look inside Mr. Osmond's desk? Or is it locked?"

"I don't think it is locked. No, it is not," he added, demonstrating the fact by raising the lid; "and, as you see, there is nothing very secret inside."

The contents, in fact, consisted of a tobacco-tin, a couple of briar pipes, a ball of string, a pair of gloves, a clothes-brush, a pair of much-worn hair-brushes, and a number of loose letters and bills. These last Thorndyke gathered together and laid aside without examination, and then proceeded methodically to inspect each of the other objects in turn, while Mr. Wampole watched him with the faintest shadow of a smile.

"He seems to have had a pretty good set of teeth and a fairly strong jaw," Thorndyke remarked, balancing a massive pipe in his fingers and glancing at the deep tooth-marks on the mouth-piece, "which supports your statement as to his physique."

He peered into the tobacco-tin, smelt the tobacco, inspected the gloves closely, especially at their palmar surfaces, and tried them on; examined the clothes brush, first with the naked eye and then with the aid of his pocket-lens, and, holding it

inside the desk, stroked its hair backwards and forwards, looking closely to see if any dust fell from it. Finally, he took up the hair-brushes one at a time and, having examined them in the same minute fashion, produced from his pocket a pair of fine forceps and a seed-envelope. With the forceps he daintily picked out from the brushes a number of hairs which he laid on a sheet of paper, eventually transferring the collection to the little envelope, on which he wrote: "Hairs from John Osmond's hair-brushes."

"You don't take anything for granted, sir," remarked Mr. Wampole, who had been watching this proceeding with concentrated interest (perhaps he was again reminded of the wise woman of the East).

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "Your description was hearsay testimony, whereas these hairs could be produced in Court and sworn to by me."

"So they could, sir; though, as it is not disputed that Mr. Osmond has been in this office, I don't quite see what they could prove."

"Neither do I," rejoined Thorndyke. "I was merely laying down the principle."

Meanwhile, Polton had been silently carrying out his part of the programme, not unobserved by Mr. Wampole; and a pale patch about a foot square, between Mr. Hepburn's chair and the front of the table, where the pattern of the grimy carpet had miraculously reappeared, marked the site of his operations. Tenderly removing the little silken bag, now bulging with its load of dust, he slipped it into a numbered envelope and wrote the number on the spot on the plan to which it corresponded.

Presently a similar patch appeared on the carpet in front of Osmond's desk, and when the sample had been disposed of and the spot on the plan marked, Polton cast a wistful glance at the open desk.

"Wouldn't it be as well, sir, to take a specimen from the inside?" he asked.

"Perhaps it would," Thorndyke replied. "It should give us what we may call a 'pure culture.'" He rapidly emptied the desk of its contents, when Polton introduced the nozzle of his apparatus and drew it slowly over every part of the interior. When this operation was completed, including the disposal of the specimen and the marking of the plan, the party moved into Mr. Woodstock's office, and from thence back into the clerks' office.

"I find this investigation intensely interesting," said Mr. Wampole, rubbing his hands gleefully. "It seems to combine the attractions of a religious ceremony and a parlour game. I am enjoying it exceedingly. You will like to have the names of the clerks who sit at those desks, I presume."

"If you please," replied Thorndyke.

"And, of course, you will wish to take samples from the insides of the desks. You certainly ought to. The informal lunches which the occupants consume during the forenoon will have left traces which should be most illuminating. And the desks are not locked, as there are no keys."

Mr. Wampole's advice produced on Polton's countenance a smile of most extraordinary crinkliness, but Thorndyke accepted it with unmoved gravity and it was duly acted upon. Each of the desks was opened and emptied of its contents—instructive enough as to the character and personal habits of the tenant—and cleared of its accumulation of crumbs, tobacco-ash, and miscellaneous dirt, the 'catch' forming a specimen supplementary to those obtained from the floor. At length, when they had made the round of the office, leaving in their wake a succession of clean squares on the matting which covered the floor, Mr. Wampole halted before an old-fashioned high desk which stood in a corner in company with a high office-stool.

"This is my desk," said he. "I presume that you are going to take a little souvenir from it?"

"Well," replied Thorndyke, "we may as well complete the series. We operated on Mr. Hollis's premises this morning."

"Did you indeed, sir! You went there first; and very proper too. I am sure Mr. Hollis was very gratified."

"If he was," Thorndyke replied with a smile, "he didn't make it obtrusively apparent. May I compliment you on your desk? You keep it in apple-pie order."

"I try to show the juniors an example," replied Mr. Wampole, throwing back the lid of the desk and looking complacently at the neatly stowed contents. "It is a miscellaneous collection," he added as he proceeded to transfer his treasures from the desk to a cleared space on the table.

It certainly was. There were a few tools—pliers, hack-saw, hammer, screw-driver, and a couple of gimlets—a loosely folded linen apron, one or two battery terminals and a coil of insulated wire, a stamp-album, a cardboard tray full of military buttons, cap-badges, and old civilian coat buttons, and a smaller tray containing one or two old copper and silver coins.

"I see you are a stamp collector," remarked Thorndyke, opening the album and casting a glance of lukewarm interest over its variegated pages.

"Yes," was the reply, "in a small way. It is a poor man's hobby, unless one seeks to acquire costly rarities, which I do not. As a matter of fact, I seldom buy specimens at all. This album has been filled principally from our foreign correspondence. And the same is true of the coins. I don't regularly collect them; I just keep any odd specimens that come my way."

"And the buttons? You have a better opportunity there, for you have practically no competitors. And yet it seems to me that they are of more interest than the things that the conventional collectors seek so eagerly."

"I entirely agree with you, sir," Mr. Wampole replied, warmly. "It is the common things that are best worth collecting—the things that are common now and will be rare in a few years' time. But the collector who has no imagination neglects things until they have become rare and precious. Then he buys at a high price what he could have got a few years previously for nothing. Look at these old gilt coat-buttons. I got them from an old-established tailor who was clearing out his obsolete stock. Unfortunately, he had thrown away most of them and nearly all the steel button-dies. I just managed to rescue these few and one or two dies, which I have at home. They are of no value now, but when the collectors discover the interest of old buttons, they will be worth their weight in gold. I am collecting all the buttons I can get hold of."

"I think you are wise, from a collector's point of view. By the way, did you ever meet with any of those leather-bound sample wallets that the old button-makers used to supply to tailors?"

"Never," replied Mr. Wampole. "I have never even heard of them."

"I have seen one or two," said Thorndyke, "and each was a collection in itself, for it contained some two or three hundred buttons, fixed in sheets of mill-board, forming a sort of album; and, of course, every button was different from every other."

Mr. Wampole's eyes sparkled. "What an opportunity you had, sir!" he exclaimed. "But probably you are not a collector. It was a pity, though, for, as you say, one of those wallets was a museum in itself. If you should ever chance to meet with another, would it be too great a liberty for me to beg you to secure an option for me, at a price within my slender means?"

"It is no liberty at all," Thorndyke replied. "It is not likely that I shall ever come across one again, but if I should, I will certainly secure it for you."

"That is most kind of you, sir," exclaimed Mr. Wampole. "And now, as Mr. Polton seems to have completed the cleansing of my desk—the first that it has had, I am afraid, for a year or two—we may continue our exploration. Did you wish to examine the waiting-room?"

"I think not. I have just looked into it, but its associations are too ambiguous for the dust to be of any interest. But I should like to glance at the rooms upstairs."

To the upstairs rooms they accordingly proceeded, but the inspection was little more than a formality. They walked slowly through each room, awakening the echoes as they trod the bare floors, and as they went, Thorndyke's eye travelled searchingly over the shelves and rough tables, stacked with documents and obsolete account-books, and the few rickety Windsor chairs. There was certainly an abundance of dust, as Mr. Wampole pointed out, but it did not appear to be of the brand in which Thorndyke was interested.

"Well," said Mr. Wampole, as they descended to the ground-floor, "you have now seen the whole of our premises. I think you said that you would like to inspect Mr. Osmond's rooms. If you will wait a few moments, I will get the keys."

He disappeared into the principal's office, and meanwhile Polton rapidly packed his apparatus in the suit case, so that by the time Mr. Wampole reappeared, he was ready to start.

"Mr. Osmond's rooms," said Mr. Wampole, as they set forth, "are over a bookseller's shop. This is the place. If you will wait for a moment at the private door, I will notify the landlord of our visit." He entered the shop and after a short interval emerged briskly and stepped round to the side-door, into which he inserted a latch-key. He led the way along the narrow hall, past a partially open door, in the opening of which a portion of a human face was visible, to the staircase, up which the little procession advanced until the second-floor landing was reached. Here Mr. Wampole halted and, selecting a key from the small bunch, unlocked and opened a door, and preceded his visitors into the room.

"It is just as well that you came to-day," he remarked, "for I understand that Mrs. Hepburn is going to take charge of these rooms. A day or two later and she would have been beforehand with you in the matter of dust. As it is, you ought to get quite a good haul."

"Quite," Thorndyke agreed. "There is plenty of dust; but in spite of that, the place has a very neat, orderly appearance. Do you happen to know whether the rooms have been tidied up since Mr. Osmond left?"

"They are just as he left them," was the reply, "excepting that the Chief Constable and Mr. Woodstock came and looked over them. But I don't think they disturbed them to any extent. There isn't much to disturb, as you see."

Mr. Wampole was right. The furnishing of the room did not go beyond the barest necessities, and when Thorndyke opened the door of communication and looked into the bedroom, it was seen to be characterized by a like austere simplicity. Whatever might be the moral short-comings of the vanished tenant, softness or effeminate luxuriousness did not appear to be among them.

As his assistant refixed the 'extractor', Thorndyke stood thoughtfully surveying the room, trying to assess the personality of its late occupant by the light of his belongings. And those belongings and the room which held them were highly characteristic. The late tenant was clearly an active man, a man whose interests lay out-of-doors; an orderly man, too, with something of a sailor's tidiness. He had the sailor's knack of keeping the floor clear by slinging things aloft out of the way. Not only small articles such as rules, dividers, marlinspike, and sheath-knife, but a gun-case, fishing-rods, cricket-bats, and a bulky roll of charts were disposed of on the walls by means of picture-hooks and properly-made slings—the height of

which gave a clue to the occupant's stature and length of arm. And the nautical flavour was accentuated by the contents of a set of rough shelves in a recess, which included a boat compass, a nautical almanack, a volume of sailing directions, and a manual of naval architecture. The only touch of ornament was given by a set of four photographs in silver frames, which occupied the mantelpiece in company with a pipe-rack, a tobacco-jar, an ash-bowl, and a box of matches.

Thorndyke stepped across to the fireplace to look at them more closely. They were portraits of five persons: a grave-looking, elderly clergyman; a woman of about the same age with a strong, alert, resolute face and markedly aquiline features; and a younger woman, recognizably like the clergyman; and two boys of about seven and eight, photographed together.

"Those," said Mr. Wampole, indicating the older persons, "are Mr. Osmond's parents, both, I regret to say, deceased. The younger lady is Mrs. Hepburn, Mr. Osmond's sister, and those little boys are her sons. Mr. Osmond was very devoted to them, as I believe they were to him."

Thorndyke nodded. "They are fine little fellows," he remarked. "Indeed it is a good-looking family. I gather from your description that Mr. Osmond must have taken rather strongly after his mother."

"You are quite right, sir," replied Mr. Wampole. "From that portrait of his mother you would recognize Mr. Osmond without the slightest difficulty. The likeness is quite remarkable."

Thorndyke nodded again as he considered long and earnestly the striking face that looked out of the frame so keenly under its bold, straight brows. Strength, courage, determination, were written in every line of it; and as he stood with his eyes bent upon those of the portrait and thought of this woman's son—of the mean, avaricious crime, so slyly and craftily carried out, of the hasty, pusillanimous flight, unjustified by any hint of danger—he was sensible of a discrepancy between personality and conduct to which his experience furnished no parallel. A vast amount of nonsense has been talked and believed on the subject of physiognomy; but within this body of error there lies a soul of truth. 'Character reading' in the Lavater manner is largely pure quackery; but there is a certain general congruity between a man's essential character and his bodily 'make-up', including his facial type. Here, however, was a profound incongruity. Thorndyke found it difficult to identify the sly, cowardly knave whom he was seeking with the actual man who appeared to be coming into view.

But his doubts did not affect his actions. He had come here to collect evidence; and that purpose he proceeded to execute with a perfectly open mind. He pointed out to Polton the most likely spots to work for characteristic dust; he examined minutely every piece of furniture and woodwork in both the rooms; he made careful notes of every fact observed by himself or communicated by Wampole that could throw any light on the habits or occupations of the absent man. Even the secretly-amused onlooker was impressed by the thoroughness of the investigation, for, as Polton finally packed his apparatus, he remarked: "Well, sir, I have told you what I think—that you are following a will-o'-the-wisp. But if you fail to run him to earth, it certainly won't be for lack of painstaking effort. You deserve to succeed."

Thorndyke thanked him for the compliment and retired slowly down the stairs while the rooms were being locked up. They called in at the office to collect Thorndyke's green canvas-covered case and then made their adieux.

"I must thank you most warmly, Mr. Wampole," said Thorndyke, "for the kind interest that you have taken in our investigations. You have given us every possible help."

Mr. Wampole bowed. "It is very good of you to say so. But it has really been a great pleasure and a most novel and interesting experience." He held the door open for them to pass out, and as they were crossing the threshold he added: "You won't forget about that button-wallet, sir, if the opportunity should arrive."

"I certainly will not," was the reply. "I will secure an option—or better still, the wallet itself and send it to you. By the way, should it be sent here or to your private address?"

Mr. Wampole reflected for a few moments. Then he drew from his pocket a much-worn letter-case from which he extracted a printed visiting-card.

"I think, sir, it would be best to send it to my private address. One doesn't want it opened by the wrong hands. This is my address; and let me thank you in advance, even if only for the kind intention. Good evening, sir. Good evening, Mr. Polton. I trust that your little dusty souvenirs will prove highly illuminating."

He stood on the threshold and gravely watched his two visitors as they retired down the street. At length, when they turned a corner, he re-entered, shutting and locking the outer door. Then in an instant his gravity relaxed, and flinging himself into a chair, he roused the echoes with peal after peal of joyous laughter.



## XVI. — WHICH TREATS OF LAW AND BUTTONS

"THIS seems highly irregular," said Mr. Penfield, settling himself comfortably in the easy-chair and smilingly regarding a small table on which were a decanter and glasses. "I don't treat my professional visitors in this hospitable fashion. And you don't even ask what has brought me here."

"No," replied Thorndyke, as he filled a couple of glasses; "I accept the gifts of Fortune and ask no questions."

Mr. Penfield bowed. "You were good enough to say that I might call out of business hours, which is a great convenience, so here I am, with a twofold purpose; first, to seek information from you; and second to give you certain news of my own. Perhaps I may take them in that order and begin by asking one or two questions?"

"Do so, by all means," replied Thorndyke.

"I have heard," pursued Mr. Penfield, "from our friends Hollis and Woodstock, and perhaps you will not be surprised to learn that you have made yourself somewhat unpopular with them. They have even applied disrespectful epithets to you."

"Such as mountebank, impostor, quack, and so forth," suggested Thorndyke.

Mr. Penfield chuckled as he sipped his wine. "Your insight is remarkable," said he. "You have quoted the very words. They complain that, after making a serious appointment with them and occupying their time, you merely asked a number of foolish and irrelevant questions, and then proceeded to sweep the floor. Is that an exaggeration, or did you really sweep the floor?"

"I collected a few samples of dust from the floor and elsewhere."

Mr. Penfield consumed a luxurious pinch of snuff and regarded Thorndyke with delighted amusement.

"Did you indeed? Well, I am not surprised at their attitude. But a year or so ago it would have been my own. It must have looked like sheer wizardry. But tell me, have your investigations and floor-sweepings yielded any tangible facts?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "they have; and those facts I will lay before you on the strict understanding that you communicate them to nobody. As to certain further inferences of a more speculative character, I should prefer to make no statement at present. They may be entirely erroneous."

"Exactly, exactly. Let us keep scrupulously to definite facts which are susceptible of proof. Now, what have you discovered?"

"My positive results amount to this: in the first place I have ascertained beyond the possibility of any reasonable doubt that those boxes had been opened by some person other than Mr. Hollis. In the second place it is virtually certain that the person who opened them was in some way connected with Mr. Woodstock's office."

"Do you say that the boxes were actually opened in his office?"

"No. The evidence goes to prove that they were taken from the office and opened elsewhere."

"But surely they would have been missed from the strong-room?"

"That, I think was provided for. I infer that only one box was taken at a time and that its place was filled by a dummy."

"Astonishing!" exclaimed Mr. Penfield. "It seems incredible that you should have been able to discover this—or, indeed, that it should be true. The seals seem to me to offer an insuperable difficulty."

"On the contrary," replied Thorndyke, "it was the seals that furnished the evidence. They were manifest forgeries."

"Were they really! The robber had actually had a counterfeit seal engraved?"

"No. The false seal was not engraved. It was an electrotype made from one of the wax impressions; a much simpler and easier proceeding, and one that the robber could carry out himself and so avoid the danger of employing a seal engraver."

"No doubt it would be the safer plan, and probably you are right in assuming that he adopted it; but—"

"I am not assuming," said Thorndyke. "There is direct evidence that the seal used to make the false impressions was an electrotype."

"Now, what would be the nature of that evidence—or is it, perhaps, too technical for an ignorant person like me to follow?"

"There is nothing very technical about it," replied Thorndyke. "You know how an electrotype is made? Well, to put it briefly, the process would be this: one of the wax impressions from a box would be carefully coated with black lead or some other conducting material and attached to one of the terminals of an electric battery; and to the other terminal a piece of copper would be attached. The black-leaded wax impression and the piece of copper would be suspended from the wires of the battery, close together but not touching, in a solution of sulphate of copper. Then, as the electric current passed, the copper would dissolve in the solution and a film of metallic copper would become deposited on the black-leaded wax and would gradually thicken until it became a solid shell of copper. When this shell was picked off the wax it would be, in effect, a copper seal which would give impressions on wax just like the original seal. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly. But what is the evidence that this was actually done?"

"It is really very simple," replied Thorndyke. "Let us consider what would happen in the two alternative cases. Take first that of the seal engraver. He has handed to him one or more of the wax impressions from the boxes and is asked to engrave a seal which shall be an exact copy of the seal which made the impressions. What does he do? If the wax impression were absolutely perfect, he would simply copy it in intaglio. But a seal impression never is perfect unless it is made with quite extraordinary care. But the wax impressions on the boxes were just ordinary impressions, hastily made with no attempt at precision, and almost certainly not a perfect one among them. The engraver, then, would not rigorously copy a particular impression, but, eliminating its individual and accidental imperfections, he would aim at producing a seal which should be a faithful copy of the original seal, without any imperfections at all.

"Now take the case of the electrotype. This is a mechanical reproduction of a particular impression. Whatever accidental marks or imperfections there may be in that impression will be faithfully reproduced. In short, an engraved seal would be a copy of the original seal; an electrotype would be a copy of a particular impression of that seal."

Mr. Penfield nodded approvingly. "An excellent point and very clearly argued. But what is its bearing on the case?"

"It is this: since an electrotype seal is a mechanical copy of a particular wax impression, including any accidental marks or imperfections in it, it follows that every impression made on wax with such a seal will exhibit the accidental marks or imperfections of the original wax impression, in addition to any defects of its own. So that, if a series of such impressions were examined, although each would probably have its own distinctive peculiarities, yet all of them would be found to agree in displaying the accidental marks or imperfections of the original impression."

"Yes, I see that," said Mr. Penfield with a slightly interrogative inflexion.

"Well, that is what I have found in the series of seal-impressions from Mr. Hollis's boxes. They are of all degrees of badness, but in every one of the series two particular defects occur; which, as the series consists of over thirty impressions, is utterly outside the limits of probability."

"Might those imperfections not have been in the seal itself?"

"No. I took, with the most elaborate care, two impressions from the original seal, and those impressions are, I think, as perfect as is possible. At any rate, they are free from these, or any other visible defects. I will show them to you."

He took from a drawer a portfolio and an envelope. From the latter he produced one of the two impressions that he had made with Mr. Hollis's seal and from the former a half-plate photograph.

"Here," he said, handing them to Mr. Penfield, "is one of the seal impressions taken by me, and here is a magnified photograph of it. You can see that every part of the design is perfectly clear and distinct and the background quite free from indentations. Keep that photograph for comparison with these others, which show a series of thirty-two impressions from the boxes, magnified four diameters. In every one of them you will find two defects. First the projecting fore-legs of the left-hand horse are blurred and faint; second, there is, just in front of the chariot and above the back of the near horse, a minute pit in the back ground. It is hardly visible to the naked eye in the wax impressions, but the photographs show it plainly. It was probably produced by a tiny bubble of air between the seal and the wax.

"Now, neither of these defects is to be seen in Mr. Hollis's seal. Either of them might have occurred accidentally in one or two impressions. But since they both occur in every case, whether the impressions are relatively good or bad, it is practically certain that they existed in the matrix or seal with which the impressions were made. And this conclusion is confirmed by the fact that, in some cases, the defect in the horse's fore legs is inconsistent with other defects in the same impression."

"How inconsistent?" Mr. Penfield demanded.

"I mean that the faint impression of the horse's legs is due to insufficient pressure of the left side of the seal; the seal has not been put down quite vertically. But here—in number 23, for instance—the impression of the chariot and driver on the right-hand side is quite faint and shallow. In that case, the left-hand side of the impression should have been deep and distinct. But both sides are faint, whereas the middle is deep."

"Might not the seal have been rocked from side to side?"

"No, that would not explain the appearances; for if the seal were rocked from side to side, both sides would be deep, though the middle might be shallow. It is impossible to imagine any kind of pressure which would give an impression shallow on both sides and deep in the middle. The only possible explanation is that the matrix, itself, was shallow on one side."

Mr. Penfield reflected, helping his cogitations with a pinch of snuff.

"Yes," he agreed. "Incredible as the thing appears, I think you have made out your case. But doesn't it strike you as rather odd that this ingenious rascal should not have taken more care to secure a good impression from which to make his false seal?"

"I imagine that he had no choice," replied Thorndyke. "On each box were six seals; three on the paper wrapping, two in the recesses by the keyhole, and one on the knot of the string. Now, as the paper had to be preserved, the seals could not be torn or cut from that. It would be impossible to get them out of the recesses. There remained only the seals on the knots.

These were, of course, much the least perfect, though the string was little more than thread and the knots quite small. But they were the only ones that it was possible to remove, and our friend was lucky to have got as good an impression as he did."

Mr. Penfield nodded. "Yes," said he, "you have an answer to every objection. By the way, if the paper had to be preserved so carefully, how do you suppose he got the parcels open? He would have had to break the seals."

"I think not. I assume that he melted the seals by holding a hot iron close to them and then gently opened the packets while the wax was soft."

Mr. Penfield chuckled. "Yes," he admitted, "it is all very complete and consistent. And now to go on to the next point. You say that there is evidence that these boxes were opened by some person other than Hollis himself; a person connected in some way with Woodstock's office. Further that they were opened, not in the office itself, but in some other place to which they had been taken. I should like to hear that evidence; especially if it should happen to be connected with those mysterious floor-sweepings."

"As a matter of fact, it is," Thorndyke replied, with a smile. "But the floor-sweeping was not the first stage. The investigation began with Mr. Hollis's boxes, from which I extracted every particle of dust that I could obtain; and this dust I examined minutely and exhaustively. The results were unexpectedly illuminating. For instance, from every one of the untouched boxes I obtained one or more moustache hairs."

"Really! But isn't that very remarkable?"

"Perhaps it is. But moustache hairs are shed very freely. If you look at the dust from a desk used by a man with a moustache, you will usually see in it quite a number of moustache hairs."

"I have not noticed that," said Mr. Penfield, "having no moustache myself. And what else did you obtain by your curious researches?"

"The other result was really very remarkable indeed. From every one of the boxes I obtained particles—in some cases only one or two, in others quite a number—of the very characteristic dust which is shed by worm-eaten furniture."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Penfield. "And you were actually able to identify it! Astonishing! Now, I suppose—you must excuse me," he interpolated with an apologetic smile, "but I am walking in an enchanted land and am ready to expect and believe in any marvels—I suppose you were not able to infer the character of the piece of furniture?"

"Not with anything approaching certainty," replied Thorndyke. "I formed certain opinions; but they are necessarily speculative, and we are dealing with evidence."

"Quite so, quite so," said Mr. Penfield. "Let us avoid speculation. But I now begin to see the inwardness of the floor-sweeping. You were tracing this mysterious dust to its place of origin."

"Exactly. And, naturally, I began with Mr. Hollis's premises—though the forgery of the seals seemed to put him outside the field of inquiry."

"Yes; he would hardly have needed to forge his own seal."

"No. But I examined his premises thoroughly, with an entirely negative result. There was no one on them with a moustache of any kind; the dust from his floors showed not a particle of the wood-dust, and I could find no piece of furniture in his house which could have yielded such dust."

"I then proceeded to Woodstock's office, and there I obtained abundant samples both of hairs and wood-dust. I found Osmond's hair-brushes in his desk, and from them obtained a number of moustache hairs which, on careful comparison, appear to be identically similar to those found in the boxes."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Penfield in what sounded like a tone of disapproval. "And as to the wood-dust?"

"I obtained traces of it from every part of the floor. But it was very unequally distributed; so unequally as to associate it quite distinctly with a particular individual. I obtained abundant traces of it from the floor round that individual's desk, and even more from the inside of the desk; whereas, from the interiors of the other desks I recovered hardly a particle."

"You refer to 'a particular individual.' Do you mean John Osmond?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "Osmond's desk contained no wood-dust."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Penfield in what sounded very like a tone of satisfaction.

"As to the individual referred to," said Thorndyke, "I think that, for the present, it might be better—"

"Certainly," Mr. Penfield interrupted emphatically, "certainly. It will be much better to mention no names. After all, it is but a coincidence, though undoubtedly a striking one. But we must keep an open mind."

"That is what I feel," said Thorndyke. "It is an impressive fact, but there is the possibility of some fallacy. Nevertheless it is the most promising clue that offers, and I shall endeavour to follow it up."

"Undoubtedly," Mr. Penfield agreed, warmly. "It indicates a new line of inquiry adapted to your peculiar gifts, though to me I must confess it only adds a new complication to this mystery. And I do really find this a most perplexing case. Perhaps you do not?"

"I do, indeed," replied Thorndyke. "It bristles with contradictions and inconsistencies. Take the case against Osmond. On the one hand it is in the highest degree convincing. The robberies coincide in time with his presence in the office. His disappearance coincides with the discovery of the robbery; and then in the rifled boxes we find a number of hairs from his moustache."

"Can you prove that they are actually his?" Mr. Penfield asked.

"No," Thorndyke replied. "But I have not the slightest doubt that they are, and I think they would be accepted by a jury—in conjunction with the other circumstances—as good evidence. These facts seem to point quite clearly to his guilt. On the other hand, the wood-dust is not connected with him at all. None was found in his desk or near it; and when I examined his rooms—which by a fortunate chance I was able to do—I not only found no trace whatever of wood-dust, but from the appearance of the place I was convinced that the boxes had not been opened there. And furthermore, so far as I could ascertain, the man's personality was singularly out of character with a subtle, cunning, avaricious crime of this type; not that I would lay great stress on that point."

"No," agreed Mr. Penfield; "the information is too scanty. But tell me: you inferred that the boxes were not opened in Woodstock's office, but were taken away and opened in some other place. How did you arrive at that?"

"By means of the wood-dust. The place in which those boxes were opened and refilled must have contained some worm-eaten wooden object which yielded that very distinctive dust, and yielded it in large quantities. But there was no such object on Woodstock's premises. I searched the house from top to bottom and could not find a single piece of worm-eaten wood work."

"And may I inquire—mind, I am not asking for details—but may I inquire whether you have any idea as to the whereabouts of that piece of furniture?"

"I have a suspicion," replied Thorndyke. "But there is my dilemma. I have a strong suspicion as to the place where it might be found; but, unfortunately, that place is not accessible for exploration. So, at present, I am unable either to confirm or disprove my theory."

"But supposing you were able to ascertain definitely that the piece of furniture is where you believe it to be? What then?"

"In that case," Thorndyke replied, "provided that this worm-eaten object turned out to be the kind of object that I believe it to be, I should be disposed to apply for a search-warrant."

"To search for what?" demanded Mr. Penfield.

"The stolen property—and certain other things."

"But surely the stolen property has been disposed of long ago."

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that there are reasons for believing that it has not. But I would rather not go into that question at present."

"No," said Mr. Penfield. "We agreed to avoid speculative questions. And now, as I think I have exhausted your supply of information, it is my turn to contribute. I have a rather startling piece of news to communicate. John Osmond is dead."

Thorndyke regarded Mr. Penfield with raised eyebrows. "Have you heard any particulars?" he asked.

"Woodstock sent me a copy of the police report, of which I will send you a duplicate if you would like one. Briefly, it amounts to this: Osmond was traced to Bristol, and it was suspected that he had embarked on a ship which traded from that port to the west coast of Africa. That ship was seen, some weeks later, at anchor off the coast at a considerable distance from her usual trading-ground, and on her arrival at her station—a place called Half-Jack on the Grain Coast—was boarded by an inspector of constabulary who had been sent up from the Gold Coast to make inquiries. To him the captain admitted that he had landed a passenger from Bristol at a place called Adaffia in the Bight of Benin. The passenger was a man named Walker whose description agreed completely with that of Osmond. Thereupon, the inspector returned to Accra to report; and from thence was sent down to Adaffia with an armed party to find the man and arrest him.

"But he was too late. He arrived only in time to find a trader named Larkom setting up a wooden cross over the grave. Walker had died early that morning or the night before."

"Is it quite clear that this man was really John Osmond?"

"Quite," replied Mr. Penfield. "Larkom had just painted the name John Osmond on the cross. It appeared that Osmond, when he realized that he was dying, had disclosed his real name and asked to have it written above his grave—naturally enough. One doesn't want to be buried under an assumed name."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "The grave is a sufficiently secure sanctuary. Does the report say what was the cause of death?"

"Yes, though it doesn't seem very material. He is stated to have died from blackwater fever—whatever that may be."

"It is a peculiarly malignant type of malaria," Thorndyke explained; and he added after a pause: "Well, 'the White Man's Grave' is a pestilential region, but poor Osmond certainly wasted no time in dying. How does his death affect our inquiry?"

Mr. Penfield took snuff viciously. "Woodstock's view is—I can hardly speak of it with patience—that as the thief is dead, the inquiry comes automatically to an end."



"And Hollis, I take it, does not agree?"

"Indeed he does not. He wants his property traced and recovered."

"And do I understand that you instruct me to proceed with my investigations?"

"Most certainly; especially in view of what you have told me."

"I am glad of that," said Thorndyke. "I dislike exceedingly leaving an inquiry uncompleted. In fact, I should have completed the case for my own satisfaction and as a matter of public policy. For if Osmond stole these gems, the fact ought to be proved lest any other person should be suspected; and if he did not, his character ought to be cleared as a matter of common justice."

"That is exactly my own feeling," said Mr. Penfield. "And then, of course, there is the property. That ought to be recovered if possible, especially if, as you seem to think, it is still intact. And now," he added, draining his glass and rising, "it is time for me to depart. I have to thank you for a most interesting and pleasant evening."

As Thorndyke stood on the landing looking down upon his retreating guest, he was dimly aware of a presence on the stair above; and when he turned to re-enter his chambers, the presence materialized into the form of Polton. With silent and stealthy tread the 'familiar spirit' stole down the stairs and followed his principal into the room, where, having closed both doors with a secret and portentous air, he advanced to the table.

"What have you got under your arm, Polton?" Thorndyke asked.

By way of reply, Polton regarded his employer with a smile of the most extraordinary crinkliness and began very deliberately to untie the string of a small parcel. From the latter he at length disengaged a kind of leathern wallet marked in gold lettering with what appeared to be a tradesman's name and address. This he bore, slowly and ceremoniously, to the table, where with a sudden movement he unrolled it, displaying a glittering constellation of metal buttons.

"Well done, Polton!" Thorndyke exclaimed. "What a man you are! Now, where might you have unearthed this relic?"

"I discovered it, sir," replied Polton, blushing with pleasure like a dried apricot, "in a little, old-fashioned tailor's trimming-shop in one of the courts off Carnaby Street. It is quite a well preserved specimen, sir."

"Yes, it is in wonderful condition, considering its age. Mr. Wampole will be delighted with it. He will be set up with buttons for life. I think, Polton, it would add to his pleasure if you were to run down and make the presentation in person. Don't you?"

Polton's features crinkled to the point of obliteration. "I do, indeed, sir," he replied. "At his private residence, I think, sir."

"Certainly; at his private residence. And we shall have to find out at what time he usually returns from the office."

"We shall, sir," Polton agreed; and thereupon proceeded to crinkle to a perfectly alarming extent.

---

## XVII. — THE LAPIDARY

IN a small street hard by Clerkenwell Green is a small shop of antique and mouldy aspect, the modest window of which is so obscured by a coat of paint on the inside as to leave the unaided observer to speculate in vain as to the kind of wares concealed within. A clue to the mystery is, however, furnished by an inscription in faded gilt lettering on the fascia above, which sets forth that the tenant's name is Lambert and that his vocation is that of a lapidary and dealer in precious stones.

On a certain afternoon a few days after his interview with Mr. Penfield, Dr. John Thorndyke might have been seen to turn into the small street with a brisk, decisive air suggestive of familiarity with the neighbourhood and a definite purpose; and the latter suggestion would have been confirmed when, having arrived at the shop, he pushed open the door and entered. A faded, elderly man confronted him across the counter and inquired what might be his pleasure.

"I have called," said Thorndyke, "to make some inquiries concerning artificial stones."

"Did you want them for theatrical purposes?"

"No. Those are usually cast or moulded, aren't they?"

"Sometimes. Not as a rule. Can't get much sparkle out of moulded glass, you know. But what was the class of goods you were wanting?"

"I wanted a set of imitation gems made to given shapes and dimensions to form a collection such as might be suitable for purposes of instruction in a technical school."

"Would the shapes and dimensions have to be exact?"

"Yes, quite exact. They are intended to be copies of existing specimens and the settings are already made."

Thorndyke's answer seemed to occasion some surprise, for the man to whom he made it reflected profoundly for a few moments and then looked round at a younger man who was sorting samples from the stock at a side-bench.

"Odd, isn't it, Fred?" said the former.

"What is odd?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Why, you see, sir, we had someone come in only a few days ago making the very same inquiry. You remember him, Fred?"

"Yes, I remember him, Mr. Lambert. Crinkly-faced little blighter."

"That's the man," said Mr. Lambert. "I rather wondered at the time what his game was. Seemed to know a lot about the trade, too; but you have to mind what you are about making strass facsimiles."

"Of course you have," Thorndyke agreed, "especially when you are dealing with these crinkly-faced people."

"Exactly," said Mr. Lambert, "But, of course, sir, in your case we know where we are."

"It is very good of you to say so," rejoined Thorndyke. "But I gather that you are not often asked to make sets of facsimile imitations."

"No, not sets. Occasionally we get an order from a jeweller to duplicate the stones of a diamond necklace or tiara to be used while the original is in pawn, or for safety in a crowd. But not a collection such as you are speaking of. In fact, during all the thirty-five years that I have been in business, I have only had one order of the kind. That was between four and five years ago. A gentleman named Scofield wanted a set to offer to some local museum, and he wanted them to be copies of stones in various public collections. He got the shapes and dimensions from the catalogues—so I understood."

"Did you execute the order?"

"Yes; and quite a big order it was."

"I wonder," said Thorndyke, "whether he happened to have selected any of the stones that are in my list. Mine are mostly from the Hollis collection. But I suppose you don't keep records of the work you do?"

"I expect all the particulars are in the order book. We can soon see."

He went over to a shelf on which was ranged a row of books of all ages, and running his hand along, presently drew out a leather volume which he laid on the counter and opened.

"Ah! Here we are," said he, after a brief search. "Mr. Scofield. Perhaps you would like to glance over his list. You see there are quite a lot of them."

He pushed the book across to Thorndyke, who had already produced a note-book from his pocket, the entries in which he now proceeded to compare with those in Mr. Scofield's list. Mr. Lambert watched him with close interest as he placed his finger on one after another of the entries in the book, and presently remarked:

"You seem to be finding some duplicates of your own lot."

"It is most remarkable," said Thorndyke "—and yet perhaps it isn't—but his selection coincides with mine in over a dozen

instances. May I tick them off with a pencil?"

"Do, by all means," said Lambert. "Then I can copy them out afterwards—that is, if you want me to get the duplicates cut."

"I do, certainly. I will mark off those that I want, and, when you have cut those, I will give you a further list. And I may add that I should like you to use the best-quality strass that you can get. I want them to be as much like real stones as possible."

"I should do that in any case for good cut work," said Lambert; and he added: "I suppose there is no special hurry for these stones?"

"None at all," replied Thorndyke. "If you will send me a card to this address when they are ready, I will call for them. Or, perhaps, if I pay for them now you could send them to me."

The latter alternative was adopted, and while the prices were being reckoned up and the bill was being made out, Thorndyke occupied himself in making, in shorthand, a copy of the list in the order book. He had finished and put away his note-book by the time the account was ready; when, having laid a visiting-card on the counter, he paid his score and began to put on his gloves.

"By the way," said he, "your customer would not happen to be Mr. Scofield of the Middle Temple, I suppose?"

"I really couldn't say, sir," replied Lambert. "He never gave any address. But I had an idea that he came up from the country. He used to give his orders and then he would call, at longish intervals, and take away as many of the stones as were ready. He was a middle-aged man, a bit on the shady side; tallish, clean-shaved, iron-grey hair, and not too much of it."

"Ah, then I don't think that would be the same Mr. Scofield. It is not a very uncommon name. Good-afternoon."

With this Thorndyke took up his stick and, emerging from the shop, set a course southward for the Temple, walking quickly, as was his wont, with a long, swinging stride, and turning over in his mind the bearings of what he had just learned. In reality he had not learned much. Still, he had added one or two small items to his stock of facts, and in circumstantial evidence every added fact gives additional weight to all the others. He sorted out his new acquisitions and considered each in turn.

In the first place, it was clear that Mr. Scofield's collection was a facsimile of the missing part of Hollis's. The list in Lambert's book was identical with the one in his own pocket-book; which, in its turn, was a list of the forgeries. The discovery of the maker of the forgeries (a result of extensive preliminary scouting on the part of Polton) was of little importance at the moment, though it might be of great value in the future. For, since the forgeries existed, it was obvious that someone must have made them. Much more to the point was the identity of the person for whom they were made. Whoever 'Mr. Scofield' might have been, he certainly was not John Osmond. And this set Thorndyke once more puzzling over the really perplexing feature of this curious case. Why had Osmond absconded? That he had really done so, Thorndyke had no doubt, though he would have challenged the use of the word by anyone else. But why? There had been nothing to implicate him in any way. Beyond the hairs in the boxes—of which he could not have known and which were not at all conclusive—there was nothing to implicate him now but his own flight. All the other evidence seemed to point away from him. Yet he had absconded.

Thorndyke put to himself the various possibilities and argued them one at a time. There were three imaginable hypotheses. First, that Osmond had committed the robbery alone and unassisted; second, that he had been an accessory or worked with a confederate; third, that he had had no connection with the robbery at all.

The first hypothesis could be excluded at once, for Mr. Scofield must have been, at least, an accessory; and Mr. Scofield was not John Osmond. The second was much more plausible. It not only agreed with the known facts, but might even furnish some sort of explanation of the flight. Thus, supposing Osmond to have planned and executed the robbery with the aid of a confederate in the expectation that, even if discovered, it would never be traced to the office, might it not have been that, when, unexpectedly, it was so traced, Osmond had decided to take the onus on himself, and by absconding, divert suspicion from his accomplice? The thing was quite conceivable. It was entirely in agreement with Osmond's character as pictured by Mr. Wampole; that of a rash, impulsive, rather unreasonable man. And if it were further assumed that there had been known to him some incriminating fact which he had expected to leak out, but which had not leaked out, then the whole set of facts, including the flight, would appear fairly consistent.

Nevertheless, consistent as the explanation might be, Thorndyke did not find it convincing. The aspect of Osmond's rooms, with their suggestion of hardy simplicity and a robust asceticism, still lingered in his memory. Nor had he forgotten the impressive face of the gentlewoman whose portrait he had looked on with such deep interest in those rooms. These were, perhaps, but mere impressions, of no evidential weight; but yet they refused to be lightly dismissed.

As to the third hypothesis, that Osmond had not been concerned in the robbery at all, it would have been quite acceptable but for the irreconcilable fact of the flight. That seemed, beyond any question, to connect him with the crime. Of course it was conceivable that he might have some other reason for his flight. But no such reason had been suggested; whereas the circumstances in which he had elected to disappear—at the exact moment when the crime had been traced to the office—made it idle to look for any other explanation. And so, once more, Thorndyke found himself involved in a tangle of contradictions from which he could see no means of escape.

The end of his train of thought coincided with his arrival at the entry to his chambers. Ascending the stairs, he became aware of a light above as from an open door; and a turn of the staircase showed him that door—his own—framing a small, restless figure.

"Why, Polton," he exclaimed, "you are early, aren't you? I didn't expect you for another hour or two."

"Yes, sir," replied Polton, "I got away early. But I've seen it, sir. And you were perfectly right—absolutely right. It is a sparrowhawk, stuck in a little log of cherry wood. Exactly as you said."

"I didn't say a sparrowhawk," Thorndyke objected.

"You said, sir, that it was a stake or a bec iron or some kind of small anvil, and a sparrowhawk is a kind of small anvil."

"Very well, Polton," Thorndyke conceded. "But tell me how you managed it and why you are home so early."

"Well, sir, you see," Polton explained, fidgeting about the room as if he were afflicted with St. Vitus's dance, "it came off much easier than I had expected. I got to his house a good hour too soon. His house keeper opened the door and wanted me to call again. But I said I had come down from London and would like to wait. And then I told her about the buttons and explained how valuable they were and asked her if she would like to see them; and she said she would. So she took me upstairs to his sitting-room and there I undid the parcel and showed her the buttons.

"Then I got talking to her about the rooms; remarked what a nice place Mr. Wampole had got and how beautifully it was kept."

"Really, Polton!" Thorndyke chuckled, "I had no idea you were such a humbug."

"No more had I, sir," replied Polton, with a complacent crinkle. "But, you see, it was a case of necessity; and besides, the room was wonderfully neat and tidy. Well, I got her talking about the house, and very proud she seemed to be of it. So I asked her all the questions I could think of: whether she had a good kitchen and whether there was pipe water or a pump in the scullery, and so on. And she got so interested and pleased with herself that presently she offered to let me see over the house if I liked, and of course, I said that there was nothing in the world that I should like better. So she took me down and showed me the kitchen and the scullery and her own little sitting-room and a couple of big cupboards for linen and stores, and it was all as neat and clean as a new pin. Then we went upstairs again, and as we passed a door on the landing she said, 'That's a little room that Mr. Wampole does his tinkering in.'

"Ah!" says I, 'but I'll warrant that room isn't quite so neat and tidy. I do a bit of tinkering myself and I know what a workroom looks like.'

"Oh, it isn't so bad," says she. 'Mr. Wampole is a very orderly man. You shall see for yourself, if it isn't locked. He usually locks it when he has a job in hand.'

"Well, it wasn't locked; so she opened the door and in we went; and the very moment I put my head inside, I saw it—on the table that he used for a bench. It was set in a little upright log, such as you get from the trimmings of fruit trees. And, my word! it was fairly riddled.—like a sponge—and where it stood on the bench there was a regular ring of powder round it.

"That's a rare old block that his anvil is set in," says I, going across to look at it.

"Not so old as you'd think," says she. 'He got it about five years ago, when we had the cherry tree lopped. You can see the tree in the garden from this window.'

"She went over to the window and I followed her; and as I passed the bench I picked up a pinch of the dust between my finger and thumb and put my hand in my pocket, where I had a pill-box that I had brought in case I should get a chance to collect a sample. As we were looking out of the window, I managed to work the lid off the pill-box and drop the pinch of dust in and slip the lid on again. Then I was happy; and as I had done all that I came to do, I thought I would rather like to clear off."

"Why?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well, sir," said Polton in a slightly apologetic tone, "the fact is that I wasn't very anxious to meet Mr. Wampole. It wouldn't have been quite pleasant, under the circumstances, to present those buttons and have him thanking me and shaking my hand. I should have felt rather like Pontius Pilate."

"Why Pontius Pilate?" asked Thorndyke.

"Wasn't he the chap—or was it Judas Iscariot? At any rate, I had a sudden feeling that I didn't want to hand him those buttons. So I looked up my time table and discovered that I couldn't wait to see him. 'But, however,' I said, 'it doesn't matter. I can leave the buttons with you to give him; and I will leave my card, too, so that he can send me a line if he wants to.' So with that I gave her the roll of buttons and nipped off to the station, just in time to catch the earlier train to town. I hope I didn't do wrong, sir."

"Not at all," Thorndyke replied heartily. "I quite understand your feeling on the matter; in fact, I think I should have done the same. Shall we look at that pill-box? I didn't expect such good fortune as to get a specimen."

Polton produced the little box, and having opened it to make sure that the contents were intact, handed it to Thorndyke, who forthwith made a preliminary inspection of the dust with the aid of his lens.

"Yes," he reported, "it is evidently the same dust as was in the other samples, so that aspect of the case is complete. I

must compliment you, Polton, on the masterly way in which you carried out your really difficult and delicate mission. You have made a brilliant success of it. And you have been equally successful in another direction. I have just come from Lambert's, where I had a very instructive interview. You were perfectly correct. It was Lambert who cut those dummy stones."

"I felt sure it must be," said Polton, "when I had been round to those other lapidaries. He seems to be the only one who specializes in cutting strass gems. But did you find out who the customer was, sir?"

"I found out who he was not," replied Thorndyke, "and that was as far as it seemed wise to go. The rest of the inquiry—the actual identification—will be better carried out by the police. I think, if we give Mr. Lambert's address, with certain other particulars, to Mr. Superintendent Miller, we can safely leave him to do what is necessary."

---

## XVIII. — THE END OF THE CLUE

IT was nearing the hour of six in the evening when five men made their appearance on the stretch of pavement on which Mr. Woodstock's office door opened. They did not, however, arrive in a solid body, but in two groups—of two and three, respectively—which held no mutual communication, but kept within easy distance of one another. The larger group consisted of Dr. Thorndyke, Mr. Lambert, the lapidary, and a tall, powerful man of distinctly military appearance and bearing; the smaller group consisted of a uniformed inspector of the local police and Mr. Lambert's assistant "Fred."

"I hope our friends are punctual in coming out," Thorndyke remarked as he stood with his two companions ostensibly inspecting the stock in a bookseller's window. "If we have to wait about long, we are likely to attract notice. Even a bookseller's window won't explain our presence indefinitely."

"No," the tall man agreed. "But there is a good deal of traffic in this street to cover us up and prevent us from being too conspicuous. All I hope is that he will take things quietly—that is, if he is the right man. You are sure you would know him again, Mr. Lambert?"

"Perfectly sure, Superintendent," was the confident reply. "I remember him quite well. I have a good memory for faces, and so has my man, Fred. But I tell you frankly that neither of us relishes this job."

"I sympathize with you, Mr. Lambert," said Thorndyke. "I don't relish it myself. We are both martyrs to duty. Ah! Here is somebody coming out. That is Mr. Woodstock. I mustn't let him see me."

He turned to the shop-window, presenting his back to the street, and the solicitor walked quickly past without noticing him. A few moments later Mr. Hepburn emerged and walked away in the opposite direction, furtively observed by Fred, who, with his companion, occupied a position on the farther side of the office door. He was followed after a short interval by two young men, apparently clerks, who walked away together up the street and were narrowly inspected by Fred as they passed. Close on their heels came an older man, who emerged with an air of business and, turning towards the three watchers, approached at a brisk walk.

"That the man, Mr. Lambert?" the superintendent asked in a low, eager tone, as the new-comer drew near.

"No," was the reply. "Not a bit like him."

Two more men came out, at both of whom Mr. Lambert shook his head. Then came a youth of about eighteen, and after his emergence an interval of several minutes, during which no one else appeared.

"That can't be the lot," said the superintendent, with a glance of anxious inquiry at Thorndyke.

"It isn't unless some of them are absent," the latter replied. "That would be rather a disaster."

"It would, indeed," the superintendent replied. "What do you say, Doctor, to going in—that is, if the door isn't locked?"

"Not yet, Miller," Thorndyke replied. "Of course we can't wait indefinitely, but, if possible—Ah! here is someone else."

As he spoke, an elderly man came out and stood for a few moments looking up and down the street. Then he turned and very deliberately locked the door behind him.

"That's the man!" Lambert exclaimed. "That is Mr. Scofield."

"You are quite sure?" demanded Miller.

"Positive," was the reply. "I recognized him instantly"; and in confirmation, Fred was signalling with a succession of emphatic nods.

Superintendent Miller cast an interrogative glance at Thorndyke. "Your man, too?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "Mr. Wampole."

The unconscious subject of these observations, having locked the door, slowly pocketed the key and began to walk at a leisurely pace and with a thoughtful air towards the three observers, closely followed by Fred and the inspector. Suddenly he became aware of Thorndyke; and the beginnings of a smile of recognition had appeared on his face when he caught sight of Mr. Lambert. Instantly, the smile froze; and as Superintendent Miller bore down on him with evident purpose, he halted irresolutely and cast a quick glance behind him. At the sight of Fred—whom he evidently recognized at once—and the inspector, his bewilderment changed to sheer panic, and he darted out into the road close behind a large covered van that was drawn up at the kerb.

"Look out!" roared Miller, as Wampole passed the rear of the van; but the only effect of the warning was to cause the fugitive to cast a terrified glance backward over his shoulder as he ran. And then, in an instant, came the catastrophe. An empty lorry was coming up the street at a brisk trot, but its approach had been hidden from Wampole by the van. As the unfortunate man ran out from behind the latter, still looking back, he charged straight in front of the horses. The driver uttered a yell of dismay and tugged at the reins; but the affair was over in a moment. The pole of the lorry struck Wampole at the side of the neck with the force of a battering-ram and flung him violently down on the road, where he lay motionless as the ponderous vehicle swerved past within an inch of his head.

A number of bystanders immediately gathered round, and the carman, having pulled up the lorry, climbed down from

his high perch and came hurrying, white-faced and breathless, across the road. Through the gathering crowd the inspector made his way and piloted Thorndyke to the fatal spot.

"Looks a pretty bad case, sir," said he, casting a perturbed eye down at the motionless form, which lay where it had fallen. "Will you just have a glance at him?"

Thorndyke stooped over the prostrate figure and made a brief—a very brief—inspection. Then he stood up and announced curtly: "He is dead. The blow dislocated his neck."

"Ha!" the inspector exclaimed, "I was afraid he was—though perhaps it is all for the best. At any rate, we've done with him now."

"I haven't," said Miller. "I've got a search warrant; and I shall want his keys. We will come along with you to the mortuary. Can't very well get them here."

At this moment the carman presented himself, wiping his pale face with a large red handkerchief.

"Shockin' affair, this, Inspector," he said, huskily. "Pore old chap. I couldn't do no more than what I done. You could see that for yourself. He was down almost as soon as I see 'im."

"Yes," the inspector agreed, "he ran straight at the pole. It was no fault of yours. At least, that's my opinion," he added with official caution. "Just help me and the constable here to lift the body on to your lorry and then he will show you the way to the mortuary. You understand, Borman," he continued, addressing the constable. "You are to take the body to the mortuary, and wait there with the lorry until I come. I shall be there in a minute or two."

The constable saluted, and the inspector, having made a note of the carman's name and address, stood by while the ghastly passenger was lifted up on to the rough floor. Then, as the lorry moved off, he turned to Miller and remarked: "Your friend Mr. Lambert looks rather poorly, Superintendent. It has been a bit of a shock for him. Hadn't you better take him somewhere and give him a little pick-me-up? We shall want him and his assistant at the mortuary, you know, for a regular identification."

"Yes," agreed Miller, glancing sympathetically at the white-faced, shaking lapidary, "he does look pretty bad, poor old chap. Thinks it's all his doing, I expect. Well, you show us the way to a suitable place."

"The Blue Lion Hotel is just round the corner," said the inspector, "and it is on our way."

To the Blue Lion he accordingly led the way, while Thorndyke followed, assisting and trying to comfort the shaken and self-reproachful Lambert. From the hotel they proceeded to the mortuary, where Lambert having, almost with tears, identified the body of 'Mr. Scofield', and the dead man's keys having been handed to Superintendent Miller, the latter departed with Thorndyke, leaving the inspector to conduct the carman to the police-station.

"You seem to be pretty confident," said Miller as they set forth, guided by Polton's written directions, "that the stuff is still there."

"Not confident, Miller," was the reply, "but I think it is there. At any rate, it is worth while to make the search. There may be other things to see besides the stones."

"Ah!" Miller agreed doubtfully. "Well, I hope you are right."

They walked on for some five minutes when Thorndyke, having again referred to his notes, halted before a pleasant little house in a quiet street on the outskirts of the town, and entering the front garden, knocked at the door. It was opened by a motherly-looking, middle-aged woman to whom Miller briefly but courteously explained his business and exhibited his warrant.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "What on earth makes you think the missing property is here?"

"I can't go into particulars," replied Miller. "Here is the search-warrant."

"Yes, I see. But couldn't you wait until Mr. Wampole comes home? He is due now, and his tea is waiting for him in his sitting-room."

Miller cleared his throat. Then, hesitatingly and with manifest discomfort, he broke the dreadful news.

The poor woman was thunderstruck. For a few moments she seemed unable to grasp the significance of what Miller was telling her; then, when the horrid reality burst upon her, she turned away quickly, flinging out her hand towards the staircase, ran into her room, and shut the door.

The two investigators ascended the stairs in silence with an unconsciously stealthy tread. On the landing they paused, and as he softly opened the three doors and peered into the respective apartments, Miller remarked in an undertone: "Rather gruesome, Doctor, isn't it? I feel like a tomb-robber. Which one shall we go in first?"

"This one on the left seems to be the workshop," replied Thorndyke. "Perhaps we had better take that first, though it isn't likely that the gems are in there."

They entered the workshop, and Thorndyke looked about it with keen interest. On a small table, fitted with a metal-worker's bench-vice, stood the "sparrow-hawk," like a diminutive smith's anvil, in its worm-eaten block, surrounded by a ring of pinkish-yellow dust. A Windsor chair, polished by years of use, was evidently the one on which the workman had

been accustomed to sit at his bench; and close inspection showed a powdering of the pink dust on the rails and other protected parts. On the right-hand side of the room was a small woodworker's bench, and on the wall above it a rack filled with chisels and other small tools. There was a tool cabinet ingeniously made from grocer's boxes, and a set of shelves on which the glue-pot and various jars and small appliances were stowed out of the way.

"Seems to have been a pretty handy man," remarked Miller, pulling out one of the drawers of the cabinet and disclosing a set of files.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed; "he appears to have been quite a good workman. It is all very neat and orderly. This is rather interesting," he added, reaching down from the shelf a box containing two earthen ware cells filled with a blue liquid, and a wide jar with similar contents.

"Electric battery, isn't it?" said Miller. "What is the point of interest about it?"

"It is a two-cell Daniell's battery," replied Thorndyke, "the form of battery most commonly used for making small electrotypes. And in evidence that it was used for that purpose, here is the jar filled with copper sulphate solution, forming the tank, with the copper electrode in position. Moreover, I see on the shelf what look like some gutta-percha moulds." He reached one down and examined it. "Yes," he continued, "this is a squeeze from a coin. Apparently he had been making electrotype copies of coins; probably some that had been lent to him."

"Well," said Miller, "what about it?"

"The point is that whoever stole those gems made an electrotype copy of Hollis's seal. We now have evidence that Wampole was able to make electrotypes and did actually make them."

"It would be more to the point if we could find the gems themselves," rejoined Miller.

"Yes, that is undoubtedly true," Thorndyke admitted; "and as we are not likely to find them here, perhaps we had better examine the sitting-room. That is much the most probable place."

"I don't quite see why," said Miller. "But I expect you do," and with this he followed Thorndyke across the landing to the adjoining room.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, stopping to gaze at the neatly-arranged tea-service on the table, "just look at this! Uncanny, isn't it? Teapot under the cosy—quite hot still. And what's under this cover? Crumpets, by gum! And him lying there in the mortuary! Fairly gives one the creeps. Don't you feel a bit like a ghoul, Doctor?"

"I might, perhaps," Thorndyke replied, dryly, "if there had been no such person as John Osmond."

"True," said Miller. "He did do the dirty on Osmond, and that's the fact—unless Osmond was in it, too. Looks rather as if he was; but you don't seem to think so."

"As a mere guess, I do not; but it is a puzzling case in some respects."

He stood for a while looking about the room, letting his eye travel slowly along the papered walls as if in search of a possible hiding-place. From the general survey he proceeded to the consideration of details, turning the door-key—which was on the inside and turned smoothly and silently—and examining and trying a solid-looking brass bolt.

"You notice, Miller," he said, "that he seems to have been in the habit of locking and bolting himself in; and that the bolt has been fixed on comparatively recently. That is somewhat significant."

"It seems to suggest that the swag was hidden here at one time, if it isn't here now. I suppose we may as well look through these cabinets, just as a matter of form, for he won't have hidden the stuff in them."

He produced the dead man's bunch of keys, and having unlocked the hinged batten which secured the drawers of one, pulled out the top drawer.

"Coins," he announced; "silver coins. No! By jingo, they're copper, plated, and no backs to them. Just look at that!"

"Yes," said Thorndyke, taking the specimen from him, "a silver-faced copper electro, taken, no doubt, from a borrowed coin. Not a bad way of forming a collection. Probably, if he had been skilful enough to join the two faces and make a complete coin, it would have been the original owner who would have had the electrotype, and Wampole would have kept the genuine coin. While you are going through the cabinets, I think I will explore those two cupboards. They seem to me to have possibilities."

The cupboards in question filled the recesses on either side of the fireplace. Each cupboard was built in two stages—a lower about three feet in height, and an upper extending nearly to the ceiling. Thorndyke began with the right-hand one, throwing open both its pairs of folding doors, after unlocking them with the keys, handed to him by Miller. Then he cleared the shelves of their contents—principally stamp albums and back numbers of *The Connoisseur*—until the cupboard was completely empty, when he proceeded to a systematic survey of the interior, rapping with his knuckles on every part of the back and sides and testing each shelf by a vigorous pull. Standing on a chair, he inspected the top and ascertained, by feeling it simultaneously from above and below, that it consisted of only a single board.

Having thoroughly explored the upper stage with no result, he next attacked the lower story, rapping at the back, sides, and floor and pulling at the solitary shelf, which was as immovable as the others. Then he tested the ceiling or top by feeling it with one hand while the other was placed on the floor of the upper story.



Meanwhile, Miller, who had been systematically examining the row of home-made cabinets, shut the last of the multitudinous drawers and stood up.

"Well," he announced, "I've been right through the lot, Doctor, and there's nothing in any of them—nothing, I mean, but trash. This last one is full of buttons—brass buttons, if you'll believe it. How are you getting on? Had any luck?"

"Nothing definite, so far," replied Thorndyke, who was, at the moment, taking a measurement of the height of the lower story with a tape-measure; "but there is something here that wants explaining. The internal height of the lower part of this cupboard is two feet ten inches; but the height from the floor of the lower part to the floor of the top part is three feet one inch. So there seems to be a space of three inches, less the thickness of two boards, between the ceiling of the lower part and the floor of the top part. That is not a normal state of affairs."

"No, by jingo!" exclaimed the superintendent. "Ordinarily, the floor of the top part would be the ceiling of the bottom part. Carpenters don't waste wood like that. Either the floor or the ceiling is false. Let us see if we can get a move on the floor. That is the most likely, as it would be the lid of the space between the two."

He passed his hands over the board, feeling for a yielding spot, and craned in, searching for some indication of a joint, as he made heavy pressure on the edges and corners. But the floor showed no sign whatever of a tendency to move. He was about to transfer his attention to the ceiling underneath when Thorndyke stopped him.

"Wait," said he. "Here is another abnormal feature. This moulding along the front of the door is fastened on with three screws. They have been painted over with the rest of the moulding, but you can make out the slots quite plainly."

"Well?" queried Miller.

"Carpenters don't fix mouldings on with screws. They use nails and punch them in with a 'nail-set' and stop the holes with putty. Moreover, if you look closely at these screw-heads, you can see that they have been turned at some time since the moulding was painted."

As the superintendent stooped to verify this observation, Thorndyke produced from his pocket a small leather pouch of portable tools from which he took a screw-bit and the universal handle. Having fitted them together, he inserted the screwdriver into the slot of the middle screw and gave a turn.

"Ah!" said he. "This screw has been greased. Do you see how easily it turns?"

He rotated the tool rapidly, and as the screw emerged he picked it out and exhibited it to Miller.

"Not a trace of rust, you see, although the paint is some years old."

He laid it down and turned to the left-hand screw, which he extracted with similar ease. As he drew it out of its hole, the moulding became visibly loose, though still supported by the mitre; but when the last screw was extracted, the length of moulding came away in his hand, showing the free front edge of the floor, or bottom-board. This Thorndyke grasped with both hands and gave a steady pull, when the board slid forward easily, revealing a cavity about two inches deep.

"My eye!" exclaimed Miller, as Thorndyke drew the board right out. "This puts the lid on it—or rather takes the lid off."

He stood for a moment gazing ecstatically into the cavity, and especially at a collection of small, flat boxes that were neatly packed into it; then he grabbed up one of the boxes, and sliding back the hooked catch, raised the lid.

The expression of half-amused astonishment with which he viewed the open box was not entirely unjustified. As the receptacle for a robber's hoard, it was, to say the least, unconventional. The interior of the box was divided by partitions into a number of little square cells; and in each cell, reposing in a nest of black or white velvet according to its colour, was an unmounted gem.

The superintendent drew a deep breath. "Well," he exclaimed, "this knocks anything I've ever come across. Looks as if he never meant to sell the stuff at all. Just meant to keep it to gloat over. Is this what you had expected to find, Doctor? I believe it is, from what you said."

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "This agrees exactly with my theory of the robbery. I never supposed that he had stolen the gems for the purpose of selling them."

"Didn't you?" said Miller. "Now, I wonder why."

"My dear Miller," Thorndyke answered, with a smile, "the answer is before you in those cabinets which you have just examined. The man was a human magpie. He had a passion for acquiring and accumulating. He was the born, inveterate collector. Now, your half-baked collector will sell his treasures at a sufficient profit; but the real, thoroughbred collector, when once he has got hold, will never let go."

"Well," said Miller, who had been meanwhile lifting out the boxes and verifying their contents with a supercilious glance into each, "what is one man's meat is another man's poison. I can't see myself hoarding up expensive trash like this when I could swap it for good money."

"Nor I," said Thorndyke. "We both lack the acquisitive instinct. By the way, Miller, I think you will agree with me that all the circumstances point to Wampole's having done this single-handed?"

"Undoubtedly," was the reply. "This is a 'one-man show,' if ever there was one."

"And, consequently, that this 'find' puts Osmond definitely out of the picture?"

"Yes," Miller agreed; "I think there is no denying that."

"Then you will also agree that, although we might wish it otherwise, the whole of the circumstances connected with this robbery must be made public. That is necessary as a measure of common justice to the memory of Osmond. He was publicly accused and he must be publicly exonerated."

"You are quite right, Doctor," Miller admitted, regretfully; "though it seems a pity, as the poor devil is dead and we've got the swag back. But, as you say, justice is justice. The innocent man ought to be cleared."

He took out the last remaining box, and having opened it and looked in, handed it to Thorndyke and cast a final glance into the cavity.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, reaching into the back of the space, "here's something wrapped in paper—a key, by Jove!"

"Ah," said Thorndyke, taking it from him and inspecting it curiously, "the key of the strong-room. I recognize it. Quite a well-made key, too. I think we ought to hand that to Woodstock at once; and perhaps it would be as well to hand him the gems, too, and get his receipt for them. We don't want property of this value—something like a hundred thousand pounds—on our hands any longer than we can help. What do you say?"

"I say let us get rid of them at once if we can. But we must seal the boxes before we hand them over. And we must seal up these rooms until the property has been checked by Hollis. Let us put the books back in the cupboard and then, perhaps, you might go and find Woodstock while I keep guard on the treasure-trove."

They fell to work repacking the cupboard with the albums and magazines which they had taken out; and had nearly finished when they became aware of voices below and then of hurried footsteps on the stairs. A few moments later the door was flung open and Mr. Woodstock and Mr. Hepburn strode into the room.

"May I ask," the former demanded, glaring at Miller, "who the deuce you are and what is the meaning of this indecent invasion? The housekeeper tells me that you profess to have come here to search for missing property. What property are you searching for, and what is your authority?"

The superintendent quietly explained who he was and exhibited his warrant.

"Ha!" exclaimed Woodstock, with a withering glance at Thorndyke. "And I suppose you are making this ridiculous search at the suggestion of this gentleman?"

"You are quite correct, sir," replied Miller. "The warrant was issued on information supplied by Dr. Thorndyke."

"Ha!" was the contemptuous comment. "You obtained a warrant to search the private residence of a man of irreproachable character who has been in my employ for something like a score of years! Well, have you made your search? And if so, what have you found?"

"We have completed the search," replied Miller, "and we have found what we believe to be the whole of the stolen property, and this key, which I understand is the key of your strong-room."

As the superintendent made this statement, in studiously matter-of-fact tones, Mr. Woodstock's jaw fell and his eyes opened until he appeared the very picture of astonishment. Nor was his colleague, Mr. Hepburn, less amazed; and for a space of some seconds the two solicitors stood speechless looking from one another to the wooden-faced but secretly amused detective officer. Then Woodstock recovered somewhat and began to show signs of incredulity. But there was the key and there were the boxes; and it needed only a glance at the contents of the latter to put the matter beyond all question. Even Woodstock could not reject the evidence of his eyesight.

"But," he said with a puzzled air and with new born civility, "what I cannot understand is how you came to connect Wampole with the robbery. Where did you obtain the evidence of his guilt?"

"I obtained it," Thorndyke replied, "from the dust which I collected from your office floor."

Mr. Woodstock frowned impatiently and shook his head. "I am afraid," he said, coldly, "you are speaking a language that I don't understand. But no doubt you are right to keep your own counsel. What do you propose to do with this property?"

"We had proposed to hand it to you to hold pending the formal identification of the gems by Mr. Hollis."

"Very well," said Woodstock; "but I shall want you to seal the boxes before I put them in my strong-room. I can't accept any responsibility as to the nature of the contents."

"They shall be sealed with my seal and the superintendent's," Thorndyke replied, with a faint smile; "and we will hope that the seals will give more security than they did last time."

This understanding having been arrived at, the boxes were gathered up and distributed among the party for conveyance to the office; and after a short halt on the landing while Miller locked the doors and sealed the keyholes, they went down the stairs, at the foot of which the tearful housekeeper was waiting. To her Mr. Woodstock gave a brief and somewhat obscure explanation of the proceedings and the sealed doors, and then the party set forth for the office, the two solicitors leading and conversing in low tones as they went.

Arrived at their destination, the formalities were soon disposed of. Each box was tied up with red tape, sealed on the

knot and on the opening of the lid. Then, when they had all been conveyed into the strong-room and locked in, Mr. Woodstock wrote out a receipt for "eight boxes, containing real or artificial precious stones, said to be the property of James Hollis, Esq., and sealed with the seals of Dr. Thorndyke and Superintendent Miller of the C.I.D.," and handed it to the latter officer.

"Of course," he said, "I shall communicate with Mr. Hollis at once and ask him to remove these things from my custody. Probably he will write to you concerning them; but, in any case, I shall wash my hands of them when I get his receipt—and I shall take very good care that nobody ever saddles me with portable property of this kind again."

"A very wise resolution," said Thorndyke. "Perhaps you might point out to Mr. Hollis that the boxes ought to be opened in the presence of witnesses, one of whom, at least, should be an expert judge of precious stones. I shall write to him to-night, before I leave the town, to the same effect. We all want the restitution to be definitely proved and acknowledged."

"That is perfectly true," Woodstock admitted; "and perhaps I had better make it a condition on which I allow him to take possession of the boxes."

The business being now concluded, Thorndyke and the superintendent prepared to take their departure. As they were turning away, Mr. Hepburn addressed Thorndyke for the first time.

"May I ask," he said, hesitatingly and with an air of some embarrassment, "whether the—er—the dust from our office floor or—er—any other observations of yours which led you to this surprising discovery seemed to suggest the existence of any confederate?"

"No," Thorndyke replied, decisively. "All the evidence goes to show, very conclusively, that Wampole carried out this robbery single-handed. Of that I, personally, have no doubt; and I think the superintendent agrees with me."

"Undoubtedly," Miller assented. "I, too, am perfectly convinced that our late lamented friend played a lone hand. You are thinking of John Osmond?"

"Yes," Hepburn admitted, with a frown of perplexity. "I am. I am wondering what on earth can have induced him to go off in that extraordinary manner and at that particular time."

"So am I," said Thorndyke.

"Well, I'm afraid we shall never learn now," said Woodstock.

"Apparently not," Thorndyke agreed; "and yet—who knows?"

---

## XIX. — THORNDYKE CONNECTS THE LINKS

EARLY in the afternoon—at forty minutes past twelve, to be exact—of a sunny day in late spring, a tall, hatchet-faced man, accompanied by a small, sprightly lady, strolled at a leisurely pace through Pump Court and presently emerged into the cloisters, where he and his companion halted and looked about them.

"What a lovely old place it is!" the latter exclaimed, letting her eyes travel appreciatively from the porch of the Temple Church to the façade of Lamb Buildings. "Wouldn't you like to live here, Jack?"

"I should," he replied. "It is delightful to look at whichever way you turn; and there is such a delicious atmosphere of peace and quiet."

She laughed merrily. "Peace and quiet!" she repeated. "Peace, perfect peace. That has always been the desire of your heart, hasn't it? Oh, you old hum bug! Before you had been here a month you would be howling for the sea and someone to fight." Here her glance lighted on the little wig shop, tucked away in its shady corner, and she drew him eagerly towards it. "Let us have a look at these wigs," said she. "I love wigs. It is a pity they have gone out of fashion for general use. They were such a let-off for bald-headed men. Which one do you like best, Jack? I rather fancy that big one—full-bottomed, I think, is its proper description. It would suit you to a T. It looks a little vacant with no face inside it, but it would have a grand appearance with your old nose sticking out in front. You'd look like the Great Sphinx before they knocked his nose off. Don't you think you'd look rather well in it?"

"I don't know that I am particularly keen on wigs," he replied.

"Unless they are on the green," she suggested with a roguish smile.

He smiled at her in return, with a surprising softening of the rather rugged face, and then glanced at his watch.

"We mustn't loiter here staring at these ridiculous wigs," said he; "or we shall be late. Come along, you little babbler."

"Aye, aye, sir," she responded; "come along, it is," and they resumed their leisurely progress eastward across the court.

"I wonder," he said, reflectively, "what sort of fellow Thorndyke is. Moderately human, I hope, because I want him to understand what I feel about all that he has done for us."

"I shall want to kiss him," said she.

"You had better not," he said, threateningly. "Still, short of that, I shall look to you to let him know how grateful, beyond all words, we are to him."

"You can trust me, Jack, darling," she replied, "to make it as clear as I can. When I think of it, I feel like crying. We owe him everything. He is our fairy-godmother."

"I don't think, Betty, dear," said Osmond with a faint grin, "that I should put it to him in exactly those words."

"I wasn't going to, you old guffin!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "But it is what I feel. He is a magician. A touch of his magic wand changed us in a moment from a pair of miserable, hopeless wretches into the pet children of Fortune, rich in everything we desired, and with the whole world of happiness at our feet. Oh, the wonder of it! Just think, darling! While you, with that ridiculous bee in your silly old bonnet, were doing everything that you could to make yourself—and me—miserable for life, here was this dry old lawyer, whose very existence we were unaware of, quietly, methodically working away to dig us out of our own entanglements. We can never even thank him properly."

"No. That's a fact," Osmond agreed. "And, in spite of Penfield's explanations, I can't in the least understand how he did it."

"Mr. Penfield admits that he has only a glimmering of an idea himself; but as he has promised to extract a full explanation to-day, we can afford to bottle up our curiosity a little longer. This seems to be the house; yes, here we are: '1st Pair, Dr. John Thorndyke.'"

She tripped up the stairs, followed by Osmond, and on the landing was confronted by the open 'oak' and a closed inner door, adorned by a small but brilliantly burnished brass knocker.

"What a dinkie little knocker!" she exclaimed; and forthwith executed upon it a most impressive flourish. Almost instantly the door was opened by a tall, dignified man who greeted the visitors with a smile of quiet geniality.

"I have no need to ask who you are," he said, as, having saluted the lady, he shook hands with Osmond. "Your resemblance to your mother is quite remarkable."

"Yes," replied Osmond, a little mystified, nevertheless. "I was always considered to be very like her. I should like to think that the likeness is not only a superficial one."

Here he became aware of Mr. Penfield, who had risen from an arm-chair and was advancing, snuff-box in hand, to greet them.

"It is very delightful to meet you both in these chambers," said he, with an old bow. "A most interesting and significant meeting. Your husband's name has often been spoken here, Mrs. Osmond, in the days when he was, to us, a mere abstraction of mystery."

"I've no doubt it has," said Betty, regarding the old lawyer with a mischievous smile, "and I don't suppose it was spoken of in very complimentary terms. But we are both absolutely bursting with gratitude and we don't know how to put our feelings into words."

"There is no occasion for gratitude," said Thorndyke. "It has been a mutual change of benefits. Your husband has provided us with a problem of the most thrilling interest, which we have had the satisfaction of solving, with the added pleasure of being of some service to you. We are really your debtors."

"Very kind of you to put it in that way," said Osmond, with a faint grin. "I seem to have played a sort of Falstaffian part. My deficiency of wit has been the occasion of wit in others."

"Well, Mr. Osmond," Thorndyke rejoined, with an appreciative side-glance at the smiling Betty, "you seem to have had wit enough to bring your affairs to a very happy conclusion. But let us draw up to the table. I understand that there are to be mutual explanations presently, so we had better fortify ourselves with nourishment."

He pressed an electric bell, and, as his guests took their places at the table, the door opened silently and Polton entered with demure gravity to post himself behind Thorndyke's chair and generally to supervise the proceedings.

Conversation was at first somewhat spasmodic and covered a good deal of mutual and curious inspection. Betty was frankly interested in her surroundings, in the homely simplicity of this queer bachelor household, in which everything seemed to be done so quietly, so smoothly, and so efficiently. But especially was she interested in her host. Of his great intellect and learning she had been readily enough convinced by Mr. Penfield's enthusiastic accounts of him; but his personality, his distinguished appearance, and his genial, pleasant manners were quite beyond her expectations. It was a pleasure to her to look at him and to reflect that the affectionate gratitude that she must have felt for him, whatever he had been like, had at least been worthily bestowed.

"My husband and I were speaking as we came along," she said, "of the revolution in our prospects that you created, in an instant, as it seemed, in the twinkling of an eye. One moment our affairs were at a perfectly hopeless deadlock; the next, all our difficulties were smoothed out, the tangle was unravelled, and an assured and happy future lay before us. It looked like nothing short of magic; for, you see, John had done everything that he possibly could to convince all the world that he was guilty."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that is how it appeared; and that is one of the mysteries which has to be cleared up presently."

"It shall be," Osmond promised, "if utterly idiotic, wrong-headed conduct can be made intelligible to reasonable men. But still, I agree with my wife. There is something quite uncanny in the way in which you unravelled this extraordinary tangle. I am a lawyer myself—a pretty poor lawyer, I admit—and I have heard Mr. Penfield's account of the investigation, but even that has not enlightened me."

"For a very good reason," said Mr. Penfield. "I am not enlightened myself. I am, I believe, in possession of most of the material facts. But I have not the special knowledge that is necessary to interpret them. I am still unable to trace the connection between the evidence and the conclusion. Dr. Thorndyke's methods are, to me, a source of endless wonder."

"And yet," said Thorndyke, "they are perfectly normal and simple. They differ from the methods of an orthodox lawyer merely in this: that whereas the issues that I have to try are usually legal issues, the means which I employ are those proper to scientific research."

"But surely," Betty interposed, "the purposes of legal and scientific research are essentially the same. Both aim at arrive at the truth."

"Certainly," he replied. "The purposes are identical. But the procedure is totally different. In legal practice the issues have to be decided by persons who have no first-hand knowledge of the facts—by the judge and jury. To them the facts are furnished by other persons—the witnesses—who have such first-hand knowledge and who are sworn to give it truly and completely. And on such sworn testimony the judges form their decision. The verdict has to be 'according to the evidence,' and its truth is necessarily subject to the truth of the testimony and the competence of the witnesses.

"But in scientific research there is no such division of function. The investigator is at once judge, jury, and witness. His knowledge is first-hand, and hence he knows the exact value of his evidence. He can hold a suspended judgment. He can form alternative opinions and act upon both alternatives. He can construct hypotheses and try them out. He is hampered by no rules but those of his own making. Above all, he is able to interrogate things as well as persons."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Penfield, "that is what has impressed me. You are independent of witnesses. Instead of having to seek somebody who can give evidence in respect of certain facts, you obtain the facts yourself and become your own witness. No doubt this will become evident in your exposition of this case, to which I—and our friends too, I am sure—are looking forward with eager interest."

"You are paying me a great compliment," said Thorndyke; "and as I hear Polton approaching with the coffee, I need not keep you waiting any longer. By the way, how much may I assume that our friends know?"

"They know all that I know," replied Mr. Penfield. "We have had a long talk and I have told them everything I have learned and that you have told me."

"Then I shall assume that they have all the main facts, and they must stop me if I assume too much." He paused while Polton poured out the coffee and partially disencumbered the table. Then as his familiar retired, he continued: "I think that

the clearest and most interesting way for me to present the case will be by recounting the investigation as it actually occurred, giving the facts observed and the inferences from them in their actual order of occurrence."

"That will certainly be the easiest plan for us to follow," said Osmond, "if it will not be too wearisome for you."

"On the contrary," replied Thorndyke, "it will be quite interesting to me to reconstitute the case as a whole; and the best way will be to treat it in the successive stages into which the inquiry naturally fell. I will begin with the information which was given to me when the case was placed in my hands.

"A number of sealed boxes had been deposited by Mr. Hollis in the custody of Mr. Woodstock, who placed them in his strong-room. These boxes were stated by Hollis to contain a number of valuable gems, but the nature of the contents was actually known only to Hollis, who had packed the boxes himself. After an interval the boxes were returned to Hollis; and it was agreed by all the parties, including Hollis, that all the seals were then intact. Nevertheless, on opening the boxes, Hollis found that most of the gems had been abstracted and replaced by counterfeits. Thereupon he declared that a robbery had been committed while the boxes were reposing in the strong room; and this view was, strange to say, accepted by Mr. Woodstock.

"Now, it was perfectly obvious that these statements of alleged fact were mutually irreconcilable. They could not possibly be all true. The question was, Which of them was untrue? If the stones were in the boxes when they were handed to Woodstock and were not there when he returned them to Hollis, then the boxes must have been opened in the interval. But in that case the seals must have been broken. On the other hand, if the seals were really intact, the boxes could not have been opened while they were in Woodstock's custody. Woodstock's position—which was also that of Hollis—was a manifest absurdity. What they alleged to have happened was a physical impossibility.

"So far, however, the legal position was quite simple, if Woodstock had accepted it. The seals were admitted to be intact. Therefore no robbery could have occurred in Woodstock's office. But Woodstock accepted the impossible; and thereupon a certain Mr. John Osmond proceeded very deliberately to tip the fat into the fire."

"Yes, didn't he?" agreed Betty with a delighted gurgle. "You were an old guffin, Jack! Still, it was all for the best, wasn't it?"

"It was, indeed," assented Osmond. "Best stroke of work I ever did. You see, I knew that there is a Providence that watches over fools. But we mustn't interrupt the exposition."

"Well," continued Thorndyke, "the disappearance of Mr. Osmond settled the matter so far as Mr. Woodstock was concerned. He swore an information forthwith, and must have grossly misled the police, for they immediately obtained a warrant, which they certainly would not have done if they had known the real facts. Then Woodstock, distrusting his own abilities—very justly, but too late—consulted Mr. Penfield. But Mr. Penfield took the perfectly sound legal view of the case. The seals were admittedly unbroken. Therefore the boxes had been returned intact and there had been no robbery in the office. But if there had been no robbery, the disappearance of Osmond had no bearing on the case. Of course, neither Woodstock nor Hollis would agree to this view, and Mr. Penfield then recommended that the case should be put in my hands.

"Now it was obvious that the whole case turned on the seals. They had been accepted as intact—without any kind of inquiry or examination. But were they really intact? If they were, the case was against Hollis; and I could see that my friend Professor Eccles suspected him of having engineered a sham robbery to evade a bequest to the nation. But this seemed to me a wild and unfair suspicion, and for my own part I strongly suspected the seals. Accordingly, I examined a whole series of them, minutely and exhaustively, with the result that they proved to be impressions, not of the matrix in Mr. Hollis's ring, but of an electrotpe matrix made from a wax impression.

"This new fact brought the inquiry to the next stage. It proved that the boxes had been opened and that they had been opened in Woodstock's office. For when they came there they were sealed with Hollis's seal, but when they left the office they were sealed with the forged seal. Things began to look rather black as regards Osmond; but, although I was retained ostensibly to work up a case against him, I kept an open mind and proceeded with the investigation as if he did not exist.

"The second stage, then, started with the establishment of these facts: a robbery had really occurred; it had occurred in Woodstock's office; and, since the boxes had been kept in the strong-room, it was from thence that they had been abstracted. The next question was, By whom had the robbery been committed? Now, since the property had been taken from the strong-room, and since the strong-room had not been broken into, it followed that the thief must have had, or obtained, access to it. Now, there were three persons who had easy access to it: Woodstock who possessed the key, Hepburn and Osmond, both of whom occasionally had the key in their custody: There might be others, but if so, they were at present unknown to me. But of the three who were known, one, Osmond, had apparently absconded as soon as the robbery was discovered and connected with the office. Moreover, the commencement of the robberies apparently coincided in time with the date on which he joined the staff.

"Evidently, then, everything that was known pointed to Osmond as the delinquent. But there was no positive case against him, and I decided to proceed as if nothing at all were known and seek for fresh data. And my first proceeding was to make an exhaustive examination of the boxes, the wrapping-paper, and the inside packing. As to the paper, I may say that I developed up a large number of finger-prints—on the outside surface only—I never examined, as the occasion did not arise. The investigation really concerned itself with the dust from the insides of the boxes and from the packing material. Of this I collected every particle that I could extract and put it aside in pill-boxes numbered in accordance with the boxes

from which it was obtained. When I came to examine systematically the contents of the pill-boxes, I made two very curious discoveries.

"First, every pill-box—representing, you will remember, one of the gem-boxes—contained one or more hairs; usually one only and never more than three. They were all alike. Each was a hair from a moustache of a light-brown colour and cut quite short, and there could be no doubt that they were all from the same individual. Consequently they could not be chance hairs which had blown in accidentally. The gem-boxes had been packed at various times, and hence the uniformity of the hairs connected them definitely with the person who packed the boxes. In short, it seemed at first sight practically certain that they were the hairs of the actual robber; in which case we could say that the robber was a man with a short light-brown moustache.

"But when I came to reflect on the facts observed I was struck by their singularity. Moustache hairs are shed very freely, but they do not drop out at regular intervals. One, two, or more hairs in any one box would not have been surprising. A man who was in the habit of pulling at or stroking his moustache might dislodge two or three at once. The surprising thing was the regularity with which these hairs occurred; one, and usually one only, in each box, and no complete box in which there was none. It was totally opposed to the laws of probability.

"The point was highly significant. Anyone can recognize a hair. Most men can recognize a moustache hair. A detective certainly could. If these boxes had been opened by the police, as Hollis had originally intended, these hairs would almost certainly have been seen and eagerly fastened on as giving what would amount to a description of the thief. They would have been put in evidence at the trial and would have been perfectly convincing to the jury.

"The more I reflected on the matter the more did I suspect those hairs. If one assumed that they had been planted deliberately, say by a clean-shaved or dark-haired criminal, their regular occurrence in every box would be quite understandable. It would be a necessary precaution against their being overlooked. Otherwise it was unaccountable. Still, the fact of their presence had to be noted and the individual from whom they came identified, if possible.

"The second discovery that I made was, perhaps, even more odd. In every one of the boxes I found particles of the fine dust which falls out of the holes in worm-eaten wood; sometimes only a few grains, sometimes quite a large number of grains, and in the aggregate a really considerable quantity."

"But how astonishing," exclaimed Betty, "that you should be able to tell at once that these tiny grains came from worm-eaten wood."

"I make it my business," he replied, "to be able to recognize the microscopical appearances of the different forms of dust. But your remark indicates a very significant point. I imagine that there will be very few persons in the world who could identify these particles in a collection of miscellaneous dust. And therein lay the value of this discovery; for if the significance of the hairs was open to doubt, that of the wood certainly was not. There was no question of its having been purposely planted. It had certainly found its way into the boxes accidentally, and the person who had unconsciously introduced it was pretty certainly unaware of its presence. It was undoubtedly a genuine clue.

"The discovery of this characteristic dust raised several questions. In the first place, how came it into the boxes? Dust from worm-eaten furniture falls on the floor and remains there. It is too coarse and heavy to float in the air like the finer kinds of dust. In a room in which there is worm-eaten furniture, you will find the particles of dust all over the floor; but you will not find any on the tables or chair-rails or mantelpiece. But these boxes must have stood on a table or bench when they were being packed and when the dust got into them. Then the dust must have been on the table or bench. But how could it have got there? It was possible that the bench, itself, might have been worm-eaten. But that was not a probable explanation, for the dust tends to fall, not to rise. It would have fallen, for the most part, from the under surface on to the floor. The most likely explanation emerged from a consideration of the next question; which was, how could one account for the large quantity that was found?

"The quantity was extraordinarily large. From the whole set of boxes we collected something approaching a quarter of a thimbleful; which seems an enormous amount if you consider that it must all have got into the boxes during the short time that they were open for packing. What could be the explanation?

"There were two factors which had to be considered: the nature of the wood and the nature of the object which had been fashioned from it; and both were important for purposes of identification. Let us consider the first factor—material. Now, these wood-boring insects do not bore through wood as the bookworm bores through paper, to get at something else. They actually feed upon the wood. Naturally, then, they tend to select the kind of wood which contains the most nourishment and which, incidentally, is usually the softest. But of all woods those of the fruit trees are richest in gum and sap and are most subject to the attacks of the worm. Walnut, pear, apple, plum, and cherry all have this drawback, and of these cherry is so inveterately 'wormy' that it has usually been shunned by the cabinet-maker. Now, the quantity of the wood-dust pointed to some excessively worm-eaten object and suggested one of the fruit woods as the probable material, and the balance of probability was in favour of cherry; and this was supported by the pinkish colour of the dust. But, of course, this inference was purely hypothetical. It represented the general probabilities and nothing more.

"And now we come to the second factor. What was the nature of this wooden object? A piece of ordinary furniture we could dismiss for two reasons: first, the dust from such a piece will ordinarily fall upon the floor, from whence it could hardly have got into the boxes; and, second, no matter how badly wormed a piece of furniture may be, the quantity of dust which falls from it is relatively small and accumulates quite slowly, being practically confined to that which is pushed out of

the holes by the movements of the insects within. This process would not account for the great quantity indicated by these samples of ours. My feeling was that this worm-eaten object was an appliance of some sort, subject to frequent and violent disturbance. Let us take an imaginary case as an illustration. Let us imagine a mallet with an excessively worm-eaten head. Whenever that mallet is used, the shock of the impact will send a shower of wood-dust flying out on the bench, where it will rapidly accumulate.

"But, of course, this object of ours could not be a mallet for the reason that mallets are always made of hard wood; and jewellers' mallets are usually made of box-wood, lignum vitae or horn, none of which is subject to 'the worm'. Thinking over the various appliances used by jewellers—since it was with a jeweller we were dealing—I suddenly bethought me of one which seemed to fulfil the conditions exactly. Jewellers and goldsmiths, as you probably know, use a variety of miniature anvils, known as stakes, bec irons, sparrowhawks, etc. Now, these little anvils are usually stuck in a block of wood, just as a smith's anvil is planted on a tree-stump. These blocks are not usually hard wood; indeed, soft wood is preferable as it absorbs the shock better. A favourite plan is to get a little log of wood and set the spike of the stake or sparrow-hawk in a hole bored in the end grain; and the most abundant source of these little logs—at least in the country—is the pile of trimmings from old fruit trees. Such a log would tend very soon to become worm-eaten; and if it did, every time it was used a ring of wood-dust would form around its base and would soon spread all over the bench, sticking to everything on it and straying on to the hands, arms, and clothing of the workman.

"This inference, you will observe, was, like the previous one, purely hypothetical. But it agreed perfectly with the observed facts and accounted for them in a reasonable way; and as I could think of no other that did, I adopted it with the necessary reservations. But, in fact, the correctness or incorrectness of this hypothesis was at present of no great importance. Apart from any question as to its exact origin, the wood-dust was an invaluable clue. We now knew that the unknown robber was a person whose clothing was more or less impregnated with wood-dust; that any places that he had frequented would yield traces of wood-dust from the floors, and that the place where the boxes had been packed abounded in wood-dust and contained a badly worm-eaten wooden object of some kind.

"The next proceeding was obvious. It was to find the places which had been frequented by that unknown person, to seek for the worm-eaten object, and, if possible, to identify the individual who appeared to be connected with it. The suspected places were two: Mr. Hollis's house and Mr. Woodstock's office. I did not, myself, suspect Hollis; but nevertheless I determined to examine his house as narrowly as the other. Accordingly I asked Mr. Penfield to obtain facilities for me to visit both places to make inquiries on the spot; which he did.

"Perhaps, before I describe that voyage of exploration, it may be as well to pause and consider what knowledge I now possessed and what I was going to look for. There was the wood-dust, of course. That was the visible trail that I hoped to pick up. But there were other matters. I knew that there was a man, in some way connected with the robbery, who had a short, fair moustache. I had to find out who he was. Also if there was any source from which some other person might collect specimen hairs from that moustache—a hair-brush, for instance—and if such source existed, who had access to it.

"Then there was the personality of the thief. One knew a good deal about him by this time. He was an ingenious man; a fairly good workman, at any rate, with metal-worker's tools, but not a skilled jeweller. He must have been able to make a key from a wax squeeze—unless he were Woodstock himself, which he pretty certainly was not; for none of the others had sufficiently free access to the strong-room to do what had been done. Then he must have had at least a simple working knowledge of electric batteries, since we could be fairly certain that he made the electrotypes himself; he would never have run the risk of putting the forgery out to the trade. He was clearly a secretive, self-contained man. The only fallacy that I had to guard against was the possibility of a confederate outside the office, who might have done the actual work; but this possibility seemed to be negated by the whole character of the robbery and especially by one very odd feature in it, which was this: Professor Eccles had noticed with surprise that many of the stones which were taken were of quite trifling intrinsic value, so trifling that, if they had been sold, they would hardly have realized enough to pay the cost of replacing them with the specially-made counterfeits. Indeed, in one case, at least, the thief must have lost money on the transaction, for he had taken a fine moonstone and replaced it with an inferior one of the same dimensions. But the value of the original was only about ten shillings, and he must have spent more than that on the replacement. The professor was greatly puzzled by this, having assumed, of course, that the gems were stolen to sell. But to me, this rather anomalous feature of the robbery offered a very curious suggestion; which was that no sale of the booty had ever been contemplated. It looked like a collector's robbery; and if there had been a collector in any way connected with the parties, I should have given him my very close attention. But, so far as I knew, there was none. Nevertheless, this peculiarity of the robbery had to be borne in mind when I came to make my investigations on the spot.

"Let me now briefly describe those investigations. Their main object was to ascertain whether there were any traces of wood-dust in the premises of either Hollis or Woodstock, and the method was this: in each case, a rough ground-plan of the premises was made; then small areas of the floors were cleaned thoroughly with a specially constructed vacuum cleaner and the dust from each area put into an envelope marked with a number, which number was also marked in the plan on the spot from which the dust had been collected. The collection was carried out by my laboratory assistant, Mr. Polton, whom you have seen, leaving me free to make inquiries and to inspect the premises. Of course, the samples of dust had to be brought home to be examined in the laboratory, so we were hampered by the circumstance that we did not know at the time whether any wood-dust had or had not been obtained. But this proved to be of no importance.

"We operated first at Mr. Hollis's house, regardless of his scornful protests. Then we went on to Mr. Woodstock's office; and there I had a rather remarkable experiences As I entered with Mr. Woodstock, I saw an elderly man engaged in



repairing an electric bell; and a glance at his hands and the way in which he manipulated his tools showed the unmistakable facility and handiness of the skilled workman. It was a little startling; for here were two of the characteristics of the unknown person I was endeavouring to identify. This man had evident skill in the use of metal-worker's tools and he clearly knew a good deal about electric batteries. And when I learned that this Mr. Wampole was the office-keeper and that he evidently had a key of the premises, I was still further impressed. I began to revise my opinion as to there being no confederate; for the fact remained that Osmond had absconded and that his disappearance—until it was otherwise explained—undeniably connected him with the robbery. I began to think it possible that there had been a partnership and that he had been used as a cat's paw. Meanwhile, I had to find out as much as I could about him, and to this end I sat down by Wampole, as he worked at refitting the batteries, and questioned him on the subject of Osmond's appearance, habits, temperament, and circumstances. It is only fair to him to say that he scouted the idea of Osmond's having committed the robbery and gave excellent reasons for rejecting it. On the other hand, his description of Osmond made it clear that the hairs which I had found in the boxes were Osmond's hairs; and when I expressed a wish to inspect Osmond's desk, he took me to it readily enough, and as it was unlocked, he threw up the lid and showed me the interior. The most interesting thing in it, from my point of view, was a pair of hair-brushes; from which I was able to extract several moustache hairs which appeared—and subsequently turned out to be—identically similar to those found in the boxes.

"The examination of Osmond's desk suggested a similar examination of all the other desks in the office, finishing up with that belonging to Mr. Wampole. And it was in examining that desk that I did really receive somewhat of a shock. For when we came to turn out its contents, I found that these included, in addition to a number of metal-worker's tools, a work man's linen apron and some battery terminals and insulated wire, a stamp-album, a tray of military buttons and badges and old civilian buttons, and another tray of old coins.

"The coincidence was too striking to be ignored. Here was a man who had free access to these premises night and day, and who corresponded in every particular with the unknown robber. We had already seen that he had the skill and special knowledge that were postulated; now this stamp-album, these buttons, badges, and coins, wrote him down an inveterate collector. If I had looked on Mr. Wampole with interest before, I now regarded him with very definite suspicion. Whatever significance the hairs had seemed to have was now entirely against him; for there were the brushes, easily available, and he knew it.

"I must confess that I was greatly puzzled. Every new fact that I observed seemed more and more to confuse the issues. With the exception of the hairs—which were, at least, doubtful evidence—I had found nothing whatever to incriminate Osmond; whereas Wampole presented a highly suspicious appearance. But Osmond had absconded; which seemed to put Wampole outside the inquiry, excepting as a confederate. And when I went with Wampole to Osmond's rooms, my inspection of them only left me more puzzled; for the personality that they reflected was the very opposite of that indicated by the nature and method of the robbery. Instead of the avarice and cunning that characterized the robber, the qualities suggested were those of a hardy, adventurous, open-air man, simple to austerity in his tastes and concerned with any thing rather than wealth and worldly possessions. The very photographs on the mantelpiece proclaimed the incongruity, especially that of his mother, whom Wampole informed me he strongly resembled; which showed the face of a dignified, strong, resolute, courageous looking lady, whose son I found it hard to picture, first as a thief, and then as a panicky fugitive. Yet the fact remained that Osmond had absconded.

"However, when we got home and proceeded to question the samples of dust in the laboratory, they gave an answer that was unmistakable. The results were roughly thus: the samples from Hollis's house contained no wood-dust; those from Osmond's rooms contained none; that from the inside of his desk contained none and that from his office floor barely a trace. Those from the floor of the clerks' office yielded a very small quantity, but that from the floor by Wampole's desk contained quite a large amount, while the dust extracted from the interior of his desk was full of the castings—derived, no doubt, to a large extent from the apron which he had kept in it. So the murder was out. The man who had packed those boxes was Mr. Wampole, and the hairs which I found in them had come from Osmond's brushes.

"One thing only remained to be done: the final verification. The wood-dust had to be traced to its ultimate source in Wampole's lair. This invaluable service was carried out by my assistant, Polton, who, with extraordinary tact and skill, contrived to get a glimpse into the workshop during Wampole's absence; and when he peeped in, the first object that met his eye was a sparrowhawk, planted in a little log of cherry-wood that was absolutely riddled by the worm. That concluded the inquiry so far as I was concerned, though some further work had to be done to enable the police to act. But no doubt Mr. Penfield has told you about the lapidary and the police raid which resulted in Wampole's death and the discovery of the gems in his possession."

"Yes," Osmond replied, "I think we have had full details of the final stages. Indeed, Mr. Penfield had given us most of the facts that you have mentioned, but neither he nor we were able to connect them completely. It seemed to us as if you had made one or two very fortunate guesses; but now that I have heard your reasoned exposition I can see that there was no element of guessing at all."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Penfield; "every stage of the argument rests securely on the preceding stages. I am beginning to suspect that we lawyers habitually underestimate the man of science."

"Yes," said Osmond, "I am afraid that is so. It is pretty certain that no lawyer could have solved this mystery."

"I have to remind you," Thorndyke remarked, "that the man of science was not able to solve it. He was able only to solve a part of it. The thief was identified and the stolen property traced to its hiding-place. But one question remained and still

remains unanswered. Why did John Osmond disappear?"

Osmond and Betty both smiled, and the latter asked: "Did you never form any guess on the subject?"

"Oh, yes," replied Thorndyke, "I made plenty of guesses. But that was mere speculation which led to nothing. It occurred to me, for instance, that he was perhaps drawing a red-herring across the trail—that he was shielding the real criminal. But I could find no support for the idea. I could see no reason why he should shield Wampole—unless he was a confederate, which I did not believe. If the criminal had been Hepburn, it would have been at least imaginable. But there was never the shadow of a suspicion in regard to Hepburn. No, I never had even a hypothesis; and I haven't now."

"I am not surprised," said Osmond, with a slightly sheepish grin. "It was beyond even your powers to conceive the possible actions of an impulsive fool who has mistaken the facts. However, as I have put you to the trouble of trying to account for my unaccountable conduct, it is only fair that I should make it clear, if I can; even though I know that when I have finished, your opinion of me will be like Bumble's opinion of the Law—that I am 'a ass and a idiot.'"

"I hardly think that very likely," said Thorndyke, turning a twinkling eye on Betty. "As I said just now, you seem to have brought a most unpromising affair to an extraordinarily satisfactory conclusion which is not at all suggestive of 'a ass and a idiot.'"

"But," objected Osmond, "the satisfactory conclusion which you are putting to my credit is entirely your own work. I set up the obstacles; you knocked them down. However, we need not argue the point in advance. I will tell you the story and you shall judge for yourself."



## XX. — OSMOND'S MOTIVE

"IN order to make my position clear," Osmond began, "it is necessary for me to say certain things to you, my best and kindest of friends, which I should not confide to any other human creature. I shall have to confess to thoughts and suspicions which were probably quite unjust and unreasonable and which are now uttered subject to the seal of the confession."

The two lawyers bowed gravely in acknowledgement, and Osmond continued: "I was introduced to Mr. Woodstock, as you know, by my brother-in-law, Mr. Hepburn; and I may say that I accepted the post chiefly that I might be near my sister. She and I had always been very devoted to one another, and from the time when I left Oxford up to the date of her marriage we had lived under one roof; and that was how she came to make the acquaintance of Hepburn.

"I did not encourage the intimacy, but neither could I hinder it. She was of a responsible age and she knew her own mind. The end of it was that, after an engagement lasting a few months, they were married, and there was nothing more to be said. But I was rather troubled about it. I had known Hepburn nearly all my life. We had been at school together and the greater part of our time at Oxford, where we belonged to the same college, Merton. Through all those years we were on the footing of intimate friends—rather oddly, for we were very different in temperament and tastes, and, indeed, had very little in common—and we knew one another extremely well. I don't know what Hepburn thought of me, but I must confess that I never had much of an opinion of him. He was a clever man; rather too clever, to my taste. An excellent manager, very much on the spot, and in fact decidedly cunning; fearfully keen on the main chance, fond of money and ambitious to be rich, and none too scrupulous in his ideas. At school he was one of those boys who contrive to increase their pocket-money by all sorts of mysterious little deals, and the same tendency showed up at Oxford. I didn't like his ways at all. I always had the feeling that, if he should ever be tempted by an opportunity to make a haul by illegitimate means, he might be led by his acquisitiveness to do something shady.

"However, his morals were not in my custody and were none of my business until he began to visit us at my rooms, where I was living with my sister. Then I gave her a few words of warning; but they took no effect. He made himself acceptable to her, and, as I have said, they became engaged and eventually, when Hepburn took up his job with Woodstock, married. For a year or two I saw little of them—I was articled to a solicitor in London; but when I was fully qualified Hepburn, at my sister's suggestion, offered to speak to Woodstock on my behalf, and the result was that I entered the office, as you have heard.

"And now I come to the particular transaction. Woodstock's office was, as you know, conducted in a rather happy-go-lucky fashion, especially as regards the strong-room. The key hung on the wall practically all day. Usually, Woodstock took it away with him at night; but quite frequently, when Woodstock was away for a night, it would be left in Hepburn's charge. Occasionally it was left with me; and on one occasion, at least, Wampole had charge of it for a night. And each of us four, Woodstock, Hepburn, Wampole, and myself, had a key of the outer door and could enter the premises whenever we pleased. You will remember, too, that the house was empty, out of office hours. There was no caretaker.

"Now, one night when I had been out on the river and got home rather late, I found that I had run out of tobacco. The shops were all shut, but I remembered that there was a nearly full tin in my desk at the office, so I ran round there to fill my pouch. I am always rather quiet in my movements, and perhaps, as it was late, I may have moved, instinctively, more silently than usual. Moreover, I still wore my rubber-soled boating-shoes. Well, I let myself in with my key and entered the office, leaving the outer door ajar. As I came in through the clerks' office I could see through the open doorway that there was a light in Woodstock's office and that the door of the strong-room was open. A good deal surprised at this, I stopped and listened. There were sounds of someone moving about in the strong-room, and I was on the point of going in to see who it was when Hepburn came out with one of Hollis's boxes in his hand. And at that moment the outer door blew-to with a bang.

"At the sound of the closing door Hepburn started and whisked round to re-enter the strong-room. Then he saw me standing in the dark office, and I shall never forget his look of terror. He turned as white as a ghost and nearly dropped the box. Of course I sang out to let him know who I was and apologized for giving him such a start, but it was a minute or two before he recovered himself, and when he did he was decidedly huffy with me for creeping in so silently. His explanation of the affair was quite simple. He had been up to London with Woodstock, who had stayed in town for the night and had sent him down with a consignment of valuable securities which the firm were taking charge of. Not liking to have them in his personal possession, he had come on to the office to deposit them in the strong-room; and then, while he was there, he had taken the opportunity of checking Hollis's boxes, which he informed me he was in the habit of doing periodically and usually after office hours.

"The explanation was, as I have said, quite simple; indeed, no explanation seemed to be called for. There was nothing in the least abnormal about the affair. When I had once more apologized for the fright that I had given him, I filled my pouch and we went away together, and I dismissed the matter from my mind.

"I don't suppose I should ever have given the incident another thought if nothing had occurred to remind me of it. The months went by and it seemed to have passed completely out of my memory. Then Hollis dropped his bomb-shell into the office. Some one among us, he declared, had secretly opened his boxes and stolen his gems; and until that somebody was identified, we were all more or less under suspicion.

"Of course, Hepburn scouted the idea of there having been any robbery at all, and so did Wampole. They both pointed to the unbroken seals and declared that the thing was a physical impossibility; and I should have been disposed to take the same view, in spite of the strong evidence of the missing emerald. But as soon as I heard the charge, that scene in the office came back to me in a flash; and now, somehow, it did not look by any means so natural and simple as it had at the time. I recalled Hepburn's terrified stare at me; his pale face and trembling hands. Of course, my sudden appearance must have been startling enough to upset anyone's nerves; but it now seemed to me that his fright had been out of all proportion to the cause.

"Then, when I came to think it over, the whole affair seemed very characteristic of Hepburn; of his greed for money, his slyness, his cunning, calculating ways. The property which had been stolen was of great value, and I did not doubt that Hepburn would have annexed it without a qualm if he could have done so with complete safety. But it had been done so skilfully that the risk had been almost entirely eliminated. It was a very clever robbery. But for the merest chance the things would have gone back to Hollis's cabinet unchallenged; and when they had been there a week or two the issues would have become hopelessly confused. It would have been impossible to say when or where the robbery had been committed. The whole affair had been most cunningly planned and neatly carried out. I felt that, if Hepburn had been the robber, that was just the way in which he would have done it.

"Moreover, the robbery—if there had really been one, as I had no doubt there had—seemed to lie between three, or at the most, four of us: those who had easy access to the strong-room. But of these Woodstock was out of the question, Wampole had practically no access to the strong-room and was an old and trusted servant of irreproachable character, and as I was out of it, there remained only Hepburn. Whichever way I thought of the affair, everything seemed to point to him, and whenever I thought of it the vision came back to me of that scared figure standing by the the strong-room door with the box of gems in his hand.

"But I need not go into any further detail. The bald fact is that it appeared to me beyond a doubt that Hepburn was the thief, and the only question was, what was to be done. The fat was in the fire. The police would be called in. The stolen property would be traced and the crime pretty certainly brought I home to Hepburn. That was how I forecast the probable course of events.

"Now, if Hepburn had been a single man it would have been no affair of mine. But he was my sister's husband and the father of my two little nephews, who had been to me like my own children. If Hepburn had been convicted of this crime, my sister's life would have been absolutely wrecked. It would have broken her heart; and as for the two little boys, their future would have been utterly and irrevocably damned. I couldn't bear to think of it. But was there any way out? It seemed to me that there was. I was a bachelor with no home-ties but my sister and the kiddies. I had always had a desire to travel and see the world. Well, now was the time. If I cleared off to some out-of-the-way region, the dangerous inquiries at the office would stop at once and the whole hue-and-cry would be transferred to me. So I decided to go. And the place that I selected as my destination was Adaffia, where I knew that an old friend of Hepburn's had settled as a trader.

"But I thought I would take Hepburn into my confidence and give him a chance of doing the same by me, only I am afraid I rather muddled the business. The fact is that, when it came to the point, I was a little shy of telling him exactly what was in my mind. It is a delicate business, telling a man that you have discovered him to be a thief. So I hummed and hawed and approached the subject gradually by remarking that it looked as if there would be wigs on the green presently. But that cat didn't jump. Hepburn declined to admit that any robbery had occurred in the office. However, I persisted that we should presently have the police buzzing about the office and that then the position would become mighty uncomfortable for some of us. Still, he professed to be—and, of course, was—quite unconcerned; but when I went on to suggest that if I took a little holiday the state of affairs at the office would be made more comfortable for everybody, he stared at me in astonishment, as well he might. Of course, I could think of nothing but what I had seen that night when I caught him coming out of the strong-room, and I took it for granted that he realized what was in my mind, so that his astonishment didn't surprise me.

"'Wouldn't it look a bit queer if you went away just now?' he asked.

"'That is just the point,' I replied. 'I'll hop off, they will leave the office alone and there will be no more trouble.'

"He seemed a good deal puzzled, but he didn't raise any objections; and of course he did not make any confidences, which again did not very much surprise me. He was the very soul of caution and secretiveness.

"'Where did you think of going for your holiday?' he asked.

"I told him that I thought of running over to Adaffia to call on Larkom, the trader there, and suggested that he should send Larkom a letter introducing me. He didn't much like writing that letter, and he liked it less when I mentioned that I proposed to travel under the name of Walker. However, Larkom was an old friend whom he knew that he could trust, so, in the end, he agreed to write the letter. And that settled the affair. In due course I went off in the comfortable belief that he understood the position exactly, leaving him considerably surprised but quite confident that he knew all about the robbery. It was a very pretty comedy of errors; but it would have become a tragedy but for your wonderful insight and for the strange chance that the results of your investigations should have found their way into the newspapers. That is to say, if it was a chance."

"It was not a chance," said Mr. Penfield. "As a matter of fact, Dr. Thorndyke wrote out the account himself and broadcast it to all the papers, including those of the United States."

"Why did you do that?" Betty inquired, with a glance of intense curiosity at Thorndyke.

"For two reasons," the latter replied: "one obvious, the other less so. In the first place, Osmond had been publicly accused, and as there had been no trial, there had been no public withdrawal of the accusation. But he was a man of honourable antecedents and irreproachable character. Common justice demanded that his innocence should be proclaimed at least as widely as had been the presumption of his guilt. Even if he were dead, it was necessary that his memory should be cleared of all reproach. But, in the second place, it was not at all clear to me that he was dead."

"The deuce it wasn't!" exclaimed Osmond. "I thought I had settled that question beyond any possible doubt. But you were not satisfied?"

"No. The report which reached me was singularly unconvincing, and there were certain actual discrepancies. Take first the general appearance of the alleged occurrences; here is a man, a fugitive from justice, whose purpose is to disappear. He lands at Adaffia and in the course of a week or two is reported to have died. Now, West Africa is a very unhealthy place, but people don't usually drop down dead as soon as they arrive there. On the contrary. The mortality among new-comers is quite small. Death is most commonly due to the cumulative effects of repeated attacks of malaria and does not ordinarily occur during the first year of residence. Osmond's death under the circumstances alleged was not in agreement with ordinary probabilities.

"Then the fact of death was not certified or corroborated. The officer who reported it had not seen the body; he had only seen the grave. But to a man of my profession, the uncorroborated grave of a man who is admittedly trying to escape from the police is an object of deep suspicion. The possibility of a sham burial was obvious. This man, on leaving his home, had made a bee-line for Adaffia, an insignificant village on the African coast the existence of which was unknown to the immense majority of persons, including myself. How came he to know of Adaffia? and why did he select it as a hiding-place? The obvious answer suggested was that he had a friend there. But as there was only one white man in the place—who must have been that friend—a sham death and burial would have been perfectly easy and a most natural expedient.

"Then there was the discrepancy. Osmond was reported to have died of blackwater fever. Now, this was almost an impossibility. Blackwater fever is not a disease which attacks new-comers. It lies in wait for the broken-down coaster whose health has been sapped by long-standing chronic malaria. In the immense majority of cases it occurs during, or after the third year of residence. I have found no record of a single case in which the patient was a new-comer to the coast. It was this discrepancy that immediately aroused my suspicions; and as soon as I came to consider the circumstances at large, the other improbabilities came into view. The conclusion that I arrived at was that there was a considerable probability that the trader, Larkom, had carried out a sham burial; or, if it had really been a case of blackwater fever at Adaffia, the victim was Larkom himself, and that a false name had been put on the grave; in which case the man whom the officer saw must have been Osmond. You will note the suspicious fact that the name on the grave was 'John Osmond'—not 'Walker.' That impressed me very strongly. It met the necessities of the fugitive so very perfectly."

Osmond chuckled softly. "It seems to me, Dr. Thorndyke," said he, "that you and I represent the two opposite extremes. You take nothing for granted. You accept no statement at its face value. You weigh, measure, and verify every item of evidence put to you. Whereas I—well, I wonder what you think of me. I shan't be hurt if you speak your mind bluntly."

"There is nothing in my mind," said Thorndyke, "by which you need be hurt. It would, of course, be insincere to pretend that you did not display very bad judgement in taking so momentous a course of action on a mere, unconfirmed suspicion. But perhaps there are qualities even more valuable than worldly wisdom, and certainly more endearing; such as chivalry, generosity and self-forgetfulness. I can only say that what you have told us as to your motives has made my little service to you a great pleasure to me; it has turned a mere technical success into a source of abiding satisfaction—even though you did seek to defeat the ends of justice."

"It is nice of you to say that, Dr. Thorndyke," Betty exclaimed with brimming eyes. "After all, it is better to be generous than discreet—at least, I think so; and I don't mind admitting that I am proud to be the wife of a man who could cheerfully give up everything for the good of his kinsfolk."

"I think," said Mr. Penfield, tapping his snuff-box by way of emphasis, "you have very good reason to be proud of one another."

"Thank you, Mr. Penfield," she replied, smilingly. "And that brings me to what really was the object of our visit to-day. Only, here I am in rather a difficulty. I am commissioned to give thanks for all that has been done for us, and I really don't know how to express one-half of what we feel."

"Is there any need?" said Thorndyke. "Mr. Penfield and I already understand that you enormously overestimate your indebtedness to us. Isn't that enough?"

"Well, then," said Betty, "I will just say this. But for you, Jack and I could never have been married. It was really you who gave us to one another. We wish to say that we are extremely pleased with your gift and we are very much obliged."

---

THE END

---

## I. — THE MAGIC CASKET

IT was in the near neighbourhood of King's Road, Chelsea, that chance, aided by Thorndyke's sharp and observant eyes, introduced us to the dramatic story of the Magic Casket. Not that there was anything strikingly dramatic in the opening phase of the affair, nor even in the story of the casket itself. It was Thorndyke who added the dramatic touch, and most of the magic, too; and I record the affair principally as an illustration of his extraordinary capacity for producing odd items of out-of-the-way knowledge and instantly applying them in the most unexpected manner.

Eight o'clock had struck on a misty November night when we turned out of the main road, and, leaving behind the glare of the shop windows, plunged into the maze of dark and narrow streets to the north. The abrupt change impressed us both, and Thorndyke proceeded to moralise on it in his pleasant, reflective fashion.

"London is an inexhaustible place," he mused. "Its variety is infinite. A minute ago we walked in a glare of light, jostled by a multitude. And now look at this little street. It is as dim as a tunnel, and we have got it absolutely to ourselves. Anything might happen in a place like this."

Suddenly he stopped. We were, at the moment, passing a small church or chapel, the west door of which was enclosed in

an open porch; and as my observant friend stepped into the latter and stooped, I perceived in the deep shadow against the wall, the object which had evidently caught his eye.

"What is it?" I asked, following him in.

"It is a handbag," he replied; "and the question is, what is it doing here?"

He tried the church door, which was obviously locked, and coming out, looked at the windows.

"There are no lights in the church," said he; "the place is locked up, and there is nobody in sight. Apparently the bag is derelict. Shall we have a look at it?"

Without waiting for an answer, he picked it up and brought it out into the mitigated darkness of the street, where we proceeded to inspect it. But at the first glance it told its own tale; for it had evidently been locked, and it bore unmistakable traces of having been forced open.

"It isn't empty," said Thorndyke. "I think we had better see what is in it. Just catch hold while I get a light."

He handed me the bag while he felt in his pocket for the tiny electric lamp which he made a habit of carrying, and an excellent habit it is. I held the mouth of the bag open while he illuminated the interior, which we then saw to be occupied by several objects neatly wrapped in brown paper. One of these Thorndyke lifted out, and untying the string and removing the paper, displayed a Chinese stoneware jar. Attached to it was a label, bearing the stamp of the Victoria and Albert Museum, on which was written:

**"MISS MABEL BONNET,  
168 WILLOW WALK,  
FULHAM ROAD, W."**

"That tells us all that we want to know," said Thorndyke, re-wrapping the jar and tenderly replacing it in the bag. "We can't do wrong in delivering the things to their owner, especially as the bag itself is evidently her property, too," and he pointed to the gilt initials, "M. B.," stamped on the morocco.

It took us but a few minutes to reach the Fulham Road, but we then had to walk nearly a mile along that thoroughfare before we arrived at Willow Walk—to which an obliging shopkeeper had directed us—and, naturally, No. 168 was at the farther end.

As we turned into the quiet street we almost collided with two men, who were walking at a rapid pace, but both looking back over their shoulders. I noticed that they were both Japanese—well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking men—but I gave them little attention, being interested, rather, in what they were looking at. This was a taxicab which was dimly visible by the light of a street lamp at the farther end of the "Walk," and from which four persons had just alighted. Two of these had hurried ahead to knock at a door, while the other two walked very slowly across the pavement and up the steps to the threshold. Almost immediately the door was opened; two of the shadowy figures entered, and the other two returned slowly to the cab and as we came nearer, I could see that these latter were policemen in uniform. I had just time to note this fact when they both got into the cab and were forthwith spirited away.

"Looks like a street accident of some kind," I remarked; and then, as I glanced at the number of the house we were passing, I added: "Now, I wonder if that house happens to be—yes, by Jove! it is. It is 168! Things have been happening, and this bag of ours is one of the dramatis personae."

The response to our knock was by no means prompt. I was, in fact, in the act of raising my hand to the knocker to repeat the summons when the door opened and revealed an elderly servant-maid, who regarded us inquiringly, and, as I thought, with something approaching alarm.

"Does Miss Mabel Bonney live here?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "but I am afraid you can't see her just now, unless it is something urgent. She is rather upset, and particularly engaged at present."

"There is no occasion whatever to disturb her," said Thorndyke. "We have merely called to restore this bag, which seemed to have been lost;" and with this he held it out towards her. She grasped it eagerly with a cry of surprise, and as the mouth fell open, she peered into it.

"Why," she exclaimed, "they don't seem to have taken anything, after all. Where did you find it, sir?"

"In the porch of a church in Spelton Street," Thorndyke replied, and was turning away when the servant said earnestly: "Would you kindly give me your name and address, sir? Miss Bonney will wish to write and thank you."

"There is really no need," said he; but she interrupted anxiously: "If you would be so kind, sir. Miss Bonney will be so vexed if she is unable to thank you; and besides, she may want to ask you some questions about it."

"That is true," said Thorndyke (who was restrained only by good manners from asking one or two questions, himself). He produced his card-case, and having handed one of his cards to the maid, wished her "good-evening" and retired.

"That bag had evidently been pinched," I remarked, as we walked back towards the Fulham Road.

"Evidently," he agreed, and was about to enlarge on the matter when our attention was attracted to a taxi, which was approaching from the direction of the main road. A man's head was thrust out of the window, and as the vehicle passed a street lamp, I observed that the head appertained to an elderly gentleman with very white hair and a very fresh face.

"Did you see who that was?" Thorndyke asked.

"It looked like old Brodribb," I replied.

"It did; very much. I wonder where he is off to."

He turned and followed, with a speculative eye, the receding taxi, which presently swept alongside the kerb and stopped, apparently opposite the house from where we had just come. As the vehicle came to rest, the door flew open and the passenger shot out like an elderly, but agile, Jack-in-the-box, and bounced up the steps.

"That is Brodribb's knock, sure enough," said I, as the old-fashioned flourish reverberated up the quiet street. "I have heard it too often on our own knocker to mistake it. But we had better not let him see us watching him."

As we went once more on our way, I took a sly glance, now and again, at my friend, noting with a certain malicious enjoyment his profoundly cogitative air. I knew quite well what was happening in his mind for his mind reacted to observed facts in an invariable manner. And here was a group of related facts: the bag, stolen, but deposited intact; the museum label; the injured or sick person—probably Miss Bonney, herself—brought home under police escort; and the arrival, post-haste, of the old lawyer; a significant group of facts. And there was Thorndyke, under my amused and attentive observation, fitting them together in various combinations to see what general conclusion emerged. Apparently my own mental state was equally clear to him, for he remarked, presently, as if response to an unspoken comment: "Well, I expect we shall know all about it before many days have passed if Brodribb sees my card, as he most probably will. Here comes an omnibus that will suit us. Shall we hop on?"

He stood at the kerb and raised his stick; and as the accommodation on the omnibus was such that our seats were separated, there was no opportunity to pursue the subject further, even if there had been anything to discuss.

But Thorndyke's prediction was justified sooner than I had expected. For we had not long finished our supper, and had not yet closed the "oak," when there was heard a mighty flourish on the knocker of our inner door.

"Brodribb, by Jingo!" I exclaimed, and hurried across the room to let him in.

"No, Jervis," he said as I invited him to enter, "I am not coming in. Don't want to disturb you at this time of night. I've just called to make an appointment for to-morrow with a client."

"Is the client's name Bonney?" I asked.

He started and gazed at me in astonishment. "Gad, Jervis!" he exclaimed, "you are getting as bad as Thorndyke. How the deuce did you know that she was my client?"

"Never mind how I know. It is our business to know everything in these chambers. But if your appointment concerns Miss Mabel Bonney, for the Lord's sake come in and give Thorndyke a chance of a night's rest. At present, he is on broken bottles, as Mr. Bumble would express it."

On this persuasion, Mr. Brodribb entered, nothing loath—very much the reverse, in fact—and having bestowed a jovial greeting on Thorndyke, glanced approvingly round the room.

"Ha!" said he, "you look very cosy. If you are really sure I am not—"

I cut him short by propelling him gently towards the fire, beside which I deposited him in an easy chair, while Thorndyke pressed the electric bell which rang up in the laboratory.

"Well," said Brodribb, spreading himself out comfortably before the fire like a handsome old Tom-cat, "if you are going to let me give you a few particulars—but perhaps you would rather that I should not talk shop?"

"Now you know perfectly well, Brodribb," said Thorndyke, "that 'shop' is the breath of life to us all. Let us have those particulars."

Brodribb sighed contentedly and placed his toes on the fender (and at this moment the door opened softly and Polton looked into the room. He took a single, understanding glance at our visitor, and withdrew, shutting the door without a sound).

"I am glad," pursued Brodribb, "to have this opportunity of a preliminary chat, because there are certain things that one can say better when the client is not present; and I am deeply interested in Bonney's affairs. The crisis in those affairs which has brought me here is of quite recent date—in fact, it dates from this evening. But I know your partiality for having events related in their proper sequence, so I will leave today's happenings for the moment and tell you the story—the whole of which is material to the case—from the beginning."

Here there was a slight interruption, due to Polton's noiseless entry with a tray on which was a decanter, a biscuit box, and three port glasses. This he deposited, on a small table, which he placed within convenient reach of our guest. Then, with a glance of altruistic satisfaction at our old friend, he stole out like a benevolent ghost.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Brodribb, beaming on the decanter, "this is really too bad. You ought not to indulge me in this way."



"My dear Brodribb," replied Thorndyke, "you are a benefactor to us. You give us a pretext for taking a glass of port. We can't drink alone, you know."

"I should, if I had a cellar like yours," chuckled Brodribb, sniffing ecstatically at his glass. He took a sip, with his eyes closed, savoured it solemnly, shook his head, and set the glass down on the table.

"To return to our case," he resumed; "Miss Bonney is the daughter of a solicitor, Harold Bonney—you may remember him. He had offices in Bedford Row; and there, one morning, a client came to him and asked him to take care of some property while he, the said client, ran over to Paris, where he had some urgent business. The property in question was a collection of pearls of most unusual size and value, forming a great necklace, which had been unstrung for the sake of portability. It is not clear where they came from, but as the transaction occurred soon after the Russian Revolution, we may make a guess. At any rate, there they were, packed loosely in a leather bag, the string of which was sealed with the owner's seal.

"Bonney seems to have been rather casual about the affair. He gave the client a receipt for the bag, stating the nature of the contents, which he had not seen, and deposited it, in the client's presence, in the safe in his private office. Perhaps he intended to take it to the bank or transfer it to his strong-room, but it is evident that he did neither; for his managing clerk, who kept the second key of the strong-room—without which the room could not be opened—knew nothing of the transaction. When he went home at about seven o'clock, he left Bonney hard at work in his office, and there is no doubt that the pearls were still in the safe.

"That night, at about a quarter to nine, it happened that a couple of C.I.D. officers were walking up Bedford Row when they saw three men come out of one of the houses. Two of them turned up towards Theobald's Road, but the third came south, towards them. As he passed them, they both recognised him as a Japanese named Uyenishi, who was believed to be a member of a cosmopolitan gang and whom the police were keeping under observation. Naturally, their suspicions were aroused. The first two men had hurried round the corner and were out of sight; and when they turned to look after Uyenishi, he had mended his pace considerably and was looking back at them. Thereupon one of the officers, named Barker, decided to follow the Jap, while the other, Holt, reconnoitred the premises.

"Now, as soon as Barker turned, the Japanese broke into a run. It was just such a night as this dark and, slightly foggy. In order to keep his man in sight, he had to run, too; and he found that he had a sprinter to deal with. From the bottom of Bedford Row, Uyenishi darted across and shot down Hand Court like a lamp-lighter. Barker followed, but at the Holborn end his man was nowhere to be seen. However, he presently learned from a man at a shop door that the fugitive had run past and turned up Brownlow Street, so off he went again in pursuit. But when he got to the top of the street, back in Bedford Row, he was done. There was no sign of the man, and no one about from whom he could make inquiries. All he could do was to cross the road and walk up Bedford Row to see if Holt had made any discoveries.

"As he was trying to identify the house, his colleague came out on to the doorstep and beckoned him in and this was the story that he told. He had recognised the house by the big lamp-standard; and as the place was all dark, he had gone into the entry and tried the office door. Finding it unlocked, he had entered the clerks' office, lit the gas, and tried the door of the private office, but found it locked. He knocked at it, but getting no answer, had a good look round the clerk's office; and there, presently, on the floor in a dark corner, he found a key. This he tried in the door of the private office, and finding that it fitted, turned it and opened the door. As he did so, the light from the outer office fell on the body of a man lying on the floor just inside.

"A moment's inspection showed that the man had been murdered—first knocked on the head and then finished with a knife. Examination of the pockets showed that the dead man was Harold Bonney, and also that no robbery from the person seemed to have been committed. Nor was there any sign of any other kind of robbery. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, and the safe had not been broken into, though that was not very conclusive, as the safe key was in the dead man's pocket. However, a murder had been committed, and obviously Uyenishi was either the murderer or an accessory; so Holt had, at once, rung up Scotland Yard on the office telephone, giving all the particulars.

"I may say at once that Uyenishi disappeared completely and at once. He never went to his lodgings at Limehouse, for the police were there before he could have arrived. A lively hue and cry was kept up. Photographs of the wanted man were posted outside every police-station, and a watch was set at all the ports. But he was never found. He must have got away at once on some outward-bound tramp from the Thames. And there we will leave him for the moment.

"At first it was thought that nothing had been stolen, since the managing clerk could not discover that anything was missing. But a few days later the client returned from Paris, and presenting his receipt, asked for his pearls. But the pearls had vanished. Clearly they had been the object of the crime. The robbers must have known about them and traced them to the office. Of course the safe had been opened with its own key, which was then replaced in the dead man's pocket.

"Now, I was poor Bonney's executor, and in that capacity I denied his liability in respect of the pearls on the ground that he was a gratuitous bailee—there being no evidence that any consideration had been demanded—and that being murdered cannot be construed as negligence. But Miss Mabel, who was practically the sole legatee, insisted on accepting liability. She said that the pearls could have been secured in the bank or the strong-room, and that she was morally, if not legally, liable for their loss; and she insisted on handing to the owner the full amount at which he valued them. It was a wildly foolish proceeding, for he would certainly have accepted half the sum. But still I take my hat off to a person—man or woman—who can accept poverty in preference to a broken covenant;" and here Brodribb, being in fact that sort of person himself, had to be consoled with a replenished glass.

“And mind you,” he resumed, “when I speak of poverty, I wish to be taken literally. The estimated value of those pearls was fifty thousand pounds—if you can imagine anyone out of Bedlam giving such a sum for a parcel of trash like that; and when poor Mabel Bonney had paid it, she was left with the prospect of having to spread her butter mighty thin for the rest of her life. As a matter of fact, she has had to sell one after another of her little treasures to pay just her current expenses, and I’m hanged if I can see how she is going to carry on when she has sold the last of them. But there, I mustn’t take up your time with her private troubles. Let us return to our muttons.

“First, as to the pearls They were never traced, and it seems probable that they were never disposed of. For, you see, pearls are different from any other kind of gems. You can cut up a big diamond, but you can’t cut up a big pearl. And the great value of this necklace was due not only to the size, the perfect shape and ‘orient’ of the separate pearls, but to the fact that the whole set was perfectly matched. To break up the necklace was to destroy a good part of its value.

“And now as to our friend Uyenishi. He disappeared, as I have said; but he reappeared at Los Angeles, in custody of the police, charged with robbery and murder. He was taken red-handed and was duly convicted and sentenced to death; but for some reason—or more probably, for no reason, as we should think—the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life. Under these circumstances, the English police naturally took no action, especially as they really had no evidence against him.

“Now Uyenishi was, by trade, a metal-worker; a maker of those pretty trifles that are so dear to the artistic Japanese, and when he was in prison he was allowed to set up a little workshop and practise his trade on a small scale. Among other things that he made was a little casket in the form of a seated figure, which he said he wanted to give to his brother as a keepsake. I don’t know whether any permission was granted for him to make this gift, but that is of no consequence; for Uyenishi got influenza and was carried off in a few days by pneumonia; and the prison authorities learned that his brother had been killed, a week or two previously, in a shooting affair at San Francisco. So the casket remained on their hands.

“About this time, Miss Bonney was invited to accompany an American lady on a visit to California, and accepted gratefully. While she was there she paid a visit to the prison to inquire whether Uyenishi had ever made any kind of statement concerning the missing pearls. Here she heard of Uyenishi’s recent death; and the governor of the prison, as he could not give her any information, handed over to her the casket as a sort of memento. This transaction came to the knowledge of the press, and—well, you know what the Californian press is like. There were ‘some comments,’ as they would say, and quite an assortment of Japanese, of shady antecedents, applied to the prison to have the casket ‘restored’ to them as Uyenishi’s heirs. Then Miss Bonney’s rooms at the hotel were raided by burglars—but the casket was in the hotel strong-room—and Miss Bonney and her hostess were shadowed by various undesirables in such a disturbing fashion that the two ladies became alarmed and secretly made their way to New York. But there another burglary occurred, with the same unsuccessful result, and the shadowing began again. Finally, Miss Bonney, feeling that her presence was a danger to her friend, decided to return to England, and managed to get on board the ship without letting her departure be known in advance.

“But even in England she has not been left in peace. She has had an uncomfortable feeling of being watched and attended, and has seemed to be constantly meeting Japanese men in the streets, especially in the vicinity of her house. Of course, all the fuss is about this infernal casket; and when she told me what was happening, I promptly popped the thing in my pocket and took it, to my office, where I stowed it in the strong-room. And there, of course, it ought to have remained. but it didn’t. One day Miss Bonney told me that she was sending some small things to a loan exhibition of oriental works of art at the South Kensington Museum, and she wished to include the casket. I urged her strongly to do nothing of the kind, but she persisted; and the end of it was that we went to the museum together, with her pottery and stuff in a handbag and the casket in my pocket.

“It was a most imprudent thing to do, for there the beastly casket was, for several months, exposed in a glass case for anyone to see, with her name on the label; and what was worse, full particulars of the origin of the thing. However, nothing happened while it was there—the museum is not an easy place to steal from—and all went well until it was time to remove the things after the close of the exhibition. Now, to-day was the appointed day, and, as on the previous occasion, she and I went to the museum together. But the unfortunate thing is that we didn’t come away together. Her other exhibits were all pottery, and these were dealt with first, so that she had her handbag packed and was ready to go before they had begun on the metal work cases. As we were not going the same way, it didn’t seem necessary for her to wait; so she went off with her bag and I stayed behind until the casket was released, when I put it in my pocket and went home, where I locked the thing up again in the strong-room.

“It was about seven when I got home. A little after eight I heard the telephone ring down in the office, and down I went, cursing the untimely ringer, who turned out to be a policeman at St. George’s Hospital. He said he had found Miss Bonney lying unconscious in the street and had taken her to the hospital, where she had been detained for a while, but she was now recovered and he was taking her home. She would like me, if possible, to go and see her at once. Well, of course, I set off forthwith and got to her house a few minutes after her arrival, and just after you had left.

“She was a good deal upset, so I didn’t worry her with many questions, but she gave me a short account of her misadventure, which amounted to this: She had started to walk home from the museum along the Brompton Road, and she was passing down a quiet street between that and Fulham Road when she heard soft footsteps behind her. The next moment, a scarf or shawl was thrown over her head and drawn tightly round her neck. At the same moment, the bag was snatched from her hand. That is all that she remembers, for she was so terrified that she fainted, and knew no more until

she found herself in a cab with two policemen who were taking her to the hospital.

"Now it is obvious that her assailants were in search of that damned casket, for the bag had been broken open and searched, but nothing taken or damaged; which suggests the Japanese again, for a British thief would have smashed the crockery. I found your card there, and I put it to Miss Bonney that we had better ask you to help us—I told her all about you—and she agreed emphatically. So that is why I am here, drinking your port and robbing you of your night's rest."

"And what do you want me to do?" Thorndyke asked.

"Whatever you think best," was the cheerful reply. "In the first place, this nuisance must be put a stop to—this shadowing and hanging about. But apart from that, you must see that there is something queer about this accursed casket. The beastly thing is of no intrinsic value. The museum man turned up his nose at it. But it evidently has some extrinsic value, and no small value either. If it is good enough for these devils to follow it all the way from the States, as they seem to have done, it is good enough for us to try to find out what its value is. That is where you come in. I propose to bring Miss Bonney to see you to-morrow, and I will bring the infernal casket, too. Then you will ask her a few questions, take a look at the casket—through the microscope, if necessary—and tell us all about it in your usual necromantic way."

Thorndyke laughed as he refilled our friend's glass. "If faith will move mountains, Brodribb," said he, "you ought to have been a civil engineer. But it is certainly a rather intriguing problem."

"Ha!" exclaimed the old solicitor; "then it's all right. I've known you a good many years, but I've never known you to be stumped; and you are not going to be stumped now. What time shall I bring her? Afternoon or evening would suit her best."

"Very well," replied Thorndyke; "bring her to tea—say, five o'clock. How will that do?"

"Excellently; and here's good luck to the adventure." He drained his glass, and the decanter being now empty, he rose, shook our hands warmly, and took his departure in high spirits.

It was with a very lively interest that I looked forward to the prospective visit. Like Thorndyke, I found the case rather intriguing. For it was quite clear, as our shrewd old friend had said, that there was something more than met the eye in the matter of this casket.

Hence, on the following afternoon, when, on the stroke of five, footsteps became audible on our stairs, I awaited the arrival of our new client with keen curiosity, both as to herself and her mysterious property.

To tell the truth, the lady was better worth looking at than the casket. At the first glance, I was strongly prepossessed in her favour, and so, I think, was Thorndyke. Not that she was a beauty, though comely enough. But she was an example of a type that seems to be growing rarer; quiet, gentle, soft-spoken, and a lady to her finger-tips; a little sad-faced and care worn, with a streak or two of white in her prettily-disposed black hair, though she could not have been much over thirty-five. Altogether a very gracious and winning personality.

When we had been presented to her by Brodribb—who treated her as if she had been a royal personage—and had enthroned her in the most comfortable easy-chair, we inquired as to her health, and were duly thanked for the salvage of the bag. Then Polton brought in the tray, with an air that seemed to demand an escort of choristers; the tea was poured out, and the informal proceedings began.

She had not, however, much to tell; for she had not seen her assailants, and the essential facts of the case had been fully presented in Brodribb's excellent summary. After a very few questions, therefore, we came to the next stage; which was introduced by Brodribb's taking from his pocket a small parcel which he proceeded to open.

"There," said he, "that is the fons et origo mali. Not much to look at, I think you will agree." He set the object down on the table and glared at it malevolently, while Thorndyke and I regarded it with a more impersonal interest. It was not much to look at. Just an ordinary Japanese casket in the form of a squat, shapeless figure with a silly little grinning face, of which the head and shoulders opened on a hinge; a pleasant enough object, with its quiet, warm colouring, but certainly not a masterpiece of art.

Thorndyke picked it up and turned it over slowly for preliminary inspection; then he went on to examine it detail by detail, watched closely, in his turn, by Brodribb and me. Slowly and methodically, his eye—fortified by a watchmaker's eyeglass—travelled over every part of the exterior. Then he opened it, and I having examined the inside of the lid, scrutinised the bottom from within, long and attentively. Finally, he turned the casket upside down and examined the bottom from without, giving to it the longest and most rigorous inspection of all—which puzzled me somewhat, for the bottom was absolutely plain. At length, he passed the casket and the eyeglass to me without comment.

"Well," said Brodribb, "what is the verdict?"

"It is of no value as a work of art," replied Thorndyke. "The body and lid are just castings of common white metal—an antimony alloy, I should say. The bronze colour is lacquer."

"So the museum man remarked," said Brodribb.

"But," continued Thorndyke, "there is one very odd thing about it. The only piece of fine metal in it is in the part which matters least. The bottom is a separate plate of the alloy known to the Japanese as Shakudo—an alloy of copper and gold."

"Yes," said Brodribb, "the museum man noted that, too, and couldn't make out why it had been put there."

"Then," Thorndyke continued, "there is another anomalous feature; the inside of the bottom is covered with elaborate decoration—just the place where decoration is most inappropriate, since it would be covered up by the contents of the casket. And, again, this decoration is etched; not engraved or chased. But etching is a very unusual process for this purpose, if it is ever used at all by Japanese metal-workers. My impression is that it is not; for it is most unsuitable for decorative purposes. That is all that I observe, so far."

"And what do you infer from your observations?" Brodribb asked.

"I should like to think the matter over," was the reply. "There is an obvious anomaly, which must have some significance. But I won't embark on speculative opinions at this stage. I should like, however, to take one or two photographs of the casket, for reference; but that will occupy some time. You will hardly want to wait so long."

"No," said Brodribb. "But Miss Bonney is coming with me to my office to go over some documents and discuss a little business. When we have finished, I will come back and fetch the confounded thing."

"There is no need for that," replied Thorndyke. "As soon as I have done what is necessary, I will bring it up to your place."

To this arrangement Brodribb agreed readily, and he and his client prepared to depart. I rose, too, and as I happened to have a call to make in Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, I asked permission to walk with them.

As we came out into King's Bench Walk I noticed a smallish, gentlemanly-looking man who had just passed our entry and now turned in at the one next door; and by the light of the lamp in the entry he looked to me like a Japanese. I thought Miss Bonney had observed him, too, but she made no remark, and neither did I. But, passing up Inner Temple Lane, we nearly overtook two other men, who—though I got but a back view of them and the light was feeble enough—aroused my suspicions by their neat, small figures. As we approached, they quickened their pace, and one of them looked back over his shoulder; and then my suspicions were confirmed, for it was an unmistakable Japanese face that looked round at us. Miss Bonney saw that I had observed the men, for she remarked, as they turned sharply at the Cloisters and entered Pump Court: "You see, I am still haunted by Japanese."

"I noticed them," said Brodribb. "They are probably law students. But we may as well be cornpanionable;" and with this, he, too, headed for Pump Court.

We followed our oriental friends across the Lane into Fountain Court, and through that and Devereux Court out to Temple Bar, where we parted from them; they turning westward and we crossing to Bell Yard, up which we walked, entering New Square by the Carey Street gate. At Brodribb's doorway we halted and looked back, but no one was in sight. I accordingly went my way, promising to return anon to hear Thorndyke's report, and the lawyer and his client disappeared through the portal.

My business occupied me longer than I had expected, but nevertheless, when I arrived at Brodribb's premises—where he lived in chambers over his office—Thorndyke had not yet made his appearance. A quarter of an hour later, however, we heard his brisk step on the stairs, and as Brodribb threw the door open, he entered and produced the casket from his pocket.

"Well," said Brodribb, taking it from him and locking it, for the time being, in a drawer, "has the oracle Spoken; and if so, what did he say?"

"Oracles," replied Thorndyke, "have a way of being more concise than explicit. Before I attempt to interpret the message, I should like to view the scene of the escape; to see if there was any intelligible reason why this man Uyenishi should have returned up Brownlow Street into what must have been the danger zone. I think that is a material question."

"Then," said Brodribb, with evident eagerness, "let us all walk up and have a look at the confounded place. It is quite close by."

We all agreed instantly, two of us, at least, being on the tip-toe of expectation. For Thorndyke, who habitually understated his results, had virtually admitted that the casket had told him something; and as we walked up the Square to the gate in Lincoln's Inn Fields, I watched him furtively, trying to gather from his impassive face a hint as to what the something amounted to, and wondering how the movements of the fugitive bore on the solution of the mystery. Brodribb was similarly occupied, and as we crossed from Great Turnstile and took our way up Brownlow Street, I could see that his excitement was approaching bursting-point.

At the top of the street Thorndyke paused and looked up and down the rather dismal thoroughfare which forms a continuation of Bedford Row and bears its name. Then he crossed to the paved island surrounding the pump which stands in the middle of the road, and from thence surveyed the entrances to Brownlow Street and Hand Court; and then he turned and looked thoughtfully at the pump.

"A quaint old survivor, this," he remarked, tapping the iron shell with his knuckles. "There is a similar one, you may remember, in Queen Square, and another at Aldgate. But that is still in use."

"Yes," Brodribb assented, almost dancing with impatience and inwardly damning the pump, as I could see, "I've noticed it."

"I suppose," Thorndyke proceeded, in a reflective tone, "they had to remove the handle. But it was rather a pity."

"Perhaps it was," growled Brodribb, whose complexion was rapidly developing affinities to that of a pickled cabbage, "but what the d—"

Here he broke off short and glared silently at Thorndyke, who had raised his arm and squeezed his hand into the opening once occupied by the handle. He groped in the interior with an expression of placid interest, and presently reported: "The barrel is still there, and so, apparently, is the plunger"—(Here I heard Brodribb mutter huskily, "Damn the barrel and the plunger too!")—"but my hand is rather large for the exploration. Would you, Miss Bonney, mind slipping your hand in and telling me if I am right?"

We all gazed at Thorndyke in dismay, but in a moment Miss Bonney recovered from her astonishment, and with a deprecating smile, half shy, half amused, she slipped off her glove, and reaching up—it was rather high for her—inserted her hand into the narrow slit. Brodribb glared at her and gobbled like a turkey-cock, and I watched her with a sudden suspicion that something was going to happen. Nor was I mistaken. For, as I looked, the shy, puzzled smile faded from her face and was succeeded by an expression of incredulous astonishment. Slowly she withdrew her hand, and as it came out of the slit it dragged something after it. I started forward, and by the light of the lamp above the pump I could see that the object was a leather bag secured by a string from which hung a broken seal.

"It can't be!" she gasped as, with trembling fingers, she untied the string. Then, as she peered into the open mouth, she uttered a little cry. "It is! It is! It is the necklace!"

Brodribb was speechless with amazement. So was I; and I was still gazing open-mouthed at the bag in Miss Bonney's hands when I felt Thorndyke touch my arm. I turned quickly and found him offering me an automatic pistol. "Stand by, Jervis," he said quietly, looking towards Gray's Inn.

I looked in the same direction, and then perceived three men stealing round the corner from Jockey's Fields. Brodribb saw them, too, and snatching the bag of pearls from his client's hands, buttoned it into his breast pocket and placed himself before its owner, grasping his stick with a war-like air. The three men filed along the pavement until they were opposite us, when they turned simultaneously and bore down on the pump, each man, as I noticed, holding his right hand behind him. In a moment, Thorndyke's hand, grasping a pistol, flew up—as did mine, also—and he called out sharply: "Stop! If any man moves a hand, I fire."

The challenge brought them up short, evidently unprepared for this kind of reception. What would have happened next it is impossible to guess. But at this moment a police whistle sounded and two constables ran out from Hand Court. The whistle was instantly echoed from the direction of Warwick Court, whence two more constabulary figures appeared through the postern gate of Gray's Inn. Our three attendants hesitated but for an instant. Then, with one accord, they turned tail and flew like the wind round into Jockey's Fields, with the whole posse of constables close on their heels.

"Remarkable coincidence," said Brodribb, "that those policemen should happen to be on the look-out. Or isn't it a coincidence?"

"I telephoned to the station superintendent before I started," replied Thorndyke, "warning him of a possible breach of the peace at this spot."

Brodribb chuckled. "You're a wonderful man, Thorndyke. You think of everything. I wonder if the police will catch those fellows."

"It is no concern of ours," replied Thorndyke. "We've got the pearls, and that finishes the business. There will be no more shadowing, in any case."

Miss Bonney heaved a comfortable little sigh and glanced gratefully at Thorndyke. "You can have no idea what a relief that is!" she exclaimed; "to say nothing of the treasure-trove."

We waited some time, but as neither the fugitives nor the constables reappeared, we presently made our way back down Brownlow Street. And there it was that Brodribb had an inspiration.

"I'll tell you what," said he. "I will just pop these things in my strong-room—they will be perfectly safe there until the bank opens to-morrow—and then we'll go and have a nice little dinner. I'll pay the piper."

"Indeed you won't!" exclaimed Miss Bonney. "This is my thanksgiving festival, and the benevolent wizard shall be the guest of the evening."

"Very well, my dear," agreed Brodribb. "I will pay and charge it to the estate. But I stipulate that the benevolent wizard shall tell us exactly what the oracle said. That is essential to the preservation of my sanity."

"You shall have his ipsissima verba," Thorndyke promised; and the resolution was carried, *nem. con.*

An hour and a half later we were seated around a table in a private room of a café to which Mr. Brodribb had conducted us. I may not divulge its whereabouts, though I may, perhaps, hint that we approached it by way of Wardour Street. At any rate, we had dined, even to the fulfilment of Brodribb's ideal, and coffee and liqueurs furnished a sort of gastronomic doxology. Brodribb had lighted a cigar and Thorndyke had produced a vicious-looking little black cheroot, which he regarded fondly and then returned to its abiding-place as unsuited to the present company.

"Now," said Brodribb, watching Thorndyke fill his pipe (as understudy of the cheroot aforesaid), "we are waiting to hear the words of the oracle."

"You shall hear them," Thorndyke replied. "There were only five of them. But first, there are certain introductory matters to be disposed of. The solution of this problem is based on two well-known physical facts, one metallurgical and the other optical."

"Ha!" said Brodribb. "But you must temper the wind to the shorn lamb, you know, Thorndyke. Miss Bonney and I are not scientists."

"I will put the matter quite simply, but you must have the facts. The first relates to the properties of malleable metals—excepting iron and steel—and especially of copper and its alloys. If a plate of such metal or alloy—say, bronze, for instance—is made red-hot and quenched in water, it becomes quite soft and flexible—the reverse of what happens in the case of iron. Now, if such a plate of softened metal be placed on a steel anvil and hammered, it becomes extremely hard and brittle."

"I follow that," said Brodribb.

"Then see what follows. If, instead of hammering the soft plate, you put on it the edge of a blunt chisel and strike on that chisel a sharp blow, you produce an indented line. Now the plate remains soft; but the metal forming the indented line has been hammered and has become hard. There is now a line of hard metal on the soft plate. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," replied Brodribb; and Thorndyke accordingly continued: "The second fact is this: If a beam of light falls on a polished surface which reflects it, and if that surface is turned through a given angle, the beam of light is deflected through double that angle."

"H'm!" grunted Brodribb. "Yes. No doubt. I hope we are not going to get into any deeper waters, Thorndyke."

"We are not," replied the latter, smiling urbanely. "We are now going to consider the application of these facts. Have you ever seen a Japanese magic mirror?"

"Never; nor even heard of such a thing."

"They are bronze mirrors, just like the ancient Greek or Etruscan mirrors—which are probably 'magic' mirrors, too. A typical specimen consists of a circular or oval plate of bronze, highly polished on the face and decorated on the back with chased ornament—commonly a dragon or some such device—and furnished with a handle. The ornament is, as I have said, chased; that is to say, it is executed in indented lines made with chasing tools, which are, in effect, small chisels, more or less blunt, which are struck with a chasing-hammer.

"Now these mirrors have a very singular property. Although the face is perfectly plain, as a mirror should be, yet, if a beam of sunlight is caught on it and reflected, say, on to a white wall, the round or oval patch of light on the wall is not a plain light patch. It shows quite clearly the ornament on the back of the mirror."

"But how extraordinary!" exclaimed Miss Bonney.

"It sounds quite incredible," I said.

"It does," Thorndyke agreed. "And yet the explanation is quite simple. Professor Sylvanus Thompson pointed it out years ago. It is based on the facts which I have just stated to you. The artist who makes one of these mirrors begins, naturally, by annealing the metal until it is quite soft. Then he chases the design on the back, and this design then shows slightly on the face. But he now grinds the face perfectly flat with fine emery and water so that the traces of the design are completely obliterated. Finally, he polishes the face with rouge on a soft buff.

"But now observe that wherever the chasing-tool has made a line, the metal is hardened right through, so that the design is in hard metal on a soft matrix. But the hardened metal resists the wear of the polishing buffer more than the soft metal does. The result is that the act of polishing causes the design to appear in faint relief on the face. Its projection is infinitesimal—less than the hundred-thousandth of an inch—and totally invisible to the eye. But, minute as it is, owing to the optical law which I mentioned—which, in effect, doubles the projection—it is enough to influence the reflection of light. As a consequence, every chased line appears on the patch of light as a dark line with a bright border, and so the whole design is visible. I think that is quite clear."

"Perfectly clear," Miss Bonney and Brodribb agreed.

"But now," pursued Thorndyke, "before we come to the casket, there is a very curious corollary which I must mention. Supposing our artist, having finished the mirror, should proceed with a scraper to erase the design from the back; and on the blank, scraped surface to etch a new design. The process of etching does not harden the metal, so the new design does not appear on the reflection. But the old design would. For although it was invisible on the face and had been erased from the back, it would still exist in the substance of the metal and continue to influence the reflection. The odd result would be that the design which would be visible in the patch of light on the wall would be a different one from that on the back of the mirror.

"No doubt, you see what I am leading up to. But I will take the investigation of the casket as it actually occurred. It was obvious, at once, that the value of the thing was extrinsic. It had no intrinsic value, either in material or workmanship. What could that value be? The clear suggestion was that the casket was the vehicle of some secret message or information. It had been made by Uyenishi, who had almost certainly had possession of the missing pearls, and who had been so closely pursued that he never had an opportunity to communicate with his confederates. It was to be given to a man who was almost certainly one of those confederates; and, since the pearls had never been traced, there was a distinct probability

that the (presumed) message referred to some hiding-place in which Uyenishi had concealed them during his flight, and where they were probably still hidden.

"With these considerations in my mind, I examined the casket, and this was what I found. The thing, itself, was a common white-metal casting, made presentable by means of lacquer. But the white metal bottom had been cut out and replaced by a plate of fine bronze—Shakudo. The inside of this was covered with an etched design, which immediately aroused my suspicions. Turning it over, I saw that the outside of the bottom was not only smooth and polished; it was a true mirror. It gave a perfectly undistorted reflection of my face. At once, I suspected that the mirror held the secret; that the message, whatever it was, had been chased on the back, had then been scraped away and an etched design worked on it to hide the traces of the scraper.

"As soon as you were gone, I took the casket up to the laboratory and threw a strong beam of parallel light from a condenser on the bottom, catching the reflection on a sheet of white paper. The result was just what I had expected. On the bright oval patch on the paper could be seen the shadowy, but quite distinct, forms of five words in the Japanese character.

"I was in somewhat of a dilemma, for I have no knowledge of Japanese, whereas the circumstances were such as to make it rather unsafe to employ a translator. However, as I do just know the Japanese characters and possess a Japanese dictionary, I determined to make an attempt to fudge out the words myself. If I failed, I could then look for a discreet translator.

"However, it proved to be easier than I had expected, for the words were detached; they did not form a sentence, and so involved no questions of grammar. I spelt out the first word and then looked it up in the dictionary. The translation was 'pearls.' This looked hopeful, and I went on to the next, of which the translation was 'pump.' The third word floored me. It seemed to be 'jokkis,' or 'jokkish,' but there was no such word in the dictionary; so I turned to the next word, hoping that it would explain its predecessor. And it did. The fourth word was 'fields,' and the last word was evidently 'London.' So the entire group read 'Pearls, Pump, Jokkis, Fields, London.'

"Now, there is no pump, so far as I know, in Jockey Fields, but there is one in Bedford Row close to the corner of the Fields, and exactly opposite the end of Brownlow Street. And by Mr. Brodribb's account, Uyenishi, in his flight, ran down Hand Court and returned up Brownlow Street, as if he were making for the pump. As the latter is disused and the handle-hole is high up, well out of the way of children, it offers quite a good temporary hiding-place, and I had no doubt that the bag of pearls had been poked into it and was probably there still. I was tempted to go at once and explore; but I was anxious that the discovery should be made by Miss Bonney, herself, and I did not dare to make a preliminary exploration for fear of being shadowed. If I had found the treasure I should have had to take it and give it to her; which would have been a flat ending to the adventure. So I had to dissemble and be the occasion of much smothered objurgation on the part of my friend Brodribb. And that is the whole story of my interview with the oracle."

Our mantelpiece is becoming a veritable museum of trophies of victory, the gifts of grateful clients. Among them is a squat, shapeless figure of a Japanese gentleman of the old school, with a silly grinning little face—The Magic Casket. But its possession is no longer a menace. Its sting has been drawn; its magic is exploded; its secret is exposed, and its glory departed.

---

## THE CONTENTS OF A MARE'S NEST

"It is very unsatisfactory," said Mr. Stalker, of the Griffin Life Assurance Company, at the close of a consultation on a doubtful claim. "I suppose we shall have to pay up."

"I am sure you will," said Thorndyke. "The death was properly certified, the deceased is buried, and you have not a single fact with which to support an application for further inquiry."

"No," Stalker agreed. "But I am not satisfied. I don't believe that doctor really knew what she died from. I wish cremation were more usual."

"So, I have no doubt, has many a poisoner," Thorndyke remarked dryly.

Stalker laughed, but stuck to his point. "I know you don't agree," said he, "but from our point of view it is much more satisfactory to know that the extra precautions have been taken. In a cremation case, you have not to depend on the mere death certificate; you have the cause of death verified by an independent authority, and it is difficult to see how any miscarriage can occur."

Thorndyke shook his head. "It is a delusion, Stalker. You can't provide in advance for unknown contingencies. In practice, your special precautions degenerate into mere formalities. If the circumstances of a death appear normal, the independent authority will certify; if they appear abnormal, you won't get a certificate at all. And if suspicion arises only after the cremation has taken place, it can neither be confirmed nor rebutted."

"My point is," said Stalker, "that the searching examination would lead to discovery of a crime before cremation."

"That is the intention," Thorndyke admitted. "But no examination, short of an exhaustive post-mortem, would make it safe to destroy a body so that no reconsideration of the cause of death would be possible."

Stalker smiled as he picked up his hat. "Well," he said, "to a cobbler there is nothing like leather, and I suppose that to a

toxicologist there is nothing like an exhumation," and with this parting shot he took his leave.

We had not seen the last of him, however. In the course of the same week he looked in to consult us on a fresh matter.

"A rather queer case has turned up," said he. "I don't know that we are deeply concerned in it, but we should like to have your opinion as to how we stand. The position is this: Eighteen months ago, a man named Ingle insured with us for fifteen hundred pounds, and he was then accepted as a first-class life. He has recently died—apparently from heart failure, the heart being described as fatty and dilated—and his wife, Sibyl, who is the sole legatee and executrix, has claimed payment.

"But just as we were making arrangements to pay, a caveat has been entered by a certain Margaret Ingle, who declares that she is the wife of the deceased and claims the estate as next-of-kin. She states that the alleged wife, Sibyl, is a widow named Huggard who contracted a bigamous marriage with the deceased, knowing that he had a wife living."

"An interesting situation," commented Thorndyke, "but, as you say, it doesn't particularly concern you. It is a matter for the Probate Court."

"Yes," agreed Stalker. "But that is not all. Margaret Ingle not only charges the other woman with bigamy; she accuses her of having made away with the deceased."

"On what grounds?"

"Well, the reasons she gives are rather shadowy. She states that Sibyl's husband, James Huggard, died under suspicious circumstances—there seems to have been some suspicion that he had been poisoned—and she asserts that Ingle was a healthy, sound man and could not have died from the causes alleged."

"There is some reason in that," said Thorndyke, "if he was really a first-class life only eighteen months ago. As to the first husband, Huggard, we should want some particulars: as to whether there was an inquest what was the alleged cause of death, and what grounds there were for suspecting that he had been poisoned. If there really were any suspicious circumstances, it would be advisable to apply to the Home Office for an order to exhume the body of Ingle and verify the cause of death."

Stalker smiled somewhat sheepishly. "Unfortunately," said he, "that is not possible. Ingle was cremated."

"Ah!" said Thorndyke, "that is, as you say, unfortunate. It clearly increases the suspicion of poisoning, but destroys the means of verifying that suspicion."

"I should tell you," said Stalker, "that the cremation was in accordance with the provisions of the will."

"That is not very material," replied Thorndyke. "In fact, it rather accentuates the suspicious aspect of the case; for the knowledge that the death of the deceased would be followed by cremation might act as a further inducement to get rid of him by poison. There were two death certificates, of course?"

"Yes. The confirmatory certificate was given by Dr. Halbury, of Wimpole Street. The medical attendant was a Dr. Barber, of Howland Street. The deceased lived in Stock-Orchard Crescent, Holloway."

"A good distance from Howland Street," Thorndyke remarked. "Do you know if Halbury made a post-mortem? I don't suppose he did."

"No, he didn't," replied Stalker.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "his certificate is worthless. You can't tell whether a man has died from heart failure by looking at his dead body. He must have just accepted the opinion of the medical attendant. Do I understand that you want me to look into this case?"

"If you will. It is not really our concern whether or not the man was poisoned, though I suppose we should have a claim on the estate of the murderer. But we should like you to investigate the case; though how the deuce you are going to do it I don't quite see."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "However, we must get into touch with the doctors who signed the certificates, and possibly they may be able to clear the whole matter up."

"Of course," said I, "there is the other body—that of Huggard—which might be exhumed—unless he was cremated, too."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke; "and for the purposes of the criminal law, evidence of poisoning in that case would be sufficient. But it would hardly help the Griffin Company, which is concerned exclusively with Ingle deceased. Can you let us have a précis of the facts relating to this case, Stalker?"

"I have brought one with me," was the reply; "a short statement, giving names, addresses, dates, and other particulars. Here it is;" and he handed Thorndyke a sheet of paper bearing a tabulated statement.

When Stalker had gone Thorndyke glanced rapidly through the précis and then looked at his watch. "If we make our way to Wimpole Street at once," said he, "we ought to catch Halbury. That is obviously the first thing to do. He signed the 'C' certificate, and we shall be able to judge from what he tells us whether there is any possibility of foul play. Shall we start now?"

As I assented, he slipped the précis in his pocket and we set forth. At the top of Middle Temple Lane we chartered a taxi by which we were shortly deposited at Dr. Halbury's door and a few minutes later were ushered into his consulting room,



and found him shovelling a pile of letters into the waste-paper basket.

"How d'ye do?" he said briskly, holding out his hand. "I'm up to my eyes in arrears, you see. Just back from my holiday. What can I do for you?"

"We have called," said Thorndyke, "about a man named Ingle."

"Ingle—Ingle," repeated Halbury. "Now, let me see—"

"Stock-Orchard Crescent, Holloway," Thorndyke explained.

"Oh, yes. I remember him. Well, how is he?"

"He's dead," replied Thorndyke.

"Is he really?" exclaimed Halbury. "Now that shows how careful one should be in one's judgments. I half suspected that fellow of malingering. He was supposed to have a dilated heart, but I couldn't make out any appreciable dilatation. There was excited, irregular action. That was all. I had a suspicion that he had been dosing himself with trinitrine. Reminded me of the cases of cordite chewing that I used to meet with in South Africa. So he's dead, after all. Well, it's queer. Do you know what the exact cause of death was?"

"Failure of a dilated heart is the cause stated on the certificates—the body was cremated; and the 'C' Certificate was signed by you."

"By me!" exclaimed the physician. "Nonsense! It's a mistake. I signed a certificate for a Friendly Society. Ingle brought it here for me to sign—but I didn't even know he was dead. Besides, I went away for my holiday a few days after I saw the man and only came back yesterday. What makes you think I signed the death certificate?"

Thorndyke produced Stalker's précis and handed it to Halbury, who read out his own name and address with a puzzled frown. "This is an extraordinary affair," said he. "It will have to be looked into."

"It will, indeed," assented Thorndyke; "especially as a suspicion of poisoning has been raised."

"Ha!" exclaimed Halbury. "Then it was trinitrine, you may depend. But I suspected him unjustly. It was somebody else who was dosing him; perhaps that sly-looking baggage of a wife of his. Is anyone in particular suspected?"

"Yes. The accusation, such as it is, is against the wife."

"H'm. Probably a true bill. But she's done us. Artful devil. You can't get much evidence out of an urnful of ashes. Still, somebody has forged my signature. I suppose that is what the hussy wanted that certificate for—to get a specimen of my handwriting. I see the 'B' certificate was signed by a man named Meeking. Who's he? It was Barber who called me in for an opinion."

"I must find out who he is," replied Thorndyke. "Possibly Dr. Barber will know. I shall go and call on him now."

"Yes," said Dr. Halbury, shaking hands as we rose to depart, "you ought to see Barber. He knows the history of the case, at any rate."

From Wimpole Street we steered a course for Howland Street, and here we had the good fortune to arrive just as Dr. Barber's car drew up at the door. Thorndyke introduced himself and me, and then introduced the subject of his visit, but said nothing, at first, about our call on Dr. Halbury.

"Ingle," repeated Dr. Barber. "Oh, yes, I remember him. And you say he is dead. Well, I'm rather surprised. I didn't regard his condition as serious."

"Was his heart dilated?" Thorndyke asked.

"Not appreciably. I found nothing organic; no valvular disease. It was more like a tobacco heart. But it's odd that Meeking didn't mention the matter to me—he was my locum, you know. I handed the case over to him when I went on my holiday. And you say he signed the death certificate?"

"Yes; and the 'B' certificate for cremation, too."

"Very odd," said Dr. Barber. "Just come in and let us have a look at the day book."

We followed him into the consulting room, and there, while he was turning over the leaves of the day book, I ran my eye along the shelf over the writing-table from which he had taken it; on which I observed the usual collection of case books and books of certificates and notification forms, including the book of death certificates.

"Yes;" said Dr. Barber, "here we are; 'Ingle, Mr., Stock-Orchard Crescent.' The last visit was on the 4th of September, and Meeking seems to have given some sort of certificate. Wonder if he used a printed form." He took down two of the books and turned over the counterfoils.

"Here we are," he said presently; "'Ingle, Jonathan, 4 September. Now recovered and able to resume duties.' That doesn't look like dying, does it? Still, we may as well make sure."

He reached down the book of death certificates and began to glance through the most recent entries.

"No," he said, turning over the leaves, "there doesn't seem to be—Hullo! What's this? Two blank counterfoils; and about the date, too; between the 2nd and 13th of September. Extraordinary! Meeking is such a careful, reliable man."

He turned back to the day book and read through the fortnight's entries. Then he looked up with an anxious frown.

"I can't make this out," he said. "There is no record of any patient having died in that period."

"Where is Dr. Meeking at present?" I asked.

"Somewhere in the South Atlantic," replied Barber. "He left here three weeks ago to take up a post on a Royal Mail Boat. So he couldn't have signed the certificate in any case."

That was all that Dr. Barber had to tell us, and a few minutes later we took our departure.

"This case looks pretty fishy," I remarked, as we turned down Tottenham Court Road.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "There is evidently something radically wrong. And what strikes me especially is the cleverness of the fraud; the knowledge and judgment and foresight that are displayed."

"She took pretty considerable risks," I observed.

"Yes, but only the risks that were unavoidable. Everything that could be foreseen has been provided for. All the formalities have been complied with—in appearance. And you must notice, Jervis, that the scheme did actually succeed. The cremation has taken place. Nothing but the incalculable accident of the appearance of the real Mrs. Ingle, and her vague and apparently groundless suspicions, prevented the success from being final. If she had not come on the scene, no questions would ever have been asked."

"No," I agreed. "The discovery of the plot is a matter of sheer bad luck. But what do you suppose has really happened?"

Thorndyke shook his head.

"It is very difficult to say. The mechanism of the affair is obvious enough, but the motives and purpose are rather incomprehensible. The illness was apparently a sham, the symptoms being produced by nitro-glycerine or some similar heart poison. The doctors were called in, partly for the sake of appearances and partly to get specimens of their handwriting. The fact that both the doctors happened to be away from home and one of them at sea at the time when verbal questions might have been asked—by the undertaker, for instance—suggests that this had been ascertained in advance. The death certificate forms were pretty certainly stolen by the woman when she was left alone in Barber's consulting-room, and, of course, the cremation certificates could be obtained on application to the crematorium authorities. That is all plain sailing. The mystery is, what is it all about? Barber or Meeking would almost certainly have given a death certificate, although the death was unexpected, and I don't suppose Halbury would have refused to confirm it. They would have assumed that their diagnosis had been at fault."

"Do you think it could have been suicide, or an inadvertent overdose of trinitrine?"

"Hardly. If it was suicide, it was deliberate, for the purpose of getting the insurance money for the woman, unless there was some further motive behind. And the cremation, with all its fuss and formalities, is against suicide; while the careful preparation seems to exclude inadvertent poisoning. Then, what was the motive for the sham illness except as a preparation for an abnormal death?"

"That is true," said I. "But if you reject suicide, isn't it rather remarkable that the victim should have provided for his own cremation?"

"We don't know that he did," replied Thorndyke. "There is a suggestion of a capable forger in this business. It is quite possible that the will itself is a forgery."

"So it is!" I exclaimed. "I hadn't thought of that."

"You see," continued Thorndyke, "the appearances suggest that cremation was a necessary part of the programme; otherwise these extraordinary risks would not have been taken. The woman was sole executrix and could have ignored the cremation clause. But if the cremation was necessary, why was it necessary? The suggestion is that there was something suspicious in the appearance of the body; something that the doctors, would certainly have observed or that would have been discovered if an exhumation had taken place."

"You mean some injury or visible signs of poisoning?"

"I mean something discoverable by examination even after burial."

"But what about the undertaker? Wouldn't he have noticed anything palpably abnormal?"

"An excellent suggestion, Jervis. We must see the undertaker. We have his address: Kentish Town Road—a long way from deceased's house, by the way. We had better get on a bus and go there now."

A yellow omnibus was approaching as he spoke. We hailed it and sprang on, continuing our discussion as we were borne northward.

Mr. Burrell, the undertaker, was a pensive-looking, profoundly civil man who was evidently in a small way, for he combined with his funeral functions general carpentry and cabinet making. He was perfectly willing to give any required information, but he seemed to have very little to give.

"I never really saw the deceased gentleman," he said in reply to Thorndyke's cautious inquiries. "When I took the measurements, the corpse was covered with a sheet; and as Mrs. Ingle was in the room, I made the business as short as

possible.”

“You didn’t put the body in the coffin, then?”

“No. I left the coffin at the house, but Mrs. Ingle said that she and the deceased gentleman’s brother would lay the body in it.”

“But didn’t you see the corpse when you screwed the coffin-lid down?”

“I didn’t screw it down. When I got there it was screwed down already. Mrs. Ingle said they had to close up the coffin, and I dare say it was necessary. The weather was rather warm; and I noticed a strong smell of formalin.”

“Well,” I said, as we walked back down the Kentish Town Road, “we haven’t got much more forward.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” replied Thorndyke. “We have a further instance of the extraordinary adroitness with which this scheme was carried out; and we have confirmation of our suspicion that there was something unusual in the appearance of the body. It is evident that this woman did not dare to let even the undertaker see it. But one can hardly help admiring the combination of daring and caution, the boldness with which these risks were taken, and the care and judgment with which they were provided against. And again I point out that the risks were justified by the result. The secret of that man’s death appears to have been made secure for all time.”

It certainly looked as if the mystery with which we were concerned were beyond the reach of investigation. Of course, the woman could be prosecuted for having forged the death certificates, to say nothing of the charge of bigamy. But that was no concern of ours or Stalker’s. Jonathan Ingle was dead, and no one could say how he died.

On our arrival at our chambers we found a telegram that had just arrived, announcing that Stalker would call on us in the evening; and as this seemed to suggest that he had some fresh information we looked forward to his visit with considerable interest. Punctually at six o’clock he made his appearance and at once opened the subject.

“There are some new developments in this Ingle case,” said he. “In the first place, the woman, Huggard, has bolted. I went to the house to make a few inquiries and found the police in possession. They had come to arrest her on the bigamy charge, but she had got wind of their intentions and cleared out. They made a search of the premises, but I don’t think they found anything of interest except a number of rifle cartridges; and I don’t know that they are of much interest either, for she could hardly have shot him with a rifle.”

“What kind of cartridges were they?” Thorndyke asked.

Stalker put his hand in his pocket.

“The inspector let me have one to show you,” said he; and he laid on the table a military cartridge of the pattern of some twenty years ago. Thorndyke picked it up, and taking from a drawer a pair of pliers drew the bullet out of the case and inserted into the latter a pair of dissecting forceps. When he withdrew the forceps, their points grasped one or two short strings of what looked like cat-gut.

“Cordite!” said I. “So Halbury was probably right, and this is how she got her supply.” Then, as Stalker looked at me inquiringly, I gave him a short account of the results of our investigations.

“Ha!” he exclaimed, “the plot thickens. This juggling with the death certificates seems to connect itself with another kind of juggling that I came to tell you about. You know that Ingle was Secretary and Treasurer to a company that bought and sold land for building estates. Well, I called at their office after I left you and had a little talk with the chairman. From him I learned that Ingle had practically complete control of the financial affairs of the company, that he received and paid all moneys and kept the books. Of late, however, some of the directors have had a suspicion that all was not well with the finances, and at last it was decided to have the affairs of the company thoroughly overhauled by a firm of chartered accountants. This decision was communicated to Ingle, and a couple of days later a letter arrived from his wife saying that he had had a severe heart attack and asking that the audit of the books might be postponed until he recovered and was able to attend at the office.”

“And was it postponed?” I asked.

“No,” replied Stalker. “The accountants were asked to get to work at once, which they did; with the result that they discovered a number of discrepancies in the books and a sum of about three thousand pounds unaccounted for. It isn’t quite obvious how the frauds were carried out, but it is suspected that some of the returned cheques are fakes with forged endorsements.”

“Did the company communicate with Ingle on the subject?” asked Thorndyke.

“No. They had a further letter from Mrs. Ingle—that is, Huggard—saying that Ingle’s condition was very serious; so they decided to wait until he had recovered. Then, of course, came the announcement of his death, on which the matter was postponed pending the probate of the will. I suppose a claim will be made on the estate, but as the executrix has absconded, the affair has become rather complicated.”

“You were saying,” said Thorndyke, “that the fraudulent death certificates seem to be connected with these frauds on the company. What kind of connection do you assume?”

“I assume—or at least, suggest,” replied Stalker, “that this was a case of suicide. The man, Ingle, saw that his frauds were

discovered, or were going to be, and that he was in for a long term of penal servitude, so he just made away with himself. And I think that if the murder charge could be dropped, Mrs. Huggard might be induced to come forward and give evidence as to the suicide.”

Thorndyke shook his head.

“The murder charge couldn’t be dropped,” said he, “if it was suicide, Huggard was certainly an accessory; and in law, an accessory to suicide is an accessory to murder. But, in fact, no official charge of murder has been made, and at present there are no means of sustaining such a charge. The identity of the ashes might be assumed to be that stated in the cremation order, but the difficulty is the cause of death. Ingle was admittedly ill. He was attended for heart disease by three doctors. There is no evidence that he did not die from that illness.”

“But the illness was due to cordite poisoning,” said I, “That is what we believe. But no one could swear to it. And we certainly could not swear that he died from cordite poisoning.”

“Then,” said Stalker, “apparently there is no means of finding out whether his death was due to natural causes, suicide, or murder?”

“There is only one chance,” replied Thorndyke. “It is just barely possible that the cause of death might be ascertainable by an examination of the ashes.”

“That doesn’t seem very hopeful,” said I. “Cordite poisoning would certainly leave no trace.”

“We mustn’t assume that he died from cordite poisoning,” said Thorndyke. “Probably he did not. That may have masked the action of a less obvious poison, or death might have been produced by some new agent.”

“But,” I objected, “how many poisons are there that could be detected in the ashes? No organic poison would leave any traces, nor would metallic poisons such as mercury, antimony, or arsenic.”

“No,” Thorndyke agreed. “But there are other metallic poisons which could be easily recovered from the ashes; lead, tin, gold, and silver, for instance. But it is useless to discuss speculative probabilities. The only chance that we have of obtaining any new facts is by an examination of the ashes. It seems infinitely improbable that we shall learn anything from it, but there is the bare possibility and we ought not to leave it untried.”

Neither Stalker nor I made any further remark, but I could see that the same thought was in both our minds. It was not often that Thorndyke was “gravelled;” but apparently the resourceful Mrs. Huggard had set him a problem that was beyond even his powers. When an investigator of crime is reduced to the necessity of examining a potful of ashes in the wild hope of ascertaining from them how the deceased met his death, one may assume that he is at the very end of his tether. It is a forlorn hope indeed.

Nevertheless, Thorndyke seemed to view the matter quite cheerfully, his only anxiety being lest the Home Secretary should refuse to make the order authorising the examination. And this anxiety was dispelled a day or two later by the arrival of a letter giving the necessary authority, and informing him that a Dr. Hemming—known to us both as an expert pathologist—had been deputed to be present at the examination and to confer with him as to the necessity for a chemical analysis.

On the appointed day Dr. Hemming called at our chambers and we set forth together for Liverpool Street; and as we drove thither it became evident to me that his view of our mission was very similar to my own. For, though he talked freely enough, and on professional topics, he maintained a most discreet silence on the subject of the forthcoming inspection; indeed, the first reference to the subject was made by Thorndyke himself just as the train was approaching Corfield, where the crematorium was situated.

“I presume,” said he, “you have made all necessary arrangements, Hemming?”

“Yes,” was the reply. “The superintendent will meet us and will conduct us to the catacombs, and there, in our presence, will take the casket from its niche in the columbarium and have it conveyed to the office, where the examination will be made. I thought it best to use these formalities, though, as the casket is sealed and bears the name of the deceased, there is not much point in them.”

“No,” said Thorndyke, “but I think you were right. It would be easy to challenge the identity of a mass of ashes if all precautions were not taken, seeing that the ashes themselves are unidentifiable.”

“That was what I felt,” said Hemming; and then, as the train slowed down, he added: “This is our station, and that gentleman on the platform, I suspect, is the superintendent.”

The surmise turned out to be correct; but the cemetery official was not the only one present bearing that title; for as we were mutually introducing ourselves, a familiar tall figure approached up the platform from the rear of the train—our old friend Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department.

“I don’t wish to intrude,” said he, as he joined the group and was presented by Thorndyke to the strangers, “but we were notified by the Home Office that an investigation was to be made, so I thought I would be on the spot to pick up any crumbs of information that you may drop. Of course, I am not asking to be present at the examination.”

“You may as well be present as an additional witness to the removal of the urn,” said Thorndyke; and Miller accordingly joined the party, which now made its way from the station to the cemetery.

The catacombs were in a long, low arcaded building at the end of the pleasantly-wooded grounds, and on our way thither we passed the crematorium, a smallish, church-like edifice with a perforated chimney-shaft partly concealed by the low spire. Entering the catacombs, we were conducted to the "columbarium," the walls of which were occupied by a multitude of niches or pigeon-holes, each niche accommodating a terra-cotta urn or casket. The superintendent proceeded to near the end of the gallery, where he halted, and opening the register, which he had brought with him, read out a number and the name "Jonathan Ingle," and then led us to a niche bearing that number and name, in which reposed a square casket, on which was inscribed the name and date of death. When we had verified these particulars, the casket was tenderly lifted from its place by two attendants, who carried it to a well-lighted room at the end of the building, where a large table by a window had been covered with white paper. Having placed the casket on the table, the attendants retired, and the superintendent then broke the seals and removed the cover.

For a while we all stood looking in at the contents of the casket without speaking; and I found myself contrasting them with what would have been revealed by the lifting of a coffin-lid. Truly corruption had put on incorruption. The mass of snow-white, coral-like fragments, delicate, fragile, and lace-like in texture, so far from being repulsive in aspect, were almost attractive. I ran my eye, with an anatomist's curiosity, over these dazzling remnants of what had lately been a man, half-unconsciously seeking to identify and give a name to particular fragments, and a little surprised at the difficulty of determining that this or that irregularly-shaped white object was a part of any one of the bones with which I had thought myself so familiar.

Presently Hemming looked up at Thorndyke and asked: "Do you observe anything abnormal in the appearance of these ashes? I don't."

"Perhaps," replied Thorndyke, "we had better turn them out on to the table, so that we can see the whole of them."

This was done very gently, and then Thorndyke proceeded to spread out the heap, touching the fragments with the utmost delicacy—for they were extremely fragile and brittle—until the whole collection was visible.

"Well," said Hemming, when we had once more looked them over critically, "what do you say? I can see no trace of any foreign substance. Can you?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "And there are some other things that I can't see. For instance, the medical referee reported that the proposer had a good set of sound teeth. Where are they? I have not seen a single fragment of a tooth. Yet teeth are far more resistant to fire than bones, especially the enamel caps."

Hemming ran a searching glance over the mass of fragments and looked up with a perplexed frown.

"I certainly can't see any sign of teeth," he admitted, "and it is rather curious, as you say. Does the fact suggest any particular significance to you?"

By way of reply, Thorndyke delicately picked up a flat fragment and silently held it out towards us. I looked at it and said nothing; for a very strange suspicion was beginning to creep into my mind.

"A piece of a rib," said Hemming. "Very odd that it should have broken across so cleanly. It might have been cut with a saw."

Thorndyke laid it down and picked up another, larger fragment, which I had already noticed.

"Here is another example," said he, handing it to our colleague.

"Yes," agreed Hemming. "It is really rather extraordinary. It looks exactly as if it had been sawn across."

"It does," agreed Thorndyke. "What bone should you say it is?"

"That is what I was just asking myself," replied Hemming, looking at the fragment with a sort of half-vexed smile. "It seems ridiculous that a competent anatomist should be in any doubt with as large a portion as this, but really I can't confidently give it a name. The shape seems to me to suggest a tibia, but of course it is much too small. Is it the upper end of the ulna?"

"I should say no," answered Thorndyke. Then he picked out another of the larger fragments, and handing it to Hemming, asked him to name it.

Our friend began to look somewhat worried.

"It is an extraordinary thing, you know," said he, "but I can't tell you what bone it is part of. It is clearly the shaft of a long bone, but I'm hanged if I can say which. It is too big for a metatarsal and too small for any of the main limb bones. It reminds one of a diminutive thigh bone."

"It does," agreed Thorndyke, "very strongly." While Hemming had been speaking he had picked out four more large fragments, and these he now laid in a row with the one that had seemed to resemble a tibia in shape. Placed thus together, the five fragments bore an obvious resemblance.

"Now," said he, "look at these. There are five of them. They are parts of limb bones, and the bones of which they are parts were evidently exactly alike, excepting that three were apparently from the left side and two from the right. Now, you know, Hemming, a man has only four limbs and of those only two contain similar bones. Then two of them show distinct traces of what looks like a saw-cut."

Hemming gazed at the row of fragments with a frown of deep cogitation.

"It is very mysterious," he said. "And looking at them in a row they strike me as curiously like tibia in shape; not in size."

"The size," said Thorndyke about that of a sheep's tibia."

"A sheep's?" exclaimed Hemming, staring in amazement, first at the calcined bones and then at my colleague.

"Yes; the upper half, sawn across in the middle of the shank."

Hemming was thunderstruck. "It is an astounding affair!" he exclaimed. "You mean to suggest—"

"I suggest," said Thorndyke, "that there is not a sign of a human bone in the whole collection. But there are very evident traces of at least five legs of mutton."

For a few moments there was a profound silence, broken only by a murmur of astonishment from the cemetery official and a low chuckle from Superintendent Miller, who had been listening with absorbed interest. At length Hemming spoke.

"Then, apparently, there was no corpse in the coffin at all?"

"No," answered Thorndyke. "The weight was made up, and the ashes furnished, by joints of butcher's meat. I dare say, if we go over the ashes carefully, we shall be able to judge what they were. But it is hardly necessary. The presence of five legs of mutton and the absence of a single recognisable fragment of a human skeleton, together with the forged certificates, gives us a pretty I conclusive case. The rest, I think we can leave to Superintendent Miller."

"I take it, Thorndyke," said I, as the train moved out of the station, "that you came here expecting to find what you did find?"

"Yes," he replied. "It seemed to me the only possibility, having regard to all the known facts."

"When did it first occur to you?"

"It occurred to me as a possibility as soon as we discovered that the cremation certificates had been forged; but it was the undertaker's statement that seemed to clench the matter."

"But he distinctly stated that he measured the body."

"True. But there was nothing to show that it was a dead body. What was perfectly clear was that there was something that must on no account be seen; and when Stalker told us of the embezzlement we had a body of evidence that could point to only one conclusion. Just consider that evidence.

"Here we had a death, preceded by an obviously sham illness and followed by cremation with forged certificates. Now, what was it that had happened? There were four possible hypotheses. Normal death, suicide, murder, and fictitious death. Which of these hypotheses fitted the facts?"

"Normal death was apparently excluded by the forged certificates.

"The theory of suicide did not account for the facts. It did not agree with the careful, elaborate preparation. And why the forged certificates? If Ingle had really died, Meeking would have certified the death. And why the cremation? There was no purpose in taking those enormous risks.

"The theory of murder was unthinkable. These certificates were almost certainly forged by Ingle himself, who we know was a practised forger. But the idea of the victim arranging for his own cremation is an absurdity.

"There remained only the theory of fictitious death; and that theory fitted all the facts perfectly. First, as to the motive. Ingle had committed a felony. He had to disappear. But what kind of disappearance could be so effectual as death and cremation? Both the prosecutors and the police would forthwith write him off and forget him. Then there was the bigamy—a criminal offence in itself. But death would not only wipe that off; after 'death' he could marry Huggard regularly under another name, and he would have shaken off his deserted wife for ever. And he stood to gain fifteen hundred pounds from the Insurance Company. Then see how this theory explained the other facts. A fictitious death made necessary a fictitious illness. It necessitated the forged certificates, since there was no corpse. It made cremation highly desirable; for suspicion might easily have arisen, and then the exhumation of a coffin containing a dummy would have exploded the fraud. But successful cremation would cover up the fraud for ever. It explained the concealment of the corpse from the undertaker, and it even explained the smell of formalin which he noticed."

"How did it?" I asked.

"Consider, Jervis," he replied. "The dummy in this coffin had to be a dummy of flesh and bone which would yield the correct kind of ash. Joints of butcher's meat would fulfil the conditions. But the quantity required would be from a hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds. Now Ingle could not go to the butcher and order a whole sheep to be sent the day before the funeral. The joints would have to be bought gradually and stored. But the storage of meat in warm weather calls for some kind of preservative; and formalin is highly effective, as it leaves no trace after burning.

"So you see that the theory of fictitious death agreed with all the known circumstances, whereas the alternative theories presented inexplicable discrepancies and contradictions. Logically, it was the only possible theory, and, as you have seen, experiment proved it to be the true one."

As he concluded, Dr. Hemming took his pipe from his mouth and laughed softly.

"When I came down to-day," said he, "I had all the facts which you had communicated to the Home Office, and I was absolutely convinced that we were coming to examine a mare's nest. And yet, now I have heard your exposition, the whole thing looks perfectly obvious."

"That is usually the case with Thorndyke's conclusions," said I. "They are perfectly obvious—when you have heard the explanation."

Within a week of our expedition, Ingle was in the hands of the police. The apparent success of the cremation adventure had misled him to a sense of such complete security that he had neglected to cover his tracks, and he had accordingly fallen an easy prey to our friend Superintendent Miller. The police were highly gratified, and so were the directors of the Griffin Life Assurance Company.

---

## THE STALKING HORSE

AS Thorndyke and I descended the stairs of the foot bridge at Densford Junction we became aware that something unusual had happened. The platform was nearly deserted save at one point, where a small but dense crowd had collected around the open door of a first-class compartment of the down train; heads were thrust out of the windows of the other coaches, and at intervals doors opened and inquisitive passengers ran along to join the crowd, from which an excited porter detached himself just as we reached the platform.

"You'd better go for Dr. Pooke first," the station-master called after him.

On this, Thorndyke stepped forward.

"My friend and I," said he, "are medical men. Can we be of any service until the local doctor arrives?"

"I'm very much afraid not, sir," was the reply, "but you'll see." He cleared a way for us and we approached the open door.

At the first glance there appeared to be nothing to account for the awe-stricken expression with which the bystanders peered into the carriage and gazed at its solitary occupant. For the motionless figure that sat huddled in the corner seat, chin on breast, might have been a sleeping man. But it was not. The waxen pallor of the face and the strange, image-like immobility forbade the hope of any awakening.

"It looks almost as if he had passed away in his sleep," said the station when we had concluded our brief examination and ascertained certainly that the man was dead. "Do you think it was a heart attack, sir?"

Thorndyke shook his head and touched with his finger a depressed spot on the dead man's waistcoat. When he withdrew his finger it was smeared with blood.

"Good God!" the official gasped, in a horrified whisper. "The man has been murdered!" He stared incredulously at the corpse for a few moments and then turned and sprang out of the compartment, shutting the door behind him, and we heard him giving orders for the coach to be separated and shunted into the siding.

"This is a gruesome affair, Jervis," my colleague, said as he sat down on the seat opposite the dead man and cast a searching glance round the compartment. "I wonder who this poor fellow was and what was the object of the murder? It looks almost too determined, for a common robbery; and, in fact, the body does not appear to have been robbed." Here he stooped suddenly to pick up one or two minute fragments of glass which seemed to have been trodden into the carpet, and which he examined closely in the palm of his hand. I leaned over and looked at the fragments, and we agreed that they were portions of the bulb of an electric torch or flash-lamp.

"The significance of these—if they have any," said Thorndyke, "we can consider later. But if they are recent, it would appear that the metal part of the bulb has been picked up and taken away. That might be an important fact. But, on the other hand, the fragments may have been here some time and have no connection with the tragedy; though you notice that they were lying opposite the body and opposite the seat which the murderer must have occupied when the crime was committed."

As he was speaking, the uncoupled coach began slowly to move towards the siding, and we both stooped to make a further search for the remainder of the lamp-bulb. And then, almost at the same moment, we perceived two objects lying under the opposite seat—the seat occupied by the dead man. One was a small pocket-handkerchief, the other a sheet of notepaper.

"This," said I, as I picked up the former, "accounts for the strong smell of scent in the compartment."

"Possibly," Thorndyke agreed, "though you will notice that the odour does not come principally from the handkerchief, but from the back cushion of the corner seat. But here is something more distinctive—a most incriminating piece of evidence, unless it can be answered by an undeniable alibi." He held out to me a sheet of letter paper, both pages of which were covered with writing in bright blue ink, done with a Hectograph or some similar duplicator. It was evidently a circular letter, for it bore the printed heading, "Women's Emancipation League, 16 Barnabas Square, S.W.," and the contents appeared to refer to a "militant demonstration" planned for the near future.

"It is dated the day before yesterday," commented Thorndyke, "so that it might have been lying here for twenty-four

hours, though that is obviously improbable; and as this is neither the first sheet nor the last, there are—or have been—at least two more sheets. The police will have something to start on, at any rate.”

He laid the letter on the seat and explored both of the hat-racks, taking down the dead man’s hat, gloves, and umbrella, and noting in the hat the initials “F. B.” He had just replaced them when voices became audible outside, and the station-master climbed up on the foot-board and opened the door to admit two men, one of whom I assumed to be a doctor, the other being a police inspector.

“The station-master tells me that this is a case of homicide,” said the former, addressing us jointly.

“That is what the appearances suggest,” replied Thorndyke. “There is a bullet wound, inflicted apparently at quite short range—the waistcoat is perceptibly singed—and we have found no weapon in the compartment.”

The doctor stepped past us and proceeded to make a rapid examination of the body.

“Yes,” he said, “I agree with you. The position of the wound and the posture of the body both suggest that death was practically instantaneous. If it had been suicide, the pistol would have been in the hand or on the floor. There is no clue to the identity of the murderer, I suppose?”

“We found these on the floor under the dead man’s seat,” replied Thorndyke, indicating the letter and the handkerchief; “and there is some glass trodden into the carpet—apparently the remains of an electric flash-lamp.”

The inspector pounced on the handkerchief and the letter, and having scrutinised the former vainly in search of name or initials, turned to the letter.

“Why, this is a suffragist’s letter!” he exclaimed. “But it can’t have anything to do with this affair. They are mischievous beggars, but they don’t do this sort of thing.” Nevertheless, he carefully bestowed both articles in a massive wallet, and approaching the corpse, remarked: “We may as well see who he is while we are waiting for the stretcher.”

With a matter-of-fact air, which seemed somewhat to shock the station-master, he unbuttoned the coat of the passive figure in the corner and thrust his hand into the breast pocket, drawing out a letter-case which he opened, and from which he extracted a visiting card. As he glanced at it, his face suddenly took on an expression of amazement.

“God!” he exclaimed in a startled tone. “Who do you think he is, doctor? He is Mr. Francis Burnham!”

The doctor looked at him with an interrogative frown. “Burnham—Burnham,” he repeated. “Let me see, now—”

“Don’t you know? The anti-suffrage man. Surely—”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted the doctor. “Of course I remember him. The arch-enemy of the suffrage movement and—yes, of course.” The doctor’s brisk speech changed abruptly into a hesitating mumble. Like the inspector, he had suddenly “seen a great light;” and again, like the officer, his perception had begotten a sudden reticence.

Thorndyke glanced at his watch. “Our train is a minute overdue,” said he. “We ought to get back to the platform.” Taking a card from his case, he handed it to the inspector, who looked at it and slightly raised his eyebrows.

“I don’t think my evidence will be of much value,” said he; “but, of course, I am at your service if you want it.” With this and a bow to the doctor and the station-master, he climbed down to the ground; and when I had given the inspector my card, I followed, and we made our way to the platform.

The case was not long in developing. That very evening, as Thorndyke and I were smoking our after-dinner pipes by the fire, a hurried step was heard on the stair and was followed by a peremptory knock on our door. The visitor was a man of about thirty, with a clean-shaved face, an intense and rather neurotic expression, and a restless, excited manner. He introduced himself by the name of Cadmus Bawley, and thereby, in effect, indicated the purpose of his visit.

“You know me by name, I expect,” he said, speaking rapidly and with a sharp, emphatic manner, “and probably you can guess what I have come about. You have seen the evening paper, of course?”

“I have not,” replied Thorndyke.

“Well,” said Mr. Bawley, “you know about the murder of the man Burnham, because I see that you were present at the discovery; and you know that part of a circular letter from our League was found in the compartment. Perhaps you will not be surprised to learn that Miss Isabel Dalby has been arrested and charged with the murder.”

“Indeed!” said Thorndyke.

“Yes. It’s an infamous affair! A national disgrace!” exclaimed Bawley, banging the table with his fist. “A manifest plot of the enemies of social reform to get rid of a high-minded, noble-hearted lady whose championship of this great Cause they are unable to combat by fair means in the open. And it is a wild absurdity, too. As to the fellow, Burnham, I can’t pretend to feel any regret—”

“May I suggest”—Thorndyke interrupted somewhat stiffly—“that the expression of personal sentiments is neither helpful nor discreet? My methods of defence—if that is what you have come about—are based on demonstration rather than rhetoric. Could you give us the plain facts?”

Mr. Cadmus Bawley looked unmistakably sulky, but after a short pause, he began his recital in a somewhat lower key.

“The bald facts,” he said, “are these: This afternoon, at half-past two, Miss Dalby took the train from King’s Cross to



Holmwood. This is the train that stops at Densford Junction and is the one in which Burnham travelled. She took a first-class ticket and occupied a compartment for ladies only, of which she was the only occupant. She got out at Holmwood and went straight to the house of our Vice-President, Miss Carleigh—who has been confined to her room for some days—and stayed there about an hour. She came back by the four-fifteen train, and I met her at the station—King's Cross—at a quarter to five. We had tea at a restaurant opposite the station, and over our tea we discussed the plans for the next demonstration, and arranged the rendezvous and the most convenient routes for retreat and dispersal when the police should arrive. This involved the making of sketch plans, and these Miss Dalby drew on a sheet of paper that she took from her pocket, and which happened to be part of the circular letter referring to the raid. After tea we walked together down Gray's Inn Road and parted at Theobald's Road, I going on to the head-quarters and she to her rooms in Queen Square. On her arrival home, she found two detectives waiting outside her house, and then—and then, in short, she was arrested, like a common criminal, and taken to the police station, where she was searched and the remainder of the circular letter found in her pocket. Then she was formally charged with the murder of the man Burnham, and she was graciously permitted to send a telegram to head-quarters. It arrived just after I got there, and, of course, I at once went to the police station. The police refused to accept bail, but they allowed me to see her to make arrangements for the defence."

"Does Miss Dalby offer any suggestion," asked Thorndyke, "as to how a sheet of her letter came to be in the compartment with the murdered man?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Mr. Bawley. "I had forgotten that. It wasn't her letter at all. She destroyed her copy of the letter as soon as she had read it."

"Then," inquired Thorndyke, "how came the letter to be in her pocket?"

"Ah," replied Bawley, "that is the mystery. She thinks someone must have slipped it into her pocket to throw suspicion on her."

"Did she seem surprised to find it in her pocket when you were having tea together?"

"No. She had forgotten having destroyed her copy. She only remembered it when I told her that the sheet had been found in Burnham's carriage."

"Can she produce the fragments of the destroyed letter?"

"No, she can't. Unfortunately she burned it."

"Do these circular letters bear any distinguishing mark? Are they addressed to members by name?"

"Only on the envelopes. The letters are all alike. They are run off a duplicator. Of course, if you don't believe the story—"

"I am not judging the case," interrupted Thorndyke; "I am simply collecting the facts. What do you want me to do?"

"If you feel that you could undertake the defence I should like you to do so. We shall employ the solicitors to the League, Bird & Marshall, but I know they will be willing and glad to act with you."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "I will investigate the case and consult with your solicitors. By the way, do the police know about the sheet of the letter on which the plans were drawn?"

"No. I thought it best to say nothing about that, and I have told Miss Dalby not to mention it."

"That is just as well," said Thorndyke. "Have you the sheet with the plan on it?"

"I haven't it about me," was the reply. "It is in my desk at my chambers."

"You had better let me have it to look at," said Thorndyke.

"You can have it if you want it, of course," said Bawley, "but it won't help you. The letters are all alike, as I have told you."

"I should like to see it, nevertheless," said Thorndyke; "and perhaps you could give me some account of Mr. Burnham. What do you know about him?"

Mr. Bawley shut his lips tightly, and his face took on an expression of vindictiveness verging on malignity.

"All I know about Burnham," he said, "is that he was a fool and a ruffian. He was not only an enemy of the great reform that our League stands for; he was a treacherous enemy—violent, crafty, and indefatigably active. I can only regard his death as a blessing to mankind."

"May I ask," said Thorndyke, "if any members of your League have ever publicly threatened to take personal measures against him?"

"Yes," snapped Bawley. "Several of us—including myself—have threatened to give him the hiding that he deserved. But a hiding is a different thing from murder, you know."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed somewhat dryly; then he asked: "Do you know anything about Mr. Burnham's occupation and habits?"

"He was a sort of manager of the London and Suburban Bank. His job was to supervise the suburban branches, and his habit was to visit them in rotation. He was probably going to the branch at Holmwood when he was killed. That is all I can tell you about him."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke; and as our visitor rose to depart he continued: "Then I will look into the case and arrange with your solicitors to have Miss Dalby properly represented at the inquest; and I shall be glad to have that sheet of the letter as soon as you can send or leave it."

"Very well," said Bawley, "though, as I have told you, it won't be of any use to you. It is only a duplicated circular."

"Possibly," Thorndyke assented. "But the other sheets will be produced in Court, so I may as well have an opportunity of examining it beforehand."

For some minutes after our client had gone Thorndyke remained silent and reflective, copying his rough notes into his pocket-book and apparently amplifying and arranging them. Presently he looked up at me with an unspoken question in his eyes.

"It is a queer case," said I. "The circumstantial evidence seems to be strongly against Miss Dalby, but it is manifestly improbable that she murdered the man."

"It seems so," he agreed. "But the case will be decided on the evidence; and the evidence will be considered by a judge, not by a Home Secretary. You notice the importance of Burnham's destination?"

"Yes. He was evidently dead when the train arrived at Holmwood. But it isn't clear how long he had been dead."

"The evidence," said Thorndyke, "points strongly to the tunnel between Cawden and Holmwood as the place where the murder was committed. You will remember that the up-express passed our train in the tunnel. If the adjoining compartments were empty, the sound of a pistol shot would be completely drowned by the noise of the express thundering past. Then you will remember the fragments of the electric bulb that we picked up, and that there was no light on in the carriage. That is rather significant. It not only suggests that the crime was committed in the dark, but there is a distinct suggestion of preparation—arrangement and premeditation. It suggests that the murderer knew what the circumstances would be and provided for them."

"Yes; and that is rather a point against our client. But I don't quite see what you expect to get out of that sheet of the letter. It is the presence of the letter, rather than its matter, that constitutes the evidence against Miss Dalby."

"I don't expect to learn anything from it," replied Thorndyke; "but the letter will be the prosecution's trump card, and it is always well to know in advance exactly what cards your opponent holds. It is a mere matter of routine to examine everything, relevant or irrelevant."

The inquest was to be held at Densford on the third day after the discovery of the body. But in the interval certain new facts had come to light. One was that the deceased was conveying to the Holmwood branch of the bank a sum of three thousand pounds, of which one thousand was in gold and the remainder in Bank of England notes, the whole being contained in a leather handbag. This bag had been found, empty, in a ditch by the side of the road which led from the station to the house of Miss Carleigh, the Vice-President of the Women's Emancipation League. It was further stated that the ticket-collector at Holmwood had noticed that Miss Dalby—whom he knew by sight—was carrying a bag of the kind described when she passed the barrier, and that when she returned, about an hour later, she had no bag with her. On the other hand, Miss Carleigh had stated that the bag which Miss Dalby brought to her house was her (Miss Carleigh's) property, and she had produced it for the inspection of the police. So that already there was some conflict of evidence, with a balance distinctly against Miss Dalby.

"There is no denying," said Thorndyke, as we discussed the case at the breakfast table on the morning of the inquest that the circumstantial evidence is formidably complete and consistent, while the rebutting evidence is of the feeblest. Miss Dalby's statement that the letter had been put into her pocket by some unknown person will hardly be taken seriously, and even Miss Carleigh's statement with reference to the bag will not carry much weight unless she can furnish corroboration."

"Nevertheless," said I, "the general probabilities are entirely in favour of the accused. It is grossly improbable that a lady like Miss Dalby would commit a robbery with murder of this cold-blooded, deliberate type."

"That may be," Thorndyke retorted, "but a jury has to find in accordance with the evidence."

"By the way," said I, "did Bawley ever send you that sheet of the letter that you asked for?"

"No, confound him! But I have sent Polton round to get it from him, so that I can look it over carefully in the train. Which reminds me that I can't get down in time for the opening of the inquest. You had better travel with the solicitors and see the shorthand writers started. I shall have to come down by a later train."

Half an hour later, just as I was about to start, a familiar step was heard on the stair, and then our laboratory assistant, Polton, let himself in with his key.

"Just caught him, sir, as he was starting for the station," he said, with a satisfied, crinkly smile, laying an envelope on the table, and added, "Lord! how he did swear!"

Thorndyke chuckled, and having thanked his assistant, opened the envelope and handed it to me. It contained a single sheet of letter-paper, exactly similar to the one that we had found in the railway carriage, excepting that the writing filled one side and a quarter only, and, since it concluded with the signature "Letitia Humboe, President," it was evidently the last sheet. There was no water-mark nor anything, so far as I could see, to distinguish it from the dozens of other impressions that had been run off on the duplicator with it, excepting the roughly-pencilled plan on the blank side of the

sheet.

"Well," I said as I put on my hat and walked towards the door, "I suspect that Bawley was right. You won't get much help from this to support Miss Dalby's rather improbable statement." And Thorndyke agreed that appearances were not very promising.

The scene in the coffee-room of "The Plough" Inn at Densford was one with which I was familiar enough. The quiet, business-like coroner, the half-embarrassed jurors, the local police and witnesses and the spectators, penned up at one end of the room, were all well-known characters. The unusual feature was the handsome, distinguished-looking young lady who sat on a plain Windsor chair between two inscrutable policemen, watched intently by Mr. Cadmus Bawley. Miss Dalby was pale and obviously agitated, but quiet, resolute, and somewhat defiant in manner. She greeted me with a pleasant smile when I introduced myself, and hoped that I and my colleague would have no difficulty in disposing of "this grotesque and horrible accusation."

I need not describe the proceedings in detail. Evidence of the identity of the deceased having been taken, Dr. Pooke deposed that death was due to a wound of the heart produced by a spherical bullet, apparently fired from a small, smooth-bore pistol at very short range. The wound was in his opinion not self-inflicted. The coroner then produced the sheet of the circular letter found in the carriage, and I was called to testify to the finding of it. The next witness was Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department, who produced the two sheets of the letter which were taken from Miss Dalby's pocket when she was arrested. These he handed to the coroner for comparison with the one found in the carriage with the body of deceased.

"There appear," said the coroner, after placing the three sheets together, "to be one or more sheets missing. The two you have handed me are sheets one and three, and the one found in the railway carriage is sheet two."

"Yes," the witness agreed, "sheet four is missing, but I have a photograph of it. Here is a set of the complete letter," and he laid four unmounted prints on the table.

The coroner examined them with a puzzled frown. "May I ask," he said, "how you obtained these photographs?"

"They are not photographs of the copy that you have," the witness explained, "but of another copy of the same letter which we intercepted in the post. That letter was addressed to a stationer's shop to be called for. We have considered it necessary to keep ourselves informed of the contents of these circulars, so that we can take the necessary precautions; and as the envelopes are marked with the badge and are invariably addressed in blue ink, it is not difficult to identify them."

"I see," said the coroner, glaring stonily at Mr. Bawley, who had accompanied the superintendent's statement with audible and unfavourable comments. "Is that the whole of your evidence? Thank you. Then, if there is no cross-examination, I will call the next witness. Mr. Bernard Parsons."

Mr. Parsons was the general manager of the London and Suburban Bank, and he deposed that deceased was, on the day when he met his death, travelling to Holmwood to visit and inspect the new local branch of the bank, and that he was taking thither the sum of three thousand pounds, of which one thousand was in gold and the remainder in Bank of England notes—mostly five-pound notes. He carried the notes and specie in a strong leather handbag.

"Can you say if either of these is the bag that he carried?" the coroner asked, indicating two largish, black leather bags that his officer had placed on the table.

Mr. Parsons promptly pointed to the larger of the two, which was smeared externally with mud. The coroner noted the answer and then asked: "Did anyone besides yourself know that deceased was making this visit?"

"Many persons must have known," was the reply. "Deceased visited the various branches in a fixed order. He came to Holmwood on the second Tuesday in the month."

"And would it be known that he had this great sum of money with him?"

"The actual amount would not be generally known, but he usually took with him supplies of specie and notes—sometimes very large sums—and this would be known to many of the bank staff, and probably to a good many persons outside. The Holmwood Branch consumes a good deal of specie, as most of the customers pay in cheques and draw out cash for local use."

This was the substance of Mr. Parsons' evidence, and when he sat down the ticket-collector was called. That official identified Miss Dalby as one of the passengers by the train in which the body of deceased was found. She was carrying a bag when she passed the barrier. He could not identify either of the bags, but both were similar to the one that she was carrying. She returned about an hour later and caught an up-train, and he noticed that she was then not carrying a bag. He could not say whether any of the other passengers was carrying a bag. There were very few first-class passengers by that train, but a large number of third-class—mostly fruit-pickers—and they made a dense crowd at the barrier so that he did not notice individual passengers particularly. He noticed Miss Dalby because he knew her by sight, as she often came to Holmwood with other suffragist ladies. He did not see which carriage Miss Dalby came from, and he did not see any first-class compartment with an open door.

The coroner noted down this evidence with thoughtful deliberation, and I was considering whether there were any questions that it would be advisable to ask the witness when I felt a light touch on my shoulder, and looking up perceived a constable holding out a telegram. Observing that it was addressed to "Dr. Jervis, Plough Inn, Densford," I nodded to the

constable, and taking the envelope from him, opened it and unfolded the paper. The telegram was from Thorndyke, in the simple code that he had devised for our private use. I was able to decode it without referring to the key—which each of us always carried in his pocket—and it then read:

"I AM STARTING FOR FOLKESTONE IN RE BURNHAM DECEASED. FOLLOW IMMEDIATELY  
AND BRING MILLER IF YOU CAN FOR POSSIBLE ARREST. MEET ME ON PIER NEAR  
OSTEND BOAT. THORNDYKE."

Accustomed as I was to my colleague's inveterate habit of acting in the least expected manner, I must confess that I gazed at the decoded message in absolute stupefaction. I had been totally unaware of the faintest clue beyond the obvious evidence to which I had been listening, and behold! here was Thorndyke with an entirely fresh case, apparently cut-and-dried, and the unsuspected criminal in the hollow of his hand. It was astounding.

Unconsciously I raised my eyes—and met those of Superintendent Miller, fixed on me with devouring curiosity. I held up the telegram and beckoned, and immediately he tip-toed across and took a seat by my side. I laid the decoded telegram before him, and when he had glanced through it, I asked in a whisper: "Well, what do you say?"

By way of reply, he whisked out a time-table, conned it eagerly for a few minutes, and then held it towards me with his thumb-nail on the words "Densford Junction."

"There's a fast train up in seven minutes," he whispered hoarsely. "Get the coroner to excuse us and let your solicitors carry on for you."

A brief, and rather vague, explanation secured the assent of the coroner—since we had both given our evidence—and the less willing agreement of my clients. In another minute the superintendent and I were heading for the station, which we reached just as the train swept up alongside the platform.

"This is a queer start," said Miller, as the train moved out of the station; "but, Lord! there is never any calculating Dr. Thorndyke's moves. Did you know that he had anything up his sleeve?"

"No; but then one never does know. He is as close as an oyster. He never shows his hand until he can play a trump card. But it is possible that he has struck a fresh clue since I left."

"Well," rejoined Miller, "we shall know when we get to the other end And I don't mind telling you that it will be a great relief to me if we can drop this charge against Miss Dalby."

From time to time during the journey to London, and from thence to Folkestone, the superintendent reverted to Thorndyke's mysterious proceedings. But it was useless to speculate. We had not a single fact to guide us; and when, at last, the train ran into Folkestone Central Station we were as much in the dark as when we started.

Assuming that Thorndyke would have made any necessary arrangements for assistance from the local police, we chartered a cab and proceeded direct to the end of Rendez-vous Street—a curiously appropriate destination, by the way. Here we alighted in order that we might make our appearance at the meeting-place as inconspicuously as possible, and, walking towards the harbour, perceived Thorndyke waiting on the quay, ostensibly watching the loading of a barge, and putting in their case a pair of prismatic binoculars with which he had apparently observed our arrival.

"I am glad you have come, Miller," he said, shaking the superintendent's hand. "I can't make any promises, but I have no doubt that it is a case for you even if it doesn't turn out all that I hope and expect. The Cornflower is our ship, and we had better go on board separately in case our friends are keeping a look-out. I have arranged matters with the captain, and the local superintendent has got some plain-clothes men on the pier."

With this we separated. Thorndyke went on in advance, and Miller and I followed at a discreet interval.

As I descended the gangway a minute or so after Miller, a steward approached me, and having asked my name requested me to follow him, when he conducted me to the purser's office, in which I found Thorndyke and Miller in conversation with the purser.

"The gentlemen you are inquiring for," said the latter, "are in the smoking-room playing cards with another passenger. I have put a tarpaulin over one of the ports, in case you want to have a look at them without being seen."

"Perhaps you had better make a preliminary inspection, Miller," said Thorndyke. "You may know some of them."

To this suggestion the superintendent agreed, and forthwith went off with the purser, leaving me and Thorndyke alone. I at once took the opportunity to demand an explanation. "I take it that you struck some new evidence after I left you?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "And none too soon, as you see. I don't quite know what it will amount to, but I think we have secured the defence, at any rate and that is really all that we are concerned with. The positive aspects of the case are the business of the police. But here comes Miller, looking very pleased with himself, and with the purser."

The superintendent, however, was not only pleased; he was also not a little puzzled.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "this is a quaint affair. We have got two of the leading lights of the suffrage movement in there. One is Jameson, the secretary of the Women's Emancipation League, the other is Pinder, their chief bobbery-monger. Then there are two men named Dorman and Spiller, both of them swell crooks, I am certain, though we have never been able to fix anything on them. The fifth man I don't know."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "My repertoire includes only four. And now we will proceed to sort them out. Could we have a few words with Mr. Thorpe—in here, if you don't mind."

"Certainly," replied the purser "I'll go and fetch him." He bustled away in the direction of the smoking-room, whence he presently reappeared, accompanied by a tall, lean man who wore large bi-focal spectacles of the old-fashioned, split-lens type, and was smoking a cigar. As the newcomer approached down the alley-way, it was evident that he was nervous and uneasy, though he maintained a certain jaunty swagger that accorded ill with a pronounced, habitual stoop. As he entered the cabin, however, and became aware of the portentous group of strangers, the swagger broke down completely; suddenly his face became ashen and haggard, and he peered through his great spectacles from one to the others, with an expression of undisguisable terror.

"Mr. Thorpe?" queried Thorndyke; and the superintendent murmured: "Alias Pinder."

"Yes," was the reply, in a husky undertone. "What can I do for you?"

Thorndyke turned to the superintendent. "I charge this man," said he, "with having murdered Francis Burnham in the train between London and Holmwood."

The superintendent was visibly astonished, but not more so than the accused, on whom Thorndyke's statement produced the most singular effect. In a moment, his terror seemed to drop from him; the colour returned to his face, the haggard expression of which gave place to one of obvious relief.

Miller stood up, and addressing the accused, began "It is my duty to caution you—" but the other interrupted: "Caution your grandmother! You are talking a parcel of dam' nonsense. I was in Birmingham when the murder was committed. I can prove it, easily."

The superintendent was somewhat taken aback, for the accused spoke with a confidence that carried conviction.

"In that case," said Thorndyke, "you can probably explain how a letter belonging to you came to be found in the carriage with the murdered man."

"Belonging to me!" exclaimed Thorpe. "What the deuce do you mean? That letter belonged to Miss Dalby. The rest of it was found in her pocket."

"Precisely," said Thorndyke. "One sheet had been placed in the railway carriage and the remainder in Miss Dalby's pocket to fix suspicion on her. But it was your letter, and the inference is that you disposed of it in that manner for the purpose that I have stated."

"But," persisted Thorpe, with visibly-growing uneasiness, "this was a duplicated circular. You couldn't tell one copy from another."

"Mr. Pinder," said Thorndyke, in an impressively quiet tone, "if I tell you that I ascertained from that letter that you had taken a passage on this ship in the name of Thorpe, you will probably understand what I mean."

Apparently he did understand, for, once more, the colour faded from his face and he sat down heavily on a locker, fixing on Thorndyke a look of undisguised dismay. Thus he sat for some moments, motionless and silent, apparently thinking hard.

Suddenly he started up. "My God!" he exclaimed, "I see now what has happened. The infernal scoundrel! First he put it on to Miss Dalby, and now he has put it on to me. Now I understand why he looked so startled when I ran against him."

"What do you mean?" asked Thorndyke.

"I'll tell you," replied Pinder. "As I move about a good deal—and for other reasons—I used to have my suffrage letters sent to a stationer's shop in Barlow Street—"

"I know," interrupted the superintendent; "Bedall's. I used to look them over and take photographs of them." He grinned craftily as he made this statement, and, rather to my surprise, the accused grinned too. A little later I understood that grin.

"Well," continued Pinder, "I used to collect these letters pretty regularly. But this last letter was delivered while I was away at Birmingham. Before I came back I met a man who gave me certain—er—instructions—you know what they were," he added, addressing Thorndyke—"so I did not need the letter. But, of course, I couldn't leave it there uncollected, so when I got back to London, I called for it. That was two days ago. To my astonishment Miss Bedall declared that I had collected it three days previously. I assured her that I was not in London on that day, but she was positive that I had called. 'I remember clearly,' she said, 'giving you the letter myself.' Well, there was no arguing. Evidently she had given the letter to the wrong person—she is very near-sighted, I should say, judging by the way she holds things against her nose—but how it happened I couldn't understand. But I think I understand now. There is one person only in the world who knew that I had my letters addressed there: a sort of pal of mine named Payne. He happened to be with me one evening when I called to collect my letters. Now, Payne chanced to be a good deal like me—at least he is tall and thin and stoops a bit; but he does not wear spectacles. He tried on my spectacles once for a joke, and then he really looked extremely like me. He looked in a mirror and remarked on the resemblance himself. Now, Payne did not belong to the Women's League, and I suggest that he took advantage of this resemblance to get possession of this letter. He got a pair of spectacles like mine and personated me at the shop."

"Why should he want to get possession of that letter?" Miller demanded.

"To plant it as he has planted it," replied Pinder, "and set the police on a false trail."

"This sounds pretty thin," said Miller. "You are accusing this man of having murdered Mr. Burnham. What grounds have you for this accusation?"

"My grounds," replied Pinder, "are, first, that he stole this letter which has been found, obviously planted; and, second, that he had a grudge against Burnham and knew all about his movements."

"Indeed!" said Miller, with suddenly increased interest. "Then who and what is this man Payne?"

"Why," replied Pinder, "until a month ago, he was assistant cashier at the Streatham branch of the bank. Then Burnham came down and hoofed him out without an hour's notice. I don't know what for, but I can guess."

"Do you happen to know where Payne is at this moment?"

"Yes, I do. He is on this ship, in the smoking-room—only he is Mr. Shenstone now. And mighty sick he was when he found me on board."

The superintendent looked at Thorndyke. "What do you think about it, doctor?" he asked.

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that we had better have Mr. Shenstone in here and ask him a few questions. Would you see if you can get him to come here?" he added, addressing the purser, who had been listening with ecstatic enjoyment.

"I'll get him to come along all right," replied the purser, evidently scenting a new act in this enthralling drama; and away he bustled, all agog. In less than a minute we saw him returning down the alley-way, with a tall, thin man, who, at a distance, was certainly a good deal like Pinder, though the resemblance diminished as he approached. He, too, was obviously agitated, and seemed to be plying the purser with questions. But when he came opposite the door of the cabin he stopped dead and seemed disposed to shrink back.

"Is that the man?" Thorndyke demanded sharply and rather loudly, springing to his feet as he spoke.

The effect of the question was electrical. As Thorndyke rose, the new-comer turned, and, violently thrusting the purser aside, raced madly down the alley-way and out on to the deck.

"Stop that man!" roared Miller, darting out in pursuit; and at the shout a couple of loitering deck-hands headed the fugitive off from the gangway. Following, I saw the terrified man swerving this way and that across the littered deck to avoid the seamen, who joined in the pursuit; I saw him make a sudden frantic burst for a baggage-slide springing from a bollard up to the bulwark-rail. Then his foot must have tripped on a lashing, for he staggered for a moment, flung out his arms with a wild shriek, and plunged headlong into the space between the ship's side and the quay wall.

In an instant the whole ship was in an uproar. An officer and two hands sprang to the rail with ropes and a boathook, while others manned the cargo derrick and lowered a rope with a running bowline between the ship and the quay.

"He's gone under," a hoarse voice proclaimed from below; "but I can see him jammed against the side."

There were a couple of minutes of sickening suspense. Then the voice from below was heard again. "Heave up!"

The derrick-engine rattled, the taut rope came up slowly, and at length out of that horrid gulf arose a limp and dripping shape that, as it cleared the bulwark, was swung inboard and let down gently on the deck. Thorndyke and I stooped over him. But it was a dead man's face that we looked into; and a tinge of blood on the lips told the rest of the tale.

"Cover him up," said the superintendent. "He's out of our jurisdiction now. But what's going on there?"

Following his look, I perceived a small scattered crowd of men all running furiously along the quay towards the town. Some of them I judged to be the late inmates of the smoking-room and some plain-clothes men. The only figure that I recognised was that of Mr. Pinder, and he was already growing small in the distance.

"The local police will have to deal with them," said Miller. Then turning to the purser, he asked: "What baggage had this man?"

"Only two cabin trunks," was the reply. "They are both in his state-room."

To the state-room we followed the purser, when Miller had possessed himself of the dead man's keys, and the two trunks were hoisted on to the bunk and opened. Each trunk contained a large cash-box, and each cash-box contained five hundred pounds in gold and a big bundle of notes. The latter Miller examined closely, checking their numbers by a column of entries in his pocket-book.

"Yes," he reported at length; "it's a true bill. These are the notes that were stolen from Mr. Burnham. And now I will have a look at the baggage of those other four sportsmen."

This being no affair of ours, Thorndyke and I went ashore and slowly made our way towards the town. But presently the superintendent overtook us in high glee, with the news that he had discovered what appeared to be the accumulated "swag" of a gang of swell burglars for whom he had been for some months vainly on the look-out.

"How was it done?" repeated Thorndyke in reply to Miller's question, as we sat at a retired table in the "Lord Warden" Hotel. "Well, it was really very simple. I am afraid I shall disappoint you if you expect anything ingenious and recondite. Of course, it was obvious that Miss Dalby had not committed this atrocious murder and robbery; and it was profoundly improbable that this extremely incriminating letter had been dropped accidentally. That being so, it was almost certain

that the letter had been 'planted,' as Pinder expressed it. But that was a mere opinion that helped us not at all. The actual solution turned upon a simple chemical fact with which I happened to be acquainted; which is this: that all the basic coal-tar dyes, and especially methylene blue, dye oxycellulose without requiring a mordant, but do not react in this way on cellulose. Now, good paper is practically pure cellulose; and if you dip a sheet of such paper into certain oxidising liquids, such as a solution of potassium chlorate with a slight excess of hydrochloric acid, the paper is converted into oxycellulose. But if instead of immersing the paper, you write on it with a quill or glass pen dipped in the solution, only the part which has been touched by the pen is changed into oxycellulose. No change is visible to the eye: but if a sheet of paper written on with this colourless fluid is dipped in a solution of, say, methylene blue, the invisible writing immediately becomes visible. The oxycellulose takes up the blue dye.

"Now, when I picked up that sheet of the letter in the railway carriage and noted that the ink used appeared to be methylene blue, this fact was recalled to my mind. Then, on looking at it closely, I seemed to detect a certain slight spottiness in the writing. There were points on some of the letters that were a little deeper in colour than the rest; and it occurred to me that it was possible that these circulars might be used to transmit secret messages of a less innocent kind than those that met the unaided eye, just as these political societies might form an excellent cover for the operations of criminal associations. But if the circulars had been so used, it is evident that the secret writing would not be on all the circulars. The prepared sheets would be used only for the circulars that were to be sent to particular persons, and in those cases the secret writing would probably be in the nature of a personal communication, either to a particular individual or to a small group. The possible presence of a secret message thus became of vital evidential importance; for if it could be shown that this letter was addressed to some person other than Miss Dalby, that would dispose of the only evidence connecting her with the crime.

"It happened, most fortunately, that I was able to get possession of the final sheet of this letter—"

"Of course it did," growled Miller, with a sour smile.

"It reached me," continued Thorndyke, "only after Dr. Jervis had started for Densford. The greater part of one side was blank, excepting for a rough plan drawn in pencil, and this blank side I laid down on a sheet of glass and wetted the written side with a small wad of cotton-wool dipped in distilled water. Of course, the blue writing began to run and dissolve out; and then, very faintly, some other writing began to show through in reverse. I turned the paper over, and now the new writing, though faint, was quite legible, and became more so when I wiped the blue-stained cotton-wool over it a few times. A solution of methylene blue would have made it still plainer, but I used water only, as I judged that the blue writing was intended to furnish the dye for development. Here is the final result."

He drew from his pocket a letter-case, from which he extracted a folded paper which he opened and laid on the table. It was stained a faint blue, through which the original writing could be seen, dim and blurred, while the secret message, though very pale, was quite sharp and clear. And this was the message:

"...so although we are not actually blown on, the position is getting risky and it's time for us to hop. I have booked passages for the four of us to Ostend by the Cornflower, which sails on Friday evening next (20th). The names of the four illustrious passengers are, Walsh (that's me), Grubb (Dorman), Jenkins (Spiller) and Thorpe (that's you). Get those names well into your canister—better make a note of them—and turn up in good time on Friday."

"Well," said Miller, as he handed back the letter, "we can't know everything—unless we are Dr. Thorndyke. But there's one thing I do know."

"What is that?" I asked.

"I know why that fellow Pinder grinned when I told him that I had photographed his confounded letters."

---

## THE NATURALIST AT LAW

A HUSH had fallen on the court as the coroner concluded his brief introductory statement and the first witness took up his position by the long table. The usual preliminary questions elicited that Simon Moffet, the witness aforesaid, was fifty-eight years of age, that he followed the calling of a shepherd and that he was engaged in supervising the flocks that fed upon the low-lying meadows adjoining the little town of Bantree in Buckinghamshire.

"Tell us how you came to discover the body," said the coroner.

"'Twas on Wednesday morning, about half-past five," Moffet began. "I was getting the sheep through the gate into the big meadow by Reed's farm, when I happened to look down the dyke, and then I noticed a boot sticking up out of the water. Seemed to me as if there was a foot in it by the way it stuck up, so as soon as all the sheep was in, I shut the gate and walked down the dyke to have a look at un. When I got close I see the toe of another boot just alongside. Looks a bit queer, I thinks, but I couldn't see anything more, 'cause the duck-weed is that thick as it looks as if you could walk on it. Howsever, I clears away the weed with my stick, and then I see 'twas a dead man. Give me a rare turn, it did. He was a-layin' at the bottom of the ditch with his head near the middle and his feet up close to the bank. Just then young Harry Walker comes along the cart-track on his way to work, so I shows him the body and sends him back to the town for to give notice at the police station."

"And is that all you know about the affair?"

"Ay. Later on I see the sergeant come along with a man wheelin' the stretcher, and I showed him where the body was and helped to pull it out and load it on the stretcher. And that's all I know about it."

On this the witness was dismissed and his place taken by a shrewd-looking, business-like police sergeant, who deposed as follows:

"Last Wednesday, the 8th of May, at 6.15 a.m., I received information from Henry Walker that a dead body was lying in the ditch by the cart-track leading from Ponder's Road to Reed's farm. I proceeded there forthwith, accompanied by Police-Constable Ketchum, and taking with us a wheeled stretcher. On the track I was met by the last witness, who conducted me to the place where the body was lying and where I found it in the position that he has described; but we had to clear away the duck-weed before we could see it distinctly. I examined the bank carefully, but could see no trace of footprints, as the grass grows thickly right down to the water's edge. There were no signs of a struggle or any disturbance on the bank. With the aid of Moffet and Ketchum, I drew the body out and placed it on the stretcher. I could not see any injuries or marks of violence on the body or anything unusual about it. I conveyed it to the mortuary, and with Constable Ketchum's assistance removed the clothing and emptied the pockets, putting the contents of each pocket in a separate envelope and writing the description on each. In a letter-case from the coat pocket were some visiting cards bearing the name and address of Mr. Cyrus Pedley, of 21 Hawtrey Mansions, Kensington, and a letter signed Wilfred Pedley, apparently from deceased's brother. Acting on instructions, I communicated with him and served a summons to attend this inquest."

"With regard to the ditch in which you found the body," said the coroner, "can you tell us how deep it is?"

"Yes; I measured it with Moffet's crook and a tape measure. In the deepest part, where the body was lying, it is four feet two inches deep. From there it slopes up pretty sharply to the bank."

"So far as you can judge, if a grown man fell into the ditch by accident, would he have any difficulty in getting out?"

"None at all, I should say, if he were sober and in ordinary health. A man of medium height, standing in the middle at the deepest part, would have his head and shoulders out of water; and the sides are not too steep to climb up easily, especially with the grass and rushes on the bank to lay hold of."

"You say there were no signs of disturbance on the bank. Were there any in the ditch itself?"

"None that I could see. But, of course, signs of disturbance soon disappear in water. The duck-weed drifts about as the wind drives it, and there are creatures moving about on the bottom. I noticed that deceased had some weed grasped in one hand."

This concluded the sergeant's evidence, and as he retired, the name of Dr. Albert Parton was called. The new witness was a young man of grave and professional aspect, who gave his evidence with an extreme regard for clearness and accuracy.

"I have made an examination of the body of the deceased," he began, after the usual preliminaries. "It is that of a healthy man of about forty-five. I first saw it about two hours after it was found. It had then been dead from twelve to fifteen hours. Later I made a complete examination. I found no injuries, marks of violence or any definite bruises, and no signs of disease."

"Did you ascertain the cause of death?" the coroner asked.

"Yes. The cause of death was drowning."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure. The lungs contained a quantity of water and duck-weed, and there was more than a quart of water mixed with duck-weed and water-weed in the stomach. That is a clear proof of death by drowning. The water in the lungs was the immediate cause of death, by making breathing impossible, and as the water and weed in the stomach must have been swallowed, they furnish conclusive evidence that deceased was alive when he fell into the water."

"The water and weed could not have got into the stomach after death?"

"No, that is quite impossible. They must have been swallowed when the head of the deceased was just below the surface; and the water must have been drawn into the lungs by spasmodic efforts to breathe when the mouth was under water."

"Did you find any signs indicating that deceased might have been intoxicated?"

"No. I examined the water from the stomach very carefully with that question in view, but there was no trace of alcohol—or, indeed, of anything else. It was simple ditch-water. As the point is important I have preserved it, and—" here the witness produced a paper parcel which he unfastened, revealing a large glass jar containing about a quart of water plentifully sprinkled with duck-weed. This he presented to the coroner, who waved it away hastily and indicated the jury; to whom it was then offered and summarily rejected with emphatic head-shakes. Finally it came to rest on the table by the place where I was sitting with my colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, and our client, Mr. Wilfred Pedley. I glanced at it with faint interest, noting how the duck-weed plants had risen to the surface and floated, each with its tassel of roots hanging down into the water, and how a couple of tiny, flat shells, like miniature ammonites, had sunk and lay on the bottom of the jar. Thorndyke also glanced at it; indeed, he did more than glance, for he drew the jar towards him and examined its contents in the systematic way in which it was his habit to examine everything. Meanwhile the coroner asked: "Did you find anything abnormal or unusual, or anything that could throw light on how deceased came to be in the water?"

"Nothing whatever," was the reply. "I found simply that deceased met his death by drowning."



Here, as the witness seemed to have finished his evidence, Thorndyke interposed.

"The witness states, sir, there were no definite bruises. Does he mean that there were any marks that might have been bruises?"

The coroner glanced at Dr. Parton, who replied: "There was a faint mark on the outside of the right arm, just above the elbow, which had somewhat the appearance of a bruise, as if the deceased had been struck with a stick. But it was very indistinct. I shouldn't like to swear that it was a bruise at all."

This concluded the doctor's evidence, and when he had retired, the name of our client, Wilfred Pedley, was called. He rose, and having taken the oath and given his name and address, deposed: "I have viewed the body of deceased. It is that of my brother, Cyrus Pedley, who is forty-three years of age. The last time I saw deceased alive was on Tuesday morning, the day before the body was found."

"Did you notice anything unusual in his manner or state of mind?"

The witness hesitated but at length replied: "Yes. He seemed anxious and depressed. He had been in low spirits for some time past, but on this occasion he seemed more so than usual."

"Had you any reason to suspect that he might contemplate taking his life?"

"No," the witness replied, emphatically, "and I do not believe that he would, under any circumstances, have contemplated suicide."

"Have you any special reason for that belief?"

"Yes. Deceased was a highly conscientious man and he was in my debt. He had occasion to borrow two thousand pounds from me, and the debt was secured by an insurance on his life. If he had committed suicide that insurance would be invalidated and the debt would remain unpaid. From my knowledge of him, I feel certain that he would not have done such a thing."

The coroner nodded gravely, and then asked: "What was deceased's occupation?"

"He was employed in some way by the Foreign Office, I don't know in what capacity. I know very little about his affairs."

"Do you know if he had any money worries or any troubles or embarrassments of any kind?"

"I have never heard of any; but deceased was a very reticent man. He lived alone in his flat, taking his meals at his club, and no one knew—at least, I did not—how he spent his time or what was the state of his finances. He was not married, and I am his only near relative."

"And as to deceased's habits. Was he ever addicted to taking more stimulants than was good for him?"

"Never," the witness replied emphatically. "He was a most temperate and abstemious man."

"Was he subject to fits of any kind, or fainting attacks?"

"I have never heard that he was."

"Can you account for his being in this solitary place at this time—apparently about eight o'clock at night?"

"I cannot. It is a complete mystery to me. I know of no one with whom either of us was acquainted in this district. I had never heard of the place until I got the summons to the inquest."

This was the sum of our client's evidence, and, so far, things did not look very favourable from our point of view—we were retained on the insurance question, to rebut, if possible, the suggestion of suicide. However, the coroner was a discreet man, and having regard to the obscurity of the case—and perhaps to the interests involved—summed up in favour of an open verdict; and the jury, taking a similar view, found that deceased met his death by drowning, but under what circumstances there was no evidence to show.

"Well," I said, as the court rose, "that leaves it to the insurance people to make out a case of suicide if they can. I think you are fairly safe, Mr. Pedley. There is no positive evidence."

"No," our client replied. "But it isn't only the money I am thinking of. It would be some consolation to me for the loss of my poor brother if I had some idea how he met with his death, and could feel sure that it was an unavoidable misadventure. And for my own satisfaction—leaving the insurance out of the question—I should like to have definite proof that it was not suicide."

He looked half-questioningly at Thorndyke, who nodded gravely. "Yes," the latter agreed, "the suggestion of suicide ought to be disposed of if possible, both for legal and sentimental reasons. How far away is the mortuary?"

"A couple of minutes' walk," replied Mr. Pedley. "Did you wish to inspect the body?"

"If it is permissible," replied Thorndyke; "and then I propose to have a look at the place where the body was found."

"In that case," our client said, "I will go down to the Station Hotel and wait for you. We may as well travel up to town together, and you can then tell me if you have seen any further light on the mystery."

As soon as he was gone, Dr. Parton advanced, tying the string of the parcel which once more enclosed the jar of ditch-water.

"I heard you say, sir, that you would like to inspect the body," said he. "If you like, I will show you the way to the mortuary. The sergeant will let us in, won't you, sergeant? This gentleman is a doctor as well as a lawyer."

"Bless you, sir," said the sergeant, "I know who Dr. Thorndyke is, and I shall feel it an honour to show him anything he wishes to see."

Accordingly we set forth together, Dr. Parton and Thorndyke leading the way.

"The coroner and the jury didn't seem to appreciate my exhibit," the former remarked with a faint grin, tapping the parcel as he spoke.

"No," Thorndyke agreed; "and it is hardly reason able to expect a layman to share our own matter-of-fact outlook. But you were quite right to produce the specimen. That ditch-water furnishes conclusive evidence on a vitally material question. Further, I would advise you to preserve that jar for the present, well covered and under lock and key."

Parton looked surprised. "Why?" he asked. "The inquest is over and the verdict pronounced."

"Yes, but it was an open verdict, and an open verdict leaves the case in the air. The inquest has thrown no light on the question as to how Cyrus Pedley came by his death."

"There doesn't seem to me much mystery about it," said the doctor. "Here is a man found drowned in a shallow ditch which he could easily have got out of if he had fallen in by accident. He was not drunk. Apparently he was not in a fit of any kind. There are no marks of violence and no signs of a struggle, and the man is known to have been in an extremely depressed state of mind. It looks like a clear case of suicide, though I admit that the jury were quite right, in the absence of direct evidence."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "it will be my duty to contest that view if the insurance company dispute the claim on those grounds."

"I can't think what you will have to offer in answer to the suggestion of suicide," said Parton.

"Neither can I, at present," replied Thorndyke. "But the case doesn't look to me quite so simple as it does to you."

"You think it possible that an analysis of the contents of this jar may be called for?"

"That is a possibility," replied Thorndyke. "But I mean that the case is obscure, and that some further inquiry into the circumstances of this man's death is by no means unlikely."

"Then," said Parton, "I will certainly follow your advice and lock up this precious jar. But here we are at the mortuary. Is there anything in particular that you want to see?"

"I want to see all that there is to see," Thorndyke replied. "The evidence has been vague enough so far. Shall we begin with that bruise or mark that you mentioned?"

Dr. Parton advanced to the grim, shrouded figure that lay on the slate-topped table, like some solemn effigy on an altar tomb, and drew back the sheet that covered it. We all approached, stepping softly, and stood beside the table, looking down with a certain awesome curiosity at the still, waxen figure that, but a few hours since, had been a living man like ourselves. The body was that of a good-looking, middle-aged man with a refined, intelligent face—slightly disfigured by a scar on the cheek—now set in the calm, reposeful expression that one so usually finds on the faces of the drowned; with drowsy, half-closed eyes and slightly parted lips that revealed a considerable gap in the upper front teeth.

Thorndyke stood awhile looking down on the dead man with a curious questioning expression. Then his eye travelled over the body, from the placid face to the marble-like torso and the hand which, though now relaxed, still lightly grasped a tuft of water-weed. The latter Thorndyke gently disengaged from the limp hand, and, after a glance at the dark green, feathery fronds, laid it down and stooped to examine the right arm at the spot above the elbow that Parton had spoken of.

"Yes," he said, "I think I should call it a bruise, though it is very faint. As you say, it might have been produced by a blow with a stick or rod. I notice that there are some teeth missing. Presumably he wore a plate?"

"Yes," replied Parton; "a smallish gold plate with four teeth on it—at least, so his brother told me. Of course, it fell out when he was in the water, but it hasn't been found; in fact, it hasn't been looked for."

Thorndyke nodded and then turned to the sergeant. "Could I see what you found in the pockets?" he asked.

The sergeant complied readily, and my colleague watched his orderly procedure with evident approval. The collection of envelopes was produced from an attaché-case and conveyed to a side table, where the sergeant emptied out the contents of each into a little heap, opposite which he placed the appropriate envelope with its written description. Thorndyke ran his eye over the collection—which was commonplace enough—until he came to the tobacco pouch, from which protruded the corner of a scrap of crumpled paper. This he drew forth and smoothed out the creases, when it was seen to be a railway receipt for an excess fare.

"Seems to have lost his ticket or travelled without one," the sergeant remarked. "But not on this line."

"No," agreed Thorndyke. "It is the Tilbury and Southend line. But you notice the date. It is the 18th; and the body was found on the morning of Wednesday, the 19th. So it would appear that he must have come into this neighbourhood in the evening; and that he must have come either by way of London or by a very complicated cross-country route. I wonder what brought him here."

He produced his notebook and was beginning to copy the receipt when the sergeant said: "You had better take the paper, sir. It is of no use to us now, and it isn't very easy to make out."

Thorndyke thanked the officer, and, handing me the paper, asked: "What do you make of it, Jervis?"

I scrutinised the little crumpled scrap and deciphered with difficulty the hurried scrawl, scribbled with a hard, ill-sharpened pencil.

"It seems to read 'Ldn to C.B.' or 'S.B', 'Hlt'—that is some 'Halt,' I presume. But the amount, 4/9, is clear enough, and that will give us a clue if we want one." I returned the paper to Thorndyke, who bestowed it in his pocket-book and then remarked: "I don't see any keys."

"No, sir," replied the sergeant, "there aren't any. Rather queer, that, for he must have had at least a latch key. They must have fallen out into the water."

"That is possible," said Thorndyke, "but it would be worth while to make sure. Is there anyone who could show us the place where the body was found?"

"I will walk up there with you myself, sir, with pleasure," said the sergeant, hastily repacking the envelopes. "It is only a quarter of an hour's walk from here."

"That is very good of you, sergeant," my colleague responded; "and as we seem to have seen everything here, I propose that we start at once. You are not coming with us, Parton?"

"No," the doctor replied. "I have finished with the case and I have got my work to do." He shook hands with us heartily and watched us—with some curiosity, I think—as we set forth in company with the sergeant.

His curiosity did not seem to me to be unjustified. In fact, I shared it. The presence of the police officer precluded discussion, but as we took our way out of the town I found myself speculating curiously on my colleague's proceedings. To me, suicide was written plainly on every detail of the case. Of course, we did not wish to take that view, but what other was possible? Had Thorndyke some alternative theory? Or was he merely, according to his invariable custom, making an impartial survey of everything, no matter how apparently trivial, in the hope of lighting on some new and informative fact?

The temporary absence of the sergeant, who had stopped to speak to a constable on duty, enabled me to put the question: "Is this expedition intended to clear up anything in particular?"

"No," he replied, "excepting the keys, which ought to be found. But you must see for yourself that this is not a straightforward case. That man did not come all this way merely to drown himself in a ditch. I am quite in the dark at present, so there is nothing for it but to examine everything with our own eyes and see if there is anything that has been overlooked that may throw some light on either the motive or the circumstances. It is always desirable to examine the scene of a crime or a tragedy."

Here the return of the sergeant put a stop to the discussion and we proceeded on our way in silence. Already we had passed out of the town, and we now turned out of the main road into a lane or by-road, bordered by meadows and orchards and enclosed by rather high hedgerows.

"This is Ponder's Road," said the sergeant. "It leads to Renham, a couple of miles farther on, where it joins the Aylesbury Road. The cart track is on the left a little way along."

A few minutes later we came to our turning, a narrow and rather muddy lane, the entrance to which was shaded by a grove of tall elms. Passing through this shady avenue, we came out on a grass-covered track, broken by deep wagon-ruts and bordered on each side by a ditch, beyond which was a wide expanse of marshy meadows.

"This is the place," said the sergeant, halting by the side of the right-hand ditch and indicating a spot where the rushes had been flattened down. "It was just as you see it now, only the feet were just visible sticking out of the duck-weed, which had drifted back after Moffet had disturbed it."

We stood awhile looking at the ditch, with its thick mantle of bright green, spotted with innumerable small dark objects and showing here and there a faint track where a water-vole had swum across.

"Those little dark objects are water-snails, I suppose," said I, by way of making some kind of remark.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "the common Amber shell, I think—*Succinea putris*." He reached out his stick and fished up a sample of the duck-weed, on which one or two of the snails were crawling. "Yes," he repeated. "*Succinea putris* it is; a queer little left handed shell, with the spire, as you see, all lop-sided. They have a habit of swarming in this extraordinary way. You notice that the ditch is covered with them."

I had already observed this, but it hardly seemed to be worth commenting on under the present circumstances—which was apparently the sergeant's view also, for he looked at Thorndyke with some surprise, which developed into impatience when my colleague proceeded further to expand on the subject of natural history.

"These water-weeds," he observed, "are very remarkable plants in their various ways. Look at this duck-weed, for instance. Just a little green oval disc with a single root hanging down into the water, like a tiny umbrella with a long handle; and yet it is a complete plant, and a flowering plant, too." He picked a specimen off the end of his stick and held it up by its root to exhibit its umbrella-like form; and as he did so, he looked in my face with an expression that I felt to be

somehow significant; but of which I could not extract the meaning. But there was no difficulty in interpreting the expression on the sergeant's face. He had come here on business and he wanted to "cut the cackle and get to the hosses."

"Well, sergeant," said Thorndyke, "there isn't much to see, but I think we ought to have a look for those keys. He must have had keys of some kind, if only a latchkey; and they must be in this ditch."

The sergeant was not enthusiastic. "I've no doubt you are right, sir," said he; "but I don't see that we should be much forrader if we found them. However, we may as well have a look, only I can't stay more than a few minutes. I've got my work to do at the station."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "let us get to work at once. We had better hook out the weed and look it over; and if the keys are not in that, we must try to expose the bottom where the body was lying. You must tell us if we are working in the right place."

With this he began, with the crooked handle of his stick, to rake up the tangle of weed that covered the bottom of the ditch and drag the detached masses ashore, piling them on the bank and carefully looking them through to see if the keys should chance to be entangled in their meshes. In this work I took my part under the sergeant's direction, raking in load after load of the delicate, stringy weed, on the pale green ribbon-like leaves of which multitudes of the water-snails were creeping; and sorting over each batch in hopeless and fruitless search for the missing keys. In about ten minutes we had removed the entire weedy covering from the bottom of the ditch over an area of from eight to nine feet—the place which, according to the sergeant, the body had occupied; and as the duck-weed had been caught by the tangled masses of water-weed that we had dragged ashore, we now had an uninterrupted view of the cleared space save for the clouds of mud that we had stirred up.

"We must give the mud a few minutes to settle," said Thorndyke.

"Yes," the sergeant agreed, "it will take some time; and as it doesn't really concern me now that the inquest is over, I think I will get back to the station if you will excuse me."

Thorndyke excused him very willingly, I think, though politely and with many thanks for his help. When he had gone I remarked, "I am inclined to agree with the sergeant. If we find the keys we shan't be much forrader."

"We shall know that he had them with him," he replied. "Though, of course, if we don't find them, that will not prove that they are not here. Still, I think we should try to settle the question."

His answer left me quite unconvinced; but the care with which he searched the ditch and sorted out the weed left me in no doubt that, to him, the matter seemed to be of some importance. However, nothing came of the search. If the keys were there they were buried in the mud, and eventually we had to give up the search and make our way back towards the station.

As we passed out of the lane into Ponder's Road, Thorndyke stopped at the entrance, under the trees, by a little triangle of turf which marked the beginning of the lane, and looked down at the muddy ground.

"Here is quite an interesting thing, Jervis," he remarked, "which shows us how standardised objects tend to develop an individual character. These are the tracks of a car, or more probably a tradesman's van, which was fitted with Barlow tyres. Now there must be thousands of vans fitted with these tyres; they are the favourite type for light covered vans, and when new they are all alike and indistinguishable. Yet this tyre—of the off hind wheel—has acquired a character which would enable one to pick it out with certainty from ten thousand others. First, you see, there is a deep cut in the tyre at an angle of forty-five, then a kidney-shaped 'Blakey' has stuck in the outer tyre without puncturing the inner; and finally some adhesive object—perhaps a lump of pitch from a newly-mended road—has become fixed on just behind the 'Blakey.' Now, if we make a rough sketch of those three marks and indicate their distance apart, thus"—here he made a rapid sketch in his notebook, and wrote in the intervals in inches—"we have the means of swearing to the identity of a vehicle which we have never seen."

"And which," I added, "had for some reason swerved over to the wrong side of the road. Yes, I should say that tyre is certainly unique. But surely most tyres are identifiable when they have been in use for some time."

"Exactly," he replied. "That was my point. The standardised thing is devoid of character only when it is new."

It was not a very subtle point, and as it was fairly obvious I made no comment, but presently reverted to the case of Pedley deceased.

"I don't quite see why you are taking all this trouble. The insurance claim is not likely to be contested. No one can prove that it was a case of suicide, though I should think no one will feel any doubt that it was, at least that is my own feeling."

Thorndyke looked at me with an expression of reproach.

"I am afraid that my learned friend has not been making very good use of his eyes," said he. "He has allowed his attention to be distracted by superficial appearances."

"You don't think that it was suicide, then?" I asked, considerably taken aback.

"It isn't a question of thinking," he replied. "It was certainly not suicide. There are the plainest indications of homicide; and, of course, in the particular circumstances, homicide means murder."

I was thunderstruck. In my own mind I had dismissed the case somewhat contemptuously as a mere commonplace

suicide. As my friend had truly said, I had accepted the obvious appearances and let them mislead me, whereas Thorndyke had followed his golden rule of accepting nothing and observing everything. But what was it that he had observed? I knew that it was useless to ask, but still I ventured on a tentative question.

"When did you come to the conclusion that it was a case of homicide?"

"As soon as I had had a good look at the place where the body was found," he replied promptly.

This did not help me much, for I had given very little attention to anything but the search for the keys. The absence of those keys was, of course, a suspicious fact, if it was a fact. But we had not proved their absence; we had only failed to find them.

"What do you propose to do next?" I asked.

"Evidently," he answered, "there are two things to be done. One is to test the murder theory—to look for more evidence for or against it; the other is to identify the murderer, if possible. But really the two problems are one, since they involve the questions Who had a motive for killing Cyrus Pedley? and Who had the opportunity and the means?"

Our discussion brought us to the station, where, outside the hotel, we found Mr. Pedley waiting for us.

"I am glad you have come," said he. "I was beginning to fear that we should lose this train. I suppose there is no new light on this mysterious affair?"

"No," Thorndyke replied. "Rather there is a new problem. No keys were found in your brother's pockets, and we have failed to find them in the ditch; though, of course, they may be there."

"They must be," said Pedley. "They must have fallen out of his pocket and got buried in the mud, unless he lost them previously, which is most unlikely. It is a pity, though. We shall have to break open his cabinets and drawers, which he would have hated. He was very fastidious about his furniture."

"You will have to break into his flat, too," said I.

"No," he replied, "I shan't have to do that. I have a duplicate of his latchkey. He had a spare bedroom which he let me use if I wanted to stay in town." As he spoke, he produced his key-bunch and exhibited a small Chubb latchkey. "I wish we had the others, though," he added.

Here the up-train was heard approaching and we hurried on to the platform, selecting an empty first-class compartment as it drew up. As soon as the train had started, Thorndyke began his inquiries, to which I listened attentively.

"You said that your brother had been anxious and depressed lately. Was there anything more than this? Any nervousness or foreboding?"

"Well yes," replied Pedley. "Looking back, I seem to see that the possibility of death was in his mind. A week or two ago he brought his will to me to see if it was quite satisfactory to me as the principal beneficiary and he handed to me his last receipt for the insurance premium. That looks a little suggestive."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed. "And as to his occupation and his associates, what do you know about them?"

"His private friends are mostly my own, but of his official associates I know nothing. He was connected with the Foreign Office; but in what capacity I don't know at all. He was extremely reticent on the subject. I only know that he travelled about a good deal, presumably on official business."

This was not very illuminating, but it was all our client had to tell; and the conversation languished somewhat until the train drew up at Marylebone, when Thorndyke said, as if by an after-thought: "You have your brother's latchkey. How would it be if we just took a glance at the flat? Have you time now?"

"I will make time," was the reply, "if you want to see the flat. I don't see what you could learn from inspecting it; but that is your affair. I am in your hands."

"I should like to look round the rooms," Thorndyke answered; and as our client assented, we approached a taxi-cab and entered while Pedley gave the driver the necessary directions. A quarter of an hour later we drew up opposite a tall block of buildings, and Mr. Pedley, having paid off the cab, led the way to the lift.

The dead man's flat was on the third floor, and, like the others, was distinguished only by the number on the door. Mr. Pedley inserted the key into the latch, and having opened the door, preceded us across the small lobby into the sitting-room.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, as he entered, "this solves your problem." As he spoke, he pointed to the table, on which lay a small bunch of keys, including a latch key similar to the one that he had shown us. "But," he continued, "it is rather extraordinary. It just shows what a very disturbed state his mind must have been in."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, looking critically about the room; "and as the latchkey is there, it raises the question whether the keys may have been out of his possession. Do you know what the various locked receptacles contain?"

"I know pretty well what is in the bureau; but as to the cupboard above it, I have never seen it open and don't know what he kept in it. I always assumed that he reserved it for his official papers. I will just see if anything seems to have been disturbed."

He unlocked and opened the flap of the old-fashioned bureau and pulled out the small drawers one after the other, examining the contents of each. Then he opened each of the larger drawers and turned over the various articles in them. As he closed the last one, he reported "Everything seems to be in order—cheque-book, insurance policy, a few share certificates, and so on. Nothing seems to have been touched. Now we will try the cupboard, though I don't suppose its contents would be of much interest to anyone but himself. I wonder which is the key."

He looked at the keyhole and made a selection from the bunch, but it was evidently the wrong key. He tried another and yet another with a like result, until he had exhausted the resources of the bunch.

"It is very remarkable," he said. "None of these keys seems to fit. I wonder if he kept this particular key locked up or hidden. It wasn't in the bureau. Will you try what you can do?"

He handed the bunch to Thorndyke, who tried all the keys in succession with the same result. None of them was the key belonging to the lock. At length, having tried them all, he inserted one and turned it as far as it would go. Then he gave a sharp pull; and immediately the door came open.

"Why, it was unlocked after all!" exclaimed Mr. Pedley. "And there is nothing in it. That is why there was no key on the bunch. Apparently he didn't use the cupboard."

Thorndyke looked critically at the single vacant shelf, drawing his finger along it in two places and inspecting his fingertips. Then he turned his attention to the lock, which was of the kind that is screwed on the inside of the door, leaving the bolt partly exposed. He took the bolt in his fingers and pushed it out and then in again; and by the way it moved I could see that the spring was broken. On this he made no comment, but remarked, "The cupboard has been in use pretty lately. You can see the trace of a largish volume—possibly a box-file—on the shelf. There is hardly any dust there whereas the rest of the shelf is fairly thickly coated. However, that does not carry us very far; and the appearance of the rooms is otherwise quite normal."

"Quite," agreed Pedley. "But why shouldn't it be? You didn't suspect—"

"I was merely testing the suggestion offered by the absence of the keys," said Thorndyke. "By the way, have you communicated with the Foreign Office?"

"No," was the reply, "but I suppose I ought to. What had I better say to them?"

"I should merely state the facts in the first instance. But you can, if you like, say that I definitely reject the idea of suicide."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Pedley. "Can I give any reasons for your opinion?"

"Not in the first place," replied Thorndyke. "I will consider the case and let you have a reasoned report in a day or two, which you can show to the Foreign Office and also to the insurance company."

Mr. Pedley looked as if he would have liked to ask some further questions, but as Thorndyke now made his way to the door, he followed in silence, pocketing the keys as we went out. He accompanied us down to the entry and there we left him, setting forth in the direction of South Kensington Station.

"It looked to me," said I, as soon as we were out of ear-shot, "as if that lock had been forced. What do you think?"

"Well," he answered, "locks get broken in ordinary use, but taking all the facts together, I think you are right. There are too many coincidences for reasonable probability. First, this man leaves his keys, including his latchkey, on the table, which is an extraordinary thing to do. On that very occasion, he is found dead under inexplicable circumstances. Then, of all the locks in his rooms, the one which happens to be broken is the one of which the key is not on the bunch. That is a very suspicious group of facts."

"It is," I agreed. "And if there is, as you say—though I can't imagine on what grounds—evidence of foul play, that makes it still more suspicious. But what is the next move? Have you anything in view?"

"The next move," he replied, "is to clear up the mystery of the dead man's movements on the day of his death. The railway receipt shows that on that day he travelled down somewhere into Essex. From that place, he took a long, cross-country journey of which the destination was a ditch by a lonely meadow in Buckinghamshire. The questions that we have to answer are, What was he doing in Essex? Why did he make that strange journey? Did he make it alone? and, if not, Who accompanied him?"

"Now, obviously, the first thing to do is to locate that place in Essex; and when we have done that, to go down there and see if we can pick up any traces of the dead man."

"That sounds like a pretty vague quest," said I; "but if we fail, the police may be able to find out something. By the way, we want a new Bradshaw."

"An excellent suggestion, Jervis," said he. "I will get one as we go into the station."

A few minutes later, as we sat on a bench waiting for our train, he passed to me the open copy of Bradshaw, with the crumpled railway receipt.

"You see," said he, "it was apparently 'G.B.Hlt.,' and the fare from London was four and ninepence. Here is Great Buntingfield Halt, the fare to which is four and ninepence. That must be the place. At any rate, we will give it a trial. May I

take it that you are coming to lend a hand? I shall start in good time to-morrow morning."

I assented emphatically. Never had I been more completely in the dark than I was in this case, and seldom had I known Thorndyke to be more positive and confident. Obviously, he had something up his sleeve; and I was racked with curiosity as to what that something was.

On the following morning we made a fairly early start, and half-past ten found us seated in the train, looking out across a dreary waste of marshes, with the estuary of the Thames a mile or so distant. For the first time in my recollection Thorndyke had come unprovided with his inevitable "research case," but I noted that he had furnished himself with a botanist's vasculum—or tin collecting-case—and that his pocket bulged as if he had some other appliances concealed about his person. Also that he carried a walking-stick that was strange to me.

"This will be our destination, I think," he said, as the train slowed down; and sure enough it presently came to rest beside a little makeshift platform on which was displayed the name "Great Buntingfield Halt." We were the only passengers to alight, and the guard, having noted the fact, blew his whistle and dismissed the little station with a contemptuous wave of his flag.

Thorndyke lingered on the platform after the train had gone, taking a general survey of the country. Half a mile away to the north a small village was visible; while to the south the marshes stretched away to the river, their bare expanse unbroken save by a solitary building whose unredeemed hideousness proclaimed it a factory of some kind. Presently the station-master approached deferentially, and as we proffered our tickets, Thorndyke remarked: "You don't seem overburdened with traffic here."

"No, sir. You're right," was the emphatic reply. "'Tis a dead-alive place. Excepting the people at the Golomite Works and one now and then from the village, no one uses the halt. You're the first strangers I've seen for more than a month."

"Indeed," said Thorndyke. "But I think you are forgetting one. An acquaintance of mine came here last Tuesday—and by the same token, he hadn't got a ticket and had to pay his fare."

"Oh, I remember," the station-master replied. "You mean a gentleman with a scar on his cheek. But I don't count him as a stranger. He has been here before; I think he is connected with the works, as he always goes up their road."

"Do you happen to remember what time he came back?" Thorndyke asked.

"He didn't come back at all," was the reply. "I am sure of that, because I work the halt and level crossing by myself. I remember thinking it queer that he didn't come back, because the ticket that he had lost was a return. He must have gone back in the van belonging to the works—that one that you see coming towards the crossing."

As he spoke, he pointed to a van that was approaching down the factory road—a small covered van with the name "Golomite Works" painted, not on the cover, but on a board that was attached to it. The station-master walked towards the crossing to open the gates, and we followed; and when the van had passed, Thorndyke wished our friend "Good morning," and led the way along the road, looking about him with lively interest and rather with the air of one looking for something in particular.

We had covered about two-thirds of the distance to the factory when the road approached a wide ditch; and from the attention with which my friend regarded it, I suspected that this was the something for which he had been looking. It was, however, quite unapproachable, for it was bordered by a wide expanse of soft mud thickly covered with rushes and trodden deeply by cattle. Nevertheless, Thorndyke followed its margin, still looking about him keenly, until, about a couple of hundred yards from the factory, I observed a small decayed wooden staging or quay, apparently the remains of a vanished footbridge. Here Thorndyke halted and unbuttoning his coat, began to empty out his pockets, producing first the vasculum, then a small case containing three wide-mouthed bottles—both of which he deposited on the ground—and finally a sort of miniature landing-net, which he proceeded to screw on to the ferrule of his stick.

"I take it," said I, "that these proceedings are a blind to cover some sort of observations."

"Not at all," he replied. "We are engaged in the study of pond and ditch natural history, and a most fascinating and instructive study it is. The variety of forms is endless. This ditch, you observe, like the one at Bantree, is covered with a dense growth of duck-weed: but whereas that ditch was swarming with succinea here there is not a single succinea to be seen."

I grunted a sulky assent, and watched suspiciously as he filled the bottles with water from the ditch and then made a preliminary sweep with his net.

"Here is a trial sample," said he, holding the loaded net towards me. "Duck-weed, horn-weed, *Planorbis nautilius*, but no succinea. What do you think of it, Jervis?"

I looked distastefully at the repulsive mess, but yet with attention, for I realised that there was a meaning in his question. And then, suddenly, my attention sharpened. I picked out of the net a strand of dark green, plummy weed and examined it. "So this is horn-weed," I said. "Then it was a piece of horn-weed that Cyrus Pedley held grasped in his hand; and now I come to think of it, I don't remember seeing any horn-weed in the ditch at Bantree."

He nodded approvingly. "There wasn't any," said he.

"And these little ammonite-like shells are just like those that I noticed at the bottom of Dr. Parton's jar. But I don't

remember seeing any in the Bantree ditch."

"There were none there," said he. "And the duck-weed?"

"Oh, well," I replied, "duck-weed is duck-weed, and there's an end of it."

He chuckled aloud at my answer, and quoting: "A primrose by the river's brim A yellow primrose was to him," bestowed a part of the catch in the vasculum, then turned once more to the ditch and began to ply his net vigorously, emptying out each netful on the grass, looking it over quickly and then making a fresh sweep, dragging the net each time through the mud at the bottom. I watched him now with a new and very lively interest; for enlightenment was dawning, mingled with some self-contempt and much speculation as to how Thorndyke had got his start in this case.

But I was not the only interested watcher. At one of the windows of the factory I presently observed a man who seemed to be looking our way. After a few seconds' inspection he disappeared, to reappear almost immediately with a pair of field-glasses, through which he took a long look at us. Then he disappeared again, but in less than a minute I saw him emerge from a side door and advance hurriedly towards us.

"We are going to have a notice of ejectment served on us, I fancy," said I.

Thorndyke glanced quickly at the approaching stranger but continued to ply his net, working, as I noticed, methodically from left to right. When the man came within fifty yards he hailed us with a brusque inquiry as to what our business was. I went forward to meet him and, if possible, to detain him in conversation; but this plan failed, for he ignored me and bore straight down on Thorndyke.

"Now, then," said he, "what's the game? What are you doing here?"

Thorndyke was in the act of raising his net from the water, but he now suddenly let it fall to the bottom of the ditch while he turned to confront the stranger.

"I take it that you have some reason for asking," said he.

"Yes, I have," the other replied angrily and with a slight foreign accent that agreed with his appearance—he looked like a Slav of some sort. "This is private land. It belongs to the factory. I am the manager."

"The land is not enclosed," Thorndyke remarked.

"I tell you the land is private land," the fellow retorted excitedly. "You have no business here. I want to know what you are doing."

"My good sir," said Thorndyke, "there is no need to excite yourself. My friend and I are just collecting botanical and other specimens."

"How do I know that?" the manager demanded. He looked round suspiciously and his eye lighted on the vasculum. "What have you got in that thing?" he asked.

"Let him see what is in it," said Thorndyke, with a significant look at me.

Interpreting this as an instruction to occupy the man's attention for a few moments, I picked up the vasculum and placed myself so that he must turn his back to Thorndyke to look into it. I fumbled awhile with the catch, but at length opened the case and began to pick out the weed strand by strand. As soon as the stranger's back was turned Thorndyke raised his net and quickly picked out of it something which he slipped into his pocket. Then he advanced towards us, sorting out the contents of his net as he came.

"Well," he said, "you see we are just harmless naturalists. By the way, what did you think we were looking for?"

"Never mind what I thought," the other replied fiercely. "This is private land. You have no business here, and you have got to clear out."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "As you please. There are plenty of other ditches." He took the vasculum and the case of bottles, and having put them in his pocket, unscrewed his net, wished the stranger "Good-morning," and turned back towards the station. The man stood watching us until we were near the level crossing, when he, too, turned back and retired to the factory.

"I saw you take something out of the net," said I. "What was it?"

He glanced back to make sure that the manager was out of sight. Then he put his hand in his pocket, drew it out closed, and suddenly opened it. In his palm lay a small gold dental plate with four teeth on it.

"My word!" I exclaimed; "this clenches the matter with a vengeance. That is certainly Cyrus Pedley's plate. It corresponds exactly to the description."

"Yes," he replied, "it is practically a certainty. Of course, it will have to be identified by the dentist who made it. But it is a foregone conclusion."

I reflected as we walked towards the station on the singular sureness with which Thorndyke had followed what was to me an invisible trail. Presently I said, "What is puzzling me is how you got your start in this case. What gave you the first hint that it was homicide and not suicide or misadventure?"



"It was the old story, Jervis," he replied; "just a matter of observing and remembering apparently trivial details. Here, by the way, is a case in point."

He stopped and looked down at a set of tracks in the soft, earth road—apparently those of the van which we had seen cross the line. I followed the direction of his glance and saw the clear impression of a Blakey's protector, preceded by that of a gash in the tyre and followed by that of a projecting lump.

"But this is astounding!" I exclaimed. "It is almost certainly the same track that we saw in Ponder's Road."

"Yes," he agreed. "I noticed it as we came along." He brought out his spring-tape and notebook, and handing the latter to me, stooped and measured the distances between the three impressions. I wrote them down as he called them out, and then we compared them with the note made in Ponder's Road. The measurements were identical, as were the relative positions of the impressions.

"This is an important piece of evidence," said he. "I wish we were able to take casts, but the notes will be pretty conclusive. And now," he continued as we resumed our progress towards the station, "to return to your question. Parton's evidence at the inquest proved that Cyrus Pedley was drowned in water which contained duck-weed. He produced a specimen and we both saw it. We saw the duck-weed in it and also two *Planorbis* shells. The presence of those two shells proved that the water in which he was drowned must have swarmed with them. We saw the body, and observed that one hand grasped a wisp of horn-weed. Then we went to view the ditch and we examined it. That was when I got, not a mere hint, but a crucial and conclusive fact. The ditch was covered with duck-weed, as we expected. But it was the wrong duck-weed."

"The wrong duck-weed!" I exclaimed. "Why, how many kinds of duck-weed are there?"

"There are four British species," he replied. "The Greater Duck-weed, the Lesser Duck-weed, the Thick Duck-weed, and the Ivy-leaved Duckweed. Now the specimens in Parton's jar I noticed were the Greater Duck-weed, which is easily distinguished by its roots, which are multiple and form a sort of tassel. But the duck-weed on the Bantree ditch was the Lesser Duck weed, which is smaller than the other, but is especially distinguished by having only a single root. It is impossible to mistake one for the other.

"Here, then, was practically conclusive evidence of murder. Cyrus Pedley had been drowned in a pond or ditch. But not in the ditch in which his body was found. Therefore his dead body had been conveyed from some other place and put into this ditch. Such a proceeding furnishes *prima facie* evidence of murder. But as soon as the question was raised, there was an abundance of confirmatory evidence. There was no horn-weed or *Planorbis* shells in the ditch, but there were swarms of succinea, some of which would inevitably have been swallowed with the water. There was an obscure linear pressure mark on the arm of the dead man, just above the elbow: such a mark as might be made by a cord if a man were pinioned to render him helpless. Then the body would have had to be conveyed to this place in some kind of vehicle; and we found the traces of what appeared to be a motor-van, which had approached the cart-track on the wrong side of the road, as if to pull up there. It was a very conclusive mass of evidence; but it would have been useless but for the extraordinarily lucky chance that poor Pedley had lost his railway ticket and preserved the receipt; by which we were able to ascertain where he was on the day of his death and in what locality the murder was probably committed. But that is not the only way in which Fortune has favoured us. The station-master's information was, and will be, invaluable. Then it was most fortunate for us that there was only one ditch on the factory land; and that that ditch was accessible at only one point, which must have been the place where Pedley was drowned."

"The duck-weed in this ditch is, of course, the Greater Duck-weed?"

"Yes. I have taken some specimens as well as the horn-weed and shells."

He opened the vasculum and picked out one of the tiny plants, exhibiting the characteristic tassel of roots.

"I shall write to Parton and tell him to preserve the jar and the horn-weed if it has not been thrown away. But the duck-weed alone, produced in evidence, would be proof enough that Pedley was not drowned in the Bantree ditch; and the dental plate will show where he was drowned."

"Are you going to pursue the case any farther?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "I shall call at Scotland Yard on my way home and report what I have learned and what I can prove in court. Then I shall have finished with the case. The rest is for the police, and I imagine they won't have much difficulty. The circumstances seem to tell their own story. Pedley was employed by the Foreign Office, probably on some kind of secret service. I imagine that he discovered the existence of a gang of evil-doers—probably foreign revolutionaries, of whom we may assume that our friend the manager of the factory is one; that he contrived to associate himself with them and to visit the factory occasionally to ascertain what was made there besides Golomite—if Golomite is not itself an illicit product. Then I assume that he was discovered to be a spy, that he was lured down here; that he was pinioned and drowned some time on Tuesday night and his body put into the van and conveyed to a place miles away from the scene of his death, where it was deposited in a ditch apparently identical in character with that in which he was drowned. It was an extremely ingenious and well-thought-out plan. It seemed to have provided for every kind of inquiry, and it very narrowly missed being successful."

"Yes," I agreed. "But it didn't provide for Dr. John Thorndyke."

"It didn't provide for a searching examination of all the details," he replied; "and no criminal plan that I have ever met

has done so. The completeness of the scheme is limited by the knowledge of the schemers, and, in practice, there is always something overlooked. In this case, the criminals were unlearned in the natural history of ditches.”

Thorndyke’s theory of the crime turned out to be substantially correct. The Golomite Works proved to be a factory where high explosives were made by a gang of cosmopolitan revolutionaries who were all known to the police. But the work of the latter was simplified by a detailed report which the dead man had deposited at his bank and which was discovered in time to enable the police to raid the factory and secure the whole gang. When once they were under lock and key, further information was forthcoming; for a charge of murder against them jointly soon produced King’s Evidence sufficient to procure a conviction of the three actual perpetrators of the murder.

---

## MR. PONTING'S ALIBI

THORNDYKE looked doubtfully at the pleasant-faced athletic-looking clergyman who had just come in, bearing Mr. Brodribb's card as an explanatory credential.

"I don't quite see," said he, "why Mr. Brodribb sent you to me. It seems to be a purely legal matter which he could have dealt with himself, at least as well as I can."

"He appeared to think otherwise," said the clergyman. ("The Revd. Charles Meade" was written on the card.)

"At any rate," he added with a persuasive smile, "here I am, and I hope you are not going to send me away."

"I shouldn't offer that affront to my old friend Brodribb," replied Thorndyke, smiling in return; "so we may as well get to business, which, in the first place, involves the setting out of all the particulars. Let us begin with the lady who is the subject of the threats of which you spoke."

"Her name," said Mr. Meade, "is Miss Millicent Fawcett. She is a person of independent means, which she employs in works of charity. She was formerly a hospital sister, and she does a certain amount of voluntary work in the parish as a sort of district nurse. She has been a very valuable help to me and we have been close friends for several years; and I may add, as a very material fact, that she has consented to marry me in about two months' time. So that, you see, I am properly entitled to act on her behalf."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke. "You are an interested party. And now, as to the threats. What do they amount to?"

"That," replied Meade, "I can't tell you. I gathered quite by chance, from some words that she dropped, that she had been threatened. But she was unwilling to say more on the subject, as she did not take the matter seriously. She is not at all nervous. However, I told her I was taking advice; and I hope you will be able to extract more details from her. For my own part, I am decidedly uneasy."

"And as to the person or persons who have uttered the threats. Who are they? and out of what circumstances have the threats arisen?"

"The person is a certain William Ponting, who is Miss Fawcett's step-brother—if that is the right term. Her father married, as his second wife, a Mrs. Ponting, a widow with one son. This is the son. His mother died before Mr. Fawcett, and the latter, when he died, left his daughter, Millicent, sole heir to his property. That has always been a grievance to Ponting. But now he has another. Miss Fawcett made a will some years ago by which the bulk of her rather considerable property is left to two cousins, Frederick and James Barnett, the sons of her father's sister. A comparatively small amount goes to Ponting. When he heard this he was furious. He demanded a portion at least equal to the others, and has continued to make this demand from time to time. In fact, he has been extremely troublesome, and appears to be getting still more so. I gathered that the threats were due to her refusal to alter the will."

"But," said I, "doesn't he realise that her marriage will render that will null and void?"

"Apparently not," replied Meade; "nor, to tell the truth, did I realise it myself. Will she have to make a new will?"

"Certainly," I replied. "And as that new will may be expected to be still less favourable to him, that will presumably be a further grievance."

"One doesn't understand," said Thorndyke, "why he should excite himself so much about her will. What are their respective ages?"

"Miss Fawcett is thirty-six and Ponting is about forty."

"And what kind of man is he?" Thorndyke asked.

"A very unpleasant kind of man, I am sorry to say. Morose, rude, and violent-tempered. A spendthrift and a cadger. He has had quite a lot of money from Miss Fawcett—loans, which, of course, are never repaid. And he is none too industrious, though he has a regular job on the staff of a weekly paper. But he seems to be always in debt."

"We may as well note his address," said Thorndyke.

"He lives in a small flat in Bloomsbury—alone now, since he quarrelled with the man who used to share it with him. The address is 12 Borneo House, Devonshire Street."

"What sort of terms is he on with the cousins, his rivals?"

"No sort of terms now," replied Meade. "They used to be great friends. So much so that he took his present flat to be near them—they live in the adjoining flat, number 12 Sumatra House. But since the trouble about the wills he is hardly on speaking terms with them."

"They live together, then?"

"Yes, Frederick and his wife and James, who is unmarried. They are rather a queer lot, too. Frederick is a singer on the variety stage, and James accompanies him on various instruments. But they are both sporting characters of a kind, especially James, who does a bit on the turf and engages in other odd activities. Of course, their musical habits are a grievance to Ponting. He is constantly making complaints of their disturbing him at his work."

Mr. Meade paused and looked wistfully at Thorndyke, who was making full notes of the conversation.

"Well," said the latter, "we seem to have got all the facts excepting the most important—the nature of the threats. What do you want us to do?"

"I want you to see Miss Fawcett—with me, if possible—and induce her to give you such details as would enable you to put a stop to the nuisance. You couldn't come to-night, I suppose? It is a beast of a night, but I would take you there in a taxi—it is only to Tooting Bec. What do you say?" he added eagerly, as Thorndyke made no objection. "We are sure to find her in, because her maid is away on a visit to her home and she is alone in the house."

Thorndyke looked reflectively at his watch.

"Half-past eight," he remarked, "and half an hour to get there. These threats are probably nothing but ill-temper. But we don't know. There may be something more serious behind them; and, in law as in medicine, prevention is better than a post-mortem. What do you say, Jervis?"

What could I say? I would much sooner have sat by the fire with a book than turn out into the murk of a November night. But I felt it necessary, especially as Thorndyke had evidently made up his mind. Accordingly I made a virtue of necessity; and a couple of minutes later we had exchanged the cosy room for the chilly darkness of Inner Temple Lane, up which the gratified parson was speeding ahead to capture a taxi. At the top of the Lane we perceived him giving elaborate instructions to a taxi-driver as he held the door of the cab open; and Thorndyke, having carefully disposed of his research-case—which, to my secret amusement, he had caught up, from mere force of habit, as we started—took his seat, and Meade and I followed.

As the taxi trundled smoothly along the dark streets, Mr. Meade filled in the details of his previous sketch, and, in a simple, manly, unaffected way dilated upon his good fortune and the pleasant future that lay before him. It was not, perhaps, a romantic marriage, he admitted; but Miss Fawcett and he had been faithful friends for years, and faithful friends they would remain till death did them part. So he ran on, now gleefully, now with a note of anxiety, and we listened by no means unsympathetically, until at last the cab drew up at a small, unpretentious house, standing in its own little grounds in a quiet suburban road.

"She is at home, you see," observed Meade, pointing to a lighted ground-floor window. He directed the taxi-driver to wait for the return journey, and striding up the path, delivered a characteristic knock at the door. As this brought no response, he knocked again and rang the bell. But still there was no answer, though twice I thought I heard the sound of a bolt being either drawn or shot softly. Again Mr. Meade plied the knocker more vigorously, and pressed the push of the bell, which we could hear ringing loudly within.

"This is very strange," said Meade, in an anxious tone, keeping his thumb pressed on the bell-push. "She can't have gone out and left the electric light on. What had we better do?"

"We had better enter without more delay," Thorndyke replied. "There were certainly sounds from within. Is there a side gate?"

Meade ran off towards the side of the house, and Thorndyke and I glanced at the lighted window, which was slightly open at the top.

"Looks a bit queer," I remarked, listening at the letter-box.

Thorndyke assented gravely, and at this moment Meade returned, breathing hard.

"The side gate is bolted inside," said he; and at this I recalled the stealthy sound of the bolt that I had heard. "What is to be done?"

Without replying, Thorndyke handed me his research-case, stepped across to the window, sprang up on the sill, drew down the upper sash and disappeared between the curtains into the room. A moment later the street door opened and Meade and I entered the hall. We glanced through the open doorway into the lighted room, and I noticed a heap of needlework thrown hastily on the dining-table. Then Meade switched on the hall light, and Thorndyke walked quickly past him to the half-open door of the next room. Before entering, he reached in and switched on the light; and as he stepped into the room he partly closed the door behind him.

"Don't come in here, Meade!" he called out. But the parson's eye, like my own, had seen something before the door closed: a great, dark stain on the carpet just within the threshold. Regardless of the admonition, he pushed the door open and darted into the room. Following him, I saw him rush forward, fling his arms up wildly, and with a dreadful, strangled cry, sink upon his knees beside a low couch on which a woman was lying.

"Merciful God!" he gasped. "She is dead! Is she dead, doctor? Can nothing be done?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "Nothing," he said in a low voice. "She is dead."

Poor Meade knelt by the couch, his hands clutching at his hair and his eyes riveted on the dead face, the very embodiment of horror and despair.

"God Almighty!" he exclaimed in the same strangled undertone. "How frightful! Poor, poor Millie! Dear, sweet friend!" Then suddenly—almost savagely—he turned to Thorndyke. "But it can't be, doctor! It is impossible—unbelievable. That, I mean!" and he pointed to the dead woman's right hand, which held an open razor.

Our poor friend had spoken my own thought. It was incredible that this refined, pious lady should have inflicted those savage wounds, that gaped scarlet beneath the waxen face. There, indeed, was the razor lying in her hand. But what was its testimony worth? My heart rejected it; but yet, unwillingly, I noted that the wounds seemed to support it; for they had been made from left to right, as they would have been if self-inflicted.

"It is hard to believe," said Thorndyke, "but there is only one alternative. Someone should acquaint the police at once."

"I will go," exclaimed Meade, starting up. "I know the way and the cab is there." He looked once more with infinite pity and affection at the dead woman. "Poor, sweet girl!" he murmured. "If we can do no more for you, we can defend your memory from calumny and call upon the God of Justice to right the innocent and punish the guilty."

With these words and a mute farewell to his dead friend, he hurried from the room, and immediately afterwards we heard the street door close.

As he went out, Thorndyke's manner changed abruptly. He had been deeply moved—as who would not have been—by this awful tragedy that had in a moment shattered the happiness of the genial, kindly parson. Now he turned to me with a face set and stern. "This is an abominable affair, Jervis," he said in an ominously quiet voice.

"You reject the suggestion of suicide, then?" said I, with a feeling of relief that surprised me.

"Absolutely," he replied. "Murder shouts at us from everything that meets our eye. Look at this poor woman, in her trim nurse's dress, with her unfinished needlework lying on the table in the next room and that preposterous razor loose in her limp hand. Look at the savage wounds. Four of them, and the first one mortal. The great bloodstain by the door, the great bloodstain on her dress from the neck to the feet. The gashed collar, the cap-string cut right through. Note that the bleeding had practically ceased when she lay down. That is a group of visible facts that is utterly inconsistent with the idea of suicide. But we are wasting time. Let us search the premises thoroughly. The murderer has pretty certainly got away, but as he was in the house when we arrived, any traces will be quite fresh."

As he spoke he took his electric lamp from the research-case and walked to the door.

"We can examine this room later," he said, "but we had better look over the house. If you will stay by the stairs and watch the front and back doors, I will look through the upper rooms."

He ran lightly up the stairs while I kept watch below, but he was absent less than a couple of minutes.

"There is no one there," he reported, "and as there is no basement we will just look at this floor and then examine the grounds."

After a rapid inspection of the ground-floor rooms, including the kitchen, we went out by the back door, which was unbolted, and inspected the grounds. These consisted of a largish garden with a small orchard at the side. In the former we could discover no traces of any kind, but at the end of the path that crossed the orchard we came on a possible clue. The orchard was enclosed by a five-foot fence, the top of which bristled with hooked nails; and at the point opposite to the path, Thorndyke's lantern brought into view one or two wisps of cloth caught on the hooks.

"Someone has been over here," said Thorndyke, "but as this is an orchard, there is nothing remarkable in the fact. However, there is no fruit on the trees now, and the cloth looks fairly fresh. There are two kinds, you notice: a dark blue and a black and white mixture of some kind."

"Corresponding, probably, to the coat and trousers," I suggested.

"Possibly," he agreed, taking from his pocket a couple of the little seed-envelopes of which he always carried a supply. Very delicately he picked the tiny wisps of cloth from the hooks and bestowed each kind in a separate envelope. Having pocketed these, he leaned over the fence and threw the light of his lamp along the narrow lane or alley that divided the orchard from the adjoining premises. It was ungravelled and covered with a growth of rank grass, which suggested that it was little frequented. But immediately below was a small patch of bare earth, and on this was a very distinct impression of a foot, covering several less distinct prints.

"Several people have been over here at different times," I remarked.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "But that sharp footprint belongs to the last one over, and he is our concern. We had better not confuse the issues by getting over ourselves. We will mark the spot and explore from the other end." He laid his handkerchief over the top of the fence and we then went back to the house.

"You are going to take a plaster cast, I suppose?" said I; and as he assented, I fetched the research-case from the drawing-room. Then we fixed the catch of the front-door latch and went out, drawing the door to after us.

We found the entrance to the alley about sixty yards from the gate, and entering it, walked slowly forwards, scanning the ground as we went. But the bright lamplight showed nothing more than the vague marks of trampling feet on the grass until we came to the spot marked by the handkerchief on the fence.

"It is a pity," I remarked, "that this footprint has obliterated the others."

"On the other hand," he replied, "this one, which is the one that interests us, is remarkably clear and characteristic: a circular heel and a rubber sole of a recognisable pattern mended with a patch of cement paste. It is a footprint that could be identified beyond a doubt."

As he was speaking, he took from the research-case the water-bottle, plaster-tin, rubber mixing-bowl and spoon, and a piece of canvas with which to "reinforce" the cast. Rapidly, he mixed a bowlful—extra thick, so that it should set quickly and hard—dipped the canvas into it, poured the remainder into the footprint, and laid the canvas on it.

"I will get you to stay here, Jervis," said he, "until the plaster has set. I want to examine the body rather more thoroughly before the police arrive, particularly the back."

"Why the back?" I asked.

"Did not the appearance of the body suggest to you the advisability of examining the back?" he asked, and then, without waiting for a reply, he went off, leaving the inspection-lamp with me.

His words gave me matter for profound thought during my short vigil. I recalled the appearance of the dead woman very vividly—indeed, I am not likely ever to forget it—and I strove to connect that appearance with his desire to examine the back of the corpse. But there seemed to be no connection at all. The visible injuries were in front, and I had seen nothing to suggest the existence of any others. From time to time I tested the condition of the plaster, impatient to rejoin my colleague but fearful of cracking the thin cast by raising it prematurely. At length the plaster seemed to be hard enough, and trusting to the strength of the canvas, I prised cautiously at the edge, when, to my relief, the brittle plate came up safely and I lifted it clear. Wrapping it carefully in some spare rag, I packed it in the research-case, and then, taking this and the lantern, made my way back to the house.

When I had let down the catch and closed the front door, I went to the drawing-room, where I found Thorndyke stooping over the dark stain at the threshold and scanning the floor as if in search of something. I reported the completion of the cast and then asked him what he was looking for.

"I am looking for a button," he replied. "There is one missing from the back; the one to which the collar was fastened."

"Is it of any importance?" I asked.

"It is important to ascertain when and where it became detached," he replied. "Let us have the inspection-lamp."

I gave him the lamp, which he placed on the floor, turning it so that its beam of light travelled along the surface. Stooping to follow the light, I scrutinised the floor minutely but in vain.

"It may not be here at all," said I; but at that moment the bright gleam, penetrating the darkness under a cabinet, struck a small object close to the wall. In a moment I had thrown myself prone on the carpet, and reaching under the cabinet, brought forth a largish mother-of-pearl button.

"You notice," said Thorndyke, as he examined it, "that the cabinet is near the window, at the opposite end of the room to the couch. But we had better see that it is the right button."

He walked slowly towards the couch, still stooping and searching the floor with the light. The corpse, I noticed, had been turned on its side, exposing the back and the displaced collar. Through the strained button-hole of the latter Thorndyke passed the button without difficulty.

"Yes," he said, "that is where it came from. You will notice that there is a similar one in front. By the way," he continued, bringing the lamp close to the surface of the grey serge dress, "I picked off one or two hairs—animal hairs; cat and dog they looked like. Here are one or two more. Will you hold the lamp while I take them off?"

"They are probably from some pets of hers," I remarked, as he picked them off with his forceps and deposited them in one of the invaluable seed-envelopes. "Spinsters are a good deal addicted to pets, especially cats and dogs."

"Possibly," he replied. "But I could see none in front, where you would expect to find them, and there seem to be none on the carpet. Now let us replace the body as we found it and just have a look at our material before the police arrive. I expected them here before this."

We turned the body back into its original position, and taking the research-case and the lamp, went into the dining-room. Here Thorndyke rapidly set up the little travelling microscope, and bringing forth the seed-envelopes, began to prepare slides from the contents of some while I prepared the others. There was time only for a very hasty examination, which Thorndyke made as soon as the specimens were mounted.

"The clothing," he reported, with his eye at the microscope, "is woollen in both cases. Fairly good quality. The one a blue serge, apparently indigo dyed; the other a mixture of black and white, no other colour. Probably a fine tabby or a small shepherd's plaid."

"Serge coat and shepherd's plaid trousers," I suggested. "Now see what the hairs are." I handed him the slide, on which I had roughly mounted the collection in oil of lavender, and he placed it on the stage.

"There are three different kinds of hairs here," he reported, after a rapid inspection. "Some are obviously from a cat—a smoky Persian. Others are long, rather fine tawny hairs from a dog. Probably a Pekinese. But there are two that I can't quite place. They look like monkey's hairs, but they are a very unusual colour. There is a perceptible greenish tint, which is extremely uncommon in mammalian hairs. But I hear the taxi approaching. We need not be expansive to the local police as to what we have observed. This will probably be a case for the C.I.D."

I went out into the hall and opened the door as Meade came up the path, followed by two men; and as the latter came

into the light, I was astonished to recognise in one of them our old friend, Detective-Superintendent Miller, the other being, apparently, the station superintendent.

"We have kept Mr. Meade a long time," said Miller, "but we knew you were here, so the time wouldn't be wasted. Thought it best to get a full statement before we inspected the premises. How do, doctor?" he added, shaking hands with Thorndyke. "Glad to see you here. I suppose you have got all the facts. I understood so from Mr. Meade."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "we have all the antecedents of the case, and we arrived within a few minutes of the death of the deceased."

"Ha!" exclaimed Miller. "Did you? And I expect you have formed an opinion on the question as to whether the injuries were self-inflicted?"

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that it would be best to act on the assumption that they were not—and to act promptly."

"Precisely," Miller agreed emphatically. "You mean that we had better find out at once where a certain person was at—What time did you arrive here?"

"It was two minutes to nine when the taxi stopped," replied Thorndyke; "and, as it is now only twenty-five minutes to ten, we have good time if Mr. Meade can spare us the taxi. I have the address."

"The taxi is waiting for you," said Mr. Meade, "and the man has been paid for both journeys. I shall stay here in case the superintendent wants anything." He shook our hands warmly, and as we bade him farewell and noted the dazed, despairing expression and lines of grief that had already eaten into the face that had been so blithe and hopeful, we both thought bitterly of the few fatal minutes that had made us too late to save the wreck of his life.

We were just turning away when Thorndyke paused and again faced the clergyman. "Can you tell me," he asked, "whether Miss Fawcett had any pets? Cats, dogs, or other animals?"

Meade looked at him in surprise, and Superintendent Miller seemed to prick up his ears. But the former answered simply: "No. She was not very fond of animals; she reserved her affections for men and women."

Thorndyke nodded gravely, and picking up the research-case walked slowly out of the room, Miller and I following.

As soon as the address had been given to the driver and we had taken our seats in the taxi, the superintendent opened the examination-in-chief.

"I see you have got your box of magic with you, doctor," he said, cocking his eye at the research-case. "Any luck?"

"We have secured a very distinctive footprint," replied Thorndyke, "but it may have no connection with the case."

"I hope it has," said Miller. "A good cast of a footprint which you can let the jury compare with the boot is first-class evidence." He took the cast, which I had produced from the research-case, and turning it over tenderly and gloatingly, exclaimed: "Beautiful! beautiful! Absolutely distinctive! There can't be another exactly like it in the world. It is as good as a fingerprint. For the Lord's sake take care of it. It means a conviction if we can find the boot."

The superintendent's efforts to engage Thorndyke in discussion were not very successful, and the conversational brunt was borne by me. For we both knew my colleague too well to interrupt him if he was disposed to be meditative. And such was now his disposition. Looking at him as he sat in his corner, silent but obviously wrapped in thought, I knew that he was mentally sorting out the data and testing the hypotheses that they yielded.

"Here we are," said Miller, opening the door as the taxi stopped. "Now what are we going to say? Shall I tell him who I am?"

"I expect you will have to," replied Thorndyke, "if you want him to let us in."

"Very well," said Miller. "But I shall let you do the talking, because I don't know what you have got up your sleeve."

Thorndyke's prediction was verified literally. In response to the third knock, with an obligato accompaniment on the bell, wrathful footsteps—I had no idea footsteps could be so expressive—advanced rapidly along the lobby, the door was wrenched open—but only for a few inches—and an angry, hairy face appeared in the opening.

"Now then," the hairy person demanded, "what the deuce do you want?"

"Are you Mr. William Pouting?" the superintendent inquired.

"What the devil is that to do with you?" was the genial answer—in the Scottish mode.

"We have business," Miller began persuasively.

"So have I," the presumable Pouting replied, "and mine won't wait."

"But our business is very important," Miller urged.

"So is mine," snapped Pouting, and would have shut the door but for Miller's obstructing foot, at which he kicked viciously, but with unsatisfactory results, as he was shod in light slippers, whereas the superintendent's boots were of constabulary solidity.

"Now, look here," said Miller, dropping his conciliatory manner very completely, "you'd better stop this nonsense. I am a police officer, and I am going to come in;" and with this he inserted a massive shoulder and pushed the door open.

"Police officer, are you?" said Ponting. "And what might your business be with me?"

"That is what I have been waiting to tell you," said Miller. "But we don't want to do our talking here."

"Very well," growled Panting. "Come in. But understand that I am busy. I've been interrupted enough this evening."

He led the way into a rather barely furnished room with a wide bay-window in which was a table fitted with a writing-slope and lighted by an electric standard lamp. A litter of manuscript explained the nature of his business and his unwillingness to receive casual visitors. He sulkily placed three chairs, and then, seating himself, glowered at Thorndyke and me.

"Are they police officers, too?" he demanded.

"No," replied Miller, "they are medical gentlemen. Perhaps you had better explain the matter, doctor," he added, addressing Thorndyke, who thereupon opened the proceedings.

"We have called," said he, "to inform you that Miss Millicent Fawcett died suddenly this evening."

"The devil!" exclaimed Panting. "That's sudden with a vengeance. What time did this happen?"

"About a quarter to nine."

"Extraordinary!" muttered Ponting. "I saw her only the day before yesterday, and she seemed quite well then. What did she die of?"

"The appearances," replied Thorndyke, "suggest suicide."

"Suicide!" gasped Ponting. "Impossible! I can't believe it. Do you mean to tell me she poisoned herself?"

"No," said Thorndyke, "it was not poison. Death was caused by injuries to the throat inflicted with a razor."

"Good God!" exclaimed Ponting. "What a horrible thing! But," he added, after a pause, "I can't believe she did it herself, and I don't. Why should she commit suicide? She was quite happy, and she was just going to be married to that mealy-faced parson. And a razor, too! How do you suppose she came by a razor? Women don't shave. They smoke and drink and swear, but they haven't taken to shaving yet. I don't believe it. Do you?"

He glared ferociously at the superintendent who replied: "I am not sure that I do. There's a good deal in what you've just said, and the same objections had occurred to us. But you see, if she didn't do it herself, someone else must have done it, and we should like to find out who that someone is. So we begin by ascertaining where any possible persons may have been at a quarter to nine this evening."

Ponting smiled like an infuriated cat. "So you think me a possible person, do you?" said he.

"Everyone is a possible person," Miller replied blandly, "especially when he is known to have uttered threats."

The reply sobered Ponting considerably. For a few moments he sat, looking reflectively at the superintendent; then, in comparatively quiet tones, he said: "I have been working here since six o'clock. You can see the stuff for yourself, and I can prove that it has been written since six."

The superintendent nodded, but made no comment, and Ponting gazed at him fixedly, evidently thinking hard. Suddenly he broke into a harsh laugh.

"What is the joke?" Miller inquired stolidly.

"The joke is that I have got another alibi—a very complete one. There are compensations in every evil. I told you I had been interrupted in my work already this evening. It was those fools next door, the Barnetts—cousins of mine. They are musicians, save the mark! Variety stage, you know. Funny songs and jokes for mental defectives. Well, they practise their infernal ditties in their rooms, and the row comes into mine, and an accursed nuisance it is. However, they have agreed not to practise on Thursdays and Fridays—my busy nights—and usually they don't. But to-night, just as I was in the thick of my writing, I suddenly heard the most unholy din; that idiot, Fred Barnett, bawling one of his imbecile songs—'When the pigs their wings have folded,' and balderdash of that sort—and the other donkey accompanying him on the clarinet, if you please! I stuck it for a minute or two. Then I rushed round to their flat and raised Cain with the bell and knocker. Mrs. Fred opened the door, and I told her what I thought of it. Of course she was very apologetic, said they had forgotten that it was Thursday and promised that she would make her husband stop. And I suppose she did, for by the time I got back to my rooms the row had ceased. I could have punched the whole lot of them into a jelly, but it was all for the best as it turns out."

"What time was it when you went round there?" asked Miller.

"About five minutes past nine," replied Ponting. "The church bell had struck nine when the row began."

"Hm!" grunted Miller, glancing at Thorndyke. "Well, that is all we wanted to know, so we need not keep you from your work any longer."

He rose, and being let out with great alacrity, stumped down the stairs, followed by Thorndyke and me. As we came out into the street, he turned to us with a deeply disappointed expression.

"Well," he exclaimed, "this is a suck-in. I was in hopes that we had pounced on our quarry before he had got time to clear away the traces. And now we've got it all to do. You can't get round an alibi of that sort."



I glanced at Thorndyke to see how he was taking this unexpected check. He was evidently puzzled, and I could see by the expression of concentration in his face that he was trying over the facts and inferences in new combinations to meet this new position. Probably he had noticed, as I had, that Ponting was wearing a tweed suit, and that therefore the shreds of clothing from the fence could not be his unless he had changed. But the alibi put him definitely out of the picture, and, as Miller had said, we now had nothing to give us a lead.

Suddenly Thorndyke came out of his reverie and addressed the superintendent.

"We had better put this alibi on the basis of ascertained fact. It ought to be verified at once. At present we have only Ponting's unsupported statement."

"It isn't likely that he would risk telling a lie," Miller replied gloomily.

"A man who is under suspicion of murder will risk a good deal," Thorndyke retorted, "especially if he is guilty. I think we ought to see Mrs. Barnett before there is any opportunity of collusion."

"There has been time for collusion already," said Miller. "Still, you are quite right, and I see there is a light in their sitting-room, if that is it, next to Ponting's. Let us go up and settle the matter now. I shall leave you to examine the witness and say what you think it best to say."

We entered the building and ascended the stairs to the Barnetts' flat, where Miller rang the bell and executed a double knock. After a short interval the door was opened and a woman looked out at us inquisitively.

"Are you Mrs. Frederick Barnett?" Thorndyke inquired. The woman admitted her identity in a tone of some surprise, and Thorndyke explained: "We have called to make a few inquiries concerning your neighbour, Mr. Ponting, and also about certain matters relating to your family. I am afraid it is a rather unseasonable hour for a visit, but as the affair is of some importance and time is an object, I hope you will overlook that."

Mrs. Barnett listened to this explanation with a puzzled and rather suspicious air. After a few moments' hesitation, she said: "I think you had better see my husband, if you will wait here a moment I will go and tell him." With this, she pushed the door to, without actually closing it, and we heard her retire along the lobby, presumably to the sitting-room. For, during the short colloquy, I had observed a door at the end of the lobby, partly open, through which I could see the end of a table covered with a red cloth.

The "moment" extended to a full minute, and the superintendent began to show signs of impatience.

"I don't see why you didn't ask her the simple question straight out," he said, and the same question had occurred to me. But at this point footsteps were heard approaching, the door opened, and a man confronted us, holding the door open with his left hand, his right being wrapped in a handkerchief. He looked suspiciously from one to the other of us, and asked stiffly: "What is it that you want to know? And would you mind telling me who you are?"

"My name is Thorndyke," was the reply. "I am the legal adviser of the Reverend Charles Meade, and these two gentlemen are interested parties. I want to know what you can tell me of Mr. Ponting's recent movements—to-day, for instance. When did you last see him?"

The man appeared to be about to refuse any conversation, but suddenly altered his mind, reflected for a few moments, and then replied: "I saw him from my window at his—they are bay-windows—about half-past eight. But my wife saw him later than that. If you will come in she can tell you the time exactly." He led the way along the lobby with an obviously puzzled air. But he was not more puzzled than I, or than Miller, to judge by the bewildered glance that the superintendent cast at me, as he followed our host along the lobby. I was still meditating on Thorndyke's curiously indirect methods when the sitting-room door was opened; and then I got a minor surprise of another kind. When I had last looked into the room, the table had been covered by a red cloth. It was now bare; and when we entered the room I saw that the red cover had been thrown over a side table, on which was some bulky and angular object. Apparently it had been thought desirable to conceal that object, whatever it was, and as we took our seats beside the bare table, my mind was busy with conjectures as to what that object could be.

Mr. Barnett repeated Thorndyke's question to his wife, adding: "I think it must have been a little after nine when Ponting came round. What do you say?"

"Yes," she replied, "it would be, for I heard it strike nine just before you began your practice, and he came a few minutes after."

"You see," Barnett explained, "I am a singer, and my brother, here, accompanies me on various instruments, and of course we have to practise. But we don't practise on the nights when Ponting is busy—Thursdays and Fridays—as he said that the music disturbed him. To-night, however, we made a little mistake. I happen to have got a new song that I am anxious to get ready—it has an illustrative accompaniment on the clarinet, which my brother will play. We were so much taken up with the new song that we all forgot what day of the week it was, and started to have a good practice. But before we had got through the first verse, Ponting came round, battering at the door like a madman. My wife went out and pacified him, and of course we shut down for the evening."

While Mr. Barnett was giving his explanation, I looked about the room with vague curiosity. Somehow—I cannot tell exactly how—I was sensible of something queer in the atmosphere of this place; of a certain indefinite sense of tension. Mrs. Barnett looked pale and flurried. Her husband, in spite of his volubility, seemed ill at ease, and the brother, who sat

huddled in an easy-chair, nursing a dark-coloured Persian cat, stared into the fire, and neither moved nor spoke. And again I looked at the red table-cloth and wondered what it covered.

"By the way," said Barnett, after a brief pause, "what is the point of these inquiries of yours? About Ponting, I mean. What does it matter to you where he was this evening?"

As he spoke, he produced a pipe and tobacco-pouch, and proceeded to fill the former, holding it in his bandaged right hand and filling it with his left. The facility with which he did this suggested that he was left-handed, an inference that was confirmed by the ease with which he struck the match with his left hand, and by the fact that he wore a wrist-watch on his right wrist.

"Your question is a perfectly natural one," said Thorndyke. "The answer to it is that a very terrible thing has happened. Miss Millicent Fawcett, who is, I think, a connection of yours, met her death this evening under circumstances of grave suspicion. She died, either by her own hand or by the hand of a murderer, a few minutes before nine o'clock. Hence it has become necessary to ascertain the whereabouts at that time of any persons on whom suspicion might reasonably fall."

"Good God!" exclaimed Barnett. "What a shocking thing!"

The exclamation was followed by a deep silence, amidst which I could hear the barking of a dog in an adjacent room, the unmistakable sharp, treble yelp of a Pekinese. And again I seemed to be aware of a strange sense of tension in the occupants of this room. On hearing Thorndyke's answer, Mrs. Barnett had turned deadly pale and let her head fall forward on her hand. Her husband had sunk on to a chair, and he, too, looked pale and deeply shocked, while the brother continued to stare silently into the fire.

At this moment Thorndyke astonished me by an exhibition of what seemed—under the tragic circumstances—the most outrageous bad manners and bad taste. Rising from his chair with his eyes fixed on a print which hung on the wall above the red-covered table, he said: "That looks like one of Cameron's etchings," and forthwith stepped across the room to examine it, resting his hand, as he leaned forward, on the object covered by the cloth.

"Mind where you are putting your hand, sir!" Fred Barnett called out, springing to his feet.

Thorndyke looked down at his hand, and deliberately raising a corner of the cloth, looked under. "There is no harm done," he remarked quietly, letting the cloth drop; and with another glance at the print, he went back to his chair.

Once more a deep silence fell upon the room, and I had a vague feeling that the tension had increased. Mrs. Barnett was as white as a ghost and seemed to catch at her breath. Her husband watched her with a wild, angry expression and smoked furiously, while the superintendent—also conscious of something abnormal in the atmosphere of the room—looked furtively from the woman to the man and from him to Thorndyke.

Yet again in the silence the shrill barking of the Pekinese dog broke out, and somehow that sound connected itself in my mind with the Persian cat that dozed on the knees of the immovable man by the fire. I looked at the cat and at the man, and even as I looked, I was startled by a most extraordinary apparition. Above the man's shoulder, slowly rose a little round head like the head of a diminutive, greenish-brown man. Higher and higher the tiny monkey raised itself, resting on its little hands to peer at the strangers. Then, with sudden coyness, like a shy baby, it popped down out of sight.

I was thunderstruck. The cat and the dog I had noted merely as a curious coincidence. But the monkey—and such an unusual monkey, too—put coincidences out of the question. I stared at the man in positive stupefaction. Somehow that man was connected with that unforgettable figure lying upon the couch miles away. But how? When that deed of horror was doing, he had been here in this very room. Yet, in some way, he had been concerned in it. And suddenly a suspicion dawned upon me that Thorndyke was waiting for the actual perpetrator to arrive.

"It is a most ghastly affair," Barnett repeated presently in a husky voice. Then, after a pause, he asked: "Is there any sort of evidence as to whether she killed herself or was killed by somebody else?"

"I think that my friend, here, Detective-Superintendent Miller, has decided that she was murdered." He looked at the bewildered superintendent, who replied with an inarticulate grunt.

"And is there any clue as to who the—the murderer may be? You spoke of suspected persons just now."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "there is an excellent clue, if it can only be followed up. We found a most unmistakable footprint; and what is more, we took a plaster cast of it. Would you like to see the cast?"

Without waiting for a reply, he opened the research-case and took out the cast, which he placed in my hands.

"Just take it round and show it to them," he said.

The superintendent had witnessed Thorndyke's amazing proceedings with an astonishment that left him speechless. But now he sprang to his feet, and, as I walked round the table, he pressed beside me to guard the precious cast from possible injury. I laid it carefully down on the table, and as the light fell on it obliquely, it presented a most striking appearance—that of a snow-white boot-sole on which the unshapely patch, the circular heel, and the marks of wear were clearly visible.

The three spectators gathered round, as near as the superintendent would let them approach, and I observed them closely, assuming that this incomprehensible move of Thorndyke's was a device to catch one or more of them off their guard. Fred Barnett looked at the cast stolidly enough, though his face had gone several shades paler, but Mrs. Barnett stared at it with starting eyeballs and dropped jaw—the very picture of horror and dismay. As to James Barnett, whom I

now saw clearly for the first time, he stood behind the woman with a singularly scared and haggard face, and his eyes riveted on the white boot-sole. And now I could see that he wore a suit of blue serge and that the front both of his coat and waistcoat were thickly covered with the shed hairs of his pets.

There was something very uncanny about this group of persons gathered around that accusing footprint, all as still and rigid as statues and none uttering a sound. But something still more uncanny followed. Suddenly the deep silence of the room was shattered by the shrill notes of a clarinet, and a brassy voice burst forth:

“When the pigs their wings have folded  
And the cows are in their nest—”

We all spun round in amazement, and at the first glance the mystery of the crime was solved. There stood Thorndyke with the red table-cover at his feet, and at his side, on the small table, a massively-constructed phonograph of the kind used in offices for dictating letters, but fitted with a convoluted metal horn in place of the rubber ear-tubes.

A moment of astonished silence was succeeded by a wild confusion. Mrs. Barnett uttered a piercing shriek and fell back on to a chair, her husband broke away and rushed at Thorndyke, who instantly gripped his wrist and pinioned him, while the superintendent, taking in the situation at a glance, fastened on the unresisting James and forced him down into a chair. I ran round, and having stopped the machine—for the preposterous song was hideously incongruous with the tragedy that was enacting—went to Thorndyke’s assistance and helped him to remove his prisoner from the neighbourhood of the instrument.

“Superintendent Miller,” said Thorndyke, still maintaining a hold on his squirming captive, “I believe you are a justice of the peace?”

“Yes,” was the reply, “ex officio.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “I accuse these three persons of being concerned in the murder of Miss Millicent Fawcett; Frederick Barnett as the principal who actually committed the murder, James Barnett as having aided him by holding the arms of the deceased, and Mrs. Barnett as an accessory before the fact in that she worked this phonograph for the purpose of establishing a false alibi.”

“I knew nothing about it!” Mrs. Barnett shrieked hysterically. “They never told me why they wanted me to work the thing.”

“We can’t go into that now,” said Miller. “You will be able to make your defence at the proper time and place. Can one of you go for assistance or must I blow my whistle?”

“You had better go, Jervis,” said Thorndyke. “I can hold this man until reinforcements arrive. Send a constable up and then go on to the station. And leave the outer door ajar.”

I followed these directions, and having found the police station, presently returned to the flat with four constables and a sergeant in two taxis.

When the prisoners had been removed, together with the three animals—the latter in charge of a zoophilist constable—we searched the bedrooms. Frederick Barnett had changed his clothing completely, but in a locked drawer—the lock of which Thorndyke picked neatly, to the superintendent’s undisguised admiration—we found the discarded garments, including a pair of torn shepherd’s plaid trousers, covered with blood stains, and a new, empty razor-case. These things, together with the wax cylinder of the phonograph, Miller made up into a neat parcel and took away with him.

“Of course,” said I, as we walked homewards, “the general drift of this case is quite obvious. But it seemed to me that you went to the Barnetts’ flat with a definite purpose already formed, and with a definite suspicion in your mind. Now, I don’t see how you came to suspect the Barnetts.”

“I think you will,” he replied, “if you will recall the incidents in their order from the beginning, including poor Meade’s preliminary statement. To begin with the appearances of the body: the suggestion of suicide was transparently false. To say nothing of its incongruity with the character and circumstances of the deceased and the very unlikely weapon used, there were the gashed collar and the cut cap-string. As you know, it is a well-established rule that suicides do not damage their clothing. A man who cuts his own throat doesn’t cut his collar. He takes it off. He removes all obstructions. Naturally, for he wishes to complete the act as easily and quickly as possible, and he has time for preparation. But the murderer must take things as he finds them and execute his purpose as best he can.

“But further; the wounds were inflicted near the door, but the body was on the couch at the other end of the room. We saw, from the absence of bleeding, that she was dying—in fact, apparently dead—when she lay down. She must therefore have been carried to the couch after the wounds were inflicted.

“Then there were the blood-stains. They were all in front, and the blood had run down vertically. Then she must have been standing upright while the blood was flowing. Now there were four wounds, and the first one was mortal, it divided the common carotid artery and the great veins. On receiving that wound she would ordinarily have fallen down. But she did not fall, or there would have been a blood-stain across the neck. Why did she not fall? The obvious suggestion was that someone was holding her up. This suggestion was confirmed by the absence of cuts on her hands—which would certainly have been cut if someone had not been holding them. It was further confirmed by the rough crumpling of the collar at the back: so rough that the button was torn off. And we found that button near the door.

“Further, there were the animal hairs. They were on the back only. There were none on the front—where they would have been if derived from the animals—or anywhere else. And we learned that she kept no animals. All these appearances pointed to the presence of two persons, one of whom stood behind her and held her arms while the other stood in front and committed the murder. The cloth on the fence supported this view, being probably derived from two different pairs of trousers. The character of the wounds made it nearly certain that the murderer was left-handed.

“While we were returning in the cab, I reflected on these facts and considered the case generally. First, what was the motive? There was nothing to suggest robbery, nor was it in the least like a robber’s crime. What other motive could there be? Well, here was a comparatively rich woman who had made a will in favour of certain persons, and she was going to be married. On her marriage the will would automatically become void, and she was not likely to make another will so favourable to those persons. Here, then, was a possible motive, and that motive applied to Ponting, who had actually uttered threats and was obviously suspect.

“But, apart from those threats, Ponting was not the principal suspect, for he benefited only slightly under the will. The chief beneficiaries were the Barnetts, and Miss Fawcett’s death would benefit them, not only by securing the validity of the will, but by setting the will into immediate operation. And there were two of them. They therefore fitted the circumstances better than Ponting did. And when we came to interview Ponting, he went straight out of the picture. His manuscript would probably have cleared him—with his editor’s confirmation. But the other alibi was conclusive.

“What instantly struck me, however, was that Ponting’s alibi was also an alibi for the Barnetts. But there was this difference: Ponting had been seen; the Barnetts had only been heard. Now, it has often occurred to me that a very effective false alibi could be worked with a gramophone or a phonograph—especially with one on which one can make one’s own records. This idea now recurred to me; and at once it was supported by the appearance of an arranged effect. Ponting was known to be at work. It was practically certain that a blast of ‘music’ would bring him out. Then he would be available, if necessary, as a witness to prove an alibi. It seemed to be worth while to investigate.

“When we came to the flat we encountered a man with an injured hand—the right, it would have been more striking if it had been his left. But it presently turns out that he is left-handed; which is still more striking as a coincidence. This man is extraordinarily ready to answer questions which most persons would have refused to answer at all. Those answers contain the alibi.

“Then there was the incident of the table—I think you noticed it. That cover was on the large table when we arrived, but it was taken off and thrown over something, evidently to conceal it. But I need not pursue the details. When I had seen the cat, heard the dog, and then seen the monkey, I determined to see what was under the table-cover; and finding that it was a phonograph with the cylinder record still on the drum, I decided to ‘go Nap’ and chance making a mistake. For until we had tried the record, the alibi remained. If it had failed, I should have advised Miller to hold a boot parade. Fortunately we struck the right record and completed the case.”

Mrs. Barnett’s defence was accepted by the magistrate and the charge against her was dismissed. The other two were committed for trial, and in due course paid the extreme penalty. “Yet another illustration,” was Thorndyke’s comment, “of the folly of that kind of criminal who won’t let well alone, and who will create false clues. If the Barnetts had not laid down those false tracks, they would probably never have been suspected. It was their clever alibi that led us straight to their door.”

---

## PANDORA’S BOX

“I SEE our friend, S. Chapman, is still a defaulter,” said I, as I ran my eye over the “personal” column of The Times.

Thorndyke looked up interrogatively.

“Chapman?” he repeated; “let me see, who is he?”

“The man with the box. I read you the advertisement the other day. Here it is again. ‘If the box left in the luggage-room by S. Chapman is not claimed within a week from this date, it will be sold to defray expenses.—Alexander Butt, “Red Lion” Hotel, Stoke Varley, Kent.’ That sounds like an ultimatum; but it has been appearing at intervals for the last month. As the first notice expired about three weeks ago, the question is, why doesn’t Mr. Butt sell the box and have done with it?”

“He may have some qualms as to the legality of the proceeding,” said Thorndyke. “It would be interesting to know what expenses he refers to and what is the value of the box.”

The latter question was resolved a day or two later by the appearance in our chambers of an agitated gentleman, who gave his name as George Chapman. After apologising for his unannounced visit he explained: “I have come to you on the advice of my solicitor and on behalf of my brother, Samuel, who has become involved in a most extraordinary and horrible set of complications. At present he is in custody of the police charged with an atrocious murder.”

“That is certainly a rather serious complication,” Thorndyke observed dryly. “Perhaps you had better give us an account of the circumstances—the whole set of circumstances, from the beginning.”

“I will,” said Mr. Chapman, “without any reservations. The only question is, which is the beginning? There are the business and the domestic affairs. Perhaps I had better begin with the business concerns. My brother was a sort of travelling agent for a firm of manufacturing jewellers. He held a stock of the goods, which he used as samples for large

orders, but in the case of small retailers he actually supplied the goods himself. When travelling, he usually carried his stock in a small Gladstone bag, but he kept the bulk of it in a safe in his house, and he used to go home at week-ends, or oftener, to replenish his travelling stock. Now, about two months ago he left home on a trip, but instead of taking a selection of his goods, he took the entire stock in a largish wooden box, leaving the safe empty. What he meant to do I don't know, and that's the fact. I offer no opinion. The circumstances were peculiar, as you will hear presently, and his proceedings were peculiar; for he went down to Stoke Varley—a village not far from Folkestone—put up at the 'Red Lion,' and deposited his box in the luggage-room that is kept for the use of commercial travellers; and then, after staying there for a few days, came up to London to make some arrangements for selling or letting his house—which, it seems, he had decided to leave. He came up in the evening, and the very next morning the first of his adventures befell, and a very alarming one it was.

"It appears that, as he was walking down a quiet street, he saw a lady's purse lying on the pavement. Naturally he picked it up, and as it contained nothing to show the name or address of the owner, he put it in his pocket, intending to hand it in at a police station. Shortly after this, he got into an omnibus, and a well-dressed woman entered at the same time and sat down next to him. Just as the conductor was coming in to collect the fares, the woman began to search her pocket excitedly, and then, turning to my brother, called on him loudly to return her purse. Of course, he said that he knew nothing about her purse, whereupon she roundly accused him of having picked her pocket, declaring to the conductor that she had felt him take out her purse, and demanding that the omnibus should be stopped and a policeman fetched. At this moment a policeman was seen on the pavement. The conductor stopped the omnibus and hailed the constable, who came, and having examined the floor of the vehicle without finding the missing purse, and taken the conductor's name and number, took my brother into custody and conducted him and the woman to the police station. Here the inspector took down from the woman a description of the stolen purse and its contents, which my brother, to his utter dismay, recognised as that of the purse which he had picked up and which was still in his pocket. Immediately, he gave the inspector an account of the incident and produced the purse; but it is hardly necessary to say that the inspector refused to take his explanation seriously.

"Then my brother did a thing which was natural enough, but which did not help him. Seeing that he was practically certain to be convicted—for there was really no answer to the charge—he gave a false name and refused his address. He was then locked up in a cell for the night, and the next morning was brought before the magistrate, who, having heard the evidence of the woman and the inspector and having listened without comment to my brother's story, committed him for trial at the Central Criminal Court, and refused bail. He was then removed to Brixton, where he was detained for nearly a month, pending the opening of the sessions.

"At length the day of his trial drew near. But it was then found that the woman who had accused him had left her lodgings and could not be traced. As there was no one to prosecute, and as the disappearance of the woman put a rather new light upon my brother's story, the case against him was allowed to drop, and he was released.

"He went home by train, and at the station he bought a copy of *The Times* to read on the way. Before opening it he chanced to run his eye over the 'personal' column, and there his attention was arrested by his own name in an advertisement—"

"Relating to a box?" said I.

"Precisely. Then you have seen it. Well, considering the value of the contents of that box, he was naturally rather anxious. At once he sent off a telegram saying that he would call on the following day before noon to claim the box and pay what was owing. And he did so. Yesterday morning he took an early train down to Stoke Varley and went straight to the 'Red Lion.' On his arrival he was asked to step into the coffee-room, which he did; and there he found three police officers, who forthwith arrested him on a charge of murder. But before going into the particular that charge I had better give you an account of his domestic affairs on which this incredible and horrible accusation turns.

"My brother, I am sorry to say, was living with a woman who was not his wife. He had originally intended to marry her, but his association with her—which lasted over several years—did not encourage that intention. She was a terrible woman, and she led him a terrible life. Her temper was ungovernable; and when she had taken too much to drink—which was a pretty frequent occurrence—she was not only noisy and quarrelsome, but physically violent as well. Her antecedents were disreputable—she had been connected with the seamy side of the music-hall stage; her associations were disreputable; she brought questionable women to my brother's house; she consorted with men of doubtful character, and her relations with them were equally doubtful. Indeed, with one of them, a man named Gamble, I should say that her relations were not doubtful at all, though I understand he was a married man.

"Well, my brother put up with her for years, living a life that cut him off from all decent society. But at last his patience gave way (and I may add that he made the acquaintance of a very desirable lady, who was willing to condone his past and marry him if he could secure a possible future). After a particularly outrageous scene, he ordered the woman—Rebecca Mings was her name—out of the house and declared their relationship at an end.

"But she refused to be shaken off. She kept possession of the street-door key, and she returned again and again, and made a public scandal. The last time she created such an uproar when the door was bolted against her that a crowd collected in the street and my brother was forced to let her in. She stayed with him some hours, alone in the house—for the only servant he had was a daily girl who left at three o'clock—and went away quite quietly about ten at night. But, although a good many people saw her go into the house, no one but my brother seems to have seen her leave it; a most disastrous

circumstance, for, from the moment when she left the house, no one ever saw her again. She did not go to her lodgings that night. She disappeared utterly—until—but I must go back now to the ‘Red Lion’ at Stoke Varley.

“When my brother was arrested on the charge of having murdered Rebecca Mings, certain particulars were given to him; and when I went down there in response to a telegram, I gathered some more. The circumstances are these: About a fortnight after my brother had left to come to London, some of the ‘commercial’ who used the luggage-room complained of an unpleasant odour in it, which was presently traced to my brother’s box. As that box appeared to have been abandoned, the landlord became suspicious, and communicated with the police. They telephoned to the London police, who found my brother’s house shut up and his whereabouts unknown. Thereupon the local police broke open the box and found in it a woman’s left arm and a quantity of blood-stained clothing. On which they caused the advertisement to be put in *The Times*, and meanwhile they made certain inquiries. It appeared that my brother had spent part of his time at Stoke Varley fishing in the little river. On learning this, the police proceeded to dredge the river, and presently they brought up a right arm—apparently the fellow of the one found in the box—and a leg divided into three parts, evidently a woman’s. Now, as to the arm found in the box, there could be no question about its identity, for it bore a very distinct tattooed inscription consisting of the initials R. M. above a heart transfixing by an arrow, with the initials J. B. underneath. A few inquiries elicited the fact that the woman, Rebecca Mings, who had disappeared, bore such a tattooed mark on her left arm and certain persons who had known her, having been sworn to secrecy, were shown the arm, and recognised the mark without hesitation. Further inquiries showed that Rebecca Mings was last seen alive entering my brother’s house, as I have described; and on this information the police broke into the house and searched it.”

“Do you know if they found anything?” Thorndyke asked.

“I don’t,” replied Chapman, “but I infer that they did. The police at Stoke Varley were very courteous and kind, but they declined to give any particulars about the visit to the house. However, we shall hear at the inquest if they made any discoveries.”

“And is that all that you have to tell us?” asked Thorndyke.

“Yes,” was the reply, “and enough, too. I make no comment on my brother’s story, and I won’t ask whether you believe it. I don’t expect you to. The question is whether you would undertake the defence. I suppose it isn’t necessary for a lawyer to be convinced of his client’s innocence in order to convince the jury.”

“You are thinking of an advocate,” said Thorndyke. “I am not an advocate, and I should not defend a man whom I believed to be guilty. The most that I can do is to investigate the case. If the result of the investigation is to confirm the suspicions against your brother, I shall, go no farther in the case. You will have to get an ordinary criminal barrister to defend your brother. If, on the other hand, I find reasonable grounds for believing him innocent, I will undertake the defence. What do you say to that?”

“I’ve no choice,” replied Chapman; “and I suppose if you find all the evidence against him, the defence won’t matter much.”

“I am afraid that is so,” said Thorndyke. “And, now there are one or two questions to be cleared up. First, does your brother offer any explanation of the presence of these remains in his box?”

“He supposes that somebody at the ‘Red Lion’ must have taken the jewellery out and put the remains in. Anyone could get access to the luggage-room by asking for the key at the office.”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “that is conceivable. Then, as to the person who might have made this exchange. Is there anyone who had any reason for wishing to make away with deceased?”

“No,” replied Chapman. “Plenty of people disliked her, but no one but my brother had any motive for getting rid of her.”

“You spoke of a man with whom she was on somewhat intimate terms. There had been no quarrel or breach there, I suppose?”

“The man Gamble, you mean. No, I should say they were the best of friends. Besides, Gamble had no responsibilities in regard to her. He could have dropped her whenever he was tired of her.”

“Do you know anything about him?” Thorndyke asked.

“Very little. He has been a rolling stone, and has been in all sorts of jobs, I believe. He was in the New Zealand trade for some time, and dealt in all sorts of things—among others, in smoked human heads; sold them to collectors and museums, I understand. So he would have had some previous experience,” Chapman added with a faint grin.

“Not in dismemberment,” said Thorndyke. “Those will have been ancient Maori heads—relics of the old head hunters. There are some in the Hunterian Museum. But, as you say, there seems to be no motive in Gamble’s case, even if there had been the opportunity; whereas, in your brother’s case, there seem to have been both the motive and the opportunity. I suppose your brother never threatened the deceased?”

“I am sorry to say he did,” replied Chapman. “On several occasions, and before witnesses, too, he threatened to put her out of the way. Of course he never meant it—he was really the mildest of men. But it was a foolish thing to do and most unfortunate, as things have turned out.”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “I will look into the matter and let you know what I think of it. It is unnecessary to remark that

appearances are not very encouraging.”

“No, I can see that,” said Chapman, rising and producing his card-case. “But we must hope for the best.” He laid his card on the table, and having shaken hands with us gloomily, took his departure.

“It doesn’t do to take things at their face value,” I remarked, when he had gone; “but I don’t think we have ever had a more hopeless-looking case. All it wants to complete it is the discovery of remains in Chapman’s house.”

“In that respect,” said Thorndyke, “it may already be complete. But it hardly wants that finishing touch. On the evidence that we have, any jury would find a verdict of ‘guilty’ without leaving the box. The only question for us is whether the face value of the evidence is its real value. If it is, the defence will be a mere formality.”

“I suppose,” said I, “you will begin the investigation at Stoke Varley?”

“Yes,” he replied. “We begin by checking the alleged facts. If they are really as stated, we shall probably need to go no farther. And we had better lose no time, as the remains may be moved into the jurisdiction of a London coroner, and we ought to see everything in situ as far as possible. I suggest that we postpone the rest of to-day’s business and start at once, taking Scotland Yard on the way to get authority to inspect the remains and the premises.”

In a few minutes we were ready for the expedition. While Thorndyke packed the “research-case” with the necessary instruments, I gave instructions to our laboratory assistant, Polton, as to what was to be done in our absence, and then, when we had consulted the time-table, we set forth by way of the Embankment.

At Scotland Yard, on inquiring for our friend, Superintendent Miller, we received the slightly unwelcome news that he was at Stoke Varley, inquiring into the case. However, the authorisation was given readily enough, and, armed with this, we made our way to Charing Cross Station, arriving there in good time to catch our train.

We had just given up our tickets and turned out into the pleasant station approach of Stoke Varley when Thorndyke gave a soft chuckle. I looked at him inquiringly, and he explained. “Miller has had a telegram, and we are going to have facilities, with a little supervision.” Following the direction of his glance, I now observed the superintendent strolling towards us, trying to look surprised, but achieving only a somewhat sheepish grin.

“Well, I’m sure, gentlemen!” he exclaimed. “This is an unexpected pleasure. You don’t mean to say you are engaged in this treasure-trove case?”

“Why not?” asked Thorndyke.

“Well, I’ll tell you why not,” replied Miller. “Because it’s no go. You’ll only waste your time and injure your reputation. I may as well let you know, in confidence, that we’ve been through Chapman’s house in London. It wasn’t very necessary; but still, if there was a vacancy in his coffin for one or two more nails, we’ve knocked them in.”

“What did you find in his house?” Thorndyke asked.

“We found,” replied Miller, “in a cupboard in his bedroom, a good-sized bottle of hyoscine tablets, about two-thirds full—one-third missing. No great harm in that; he might have taken ‘em himself. But when we went down into the cellar, we noticed that the place smelt—well, a bit graveyardy, so to speak. So we had a look round. It was a stone-floored cellar, not very even, but so far as we could see, none of the flagstones seemed to have been disturbed. We didn’t want the job of digging the whole of them up, so I just filled a bucket with water and poured it over the floor. Then I watched.

“In less than a minute one big flagstone near the middle went nearly dry, while the water still stood on all the others. ‘What O!’ says I. ‘Loose earth underneath here.’ So we got a crow-bar and prised up that big flag; and sure enough, underneath it we found a good-sized bundle done up in a sheet. I won’t go into unpleasant particulars—not that it would upset you, I suppose—but that bundle contained human remains.”

“Any bones?” inquired Thorndyke.

“No. Mostly in’ards and some skin from the front of the body. We handed them over to the Home Office experts, and they examined them and made an analysis. Their report states that the remains are those of a woman of about thirty-five—that was about Mings’ age—and that the various organs contained a large quantity of hyoscine; more than enough to have caused death. So there you are. If you are going to conduct the defence, you won’t get much glory from it.”

“It is very good of you, Miller,” said Thorndyke, “to have given us this private information. It is very helpful, though I have not undertaken the defence. I have merely come down to check the facts and see if there is any material for a defence. And I shall go through the routine, as I am here. Where are the remains?”

“In the mortuary. I’ll show you the way, and as I happen to have the key in my pocket, I can let you in.”

We passed through the outskirts of the village, gathering a small train of stealthy followers, who dogged us to the door of the mortuary and hungrily watched us as the superintendent let us in and locked the door after us.

“There you are,” said Miller, indicating the slate table on which the remains lay, covered by a sheet soaked in an antiseptic. “I’ve seen all I want to see.” And he retired into a corner and lit his pipe.

The remnants of mortality, disclosed by the removal of the sheet, were dreadfully suggestive of crime in its most brutal and horrible form, but they offered little information. The dismemberment had been manifestly rude and unskilful, and the remains were clearly those of a woman of medium size and apparently in the prime of life. The principal interest

centred in the left arm, the waxen skin of which bore a very distinct tattoo-mark, consisting of the initials R. M. over a very symmetrical heart, transfixing by an arrow, beneath which were the initials J. B. The letters were Roman capitals about half an inch high, well-formed and finished with serifs, and the heart and arrow quite well drawn. I looked reflectively at the device, standing out in dull blue from its ivory-like background, and speculated vaguely as to who J. B. might have been and how many predecessors and successors he had had. And then my interest waned, and I joined the superintendent in the corner. It was a sordid case, and a conviction being a foregone conclusion, it did not seem to call for further attention.

Thorndyke, however, seemed to think otherwise. But that was his way. When he was engaged in an investigation he put out of his mind everything that he had been told and began from the very beginning. That was what he was doing now. He was inspecting these remains as if they had been the remains of some unidentified person. He made, and noted down, minute measurements of the limbs; he closely examined every square inch of surface; he scrutinised each finger separately, and then with the aid of his portable inking-plate and roller, took a complete set of finger-prints. He measured all the dimensions of the tattoo-marks with a delicate calliper-gauge, and then examined the marks themselves, first with a common lens and then with the high-power Coddington. The principles that he laid down in his lectures at the hospital were: "Accept no statement without verification; observe every fact independently for yourselves; and keep an open mind." And, certainly, no one ever carried out more conscientiously his own precepts.

"Do you know, Dr. Jervis," the superintendent whispered to me as Thorndyke brought his Coddington to bear on the tattoo-marks, "I believe this lens business is becoming a habit with the doctor. It's my firm conviction that if somebody were to blow up the Houses of Parliament, he'd go and examine the ruins through a magnifying glass. Just look at him poring over those tattooed letters that you could read plainly twenty feet away!"

Meanwhile, Thorndyke, unconscious of these criticisms, placidly continued his inspection. From the table, with its gruesome burden, he transferred his attention to the box, which had been placed on a bench by the window, examining it minutely inside and out; feeling with his fingers the dark grey paint with which it was coated and the white-painted initials, "S. C.," on the lid, which he also measured carefully. He even copied into his note book the maker's name, which was stamped on a small brass label affixed to the inside of the lid, and the name of the lock-maker, and inspected the screws which had drawn from the wood when it was forced open. At length he put away his notebook, closed the research-case and announced that he had finished, adding the inquiry: "How do you get to the 'Red Lion' from here?"

"It's only a few minutes' walk," said Miller. "I'll show you the way. But you're wasting your time, doctor, you are indeed. You see," he continued, when he had locked up the mortuary and pocketed the key, "that suggestion of Chapman's is ridiculous on the face of it. Just imagine a man bringing a portmanteau full of human remains into the luggage-room of a commercial hotel, opening it and opening another's man's box, and swapping the contents of the one for the other with the chance of one of the commercials coming in at any moment. Supposing one of 'em had, what would he have had to say? 'Hallo!' says the baggy, 'you seem to have got somebody's arm in your box.' 'So I have,' says Chapman. 'I expect it's my wife's. Careless woman! must have dropped it in when she was packing the box.' Bah! It's a fool's explanation. Besides, how could he have got Chapman's box open? We couldn't. It was a first-class lock. We had to break it open, but it hadn't been broken open before. No, sir, that cat won't jump. Still, you needn't take my word for it. Here is the place, and here is Mr. Butt, himself, standing at his own front door looking as pleasant as the flowers in May, like the lump of sugar that you put in a fly-trap to induce 'em to walk in."

The landlord, who had overheard—without difficulty—the concluding passage of Miller's peroration, smiled genially; and when the purpose of the visit had been explained, suggested a "modest quencher" in the private parlour as an aid to conversation.

"I wanted," said Thorndyke, waiving the suggestion of the 'quencher,' "to ascertain whether Chapman's theory of an exchange of contents could be seriously entertained."

Well, sir," said the landlord, "the fact is that it couldn't. That room is a public room, and people may be popping in there at any time all day. We don't usually keep it locked. It isn't necessary. We know most of our customers, and the contents of the packages that are stowed in the room are principally travellers' samples of no considerable value. The thing would have been impossible in the daytime, and we lock the room up at night."

"Have you had any strangers staying with you in the interval between Chapman's going away and the discovery of the remains?"

"Yes. There was a Mr. Doler; he had two cabin trunks: and a uniform case which went to the luggage-room. And then there was a lady, Mrs. Murchison. She had a lot of stuff in there: a small, flat trunk, a hat-box, and a big dress-basket—one of these great basket pantehnicons that ladies take about with them. And there was another gentleman—I forget his name, but you will see it in the visitors' book—he had a couple of largish portmanteaux in there. Perhaps you would like to see the book?"

"I should," said Thorndyke, and when the book was produced and the names of the guests pointed out, he copied the entries into his notebook, adding the particulars of their luggage.

"And now, sir," said Miller, "I suppose you won't be happy until you've seen the room itself?"

"Your insight is really remarkable, superintendent," my colleague replied. "Yes, I should like to see the room."

There was little enough to see, however, when we arrived there. The key was in the door, and the latter was not only



unlocked but stood ajar; and when we pushed it open and entered we saw a small room, empty save for a collection of portmanteaux, trunks, and Gladstone bags. The only noteworthy fact was that it was at the end of a corridor, covered with linoleum, so that anyone inside would have a few seconds' notice of another person's approach. But evidently that would have been of little use in the alleged circumstances. For the hypothetical criminal must have emptied Chapman's box of the jewellery before he could put the incriminating objects into it; so that, apart from the latter, the arrival of an inopportune visitor would have found him apparently in the act of committing a robbery. The suggestion was obviously absurd.

"By the way," said Thorndyke, as we descended the stairs, "where is the central character of this drama—Chapman? He is not here, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is," replied Miller. "He is committed for trial, but we are keeping him here until we know where the inquest is to be held. You would probably like to have a few words with him? Well, I'll take you along to the police station and tell them who you are, and then perhaps you would like to come back here and have some lunch or dinner before you return to town."

I warmly seconded the latter proposal, and the arrangement having been made, we set forth for the police station, which we gathered from Miller was incorporated with a small local prison. Here we were shown into what appeared to be a private office, and presently a sergeant entered, ushering in a man whom we at once recognised from his resemblance to our client, Mr. George Chapman, disguised though it was by his pallor, his unshaven face, and his air of abject misery. The sergeant, having announced him by name, withdrew with the superintendent and locked the door on the outside. As soon as we were alone, Thorndyke rapidly acquainted the prisoner with the circumstances of his brother's visit and then continued: "Now, Mr. Chapman, you want me to undertake your defence. If I do so, I must have all the facts. If there is anything known to you that your brother has not told me, I ask you to tell it to me without reservation."

Chapman shook his head wearily.

"I know nothing more than you know," said he. "The whole affair is a mystery that I can make nothing of. I don't expect you to believe me. Who would, with all this evidence against me? But I swear to God that I know nothing of this abominable crime. When I brought that box down here, it contained my stock of jewellery and nothing else; and after I put it in the luggage-room, I never opened it."

"Do you know of anybody who might have had a motive for getting rid of Rebecca Mings?"

"Not a soul," replied Chapman. "She led me the devil's own life, but she was popular enough with her own friends. And she was an attractive woman in her way: a fine, well-built woman, rather big—she stood five-feet-seven—with a good complexion and very handsome golden hair. Such as her friends were—they were a shady lot—I think they were fond of her, and I don't believe she had any enemies."

"Some hyoscine was found in your house," said Thorndyke. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes. I got it when I suffered from neuralgia. But I never took any. My doctor heard about it and sent me to the dentist. The bottle was never opened. It contained a hundred tablets."

"And with regard to the box," said Thorndyke. "Had you had it long?"

"Not very long. I bought it at Fletchers, in Holborn, about six months ago."

"And you have nothing more to tell us?"

"No," he replied. "I wish I had;" and then, after a pause, he asked with a wistful look at Thorndyke: "Are you going to undertake my defence, sir? I can see that there is very little hope, but I should like to be given just a chance."

I glanced at Thorndyke, expecting at the most a cautious and conditional reply. To my astonishment he answered: "There is no need to take such a gloomy view of the case, Mr. Chapman. I shall undertake the defence, and I think you have quite a fair chance of an acquittal."

On this amazing reply I reflected, not without some self-condemnation, during our walk to the hotel and the meal that preceded our departure. For it was evident that I had missed something vital. Thorndyke was a cautious man and little given to making promises or forecasts of results. He must have picked up some evidence of a very conclusive kind; but what that evidence could be, I found it impossible to imagine. The superintendent, too, was puzzled, I could see, for Thorndyke made no secret of his intention to go on with the case. But Miller's delicate attempts to pump him came to nothing; and when he had escorted us to the station and our train moved off, I could see him standing on the platform, gently scratching the back of his head and gazing speculatively at our retreating carriage.

As soon as we were clear of the station, I opened my attack.

"What on earth," I demanded, "did you mean by giving that poor devil, Chapman, hopes of acquittal? I can't see that he has a dog's chance."

Thorndyke looked at me gravely.

"My impression is, Jervis," he said, "that you have not kept an open mind in this case. You have allowed yourself to fall under the suggestive influence of the obvious; whereas the function of the investigator is to consider the possible alternatives of the obvious inference. And you have not brought your usual keen attention to bear on the facts. If you had considered George Chapman's statement attentively you would have noticed that it contained some very curious and

significant suggestions; and if you had examined those dismembered remains critically, you would have seen that they confirmed those suggestions in a very remarkable manner.”

“As to George Chapman’s statement,” said I, “the only suggestive point that I recall is the reference to those Maori heads. But, as you, yourself, pointed out, the dealers in those heads don’t do the dismemberment.”

Thorndyke shook his head a little impatiently.

“Tut, tut, Jervis,” said he, “that isn’t the point at all. Any fool can cut up a dead body as this one has been cut up. The point is that that statement, carefully considered, yields a definite and consistent alternative to the theory that Samuel Chapman killed this woman and dismembered her body; and that alternative theory is supported by the appearance of these remains. I think you will see the point if you recall Chapman’s statement, and reflect on the possible bearing of the various incidents that he described.”

In this, however, Thorndyke was unduly optimistic. I recalled the statement completely enough, and reflected on it frequently and profoundly during the next few days; but the more I thought of it the more conclusive did the case against the accused appear.

Meanwhile, my colleague appeared to be taking no steps in the matter, and I assumed that he was waiting for the inquest. It is true that, when, on one occasion, he had accompanied me towards the City, and leaving me in Queen Victoria Street disappeared into the premises of Messrs. Burden Brothers, lock manufacturers, I was inclined to associate his proceedings with his minute examination of the lock at Stoke Varley. And, again, when our laboratory assistant, Polton, was seen to issue forth, top-hatted and armed with an umbrella and an attaché-case, I suspected some sort of “private inquiries,” possibly connected with the case. But from Thorndyke I could get no information at all. My tentative “pumpings” elicited one unvarying reply. “You have the facts, Jervis. You heard George Chapman’s statement, and you have seen the remains. Give me a reasonable theory and I will discuss it with pleasure.” And that was how the matter remained. I had no reasonable theory—other than that of the police—and there was accordingly no discussion.

On a certain evening, a couple of days before the inquest—which had been postponed in the hope that some further remains might be discovered—I observed signs of an expected visitor: a small table placed by the supernumerary arm-chair and furnished with a tray bearing a siphon, a whisky-decanter and a box of cigars. Thorndyke caught my inquiring glance at these luxuries, for which neither of us had any use, and proceeded to explain.

“I have asked Miller to look in this evening—he is due now. I have been working at this Chapman case, and, as it is now complete, I propose to lay my cards on the table.”

“Is that safe?” said I. “Supposing the police still go for a conviction and try to forestall your evidence?”

“They won’t,” he replied. “They couldn’t. And it would be most improper to let the case go for trial on a false theory. But here is Miller; and a mighty twitter he is in, I have no doubt.”

He was. Without even waiting for the customary cigar, he plumped down into the chair, and dragging a letter from his pocket, fixed a glare of astonishment on my placid colleague.

“This letter of yours, sir,” said he, “is perfectly incomprehensible to me. You say that you are prepared to put us in possession of the facts of this Chapman case. But we are in possession of the facts already. We are absolutely certain of a conviction. Let me remind you, sir, of what those facts are. We have got a dead body which has been identified beyond all doubt. Part of that body was found in a box which is the property of Samuel Chapman, which was brought by him and deposited by him at the ‘Red Lion’ Hotel. Another part of that body was found in his dwelling-house. A supply of poison—an uncommon poison, too—similar to that which killed the dead person, has also been found in his house; and the dead body is that of a woman with whom Chapman was known to be on terms of enmity and whom he has threatened, in the presence of witnesses, to kill. Now, sir, what have you got to say to those facts?”

Thorndyke regarded the agitated detective with a quiet smile. “My comments,” Miller,” said he, “can be put in a nutshell. You have got the wrong man, you have got the wrong box, and you have got the wrong body.”

The superintendent was thunderstruck, and no wonder. So was I. As to Miller, he drew himself forward until he was sitting on the extreme edge of the chair, and for some moments stared at my impassive colleague in speechless amazement. At length he burst out: “But, my dear sir! This is sheer nonsense—at least, that’s what it sounds like, though I know it can’t be. Let’s begin with the body. You say it’s the wrong one.”

“Yes. Rebecca Mings was a biggish woman. Her height was five-feet-seven. This woman was not more than five-feet-four.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Miller. “You can’t judge to an inch or two from parts of a dismembered body. You are forgetting the tattoo-mark. That clenches the identity beyond any possible doubt.”

“It does, indeed,” said Thorndyke. “That is the crucial evidence. Rebecca Mings had a certain tattoo mark on her left forearm. This woman had not.”

“Had not!” shrieked Miller, coming yet farther forward on his chair. (I expected, every moment, to see him sitting on the floor.) “Why, I saw it; and so did you.”

“I am speaking of the woman, not of the body,” said Thorndyke. “The mark that you saw was a post-mortem tattoo-

mark. It was made after death. But the fact that it was made after death is good evidence, that it was not there during life."

"Moses!" exclaimed the superintendent. "This is a facer. Are you perfectly sure it was done after death?"

"Quite sure. The appearance, through a powerful lens, is unmistakable. Tattoo-marks are made, as you know, of course, by painting Indian ink on the skin and pricking it in with fine needles. In the living skin the needle-wounds heal up at once and disappear, but in the dead skin the needle-holes remain unclosed and can be easily seen with a lens. In this case the skin had been well washed and the surface pressed with some smooth object; but the holes were plainly visible and the ink was still in them."

"Well, I'm sure!" said Miller. "I never heard of tattooing a dead body before."

"Very few people have, I expect," said Thorndyke. "But there is one class of persons who know all about it: the persons who deal in Maori heads."

"Indeed?" queried Miller. "How does it concern them?"

"Those heads are usually elaborately tattooed, and the value of a head depends on the quality of the tattooing. Now, when those heads became objects of trade, the dealers conceived the idea of touching up defective specimens by additional tattooing on the dead head, and from this they proceeded to obtain heads which had no tattoo-marks, and turn them into tattooed heads."

"Well, to be sure," said the superintendent, with a grin, "what wicked men there are in the world, aren't there, Dr. Jervis?"

I murmured a vague assent, but I was principally conscious of a desire to kick myself for having failed to pick this invaluable clue out of George Chapman's statement.

"And now," said Miller, "we come to the box. How do you know it is the wrong one?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "is proved even more conclusively. The original box was made by Fletchers, in Holborn. It was sold to Chapman, and his initials painted on it, on the 9th of last April. I have seen the entry in the day-book. The locks of these boxes are made by Burden Brothers of Queen Victoria Street, and as they are quite high-class locks each is given a registered number, which is stamped on the lock. The number on the box that you have is 5007, and Burden's books show that it was made and sold to Fletchers about the middle of July—the sale was dated the 13th. Therefore this can not be Chapman's box."

"Apparently not," Miller agreed. "But whose box is it? And what has become of Chapman's box?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "was presumably taken away in Mrs. Murchison's dress-basket."

"Then who the deuce is Mrs. Murchison?" demanded the superintendent.

"I should say," replied Thorndyke, "that she was formerly known as Rebecca Mings."

"The deceased!" exclaimed Miller, falling back in his chair with a guffaw. "My eye! What a lark it is! But she must have some sauce, to walk off with the jewellery and leave her own dismembered remains in exchange! By the way, whose remains are they?"

"We shall come to that presently," Thorndyke answered. "Now we have to consider the man you have in custody."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "we must settle about him. Of course if it isn't his box, and the body isn't Mings' body, that puts him out of it so far. But there are those remains that we dug up in his cellar. What about them?"

"That question," replied Thorndyke, "will, I think, be answered by a general review of the case. But I must, remind you that if the box is not Chapman's, it is some other person's; that is to say, that if Chapman goes out of the case, as to the Stoke Varley incidents, someone else comes in. So, if the body is not Mings' body, it is some other woman's, and that other woman must have disappeared. And now let us review the case as a whole.

"You know about the pocket-picking charge. It was obviously a false charge, deliberately prepared by 'planting' the purse; that is, it was a conspiracy. Now what was the object of this conspiracy? Clearly it was to get Chapman out of the way while the boxes were exchanged at Stoke Varley, and the remains deposited in the river and elsewhere. Then who were the conspirators—other than the agent who planted the purse?

"They—if there were more than one—must have had access to Mings, dead or alive, in order to make the exact copy, or tracing, of her tattoo-mark. They must have had some knowledge of the process of post-mortem tattooing. They must have had access to Chapman's house. And, since they had in their possession the dead body of a woman, they must have been associated with some woman who has disappeared.

"Who is there who answers this description? Well, of course, Mings had access to herself, though she could hardly have taken a tracing from her own arm, and she had access to Chapman's house, since she had possession of the latchkey. Then there is a man named Gamble, with whom Mings was on terms of great intimacy. Now Gamble was formerly a dealer in tattooed Maori heads, so he may be assumed to know something about post-mortem tattooing. And I have ascertained that Gamble's wife has disappeared from her usual places of resort. So here are two persons who, together, agree with the description of the conspirators. And now let us consider the train of events in connection with the dates.

"On July the 29th Chapman came to town from Stoke Varley. On the 30th he was arrested as a pick pocket. On the 31st

he was committed for trial. On the 2nd of August Mrs. Gamble went away to the country. No one seems to have seen her go, but that is the date on which she is reported to have gone. On August the 5th Mrs. Murchison deposited at Stoke Varley a box which must have been purchased between the 13th of July and the 4th of August, and which contained a woman's arm. On the 14th of August that box was opened by the police. On the 18th human remains were discovered in Chapman's house. On the 27th Chapman was released from Brixton. On the 28th he was arrested for murder at Stoke Varley. I think, Miller, you will agree that that is a very striking succession of dates."

"Yes," Miller agreed. "It looks like a true bill. If you will give me Mr. Gamble's address, I'll call on him."

"I'm afraid you won't find him at home," said Thorndyke. "He has gone into the country, too; and I gather from his landlord, who holds a returned cheque, that Mr. Gamble's banking account has gone into the country with him."

"Then," said the superintendent "I suppose I must take a trip into the country, too."

"Well, Thorndyke," I said, as I laid down the paper containing the report of the trial of Gamble and Mings for the murder of Theresa Gamble, one morning about four months later, "you ought to be very highly gratified. After sentencing Gamble to death and Mings to fifteen years' penal servitude, the judge took the opportunity to compliment the police on their ingenuity in unravelling this crime, and the Home Office experts on their skill in detecting the counterfeit tattoo-marks. What do you think of that?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that his lordship showed a very proper and appreciative spirit."

---

## THE TRAIL OF BEHEMOTH

OF all the minor dissipations in which temperate men indulge there is none, I think, more alluring than the after-breakfast pipe. I had just lit mine and was standing before the fire with the unopened paper in my hand when my ear caught the sound of hurried footsteps ascending the stair. Now experience has made me somewhat of a connoisseur in footsteps. A good many are heard on our stair, heralding the advent of a great variety of clients, and I have learned to distinguish those which are premonitory of urgent cases. Such I judged the present ones to be, and my judgment was confirmed by a hasty, importunate tattoo on our small brass knocker, Regretfully taking the much-appreciated pipe from my mouth, I crossed the room and threw the door open.

"Good morning, Dr. Jervis," said our visitor, a barrister whom I knew slightly. "Is your colleague at home?"

"No, Mr. Bidwell," I replied. "I am sorry to say he is out of town. He won't be back until the day after to-morrow."

Mr. Bidwell was visibly disappointed.

"Ha! Pity!" he exclaimed; and then with quick tact he added. "But still, you are here. It comes to the same thing."

"I don't know about that," said I. "But, at any rate, I am at your service."

"Thank you," said he. "And in that case I will ask you to come round with me at once to Tanfield Court. A most shocking thing has happened. My old friend and neighbour, Giles Herrington has been—well, he is dead—died suddenly, and I think there can be no doubt that he was killed. Can you come now? I will give you the particulars as we go."

I scribbled a hasty note to say where I had gone, and having laid it on the table, got my hat and set forth with Mr. Bidwell.

"It has only just been discovered," said he, as we crossed King's Bench Walk. "The laundress who does his chambers and mine was battering at my door when I arrived—I don't live in the Temple, you know. She was as pale as a ghost and in an awful state of alarm and agitation. It seems that she had gone up to Herrington's chambers to get his breakfast ready as usual; but when she went into the sitting-room she found him lying dead on the floor. Thereupon she rushed down to my chambers—I am usually an early bird—and there I found her, as I said, battering at my door, although she has a key.

"Well, I went up with her to my friend's chambers—they are on the first floor, just over mine—and there, sure enough, was poor old Giles lying on the floor, cold and stiff. Evidently he had been lying there all night."

"Were there any marks of violence on the body?" I asked.

"I didn't notice any," he replied, "but I didn't look very closely. What I did notice was that the place was all in disorder—a chair overturned and things knocked off the table. It was pretty evident that there had been a struggle and that he had not met his death by fair means."

"And what do you want us to do?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "I was Herrington's friend; about the only friend he had, for he was not an amiable or a sociable man; and I am the executor of his will.

"Appearances suggest very strongly that he has been murdered, and I take it upon myself to see that his murderer is brought to account. Our friendship seems to demand that. Of course, the police will go into the affair, and if it turns out to be all plain sailing, there will be nothing for you to do. But the murderer, if there is one, has got to be secured and convicted, and if the police can't manage it, I want you and Thorndyke to see the case through. This is the place."

He hurried in through the entry and up the stairs to the first-floor landing, where he rapped loudly at the closed "oak" of

a set of chambers above which was painted the name of "Mr. Giles Herrington."

After an interval, during which Mr. Bidwell repeated the summons, the massive door opened and a familiar face looked out: the face of Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department. The expression that it bore was not one of welcome, and my experience of the inspector caused me to brace myself up for the inevitable contest.

"What is your business?" he inquired forbiddingly.

Mr. Bidwell took the question to himself and replied: "I am Mr. Herrington's executor, and in that capacity I have instructed Dr. Jervis and his colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, to watch the case on my behalf. I take it that you are a police officer?"

"I am," replied Badger, "and I can't admit any unauthorised persons to these chambers."

"We are not unauthorised persons," said Mr. Bidwell. "We are here on legitimate business. Do I understand that you refuse admission to the legal representatives of the deceased man?"

In the face of Mr. Bidwell's firm and masterful attitude, Badger began, as usual, to weaken. Eventually, having warned us to convey no information to anybody, he grudgingly opened the door and admitted us.

"I have only just arrived, myself," he said. "I happened to be in the porter's lodge on other business when the laundress came and gave the alarm."

As I stepped into the room and looked round, I saw at a glance the clear indications of a crime. The place was in the utmost disorder. The cloth had been dragged from the table, littering the floor with broken glass, books, a tobacco jar, and various other objects. A chair sprawled on its back, the fender was dislodged from its position, the hearth-rug was all awry; and in the midst of the wreckage, on the space of floor between the table and the fireplace, the body of a man was stretched in a not uneasy posture.

I stooped over him and looked him over searchingly; an elderly man, clean-shaved and slightly bald, with a grim, rather forbidding countenance, which was not, however, distorted or apparently unusual in expression. There were no obvious injuries, but the crumpled state of the collar caused me to look more closely at the throat and neck, and I then saw pretty plainly a number of slightly discoloured marks, such as would be made by fingers tightly grasping the throat. Evidently Badger had already observed them, for he remarked: "There's no need to ask you what he died of, doctor; I can see that for myself."

"The actual cause of death," said I, "is not quite evident. He doesn't appear to have died from suffocation, but those are very unmistakable marks on the throat."

"Uncommonly," agreed Badger; "and they are enough for my purpose without any medical hair-splittings. How long do you think he has been dead?"

"From nine to twelve hours," I replied, "but nearer nine, I should think."

The inspector looked at his watch.

"That makes it between nine o'clock and midnight, but nearer midnight," said he. "Well, we shall hear if the night porter has anything to tell us. I've sent word for him to come over, and the laundress, too. And here is one of 'em."

It was, in fact, both of them, for when the inspector opened the door, they were discovered conversing eagerly in whispers. "One at a time," said Badger. "I'll have the porter in first;" and having admitted the man, he unceremoniously shut the door on the woman. The night porter saluted me as he came in—we were old acquaintances—and then halted near the door, where he stood stiffly, with his eyes riveted on the corpse.

"Now," said Badger, "I want you to try to remember if you let in any strangers last night, and if so, what their business was."

"I remember quite well," the porter replied. "I let in three strangers while I was on duty. One was going to Mr. Bolter in Fig Tree Court, one was going to Sir Alfred Blain's chambers, and the third said he had an appointment with Mr. Herrington."

"Ha!" exclaimed Badger, rubbing his hands. "Now, what time did you let him in?"

"It was just after ten-fifteen."

"Can you tell us what he was like and how he was dressed?"

"Yes," was the reply. "He didn't know where Tanfield Court was, and I had to walk down and show him, so I was able to have a good look at him. He was a middle-sized man, rather thin, dark hair, small moustache, no beard, and he had a long, sharp nose with a bump on the bridge. He wore a soft felt hat, a loose light overcoat, and he carried a thickish rough stick."

"What class of man was he? Seem to be a gentleman?"

"He was quite a gentlemanly kind of man, so far as I could judge, but he looked a bit shabby as to his clothes."

"Did you let him out?"

"Yes. He came to the gate a few minutes before eleven."

"And did you notice anything unusual about him then?"

"I did," the porter replied impressively. "I noticed that his collar was all crumpled and his hat was dusty and dented. His face was a bit red, and he looked rather upset, as if he had been having a tussle with somebody. I looked at him particularly and wondered what had been happening, seeing that Mr. Herrington was a quiet, elderly gentleman, though he was certainly a bit peppery at times."

The inspector took down these particulars gleefully in a large notebook and asked: "Is that all you know of the affair?" And when the porter replied that it was, he said: "Then I will ask you to read this statement and sign your name below it."

The porter read through his statement and carefully signed his name at the foot. He was about to depart when Badger said: "Before you go, perhaps you had better help us to move the body into the bedroom. It isn't decent to leave it lying there."

Accordingly the four of us lifted the dead man and carried him into the bedroom, where we laid him on the undisturbed bed and covered him with a rug. Then the porter was dismissed, with instructions to send in Mrs. Runt.

The laundress's statement was substantially a repetition of what Mr. Bidwell had told me. She had let herself into the chambers in the usual way, had come suddenly on the dead body of the tenant, and had forthwith rushed downstairs to give the alarm. When she had concluded the inspector stood for a few moments looking thoughtfully at his notes.

"I suppose," he said presently, "you haven't looked round these chambers this morning? Can't say if there is anything unusual about them, or anything missing?"

The laundress shook her head.

"I was too upset," she said, with another furtive glance at the place where the corpse had lain; "but," she added, letting her eyes roam vaguely round the room, "there doesn't seem to be anything missing, so far as I can see—wait! Yes, there is. There's something gone from that nail on the wall; and it was there yesterday morning, because I remember dusting it."

"Ha!" exclaimed Badger. "Now what was it that was hanging on that nail?"

"Well," Mrs. Runt replied hesitatingly, "I really don't know what it was. Seemed like a sort of sword or dagger, but I never looked at it particularly, and I never took it off its nail. I used to dust it as it hung."

"Still," said Badger, "you can give us some sort of description of it, I suppose?"

"I don't know that I can," she replied. "It had a leather case, and the handle was covered with leather, I think, and it had a sort of loop, and it used to hang on that nail."

"Yes, you said that before," Badger commented sourly. "When you say it had a case, do you mean a sheath?"

"You can call it a sheath if you like," she retorted, evidently ruffled by the inspector's manner. "I call it a case."

"And how big was it? How long, for instance?"

Mrs. Runt held out her hands about a yard apart, looked at them critically, shortened the interval to a foot, extended it to two, and still varying the distance, looked vaguely at the inspector.

"I should say it was about that," she said.

"About what?" snorted Badger. "Do you mean a foot or two feet or a yard? Can't you give us some idea?"

"I can't say no clearer than what I have," she snapped. "I don't go round gentlemen's chambers measuring the things."

It seemed to me that Badger's questions were rather unnecessary, for the wall-paper below the nail gave the required information. A coloured patch on the faded ground furnished a pretty clear silhouette of a broad bladed sword or large dagger, about two feet six inches long, which had apparently hung from the nail by a loop or ring at the end of the handle. But it was not my business to point this out. I turned to Bidwell and asked:

"Can you tell us what the thing was?"

"I am afraid I can't," he replied. "I have very seldom been in these chambers. Herrington and I usually met in mine and went to the club. I have a dim recollection of something hanging on that nail, but I have not the least idea what it was or what it was like. But do you think it really matters? The thing was almost certainly a curio of some kind. It couldn't have been of any appreciable value. It is absurd, on the face of it, to suppose that this man came to Herrington's chambers, apparently by appointment, and murdered him for the sake of getting possession of an antique sword or dagger. Don't you think so?"

I did, and so, apparently, did the inspector, with the qualification that the thing seemed to have disappeared, and its disappearance ought to be accounted for; which was perfectly true, though I did not quite see how the "accounting for" was to be effected. However, as the laundress had told all that she knew, Badger gave her her dismissal and she retired to the landing, where I noticed that the night porter was still lurking. Mr. Bidwell also took his departure, and happening, a few moments later, to glance out of the window, I saw him walking slowly across the court, apparently conferring with the laundress and the porter.

As soon as we were alone, Badger assumed a friendly and confidential manner and proceeded to give advice.

"I gather that Mr. Bidwell wants you to investigate this case, but I don't fancy it is in your line at all. It is just a matter of tracing that stranger and getting hold of him. Then we shall have to find out what property there was on these premises. The laundress says that there is nothing missing, but of course no one supposes that the man came here to take the furniture. It is most probable that the motive was robbery of some kind. There's no sign of anything broken open; but then, there wouldn't be, as the keys were available."

Nevertheless he prowled round the room, examining every receptacle that had a lock and trying the drawers of the writing-table and of what looked like a file cabinet.

"You will have your work cut out," I remarked, "to trace that man. The porter's description was pretty vague."

"Yes," he replied; "there isn't much to go on. That's where you come in," he added with a grin, "with your microscopes and air-pumps and things. Now if Dr. Thorndyke was here he would just sweep a bit of dust from the floor and collect any stray oddments and have a good look at them through his magnifier, and then we should know all about it. Can't you do a bit in that line? There's plenty of dust on the floor. And here's a pin. Wonderful significant thing is a pin. And here's a wax vesta; now, that ought to tell you quite a lot. And here is the end of a leather boot-lace—at least, that is what it looks like. That must have come out of somebody's boot. Have a look at it, doctor, and see if you can tell me what kind of boot it came out of and whose boot it was."

He laid the fragment, and the match, and the pin on the table and grinned at me somewhat offensively. Inwardly I resented his impertinence—perhaps the more so since I realised that Thorndyke would probably not have been so completely gravelled as I undoubtedly was. But I considered it politic to take his clumsy irony in good part, and even to carry on his elephantine joke. Accordingly, I picked up the three "clues," one after the other, and examined them gravely, noting that the supposed boot-lace appeared to be composed of whalebone or vulcanite.

"Well, inspector," I said. "I can't give you the answer off-hand. There's no microscope here. But I will examine these objects at my leisure and let you have the information in due course."

With that I wrapped them with ostentatious care in a piece of note and bestowed them in my pocket, a proceeding which the inspector watched with a sour smile.

"I'm afraid you'll be too late," said he. "Our men will probably pick up the tracks while you are doing the microscope stunt. However, I mustn't stay here any longer. We can't do anything until we know what valuables there were on the premises; and I must have the body removed and examined by the police surgeon."

He moved towards the door, and as I had no further business in the rooms, I followed, and leaving him to lock up, I took my way back to our chambers.

When Thorndyke returned to town a couple of days later, I mentioned the case to him. But what Badger had said appeared to be true. It was a case of ascertaining the identity of the stranger who had visited the dead man on that fatal night, and this seemed to be a matter for the police rather than for us. So the case remained in abeyance until the evening following the inquest, when Mr. Bidwell called on us, accompanied by a Mr. Carston, whom he introduced as an old friend of his and of Herrington's family.

"I have called," he said, "to bring you a full report of the evidence at the inquest. I had a shorthand writer there, and this is a typed transcript of his notes. Nothing fresh transpired beyond what Dr. Jervis knows and has probably told you, but I thought you had better have all the information in writing."

"There is no clue as to who the suspicious visitor was, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

"Not the slightest," replied Bidwell. "The porter's description is all they have to go on, and of course it would apply to hundreds of persons. But, in connection with that, there is a question on which I should like to take your opinion. Poor Herrington once mentioned to me that he was subjected to a good deal of annoyance by a certain person who from time to time applied to him for financial help. I gathered that some sort of claim was advanced, and that the demands for money were more or less of the nature of blackmail. Giles didn't say who the person was, but I got the impression that he was a relative. Now, my friend Carston, who attended the inquest with me, noticed that the porter's description of the stranger would apply fairly well to a nephew of Giles's, whom he knows slightly and who is a somewhat shady character; and the question that Carston and I have been debating is whether these facts ought to be communicated to the police. It is a serious matter to put a man under suspicion on such very slender data; and yet—"

"And yet," said Carston, "the facts certainly fit the circumstances. This fellow—his name is Godfrey Herrington—is a typical ne'er-do-weel. Nobody knows how he lives. He doesn't appear to do any work. And then there is the personality of the deceased. I didn't know Giles Herrington very well, but I knew his brother, Sir Gilbert, pretty intimately, and if Giles was at all like him, a catastrophe might easily have occurred."

"What was Sir Gilbert's special characteristic?" Thorndyke asked.

"Unamiability," was the reply. "He was a most cantankerous, overbearing man, and violent at times. I knew him when I was at the Colonial Office with him, and one of his official acts will show the sort of man he was. You may remember it, Bidwell—the Bekwè affair. There was some trouble in Bekwè, which is one of the minor kingdoms bordering on Ashanti, and Sir Gilbert was sent out as a special commissioner to settle it. And settle it he did with a vengeance. He took up an armed force, deposed the king of Bekwè, seized the royal stool, message stick, state sword, drums, and the other insignia of royalty, and brought them away with him. And what made it worse was that he treated these important things as mere loot

kept some of them himself and gave away others as presents to his friends.

"It was an intolerably high-handed proceeding, and it caused a rare outcry. Even the Colonial Governor protested, and in the end the Secretary of State directed the Governor to reinstate the king and restore the stolen insignia, as these things went with the royal title and were necessary for the ceremonies of reinstatement or the accession of a new king."

"And were they restored?" asked Bidwell.

"Most of them were. But just about this time Gilbert died, and as the whereabouts of one or two of them were unknown, it was impossible to collect them then. I don't know if they have been found since."

Here Thorndyke led Mr. Carston back to the point from which he had digressed.

"You are suggesting that certain peculiarities of temper and temperament on the part of the deceased might have some bearing on the circumstances of his death."

"Yes," said Carston. "If Giles Herrington was at all like his brother—I don't know whether he was—" here he looked inquiringly at Bidwell, who nodded emphatically.

"I should say he was, undoubtedly," said he. "He was my friend, and I was greatly attached to him; but to others, I must admit, he must have appeared a decidedly morose, cantankerous, and irascible man."

"Very well," resumed Carston. "If you imagine this cadging, blackmailing wastrel calling on him and trying to squeeze him, and then you imagine Herrington refusing to be squeezed and becoming abusive and even violent, you have a fair set of antecedents for—for what, in fact, did happen."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "what exactly did happen, according to the evidence?"

"The medical evidence," replied Bidwell, "showed that the immediate cause of death was heart failure. There were marks of fingers on the throat, as you know, and various other bruises. It was evident that deceased had been violently assaulted, but death was not directly due to the injuries."

"And the finding of the jury?" asked Thorndyke.

"Wilful murder, committed by some person unknown."

"It doesn't appear to me," said I, "that Mr. Carston's suggestion has much present bearing on the case. It is really a point for the defence. But we are concerned with the identity of the unknown man."

"I am inclined to agree with Dr. Jervis," said Bidwell. "We have got to catch the hare before we go into culinary details."

"My point is," said Carston, "that Herrington's peculiar temper suggests a set of circumstances that would render it probable that his visitor was his nephew Godfrey."

"There is some truth in that," Thorndyke agreed. "It is highly speculative, but a reasonable speculation cannot be disregarded when the known facts are so few. My feeling is that the police ought to be informed of the existence of this man and his possible relations with the deceased. As to whether he is or is not the suspected stranger, that could be settled at once if he were confronted with the night porter."

"Yes, that is true," said Bidwell. "I think Carston and I had better call at Scotland Yard and give the Assistant Commissioner a hint on the subject. It will have to be a very guarded hint, of course."

"Was the question of motive raised?" Thorndyke asked. "As to robbery, for instance."

"There is no evidence of robbery," replied Bidwell. "I have been through all the receptacles in the chambers, and everything seems intact. The keys were in poor Giles's pocket and nothing seems to have been disturbed; indeed, it doesn't appear that there was any portable property of value on the premises."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "the first thing that has to be done is to establish the identity of the nocturnal visitor. That is the business of the police. And if you call and tell them what you have told us, they will, at least, have something to investigate. They should have no difficulty in proving either that he is or is not the man whom the porter let in at the gate; and until they have settled that question, there is no need for us to take any action."

"Exactly," said Bidwell, rising and taking up his hat. "If the police can complete the case, there is nothing for us to do. However, I will leave you the report of the inquest to look over at your leisure, and will keep you informed as to how the case progresses."

When our two friends had gone, Thorndyke sat for some time turning over the sheets of the report and glancing through the depositions of the witnesses. Presently he remarked: "If it turns out that this man, Godfrey Herrington, is not the man whom the porter let in, the police will be left in the air. Apart from Bidwell's purely speculative suggestion, there seems to be no clue whatever to the visitor's identity."

"Badger would like to hear you say that," said I. "He was very sarcastic respecting our methods of research," and here I gave him an account of my interview with the inspector, including the "clues" with which he had presented me.

"It was like his impudence," Thorndyke commented smilingly, "to pull the leg of my learned junior. Still, there was a germ of sense in what he said. A collection of dust from the floor of that room, in which two men had engaged in a violent struggle, would certainly yield traces of both of them."



"Mixed up with the traces of a good many others," I remarked.

"True," he admitted. "But that would not affect the value of a positive trace of a particular individual. Supposing, for instance, that Godfrey Herrington were known to have dyed hair; and suppose that one or more dyed male hairs were found in the dust from the floor of the room. That would establish a probability that he had been in that room, and also that he was the person who had struggled with the deceased."

"Yes, I see that," said I. "Perhaps I ought to have collected some of the dust. But it isn't too late now, as Bidwell has locked up the chambers, Meanwhile, let me present you with Badger's clues. They came off the floor."

I searched in my pocket and produced the paper packet, the existence of which I had forgotten, and having opened it, offered it to him with an ironical bow. He looked gravely at the little collection, and, disregarding the pin and the match, picked out the third object and examined it curiously.

"That is the alleged boot-lace end," he remarked. "It doesn't do much credit to Badger's powers of observation. It is as unlike leather as it could well be."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is obviously whalebone or vulcanite."

"It isn't vulcanite," said he, looking closely at the broken end and getting out his pocket lens for a more minute inspection.

"What do you suppose it is?" I asked, my curiosity stimulated by the evident interest with which he was examining the object.

"We needn't suppose," he replied. "I fancy that if we get Polton to make a cross section of it, the microscope will tell us what it is. I will take it up to him." As he went out and I heard him ascending to the laboratory where our assistant, Polton, was at work, I was conscious of a feeling of vexation and a sense of failure. It was always thus. I had treated this fragment with the same levity as had the inspector, just dropping it into my pocket and forgetting it. Probably the thing was of no interest or importance; but whether it was or not, Thorndyke would not be satisfied until he knew for certain what it was. And that habit of examining everything, of letting nothing pass without the closest scrutiny, was one of the great secrets of his success as an investigator.

When he came down again I reopened the subject.

It has occurred to me," I said, "that it might be as well for us to have a look at that room. My inspection was rather perfunctory, as Badger was there."

"I have just been thinking the same," he replied. "If Godfrey is not the man, and the police are left stranded, Bidwell will look to us to take up the inquiry, and by that time the room may have been disturbed. I think we will get the key from Bidwell to-morrow morning and make a thorough examination. And we may as well adopt Badger's excellent suggestion respecting the dust. I will instruct Polton to come over with us and bring a full-sized vacuum-cleaner, and we can go over what he collects at our leisure."

Agreeably to this arrangement, we presented ourselves on the following morning at Mr. Bidwell's chambers, accompanied by Polton, who, however, being acutely conscious of the vacuum-cleaner, which was thinly disguised in brown paper, sneaked up the stairs and got out of sight. Bidwell opened the door himself, and Thorndyke explained our intentions to him.

"Of course you can have the key," he said, "but I don't know that it is worth your while to go into the matter. There have been developments since I saw you last night. When Carston and I called at Scotland Yard we found that we were too late. Godfrey Herrington had come forward and made a voluntary statement."

"That was wise of him," said Thorndyke, "but he would have been wiser still to have notified the porter of what had happened and sent for a doctor. He claims that the death was a misadventure, of course?"

"Not at all," replied Bidwell. "He states that when he left, Giles was perfectly well; so well that he was able to kick him—Godfrey—down the stairs and pitch him out on to the pavement. It seems, according to his account, that he called to try to get some financial help from his uncle. He admits that he was rather importunate and persisted after Giles had definitely refused. Then Giles got suddenly into a rage, thrust him out of the chambers, ran him down the stairs, and threw him out into Tanfield Court. It is a perfectly coherent story, and quite probable up to a certain point, but it doesn't account for the bruises on Giles's body or the finger-marks on his throat."

"No," agreed Thorndyke; "either he is lying, or he is the victim of some very inexplicable circumstances. But I gather that you have no further interest in the case?"

Bidwell reflected.

"Well," he said, "I don't know about that. Of course I don't believe him, but it is just possible that he is telling the truth. My feeling is that, if he is guilty, I want him convicted; but if by any chance he is innocent—well, he is Giles's nephew, and I suppose it is my duty to see that he has a fair chance. Yes, I think I would like you to watch the case independently—with a perfectly open mind, neither for nor against. But I don't see that there is much that you can do."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "But one can observe and note the visible facts, if there are any. Has anything been done to the rooms?"

"Nothing whatever," was the reply. "They are just as Dr. Jervis and I found them the morning after the catastrophe."

With this he handed Thorndyke the key and we ascended to the landing, where we found Polton on guard with the vacuum-cleaner, like a sentry armed with some new and unorthodox weapon.

The appearance of the room was unchanged. The half-dislodged table-cloth, the litter of broken glass on the floor, even the displaced fender and hearth-rug, were just as I had last seen them. Thorndyke looked about him critically and remarked "The appearances hardly support Godfrey's statement. There was clearly a prolonged and violent struggle, not a mere ejection. And look at the table cloth. The uncovered part of the table is that nearest the door, and most of the things have fallen off at the end nearest the fireplace. Obviously, the body that dislodged the cloth was moving away from the door, not towards it, which again suggests something more than an unresisted ejection."

He again looked round, and his glance fell on the nail and the coloured silhouette on the wall-paper.

"That, I presume," said he, "is where the mysterious sword or dagger hung. It is rather large for a dagger and somewhat wide for a sword, though barbaric swords are of all shapes and sizes."

He produced his spring tape and carefully measured the phantom shape on the wall. "Thirty-one inches long," he reported, "including the loop at the end of the handle, by which it hung; seven and a half inches at the top of the scabbard, tapering rather irregularly to three inches at the tip. A curious shape. I don't remember ever having seen a sword quite like it."

Meanwhile Polton, having picked up the broken glass and other objects, had uncovered the vacuum-cleaner and now started the motor—which was driven by an attached dry battery—and proceeded very systematically to trundle the machine along the floor. At every two or three sweeps he paused to empty the receiver, placing the grey, felt-like mass on a sheet of paper, with a pencilled note of the part of the room from whence it came. The size of these masses of felted dust, and the astonishing change in the colour of the carpet that marked the trail of the cleaner, suggested that Mrs. Runt's activities had been of a somewhat perfunctory character. Polton's dredgings apparently represented the accumulations of years.

"Wonderful lot of hairs in this old dust," Polton remarked as he deposited a fresh consignment on the paper, "especially in this lot. It came from under that looking-glass on the wall. Perhaps that clothes brush that hangs under the glass accounts for it."

"Yes," I agreed, "they will be hairs brushed off Mr. Herrington's collar and shoulders. But," I added, taking the brush from its nail and examining it, "Mrs. Runt seems to have used the glass, too. There are three long hairs still sticking to the brush."

As Thorndyke was still occupied in browsing inquisitively round the room, I proceeded to make a preliminary inspection of the heaps of dust, picking out the hairs and other recognisable objects with my pocket forceps, and putting them on a separate sheet of paper. Of the former, the bulk were pretty obviously those of the late tenant—white or dull black male hairs—but Mrs. Runt had contributed quite liberally, for I picked out of the various heaps over a dozen long hairs, the mousy brown colour of which seemed to identify them as hers. The remainder were mostly ordinary male hairs of various colours, eyebrow hairs and eyelashes, of no special interest, with one exception. This was a black hair which lay flat on the paper in a close coil, like a tiny watch-spring.

"I wonder who this negro was," said I, inspecting it through my lens.

"Probably some African or West Indian Law student," Thorndyke suggested. "There are always a good many about the Inns of Court."

He came round to examine my collection, and while he was viewing the negro hair with the aid of my lens, I renewed my investigation of the little dust-heaps. Presently I made a new discovery.

"Why," I exclaimed, "here is another of Badger's boot-laces—another piece of the same one, I think. By the way, did you ascertain what that boot-lace really was?"

"Yes," he replied. "Polton made a section of it and mounted it; and furthermore, he made a magnified photograph of it. I have the photograph in my pocket, so you can answer your own question."

He produced from his letter-case a half-plate print which he handed to me and which I examined curiously.

"It is a singular object," said I, "but I don't quite make it out. It looks rather like a bundle of hairs embedded in some transparent substance."

"That, in effect," he replied, "is what it is. It is an elephant's hair, probably from the tail. But, as you see, it is a compound hair; virtually a group of hairs agglutinated into a single stem. Most very large hairs are compound. A tiger's whiskers, for instance, are large, stiff hairs which, if cut across, are seen to be formed of several largish hairs fused together; and the colossal hair which grows on the nose of the rhinoceros—the so-called nasal horn—is made up of thousands of subordinate hairs."

"It is a remarkable-looking thing," I said, handing back the photograph; "very distinctive—if you happen to know what it is. But the mystery is how on earth it came here. There are no elephants in the Temple."

"I certainly haven't noticed any," he replied; "and, as you say, the presence of an elephant's hair in a room in the middle

of London is a rather remarkable circumstance. And yet, perhaps, if we consider all the other circumstances, it may not be impossible to form a conjecture as to how it came here. I recommend the problem to my learned friend for consideration at his leisure and now, as we have seen all that there is to see—which is mighty little—we may as well leave Polton to finish the collection of data from the floor. We can take your little selection with us.”

He folded the paper containing the hairs that I had picked out into a neat packet, which he slipped into his pocket; then, having handed the key of the outer door to Polton, for return to Mr. Bidwell, he went out and I followed. We descended the stairs slowly, both of us deeply reflective. As to the subject of his meditations I could form no opinion, but my own were occupied by the problem which he had suggested; and the more I reflected on it, the less capable of solution did it appear.

We had nearly reached the ground floor when I became aware of quick footsteps descending the stairs behind us. Near the entry our follower overtook us, and as we stood aside to let him pass, I had a brief vision of a shortish, dapper, smartly-dressed coloured man—apparently an African or West Indian—who carried a small suit-case and a set of golf-clubs.

“Now,” said I, in a low tone, “I wonder if that gentleman is the late owner of that negro hair that I picked up. It seems intrinsically probable as he appears to live in this building, and would be a near neighbour of Herrington’s.” I halted at the entry and read out the only name painted on the door-post as appertaining to the second floor—Mr. Kwaku Essien, which, I decided, seemed to fit a gentleman of colour.

But Thorndyke was not listening. His long legs were already carrying him, with a deceptively leisurely air, across Tanfield Court in the wake of Mr. Essien, and at about the same pace. I put on a spurt and overtook him, a little mystified by his sudden air of purpose and by the fact that he was not walking in the direction of our chambers. Still more mystified was I when it became clear that Thorndyke was following the African and keeping at a constant distance in rear of him; but I made no comment until, having pursued our quarry to the top of Middle Temple Lane, we saw him hail a taxi and drive off. Then I demanded an explanation.

“I wanted to see him fairly out of the precincts,” was the reply, “because I have a particular desire to see what his chambers are like. I only hope his door has a practicable latch.”

I stared at him in dismay.

“You surely don’t contemplate breaking into his chambers!” I exclaimed.

“Certainly not,” he replied, “if the latch won’t yield to gentle persuasion I shall give it up. But don’t let me involve you, Jervis. I admit that it is a slightly irregular proceeding.”

“Irregular!” I repeated. “It is house-breaking, pure and simple I can only hope that you won’t be able to get in.”

The hope turned out to be a vain one, as I had secretly feared. When we had reconnoitred the stairs and established the encouraging fact that the third floor was untenanted, we inspected the door above which our victim’s name was painted; and a glance at the yawning key of an old-fashioned draw-latch told me that the deed was as good as done.

“Now, Jervis,” said Thorndyke, producing from his pocket the curious instrument that he described as a “smoker’s companion”—it was an undeniable pick-lock, made by Polton under his direction—“you had better clear out and wait for me at our chambers.”

“I shall do nothing of the kind,” I replied. “I am an accessory before the fact already, so I may as well stay and see the crime committed.”

“Then in that case,” said he, “you had better keep a look-out from the landing window and call me if any one comes to the house. That will make us perfectly safe.”

I accordingly took my station at the window, and Thorndyke, having knocked several times at the “oak” without eliciting any response, set to work with the smoker’s companion. In less than a minute the latch clicked, the outer door opened, and Thorndyke, pushing the inner door open, entered, leaving both doors ajar. I was devoured by curiosity as to what his purpose was. Obviously it must be a very definite one to justify this most extraordinary proceeding. But I dared not leave my post for a moment, seeing that we were really engaged in a very serious breach of the law and it was of vital importance that we should not be surprised in the act. I was therefore unable to observe my colleague’s proceedings, and I waited impatiently to see if anything came of this unlawful entry.

I had waited thus some ten minutes, keeping a close watch on the pavement below, when I heard Thorndyke quickly cross the room and approach the door. A moment later he came out on the landing, bearing in his hand an object which, while it enlightened me as to the purpose of the raid, added to my mystification.

“That looks like the missing sword from Herrington’s room!” I exclaimed, gazing at it in amazement.

“Yes,” he replied. “I found it in a drawer in the bedroom. Only it isn’t a sword.”

“Then, what the deuce is it?” I demanded, for the thing looked like a broad-bladed sword in a soft leather scabbard of somewhat rude native workman ship.

By way of reply he slowly drew the object from its sheath, and as it came into sight, I uttered an exclamation of astonishment. To the inexperienced eye it appeared an elongated body about nine inches in length covered with coarse, black leather, from either side of which sprang a multitude of what looked like thick, black wires. Above, it was furnished with a leather handle which was surmounted by a suspension loop of plaited leather.

"I take it," said I, "that this is an elephant's tail."

"Yes," he replied, "and a rather remarkable specimen. The hairs are of unusual length. Some of them, you see, are nearly eighteen inches long."

"And what are you going to do now?" I asked.

"I am going to put it back where I found it. Then I shall run down to Scotland Yard and advise Miller to get a search warrant. He is too discreet to ask inconvenient questions."

I must admit that it was a great relief to me when, a minute later, Thorndyke came out and shut the door; but I could not deny that the raid had been justified by the results. What had, presumably, been a mere surmise had been converted into a definite fact on which action could confidently be taken.

"I suppose," said I, as we walked down towards the Embankment en route for Scotland Yard, "I ought to have spotted this case."

"You had the means," Thorndyke replied. "At your first visit you learned that an object of some kind had disappeared from the wall. It seemed to be a trivial object of no value, and not likely to be connected with the crime. So you disregarded it. But it had disappeared. Its disappearance was not accounted for, and that disappearance seemed to coincide in time with the death of Herrington. It undoubtedly called for investigation. Then you found on the floor an object the nature of which was unknown to you. Obviously, you ought to have ascertained what it was."

"Yes, I ought," I admitted, "though I am not sure that I should have been much forrader even then. In fact, I am not so very much forrader even now. I don't see how you spotted this man Essien, and I don't understand why he took all this trouble and risk and even committed a murder to get possession of this trumpety curio. Of course I can make a vague guess. But I should like to hear how you ran the man and the thing to earth."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "Let me retrace the train of discoveries and inferences in their order. First I learned that an object, supposed to be a barbaric sword of some kind, had disappeared about the time of the murder—if it was a murder. Then we heard from Carston that Sir Gilbert Herrington had appropriated the insignia and ceremonial objects belonging to the king of Bekwè; that some had subsequently been restored, but others had been given to friends as curios. As I listened to that story, the possibility occurred to me that this curio which had disappeared might be one of the missing ceremonial objects. It was not only possible: it was quite probable. For Giles Herrington was a very likely person to have received one of these gifts, and his morose temper made it unlikely that he would restore it. And then, since such an object would be of great value to somebody, and since it was actually stolen property, there would be good reasons why some interested person should take forcible possession of it. This, of course, was mere hypothesis of a rather shadowy kind. But when you produced an object which I at once suspected, and then proved, to be an elephant's hair, the hypothesis became a reasonable working theory. For, among the ceremonial objects which form what we may call the regalia of a West African king is the elephant's tail which is carried before him by a special officer as a symbol of his power and strength. An elephant's tail had pretty certainly been stolen from the king, and Carston said nothing about its having been restored."

"Well, when we went to Herrington's chambers just now, it was clear to me that the thing which had disappeared was certainly not a sword. The phantom shape on the wall did not show much, but it did show plainly that the object had hung from the nail by a large loop at the end of the handle. But the suspension loop of a sword or dagger is always on the scabbard, never on the hilt. But if the thing was not a sword, what was it? The elephant's hair that you found on the floor seemed to answer the question."

"Now, as we came in, I had noticed on the doorpost the West African name, Kwaku Essien. A man whose name is Kwaku is pretty certainly a negro. But if this was an elephant's tail, its lawful owner was a negro, and that owner wanted to recover it and was morally entitled to take possession of it. Here was another striking agreement. The chambers over Herrington's were occupied by a negro. Finally, you found among the floor dust a negro's hair. Then a negro had actually been in this room. But from what we know of Herrington, that negro was not there as an invited visitor. All the probabilities pointed to Mr. Essien. But the probabilities were not enough to act on. Then we had a stroke of sheer luck. We got the chance to explore Essien's chambers and seek the crucial fact. But here we are at Scotland Yard."

That night, at about eight o'clock, a familiar tattoo on our knocker announced the arrival of Mr. Superintendent Miller, not entirely unexpected as I guessed.

"Well," he said, as I let him in, "the coloured nobleman has come home. I've just had a message from the man who was detailed to watch the premises."

"Are you going to make the arrest now?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, and I should be glad if you could come across with me. You know more about the case than I do."

Thorndyke assented at once, and we set forth together. As we entered Tanfield Court we passed a man who was lurking in the shadow of an entry, and who silently indicated the lighted windows of the chambers for which we were bound. Ascending the stairs up which I had lately climbed with unlawful intent, we halted at Mr. Essien's door, on which the superintendent executed an elaborate flourish with his stick, there being no knocker. After a short interval we heard a bolt with drawn, the door opened a short distance, and in the interval a black face appeared looking out at us suspiciously.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" the owner of the face demanded gruffly.

"You are Mr. Kwaku Essien, I think?" said Miller, unostentatiously insinuating his foot into the door opening.

"Yes," was the reply. "But I don't know you. What is your business?"

"I am a police officer," Miller replied, edging his foot in a little farther, "and I hold a warrant to arrest you on the charge of having murdered Mr. Giles Herrington."

Before the superintendent had fairly finished his sentence, the dusky face vanished and the door slammed violently—on to the superintendent's massive foot. That foot was instantly reinforced by a shoulder and for a few moments there was a contest of forces, opposite but not equal. Suddenly the door flew open and the superintendent charged into the room. I had a momentary vision of a flying figure, closely pursued, darting through into an inner room, of the slamming of a second door—once more on an intercepting foot. And then—it all seemed to have happened in a few seconds—a dejected figure, sitting on the edge of a bed, clasping a pair of manacled hands and watching Miller as he drew the elephant's tail out of a drawer in the dressing-chest.

"This—er—article," said Miller, "belonged to Mr. Herrington, and was stolen from his premises on the night of the murder."

Essien shook his head emphatically.

"No," he replied. "You are wrong. I stole nothing, and I did not murder Mr. Herrington. Listen to me and I will tell you all about it."

Miller administered the usual caution and the prisoner continued: "This elephant-brush is one of many things stolen, years ago, from the king of Bekwè. Some of those things—most of them—have been restored, but this could not be traced for a long time. At last it became known to me that Mr. Herrington had it, and I wrote to him asking him to give it up and telling him who I was—I am the eldest living son of the king's sister, and therefore, according to our law, the heir to the kingdom. But he would not give it up or even sell it. Then, as I am a student of the Inn, I took these chambers above his, intending, when I had an opportunity, to go in and take possession of my uncle's property. The opportunity came that night that you have spoken of. I was coming up the stairs to my chambers when, as I passed his door, I heard loud voices inside as of people quarrelling. I had just reached my own door and opened it when I heard his door open, and then a great uproar and the sound of a struggle. I ran down a little way and looked over the banisters, and then I saw him thrusting a man across the landing and down the lower stairs. As they disappeared, I ran down, and finding his door ajar, I went in to recover my property. It took me a little time to find it, and I had just taken it from the nail and was going out with it when, at the door, I met Mr. Herrington coming in. He was very excited already, and when he saw me he seemed to go mad. I tried to get past him, but he seized me and dragged me back into the room, wrenching the thing out of my hand. He was very violent. I thought he wanted to kill me, and I had to struggle for my life. Suddenly he let go his hold of me, staggered back a few paces, and then fell on the floor. I stooped over him, thinking that he was taken ill, and wondering what I had better do. But soon I saw that he was not ill; he was dead. Then I was very frightened. I picked up the elephant brush and put it back into its case, and I went out very quietly, shut the door, and ran up to my rooms. That is what happened. There was no robbery and murder."

"Well," said Miller, as the prisoner and his escort disappeared towards the gate, "I suppose, in a technical sense, it is murder, but they are hardly likely to press the charge."

"I don't think it is even technically," said Thorndyke. "My feeling is that he will be acquitted if he is sent for trial. Meanwhile, I take it that my client, Godfrey Herrington, will be released from custody at once."

"Yes, doctor," replied Miller, "I will see to that now. He has had better luck than he deserved, I suspect, in having his case looked after by you. I don't fancy he would have got an acquittal if he had gone for trial."

Thorndyke's forecast was nearly correct, but there was no acquittal, since there was no trial. The case against Kwaku Essien never got farther than the Grand Jury.

---

## THE PATHOLOGIST TO THE RESCUE

"I HOPE," said I, as I looked anxiously out of our window up King's Bench Walk, "that our friend, Foxley, will turn up to time, or I shall lose the chance of hearing his story. I must be in court by half-past eleven. The telegram said that he was a parson, didn't it?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "The Reverend Arthur Foxley."

"Then perhaps this may be he. There is a parson crossing from the Row in this direction, only he has a girl with him. He didn't say anything about a girl, did he?"

"No. He merely asked for the appointment. However," he added, as he joined me at the window and watched the couple approaching with their eyes apparently fixed on the number above our portico, "this is evidently our client, and punctual to the minute."

In response to the old-fashioned flourish on our little knocker, he opened the inner door and invited the clergyman and his companion to enter; and while the mutual introductions were in progress, I looked critically at our new clients. Mr. Foxley was a typical and favourable specimen of his class: a handsome, refined, elderly gentleman, prim as to his speech, suave and courteous in bearing, with a certain engaging simplicity of manner which impressed me very favourably. His companion I judged to be a parishioner for she was what ladies are apt to describe as "not quite;" that is to say, her social level appeared to appertain to the lower strata of the middle-class. But she was a fine, strapping girl, very sweet-faced and winsome, quiet and gentle in manner and obviously in deep trouble, for her clear grey eyes—fixed earnestly, almost devouringly, on Thorndyke—were reddened and swimming with unshed tears.

"We have sought your aid, Dr. Thorndyke," the clergyman began, "on the advice of my friend, Mr. Brodribb, who happened to call on me on some business. He assured me that you would be able to solve our difficulties if it were humanly possible, so I have come to lay those difficulties before you. I pray to God that you may be able to help us, for my poor young friend here, Miss Markham, is in a most terrible position, as you will understand when I tell you that her future husband, a most admirable young man named Robert Fletcher, is in the custody of the police, charged with robbery and murder."

Thorndyke nodded gravely, and the clergyman continued: "I had better tell you exactly what has happened. The dead man is one Joseph Riggs, a maternal uncle of Fletcher's, a strange, eccentric man, solitary, miserly, and of a violent, implacable temper. He was quite well-to-do, though penurious and haunted constantly by an absurd fear of poverty. His nephew, Robert, was apparently his only known relative, and, under his will, was his sole heir. Recently, however, Robert has become engaged to my friend, Miss Lilian, and this engagement was violently opposed by his uncle, who had repeatedly urged him to make what he called a profitable marriage. For Miss Lilian is a dowerless maiden—dowerless save for those endowments with which God has been pleased to enrich her, and which her future husband has properly prized above mere material wealth. However, Riggs declared, in his brutal way, that he was not going to leave his property to the husband of a shop-woman, and that Robert might look out for a wife with money or be struck out of his will.

"The climax was reached yesterday when Robert, in response to a peremptory summons, went to see his uncle. Mr. Riggs was in a very intractable mood. He demanded that Robert should break off his engagement unconditionally and at once, and when Robert bluntly insisted on his right to choose his own wife the old man worked himself up into a furious rage, shouting, cursing, using the most offensive language and even uttering threats of personal violence. Finally, he drew his gold watch from his pocket and laid it with its chain on the table then, opening a drawer, he took out a bundle of bearer bonds and threw them down by the watch.

"There, my friend," said he, "that is your inheritance. That is all you will get from me, living or dead. Take it and go, and don't let me ever set eyes on you again."

"At first Robert refused to accept the gift, but his uncle became so violent that eventually, for peace's sake, he took the watch and the bonds, intending to return them later, and went away. He left at half-past five, leaving his uncle alone in the house."

"How was that?" Thorndyke asked. "Was there no servant?"

"Mr. Riggs kept no resident servant. The young woman who did his housework came at half-past eight in the morning and left at half-past four. Yesterday she waited until five to get tea ready, but then, as the uproar in the sitting-room was still unabated, she thought it best to go. She was afraid to go in to lay the tea-things.

"This morning, when she arrived at the house, she found the front door unlocked, as it always was during the day. On entering, her attention was at once attracted by two or three little pools of blood on the floor of the hall, or passage. Somewhat alarmed by this, she looked into the sitting-room, and finding no one there, and being impressed by the silence in the house, she went along the passage to a back room—a sort of study or office, which was usually kept locked when Mr. Riggs was not in. Now, however, it was unlocked and the door was ajar; so having first knocked and receiving no answer, she pushed open the door and looked in; and there, to her horror, she saw her employer lying on the floor, apparently dead, with a wound on the side of his head and a pistol on the floor by his side.

"Instantly she turned and rushed out of the house, and she was running up the street in search of a policeman when she

encountered me at a corner and burst out with her dreadful tidings. I walked with her to the police station, and as we went she told me what had happened on the previous afternoon. Naturally, I was profoundly shocked and also alarmed, for I saw that—rightly or wrongly—suspicion must immediately fall on Robert Fletcher. The servant, Rose Turnmill, took it for granted that he had murdered her master; and when we found the station inspector, and Rose had repeated her statement to him, it was evident that he took the same view.

“With him and a sergeant, we went back to the house; but on the way we met Mr. Brodribb, who was staying at the ‘White Lion’ and had just come out for a walk. I told him, rapidly, what had occurred and begged him to come with us, which, with the inspector’s consent, he did; and as we walked I explained to him the awful position that Robert Fletcher might be placed in, and asked him to advise me what to do. But, of course, there was nothing to be said or done until we had seen the body and knew whether any suspicion rested on Robert.

“We found the man Riggs lying as Rose had said. He was quite dead, cold and stiff. There was a pistol wound on the right temple, and a pistol lay on the floor at his right side. A little blood—but not much—had trickled from the wound and lay in a small pool on the oilcloth. The door of an iron safe was open and a bunch of keys hung from the lock; and on a desk one or two share certificates were spread out. On searching the dead man’s pockets it was found that the gold watch which the servant told us he usually carried was missing, and when Rose went to the bedroom to see if it was there, it was nowhere to be found.

“Apart from the watch, however, the appearances suggested that the man had taken his own life. But against this view was the blood on the hall floor. The dead man appeared to have fallen at once from the effects of the shot, and there had been very little bleeding. Then how came the blood in the hall? The inspector decided that it could not have been the blood of the deceased; and when we examined it and saw that there were several little pools and that they seemed to form a track towards the street door, he was convinced that the blood had fallen from some person who had been wounded and was escaping from the house. And, under the circumstances, he was bound to assume that that person was Robert Fletcher; and on that assumption, he dispatched the sergeant forthwith to arrest Robert.

“On this I held a consultation with Mr. Brodribb, who pointed out that the case turned principally on the blood in the hall. If it was the blood of deceased, and the absence of the watch could be explained, a verdict of suicide could be accepted. But if it was the blood of some other person, that fact would point to murder. The question, he said, would have to be settled, if possible, and his advice to me, if I believed Robert to be innocent—which, from my knowledge of him, I certainly did—was this: Get a couple of small, clean, labelled bottles from a chemist and—with the inspector’s consent—put in one a little of the blood from the hall and in the other some of the blood of the deceased. Seal them both in the inspector’s presence and mine and take them up to Dr. Thorndyke. If it is possible to answer the question, Are they or are they not from the same person? he will answer it.

“Well, the inspector made no objection, so I did what he advised. And here are the specimens. I trust they may tell us what we want to know.”

Here Mr. Foxley took from his attaché-case a small cardboard box, and opening it, displayed two little wide-mouthed bottles carefully packed in cotton wool. Lifting them out tenderly, he placed them on the table before Thorndyke. They were both neatly corked, sealed—with Brodribb’s seal, as I noticed—and labelled; the one inscribed “Blood of Joseph Riggs,” and the other “Blood of unknown origin,” and both signed “Arthur Foxley” and dated. At the bottom of each was a small mass of gelatinous blood-clot.

Thorndyke looked a little dubiously at the two bottles, and addressing the clergyman, said: “I am afraid Mr. Brodribb has rather over-estimated our resources. There is no known method by which the blood of one person can be distinguished with certainty from that of another.”

“Dear, dear!” exclaimed Mr. Foxley. “How disappointing! Then these specimens are useless, after all?”

“I won’t say that; but it is in the highest degree improbable that they will yield any information. You must build no expectations on them.”

“But you will examine them and see if anything is to be gleaned,” the parson urged, persuasively.

“Yes, I will examine them. But you realise that if they should yield any evidence, that evidence might be unfavourable?”

“Yes; Mr. Brodribb pointed that out, but we are willing to take the risk, and so, I may say, is Robert Fletcher, to whom I put the question.”

“Then you have seen Mr. Fletcher since the discovery?”

“Yes, I saw him at the police station after his arrest. It was then that he gave me—and also the police—the particulars that I have repeated to you. He had to make a statement, as the dead man’s watch and the bonds were found in his possession.”

“With regard to the pistol. Has it been identified?”

“No. It is an old-fashioned derringer which no one has ever seen before, so there is no evidence as to whose property it was.”

“And as to those share certificates which you spoke of as lying on the desk. Do you happen to remember what they were?”

"Yes, they were West African mining shares; Abusum Pa-pa was the name, I think."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "Mr. Riggs had been losing money. The Abusum Pa-pa Company has just gone into liquidation. Do you know if anything had been taken from the safe?"

"It is impossible to say, but apparently not, as there was a good deal of money in the cash-box, which we unlocked and inspected. But we shall hear more to-morrow at the inquest, and I trust we shall hear something there from you. But in any case I hope you will attend to watch the proceedings on behalf of poor Fletcher. And if possible, to be present at the autopsy at eleven o'clock. Can you manage that?"

"Yes. And I shall come down early enough to make an inspection of the premises if the police will give the necessary facilities."

Mr. Foxley thanked him effusively, and when the details as to the trains had been arranged, our clients rose to depart. Thorndyke shook their hands cordially, and as he bade farewell to Miss Markham he murmured a few words of encouragement. She looked up at him gratefully and appealingly as she naïvely held his hand.

"You will try to help us, Dr. Thorndyke, won't you?" she urged. "And you will examine that blood very, very carefully. Promise that you will. Remember that poor Robert's life may hang upon what you can tell about it."

"I realise that, Miss Markham," he replied gently, "and I promise you that the specimens shall be most thoroughly examined; and further, that no stone shall be left unturned in my endeavours to bring the truth to light."

At his answer, spoken with infinite kindness and sympathy, her eyes filled and she turned away with a few broken words of thanks, and the good clergyman—himself not unmoved by the little episode—took her arm and led her to the door.

"Well," I remarked as their retreating footsteps died away, "old Brodribb's enthusiasm seems to have let you in for a queer sort of task; and I notice that you appear to have accepted Fletcher's statement."

"Without prejudice," he replied. "I don't know Fletcher, but the balance of probabilities is in his favour. Still, that blood-track in the hall is a curious feature. It certainly requires explanation."

"It does, indeed!" I exclaimed, "and you have got to find the explanation! Well, I wish you joy of the job. I suppose you will carry out the farce to the bitter end as you have promised?"

"Certainly," he replied. "But it is hardly a farce. I should have looked the specimens over in any case. One never knows what illuminating fact a chance observation may bring into view."

I smiled sceptically.

"The fact that you are asked to ascertain is that these two samples of blood came from the same person. If there are any means of proving that, they are unknown to me. I should have said it was an impossibility."

"Of course," he rejoined, "you are quite right, speaking academically and in general terms. No method of identifying the blood of individual persons has hitherto been discovered. But yet I can imagine the possibility, in particular and exceptional cases, of an actual, personal identification by means of blood. What does my learned friend think?"

"He thinks that his imagination is not equal to the required effort," I answered; and with that I picked up my brief-bag and went forth to my duties at the courts.

That Thorndyke would keep his promise to poor Lilian Markham was a foregone conclusion, preposterous as the examination seemed. But even my long experience of my colleague's scrupulous conscientiousness had not prepared me for the spectacle which met my eyes when I returned to our chambers. On the table stood the microscope, flanked by three slide-boxes. Each box held six trays, and each tray held six slides—a hundred and eight slides in all!

But why three boxes? I opened one. The slides—carefully mounted blood-films—were labelled "Joseph Riggs." Those in the second box were labelled, "Blood from hall floor." But when I opened the third box, I beheld a collection of empty slides labelled "Robert Fletcher"!

I chuckled aloud. Prodigious! Thorndyke was going even one better than his promise. He was not only going to examine—probably had examined—the two samples produced; he was actually going to collect a third sample for himself!

I picked out one of Mr. Riggs's slides and laid it on the stage of the microscope. Thorndyke seemed to have been using a low-power objective—the inch-and-a-half. After a glance through this, I swung round the nose-piece to the high power. And then I got a further surprise. The brightly-coloured "white" corpuscles showed that Thorndyke had actually been to the trouble of staining the films with eosin! Again I murmured, "Prodigious!" and put the slide back in its box. For, of course, it showed just what one expected: blood—or rather, broken-up blood-clot. From its appearance I could not even have sworn that it was human blood.

I had just closed the box when Thorndyke entered the room. His quick eye at once noted the changed objective and he remarked: "I see you have been having a look at the specimens."

"A specimen." I corrected. "Enough is as good as a feast."

"Blessed are they who are easily satisfied," he retorted; and then he added: "I have altered my arrangements, though I needn't interfere with yours. I shall go down to Southaven to-night; in fact, I am starting in a few minutes."



"Why?" I asked.

"For several reasons. I want to make sure of the post-mortem to-morrow morning, I want to pick up any further facts that are available, and finally, I want to prepare a set of blood-films from Robert Fletcher. We may as well make the series complete," he added with a smile, to which I replied by a broad grin.

"Really, Thorndyke," I protested. "I'm surprised at you, at your age, too. She is a nice girl, but she isn't so beautiful as to justify a hundred and eight blood-films."

I accompanied him to the taxi, followed by Polton, who carried his modest luggage, and then returned to speculate on his probable plan of campaign. For, of course, he had one. His purposive, resolute manner told me that he had seen farther into this case than I had. I accepted that as natural and inevitable. Indeed, I may admit that my disrespectful badinage covered a belief in his powers hardly second even to old Brodribb's. I was, in fact, almost prepared to discover that those preposterous blood-films had, after all, yielded some "illuminating fact" which had sent him hurrying down to Southaven in search of corroboration.

When I alighted from the train on the following day at a little past noon, I found him waiting on the platform, ready to conduct me to his hotel for an early lunch.

"All goes well, so far," he reported. "I attended the post-mortem, and examined the wound thoroughly. The pistol was held in the right hand not more than two inches from the head; probably quite close, for the skin is scorched and heavily tattooed with black powder grains. I find that Riggs was right-handed. So the *prima facie* probabilities are in favour of suicide; and the recent loss of money suggests a reasonable motive."

"But what about that blood in the hall?"

"Oh, we have disposed of that. I completed the blood-film series last night."

I looked at him quickly to see if he was serious or only playing a facetious return-shot. But his face was as a face of wood.

"You are an exasperating old devil, Thorndyke!" I exclaimed with conviction. Then, knowing that cross-examination would be futile, I asked: "What are we going to do after lunch?"

"The inspector is going to show us over 'the scene of the tragedy,' as the newspapers would express it."

I noted gratefully that he had reserved this item for me, and dismissed professional topics for the time being, concentrating my attention on the old-world, amphibious streets through which we were walking. There is always something interesting in the aspect of a sea-port town, even if it is only a small one like Southaven.

The inspector arrived with such punctuality that he found us still at the table and was easily induced to join us with a cup of coffee and to accept a cigar—administered by Thorndyke, as I suspected, with the object of hindering conversation. I could see that his interest in my colleague was intense and not unmingled with awe, a fact which, in conjunction with the cigar, restrained him from any undue manifestations of curiosity, but not from continuous, though furtive, observation of my friend. Indeed, when we arrived at the late Mr. Riggs's house, I was secretly amused by the close watch that he kept on Thorndyke's movements, unsensational as the inspection turned out to be.

The house, itself, presented very little of interest excepting its picturesque old-world exterior, which fronted on a quiet by-street and was furnished with a deep bay which, as Thorndyke ascertained, commanded a clear view of the street from end to end. It was a rather shabby, neglected little house, as might have been expected, and our examination of it yielded, so far as I could see, only a single fact of any significance: which was that there appeared to be no connection whatever between the blood-stain on the study floor and the train of large spots from the middle of the hall to the street door. And on this piece of evidence—definitely unfavourable from our point of view—Thorndyke concentrated his attention when he had made a preliminary survey.

Closely followed by the watchful inspector, he browsed round the little room, studying every inch of the floor between the blood-stain and the door. The latter he examined minutely from top to bottom, especially as to the handle, the jambs, and the lintel. Then he went out into the hall, scrutinising the floor inch by inch, poring over the walls, and even looking behind the framed prints that hung on them. A reflector lamp suspended by a nail on the wall received minute and prolonged attention, as did also a massive lamp-hook screwed into one of the beams of the low ceiling, of which Thorndyke remarked as he stooped to pass under it, that it must have been fixed there by a dwarf.

"Yes," the inspector agreed, "and a fool. A swinging lamp hung on that hook would have blocked the whole fairway. There isn't too much room as it is. What a pity we weren't a bit more careful about footprints in this place. There are plenty of tracks of wet feet here on this oil-cloth; faint, but you could have made them out all right if they hadn't been all on top of one another. There's Mr. Foxley's, the girl's, mine, and the men who carried out the body, but I'm hanged if I can tell which is which. It's a regular mix up."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is all very confused. But I notice one rather odd thing. There are several faint traces of a large right foot, but I can't see any sign of the corresponding left foot. Can you?"

"Perhaps this is it," said Thorndyke, pointing to a large, vague oval mark. "I have noticed that it seems to occur in some sort of connection with the big right foot; but I must admit that it is not a very obvious foot-print."

"I shouldn't have taken it for a foot-print at all, or at any rate, not a human foot-print. It is more like the spoor of some

big animal.”

“It is,” Thorndyke agreed; “but whatever it is, it seems to have been here before any of the others arrived. You notice that wherever it occurs, it seems to have been trodden on by some of the others.”

“Yes, I had noticed that, and the same is true of the big right foot, so it seems probable that they are connected, as you say. But I am hanged if I can make anything of it. Can you, inspector?”

The inspector shook his head. He could not recognise the mark as a foot-print, but he could see very plainly that he had been a fool not to have taken more care to protect the floor.

When the examination of the hall was finished, Thorndyke opened the door and looked at the big, flat doorstep. “What was the weather like here on Wednesday evening?” he asked.

“Showery,” the inspector replied; “and there were one or two heavy showers during the night. You were noticing that there are no blood-tracks on the doorstep. But there wouldn’t be in any case; for if a man had come out of this door dropping blood, the blood would have dropped on wet stone and got washed away at once.”

Thorndyke admitted the truth of this; and so another item of favourable evidence was extinguished. The probability that the blood in the hall was that of some person other than the deceased remained undisturbed; and I could not see that a single fact had been elicited by our inspection of the house that was in any way helpful to our client. Indeed, it appeared to me that there was absolutely no case for the defence, and I even asked myself whether we were not, in fact, merely trying to fudge up a defence for an obviously guilty man. It was not like Thorndyke to do that. But how did the case stand? There was a suggestion of suicide, but a clear possibility of homicide. There was strong evidence that a second person had been in the house, and that person appeared to have received a wound. But a wound suggested a struggle; and the servant’s evidence was to the effect that when she left the house a violent altercation was in progress. The deceased was never again seen alive; and the other party to the quarrel had been found with property of the dead man in his possession. Moreover, there was a clear motive for the crime, stupid as that crime was. For the dead man had threatened to revoke his will but as he had presumably not done so, his death left the will still operative. In short, everything pointed to the guilt of our client, Robert Fletcher.

I had just reached this not very gratifying conclusion when a statement of Thorndyke’s shattered my elaborate summing up into impalpable fragments.

“I suppose, sir,” said the inspector, “there isn’t anything that you would care to tell us, as you are for the defence. But we are not hostile to Fletcher. In fact, he hasn’t been charged. He is only being detained in custody until we have heard what turns up at the inquest. I know you have examined that blood that Mr. Foxley took, and Fletcher’s blood, too, and you’ve seen the premises. We have given all the facilities that we could, and if you could give us any sort of hint that might be useful, I should be very much obliged.”

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments. Then he replied: “There is no reason for secrecy in regard to you, inspector, who have been so helpful and friendly, so I will be quite frank. I have examined both samples of blood and Fletcher’s, and I have inspected the premises; and what I am able to say definitely is this: the blood in the hall is not the blood of the deceased—”

“Ah!” exclaimed the inspector, “I was afraid it wasn’t.”

“And it is not the blood of Robert Fletcher.”

“Isn’t it now! Well, I am glad to hear that.”

“Moreover,” continued Thorndyke, “it was shed well after nine o’clock at night, probably not earlier than midnight.”

“There, now!” the inspector exclaimed, with an admiring glance at Thorndyke, “just think of that. See what it is to be a man of science! I suppose, sir, you couldn’t give us any sort of description of the person who dropped that blood in the hall?”

Staggered as I had been by Thorndyke’s astonishing statements, I could not repress a grin at the inspector’s artless question. But the grin faded rather abruptly as Thorndyke replied in matter-of-fact tones: “A detailed description is, of course, impossible. I can only sketch out the probabilities. But if you should happen to meet with a negro—a tall negro with a bandaged head or a contused wound of the scalp and a swollen leg—you had better keep your eye on him. The leg which is swollen is probably the left.”

The inspector was thrilled; and so was I, for that matter. The thing was incredible; but yet I knew that Thorndyke’s amazing deductions were the products of perfectly orthodox scientific methods. Only I could form no sort of guess as to how they had been arrived at. A negro’s blood is no different from any other person’s, and certainly affords no clue to his height or the condition of his legs. I could make nothing of it: and as the dialogue and the inspector’s note-takings brought us to the little town hall in which the inquest was to be held, I dismissed the puzzle until such time as Thorndyke chose to solve it.

When we entered the town hall we found everything in readiness for the opening of the proceedings. The jury were already in their places and the coroner was just about to take his seat at the head of the long table. We accordingly slipped on to the two chairs that were found for us by the inspector, and the latter took his place behind the jury and facing us. Near to him Mr. Foxley and Miss Markham were seated, and evidently hailed our arrival with profound relief, each of them smiling us a silent greeting. A professional-looking man sitting next to Thorndyke I assumed to be the medical witness, and

a rather good young man who sat apart with a police constable I identified as Robert Fletcher.

The evidence of the “common” witnesses, who deposed to the general facts, told us nothing that we did not already know, excepting that it was made clear that Fletcher had left his uncle’s house not later than seven o’clock and that thereafter until the following morning his whereabouts were known. The medical witness was cautious, and kept an uneasy eye on Thorndyke. The wound which caused the death of deceased might have been inflicted by himself or by some other person. He had originally given the probable time of death as six or seven o’clock on Wednesday evening. He now admitted in reply to a question from Thorndyke that he had not taken the temperature of the body, and that the rigidity and other conditions were not absolutely inconsistent with a considerable later time of death. Death might even have occurred after midnight.

In spite of this admission, however, the sum of the evidence tended strongly to implicate Fletcher, and one or two questions from jurymen suggested a growing belief in his guilt. I had no doubt whatever that if the case had been put to the jury at this stage, a unanimous verdict of “wilful murder” would have been the result. But, as the medical witness returned to his seat, the coroner fixed an inquisitive eye on Thorndyke.

“You have not been summoned as a witness, Dr. Thorndyke,” said he, “but I understand that you have made certain investigations in this case. Are you able to throw any fresh light on the circumstances of the death of the deceased, Joseph Riggs?”

“Yes,” Thorndyke replied. “I am in a position to give important and material evidence.”

Thereupon he was sworn, and the coroner, still watching him curiously, said: “I am informed that you have examined samples of the blood of deceased and the blood which was found in the hall of deceased’s house. Did you examine them, and if so, what was the object of the examination?”

“I examined both samples and also samples of the blood of Robert Fletcher. The object was to ascertain whether the blood on the hall floor was the blood of the deceased or of Robert Fletcher.”

The coroner glanced at the medical witness, and a faint smile appeared on the face of each.

“And did you,” the former asked in a slightly ironical tone, “form any opinion on the subject?”

“I ascertained definitely that the blood in the hall was neither that of the deceased nor that of Robert Fletcher.”

The coroner’s eyebrows went up, and once more he glanced significantly at the doctor.

“But,” he demanded incredulously, “is it possible to distinguish the blood of one person from that of another?”

“Usually it is not, but in certain exceptional cases it is. This happened to be an exceptional case.”

“In what respect?”

“It happened,” Thorndyke replied, “that the person whose blood was found in the hall suffered from the parasitic disease known as filariasis. His blood was infested with swarms of a minute worm named *Filaria nocturna*. I have here,” he continued, taking out of his research-case the two bottles and the three boxes, “thirty-six mounted specimens of this blood, and in every one of them one or more of the parasites is to be seen. I have also thirty-six mounted specimens each of the blood of the deceased and the blood of Robert Fletcher. In not one of these specimens is a single parasite to be found. Moreover, I have examined Robert Fletcher and the body of the deceased, and can testify that no sign of filarial disease was to be discovered in either. Hence it is certain, that the blood found in the hall was not the blood of either of these two persons.”

The ironic smile had faded from the coroner’s face. He was evidently deeply impressed, and his manner was quite deferential as he asked: “Do these very remarkable observations of yours lead to any further inferences?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke. “They render it certain that this blood was shed no earlier than nine o’clock and probably nearer midnight.”

“Really!” the astonished coroner exclaimed. “Now, how is it possible to fix the time in that exact manner?”

“By inference from the habits of the parasite,” Thorndyke explained. “This particular filaria is distributed by the mosquito, and its habits are adapted to the habits of the mosquito. During the day, the worms are not found in the blood; they remain hidden in the tissues of the body. But about nine o’clock at night they begin to migrate from the tissues into the blood, and remain in the blood during the hours when the mosquitoes are active. Then about six o’clock in the morning, they leave the blood and migrate back into the tissues.

“There is another very similar species—*Filaria diurna*—which has exactly opposite habits, adapted to day-flying suctorial insects. It appears in the blood about eleven in the forenoon and goes back into the tissues at about six o’clock in the evening.”

“Astonishing!” exclaimed the coroner. “Wonderful! By the way, the parasites that you found could not, I suppose, have been *Filaria diurna*?”

“No,” Thorndyke replied. “The time excludes that possibility. The blood was certainly shed after six. They were undoubtedly nocturna, and the large numbers found suggest a late hour. The parasites come out of the tissues very gradually, and it is only about midnight that they appear in the blood in really large numbers.”

"That is very important," said the coroner. "But does this disease affect any particular class of persons?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "As the disease is confined to tropical countries, the sufferers are naturally residents of the tropics, and nearly always natives. In West Africa, for instance, it is common among the negroes but practically unknown among the white residents."

"Should you say that there is a distinct probability that this unknown person was a negro?"

"Yes. But apart from the filaria there is direct evidence that he was. Searching for some cause of the bleeding, I noticed a lamp-hook screwed into the ceiling, and low enough to strike a tall man's head. I examined it closely, and observed on it a dark, shiny mark, like a blood-smear, and one or two short coiled hairs which I recognised as the scalp-hairs of a negro. I have no doubt that the unknown man is a negro, and that he has a wound of the scalp."

"Does filarial disease produce any effects that can be recognised?"

"Frequently it does. One of the commonest effects produced by *Filaria nocturna*, especially among negroes, is the condition known as elephantiasis. This consists of an enormous swelling of the extremities, most usually of one leg, including the foot; whence the name. The leg and foot look like those of an elephant. As a matter of fact, the negro who was in the hall suffered from elephantiasis of the left leg. I observed prints of the characteristically deformed foot on the oil-cloth covering the floor."

Thorndyke's evidence was listened to with intense interest by everyone present, including myself. Indeed, so spell-bound was his audience that one could have heard a pin drop; and the breathless silence continued for some seconds after he had ceased speaking. Then, in the midst of the stillness, I heard the door creak softly behind me.

There was nothing particularly significant in the sound. But its effects were amazing. Glancing at the inspector, who faced the door, I saw his eyes open and his jaw drop until his face was a very mask of astonishment. And as this expression was reflected on the faces of the jurymen, the coroner and everyone present, excepting Thorndyke, whose back was towards the door, I turned to see what had happened. And then I was as astonished as the others.

The door had been pushed open a few inches and a head thrust in—a negro's head, covered with a soiled and blood rag forming a rough bandage. As I gazed at the black, shiny, inquisitive face, the man pushed the door farther open and shuffled into the room; and instantly there arose on all sides a soft rustle and an inarticulate murmur followed by breathless silence, while every eye was riveted on the man's left leg.

It certainly was a strange, repulsive-looking member, its monstrous bulk exposed to view through the slit trouser and its great shapeless foot—shoeless, since no shoe could have contained it—rough and horny like the foot of an elephant. But it was tragic and pitiable too, for the man, apart from this horrible excrescence, was a fine, big, athletic-looking fellow.

The coroner was the first to recover. Addressing Thorndyke, but keeping an eye on the negro, he said: "Your evidence, then, amounts to this: On the night of Joseph Riggs' death, there was a stranger in the house. That stranger was a negro, who seems to have wounded his head and who, you say, had a swelled left leg."

"Yes," Thorndyke admitted, "that is the substance of my evidence."

Once more a hush fell on the room. The negro stood near the door, rolling his eyes to and fro over the assembly as if uneasily conscious that everyone was looking at him. Suddenly, he shuffled up to the foot of the table and addressed the coroner in deep, buzzing, resonant tones. "You tink I kill dat ole man! I no kill um. He kill himself. I look um."

Having made this statement, he rolled his eyes defiantly round the court, and then turned his face expectantly towards the coroner, who said: "You say you know that Mr. Riggs killed himself?"

"Yas. I look um. He shoot himself. You tink I shoot um. I tell you I no shoot um. Why I fit kill this man? I no sabby um."

"Then," said the coroner, "if you know that he killed himself, you must tell us all that you know; and you must swear to tell us the truth."

"Yas," the negro agreed, "I tell you eberyting one time. I tell you de troof. Dat ole man kill himself."

When the coroner had explained to him that he was not bound to make any statement that would incriminate him, as he still elected to give evidence, he was sworn and proceeded to make his statement with curious fluency and self-possession.

"My name Robert Bruce. Dat my English name. My country name Kwaku Mensah. I live for Winnebah on de Gold Coast. Dis time I cook's mate for dat steamer Leckie. On Wednesday night I lay in my bunk. I no fit sleep. My leg he chook me. I look out of de porthole. Plenty moon live. In my country when de moon big, peoples walk about. So I get up. I go ashore to walk about de town. Den de rain come. Plenty rain. Rain no good for my sickness. So I try for open house doors. No fit. All doors locked. Den I come to dis ole man's house. I turn de handle. De door open. I go in. I look in one room. All dark. Nobody live. Den I look annudder room. De door open a little. Light live inside. I no like dat I tink, spose somebody come out and see me, be tink I come for teef someting. So I tink I go away."

"Den something make 'Ping!' same like gun. I hear something fall down in dat room. I go to de door and I sing out, 'Who live in dere?' Nobody say nutting. So I open de door and look in. De room full ob smoke. I look dat ole man on de floor. I look dat pistol. I sabby dat ole man kill himself. Den I frighten too much. I run out. De place all dark. Someting knock my head. He make blood come plenty. I go back for ship. I no say nutting to nobody. Dis day I hear peoples talk 'bout dis inquest to find out who kill dat ole man. So I come to hear what peoples say. I hear dat gentleman say I kill dat ole man. So

I tell you eberyting. I tell you de troof. Finish."

"Do you know what time it was when you came ashore?" the coroner asked.

"Yas. When I come down de ladder I hear eight bells ring. I get back to de ship jus' before dey ring two bells in de middle watch."

"Then you came ashore at midnight and got back just before one o'clock?"

"Yas. Dat is what I say."

A few more questions put by the coroner having elicited nothing fresh, the case was put briefly to the jury.

"You have heard the evidence, gentlemen, and most remarkable evidence it was. Like myself, you must have been deeply impressed by the amazing skill with which Dr. Thorndyke reconstructed the personality of the unknown visitor to that house, and even indicated correctly the very time of the visit, from an examination of a mere chance blood-stain. As to the statement of Kwaku Mensab, I can only say that I see no reason to doubt its truth. You will note that it is in complete agreement with Dr. Thorndyke's evidence, and it presents no inconsistencies or improbabilities. Possibly the police may wish to make some further inquiries, but for our purposes it is the evidence of an eyewitness, and as such must be given full weight. With these remarks, I leave you to consider your verdict."

The jury took but a minute or two to deliberate. Indeed, only one verdict was possible if the evidence was to be accepted, and that was agreed on unanimously—suicide whilst temporarily insane. As soon as it was announced, the inspector, formally and with congratulations, released Fletcher from custody, and presently retired in company with the negro to make a few inquiries on board the ship.

The rising of the court was the signal for a wild demonstration of enthusiasm and gratitude to Thorndyke. To play his part efficiently in that scene he would have needed to be furnished, like certain repulsive Indian deities, with an unlimited outfit of arms. For everyone wanted to shake his hand, and two of them—Mr. Foxley and Miss Markham—did so with such pertinacity as entirely to exclude the other candidates.

"I can never thank you enough," Miss Markham exclaimed, with swimming eyes, "if I should live to be a hundred. But I shall think of you with gratitude every day of my life. Whenever I look at Robert, I shall remember that his liberty, and even his life, are your gifts."

Here she was so overcome by grateful emotion that she again seized and pressed his hand. I think she was within an ace of kissing him; but being, perhaps, doubtful how he would take it, compromised by kissing Robert instead. And, no doubt, it was just as well.

---

## GLEANINGS FROM THE WRECKAGE

THERE was a time, and not so very long ago, when even the main streets of London, after midnight, were as silent as—the grave; that is an unpleasant simile. Besides, who has any experience of conditions in the grave? But they were nearly as silent as the streets of a village. Then the nocturnal pedestrian could go his way encompassed and soothed by quiet, which was hardly disturbed by the rumble of a country wagon wending to market or the musical tinkle of the little bells on the collar of the hansom-cab horse sedately drawing some late reveller homeward.

Very different is the state of those streets nowadays. Long after the hour when the electric trams have ceased from troubling and the motor omnibuses are at rest, the heavy road transport from the country thunders through the streets; the air is rent by the howls of the electric hooter, and belated motor-cyclists fly past, stuttering explosively like perambulant Lewis guns with an inexhaustible charge.

"Let us get into the by-streets," said Thorndyke, as a car sped past us uttering sounds suggestive of a dyspeptic dinosaur. "We don't want our conversation seasoned with mechanical objurgations. In the back-streets it is still possible to hear oneself speak and forget the march of progress."

We turned into a narrow by-way with the confidence of the born and bred Londoner in the impossibility of losing our direction, and began to thread the intricate web of streets in the neighbourhood of a canal.

"It is a remarkable thing," Thorndyke resumed anon, "that every new application of science seems to be designed to render the environment of civilised man more and more disagreeable. If the process goes much farther, as it undoubtedly will, we shall presently find ourselves looking back wistfully at the Stone-age as the golden age of human comfort."

At this point his moralising was cut short by a loud, sharp explosion. We both stopped and looked about from the parapet of the bridge that we were crossing.

"Quite like old times," Thorndyke remarked. "Carries one back to 1915, when friend Fritz used to call on us. Ah! There is the place; the top story of that tall building across the canal." He pointed as he spoke to a factory-like structure, from the upper windows of which a lurid light shone and rapidly grew brighter.

"It must be down the next turning," said I, quickening my pace.

But he restrained me, remarking: "There is no hurry. That was the sound of high explosive, and those flames suggest nitro compounds burning. Festina lente. There may be some other packets of high explosives."

He had hardly finished speaking when a flash of dazzling violet light burst from the burning building. The windows flew out bodily, the roof opened in places, and almost at the same moment the clang of a violent explosion shook the ground under our feet, a puff of wind stirred our hair, and then came a clatter of falling glass and slates.

We made our way at a leisurely pace towards the scene of the explosion, through streets lighted up by the ruddy glare from the burning factory. But others were less cautious. In a few minutes the street was filled by one of those crowds which, in London, seem mysteriously to spring up in an instant where but a moment before not a person was to be seen. Before we had reached the building, a fire-engine had rumbled past us, and already a sprinkling of policemen had appeared as if, like the traditional frogs, they had dropped from the clouds.

In spite of the ferocity of its outbreak, the fire seemed to be no great matter, for even as we looked and before the fire-hose was fully run out, the flames began to die down. Evidently, they had been dealt with by means of extinguishers within the building, and the services of the engine would not be required after all. Noting this flat ending to what had seemed so promising a start, we were about to move off and resume our homeward journey when I observed a uniformed inspector who was known to us, and who, observing us at the same instant, made his way towards us through the crowd.

"You remind me, sir," said he, when he had wished us good-evening, "of the stories of the vultures that make their way in the sky from nowhere when a camel drops dead in the desert. I don't mean anything uncomplimentary," he hastened to add. "I was only thinking of the wonderful instinct that has brought you to this very spot at this identical moment, as if you had smelt a case afar off."

"Then your imagination has misled you," said Thorndyke, "for I haven't smelt a case, and I don't smell one now. Fires are not in my province."

"No, sir," replied the inspector, "but bodies are, and the fireman tells me that there is a dead man up there—or at least the remains of one. I am going up to inspect. Do you care to come up with me?"

Thorndyke considered for a moment, but I knew what his answer would be, and I was not mistaken.

"As a matter of professional interest, I should," he replied, "but I don't want to be summoned as a witness at the inquest."

"Of course you don't, sir," the inspector agreed, "and I will see that you are not summoned, unless an expert witness is wanted. I need not mention that you have been here; but I should be glad of your opinion for my own guidance in investigating the case."

He led us through the crowd to the door of the building, where we were joined by a fireman—whose helmet I should have liked to borrow—by whom we were piloted up the stairs. Half up we met the night-watchman, carrying an exhausted extinguisher and a big electric lantern, and he joined our procession, giving us the news as we ascended.

"It's all safe up above," said he, "excepting the roof; and that isn't so very much damaged. The big windows saved it. They blew out and let off the force of the explosion. The floor isn't damaged at all. It's girder and concrete. But poor Mr. Manford caught it properly. He was fairly blown to bits."

"Do you know how it happened?" the inspector asked.

"I don't," was the reply. "When I came on duty Mr. Manford was up there in his private laboratory. Soon afterwards a friend of his—a foreign gentleman of the name of Bilsky—came to see him. I took him up, and then Mr. Manford said he had some business to do, and after that he had got a longish job to do and would be working late. So he said I might turn in and he would let me know when he had finished. And he did let me know with a vengeance, poor chap. I lay down in my clothes, and I hadn't been asleep above a couple of hours when some noise woke me up. Then there came a most almighty bang. I rushed for an extinguisher and ran upstairs, and there I found the big laboratory all ablaze, the windows blown out and the ceiling down. But it wasn't so bad as it looked. There wasn't very much stuff up there; only the experimental stuff, and that burned out almost at once. I got the rest of the fire out in a few minutes."

"What stuff is it that you are speaking of?" the inspector asked.

"Celluloid, mostly, I think," replied the watchman. "They make films and other celluloid goods in the works. But Mr. Manford used to do experiments in the material up in his laboratory. This time he was working with alloys, melting them on the gas furnace. Dangerous thing to do with all that inflammable stuff about. I don't know what there was up there, exactly. Some of it was celluloid, I could see by the way it burned, but the Lord knows what it was that exploded. Some of the raw stuff, perhaps."

At this point we reached the top floor, where a door blown off its hinges and a litter of charred wood fragments filled the landing. Passing through the yawning doorway, we entered the laboratory and looked on a hideous scene of devastation. The windows were mere holes, the ceiling a gaping space fringed with black and ragged lathing, through which the damaged roof was visible by the light of the watchman's powerful lantern. The floor was covered with the fallen plaster and fragments of blackened woodwork, but its own boards were only slightly burnt in places, owing, no doubt, to their being fastened directly to the concrete which formed the actual floor.

"You spoke of some human remains," said the inspector.

"Ah!" said the watchman, "you may well say 'remains'. Just come here." He led the way over the rubbish to a corner of the laboratory, where he halted and threw the light of his lantern down on a brownish, dusty, globular object that lay on

the floor half buried in plaster. "That's all that's left of poor Mr. Manford; that and a few other odd pieces. I saw a hand over the other side."

Thorndyke picked up the head and placed it on the blackened remnant of a bench, where, with the aid of the watchman's lantern and the inspection lamp which I produced from our research-case, he examined it curiously. It was extremely, but unequally, scorched. One ear was completely shrivelled, and most of the face was charred to the bone. But the other ear was almost intact; and though most of the hair was burned away to the scalp, a tuft above the less damaged ear was only singed, so that it was possible to see that the hair had been black, with here and there a stray white hair.

Thorndyke made no comments, but I noticed that he examined the gruesome object minutely, taking nothing for granted. The inspector noticed this, too; and when the examination was finished, looked at him inquiringly.

"Anything abnormal, sir?" he asked.

"No," replied Thorndyke; "nothing that is not accounted for by fire and the explosion. I see he had no natural teeth, so he must have worn a complete set of false teeth. That should help in the formal identification, if the plates are not completely destroyed."

"There isn't much need for identification," said the watchman, "seeing that there was nobody in the building but him and me. His friend went away about half-past twelve. I heard Mr. Manford let him out."

"The doctor means at the inquest," the inspector explained. "Somebody has got to recognise the body if possible."

He took the watchman's lantern, and throwing its light on the floor, began to search among the rubbish. Very soon he disinterred from under a heap of plaster the headless trunk. Both legs were attached, though the right was charred below the knee and the foot blown off, and one complete arm. The other arm—the right—was intact only to the elbow. Here, again, the burning was very unequal. In some parts the clothing had been burnt off or blown away completely; in others, enough was left to enable the watchman to recognise it with certainty. One leg was much more burnt than the other; and whereas the complete arm was only scorched, the dismembered one was charred almost to the bone. When the trunk had been carried to the bench and laid there beside the head, the lights were turned on it for Thorndyke to make his inspection.

"It almost seems," said the police officer, as the hand was being examined, "as if one could guess how he was standing when the explosion occurred. I think I can make out finger-marks—pretty dirty ones, too—on the back of the hand, as if he had been standing with his hands clasped together behind him while he watched something that he was experimenting with." The inspector glanced for confirmation at Thorndyke, who nodded approvingly.

"Yes," he said, "I think you are right. They are very indistinct, but the marks are grouped like fingers. The small mark near the wrist suggests a little finger and the separate one near the knuckle looks like a fore-finger, while the remaining two marks are close together." He turned the hand over and continued "And there, in the palm, just between the roots of the third and fourth fingers, seems to be the trace of a thumb. But they are all very faint. You have a quick eye, inspector."

The gratified officer, thus encouraged, resumed his explorations among the debris in company with the watchman—the fireman had retired after a professional look round—leaving Thorndyke to continue his examination of the mutilated corpse, at which I looked on unsympathetically. For we had had a long day and I was tired and longing to get home. At length I drew out my watch, and with a portentous yawn, entered a mild protest.

"It is nearly two o'clock," said I. "Don't you think we had better be getting on? This really isn't any concern of ours, and there doesn't seem to be anything in it, from our point of view."

"Only that we are keeping our intellectual joints supple," Thorndyke replied with a smile. "But it is getting late. Perhaps we had better adjourn the inquiry."

At this moment, however, the inspector discovered the missing forearm—completely charred—with the fingerless remains of the hand, and almost immediately afterwards the watchman picked up a dental plate of some white metal, which seemed to be practically uninjured. But our brief inspection of these objects elicited nothing of interest, and having glanced at them, we took our departure, avoiding on the stairs an eager reporter, all agog for "copy."

A few days later we received a visit, by appointment, from a Mr. Herdman, a solicitor who was unknown to us and who was accompanied by the widow of Mr. James Manford, the victim of the explosion. In the interval the inquest had been opened but had been adjourned for further examination of the premises and the remains. No mention had been made of our visit to the building, and so far as I knew nothing had been said to anybody on the subject.

Mr. Herdman came to the point with business directness.

"I have called," he said, "to secure your services, if possible, in regard to the matter of which I spoke in my letter. You have probably seen an account of the disaster in the papers?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I read the report of the inquest."

"Then you know the principal facts. The inquest, as you know, was adjourned for three weeks. When it is resumed; I should like to retain you to attend on behalf of Mrs. Manford."

"To watch the case on her behalf?" Thorndyke suggested.

"Well, not exactly," replied Herdman. "I should ask you to inspect the premises and the remains of poor Mr. Manford, so

that, at the adjourned inquest, you could give evidence to the effect that the explosion and the death of Mr. Manford were entirely due to accident."

"Does anyone say that they were not?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, certainly not," Mr. Herdman replied hastily. "Not at all. But I happened, quite by chance, to see the manager of the 'Pilot' Insurance Society, on another matter, and I mentioned the case of Mr. Manford. He then let drop a remark which made me slightly uneasy. He observed that there was a suicide clause in the policy, and that the possibility of suicide would have to be ruled out before the claim could be settled. Which suggested a possible intention to contest the claim."

"But," said Thorndyke, "I need not point out to you that if he sets up the theory of suicide, it is for him to prove it, not for you to disprove it. Has anything transpired which would lend colour to such a suggestion?"

"Nothing material," was the reply. "But we should feel more happy if you could be present and give positive evidence that the death was accidental."

"That," said Thorndyke, "would be hardly possible. But my feeling is that the suicide question is negligible. There is nothing to suggest it, so far as I know. Is there anything known to you?"

The solicitor glanced at his client and replied somewhat evasively: "We are anxious to secure ourselves. Mrs. Manford is left very badly off, unless there is some personal property that we don't know about. If the insurance is not paid, she will be absolutely ruined. There isn't enough to pay the debts. And I think the suicide question might be raised—even successfully—on several points. Manford had been rather queer lately: jumpy and rather worried. Then, he was under notice to terminate his engagement at the works. His finances were in a confused state; goodness knows why, for he had a liberal salary. And then there was some domestic trouble. Mrs. Manford had actually consulted me about getting a separation. Some other woman, you know."

"I should like to forget that," said Mrs. Manford; "and it wasn't that which worried him. Quite the contrary. Since it began he had been quite changed. So smart in his dress and so particular in his appearance. He even took to dyeing his hair. I remember that he opened a fresh bottle of dye the very morning before his death and took no end of trouble putting it on. It wasn't that entanglement that made him jumpy. It was his money affairs. He had too many irons in the fire."

Thorndyke listened with patient attention to these rather irrelevant details and inquired: "What sort of irons?"

"I will tell you," said Herdman. "About three months ago he had need for two thousand pounds; for what purpose, I can't say, but Mrs. Manford thinks it was to invest in certain valuables that he used to purchase from time to time from a Russian dealer named Bilsky. At any rate, he got this sum on short loan from a Mr. Clines, but meanwhile arranged for a longer loan with a Mr. Elliott on a note of hand and an agreement to insure his life for the amount."

"As a matter of fact, the policy was made out in Elliott's name, he having proved an insurable interest. So if the insurance is paid, Elliott is settled with. Otherwise the debt falls on the estate, which would be disastrous; and to make it worse, the day before his death, he drew out five hundred pounds—nearly the whole balance—as he was expecting to see Mr. Bilsky, who liked to be paid in bank-notes. He did see him, in fact, at the laboratory, but they couldn't have done any business, as no jewels were found."

"And the bank-notes?"

"Burned with the body, presumably. He must have had them with him."

"You mentioned," said Thorndyke, "that he occasionally bought jewels from this Russian. What became of them?"

"Ah!" replied Herdman, "there is a gleam of hope there. He had a safe deposit somewhere. We haven't located it yet, but we shall. There may be quite a nice little nest-egg in it. But meanwhile there is the debt to Elliott. He wrote to Manford about it a day or two ago. You have the letter, I think," he added, addressing Mrs. Manford, who thereupon produced two envelopes from her handbag and laid them on the table.

"This is Mr. Elliott's letter," she said. "Merely a friendly reminder, you see, telling him that he is just off to the Continent and that he has given his wife a power of attorney to act in his absence."

Thorndyke glanced through the letter and made a few notes of its contents. Then he looked inquiringly at the other envelope.

"That," said Mrs. Manford, "is a photograph of my husband. I thought it might help you if you were going to examine the body."

As Thorndyke drew the portrait out and regarded it thoughtfully, I recalled the shapeless, blackened fragments of its subject; and when he passed it to me, I inspected it with a certain grim interest, and mentally compared it with those grisly remains. It was a commonplace face, rather unsymmetrical—the nose was deflected markedly to the left, and the left eye had a pronounced divergent squint. The bald head, with an abundant black fringe and an irregular scar on the side of the forehead, sought compensation in a full beard and moustache, both apparently jet-black. It was not an attractive countenance, and it was not improved by a rather odd-shaped ear—long, lobeless, and pointed above, like the ear of a satyr.

"I realise your position," said Thorndyke, "but I don't quite see what you want of me. If," he continued, addressing the solicitor, "you had thought of my giving ex parte evidence, dismiss the idea. I am not a witness-advocate. All I can



undertake to do is to investigate the case and try to discover what really happened. But in that case, whatever I may discover I shall disclose to the coroner. Would that suit you?"

The lawyer looked doubtful and rather glum, but Mrs. Manford interposed, firmly: "Why not? We are not proposing any deception, but I am certain that he did not commit suicide. I agree unreservedly to what you propose."

With this understanding—which the lawyer was disposed to boggle at—our visitors took their leave. As soon as they were gone, I gave utterance to the surprise with which I had listened to Thorndyke's proposal.

"I am astonished at your undertaking this case. Of course, you have given them fair warning, but still, it will be unpleasant if you have to give evidence unfavourable to your client."

"Very," he agreed. "But what makes you think I may have to?"

"Well, you seem to reject the probability of suicide, but have you forgotten the evidence at the inquest?"

"Perhaps I have," he replied blandly. "Let us go over it again."

I fetched the report from the office, and spreading it out on the table began to read it aloud. Passing over the evidence of the inspector and the fireman, I came to that of the night-watchman.

"Shortly after I came on duty at ten o'clock, a foreign, gentleman named Bilsky called to see Mr. Manford. I knew him by sight, because he had called once or twice before at about the same time. I took him up to the laboratory, where Mr. Manford was doing something with a big crucible on the gas furnace. He told me that he had some business to transact with Mr. Bilsky and when he had finished he would let him out. Then he was going to do some experiments in making alloys, and as they would probably take up most of the night he said I might as well turn in. He said he would call me when he was ready to go. So I told him to be careful with the furnace and not set the place on fire and burn me in my bed, and then I went downstairs. I had a look round to see that everything was in order, and then I took off my boots and laid down. About half-past twelve I heard Mr. Manford and Bilsky come down. I recognised Mr. Bilsky by a peculiar cough that he had and by the sound of his stick and his limping tread—he had something the matter with his right foot and walked quite lame."

"You say that the deceased came down with him," said the coroner. "Are you quite sure of that?"

"Well, I suppose Mr. Manford came down with him, but I can't say I actually heard him."

"You did not hear him go up again?"

"No, I didn't. But I was rather sleepy and I wasn't listening very particular. Well, then I went to sleep and slept till about half-past one, when some noise woke me. I was just getting up to see what it was when I heard a tremendous bang, right overhead. I ran down and turned the gas off at the main and then I got a fire extinguisher and ran up to the laboratory. The place seemed to be all in a blaze, but it wasn't much of a fire after all, for by the time the fire engines arrived I had got it practically out."

The witness then described the state of the laboratory and the finding of the body, but as this was already known to us, I passed on to the evidence of the next witness, the superintendent of the fire brigade, who had made a preliminary inspection of the premises. It was a cautious statement and subject to the results of a further examination; but clearly the officer was not satisfied as to the cause of the outbreak. There seemed to have been two separate explosions, one near a cupboard and another—apparently the second—in the cupboard itself; and there seemed to be a burned track connecting the two spots. This might have been accidental or it might have been arranged. Witness did not think that the explosive was celluloid. It seemed to be a high explosive of some kind. But further investigations were being made.

The superintendent was followed by Mrs. Manford, whose evidence was substantially similar to what she and Mr. Herdman had told us, and by the police surgeon, whose description of the remains conveyed nothing new to us. Finally, the inquest was adjourned for three weeks to allow of further examination of the premises and the remains.

"Now," I said, as I folded up the report, "I don't see how you are able to exclude suicide. If the explosion was arranged to occur when Manford was in the laboratory, what object, other than suicide, can be imagined?"

Thorndyke looked at me with an expression that I knew only too well. "Is it impossible," he asked, "to imagine that the object might have been homicide?"

"But," I objected, "there was no one there but Manford—after Bilsky left."

"Exactly," he agreed, dryly; "after Bilsky left. But up to that time there were two persons there."

I must confess that I was startled, but as I rapidly reviewed the circumstances I perceived the cogency of Thorndyke's suggestion. Bilsky had been present when Manford dismissed the night-watchman. He knew that there would be no interruption. The inflammable and explosive materials were there, ready to his hand. Then Bilsky had gone down to the door alone instead of being conducted down and let out; a very striking circumstance, this. Again, no jewels had been found though the meeting had been ostensibly for the purpose of a deal; and the bank-notes had vanished utterly. This was very remarkable. In view of the large sum, it was nearly certain that the notes would be in a close bundle, and we all know how difficult it is to burn tightly-folded paper. Yet they had vanished without leaving a trace. Finally, there was Bilsky himself. Who was he? Apparently a dealer in stolen property—a hawker of the products of robbery and murder committed during the revolution.

"Yes," I admitted, "the theory of homicide is certainly tenable. But unless some new facts can be produced, it must remain a matter of speculation."

"I think, Jervis," he rejoined, "you must be overlooking the facts that are known to us. We were there. We saw the place within a few minutes of the explosion and we examined the body. What we saw established a clear presumption of homicide, and what we have heard this morning confirms it. I may say that I communicated my suspicions the very next day to the coroner and to Superintendent Miller."

"Then you must have seen more than I did," I began. But he shook his head and cut short my protestations.

"You saw what I saw, Jervis, but you did not interpret its meaning. However, it is not too late. Try to recall the details of our adventure and what our visitors have told us. I don't think you will then entertain the idea of suicide."

I was about to put one or two leading questions, but at this moment footsteps became audible ascending our stairs. The knock which followed informed me that our visitor was Superintendent Miller, and I rose to admit him.

"Just looked in to report progress," he announced as he subsided into an arm-chair. "Not much to report, but what there is supports your view of the case. Bilsky has made a clean bolt. Never went home to his hotel. Evidently meant to skedaddle, as he has left nothing of any value behind. But it was a stupid move, for it would have raised suspicion in any case. The notes were a consecutive batch. All the numbers are known, but, of course, none of them have turned up yet. We have made inquiries about Bilsky, and gather that he is a shady character; practically a fence who deals in the jewellery stolen from those unfortunate Russian aristocrats. But we shall have him all right. His description has been circulated at all the seaports and he is an easy man to spot with his lame foot and his stick and a finger missing from his right hand."

Thorndyke nodded, and seemed to reflect for a moment. Then he asked: "Have you made any other inquiries?"

"No; there is nothing more to find out until we get hold of our man, and when we do, we shall look to you to secure the conviction. I suppose you are quite certain as to your facts?"

Thorndyke shook his head with a smile.

"I am never certain until after the event. We can only act on probabilities."

"I understand," said the superintendent, casting a sly look at me; "but your probabilities are good enough for me."

With this, he picked up his hat and departed, leaving us to return to the occupations that our visitors had interrupted.

I heard no more of the Manford case for about a week, and assumed that Thorndyke's interest in it had ceased. But I was mistaken, as I discovered when he remarked casually one evening: "No news of Bilsky, so far; and time is running on. I am proposing to make a tentative move in a new direction." I looked at him inquiringly, and he continued: "It appears, 'from information received,' that Elliott had some dealings with him, so I propose to call at his house to-morrow and see if we can glean any news of the lost sheep."

"But Elliott is abroad," I objected.

"True; but his wife isn't; and she evidently knows all about his affairs. I have invited Miller to come with me in case he would like to put any questions; and you may as well come, too, if you are free."

It did not sound like a very thrilling adventure, but one never knew with Thorndyke. I decided to go with him, and at that the matter dropped, though I speculated a little curiously on the source of the information. So, apparently, had the superintendent, for when he arrived on the following morning he proceeded to throw out a few cautious feelers, but got nothing for his pains beyond vague generalities.

"It is a purely tentative proceeding," said Thorndyke, "and you mustn't be disappointed if nothing comes of it."

"I shall be, all the same," replied Miller, with a sly glance at my senior, and with this we set forth on our quest.

The Elliotts' house was, as I knew, in some part of Wimbledon, and thither we made our way by train. From the station we started along a wide, straight main street from which numbers of smaller streets branched off. At the corner of one of these I noticed a man standing, apparently watching our approach; and something in his appearance seemed to me familiar. Suddenly he took off his hat, looked curiously into its interior, and put it on again. Then he turned about and walked quickly down the side street. I looked at his retreating figure as we crossed the street, wondering who he could be. And then it flashed upon me that the resemblance was to a certain ex-sergeant Barber whom Thorndyke occasionally employed for observation duties. Just as I reached this conclusion, Thorndyke halted and looked about him doubtfully.

"I am afraid we have come too far," said he. "I fancy we ought to have gone down that last turning." We accordingly faced about and walked back to the corner, where Thorndyke read out the name, Mendoza Avenue.

"Yes," he said, "this is the way," and we thereupon turned down the Avenue, following it to the bottom, where it ended in a cross-road, the name of which, Berners Park, I recognised as that which I had seen on Elliott's letter.

"Sixty-four is the number," said Thorndyke, "so as this corner house is forty-six and the next is forty-eight, it will be a little way along on this side, just about where you can see that smoke—which, by the way, seems to be coming out of a window."

"Yes, by Jove!" I exclaimed. "The staircase window, apparently. Not our house, I hope!"

But it was. We read the number and the name, 'Green Bushes', on the gate as we came up to it, and we hurried up the short path to the door. There was no knocker, but when Miller fixed his thumb on the bell-push, we heard a loud ringing within. But there was no response; and meanwhile the smoke poured more and more densely out of the open window above.

"Rum!" exclaimed Miller, sticking to the bell-push like a limpet. "House seems to be empty."

"I don't think it is." Thorndyke replied calmly.

The superintendent looked at him with quick suspicion, and then glanced at the ground-floor window.

"That window is unfastened," said he, "and here comes a constable."

Sure enough, a policeman was approaching quickly, looking up at the houses. Suddenly he perceived the smoke and quickened his pace, arriving just as Thorndyke had pulled down the upper window-sash and was preparing to climb over into the room. The constable hailed him sternly, but a brief explanation from Miller reduced the officer to a state of respectful subservience, and we all followed Thorndyke through the open window, from which smoke now began to filter.

"Send the constable upstairs to give the alarm," Thorndyke instructed Miller in a low tone. The order was given without question, and the next moment the officer was bounding up the stairs, roaring like a whole fire brigade. Meanwhile, the superintendent browsed along the hall through the dense smoke, sniffing inquisitively, and at length approached the street door. Suddenly, from the heart of the reek, his voice issued in tones of amazement.

"Well, I'm hanged! It's a plumber's smoke-rocket. Some fool has stuck it through into the letter-cage!"

In the silence which followed this announcement I heard an angry voice from above demand: "What is all this infernal row about? And what are you doing here?"

"Can't you see that the house is on fire?" was the constable's, stern rejoinder. "You'd better come down and help to put it out."

The command was followed by the sound of descending footsteps, on which Thorndyke ran quickly up the stairs, followed by the superintendent and me. We met the descending party on the landing, opposite a window, and here we all stopped, gazing at one another with mutual curiosity. The man who accompanied the constable looked distinctly alarmed—as well he might—and somewhat hostile.

"Who put that smoke in the hall?" Miller demanded fiercely. "And why didn't you come down when you heard us ringing the bell?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," the man replied sulkily, "or what business this is of yours. Who are you? And what are you doing in my house?"

"In your house?" repeated Thorndyke. "Then you will be Mr. Elliott?"

The man turned a startled glance on him and replied angrily: "Never you mind who I am. Get out of this house."

"But I do mind who you are," Thorndyke rejoined mildly. "I came here to see Mr. Elliott. Are you Mr. Elliott?"

"No, I am not. Mr. Elliott is abroad. If you like to send a letter here for him, I will forward it when I get his address."

While this conversation had been going on, I had been examining the stranger, not without curiosity. For his appearance was somewhat unusual. In the first place, he wore an unmistakable wig, and his shaven face bore an abundance of cuts and scratches, suggesting a recently and unskilfully mown beard. His spectacles did not disguise a pronounced divergent squint of the left eye; but what specially caught my attention was the ear—large ear, lobeless and pointed at the tip like the ear of a satyr. As I looked at this, and at the scraped face, the squint and the wig, a strange suspicion flashed into my mind; and then, as I noted that the nose was markedly deflected to the left, I turned to glance at Thorndyke.

"Would you mind telling us your name?" the latter asked blandly.

"My name is—is—Johnson; Frederick Johnson."

"Ah," said Thorndyke. "I thought it was Manford—James Manford—and I think so still. I suggest that you have a scar on the right side of your forehead, just under the wig. May we see?"

As Thorndyke spoke the name, the man turned a horrible livid grey and started back as if to retreat up the stairs. But the constable blocked the way; and as the man was struggling to push past, Miller adroitly snatched off the wig; and there, on the forehead, was the tell-tale scar.

For an appreciable time we all stood stock-still like the figures of a tableau. Then Thorndyke turned to the superintendent.

"I charge this man, James Manford, with the murder of Stephan Bilsky."

Again there was a brief interval of intolerable silence. In the midst of it, we heard the street door open and shut, and a woman's voice called up the stairs: "Whatever is all this smoke? Are you up there, Jim?"

I pass over the harrowing details of the double arrest. I am not a policeman, and to me such scenes are intensely repugnant. But we must needs stay until two taxis and four constables had conveyed the prisoners away from the still

reeking house to the caravanserai of the law. Then, at last, we went forth with relief into the fresh air and bent our steps towards the station.

"I take it," Miller said reflectively, "that you never suspected Bilsky?"

"I did at first. But when Mrs. Manford and the solicitor told their tale I realised that he was the victim and that Manford must be the murderer."

"Let us have the argument," said I. "It is obvious that I have been a blockhead, but I don't mind our old friend here knowing it."

"Not a blockhead, Jervis," he corrected. "You were half asleep that night and wholly uninterested. If you had been attending to the matter, you would have observed several curious and anomalous appearances. For instance, you would have noticed that the body was, in parts, completely charred, and brittle. Now we saw the outbreak of the fire and we found it extinguished when we reached the building. Its duration was a matter of minutes; quite insufficient to reduce a body to that state. For, as you know, a human body is an extremely incombustible thing. The appearance suggested the destruction of a body which had been already burnt; and this suggestion was emphasised by the curiously unequal distribution of the charring. The right hand was burnt to a cinder and blown to pieces. The left hand was only scorched. The right foot was utterly destroyed, but the left foot was nearly intact. The face was burned away completely, and yet there were parts of the head where the hair was only singed.

"Naturally, with these facts in mind, I scrutinised those remains narrowly. And presently something much more definite and sinister came to light. On the left hand, there was a faint impression of another hand—very indistinct and blurred, but still unmistakably a hand."

"I remember," said I, "the inspector pointed it out as evidence that the deceased had been standing with his hands clasped before or behind him; and I must admit that it seemed a reasonable inference."

"So it did, because you were both assuming that the man had been alone and that it must therefore have been the impression of his own hand. For that reason, neither of you looked at it critically. If you had, you would have seen at once that it was the impression of a left hand."

"You are quite right," I confessed ruefully. "As the man was stated to have been alone, the hand impression did not interest me. And it was a mere group of smudges, after all. You are sure that it was a left hand?"

"Quite," he replied. "Blurred as the smudges were, one could make out the relative lengths of the fingers. And there was the thumb mark at the distal end of the palm, but pointing to the outer side of the hand. Try how you may, you can't get a right hand into that position.

"Well, then, here was a crucial fact. The mark of a left hand on a left hand proved the presence of a second person, and at once raised a strong presumption of homicide, especially when considered in conjunction with the unaccountable state of the body. During the evening, a visitor had come and gone, and on him—Bilsky—the suspicion naturally fell. But Mrs. Manford unwittingly threw an entirely new light on the case. You remember she told us that her husband had opened a new bottle of hair dye on the very morning before the explosion and had applied it with unusual care. Then his hair was dyed. But the hair of the corpse was not dyed. Therefore the corpse was not the corpse of Manford. Further, the presumption of murder applied now to Manford, and the body almost certainly was that of Bilsky."

"How did you deduce that the hair of the corpse was not dyed?" I asked.

"I didn't deduce it at all. I observed it. You remember a little patch of hair above the right ear, very much singed but still recognisable as hair? Well, in that patch I made out distinctly two or three white hairs. Naturally, when Mrs. Manford spoke of the dye, I recalled those white hairs, for though you may find silver hairs among the gold, you don't find them among the dyed. So the corpse could not be Manford's and was presumably that of Bilsky.

"But the instant that this presumption was made, a quantity of fresh evidence arose to support it. The destruction of the body was now understandable. Its purpose was to prevent identification. The parts destroyed were the parts that had to be destroyed for that purpose: the face was totally unrecognisable, and the right hand and right foot were burnt and shattered to fragments. But these were Bilsky's personal marks. His right hand was mutilated and his right foot deformed. And the fact that the false teeth found were undoubtedly Manford's was conclusive evidence of the intended deception.

"Then there were those very queer financial transactions, of which my interpretation was this: Manford borrowed two thousand pounds from Clines. With this he opened an account in the name of Elliott. As Elliott, he lent himself two thousand pounds which he repaid Clines—subject to an insurance of his life for that amount, taken out in Elliott's name."

"Then he would have gained nothing," I objected.

"On the contrary, he would have stood to gain two thousand pounds on proof of his own death. That, I assumed, was his scheme: to murder Bilsky, to arrange for Bilsky's corpse to personate his own, and then, when the insurance was paid, to abscond the company of some woman this sum, with the valuables that he had taken from Bilsky, and the five hundred pounds that he had withdrawn from the bank.

"But this was only theory. It had to be tested; and as we had Elliott's address, I did the only thing that was possible. I employed our friend, ex-Sergeant Barber, to watch the house. He took lodgings in a house nearly opposite and kept up continuous observation, which soon convinced him that there was someone on the premises besides Mrs. Elliott. Then, late

one night, he saw a man come out and walk away quickly. He followed the man for some distance, until the stranger turned back and began to retrace his steps. Then Barber accosted him, asking for a direction, and carefully inspecting him. The man's appearance tallied exactly with the description that I had given—I had assumed that he would probably shave off his beard—and with the photograph; so Barber, having seen him home, reported to me. And that is the whole story."

"Not quite the whole," said Miller, with a sly grin. "There is that smoke-rocket. If it hadn't been for the practical joker who slipped that through the letter-slit, we could never have got into that house. I call it a most remarkable coincidence."

"So do I," Thorndyke agreed, without moving a muscle; "but there is a special providence that watches over medical jurists."

We were silent for a few moments. Then I remarked: "This will come as a terrible shock to Mrs. Manford."

"I am afraid it will," Thorndyke agreed. "But it will be better for her than if Manford had absconded with this woman, taking practically every penny that he possessed with him. She stood to lose a worthless husband in either event. At least we have saved her from poverty. And, knowing the facts, we were morally and legally bound to further the execution of justice."

"A very proper sentiment," said the superintendent, "though I am not quite clear as to the legal aspects of that smoke-rocket."

---

THE END

## AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

---

### I. — THE INVALID

LOOKING back on events by the light of experience I perceive clearly that the thunder-cloud which burst on me and on those who were dear to me had not gathered unseen. It is true that it had rolled up swiftly; that the premonitory mutterings, now so distinct but then so faint and insignificant, gave but a brief warning. But that was of little consequence, since whatever warnings there were passed unheeded, as warnings commonly do, being susceptible of interpretation only by means of the subsequent events which they foreshadowed.

The opening scene of the tragedy—if I had but realized it—was the arrival of the Reverend Amos Monkhouse from his far-away Yorkshire parish at the house of his brother Harold. I happened to be there at the time; and though it was not my concern, since Harold had a secretary, I received the clergyman when he was announced. We knew one another well enough by name though we had never met, and it was with some interest and curiosity that I looked at the keen-faced, sturdy, energetic-looking parson and contrasted him with his physically frail and rather characterless brother. He looked at me, too, curiously and with a certain appearance of surprise, which did not diminish when I told him who I was.

“Ha!” said he, “yes, Mr Mayfield. I am glad to have the opportunity of making your acquaintance. I have heard a good

deal about you from Harold and Barbara. Now I can fit you with a visible personality. By the way, the maid tells me that Barbara is not at home."

"No, she is away on her travels in Kent."

"In Kent!" he repeated, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, on one of her political expeditions; organizing some sort of women's emancipation movement. I dare say you have heard about it."

He nodded a little impatiently. "Yes. Then I assume that Harold is not so ill as I had supposed?"

I was inclined to be evasive; for, to be quite candid, I had thought more than once that Barbara might properly have given a little less attention to her political hobbies and a little more to her sick husband. So I replied cautiously:

"I really don't quite know what his condition is. You see, when a man has chronically bad health, one rather loses count. Harold has his ups and downs, but he always looks pretty poorly. Just now, I should say he is rather below his average."

"Ha! Well, perhaps I had better go up and have a look at him. The maid has told him that I am here. I wonder if you would be so kind as to show me the way to his room. I have not been in this house before."

I conducted him up to the door of the bedroom and then returned to the library to wait for him and hear what he thought of the invalid. And now that the question had been raised, I was not without a certain uneasiness. What I had said was true enough. When a man is always ailing one gets to take his ill-health for granted and to assume that it will go on without any significant change. One repeats the old saying of "the creaking gate" and perhaps makes unduly light of habitual illness. Might it be that Harold was being a little neglected? He had certainly looked bad enough when I had called on him that morning. Was it possible that he was really seriously ill? Perhaps in actual danger?

I had just asked myself this question when the door was opened abruptly and the clergyman strode into the room. Something in his expression—a mingling, as it seemed, of anger and alarm—rather startled me; nevertheless I asked him calmly enough how he found his brother. He stared at me, almost menacingly, for a second or two; then slowly and with harsh emphasis he replied: "I am shocked at the change in him. I am horrified. Why, good God, Sir! the man is dying!"

"I think that can hardly be," I objected. "The doctor saw him this morning and did not hint at anything of the sort. He thought he was not very well but he made no suggestion as to there being any danger."

"How long has the doctor been attending him?"

"For something like twenty years, I believe; so by this time he ought to understand the patient's—"

"Tut-tut," the parson interrupted, impatiently, "what did you say yourself but a few minutes ago? One loses count of the chronic invalid. He exhausts our attention until, at last, we fail to observe the obvious. What is wanted is a fresh eye. Can you give me the doctor's address? Because, if you can, I will call on him and arrange a consultation. I told Harold that I wanted a second opinion and he made no objection; in fact he seemed rather relieved. If we get a really first-class physician, we may save him yet."

"I think you are taking an unduly gloomy view of Harold's condition," said I. "At any rate, I hope so. But I entirely agree with you as to the advisability of having further advice. I know where Dr Dimsdale lives so if you like I will walk round with you."

He accepted my offer gladly and we set forth at once, walking briskly along the streets, each of us wrapped in thought and neither speaking for some time. Presently I ventured to remark:

"Strictly, I suppose, we ought to have consulted Barbara before seeking another opinion."

"I don't see why," he replied. "Harold is a responsible person and has given his free consent. If Barbara is so little concerned about him as to go away from home—and for such a trumpery reason, too—I don't see that we need consider her. Still, as a matter of common civility, I might as well send her a line. What is her present address?"

"Do you know," I said, shamefacedly, "I am afraid I can't tell you exactly where she is at the moment. Her permanent address, when she is away on these expeditions, is the head-quarters of the Women's Friendship League at Maidstone."

He stopped for a moment and glowered at me with an expression of sheer amazement. "Do you mean to tell me," he exclaimed, "that she has gone away, leaving her husband in this condition, and that she is not even within reach of a telegram?"

"I have no doubt that a telegram or letter would be forwarded to her."

He emitted an angry snort and then demanded: "How long has she been away?"

"About a fortnight," I admitted, reluctantly.

"A fortnight!" he repeated in angry astonishment. "And all that time beyond reach of communication! Why the man might have been dead and buried and she none the wiser!"

"He was much better when she went away," I said, anxious to make the best of what I felt to be a rather bad case. "In fact, he seemed to be getting on quite nicely. It is only during the last few days that he has got this set-back. Of course, Barbara is kept informed as to his condition. Madeline sends her a letter every few days."

"But, my dear Mr Mayfield," he expostulated, "just consider the state of affairs in this amazing household. I came to see my brother, expecting—from the brief letter that I had from him—to find him seriously ill. And I do find him seriously ill; dangerously ill, I should say. And what sort of care is being taken of him? His wife is away from home, amusing herself with her platform fooleries, and has left no practicable address. His secretary, or whatever you call him, Wallingford, is not at home. Madeline is, of course, occupied in her work at the school. Actually, the only person in the house besides the servants is yourself—a friend of the family but not a member of the household at all. You must admit that it is a most astonishing and scandalous state of affairs."

I was saved from the necessity of answering this rather awkward question by our arrival at Dr Dimsdale's house; and, as it fortunately happened that the doctor was at home and disengaged, we were shown almost at once into his consulting room.

I knew Dr Dimsdale quite well and rather liked him, though I was not deeply impressed by his abilities. However, his professional skill was really no concern of mine, and his social qualities were unexceptionable. In appearance and manner he had always seemed to me the very type of a high-class general practitioner, and so he impressed me once more as we were ushered into his sanctum. He shook hands with me genially, and as I introduced the Reverend Amos looked at him with a politely questioning expression. But the clergyman lost no time in making clear the purpose of his visit; in fact he came to the point with almost brutal abruptness.

"I have just seen my brother for the first time for several months and I am profoundly shocked at his appearance. I expected to find him ill, but I did not understand that he was so ill as I find him."

"No," Dr Dimsdale agreed, gravely, "I suppose not. You have caught him at a rather unfortunate time. He is certainly not so well today."

"Well!" exclaimed Amos. "To me he has the look of a dying man. May I ask what, exactly, is the matter with him?"

The doctor heaved a patient sigh and put his fingertips together.

"The word 'exactly,'" he replied, with a faint smile, "makes your question a little difficult to answer. There are so many things the matter with him. For the last twenty years, on and off, I have attended him, and during the whole of that time his health has been unsatisfactory—most unsatisfactory. His digestion has always been defective, his circulation feeble, he has had functional trouble with his heart, and throughout the winter months, more or less continuous respiratory troubles—nasal and pulmonary catarrh and sometimes rather severe bronchitis."

The Reverend Amos nodded impatiently. "Quite so, quite so. But, to come from the past to the present, what is the matter with him now?"

"That," the doctor replied suavely, "is what I was coming to. I mentioned the antecedents to account for the consequents. The complaints from which your brother has suffered in the past have been what are called functional complaints. But functional disease—if there really is such a thing—must, in the end, if it goes on long enough, develop into organic disease. Its effects are cumulative. Each slight illness leaves the bodily organs a little less fit."

"Yes?"

"Well, that is, I fear, what is happening in your brother's case. The functional illnesses of the past are tending to take on an organic character."

"Ha!" snorted the Reverend Amos. "But what is his actual condition now? To put it bluntly, supposing he were to die tonight, what would you write on the death certificate?"

"Dear me!" said the doctor. "That is putting it very bluntly. I hope the occasion will not arise."

"Still, I suppose you don't regard his death as an impossible contingency?"

"Oh, by no means. Chronic illness confers no immortality, as I have just been pointing out."

"Then, supposing his death to occur, what would you state to be the cause?"

Dr Dimsdale's habitual suavity showed a trace of diminution as he replied: "You are asking a very unusual and hardly admissible question, Mr Monkhouse. However, I may say that if your brother were to die tonight he would die from some definite cause, which would be duly set forth in the certificate. As he is suffering from chronic gastritis, chronic bronchial catarrh, functional disorder of the heart and several other morbid conditions, these would be added as contributory causes. But may I ask what is the object of these very pointed questions?"

"My object," replied Amos, "was to ascertain whether the circumstances justified a consultation. It seems to me that they do. I am extremely disturbed about my brother. Would you have any objection to meeting a consultant?"

"But not in the least. On the contrary, I should be very glad to talk over this rather indefinite case with an experienced physician who would come to it with a fresh eye. Of course, the patient's consent would be necessary."

"He has consented, and he agreed to the consultant whom I proposed—Sir Robert Detling—if you concurred."

"I do certainly. I could suggest no better man. Shall I arrange with him or will you?"

"Perhaps I had better," the parson replied, "as I know him fairly well. We were of the same year at Cambridge. I shall go straight on to him now and will let you know at once what arrangement he proposes."



"Excellent," said the doctor, rising with all his suavity restored. "I shall keep tomorrow as free as I can until I hear from you, and I hope he will be able to manage it so soon. I shall be glad to hear what he thinks of our patient, and I trust that the consultation may be helpful in the way of treatment."

He shook our hands heartily and conducted us to the street door, whence he launched us safely into the street.

"That is a very suave gentleman," Amos remarked as we turned away. "Quite reasonable, too; but you see for yourself that he has no real knowledge of the case. He couldn't give the illness an intelligible name."

"It seemed to me that he gave it a good many names, and it may well be that it is no more than he seems to think; a sort of collective illness, the resultant of the various complaints that he mentioned. However, we shall know more when Sir Robert has seen him; and meanwhile, I wouldn't worry too much about the apparent neglect. Your brother, unlike most chronic invalids, doesn't hanker for attention. He has all he wants and he likes to be left alone with his books. Shall you see him again today?"

"Assuredly. As soon as I have arranged matters with Detling I shall let Dr Dimsdale know what we have settled and I shall then go back and spend the evening with my brother. Perhaps I shall see you tomorrow?"

"No. I have to run down to Bury St Edmunds tomorrow morning and I shall probably be there three or four days. But I should very much like to hear what happens at the consultation. Could you send me a few lines? I shall be staying at the Angel."

"I will certainly," he replied, halting and raising his umbrella to signal an approaching omnibus. "Just a short note to let you know what Sir Robert has to tell us of poor Harold's condition."

He waved his hand, and stepping off the kerb, hopped on to the foot-board of the omnibus as it slowed down, and vanished into the interior. I stood for a few moments watching the receding vehicle, half inclined to go back and take another look at the sick man; but reflecting that his brother would be presently returning, I abandoned the idea and made my way instead to the Underground Railway station and there took a ticket for the Temple.

There is something markedly infectious in states of mind. Hitherto I had given comparatively little attention to Harold Monkhouse. He was a more or less chronic invalid, suffering now from one complaint and now from another, and evidently a source of no particular anxiety either to his friends or to his doctor. He was always pallid and sickly-looking, and if, on this particular morning, he had seemed to look more haggard and ghastly than usual, I had merely noted that he was "not so well today."

But the appearance on the scene of the Reverend Amos had put a rather different complexion on the affair. His visit to his brother had resulted in a severe shock, which he had passed on to me; and I had to admit that our interview with Dr Dimsdale had not been reassuring. For the fact which had emerged from it was that the doctor could not give the disease a name.

It was very disquieting. Supposing it should turn out that Harold was suffering from some grave, even some mortal disease, which ought to have been detected and dealt with months ago. How should we all feel? How, in particular, would Barbara feel about the easygoing way in which the illness had been allowed to drift on? It was an uncomfortable thought; and though Harold Monkhouse was really no concern of mine, excepting that he was Barbara's husband, it continued to haunt me as I sat in the rumbling train and as I walked up from the Temple station to my chambers in Fig Tree Court.

---

## II. — BARBARA MONKHOUSE COMES HOME

IN the intervals of my business at Bury St Edmunds I gave more than a passing thought to the man who was lying sick in the house in the quiet square at Kensington. It was not that I had any very deep feeling for him as a friend, though I liked him well enough. But the idea had got into my mind that he had perhaps been treated with something less than ordinary solicitude; that his illness had been allowed to drift on when possibly some effective measures might have been taken for his relief. And as it had never occurred to me to make any suggestions on the matter or to interest myself particularly in his condition, I was now inclined to regard myself as a party to the neglect, if there had really been any culpable failure of attention. I therefore awaited with some anxiety the letter which Amos had promised to send.

It was not until the morning of my third day at Bury that it arrived; and when I had opened and read it I found myself even less reassured than I had expected.

"Dear Mayfield," it ran. "The consultation took place this afternoon and the result is, in my opinion, highly unsatisfactory. Sir Robert is, at present, unable to say definitely what is the matter with Harold. He states that he finds the case extremely obscure and reserves his opinion until the blood-films and other specimens which he took, have been examined and reported on by an expert pathologist. But on one point he is perfectly clear. He regards Harold's condition as extremely grave—even critical—and he advised me to send a telegram to Barbara insisting on her immediate return home. Which I have done; and only hope it may reach her in the course of the day.

"That is all I have to tell you and I think you will agree that it is not an encouraging report. Medical science must be in a very backward state if two qualified practitioners—one of them an eminent physician—cannot between them muster enough professional knowledge to say what is the matter with a desperately sick man. However, I hope that we shall have a diagnosis by the time you come back.

"Yours sincerely,

"AMOS MONKHOUSE."

I could not but agree, in the main, that my clerical friend's rather gloomy view was justified, though I thought that he was a trifle unfair to the doctors, especially to Sir Robert. Probably a less scientific practitioner, who would have given the condition some sort of name, would have been more satisfying to the parson. Meanwhile, I allowed myself to build on "the blood-films and other specimens" hopes of a definite discovery which might point the way to some effective treatment.

I despatched my business by the following evening and returned to London by the night train, arriving at my chambers shortly before midnight. With some eagerness I emptied the letter-cage in the hope of finding a note from Amos or Barbara; but there was none, although there were one or two letters from solicitors which required to be dealt with at once. I read these through and considered their contents while I was undressing, deciding to get up early and reply to them so that I might have the forenoon free; and this resolution I carried out so effectively that by ten o'clock in the morning I had breakfasted, answered and posted the letters, and was on my way westward in an Inner Circle train.

It was but a few minutes' walk from South Kensington Station to Hilborough Square and I covered the short distance more quickly than usual. Turning into the square, I walked along the pavement on the garden side, according to my habit, until I was nearly opposite the house. Then I turned to cross the road and as I did so, looked up at the house. And at the first glance I stopped short and stared in dismay: for the blinds were lowered in all the windows. For a couple of seconds I stood and gazed at this ominous spectacle; then I hurried across the road and, instinctively avoiding the knocker, gave a gentle pull at the bell.

The door was opened by the housemaid, who looked at me somewhat strangely but admitted me without a word and shut the door softly behind me. I glanced at her set face and asked in a low voice: "Why are all the blinds down, Mabel?"

"Didn't you know, Sir?" she replied, almost in a whisper. "It's the master—Mr Monkhouse. He passed away in the night. I found him dead when I went in this morning to draw up the blinds and give him his early tea."

I gazed at the girl in consternation, and after a pause she continued:

"It gave me an awful turn. Sir, for I didn't see, at first, what had happened. He was lying just as he usually did, and looked as if he had gone to sleep, reading. He had a book in his hand, resting on the counterpane, and I could see that his candle-lamp had burned itself right out. I put his tea on the bedside table and spoke to him, and when he didn't answer I spoke again a little louder. And then I noticed that he was perfectly still and looked even paler and more yellow than usual and I began to feel nervous about him. So I touched his hand; and it was as cold as stone and as stiff as a wooden hand. Then I felt sure he must be dead and I ran away and told Miss Norris."

"Miss Norris!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Sir. Mrs Monkhouse only got home about an hour ago. She was fearfully upset when she found she was too late. Miss Norris is with her now, but I expect she'll be awfully glad you've come. She was asking where you were. Shall I tell her you are here?"

"If you please, Mabel," I replied; and as the girl retired up the stairs with a stealthy, funereal tread, I backed into the open doorway of the dining room (avoiding the library, in case Wallingford should be there) where I remained until Mabel returned with a message asking me to go up.

I think I have seldom felt more uncomfortable than I did as I walked slowly and softly up the stairs. The worst had happened—at least, so I thought—and we all stood condemned; but Barbara most of all. I tried to prepare some comforting, condolent phrases, but could think of nothing but the unexplainable, inexcusable fact that Barbara had, of her own choice and for her own purposes, gone away leaving a sick husband and had come back to find him dead.

As I entered the pleasant little boudoir—now gloomy enough, with its lowered blinds—the two women rose from the settee on which they had been sitting together, and Barbara came forward to meet me, holding out both her hands.

"Rupert!" she exclaimed, "how good of you! But it is like you to be here just when we have need of you." She took both my hands and continued, looking rather wildly into my face: "Isn't it an awful thing? Poor, poor Harold! So patient and uncomplaining! And I so neglectful, so callous! I shall never, never forgive myself. I have been a selfish, egotistical brute."

"We are all to blame," I said, since I could not honestly dispute her self-accusations; "and Dr Dimsdale not the least. Harold has been the victim of his own patience. Does Amos know?"

"Yes," answered Madeline, "I sent him a telegram at half-past eight. I should have sent you one, too, but I didn't know that you had come back."

There followed a slightly awkward silence during which I reflected with some discomfort on the impending arrival of the dead man's brother, which might occur at any moment. It promised to be a somewhat unpleasant incident, for Amos alone had gauged the gravity of his brother's condition, and he was an outspoken man. I only hoped that he would not be too outspoken.

The almost embarrassing silence was broken by Barbara, who asked me in a low voice: "Will you go and see him, Rupert?" and added: "You know the way and I expect you would rather go alone."

I said "yes" as I judged that she did not wish to come with me, and, walking out of the room, took my way along the

corridor to the well-remembered door, at which I halted for a moment, with an unreasonable impulse to knock, and then entered. A solemn dimness pervaded the room, with its lowered blinds, and an unusual silence seemed to brood over it. But everything was clearly visible in the faint, diffused light—the furniture, the pictures on the walls, the bookshelves and the ghostly shape upon the bed, half-revealed through the sheet which had been laid over it.

Softly, I drew back the sheet, and the vague shape became a man; or rather, as it seemed, a waxen effigy, with something in its aspect at once strange and familiar. The features were those of Harold Monkhouse, but yet the face was not quite the face that I had known. So it has always seemed to me with the dead. They have their own distinctive character which belongs to no living man—the physiognomy of death; impassive, expressionless, immovable; fixed for ever, or at least, until the changes of the tomb shall obliterate even its semblance of humanity.

I stepped back a pace and looked thoughtfully at the dead man who had slipped so quietly out of the land of the living. There he lay, stretched out in an easy, restful posture, just as I had often seen him; the eyes half-closed and one long, thin arm lying on the counterpane, the waxen hand lightly grasping the open volume; looking—save for the stony immobility—as he might if he had fallen asleep over his book. It was not surprising that the housemaid had been deceived, for the surroundings all tended to support the illusion. The bedside table with its pathetic little provisions for a sick man's needs: the hooded candle-lamp, drawn to the table-edge and turned to light the book; the little decanter of brandy, the unused tumbler, the water-bottle, the watch, still ticking in its upright case, the candle-box, two or three spare volumes and the hand-bell for night use; all spoke of illness and repose with never a hint of death.

There was nothing by which I could judge when he had died. I touched his arm and found it rigid as an iron bar. So Mabel had found it some hours earlier, whence I inferred that death had occurred not much past midnight. But the doctors would be able to form a better opinion, if it should seem necessary to form any opinion at all. More to the point than the exact time of death was the exact cause. I recalled the blunt question that Amos had put to Dr Dimsdale and the almost indignant tone in which the latter had put it aside. That was less than a week ago; and now that question had to be answered in unequivocal terms. I found myself wondering what the politic and plausible Dimsdale would put on the death certificate and whether he would seek Sir Robert Detling's collaboration in the execution of that document.

I was about to replace the sheet when my ear caught the footsteps of some one approaching on tip-toe along the corridor. The next moment the door opened softly and Amos stole into the room. He passed me with a silent greeting and drew near the bed, beside which he halted with his hand laid on the dead hand and his eyes fixed gloomily on the yellowish-white, impassive face. He spoke no word, nor did I presume to disturb this solemn meeting and farewell, but silently slipped out into the corridor where I waited for him to come out.

Two or three minutes passed, during which I heard him, once or twice, moving softly about the room and judged that he was examining the surroundings amidst which his brother had passed the last few weeks of his life. Presently he came out, closing the door noiselessly behind him, and joined me opposite the window. I looked a little nervously into the stern, grief-stricken face, and as he did not speak, I said, lamely enough: "This is a grievous and terrible thing, Mr Monkhouse."

He shook his head gravely. "Grievous indeed; and the more so if one suspects, as I do, that it need not have happened. However, he is gone and recriminations will not bring him back."

"No," I agreed, profoundly relieved and a little surprised at his tone; "whatever we may feel or think, reproaches and bitter words will bring no remedy. Have you seen Barbara?"

"No; and I think I won't—this morning. In a day or two, I hope I shall be able to meet and speak to her as a Christian man should. Today I am not sure of myself. You will let me know what arrangements are made about the funeral?"

I promised that I would, and walked with him to the head of the stairs, and when I had watched him descend and heard the street door close, I went back to Barbara's little sitting-room.

I found her alone, and, when I entered she was standing before a miniature that hung on the wall. She looked round as I entered and I saw that she still looked rather dazed and strange. Her eyes were red, as if she had been weeping, but they were now tearless, and she seemed calmer than when I had first seen her. I went to her side, and for a few moments we stood silently regarding the smiling, girlish face that looked out at us from the miniature. It was that of Barbara's step-sister, a very sweet, loveable girl, little more than a child, who had died some four years previously, and who, I had sometimes thought, was the only human creature for whom Barbara had felt a really deep affection. The miniature had been painted from a photograph after her death and a narrow plait of her gorgeous, red-gold hair had been carried round inside the frame.

"Poor little Stella!" Barbara murmured, "I have been asking myself if I neglected her, too. I often left her for days at a time."

"You mustn't be morbid, Barbara," I said. "The poor child was very well looked after and as happy as she could be made. And nobody could have done any more for her. Rapid consumption is beyond the resources of medical science at present."

"Yes, unfortunately." She was silent for a while. Then she said: "I wonder if anything could have been done for Harold. Do you think it possible that he might have been saved?"

"I know of no reason for thinking so, and now that he is gone I see no use in raising the question."

She drew closer to me and slipped her hand into mine.

"You will be with us as much as you can, Rupert, won't you? We always look to you in trouble or difficulty, and you have never failed us. Even now you don't condemn me, whatever you may think."

"No, I blame myself for not being more alert, though it was really Dimsdale who misled us all. Has Madeline gone to the school?"

"Yes. She had to give a lecture or demonstration, but I hope she will manage to get a day or two off duty. I don't want to be left alone with poor Tony. It sounds unkind to say so, for no one could be more devoted to me than he is. But he is so terribly high-strung. Just now, he is in an almost hysterical state. I suppose you haven't seen him this morning?"

"No. I came straight up to you." I had, in fact, kept out of his way, for, to speak the truth, I did not much care for Anthony Wallingford. He was of a type that I dislike rather intensely; nervous, high-strung, emotional and in an incessant state of purposeless bustle. I did not like his appearance, his manners or his dress. I resented the abject fawning way in which he followed Barbara about, and I disapproved of his position in this house; which was nominally that of secretary to Barbara's husband, but actually that of tame cat and generally useless hanger-on. I think I was on the point of making some disparaging comments on him, but at that moment there came a gentle tap at the door and the subject of my thoughts entered.

I was rather sorry that Barbara was still holding my hand. Of course, the circumstances were very exceptional, but I have an Englishman's dislike of emotional demonstrations in the presence of third parties. Nevertheless, Wallingford's behaviour filled me with amazed resentment. He stopped short with a face black as thunder, and, after a brief, insolent stare, muttered that he was afraid he was "intruding" and walked out of the room, closing the door sharply after him.

Barbara flushed (and I daresay I did, too), but made no outward sign of annoyance. "You see what I mean," she said. "The poor fellow is quite unstrung. He is an added anxiety instead of a help."

"I see that plainly enough," I replied, "but I don't see why he is unstrung, or why an unstrung man should behave like an ill-mannered child. At any rate, he will have to pull himself together. There is a good deal to be done and he will have to do some of it. I may assume, I suppose, that it will be his duty to carry out the instructions of the executors?"

"I suppose so. But you know more about such things than I do."

"Then I had better go down and explain the position to him and set him to work. Presently I must call on Mr Brodribb, the other executor, and let him know what has happened. But meanwhile there are certain things which have to be done at once. You understand?"

"Yes, indeed. You mean arrangements for the funeral. How horrible it sounds. I can't realize it yet. It is all so shocking and so sudden and unlooked-for. It seems like some dreadful dream."

"Well, Barbara," I said gently, "you shan't, be troubled more than is unavoidable. I will see to all the domestic affairs and leave the legal business to Brodribb. But I shall want Wallingford's help, and I think I had better go down and see him now."

"Very well, Rupert," she replied with a sigh. "I shall lean on you now as I always have done in times of trouble and difficulty, and you must try to imagine how grateful I am since I can find no words to tell you."

She pressed my hand and released me, and I took my way down to the library with a strong distaste for my mission.

That distaste was not lessened when I opened the door and was met by a reek of cigarette smoke. Wallingford was sitting huddled up in an easy chair, but as I entered, he sprang to his feet and stood facing me with a sort of hostile apprehensiveness. The man was certainly unstrung; in fact he was on wires. His pale, haggard face twitched, his hands trembled visibly and his limbs were in constant, fidgety movement. But, to me, there seemed to be no mystery about his condition. The deep yellow stains on his fingers, the reek in the air and a pile of cigarette-ends in an ash-bowl were enough to account for a good deal of nervous derangement, even if there were nothing more—no drugs or drink.

I opened the business quietly, explaining what had to be done and what help I should require from him. At first he showed a tendency to dispute my authority and treat me as an outsider, but I soon made the position and powers of an executor clear to him. When I had brought him to heel I gave him a set of written instructions the following-out of which would keep him fairly busy for the rest of the day; and having set the dismal preparations going, I went forth from the house of mourning and took my way to New Square, Lincoln's Inn, where were the offices of Mr Brodribb, the family solicitor and my co-executor.

---

### III. — A SHOCK FOR THE MOURNERS

IT was on the day of the funeral that the faint, unheeded mutterings of the approaching storm began to swell into audible and threatening rumblings, though, even then, the ominous signs failed to deliver their full significance.

How well do I recall the scene in the darkened dining room where we sat in our sable raiment, "ready to wend on our pilgrimage" to the place of everlasting rest and eternal farewell. There were but four of us, for Amos Monkhouse had not yet arrived, though it was within a few minutes of the appointed time to start; quite a small party; for the deceased had but few relatives, and no outsiders had been bidden.

We were all rather silent. Intimate as we were, there was no need to make conversation. Each, no doubt, was busy with his or her own thoughts, and as I recall my own they seem to have been rather trivial and not very suitable to the occasion. Now and again I stole a look at Barbara and thought what a fine, handsome woman she was, and dimly wondered why, in all the years that I had known her, I had never fallen in love with her. Yet so it was. I had always admired her; we had been intimate friends, with a certain amount of quiet affection, but nothing more—at any rate on my part. Of her I was not so sure. There had been a time, some years before, when I had had an uneasy feeling that she looked to me for something more than friendship. But she was always a reticent girl; very self-reliant and self-contained. I never knew a woman better able to keep her own counsel or control her emotions.

She was now quite herself again, quiet, dignified, rather reserved and even a little inscrutable. Seated between Wallingford and Madeline, she seemed unconscious of either and quite undisturbed by the secretary's incessant nervous fidgeting and by his ill-concealed efforts to bring himself to her notice.

From Barbara my glance turned to the woman who sat by her side noting with dull interest the contrast between the two; a contrast as marked in their bearing as in their appearance. For whereas Barbara was a rather big woman, dark in colouring, quiet and resolute in manner, Madeline Norris was somewhat small and slight, almost delicately fair, rather shy and retiring, but yet with a suggestion of mental alertness under the diffident manner. If Barbara gave an impression of quiet strength, Madeline's pretty, refined face was rather expressive of subtle intelligence. But what chiefly impressed me at this moment was the curious inversion of their attitudes towards the existing circumstances; for whereas Barbara, the person mainly affected, maintained a quiet, untroubled demeanour, Madeline appeared to be overcome by the sudden catastrophe. Looking at her set, white face and the dismay in her wide, grey eyes, and comparing her with the woman at her side, a stranger would at once have assumed the bereavement to be hers.

My observations were interrupted by Wallingford once more dragging out his watch.

"What on earth can have happened to Mr Amos?" he exclaimed "We are due to start in three minutes. If he isn't here by then we shall have to start without him. It is perfectly scandalous! Positively indecent! But there, it's just like a parson."

"My experience of parsons," said I, "is that they are, as a rule, scrupulously punctual. But certainly, Mr Amos is unpardonably late. It will be very awkward if he doesn't arrive in time. Ah, there he is," I added as the bell rang and a muffled knock at the street door was heard.

At the sound, Wallingford sprang up as if the bell had actuated a hidden spring in the chair, and darted over to the window, from which he peered out through the chink beside the blind.

"It isn't Amos," he reported. "It's a stranger, and a fool at that, I should say, if he can't see that all the blinds are down."

We all listened intently. We heard the housemaid's hurried footsteps, though she ran on tip-toe; the door opened softly, and then, after an interval, we heard some one ushered along the hall to the drawing room. A few moments later, Mabel entered with an obviously scandalized air.

"A gentleman wishes to speak to you, Ma'am," she announced.

"But, Mabel," said Barbara, "did you tell him what is happening in this house?"

"Yes, Ma'am, I explained exactly how things were and told him that he must call tomorrow. But he said that his business was urgent and that he must see you at once."

"Very well," said Barbara. "I will go and see what he wants. But it is very extraordinary."

She rose, and nearly colliding with Wallingford, who had rushed to open the door—which was, in fact, wide open—walked out quickly, closing the door after her. After a short interval—during which Wallingford paced the room excitedly, peered out of the window, sat down, got up again and looked at his watch—she came back, and, standing in the doorway, looked at me.

"Would you come here for a minute, Rupert," she said, quietly.

I rose at once and walked back with her to the drawing room, on entering which I became aware of a large man, standing monumentally on the hearth-rug and inspecting the interior of his hat. He looked to me like a plainclothes policeman, and my surmise was verified by a printed card which he presented and which bore the inscription "Sergeant J Burton."

"I am acting as coroner's officer," he explained in reply to my interrogatory glance, "and I have come to notify you that the funeral will have to be postponed as the coroner has decided to hold an inquest; I have seen the undertakers and explained matters to them."

"Do you know what reason there is for an inquest?" I asked. "The cause of death was certified in the regular way."

"I know nothing beyond my instructions, which were to notify Mrs Monkhouse that the funeral is put off and to serve the summonses for the witnesses. I may as well do that now."

With this he laid on the table six small blue papers, which I saw were addressed respectively to Barbara, Madeline, Wallingford, the housemaid, the cook and myself.

"Have you no idea at all why an inquest is to be held?" I asked as I gathered up the papers.

"I have no information," he replied, cautiously, "but I expect there is some doubt about the exact cause of death. The

certificate may not be quite clear or it may be that some interested party has communicated with the coroner. That is what usually happens, you know, Sir. But at any rate," he added, cheerfully, "you will know all about it the day after tomorrow, which, you will observe, is the day fixed for the inquest."

"And what have we to do meanwhile?" Barbara asked. "The inquest will not be held in this house, I presume."

"Certainly not, Madam," the sergeant replied. "A hearse will be sent round tonight to remove the body to the mortuary, where the post mortem examination will be carried out, and the inquest will be held in the parish hall, as is stated on the summons. I am sorry that you should be put to this inconvenience," he concluded, moving tentatively towards the door, "but—er—it couldn't be helped, I suppose. Good morning, Madam."

I walked with him to the door and let him out, while Barbara waited for me in the hall, not unobserved by Wallingford, whose eye appeared in a chink beside the slightly open dining room door. I pointedly led her back into the drawing room and closed the door audibly behind us. She turned a pale and rather shocked face to me but she spoke quite composedly as she asked: "What do you make of it, Rupert? Is it Amos?"

I had already reluctantly decided that it must be. I say, reluctantly, because, if this were really his doing, the resigned tone of his last words to me would appear no less than sheer, gross hypocrisy.

"I don't know who else it could be," I answered. "The fact that he did not come this morning suggests that he at least knew what was happening. If he did, I think he might have warned us."

"Yes, indeed. It will be a horrid scandal; most unpleasant for us all, and especially for me. Not that I am entitled to any sympathy. Poor Harold! How he would have hated the thought of a public fuss over his body. I suppose we must go in now and tell the others. Do you mind telling them, Rupert?"

We crossed the hall to the dining room where we found the two waiting impatiently, Madeline very pale and agitated while Wallingford was pacing the room like a wild beast. Both looked at us with eager interrogation as we entered, and I made the announcement bluntly and in a dozen words.

The effect on both was electrical. Madeline, with a little cry of horror, sank, white-faced and trembling, into a chair. As for Wallingford, his behaviour was positively maniacal. After staring at me for a few moments with starting eyes and mouth agape, he flung up his arms and uttered a hoarse shout.

"This," he yelled, "is the doing of that accursed parson! Now we know why he kept out of the way—and it is well for him that he did!"

He clenched his fists and glared around him, showing his tobacco-stained teeth in a furious snarl while the sweat gathered in beads on his livid face. Then, suddenly, his mood changed and he dropped heavily on a chair, burying his face in his shaking hands. Barbara admonished him, quietly.

"Do try to be calm, Tony. There is nothing to get so excited about. It is all very unpleasant and humiliating, of course, but at any rate you are not affected. It is I who will be called to account."

"And do you suppose that doesn't affect me?" demanded Wallingford, now almost on the verge of tears.

"I am sure it does, Tony," she replied, gently, "but if you want to be helpful to me you will try to be calm and reasonable. Come, now," she added, persuasively, "let us put it away for the present. I must tell the servants. Then we had better have lunch and go our several ways to think the matter over quietly each of us alone. We shall only agitate one another if we remain together."

I agreed emphatically with this sensible suggestion. "Not," I added, "that there is much for us to think over. The explanations will have to come from Dimsdale. It was he who failed to grasp the seriousness of poor Harold's condition."

While Barbara was absent, breaking the news to the servants, I tried to bring Madeline to a more composed frame of mind. With Wallingford I had no patience. Men should leave hysterics to the other sex. But I was sorry for Madeline; and even if she seemed more overwhelmed by the sudden complications than the occasion justified, I told myself that the blow had fallen when she was already shaken by Harold's unexpected death.

The luncheon was a silent and comfortless function; indeed it was little more than an empty form. But it had the merit of brevity. When the last dish had been sent away almost intact, Wallingford drew out his cigarette case and we all rose.

"What are you going to do, Madeline?" Barbara asked.

"I must go to the school, I suppose, and let the secretary know that—that I may have to be absent for a day or two. It will be horrid. I shall have to tell him all about it—after having got leave for the funeral. But it will sound so strange, so extraordinary. Oh! It is horrible!"

"It is!" exclaimed Wallingford, fumbling with tremulous fingers at his cigarette case. "It is diabolical! A fiendish plot to disgrace and humiliate us. As to that infernal parson, I should like—"

"Never mind that, Tony," said Barbara; "and we had better not stay here, working up one another's emotions. What are you doing, Rupert?"

"I shall go to my chambers and clear off some correspondence."

"Then you might walk part of the way with Madeline and see if you can't make her mind a little more easy."

Madeline looked at me eagerly. "Will you, Rupert?" she asked.

Of course I assented, and a few minutes later we set forth together.

For a while she walked by my side in silence with an air of deep reflection, and I refrained from interrupting her thoughts, having no very clear idea as to what I should say to her. Moreover, my own mind was pretty busily occupied. Presently she spoke, in a tentative way, as if opening a discussion.

"I am afraid you must think me very weak and silly to be so much upset by this new trouble."

"Indeed, I don't," I replied. "It is a most disturbing and humiliating affair and it will be intensely unpleasant for us all, but especially for Barbara—to say nothing of Dimsdale."

"Dr Dimsdale is not our concern," said she, "but it will be perfectly horrible for Barbara. For she really has been rather casual, poor girl, and they are sure to make things unpleasant for her. It will be a most horrid scandal. Don't you think so?"

To be candid, I did. Indeed, I had just been picturing to myself the possibilities with an officious coroner—and he would not need to be so very officious, either—and one or two cross-grained jurymen. Barbara might be subjected to a very unpleasant examination. But I did not think it necessary to say this to Madeline. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. I contented myself with a vague agreement.

There was another interval of silence. Then, a little to my surprise, she drew closer to me, and, slipping her hand under my arm, said very earnestly: "Rupert, I want you to tell me what you really think. What is it all about?"

I looked down, rather disconcerted, into the face that was turned up to me so appealingly; and suddenly—and rather irrelevantly—it was borne in on me that it was a singularly sweet and charming face. I had never quite realized it before. But then she had never before looked at me quite in this way; with this trustful, coaxing, appealing expression.

"I don't quite understand you, Madeline," I said, evasively. "I know no more about it than you do."

"Oh, but you do, Rupert. You are a lawyer and you have had a lot of experience. You must have formed some opinion as to why they have decided to hold an inquest. Do tell me what you think."

The coaxing, almost wheedling tone, and the entreaty in her eyes, looking so earnestly into mine, nearly conquered my reserve. But not quite. Once more I temporized.

"Well, Madeline, we all realize that what Dimsdale has written on the certificate is little more than a guess, and quite possibly wrong; and even Detling couldn't get much farther."

"Yes, I realize that. But I didn't think that inquests were held just to find out whether the doctors' opinions were correct or not."

Of course she was perfectly right; and I now perceived that her thoughts had been travelling along the same lines as my own. An inquest would not be held merely to clear up an obscure diagnosis. There was certainly something more behind this affair than Dimsdale's failure to recognize the exact nature of the illness. There was only one simple explanation of the coroner's action, and I gave it—with a strong suspicion that it was not the right one.

"They are not, as a rule, excepting in hospitals. But this is a special case. Amos Monkhouse was obviously dissatisfied with Dimsdale, and with Barbara, too. He may have challenged the death certificate and asked for an inquest. The coroner would be hardly likely to refuse, especially if there were a hint of negligence or malpractice."

"Did Mr Amos say anything to you that makes you think he may have challenged the certificate?"

"He said very little to me at all," I replied, rather casuistically and suppressing the fact that Amos had explicitly accepted the actual circumstances and deprecated any kind of recrimination.

"I can hardly believe that he would have done it," said Madeline, "just to punish Barbara and Dr Dimsdale. It would be so vindictive, especially for a clergyman."

"Clergymen are very human sometimes," I rejoined; and, as, rather to my relief, we now came in sight of Madeline's destination, I adverted to the interview which she seemed to dread so much. "There is no occasion for you to go into details with the secretary," I said. "In fact you can't. The exact cause of death was not clear to the doctors and it has been considered advisable to hold an inquest. That is all you know, and it is enough. You are summoned as a witness and you are legally bound to attend, so you are asking no favour. Cut the interview dead short, and when you have done with it, try, like a sensible girl, to forget the inquest for the present. I shall come over tomorrow and then we can reconstitute the history of the case, so that we may go into the witness-box, or its equivalent, with a clear idea of what we have to tell. And now, good-bye, or rather au revoir!"

"Good-bye, Rupert." She took my proffered hand and held it as she thanked me for walking with her. "Do you know, Rupert," she added, "there is something strangely comforting and reassuring about you. We all feel it. You seem to carry an atmosphere of quiet strength and security. I don't wonder that Barbara is so fond of you. Not," she concluded, "that she holds a monopoly."

With this she let go my hand, and, with a slightly shy smile and the faintest suspicion of a blush, turned away and walked quickly and with an air quite cheerful and composed towards the gateway of the institution. Apparently, my society had had a beneficial effect on her nervous condition.

I watched her until she disappeared into the entry, and then resumed my journey eastward, rather relieved, I fear, at having disposed of my companion. For I wanted to think—of her among other matters; and it was she who first occupied my cogitations. The change from her usual matter-of-fact friendliness had rather taken me by surprise; and I had to admit that it was not a disagreeable surprise. But what was the explanation? Was this intimate, clinging manner merely a passing phase due to an emotional upset, or was it that the special circumstances had allowed feelings hitherto concealed to come to the surface? It was an interesting question, but one that time alone could answer; and as there were other questions, equally interesting and more urgent, I consigned this one to the future and turned to consider the others.

What could be the meaning of this inquest? The supposition that Amos had suddenly turned vindictive and resolved to expose the neglect, to which he probably attributed his brother's death, I could not entertain, especially after what he had said to me. It would have written him down the rankest of hypocrites. And yet he was in some way connected with the affair as was proved by his failure to appear at the funeral. As to the idea that the inquiry was merely to elucidate the nature of the illness, that was quite untenable. A private autopsy would have been the proper procedure for that purpose.

I was still turning the question over in my mind when, as I passed the Griffin at Temple Bar, I became aware of a tall figure some distance ahead walking in the same direction. The build of the man and his long, swinging stride seemed familiar. I looked at him more attentively; and just as he turned to enter Devereux Court I recognized him definitely as a fellow Templar named Thorndyke.

The chance encounter seemed a singularly fortunate one, and at once I quickened my pace to overtake him. For Dr Thorndyke was a medical barrister and admittedly the greatest living authority on medical jurisprudence. The whole subject of inquests and Coroners' Law was an open book to him. But he was not only a lawyer. He had, I understood, a professional and very thorough knowledge of pathology and of the science of medicine in general, so that he was the very man to enlighten me in my present difficulties.

I overtook him at the Little Gate of the Middle Temple and we walked through together into New Court. I wasted no time, but, after the preliminary greetings, asked him if he had a few minutes to spare. He replied, in his quiet, genial way: "But, of course, Mayfield. I always have a few minutes to spare for a friend and a colleague."

I thanked him for the gracious reply, and, as we slowly descended the steps and sauntered across Fountain Court, I opened the matter without preamble and gave him a condensed summary of the case; to which he listened with close attention and evidently with keen interest.

"I am afraid," he said, "that your family doctor will cut rather a poor figure. He seems to have mismanaged the case rather badly, to judge by the fact that the death of the patient took him quite by surprise. By the way, can you give me any idea of the symptoms—as observed by yourself, I mean?"

"I have told you what was on the certificate."

"Yes. But the certified cause of death appears to be contested. You saw the patient pretty often, I understand. Now what sort of appearance did he present to you?"

The question rather surprised me. Dimsdale's opinion might not be worth much, but the casual and inexperienced observations of a layman would have seemed to me to be worth nothing at all. However, I tried to recall such details as I could remember of poor Monkhouse's appearance and his own comments on his condition and recounted them to Thorndyke with such amplifications as his questions elicited. "But," I concluded, "the real question is, who has set the coroner in motion and with what object?"

"That question," said Thorndyke, "will be answered the day after tomorrow, and there is not much utility in trying to guess at the answer in advance. The real question is whether any arrangements ought to be made in the interests of your friends. We are quite in the dark as to what may occur in the course of the inquest."

"Yes, I had thought of that. Some one ought to be present to represent Mrs Monkhouse. I suppose it would not be possible for you to attend to watch the case on her behalf?"

"I don't think it would be advisable," he replied. "You will be present and could claim to represent Mrs Monkhouse so far as might be necessary to prevent improper questions being put to her. But I do think that you should have a complete record of all that takes place. I would suggest that I send Holman, who does most of my shorthand reporting, with instructions to make a verbatim report of the entire proceedings. It may turn out to be quite unnecessary; but if any complications should arise, we shall have the complete depositions with the added advantage that you will have been present and will have heard all the evidence. How will that suit you?"

"If you think it is the best plan there is nothing more to say, excepting to thank you for your help."

"And give me a written note of the time and place to hand to Holman when I give him his instructions."

I complied with this request at once; and having by this time reached the end of the Terrace, I shook hands with him and walked slowly to my chambers in Fig Tree Court. I had not got much out of Thorndyke excepting a very useful suggestion and some valuable help; indeed, as I turned over his extremely cautious utterances and speculated on what he meant by "complications," I found myself rather more uncomfortably puzzled than I had been before I met him.

---

#### IV. — "HOW, WHEN AND WHERE—"



IT was on the second day after the interrupted funeral that the thunderbolt fell. I cannot say that it found me entirely unprepared, for my reflections during the intervening day had filled me with forebodings; and by Thorndyke that catastrophe was pretty plainly foreseen. But on the others the blow fell with devastating effect. However, I must not anticipate. Rather let me get back to a consecutive narration of the actual events.

On the day after the visit of the coroner's officer we had held, at my suggestion, a sort of family committee to consider what we knew of the circumstances and antecedents of Harold's death, so that we might be in a position to give our evidence clearly and readily and be in agreement as to the leading facts. Thus we went to the coroner's court prepared, at least, to tell an intelligible and consistent story.

As soon as I entered the large room in which the inquest was to be held, my forebodings deepened. The row of expectant reporters was such as one does not find where the proceedings are to be no more than a simple, routine inquiry. Something of public interest was anticipated, and these gentlemen of the Press had received a hint from some well-informed quarter. I ran my eye along the row and was somewhat relieved to observe Mr Holman, Thorndyke's private reporter, seated at the table with a large note-book and a half-dozen well-sharpened pencils before him. His presence—as, in a sense, Thorndyke's deputy—gave me the reassuring feeling that, if there were to be “complications,” I should not have to meet them with my own limited knowledge and experience, but that there were reserves of special knowledge and weighty counsel on which I could fall back.

The coroner's manner seemed to me ominous. His introductory address to the jury was curt and ambiguous, setting forth no more than the name of the deceased and the fact that circumstances had seemed to render an inquiry advisable; and having said this, he proceeded forthwith (the jury having already viewed the body) to call the first witness, the Reverend Amos Monkhouse.

I need not repeat the clergyman's evidence in detail. When he had identified the body as that of his brother, Harold, he went on to relate the events which I have recorded: his visit to his sick brother, his alarm at the patient's appearance, his call upon Dr Dimsdale and his subsequent interview with Sir Robert Detling. It was all told in a very concise, matter-of-fact manner, and I noted that the coroner did not seek to amplify the condensed statement by any questions.

“At about nine o'clock in the morning of the 13th,” the witness continued, “I received a telegram from Miss Norris informing me that my brother had died in the night. I went out at once and sent a telegram to Sir Robert Detling informing him of what had happened. I then went to number 16 Hilborough Square, where I saw the body of deceased lying in his bed quite cold and stiff. I saw nobody at the house excepting the housemaid and Mr Mayfield. After leaving the house I walked about the streets for several hours and did not return to my hotel until late in the afternoon. When I arrived there, I found awaiting me a telegram from Sir Robert Detling asking me to call on him without delay. I set forth at once and arrived at Sir Roberts house at half-past five, and was shown into his study immediately. Sir Robert then told me that he had come to the conclusion that the circumstances of my brother's death called for some investigation and that he proposed to communicate with the coroner. He urged me not to raise any objections and advised me to say nothing to anyone but to wait until the coroner's decision was made known. I asked him for his reasons for communicating with the coroner, but he said that he would rather not make any statement. I heard no more until the morning of the fifteenth, the day appointed for the funeral, when the coroner's officer called at my hotel to inform me that the funeral would not take place and to serve the summons for my attendance here as a witness.”

When Amos had concluded his statement, the coroner glanced at the Jury, and as no one offered to put any questions, he dismissed the witness and called the next—Mabel Withers—who, at once, came forward to the table. Having been sworn and having given her name, the witness deposed that she had been housemaid to deceased and that it was she who had discovered the fact of his death, relating the circumstances in much the same words as I have recorded. When she had finished her narrative, the coroner said: “You have told us that the candle in the deceased's lamp was completely burnt out. Do you happen to know how long one of those candles would burn?”

“Yes. About four hours.”

“When did you last see deceased alive?”

“At half-past ten on Tuesday night, the twelfth. I looked in at his room on my way up to bed to see if he wanted anything, and I gave him a dose of medicine.”

“What was his condition then?”

“He looked very ill, but he seemed fairly comfortable. He had a book in his hand but was not reading.”

“Was the candle alight then?”

“No, the gas was alight. I asked him if I should turn it out but he said ‘no.’ He would wait until Miss Norris or Mr Wallingford came.”

“Did you notice how much candle there was in the lamp then?”

“There was a whole candle. I put it in myself in the afternoon and it had not been lit. He used to read by the gas as long as it was alight. He only used the candle-lamp if he couldn't sleep and the gas was out.”

“Could you form any opinion as to how long the candle had been burnt out?”

“It must have been out some time, for there was no smell in the room as there would have been if it had only been out a

short time. The window was hardly open at all; only just a small crack.”

“Do you know when deceased last took food?”

“Yes, he had his supper at eight o’clock; an omelette and a tiny piece of toast with a glass of milk.”

“Who cooked the omelette?”

“Miss Norris.”

“Why did Miss Norris cook it? Was the cook out?”

“No. But Miss Norris usually cooked his supper and sometimes made little dishes for his lunch. She is a very expert cook.”

“Who took the omelette up to deceased?”

“Miss Norris. I asked if I should take his supper up, but she said she was going up and would take it herself.”

“Was anyone else present when Miss Norris was cooking the omelette?”

“Yes, I was present and so was the cook.”

“Did deceased usually have the same food as the rest of the household?”

“No, he usually had his own special diet.”

“Who prepared his food, as a rule?”

“Sometimes the cook, but more often Miss Norris.”

“Now, with regard to his medicine. Did deceased usually take it himself?”

“No, he didn’t like to have the bottle on the bedside table, as it was rather crowded with his books and things. The bottle and the medicine-glass were kept on the mantelpiece and the medicine was given to him by whoever happened to be in the room when a dose was due. Sometimes I gave it to him; at other times Mrs Monkhouse or Miss Norris or Mr Wallingford.”

“Do you remember when the last bottle of medicine came?”

“Yes. It came early in the afternoon of the day before he died. I took it in and carried it up at once.”

When he had written down this answer, the coroner ran his eye through his previous notes and then glanced at the jury.

“Do any of you gentlemen wish to ask the witness any questions?” he enquired; and as no one answered, he dismissed the witness with the request that she would stay in the court in case any further testimony should be required of her. He then announced that he would take the evidence of Sir Robert Detling next in order to release him for his probably numerous engagements. Sir Robert’s name was accordingly called and a grave-looking, elderly gentleman rose from near the doorway and walked up to the table. When the new witness had been sworn and the formal preliminaries disposed of, the coroner said: “I will ask you, Sir Robert, to give the jury an account of the circumstances which led to your making a certain communication to me.”

Sir Robert bowed gravely and proceeded at once to make his statement in the clear, precise manner of a practised speaker.

“On Friday, the 8th instant, the Reverend Amos Monkhouse called on me to arrange a consultation with Dr Dimsdale who was in attendance on his brother, the deceased. I met Dr Dimsdale by appointment the following afternoon, the 9th, and with him made a careful examination of deceased. I was extremely puzzled by the patient’s condition. He was obviously very seriously—I thought, dangerously—ill, but I was unable to discover any signs or symptoms that satisfactorily accounted for his grave general condition. I could not give his disease a name. Eventually, I took a number of blood-films and some specimens of the secretions to submit to a pathologist for examination and to have them tested for micro-organisms. I took them that night to Professor Garnett’s laboratory, but the professor was unfortunately absent and not returning until the following night—Sunday. I therefore kept them until Sunday night when I took them to him and asked him to examine them with as little delay as possible. He reported on the following day that microscopical examination had not brought to light anything abnormal, but he was making cultures from the secretions and would report the result on Wednesday morning. On Wednesday morning at about half-past nine, I received a telegram from the Reverend Amos Monkhouse informing me that his brother had died during the night. A few minutes later, a messenger brought Professor Garnett’s report; which was to the effect that no disease-bearing organisms had been found, nor any thing abnormal excepting a rather singular scarcity of micro-organisms of any kind.

“This fact, together with the death of the patient, suddenly aroused my suspicions. For the absence of the ordinary micro-organisms suggested the presence of some foreign chemical substance. And now, as I recalled the patient’s symptoms, I found them consistent with the presence in the body of some foreign substance. Instantly, I made my way to Professor Garnett’s laboratory and communicated my suspicions to him. I found that he shared them and had carefully preserved the remainder of the material for further examination. We both suspected the presence of a foreign substance, and we both suspected it to be arsenic.

“The professor had at hand the means of making a chemical test, so we proceeded at once to use them. The test that we employed was the one known as Reinsch’s test. The result showed a very appreciable amount of arsenic in the secretions

tested. On this, I sealed up what was left of the specimens, and, after notifying Mr Monkhouse of my intention, reported the circumstances to the coroner."

When Sir Robert ceased speaking, the coroner bowed, and having written down the last words, reflected for a few moments. Then he turned to the jury and said: "I don't think we need detain Sir Robert any longer unless there are any questions that you would like to ask."

At this point the usual over-intelligent jurymen interposed.

"We should like to know whether the vessels in which the specimens were contained were perfectly clean and free from chemicals."

"The bottles," Sir Robert replied, "were clean in the ordinary sense. I rinsed them out with clean water before introducing the material. But, of course, they could not be guaranteed to be chemically clean."

"Then doesn't that invalidate the analysis?" the juror asked.

"It was hardly an analysis," the witness replied. "It was just a preliminary test."

"The point which you are raising, Sir," said the coroner, "is quite a sound one but it is not relevant to this inquiry. Sir Robert's test was made to ascertain if an inquiry was necessary. He decided that it was, and we are now holding that inquiry. You will not form your verdict on the results of Sir Robert's test but on those of the post mortem examination and the special analysis that has been made."

This explanation appeared to satisfy the juror and Sir Robert was allowed to depart. The coroner once more seemed to consider awhile and then addressed the jury.

"I think it will be best to take next the evidence relating to the examination of the body. When you have heard that you will be better able to weigh the significance of what the other witnesses have to tell us. We will now take the evidence of Dr Randall."

As the new witness, a small, dry, eminently professional-looking man, stepped briskly up to the table, I stole a quick, rather furtive glance at my companions and saw my own alarm plainly reflected in their faces and bearing. Barbara, on my left hand, sat up stiffly, rigid as a statue, her face pale and set, but quite composed, her eyes fixed on the man who was about to be sworn. Madeline, on my right, was ghastly. But she, too, was still and quiet, sitting with her hands tightly clasped, as if to restrain or conceal their trembling, and her eyes bent on the floor. As to Wallingford, who sat on the other side of Barbara, I could not see his face, but by his foot, which I could see and hear, tapping quickly on the floor as if he were working a spinning-wheel, and his incessantly moving hands, I judged that his nerves were at full tension.

The new witness deposed that his name was Walter Randall, that he was a Bachelor of Medicine and police surgeon of the district and that he had made a careful examination of the body of deceased and that, with Dr Barnes, he had made an analysis of certain parts of that body.

"To anticipate a little," said the coroner, "did you arrive at an opinion as to the cause of death?"

"Yes. From the post mortem examination and the analysis taken together, I came to the conclusion that deceased died from the effects of arsenic poisoning."

"Have you any doubt that arsenic poisoning was really the cause of the deceased's death?"

"No, I have no doubt whatever."

The reply, uttered with quiet decision, elicited a low murmur from the jury and the few spectators, amidst which I heard Madeline gasp in a choking whisper, "Oh! God!" and even Barbara was moved to a low cry of horror. But I did not dare to look at either of them. As for me, the blow had fallen already. Sir Robert's evidence had told me all.

"You said," the coroner resumed, "that the post mortem and the analysis, taken together, led you to this conclusion. What did you mean by that?"

"I meant that the appearance of the internal organs, taken alone, would not have been conclusive. The conditions that I found were suggestive of arsenic poisoning but might possibly have been due to disease. It was only the ascertained presence of arsenic that converted the probability into certainty."

"You are quite sure that the conditions were not due to disease?"

"Not entirely. I would rather say that the effects of arsenical poisoning were added to and mingled with those of old-standing disease."

"Would you tell us briefly what abnormal conditions you found?"

"The most important were those in the stomach, which showed marked signs of inflammation."

"You are aware that the death certificate gives old-standing chronic gastritis as one of the causes of death?"

"Yes, and I think correctly. The arsenical gastritis was engrafted on an already existing chronic gastritis. That is what made the appearances rather difficult to interpret, especially as the post mortem appearances in arsenical poisoning are extraordinarily variable."

"What else did you find?"

"There were no other conditions that were directly associated with the poison. The heart was rather fatty and dilated, and its condition probably accounts for the sudden collapse which seems to have occurred."

"Does not collapse usually occur in poisoning by arsenic?"

"Eventually it does, but it is usually the last of a long train of symptoms. In some cases, however, collapse occurs quite early and may carry the victim off at once. That is what appears from the housemaid's evidence to have happened in this case. Death seems to have been sudden and almost peaceful."

"Were there any other signs of disease?"

"Yes, the lungs were affected. There were signs of considerable bronchial catarrh, but I do not regard this as having any connection with the effects of the poison. It appeared to be an old-standing condition."

"Yes," said the coroner. "The certificate mentions chronic bronchial catarrh of several years' standing. Did you find any arsenic in the stomach?"

"Not in the solid form and only a little more than a hundredth of a grain altogether. The stomach was practically empty. The other organs were practically free from disease, excepting, perhaps, the kidneys, which were congested but not organically diseased."

"And as to the amount of arsenic present?"

"The analysis was necessarily a rather hasty one and probably shows less than the actual quantity; but we found, as I have said, just over a hundredth of a grain in the stomach, one and a half grains in the liver, nearly a fifth of a grain in the kidneys and small quantities, amounting in all to two grains, in the blood and tissues. The total amount actually found was thus a little over three and a half grains—a lethal dose."

"What is the fatal dose of arsenic?"

"Two grains may prove fatal if taken in solution, as it appears to have been in this case. Two and a half grains, in a couple of ounces of fly-paper water, killed a strong, healthy girl of nineteen in thirty-six hours."

"And how long does a poisonous dose take to produce death?"

"The shortest period recorded is twenty minutes, the longest, over three weeks."

"Did you come to any general conclusion as to how long deceased had been suffering from the effects of arsenic and as to the manner in which it had been administered?"

"From the distribution of the poison in the organs and tissues and from the appearance of the body, I inferred that the administration of arsenic had been going on for a considerable time. There were signs of chronic poisoning which led me to believe that for quite a long time—perhaps months—deceased had been taking repeated small doses of the poison, and that the final dose took such rapid effect by reason of the enfeebled state of the deceased at the time when it was administered."

"And as to the mode of administration? Did you ascertain that?"

"In part, I ascertained it quite definitely. When the bearers went to the house to fetch the body, I accompanied them and took the opportunity to examine the bedroom. There I found on the mantelpiece a bottle of medicine with the name of deceased on the label and brought it away with me. It was an eight ounce bottle containing when full eight doses, of which only one had been taken. Dr Barnes and I, together, analyzed the remaining seven ounces of the medicine and obtained from it just over eleven grains of arsenic; that is a fraction over a grain and a half in each ounce dose. The arsenic was in solution and had been introduced into the medicine in the form of the solution known officially as Liquor Arsenicalis, or Fowler's Solution."

"That is perfectly definite," said the coroner. "But you said that you ascertained the mode of administration in part. Do you mean that you inferred the existence of some other vehicle?"

"Yes. A single dose of this medicine contained only a grain and a half of arsenic, which would hardly account for the effects produced or the amount of arsenic which was found in the body. Of course, the preceding dose from the other bottle may have contained the poison, too, or it may have been taken in some other way."

"What other way do you suggest?"

"I can merely suggest possibilities. A meal was taken about eight o'clock. If that meal had contained a small quantity of arsenic—even a single grain—that, added to what was in the medicine, would have been enough to cause death. But there is no evidence whatever that the food did contain arsenic."

"If the previous dose of medicine had contained the same quantity of the poison as the one that was last taken, would that account for the death of deceased?"

"Yes. He would then have taken over three grains in four hours—more than the minimum fatal dose."

"Did you see the other—the empty medicine bottle?"

"No. I looked for it and should have taken possession of it, but it was not there."

“Is there anything else that you have to tell us concerning your examination?”

“No, I think I have told you all I know about the case.”

The coroner cast an interrogatory glance at the jury, and when none of them accepted the implied invitation, he released the witness and named Dr Barnes as his successor.

I need not record in detail the evidence of this witness. Having deposed that he was a Doctor of Science and lecturer in Chemistry at St Martha's Medical College, he proceeded to confirm Dr Randall's evidence as to the analysis, giving somewhat fuller and more precise details. He had been present at the autopsy, but he was not a pathologist and was not competent to describe the condition of the body. He had analyzed the contents of the medicine bottle with Dr Randall's assistance and he confirmed the last witness's statement as to the quantity of arsenic found and the form in which it had been introduced—Fowler's Solution.

“What is the strength of Fowler's Solution?”

“It contains four grains of arsenic—or, more strictly, of arsenious acid—to the fluid ounce. So that, as the full bottle of medicine must have contained just over twelve and a half grains of arsenious acid, the quantity of Fowler's Solution introduced must have been a little over three fluid ounces; three point fourteen, to be exact.”

“You are confident that it was Fowler's Solution that was used?”

“Yes; the chemical analysis showed that; but in addition, there was the colour and the smell. Fowler's Solution is coloured red with Red Sandalwood and scented with Tincture of Lavender as a precaution against accidents. Otherwise it would be colourless, odourless and tasteless, like water.”

On the conclusion of Dr Barnes' evidence, the coroner remarked to the jury: “I think we ought to be clear on the facts with regard to this medicine. Let Mabel Withers be recalled.”

Once more the housemaid took her place by the table and the coroner resumed the examination.

“You say that the last bottle of medicine came early in the afternoon. Can you tell us the exact time?”

“It was about a quarter to three. I remember that because when I took up the new bottle, I asked Mr Monkhouse if he had had his medicine and he said that his brother, Mr Amos Monkhouse, had given him a dose at two o'clock just before he left.”

“Did you open the fresh bottle?”

“I took off the paper wrapping and the cap but I didn't take the cork out.”

“Was the old bottle empty then?”

“No; there was one dose left in it. That would be due at six o'clock.”

“Do you know what became of the old bottle?”

“Yes. When I had given him his last dose—that was out of the new bottle—I took the old bottle away and washed it at once.”

“Why did you wash the bottle?”

“The used medicine bottles were always washed and sent back to Dr Dimsdale.”

“Did you send back the corks, too?”

“No, the corks were usually burned in the rubbish destructor.”

“Do you know what happened to this particular cork?”

“I took it down with me in the morning and dropped it in the bin which was kept for the rubbish to be taken out to the destructor. The cork must have been burned with the other rubbish the same day.”

“When you gave deceased that last dose of medicine from the new bottle, did you notice anything unusual about it? Any smell, for instance?”

“I noticed a very faint smell of lavender. But that was not unusual. His medicine often smelt of lavender.”

“Do you know if the previous bottle of medicine smelt of lavender?”

“Yes, it did. I noticed it when I was washing out the bottle.”

“That, gentlemen,” said the coroner, as he wrote down the answer, “is a very important fact. You will notice that it bears out Dr Randall's opinion that more than one dose of the poison had been given; that, in fact, a number of repeated small doses had been administered. And, so far as we can see at present, the medicine was, at least, the principal medium of its administration. The next problem that we have to solve is how the poison got into the medicine. If none of you wish to put any questions to the very intelligent witness whom we have just been examining, I think we had better call Dr Dimsdale and hear what he has to tell us.”

The jury had no questions to put to Mabel but were manifestly all agog to hear Dr Dimsdale's evidence. The housemaid was accordingly sent back to her seat, and the doctor stepped briskly—almost too briskly, I thought—up to the table.

---

## V. — MADELINE'S ORDEAL

I WAS rather sorry for Dimsdale. His position was a very disagreeable one and he fully realized it. His patient had been poisoned before his very eyes and he had never suspected even grave illness. In a sense, the death of Harold Monkhouse lay at his door and it was pretty certain that every one present would hold him accountable for the disaster. Indeed, it was likely that he would receive less than justice. Those who judged him would hardly stop to reflect on the extraordinary difficulties that beset a busy medical man whose patient is being secretly poisoned; would fail to consider the immense number of cases of illness presented to him in the course of years of practice and the infinitely remote probability that any one of them is a case of poison. The immense majority of doctors pass through the whole of their professional lives without meeting with such a case; and it is not surprising that when the infinitely rare contingency arises, it nearly always takes the practitioner unawares. My own amazement at this incredible horror tended to make me sympathetic towards Dimsdale and it was with some relief that I noted the courteous and considerate manner that the coroner adopted in dealing with the new witness.

"I think," the former observed, "that we had better, in the first place, pursue our inquiries concerning the medicine. You have heard the evidence of Dr Randall and Dr Barnes. This bottle of medicine, before any was taken from it, contained twelve and a half grains of arsenious acid, in the form of just over three fluid ounces of Fowler's Solution. Can you suggest any explanation of that fact?"

"No," replied Dimsdale, "I cannot."

"What should the bottle have contained? What was the composition of the medicine?"

"The medicine was just a simple, very mild tonic and alternative. The bottle contained twenty-four minims of Tincture of Nux Vomica, sixteen minims of Liquor Arsenicalis, half a fluid ounce of Syrup of Bitter Orange to cover the taste of the Nux Vomica and half an ounce of Compound Tincture of Cardamoms. So that each dose contained three minims of Tincture of Nux Vomica and two minims of Liquor Arsenicalis."

"Liquor Arsenicalis is another name for Fowler's Solution, I understand?"

"Yes, it is the official name; the other is the popular name."

"Who supplied this medicine?"

"It was supplied by me."

"Do you usually supply your patients with medicine?"

"No. Only a few of my old patients who prefer to have their medicine from me. Usually, I write prescriptions which my patients have made up by chemists."

"This bottle, then, was made up in your own dispensary?"

"Yes."

"Now, I put it to you, Dr Dimsdale: this medicine did actually contain Fowler's Solution, according to the prescription. Is it not possible that some mistake may have occurred in the amount put into the bottle?"

"No, it is quite impossible."

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because I made up this particular bottle myself. As my dispenser is not a qualified pharmacist, I always dispense, with my own hands, any medicines containing poisons. All dangerous drugs are kept in a poison cupboard under lock and key, and I carry the key on my private bunch. This is the key, and as you see, the lock is a Yale lock."

He held up the bunch with the little flat key separated, for the coroner's and the jurymen's inspection.

"But," said the coroner, "you have not made it clear that a mistake in the quantity was impossible."

"I was coming to that," replied Dimsdale. "The poisons in the cupboard are, of course, powerful drugs which are given only in small doses, and a special measure-glass is kept in the cupboard to measure them. This glass holds only two drachms—a hundred and twenty minims, that is, a quarter of an ounce. Now, the analysts found in this bottle three fluid ounces of Fowler's Solution. But to measure out that quantity, I should have had to fill the measure-glass twelve times! That is impossible. No one could do such a thing as that inadvertently, especially when he was dispensing poisons."

"But that is not all. The poison bottles are all quite small. The one in which the Liquor Arsenicalis is kept is a four ounce bottle. It happened that I had refilled it a few days previously and it was full when I dispensed this medicine. Now, obviously, if I had put three ounces of the Liquor into the medicine bottle, there would have remained in the dispensing bottle only one ounce. But the dispensing bottle is still practically full. I had occasion to use it this morning and I found it full save for the few minims that had been taken to make up the deceased's medicine."

"And there is another point. This medicine was coloured a deepish pink by the Tincture of Cardamoms. But if it had contained three ounces of Fowler's Solution in addition, it would have been a deep red of quite a different character. But I clearly remember the appearance of the bottle as it lay on the white paper when I was wrapping it up. It had the delicate

pink colour that is imparted by the cochineal in the Tincture of Cardamoms.”

The coroner nodded as he wrote down the reply, and enquired:

“Would any of you, gentlemen, like to ask any questions concerning the bottle of medicine?”

“We should like to know, Sir,” said the foreman, “whether this bottle of medicine ever left the doctor’s hands before it was sent to deceased?”

“No, it did not,” replied Dimsdale. “As the dispenser was absent, I put up the bottle entirely myself. I put in the cork, wrote the label, tied on the paper cap, wrapped the bottle up, sealed the wrapping, addressed it and gave it to the boy to deliver.”

The foreman expressed himself as fully satisfied with this answer and the coroner then resumed: “Well, we seem to have disposed of the medicine so far as you are concerned, Doctor. We will now go on to consider the condition of deceased during the last few days. Did no suspicion of anything abnormal ever occur to you?”

“No, I neither perceived nor suspected anything abnormal.”

“Is that not rather remarkable? I realize that poisoning would be the last thing that you would be looking for or expecting. But when it occurred, is it not a little strange that you did not recognize the symptoms?”

“Not at all,” replied Dimsdale. “There was nothing to recognize. The classical symptoms of arsenic poisoning were entirely absent. You will remember that Sir Robert Detling had no more suspicion than I had.”

“What are the classical symptoms, as you call them, of arsenic poisoning?”

“The recognized symptoms—which are present in the immense majority of cases—are acute abdominal pain and tenderness, intense thirst, nausea, vomiting and purging; the symptoms, in fact, of extreme irritation of the stomach and intestines. But in the case of deceased, these symptoms were entirely absent. There was, in my opinion, nothing whatever in his appearance or symptoms to suggest arsenic poisoning. His condition appeared in no way different from what I had known it to be on several previous occasions; just a variation for the worse of his ordinary ill-health.”

“You do not doubt that arsenic poisoning was really the cause of his death?”

“The analysis seems to put the matter beyond question; otherwise—I mean apart from the analysis—I would not have entertained the idea of arsenic poisoning for a moment.”

“But you do not dispute the cause of death?”

“No. Arsenic is extraordinarily variable in its effects, as Dr Randall mentioned, both on the dead body and on the living. Very anomalous cases of arsenic poisoning have been mistaken, during life, for opium poisoning.”

The coroner wrote down the answer and having glanced over his notes, asked: “What was the condition of deceased when his wife went away from home?”

“He was much better. In fact his health seemed to be improving so much that I hoped he would soon be about again.”

“And how soon after his wife’s departure did his last attack begin?”

“I should hardly call it an attack. It was a gradual change for the worse. Mrs Monkhouse went away on the 29th of August. On the 2nd of September deceased was not so well and was extremely depressed and disappointed at the relapse. From that time his condition fluctuated, sometimes a little better and sometimes not so well. On the 8th he appeared rather seriously ill and was no better on the 9th, the day of the consultation with Sir Robert Detling. After that he seemed to improve a little, and the slight improvement was maintained up to the 12th. His death came, at least to me, as quite a surprise.”

“You spoke just now of several previous occasions on which attacks—or, if you prefer it, relapses—of a similar kind occurred. Looking back on those relapses by the light of what we now know, do you say that they were quite similar, in respect of the symptoms, to the one which ended in the death of deceased?”

“I should say they were identically similar. At any rate, I can recall no difference.”

“Did any of them seem to be as severe as the fatal one?”

“Yes; in fact the last of them—which occurred in June—seemed to be more severe, only that it was followed by improvement and recovery. I have here the section of my card-index which relates to deceased. In the entry dated June 19 you will see that I have noted the patient’s unsatisfactory condition.”

He handed a small pack of index-cards to the coroner, who examined the upper card intently and then, with a sudden raising of the eyebrows, addressed the jury.

“I had better read out the entry. The card is headed ‘Harold Monkhouse’ and this entry reads: ‘June 19. Patient very low and feeble. No appetite. Considerable gastric discomfort and troublesome cough. Pulse 90, small, thready. Heart sounds weak. Sending report to Mrs Monkhouse.’”

He laid the cards down on the table, and, looking fixedly at Dimsdale, repeated: “Sending report to Mrs Monkhouse? Where was Mrs Monkhouse?”

"Somewhere in Kent, I believe. I sent the report to the headquarters of the Women's Freedom League in Knightrider Street, Maidstone, from whence I supposed it would be forwarded to her."

For some seconds after receiving this answer the coroner continued to gaze steadily at the witness. At length he observed: "This is a remarkable coincidence. Can you recall the condition of deceased when Mrs Monkhouse went away on that occasion?"

"Yes. I remember that he was in comparatively good health. In fact, his improved condition furnished the opportunity for Mrs Monkhouse to make her visit to Maidstone."

"Can you tell us how soon after her departure on that occasion the relapse occurred?"

"I cannot say definitely, but my impression is that the change for the worse began a few days after she went away. Perhaps I might be able to judge by looking at my notes."

The coroner handed him back the index-cards, which he looked through rapidly. "Yes," he said, at length, "here is an entry on June 11 of a bottle of tonic medicine for Mrs Monkhouse. So she must have been at home on that date; and as it was a double-sized bottle, it was probably for her to take away with her."

"Then," said the coroner, "it is clear that, on the last two occasions, the deceased was comparatively well when his wife left home, but had a serious relapse soon after she went away. Now, what of the previous relapses?"

"I am afraid I cannot remember. I have an impression that Mrs Monkhouse was away from home when some of them occurred, but at this distance of time, I cannot recollect clearly. Possibly Mrs Monkhouse, herself, may be able to remember."

"Possibly," the coroner agreed, rather drily, "but as the point is of considerable importance, I should be glad if you would presently look through your case cards and see if you can glean any definite information on the subject. Meanwhile we may pass on to one or two other matters. First as to the medicine which you prescribed for deceased; it contained, as you have told us, a certain amount of Fowler's Solution, and you considered deceased to be suffering from chronic gastritis. Is Fowler's Solution usually given in cases of gastritis?"

"No. It is usually considered rather unsuitable. But deceased was very tolerant of small doses of arsenic. I had often given it to him before as a tonic and it had always seemed to agree with him. The dose was extremely small—only two minims."

"How long have you known deceased?"

"I have known, and attended him professionally about twenty years."

"From your knowledge of him, should you say that he was a man who was likely to make enemies?"

"Not at all. He was a kindly, just and generous man, amiable and even-tempered; rather reserved and aloof; not very human, perhaps, and somewhat self-contained and solitary. But I could not imagine him making an enemy and, so far as I know, he never did."

The coroner reflected awhile after writing down this answer and then turned to the jury.

"Are there any questions that you wish to put to the witness, gentlemen?"

The jury consulted together for a few moments, and the foreman then replied: "We should like to know, Sir, if possible, whether Mrs Monkhouse was or was not away from home when the previous relapses occurred."

"I am afraid," said Dimsdale, "that I cannot be more explicit as the events occurred so long ago. The other witnesses—the members of the household—would be much more likely to remember. And I would urge you not to detain me from my professional duties longer than is absolutely necessary."

Hereupon a brief consultation took place between the coroner and the jury, with the result that Dimsdale was allowed to go about his business and Barbara was summoned to take his place. I had awaited this stage of the proceedings with some uneasiness and was now rather surprised and greatly relieved at the coroner's manner towards her; which was courteous and even sympathetic. Having expressed his and the jury's regret at having to trouble her in the very distressing circumstances, he proceeded at once to clear off the preliminaries, eliciting the facts that she was 32 years of age and had been married a little over three years, and then said: "Dr Dimsdale has told us that on the occasion of the attack or relapse in June last you were away from home, but he is not certain about the previous ones. Can you give us any information on the subject?"

"Yes," she replied, in a quiet, steady voice, "I recall quite clearly at least three previous occasions on which I went away from home leaving my husband apparently well—as well as he ever was—and came back to find him quite ill. But I think there were more than three occasions on which this happened, for I remember having once accused him, facetiously, of saving up his illnesses until I was out of the house."

"Can you remember if a serious relapse ever occurred when you were at home?"

"Not a really serious one. My husband's health was always very unstable and he often had to rest in bed for a day or two. But the really bad attacks of illness seem always to have occurred when I was away from home."

"Did it never strike you that this was a very remarkable fact?"



"I am afraid I did not give the matter as much consideration as I ought to have done. Deceased was always ailing, more or less, and those about him came to accept ill-health as his normal condition."

"But you see the significance of it now?"

Barbara hesitated and then replied in a low voice and with evident agitation: "I see that it may have some significance, but I don't in the least understand it. I am quite overwhelmed and bewildered by the dreadful thing that has happened."

"Naturally, you are," the coroner said in a sympathetic tone, "and I am most reluctant to trouble you with questions under circumstances that must be so terrible to you. But we must find out the truth if we can."

"Yes, I realize that," she replied, "and thank you for your consideration."

The coroner bowed, and after a brief pause, asked: "Did it never occur to you to engage a nurse to attend to deceased?"

"Yes. I suggested it more than once to deceased, but he wouldn't hear of it. And I think he was right. There was nothing that a nurse could have done for him. He was not helpless and he was not continuously bed-ridden. He had a bell-push by his bedside and his secretary or the servants were always ready to do anything that he wanted done. The housemaid was most attentive to him. But he did not want much attention. He kept the books that he was reading on his bedside table and he liked to be left alone to read in peace. He felt that the presence of a nurse would have been disturbing."

"And at night?"

"At night his bell-push was connected with a bell in the secretary's bedroom. But he hardly ever used it. If his candle-lamp burned out he could put in a fresh candle from the box on his table; and he never seemed to want anything else."

"Besides deceased and yourself, who were the inmates of the house?"

"There was my husband's secretary, Mr Wallingford, Miss Norris, the cook, Anne Baker, the housemaid, Mabel Withers, and the kitchenmaid, Doris Brown."

"Why did deceased need a secretary? Did he transact much business?"

"No. The secretary wrote his few business letters, kept the accounts and executed any commissions, besides doing the various things that the master of the house would ordinarily have done. He is the son of an old friend of my husband's, and he came to us when his father died."

"And Miss Norris? What was her position in the household?"

"She lived with us as a guest at my husband's invitation. She was the daughter of his first wife's sister, and he, more or less informally, adopted her as he had no children of his own."

"Deceased was a widower, then, when you married him?"

"Yes. His wife had been dead about two years."

"What was his age when he died?"

"He had just turned fifty-seven."

"On what sort of terms was deceased with the members of his household?"

"On the best of terms with them all. He was an undemonstrative man and rather cool and reserved with strangers and distinctly solitary and self-contained. But he was a kind and generous man and all the household, including the servants, were devoted to him."

"Was deceased engaged in any business or profession?"

"No, he had independent means, inherited from his father."

"Would you describe him as a wealthy man?"

"I believe he was quite well off, but he never spoke of his financial affairs to me, or to anybody but his lawyers."

"Do you know how his property is disposed of?"

"I know that he made a will, but I never enquired about the terms of it and he never told me."

"But surely you were an interested party."

"It was understood that some provision would be made for me if I survived him. That was all that concerned me. Deceased was not a man with whom it was necessary to make conditions; and I have some small property of my own. Mr Mayfield, who is present, of course, knows what the provisions of the will are as he is one of the executors."

Once more the coroner paused to look over his notes. Then he glanced inquiringly at the jury, and, when the foreman shook his head, he thanked Barbara and dismissed her; and as she walked back to her chair, pale and grave but perfectly composed, I found myself admiring her calm dignity and only hoping that the other witnesses would make as good a figure. But this hope was no sooner conceived than it was shattered. The next name that was called was Madeline Norris and for a few moments there was no response. At length Madeline rose slowly, ashen and ghastly of face, and walked unsteadily to the table. Her appearance—her deathly pallor and her trembling hands—struck me with dismay; and what increased my concern for the unfortunate girl was the subtle change in manner that I detected in the jury and the coroner.

The poor girl's manifest agitation might surely have bespoken their sympathy; but not a sign of sympathy was discernible in their faces—nothing but a stony curiosity.

Having been sworn—on a testament which shook visibly in her grasp—she deposed that her name was Madeline Norris and her age twenty-seven.

“Any occupation?” the coroner enquired drily without looking up.

“I am a teacher at the Westminster College of Domestic Science.”

“Teacher of what?”

“Principally of cookery and kitchen management, especially invalid cookery.”

“Are you, yourself, a skilled cook?”

“Yes. It is my duty to demonstrate to the class.”

“Have you ever cooked or prepared food for the deceased?”

“Yes. I usually cooked his meals when I was in the house at meal times.”

“It has been stated that you prepared the last meal that deceased took. Is that correct?”

“Yes. I cooked an omelette for his supper.”

“Will you describe to us the way in which you prepared that omelette?”

Madeline considered for a few moments and then replied in a low, shaky voice: “It was just a simple omelette. I first rubbed the pan with a cut clove of garlic and put in the butter to heat. Then I broke an egg into a cup, separated the yolk from the white, and, having beaten them up separately, mixed them and added a very small portion of pounded anchovy, a pinch or two of finely chopped parsley and a little salt. I cooked it in the usual way and turned it out on a hot plate which I covered at once.”

“Who took it up to deceased?”

“I did. I ran straight up with it and sat and talked to deceased while he ate it.”

“Did you meet anyone on your way up or in the bedroom?”

“No. There was nobody on the stairs, and, the deceased was alone.”

“Did deceased take anything to drink with his supper?”

“Yes. He had a glass of chablis. I fetched the bottle and the glass from the dining room and poured out the wine for him.”

“Did you meet anybody in the dining room or coming or going?”

“No, I met nobody.”

“Can you think of any way in which any poison could have got into the omelette or into the wine?”

“No. Nothing could possibly have got into the omelette. As to the wine, I poured it from the bottle into a clean glass. But the bottle was already open and had been in the cellaret since lunch.”

“Now, with regard to the medicine. Did you give deceased any on the day before his death?”

“Yes. I gave him a dose soon after I came in—about six o'clock. That was the last dose in the bottle.”

“Did you notice anything unusual about the medicine?”

“No. It was similar to what he had been taking for some days past.”

“What was the medicine like?”

“It was nearly colourless with the faintest tinge of red and smelled slightly of lavender and bitter orange.”

“Was there anything that caused you to notice particularly, on this occasion, the appearance and smell of the medicine?”

“No. I noticed the colour and the smell when I opened the bottle on the previous morning to give deceased a dose.”

“Did you examine the new bottle which had just been sent?”

“Yes; I looked at it and took out the cork and smelled it and tasted it.”

“What made you do that?”

“I noticed that it seemed to contain Tincture of Cardamoms and I smelled and tasted it to find out if the other ingredients had been changed.”

“And what conclusion did you arrive at?”

“That they had not been changed. I could taste the Nux Vomica and smell the orange and the Liquor Arsenicalis—at least the lavender.”

“Did you realize what the lavender smell was due to?”

"Yes. I recognized it as the smell of Liquor Arsenicalis. I knew that deceased was taking Liquor Arsenicalis because I had asked Dr Dimsdale about it when I first noticed the smell."

The coroner wrote down this answer and then, raising his head, looked steadily at Madeline for some seconds without speaking; and the jury looked harder still. At length the former spoke, slowly, deliberately, emphatically.

"You have told us that you examined this medicine to find out what it contained, and that you were able to recognize Tincture of Cardamoms by its colour and Liquor Arsenicalis by its smell. It would seem, then, that you know a good deal about drugs. Is that so?"

"I know something about drugs. My father was a doctor and he taught me simple dispensing so that I could help him."

The coroner nodded. "Was there any reason why you should have taken so much interest in the composition of deceased's medicine?"

Madeline did not answer immediately. And as she stood trembling and hesitating in evident confusion, the coroner gazed at her stonily, and the jury craned forward to catch her reply.

"I used to examine his medicine," she replied at length, in a low voice and a reluctant and confused manner, "because I knew that it often contained Liquor Arsenicalis and I used to wonder whether that was good for him. I understood from my father that it was a rather irritating drug, and it did not seem very suitable for a patient who suffered from gastritis."

There was a pause after she had spoken and something in the appearance of the inquisitors almost as if they had been a little disappointed by this eminently reasonable answer. At length the coroner broke the silence by asking, with a slight softening of manner:

"You have said that the change in colour of the last medicine led you to taste and smell it to ascertain if the other ingredients had been changed. You have said that you decided that they had not been changed. Are you sure of that? Can you swear that the smell of lavender was not stronger in this bottle than in the previous ones?"

"It did not seem to me to be stronger."

"Supposing the bottle had then contained as much Liquor Arsenicalis as was found in it by the analysts, would you have been able to detect it by the smell or otherwise?"

"Yes, I feel sure that I should. The analysts found three ounces of Liquor Arsenicalis; that would be nearly half the bottle. I am sure I should have detected that amount, not only by the strong smell but by the colour, too."

"You are sure that the colour of this medicine was due to Cardamoms only?"

"Yes, that is to cochineal. I recognized it at once. It is perfectly unmistakable and quite different from the colour of Red Sandalwood, with which Liquor Arsenicalis is coloured. Besides, this medicine was only a deepish pink in colour. But if three ounces of Liquor Arsenicalis had been in the bottle, the medicine would have been quite a dark red."

"You have had some experience in dispensing. Do you consider it possible that the Liquor Arsenicalis could have been put into the medicine by mistake when it was being made up?"

"It would be quite impossible if a minim measure-glass was used, as the glass would have had to be filled twelve times. But this is never done. One does not measure large quantities in small measures. Three ounces would be measured out in a four or five ounce measure, as a rule, or, possibly in a two ounce measure, by half refilling it."

"Might not the wrong measure-glass have been taken up by mistake?"

"That is, of course, just possible. But it is most unlikely; for the great disproportion between the large measure-glass and the little stock-bottle would be so striking that it could hardly fail to be noticed."

"Then, from your own observation and from Dr Dimsdale's evidence, you reject the idea that a mistake may have been made in dispensing this bottle of medicine?"

"Yes, entirely. I have heard Dr Dimsdale's evidence and I examined the medicine. I am convinced that he could not have made a mistake under the circumstances that he described and I am certain that the medicine that I saw did not contain more than a small quantity—less than a drachm—of Liquor Arsenicalis."

"You are not forgetting that the analysts actually found the equivalent of three ounces of Liquor Arsenicalis in the bottle?"

"No. But I am sure it was not there when I examined the bottle."

The coroner wrote down this answer with a deliberate air, and, when he had finished, turned to the jury.

"I think we have nothing more to ask this witness, unless there is any point that you want made more clear."

There was a brief silence. Then the super-intelligent juryman interposed.

"I should like to know if this witness ever had any Liquor Arsenicalis in her possession."

The coroner held up a warning hand to Madeline, and replied:

"That question, Sir, is not admissible. It is a principle of English law that a witness cannot be compelled to make a statement incriminating him—or herself. But an affirmative answer to this question would be an incriminating statement."

"But I am perfectly willing to answer the question," Madeline said eagerly. "I have never had in my possession any Liquor Arsenicalis or any other preparation of arsenic."

"That answers your question, Sir," said the coroner, as he wrote down the answer, "and if you have nothing more to ask, we can release the witness."

He handed his pen to Madeline, and when she had signed her depositions—a terribly shaky signature it must have been—she came back to her chair, still very pale and agitated, but obviously relieved at having got through the ordeal. I had taken her arm as she sat down and was complimenting her on the really admirable way in which she had given her evidence, when I heard the name of Anthony Wallingford called and realized that another unpleasant episode had arrived.

---

## VI. — THE VERDICT

I HAD not been taking much notice of Wallingford, my attention being occupied with the two women when it strayed from the proceedings. Beyond an irritated consciousness of his usual restless movements, I had no information as to how the soul-shaking incidents of this appalling day were affecting him. But when he rose drunkenly and, grasping the back of his chair, rolled his eyes wildly round the Court, I realized that there were breakers ahead.

When I say that he rose drunkenly, I use the word advisedly. Familiar as I was with his peculiarities—his jerkings, twitchings and grimacings—I saw, at once, that there was something unusual both in his face and in his bearing; a dull wildness of expression and an uncertainty of movement that I had never observed before. He had not come to the Court with the rest of us, preferring, for some reason, to come alone. And I now suspected that he had taken the opportunity to fortify himself on the way.

I was not the only observer of his condition. As he walked, with deliberate care, from his seat to the table, I noticed the coroner eyeing him critically and the jury exchanging dubious glances and whispered comments. He made a bad start by dropping the book on the floor and sniggering nervously as he stooped to pick it up; and I could see plainly, by the stiffness of the coroner's manner that he had made an unfavourable impression before he began his evidence.

"You were secretary to the deceased?" said the coroner, when the witness had stated his name, age (33) and occupation. "What was the nature of your duties?"

"The ordinary duties of a secretary," was the dogged reply.

"Will you kindly give us particulars of what you did for deceased?"

"I opened his business letters and answered them and some of his private ones. And I kept his accounts and paid his bills."

"What accounts would those be? Deceased was not in business, I understand?"

"No, they were his domestic accounts; his income from investments and rents and his expenditure."

"Did you attend upon deceased personally; I mean in the way of looking after his bodily comfort and supplying his needs?"

"I used to look in on him from time to time to see if he wanted anything done. But it wasn't my business to wait on him. I was his secretary, not his valet."

"Who did wait on him, and attend to his wants?"

"The housemaid, chiefly, and Miss Norris, and of course, Mrs Monkhouse. But he didn't usually want much but his food, his medicine, a few books from the library and a supply of candles for his lamp. His bell-push was connected with a bell in my room at night, but he never rang it."

"Then, practically, the housemaid did everything for him?"

"Not everything. Miss Norris cooked most of his meals, we all used to give him his medicine, I used to put out his books and keep his fountain pen filled, and Mrs Monkhouse kept his candle-box; supplied. That was what he was most particular about as he slept badly and used to read at night."

"You give us the impression, Mr Wallingford," the coroner said, drily, "that you must have had a good deal of leisure."

"Then I have given you the wrong impression. I was kept constantly on the go, doing jobs, paying tradesmen, shopping and running errands."

"For whom?"

"Everybody. Deceased, Mrs Monkhouse, Miss Norris and even Dr Dimsdale. I was everybody's servant."

"What did you do for Mrs Monkhouse?"

"I don't see what that has got to do with this inquest?"

"That is not for you to decide," the coroner said, sternly. "You will be good enough to answer my question."

Wallingford winced as if he had had his ears cuffed. In a moment, his insolence evaporated and I could see his hands

shaking as he, evidently, cudgelled his brains for a reply. Suddenly he seemed to have struck an idea.

"Shopping of various kinds," said he; "for instance, there were the candles for deceased. His lamp was of German make and English lamp-candles wouldn't fit it. So I used to have to go to a German shop at Sparrow Corner by the Tower, to get packets of Schneider's stearine candles. That took about half a day."

The coroner, stolidly and without comment, wrote down the answer, but my experience as a counsel told me that it had been a dummy question, asked to distract the witness's attention and cover a more significant one that was to follow. For that question I waited expectantly, and when it came my surmise was confirmed.

"And Dr Dimsdale? What did you have to do for him?"

"I used to help him with his books sometimes when he hadn't got a dispenser. I am a pretty good accountant and he isn't."

"Where does Dr Dimsdale do his bookkeeping?"

"At the desk in the surgery."

"And is that where you used to work?"

"Yes."

"Used Dr Dimsdale to work with you or did you do the books by yourself?"

"I usually worked by myself."

"At what time in the day used you to work there?"

"In the afternoon, as a rule."

"At what hours does Dr Dimsdale visit his patients?"

"Most of the day. He goes out about ten and finishes about six or seven."

"So that you would usually be alone in the surgery?"

"Yes, usually."

As the coroner wrote down the answer I noticed the super-intelligent juryman fidgeting in his seat. At length he burst out: "Is the poison cupboard in the surgery?"

The coroner looked interrogatively at Wallingford, who stared at him blankly in sudden confusion.

"You heard the question? Is the poison cupboard there?"

"I don't know. It may be. It wasn't any business of mine."

"Is there any cupboard in the surgery? You must know that."

"Yes, there is a cupboard there, but I don't know what is in it."

"Did you never see it open?"

"No. Never."

"And you never had the curiosity to look into it?"

"Of course I didn't. Besides I couldn't. It was locked."

"Was it always locked when you were there?"

"Yes, always."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Yes, perfectly certain."

Here the super-intelligent juror looked as if he were about to spring across the table as he demanded eagerly: "How does the witness know that that cupboard was locked?"

The coroner looked slightly annoyed. He had been playing his fish carefully and was in no wise helped by this rude jerk of the line. Nevertheless, he laid down his pen and looked expectantly at the witness. As for Wallingford, he was struck speechless. Apparently his rather muddled brain had suddenly taken in the import of the question, for he stood with dropped jaw and damp, pallid face, staring at the juryman in utter consternation.

"Well," said the coroner, after an interval, "how did you know that it was locked?"

Wallingford pulled himself together by an effort and replied: "Why, I knew—I knew, of course, that it must be locked."

"Yes; but the question is, how did you know?"

"Why it stands to reason that it must have been locked."

"Why does it stand to reason? Cupboards are not always locked."

"Poison cupboards are. Besides, you heard Dimsdale say that he always kept this cupboard locked. He showed you the key."

Once more the coroner, having noted the answer, laid down his pen and looked steadily at the witness.

"Now, Mr Wallingford," said he, "I must caution you to be careful as to what you say. This is a serious matter, and you are giving evidence on oath. You said just now that you did not know whether the poison cupboard was or was not in the surgery. You said that you did not know what was in that cupboard. Now you say that you knew the cupboard must have been locked because it was the poison cupboard. Then it seems that you did know that it was the poison cupboard. Isn't that so?"

"No. I didn't know then. I do now because I heard Dimsdale say that it was."

"Then, you said that you were perfectly certain that the cupboard was always locked whenever you were working there. That meant that you knew positively, as a fact, that it was locked. Now you say that you knew that it must be locked. But that is an assumption, an opinion, a belief. Now, a man of your education must know the difference between a mere belief and actual knowledge. Will you, please, answer definitely: Did you, or did you not, know as a fact whether that cupboard was or was not locked?"

"Well, I didn't actually know, but I took it for granted that it was locked."

"You did not try the door?"

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"Very well. Does any gentleman of the jury wish to ask any further questions about this cupboard?"

There was a brief silence. Then the foreman said: "We should like the witness to say what he means and not keep contradicting himself."

"You hear that, Sir," said the coroner. "Please be more careful in your answers in future. Now, I want to ask you about that last bottle of medicine. Did you notice anything unusual in its appearance?"

"No. I didn't notice it at all. I didn't know that it had come."

"Did you go into deceased's room on that day—the Wednesday?"

"Yes, I went to see deceased in the morning about ten o'clock and gave him a dose of his medicine; and I looked in on him in the evening about nine o'clock to see if he wanted anything, but he didn't."

"Did you give him any medicine then?"

"No. It was not due for another hour."

"What was his condition then?"

"He looked about the same as usual. He seemed inclined to doze, so I did not stay long."

"Is that the last time you saw him alive?"

"No. I looked in again just before eleven. He was then in much the same state—rather drowsy—and, at his request, I turned out the gas and left him."

"Did you light the candle?"

"No, he always did that himself, if he wanted it."

"Did you give him any medicine?"

"No. He had just had a dose."

"Did he tell you that he had?"

"No. I could see that there was a dose gone."

"From which bottle was that?"

"There was only one bottle there. It must have been the new bottle, as only one dose had been taken."

"What colour was the medicine?"

Wallingford hesitated a moment or two as if suspecting a trap. Then he replied, doggedly: "I don't know. I told you I didn't notice it."

"You said that you didn't notice it at all and didn't know that it had come. Now you say that you observed that only one dose had been taken from it and that you inferred that it was the new bottle. Which of those statements is the true one?"

"They are both true," Wallingford protested in a whining tone. "I meant that I didn't notice the medicine particularly and that I didn't know when it came."

"That is not what you said," the coroner rejoined. "However, we will let that pass. Is there anything more that you wish to ask this witness, gentlemen? If not, we will release him and take the evidence of Mr Mayfield."

I think the jury would have liked to bait Wallingford but apparently could not think of any suitable questions. But they watched him malevolently as he added his—probably quite illegible—signature to his depositions and followed him with their eyes as he tottered shakily back to his seat. Immediately afterwards my name was called and I took my place at the table, not without a slight degree of nervousness; for, though I was well enough used to examinations, it was in the capacity of examiner, not of witness, and I was fully alive to the possibility of certain pitfalls which the coroner might, if he were wide enough awake, dig for me. However, when I had been sworn and had given my particulars (Rupert Mayfield, 35, Barrister-at-Law, of No. 64 Fig Tree Court, Inner Temple) the coroner's conciliatory manner led me to hope that it would be all plain sailing.

"How long have you known deceased?" was the first question.

"About two and a half years," I replied.

"You are one of the executors of his will, Mrs Monkhouse has told us."

"Yes."

"Do you know why you were appointed executor after so short an acquaintance?"

"I am an old friend of Mrs Monkhouse. I have known her since she was a little girl. I was a friend of her father—or rather, her stepfather."

"Was it by her wish that you were made executor?"

"I believe that the suggestion came from the deceased's family solicitor, Mr Brodribb, who is my co-executor. But probably he was influenced by my long acquaintance with Mrs Monkhouse."

"Has probate been applied for?"

"Yes."

"Then there can be no objections to your disclosing the provisions of the will. We don't want to hear them in detail, but I will ask you to give us a general idea of the disposal of deceased's property."

"The gross value of the estate is about fifty-five thousand pounds, of which twelve thousand represents real property and forty-three thousand personal. The principal beneficiaries are: Mrs Monkhouse, who receives a house valued at four thousand pounds and twenty thousand pounds in money and securities; the Reverend Amos Monkhouse, land of the value of five thousand and ten thousand invested money; Madeline Norris, a house and land valued at three thousand and five thousand in securities; Anthony Wallingford, four thousand pounds. Then there are legacies of a thousand pounds each to the two executors, and of three hundred, two hundred and one hundred respectively to the housemaid, the cook and the kitchen-maid. That accounts for the bulk of the estate. Mrs Monkhouse is the residuary legatee."

The coroner wrote down the answer as I gave it and then read it out slowly for me to confirm, working out, at the same time, a little sum on a spare piece of paper—as did also the intellectual jurymen.

"I think that gives us all the information we want," the former remarked, glancing at the jury; and as none of them made any comment, he proceeded: "Did you see much of deceased during the last few months?"

"I saw him usually once or twice a week. Sometimes oftener. But I did not spend much time with him. He was a solitary, bookish man who preferred to be alone most of his time."

"Did you take particular notice of his state of health?"

"No, but I did observe that his health seemed to grow rather worse lately."

"Did it appear to you that he received such care and attention as a man in his condition ought to have received?"

"It did not appear to me that he was neglected."

"Did you realize how seriously ill he was?"

"No. I am afraid not. I regarded him merely as a chronic invalid."

"It never occurred to you that he ought to have had a regular nurse?"

"No, and I do not think he would have consented. He greatly disliked having anyone about his room."

"Is there anything within your knowledge that would throw any light on the circumstances of his death?"

"No. Nothing."

"Have you ever known arsenic in any form to be used in that household for any purpose; any fly-papers, weed-killer or insecticides, for instance?"

"No, I do not remember ever having seen anything used in that household which, to my knowledge or belief, contained arsenic."

"Do you know of any fact or circumstance which, in your opinion, ought to be communicated to this Court or which might help the jury in arriving at their verdict?"

"No, I do not."

This brought my examination to an end. I was succeeded by the cook and the kitchenmaid, but, as they had little to tell, and that little entirely negative, their examination was quite brief. When the last witness was dismissed, the coroner addressed the jury.

"We have now, gentlemen," said he, "heard all the evidence that is at present available, and we have the choice of two courses; which are, either to adjourn the inquiry until further evidence is available, or to find a verdict on the evidence which we have heard. I incline strongly to the latter plan. We are now in a position to answer the questions, how, when and where the deceased came by his death, and when we have done that, we shall have discharged our proper function. What is your feeling on the matter, gentlemen?"

The jury's feeling was very obviously that they wished to get the inquiry over and go about their business, and when they had made this clear, the coroner proceeded to sum up.

"I shall not detain you, gentlemen, with a long address. All that is necessary is for me to recapitulate the evidence very briefly and point out the bearing of it.

"First as to the cause of death. It has been given in evidence by two fully qualified and expert witnesses that deceased died from the effects of poisoning by arsenic. That is a matter of fact which is not disputed and which you must accept, unless you have any reasons for rejecting their testimony, which I feel sure you have not. Accepting the fact of death by poison, the question then arises as to how the poison came to be taken by deceased. There are three possibilities: he may have taken it himself, voluntarily and knowingly; he may have taken it by accident or mischance; or it may have been administered to him knowingly and maliciously by some other person or persons. Let us consider those three possibilities.

"The suggestion that deceased might have taken the poison voluntarily is highly improbable in three respects. First, since deceased was mostly bed-ridden, it would have been almost impossible for him to have obtained the poison. Second, there is the nature of the poison. Arsenic has often been used for homicidal poisoning but seldom for suicide; for an excellent reason. The properties of arsenic which commend it to poisoners—its complete freedom from taste and the indefinite symptoms that it produces—do not commend it to the suicide. He has no need to conceal either the administration or its results. His principal need is rapidity of effect. But arsenic is a relatively slow poison and one which usually causes great suffering. It is not at all suited to the suicide. Then there is the third objection that the mode of administration was quite unlike that of a suicide. For the latter usually takes his poison in one large dose, to get the business over; but here it was evidently given in repeated small doses over a period that may have been anything from a week to a year. And, finally, there is not a particle of evidence in favour of the supposition that deceased took the poison himself.

"To take the second case, that of accident: the only possibility known to us is that of a mistake in dispensing the medicine. But the evidence of Dr Dimsdale and Miss Norris must have convinced you that the improbability of a mistake is so great as to be practically negligible. Of course, the poison might have found its way accidentally into the medicine or the food or both in some manner unknown to us. But while we admit this, we have, in fact, to form our decision on what is known to us, not what is conceivable but unknown.

"When we come to the third possibility, that the poison was administered to deceased by some other person or persons with intent to compass his death, we find it supported by positive evidence. There is the bottle of medicine for instance. It contained a large quantity of arsenic in a soluble form. But two witnesses have sworn that it could not have contained, and, in fact, did not contain, that quantity of arsenic when it left Dr Dimsdale's surgery or when it was delivered at deceased's house. Moreover, Miss Norris has sworn that she examined this bottle of medicine at six o'clock in the evening and that it did not then contain more than a small quantity—less than a drachm—of *Liquor Arsenicalis*. She was perfectly positive. She spoke with expert knowledge. She gave her reasons, and they were sound reasons. So that the evidence in our possession is to the effect that at six o'clock in the afternoon, that bottle of medicine did not contain more than a drachm—about a teaspoonful—of *Liquor Arsenicalis*; whereas at half-past ten, when a dose from the bottle was given to deceased by the housemaid, it contained some three ounces—about six tablespoonfuls. This is proved by the discovery of the poison in the stomach of deceased and by the exact analysis of the contents of the bottle. It follows that, between six o'clock and half-past ten, a large quantity of arsenical solution must have been put into the bottle. It is impossible to suppose that it could have got in by accident. Somebody must have put it in; and the only conceivable object that the person could have had in putting that poison into the bottle would be to cause the death of deceased.

"But further; the evidence of the medical witnesses proves that arsenic had been taken by deceased on several previous occasions. That, in fact, he had been taking arsenic in relatively small doses for some time past—how long we do not know—and had been suffering from chronic arsenical poisoning. The evidence, therefore, points very strongly and definitely to the conclusion that some person or persons had been, for some unascertained time past, administering arsenic to him.

"Finally, as to the identity of the person or persons who administered the poison, I need not point out that we have no evidence. You will have noticed that a number of persons benefit in a pecuniary sense by deceased's death. But that fact establishes no suspicion against any of them in the absence of positive evidence; and there is no positive evidence connecting any one of them with the administration of the poison. With these remarks, gentlemen, I leave you to consider the evidence and agree upon your decision."

The jury did not take long in arriving at their verdict. After a few minutes' eager discussion, the foreman announced that they had come to an unanimous decision.

"And what is the decision upon which you have agreed?" the coroner asked.



"We find," was the reply, "that deceased died from the effects of arsenic, administered to him by some person or persons unknown, with the deliberate intention of causing his death."

"Yes," said the coroner; "that is, in effect, a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown. I agree with you entirely. No other verdict was possible on the evidence before us. It is unfortunate that no clue has happened as to the perpetrator of this abominable crime, but we may hope that the investigations of the police will result in the identification and conviction of the murderer."

The conclusion of the coroner's address brought the proceedings to an end, and as he finished speaking, the spectators rose and began to pass out of the Court. I remained for a minute to speak a few words to Mr Holman and ask him to transcribe his report in duplicate. Then, I, too, went out to find my three companions squeezing into a taxicab which had drawn up opposite the entrance, watched with ghoulish curiosity by a quite considerable crowd. The presence of that crowd informed me that the horrible notoriety which I had foreseen had even now begun to envelop us. The special editions of the evening papers were already out, with, at least, the opening scenes of the inquest in print. Indeed, during the short drive to Hilborough Square, I saw more than one news-vendor dealing out papers to little knots of eager purchasers, and once, through the open window, a stentorian voice was borne in with hideous distinctness, announcing:

"Sensational Inquest! Funeral stopped!"

---

## VII. — THE SEARCH WARRANT

THE consciousness of the horrid notoriety that had already attached itself to us was brought home to me once more when the taxi drew up at the house in Hilborough Square. I stepped out first to pay the driver, and Barbara following, with the latch-key ready in her hand, walked swiftly to the door, looking neither to the right nor left, opened it and disappeared into the hall; while the other two, lurking in the cab until the door was open, then darted across the pavement, entered and disappeared also. Nor was their hasty retreat unjustified. Lingered doggedly and looking about me with a sort of resentful defiance, I found myself a focus of observation. In the adjoining houses, not a window appeared to be unoccupied. The usually vacant foot-way was populous with loiterers whose interest in me and in the ill-omened house was undissembled; while mucous voices, strange to those quiet precincts, told me that the astute news-vendors had scented and exploited a likely market.

With ill-assumed indifference I entered the house and shut the door—perhaps rather noisily; and was about to enter the dining room when I heard hurried steps descending the stairs and paused to look up. It was the woman—the cook's sister, I think—who had been left to take care of the house while the servants were absent; and something of eagerness and excitement in her manner caused me to walk to the foot of the stairs to meet her.

"Is anything amiss?" I asked in a low voice as she neared the bottom of the flight.

She held up a warning finger, and coming close to me, whispered hoarsely: "There's two gentlemen upstairs. Sir, leastways they look like gentlemen, but they are really policemen."

"What are they doing upstairs?" I asked.

"Just walking through the rooms and looking about. They came about a quarter of an hour ago, and when I let them in they said they were police officers and that they had come to search the premises."

"Did they say anything about a warrant?"

"Oh, yes, Sir. I forgot about that. One of them showed me a paper and said it was a search warrant. So of course I couldn't do anything. And then they started going through the house with their note-books like auctioneers getting ready for a sale."

"I will go up and see them," said I; "and meanwhile you had better let Mrs Monkhouse know. Where did you leave them?"

"In the large back bedroom on the first floor," she replied. "I think it was Mr Monkhouse's."

On this I began quickly to ascend the stairs, struggling to control a feeling of resentment which, though natural enough, I knew to be quite unreasonable. Making my way direct to the dead man's room, I entered and found two tall men standing before an open cupboard. They turned on hearing me enter and the elder of them drew a large wallet from his pocket.

"Mr Mayfield, I think, sir," said he. "I am Detective Superintendent Miller and this is Detective-Sergeant Cope. Here is my card and this is the search warrant, if you wish to see it."

I glanced at the document and returning it to him asked:

"Wouldn't it have been more in order if you had waited to show the warrant to Mrs Monkhouse before beginning your search?"

"That is what we have done," he replied, suavely. "We have disturbed nothing yet. We have just been making a preliminary inspection. Of course," he continued, "I understand how unpleasant this search is for Mrs Monkhouse and the rest of your friends, but you, Sir, as a lawyer will realize the position. That poor gentleman was poisoned with arsenic in this house. Somebody in this house had arsenic in his or her possession and we have got to see if any traces of it are left."

After all, you know, Sir, we are acting in the interests of everybody but the murderer.”

This was so obviously true that it left me nothing to say. Nor was there any opportunity, for, as the superintendent concluded, Barbara entered the room. I looked at her a little anxiously as I briefly explained the situation. But there was no occasion. Pale and sombre of face, she was nevertheless perfectly calm and self-possessed and greeted the two officers without a trace of resentment; indeed, when the superintendent was disposed to be apologetic, she cut him short by exclaiming energetically: “But, surely, who should be more anxious to assist you than I? It is true that I find it incredible that this horrible crime could have been perpetrated by any member of my household. But it was perpetrated by somebody. And if, either here or elsewhere, I can help you in any way to drag that wretch out into the light of day, I am at your service, no matter who the criminal may be. Do you wish anyone to attend you in your search?”

“I think, Madam, it would be well if you were present, and perhaps Mr Mayfield. If we want any of the others, we can send for them. Where are they now?”

“Miss Norris and Mr Wallingford are in the dining room. The servants have just come in and I think have gone to the kitchen or their sitting room.”

“Then,” said Miller, “we had better begin with the dining room.”

We went down the stairs, preceded by Barbara, who opened the dining room door and introduced the visitors to the two inmates in tones as quiet and matter-of-fact as if she were announcing the arrival of the gas-fitter or the upholsterer. I was sorry that the other two had not been warned, for the announcement took them both by surprise and they were in no condition for surprises of this rather alarming kind. At the word “search,” Madeline started up with a smothered exclamation and then sat down again, trembling and pale as death; while as for Wallingford, if the two officers had come to pinion him and lead him forth to the gallows, he could not have looked more appalled.

Our visitors were scrupulously polite, but they were also keenly observant and I could see that each had made a mental note of the effect of their arrival. But, of course, they made no outward sign of interest in any of us but proceeded stolidly with their business; and I noticed that, before proceeding to a detailed inspection, they opened their note-books and glanced through what was probably a rough inventory, to see that nothing had been moved in the interval since their preliminary inspection.

The examination of the dining room was, however, rather perfunctory. It contained nothing that appeared to interest them, and after going through the contents of the sideboard cupboards methodically, the superintendent turned a leaf of his note-book and said: “I think that will do, Madam. Perhaps we had better take the library next. Who keeps the keys of the bureau and the cupboard?”

“Mr Wallingford has charge of the library,” replied Barbara. “Will you give the superintendent your keys, Tony?”

“There’s no need for that,” said Miller. “If Mr Wallingford will come with us, he can unlock the drawers and cupboard and tell us anything that we want to know about the contents.”

Wallingford rose with a certain alacrity and followed us into the library, which adjoined the dining room. Here the two officers again consulted their note-books, and having satisfied themselves that the room was as they had left it, began a detailed survey, watched closely and with evident anxiety by Wallingford. They began with a cupboard, or small armoire, which formed the upper member of a large, old-fashioned bureau. Complying with Miller’s polite request that it might be unlocked, Wallingford produced a bunch of keys, and, selecting from it, after much nervous fumbling, a small key, endeavoured to insert it into the keyhole; but his hand was in such a palsied condition that he was unable to introduce it.

“Shall I have a try, Sir?” the superintendent suggested, patiently, adding with a smile, “I don’t smoke quite so many cigarettes as you seem to.”

His efforts, however, also failed, for the evident reason that it was the wrong key. Thereupon he looked quickly through the bunch, picked out another key and had the cupboard open in a twinkling, revealing a set of shelves crammed with a disorderly litter of card-board boxes, empty ink-bottles, bundles of letters and papers and the miscellaneous rubbish that accumulates in the receptacles of a thoroughly untidy man. The superintendent went through the collection methodically, emptying the shelves, one at a time, on to the flap of the bureau, where he and the sergeant sorted the various articles and examining each, returned it to the shelf. It was a tedious proceeding and, so far as I could judge, unproductive, for, when all the shelves had been looked through and every article separately inspected, nothing was brought to light save an empty foolscap envelope which had apparently once contained a small box and was addressed to Wallingford, and two pieces of what looked like chemist’s wrapping-paper, the creases in which showed that they had been small packets. These were not returned to the shelves, but, without comment, enclosed in a large envelope on which the superintendent scribbled a few words with a pencil and which was then consigned to a large handbag that the sergeant had brought in with him from the hall.

The large drawers of the bureau were next examined. Like the shelves, they were filled with a horrible accumulation of odds and ends which had evidently been stuffed into them to get them out of the way. From this collection nothing was obtained which interested the officers, who next turned their attention to the small drawers and pigeonholes at the back of the flap. These, however, contained nothing but stationery and a number of letters, bills and other papers, which the two officers glanced through and replaced. When all the small drawers and pigeonholes had been examined, the superintendent stood up, fixing a thoughtful glance at the middle of the range of drawers; and I waited expectantly for the

next development. Like many old bureaus, this one had as a central feature a nest of four very small drawers enclosed by a door. I knew the arrangement very well, and so, apparently, did the superintendent; for, once more opening the top drawer, he pulled it right out and laid it on the writing flap. Then, producing from his pocket a folding foot-rule, he thrust it into one of the pigeonholes, showing a depth of eight and a half inches, and then into the case of the little drawer, which proved to be only a fraction over five inches deep.

"There is something more here than meets the eye," he remarked pleasantly. "Do you know what is at the back of those drawers, Mr Wallingford?"

The unfortunate secretary, who had been watching the officer's proceedings with a look of consternation, did not reply for a few moments, but remained staring wildly at the aperture from which the drawer had been taken out.

"At the back?" he stammered, at length. "No, I can't say that I do. It isn't my bureau, you know. I only had the use of it."

"I see," said Miller. "Well, I expect we can soon find out."

He drew out a second drawer and, grasping the partition between the two, gave a gentle pull, when the whole nest slid easily forward and came right out of its case. Miller laid it on the writing flap, and, turning it round, displayed a sliding lid at the back, which he drew up; when there came into view a set of four little drawers similar to those in front but furnished with leather tabs instead of handles. Miller drew out the top drawer and a sudden change in the expression on his face told me that he had lighted on something that seemed to him significant.

"Now I wonder what this is?" said he, taking from the drawer a small white-paper packet. "Feels like some sort of powder. You say you don't know anything about it, Mr Wallingford?"

Wallingford shook his head but made no further reply, whereupon the superintendent laid the packet on the flap and very carefully unfolded the ends—it had already been opened—when it was seen that the contents consisted of some two or three teaspoonfuls of a fine, white powder.

"Well," said Miller, "we shall have to find out what it is. Will you pass me that bit of sealing-wax, Sergeant?"

He reclosed the packet with the greatest care and having sealed both the ends with his signet-ring, enclosed it in an envelope and put it into his inside breast pocket. Then he returned to the little nest of drawers. The second drawer was empty, but on pulling out the third, he uttered an exclamation.

"Well, now! Look at that! Somebody seems to have been fond of physic. And there's no doubt as to what this is. Morphine hydrochlor, a quarter of a grain."

As he spoke, he took out of the drawer a little bottle filled with tiny white discs or tablets and bearing on the label the inscription which the superintendent had read out. Wallingford gazed at it with a foolish expression of surprise as Miller held it up for our—and particularly Wallingford's—inspection; and Barbara, I noticed, cast at the latter a side-long, inscrutable glance which I sought in vain to interpret.

"Morphine doesn't seem much to the point," Miller remarked as he wrapped the little bottle in paper and bestowed it in his inner pocket, "but, of course, we have only got the evidence of the label. It may turn out to be something else, when the chemical gentlemen come to test it."

With this he grasped the tab of the bottom drawer and drew the latter out; and in a moment his face hardened. Very deliberately, he picked out a small, oblong envelope, which appeared once to have contained a box or hard packet, but was now empty. It had evidently come through the post and was addressed in a legible business hand to "A Wallingford Esq., 16 Hilborough Square." Silently the superintendent held it out for us all to see, as he fixed a stern look on Wallingford. "You observe, Sir," he said, at length, "that the post-mark is dated the 20th of August; only about a month ago. What have you to say about it?"

"Nothing," was the sullen reply. "What comes to me by post is my affair. I am not accountable to you or anybody else."

For a moment, the superintendent's face took on a very ugly expression. But he seemed to be a wise man and not unkindly, for he quickly controlled his irritation and rejoined without a trace of anger, though gravely enough: "Be advised by me, Mr Wallingford, and don't make trouble for yourself. Let me remind you what the position is. In this house a man has died from arsenic poisoning. The police will have to find out how that happened and if anyone is open to the suspicion of having poisoned him. I have come here today for that purpose with full authority to search this house. In the course of my search I have asked you for certain information, and you have made a number of false statements. Believe me, sir, that is a very dangerous thing to do. It inevitably raises the question why those false statements should have been made. Now, I am going to ask you one or two questions. You are not bound to answer them, but you will be well advised to hold nothing back, and, above all, to say nothing that is not true. To begin with that packet of powder. What do you say that packet contains?"

Wallingford, who characteristically, was now completely cowed by the superintendent's thinly-veiled threats, hung his head for a moment and then replied, almost inaudibly, "Cocaine."

"What were you going to do with cocaine?" Miller asked.

"I was going to take a little of it for my health."

The superintendent smiled faintly as he demanded: "And the morphine tablets?"

"I had thought of taking one of them occasionally to—er—to steady my nerves."

Miller nodded, and casting a swift glance at the sergeant, asked:

"And the packet that was in this envelope: what did that contain?"

Wallingford hesitated and was so obviously searching for a plausible lie that Miller interposed, persuasively: "Better tell the truth and not make trouble"; whereupon Wallingford replied in a barely audible mumble that the packet had contained a very small quantity of cocaine.

"What has become of that cocaine?" the superintendent asked.

"I took part of it; the rest got spilt and lost."

Miller nodded rather dubiously at this reply and then asked:

"Where did you get this cocaine and the morphine?"

Wallingford hesitated for some time and at length, plucking up a little courage again, replied: "I would rather not answer that question. It really has nothing to do with your search. You are looking for arsenic."

Miller reflected for a few moments and then rejoined, quietly:

"That isn't quite correct, Mr Wallingford. I am looking for anything that may throw light on the death of Mr Monkhouse. But I don't want to press you unduly, only I would point out that you could not have come by these drugs lawfully. You are not a doctor or a chemist. Whoever supplied you with them was acting illegally and you have been a party to an illegal transaction in obtaining them. However, if you refuse to disclose the names of the persons who supplied them, we will let the matter pass, at least for the present; but I remind you that you have had these drugs in your possession and that you may be, and probably will be compelled to give an account of the way in which you obtained them."

With that he pocketed the envelope, closed the drawers and turned to make a survey of the room. There was very little in it, however, for the bureau and its surmounting cupboard were the only receptacles in which anything could be concealed, the whole of the walls being occupied by open book-shelves about seven feet high. But even these the superintendent was not prepared to take at their face value. First, he stood on a chair and ran his eye slowly along the tops of all the shelves; then he made a leisurely tour of the room, closely inspecting each row of books, now and again taking one out or pushing one in against the back of the shelves. A set of box-files was examined in detail, each one being opened to ascertain that it contained nothing but papers, and even one or two obvious portfolios were taken out and inspected. Nothing noteworthy, however, was brought to light by this rigorous search until the tour of inspection was nearly completed. The superintendent was, in fact, approaching the door when his attention was attracted by a row of books which seemed to be unduly near the front edge of the shelf. Opposite this he halted and began pushing the books back, one at a time. Suddenly I noticed that one of the books, on being pushed, slid back about half an inch and stopped as if there were something behind it. And there was. When the superintendent grasped the book and drew it out, there came into view, standing against the back of the shelf, a smallish bottle, apparently empty, and bearing a white label.

"Queer place to keep a bottle," Miller remarked, adding, with a smile, "unless it were a whiskey bottle, which it isn't." He drew it out, and after looking at it suspiciously and holding it up to the light, took out the cork and sniffed at it. "Well," he continued, "it is an empty bottle and it is labelled 'Benzine.' Do you know anything about it, Mr Wallingford?"

"No, I don't," was the reply. "I don't use benzine, and if I did I should not keep it on a book-shelf. But I don't see that it matters much. There isn't any harm in benzine, is there?"

"Probably not," said Miller; "but, you see, the label doesn't agree with the smell. What do you say, Mrs Monkhouse?"

He once more drew out the cork and held the bottle towards her. She took it from him and having smelled at it, replied promptly: "It smells to me like lavender. Possibly the bottle has had lavender water in it, though I shouldn't, myself, have chosen a benzine bottle to keep a perfume in."

"I don't think it was lavender water," said the superintendent. "That, I think, is nearly colourless. But the liquid that was in this bottle was red. As I hold it up to the light, you can see a little ring of red round the edge of the bottom. I daresay the chemists will be able to tell us what was in the bottle, but the question now is, who put it there? You are sure you can't tell us anything about it, Mr Wallingford?"

"I have never seen it before, I assure you," the latter protested almost tearfully. "I know nothing about it, whatsoever. That is the truth, Superintendent; I swear to God it is."

"Very well, sir," said Miller, writing a brief note on the label and making an entry in his note-book. "Perhaps it is of no importance after all. But we shall see. I think we have finished this room. Perhaps, Sergeant, you might take a look at the drawing room while I go through Mr Monkhouse's room. It will save time. And I needn't trouble you anymore just at present, Mr Wallingford."

The secretary retired, somewhat reluctantly, to the dining room while Barbara led the way to the first floor. As we entered the room in which that unwitnessed tragedy had been enacted in the dead of the night, I looked about me with a sort of shuddering interest. The bed had been stripped, but otherwise nothing seemed to be changed since I had seen the room but a few days ago when it was still occupied by its dread tenant. The bedside table still bore its pathetic furnishings: the water-bottle, the little decanter, the books, the candle-box, the burnt-out lamp, the watch—though that ticked no

longer, but seemed, with its motionless hands, to echo the awesome stillness that pervaded that ill-omened room.

As the superintendent carried out his methodical search, joined presently by the sergeant, Barbara came and stood by me with her eyes fixed gloomily on the table.

"Were you thinking of him, Rupert?" she whispered. "Were you thinking of that awful night when he lay here, dying, all alone, and—Oh! the thought of it will haunt me every day of my life until my time comes, too, however far off that may be."

I was about to make some reply, as consolatory as might be, when the superintendent announced that he had finished and asked that Wallingford might be sent for to be present at the examination of his room. I went down to deliver the message, and, as it would have appeared intrusive for me to accompany him, I stayed in the dining room with Madeline, who, though she had recovered from the shock of the detectives' arrival, was still pale and agitated.

"Poor Tony seemed dreadfully upset when he came back just now," she said. "What was it that happened in the library?"

"Nothing very much," I answered. "The superintendent unearthed his little stock of dope; which, of course, was unpleasant for him, but it would not have mattered if he had not been fool enough to lie about it. That was a fatal thing to do, under the circumstances."

As Wallingford seemed not to have said anything about the bottle, I made no reference to it, but endeavoured to distract her attention from what was going on in the house by talking of other matters. Nor was it at all difficult; for the truth is that we all, with one accord, avoided any reference to the horrible fact which was staring us in the face, and of which we must all have been fully conscious. So we continued a somewhat banal conversation, punctuated by pauses in which our thoughts stole secretly back to the hideous realities, until, at length, Wallingford returned, pale and scowling, and flung himself into an arm-chair. Madeline looked at him inquiringly, but as he offered no remark but sat in gloomy silence, smoking furiously, she asked him no questions, nor did I.

A minute or two later, Barbara came into the room, quietly and with an air of calm self-possession that was quite soothing in the midst of the general emotional tension.

"Do you mind coming up, Madeline?" she said. "They are examining your room and they want you to unlock the cupboard. You have your keys about you, I suppose?"

"Yes," Madeline replied, rising and taking from her pocket a little key-wallet. "That is the key. Will you take it up to them?"

"I think you had better come up yourself," Barbara replied. "It is very unpleasant but, of course, they have to go through the formalities, and we must not appear unwilling to help them."

"No, of course," said Madeline. "Then I will come with you, but I should like Rupert to come, too, if he doesn't mind. Will you?" she asked, looking at me appealingly. "Those policemen make me feel so nervous."

Of course, I assented at once; and as Wallingford, muttering "Damned impertinence! Infernal indignity!" rose to open the door for us, we passed out and took our way upstairs.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Miss Norris," said Miller, in a suave tone, as we entered, "but we must see everything if only to be able to say that we have. Would you be so kind as to unlock this cupboard?"

He indicated a narrow cupboard which occupied one of the recesses by the chimney-breast, and Madeline at once inserted the key and threw open the door. The interior was then seen to be occupied by shelves, of which the lower ones were filled, tidily enough, with an assortment of miscellaneous articles—shoes, shoe-trees, brushes, leather bags, cardboard boxes, note-books and other "oddments"—while the top shelf seemed to have been used as a repository for jars, pots and bottles, of which several appeared to be empty. It was this shelf which seemed to attract the superintendent's attention and he began operations by handing out its various contents to the sergeant, who set them down on a table in orderly rows. When they were all set out and the superintendent had inspected narrowly and swept his hand over the empty shelf, the examination of the jars and bottles began.

The procedure was very methodical and thorough. First, the sergeant picked up a bottle or jar, looked it over carefully, read the label if there was one, uncovered or uncorked it, smelled it and passed it to the superintendent, who, when he had made a similar inspection, put it down at the opposite end of the table.

"Can you tell us what this is?" Miller asked, holding out a bottle filled with a thickish, nearly black liquid.

"That is caramel," Madeline replied. "I use it in my cookery classes and for cooking at home, too."

The superintendent regarded the bottle a little dubiously but set it down at the end of the table without comment. Presently he received from the sergeant a glass jar filled with a brownish powder.

"There is no label on this," he remarked, exhibiting it to Madeline.

"No," she replied. "It is turmeric. That also is used in my classes; and that other is powdered saffron."

"I wonder you don't label them," said Miller. "It would be easy for a mistake to occur with all these unlabelled bottles."

"Yes," she admitted, "they ought to be labelled. But I know what each of them is, and they are all pretty harmless. Most of them are materials that are used in cookery demonstrations, but that one that you have now is French chalk, and the one the sergeant has is pumice-powder."

"H'm," grunted Miller, dipping his finger into the former and rubbing it on his thumb; "what would happen if you thickened a soup with French chalk or pumice-powder? Not very good for the digestion, I should think."

"No, I suppose not," Madeline agreed, with the ghost of a smile on her pale face. "I must label them in future."

During this colloquy I had been rapidly casting my eye over the collection that still awaited examination, and my attention had been almost at once arrested by an empty bottle near the end of the row. It looked to me like the exact counterpart of the bottle which had been found in the library; a cylindrical bottle of about the capacity of half a pint, or rather less, and like the other, labelled in printed characters 'Benzine.'

But mine was not the only eye that had observed it. Presently, I saw the sergeant pick it up—out of its turn—scrutinize it suspiciously,—hold it up to the light, take out the cork and smell both it and the bottle, and then, directing the latter, telescope-fashion, towards the window, inspect the bottom by peering in through the mouth. Finally, he clapped in the cork with some emphasis, and with a glance full of meaning handed the bottle to the superintendent.

The latter repeated the procedure in even more detail. When he had finished, he turned to Madeline with a distinctly inquisitorial air.

"This bottle, Miss Norris," said he, "is labelled 'Benzine.' But it was not benzine that it contained. Will you kindly smell it and tell me what you think it did contain. Or perhaps you can say off-hand."

"I am afraid I can't," she replied. "I have no recollection of having had any benzine and I don't remember this bottle at all. As it is in my cupboard I suppose I must have put it there, but I don't remember having ever seen it before. I can't tell you anything about it."

"Well, will you kindly smell it and tell me what you think it contained?" the superintendent persisted, handing her the open bottle. She took it from him apprehensively, and, holding it to her nose, took a deep sniff; and instantly her already pale face became dead white to the very lips.

"It smells of lavender," she said in a faint voice.

"So I thought," said Miller. "And now, Miss Norris, if you will look in at the mouth of the bottle against the light, you will see a faint red ring round the bottom. Apparently, the liquid that the bottle contained was a red liquid. Moreover, if you hold the bottle against the light and look through the label, you can see the remains of another label under it. There is only a tiny scrap of it left, but it is enough for us to see that it was a red label. So it would seem that the liquid was a poisonous liquid—poisonous enough to require a red poison label. And then you notice that this red poison label seems to have been scraped off and the benzine label stuck on over the place where it had been, although, as the lavender smell and the red stain clearly show, the bottle never had any benzine in it at all. Now, Miss Norris, bearing those facts in mind, I ask you if you can tell me what was in that bottle."

"I have told you," Madeline replied with unexpected firmness, "that I know nothing about this bottle. I have no recollection of ever having seen it before. I do not believe that it ever belonged to me. It may have been in the cupboard when I first began to use it. At any rate, I am not able to tell you anything about it."

The superintendent continued to look at her keenly, still holding the bottle. After a few moments' silence he persisted: "A red, poisonous liquid which smells of lavender. Can you not form any idea as to what it was?"

I was about to enter a protest—for the question was really not admissible—when Madeline, now thoroughly angry and quite self-possessed, replied, stiffly: "I don't know what you mean. I have told you that I know nothing about this bottle. Are you suggesting that I should try to guess what it contained?"

"No," he rejoined hastily; "certainly not. A guess wouldn't help us at all. If you really do not know anything about the bottle, we must leave it at that. You always keep this cupboard locked, I suppose?"

"Usually. But I am not very particular about it. There is nothing of value in the cupboard, as you see, and the servants are quite trustworthy. I sometimes leave the key in the door, but I don't imagine that anybody ever meddles with it."

The superintendent took the key out of the lock and regarded it attentively. Then he examined the lock itself, and I also took the opportunity of inspecting it. Both the lock and the key were of the simplest kind, just ordinary builder's fittings, which, so far as any real security was concerned, could not be taken seriously. In the absence of the key, a stiff wire or a bent hair-pin would probably have shot that little bolt quite easily, as I took occasion to remark to the superintendent, who frankly agreed with me.

The bottle having been carefully wrapped up and deposited in the sergeant's hand-bag, the examination was resumed; but nothing further of an interesting or suspicious character was discovered among the bottles or jars. Nor did the sorting-out of the miscellaneous contents of the lower shelves yield anything remarkable with a single exception. When the objects on the lowest shelf had been all taken out, a small piece of white paper was seen at the back, and on this Miller pounced with some eagerness. As he brought it out I could see that it was a chemist's powder paper, about six inches square (when Miller had carefully straightened it out), and the creases which marked the places where it had been folded showed that it had contained a mass of about the bulk of a dessert-spoonful. But what attracted my attention—and the superintendent's—was the corner of a red label which adhered to a torn edge in company with a larger fragment of a white label on which the name or description of the contents had presumably been written or printed. Miller held it out towards Madeline, who looked at it with a puzzled frown.

"Do you remember what was in this paper, Miss Norris?" the former asked.

"I am afraid I don't," she replied.

"H'm," grunted Miller; "I should have thought you would. It seems to have been a good-sized powder and it had a poison label in addition to the descriptive label. I should have thought that would have recalled it to your memory."

"So should I," said Madeline. "But I don't remember having bought any powder that would be labelled 'poison.' It is very odd; and it is odd that the paper should be there. I don't usually put waste paper into my cupboard."

"Well, there it is," said Miller, "but if you can't remember anything about it, we must see if the analysts can find out what was in it." With which he folded it and having put it into an envelope, bestowed it in his pocket in company with his other treasures.

This was the last of the discoveries. When they had finished their inspection of Madeline's room the officers went on to Barbara's, which they examined with the same minute care as they had bestowed on the others, but without bringing anything of interest to light. Then they inspected the servants' bedrooms and finally the kitchen and the other premises appertaining to it, but still without result. It was a tedious affair and we were all relieved when, at last, it came to an end. Barbara and I escorted the two detectives to the street door, at which the superintendent paused to make a few polite acknowledgments.

"I must thank you, Madam," said he, "for the help you have given us and for the kind and reasonable spirit in which you have accepted a disagreeable necessity. I assure you that we do not usually meet with so much consideration. A search of this kind is always an unpleasant duty to carry out and it is not made any more pleasant by a hostile attitude on the part of the persons concerned."

"I can understand that," replied Barbara; "but really the thanks are due from me for the very courteous and considerate way in which you have discharged what I am sure must be a most disagreeable duty. And of course, it had to be; and I am glad that it has been done so thoroughly. I never supposed that you would find what you are seeking in this house. But it was necessary that the search should be made here if only to prove that you must look for it somewhere else."

"Quite so, Madam," the superintendent returned, a little drily; "and now I will wish you good afternoon and hope that we shall have no further occasion to trouble you."

As I closed the street door and turned back along the hall, the dining room door—apparently already ajar—opened and Madeline and Wallingford stepped out; and I could not help reflecting, as I noted their pale, anxious faces and shaken bearing, how little their appearance supported the confident, optimistic tone of Barbara's last remarks. But, at any rate, they were intensely relieved that the ordeal was over, and Wallingford even showed signs of returning truculence.

Whatever he was going to say, however, was cut short by Barbara, who, passing the door and moving towards the staircase, addressed me over her shoulder.

"Do you mind coming up to my den, Rupert? I want to ask your advice about one or two things."

The request seemed a little inopportune; but it was uttered as a command and I had no choice but to obey. Accordingly, I followed Barbara up the stairs, leaving the other two in the hall, evidently rather disconcerted by this sudden retreat. At the turn of the stairs I looked down on the two pale faces. In Madeline's I seemed to read a new apprehensiveness, tinged with suspicion; on Wallingford's a scowl of furious anger which I had no patience to seek to interpret.

---

## VIII. — THORNDYKE SPEAKS BLUNTLY

WHEN I had entered the little sitting room and shut the door, I turned to Barbara, awaiting with some curiosity what she had to say to me. But for a while she said nothing, standing before me silently, and looking at me with a most disquieting expression. All her calm self-possession had gone. I could read nothing in her face but alarm and dismay.

"It is dreadful, Rupert!" she exclaimed, at length, in a half-whisper. "It is like some awful dream! What can it all mean? I don't dare to ask myself the question."

I shook my head, for I was in precisely the same condition. I did not dare to weigh the meaning of the things that I had seen and heard.

Suddenly, the stony fixity of her face relaxed and with a little smothered cry she flung her arm around my neck and buried her face on my shoulder.

"Forgive me, Rupert, dearest, kindest friend," she sobbed. "Suffer a poor lonely woman for a few moments. I have only you, dear, faithful one; only your strength and steadfastness to lean upon. Before the others I must needs be calm and brave, must cloak my own fears to support their flagging courage. But it is hard, Rupert; for they see what we see and dare not put it into words. And the mystery, Rupert, the horrible shadow that is over us all! In God's name, what can it all mean?"

"That is what I ask myself, Barbara, and dare not answer my own question."

She uttered a low moan and clung closer to me, sobbing quietly. I was deeply moved, for I realized the splendid courage that enabled her to go about this house of horror, calm and unafraid; to bear the burden of her companions' weakness as

well as her own grief and humiliation. But I could find nothing to say to her. I could only offer her a silent sympathy, holding her head on my shoulder and softly stroking her hair while I wondered dimly what the end of it all would be.

Presently she stood up, and, taking out her handkerchief, wiped her eyes resolutely and finally.

"Thank you, dear Rupert," she said, "for being so patient with me. I felt that I had come to the end of my endurance and had to rest my burden on you. It was a great relief. But I didn't bring you up here for that. I wanted to consult you about what has to be done. I can't look to poor Tony in his present state."

"What is it that has to be done?" I asked.

"There is the funeral. That has still to take place."

"Of course it has," I exclaimed, suddenly taken aback; for amidst all the turmoils and alarms, I had completely lost sight of this detail. "I suppose I had better call on the undertaker and make the necessary arrangements."

"If you would be so kind, Rupert, and if you can spare the time. You have given up the whole day to us already."

"I can manage," said I. "And as to the time of the funeral, I don't know whether it could be arranged for the evening. It gets dark pretty early."

"No, Rupert," she exclaimed, firmly. "Not in the evening. Certainly not. I will not have poor Harold's body smuggled away in the dark like the dishonoured corpse of some wretched suicide. The funeral shall take place at the proper time, if I go with it alone."

"Very well, Barbara. I will arrange for us to start at the time originally fixed. I only suggested the evening because—well, you know what to expect."

"Yes, only too well!" But I refuse to let a crowd of gaping sight-seers intimidate me into treating my dead husband with craven disrespect."

"Perhaps you are right," said I with secret approval of her decision, little as I relished the prospect that it opened. "Then I had better go and make the arrangements at once. It is getting late. But I am loath to leave you alone with Madeline and Wallingford."

"I think, perhaps, we shall be better alone for the present, and you have your own affairs to attend to. But you must have some food before you go. You have had nothing since the morning, and I expect a meal is ready by now."

"I don't think I will wait, Barbara," I replied. "This affair ought to be settled at once. I can get some food when I have dispatched the business."

She was reluctant to let me go. But I was suddenly conscious of a longing to escape from this house into the world of normal things and people; to be alone for a while with my own thoughts, and, above all, to take counsel with Thorndyke. On my way out I called in at the dining room to make my adieux to Madeline and Wallingford. The former looked at me, as she shook my hand, very wistfully and I thought a little reproachfully.

"I am sorry you have to go, Rupert," she said. "But you will try to come and see us tomorrow, won't you? And spend as much time here as you can."

I promised to come at some time on the morrow; and having exchanged a few words with Wallingford, took my departure, escorted to the street door by the two women.

The closing of the door, sounding softly in my ears, conveyed a sense of relief of which I felt ashamed. I drew a deep breath and stepped forward briskly with a feeling of emancipation that I condemned as selfish and disloyal even as I was sensible of its intensity. It was almost with a sense of exhilaration that I strode along, a normal, unnoticed wayfarer among ordinary men and women, enveloped by no cloud of mystery, overhung by no shadow of crime. There was the undertaker, indeed, who would drag me back into the gruesome environment, but I would soon have finished with him, and then, for a time, at least, I should be free.

I finished with him, in fact, sooner than I had expected, for he had already arranged the procedure of the postponed funeral and required only my assent; and when I had given this, I went my way breathing more freely but increasingly conscious of the need for food.

Yet, after all, my escape was only from physical contact. Try as I would to forget for a while the terrible events of this day of wrath, the fresh memories of them came creeping back in the midst of those other thoughts which I had generated by a deliberate effort. They haunted me as I walked swiftly through the streets, they made themselves heard above the rumble of the train, and even as I sat in a tavern in Devereux Court, devouring with ravenous appreciation a well-grilled chop, accompanied by a pint of claret, black care stood behind the old-fashioned, high-backed settle, an unseen companion of the friendly waiter.

The lighted windows of Thorndyke's chambers were to my eyes as the harbour lights to the eyes of a storm-beaten mariner. As I emerged from Fig Tree Court and came in sight of them, I had already the feeling that the burden of mystery and vague suspicion was lightened; and I strode across King's Bench Walk with the hopeful anticipation of one who looks to shift his fardel on to more capable shoulders.

The door was opened by Thorndyke, himself; and the sheaf of papers in his hand suggested that he was expecting me.



"Are those the depositions?" I asked as we shook hands.

"Yes," he replied. "I have just been reading through them and making an abstract. Holman has left the duplicate at your chambers."

"I suppose the medical evidence represents the 'complications' that you hinted at? You expected something of the kind?"

"Yes. An inquest in the face of a regular death certificate suggested some pretty definite information; and then your own account of the illness told one what to expect."

"And yet," said I, "neither of the doctors suspected anything while the man was alive."

"No; but that is not very remarkable. I had the advantage over them of knowing that a death certificate had been challenged. It is always easier to be wise after than before the event."

"And now that you have read the depositions, what do you think of the case? Do you think, for instance, that the verdict was justified?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied. "What other verdict was possible on the evidence that was before the court? The medical witness swore that deceased died from the effects of arsenic poisoning. That is an inference, it is true. The facts are that the man died and that a poisonous quantity of arsenic was found in the body. But it is the only reasonable inference and we cannot doubt that it is the true one. Then again as to the question of murder as against accident or suicide, it is one of probabilities. But the probabilities are so overwhelmingly in favour of murder that no others are worth considering. No, Mayfield, on the evidence before us, we have to accept the verdict as expressing the obvious truth."

"You think it impossible that there can be any error or fallacy in the case?"

"I don't say that," he replied. "I am referring exclusively to the evidence which is set forth in these depositions. That is all the evidence that we possess. Apart from the depositions we have no knowledge of the case at all; at least I have none, and I don't suppose you have any."

"I have not. But I understand that you think it at least conceivable that there may be, after all, some fallacy in the evidence of wilful murder?"

"A fallacy," he replied, "is always conceivable. As you know, Mayfield, complete certainty, in the most rigorous sense, is hardly ever attainable in legal practice. But we must be reasonable. The law has to be administered; and if certainty, in the most extreme, academic sense, is unattainable, we must be guided in our action by the highest degree of probability that is within our reach."

"Yes, I realize that. But still you admit that a fallacy is conceivable. Can you list for the sake of illustration, suggest any such possibility in the evidence that you have read?"

"Well," he replied, "as a matter of purely academic interest, there is the point that I mentioned just now. The body of this man contained a lethal quantity of arsenic. With that quantity of poison in his body, the man died. The obvious inference is that those two facts were connected as cause and effect. But it is not absolutely certain that they were. It is conceivable that the man may have died from some natural cause overlooked by the pathologist—who was already aware of the presence of arsenic, from Detling's information; or again it is conceivable that the man may have been murdered in some other way—even by the administration of some other, more rapidly acting poison, which was never found because it was never looked for. These are undeniable possibilities. But I doubt if any reasonable person would entertain them, seeing that they are mere conjectures unsupported by any sort of evidence. And you notice that the second possibility leaves the verdict of wilful murder unaffected."

"Yes, but it might transfer the effects of that verdict to the wrong person."

"True," he rejoined with a smile. "It might transfer them from a poisoner who had committed a murder to another poisoner who had only attempted to commit one; and the irony of the position would be that the latter would actually believe himself to be the murderer. But as I said, this is mere academic talk. The coroner's verdict is the reality with which we have to deal."

"I am not so sure of that, Thorndyke," said I, inspired with a sudden hope by his 'illustration.' "You admit that fallacies are possible and you are able to suggest two off-hand. You insist, very properly, that our opinions at present must be based exclusively on the evidence given at the inquest. But, as I listened to that evidence, I had the feeling—and I have it still—that it did not give a credible explanation of the facts that were proved. I had—and have—the feeling that careful and competent investigation might bring to light some entirely new evidence."

"It is quite possible," he admitted, rather drily.

"Well, then," I pursued, "I should wish some such investigation to be made. I can recall a number of cases in which the available evidence, as in the present case, appeared to point to a certain definite conclusion, but in which investigations undertaken by you brought out a body of new evidence pointing in a totally different direction. There was the Hornby case, the case of Blackmore, deceased, the Bellingham case and a number of others in which the result of your investigations was to upset completely a well-established case against some suspected individual."

He nodded, but made no comment, and I concluded with the question: "Well, why should not a similar result follow in the present case?"

He reflected for a few moments and then asked: "What is it that is in your mind, Mayfield? What, exactly do you propose?"

"I am proposing that you should allow me to retain you on my own behalf and that of other interested parties to go thoroughly into this case."

"With what object?"

"With the object of bringing to light the real facts connected with the death of Harold Monkhouse."

"Are you authorized by any of the interested parties to make this proposal?"

"No; and perhaps I had better leave them out and make the proposal on my own account only."

He did not reply immediately but sat looking at me steadily with a rather inscrutable expression which I found a little disturbing. At length he spoke, with unusual deliberation and emphasis.

"Are you sure, Mayfield, that you want the real facts brought to light?"

I stared at him, startled and a good deal taken aback by his question, and especially by the tone in which it was put. "But, surely," I stammered, in reply. "Why not?"

"Don't be hasty, Mayfield," said he. "Reflect calmly and impartially before you commit yourself to any course of action of which you cannot foresee the consequences. Perhaps I can help you. Shall we, without prejudice and without personal bias, take a survey of the status quo and try to see exactly where we stand?"

"By all means," I replied, a little uncomfortably.

"Well," he said, "the position is this. A man has died in a certain house, to which he has been confined as an invalid for some considerable time. The cause of his death is stated to be poisoning by arsenic. That statement is made by a competent medical witness who has had the fullest opportunity to ascertain the facts. He makes the statement with complete confidence that it is a true statement, and his opinion is supported by those of two other competent professional witnesses. It is an established fact, which cannot be contested, that the body of deceased contained sufficient arsenic to cause his death. So far as we can see, there is not the slightest reason to doubt that the man died from arsenical poisoning.

"When we come to the question, 'How did the arsenic find its way into the man's body?' there appears to be only one possible answer. Suicide and accident are clearly excluded. The evidence makes it practically certain that the poison was administered to him by some person or persons with the intent to compass his death; and the circumstances in which the poisoning occurred make it virtually certain that the arsenic was administered to this man by some person or persons customarily and intimately in contact with him.

"The evidence shows that there were eight persons who would answer this description; and we have no knowledge of the existence of any others. Those persons are: Barbara Monkhouse, Madeline Norris, Anthony Wallingford, the housemaid, Mabel Withers, the cook, the kitchenmaid, Dr Dimsdale and Rupert Mayfield. Of these eight persons the police will assume that one, or more, administered the poison; and, so far as we can see, the police are probably right."

I was rather staggered by his bluntness. But I had asked for his opinion and I had got it. After a brief pause, I said: "We are still, of course, dealing with the depositions. On those, as you say, a presumption of guilt lies against these eight persons collectively. That doesn't carry us very far in a legal sense. You can't indict eight persons as having among them the guilty party. Do you take it that the presumption of guilt lies more heavily on some of these persons than on others?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied. "I enumerated them merely as the body of persons who fulfilled the necessary conditions as to opportunity and among whom the police will—reasonably—look for the guilty person. In a sense, they are all suspect until the guilt is fixed on a particular person. They all had, technically, a motive, since they all benefited by the death of deceased. Actually, none of them has been shown to have any motive at all in an ordinary and reasonable sense. But for practical purposes, several of them can almost be put outside the area of suspicion; the kitchenmaid, for instance, and Dr Dimsdale and yourself."

"And Mrs Monkhouse," I interposed, "seeing that she appears to have been absent and far away on each occasion when the poison seems to have been administered."

"Precisely," he agreed. "In fact, her absence would seem to exclude her from the group of possible suspects. But apart from its bearing on herself, her absence from home on these occasions has a rather important bearing on some of the others."

"Indeed!" said I, trying rapidly to judge what that bearing might be.

"Yes, it is this: the fact that the poisoning occurred—as it appears—only when Mrs Monkhouse was away from home, suggests not only that the poisoner was fully cognizant of her movements, which all the household would be, but that her presence at home would have hindered that poisoner from administering the poison. Now, the different persons in the house would be differently affected by her presence. We need not pursue the matter any further just now, but you must see that the hindrance to the poisoning caused by Mrs Monkhouse's presence would be determined by the nature of the relations between Mrs Monkhouse and the poisoner."

"Yes, I see that."

"And you see that this circumstance tends to confirm the belief that the crime was committed by a member of the household?"

"I suppose it does," I admitted, grudgingly.

"It does, certainly," said Thorndyke; "and that being so, I ask you again: do you think it expedient that you should meddle with this case? If you do, you will be taking a heavy responsibility; for I must remind you that you are not proposing to employ me as a counsel, but as an investigator who may become a witness. Now, when I plead in court, I act like any other counsel; I plead my client's case frankly as an advocate, knowing that the judge is there to watch over the interests of justice. But as an investigator or witness I am concerned only with the truth. I never give ex parte evidence. If I investigate a crime and discover the criminal, I denounce him, even though he is my employer; for otherwise I should become an accessory. Whoever employs me as an investigator of crime does so at his own risk.

"Bear this in mind, Mayfield, before you go any further in this matter. I don't know what your relations are to these people, but I gather that they are your friends; and I want you to consider very seriously whether you are prepared to risk the possible consequences of employing me. It is actually possible that one or more of these persons may be indicted for the murder of Harold Monkhouse. That would, in any case, be extremely painful for you. But if it happened through the action of the police, you would be, after all, but a passive spectator of the catastrophe. Very different would be the position if it were your own hand that had let the axe fall. Are you prepared to face the risk of such a possibility?"

I must confess that I was daunted by Thorndyke's blunt statement of the position. There was no doubt as to the view that he took of the case. He made no secret of it. And he clearly gauged my own state of mind correctly. He saw that it was not the crime that was concerning me; that I was not seeking justice against the murderer but that I was looking to secure the safety of my friends.

I turned the question over rapidly in my mind. The contingency that Thorndyke had suggested was horrible. I could not face such a risk. Rather, by far, would I have had the murderer remain unpunished than be, myself, the agent of vengeance on any of these suspects. Hideous as the crime was, I could not bring myself to accept the office of executioner if one of my own friends was to be the victim.

I had almost decided to abandon the project and leave the result to Fate or the police. But then came a sudden revulsion. From the grounds of suspicion my thoughts flew to the persons suspected; to gentle, sympathetic Madeline, so mindful of the dead man's comfort, so solicitous about his needs, so eager to render him the little services that mean so much to a sick man. Could I conceive of her as hiding under this appearance of tender sympathy the purposes of a cruel and callous murderess? The thing was absurd. My heart rejected it utterly. Nor could I entertain for a moment such a thought of the kindly, attentive housemaid; and even Wallingford, much as I disliked him, was obviously outside the area of possible suspicion. An intolerable coxcomb he certainly was; but a murderer—never!

"I will take the risk, Thorndyke," said I. He looked at me with slightly raised eyebrows, and I continued: "I know these people pretty intimately and I find it impossible to entertain the idea that any of them could have committed this callous, deliberate crime. At the moment, I realize circumstances seem to involve them in suspicion; but I am certain that there is some fallacy—that there are some facts which did not transpire at the inquest but which might be brought to the surface if you took the case in hand."

"Why not let the police disinter those facts?"

"Because the police evidently suspect the members of the household and they will certainly pursue the obvious probabilities."

"So should I, for that matter," said he; "and in any case, we can't prevent the police from bringing a charge if they are satisfied that they can support it. And your own experience will tell you that they will certainly not take a case into the Central Criminal Court unless they have enough evidence to make a conviction a virtual certainty. But I remind you, Mayfield, that they have got it all to do. There is grave suspicion in respect of a number of persons, but there is not, at present, a particle of positive evidence against any one person. It looks to me as if it might turn out to be a very elusive case."

"Precisely," said I. "That is why I am anxious that the actual perpetrator should be discovered. Until he is, all these people will be under suspicion, with the peril of a possible arrest constantly hanging over them. I might even say, 'hanging over us'; for you, yourself, have included me in the group of possible suspects."

He reflected for a few moments. At length he replied: "You are quite right, Mayfield. Until the perpetrator of a crime is discovered and his guilt established, it is always possible for suspicion to rest upon the innocent and even for a miscarriage of justice to occur. In all cases it is most desirable that the crime should be brought home to the actual perpetrator without delay for that reason, to say nothing of the importance, on grounds of public policy, of exposing and punishing wrongdoers. You know these people and I do not. If you are sufficiently confident of their innocence to take the risk of associating yourself with the agencies of detection, I have no more to say on that point. I am quite willing to go into the case so far as I can, though, at present, I see no prospect of success."

"It seems to you a difficult case, then?"

"Very. It is extraordinarily obscure and confused. Whoever poisoned that unfortunate man, seems to have managed most skilfully to confuse all the issues. Whatever may have been the medium through which the poison was given, that

medium is associated equally with a number of different persons. If the medicine was the vehicle, then the responsibility is divided between Dimsdale, who prepared it, and the various persons who administered it. If the poison was mixed with the food, it may have been introduced by any of the persons who prepared it or had access to it on its passage from the kitchen to the patient's bedroom. There is no one person of whom we can say that he or she had any special opportunity that others had not. And it is the same with the motive. No one had any really, adequate motive for killing Monkhouse; but all the possible suspects benefited by his death, though they were apparently not aware of it."

"They all knew, in general terms, that they had been mentioned in the will though the actual provisions and amounts were not disclosed. But I should hardly describe Mrs Monkhouse as benefiting by her husband's death. She will not be as well off now as she was when he was alive and the whole of his income was available."

"No. But we were not including her in the group since she was not in the house when the poison was being administered. We were speaking of those who actually had the opportunity to administer the poison; and we see that the opportunity was approximately equal in all. And you see, Mayfield, the trouble is that any evidence incriminating any one person would be in events which are past and beyond recall. The depositions contain all that we know and all that we are likely to know, unless the police are able to ascertain that some one of the parties has purchased arsenic from a chemist; which is extremely unlikely considering the caution and judgment that the poisoner has shown. The truth is that, if no new evidence is forthcoming, the murder of Harold Monkhouse will take its place among the unsolved and insoluble mysteries."

"Then, I take it that you will endeavour to find some new evidence? But I don't see, at all, how you will go about it."

"Nor do I," said he. "There seems to be nothing to investigate. However, I shall study the depositions and see if a careful consideration of the evidence offers any suggestion for a new line of research. And as the whole case now lies in the past, I shall try to learn as much as possible about everything and everybody concerned. Perhaps I had better begin with you. I don't quite understand what your position is in this household."

"I will tell you with pleasure all about my relations with the Monkhouses, but it is a rather long story, and I don't see that it will help you in any way."

"Now, Mayfield," said Thorndyke, "don't begin by considering what knowledge may or may not be helpful. We don't know. The most trivial or seemingly irrelevant fact may offer a most illuminating suggestion. My rule is, when I am gravelled for lack of evidence, to collect, indiscriminately, all the information that I can obtain that is in the remotest way connected with the problem that I am dealing with. Bear that in mind. I want to know all that you can tell me, and don't be afraid of irrelevant details. They may not be irrelevant, after all; and if they are, I can sift them out afterwards. Now, begin at the beginning and tell me the whole of the long story."

He provided himself with a note-book, uncapped his fountain pen and prepared himself to listen to what I felt to be a perfectly useless recital of facts that could have no possible bearing on the case.

"I will take you at your word," said I, "and begin at the very beginning, when I was quite a small boy. At that time, my father, who was a widower, lived at Highgate and kept the chambers in the Temple which I now occupy. A few doors away from us lived a certain Mr Keene, an old friend of my father's—his only really intimate friend, in fact—and, of course, I used to see a good deal of him. Mr Keene, who was getting on in years, had married a very charming woman, considerably younger than himself, and at this time there was one child, a little girl about two years old. Unfortunately, Mrs Keene was very delicate, and soon after the child's birth she developed symptoms of consumption. Once started, the disease progressed rapidly in spite of the most careful treatment, and in about two years from the outset of the symptoms, she died.

"Her death was a great grief to Mr Keene, and indeed, to us all, for she was a most lovable woman; and the poor little motherless child made the strongest appeal to our sympathies. She was the loveliest little creature imaginable and as sweet and winning in nature as she was charming in appearance. On her mother's death, I adopted her as my little sister, and devoted myself to her service. In fact, I became her slave; but a very willing slave; for she was so quick and intelligent, so affectionate and so amiable that, in spite of the difference in our ages—some eight or nine years—I found her a perfectly satisfying companion. She entered quite competently into all my boyish sports and amusements, so that our companionship really involved very little sacrifice on my part but rather was a source of constant pleasure.

"But her motherless condition caused Mr Keene a good deal of anxiety. As I have said, he was getting on in life and was by no means a strong man, and he viewed with some alarm the not very remote, possibility of her becoming an orphan with no suitable guardian, for my father was now an elderly man, and I was, as yet, too young to undertake the charge. Eventually, he decided, for the child's sake, to marry again; and about two years after his first wife's death he proposed to and was accepted by a lady named Ainsworth whom he had known for many years, who had been left a widow with one child, a girl some two years younger than myself.

"Naturally, I viewed the advent of the new Mrs Keene with some jealousy. But there was no occasion. She was a good, kindly woman who showed from the first that she meant to do her duty by her little stepdaughter. And her own child, Barbara, equally disarmed our jealousy. A quiet, rather reserved little girl, but very clever and quickwitted, she not only accepted me at once with the frankest friendliness but, with a curious tactfulness for such a young girl, devoted herself to my little friend, Stella Keene, without in the least attempting to oust me from my position. In effect, we three young people became a most united and harmonious little coterie in which our respective positions were duly recognized. I was the head of the firm, so to speak, Stella was my adopted sister, and Barbara was the ally of us both.

"So our relations continued as the years passed; but presently the passing years began to take toll of our seniors. My father was the first to go. Then followed Mr Keene, and after a few more years, Barbara's mother. By the time my twenty-fifth birthday came round, we were all orphans."

"What were your respective ages then?" Thorndyke asked.

Rather surprised at the question, I paused to make a calculation. "My own age," I replied, "was, as I have said, twenty-five. Barbara would then be twenty-two and Stella sixteen."

Thorndyke made a note of my answer and I proceeded: "The death of our elders made no appreciable difference in our way of living. My father had left me a modest competence and the two girls were fairly provided for. The houses that we occupied were beyond our needs, reduced as we were in numbers and we discussed the question of sharing a house. But, of course, the girls were not really my sisters and the scheme was eventually rejected as rather too unconventional; so we continued to live in our respective houses."

"Was there any trustee for the girls?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, Mr Brodribb. The bulk of the property was, I believe, vested in Stella, but, for reasons which I shall come to in a moment, there was a provision that, in the event of her death, it should revert to Barbara."

"On account, I presume, of the tendency to consumption?"

"Exactly. For some time before Mr Keene's death there had been signs that Stella inherited her mother's delicacy of health. Hence the provisions for Barbara. But no definite manifestations of disease appeared until Stella was about eighteen. Then she developed a cough and began to lose weight; but, for a couple of years the disease made no very marked progress, in fact, there were times when she seemed to be in a fair way to recovery. Then, rather suddenly, her health took a turn for the worse. Soon she became almost completely bed-ridden. She wasted rapidly, and, in fact, was now the typical consumptive, hectic, emaciated, but always bright, cheerful and full of plans for the future and enthusiasm for the little hobbies that I devised to keep her amused.

"But all the time, she was going down the hill steadily, although, as I have said, there were remissions and fluctuations; and, in short, after about a year's definite illness, she went the way of her mother. Her death was immediately caused, I understand, by an attack of hemorrhage."

"You understand?" Thorndyke repeated, interrogatively.

"Yes. To my lasting grief, I was away from home when she died. I had been recently called to the bar and was offered a brief for the Chelmsford Assizes, which I felt I ought not to refuse, especially as Stella seemed, just then, to be better than usual. What made it worse was that the telegram which was sent to recall me went astray. I had moved on to Ipswich and had only just written to give my new address, so that I did not get home until just before the funeral. It was a fearful shock, for no one had the least suspicion that the end was so near. If I had supposed that there was the slightest immediate danger, nothing on earth would have induced me to go away from home."

Thorndyke had listened to my story not only with close attention but with an expression of sympathy which I noted gratefully and perhaps with a little surprise. But he was a strange man; as impersonal as Fate when he was occupied in actual research and yet showing at times unexpected gleams of warm human feeling and the most sympathetic understanding. He now preserved a thoughtful silence for some time after I had finished. Presently he said: "I suppose this poor girl's death caused a considerable change in your way of living?"

"Yes, indeed! Its effects were devastating both on Barbara and me. Neither of us felt that we could go on with the old ways of life. Barbara let her house and went into rooms in London, where I used to visit her as often as I could; and I sold my house, furniture and all and took up residence in the Temple. But even that I could not endure for long. Stella's death had broken me up completely. Right on from my boyhood, she had been the very hub of my life. All my thoughts and interests had revolved around her. She had been to me friend and sister in one. Now that she was gone, the world seemed to be a great, chilly void, haunted everywhere by memories of her. She had pervaded my whole life, and everything about me was constantly reminding me of her. At last I found that I could bear it no longer. The familiar things and places became intolerable to my eyes. I did not want to forget her; on the contrary, I loved to cherish her memory. But it was harrowing to have my loss thrust upon me at every turn. I yearned for new surroundings in which I could begin a new life; and in the end, I decided to go to Canada and settle down there to practise at the Bar.

"My decision came as a fearful blow to Barbara, and indeed, I felt not a little ashamed of my disloyalty to her; for she, too, had been like a sister to me and, next to Stella, had been my dearest friend. But it could not be helped. An intolerable unrest had possession of me. I felt that I must go; and go I did, leaving poor Barbara to console her loneliness with her political friends.

"I stayed in Canada nearly two years and meant to stay there for good. Then, one day, I got a letter from Barbara telling me that she was married. The news rather surprised me, for I had taken Barbara for an inveterate spinster with a tendency to avoid male friends other than myself. But the news had another, rather curious effect. It set my thoughts rambling amidst the old surroundings. And now I found that they repelled me no longer; that, on the contrary, they aroused a certain feeling of home-sickness, a yearning for the fuller, richer life of London and a sight of the English countryside. In not much more than a month, I had wound up my Canadian affairs and was back in my old chambers in the Temple, which I had never given up, ready to start practice afresh."

"That," said Thorndyke, "would be a little less than three years ago. Now we come to your relations with the Monkhouse establishment."

"Yes; and I drifted into them almost at once. Barbara received me with open arms, and of course, Monkhouse knew all about me and accepted me as an old friend. Very soon I found myself, in a way, a member of the household. A bedroom was set apart for my use, whenever I cared to occupy it, and I came and went as if I were one of the family. I was appointed a trustee, with Brodribb, and dropped into the position of general family counsellor."

"And what were your relations with Monkhouse?"

"We were never very intimate. I liked the man and I think he liked me. But he was not very approachable; a self-contained, aloof, undemonstrative man, and an inveterate book-worm. But he was a good man and I respected him profoundly, though I could never understand why Barbara married him, or why he married Barbara. I couldn't imagine him in love. On the other hand I cannot conceive any motive that anyone could have had for doing him any harm. He seemed to me to be universally liked in a rather lukewarm fashion."

"It is of no use, I suppose," said Thorndyke, "to ask you if these reminiscences have brought anything to your mind that would throw any light on the means, the motive or the person connected with the crime?"

"No," I answered; "nor can I imagine that they will bring anything to yours. In fact, I am astonished that you have let me go on so long dribbling out all these trivial and irrelevant details. Your patience is monumental."

"Not at all," he replied. "Your story has interested me deeply. It enables me to visualize very clearly at least a part of the setting of this crime, and it has introduced me to the personalities of some of the principal actors, including yourself. The details are not in the least trivial; and whether they are or are not irrelevant we cannot judge. Perhaps, when we have solved the mystery—if ever we do—we may find connections between events that had seemed to be totally unrelated."

"It is, I suppose, conceivable as a mere, speculative possibility. But what I have been telling you is mainly concerned with my own rather remote past, which can hardly have any possible bearing on comparatively recent events."

"That is perfectly true," Thorndyke agreed. "Your little autobiography has made perfectly clear your own relation to these people, but it has left most of them—and those in whom I am most interested—outside the picture. I was just wondering whether it would be possible for you to amplify your sketch of the course of events after Barbara's marriage—I am, like you, using the Christian name, for convenience. What I really want is an account of the happenings in that household during the last three years, and especially during the last year. Do you think that, if you were to turn out the garrets of your memory, you could draw up a history of the house in Hilborough Square and its inmates from the time when you first made its acquaintance? Have you any sort of notes that would help you?"

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "Of course I have. There is my diary."

"Oh," said Thorndyke, with obviously awakened interest. "You keep a diary. What sort of diary is it? Just brief jottings, or a full record?"

"It is a pretty full diary. I began it more than twenty years ago as a sort of schoolboy hobby. But it turned out so useful and entertaining to refer to that I encouraged myself to persevere. Now, I am a confirmed diarist; and I write down not only facts and events, but also comments, which may be quite illuminating to study by the light of what has happened. I will read over the last three years and make an abstract of everything that has happened in that household. And I hope the reading of that abstract will entertain you; for I can't believe that it will help you to unravel the mystery of Harold Monkhouse's death."

"Well," Thorndyke replied, as I rose to take my leave, "don't let your scepticism influence you. Keep in your mind the actual position. In that house a man was poisoned, and almost certainly feloniously poisoned. He must have been poisoned either by someone who was an inmate of that house or by someone who had some sort of access to the dead man from without. It is conceivable that the entries in your diary may bring one or other such person into view. Keep that possibility constantly before you; and fill your abstract with irrelevancies rather than risk omitting anything from which we could gather even the most shadowy hint."



## IX. — SUPERINTENDENT MILLER IS PUZZLED

ON arriving at my chambers after my conference with Thorndyke, I found awaiting me a letter from a Maidstone solicitor offering me a brief for a case of some importance that was to be tried at the forthcoming assizes. At first, I read it almost impatiently, so preoccupied was my mind with the tragedy in which I was involved. It seemed inopportune, almost impertinent. But, in fact it was most opportune, as I presently realized, in that it recalled me to the realities of normal life. My duties to my friends I did, indeed, take very seriously. But I was not an idle man. I had my way to make in my profession and could not afford to drop out of the race, to sacrifice my ambitions entirely, even on the altar of friendship.

I sat down and glanced through the instructions. It was a case of alleged fraud, an intricate case which interested me at once and in which I thought I could do myself credit; which was also the opinion of the solicitor, who was evidently anxious for me to undertake it. Eventually, I decided to accept the brief, and having written a letter to that effect, I set myself to spend the remainder of the evening in studying the instructions and mastering the rather involved details. For time was short, since the case was down for hearing in a couple of days' time and the morrow would be taken up by my engagements at Hilborough Square.

I pass over the incidents of the funeral. It was a dismal and unpleasant affair, lacking all the dignity and pathos that relieve the dreariness of an ordinary funeral. None of us could forget, as we sat back in the mourning coach as far out of sight as possible, that the corpse in the hearse ahead was the corpse of a murdered man, and that most of the bystanders knew it. Even in the chapel, the majestic service was marred and almost vulgarized by the self-consciousness of the mourners and at the grave-side we found one another peering furtively around for signs of recognition. To all of us it was a profound relief, when we were once more gathered together in the drawing room, to hear the street door close firmly and the mourning carriage rumble away down the square.

I took an early opportunity of mentioning the brief and I could see that to both the women the prospect of my departure came as a disagreeable surprise.

"How soon will you have to leave us?" Madeline asked, anxiously.

"I must start for Maidstone tomorrow morning," I replied.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "How empty the place will seem and how lost we shall be without you to advise us."

"I hope," said I, "that the occasions for advice are past, and I shall not be so very far away, if you should want to consult me."

"No," said Barbara, "and I suppose you will not be away for very long. Shall you come back when your case is finished or shall you stay for the rest of the assizes?"

"I shall probably have some other briefs offered, which will detain me until the assizes are over. My solicitor hinted at some other cases, and of course there is the usual casual work that turns up on circuit."

"Well," she rejoined, "we can only wish you good luck and plenty of work, though we shall be glad when it is time for you to come back; and we must be thankful that you were here to help us through the worst of our troubles."

The general tenor of this conversation, which took place at the lunch table, was not, apparently, to Wallingford's taste; for he sat glumly consuming his food and rather ostentatiously abstaining from taking any part in the discussion. Nor was I surprised; for the obvious way in which both women leant on me was a reproach to his capacity, which ought to have made my advice and guidance unnecessary. But though I sympathized in a way with his displeasure, it nevertheless made me a little uneasy. For there was another matter that I wanted to broach; one in which he might consider himself concerned; namely, my commission to Thorndyke. I had, indeed, debated with myself whether I should not be wiser to keep my own counsel on the subject; but I had decided that they were all interested parties and that it would seem unfriendly and uncandid to keep them in the dark. But, for obvious reasons, I did not propose to acquaint them with Thorndyke's views on the case.

The announcement, when I made it, was received without enthusiasm, and Wallingford, as I had feared, was inclined to be resentful.

"Don't you think, Mayfield," said he, "that you ought to have consulted the rest of us before putting this private inquiry agent, or whatever he is, on the case?"

"Perhaps I ought," I admitted. "But it is important to us all that the mystery should be cleared up."

"That is quite true," said Barbara, "and for my part, I shall never rest until the wretch who made away with poor Harold is dragged out into the light of day—that is, if there is really such a person; I mean, if Harold's death was not, after all, the result of some ghastly accident. But is it wise for us to meddle? The police have the case in hand. Surely, with all their experience and their machinery of detection, they are more likely to be successful than a private individual, no matter how clever he may be."

"That," I replied, "is, in fact, Dr Thorndyke's own view. He wished to leave the inquiry to the police; and I may say that he will not come into the case unless it should turn out that the police are unable to solve the mystery."

"In which case," said Wallingford, "it is extremely unlikely that an outsider, without their special opportunities, will be

able to solve it. And if he should happen to find a mare's nest, we shall share the glory and the publicity of his discovery."

"I don't think," said I, "that you need have any anxiety on that score. Dr Thorndyke is not at all addicted to finding mare's nests and still less to publicity. If he makes any discovery he will probably keep it to himself until he has the whole case cut and dried. Then he will communicate the facts to the police; and the first news we shall have on the subject will be the announcement that an arrest has been made. And when the police make an arrest on Thorndyke's information, you can take it that a conviction will follow inevitably."

"I don't think I quite understand Dr Thorndyke's position," said Madeline. "What is he? You seem to refer to him as a sort of superior private detective."

"Thorndyke," I replied, "is a unique figure in the legal world. He is a barrister and a doctor of medicine. In the one capacity he is probably the greatest criminal lawyer of our time. In the other he is, among other things, the leading authority on poisons and on crimes connected with them; and so far as I know, he has never made a mistake."

"He must be a very remarkable man," Wallingford remarked, drily.

"He is," I replied; and in justification of my statement, I gave a sketch of one or two of the cases in which Thorndyke had cleared up what had seemed to be a completely and helplessly insoluble mystery. They all listened with keen interest and were evidently so far impressed that any doubts as to Thorndyke's capacity were set at rest. But yet I was conscious, in all three, of a certain distrust and uneasiness. The truth was, as it seemed to me, that none of them had yet recovered from the ordeal of the inquest. In their secret hearts, what they all wanted—even Barbara, as I suspected—was to bury the whole dreadful episode in oblivion. And seeing this, I had not the courage to remind them of their—of our position as the actual suspected parties whose innocence it was Thorndyke's function to make clear.

In view of my impending departure from London, I stayed until the evening was well advanced, though sensible of a certain impatience to be gone; and when, at length, I took my leave and set forth homeward, I was conscious of the same sense of relief that I had felt on the previous day. Now, for a time, I could dismiss this horror from my mind and let my thoughts occupy themselves with the activities that awaited me at Maidstone; which they did so effectually that by the time I reached my chambers, I felt that I had my case at my fingers' ends. I had just set to work making my preparations for the morrow when my glance happened to light on the glazed bookcase in which the long series of my diaries was kept; and then I suddenly bethought me of the abstract which I had promised to make for Thorndyke. There would be no time for that now; and yet, since he had seemed to attach some importance to it, I could not leave my promise unfulfilled. The only thing to be done was to let him have the diary, itself. I was a little reluctant to do this for I had never yet allowed any-one to read it. But there seemed to be no alternative; and, after all, Thorndyke was a responsible person; and if the diary did contain a certain amount of confidential matter, there was nothing in it that was really secret or that I need object to anyone reading. Accordingly, I took out the current volume, and, dropping it into my pocket, made my way round to King's Bench Walk.

My knock at the door was answered by Thorndyke, himself, and as I entered the room, I was a little disconcerted at finding a large man seated in an easy chair by the fire with his back to me; and still more so when, on hearing me enter, he rose and turned to confront me. For the stranger was none other than Mr Superintendent Miller.

His gratification at the meeting seemed to be no greater than mine, though he greeted me quite courteously and even cordially. I had the uncomfortable feeling that I had broken in on a conference and began to make polite preparations for a strategic retreat. But Thorndyke would have none of it.

"Not at all, Mayfield," said he. "The superintendent is here on the same business as you are, and when I tell him that you have commissioned me to investigate this case, he will realize that we are colleagues."

I am not sure that the superintendent realized this so very vividly, but it was evident that Thorndyke's information interested him. Nevertheless he waited for me and Thorndyke to make the opening moves and only relaxed his caution by slow degrees.

"We were remarking when you came in," he said, at length, "what a curiously baffling case this is, and how very disappointing. At first it looked all plain sailing. There was the lady who used to prepare the special diet for the unfortunate man and actually take it up to him and watch him eat it. It seemed as if we had her in the hollow of our hand. And then she slipped out. The arsenic that was found in the stomach seemed to connect the death with the food; but then there was that confounded bottle of medicine that seemed to put the food outside the case. And when we came to reckon up the evidence furnished by the medicine, it proved nothing. Somebody put the poison in. All of them had the opportunity, more or less, and all about equally. Nothing pointed to one more than another. And that is how it is all through. There is any amount of suspicion; but the suspicion falls on a group of people, not on anyone in particular."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "the issues are most strangely confused."

"Extraordinarily," said Miller. "This queer confusion runs all through the case. You are constantly thinking that you have got the solution, and just as you are perfectly sure, it slips through your fingers. There are lots of clues—fine ones; but as soon as you follow one up it breaks off in the middle and leaves you gaping. You saw what happened at the search, Mr Mayfield."

"I saw the beginning—the actual search; but I don't know what came of it."

"Then I can tell you in one word. Nothing. And yet we seemed to be right on the track every time. There was that secret



drawer of Mr Wallingford's. When I saw that packet of white powder in it, I thought it was going to be a walk-over. I didn't believe for a moment that the stuff was cocaine. But it was. I went straight to our analyst to have it tested."

As the superintendent was speaking I caught Thorndyke's eye, fixed on me with an expression of reproachful inquiry. But he made no remark and Miller continued: "Then there were those two empty bottles. The one that I found in the library yielded definite traces of arsenic. But then, whose bottle was it? The place was accessible to the entire household. It was impossible to connect it with any one person."

"On the other hand, the bottle that I found in Miss Norris' cupboard, and that was presumably hers—though she didn't admit it—contained no arsenic; at least the analyst said it didn't, though as it smelt of lavender and had a red stain at the bottom, I feel convinced that it had had Fowler's Solution in it. What do you think, Doctor? Don't you think the analyst may have been mistaken?"

"No," Thorndyke replied, decidedly. "If the red stain had been due to Fowler's Solution there would have been an appreciable quantity of arsenic present; probably a fiftieth of a grain at least. But Marsh's test would detect a much smaller quantity than that. If no arsenic was found by a competent chemist who was expressly testing for it, you can take it that no arsenic was there."

"Well," Miller rejoined, "you know best. But you must admit that it is a most remarkable thing that one bottle which smelt of lavender and had a red stain at the bottom, should contain arsenic, and that another bottle, exactly similar in appearance and smelling of lavender and having a red stain at the bottom, should contain no arsenic."

"I am entirely with you, Miller," Thorndyke agreed. "It is a most remarkable circumstance."

"And you see my point," said Miller. "Every discovery turns out a sell. I find a concealed packet of powder—with the owner lying like Ananias—but the powder turns out not to be arsenic. I find a bottle that did contain arsenic, and there is no owner. I find another, similar bottle, which has an owner, and there is no arsenic in it. Rum, isn't it? I feel like the donkey with the bunch of carrots tied to his nose. The carrots are there all right, but he can never get a bite at 'em."

Thorndyke had listened with the closest attention to the superintendent's observations and he now began a cautious cross-examination—cautious because Miller was taking it for granted that I had told him all about the search; and I could not but admire his discretion in suppressing the fact that I had not. For, while Thorndyke, himself, would not suspect me of any intentional concealment, Miller undoubtedly would, and what little confidence he had in me would have been destroyed. Accordingly, he managed the superintendent so adroitly that the latter described, piecemeal, all the incidents of the search.

"Did Wallingford say how he came to be in possession of all this cocaine and morphine?" he asked.

"No," replied Miller, "I asked him, but he refused to say where he had got it."

"But he could be made to answer," said Thorndyke. "Both of these drugs are poisons. He could be made to account for having them in his possession and could be called upon to show that he came by them lawfully. They are not ordinarily purchasable by the public."

"No, that's true," Miller admitted. "But is there any object in going into the question? You see, the cocaine isn't really any affair of ours."

"It doesn't seem to be," Thorndyke agreed, "at least, not directly; but indirectly it may be of considerable importance. I think you ought to find out where he got that cocaine and morphine, Miller."

The superintendent reflected with the air of having seen a new light.

"I see what you mean, Doctor," said he. "You mean that if he got the stuff from some Chinaman or common dope merchant, there wouldn't be much in it; whereas, if he got it from someone who had a general stock of drugs, there might be a good deal in it. Is that the point?"

"Yes. He was able to obtain poisons from somebody, and we ought to know exactly what facilities he had for obtaining poisons and what poisons he obtained."

"Yes, that is so," said Miller. "Well, I will see about it at once. Fortunately he is a pretty easy chappie to frighten. I expect, if I give him a bit of a shake-up, he will give himself away; and if he won't, we must try other means. And now, as I think we have said all that we have to say at present, I will wish you two gentlemen good night."

He rose and took up his hat, and having shaken our hands, was duly escorted to the door by Thorndyke; who, when he had seen his visitor safely on to the stairs, returned and confronted me with a look of deep significance.

"You never told me about that cocaine," said he.

"No," I admitted. "It was stupid of me, but the fact is that I was so engrossed by your rather startling observations on the case that this detail slipped my memory. And it really had not impressed me as being of any importance. I accepted Wallingford's statement that the stuff was cocaine and that, consequently, it was no concern of ours."

"I don't find myself able to agree to that 'consequently', Mayfield. How did you know that the cocaine was no concern of ours?"

"Well, I didn't see that it was, and I don't now. Do you?"

"No; I know very little about the case at present. But it seems to me that the fact that a person in this house had a considerable quantity of a highly poisonous substance in his possession is one that at least requires to be noted. The point is, Mayfield, that until we know all the facts of this case we cannot tell which of them is or is not relevant. Try to bear that in mind. Do not select particular facts as important and worthy of notice. Note everything in any way connected with our problem that comes under your observation and pass it on to me without sifting or selection."

"I ought not to need these exhortations," said I. "However, I will bear them in mind should I ever have anything more to communicate. Probably I never shall. But I will say that I think Miller is wasting his energies over Wallingford. The man is no favourite of mine. He is a neurotic ass. But I certainly do not think he has the makings of a murderer."

Thorndyke smiled a little drily. "If you are able," said he, "to diagnose at sight a potential murderer, your powers are a good deal beyond mine. I should have said that every man has the makings of a murderer, given the appropriate conditions."

"Should you really?" I exclaimed "Can you, for instance, imagine either of us committing a murder?"

"I think I can," he replied "Of course, the probabilities are very unequal in different cases. There are some men who may be said to be prone to murder. A man of low intelligence, of violent temper, deficient in ordinary self-control, may commit a murder in circumstances that would leave a man of a superior type unmoved. But still, the determining factors are motive and opportunity. Given a sufficient motive and a real opportunity, I can think of no kind of man who might not commit a homicide which would, in a legal sense, be murder."

"But is there such a thing as a sufficient motive for murder?"

"That question can be answered only by the individual affected. If it seems to him sufficient, it is sufficient in practice."

"Can you mention a motive that would seem to you sufficient?"

"Yes, I can. Blackmail. Let us take an imaginary case. Suppose a man to be convicted of a crime of which he is innocent. As he has been convicted, the evidence, though fallacious, is overwhelming. He is sentenced to a term of imprisonment—say penal servitude. He serves his sentence and is in due course discharged. He is now free; but the conviction stands against him. He is a discharged convict. His name is in the prison books, his photograph and his fingerprints are in the Habitual Criminals' Register. He is a marked man for life.

"Now suppose that he manages to shed his identity and in some place where he is unknown begins life afresh. He acquires the excellent character and reputation to which he is, in fact, entitled. He marries and has a family; and he and his family prosper and enjoy the advantages that follow deservedly from his industry and excellent moral qualities.

"And now suppose that at this point his identity is discovered by a blackmailer who forthwith fastens on him, who determines to live on him in perpetuity, to devour the products of his industry, to impoverish his wife and children and to destroy his peace and security by holding over his head the constant menace of exposure. What is such a man to do? The law will help him so far as it can; but it cannot save him from exposure. He can obtain the protection of the law only on condition that he discloses the facts. But that disclosure is precisely the evil that he seeks to avoid. He is an innocent man, but his innocence is known only to himself. The fact, which must transpire if he prosecutes, is that he is a convicted criminal.

"I say, Mayfield, what can he do? What is his remedy? He has but one; and since the law cannot really help him, he is entitled to help himself. If I were in that man's position and the opportunity presented itself, I would put away that blackmailer with no more qualms than I should have in killing a wasp."

"Then I am not going to blackmail you. Thorndyke, for I have a strong conviction that an opportunity would present itself."

"I think it very probable," he replied with a smile. "At any rate, I know a good many methods that I should not adopt, and I think arsenic poisoning is one of them. But don't you agree with me?"

"I suppose I do, at least in the very extreme case that you have put. But it is the only case of justifiable premeditated homicide that I can imagine; and it obviously doesn't apply to Wallingford."

"My dear Mayfield," he exclaimed. "How do we know what does or does not apply to Wallingford? How do we know what he would regard as an adequate motive? We know virtually nothing about him or his affairs or about the crime itself. What we do know is that a man has apparently been murdered, and that, of the various persons who had the opportunity to commit the murder (of whom he is one) none had any intelligible motive at all. It is futile for us to argue back and forth on the insufficient knowledge that we possess. We can only docket and classify all the facts that we have and follow up each of them impartially with a perfectly open mind. But, above all, we must try to increase our stock of facts. I suppose you haven't had time to consider that abstract of which we spoke?"

"That is really what brought me round here this evening. I haven't had time, and I shan't have just at present as I am starting tomorrow to take up work on the Southeastern Circuit. But I have brought the current volume of the diary, itself, if you would care to wade through it."

"I should, certainly. The complete document is much preferable to an abstract which might leave me in the dark as to the context. But won't you want to have your diary with you?"

"No, I shall take a short-hand note-book to use while I am away. That is, in fact, what I usually do."

"And you don't mind putting this very confidential document into the hands of a stranger?"

"You are not a stranger, Thorndyke. I don't mind you, though I don't think I would hand it to anybody else. Not that it contains anything that the whole world might not see, for I am a fairly discreet diarist. But there are references to third parties with reflections and comments that I shouldn't care to have read by Thomas, Richard and Henry. My only fear is that you will find it rather garrulous and diffuse."

"Better that than overcondensed and sketchy," said he, as he took the volume from me. He turned the leaves over, and having glanced at one or two pages exclaimed: "This is something like a diary, Mayfield! Quite in the classical manner. The common, daily jottings such as most of us make, are invaluable if they are kept up regularly, but this of yours is immeasurably superior. In a hundred years' time it will be a priceless historical work. How many volumes of it have you got?"

"About twenty: and I must say that I find the older ones quite interesting reading. You may perhaps like to look at one or two of the more recent volumes."

"I should like to see those recording the events of the last three years."

"Well, they are all at your service. I have brought you my duplicate latchkey and you will find the volumes of the diary in the glazed book-case. It is usually kept locked, but as nobody but you will have access to the chambers while I am away, I shall leave the key in the lock."

"This is really very good of you, Mayfield," he said, as I rose to take my departure. "Let me have your address, wherever you may be for the time being, and I will keep you posted in any developments that may occur. And now, good-bye and good luck!" He shook my hand cordially and I betook myself to my chambers to complete my preparations for my start on the morrow.

---

## X. — A GREEK GIFT

THE incidents of my life while I was following the Southeastern Circuit are no part of this history, and I refer to this period merely by way of marking the passage of time. Indeed, it was its separateness, its detachment from the other and more personal aspects of my life that specially commended it to me. In the cheerful surroundings of the Bar Mess I could forget the terrible experiences of the last few weeks, and even in the grimmer and more suggestive atmosphere of the courts, the close attention that the proceedings demanded kept my mind in a state of wholesome preoccupation.

Quite a considerable amount of work came my way, and though most of the briefs were small—so small, often, that I felt some compunction in taking them from the more needy juniors—yet it was all experience and what was more important just now, it was occupation that kept my mind occupied.

That was the great thing. To keep my mind busy with matters that were not my personal concern. And the intensity of my yearning for distraction was the measure of the extent to which my waking thoughts tended to be pervaded by the sinister surroundings of Harold Monkhouse's death. That dreadful event and the mystery that encompassed it had shaken me more than I had at first realized. Nor need this be a matter for surprise. Harold Monkhouse had apparently been murdered; at any rate that was the accepted view. And who was the murderer? Evade the answer as I would, the fact remained that the finger of suspicion pointed at my own intimate friends—nay, even at me. It is no wonder, then, that the mystery haunted me. Murder has an ominous sound to any ears; but to a lawyer practising in criminal courts the word has connotations to which his daily experiences impart a peculiarly, hideous vividness and realism. Once, I remember that, sitting in court, listening to the evidence in a trial for murder, as my glance strayed to the dock where the prisoner stood, watched and guarded like a captured wild beast, the thought suddenly flashed on me that it was actually possible—and to the police actually probable—that thus might yet stand Wallingford or Madeline, or even Barbara or myself.

It would have been possible for me to run home from time to time at weekends but I did not. There was nothing that called for my presence in London and it was better to stick close to my work. Still, I was not quite cut off from my friends, for Barbara wrote regularly and I had an occasional letter from Madeline. As to Thorndyke, he was too busy to write unnecessary letters and his peculiar circumstances made a secretary impossible, so that I had from him no more than one or two brief notes reporting the absence of any new developments. Nor had Barbara much to tell excepting that she had decided to let or sell the house in Hilborough Square and take up her residence in a flat. The decision did not surprise me. I should certainly have done the same in her place; and I was only faintly surprised when I learned that she proposed to live alone and that Madeline had taken a small flat near the school. The two women had always been on excellent terms, but they were not specially devoted to one another; and Barbara would now probably pursue her own special interests. Of Wallingford I learned only that, on the strength of his legacy he had taken a set of rooms in the neighbourhood of Jermyn Street and that his nerves did not seem to have benefited by the change.

Such was the position of affairs when the Autumn Assizes came to an end and I returned home. I remember the occasion very vividly, as I have good reason to do—indeed, I had better reason than I knew at the time. It was a cold, dark, foggy evening, though not densely foggy, and my taxicab was compelled to crawl at an almost funereal pace (to the exasperation of the driver) through the murky streets, though the traffic was now beginning to thin out. We approached the Temple

from the east and eventually entered by the Tudor Street Gate whence we crept tentatively across Kings Bench Walk to the end of Crown Office Row. As we passed Thorndyke's chambers I looked up and had a momentary glimpse of lighted windows glimmering through the fog; then they faded away and I looked out on the other side where the great shadowy mass of Paper Buildings loomed above us. A man was standing at the end of the narrow passage that leads to Fig Tree Court—a tallish man wearing a preposterous wide-brimmed hat and a long overcoat with its collar turned up above his ears. I glanced at him incuriously as we approached but had no opportunity to inspect him more closely, if I had wished—which I did not—for, as the cab stopped he turned abruptly and walked away up the passage. The suddenness of his retirement struck me as a little odd and, having alighted from the cab, I stood for a moment or two watching his receding figure. But he soon disappeared in the foggy darkness, and I saw him no more. By the time that I had paid my fare and carried my portmanteau to Fig Tree Court, he had probably passed out into Middle Temple Lane.

When I had let myself into my chambers, switched on the light and shut the door, I looked round my little domain with somewhat mixed feelings. It was very silent and solitary. After the jovial Bar Mess and the bright, frequented rooms of the hotels or the excellent lodgings which I had just left, these chambers struck me as just a shade desolate. But yet there were compensations. A sense of peace and quiet pervaded the place and all around were my household gods; my familiar and beloved pictures, the little friendly cabinet busts and statuettes, and, above all, the goodly fellowship of books. And at this moment my glance fell on the long range of my diaries and I noticed that one of the series was absent. Not that there was anything remarkable in that since I had given Thorndyke express permission to take them away to read. What did surprise me a little was the date of the missing volume. It was that of the year before Stella's death. As I noted this I was conscious of a faint sense of annoyance. I had, it is true, given him the free use of the diary, but only for purposes of reference. I had hardly bargained for his perusal of the whole series for his entertainment. However, it was of no consequence. The diary enshrined no secrets. If I had, in a way, emulated Pepys in respect of fullness, I had taken warning from his indiscretions; nor, in fact, was I quite so rich in the material of indiscreet records as the vivacious Samuel.

I unpacked my portmanteau—the heavier impedimenta were coming on by rail—lit the gas fire in my bedroom, boiled a kettle of water, partly for a comfortable wash and partly to fill a hot water bottle wherewith to warm the probably damp bed, and then, still feeling a little like a cat in a strange house, decided to walk along to Thorndyke's chambers and hear the news, if there were any.

The fog had grown appreciably denser when I turned out of my entry, and, crossing the little quadrangle, strode quickly along the narrow passage that leads to the Terrace and King's Bench Walk. I was approaching the end of the passage when there came suddenly into view a shadowy figure which I recognized at once as that of the man whom I had seen when I arrived. But again I had no opportunity for a close inspection, for he had already heard my footsteps and he now started to walk away rapidly in the direction of Mitre Court. For a moment I was disposed to follow him, and did, in fact, make a few quick steps towards him—which seemed to cause him to mend his pace; but it was not directly my business to deal with loiterers, and I could have done nothing even if I had overtaken him. Accordingly I changed my direction, and crossing King's Bench Walk, bore down on Thorndyke's entry.

As I approached the house I was a little disconcerted to observe that there were now no lights in his chambers, though the windows above were lighted. I ran up the stairs, and finding the oak closed, pressed the electric bell, which I could hear ringing on the floor above. Almost immediately footsteps became audible descending the stairs and were followed by the appearance of a small gentleman whom I recognized as Thorndyke's assistant, artificer or familiar spirit, Mr Polton. He recognized me at the same moment and greeted me with a smile that seemed to break out of the corners of his eyes and spread in a network of wrinkles over every part of his face; a sort of compound smile inasmuch as every wrinkle seemed to have a smile of its own.

"I hope, Mr Polton," said I, "that I haven't missed the doctor."

"No, Sir," he replied. "He is up in the laboratory. We are just about to make a little experiment."

"Well, I am in no hurry. Don't disturb him. I will wait until he is at liberty."

"Unless, sir," he suggested, "you would like to come up. Perhaps you would like to see the experiment."

I closed with the offer gladly. I had never seen Thorndyke's laboratory and had often been somewhat mystified as to what he did in it. Accordingly I followed Mr Polton up the stairs, at the top of which I found Thorndyke waiting.

"I thought it was your voice, Mayfield," said he, shaking my hand. "You are just in time to see us locate a mare's nest. Come in and lend a hand."

He led me into a large room around which I glanced curiously and not without surprise. One side was occupied by a huge copying camera, the other by a joiner's bench. A powerful back-gear lathe stood against one window, a jeweller's bench against the other, and the walls were covered with shelves and tool-racks, filled with all sorts of strange implements. From this room we passed into another which I recognized as a chemical laboratory, although most of the apparatus in it was totally unfamiliar to me.

"I had no idea," said I, "that the practice of Medical Jurisprudence involved such an outfit as this. What do you do with it all? The place is like a factory."

"It is a factory," he replied with a smile; "a place where the raw material of scientific evidence is worked up into the finished product suitable for use in courts of law."

"I don't know that that conveys much to me," said I. "But you are going to perform some sort of experiment; perhaps that will enlighten me."

"Probably it will, to some extent," he replied, "though it is only a simple affair. We have a parcel here which came by post this evening and we are going to see what is in it before we open it."

"The devil you are!" I exclaimed. "How in the name of Fortune are you going to do that?"

"We shall examine it by means of the X-rays."

"But why? Why not open it and find out what is in it in a reasonable way?"

Thorndyke chuckled softly. "We have had our little experiences, Mayfield, and we have grown wary. We don't open strange parcels nowadays until we are sure that we are not dealing with a 'Greek gift' of some sort. That is what we are going to ascertain now in respect of this."

He picked up from the bench a parcel about the size of an ordinary cigar-box and held it out for my inspection. "The overwhelming probabilities are," he continued, "that this is a perfectly innocent package. But we don't know. I am not expecting any such parcel and there are certain peculiarities about this one that attract one's attention. You notice that the entire address is in rough Roman capitals—what are commonly called 'block letters'. That is probably for the sake of distinctness; but it might possibly be done to avoid a recognizable handwriting or a possibly traceable typewriter. Then you notice that it is addressed to 'Dr Thorndyke' and conspicuously endorsed 'personal.' Now, that is really a little odd. One understands the object of marking a letter 'personal'—to guard against its being opened and read by the wrong person. But what does it matter who opens a parcel?"

"I can't imagine why it should matter," I admitted without much conviction, "but I don't see anything in the unnecessary addition that need excite suspicion. Do you?"

"Perhaps not; but you observe that the sender was apparently anxious that the parcel should be opened by a particular person."

I shrugged my shoulders. The whole proceeding and the reasons given for it struck me as verging on farce. "Do you go through these formalities with every parcel that you receive?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Only with those that are unexpected or offer no evidence as to their origin. But we are pretty careful. As I said just now, we have had our experiences. One of them was a box which, on being opened, discharged volumes of poisonous gas."

"The deuce!" I exclaimed, rather startled out of my scepticism and viewing the parcel with a new-born respect, not unmixed with apprehension. "Then this thing may actually be an infernal machine! Confound it all, Thorndyke! Supposing it should have a clockwork detonator, ticking away while we are talking. Hadn't you better get on with the X-rays?"

He chuckled at my sudden change of attitude. "It is all right, Mayfield. There is no clockwork. I tried it with the microphone as soon as it arrived. We always do that. And, of course, it is a thousand to one that it is just an innocent parcel. But we will just make sure and then I shall be at liberty for a chat with you."

He led the way to a staircase leading to the floor above where I was introduced to a large, bare room surrounded by long benches or tables occupied by various uncanny-looking apparatus. As soon as we entered, he placed the parcel on a raised stand while Polton turned a switch connected with a great coil; the immediate result of which was a peculiar, high-pitched, humming sound as if a gigantic mosquito had got into the room. At the same moment a glass globe that was supported on an arm behind the parcel became filled with green light and displayed a bright red spot in its interior.

"This is a necromantic sort of business, Thorndyke," said I, "only you and Mr Polton aren't dressed for the part. You ought to have tall pointed caps and gowns covered with cabalistic signs. What is that queer humming noise?"

"That is the interrupter," he replied. "The green bulb is the Crookes's tube and the little red-hot disc inside it is the anti-cathode. I will tell you about them presently. That framed plate that Polton has is the fluorescent screen. It intercepts the X-rays and makes them visible. You shall see, when Polton has finished his inspection."

I watched Polton—who had taken the opportunity to get the first innings—holding the screen between his face and the parcel. After a few moments' inspection he turned the parcel over on its side and once more raised the screen, grazing at it with an expression of the most intense interest. Suddenly he turned to Thorndyke with a smile of perfectly incredible wrinkliness and, without a word, handed him the screen; which he held up for a few seconds and then silently passed to me.

I had never used a fluorescent screen before and I must confess that I found the experience most uncanny. As I raised it before the parcel behind which was the glowing green bulb, the parcel became invisible but in its place appeared the shadow of a pistol the muzzle of which seemed to be inserted into a jar. There were some other, smaller shadows, of which I could make nothing, but which seemed to be floating in the air.

"Better not look too long, Mayfield," said Thorndyke. "X-rays are unwholesome things. We will take a photograph and then we can study the details at our leisure; though it is all pretty obvious."

"It isn't to me," said I. "There is a pistol and what looks like a jar. Do you take it that they are parts of an infernal machine?"

"I suppose," he replied, "we must dignify it with that name. What do you say, Polton?"

"I should call it a booby-trap, Sir," was the reply. "What you might expect from a mischievous boy of ten—rather backward for his age."

Thorndyke laughed. "Listen to the artificer," said he, "and observe how his mechanical soul is offended by an inefficient and unmechanical attempt to blow us all up. But we won't take the inefficiency too much for granted. Let us have a photograph and then we can get to work with safety."

It seemed that this part also of the procedure was already provided for in the form of a large black envelope which Polton produced from a drawer and began forthwith to adjust in contact with the parcel; in fact the appearance of preparedness was so striking that I remarked:

"This looks like part of a regular routine. It must take up a lot of your time."

"As a matter of fact," he replied, "we don't often have to do this. I don't receive many parcels and of those that are delivered, the immense majority come from known sources and are accompanied by letters of advice. It is only the strange and questionable packages that we examine with the X-rays. Of course, this one was suspect at a glance with that disguised handwriting and the special direction as to who should open it."

"Yes, I see that now. But it must be rather uncomfortable to live in constant expectation of having bombs or poison-gas handed in by the postman."

"It isn't as bad as that," said he. "The thing has happened only three or four times in the whole of my experience. The first gift of the kind was a poisoned cigar, which I fortunately detected and which served as a very useful warning. Since then I have kept my weather eyelid lifting, as the mariners express it."

"But don't you find it rather wearing to be constantly on the lookout for some murderous attack?"

"Not at all," he answered with a laugh. "It rather adds to the zest of life. Besides, you see, Mayfield, that on the rare occasions when these trifles come my way, they are so extremely helpful."

"Helpful!" I repeated. "In the Lord's name, how?"

"In a number of ways. Consider my position, Mayfield. I am not like an Italian or Russian politician who may have scores of murderous enemies. I am a lawyer and an investigator of crime. Whoever wants to get rid of me has something to fear from me; but at any given time, there will not be more than one or two of such persons. Consequently, when I receive a gift such as the present one, it conveys to me certain items of information. Thus it informs me that some one is becoming alarmed by some proceedings on my part. That is a very valuable piece of information, for it tells me that some one of my inquiries is at least proceeding along the right lines. It is virtually an admission that I have made, or am in the way of making a point. A little consideration of the cases that I have in hand will probably suggest the identity of the sender. But on this question the thing itself will in most cases yield quite useful information as well as telling us a good deal about the personality of the sender. Take the present case. You heard Polton's contemptuous observations on the crudity of the device. Evidently the person who sent this is not an engineer or mechanic of any kind. There is an obvious ignorance of mechanism; and yet there is a certain simple ingenuity. The thing is, in fact, as Polton said, on the level of a schoolboy's booby-trap. You must see that if we had in view two or more possible senders, these facts might enable us to exclude one and select another. But here is Polton with the photograph. Now we can consider the mechanism at our leisure."

As he spoke, Polton deposited on the bench a large porcelain dish or tray in which was a very odd-looking photograph; for the whole of it was jet-black excepting the pistol, the jar, the hinges, and a small, elongated spot, which all stood out in clear, white silhouette.

"Why," I exclaimed as I stooped over it, "that is a muzzle-loading pistol!"

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "and a pocket pistol, as you can tell by the absence of a trigger-guard. The trigger is probably hinged and folds forward into a recess. I daresay you know the kind of thing. They were usually rather pretty little weapons—and useful, too, for you could carry one easily in your waistcoat pocket. They had octagon barrels, which screwed off for loading, and the butts were often quite handsomely ornamented with silver mounts. They were usually sent out by the gunsmiths in little baize-lined mahogany cases with compartments for a little powder-flask and a supply of bullets."

"I wonder why he used a muzzle-loader?" said I.

"Probably because he had it. It answers the purpose as well as a modern weapon, and, as it was probably made more than a hundred years ago, it would be useless to go round the trade enquiring as to recent purchases."

"Yes, it was safer to use an old pistol than to buy a new one and leave possible tracks. But how does the thing work? I can see that the hammer is at full cock and that there is a cap on the nipple. But what fires the pistol?"

"Apparently a piece of string, which hasn't come out in the photograph except, faintly, just above that small mark—string is not dense enough to throw a shadow at the full exposure—but you see, about an inch behind the trigger, an elongated shadow. That is probably a screw-eye seen end-ways. The string is tied to the trigger, passed through the screw-eye and fastened to the lid of the box. I don't see how. There is no metal fastening, and you see that the lid is not screwed or nailed down. As to how it works; you open the lid firmly; that pulls the string tight; that pulls back the trigger and fires the pistol into the jar, which is presumably full of some explosive; the jar explodes and—up goes the donkey. There is a noble

simplicity about the whole thing. How do you propose to open it, Polton?"

"I think, Sir," replied the latter, "we had better get the paper off and have a look at the box."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "but don't take anything for granted. Make sure that the paper isn't part of the joke."

I watched Polton with intense—and far from impersonal—interest, wishing only that I could have observed him from a somewhat greater distance. But for all his contempt for the "booby-trap," he took no unnecessary risks. First, with a pair of scissors, he cut out a piece at the back and enlarged the opening so that he could peer in and inspect the top of the lid. When he had made sure that there were no pitfalls, he ran the scissors round the top and exposed the box, which he carefully lifted out of the remainder of the wrapping and laid down tenderly on the bench. It was a cigar-box of the flat type and presented nothing remarkable excepting that the lid, instead of being nailed or pinned down, was secured by a number of strips of stout adhesive paper, and bore, near the middle, a large spot of sealing-wax.

"That paper binding is quite a happy thought," remarked Thorndyke, "though it was probably put on because our friend was afraid to knock in nails. But it would be quite effective. An impatient man would cut through the front strips and then wrench the lid open. I think that blob of sealing-wax answers our question about the fastening of the string. The end of it was probably drawn through a bradawl hole in the lid and fixed with sealing wax. But it must have been an anxious business drawing it just tight enough and not too tight. I suggest, Polton, that an inch-and-a-half centre-bit hole just below and to the right of the sealing-wax would enable us to cut the string. But you had better try it with the photograph first."

Polton picked the wet photograph out of the dish and carefully laid it on the lid of the box, adjusting it so that the shadows of the hinges were opposite the actual hinges. Then with a marking-awl he pricked through the shadow of the screw-eye, and again about two inches to the right and below it.

"You are quite right, sir," said he as he removed the photograph and inspected the lid of the box. "The middle of the wax is exactly over the screw-eye. I'll just get the centre-bit."

He bustled away down the stairs and returned in less than a minute with a brace and a large centre-bit, the point of which he inserted into the second awl-hole. Then, as Thorndyke grasped the box (and I stepped back a pace or two), he turned the brace lightly and steadily, stopping now and again to clear away the chips and examine the deepening hole. A dozen turns carried the bit through the thin lid and the remaining disc of wood was driven into the interior of the box. As soon as the hole was clear, he cautiously inserted a dentist's mirror, which he had brought up in his pocket, and with its aid examined the inside of the lid.

"I can see the string, Sir," he reported; "a bit of common white twine and it looks quite slack. I could reach it easily with a small pair of scissors."

He handed the mirror to Thorndyke, who, having confirmed his observations, produced a pair of surgical scissors from his pocket. These Polton cautiously inserted into the opening, and as he closed them there was an audible snip. Then he slowly withdrew them and again inserted the mirror.

"Its all right," said he. "The string is cut clean through. I think we can open the lid now." With a sharp penknife he cut through the paper binding-strips and then, grasping the front of the lid, continued:

"Now for it. Perhaps you two gentlemen had better stand a bit farther back, in case of accidents."

I thought the suggestion an excellent one, but as Thorndyke made no move, I had not the moral courage to adopt it. Nevertheless, I watched Polton's proceedings with my heart in my mouth. Very slowly and gently did that cunning artificer raise the lid until it had opened some two inches, when he stooped and peered in. Then, with the cheerful announcement that it was "all clear," he boldly turned it right back.

Of course, the photograph had shown us, in general, what to expect, but there were certain details that had not been represented. For instance, both the pistol and the jar were securely wedged between pieces of cork—sections of wine-bottle corks, apparently—glued to the bottom of the box.

"How is it," I asked, "that those corks did not appear in the photograph?"

"I think there is a faint indication of them," Thorndyke replied; "but Polton gave a rather full exposure. If you want to show bodies of such low density as corks, you have to give a specially short exposure and cut short the development, too. But I expect Polton saw them when he was developing the picture, didn't you, Polton?"

"Yes," the latter replied; "they were quite distinct at one time, but then I developed up to get the pistol out clear."

While these explanations were being given, Polton proceeded methodically to "draw the teeth" of the infernal apparatus. First, he cut a little wedge of cork which he pushed in between the threatening hammer and the nipple and having thus fixed the former he quietly removed the percussion-cap from the latter; on which I drew a deep breath of relief. He next wrenched away one of the corks and was then able to withdraw the pistol from the jar and lift it out of the box. I took it from him and examined it curiously, not a little interested to note how completely it corresponded with Thorndyke's description. It had a blued octagon barrel, a folding trigger which fitted snugly into a recess, a richly-engraved lock-plate and an ebony butt, decorated with numbers of tiny silver studs and a little lozenge-shaped scutcheon-plate on which a monogram had been engraved in minute letters, which, however, had been so thoroughly scraped out that I was unable to make out or even to guess what the letters had been.

My investigations were cut short by Thorndyke, who, having slipped on a pair of rubber gloves, now took the pistol from me, remarking: "You haven't touched the barrel, I think, Mayfield?"

"No," I answered; "but why do you ask?"

"Because we shall go over it and the jar for fingerprints. Not that they will be much use for tracing the sender of this present, but they will be valuable corroboration if we catch him by other means; for whoever sent this certainly had a guilty conscience."

With this he delicately lifted out the jar—a small, dark-brown stoneware vessel such as is used as a container for the choicer kinds of condiments—and inverted it over a sheet of paper, upon which its contents, some two or three tablespoonfuls of black powder, descended and formed a small heap.

"Not a very formidable charge," Thorndyke remarked, looking at it with a smile.

"Formidable!" repeated Polton. "Why, it wouldn't have hurt a fly! Common black powder such as old women use to blow out the copper flues. He must be an innocent, this fellow—if it is a he," he added reflectively.

Polton's proviso suddenly recalled to my mind the man whom I had seen lurking at the corner of Fig Tree Court. It was hardly possible to avoid connecting him with the mysterious parcel, as Thorndyke agreed when I had described the incident.

"Yes," exclaimed Polton, "of course. He was waiting to hear the explosion. It is a pity you didn't mention it sooner, Sir. But he may be waiting there still. Hadn't I better run across and see?"

"And suppose he is there still," said Thorndyke. "What would you propose to do?"

"I should just pop up to the lodge and tell the porter to bring a policeman down. Why, we should have him red-handed."

Thorndyke regarded his henchman with an indulgent smile. "Your handicraft, Polton," said he, "is better than your law. You can't arrest a man without a warrant unless he is doing something unlawful. This man was simply standing at the corner of Fig Tree Court."

"But," protested Polton, "isn't it unlawful to send infernal machines by parcel post?"

"Undoubtedly it is," Thorndyke admitted, "but we haven't a particle of evidence that this man has any connection with the parcel or with us. He may have been waiting there to meet a friend."

"He may, of course," said I, "but seeing that he ran off like a lamplighter on both the occasions when I appeared on the scene, I should suspect that he was there for no good. And I strongly suspect him of having some connection with this precious parcel."

"So do I," said Thorndyke. "As a matter of fact, I have once or twice, lately, met a man answering to your description, loitering about King's Bench Walk in the evening. But I think it much better not to appear to notice him. Let him think himself unobserved and presently he will do something definite that will enable us to take action. And remember that the more thoroughly he commits himself the more valuable his conduct will be as indirect evidence on certain other matters."

I was amused at the way in which Thorndyke sank all considerations of personal safety in the single purpose of pursuing his investigations to a successful issue. He was the typical enthusiast. The possibility that this unknown person might shoot at him from some ambush, he would, I suspected, have welcomed as offering the chance to seize the aggressor and compel him to disclose his motives. Also, I had a shrewd suspicion that he knew or guessed who the man was and was anxious to avoid alarming him.

"Well," he said when he had replaced the pistol and the empty jar in the box and closed the latter, "I think we have finished for the present. The further examination of these interesting trifles can be postponed until tomorrow. Shall we go downstairs and talk over the news?"

"It is getting rather late," said I, "but there is time for a little chat, though, as to news, they will have to come from you, for I have nothing to tell."

We went down to the sitting room where, when he had locked up the box, we took each an armchair and filled our pipes.

"So you have no news of any kind?" said he.

"No; excepting that the Hilborough Square household has been broken up and the inmates scattered into various flats."

"Then the house is now empty?" said he, with an appearance of some interest.

"Yes, and likely to remain so with this gruesome story attached to it. I suppose I shall have to make a survey of the premises with a view to having them put in repair."

"When you do," said he, "I should like to go with you and look over the house."

"But it is all dismantled. Everything has been cleared out. You will find nothing there but empty rooms and a litter of discarded rubbish."

"Never mind," said he. "I have occasionally picked up some quite useful information from empty rooms and discarded rubbish. Do you know if the police have examined the house?"



"I believe not. At any rate, nothing has been said to me to that effect."

"So much the better," said he. "Can we fix a time for our visit?"

"It can't be tomorrow," said I, "because I must see Barbara and get the keys if she has them. Would the day after tomorrow do, after lunch?"

"Perfectly," he replied. "Come and lunch with me; and, by the way, Mayfield, it would be best not to mention to anyone that I am coming with you, and I wouldn't say anything about this parcel."

I looked at him with sudden suspicion, recalling Wallingford's observations on the subject of mare's nests. "But, my dear Thorndyke!" I exclaimed, "you don't surely associate that parcel with any of the inmates of that house!"

"I don't associate it with any particular person," he replied. "I know only what you know; that it was sent by someone to whom my existence is, for some reason, undesirable, and whose personality is to some extent indicated by the peculiarities of the thing itself."

"What peculiarities do you mean?"

"Well," he replied, "there is the nature and purpose of the thing. It is an appliance for killing a human being. That purpose implies either a very strong motive or a very light estimate of the value of human life. Then, as we have said, the sender is fairly ingenious but yet quite unmechanical and apparently unprovided with the common tools which ordinary men possess and are more or less able to use. You notice that the combination of ingenuity with non-possession of tools is a rather unusual one."

"How do you infer that the sender possessed no tools?"

"From the fact that none were used, and that such materials were employed as required no tools, though these were not the most suitable materials. For instance, common twine was used to pull the trigger, though it is a bad material by reason of its tendency to stretch. But it can be cut with a knife or a pair of scissors, whereas wire, which was the really suitable material, requires cutting pliers to divide it. Again, there were the corks. They were really not very safe, for their weakness and their resiliency might have led to disaster in the event of a specially heavy jerk in transit. A man who possessed no more than a common keyhole saw, or a hand-saw and a chisel or two, would have roughly shaped up one or two blocks of wood to fit the pistol and jar, which would have made the thing perfectly secure. If he had possessed a glue-pot, he would not have used seccotine. But every one has waste corks, and they can be trimmed to shape with an ordinary dinner-knife; and seccotine can be bought at any stationer's. But, to return to what we were saying. I had no special precautions in my mind. I suggested that we should keep our own counsel merely on the general principle that it is always best to keep one's own counsel. One may make a confidence to an entirely suitable person; but who can say that that person may not, in his or her turn, make a confidence? If we keep our knowledge strictly to ourselves we know exactly how we stand, and that if there has been any leakage, it had been from some other source. But I need not platitudinize to an experienced and learned counsel."

I grinned appreciatively at the neat finish; for "experienced counsel" as I certainly was not, I was at least able to realize, with secret approval, how adroitly Thorndyke had eluded my leading question.

And at that I left it, enquiring in my turn: "I suppose nothing of interest has transpired since I have been away?"

"Very little. There is one item of news, but that can hardly be said to have 'transpired' unless you can associate the process of transpiration with a suction-pump. Superintendent Miller took my advice and applied the suctorial method to Wallingford with results of which he possibly exaggerates the importance. He tells me—this is, of course, in the strictest confidence—that under pressure, Wallingford made a clean breast of the cocaine and morphine business. He admitted that he had obtained those drugs fraudulently by forging an order in Dimsdale's name, written on Dimsdale's headed note-paper, to the wholesale druggists to deliver to bearer the drugs mentioned. He had possessed himself of the note-paper at the time when he was working at the account books in Dimsdale's surgery."

"But how was it that Dimsdale did not notice what had happened when the accounts were sent in?"

"No accounts were ever sent in. The druggists whom Wallingford patronized were not those with whom Dimsdale had an account. The order stated, in every case, that bearer would pay cash."

"Quite an ingenious little plan of Wallingford's," I remarked. "It is more than I should have given him credit for. And you say that Miller attaches undue importance to this discovery. I am not surprised at that. But why do you think he exaggerates its importance?"

Thorndyke regarded me with a quizzical smile. "Because," he answered, "Miller's previous experiences have been repeated. There has been another discovery. It has transpired that Miss Norris also had dealings with a wholesale druggist. But in her case there was no fraud or irregularity. The druggist with whom she dealt was the one who used to supply her father with materia medica and to whom she was well known."

"Then, in that case, I suppose she had an account with him?"

"No, she did not. She also paid cash. Her purchases were only occasional and on quite a small scale; too small to justify an account."

"Has she made any statement as to what she wanted the drugs for?"

"She denies that she ever purchased drugs, in the usual sense, that is substances having medicinal properties. Her purchases were, according to her statement, confined to such pharmaceutical and chemical materials as were required for purposes of instruction in her classes. Which is perfectly plausible, for, as you know, academic cookery is a rather different thing from the cookery of the kitchen."

"Yes, I know that she had some materials in her cupboard that I shouldn't have associated with cookery and I should accept her statement without hesitation. In fact, the discovery seems to me to be of no significance at all."

"Probably you are right," said he; "but the point is that, in a legal sense, it confuses the issues hopelessly. In her case, as in Wallingford's, materials have been purchased from a druggist, and, as no record of those purchases has been kept, it is impossible to say what those materials were. Probably they were harmless, but it cannot be proved that they were. The effect is that the evidential value of Wallingford's admission is discounted by the fact that there was another person who is known to have purchased materials some of which may have been poisons."

"Yes," said I, "that is obvious enough. But doesn't it strike you, Thorndyke, that all this is just a lot of futile logic-chopping such as you might hear at a debating club? I can't take it seriously. You don't imagine that either of these two persons murdered Harold Monkhouse, do you? I certainly don't; and I can't believe Miller does."

"It doesn't matter very much what he believes, or, for that matter, what any of us believe. 'He discovers who proves.' Up to the present, none of us has proved anything, and my impression is that Miller is becoming a little discouraged. He is a genius in following up clues. But where there are no clues to follow up, the best of detectives is rather stranded."

"By the way," said I, "did you pick up anything from my diary that threw any light on the mystery?"

"Very little," he replied; "in fact nothing that gets us any farther. I was able to confirm our belief that Monkhouse's attacks of severe illness coincided with his wife's absence from home. But that doesn't help us much. It merely indicates, as we had already observed, that the poisoner was so placed that his or her activities could not be carried on when the wife was at home. But I must compliment you on your diary, Mayfield. It is quite a fascinating work; so much so that I have been tempted to encroach a little on your kindness. The narrative of the last three years was so interesting that it lured me on to the antecedents that led up to them. It reads like a novel."

"How much of it have you read?" I asked, my faint resentment completely extinguished by his appreciation.

"Six volumes," he replied, "including the one that I have just borrowed. I began by reading the last three years for the purposes of our inquiry, and then I ventured to go back another three years for the interest of tracing the more remote causation of recent events. I hope I have not presumed too much on the liberty that you were kind enough to give me."

"Not at all," I replied, heartily. "I am only surprised that a man as much occupied as you are should have been willing to waste your time on the reading of what is, after all, but a trivial and diffuse autobiography."

"I have not wasted my time, Mayfield," said he. "If it is true that 'the proper study of mankind is man,' how much more true is it of that variety of mankind that wears the wig and gown and pleads in Court. It seems to me that to lawyers like ourselves whose professional lives are largely occupied with the study of motives of human actions and with the actions themselves viewed in the light of their antecedents and their consequences, nothing can be more instructive than a full, consecutive diary in which, over a period of years, events may be watched growing out of those that went before and in their turn developing their consequences and elucidating the motives of the actors. Such a diary is a synopsis of human life."

I laughed as I rose to depart. "It seems," said I, "that I wrought better than I knew; in fact I am disposed, like Pendennis, to regard myself with respectful astonishment. But perhaps I had better not be too puffed up. It may be that I am, after all, no more than a sort of literary Strasburg goose; an unconscious provider of the food of the gods."

Thorndyke laughed in his turn and escorted me down the stairs to the entry where we stood for a few moments looking out into the fog.

"It seems thicker than ever," said he. "However, you can't miss your way. But keep a look-out as you go, in case our friend is still waiting at the corner. Good night!"

I returned his farewell and plunged into the fog, steering for the left corner of the library, and was so fortunate as to strike the wall within just a few yards of it. From thence I felt my way without difficulty to the Terrace where I halted for a moment to look about and listen; and as there was no sign, visible or audible of any loiterer at the corner, I groped my way into the passage and so home to my chambers without meeting a single human creature.

---

## XI. — THE RIVALS

THE warmth with which Barbara greeted me when I made my first appearance at her flat struck me as rather pathetic, and for the first time I seemed to understand what it was that had induced her to marry Harold Monkhouse. She was not a solitary woman by nature and she had never been used to a solitary existence. When Stella's death had broken up her home and left her with no intimate friend in the world but me, I had been too much taken up with my own bereavement to give much consideration to her. But now, as she stood before me in her pretty sitting room, holding both my hands and smiling her welcome, it was suddenly borne in on me that her state was rather forlorn in spite of her really comfortable means.

Indeed, my heart prompted me to some demonstrations of affection and I was restrained only by the caution of a confirmed bachelor. For Barbara was now a widow; and even while my sympathy with my almost life long friend tempted me to pet her a little, some faint echoes of Mr. Tony Weller's counsels bade me beware.

"You are quite an anchoress here, Barbara," I said, "though you have a mighty comfortable cell. I see you have a new maid, too. I should have thought you would have brought Mabel with you."

"She wouldn't come—naturally. She said she preferred to go and live among strangers and forget what had happened at Hilborough Square. Poor Mabel! She was very brave and good, but it was a terrible experience for her."

"Do you know what has become of her?"

"No. She has disappeared completely. Of course, she has never applied for a reference."

"Why 'of course'?"

"My dear Rupert," she replied a little bitterly, "do you suppose that she would want to advertise her connection with Mrs Harold Monkhouse?"

"No, I suppose she would be likely to exaggerate the publicity of the affair, as I think you do. And how is Madeline? I rather expected that you and she would have shared a flat. Why didn't you?"

Barbara was disposed to be evasive. "I don't know," she replied, "that the plan commended itself to either of us. We have our separate interests, you know. At any rate, she never made any such suggestion and neither did I."

"Do you ever see Wallingford now?" I asked.

"Indeed, I do," she replied; "in fact I have had to hint to him that he mustn't call too frequently. One must consider appearances, and, until I spoke, he was here nearly every day. But I hated doing it."

"Still, Barbara, it was very necessary. It would be so in the case of any young woman, but in your case—er—especially so."

I broke off awkwardly, not liking to say exactly what was in my mind. For, of course, in the atmosphere of suspicion which hung about him, his frequent visits would be a source of real danger. No motive for the murder had yet been suggested. It would be a disaster if his folly were to create the false appearance of one. But, as I have said, I shrank from pointing this out, though I think she understood what was in my mind, for she discreetly ignored the abrupt finish of my sentence and continued: "Poor Tony! He is so very self-centred and he seems so dependent on me. And really, Rupert, I am a good deal concerned about him."

"Why?" I asked, rather unsympathetically.

"He is getting so queer. He was always rather odd, as you know, but this trouble seems to be quite upsetting his balance. I am afraid he is getting delusions—and yet, in a way, I hope that he is."

"What do you mean? What sort of delusions?"

"He imagines that he is being followed and watched. It is a perfect obsession, especially since that superintendent man called on him and cross-questioned him. But I don't think I told you about that."

"No, you did not," said I, quite truthfully, but with an uncomfortable feeling that I was indirectly telling a lie.

"Well, it seems that this man, Miller, called at his rooms—so you see he knew where Tony was living—and, according to Tony's account, extracted by all sorts of dreadful threats, a full confession of the means by which he obtained that cocaine."

"And how did he obtain it?"

"Oh, he just bought it at a wholesale druggist's. Rather casual of the druggist to have supplied him, I think, but still, he needn't have made such a secret of it. However, since then he has been possessed by this obsession. He imagines that he is constantly under observation. He thinks that some man hangs about near his rooms and watches his comings and goings and follows him about whenever he goes abroad. I suppose there can't be anything in it?"

"Of course not. The police have something better to do than spend their time shadowing harmless idiots. Why on earth should they shadow him? If they have any suspicions of him, those suspicions relate to the past, not to the present."

"But I don't think Tony connects these watchers with the police. I fancy he suspects them of being agents of Dr Thorndyke. You remember that he was suspicious and uneasy about Dr Thorndyke from the first; and I know that he suspects him of having set the superintendent on him about the cocaine."

"The deuce he does!" I exclaimed, a little startled. "Have you any idea what makes him suspect Thorndyke of that?"

"He says that the superintendent accepted his statement at the time when the cocaine was found, or at least, did not seem disposed to press him on the question as to where he obtained it, and that this inquisition occurred only after you had put the case in Dr Thorndyke's hands."

I reflected on this statement with some surprise. Of course, Wallingford was quite right, as I knew from first-hand knowledge. But how had he arrived at this belief? Was it a mere guess, based on his evident prejudice against Thorndyke? Or had he something to go on? And was it possible that his other suspicions might be correct? Could it be that Thorndyke was really keeping him under observation? I could imagine no object for such a proceeding. But Thorndyke's methods were

so unlike those of the police or of anyone else that it was idle to speculate on what he might do; and his emphatic advice to Miller showed that he regarded Wallingford at least with some interest.

"Well, Barbara," I said, mentally postponing the problem for future consideration, "let us forget Wallingford and everybody else. What are we going to do this afternoon? Is there a matinee that we could go to, or shall we go and hear some music?"

"No, Rupert," she replied. "I don't want any theatres or music. I can have those when you are not here. Let us go and walk about Kensington Gardens and gossip as we used to in the old days. But we have a little business to discuss first. Let us get that finished and then we can put it away and be free. You were going to advise me about the house in Hilborough Square. My own feeling is that I should like to sell it and have done with it once for all."

"I shouldn't do that, Barbara," said I. "It is a valuable property, but just at present its value is depreciated. It would be difficult to dispose of at anything like a reasonable price until recent events have been forgotten. The better plan would be to let it at a low rent for a year or two."

"But would anybody take it?"

"Undoubtedly, if the rent were low enough. Leave it to Brodribb and me to manage. You needn't come into the matter at all beyond signing the lease. Is the house in fairly good repair?"

"Most of it is, but there are one or two rooms that will need redecorating, particularly poor Harold's. That had to be left when the other rooms were done because he refused to be disturbed. It is in a very dilapidated state. The paint is dreadfully shabby and the paper is positively dropping off the walls in places. I daresay you remember its condition."

"I do, very well, seeing that I helped Madeline to paste some of the loose pieces back in their places. But we needn't go into details now. I will go and look over the house and see what is absolutely necessary to make the place presentable. Who has the keys?"

"I have the latch-keys. The other keys are inside the house."

"And I suppose you don't wish to inspect the place yourself?"

"No. I do not. I wish never to set eyes upon that house again." She unlocked a little bureau, and taking a bunch of latch-keys from one of the drawers handed it to me. Then she went away to put on her outdoor clothes.

Left alone in the room, I sauntered round and inspected Barbara's new abode, noting how, already, it seemed to reflect in some indefinable way the personality of the tenant. It is this sympathetic quality in human dwelling-places which gives its special charm and interest to a room in which some person of character has lived and worked, and which, conversely, imparts such deadly dullness to the "best room" in which no one is suffered to distribute the friendly, humanizing litter, and which is jealously preserved, with all its lifeless ornamentation—its unenjoyed pictures and its unread books—intact and undefiled by any traces of human occupation. The furniture of this room was mostly familiar to me, for it was that of the old boudoir. There was the little piano, the two cosy armchairs, the open bookshelves with their array of well-used books, the water-colours on the walls, and above the chimney-piece, the little portrait of Stella with the thin plait of golden hair bordering the frame.

I halted before it and gazed at the beloved face which seemed to look out at me with such friendly recognition, and let my thoughts drift back into the pleasant old times and stray into those that might have been if death had mercifully passed by this sweet maid and left me the one companion that my heart yearned for. Now that time had softened my passionate grief into a tender regret, I could think other with a sort of quiet detachment that was not without its bitter-sweet pleasure. I could let myself speculate on what my life might have been if she had lived, and what part she would have played in it; questions that, strangely enough, had never arisen while she was alive.

I was so immersed in my reverie that I did not hear Barbara come into the room, and the first intimation that I had of her presence was when I felt her hand slip quietly into mine. I turned to look at her and met her eyes, brimming with tears, fixed on me with an expression of such unutterable sadness that, in a moment, my heart leaped out to her, borne on a wave of sympathy and pity which swept away all my caution and reserve. Forgetful of everything but her loneliness and the grief which we shared, I drew her to me and kissed her. It seemed the natural thing to do and I felt that she understood, though she flushed warmly and the tears started from her eyes so that she must needs wipe them away. Then she looked at me with the faintest, most pathetic little smile and without a word, we turned together and walked out of the room.

Barbara was, as I have said, a rather inscrutable and extremely self-contained woman, but she could be, on occasions, a very delightful companion. And so I found her today. At first a little pensive and silent, she presently warmed up into a quite unwonted gaiety and chatted so pleasantly and made so evident her pleasure at having me back that I yearned no more for the Bar Mess but was able to forget the horrors and anxieties of the past and give myself up to the very agreeable present.

I have seldom spent a more enjoyable afternoon. Late autumn as it was, the day was mild and sunny, the sky of that wonderful tender, misty blue that is the peculiar glory of London. And the gardens, too, though they were beginning to take on their winter garb, had not yet quite lost their autumnal charm. Still, on the noble elms, thin as their raiment was growing, the golden and russet foliage lingered, and the leaves that they had already shed remained to clothe the earth with a many-coloured carpet.

We had crossed the gardens by some of the wider paths and had turned into one of the pleasant by-paths when Barbara, spying a seat set back between a couple of elms, suggested that we should rest for a few minutes before recrossing the gardens to go forth in search of tea. Accordingly we sat down, sheltered on either side by the great boles of the elms and warmed by the rays of the late afternoon sun; but we had been seated hardly a minute when the peace and forgetfulness that had made our ramble so delightful were dissipated in a moment by an apparition on the wide path that we had just left.

I was the first to observe it. Glancing back through the interval between the elm on my left and another at a little distance, I noticed a man coming toward us. My attention was first drawn to him by his rather singular behaviour. He seemed to be dividing his attention between something that was ahead of him and something behind. But I had taken no special note of him until I saw him step, with a rather absurd air of secrecy and caution, behind a tree-trunk and peer round it along the way that he had come. After keeping a look-out in this fashion for nearly a minute, apparently without result, he backed away from the tree and came forward at a quick pace, peering eagerly ahead and on both sides and pausing now and again to cast a quick look back over his shoulder. I drew Barbara's attention to him, remarking:

"There is a gentleman who seems to be afflicted with Wallingford's disease. He is trying to look all round the compass at once."

Barbara looked at the man, watching his movements for a time with a faint smile. But suddenly the smile faded and she exclaimed:

"Why, I believe it is Tony! Yes, I am sure it is."

And Tony it was. I recognized him almost as soon as she spoke. He came on now at a quick pace and seemed in a hurry either to escape from what he supposed to be behind him or to overtake whatever was in front. He had apparently not seen us, for though we must have been visible to him—or we could not have seen him—we were rendered inconspicuous by the two trees between which we sat. Presently he disappeared as the nearer elm-trunk hid him from our view, and I waited with half-amused annoyance for him to reappear.

"What a nuisance he is!" said Barbara. "Disturbing our peaceful tete-a-tete. But he won't freeze on to us. He would rather forego my much desired society than put up with yours." She laughed softly and added in a thoughtful tone: "I wonder what he is doing here."

I had been wondering that, myself. Kensington Gardens were quite near to Barbara's flat, but they were a long way from Jermyn Street. It was certainly odd that he should be here and on this day of all days. But at this point my reflections were interrupted by the appearance of their subject from behind the big elm-trunk.

He came on us suddenly and was quite close before he saw us. When he did see us, however, he stopped short within a few paces of us, regarding us with a wild stare. It was the first time that I had seen him since the funeral; and certainly his appearance had not improved in the interval. There was something neglected and dishevelled in his aspect that was distinctly suggestive of drink or drugs. But what principally struck me was the expression of furious hate with which he glared at me. There was no mistaking it. Whatever might be the cause, there could be no doubt that he regarded me with almost murderous animosity. He remained in this posture only for a few seconds. Then, as Barbara had begun to utter a few words of greeting, he raised his hat and strode away without a word.

Barbara looked at his retreating figure with a vexed smile.

"Silly fellow!" she exclaimed. "He is angry that I have come out to spend a few hours with my oldest friend, and shows it like a bad-mannered child. I wish he would behave more like an ordinary person."

"You can hardly expect him to behave like what he is not," I said. "Besides, a very ordinary man may feel jealous at seeing another man admitted to terms of intimacy, which are denied to him, with the woman to whom he is specially attached. For I suppose, Barbara, we may take it that that is the position?"

"I suppose so," she admitted. "He is certainly very devoted to me, and I am afraid he is rather jealous of you."

As she spoke, I looked at her and could not but feel a faint sympathy with Wallingford. She was really a very handsome woman; and today she was not only looking her best; she seemed, in some mysterious way to have grown younger, more girlish. The rather sombre gravity of the last few years seemed to be quite dissipated since we had left the flat, and much of the charm of her youth had come back to her.

"He looked more than rather jealous," said I. "Venomous hatred was what I read in his face. Do you think he has anything against me other than my position as his rival in your affections?"

"Yes, I do. He is mortally afraid of you. He believes that you suspect him of having at least had a hand in poor Harold's death and that you have set Dr Thorndyke to track him down and bring the crime home to him. And his terror of Dr Thorndyke is positively an insane obsession."

I was by no means so sure of this, but I said nothing, and she continued: "I suppose you don't know whether Dr Thorndyke does really look on him with any suspicion? To me the idea is preposterous. Indeed, I find it impossible to believe that there was any crime at all. I am convinced that poor Harold was the victim of some strange accident."

"I quite agree with you, Barbara. That is exactly my own view. But I don't think it is Thorndyke's. As to whom he suspects—if he suspects anybody—I have not the faintest idea. He is a most extraordinarily close and secretive man. No one ever

knows what is in his mind until the very moment when he strikes. And he never does strike until he has his case so complete that he can take it into court with the certainty of getting a conviction, or an acquittal, as the case may be."

"But I suppose there are mysteries that elude even his skill?"

"No doubt there are; and I am not sure that our mystery is not one of them. Even Thorndyke can't create evidence, and as he pointed out to me, the evidence in our case lies in the past and is mostly irrecoverable."

"I hope it is not entirely irrecoverable," said she; "for until some reasonable solution of the mystery is reached, an atmosphere of suspicion will continue to hang about all the inmates of that house. So let us wish Dr Thorndyke his usual success; and when he has proved that no one was guilty—which I am convinced is the fact—perhaps poor Tony will forgive him."

With this, we dismissed the subject, and, getting up from the seat, made our way out of the gardens just as the sun was setting behind the trees, and went in search of a suitable tea-shop. And there we lingered gossiping until the evening was well advanced and it was time for me to see Barbara home to her flat and betake myself to Fig Tree Court and make some pretence of doing an evening's work.

---

## XII. — THORNDYKE CHALLENGES THE EVIDENCE

MY relations with Thorndyke were rather peculiar and a little inconsistent. I had commissioned him, somewhat against his inclination, to investigate the circumstances connected with the dead of Harold Monkhouse. I was, in fact, his employer. And yet, in a certain subtle sense, I was his antagonist. For I held certain beliefs which I, half-unconsciously, looked to him to confirm. But apparently he did not share those beliefs. As his employer, it was clearly my duty to communicate to him any information which he might think helpful or significant, even if I considered it irrelevant. He had, in fact, explicitly pointed this out to me; and he had specially warned me to refrain from sifting or selecting facts which might become known to me according to my view of their possible bearing on the case.

But yet this was precisely what I felt myself constantly tempted to do; and as we sat at lunch in his chambers on the day after my visit to Barbara, I found myself consciously suppressing certain facts which had then come to my knowledge. And it was not that those facts appeared to me insignificant. On the contrary, I found them rather surprising. Only I had the feeling that they would probably convey to Thorndyke a significance that would be erroneous and misleading.

There was, for instance, the appearance of Wallingford in Kensington Gardens. Could it have been sheer chance? If so, it was a most remarkable coincidence; and one naturally tends to look askance at remarkable coincidences. In fact, I did not believe it to be a coincidence at all. I felt little doubt that Wallingford had been lurking about the neighbourhood of Barbara's flat and had followed us, losing sight of us temporarily, when we turned into the by-path. But, knowing Wallingford as I did, I attached no importance to the incident. It was merely a freak of an unstable, emotional man impelled by jealousy to make a fool of himself. Again, there was Wallingford's terror of Thorndyke and his ridiculous delusions on the subject of the "shadowings." How easy it would be for a person unacquainted with Wallingford's personality to read into them a totally misleading significance! Those were the thoughts that drifted half-consciously through my mind as I sat opposite my friend at the table. So, not without some twinges of conscience, I held my peace.

But I had not allowed for Thorndyke's uncanny capacity for inferring what was passing in another person's mind. Very soon it became evident to me that he was fully alive to the possibility of some reservations on my part; and when one or two discreet questions had elicited some fact which I ought to have volunteered, he proceeded to something like definite cross-examination.

"So the household has broken up and the inmates scattered?" he began, when I had told him that I had obtained possession of the keys. "And Mabel Withers seems to have vanished, unless the police have kept her in view. Did you hear anything about Miss Norris?"

"Not very much. Barbara and she have exchanged visits once or twice, but they don't seem to see much of each other."

"And what about Wallingford? Does he seem to have been much disturbed by Miller's descent on him?"

I had to admit that he was in a state bordering on panic.

"And what did Mrs Monkhouse think of the forged orders on Dimsdale's headed paper?"

"He hadn't disclosed that. She thinks that he bought the cocaine at a druggist's in the ordinary way, and I didn't think it necessary to undeceive her."

"No. The least said the soonest mended. Did you gather that she sees much of Wallingford?"

"Yes, rather too much. He was haunting her flat almost daily until she gave him a hint not to make his visits too noticeable."

"Why do you suppose he was haunting her flat? So far as you can judge, Mayfield—that is in the strictest confidence, you understand—does there seem to be anything between them beyond ordinary friendliness?"

"Not on her side, certainly, but on his—yes, undoubtedly. His devotion to her amounts almost to infatuation, and has for a long time past. Of course, she realizes his condition, and though he is rather a nuisance to her, she takes a very kindly and

indulgent view of his vagaries.”

“Naturally, as any well-disposed woman would. I suppose you didn’t see anything of him yesterday?”

Of course I had to relate the meeting in Kensington Gardens, and I could see by the way Thorndyke looked at me that he was wondering why I had not mentioned the matter before.

“It almost looks,” said he, “as if he had followed you there. Was there anything in his manner of approach that seemed to support that idea?”

“I think there was, for I saw him at some distance,” and here I felt bound to describe Wallingford’s peculiar tactics.

“But,” said Thorndyke, “why was he looking about behind him? He must have known that you were in front.”

“It seems,” I explained, feebly, “that he has some ridiculous idea that he is being watched and followed.”

“Ha!” said Thorndyke. “Now I wonder who he supposes is watching and following him.”

“I fancy he suspects you,” I replied. And so the murder was out, with the additional fact that I had not been very ready with my information.

Thorndyke, however, made no comment on my reticence beyond a steady and significant look at me.

“So,” said he, “he suspects me of suspecting him. Well, he is giving us every chance. But I think, Mayfield, you would do well to put Mrs Monkhouse on her guard. If Wallingford makes a public parade of his feelings towards her, he may put dangerous ideas into the head of Mr Superintendent Miller. You must realize that Miller is looking for a motive for the assumed murder. And if it comes to his knowledge that Harold Monkhouse’s secretary was in love with Harold Monkhouse’s wife, he will think that he has found a motive that is good enough.”

“Yes, that had occurred to me; and in fact, I did give her a hint to that effect, but it was hardly necessary. She had seen it for herself.”

As we now seemed to have exhausted this topic, I ventured to make a few enquiries about the rather farcical infernal machine.

“Did your further examination of it,” I asked, “yield any new information?”

“Very little,” Thorndyke replied, “but that little was rather curious. There were no finger-prints at all. I examined both the pistol and the jar most thoroughly, but there was not a trace of a finger-mark, to say nothing of a print. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the person who sent the machine wore gloves while he was putting it together.”

“But isn’t that a rather natural precaution in these days?” I asked.

“A perfectly natural precaution, in itself,” he replied, “but not quite consistent with some other features. For instance, the wadding with which the pistol-barrel was plugged consisted of a little ball of knitting-wool of a rather characteristic green. I will show it to you, and you will see that it would be quite easy to match and therefore possible to trace. But you see that there are thus shown two contrary states of mind. The gloves suggest that the sender entertained the possibility that the machine might fail to explode, whereas the wool seems to indicate that no such possibility was considered.”

He rose from the table—lunch being now finished—and brought from a locked cabinet a little ball of wool of a rather peculiar greenish blue. I took it to the window and examined it carefully, impressed by the curious inconsistency which he had pointed out.

“Yes,” I agreed, “there could be no difficulty in matching this. But as to tracing it, that is a different matter. There must have been thousands of skeins of this sold to, at least, hundreds of different persons.”

“Very true,” said he. “But I was thinking of it rather as a corroborating item in a train of circumstantial evidence.”

He put the “corroborating item” back in the cabinet and as, at this moment a taxi was heard to draw up at our entry, he picked up a large attache case and preceded me down the stairs.

During the comparatively short journey I made a few not very successful efforts to discover what was Thorndyke’s real purpose in making this visit of inspection to the dismantled house. But his reticence and mine were not quite similar. He answered all my questions freely. He gave me a wealth of instances illustrating the valuable evidence obtained by the inspection of empty houses. But none of them seemed to throw any light on his present proceedings. And when I pointed this out, he smilingly replied that I was in precisely the same position as himself.

“We are not looking for corroborative evidence,” said he. “That belongs to a later stage of the inquiry. We are looking for some suggestive fact which may give us a hint where to begin. Naturally we cannot form any guess as to what kind of fact that might be.”

It was not a very illuminating answer, but I had to accept it, although I had a strong suspicion that Thorndyke’s purpose was not quite so vague as he represented it to be, and determined unobtrusively to keep an eye on his proceedings.

“Can I give you any assistance?” I enquired, craftily, when I had let him into the hall and shut the outer door.

“Yes,” he replied, “there is one thing that you can do for me which will be very helpful. I have brought a packet of cards with me”—here he produced from his pocket a packet of stationer’s postcards. “If you will write on each of them the

description and particulars of one room with the name of the occupant in the case of bedrooms, and lay the card on the mantelpiece of the room which it describes, I shall be able to reconstitute the house as it was when it was inhabited. Then we can each go about our respective businesses without hindering one another."

I took the cards—and the fairly broad hint—and together we made a preliminary tour of the house, which, now that the furniture, carpets and pictures were gone, looked very desolate and forlorn; and as it had not been cleaned since the removal, it had a depressingly dirty and squalid appearance. Moreover, in each room, a collection of rubbish and discarded odds and ends had been roughly swept up on the hearth, converting each fireplace into a sort of temporary dust-bin.

After a glance around the rooms on the ground floor, I made my way up to the room in which Harold Monkhouse had died, which was my principal concern as well as Thorndyke's.

"Well, Mayfield," the latter remarked, running a disparaging eye round the faded, discoloured walls and the blackened ceiling, "you will have to do something here. It is a shocking spectacle. Would you mind roughly sketching out the position of the furniture? I see that the bedstead stood by this wall with the head, I presume, towards the window, and the bedside table about here, I suppose, at his right hand. By the way, what was there on that table? Did he keep a supply of food of any kind for use at night?"

"I think they usually put a little tin of sandwiches on the table when the night preparations were made."

"You say 'they'. Who put the box there?"

"I can't say whose duty it was in particular. I imagine Barbara would see to it when she was at home. In her absence it would be done by Madeline or Mabel."

"Not Wallingford?"

"No. I don't think Wallingford ever troubled himself about any of the domestic arrangements excepting those that concerned Barbara."

"Do you know who made the sandwiches?"

"I think Madeline did, as a rule. I know she did sometimes."

"And as to drink? I suppose he had a water-bottle, at any rate."

"Yes, that was always there, and a little decanter of whiskey. But he hardly ever touched that. Very often a small flagon of lemonade was put on the table with the sandwiches."

"And who made the lemonade?"

"Madeline. I know that, because it was a very special brand which no one else could make."

"And supposing the sandwiches and the lemonade were not consumed, do you happen to know what became of the remainder?"

"I have no idea. Possibly the servants consumed them, but more probably they were thrown away. Well-fed servants are not partial to remainders from a sick-room."

"You never heard of any attacks of illness among any of the servants?"

"Not to my knowledge. But I shouldn't be very likely to, you know."

"No. You notice, Mayfield, that you have mentioned one or two rather material facts that were not disclosed at the inquest?"

"Yes. I was observing that. And it is just as well that they were not disclosed. There were enough misleading facts without them."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently. "You seem to have made up your mind pretty definitely, on the negative side, at least," he remarked; and then, looking round once more at the walls with their faded, loosened paper, he continued: "I take it that Mr Monkhouse was not a fresh-air enthusiast."

"He was not," I replied. "He didn't much care for open windows, especially at night. But how did you arrive at that fact?"

"I was looking at the wallpaper. This is not a damp house, but yet the paper on the walls of this room is loosening and peeling off in all directions. And if you notice the distribution of this tendency you get the impression that the moisture which loosened the paper proceeded from the neighbourhood of the bed. The wall which is most affected is the one against which the bed stood; and the part of that wall that has suffered most is that which was nearest to the occupant of the bed, and especially to his head. That large piece, hanging down, is just where the main stream of his breath would have impinged."

"Yes, I see the connection now you mention it; and yet I am surprised that his breath alone should have made the air of the room so damp. All through the winter season, when the window would be shut most closely, the gas was burning; and at night, when the gas was out, he commonly had his candle-lamp alight. I should have thought that the gas and the candle together would have kept the air fairly dry."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is a common delusion. As a matter of fact they would have quite the opposite effect. You have



only to hold an inverted tumbler over a burning candle to realize, from the moisture which immediately condenses on the inside of the tumbler, that the candle, as it burns, gives off quite a considerable volume of steam. But of course, the bulk of the moisture which has caused the paper to peel in this room came from the man's own breath. However, we didn't come here for debating purposes. Let us complete our preliminary tour, and when we have seen the whole house we can each make such more detailed inspection as seems necessary for our particular purposes."

We accordingly resumed our perambulation (but I noticed that Thorndyke deposited his attache case in Monkhouse's room with the evident intention of returning thither), both of us looking about narrowly: Thorndyke, no doubt, in search of the mysterious "traces" of which he had spoken, and I with an inquisitive endeavour to ascertain what kind of objects or appearances he regarded as "traces."

We had not gone very far before we encountered an object that even I was able to recognize as significant. It was in a corner of the long corridor that we came upon a little heap of rubbish that had been swept up out of the way; and at the very moment when Thorndyke stopped short with his eyes fixed on it, I saw the object—a little wisp of knitting-wool of the well-remembered green colour. Thorndyke picked it up, and, having exhibited it to me, produced from his letter-case a little envelope such as seedsmen use, in which he put the treasure trove, and as he uncapped his fountain pen, he looked up and down the corridor.

"Which is the nearest room to this spot?" he asked.

"Madeline's," I replied. "That is the door of her bedroom, on the right. But all the principal bedrooms are on this floor and Barbara's boudoir as well. This heap of rubbish is probably the sweepings from all the rooms."

"That is what it looks like," he agreed as he wrote the particulars on the envelope and slipped the latter in his letter-case. "You notice that there are some other trifles in this heap—some broken glass, for instance. But I will go through it when we have finished our tour, though I may as well take this now."

As he spoke, he stooped and picked up a short piece of rather irregularly shaped glass rod with a swollen, rounded end.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It is a portion of a small glass pestle and it belongs to one of those little glass mortars such as chemists use in rubbing up powders into solutions or suspensions. You had better not touch it, though it has probably been handled pretty freely. But I shall test it on the chance of discovering what it was last used for."

He put it away carefully in another seed-envelope and then looked down thoughtfully at the miniature dust-heap; but he made no further investigations at the moment and we resumed the perambulation, I placing the identification card on the mantelpiece of each room while he looked sharply about him, opening all cupboards and receptacles and peering into their, usually empty, interiors.

When we had inspected the servants' bedrooms and the attics—leaving the indispensable cards—we went down to the basement and visited the kitchen, the scullery, the servants' parlour and the cellars; and this brought our tour to an end.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "we proceed from the general to the particular. While you are drawing up your schedule of dilapidations I will just browse about and see if I can pick up any stray crumbs in which inference can find nourishment. It isn't a very hopeful quest, but you observe that we have already lighted on two objects which may have a meaning for us."

"Yes, we have ascertained that someone in this house used a particular kind of wool and that someone possessed a glass mortar. Those do not seem to me very weighty facts."

"They are not," he agreed; "indeed, they are hardly facts at all. The actual fact is that we have found the things here. But trifles light as air sometimes serve to fill up the spaces in a train of circumstantial evidence. I think I will go and have another look at that rubbish-heap."

I was strongly tempted to follow him, but could hardly do so in face of his plainly expressed wish to make his inspection alone. Moreover, I had already seen that there was more to be done than I had supposed. The house was certainly not in bad repair, but neither did it look very fresh nor attractive. Furniture and especially pictures have a way of marking indelibly the walls of a room, and the paintwork in several places showed disfiguring traces of wear. But I was anxious to let this house, even at a nominal rent, so that, by a few years' normal occupation its sinister reputation might be forgotten and its value restored.

As a result, I was committed to a detailed inspection of the whole house and the making of voluminous notes on the repairs and re-decorations which would be necessary to tempt even an impecunious tenant to forget that this was a house in which a murder had been committed. For that was the current view, erroneous as I believed it to be. Note-book in hand, I proceeded systematically from room to room and from floor to floor, and became so engrossed with my own business that I almost forgot Thorndyke; though I could hear him moving about the house, and once I met him—on the first floor, with a couple of empty medicine bottles and a small glass jar in his hands, apparently making his way to Harold's room, where, as I have said, he had left his attache case.

That room I left to the last, as it was already entered in my list and I did not wish to appear to spy upon Thorndyke's proceedings. When, at length, I entered the room I found that he, like myself, had come to the end of his task. On the floor his attache case lay open, crammed with various objects, several of which appeared to be bottles, wrapped in oddments of waste paper (including some pieces of wallpaper which he had apparently stripped off ad hoc when the other supplies

failed) and among which I observed a crumpled fly-paper. Respecting this I remarked: "I don't see why you are burdening yourself with this. A fly-paper is in no sense an incriminating object, even though such things have, at times, been put to unlawful use."

"Very true," he replied as he peeled off the rubber gloves which he had been wearing during the search. "A fly-paper is a perfectly normal domestic object. But, as you say, it can on occasion be used as a source of arsenic for criminal purposes; and a paper that has been so used will be found to have had practically the whole of the arsenic soaked out of it. As I happened to find this in the servants' parlour, it seemed worth while to take it to see whether its charge of arsenic had or had not been extracted."

"But," I objected, "why on earth should the poisoner—if there really is such a person—have been at the trouble of soaking out fly papers when apparently he was able to command an unlimited supply of Fowler's Solution?"

"Quite a pertinent question, Mayfield," he rejoined. "But may I ask my learned friend whether he found the evidence relating to the Fowler's Solution perfectly satisfactory?"

"But surely!" I exclaimed. "You had the evidence of two expert witnesses on the point. What more would you require? What is the difficulty?"

"The difficulty is this. There were several witnesses who testified that when they saw the bottle of medicine, the Fowler's Solution had not yet been added; but there was none who saw the bottle after the addition had been made."

"But it must have been added before Mabel gave the patient the last dose."

"That is the inference. But Mabel said nothing to that effect. She was not asked what colour the medicine was when she gave the patient that dose."

"But what of the analysts and the post mortem?"

"As to the post mortem, the arsenic which was found in the stomach was not recognized as being in the form of Fowler's Solution, and as to the analysts, they made their examination three days after the man died."

"Still, the medicine that they analysed was the medicine that deceased had taken. You don't deny that, do you?"

"I neither deny it nor affirm it. I merely say that no evidence was given that proved the presence of Fowler's Solution in that bottle before the man died; and that the bottle which was handed to the analysts was one that had been exposed for three days in a room which had been visited by a number of persons, including Mrs Monkhouse, Wallingford, Miss Norris, Mabel Withers, Amos Monkhouse, Dr Dimsdale and yourself."

"You mean to suggest that the bottle might have been tampered with or changed for another? But, my dear Thorndyke, why in the name of God should anyone want to change the bottle?"

"I am not suggesting that the bottle actually was changed. I am merely pointing out that the evidence of the analysts is material only subject to the conditions that the bottle which they examined was the bottle from which the last dose of medicine was given, and that its contents were the same as on that occasion; and that no conclusive proof exists that it was the same bottle or that the contents were unchanged."

"But what reason could there be for supposing that it might have been changed?"

"There is no need to advance any reason. The burden of proof lies on those who affirm that it was the same bottle with the same contents. It is for them to prove that no change was possible. But obviously a change was possible."

"But still," I persisted, "there seems to be no point in this suggestion. Who could have had any motive for making a change? And what could the motive have been? It looks to me like mere logic-chopping and hair-splitting."

"You wouldn't say that if you were for the defence," chuckled Thorndyke. "You would not let a point of first-rate importance pass on a mere assumption, no matter how probable. And as to a possible motive, surely a most obvious one is staring us in the face. Supposing some person in this household had been administering arsenic in the food. If it could be arranged that a poisonous dose could be discovered in the medicine, you must see that the issue would be at once transferred from the food to the medicine, and from those who controlled the food to those who controlled the medicine. Which is, in fact, what happened. As soon as the jury heard about the medicine, their interest in the food became extinct."

I listened to this exposition with a slightly sceptical smile. It was all very ingenious but I found it utterly unconvincing.

"You ought to be pleading in court, Thorndyke," I said, "instead of grubbing about in empty houses and raking over rubbish-heaps. By the way, have you found anything that seems likely to yield any suggestions?"

"It is a little difficult to say," he replied. "I have taken possession of a number of bottles and small jars for examination as to their contents, but I have no great expectation in respect of them. I also found some fragments of the glass mortar—an eight-ounce mortar it appears to have been."

"Where did you find those?" I asked.

"In Miss Norris' bedroom, in a little pile of rubbish under the grate. They are only tiny fragments, but the curvature enables one to reconstruct the vessel pretty accurately."

It seemed to me a rather futile proceeding, but I made no comment. Nor did I give utterance to a suspicion which had

just flashed into my mind, that it was the discovery of these ridiculous fragments of glass that had set my learned friend splitting straws on the subject of the medicine bottle. I had not much liked his suggestion as to the possible motive of that hypothetical substitution, and I liked it less now that he had discovered the remains of the mortar in Madeline's room. There was no doubt that Thorndyke had a remarkable constructive imagination; and, as I followed him down the stairs and out into the square, I found myself faintly uneasy lest that lively imagination should carry him into deeper waters than I was prepared to navigate in his company.

---

### XIII. — RUPERT MAKES SOME DISCOVERIES

BY a sort of tacit understanding Thorndyke and I parted in the vicinity of South Kensington Station, to which he had made a bee line on leaving the square. As he had made no suggestion that I should go back with him, I inferred that he had planned a busy evening examining and testing the odds and ends that he had picked up in the empty house; while I had suddenly conceived the idea that I might as well take the opportunity of calling on Madeline, who might feel neglected if I failed to put in an appearance within a reasonable time after my return to town. Our researches had taken up most of the afternoon and it was getting on for the hour at which Madeline usually left the school; and as the latter was less than half-an-hour's walk from the station, I could reach it in good time without hurrying.

As I walked at an easy pace through the busily populated streets, I turned over the events of the afternoon with rather mixed feelings. In spite of my great confidence in Thorndyke, I was sensible of a chill of disappointment in respect alike of his words and his deeds. In this rather farcical grubbing about in the dismantled house there was a faint suggestion of charlatanism; of the vulgar, melodramatic sleuth, nosing out a trail; while, as to his hair-splitting objections to a piece of straightforward evidence, they seemed to me to be of the kind at which the usual hard-headed judge would shake his hard head while grudgingly allowing them as technically admissible.

But whither was Thorndyke drifting? Evidently he had turned a dubious eye on Wallingford; and that egregious ass seemed to be doing all that he could to attract further notice. But today I had seemed to detect a note of suspicion in regard to Madeline; and even making allowance for the fact that he had not my knowledge of her gentle, gracious personality, I could not but feel a little resentful. Once more, Wallingford's remarks concerning a possible mare's nest and a public scandal recurred to me, and, not for the first time, I was aware of faint misgivings as to my wisdom in having set Thorndyke to stir up these troubled waters. He had, indeed, given me fair warning, and I was half-inclined to regret that I had not allowed myself to be warned off. Of course, Thorndyke was much too old a hand to launch a half-prepared prosecution into the air. But still, I could not but ask myself uneasily whither his overacute inferences were leading him.

These reflections brought me to the gate of the school, where I learned from the porter that Madeline had not yet left and accordingly sent up my card. In less than a minute she appeared, dressed in her out-of-door clothes and wreathed in smiles, looking, I thought, very charming.

"How nice of you, Rupert!" she exclaimed, "to come and take me home. I was wondering how soon you would come to see my little spinster lair. It is only a few minutes' walk from here. But I am sorry I didn't know you were coming, for I have arranged to make a call—a business call—and I am due in about ten minutes. Isn't it a nuisance?"

"How long will you have to stay?"

"Oh, a quarter of an hour, at least. Perhaps a little more."

"Very well. I will wait outside for you and do sentry-go."

"No, you won't. I shall let you into my flat—I should have to pass it—and you can have a wash and brush-up, and then you can prowls about and see how you like my little mansion—I haven't quite settled down in it yet, but you must overlook that. By the time you have inspected everything, I shall be back and then we can consider whether we will have a late tea or an early supper. This is the way."

She led me into a quiet by-street, one side of which was occupied by a range of tall, rather forbidding buildings whose barrack-like aspect was to some extent mitigated by signs of civilized humanity in the tastefully curtained windows. Madeline's residence was on the second floor, and when she had let me in by the diminutive outer door and switched on the light, she turned back to the staircase with a wave of her hand.

"I will be back as soon as I can," she said. "Meanwhile go in and make yourself at home."

I stood at the door and watched her trip lightly down the stairs until she disappeared round the angle, when I shut the door and proceeded to follow her injunctions to the letter by taking possession of the bathroom, in which I was gratified to find a constant supply of hot water. When I had refreshed myself by a wash, I went forth and made a leisurely survey of the little flat. It was all very characteristic of Madeline, the professional exponent of Domestic Economy, in its orderly arrangement and its evidences of considered convenience. The tiny kitchen reminded one of a chemical laboratory or a doctor's dispensary with its labelled jars of the cook's materials set out in ordered rows on their shelves, and the two little mortars, one of Wedgewood ware and the other of glass. I grinned as my eye lighted on this latter and I thought of the fragments carefully collected by Thorndyke and solemnly transported to the Temple for examination. Here, if he could have seen it, was evidence that proved the ownership of that other mortar and at the same time demolished the significance of that discovery.

I ventured to inspect the bedroom, and a very trim, pleasant little room it was; but the feature which principally attracted my attention was an arrangement for switching the electric light off and on from the bed—an arrangement suspiciously correlated to a small set of bookshelves also within easy reach of the bed. What interested me in it was what Thorndyke would have called its “unmechanical ingenuity”; for it consisted of no more than a couple of lengths of stout string, of each of which one end was tied to the light-switch and the other end led by a pair of screw-eyes to the head of the bed. No doubt the simple device worked well enough in spite of the friction at each screw-eye, but a man of less intelligence than Madeline would probably have used levers or bell-cranks, or at least pulleys to diminish the friction in changing the direction of the pull.

There was a second bedroom, at present unoccupied and only partially furnished and serving, apparently, as a receptacle for such of Madeline’s possessions as had not yet had a permanent place assigned to them. Here were one or two chairs, some piles of books, a number of pictures and several polished wood boxes and cases of various sizes; evidently the residue of the goods and chattels that Madeline had brought from her home and stored somewhere while she was living at Hilborough Square. I ran my eye along the range of boxes, which were set out on the top of a chest of drawers. One was an old-fashioned tea-caddy, another an obvious folding desk of the same period, while a third, which I opened, turned out to be a work-box of mid-Victorian age. Beside it was a little flat rosewood case which looked like a small case of mathematical instruments. Observing that the key was in the lock, I turned it and lifted the lid, not with any conscious curiosity as to what was inside it, but in the mere idleness of a man who has nothing in particular to do. But the instant that the lid was up my attention awoke with a bound and I stood with dropped jaw staring at the interior in utter consternation.

There could be not an instant’s doubt as to what this case was, for its green-baize-lined interior showed a shaped recess of the exact form of a pocket pistol; and, if that were not enough, there, in its own compartment was a little copper powder-flask, and in another compartment about a dozen globular bullets.

I snapped down the lid and turned the key and walked guiltily out of the room. My interest in Madeline’s flat was dead. I could think of nothing but this amazing discovery. And the more I thought, the more overpowering did it become. The pistol that fitted that case was the exact counterpart of the pistol that I had seen in Thorndyke’s laboratory; and the case, itself, corresponded, exactly to his description of the case from which that pistol had probably been taken. It was astounding; and it was profoundly disturbing. For it admitted of no explanation that I could bring myself to accept other than that of a coincidence. And coincidences are unsatisfactory things; and you can’t do with too many of them at once.

Yet, on reflection, this was the view that I adopted. Indeed, there was no thinkable alternative. And really, when I came to turn the matter over, it was not quite so extraordinary as it had seemed at the first glance. For what, after all, was this pistol with its case? It was not a unique thing. It was not even a rare thing. Thorndyke had spoken of these pistols and cases as comparatively common things with which he expected me to be familiar. Thousands of them must have been made in their time, and since they were far from perishable, thousands of them must still exist. The singularity of the coincidence was not in the facts; it was the product of my own state of mind.

Thus I sought—none too successfully—to rid myself of the effects of the shock that I had received on raising the lid of the case; and I was still moodily gazing out of the sitting room window and arguing away my perturbation when I heard the outer door shut and a moment later Madeline looked into the room.

“I haven’t been so very long, have I?” she said, cheerily. “Now I will slip off my cloak and hat and we will consider what sort of meal we will have: or perhaps you will consider the question while I am gone.”

With this she flitted away; and my thoughts, passing by the problem submitted, involuntarily reverted to the little rosewood case in the spare room. But her absence was of a brevity suggesting the performance of the professional quick-change artist. In a minute or two I heard her approach and open the door; and I turned to receive a real knock-out blow.

I was so astonished and dismayed that I suppose I must have stood staring like a fool, for she asked in a rather disconcerted tone: “What is the matter, Rupert? Why are you looking at my jumper like that? Don’t you like it?”

“Yes,” I stammered, “of course I do. Most certainly. Very charming. Very—er—becoming. I like it—er—exceedingly.”

“I don’t believe you do,” she said, doubtfully, “you looked so surprised when I first came in. You don’t think the colour too startling, do you? Women wear brighter colours than they used to, you know, and I do think this particular shade of green is rather nice. And it is rather unusual, too.”

“It is,” I agreed, recovering myself by an effort. “Quite distinctive.” And then, noting that I had unconsciously adopted Thorndyke’s own expression, I added, hastily, “And I shouldn’t describe it as startling, at all. It is in perfectly good taste.”

“I am glad you think that,” she said, “for you certainly did look rather startled at first, and I had some slight misgivings about it myself when I had finished it. It looked more brilliant in colour as a garment than it did in the form of mere skeins.”

“You made it yourself, then?”

“Yes. But I don’t think I would ever knit another. It took me months to do, and I could have bought one for very little more than the cost of the wool, though, of course, I shouldn’t have been able to select the exact tint that I wanted. But what about our meal? Shall we call it tea or supper?”

She could have called it breakfast for all I cared, so completely had this final shock extinguished my interest in food. But I had to make some response to her eager hospitality.

"Let us split the difference or strike an average," I replied. "We will call it a 'swarry'-tea and unusual trimmings."

"Very well," said she, "then you shall come to the kitchen and help. I will show you the raw material of the feast and you shall dictate the bill of fare."

We accordingly adjourned to the kitchen where she fell to work on the preparations with the unhurried quickness that is characteristic of genuine efficiency, babbling pleasantly and pausing now and then to ask my advice (which was usually foolish and had to be blandly rejected) and treating the whole business with a sort of playful seriousness that was very delightful. And all the time I looked on in a state of mental chaos and bewilderment for which I can find no words. There she was, my friend, Madeline, sweet, gentle, feminine—the very type of gracious womanhood, and the more sweet and gracious by reason of these homely surroundings. For it is an appalling reflection, in these days of lady professors and women legislators, that to masculine eyes a woman never looks so dignified, so worshipful, so entirely desirable, as when she is occupied in the traditional activities that millenniums of human experience have associated with her sex. To me, Madeline, flitting about the immaculate little kitchen, neat-handed, perfect in the knowledge of her homely craft; smiling, dainty, fragile, with her gracefully flowing hair and the little apron that she had slipped on as a sort of ceremonial garment, was a veritable epitome of feminine charm. And yet, but a few feet away was a rosewood case that had once held a pistol; and even now, in Thorndyke's locked cabinet—but my mind staggered under the effort of thought and refused the attempt to combine and collate a set of images so discordant.

"You are very quiet, Rupert," she said, presently, pausing to look at me. "What is it? I hope you haven't any special worries."

"We all have our little worries, Madeline," I replied, vaguely.

"Yes, indeed," said she, still regarding me thoughtfully; and for the first time I noticed that she seemed to have aged a little since I had last seen her and that her face, in repose, showed traces of strain and anxiety. "We all have our troubles and we all try to put them on you. How did you think Barbara was looking?"

"Extraordinarily well. I was agreeably surprised."

"Yes. She is wonderful. I am full of admiration of the way she has put away everything connected with—with that dreadful affair. I couldn't have done it if I had been in her place. I couldn't have let things rest. I should have wanted to know."

"I have no doubt that she does. We all want to know. But she can do no more than the rest of us. Do you ever see Wallingford now?"

"Oh, dear, yes. He was inclined to be rather too attentive at first, but Barbara gave him a hint that spinsters who live alone don't want too many visits from their male friends, so now he usually comes with her."

"I must bear Barbara's words of wisdom in mind," said I.

"Indeed you won't!" she exclaimed. "Don't be ridiculous. Rupert. You know her hint doesn't apply to you. And I shouldn't have troubled about the proprieties in Tony's case if I had really wanted him. But I didn't, though I felt awfully sorry for him."

"Yes, he seems to be in a bad way mentally, poor devil. Of course you have heard about his delusions?"

"If they really are delusions, but I am not at all sure that they are. Now help me to carry these things into the sitting room and then I will do the omelette and bring it in."

I obediently took up the tray and followed her into the sitting room, where I completed the arrangement of the table while she returned to the kitchen to perform the crowning culinary feat. In a minute or two she came in with the product under a heated cover and we took our seats at the table.

"You were speaking of Wallingford," said I. "Apparently you know more about him than I do. It seemed to me that he was stark mad."

"He is queer enough, I must admit—don't let your omelette get cold—but I think you and Barbara are mistaken about his delusions. I suspect that somebody is really keeping him under observation; and if that is so, one can easily understand why his nerves are so upset."

"Yes, indeed. But when you say you suspect that we are mistaken, what does that mean? Is it just a pious opinion or have you something to go upon?"

"Oh, I shouldn't offer a mere pious opinion to a learned counsel," she replied, with a smile. "I have something to go upon, and I will tell you about it, though I expect you will think I am stark mad, too. The fact is that I have been under observation, too."

"Nonsense, Madeline," I exclaimed. "The thing is absurd. You have let Wallingford infect you."

"There!" she retorted. "What did I say? You think I am qualifying for an asylum now. But I am not. Absurd as the thing seems—and I quite agree with you on that point—it is an actual fact. I haven't the slightest doubt about it."

"Well," I said, "I am open to conviction. But let us have your actual facts. How long do you think it has been going on?"

"That I can't say; and I don't think it is going on now at all. At any rate, I have seen no signs of any watcher for more than

a week, and I keep a pretty sharp lookout. The way I first became aware of it was this: I happened one day at lunch time to be looking out of this window through the chink in the curtains when I saw a man pass along slowly on the other side of the street and glance up, as it seemed, at this window. I didn't notice him particularly, but still I did look at him when he glanced up, and of course, his face was then directly towards me. Now it happened that, a few minutes afterwards, I looked out again; and then I saw what looked like the same man pass along again, at the same slow pace and in the same direction. And again he looked up at the window, though he couldn't have seen me because I was hidden by the curtain. But this time I looked at him very closely and made careful mental notes of his clothing, his hat and his features, because, you see, I remembered what Tony had said and I hadn't forgotten the way I was treated at the inquest or the way in which that detective man had turned out my cupboard when he came to search the house. So I looked this man over very carefully indeed so that I should recognize him without any doubt if I should see him again.

"Well, before I went out after lunch I had a good look out of the window, but I couldn't see anything of him; nor did I see him on my way to the school, though I stopped once or twice and looked back. When I got to the school I stopped at the gate and looked along the street both ways, but still there was no sign of him. Then I ran up to a class-room window from which I could see up and down the street; and presently I saw him coming along slowly on the school side and I was able to check him off point by point, and though he didn't look up this time, I could see his face and check that off, too. There was no doubt whatever that it was the same man.

"When I came out of school that afternoon I looked round but could not see him, so I walked away quickly in the direction that I usually take when going home, but suddenly turned a corner and slipped into a shop. I stayed there a few minutes buying some things, then I came out, and, seeing no one, slipped round the corner and took my usual way home but kept carefully behind a man and a woman who were going the same way. I hadn't gone very far before I saw my man standing before a shop window but evidently looking up and down the street. I was quite close to him before he saw me and of course I did not appear to notice him; but I hurried home without looking round and ran straight up to this window to watch for him. And sure enough, in about a couple of minutes I saw him come down the street and walk slowly past."

"And did you see him again after that?"

"Yes, I saw him twice more that same day. I went out for a walk in the evening on purpose to give him a lead. And I saw him from time to time every day for about ten days. Then I missed him, and I haven't seen a sign of him for more than a week. I suppose he found me too monotonous and gave me up."

"It is very extraordinary," I said, convinced against my will by her very circumstantial description. "What possible object could anyone have in keeping a watch on you?"

"That is what I have wondered," said she. "But I suppose the police have to do something for their pay."

"But this doesn't quite look like a police proceeding. There is something rather feeble and amateurish about the affair. With all due respect to your powers of observation, Madeline, I don't think a Scotland Yard man would have let himself be spotted quite so easily."

"But who else could it be?" she objected; and then, after a pause, she added with a mischievous smile, "unless it should be your friend, Dr Thorndyke. That would really be a quaint situation—if I should, after all, be indebted to you, Rupert, for these polite attentions."

I brushed the suggestion aside hastily but with no conviction. And once more I recalled Wallingford's observations on mare's nests. Obviously this clumsy booby was not a professional detective. And if not, what could he be but some hired agent of Thorndyke's? It was one more perplexity, and added to those with which my mind was already charged, it reduced me to moody silence which must have made me the very reverse of an exhilarating companion. Indeed, when Madeline had rallied me once or twice on my gloomy preoccupation, I felt that the position was becoming untenable. I wanted to be alone and think things out; but as it would have been hardly decent to break up our little party and take my departure, I determined, if possible, to escape from this oppressive tete-a-tete. Fortunately, I remembered that a famous pianist was giving a course of recitals at a hall within easy walking distance and ventured to suggest that we might go and hear him.

"I would rather stay here and gossip with you," she replied, "but as you don't seem to be in a gossiping humour, perhaps the music might be rather nice. Yes, let us go. I don't often hear any good music nowadays."

Accordingly we went, and on the way to the hall Madeline gave me a few further details of her experiences with her follower; and I was not a little impressed by her wariness and the ingenuity with which she had lured that guileless sleuth into exposed and well-lighted situations.

"By the way," said I, "what was the fellow like? Give me a few particulars of his appearance in case I should happen to run across him."

"Good Heavens, Rupert!" she exclaimed, laughing mischievously, "you don't suppose he will take to haunting you, do you? That would really be the last straw, especially if he should happen to be employed by Dr Thorndyke."

"It would," I admitted with a faint grin, "though Thorndyke is extremely thorough and he plumes himself on keeping an open mind. At any rate, let us have a few details."

"There was nothing particularly startling about him. He was a medium-sized man, rather fair, with a longish, sharp, turned-up nose and a sandy moustache, rather bigger than men usually have nowadays. He was dressed in a blue serge suit, without an overcoat and he wore a brown soft felt hat, a turn-down collar and a dark green necktie with white spots.

He had no gloves but he carried a walking-stick—a thickish yellow cane with a crooked handle.”

“Not very distinctive,” I remarked, disparagingly.

“Don’t you think so?” said she. “I thought he was rather easy to recognize with that brown hat and the blue suit and the big moustache and pointed nose. Of course, if he had worn a scarlet hat and emerald-green trousers and carried a brass fire-shovel instead of a walking-stick he would have been still easier to recognize; but you mustn’t expect too much, even from a detective.”

I looked with dim surprise into her smiling face and was more bewildered than ever. If she were haunted by any gnawing anxieties, she had a wonderful way of throwing them off. Nothing could be less suggestive of a guilty conscience than this quiet gaiety and placid humour. However, there was no opportunity for moralizing, for her little retort had brought us to the door of the hall; and we had barely time to find desirable seats before the principal musician took his place at the instrument.

It was a delightful entertainment; and if the music did not “soothe my savage breast” into complete forgetfulness, it occupied my attention sufficiently to hinder consecutive thought on any other subject. Indeed, it was not until I had said “good night” to Madeline outside her flat and turned my face towards the neighbouring station that I was able to attempt a connected review of the recent startling discoveries.

What could they possibly mean? The pistol alone could have been argued away as a curious coincidence, and the same might have been possible even in the case of the wool. But the two together! The long arm of coincidence was not long enough for that. The wisp of wool that we had found in the empty house was certainly—admittedly—Madeline’s. But that wisp matched identically the ball of wool from the pistol; and here was a missing pistol which was certainly the exact counterpart of that which had contained the wool plug. The facts could not be disputed. Was it possible to escape from the inferences which they yielded?

The infernal machine, feeble as it was, gave evidence of a diabolical intention—an intention that my mind utterly refused to associate with Madeline. And yet, even in the moment of rejection, my memory suddenly recalled the arrangement connected with the electric light switch in Madeline’s bedroom. Its mechanism was practically identical with that of the infernal machine, and the materials used—string and screw-eyes—were actually the same. It seemed impossible to escape from this proof piled on proof.

But if the machine itself declared an abominable intention, what of that which lay behind the machine? The sending of that abomination was not an isolated or independent act. It was related to some antecedent act, as Thorndyke had implied. Whoever sent it, had a guilty conscience.

But guilty of what?

As I asked myself this question, and the horrid, inevitable answer framed itself in my mind, I turned automatically from Middle Temple Lane and passed into the deep shadow of the arch that gives entrance to Elm Court.

---

#### XIV. — RUPERT CONFIDES IN THORNDYKE

ALTHOUGH few of its buildings (excepting the Halls) are of really great antiquity, the precinct of the Temples shares with the older parts of London at least one medieval characteristic: it abounds in those queer little passages and alleys which, burrowing in all directions under the dwelling-houses, are a source of endless confusion and bewilderment to the stranger, though to the accustomed denizen they offer an equally great convenience. For by their use the seasoned Templar makes his way from any one part of the precinct to any other, if not in an actual bee-line, at least in an abbreviated zig-zag that cuts across the regular thoroughfares as though they were mere paths traversing an open meadow. Some of these alleys do, indeed, announce themselves even to unaccustomed eyes, as public passage-ways, by recognizable entrance arches; but many of them scorn even this degree of publicity, artfully concealing their existence from the uninitiated by an ordinary doorway, which they share with a pair of houses. Whereby the unsuspecting stranger, entering what, in his innocence, he supposes to be the front doorway of a house, walks along the hall and is presently astonished to find himself walking out of another front door into another thoroughfare.

The neighbourhood of Fig Tree Court is peculiarly rich in these deceptive burrows, indeed, excepting from the Terrace, it has no other avenue of approach. On the present occasion I had the choice of two, and was proceeding along the narrow lane of Elm Court to take the farther one, which led to the entry of my chambers, when I caught sight of a man approaching hurriedly from the direction of the Cloisters. At the first glance, I thought I recognized him—though he was a mere silhouette in the dim light—as the loiterer whom I had seen on the night of my return. And his behaviour confirmed my suspicion; for as he came in sight of me, he hesitated for a moment and then, quickening his pace forward, disappeared suddenly through what appeared to be a hole in the wall but was, in fact, the passage for which I was making.

Instantly, I turned back and swiftly crossing the square of Elm Court, dived into the burrow at its farther corner and came out into the little square of Fig Tree Court at the very moment when the mysterious stranger emerged from the burrow at the other side, so that we met face to face in the full light of the central lamp.

Naturally, I was the better prepared for the encounter and I pursued my leisurely way towards my chambers with the air of not having observed him; while he, stopping short for a moment with a wild stare at me, dashed across the square and

plunged into the passage from which I had just emerged.

I did not follow him. I had seen him and had thereby confirmed a suspicion that had been growing upon me, and that was enough. For I need hardly say that the man was Anthony Wallingford. But though I was prepared for the identification, I was none the less puzzled and worried by it. Here was yet another perplexity; and I was just stepping into my entry to reflect upon it at my leisure when I became aware of hurrying footsteps in the passage through which Wallingford had come. Quickly drawing back into the deep shadow of the vestibule, I waited to see who this new-comer might be. In a few seconds he rushed out of the passage and came to a halt in the middle of the square, nearly under the lamp, where he stood for a few moments, looking to right and left and listening intently. And now I realized the justice of what Madeline had said; for, commonplace as the man was, I recognized him in an instant. Brown hat, blue serge suit, big, sandy moustache and concave, pointed nose; they were not sensational characteristics, but they identified him beyond a moment's doubt.

Apparently, his ear must have caught the echoes of Wallingford's footsteps, for, after a very brief pause, he started off at something approaching a trot and disappeared into the passage by which I had come and Wallingford had gone. A sudden, foolish curiosity impelled me to follow and observe the methods of this singular and artless sleuth. But I did not follow directly. Instead, I turned and ran up the other passage, which leads into the narrow part of Elm Court; and as I came flying out of the farther end of it I ran full tilt into a man who was running along the court towards the Cloisters. Of course the man was Wallingford. Who else would be running like a lunatic through the Temple at night, unless it were his pursuer?

With muttered curses but no word of recognition, he disengaged himself and pursued his way, disappearing at length round the sharp turn in the lane which leads towards the Cloisters. I did not follow him, but drew back into the dark passage and waited. Very soon another figure became visible, approaching rapidly along the dimly lighted lane. I drew farther back and presently from my hiding-place I saw the brown-hatted shadower steal past with a ridiculous air of secrecy and caution; and when he had passed, I peered out and watched his receding figure until it disappeared round the angle of the lane.

I felt half-tempted to join the absurd procession and see what eventually became of these two idiots. But I had really seen enough. I now knew that Wallingford's "delusions" were no delusions at all and that Madeline's story set forth nothing but the genuine, indisputable truth. And with these new facts to add to my unwelcome store of data, I walked slowly back to my chambers, cogitating as I went.

In truth, I had abundant material for reflection. The more I turned over my discoveries in Madeline's flat the more did the incriminating evidence seem to pile up. I recalled Polton's plainly expressed suspicion that the sender of the infernal machine was a woman; and I recalled Thorndyke's analysis of the peculiarities of the thing with the inferences which those peculiarities suggested, and read into them a more definite meaning. I now saw what the machine had conveyed to him, and what he had been trying to make it convey to me. The unmechanical outlook combined with evident ingenuity, the unfamiliarity with ordinary mechanical appliances, the ignorance concerning the different kinds of gun-powder, the lack of those common tools which nearly every man, but hardly any woman, possesses and can use: all these peculiarities of the unknown person were feminine peculiarities. And finally, there had been the plug of knitting-wool: a most unlikely material for a man to use for such a purpose, or, indeed, to possess at all.

So my thoughts went over and over the same ground, and every time finding escape from the obvious conclusion more and more impossible. The evidence of Madeline's complicity—at the very least—in the sending of the infernal machine appeared overwhelming. I could not reject it. Nor could I deny what the sending of it implied. It was virtually a confession of guilt. And yet, even as I admitted this to myself, I was strangely enough aware that my feelings towards Madeline remained unaltered. The rational, legal side of me condemned her. But somehow, in some incomprehensible way, that condemnation had a purely technical, academic quality. It left my loyalty and affection for her untouched.

But what of Thorndyke? Had his reasoning travelled along the same lines? If it had, there would be nothing sentimental in his attitude. He had warned me, and I knew well enough that whenever there should be evidence enough to put before a court, the law would be set in motion. What, then, was his present position? And even as I asked myself the question, there echoed uncomfortably in my mind the significant suggestion that he had thrown out only a few hours ago concerning the bottle of medicine. Evidently, he at least entertained the possibility that the Fowler's Solution had been put into that bottle after Monkhouse's death, and that for the express purpose of diverting suspicion from the food. The manifest implication was that he entertained the possibility that the poison had been administered in the food. But to suspect this was to suspect the person who prepared the food of being the poisoner. And the person who prepared the food was Madeline.

The question, therefore, as to Thorndyke's state of mind was a vital one. He had expressed no suspicion of Madeline. But then he had expressed no suspicion of anybody. On the other hand, he had exonerated nobody. He was frankly observant of every member of that household. Then there was the undeniable fact that Madeline had been watched and followed. Somebody suspected her. But who? The watcher was certainly not a detective. Amateur was writ large all over him. Then it was not the police who suspected her. Apparently there remained only Thorndyke, though one would have expected him to employ a more efficient agent.

But Wallingford was also under observation, and more persistently. Then he, too, was suspected. But here there was some show of reason. For what was Wallingford doing in the Temple? Evidently he had been lurking about, apparently keeping a watch on Thorndyke, though for what purpose I could not imagine. Still, it was a suspicious proceeding and



justified some watch being kept on him. But the shadowing of Madeline was incomprehensible.

I paced up and down my sitting room turning these questions over in my mind and all the time conscious of a curious sense of unreality in the whole affair; in all this watching and following and dodging which looked so grotesque and purposeless. I felt myself utterly bewildered. But I was also profoundly unhappy and, indeed, overshadowed by a terrible dread. For out of this chaos one fact emerged clearly: there was a formidable body of evidence implicating Madeline. If Thorndyke had known what I knew, her position would have been one of the gravest peril. My conscience told me that it was my duty to tell him; and I knew that I had no intention of doing anything of the kind. But still the alarming question haunted me: how much did he really know? How much did he suspect?

In the course of my perambulations I passed and repassed a smallish deed box which stood on a lower book-shelf and which was to me what the Ark of the Covenant was to the ancient Israelites: the repository of my most sacred possessions. Its lid bore the name "Stella," painted on it by me, and its contents were a miscellany of trifles, worthless intrinsically, but to me precious beyond all price as relics of the dear friend who had been all in all to me during her short life and who, though she had been lying in her grave for four long years, was all in all to me still. Often, in the long, solitary evenings, had I taken the relics out of their abiding-place and let the sight of them carry my thoughts back to the golden days of our happy companionship, filling in the pleasant pictures with the aid of my diary—but that was unnecessary now, since I knew the entries by heart—and painting other, more shadowy, pictures of a future that might have been. It was a melancholy pleasure, perhaps, but yet, as the years rolled on, the bitterness of those memories grew less bitter and still the sweet remained.

Presently, as for the hundredth time the beloved name met my eye, there came upon me a yearning to creep back with her into the sunny past; to forget, if only for a short hour, the hideous anxieties of the present and in memory to walk with her once more "along the meads of asphodel."

Halting before the box, I stood and lifted it tenderly to the table and having unlocked it, raised the lid and looked thoughtfully into the interior. Then, one by one, I lifted out my treasures, set them out in order on the table, and sat down to look at them and let them speak to me their message of peace and consolation.

To a stranger's eye they were a mere collection of odds and ends. Some would have been recognizable as relics of the more conventional type. There were several photographs of the dead girl, some taken by myself, and a tress of red-gold hair—such hair as I had been told often glorifies the victims whom consumption had marked for its own. It had been cut off for me by Barbara when she took her own tress, and tied up with a blue ribbon. But it was not these orthodox relics that spoke to me most intimately. I had no need of their aid to call up the vision of her person. The things that set my memory working were the records of actions and experiences; the sketch-books, the loose sketches and the little plaster plaques and medallions that she had made with my help after she had become bed-ridden and could go no more abroad to sketch. Every one of these had its story to tell, its vision to call up.

I turned over the sketches—simple but careful pencil drawings for the most part, for Stella, like me, had more feeling for form than for colour—and recalled the making of them; the delightful rambles across the sunny meadows or through the cool woodlands, the solemn planting of sketching-stools and earnest consultation on the selection and composition of the subjects. These were the happiest days, before the chilly hand of the destroyer had been laid on its chosen victim and there was still a long and sunny future to be vaguely envisaged.

And then I turned to the little plaques and medallions which she had modelled under my supervision and of which I had made the plaster moulds and casts. These called up sadder memories, but yet they spoke of an even closer and more loving companionship; for each work was, in a way, a joint achievement over which we had triumphed and rejoiced together. So it happened that, although the shadow of sickness, and at last of death, brooded over them, it was on these relics that I tended to linger most lovingly.

Here was the slate that I had got for her to stick the clay on and which she used to hold propped up against her knees as she worked with never-failing enthusiasm through the long, monotonous days, and even, when she was well enough, far into the night by the light of the shaded candle. Here were the simple modelling-tools and the little sponge and the camelhair brush with which she loved to put the final finish on the damp clay reliefs. Here was Lanterri's priceless textbook over which we used to pore together and laud that incomparable teacher. Here were the plaques, medals and medallions that we had prised out, with bated breath, from their too-adherent moulds. And here—the last and saddest relic—was the wax mould from which no cast had ever been made, the final, crowning work of those deft, sensitive fingers.

For the thousandth time, I picked it up and let the light fall obliquely across its hollows. The work was a medal some three inches across, a portrait of Stella, herself, modelled from a profile photograph that I had taken for the purpose. It was an excellent likeness and unquestionably the best piece of modelling that she had ever done.

Often, I had intended to take the cast from it, but always had been restrained by a vague reluctance to disturb the mould. Now, as I looked at the delicate, sunken impression, I had again the feeling that this, her last work, ought to be finished; and I was still debating the matter with the mould in my hand when I heard a quick step upon the stair, followed by a characteristic knock on my door.

My first impulse was to hustle my treasures back into their box before answering the summons. But this was almost instantly followed by a revulsion. I recognized the knock as Thorndyke's; and somehow there came upon me a desire to share my memories with him. He had shown a strangely sympathetic insight into my feelings towards Stella. He had read

my diary. He now knew the whole story; and he was the kindest, the most loyal and most discreet of friends. Gently laying down the mould I went to the door and threw it open.

"I saw your light burning as I passed just now," said Thorndyke as he entered and shook my hand warmly, "so I thought I would take the opportunity to drop in and return your diary. I hope I am not disturbing you. If I am, you must treat me as a friend and eject me."

"Not at all, Thorndyke," I replied. "On the contrary, you would be doing me a charity if you would stay and smoke a companionable pipe."

"Good," said he, "then I will give myself the pleasure of a quiet gossip. But what is amiss, Mayfield?" he continued, laying a friendly hand on my shoulder and looking me over critically. "You look worn, and worried and depressed. You are not letting your mind dwell too much, I hope, on the tragedy that has come unbidden into your life?"

"I am afraid I am," I replied. "The horrible affair haunts me. Suspicion and mystery are in the very air I breathe. A constant menace seems to hang over all my friends, so that I am in continual dread of some new catastrophe. I have just ascertained that Wallingford is really being watched and shadowed; and not only Wallingford but even Miss Norris."

He did not appear surprised or seek for further information. He merely nodded and looked into my face with grave sympathy.

"Put it away, Mayfield," said he. "That is my counsel to you. Try to forget it. You have put the investigation into my hands. Leave it there and wash your own of it. You did not kill Harold Monkhouse. Whoever did must pay the penalty if ever the crime should be brought home to the perpetrator. And if it never can be, it were better that you and all of us should let it sink into oblivion rather than allow it to remain to poison the lives of innocent persons. Let us forget it now. I see you were trying to."

I had noticed that when he first entered the room, he cast a single, swift glance at the table which, I was sure, had comprehended every object on it. Then he had looked away and never again let his eyes stray in that direction. But now, as he finished speaking, he glanced once more at the table, and this time with undisguised interest.

"Yes," I admitted. "I was trying to find in the memories of the past an antidote for the present. These are the relics of that past. I daresay you have read of them in the diary and probably have written me down a mawkish sentimentalist."

"I pray you, my friend, not to do me that injustice!" he exclaimed. "Faithful friendship, that even survives the grave, is not a thing that any man can afford to despise. But for the disaster of untimely death, your faithfulness and hers would have created for two persons the perfect life. I assure you, Mayfield, that I have been deeply moved by the story of your delightful friendship and your irreparable loss. But don't let us dwell too much on the sad aspects of the story. Show me your relics. I see some very charming little plaques among them."

He picked up one with reassuring daintiness of touch and examined it through a reading-glass that I handed to him.

"It really is a most admirable little work," said he. "Not in the least amateurish. She had the makings of a first-class medallist; the appreciation of the essential qualities of a miniature relief. And she had a fine feeling for composition and spacing."

Deeply gratified by his appreciation and a little surprised by his evident knowledge of the medallist's art, I presented the little works, one after another, and we discussed their merits with the keenest interest. Presently he asked: "Has it never occurred to you, Mayfield, that these charming little works ought to be finished?"

"Finished?" I repeated. "But, aren't they finished?"

"Certainly not. They are only on the plaster. But a plaster cast is an intermediate form. Just a mere working model. It is due to the merits of these plaques and medals that they should be put into permanent material—silver or copper or bronze. I'll tell you what, Mayfield," he continued, enthusiastically. "You shall let Polton make replicas of some of them—he could do it with perfect safety to the originals. Then we could hand the casts to an electrotyper or a founder—I should favour the electrotype process for such small works—and have them executed in whichever metal you preferred. Then you would be able to see, for the first time, the real quality of the modelling."

I caught eagerly at the idea, but yet I was a little nervous.

"You think it would be perfectly safe?" I asked.

"Absolutely safe. Polton would make gelatine moulds which couldn't possibly injure the originals."

That decided me. I fell in with the suggestion enthusiastically, and forthwith we began an anxious consultation as to the most suitable pieces with which to make a beginning. We had selected half a dozen casts when my glance fell on the wax mould. That was Stella's masterpiece and it certainly ought to be finished; but I was loath to part with the mould for fear of an accident. Very dubiously, I handed it to Thorndyke and asked: "What do you think of this? Could it be cast without any risk of breaking it?"

He laid the mould on the table before him so that the light fell obliquely across it and looked down on it reflectively.

"So," said he, "this is the wax mould. I was reading about it only yesterday and admiring your resourcefulness and ingenuity. I must read the entry again with the actual object before me."

He opened the diary, which he had laid on the table, and when he had found the entry, read it to himself in an undertone.

"Dropped in to have tea with Stella and found her bubbling with excitement and triumph. She had just finished the portrait medal and though her eyes were red and painful from the strain of the close work, in spite of her new spectacles, she was quite happy and as proud as a little peacock. And well she might be. I should like Lanterri to see his unknown pupil's work. We decided to make the mould of it at once, but when I got out the plaster tin, I found it empty. Most unfortunate, for the clay was beginning to dry and I didn't dare to damp it. But something had to be done to protect it. Suddenly I had a brilliant idea. There was nearly a whole candle in Stella's candlestick, quite enough for a mould, and good, hard wax that wouldn't warp. I took off the reflector and lighted the candle, which I took out of the candlestick and held almost upside down over the clay medal and let the wax drip on to it. Soon the medal was covered by a film of wax which grew thicker and thicker, until, by the time I had used up practically the whole of the candle, there was a good, solid crust of wax, quite strong enough to cast from. When I went home, I took the slate with me with the wax mould sticking to it, intending to cover it with a plaster shell for extra safety. But my plaster tin was empty, too, so I put the slate away in a safe place until I should get some fresh plaster to make the cast; which will not happen until I get back from Chelmsford.

"Busy evening getting ready for tomorrow; hope I shall feel less cheap then than I do now."

As Thorndyke finished reading he looked up and remarked: "That was an excellent plan of yours. I have seen Polton use the same method. But how was it that you never made the cast?"

"I was afraid of damaging the mould. As you know, when I came back from Ipswich, Stella was dead, and as the medal was her last work and her best, I hardly dared to risk the chance of destroying it."

"Still," Thorndyke urged, "it was the medal that was her work. The mould was your own; and the medal exists only potentially in the mould. It will come into actual existence only when the cast is made."

I saw the force of this, but I was still a little uneasy, and said so,

"There is no occasion," said he. "The mould is amply strong enough to cast from. It might possibly break in separating the cast, but that would be of no consequence, as you would then have the cast, which would be the medal, itself. And it could then be put into bronze or silver."

"Very well," I said, "if you guarantee the safety of the operation, I am satisfied. I should love to see it in silver; or perhaps it might look even better in gold."

Having disposed of the works, themselves, we fell to discussing the question of suitable settings or frames; and this led us to the subject of the portraits. Thorndyke glanced over the collection, and picking up one, which happened to be my own favourite, looked at it thoughtfully.

"It is a beautiful face," said he, "and this seems to have been a singularly happy portrait. In red chalk autotype, it would make a charming little picture. Did you take it?"

"Yes; and as I have the negative I am inclined to adopt your suggestion. I am surprised that I never thought of it myself, for red chalk is exactly the right medium."

"Then let Polton have the negative. He is quite an expert in autotype work."

I accepted the offer gladly and we then came back to the question of framing. Thorndyke's suggestion was that the portrait should be treated as a medallion and enclosed in a frame to match that of the medal. The idea appealed to me rather strongly, and presently a further one occurred to me, though it was suggested indirectly by Thorndyke, who had taken up the tress of Stella's hair and was looking at it admiringly as he drew it softly between his fingers.

"Human hair," he remarked, "and particularly a woman's hair, is always a beautiful material, no matter what its colour may be; but this red-gold variety is one of the most gorgeous of Nature's productions."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is extremely decorative. Barbara had her tress made up into a thin plait and worked into the frame of a miniature of Stella. I liked the idea, but somehow the effect is not so very pleasing. But it is an oblong frame."

"I don't think," said Thorndyke, "that a plait was quite the best form. A little cable would look better, especially for a medallion portrait; indeed I think that if you had a plain square black frame with a circular opening, a little golden cable, carried round concentrically with the opening would have a rather fine effect."

"So it would," I exclaimed. "I think it would look charming. I had no idea, Thorndyke, that you were a designer. Do you think Polton could make the cable?"

"Polton," he replied, impressively, "can do anything that can be done with a single pair of human hands. Let him have the hair, and he will make the cable and the frame, too; and he will see that the glass cover is an airtight fit—for, of course, the cable would have to be under the glass."

To this also I agreed with a readiness that surprised myself. And yet it was not surprising. Hitherto I had been accustomed secretly and in solitude to pore over these pathetic little relics of happier days and lock up my sorrows and my sense of bereavement in my own breast. Now, for the first time, I had a confidant who shared the knowledge of my shattered hopes and vanished happiness; and so wholeheartedly, with such delicate sympathy and perfect understanding had Thorndyke entered into the story of my troubled life that I found in his companionship not only a relief from my old

self-repression but a sort of subdued happiness. Almost cheerfully I fetched an empty cigar-box and a supply of cotton wool and tissue paper and helped him tenderly and delicately to pack my treasures for their first exodus from under my roof. And it was with only a faint twinge of regret that I saw him, at length, depart with the box under his arm.

“You needn’t be uneasy, Mayfield,” he said, pausing on the stairs to look back. “Nothing will be injured; and as soon as the casting is successfully carried through, I shall drop a note in your letter-box to set your mind at rest. Good night.”

I watched him as he descended the stairs, and listened to his quick foot-falls, fading away up the court. Then I went back to my room with a faint sense of desolation to repack the depleted deed-box and thereafter to betake myself to bed.

---

## XV. — A PURSUIT AND A DISCOVERY

MORE than a week had passed since that eventful evening—how eventful I did not then realize—when I had delivered my simple treasures into Thorndyke's hands. But I was not uneasy; for, within twenty-four hours, I had found in my letter-box the promised note, assuring me that the preliminary operations had been safely carried through and that nothing had been damaged. Nor was I impatient. I realized that Polton had other work than mine on hand and that there was a good deal to do. Moreover, a little rush of business had kept me employed and helped me to follow Thorndyke's counsel and forget, as well as I could, the shadow of mystery and peril that hung over my friends, and, by implication, over me.

But on the evening of which I am now speaking I was free. I had cleared off the last of the day's work, and, after dining reposefully at my club, found myself with an hour or two to spare before bed-time; and it occurred to me to look in on Thorndyke to smoke a friendly pipe and perchance get a glimpse of the works in progress.

I entered the Temple from the west, and, threading my way through the familiar labyrinth, crossed Tanfield Court, and passing down the narrow alley at its eastern side, came out into King's Bench Walk. I crossed the Walk at once and was sauntering down the pavement towards Thorndyke's house when I noticed a large, closed car drawn up at its entry, and, standing on the pavement by the car, a tall man whom I recognized by the lamplight as Mr Superintendent Miller.

Now I did not much want to meet the superintendent, and in any case it was pretty clear to me that my visit to Thorndyke was not very opportune. The presence of Miller suggested business, and the size of the car suggested other visitors. Accordingly I slowed down and was about to turn back when my eye caught another phenomenon. In the entry next to Thorndyke's a man was standing, well back in the shadow, but not so far that he could not get a view of the car; on which he was quite obviously keeping a watchful eye. Indeed, he was so preoccupied with his observation of it that he had not noticed my approach, his back being turned towards me.

Naturally, the watchful attitude and the object of his watchfulness aroused my suspicions as to his identity. But a movement backward on his part which brought him within range of the entry lamp, settled matter. He was Anthony Wallingford.

I turned and walked quietly back a few paces. What was this idiot doing here within a few yards of Thorndyke's threshold? Was he merely spying fatuously and without purpose? Or was it possible that he might be up to some kind of mischief? As I framed the question my steps brought me opposite another entry. The walk was in darkness save for the few lamps and the place was practically deserted. After a moment's reflection, I stepped into the entry and decided thence to keep a watch upon the watcher.

I had not long to wait. Hardly had I taken up my rather undignified position when three men emerged from the house and walked slowly to the car. By the light of the lamp above Thorndyke's entry, I could see them quite plainly and I recognized them all. One was Thorndyke, himself, another was Dr Jervis, Thorndyke's colleague, now in the employ of the Home Office, and the third was Dr Barnwell, well-known to me as the analyst and toxicologist to the Home Office. All three carried substantial bags and Dr Barnwell was encumbered with a large case, like an out-size suit-case, suggestive of chemical apparatus. While they were depositing themselves and their impedimenta in the car, Superintendent Miller gave directions to the driver. He spoke in clear, audible tones, but though (I have to confess) I listened intently, I caught only the question: "Do you know the way?" The words which preceded and followed it were just audible but not intelligible to me. It appeared, however, that they were intelligible to Wallingford, for, as soon as they were spoken and while the superintendent still held the open door of the car, he stepped forth from his lurking-place and walked boldly and rapidly across to the narrow passage by which I had come.

Realizing instantly what his intention was, I came out of the entry and started in pursuit. As I reached the entrance to the passage, my ear caught the already faint sound of his receding footsteps; by which I learned that he was running swiftly and as silently as he could. Since I did not intend to lose him, I had no choice but to follow his example, and I raced across Tanfield Court, past the Cloisters and round by the church as if the Devil were after me instead of before. Half-way up Inner Temple Lane he slowed down to a walk—very wisely, for otherwise the night porter would certainly have stopped him—and was duly let out into Fleet Street, whither I followed him at a short interval.

When I stepped out of the gate I saw him some little distance away to the west, giving directions to the driver of a taxi. I looked round desperately, and, to my intense relief, perceived an apparently empty taxi approaching from the east. I walked quickly towards it, signalling as I went, and the driver at once drew in to the kerb and stopped. I approached him, and, leaning forward, said in a low voice—though there was no one within earshot: "There is a taxi just in front. It will probably follow a big car which is coming up Middle Temple Lane. I want you to keep that taxi in sight, wherever it may go. Do you understand?"

The man broke into a cynical grin—the nearest approach to geniality of which a taxi-driver is capable—and replied that he understood; and as, at this moment, the nose of the car appeared coming through the arched entrance gate of Middle Temple Lane, I sprang into the taxi and shut the door. From the off-side window, but keeping well back out of sight, I saw the car creep across Fleet Street, turn eastward and then sweep round into Chancery Lane. Almost immediately, Wallingford's taxi moved off and followed; and then, after a short interval, my own vehicle started, and, crossing directly to Chancery Lane, went ahead in the wake of the others.

It was an absurd affair. Now that the pursuit was started and its conduct delegated for the time to the driver, I leaned

back in the shadow and was disposed to grin a little sheepishly at my own proceedings. I had embarked on them in obedience to a sudden impulse without reflection—for which, indeed, there had been no time. But was there anything to justify me in keeping this watch on Wallingford? I debated the question at some length and finally decided that, although he was probably only playing the fool, still it was proper that I should see what he was really up to. Thorndyke was my friend and it was only right that I should stand between him and any possible danger. Well as he was able to take care of himself, he could not be always on his guard. And I could not forget the infernal machine. Someone at least had the will to do him an injury.

But what about the brown-hatted man? Why had he not joined in this novel sport? Or had he? I put my head out of the window and looked along the street in our rear, but there was no sign of any pursuing taxi. The ridiculous procession was limited to three vehicles; which was just as well, since we did not want a police cyclist bringing up the rear.

From my own proceedings my thoughts turned to those of Thorndyke and his companions, though they were no affair of mine, or of Wallingford's either, for that matter. Apparently the three men were going somewhere to make a post mortem examination. The presence of Dr Barnwell suggested an analysis in addition; and the presence of Miller hinted at a criminal case of some kind. But it was not my case or Wallingford's. For both of us the analyst had already done his worst.

While I reflected, I kept an eye on the passing landmarks, checking our route and idly trying to forecast our destination. From Chancery Lane we crossed Holborn and entered Gray's Inn Road, at the bottom of which we swept round by King's Cross into Pancras Road. At the end of this we turned up Great College Street, crossed Camden Road and presently passed along the Kentish Town Road. So far I had noted our progress with no more than a languid interest. It did not matter to me whither we were going. But when, at the Bull and Gate, we swept round into Highgate Road, my attention awoke; and when the taxi turned sharply at the Duke of St Albans and entered Swain's Lane, I sat up with a start. In a moment of sudden enlightenment, I realized what our destination must be; and the realization came upon me with the effect of a palpable blow. This lane, with its precipitous ascent at the upper end, was no ordinary thoroughfare. It was little more than an approach to the great cemetery whose crowded areas extended on either side of it; its traffic was almost completely limited to the mournful processions that crept up to the wide gates by the mortuary chapel. Indeed, on the very last occasion when I had ridden up this lane, my conveyance had been the mourning carriage which followed poor little Stella to her last home.

Before I had recovered from the shock of this discovery sufficiently to consider what it might mean, the taxi came to a sudden halt. I stepped out, and, looking up the lane, made out the shadowy form of Wallingford's vehicle, already backing and manoeuvring to turn round.

"Bloke in front has got out," my driver announced in a hoarse whisper, and as he spoke, I caught sight of Wallingford—or at least of a human figure—lurking in the shadow of the trees by the railings on the right-hand side of the road. I paid off my driver (who, thereupon, backed on to the footway, turned and retired down the hill) and having waited for the other taxi to pass down, began slowly to ascend the lane, keeping in the shadow of the trees. Now that the two taxis were gone, Wallingford and I had the lane to ourselves, excepting where, in the distance ahead, the reflected light from the headlamps of the car made a dim halo and the shape of the gothic chapel loomed indistinctly against the murky sky. I could see him quite plainly, and no doubt he was aware of my presence; at any rate, I did not propose to attempt any concealment, so far as he was concerned. His movements had ceased to be of any interest to me. My entire concern was with the party ahead and with the question as to what Thorndyke was doing at this time of night in Highgate Cemetery.

The burial ground is divided, as I have said, into two parts, which lie on either side of the lane; the old cemetery with its great gates and the large mortuary chapel, on the left or west side and the newer part on the right. To which of these two parts was Thorndyke bound? That was the question that I had to settle.

I continued to advance up the lane, keeping in the shadow, though it was a dark night and the precaution was hardly necessary. Presently I overtook Wallingford and passed him without either concealment or recognition on either side. I could now clearly make out the gable and pinnacles of the chapel and saw the car turn in the wide sweep and then extinguish its headlights. Presently, from the gate-house there emerged a party of men of whom some carried lanterns, by the light of which I could recognize Thorndyke and his three companions; and I noted that they appeared to have left their cases either in the car or elsewhere for they now carried nothing. They lingered for a minute or two at the wicket by the great gates; then, accompanied by a man whom I took to be the gate-keeper, they crossed the road to the gate of the eastern cemetery and were at once followed by another party of men, who trundled two wheel-barrow, loaded with some bulky objects the nature of which I could not make out. I watched them with growing anxiety and suspicion as they passed in at the gate; and when they had all entered and moved away along the main path, I came forth from the shadow and began to walk quickly up the lane.

The eastern cemetery adjoins Waterlow Park, from which it is separated by a low wall surmounted by tall railings, and this was my objective. The park was now, of course, closed for the night, locked up and deserted. So much the better. Locks and bars were no hindrance to me. I knew the neighbourhood of old. Every foot of the lane was familiar to me, though the houses that had grown up at the lower end had changed its aspect from that which I remembered when as a boy I had rambled through its leafy shades. On I strode, past the great gates on the left and the waiting car, within which I could see the driver dozing, past the white gatehouse on the right, up the steep hill until I came to the place where a tall oak fence encloses the park from the lane. Here I halted and took off my overcoat, for the six-foot fence is guarded at the top by a row of vicious hooks. Laying the folded overcoat across the top of the fence, I sprang up, sat for a moment astride and then

dropped down into the enclosure.

I now stood in a sort of dry ditch between the fence and a steep bank, covered with bushes which rose to the level of the park. I had just taken down my overcoat and was putting it on before climbing the bank when its place was taken by another overcoat cast over from without. Then a pair of hands appeared, followed by the clatter of feet against the fence and the next moment I saw Wallingford astride of the top and looking down at me.

I still affected to be unaware of him, and, turning away, began to scramble up the bank, at the summit of which I pushed my way through the bushes, and, stepping over a three-foot fence, came out upon a by-path overshadowed by trees. Pausing for a moment to get my bearings and to mark out a route by which I could cross the park without coming into the open, where I might be seen by some watchful keeper, I started off towards a belt of trees just as Wallingford stepped over the dwarf fence and came out upon the path behind me.

The position was becoming absurd, though I was too agitated to appreciate its humour. I could not protest against his following me seeing that I had come in the first place to spy upon him, and was now, like himself, engaged in spying upon Thorndyke. However, he soon solved the difficulty by quickening his pace and overtaking me, when he asked in a quite matter-of-fact tone: "What is Thorndyke up to, Mayfield?"

"That is what I want to find out," I replied.

"He is not acting on your instructions, then?"

"No; and the probability is that what he is doing is no concern of mine or of yours either. But I don't know; and I have come here to make sure. Keep in the shadow. We don't want the keeper to see us prowling about here."

He stepped back into the shade and we pursued our way in silence; and even then, troubled and agitated as I was, I noted that he asked me no question as to what was in my mind. He was leaving the initiative entirely to me.

When we had crossed the park in the shelter of the trees and descended into the hollow by the little lake where we were out of sight of the gate-house, I led the way towards the boundary between the park and the cemetery. The two enclosures were separated, as I have said, by a low wall surmounted by a range of high, massive railings; and the wall and the cemetery beyond were partially concealed by an irregular hedge of large bushes. Pushing through the bushes, I moved along the wall until I came to the place which I intended to watch; and here I halted in the shade of a tall mass of bushes, and resting my arms on the broad coping of the wall, took up my post of observation with Wallingford, silently attentive at my side.

The great burial ground was enveloped in darkness so profound that the crowded headstones and monuments conveyed to the eye no more than a confused glimmer of ghostly pallor that was barely distinguishable from the general obscurity. One monument only could be separately identified: a solitary stone cross that rose above a half-seen grave some sixty yards from the wall. But already the mysterious procession could be seen threading its way in and out by the intricate, winding paths, the gleam of the lanterns lighting up now a marble figure and now a staring head-stone or urn or broken column; and as it drew ever nearer, the glare of the lanterns, the rumble of the barrow-wheels on the hard paths and the spectral figures of the men grew more and more distinct. And still Wallingford watched and spoke never a word.

At length, a turn of the path brought the procession into full view, and as it approached I could make out a man—evidently by his uniform, the cemetery keeper—leading, lantern in hand and showing the way. Nearer and nearer the procession drew until at last, close by the stone cross, the leader halted. Then, as Thorndyke and his companions—now clearly visible—came up, he lifted his lantern and let its light fall full on the cross. And even at this distance I could read with ease—though it was unnecessary—the single name STELLA.

As that name—to me so sacred—flashed out of the darkness, Wallingford gripped my arm. "Great God!" he exclaimed. "It is Stella Keene's grave! I came here once with Barbara to plant flowers on it."

He paused, breathing hard and still clutching my arm. Then, in a hoarse whisper, he demanded: "What can that devil be going to do?"

There was little need to ask. Even as he spoke, the labourers began to unload from the first barrow its lading of picks, shovels and coils of rope. And when these were laid on the ground, the second barrow yielded up its cargo; a set of rough canvas screens which the men began to set up around the grave. And even as the screens were being erected, another lantern slowly approaching along the path, revealed two men carrying a long, bedstead-like object—a bier—which they at length set down upon its stunted legs just outside the screens.

With set teeth I stared incredulously between the railings at these awful preparations while Wallingford, breathing noisily, held fast to my arm with a hand that I could feel shaking violently. The lanterns inside the screens threw a weird, uncertain light on the canvas, and monstrous, distorted shadows moved to and fro. Presently, amidst these flitting, spectral shapes, appeared one like an enormous gnome, huge, hideous and deformed, holding an up-raised pick. The shadowy implement fell with an audible impact, followed by the ring of a shovel.

At the sight and the sound—so dreadfully conclusive—Wallingford sprang up with a stifled cry.

"God Almighty! That devil is going to dig her up!"

He stood motionless and rigid for a few moments. Then, turning suddenly, without another word, he burst through the bushes, and I heard him racing madly across the park.

I had half a mind to follow him. I had seen enough. I now knew the shocking truth. Why stay and let my soul be harrowed by the sight of these ghouls? Every stroke of pick or shovel seemed to knock at my heart. Why not go and leave them to their work of desecration? But I could not go. I could not tear myself away. There was the empty bier. Presently she would be lying on it. I could not go until I had seen her borne away.

So I stayed there gazing between the railings, watching the elfin shapes that flitted to and fro on the screen, listening to the thud of pick and the ring and scrape of shovel and letting my confused thoughts wander obscurely through a maze of half-realized pain and anger. I try in vain to recall clearly what was my state of mind. Out of the confusion and bewilderment little emerges but a dull indignation and especially a feeling of surprised resentment against Thorndyke.

The horrible business went on methodically. By degrees a shadowy mound grew up at the bottom of the screen. And then of her movements and other sounds; a hollow, woody sound that seemed to bring my heart into my mouth. At last, the screens were opened at the end and then the coffin was borne out and laid on the bier. By the light of the lanterns I could see it distinctly. I was even able to recognize it, shabby and earth-stained as it now was. I saw Thorndyke help the keeper to spread over it some kind of pall, and then two men stepped between the handles of the bier, stooped and picked it up; and then the grim procession re-formed and began slowly to move away.

I watched it until it had passed round a turn of the path and was hidden from my view. Then I stood up, pushed my way through the bushes and stole away across the park by the way I had come. In the ditch inside the fence I stood for a few moments listening, but the silence was as profound as the darkness. As quietly as I could I climbed over the fence and dropped down into the lane. There seemed to be not a soul moving anywhere near; nevertheless, when I had slipped on my overcoat, instead of retracing my steps down the lane past the entrance-gates of the cemetery, I turned to the right and toiled up the steep hill to its termination in South Grove, where I bore away westward and, descending the long slope of West Hill, passed the Duke of St Albans and re-entered the Highgate Road.

It did not occur to me to look out for any conveyance. My mind was in a whirl that seemed to communicate itself to my body and I walked on and on like one in a dream.

The dreary miles of deserted streets were consumed unreckoned—though still, without conscious purpose, I followed the direct road home as a well-constructed automaton might have done. But I saw nothing. Nor, for a time, could I be said to think coherently. My thoughts seethed and eddied in such confusion that no product emerged. I was conscious only of an indignant sense of shocked decency and a loathing of Thorndyke and all his works.

Presently, however, I grew somewhat more reasonable and my thoughts began to take more coherent shape. As a lawyer, I could not but perceive that Thorndyke must have something definite in his mind. He could not have done what I had seen him do without a formal authority from the Home Secretary; and before any such authority would have been given he would have been called upon to show cause why the exhumation should be carried out. And such licences are not lightly granted. Nor, I had to admit, was Thorndyke likely to have made the application without due consideration. He must have had reasons for this outrageous proceeding which not only appeared sufficient to him but which must have appeared sufficient to the Home Secretary.

All this became by degrees clear enough to me. But yet I had not a moment's doubt that he had made some monstrous mistake. Probably he had been misled by something in my diary. That seemed to be the only possible explanation. Presently he would discover his error—by means which I shudderingly put aside. But when the error was discovered, the scandal would remain. It is impossible to maintain secrecy in a case like this. In twenty-four hours or less, all the world would know that the body of Mrs Monkhouse's step-sister had been exhumed; and no subsequent explanation would serve to destroy the effect of that announcement. Wallingford's dismal prophecy was about to be fulfilled.

Moreover, Thorndyke's action amounted in effect to an open accusation—not of Madeline or Wallingford but of Barbara, herself. And this indignity she would suffer at my hands—at the hands of her oldest friend! The thought was maddening. But for the outrageous lateness of the hour, I would have gone to her at once to put her on her guard and crave her pardon. It was the least that I could do. But it could not be done tonight, for she would have been in bed hours ago and her flat locked up for the night. However, I would go in the morning at the earliest possible hour. I knew that Barbara was an early riser and it would not be amiss if I arrived at the flat before the maid. She must be warned at the earliest possible moment and by me, who was the author of the mischief.

Thus, by the time that I reached my chambers I had decided clearly what was to be done. At first, I was disposed to reject altogether the idea of sleep. But presently, more reasonable thoughts prevailing, I decided at least to lie down and sleep a little if I could. But first I made a few indispensable preparations for the morning; filled the kettle and placed it on the gas-ring, set out the materials for a hasty breakfast, and cleaned my shoes. Then, when I had wound the alarm clock and set it for five, I partially undressed and crept into bed.

---

## XVI. — BARBARA'S MESSAGE

THE routine of modern life creates the habit of dividing the day into a series of definite phases which we feel impelled to recognize even in circumstances to which they have no real application. Normally, the day is brought formally to an end by retirement to bed, a process that—also normally—leads to a lapse into unconsciousness the emergence from which marks the beginning of another day. So, in mere obedience to the call of habit, I had gone to bed, though, in spite of bodily



fatigue, there had been no hint of any tendency to sleep. But I might have saved myself the trouble. True, my tired limbs stretched themselves out restfully and mere muscular fatigue slowly wore off; but my brain continued, uselessly and chaotically, to pursue its activities only the more feverishly when the darkness and the silence closed the avenues of impressions from without.

Hour after hour crept by with incredible slowness, marked at each quarter by the gentle undertone of the Treasury clock, voicing its announcement, as it seemed, in polite protest (surely there was never a clock that hinted so delicately and unobtrusively at the passage of the irrevocable minutes "that perish for us and are reckoned"). Other sound there was none to break the weary silence of the night; but by the soft, mellow chime I was kept informed of the birth of another day and the progress of its infancy, which crawled so tardily in the wake of my impatience.

At last, when half-past four had struck, I threw back the bedclothes, and, stepping out, switched on the light and put a match to the gas under the kettle. I had no occasion to hurry, but rather sought to make my preparations with studied deliberation; in spite of which I had shaved, washed and dressed and was sitting down to my frugal breakfast when the alarm clock startled me by blurting out with preposterous urgency its unnecessary reminder.

It had just turned a quarter-past five when I set forth to take my way on foot towards Kensington. No conveyance was necessary, nor would it have been acceptable; for though throughout the wearisome hours that I had spent in bed my thoughts had never ceased to revolve around the problem that Thorndyke had set, I still seemed to have the whole matter to debate afresh.

What should I say to Barbara? How should I break to her the news that my own appointed agent had made an undissembled accusation and was holding over her an unconcealed menace? I knew well enough what her attitude would be. She would hold me blameless and she would confront the threat against her reputation—even against her liberty—calmly and unafraid. I had no fear for her either of panic or recrimination. But how could I excuse myself? What could I say in extenuation of Thorndyke's secret, hostile manoeuvre?

The hands of the church clock were approaching half-past six when I turned the corner and came in sight of the entrance to her flat. And at the same moment I was made to realize the imminence and the actuality of the danger which threatened her. In a narrow street nearly opposite to the flat, a closed car was drawn up in such a position that it could move out into the main road either to the right or left without turning round; and a glance at the alert driver and a watchful figure inside—both of whom looked at me attentively as I passed—at once aroused my suspicions. And when, as I crossed to the flat, I observed a tall man perambulating the pavement, those suspicions were confirmed. For this was no brown-hatted neophyte. The hard, athletic figure and the calm, observant face were unmistakable. I had seen too many plain-clothes policemen to miss the professional characteristics. And this man also took unobtrusive note of me as my destination became apparent.

The church clock was chiming half-past six as I pressed the button of the electric bell by Barbara's front door. In the silence that still wrapped the building, I could hear the bell ring noisily, though far away, and I listened intently for some sounds of movement within. The maid would not arrive for another half hour, but I knew that Barbara was usually up at this hour. But I could hear no sign of any one stirring in the flat. Then I rang again, and yet again; and as there was still no sound from within, a vague uneasiness began to creep over me. Could Barbara be away from home? That might be as well in some respects. It might give time for the discovery of the error and save some unpleasantness. On the other hand—but at this moment I made a singular discovery myself. The latch-key was in the door! That was a most remarkable circumstance. It was so very unlike the methodical, self-possessed Barbara. But probably it had been left there by the maid. At any rate, there it was; and as I had now rung four times without result, I turned the key, pushed open the door and entered.

When I had closed the door behind me, I stood for some seconds in the dark hall, listening. There was not a sound. I was astonished that the noise of the bell had not aroused Barbara; indeed, I was surprised that she was not already up and about. Still vaguely uneasy, I felt for the light-switch, and when I had turned it on, stole along the hall and peered into the sitting room. Of course there was no one in it; nor was there any one in the kitchen, or in the spare bedroom. Finally, I went to Barbara's bedroom and knocked loudly, at the same time calling her by name. But still there was no response or sound of movement.

At last, after one or two more trials, I turned the handle and opening the door a few inches, looked in. The room was nearly dark, but the cold, wan light of the early morning was beginning to show on the blind; and in that dim twilight I could just make out a figure lying on the bed. With a sudden thrill of alarm, I stepped into the room and switched on the light. And then I stood, rooted to the spot, as if I had been turned into stone.

She was there, lying half-dressed upon the bed and as still as a bronze effigy upon a tomb. From where I stood I could see that her right hand, resting on the bed, lightly held a hypodermic syringe, and that her left sleeve was rolled up nearly to the shoulder. And when, approaching stealthily on tip-toe, I drew near, I saw upon the bare arm a plainly visible puncture and close by it a little blister-like swelling.

The first glance had made plain the dreadful truth. I had realized instantly that she was dead. Yet still, instinctively, I put my fingers to her wrist in the forlorn hope of detecting some lingering trace of life; and then any possible doubt was instantly dispelled; for the surface was stone-cold and the arm as rigid as that of a marble statue. Not only was she dead; she had been lying here dead while I, in my bed in the Temple, had lain listening to the chimes and waiting for the hour when I could come to her.

For quite a long time I stood by the bed looking down on her in utter stupefaction. So overwhelming was the catastrophe that for the moment my faculties seemed to be paralysed, my power of thought suspended. In a trance of amazement I gazed at her, and, with the idle irrelevancy of a dreamer, noted how young, how beautiful she looked; how lissom and graceful was the pose of the figure, how into the waxen face with its drowsy eyes and parted lips, there had come a something soft and youthful, almost girlish, that had not been there during life. Dimly and dreamily I wondered what the difference could be.

Suddenly my glance fell on the syringe that still rested in her hand. And with that my faculties awoke. She had killed herself! But why? Even as I asked myself the question, the terrible, the incredible answer stole into my mind only to be indignantly cast out. But yet—I lifted my eyes from the calm, pallid face, so familiar and yet so strange, and cast a scared glance round the room; and then I observed for the first time a small table near the bed on which beside a flat candle-stick containing the remains of a burnt-out candle, lay two unstamped letters. Stepping over to the table, I read their superscriptions. One was addressed to me, the other to Superintendent Miller, CID, and both were in Barbara's handwriting.

With a shaking hand I snatched up the one addressed to me, tore open the envelope and drew out the letter; and this is what I read:—

“Thursday, 1 a.m.

“My dearest Rupert,

“This letter is to bid you farewell. When you receive it you will curse and revile me, but I shall not hear those curses. Now, as I write, you are my darling Rupert and I am your dear friend, Barbara. With what will be when I am gone, I have no concern. It would be futile to hope that any empty words of mine could win your forgiveness. I have no such thought and do not even ask for pardon. When you think of me in the future it will be with hatred and loathing. It cannot be otherwise. But I have no part in the future. In the present—which runs out with every word that I write—I love you, and you, at least, are fond of me. And so it will be to the end, which is now drawing near.

“But though this which I write to you in love will be read by you in hatred, yet I have a mind to let you know the whole truth. And that truth can be summed up in three words. I love you. I have always loved you, even when I was a little girl and you were a boy. My desire for you has been the constant, consuming passion of my life, and to possess you for my own has been the settled purpose from which I have never deviated but once—when I married Harold.

“As I grew up from girlhood to womanhood, my love grew from a girl's to a woman's passion and my resolution became more fixed. I meant to have you for my own. But there was Stella. I could see that you worshipped her, and I knew that I should never have you while she lived. I was fond of poor Stella. But she stood as an insuperable obstacle between you and me. And—I suppose I am not quite as other women. I am a woman of a single purpose. Stella stood in the way of that purpose. It was a terrible necessity. But it had to be.

“And after all, I seemed to have failed. When Stella was gone, you went away and I thought I had lost you for ever. For I could not follow you. I knew that you had understood me, at least partly, and that you had fled from me.

“Then I was in despair. It seemed that I had dismissed poor Stella to no purpose. For once, I lost courage, and, in my loneliness, committed myself to a marriage with poor Harold. It was a foolish lapse. I ought to have kept my courage and lived in hope, as I realized almost as soon as I had married him.

“But when you came back, I could have killed myself. For I could see that you were still the same old Rupert and my love flamed up more intensely than ever. And once more I resolved that you should be my own; and so you would have been in the end but for Dr Thorndyke. That was the fatal error that I fell into; the error of under-valuing him. If I had only realized the subtlety of that man, I would have made a serious effort to deal with him. He should have had something very different from the frivolous make-believe that I sent him.

“Well, Rupert, my darling, I have played my hand and I have lost. But I have lost only by the merest mischance. As I sit here with the ready-filled syringe on the table at my side, I am as confident as ever that it was worth while. I regret nothing but the bad luck that defeated skilful play, and the fact that you, my dear one, have had to pay so large a proportion of my losings.

“I will say no more. You know everything now; and it has been a melancholy pleasure to me to have this little talk with you before making my exit.

“Your loving friend,

“BARBARA.”

“I have just slipped the key into the latch on the chance that you may come to me early. From what Tony said and what I know of you, I think it just possible. I hope you may. I like to think that we may meet, for the last time, alone.”

To say that this astounding letter left me numb and stupefied with amazement would be to express but feebly its effect on me. The whole episode presented itself to me as a frightful dream from which I should presently awaken and come back to understandable and believable realities. For I know not how long I stood, dazed by the shock, with my eyes riveted on that calm, comely figure on the bed, trying to grasp the incredible truth that this dead woman was Barbara, that she had killed herself and that she had murdered Stella—murdered her callously, deliberately and with considered intent.

Suddenly, the deathly silence of the flat was broken by the sound of an opening, and then of a closing door. Then a strong masculine voice was borne to my ear saying, in a not unkindly tone. "Now, my girl, you had better run off to the kitchen and shut yourself in."

On this I roused, and, walking across to the door, which was still ajar, went out into the hall, where I confronted Superintendent Miller and Barbara's maid. Both stared at me in astonishment and the maid uttered a little cry of alarm as she turned and hurried into the kitchen. The superintendent looked at me steadily and with obvious suspicion, and, after a moment or two, asked, gruffly, nodding at the bedroom door, "Is Mrs Monkhouse in there?"

"Mrs Monkhouse is dead," I answered.

"Dead!" he repeated, incredulously. Then, pushing past me, he strode into the room, and as I followed, I could hear him cursing furiously in a not very low undertone. For a few moments he stood looking down on the corpse, gently touching the bare arm and apparently becoming aware of its rigidity. Suddenly he turned, and, glaring fiercely at me, demanded: "What is the meaning of this, Mr Mayfield?"

"The meaning?" I repeated, looking at him inquiringly.

"Yes. How came you to let her do this—that is, if she did it herself?"

"I found her dead when I arrived here," I explained.

"And when did you arrive here?"

"About half an hour ago."

He shook his head and rejoined in an ominously quiet tone: "That won't do, Sir. The maid has only just come and the dead woman couldn't have let you in."

I explained that I had found the key in the outer door but he made no pretence of accepting the explanation.

"That is well enough," said he, "if you can prove that the key was in the door. Otherwise it is a mere statement which may or may not be true. The actual position is that I have found you alone in this flat with the body of a woman who has died a violent death. You will have to account satisfactorily for your presence here at this time in the morning, and for your movements up to the time of your arrival here."

The very equivocal, not to say perilous, position in which I suddenly found myself served to steady my wits. I realized instantly how profoundly suspicious the appearances really were and that if I could not produce evidence of my recent arrival I should quite probably have to meet the charge of being an accessory to the suicide. And an accessory to suicide is an accessory to murder. It was a very serious position.

"Have you seen your man yet?" I asked. "The men, I mean, who were on observation duty outside."

"I have seen them, but I haven't spoken to them. They are waiting out on the landing now. Why do you ask?"

"Because I think they saw me come in here."

"Ah, well, we can see about that presently. Is that letter that you have in your hand from Mrs Monkhouse? Because, if it is, I shall want to see it."

"I don't want to show it unless it is necessary; and I don't think it will be. There is a letter addressed to you which will probably tell you all that you need know."

He snatched up the letter, and, tearing it open, glanced through it rapidly. Then, without comment, he handed it to me. It was quite short and ran as follows:

"Thursday, 1.35 a.m.

"Mr Superintendent Miller, CID

"This is to inform you that I alone am responsible for the death of my late husband, Harold Monkhouse, and also for that of the late Miss Stella Keene. I had no confidants or accomplices and no one was aware of what I had done.

"As my own death will occur in about ten minutes (from an injection of morphine which I shall administer to myself) this statement may be taken as my dying declaration.

"I may add that no one is aware of my intention to take my life.

"Yours very truly

"BARBARA MONKHOUSE."

"Well," said Miller, as I returned the letter to him, "that supports your statement, and if my men saw you enter the flat, that will dispose of the matter so far as the suicide is concerned. But there is another question. It is evident that she knew that a discovery had been made. Now, who told her? Was it you, Mr Mayfield?"

"No," I replied, "it was not. I found her dead when I arrived, as I have told you."

"Do you know who did tell her?"

"I do not; and I am not disposed to make any guesses."

"No, it's no use guessing. Still, you know, Mr Mayfield, you knew, and you came here to tell her; and you know who knew besides yourself. But there," he added, as we moved out into the hall, "it is no use going into that now. I've acted like a fool—too punctilious by half. I oughtn't to have let her slip through my fingers. I should have acted at once on Dr Thorndyke's hint without waiting for confirmation."

He was still speaking in an angry, reproachful tone; but suddenly his manner changed. Looking at me critically but with something of kindly sympathy, he said: "It has been a trying business for you, Mr Mayfield—the whole scandalous affair; and this must have given you a frightful shock, though I expect you would rather have it as it is than as it ought to have been. But you don't look any the better for it."

He escorted me politely but definitely to the outer door, and when he opened it I saw his two subordinates waiting on the landing; to both of whom collectively Miller addressed the inquiry: "Did you see Mr Mayfield enter this flat?"

"Yes, Sir," was the reply of one, confirmed by the other. "He went up the stairs at exactly half-past six."

Miller nodded, and wishing me "good morning," beckoned to the two officers; and as I turned to descend the stairs, I saw the three enter and heard the door shut.

Once more in the outer world, walking the grey, half-lighted streets, to which the yet unextinguished lamps seemed only to impart an added chill, my confused thoughts took up the tangled threads at the point at which the superintendent's appearance had broken them off. But I could not get my ideas arranged into any intelligible form. Each aspect of the complex tragedy conflicted with all the others. The pitiful figure that I had left lying on the bed made its appeal in spite of the protest of reason; for the friendship of a lifetime cannot easily be extinguished in a moment. I knew now that she was a wretch, a monster; and when I reminded myself of what she had done, I grudged the easy, painless death by which she had slipped away so quietly from the wreckage that her incredible wickedness had created. When I contrasted that death—a more gentle lapsing into oblivion—with the long, cheerfully endured sufferings of brave, innocent little Stella, I could have cursed the faithful friendship of Wallingford which had let her escape from the payment to the uttermost farthing other hideous debt. And yet the face that haunted me—the calm, peaceful, waxen face—was the face of Barbara, my friend, almost my sister, who had been so much to me, who had loved me with that strange, tenacious, terrible passion.

It was very confusing. And the same inconsistency pervaded my thoughts of Thorndyke. Unreasonably, I found myself thinking of him with a certain repulsion, almost of dislike, as the cause of this catastrophe. Yet my reason told me that he had acted with the highest motives of justice; that he had but sought retribution for Stella's sufferings and death and those of poor, harmless Harold Monkhouse; that as a barrister, even as a citizen, he could do no less than denounce the wrong-doer. But my feelings were too lacerated, my emotions too excited to allow my reason to deal with the conflicting elements of this tragedy.

In this confused state of mind, I walked on, hardly conscious of direction, until I found myself at the entry of my chambers. I went in and made a futile attempt to do some work. Then I paced the room for an hour or more, alternately raging against Barbara and recalling the lonely figure that I had seen in the twilight of that darkened room, until my unrest drove me forth again to wander through the streets, away into the squalid east, among the docks and the rookeries from Whitechapel to Limehouse.

It was evening when, once more, I dragged myself up my stairs, and, spent with fatigue and exhausted by lack of food—for during the whole day I had taken but a few cups of tea, hastily snatched in the course of my wanderings—re-entered my chamber. As I closed the door, I noticed a letter in the box, and taking it out, listlessly opened the envelope. It was from Thorndyke; a short note, but very cordially worded, begging me "like a good fellow" to go round to have a talk with him.

I flung the note down impatiently on the table, with an immediate resurgence of my unreasonable sense of resentment. But in a few minutes I experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling. A sense of profound loneliness came upon me; a yearning for human companionship, and especially for the companionship of Thorndyke, from whom I had no secrets, and who knew the whole dreadful story even to its final culmination.

Once more, foot-sore as I was, I descended my stairs and a couple of minutes later was ascending the "pair" that led up to Thorndyke's chambers.

---

## XVII. — THORNDYKE RETRACES THE TRAIL

APPARENTLY Thorndyke had seen me from the window as I crossed the Walk, for, when I reached the landing, I found him standing in the open doorway of his chambers; and at the sight of him, whatever traces of unreasonable resentment may have lingered in my mind, melted away instantly. He grasped my hand with almost affectionate warmth, and looking at me earnestly and with the most kindly solicitude, said: "I am glad you have come, Mayfield. I couldn't bear to think of you alone in your chambers, haunted by this horrible tragedy."

"You have heard, then—about Barbara, I mean?"

"Yes. Miller called and told me. Of course, he is righteously angry that she has escaped, and I sympathize with him. But for us—for you and me—it is a great deliverance. I was profoundly relieved when I heard that she was gone; that the axe had fallen once for all."

"Yes," I admitted, "it was better than the frightful alternative of a trial and what would have followed. But still, it was

terrible to see her, lying dead, and to know that it was my hand—the hand of her oldest and dearest friend—that had struck the blow.”

“It was my hand, Mayfield, not yours, that actually struck the blow. But even if it had been yours instead of your agent’s, what could have been more just and proper than that retribution should have come through the hand of the friend and guardian of that poor murdered girl?”

I assented with a shudder to the truth of what he had said, but still my mind was too confused to allow me to see things in their true perspective. Barbara, my friend, was still more real to me than Barbara the murderess. He nodded sympathetically enough when I explained this, but rejoined, firmly: “You must try, my dear fellow, to see things as they really are. Shocking as this tragedy is, it would have been immeasurably worse if that terrible woman had not received timely warning. As it is, the horrible affair has run its course swiftly and is at an end. And do not forget that if the axe has fallen on the guilty its menace has been lifted from the innocent. Madeline Norris and Anthony Wallingford will sleep in peace tonight, free from the spectre of suspicion that has haunted them ever since Harold Monkhouse died. As to the woman whose body you found this morning, she was a monster. She could not have been permitted to live. Her very existence was a menace to the lives of all who came into contact with her.”

Again, I could not but assent to his stern indictment and his impartial statement of the facts.

“Very well, Mayfield,” said he. “Then try to put it to yourself that, for you, the worst has happened and is done with. Try to put it away as a thing that now belongs to the past and is, in so far as it is possible, to be forgotten.”

“As far as is possible,” I repeated. “Yes, of course, you are quite right, Thorndyke. But forgetfulness is not a thing which we can command at will.”

“Very true,” he replied. “But yet we can control to a large extent the direction of our thoughts. We can find interests and occupations. And, speaking of occupations, let me show you some of Polton’s productions.”

He rose, and putting a small table by the side of my chair, placed on it one or two small copper plaques and a silver medallion which he had taken from a drawer. The medallion was the self-portrait of Stella which had lain dormant in the wax mould through all the years which had passed since her death, and as I took it in my hand and gazed at the beloved face, I found it beautiful beyond my expectations.

“It is a most charming little work,” I said, holding it so that the lamp light fell most favourably on the relic, “I am infinitely obliged to you, Thorndyke.”

“Don’t thank me,” said he. “The whole credit is due to Polton. Not that he wants any thanks, for the work has yielded him hours of perfect happiness. But here he is with the products of another kind of work.”

As he spoke, Polton entered with a tray and began in his neat, noiseless way, to lay the table. I don’t know how much he knew, but when I caught his eye and his smile of greeting, it seemed to me that friendliness and kindly sympathy exuded from every line of his quaint, crinkly face. I thanked him for his skilful treatment of my treasures and then, observing that he was apparently laying the table for supper, would have excused myself. But Thorndyke would hear of no excuses.

“My dear fellow,” said he, “you are the very picture of physical exhaustion. I suspect that you have had practically no food today. A meal will help you to begin to get back to the normal. And, in any case, you mustn’t disappoint Polton, who has been expecting you to supper and has probably made a special effort to do credit to the establishment.”

I could only repeat my acknowledgments of Polton’s goodness (noting that he certainly must have made a special effort, to judge by the results which began to make themselves evident) and, conquering my repugnance to the idea of eating, take my place at the table.

It is perhaps somewhat humiliating to reflect that our emotional states, which we are apt to consider on a lofty spiritual plane, are controlled by matters so grossly material as the mere contents of our stomachs. But such is the degrading truth, as I now realized. For no sooner had I commenced a reluctant attack on the products of Polton’s efforts and drunk a glass of Burgundy—delicately warmed by that versatile artist to the exact optimum temperature—than my mental and physical unrest began to subside and allow a reasonable, normal outlook to develop, with a corresponding bodily state. In effect, I made quite a good meal and found myself listening with lively interest to Thorndyke’s account of the technical processes involved in converting my little plaster plaques and the wax mould into their final states in copper and silver.

Nevertheless, in the intervals of conversation the unforgettable events of the morning and the preceding night tended to creep back into my consciousness; and now a question which I had hitherto hardly considered began to clamour for an answer. Towards the end of the meal, I put it into words. Apropos of nothing in our previous conversation, I asked: “How did you know, Thorndyke?” and as he looked up inquiringly, I added: “I mean, how were you able to make so confident a guess, for, of course, you couldn’t actually know?”

“When do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean that when you applied for a Home Office authority you must have had something to go on beyond a mere guess.”

“Certainly I had,” he replied. “It was not a guess at all. It was a certainty. When I made the application I was able to say that I had positive knowledge that Stella Keene had been poisoned with arsenic. The examination of the poor child’s body was not for my information. I would have avoided it if that had been possible. But it was not. As soon as my declaration was made, the exhumation became inevitable. The Crown could not have prosecuted on a charge of poisoning without an

examination of the victim's body."

"But, Thorndyke," I expostulated, "how could you have been certain—I mean certain in a legal sense? Surely it could have been no more than a matter of inference."

"It was not," he replied. "It was a matter of demonstrated fact. I could have taken the case into court and proved the fact of arsenical poisoning. But, of course, the jury would have demanded evidence from an examination of the body, and quite properly, too. Every possible corroboration should be obtained in a criminal trial."

"Certainly," I agreed. "But still I find your statement incomprehensible. You speak of demonstrated fact. But what means of demonstration had you? There was my diary. I take it that that was the principal source of your information; in fact I can't think of any other. But the diary could only have yielded documentary evidence, which is quite a different thing from demonstrated fact."

"Quite," he agreed. "The diary contributed handsomely to the train of circumstantial evidence that I had constructed. But the demonstration—the final, positive proof—came from another source. A very curious and unexpected source."

"I suppose," said I, "as the case is finished and dealt with, there would be no harm in my asking how you arrived at your conclusion?"

"Not at all," he replied. "The whole investigation is a rather long story, but I will give you a summary of it if you like."

"Why a summary?" I objected. "I would rather have it in extenso if it will not weary you to relate it."

"It will be more likely to weary you," he replied. "But if you are equal to a lengthy exposition, let us take to our easy chairs and combine bodily comfort with forensic discourse."

We drew up the two arm-chairs before the hearth, and when Polton had made up the fire and placed between us a small table furnished with a decanter and glasses, Thorndyke began his exposition.

"This case is in some respects one of the most curious and interesting that I have met with in the whole of my experience of medico-legal practice. At the first glance, as I told you at the time, the problem that it presented seemed hopelessly beyond solution. All the evidence appeared to be in the past and utterly irrecoverable. The vital questions were concerned with events that had passed unrecorded and of which there seemed to be no possibility that they could ever be disinterred from the oblivion in which they were buried. Looking back now on the body of evidence that has gradually accumulated, I am astonished at the way in which the apparently forgotten past has given up its secrets, one after another, until it has carried its revelation from surmise to probability and from probability at last to incontestable proof.

"The inquiry divides itself into certain definite stages, each of which added new matter to that which had gone before. We begin, naturally, with the inquest on Harold Monkhouse, and we may consider this in three aspects: the ascertained condition of the body; the evidence of the witnesses; and the state of affairs disclosed by the proceedings viewed as a whole.

"First, as to the body: there appeared to be no doubt that Monkhouse died from arsenical poisoning, but there was no clear evidence as to how the poison had been administered. It was assumed that it had been taken in food or in medicine—that it had been swallowed—and no alternative method of administration was suggested or considered. But on studying the medical witnesses' evidence, and comparing it with the descriptions of the patient's symptoms, I was disposed to doubt whether the poison had actually been taken by the mouth at all."

"Why," I exclaimed, "how else could it have been taken?"

"There are quite a number of different ways in which poisonous doses of arsenic can be taken. Finely powdered arsenic is readily absorbed by the skin. There have been several deaths from the use of 'violet powder' contaminated with arsenic, and clothing containing powdered arsenic would produce poisonous effects. Then there are certain arsenical gases—notably arsine, or arseniureted hydrogen—which are intensely poisonous and which possibly account for a part of the symptoms in poisoning from arsenical wallpapers. There seemed to me to be some suggestion of arsenical gas in Monkhouse's case, but it was obviously not pure gas poisoning. The impression conveyed to me was that of a mixed poisoning; that the arsenic had been partly inhaled and partly applied to the skin, but very little, if any, taken by the mouth."

"You are not forgetting that arsenic was actually found in the stomach?"

"No. But the quantity was very minute; and a minute quantity is of no significance. One of the many odd and misleading facts about arsenic poisoning is that, in whatever way the drug is taken, a small quantity is always found in the stomach and there are always some signs of gastric irritation. The explanation seems to be that arsenic which has got into the blood in any way—through the skin, the lungs or otherwise—tends to be eliminated in part through the stomach. At any rate, the fact is that the presence of minute quantities of arsenic in the stomach affords no evidence that the poison was swallowed."

"But," I objected, "what of the Fowler's Solution which was found in the medicine?"

"Exactly," said he. "That was the discrepancy that attracted my attention. The assumption was that deceased had taken in his medicine a quantity of Fowler's Solution representing about a grain and a half of arsenious acid. If that had been so we should have expected to find a very appreciable quantity in the stomach: much more than was actually found. The condition of the body did not agree with the dose that was assumed to have been taken; and when one came to examine the

evidence of the various witnesses there was further room for doubt. Two of them had noticed the medicine at the time when the Fowler's Solution had not been added; but no witness had noticed it after the alleged change and before the death of deceased. The presence of the Fowler's Solution was not observed until several days after his death. Taking all the facts together, there was a distinct suggestion that the solution had been added to the medicine at some time after Monkhouse's death. But this suggestion tended to confirm my suspicion that the poison had not been swallowed. For the discovery of the Fowler's Solution in the medicine would tend to divert inquiry—and did, in fact, divert it—from any other method of administering the poison.

"To finish with the depositions: not only was there a complete lack of evidence even suggesting any one person as the probable delinquent; there was not the faintest suggestion of any motive that one could consider seriously. The paltry pecuniary motive applied to all the parties and could not be entertained in respect of any of them. The only person who could have had a motive was Barbara. She was a young, attractive woman, married to an elderly, unattractive husband. If she had been attached to another man, she would have had the strongest and commonest of all motives. But there was nothing in the depositions to hint at any other man; and since she was absent from home when the poisoning occurred, she appeared to be outside the area of possible suspicion.

"And now to look at the evidence as a whole; you remember Miller's comment. There was something queer about the case; something very oddly elusive. At the first glance it seemed to bristle with suspicious facts. But when those facts were scrutinized they meant nothing. There were plenty of clues but they led nowhere. There was Madeline Norris who prepared the victim's food—an obvious suspect. But then it appeared that the poison was in the medicine, not in the food. There was Wallingford who actually had poison in his possession. But it was the wrong poison. There was the bottle that had undoubtedly contained arsenic. But it was nobody's bottle. There was the bottle that smelled of lavender and had red stains in it and was found in Miss Norris' possession; but it contained no arsenic. And so on.

"Now all this was very strange. The strongest suspicion was thrown on a number of people collectively. But it failed every time to connect itself with any one individually. I don't know precisely what Miller thought of it, but to me it conveyed the strong impression of a scheme—of something arranged, and arranged with extraordinary skill and ingenuity, I had the feeling that, behind all these confusing and inconsistent appearances, was a something quite different, with which they had no real connection; that all these apparent clues were a sort of smoke-screen thrown up to conceal the actual mechanism of the murder.

"What could the mechanism of the murder have been? That was what I asked myself. And by whom could the arrangements have been made and carried out? Here the question of motive became paramount. What motive could be imagined? And who could have been affected by it? That seemed to be the essential part of the problem, and the only one that offered the possibility of investigation.

"Now, as I have said, the most obvious motive in cases of this kind is that of getting rid of a husband or wife to make room for another. And ignoring moral considerations, it is a perfectly rational motive; for the murder of the unwanted spouse is the only possible means of obtaining the desired release. The question was, could such a motive have existed in the present case; and the answer was that, on inspection, it appeared to be a possible motive, although there was no evidence that it actually existed. But, assuming its possibility for the sake of argument, who could have been affected by it? At once, one saw that Madeline Norris was excluded. The death of Harold Monkhouse did not affect her, in this respect, at all. There remained only Barbara and Wallingford. To take the latter first: he was a young man, and the wife was a young, attractive woman; he had lived in the same house with her, appeared to be her social equal and was apparently on terms of pleasant intimacy with her. If he had any warmer feelings towards her, her husband's existence formed an insuperable obstacle to the realization of his wishes. There was no evidence that he had any such feelings, but the possibility had to be borne in mind. And there were the further facts that he evidently had some means of obtaining poisons and that he had ample opportunities for administering them to the deceased. All things considered, Wallingford appeared, *prima facie*, to be the most likely person to have committed the murder.

"Now to take the case of Barbara. In the first place, there was the possibility that she might have had some feeling towards Wallingford, in which case she would probably have been acting in collusion with him and her absence from home on each occasion when the poisoning took place would have been part of the arrangement. But, excluding Wallingford, and supposing her to be concerned with some other man, did her absence from home absolutely exclude the possibility of her being the poisoner? There were suggestions of skilful and ingenious arrangements to create false appearances. Was it possible that those arrangements included some method by which the poison could be administered during her absence without the connivance or knowledge of any other person?

"I pondered this question carefully by the light of all the details disclosed at the inquest; and the conclusion that I reached was that, given a certain amount of knowledge, skill and executive ability, the thing was possible. But as soon as I had admitted the possibility, I was impressed by the way in which the suggestion fitted in with the known facts and served to explain them. For all the arranged appearances pointed to the use of Fowler's Solution, administered by the mouth. But this could not possibly have been the method if the poisoner were a hundred miles away. And as I have said, I was strongly inclined to infer, from the patient's symptoms and the condition of the body, that the poison had not been administered by the mouth.

"But all this, as you will realize, was purely hypothetical. None of the assumptions was supported by a particle of positive evidence. They merely represented possibilities which I proposed to bear in mind in the interpretation of any new evidence

that might come into view.

"This brings us to the end of the first stage; the conclusions arrived at by a careful study of the depositions. But following hard on the inquest was your visit to me when you gave me the particulars of your past life and your relations with Barbara and Monkhouse. Now your little autobiographical sketch was extremely enlightening, and, as it has turned out, of vital importance. In the first place, it made clear to me that your relations with Barbara were much more intimate than I had supposed. You were not merely friends of long standing; you were virtually in the relation of brother and sister. But with this very important difference: that you were not brother and sister. An adopted brother is a possible husband; an adopted sister is a possible wife. And when I considered your departure to Canada with the intention of remaining there for life, and your unexpected return. I found that the bare possibility that Barbara might wish to be released from her marriage had acquired a certain measure of probability.

"But further; your narrative brought into view another person who had died. And the death of that person presented a certain analogy with the death of Monkhouse. For if Barbara had wished to be your wife, both these persons stood immovably in the way of her wishes. Of course there was no evidence that she had any such wish and the death of Stella was alleged to have been due to natural causes. Nevertheless, the faint, hypothetical suggestions offered by these new facts were strikingly similar to those offered by the previous facts.

"The next stage opened when I read your diary, especially the volume written during the last year of Stella's life. But now one came out of the region of mere speculative hypothesis into that of very definite suspicion. I had not read very far when, from your chance references to the symptoms of Stella's illness, I came to the decided conclusion that, possibly mingled with the symptoms of real disease, were those of more or less chronic arsenical poisoning. And what was even more impressive, those symptoms seemed to be closely comparable with Monkhouse's symptoms, particularly in the suggestion of a mixed poisoning partly due to minute doses of arsine. I need not go into details, but you will remember that you make occasional references to slight attacks of jaundice (which is very characteristic of arsine poisoning) and to 'eye-strain' which the spectacles failed to relieve. But, redness, smarting and watering of the eyes is an almost constant symptom of chronic arsenic poisoning. And there were various other symptoms of a decidedly suspicious character to which you refer and which I need not go into now.

"Then a careful study of the diary brought into view another very impressive fact. There were considerable fluctuations in Stella's condition. Sometimes she appeared to be so far improving as to lead you to some hopes of her actual recovery. Then there would be a rather sudden change for the worse and she would lose more than she had gained. Now, at this time Barbara had already become connected with the political movement which periodically called her away from home for periods varying from one to four weeks; and when I drew up a table of the dates other departures and returns, I found that the periods included between them—that is the periods during which she was absent from home—coincided most singularly with Stella's relapses. The coincidence was so complete that, when I had set the data out in a pair of diagrams in the form of graphs, the resemblance of the two diagrams was most striking. I will show you the diagrams presently.

"But there was something else that I was on the look-out for in the diary, but it was only quite near the end that I found it. Quite early, I learned that Stella was accustomed to read and work at night by the light of a candle. But I could not discover what sort of candle she used; whether it was an ordinary household candle or one of some special kind. At last I came on the entry in which you describe the making of the wax mould; and then I had the information that I had been looking for. In that entry you mention that you began by lifting the reflector off the candle, by which I learned that the receptacle used was not an ordinary candlestick. Then you remark that the candle was of 'good hard wax'; by which I learned that it was not an ordinary household candle—these being usually composed of a rather soft paraffin wax. Apparently, it was a stearine candle such as is made for use in candlelamps."

"But," I expostulated, "how could it possibly matter what sort of candle she used? The point seems to be quite irrelevant."

"The point," he replied, "was not only relevant; it was of crucial importance. But I had better explain. When I was considering the circumstances surrounding the poisoning of Monkhouse, I decided that the probabilities pointed to Barbara as the poisoner. But she was a hundred miles away when the poisoning occurred; hence the question that I asked myself was this: Was there any method that was possible and practicable in the existing circumstances by which Barbara could have arranged that the poisoning could be effected during her absence? And the answer was that there was such a method, but only one. The food and the medicine were prepared and administered by those who were on the spot. But the candles were supplied by Barbara and by her put into the bedside candle-box before she went away. And they would operate during her absence."

"But," I exclaimed, "do I understand you to suggest that it is possible to administer poison by means of a candle?"

"Certainly," he replied. "It is quite possible and quite practicable. If a candle is charged with finely powdered arsenious acid—'white arsenic'—when that candle is burnt, the arsenious acid will be partly vaporized and partly converted into arsine, or arseniureted hydrogen. Most of the arsine will be burnt in the flame and reconverted into arsenious acid, which will float in the air, as it condenses, in the form of an almost invisible white cloud. The actual result will be that the air in the neighbourhood of the candle will contain small traces of arsine—which is an intensely poisonous gas—and considerable quantities of arsenious acid, floating about in the form of infinitely minute crystals. This impalpable dust will be breathed into the lungs of any person near the candle and will settle on the skin, from which it will be readily absorbed into the blood and produce all the poisonous effects of arsenic.



"Now, in the case of Harold Monkhouse, not only was there a special kind of candle, supplied by the suspected person, but, as I have told you, the symptoms during life and the appearances of the dead body, all seemed to me to point to some method of poisoning through the lungs and skin rather than by way of the stomach, and also suggested a mixed poisoning in which arsine played some part. So that the candle was not only a possible medium of the poisoning; it was by far the most probable.

"Hence, when I came to consider Stella's illness and noted the strong suggestion of arsenic poisoning; and when I noted the parallelism of her illness with that of Monkhouse; I naturally kept a watchful eye for a possible parallelism in the method of administering the poison. And not only did I find that parallelism; but in that very entry, I found strong confirmation of my suspicion that the candle was poisoned. You will remember that you mention the circumstance that on the night following the making of the wax mould you were quite seriously unwell. Apparently you were suffering from a slight attack of acute arsenical poisoning, due to your having inhaled some of the fumes from the burning candle."

"Yes, I remember that," said I. "But what is puzzling me is how the candles could have been obtained. Surely it is not possible to buy arsenical candles?"

"No," he replied, "it is not. But it is possible to buy a candle-mould, with which it is quite easy to make them. Remember that, not so very long ago, most country people used to make their own candles, and the hinged moulds that they used are still by no means rare. You will find specimens in most local museums and in curio shops in country towns and you can often pick them up in farmhouse sales. And if you have a candle-mould, the making of arsenical candles is quite a simple affair. Barbara, as we know, used to buy a particular German brand of stearine candles. All that she had to do was to melt the candles, put the separated wicks into the mould, stir some finely-powdered white arsenic into the melted wax and pour it into the mould. When the wax was cool, the mould would be opened and the candles taken out—these hinged moulds usually made about six candles at a time. Then it would be necessary to scrape off the seam left by the mould and smooth the candles to make them look like those sold in the shops."

"It was a most diabolically ingenious scheme," said I.

"It was," he agreed. "The whole villainous plan was very completely conceived and most efficiently carried out. But to return to our argument. The discovery that Stella had used a special form of candle left me in very little doubt that Barbara was the poisoner and that poisoned candles had been the medium used in both crimes. For we were now out of the region of mere hypothesis. We were dealing with genuine circumstantial evidence. But that evidence was still much too largely inferential to serve as the material for a prosecution. We still needed some facts of a definite and tangible kind; and as soon as you came back from your travels on the Southeastern Circuit, fresh facts began to accumulate. Passing over the proceedings of Wallingford and his follower and the infernal machine—all of which were encouraging, as offering corroboration, but of no immediate assistance—the first really important accretion of evidence occurred in connection with our visit to the empty house in Hilborough Square."

"Ha!" I exclaimed. "Then you did find something significant, in spite of your pessimistic tone at the time? I may say, Thorndyke, that I had a feeling that you went to that house with the definite expectation of finding some specific thing. Was I wrong?"

"No. You were quite right. I went there with the expectation of finding one thing and a faint hope of finding another; and both the expectation and the hope were justified by the event. My main purpose in that expedition was to obtain samples of the wallpaper from Monkhouse's room, but I thought it just possible that the soot from the bedroom chimneys might yield some information. And it did.

"To begin with the wallpaper: the condition of the room made it easy to secure specimens. I tore off about a dozen pieces and wrote a number on each, to correspond with numbers that I marked on a rough sketch-plan of the room which I drew first. My expectation was that if—as I believed—arsenical candles had been burnt in that room, arsenic would have been deposited on all the walls, but in varying amounts, proportionate to the distance of the wall from the candle. The loose piece of paper on the wall by the bed was, of course, the real touchstone of the case, for if there were no arsenic in it, the theory of the arsenical candle would hardly be tenable. I therefore took the extra precaution of writing a full description of its position on the back of the piece and deposited it for greater safety in my letter-case.

"As soon as I reached home that day I spread out the torn fragment on the wide stage of a culture microscope and examined its outer surface with a strong top light. And the very first glance settled the question. The whole surface was spangled over with minute crystals, many of them hardly a ten-thousandth of an inch in diameter, sparkling in the strong light like diamonds and perfectly unmistakable; the characteristic octahedral crystals of arsenious acid.

"But distinctive as they were, I took nothing for granted. Snipping off a good-sized piece of the paper, I submitted it to the Marsh-Berzelius test and got a very pronounced 'arsenical mirror,' which put the matter beyond any possible doubt or question. I may add that I tested all the other pieces and got an arsenic reaction from them all, varying, roughly, according to their distance from the table on which the candle stood.

"Thus the existence of the arsenical candle was no longer a matter of hypothesis or even of mere probability; it was virtually a demonstrated fact. The next question was, who put the arsenic into the candle? All the evidence, such as it was, pointed to Barbara. But there was not enough of it. No single fact connected her quite definitely with the candles, and it had to be admitted that they had passed through other hands than hers and that the candle-box was accessible to several people, especially during her absence. Clear evidence, then, was required to associate her—or someone else—with those

poisoned candles, and I had just a faint hope that such evidence might be forthcoming. This was how I reasoned:

“Here was a case of poisoning in which the poison was self-administered and the actual poisoner was absent. Consequently it was impossible to give a calculated dose on a given occasion, nor was it possible to estimate in advance the amount that would be necessary to produce the desired result. Since the poison was to be left within reach of the victim, to be taken from time to time, it would be necessary to leave a quantity considerably in excess of the amount actually required to produce death on any one occasion. It is probable that all the candles in the box were poisoned. In any case, most of them must have been; and as the box was filled to last for the whole intended time of Barbara’s absence, there would be a remainder of poisoned candles in the box when Monkhouse died. But the incident of the ‘faked’ medicine showed that the poisoner was fully alive to the possibility of an examination of the room. It was not likely that so cautious a criminal would leave such damning evidence as the arsenical candles in full view. For if, by chance, one of them had been lighted and the bearer had developed symptoms of poisoning, the murder would almost certainly have been out. In any case, we could assume that the poisoner would remove them and destroy them after putting ordinary candles in their place.

“But a candle is not a very easy thing to destroy. You can’t throw it down a sink, or smash it up and cast it into the rubbish-bin. It must be burnt; and owing to its inflammability, it must be burnt carefully and rather slowly; and if it contains a big charge of arsenic, the operator must take considerable precautions. And finally, these particular candles had to be burnt secretly.

“Having regard to these considerations, I decided that the only safe and practicable way to get rid of them was to burn them in a fireplace with the window wide open. This would have to be done at night when all the household was asleep, so as to be safe from interruption and discovery; and a screen would have to be put before the fireplace to prevent the glare from being visible through the open window. If there were a fire in the grate, so much the better. The candles could be cut up into small pieces and thrown into the fire one at a time.

“Of course the whole matter was speculative. There might have been no surplus candles, or if there were, they might have been taken out of the house and disposed of in some other way. But one could only act on the obvious probabilities and examine the chimneys, remembering that whereas a negative result would prove nothing for or against any particular person, a positive result would furnish very weighty evidence. Accordingly I collected samples of soot from the various bedroom chimneys and from that of Barbara’s boudoir, labelling each of them with the aid of the cards which you had left in the respective rooms.

“The results were, I think, quite conclusive. When I submitted the samples to analysis I found them all practically free from arsenic—disregarding the minute traces that one expects to find in ordinary soot—with one exception. The soot from Barbara’s bedroom chimney yielded, not mere traces, but an easily measurable quantity—much too large to have been attributable to the coal burnt in the grate.

“Thus, you see, so far as the murder of Monkhouse was concerned, there was a fairly conclusive case against Barbara. It left not a shadow of doubt in my mind that she was the guilty person. But you will also see that it was not a satisfactory case to take into court. The whole of the evidence was scientific and might have appeared rather unconvincing to the ordinary juryman, though it would have been convincing enough to the judge. I debated with myself whether I should communicate my discoveries to the police and leave them to decide for or against a prosecution, or whether I should keep silence and seek for further evidence. And finally I decided, for the present, to keep my own counsel. You will understand why.”

“Yes,” said I. “You suspected that Stella, too, had been poisoned.”

“Exactly. I had very little doubt of it. And you notice that in this case there was available evidence of a kind that would be quite convincing to a jury—evidence obtainable from an examination of the victim’s body. But here again I was disposed to adopt a waiting policy for three reasons.

“First, I should have liked to avoid the exhumation if possible. Second, if the exhumation were unavoidable, I was unwilling to apply for it until I was certain that arsenic would be found in the body; and third, although the proof that Stella had been poisoned would have strengthened the case enormously against Barbara, it would yet have added nothing to the evidence that a poisoned candle had been used.

“But the proof of the poisoned candle was the kernel of the case against Barbara. If I could prove that Stella had been poisoned by means of a candle, that would render the evidence absolutely irresistible. This I was not at present able to do. But I had some slight hopes that the deficiency might be made up, that some new facts might come into view if I waited. And, as there was nothing that called for immediate action, I decided to wait, and in due course, the deficiency was made up and the new facts did come into view.”

As he paused, I picked up Stella’s medallion and looked at it with a new and sombre interest. Holding it up before him, I said: “I am assuming, Thorndyke, that the new facts were in some way connected with this. Am I right?”

“Yes,” he replied, “you are entirely right. The connection between that charming little work and the evidence that sent that monster of wickedness to her death is one of the strangest and most impressive circumstances that has become known to me in the whole of my experience. It is no exaggeration to say that when you and Stella were working on that medallion, you were forging the last link in the chain of evidence that could have dragged the murderess to the gallows.”

He paused, and, having replenished my glass, took the medallion in his hand and looked at it thoughtfully. Then he

knocked out and refilled his pipe and I waited expectantly for the completion of this singular story.

---

## XVIII. — THE FINAL PROOF

"WE now," Thorndyke resumed, "enter the final stage of the inquiry. Hitherto we have dealt with purely scientific evidence which would have had to be communicated to the jury and which they would have had to take on trust with no convincing help from their own eyes. We had evidence, conclusive to ourselves, that Monkhouse had been murdered by means of a poisoned candle. But we could not produce the candle or any part of it. We had nothing visible or tangible to show to the jury to give them the feeling of confidence and firm conviction which they rightly demand when they have to decide an issue involving the life or death of the accused. It was this something that could be seen and handled that I sought, and sought in vain until that momentous evening when I called at your chambers to return your diary.

"I remember that as I entered the room and cast my eyes over the things that were spread out on the table, I received quite a shock. For the first glance showed me that, amongst those things were two objects that exactly fulfilled the conditions of the final test. There was the wax mould—a part, and the greater part, of one of the suspected candles; and there was the tress of hair—a portion of the body of the person suspected to have been poisoned. With these two objects it was possible to determine with absolute certainty whether that person had or had not been poisoned with arsenic, and if she had, whether the candle had or had not been the medium by which the poison was administered."

"But," I said, "you knew from the diary of the existence of the wax mould."

"I knew that it had existed. But I naturally supposed that the cast had been taken and the mould destroyed years ago, though I had intended to ask you about it. However, here it was, miraculously preserved, against all probabilities, still awaiting completion. Of course, I recognized it instantly, and began to cast about in my mind for some means of making the necessary examination without disclosing my suspicions. For you will realize that I was unwilling to say anything to you about Stella's death until the question was settled one way or the other. If the examination had shown no arsenic either in the candle or in the hair, it would not have been necessary to say anything to you at all.

"But while I was debating the matter, the problem solved itself. As soon as I came to look at Stella's unfinished works, I saw that they cried aloud to be completed and that Polton was the proper person to carry out the work. I made the suggestion, which I should have made in any case, and when you adopted it, I decided to say nothing but to apply the tests when the opportunity offered."

"I am glad," said I, "to hear you say that you would have made the suggestion in any case. It looked at first like a rather cold-blooded pretext to get possession of the things. But you were speaking of the hair. Can you depend on finding recognizable traces of arsenic in the hair of a person who has been poisoned?"

"Certainly, you can," he replied. "The position is this: when arsenic is taken it becomes diffused throughout the whole body, including the blood, the bones and the skin. But as soon as a dose of arsenic is taken, the poison begins to be eliminated from the body, and, if no further dose is taken, the whole of the poison is thrown off in a comparatively short time until none remains in the tissues—with one exception. That exception is the epidermis, or outer skin, with its appendages—the finger and toe nails and the hair. These structures differ from all others in that, instead of growing interstitially and being alive throughout, they grow at a certain growing-point and then become practically dead structures. Thus a hair grows at the growing-point where the bulb joins the true skin. Each day a new piece of hair is produced at the living root, but when once it has come into being it grows no more, but is simply pushed up from below by the next portion. Thenceforward it undergoes no change, excepting that it gradually moves upwards as new portions are added at the root. It is virtually a dead, unchanging structure.

"Now suppose a person to take a considerable dose of arsenic. That arsenic becomes diffused throughout all the living tissues and is for a time deposited in them. The growing-point of the hair is a living tissue and of course the arsenic becomes deposited in it. Then the process of elimination begins and the arsenic is gradually removed from the living tissues. But in twenty-four hours, what was the growing-point of the hair has been pushed up about the fiftieth of an inch and is no longer a growing structure. It is losing its vitality. And as it ceases to be a living tissue it ceases to be affected by the process of elimination. Hence the arsenic which was deposited in it when it was a living tissue is never removed. It remains as a permanent constituent of that part of the hair, slowly moving up as the hair grows from below, until at last it is snipped off by the barber; or, if the owner is a long-haired woman, it continues to creep along until the hair is full-grown and drops out."

"Then the arsenic remains always in the same spot?"

"Yes. It is a local deposit at a particular point in the hair. And this, Mayfield, is a most important fact, as you will see presently. For observe what follows. Hair grows at a uniform rate—roughly, a fiftieth of an inch in twenty-four hours. It is consequently possible, by measurement, to fix nearly exactly the age of any given point on a hair. Thus if we have a complete hair and we find at any point in it a deposit of arsenic, by measuring from that point to the root we can fix, within quite narrow limits, the date on which that dose of arsenic was taken."

"But is it possible to do this?" I asked.

"Not in the case of a single hair," he replied. "But in the case of a tress, in which all the hairs are of the same age, it is

perfectly possible. You will see the important bearing of this presently.

"To return now to my investigation. I had the bulk of a candle and a tress of Stella's hair. The questions to be settled were,

"1. Was there arsenic in the candle? and

"2. Had Stella been poisoned with arsenic?

"I began by trimming the wax mould in readiness for casting and then I made an analysis of the trimmings. The result was the discovery of considerable quantities of arsenic in the wax.

"That answered the first question. Next, as the tress of hair was larger than was required for your purpose, I ventured to sacrifice a portion of it for a preliminary test. That test also gave a positive result. The quantity of arsenic was, of course, very minute, but still it was measurable by the delicate methods that are possible in dealing with arsenic; and the amount that I found pointed either to one large dose or to repeated smaller ones.

"The two questions were now answered definitely. It was certain—and the certainty could be demonstrated to a jury—that Stella had been poisoned by arsenic, and that the arsenic had been administered by means of poisoned candles. The complete proof in this case lent added weight to the less complete proof in the case of Monkhouse; and the two cases served to corroborate one another in pointing to Barbara as the poisoner. For she was the common factor in the two cases. The other persons—Wallingford, Madeline and the others—who appeared in the Monkhouse case, made no appearance in the case of Stella; and the persons who were associated with Stella were not associated with Monkhouse. But Barbara was associated with both. And her absence from home was no answer to the charge if death was caused by the candles which she had admittedly supplied.

"But complete as the proof was, I wished, if possible, to make it yet more complete: to associate Barbara still more definitely with the crime. In the case of Monkhouse, it was clear that the poisoning always occurred when she was absent from home. But this was not so clear in the case of Stella. Your diary showed that Stella's relapses coincided pretty regularly with Barbara's absences; but it was not certain (though obviously probable) that the relapses coincided with the periods of poisoning. If it could be proved that they did coincide, that proof would furnish corroboration of the greatest possible weight. It would show that the two cases were parallel in all respects.

"But could it be proved? If the tress of Stella's hair had been at my disposal, I had no doubt that I could have decided the question. But the tress was yours, and it had to be preserved. Whatever was to be done must be done without destroying or injuring the hair, and I set myself the task of finding some practicable method. Eventually, I decided, without much hope of success, to try the X-rays. As arsenic is a fairly dense metal and the quantity of it in the deposits quite considerable, it seemed to me possible that it might increase the density of the hairs at those points sufficiently to affect the X-ray shadow. At any rate, I decided to give the method a trial.

"Accordingly, Polton and I set to work at it. First, in order to get the densest shadow possible, we made the tress up into a close cylinder, carefully arranging it so that all the cut ends were in exactly the same plane. Then we made a number of graduated exposures on 'process' plates, developing and intensifying with the object of getting the greatest possible degree of contrast. The result was unexpectedly successful. In the best negative, the shape of the tress was faintly visible and was soon to be crossed by a number of perfectly distinct pale bands. Those bands were the shadows of the deposits of arsenic. There could be no doubt on the subject. For, apart from the fact that there was nothing else that they could be, their appearance agreed exactly with what one would have expected. Each band presented a sharp, distinct edge towards the tips of the hairs and faded away imperceptibly towards the roots. The sharp edge corresponded to the sudden appearance of arsenic in the blood when the poisoning began. The gradual fading-away corresponded to the period of elimination when the poisoning had ceased and the quantity of arsenic in the blood was becoming less and less from day to day.

"Now, since hair grows at a known, uniform rate, it was possible to convert the distances between these arsenical bands into periods of time; not with perfect exactness, because the rate of growth varies slightly in different persons, but with sufficient exactness for our present purpose. As soon as I looked at those bands, I saw that they told the whole story. But let us follow the method of proof.

"Assuming the rate of growth to be one fiftieth of an inch in twenty-four hours—which was probably correct for a person of Stella's age—I measured off on the photograph seven inches and a quarter from the cut ends as representing the last year of her life. Of course, I did not know how close to the head the hair had been cut, but, judging by the bands, I assumed that it had been cut quite close to the skin—within a quarter of an inch."

"I happen to know that you were quite right," said I, "but I can't imagine how you arrived at your conclusion."

"It was quite a simple inference," he replied, "as you will see, presently. But to return to the photograph. Of the measured space of seven inches and a quarter I took a tracing on sheet celluloid, marking the sharp edges of the bands, the points at which the fading began and the points at which the band ceased to be visible. This tracing I transferred to paper ruled in tenths of an inch—a tenth of an inch representing five days—and I joined the points where the fading began and ended by a sloping line. I now had a diagram, or chart, which showed, with something approaching to accuracy, the duration of each administration of arsenic and the time which elapsed between the successive poisonings. This is the chart. The sloping lines show the fading of the bands."

He handed me a paper which he had just taken from a drawer and I looked at it curiously but with no great interest. As I returned it after a brief inspection I remarked: "It is quite clear and intelligible, but I don't quite see why you took the

considerable trouble of making it. Does it show anything that could not be stated in a few words?"

"Not by itself," he replied. "But you remember that I mentioned having made two other charts, one showing the fluctuations in Stella's illness and the other showing Barbara's absences from home during the same period. Here are those other two charts; and now, if you put the three together, your eye can take in at a glance a fact of fundamental importance; which is that the relapses, the absences and the poisonings all coincided in time. The periodicity is strikingly irregular; but it is identical in all three charts. I made these to hand to the jury, and I think they would have been quite convincing, since any jurymen could check them by the dates given in evidence, and by inspection of the radiograph of the hair."



#### EXPLANATION OF THE CHARTS

CHART A shows the fluctuations in the illness of Stella Keene during the year preceding her death in October. Divided into intervals of five days.

CHART B shows the distribution of the arsenical bands in Stella Keene's hair. The steep sides of the curves, towards the tips of the hairs, show the sudden appearance of the deposit, and the sloping sides, towards the roots of the hairs, represent its more gradual fading. Each of the narrow divisions represents five days' growth.

CHART C shows the periods during which Barbara was absent from home, each absence being represented by a black column. Divided into intervals of five days.

I gazed at the three charts and was profoundly impressed by the convincing way in which they demonstrated the connection between Barbara's movements and the results of her diabolical activities. But what impressed me still more was the amazing ingenuity with which Thorndyke had contrived to build up a case of the most deadly precision and completeness out of what seemed, even to my trained intelligence, no more than a few chance facts, apparently quite trivial and irrelevant.

"It seems," I said, "that, so far as you were concerned, the exhumation was really unnecessary."

"Quite," he replied. "It proved nothing that was not already certain. Still, the Commissioner was quite right. For the purposes of a trial, evidence obtained from the actual body of the victim is of immeasurably more weight than indirect scientific evidence, no matter how complete. An ordinary jurymen might have difficulty in realizing that the hair is part of the body and that proof of arsenical deposit in the hair is proof of arsenic in the body. But the mistake that he made, as events turned out, was in refusing to make the arrest until my statements had been confirmed by the autopsy and the analysis. That delay allowed the criminal to escape. Not that I complain. To me, personally, her suicide came as a blessed release from an almost intolerable position. But if I had been in his place, I would have taken no chances. She would have gone to trial and to the gallows."

"Yes," I admitted; "that was what justice demanded. But I cannot be thankful enough for the delay that let her escape. Fiend as she was, it would have been a frightful thing to have had to give the evidence that would have hanged her."

"It would," he agreed; "and the thought of it was a nightmare to me. However, we have escaped that; and after all, justice has been done."

We were silent for a few minutes, during which Thorndyke smoked his pipe with a certain air of attention as it he expected me to put some further questions. And, in fact, there were one or two questions that I wanted to have answered. I began with the simplest.

"I am still a little puzzled by some of the circumstances in this case. The infernal machine I happen to know to have been sent by Barbara, though I don't understand why she sent it. But Wallingford's proceedings are a complete mystery to me. What do you suppose induced him to keep a watch on you in that extraordinary fashion? And who was the man who shadowed him? There certainly was such a man, for I saw him, myself. And the same man had been shadowing Miss Norris. What do you make of it all?"

"One can only reason from past experiences," he replied. "It seems to be a rule that a person who has committed a crime cannot remain quiet and let things take their course. There appears to be an irresistible impulse to lay down false clues and create misleading appearances. It is always a mistake, unless the false clues are laid down in advance, and even then it is apt to fail and unexpectedly furnish a real clue."

"Now Barbara, with all her astonishing cleverness, made that mistake. She laid down a false clue in advance by her absences from home, and the trick certainly worked successfully at the inquest. But it was precisely those absences that put me on the track of the candle, which otherwise might have passed unsuspected. The faked medicine was another false clue which attracted my attention and added to my suspicion concerning the candle. Then, after the event came these other endeavours to mislead. They did neither harm nor good, as it happened, since I had already marked her down as the principal suspect. But if I had been in doubt, I should have followed up those clues and found her at the end of them."

"As to Wallingford, I imagine that she led him to believe that I was employed by you to fix the crime on him and that he

was advised to watch me and be ready to anticipate any move on my part; her actual object being to cause him to behave in such a manner as to attract suspicious attention. The function of the private detective—for that is what he must have been—would be to keep Wallingford's nerves—and Miss Norris', too—in such a state that they would appear anxious and terrified and tend to attract attention. The infernal machine was primarily intended, I think, to cast suspicion on one or both of them.

"That was what I inferred from the total absence of finger-prints and the flagrantly identifiable character of the pistol and the wool.

"But the greatest, the most fatal mistake that Barbara made was the one that is absolutely characteristic of the criminal. She repeated the procedure of a previous crime that had been successful. It was that repetition that was her undoing. Either crime, separately, might have been difficult to fix on her. As it was, each crime was proof of the other."

Once more we fell silent; and still Thorndyke had the air of expecting some further question from me. I looked at him nervously; for there was something that I wanted to ask and yet I hardly dared to put it into words. For, as I had looked at those charts, a horrid suspicion had taken hold of me. I feared to have it confirmed, and yet I could not let it rest. At last, I summoned courage enough to put the question.

"Thorndyke," I said, "I want you to tell me something. I expect you know what it is."

He looked up and nodded gravely.

"You mean about Stella?" said he.

"Yes. How long would she have lived if she had not been poisoned?"

He looked away for a few moments, and, impassive as his face was, I could see that he was deeply moved. At length he replied: "I was afraid you were going to ask me that. But since you have, I can only answer you honestly. So far as I can judge, but for that accursed ghoul, the poor girl might have been alive and well at this moment."

I stared at him in amazement. "Do you mean," I demanded, "that she was not really suffering from consumption at all?"

"That is what it amounts to," he replied. "There were signs of old tubercular trouble, but there was nothing recent. Evidently she had good powers of resistance, and the disease had not only become stationary, but was practically extinct. The old lesions had undergone complete repair, and there is no reason to suppose that any recurrence would have taken place under ordinary conditions."

"But," I exclaimed, hardly able to believe that the disaster had been so overwhelmingly complete, "what about the cough? I know that she always had a more or less troublesome cough."

"So had Monkhouse," he replied; "and so would anyone have had whose lungs were periodically irritated by inhaling particles of arsenious acid. But the tubercular mischief was quite limited and recovery must have commenced early. And Barbara, watching eagerly the symptoms of the disease which was to rid her of her rival, must have noted with despair the signs of commencing recovery and at last resolved to do for herself what nature was failing to do. Doubtless, the special method of poisoning was devised to imitate the symptoms of the disease; which it did well enough to deceive those whose minds were prepared by the antecedent illness to receive the suggestion. It was a horribly, fiendishly ingenious crime; calmly, callously devised and carried out to its appalling end with the most hideous efficiency."

After he had finished speaking, I remained gazing at him dumbly, stupefied, stunned by the realization of the enormity of this frightful thing that had befallen. He, too, seemed quite overcome, for he sat silently, grasping his extinct pipe and looking sternly and fixedly into the fire. At length he spoke, but without removing his gaze from the bright embers.

"I am trying, Mayfield," he said, gently, "to think of something to say to you. But there is nothing to say. The disaster is too complete, too irretrievable. This terrible woman has, so far, wrecked your life, and I recognize that you will carry the burden of your loss so long as you live. It would be a mere impertinence to utter futile and banal condolences. You know what I, your friend, am feeling and I need say no more of that; and I have too much confidence in your wisdom and courage to think of exhortations.

"But, though you have been robbed of the future that might have been, there is still a future that may be. It remains to you now only to shoulder your fardel and begin your pilgrimage anew; and if the road shall seem at first a dreary one, you need not travel it alone. You have friends; and one of them will think it a privilege to bear you company and try to hearten you by the way."

He held out his hand and I grasped it silently and with a full heart. And the closer friendship that was inaugurated in that hand-clasp has endured through the passing years, ever more precious and more helpful.

---

THE END

## THE OVERSIGHT OF MR. POTTERMACK

### PROLOGUE

THE afternoon of a sultry day near the end of July was beginning to merge into evening. The crimson eye of the declining sun peered out through chinks in a bank of slaty cloud as if taking a last look at the great level of land and water before retiring for the night; while already, in the soft, greenish grey of the eastern sky, the new-risen moon hung like a globe of pearl.

It was a solitary scene; desolate, if you will, or peaceful. On the one hand the quiet waters of a broad estuary; on the other a great stretch of marshes; and between them the sea wall, following faithfully the curves and indentations of the shore and fading away at either end into invisibility.

A great stillness brooded over the place. On the calm water, far out beyond the shallows, one or two coasting craft lay at anchor, and yet farther out a schooner and a couple of barges crept up on the flood tide. On the land side in the marshy meadows a few sheep grazed sedately, and in the ditch that bordered the sea wall the water-voles swam to and fro or sat on the banks and combed their hair. Sound there was none save the half-audible wash of the little waves upon the shore and now and again the querulous call of a sea-gull.

In strange contrast to the peaceful stillness that prevailed around was the aspect of the one human creature that was visible. Tragedy was written in every line of his figure; tragedy and fear and breathless haste. He was running—so far as it was possible to run among the rough stones and the high grass—at the foot of the sea wall on the seaward side; stumbling onward desperately, breathing hard, and constantly brushing away with his hand the sweat that streamed down his forehead into his eyes. At intervals he paused to scramble up the slope of the wall among the thistles and ragwort, and with infinite caution, to avoid even showing his head on the skyline, peered over the top backwards and forwards, but especially backwards where, in the far distance, the grey mass of a town loomed beyond the marshes.

There was no mystery about the man's movements. A glance at his clothing explained everything. For he was dressed in prison grey, branded with the broad arrow and still bearing the cell number. Obviously, he was an escaped convict.

Criminologists of certain Continental schools are able to give us with remarkable exactness the facial and other characteristics by which the criminal may be infallibly recognized. Possibly these convenient "stigmata" may actually occur in the criminals of those favoured regions. But in this backward country it is otherwise; and we have to admit the regrettable fact that the British criminal inconsiderately persists in being a good deal like other people. Not that the criminal class is, even here, distinguished by personal beauty or fine physique. The criminal is a low-grade man; but he is not markedly different from other low-grade men.

But the fugitive whose flight in the shelter of the sea wall we are watching did not conform even to the more generalized type. On the contrary, he was a definitely good-looking young man rather small and slight yet athletic and well-knit, with a face not only intelligent and refined but, despite his anxious and even terrified expression, suggestive of a courageous, resolute personality. Whatever had brought him to a convict prison, he was not of the rank and file of its inmates.

Presently, as he approached a bluff which concealed a stretch of the sea wall ahead, he slowed down into a quick walk, stooping slightly and peering forward cautiously to get a view of the shore beyond the promontory, until, as he reached the most projecting point of the wall, he paused for a moment and then crept stealthily forward, alert and watchful for any unexpected thing that might be lurking round the promontory.

Suddenly he stopped dead and then drew back a pace, craning up to peer over the high, rushy grass, and casting a glance of intense scrutiny along the stretch of shore that had come into view. After a few moments he again crept forward slowly and silently, still gazing intently along the shore and the face of the sea wall that was now visible for nearly a mile ahead. And still he could see nothing but that which had met his eyes as he crept round the bluff. He drew himself up and looked down at it with eager interest.

A little heap of clothes; evidently the shed raiment of a bather, as the completeness of the outfit testified. And in confirmation, just across the narrow strip of "saltings", on the smooth expanse of muddy sand the prints of a pair of naked feet extended in a line towards the water. But where was the bather? There was only a single set of footprints, so that he must be still in the water or have come ashore farther down. Yet neither on the calm water nor on the open, solitary shore was any sign of him to be seen.

It was very strange. On that smooth water a man swimming would be a conspicuous object, and a naked man on that low, open shore would be still more conspicuous. The fugitive looked around with growing agitation. From the shore and the water his glance came back to the line of footprints; and now, for the first time, he noticed something very remarkable about them. They did not extend to the water. Starting from the edge of the saltings, they took a straight line across the sand, every footprint deep and distinct, to within twenty yards of the water's edge; and there they ended abruptly. Between the last footprint and the little waves that broke on the shore was a space of sand perfectly smooth and untouched.

What could be the meaning of this? The fugitive gazed with knitted brows at that space of smooth sand; and even as he gazed, the explanation flashed upon him. The tide was now coming in, as he could see by the anchored vessels. But when these footprints were made, the tide was going out. The spot where the footprints ended was the spot where the bather had entered the water. Then—since the tide had gone out to the low-water mark and had risen again to nearly half-tide—some five hours must have passed since that man had walked down into the water.

All this flashed through the fugitive's brain in a matter of seconds. In those seconds he realized that the priceless heap of clothing was derelict. As to what had become of the owner, he gave no thought but that in some mysterious way he had apparently vanished for good. Scrambling up the slope of the sea wall, he once more scanned the path on its summit in both directions; and still there was not a living soul in sight. Then he slid down, and breathlessly and with trembling hands stripped off the hated livery of dishonour and, not without a certain incongruous distaste, struggled into the derelict garments.

A good deal has been said—with somewhat obvious truth—about the influence of clothes upon the self-respect of the wearer. But surely there could be no more extreme instance than the present one, which, in less than one brief minute, transformed a manifest convict into a respectable artisan. The change took effect immediately. As the fugitive resumed his flight he still kept off the skyline; but he no longer hugged the base of the wall, he no longer crouched nor did he run. He walked upright out on the more or less level saltings, swinging along at a good pace but without excessive haste. And as he went he explored the pockets of the strange clothes to ascertain what bequests the late owner had made to him, and brought up at the first cast a pipe, a tobacco-pouch, and a box of matches. At the first he looked a little dubiously, but could not resist the temptation; and when he had dipped the mouthpiece in a little salt pool and scrubbed it with a handful of grass, he charged the bowl from the well-filled pouch, lighted it and smoked with an ecstasy of pleasure born of long deprivation.

Next, his eye began to travel over the abundant jetsam that the last spring-tide had strewn upon the saltings. He found a short length of old rope, and then he picked up from time to time a scrap of driftwood. Not that he wanted the fuel, but that a bundle of driftwood seemed a convincing addition to his make-up and would explain his presence on the shore if he should be seen. When he had made up a small bundle with the aid of the rope, he swung it over his shoulder and collected no more.

He still climbed up the wall now and again to keep a look-out for possible pursuers, and at length, in the course of one of these observations, he espied a stout plank set across the ditch and connected with a footpath that meandered away across the marshes. In an instant he decided to follow that path, whithersoever it might lead. With a last glance towards the town, he boldly stepped up to the top of the wall, crossed the path at its summit, descended the landward side, walked across the little bridge and strode away swiftly along the footpath across the marshes.

He was none too soon. At the moment when he stepped off the bridge, three men emerged from the waterside alley that led to the sea wall and began to move rapidly along the rough path. Two of them were prison warders, and the third, who trundled a bicycle, was a police patrol.

"Pity we didn't get the tip a bit sooner", grumbled one of the warders. "The daylight's going fast, and he's got a devil of a start."

"Still", said the constable cheerfully, "it isn't much of a place to hide in. The wall's a regular trap; sea one side and a deep ditch the other. We shall get him all right, or else the patrol from Clifton will. I expect he has started by now."

"What did you tell the sergeant when you spoke to him on the 'phone?"

"I told him there was a runaway coming along the wall. He said he would send a cyclist patrol along to meet us."

The warder grunted. "A cyclist might easily miss him if he was hiding in the grass or in the rushes by the ditch. But we must see that we don't miss him. Two of us had better take the two sides of the wall so as to get a clear view."

His suggestion was adopted at once. One warder climbed down and marched along the saltings, the other followed a sort of sheep-track by the side of the ditch, while the constable wheeled his bicycle along the top of the wall. In this way they advanced as quickly as was possible to the two men stumbling over the rough ground at the base of the wall, searching the steep sides, with their rank vegetation, for any trace of the lost sheep, and making as little noise as they could. So for over a mile they toiled on, scanning every foot of the rough ground as they passed but uttering no word. Each of the warders could see the constable on the path above, and thus the party was enabled to keep together.

Suddenly the warder on the saltings stopped dead and emitted a shout of triumph. Instantly the constable laid his bicycle on the path and slithered down the bank, while the other warder came scrambling over the wall, twittering with excitement. Then the three men gathered together and looked down at the little heap of clothes, from which the discoverer had already detached the jacket and was inspecting it.

"They're his duds all right", said he. "Of course, they couldn't be anybody else's. But here's his number. So that's that."

"Yes", agreed the other, "they're his clothes right enough. But the question is, Where's my nabs himself?"

They stepped over to the edge of the saltings and gazed at the line of footprints. By this time the rising tide had covered up the strip of smooth, unmarked sand and was already eating away the footprints, winch now led directly to the water's edge.

"Rum go", commented the constable, looking steadily over the waste of smooth water. "He isn't out there. If he was, you'd see him easily, even in this light. The water's as smooth as oil."

"Perhaps he's landed farther down", suggested the younger warder.

"What for?" demanded the constable.



"Might mean to cross the ditch and get away over the marshes."

The constable laughed scornfully. "What, in his birthday suit? I don't think. No, I reckon he had his reasons for taking to the water, and those reasons would probably be a barge sailing fairly close inshore. They'd have to take him on board, you know; and from my experience of bargees, I should say they'd probably give him a suit of togs and keep their mouths shut."

The elder warder looked meditatively across the water.

"Maybe you are right", said he, "but barges don't usually come in here very close. The fairway is right out the other side. And, for my part, I should be mighty sorry to start on a swim out to a sailing vessel."

"You might think differently if you'd just hopped out of the jug", the constable remarked as he lit a cigarette.

"Yes, I suppose I should be ready to take a bit of a risk. Well", he concluded, "if that was his lay, I hope he got picked up. I shouldn't like to think of the poor beggar drifting about the bottom of the river. He was a decent, civil little chap."

There was silence for a minute or two as the three men smoked reflectively. Then the constable proposed, as a matter of form, to cycle along the wall and make sure that the fugitive was not lurking farther down. But before he had time to start, a figure appeared in the distance, apparently mounted on a bicycle and advancing rapidly towards them. In a few minutes he arrived and dismounted on the path above them glancing down curiously at the jacket which the warder still held.

"Those his togs?" he asked.

"Yes", replied the constable. "I suppose you haven't seen a gent bathing anywhere along here?"

The newcomer shook his head. "No", said he. "I have patrolled the whole wall from Clifton to here and I haven't seen a soul excepting old Barnett, the shepherd."

The elder warder gathered up the rest of the clothes and handed them to his junior. "Well", he said, "we must take it that he's gone to sea. All that we can do is to get the Customs people to give us a passage on their launch to make the round of all the vessels anchored about here. And if we don't find him on any of them, we shall have to hand the case over to the police."

The three men climbed to the top of the wall and turned their faces towards the town; and the Clifton patrol, having turned his bicycle about, mounted expertly and pedalled away at a smart pace to get back to his station before the twilight merged into night.

At that very moment, the fugitive was stepping over a stile that gave access from the marshes to a narrow, tree-shaded lane. Here he paused for a few moments to fling away the bundle of driftwood into the hedge and refill and light his pipe. Then, with a springy step, he strode away into the gathering moonlit dusk.

---

## CHAPTER I. — MR. POTTERMACK MAKES A DISCOVERY

A CONSCIENTIOUS desire on the part of the present historian to tell his story in a complete and workmanlike fashion from the very beginning raises the inevitable question. What was the beginning? Not always an easy question to answer offhand; for if we reflect upon certain episodes in our lives and try to track them to their beginnings, we are apt, on further cogitation, to discover behind those beginnings antecedents yet more remote which have played an indispensable part in the evolution of events.

As to this present history the whole train of cause and consequence might fairly be supposed to have been started by Mr. Pottermack's singular discovery in his garden. Yet, when we consider the matter more closely, we may doubt if that discovery would ever have been made if it had not been for the sun-dial. Certainly it would not have been made at that critical point in Mr. Pottermack's life; and if it had not—but we will not waste our energies on vain speculations. We will take the safe and simple course. We will begin with the sun-dial.

It stood, when Mr. Pottermack's eyes first beheld it, in a mason's yard at the outskirts of the town. It was obviously of some age, and therefore could not have been the production of Mr. Gallett, the owner of the yard; and standing amidst the almost garishly new monuments and blocks of freshly hewn stone, it had in its aspect something rather downfallen and forlorn. Now Mr. Pottermack had often had secret hankerings for a sun-dial. His big walled garden seemed to cry out for some central feature: and what more charming ornament could there be than a dial which like the flowers and trees amidst which it would stand lived and had its being solely by virtue of the golden sunshine?

Mr. Pottermack halted at the wide-open gate and looked at the dial (I use the word, for convenience to include the stone support). It was a graceful structure with a twisted shaft like that of a Norman column, a broad base and a square capital. It was nicely lichened and weathered, and yet in quite good condition. Mr. Pottermack found something very prepossessing in its comely antiquity. It had a motto, too, incised on the sides of the capital; and when he had strolled into the yard, and, circumnavigating the sun-dial, had read it, he was more than ever pleased. He liked the motto. It struck a sympathetic chord. Sole orto: spes: decedente pax. It might have been his own personal motto. At the rising of the sun; hope: at the going down thereof, peace. On his life the sun had risen in hope: and peace at eventide was his chief desire. And the motto was discreetly reticent about the intervening period. So, too, were there passages in the past which he was very willing to forget so that the hope of the morning might be crowned by peace when the shadows of life were lengthening.

"Having a look at the old dial, Mr. Pottermack?" said the mason, crossing the yard and disposing himself for conversation. "Nice bit of carving, that, and wonderful well preserved. He's counted out a good many hours in his time, he has. Seventeen thirty-four. And ready to count out as many again. No wheels to go rusty. All done with a shadder. No wear and tear about a shadder. And never runs down and never wants winding up. There's points about a sun-dial."

"Where did it come from?"

"I took it from the garden of Apsley Manor House, what's being rebuilt and brought up to date. New owner told me to take it away. Hadn't any use for sun-dials in these days, he said. More hasn't anybody else. So I've got him on my hands. Wouldn't like him for your garden, I suppose? He's going cheap."

It appeared, on enquiry, that he was going ridiculously cheap. So cheap that Mr. Pottermack closed with the offer there and then,

"You will bring it along and fix it for me?" said he.

"I will, sir. Don't want much fixing. If you will settle where he is to stand, I'll bring him and set him up. But you'd better prepare the site. Dig well down into the subsoil and make a level surface. Then I can put a brick foundation and there will be no fear of his settling out of the upright."

That was how it began. And on the knife-edge of such trivial chances is human destiny balanced. From the mason's yard Mr. Pottermack sped homeward with springy step, visualizing the ground-plan of his garden as he went; and by the time that he let himself into his house by the front door within the rose-embowered porch he was ready to make a bee-line for the site of his proposed excavation.

He did not, however; for, as he opened the door, he became aware of voices in the adjacent room and his housekeeper came forth to inform him that Mrs. Bellard had called to see him, and was waiting within. Apparently the announcement was not unwelcome, for Mr. Pottermack's cheerfulness was in nowise clouded thereby. We might even go far as to say that his countenance brightened.

Mrs. Bellard was obviously a widow. That is not to say that she was arrayed in the hideous "weeds" with which, a generation ago, women used to make their persons revolting and insult the memory of the deceased. But she was obviously a widow. More obviously than is usual in these latter days. Nevertheless her sombre raiment was well-considered, tasteful and becoming; indeed the severity of her dress seemed rather to enhance her quiet, dignified comeliness. She greeted Mr. Pottermack with a frank smile, and as they shook hands she said in a singularly pleasant, musical voice:

"It is too bad of me to come worrying you like this. But you said I was to."

"Of course I did", was the hearty response; and as the lady produced from her basket a small tin box, he enquired: "Snails?"

"Snails", she replied; and they both laughed.

"I know", she continued, "it is very silly of me. I quite believe that, as you say, they die instantaneously when you drop them into boiling water. But I really can't bring myself to do it."

"Very natural, too", said Pottermack. "Why should you, when you have a fellow conchologist to do it for you? I will slaughter them this evening and extract them from their shells, and you shall have their empty residences to-morrow. Shall I leave them at your house?"

"You needn't trouble to do that. Give them to your housekeeper and I will call for them on my way home from the shops. But I really do impose on you most shamefully. You kill the poor little beasts, you clean out the shells, you find out their names and you leave me nothing to do but stick them on card, write their names under them, and put them in the cabinet. I feel a most horrid impostor when I show them at the Naturalists' Club as my own specimens."

"But, my dear Mrs. Bellard", protested Pottermack, "you are forgetting that you collect them, that you discover them in their secret haunts and drag them out to the light of day. That is the really scientific part of conchology. The preparation of the shells and their identification are mere journeyman's work. The real naturalist's job is the field work; and you are a positive genius in finding these minute shells—the pupas and cochlicopas and such like."

The lady rewarded him with a grateful and gratified smile, and, opening the little box, exhibited her "catch" and recounted some of the thrilling incidents of the chase, to which Pottermack listened with eager interest. And as they chatted, but half seriously, an observer would have noted that they were obviously the best of friends, and might have suspected that the natural history researches were, perhaps, somewhat in the nature of a plausible and convenient pretext for their enjoying a good deal of each other's society. These little precautions are sometimes necessary in a country district where people take an exaggerated interest in one another and tongues are apt to wag rather freely.

But a close observer would have noted certain other facts. For instance, these two persons were curiously alike in one respect: they both looked older to the casual stranger than they appeared on closer inspection. At a first glance, Mr. Pottermack, spectacled, bearded, and grave, seemed not far short of fifty. But a more critical examination showed that first impression to be erroneous. The quick, easy movements and the supple strength that they implied in the rather small figure, as well as the brightness of the alert, attentive eyes behind the spectacles, suggested that the lines upon the face and the white powdering of the hair owed their existence to something other than the mere effluxion of time. So, too, with Mrs. Bellard. On a chance meeting she would have passed for a well-preserved middle-aged woman. But now, as she chatted smilingly with her friend, the years dropped from her until, despite the white hairs that gleamed among the brown and a faint hint of crow's-feet, she seemed almost girlish.

But there was something else; something really rather odd. Each of the two cronies seemed to have a way of furtively examining the other. There was nothing unfriendly or suspicious in these regards. Quite the contrary, indeed. But they conveyed a queer impression of curiosity and doubt, differently manifested, however, in each. In Mr. Pottermack's expression there was something expectant. He had the air of waiting for some anticipated word or action; but the expression vanished instantly when his companion looked in his direction. The widow's manner was different, but it had the same curious furtive quality. When Pottermack's attention was occupied, she would cast a steady glance at him; and then the lines would come back upon her forehead, her lips would set, and there would steal across her face a look at once sad, anxious, and puzzled. Especially puzzled. And if the direction of her glance had been followed, it would have been traced more particularly to his profile and his right ear. It is true that both these features were a little unusual. The profile was almost the conventional profile of the Greek sculptors—the nose continuing the line of the forehead with no appreciable notch—a character very seldom seen in real persons. As to the ear, it was a perfectly well-shaped, proportionate ear. It would have been of no interest to Lombroso. But it had one remarkable peculiarity: on its lobule was what doctors call a "diffuse naevus" and common folk describe as a "port-wine mark". It was quite small, but very distinct; as if the lobule had been dipped into damson juice. Still, it hardly seemed to justify such anxious and puzzled consideration.

"What a dreadful pair of gossips we are!" Mrs. Bellard exclaimed, taking her basket up from the table. "I've been here half an hour by the clock, and I know I have been hindering you from some important work. You looked full of business as you came up the garden path."

"I have been full of business ever since—land and fresh-water mollusca. We have had a most instructive talk."

"So we have", she agreed, with a smile. "We are always instructive; especially you. But I must really take myself off now and leave you to your other business."

Mr. Pottermack held the door open for her and followed her down the hall to the garden path, delaying her for a few moments to fill her basket with roses from the porch. When he had let her out at the gate, he lingered to watch her as she walked away towards the village; noting how the dignified, matronly bearing seemed to contrast with the springy tread and youthful lissomness of movement.

As he turned away to re-enter the house he saw the postman approaching; but as he was not expecting any letters, and his mind was still occupied with his late visitor, he did not wait. Nor when, a minute later, he heard the characteristic knock, did he return to inspect the letter-box; which was, just as well in the circumstances. Instead, he made his way out by the back door into the large kitchen garden and orchard and followed the long, central path which brought him at length to a high red brick wall, in which was a door furnished with a knocker and flanked by an electric bell. This he opened with a

latchkey of the Yale pattern, and, having passed through, carefully shut it behind him.

He was now in what had probably been originally the orchard and kitchen garden of the old house in which he lived, but which had since been converted into a flower garden, though many of the old fruit trees still remained. It was a large oblong space, more than a quarter of an acre in extent, and enclosed on all sides by a massive old wall nearly seven feet high, in which were only two openings: the door by which he had just entered and another door at one side, also fitted with a Yale lock and guarded, in addition, by two bolts.

It was a pleasant place if quiet and seclusion were the chief desire of the occupant—as they apparently were, to judge by Mr. Pottermack's arrangements. The central space was occupied by a large, smooth grass plot, surrounded by well-made paths, between which and the wall were wide flower borders. In one corner was a brick-built summer-house; quite a commodious affair, with a good tiled roof, a boarded floor, and space enough inside for a couple of armchairs and a fair-sized table. Against the wall opposite to the summer-house was a long shed or outhouse with glass lights in the roof, evidently a recently built structure and just a little unsightly—but that would be remedied when the yew hedge that had been planted before it grew high enough to screen it from view. This was the workshop, or rather a range of workshops; for Mr. Pottermack was a man of many occupations, and, being also a tidy, methodical man, he liked to keep the premises appertaining to those occupations separate.

On the present occasion he made his way to the end compartment, in which were kept the gardening tools and appliances, and having provided himself with a spade, a mallet, a long length of cord, and a half-dozen pointed stakes, walked out to the grass plot and looked about him. He was quite clear in his mind as to where the sun-dial was to stand, but it was necessary to fix the spot with precision. Hence the stakes and the measuring-line, which came into use when he had paced out the distances approximately and enabled him, at length, to drive a stake into the ground and thereby mark the exact spot which would be occupied by the centre of the dial.

From this centre, with the aid of the cord, he drew a circle some four yards in diameter and began at once to take up the turf, rolling it up tidily and setting it apart ready for relaying. And now he came to the real job. He had to dig right down to the subsoil. Well, how far down was that? He took off his coat, and, grasping the spade with a resolute air, gave a vigorous drive into the soil at the edge of the circle. That carried him through the garden mould down into a fine, yellowish, sandy loam, a small quantity of which came up on the spade. He noted its appearance with some interest but went on digging, opening up a shallow trench round the circumference of the circle.

By the time that he had made a second complete circuit and carried his trench to a depth of some eight inches, the circle was surrounded by a ring of the yellow loam, surprisingly bulky in proportion to the shallow cavity from which it had been derived. And once more his attention was attracted by its appearance. For Mr. Pottermack amongst his various occupations included occasionally that of sand-casting. Hitherto he had been in the habit of buying his casting-sand by the bag. But this loam, judging by the sharp impressions of his feet where he had trodden in it, was a perfect casting-sand, and to be had for the taking at his very door. By way of testing its cohesiveness, he took up a large handful and squeezed it tightly. When he opened his hand the mass remained hard and firm and showed the impressions of his fingers perfectly to the very creases of the skin.

Very pleased with his discovery, and resolving to secure a supply of the loam for his workshop, he resumed his digging, and presently came down to a stratum where the loam was quite dense and solid and came up on the spade in definite coherent lumps like pieces of a soft rock. This, he decided, was the true subsoil and was as deep as he need go; and having decided this, he proceeded to dig out the rest of the circle to the same depth.

The work was hard and, after a time, extremely monotonous. Still Mr. Pottermack laboured steadily with no tendency to slacking. But the monotony exhausted his attention, and while he worked on mechanically with unabated vigour his thoughts wandered away from his task; now in the direction of the sun-dial, and now—at, perhaps, rather more length—in that of his pretty neighbour and her spoils, which were still awaiting his attentions in the tin box.

He was getting near the centre of the circle when his spade cut through and brought up a piece of spongy, fungus-eaten wood. He glanced at it absently, and having flung it outside the circle, entered his spade at the same spot and gave a vigorous drive. As the spade met with more than usual resistance, he threw a little extra weight on it. And then, suddenly, the resistance gave way; the spade drove through, apparently into vacant space. Mr. Pottermack uttered a startled cry, and after an instant's precarious balancing saved himself by a hair's breadth from going through after it.

For a moment he was quite shaken—and no wonder. He had staggered back a pace or two and now stood, still grasping the spade, and gazing with horror at the black, yawning hole that had so nearly swallowed him up. But as, after all, it had not, he presently pulled himself together and began cautiously to investigate. A very little tentative probing with the spade made everything clear. The hole which he had uncovered was the mouth of an old well: one of those pernicious wells which have no protective coping but of which the opening, flush with the surface of the ground, is ordinarily closed by a hinged flap. The rotten timber that he had struck was part of this flap, and he could now see the rusty remains of the hinges. When the well had gone out of use, some one, with incredible folly, had simply covered it up by heaping earth on the closed flap.

Mr. Pottermack, having made these observations, proceeded methodically to clear away the soil until the entire mouth of the well was exposed. Then, going down on hands and knees, he approached, and cautiously advancing his head over the edge, peered down into the dark cavity. It was not quite dark, however, for though the slimy brick cylinder faded after a few feet into profound gloom, Mr. Pottermack could see, far down, as it seemed in the very bowels of the earth, a little circular spot of light on which was the dark silhouette of a tiny head. He picked up a pebble, and, holding it at the centre of the

opening, let it drop. After a brief interval the bright spot grew suddenly dim and the little head vanished: and after another brief interval there came up to his ear a hollow "plop" followed by a faint, sepulchral splash.

There was, then, water in the well; not that it mattered to him, as he was going to cover it up again. But he was a man with a healthy curiosity and he felt that he would like to know all about this well before he once more consigned it to oblivion. Walking across to the workshop, he entered the metalwork section and cast his eye around for a suitable sinker. Presently, in the "oddments" drawer, he found a big iron clock-weight. It was heavier than was necessary, but he took it in default of anything more suitable, and going back to the well, he tied it to one end of the measuring-cord. The latter, being already marked in fathoms by means of a series of knots, required no further preparation. Lying full-length by the brink of the well, Mr. Pottermack dropped the weight over and let the cord slip through his hands, counting the knots as it ran out and moving it up and down as the weight neared the water.

The hollow splash for which he was listening came to his ear when the hand that grasped the cord was between the fourth and fifth knots. The depth, therefore, of the well to the surface of the water was about twenty-seven feet. He made a mental note of the number and then let the cord slip more rapidly through his hands. It was just after the seventh knot had passed that the tension of the cord suddenly relaxed, telling him that the weight now rested on the bottom. This gave a depth of sixteen feet of water and a total depth of about forty-three feet. And to think that, but for the merest chance, he would now have been down there where the clock-weight was resting!

With a slight shudder he rose, and, hauling up the cord, coiled it neatly and laid it down, with the weight still attached, a few feet away on the cleared ground. The question that he now had to settle was how far the existence of the well would interfere with the placing of the sun-dial. It did not seem to him that it interfered at all. On the contrary; the well had to be securely covered up in any case, and the sun-dial on top of the covering would make it safe for ever. For it happened that the position of the well coincided within a foot with the chosen site of the dial; which seemed quite an odd coincidence until one remembered that the position of both had probably been determined by identical sets of measurements, based on the ground-plan of the garden.

One thing, however, was obvious. Mr. Gallett would have to be informed of the discovery without delay, for something different from the proposed brickwork foundation would be required. Accordingly, Mr. Pottermack slipped on his coat, and, having sought out a hurdle and laid it over the well—for you can't be too careful in such a case—set off without delay for the mason's yard. As he opened the front door, he observed the letter still lying in the wire basket under the letter-slit. But he did not take it out. It could wait until he came back.

Mr. Gallett was deeply interested, but he was also a little regretful. The altered arrangements would cause delay and increase the cost of the job. He would want two bigish slabs of stone, which would take some time to prepare.

"But why cover the well at all?" said he. "A good well with sixteen feet of water in it is not to be sneezed at if you gets a hard frost and all the pipes is bunged up and busted."

But Mr. Pottermack shook his head. Like most town-bred men, he had rather a dislike to wells, and his own recent narrow escape had done nothing to diminish his prejudice. He would have no open well in his garden.

"The only question is", he concluded, "whether the sun-dial will be safe right over the well. Will a stone slab bear the weight?"

"Lor' bless you", replied Gallett, "a good thick slab of flagstone would bear St. Paul's Cathedral. And we are going to put two, one on top of the other to form a step; and the base of the dial itself a good two foot wide. It will be as strong as a house."

"And when do you think you'll be able to fix it?"

Mr. Gallett reflected. "Let's see. To-day's Toos-day. It will take a full day to get them two slabs sawn off the block and trimmed to shape. Shall we say Friday?"

"Friday will do perfectly. There is really no hurry, though I shall be glad to get the well covered and made safe. But don't put yourself out."

Mr. Gallett promised that he would not, and Pottermack then departed homeward to resume his labours.

As he re-entered his house, he picked the letter out of the letter-cage, and, holding it unopened in his hand, walked through to the garden. Emerging into the open air, he turned the letter over and glanced at the address; and in an instant a most remarkable change came over him. The quiet gaiety faded from his face and he stopped dead, gazing at the superscription with a frown of angry apprehension. Tearing open the envelope, he drew out the letter, unfolded it and glanced quickly through the contents. Apparently it was quite short, for, almost immediately, he refolded it, returned it to its envelope and slipped the latter into his pocket.

Passing through into the walled garden, he took off his coat, laid it down in the summer-house and fell to work on the excavation, extending the circle into a square and levelling the space around the well to make a bed for the stone slab. But all his enthusiasm had evaporated. He worked steadily and with care; but his usually cheerful face was gloomy and stern, and a certain faraway look in his eyes hinted that his thoughts were not on what he was doing but on something suggested by the ill-omened missive.

When the light failed, he replaced the hurdle, cleaned and put away the spade, and then went indoors with his coat on

his arm to wash and take his solitary supper; of which he made short work, eating and drinking mechanically and gazing before him with gloomy preoccupation. Supper being finished and cleared away, he called for a kettle of boiling water and a basin, and, taking from a cupboard a handled needle, a pair of fine forceps, and a sheet of blotting-paper, laid them on the table with Mrs. Bellard's tin box. The latter he opened and very carefully transferred the imprisoned snails to the basin, which he then filled with boiling water; whereupon the unfortunate molluscs each emitted a stream of bubbles and shrank instantly into the recesses of its shell.

Having deposited the kettle in the fireplace, Mr. Pottermack drew a chair up to the table and seated himself with the basin before him and the blotting-paper at his right hand. But before beginning his work he drew forth the letter, straightened it out and, laying it on the table, read it through slowly. It bore no address and no signature; and though the envelope was addressed to Marcus Pottermack, Esq., it began, oddly enough, "Dear Jeff."

"I send you this little billy doo", it ran on, "with deep regret, which I know you will share. But it can't be helped. I had hoped that the last one would be in fact, the last one, whereas it turns out to have been the last but one. This is positively my final effort, so keep up your pecker. And it is only a small affair this time. A hundred—in notes, of course. Fivers are safest. I shall call at the usual place on Wednesday at 8 p.m. ('in the gloaming, O! my darling!' This will give you time to hop up to town in the morning to collect the rhino. And mind I've got to have it. No need to dwell on unpleasant alternatives. Necessity knows no law. I am in a devil of a tight corner and you have got to help me out. So adieu until Wednesday evening."

Mr. Pottermack turned from the letter, and, taking up the mounted needle, with the other hand picked out of the basin a snail with a delicate yellow shell (*Helix hortensis*, var. *arenicola* and, regarding it reflectively, proceeded with expert care to extract the shrivelled body of the mollusc. But though his attention seemed to be concentrated on his task, his thoughts were far away, and his eyes strayed now and again to the letter at his side.

"I am in a devil of a tight corner". Of course he was. The incurable plunger is always getting into tight corners. "And you have got to help me out". Exactly. In effect, the money that you have earned by unstinted labour and saved by self-denial has got to be handed to me that I may drop it into the bottomless pit that swallows up the gambler's losings. "This is positively my final effort". Yes. So was the last one, and the one before that; and so would be the next, and the one that would follow it, and so on without end. Mr. Pottermack saw it all clearly; realized, as so many other sufferers have realized, that there is about a blackmailer something hopelessly elusive. No transaction with him has any finality. He has something to sell, and he sells it; but behold! even as the money passes the thing sold is back in the hand of the vendor, to be sold again and yet again. No covenant with him is binding; no agreement can be enforced. There can be no question of cutting a loss, for, no matter how drastic the sacrifice, it is no sooner made than the status quo ante reappears.

On these truths Mr. Pottermack cogitated gloomily and asked himself, as such victims often do, whether it would not have been better in the first place to tell this ruffian to go to the devil and do his worst. Yet that had hardly seemed practicable. For the fellow would probably have done his worst:—and his worst was so extremely bad. On the other hand, it was impossible that this state of affairs should be allowed to go on indefinitely. He was not by any means a rich man, though this parasite persisted in assuming that he was. At the present rate he would soon be sucked dry—reduced to stark poverty. And even then he would be no safer.

The intensity of his revolt against his intolerable position was emphasized by his very occupation. The woman for whom he was preparing these specimens was very dear to him. In any pictures that his fancy painted of the hoped-for future, hers was the principal figure. His fondest wish was to ask her to be his wife, and he felt a modest confidence that she would not say him nay. But how could he ask any woman to marry him while this vampire clung to his body? Marriage was not for him—a slave to-day, a pauper to-morrow, at the best; and at the worst—

The evening had lapsed into night by the time that all the specimens had been made presentable for the cabinet. It remained to write a little name-ticket for each with the aid, when necessary, of a handbook of the British Mollusca, and then to wrap each separate shell, with its ticket, in tissue paper and pack it tenderly in the small tin box. Thus was he occupied when his housekeeper, Mrs. Gadby, "reported off duty" and retired; and the clock in the hall was striking eleven when, having packed the last of the shells, he made the tin box into a neat little parcel with the consignee's name legibly written on the cover.

The house was profoundly quiet. Usually Mr. Pottermack was deeply appreciative of the restful silence that settles down upon the haunts of men when darkness has fallen upon field and hedgerow and the village has gone to sleep. Very pleasant it was then to reach down from the bookshelves some trusty companion and draw the big easy-chair up to the fireplace, even though, as to-night, the night was warm and the grate empty. The force of habit did, indeed, even now, lead him to the bookshelves. But no book was taken down. He had no inclination for reading to-night. Neither had he any inclination for sleep. Instead, he lit a pipe and walked softly up and down the room, stem and gloomy of face, yet with a look of concentration as if he were considering a difficult problem.

Up and down, up and down he paced, hardly making a sound. And as the time passed, the expression of his face underwent a subtle change. It lost none of its sternness, but yet it seemed to clear, as if a solution of the problem were coming into sight.

The striking of the clock in the hall, proclaiming the end of the day, brought him to a halt. He glanced at his watch, knocked out his empty pipe, lit a candle and blew out the lamp. As he turned to pass out to the stairs, something in his expression seemed to hint at a conclusion reached. All the anxiety and bewilderment had passed out of his face. Stern it was still; but there had come into it a certain resolute calm; the calm of a man who has made up his mind.

## CHAPTER II. — THE SECRET VISITOR

THE following morning found Mr. Pottermack in an undeniably restless mood. For a time he could settle down to no occupation, but strayed about the house and garden with an air of such gravity and abstraction that Mrs. Gadby looked at him askance and inwardly wondered what had come over her usually buoyant and cheerful employer.

One thing, however, was clear. He was not going to 'hop up to town'. Of the previous expeditions of that kind he had a vivid and unpleasant recollection; the big "bearer" cheque sheepishly pushed across the counter, the cashier's astonished glance at it, the careful examination of books, and then the great bundle of five-pound notes, which he counted, at the cashier's request, with burning cheeks; and his ignominious departure with the notes buttoned into an inside pocket and an uncomfortable suspicion in his mind that the ostentatiously unobservant cashier had guessed at once the nature of the transaction. Well, that experience was not going to be repeated on this occasion. There was going to be a change of procedure.

As he could fix his mind at nothing more definite, he decided to devote the day to a thorough clear-up of his workshops: a useful and necessary work, which had the added advantage of refreshing his memory as to the abiding-places of rarely used appliances and materials. And an excellent distraction he found it; so much so that several times, in the interest of rediscovering some long-forgotten tool or stock of material, he was able to forget for a while the critical interview that loomed before him.

So the day passed. The mid-day meal was consumed mechanically—under the furtive and disapproving observation of Mrs. Gadby—and dispatched with indecent haste. He was conscious of an inclination to lurk about the house on the chance of a brief gossip with his fair friend; but he resisted it, and, when he came in to tea, the housekeeper reported that the little package had been duly collected.

He lingered over his tea as if he were purposely consuming time, and when at last he rose from the table, he informed Mrs. Gadby that he had some important work to do and was under no circumstances to be disturbed. Then once more he retired to the walled garden, and having shut himself in, dropped the key into his pocket. He did not, however, resume his labours in the workshop. He merely called in there for an eight-inch steel bolt and a small electric lamp, both of which he bestowed in his pockets. Then he came out and walked slowly up and down the grass plot with his hands behind him and his chin on his breast as if immersed in thought, but glancing from time to time at his watch. At a quarter to eight he took off his spectacles and put them in his pocket, stepped across to the well, and picking up the hurdle that still lay over the dark cavity, carried it away and stood it against the wall. Then he softly unbolted the side gate, turned the handle of the latch, drew the gate open a bare inch, and, leaving it thus ajar, walked to the summer-house, and, entering it, sat down in one of the chairs.

His visitor, if deficient in some of the virtues, had at least that of punctuality; for the clock of the village church had barely finished striking the hour when the gate opened noiselessly and the watcher in the summer-house saw, through the gathering gloom, a large, portly man enter with stealthy step, close the gate silently behind him and softly shoot the upper bolt.

Pottermack rose as his visitor approached, and the two men met just outside the summer-house. There was a striking contrast between them in every respect, in build, in countenance, and in manner. The newcomer was a big, powerful man, heavy and distinctly over-fat, whose sly, shifty face—at present exhibiting an uneasy smile—showed evident traces of what is commonly miscalled "good living", especially as to the liquid element thereof; whereas his host, smallish, light, spare, with clean-cut features expressive of lively intelligence, preserved a stony calm as he looked steadily into his visitor's evasive eyes.

"Well, Jeff", the latter began in a deprecating tone, "you don't seem overjoyed to see me. Not an effusive welcome. Aren't you going to shake hands with an old pal?"

"It doesn't seem necessary", Pottermack replied coldly.

"Oh, very well", the other retorted. "Perhaps you'd like to kiss me instead". He sniggered foolishly, and, entering the summer-house, dropped into one of the armchairs and continued: "What about a mild refresher while we discuss our little business? Looks like being a dry job, to judge by your mug."

Without replying, Pottermack opened a small cupboard, and taking out a decanter, a siphon, and a tumbler, placed them on the table by his guest. It was not difficult to see that the latter had already fortified himself with one or two refreshers, mild or otherwise, but that was not Pottermack's affair. He was going to keep his own brain clear. The other might do as he pleased.

"Not going to join me, Jeff?" the visitor protested. "Oh, buck up, old chap! It's no use getting peevish about parting with a few pounds. You won't miss a little donation to help a pal out of a difficulty."

As Pottermack made no reply but sat down and gazed stonily before him, the other poured out half a tumblerful of whisky, filled up with soda, and took a substantial gulp. Then he, too, sat silent for a time, gazing out into the darkening garden. And gradually the smile faded from his face, leaving it sullen and a little anxious.

"So you've been digging up your lawn", he remarked presently. "What's the game? Going to set up a flagstaff?"

"No. I am going to have a sun-dial there."

"A sun-dial, hey? Going to get your time on the cheap? Good. I like sun-dials. Do their job without ticking. Suppose you'll have a motto on it. Tempus fugit is the usual thing. Always appropriate, but especially so in the case of a man who has 'done time' and fugitted. It will help to remind you of olden days, 'the days that are no more.'" He finished with a mirthless cackle and cast a malignant glance at the silent and wooden-faced Pottermack. There was another interval of strained, uncomfortable silence, during which the visitor took periodic gulps from his tumbler and eyed his companion with sullen perplexity. At length, having finished his liquor, he set down the empty tumbler and turned towards Pottermack. "You got my letter, I suppose, as you left the gate ajar?"

"Yes", was the laconic reply.

"Been up to town to-day?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose you have got the money?"

"No, I have not."

The big man sat up stiffly and stared at his companion in dismay.

"But, damn it, man!" he exclaimed, "didn't I tell you it was urgent? I'm in a devil of a fix. I've got to pay that hundred to-morrow. Must pay it, you understand. I'm going up to town in the morning to pay. As I hadn't got the money myself, I've had to borrow it from—you know where; and I was looking to you to enable me to put it back at once. I must have that money to-morrow at the latest. You'd better run up to town in the morning and I'll meet you outside your bank."

Pottermack shook his head. "It can't be done, Lewson. You'll have to make some other arrangements."

Lewson stared at him in mingled amazement and fury. For a moment he was too astonished for speech. At length he burst out:

"Can't be done! What the devil do you mean? You've got the money in your bank and you are going to hand it over, or I'll know the reason why. What do you imagine you are going to do?"

"I am going", said Pottermack, "to hold you to your agreement, or at least to part of it. You demanded a sum of money—a large sum—as the price of your silence. It was to be a single payment, once for all, and I paid it. You promised solemnly to make no further demands; yet, within a couple of months, you did make further demands, and I paid again. Since then you have made demands at intervals, regardless of your solemn undertaking. Now this has got to stop. There must be an end to it, and this has got to be the end."

As he spoke, quietly but firmly, Lewson gazed at him as if he could not trust the evidence of his senses. This was quite a new Pottermack. At length, suppressing his anger, he replied in a conciliatory tone:

"Very well, Jeff. It shall be the end. Help me out just this time and you shall hear no more from me. I promise you that on my word of honour."

At this last word Pottermack smiled grimly. But he answered in the same quiet, resolute manner:

"It is no use, Lewson. You said that last time and the time before that, and, in fact, time after time. You have always sworn that each demand should be positively the last. And so you will go on, if I let you, until you have squeezed me dry."

On this Lewson threw off all disguise. Thrusting out his chin at Pottermack, he exclaimed furiously: "If you let me! And how do you think you are going to prevent me? You are quite right. I've got you, and I'm going to squeeze you, so now you know. And look here, young fellow, if that money isn't handed out to me to-morrow morning, something is going to happen. A very surprised gentleman at Scotland Yard will get a letter informing him that the late Jeffrey Brandon, runaway convict, is not the late J. B. but is alive and kicking, and that his present name and address is Marcus Pottermack, Esquire, of 'The Chestnuts', Borley, Bucks. How will that suit you?"

"It wouldn't suit me at all", Mr. Pottermack replied, with unruffled calm; "but before you do it, let me remind you of one or two facts. First, the run-away convict, once your closest friend, was to your knowledge an innocent man—"

"That's no affair of mine", Lewson interrupted. "He was a convict, and is one still. Besides, how do I know he was innocent? A jury of his fellow-countrymen found him guilty—"

"Don't talk rubbish, Lewson", Pottermack broke in impatiently. "There is no one here but ourselves. We both know that I didn't do those forgeries and we both know who did."

Lewson grinned as he reached out for the decanter and poured out another half-tumblerful of whisky. "If you knew who did it", he chuckled, "you must have been a blooming mug not to say."

"I didn't know then", Pottermack rejoined bitterly. "I thought you were a decent, honest fellow, fool that I was."

"Yes", Lewson agreed, with a low, cackling laugh, "you were a blooming mug and that's a fact. Well, well; we live and learn."

Still sniggering foolishly, he took a long pull at the tumbler, leering into the flushed, angry face that confronted him across the table. Suddenly Pottermack rose from his chair, and, striding out into the garden, halted some dozen paces away



and stood with his back to the summer-house, looking steadily across the lawn. It was now quite dark, though the moon showed dimly from time to time through a thinning of the overcast sky; but still, through the gloom, he could make out faintly the glimmer of lighter-coloured soil where it had been turned up to level the ground for the sun-dial. The well was invisible, but he knew exactly where the black cavity yawned, and his eye, locating the spot, rested on it with gloomy fixity.

His reverie was interrupted by Lewson's voice, now pitched in a more ingratiating key.

"Well, Jeff; thinking it over? That's right, old chap. No use getting pippy."

He paused, and as there was no reply he continued:

"Come now, dear boy, let's settle the business amicably as old pals should. Pity for you to go back to the jug when there's no need. You just help me out of this hole, and I will give you my solemn word of honour that it shall be the very last time. Won't that satisfy you?"

Pottermack turned his head slightly, and speaking over his shoulder, replied; "Your word of honour! The honour of a blackmailer, a thief and a liar. It isn't exactly what you would call a gilt-edged security."

"Well", the other retorted thickly, "gilt-edged or not, you had better take it and shell out. Now, what do you say?"

"I say", Pottermack replied with quiet decision, "that I am not going to give you another farthing on any condition whatever."

For several seconds Lewson gazed in silent dismay at the shadowy figure on the lawn. This final, definite refusal was a contingency that he had never dreamed of, and was utterly unprovided for, and it filled him, for the moment, with consternation. Then, suddenly, his dismay changed to fury. Starting up from his chair, he shouted huskily:

"Oh, you won't, won't you? We'll see about that! You'll either pay up or I'll give you the finest hammering that you've ever had in your life. When I've done with you, they'll want your finger-prints to find out who you are."

He paused to watch the effect of this terrifying proposal and to listen for a reply. Then, as the dim figure remained unmoved and no answer came, he bellowed: "D' you hear? Are you going to pay up or take a hammering?"

Pottermack turned his head slightly and replied in a quiet, almost a gentle tone: "I don't think I'm going to do either."

The reply and the quiet, unalarmed tone were not quite what Lewson had expected. Trusting to the moral effect of his greatly superior size and weight, he had bluffed confidently. Now it seemed that he had got to make good his threat, and the truth is that he was not eager for the fray. However, it had to be done, and done as impressively as possible. After pausing for another couple of seconds, he proceeded, with a formidable air (but unobserved by Pottermack, whose back was still turned to him), to take off his coat and fling it on the table, whence it slipped down on to the floor. Then, stepping outside the summer-house, he bent forward, and, with an intimidating roar, charged like an angry rhinoceros.

At the sound of his stamping feet Pottermack spun round and faced him, but then stood motionless until his assailant was within a yard of him, when he sprang lightly aside, and as the big, unwieldy bully lumbered past him, he followed him closely. As soon as Lewson could overcome the momentum of his charge, he halted and turned; and instantly a smart left-hander alighted on his cheek and a heavy right-hander impinged on his ribs just below the armpit. Furious with the pain, and utterly taken aback, he cursed and grunted, hitting out wildly with all the viciousness of mingled rage and fear for now he realized with amazement that he was hopelessly outclassed by his intended victim. Not one of his sledge-hammer blows took effect on that agile adversary, whereas his own person seemed to be but an unprotected target on which the stinging blows fell in endless and intolerable succession. Slowly at first, and then more quickly, he backed away from that terrific bombardment, followed inexorably by the calm and scientific Pottermack, who seemed to guide and direct his backward course as a skilful drover directs the movements of a refractory bullock.

Gradually the pair moved away from the vicinity of the summer-house across the dark lawn, the demoralized bully, breathing hard and sweating profusely, reduced to mere defence and evasion while his light-footed antagonist plied him unceasingly with feint or blow. Presently Lewson stumbled backward as his foot sank into the loose, heaped earth at the margin of the cleared space; but Pottermack did not press his advantage, renewing his attack only when Lewson had recovered his balance. Then the movement began again, growing faster as the big man became more and more terrified and his evasion passed into undissembled retreat; deviously and with many a zig-zag but always tending towards the centre of the cleared area. Suddenly Pottermack's tactics changed. The rapid succession of light blows ceased for an instant and he seemed to gather himself up as if for a decisive effort. There was a quick feint with the left; then his right fist shot out like lightning and drove straight on to the point of the other man's jaw, and as his teeth clicked together with an audible snap, Lewson dropped like a pole-axed ox, falling with his body from the waist upwards across the mouth of the well and his head on the brick edge, on which it struck with a sickening thud.

So he lay for a second or two until the limp trunk began to sag and the chin came forward on to the breast. Suddenly the head slipped off the brick edge and dropped into the cavity, shedding its cap and carrying the trunk with it. The heavy jerk started the rest of the body sliding forward, slowly at first, then with increasing swiftness until the feet rose for an instant, kicked at the farther edge and were gone. From the black pit issued vague, echoing murmurs, followed presently by a hollow, reverberating splash; and after that, silence.

It had been but a matter of seconds. Even as those cavernous echoes were muttering in the unseen depths, Pottermack's knuckles were still tingling from the final blow. From the moment when that blow had been struck he had made no move.

He had seen his enemy fall, had heard the impact of the head on the brick edge, and had stood looking down with grim composure on the body as it sagged, slid forward, and at last made its dreadful dive down into the depths of its sepulchre. But he had moved not a muscle. It was a horrible affair. But it had to be. Not he, but Lewson had made the decision.

As the last reverberations died away he approached the forbidding circle of blackness, and kneeling down at its edge, peered into the void. Of course, he could see nothing; and when he listened intently, not a sound came to his ear. From his pocket he brought out his little electric lamp and threw a beam of light down into the dark cavity. The effect was very strange and uncanny. He found himself looking down a tube of seemingly interminable length while from somewhere far away, down in the very bowels of the earth, a tiny spark of light glowed steadily. So even the last ripples had died away and all was still down in that underworld.

He replaced the lamp in his pocket, but nevertheless he remained kneeling by the well-mouth, resting on one hand, gazing down into the black void and unconsciously listening for some sound from below. Despite his outward composure, he was severely shaken. His heart still raced, his forehead was damp with sweat, his body and limbs were pervaded by a fine, nervous tremor.

Yet he was sensible of a feeling of relief. The dreadful thing that he had nerved himself to do, that he had looked forward to with shuddering horror, was done. And the doing of it might have been so much worse. He was relieved to feel the screw-bolt in his pocket—unused; to think that the body had slipped down into its grave without the need of any hideous dragging or thrusting. Almost, he began to persuade himself that it had been more or less of an accident. At any rate, it was over and done with. His merciless enemy was gone. The menace to his liberty, the constant fear that had haunted him were no more. At last—at long last—he was free.

Fear of discovery he had none; for Lewson, in his own interests, had insisted on strict secrecy as to their acquaintance with each other. In his own words, "he preferred to sit on his own nest-egg". Hence to all the world they were strangers, not necessarily even aware of each other's existence. And the blackmailer's stealthy arrival and his care in silently shutting the gate gave a guarantee that no one had seen him enter.

While these thoughts passed somewhat confusedly through his mind, he remained in the same posture; still unconsciously listening and still gazing, as if with a certain expectancy, into the black hole before him, or letting his eyes travel, now and again, round the dark garden. Presently an opening in the dense pall of cloud that obscured the sky uncovered the moon and flooded the garden with light. The transition from darkness to brilliant light—for it was full moon—was so sudden that Pottermack looked up with a nervous start, as though to see who had thrown the light on him; and in his overwrought state he even found something disquieting in the pale, bright disc with its queer, dim, impassive face that seemed to be looking down on him through the rent in the cloud like some secret watcher peeping from behind a curtain. He rose to his feet, and, drawing a deep breath, looked around him; and then his glance fell on something more real and more justly disquieting. From the edge of the grass to the brink of the well was a double track of footprints, meandering to and fro, zig-zagging hither and thither, but undeniably ending at the well.

Their appearance was sinister in the extreme. In the bright moonlight they stared up from the pale buff soil, and they shouted of tragedy. To the police eye they would have been the typical "signs of a struggle"; the tracks of two men facing one another and moving towards the well with, presently, a single track coming away from it. No one could mistake the meaning of those tracks; nothing could explain them away—especially in view of what was at the bottom of the well.

The first glance at those tracks gave Pottermack a severe shock. But he recovered from it in a moment. For they were mere transitory marks that could be obliterated in a minute or two by a few strokes of a rake and a few sweeps of a besom; and meanwhile he stooped over them, examining them with a curious interest not unmixed with a certain vague uneasiness. They were very remarkable impressions. He had already noted the peculiar quality of this loamy soil; its extraordinary suitability for making casting-moulds. And here was a most striking illustration of this property. The prints of his own feet were so perfect that the very brads in his soles were quite clear and distinct, while as to Lewson's, they were positively ridiculous. Every detail of the rubber soles and the circular rubber heels came out as sharply as if the impressions had been taken in moulding-wax. There was the prancing horse of Kent—the soles were of the Invicta brand and practically new—with the appropriate legend and the manufacturers' name, and in the central star-shaped space of the heels was the perfect impression of the screw. No doubt the singular sharpness of the prints was due to the fact that a heavy shower in the previous night had brought the loam to that particular state of dampness that the professional moulder seeks to produce with his watering-pot.

However, interesting as the prints were to the mechanic's eye, the sooner they were got rid of the better. Thus reflecting, Pottermack strode away towards the workshop in quest of a rake and a besom; and he was, in fact, reaching out to grasp the handle of the door when he stopped dead and stood for some seconds rigid and still with outstretched arm and dropped jaw. For in that moment a thought which had, no doubt, been stirring in his subconscious mind had come to the surface, and for the first time the chill of real terror came over him. Suddenly he realized that he had no monopoly of this remarkable loam. It was the soil of the neighbourhood—and incidentally of the little lane that led from the town and passed along beside his wall. In that lane there must be a single track of footprints—big, staring footprints, and every one of them as good as a signature of James Lewson—leading from the town and stopping at his gate!

After a few moments of horror-stricken reflection he darted into the tool-house and brought out a short ladder. His first impulse had been to open the gate and peer out, but an instant's reflection had shown him the folly of exposing himself to the risk of being seen—especially at the very gate to which the tracks led. He now carried the ladder across to an old pear

tree which thrust its branches over the wall, and, planting it silently where the foliage was densest, crept softly up and listened awhile. As no sound of footsteps was audible, and as the moon had for the moment retired behind the bank of cloud, he cautiously advanced his head over the wall and looked down into the lane. It was too dark to see far in either direction, but apparently there was no one about; and as the country quiet was unbroken by any sound, he ventured to crane farther forward to inspect the path below.

The light was very dim; but even so he could make out faintly a single track of footprints—large footprints, widely spaced, the footprints of a tall man. But even as he was peering down at them through the darkness, trying to distinguish in the vaguely seen shapes some recognizable features, the moon burst forth again and the light became almost as that of broad day. Instantly the half-seen shapes started up with a horrid distinctness that made him catch his breath. There was the preposterous prancing horse with the legend "Invicta", there was the makers' name, actually legible from the height of the wall, and there were the circular heels with their raised central stars and the very screws clearly visible even to their slots!

Pottermack was profoundly alarmed. But he was not a panicky man. There, in those footprints, was evidence enough to hang him. But he was not hanged yet; and he did not mean to be, if the unpleasantness could be avoided. Perched on the ladder, with his eyes riveted on the tracks of the man who had come to "squeeze" him, he reviewed the situation with cool concentration, and considered the best way to deal with it.

The obvious thing was to go out and trample on those footprints until they were quite obliterated. But to this plan there were several objections. In the first place, those enormous impressions would take a deal of trampling out. Walking over them once would be quite useless, for his own feet were comparatively small, and even a fragment of one of Lewson's footprints would be easily recognizable. Moreover, the trampling process would involve the leaving of his own footprints in evidence; which might be disastrous if it should happen—as it easily might—that Lewson had been seen starting along the footpath. For this path, unfrequented as it was, turned off from the main road at the outskirts of the town where wayfarers were numerous enough. The reason that it was unfrequented was that it led only to a wood and a stretch of heath which were more easily approached by a by-road. Finally, he himself might quite possibly be seen performing the trampling operations, and that would never do. In short, the trampling scheme was not practicable at all.

But what alternative was there? Something must be done. Very soon the man would be missed and there would be a search for him; and as things stood there was a set of tracks ready to guide the searchers from the town to his—Pottermack's—very gate. And inside the gate was the open well. Clearly, something must be done, and done at once. But what?

As he asked himself this question again and again he was half-consciously noting the conditions. Hitherto, no one had seen Lewson's footprints at this part of the path. That was evident from the fact that there were no other fresh footprints—none that trod on Lewson's. Then, in half an hour at the most, the shadow of the wall would be thrown over the path and the tracks would then be quite inconspicuous. And, again, it was now past nine o'clock and his neighbours were early folk. It was extremely unlikely that any one would pass along that path until the morning. So there was still time. But time for what?

One excellent plan occurred to him, but, alas! he had not the means to carry it out. If only he had possession of Lewson's shoes he could put them on, slip out at the gate and continue the tracks to some distant spot well out of his neighbourhood. That would be a perfect solution of the problem. But Lewson's shoes had vanished for ever from human ken—at least, he hoped they had. So that plan was impracticable.

And yet, was it? As he put the question to himself his whole demeanour changed. He stood up on his perch with a new eagerness in his face; the eagerness of a man who has struck a brilliant idea. For that was what he had done. This excellent plan, which yielded the perfect solution, was practicable after all. Lewson's shoes were indeed beyond his reach. But he had a fine assortment of Lewson's footprints. Now footprints are made by the soles of shoes. That is the normal process. But by the exercise of a little ingenuity the process could be reversed; shoe-soles could be made from footprints.

He descended the ladder, thinking hard; and as the cloud once more closed over the moon, he fetched the hurdle and placed it carefully over the mouth of the well. Then he walked slowly towards the workshop—avoiding the now invaluable footprints—shaping his plan as he went.

---

### CHAPTER III. — MR. POTTERMACK GOES A-SUGARING

THE efficient workman saves a vast amount of time by so planning out his job in advance that intervals of waiting are eliminated. Now Mr. Pottermack was an eminently methodical man and he was very sensible that, in the existing circumstances, time was precious. Accordingly, although his plan was but roughly sketched out in his mind, he proceeded forthwith to execute that part of it which could be clearly visualized, filling in the further details mentally as he worked.

The first thing to be done was, obviously, to convert the perishable, ephemeral footprints, which a light shower would destroy, into solid, durable models. To this end, he fetched from the workshop the tin of fine plaster of Paris which he kept for making small or delicate moulds. By the aid of his little lamp he selected a specially deep and perfect impression of Lewson's right foot, and into this he lightly dusted the fine powder, continuing the process until the surface was covered with an even layer of about half an inch thick. This he pressed down very gently with the flat end of the lamp, and then went in search of a suitable impression of the left foot, which he treated in like manner. He next selected a second pair of prints, but instead of dusting the dry plaster into them he merely dropped into each a pinch to serve as a mark for identifying it. His reason for thus varying the method was that he was doubtful whether it was possible to pour liquid plaster into a loam mould (for that was what the footprint actually was) without disturbing the surface and injuring the pattern.

Returning to the workshop, he mixed a good-sized bowl of plaster, stirring and beating the creamy liquid with a large spoon. Still stirring, he carried it out, and, going first to the prints which contained the dry plaster, he carefully ladled into them with the spoon small quantities of the liquid plaster until they were well filled. By this time the liquid was growing appreciably thicker and more suitable for the unprotected prints, to which he accordingly hastened, and proceeded quickly, but with extreme care, to fill them until the now rapidly thickening plaster was well heaped up above the surface.

He had now at least, a quarter of an hour to wait while the plaster was setting, but this he occupied in cleaning out the bowl and spoon ready for the next mixing, placing the brush and plaster tools in readiness and pouring out a saucerful of soap-size. When he had made these preparations, he filled a small jug with water, and making his way to the first two impressions, poured the water on to them to make up for that which would have been absorbed by the dry plaster underneath. In the second pair of impressions, which he ventured to test by a light touch of the finger, the plaster was already quite solid, and he was strongly tempted to raise them and see what luck he had had; but he resisted the temptation and went back to the workshop, leaving them to harden completely.

All this time, although he had given the closest attention to what he was doing, his mind had been working actively, and already the sketch-plan was beginning to shape into a complete and detailed scheme; for he had suddenly remembered a supply of sheet gutta-percha which he had unearthed when he turned out the workshop, and this discovery disposed of what had been his chief difficulty. Now, in readiness for a later stage of his work, he lighted his Primus stove, and having filled a good-sized saucepan with water, placed it on the stove to heat. This consumed the rest of the time that he had allotted for the hardening of the plaster, and he now went forth with no little anxiety to see what the casts were like. For they were the really essential element of his plan on which success or failure depended. If he could get a perfect reproduction of the footprints, the rest of his task, troublesome as it promised to be, would be plain sailing.

Very gingerly he insinuated his finger under one of the casts of the second pair and gently turned it over. And then, as he threw the light of his lamp on it, all his misgivings vanished in respect of that foot—the right. The aspect of the cast was positively ridiculous. It was just the sole of a shoe; snow-white, but otherwise completely realistic, and perfect in every detail and marking, even to the makers' name. And the second cast was equally good; so his special precautions had been unnecessary. Nevertheless, he went on to the first pair, and they proved to be, if anything, sharper and cleaner, more free from adherent particles of earth than the others. With a sigh of relief he picked up the four casts and bore them tenderly to the workshop, where he deposited them on the bench. There, under the bright electric light, their appearance was even more striking. But he did not stop to gloat. He could do that while he was working.

The first proceeding was to trim off the ragged edges with a scraper, and then came the process of "sizing"—painting with a boiled solution of soft soap—which also cleaned away the adherent particles of loam. When the soap had soaked in and "stopped" the surface, the surplus was washed away under the tap, and then, with a soft brush, an infinitesimal coating of olive oil was applied. The casts were now ready for the next stage—the making of the moulds. First, Pottermack filled a shallow tray with loam from the garden, striking the surface level with a straight-edge. On this surface the two best casts were laid, sole upwards, and pressed down until they were slightly embedded. Then came the mixing of another bowl of plaster, and this was "gauged" extra stiff in order that it should set quickly and set hard. By the time this had been poured on—rapidly, but with infinite care to avoid bubbles, which would have marred the perfection of the moulds—the water in the saucepan was boiling. Having cleaned out the bowl and spoon, Pottermack fetched the pieces of gutta-percha from their drawer and dropped them into the saucepan, replacing the lid. Then he put on his spectacles, extinguished the lamp, switched off the light, and, passing out of the workshop, walked quickly towards the house.

As he let himself out of the walled garden and closed the door behind him, he had a strange feeling as of one awakening from a dream. The familiar orchard and kitchen garden through which he was now passing, and the lighted windows of the house which twinkled through the trees, brought him back to the realities of his quiet, usually uneventful life and made the tragic interlude of the past hour seem incredible and unreal. He pondered on it with a sort of dull surprise as he walked up the long path; on all that had happened since he had last walked along it a few hours ago. How changed since then was his

world—and himself! Then, he was an innocent man over whom yet hung the menace of the convict prison. Now, that menace was lifted, but he was an innocent man no more. Legally—technically, he put it to himself—he was a murderer; and the menace of the prison was exchanged for that of the rope. But there was this difference: the one had been an abiding menace that had been with him for the term of his life; the other was a temporary peril from which, when he had once freed himself, he would be free for ever.

His appearance in the house was hailed by Mrs. Gadby with a sigh of relief. It seemed that she had made a special effort in the matter of supper and had feared lest her trouble should be wasted after all. Very complacently she inducted him into the dining-room and awaited, with confidence born of much experience, his appreciative comments.

"Why, bless my soul, Mrs. Gadby!" he exclaimed, gazing at the display on the table, "it's a regular banquet! Roses, too! And do I see a bottle under that shawl?"

Mrs. Gadby smilingly raised the shawl, revealing a small wooden tub in which a bottle of white wine stood embedded in ice. "I thought", she explained, "that a glass of Chablis would go rather well with the lobster."

"Rather well!" exclaimed Pottermack. "I should think it will. But why these extraordinary festivities?"

"Well, sir", said Mrs. Gadby, "you haven't seemed to be quite yourself the last day or two. Not in your usual spirits. So I thought a nice little supper and a glass of wine might pick you up a bit."

"And so it will, I am sure", affirmed Pottermack. "To-morrow you will find me as lively as a cricket and as gay as a lark. And, by the way, Mrs. Gadby, don't clear the table to-night. I am going out sugaring presently, and as I may be late getting back I shall probably be ready for another little meal before turning in. And of course you won't bolt the door—but I expect you will have gone to bed before I start."

Mrs. Gadby acknowledged these instructions and retired in sedate triumph. Particularly gratified was she at the evident satisfaction with which her employer had regarded the Chablis. A happy thought of hers, that had been. In which she was right in general though mistaken in one particular. For it was not the wine that had brought that look of satisfaction to Pottermack's face. It was the ice. Mrs. Gadby's kindly forethought had disposed of the last of his difficulties.

Before sitting down to supper, he ran up to his bedroom, ostensibly for the necessary wash and brush up; but first he visited a spacious cupboard from the ground floor of which he presently took a pair of over-shoes that he was accustomed to wear in very rainy or snowy weather. Their upper parts were of strong waterproof cloth and their soles of balata, cemented on to leather inner soles. He had, in fact, cemented them on himself when the original soles had worn through, and he still had, in the workshop, a large tin nearly full of the cement. He now inspected the soles critically, and when, after having washed and made himself tidy, he went down to the dining-room, he carried the over-shoes down with him and slipped them out of sight under the table.

Although he was pretty sharp-set after his strenuous and laborious evening, he made but a hasty meal; for time was precious and he could dispose of the balance of the feast when he had finished his task. Rising from the table, he picked up the over-shoes, and, stealing softly out into the garden, laid them down beside the path. Then he stole back to the dining-room, whence he walked briskly to the kitchen and tapped at the door.

"Good-night, Mrs. Gadby", he called out cheerfully. "I shall be starting when I've got my traps together. Leave everything as it is in the dining-room so that I can have a snack when I come in. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir", the housekeeper responded cordially, presenting a smiling countenance at the door, "and good luck with the moths, though I must admit, sir, that they don't seem to me worth all the trouble of catching them."

"Ah, Mrs. Gadby", said Pottermack, "but you see you are not a naturalist. You would think better of the moths, I expect, if they were good to eat". With this and a chuckle, in which the housekeeper joined, he turned away and went forth into the garden, where, having picked up the over-shoes, he made his way up the long path to the door of the walled garden. As he unlocked the door and let himself into the enclosure, he was again sensible of a change of atmosphere. The vision of that fatal combat rose before him with horrid vividness and once more he felt the menace of the rope hanging over him. He went to the ladder and looked over the wall to see if any new tracks had appeared on the path to tell of some wayfarer who might hereafter become a witness. But the path was shrouded in darkness so profound that he could not even see the tracks that he knew were there; so he descended, and, crossing the lawn by the well—where some unaccountable impulse led him to stop for a while and listen—re-entered the workshop, switched on the light and laid the over-shoes on the bench.

First, he assured himself by a touch that the saucepan was still hot. Then he turned his attention to the moulds. They were as hard as stone, and, as he had made them thick and solid, he ventured to use some little force in trying to separate them from the casts; but all his efforts failed. Then, since he could not prise them open with a knife for fear of marking them, he filled a bucket with water and in this immersed each of the moulds with its adherent cast, when, after a few seconds' soaking, they came apart quite easily.

He stood for a few moments with the cast of the right foot in one hand and its mould in the other, looking at them with a sort of amused surprise. They were so absurdly realistic in spite of their staring whiteness. The cast was simply a white shoe-sole; the mould an exact reproduction of the original footprint; and both were preposterously complete, not only in respect of the actual pattern and lettering but even of the little trivial accidental characters such as a clean cut—probably made by a sharp stone—across the neck of the prancing horse and a tiny angular fragment of gravel which had become embedded in the rubber heel. However, this was no time for contemplation. The important fact was that both the moulds

appeared to be quite perfect. If the rest of the operations should be as successful, he would be in a fair way of winning through this present danger to find a permanent security.

He began with the right mould. Having first poured into it a little of the hot water from the saucepan, to take the chill off the surface, he laid it on a carefully folded towel, spread on the bench. Then with a pair of tongs he picked out of the saucepan one of the pieces of gutta-percha—now quite soft and plastic—and laid it in the mould, which it filled completely, with some overlap. As it was, at the moment, too hot to work comfortably with the fingers, he pressed it into the mould with a wet file-handle, replacing this as soon as possible with the infinitely more efficient thumb. It was a somewhat tedious process, for every part of the surface had to be pressed into the mould so that no detail should be missed; but it was not until the hardening of the gutta-percha as it cooled rendered further manipulation useless that Pottermack laid it aside as finished and proceeded to operate in like manner on the other mould.

When both moulds were filled, he immersed them in the cold water in the bucket in order to cool and harden the gutta-percha more quickly, and leaving them there, he turned his attention to the over-shoes. The important question was as to their size. How did they compare with Lewson's shoes? He had assumed that they were as nearly as possible alike in size, but now, when he placed one of the over-shoes, sole upwards, beside the corresponding cast, he felt some misgivings. However, a few careful measurements with a tape-measure reassured him. The over-shoes were a trifle larger—an eighth of an inch wider and nearly a quarter of an inch longer than the casts, so that there would be a sixteenth overlap at the sides and an eighth at the toe and heel. That would be of no importance; or if it were, he could pare off the overlap.

Much encouraged, he fell to work on the over-shoes. He knew all about batata soles. The present ones—which were of one piece with the flat heels—he had stuck on with a powerful fusible cement. All that he had to do now was to warm them cautiously over the Primus stove until the cement was softened and then peel them off; and when he had done this, there were the flat leather soles, covered with the sticky cement, all ready for the attachment of the gutta-percha "squeezes."

There was still one possible snag ahead. The squeezes might have stuck to the moulds; for gutta-percha is a sticky material when hot. However, the moulds had been saturated with water and usually gutta-percha will not stick to a wet surface, so he hoped for the best. Nevertheless it was with some anxiety that he fished one of the moulds out of the bucket, and, grasping an overlapping edge of the squeeze with a pair of flat-nosed pliers, gave a cautious and tentative pull. As it showed no sign of yielding, he shifted to another part of the overlap and made gentle traction on that, with no better result. He then tried the piece of overlap that projected beyond the toe, and here he had better luck; for, as he gave a firm, steady pull, the squeeze separated visibly from the mould, and, with a little coaxing, came out bodily.

Pottermack turned it over eagerly to see what result his labours had yielded, and as his glance fell on the smooth, brown surface he breathed a sigh of deep satisfaction. He could have asked for no better result. The squeeze had not failed at a single point. There was the horse with the little gash in its neck, the inscription and the makers' mark; the circular heel with its sunk, five-pointed star, the little marks of wear, and the central screw showing its slot quite distinctly. Even the little grain of embedded gravel was there. The impression was perfect. He had never seen the soles of Lewson's shoes, but he knew now exactly what they looked like. For here before him was an absolutely faithful facsimile.

Handling it with infinite tenderness—for gutta-percha, when once softened, is slow to harden completely—he replaced it in the bucket, and taking out the other mould, repeated the extracting operation with the same patient care and with a similar happy result. It remained now only to pare off the overlap round the edges, shave off with a sharp knife one or two slight projections on the upper surface and wipe the latter perfectly dry. When this was done, the soles were ready for fixing on the over-shoes.

Placing the invaluable tin of cement on the bench near the Primus, Pottermack proceeded to warm the sole of one of the over-shoes over the flame. Then, scooping out a lump of tough cement, he transferred it to the warmed sole and spread it out evenly with a hot spatula. The next operation was more delicate and rather risky; for the upper surface of the gutta-percha sole had to be coated with cement without warming the mass of the sole enough to endanger the impression on its under surface. However, by loading the spatula with melted cement and wiping it swiftly over the surface, the perilous operation was completed without mishap. And now came the final stage. Fixing the over-shoe in the bench-vice, and once more passing the hot spatula over its cemented sole, Pottermack picked up the gutta-percha sole and carefully placed it in position on the over-shoe, adjusting it so that the overlaps at the sides and the toe were practically equal, the larger overlap at the heel being—by reason of the thickness of the latter—of no consequence.

When the second shoe had been dealt with in a similar manner and with a like success, and the pair placed on the bench, soles upward, to cool and harden, Pottermack emptied the bucket, and, carrying it in his hand, stole out of the workshop and made his way out of the walled garden into the orchard, where he advanced cautiously along the path. Presently the house came into view and he saw with satisfaction that the lower part was in darkness whereas lights were visible at two of the upper windows—those of the respective bedrooms of Mrs. Gadby and the maid. Thereupon he walked forward boldly, let himself silently into the house and tiptoed to the dining-room, where, having closed the door, he proceeded at once to transfer the ice and the ice-cold water from the tub to the bucket. Then, in the same silent manner, he went out into the garden, softly closing the door after him, and took his way back to the workshop.

Here his first proceeding was to take down from a shelf a large, deep porcelain dish, such as photographers use. This he placed on the bench and poured into it the iced water from the bucket. Then, taking up the shoes, one at a time, he lowered them slowly and carefully, soles downward, into the iced water and finished by packing the ice round them. And there he left them to cool and harden completely while he attended to one or two other important matters.

The first of these was the line of tell-tale footprints leading to the well. They had served their invaluable purpose and now it was time to get rid of them; which he did forthwith with the aid of a rake and a hard broom. Then there must be one or two footprints outside the gate that would need to be obliterated. He took the broom and rake, and, crossing to the gate, listened awhile, then softly opened it, listened again and peered out. Having satisfied himself that there was no one in sight, he stooped to scrutinize the ground and finally went down on his hands and knees. Sure enough, there were four footprints that told the story much too plainly for safety: two diverging from the main track towards the gate and two more pointing directly towards it. Their existence was a little disquieting at the first glance, for they might already have been seen; but a close scrutiny of the ground for signs of any more recent footprints reassured him. Evidently Lewson was the last person who had trodden that path. Having established this encouraging fact, Pottermack, still keeping inside his gate, passed the rake lightly over the four footprints and then smoothed the surface with the broom.

His preparations were now nearly complete. Re-closing the gate, he went back to the workshop to prepare his outfit. For though the 'sugaring' expedition was but a pretext, he intended to carry it through with completely convincing realism. On that realism it was quite conceivable that his future safety might depend. Accordingly he proceeded to pack the large rucksack that he usually carried on these expeditions with the necessary appliances: a store of collecting-boxes, the killing-jar, a supply of pins, the folding-net, an air-tight metal pot which he filled with pieces of rag previously dipped into the sugaring mixture and reeking of beer and rum, and an electric inspection-lamp. When he had packed it, he laid the net-stick by its side and then turned his attention to the shoes.

The gutta-percha soles were now quite cold and hard. He dried them carefully with a soft rag, and as he did so, the little surrounding overlap caught his eye. It seemed to be of no consequence. It was very unlikely that it would leave any mark on the ground, unless he should meet with an exceptionally soft patch. Still, there had been no overlap on Lewson's shoes, and it was better to be on the safe side. Thus reflecting, he took from the tool-rack a shoemaker's knife, and having given it a rub or two on the emery board, neatly shaved away the overlap on each sole to a steep bevel. Now the impression would be perfect no matter what kind of ground he met with.

This was the finishing touch, and he was now ready to go forth. Slipping his arms through the straps of the rucksack, he picked up the net-stick, took down from a peg his working apron, tucked the shoes under his arm, switched off the light and went out, crossing the lawn direct to the side gate. Here he spread the apron on the ground, and, stepping on to it, listened for a few moments and then softly opened the gate. Having taken a cautious peep out to assure himself that there was no one in sight, he slipped on and fastened the over-shoes, and, taking the inspection-lamp from the rucksack, dropped the battery into his coat pocket and hooked the bull's-eye into a button-hole. Then, throwing the light for an instant on the path and marking the correct spot by his eye, he stepped out sideways, planting his right foot on the smoothly swept ground a pace in front of the last impression of Lewson's left foot.

Steadying himself with the net-stick, he pulled the gate to until the latch clicked; then he put down his left foot a good pace in advance and set forth on his pilgrimage, carefully adapting the length of his stride to match, as well as he could judge, that of his long-legged predecessor.

The country was profoundly quiet, and, though the moon peeped out now and again, the night was for the most part so dark that he had occasionally to switch on his lamp to make sure that he was keeping to the path. The state of affairs, however, that these occasional flashes revealed was highly encouraging, for though the beaten surface of the path showed numerous traces of human feet, these were mostly faint and ill-defined, and none of them looked very recent. They suggested that few wayfarers used this path, and that the very striking tracks that he was laying down might remain undisturbed and plainly visible for many days unless a heavy rain should fall and wash them away.

So Pottermack trudged on, stepping out with conscious effort and keeping his attention fixed on the regulation of his stride. About half a mile from home the path entered a small wood, and here the aid of the lamp was needed continuously. Here, too, the sodden state of the path caused Pottermack to congratulate himself on his wise caution in shaving off the overlaps. For in this soft earth they would have shown distinctly and might have attracted undesirable notice—that is, if any one should give the footprints more than the passing glance that would suffice for recognition; which was in the highest degree unlikely.

Presently the path emerged from the wood and meandered across a rough common, covered with gorse and heather. Eventually, as Pottermack knew, it joined, nearly at a right angle, a by-road, which in its turn opened on the main London road. Here, he decided, the tracks could plausibly be lost; and as he drew near to the neighbourhood of the by-road he kept a sharp look-out for some indication of its whereabouts. At length he made out dimly a gate which he recognized as marking a little bridge across the roadside ditch. At once he stepped off the path into the heather, and, after walking on some twenty paces, halted, and unfastening the over-shoes, slipped them off. Then he took off the rucksack, turned out its contents, and having stowed the shoes at the bottom, repacked it and put it on again.

Hitherto he had not met or seen a soul since he started, and he was rather anxious not to meet any one until he was clear of this neighbourhood. His recent activities had perhaps made him a little over-conscious. Still, this was the night of the disappearance and here the tracks faded into the heather. If he were seen hereabouts, he might hereafter be questioned as to whether he had seen the missing man. No great harm in that, perhaps; but he had the feeling that it were much better for him not to be associated with the affair in any way. There were all sorts of possible snags. For instance, how did he get here without leaving any footprints on the path by which he would naturally have come? From which it will be seen that, if conscience was not making a coward of Mr. Pottermack, it was at least a little unduly stimulating his imagination. And yet

it was as well to err on the right side.

Turning back, he strode on through the heather until he came once more to the path, which he crossed by a long jump that landed him in the heather on the farther side. He now struck across the common, making for a detached coppice that formed an outlier of the wood. As soon as he reached it he fell to work without delay on the completion of his programme, pinning the pieces of sugared rag on the trunks of half a dozen trees. Usually he gave the moths ample time to find the bait and assemble round it. But to-night, with that incriminating pair of shoes in his rucksack, his methods were more summary. By the time that he had pinned on the last rag, one or two moths had begun to flutter round the first, easily visible in the darkness by the uncanny, phosphorescent glow of their eyes. Pottermack unfolded his net, and, screwing it on to the stick switched on his lamp and proceeded to make one or two captures, transferring the captives from the net to the killing-jar, and, after the necessary interval, thence to the collecting-boxes.

He was not feeling avaricious to-night. He wanted to get home and bring his task definitely to an end. He was even disposed to resent the indecent way in which the moths began to swarm round the rags. They seemed to be inviting him to make a night of it, as they were doing amidst the fumes of the rum. But he was not to be tempted. When he had pinned a dozen specimens in his collecting-box and put a few more in the lethal jar, he considered that he had done enough to account plausibly for his nocturnal expedition. Thereupon he packed up, and, leaving the lepidopterous revellers to the joys of intoxication, he turned away and strode off briskly in the direction of the by-road, carrying the net still screwed to the stick. A few minutes' rough walking brought him to the road, down which he turned in the direction of the town. In another ten minutes he reached the outskirts of the town and the road on which his house fronted. At this late hour it was as deserted as the country; indeed in its whole length he encountered but a single person—a jovial constable who greeted him with an indulgent smile as he fixed a twinkling eye on the butterfly net, and, having playfully enquired what Mr. Pottermack had got in that bag, hoped that he had had good sport, and wished him good-night. So Pottermack went on his way, faintly amused at the flutter into which the constable's facetious question had put him. For if it had chanced that the guardian of the law had been a stranger and had insisted on examining the bag, nothing could have been more apparently innocent than its contents. But the guilty man finds it hard to avoid projecting into the minds of others the secret knowledge that his own mind harbours.

When Pottermack at last let himself in at his front door and secured it with bolt and chain, he breathed a sigh of relief. The horrible chapter was closed. Tomorrow he could clear away the last souvenirs of that hideous scene in the garden and then, in the peace and security of his new life, try to forget the price that he had paid for it. So he reflected as he carried the tub to the scullery and drew into it enough water to account for the vanished ice; as he washed at the sink, as he sat at the table consuming the arrears of his supper, and as, at length, he went up to bed, carrying the rucksack with him.

---



## CHAPTER IV. — THE PLACING OF THE SUN-DIAL

WHEN, after breakfast on the following morning, Mr. Pottermack betook himself, rucksack in hand, to the walled garden, he experienced, as he closed the door behind him and glanced round the enclosure, curiously mixed feelings. He was still shaken by the terrific events of the previous night, and, in his disturbed state, disposed to be pessimistic and vaguely apprehensive. Not that he regretted what he had done. Lewson had elected to make his life insupportable, and a man who does that, does it at his own risk. So Pottermack argued, and he reviewed the circumstances without the slightest twinge of remorse. Repugnant as the deed had been to him, and horrible as it had been in the doing—for he was by temperament a humane and kindly man—he had no sense of guilt. He had merely the feeling that he had been forced to do something extremely unpleasant.

When, however, he came to review the new circumstances, he was conscious of a vague uneasiness. Considered in advance, the making away with Lewson had been a dreadful necessity, accepted for the sake of the peace and security that it would purchase. But had that security been attained? The blackmailer, indeed, had gone for ever with his threats and his exactions. But that thing in the well—It was actually possible that Lewson dead might prove more formidable even than Lewson living. It was true that everything seemed to be quite safe and secret. He, Pottermack, had taken every possible precaution. But supposing that he had forgotten something; that he had overlooked some small but vital detail. It was quite conceivable. The thing had frequently happened. The annals of crime, and especially of murder, were full of fatal oversights.

So Mr. Pottermack cogitated as, having picked up the apron, he made his way to the workshop, where he set to work at once on the tasks that remained to be done. First he dealt with the shoes. As it would have been difficult and was quite unnecessary to remove the gutta-percha soles, he simply shaved off the heels, heated the surface and then stuck on the original soles of balata.

Next he broke up the plaster moulds and casts into small fragments, which he carried out in the bucket and shot down the well. Those, he reflected with a sense of relief as he replaced the hurdle, were the last visible traces of the tragedy; but even as he turned away from the well, he saw that they were not. For, glancing at the summer-house, he observed the decanter, the siphon, and the tumbler still on the table. Of course, to no eye but his was there anything suspicious or unusual in their presence there. But the sight of them affected him disagreeably. Not only were they a vivid and unpleasant reminder of events which he wished to forget. They revived the doubts that had tended to fade away under the exhilarating influence of work. For here was something that he had overlooked. A thing of no importance, indeed, but still a detail that he had forgotten. Trivial as the oversight was, he felt his confidence in his foresight shaken.

He walked to the summer-house, and, setting down the bucket outside, entered and proceeded to clear away these traces. Opening the cupboard, he caught up the siphon and the decanter and stepped behind the table to put them on the shelves. As he did so, he felt something soft under his foot, and when he had closed the cupboard door he looked down to see what it was. And then his heart seemed to stand still. For the thing under his foot was a coat—and it was not his coat.

There is a very curious phenomenon which we may describe as deferred visual sensation. We see something which is plainly before our eyes, but yet, owing to mental preoccupation, we are unaware of it. The image is duly registered on the retina; the retina passes on its record to the brain; but there the impression remains latent until some association brings it to the surface of consciousness.

Now, this was what had happened to Pottermack. In the moment in which his glance fell on the coat there started up before him the vision of a bulky figure flourishing its fists and staggering backwards towards the well—the figure of a man in shirt-sleeves. In spite of the darkness, he had seen that figure quite distinctly; he even recalled that the shirt-sleeves were of a dark grey. But so intense had been his preoccupation with the dreadful business of the moment that the detail, physically seen, had passed into his memory without conscious recognition.

He was literally appalled. Here, already, was a second oversight; and this time it was one of vital importance. Had any one who knew Lewson been present when the coat was discovered, recognition would have been almost certain; for the material was of a strikingly conspicuous and distinctive pattern. Then the murder would have been out, and all his ingenious precautions against discovery would have risen up to testify to his guilt.

All his confidence, all of the sense of security that he had felt on his return home on the previous night, had evaporated in an instant. Two obvious things he had forgotten, and one of them might have been fatal. Indeed, there were three; for he had been within an ace of overlooking those incriminating footprints that might have led the searchers to his very gate. Was it possible that there was yet some other important fact that he had failed to take into account? He realized that it was very possible indeed; that it might easily be that he should add yet another instance to the abundant records of murderers who, covering up their tracks with elaborate ingenuity, have yet left damning evidence plain for any investigator to see.

He picked up the coat, and, rolling it up loosely, considered what he should do with it. His first impulse was to drop it in the well. But he rejected the idea for several reasons. It would certainly float, and might possibly be seen by the mason when the sun-dial was fixed, especially if he should throw a light down. And then, if the well should, after all, be searched, the presence of a separate coat would be against the suggestion of accident. And it would be quite easy to burn it in the rubbish destructor. Moreover, in rolling the coat he had become aware of a bulky object in one of the pockets which recalled certain statements that Lewson had made. In the end, he tucked the coat under his arm and, catching up the

bucket, took his way back to the workshop.

It was significant of Pottermack's state of mind that as soon as he was inside he locked the door; notwithstanding that he was alone in the walled garden and that both the gates were securely fastened. Moreover, before he began his inspection he unlocked a large drawer and left it open with the key in the lock, ready to thrust the coat out of sight in a moment. Then he unrolled the coat on the bench, and, putting his hand into the inside breast pocket, drew out a leather wallet. It bulged with papers of various kinds, mostly bills and letters, but to these Pottermack gave no attention. The one item in the contents that interested him was a compact bundle of banknotes. There were twenty of them, all five-pound notes, as he ascertained by going through the bundle; a hundred pounds in all—the exact sum that had been demanded of him. In fact, these notes were understudies of his expected contribution. They had been "borrowed" by Lewson out of the current cash to meet some sudden call, and his, Pottermack's, notes were to have been either paid in place of them or to have enabled Lewson to make good his loan in the morning.

It seemed a queer proceeding, and to Mr. Pottermack it was not very intelligible. But the motive was no concern of his; what was his concern was the train of consequences that would be set going. The obvious fact was that the little branch bank of which Lewson had had sole charge was now minus a hundred pounds in five-pound notes. That fact must inevitably come to light within a day or two; most probably this very day. Then the hue and cry would be out for the missing manager.

Well, that was all to the good. There would certainly be a hot search for Lewson. But the searchers would not be seeking the body of a murdered man. They would be on the look-out for an exceedingly live gentleman with a bundle of stolen notes in his pocket. As he considered the almost inevitable course of events, Pottermack's spirits rose appreciably. The borrowing of those notes had been most fortunate for him, for it turned what would have been an unaccountable disappearance into a perfectly accountable flight. It seemed an incredibly stupid proceeding, for if Pottermack had paid up, the borrowing would have been unnecessary; if he had not paid up, the "loan" could not have been made good. However, stupid or not, it had been done; and in the doing it Lewson had, for the first and last time, rendered his victim a real service.

When he had inspected the notes, Pottermack replaced them in the wallet, returned the latter to the pocket whence it had come, rolled up the coat and bestowed it in the drawer, which he closed and locked. The consumption of it in the rubbish destructor could be postponed for a time; and perhaps it might not come to that at all. For the finding of the notes had, to a great extent, restored Pottermack's confidence; and already there had appeared in his mind the germ of an idea—vague and formless at present—that the notes, and perhaps even the coat, might yet have further useful offices to perform.

As he had now completed his tasks and cleared away—as he hoped—the last traces of the previous night's doings, he thought it time that he should show himself to Mrs. Gadby in his normal, everyday aspect. Accordingly he took the rucksack, a setting-board, and a few other necessary appliances and made his way to the house, where he established himself in the dining-room at a table by the window and occupied the time in setting the moths which he had captured on the previous night. They were but a poor collection, with an unconscionable proportion of duplicates, but Pottermack pinned them all out impartially—even the damaged ones—on the setting-board. It was their number, not their quality, that would produce the necessary moral effect on Mrs. Gadby when she came in to lay the table for his mid-day dinner. So he worked away placidly with an outward air of complete absorption in his task; but all the while there kept recurring in his mind, like some infernal refrain, the disturbing question: Was there even now something that he had forgotten: something that his eye had missed but that other eyes might detect?

In the afternoon he strolled round to Mr. Gallett's yard to see if all was going well in regard to the preparations for setting up the sun-dial. He was anxious that there should be no delay, for though the presence of the dial would afford him no added security, he had an unreasonable feeling that the fixing of it would close the horrible incident. And he did very much want that sinister black hole hidden from sight for ever. Great therefore, was his relief when he discovered Mr. Gallett and two of his men in the very act of loading a low cart with what was obviously the material for the job.

The jovial mason greeted him with a smile and a nod. "All ready, you see, Mr. Pottermack", said he, indicating the dial-pillar, now swathed in a canvas wrapping, and slapping one of the stone slabs that stood on edge by its side. "Could almost have done it to-day, but it's getting a bit late and we've got one or two other jobs to finish up here. But we'll have him round by nine o'clock to-morrow morning, if that will do."

It would do admirably, Mr. Pottermack assured him, adding: "You will have to bring it in at the side gate. Do you know whereabouts that is?"

"I can't say as I do exactly", replied Gallett. "But I'll bring him to the front gate and then you can show me where he is to go."

To this Pottermack agreed, and they then strolled together to the gate, where Mr. Gallett halted, and, having looked up and down the street with a precautionary air, said in what he meant to be a low tone:

"Rummy report going round the town. Have you heard anything of it?"

"No", replied Pottermack, all agog in a moment.

"What is it?"

"Why, they say that the manager of Perkins's Bank has hopped it. That's what they say, and I fancy there must be

something in it, because I went there this morning to pay in a cheque and I found the place closed. Give me a rare turn, because I've got an account there. So I rang the bell and the caretaker he come and tells me that Mr. Lewson wasn't able to attend to-day but that there would be some one there later to carry on till he came back. And so there was, for I went round a couple of hours later and found the place open and business going on as usual. There was a youngish fellow at the counter, but there was an elderly gent—rather a foxy-looking customer—who seemed to be smelling round, taking down the books and looking into the drawers and cupboards. Looks a bit queer, don't you think?"

"It really does", Pottermack admitted. "The fact of the bank not being open at the usual time suggests that Mr. Lewisham —"

"Lewson is his name", Mr. Gallett corrected.

"Mr. Lewson. It suggests that he had absented himself without giving notice, which is really rather a remarkable thing for a manager to do."

"It is", said Gallett; "particularly as he lived on the premises."

"Did he, indeed?" exclaimed Pottermack. "That makes it still more remarkable. Quite mysterious, in fact."

"Very mysterious", said Gallett. "Looks as if he had mizzled; and if he has, why, he probably didn't go away with his pockets empty."

Pottermack shook his head gravely. "Still", he urged, "it is early to raise suspicions. He may possibly have been detained somewhere. He was at the bank yesterday?"

"Oh, yes; and seen in the town yesterday evening. Old Keeling, the postman, saw him about half-past seven and wished him good-night. Says he saw him turn into the footpath that leads through Potter's Wood."

"Ha", said Pottermack. "Well, he may have lost his way in the wood, or been taken ill. Who knows? It is best not to jump at conclusions too hastily."

With this and a friendly nod he turned out of the yard and took his way homeward, cogitating profoundly. Events were moving even more quickly than he had anticipated, but they were moving in the right direction. Nevertheless, he recognized with something like a shudder how near he had been to disaster. But for the chance moonbeam that had lighted up the footprints in his garden, he would have overlooked those other tell-tale tracks outside. And again he asked himself uneasily if there could be something else that he had overlooked. He was tempted to take a walk into the country in the direction of the wood to see if there were yet any signs of a search; for, by Gallett's report, it appeared that the direction in which Lewson had gone, and even his route, was already known. But prudence bade him keep aloof and show no more than a stranger's interest in the affair. Accordingly he went straight home; and since in his restless state he could not settle down to read, he betook himself to his workshop and spent the rest of the day in sharpening chisels and plane-irons and doing other useful, time-consuming jobs.

True to his word, Mr. Gallett appeared on the following morning almost on the stroke of nine. Pottermack himself opened the door to him and at once conducted him through the house out into the orchard and thence to the walled garden. It was not without a certain vague apprehensiveness that he unlocked the gate and admitted his visitor, for since that fatal night no eye but his had looked on that enclosure. It is true that on this very morning he had made a careful tour of inspection and had satisfied himself that nothing was visible that all the world might not see. Nevertheless, he was conscious of a distinct sense of discomfort as he let the mason in, and still more when he led him to the well.

"So this is where you wants him planted?" said Mr. Gallett, stepping up to the brink of the well and looking down it reflectively. "It do seem a pity for to bung up a good well. And you say there's a tidy depth of water in him."

"Yes", said Pottermack; "a fair depth. But it's a long way down to it."

"So 'tis, seemingly", Gallett agreed. "The bucket would take a bit of histing up". As he spoke, he felt in his pocket and drew out a folded newspaper, and from another pocket he produced a box of matches. In leisurely fashion he tore off a sheet of the paper, struck a match, and, lighting a corner of the paper, let it fall, craning over to watch its descent. Pottermack also craned over, with his heart in his mouth, staring breathlessly at the flaming mass as it sank slowly, lighting up the slimy walls of the well, growing smaller and fainter as it descended, while a smaller, fainter spark rose from the depths to meet it. At length they met and were in an instant extinguished; and Pottermack breathed again. What a mercy he had not thrown the coat down!

"We'll have to bank up the earth a bit", said Mr. Gallett, "for the slabs to bed on. Don't want 'em to rest on the brickwork of the well or they may settle out of the level after a time. And if you've got a spade handy, we may as well do it now, 'cause we can't get to the side gate for a few minutes. There's a gent out there a-takin' photographs of the ground."

"Of the ground!" gasped Pottermack.

"Ay. The path, you know. Seems as there's some footmarks there—pretty plain ones they looked to me without a photographin' of em. Well, it's them footmarks as he's a-takin'."

"But what for?" demanded Pottermack.

"Ah", said Mr. Gallett. "There you are. I don't know, but I've got my ideas. I see the police inspector a-watchin' of him—all on the broad grin he was too—and I suspect it's got something to do with that bank manager that I was tellin' you

about."

"Ah, Mr. Lewis?"

"Lewson is his name. There's no news of him and he was seen coming this way on Wednesday night. Why, he must have passed this very gate."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Pottermack. "And as to his reasons for going away so suddenly. Is anything—er—?"

"Well, no", replied Gallett. "Nothing is known for certain. Of course, the bank people don't let on. But there's some talk in the town about some cash that is missing. May be all bunkum, though it's what you'd expect. Now, about that spade. Shall I call in my men or can we do it ourselves?"

Pottermack decided that they could do it themselves, and, having produced a couple of spades, he fell to work under Gallett's direction, raising a low platform for the stone slabs to rest on. A few minutes' work saw it finished to the mason's satisfaction, and all was now ready for the fixing of the dial.

"I wonder if that photographer chap has finished", said Mr. Gallett. "Shall we go and have a look?"

This was what Pottermack had been bursting to do, though he had heroically suppressed his curiosity; and even now he strolled indifferently to the gate and held it open for the mason to go out first.

"There he is", said Gallett, "and blow me if he isn't a-takin' of 'em all the way along. What can he be doing that for? The cove had only got two feet."

Mr. Pottermack looked out and was no less surprised than the worthy mason. But he did not share the latter's purely impersonal interest. On the contrary, what he saw occasioned certain uncomfortable stirrings in the depths of his consciousness. Some little distance up the path a spectacled youth of sage and sober aspect had set up a tripod to which a rather large camera of the box type was attached by a goose-neck bracket. The lens was directed towards the ground, and when the young man had made his exposure by means of a wire release, he opened a portfolio and made a mark or entry of some kind on what looked like a folded map. Then he turned a key on the camera, and, lifting it with its tripod, walked away briskly for some twenty or thirty yards, when he halted, fixed the tripod and repeated the operation. It really was a most astonishing performance.

"Well", said Mr. Gallett, "he's finished here, at any rate, so we can get on with our business now. I'll just run round and fetch the cart along."

He sauntered away towards the road, and Pottermack, left alone, resumed his observation of the photographer. The proceedings of that mysterious individual puzzled him not a little. Apparently he was taking a sample footprint about every twenty yards, no doubt selecting specially distinct impressions. But to what purpose? One or two photographs would have been understandable as permanent records of marks that a heavy shower might wash away and that would, in any case, soon disappear. But a series, running to a hundred or more, could have no ordinary utility. And, yet it was not possible that that solemn young man could be taking all this trouble without some definite object. Now, what could that object be?

Pottermack was profoundly puzzled. Moreover, he was more than a little disturbed. Hitherto his chief anxiety had been lest the footprints should never be observed. Then he would have had all his trouble for nothing, and those invaluable tracks, leading suspicion far away from his own neighbourhood to an unascertainable destination, would have been lost. Well, there was no fear of that now. The footprints had not only been observed and identified, they were going to be submitted to minute scrutiny. He had not bargained for that. He had laid down his tracks expecting them to be scanned by the police or the members of a search party, to whom they would have been perfectly convincing. But how would they look in a photograph? Pottermack knew that photographs have an uncanny way of bringing out features that are invisible to the eye. Now could there be any such features in those counterfeit footprints? He could not imagine any. But then why was this young man taking all those photographs? With his secret knowledge of the real facts, Pottermack could not shake off an unreasoning fear that his ruse had been already discovered, or at least suspected.

His cogitations were interrupted by the arrival of the cart, which was halted and backed up against his gateway. Then there came the laying down of planks to enable the larger slab to be trundled on rollers to the edge of the platform. Pottermack stood by, anxious and restless, inwardly anathematizing the conscientious mason as he tried the surface of the platform again and again with his level. At last he was satisfied. Then the big base slab was brought on edge to the platform, adjusted with minute care and finally let down slowly into its place; and as it dropped the last inch with a gentle thud, Pottermack drew a deep breath and felt as if a weight, greater far than that of the slab, had been lifted from his heart.

In the remaining operations he had to feign an interest that he ought to have felt but did not. For him, the big base slab was what mattered. It shut that dreadful, yawning, black hole from his sight, as he hoped, for ever. The rest was mere accessory detail. But, as it would not do for him to let this appear, he assumed an earnest and critical attitude, particularly when it came to the setting up of the pillar on the centre of the upper slab.

"Now then", said Mr. Gallett as he spread out a thin bed of mortar on the marked centre, "how will you have him? Will you have the plinth parallel to the base or diagonal?"

"Oh, parallel, I think", replied Pottermack; "and I should like to have the word 'spes' on the eastern side, which will bring the word 'pax' to the western."

Mr. Gallett looked slightly dubious. "If you was thinking of setting him to the right time", said he, "you won't do it that

way. You'll have to unscrew the dial-plate from the lead bed and have him fixed correct to time. But never mind about him now. We're a-dealing with the stone pillar."

"Yes", said Pottermack, "but I was considering the inscription. That is the way in which it was meant to be placed, I think"; and here he explained the significance of the motto.

"There now", said Mr. Gallett, "see what it is to be a scholar. And you're quite right too, sir: you can see by the way the lichen grew on it that this here 'sole orto' was the north side. So we'll put him round to the north again, and then I expect the dial will be about right, if you aren't partickler to a quarter of an hour or so."

Accordingly the pillar was set up in its place and centred with elaborate care. Then, when the level of the slabs had been tested and a few slight adjustments made, the pillar was tried on all sides with the plumb-line and corrected to a hair's breadth.

"There you are, Mr. Pottermack", said Mr. Gallett, as he put the last touch to the mortar joint and stepped back to view the general effect of his work; "see that he isn't disturbed until the mortar has had time to set and he won't want touching again for a century or two. And an uncommon nice finish he'll give to the garden when you get a bit of smooth turf round him and a few flowers."

"Yes", said Pottermack, "you've made an extremely neat job of it, Mr. Gallett, and I'm very much obliged to you. When I get the turf laid and the flower borders set out, you must drop in and have a look at it."

The gratified mason, having suitably acknowledged these commendations of his work, gathered up his tools and appliances and departed with his myrmidons. Pottermack followed them out into the lane and watched the cart as it retired, obliterating the footprints which had given him so much occupation. When it had gone, he strolled up the path in the direction in which the photographer had gone, unconsciously keeping to the edge and noting with a sort of odd self-complacency the striking distinctness of the impressions of his gutta-percha soles. The mysterious operator was now out of sight, but he, too, had left his traces on the path, and these Pottermack studied with mingled curiosity and uneasiness. It was easy to see, by the marks of the tripod, which footprints had been photographed, and it was evident that care had been taken to select the sharpest and most perfect impressions. Pottermack had noticed, when he first looked out of the gate with Mr. Gallett, that the tripod had been set up exactly opposite the gateway and that the three marks surrounded the particularly fine impression that he had made when he stepped out sideways on to the smooth-swept path.

On these facts he reflected as he sauntered back to the gate, and entering, closed it behind him. What could be that photographer's object in his laborious proceeding? Who could it be that had set him to work? And what was it possible for a photograph to show that the eye might fail to see? These were the questions that he turned over uncomfortably in his mind and to which he could find no answer. Then his glance fell on the dial, resting immovable on its massive base, covering up the only visible reminder of the past, standing there to guard for ever his secret from the eyes of man. And at the sight of it he was comforted. With an effort he shook off his apprehensions and summoned his courage afresh. After all, what was there to fear? What could these photographs show that was not plainly visible? Nothing. There was nothing to show. The footprints were, it is true, counterfeits in a sense. But they were not imitations in the sense that a forged writing is an imitation. They were mechanical reproductions, necessarily true in every particular. In fact, they were actually Lewson's own footprints, though it happened that other feet than his were in the shoes. No. Nothing could be discovered for the simple reason that there was nothing to discover.

So Mr. Pottermack, with restored tranquillity and confidence, betook himself to the summer-house, and sitting down, looked out upon the garden and let his thoughts dwell upon what it should be when the little island of stone should be girt by a plot of emerald turf. As he sat, two sides of the sun-dial were visible to him, and on them he read the words "decedente pax". He repeated them to himself, drawing from them a new confidence and encouragement. Why should it not be so? The storms that had scattered the hopes of his youth had surely blown themselves out. His evil genius, who had first betrayed him and then threatened to destroy utterly his hardly earned prosperity and security; who had cast him into the depths and had fastened upon him when he struggled to the surface; the evil genius, the active cause of all his misfortunes, was gone for ever and would certainly trouble him no more.

Then why should the autumn of his life not be an Indian summer of peace and tranquil happiness? Why not?

---

## CHAPTER V. — DR. THORNDYKE LISTENS TO A STRANGE STORY

"AND that", said Mr. Stalker, picking up a well-worn attache-case and opening it on his knees, "finishes our little business and relieves you of my society."

"Say 'deprives'", Thorndyke corrected. "That is, if you must really go."

"That is very delicate of you, doctor", Stalker replied as he stuffed a bundle of documents into the attache-case; "and, by the way, it isn't quite the finish. There is another small matter which I had nearly forgotten; something that my nephew, Harold, asked me to hand to you. You have heard me speak of Harold—my sister's boy?"

"The inventive genius? Yes, I remember your telling me about him."

"Well, he asked me to pass this on to you; thought it might interest you."

He took from his case a flat disc which looked like a closely rolled coil of paper tape, secured with a rubber band, and passed it to Thorndyke, who took it, and, unrolling a few inches, glanced at it with a slightly puzzled smile.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I had better explain", replied Stalker. "You see, Harold has invented a recording camera which will take small photographs in a series and mark each one with its serial number, so that there can be no mistake about the sequence. It is a box camera and it takes quite a big roll of kinematograph film with a capacity of something like five hundred exposures. And the mechanism not only marks each negative with its number but also shows the number which is being exposed on a little dial on the outside of the camera. Quite a useful instrument, I should think, for certain purposes, though I can't, at the moment, think of a case to which it would be applicable."

"I can imagine certain cases, however", said Thorndyke, "in which it would be quite valuable. But with regard to these particular photographs?"

"They are, as you see, a series of footprints—the footprints of a man who absconded from a country bank and has not been seen since."

"But why did Harold take so many? There must be about a couple of hundred on this strip."

Stalker chuckled. "I don't think", said he, "that we need go far for the reason. Harold had got a camera that would take a numbered series and he had never had a chance to try it. Now here was an undoubted series of footprints on a footpath and they were those of an absconding man. It was a chance to show what the camera would do, and he took it. He professes to believe that these photographs might furnish an important clue to an investigator like yourself. But, of course, that is all nonsense. He just wanted to try his new camera. Still, he did the job quite thoroughly. He took a twenty-five inch ordnance map with him and marked each exposure on it, showing the exact position of that particular footprint. He made an exposure about every twenty yards. You will see, if you look at the map. I have the three sheets here. He told me to give them to you with the photographs, so that you could examine them together if you wanted to—which I imagine you won't. Of course, the information they give is quite valueless. One or two photographs would have shown all that there was to show."

"I wouldn't say that", Thorndyke dissented. "The application of the method to the present case is, I must admit, not at all evident. One or two photographs would have been enough for simple identification. But I can imagine a case in which it might be of the highest importance to be able to prove that a man did actually follow a particular route, especially if a time factor were also available."

"Which it is, approximately, in the present instance. But it was already known that the man went that way at that time, so all this elaborate detail is merely flogging a dead horse. The problem is not which way did he go, but where is he now? Not that we care a great deal. He only took a hundred pounds with him—so far as we know at present—so the Bank is not particularly interested in him. Nor am I, officially, though I must confess to some curiosity about him. There are some rather odd features in the case. I am quite sorry that we can't afford to call you in to investigate them."

"I expect you are more competent than I am", said Thorndyke. "Banking affairs are rather out of my province."

"It isn't the banking aspect that I am thinking of", replied Stalker. "Our own accountants can deal with that. But there are some other queer features, and about one of them I am a little uncomfortable. It seems to suggest a miscarriage of justice in another case. But I mustn't take up your time with irrelevant gossip."

"But indeed you must", Thorndyke rejoined. "If you have got a queer case, I want to hear it. Remember, I live by queer cases."

"It is rather a long story", objected Stalker, evidently bursting to tell it nevertheless.

"So much the better", said Thorndyke. "We will have a bottle of wine and make an entertainment of it."

He retired from the room and presently reappeared with a bottle of Chambertin and a couple of glasses; and having, filled the latter, he provided himself with a writing-pad, resumed his armchair and disposed himself to listen at his ease.

"I had better begin", said Stalker, "with an account of this present affair. The man who has absconded is a certain James

Lewson, who was the manager of a little branch of Perkins's Bank down at Borley. He ran it by himself, living on the premises and being looked after by the caretaker's wife. It is quite a small affair—just a nucleus with an eye for the future, for Meux's do most of the business at Borley, such as it is—and easily run by one man; and everything has gone on quite smoothly there until last Wednesday week. On that day Lewson went out at about a quarter-past seven in the evening. The caretaker saw him go out at the back gate and thought that he looked as if he had been drinking, and on that account he sat up until past twelve o'clock to see him in safety. But he never came home, and as he had not returned by the morning, the caretaker telegraphed up to headquarters.

"Now I happened to be there when the telegram arrived—for I am still on the board of directors and do a bit of work there—and I suggested that old Jewsbury should go down to see what had been happening and take a young man with him to do the routine work while he was going through the books. And as Harold was the only one that could be spared, he was told off for the job. Of course, he fell in with it joyfully, for he thought he saw a possible chance of giving his camera a trial. Accordingly, down he went, with the camera in his trunk, all agog to find a series of some kind that wanted photographing. As soon as they arrived, Jewsbury saw at a glance that some of the cash was missing—a hundred pounds in five-pound Bank of England notes."

"And the keys?" asked Thorndyke.

"The safe key was missing too. But that had been anticipated, so Jewsbury had been provided with a master-key. The other keys were in the safe.

"Well, as soon as the robbery was discovered, Jewsbury had a talk with the caretaker and the police inspector, who had called to see him. From the caretaker, a steady old retired police sergeant, Jewsbury gathered that Lewson had been going to the bad for some time, taking a good deal more whisky than was good for him. But we needn't go into that. The police inspector reported that Lewson had been seen at about seven-thirty—that is, within a quarter of an hour of his leaving the bank—turning into a footpath that leads out into the country and eventually to the main London road. The inspector had examined the path and found on it a track of very distinct and characteristic footprints, which he was able to identify as Lewson's, not only by the description given by the caretaker, who usually cleaned Lewson's shoes, but by one or two fairly clear footprints in the garden near the back gate, by which Lewson went out. Thereupon, he returned to the footpath and followed the tracks out into the country, through a wood and across a heath until he came to a place where Lewson had left the path and gone off through the heather; and there, of course all traces of him were lost. The inspector went on and searched a by-road and went on to the London road, but not a single trace of him could he discover. At that point where he stepped off the footpath into the heather James Lewson vanished into thin air."

"Where is the railway station?" Thorndyke asked.

"In the town. There is a little branch station by the London road, but it is certain that Lewson did not go there, for there were no passengers at all on that evening. He must have gone off along the road on foot.

"Now, as soon as Harold heard of those footprints, he decided that his chance had come. The footprints would soon be trodden out or washed away by rain, and they ought to be recorded permanently. That was his view."

"And a perfectly sound one, too", remarked Thorndyke.

"Quite. But there was no need for a couple of hundred repetitions."

"Apparently not", Thorndyke agreed, "though it is impossible to be certain even of that. At any rate, a superabundance of evidence is a good deal better than a deficiency."

"Well, that is what Harold thought, or pretended to think, and in effect, he nipped off to the Post Office and got the large-scale ordnance maps that contained his field of operations. Then on the following morning he set to work, leaving Jewsbury to carry on. He began by photographing a pair of the footprints in the garden—they are numbers 1 and 2—and marking them on the map. Then he went off to the footpath and took a photograph about every twenty yards, selecting the most distinct footprints and writing down the number of the exposure on the map at the exact spot on which it was made. And so he followed the track into the country, through the wood, across the heath to what we may call the vanishing point. Number 197 is the last footprint that Lewson made before he turned off into the heather.

"So much for Harold and his doings. Now we come to the queer features of the case, and the first of them is the amount taken. A hundred pounds! Can you imagine a sane man, with a salary of six hundred a year, absconding with such a sum? The equivalent of two months' salary. The thing seems incredible. And why a hundred pounds only? Why didn't he take, at least, the whole of the available cash? It is incomprehensible. And in a few days his monthly salary would have been due. Why didn't he wait to collect that?

"But there is a partial explanation. Only the explanation is more incomprehensible than what it explains. By the evening post on the day on which Jewsbury arrived a letter was delivered, addressed to Lewson, and, under the circumstances, Jewsbury felt justified in opening it. Its contents were to this effect:

"DEAR LEWSON,—I expected you to come round last night, as you promised, to settle up. As you didn't come and have not written, I think it necessary to tell you plainly that this can't be allowed to go on. If the amount (£97 13s 4d.) is not paid within the next forty-eight hours, I shall have to take measures that will be unpleasant to both of us.—Yours faithfully,

"LEWIS BATEMAN

"Now this letter seemed to explain the small amount taken. It suggested that Lewson was being pressed for payment and that, as he had not got the wherewith to pay, he had taken the amount out of the cash, trusting to be able to replace it before the periodical audit. But if so, why had he not paid Bateman? And why had he absconded? The letter only deepens the mystery."

"Is it an ascertained fact that he had not the wherewithal to pay?"

"I think I may say that it is. His own current account at the bank showed a balance of about thirty shillings and he had no deposit account. Looking over his account, Jewsbury noticed that he seemed to spend the whole of his income and was often overdrawn at the end of the month.

"But this letter brought into view another queer feature of the case. On enquiring of the police inspector, Jewsbury found that the man, Bateman, is a member of a firm of outside brokers who have offices in Moorgate Street. Bateman lives at Borley, and he and Lewson seemed to have been on more or less friendly terms. Accordingly, Jewsbury and the inspector called on him, and, under some pressure, he disclosed the nature of Lewson's dealing with his firm. It appeared that Lewson was a regular 'operator,' and that he was singularly unfortunate in his speculations and that he had a fatal habit of carrying over when he ought to have cut his loss and got out. As a result, he dropped quite large sums of money from time to time, and had lost heavily during the last few months. On the transactions of the last twelve months, Bateman reckoned—he hadn't his books with him, of course, at Borley—that Lewson had dropped over six hundred pounds; and in addition, he happened to know that Lewson had been plunging and losing on the turf.

"Now, where did Lewson get all this money? His account shows no income beyond his salary, and the debit side shows only his ordinary domestic expenditure. There are a good many cash drafts, some of which may have represented betting losses, but they couldn't represent the big sums that he lost through the bucket shop."

"He didn't pay the brokers by cheque, then?"

"No. Always in notes—five-pound notes; not that there is anything abnormal in that. As a bank manager, he would naturally wish to keep these transactions secret. It is the amount that creates the mystery. He spent the whole of his income in a normal though extravagant fashion, and he dropped over six hundred pounds in addition. Now, where did he get that six hundred pounds?"

"Is it certain that he had no outside source of income?" Thorndyke asked.

"Obviously he had. But since there is no sign of it on the credit side of his account, he must have received it in cash; which is a mighty queer circumstance when you consider the amount. Jewsbury is convinced that he must have been carrying on some kind of embezzlement, and I don't see what other explanation there can be. But if so, it has been done with extraordinary skill. Jewsbury has been through the books with the utmost rigour and with this suspicion in his mind, but he can't discover the slightest trace of any falsification. And mind you, Jewsbury is a first-class accountant and as sharp as a needle. So that is how the matter stands, and I must confess that I can make nothing of it."

Mr. Stalker paused, and, with a profoundly reflective air, took a sip from his glass, which Thorndyke had just refilled. The latter waited for some time with an expectant eye upon his guest and at length remarked: "You were saying something about a miscarriage of justice."

"So I was", said Stalker. "But that is another story—unless it is a part of this story, which I begin to be afraid it is. However, you shall judge. I should like to hear what you think. It carries us back some fifteen years; that was before I took up the 'Griffin' company, and I was then assistant manager of Perkins', at the Cornhill office. About that time it was discovered that quite a long series of forgeries had been committed. They were very skilfully done and very cleverly managed, evidently by somebody who knew what customers' accounts it would be safe to operate on. It was found that a number of forged bearer cheques had been presented and paid over the counter; and it was further found that nearly all of them had been presented and paid at the counter of one man, a young fellow named Jeffrey Brandon. As soon as the discovery was made it was decided—seeing that the forger was almost certainly an employee of the bank—to muster the staff and invite them all to turn out their pockets. And this was done on the following morning. When they had all arrived, and before the bank opened, they were mustered in the hall and the position of affairs explained to them; whereupon all of them, without being invited, expressed the wish to be searched. Accordingly, a detective officer who was in attendance searched each of them in turn, without any result. Then the detective suggested that the office coats, which most of them used and which were hanging in the lobby, should be fetched by the detective and the porter and searched in the presence of their owners. This also was done. Each man identified his own coat, and the detective searched it in his presence. All went well until we came to nearly the last coat—that belonging to Jeffrey Brandon and identified by him as his. When the detective put his hand into the inside breast pocket, he found in it a letter-case; and on opening this and turning out its contents, he discovered in an inner compartment three bearer cheques. They were payable to three different—presumably fictitious—persons and were endorsed in the names of the payees in three apparently different handwritings.

"On the production of those cheques, Brandon showed the utmost astonishment. He admitted that the letter-case was his, but denied any knowledge of the cheques, declaring that they must have been put into the case by someone else—presumably the forger—while the coat was hanging in the lobby. Of course, this could not be accepted. No one but the senior staff knew even of the discovery of the forgery—at least, that was our belief at the time. And the search had been sprung on the staff without a moment's warning. Furthermore, there was the fact that nearly all the forged cheques had been paid at Brandon's counter. What followed was inevitable. Brandon was kept under observation at the bank until the



ostensible drawers of the cheques had been communicated with by telegram or telephone; and when they had all denied having drawn any such cheques, he was arrested and charged before a magistrate. Of course, he was committed for trial; and when he was put in the dock at the Old Bailey the only defence he had to offer was a complete denial of any knowledge of the cheques and a repetition of his statement that they must have been put into his pocket by some other person for the purpose of incriminating him. It was not a very convincing defence, and it is not surprising that the jury would not accept it."

"And yet", Thorndyke remarked, "it was the only defence that was possible if he was innocent. And there was nothing inherently improbable in it."

"No. That was what I felt; and when he was found guilty and sentenced to five years' penal servitude, I was decidedly unhappy about the affair. For Brandon was a nice, bright, prepossessing youngster, and there was nothing whatever against him but this charge. And, later, I was made still more uncomfortable when I had reason to believe that the discovery of the forgeries had in some way become known, on the day before the search, to some members of the junior staff. So that what Brandon had said might easily have been true.

"However, that is the old story. And now as to its connection with the present one. Brandon had one specially intimate friend at the bank, and that friend's name was James Lewson. Now, we have never had anything against Lewson in all these years, or he would never have been a branch manager. But, from what we know of him now, he is, at least, an unscrupulous rascal and, if Jewsbury is right, he is an embezzler and a thief. I can't rid myself of a horrible suspicion that James Lewson put those forged cheques into Brandon's pocket."

"If he did", said Thorndyke, "hanging would be a great deal too good for him."

"I quite agree with you", Stalker declared emphatically. "It would have been a dastardly crime. But I can't help suspecting him very gravely. I recall the look of absolute amazement on poor Brandon's face when those cheques were produced. It impressed me deeply at the time, but the recollection of it impresses me still more now. If Brandon was innocent, it was a truly shocking affair. It won't bear thinking of."

"No", Thorndyke agreed. "There is no tragedy more dreadful than the conviction of an innocent man. By the way, do you know what became of Brandon?"

"Indeed I do", replied Stalker. "The poor fellow is beyond the reach of any possible reparation, even if his innocence could be proved. He died in an attempt to escape from prison. I remember the circumstances only too clearly. Soon after his conviction he was sent to the convict prison at Colport. There, while he was working outside with a gang, he slipped past the civil guard and made off along the sea wall. He got quite a good start while they were searching for him in the wrong direction, but at last they picked up his tracks and set off in pursuit. And presently, on the seaward face of the wall, they found his clothes and the marks of his feet where he had walked out across the mud to the sea. They assumed that he had swum out to some passing vessel, and that is probably what he tried to do. But no tidings of him could be obtained from any of the anchored vessels or those that had passed up or down. Then, about six weeks later, the mystery was solved; for his body was found on the mud in a creek some miles farther down."

"About six weeks later", Thorndyke repeated. "What time of year was it?"

"He was found about the middle of August. Yes, I know what you are thinking. But, really, the question of identity hardly arose, although, no doubt, the corpse was examined as far as was possible. Still, the obvious facts were enough. A naked man was missing and the body of a nude man was found just where it was expected to wash ashore. I think we may take it that the body was Brandon's body. I only wish I could think otherwise."

"Yes", said Thorndyke. "It is a melancholy end to what sounds like a very tragic story. But I am afraid you are right. The body was almost certainly his."

"I think so", agreed Stalker. "And now, I hope I haven't taken up your time for nothing. You will admit that this Lewson case has some rather queer features."

"It certainly has", said Thorndyke. "It is most anomalous and puzzling from beginning to end."

"I suppose", said Stalker, "it would be hardly fair to ask for a few comments?"

"Why not?" demanded Thorndyke. "This is an entertainment, not a professional conference. If you want my views on the case, you are welcome to them and I may say, in the first place, that I do not find myself quite in agreement with Jewsbury in regard to the embezzlement—of which, you notice, he can find no evidence. To me there is a strong suggestion of some outside source of income. We note that Lewson paid these large sums of money in cash—in five-pound notes. Now that may have been for secrecy. But where did he get all those notes? He paid no cheques into his account. He couldn't have stolen the notes from the bank's cash. There is a distinct suggestion that he received the money in the same form in which he paid it away. And his conduct on this occasion supports that view. He just baldly took a hundred pounds out of cash—in five-pound notes—to meet a sudden urgent call. One feels that he must have expected to be able to replace it almost at once. The idea that a man of his experience should have committed a simple, crude robbery like this is untenable. And then there is the amount: taken, almost certainly, for this specific purpose. The irresistible suggestion is that he merely borrowed this money in the confident expectation of obtaining the wherewith to put it back before it should be missed.

"Then there is the singular suggestion of a change of purpose. Apparently he started out to pay Bateman. Then why did he not pay him? He had the money. Instead, he suddenly turns off and walks out into the country. Why this change of

plan? What had happened in the interval to cause him to change his plans in this remarkable manner? Had he discovered that he would not be able to replace the money? Even that would not explain his proceedings, for the natural thing would have been to return to the bank and put the notes back.

"Again, if he intended to abscond, why go away across the country on foot? He could easily have taken the train to town and disappeared there. But the idea of his absconding with that small amount of money is difficult to accept: and yet he undoubtedly did walk out into the country. And he has disappeared in a manner which is rather remarkable when one considers how easy a solitary pedestrian is to trace in the country. There is even something rather odd in his leaving the footpath and plunging into the heather, which must have been very inconvenient walking for a fugitive. Taking the case as a whole, I feel that I cannot accept the idea that he simply absconded with stolen money. Why he suddenly changed his plans and made off I am unable to guess, but I am certain that behind his extraordinary proceedings there is something more than meets the eye."

"That is precisely my feeling," said Stalker, and the more so now that I have heard your summing-up of the case. I don't believe the man set out from home with the idea of absconding. I suspect that something happened after he left the house; that he got some sudden scare that sent him off into the country in that singular fashion. And now I must really take myself off. It has been a great pleasure to talk this case over with you. What about those things of Harold's? Shall I relieve you of them, now that you have seen them?"

"No", replied Thorndyke. "Leave them with me for the present. I should like to look them over before I hand them back."

"You don't imagine that Harold is right, do you? That these footprints may yield a clue to the man's disappearance?"

"No. I was not thinking of them in relation to the present case, but in regard to their general evidential bearing. As you know, I have given a great deal of attention and study to footprints. They sometimes yield a surprising amount of information, and as they can be accurately reproduced in the form of plaster casts, or even photographs, they can be produced in court and shown to the judge and the jury, who are thus able to observe for themselves instead of having to rely on the mere statements of witnesses.

"But footprints, as one meets with them in practice, have this peculiarity: that, although they are made in a series, they have to be examined separately as individual things. If we try to examine them on the ground as a series, we have to walk from one to another and trust largely to memory. But in these photographs of Harold's we can take in a whole series at a glance and compare any one specimen with any other. So what I propose to do is to look over these photographs and see if, apart from the individual characters which identify a footprint, there are any periodic or recurring characters which would make it worth while to use a camera of this type in practice. I want to ascertain, in fact, whether a consecutive series of footprints is anything more than a number of repetitions of a given footprint."

"I see. Of course, this is not a continuous series. There are long intervals."

"Yes. That is a disadvantage. Still, it is a series of a kind."

"True. And the maps?"

"I may as well keep them too. They show the distances between the successive footprints, which may be relevant, since the intervals are not all equal."

"Very well", said Stalker, picking up his attache-case. "I admire your enthusiasm and the trouble you take, and I will tell Harold how seriously you take his productions. He will be deeply gratified."

"It was very good of him to send them, and you must thank him for me."

The two men shook hands, and when Thorndyke had escorted his guest to the landing and watched him disappear down the stairs, he returned to his chambers, closing the "oak" behind him and thereby secluding himself from the outer world.

---

## CHAPTER VI. — DR. THORNDYKE BECOMES INQUISITIVE

TEMPERAMENTALLY, Dr. John Thorndyke presented a peculiarity which, at the first glance, seemed to involve a contradiction. He was an eminently friendly man; courteous, kindly and even genial in his intercourse with his fellow-creatures. Nor was his suave, amicable manner in any way artificial or consciously assumed. To every man his attitude of mind was instinctively friendly, and if he did not suffer fools gladly, he could, on occasion, endure them with almost inexhaustible patience.

And yet, with all his pleasant exterior and his really kindly nature, he was at heart a confirmed solitary. Of all company, his own thoughts were to him the most acceptable. After all, his case was not singular. To every intellectual man, solitude is not only a necessity, it is the condition to which his mental qualities are subject; and the man who cannot endure his own sole society has usually excellent reasons for his objection to it.

Hence, when Thorndyke closed the massive outer door and connected the bell-push with the laboratory floor above, there might have been detected in his manner a certain restfulness. He had enjoyed Stalker's visit. Particularly had he enjoyed the "queer case", which was to him what a problem is to an ardent chess player. But still, that was only speculation, whereas with the aid of Harold's photographs he hoped to settle one or two doubtful points relating to the characters of footprints which had from time to time arisen in his mind, and thereby to extend his actual knowledge.

With a leisurely and thoughtful air he moved a few things on the table to make a clear space, took out from a cupboard a surveyor's boxwood scale, a pair of needle-pointed spring dividers, a set of paper-weights, a note-block, and a simple microscope (formed of a watchmaker's doublet mounted on three legs) which he used for examining documents. Then he laid the three sheets of the ordnance map in their proper sequence on the table, with the roll of photographs by their side, drew up a chair and sat down to his task.

He began by running his eye along the path traversed by the fugitive, which was plainly marked by a row of dots, each dot having above it a microscopic number. Dots and numbers had originally been marked with a sharp-pointed pencil, but they had subsequently been inked in with red ink and a fine-pointed pen. From the maps he turned his attention to the photographs, unrolling a length of about nine inches and fixing the strip with a paper-weight at each end. The strip itself was an inch wide, and each photograph was an inch and a half long, and every one of the little oblongs contained the image of a footprint which occupied almost its entire length and which measured—as Thorndyke ascertained by taking the dimensions with his dividers—one inch and three-eighths. Small as the photographs were, they were microscopically sharp in definition, having evidently been taken with a lens of very fine quality; and in the corner of each picture was a minute number in white, which stood out clearly against the rather dark background.

Sliding the little microscope over one of the prints, Thorndyke examined it with slightly amused interest. For a fugitive's footprint it was a frank absurdity, so strikingly conspicuous and characteristic was it. If Mr. Lewson had had his name printed large upon the soles of his shoes he could hardly have given more assistance to his pursuers. The impression was that of a rubber sole on which, near the toe, was a framed label containing the makers' name, J. Dell and Co. Behind this was a panel, occupied by a prancing horse, and the Kentish motto, "Invicta", beneath the panel, implied that this was the prancing horse of Kent. The circular rubber heel was less distinctive, though even this was a little unusual, for its central device was a five-pointed star, whereas most star-pattern heels present six points. But not only were all the details of the pattern distinctly visible; even the little accidental markings, due to wear and damage, could be plainly made out. For instance, a little ridge could be seen across the horse's neck, corresponding to a cut or split in the rubber sole, and a tiny speck on the heel, which seemed to represent a particle of gravel embedded in the rubber.

When he had made an exhaustive examination of the one photograph, he went back to numbers 1 and 2 which represented the footprints near the back gate of the bank, and which were not for his purpose part of the series. After a brief inspection of them, he placed one of the paper-weights on them, and, by means of another, exposed about eighteen inches of the strip. Next, he drew a vertical line down the middle of the note-block, dividing it into two parts, which he headed respectively "Right" and "Left". Then he began his comparative study with a careful examination of number 3, the first print photographed on the footpath.

Having finished with number 3, which was a right foot, he wrote down the number at the top of the "Right" column, in the middle of the space. Then he passed to number 5—the next right foot—and having examined it, wrote down its number. Next, he took, with the dividers, the distance between the dots marked 3 and 5 on the map, and, transferring the dividers to the boxwood scale, took off the distance in yards—forty-three yards—and wrote this down on the note-block opposite and at the left side of the number 5. From 5 he passed on to 7, 9, 11, 13, and so on, following the right foot along the strip until he had dealt with a couple of yards (the total length of the strip was a little over twenty-four feet), occasionally turning back to verify his comparisons, writing down the numbers in the middle of the column with the distances opposite to them on the left and jotting down in the space at the right a few brief notes embodying his observations. Then he returned to the beginning of the strip and dealt with the prints of the left foot in the same manner and for the same distance along the strip.

One would not have regarded it as a thrilling occupation. Indeed there was rather a suggestion of monotony in the endless recurrence of examination, comparison, and measurements of things which appeared to be merely mechanical repetitions of one another. Nor did the brief and scanty jottings in the "notes" column suggest that this tedious procedure

was yielding any great wealth of information. Nevertheless, Thorndyke continued to work at his task methodically, attentively, and without any symptoms of boredom, until he had dealt with nearly half of the strip. But at this point his manner underwent a sudden and remarkable change. Hitherto he had carried on his work with the placid air of one who is engaged on a mildly interesting piece of routine work. Now he sat up stiffly, gazing at the strip of photographs before him with a frown of perplexity, even of incredulity. With intense attention, he re-examined the last half-dozen prints that he had dealt with; then, taking a right foot as a starting-point, he followed the strip rapidly, taking no measurements and making no notes, until he reached the end, where he found a slip of paper pasted to the strip and bearing the note: "Footprints cease here. Track turned off to left into heather. Length of foot, 12 inches. Length of stride from heel to heel, 34 inches."

Having rapidly copied this note on to his block, Thorndyke resumed his examination with eager interest. Returning to the starting-point, he again examined a print of the left foot and then followed its successive prints to the final one at the end of the strip. Again he came back to the starting-point; but now, taking this as a centre, he began to move backwards and forwards, at first taking a dozen prints in each direction, then, by degrees, reducing the distance of his excursions until he came down to a single print of the right foot—a specially clear impression, marked with the number 93. This he again examined through the little microscope with the most intense scrutiny. Then, with a like concentrated attention, he examined first the preceding right-foot print, 91, and then the succeeding one, 95. Finally, he turned to the map to locate number 93, which he found near the middle of a wall—apparently the enclosing wall of a large garden or plantation—and exactly opposite a gate in that wall.

From this moment Thorndyke's interest in his original investigations seemed to become extinct. The little microscope, the scale, even the photographs themselves, were neglected and unnoticed, while he sat with his eyes fixed on the map—yet seeming to look through it rather than at it—evidently immersed in profound thought. For a long time he sat thus, immovable as a seated statue. At length he rose from his chair, and, mechanically filling his pipe, began slowly to pace up and down the room, and to any observer who knew him, had there been one, the intense gravity of his expression, the slight frown, the compressed lips, the downcast eyes, as well as the unlighted pipe that he grasped in his hand, would have testified that some problem of more than common intricacy was being turned over in his mind and its factors sorted out and collated.

He had been pacing the room for nearly half an hour when a key was softly inserted into the latch of the outer door. The door opened and closed quietly, and then a gentle tap on the knocker of the inner door heralded the entry of a small gentleman of somewhat clerical aspect and uncommon crinkliness of countenance, who greeted Thorndyke with a deprecating smile.

"I hope, sir", said he, "that I am not disturbing you, but I thought that I had better remind you that you have not had any supper."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "What a memory you have, Polton. And to think that I, who am really the interested party, should have overlooked the fact. Well, what do you propose?"

Polton glanced at the table with a sympathetic eye. "You won't want your things disturbed, I expect, if you have got a job on hand. I had better put your supper in the little laboratory. It won't take more than five minutes."

"That will do admirably", said Thorndyke. "And, by the way, I think that adjourned inquest at Aylesbury is the day after to-morrow, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, Thursday. I fixed the letter on the appointment board."

"Well, as there is nothing pressing on Friday, I think I will stay the night there and come back on Friday evening if nothing urgent turns up in the interval."

"Yes, sir. Will you want anything special in the research case?"

"I shall not take the research case", replied Thorndyke; "in fact, I don't know that I want anything excepting the one-inch ordnance map, unless I take that stick of yours."

Polton's face brightened. "I wish you would, sir", he said persuasively. "You have never tried it since I made it, and I am sure you will find it a most useful instrument."

"I am sure I shall", said Thorndyke; "and perhaps I might as well take the little telephoto camera, if you will have it charged."

"I will charge it to-night, sir, and overhaul the stick. And your supper will be ready in five minutes."

With this Polton disappeared as silently as he had come, leaving his principal to his meditations.

On the following Friday morning, at about half-past ten. Dr. John Thorndyke might have been seen—if there had been any one to see him, which there was not—seated in a first-class smoking-compartment in the Aylesbury to London train. But he was evidently not going to London, for, as the train slowed down on approaching Borley station, he pocketed the folded ordnance map which he had been studying, stood up and took his stick down from the rack.

Now this stick was the only blot on Thorndyke's appearance. Apart from it his "turn-out" was entirely satisfactory and appropriate to his country surroundings without being either rustic or sporting. But that stick, with a tweed suit and a soft hat, struck a note of deepest discord. With a frock-coat and a top-hat it might have passed, though even then it would have

called for a Falstaffian bearer. But as a country stick it really wouldn't do at all.

In the first place it was offensively straight—as straight as a length of metal tube. It was of an uncomely thickness, a full inch in diameter. As to the material, it might, by an exceedingly bad judge, have been mistaken for ebony. In fact, it was, as to its surface, strongly reminiscent of optician's black enamel. And the handle was no better. Of the same funereal hue and an unreasonable thickness, it had the stark mechanical regularity of an elbow-joint on a gas pipe, and, to make it worse, its end was finished by a sort of terminal cap. Moreover, on looking down the shaft of the stick, a close observer would have detected, about fifteen inches from the handle, a fine transverse crack, suggestive of a concealed joint. A sharp-eyed rural constable would have "spotted" it at a glance as a walking-stick gun; and he would have been wrong.

However, despite its aesthetic shortcomings, Thorndyke seemed to set some store by it, for he lifted it from the rack with evident care, and with the manner of lifting something heavier than an ordinary walking-stick; and when he stepped forth from the station, instead of holding it by its unlovely handle with its ferrule on the ground, he carried it "at the trail", grasping it by its middle.

On leaving the station precincts, Thorndyke set forth with the confident air of one who is on familiar ground, though, as a matter of fact, he had never been in the district before; but he had that power, which comes by practice, of memorizing a map that makes unvisited regions familiar and is apt to cause astonishment to the aboriginal inhabitants. Swinging along at an easy but rapid pace, he presently entered a quiet, semi-suburban road which he followed for a quarter of a mile, looking about him keenly, and identifying the features of the map as he went. At length he came to a kissing-gate which gave access to a footpath, and, turning into this, he strode away along the path, looking closely at its surface and once stopping and retracing his steps for a few yards to examine his own footprints.

A few hundred yards farther on he crossed another road, more definitely rural in character, and noted at the corner a pleasant-looking house of some age, standing back behind a well-kept garden, its front entrance sheltered by a wooden porch which was now almost hidden by a mass of climbing roses. The side wall of the garden abutted on the footpath and extended along it for a distance that suggested somewhat extensive grounds. At this point he reduced his pace to a slow walk, scrutinizing the ground—on which he could detect, even now, occasional fragmentary traces of the familiar footprints of Harold's photographs—and noting how, since crossing the road, he had passed completely out of the last vestiges of the town into the open country.

He had traversed rather more than half the length of the wall when he came to a green-painted wooden gate, before which he halted for a few moments. There were, however, no features of interest to note beyond the facts that its loop handle was unprovided with a latch and that it was secured with a Yale lock. But as he stood looking at it with a deeply reflective air, he was aware of a sound proceeding from within—a pleasant sound, though curiously out of key with his own thoughts—the sound of some one whistling, very skilfully and melodiously, the old-fashioned air, "Alice, where art thou?" He smiled grimly, keenly appreciative of the whimsical incongruity of these cheerful, innocent strains with the circumstances that had brought him thither; then he turned away and walked slowly to the end of the wall where it was joined by another, which enclosed the end of the grounds. Here he halted and looked along the path towards a wood which was visible in the distance; then, turning, he looked back along the way by which he had come. In neither direction was there any one in sight, and Thorndyke noted that he had not met a single person since he had passed through the kissing-gate. Apparently this path was quite extraordinarily unfrequented.

Having made this observation, Thorndyke stepped off the path and walked a few paces along the end wall—which abutted on a field—to a spot where an apple tree in the grounds rose above the summit. Here he stopped, and, having glanced up at the wall—which was nearly seven feet high—grasped the uncomely stick with both hands, one on either side of the concealed joint, and gave a sharp twist. Immediately the stick became divided into two parts, the lower of which—that bearing the ferrule—Thorndyke stood against the wall. It could now be seen that the upper part terminated in a blackened brass half-cylinder, the flat face of which was occupied by a little circular glass window, and when Thorndyke had unscrewed the cap from the end of the handle, the latter was seen to be a metal tube, within which was another little glass window—the eye-piece. In effect, Polton's hideous walking-stick was a disguised periscope.

Taking up a position close to the wall, Thorndyke slowly raised the periscope until its end stood an inch or so above the top of the wall, with the little window looking into the enclosure. The eye-piece being now at a convenient level, he applied his eye to it, and immediately had the sensation of looking through a circular hole in the wall. Through this aperture (which was, of course, the aperture of the object-glass above him, reflected by a pair of prisms) he looked into a large garden, enclosed on all sides by the high wall and having apparently only two doors or gates, the one at the side, which he had already seen, and another which appeared to open into another garden nearer the house, and which, like the side gate, seemed to be fitted with a night-latch of the Yale type. On one side, partly concealed by a half-grown yew hedge, was a long, low building which, by the windows in its roof, appeared to be some kind of workshop; and by rotating the periscope it was possible to catch a glimpse of part of what seemed to be a summer-house in the corner opposite the workshop. Otherwise, excepting a narrow flower border and a few fruit trees ranged along the wall, the whole of the enclosure was occupied by a large lawn, the wide expanse of which was broken only by a sun-dial beside which, at the moment, a man was standing and on man and sun-dial, Thorndyke, after his swift preliminary survey, concentrated his attention.

The stone pillar of the dial was obviously ancient. Equally obviously the stone base on which it stood was brand new. Moreover, the part of the lawn immediately surrounding the base was yellow and faded as if it had been recently raised and relaid. The manifest inference was that the dial had but lately been placed in its present position; and this inference was

supported by the occupation in which the man was engaged. On the stone base stood a Windsor chair, the seat of which bore one or two tools and a pair of spectacles. Thorndyke noted the spectacles with interest, observing that they had "curl sides" and were therefore habitually worn; and since they had been discarded while their owner consulted a book that he held, it seemed to follow that he must be near-sighted.

As Thorndyke watched, the man closed the book and laid it on the chair, when by its shape and size, its scarlet back and apple-green sides, it was easily recognizable as Whitaker's Almanack. Having laid down the book, the man drew out his watch, and, holding it in his hand, approached the pillar and grasped the gnomon of the dial; and now Thorndyke could see that the dial-plate had been unfixed from its bed, for it moved visibly as the gnomon was grasped. The nature of the operation was now quite clear. The man was re-setting the dial. He had taken out the Equation of Time from Whitaker and was now adjusting the dial-plate by means of his watch to show the correct Apparent Solar Time.

At this point—leaving the man standing beside the pillar, watch in hand—Thorndyke picked up the detached portion of the stick, and stepping along the wall, glanced up and down the path. So far as he could see—nearly a quarter of a mile in each direction—he had the path to himself; and, noting with some surprise and no little interest the remarkable paucity of wayfarers, he returned to his post and resumed his observations.

The man had now put away his watch and taken up a hammer and bradawl. Thorndyke noted the workmanlike character of the former—a rather heavy ball-pane hammer such as engineers use—and when the bradawl was inserted into one of the screw-holes of the dial-plate and driven home into the lead bed with a single tap, he observed the deftness with which the gentle, calculated blow was delivered with the rather ponderous tool. So, too, with the driving of the screw; it was done with the unmistakable ease and readiness of the skilled workman.

Having rapidly made these observations, Thorndyke drew from his hip pocket the little camera and opened it, setting the focus by the scale to the assumed distance—about sixty feet—fixing the wire release and setting the shutter to half a second—the shortest exposure that was advisable with a telephoto lens. Another peep through the periscope showed the man in the act of again inserting the bradawl, and, incidentally, presenting a well-lighted right profile; whereupon Thorndyke raised the camera and placed it on the top of the wall with the wire release hanging down and the lens pointed, as well as he could judge, at the sun-dial. Then, as the man poised the hammer preparatory to striking, he pressed the button of the release and immediately took down the camera and changed the film.

Once more he went to the corner of the wall and looked up and down the path. This time a man was visible—apparently a labourer—coming from the direction of the town. But he was a long distance away and was advancing at a pace so leisurely that Thorndyke decided to complete his business, if possible, before he should arrive. A glance through the periscope showed the man in the garden driving another screw. When he had driven it home, he stepped round the pillar to deal with the screws on the other side. As he inserted the bradawl and balanced the hammer, presenting now his left profile, Thorndyke lifted the camera to the top of the wall, made the exposure, took down the camera, and having changed the film, closed it and put it in his pocket. Then he joined up the two parts of the stick, fixed the cap on the eye-piece and came out on to the path, turning towards the town to meet the labourer. But the latter had now disappeared, having apparently turned into the road on which the house fronted. Having the path once more to himself, Thorndyke walked along it to the gate, where he paused and rapped on it smartly with his knuckles.

After a short interval, during which he repeated the summons, the gate was opened a few inches and the man whom he had seen within looked out with an air of slightly irritable enquiry.

"I must apologize for disturbing you", Thorndyke said with disarming suavity, "but I heard some one within, and there was no one about from whom I could make my enquiry."

"You are not disturbing me in the least", the other replied, not less suavely. "I shall be most happy to give you any information that I can. What was the enquiry that you wished to make?"

As he asked the question, the stranger stepped out on the path, drawing the gate to after him, and looked inquisitively at Thorndyke.

"I wanted to know", the latter replied, "whether this footpath leads to a wood—Potter's Wood, I think it is called. You see, I am a stranger to this neighbourhood."

On this the man seemed to look at him with heightened interest as he replied:

"Yes, it leads through the wood about half a mile farther on."

"And where does it lead to eventually?"

"It crosses a patch of heath and joins a by-road that runs from the town to the main London road. Was that where you wanted to go?"

"No", replied Thorndyke. "It is the path itself that I am concerned with. The fact is, I am making a sort of informal inspection in connection with the case of a man who disappeared a short time ago—the manager of a local branch of Perkins's Bank. I understand that he was last seen walking along this path."

"Ah", said the other, "I remember the affair. And is he still missing?"

"Yes. He has never been seen or heard of since he started along this path. What is the wood like? Is it a place in which a man might lose himself?"

The other shook his head. "No, it is only a small wood. A sound and sober man could not get lost in it. Of course, if a man were taken ill and strayed into the wood, he might die and lie hidden for months. Has the wood been searched?"

"I really can't say. It ought to have been."

"I thought", said the stranger, "that you might, perhaps, be connected with the police."

"No", replied Thorndyke. "I am a lawyer and I look after some of the affairs of the bank. One of the directors mentioned this disappearance to me a few days ago, and as I happened to be in the neighbourhood to-day, I thought I would come and take a look round. Perhaps you could show me where we are on my map. It is a little confusing to a stranger."

He drew out the folded map and handed it to his new acquaintance, who took it and pored over it as if he found it difficult to decipher. As he did so, Thorndyke took the opportunity to look him over with the most searching scrutiny; his face, his hair, his spectacles, his hands and his feet; and when he had inspected the left side of the face which was the one presented to him—he crossed as if to take over the man's right shoulder and examined the face from that side.

"This dotted line seems to be the footpath", said the stranger, tracing it with the point of a pencil. "This black dot must be my house, and here is the wood with the dotted line running through it. I think that is quite clear."

"Perfectly clear, thank you", said Thorndyke, as the other handed him back the map. "I am very greatly obliged to you and I must again apologize for having disturbed you."

"Not at all", the stranger returned genially; "and I hope your inspection may be successful."

Thorndyke thanked him again, and with mutual bows they separated, the one retiring into his domain, the other setting forth in the direction of the wood.

For some minutes Thorndyke continued to walk at a rapid pace along the path. Only when a sharp turn carried him out of sight of the walled garden did he halt to jot down in his note-book a brief summary of his observations while they were fresh in his mind. Not that the notes were really necessary, for, even as he had made those observations, the significance of the facts that they supplied became apparent. Now, as he walked, he turned them over again and again.

What had he observed? Nothing very sensational, to be sure. He had seen a man who had recently set up in his garden a pillar dial on a broad stone base. The dial was old, but the base was new and seemed to have been specially constructed for its present purpose. The garden in which it had been set up was completely enclosed, was extremely secluded, was remote from its own or any other house, and was very thoroughly secured against any possible intrusion by two locked gates. The man himself was a skilled workman, or at least a very handy man; ingenious and resourceful, too, for he could time a sundial, a thing that not every handy man could do. Then he appeared to have some kind of workshop of a size suggesting good accommodation and facilities for work, and this workshop was in a secluded situation, very secure from observation. But in these facts there would seem to be nothing remarkable; only they were in singular harmony with certain other facts—very remarkable facts indeed—that Thorndyke had gleaned from an examination of Harold's absurd photographs.

And there was the man himself, and especially his spectacles. When Thorndyke had seen those spectacles lying on the chair while their owner drove in the screws, looked at his watch, and scrutinized the shadow on the dial, he had naturally assumed that the man was near-sighted; that he had taken off his "distance" glasses to get the advantage of his near sight for the near work. But when the man appeared at the gate, it was immediately evident that he was not near-sighted. The spectacles were convex bi-focal glasses, with an upper half of nearly plain glass and a lower segment distinctly convex, suited for long sight or "old sight". A near-sighted man could not have seen through them. But neither did their owner seem to need them, since he had taken them off just when they should have been most useful—for near work. Moreover, when Thorndyke had presented the map, the man had looked at it, not through the lower "reading" segment, but through the weak, upper, "distance" segment. In short, the man did not need those spectacles at all. So far from being a convenience, they were a positive inconvenience. Then, why did he wear them? Why had he put them on to come to the gate? There could be only one answer. People who wear useless and inconvenient spectacles do so in order to alter their appearance; as a species of disguise, in fact. Then it seemed as if this man had some reason for wishing to conceal his identity. But what could that reason be?

As to his appearance, he was a decidedly good-looking man, with an alert, intelligent face that was in harmony with his speech and bearing. His mouth and chin were concealed by a moustache and a short beard, but his nose was rather handsome and very striking, for it was of that rare type which is seen in the classical Greek sculptures. His ears were both well-shaped, but one of them—the right—was somewhat disfigured by a small "port-wine mark", which stained the lobule a deep purple. But it was quite small and really inconspicuous.

This was the sum of Thorndyke's observations, to which may be added that the man appeared to be prematurely grey and that his face, despite its cheerful geniality, had that indefinable character that may be detected in the faces of men who have passed through long periods of stress and mental suffering. Only one datum remained unascertained, and Thorndyke added it to his collection when, having traversed the wood and the heath, he returned to the town by way of the by-road. Encountering a postman on his round, he stopped him and enquired:

"I wonder if you can tell me who is living at 'The Chestnuts' now? You know the house I mean. It stands at the corner—"

"Oh, I know 'The Chestnuts,' sir. Colonel Barnett used to live there. But he went away nigh upon two years ago, and, after it had been empty for a month or two, it was bought by the gentleman who lives there now, Mr. Pottermack."

"That is a queer name", said Thorndyke. "How does he spell it?"

"P.o.t.t.e.r.m.a.c.k", the postman replied. "Marcus Pottermack, Esq. It is a queer name, sir. I've never met with it before. But he is a very pleasant gentleman, all the same."

Thorndyke thanked the postman for his information, on which he pondered as he made his way to the station. It was a very queer name. In fact, there was about it something rather artificial; something that was not entirely out of character with the unwanted spectacles.





## CHAPTER VII. — THE CRIMINAL RECORDS

ON each of the two men who parted at the gate the brief interview produced its appropriate effects; in each it generated a certain train of thought which, later, manifested itself in certain actions. In Mr. Pottermack, as he softly reopened the gate to listen to the retreating footsteps, once even venturing to peep out at the tall figure that was striding away up the path, the encounter was productive of a dim uneasiness, a slight disturbance of the sense of security that had been growing on him since the night of the tragedy. For the first few days thereafter he had been on wires. All seemed to be going well, but he was constantly haunted by that ever-recurring question, "Was there anything vital that he had overlooked?"

The mysterious photographer, too, had been a disturbing element, occasioning anxious speculations on the motive or purpose of his inexplicable proceedings and on the possibility of something being brought to light by the photographs that was beyond the scope of human vision. But as the days had passed with no whisper of suspicion, as the local excitement died down and the incident faded into oblivion, his fears subsided, and by degrees he settled down into a feeling of comfortable security.

And after all, why not? In the first few days his own secret knowledge had prevented him from seeing the affair in its true perspective. But now, looking at it calmly with the eyes of those who had not that knowledge, what did Lewson's disappearance amount to? It was a matter of no importance at all. A disreputable rascal had absconded with a hundred pounds that did not belong to him. He had disappeared and no one knew whither he had gone. Nor did any one particularly care. Doubtless the police would keep a look-out for him; but he was only a minor delinquent, and they would assuredly make no extraordinary efforts to trace him.

So Mr. Pottermack argued, and quite justly; and thus arguing came by degrees to the comfortable conclusion that the incident was closed and that he might now take up again the thread of his peaceful life, secure alike from the menace of the law and the abiding fear of impoverishment and treachery.

It was this new and pleasant feeling of security that had been disturbed by his encounter with the strange lawyer. Not that he was seriously alarmed. The man seemed harmless enough. He was not, apparently, making any real investigations but just a casual inspection of the neighbourhood, prompted, as it appeared, by a not very lively curiosity. And as a tracker he seemed to be of no account, since he could not even find his position on a one-inch map.

But for all that, the incident was slightly disquieting. Pottermack had assumed that the Lewson affair was closed. But now it seemed that it was not closed. And it was a curious coincidence that this man should have knocked at his gate, should have selected him for these enquiries. No doubt it was but chance; but still, there was the coincidence. Again, there was the man himself. He had seemed foolish about the map. But he did not look at all like a foolish man. On the contrary, his whole aspect and bearing had a suggestion of power, of acute intellect and quiet strength of character. As Pottermack recalled his appearance and manner he found himself asking again and again: Was there anything behind this seemingly chance encounter? Had this lawyer seen those photographs, and if so, had he found in them anything more than met the eye? Could he have had any special reason for knocking at this particular gate? And what on earth could he be doing with that walking-stick gun?

Reflections such as these pervaded Mr. Pottermack's consciousness as he went about his various occupations. They did not seriously disturb his peace of mind, but still they did create a certain degree of unrest, and this presently revived in his mind certain plans which he had considered and rejected; plans for further establishing his security by shifting the field of possible inquiry yet farther from his own neighbourhood.

On Thorndyke the effects of the meeting were quite different. He had come doubting if a certain surmise that he had formed could possibly be correct. He had gone away with his doubts dispelled and his surmise converted into definite belief. The only unsolved question that remained in his mind was, "Who was Marcus Pottermack?" The answer that suggested itself was improbable in the extreme. But it was the only one that he could produce, and if it were wrong he was at the end of his unassisted resources.

The first necessity, therefore, was to eliminate the improbable—or else to confirm it. Then he would know where he stood and could consider what action he would take. Accordingly he began by working up the scanty material that he had collected. The photographs, when developed and enlarged by Polton, yielded two very fair portraits of Mr. Pottermack showing clearly the right and left profiles respectively; and while Polton was dealing with these, his principal made a systematic, but not very hopeful, inspection of the map in search of possible finger-prints. He had made a mental note of the way in which Pottermack had held the map, and even of the spots which his finger-tips had touched, and on these he now began cautiously to operate with two fine powders, a black and a white, applying each to its appropriate background.

The results were poor enough, but yet they were better than he had expected. Pottermack had held the map in his left hand, the better to manipulate the pencil with which he pointed, and his thumb had been planted on a green patch which represented a wood. Here the white powder settled and showed a print which, poor as it was, would present no difficulties to the experts and which would be more distinct in a photograph, as the background would then appear darker. The prints of the finger-tips which the black powder brought out on the white background were more imperfect and were further confused by the black lettering. Still, Thorndyke had them all carefully photographed and enlarged to twice the natural size, and, having blocked out on the negative the surrounding lettering (to avoid giving any information that might be better withheld), had prints made and mounted on card.

With these in his letter-case and the two portraits in his pocket, he set forth one morning for New Scotland Yard, proposing to seek the assistance of his old friend, Mr. Superintendent Miller, or, if he should not be available, that of the officer in charge of criminal records. However, it happened fortunately that the Superintendent was in his office, and thither Thorndyke, having sent in his card, was presently conducted.

"Well, doctor", said Miller, shaking hands heartily, "here you are, gravelled as usual. Now what sort of mess do you want us to help you out of?"

Thorndyke produced his letter-case, and, extracting the photographs, handed them to the Superintendent.

"Here", he said, "are three finger-prints; apparently the thumb and first two fingers of the left hand."

"Ha", said Miller, inspecting the three photographs critically. "Why 'apparently'?"

"I mean", explained Thorndyke, "that that was what I inferred from their position on the original document."

"Which seems to have been a map", remarked Miller, with a faint grin. "Well, I expect you know. Shall I take it that they are the thumb and index and middle finger of the left hand?"

"I think you may", said Thorndyke.

"I think I may", agreed Miller; "and now the question is: What about it? I suppose you want us to tell you whose finger-prints they are; and you want to gammon us that you don't know already. And I suppose—as I see you have been faking the negative—that you don't want to give us any information?"

"In effect", replied Thorndyke, "you have, with your usual acuteness, diagnosed the position exactly. I don't much want to give any details, but I will tell you this much. If my suspicions are correct, these are the finger-prints of a man who has been dead some years."

"Dead!" exclaimed Miller. "Good Lord, doctor, what a vindictive man you are! But you don't suppose that we follow the criminal class into the next world, do you?"

"I have been assuming that you don't destroy records. If you do, you are unlike any government officials that I have ever met. But I hope I was right."

"In the main, you were. We don't keep the whole set of documents of a dead man, but we have a set of skeleton files on which the personal documents—the finger-prints, photographs and description—are preserved. So I expect we shall be able to tell you what you want to know."

"I am sorry", said Thorndyke, "that they are such wretchedly poor prints. You don't think that they are too imperfect to identify, I hope."

Miller inspected the photographs afresh. "I don't see much amiss with them", said he. "You can't expect a crook to go about with a roller and inking-plate in his pocket so as to give you nice sharp prints. These are better than a good many that our people have to work from. And besides, there are three digits from one hand. That gives you part of the formula straight away. No, the experts won't make any trouble about these. But supposing these prints are not on the file?"

"Then we shall take it that I suspected the wrong man."

"Quite so. But, if I am not mistaken, your concern is to prove whose finger-prints they are in order that you can say whose finger-prints they are not. Now, supposing that we don't find them on the files of the dead men, would it help you if we tried the current files—the records of the crooks who are still in business? Or would you rather not?"

"If it would not be giving you too much trouble", said Thorndyke, "I should be very much obliged if you would."

"No trouble at all", said Miller, adding with a sly smile: "only it occurred to me that it might be embarrassing to you if we found your respected client's finger-prints on the live register".

"That would be a highly interesting development," said Thorndyke, "though I don't think it a likely one. But it is just as well to exhaust the possibilities."

"Quite", agreed Miller; and thereupon he wrote the brief particulars on a slip of paper which he put into an envelope with the photographs, and, having rung a bell, handed the envelope to the messenger who appeared in response to the summons.

"I don't suppose we shall have to keep you waiting very long", said the Superintendent. "They have an extraordinarily ingenious system of filing. Out of all the thousands of finger-prints that they have, they can pounce on the one that is wanted in the course of a few minutes. It seems incredible, and yet it is essentially simple—just a matter of classification and ringing the changes on different combinations of types."

"You are speaking of completely legible prints?" suggested Thorndyke.

"Yes, the sort of prints that we get sent in from local prisons for identification of a man who has been arrested under a false name. Of course, when we get a single imperfect print found by the police at a place where a crime has been committed, a bit more time has to be spent. Then we have not only got to place the print, but we've got to make mighty sure that it is the right one, because an arrest and a prosecution hangs on it. You don't want to arrest a man and then, when you come to take his finger-prints properly, find that they are the wrong ones. So, in the case of an imperfect print, you

have got to do some careful ridge-tracing and counting and systematic checking of individual ridge-characters, such as bifurcations and islands. But, even so, they don't take so very long over it. The practised eye picks out at a glance details that an unpractised eye can hardly recognize even when they are pointed out."

The Superintendent was proceeding to dilate, with professional enthusiasm, on the wonders of finger-print technique and the efficiency of the Department when his eulogies were confirmed by the entrance of an officer carrying a sheaf of papers and Thorndyke's photographs, which he delivered into Miller's hands.

"Well, doctor", said the Superintendent, after a brief glance at the documents, "here is your information. Jeffrey Brandon is the name of the late lamented. Will that do for you?"

"Yes", replied Thorndyke, "that is the name I expected to hear."

"Good", said Miller. "I see they have kept the whole of his papers for some reason. I will just glance through them while you are doing Thomas Didymus with the finger-prints. But it is quite obvious, if you compare your photographs with the rolled impressions, that the ridge-patterns are identical."

He handed Thorndyke the finger-print sheet, to which were attached the photograph and personal description, and sat down at the table to look over the other documents, while Thorndyke walked over to the window to get a better light. But he did not concern himself with the finger-prints beyond a very brief inspection. It was the photograph that interested him. It showed, on the same print, a right profile and a full face; of which he concentrated his attention on the former. A rather remarkable profile it was, strikingly handsome and curiously classical in outline, rather recalling the head of Antinous in the British Museum. Thorndyke examined it minutely, and then—his back being turned to Miller—he drew from his waistcoat pocket the right profile of Mr. Pottermack and placed it beside the prison photograph.

A single glance made it clear that the two photographs represented the same face. Though one showed a clean-shaven young man with the full lips and strong, rounded chin completely revealed, while the other was a portrait of a bearded, spectacled, middle-aged man, yet they were unmistakably the same. The remarkable nose and brow and the shapely ear were identical in the two photographs; and in both, the lobe of the ear was marked at its tip by a dark spot.

From the photograph he turned to the description. Not that it was necessary to seek further proof; and he did, in fact, merely glance through the particulars. But that rapid glance gathered fresh confirmation. "Height 5 feet 6 inches, hair chestnut, eyes darkish grey, small port-wine mark on lobe of right ear", etc. All the details of Jeffrey Brandon's personal characteristics applied perfectly to Mr. Marcus Pottermack.

"I don't quite see", said Miller, as he took the papers from Thorndyke and laid them on the others, "why they kept all these documents. The conviction doesn't look to me very satisfactory—I don't like these cases where the prosecution has all its eggs in one basket, with the possible chance that they may be bad eggs; and it was a devil of a sentence for a first offence. But as the poor beggar is dead, and no reconsideration of either the conviction or the sentence is possible, there doesn't seem much object in preserving the records. Still, there may have been some reason at the time."

In his own mind, Thorndyke was of opinion that there might have been a very good reason. But he did not communicate this opinion. He had obtained the information that he had sought and was not at all desirous of troubling still waters; and his experience having taught him that Mr. Superintendent Miller was an exceedingly "noticing" gentleman, he thought it best to avoid further discussion and take his departure, after having expressed his appreciation of the assistance that he had received.

Nevertheless, for some time after he had gone, the Superintendent remained wrapped in profound thought; and that his cogitations were in some way concerned with the departed visitor would have been suggested by the circumstance that he sauntered to the window and looked down with a speculative eye on that visitor as he strode across the courtyard towards the Whitehall gate.

Meanwhile Thorndyke's mind was no less busy. As he wended his way Templewards he reviewed the situation in all its bearings. The wildly improbable had turned out to be true. He had made a prodigiously long shot and he had hit the mark: which was gratifying inasmuch as it justified a previous rather hypothetical train of reasoning. Marcus Pottermack, Esq., was undoubtedly the late Jeffrey Brandon. There was now no question about that. The only question that remained was what was to be done in the matter; and that question would have been easier to decide if he had been in possession of more facts. He had heard Mr. Stalker's opinion of the conviction, based on intimate knowledge of the circumstances, and he had heard that of the Superintendent, based on an immense experience of prosecutions. He was inclined to agree with them both; and the more so inasmuch as he had certain knowledge which they had not.

In the end, he decided to take no action at present, but to keep a watchful eye for further developments.

---

## CHAPTER VIII. — MR. POTTERMACK SEEKS ADVENTURE

IN the last chapter it was stated that one of the effects of Thorndyke's appearance at the side gate of "The Chestnuts", Borley, was to revive in the mind of its tenant certain projects which had been considered and rejected. But perhaps the word "rejected" overstates the case. For the continued existence in a locked drawer in Mr. Pottermack's workshop of a coat which had once been James Lewson's and a bundle of twenty five-pound notes implied a purpose which had been abandoned only conditionally and subject to possible reconsideration.

Again and again, as the destructor which stood in the corner beyond the tool-shed smoked and flared as he fed it with combustible rubbish, had he been on the point of flinging into it the coat and the banknotes and thereby reducing to unrecognizable ash the last visible traces of the tragedy. And every time his hand had been stayed by the thought that possibly, in some circumstances as yet unforeseen, these mementoes of that night of horror might yet be made to play a useful part. So, not without many a twinge of uneasiness, he had let these incriminating objects lie hidden in the locked drawer. And now, as it seemed to him, the circumstances had arisen in which some of them, at least, might be turned to account.

What were those circumstances? Simply the state of mind of the strange lawyer. To the people of Borley, including the police, Lewson was a man who had absconded and vanished. His tracks had shown him striking out across country towards the London road. Those tracks, it is true, broke off short on the heath and had not reappeared elsewhere, but no one doubted that he had gone clear away from the vicinity of Borley and was now in hiding at a safe distance from his old haunts. The natives of the district had never given Mr. Pottermack a moment's anxiety. But with this lawyer the case was different. The disturbing thing about him was that his curiosity, tepid as it was, concerned itself, not with the man who had vanished but with the locality from which he disappeared. But curiosity of that kind, Mr. Pottermack felt, was a thing that was not to be encouraged. On the contrary, it had better be diverted into a more wholesome channel. In short, the time had come when it would be desirable that James Lewson should make his appearance, if only by proxy, in some district as far removed as possible from the neighbourhood of "The Chestnuts", Borley.

So it came about that Mr. Pottermack prepared to set forth along that perilous track beaten smooth by the feet of those who do not know when to let well alone.

For some days after having come to his decision in general terms he was at a loss for a detailed plan. Somehow, the stolen notes had got to be put into circulation. But not by him. The numbers of those notes were known, and, as soon as they began to circulate, some, at least, of them would be identified and would be rigorously traced. The problem was how to get rid of them in a plausible manner without appearing in the transaction; and for some time he could think of no better plan than that of simply dropping them in a quiet London street, a plan which he summarily rejected as not meeting the necessities of the case. The fruitful suggestion eventually came from a newsboy who was roaring "Egbert Bruce's Finals!" outside the station. In an instant, Mr. Pottermack realized that here was the perfect plan, and having purchased a paper, took it home to extract the details on which he proposed to base his strategic scheme.

The "finals" related to a somewhat unselect race-meeting which was to take place in a couple of days' time at Illingham in Surrey, a place conveniently accessible from Borley and yet remote enough to render it unlikely that he would be seen there by any of his fellow-townsmen. Not that his presence there would be in any way suspicious or incriminating, but, still, the less people knew about his movements the better.

On the appointed day he set forth betimes, neatly but suitably dressed and all agog for the adventure, tame though it promised to be if it worked according to plan. To Mrs. Gadby he had explained—quite truthfully—that he was going to London; and if she had wanted confirmation of the statement, it could have been supplied by sundry natives of the town with whom he exchanged greetings on the platform as he waited for the London train.

But despite his geniality, he made a point of selecting an empty first-class compartment and shutting himself in. He had no hankering for human companionship. For, beneath the exhilaration engendered by this little adventure was an appreciable tinge of nervousness. No foreseeable contingency threatened his safety; but it is an undeniable fact that a man who carries, buttoned up in his inside breast pocket, twenty stolen banknotes, of which the numbers are known to the police, and of his possession of which he could give no credible account, is not without some reason for nervousness. And that was Mr. Pottermack's position. Just before starting, he had disinterred the whole bundle of those fatal notes and stuffed them into a compartment of the letter-case which he usually carried in his breast pocket. He had also hunted up another letter-case, aged, outworn and shabby, into which he had put a half-dozen ten-shilling notes for the day's expenses and stowed it in the outside hip pocket of his jacket.

As soon as the train had fairly started, he proceeded to make certain rearrangements related to his plan of campaign. Taking out the two letter-wallets—which we may distinguish as the inner and the outer—he laid them on the seat beside him. From the inner wallet he took out five of the stolen notes and placed them loosely in a compartment of the other wallet with their ends projecting so that they were plainly visible when it was open; and from the outer wallet he transferred four of the ten-shilling notes to the inner (he had paid for his ticket in silver). Then he returned the two wallets to their respective pockets and buttoned up his coat.

From Marylebone Station he walked to Baker Street, where he took a train for Waterloo and arrived to find the great station filled with a seething crowd of racegoers. Not, on the whole, a prepossessing crowd, though all sorts and conditions

of men were represented. But Mr. Pottermack was not hypercritical. At the over-smart, horsey persons, the raffish sporting men with race-glasses slung over their shoulders, the men of mystery with handbags or leather satchels, he glanced with benevolent interest. They had their uses in the economy of nature—in fact, he hoped to make use of some of them himself. So tolerant, indeed, was he that he even greeted with a kindly smile the notices pasted up urging passengers to beware of pickpockets. For in that respect his condition was unique. In spite of the wallet in his outside pocket, he enjoyed complete immunity; and as he joined the queue at the booking-office window, he reflected with grim amusement that, of all that throng, he was probably the only person who had come expressly to have his pocket picked.

As he approached the window he drew the wallet from his outside pocket, and, opening it, inspected its interior with an air of indecision, took out one of the banknotes, put it back, and, finally dipping into the other compartment, fished out a ten-shilling note. Holding this in one hand and the open wallet in the other, he at last came opposite the window, where he purchased his ticket and moved on to make way for a large, red-faced man who seemed to be in a hurry. As he walked on slowly towards the barrier, pocketing the wallet as he went, the crowd surged impatiently past him; but watching that crowd as it swept on ahead, he could see no sign of the red-faced man. That gentleman's hurry seemed suddenly to have evaporated, and it was only when Pottermack was entering his carriage and turned to look back that he observed his roseate friend immediately behind him. Instantly he entered the nearly full compartment, and as he took his seat he was careful to leave a vacant place on his right hand; and when the red-faced man, closely following him, plumped down into the vacant space and at once began to exercise his elbows, he smiled inwardly with the satisfaction of the fortunate angler who "sees his quill or cork down sink". In short, he felt a comfortable certainty that he had "got a bite."

It was now a matter of deep regret to him that he had neglected to provide himself at the bookstall with something to read. A newspaper would have been so helpful to his friend on the right. However, the deficiency was made up to a practicable extent by a couple of men who faced each other from the two corners to his left, and who, having spread a small rug across their joint knees, were good enough to give a demonstration for the benefit of the company at large of the immemorial three-card trick. Towards them Pottermack craned with an expression of eager interest that aroused in them an unjustified optimism. With intense concentration the operator continued over and over again to perform dummy turns, and the professional "mug", who sat opposite to Pottermack, continued with blatant perversity to spot the obviously wrong card every time, and pay up his losses with groans of surprise, while the fourth confederate, on Pottermack's left, nudged him from time to time and solicited in a whisper his opinion as to which was really the right card. It is needless to say that his opinion turned out invariably to be correct, but still he resisted the whispered entreaties of his neighbour to try his luck "seeing that he was such a dab at spotting 'em". Under other circumstances he would have invested the ten-shilling note for the sake of publicity. As things were, he did not dare to touch the wallet, or even put his hand to the pocket wherein it reposed. Premature discovery would have been fatal.

As the train sped on and consumed the miles of the short journey, the operator's invitations to Pottermack to try his luck became more urgent and less polite; until at length, as the destination drew near, they degenerated into mere oburgation and epithets of contempt. At length the train slowed down at the platform. Every one stood up and all together tried to squeeze through the narrow doorway, Pottermack himself emerging with unexpected velocity, propelled by a vigorous shove. At the same moment his hat was lightly flicked off his head and fell among the feet of the crowd. He would have stooped to recover it, but the necessity was forestalled by an expert kick which sent it soaring aloft; and hardly had it descended when it rose again and yet again until, having taken its erratic flight over the fence, it came at last to rest in the station-master's garden. By the time it had been retrieved with the aid of the sympathetic station-master, the last of the passengers had filed through the barrier and Pottermack brought up the extreme rear like a belated straggler.

As soon as he had had time to recover from these agitating experiences his thoughts flew to the wallet and he thrust his hand into his outside pocket. To his unspeakable surprise, the wallet was still there. As he made the discovery he was aware of a pang of disappointment, even of a sense of injury. He had put his trust in the red-faced man, and behold! that rubicund impostor had betrayed him. It looked as if this plan of his was not so easy as it had appeared.

But when he came to the turnstile of the enclosure and drew out the wallet to extract the ten-shilling note—and incidentally to display its other contents—he realized that he had done the red-faced man an injustice. The ten-shilling note, indeed, was there, tucked away at the bottom of its compartment, but otherwise the wallet was empty. Pottermack could hardly believe his eyes. For a few moments he stood staring at it in astonishment until an impatient poke in the back and an imperative command to "pass along, please", recalled him to the present proceedings, when he swept up and pocketed his change and strolled away into the enclosure, meditating respectfully on the skill and tact of his red-faced acquaintance and wishing that he had made the discovery sooner. For, now, the wallet would need to be recharged for the benefit of the next artist. This he could have done easily in the empty station, but in the crowd which surrounded him the matter presented difficulties. He could not do it unobserved, and it would appear a somewhat odd proceeding—especially to the eye of a plain-clothes policeman. There must be a good number of those useful officials in the crowd, and it was of vital importance that he should not attract the attention of any of them.

He looked round in some bewilderment, seeking a secluded spot in which he could refill the outer wallet unnoticed. A vain quest! Every part of the enclosure, excepting the actual course, was filled with a seething multitude, varying in density but all-pervading. Here and there a closely packed mass indicated some juggler, mountebank, thimble artist, or card expert, and some distance away a Punch and Judy show rose above the heads of the crowd, the sound of its drum and Pan's pipes and the unmistakable voice of the hero penetrating the general hubbub. Towards this exhibition Pottermack was directing his course when shouts of laughter proceeding from the interior of a small but dense crowd suggested that

something amusing was happening there; whereupon Pottermack, renouncing the delights of Punch and Judy, began cautiously to elbow his way towards the centre of attraction.

At this moment a bell rang in the distance, and instantly the whole crowd was in motion, surging towards the course. And then began a most singular hurly-burly in Pottermack's immediate neighbourhood. An unseen foot trod heavily on his toes, and at the same moment he received a violent shove that sent him staggering to the right against a seedy-looking person who thumped him in the ribs and sent him reeling back to the left. Before he could recover his balance some one butted him in the back with such violence that he flew forward and impinged heavily on a small man in a straw hat—very much in it, in fact, for it had been banged down right over his eyes—who was beginning to protest angrily when some unseen force from behind propelled him towards Pottermack and another violent collision occurred. Thereafter Pottermack had but a confused consciousness of being pushed, pulled, thumped, pinched, and generally hustled until his head swam. And then, quite suddenly, the crowd streamed away towards the course and Pottermack was left alone with the straw-hatted man, who stood a few yards away, struggling to extract himself from his hat and at the same time feverishly searching his pockets. By the well-known process of suggestion, this latter action communicated itself to Mr. Pottermack, who proceeded to make a hasty survey of his own pockets, which resulted in the discovery that, though the inside wallet, securely buttoned in, was still intact, the outside, empty one had this time disappeared, and most of his small change with it.

Strange are the inconsistencies of the human mind. But a little while ago he had been willing to make a free gift of that wallet to his red-faced fellow-traveller. Now that it was gone he was quite appreciably annoyed. He had planned to recharge it with a fresh consignment to be planted in a desirable quarter, and its loss left him with the necessity of making some other plausible arrangements, and at the moment he could not think of any. To put the notes loose in his pocket seemed to be but inviting failure, for, to the sense of touch from without, the pocket would appear to be empty.

As he was thus cogitating, he caught the eye of the straw-hatted gentleman fixed upon him with unmistakable and undissembled suspicion. This was unpleasant, but one must make allowances. The man was, no doubt, rather upset. With a genial smile, Mr. Pottermack approached the stranger and expressed the rather optimistic hope that he had not suffered any loss; but the only reply that his enquiry elicited was an inarticulate grunt.

"They have been through my pockets", said Mr. Pottermack cheerfully, "but I am glad to say that they took nothing of any value."

"Ha", said the straw-hatted gentleman.

"Yes", pursued Pottermack, "they must have found me rather disappointing."

"Oh", said the other in a tone of sour indifference.

"Yes", said Pottermack, "all they got from me was an empty letter-case and a little loose silver."

"Ah", said the straw-hatted man.

"I hope", Pottermack repeated, beginning slightly to lose patience, "that you have not lost anything of considerable value."

For a moment or two the other made no reply. At length, fixing a baleful eye on Pottermack, he answered with significant emphasis: "If you want to know what they took, you'd better ask them"; and with this he turned away.

Pottermack also turned away—in the opposite direction, and some inward voice whispered to him that it were well to evacuate the neighbourhood of the man in the straw hat.

He strolled away, gradually increasing his pace, until he reached the outskirts of the crowd that had gathered at the margin of the course. By a sound of cheering he judged that some ridiculous horses were careering along somewhere beyond the range of his vision. But they were of no interest to him. They did, however, furnish him with a pretext for diving into the crowd and struggling towards the source of the noise, and this he did, regardless of the unseemly comments that he provoked and the thumps and prods that he received in his progress. When, as it seemed, he had become immovably embedded, he drew a deep breath and turned to look back. For a few blissful moments he believed that he had effected a masterly retreat and escaped finally from his suspicious fellow-victim; but suddenly there emerged into view a too-familiar battered straw hat, moving slowly through the resisting multitude, and moving in a bee-line in his direction.

Then it was that Mr. Pottermack became seized with sudden panic. And no wonder. His previous experiences of the law had taught him that mere innocence is of no avail; and now, simply to be charged involved the risk of recognition and inevitable return to a convict prison. But apart from that, his position was one of extreme peril. On his person at this very moment were fifteen stolen notes of which he could give no account, but which connected him with that thing that reposed under the sun-dial. At the best, those notes might fairly send him to penal servitude; at the worst, to the gallows.

It is therefore no matter for surprise that the sight of that ominous straw hat sent a sudden chill down his spine. But Mr. Pottermack was no coward. Unforeseen as the danger was, he kept his nerve and made no outward sign of the terror that was clutching at his heart. Calmly he continued to worm his way through the crowd, glancing back now and again to note his distance from that relentless hat, and ever looking for a chance to get rid of those fatal notes. For, if once he could get clear of those, he would be ready to face with courage and composure the lesser risk. But no chance ever came. Openly to jettison the notes in the midst of the crowd would have been fatal. He would have been instantly written down a detected and pursued pickpocket.

While his mind was busy with these considerations his body was being skilfully piloted along the line of least resistance in the crowd. Now and again he made excursions into the less dense regions on the outskirts, thereby securing a gain in distance, only to plunge once more into the thick of the throng in the faint hope of being lost sight of. But this hope was never realized. On the whole, he maintained his distance from his pursuer and even slightly increased it. Sometimes for the space of a minute or more the absurd sleuth was lost to his view; but just as his hopes were beginning to revive, that accursed hat would make its reappearance and reduce him, if not to despair, at least to the most acute anxiety.

In the course of one of his excursions into the thinner part of the crowd, he noticed that, some distance ahead, a bold curve of the course brought it comparatively near to the entrance to the enclosure. He could see a steady stream of people still pouring in through the entrance turnstile, but that which gave exit from the ground was practically free. No one seemed to be leaving the enclosure at present, so the way out was quite unobstructed. Noting this fact with a new hope, he plunged once more into the dense crowd and set a course through it nearly parallel to the railings. When he had worked his way to a point nearly opposite to the entrance, he looked back to ascertain the whereabouts of his follower. The straw-hatted man was plainly visible, tightly jammed in the thickest part of the crowd and apparently not on amicable terms with his immediate neighbours. Pottermack decided that this was his chance and proceeded to take it. Skilfully extricating himself from the throng, he walked briskly towards the gates and made for the exit turnstile. As there was no one else leaving the ground, he passed out unhindered, pausing only for a moment to take a quick glance back. But what he saw in that glance was by no means reassuring. The straw-hatted man was, indeed, still tightly jammed in the thick of the crowd; but at his side was a policeman to whom he appeared to be making a statement as he pointed excitedly towards the turnstile. And both informer and constable seemed to be watching his departure.

Pottermack waited to see no more. Striding away from the entrance, he came to a road on which was a signpost pointing to the station. The railway being the obvious means of escape, he turned in the opposite direction, which apparently led into the country. A short distance along the road, he encountered an aged man, engaged in trimming the hedge, who officiously wished him good-afternoon and whom he secretly anathematized for being there. A little farther on, round a sharp turn in the road, he came to a stile which gave access to a little-used footpath which crossed a small meadow. Vaulting over the stile, he set out along the footpath at a sharp walk. His impulse was to run, but he restrained it, realizing that a running man would attract attention where a mere walker might pass unobserved, or at least unnoticed. However, he quickly came to the farther side of the meadow, where another stile gave on a narrow by-lane. Here Pottermack paused for a moment, doubtful which way to turn; but the fugitive's instinct to get as far as possible from the pursuers decided the question. He turned in the direction that led away from the race-course.

Walking quickly along the lane for a minute or two, he came to a sudden turn and saw that, a short distance ahead, the lane opened into a road. At the same moment there rose among a group of elms on his right the tower of a church; and here the hedgerow gave place to a brick wall, broken by a wicket-gate, through which he looked into a green and pleasant churchyard. The road before him he surmised to be the one that he had left by the stile, and his surmise received most alarming confirmation. For, even at the very moment when he was entering the wicket, two figures walked rapidly across the end of the lane. One of them was a tall, military-looking man who swung along with easy but enormous strides; the other, who kept up with him with difficulty, was a small man in a battered straw hat.

With a gasp of horror, Pottermack darted in through the wicket and looked round wildly for possible cover. Then he saw that the church door was open, and, impelled, possibly, by some vague idea of sanctuary, bolted in. For a moment he stood at the threshold looking into the peaceful, silent interior, forgetting in his agitation even to take off his hat. There was no one in the church; but immediately confronting the intruder, securely bolted to a stone column, was a small iron-bound chest. On its front were painted the words "Poor Box", and above it, an inscription on a board informed Mr. Pottermack that "The Lord loveth a Cheerful Giver."

Well, He had one that time. No sooner had Mr. Pottermack's eyes lighted on that box than he had whipped out his wallet and extracted the notes. With trembling fingers he folded them up in twos and threes and poked them through the slit; and when the final pair—as if protesting against his extravagant munificence—stuck in the opening and refused to go in, he adroitly persuaded them with a penny, which he pushed through and dropped in by way of an additional thank-offering. As that penny dropped down with a faint, papery rustle, he put away his wallet and drew a deep breath. Mr. Pottermack was his own man again.

Of course, there was the straw-hatted man. But now that those incriminating notes were gone, so great was the revulsion that he could truly say, in the words of the late S. Pepys—or at least in a polite paraphrase of them—that he "valued him not a straw". The entire conditions were changed. But as he turned with a new buoyancy of spirit to leave the church, there came to him a sudden recollection of the red-faced man's skill and ingenuity which caused him to thrust his hands into his pockets. And it was just as well that he did, for he brought up from his left-hand coat pocket a battered silver pencil-holder that was certainly not his and that advertised the identity of its legitimate owner by three initial letters legibly engraved on its flat end.

On this—having flung the pencil-holder out through the porch doorway into the high grass of the churchyard—he turned back into the building and made a systematic survey of his pockets, emptying each one in turn on to the cushioned seat of a pew. When he had ascertained beyond all doubt that none of them contained any article of property other than his own, he went forth with a light heart and retraced his steps through the wicket out into the lane, and, turning to the right, walked on towards the road. It had been his intention to return along it to the station, but when he came out of the lane, he found himself at the entrance to a village street and quite near to a comfortable-looking inn which hung out the sign of "The

Farmer's Boy". The sight of the homely hostelry reminded him that it was now well past his usual luncheon hour and made him aware of a fine, healthy appetite.

It appeared, on enquiry, that there was a cold sirloin in cut and a nice, quiet parlour in which to consume it. Pottermack smiled with anticipatory gusto at the report and gave his orders; and within a few minutes found himself in the parlour aforesaid, seated at a table covered with a clean white cloth on which was an abundant sample of the sirloin, a hunk of bread, a slab of cheese, a plate of biscuits and a jovial, pot-bellied brown jug crowned with a cap of foam.

Mr. Pottermack enjoyed his lunch amazingly. The beef was excellent, the beer was of the best, and their combined effect was further to raise his spirits and lower his estimate of the straw-hatted man. He realized now that his initial panic had been due to those ill-omened notes; to the fact that a false charge might reveal the material for a real one of infinitely greater gravity. Now that he was clear of them, the fact that he was a man of substance and known position would be a sufficient answer to any mere casual suspicion. His confidence was completely restored, and he even speculated with detached interest on the possible chance of encountering his pursuers on his way back to the station.

He had finished the beef to the last morsel and was regarding with tepid interest the slab of high-complexioned cheese when the door opened and revealed two figures at the threshold, both of whom halted with their eyes fixed on him intently. After a moment's inspection, the shorter—who wore a battered straw hat—pointed to him and affirmed in impressive tones:

"That's the man."

On this, the taller stranger took a couple of steps forward and said, as if repeating a formula: "I am a police officer" (it was a perfectly unnecessary statement. No one could have supposed that he was anything else). "This—er—gentleman informs me that you picked his pocket."

"Does he really?" said Pottermack, regarding him with mild surprise and pouring himself out another glass of beer.

"Yes, he does; and the question is, what have you got to say about it? It is my duty to caution you—"

"Not at all", said Pottermack. "The question is, what has he got to say about it? Has he given you any particulars?"

"No. He says you picked his pocket. That's all."

"Did he see me pick his pocket?"

The officer turned to the accuser. "Did you?" he asked.

"No, of course I didn't", snapped the other. "Pickpockets don't usually let you see what they are up to."

"Did he feel me pick his pocket?" Pottermack asked, with the air of a cross-examining counsel.

"Did you?" the officer asked, looking dubiously at the accuser.

"How could I," protested the latter, "when I was being pulled and shoved and hustled in the crowd?"

"Ha", said Pottermack, taking a sip of beer. "He didn't see me pick his pocket, he didn't feel me pick his pocket. Now, how did he arrive at the conclusion that I did pick his pocket?"

The officer turned almost threateningly on the accuser.

"How did you?" he demanded.

"Well", stammered the straw-hatted man, "there was a gang of pickpockets and he was among them."

"But so were you", retorted Pottermack. "How do I know that you didn't pick my pocket? Somebody did."

"Oh!" said the officer. "Had your pocket picked too? What did they take of yours?"

"Mighty little—just a few oddments of small change. I kept my coat buttoned."

There was a slightly embarrassed silence, during which the officer, not for the first time, ran an appraising eye over the accused. His experience of pickpockets was extensive and peculiar, but it did not include any persons of Pottermack's type. He turned and directed a dubious and enquiring look at the accuser.

"Well", said the latter, "here he is. Aren't you going to take him into custody?"

"Not unless you can give me something to go on", replied the officer. "The station inspector wouldn't accept a charge of this sort."

"At any rate", said the accuser, "I suppose you will take his name and address?"

The officer grinned sardonically at the artless suggestion but agreed that it might be as well, and produced a large, funereal note-book.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Marcus Pottermack", the owner of that name replied, adding "my address is 'The Chestnuts' Borley, Buckinghamshire."

The officer wrote down these particulars, and then closing the note-book, put it away with a very definite air of finality, remarking: "That's about all that we can do at present". But this did not at all meet the views of the straw-hatted man, who



protested plaintively:

"And you mean to say that you are going to let him walk off with my gold watch and my note-case with five pounds in it? You are not even going to search him?"

"You can't search people who haven't been charged", the officer growled; but here Pottermack interposed.

"There is no need", he said suavely, "for you to be hampered by mere technical difficulties. I know it is quite irregular, but if it would give you any satisfaction just to run through my pockets, I haven't the slightest objection."

The officer was obviously relieved. "Of course, sir, if you volunteer that is a different matter, and it would clear things up."

Accordingly, Pottermack rose and presented himself for the operation, while the straw-hatted man approached and watched with devouring eyes. The officer began with the wallet, noted the initials, M. P., on the cover, opened and considered the orderly arrangement of the stamps, cards and other contents; took out a visiting-card, read it and put it back, and finally laid the wallet on the table. Then he explored all the other pockets systematically and thoroughly, depositing the treasure trove from each on the table beside the wallet. When he had finished, he thanked Mr. Pottermack for his help, and turning to the accuser, demanded gruffly: "Well, are you satisfied now?"

"I should be better satisfied", the other man answered, "if I had got back my watch and my note-case. But I suppose he passed them on to one of his confederates."

Then the officer lost patience. "Look here", said he, "you are behaving like a fool. You come to a race-meeting, like a blooming mug, with a gold watch sticking out, asking for trouble, and when you get what you asked for, you let the crooks hop off with the goods while you go dandering about after a perfectly respectable gentleman. You bring me trapesing out here on a wild goose chase, and when it turns out that there isn't any wild goose, you make silly, insulting remarks. You ought to have more sense at your age. Now, I'll just take your name and address and then you'd better clear off."

Once more he produced the Black Maria note-book, and when he had entered the particulars he dismissed the straw-hatted man, who slunk off, dejected but still muttering.

Left alone with the late accused, the officer became genially and politely apologetic. But Pottermack would have none of his apologies. The affair had gone off to his complete satisfaction, and, in spite of some rather half-hearted protests, he insisted on celebrating the happy conclusion by the replenishment of the brown jug. Finally, the accused and the minion of the law emerged from the inn together and took their way back along the road to the station, beguiling the time by amicable converse on the subject of crooks and their ways and the peculiar mentality of the straw-hatted man.

It was a triumphant end to what had threatened to be a most disastrous incident. But yet, when he came to consider it at leisure, Pottermack was by no means satisfied. The expedition had been a failure, and he now wished, heartily, that he had left well alone and simply burnt the notes. His intention had been to distribute them in small parcels among various pickpockets, whereby they would have been thrown into circulation with the certainty that it would have been impossible to trace them. That scheme had failed utterly. There they were, fifteen stolen notes, in the poor-box of Illingham church. When the reverend incumbent found them, he would certainly be surprised, and, no doubt, gratified. Of course, he would pay them into his bank; and then the murder would be out. The munificent gift would resolve itself into the dump of a hunted and hard-pressed pickpocket; and Mr. Pottermack's name and address was in the note-book of the plain-clothes constable.

Of course, there was no means of connecting him directly with the dump. But there was the unfortunate coincidence that both he and the stolen notes were connected with Borley, Buckinghamshire. That coincidence could hardly fail to be noticed; and, added to his known proximity to the church, it might create a very awkward situation. In short, Mr. Pottermack had brought his pigs to the wrong market. He had planned to remove the area of investigation from his own neighbourhood to one at a safe and comfortable distance; instead of which, he had laid down a clue leading straight to his own door.

It was a lamentable affair. As he sat in the homeward train with an unread evening paper on his knee, he found himself recalling the refrain of the old revivalist hymn and asking himself "Oh, what shall the harvest be?"

---

## CHAPTER IX. — PROVIDENCE INTERVENES

IN his capacity of medico-legal adviser to the "Griffin" Life Assurance Company, Thorndyke saw a good deal of Mr. Stalker, who, in addition to his connection with Perkins's Bank, held the post of Managing Director of the "Griffin". For if the Bank had but rarely any occasion to seek Thorndyke's advice, the Assurance Office was almost daily confronted with problems which called for expert guidance. It thus happened that, about three weeks after the date of the Illingham Races, Thorndyke looked in at Mr. Stalker's office in response to a telephone message to discuss the discrepancies between a proposal form and the medical evidence given at an inquest on the late proposer. The matter of this discussion does not concern us and need not be detailed here. It occupied some considerable time, and when Thorndyke had stated his conclusions, he rose to take his departure. As he turned towards the door, Mr. Stalker held up a detaining hand.

"By the way, doctor", said he, "I think you were rather interested in that curious case of disappearance that I told you about—one of our branch managers, you may remember."

"I remember", said Thorndyke; "James Lewson of your Borley branch."

"That's the man", Stalker assented, adding: "I believe you keep a card index in your head."

"And the best place to keep it", retorted Thorndyke. "But what about Lewson? Has he been run to earth?"

"No; but the notes that he took with him have. You remember that he went off with a hundred pounds—twenty five-pound notes, of all of which we were able to ascertain the numbers. Now, the numbers of those notes were at once given to the police, who circulated the information in all the likely quarters and kept a sharp look-out for their appearance. Yet in all this time, up to a week or two ago, there was not a sign of one of them. Then a most odd thing happened. The whole lot of them made their appearance almost simultaneously."

"Very remarkable", commented Thorndyke.

"Very", agreed Stalker. "But there is something still more queer about the affair. Of course, each note, as it was reported, was rigorously traced. As a rule there was no difficulty—up to a certain point. And at that point the trail broke off short, and that point was the possession of the note by a person known to the police. In every case in which tracing was possible, the trail led back to an unquestionable crook."

"And were the crooks unable to say where they got the notes?"

"Oh, not at all. They were able, in every case, to give the most lucid and convincing accounts of the way in which they came into possession of the notes. Only, unfortunately, not one of them could give 'a local habitation and a name.' They had all received the notes from total strangers."

"They probably had", said Thorndyke, "without the stranger's concurrence."

"Exactly. But you see the oddity of the affair—at least, I expect you do. Remember that, although the individual notes were reported at different times, on tracing them to their origin it looks almost as if the whole of them had come into circulation on the same day; about three weeks ago. Now, what does that suggest to you?"

"The obvious suggestion", replied Thorndyke, "seems to be that Lewson had been robbed; that some fortunate thief had managed to relieve him of the whole consignment at one coup. The only other explanation—and it is far less probable—is that Lewson deliberately jettisoned an incriminating cargo."

"Yes", Stalker agreed doubtfully, "that is a possibility; but, as you say, it is very much less probable. For if he had simply thrown them away, there would be no reason why they should have been so invariably traceable to a member of the criminal class; and surely, out of the whole lot, there would have been one or two honest persons who would admit to having found them. No, I feel pretty certain that Lewson has been robbed, and if he has, he must be in a mighty poor way. One is almost tempted to feel sorry for him."

"He has certainly made a terrible hash of his affairs", said Thorndyke; and with this, the subject having been exhausted, he picked up his hat and stick and took his departure.

But as he wended his way back to the Temple he cogitated profoundly on what Stalker had told him; and very surprised would Mr. Stalker have been if he could have been let into the matter of those cogitations. For, as to what had really happened, Thorndyke could make an approximate guess, though guesses were not very satisfying to a man of his exact habit of mind. But he had been expecting those notes to reappear, and he had expected that when they did reappear it would prove impossible to trace them to their real source.

Nevertheless, though events had befallen, so to speak, according to plan, he speculated curiously on the possible circumstances that had determined the issue of the whole consignment at once; and on arrival at his chambers he made certain notes in his private shorthand which he bestowed in a small portfolio labelled "James Lewson", which, in its turn, reposed, safely under lock and key, in the cabinet in which he kept his confidential documents.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pottermack was passing through a period of tribulation and gnawing anxiety. Again and again did he curse the folly that had impelled him, when everything seemed to have settled down so comfortably, to launch those notes into the world to start a fresh train of trouble. Again and again did he follow in imagination what appeared to be the inevitable course of events. With horrid vividness did his fancy reconstruct the scenes of that calamitous comedy; the

astonished parson lifting the treasure with incredulous joy from the poor-box; the local bank manager carrying the notes round to the police station; the plain-clothes constable triumphantly producing his note-book and pointing to the significant word "Borley"; and finally, the wooden-faced detective officer confronting him in his dining-room and asking embarrassing questions. Sometimes his imagination went farther, and, becoming morbid, pictured Mr. Gallett, the mason, volunteering evidence, with a resulting exploration of the well. But this was only when he was unusually depressed.

In his more optimistic moods he presented the other side of the case. If enquiries were made, he would, naturally, deny all knowledge of the notes. And who was to contradict him? There was not a particle of evidence that could connect him with them directly—at least, he believed there was not. But still, deep down in his consciousness was the knowledge that he was connected with them; that he had taken them from the dead man's pocket and he had dumped them in the church. And Mr. Pottermack was no more immune than the rest of us from the truth that "conscience does make cowards of us all."

So, in those troublous times, by day and by night, in his walks abroad and in his solitude at home, he lived in a state of continual apprehension. The fat was in the fire and he waited with constantly strained ears to catch the sound of its sizzling; and though, as the days and then the weeks went by and no sound of sizzling became audible, the acuteness of his anxiety wore off, still his peace of mind was gone utterly and he walked in the shadow of dangers unknown and incalculable. And so he might have gone on indefinitely but for one of those trivial chances that have befallen most of us and that sometimes produce results so absurdly disproportionate to their own insignificance.

The occasion of this fortunate chance was a long, solitary walk through the beautiful Buckinghamshire lanes. Of late, in his disturbed state of mind, which yielded neither to the charms of his garden nor the allurements of his workshop, Mr. Pottermack had developed into an inveterate pedestrian; and on this particular day he had taken a long round, which brought him at length, tired and hungry, to the town of Aylesbury, where, at a frowsy restaurant in a bystreet, he sat him down to rest and feed. It was a frugal meal that he ordered, for with the joy of living had gone his zest for food. Indeed, to such depths of despondency had he sunk that he actually scandalized the foreign proprietor by asking for a glass of water.

Now, it happened that on an adjacent chair was an evening paper. It was weeks old, badly crumpled and none too clean. Almost automatically, Mr. Pottermack reached out for it, laid it on the table beside him and smoothed out its crumpled pages. Not that he had any hankering for news; but, like most of us, he had contracted the pernicious habit of miscellaneous reading—which is often but an idle substitute for thought—and he scanned the ill-printed columns in mere boredom. He was not in the least interested in the Hackney Man who had kicked a cat and been fined forty shillings. No doubt it served him right—and the cat too, perhaps—but it was no affair of his, Pottermack's. Nevertheless he let an inattentive eye ramble aimlessly up and down the page, lightly scanning the trivial vulgarities that headed the paragraphs, while in the background of his consciousness, hovering, as it were, about the threshold, lurked the everlasting theme of those accursed notes.

Suddenly his roving eye came to a dead stop, for it had alighted on the word "Illingham". With suddenly sharpened attention, he turned back to the heading and read:

'Sacrilege in a Surrey Church'

'A robbery of a kind that is now becoming increasingly common occurred late in the afternoon of last Tuesday at the picturesque and venerable church of Illingham. This was the day of the races on the adjacent course, and it is believed that the outrage was committed by some of the doubtful characters who are always to be found at race-meetings. At any rate, when the sexton entered to close the church in the evening, he found that the lid of the poor-box had been wrenched open, and, of course, the contents, whatever they may have been, abstracted. The rector is greatly distressed at the occurrence, not on account of what has been stolen—for he remarked, with a pensive smile, that the loss is probably limited to the cost of repairing the box—but because he holds strong opinions on the duty of a clergyman to leave his church open for private prayer and meditation, and he fears that he may be compelled to close it in future, at least on race-days.'

Mr. Pottermack read this paragraph through, first with ravenous haste and then again, slowly and with the minutest attention. It was incredible. He could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes. Yet there it was, a clear and unmistakable message, of which the marvellous significance was to be grasped by him alone of all the world. Providence—which is reported to make some queer selections for its favourites—had stepped in and mercifully repaired his error.

In a moment he was a new man, or rather the old man restored. For he was saved. Now could he go abroad with a confident step and look the world in the face. Now could he take his ease at home in peace and security; could return with gusto to his garden and know once more the joys of labour in his workshop. With a fresh zest he fell to upon the remainder of his meal. He even electrified the proprietor by calling for coffee and a green Chartreuse. And when he at length went forth refreshed, to take the road homeward, he seemed to walk upon air.

---

## CHAPTER X. — A RETROSPECT

THE fortunate ending of the great note adventure, which had at one time looked so threatening, had a profound effect on Mr. Pottermack's state of mind, and through this on his subsequent actions. Wherever the notes might be circulating, they were, he felt confident, well out of his neighbourhood; and since they had all fallen into the hands of thieves, he was equally confident that they would prove untraceable. So far as he was concerned, they had served their purpose. The field of inquiry concerning Lewson's disappearance was now shifted from Borley to the localities in which those notes had made their appearance.

Thus, to Mr. Pottermack it appeared that he was finally rid of Lewson, alive or dead. The incident was closed. He could now consign the whole horrible affair to oblivion, forget it if he could, or at least remember it only as a hideous experience which he had passed through and finished with, just as he might remember certain other experiences which belonged to the unhappy past. Now he might give his whole attention to the future. He was still a comparatively young man, despite the grizzled hair upon his temples. And Fortune was deeply in his debt. It was time that he began to collect from her some of the arrears.

Now, whenever Mr. Pottermack let his thoughts stray into the future, the picture that his fancy painted was wont to present a certain constant deviation from the present. It was not that the surroundings were different. Still in imagination he saw himself rambling through the lovely Buckinghamshire lanes, busying himself in his workshop or whiling away the pleasant hours in the walled garden among his flowers and his fruit trees. But in those pictures of the sunny future that was to indemnify him for the gloomy past there were always two figures; and one of them was that of the comely, gracious young widow who had already brought so much sunshine into his rather solitary life.

During the last few strenuous weeks he had seen little of her, indeed he had hardly seen her at all. Now that he could put behind him for ever the events that had filled those weeks, now that he was free from the haunting menace of the blackmailer's incalculable actions and could settle down to a stable life with his future in his own hands, the time had arrived when he might begin to mould that future in accordance with his heart's desire.

Thus reflecting on the afternoon following his visit to Aylesbury, he proceeded to make the first move. Having smartened himself up in a modest way, he took down from his shelves a favourite volume to serve as a pretext for a call, and set forth with it in his pocket towards the quiet lane on the fringe of the town wherein Mrs. Alice Bellard had her habitation. And a very pleasant habitation it was, though, indeed, it was no more than an old-fashioned country cottage, built to supply the simple needs of some rural worker or village craftsman. But houses, like dogs, have a way of reflecting the personalities of their owners; and this little dwelling, modest as it was, conveyed to the beholder a subtle sense of industry, of ordered care, and a somewhat fastidious taste.

Pottermack stood for a few moments with his hand on the little wooden gate, looking up with an appreciative eye at the ripe red brickwork, the golden tiles of the roof, and the little stone tablet with the initials of the first owners and the date, 1761. Then he opened the latch and walked slowly up the path. Through the open window came the sound of a piano rendering, with no little skill and feeling, one of Chopin's preludes. He waited at the door, listening, until the final notes of the piece were played, when he turned and rapped out a flourish on the brightly burnished brass knocker.

Almost immediately the door opened, revealing a girl of about sixteen, who greeted him with a friendly smile, and forthwith, without question or comment inducted him to the sitting-room, where Mrs. Bellard had just risen from the piano-stool.

"I am afraid", said he, as they shook hands, "that I am interrupting your playing—in fact, I know I am. I was half inclined to wait out in the garden and enjoy your performance without disturbing you."

"That would have been foolish of you", she replied, "when there is a nice, comfortable armchair in which you can sit and smoke your pipe and listen at your ease—if you want to."

"I do, most certainly", said he. "But first, lest I should forget it, let me hand you this book. I mentioned it to you once—'The Harvest of a Quiet Eye'. It is by a nice old west country parson and I think you will like it."

"I am sure I shall if you do", she said. "We seem to agree in most things."

"So we do", assented Pottermack, "even to our favourite brands of snail. Which reminds me that the pleasures of the chase seem to have been rather neglected of late."

"Yes, I have been quite busy lately furbishing up the house. But I have nearly finished. In a few days I shall have everything straight and tidy, and then a-snailing we will go."

"We will", he agreed, "and if we find that we are exhausting the subject of molluscs, we might, perhaps, give a passing thought to the question of beetles. They are practically inexhaustible and they are not so hackneyed as butterflies and moths, and not so troublesome to keep. And they are really very beautiful and interesting creatures."

"I suppose they are", she said a little doubtfully, "when you have got over your prejudice against their undeniable tendency to crawliness. But I am afraid you will have to do the slaughtering. I really couldn't kill the poor little wretches."

"Oh, I will do that cheerfully", said Pottermack, "if you will make the captures."

"Very well; then, on that understanding I will consider the beetle question. And now, would you really like me to play to you a little?"

"I should like it immensely. I seem to hear so little music nowadays, and you play so delightfully. But are you sure you don't mind?"

She laughed softly as she sat down at the piano. "Mind, indeed!" she exclaimed. "Did you ever know a musician who wasn't only too delighted to play to a sympathetic listener? It is the whole joy and reward of the art. Now, you just sit in that chair and fill your pipe, and I will play to you some of the things that I like playing to myself and that you have got to like too."

Obediently Pottermack seated himself in the easy-chair and reflectively filled his pipe while he watched the skilful hands moving gracefully with effortless precision over the keyboard. At first she kept to regular pianoforte music, mostly that of Chopin: one or two of the shorter nocturnes, a prelude and a polonaise, and a couple of Mendelssohn's "Lieder". But presently she began to ramble away reminiscently among all sorts of unconventional trifles: old-fashioned songs, country dances, scraps of church music, and even one or two time-honoured hymn tunes. And as she played these simple melodies, softly, tastefully, and with infinite feeling, she glanced furtively from time to time at her visitor until, seeing he was no longer looking at her but was gazing dreamily out of the window, she let her eyes rest steadily on his face. There was something very curious in that long, steady look; a strange mingling of sadness, of pity and tenderness and of yearning affection with a certain vague anxiety as if something in his face was puzzling her. The eyes that dwelt on him with such soft regard yet seemed to ask a question.

And Pottermack, sitting motionless as a statue, grasping his unlighted pipe, let the simple, homely melodies filter into his soul and deliver their message of remembrance. His thoughts were at once near and far away; near to the woman at his side, yet far away from the quiet room and the sunlit garden on which his eyes seemed to rest. Let us for a while leave him to his reverie, and if we may not follow his thoughts, at least—in order that we may the better enter into the inwardness of this history—transport ourselves into the scenes that memory is calling up before his eyes.

Fifteen years ago there was no such person as Marcus Pottermack. The sober, middle-aged man, greyheaded, bearded, spectacled, who sits dreaming in the widow's parlour, was a handsome, sprightly youth of twenty-two—Jeffrey Brandon by name—who, with his shapely, clean-shaven face and his striking Grecian nose, had the look and manner of a young Olympian. And his personality matched his appearance. Amiable and kindly by nature, with a gay and buoyant temperament that commended him alike to friends and strangers, his keen intelligence, his industry and energy promised well for his worldly success in the future.

Young as he was, he had been, at this time, engaged for two years. And here again he was more than commonly fortunate. It was not merely that the maiden of his choice was comely, sweet-natured, clever and accomplished; or that she was a girl of character and spirit; or even that she had certain modest expectations. The essence of the good fortune lay in the fact that Jeffrey Brandon and Alice Bentley were not merely lovers; they were staunch friends and sympathetic companions, with so many interests in common that it was incredible that they should ever tire of each other's society.

One of their chief interests—perhaps the greatest—was music. They were both enthusiasts. But whereas Jeffrey's accomplishments went no farther than a good ear, a pleasant baritone voice and the power of singing a part at sight, Alice was really a musician. Her skill at the piano was of the professional class; she was a fair organist, and in addition she had a good and well-trained contralto voice. Naturally enough, it happened that they drifted into the choir of the little friendly Evangelical church that they attended together, and this gave them a new and delightful occupation. Now and again Alice would take a service at the organ; and then there were practice nights and preparations for special services, musical festivals or informal sacred concerts which kept them busy with the activities that they both loved. And so their lives ran on, serenely, peacefully, filled with quiet enjoyment of the satisfying present, with the promise of a yet more happy future when they should be married and in full possession of each other.

And then, in a moment, the whole fabric of their happiness collapsed like a house of cards. As if in an incomprehensible nightmare, the elements of that tragedy unfolded: the amazing accusation, the still more amazing discovery; the trial at the Old Bailey Sessions, the conviction, the sentence; the bitter, despairing farewell, and, last of all, the frowning portals of the convict prison.

Of course, Alice Bentley scouted the idea of her lover's guilt. She roundly declared that the whole affair was a plot, a wicked and foolish miscarriage of justice, and she announced her intention of meeting him at the prison gate when he should be set free, to claim him as her promised husband, that she might try to make up to him by her devotion and sympathy what he had suffered from the world's injustice. And when it was coldly pointed out to her that he had had a fair trial and had been found guilty by a jury of his fellow-countrymen, she broke away indignantly and thereafter withdrew herself from the society of these fair-weather friends.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate Jeffrey, meditating in his prison cell, had come with no less resolution to his decision. In so far as was possible he would bear the burden of his misfortune alone. Deeply, passionately as he loved the dear girl who, almost alone of all the world, still believed in his innocence, he must cast her out of his life for ever. He gloried in her loyalty, but he could not accept her sacrifice. Alice—his Alice—should never marry a convict. For that was what he was: a convicted thief and forger; and nothing but a miracle could alter his position. The fact that he was innocent was beside the mark, since his innocence was known only to himself and one other—the nameless villain who had set this infamous trap for him. To all the rest of the world he was a guilty man; and the world was right according to the known facts. He had had

a fair trial, a perfectly fair trial. The prosecution had not been vindictive, the judge had summed up fairly, and the jury had found him guilty; and the jury had been right. On the evidence before them, they could have found no other verdict. He had no complaint against them. No one could have guessed that all the evidence was false and illusory. From which it followed that he must go through life stamped as a convicted thief, and as such could never be a possible husband for Alice Bentley.

But he realized very clearly that Alice, certain as she was of his innocence, would utterly refuse to accept this view. To her he was a martyr, and as such she would proclaim him before all the world. On his release, she would insist on the restoration of the status quo ante. Of that he felt certain; and hour after hour, in his abundant solitude, he sought vainly a solution of the problem. How should he meet her demand? Letters he knew would be useless. She would wait for the day of his release, and then—The prospect of having, after all, to refuse her love, to repudiate her loyalty, was one that wrung his heart to contemplate.

And then, in the most unforeseen way, the problem was solved. His escape from the gang was totally unpremeditated. He just saw a chance, when the attention of the civil guard was relaxed, and took it instantly. When he found the absent bather's clothes upon the shore and hastily assumed them in place of his prison suit, he suspected that the bather was already dead, and the report which he read in the next day's paper confirmed this belief. But during the next few weeks, as he tramped across country to Liverpool—subsisting, not without qualms, on the little money that he had found in the unknown bather's pockets, eked out by an occasional odd job—he watched the papers eagerly for further news. For six long weeks he found nothing either to alarm or reassure him. Indeed, it was not until he had secured a job as deck-hand on an American tramp steamer and was on the point of departure that he learned the welcome tidings. On the very night before the ship was due to sail, he was sitting in the forecastle, watching an evening paper that was passing round from hand to hand, when the man who was reading it held it towards him, pointing with a grimy forefinger to a particular paragraph.

"I call that damned hard luck, I do", said he. "Just you read it, mate, and see what you think of it."

Jeffrey took the paper, and, glancing at the indicated paragraph, suddenly sat up with a start. It was the report of an inquest on the body of a man who had been found drowned; which body had been identified as that of Jeffrey Brandon, a convict who had recently escaped from Colport Gaol. He read it through slowly, and then, with an inarticulate mumble, handed the paper back to his sympathetic messmate. For some minutes he sat dazed, hardly able to realize this sudden change in his condition. That the bather's body would, sooner or later, be found he had never doubted. But he had expected that the finding of it and its identification would solve the mystery of his escape and immediately give rise to a hue and cry. Never had he dreamed that the body could be identified as his.

But now that this incredible thing had happened, he would be simply written off and forgotten. He was free. And not only was he free; Alice was free too. Now he would quietly pass out of her life without bitterness or misunderstanding; not forgotten, indeed, but cherished only, in the years to come, with loving remembrance.

Nevertheless, when at daybreak on the morrow the good ship Potomac of New Orleans crossed the Mersey bar, the new deck-hand, Joe Watson, looked back at the receding land with a heavy heart and a moistening eye. The world was all before him. But it was an empty world. All that could make life gracious and desirable was slipping away farther with each turn of the propeller, and a waste of waters was stretching out between him and his heart's desire.

His life in America need not be followed in detail. He was of the type that almost inevitably prospers in that country. Energetic, industrious, handy, ready to put his heart into any job that offered; an excellent accountant with a sound knowledge of banking business and general finance, he was not long in finding a position in which he could prove his worth. And he had undeniably good luck. Within a year of his landing, almost penniless, he had managed, by hard work and the most drastic economy, to scrape together a tiny nest-egg of capital. Then he met with a young American, nearly as poor as himself but of the stuff of which millionaires are made; a man of inexhaustible energy, quick, shrewd and resolute, and possessed by a devouring ambition to be rich. But notwithstanding his avidity for wealth, Joseph Walden was singularly free from the vices of his class. He looked to become rich by work, good management, thrift, and a reputation for straight dealing. He was a man of strict integrity, and, if a little blunt and outspoken, was still a good friend and a pleasant companion.

With his shrewd judgment, Walden saw at once that his new friend would make an ideal collaborator in a business venture. Each had special qualifications that the other lacked, and the two together would form a highly efficient combination. Accordingly the two young men pooled forces and embarked under the style and title of the Walden Pottermack Company. (Jeffrey had abandoned the name of Joe Watson on coming ashore, and, moved by some whimsical sentiment, had adopted as his godparent the ship which had carried him away to freedom and the new life. With a slight variation of spelling, he was now Marcus Pottermack.)

For some time the new firm struggled on under all the difficulties that attend insufficient capital. But the two partners held together in absolute unison. They neglected no chances, they spared no effort, they accepted willingly the barest profits, and they practised thrift to the point of penury. And slowly the tension of poverty relaxed. The little snowball of their capital began to grow, imperceptibly at first, but then with a constantly increasing acceleration—for wealth, like population, tends to increase by geometrical progression. In a year or two the struggles were over and the Company was a well-established concern. A few more years and the snowball had rolled up to quite impressive dimensions. The Walden Pottermack Company had become a leading business house, and the partners men of respectable substance.

It was at this point that the difference between the two men began to make itself apparent. To the American, the

established prosperity of the firm meant the attainment of the threshold of big business with the prospect of really big money. His fixed intention was to push the success for all that it was worth, to march on to greater and yet greater things, even unto million-aiedom. Pottermack, on the other hand, began to feel that he had enough. Great wealth held out no allurements for him. Nor did he, like Walden, enjoy the sport of winning and piling it up. At first he had worked hard for a mere livelihood, then for a competence that should presently enable him to live his own life. And now, as he counted up his savings, it seemed to him that he had achieved his end. With what he had he could purchase all that he desired and that was purchasable.

It was not purchasable in America. Grateful as he was to the country that had sheltered him and taken him to her heart as one of her own sons, yet he found himself from time to time turning a wistful eye towards the land beyond the great ocean. More and more, as the time went on, he was conscious of a hankering for things that America could not give; for the sweet English countryside, the immemorial villages with their ancient churches, their oast-houses and thatched barns, for all the lingering remains of an older civilization.

And there was another element of unrest. All through the years the image of Alice had never ceased to haunt him. At first it was but as the cherished memory of a loved one who had died and passed out of his life for ever. But as the years ran on there came a subtle change. Gradually he began to think of their separation, not as something final and irretrievable but as admitting in a vague and shadowy way of the idea of reunion this side of the grave. It was very nebulous and indefinite, but it clung to him persistently, and ever the idea grew more definite. The circumstances were, indeed, changed utterly. When he left her, he was a convict, infamous in the eyes of all the world. But the convict, Jeffrey Brandon, was dead and forgotten, whereas he, Marcus Pottermack, was a man of position and repute. The case was entirely altered.

So he would argue with himself in moments of expansiveness. And then he would cast away his dreams, chiding himself for his folly and telling himself that doubtless, she had long since married and settled down, that dead he was and dead he must remain, and not seek to rise again like some unquiet spirit to trouble the living.

Nevertheless, the heaven continued to work, and the end of it was that Mr. Pottermack wound up his business affairs and made arrangements for his retirement. His partner regretfully agreed to take over his interest in the company—which he did on terms that were not merely just but generous—and thus his commercial life came to an end. A week or two later he took his passage for England.

Now, nebulous and shadowy as his ideas had been with reference to Alice, partaking rather of the nature of day-dreams than of thoughts implying any settled purpose, no sooner had he landed in the Old Country than he became possessed by a craving, at least to hear of her, to make certain that she was still alive, if possible to see her. He could not conceal from himself some faint hope that she might still be unmarried. And if she were—well, then it would be time for him to consider what he would do.

His first proceeding was to establish himself in lodgings in the old neighbourhood, where he spent his days loitering about the streets that she had been used to frequent. On Sundays he attended the church with scrupulous regularity, modestly occupying a back seat and lingering in the porch as the congregation filed out. Many familiar faces he noted, changed more or less by the passage of time; but no one recognized in the grey-haired, bearded, spectacled stranger the handsome youth whom they had known in the years gone by. Indeed, how should they, when that youth had died, cut off in the midst of his career of crime?

He would have liked to make some discreet enquiries, but no enquiries would have been discreet. Above all things, it was necessary for him to preserve his character as a stranger from America. And so he could do no more than keep his vigil in the streets and at the church, watching with hungry eyes for the beloved face—and watching in vain.

And then at last, after weeks of patient searching with ever-dwindling hope, he had his reward. It was on Easter Sunday, a day which had, in old times, been kept as the chief musical festival of the year. Apparently the custom was still maintained, for the church was unusually full and there was evidently a special choir. Mr. Pottermack's hopes revived, though he braced himself for another disappointment. Surely, he thought, if she ever comes to this church, she will come to-day.

And this time he was not disappointed. He had not long been seated on the modest bench near the door when a woman, soberly dressed in black, entered and walked past him up the aisle, where she paused for a few moments looking about her somewhat with the air of a stranger. He knew her in a moment by her figure, her gait, and the poise of her head. But if he had had any doubt, it would have been instantly dispelled when she entered a pew, and, before sitting down, glanced back quickly at the people behind her.

For Pottermack it was a tremendous moment. It was as if he were looking on the face of one risen from the dead. For some minutes after she had sat down and become hidden from his sight by the people behind her he felt dazed and half-incredulous of the wonderful vision that he had seen. But as the effects of the shock passed, he began to consider the present position. That single instantaneous glance had shown him that she had aged a little more than the lapse of time accounted for. She looked graver than of old, perhaps even a thought sombre, and something matronly and middle-aged in the fashion of her dress made disquieting suggestions.

When the long service was ended, Pottermack waited on his bench watching her come down the aisle and noting that she neither spoke to nor seemed to recognize any one. As soon as she had passed his bench, he rose and joined the throng behind her. His intention was to follow her and discover, if possible, where she lived. But as they came into the crowded

porch he heard an elderly woman exclaim in a markedly loud tone:

"Why, surely it is Miss Bentley!"

"Yes", was the reply in the well-remembered voice. "At least, I was Miss Bentley when you knew me. Nowadays I am Mrs. Bellard."

Pottermack, standing close behind her and staring at a notice-board, drew a deep breath. Only in that moment of bitter disappointment did he realize how much he had hoped.

"Oh, indeed", said the loud-spoken woman. "Mrs. Bennett—it was Bennett that you said?"

"No, Bellard—B.e.l.l.a.r.d."

"Oh, Bellard. Yes. And so you are married. I have often wondered what became of you when you stopped coming to the church after—er—all those years ago. I hope your good husband is well."

"I lost my husband four years ago", Mrs. Bellard replied in a somewhat dry, matter-of-fact tone.

Pottermack's heart gave a bound and he listened harder than ever.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed the other woman. "What a dreadfully sad thing! And are there any children?"

"No; no children."

"Ah, indeed. But perhaps it is as well, though it must be lonely for you. Are you living in London?"

"No", replied Mrs. Bellard, "I have only just come up for the week-end. I live at Borley in Buckinghamshire—not far from Aylesbury."

"Do you? It must be frightfully dull for you living all alone right down in the country. I do hope you have found comfortable lodgings".

Mrs. Bellard laughed softly. "You are pitying me more than you need, Mrs. Goodman. I am not dull at all, and I don't have to live in lodgings. I have a house to myself. It is only a very small one, but it is big enough and it is my own; so I am secure of a shelter for the rest of my life."

Here the two women drifted out of distinct ear-shot, though their voices continued to be audible as they walked away, for they both spoke in raised tones, Mrs. Goodman being, apparently, a little dull of hearing. But Pottermack had heard enough. Drawing out his pocket-book, he carefully entered the name and the address, such as it was, glancing at the notice-board as if he were copying some particulars from it. Then he emerged from the porch and walked after the two women; and when they separated, he followed Mrs. Bellard at a discreet distance, not that he now had any curiosity as to her present place of abode, but merely that he might pleasure his eyes with the sight of her trim figure tripping youthfully along the dull suburban street.

Mr. Pottermack's joy and triumph were tempered with a certain curiosity, especially with regard to the late Mr. Bellard. But his cogitations were not permitted to hinder the necessary action. Having no time-table, it being Sunday, he made his way to Marylebone Station to get a list of the week-day trains; and at that station he presented himself on the following morning at an unearthly hour, suitcase in hand, to catch the first train to Borley. Arrived at the little town, he at once took a room at the Railway Inn, from whence he was able conveniently to issue forth and stroll down the station approach as each of the London trains came in.

It was late in the afternoon when, among the small crowd of passengers who came out of the station, he saw her, stepping forward briskly and carrying a good-sized handbag. He turned, and, walking back slowly up the approach, let her pass him and draw a good distance ahead. He kept her in sight without difficulty in the sparsely peopled streets until, at the outskirts of the town, she turned into a quiet by-lane and disappeared. Thereupon he quickened his pace and entered the lane just in time to see her opening the garden gate of a pleasant-looking cottage, at the open door of which a youthful maidservant stood, greeting her with a welcoming grin. Pottermack walked slowly past the little house, noting the name, "Lavender Cottage", painted on the gate, and went on to the top of the lane, where he turned and retraced his steps, indulging himself as he passed the second time with a long and approving look at the shrine which held the object of his worship.

On his return to the inn he proceeded to make enquiries as to a reliable house-agent, in response to which he was given, not only the name of a recommended agent but certain other more valuable information. For the landlord, interested in a prospective new resident, was questioning Pottermack as to the class of house that he was seeking when the landlady interposed.

"What about 'The Chestnuts,' Tom, where Colonel Barnett used to live? That's empty and for sale—been empty for months. And it's a good house though rather out-of-the-way. Perhaps that might suit this gentleman."

Further details convinced Mr. Pottermack that it would, and the upshot was that on the very next day, after a careful inspection, the deposit was paid to the agents, Messrs. Hook and Walker, and a local solicitor was instructed to carry out the conveyance. Within a week the principal builder of the town had sent in his estimates for repairs and decoration, and Mr. Pottermack was wrestling with the problem of household furnishing amidst a veritable library of catalogues.

But these activities did not distract him from his ultimate object. Realizing that, as a stranger to the town, his chance of



getting a regular introduction to Mrs. Bellard was infinitely remote, he decided to waive the conventions and take a short-cut. But the vital question was, would she recognize him? It was a question that perplexed him profoundly and that he debated endlessly without reaching any conclusion. Of course, under normal circumstances there would be no question at all. Obviously, in spite of his beard, his spectacles, and his grey hair, she would recognize him instantly. But the circumstances were very far from normal. To her, he was a person who had died some fifteen years ago. And the news of his death would have come to her, not as a mere rumour or vague report, but as an ascertained fact. He had been found dead and identified by those who knew him well. She could never have had a moment's doubt that he was dead.

How, then, would she react to the conflict between her knowledge and the evidence of her senses? Which of the two alternate possibilities would she accept? That a dead man might come to life again or that one human being might bear so miraculous a resemblance to another? He could form no opinion. But of one thing he felt confident. She would certainly be deeply impressed by the resemblance, and that state of mind would easily cover anything unconventional in the manner of their meeting.

His plan was simple to crudeness. At odd times, in the intervals of his labours, he made it his business to pass the entrance of the lane—Malthouse Lane was its name—from whence he could see her house. For several days no opportunity presented itself. But one morning, a little more than a week after his arrival, on glancing up the lane, he perceived a manifestly feminine hat above the shrubs in her garden. Thereupon he turned boldly into the little thoroughfare and walked on until he was opposite the cottage, when he could see her, equipped with gardening gloves and a rather juvenile fork, tidying up the borders. Unobserved by her, he stepped up to the wooden palings, and, lifting his hat, enquired apologetically if she could inform him whether, if he followed the lane, he would come to the Aylesbury road.

At the first sound of his voice she started up and gazed at him with an expression of the utmost astonishment; nor was her astonishment diminished when she looked at his face. For an appreciable time she stood quite still and rigid, with her eyes fixed on him and her lips parted as if she had seen a spectre. After an interval, Pottermack—who was more or less prepared, though his heart was thumping almost audibly—repeated his question, with apologies for intruding on her; whereupon, recovering herself with an effort, she came across to the palings and began to give him some directions in a breathless, agitated voice, while the gloved hand that she rested on the palings trembled visibly.

Pottermack listened deferentially and then ventured to explain his position: that he was a stranger, about to settle in the district and anxious to make himself acquainted with his new surroundings. As this was received quite graciously, he went on to comment in admiring terms on the appearance of the cottage and its happy situation in this pleasant leafy lane. Through this channel they drifted into amicable conversation concerning the town and the surrounding country, and as they talked—Pottermack designedly keeping his face partially turned away from her—she continued to watch him with a devouring gaze and with a curious expression of bewilderment and incredulity mingled with something reminiscent, far away and dreamy. Finally, encouraged by his success, Pottermack proceeded to expound the embryonic state of his household, and enquired if by any chance she happened to know of a reliable middle-aged woman who would take charge of it.

"How many are you in family?" Mrs. Bellard asked with ill-concealed eagerness.

"My entire family", he replied, "is covered by one rather shabby hat."

"Then you ought to have no difficulty in finding a housekeeper. I do, in fact", she continued, "know of a woman who might suit you, a middle-aged widow named Gadby—quite a Dickens name, isn't it? I know very little about her abilities, but I do know that she is a pleasant, good-natured, and highly respectable woman. If you like, and will give me your address, I will send her to see you."

Mr. Pottermack jumped at the offer, and having written down his name and his address at the inn (at the former of which she glanced with eager curiosity) he thanked her warmly, and, wishing her good-morning with a flourish of the shabby hat, went on his way rejoicing. That same evening, Mrs. Gadby called at the inn and was promptly engaged; and a very fortunate transaction the engagement proved. For, not only did she turn out to be an incomparable servant, but she constituted herself a link between her employer and her patroness. Not that the link was extremely necessary, for whenever Pottermack chanced to meet Mrs. Bellard—and it was surprising how often it happened—she greeted him frankly as an acknowledged acquaintance; so that gradually—and not so very gradually either—their footing as acquaintances ripened into that of friends. And so, as the weeks passed and their friendship grew up into a pleasant, sympathetic intimacy, Mr. Pottermack felt that all was going well and that the time was at hand when he should collect some of the arrears that were outstanding in his account with Fortune.

But Fortune had not done with him yet. The card that she held up her sleeve was played a few weeks after he had entered into occupation of his new house and was beginning to be comfortably settled. He was standing by the counter of a shop where he had made some purchases when he became aware of some person standing behind him and somewhat to his left. He could not see the person excepting as a vague shadow, but he had the feeling that he was being closely scrutinized. It was not a pleasant feeling, for, altered as he was, some inopportune recognition was always possible; and when the person moved from the left side to the right, Mr. Pottermack began to grow distinctly apprehensive. His right ear bore a little purple birthmark that was highly distinctive, and the movement of the unknown observer associated itself very disagreeably in his mind with this mark. After enduring the scrutiny for some time with growing uneasiness, he turned and glanced at the face of the scrutinizer. Then he received a very distinct shock, but at the same time was a little reassured. For the stranger was not a stranger at all, but his old friend and fellow-clerk, James Lewson.

Involuntarily his face must have given some sign of recognition, but this he instantly suppressed. He had no fear of his old friend, but still, he had renounced his old identity and had no intention of acknowledging it. He had entered on a new life with a new personality. Accordingly, after a brief glance, as indifferent as he could make it, he turned back to the counter and concluded his business. And Lewson, for his part, made no outward sign of recognition, so that Pottermack began to hope that he had merely noticed an odd resemblance, without any suspicion of actual identity. After all, that was what one would expect, seeing that the Jeffrey Brandon whom he resembled had been dead nearly fifteen years.

But when he left the shop and went his way through the streets on other business, he soon discovered that Lewson was shadowing him closely. Once or twice he put the matter to the test by doubling back or darting through obscure passages and by-ways; and when he still found Lewson doggedly clinging to his skirts, he had to accept the conviction that he had been recognized and deal with the position to the best of his discretion. Accordingly, he made straight for home; but instead of entering by the front door, he took the path that skirted the long wall of his garden and let himself in by the small side gate, which he left unlatched behind him. A minute later, Lewson pushed it open and looked in then, seeing that the garden was unoccupied save by Pottermack, he entered and shut the gate.

"Well, Jeff", he said genially, as he faced Pottermack, "so here you are. A brand—or shall we say a Brandon—snatched from the burning. I always wondered if you had managed to do a mizzle, you are such an uncommonly downy bird."

Pottermack made a last, despairing effort. "Pardon me", said he, "but I fancy you must be mistaking me for——"

"Oh, rats", interrupted Lewson. "Won't do, old chap. Besides, I saw that you recognized me. No use pretending that you don't know your old pal, and certainly no use pretending that he doesn't know you."

Pottermack realised the unwelcome truth and, like a wise man, bowed to the inevitable.

"I suppose it isn't", he admitted, "and, for that matter, I don't know that there is any reason why I should. But you will understand that——"

"Oh, I understand well enough", said Lewson. "Don't imagine that I am offended. Naturally you are not out for digging up your old acquaintances, especially as you seem to have feathered your nest pretty well. Where have you been all these years?"

"In the States. I only came back a few weeks ago."

"Ah, you'd have been wiser to stay there. But I suppose you made a pile and have come home to spend it."

"Well, hardly a pile", said Pottermack, "but I have saved enough to live on in a quiet way. I am not expensive in my habits."

"Lucky beggar!" said Lewson, glancing around with greedy eyes. "Is this your own place?"

"Yes, I have just bought it and moved in. Got it remarkably cheap, too."

"Did you? Well, I say again, lucky beggar. It's quite a lordly little estate."

"Yes, I am very pleased with it. There's a good house and quite a lot of land, as you see. I hope to live very comfortably here."

"You ought to, if you don't get blown on; and you never need be if you are a wise man."

"No, I hope not", said Pottermack, a little uneasily. He had been looking at his old friend and was disagreeably impressed by the change that the years had wrought. He was by no means happy to know that his secret was shared with this unprepossessing stranger—for such he, virtually, was. But still he was totally unprepared for what was to follow.

"It was a lucky chance for me", remarked Lewson, "that I happened to drop in at that shop. Best morning's work that I have done for a long time."

"Indeed!" said Pottermack, looking a little puzzled.

"Yes. I reckon that chance was worth a thousand pounds to me."

"Was it really? I don't quite see how."

"Don't you?" demanded Lewson, with a sudden change of manner. "Then I'll explain. I presume you don't want the Scotland Yard people to know that you are alive and living here like a lord?"

"Naturally I don't."

"Of course you don't. And if you show a proper and liberal spirit towards your old pal, they are never likely to know."

"But", gasped Pottermack, "I don't think I quite understand what you mean."

"You are devilish thick-headed if you don't", said Lewson. "Then I'll put in a nutshell. You hand me over a thousand pounds and I give you a solemn undertaking to keep my mouth shut for ever."

"And if I don't?"

"Then I hop off to Scotland Yard and earn a small gratuity by giving them the straight tip."

Pottermack recoiled from him in horror. He was thunderstruck. It was appalling to find that this man, whom he had

known as an apparently decent youth, had sunk so low. He had actually descended to blackmail—the lowest, the meanest, and the shabbiest of crimes. But it was not the blackmail alone that filled Pottermack's soul with loathing of the wretch who stood before him. In the moment in which Lewson made his demand, Pottermack knew the name of the villain who had forged those cheques and had set the dastardly trap in which he, Pottermack, was, in effect, still held.

For some moments he was too much shocked to reply. When at length he did, it was merely to settle the terms of the transaction. He had no choice. He realized that this was no empty threat. The gleam of malice in Lewson's eye was unmistakable. It expressed the inveterate hatred that a thoroughly base man feels towards one on whom he has inflicted an unforgivable injury.

"Will a crossed cheque do for you?" he asked.

"Good Lord! no!" was the reply; "nor an open one either. No cheques for me. Hard cash is what I should prefer, but as that might be difficult to manage I'll take it in notes—five-pound notes."

"What, a thousand pounds!" exclaimed Pottermack. "What on earth will the people at the bank think?"

Lewson sniggered. "What would they think, old chap, if I turned up with an open cheque for a thousand pounds? Wouldn't they take an interest in the endorsement? No, dear boy, you get the notes—fivers, mind. They know you. And look here, Jeff. This is a strictly private transaction. Neither of us wants it to leak out. It will be much safer for us both if we remain tee-total strangers. If we should meet anywhere, you needn't take off your hat. I shan't. We don't know one another. I don't even know your name. By the way, what is your name?"

"Marcus Pottermack."

"God, what a name! However, I'll forget it if I can. You agree with me?"

"Certainly", replied Pottermack with unmistakable sincerity. "But where and how am I to hand you over the money?"

"I was coming to that", said Lewson. "I will come along here and collect it on Thursday night—that will give you time to get the notes. I shall come after dark, about nine o'clock. You had better leave this gate unlatched, and then, if I see that the coast is clear, I can pop in unobserved. Will that do?"

Pottermack nodded. "But there is one thing more, Lewson", said he. "This is a single, final transaction. I pay you a thousand pounds to purchase your silence and secrecy for ever!"

"That is so. In saecula saeculorum."

"There will be no further demands?"

"Certainly not", Lewson replied indignantly. "Do you think I don't know what a square deal is? I've given you my solemn promise and you can trust me to keep it."

Pottermack pursued the matter no farther; and as the calamitous business was now concluded, he softly opened the gate, and, having ascertained that no one was in sight, he let his visitor out and watched the big burly figure swaggering townwards along the little path that bordered his wall.

Closing the gate, he turned back into the garden, his heart filled with bitterness and despair. His dream was at an end. Never, while this horse-leech hung on to him, could he ask Alice Bellard to be his wife. For his prophetic soul told him only too truly that this was but a beginning; that the blackmailer would come again and again and yet again, always to go away still holding the thing that he had sold.

And so it befell; and so the pitiless extortion might have gone on to its end in the ruin and impoverishment of the victim but for the timely appearance of the sundial in Mr. Gallett's yard.

---

## CHAPTER XI. — MR. POTTERMACK'S DILEMMA

THE sound of the piano faded away in a gradual diminuendo and at last stopped. A brief interval of silence followed.

Then Mr. Pottermack, withdrawing his gaze from the infinite distance beyond the garden, turned to look at his hostess and found her regarding him with a slightly quizzical smile.

"You haven't lit your pipe after all, Mr. Pottermack", said she.

"No", he replied. "My savage breast was so effectually soothed by your music that tobacco would have been superfluous. Besides, my pipe would have gone out. It always does when my attention is very completely occupied."

"And was it? I almost thought you were dozing."

"I was dreaming", said he; "day-dreaming; but wide awake and listening. It is curious," he continued after a pause, "what power music has to awaken associations. There is nothing like it, excepting, perhaps, scents. Music and odours, things utterly unlike anything but themselves, seem to have a power of arousing dormant memories that is quite lacking in representative things such as pictures and statues."

"So it would seem", said Mrs. Bellard, "that I have been, in a fashion, performing the function of an opium pipe in successful competition with the tobacco article. But it is too late to mend matters now. I can hear Anne approaching with the tea-things."

Almost as she spoke, the door opened and the maid entered, carrying a tray with anxious care, and proceeded to set out the tea-things with the manner of one performing a solemn rite. When she had gone and the tea was poured out, Mrs. Bellard resumed the conversation.

"I began to think you had struck me off your visiting list. What have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

"Well", Pottermack replied evasively—for, obviously, he could not go into details—"I have been a good deal occupied. There have been a lot of things to do; the sun-dial, for instance. I told you about the sun-dial, didn't I?"

"Yes, but that was a long time ago. You said you were going to show it to me when it was set up, but you never have. You haven't even shown it to Mrs. Gadby. She is quite hurt about it."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Pottermack; "how self-centred we old bachelors get! But this neglect must be remedied at once. When can you come and see it? Could you come round and have tea with me tomorrow?"

"Yes. I should like to; but I can't come very early. Will a quarter to five do?"

"Of course it will. We can have tea first and then make a leisurely survey of the sun-dial and the various other things that I have to show you."

Thus the arrangement was made, very much to Mr. Pottermack's satisfaction, for it enabled him to postpone to the morrow a certain very momentous question which he had thought of raising this very afternoon, but which now appeared a little inopportune. For a delicate question must be approached cautiously through suitable channels, and no such means of approach had presented themselves or seemed likely to. Accordingly, relieved of the necessity of looking for an opening, Mr. Pottermack was able to give his whole attention to making himself agreeable, and eventually took his departure in the best of spirits, looking forward with confidence to the prospects of the morrow.

The tea, as arranged by Mrs. Gadby in the pleasant dining-room of 'The Chestnuts', was a triumphant success. It would have been an even greater success if the fair visitor had happened to have been on short commons for the preceding week. But the preposterous abundance at least furnished the occasion of mirth, besides serving as an outlet for Mrs. Gadby's feelings of regard and admiration towards the guest and a demonstration of welcome.

"It is really very nice of her", said Mrs. Bellard, glancing smilingly round the loaded table, "and tactful too. It is a compliment to us both. It implies that she has cause to be grateful to me for introducing her here, and you are that cause. I expect she has a pretty comfortable time."

"I hope so", said Pottermack. "I have, thanks to her and to you. And she keeps the house in the most perfect order. Would you like to look over it presently?"

"Naturally I should. Did you ever meet a woman who was not devoured by curiosity in regard to a bachelor's household arrangements? But I am really more interested in the part of the premises that is outside Mrs. Gadby's domain; the part that reflects your own personality. I want especially to see your workshop. Am I to be allowed to?"

"Undoubtedly you are; in fact, if we have finished, as it seems we have, you shall be introduced to it forthwith."

They rose, and, passing out at the back door, walked together up the long path through the kitchen garden and orchard until they came to the gate of the walled garden, which Pottermack unlocked with his Yale key.

"This is very impressive and mysterious", said Mrs. Bellard as the gate closed and the spring-latch snapped. "I am quite proud to be admitted into this holy of holies. It is a delightful garden", she continued, letting her eyes travel round the great oblong enclosure, "so perfectly peaceful and quiet and remote. Here one is cut off from all the world, which is rather restful at times."

Mr. Pottermack agreed, and reflected that the present was one of those times. "When I want to be alone", he remarked, "I like to be definitely alone and secure from interruption."

"Well, you are secure enough here, shut in from the sight of any human eye. Why, you might commit a murder and no one would be any the wiser."

"So I might", agreed Mr. Pottermack, rather taken aback. "I hadn't thought of that advantage, and, of course, you understand that the place wasn't laid out with that purpose in view. What do you think of the sun-dial?"

"I was just looking at it and thinking what a charming finish it gives to the garden. It is delightful, and will be still more so when the new stone has weathered down to the tone of the old. And I think you told me that there is a well underneath. That adds a sort of deliciously horrible interest to it."

"Why horrible?" Pottermack enquired uncomfortably.

"Oh, don't you think wells are rather gruesome things? I do. There is one in my garden, and it gives me the creeps whenever I lower the bucket and watch it sinking down, down that black hole and vanishing into the bowels of the earth."

"Yes", said Pottermack, "I have that feeling myself. Probably most town-bred people have. And they are really rather dangerous, especially when they are unguarded as this one was. That was why I took the opportunity to cover it up."

By this time they were close up to the dial, and Mrs. Bellard walked round it to read the motto. "Why do they always write these things in Latin?" she asked.

"Partly for the sake of brevity", he replied. "Here are five Latin words. The equivalent in English is: 'At the rising of the sun, hope: at the going down thereof, peace.'"

"It is a beautiful motto", she said, looking wistfully and a little sadly at the stone pillar. "The first part is what we all know by experience; the second is what we pray for to compensate us for the sorrows and disillusionments of the years that come between. But now let us go and look at the workshop."

Pottermack conducted her behind the yew hedge into the range of well-lighted workrooms, where he exhibited, not without a touch of pride, his very complete outfit. But the fair widow's enthusiastic interest in the tools and appliances rather surprised him; for women are apt to look on the instruments of masculine handicraft with a slightly supercilious eye. No general survey satisfied her. He had to display his "plant" in detail and explain and demonstrate the use of each appliance: the joiner's bench with its quick-grip vice; the metal-work bench with its anvil and stakes and the big brazing-jet; the miniature forge, the lathe, the emery-wheel, and the bench-drill. She examined them all with the closest attention and with a singularly intelligent grasp of their purposes and modes of action. Pottermack became so absorbed in the pleasure of exhibiting his treasures that, for the moment, he almost forgot his main purpose.

"I am glad I have seen the place where you work", she said, as they came out into the garden. "Now I can picture you to myself among your workshop gods, busy and happy. You are happy when you are working there, aren't you?"

She asked the question with so much concern that Pottermack was fain to reply:

"Every workman, I think, is happy when he is working. Of course, I mean a skilled man, working with his hands and his brain, creating something, even if it is only a simple thing. Yes, I am happy when I am doing a job, especially if it is a little difficult."

"I understand; for a little extra planning and thought. But are you, in general, a happy man? Do you find life pleasant? You always seem very cheerful and yet sometimes I wonder if you really enjoy life."

Pottermack reflected a few moments. "You are thinking", said he, "of my solitary and apparently friendless state, though I am not friendless at all, seeing that I have you—the dearest and kindest friend that a man could wish for. But in a sense you are right. My life is an incomplete affair, and these activities of mine, pleasant as they are, serve but as makeshifts to fill a blank. But it could easily be made complete. A word from you would be enough. If you were my wife there would be nothing left in the world for me to covet. I should be a perfectly happy man."

He paused and looked at her, and was a little disconcerted to see that her eyes had filled and that she was looking down with an evident expression of distress. As she made no answer, he continued, more eagerly:

"Why should it not be, Alice? We are the very best of friends—really devoted and affectionate friends. We like the same things and the same ways of life. We have the same interests, the same pleasures. We should try to make one another happy, and I am sure we should succeed. Won't you say the word, dear, and let us join hands to go our ways together for the rest of our lives?"

She turned and looked in his face with brimming eyes and laid her hand on his arm.

"Dear friend", she said, "dearest Marcus, I would say yes, joyfully, thankfully, if only it were possible. I have given you my friendship, my most loving friendship, and that is all I have to give. It is impossible for me to be your wife."

Pottermack gazed at her in dismay. "But", he asked huskily, "why is it impossible? What hinders?"

"My husband hinders", she replied in a low voice.

"Your husband!" gasped Pottermack.

"Yes. You have believed, as every one here believes, that I am a widow. I am not. My husband is still alive. I cannot and will not live with him or even acknowledge him. But he lives, to inflict one more injury on me by standing between you and me. Come", she continued, as Pottermack, numb with amazement, gazed at her in silence, "let us go and sit down in the summer-house and I will tell you the whole pitiful story."

She walked across the lawn, and Pottermack accompanied her with half-unconscious reluctance. Since that fatal night he had made little use of the summer-house. Its associations repelled him. Even now he would, by choice, have avoided it; and it was with a certain vague discomfort that he saw his beloved friend seat herself in the chair that had stood vacant since that night when Lewson had sat in it.

"I will tell you my story", she began, "from the time when I was a girl, or perhaps I should say a young woman. At that time I was engaged to a young man named Jeffrey Brandon. We were devotedly attached to each other. As to Jeffrey, I need say no more than that you are—allowing for the difference of age—quite extraordinarily like him; like in features, in voice, in tastes, and in nature. If Jeffrey had been alive now, he would have been exactly like you. That is what attracted me to you from the first.

"We were extremely happy—perfectly happy—in our mutual affection, and we were all-sufficient to one another. I thought myself the most fortunate of girls, and so I was; for we were only waiting until I should come into a small property that was likely to fall to me shortly, when we should have had enough to marry upon comfortably. And then, in a moment, our happiness was shattered utterly. A most dreadful thing happened. A series of forgeries was discovered at the bank where Jeffrey was employed. Suspicion was made to fall upon him. He was prosecuted, convicted—on false evidence, of course—and sentenced to a term of penal servitude.

"As soon as he was convicted, he formally released me from our engagement, but I need not say that I had no intention of giving him up. However, the question never arose. Poor Jeffrey escaped from prison, and in trying to swim out to some ship in the river was drowned. Later, his body was recovered and taken to the prison, where an inquest was held. I went down, and by special permission attended the funeral and laid a wreath on the grave in the prison cemetery. And that was the end of my romance.

"When Jeffrey died, I made up my mind that I was a spinster for life; and so I ought to have been. But things fell out otherwise. Besides me, Jeffrey had one intimate friend, a fellow-clerk at the bank named James Lewson. Of course, I knew him fairly intimately, and after Jeffrey's conviction I saw a good deal of him. Indeed, we became quite friendly—which we had hardly been before—by reason of the firm belief that he expressed in Jeffrey's innocence. Every one else took the poor boy's guilt for granted, so, naturally, I was drawn to the one loyal friend. Then, when Jeffrey died and was lost to me for ever, he took every opportunity of offering me comfort and consolation; and he did it so tactfully, was so filled with grief for our lost friend and so eager to talk of him and keep his memory green between us, that we became greater friends than ever.

"After a time, his friendship took on a more affectionate and demonstrative character, and finally he asked me plainly to marry him. Of course, I said no; in fact, I was rather shocked at the proposal, for I still felt that I belonged to Jeffrey. But he was quietly persistent. He took no offence, but he did not pretend to accept my refusal as final. Especially he urged on me that Jeffrey would have wished that I should not be left to go through life alone, but that I should be cherished and protected by his own loyal and devoted friend.

"Gradually his arguments overcame my repugnance to the idea of the marriage, though it was still distasteful to me, and when he asked for my consent as a recognition and reward of his loyalty to Jeffrey, I at last gave way. It appeared ungrateful to go on refusing him; and after all, nothing seemed to matter much now that Jeffrey was gone. The end of it was that we were married just before he started to take up an appointment in a branch of the bank at Leeds.

"It was not long before the disillusionment came, and when it did come, I was astonished that I could have been so deceived. Very soon I began to realize that it was not love of me that had made him such a persistent suitor. It was the knowledge that he had gathered of the little fortune that was coming to me. His greediness for money was incredible; and yet he was utterly unable to hold it. It ran through his hands like water. He had a fair salary, but yet we were always poor and usually in debt. For he was an inveterate gambler—a gambler of that hopeless type that must inevitably lose. He usually did lose at once, for he was a reckless plunger, but if by chance he made a coup, he immediately plunged with his winnings and lost them. It was no wonder that he was always in difficulties.

"When, at last, my little property came to me, he was deeply disappointed; for it was tied up securely in the form of a trust, and my uncle, who is a solicitor, was the managing trustee. And a very careful trustee he was, and not at all well impressed by my husband. James Lewson had hoped to get control of the entire capital, instead of which he had to apply to me for money when he was in difficulties and I had to manage my trustee as best I could. But in spite of this, most of the income that I received went to pay my husband's debts and losses.

"Meanwhile our relations grew more and more unsatisfactory. The disappointment due to the trust, and the irritation at having to ask me for money and explain the reasons for his need of it, made him sullen and morose, and even, at times, coarsely abusive. But there was something more. From the first I had been dismayed at his freedom in the matter of drink. But the habit grew upon him rapidly, and it was in connection with this that the climax of our disagreement came about and led to our separation.

"I understand that drink has different effects on different types of men. On James Lewson its effects began with the loss

of all traces of refinement and a tendency to coarse facetiousness. The next stage was that of noisy swagger and boasting, and then he soon became quarrelsome and even brutal. There were one or two occasions when he threatened to become actually violent. Now it happened more than once that, when he had drunk himself into a state of boastful exaltation, he spoke of Jeffrey in a tone of such disrespect and even contempt that I had to leave the room to avoid an open, vulgar quarrel. But on the final occasion he went much farther. He began by jeering at my infatuation for 'that nincompoop,' as he called him, and when I, naturally, became furiously angry and was walking out of the room, he called me back, and, laughing in my face, actually boasted to me—to me!—that his was the master mind that had planned and carried out the forgeries and then set up that mug, Jeff,' as the man of straw for the lawyers to knock down.

"I was absolutely thunderstruck. At first I thought that it was mere drunken fooling. But then he went on to give corroborative details, chuckling with idiotic self-complacency, until at last I realized that it was true; that this fuddled brute was the dastardly traitor who had sent my Jeffrey to his death.

"Then I left him. At once I packed a small suitcase and went out and took a room at an hotel in the town. The next day I returned and had an interview with him. He was mightily flustered and apologetic. He remembered quite well what he had said, but tried to persuade me that it was a mere drunken joke and that it was all a fabrication, invented to annoy me. But I knew better. In the interval I had thought matters over, and I saw how perfectly his confession explained everything and agreed with what I now knew of him; his insatiable greed for money, his unscrupulousness, his wild gambling, and the reckless way in which he contracted debts. I brushed aside his explanations and denials and presented my ultimatum, of which the terms were these:

"We should separate at once and completely, and henceforth be as total strangers, not recognizing one another if we should ever meet. I should take my mother's maiden name, Bellard, and assume the status of a widow. He should refrain from molesting me or claiming any sort of acquaintance or relationship with me.

"If he agreed to these terms, I undertook to pay him a quarterly allowance and to take no action in respect of what I had learned. If he refused, I should instruct my uncle to commence proceedings to obtain a judicial separation and I should state in open court all that I knew. I should communicate these facts to the directors of the bank; and if, in my uncle's opinion, any prosecution were possible—for perjury or any other offence connected with the forgeries—I should instruct him to prosecute.

"My ultimatum took him aback completely. At first he tried to bluster, then he became pathetic and tried to wheedle. But in the end, when he saw that I was not to be moved from my resolution, he gave way. I could see that my threats had scared him badly, though, in fact, I don't believe that I could have done anything. But perhaps he knew better. There may have been some other matters of which I had no knowledge. At any rate, he agreed, with the one stipulation, that the quarterly allowance should be paid in notes and not by a cheque.

"As soon as I had settled the terms of the separation I moved to Aylesbury, where my mother's people had lived, and stayed there in lodgings while I looked for a small, cheap house. At length I found the cottage at Borley, and there I have lived ever since, as comfortably as my rather straitened means would let me. For, of course, the allowance has been rather a strain, though I have paid it cheerfully as the price of my freedom; and I may say that James Lewson has kept to the terms of our agreement with one exception—an exception that I expected. He has not been satisfied with the allowance. From time to time, and with increasing frequency, he has applied for loans—which, of course, meant gifts—to help him out of some temporary difficulty; and sometimes—but not always—I have been weak enough to supply him.

"But I was not to be left completely in peace. When I had been settled in Borley for about a year, I received a letter from him informing me that 'by a strange coincidence' he had been appointed to the managership of the Borley branch of the Bank. Of course, I knew that it was no coincidence at all. He had engineered the transfer himself."

"With what object, do you suppose?" asked Pottermack.

"It may have been mere malice", she replied, "just to cause me annoyance without breaking the terms of the agreement. But my impression is that it was done with the deliberate purpose of keeping me in a state of nervous unrest so that I should be the more easily prevailed on to comply with his applications for money. At any rate, those applications became more frequent and more urgent after he came to live here, and once he threw out a hint about calling at my house for an answer. But I put a stop to that at once."

"Did you ever meet him in Borley?" Pottermack asked.

"Yes, once or twice. But I passed him in the street without a glance of recognition and he made no attempt to molest me. I think he had a wholesome fear of me. And, of course, I kept out of his way as much as I could. But it was an immense relief to me when he went away. You heard of his disappearance, I suppose? It was the talk of the town at the time."

"Oh yes", replied Pottermack. "My friend, Mr. Gallett, the mason, was the first to announce the discovery. But I little thought when I heard of it how much it meant to you—and to me. What do you suppose has become of him?"

"I can't imagine. It is a most mysterious affair. There is no reason that I can think of why he should have absconded at all. I can only suppose that he had done something which he expected to be found out but which has not come to light. Perhaps the most mysterious thing about it is that he has never applied to me for money. He would know quite well that I should at least have sent him his allowance, and that he could depend on me not to betray him, profoundly as I detest him."

Mr. Pottermack cogitated anxiously. He loathed the idea of deceiving this noble, loyal-hearted woman. Yet what could he do? He was committed irrevocably to a certain line of action, and in committing himself he had unconsciously committed her. He had embarked on a course of deception and had no choice but to follow it. And with regard to the future, he could honestly assure himself that whatever made for his happiness would make for hers.

"Do you think he may have gone abroad?" he asked.

"It is impossible to say", she replied. "I have no reason to suppose he has, excepting his extraordinary silence."

"It is even possible", Pottermack suggested in a slightly husky voice, "that he may be dead."

"Yes", she admitted, "that is possible, and it would certainly account for his silence. But is it any use guessing?"

"I was only thinking", said Pottermack, "that if he should happen to have died, that would—er—dispose of our difficulties."

"Not unless we knew that he was dead. On the contrary. If he should have died and his death should remain undiscovered, or, what is the same thing, if he should have died without having been identified, then I should be bound to him beyond any possible hope of release."

Pottermack drew a deep breath, and unconsciously his glance fell on the sun-dial.

"But", he asked in a low tone, "if it should ever become known as an ascertained fact that he was dead? Then, dear Alice, would you say yes?"

"But have I not said it already?" she exclaimed. "Did I not tell you that, if I were free, I would gladly, thankfully take you for my husband? Then, if that is not enough, I say it again. Not that it is of much use to say it, seeing that there is no reason to suppose that he is dead or likely to die. I only wish there were. It may sound callous to express such a wish, but it would be mere hypocrisy to pretend to any other feeling. He ruined poor Jeffrey's life and he has ruined mine."

"I wouldn't say that", Pottermack protested gently. "The sands of your life have yet a long time to run. There is still time for us both to salve some happy years from the wreckage of the past."

"So there is", she agreed. "I was wrong. It is only a part of my life that has been utterly spoiled. And if you, too, have been through stormy weather—as I, somehow, think you have—we must join forces and help one another with the salvage work. But we shall have to be content to be friends, since marriage is out of our reach."

"My dear", said Pottermack, "if you say that you would be willing to have me for your husband that is all I ask."

They went forth from the summer-house and walked slowly, hand in hand, round the old garden; and Pottermack, anxious to conceal his bitter disappointment, chatted cheerfully about his fruit trees and the flowers that he meant to plant in the sunny borders. Very soon they seemed to be back on the old footing, only with a new note of affection and intimacy which made itself evident when Pottermack, with his hand on the latch of the gate, drew his companion to him and kissed her before they passed through together into the orchard.

He walked with her back to the cottage and said good-bye at the little wooden gate.

"I hope, dear", she whispered, as she held his hand for a moment, "that you are not very, very disappointed."

"I am not thinking of disappointments", he replied cheerily. "I am gloating over the blessings that I enjoy already and hoping that Fortune may have something to add to them later on."

But despite his assumed cheeriness of manner, Mr. Pottermack took his way homeward in a profoundly depressed state of mind. The dream of settled happiness that had haunted him for years, vague and unreal at first but ever growing more definite and vivid, had been shattered in the very moment when it seemed to have become a reality. He thought bitterly of the later years in America when his purpose of seeking his lost love had been forming, almost unrecognized by himself as a thing actually intended; of his long search in London with its ultimate triumph; of the patient pursuit of the beloved object to this place and the purchase of his house; of the long untiring effort, always bringing him nearer and nearer to success. And then, when he seemed to have conquered every difficulty, to have his treasure within his very grasp, behold an obstacle undreamed of and apparently insuperable.

It was maddening; and the most exasperating feature of it was that the obstacle was of his own creating. Like most men who have committed a fatal blunder, Mr. Pottermack was impelled to chew the bitter cud of the might-have-been. If he had only known! How easy it would have been to arrange things suitably! Looking back, he now saw how unnecessary had been all that laborious business of the gutta-percha soles. It had been the result of mere panic. He could see that now. And he could have met the conditions so much more simply and satisfactorily. Supposing he had just made a few footprints in the soft earth leading to the well—he could have done that with the plaster casts—flung down the coat by the brink and gone out on the following morning and informed the police. There would have been no risk of suspicion. Why should there have been? He would have told a perfectly convincing story. He could have related how he had gone out in the evening, leaving his gate unlocked, had returned in the dark and found it ajar; had discovered in the morning strange footprints and a coat, suggesting that some stranger had strayed into the garden and, in the darkness, had fallen down the well. It would have been a perfectly natural and straightforward story. Nobody would have doubted it or connected him with the accident. Then the well would have been emptied, the body recovered and the incident closed for ever.

As it was, the situation was one of exasperating irony. He was in a dilemma from which there seemed to be no escape. He alone, of all the world, knew that Alice Bellard was free to marry him; and that knowledge he must carry locked up in his breast for the remainder of his life.



## CHAPTER XII. — THE UNDERSTUDY

READERS who have followed this history to its present stage will have realized by this time that Mr. Pottermack was a gentleman of uncommon tenacity of purpose. To the weaker vessels the sudden appearance of an apparently insuperable obstacle is the occasion for abandoning hope and throwing up the sponge. But Mr. Pottermack was of a tougher fibre. To him a difficulty was not a matter for wringing of hands but for active search for a solution.

Hence it happened that the black despair that enveloped and pervaded him after his proposal to Alice Bellard soon began to disperse under the influence of his natural resiliency. From profitless reflections on the might-have-been he turned to the consideration of the may-be. He began to examine the obstacle critically, not as a final extinguisher of his hopes, but as a problem to be dealt with.

Now what did that problem amount to? He, Marcus Pottermack, desired to marry Alice Bellard. That had been the darling wish and purpose of his life and he had no intention of abandoning it. She, on her side, wished to marry him, but she believed that her husband was still alive. He, Pottermack, knew that the said husband was dead, but he could not disclose his knowledge. Yet until the fact of the husband's death was disclosed, the marriage was impossible and must remain so for ever. For there is this unsatisfactory peculiarity about a dead man: that it is hopeless to look forward to the possibility of his dying. Thus the problem, put in a nutshell, amounted to this: that James Lewson, being dead *de facto*, had got to be made dead *de jure*.

But how was this to be done? It is hardly necessary to say that, at first, a number of wild-cat schemes floated through Mr. Pottermack's mind, though they found no lodgment there. For instance, he actually considered the feasibility of dismounting the sun-dial, fishing up the body and planting it in some place where it might be found. Of course, the plan was physically impossible even if he could have faced the horrors of its execution.

Then he turned his attention to the now invaluable coat. He conceived the idea of depositing it at the edge of a cliff or on the brink of a river or dock. But this would not have served the required purpose. Doubtless it would have raised a suspicion that the owner was dead. But suspicion was of no use. Absolute certainty was what was needed to turn the wife into a widow. In connection with this idea, he studied the law relating to Presumption of Death; but when he learned that, about 1850, the Court of Queen's Bench had refused to presume the death of a person who was known to have been alive in the year 1027, he decided that the staying power of the law was considerably greater than his own and finally abandoned the idea.

Nevertheless his resolution remained unshaken. Somehow James Lewson would have to be given the proper, recognized status of a dead man. Though no practicable scheme presented itself, the problem was ever present in his mind. By day and by night, in his work in the garden, in his walks through the quiet lanes, even in the fair widow's pleasant sitting-room, his thoughts were constantly busy with the vain search for some solution; and so they might have continued indefinitely but for a chance circumstance that supplied him with a new suggestion. And even then, the suggestion was so indirect and so little related to the nature of his problem that he had nearly missed it.

From time to time, Mr. Pottermack was in the habit of paying a visit to London for the purpose of making various purchases, particularly of tools and materials. On one of these occasions, happening to be in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, and realizing suddenly that the day was Friday, it occurred to him to, look in at the auction rooms in King Street, hard by and see what was going. For the Friday sales of "miscellaneous property" are of special interest to those who use tools, appliances, or scientific instruments, and Pottermack had on one or two previous occasions picked up some very useful bargains.

But this time he seemed to have drawn a blank; for when he ran his eye over the catalogue which was fixed to the doorpost he found, to his disgust, that the principal feature was "The valuable collection brought together by a well-known Egyptologist, lately deceased". He was on the point of turning away when he noticed, near the end of the catalogue, "another property" consisting of a quantity of model-maker's tools and appliances; whereupon he entered the office, and, having provided himself with a catalogue, made his way to the inner room where the tools were on view. These he looked over critically, marking here and there a "Lot" which might be worth buying if it should go cheaply enough. Then, having finished his actual business, he proceeded rather aimlessly to browse round the room, catalogue in hand, glancing at the various items of the Egyptologist's collection.

There is always something impressive about the relics of Ancient Egypt. Their vast antiquity, the evidence that they present of strange knowledge and a rather uncanny skill, with suggestions of a state of mind by no means primitive, yet utterly unlike our own, gives them a certain weird quality that makes itself felt by most observers. Pottermack was distinctly aware of it. As he looked over the collection of venerable objects—the ushabti figures, the wooden head-rests, the pre-dynastic painted vases, the jar-sealings, the flint implements and copper tools and weapons—he had the feeling that the place was unworthy of them. Particularly in regard to the wooden and stone steles, the portrait statuettes, the canopic jars and other pious memorials of the dead, did he feel that their presence here, offered for sale in the public market, was an affront to their sacred character. As to the coffins, and above all the mummies, their exposure here seemed to him positively indecent. Here were the actual bodies of deceased ladies and gentlemen, persons of rank and station in their day, as the inscriptions testified, catalogued as mere curios, with the auctioneer's ticket pasted on their very coffins or even on their funeral vesture.

Mr. Pottermack halted by a large open box into which a much-damaged mummy had been crammed and lay, partly doubled up, amidst a litter of broken wood. The ticket, stuck on the linen bandage in which the body was swathed, marked it as "Lot 15"; and reference to the catalogue elicited the further particulars: "Mummy of an official with portions of wooden coffin (a.f.)", while a label attached to the mummy identified the deceased as "Khama-Heru, a libationer of the 19th or 20th dynasty."

Mr. Pottermack stood by the box, looking down distastefully, almost resentfully, at the shapeless figure, wrapped in its bulky swathings, and looking like a gigantic rag doll that had been bundled into a rubbish-box. That great rag doll had once been a respected attendant at feasts and solemn ceremonials. Presently it would be put up "with all faults" and probably knocked down for a few shillings to some speculative curio dealer. And as he reflected thus, the words of Sir Thomas Browne floated through his mind: "The Egyptian mummies which Time or Cambyses hath spared, Avarice now consumeth". Vain, indeed, were the efforts of the pious Mizraim to achieve even physical immortality.

He had turned away and was beginning to move slowly towards the door. And then, suddenly, in a moment of time, two separate ideas, apparently unrelated, linked themselves together and evolved a third. And a very strange one that newly evolved idea was. Mr. Pottermack was quite startled. As it flashed into his mind, he stopped dead, and then, retracing his steps, halted once more beside the box. But now, as he looked down on the great rag doll that had once been Khama-Heru, no distaste or resentment was in his eye, but rather an eager curiosity that estimated and measured and sought for details. He inspected critically the fracture where the brittle corpse had been doubled up to jam it in the box; the spot where part of a shrivelled nose peeped through a hole in the rotten linen. The history of this thing interested him no more. What it had been was no concern of his. Its importance to him was in what it was now. It was a dead body—a dead human body; the body of a man; of a tall man, so far as he could judge.

He made a pencil mark on his catalogue opposite Lot 15, and then, having glanced at his watch, walked out into King Street, there to pace up and down until it should be time for the auction to begin; and meanwhile to try to fashion this startling but rather nebulous idea into a more definite shape; to decide, in short, the part which the late Khama-Heru could be given to play in his slightly involved affairs.

The actual acquirement of the gruesome relic presented no difficulties. It is true that the auctioneer made some conscientious efforts to invest Lot 15 with some semblance of value. But his plausible suggestions as to the "trifling restorations" that might be necessary aroused no enthusiasm. He had to start the bidding himself—at ten shillings; and at fifteen the hammer descended to confirm Mr. Pottermack in the lawful possession of a deceased libationer. Thereupon the money was handed in and the box handed out, and when it had its lid nailed on and a length of cord tied round it, it was conveyed out to the pavement, whence it was presently transferred to the roof of a cab and in due course transported to Marylebone Station to await the next train to Borley.

The advent of Khama-Heru, deceased, to 'The Chestnuts', Borley, inaugurated a radical change in Mr. Pottermack's habits and mental state. Gone was the restless indecision that had kept him mooning about, thinking everlastingly and getting nothing done. Now, his mind was, in a measure, at rest. He had a job, and if all the details of that job were not yet clear to him, still he could, as in any other job, get on with the part that he knew while he was planning out the remainder.

The first problem was to dispose of the box—and of the occupant when he should emerge. In the first place, it had been conveyed through the side gate to the workshop, where it at present reposed. But this would never do, especially when the emergence should take place. For, of late, Alice Bellard had taken to bringing him little commissions and sitting by him in the workshop babbling cheerfully while he carried them out. Which was exceedingly pleasant. But two is company, and, assuredly, Khama-Heru would have made a very undesirable third. And there was another point. At present, in his box with the fragments of the coffin and the auctioneer's ticket, K.-H. was harmless enough; a mere fifteen shillings' worth of miscellaneous property. But after a few "trifling restorations" (of a rather different kind from those contemplated by the auctioneer) the said K.-H. would present a highly compromising appearance. Arrangements would have to be made for keeping him in strict retirement.

The conditions were met fairly well by emptying the tool-house. The roller and the lawn-mower could rest safely outside under a tarpaulin, and the garden tools could be stowed at the end of the metal-shop. When this had been done and the tool-house door fitted with a really safe lock, Pottermack dragged the box thither; and having taken off the lid, strengthened it, and fitted it with a pair of stout hinges and a good lever lock, he felt that he had made things secure for the present. The tool-house was furnished with a long bench for the storage of flower-pots, and, as it was lighted only by a window in the roof, he would be able to work there conveniently and safe from observation.

His first proceeding was to unroll the mummy, to unwind the countless yards of rotten linen bandage with which it had been covered. He wanted to see what the mummy itself was like and whether it was complete. But when he had got all the wrappings off and looked at the thing as it lay on the bench, he was appalled at its appearance. In its wrappings it had been gruesome enough—a great, horrible rag doll; but divested of those wrappings it was ghastly. For now it revealed itself frankly for what it was—a dead man; dry, shrivelled, unnatural, but still undeniably the dead body of a man.

Pottermack stood by the bench gazing at it distastefully and with something of the compunction that he had felt in the auction room. But it was of no use being squeamish. He had bought the thing for a specific and most necessary purpose, and that purpose had got to be carried into effect. Gulping down his qualms, therefore, he set himself to make a systematic examination.

Apparently the body was quite complete. The abdomen looked a little queer, but probably that was due to the drying,

though there were unmistakable signs of its having been opened. Both legs were partially broken off at the hip-joints, just hanging on loosely by a few strings of dried flesh. But the bones seemed quite uninjured. The head was in the same condition as the legs, detached from the spine save for one or two strands of dry muscle, and at the moment rolled over on its side with its face turned towards Pottermack. And a grisly face it was; for despite the shrivelled nose, the papery ears, the sunken eyes, and the horrid sardonic grin, it had a recognizable human expression. Looking at it with shuddering interest, Pottermack felt that he could form a fairly clear idea as to what Khama-Heru must have looked like when alive.

Careful measurement with a two-foot rule showed that the body was just under five feet nine inches in length. Allowing for shrinkage in drying, his height had probably been well over five feet ten; enough to make him a passable understudy for James Lewson. Unfortunately, there was no facial resemblance whatever, but this, Pottermack hoped, would be of no consequence. The dimensions were what really mattered. But, of course, the body was useless for Pottermack's purpose in its present rigid, brittle state, and the important question was how far it could be softened and rendered flexible. Pottermack decided to make a tentative experiment on one shoulder by leaving it for an hour or two under several thicknesses of wet rag; which he did, with results that were, on the whole, satisfactory. The moistened flesh and skin swelled up appreciably and took on a much more natural appearance, and the arm now moved freely at the shoulder-joint. But it was evident that this treatment must not be applied prematurely, or other, less desirable changes would set in. He accordingly allowed the moistened area to dry thoroughly and then put the mummy away in its box, there to remain hidden until the other preparations had been completed.

These were of two kinds. First, the understudy had to be provided with a "make-up" which would be perfectly convincing under somewhat rigorous conditions; and secondly, a suitable setting had to be found for the little drama in which the understudy should play his part. Both gave Mr. Pottermack considerable occupation.

In connection with the make-up, it happened most fortunately that he had preserved the copy of the local paper containing the announcement of the disappearance with the description of the missing man issued by the police. With native caution, Mr. Pottermack had used the paper to line a drawer, and he now drew it forth and studied its remarkably full details. The coat was in his possession; most fortunately, since it was of a conspicuous pattern and would have been almost impossible to duplicate. The other clothing—the pin-head worsted waistcoat and trousers, the plain grey cotton shirt, the collar, neck-tie, and underclothing—was all of a kind that could be easily matched from the description, aided in some cases by his own memory; and the shoes, which were described minutely, could be duplicated with ease at any large shoe-retailers, while as to the rubber soles, they were of a pattern that were turned out by the thousand.

Nevertheless, the outfit for the deceased gave him endless trouble and occasioned numerous visits to London. The clothing called for tactful manoeuvring, since it was obviously not for his own wear. The "Invicta" sole manufacturers had to be found through the directory, and the circular heels, with their five-pointed stars, involved a long and troublesome search; for most of the star-pattern heels have six-pointed stars. And even when the outfit had been obtained the work was not at an end. For all the things were new. They had to be "conditioned" before they would be ready for the final act. The garments had to be worn, and worn roughly (in the garden and workshop, since their size made them entirely unpresentable), to produce marks of wear and convincing creases. The shoes, when the soles had been stuck on and a knife-cut made across the neck of the horse on the right sole, had to be taken out for long nocturnal walks on rough roads, having been previously fitted with two pairs of inner cork soles to prevent them from dropping off. The underclothing would require to be marked, but this Pottermack prudently put off until the last moment. Still, all these preparatory activities took up a good deal of time and gave a considerable amount of trouble. Not that time was of any importance. There was no hurry. Now that Pottermack had a plan his mind was at rest.

Moreover, he had certain distractions, besides his frequent visits to Lavender Cottage. For, in addition to these preparations connected with the costume of the actor, there were others concerned with the scene of the drama. A suitable setting had to be found for James Lewson's next—and, as Pottermack devoutly hoped, final—appearance.

The place must of necessity be close at hand and ought to be on the line of Lewson's known route. This left, practically, the choice between the heath and the wood. The former he rejected as too exposed for his purpose and too much frequented to be perfectly convincing. Of the wood he knew little excepting that few persons seemed ever to enter it, probably for the reason that had led him to avoid it; that, owing to its neglected state, it was choked by almost impenetrable undergrowth.

Now he decided to explore it thoroughly, and since the path which meandered through it divided it into two nearly equal parts, he proposed to make a systematic exploration of each part separately.

He began with the part that lay to the left of the path, which was, if possible, less frequented than the other. Choosing a place where the undergrowth was least dense, he plunged in and began to burrow through the bushes, stooping low to avoid the matted twigs and branches and keeping an eye on a pocket-compass that he held in his left hand. It was a wearisome and uncomfortable mode of progression, and had the disadvantage that, doubled up as he was, he could see little but the compass and the ground at his feet. And it nearly brought him to disaster; for he had been blundering along thus for about ten minutes in as near to a straight line as was possible, when he suddenly found himself at the edge of what looked like a low cliff. Another step forward and he would have been over the brink.

He stopped short, and, straightening his back, drew aside the branches of the tall bushes and looked down. Beneath him was what had evidently been a gravel-pit; but it must have been disused for many years, for its floor was covered, not only with bushes but trees of quite a respectable size. It seemed to him that this place was worth a closer examination. And

since the pit had been produced by excavation, there must obviously be some passage-way to the bottom, up and down which the carts had passed when the gravel was being dug.

Accordingly he began to make his way cautiously along the brink, keeping a safe distance from the possibly crumbling edge. He had proceeded thus for a couple of hundred yards when he came to the edge of a sunken cart-track, and following this, soon reached the entrance. Walking down the rough track, in which the deep cart-ruts could still be made out, he reached the floor of the pit and paused to look around; but the trees that had grown up and the high bushes made it impossible to see across. He therefore embarked on a circumnavigation of the pit, wading through beds of tall nettles that grew luxuriantly right up to the cliff-like face of the gravel.

He had made nearly half the circuit of the pit when he perceived, some distance ahead, a large wooden gate which guarded the entrance to a tunnel or excavation of some kind. It had two leaves, in of which he could see, as he came nearer, a wicket which stood half open. Approaching and peering in through the opening, he found the cavity to be an artificial cave dug in the hard gravel, apparently to serve as a cart-shelter, for the floor was marked by a pair of wide ruts and the remains of a broken sway-bar lay close to one side.

Deeply interested in this excavation, Mr. Pottermack pulled open the wicket-gate—in the lock of which a rusty key still remained—and stepping in through the opening, looked critically around the interior. That it had been for many years disused, so far as its original purpose was concerned, followed from the state of the pit and the absence of any signs of recent digging. But yet the cave itself showed traces of comparatively recent occupation; and those traces threw considerable light on the character of the occupants. A sooty streak up one wall, fading away on the roof, and a heap of wood-ashes mixed with fragments of charcoal, told of not one fire but a series of fires lit on the same spot. Beside the long-extinct embers lay a rusty "billy", originally made from a bully-beef tin fitted with a wire handle; fragments of unsavoury rags and a pair of decayed boots spoke of changes of costume that could certainly not have been premature; while numbers of bird and rabbit bones strewn around hinted at petty poaching, with, perchance, a fortunate snatch now and again in the vicinity of a farmyard.

Mr. Pottermack viewed these relics of the unknown nomad with profound attention. Like most resourceful men, he was quick to take a suggestion. And here, in the pit, the cavern, and these unmistakable relics, was a ready-made story. His own scheme had hardly advanced beyond the stage of sketchy outline. He knew broadly what he intended, but the details had not yet been filled in. Now he could complete the sketch in such detail that nothing would remain but the bare execution; and even that had been robbed of its chief difficulties by the discovery of this cavern.

He paced slowly up and down the echoing chamber, letting his imagination picture the dramatic climax and congratulating himself on this fortunate discovery. How astonishingly well it all came together! The place and the circumstances might have been designed for the very purpose. No need now to puzzle out a plausible cause of death. The empty poison-bottle and the discharged pistol-bullet, which he had considered alternatively, could now be discarded. The cause of death would be obvious. He had nearly broken his own neck coming here in broad daylight. If he had come in the dark, he would have broken it to a certainty.

Then there were the vanished notes and the necessarily empty pockets—necessarily empty, since, as he did not know what they had contained, he would not dare to introduce contents. He had hoped that a reasonable inference would be drawn. But now no inference would be needed. Even the most guileless village constable, when he had seen those fowl and rabbit bones, would understand how deceased's pockets came to be empty.

From reflections on the great denouement Pottermack recalled his thoughts to the practical details of procedure. He proposed forthwith to take over the reversion of the late resident's tenancy. But he could not leave it in its present unguarded state. When the time came for him to occupy it he would require "the use and enjoyment of the said messuage and premises" in the strictest privacy. It would never do to have casual callers dropping in there in his absence. He must see how the place could be made secure.

Inspection of the entrance showed that the large gates were fastened on the inside by massive bars of wood thrust through great iron staples. Consequently, when the wicket-gate was locked the cave was absolutely secure from intrusion. The important question now was as to the lock of the wicket-gate. Was it possible to turn the key? A few strenuous wrenches answered the question in the negative. It is true that, by a strong effort, the rusty key could be made to turn backwards, but by no effort whatever could it be made to shoot the bolt. Key and lock were both encrusted with the rust of years.

There was only one thing to be done. The key must be taken away and scraped clean. Then, with the aid of oil or paraffin, it would probably be possible to make the lock work. By putting out all his strength, Pottermack managed to turn the key backwards far enough to enable him to pull it out of the lock; whereupon, having dropped it in his pocket, he retraced his steps to the entrance to the pit and walked up the sloping cart-track until it emerged on the level, when he halted, and having consulted his compass, set forth, holding it in his hand, and trying by means of the ruts to find the track along which the carts used to pass to and fro across the road.

As the matter was of considerable importance (since the cave was to be the scene of some momentous operations and it was necessary for him to be able to find his way to it with ease and certainty), he took his time over the survey, tracing the ruts until they faded away into the younger undergrowth, and thereafter identifying the overgrown track by the absence of large bushes or trees. From time to time he jotted down a note of the compass-bearing and sliced off with his knife a piece of bark from one of the larger branches of a bush or the trunk of a sapling, and so proceeded methodically, leaving an

inconspicuously blazed trail behind him until at last he came out on to the path. Here he paused and looked about him for a landmark, his natural caution restraining him from making an artificial mark; nor was this necessary, for exactly opposite to the point where he had emerged, a good-sized beech tree stood back only a few yards from the path.

Having taken a good look at the tree, that he might recognize it at the next visit, he pocketed his compass and started homewards, counting his paces as he went until he reached the place where the path entered the wood, when he halted and wrote down in his pocket-book the number of paces. That done, his exploration was finished for the time being. The rest of the day he devoted to cleaning the key, to drawing on a card a little sketch-map of his route from the notes in his pocket-book, and to one or two odd jobs connected with the great scheme.

We need not follow his proceedings in minute detail. On the following day, having furnished himself with the cleaned key, a small spanner, a bottle of paraffin mixed with oil, and one or two feathers, he returned to the cave, finding his way thither without difficulty by the aid of his map. There he made a determined attack on the rusty lock, oiling its interior parts freely and turning the key—also oiled—by means of the spanner. At length its corroded bolt shot out with a reluctant groan; and when this, too, had been oiled and shot back and forth a few times, Pottermack shut the wicket, locked it and carried off the key in his pocket, with the comfortable feeling that he now had a secure place in which the highly compromising final operations could be carried out in reasonable safety.

And now the time drew nigh for those final operations to be proceeded with. The costume was complete and its various items had been brought by wear and rough usage to a suitable condition. The waning summer hinted at the approach of autumn and the weather would presently be such as to render woodland expeditions, especially of a nocturnal kind, disagreeable and difficult. And then Pottermack, though not in any way hustled, was beginning to look forward a little eagerly to the end of this troublesome, secret business. He yearned to feel that the tableau was set and that he could wait quietly for the denouement. Also, he was getting to feel very strongly that he would be glad to be relieved of the society of Khama-Heru.

But meanwhile that ancient libationer became daily a more and more undesirable tenant. For the time had come for the course of treatment that should render him at once more convincing and more portable. His condition when first unrolled from his wrappings was that of a wooden effigy, hard and stiff as a board. In that state he could never be got into his clothes, nor could he be transported to the cave under the necessary conditions of secrecy; nor could he effectively impersonate the late James Lewson. The work that the embalmers had done so well would have to be undone. After all, he had had some four thousand years of physical immortality, so the embalmers' fees would not have been thrown away.

There was no difficulty about the treatment. Pottermack simply wrapped the mummy in several thicknesses of wet rag, poured a can of water over it, and, having enclosed it in an outer covering of tarpaulin, left it to macerate for forty-eight hours. When, at the end of that time, he uncovered it, he was at once encouraged and appalled. The last trace of the museum atmosphere was dissipated. It was a mummy no more but just an unburied corpse. The dry muscles had absorbed the moisture and swelled up to an unexpected bulk; the parchment-like skin had grown soft and sodden, and the skeleton hands had filled out and looked almost natural save for the queer, dirty orange colour of the fingernails. And even that, when Pottermack had observed it with a strong suspicion that it was an artificial stain, disappeared almost completely after a cautious application of chlorinated soda. In short, Khama-Heru seemed already to call aloud for the coroner. All, then, was going well so far. But Pottermack realized only too clearly that the part that was done was the easy part. The real difficulties had now to be faced; and when he considered those difficulties, when he reflected on the hideous risks that he would have to run, the awful consequences of a possible miscarriage of his plans, he stood aghast.

But still with unshaken resolution he set himself to plotting out the details of the next move.

---

### CHAPTER XIII. — THE SETTING OF THE TABLEAU

THE task which confronted Mr. Pottermack in the immediate future involved a series of operations of greatly varying difficulty. The materials for the "tableau" had to be transported from the workshop and tool-house to the cave in the gravel-pit. Thither they would be conveyed in instalments and left safely under lock and key until they were all there, ready to be "assembled". In the case of the clothing, the conveyance would be attended by no difficulties and little risk. It could be done quite safely by daylight. But the instalments of Khama-Heru, particularly the larger ones, would have to be transported, not merely after dark, but so late as to make it practically certain that he would have the path and the wood to himself.

The latter fact had been evident from the beginning, and in view of it, Pottermack had provided himself with a night-marching compass (having a two-inch luminous dial and direction-pointer) and an electric lamp of the police pattern; so that he was now ready to begin; and as he had decided to convey the clothing first, he commenced operations by making a careful survey of the separate items and putting the necessary finishing touches to them.

It was now for the first time that he made a thorough examination of Lewson's coat and of the contents of the letter-case. And it was just as well that he did; for among those contents was a recent letter from Alice, refusing a "loan" (probably that letter had precipitated the catastrophe). It was unsigned and bore no address, but still it might have given trouble, even if no one but himself should have been able to identify the very characteristic handwriting. Accordingly he burned it forthwith and went still more carefully through the remaining papers; but there was nothing more that interested him. They consisted chiefly of tradesmen's bills, demands for money owing, notes of racing transactions, a letter from his broker, and a few visiting-cards—his own—all of which Pottermack returned to their receptacle. The other pockets contained only a handkerchief, marked "J. Lewson", a leather cigarette-case, and a loose key which looked like a safe key. The key he transferred to the trousers pocket, the cigarette-case he burned, and the handkerchief he retained as a guide to the next operation, that of marking the underclothing. This he did with great care, following his copy closely and placing the marks in accordance with the particulars in the police description, using a special ink of guaranteed durability.

When the "properties" were ready for removal he considered the question of time. This need not be a nocturnal expedition. There would be nothing suspicious in his appearance, and he had, in fact, during his exploration of the wood, not met or seen a single person. Still, it might be better to make his visit to the pit after dusk, when, even if he should be seen, he would not be recognized, and the nature of his proceedings there would not be clearly observable.

Accordingly he prepared for his start with the first instalment as the sun was getting low in the west. Lewson's coat he put on in lieu of his own, covering it with a roomy showerproof overcoat. The trousers and waistcoat he stowed neatly at the bottom of his rucksack with his moth-collecting kit and folding-net above them. Then, with the net-staff in his hand, he let himself out of the side gate just as the crimson disc of the sun began to dive behind a bank of slaty cloud.

The expedition was quite uneventful. He tramped along the path in the gloaming, a solitary figure in the evening landscape; he followed it into the wood and along to the now familiar beech tree; and in all the way he met not a soul. He turned off on the almost indistinguishable track, finding no need for his sketch-map and only glancing at the inconspicuous blazings on bush and sapling. By the time he reached the entrance to the pit, the dusk had closed in but even now there was light enough for him to find his way down the sloping cart-track, and even to note that apparently since his last visit, inasmuch as he had not noticed it before, a small tree had toppled over the edge of the cliff, bringing down with it a little avalanche of stones and gravel. He looked up and made a slight detour, picking his way cautiously among the fallen stones; and, preoccupied as he was, that fallen tree and those heaped and scattered stones started a train of thought of which he was hardly conscious at the time.

When he had shed Lewson's coat and by the light of a little, dim pocket-lamp unpacked the trousers and waistcoat, he threw them down in a corner at the back of the cave. Apprehensively he glanced round for some trace of recent visitors (though he knew there could have been none); then he extinguished the lamp, passed out through the wicket, shut the little gate, locked it, and, having pocketed the key, turned away with a sigh of relief. The first instalment was delivered. It wasn't much, but still, he had made a beginning.

On his way back through the wood he made use of the night-compass; not that he seemed greatly to need it, for he found his way with an ease that surprised him. But it was obviously a useful instrument and it was well that he should acquire experience in its management, for there were circumstances that might possibly arise in which it would be invaluable. It would be a fearsome experience to be lost at night in the wood—especially with one of the later instalments.

The easy success of this first expedition had a beneficial moral effect, and with each of the succeeding journeys the strangeness of the experience wore off more and more. Even in the twilight he threaded the blazed track through the wood quite readily without reference to the blazings; and the return in the dark, with the glowing compass in his hand, was hardly more difficult. Half a dozen of these evening jaunts found the entire costume—clothes, shoes, cap, socks, underclothing—stored under lock and key in the cave—waiting for the arrival of the wearer.

But now came the really formidable part of the undertaking, and as Pottermack contemplated those next few journeys he quailed. There was now no question of setting forth in the gloaming; these journeys would have to be made in the very dead of night. So he felt; and even as he yielded to the feeling as to something inevitable, he knew that the reason for it was largely psychological; that it was determined by his own mental state rather than by external circumstances. Admittedly, a

human head is an awkward thing to pack neatly in a rucksack. Still, it is of no great size. Its longest diameter, including the lower jaw, is no more than nine or ten inches. A half-quartern loaf and a bottle of beer would make a bigger bulge; yet with these, Pottermack would have gone abroad gaily, never dreaming of having his burden challenged.

He knew all this. And yet as he took up the head (it came off in his hands owing to the frayed-out condition of the softened muscle and ligament) a thrill of horror ran through him at the thought of that journey. The thing seemed to grin derisively in his face as he carried it from the tool-house to the workshop; and when he laid it down on the sheet of brown paper on the bench, the jaws fell open as if it were about to utter a yell.

He wrapped it up hastily and thrust it into the ruck-sack, and then, by way of feeble and futile precaution stuffed the sugaring-tin and collecting-box on top. With creeping flesh he slung the package on his back and, grasping the net-stick, went out across the garden to the gate. He was frankly terrified. When he had passed out of the gate, he stood for some seconds irresolute, unwilling to shut it behind him; and when at last he closed it softly, the click of the spring-latch shutting him out definitely gave him such a qualm that he could hardly resist the impulse to reopen the gate, or, at least, to leave the key in the lock ready for instant use.

Once started, he strode forward at a rapid pace, restraining himself by an effort from breaking into a run. It was a pitch-dark night, near to new moon and overcast as well; so dark that he could barely see the path in the open, and only a slightly intenser gloom told him when he had entered the wood. Here he began to count his paces and strain his eyes into the blackness ahead; for, anticipating some nervousness on this journey, he had taken the precaution when returning from the last to spread a sheet of newspaper at the foot of the beech tree (which formed his "departure" for the cart-track and the gravel-pit) and weight it with a large stone. For this patch of light on the dark background he looked eagerly as he stumbled forward, peering into utter blackness and feeling his way along the path with his feet; and when he had counted out the distance and still saw no sign of it, he halted, and, listening fearfully to the stealthy night sounds of the wood, looked anxiously both ahead and behind him.

Nothing whatever could be seen. But perhaps it was too dark for even a white object to show. Perhaps he had counted wrong, or possibly in his haste he had "stepped out" or "stepped short". Reluctantly he drew out his little pocket-lamp (he did not dare to use the powerful inspection-lamp, though he had it with him) and let its feeble glimmer travel around him. Somehow the trees and bushes looked unfamiliar; but doubtless everything would look unfamiliar in that deceptive glimmer. Still, he had begun to know this path pretty well, even by night. Eventually he turned back and slowly retraced his steps, throwing the dim lamplight on the path ahead. Presently, out of the greenish gloom with its bewildering shadows there sprang a spot of white; and hurrying forward, he recognized with a sigh of relief the sheet of paper lying at the foot of the beech.

From this point he had no more difficulty. Plunging forward into the cellar-like darkness, he went on confidently, guided by the trusty compass which glowed only the more brightly for the impenetrable gloom around. Now and again he stopped to let the swinging dial come to rest and to verify his position by a momentary flash of the lamp. Soon he felt the familiar ruts beneath his feet and came out into the mitigated obscurity of the open track; then, following it down the slope, found his way through the nettles under the cliff, over the remains of the avalanche, until he reached the gate of the cave. A few minutes more and he had discharged his ghastly cargo, locked it into its new abode, and started, free at last from his horrid incubus, on the homeward journey, noting with a certain exasperation how, now that it was of no consequence, he made his way through the wood almost as easily as he would have done by daylight.

But it had been a harrowing experience. Short as had been the journey and light the burden, he stumbled in at his gate as wearily as if he had tramped a dozen miles with a sack of flour on his back. And yet it was but the first and by far the easiest of these midnight expeditions. He realized that clearly enough as he stole silently into the house while a neighbouring church clock struck two. There were three more instalments; and of the last one he would not allow himself to think.

But events seldom fall out precisely as we forecast them. The next two 'trips' gave Pottermack less trouble than had the first, though they were undeniably more risky. The safe conveyance of the first instalment gave him confidence, and the trifling, but disconcerting, hitch in finding the 'departure' mark suggested measures to prevent its repetition. Still, it was as well that he had transported the easiest load first, for the two succeeding ones made call enough on his courage and resolution. For whereas the head had merely created a conspicuous bulge in the rucksack, the legs refused to be concealed at all. Doubled up as completely as the softened muscles and ligaments permitted, each made an unshapely, elongated parcel over twenty inches in length, of which nearly half projected from the mouth of the rucksack.

However, the two journeys were made without any mishap. As on the previous occasions, Pottermack met nobody either on the path or in the wood, and this circumstance helped him to brace up his nerves for the conveyance of the final instalment. Indeed, the chance of his meeting any person at one or two in the morning in this place, which was unfrequented even by day, was infinitely remote. At those hours one could probably have walked the whole length of the town without encountering a single human being other than the constables on night duty; and it was certain that no constable would be prowling about the deserted countryside or groping his way through the wood.

So Pottermack argued, and reasonably enough; but still he shied at that last instalment. The headless trunk alone was some twenty-six inches long, and, with the attached arms, was a bulky mass. No disguise was possible in its conveyance. It would have to be put into a sack and frankly carried on his shoulder. Of course, if he met nobody, this was of no consequence apart from the inconvenience and exertion; and again he assured himself that he would meet nobody. There was nobody to meet. But still—well, there was no margin for the unexpected. The appearance of a man carrying a sack at

one o'clock in the morning was a good deal more than suspicious. No rural constable or keeper would let him pass. And a single glance into that sack—

However, it was useless to rack his nerves with disquieting suppositions. There was pretty certainly not a human creature abroad in the whole countryside, and at any rate the thing had got to be taken to the cave. Quivering with disgust and apprehension, he persuaded the limp torso into the sack that he had obtained for it, tied up the mouth, and, hoisting it on his shoulder, put out into the darkness.

As soon as he had closed the gate he set off at a quick walk. He had no inclination to run this time, for his burden was of a very substantial weight from the moisture that it had absorbed. From time to time he had to halt and transfer it from one shoulder to the other. He would have liked to put it down and rest for a few moments, but did not dare while he was in the open. An unconquerable terror urged him forward to the shelter of the wood and forbade him to slacken his pace, though his knees were trembling and the sweat trickled down his face. Yet he kept sufficient presence of mind to make sure of his 'departure', counting his paces from the entrance to the wood and showing the glimmer of his little lamp as his counting warned him of his approach to the beech tree. Soon its light fell on the sheet of paper, and, with a sigh of relief, he turned off the path into the old cart-track.

Once off the path, his extreme terror subsided and he followed the track confidently with only an occasional flash of his lamp to pick up a blaze on bush or tree and verify his direction. He even contemplated a brief rest, and he had, in fact, halted and was about to lower his burden from his shoulders when his ear seemed to catch a faint sound of movement somewhere within the wood. Instantly all his terrors revived. His limbs trembled and his hair seemed to stir under his cap as he stood stock-still with mouth agape, listening with almost agonized intentness.

Presently he heard the sound again; the sound of something moving through the undergrowth. And then it became quite distinct and clearly recognizable as footfalls—the footsteps of two persons at least, moving rather slowly and stealthily; and by the increasing distinctness of the sounds, it was evident that they were coming in his direction. The instant that he recognized this, Pottermack stole softly off the track into the dense wood until he came to a young beech tree, at the foot of which he silently deposited the sack, leaning it against the bole of the tree. Then in the same stealthy manner he crept away a dozen paces or so and again halted and listened. But now the sounds had unaccountably ceased; and to Pottermack the profound silence that had followed them was sinister and alarming. Suddenly there came to him distinctly a hoarse whisper:

"Joe, there's some one in the wood!"

Again the deathly silence descended. Then the sack, which must have been stood up insecurely, slipped from the bole of the tree and rolled over among the dead leaves.

"J'ear that?" came the hushed voice of the unseen whisperer.

Pottermack listened intently, craning forward in an effort to locate the owner of the voice. In fact, he craned a little too far and had to move one foot to recover his balance. But the toe of that foot caught against a straggling root and tripped him up, so that he staggered forward a couple of paces, not noisily, but still very audibly.

Instantly the silence of the wood was dissipated. A startled voice exclaimed: "Gawd! Look out!" and then Joseph and his companion took to undissembled flight, bursting through the undergrowth and crashing into the bushes like a couple of startled elephants. Pottermack made a noisy pretence of pursuit which accelerated the pace of the fugitives; then he stood still, listening with grateful ears to the hurried tramlings as they gradually grew faint in the distance.

When they had nearly died away, he turned, and re-entering the dense wood, made his way, with the aid of the little lamp, towards the beech where he had put down the sack. But the beech was not exactly where he had supposed it to be, and it took him a couple of minutes of frantic searching to locate it. At last the feeble rays of his lamp fell on the slender trunk, and he hurried forward eagerly to retrieve his treasure. But when he reached the tree and cast the light of his lamp on the buttressed roots, the sack was nowhere to be seen. He gazed in astonishment at the roots and the ground beyond, but the sack was certainly not there. It was very strange. He had heard the sack fall over and roll off the roots, but it could not have rolled out of sight. Was it possible that the poachers, or whatever they were, could have picked it up and carried it away? That seemed quite impossible, for the voice had come from the opposite direction. And then the simple explanation dawned on him. This was the wrong tree.

As he realized this, his self-possession forsook him completely. With frantic haste he began to circle round, thrusting through the undergrowth, peering with starting eyes at the ground carpeted with last year's leaves on which the light fell from his lamp. Again and again a tall, slender trunk lured him on to a fresh disappointment. He seemed to be bewitched. The place appeared to be full of beech trees—as in fact it was, being a beech wood. And with each failure he became more wildly terrified and distraught. All sense of direction and position was gone. He was just blindly seeking an unknown tree in a pitch-dark wood.

Suddenly he realized the horrid truth. He was lost. He had no idea whatever as to his whereabouts. He could not even guess in which direction the track lay, and as to his hideous but precious burden, he might have strayed half a mile away from it. He stopped short and tried to pull himself together. This sort of thing would never do. He might wander on, at this rate, until daylight or topple unawares into the pit and break his neck. There was only one thing to be done. He must get back to the path and take a fresh departure.



As this simple solution occurred to him, his self-possession became somewhat restored and he was able to consider his position more calmly. Producing his compass and opening it, he stood quite still until the dial came to rest. Then he turned slowly, so as not to set it swinging again, until the luminous "lubber-line" pointed due west. He had only to keep it pointing in that direction and it would infallibly lead him to the path, which ran nearly north and south. So, with renewed confidence, he began to walk forward, keeping his eye fixed on that invaluable direction-line.

He had been walking thus some three or four minutes, progressing slowly of necessity since he had to push straight forward through the undergrowth, when he tripped over some bulky object and butted rather heavily into the trunk of a tree. Picking himself up, a little shaken by the impact, he snatched out his lamp and threw its light on the object over which he had stumbled. And then he could hardly repress a shout of joy.

It was the sack.

How differently do we view things under different circumstances. When Pottermack had started, the very touch of that sack with its damp, yielding inmate had sent shudders of loathing down his spine. Now he caught it up joyfully, he could almost have embraced it, and as he set forward in the new direction he steadied it fondly on his shoulder. For he had not only found the sack, he had recovered his position. A dozen paces to the north brought him to the spot from whence he had stepped off the track into the wood. Now he had but to turn east and resume his interrupted journey.

But the meeting with those two men had shaken his confidence. He stole on nervously along the cart-track, and when he reached the pit, he peered apprehensively into the darkness on every side, half expecting to detect some lurking figure watching him from among the high nettles. Only when he had at last deposited his burden in the cave and locked and tried the wicket was his mind even moderately at rest; and even then throughout the homeward journey his thoughts occupied themselves in picturing, with perverse ingenuity, all the mischances that might possibly have befallen him and that might yet lie in wait to defeat his plans in the very moment of their accomplishment.

He arrived home tired, shaken, and dispirited, inclined rather to let his thoughts dwell on the difficulties and dangers that lay ahead than to congratulate himself on those that he had surmounted. As he crept noiselessly up to bed and thought of the gruesome task that had yet to be accomplished, he resolved to give himself a day or two's rest to steady his nerves before he embarked on it. But the following day saw a change of mind. Refreshed even by the short night's sleep, as soon as he had risen he began to be possessed by a devouring anxiety to finish this horrible business and be done with it. Besides which, common sense told him that the presence of the body and the clothes in the cave constituted a very serious danger. If they should be discovered, very awkward enquiries might be set on foot, and at the best his scheme would be "blown on" and rendered impossible for ever after.

A long nap in the afternoon further revived him, and as the evening wore on he began to be impatient to get on the road. This time there were no special preparations to make and no risks in the actual journeys, either going or returning. The recollection of those two men occasioned some passing thoughts of means of defence, for they had obviously been out for no good, as their precipitate retreat showed. He even considered taking a revolver, but his thorough-going British dislike of lethal weapons, which his long residence in the States had accentuated rather than diminished, made him reject the idea. The net-staff was quite a good weapon, especially in the dark; and, in fact, he was not particularly nervous about those men, or any others, so long as he bore no incriminating burden.

When at last he started, just after midnight, he carried the rucksack slung from his shoulders and the stout net-stick in his hand. But the former contained nothing but a bona fide collecting outfit, including the inspection-lamp, so even a police patrol had no terrors for him. Naturally, it followed that he neither met, saw, nor heard a single person either on the path or in the wood. Swinging easily along the now familiar way, he made his departure almost by instinct and threaded the cart-track with hardly a glance at the compass. And all too soon—as it seemed to him—he found himself at the gate of the cave with the last horrid task immediately confronting him.

It was even worse than he had expected, for he had never dared to let his imagination fill in all the dreadful details. But now, when he had locked himself in and hung the inspection-lamp on a nail in the gate so that a broad beam of light fell on the grisly heap, he stood, shivering and appalled, struggling to brace up his courage to begin. And at last he brought himself to the sticking point and fell to work.

We need not share his agonies. It was a loathly business. The dismembered parts had to be inducted separately into their garments, leaving the 'assembling' for a later stage; and the sheer physical difficulty of persuading those limp, flabby, unhelpful members into the closer-fitting articles of clothing was at once an aggravation and a distraction from the horror of the task. And with it all, it was necessary to keep the attention wide awake. For there must be no mistakes. A time would come when the clothing would be submitted to critical examination and the slightest error might rouse fatal suspicions. So Pottermack told himself as, with trembling fingers, he buttoned the waistcoat on the headless, legless torso; only to discover, as he fastened the last button, that he had forgotten the braces.

At length the actual clothing was completed. The legs, encased in underclothing, trousers, socks and shoes, lay on the floor, sprawling in hideous, unnatural contortion; the trunk, fully dressed even to collar and neck-tie, reposed on its back with its arms flung out and the brown, claw-like hands protruding from the sleeves; while, hard by, the head seemed to grin with sardonic amusement at the cloth cap that sat incongruously on its ancient cranium. All was now ready for the 'assembling'.

This presented less difficulty, but the result was far from satisfactory. For no kind of fastening was permissible. The legs

were joined to the trunk by the trousers only, secured precariously by the braces. As to the head, it admitted of no junction, but would have to be placed in position as best it could. However, bad as the 'assemblage' was, it would answer well enough if there were no premature discovery.

Having seen everything ready for the final act, Pottermack switched off the lamp and stood awhile to let his eyes grow accustomed to the darkness before he should venture outside. It was not a situation that was helpful to a man whose nerves were already on edge. All sorts of sinister suggestions awakened in his mind in connection with the ghastly figure that sprawled unseen within a few inches of his feet. And then he became acutely sensible of the sepulchral silence of the place; a silence which was yet penetrated by sounds from without, especially by the hootings of a company of owls, whose derisive "hoo-hoos" seemed particularly addressed to him with something of a menacing quality. At length, finding the suspense unbearable, he unlocked the wicket and looked out. By now his eyes had recovered from the glare of the lamp sufficiently for him to be able to see the nearer objects distinctly and to make out the shadowy mass of the cliff close at hand. He peered into the gloom on all sides and listened intently. Nothing seemed to be moving, nor could his ear detect aught but the natural sounds of the woods.

He turned back into the cave, and, guided by a momentary glimmer of his small lamp, carefully gathered up the limp, headless effigy and lifted it with infinite precaution not to disturb the insecure fastenings that held its parts together. Thus he carried it tenderly out through the wicket, and, stepping cautiously over the rough ground and through the rank vegetation, bore it to "the appointed place"—the place where the fallen tree and the scattered stones and gravel marked the site of the "avalanche". Here, close by the tree, he laid it down, and, having inspected it rapidly by the light of the lamp and made a few readjustments, he went back and fetched out the head. This he laid in position by what was left of the neck and supported it in the chosen posture by packing handfuls of gravel round it. When the arrangement was completed he threw the feeble glimmer of the lamp on it once more and looked it over quickly. Then, satisfied that its appearance was as convincing as he could make it, he gathered a few stones and laid them on it, sprinkled over it a handful or two of gravel, and, finally, pulled the high nettles down over it until it was almost hidden from view.

And with that, his task was finished. Now, all he had to do was to get clear of the neighbourhood and wait for whatever might happen. With a sigh of relief he turned away and re-entered the cave, for the last time, as he hoped. Shutting himself in once more, he made a thorough examination of the place by the light of the inspection-lamp to make sure that he had left no traces of his tenancy. The remains of the tramp's fire, the billy, and the fowl and rabbit bones, he left intact; and, having satisfied himself that there was nothing else, he slipped on his rucksack, picked up his net-stick and went out, leaving the wicket gate ajar with the key in the outside of the lock as he had found it.

Very different were his feelings this night as he wended homewards through the woods from what they had been on the night before. Now he cared not whom he might meet—though he was better pleased that he met nobody. His task was done. All the troublesome secrecy and scheming was over, and all the danger was at an end. His premises were purged of every relic of that night of horror and release. Now he could go back to his normal life and resume his normal occupations. And as to the future; at the worst, a premature discovery might expose the fraud and spoil his plans. But no one would connect him with the fraud. He had given no name to the auctioneer. If suspicion fell on any one, it would fall on the fugitive, James Lewson.

But it was infinitely unlikely that the fraud would be detected. And if it were not, if all went well, James Lewson would be given a decent, reasonable death, and, in due course, a suitable burial. And—again in due course—Alice Bellard would become Mrs. Pottermack.



## CHAPTER XIV. — THE DISCOVERY

IT will not appear surprising that for some days after his final expedition Mr. Pottermack's thoughts were almost exclusively occupied by the product of that night's labour. Indeed, his interest in it was so absorbing that on the very next day he was impelled to pay it a visit of inspection. He did not, however, go down to the gravel-pit, but, approaching it from above, found his way easily to that part of the brink from which the tree had fallen, carrying the 'avalanche' with it. Here, going down on hands and knees, he crept to the extreme edge and peered over. There was not much to see. There lay the fallen tree, there was the great bed of nettles, and in the midst of it an obscure shape displaying at one end a pair of shoes and at the other, part of a shabby cap.

It was surprisingly inconspicuous. The tall nettles, which he had pulled down across it, concealed the face and broke the continuity of the figure so that its nature was not evident at the first glance. This was eminently satisfactory, for it multiplied the improbabilities of early discovery. It was unlikely that any one would come here at all, but if some person should chance to stray hither, still it was unlikely that the body would be observed.

Considerably reassured, Mr. Pottermack backed away from the insecure edge and went his way, and thereafter firmly resisted the strong impulse to repeat his visit. But, as we have said, that grim figure, though out of sight, was by no means out of mind; and for the next week or two Mr. Pottermack was uncomfortably on the *qui vive* for the rumour of discovery. But as the weeks went by and still the body lay undiscovered, his mind settled down more and more to a state of placid expectancy.

The summer came to an end with a month of steady rain that made the woods impossible for wayfarers despite the gravel soil. The autumn set in mild and damp. Hedgerow elms broke out into patches of yellow, and the beeches in the wood, after a few tentative changes, burst out into a glory of scarlet and crimson and orange. But their glory was short-lived. A sudden sharp frost held them in its grip for a day or two; and when it lifted, the trees were bare. Their gay mantles had fallen to form a carpet for the earth at their feet.

Then came the autumn gales, driving the fallen leaves hither and thither, but sooner or later driving most of them into the gravel-pit, whence there was no escape. And there they accumulated in drifts and mounds, moving restlessly round their prison as the winds eddied beneath the cliffs, and piling up in sheltered places, smothering the nettles and flattening them down by their weight.

Once, at this time, Mr. Pottermack was moved to call on the disguised libationer. But when he crawled to the edge of the pit and looked down, the figure was invisible. Even the nettles were hidden. All that was to be seen was a great russet bank, embedding the fallen tree, and revealing to the expert eye a barely perceptible elongated prominence.

These months of waiting were to Pottermack full of peace and quiet happiness. He was not impatient. The future was rich in promise and it was not so far ahead but that it seemed well within reach. He had no present anxieties, for the danger of premature discovery was past, and every month that rolled away added its contribution of security as to the final result. So he went his way and lived his life, care-free and soberly cheerful.

There were, indeed, times when he was troubled with twinges of compunction with regard to his beloved friend, for whom these Titanic labours had been undertaken. For Alice Bellard was acutely aware of the unsatisfactory nature of their relationship. She realized that simple, almost conventional friendship is no sort of answer to passionate love, and she made it clear to Pottermack that it was an abiding grief to her that she had no more to give. He yearned to disillusion her; to let her share his confident hopes that all would yet be well. But how could he? It was unavoidable that, in deceiving all the world, he must deceive her.

But, in fact, he was not deceiving her. He was merely conveying to her the actual truth by an indirect and slightly illusory method. So he argued in regard to his ultimate purpose; and as to this intervening period—well, obviously he could not make her an accessory to his illegal actions. So he had to put up, as best he could, with her grateful acknowledgments of his patience and resignation, his cheerful acceptance of the inevitable; feeling all the time an arrant humbug as he realized how far he had been from any such acceptance.

Thus, in quiet content and with rising hopes, he watched the seasons pass; saw the countryside mantled with snow, heard "the ring of gliding steel" on icebound ponds and streams, and walked with smoking breath on the hard-frozen roads. And still, as the sands of time trickled out slowly, he waited, now hardly expectant and not at all impatient but rather disposed to favour a little further delay. But presently the winter drew off her forces reluctantly, like a defeated army, with rear guard actions of rain and howling gales. And then the days began to lengthen, the sunbeams to shed a sensible warmth; the birds ventured on tentative twitterings and the buds made it clear that they were getting ready for business. In short, the spring was close at hand; and with the coming of spring, Mr. Pottermack's fancy lightly turned to thoughts of inquests.

For the time had come. The long months of waiting had been all to the good. They had given the crude understudy time to mature, to assimilate itself to its setting and to take on the style of the principal actor. But the preparatory stage must not be unduly prolonged or it might defeat its own end. There might come a stage at which the transformation would be so complete as not only to prevent the detection of the imposture but to render identification even of the counterfeit impossible. Hence, as the spring sunshine brightened and the buds began to burst, Mr. Pottermack's expectancy revived, not untinged with anxiety. Hopefully his thoughts dwelt on primrose-gatherers and rambling juveniles in search of birds'

nests and eggs; and when still no news was heard from the gravel-pit, he began seriously to consider the abandonment of his purely passive attitude and the adoption of some active measures to bring about the discovery.

It was a difficult problem. The one thing that was quite clear to him was that he must on no account appear personally in the matter. He could not say exactly why. But he had that feeling, and probably he was right. But if he could not appear in it himself, how was the thing to be managed? That was the question that he put to himself a hundred times in a day, but to which he could find no answer. And as events fell out, no answer had, after all, to be found, for a contingency that he had never contemplated arose and solved his problem for him.

It happened that on a fine sunny day after a spell of wet he was moved to take a walk along the path through the wood, which he had not done for a week or two. He was conscious of a rather strong desire to pay a visit to the pit and see for himself how matters were progressing, but he had no intention of yielding to this weakness; for the nearer the discovery, the more necessary it was for him to keep well in the background. Accordingly he trudged on, propounding to himself again and again that seemingly unanswerable question, and meanwhile picking up half-unconsciously the old landmarks. He had approached within a few yards of the well-remembered 'departure' beech tree when he suddenly caught sight of a new feature that brought him instantly to a stand. Right across the path, cutting deep into the soft loam of the surface, was a pair of cart-ruts with a row of large hoof-marks between them. They were obviously quite fresh, and it was clear, by the depth and width of the ruts and by the number of hoof-prints and the fact that they pointed in both directions, that they had been made by more than one cart, or at least by more than one journey to and fro of a single cart.

As he was standing eagerly examining them and speculating on what they portended, a hollow rumbling on his right heralded the approach of an empty cart from the west. A few moments later it came into sight through an opening just beyond the beech, the carter, dismounted, leading his horse by the bridle. Seeing Pottermack, he touched his hat and civilly wished him good morning.

"Now, where might you be off to?" Pottermack enquired genially.

"To the old gravel-pit, sir", was the reply. "'Tis many a year since any gravel was dug there. But Mr. Barber he's a-makin' a lot of this here concrete stuff for to put into the foundations of the new houses what he's buildin', and he thought as it were foolishness to send for gravel to a distance when there's a-plenty close at hand. So we're a-openin' up the old pit."

"Where about is the pit?" asked Pottermack. "Is it far from here?"

"Far! Lor' bless yer, no, sir. Just a matter of a few hundred yards. If you like to walk along with me, I'll show you the place."

Pottermack accepted the offer promptly, and as the man started his horse with a friendly "gee-up", he walked alongside, following the new ruts down the familiar track—less familiar now that the great hoofs and the wide cart wheels had cleared an open space—until they came out at the top of the rough road that led down to the pit. Here Pottermack halted, wishing his friend "good morning", and stood watching the cart as it rumbled down the slope and skirted the floor of the pit towards a spot where a bright-coloured patch on the weathered 'face' showed the position of the new working.

Here Pottermack could see two men loosening the gravel with picks and two more shovelling the fallen stuff into a cart that was now nearly full. The place where they were at work was on the right side of the pit, as Pottermack stood, and nearly opposite to the cave, the gates of which he could see somewhat to his left. Standing there, he made a rapid mental note of the relative positions, and then, turning about, made his way back to the path, cogitating profoundly as he went.

How long would it be before one of those men made the momentous discovery? Or was it possible that they might miss it altogether? The British labourer is not by nature highly observant, nor has he an excessively active curiosity. Nearly the whole width of the pit separated them from the remains. No occasion need arise for them to stray away from the spot where their business lay. But it would be exasperating if they should work there for a week or two and then go away leaving the discovery still to be made.

However, it was of no use to be pessimistic. There was a fair probability that one of them would at least go round to the cave. Quite possibly it might again be put to its original use as a cart-shelter. For his part, he could do no more than wait upon the will of Fortune and meanwhile hold himself prepared for whatever might befall. But in spite of the latter discreet resolution, the discovery, when it came, rather took him by surprise. He was lingering luxuriously over his after-breakfast pipe some four or five days after his meeting with the carter, idly turning over the leaves of a new book, while his thoughts circled about the workers in the pit and balanced the chances of their stumbling upon that gruesome figure under the cliff, when a familiar knock at the front door dispelled his reverie in an instant and turned his thoughts to more pleasant topics. He had risen and was about to go to the door himself, but was anticipated by Mrs. Gadby, who, a few moments later, announced and ushered in Mrs. Bellard.

Pottermack advanced to greet her, but was instantly struck by something strange and disquieting in her appearance and manner. She stopped close by the door until the housekeeper's footsteps had died away, then, coining close to him, exclaimed almost in a whisper:

"Marcus, have you heard—about James, I mean?"

"James!" repeated Pottermack helplessly, his wits for the moment paralysed by the suddenness of the disclosure; then, pulling himself together with a violent effort, he asked: "You don't mean to say that fellow has turned up again?"

"Then you haven't heard. He is dead, Marcus. They found his body yesterday evening. The news is all over the town this

morning."

"My word!" exclaimed Pottermack. "This is news with a vengeance! Where was he found?"

"Quite near here. In a gravel-pit in Potter's Wood. He must have fallen into it the very night that he went away."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Pottermack. "What an astonishing thing! Then he must have been lying there all these months! But—er—I suppose there is no doubt that it is Lewson's body?"

"Oh, not the least. Of course the body itself was quite unrecognizable. They say it actually dropped to pieces when they tried to pick it up. Isn't it horrible? But the police were able to identify it by the clothes and some letters and visiting-cards in the pockets. Otherwise there was practically nothing left but the bones. It makes me shudder to think of it."

"Yes", Pottermack admitted calmly, his self-possession being now restored, "it does sound rather unpleasant. But it might have been worse. He might have turned up alive. Now you are rid of him for good."

"Yes, I know", said she; "and I can't pretend that it isn't a great relief to know that he is dead. But still—what ought I to do, Marcus?"

"Do?" Pottermack repeated in astonishment.

"Yes. I feel that I ought to do something. After all, he was my husband."

"And a shocking bad husband at that. But I don't understand what you mean. What do you suppose you ought to do?"

"Well, don't you think that somebody—somebody belonging to him—ought to come forward to—to identify him?"

"But", exclaimed Pottermack, "you said that there is nothing left of him but his bones. Now, my dear, you know you can't identify his bones. You've never seen them. Besides, he has been identified already."

"Well, say, to acknowledge him."

"But, my dear Alice, why on earth should you acknowledge him, when you had, years ago, repudiated him, and even taken another name to avoid being in any way associated with him? No, no, my dear, you just keep quiet and let things take their course. This is one of those cases in which a still tongue shows a wise head. Think of all the scandal and gossip that you would start if you were to come forward and announce yourself as Mrs. Lewson. You would never be able to go on living here. I take it that no one in this place knows who you are?"

"Not a soul."

"And how many people altogether know that you were married to him?"

"Very few, and those practically all strangers. We lived a very solitary life at Leeds."

"Very well. Then the least said the soonest mended. Besides", he added, as another highly important consideration burst on him, "there is our future to think of. You are still willing to marry me, dear, aren't you?"

"Yes, Marcus, of course I am. But please don't let us talk about it now."

"I don't want to, my dear, but we have to settle this other matter. The position now is that we can get married whenever we please."

"Yes, there is no obstacle now."

"Then, Alice dearest, don't let us make obstacles. But we shall if we make known the fact that you were Lewson's wife. Just think of the position. Here were you and your husband in the same town, posing as total strangers. And here were you and I, intimate friends and generally looked upon almost as an engaged couple. Now, suppose that we marry in the reasonably near future. That alone would occasion a good deal of comment. But suppose that it should turn out that Lewson met his death by foul means. What do you imagine people would say then?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Alice. "I had never thought of that. Of course, people—or at any rate, some people—would say that we had conspired to get him out of the way. And really, that is what it would look like. I am glad I came and consulted you."

Pottermack drew a deep breath. So that danger was past. Not that it had been a very obvious danger. But instinct warned him—and it was a perfectly sound instinct—to avoid at all costs having his personality in any way connected with that of James Lewson. Now he would be able to watch the course of events at his ease, and to all appearance from the detached standpoint of a total stranger. Nor was Alice less relieved. Some obscure sense of loyalty had seemed to impel her to proclaim her relationship to the dead wastrel. But she was not unwilling to be convinced of her mistake; and when presently she went away, her heart was all the lighter for feeling herself excused from the necessity of laying bare to the public gaze the sordid details of her domestic tragedy.

When she was gone, Pottermack reflected on the situation and considered what he had better do. Caution conflicted with inclination. He was on the very tiptoe of curiosity, but yet he felt that he must show no undue interest in the affair. Nevertheless, it was desirable that he should know, if possible, what had really happened and what was going to be done about it. Accordingly he decided to go forth and perambulate the town and passively permit the local quidnuncs to supply him with the latest details.

He did not, however, add much to his knowledge excepting in one important respect, which was that the date of the inquest was already fixed. It was to take place at three o'clock in the afternoon on the next day but one; and having regard to the public interest in the case, the inquiry was to be held in the Town Hall. When he had ascertained this fact, and that the public would have free access to the hall during the proceedings, he went home and resolved to manifest no further interest in the case until those proceedings should open.

But the interval was one of intense though suppressed excitement. He could settle to nothing either in the workshop or in the garden. He could only seek relief in interminable tramps along the country roads. His mind seethed with mingled anxiety and hope. For the inquest was the final scene of this strange drama of which he was at once author and stage manager; and it was the goal of all his endeavours. If it went off successfully, James Lewson would be finished with for ever; he would be dead, buried, and duly registered at Somerset House; and Marcus Pottermack could murmur "Nunc dimittis" and go his way in peace.

Naturally enough, he was punctual, and more than punctual, in his attendance at the Town Hall on the appointed day, for he arrived at the entrance nearly half an hour before the time announced for the opening of the inquiry. However, he was not alone. There were others still more punctual and equally anxious to secure good places. In fact, there was quite a substantial crowd of early place-seekers which grew from moment to moment. But their punctuality failed to serve its purpose, since the main doors were still closed and a constable stationed in front of them barred all access. Some of them strayed into the little square or yard adjoining, apparently for the satisfaction of looking at the closed door of the mortuary on its farther side.

Pottermack circulated among the crowd, speaking to no one but listening to the disjointed scraps of conversation that came his way. His state of mind was very peculiar. He was acutely anxious, excited, and expectant. But behind these natural feelings he had a queer sense of aloofness, of superiority to these simple mortals around him, including the coroner and the police. For he knew all about it, whereas they would presently grope their way laboriously to a conclusion, and a wrong conclusion at that. He knew whose were the remains lying in the mortuary. He could have told them that they were about to mistake the scanty vestiges of a libationer of the nineteenth or twentieth dynasty for the body of the late James Lewson. So it was that he listened with a sort of indulgent complacency to the eager discussions concerning the mysterious end of the deceased branch manager.

Presently a report began to circulate that a gentleman had been admitted to the mortuary by the sergeant and, as the crowd forthwith surged along in that direction, he allowed himself willingly to be carried with it. Arrived at the little square, the would-be spectators developed a regular gyratory movement down one side and up the other, being kept on the move by audible requests to "pass along, please". In due course Pottermack came in sight of the mortuary door, now half open and guarded by a police-sergeant who struggled vainly to combine the incompatible qualities of majestic impassivity and a devouring curiosity as to what was going on inside.

At length Pottermack reached the point at which he could see in through the half-open door, and at the first glance his "superiority complex" underwent sudden dissolution. A tall man, whose back was partly turned towards him, held in his hand a shoe, the sole of which he was examining with concentrated attention. Pottermack stopped dead, gazing at him in consternation. Then the sergeant sang out his oft-repeated command and Pottermack was aware of increasing pressure from behind. But at the very instant when he was complying with the sergeant's injunction to "pass along", the tall man turned his head to look out at the door and their eyes met. And at the sight of the man's face Pottermack could have shrieked aloud.

It was the strange lawyer.

For some moments Pottermack's faculties were completely paralysed by this apparition. He drifted on passively with the crowd in a state of numb dismay. Presently, however, as the effects of the shock passed off and his wits began to revive, some of his confidence revived with them. After all, what was there to be so alarmed about? The man was only a lawyer, and he had seemed harmless enough when they had talked together at the gate. True, he had seemed to be displaying an unholy interest in the soles of those shoes. But what of that? Those soles were all correct, even to the gash in the horse's neck. They were, in fact, the most convincing and unassailable part of the make-up.

But, encourage himself as he would, the unexpected appearance of this lawyer had given his nerves a nasty jar. It suggested a number of rather disquieting questions. For instance, how came this man to turn up at this 'psychological moment' like a vulture sniffing from afar a dead camel in the desert? Why was he looking at those soles with such extraordinary interest? Was it possible that he had seen those photographs? And if so, might they have shown something that was invisible to the unaided eye?

These questions came crowding into Mr. Pottermack's mind, each one more disquieting than the others. But always he came back to the most disquieting one of all. How, in the name of Beelzebub, came this lawyer to make his appearance in the Borley mortuary at this critical and most inopportune moment?

It was natural that Mr. Pottermack should ask himself this very pertinent question; for, in truth, it did appear a singular coincidence. And inasmuch as coincidences usually seem to demand some explanation, we may venture to pursue the question that the reader may attain to the enlightenment that was denied to Mr. Pottermack.

---

## CHAPTER XV. — DR. THORNDYKE'S CURIOSITY IS AROUSED

THE repercussions of Mr. Pottermack's activities made themselves felt at a greater distance than he had bargained for. By the agency of an enterprising local reporter they became communicated to the daily press, and thereby to the world at large, including Number 5A King's Bench Walk, Inner Temple, London, E.C., and the principal occupant thereof. The actual purveyor of intelligence to the latter was Mr. Nathaniel Polton, and the communication took place in the afternoon of the day following the discovery. At this time Dr. Thorndyke was seated at the table with an open brief before him, jotting down a few suggestions for his colleague, Mr. Anstey, when to him entered Nathaniel Polton aforesaid, with a tray of tea-things in one hand and the evening paper in the other. Having set down the tray, he presented the paper, neatly folded into a small oblong, with a few introductory words.

"There is a rather curious case reported in the Evening Post, sir. Looks rather like something in our line. I thought you might be interested to see it, so I've brought you the paper."

"Very good of you, Polton", said Thorndyke, holding out his hand with slightly exaggerated eagerness. "Curious cases are always worth our attention."

Accordingly he proceeded to give his attention to the marked paragraph; but at the first glance at the heading, the interest which he had assumed out of courtesy to his henchman became real and intense. Polton noted the change, and his lined face crinkled up into a smile of satisfaction as he watched his employer reading the paragraph through with a concentration that, even to him, seemed hardly warranted by the matter. For, after all, there was no mystery about the affair, so far as he could see. It was just curious and rather gruesome. And Polton had a distinct liking for the gruesome. So, apparently, had the reporter, for he used that very word to lend attraction to his heading. Thus:—

'Gruesome discovery at Borley.'

'Yesterday afternoon some labourers who were digging gravel in a pit in Potter's Wood, Borley, near Aylesbury, made a shocking discovery. When going round the pit to inspect a disused cart-shelter, they were horrified at coming suddenly upon the much-decomposed body of a man lying at the foot of the perpendicular 'face,' down which he had apparently fallen some months previously. Later it was ascertained that the dead man is a certain James Lewson, the late manager of the local branch of Perkins's Bank, who disappeared mysteriously about nine months ago. An inquest on the body is to be held at the Town Hall, Borley, on Thursday next at 3 p.m., when the mystery of the disappearance and death will no doubt be elucidated.'

"A very singular case, Polton", said Thorndyke, as he returned the paper to its owner. "Thank you for drawing my attention to it."

"There doesn't seem to be any mystery as to how the man met his death", remarked Polton, cunningly throwing out this remark in the hope of eliciting some illuminating comments. "He seems to have just tumbled into the pit and broken his neck."

"That is what is suggested", Thorndyke agreed. But there are all sorts of other possibilities. It would be quite interesting to attend the inquest and hear the evidence."

"There is no reason why you shouldn't, sir", said Polton. "You've got no arrangements for Thursday that can't easily be put off."

"No, that is true", Thorndyke rejoined. "I must think it over and consider whether it would be worth giving up the time."

But he did not think it over, for the reason that he had already made up his mind. Even as he read the paragraph, it was clear to him that here was a case that called aloud for investigation.

The call was twofold. In the first place he was profoundly interested in all the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of James Lewson. In any event he would have wished to make his understanding of the case complete. But there was another and a more urgent reason for inquiry. Hitherto his attitude had been simply spectatorial. Neither as a citizen nor as an officer of the law had he felt called upon to interfere. Now it became incumbent on him to test the moral validity of his position; to ascertain whether that detached attitude was admissible in these new circumstances.

The discovery had taken him completely by surprise. Some developments he had rather expected. The appearance of the stolen notes, for instance, had not surprised him at all. It had seemed quite 'according to plan'; just a manoeuvre to shift the area of inquiry. But this new development admitted of no such explanation; for if it was an 'arrangement' of some kind, what could be the motive? There appeared to be none.

He was profoundly puzzled. If this was really James Lewson's body, then the whole of his elaborate scheme of reasoning was fallacious. But it was not fallacious. For it had led him to the conclusion that Mr. Marcus Pottermack was Jeffrey Brandon, deceased. And investigation had proved beyond a doubt that that conclusion was correct. But a hypothesis which, on being applied, yields a new truth—and one that is conditional upon its very terms—must be true. But again, if his reasoning was correct, this could not be Lewson's body.

But if it was not Lewson's body, whose body was it? And how came it to be dressed in Lewson's clothes—if they really were Lewson's clothes and not a carefully substituted make-up? It was here that the question of public policy arose. For

here was undoubtedly a dead person. If that person proved to be James Lewson, there was nothing more to be said. But if he were not James Lewson, then it became his, Thorndyke's, duty as a citizen and a barrister to ascertain who he was and how his body came to be dressed in Lewson's clothes; or, at least, to set going inquiries to that effect.

That evening he rapidly reviewed the material on which his reasoning had been based. Then, unrolling the strip of photographs, he selected a pair of the most distinct—showing a right and a left foot—and, with the aid of the little document microscope, made an enlarged drawing of each on squared paper to a scale of three inches to the foot, i.e. a quarter of the natural size. The drawings, however, were little more than outlines, showing none of the detail of the soles; but the dimensions were accurately rendered, excepting those of the screws which secured the heels, which were drawn disproportionately large and the position of the slots marked in with special care and exactness.

With these drawings in his pocket and the roll of photographs in his attache-case for reference if any unforeseen question should arise, Thorndyke started forth on the Thursday morning en route for Borley. He did not anticipate any difficulties. An inquest which he had attended at Aylesbury some months previously had made him acquainted with the coroner who would probably conduct this inquiry; but in any case, the production of his card would secure him the necessary facilities.

It turned out, however, that his acquaintance was to conduct the proceedings, though he had not yet arrived when Thorndyke presented himself at the Town Hall nearly an hour before the time when the inquest was due to open. But the police officer on duty, after a glance at his card, showed him up to the coroner's room and provided him with a newspaper wherewith to while away the time of waiting; which Thorndyke made a show of reading, as a precaution against possible attempts at conversation, until the officer had retired, when he brought forth the two drawings and occupied himself in memorizing the dimensions and other salient characteristics of the footprints.

He had been waiting close upon twenty minutes when he heard a quick step upon the stair and the coroner entered the room with extended hand.

"How do you do, doctor?" he exclaimed, shaking Thorndyke's hand warmly. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. Have you come down to lend us a hand in solving the mystery?"

"Is there a mystery?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well, no, there isn't", was the reply, "excepting how the poor fellow came to be wandering about the wood in the dark. But I take it, from your being here, that you are in some way interested or concerned in the case."

"Not in the case", replied Thorndyke. "Only in the body. And my interest in that is rather academic. I understand that it is known to have been lying exposed in the open for nine months. Now, I have never had an opportunity of inspecting a body that has been exposed completely in the open for so long. Accordingly, as I happened to be in the neighbourhood, I thought that I would ask your kind permission just to look it over and make a few notes as to its condition."

"I see; so that you may know exactly what a nine-months-old exposed body looks like, with a view to due future contingencies. But of course, my dear doctor, I shall be delighted to help you to this modest extent. Would you like to make your inspection now?"

"How will that suit you?"

"Perfectly. The jury will be going in to view the remains in about half an hour, but they won't interfere with your proceedings. But you will probably be finished by then. Are you coming to the inquest?"

"I may as well, as I have nothing special to do for an hour or two; and the evidence may help me to amplify my notes."

"Very well", said the coroner, "then I will see that a chair is kept for you. And now I will tell Sergeant Tatnell to take you to the mortuary and see that you are not disturbed while you are making your notes."

Hereupon, the sergeant, being called in and given his instructions, took Thorndyke in custody and conducted him down a flight of stairs to a side door which opened on a small square, on the opposite side of which was the mortuary. A considerable crowd had already collected here, in front of the Town Hall and at the entrance of the square, and by its members Thorndyke's emergence with the sergeant by no means passed unnoticed; and when the latter proceeded to unlock the mortuary door and admit the former, there was a general movement of the crowd into the square with a tendency to converge on the mortuary door.

The sergeant, having admitted Thorndyke, gazed at him hungrily as he pointed out the rather obvious whereabouts of the corpse and the clothing. Then, with evident reluctance, he retired, leaving the door half open and stationing himself on guard in a position which commanded an unobstructed view of the interior. Thorndyke would rather have had the door closed, but he realized the sergeant's state of mind and viewed it not unsympathetically. And a spectator or two was of no consequence since he was merely making an inspection.

As the sergeant had obligingly explained, the body was in the open shell or coffin which rested on one of the tables, while the clothing was laid out on an adjoining table in a manner slightly reminiscent of a rummage sale or a stall in the Petticoat Lane Market. Having put down his attache-case, Thorndyke began his inspection with the clothing, and, bearing in mind the sergeant's eye, which was following his every movement, he first looked over the garments, one by one, until he came naturally to the shoes. These he inspected from various points of view, and when he had minutely examined the uppers he picked up the right shoe, and, turning it over, looked at the heel. And in the instant that his glance fell on it his question



was answered.

It was not Lewson's shoe.

Putting it down, he picked up the left shoe and inspected it in the same manner. It gave the same answer as the right had done, and each confirmed the other with the force of cumulative evidence. These were not James Lewson's shoes. There was no need to apply the measurements that he had marked on his diagrams. The single fact which he had elicited settled the matter.

It was quite a plain and obvious fact, too, though it had escaped the police for the simple reason that they were not looking for a discrepancy in the position of the screws. But it was absolutely conclusive. For the central screw by which a circular rubber heel is secured is of necessity a fixture. When once it is driven in, it remains immovable so long as the heel continues in position. For if the screw turns in the slightest degree, its hold is loosened, it unscrews from its hole and the heel comes off. But these heels had not come off. They were quite firmly attached, as Thorndyke ascertained by grasping them and as was proved by the extent to which they were worn down. Therefore the screws could not have moved. But yet their slots were at a totally different angle from the slots of the screws in Lewson's shoes.

He was standing with the shoe in his hand when a sharply spoken command from the sergeant to "pass along, please" caused him half-unconsciously to turn his head. As he did so, he became aware of Mr. Pottermack gazing at him through the half-open door with an expression of something very like consternation. The glance was only momentary, for, even as their eyes met, Pottermack moved away in obedience to the sergeant's command, reinforced by a vigorous *vis a tergo* applied by the spectators in his rear.

Thorndyke smiled grimly at the coincidence—which was hardly a coincidence at all—and then returned to the consideration of the shoes. He had thoroughly memorized his drawings, but still, his rigorously exact mind demanded verification. Accordingly he placed both shoes sole uppermost and—with his back to the sergeant—produced the drawings from his pocket for comparison with the shoes. Of course he had made no mistake. In the drawing of the right foot, the slot of the screw was at a right angle to the long axis of the shoe—in the position of the hands of a clock at a quarter to three; in the right shoe before him, the slot was oblique—in the position of the clock-hands at five minutes past seven. So with the left; in the drawing it was in the position of ten minutes to four; in the mortuary shoe it was in that of twenty minutes to two.

The proof was conclusive, and it justified Thorndyke's forecast. For he had assumed that if the shoes on the discovered body were counterfeits, the one detail which the counterfeiter would overlook or neglect would be the position of the screw-slots; while, by the ordinary laws of probability, it was infinitely unlikely that the positions of the slots would happen to match in both feet by mere chance.

But, this point being settled, a more important one arose. If the shoes were not Lewson's shoes, the body was probably not Lewson's body. And if it were not, then it was the body of some other person; which conclusion would raise the further question. How was that body obtained? This was the vitally important issue, for it would appear that the having possession of a dead human body almost necessarily implies the previous perpetration of some highly criminal act.

So Thorndyke reflected, a little anxiously, as he stood by the open shell, looking down on the scanty remains of what had once been a man. His position was somewhat difficult, for, since he had never seen Lewson and knew nothing of his personal characteristics beyond his approximate age and what he had inferred from the footprints—that he was a man approaching six feet in height, which appeared to be also true of the body in the shell—he had no effective means of identification. Nevertheless, it was possible that a careful examination might bring into view some distinctive characters that would furnish a basis for further inquiry when the witnesses should presently be called.

Thus encouraging himself, he began to look over the gruesome occupant of the shell more critically. And now, as his eye travelled over it, he began to be conscious of an indefinite something in its aspect that was not quite congruous with the ostensible circumstances. It seemed to have wasted in a somewhat unusual manner. Then his attention was attracted by the very peculiar appearance of the toe-nails. They showed a distinct orange-yellow coloration which was obviously abnormal, and when he turned for comparison to the finger-nails, traces of the same unnatural colour were detectable though much less distinct.

Here was a definite suggestion. Following it up, he turned his attention to the teeth, and at once the suggestion was confirmed. These were the teeth of no modern civilized European. The crowns of the molars, cuspless and ground down to a level surface, spoke of the gritty meal from a hand-quern and other refractory food-stuffs beyond the powers of degenerate civilized man. Still following the clue, Thorndyke peered into the nasal cavities, the entrance to which had been exposed by the almost complete disappearance of the nose. With the aid of a tiny pocket electric lamp, he was able to make out on both sides extensive fractures of the inner bones—the turbinates and ethmoid. In the language of the children's game, he was 'getting warm'; and when he had made a close and prolonged examination of the little that was left of the abdomen, his last lingering doubts were set at rest.

He stood up, at length, with a grim but appreciative smile, and recapitulated his findings. Here was a body, found in a gravel-pit, clothed in the habiliments of one James Lewson. The toe and finger nails were stained with henna; the teeth were the characteristic teeth of somewhat primitive man; the ethmoid and turbinate bones were fractured in a manner incomprehensible in connection with any known natural agency but in precisely the manner in which they would have been damaged by the embalmer's hook; there was not the faintest trace of any abdominal viscera, and there did appear to

be—though this was not certain, owing to the wasted condition of the remains—some signs of an incision in the abdominal wall; and finally, the hair showed evidence of chemical corrosion, not to be accounted for by any mere exposure to the weather. In short, this body displayed a group of distinctive features which, taken collectively, were characteristic of, and peculiar to, an Egyptian mummy; and that it was an Egyptian mummy he felt no doubt whatever.

He hailed the conclusion with a sigh of relief. He had come here prepared to intervene at the inquest and challenge the identity of the corpse if he had found any evidence of the perpetration of a crime. But he would have been profoundly reluctant to intervene. Now there was no need to intervene, since there was no reason to suppose that any crime had been committed. Possession of an Egyptian mummy does not imply any criminal act. Admittedly, these proceedings of Mr. Pottermack's were highly irregular. But that was a different matter. Allowance had to be made for special circumstances.

Nevertheless, Thorndyke was not a little puzzled. Acting on his invariable principle, he had disregarded the apparent absence of motive and had steadily pursued the visible facts. But now the question of motive arose as a separate problem. What could be the purpose that lay behind this quaint and ingenious personation of a dead man? Some motive there must have been, and a powerful motive too. Its strength could be measured by the enormous amount of patient and laborious preparation that the result must have entailed, to say nothing of the risk. What could that motive have been? It did not, apparently, arise out of the original circumstances. There must be something else that had not yet come into view. Perhaps the evidence at the inquest might throw some light upon it.

At any rate, no crime had been committed, and as to this dummy inquest, there was no harm in it. On the contrary, it was all to the good. For it would establish and put on record a fact which otherwise would have-gone unascertained and unrecorded, but which ought, on public grounds, to be duly certified and recorded.

As Thorndyke reached this comfortable conclusion, the sergeant announced the approach of the jury to view the body; whereupon he picked up his attache-case, and, emerging from the mortuary, made his way to the court-room and took possession of a chair which a constable was holding in reserve for him, close to that which was to be occupied by the coroner.



## CHAPTER XVI. — EXIT KHAMA-HERU

HAVING taken his seat—and wished that it had been a little farther from the coroner's—Thorndyke glanced round the large court-room, noting the unusual number of spectators and estimating from it the intense local interest in the inquiry. And as his eye roamed round, it presently alighted on Mr. Pottermack, who had secured a seat in a favourable position near the front and was endeavouring, quite unsuccessfully, to appear unaware of Thorndyke's arrival. So unsuccessful, indeed, were his efforts that inevitably their eyes met, and then there was nothing for it but to acknowledge as graciously as he could the lawyer's friendly nod of recognition.

Pottermack's state of mind was one of agonized expectation. He struggled manfully enough to summon up some sort of confidence. He told himself that this fellow was only a lawyer, and that lawyers know nothing about bodies. Now, if he had been a doctor it might have been a different matter. But there was that accursed shoe. He had certainly looked at that as if he saw something unusual about it; and there was no reason why a lawyer shouldn't know something about shoes. Yet what could he have seen in it? There was nothing to see. It was a genuine shoe, and the soles and heels were unquestionably correct in every detail. He, Pottermack, could hardly have distinguished them from the originals himself.

So his feelings oscillated miserably between unreasonable hope and an all too reasonable alarm. He would have got up and gone out but that even his terrors urged him to stay at all costs and hear what this lawyer should say when his turn came to give evidence. And thus, though he longed to escape, he remained glued to his chair, waiting, waiting for the mine to blow up; and whenever his roving glance fell, as it constantly did from minute to minute, on the sphinx-like countenance of that inopportune lawyer, a cold chill ran down his spine.

Thorndyke, catching from time to time that wandering, apprehensive gaze, was alive to Mr. Pottermack's condition and felt a humane regret that it was impossible to reassure him and put an end to his sufferings. He realized how sinister a significance his unexpected arrival would seem to bear to the eyes of the self-conscious gamester, sitting there trembling for the success of his last venture. And the position was made even worse when the coroner, re-entering with the jury, stopped to confer with him before taking his seat.

"You had a good look at the body, doctor?" he asked, stooping and speaking almost in a whisper. "I wonder if it would be fair for me to ask you a question?"

"Let us hear the question", Thorndyke replied cautiously.

"Well, it is this: the medical witness that I am calling is the police surgeon's locum tenens. I don't know anything about him, but I suspect that he hasn't had much experience. He tells me that he can find nothing definite to indicate the cause of death, but that there are no signs of violence. What do you say to that?"

"It is exactly what I should have said myself if I had been in his place", Thorndyke replied. "I saw nothing that gave any hint as to the cause of death. You will have to settle that question on evidence other than medical."

"Thank you, thank you", said the coroner. "You have set my mind completely at rest. Now I will get on with the inquiry. It needn't take very long."

He retired to his chair at the head of the long table, on one side of which sat the jury and on the other one or two reporters, and having seen that his writing materials were in order, prepared to begin. And Thorndyke, once more meeting Mr. Pottermack's eye, found it fixed on him with an expression of expectant horror.

"The inquiry, gentlemen," the coroner began, "which we are about to conduct concerns the most regrettable death of a fellow-townsmen of yours, Mr. James Lewson, who, as you probably know, disappeared rather mysteriously on the night of the 23rd of last July. Quite by chance, his dead body was discovered last Monday afternoon, and it will be our duty to inquire and determine how, when, and where he met with his death. I need not trouble you with a long preliminary statement, as the testimony of the witnesses will supply you with the facts and you will be entitled to put any questions that you may wish to amplify them. We had better begin with the discovery of the body and take events in their chronological order. Joseph Crick."

In response to this summons a massively built labourer rose and advanced sheepishly to the table. Having been sworn, he deposed that his name was Joseph Crick and that he was a labourer in the employ of Mr. Barber, a local builder.

"Well, Crick", said the coroner, "now tell us how you came to discover this body."

The witness cast an embarrassed glance at the eager jurymen, and, having wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, began: "'Twere last Monday afternoon—"

"That was the thirteenth of April", the coroner interposed.

"Maybe 'twere", the witness agreed cautiously, "I dunno. But 'twere last Monday afternoon. Me and Jim Wurdle had been workin' in the pit a-fillin' the carts with gravel. We'd filled the last cart and seen her off, and then, as it were gettin' on for knockin'-off time, we lights our pipes and goes for a stroll round the pit to have a look at the old shelter-place where they used to keep the carts in the winter. We'd got round to the gate and Jim Wurdle was a lookin'-in when I happened to notice a tree that had fell down from the top of the face. And then I see something layin' by the tree what had got a cap at one end and a pair of shoes at the other. Give me a reglar start, it did. So I says to Jim Wurdle I says, Jim, I says, that's a

funny-lookin' thing over yonder long-side the tree, I says. Looks like some one a-layin' down there, I says. So Jim Wurdle he looks at it and he says, 'right you are, mate,' he says, 'so it do,' he says. So we walked over to have a look at it and then we see as 'twere a dead man, or leastways a man's skillinton. Give us a rare turn, it did, to see it a-layin' there in its shabby old clothes with the beedles a-crawlin' about on it."

"And what did you do then?" asked the coroner.

"We sung out to the other chaps t'other side of the pit and told them about it, and then we set off for the town as hard as we could go until we come to the police station, where we see Sergeant Tatnell and told him about it; and he sent us back to the pit to wait for him and show him where it were."

When the coroner had written down Crick's statement he glanced at the jury and enquired: "Do you wish to ask the witness any questions, gentlemen?" And as nobody expressed any such wish, he dismissed Crick and called James Wurdle, who, in effect, repeated the evidence of the previous witness and was in his turn dismissed.

The next witness was Inspector Barnaby of the local police force, a shrewd-looking man of about fifty, who gave his evidence in the concise, exact manner proper to a police officer.

"On Monday last, the thirteenth of April, at five twenty-one p.m., it was reported to me by Sergeant Tatnell that the dead body of a man had been discovered in the gravel-pit in Potter's Wood. I obtained an empty shell from the mortuary, and, having put it on a wheeled stretcher, proceeded with Sergeant Tatnell to the gravel-pit, where the previous witnesses showed us the place where the body was lying. We found the body lying at the foot of the gravel-face close to a tree that had fallen from the top. I examined it carefully before moving it. It was lying in a sprawling posture, not like that of a sleeping man but like that of a man who had fallen heavily. There were a few stones and some gravel on the body, but most of the gravel which had come down with the tree was underneath. The body was in an advanced stage of decay; so much so that it began to fall to pieces when we lifted it to put it into the shell. The head actually dropped off, and we had great trouble in preventing the legs from separating."

An audible shudder ran round the court at this description and the coroner murmured, "Horrible! horrible!" But the inspector proceeded in matter-of-fact tones:

"We conveyed the remains to the mortuary, where I removed the clothing from the body and examined it with a view to ascertaining the identity of deceased. The underclothing was marked clearly 'J. Lewson' and in the breast pocket of the coat I found a letter-case with the initials 'J.L.' stamped on the cover. Inside it were a number of visiting-cards bearing the name 'Mr. James Lewson' and the address 'Perkins's Bank, Borley, Bucks,' and some letters addressed to James Lewson, Esquire, at that address. In one of the trousers pockets I found a key, which looked like a safe key, and as there seemed to be no doubt that the body was that of Mr. Lewson, the late manager of the Borley branch of Perkin's Bank, I cleaned the rust off the key and showed it to Mr. Hunt, the present manager, who tried it in the lock of the safe and found that it entered and seemed to fit perfectly."

"Did it shoot the bolt of the lock?" one of the jurors asked.

"No", replied the inspector, "because, after Mr. Lewson went away and took the key with him, the manager had the levers of the lock altered and a pair of new keys made. But the old duplicate key was there, and when we compared it with the key from the body, it was obvious that the two keys were identical in pattern."

"Did you take any other measures to identify the body?" the coroner asked.

"Yes, sir. I checked the clothing carefully, garment by garment, by the description that we issued when Mr. Lewson disappeared, and it corresponded to the description in every respect. Then I got the caretaker from the bank to look it over, and he identified the clothes and shoes as those worn by Mr. Lewson on the night when he disappeared."

"Excellent", said the coroner. "Most thorough and most conclusive. I think, gentlemen, that we can fairly take it as an established fact that the body is that of Mr. James Lewson. And now. Inspector, to return to the clothing; you have mentioned two articles found by you in deceased's pockets. What else did you find?"

"Nothing, sir. With the exception of those two articles—which I handed to you—the pockets were all completely empty."

"And the letter-case?"

"That contained nothing but letters, bills, cards, and a few stamps; nothing but what was in it when I gave it to you."

Here the coroner opened his attache-case, and, taking from it the letter-wallet, the letters, cards, bills, and other contents, placed them, together with the key, on a wooden office tray which he pushed along the table for the jurymen's inspection. While they were curiously poring over the tray, he continued his examination.

"Then you found nothing of value on the person of deceased?"

"With the exception of the stamps, nothing whatsoever. The pockets were absolutely empty."

"Do you happen to know if deceased, at the time of his disappearance, had any valuable property about him?"

"Yes, sir. It is nearly certain that when he went away at about eight o'clock on the night of Wednesday, the twenty-third of last July, he had on his person one hundred pounds in five-pound Bank of England notes."

"When you say that it is nearly certain, what does that certainty amount to?"

"It is based on the fact that after he had gone, banknotes to that amount were found to be missing from the bank."

"And is it known what became of those notes?"

"Yes, sir. Their numbers were known and they have now all been recovered. As soon as they appeared in circulation they were traced; and in nearly every case traced to some person who was known to the police."

"Is it certain that these notes were taken by deceased and not by some other person?"

"Yes, practically certain. Deceased was in sole charge, and he had one key on his person and the other locked in the safe, where it was found when the lock was picked. But, if you will allow me, sir, I should like to say, in justice to deceased, that he had, apparently, no intention of stealing these notes, as was thought at first. Certain facts came to light later which seemed to show that he had merely borrowed this money to meet a sudden urgent call and that he meant to replace it."

"I am sure every one will be very glad to hear that", said the coroner. "We need not go into the circumstances that you mention, as they do not seem relevant to this inquiry. But these notes raise an important point. If they were on his person when he went away and they were not on his body when it was found, and if, moreover, they are known to have been in circulation since his death, the question of robbery arises, and with it the further question of possible murder. Can you give us any help in considering those questions?"

"I have formed certain opinions, sir, but, of course, it is a matter of guesswork."

"Never mind, Inspector. A coroner's court is not bound by the strict rules of evidence; and, besides, yours is an expert opinion. Let us hear what view you take of the matter."

"Well, sir, my opinion is that deceased met his death by accident the night that he went away. I think that he fell into the pit in the dark, dislodging a lot of gravel and pulling the small tree down with him. Both the body and the tree were on top of the heap of gravel, but yet there was a good deal of gravel and some stones on the body."

The coroner nodded and the witness proceeded:

"Then I think that, about a month later, some tramp found the body and went through the pockets, and when he discovered the notes, he cleared off and said nothing about having seen the body."

"Have you any specific reasons for this very definite theory?"

"Yes, sir. First, there is clear evidence that the pit has been frequented by one or more tramps. Quite close to where the body was discovered is an old cart-shelter, dug out of the gravel, and that shelter has been used from time to time by some tramp or tramps as a residence. I found in it a quantity of wood ashes and charcoal and large sooty deposits on the wall and roof, showing that many fires had been lit there. I also found an old billy, or boiling-can, a lot of rags and tramps' raffle and a quantity of small bones—mostly rabbits' and fowls' bones. So tramps have certainly been there."

"Then the state of deceased's pockets suggests a tramp's robbery. It was not only the valuables that were taken. He had made a clean sweep of everything. Not a thing was left. Not even a pipe or a packet of cigarettes or even a match-box."

"And as to the time that you mentioned?"

"I am judging by the notes. A sharp look-out was kept for them from the first. A very sharp look-out. But for fully a month after the disappearance not one of them came to light. And then, suddenly, they began to come in one after the other and even in batches, as if the whole lot had been thrown into circulation at once. But if it had been a case of robbery with violence, the robber would have got rid of the notes immediately, before the hue and cry started."

"So you consider that the possibility of robbery with murder may be ruled out?"

"On the facts known to me, sir, I do—subject, of course, to the medical evidence."

"Exactly", said the coroner. "But in any case you have given us most valuable assistance. Is there any point, gentlemen, that is not quite clear, or any question that you wish to put to the inspector? No questions? Very well. Thank you, Inspector."

The next witness called was the police surgeon's deputy, a youngish Irishman of somewhat convivial aspect. Having been sworn, he deposed that his name was Desmond M'Alarney, that he was a Doctor of Medicine and at present acting as locum tenens for the police surgeon, who was absent on leave.

"Well, doctor", said the coroner, "I believe that you have made a careful examination of the body of deceased. Is that so?"

"I have made a most careful examination, sir", was the reply, "though as to calling it a body, I would rather describe it as a skeleton."

"Very well!" the coroner agreed good-humouredly, "call it what you like. Perhaps we may refer to it as the remains."

"Ye may", replied the witness, "and mighty small remains, by the same token. But such as they are, I have examined them with the greatest care."

"And did your examination enable you to form any opinion as to the cause of death?"

"It did not."

"Did you find any injuries or signs of violence?"

"I did not."

"Were any of the bones fractured or injured in any way?"

"They were not."

"Can you give us no suggestion as to the probable cause of death?"

"I would suggest, sir, that a twenty-foot drop into a gravel-pit is a mighty probable cause of death."

"No doubt", said the coroner. "But that is hardly a matter of medical evidence."

"Tis none the worse for that", the witness replied cheerfully.

"Can you say, definitely, that deceased did not meet his death by any kind of homicidal violence?"

"I can not. When a body is reduced to a skeleton, all traces of violence are lost so long as there has been no breaking of bones. He might have been strangled or smothered or stabbed or had his throat cut without leaving any marks on the skeleton. I can only say that I found no indications of any kind of homicidal violence or any violence whatsoever."

"The inspector has suggested that deceased met his death by accident—that is by the effects of the fall, and that appears to be your opinion too. Now, if that were the case, what would probably be the immediate cause of death?"

"There are several possible causes, but the most probable would be shock, contusion of the brain, or dislocation of the neck."

"Would any of those conditions leave recognizable traces?"

"Contusion of the brain and dislocation of the neck could be recognized in the fresh body but not in a skeleton like this. Of course, if the dislocation were accompanied—as it very often is—by fracture of the little neck-bone known as the odontoid process of the axis, that could be seen in the skeleton. But there is no such fracture in the skeleton of deceased. I looked for it particularly."

"Then we understand that you found nothing definite to indicate the cause of death?"

"That is so, sir."

"Do you consider that the appearance of the body, in a medical sense, is consistent with a belief that deceased was killed by the effects of the fall?"

"I do, sir."

"Then", said the coroner, "that seems to be about all that we can say as to the cause of death. Do the jury wish to put any questions to the medical witness? If not, we need not detain the doctor any longer."

As Dr. M'Alarney picked up an uncommonly smart hat and retired, the coroner glanced quickly over his notes and then proceeded to address the jury.

"I need not occupy your time, gentlemen, with a long summing-up. You have heard the evidence and probably have already arrived at your conclusions. There are certain mysterious circumstances in the case, as, for instance, how deceased came to be wandering about in the wood at night. But these questions do not concern us. We have to consider only how deceased met his death, and as the doctor justly remarked, the fact that the body was found at the bottom of a gravel-pit, having evidently fallen some eighteen or twenty feet, offers a pretty obvious explanation. The only suspicious circumstance was that deceased had clearly been robbed either before or after death. But you have heard the opinion of a very able and experienced police inspector, and the excellent reasons that he gave for that opinion. So I need say no more, but will now leave you to consider your verdict."

During the short interval occupied by the discussions of the jurymen among themselves, two members of the audience were engaged busily in reviewing the evidence in its relation to the almost inevitable verdict. To Thorndyke the proceedings offered an interesting study in the perverting effect upon the judgment of an unconscious bias, engendered by the suggestive power of a known set of circumstances. All the evidence that had been given was true. All the inferences from that evidence were sound and proper inferences, so far as they went. Yet the final conclusion which was going to be arrived at would be wildly erroneous, for the simple reason that all the parties to the inquiry had come to it already convinced as to the principal fact—the identity of the deceased person—which had accordingly been left unverified.

As to Pottermack, his state of mind at the close of the inquiry was one of astonished relief. All through the proceedings he had sat in tremulous expectancy, with a furtive eye on the strange lawyer, wondering when that lawyer's turn would come to give his evidence and what he would have to say. That the stranger had detected some part, at least, of the fraud he had at first little doubt, and he expected no less than to hear the identity of the body challenged. But, as the time ran on and witness after witness came forward guilelessly and disgorged the bait for the nourishment of the jury, his fears gradually subsided and his confidence began to revive. And now that the inquiry was really over and they had all gobbled the bait and got it comfortably into their gizzards; now that it was evident that this lawyer had nothing to say, after all, in spite of his preposterous porings over those admirable shoes, Mr. Pottermack was disposed just a little to despise himself for having been so easily frightened. The 'superiority complex' began to reassert itself. Here he sat, looking upon a thoroughly bamboozled assembly, including a most experienced police inspector, a coroner, a lawyer, and a doctor. He alone of all that assembly, indeed of the whole world, knew all about it.

But perhaps his alarm had been excusable. We get into the habit too much importance to these lawyers and doctors. We credit them with knowing a great deal more than they do. But, at any rate, in this case it was all to the good. And as Mr. Pottermack summed up in this satisfactory fashion, the foreman of the jury announced that the verdict had been agreed on.

"And what is your finding, gentlemen, on the evidence that you have heard?" the coroner asked.

"We find that the deceased, James Lewson, met his death on the night of the twenty-third of last July by falling into a gravel-pit in Potter's Wood."

"Yes", said the coroner. "That amounts to a verdict of Death by Misadventure. And a very proper verdict, too, in my opinion. I must thank you, gentlemen, for your attendance and for the careful consideration which you have given to this inquiry, and I may take this opportunity of telling you what I am sure you will be glad to hear, that the directors of Perkins's Bank have generously undertaken to have the funeral conducted at their expense."

As the hall slowly emptied, Thorndyke lingered by the table to exchange a few rather colourless comments on the case with the coroner. At length, after a cordial handshake, he took his departure, and, joining the last stragglers, made his way slowly out of the main doorway, glancing among the dispersing crowd as he emerged; and presently his roving glance alighted on Mr. Pottermack at the outskirts of the throng, loitering irresolutely as if undecided which way to go.

The truth is that the elation at the triumphant success of his plan had begotten in that gentleman a spirit of mischief. Under the influence of the 'superiority complex' he was possessed with a desire to exchange a few remarks with the strange lawyer; perhaps to 'draw' him on the subject of the inquest; possibly even to 'pull his leg'—not hard, of course, which would be a liberty, but just a gentle and discreet tweak. Accordingly he hovered about opposite the hall, waiting to see which way the lawyer should go; and as Thorndyke unostentatiously steered in his direction, the meeting came about quite naturally, just as the lawyer was turning—rather to Mr. Pottermack's surprise—away from the direction of the station.

"I don't suppose you remember me", he began.

But Thorndyke interrupted promptly: "Of course I remember you, Mr. Pottermack, and am very pleased to meet you again."

Pottermack, considerably taken aback by the mention of his name, shook the proffered hand and cogitated rapidly. How the deuce did the fellow know that his name was Pottermack? He hadn't told him.

"Thank you", he said. "I am very pleased, too, and rather surprised. But perhaps you are professionally interested in this inquiry."

"Not officially", replied Thorndyke. "I saw a notice in the paper of what looked like an interesting case, and, being in the neighbourhood, I dropped in to see and hear what was going on."

"And did you find it an interesting case?" Pottermack asked.

"Very. Didn't you?"

"Well", replied Pottermack, "I didn't bring an expert eye to it as you did, so I may have missed some of the points. But there did seem to be some rather queer features in it. I wonder which of them in particular you found so interesting?"

This last question he threw out by way of a tentative preliminary to of 'drawing' the lawyer, and he waited expectantly for the reply.

Thorndyke reflected a few moments before answering it. At length he replied;

"There was such a wealth of curious matter that I find it difficult to single out any one point in particular. The case interested me as a whole, and especially by reason of the singular parallelism that it presented to another most remarkable case which was related to me in great detail by a legal friend of mine, in whose practice it occurred."

"Indeed", said Mr. Pottermack, still intent on tractive operations; "and what were the special features in that case?"

"There were many very curious features in that case", Thorndyke replied in a reminiscent tone. "Perhaps the most remarkable was an ingenious fraud perpetrated by one of the parties, who dressed an Egyptian mummy in a recognizable suit of clothes and deposited it in a gravel-pit."

"Good gracious!" gasped Pottermack, and the 'superiority complex' died a sudden death.

"Yes", Thorndyke continued with the same reminiscent air, observing that his companion was for the moment speechless, "it was a most singular case. My legal friend used to refer to it, in a whimsical fashion, as the case of the dead man who was alive and the live man who was dead."

"B-but", Pottermack stammered, with chattering teeth, "that sounds like a c-contradiction."

"It does", Thorndyke agreed, "and of course it is. What he actually meant was that it was a case of a living man who was believed to be dead, and a dead man who was believed to be alive—until the mummy came to light."

Pottermack made no rejoinder. He was still dumb with amazement and consternation. He had a confused feeling of unreality as if he were walking in a dream. With a queer sort of incredulous curiosity he looked up at the calm, inscrutable face of the tall stranger who walked by his side and asked himself who and what this man could be. Was he, in truth, a

lawyer—or was he the Devil? Stranger as he certainly was, he had some intimate knowledge of his—Pottermack's—most secret actions; knowledge which could surely be possessed by no mere mortal. It seemed beyond belief.

With a violent effort he pulled himself together and made an attempt to continue the conversation. For it was borne in on him that he must, at all costs, find out what those cryptic phrases meant and how much this person—lawyer or devil—really knew. After all, he did not seem to be a malignant or hostile devil.

"That must have been a most extraordinary case", he observed at length. "I am—er—quite intrigued by what you have told me. Would it be possible or admissible for you to give me a few details?"

"I don't know why not", said Thorndyke, "excepting that it is rather a long story, and I need not say highly confidential. But if you know of some place where we could discuss it in strict privacy, I should be pleased to tell you the story as it was told to me. I am sure it would interest you. But I make one stipulation."

"What is that?" Pottermack asked.

"It is that you, too, shall search your memory, and if you can recall any analogous circumstances as having arisen within your experience or knowledge, you shall produce them so that we can make comparisons."

Pottermack reflected for a few moments, but only a few. For his native common sense told him that neither secrecy nor reservation was going to serve him.

"Very well", he said, "I agree; though until I have heard your story I cannot judge how far I shall be able to match it from my limited experience. But if you will come and take tea with me in my garden, where we shall be quite alone, I will do my best to set my memory to work when I have heard what you have to tell."

"Excellent", said Thorndyke. "I accept your invitation with great pleasure. And I observe that some common impulse seems to have directed us towards your house, and even towards the very gate at which I had the good fortune to make your acquaintance."

In effect, as they had been talking, they had struck into the footpath and now approached the gate of the walled garden.





## CHAPTER XVII. — DR. THORNDYKE RELATES A QUEER CASE

MR. Pottermack inserted the small, thin key into the Yale lock of the gate and turned it while Thorndyke watched him with a faint smile.

"Admirable things, these Yale locks", the latter remarked as he followed his host in through the narrow gateway and cast a comprehensive glance round the walled garden, "so long as you don't lose the key. It is a hopeless job trying to pick one."

"Did you ever try?" asked Pottermack.

"Yes, and had to give it up. But I see you appreciate their virtues. That looks like one on the farther gate."

"It is", Pottermack admitted. "I keep this part of the garden for my own sole use and I like to be secure from interruption."

"I sympathize with you", said Thorndyke. "Security from interruption is always pleasant, and there are occasions when it is indispensable."

Pottermack looked at him quickly but did not pursue the topic.

"If you will excuse me for a minute", he said, "I will run and tell my housekeeper to get us some tea. You would rather have it out here than in the house, wouldn't you?"

"Much rather", replied Thorndyke. "We wish to be private, and here we are with two good Yale locks to keep eavesdroppers at bay."

While his host was absent he paced slowly up and down the lawn, observing everything with keen interest but making no particular inspections. Above the yew hedge he could see the skylighted roof of what appeared to be a studio or workshop, and in the opposite corner of the garden a roomy, comfortable summer-house. From these objects he turned his attention to the sundial, looking it over critically and strolling round it to read the motto. He was thus engaged when his host returned with the news that tea was being prepared and would follow almost immediately.

"I was admiring your sun-dial, Mr. Pottermack", said Thorndyke. "It is a great adornment to the garden and a singularly happy and appropriate one; for the flowers, like the dial, number only the sunny hours. And it will look still better when time has softened the contrast between the old pillar and the new base."

"Yes", Pottermack agreed, a trifle uneasily, "the base will be all the better for a little weathering. How do you like the motto?"

"Very much," replied Thorndyke. "A pleasant, optimistic motto, and new to me. I don't think I have ever met with it before. But it is a proper sun-dial motto: 'Hope in the morning, Peace at eventide.' Most of us have known the first and all of us look forward to the last. Should I be wrong if I were to assume that there is a well underneath?"

"N-no", stammered Pottermack, "you would not. It is an old well that had been disused and covered up. I discovered it by accident when I was levelling the ground for the sun-dial and very nearly fell into it. So I decided to put the sun-dial over it to prevent any accidents in the future. And mighty glad I was to see it safely covered up."

"You must have been," said Thorndyke. "While it was uncovered it must have been a constant anxiety to you."

"It was", Pottermack agreed, with a nervous glance at his guest.

"That would be about the latter part of last July", Thorndyke suggested with the air of one recalling a half-forgotten event; and Mr. Pottermack breathlessly admitted that it probably was.

Here they were interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Gadby, for whom the gate had been left open, followed by a young maid, both laden with the materials for tea on a scale suggestive of a Sunday School treat. The housekeeper glanced curiously at the tall, imposing stranger, wondering inwardly why he could not come to the dining-room like a Christian. In due course the load of provisions was transferred to the somewhat inadequate table in the summer-house and the two servants then retired, Mrs. Gadby ostentatiously shutting the gate behind her. As its lock clicked, Mr. Pottermack ushered his guest into the summer-house, offering him the chair once occupied by James Lewson and since studiously avoided by its owner.

When the hospitable preliminaries had been disposed of and the tea poured out, Thorndyke opened the actual proceedings with only the briefest preamble.

"I expect, Mr. Pottermack, you are impatient to hear about that case which seemed to pique your curiosity so much, and as the shadow is creeping round your dial, we mustn't waste time, especially as there is a good deal to tell. I will begin with an outline sketch of the case, in the form of a plain narrative, which will enable you to judge whether anything at all like it has ever come to your knowledge.

"The story as told to me by my legal friend dealt with the histories of two men, whom we will call respectively Mr. Black and Mr. White. At the beginning of the story they appear to have been rather intimate friends, and both were employed at a bank, which we will call Alsop's Bank. After they had been there some time—I don't know exactly how long—a series of forgeries occurred, evidently committed by some member of the staff of the bank. I need not go into details. For our

purpose the important fact is that suspicion fell upon Mr. White. The evidence against him was striking, and, if genuine, convincing and conclusive. But to my friend it appeared decidedly unsatisfactory. He was strongly disposed to suspect that the crime was actually committed by Mr. Black and that he fabricated the evidence against Mr. White. But, however that may have been, the Court accepted the evidence. The jury found Mr. White guilty and the judge sentenced him to five years' penal servitude.

"It was a harsh sentence, but that does not concern us, as Mr. White did not serve the full term. After about a year of it, he escaped and made his way to the shore of an estuary, and there his clothes were found and a set of footprints across the sand leading into the water. Some six weeks later a nude body was washed up on the shore and was identified as his body. An inquest was held and it was decided that he had been accidentally drowned. Accordingly he was written off the prison books and the records at Scotland Yard as a dead man.

"But he was not dead. The body which was found was probably that of some bather whose clothes Mr. White had appropriated in exchange for his own prison clothes. Thus he was able to get away without hindrance and take up a new life elsewhere, no doubt under an assumed name. Probably he went abroad, but this is only surmise. From the moment of his escape from prison he vanishes from our ken, and for the space of about fifteen years remains invisible, his existence apparently unknown to any of his former friends or acquaintances.

"This closes the first part of the history; the part which deals with the person whom my friend whimsically described as 'the dead man who was alive And now, perhaps, Mr. Pottermack, you can tell me whether you have ever heard of a case in any way analogous to this one."

Mr. Pottermack reflected for a few moments. Throughout Thorndyke's recital he had sat with the feeling of one in a dream. The sense of unreality had again taken possession of him. He had listened with a queer sort of incredulous curiosity to the quiet voice of this inscrutable stranger, relating to him with the calm assurance of some wizard or clairvoyant the innermost secrets of his own life; describing actions and events which he, Pottermack, felt certain could not possibly be known to any human creature but himself. It was all so unbelievable that any sense of danger, of imminent disaster, was merged in an absorbing wonder. But one thing was quite clear to him. Any attempt to deceive or mislead this mysterious stranger would be utterly futile. Accordingly he replied:

"By a most strange coincidence it happens that a case came to my knowledge which was point by point almost identical with yours. But there was one difference. In my case, the guilt of the person who corresponds to your Mr. Black was not problematical at all. He admitted it. He even boasted of it and of the clever way in which he had set up Mr. White as the dummy to take all the thumps."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "That is extremely interesting. We must bear that point in mind when we come to examine the details. Now I go on to the second part of the narrative; the part that deals with the 'live man who was dead.'

"After the lapse of some fifteen years, Mr. White came to the surface, so to speak. He made his appearance in a small country town, and from his apparently comfortable circumstances he seemed to have prospered in the interval. But here he encountered a streak of bad luck. By some malignant chance, it happened that Mr. Black was installed as manager of the branch bank in that very town, and naturally enough they met. Even then all might have been well but for an unaccountable piece of carelessness on Mr. White's part. He had, by growing a beard and taking to the use of spectacles, made a considerable change in his appearance. But he had neglected one point. He had, it appears, on his right ear a small birth-mark. It was not at all conspicuous, but when once observed it was absolutely distinctive.

"But," exclaimed Pottermack, "I don't understand you. You say he neglected this mark. But what could he possibly have done to conceal it?"

"He could have had it obliterated", replied Thorndyke. "The operation is quite simple in the case of a small mark. The more widespread 'port-wine' mark is less easy to treat; but a small spot, such as I understand that this was, can be dealt with quite easily and effectively. Some skin surgeons specialize in the operation. One of them I happen to know personally: Mr. Julian Parsons, the dermatologist to St. Margaret's Hospital."

"Ha", said Mr. Pottermack.

"But", continued Thorndyke, "to return to our story. Mr. White had left his birth-mark untreated, and that was probably his undoing. Mr. Black would doubtless have been struck by the resemblance, but the birth-mark definitely established the identity. At any rate, Mr. Black recognized him and forthwith began to levy blackmail. Of course, Mr. White was an ideal subject for a blackmailer's operations. He was absolutely defenceless, for he could not invoke the aid of the law by reason of his unexpired sentence. He had to pay, or go back to prison—or take some private measures.

"At first, it appears that he accepted the position and paid. Probably he submitted to be bled repeatedly, for there is reason to believe that quite considerable sums of money passed. But eventually Mr. White must have realized what most blackmailers' victims have to realize: that there is no end to this sort of thing. The blackmailer is always ready to begin over again. At any rate, Mr. White adopted the only practicable alternative to paying out indefinitely. He got Mr. Black alone in a secluded garden in which there was a disused well. Probably Mr. Black came there voluntarily to make fresh demands. But however that may have been, Mr. Black went, dead or alive, down into the well."

"In the case which came to my knowledge", said Pottermack, "it was to some extent accidental. He had become rather violent, and in the course of what amounted to a fight he fell across the opening of the well, striking his head heavily on the

brick coping, and dropped down in a state of insensibility."

"Ah," said Thorndyke, "that may be considered, as you say, to some extent accidental. But probably to a rather small extent. I think we may take it that he would have gone down that well in any case. What do you say?"

"I think I am inclined to agree with you", replied Pottermack.

"At all events", said Thorndyke, down the well he went. And there seemed to be an end of the blackmailer. But it was not quite the end, and the sequel introduces a most interesting feature into the case.

"It appears that the path by which Mr. Black approached Mr. White's premises was an earth path, and owing to the peculiar qualities of the soil in that locality, it took the most extraordinarily clear impressions of the feet that trod on it. Now, it happened that Mr. Black was wearing shoes with rubber soles and heels of a strikingly distinctive pattern, which left on the earth path impressions of the most glaringly conspicuous and distinctive character. The result was a set of footprints, obviously and certainly those of Mr. Black, leading directly to Mr. White's gate and stopping there. This was a most dangerous state of affairs, for as soon as the hue and cry was raised—which it would be immediately in the case of a bank manager—the missing Black would be traced by his footprints to Mr. White's gate. And then the murder would be out.

"Now what was Mr. White to do? He could not obliterate those footprints in any practicable manner. So he did the next best—or even better—thing. He continued them past his gate, out into the country and across a heath, on the farther side of which he allowed them discreetly to fade away into the heather.

"It was an admirable plan, and it succeeded perfectly. When the hue and cry was raised, the police followed those tracks like bloodhounds until they lost them on the heath. A photographer with a special camera patiently took samples of the footprints along the whole route, from the place where they started to where they were lost on the heath. But no one suspected Mr. White. He did not come into the picture at all. It seemed that he had now nothing to do but to lie low and let the affair pass into oblivion.

"But he did nothing of the kind. Instead, he embarked on a most unaccountable proceeding. Months after the disappearance of Mr. Black, when the affair had become nearly forgotten, he proceeded deliberately to revive it. He obtained an Egyptian mummy, and having dressed it in Mr. Black's clothes, or in clothes that had been specially prepared to counterfeit those of Mr. Black, he deposited it in a gravel-pit. His reasons for doing this are unknown to my legal friend and are difficult to imagine. But whatever the object may have been, it was attained, for in due course the mummy was discovered and identified as the body of Mr. Black, an inquest was held and the mystery of the disappearance finally disposed of.

"That is a bare outline of the case, Mr. Pottermack; just sufficient to enable us to discuss it and compare it with the one that you have in mind."

"It is a very remarkable case", said Pottermack, "and the most remarkable feature in it is its close resemblance to the one of which I came to hear. In fact, they are so much alike that—"

"Exactly", interrupted Thorndyke. "The same thought had occurred to us both—that your case and the one related by my legal friend are in reality one and the same."

"Yes", agreed Pottermack, "I think they must be. But what is puzzling me is how your legal friend came by the knowledge of these facts, which would seem to have been known to no one but the principal actor."

"That is what we are going to consider", said Thorndyke. "But before we begin our analysis, there is one point that I should like to clear up. You said that Mr. Black had explicitly admitted his guilt in regard to those forgeries. To whom did he make that admission?"

"To his wife", replied Pottermack.

"His wife!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "But it was assumed that he was a bachelor."

"The facts", said Pottermack, "are rather singular. I had better fill in this piece of detail, which apparently escaped your legal friend's investigations.

"Mr. White, in the days before his troubles befell, was engaged to be married to a very charming girl to whom he was completely devoted and who was equally devoted to him. After Mr. White's reported death, Mr. Black sought her friendship and later tried to induce her to marry him. He urged that he had been Mr. White's most intimate friend and that their marriage was what the deceased would have wished. Eventually she yielded to his persuasion and married him, rather reluctantly, since her feeling towards him was merely that of a friend. What his feeling was towards her it is difficult to say. She had some independent means, and it is probable that her property was the principal attraction. That is what the subsequent history suggests.

"The marriage was a failure from the first. Black sponged on his wife, gambled with her money and was constantly in debt and difficulties. Also he drank to an unpleasant extent. But she put up with all this until one day he let out that he had committed the forgeries, and even boasted of his smartness in putting the suspicion on White. Then she left him, and, assuming another name, went away to live by herself, passing herself off as a widow."

"And as to her husband? How came he to allow this?"

"First, she frightened him by threatening to denounce him; but she also made him an allowance on condition that he should not molest her. He seems to have been rather scared by her threats and he wanted the money, so he took the allowance and as much more as he could squeeze out of her, and agreed to her terms.

"Later Mr. White returned to England from America. As he had now quite shed his old identity and was a man of good reputation and comfortably off, he sought her out in the hopes of possibly renewing their old relations. That, in fact, was what brought him to England. Eventually he discovered her, apparently a widow, and had no difficulty in making her acquaintance."

"Did she recognize him?"

"I think we must assume that she did. But nothing was said. They maintained the fiction that they were new acquaintances. So they became friends. Finally he asked her to marry him, and it was then that he learned, to his amazement, that she had married Mr. Black."

Thorndyke's face had suddenly become grave. He cast a searching glance at Mr. Pottermack and demanded: "When was this proposal of marriage made? I mean, was it before or after the incident of the well?"

"Oh, after, of course. No marriage could have been thought of by Mr. White while he was under the thumb of the blackmailer, with the choice of ruin or the prison before him. It was only when the affair was over and everything seemed to be settling down quietly that the marriage seemed to have become possible."

Thorndyke's face cleared and a grim smile spread over it. "I see", he chuckled. "A quaint situation for Mr. White. Now, of course, one understands the mummy. His function was to produce a death certificate. Very ingenious. And now I gather that you would like an exposition of the evidence in this case?"

"Yes", replied Pottermack. "Your legal friend seems to have had knowledge of certain actions of Mr. White's which I should have supposed could not possibly have been known to any person in the world but Mr. White himself. I should like to hear how he came by that knowledge if you would be so kind as to enlighten me."

"Very well", said Thorndyke, "then we will proceed to consider the evidence in this case; and I must impress on you, Mr. Pottermack, the necessity of discriminating clearly between what my legal friend knew and what he inferred, and of observing the point at which inference becomes converted into knowledge by verification or new matter.

"To begin with what my friend knew, on the authority of a director of Mr. Black's bank. He knew that Mr. Black had disappeared under very mysterious circumstances. That he had received an urgent and threatening demand from a creditor for the payment of a certain sum of money. That before starting that night he had taken from the monies belonging to the bank a sum of money in notes exactly equal to the amount demanded from him. The reasonable inference was that he set out intending to call on that creditor and pay that money; instead of which, he appeared to have walked straight out of the town into the country, where all trace of him was lost.

"Then my friend learned from the director that, whereas the books of the bank showed Mr. Black's known income and ordinary expenditure, there was evidence of his having paid away large sums of money on gambling transactions, always in cash—mostly five-pound notes; that these sums greatly exceeded his known income, and that his account showed no trace of their having been received. Since he must have received that money before he could have paid it away, he must clearly have had some unknown source of income; and since he had paid it away in cash, and there was no trace of his having received any cheques to these amounts, the inference was that he had received it in cash. I need not remind you, Mr. Pottermack, that the receipt of large sums of money in notes or specie is a very significant and rather suspicious circumstance."

"Might not these sums represent his winnings?" Pottermack asked.

"They might, but they did not, for all the transactions that were traced resulted in losses. Apparently he was the type of infatuated gambler who always loses in the end. So much for Mr. Black. Next, my friend learned from the director the circumstances of the forgeries, and he formed the opinion—which was also that of the director—that Mr. White had been a victim of a miscarriage of justice and that the real culprit had been Mr. Black. He also learned the particulars of Mr. White's escape from prison and alleged death. But he differed from the director in that, being a lawyer with special experience, he did not accept that death as an established fact, but only as a probability, reserving in his mind the possibility of a mistaken identity of the body and that Mr. White might have escaped and be still alive.

"Thus, you see, Mr. Pottermack, that my friend started with a good deal of knowledge of this case and the parties to it. And now we come to some facts of another kind which carry us on to the stage of inference. The director who furnished my friend with the information that I have summarized also put into his hands a long series of photographs of the footprints of Mr. Black, taken by an employee of the bank on the second morning after the disappearance."

"For what purpose?" asked Mr. Pottermack.

"Principally, I suspect, to try a new camera of a special type, but ostensibly to help the investigators to discover what had become of the missing man. They were handed to my friend for his inspection and opinion as to their value for this purpose. Of course, at the first glance they appeared to be of no value at all, but as my friend happens to be deeply interested in footprints as material for evidence, he retained them for further examination in relation to a particular point which he wished to clear up. That point was whether a series of footprints is anything more than a mere multiple of a single footprint; whether it might be possible to extract from a series any kind of evidence that would not be furnished by an

individual footprint.

"Evidently, those photographs offered an exceptional opportunity for settling this question. They were in the form of a long paper ribbon on which were nearly two hundred numbered photographs of footprints, and they were accompanied by a twenty-five inch ordnance map on which each footprint was indicated by a numbered dot. The row of dots started at the bank, and then, after a blank interval, entered and followed a footpath which passed along a wall in which was a gate, and which enclosed a large garden or plantation; beyond the wall the dots continued, still on the footpath, between some fields, through a wood and across a heath, on the farther side of which they stopped. A note at the end of the ribbon stated that here the missing man had turned off the path into the heather and that no further traces of him could be found."

"Well," remarked Pottermack. "the police could see all that for themselves. It doesn't seem as if the photographs gave any further information."

"It does not". Thorndyke agreed. "And yet a careful examination of those photographs led my friend to the conviction that the missing man had entered the gate in the wall and had never come out again."

"But", exclaimed Pottermack, "I understood you to say that the footprints continued past the wall, through the wood and out across the heath."

"So they did. But a careful scrutiny of the photographs convinced my friend that this was not a single series of footprints, made by one man but two series, made by two different men. The first series started from the bank and ended at the gate. The second series started from the gate and ended on the heath."

"Then the footprints were not all alike?"

"That", replied Thorndyke, "depends on what we mean by 'alike.' If you had taken any one footprint from any part of the whole series and compared it with any other corresponding footprint—right or left—in any other part of the series, you would have said that they were undoubtedly prints of the same foot."

"Do I understand you to mean that every footprint in the whole series was exactly like every other footprint of the same side?"

"Yes. Every right footprint was exactly like every other right footprint, and the same with the left. That is, considered as individual footprints."

"Then I don't see how your friend could have made out that the whole series of footprints, all indistinguishably alike, consisted of two different series, made by two different men."

Thorndyke chuckled. "It is quite a subtle point", he said, "and yet perfectly simple. I am a little surprised that it had not occurred to Mr. White, who seems to have been an acute and ingenious man. You see, the difference was not between the individual footprints but between certain periodic characters in the two series."

"I don't think I quite follow you", said Pottermack.

"Well, let us follow my legal friend's procedure. I have told you that his object in examining these photographs was to ascertain whether footprints in series present any periodic or recurrent characters that might be of evidential importance. Now, a glance at these photographs showed him that these footprints must almost certainly present at least one such character. They were the prints of shoes with rubber soles of a highly distinctive pattern and circular rubber heels. Now, Mr. Pottermack, why does a man wear circular rubber heels?"

"Usually, I suppose, because if he wears ordinary leather heels he wears them down all on one side."

"And how do the circular heels help him?"

"In the case of circular heels", Pottermack replied promptly, "the wear does not occur all at one point, but is distributed round the whole circumference—"

He stopped abruptly with his mouth slightly open and looked at Thorndyke.

"Exactly", said the latter, "you see the point. A circular heel is secured to the shoe by a single, central screw. But it is not a complete fixture. As the wearer walks, the oblique impact as it meets the ground causes it to creep round; very slowly when the heel is new and tightly screwed on, more rapidly as it wears thinner and the central screw-hole wears larger. Of course, my friend knew this, but he now had an opportunity of making his knowledge more exact and settling certain doubtful points as to rapidity and direction of rotation. Accordingly he proceeded, with the ribbon of photographs and the ordnance map before him, to follow the track methodically, noting down the distances and the rate and direction of rotation of each heel.

"His industry was rewarded and justified within the first dozen observations, for it brought to light a fact of considerable importance, though it does not happen to be relevant to our case. He found that both heels revolved in the same direction—clock-wise—though, of course, since they were in what we may call 'looking-glass' relation, they ought to have revolved in opposite directions."

"Yes", said Pottermack, "it is curious, but I don't see what its importance is."

"Its importance in an evidential sense", replied Thorndyke, "is this: the anomaly of rotation was evidently not due to the shoes but to some peculiarity in the gait of the wearer. The same shoes on the feet of another person would almost

certainly have behaved differently. Hence the character of the rotation might become a test point in a question of personal identity. However, that is by the way. What concerns us is that my friend established the fact that both heels were rotating quite regularly and rather rapidly. Each of them made a complete rotation in about a hundred and fifty yards.

"My friend, however, did not accept this result as final, but continued his observations to ascertain if this regular rate of rotation was maintained along the whole of the track. So he went on methodically until he had examined nearly half of the ribbon. And then a most astonishing thing happened. Both the heels suddenly ceased to revolve. They stopped dead, and both at the same place.

"Now, the thing being apparently an impossibility, my friend thought that he must have made some error of observation. Accordingly he went over this part of the ribbon again. But the same result emerged. Then, abandoning his measurements, he went rapidly along the whole remaining length of the ribbon to the very end, but still with the same result. Throughout the whole of that distance, neither heel showed the slightest sign of rotation. So it came to this: the photographs from number 1 to number 92 showed both heels rotating regularly about once in every hundred and fifty yards; from number 93 to number 197—showed the heels completely stationary.

"My friend was profoundly puzzled. On the showing of the photographs, the heels of this man's shoes which had been turning quite freely and regularly as he walked, had, in an instant, become immovably fixed. And both at the same moment. He tried to think of some possible explanation, but he could think of none. The thing was utterly incomprehensible. Then he turned to the ordnance map to see if anything in the environment could throw any light on the mystery. Searching along the row of dots for number 93 he at length found it—exactly opposite the gate in the wall.

"This was a decidedly startling discovery. It was impossible to ignore the coincidence. The position was that this man's heels had been turning freely until he reached the gate; after passing the gate his heels had become permanently fixed. The obvious suggestion was that this mysterious change in the condition of the heels was in some way connected with the gate. But what could be the nature of the connection? And what could be the nature of the change in the shoes?

"To the first question the suggested answer was that the man might have gone in at the gate; and while he was inside, something might have happened to his shoes which caused the heels to become fixed. But still the difficulty of the shoes remained. What could cause revolving heels to become fixed? To this question my friend could find no answer. The possibility that the heels had been taken off and screwed on again more tightly would not have explained their complete immobility; and, in fact, they had not been. The screws showed plainly in many of the photographs, and the position of their slots in all was identical. The footprints in the second series—those past the gate—were in every respect the exact counterparts of those in the first series—those from the town to the gate. The only condition that my friend could think of as agreeing with the physical facts was that which would have occurred if the prints in the second series had been made, not by the shoes themselves but by some sort of reproductions of them, such as plaster casts or casts in some other material."

"That sounds rather a far-fetched suggestion", remarked Pottermack.

"It does," Thorndyke agreed; "and in fact my friend did not entertain it seriously at first. He merely noted that the appearances were exactly such as would be produced by making impressions with casts; in which, of course, since the soles and heels would be all in one piece, no movement of the heels would be possible. But, Mr. Pottermack, we must bear in mind whose footprints these were. They were the footprints of a man who had disappeared in the most mysterious and unaccountable manner. The whole affair was highly abnormal. No reasonable explanation was possible either of the disappearance or of the singular character of the footprints. But in the absence of a reasonable explanation, it is admissible to consider an unreasonable one, if it agrees with the known facts. The cast theory did agree with the physical facts, and, on reflection, my friend decided to adopt it as a working hypothesis and see what came of it.

"Now, if the footprints from the gate to the heath were counterfeits of Black's footprints, made with shoes the soles and heels of which were mechanical reproductions of the soles and heels of Black's shoes, it followed that the wearer of these shoes was not Black, but some other person, in which case Black's own footprints ended at the gate. This at once got rid of the most unaccountable feature of the disappearance—the nocturnal flight out into the country; for if his footprints ended at the gate he must have gone in. But there was nothing at all abnormal about his calling at a house quite close to, and, in fact, almost in the town, from which he could have easily gone to keep his appointment with his creditor. Thus far, the hypothesis seemed to simplify matters.

"But it not only followed that Black must have gone in at the gate, it followed that he could never have come out. For the footprints that went on were not his, and there were no footprints going back towards the town."

"He might have come out another way; by the front door, for instance", Pottermack suggested.

"So he might", Thorndyke agreed, "under different circumstances. But the counterfeit footprints showed that he did not. For if the continuing footprints were counterfeits, made by some other person, what could have been their purpose? Clearly their purpose could have been no other than that of concealing the fact that Black had gone in at the gate. But if he had come out of the premises, there could have been no reason for concealing the fact that he had gone in.

"If, however, he did not come out, then, obviously, he remained inside. But in what condition? Was he alive and in hiding? Evidently not. In the first place, he had no occasion to hide, since he could have gone back to the bank and replaced the money. But the conclusive evidence that he was not in hiding was the counterfeit footprints. No mechanical reproduction of the shoes would have been necessary if Black had been there. Black's own shoes would have been

borrowed and used to make the false footprints. But, obviously, the whole set of circumstances was against the supposition that he could be alive. If the evidence was accepted that he went in and was never seen again, the most obvious inference was that he had been made away with. And this inference was strongly supported by the troublesome and elaborate measures that had been taken to conceal the fact that he had gone in at the gate. Accordingly my friend adopted the view, provisionally, that Mr. Black had been made away with by some person inside the gate, hereinafter referred to as the tenant.

"But the adoption of this view at once raised two questions. First, how came it to be necessary to make reproductions of the dead man's shoes? Why did not the tenant simply take the shoes off the corpse and put them on his own feet? If he had done this, if he had made the false footprints with the dead man's own shoes, the illusion would have been perfect. No detection would have been possible. Why had he not done it? The shoes themselves could have presented no difficulty. They were large shoes, and large shoes can, with suitable preparation, be worn even by a small man.

"The answer that suggested itself was that, for some reason, the shoes were not available; that by the time that the necessity for the false footprints had been perceived, the shoes had in some way become inaccessible. But how could they have become inaccessible? Could the body have been buried? Apparently not. For it would have been much less trouble to dig up a body and recover the shoes than to make a pair of reproductions of them. Could it have been burned? Evidently not. Apart from the extreme difficulty of the operation, there had not been time. The false footprints were made on the very night of the disappearance since they were traced by the police the next morning.

"The possibility that the body might have been conveyed away off the premises had to be borne in mind. But it was highly improbable, for many obvious reasons and it did not dispose of the difficulty. For it would surely have been easier and quicker to go—at night—and retrieve the shoes than to make the counterfeits. Indeed, when my friend considered the immense labour that the making of those reproductions must have entailed, to say nothing of the great expenditure of time, just when every moment was precious, he felt that nothing but the absolute physical impossibility of getting access to the original shoes would explain their having been made.

"Now, what conditions would have rendered those shoes totally inaccessible? Remember the circumstances. Inasmuch as the sham footprints were found on the following morning, they must have been made that night. But before they could be made, the counterfeit soles must have been made, and the making of them must have been a long and tedious piece of work. It therefore followed that the tenant must have begun work on them almost immediately after the death of Mr. Black. From this it followed that the body of Mr. Black must have been immediately disposed of in such a way as at once to become inaccessible.

"What methods of disposing of a body would fulfil these conditions? My friend could think of only three, all very much alike: the dropping of the body down a dene-hole, or into a cess-pit, or into a disused well. Any of these methods would at once put the body completely out of reach. And all these methods had a special probability in this particular case. The great difficulty that confronts the would-be murderer is the disposal of the body. Hence the knowledge that there was available a means of immediately, securely, and permanently hiding the body might be the determining factor of the murder. Accordingly, my friend was strongly inclined to assume that one of these three methods was the one actually employed.

"As to the particular method, the question was of no great importance. Still, my friend considered it. The idea of a dene-hole was at once excluded on geological grounds. Dene-holes are peculiar to the chalk. But this was not a chalk district.

"The cess-pit was possible but not very probable; for if in use, it would be subject to periodical clearance, which would make it quite unsuitable as a hiding-place, while cess-pits which become superseded by drainage are usually filled in and definitely covered up. A well, on the other hand, is often kept open for occasional and special use after the laying on of a pipe service."

"Your friend", remarked Pottermack, "seems to have taken it for granted that a well actually existed."

"Not entirely", said Thorndyke. "He looked up an older map and found that this house had formerly been a farm-house, so that it must once have had a well; and as it now fronts on a road in which other houses have been built and which is virtually a street, it is pretty certainly connected with the water-service. So that it was practically certain that there was a well, and that well would almost certainly be out of use.

"And now, having deduced a reason why the counterfeit soles should have been necessary, he had to consider another question. If the original shoes were inaccessible, how could it have been possible to make the counterfeits, which were, apparently, casts of the originals? At first it looked like an impossibility. But a little reflection showed that the footprints themselves supplied the answer. Mr. Black's own footprints on the path were such perfect impressions that a little good plaster poured into selected samples of them would have furnished casts which would have been exact reproductions of the soles and heels of Mr. Black's shoes. Possibly there were equally good footprints inside the premises, but that is of no consequence. Those on the footpath would have answered the purpose perfectly.

"I may say that my friend tested this conclusion and got some slight confirmation. For if the false footprints were impressions of reproductions, not of the original shoes but of some other footprints, one would expect to find the accidental characters of those particular footprints as well as those of the shoes which produced them. And this appeared to be the case. In one of the points of the star on the left heel a small particle of earth seemed to have adhered. This was not to be found in Black's own footprints, but it was visible in all the footprints of the second series, from the gate to the heath. And the fact that it never changed along the whole series suggested that it was really a part of the cast, due to an

imperfection in the footprint from which it was made.

"That brings us to an end of my friend's train of reasoning in regard to the actual events connected with Mr. Black's disappearance. His conclusions were, you observe, that Mr. Black went in at the gate; that he was thereafter made away with by some person inside whom we have called the tenant; that his body was deposited by the tenant in some inaccessible place, probably a disused well; and that the tenant then made a set of false footprints to disguise the fact that Mr. Black had gone in at the gate.

"The questions that remained to be considered were; first, what could be the tenant's motive for making away with Mr. Black? and second, Who was the tenant? But before we deal with his inferences on those points, I should like to hear any observations which you may have to make on what I have told you."

Mr. Pottermack pondered awhile on what he had heard, and as he reflected, he laid a disparaging hand on the teapot.

"It is rather cool", he remarked apologetically; "but such as it is, can I give you another cup?"

"Prolonged exposition", Thorndyke replied with a smile, "is apt to have a cooling effect upon tea. But it also creates a demand for liquid refreshment. Thank you, I think another cup would cheer, and we can dispense with the inebriation."

Mr. Pottermack refilled both the cups and put down the teapot, still cogitating profoundly.

---



## CHAPTER XVIII. — THE SUN-DIAL HAS THE LAST WORD

"YOUR legal friend", Mr. Pottermack said at length, "must be a man of extraordinary subtlety and ingenuity if he deduced all that you have told me from the mere peculiarities of a set of footprints, and only photographs at that. But what strikes me about it is that his reconstruction was, after all, pure speculation. There were too many 'ifs'."

"But, my dear Mr. Pottermack", exclaimed Thorndyke, "it was all 'ifs'. The whole train of reasoning was on the plane of hypothesis, pure and simple. He did not, at this stage, assume that it was actually true, but merely true conditionally on the facts being what they appeared to be. But what does a scientific man do when he sets up a working hypothesis? He deduces from it its consequences, and he continues to pursue these so long as they are consistent with the facts known to him. Sooner or later, this process brings him either to an impossibility or a contradiction—in which case he abandons the hypothesis—or to a question of fact which is capable of being settled conclusively, yes or no.

"Well, this is what my friend did. So far we have seen him pursuing a particular hypothesis and deducing from it certain consequences. The whole thing might have been fallacious. But it was consistent, and the consequences were compatible with the known facts. Presently we shall come to the question of fact—the crucial experiment which determines yes or no, whether the hypothesis is true or false. But we have to follow the hypothetical method a little farther first.

"The questions that remained to be considered were: first, What could have been the tenant's motive for killing Mr. Black? and second, Who was the tenant? My friend took the questions in this order because the motive might be arrived at by reasoning, and, if so arrived at, might throw light on the personality of the tenant; whereas the identity of the tenant, taken by itself, was a matter of fact capable of being ascertained by enquiry, but not by reasoning apart from the motive.

"Now, what motives suggest themselves? First, we must note that my friend assumed that the homicide was committed by the tenant himself, that is, by the proprietor of the premises and not by a servant or other person. That is a reasonable inference from the facts that the person, whoever he was, appeared to have command of all the means and materials necessary for making the counterfeits, and also that he must have had full control of the premises, both at the time and in the future, in order to hide the body and ensure that it should remain hidden. Well, what motive could a man in this position have had to kill Mr. Black?

"There is the motive of robbery, but the circumstances seem to exclude it as not reasonably probable. It is true that Black had a hundred pounds on his person, but there is no reason to suppose that any one knew that he had; and in any case, so small a sum, relatively, furnishes a quite insufficient motive for murder in the case of an apparently well-to-do man such as the tenant. My friend decided that robbery, though possible, was highly improbable.

"The possibilities that Black's death might have been the result of a quarrel or of some act of private vengeance had to be borne in mind, but there were no means of forming any opinions for or against them. They had to be left as mere speculative possibilities. But there was another possibility which occurred to my friend, the probabilities of which were susceptible of being argued, and to this he turned his attention. It was based upon the application of certain facts actually known and which we will now consider.

"First, he noted that Mr. Black came to this place voluntarily, and that he came expressly to visit the premises within the gate is proved by the fact that this is the last house on that path. Beyond it is the country. There is no other human habitation to which he could have been bound. Now Mr. Black was, at this moment, in acute financial difficulties. He had borrowed a hundred pounds from the bank's money, and this hundred pounds he was about to pay away to meet an urgent demand. But that hundred pounds would have to be replaced, and it was of the utmost importance that it should be replaced without delay. For if a surprise inspection should have occurred before it was replaced, he stood to be charged with robbery. The circumstances, therefore, seemed to suggest that he had taken it with the expectation of being able to replace it almost immediately.

"Now, you will remember that it transpired after his disappearance that Mr. Black had some mysterious unknown source of income; that he had received on several occasions large sums of money, which had apparently come to him in the form of cash and had been paid away in the same form—always in five-pound notes. These monies did not appear in his banking account or in any other account. They were unrecorded—and, consequently, their total amount is not known. But the sums that he is known to have received were ascertained by means of the discovery of certain payments that he had made. I need not point out to you the great and sinister significance of these facts. When a man who has a banking account receives large payments in cash, and when, instead of paying them into his account, he pays them away in cash, it is practically certain that the monies that he has received are connected with some secret transaction, and that transaction is almost certainly an illicit one. But of all such transactions, by far the commonest is blackmail. In fact, one would hardly be exaggerating if one were to say that evidence of secret payments of large sums in coin or notes is presumptive evidence of blackmail. Accordingly my friend strongly suspected Mr. Black of being a blackmailer.

"And now, assuming this to be correct, see how admirably the assumption fits the circumstances. Mr. Black is at the moment financially desperate. He has taken certain money, which is not his, to pay an urgent and threatening creditor. Instead of going direct to that creditor, he comes first to this house. But he does not enter by the front door. He goes to a gate which opens on an unfrequented lane and which gives entrance to a remote part of the grounds, and he does this late in the evening. There is a manifestly secret air about the whole proceeding.

"And now let us make another assumption."

"What, another!" protested Pottermack.

"Yes, another; just to see if it will fit the circumstances as the others have done. Let us assume that the tenant was the person from whom Mr. Black had been extorting those mysterious payments; the victim whom he had been blackmailing. That he had called in on his way to his creditor to see if he could squeeze him for yet another hundred, so that the notes could be replaced before they could be missed. That the victim, being now at the end of his patience and having an opportunity of safely making away with his persecutor, took that opportunity and made away with him. Is it not obvious that we have a perfectly consistent scheme of the probable course of events?"

"It is all pure conjecture", objected Pottermack.

"It is all pure hypothesis", Thorndyke admitted, "but you see that it all hangs together, it all fits the circumstances completely. We have not come to any inconsistency or impossibility. And it is all intrinsically probable in the special conditions; for you must not forget that we are dealing with a set of circumstances that admits of no normal explanation.

"And now for the last question. Assuming that Mr. Black was a blackmailer and that the tenant was his victim, was it possible to give that victim a name? Here my friend was handicapped by the fact that Mr. Black was a complete stranger, of whose domestic affairs and friends and acquaintances he had no knowledge. With one exception. He had knowledge of one of Mr. Black's friends. That friend, it is true, was alleged to be dead. But it was by no means certain that he was dead. And if he were not dead, he was a perfectly ideal subject for blackmail, for he was an escaped convict with a considerable term of penal servitude still to run. My friend was, of course, thinking of Mr. White. If he should have attained to something approaching affluence and should be living in prosperous and socially desirable circumstances, he would allow himself to be bled to an unlimited extent rather than suffer public disgrace and be sent back to prison. And the person who would be, of all others, the most likely to recognize him and in the best position to blackmail him would be his old friend Mr. Black.

"Bearing these facts in mind, my friend was disposed to waive the prima facie improbability and assume, provisionally, that the tenant was Mr. White. It was certainly rather a long shot."

"It was indeed", said Pottermack. "Your friend was a regular Robin Hood."

"And yet", Thorndyke rejoined, "the balance of probability was in favour of that assumption. For against the various circumstances that suggested that the tenant was Mr. White there was to be set only one single improbability, and that not at all an impressive one: the improbability that a body—found drowned after six weeks' immersion and therefore really unrecognizable—should have been wrongly identified. However, my friend did feel that (to continue the metaphor, since you seem to approve of it) the time had come to step forward and have a look at the target. The long train of hypothetical reasoning had at length brought him to a proposition the truth of which could be definitely tested. The tenant's identity with Mr. White was a matter of fact which could be proved or disproved beyond all doubt. Of course, the test would not be a real experimentum crucis, because it would act in only one direction. If it should turn out that the tenant was not Mr. White, that would not invalidate the other conclusions, but if it should turn out that he was Mr. White, that fact would very strongly confirm those conclusions.

"My friend, then, left his photographs and his ordnance map and made a journey to the scene of these strange events to inspect the place and the man with his own eyes. First he examined the path and the exterior of the premises, and then he made a survey of the grounds enclosed by the wall."

"How did he do that?" enquired Pottermack. "It was a pretty high wall—at least, so I understand."

"He made use of an ancient optical instrument which has been recently revived in an improved form under the name of 'periscope.' The old instrument had two mirrors; the modern one has two total-reflection prisms in a narrow tube. By projecting the upper or objective end of the tube above the top of the wall, my friend was able, on looking into the eyepiece, to get an excellent view of the premises. What he saw was a large garden, completely enclosed by four high walls in which were two small gates, each provided with a night-latch and therefore capable of being opened only from within or by means of a latch-key. A very secure and secluded garden. On one side of it was a range of out-buildings which, by the glazed lights in their roofs, appeared to be studios or workshops. Near one end of the lawn was a sun-dial on a very wide stone base. The width of the base was rather remarkable, being much greater than is usual in a garden dial. A glance at it showed that the dial had been quite recently set up, for, though the stone pillar was old, the base stones were brand new. Moreover, the turf around it had been very recently laid and some of the earth was still bare. Further proof of its newness was furnished by a gentleman who was, at the moment, engaged, with the aid of Whitaker's Almanack and his watch, in fixing the dial-plate in correct azimuth.

"This gentleman—the mysterious tenant—naturally engaged my friend's attention. There were several interesting points to be noted concerning him. The tools that he used were workmen's tools, not amateurs', and he used them with the unmistakable skill of a man accustomed to tools. Then he had laid aside his spectacles, which were 'curl-sided' and therefore habitually worn. It followed, then, that he was near-sighted; for if he had been old-sighted or long-sighted he would have needed the spectacles especially for the close and minute work that he was doing.

"When he had made these observations, my friend proceeded to take a couple of photographs—a right and a left profile."

"How did he manage that?" demanded the astonished Pottermack.

"By placing his camera on the top of the wall. It was a special, small camera, fitted with a four-point-five Ross-Zeiss lens and a cord release. Of course, he made the exposure with the aid of the periscope.

"When he had exposed the photographs, he decided to have a nearer view of the tenant. Accordingly he went round and knocked at the gate, which was presently opened by the gentleman of the sun-dial, who was now wearing his spectacles. Looking at those spectacles, my friend made a very curious discovery. The man was not near-sighted, for the glasses were convex bi-focals, the upper part nearly plain glass. Now, if he had not needed those spectacles for near work, he certainly could not need them for distance. Then, obviously, he did not need them at all. But, if so, why was he wearing them? The only possible explanation was that they were worn for their effect on his appearance; in short, for the purpose of disguise.

"As this gentleman was answering some questions about the locality my friend handed him a folded map. This he did with two objects: that he might get a good look at him unobserved, and that he might possibly obtain some prints of his finger-tips. As to the first, he was able to make a mental note of the tenant's salient characteristics and to observe, among other peculiarities, a purplish mark on the lobe of the right ear of the kind known to surgeons as a capillary naevus."

"And the finger-prints?" Pottermack asked eagerly.

"They were rather a failure, but not quite. When my friend developed them up, though very poor specimens, they were distinct enough to be recognizable by an expert.

"Now you will have noticed that everything that my friend observed was consistent with, and tended to confirm, the conclusions that he had arrived at by hypothetical reasoning. But the actual test still remained to be applied. Was the tenant Mr. White or was he not? In order to settle this question, my friend made enlargements of the photographs of the tenant and also of the finger-prints, and, with these in his pocket, paid a visit to Scotland Yard."

At the mention of the ill-omened name Pottermack started and a sudden pallor spread over his face. But he uttered no sound, and Thorndyke continued:

"There he presented the finger-prints as probably those of a deceased person, photographed from a document, and asked for an expert opinion on them. He gave no particulars and was not asked for any; but the experts made their examination and reported that the finger-prints were those of a convict named White who had died some fifteen years previously. My friend had, further, the opportunity of inspecting the prison photographs of the deceased White and of reading the personal description. Needless to say, they agreed completely in every particular, even to the capillary naevus on the ear.

"Here, then, my legal friend emerged from the region of hypothesis into that of established fact. The position now was that the person whom we have called 'the tenant' was undoubtedly the convict, White, who was universally believed to be dead. And since this fact had been arrived at by the train of reasoning that I have recited, there could be no doubt that the other, intermediate, conclusions were correct; that, in fact, the hypothesis as a whole was substantially true. Do you agree with that view?"

"There seems to be no escape from it", replied Pottermack; and after a brief pause he asked, a little tremulously: "And what action did your legal friend take?"

"In respect of the identity of the tenant? He took no action. He now considered it perfectly clear that Mr. White ought never to have been a convict at all. That unfortunate gentleman had been the victim of a miscarriage of justice. It would have been actually against public policy to disclose his existence and occasion a further miscarriage.

"With regard to the killing of Mr. Black, the position was slightly different. If it comes to the knowledge of any citizen—and especially a barrister, who is an officer of justice—that a crime has been committed, it is the duty of that citizen to communicate his knowledge to the proper authorities. But my friend had not come by any such knowledge. He had formed the opinion—based on certain inferences from certain facts—that Mr. Black had been killed. But a man is not under any obligation to communicate his opinions.

"This may seem a little casuistical. But my friend was a lawyer, and lawyers are perhaps slightly inclined to casuistry. And in this case there were certain features that encouraged this casuistical tendency. We must take it, I think, that a man who suffers a wrong for which the law provides a remedy and in respect of which it offers him protection is morally and legally bound to take the legal remedy and place himself under the protection of the law. But if the law offers him no remedy and no protection, he would appear to be entitled to resume the natural right to protect himself as best he can. That, at any rate, is my friend's view.

"Of course, the discovery of the alleged body of Mr. Black in the gravel-pit seemed to put an entirely new complexion on the affair. My friend was greatly perturbed by the news. It was hardly conceivable that it could really be Mr. Black's body. But it was some person's body, and the deliberate 'planting' of a dead human body seemed almost inevitably to involve a previous crime. Accordingly, my friend started off, hot-foot, to investigate. When the deceased turned out to be a mummy, his concern with the discovery came to an end. There was no need for him to interfere in the case. It was a harmless deception and even useful, for it informed the world at large that Mr. Black was dead.

"That, Mr. Pottermack, is the history of the dead man who was alive and the live man who was dead; and I think you will agree with me and my legal friend that it is a most curious and interesting case."

Pottermack nodded, but for some time remained silent. At length, in a tone the quietness of which failed to disguise the suppressed anxiety, he said:

"But you have not quite finished your story."

"Have I not?" said Thorndyke. "What have I forgotten?"

"You have not told me what became of Mr. White."

"Oh, Mr. White. Well, I think we can read from here upon your sun-dial a few words that put his remaining history in a nutshell. 'Sole decedente pax'. He had the mark removed from his ear, he married his old love and lived happy ever after."

"Thank you", said Mr. Pottermack, and suddenly turned away his head.

---

THE END

## **PONTIFEX & SON**

---

### **I. — DESTINY IN AN EGG-CHEST**

(JASPER GRAY'S NARRATIVE)

A CRAB of mature age and experience is represented by an ancient writer as offering advice to his son somewhat in these terms: "My son, I have observed in you a most regrettable tendency to walk with ungraceful and unbecoming sidelong steps. Pray endeavour to conquer this pernicious habit and to adopt a straightforward and direct mode of progression."

Excellent advice! Though the gait of the existing generation of crabs leads one to fear that it failed to take effect.

The ancient parable was brought to my mind by the cigarette that I was lighting; for I had been the recipient of some most excellent paternal advice on the subject of cigarettes, coupled with the same on Irish whisky. My revered parent had, in fact, actually removed a choice Egyptian from his mouth the better to expound the subject; and, pointing to the accumulated ends on the hearth and the half empty bottle on the mantelpiece, had explained with his admirable lucidity that these unsubstantial gauds were the inefficient substitutes for bacon for breakfast.

And yet I smoked. I did not consume Irish whisky, though I was perhaps restrained by reasons that were economic

rather than ethical. But I smoked cigarettes; and recently I had started a pipe, having made the interesting discovery that the paternal cigarette ends were capable of reincarnation in a pipe-bowl.

I lit my cigarette and reflected on life and its problems. I was at the moment seated on a folded sack in an up-ended two-wheeled truck or hand-cart. In that truck I had conveyed a heavy bale of stationery from my employers, Messrs. Sturt and Wopsall, to a customer at Mile End; after which I had drawn the empty truck into a quiet yard, up-ended it and taken my seat in it as aforesaid. Since that day I have sat in many a more luxurious seat; in club divans, in hansom cabs, yea! even in the chariots of the mighty. But never have I found one quite equal to an up-ended truck with its floor turned to windward and a folded sack interposed between its tail and my own. There is much to be said for the simple life.

At this time I was just turned seventeen, and needless to say, I was quite poor. But poor boy as I was, there were many things for which I had to be thankful. In the first place I enjoyed the supreme advantage of having escaped education—or rather, I should say, the particular brand that is supplied by the State. Other boys of like indigence were hauled off to Board Schools, where they contracted measles, chicken-pox, ringworm and a most hideous accent, which would cling to them and, socially speaking, damn them hopelessly for ever, even though they should subsequently rise—or sink—to millionairessdom.

From this curse I was exempt. My accent was that of the upper middle-class, my vocabulary that of the man of culture; I could manage my aitches and express myself in standard speech. If the present was meagre, the future held untold potentialities; and this was the priceless gift of circumstance.

My father was a clergyman; or rather, I should say, he had been a clergyman. Why he had ceased to be a clergyman I never knew, though I associated the cessation of pastoral activities directly or indirectly with his complexion. When I knew him he was what he called a classical tutor and other people called a crammer; and the “crammees” being mostly of humble station, though ambitious, his income was meagre and precarious even at that.

But he was a wonderful man. He could construe the most difficult passages from the ancient authors and work out intricate problems in spherical trigonometry, when, from causes which I need not dwell upon, the functions of his legs were in temporary abeyance; on which occasions he would sit on the floor, for the excellent reason—as he lucidly explained—that “the direction of the force of gravity being geocentric, it was impossible to fall off.” Yes, he was a remarkable man, and should surely have attained to distinction in the church. Not, to be sure, that you can conveniently sit on the floor to conduct morning service; but what I mean is that a man must be accounted more than ordinarily gifted in whom, once more to adopt his admirable phraseology, “the effect of alcoholic stimulation is merely to induce motor inco-ordination unaccompanied by psychical confusion.”

I must not, however, allow mere family pride to lead me into digressions of unreasonable length. To return to the present incident. The cigarette had dwindled to about an inch and a half, and I was beginning to consider the resumption of locomotive activities, when a man stopped at the entrance of the yard and then slowly advanced towards me. I thought he was going to order me to move on. But he did not. He sauntered down the yard, and, halting opposite the truck, surveyed me attentively until I became quite embarrassed and a little annoyed.

“Want a job, young feller?” he asked at length.

“No, thank you,” I replied. “I’ve got one.”

“So I see. Looks a pretty soft one, too. How much do they pay yer for sittin’ in that truck?”

Of course it was no concern of his; but I was a civil youth and replied simply: “Ten shillings a week.”

“And are they going to give yer a pension?”

“They may if I sit here long enough,” I answered.

He pondered this statement thoughtfully and then resumed: “Sure yer don’t want a job? Wouldn’t care to earn five bob, for instance?”

Now this was a different matter. Five shillings was half my weekly wage. I was not pressed for time, for I had run all the way with the loaded truck and was entitled to loiter on the return journey.

“What sort of job is it?” I asked, “and how long will it take?”

“It’s to carry a case from Mansell Street to Byleses Wharf. Take yer about ‘arf a hour.”

“Very well,” said I. “Five shillings is agreed upon, is it?”

“Five bob it is; to be paid on delivery. You cut along to Mansell Street, right ‘and side next door to the ‘bacca shop what’s got the image of a nigger outside. I’ll just mizzle on ahead and tell ‘em you’re coming.”

He turned and left the yard at a much more sprightly pace than that at which he had entered, and immediately vanished from my sight. But he evidently discharged his mission, for, when I arrived at the house indicated, a seedy-looking man accosted me.

“Are you the bloke what’s come for that case of eggs?”

“I’ve come for a case that’s to go to Byles Wharf,” I replied.

“That’s right,” said he. “And mind you’re careful with that there case. J’ever hear about Humpty Dumpty what sat on a

wall?"

I replied that I was quite familiar with the legend.

"Very well," said he. "There's two thousand of 'em in that case, so you go slow and don't get a-joltin' 'em. We don't want 'em made into omlicks before their time. Now then; just hold that truck steady."

As he spoke, two men came out of the house carrying a large, oblong case on the top side, of which was pasted an enormous label inscribed, "Fragile. This side up." I steadied the truck by its pole and they slid the case into position with extraordinary care while the seedy person stood by to superintend and admonish. Having settled it securely, they wiped their hands on the backs of their trousers and retired into the house, when the seedy one administered a final caution.

"Remember what I told yer, young covey. Don't you go a-gallopin' that there case over the cobbles or a-bangin' it aginst lamp-posts, and you'd best take the back ways so as not to get run into by fire-ingines or sechlike. D'ye ogle?"

I assured him that I ogled perfectly and he then requested me to skedaddlle; which I did with the air and at the pace of one conducting a modest funeral.

But my circumspect manner and elaborate care seemed only to invite assaults from without. In Upper East Smithfield a van, attempting to pass me at a wobbling canter, caught the corner of the precious case a bang that was enough to have turned the whole consignment into "omlicks"; and any that remained whole were like to have been addled by the van-driver's comments. Then in Pennington Street a man came running round a corner with a barrowful of empty casks; and I only escaped being capsized by turning quickly and receiving the impact of the collision on the back of the case. And, finally, an intoxicated Swedish seaman insisted on accompanying me down nearly the entire length of Old Gravel Lane, performing warlike music on the end of the case with a ship-wright's mallet.

As I turned into the gateway of Byles Wharf I looked anxiously at my charge, rather expecting to find some oozing of yellow liquid from its joints. But no such traces of its stormy passage were visible and I ventured to hope that the packing was better than I had been led to believe. Just inside the yard I encountered, somewhat to my surprise, the seedy stranger of Mansell Street, with another even seedier.

"Here you are then, young covey," said the former. "I hope you've been careful with them eggs."

I assured him that I had been most careful but I did not think it necessary to mention that some other people had not. After all, you can't mend eggs, so the less said the better.

"Very well," said he; "you stay here a minute while I go and see if they're ready."

The two men went away and disappeared round the corner of a shed, leaving me holding the pole of the truck. Now the act of standing still and holding the pole of a truck soon becomes monotonous, especially to a youth of seventeen. Half unconsciously I began, presently, to vary the monotony by working the pole up and down like a pump-handle. That couldn't hurt the eggs, and it produced a measured creak of the truck-springs that was interesting and pleasing.

Suddenly there smote on my ear a hoarse and muffled voice, which exclaimed fiercely: "Keep still, can't yer!"

I stopped instantly and looked around me. I had not noticed anyone near, and I didn't see anyone now. Could there be a ventriloquist hiding somewhere in the yard? The idea set my youthful curiosity aflame. I couldn't see him. But perhaps I could induce him to speak again and then I might locate the sound.

I renewed my application to the pump-handle with increased vigour, and the truck-springs squeaked joyously. The experiment was a perfect success. At the fourth or fifth squeak a savage but muffled voice exclaimed, rather louder than before: "Keep still, I tell yer, yer young blighter!"

The mystery was solved. There was no doubt this time as to where the voice came from. It came from inside the case. Eggs indeed! And then I thought of the Swedish sailor and I am afraid I grinned.

The joy of a youth of my age at this romantic discovery may easily be imagined. Instantly my mind began to evolve speculations as to the identity of the imprisoned man. He seemed to take his incarceration in a philosophic spirit, though the Swedish mariner must have been a trial, to say nothing of the other incidents. But at this point my reflections were cut short by the reappearance of the two seedy strangers.

"Now, young shaver," said my original employer; "bring them eggs along this way."

He preceded me round the corner to the quay, alongside of which lay a barge with a hoisting tackle rigged from the end of a mast-derrick. There I was directed to halt and my two friends proceeded to lift the case tenderly out of the truck.

"Now you can mizzle," said the seedier of the two.

"I want my five shillings," said I.

The man put his hand in his pocket and produced a half-crown, which he presented to me. I examined it critically and held it out to him.

"This is no use," I said. "It's pewter. Besides, I was to have five shillings."

He was about to argue the point when the other man broke in impatiently: "Don't play the goat, Jim. Give the cove his dibs"; on which the first man produced—from another pocket—five shillings of undoubtedly official origin. I pocketed them

after careful scrutiny and offered him the “snide” half-crown. But he waved it aside magnanimously.

“You can keep that,” said he. “‘Tain’t no good to me if it’s a wrong ‘un. And now you can cut your lucky.”

My “lucky” took me about a dozen yards along the quay, where I drew up behind a pile of bales to watch the progress of this stirring drama. The barge’s tackle-ropes had a sling hooked on the end, and this was now carefully passed round the case. The fall of the rope was put on the mast-winch, and, when all was ready, the word was given to “heave away.” The men at the winch accordingly hove away. The pawls clinked merrily, the rope tightened, the case rose clear of the ground and swung out like the bob of an enormous pendulum.

And then came the disaster. The barge was secured to two mooring-posts and was about ten feet away from the quay, so that the derrick had to be hauled over by guy-ropes. But the case had not been properly balanced in the sling; and no sooner had it swung clear of the edge of the quay than it began to slip through the rope loop.

“Look alive!” roared someone on the quay. “She’s a-slippin’!”

One of the men left the winch and rushed for the guy-rope. But it was too late. Slowly, inexorably, the case slid through the loop and fell with a resounding plop! into the water.

An agonised yell arose from the quay and a furious stampede among the onlookers. The bargees snatched up boat-hooks and setting-poles and scrambled along the deck. But, alas! A swift tide was running, and the case, gyrating and dancing like a cork in a mill race, was out of reach before the first boat-hook could be got over the side.

A barge’s dinghy was made fast at the foot of a ladder hard by. Abandoning the truck, I slithered down the ladder, closely followed by a barge-boy, and we met in the boat with mutual recriminations. But there was no time to argue. The boy cast off the painter, and snatching up the paddle, dropped it in the transom-notch and began to scull furiously down stream. Ahead of us, we could see the case dancing along on the tide, turning round and round, vanishing and reappearing among the tiers of shipping. Presently, too, I saw another boat start in pursuit and recognised my two friends among its occupants.

But the case had got a flying start and pursuit was difficult among the crowded shipping. We were beginning to overhaul it when it disappeared behind a cargo steamer, and when we next saw it, it had been neatly snared by a couple of ropes and was being hoisted by hand through the gangway of a little Welsh schooner that was just hauling out of the tiers. The barge-boy and I approached the schooner on the off shore side and climbed on board unnoticed; for the other boat, containing my seedy acquaintances had just arrived on the in-shore side. My employer proceeded to state his claim. “Hi, Captain! That there’s my case.”

The captain leaned over the bulwark and regarded him with an affable smile.

“D’y’ear,” my friend repeated. “That case belongs to me.”

The captain’s smile broadened. “Belonged,” he corrected blandly.

“What d’y’er mean?” demanded the seedy one. “You ain’t going to try to stick to my property?”

The captain maintained his affable manner. “This is a case of salvage,” said he.

“Git out,” rejoined the other. “It’s a case of eggs; and they’re my eggs.”

“Did you lay ‘em yourself?” enquired the captain (a good deal nearer the mark than he thought). The question seemed to irritate my seedy friend, for he replied angrily: “Never you mind ‘oo laid ‘em. You just hand that case over.”

At this moment there came a diversion. One of the sailors, who had been closely examining the case as it lay dribbling on the deck, suddenly started back, like a cat who has inadvertently smelt a hedgehog.

“Golly wores!” he exclaimed. “There’s some-think alive inside!”

“Hey! what’s that?” demanded the captain.

“There is, sir, swelp me! I ‘eard it a-movin’ about.”

The captain looked sharply over the bulwark. “Here you, mister!” he sang out, “you haven’t been sitting on those eggs, have you?”

“Sittin’ on ‘em? What d’y’er mean?”

“Because they seem to have hatched themselves and the chickens are running about inside the case.”

“Yes, and they’re usin’ the most shockin’ langwidge, too,” said an elderly seaman who had been pressing his ear to a crack in the case.

This report, reaching the occupants of the boat, caused very evident dismay. But my late employer made a last effort.

“Don’t talk nonsense,” he said, sulkily. “Pass that case over and I’ll pay what’s doo for salvage in reason.”

“Not me,” replied the captain. “I’m goin’ to broach that case and see what’s inside.”

The effect of this decision was rather curious. The men in the boat consulted together hurriedly; then their craft was turned about and rowed away rapidly in the direction whence they had come.



Meanwhile the captain and his myrmidons proceeded to operate on the case. Producing one or two small crow-bars, they neatly prised up the lid and threw it back; when there rose from the case, some what after the fashion of the obsolete toy known as “Jack-in-the-box,” no less a person than the man who had originally chartered my truck. He stepped out sullenly and confronting the group of grinning seamen, remarked, in, perhaps justifiably, emphatic terms, that he had had enough of that mode of travelling for the present.

The captain looked at him attentively, and he looked at the captain; and then ensued a whispered conversation between them, which was interrupted by one of the crew remarking:

“Looks like the police boat, don’t it?”

The passenger turned and stared wildly in the direction indicated. A police gig was approaching slowly but doggedly over the strong tide; and besides the amphibious officials were two men in civilian garb who sat in the stern-sheets and kept their eyes ominously glued on the schooner.

The passenger bobbed down behind the high bulwark and gazed about him despairingly; and suddenly his eye lighted on me.

“Here, boy,” he said, “get into that case.”

“No thank you,” said I.

He dived his hand frantically into his pocket and brought it out with a shining, yellow burden that clinked musically.

“Here, boy,” he pleaded. “Here’s five quid for you if you’ll get into that case and let ‘em nail it up.”

Five sovereigns! It was a fortune to a lad in my position. And there really was no particular risk. I examined the coins—I was a fairly expert judge of money from my occupation, which often included “payment on delivery”—and found them genuine; and I succumbed. Stowing the money in an inside pocket, I stepped into the case and hunched myself up so as to occupy comfortably the rather limited accommodation.

“Don’t you drop the case into the water again!” I said.

“Right-o, Sonny!” the captain answered. “We’ll handle you carefully. Now there, look sharp!”

The lid was clapped on, a few smart but not noisy blows of a hammer drove home the nails, and I began to earn my magnificent wage. The interior of the case was unpleasantly damp and stuffy, though a sufficiency of air and a few streaks of light came through the chinks of the lid. Sounds from without also reached me freely and consisted, for the present, chiefly of suppressed laughter from the sailors and admonitions from the captain.

“Stow that chap down in the lazarette, Fred,” said the latter; “and you men, don’t stand about laughing like a lot o’ fools. Get that tow-rope ready for the tug. Here comes the police boat.”

There was a pause after this with some scuffling about the deck and a good deal of sniggering. Then I heard a sharp, official voice. “What’s this case, Captain?”

“I don’t know,” was the reply. “Belongs to those men that you see running up them steps. They hooked it when they saw your boat coming.”

“That’s Jim Trout,” said another voice; “and Tommy Bayste with him. What’s in the case, Captain?”

“Can’t say. Seems to be something alive in it.”

“There!” said the first official. “What did I tell you, Smith. It’s Powis right enough. We’d better get him out of the case and clap the darbies on him.”

“Not on my ship, you won’t,” said the captain. “I can’t have any criminals let loose here just as I’m hauling out to go to sea. You’d better take the case ashore and open it there.”

“Gad!” exclaimed Smith; “the Captain’s right, Sergeant. We’d better drop the case into the boat and take it ashore. Powis is an ugly customer to handle. He might capsize us all into the river.”

“That’s true,” agreed the sergeant. “We’ll take him as he is if the Captain will have the case let down into our boat.”

The captain was most willing for certain private reasons not entirely unconnected with the lazarette. I heard and felt a rope sling passed round the case and my heart was brought into my mouth by the squeal of tackle-blocks. For a few seconds the case swung horribly in mid-air; then, to my unspeakable relief, I felt it subside on to the floor of the boat.

A good deal of laughter and facetious talk mingled with the measured sound of the oars as I was borne away. Suddenly the sergeant laughed out boisterously like a man who has had a funny idea. And apparently he had.

“I’ll tell you what, Smith,” he chuckled; “we won’t open the case till we get to Holloway. We’ll take it right into the reception ward. Ha! Ha!”

The joke was highly appreciated by Mr. Smith and his colleagues—a good deal more than it was by me; for I had had enough of my quarters already—and they were still in full enjoyment of it when another voice sang out: “Keep clear of that tug, West. She’ll be right on top of us. Hi! Tug ahoy! Look out! Where the dev—”

Here there came an alarming bump and a confused chorus of shouts arose. The case canted over sharply, there was a

fearful splash, and immediately, to my horror, water began to ooze in through the cracks between the boards. Two or three minutes of dreadful suspense followed. A loud churning noise sounded close at hand, waves seemed to be breaking over the case, and I had a sensation as if my residence were being dragged swiftly through the water.

It didn't last very long. Presently I felt the case run aground. Then it was lifted on to what I judged to be a barrow; which immediately began to move off over an abominably rough road at a pace which may have been necessary but was excessively uncomfortable to me.

Hitherto very little had been said. A few muttered directions were all that I had been able to catch. But now a newcomer appeared to join our procession, and I began to gather a few particulars of the rescue.

"Any of the coppers drowned, d'ye think, Bill?"

"Not as I knows of. I see 'em all a-crawlin' up on to a dumb barge."

"Where's the tug now?"

"Islington, I should think. We left 'er on the mud with 'er propeller goin' round like blazes."

"What are you going to do with Powis, Bill?"

"We're going to shove the case into Ebbstein's crib and then nip off to Spitalfields with the barrer. And we've got to look slippery, or we'll have the coppers on our heels, to say nothin' of them tug blokes. They'll be wantin' our scalps, I reckon, when they find their craft on the mud."

This conversation was by no means reassuring. I was certainly out of the frying-pan but it remained to be seen what sort of fire I had dropped into.

Meanwhile I carefully stowed my treasure in a secret receptacle inside the back of my waistcoat and braced myself as well as I could to resist the violent jolting and bumping caused by the combined effects of speed, indifferent springs and an abominably rough road. It was during a readjustment of my position after a more than usually violent joggle that my hand, seeking a more secure purchase on the wet surface, came into contact with a small body which felt somewhat like a flat button. I took it between my fingers and tried by the sense of touch to determine what it was, but could make out no more than that it was hard and smooth, flat and oval in shape and about half an inch long. This did not tell me much, and indeed I was not acutely interested in the question as to what the thing might be; but eventually, on the bare chance that it might turn out to be something of value, I deposited it in my secret pocket for examination on some more favourable occasion. Then I wedged myself afresh and awaited further developments.

I had not long to wait. Presently the barrow stopped. I felt the case lifted off and carried away. The light ceased to filter in through the cracks of the lid and was replaced by a curious, sour smell. A muttered conversation with someone who spoke very imperfect English was followed by another brief journey and then the case came to rest on a wooden floor and the smell grew more intense. A confused jabbering in an uncouth foreign tongue seemed to pervade the foul air, but this was soon interrupted by the unmistakable English voice that I had heard before.

"I'll soon 'ave it open, Ebbstein, if you've got a jemmy. That's the ticket, mate. Look out, there, inside!"

The beak of the jemmy drove in under the top edge; one or two quick jerks dislodged the nails, the lid was lifted clear and I popped up as the last occupant had done. A swift, comprehensive glance showed me an ill-lighted frowsy room with a coke fire on which a tailor's "goose" was heating; a large work-board on which were piled a quantity of unfinished clothing, and three wild-looking women, each holding a half-made garment and all motionless like arrested clockwork figures, with their eyes fixed on me. Besides these, and a barrel filled with herrings and cut cabbage floating in a clear liquid, were the two men who confronted me; of whom one was a common, stubbly-haired English East-End while the other was a pale, evil-looking foreigner, with high cheek-bones, black, up-standing hair and a black beard that looked like a handful of horsehair stuffing.

"Blimey!" ejaculated the Englishman, as I rose into view; "'taint Powis at all! Who the blazes are you?"

"Who is he!" hissed the foreigner, glaring at me fiercely, "I will tell you. He is a bolice spy!" and his hand began to creep under his coat-skirt.

The Englishman held up his hand. "Now none o' that, Ebbstein," said he. "You foreigners are so bloomin' excitable. Tell us who you are, young un."

I told them all I knew, including the name of the schooner—the Gladwys of Cardiff—and I could see that Ebbstein rejected the whole story as a manifest fable. Not so the Englishman. After a moment's reflection, he asked sharply: "How much did he give you for getting into that case?"

"Five shillings and a duffer," I replied promptly, having anticipated the question.

"Where's the five bob?" he asked; and I indicated my left trouser's pocket. Instantly and with remark able skill, he slipped his hand into the pocket and fished out the three coins.

"Right you are," said he, spreading them out on his palm; "one for you, Ebb, one for me and one for yourself, young un," and here, with a sly grin, he returned me the pewter half-crown, which I pocketed.

"And now," he continued, "the question is what we're to do with this young toff. We can't let him run loose just now. He

might mention our address." Ebbstein silently placed one finger under his beard; but the other man shook his head impatiently.

"That's the worst of you foreigners," said he; "you're so blooming unconstitootional. This ain't Russian Poland. Don't you understand that this boy was seen to get into that case and that the coppers'll be askin' for him presently? You'd look a pretty fine fool if they was to come here for him and you'd only got cold meat to offer 'em. Have you got a empty room?"

"Dere is der top room, vere Chonas vorks," said Ebbstein.

"Very well. Shove him in there and lock him in. And you take my tip, young feller, and don't give Mr. Ebbstein no trouble."

"Are you going away?" I asked anxiously.

"I'm going to see what's happened to my pal; but you'll see me back here some time to-night."

After a little further discussion, the pair hustled me up the grimy, ruinous stairs to the top of the house and introduced me to an extraordinarily filthy garret, where, after a brief inspection of the window, they left me, locking the door and removing the key.

The amazing folly of the ordinary criminal began to dawn on me when I proceeded to lighten the tedium of confinement by examining my prison. I was shut up here, presumably, because I knew too much; and behold! I was imprisoned in a room which contained incriminating objects connected with at least two different kinds of felony. An untidy litter of plaster moulds, iron ladles, battered pewter pots and crude electrical appliances let me into the secret at once. For, young as I was, I had learned a good deal about the seamy side of London life, and I knew a coiner's outfit when I saw it. So, too, a collection of jemmies, braces, bits and skeleton keys was quite intelligible; these premises were used by a coiner—presumably Mr. 'Chonas'—and a burglar, who was possibly Ebbstein himself.

I examined all the tools and appliances with boyish curiosity, and was quite interested for a time, especially when I discovered the plaster mould of a half-crown, very sharp and clear and coated with polished black lead, which seemed to correspond with the 'Duffer' in my pocket. The resemblance was so close that I brought forth the coin and compared it with the mould, and was positively thrilled when they proved to be one and the same coin.

Then it suddenly occurred to me that Ebbstein probably had forgotten about the moulds, and that if he should realise the position he would come up and secure his safety by those "unconstitootional" methods that he had hinted at. The idea was most alarming. No sooner had it occurred to me than I resolved to make myself scarce at all costs.

There was not much difficulty at the start. The window was fixed with screws, but there were tools with which to unscrew it; and outside was a parapet. I began by sticking the end of one jemmy in a crack in the floor and jamming the other end against the door; which was as effective as a bolt. Then I extracted the screws from the window with a turn-screw bit, softly slid up the bottom sash and looked out. Exactly opposite was the opening of a mews or stable yard, but it was unoccupied at the moment. The coast seemed quite clear, the house was not overlooked, and the parapet ran along the whole length of the street. Arming myself with a two-foot jemmy, I crawled out on to the broad gutter enclosed by the parapet, shut the window and hesitated for a moment, considering whether I should turn to the right or the left. Providence guided me to the left, and I began to crawl away along the gutter, keeping below the parapet as far as possible.

As I passed the dormer window of the next house, curiosity led me to peep in; but at the first glance my caution fled, and I rose boldly to press my face against the glass. I looked into an unfurnished room tenanted by one person only; a handsome—nay a beautiful girl of about my own age. Her limbs were pinioned with thinnish rope, and she was further secured with the same rope to a heavy chair. A single glance told me that she was no East-End girl; she was obviously a young lady; and my premature knowledge of the seamy side of life enabled me to hazard a guess as to what she was doing here.

She had already seen me and turned her deathly pale face to me in mute appeal. In a moment I had my big clasp-knife out, and, thrusting it up between the sashes, pushed back the catch; when I quietly pulled down the top sash and climbed over into the room. She looked at me with mingled hope and apprehension and exclaimed imploringly:

"Oh! Take me away from this dreadful place—" but I cut her short.

"Don't speak," I whispered; "they might hear you. I'm going to take you away."

I was about to cut the rope when it occurred to me that it might be useful, as there seemed to be a considerable length of it. So I untied the knot and unwound the coils, recoiling the rope and throwing it round my neck. As the young lady rose stiffly and stretched herself, I silently carried the chair to the door, where I stuck its low back under the handle and jammed the back legs against the floor. No one could now get into the room without breaking the door off its hinges.

"Can you follow me along the parapet, Miss?" I asked with some misgiving.

"I will do anything you tell me," she answered, "if you will only take me away from this place."

"Then," I said, "follow me, Miss, if you please," and climbing back out of the window, I reached in and took her hands to haul her up after me. She was an active, plucky girl, and I had her out on the gutter behind the parapet in a twinkling; and then, having softly shut the window, in case it should be noticed from outside, I crouched down in the gutter and motioned to her to do the same.

In the gathering dusk, we began to crawl slowly away, I leading; but we had advanced only a few yards when I heard her utter a low cry, and at the same time felt her grasp the skirt of my jacket. Turning back, I saw her peering with an expression of terror through a hole in the parapet that opened into a rain-hopper, and, backing as best I could, I applied my eye to the hole, but failed to see anything more alarming than a woman on the opposite side of the street, who was looking at the houses on our side as if searching for a number. To be sure, she was not a pleasant-looking woman. Tall and gaunt, with dead black hair and a dead white face, and pale grey eyes that struck a discord with her hair, and were not quite a match in colour—for the left eye looked considerably darker than the right—she impressed me somehow as evil-looking and abnormal with a suggestion of disguise or make-up; a suggestion that was heightened by her dress. For she wore the uniform of a hospital nurse, and I found myself instinctively rejecting it as a masquerade.

Still, unprepossessing as she was, I could see nothing terrifying in her aspect until my companion whispered in my ear: “She is coming to fetch me.” Then I vaguely understood and shared her alarm. But the greater the danger, the greater the need to escape as quickly as possible. Accordingly, with a few whispered words of encouragement, I started forward again, crawling as fast as the confined space permitted. I looked up at the windows as we passed, but did not venture to peep in; but near the end of the row, I made out on one the words “To let,” written with soap or whitewash, and on this, I raised my head and looked in. The appearance of the empty room with its open door confirmed the inscription, and I made bold, after a cautious look round, to slip back the catch with my knife, lower the top sash and enter. A very brief inspection showed that the house was really empty, so I returned, and quickly helping my protégée in through the window, slid up the sash.

While we were exploring the empty house, the young lady told me her story. That very morning her governess had left her for a few minutes to call at an office, and while she was waiting in the Strand, the woman whom we had just seen had come to her to tell her that the governess had been run over and taken to the hospital. She was then hurried into a cab by the nurse and driven to the house in which I had found her.

There was no time, however, for detailed explanations. We were by no means out of the wood yet. All the outside doors, front and back, were locked, and though I could have broken out with the jemmy, it was not a very safe plan on account of the noise that I should make. But there was another plan that looked more feasible. This particular house had no back yard, but gave directly on a narrow court; into which it would be fairly easy to drop from the first-floor window by the aid of the rope.

No sooner had I conceived the idea than I proceeded to execute it. Raising the bottom sash of the back first-floor window, I passed the cord through the bars of the fireplace.

“Shall I go first, Miss?” I asked. “The rope is rather short, and I had better be there to catch you if you have to drop.”

She agreed eagerly, and, after a careful look up and down the court, I took the doubled rope in my hand, climbed out of the window, and, slipping down easily until I was near the ends of the rope, let go and dropped on the pavement.

Looking up, I saw the young lady, without a moment’s delay, seize the rope and climb out of the window. But instead of grasping the two parts of the rope together, she had taken one in each hand, which made the descent much less easy; and as she apparently held one part more tightly than the other, the more loosely-held part began to slip up as the “bight” ran through the bars of the grate above. Finally, she let go with one hand, when the released end flew up and she came down “by the run” holding on to the other. I stepped forward as she dropped the last few feet and caught her without difficulty; and as I set her on her feet, the rope came down by its own weight and fell in a confused coil on top of us. Half unconsciously, I picked it up and flung it round my neck as I glanced about in search of the exit from the court.

At this moment a man came, treading softly, round a bend of the narrow passage; a foreigner, evidently, and so like Ebbstein that, for a moment, I really thought it was that villain himself. He stopped short and looked at me with scowling inquisitiveness. Then, suddenly, he seemed to recognise the young lady, for he uttered a sort of snarl and stepped forward. At the sound she turned and saw the man; and the low, trembling cry that she gave, and the incredulous horror that froze upon her face, will be fresh and vivid in my memory though I should live for a century.

“You shall come back with me now,” the wretch exclaimed, and rushed at her with his foul hands spread out like talons. My gorge rose at the brute. The blood surged noisily in my ears and my teeth clenched tightly. The jemmy in my hand seemed to whirl aloft of itself. I was dimly aware of a strong muscular effort and a dull-sounding blow; of a limp fall and a motionless figure on the pavement. Perhaps the man was dead. I didn’t know and I didn’t particularly care. At any rate I did not stop to ascertain. Taking my companion by the hand, I drew her swiftly down the court, grasping the jemmy tightly and quite ready to use it again if need be.

We were obviously in great danger. Even as David, when he went down into Ashdod, we walked in the midst of enemies. There were few people in the ill lighted street into which we emerged, but those few eyed us with sinister glances and whispered together ominously. We walked on quickly but without appearing to hurry, and presently turned into a street that was quite deserted save for a hansom cab that had drawn up outside a small public house. I stepped forward joyfully, remembering the golden bribe that I could, and would willingly, offer for a safe passage; but my companion suddenly seized my arm and dragged me into a deep doorway.

“Don’t let him see us!” she exclaimed breathlessly. “He is the man who brought me here, and he is one of them. I heard the nurse call him Louis.”

We pressed back into the doorway and I watched the man putting on the horse’s nose-bag. He certainly was a villainous-

looking rascal; pale, black-eyed, with crisp, curly, black hair; the very opposite of the English horsey type. When he had secured the nose-bag, he turned and entered the public house; and at the same moment I made up my mind. Advancing quickly, I deliberately took off the horse's nose-bag and threw it down.

"Jump into the cab!" I said to my companion; flinging the coil of rope and the jemmy down on the foot-board; and she stepped in without a word. I led the horse forward a few paces clear of the house, and then I climbed quickly to the driver's seat and took the reins. My experience of driving was small, but I had driven our van once or twice under the carman's supervision, and knew how to handle the 'ribbons'. A gentle shake of them now started the horse at a walk and I had just plucked the whip out of its socket when there rose from the direction of the court a shout of alarm and a confused noise of many voices. I shook the whip, and the horse broke into a trot. The voices drew nearer, and, just as I turned the corner, a loud yell from behind us announced that the cabman had discovered his loss. I gave the horse a sharp cut and he broke into a canter.

On we rattled through one after another of the short and narrow slum streets, turning the sharp corners on one wheel and shaving the treacherous posts; and always the roar of angry voices seemed to pursue us, gathering in volume and seeming to draw nearer. The cab swayed, men leaped aside with curses, women and children sprang from the kennels screaming, windows were flung up and people yelled at us from doorways. And still the roar from behind seemed to draw nearer; and still I sat with clenched teeth, grasping the reins convulsively and thinking only of the posts at the corners.

Presently we entered a longer street and I whipped up the horse afresh. At the end of this street we came out into a broad road and I took a deep breath. Now I knew where I was: Commercial Road East. Ashdod was behind us with the gibbering crowd of our enemies. I lashed the horse into a gallop and rattled gaily along the broad road, westward. The police might stop me if they pleased; I cared not a fig for them. My lady was safe from those vampires, and that was all that mattered.

As we approached Whitechapel High Street, I stopped and raised the trap to ask where I should drive my fare. The address she gave was 63, Dorchester Square; and having obtained this, I drove on once more. But I went more soberly now that the danger was over and avoided the main streams of traffic. Years of experience in the delivery of parcels had made me almost as familiar with London as a fully qualified cabman, and I threaded my way through quiet squares and by-streets with no difficulty beyond that of driving the cab straight and keeping clear of other traffic. In less than an hour I turned into Dorchester Square, and, slowing down to read the numbers, at length drew up before a large house.

I climbed down quickly, and, snatching off my cap, helped my fare to alight. She stood by the cab, still holding my hand and looking earnestly into my face; and her eyes filled.

"I want to thank you," she said with a little catch in her breath, "and I can't. But my mother will. I will send someone out to hold the horse in a minute."

She ran up the steps and rang the bell. The great door opened. It was opened by a tall footman who seemed to be prematurely grey; in fact his hair was perfectly white, though he looked quite young. He stared at the young lady for a second or two as if stupefied; then he let off a most undignified yell. "Miss Stella's come back!"

So her name was Stella. A pretty name and a fit one for a lovely young lady. But I liked not that footman. And the great house, with its unfamiliar pomp, cast a chill on me. I felt a sudden shyness, which may have been pride.

Why should I see her mother? There was nothing more to do. "Miss Stella had come back," and there was an end of it.

I led the horse a few yards farther on to a lamp-post and taking the reins, which had fallen down, I secured them to the post with what our packer calls a clove hitch. Thriftily, I gathered up the coil of rope from the footboard—the jemmy had jolted off—and then I walked away across the Square.

I looked in at Sturt and Wopsalls, though the premises were shut. But the foreman, who lived there, told me that my truck had been brought home by the police; and when he had heard my story he advised me to leave all explanations to him; which I did. Of course I said nothing about the young lady.

To my revered parent I was even more reticent. Experience had taught me to maintain a judicious silence about any pecuniary windfall until some periodical financial crisis called forth my savings. But he was singularly incurious about the details of my daily life. Even the coil of rope which I brought home on my arm, drew from him no comment or question. And as the frugal supper was on the table and we were both pretty sharp set, conversation tended for a while to be spasmodic, with the result that the story of my adventures remained untold.

---

## II. — TREASURE TROVE

(JASPER GRAY'S NARRATIVE)

IT was not until I had retired to my room for the night and taken the unusual precaution of locking the door, that I ventured to turn out the secret pocket at the back of my waistcoat and inspect the almost unbelievable wealth that the day's adventures had yielded. Indeed, so incredible did my good fortune appear that nothing short of a minute and critical examination of each coin separately would convince me that the windfall was a glorious reality.

But a reality it was; and as I laid out the shining coins on my dressing-table, my eyes travelled over them with something approaching awe. Five golden sovereigns! Wealth beyond my wildest dreams. As I recall the ecstasy with which I gazed at

them I can understand the joys of the old-fashioned miser. The paper vouchers which pass as money in these later, degenerate days hold no such thrills.

And what a fortunate inspiration that secret pocket had been! The sewing of it on had been but a mere boyish freak with no defined purpose; for nothing more valuable than an occasional stray silver coin had ever come into my possession. Yet, but for that invaluable pocket, the five sovereigns would have gone the way of the two half-crowns. And thus reflecting, I was reminded of the little object that I had picked up in the egg-chest and dipped my fingers into the recesses of the somewhat irregularly shaped pocket. The object, when I at last discovered it in a sunken corner, appeared to be a little oval glass plate, flat on one side and rounded on the other, and about half an inch in length. As it was coated with dirt, I carried it to the wash hand-basin, and, having tenderly bathed and wiped it, brought it back to the candle. And then I received another thrill; for, holding it up to the light, I found it to be of a beautiful deep, clear green colour, whereupon I instantly decided that it must be an emerald. But more than this: as I looked through it with the rounded side towards me, there appeared, as if in its very substance, but actually engraved on the flat side, a little castle, such as one uses in playing chess, and above it the tiny head of some animal which seemed to combine the characteristics of a donkey and a crocodile, while, underneath the castle, in the tiniest of lettering, were the words, "Strong in Defence." Evidently this emerald had dropped out of a seal or a signet ring.

I knew all about seals, for Sturt and Wopsalls were accustomed to secure small parcels for the post in this way; and occasionally the packer had allowed me to perform this interesting operation, having instructed me in the proper method and how to prevent the wax from sticking to the seal. But the warehouse seal was a big, clumsy, brass affair, quite different from this delicate little engraved gem. Hence it is needless to say that I was all agog to make a trial of my new treasure; and, failing any more suitable material, I made a number of experimental impressions on samples of wax from the candle before returning the gem to its secret hiding-place. Then, having bestowed my golden windfall at the bottom of a drawer filled with miscellaneous clothing—mostly outgrown—I went to bed, gloating happily over my sudden accession of wealth.

Throughout the following day—it was a Saturday, I remember—the consciousness of my new opulence never left me. I seemed to walk on air. For the first time in my life I was a capitalist. If I had chosen—only I was not such a mug—I could have gone quite extensively 'on the bust' or brought something really expensive. It was a delightful sensation, and it cost nothing so long as I kept my capital intact.

But even more than my treasure of gold was the mysterious emerald a source of joy, to which the uncertainty as to its value contributed not a little. I had read somewhere that the emerald is the most precious of stones, even more precious than the diamond. And this was quite a good-sized stone. Why it might be worth a hundred pounds! I had heard of diamonds that were worth more than that. True, it was probably some other person's property, and the circumstances in which I had acquired it strongly suggested that it was stolen property. But what of that? I had not stolen it, and I was fully prepared to surrender it to the rightful owner if ever he should appear. Meanwhile it was mine to possess and enjoy, and I made the most of it, halting from time to time in unfrequented places to fish it out of its hiding-place and hold it up to the light, revelling in its gorgeous colour and the quaint little castle and the preposterous little donkey or crocodile or whatever he was, magnified by the lens-like convex back of the gem.

Presently I became possessed by an overwhelming desire to see those mystic figures embodied in wax—real wax; sealing-wax. A survey of my pockets, revealing the presence of several pennies, and my arrival opposite a small stationer's shop in Chichester Rents, settled the matter. I went in and demanded a stick of sealing-wax. The presiding genius, a dry-looking elderly man, rummaged awhile among some shelves at the back of the shop, and at length produced a cardboard box which he laid on the counter and in which I perceived a number of sticks of black sealing-wax.

"I'd rather have red," said I.

"M'yes," said he, giving the box a sort of reproachful shake, "I seem to have run out of red for the moment. Won't black wax do?"

I was about to say "No," when I observed a portion of a broken stick in the box, and my habitual thrift suggested the chance of a "deal."

"How much for that broken piece?" I enquired.

He looked at the fragment disparagingly, picked it out with much deliberation and laid it on the counter.

"Make you a present of that," said he; and taking up the box, turned his back on me as if to avoid my grateful acknowledgments.

I went forth gleefully from the shop with the little stump of funereal wax in my pocket and a growing urge to make a trial of it. But there are three factors to a sealing operation; the seal, the wax and the document or letter. The first two I had; and even as I was searching my pockets, and searching in vain, for some letter or envelope which might form a plausible subject for an experiment, Providence, or Fate, in a playful mood, supplied the deficiency. Just as I was about to cross Fleet Street, a spectacled gentleman, who looked like a lawyer's clerk and carried in his hand a large sheaf of letters, blundered hastily out of Middle Temple Lane and collided with another hustler who was proceeding in the opposite direction. The shock of the impact dislodged one of the letters from his hand, but, unaware of his loss, he hurried away eastward. I ran across the road and picked up the letter, but by the time I had secured it, he had disappeared into the crowd. However, there was no need to pursue him. The letter was stamped and obviously ready for posting. All I had to do was to walk down to the post office and drop it in the box.

With this intention I had turned eastward and was threading my way among the crowd when, happening to glance at the letter in my hand, I noticed that the flap of the envelope was very insecurely stuck down. The letter, as I had already observed, was addressed to a Mr. Brodribb, at New Square, Lincoln's Inn. Now, if Mr. Brodribb lived in Lincoln's Inn, he was probably a lawyer, especially as the letter had come from the Temple; and if he was a lawyer, the letter possibly contained important and confidential matter. It was highly improper that such a letter should be insecurely fastened. The least that I could do was to close the envelope as securely as was possible. And since mere gum had been tried in the balance and found wanting, the obvious proceeding was to seal it and make it absolutely safe.

No sooner had I conceived the idea than I set about its execution. Darting down Inner Temple Lane in search of a retired spot, I turned to the left beside the church, and, passing Oliver Goldsmith's grave, came to a monument provided with a shelf which would serve the purpose to perfection. Here, with no one to observe my proceedings (though, indeed, they were innocent enough and even meritorious) I laid the envelope, the box of matches, the wax and the seal. Very carefully and methodically I melted the wax until I was able to deposit a nearly circular patch on the flap of the envelope. Then, giving it a few moments for the excessive stickiness to subside, I laid the precious seal daintily in position and made steady pressure on it with my thumb.

The result was perfect, even to the microscopic markings on the castle; so perfect that I was loath to part with my work. Again and again I gloated over the beauty of its jet-like polish and the clean-cut device as I walked slowly down Fleet Street until I reached the post office, where, reluctantly I dropped the letter into the yawning mouth of the box. However, if I must needs part with the finished work, I retained the means of repeating it indefinitely; nor, to do myself justice, did I neglect my opportunities. Every parcel to which I could get access went forth enriched as to its exterior with a supplementary impression on the parcel wax, and a couple of ponderous rolls of cartoon paper which I conveyed in the truck to Studios in Ebury Street and at Chelsea, arrived at their destinations adorned with one or two black seals in addition.

It was late in the evening when I reached home—for Saturday was little different to me from other days excepting that it held the promise of Sunday. I was rather tired and uncommonly hungry. But, to a strong and healthy lad, mere fatigue is not unpleasant, especially with an immediate prospect of unrestricted rest; and my hunger was mitigated by the comfortable consciousness of a pound of streaky bacon in my pocket, the product of a trifling honorarium tendered by the Ebury Street artist. That bacon was dedicated to future breakfasts, but still at a pinch (and pinches were not infrequent in our household) it might be made to yield a highly acceptable supper.

However, as I toiled up the noble staircase that mocked our poverty with its faded, old-world magnificence, my nose informed me that the bacon could be reserved for its legitimate function. A savoury aroma on the second-floor landing, waxed in intensity as I mounted the "third pair," offering suggestions that I hardly dared to entertain. But when I opened the door of our sitting-room, my doubts were dispelled and my wildest hopes received glorious confirmation.

I recall very vividly the picture that greeted my eyes as I paused for a moment in the open doorway. Beside the fire, seated in the old Windsor arm-chair and clad in his shabby dressing-gown, behold Pontifex (my revered parent—Pontifex Maximus on occasions of ceremony, shortened to Ponty in familiar conversation) delicately adjusting something that reposed in a frying-pan and murmured softly, exhaling a delicious fragrance. I sniffed and listened in ecstasy. More grateful than the odours of myrrh and frankincense was that delightful aroma; sweeter to my ears than soft, sibilant murmur than songs of Araby. For they conveyed, without the clumsy intermediary of speech, the entrancing idea of scallops; and lest any faintest misgiving might linger, there in the fender was ranged a goodly row of twelve empty scallop-shells.

As I entered, Pontifex looked up with a smile compounded of welcome, triumph and congratulation. We were strangely different in many respects, but on one point our souls were tuned in perfect unison. We both had a gluttonous passion for scallops. It could not often be indulged, for the bare necessities of life consumed the whole of our joint financial resources. Our ordinary diet—largely consisting of Irish stew—was supplied under a slightly ambiguous contract by the lady on the second-floor. But she was an indifferent culinary artist, and we did not trust her with such rare delicacies as scallops, or even with bacon. These called for more subtle treatment, and besides, the very process of cooking them was a feast in itself.

While Pontifex, with consummate artistry and an air of placid satisfaction, tended the scallops, I proceeded to cut the bread and butter in order that there might be no unnecessary delay. And as I thus busied myself, my mind became half-unconsciously occupied, in the intervals of conversation, with speculations on the train of circumstances that had produced this unlooked-for festivity. How came Pontifex to be able to buy these scallops? Only that morning funds had been so short that it had been doubtful whether they would run to butter. Could Ponty have received an unexpected payment? It might be so, but I doubted it. And as I weighed the probabilities—and found them wanting—a horrible suspicion began to steal into my mind.

Concerning my golden windfall I had, for sound economic reasons, kept my own counsel. But the "snide" half-crown I thought might be allowed to transpire, so to speak, in the form of a booby-trap for poor old Ponty; to which end I had that very morning planted it on the corner of the mantelpiece, experience having informed me of my respected parent's habit of snapping up any unconsidered trifles in the way of specie. It was a foolish joke, but I had taken it for granted that as soon as Ponty had the coin in his hand, he would see that it was a counterfeit. I had made no allowance for the difference between his eyesight and mine or our respective experiences of "snide" money. And now it looked as if my joke had failed disastrously. For I now remembered having noticed when passing a fishmonger's shop on my way home, that scallops were

marked two shillings and sixpence a dozen. Of course, it might be only a coincidence. But a sensible man looks askance at coincidences; and the suspicious fact remained that a half-crown had disappeared and two and sixpence worth of scallops had unaccountably made their appearance.

However, I refrained from spoiling poor Ponty's enjoyment of the feast by raising the very awkward question and I even managed to dismiss it from my own mind. So we had a banquet that a Lord Mayor might have envied. The scallops were cooked to perfection and served tastefully in their native shells; and when those shells had become once more empty and I had brewed myself a pot of tea while Pontifex mixed an uncommonly stiff jorum of grog and lit a cigarette, we experienced that sense of luxury and well-being that comes only to those who have to count their coppers and whose rare banquets are seasoned by habitual hard living.

But the question of the "snide" half-crown had to be disposed of, for if it had purchased those scallops, then the scallops had been virtually stolen; and if it had not, it must be lurking in Ponty's pocket, an element of potential danger. Thus, I reflected on the morrow as, in accordance with our Sunday morning routine, I shaved Pontifex, laid the table, fried the bacon and made the tea. Accordingly, as soon as we were seated at table, I opened fire with a leading question, which Pontifex received with a waggish air of surprise.

"So that was your half-crown!" he exclaimed. "Now why did that very simple explanation not occur to me? I tried to remember how I came to put it there but my memory was a complete blank. Naturally, as I realise now."

"So you annexed it and busted it on scallops."

Pontifex smiled blandly. "Your inference," he remarked, "illustrates the curious fact that it is sometimes possible to reach a correct conclusion by means of perfectly incorrect reasoning. The connection which you assumed between the Treasure Trove and the scallops though false in logic was true in fact. But as to your use of the colloquialism, 'busted', I would point out that even as omelettes cannot be made without the breaking of eggs, so scallops at two shillings and sixpence a dozen cannot be eaten without the expenditure of half-crowns."

"Precisely. That was how I established the connection."

"Assumed, my son," he corrected. "You did not establish it. You will note that your middle term was not distributed."

"If the scallops were the middle term," I rejoined, flippantly, "they were distributed all right. We had six each."

"I mean," he said with a deprecating smile, "that you fell into the common confusion of the undistributed middle. You confused the generic half-crown with a particular half-crown."

"Oh, no I didn't." I retorted. "I wasn't born yesterday. I know that the generic half-crown is made of silver. But this particular half-crown was made of pewter."

Pontifex suddenly became serious. Laying down his knife and fork, he looked at me for several seconds in silent dismay. At length he exclaimed: "You don't mean, my son, that it was a base coin?"

"That is just what I do mean. Rank duffer. Made out of a pewter pot. Chappie probably priggled the pewter pot to make it."

Pontifex was too much overcome even to protest at my vulgarisms of speech. Still gazing at me in consternation, he exclaimed tragically: "But this is terrible, Jasper. I have actually committed a gross fraud on that most estimable fish monger! Unwittingly, it is true; but a fraud nevertheless." (It was characteristic of Pontifex that he refrained from any suggestion that my idiotic booby-trap was the cause of the disaster. No man was more sensible of his own faults or more oblivious of other people's).

"Yes," I agreed, "you undoubtedly sold him a pup. Precious mug he must have been to let you. But I suppose, as it was Saturday night, he was pretty busy."

"He was. The shop was crowded with buyers. But, my son, we shall have to make restitution: though, really, in the present circumstances of—ah—financial stringency—"

He explored his various pockets, which appeared to be rich in truncated fragments of lead pencil, in addition to which they yielded a small bunch of keys, a pen knife with a broken blade, a sixpence and three half pence. These treasures he regarded disconsolately and returned them whence they came. Then he turned an enquiring and appealing eye on me. He knew, of course, that I had received my wages on the previous day but delicately refrained from explicit allusion to the fact. However, as the entire sum reposed untouched in my pocket, in the form of four half-crowns and the fishmonger had to be paid, I produced the necessary coin and pushed it across the table. Usually, I was a little chary of handing money to Pontifex, preferring to pay our debts myself. For Ponty's ideas on the subject of meum and tuum were a trifle obscure—or perhaps I should say communistic—where my property was concerned, and the establishments of the tobacconist and the spirit merchant exercised a fatal fascination. But he was scrupulous enough in regard to strangers and I had no misgivings as to my present contribution safely reaching its proper destination. Accordingly, when I had furnished him with the means wherewith to make restitution to the defrauded fishmonger, I considered the incident of the "snide" half-crown as closed.

But it was not, as I discovered when I arrived home on Monday night. The fishmonger, it appeared, had communicated with the police, and the police were profoundly interested in the coin, which they recognised as one of a series which was being issued in considerable numbers by a coiner whom they had failed to locate or identify. In consequence, Pontifex had



been requested to ascertain from me how the coin had come into my possession and to communicate the information to the fishmonger for transmission to the police.

Now, in my mind, there was little doubt as to the source of that half-crown. It had come from the work shop or studio of the mysterious artist who had been referred to as 'Chonas'. But my experiences under the too-hospitable roof of Mr. Ebbstein had begotten an unwillingness to be involved in any affair connected with that establishment. I am not peculiarly secretive, but I have a habit of keeping my own counsel. 'Chonas's' proceedings were no concern of mine and I was not disposed to meddle with them. Wherefore, in reply to Ponty's not very eager enquiries, I stated simply and quite truthfully, that I had received the coin from a man who was a total stranger to me. This answer satisfied Pontifex, who was not acutely interested in the matter, and once more I assumed that I had finished with that disreputable coin. And once more I was mistaken.

---

### III. — A MYSTERY AND A DISAPPEARANCE

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

THERE are some—and not a few, I fear—of the dwellers in, or frequenters of London to whom the inexhaustible charms of their environment are matters of no more concern than is the landscape which the rabbit surveys indifferently from the mouth of his burrow. For them the sermons in stones are preached in vain. Voices of the past, speaking their messages from many an ancient building or historic landmark, fall on deaf ears. London, to such as these, is but an assemblage of offices and shops, offering no more than a field for profitable activity.

Very different from these unreflective fauna of the town was my friend Thorndyke. Inveterate town-sparrow as he was, every link with the many-coloured past, even though it were no more than an ancient street-name, was familiar and beloved, never to be passed without at least a glance of friendly recognition. Hence it was natural that when, on a certain Tuesday morning, we crossed Chancery Lane to enter Lincoln's Inn by the spacious archway of the ancient gate-house, he should pause to glance round the picturesque little square of Old Buildings and cast his eyes up to the weathered carving above the archway which still exhibits the arms of the builder and the escutcheons of the ancient family whose title gave the inn its name.

We were just turning away, debating—not for the first time—the rather doubtful tradition that Ben Jonson had worked as a bricklayer on this gateway, when we became aware of a remarkably spruce-looking elderly gentleman who was approaching from the direction of New Square. He had already observed us, and, as he was obviously bearing down on us with intent, we stepped forward to meet him.

"This meeting," said he, as we shook hands, "is what some people would describe as providential, if you know what that means. I don't. But the fact is that I was just coming to call on you. Now you had better walk back with me to my chambers—that is, if you are at liberty."

"May I take it," said Thorndyke, "that there is some matter that you wish to discuss?"

"You may, indeed. I have a poser for you; a mystery that I am going to present to you for solution. Oh, you needn't look like that. This is a genuine mystery. The real thing. I've never been able to stump you yet, but I think I'm going to do it now."

"Then I think we are at liberty. What do you say, Jervis?"

"If there is a chance of my seeing my revered senior stumped, I am prepared to stay out all night. But I doubt if you will bring it off, Brodribb."

Mr. Brodribb shook his head. "I should like to think you are right, Jervis," said he, "for I am absolutely stumped, myself, and I want the matter cleared up. But it is a regular twister. I can give you the facts as we walk along. They are simple enough, as facts. It is the explanation of them that presents the difficulty."

"I think you have heard me speak of my client, Sir Edward Hardcastle. I am the family solicitor. I acted for Sir Edward's father, Sir Julian, and my father acted for Sir Julian's father. So I know a good deal about the family. Now, yesterday morning I received a letter which was sealed on the outside with Sir Edward Hardcastle's seal. I opened the envelope and took out the letter, naturally assuming that it was from Sir Edward. Imagine my astonishment when I found that the letter was from Frank Middlewick, your neighbour in the Temple."

"It certainly was rather odd," Thorndyke admitted.

"Odd!" exclaimed Brodribb. "It was astounding. Here was Sir Edward's private seal—the impression of his signet ring—on the envelope of a man who, as far as I knew, was a perfect stranger to him. I was positively staggered. I could make no sense of it; and as it was obviously a matter that called aloud for explanation, I slipped the letter in my pocket and hopped off to the Temple without delay."

"But my interview with Middlewick only made confusion worse confounded. To begin with, he didn't know Sir Edward Hardcastle even by name. Never heard of him. And he was perfectly certain that the seal wasn't put on in his office. He had written the letter himself—I had already observed that it was in his own handwriting—but the envelope was addressed and the letter put in it by his clerk, Dickson, after the copy had been taken and the entry made in the index. Dickson states that

he put the letter in one of the ordinary envelopes from the rack and he is quite certain that, when he closed it and stuck the stamp on, there was no seal on it. Of course, there couldn't have been. Then he took the letter, with a number of others, and posted it with his own hand at the post office in Fleet Street."

"Did he check the letters when he posted them?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, he didn't. He ought to have done so, of course. But it seems that he was in a deuce of a hurry, so he shot the whole lot of letters into the box at once. Careless, that was. A man has no business to be in such a hurry that he can't attend to what he is doing. However it doesn't matter, as it happens. The post-mark shows that the letter was actually posted there at the time stated. So there's no help in that direction."

"And what about your own premises? Who took the letter in?"

"I took it in myself. I was strolling round the square, having my morning pipe, when I saw the postman coming along towards my entry. So I waited and took my batch of letters from him, and looked them over as I strolled back to the house. This one with the seal on it was among the batch. That is the whole story. And now, what have you got to say about it?"

Thorndyke laughed softly. "It is a quaint problem," said he. "We seem to be able to take it as certain that the letter was unsealed when it left Middlewick's office. Apparently it was unsealed when it was dropped into the post office letter-box. It was certainly sealed when the postman delivered it. That leaves us the interval between the posting and the delivery. The suggestion is that somebody affixed the seal to the letter in the course of transit through the post."

"That seems quite incredible," said I. "The seal was the impression of a signet ring which couldn't possibly have been in the possession of any of the post office people, to say nothing of the general absurdity of the suggestion."

"Mere absurdity or improbability," replied Thorndyke, "can hardly be considered as excluding any particular explanation. The appearance of this seal in these circumstances is grotesquely improbable. It appears to be an impossibility. Yet there is the devastating fact that it has happened. We can hardly expect a probable or even plausible explanation of so abnormal a fact; but among the various improbable explanations, one must be true. All that we can do is to search for the one that is the least improbable, and I agree with you, Jervis, that the post office is not the most likely place in which the sealing could have occurred. It seems to me that the only point at which we make anything resembling a contact with probability is the interval between Dickson's leaving the office and the posting of the letters."

"I don't quite follow you," said Brodribb.

"What I mean is that at that point there is an element of uncertainty. Dickson believes that he posted the letter, but, as he did not check the letters that he posted, it is just barely possible that this one may have in some way escaped from his custody."

"But," objected Brodribb, "it was certainly posted at the place and time stated. The post-mark proves that."

"True. But it might have been posted by another hand."

"And how does that suggestion help us?"

"Very little," Thorndyke admitted. "It merely allows us to suggest, in addition to the alternatives known to us—all of them wildly incredible and apparently impossible—a set of unknown circumstances in which the sealing might credibly have happened."

"That doesn't seem very satisfactory," I remarked.

"It is highly unsatisfactory," he replied, "since it is purely speculative. But you see my point. If we accept Dickson's statement we are presented with a choice of apparent impossibilities. Middlewick could not have sealed the letter; Dickson could not have sealed it; we agree that it appears impossible for the postal officials to have sealed it, and it is unimaginable that the postman sealed it. Yet it left Middlewick's hands unsealed and arrived in the postman's hands sealed. Thus the apparently impossible happened. On the other hand, if we assume that the letter passed out of Dickson's possession in some way without his knowledge, we are assuming something that is not inherently improbable. And if we further assume—as we must, since the letter was posted by somebody—that there was an interval during which it was in the possession of some unknown person, then we have something like a loop-hole of escape from our dilemma. For, since the assumed person is unknown to us, we cannot say that it was impossible, or even improbable, that he should have had the means of sealing the letter."

I laughed derisively. "This is all very well, Thorndyke," said I, "but you are getting right off the plane of reality. Your unknown person is a mere fiction. To escape from the difficulty you invent an imaginary person who might have had possession of Sir Edward's ring and might have had some motive for sealing with it a letter which was not his and with which he had no concern. But there isn't a particle of evidence that such a person exists."

"There is not," Thorndyke agreed. "But I remind my learned friend that this perfectly incredible thing has undoubtedly happened and that we are trying to imagine some circumstances in which it might conceivably have happened. Obviously, there must be some such circumstances."

"But," I protested, "there is no use in merely inventing circumstances to fit the case."

"I don't quite agree with you, Jervis," Brodribb interposed. "As Thorndyke points out, since the thing happened, it must have been possible. But it does not appear to be possible in the circumstances known to us. Therefore there must have been

some other circumstances which are unknown to us. Now the suggestion that Dickson dropped the letter (which, I understand, is what Thorndyke means) is not at all improbable. We know that he was in a devil of a hurry and I know that he is as blind as a bat. If he dropped the letter, somebody certainly picked it up and put it in the post; and I agree that that is probably what really occurred. I should think so on grounds of general probability, but I have a further reason.

"Just now I said that I had told you the whole story, but that was not strictly correct. There is a sequel. As soon as I left Middlewick, I sent off a reply-paid telegram to Sir Edward asking him if his signet ring was still in his possession and if he had sealed any strange letter with it. In reply I got a telegram from his butler saying that Sir Edward was away from home and adding that a letter would follow. That letter arrived this morning, and gave me some news that I don't like at all. It appears that last Tuesday—this day week—Sir Edward left home with the expressed intention of spending a couple of days in Town and returning on Thursday afternoon. But he did not return on that day. On Friday, Weeks, the butler, telegraphed to him at the club, where he usually stayed when in town, asking him when he would be coming home. As no reply to this telegram was received, Weeks telegraphed next day—Saturday—to the secretary of the club enquiring if Sir Edward was still there. The secretary's answer informed him that Sir Edward had stayed at the club on Tuesday night, had gone out after breakfast on Wednesday morning and had not returned since, but that his suit-case and toilet fittings were still in his bedroom.

"This rather disturbed Weeks, for Sir Edward is a methodical man and regular in his habits. But he didn't like to make a fuss, so he decided to wait until Monday night, and then, if his master did not turn up, to communicate with me. As I have said, up to the time of his writing to me, Sir Edward had not returned, nor had he sent any message. So the position is that his whereabouts are unknown, and, seeing that he has left his kit at the club, the whole affair has a very unpleasant appearance."

"It has," Thorndyke agreed, gravely, "and in the light of this disappearance the seal incident takes on a new significance."

"Yes," I hastened to interpose, "and the assumed unknown person seems to rise at once to the plane of reality."

"That is what I feel," said Brodribb. "Taken with the disappearance, the incident of the seal has an ominous look. And there is another detail, which I haven't mentioned, but which I find not a little disturbing. The seal on this letter is impressed in black wax. It may mean nothing, but it conveys to me a distinctly sinister suggestion. Sir Edward, like most of us, always used red wax."

On this Thorndyke made no comment, but I could see that he was as much impressed as was our old friend and as I was, myself. Indeed, to me this funereal wax seemed to impart to the incident of the seal an entirely new character. From the region of the merely fantastic and whimsical, it passed to that of the tragic and portentous.

"There is just one point," said Thorndyke, "on which I should like to be quite clear. It is, I suppose, beyond doubt that this is really Sir Edward's seal—the actual impression of his signet ring?"

"You shall judge for yourself," replied Brodribb; and forthwith he started forward towards his entry (hitherto we had been pacing up and down the broad pavement of the square). He preceded us to his private office where, having shut the door, he unlocked and opened a large deed box on the lid of which was painted in white lettering: "Sir Edward Hardcastle, Bart". From this he took out an envelope, apparently enclosing a letter and bearing on its flap a small seal in red wax. This he laid on the table, and then, extracting from his pocket wallet another envelope, bearing a similar seal in black wax, laid it down beside the other. Thorndyke picked them up, and, holding them as near together as was possible, made a careful comparison. Then, through his pocket lens, he made a prolonged inspection, first of the red seal and then of the black. Finally, producing a small calliper gauge which he usually carried in his pocket, he measured the two diameters of each of the little oval spaces in which the device was enclosed.

"Yes," he said, handing the envelopes to me, "there is no doubt that they are impressions of the same seal. The possible fallacy is not worth considering."

"What fallacy do you mean?" asked Brodribb.

"I mean," he replied, "that if you would leave one of these impressions with me for twenty-four hours I could present you with an indistinguishable facsimile. It is quite easy to do. But, in the present case, the question of forgery doesn't seem to arise."

"No," agreed Brodribb, "I don't think it does. But the question that does arise, is, what is to be done? I suppose we ought to communicate with the police at once."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that the first thing to be done is to call at the club and find out all that we can about Sir Edward's movements. Then, when we know all that is to be known, we can, if it still seems desirable, put the police in possession of the facts."

"Yes," Brodribb agreed, eagerly, "that will be much the better plan. We may be able to do without the police and avoid a public fuss. Can you come along now? It's an urgent case."

"It is," Thorndyke agreed. "Yes, we must let our other business wait for the moment. We had no actual appointment."

Thereupon, Brodribb drew the letters out of the envelopes, and having deposited the former in the deed box, which he closed and locked, bestowed the latter in his wallet.

"May want the seals to show to the police," he explained as he slipped the wallet into his pocket. "Now let us be off."

We made our way out of the square by the Carey Street gate and headed for the Strand by way of Bell Yard. At the stand by St. Clement's Church we picked up an unoccupied 'Growler', and, when we had jammed ourselves into its interior, Brodribb communicated the destination to the cabman, who looked in on us as he closed the door. "Clarendon Club, Piccadilly."

The cabman thereupon climbed to his box and gave the reins a shake, and our conveyance started forward on its career towards the west.

"I take it," said Thorndyke, "that Sir Edward wears this ring on his finger?"

"Not as a rule," Brodribb replied. "It is an old ring—an heirloom, in fact—and it is rather a loose fit and apt to drop off. For that reason, and because he sets a good deal of value on it, Sir Edward usually carries it in his waistcoat pocket in a little wash-leather case."

"And what is the ring like? Is it of any considerable intrinsic value?"

"As to its intrinsic value," replied Brodribb, "I can't tell you much, as I have not been told and don't know much about jewels. But I can tell you what it is like, and perhaps you can judge of its value from the description. The stone, I understand, is a green tourmaline of an unusually fine colour, flat on the front, which, of course bears the engraved device, and convex at the back. The ring itself is rather massive and ornamented with a certain amount of chased work, but the general effect is rather plain and simple. What should you say as to its value?"

"Principally artistic and sentimental," Thorndyke replied. "A tourmaline is a very beautiful stone, especially if it is cut so as to display the double colouring—which, apparently, this one was not; but it is not one of the very precious stones. On the other hand, a green tourmaline might easily be mistaken by a person who had no special knowledge for an emerald, which is, in certain cases, the most precious of all stones."

"In any case," said I, "it would be worth stealing, and certainly worth picking up if it happened to be dropped."

The discussion was interrupted by the stopping of the cab opposite the club. We all alighted, and, as Thorndyke was paying the cabman, I followed Brodribb up the steps to the hall, where our friend presented his card to the porter and asked to see the secretary. Almost immediately, the messenger returned and ushered us to the private office where we found a small, grave-looking gentleman standing beside his desk to receive us.

"I am extremely relieved to see you, Mr. Brodribb," the secretary said when the necessary introductions had been made and the purpose of our visit stated. "I had the feeling that I ought to communicate with the police, but you understand the difficulty. The club members wouldn't like a public fuss or scandal; and then there is Sir Edward, himself. He would be annoyed if he should return to find himself the subject of a newspaper sensation. But now," he smiled deprecatingly, "I can transfer the burden of responsibility to your shoulders. Is there any information that I can give you?"

"If you have any," replied Brodribb. "I have seen your letter to Weeks, Sir Edward's butler."

"Then I think you know all that I have to tell. But perhaps there is something more that—" he broke off undecidedly and looked from Brodribb to Thorndyke with an air of vague enquiry.

"Could we have a look at the bedroom that Sir Edward occupied?" Thorndyke asked.

"Certainly," was the ready, almost eager response. "I will go and get the key."

He hurried away, evidently all agog to pass on his embarrassments to Brodribb and be clear of them. When he returned with the key in his hand, he invited us to follow him and preceded us along a corridor and up a back stairway, to another corridor at a door in which he halted to insert and turn the key. As the door swung open, he stood aside to let us pass, and, when we had entered, he followed and closed the door after him.

For a minute or more we all stood silently glancing around and taking in the general aspect of the room; and I could see that the distinctly uncomfortable impression that the appearance of the room produced on me was shared by my companions. Not that there was anything unusual or abnormal in its aspect. On the contrary, the room had precisely the appearance that one would expect to find in the bedroom of a gentleman who was in residence at his club. And that was, in the circumstances, the disquieting fact. For thus had the room been lying in a state of suspended animation, as one might say, for close upon a week; a fact which every object in it seemed to stress. The neatly-made bed with the folded pyjamas on the pillow, the brushes, nail scissors and other little toilet implements on the dressing-table, the tooth-brush, nail-brush and sponge on the wash-stand; all offered the same sinister suggestion.

"I take it," said Thorndyke, voicing my own conclusion, "that Sir Edward wears a beard?"

"Yes," Brodribb replied.

"Then, since he had no razors, and all his travelling necessities appear to be here, we may assume that he took nothing with him."

"Yes, that seems to be the case," Brodribb agreed, gloomily.

"Which implies," Thorndyke continued, "that, when he went away, he had the intention of returning here to sleep."

The implication was so obvious that Brodribb acknowledged it only with a nod and an inarticulate grunt. Then turning to the secretary, he asked: "Did he leave anything in your custody, Mr. Northbrook?"

"Nothing," was the reply. "Whatever he had with him and did not take away is in this room."

On this, Thorndyke stepped over to the dressing-chest and pulled out the drawers, one after another. Finding them all empty, he transferred his attention to a suit-case that rested on a trunk-stand. It proved to be locked, but the lock was an artless affair which soon yielded to a small key from Mr. Brodribb's voluminous bunch.

"Nothing much there," the latter commented as he held up the lid and glanced disparagingly at a few collars and a couple of shirts which seemed to form the sole contents of the case. He was about to lower the lid when Thorndyke, with characteristic thoroughness, took out the collars and lifted the shirts. The result drew from our friend an exclamation of surprise; for the removal of the shirts brought into view some objects that had been—perhaps intentionally—concealed by them; a large and handsome gold watch and guard, a bunch of keys, a tie-pin, set with a single large pearl and one or two opened letters addressed to the missing man. The latter, Brodribb scanned eagerly and then replaced with an air of disappointment.

"Family letters," he explained. "Nothing in them that is of any use to us. But," he added, looking anxiously at Thorndyke, "this is a most extraordinary affair. Most alarming, too. It looks as if he had deliberately removed from his person everything of intrinsic value."

"Excepting the ring," Thorndyke interposed.

"True, excepting the ring. He may have forgotten that, unless he had intended to use it—to seal some document, for instance. But otherwise he seems to have jettisoned everything of value. I need not ask you what that suggests."

"No," Thorndyke replied, answering Brodribb's interrogative glance rather than his words. "Taking appearances at their face value one would infer that he was intending to go to some place where personal property is not very secure. That is the obvious suggestion, but there are other possibilities."

"So there may be," said Brodribb, "but I shall adopt the obvious suggestion until I see reason to change my mind. Sir Edward went from here to some place where, as you say, personal chattels are not very safe. And where a man's property is not safe his life is usually not safe either. What we have seen here, coupled with his disappearance, fills me with alarm, indeed with despair; for I fear that the danger, whatever it was, has already taken effect. This is the seventh day since he left here."

Thorndyke nodded gloomily. "I am afraid, Brodribb," he said, "that I can only agree with you. Still, whatever we may think or feel, there is only one thing to be done. We must go at once to Scotland Yard and put the authorities there in possession of all the facts that are known to us. This is essentially a police case. It involves the simultaneous search of a number of likely localities by men who know those localities and their inhabitants by heart."

Brodribb assented immediately to Thorndyke's suggestion, and when he had taken possession of the derelict valuables and given Mr. Northbrook a receipt for them, we shook hands with that gentleman and took our leave.

At Scotland Yard we had the rather unexpected good fortune to learn that our old friend, Superintendent Miller, was in the building, and, after a brief parley, we were conducted to his office. On our entrance, he greeted us collectively and motioned to the messenger to place chairs for us; then, regarding Thorndyke with a quizzical smile, he enquired: "Is this a deputation?"

"In a way," replied Thorndyke, "it is. My friend, here, Mr. Brodribb, whom you have met on some previous occasions, has come to ask for your assistance in regard to a client of his who is missing."

"Anyone I know?" enquired Miller.

"Sir Edward Hardcastle of Bradstow in Kent," Brodribb replied.

The Superintendent shook his head. "I don't think I have ever heard the name," said he. "However, we will see what can be done, if you will give us the necessary particulars."

He laid a sheet of paper on the desk before him, and, taking up his fountain pen, looked interrogatively at Brodribb.

"I think," said the latter, "you had better hear the whole story first and then take down the particulars. Or I could supply you with a full account in writing, which would save time just now."

"Yes," Miller agreed, "that would be the best plan," but nevertheless he held his pen in readiness and jotted down a note from time to time as Brodribb proceeded with his narrative. But he made no comments and asked no questions until that narrative was concluded, listening with the closest attention and obviously with the keenest professional interest.

"Well," he exclaimed, as Brodribb concluded, "that is a queer story, and the queerest part of it is that sealed letter. I can make nothing of that. It may be some odd chance or it may be a practical joke. But there is an unpleasant air of purpose about it. We can hardly believe that Sir Edward sealed the letter; and if he didn't, his ring was in someone else's possession. If it was, it may have been lost and picked up or it may have been stolen. There's an alarming lot of 'ifs' in this case. Do you know anything about Sir Edward's habits?"

"Not a great deal," replied Brodribb. "He is a quiet, studious man, rather solitary and reserved."

"Not in the habit of attending race meetings?"

"I should say not."

"Nor addicted to slumming?"

"No. I believe he spends most of his time at his place in Kent, and, apart from books, I think his principal interest is gardening."

"Ha!" said Miller. "Well, that leaves us pretty much in the dark. If a man was proposing to attend a race meeting, he might naturally leave his more valuable portable property at home; and the same if he was bound on some expedition into the slums, or if he expected to be in some sort of rough crowd. At any rate, the fact remains that he did turn out his pockets before starting from the club, so we can take it that he had in view the possibility of his getting into some shady company. We shall have to find out a bit more about his habits. What is this butler man, Weeks, like?"

"A most intelligent, conscientious, responsible man. He could probably tell you more about Sir Edward's habits than anyone. Would you like him to come and see you?"

"We've got to see him," Miller replied, "to fill in details, but I think it would be better for one of our men—unless I can manage it myself—to go down and see him at the house. You see, we shall want a full description of the missing man and at least one photograph, if we can get it. And we may want to go over his clothes and hats for private marks and Bertillon measurements."

"For Bertillon measurements!" exclaimed Brodribb. "But I thought you required the most minute accuracy for them."

"So you do if you can get it," replied Miller. "But, you see, the system depends on what we may call multiple agreements, like circumstantial evidence. It isn't a question of one or two accurate measurements but of the coincidence of a large number with no disagreements. If we should find an unrecognisable body with legs and forearms, thighs and upper arms about the same length as Sir Edward's; and if the chest and waist measurements were about the same as his and if the head would fit his hats, the hands would fit his gloves and the feet would fit his boots, and if there was no disagreement in any one measurement, then we should have established a very strong probability that the body was his body. It is surprising how much information an experienced man can get from clothes. Of course, I am speaking of clothes that have been worn and that have creases that mark the position of the joints. But even new clothes will tell you quite a lot."

"Will they really?" said Brodribb, in a slightly shocked tone—for, despite his expressed pessimism, he was hardly prepared to consider his client in the character of a body. "I can understand their use for comparison with those on the—er—person, but I should not have expected them to furnish measurements of scientific value. However, I think you have Weeks's address?"

"Yes, and I will just jot down one or two particulars—dates, for instance."

He did so; and when he had finished, as our business seemed to be concluded, we thanked him for his interest in the case and rose to depart. As we moved towards the door, Brodribb turned to make a last enquiry.

"Would it be admissible to ask if you think there is a reasonable chance of your being able to trace my missing client?"

Miller reflected awhile, assisting the process of cogitation by gently scratching the back of his head. "Well, Mr. Brodribb," he replied, at length, "I'm like the doctor, I'm not fond of guessing. The position is that this gentleman is either alive or dead. If he is dead, his body must be lying somewhere and it is pretty certain to come to light before very long. If he is alive, the matter is not so simple, for he must be keeping out of sight intentionally; and as he is not known to any of our people, he might be straying about a long time before he was recognised and reported. But I can promise you that everything that is possible shall be done. When we have got a good photograph and a description, they will be circulated among the police in all likely districts and instructions issued for a sharp look-out to be kept. That is about all that we can do. I suppose you would not care for us to publish the photograph and description?"

"I don't think it would be advisable," Brodribb replied. "If he should, after all, return to his club, it would be so extremely unpleasant for him—and for me. Later, it may be necessary, but for the present, the less fuss that we make, the better."

The Superintendent was disposed to agree with this view; and when Brodribb had once more promised to send full written particulars with a special impression of the missing seal, we finally took our departure.

---

#### IV. — MR. BRODRIBB'S PERPLEXITIES

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

DURING the next few weeks we saw a good deal of Mr. Brodribb; indeed, his visits to our chambers became so frequent, and he became so acutely conscious of their frequency, that he was reduced to the most abject apologies for thus constantly intruding on our privacy. But we always received him with the warmest of welcomes, not only for the sake of our long-standing friendship but because we both realised that the warm-hearted old lawyer was passing through a period of heavy tribulation. For Mr. Brodribb took his responsibilities as a family solicitor very seriously. To him, the clients whose affairs he managed were as his own family, their welfare and their interests took precedence over every other consideration and their property was as precious and sacred as if it had been his own.

Hence, as the time ran on and no tidings of the missing man came to hand, the usually jovial old fellow grew more and more worried and depressed. It was not only the suspense of waiting for news that kept his nerves on edge, but the foreboding that when the tidings should at last come they would be tidings of tragedy and horror. Nor even was this all;

for, presently, it began to transpire that there were further causes of anxiety.

From chance phrases of rather ambiguous import we inferred that the baronet's disappearance bade fair to create a situation of some difficulty from the legal point of view; but as to the nature of the difficulties we were unable to judge until a certain evening when Brodribb at last unburdened himself of his anxieties and entered into explicit particulars. I do not think that he started with the intention of going into details, but the matter arose naturally in the course of conversation.

"I suppose," he began, "we could hardly expect to keep this horrible affair to ourselves, but I had rather hoped that we might have avoided scandal and gossip, at least until something of legitimate public interest occurred."

"And haven't we?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. There has been a leakage of information somewhere. Police, I suspect, unless it was someone at the club. It would hardly be Northwood, though, for he was more anxious than any of us to keep the affair dark. Anyhow, a notice of the disappearance has got into at least one newspaper."

"Which newspaper was it?"

"Ah, that is what I have been unable to ascertain. The way in which I became aware of it was this: a man—a relative of Sir Edward's and an interested party—called on me a day or two ago to make enquiries. He said that he had heard a rumour that Sir Edward was missing and wished to know if there was any truth in it. I asked him where he heard the rumour and he said that he had seen some obscure reference to the matter in one of the evening papers, but he couldn't remember which paper it was. I pressed him to try to remember for it struck me as most remarkable that he should have forgotten the name of the paper, he being, as I have said, an interested party. I should have expected him to preserve the paper or at least have cut out the paragraph. But he persisted that he had no idea whatever as to what paper it was."

"It was, as you say, rather odd," commented Thorndyke. "If it isn't an indiscreet question, in what respect and to what extent was he an interested party?"

"In a very vital respect," replied Brodribb. "He thinks that he is the heir presumptive."

"And do I understand that you think otherwise?"

"No. I am afraid I am disposed to agree with him. But I am not going to commit myself. Meanwhile he shows signs of being damned troublesome. He is not going to let the grass grow under his feet. He began to throw out hints of an application to the court for leave to presume death; which is preposterous at this stage."

"Quite," Thorndyke agreed. "But, of course, if Sir Edward doesn't presently turn up, alive or dead, that is what you will have to do; and having regard to the circumstances, the Court would probably be prepared to consider the application after a comparatively short period."

"So it might," Brodribb retorted, doggedly. "But he will have to make the application himself; and if he does, I shall contest it."

Here he suddenly shut himself up, dipping his fine old nose reflectively into his wineglass and fixing a thoughtful eye on the empty fireplace. But somehow, his abrupt silence conveyed to me in some subtle manner the impression that he would not be unwilling to be questioned further. Nor was I mistaken; for, after a pause, during which neither Thorndyke nor I had made any comment, he broke the silence with the remark: "But I've no business to come here boring you two fellows with a lot of shop talk—and my own private shop at that."

"Indeed!" said Thorndyke. "Are we then of no account? I rather thought that we were to some extent concerned in the case and that, to that extent, we might regard your shop as our shop."

"He knows that perfectly well, old humbug that he is," said I. "And he knows that nothing but our superlative good manners has restrained us from demanding full particulars."

Mr. Brodribb smiled genially and emptied his glass.

"Of course," said he, "if you are so polite as to express an actual interest in the civil aspects of the case I shall take you at your word. It will be very helpful to me to talk matters over with you, though I really hardly know where to begin."

"You might begin," said Thorndyke, "by filling your glass. The decanter is on your side. Then you might tell us what your objections are to this claimant, whom you admit to be the heir presumptive."

"I don't admit anything of the kind," protested Brodribb as he filled his glass and pushed the decanter across the table. "I merely agree that his claim appears, at the moment to be quite a good and well-founded one."

"I don't see much difference," said I, "between an heir presumptive and a claimant with a well-founded claim. But never mind. You object to the gentleman for some reason. Tell us why you object to him."

Brodribb considered the question for a while. At length he replied:

"I think, if you are really interested in the state of affairs, it would be best for me to give you a short sketch of the family history and the relationships. Then you will understand my position and my point of view. I need not go back in detail beyond Sir Edward's father, Sir Julian Hardcastle.

"Sir Julian had two sons, Edward and Gervase. As the estate is settled in tail male, we can ignore the female members of

the family. On Sir Julian's death, Edward, the elder, succeeded; and as he was already married and had one son, the succession was, for the time being, satisfactorily settled. The younger son, Gervase, married his cousin, Phillipa, a daughter of Sir Julian's brother William. There was a good deal of opposition to the marriage, but the young people were devoted to one another and in the end they made a run-away match of it."

"Was the opposition due to the near kinship of the parties?" I asked.

"Partly, no doubt. There is a very general prejudice against the marriage of first cousins. But the principal objection of the young lady's people was to Gervase, himself. It seems—for I never saw her—that Miss Phillipa was an extremely beautiful and attractive girl who might have been expected to make a brilliant marriage, whereas Gervase was a younger son with very little in the way of expectations. However, that might have passed. The real trouble was that Gervase had acquired some bad habits when he was up at Oxford and he hadn't shaken them off. Plenty of young fellows tend to overdo the libations to Bacchus during their undergraduate days. But it is usually mere youthful expansiveness which passes off safely when they come down from the 'Varsity and take up their adult responsibilities. Unfortunately, it was not so with Gervase. Conviviality passed into chronic intemperance. He became a confirmed drinker, though not an actual drunkard.

"I may as well finish with him, so far as his history is known to me, as that history complicates the present position. I may have given the impression that he was a waster, but he was not, by any means. He was a queer fellow in many respects, but, apart from his tipling habits, there was nothing against him. And he must have had considerable abilities, for I understand that he not only graduated with distinction but was reputed the most brilliant classical scholar of his year. In fact he became a Fellow of his college and after his marriage I believe he took Orders, though he remained at Oxford in some teaching capacity. I don't know much of his affairs at this time. It wasn't my business, and Sir Edward did not talk much about him; but so far as I can gather, his career at the University came to a sudden and disastrous end. Something happened, I don't know what it was but I suspect that he got drunk under circumstances that created a public scandal. At any rate he was deprived of his Fellowship and had to leave Oxford; and from that time, with a single exception, all trace of him is lost—at least to me. But he must have felt his disgrace acutely for it is clear that he cut himself off entirely from his family and went virtually into hiding on the continent."

"What about his wife?" I asked.

"She certainly went with him into exile, and though she never communicated with her family at this time, I think there is no doubt that, in spite of all his faults, she remained devoted to him. That appears plainly in connection with the single reappearance which I mentioned, of which I heard indirectly from Sir Edward. It seems that a friend of the family who had known Gervase at Oxford, came across him by chance in Paris; and from his account of the meeting it would seem that the poor fellow was in a very sad way. His appearance suggested abject poverty and his manner was that of a man who had received some severe shock. He had a bewildered air and seemed to be only partially conscious of what was going on around him. He gave no account of himself in any respect save one; which was that he had lost his wife some time previously, but he did not say when or where she died. He did not seem to have any distinct ideas as to place or time. The fact of his loss appeared to occupy his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. In short, he was the mere wreck of a man.

"The friend—whose name I forget, if I ever knew it—had some idea of helping him and trying to get him into touch with his family; but before he could make any move, Gervase had disappeared. As he had given no hint as to his place of abode, no search for him was possible; and so this unfortunate man passes out of our ken. The only further news we got of him was contained in a notice in the obituary column of *The Times* some twelve months later which recorded his death at Brighton. No address was given, and, I am sorry to say, neither Sir Edward nor I made any enquiries at the time. I cut the notice out and put it with the papers relating to the estate, and there, for the time being the matter ended."

"There was no doubt that the notice really referred to him?" Thorndyke asked.

"No. He was described as 'The Reverend Gervase Hardcastle, M.A. (so apparently he had taken orders), formerly Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford,' and his age was correctly given. No, I think there can be no doubt that the notice referred to him. Of course, I ought to have looked into the matter and got all the particulars; but at the time Sir Edward's son and wife were both alive and well, so it looked as if there were no chance of any question arising with regard to the succession."

"It is not known, I suppose," said Thorndyke, "whether Gervase had any children?"

"No. There were no children up to the time when he left England. But it is possible that some may have been born abroad. But if so, since we have no knowledge whatever as to where he lived during his wanderings and don't even know in what country his wife died, we have no date on which to base any enquiries. As a matter of fact, both Sir Edward and I assumed that, at least, there was no son, for if there had been, we should almost certainly have received some communication from him after Gervase's death. That was what we assumed, but of course we ought not to have left it at that. But now we had better pursue the course of events.

"Gervase's death, as recorded in *The Times*, occurred sixteen years ago. Six years later, Sir Edward lost both his wife and his son—his only child—within a few days. A malignant form of influenza swept through the house and brought Sir Edward, himself, to the very verge of the grave. When he at length rose from his bed, it was to find himself a childless widower. This altered the position radically, and, of course, we ought to have made such enquiries as would have cleared up the question of the succession. But Sir Edward was, for the time, so broken by his bereavements that I hardly liked to trouble him about a matter which had ceased to be his personal concern, and on the few occasions when I raised the



question, I found him quite uninterested. His view was that there was nothing to discuss; and assuming, as he did, that Gervase had died without issue (in which assumption I concurred) he was right. In that case, the heir presumptive was undoubtedly his cousin Paul, Phillipa's brother; and as Paul Hardcastle was an entirely eligible successor, Sir Edward made a fresh will bequeathing to him the bulk of his personal property.

"That was the position ten years ago. But four years ago Paul Hardcastle died, leaving only one child, a daughter some twelve years of age. Once more the position was altered; for, now, Sir Edward's near kin were exhausted and the new heir presumptive was a comparatively distant cousin—a grandson of Sir Julian's uncle, one David Hardcastle. On this, Sir Edward revoked his will and made another, by which about three quarters of his personal property goes to Paul Hardcastle's daughter, in trust until she shall reach the age of twenty-one and thereupon absolutely. The remaining fourth, apart from certain legacies, goes to the heir of the estate, that is to David Hardcastle."

"And supposing the young lady should die during her minority?" Thorndyke enquired.

"Then the property goes to the heir to the title and estate."

"Does the personal property amount to anything considerable?"

"Yes, it is very considerable indeed. Sir Edward came into a comfortable sum when he succeeded, and his wife was a lady of some means; and he has been an excellent manager—almost unduly thrifty—so there have been substantial accumulations during his time. Roughly, the personalty will be not less than a hundred thousand pounds."

"That," I remarked, "leaves some twenty-five thousand for the heir to the title. He won't have much to complain of."

"No," growled Brodribb, "but I expect he will complain, all the same. In fact, he has complained already. He thinks that the whole of the money should have gone to the heir to enable him to support his position in suitable style."

"So," said I, "we may take it that the gentleman who called on you was Mr. David Hardcastle?"

"You may," replied Brodribb.

"And we may further take it that the said David is not exactly the apple of your eye."

"I am afraid you may. It is all wrong, I know, for me to allow my likes and dislikes to enter into the matter. But I have acted for Sir Edward and for Sir Julian before him, and my father acted for Sir Julian and his father, Sir Henry, so that it is only natural that I should have a deep personal sentiment in regard to the family and the estate."

"Which," said I, "brings us back to the original question; What is the matter with David Hardcastle?"

Brodribb pondered the question, consciously controlling, as I suspect, his naturally peppery temper. But with no great success, for he, at length, burst out: "I can't trust myself to say what I feel about him. Everything is the matter. He is a changeling, a misfit, an outlander. He doesn't match the rest of the family at all. The Hardcastles, as I have known them, have been typical English landed gentry; straight-going, honourable men who lived within their income and paid their way and did their duty justly and even generously to their tenants."

"Now this man is a different type altogether. His appearance and manner suggest a flash bookmaker rather than a country gentleman. My gorge rose at him as soon as I clapped eyes on him, and I don't fancy I was any too civil. Which was a tactical mistake, under the circumstances."

"Is he a man of independent means," asked Thorndyke, "or does he do anything for a living?"

"I have never heard that he has any means," replied Brodribb, "and I do know that he is occasionally in pretty low water, for there are several loans from Sir Edward outstanding against him. As to his occupation, God knows what it is. I should say he is a sort of cosmopolitan adventurer, always on the move, prowling about the continental watering-places, living on his wits, or the deficiency of other people's. A distinctly shady customer in my opinion. And there is another thing. In the course of his travels he has picked up a foreign wife; a Russian woman of some sort—may be a Jewess for all I know."

"What an inveterate old John Bull it is," chuckled Thorndyke. "But we mustn't be too insular, you know, Brodribb. There are plenty of most estimable and charming Russian ladies; and even if she should be a Jewess, surely you would not deny that she would belong to a very distinguished and gifted race."

Brodribb grunted. "The Lady of Bradstow," said he, "should be an English lady, not a Russian or a Jewess. Besides, this person is not an estimable and charming lady, as you express it. She had to hop out of Russia mighty sharp in consequence of some political rumpus—and you know what that means in that part of the world. And a brother of hers was I believe, actually tried and convicted."

"Still," I urged, "political offences are not—"

"Are not what?" interrupted Brodribb. "I am surprised at you, Jervis, a member of the English Bar, condoning crime. A lawyer should revere the law above everything. No, sir, crime is crime. A man who would compass the death of a Tsar would murder anyone else if it served his purpose."

"At any rate," said Thorndyke, "we may sympathise with your distaste for the present claimant; but, as you say, your feeling as to his suitability or unsuitability for the position is beside the mark. The only question is as to the soundness of his claim. And that question is not urgent at the moment."

"No," agreed Brodribb, "not at this moment. But it may become urgent in twenty-four hours. And this fellow thinks that

the question is settled already. As he talked to me in my office, his manner was that of the heir just waiting to step into possession."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "I understand that he knows exactly how Sir Edward has disposed of the personal estate. How did he come by that knowledge?"

"Sir Edward gave him all the particulars as to the provisions of the will. He thought it the fair thing to do, though it seemed to me rather unnecessary."

"It was the kind thing to do," said I. "It will have saved him a rather severe disappointment. But what are you going to do if he shows signs of undue activity?"

"What the deuce can I do?" demanded Brodribb "That is the question that is worrying me. I have no locus standi; and the beggar knows it. Practically told me so."

"But," I objected, "you are Sir Edward's man of business and his executor."

"I shall be the executor," Brodribb corrected, "when Sir Edward dies or his death is proved or presumed. So long as he remains alive, in a legal sense, my powers as an executor have not come into being. On the other hand, my position as his solicitor gives me no authority to act without his instructions. I hold no power of attorney. In his absence I have really no locus standi at all. Of course, if he does not turn up, alive or dead, some arrangements will have to be made for administering the estate and carrying on generally. But the application for powers to do that will be made by the legally interested party—the heir presumptive."

"And supposing," said I, "Sir Edward should be proved to be dead—say by the finding of his body—your powers as the executor of the will would then come into being. In that capacity, would you accept David Hardcastle as the heir?"

Mr. Brodribb regarded me speculatively for some moments before replying. At length he said with quiet emphasis, and speaking very deliberately: "No, I should not—as matters stand at present." He paused, still with his eyes fixed on me, and then continued. "A very curious thing has happened. After my interview with Mr. David, realising that the question of the succession might become acute at any moment, I did what I ought to have done long ago. I set to work to clear up the circumstances of Gervase's death and to try to settle the question as to whether there had been any issue of the marriage, and, if so, whether there could possibly be a son living. I began by looking up that cutting from *The Times* that I told you about. As I mentioned to you, no address was given. But there was the date; and with that I thought I should have no difficulty in getting a copy of the death certificate, on which, of course, the address would be stated, and at that address it might be possible to start some enquiries."

"Accordingly, off I went to Somerset House and proceeded to look up the register of deaths for that date. To my astonishment, the name was not there. Thinking that, perhaps, a wrong date had been given, I looked up and down the entries for a week or two before and after the given date. But there was no sign of the name of Gervase Hardcastle. Then I settled down to make a thorough search, beginning ten years before the date and going on ten years after. But still there was no sign of the name. I noted one or two other Hardcastles and got copies of the certificates corresponding to the entries, but the particulars showed them all to relate to strangers."

"Then I went down to Brighton and personally called upon the local registrars and got them to overhaul their records. But the result was the same in all the cases. There was no record of the death of Gervase Hardcastle. Now what do you make of that?"

"Mighty little," said Thorndyke. "Apparently, the notice in *The Times* was a false notice, but why it should have been inserted it is difficult to guess."

"Unless," I suggested, "he was living under an assumed name and that name was given to the registrar, the true name being published for the information of the family."

Thorndyke shook his head. "I don't think that will do, Jervis," said he. "The person who sent the notice to *The Times* knew his proper name, age and description. There is no imaginable reason why a person having that knowledge should give a false name to the registrar, and there are the best of reasons why he should not."

"Is it possible," I suggested, "that he may have committed suicide and sent off the notice himself before completing the job?"

"It is possible, of course," replied Thorndyke, "but, in the absence of any positive fact indicating the probability of its having occurred, the mere possibility is not worth considering."

"No," agreed Brodribb, "it is of no use guessing. The important truth that emerges is that his death, which has been accepted all these years by the family as an established fact, has now become extremely doubtful. At any rate, there is no legal evidence that he is dead. No court would entertain a mere obituary notice unsupported by any corresponding entry in the register of deaths. Legally speaking, Gervase is presumably still living, and it is not at all improbable that he is actually alive."

"Then, in that case," said I, "why do you say that David has a good claim to be the heir?"

"Because he is here and visible—extremely visible; whereas the very existence of Gervase is problematical. David's claim is good unless it is contested by Gervase. In Gervase's absence, I think David would have no difficulty in taking possession."

Who could oppose him? If I did, as executor (and I think I should have a try), the probability is that his claim would be admitted, subject to the chance that Gervase or his heir might come forward later and endeavour to oust him.”

“And meanwhile?” asked Thorndyke.

“Meanwhile, I propose setting on foot some enquiries by which I hope to be able to pick up some trace of Gervase on the Continent. It isn’t a very hopeful task, I must admit.”

“I can’t imagine any less hopeful task,” said I, “than searching for a man who has been lost to sight for over sixteen years, who was probably living under an assumed name and whose place of abode at any time is utterly unknown. I don’t see how you are going to start.”

“I am not very clear, myself,” Brodribb admitted; and with this, as it was now growing late, he rose, and, having gathered up his hat and stick, shook our hands despondently and took his departure.



## V. — FINE FEATHERS MAKE FINE BIRDS

(JASPER GRAY'S NARRATIVE)

THE providence that doth shape our ends is apt to do so by methods so unobtrusive as entirely to escape our notice. Passively we float on the quiet stream of events with no suspicion as to whither we are being carried until at last we are thrown up high and dry on the shore of our destiny, the mere jetsam of unnoted circumstances.

When I drew up my truck at the shabby door of a studio in a mews near Fitzroy Square and pulled the bell-handle no intelligible message was borne to me by the tintinnabulation from within; nor, when the door was opened by a pleasant-faced grey-haired woman in a blue overall, did I recognise the chief arbiter—or shall I say arbitress?—of my fate. I merely pulled off my cap and said: “A roll of paper, madam, from Sturt and Wopsalls.”

“Oh, I’m glad you’ve come,” she said. “Shall I help you to carry it in?”

“Thank you, madam,” I replied, “but I think I can manage without troubling you.”

It was an unwieldy roll of cartoon paper, six feet long and uncommonly heavy. But I was used to handling ponderous and unshapely packages, and I got the roll on my shoulder without difficulty. The lady preceded me down a passage and into a great, bare studio, where, according to directions, I laid the roll down on the floor in a corner.

“You seem to be very strong,” the lady remarked.

“I’m pretty strong, thank you, madam,” I answered; adding that I got a good deal of exercise.

Here a second lady, rather younger than the first, turned from her easel to look at me.

“I wonder if he would help us to move that costume chest,” she said.

I expressed my willingness to do anything that would be of service to them; and being shown the chest, a huge box-settle with an upholstered top, I skilfully coaxed it along the bare floor to the place by the wall that had been cleared for it.

“Would you like a glass of lemonade?” the elder lady asked when she had thanked me.

I accepted gratefully, for it was a hot day; though, for that matter, I believe a healthy boy of seventeen would drink lemonade with pleasure at the North Pole. Accordingly a glass jug and a tumbler were placed on a little table by the settle and I was invited to sit down and refresh at my leisure; which I did, staring about me meanwhile with the lively curiosity proper to my age. It was a great barn of a place with rough, white washed walls, which were, however, mostly covered with large paper cartoons, on which life-size figure subjects were broadly sketched in charcoal. There were also a number of smaller studies of heads and limbs and some complete figures—complete, that is to say, excepting as to their clothing; and the strangely aboriginal state of these, even allowing for the heat of the weather, occasioned profound speculations on my part.

As I sat sipping the lemonade and gazing at the pictures with serene enjoyment, the two ladies conversed in low tones and disjointed scraps of their conversation reached my ears, though I tried not to listen.

“Yes” (this was the elder lady), “and not only so handsome but so exactly the correct type. And a rare type, too. Even the colouring is absolutely perfect.”

“Yes,” agreed the other; “it is typical. So clean-cut, refined and symmetrical. A little severe, but all the better for that; and really quite distinguished—quite distinguished.”

Here I happened to glance at the ladies and was dismayed to find them both looking very attentively at me. I blushed furiously. Could they be talking about me? It seemed impossible. Sturt and Wopsall’s parcels-boy could hardly be described as a distinguished person. But it almost seemed as if they were, for the elder lady said with an engaging smile: “We want to see how you would look in a wig. Would you mind trying one on?”

This was a staggerer, but of course I didn’t mind. It was rather a “lark” in fact. And when the lady produced from a cupboard a golden wig with long ringlets, I sniggered shyly and allowed her to put it on my head. The two women looked at me with their heads on one side and then at one another.

“It’s the very thing, you know,” said the younger lady.

The other nodded, and, addressing me, said: “Would you just frown a little and put on a rather haughty expression?”

Needless to say, I grinned like a Cheshire cat, and, a heroic effort to control my features only ended in violent giggles. The two ladies smiled good-humouredly, and the elder said, in a wheedling tone:

“I wonder if you would do me a very great favour.”

“I would if I could,” was my prompt and natural reply.

“It is this,” she continued. “I am painting a picture of an incident in the French Revolution to be called ‘An Aristocrat at Bay’. I suppose you have heard of the French Revolution?”

I had. In fact I had read Carlyle’s work on the subject—and didn’t think much of it—and the “Tale of Two Cities” which I had found greatly superior.

"Very well," my new friend went on, "then I will show you the sketch for the picture;" and she led me to a great easel with a handle like that of a barrel-organ, on which was a large canvas with a sheet of cartoon paper pinned on it. The sketch, which was roughly put in with charcoal and tinted in parts with an occasional smear of pastel or wash of water-colour, showed a lady standing in a doorway at the top of a flight of steps around the foot of which surged a crowd of revolutionaries.

"My difficulty," the lady continued, "is this. I have got a model for the figure of the Aristocrat but I can't get a suitable model for the head. Now you happen to suit perfectly and the question is, will you let me paint the head from you?"

"But it's a woman!" I protested.

That lady knew something about boys. "I know," she said; "but a man would do as well if he was clean-shaved and wore a wig. You will say yes, now, won't you? Of course it is a business arrangement. You will be paid for your time."

Eventually it was settled that I should sit from six to eight every morning—I wasn't due at the warehouse until half-past eight—and breakfast in the studio afterwards. I didn't much like this latter arrangement for Pontifex and I always breakfasted together and the old gentleman would miss me. My employer suggested that he should come to breakfast too; but this would not do. Poor old Ponty would have pawned my boots if the whisky had run short, but he took no favours from strangers. However, my salary was to be twelve shillings a week, Sunday sittings to be extra pro rata, and that would have to compensate. I agreed to the terms and the arrangement was fixed.

"Your hair is rather long," said my employer. "Would you mind having it cut short, so as to let the wig set more closely?"

Would I mind! For, twelve shillings a week I would have had my head shaved and painted in green and red stripes. As a matter of fact I went that very evening to a barber and made him trim me until my head looked like a ball of brown plush. Which must have made Providence wink the eye that was fixed on my destiny.

The sittings—or rather standings—began two days later, when I took up my pose on the model's throne, rigged out in the full costume of a royalist lady and an aristocrat; my first appearance in either character. After the sitting we all had breakfast in a corner of the studio, and the two ladies crammed me until I was ready to burst with nourishment and gratitude. They were dear women. I loved them both from the very beginning, with a slight preference, perhaps, for my employer, Miss Vernet; though, to be sure, the younger lady, Miss Brandon, was a lovable creature, too. But I must not linger on their perfections. Reluctantly I must leave them for a while to relate a most singular adventure that arose in part out of my employment by them.

It was, I think, on the day of my fourth sitting that I had a stroke of luck; a parcel—and not a very large one, either—to deliver to a bibliophile who kept a private press somewhere out Tottenham way and close to the river Lea. It was virtually a day's holiday with a railway fare thrown in, and I set forth jubilantly with the parcel on my shoulder, whistling an operatic air as I went. The train bore me luxuriously to Black Horse Road Station, I found the house of the bibliophile, delivered my parcel, a then, free as air, struck out across the fields towards the river.

Along the shallow, winding stream that runs parallel to the 'Lea Navigation' I wandered with the ecstatic delight of the thoroughbred Londoner in rural scenes, be they never so homely. It was a day of wonders. I had hardly ever been in the country before and this mere suburb—though it was more rural then than now—gave to my urban eyes a veritable glimpse of Paradise. I looked into the few inches of running water and saw actual fish. I watched an angler and saw him land, with elaborate artifice, what looked like a piece of cheese. For the first time in my life I looked upon a living frog and chased it to its lair under the bank. And then I came on a group of urchins, disporting themselves, as naked as cherubim, in the shallows; and Providence closed its left eye firmly.

It was a roasting day. Those urchins were certainly naked and wet and probably cool. How delicious! And why not? There was no one about, and there was plenty of cover. Five minutes later I had shed my garments beside a willow bush and was lying on my stomach in four inches of water making frantic efforts to swim.

I waded joyfully up the stream, sometimes almost knee-deep, and impersonated characters suitable to the scenery. Now I was some sort of Indian and impaled fish—which weren't there—with an imaginary barbed spear. There I discovered a curious lurking-place under a large pollard and between two clumps of willow-bush; and forthwith I tucked myself into it, becoming instantly—as I persuaded myself—invisible to mortal eyes. I was now an Indian no longer. My role had changed to that of some unclassified species of water-sprite; at least I think so, though I am not quite clear; for the fact is that, at this moment, a nursemaid with two children hove in sight on the bank facing me, and, having sauntered along with exasperating slowness, finally sat down exactly opposite my hiding-place and produced a novelette which she began to read with much composure and satisfaction.

I watched her balefully; and I watched the children. Especially, I watched the children. And meanwhile I sat up to my hips in water, finding it delightfully cool and shady beneath the pollard.

The minutes wore on. It was still cool. Surprisingly so, considering the heat of the sun outside. In fact my teeth presently began to chatter slightly and an urgent desire to sample the sunshine once more made itself felt. But there I was, and there I must stay until the young lady opposite moved on; for I was a modest youth with a rather exaggerated notion of the delicacy of young women. And, after all, the situation was of my own making.

At last, one of the children observed me and pointed me out with a yell of ecstasy. "Oh! Look, Nanny! What's that hiding in the water over there?"

"It's nothing, dear," replied Nanny, without raising her eyes from her novelette; "only a frog."

"But it looks like a man," the young viper protested.

"I know, dear. They do," and Nanny went on serenely with her reading.

The child was evidently dissatisfied and continued to stare at me with large, devouring eyes, and was presently joined by his fellow demon. But now a new object appeared, to divert their attention and mine. A man came along the bank just behind them, walking quickly and breaking now and again, into a shambling trot. I watched him at first without special interest; but when he had passed, and a back view was presented, I found myself viewing him with suddenly-awakened curiosity. What first attracted my attention was a patch in the rear of his trousers. For my own trousers had a precisely similar patch: I had sewn it in myself, so I knew it thoroughly. It was an extraordinary coincidence. The two patches were identical in shape and colour, but more than this; the pattern of the man's trousers was absolutely the same as the pattern of mine. There could be no doubt about it. They were made from the same piece; or else—Yes! The horrible conviction forced itself on me—they were my trousers!

But that was not all. A glance at the coat, Yea! and even the cap, revealed familiar traits. The fellow was walking off in my clothes!

For a brief space, modesty, anger and chilly horror struggled for mastery; and in that interval the man disappeared over a fence. Then modesty was "outed" and I stood up. The children howled with joy; the nursemaid bounced up and retreated, making audible references to a "disgusting creature," and I ran splashing through the shallows towards the spot where I had undressed. For it was fairly certain that the man had not come to this place unclothed. He must have left some sort of exuvium in place of mine. But if the exchange had been worth his while—well! my expectations expressed themselves in a premonitory impulse to scratch myself, for whatever the clothes were like, I should have to put them on.

The reality turned out to be better and worse than my anticipations. The clothes were good enough; better than mine, in fact, though the colour—a dusty buff—was disagreeable. But it was the decoration that spoiled them. Some misguided person had covered them with a pattern that recalled the device on a bench mark. The broad arrow, to put it in a nutshell. My absent friend was a run-away convict.

I huddled the wretched garments on as quickly as I could, for I was chilled to the marrow; and as I stood up in that livery of shame, I was sensible of a subtle influence that exhaled from it, impelling me to skulk in unfrequented places and to sneak from cover to cover. Of course the mistake could be explained if I was arrested; but I didn't want to be arrested. I was safer at large. The better plan was to get home if possible, or make for Sturt and Wopsalls, where I was known. But how was I to get home? My return ticket was in the pocket of the vanished trousers in company with a clasp-knife and eighteen-pence, and miles of town lay between me and safety.

I crept stealthily round the meadows away from the river, keeping under the cover of hedges and fences and reviewing anxiously my chances of escape, which seemed hopelessly remote. Ahead of me, near the side of a meadow, were a couple of hayricks, like enormous loaves; and the narrow space between their ends looked a likely place in which to conceal myself while I thought over my plans. Accordingly I crept along under the hedge until I was opposite the ricks, when I dashed out across the open, darted into the space between the ricks, and nearly fell over a man who was lying there smoking a pipe.

"I beg your pardon," I stammered. "I didn't know you were here."

"Don't mention it," he replied suavely. "If I'd expected yer I'd ha' told the footman to announce yer." He sat up, and, regarding me attentively, asked: "And how goes it? Doin' a bit of a skyboozle I guess?" I assented vaguely, not being perfectly clear as to the nature of a skyboozle, and he then enquired: "How did yer git out o' the jug?"

"I didn't get out at all. I wasn't ever in."

"Lor!" he exclaimed. "Wasn't yer? Where did yer git them pretty clothes from?"

I described the disastrous circumstances of the exchange and he listened to my story with a foxy smile.

"Well I'm blowed!" was his comment. "What bloomin' impudence, to take and prig a young gentleman's clothes. I call it actially rude. And he seems to 'ave cut yer 'air, too. He oughtn't to 'a done that. He'll 'ave to be spoke to."

At this reference to my closely cropped hair, I started violently. That was an added danger that I had overlooked, and I was so much disturbed by it that I have no recollection of my friend's further remarks; only I know that they were few and brief, for he shortly rose, and, knocking out his pipe (against the rick), looked at me with profound attention.

"Well," he said, at length, "I must be movin' on or I shall be late for lunch. You'd best lay down 'ere and 'ave a good rest, 'cos you may have to make a bolt for it any minute, and the fresher you are the quicker you'll be able to leg it. So long."

With these words of sage advice, he turned and sauntered away with funereal slowness, looking back once or twice to see if I had profited by his counsel. I sat down—not where he had been lying—and when he looked back again and observed this, he nodded approvingly and changed his direction slightly, so that he passed out of view. But the influence of that livery of dishonour had made me wary. After waiting a few seconds, I crept on all fours to the corner of the rick and peeped round; and behold! my friend's pace was funereal no longer; he was running across the meadow like a slipshod, disreputable hare. And I had no difficulty in guessing at his destination.

I let him get well out of sight and then I followed his example in the opposite direction. Skirting the adjoining meadow, I

came to a hedge that bordered a by-road; and here I lurked awhile, for a van was approaching, though it was still some distance away, and I was afraid to cross the road until it had passed. I watched the vehicle wistfully as it drew nearer. Through the opening of the tilt I could see that it was empty, or nearly so; and, from the conduct of the driver, who lolled in the corner of his seat and chanted a popular ballad, I judged that he had finished his delivery and was homeward bound.

Nearer and nearer drew the van at a steady jog-trot. Now I could see the driver's face and hear the words of his song. I could also make out the tops of one or two cases—probably empties—rising above the back of his seat; and I crouched by a gap in the hedge, my heart thumping violently and my knees trembling. At last the van came rumbling by. I had a brief view of a familiar name and of the words "Theobald's Road" painted on the tilt, and it had passed.

I looked out of the gap. Besides the carter there was not a soul in sight. The tail-board of the van was up, its body was half empty, and the driver's back was towards me. In a moment I was out through the gap and padding along swiftly in my soft prison shoes after the van. I had my hands on the tail-board, I gave a light spring, remained poised for a moment on the edge, and then stealthily crawling over, crept silently into the space between two empty cases. For the moment I was saved.

The van rattled along and the driver, all unconscious of his passenger, carolled blithely. From my retreat I could see out at the back by peeping round a case, and so ascertain our direction; and I was somewhat alarmed presently to observe that the road took a sharp turn towards the place where the tramp had disappeared. This made me so uneasy that I risked craning up to look out through the front of the van; and when I did so, I got a most terrible shock. Far away along the road, but coming towards us, was a small crowd of men, and, as we mutually approached, I could make out at least one constable in uniform among them. A little nearer and I was able to recognise the tramp, walking by the constable and evidently acting as guide. I broke out into a cold perspiration. Would that constable stop the van and search it? It was quite possible; it was even likely. And again I craned up and peeped at my enemies.

We were getting quite near when the tramp stopped and pointed at the ricks, no doubt. Then he climbed over the fence that bordered the road. The constable followed him and the others followed the constable; and so they passed out of view.

But they came into sight again shortly from the back of the van, and now I could see the ricks, too. The crowd had deployed out into a long, curved line and were advancing, in the highest style of strategy, under the direction of the tramp and the constable. It reminded me of the formation of the Spanish Armada, as that great fleet swept up-channel. I didn't see the end of it. The line was still deploying out to encircle the rick when the van turned sharply and rumbled over a bridge. I was sorry to miss the denouement; but perhaps it was better so. After all, my business was to get clear away.

The van rumbled on at its quiet jog-trot and all seemed plain sailing. Through the northern suburbs and gradually into the town by way of Stamford Hill and Stoke Newington. And still all went well until we came out of the Essex Road and drew nigh unto the Angel at Islington; when the Devil entered into the carman and caused him to draw up by a public house and inspect the interior of the van.

Of course he saw me at once though I squeezed myself into the farthest corner between the cases, and with a sort of gruff reluctance, he ordered me to clear out. I begged to be allowed to travel with him as far as Theobald's Road, and began to tender explanations; but he shook his head decidedly.

"I'd be in chocky myself if I let you," said he, "and I can't afford that with a wife and family to keep."

There was nothing more to be said. Reluctantly and with deep misgivings, I bundled out and began to walk away briskly along the crowded pavement. But I didn't get far. Before I had gone a hundred yards, two tall men who were walking towards me suddenly roused and, darting at me, seized me by the arms.

"Have you got a pair of darbies about you, Sims?" one of them asked the other. Fortunately Mr. Sims had not but suggested that "this young feller" did not look like giving trouble, whereupon, the two officers began to walk me along briskly in the direction of the Angel.

There was no lack of public recognition. I had already gathered quite a nice little following when I met the detectives, and my retinue increased so rapidly that before we reached the Angel we had become the centre of a hurrying hallooing crowd. At this point, my captors decided to cross the road.

Now the traffic about the cross roads by the Angel is usually pretty dense. On this occasion, I think it was denser than usual, and when our procession launched itself from the kerb, it reached a superlative degree of density. Vans, omnibuses, hansoms, all manner of vehicles slowed down that their drivers might get a better view of the man in motley. For the moment the roadway seemed to be completely choked with vehicles and foot-passengers, and from the closely-packed throng there arose a very babel of shouts and cheers. Thus we were standing in the roadway, jammed immovably, when above the universal uproar, rose a new sound; a thunderous rattle, jingling of small bells and a quick succession of shouts. The omnibuses, vans and hansoms began to back hurriedly towards the pavements, their drivers cheering lustily and flourishing their whips; the mob surged to and fro, a cloud of smoke and sparks arose behind them; there was a vision of gleaming brass helmets and of galloping horses bearing down apparently straight on us; the rattling, jingling and shouting swelled into a deafening roar, and the crowd surged away to the right and left.

"Look out, Sims!" yelled the other detective. "They'll be on top of us." He thrust his shoulder into the crowd and dragged me out of the track of the oncoming engine. The horses dashed by within a few inches; the rushing wheels grazed our very toes and still I kept a cool head. With eyes dazzled by the scarlet glare, the glitter of brass and the flying sparks, I watched

for my chance and took it. As the shining boiler whizzed past, I made a quick snatch at the big brass rail that supports the foot-plate, and at the same moment, jumped forward. The sudden wrench nearly dislocated my arm; but it was a strong arm and I held on. The jerk whisked me clean out of the grasp of the two officers; I swung round behind the engine and, grabbing the engineer with my other hand, hauled myself on to the foot-plate. A single, instantaneous glance backward showed me two plain-clothes officers lying on their backs with their feet in the air. Of course they could not have maintained that position permanently, but I saw them only for the fraction of a second and that was how they appeared.

The engine rattled on. The coachman and his two satellites had naturally seen nothing; and the four men who sat back to back on the body of the engine also appeared to be unaware of my arrival though, oddly enough, they were all on the broad grin and their "Hi, hies!" tended at times to be tremulous. Even the engineer, whom I clasped fondly by the waist, seemed to be oblivious of my presence and stolidly shovelled coal into the little furnace.

We swept round the corner at the "Angel," and never shall I forget the way in which we thundered down Pentonville Hill with our brakes on and our horses at full gallop. I think I have never enjoyed anything so thoroughly. The engine skidded to and fro, the firemen yelled themselves purple, houses and lamp-posts flashed by and far ahead, even unto King's Cross, an expectant crowd awaited us with welcoming bellows. We passed through the narrow strait at the foot of the hill like a royal procession; our arrival was respectfully anticipated at the crossing by the Great Northern, and we thundered down the Euston Road between ranks of waiting omnibuses like the leaders in a chariot race. We were approaching Tottenham Court Road when the engineer observed placidly, apparently addressing his remark to the pressure gauge, that "there was such things as telegraph wires and it might be as well to hop off." I accepted the friendly hint, and as we turned into the latter thoroughfare I dropped from the foot-plate and made a bolt down Warren Street. The engine gave me a send-off, for it attracted so much attention that I was, at first, almost unnoticed; it was only when I had covered half the length of Warren Street, that juvenile and other loafers, deciding that a convict in the hand is worth two fire engines in the bush, turned to follow my fortunes, or misfortunes, as the case might be.

What manner of crowd it was that howled at my heels, I cannot say, for I did not look back. I was on familiar ground and I now had a definite objective. Miss Vernet's studio backed on a mews, and there was a large window which was usually left open. That was my port of salvation. Swiftly I zigzagged up and down the narrow streets, keeping my pursuers at a respectable distance, and gradually drawing nearer to the vicinity of the mews. At length I shot round the last corner and, diving into the entrance of the mews, padded furiously over the rough cobbles. The place was fortunately empty, for it was now late afternoon, and half-way down, the open window yawned hospitably. Setting my foot on a brick plinth, I sprang up, grasped the window-sill and shot in through the opening like a harlequin.

My arrival on all-fours on the studio floor was hailed by startled shrieks from my two friends who were hard at work at their easels. But, of course, they recognised me at once, and a few words of breathless explanation enabled them to grasp the state of affairs.

"Get into the dressing-room instantly," said Miss Vernet, "and put on your costume."

"Yes, and throw us out those horrible clothes," added Miss Brandon.

I shot into the dressing-room, and peeling off the garb of infamy with the speed of a quick-change artist, threw the garments out and whisked the costume down from its pegs; and even as the roar of many voices from the mews outside announced the arrival of my pursuers, I dropped the gown over my head, secured the fastenings with trembling fingers and clapped the ringlets on my stubbly pate. When I came out into the studio Miss Brandon had just closed the costume chest, on the lid of which she was piling palettes, paint-tubes and sheafs of brushes, and Miss Vernet was standing at her easel.

"Now," she said briskly, "get on the throne and take up your pose; and pull your gloves on. They mustn't see your hands."

I had just struggled into my long gloves and taken up the pose when the murmur of voices announced the return of my pursuers from an unsuccessful quest at the end of the mews. There was a scrambling sound and a disreputable head and shoulders framed itself in the window, and the eyes appertaining thereto glared inquisitively into the studio. Then it disappeared with a suddenness suggestive of outside assistance; the scrambling sound was renewed and a helmeted head rose majestically in its place. The constable gazed in enquiringly, and had just opened his mouth as if about to speak, when he caught the stern and forbidding eye of Miss Vernet, which seemed to paralyse him completely.

"What are you doing at my window, sir?" the lady demanded acidly.

The constable's mouth opened once more and this time with more result.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said he, "but there is an escaped convict—" here the constable disappeared with the same suddenness as the previous observer, his toes having apparently slipped off the brick coping. He did not reappear, but I heard a voice, which seemed to be his, enquiring irritably: "Where's the dam door?"

Somebody must have shown him the "dam door", for after a brief pause, the studio bell rang and Miss Brandon, smothering her giggles, went out and returned accompanied by two constables and two elderly gentlemen. The latter came in in a state of hilarity that contrasted strongly with the solemnity of the officials.

"I hear you've got a convict hiding in here," said one of them, a fresh-faced farmer-like looking gentleman.

"What's that?" demanded Miss Vernet, whisking round from her easel.

"Yes, madam," said one of the constables, staring hard at the picture and then glaring at me. "A convict who has escaped



from Pentonville is believed to have climbed in at your window.”

“At my window!” shrieked Miss Vernet, “but what a frightful thing, and how disgraceful of you to let him. I call it a perfect scandal that a respectable householder, paying police rates, should be subjected to the annoyance and danger of having hordes of convicts and criminals swarming in at all the windows if they happen to be left open.”

“Oh, droar it mild, madam,” protested the constable. “It ain’t as bad as that. There’s only one of them.”

“If there’s one there may be a dozen,” Miss Vernet replied, rather illogically, I thought, “and I insist on your searching the premises and removing every one of them.”

“Is that the window?” asked the gentleman who had spoken before. The constable admitted that it was. “But, my good man,” the gentleman protested, “how could anyone have got in without being seen?”

The constable suggested that the ladies might have been looking the other way at the time, at which both the old gentlemen laughed aloud and shook their heads.

“At any rate,” said Miss Vernet, laying down her palette, “I must insist on having the premises searched thoroughly,” and thereupon she and Miss Brandon conducted the two constables out through the doorway that led to the kitchen and offices. As soon as they were gone, the two gentlemen settled themselves to examine the picture, and from the canvas they presently turned their attention to me with an intentness that made my flesh creep. The farmer-like gentleman seemed particularly interested, and having minutely compared me with the figure on the canvas, turned suddenly to his companion.

“This is a most extraordinary coincidence, Brodribb,” said he; and as he spoke I was dimly aware of something familiar in the sound of the name.

The other gentleman—a fine, jovial-looking old cock with a complexion like that of a Dublin Bay prawn and hair like white silk—looked about him a little vaguely and then asked: “What is?”

“That figure in the picture,” his friend replied. “Doesn’t it recall anything to your mind?”

Mr. Brodribb looked at the canvas with a frown of concentration and an air of slight perplexity, but apparently without the desired effect on his memory, for, after a prolonged stare, he shook his head and replied: “I can’t say that it does.”

“Come and stand here,” said the other, stepping back a couple of paces, “and look carefully at the central figure only, taking the architrave of the door way as the picture frame. Is there no portrait that you have ever seen that it reminds you of?”

Again Mr. Brodribb looked and again he shook his head.

“Dear, dear,” exclaimed the farmer-like gentleman, “and to think how many dozens of times you must have looked on it! Don’t you remember a portrait that hangs over the fireplace in the small drawing room at Bradstow? A portrait by Romney of, I think, a Miss Isabel Hardcastle.”

Mr. Brodribb brightened up. “Yes, yes, of course,” said he, “I remember the portrait that you mention. Not very well, though. But what about it?”

“Why, my dear Brodribb, this figure is an almost exact replica. The dress is of the same character and the pose is similar, though that might easily be in an historical picture of the same period. But the most astonishing resemblance is in the face. This might be a copy.”

Mr. Brodribb looked interested. “I remember the picture,” said he, “and I recognise the general resemblance now you point it out, though I can’t recall the face. I am not a portrait painter, you see, Sir Giles, so I haven’t your memory for faces. But if the facial resemblance is as strong as you say it is in the two portraits, a very interesting fact seems to follow; for as this portrait is an excellent likeness of this young lady,” (here the old gentleman bowed to me deferentially, whereupon I grinned and turned as red as a lobster) “she must be extremely like the subject of the other portrait, is it not so?”

Sir Giles laughed a fine, jolly, agricultural laugh. “Q.E.D., hey, Brodribb. Very acutely argued. Discreetly, too, as we can’t put the other lady in evidence. But, of course, you’re right.”

At this point the two ladies returned, accompanied by the constables, who were both looking into the interiors of their helmets and bore a subtle suggestion of having taken refreshment. They departed with thanks and apologies, and the two ladies and the gentlemen then engaged in a spirited discussion on the composition of the picture. I was glad when it came to an end and the two gentlemen took their leave—each with a valedictory bow to me, which I returned to the best of my ability—for I was tired and hungry and wanted to get home.

“Now, Jasper,” said Miss Vernet, when she had shown them out, “the question is how we are to get you away from here. You can’t wear the prison clothes and you can’t go home in your costume. What are we to do, Lucy?”

Miss Brandon reflected awhile and then suggested: “There’s that widow’s costume, you know. That would fit him.”

“Yes, of course,” agreed Miss Vernet, “it’s the very thing. He shall put it on and I will walk home with him, myself.”

And so the tragedy ended. Less than an hour later, a tall and gawky-looking widow might have been seen—but fortunately was not—sneaking up the stairs to the third floor of the house in Great Ormond Street. Pontifex was out shopping and came in later with a bottle under his arm. But by that time, my widowhood had come to an end. The

resources of my wardrobe were slender, but they included two suits which I had outgrown before they had degenerated into mere scarecrow's costume, and into one of these I insinuated myself cautiously and with some misgivings as to its tensile strength. But, of course, it was impossible. Even Sturt and Wopsall's packer revolted at the sight of four inches of visible sock above my boots, and besides, I didn't dare to stoop. Miss Vernet had delicately hinted as we walked home at a desire to replace my lost garments, but, grateful as I was to her the thing was not to be thought of when I had five golden sovereigns hidden away. Accordingly, the very next day, I disinterred two of them and, making my way to a shop of which I knew in the vicinity of Convent Garden, procured in exchange for them a most admirable second-hand suit, in which I came forth proudly with my outgrown exuvium under my arm. Never before had I been so well dressed. When I returned to the warehouse, the packer raised his brown-paper cap and made me a deep bow; and even Pontifex, who was not ordinarily acutely observant, eyed that suit in silence and with an evidently unsuccessful effort of memory.

But there was a fly in the ointment—or perhaps I should say that there was a fly—a butterfly—missing from the ointment. I hastened to sew in at the back of the waistcoat a commodious secret pocket. But alas! that pocket was empty. The miserable wretch who had absconded in my patched and threadbare clothes, had, all unconsciously, been the bearer of a priceless treasure. In the agitation of the moment, I had forgotten the emerald that reposed at the back of his—or rather my—waistcoat. Now, too late, the realisation of my loss was borne in on me and remained for weeks a deep and abiding sorrow.

---

## VI. — A VISIT TO STRATFORD ATTE BOW

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

THE mystery surrounding the disappearance of Sir Edward Hardcastle was solved in a very startling and tragic manner; if, indeed, that can be called a solution which was even more mysterious than the problem which it solved. The news was brought to us late one afternoon by Mr. Brodribb, who burst into our chambers in a state of such extreme agitation that we were at once prepared for some tidings of disaster.

"Here is a terrible thing, Thorndyke!" he exclaimed, dropping into a chair and mopping his face with his handkerchief. "Sir Edward has made away with himself."

Thorndyke was evidently surprised at the news, as also was I, but he made no comment beyond a half-articulate "Ha," and Brodribb continued: "I have just had the information from the police. Superintendent Miller was kind enough to call on me and give me the report himself. He had no details but—to put the horrible affair in a nutshell—Sir Edward's body was found this morning hanging from a beam in an empty house at Stratford."

"At Stratford!" Thorndyke repeated, incredulously. For if the news of the suicide itself was surprising, the alleged circumstances were amazing.

"Yes," said Brodribb, "it is an astonishing affair. I can't imagine what can have taken him to Stratford. But I suppose that people in the state of mind that is associated with self-destruction are apt to behave in a rather unaccountable way. Perhaps some kind of explanation will be forthcoming at the inquest, which I understand from the Superintendent is to take place to-morrow. It appears that there are some circumstances that make it desirable to hold the inquiry as soon as possible."

We had no difficulty in guessing what those circumstances were, but neither of us made any comment.

"I shall have to go," Brodribb continued; "in fact the Superintendent warned me, but I should like you to be present to watch the proceedings, if you can manage it. Not that there is any real necessity, since there is no insurance question to raise and there seems unfortunately to be no doubt of the facts. But inquests are quite out of my province and I should feel more satisfied if I had your views on the affair."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "I will attend the inquest on your instructions. But I think I had better be present at the post mortem, too. I should wish to have an opportunity of forming a direct judgement on the facts as well as hearing the evidence of the medical witness."

Brodribb nodded approvingly. "That is what I like about you, Thorndyke," said he. "You are so thorough—even beyond the necessities of the case. You take nothing on trust. But there is another matter. The Superintendent urged me—in fact, I may say that he ordered me—to go down to Stratford this evening and identify the body. He said that it was most important that the question of identity should be settled at once, and I suppose he is right. But it is frightfully unpleasant."

I suspected that it would be more unpleasant than he was aware of, but I kept my suspicions to myself; and he continued: "I don't see why the identification couldn't have been done by Weeks, Sir Edward's butler. They have summoned him by telegraph—I left his name and address with Miller, you remember—and I suppose he will have to see the body. However, the Superintendent insisted that I ought to go this evening, so there is no help for it. I suppose you couldn't come down with me?" he added, wistfully.

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, promptly, "I will come with you, and perhaps Jervis will keep us company."

He looked enquiringly at me, and, when I had assented—which I did readily enough—he resumed: "But there is one thing that must be done, at once, since there may not be time to-morrow. I must get a letter from the Home Office asking the coroner to give me the necessary facilities. Otherwise I may be refused permission to be present at the post mortem."

"Would that matter?" asked Brodribb. "There can't be much question as to the cause of death."

"That is impossible to say," replied Thorndyke. "If I am to attend I may as well be in a position to check the medical evidence. That, in fact, is my proper function."

"But you won't find anybody at the Home Office now," Brodribb objected.

"I think I shall," said Thorndyke. "There is always some responsible person on late duty to attend to urgent business. I suggest that you two go on to Stratford and wait for me at the police station."

"No, we won't do that," said Brodribb. "We will wait for you at my office and then we can all go down together."

To this arrangement Thorndyke agreed and took his departure forth en route for Whitehall, while Brodribb and I, in more leisurely fashion, made our way out into Fleet Street and so, by way of Carey Street to New Square. We did not, however, go into Brodribb's office; for our old friend was in a state of nervous unrest, and now that he was to have our company on his distasteful errand, was all impatience to start. Accordingly we walked together up and down the pavement of the quiet square, exchanging now and again a few words but mostly occupied with our own thoughts.

What Brodribb's thoughts were I cannot guess, but my own were fully occupied by the communication that he had made to us. For, brief and sketchy as it was, it contained matter that certainly invited reflection. Thorndyke, I could see, was, if not actually suspicious, at least very definitely on his guard. His determination to check the official medical evidence by independent observation showed clearly that in his view there might be more in the case than might meet the eye of a routine investigator. And I found myself in complete agreement with him. The alleged facts carried a distinct suggestion of fishiness. As to the probability of Sir Edward's committing suicide I could form no opinion; but the circumstances in which the suicide had occurred called aloud for inquiry. I was, indeed, somewhat surprised at the easy-going fashion in which the usually astute Brodribb had accepted them. But perhaps I was doing him an injustice. Possibly he was purposely withholding his own doubts the better to test Thorndyke's attitude.

I had reached this point in my reflections when, on making a quarter-deck turn, I perceived my colleague advancing swiftly up the pavement from the Carey Street gate. We stepped out to meet him and, as he joined us, Brodribb greeted him with the comprehensive question: "Well, what news?"

"I have got a letter for the coroner asking for facilities, and a hansom waiting opposite the gate."

"Hm," grunted Brodribb, "it will be a damned tight fit."

And I must admit that it was. Three large men, one of whom was distinctly of "a full habit" were more than the coach-builder had made allowance for. However, Thorndyke and I bore the brunt of the squeeze, and the journey was not a long one. In due course we unpacked ourselves at Liverpool Street Station and presently boarded a train bound for Bow and Stratford.

We travelled for the most part in silence, and what conversation passed was not connected with our present quest. There was, in fact, no opportunity for interchange of talk on confidential matters as our carriage contained, besides ourselves, three passengers, apparently businessmen returning, at the end of the day's work, not indeed to Stratford, but to some of the more savoury localities in the neighbourhood of Epping Forest. At length a strange and repulsive effluvium which began to filter in at the windows, suggestive of soap-boiling, glue-making and other odoriferous forms of industry, announced our approach to the classical neighbourhood of Stratford atte Bow, and a minute or two later we disembarked, Brodribb snorting disgustedly and holding a large silk handkerchief to his nose. From the railway station we made our way to that of the police, to which Mr. Brodribb had been directed by Superintendent Miller; and presenting ourselves to the sergeant on duty in the outer office and stating our business, were duly conducted into the inner office and the presence of the Station Superintendent.

The latter turned out to be an eminently helpful officer. Possibly the Home Office letter (which, though it was addressed to the coroner, was shown to the Superintendent) requesting that Dr. Thorndyke should be given such facilities as he might reasonably require, might have influenced him, to say nothing of our virtual introduction by Superintendent Miller. But apart from this, he was a capable, businesslike man, quite free from any tendency to red tape officialism and naturally inclined rather to help than to obstruct. Accordingly, when we had presented our credentials and explained our connection with the case, he proceeded to give us, without reserve, all the information that he possessed.

"The discovery," he began, "was made this morning about nine o'clock by a man named Holker, a retired ship's steward who owns a good deal of low-class weekly property about here—mostly small houses that he has picked up cheap and put in some sort of repair himself. He's what you'd call a handy man, able to do a job of bricklaying or plastering or joinery, so it doesn't cost him much to codge up these old derelicts that he buys. Now, some time ago he bought a row of half a dozen little houses that some fool had built on a bit of waste land down by Abbey Creek. He got them for next to nothing as they had never been inhabited and were in a ruinous condition and stood by an unmade road that was often half under water. He meant to do them up and let them at low rents to some of the labourers at the works. In fact he started work on one of them—Number Five—about a month ago, that is how we are able to fix the dates. The last time he was working there was Sunday, the twenty-first of June, and he is quite sure that nothing had happened then because he went all over the house. On Sunday night he was offered, and accepted, a temporary job on one of his old ships which traded to Marseilles; and on Monday morning he dropped in at the house to fetch away his tools. As he was in a hurry, he only went into the front room, where the tools had been left, but he could see that someone had been in the house by the fact that a glove was lying on the

floor. He thought it queer, but, as I said, he was in a hurry and as it was an empty house with nothing in it to steal, he didn't trouble to look into the matter but just got his tools and came away.

"That was three weeks ago—this is the fourteenth. Now, Holker got back from his trip yesterday, and this morning he went round to get on with his work at the house. As soon as he got there he noticed the glove still lying on the floor. And then he noticed—well he noticed that there was something wrong about the house, so he went through to the kitchen and from there to the wash-house; and the first thing he saw when he opened the wash-house door was a man hanging from a tie-beam. There was no doubt that the man was dead and that he had been dead a pretty long time. Holker didn't stop to cut the body down. He just bolted out and came up here to report what he had seen. I happened to be here at the time so I thought I had better go along and see into the affair, though the job didn't sound much of a catch from what Holker said. And I can tell you it wasn't. However, I needn't go into that. You can imagine what it was like for yourselves.

"Well, there was the body hanging from the beam and an old, broken-backed windsor chair capsized on the floor underneath. Evidently he had stood on the chair to tie the rope to the beam and when he had fixed the noose round his neck he had kicked the chair over and left himself dangling. It was all pretty obvious, fortunately, for one didn't want to spend a lot of time in that wash-house making observations. I just cut the rope when the constables had got the stretcher underneath and they lowered the body on to it, covered it up and carried it away."

"Concerning the rope," said Thorndyke, as the Superintendent paused; "I presume deceased found that on the premises?"

"No," the officer replied, "he must have brought the rope with him for it wasn't Hiker's. It was a smallish, brown rope—looked like coir—and he'd brought more than he wanted, for there was a spare end about four feet long."

"And with regard to the glove that was mentioned—?"

"Yes, I saw that in the front room. The fellow one was on the wash-house floor. I picked them both up and I've got them here."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "how do you suppose the deceased man got into the house?"

"He must have got in by the window. He didn't get in by the front door, for Holker is sure he shut it when he left on Sunday and he found it shut when he went there on Monday morning. Of course, the lock is only a cheap builder's night-latch that anyone used to locks could open easily enough. But I don't suppose the deceased gentleman was accustomed to picking locks; and he didn't open it with a key because he hadn't a key of any sort about him."

"I don't suppose," Thorndyke remarked, "that he was much accustomed to getting in at windows."

"Probably not," the officer agreed. "But, you see, sir, he got in somehow; and Holker found the sitting-room window unfastened on the Monday morning. So it would have been easy enough for anyone to get in. The window-sill is only about two feet six above the ground. And you remember that the one glove was lying on the sitting-room floor. As a matter of fact, it was just under the window."

There was silence for a few moments. Then Brodribb remarked: "The officer from Scotland Yard mentioned that the body had been identified by some letters that were found in the pockets. I suppose there were some other things?"

"Yes, but mighty few considering the man's position; and yet enough to show that the body had not been robbed. I've got the things here if you would like to see them."

He stepped over to a nest of drawers which stood on a massive shelf, and, unlocking one of the drawers, drew it out bodily and brought it over to the table at which we were sitting. "There's the collection," said he. "It isn't quite what you'd expect to find on the person of a baronet. Look at that watch, for instance. Sort of thing that you could pick up at a cheap jeweller's for seven and six. What is rather odd, too, is that there are no keys. Not even a latch-key."

"He left his keys and his gold watch and some other valuables at his club," said Brodribb as he ran a gloomy eye over the contents of the drawer.

"Ah! Did he? Yes, very natural and very proper, too, having regard to what he intended to do. I'll make a note of that. It will be an important point for the coroner."

Brodribb was evidently sorry that he had spoken, but he did not lose his presence of mind. "Yes," he agreed. "The secretary of the club, Mr. Northbrook, will be able to tell you about it. I suppose you will have to summon him as a witness as Sir Edward was staying at the club."

"Yes, we shall want his evidence, and in fact, a summons has been served on him," the Superintendent replied, adding with a faint smile, "I take it that you'd rather not be called. But I'm afraid it can't be helped. You know more about his private and financial affairs than anybody else. The butler has been summoned, but he can't tell us what state the deceased's affairs were in, whereas you can give any information that is wanted. My sergeant, here, is the coroner's officer and he will hand you the summons when he takes you over to the mortuary."

"Do you really think it necessary for me to go there?" Mr. Brodribb protested with evident discomfort. "The butler will be able to testify to the identity."

"Yes," the officer agreed, "that is so. But for our own information, now, we should like to know whether this is or is not Sir Edward's body. You had better run over and just take a glance at it."

Brodrribb acquiesced with a faint groan and the Superintendent then reverted to the contents of the drawer. "Do you recognise any of these articles?" he asked.

Brodrribb looked them over once again before replying. They comprised the watch, a pair of wash-leather gloves, a shabby leather cigar-case—empty—a small silver match-box, an old and well-worn pigskin purse, containing, as the officer demonstrated, three sovereigns, a handkerchief marked E. H., a lead pencil, a fountain-pen, a small pocket-knife, some loose silver and coppers and a letter-case, containing two five-pound notes and one or two letters in envelopes, addressed to "Sir Edward Hardcastle, Bart., Bradstow, Kent."

"No," Brodrribb replied, at length. "I don't recognise any of these things. The handkerchief is marked with Sir Edward's initials, as you can see; and the envelopes bear his name and address, as you can also see. That is all. Would you like me to look through the letters?"

"There is no need," the officer replied. "The coroner will read them and he will ask you anything that he wants to know about them. And now you would like to step across to the mortuary? I will tell the sergeant to take you over."

He rose, and, having replaced the drawer in its nest, passed through into an adjoining office and returned almost immediately accompanied by his subordinate, who bore in his hand a small blue paper.

"Here," said the Superintendent, "is your summons, Mr. Brodrribb. Is there anything else that I can do for you?"

"There is one little matter, Superintendent," said Thorndyke. "I should like, if possible, to have an opportunity to inspect the house in which the body was found. I presume there is no objection?"

"None whatever," was the reply. "But you are not thinking of going there to-night? Better go to-morrow morning by daylight, before you attend at the post mortem. I'll see that there is someone to show you the place and let you in, and then we can tell you what time to turn up at the mortuary. But you'll waste your time at the house, for there is nothing to see but the end of a cut rope and an overturned chair."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "we will inspect them. It is a mere formality, but it is a good rule to see everything."

"So it is, sir," the Superintendent agreed; and with this he glanced at the sergeant, who forthwith opened the door and launched us into the street, the gathering darkness of which was tempered by the light of the lamp over the doorway.

"A pleasant night, gentlemen," he remarked as he led us across the road; "a trifle warm, perhaps, but that is seasonable, though for my part, I prefer rather cooler weather for mortuary jobs."

At this, Mr. Brodrribb shuddered audibly, and, as I observed that he had taken Thorndyke's arm, I suddenly realised that what was for me and my colleague a matter of mere daily routine was to our poor old friend a really distressing and horrible experience. Evidently, Thorndyke had realised it too, for when the sergeant had unlocked a door at the bottom of a narrow alley and entered before us to light the gas, I heard him say in a low tone: "I'll go in first, Brodrribb. You had better wait here till I call you."

The light from the large, shaded gas-lamps shone down brightly on the shrouded figure that lay on the central table and lit more dimly and fitfully the side benches, the great porcelain sink and the white washed walls. Thorndyke and I, with the sergeant, advanced to the table and the latter drew back the sheet, exposing the head and shoulders of the corpse. It was not a pleasant spectacle, but, still, immeasurably less repulsive than I had expected from my experiences of the "found drowned" corpses that I had seen in riverside mortuaries; and what was more to the point, it appeared to be quite recognisable. For a few seconds we stood looking down at the shrunken, discoloured face. Then Thorndyke drew up the sheet and having arranged it so that the face alone was visible, called out to Brodrribb; who thereupon entered, walking quickly and a little unsteadily, and stepped up to the table by Thorndyke's side.

A single horrified glance apparently disposed of any doubts or hopes that he may have entertained, for he turned away quickly, muttering, "Dear Lord! What an end!" and began to walk towards the door.

"Can you identify the body, sir?" the sergeant asked in matter-of-fact tones.

"I can," replied Brodrribb, relapsing, despite his agitation, into legal precision. "The body is that of Sir Edward Hardcastle of Bradstow in Kent"; and having made his statement, he walked out into the dark alley.

We followed almost immediately, for there was nothing to see that would not be better seen by daylight on the morrow. At the top of the alley we wished the sergeant "good night" and while he hurried away in the direction of the office, we turned our steps towards the station.

During the short walk, hardly a word was spoken. Brodrribb strode forward with his chin on his breast and his gaze bent on the ground, absorbed in gloomy reflections, while Thorndyke and I silently turned over in our minds the significance of what we had seen and heard. It was not until we were seated in a first-class carriage—of which we were the only occupants—that our friend came out of his "brown study." Then, as the train moved out of the station, he turned to my colleague and asked abruptly: "Well, Thorndyke; what do you think of it?"

Thorndyke considered a few moments before replying. "It is early," he said, at length, "to express, or even to form an opinion. At present, we have no technical data. All that we can do is to form a provisional opinion based on the facts now known to us. That you can do as well as Jervis and I can."

"Perhaps," said Brodrribb. "All the same, I should like to hear what the facts convey to you."

"Then I may say," Thorndyke responded, "that they convey to me principally the urgent necessity of getting more facts. At present we are confronted by two sets of conflicting probabilities, and we await further facts to throw greater weight on the one or the other. For instance, the mode of death is markedly characteristic of suicide. When a man is found hanging, the probability is that he has hanged himself. The possible alternatives are accident and homicide. Accidental hanging is rare and is usually obvious on inspection. Homicidal hanging is extremely rare. So that the mode of death, in the absence of any elucidatory evidence, establishes a strong presumption of suicide. Evidence of motive or intention would turn that presumption into something approaching certainty. Absence of such motive would reduce the probability; but the presumption would remain. At present we have no evidence of motive or intention."

"You are not forgetting that he emptied his pockets of all valuables?" Brodribb objected.

"No, I am not. The exact significance of that proceeding is not obvious but it does not appear to me to indicate an intention to commit suicide."

"Does it not? Do you not find a certain congruity between that action and the place and circumstances in which the body was found?"

"Undoubtedly I do," replied Thorndyke. "But the place and circumstances have no natural connection with suicide. That is what I mean by conflicting probabilities. If Sir Edward had been found hanging from a peg in his bedroom the ordinary presumption of suicide would have existed, because suicides commonly act in that way. But here we have a man making preparations (as it appears to me) to go into some place where property on the person is not safe and being later found dead in a remote part of the town which we should suppose to be quite unknown to him. The circumstances are so abnormal and the conduct so strikingly unlike the usual conduct of suicides that the ordinary presumption based on the mode of death cannot be accepted."

"Then," said Brodribb, "what is it that you are suggesting?"

"At present, I am suggesting nothing excepting that I am not prepared to accept the Superintendent's account at its face value. Beyond that it is useless to go until we have heard what transpires at the inquest."

Brodribb nodded gravely. "Yes," he agreed. "Discussion at this stage is merely academic. But probably the evidence at the inquest will clear matters up. I suppose the post-mortem will settle the question of suicide?"

"It may," Thorndyke replied, guardedly, "in a negative sense, by showing the absence of any alternative suggestion. But the conditions are not favourable for forming positive and definite opinions as to the exact circumstances in which death occurred."

"Well, you will be there, so, if it is possible to establish the fact of suicide—or to exclude it—by an examination of the body, we may say that the question will be decided to-morrow."

To this statement Thorndyke made no rejoinder; and as Brodribb relapsed into silent meditation and my colleague showed no inclination for further discussion, I followed their example, and, as I smoked my pipe, turned the situation over in my mind.

In the colloquy to which I had listened, two things had impressed me rather forcibly. For the first time in my experience of him, Brodribb had appeared unprepared to defer to Thorndyke's judgement. It was evident that in his opinion the suicide of Sir Edward was virtually an established fact, and that in his view Thorndyke's scepticism was merely a manifestation of the specialist's tendency to see things through the medium of his own specialty. On the other hand it had struck me that Thorndyke had made little effort to influence his opinion. He had, it is true, fairly answered Brodribb's questions; but it was quite obvious to me that he had not put the case against suicide with nearly the force that was possible even with the few facts that we had. This might have been due to his habit of avoiding anything like premature conclusions, but I had the feeling that he was not unwilling that Brodribb should continue to take the case, as he had expressed it, at its face value.

At the terminus we separated, Brodribb setting forth alone in a hansom while Thorndyke and I decided to restore our circulations by a brisk walk homewards through the city streets on which the quiet and repose of evening had now descended. Having seen Brodribb fairly launched, we turned out of the station, and, crossing Liverpool Street, started at a swinging pace up New Broad Street. For a minute or two we walked on in silence while I debated inwardly whether or not I should propound my views to Thorndyke. Finally deciding in the affirmative, I began, cautiously: "Brodribb appears to me to have made up his mind definitely on this case. He seems quite convinced that Sir Edward hanged himself."

"Yes, that was what I gathered from his remarks on the case."

"I wonder why. He is a lawyer, and a pretty shrewd one, too."

"Yes; but not a criminal lawyer. His experience is all on the civil side and principally in relation to property. Still, he may have reasons for his views of the affair which he has not disclosed. He knew Sir Edward pretty intimately and he knows all about the family. There may be some highly pertinent facts connected with the dead man's personality and the family history which we know nothing about. I take it that you don't agree with Brodribb?"

"I do not; and neither, I suspect, do you."

"You are quite right, Jervis. I do not. But we must not allow ourselves to come to any sort of conclusion before we have seen and heard the evidence. We must try to approach to-morrow's investigation with a perfectly open mind, and I am not

sure that we ought to be discussing it now."

"There is no harm," said I, "in just going over the ground—without prejudice."

"Perhaps not," he agreed; "and since my learned friend seems to have arrived at certain provisional conclusions, it would be interesting to hear his exposition of the case as it presents itself to him."

I reflected for a few moments, trying to arrange my ideas in an orderly sequence. At length I began: "Taking the points for and against the theory of suicide in this case, I know of only one in favour of it; the one that you mentioned—that unofficial hanging is usually suicidal. On the other hand, there are several reasons against it.

"First, there is the fact that he came to London. Why should he, if he had been intending to commit suicide? The natural thing, according to precedent, would have been to hang himself in his own bedroom or in a garret."

"There are precedents of the opposite kind, though," objected Thorndyke. "I recall a case of a lady who poisoned herself in a very secluded wood on a common or in a park near London and whose body was not discovered for some months. Still, I agree that the probabilities are with you. What is the next point?"

"It is the fact that he unloaded his pockets of all valuables before he set out from the club. Why did he do that? If it is suggested that it was to provide against the chance that his body might be robbed, the obvious answer is that he could have avoided that possibility by committing suicide on his own premises. And the way in which the things were hidden under his shirts strongly suggests an intention to return and recover them. By Brodribb this incident seems to have been accepted as proof of an intention to commit suicide; but to me it has quite the opposite significance. Your own suggestion, made at the time, that he was expecting to go to some place and among some people where he might expect to be robbed, seems to meet the case perfectly; and Brodribb's suggestion that where property on the person is not safe, the person is probably also in some danger seems to receive corroboration. You and Brodribb suggest in advance the possibility of his being exposed to danger of personal violence, and the next thing that happens is that he is found dead, having admittedly died a violent death."

Thorndyke nodded approvingly. "Yes," he admitted, "I think that is quite fairly argued."

"The next point," I continued, "is the place in which the body was found. It is an empty house in an obscure and remote part of a region which is quite unknown to the immense majority of Londoners and almost certainly unknown to the deceased. How on earth did he get there and what could have been his object in going there? He could hardly have strayed thither by chance, for the place is difficult of access and right off the track to any more likely locality. On the other hand, the choice of this particular house suggests some local knowledge—knowledge of the existence of that desolate row of houses and of the fact that they were all uninhabited and likely to be left undisturbed and unexamined for months. The whole set of circumstances seems to me profoundly suspicious."

"There I am entirely with you," said Thorndyke. "That empty house on the edge of no-man's-land wants a deal of explaining."

"Then," I resumed, "there is that new, cheap watch, evidently bought as a substitute for the watch that he had left at the club. The purchase of that watch seems to me utterly to exclude the state of mind of a man intending immediately to commit suicide. Then, finally, there is a point which, strangely enough, seems to have been overlooked by Brodribb—the seal. That seems to me the most suspicious of all the elements in the case. The sealed letter was posted on the Saturday, but we have evidence that the hanging could not have occurred before Sunday night at the earliest. Now, it is fair to assume that the letter was not sealed by Sir Edward."

"It is extremely unlikely," Thorndyke interposed, "but we can't say that it is impossible. And if we accept the hypothesis of suicide, it is not even very improbable. It might be suggested that Sir Edward adopted that method of announcing his death. But I may say that I agree with you in assuming that the letter was almost certainly sealed and posted by some other person."

"Then, in that case, Sir Edward's signet ring must have been in the possession of some other person at least twenty-four hours before the earliest moment at which he could have hanged himself in the empty house. That is a very remarkable and significant fact."

"Has it occurred to you, Jervis," Thorndyke asked, "that Sir Edward might have been wearing his ring that day, or some other day after he left the club, and that it might have slipped off his finger and been picked up by some chance stranger? We have been told that it was a very loose fit."

"That did occur to me," I replied, "but I think we must reject that explanation. You remember that Sir Edward usually carried the ring in a little leather case or bag in his pocket. Now, if he had lost the ring off his finger, the empty case would have been in his pocket. But apparently it was not. I looked for it carefully among the things in the drawer that the Superintendent showed us and it was not there. And it could hardly have been overlooked in a careful search of the pockets."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "I think we may take it that the case was not there, though we shall have to verify its absence, since, as you say, the point is an important one and opens up some very curious possibilities. But here we are at our journey's end. Your masterly summing-up of the evidence has made the miles slip by unnoticed. I must compliment you on the completeness of your survey. And we shall be none the worse for having gone over the ground in advance, provided that we approach the actual investigation to-morrow without prejudice or any expectation as to what we are likely to

discover.”

As he concluded, we turned in at our entry and mounted the stairs to our landing. The door of our chambers was open, giving us a view of the lighted room, in which Polton was adding a few final touches to the supper table.

---

## VII. — NUMBER FIVE PIPER’S ROW

(DR. JERVIS’S NARRATIVE)

FROM my long association with Thorndyke, I was often able to deduce something of his state of mind and his intentions from observation of his actions. Particularly interesting was it to me to watch him (as unobtrusively as possible) packing his green canvas “research case” in preparation for some investigation, for, by noting carefully the appliances and materials with which he provided himself, I could form a pretty clear idea as to the points that he thought it necessary to elucidate.

Thus, on the morning on which we were to set forth for our second visit to Stratford, I stood by with an attentive eye on his proceedings as he put into the case the various articles which he thought might be needed. I was specially interested on this occasion because, while I viewed the case with the deepest suspicion, I could think of no method of attack on the undoubtedly plausible *prima facie* appearances. Possibly Thorndyke was in the same position; but one thing became clear to me as I watched him. He was taking nothing for granted. As I observed him putting into the case the chemically clean bottles with stoppers prepared for sealing, I realised that he was prepared for signs that might call for an analysis. The little portable microscope and the box of blank-labelled slides, the insufflator, or powder-spray, the miniature camera and telescopic tripod, the surveyor’s tape and small electric lamp, each indicated certain points which were to be subjected to exact tests and measurements, and the rubber gloves and case of post-mortem instruments showed that he contemplated taking an active part in the actual necropsy if the opportunity should present itself. The whole outfit suggested his habitual state of mind. Nothing was to be taken on trust. The one undoubted fact was that Sir Edward Hardcastle was dead. Beyond that Thorndyke would accept no suggestion. He was going to begin at the beginning as if no cause of death had been hinted at.

One item of the outfit did certainly puzzle me considerably—a box of keys from Polton’s rather doubtfully legal collection. The fact is that our worthy laboratory assistant held somewhat obscure views on certain aspects of the law; but on one subject he was perfectly clear. Whatever legal restrictions or obligations might apply to common persons, they had no application to “The Doctor.” In his view, his revered employer was above the law. Thus, in the assumed interests of that employer, Polton had amassed a collection of keys that would have been enough to bring a “common person” within hail of penal servitude, and a portion of his illegal hoard I now saw going into the research case. I examined them with profoundly speculative eyes. The collection included a number of common latch-keys, a graded set of blanks (how on earth had Polton managed to acquire those blanks, so strictly forbidden by the law?) and a bunch of skeleton keys of the pipe variety, simple in construction but undeniably felonious in aspect.

I asked no questions concerning those keys, reserving to myself the prospective entertainment of seeing them produced and put to their mysterious use; as to which I could form no sort of surmise. They were certainly not to let us into the house, for we had already been promised free admittance. But it was useless to speculate. The explanation would come all in good time, and now the research case, having received its lading, was closed and fastened and we were due to start.

At Stratford, we found the Superintendent ready to receive us and in the same helpful spirit as on the preceding day.

“You are full early, gentlemen,” he remarked, “as matters stand. The inquest opens, as you know, at four p.m., and the doctor has fixed two p.m. for the post-mortem. So you’ll have plenty of time to survey the ‘scene of the tragedy,’ as the newspapers call it, though I don’t fancy that you’ll spend your time very profitably. However, that’s your affair. You are acting for the executor, as I understand, so I suppose you have got to make a show of doing something.”

“Exactly,” Thorndyke agreed. “A specialist must make a demonstration of some kind. You gave my letter to the coroner?”

“Yes, sir. And it is just as well that you had it. Otherwise I don’t fancy you’d have got many facilities. He’s rather a touchy man and he seemed disposed to resent your coming here to hold what he calls ‘an unofficial inquiry of your own.’ However, it is all right. I am to let you see anything that you want to see, and the medical witness—he is the police surgeon’s deputy—has got the same instructions. And now I expect you would like to start. I’ve got the key here, but I can’t give it to you in case the coroner wants to inspect the place himself. Besides, you’ll want someone to show you where it is.”

He stepped to the door, and, looking into the adjoining office, called out: “Marshall, just take these two gentlemen down to number five Piper’s Row. You needn’t stay. Just let them into the house and bring the key back to me.”

As he spoke, he produced from the nest of drawers a key with a wooden label attached to it which he handed to the constable; and I noticed that, as it passed from hand to hand, Thorndyke bestowed a quick glance on it, and I suspected that he was memorising its shape and size. It was, however, but a momentary glance, for the key disappeared immediately into the constabulary pocket and the officer, with a salute to his superior, turned and led the way out into the street.

The town of Stratford is not strikingly prepossessing in any part. There is nothing of the residential suburb about it. But the district to which we were conducted by Constable Marshall seemed to reach the very limit of what is attainable in the way of repulsive squalor by the most advanced developments of modern industry. Turning out of the High Street by Abbey Lane, we presently emerged from the inhabited areas on to a dreary expanse of marsh, on which a few anaemic weeds



struggled to grow in the interstices of the rubbish that littered every open space. Gas works, chemical works, pumping stations and various large buildings of the mill or factory type arose on all sides, each accompanied by its group of tall chimney-shafts, all belching forth smoke and each diffusing the particular stench appropriate to the industry that it represented. A few rough roads, like urbanised cart tracks, flanked by drainage ditches, meandered across this region, and along one of these we picked our way until it brought us to the place where, as the Superintendent bluntly but justly expressed it, "some fool had built" Piper's Row.

"Not much to look at, are they, sir?" Constable Marshall remarked in comment on our disparaging glances at the unspeakably sordid, ruinous little hovels. "Mr. Holker bought them for a song, but I fancy he's going to lose his money all the same. This is the one."

He halted at a decaying door bearing the number 5, fished the key out of his pocket, inserted it, gave it a turn and pushed the door open. Then, as we entered, he withdrew the key, wished us "good morning," closed the door and took his departure.

For some moments Thorndyke stood looking about the tiny room—for there was no hall, the sitting-room opening directly on the street—letting his eye travel over its scanty details; the rusty grate, the little cupboard in the recess, the small, low window and especially the floor. He stepped across and tried the door of the cupboard, and, finding it locked, remarked that Holker had probably used it to stow away his tools.

"You notice, Jervis," he added, "that the appearance of the floor does not seem to support the theory that the house was entered by the window. There are foot-marks under the window, certainly, but they are quite faint, whereas there are well-marked prints of muddy feet, two pairs at least, leading from the street door to the next room, which I suppose is the kitchen."

"Yes, I see that," I replied; "but as we don't know whose foot-prints they are or when they were made, the observation doesn't carry us very far."

"Still," he rejoined, "we note their existence and observe that they proceed, getting rapidly fainter, direct to the kitchen."

He passed through the open doorway, still narrowly examining the floor, and halted in the kitchen to look round. But, beyond the faint marks on the floor, there was nothing to attract notice, and, after a brief inspection, we went on to the wash-house, which was what we had actually come to see.

Apparently, the place had been left in the condition in which it had been found by Holker, for the decrepit Windsor chair still lay on its side, while almost directly above it a length of thinnish brown rope hung down from a short beam that connected the principal pair of rafters. At this Thorndyke, when he had finished his scrutiny of the floor, looked with an expression of interest that it hardly seemed to warrant.

"The Superintendent," he remarked, "spoke of a tie beam. It is only a matter of terminology, but this is rather what architects would call a collar beam. But the fact is of some interest. A tie beam, in a building of this size, would be within comfortable reach of a short man. But this beam is fully eight feet above the floor. Even with the aid of the chair, it is not so very accessible."

"No. But the rope could have been thrown over and pulled taut after the knot was tied. It is made fast with a fisherman's bend, which would run up close when the rope was hauled on."

"Yes," he agreed, "that is so. And, by the way, the character of the knot is worth noting. There is something rather distinctive about a fisherman's bend."

He stood looking up thoughtfully at the knot, from which a long end hung down beside the 'standing part', which had been cut, as if the rope had been longer than was necessary for the purpose. Then he took the cut end in his hand and examined it minutely, first with the naked eye and then with the aid of a pocket lens. Finally, slipping on a glove, he picked up the chair, and, mounting on it, began deliberately to untie the knot.

"Is that quite in order, Thorndyke?" I protested. "We had permission to inspect the premises, but I don't think we were expected to disturb anything."

"We are not going to disturb anything in any essential sense," he replied. "When we have finished, we shall re-tie the knot and put the chair as we found it. That will be good enough for the coroner's jury. You might give me the tape out of the case."

I opened the case and took out the long tape, which I handed to him and watched him as he carefully measured the rope and entered the length in his note book. It seemed an unaccountable proceeding, but I made no comment until he had re-fastened the rope and stepped down from the chair. Then I ventured to remark: "I should like to know why you measured that rope, Thorndyke. It seems to me that its length can have no possible bearing on anything connected with the case that we are investigating. Evidently I am wrong."

"When we are collecting facts," he replied, "especially when we are absolutely in the dark, we are not bound to consider their relevancy in advance. The length of this rope is a fact and that fact might acquire later some relevancy which it does not appear to have now. There is no harm in noting irrelevant facts, but a great deal of harm in leaving any fact unnoted. That is a general rule. But in this case there is a reason for ascertaining and recording the length of this piece of rope. Look at it attentively and see what information it yields."

I glared at the rope with concentrated attention, but all the information that it yielded to me was that it was a piece of rope.

"I am looking at it attentively," I said, doggedly, "and what I see is a length—about a fathom and a half—of thinnish coir rope, the thinnest coir rope, I think, that I have ever seen. It is made fast at the end with a fisherman's bend and the other part has been cut."

"Why 'the other part'? I mean what is the distinction?"

"It is obvious," I replied. "The end proper has got the whipping on it."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "That is the point. Incidentally, it is not a coir rope. It is a hemp rope dyed, apparently with cutch. But that is a detail, though a significant one. The chief point is that the end is whipped. A rope with cut ends is a rope of no determinate length. It is simply a piece of rope. But a rope with whipped ends has a determinate length. It is a definite entity. It may be a boat's painter, a sheet, a halyard, a waterman's towing-rope; in any case it is a thing, not a part of a thing. Here we have a piece of rope with a whipping at one end. We haven't seen the other part. But we know that when it was complete it was whipped at both ends. And we know that, somewhere, there is a counterpart to this fragment and that the two together make up a known length."

"Yes," I agreed, "there is no denying the truth of what you have said, but it is a mere exposition of theory. Undoubtedly there does exist a piece of rope which is the complement to this piece. But as we have no idea where it is and there is not the remotest chance that we shall ever meet with it, or that we should recognise it if we did, your measurement is a mere demonstration of a principle without any utility what ever."

"Our chance of meeting with that complementary portion is small enough, I must admit," said Thorndyke, "but it is not so infinitesimal as you think. There are some points which you have overlooked; and I think you have not fully taken in the immense importance of tracing the origin of this rope. But we must not waste time in discussion. This chair is the next subject for investigation. On the hypothesis that Sir Edward hanged himself, there should be prints of his fingers on some part of it; and if he did not, then there should be prints of the fingers of some other person."

"I think we can take it that there will be plenty of finger-prints on it," said I, "if they are not too old to develop. The latest must be at least three weeks old."

"Yes, it is rather a poor chance, but we will try our luck."

He opened the research case and brought out the insufflator with one of the powder containers which was filled with a pure white powder. Having fitted the container to the spray-producer, he placed the chair where the light fell on the front aspect of it and began to work the bellows, keeping at some distance from the chair, so that the cloud of white powder met the surface quite gently. Very soon the whole of the front of the chair became covered with a thin, uniform coating of the impalpably fine white dust. Then the chair was turned about by pushing and pulling the lower parts of the legs and the other aspect coated with powder. When this process was completed Thorndyke proceeded to tap each of the legs very lightly and quickly with the handle of a large pocket-knife. At once, in response to the faint jarring strokes, the white dust began to creep down the perpendicular surfaces, and in a few seconds there came into view a number of rounded, smeary shapes on the broad, flat top rail of the chair-back. Still, as the light, quick tapping went on, the powder continued to creep down, leaving the shapes more and more conspicuous and distinct. Finally, Thorndyke transferred his operations to the top of the chair-back, gradually increasing the force of his blows until practically the whole of the powder had been jarred off, leaving the shapes—now unmistakable finger-prints—standing out strongly against the dingy, varnished surface.

"Not a very promising lot," Thorndyke commented, after a preliminary inspection. "Several hopeless smears and several more super-imposed. Those won't be much use even to the experts."

With the aid of his pocket lens, he made a more critical survey of the one side while I examined the other, reinforcing the feeble light with the electric lamp.

"They are a very confused lot," I remarked. "The trouble is that there are too many of them on top of one another. Still, there are several that show a distinguishable pattern. I should think the finger print experts will be able to make something of them."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "I think so. It is surprising to see what shockingly bad prints they manage to decipher. At any rate, we will give them a chance."

Between us, we got out the little camera, mounted it on its tripod and placed it in position by means of its wire sighting frame. Having measured the distance with the tape and set the focusing-scale, Thorndyke stopped the lens down to F. 16, and, taking out his watch, gave the long exposure that was demanded by the weak light and the small stop. Then, when, as a measure of safety, he had made a second exposure, we turned the chair round and repeated the operation on the opposite side.

"Are you going to leave the powder on the chair?" I asked as we re-packed the camera.

"No," he replied. "The police have had their opportunity. Perhaps they have taken it. At any rate it will be best for us to keep our own counsel as to our private investigations. And the photographs will be available if they are wanted."

With this he carefully dusted away all traces of the powder and when he had laid the chair in the place and position in which we had found it, he picked up the research case and we went back to the front room.

"Well," I said, moving towards the door, "I think we have seen everything here and we have picked up one or two crumbs—pretty small ones as far as I am concerned. But perhaps there is something else that you want to see?"

"Yes," he replied, "there are two more points that we ought to consider before we go. First there are those wheel-ruts. You noticed them, I suppose?"

"I observed some ruts in the road as we came along. Deuced uncomfortable they were to a man with thin shoes. But what about them?"

"Apparently you did not notice them," said he, "excepting as a source of physical discomfort. Come out now and take a careful look at them."

He opened the street door and we stepped out on to the strip of rough ground that served as the footpath or 'side-walk'. The unmade road that passed the houses was bumpy with obscure impressions of feet that had trodden it when the surface was moist and there were faint suggestions of old ruts. But in addition to these was a pair of deep, sharply-defined ruts with clear hoof-marks between, which I now remembered having seen as we came out of Abbey Lane.

"I can't quite make up my mind as to the class of vehicle," he said. "What do you make of it?"

"A two-wheeled cart of some kind," I suggested. "A largish one, to judge by the space between the ruts."

"Yes, it is rather wide for a light cart. My provisional diagnosis was a good-sized gig or dog-cart—more probably a gig. It was evidently a light, high vehicle, as we can tell by the narrowness of the rims and the large diameter of the wheels."

"I can see that the rims were narrow, but I don't see how you arrive at the diameter of the wheels."

"It happens," he explained, "to be quite easy in this case. There is a notch in the edge of the near tyre; rather a surprising feature if you consider the strength of an iron tyre. It must have been caused by striking a sharp angle of granite or iron at some corner."

"I should have thought," said I, "that a blow that would notch the tyre would have broken the wheel."

"So should I," he agreed. "However, there it is, and it leaves a small, triangular projection at the side of the rut; and of course, the distance between two such projections is the circumference of the wheel. We may as well measure that distance, and the width between the two tracks and the width of the rims. Fortunately, there is no one here to spy on us."

I looked round as I unfastened the research case and handed out the tape. There was not a human creature in sight. Piper's Row might as well have been in the midst of the Sahara.

Taking advantage of the solitude, we went out on to the road and made the three measurements at our ease; and as I held one end of the tape while Thorndyke stretched it and took the reading, I speculated vaguely as to the object of the proceeding.

"The tyres are one inch and a half wide," he reported as he put away his note-book, "the width between the outside edges of the tyre-marks is fifty-seven inches and the circumference of the wheels is thirteen feet ten inches. That makes the diameter about four feet seven and a half, that is fifty-five and a half inches."

"Yes," I agreed without much enthusiasm, "that will be about right. But why are we taking all this trouble? Is there anything particularly interesting about this cart?"

"The interest attaching to this cart," he replied, "lies in the fact that it stopped at number five Piper's Row."

"The deuce it did!" I exclaimed. "That is rather remarkable, seeing that Number Five is an empty house."

"Very remarkable," he agreed. "It was quite a short halt," he continued, "unless the horse was more than usually patient. But there is no doubt about it. You can see where the tracks swerve in slightly towards the house. Then there is the spot where the ruts lose their regularity and broaden out somewhat, and there is quite plainly the re-duplication of the hoof-marks where the horse has trodden two or three times in nearly the same place. That could have happened only when the cart was stationary."

I was still looking down at the impressions to verify his statements when I was aroused by the slamming of a door. I looked up quickly and saw that a gust of wind had caught the door of Number Five and shut us out.

"Well, Thorndyke," I remarked with a faint grin, "that seems to put the stopper on that further point that you were going to elucidate."

"Not at all," he retorted. "I would say rather that it introduces it in a particularly opportune way. Do you mind opening the research case?"

I did so; and when he had replaced the tape in its compartment, he took out the box of keys which had so stimulated my curiosity. Opening it, he extracted the bunch of skeleton keys, and, glancing from them to the keyhole, he deliberately selected one and inserted it. It entered quite easily and when he gave it a turn and a slight push, the door opened and we walked in.

"You see, Jervis," he said, withdrawing it from the keyhole and holding it out to me, "here is a perfectly elementary skeleton key, made by simply cutting away the whole of the bit excepting the top and the bolt edge. I selected it with Constable Marshall's key in my mind."

"That was a ward key, I think?"

"Yes, it had three vertical slits in the bit, which ostensibly corresponded to three concentric wards in the lock."

"Why 'ostensibly'?"

"Because I suspect that they are not there. But in selecting the skeleton key I assumed that they were there, and you saw the result. Also you see the weakness of a ward lock. The wards are obstructions placed in the path of the key. The key which fits a particular lock has slits corresponding to the wards, so that it can turn and let the wards pass through. But it isn't necessary for the slits to fit the wards. All that is necessary is a hole in the key-bit large enough to let it pass the wards. The simplest plan is, as in this key, to cut out the whole of the bit excepting the distal edge—which enters the notch, or 'talon' of the bolt and moves it—and the top edge which joins it to the key stem. I am speaking, of course, of comparatively simple locks."

"And you think that this lock hasn't any wards at all?"

"It is a mere guess based on the generally shoddy appearance of the fittings. But we can easily settle the question."

Once more he opened the key box and this time took out a locksmith's 'blank', which he compared with the skeleton key. Finding their bits about the same width, he tried the blank in the lock. It entered as easily as the skeleton had, and when he turned it, it made its circuit in the same manner and duly drew in the bolt.

"That," said Thorndyke, "makes it perfectly clear. This blank could not possibly have passed a ward. It follows that this lock contains nothing but a spring bolt. Consequently it could be opened by practically any key that would enter the keyhole and that was long enough in the bit to reach the notch of the bolt."

"By the way," said I, "if there are no wards, what is the function of those slits that you described in the key?"

"Their function, I take it, is purely commercial—a matter of salesmanship; to produce a certain moral effect on the purchaser. He sees a somewhat intricate key and naturally infers a corresponding intricacy in the lock. The ethics of commerce are sometimes a little difficult for the uncommercial mind to follow."

"Yes, by Jove," said I. "That dummy key does seem uncommonly like a fraud. But with regard to this lock: it is all very curious and interesting but I don't quite see the purpose of these experiments. Obviously they have some bearing since you took the trouble to bring that collection of keys."

"Yes," he replied as he returned the box to the green canvas case and fastened the latter, "they have a bearing. We can discuss it as we walk back to the town; and I propose that we follow the tracks of the cart and see where it went to. It is bound to go our way, as this area of marsh is enclosed on the other three sides by the creeks."

We went out of the dismal little house, slamming the door behind us, and set forth along the rough footway in the direction in which the cart had gone. We walked a short distance in silence; then Thorndyke returned to my question.

"The bearing of what we have ascertained about that lock is this; we are invited to believe that entrance was effected into the house by the window because the door was shut and locked. But the fact, which we have established, that the lock is one which can be opened with almost any key—or even with a piece of stiff wire—makes any such supposition unnecessary. The house was accessible to anybody by way of the door."

"As far as Sir Edward was concerned," said I, "you remember that he had no keys on him at all."

"Yes. And that fact may have influenced the Superintendent. But it doesn't influence us. If Sir Edward went into that house of his own free will it is of no concern to us whether he got in at the window or climbed down the chimney. But if we assume—as I take it we both do, without prejudice as to what may transpire at the inquest—that he was taken into that house forcibly, or in a state of unconsciousness, or actually dead, then the facility of access becomes a material fact. For the proceedings would necessarily be hurried. There would be no time for the manipulation of windows or picking of locks. Entry would have to be effected at once."

"That means," said I, "that the person or persons who entered knew what sort of lock was on the door."

"Undoubtedly," he agreed. "The house must have been known to at least one of the parties, and would, presumably, have been visited and explored. The plan must have been arranged and prepared in advance to enable it to be carried out quickly."

"What do you suppose to have been the actual *modus operandi*?" I asked.

"From what we have seen, I should reconstruct events somewhat thus: First, a scout would come to the place, try the lock and ascertain that a particular key would open it, explore the house and select the place where the victim could be most conveniently hanged. Then, at the appointed time, the victim—who must almost necessarily have been either dead or insensible—would be put in the cart and covered up; the three men—possibly two, but much more probably three—would mount to the seat and the cart would be driven to the house pretty late at night, so as to secure complete darkness.

"On arriving at Number Five, one man would jump down and open the door. The victim and the rope would then be handed down and carried in and the door shut. The cart would then be driven off, possibly to wait at some rendezvous outside the immediate neighbourhood. The two men, having concluded the business, would come out and walk to the rendezvous and the whole party would then return whence they came."

"Yes," I said, "that sounds very complete and consistent. But aren't we taking rather a lot for granted? I admit that the stopping of that cart opposite Number Five is a highly suspicious circumstance—and here we are, back at Abbey Lane and here are the cart-tracks back with us. So the cart must have made the round expressly to call at Number Five, which strongly supports your theory. But still, we are assuming that the cart made that very suspicious call on that particular night. Of course, it is extremely probable that it did; and if it did, it almost certainly conveyed Sir Edward, alive or dead. The fatal flaw in the evidence is that we can't fix the date on which the cart called at the house."

"But I think we can, Jervis. One doesn't like to use the word certainty, but I think I can fix the date with the very highest degree of probability."

"Then," said I, "if you can do that, I accept your hypothetical reconstruction as almost certainly representing what actually happened. But I should like to hear the evidence."

"The evidence," he replied, "is based on two factors; one is the state of the road when the tracks were made; the other is the time at which the road could have been in that particular state. Let us consider factor one."

"You saw the ruts and the hoof-prints. They were deep and sharp but by no means dead sharp. There was a slight blurring of the edges of the impressions. The soil of the road was an impure clayey loam. Now, since the impressions were deep, the road must have been quite soft; but since the impressions were fairly sharp, the mud could not have been liquid or diffuent, for liquid or semi-liquid mud does not retain impressions. It could not have been raining when the impressions were made, for in the soft state of the road, rain would have largely obliterated them. For the same reason, no appreciable rain could have fallen after they were made."

"On the other hand, the road could not have dried enough to become plastic or semi-solid, or—on soil of this kind—the impressions would have been dead sharp. So it comes to this: the ruts were made after heavy rain—heavy enough to swamp the road. But there was an interval after the rain, long enough to allow the semi-liquid stage to pass off but not long enough to allow the mud to pass into the plastic or semi-solid stage."

"Now let us take the second factor—the time factor. I need not remind you of the long drought that has prevailed this summer. It began, as you probably remember, at the very end of May, and it still continues. In that drought there has been up to the present only a single break—a single, dramatic break. On Sunday, the twenty-first June, a tremendous storm burst over the London area, and for more than an hour the rain fell in torrents. The storm clouds came up quite suddenly about half-past four in the afternoon and the rain ceased and the clouds rolled away with almost equal suddenness about six o'clock. And forthwith the drought resumed its sway. A hot, dry easterly wind followed the storm and the pavements dried up as if the water on them had been spirit."

"Now, during that heavy rain, these roads across the marshes must have been flooded. For the time being, their surfaces must have been just liquid mud. But we must remember that under that liquid mud, only a few inches down, was soil baked dry by weeks of drought. Before midnight the surface water would have soaked in, bringing the soil to the consistency shown by these ruts. By the following morning, or at least by noon, the plastic stage would have been reached, while by evening, after a day's hot sunshine and dry wind, the surface would have become too firm to yield deep impressions like these with their surrounding ridges. As I say, one doesn't like to use the word certainty; but I submit that we are justified in assuming with considerable confidence that these ruts were made on the night of Sunday, the twenty-first of June, probably after ten o'clock."

"More probably in the small hours of the morning," I suggested.

"The state of the road would admit of that view," he replied, "but other considerations suggest an earlier hour—say from eleven to half-past. A party of men with a dead or insensible man in a cart would not wish to attract notice or run the risk of being stopped and questioned. Up to midnight they would be pretty safe, but in the small hours a cart prowling round an unfrequented neighbourhood or travelling along a road that leads nowhere might excite the curiosity of an alert and enterprising policeman. However, that is mere surmise and not at present of special interest to us. The important point is the date and the approximate time."

"By the way, Thorndyke," I asked, "how do you manage to remember all these details? I recollect the storm, of course, and now that you mention it, I think I can corroborate the date and the time. But it is a mystery to me how you keep these dates and times in your memory, ready to be produced at a moment's notice."

"The solution of that mystery," he replied, "is quite simple. I don't. I keep a diary; a highly condensed affair, but I note in it everything that may need to be recalled. And I always enter the state of the weather, having learned from experience that it is often a vitally important means of fixing the time of other happenings, as in the present case. I looked it up last night, principally in connection with the possibility of finding muddy foot-prints in the house."

"After reading me a lecture on the impropriety of discussing the case in advance," I said with a grin; "and now you have built up a complete reconstruction of the events before we have even seen what the post mortem has to tell, to say nothing of the inquest."

He smiled deprecatingly. "We had no choice, Jervis. We could only observe the facts in the order in which they were presented. But, still, I hope we shall approach the inquest without prejudice; and it is possible that we may get a surprise from the evidence of Brodribb or Weeks, but especially Brodribb. I suspect that he has something in his mind that he has not disclosed to us."

"The deuce!" I exclaimed. "You think there may have been reasons for anticipating the possibility of suicide? It will be a bit of an anti-climax if evidence of that kind is given, for it will knock the bottom out of your elaborate reconstruction."

"Not necessarily," he replied; "opinions and expectations are no answer to observed facts; and you must not forget, Jervis, that a known intention or tendency to commit suicide makes things uncommonly easy for a murderer. But it is time that we turned our attention to the subject of food. We are due at the mortuary at two o'clock, and it will not be amiss if we get there a few minutes before our time. How will this place do?"

He halted opposite a restaurant of somewhat fly-blown aspect, the fascia of which bore an Italian name. In the window, a 'set piece' (consisting of two glass dishes of tomatoes flanking the head of a calf, who appeared from his complexion to have died of pernicious anaemia) was exhibited to whet the appetites of passers-by, while through the open doorway an unctuous odour suggestive of thick soup stole forth to mingle with the aroma from an adjacent soap-boiler's.

"Well," I said, "the soup inside smells better than the soap outside. Let us go in." Accordingly we went in.

---

## VIII. — SIR EDWARD HARDCASTLE, BART., DECEASED

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

THORNDYKE'S reasons for wishing to arrive at the mortuary a few minutes before the appointed time were not difficult to guess at. But they became crystal clear as soon as the constable, deputed by the Superintendent, had admitted us and retired. As soon as the door shut behind the officer, he stepped quickly across to the long shelf on which the clothing had been deposited, and, picking up the shoes, turned them over, took a single glance at the soles, and then, without comment, held them out for my inspection.

No comment was needed. The soles were, relatively speaking, perfectly clean. There was not a trace of mud or any sign whatever of their having been damp. On the contrary, there still clung to them a certain amount of light dust, and this was still more evident on the welts and uppers. The condition of those shoes proved with absolute certainty that however and whenever Sir Edward Hardcastle had got into that empty house, he had not walked there on the night of Sunday, the twenty-first of June.

There was no time, however, to dwell on this striking confirmation of our previous conclusions. Thorndyke already had the research case open and had taken out the little finger-print box and produced from it the ready-inked copper plate, a piece of soft rag and a couple of smooth cards. The latter he handed to me, and together we moved over to the great table and uncovered the hands of the corpse.

"We shan't get normal prints," he remarked, as he wiped the finger-tips one after the other and then touched them with the inked plate, "but they will be clear enough to compare with our photographs of those of the chair-back."

They were certainly not normal prints, for the finger-tips were shrunk and almost mummified. But, distorted as they were, the ridge-patterns were fairly distinct and quite decipherable, as I could see by the quick glance that I took at each print after pressing the inked finger-tip on the card.

"Yes," I agreed, "there will be no difficulty about these. I only wish the photographs were half as clear."

I handed them to him and he immediately slipped them into the grooved receptacle with which the box was provided. Then he closed the latter and replaced it in the research case.

"I am glad we were able to get that done unobserved," said he. "Now we can make our observations at our ease."

He took out of the research case a pair of rubber gloves and a case of post-mortem instruments which he placed on a vacant spot on the great table. Then he brought out the tape and carefully measured the length of the corpse.

"Sixty-five inches," he reported. "Five feet five. You remember the height of that beam. Now we will have another look at those shoes."

He took them up once more and turned them over slowly to bring each part into view. Adhering to one heel was a small flat mass of some material which had apparently been trodden on, and which Thorndyke detached with his pocket-knife and deposited in an envelope from the research case.

"Looks like a small piece of soap," he remarked as he wrote "heel of right shoe" on it and put it back in the case, "but we may as well see what it is. You notice several rubbed places on these shoes, but especially on the backs, as if deceased had been dragged along a fairly smooth surface. Perhaps the back of his coat may tell us something more."

He laid the shoes down and, taking up the neatly folded coat, carefully unfolded it and held it up.

"I think you are right, Thorndyke," said I. "The coat is pretty dirty all over, but the back is noticeably more dusty than the other parts. It looks as if it had been dragged along a dirty floor; and those two bits of cotton sticking to it suggest indoor rather than outdoor dirt. And the same is true of the trousers," I added, holding them up for inspection. "There is a definitely dusty area at the back, and here is another piece of cotton sticking to the cloth."

"Yes, I think that point is clear," he said, "and it is an important point. The cotton is, as you say, definitely suggestive of a floor rather than an out-of-door surface." He picked off the three fragments, and, as he bestowed them with the other 'specimens', remarked: "There is nothing very distinctive about cotton, but we may as well take them for reference. I wish

we had time to go over the clothing thoroughly, but we had better not show too conspicuous an interest."

Nevertheless, he looked over each garment, quickly, but with intense scrutiny, passing each to me before taking up the next. Over one object only—the collar—did he seem disposed to linger; and certainly its appearance invited notice; for not only was it extremely dirty and crumpled, but it seemed to be uniformly stained as if with weak tea. Moreover, as I held it in my hands, it gave me the impression of a sort of harsh stiffness unaccounted for by the material, for it was a collar of the kind known as 'semi-stiff' which usually becomes quite limp after a day's wear. But now Thorndyke had passed on to an examination of the rope noose and I laid down the collar to join him.

"Evidently," said he, "as they were able to remove it without cutting it, the knot must have slipped open pretty easily. And you can see why. The noose was made with a running bowline, a rather unsuitable and unusual knot for the purpose. We will venture to untie it and measure its length, to add to our other measurement. You notice that both ends are cut, so that the whole length is only a part of the complete rope, whatever it was."

He rapidly unfastened the knot and measured the length of the piece, and when he had made a note of the measurement, he produced his pocket-knife and cut off a portion about eight inches long which he dropped into the research case. Meanwhile, I carefully re-tied the bowline and had just replaced it where we had found it when the door opened somewhat abruptly and a stout, well-dressed, middle-aged man bustled in and deposited a hand-bag on a side bench.

"I must really apologise to you, gentlemen," he said, civilly, "for keeping you waiting, but you know how difficult it is for a G.P. to keep appointments punctually. Inquests are the bane of my life."

He hung his hat on a peg by the door, and then, as he turned, his glance lighted on Thorndyke's rubber gloves and instrument case.

"Those your tools?" he asked; and when Thorndyke admitted the ownership, he enquired with evident interest: "Were you thinking of taking a hand in this job?"

"I came prepared to offer any assistance that might be acceptable," Thorndyke replied.

"That is very good of you—my name is Ross, by the way. Of course I know yours—very good of you, indeed. I don't mind confiding to you that I hate post-mortems; and really, they are not very suitable jobs for a man who is going in and out of sick-rooms and examining living people."

"I quite agree with you," said Thorndyke. "Medicine and pathology do not mix kindly; and as I am a pathologist and not in medical practice, perhaps you would like me to carry out the actual dissection?"

"I should, very much," Dr. Ross replied. "You are an experienced pathologist and I am not. But do you think it would be in order?"

"Why not?" Thorndyke asked. "You are instructed to make a post-mortem inspection. You can do that without performing the dissection. The observations and inferences on which you will give evidence will be your own observations and inferences."

"Yes, that is true," agreed Ross. "But perhaps I had better make, say, the first incision. If I do that, I can say truthfully that I made the post-mortem with your assistance. That is, if I am asked. The whole affair is a mere formality."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "we will make the autopsy jointly," and with this he took off his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, drew on the rubber gloves, opened his instrument case and removed the sheet with which the body had been covered.

I was somewhat amused at our colleague's casuistry and also at the subtlety of Thorndyke's tactics. The sort of examination that our friend would have made, on the assumption that the cause of death was obvious and the autopsy "a mere formality," would not have served Thorndyke's purpose. Now he would conduct the investigation in accordance with what was in his own mind.

Dr. Ross ran his eye quickly over the corpse. "It is not an attractive body," he remarked, "but it might easily have been worse after three weeks. Still, all those post-mortem stains are a trifle confusing. You don't see anything abnormal about the general appearance, do you?"

"Nothing very definite," replied Thorndyke. "Those transverse stains on the outer sides of the arms might be pressure marks, or they might not."

"Precisely," said Ross. "I should say they are just post-mortem stains. They are certainly not bruises. What do you think of the groove?"

"Well," replied Thorndyke, "as we know that the body was hanging for three weeks, we can hardly expect to learn much from it. You notice that the knot was at the back and that it was a rather bulky knot."

"Yes," said Ross. "Wrong place, of course, and wrong sort of knot. But perhaps he hadn't had much practice in hanging himself. Shall I make the incision now?"

Thorndyke handed him a scalpel and he made an incision—a very tentative one. Then he retired to the open window and lit his pipe.

"You don't want to supervise?" Thorndyke enquired with a faint smile.

"What is the use? You are an expert and I am not. If you will tell me what you find, that will satisfy me. I accept your facts without question, though I shall form my own conclusions."

"You don't consider an expert's conclusions as convincing as his facts?" I suggested.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," he replied. "But, you see, a medico-legal expert tends to approach an inquiry with a certain bias in favour of the abnormal. Take this present case. Here is an unfortunate gentleman who is found hanging in an empty house. A melancholy affair, but that is all that there is to it. Yet here are you two experts, with an enthusiasm that I admire and respect, voluntarily and cheerfully undertaking a most unpleasant investigation in search of something that pretty certainly is not there. And why? Because you utterly refuse to accept the obvious."

"It isn't exactly the function of a medico-legal expert to accept the obvious," I ventured to remind him.

"Precisely," he agreed. "That is my point. Your function is to look out for the abnormal and find it if you possibly can. To you, a normal case is just a failure, a case in which you have drawn a blank."

I was on the point of suggesting that his own function in this case was, in effect, the same as ours. But then, as I realised that his easy-going acceptance of surface appearances was making things easy for Thorndyke, I refrained and proceeded to "make conversation" along other lines.

"Your work as police surgeon must give you a good deal of medico-legal experience," I remarked.

"I'm not the police surgeon," he replied; "at least only by acting rank. The genuine artist is away on leave and I don't care how soon he comes back. This job is a hideous interruption of one's ordinary routine. But I see that the pathologist has made a discovery. What is the specimen that you are collecting?" he added as Thorndyke replaced the stopper in a bottle and stood the latter on a side bench.

"It is some fluid from the stomach," Thorndyke replied. "There was only an ounce or so, but I am surprised to find any in a half-mummified body like this."

"And you are preserving it for analysis, I suppose?" said Ross.

"Yes, just a rough analysis as a matter of routine. Would you write the label, Jervis?"

"Any particular reason for preserving that fluid?" asked Ross. "Any signs or suggestions of poison, for instance?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "But it will be just as well to exclude it definitely. The stomach is better preserved than I should have expected and less red."

"You don't suspect arsenic?"

"No, certainly not as a cause of death; nor, in fact, any other poison. The routine analysis is just an extra precaution."

"Well, I expect you are right, from your point of view," said Ross. "And, of course, poison is a possibility. The ways of suicides are so unaccountable, I heard of a man who took a dose of oxalic acid, then cut his throat, ineffectually, and finally hanged himself. So this man may have taken a dose and failed to produce the desired effect; but he undoubtedly finished himself off with the rope, and that is all that matters to the coroner's jury."

"There are a number of small bodies which look like fish-scales sticking to the walls of the stomach," Thorndyke reported. "No other contents excepting the fluid."

"Well," Ross protested, "there is nothing very abnormal about fish-scales in the stomach. The reasonable inference is that he had been eating fish. What do you mean to suggest?"

"I am not suggesting anything," replied Thorndyke. "I am merely reporting the facts as I observe them. The lungs seem slightly cedematous and there is just a trace of fluid in them—only a trace."

"Oh, come," Ross expostulated, "you are not going to hint that he was drowned! Because he wasn't. I've seen some drowned bodies and I can say quite positively that this is not one. Besides, let us keep the facts in mind. This man was found hanging from a beam in a house."

"Once more," Thorndyke replied, a little wearily, "let me repeat that I am offering no suggestions or inferences. As we agreed, I report the facts and you form your own conclusions. There are one or two of these little bodies—fish-scales or whatever they are—in the air-passages. Perhaps you would like to look at them."

Dr. Ross walked over to the table and looked down as Thorndyke demonstrated the little whitish specks sticking to the sides of the bronchial tubes, and for the moment he seemed somewhat impressed. But only for a moment. Unlike the medico-legal expert, as his fancy painted him, Dr. Ross evidently approached an inquiry with a strong bias in favour of the normal.

"Yes," he said, as he returned to the window, "it is queer how they can have got into the lung. Still, we know he had been eating fish, and there must have been particles in the mouth. Perhaps he had an attack of coughing and got some of them drawn down his trachea. Anyhow there they are. But if you will excuse me for saying so, these curious and no doubt interesting little details are just a trifle beside the mark. The object of this examination is to ascertain the cause of death—if it isn't obvious enough from the circumstances. Now, what do you say? You have made a pretty complete examination—and uncommonly quick you have been over it. I couldn't have done it in twice the time. But what is the result? The alleged fact is that this man hanged himself. If he did, he presumably died of asphyxia. Is the appearance of the body consistent



with death from asphyxia? That is the question that I shall be asked at the inquest; and I have got to answer it. What do you say?

"One doesn't like to dogmatise," Thorndyke answered, cautiously. "You see the state of the body. Most of the characteristic signs are absent owing to the drying and the other changes. But making all the necessary allowances, I think the appearances are suggestive of death from asphyxia. At any rate there are no signs inconsistent with that cause of death and there is nothing to suggest any other."

"That is what I wanted to know," said Ross, "and if you can give me one or two details, I will run off and put my notes in order so that I can give my evidence clearly and answer any questions."

Thorndyke dictated a brief description of the state of the various organs which Ross took down verbatim in his notebook. Then he put it away, got his hat from the peg and picked up his hand-bag.

"I am infinitely obliged to you two gentlemen," he said. "You have saved me from a task that I hate and you have done the job immeasurably better than I could have done it and in half the time. I only hope that I haven't victimised you too much."

"You haven't victimised us at all," said Thorndyke. "It has been a matter of mutual accommodation."

"Very good of you to say so," said Ross; and having thanked us once more, he bustled away.

"I hope that you have not misled that good gentleman," I remarked as Thorndyke proceeded to restore, as far as possible, the status quo ante and render the corpse presentable to the coroner's jury.

"I have not misled him intentionally," he replied. "I gave him all the observed facts. His interpretation of them is his own affair. Perhaps, while I am finishing, you would complete the labels. That corked tube filled with water contains the fish-scales, as I assume them to be."

"Shall I write 'fish-scales' on the label?"

"No; just write 'from lungs, mouth and stomach'; and perhaps you might look through the beard and the hair and see if you can find any more."

"The hair!" I exclaimed. "How on earth could they get into the hair?"

"Perhaps they did not," he replied. "But you may as well look. We are not adopting Ross's interpretation, you know."

I took a pair of dissecting forceps and searched among the rather short hair of the scalp, speculating curiously as to what Thorndyke could have in his mind. But whatever it was, it evidently agreed with the facts for my search brought to light no less than six of the little, white, lustrous objects.

"You had better put them in a separate tube," said Thorndyke, when I reported the find, "in case they are not the same as the others. And now it would be as well to have another look at the coat."

He had drawn the sheet over the whole of the body excepting the head and neck and now proceeded to clean and dry his rubber gloves and instruments. While he was thus occupied, I took up the coat and made a fresh and more detailed inspection.

"It is extraordinarily dirty at the back," I reported, "and there seems to be a slight stain on the collar and shoulders as if it had been wetted with dirty water."

"Yes, I noticed that," he said. "You don't see any foreign particles sticking to it or to any of the other garments?"

I looked the coat over inside and out but could find nothing excepting a tiny fragment of what looked like black silk thread, which had stuck to the flap of a pocket. I picked it off and put it in the envelope with the ends of cotton. Then I turned my attention to the other garments. From the trousers nothing fresh was to be learned, nor from the waistcoat—the pockets of which I searched to make sure that the little leather ring-case had not been overlooked—excepting that, like the coat, it showed signs on its collar of having been wetted; as also did the blue and white striped cotton shirt. I was examining the latter when Thorndyke, having finished 'tidying up', came and looked over my shoulder.

"That stain," he remarked, "hardly looks like water, even dirty water, though it is surprising how distinct and conspicuous a stain perfectly clean water will sometimes make on linen which has been worn and exposed to dust."

He took the garment from me and examined the stained part intently, felt it critically with finger and thumb and finally held it to his nose and sniffed at it. Then he laid it down and picked up the collar, which he examined in the same manner, by sight, touch and smell, turning it over and opening the fold to inspect the inside.

"I think," he said, "we ought to find out, if possible, whether this was water or some other fluid. We don't know what light the knowledge might throw on this extraordinarily obscure case."

He was still standing, as if undecided, with the collar in his hand when the sound of footsteps approaching down the alley became audible; whereupon he turned quickly, and, dropping the collar into the research case, closed the latter and took his hat down from the peg. The next moment the door opened and the sergeant looked in.

"Jury coming to view the body, gentlemen," he announced; and with a critical look towards the table, he added: "I thought I had better come on ahead and see that they shouldn't get too bad a shock. Juries are sometimes a bit squeamish,

but I see that the doctor has left everything tidy and decent. You know where the inquest is to be held, I suppose?"

"We don't," replied Thorndyke, "but if we lurk outside and follow the jury we shan't go far wrong."

We walked up to the top of the alley, where we met a party of rather apprehensive-looking men who were being personally conducted by a constable. We waited for them to return, which they did with remarkable promptitude and looking not at all refreshed by their visit, and we turned and followed in their wake, the sergeant, as coroner's officer, hurrying past us to anticipate their arrival at the place where the inquiry was to be held.

"It seems almost a waste of time for us to sit out the proceedings," I remarked as we walked along in the rear of the procession. "We have got all the material facts."

"We think we have," replied Thorndyke, "and it is not likely that we shall hear anything that will alter our views of the case. But, still, we don't know that something vital may not turn up in the evidence."

"I can't imagine anything that could account for the state of the dead man's shoes," said I.

"No," he agreed, "that seems conclusive, and I think it is. Nevertheless, if it should transpire in evidence that Sir Edward was seen in the neighbourhood before the rain started, the absence of mud on his shoes would cease to have any special significance. But here we are at the court. I expect Brodribb is there already and it will probably be best for him and for us if we select seats that are not too near his. He will want to give his whole attention to his own evidence and that of the other witnesses."

We watched the last of the jurymen enter the municipal office in which the proceedings were to take place; then we went in and took possession of a couple of chairs in a corner, commanding a view of the table and the place in which the witnesses would stand or sit to give their evidence.

---

## IX. — THE CROWNER'S QUEST

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

DURING the brief preliminary period, while the jury-men were taking their places and the court was pervaded by the hum of conversation and the rustle of movement, I looked about me to see who was present and if possible to identify the prospective witnesses. Brodribb was seated near the coroner's chair, and, by his rather unhappy, preoccupied look, I judged that Thorndyke, with his usual tact, had pretty accurately gauged his mental state. He caught my eye once and acknowledged my silent greeting with a grave nod, but immediately relapsed into his previous gloomy and meditative condition.

Seated next to him was an elderly—or perhaps I should say an old—man, for he looked well over sixty, who was, in appearance, such a typical example of the old-fashioned better gentleman's servant that I instantly placed him, correctly, as it turned out, as Mr. Weeks, Sir Edward's butler. Behind the coroner's chair was our friend the Superintendent, who was carrying on a whispered conversation with Dr. Ross. Our colleague struck me as looking a little nervous and sheepish and I noticed that he held a paper in his hand and glanced at it from time to time. From which I inferred that he was conning over his notes with a view to the prompt and confident delivery of his evidence.

At this point my observations were brought to an end by a premonitory cough on the part of the coroner, which had somewhat the effect of the warning rattle of a striking clock, as giving the company to understand that he was about to begin his address. Thereupon, silence fell on the assembly and the proceedings opened. Quite briefly and in general terms, he indicated the nature of the case which was the subject of the inquiry, and, having sketchily recited the leading facts, proceeded to call the witnesses.

"It is the common practice," he said in conclusion, "to begin with the medical evidence, as the state of the body is usually the principal means of determining the cause of death and of answering the questions, How, When and Where that death was brought about. But in the present case the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the body have so important a bearing that I think it better to take the evidence on that point first. The first witness will be James Holker."

In response to the implied summons, a well-dressed, capable-looking man rose and approached the table. Having been sworn, he deposed that his name was James Holker, that he was by calling a ship's steward but now retired and living chiefly on the proceeds of certain house property that he owned. Among other such property was a row of houses known as Piper's Row; and it was in one of these houses, Number Five, to wit, that he made the discovery.

"On what date was that?" the coroner asked.

"On Tuesday, the fourteenth of July. Yesterday morning, in fact."

"Tell us exactly what happened on that occasion."

"I went round to Number Five to go on with some repairs that I had begun. I went straight into the front room—that is the living-room—and then I noticed a glove lying on the floor under the window. I remembered having seen that glove before. But now I noticed something very unpleasant about the air of the place and there seemed to be an unusual number of flies and blue-bottles about. So I went through to the kitchen and it was worse there. Then I opened the door of the wash-house and looked in; and there I saw a man hanging from a roof-beam. I didn't stop to examine him. I just bolted straight out of the house and ran up to the police station to report what had happened."

"You had no doubt that the man was dead?"

"None whatever. I could see at a glance that he had been dead a week or two. And it wasn't a matter of eyesight only—"

"No. Quite so. Now, have you any means of judging how long he had been hanging there?"

"Yes. I judge that he had been hanging there a little over three weeks."

"Tell us how you are able to arrive at that time."

"Well, sir, it was this way. On Sunday, the twenty-first of June, I put in a fairly full day's work at the repairs on Number Five; and nothing could have happened on that day, because I went all over the house. I worked on there all the afternoon up to getting on for five, and then, as I saw that it was coming on wet, I stowed my tools in a cupboard in the front room and ran off home as hard as I could go through the rain.

"That night, the captain of an old ship of mine, the Esmeralda, called to ask me to take a trip with him to Marseilles, as his steward had to go into hospital. I thought I'd like the trip, and I was glad to oblige the captain, so I said 'Yes' and set to work to pack my kit. Next morning, Monday, I ran round to Number Five to fetch my tools away. As I was in a hurry, I only went into the front room, where my tools were. But I could see that someone had been in the house, because there was a glove lying on the floor just under the window; and I noticed that the window was unfastened and slightly open. If I had had time I would have had a look round the house; but, as I was in a hurry to get on to the docks, and there was nothing in the house that anyone could take, I just took up my tools and came away."

"Did you pick up the glove?"

"No. I left it as it was; and when I went to the house yesterday, it was lying in the same place."

"Is there anything else that you can tell us about the case?"

"No, sir. That's all I know about it."

The coroner glanced at the jury. "Are there any questions that you wish to ask the witness, gentlemen?" he enquired. "If not, we will next take the evidence of Superintendent Thompson."

The Superintendent marched briskly up to the table and having disposed, with business-like brevity, of the preliminary formalities, gave his evidence with a conciseness born of long experience.

"At ten-fifteen yesterday morning, that is Tuesday, the fourteenth of July, the previous witness, James Holker, came to the police station and reported to me that a dead man was hanging in a house of his, Number Five Piper's Row. I gave instructions for a wheeled stretcher to be sent there and then proceeded forthwith to the house in company with Holker and Constable Marshall.

"On entering, I went straight through to the wash-house, where I saw the dead body of a man hanging by a rope from a roof-beam. Nearly underneath the body but a little to one side was an overturned chair; and close to the chair a wash-leather glove was lying on the floor and a little farther off a soft felt hat. A walking-stick was standing in the corner by the door. Deceased had no collar on, but I found the collar, afterwards, in his pocket, very dirty and crumpled. The rope by which the body was hanging was a small coir rope, a trifle thinner than my little finger. It was tied very securely to the beam above and the noose had a rather large knot, which was at the back of the neck."

"Could you form any idea as to how long the body had been hanging?" the coroner asked.

"I could only form a rough estimate. Judging by the advanced state of decomposition I concluded that it must have been hanging at least a fortnight, and I thought it probable that Holker's account, making it three weeks, was correct."

"Did there appear to be anything unusual in the method used by deceased?"

"No. The way in which the suicide was carried out seemed quite simple and ordinary. Apparently, when he came into the wash-house, he stood his stick in the corner, threw down his hat and glove, took off his collar and put it in his pocket. Then he probably made the noose, stood on the chair and tied the rope to the beam, put the noose round his neck, pulled it fairly tight, drew up his legs and kicked the chair over so that he was left swinging free. That was what it looked like."

"Is there any evidence as to how deceased got into the house?"

"I think there is no doubt that he got in by the front room window. He couldn't have got in by the street door, because it was locked—at least, so I am informed by Holker, who is quite sure that he shut it when he left the house on Sunday evening, the twenty-first of June—and deceased had no keys on him. But there is positive evidence that he got in by the window; for when I went into the front room, I found the window unfastened and open a couple of inches, and just underneath it I found a wash-leather glove on the floor, which was evidently the fellow of the glove that was lying on the wash-house floor under the body."

"And with regard to the rope. Did deceased find that on the premises?"

"No. He must have brought it with him. I questioned Holker about it and he informed me that it was not his, that he had never seen it before and that there was no rope of any kind in the house."

"Were there any signs that the body had been robbed?"

"No; and I think I can say definitely that it had not. There was not much in the pockets, considering the deceased

gentleman's position, but there were things in them that no thief would have left. For instance, there was a purse containing three sovereigns and a letter wallet with two five-pound notes in it. And the small value of the contents of the pockets seems to be satisfactorily accounted for, as Mr. Brodribb has informed me that deceased had emptied his pockets of most of his valuables, including his gold watch, before he left the club."

"Ah," said the coroner, "that is a significant fact. We must get the details from Mr. Brodribb. Are there any further facts known to you that ought to be communicated to the jury?"

"I think I ought to mention that deceased's clothing was extraordinarily dirty and tumbled. The collar was excessively dirty and seemed to have been wetted, and so did the shirt at the neck; and the coat and trousers were very dusty at the back, as if deceased had been lying on a dirty floor."

"What do you suggest as to the significance of those facts?"

"Taken with the fact that deceased left the club (as I am informed) on Wednesday, the seventeenth of June, and could not have entered the empty house before Sunday night, the twenty-first of June, the state of his clothes suggests to me that he had been wandering about in the interval, perhaps spending the nights in common lodging-houses or sleeping in the open, and that he had washed himself at pumps or taps and got his head and neck wet. Of course, that is only a guess."

"Quite so. But it seems probable and certainly agrees with the known circumstances. Is there any thing more that you have to tell the jury?"

"No, sir. That is all the information that I have to give."

"Any questions, gentlemen?" the coroner asked, glancing at the jury. "No questions. Thank you, Superintendent. Perhaps, before we hear the next witness we had better recall Mr. Holker in order that he may confirm on oath those of his statements which have been quoted by the Superintendent."

Holker was accordingly recalled and formally confirmed those passages of the officer's evidence (referring to the door and the rope) when they had been read out by the coroner from the depositions. This formality having been disposed of, the coroner glanced through his notes and then announced: "We will take the medical evidence next so that the doctor may be able to get away to his patients. Dr. Ross."

Our colleague approached the table with less obvious self-possession than the experienced officer who had preceded him. But he was quite a good witness. He had made up his mind as to what he was going to say and he said it with a confident, authoritative air that carried conviction to the jury.

"You have made a thorough examination of the body of deceased?" the coroner said, when the witness had been sworn and the other preliminaries despatched.

"I have," was the reply.

"And what was the result of your examination? You understand, doctor, that the jury don't want you to go into technical details. They just want the conclusions that you arrived at. To begin with, how long should you say the deceased had been dead?"

"I should say that he had been dead not less than three weeks."

"Were you able to ascertain the cause of death?"

"I was able to form a very definite opinion. The condition of the body was so very unfavourable for examination that I hardly like to go beyond that."

"Quite so. The jury have seen the body and I am sure they fully realise its condition. But you were able to form a decided opinion?"

"Yes. I found distinct signs of death from asphyxia and I found nothing whatever to suggest any other cause of death."

"Well," said the coroner, "that seems to be sufficient for our purpose. Was there anything to account for the asphyxia?"

"There was a deep groove encircling the neck, marking the position of the rope by which deceased had been suspended."

Here the foreman of the jury interposed with the request that the witness would explain exactly what he meant by asphyxia.

"Asphyxia," the doctor explained, "is the condition which is produced when a person is prevented from breathing. If the breathing is completely stopped, death occurs in about two minutes."

"And how may the breathing become stopped?" the foreman asked.

"In various ways. By hanging, by strangling, by covering the mouth and nose with a pillow or other soft object, by drowning or by immersion in a gas such as carbonic acid."

"What do you say was the cause of the asphyxia in this case?"

"As hanging causes asphyxia and deceased was undoubtedly hanged, the asphyxia was presumably due to the hanging."

"That seems fairly obvious," said the coroner; "but," he added, looking a little severely at the foreman, "we mustn't ask the doctor to provide us with a verdict. He is giving evidence as to the facts observed by himself. It is for you to decide on

the significance of those facts. He tells us that he observed signs of death from asphyxia. We have heard from other witnesses that deceased was found hanging; the connection of those facts is a question for the jury. Is there anything else that you have to tell us, doctor?"

"No, I observed nothing else that is relevant to the inquiry."

"Does any gentleman wish to ask the doctor any further questions?" the coroner asked, glancing at the jury; and as no one expressed any such desire, he continued: "Then I think we need not detain the doctor any longer. The next witness will be Herbert Weeks."

On hearing his name pronounced, Mr. Weeks rose and took his place at the table. Having been sworn, he stated that he had been butler to deceased, whose father, Sir Julian, he had served in the same capacity. He had known deceased practically all his (deceased's) life and they were on very intimate and confidential terms.

"Had you ever any reason to expect that deceased might make away with himself?" the coroner asked.

"No," was the reply. "Such a thing never occurred to me."

"Have you noticed anything of late in his manner or his apparent state of mind that might account for, or explain his having made away with himself? Has he, for instance, seemed worried or depressed about anything?"

Mr. Weeks hesitated. At length he replied, with an air of weighing his words carefully: "I don't think he was worried about anything. So far as I know, there was nothing for him to worry about. And I should hardly describe him as being depressed, though I must admit that he had not very good spirits. He had never really recovered from the shock of losing his wife and his son—his only child."

"When did that happen?"

"About ten years ago. They were both carried off by influenza within a few days, and Sir Edward himself nearly died of the same complaint. When he began to get better, we had to break it to him and I thought it would have killed him; and though he did at last recover, he was never the same man again."

"In what respect was he changed?"

"He seemed to have lost interest in life. When her ladyship and the young gentleman were alive, he was always cheerful and gay and full of schemes and projects for the future. He was constantly planning improvements in the estate and riding about the property with his son to discuss them. He was very devoted to his wife and son, as they were to him; a most affectionate and united family. When they died, it seemed as if he had lost everything that he cared for. He took no further interest in his property but just left it to the bailiff to manage and turned his business affairs over to Mr. Brodribb."

"And you say that he was changed in manner?"

"Yes. All his old high spirits went, though he was just as kind and thoughtful for others as he had always been. But he became grave and quiet in his manner and seemed rather dull and aimless, as if there was nothing that he cared about in particular."

The coroner reflected for a few moments on these statements. Then abandoning this line of enquiry, he asked: "When did deceased leave home?"

"On Tuesday, the sixteenth of June."

"Did he inform you what his intended movements were?"

"Yes. He said that he was going to spend a couple of days in London and that he expected to return home on Thursday afternoon. He told me that he intended to stay at his club as he usually did when visiting London."

"Did you notice anything unusual in his manner on that occasion?"

"I thought that he seemed rather preoccupied, as if he had some business on hand that he was giving a good deal of thought to."

"He did not strike you as unusually depressed or anxious?"

"No; only that he gave me the impression that he was thinking out something that he did not quite understand."

"Was that the last time that you saw him alive?"

"Yes. I stood at the main door and watched him walk away down the drive, followed by one of the gardeners carrying his suit-case. I never saw him again until this morning, when I saw him in the mortuary."

Mr. Weeks delivered these statements in quiet, even tones, but it was easy to see that he was controlling his emotion with some difficulty. Observing this, the coroner turned from the witness to the jury.

"I think," he said, "Mr. Weeks has given us all the material facts known to him, so, if there are no questions, we need not prolong what is, no doubt, a very painful ordeal for him." He paused, and then, as no question was asked, he thanked the witness and dismissed him. A brief pause followed during which the coroner glanced quickly through his notes. Then Mr. Brodribb's name was called; and, bearing Thorndyke's prediction in mind, I gave his evidence my very special attention.

"What was the exact nature of your relations with deceased?" the coroner asked, when the introductory matter had been

disposed of.

"I was his solicitor. But in addition to my purely legal functions, I acted as his adviser in respect of the general business connected with the management of his property. I am also the executor of his will."

"Then you can tell us if there were any embarrassments or difficulties connected with his property that were causing him anxiety."

"I can. There were no embarrassments or difficulties whatever. His financial affairs were not only completely in order but in a highly favourable state. I may say that his estate was flourishing and his income considerably in excess of his expenditure. He certainly had no financial anxieties."

"Had he any anxieties of any kind, so far as you know?"

"So far as I know, he had none."

"You heard Mr. Weeks's description of the change in his manner and habits caused by his bereavement. Do you confirm that?"

"Yes; the loss of his wife and son left him a broken man."

"You attribute the change in him to the grief due to his bereavement?"

"Principally. The loss of those so dear to him left an abiding grief. But there was a further effect. Sir Edward's lively interest in his estate and his ambition to improve it and increase its value were based on the consideration that it would in due course pass to his son, and probably to his son's son. Like most English landowners, he had a strong sense of continuity. But the continuity of succession was destroyed by his son's death. The present heir-presumptive is a distant relative who was almost a stranger to Sir Edward. Thus deceased had come to feel that he was no more than a life-tenant of the estate; that, at his death, it would pass out of the possession of his own family into the hands of strangers and there was no knowing what might happen to it. As a result he, not unnaturally, lost all interest in the future of the estate. But since, hitherto, this had been the predominant purpose of his life, its failure left him without any strong interest or aim in life."

The coroner nodded, as one who appreciates a material point of evidence.

"Yes," he said, "this loss of interest in life seems to have an important bearing on our inquiry. But beyond this general state of mind, did you ever notice any more particular manifestation. In short, did you ever observe anything that caused you to entertain the possibility that deceased might make away with himself?"

Mr. Brodribb hesitated. "I can't say," he replied, after a pause, "that the possibility of suicide ever entered my mind."

"That, Mr. Brodribb, seems a rather qualified answer, as if you had something further in your mind. Am I right?"

Apparently the coroner was right, for Mr. Brodribb, after a few moments' rather uneasy reflection, replied with obvious unwillingness: "I certainly never considered the possibility of suicide; but, looking back, I am not sure that there were not some suggestions that were at least susceptible of such an interpretation. I now recall, for instance, a remark which deceased made to me some months ago. We were, I think, discussing the almost universal repugnance to the idea of death when deceased said (as nearly as I can remember), 'I often feel, Brodribb, that there is something rather restful in the thought of death. That it would be quite pleasant and peaceful to feel oneself sinking into sleep with the certain knowledge that one was never going to wake up.' I attached no weight to that remark at the time, but now, looking at it in the light of what has happened, it seems rather significant."

"I agree with you," the coroner said, emphatically. "It seems very significant indeed. And that suggests another question. I presume that you are pretty well acquainted with the affairs of deceased's family?"

"Very well indeed. I have been connected with the Hardcastle estate during the whole of my professional life, and so was my father before me."

"Then you can tell us whether any instances of suicide have occurred among any of deceased's relatives."

Once more Mr. Brodribb hesitated with a slightly puzzled and reluctant air. At length, he replied, cautiously: "I can only say that no instance of suicide in the family is known to me, or even suspected by me. But it seems proper that I should acquaint you with the rather mysterious and highly eccentric conduct of deceased's brother, Gervase. This gentleman became, unfortunately, rather intemperate in his habits, with the regrettable result—among others—that he was deprived of a fellowship that he held at Oxford. Thereafter, he disappeared and ceased to communicate with his family, and all that is known of him is that he was, for a time, living in poverty, and apparently in something like squalor, in Paris and other foreign towns."

"Had his family cast him off?"

"Not at all. Sir Edward's feelings towards him were quite friendly and brotherly. He would willingly have provided the means for his brother to live comfortably and in a manner suitable to his station. The self-imposed ostracism on Gervase's part was sheer perversity."

"And what became of this brother? Is he still living?"

"His death was announced in the obituary column of The Times about sixteen years ago without any address other than Brighton. Of the circumstances of his death, nothing whatever is known."

“Have you any reason to suppose that he made away with himself?”

“I have not. I mentioned his case merely as an instance of voluntary disappearance and generally eccentric behaviour.”

“Exactly; as furnishing a parallel to the voluntary disappearance of deceased. That is quite an important point. And now, as a final question, I should like to ask you to confirm what the Superintendent told us as to deceased having emptied his pockets of things of value before leaving the club.”

“The Superintendent’s statement is, in the main, correct. When examining his bedroom at the club, I found in a locked suit-case—which I was able to unlock—a gold watch and chain, a valuable pearl tie pin, a bunch of keys and a few private letters, which I glanced through and which threw no light on his disappearance.”

“Ah,” said the coroner, “a very significant proceeding. No doubt it struck you so?”

“It did, coupled with the fact that the owner was missing; and I communicated the facts at once to the police.”

“Yes. Very proper. And that, I think, is all that we wish to ask you, unless there is anything else that occurs to you or unless the jury desire to put any questions.”

Mr. Brodribb intimated that he had nothing further to communicate, and, as the jury made no sign, the witness was allowed to retire to his seat.

The next name called was that of Mr. Northbrook, the secretary of the club; but as his evidence for the most part, merely confirmed and amplified that of the preceding witnesses, I need not record it in detail. One new fact, however, emerged, though it did not seem to me, at the time, to have any particular significance.

“You say,” said the coroner, “that you saw deceased leave the club?”

“Yes. I was in the porter’s office at the time, and, as deceased passed the open door, I wished him ‘good morning.’ But apparently he did not hear me, for he passed out without taking any notice.”

“And that, I take it, was actually the last time he is known to have been seen alive?”

“Not absolutely the last time. He was seen a few minutes later by one of the club waiters, getting into a hansom cab. I have brought the waiter with me in case you wished to hear his account first hand.”

“That was very thoughtful of you,” said the coroner, “and I am glad you did. We should certainly wish to have the evidence of the last person who saw deceased alive.”

The waiter was accordingly called and sworn, when it transpired that his name was Joseph Wood and that he had mighty little to tell. That little may as well, however, be given in his own words.

“I was coming along Piccadilly from the west when I caught sight of Sir Edward Hardcastle, coming towards me. He was a good distance off, but I recognised him at once. I wait at the table that he always used, so I knew him very well by sight. While I was looking at him, a hansom drew up by the pavement and he got in, and then the hansom drove away. I didn’t see him hail it, but he may have done. I couldn’t see if there was anyone else in the cab, because its back was towards me, and as soon as he got in it drove away. I didn’t see him say anything to the cabman, but he may have spoken up through the trap. The cab drove off in an easterly direction—towards the Circus. I did not notice the number of the cab. There was no reason why I should.”

This was the sum of his evidence, and it was not clear to me why he had been brought so far to tell so little, for the trivial circumstance that he deposed to appeared to have no bearing whatever on the case; and I was not a little surprised to observe that Thorndyke took down his statements, apparently verbatim, in short-hand; a proceeding that I could account for only by bearing in mind his invariable rule that nothing could be considered irrelevant until all the facts were known.

The waiter, Joseph Wood, was the last of the witnesses, and, when he had concluded his evidence, the coroner, having announced that all the known facts were now in the jury’s possession, made a brief inspection of his notes with a view to his summing-up. At length he began: “It is not necessary, gentlemen, that I should address you at great length. We have given to this painful case an exhaustive consideration which was called for rather by reason of the deceased gentleman’s position and the interests involved than by any inherent difficulties. The case is, in fact, quite a simple one. All the material circumstances are known to us, and there is not the slightest conflict of evidence. On the contrary, all the witnesses are in complete agreement and the evidence of each confirms that of the others.

“The time at which this sad affair occurred is fixed beyond any possible doubt by Mr. Holker’s evidence. Deceased must have entered the house, in which his body was subsequently found, during the evening or night of Sunday, the twenty-first of June; and this date is confirmed by the medical evidence. Thus, the questions, When and Where are answered conclusively. Mr. Holker and the Superintendent both saw the dead body suspended from a beam; and the medical witness found signs of death from asphyxia, as would be expected in the case of a man who had died by hanging.

“The question of motive seems to be solved as completely as we could expect by the evidence of Mr. Weeks and especially by that of Mr. Brodribb. The terrible bereavement which deceased suffered, the shipwreck of all his hopes and ambitions and the desolate state in which he was left, if they could not be properly regarded as conditions predisposing to suicide, furnish a reasonable explanation of it after the event.

“There is one feature in the case which did, at first, appear very strange and difficult to explain, and which, I may admit,

occasioned this very rigorous inquiry. That feature is the extraordinary surroundings in which the body was discovered. How, one asked oneself, is it possible to account for the appearance of a man in deceased's position in an empty house in the purlieu of Stratford? It seemed an insoluble mystery. Then came the evidence of the Superintendent and Mr. Brodribb. The one finds traces that, to the expert eye, tell of ramblings in sordid neighbourhoods and waste places, of nights spent in doss-houses or in the open. The other tells us of a relative—actually a brother of deceased—who, in a strangely similar manner, had disappeared from his usual places of resort, cut himself off from family and friends and, by deliberate choice, had lived—and perhaps died—in surroundings of sordid poverty. I will not say that this evidence explains the proceedings of deceased. Probably they will never be completely explained. But I do say that our knowledge of the brother's conduct makes that of deceased perfectly credible.

"I will add only one further observation. If you find that deceased made away with himself, as the evidence seems to prove, I think you will agree with me that, at the time and for some days previously, he was not in his right mind. If that is your view, I will ask you to embody it in your verdict."

At the conclusion of the coroner's address, the jury consulted together. But their consultation occupied only a minute or two. Apparently they had already made up their minds, as they might well have done, taking the evidence at its face value. When the whispered conference came to an end, the foreman announced that they had agreed on their verdict and the coroner then put the formal question: "And what is your decision, gentlemen?"

"We find," was the reply, "that deceased committed suicide by hanging himself while temporarily insane."

"Yes," said the coroner, "I am in entire agreement with you, and I must thank you for the care and attention with which you have considered the evidence."

As the proceedings came to an end, Thorndyke and I rose and made our way out, leaving Brodribb in conversation with the coroner and the Superintendent.

"Well," I said as we halted outside to wait for our friend, "it has been quite entertaining, but I don't see that we have got much for our attendance."

"We have got one fact, at least," replied Thorndyke, "that was worth coming for. We now know that Holker was in the house until after the rain had begun to fall. That clears away any uncertainties on a point of vital importance. But we had better not discuss the case now. And I think—though it seems rather scurvy treatment of our old friend—but I think we had better keep our own counsel. Brodribb accepts the suicide as an established fact, and perhaps it is as well that he should. If we are going to work at this case, it will be all to the good that we hold the monopoly of the real facts. It will be a difficult and obscure case, but the difficulty will be materially reduced if we can watch the development of events quietly, without anyone suspecting that we are watching. This was no crime of sudden impulse. It was premeditated and arranged. Obviously there was, behind it, some perfectly definite motive. We have, among other things, to discover what that motive was. The criminals at present believe themselves to be entirely unsuspected. If they maintain that belief, they will feel at liberty to pursue their purpose without any special precautions; and we—also unsuspected—may get our chance. But here comes Brodribb."

I must confess that Thorndyke's observations appeared to me so cryptic as to convey no meaning whatever. That, I recognised, was owing to my own 'slowness in the uptake'. However, there was no opportunity to seek elucidation, for Brodribb had seen us and was now bearing down on us. He replied to our greeting with something less than his usual vivacity, and we set forth on our way to the station in almost uninterrupted silence.

---



## X. — A SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

MR. BRODRIBB'S taciturn mood persisted even after we had taken possession of an empty first-class smoking compartment and lit our pipes. Evidently his recent experiences had depressed him profoundly; which, after all, was no matter for surprise. An inquest is not a jovial function under the most favourable conditions, and the conditions in the recent inquiry had been far from favourable for the friends of the deceased.

"It was a ghoulish business," he remarked in semi-apologetic explanation of his low spirits, "but, of course, it had to be; and the coroner managed it as decently as possible. Still, I had rather that he had managed without me."

"If he had," said I, "he would have missed what he regarded as most important evidence."

"Yes, I know," replied Brodribb. "That was what I felt, though I hated giving that evidence. The affair had to be cleared up, and I have no doubt that the jury were right in their verdict. I know you don't agree with me, Thorndyke, but I think your special experience has misled you for once."

"There is always the possibility," Thorndyke admitted, "that professional bias may influence one. In any case, our divergence of views does not affect the position in practice. The death of Sir Edward is an established fact and the ambiguity of your legal status is at an end."

"Yes," Brodribb agreed, "there is that very unsatisfactory compensation. I am now the executor and can act as I think best. I could only wish that the best course of action were a little more easy to decide on."

With this, he relapsed into silent reflection, possibly connected with the difficulties suggested by his last sentence; and as Thorndyke and I were unable to discuss before him the matters that were occupying our thoughts, we followed his example and devoted ourselves to the consideration of our own affairs.

Suddenly Brodribb sat up with a start and began to rummage in his inside breast-pocket. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What a fool I am! Clean forgot this. Ought to have mentioned it in my evidence."

Here he brought out a letter wallet, and, taking from it an envelope, opened the latter and tipped some small object out on to his palm.

"There!" he said, holding out his open hand to Thorndyke. "What do you think of that?"

Thorndyke picked up the object, and, having examined it, held it up to the light, when I saw that it was a little oval plate of a bright transparent green bearing an engraved device which I recognised instantly.

"The missing seal!" I exclaimed, taking it from Thorndyke to inspect it more closely. "Then we may assume that the great mystery is solved."

"Indeed, you may assume nothing of the kind," said Brodribb. "On the contrary, the mystery is more profound than ever and the chance of a solution more remote. I will tell you all about it—all that I know, that is to say. It is a queer story. Your friend, Superintendent Miller, brought it to me yesterday afternoon to compare with my seals and for formal identification by me (which I thought very kind and courteous of him), and this is the account he gave of its discovery.

"It seems that, about a week ago, a man escaped from Pentonville Gaol. I understand that he got away in the evening, and in some miraculous fashion—you know where the prison is; right in the middle of a populous neighbourhood—he kept out of sight until it was dark, which wouldn't have been much before eleven at this time of year. Then, with the same miraculous luck, he managed to slip away through the streets, right across the northern suburbs to the neighbourhood of Temple Mills by the River Lea.

"There he was lurking the next afternoon when he had another stroke of luck. Some devotee of the simple life had elected to take a bath in the river, and he must have strayed away some distance from his clothes, for our Pentonville sportsman found them unguarded. Possibly he may have watched the other sportsman taking them off. At any rate, he seized the opportunity; slipped off the prison clothes and popped on the others. Then he nipped off across the meadows in the direction of Tottenham. And there it was that his luck deserted him; for, by the merest chance, a plain clothes officer who knew him by sight, happened to meet him, and, as the hue and cry was out, he collared him forthwith.

"And now comes one of the quaint features of the story. At Tottenham Police Station they went through his pockets—they were really the other fellow's, of course—with mighty little result. The next day they took him back to Pentonville, and once more he was put into uniform. The clothes that were taken off him were put aside until they could be disposed of in some way. But a couple of days ago it occurred to one of the officers to go over them carefully to see if he could find out the lawful owner. And then he made a discovery. Apparently, the owner of those clothes was a pickpocket, for there was a secret receptacle in the back of the waistcoat, which had been overlooked at the first search; and in that secret pocket the officer found this stone."

"And what happened to the other man?" I asked.

"Ah!" chuckled Brodribb, quite recovering his natural spirits for the time being, "that's the cream of the joke. He found the gaol-bird's discarded garments in place of his own clothes and of course he had to put 'em on, since he couldn't go

about naked. It was a lovely situation; almost as if he had walked into prison and locked himself in. However, as soon as he was dressed in his proper character, he made a bolt for it; and he had even better luck than the other fellow. In some perfectly incredible manner, he made his way, in broad daylight, right across North London and came to the surface at the Angel, of all unlikely places."

"At the Angel!" I repeated, incredulously.

"At the Angel," Brodribb reiterated, joyously. "Just picture to yourselves an escaped convict in full uniform, elbowing his way through the crowd at the Angel! Well, of course, it couldn't go on. A couple of plain-clothes men saw him and pounced on him in an instant. It looked as if his luck had given out. But apparently his wits were as nimble as his heels, for he got just a dog's chance and he took it. At the moment when the two constables were taking him across the road, a fire-engine came thundering along and they had to scuttle back out of the way. But as it flew past, our friend made a grab at the rail of the foot-plate and held on. The momentum of the engine whisked him out of the clutches of his captors and sent them sprawling; and when they got up, their prisoner was standing on the foot-plate and fading in the distance before their eyes. Of course, it is no use shouting after a fire-engine.

"Now the odd thing is," Mr. Brodribb continued in a slightly shaky voice, "that none of the fire-men on the engine seem to have noticed him; and the constables couldn't telephone a warning until they had found out where the fire was. So our friend stuck on the engine until it turned down Tottenham Court Road, when he hopped off and made a bolt down Warren Street. Naturally, he soon picked up some followers, but he kept ahead of them, flying up one street and down another until he arrived at Cleveland Mews with half the town at his heels. He turned into the mews, still well ahead, and shot down it like a rocket. And that was the last that was seen of him. The crowd and the police surged in after him, and as the mews is a blind alley, they were quite cocksure that they'd got him. But when they came to the blind end, there was not a sign of him. He had vanished into thin air. And he had vanished for good, you observe. For, as nobody knew who he was, nobody could identify him when once he had changed his clothes."

"No," I agreed, "he has got clear away, and I must admit that I think he deserved to."

"I am afraid that I agree with you," said Brodribb. "Very improper for a lawyer, but even lawyers are human. But the police were very puzzled; not only as to how he had managed to escape, but, when the real convict was captured, they couldn't make out why he ran away. Of course, when the seal was found in the pocket, they understood."

"I wonder how he did get away," said I.

"So do I," said Brodribb. "It was a remarkable exploit. I examined the place myself and could see no apparent way of escape."

"You examined the place?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes. I forgot to mention that, by a remarkable coincidence, I happened to be there at the very time. I took Sir Giles Farnaby to see a client of mine who has a studio that fronts on the mews. When we arrived the police were actually searching the studio. They thought the fugitive might have got in at the open window, unnoticed by the two ladies who were at work there. So they went all over the premises. Just as well for our friend that they did; for while they were searching the studio premises he had time to make his little arrangements at the bottom of the mews. And now we shall never know how he came by that seal, though, as he seems to have been a pickpocket, we can make a pretty likely guess."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed a little dryly, "it is always possible to guess. But guesses are not very valuable evidential assets. The police guessed that this man was a pickpocket, and we can guess that, being a pickpocket, he obtained the seal in the practice of his art. That guess is supported by the fact that the ring is the only article known to be missing from his person, and that the leather case in which it was usually carried, is also missing. On the other hand, it is not in agreement with the fact that the stone had been dismounted from the ring and that the ring was not found with it. The pickpocket usually takes his booty to the receiver as he finds it. It is the receiver who extracts the stones and melts down the metal. That is the usual procedure, but, naturally, there are exceptions."

"At any rate," said Brodribb, "what matters to us is that the man has vanished and no one knows who he is."

On this conclusion neither Thorndyke nor I made any comment, and the discussion was brought to an end by our arrival at Liverpool Street, where we saw Mr. Brodribb into a hansom and then embarked in another for the Temple.

During the meal which we found awaiting us at our chambers, I endeavoured to extract from Thorndyke some elucidation of the statement that had seemed to me so obscure. But he was not willing to enter into details at present.

"The position at the moment, Jervis," said he, "is this. We have no doubt whatever that Sir Edward Hardcastle was murdered. We have evidence that the murder was premeditated and the methods planned in advance with considerable care and some ingenuity. It was carried out by more than one, and probably several persons. It was, in fact, of the nature of a conspiracy. The purpose of the murder was not robbery from the person. The perpetrators, or at least some of them, were apparently of a low class, socially; and the victim seems to have walked, not entirely unsuspecting, into some sort of ambush.

"That is all that we know at present, and it doesn't carry us far. What we have to discover, if we can, is the identity of the murderers. If we can do that, the motive will disclose itself. If, on the other hand, we can uncover the motive, that will probably point to the murderers. We must proceed along both lines if we can. We must endeavour cautiously to ascertain whether Sir Edward had any enemies who might conceivably have been capable of a crime of revenge; and we must watch

the consequences of his death and note who benefits by them.”

“It is evident,” said I, “that someone is going to benefit to the extent of a title and an uncommonly valuable estate.”

“Yes, and we shall bear that in mind. But we mustn’t attach undue weight to it. Whenever a well-to-do person is murdered, the heirs benefit; but that fact—though it furnishes a conceivable motive—does not cast suspicion on them in the absence of any other evidence. In practice, as you know, I like to leave the question of motive until I have got a lead in some definite direction. It is much safer. The premature consideration of motive may be very misleading, whereas its use as corroboration may be invaluable.”

“Yes, I realise that,” said I, “but in this case I don’t see how you are going to get a lead. The murderers left plenty of traces of a kind; but they were the wrong kind. There was nothing personal about them—unless the finger-prints can be identified, and I doubt if they can. They were very confused and obscure. And even if they could be made out, they would be of no use unless they were the prints of criminals known to the police and recorded at the register.”

Thorndyke laughed grimly. “My learned friend,” he remarked, “is not disposed to be encouraging. But never mind. We have made many a worse start and yet reached our goal. Presently we will examine our material and see what it has to tell us. Perhaps we may get a lead in some direction from an unexpected source.”

At the actual examination I was not present, for our expeditions to Stratford had left me with one or two unfulfilled engagements. Accordingly, as soon as we had finished our supper (or dinner—the exact status of our evening meal was not clearly defined), I went forth to despatch one of them, my regret tempered by the consideration that I should miss nothing but the mere manipulations, most of which were now fairly familiar to me, and that on my return I should find most of the work done and the results available.

And so it turned out. Re-entering our chambers about half-past ten and finding the sitting-room untenanted, I made my way up to the laboratory where a glance around told me that the final stage of the investigation had been reached. On one bench was a microscope and a row of slides, each bearing a temporary or permanent label; on the chemical bench a sand-bath stood over a bunsen burner and bore a small glass evaporating dish, and one or two large watch-glasses containing fluid with a crystalline margin had apparently had their turn on the bath. Beside them in a beaker of fluid—presumably water—was the collar that had been abstracted from the mortuary by Thorndyke, who was at the moment gently prodding it with a glass rod, while his familiar demon, Polton, was engaged in vigorously wringing out the end of rope in a basin of hot liquid which exhaled the unmistakable aroma of soft soap.

“We have nearly finished,” said Thorndyke, “and we haven’t done so badly, considering that this is only the beginning of our investigation. Have a look at the specimens and see if you agree with the findings.”

I went over to the microscope bench and ran my eye over the exhibits. As I did so, I was once more impressed by the wonderfully simple, orderly and efficient plan on which my colleague worked. For years past, indeed, from the very earliest days of his practice, it had been his habit to collect impartially examples of every kind of natural and artificial material and to make, wherever it was practicable, permanent microscopic preparations of each. The result was an immense and carefully classified collection of minute objects of all kinds—hairs, feather insect scales, diatoms, pollen, seeds, powders, starches, textiles, threads, fibres—any one of which could be found in a moment and used for comparison with any new ‘find’, the nature of which had to be determined. Thus he was, to a great extent, independent of books of reference and had the great advantage of being able to submit both the new specimen and the ‘standard’ to any kind of test with the micrometer or polariscope or otherwise.

In the present case, the specimens were laid out in pairs, the new, unknown specimen with a ‘certified’ example from the collection; and an eye-piece micrometer was in position for comparing dimensions. I took up one slide, labelled ‘E. H. decd. 15. 7. 03. From Rt. Bronchus’, and placed it on the stage of the microscope. Instantly the nature of the object became obvious. It was a fish-scale; but, of course, I could not say what fish. Then I laid on the stage the companion slide from the collection, labelled ‘Scale of Herring’, and made a rough comparison. In the shape of the margins, the concentric and radiating markings and all other characters, the two specimens appeared to be identical. I did not make an exhaustive examination, assuming that this had been done by Thorndyke, but went on to the other specimens. All the fish-scales were alike, as might have been expected, and I gave them only a passing glance. Then I picked up a slide labelled ‘From Trachea’ and placed it on the stage. The specimen appeared to be a small piece of a leaf of some kind; a rather large leaf, as I judged by the absence of any indication of form, and by its thickness, and I observed that it seemed to have one cut edge.

Taking up the ‘reference’ slide I read, ‘Cuticle of Cabbage’.

“I don’t remember this scrap of leaf, Thorndyke,” said I.

“No,” he replied. “I did not draw Ross’s attention to it. It was wearisome to keep pointing out facts to a man who had already made up his mind. It seems to be a fragment of cabbage leaf, but it is of no special importance. The fish-scales prove the entrance of water to the lungs, which is the really significant fact.”

“And this little melted fragment from the heel of the boot? It doesn’t look like soap.”

“It isn’t. It is beeswax. I put that fragment on the slide to observe the melting-point.”

The other two specimens were the scraps of cotton and silk thread that we had picked off the clothes. The silk thread was clearly shown, by comparison with the ‘reference specimen’ to be a fragment of ‘buttonhole twist’. The white cotton corresponded exactly with a reference specimen of basting cotton; but here the identification was less certain owing to the

less distinctive character of the thread.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed when I remarked upon this, "white cotton threads are a good deal alike, but I haven't much doubt that this is basting cotton. Still, I shall take the specimens to a trimmings-dealer and get an expert opinion."

"Have you made any analysis of the fluids from the stomach and lungs?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "only a preliminary test. But I think that has given us the essential facts, though as a measure of safety, I shall have a complete examination made. What I find is that both fluids contain a considerable amount of sodium chloride. They appear to be, and I have no doubt are, just simply salt water. We can't tell how salt the water was when it was swallowed and drawn into the lungs owing to the drying that had occurred in the body. But the salt is there, and that is the important point."

"You haven't yet tested the water in which you have soaked the collar?"

"No. We will do that now."

He poured a little of the water from the beaker in which the collar had been soaking, through a filter into a test-tube. Then, with a pipette, he dipped up a small quantity of a solution of silver nitrate from a bottle and let it fall, drop by drop, into the test-tube. As each drop fell into the clear liquid it gave rise to a little milky cloud, which became denser with each succeeding drop.

"Chloride of some kind," I observed.

"Yes," said he, "and we may take it, provisionally, that it is sodium chloride. And that finishes our preliminary examination of our material. Have you got that rope clean, Polton?"

"Yes, sir," replied Polton, producing the end of rope from a towel in which he had been squeezing the last remains of moisture from it. "It is quite clean, but a good deal of the colour has come out. I think you are right, sir. It looks like cutch."

He exhibited the discoloured water in the basin and handed the piece of rope to Thorndyke, who passed it to me.

"Yes," I said, "I see now that it is a hemp rope. But it is odd that they should have been at the trouble of dyeing it to imitate coir, which is an inferior rope to hemp."

He made no reply, but seemed to look at me attentively as I turned the rope over in my hand, and finally took it from me without remark. I had the feeling that he had expected me to make some observation, and I wondered vaguely what it might have been. Also, I wondered a little at his interest in the physical characters of this rope, which really seemed to have no bearing on our inquiry; and even as I wondered, I had an uneasy suspicion that I had missed some significant point.

"How have the photographs come out?" I asked.

"I haven't seen them yet," he replied. "They are in Polton's province. What do you say, Polton? Is it possible to inspect them?"

"The enlargements are now washing," Polton replied. "I'll fetch them in for you to see."

He went through into the dark room and presently returned with four porcelain dishes, each containing a half-plate bromide print, which he laid down on the bench under the shaded light. All the four prints were enlargements to the same scale—about three times the natural linear size.

"Well," I remarked, as we looked them over together, "Sir Edward's finger-prints are clear enough, though they look a little odd, but the chair-back groups are a most unholy muddle. Most of the prints are just undecipherable smears."

"Yes," Thorndyke admitted regretfully, "they are a poor lot and too many superimposed and obliterating one another. But, still, I have some hopes. Our expert friends are wonderfully clever at sorting out imperfect prints; and some of these seem to me to have enough visible detail for identification. At any rate, one important negative fact can, I think, be established. I see no print that seems to resemble any of Sir Edward's."

"Neither do I; and, of course, if they were there, they would be more distinct than any of the others, being the most recent. But it would be a facer if the experts should find them there. That would fairly knock the bottom out of the entire case."

"It would, certainly," Thorndyke agreed. "But the probability is so negligibly remote that it is not worth considering. What is of much more interest is the chance of their being able to identify some of the prints as those of known criminals."

"Supposing they can?" said I. "What then?"

"In that case," he replied, "I think we should have to take Miller into our confidence. You see, Jervis, that our present difficulty is that we are dealing with a crime in the abstract, so to speak. The perpetrators are unknown to us. We have—at the moment—no clue whatever to their identity. But give us a name; turn our unknown criminals into actual, known persons, and I think we have enough evidence to secure a conviction. At any rate, a very little corroboration by police investigation would make the case complete."

"The deuce it would!" I exclaimed, completely taken aback. "I had no idea that the case had advanced as far as that. I thought it was rather a matter of strong suspicion than of definite evidence. But evidently your examination of the material has brought some new facts to light. Is it not so?"

"We have elicited a few new facts; nothing very startling, however. But the evidence emerges when we put together, in their proper order, the facts that we already knew with the new ones added. Shall we go over the evidence together and see what we really know about the case?"

I assented with enthusiasm, and, having filled my pipe, disposed myself in the rather ascetic laboratory chair in a posture of attention and receptivity; and I noticed that Polton had unobtrusively drawn a stool up to the opposite bench, and, having stuck a watchmaker's glass into his eye, was making a shameless pretence of exploring the 'innards' of an invalid carriage clock.

"Let us begin," said Thorndyke, "by taking the evidence in order without going into much detail. In the first place we have established that Sir Edward Hardcastle was drowned in salt water in which considerable numbers of herring-scales were suspended."

"You think there is no doubt about the drowning?"

"I think it is practically certain," he replied. "The presence in the lungs of salt water and herring-scales, together with the presence of similar salt-water and herring-scales in the stomach is nearly conclusive. That the herring-scales were water-borne and not the remains of food eaten is proved by our finding them in the hair. Add to this the fairly definite signs of asphyxia and no signs of any other cause of death; and the fact that deceased's head and neck had been immersed in salt water containing suspended herring-scales, as proved by the scales which you found in the hair, by the stains on the neck of his shirt and on his collar and by the salt which I extracted from that collar; and I think we have very complete and conclusive evidence of drowning."

"I agree," said I. "Excuse my interrupting."

"Not at all," he replied. "I want you to challenge the evidence if you do not find it convincing. To proceed; we find that, Sir Edward's body, dead or alive, had been lying on, and apparently dragged along, the dirty floor of a room. Among the litter on that floor were short pieces of basting-cotton and button-hole twist and a fragment of beeswax. These materials suggest a room in which garments were being made; probably a tailor's work-room, though other people besides tailors use these materials."

"Next we find that the body was conveyed in a two-wheeled vehicle, which may have been a cart or gig, or perhaps a hansom cab—"

"Surely not a hansom, Thorndyke," I interrupted. "It had iron tyres."

"That doesn't absolutely exclude it," said he. "You occasionally meet with iron-tired hansoms even to this day. I saw one at Fenchurch Street Station only a few weeks ago—a shabby old crock with the old-fashioned, round-backed dickey, probably driven by the owner. The reason that I incline to the hansom is that the dimensions of this vehicle coincide exactly with those of a hansom. I looked them up in my notes on the dimensions of various vehicles. The wheels of a hansom are fifty-five and a half inches in diameter. The tyres, when of iron, are one and a half inches wide, on a rim which is slightly thicker and which widens inwards towards the spokes. The track, or distance between the wheels, measured at the ground level from the outer edge of one tyre to the outer edge of the other, is fifty-seven inches. Now, these are exactly the dimensions that we noted in our measurements of the track of the unknown vehicle. It isn't by any means conclusive, but we are bound to take note of the coincidence."

"Yes, indeed," I assented. "It is a decidedly striking coincidence; a sort of Bertillon measurement, at least so it appears, though I don't know to what extent the dimensions of vehicles are standardised."

"At any rate," said he, "we note the possibility that this vehicle may have been a hansom cab; and whatever it was, it served to convey the body of Sir Edward to Five Piper's Row on Sunday, the twenty-first of June, at some time in the evening or night, but most probably between eleven and twelve. The body was carried into the house by at least two persons, one of whom appears to have been a waterside or sea-faring person."

"Is it clearly established that there was more than one person?" I asked.

"Yes. There were at least two sets of muddy foot-marks—and apparently only two—on the floor leading from the front door to the kitchen. They were not Holker's, for he arrived with dry feet; they were certainly not Sir Edward's, as we know from the state of his shoes, apart from the ascertained fact that he was dead when he was taken into the house. There were undoubtedly two men; and we can take it that neither of them was the driver of the vehicle since that made merely a pause at the house and not a prolonged stay."

"The body, then, was carried into the house by these two persons, one of whom—probably the nautical person—had brought with him a piece of rope which had been cut off a longer complete rope and which bears visible evidence of having been stolen."

"What do you mean by visible evidence?" I demanded. "Surely a rope which has been stolen is not visibly different from any other rope! The act of stealing a rope does not impress on it any new distinguishable properties."

"That is true," he admitted; "and yet it may be possible to recognise a stolen rope by its visible properties. Did you ever hear of a 'rogue's' yarn?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"It is a device that used formerly to be employed in the Navy to check the stealing of cordage. Every rope that was made in the Royal Dockyards had one yarn in one of the strands which was different from all the others. It was twisted in reverse, and, if the rope was a white rope, the rogue's yarn was tarred, while in a tarred rope the tell-tale yarn was left white. Later, the special yarn was replaced by a single coloured worsted thread, which was spun into the middle of a yarn and so was not visible externally, but only at the cut end. This was a better device, as each dockyard had its own colour, so that when a stolen rope was discovered it could be seen at once which dockyard it belonged to.

"But the plan of marking rope in this way is not confined to the Navy. Many public, and even private bodies which use rope, have it made up with some distinctive mark—usually a coloured thread in one of the yarns. And that happens to be the case with this particular rope. It is a marked rope; evidently the property of some public or private body." He took the washed 'specimen' from the bench, and, handing it to me, continued: "You see this is a four-strand rope, and in two of the strands is a yarn in which has been twisted a coloured cotton thread, a red thread in the one and a green thread in the other."

I examined the little length of rope closely, and, now that I had been told, the coloured threads were easy enough to see, though only at the cut ends. Now, too, I understood Thorndyke's intense interest in the rope. But there was another thing that I did not understand at all.

"I suppose," said I, "that it was these coloured threads that made you give so much attention to this rope?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied; "and you must admit that they were calculated to attract attention."

"Certainly, I do. But what puzzles me is how you came to see them at all. They are extremely inconspicuous, and must have been still more so before the rope was cleaned."

"There is no mystery about that," said he. "I saw them because I looked for them. You remember that you—like the Superintendent—took this rope for a coir rope. So did I, at first. Then I saw that the texture did not agree with the colour; that it was really a hempen rope dyed to imitate coir. Then I asked myself the question that you asked just now: Why should anyone dye a hemp rope to imitate the less valuable coir? The natural suggestion was that the rope had been disguised to cover unlawful possession. It was probably a stolen rope. This idea suggested the possibility that it might be a marked rope. Accordingly I carefully examined the cut end, and behold! the two coloured threads; very inconspicuous, as you inferred, but visible enough when looked for."

"But this is a very important fact, Thorndyke," said I.

"It is," he agreed. "It is by far the most valuable clue that we hold. In fact, if the finger-prints fail us, it is the only clue that leads away from generalities to a definite place and set of surroundings. We shall almost certainly be able to trace this rope to the place from which it was stolen, and that alone will tell us something of the person who stole it."

"Mighty little," said I.

"Probably. But if we are able to add only a little to what we know, that little may be very illuminating."

"What do we know about these men?" I asked.

"Perhaps I should have said 'infer' rather than 'know'; but our inferences are fairly safe. First, we find a person evidently accustomed to handling cordage, and probably a seaman or waterside character; a person, probably the same, who has a stolen rope in his possession; a person who is in some way connected with a tailor's work-room or some similar establishment; and a person who uses, drives and probably owns some two-wheeled vehicle, either a gig, a light cart or possibly a hansom cab, and if the latter, an old cab, probably in poor condition and distinguished by the unusual character of iron tyres. Then there is the choice of Piper's Row. The selection of this particular house could hardly have been made by a complete stranger. It suggests a person with some knowledge of the place and of its usually undisturbed condition. Assuming the object to be the disposal of the body in some place where it would not be discovered until all traces of the crime—of the actual method of the murder—had disappeared, the hiding-place was extraordinarily well chosen. But for the mere accident of Holker's picking out this house for repairs, the body might have remained undiscovered for months and the plan have succeeded perfectly."

"It has succeeded pretty perfectly as it is," said I, "so far as the coroner and the police are concerned."

"Yes. But in another month the cause of death would have been completely unascertainable. But you notice that however long the interval might have been, the body would still have been identifiable by the contents of the pockets and the marking of the clothes. That seems to be worth noting."

"You mean that the intention was that the body should ultimately be identified?"

"I mean that there was no attempt to conceal the identity. The significance of that—such as it is—lies in the fact that in an ordinary murder the safety of the murderers is much greater if the identity of the murdered person is unknown, since, in that case, the police usually have nothing to indicate the identity of the murderer. But I doubt if there is much in it. The intention evidently was, in this case, that the death should not be recognised as a murder at all."

"Yes, and they were very near to bringing it off. In fact, they have brought it off so far. They are still very decidedly birds in the bush. And the inquest was an absolute walk-over for them. All the evidence seemed to point to suicide, and that of Weeks and Brodribb must have been most convincing to people who already had a bias in that direction. By the way, did you pick up anything from the evidence besides that statement of Holker's?"

"Nothing very definite," he replied. "There were certain hints and suggestions in the evidence of Weeks and in that of Joseph Wood, the waiter. Weeks, you remember, had evidently had the feeling that there was something unusual in the air when Sir Edward started from home that morning; and Wood seemed to me to have the impression that there was someone in the cab which drew up for Sir Edward to enter. He didn't say so, in fact he said that he did not know, but he mentioned pointedly that he did not see Sir Edward hail the cab or give any directions to the driver. Taking what was implied rather than stated by these two witnesses, there seems to be a suggestion that one, at least, of the murderers was known to Sir Edward; and the fact that he went away in a hansom, whether alone or with some other person, is certainly significant as pointing to a definite destination. It is quite inconsistent with the Superintendent's suggestion of aimless wandering.

"But we are straying away into a consideration of the general aspects of the case. To come back to the question that we were discussing, you see now what our position is at the moment. If Miller can give us the name of a person who has handled that chair at Piper's Row, we can give him sufficient information to enable him to put that person on trial for murder. Of course he would not do so off-hand. Before he moved, he would fill in detail and seek corroborative evidence. But there would be very little doubt of the result.

"On the other hand, if Miller cannot produce a known person, we shall be left with a very complete case of murder against some persons unknown. Then it will be our task to convert those unknown persons into known persons; and to do that we shall need to acquire some further facts."

There were some other points that I should have liked to raise. But Thorndyke's very definite conclusion seemed to put an end to the discussion; so much so that Polton threw off all pretence, and, removing the eyeglass from his eye, deliberately carried the clock to a cupboard and there deposited it as a thing that had served its purpose.

---

## XI. — ASHDOD REVISITED

(JASPER GRAY'S NARRATIVE)

A GOOD old proverb assures us that we may be sure our sins will find us out. I will not make the customary facetious commentary on this proposition. That joke has now worn rather thin. But the idiotic booby-trap that I set for poor old Ponty, rebounding on me again and again like a self-acting, perpetual motion boomerang, illustrated the proverb admirably, while the encounter on my very doorstep with a dry-faced, plain-clothes policeman, illustrated the joke. Most inopportunately, my sins had found me at home.

He must have had a description of me for he addressed me tentatively by name. I acknowledged my identity and he then explained his business.

"It's about that counterfeit half-crown that your father passed by mistake. I want to know, as well as you can remember, how it came into your possession."

Now, of course I ought to have told him all I knew. I realised that. But my recollections of Mr. Ebbstein's establishment were so exceedingly unpleasant that I boggled at the idea of being any further mixed up with it. And then there was Miss Stella. I couldn't endure the thought of having her name dragged into a disreputable affair of this sort. Wherefore I temporised and evaded.

"The man who gave it to me was a complete stranger," said I.

"Naturally," said the officer. "You didn't hear his name by any chance?"

"I heard another man call him 'Jim'."

"Well, that's something, though it doesn't carry us very far. But how came he to give it to you? Was it payment?"

I described the transaction with literal truth up to the point of the delivery of the coin but said nothing of the subsequent events. I think he must have been a rather inexperienced officer, for he assumed that the payment concluded the business and that I then came away. I didn't say so.

"You took the case up in Mansell Street. Do you remember what number?"

"No, but I remember the house. It was on the right-hand side, going from the High Street, just past a tobacconist's shop—next door, in fact. The shop had a figure of a Red Indian on a bracket outside."

He entered this statement in a large, black-covered note-book and then asked: "You took the case to Byles's Wharf, you say. Whereabouts is that? Isn't it somewhere down Wapping way?"

"Yes, this end of Wapping."

"And do you think you would know the man again?"

"I am sure I should."

He noted this down and reflected awhile. But having missed all the really relevant questions, he didn't seem able to think of any others. Accordingly, after a spell of profound thought, he put his note-book away and closed the proceedings.

I went on my way greatly relieved at having, as I hoped, at last shaken myself free of that accursed make-believe, but yet

by no means satisfied with my conduct of the affair. I knew that, as a good citizen, I ought to have told him about 'Chonas', and my default rankled in my bosom and again illustrated the proverb by haunting me in all my comings and goings. But the oddest effect of the working of my conscience was to develop in me a most inconsistent hankering to make my incriminating knowledge more complete. I became possessed by an unreasonable urge to revisit the scene of my adventure, to go down again into Ashdod, and turn my confused recollections into definite knowledge.

The opportunity came unexpectedly. I had to deliver a parcel of stationery at an office appertaining to a large warehouse in Commercial Road East. It was a heavy parcel, but not heavy enough to demand the use of the truck. I carried it on my shoulder, and when I had at length dumped it down in the outer office and taken my receipt for it, I was free and unencumbered. And the weight of the parcel seemed to justify me in taking a little time off to spend on my own affairs.

As I strolled back along Commercial Road East, I kept a sharp look-out for landmarks of that memorable journey with the hansom. Presently I came to the corner of Sidney Street, which I remembered having passed on that occasion, and which gave me what mariners call a "departure." I turned back, eastward, and, taking the first turning on the right (southerly), left the broad thoroughfare behind and entered a maze of small streets. They were rather bewildering. But it is difficult thoroughly to bewilder a seasoned Londoner who is accustomed to wandering about the town on foot (people who ride in conveyances don't count. They never become real Londoners). Presently I came to a corner which was marked at the kerb by an angular granite corner-stone. I remembered that stone. I had reason to (and so had the owner of the cab). Taking a fresh departure from it, I soon arrived at a little street at the end of which was a seedy-looking public-house distinguished by the sign of a lion and an inscription in Hebrew characters which suggested that the royal beast aforesaid was none other than the Lion of Judah.

I now had my bearings. This was the place where I had found and purloined the hansom. Just round the corner was the empty house from which Miss Stella and I had dropped down into the court. That was the last house in the street which I had come to identify, the street which was made illustrious by the residence therein of Mr. Ebbstein and his tenant, the ingenious 'Chonas', to say nothing of the old villain whom I had knocked on the head.

I sauntered round the corner, keeping my eyes skinned (as our packer would have expressed it) but carefully avoiding any outward manifestation of interest. The illustrious street I learned from a half-illegible name-plate rejoiced in the romantic name of Pentecost Grove. Strolling along it, I took in the numbers—where there were any—with the tail of my eye, keeping account of them, since so many were missing, until I arrived exactly opposite the mews, or stable-yard, which I had seen from the window of my prison. Thereby I learned that Mr. Ebbstein resided at Number Forty-nine, and the person whose cranium I had damaged was to be found—if still extant—at Number Fifty.

If I had been content with this enlargement of my knowledge and taken myself off, all would have been well. But at this point, my intelligent interest overpowered my caution. The stable-yard opposite, bearing the superscription, 'Zion Place', yawned invitingly and offered an alluring glimpse of a hansom cab, horseless and apparently in dry dock. I couldn't resist that hansom cab. Without doubt, it was the identical hansom with which I had scattered the howling and blaspheming denizens of Ashdod. Of course, it didn't matter a 'snide' half-crown whether it was or not. But I was sensible of an idiotic impulse to examine it and try to verify its identity. Accordingly I crossed the street and sauntered idly into Zion Place, gradually edging towards the object of my curiosity.

It was an extraordinarily shabby old vehicle and seemed to be dropping to pieces from sheer senile decay. But it wasn't really. The actual robustness of its old age was demonstrated by the near wheel, which memory impelled me to inspect narrowly. On the rim including the tyre, was a deep, angular notch, corresponding, as I grinningly realised, with that sharp granite corner-stone and recalling the terrific lurch that had nearly jerked me from my perch. The notch was an honourable scar on which the builder and wheel wright might have looked with pardonable pride.

I had just reached this conclusion when I became aware of a face protruded round a stable door and a pair of beady eyes fixed very attentively on me. Then the face emerged, accompanied by a suitable torso and a pair of thin, bandy legs, the entire outfit representing the Jehu whom I remembered as bearing the style and title of Louis. He advanced towards me crab-wise and demanded, suspiciously: "Vell. Vat you vant in here?"

I replied that I was just having a look round.

"Ah," said he, "zen you shall take your look outside."

I expressed the hope that I had not intruded, and, turning about, strolled up the yard and out into the street. He followed closely at my heels, not only up the yard, but along the street. Finding him still clinging to me, I quickened my pace, deciding now to get clear of the neighbourhood without delay. Heading towards The Lion, I was approaching the corner when two men came round it. One of them, whose head was bound with a dirty rag, instantly riveted my attention and stirred the chords of memory. Apparently, my appearance affected him in a like manner, for, as soon as he saw me he stopped, and, after regarding me for a moment with an astonished glare, flung up his arms and uttered a loud cry which sounded to me like "Hoya!" At the same moment, his companion started forward as if to intercept me.

That uncanny, Oriental alarm-cry, repeated now and echoed by the other two men, instantly warned me of my danger. I remembered its effect last time; indeed, the aid of memory was needless, for already a dozen windows were thrown up and a dozen shaggy heads thrust out, with open mouths repeating that ill-omened word, whatever it might be. Pocketing my dignity, I evaded the attempt to head me off and broke into a run with the cab-driver and the other man yelling at my heels.



Past the Lion of Judah I bolted and along the street beyond for some fifty yards; but now my imperfect recollection of the neighbourhood played me false. For, coming to a narrow turning on my right, I assumed it to be the one by which I had come, and did not discover my error until I had covered more than half its length, when a sharp turn revealed a blind end. But the discovery came too late. Already the place was humming like an overturned hive, and, when I spun about to retrace my steps, behold! the end of the little street was blocked by a yelling crowd.

There was nothing for it but to go back, which I did at a brisk walk; and when the mob came forward to meet me with the obvious intention of obstructing my retreat, I charged valiantly enough. But, of course, it was hopeless. A score of dirty hands grabbed at me as I strove to push my way through and in a few moments I was brought to a stand with both my arms immovably held, and then began to be slowly pushed and dragged forward; and all around me were those strange, pale, greasy, alien faces with their high cheek bones and beady eyes, all jabbering vociferously in an uncouth, alien tongue. Suddenly, out of this incomprehensible babel issued the welcome sound of some thing resembling English speech.

“Wot’s the good of makin’ all this rumpus? Give the bloke a clout on the ‘ed and let ‘im go.”

I looked round at the speaker and instantly recognised the man who had given me the ‘snide’ half-crown at Byles’s Wharf; and even in my bewilderment, I could see that he was obviously nervous and uneasy.

“Let ‘im go!” exclaimed a flat-faced, hairy alien who was hanging on to my arm. “You do not know zat he have try to kill poor Mr. Gomorrah!”

“I know,” said the other. “E ‘it ‘im on the ‘ed. And wot I says is, ‘it ‘im on the ‘ed and let ‘im ‘ook it. Wot’s the good of raisin’ a stink and bringin’ the coppers round?”

“He shall pay for vot he ‘ave done, Mr. Trout,” the other replied, doggedly; and at this moment, my acquaintance with the bandaged head pushed his way through the crowd and stood for a few moments gloating over me with an expression of concentrated vindictiveness; and certainly, the presence of the bandage after all these weeks suggested that he had some excuse for feeling annoyed with me. I thought that he was about to take ‘consideration for value received’ forthwith, but then he altered his mind, and, with a savage grin, directed his friends (as I gathered) to bring me along to some more convenient place.

“Don’t be a fool, Gomorrah,” urged my friend—whose name appeared to be Trout. “You’ll get yourself and the rest of us into the soup if you ain’t careful. This ‘ere is England, and don’t you forget it.”

His warnings, however, had no effect, and, once more an effort was made to propel me in the desired direction. It was clear to me that I was being led to the slaughter—not, however, like a lamb (whose policy I have always considered a mistaken one), for I proceeded to make things as uncomfortable as possible for the men who were holding me; who, to do them justice, retaliated effectively in kind. The proceedings became distinctly boisterous with considerable wear and tear of my clothing and person, and our progress was neither dignified nor rapid. Suddenly, the man who was clinging to my right wrist, breathlessly addressed the still-protesting Trout.

“Here come Mr. Zichlinsky. Now ye shall see.”

I looked anxiously at the new-comer who was thrusting through the crowd, and, as he came into view, I had two instantaneous impressions. First, in spite of his shabby, ill-fitting clothes, he was obviously of a totally different social class from the others. Secondly, though he was certainly a stranger, his face seemed to awaken some dim and vague reminiscence. It was a villainous face—dead white with a pair of strangely colourless eyes of the palest grey; and the pallor of eyes and skin was intensified by a brush of jet-black hair that stood straight up on his hatless head. Though not actually uncomely, his appearance and expression were evil to the point of repulsiveness.

These were but momentary impressions of which I was but half aware; for there was matter enough of another kind to keep my attention fully occupied. As soon as Mr. Zichlinsky had worked his way through to me, he introduced himself by slapping my face and remarking, with a sort of wild-cat grin: “So you haf come to see us again. Zis time you shall haf a brober velcome.”

With this he slapped my face again, and then grabbing a handful of flesh and clothing together, helped the others to drag me along. Mr. Trout made yet one more appeal.

“For Gawd’s sake, Mr. Zichlinsky, don’t go and do nothing stoopid. This ain’t Russia, yer know—”

Zichlinsky turned on him as if he would have bitten him. “Have I ask for you to tell me vot I shall do? Keep your hands out of my business!”

But there was yet another protestor. I could not see him, and, though I could hear his voice—speaking in barbarous French—I could make out only a word or two. But of those words, two—“la pucelle”—conveyed to me the gist of the matter.

Zichlinsky answered him less savagely and in excellent French: “It is not only revenge, though this beast has robbed me of a fortune. But he knows too much, and you can see for yourself he is a spy.”

Here he refreshed himself again by slapping my face, and then, apparently goaded to fury by the recollection of his wrongs, snarled and bared his teeth like a dog, and, seizing my ear, began to pull and twist it with the ferocity of a madman. The pain and consequent anger scattered the last remains of my patience and caution. Wrenching my left hand free, I shot out my fist with the full strength of an uncommonly strong arm.

My knuckles impinged on his countenance exactly between his eyes, and the weight of the blow flung him backward like a capsized ninepin. If there had been room, he would have measured his length on the ground. As it was, some of his friends caught him, and he leaned against them motionless for a few seconds apparently dazed, while from the crowd a deafening yell of execration arose. Then he recovered himself, and, with a horrid, womanish shriek, came at me with all his teeth exposed. And now I could see that he held a long, pointed knife in his hand.

I suppose that, until my time comes, I shall never be so near death as I was at that moment. The man was within a foot of me and his arm was swung out to strike. The nearest wretches in the crowd glared at me with gloating, fascinated eyes while my own followed the outward swing of the knife.

And then, in an instant, the fateful thing happened: A pair of strong hands—I think they were Trout’s—seized and held the outswung arm. The din of triumphant yells died down suddenly, giving place to a strange silence. The hands which gripped my arms relaxed their hold so that I could shake myself free. I cast a bewildered glance around, and then I saw the cause of this singular change. Above the heads of the crowd appeared two constabulary helmets, and in another moment two stalwart policemen (the police patrol in pairs in neighbourhoods of this type) pushed their way to the centre of the throng. Zichlinsky hurriedly put away his knife—but not before one of the policemen had observed it—and was in the act of withdrawing when a stern official voice commanded him to stay.

“Now,” said the constable who had noticed the knife, “what’s going on here?”

Mr. Trout hastened to explain. “It’s a parcel of foolery, constable, that’s what it is. A silly mistake. They took this young man for somebody else and they was going to wallop ‘im.”

“Seem to have done a fair amount of walloping already,” the constable remarked apropos of my rather dishevelled condition. “And one of them,” he added, fixing an accusing eye on Zichlinsky, “was going to do the walloping with a knife. I saw you putting it away. Now what might your name be?”

The question was evidently anticipated for Zichlinsky replied, promptly: “Jacob Silberstein.”

“And where do you live?”

“I lodge with Mr. Gomorrah.”

“Oh,” said the constable, “you live with old Solomon Gomorrah, do you? That isn’t much of a testimonial.”

He produced a large, black-covered note-book in which he entered the particulars while the other constable peered curiously over his shoulder.

“What’s that?” the latter asked. “Did he say he lived at Sodom and Gomorrah?”

“No,” his colleague explained. “Solomon Gomorrah is a man—at least he’d pass for one in the monkey-house at the Zoo. One of these cag-mag tailors. Makes shoddy trousers. What they call in Whitechapel a kickseys builder. You’ll know all about Solomon when you’ve been a little longer on this beat.” He ran an expert eye over the remaining bystanders (the production of the note-book had occasioned a rapid dwindling of the assembly, though curiosity still held the less cautious) and demanded: “But what was it all about? What did they want to wallop this young fellow for?”

Mr. Trout would have essayed to explain, but he was forestalled by an elderly Jewess who looked as if she might have been “collected” from the Assyrian room at the British Museum. “He is a vicked man! He have try to kill poor Mr. Gomorrah.”

“Nothing of the sort!” said Trout. “T’wasn’t this bloke at all. They thought ‘e was ‘im, but it wasn’t. It was another cove altogether. ‘E ‘it ‘im on the ‘ed.”

The constable’s unsympathetic comment on this slightly confused explanation was that it probably served him right; “but,” he asked, “where is Gomorrah?”

“Seems to have hooked it,” said Trout, looking round vaguely, and I then observed that Zichlinsky had also taken the opportunity to fade away. The constable turned to me somewhat wearily and asked:

“What is your name, sonny, and where do you live?”

“My name,” I replied, “is Jasper Gray, and I live at 165, Great Ormond Street.”

“Quite a treat to hear a Christianlike name,” said the officer, writing it down. “So you don’t belong to this select residential neighbourhood; and if you will take my tip, you’ll clear out of it as quickly as possible. Better walk with us up to Commercial Road East.”

I accepted the invitation gladly enough, and we turned away together from the now silent and rapidly emptying street, and as we went, the senior constable put a few judicious questions. “Do you know what the rumpus was about? Why did that man Silberstein want to knife you?”

“He said I had robbed him of a fortune. I don’t know what he meant. I have never seen him before, to my knowledge. But his name is not Silberstein. It is Zichlinsky. I heard them call him by that name.”

“Oh, Zichlinsky, is it?” said my friend, fishing out the note-book again. “Probably a ‘wanted’ name as he gave a false one. We must see who he is. And now, here we are in Commercial Road East. You’d better have a penn’orth on a bus. Safer than walking. Got any coppers?”

He was slipping his hand into his trousers pocket, but I assured him that I was solvent to the extent of twopence, whereupon, waving away my thanks, he hailed a west-bound Blackwall omnibus and stood by to see me safely on board.

I was not sorry to sink down restfully on a cushioned seat (the constable had directed me to travel inside) for I had had a strenuous finish to a rather fatiguing morning. And as the omnibus rumbled along west ward I reflected on my late experiences, and once more the voice of conscience made itself heard. Evidently, Pentecost Grove was a veritable nest of criminals of the most dangerous type. Of those criminals I knew enough to enable the police to lay hands, at least on some and probably on all. Hitherto I had, for purely selfish reasons, kept my knowledge to myself. Now it was time for me to consider my duties as a citizen.

So I reflected as the leisurely omnibus jogged on along the familiar highway, and the sordid east gradually gave place to the busy west. When I dropped off opposite Great Turnstile my mind was made up. I would seek out the guardians of the law and tell them my story.

But once more Fate intervened. The guardians of the law forestalled my intentions; and the ears into which my story was delivered were not those of the mere official police.

---

## XII. — OF A HANSOM CAB AND A BLACK EAGLE

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

WHEN I came down to breakfast on the day after the inquest, I found the table laid for one; a phenomenon which Polton explained by informing me that "the doctor" had gone out early. "In a hansom," he added with a crinkly and cunning smile. "I fancy he's got something on. I saw him copying a lot of names out of the directory."

I followed his knowing glance to a side table, whereon lay a copy of the Post Office Directory, and had no doubt that he was right. The Post Office Directory was one of Thorndyke's most potent instruments of research. In his hands, and used with imagination and analytical feeling, it was capable of throwing the most surprising amount and kind of illumination on obscure cases. In the present instance, its function, I had no doubt, was quite simple; and so, on examination, it turned out to be. Although closed, the volume had two places conspicuously marked by slips of paper, one at the page devoted to rope manufacturers and the other at the list of ship chandlers; and a number of light pencil marks opposite names in the two lists showed that a definite itinerary had been made out.

"The doctor said I was to show you this," said Polton, laying an open envelope beside my plate.

I drew out the enclosed letter, which I found to be a short and civil note from Mr. Northbrook, inviting us informally to lunch at the Clarendon Club. The invitation was for the current day, and the note was endorsed by Thorndyke: "I have accepted, and shall be at the club at one o'clock. Come if you can."

I was a little surprised, for Thorndyke was evidently full of business, and I suspected that Northbrook merely wanted to extract comments on the inquest; but it was quite convenient for me to go, and, as Thorndyke clearly wished me to—quite possibly for some definite reason—I strolled forth in good time and made my way to the rendezvous by the pleasant way of St. James's and the Green Park.

Northbrook's intentions were as I had supposed, and I have no doubt that, in the course of a very pleasant lunch, he may have elicited some interesting comments on the previous day's proceedings. But Thorndyke was an extremely difficult man to pump; the more so as he had the manner of discussing affairs without any appearance of reservation. But I noted that no inkling was conveyed to Northbrook of any dissent from the finding of the jury.

I found myself speculating from time to time on Thorndyke's object in wasting rather valuable time on this leisurely and apparently purposeless conversation. But towards the end of the meal I received a sudden enlightenment. "This," he said, "I take to be the table at which Sir Edward usually took his meals?"

"Yes," replied Northbrook, "and a very pleasant table it is, looking out right across the Green Park. You judged, no doubt, by the fact that Joseph Wood is waiting on us?"

"You are quite right," said Thorndyke; "and that reminds me that I should like to have a word or two with Joseph Wood, presently."

"But certainly, my dear sir. You shall have an opportunity of interviewing him in the strictest privacy."

"Oh, that is not necessary at all," said Thorndyke. "There are no secrets. I merely wanted him to amplify one of the points in his evidence. Perhaps I may ask him now, as I see he is coming with the coffee."

"Do so, do so, by all means," said Northbrook, evidently delighted at the chance of hearing the "amplification."

Thus invited, Thorndyke addressed the waiter as he placed the coffee on the table.

"I wanted to ask you one or two questions about your evidence at the inquest concerning the hansom in which Sir Edward drove away."

"Yessir," said Wood, standing stiffly at attention.

"It seemed to me that you had an impression that there was someone in it when it drew up for him to get in."

"Yessir. I had. I didn't say so at the inquest, because I was there to tell what I saw, not what I thought."

"You were perfectly right," said Thorndyke. "It was for the coroner to ask for your opinions if he wanted them. But you did think so?"

"Yessir. I didn't see Sir Edward hail the cab, and I don't think he did. He just stopped and the cab drew up. Then he got in and the cab drove away. I didn't see him speak to the cabman, and I don't believe he did, for the man started off and whipped up his horse as if he knew where he had to go."

"You said you didn't notice the number of the cab. Of course, you would not."

"No, sir. I hadn't no occasion to."

"Did you notice what the cab was like—whether there was anything unusual in its appearance?"

"Yessir, I did notice that. You couldn't help noticing it. That cab," he continued solemnly, "must have been the great-grandfather of all the cabs in London. You never see such a shabby old rattle-trap. Got an old round dickey with a sheet-iron back, like I remember when I was a boy, and, if you will believe me, sir, iron tyres! Iron tyres in this twentieth century! Why that cab must have been fifty years old if it was a day."

"Why didn't you say that in your evidence, Wood?" Northbrook demanded.

"Nobody asked me, sir," was the very reasonable reply.

"No. And, after all, I suppose it didn't very much matter what the cab was like. Do you think so, doctor?"

"It would have been helpful if we could have identified the cab and ascertained if anyone was in it and where it went to. That might have enabled us to fill in the picture. However, we can't; but, all the same, I must thank you, Wood, for telling me what you noticed."

After this little episode, I was not surprised when Thorndyke became suddenly conscious of the passage of time.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed with a glance at his watch, "how the minutes slip away in pleasant society! We shall have to get on the road, Jervis, and let Mr. Northbrook retire to his office. It was most kind of you to invite us, Mr. Northbrook, and we have both enjoyed a very agreeable interlude in the day's work."

He finished his coffee and we both stood up; and after a few more exchanges of compliments, we took our departure. As we descended the steps, a disengaged hansom approached and drew up in response to Thorndyke's hail. I stepped in, and, as my colleague followed, I heard him give the destination: "New Scotland Yard, Whitehall Gate."

"That waiter man's information was rather startling—at least, it was to me," I remarked as the cab horse padded away to the accompaniment of his softly tinkling bell.

"It is a very valuable addition to our small stock of facts," Thorndyke replied. "And how extraordinarily opportune Northbrook's invitation was. I was casting about for some way of getting a talk with Wood without making a fuss, and behold! Northbrook solves the difficulty in the simplest fashion. What did you think of the other point; the possible presence of some other person in the cab?"

"I think it is more than merely possible. I should say it is very highly probable, especially in view of the peculiarity of the cab. And, of course, this new information confirms very strongly your suspicion that the Stratford vehicle was really a hansom."

"It does," he agreed; "in fact I am assuming as a working hypothesis that the cab which bore Sir Edward away from the club, conveyed his body to Piper's Row. On that assumption I am now going to Scotland Yard to find out what facilities there are for tracing a cab the number of which is unknown. I should like to see Miller in the first place if we are lucky enough to catch him."

By this time our 'gondola' was turning from Trafalgar Square into Whitehall, and I was noting how strikingly it contrasted with the 'rattle-trap' that Wood had described. This was a typical West End hansom, as smart and clean as a private carriage; furnished with gay silken blinds and at each side with a little mirror and a flower-holder containing a bunch of violets; and it slid along as smoothly as a sleigh, without a sound beyond the gentle and musical tinkle-tinkle of the bell on the horse's collar.

"If you want to catch Miller," said I, as we approached the main gateway of the Police Head quarters, "you are just in time. I see him coming out across the courtyard."

In effect, the Superintendent emerged into Whitehall just as we got out of the hansom, and, observing us, stopped to wait for us.

"Were you wanting to see me?" he asked with an inflection that subtly conveyed the earnest hope that we were not. Thorndyke evidently caught that faint overtone, for he replied: "Only for a moment. Which way are you going?"

"Westminster Station—underground."

"So are we; so we can talk as we go. What I want to know is this: there are still in London a few old hansom cabs with unconverted iron tyres. Now, could your people produce a list of those cabs?"

Miller shook his head. "No," he replied. "The register doesn't give particulars of the furnishing of particular cabs. Of

course, we could find out by means of what they call an ad hoc investigation. But it would be a troublesome business. Possibly Inspector Radcliffe might be able to give you some information. He is our principal specialist in public vehicles."

He paused and seemed to reflect for a few moments. Then, suddenly, he emitted a soft laugh as if he had remembered something amusing. Which, in fact, turned out to be the case, for he resumed: "Talking of iron-tired cabs, Radcliffe told me a rather quaint story some time ago. Nothing much in it, but your question brought it to mind. It seems that a certain constable whose beat included Dorchester Square was going his round rather late one evening when he noticed a hansom cab drawn up about the middle of the south side of the square. There was no sign of the driver, and no one minding the horse; and as this was not quite according to Cocker, it naturally attracted his attention. But what specially tickled him was the way the horse was secured. The reins were made fast to a lamp-post with a clove hitch, just as a waterman makes fast his boat's painter to a railing or a thin iron post. The constable was a Margate man and familiar with the ways of boatmen, so it struck him as rather funny to see a cab moored to the lamp-post like a boat.

"However, he didn't take any notice but went off on his beat. When he came round the square the next time, the cab was still there and there was still no sign of the driver. He began to think it a bit queer, but he didn't want to make a fuss unnecessarily. But when he came round the third time and found the cab still there, he began to look into things. First he noticed that the cab was a most shocking old ramshackle—battered old round-backed dickey and iron tires—sort of cab that Queen Elizabeth might have driven about in; and then he looked at the horse and saw that it looked ready to drop with exhaustion. Just then as the sergeant happened to come round, the constable drew his attention to the cab, and the sergeant detailed another constable to take it round to a livery stable. There they gave the poor old horse a drink and a feed, and they say that he went for the oats as if he'd never tasted any before and nearly swallowed the nose-bag.

"Next morning, having found out from the register that the cab came from a little private yard down Mile End way, one of our men took it there and interviewed the owner, who drove it himself. It was a queer affair. The owner was a Polish Jew, about as unlike a horsey man as you can imagine. But what struck our man principally was that the fellow seemed to be in a blue funk. His story was that he had gone into a pub to get a drink, leaving the cab in charge of a man who happened to be loafing outside, and when he'd had his drink and come out, the cab was gone. Asked why he hadn't given information to the police, he said he hadn't thought of it, he was so upset. And that was all our man could get out of him. But as it was obvious that there was something behind the affair, our man took the fellow's name—though it was on the register—and reported the incident to Radcliffe.

"That's the story. I don't know whether it is of any interest to you, but if it is, I will tell Radcliffe to let you have particulars if you care to look him up. And he might be able to tell you about some other cabs with iron tyres."

Thorndyke thanked the Superintendent and said that he would certainly avail himself of the assistance thus kindly offered. Then, as the train began to slow down he rose. (I have not interrupted Miller's narrative to describe our movements but I may explain that, at Westminster, we had all taken tickets, Miller's being for Bishopsgate and ours for the Monument and that we had all boarded the same east-bound train.) When the train stopped we shook hands with the Superintendent and got out, leaving him to pursue his journey.

"That Polish gentleman sounds suspiciously like one of our friends," I remarked as we made our way out of the station.

"He does," Thorndyke agreed. "The man and the cab seem to fit the circumstances. It remains to be seen whether the date will. But I shall take an early opportunity of calling on Inspector Radcliffe and getting more precise details."

"Where are we going now?" I asked, having noted that our course seemed to be riverward.

"The Old Swan Pier," he replied, "whence we shall embark for a short voyage. The object of that voyage will, I hope, appear later."

As Thorndyke's answer, while withholding the explanation, did not deprecate speculation on my part, I gave the possibilities due consideration by the light of our further proceedings. From the Old Swan Pier we boarded one of the excellent and convenient river steamers which plied on the Thames in those days, by which we were borne eastward beneath the Tower Bridge and down the busy Pool. Cherry Gardens Pier was reached and left behind without supplying any hint, nor was I any the wiser when, as the boat headed in towards The Tunnel Pier, Wapping, my colleague rose and moved towards the gangway.

From the head of the pier, Thorndyke turned west ward along High Street, Wapping, commenting on our surroundings as he went.

"A queer, romantic old neighbourhood, this, Jervis; dull and squalid to look at now but rich in memories of those more stirring and eventful days which we think of fondly with the advantage of not having had to live in them. We are now passing Execution Dock, still, I believe, so called though it is now a mere work-a-day wharf. But a century or so ago you could have stood here and looked on a row of pirates hanging in chains."

"I shouldn't mind if you could now," I remarked, "if I could have the choosing of the pirates."

Thorndyke chuckled. "Yes," he said, "there was no nonsense about legal procedure in those days. If the intermediate stages were not all that could be desired, the final ones had the merit of conclusiveness. Here we approach The Town of Ramsgate Inn and Wapping Old Stairs, the latter a little disappointing to look at. The art of seasoning squalor with picturesqueness seems to have been lost. This is the goal of our pilgrimage."

As he spoke, he turned in at the gateway of a small dock and began to walk at a reduced pace along the quay. I looked

around in search of some object that might be of interest to us but my glance met nothing beyond the craft in the basin—mostly lighters and Thames barges—the dreary dock buildings, the massive mooring-posts and bollards and here and there a life-buoy stand. Suddenly, however, I became aware that these last, which my eye had passed almost without notice, were not viewed with the same indifference by Thorndyke, for he walked straight up to the nearest one and halted before it with an air of obvious interest. And then, in a moment, I saw what we had come for.

The lifebuoy stand was in the form of a screen supported on two stanchions. In the middle of the screen, under a little pent-house, was a massive wooden hook on which was hung the life-buoy and a coil of smallish rope. Neither the buoy nor the rope was secured in any way, but either or both could be freely lifted off the hook. I thought at first that Thorndyke was about to lift off the coil, but he merely sought one of the ends of the rope, and, having found it, looked at it for a few moments with close attention. Then, having spread out with his thumb the little brush of fibres that projected beyond the whipping, he made a more minute examination with the aid of his pocket lens. Finally, without comment, he handed the end of the rope and the lens to me.

A moment's careful inspection through the glass was sufficient.

"Yes," I said, "there is no doubt about it. I can see the red and the green threads plainly enough through the lens though they are mighty hard to see with the naked eye. Which is unkind to the thief as giving him a false sense of security."

"It is for the thief, like the rest of us, to know his job," said Thorndyke, producing from his pocket the invaluable calliper gauge. He took the rope from me, and having measured the diameter, continued: "The agreement is perfect. This is a four-strand rope three eighths of an inch in diameter and having the two 'rogues' threads' of the same colour and similarly placed. So we may say that the place of origin of the Piper's Row rope is established beyond doubt."

At this moment an amphibious-looking person in a peaked cap who had been approaching slowly and with a somewhat stealthy manner, made his presence known.

"What's the game?" he enquired, and then, by way of elucidation: "What are yer up to with that rope?"

Thorndyke faced him genially.

"You, I take it, are the dock keeper?"

"I ham," was the concise reply. "And what abaat it?"

"I should like, if you would not mind," said Thorndyke, "to ask you one or two questions. I may explain that I am a lawyer and am, at the moment, rather interested in the subject of rope-stealing. These life-lines look to me very exposed and easy to steal."

"So they are," our friend replied in a slightly truculent tone, "but what else can you do? Make 'em fast with a padlock, I suppose! And then you'd be in a pretty fine 'ole if a bloke went overboard and nobody hadn't got the key."

"Very true," said Thorndyke. "They must be free to lift off at a moment's notice. I see that. But I expect you find one missing now and again."

"Now and again!" repeated the dock-keeper. "I tell you, the way them ropes used to disappear was somethink chronic."

"That was before you took to marking them, I suppose?"

"How did you know we marked 'em?" our friend enquired suspiciously; and as Thorndyke silently held up the free end, he continued: "If you spotted them marks, you won't be much good to the spectacle trade. But you are quite right. Before we took to marking 'em they used to go one after the other. Couldn't keep one no how. And we lost one or two—three altogether—after we took to the marks. But we got back two of 'em and dropped on the coves that pinched one of 'em; and now they've ogled that there's something wrong with our ropes and they leaves 'em alone—leastways they have for the last week or two."

Here he paused, but neither of us made any comment. Guided by long experience, we waited for the inevitable story to emerge; and sure enough, after a brief interval, our friend resumed:

"Three ropes we lost after the marks was put in, and we got back two. The first one I found in a junk shop in Shadwell 'Igh Street. The bloke said he bought it of a stranger, and p'raps he did. Nobody could say he didn't, so there was no use in makin' a rumpus. I just collared the rope and told him to keep a sharper look out in future. The second rope I spotted laying in a boat alongside Hermitage Stairs. Nearly missed it, I did, too, for the artful blighters had gone and dyed it with cutch. Made it look just like a ky-ar rope. But I looks at it a bit hard and I thinks it looks uncommon like our rope, barrin' the colour; four strands, same size, looked about the same length as ours—ten fathoms, that is, to a inch—and it seemed to be laying spare in the boat. So I jumps down—there wasn't nobody in the boat at the time—and I has a look at the cut end. And there was our marks quite plain in spite of the cutch.

"Now it happened that while I was overhauling that rope, a bobby came out on the head of the stairs and stood there a-twiggin' of me.

"That your boat?" he says.

"No,' I says, 'it ain't.'

"Then,' he says, 'what are you doin' with that rope?' he says.

“So I nips up the stairs with the rope in my hand and tells him how things is and who I am.

“‘Well,’ says he, ‘are you goin’ to charge this man with stealin’ the rope?’

“‘No,’ I says, ‘I ain’t,’ I says. ‘I’m a-goin’ to pinch this rope,’ I says, ‘and you’ve caught me in the very act, and you’re goin’ to run me in, and you’re goin’ to bring this bloke along to make the charge and to swear to his property.’

“The copper grins at this. ‘You seem to be a pretty fly old bird,’ he says, ‘but it’s a sound wheeze. You’ll catch him on the hop if he swears to the rope.’

“Just then two blokes come down to the stairs. They take a long squint at me and the copper and then down they goes to the boat. One of ‘em was a reglar Thames water rat and the other was one of them foreign sheenies—hair down on his shoulders and a beard what looked as if he’d pinched it out of a horse hair mattress. The copper grabs hold of my wrist and runs me down after them.

“‘Here,’ he says to the water rat, ‘is this your boat?’

“Water rat didn’t seem quite sure whether it was or not, but at last he said he supposed it was.

“‘Well,’ says the copper, ‘I’ve just caught this man stealing rope out of your boat, and I’m going to take him along to the station, and you two have got to come along with me to identify your property.’

“Then I saw that my wheeze wasn’t going to work. Water rat bloke had rumbled me—seen me at the dock, I expect.

“‘Wot property are yer talkin’ about,’ says he, beginning to cast off his painter from the ring. ‘That there rope don’t belong to me. Someone must have dropped it into the boat while we was up at the pub.’

“The copper reaches out and grabs the painter so that they couldn’t hike off and he says: ‘Well, it’s somebody’s rope and it’s been pinched, and you’ve got to come along to the station to tell us about it.’

“I thought those coves was going to give trouble, but just then a Thames Police gig came along and the copper beckoned to ‘em. So they pulls in and one of the water police helped us to take the two blokes to the station. I went along quite quiet, myself. When we got there, the Inspector asks the water rat what his name was. Water rat didn’t seem quite sure about it but at last he says: ‘Frederick Walker,’ he says, ‘is my name,’ he says.

“‘No, it isn’t,’ says the Inspector. ‘Think again,’ he says. ‘Last time you was James Trout and you lived in King David Lane, Shadwell. Live there still?’

“‘Yus,’ says Trout. ‘If you knowed, what did you ask me for?’

“‘We don’t want any of your sauce,’ says the Inspector; and then he turns to the sheeny. ‘What’s your name and address?’ he says.

“The sheeny shakes his head like as if he was trundling a mop. ‘No speak English,’ says he.

“‘Oh, rats!’ says the Inspector, ‘you can’t have forgot the English language in a couple of months. Last time you was Solomon Gomorrah and you lived in Pentecost Grove and was a tailor by trade. Any change?’

“‘No,’ says Solomon. ‘It vas chust ze same.’

“‘Well,’ says the Inspector, ‘you’ll have to stay here while I send a man round to see that the addresses are correct. Sure you don’t want to make any change?’

“They said no; so I left the rope with the Inspector and came away.”

“And what was the end of it?” Thorndyke asked.

“That was,” our friend replied. He expectorated scornfully and continued: “Both of ‘em swore before the beak that it wasn’t their rope, and we couldn’t prove that it was, so he dismissed the case and told ‘em to be more careful in future.”

“And with regard to the third rope that you lost?”

“Ah,” said the dock-keeper, regretfully, “I’m afraid that’s a goner. Now that they know it’s got a secret mark, they’ll most likely have traded it away with some foreigner.”

“You haven’t done so badly,” said Thorndyke. “I must compliment you on the smart way in which you found the lost sheep. And we needn’t despair of the third rope. If you can give me the exact dates and the names and addresses, I may be able to help you, and you will certainly help me. I want to get a list of these rope thieves.”

Our friend hereupon produced from his pocket a portentous note-book, the leaves of which he turned over rapidly. Having at last found the entry of the transaction, he read out the particulars, which Thorndyke duly entered in his own note-book.

“The length of these ropes, you say, is ten fathoms?”

“Ten fathoms exactly to a inch. I cut ‘em off the coil myself and put on the whippings at the ends.”

“I should have thought you would want them longer than ten fathoms,” Thorndyke remarked.

“Why?” our friend demanded. “It’s long enough for a man overboard. Of course, if he was going for a channel swim that would be a different matter. We haven’t provided for that.”

"Naturally," said Thorndyke. "And now, perhaps I had better make a note of your name and address in case I have any information to give you."

"My name," said the dock-keeper, "is Stephen Waters, and any letters addressed to me at the office here—Black Eagle Dock, Wapping—will find me. And I may as well have your name and address, if you don't mind."

Thorndyke produced a card from his case and handed it to Waters with the remark: "Better not mention to anyone that you have been in communication with me. The less we tell other people, the more we are likely to learn."

Mr. Waters warmly agreed with these sentiments (though his own practice had not been strikingly illustrative of them), and when we had thanked him for having so far taken us into his confidence, we bade him adieu and made our way out of the dock premises.

"Well," I exclaimed as we turned out into the High Street, "this has been a regular windfall. But how did you discover the place?"

"Oh, that was simple enough," replied Thorndyke. "I just took a list of rope-merchants and ship chandlers from the Post Office Directory and started systematically to call on them. One was bound, sooner or later, to strike the right one. But I was lucky from the beginning, for the second rope-merchant whom I called on gave me the name of a rope-maker who made a speciality of private ropes of unusual construction and particularly of marked ropes. So I went straight off to that maker and gave him the description of our rope, when it turned out that it was one of his own make. He had a big coil of it actually in stock and was good enough to give me a sample (when I had given him my card) as well as a direction to Black Eagle Dock. That was a stroke of luck, for I obtained, after a couple of hours' search, information that I had been prepared to spend a week on. But this meeting with Waters is a much bigger stroke of luck. We could, and should, have discovered eventually all that he has told us, but it would have involved a long and tedious investigation. This has been an excellent day's work."

"By Jove, it has!" I exclaimed. "With the Polish-Hebrew cab-driver and Mr. William Trout and the venerable Sodom-and-Gomorrah, we seem to have gathered up the whole party."

"We mustn't let our conclusions get ahead of our facts," Thorndyke protested. "We are doing extremely well. Our great need was to give to certain unknown persons 'a local habitation and a name.' We seem to have done that; but we have to make sure that it is the right habitation and the right name. Possibly the finger-prints may dispose of that question definitely."

Unfortunately, however, they did not. As we entered the Temple by the Tudor Street gate, we perceived Superintendent Miller advancing towards us from the direction of the Mitre Court entrance. He quickened his pace on seeing us and we met almost on our own threshold.

"Well, Doctor," he said as we turned into the entry together, "I thought I would come along and give you the news, though it isn't very good news. I'm afraid you've drawn a blank."

"Finger-prints unknown or undecipherable?" asked Thorndyke.

"Both," replied Miller. "Most of the marks are just smears, no visible pattern at all. There are two prints that Singleton says he could identify if they were in the records. But they are not. They are strangers. So that cat won't jump. Then there is a print—or rather part of a print, and bad at that—which Singleton thought, at first, that he could spot. But he decided afterwards that it was only a resemblance. You do get general resemblances in finger-prints, of course, but they don't stand systematic checking, character by character."

"And this one failed to pass the test?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well, it wasn't that so much," replied Miller. "It was a bad print and the identification was very uncertain; and when we came to look up the records, it didn't seem possible that the identification could be right. The print in the register that it resembled was taken from a man named Maurice Zichlinsky who was tried under extradition procedure for conspiracy to murder. The alleged crime was committed at St. Petersburg, and, as the extradition court convicted him, he was handed over to the Russian police, and a note on the record says that he was tried in Russia and sentenced to imprisonment for life. Consequently, as he is presumably in a Russian prison at this moment, it seems to be physically impossible that this print can be his. That is, if these are recent finger-prints."

"They are," said Thorndyke. "So I am afraid it is an absolute blank. Can you show me which are the possible prints?"

"Yes," replied Miller. "Singleton marked them on the photograph and wrote the particulars on the back. Here they are," he continued, laying the photograph on the table; "these are the two possibles and this one, numbered 'three', is the one that might have been the Russian's."

"And with regard to the second photograph?"

"Ah," said Miller, producing it from his pocket, "Singleton was rather interested in that. Thought the prints looked as if they had been taken from a dead body."

"He was quite right," said Thorndyke. "They were; and the question was whether there was any trace of them on the other photograph."

"There was not," said Miller. "Of course, negative evidence is not conclusive, but Singleton couldn't find the least sign of



them and he is pretty sure that they are not there. You see, even a smear may give you a hint if you know what you are looking for."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "we have not drawn an utter blank. We can take it that our known prints are not among the group, and that is something gained."

I now inducted the Superintendent into an easy chair while Thorndyke placed by his side a decanter of whisky, a siphon and a box of cigars. It has sometimes struck me that my learned colleague would have made an excellent innkeeper, judging by the sympathetic attention that he gave to the tastes of his visitors in the matter of refreshments. Brodribb delighted in a particular kind of dry and ancient port and Thorndyke kept a special bin for his exclusive gratification. Miller's more modern tastes inclined to an aged and mellow type of Scotch whisky and a particular brand of obese and rather full-flavoured cigar; and his fancy also received due consideration.

"I was going to ask you," said Thorndyke, when the Superintendent's cigar was well alight, "at what time Radcliffe is usually to be found in his office."

"You needn't find him at all," replied Miller. "I thought you would probably want particulars of that hansom I told you about, so I got them for you when I saw him this afternoon."

"That was very thoughtful of you, Miller," said Thorndyke, watching with lively interest the extraction of a large pocket-book from the Millerian pocket.

"Not a bit," was the reply. "You are always ready to give me a bit of help. The driver's name, which is also that of the owner, as they are one and the same person, is Louis Shemrofsky—there's a name for a hansom cab driver!—and he keeps his blooming antique at a stable yard in Pentecost Grove; that is one of those little back streets somewhere between Commercial Road East and Shadwell—a pretty crummy neighbourhood, if you ask me—full of foreign crooks and shady Jews and what they call refugees."

"I suppose," said Thorndyke, "you didn't happen to note the date on which the cab was found in Dorchester Square?"

"Oh, didn't I?" replied Miller. "Do you suppose I don't appreciate the importance of dates? The cab was found in the Square on Friday, the nineteenth of June, at about ten-fifteen p.m."

Thorndyke probably experienced the faint sense of disappointment of which I was myself aware. For, of course, it was the wrong date. Meanwhile, Miller watched him narrowly, and, after a short interval, was fain to let the cloven hoof come plainly into view.

"That interest you particularly?" he asked with suppressed eagerness.

Thorndyke looked at him thoughtfully for a few moments before replying. At length he answered:

"Yes, Miller, it does. Jervis and I have a case in hand—a queer, intricate case with very important issues, and I think that this man, Shemrofsky, comes into the picture. We have quite a lot of evidence, but that evidence is in isolated patches with wide spaces between."

"Why not let me try to fill up some of the spaces," said Miller, eagerly, evidently smelling a case with possibilities of glory.

"I am going to ask for your collaboration presently," Thorndyke replied. "But just at the moment, the case is more suitable to my methods than to yours. And there is no urgency. Our activities are entirely unsuspected."

The Superintendent grinned. "I know," said he. "I've seen you do it before. Just work away out of sight until you are ready and then pounce. Well, Doctor, when you want me you know where to find me, and meanwhile, I'll do anything you want done without troubling you with inconvenient questions."

When the Superintendent had gone, I ventured to raise a question that had arisen in my mind during the conversation.

"Aren't you a little over-critical, Thorndyke? You spoke of spaces between patches of evidence but it seems to me that the case comes together very completely."

"No, Jervis," he replied. "It does not. We are getting on admirably, but we have not made out a coherent case. We have facts and we have probabilities. But the facts and the probabilities do not make complete contact."

"I do not quite follow you," said I.

"Let us look at our evidence critically," he replied. "The vehicle which went to Piper's Row was probably a hansom. Very probably but not certainly. That probable hansom was probably Shemrofsky's hansom and probably driven by Shemrofsky. We have to turn those probabilities into certainties. Again, the rope which was used to hang Sir Edward was stolen from Black Eagle Dock. We may treat that as a fact. It was dyed with cutch. That again is a fact. The rope found in the possession of Trout and Gomorrah was stolen from Black Eagle Dock and it was dyed with cutch. That is a fact. That it was stolen by, and was the temporary property of, one or both of them is highly probable but cannot be proved. The magistrate dismissed it as unproved. Gomorrah lives in Pentecost Grove. Shemrofsky's cab is kept in Pentecost Grove. Those are facts. The inference that Gomorrah and Trout and Shemrofsky were concerned in conveying that dyed rope (together with the body) to Piper's Row is very highly probable, but it cannot be certainly connected with the known facts."

"Again, the murder of Sir Edward we may regard as a known fact. He was probably murdered in a house in which is a

tailor's work-room. Therefore he was probably murdered in Gomorrah's house. Still it is only a probability. And here there is a considerable space in our evidence. For Sir Edward was murdered by being drowned in salt water in which numerous herring-scales were suspended. Now, we have not traced that salt water or those herring-scales."

"No, we have not; and I can't even make a guess at what they may have been. Have you formed any theory on the subject?"

"Yes, I have a very definite opinion. But that is of no use. We have an abundance of excellent inferences. What we want is some new facts."

"But surely, Thorndyke," I protested, "a body of facts such as you have here, affording a series of probabilities all pointing in the same direction, is virtually equivalent to proof?"

"I don't think so," he answered. "I distrust a case that rests entirely on circumstantial evidence. A learned judge has told us that circumstantial evidence, if there is enough of it, is not only as good as but better than direct evidence, because direct evidence may be false. I do not agree with him. In the first place, direct evidence which may possibly be false is not evidence at all. But the evil of circumstantial evidence is that it may yield false inferences, as it has often done, and then the whole scheme is illusory. My feeling is that circumstantial evidence requires at least one point of direct evidence to establish a real connection of its parts with the question that is to be proved.

"For instance, if we could prove directly that Shemrofsky's cab was actually at Piper's Row on that Sunday night, we should link up all the other facts. Or again, if we could establish the fact of personal contact between Sir Edward and any of these suspected persons, that would connect the other facts with the murder. Or again, if we could prove by direct evidence that the remainder of that rope was or had been in the possession of Gomorrah or Trout or Shemrofsky, the other facts, and our inferences from them, would immediately become of high evidential value.

"And that is what we have got to do. We have to obtain at least one undeniable fact which will establish incontestably the actual connection of one or more of these persons with Sir Edward or with Number Five Piper's Row."

"Yes," I admitted, "I suppose you are right. It is an obscure case, after all. And there is one curious feature in it that puzzles me. I can't understand what object these men could have had in murdering Sir Edward. Nor can I imagine how he came to be in any way mixed up with a parcel of ragamuffins like these."

"Exactly, Jervis," said he. "You have struck the heart of the mystery. How came Sir Edward to be in this neighbourhood at all? We infer that he came voluntarily in Shemrofsky's cab to Pentecost Grove, probably with some other person. But why? And who was that other person? When we ask ourselves those questions, we cannot but feel that there is something behind this murder that we have not yet got a glimpse of."

"This seems to have been a conspiracy carried out by a gang of East End criminals of the lowest class. Legally speaking, they are no doubt the principals in the crime. But I have the feeling—the very strong feeling—that behind them was some person—or some persons—of a very different social class, who were pulling the strings. The motive of this crime has not yet come into sight. Probably if we can secure the actual murderer or murderers, the motive will be revealed. But until it is, our work will not be completed. To lay hands on the criminal puppets will not be enough. We have to secure the master criminal who has furnished at once the directing and the driving force."

---

### XIII. — MR. BRODRIBB'S DISCOVERY

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

I AM not quite clear how the matter arose. We had, I remember, been discussing with Mr. Brodribb some of the cases in which a contact occurs between legal and scientific theory, and eventually the conversation drifted towards the subject of personal identity in connection with blood relationship and heredity. Mr. Brodribb quoted a novel, the title of which has escaped me, and asked for an opinion on the problem in heredity that the story presented.

"I have rather forgotten the book," he said, "but, so far as my memory serves me, the story turns upon the appearance in a certain noble or royal family of a man who is completely identical in appearance and outward characteristics with a more or less remote ancestor—so completely identical that he can be passed off as a survival or re-incarnation of that very person. Now, I should like to know whether such a thing can be, in a scientific sense, admitted as possible."

"So should I, and so would a good many other people," I interposed. "But I don't think you will get Thorndyke to commit himself to a statement as to the possibility or impossibility of any particular form of inheritance."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "A scientist is chary of declaring anything to be absolutely impossible. It is better to express it in terms of probability. Evidently a probability of one to a thousand millions is in practice equivalent to impossibility. The probability is negligible. But the statement keeps within the limits of what is known and can be proved."

"Hm," grunted Brodribb. "Seems rather a hair splitting distinction. But what is the answer to my question in terms of probability?"

"It is not at all simple," replied Thorndyke. "There are quite a number of different lines of probability to follow. First there is the multiplication of ancestors. A man has two parents, to both of whom he is equally related; four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and so on by a geometrical progression. The eighth ancestral generation contains two hundred

and fifty-six ancestors, to all of whom he is equally related. Then the first question is, what is the probability of his completely resembling one of these two hundred and fifty-six and bearing no resemblance to the other two hundred and fifty-five?"

"Of course," said Brodribb, "the probability is negligible. And since *de minimis non curat lex* we may say that it doesn't exist."

"So it would seem," Thorndyke agreed. "But it is not quite so simple as that. Have you given any attention to the subject of Mendelism?"

"Mendelism?" repeated Brodribb, suspiciously. "What's that? Sounds like some sort of political claptrap."

"It is a mode of inheritance," Thorndyke explained, "by which certain definite characteristics are transmitted unchanged and undiminished from generation to generation. Let us take the case of one such characteristic—colour-blindness, for instance. If a colour-blind man marries a normal woman, his children will be apparently normal. His sons will be really normal but of his daughters some will be carriers of colour-blindness. A proportion of their sons will be colour-blind. If these sons marry, the process will be repeated; normal sons, daughters who are carriers and whose sons may be colour-blind. Tracing the condition down the generations, we find, first a generation of colour-blind men, followed by a generation of normal men, followed by a generation of colour-blind men, and so on for ever. The defect doesn't die out, but it appears only in alternate generations. Now see how this affects your question. Supposing that, of my two hundred and fifty-six ancestors of the eighth generation, one had been colour-blind. That could not affect me, because I am of the odd generation. But my father—who would have been of the even generation—might have been colour-blind; and if I had had married sisters, I might have had colour-blind nephews."

"Yes, I see," said Brodribb, in a slightly depressed tone.

"And you will also see," pursued Thorndyke, "that this instance will not fit your imaginary case. The inheritance is masked by continued change of family name. Colour-blind Jones has normal sons, and colour blind grandsons. But those grandsons are not named Jones. They are his daughter's sons. Suppose his daughter has married a Smith. Then the defect has apparently moved out of the Jones family into the Smith family. And so on at each reappearance. It always appears associated with a new family name. But this will not do for the novelist. For his purpose inheritance must usually be in tail male to agree with the devolution of property and titles.

"But even now we have not opened up the whole problem. We have to consider what characteristics go to the making of a visibly distinguishable personality and how those characteristics are transmitted from generation to generation."

"Yes," Brodribb admitted, wearily, "it is damned complicated. But there is another question, which I was discussing the other day with Middlewick. How far is a so-called family likeness to be considered as evidence of actual relationship? What do you say to that?"

"If the likeness were real and would bear detailed comparison," replied Thorndyke, "I should attach great importance to it."

"What do you mean by a real likeness?" asked Brodribb.

"I mean, first, that subtle resemblance of facial character that one finds in families. Then special resemblance in particular features, as the nose and ears—especially the ears—the hands and particularly the finger-nails. The nails are nearly as distinctive as the ears. If, added to these resemblances, there were similarities of voice and intonation and of gait and characteristic bodily movements, I should think that these agreements as a whole established a strong probability of blood relationship."

"That was Middlewick's view, though he did not present it in so much detail. I have always had rather strong doubts as to the significance of apparent personal likeness and I have recently met with a very striking case that serves to justify my rather sceptical attitude. I told Middlewick about it, but, of course he was not convinced, as I could not produce my example for his inspection."

"We aren't as unbelieving as Middlewick," said I. "Tell us about your case."

Brodribb fortified himself with a sip from his glass and smiled reminiscently. "It was an odd experience," said he, "and quite romantic in a small way. You remember my telling you about a visit that I paid with Sir Giles Farnaby to the studio of my friend and client, Miss Vernet?"

"I remember. It was in connection with the adventure of the disappearing pickpocket in the convict suit."

"Yes, that was the occasion. Well, while Miss Vernet was assisting the police to search the premises, Sir Giles and I examined the picture that she was at work on. It was a large subject picture, called 'An Aristocrat at Bay,' showing a French noblewoman of the Revolution period standing in a doorway at the top of a flight of steps around which a hostile mob had gathered. Miss Vernet was apparently then working at the principal figure, for she had a model posed on the studio throne in the correct costume.

"Now, as soon as Sir Giles clapped eyes on the picture, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and then he drew my attention to what he declared to be a most extraordinary coincidence. It seemed that the picture of the French lady was an exact counterpart of a portrait by Romney that hangs in the small drawing-room at Bradstow, the architrave of the doorway representing the frame of the portrait. It was not only that the costume was similar and the pose nearly the same

—there would have been nothing very astonishing in that; but he declared that the facial resemblance was so perfect that the figure in the picture might have been copied from the portrait. I wasn't able to confirm this statement at the time, for, although I remembered the portrait and recognised the general resemblance, I hadn't his expert eye or his memory for faces. But what I could see was that the figure that Miss Vernet was painting was a most excellent likeness of the very handsome young lady who was posing on the throne.

"A few days later, however, I had to go down to Bradstow to see the bailiff and I then took the opportunity to have a good look at the portrait—which represented a Miss Isabel Hardcastle; and I assure you that Sir Giles's statement was absolutely correct. The figure in Miss Vernet's picture might have been a portrait of Isabel Hardcastle. But that figure, as I have said, was a perfectly admirable portrait of the young lady who was acting as the model."

"That is very interesting, Brodribb," said I. "Quite a picturesque incident as you say. But what is it supposed to prove?"

Brodribb looked at me fiercely. "The testimony of a reputable eye-witness," said he, "is good enough for a court of law. But apparently you won't accept anything short of the production in evidence of the actual things; the portrait, the picture and the model. Must see them with your own eyes."

"Not at all," I protested. "I am not contesting your facts. It is your logic that I object to, unless I have misunderstood you. I ask again, what is your instance supposed to prove?"

"It proves," Brodribb replied severely, "that your theory—and Thorndyke's and Middlewick's—that personal resemblance is evidence of blood-relationship, is not supported by observed facts. Here is a portrait of Isabel Hardcastle, by a famous painter and presumably like her; and here is a young lady, the model, a perfect stranger, who is exactly like that portrait, and therefore, presumably, exactly like Isabel Hardcastle."

"But," I objected, "you have only proved half of your case. What evidence have you that this young lady—Miss Vernet's model—is not a blood-relation of Isabel Hardcastle?"

Brodribb turned as red as a lobster (boiled) and began to gobble like a turkey. Then, suddenly, he stopped and gazed at me with his mouth slightly open.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose you are right, Jervis. Of course I was taking that for granted."

With this he let the argument drop and seemed to lose interest in the subject for he sat sipping his wine with a profoundly reflective air but speaking no word. After sitting thus for some time, he roused himself by a visible effort, and, having emptied his glass, rose to take his leave. But even as he shook our hands and moved towards the door, I had the impression that he was still deep in thought, and I seemed to detect in his bearing a certain something suggestive of a settled purpose.

"I am afraid, Jervis," said Thorndyke, as our friend's footsteps died away on the stairs, "you have given Brodribb a sleepless night and perhaps sent him off to explore a mare's nest. I hope he has not taken you too seriously."

"If you come to that," I retorted, "you are the real offender. It was you who tried to prove that ancestral characteristics might reappear after several generations—and you didn't do it."

"No," he admitted, "the argument came to a premature end. Mendelian factors were too much for Brodribb. But it is an interesting problem; I mean the question as to the number of factors that go to the making of a recognisable personality and the possibilities of their transmission. The idea of a more or less complete re-incarnation is attractive and romantic, though I am afraid that the laws of chance don't offer much encouragement. But to return to Brodribb; I deeply suspect that you have sent him off in search of a re-incarnated Isabel Hardcastle. I only hope that he won't be too seriously disappointed."

"I hope so, too. When I saw how he took my objection, I was sorry I had spoken. For poor old Brodribb would give his eyes to discover some hitherto unknown Hardcastle whose claim he could set up against that of the present heir presumptive, though I don't see that a young lady would help him, seeing that the settlement is in tail male."

"No; but he is probably looking farther afield. We may safely assume the existence of at least one male relative, alive or dead."

"Yes, she certainly must have, or have had, a father. But there again one doesn't see any loophole for Brodribb. There can't be any unknown members of the family nearer to Sir Edward than David Hardcastle, unless he is thinking of the elusive Gervase. Perhaps he is."

"I have no doubt that he is," said Thorndyke, "and I wish him luck though it doesn't look like a very hopeful quest. But time will show."

In effect, time did show and the time was not very long. Our suspicions as to Brodribb's activities were fully justified. He had 'gone a-angling'. But the fish that he landed was as great a surprise to himself as to us.

The news reached us four days after the conversation which I have recorded. It was brought by him in person, and even before he spoke, we knew by the way in which he danced into the room, fairly effervescing with excitement, that something of more than common import had happened.

"Congratulate me, gentlemen," he exclaimed. "I have made a discovery, thanks to Jervis's confounded leg-pulling."

He flopped down in a chair, and, when we had made suitable demonstrations of curiosity, he continued: "I have been making enquiries about the young lady who was posing as the Aristocrat for Miss Vernet."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "And who is she?"

"That I can't say exactly at the moment. But, to begin with, she is a he. The young lady turns out to be a boy."

"Ha!" said I, "we smell a mystery."

"You smell the solution of a mystery," he corrected. "The young lady is not only a boy. She is the boy."

"The boy?" Thorndyke repeated enquiringly.

"Yes, the boy. The disappearing pickpocket. The gentleman in the convict suit. The police were quite right, after all. He had popped in through the open studio window. But I had better begin the story at the beginning.

"It appears that this lad—Jasper Gray by name—is employed by a firm of wholesale stationers, Sturt and Wopsalls, to deliver parcels. He seems to be a highly respectable youth—"

"With a secret pocket in the back of his waistcoat," I murmured.

"Yes, that is a queer feature, I must admit," said Brodribb. "But both the ladies seem to have the highest opinion of his character."

"Plausible young rascal, I expect," I said. "Naturally, he would be able to bamboozle a pair of innocent spinsters."

"That is quite possible," Brodribb admitted, "and he is certainly most unusually good-looking. I saw that, for myself, though the wig and the costume may have helped. But to continue; he came to the studio to deliver a roll of paper, and Miss Vernet was so struck with his appearance that she persuaded him to pose for the principal figure in her picture. It was a regular arrangement. He came and took up the pose every morning before going to work.

"Now you see how the escape was managed: When he found himself in the Tottenham Court Road in a prison suit, he simply made a bee-line for the studio. He knew about the open window and made straight for it and sprang in. Then the two women bundled him into the dressing-room where he made a quick change into his costume. They hid the prison clothes and he took up his pose on the throne. By the time the police arrived he had become transformed into a lady of the old noblesse. It was a delightful comedy. Now I can appreciate the solemn way in which Miss Vernet conducted the two unsuspecting constables over the premises to search for the missing convict."

"Can you?" said I, with mock severity. "I am surprised at you, Brodribb, a respectable solicitor, chortling over a manifest conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice. You are not forgetting that secret pocket or the fact that Sir Edward Hardcastle's seal was found in it?"

"Of course I am not," he replied. "That is the importance of the discovery. I expect he picked the seal up, though as you say, there is the secret pocket to be accounted for. But we shall soon know all about it. Miss Vernet has arranged for him to meet me at the studio the day after to-morrow. He was quite willing and he is prepared to tell me anything I want to know. I suggested that you might come with me and there was no objection to that, so I hope you will be able to come. It ought to be quite interesting to us all. What do you say?"

There was no doubt in my mind as to what Thorndyke would say, for, evidently, this young scallywag was one of the indispensable missing links.

"I will come with you with the greatest pleasure," he replied, "and no doubt Jervis will come too and add to the gaiety of the proceedings."

"Good," said Brodribb. "I will let Miss Vernet know." And with this he took his departure with an appearance of satisfaction that seemed to me to be somewhat disproportionate to the results of his embassy. For, whereas to us the tracing of the seal held untold potentialities of enlightenment, to Brodribb it could appear no more than a matter of curious and trivial interest.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed when I commented on Brodribb's remarkable self-complacency. "I had the same impression. Believing as he does, that Sir Edward made away with himself, he can have no reason for attaching any special significance to the fact that the seal was in the lad's possession. But he is obviously extremely pleased with himself; and I suspect we shall find that he has not disclosed to us the whole of his discovery. But we shall see."

And in due course we did see.

---

## XIV. — NEW LIGHT ON THE PROBLEM

(JASPER GRAY'S NARRATIVE)

IT was while I was carrying out some improvements on the studio skylight that Miss Vernet made her momentous communication. Of course, she didn't know that it was momentous. Neither did I. You never do. Providence has a way of keeping these little surprises up its sleeve and letting them fly at you when you are looking the other way.

But it was not only her communication that held such unsuspected potentialities. My very occupation, trivial and

commonplace as it appeared, was fraught with a hidden significance which it was presently to develop together with that of other seemingly trifling actions.

At the moment, I was standing on the top of a rickety pair of steps which Miss Vernet was anxiously steadying while I fastened a rope to a swinging fan light. Hitherto that fan-light had been clumsily adjusted from below with the aid of a sort of boat-hook. Now, by means of the rope and a cleat on the wall, it could be conveniently set at any angle and securely fixed.

As I came down the steps, having completed the job, Miss Vernet murmured her thanks, mingled with expressions of admiration at the ingenuity of the arrangement. Then, after a pause, she said a little hesitatingly: "I have a confession to make, Jasper. I hope you won't be angry, but I have to a certain extent broken your confidence."

I looked at her in surprise but made no comment. There was nothing to say until I knew what she meant, so I waited for her to continue.

"Do you remember Mr. Brodribb?" she asked.

"I think so," I replied. "Isn't he the gentleman with beautiful silky white hair who came with Sir Giles to look at your picture?"

"Yes," she said eagerly. "I am glad you remember him. Well, for some reason, he is greatly interested in you. He came here yesterday on purpose to ask me about you. He put quite a lot of questions, which, of course, I couldn't answer, but I did let out about your coming here in those prison clothes."

"Is that all?" I exclaimed. "What does it matter? I don't mind his knowing. I don't care who knows now that the affair is over and we have sent the clothes back." (I had addressed the parcel myself to the Governor of Pentonville Prison and delivered it in person at the gate.)

She was obviously relieved at my attitude, but I could see that there was something more to come.

"I don't know why he is so concerned about you," she continued, "but he assures me that his interest is a proper and legitimate interest and not mere curiosity. He would very much like to meet you and ask you one or two questions. He thinks that you might be able to give him some information that would be very valuable and helpful to him. Do you think you would mind meeting him here one day?"

"Of course I shouldn't. Why should I? But I think he must be mistaken if he thinks I could tell him anything that would matter to him."

"Well, that is his affair," said she, "and naturally you won't tell him anything that you don't want to. I am sure, when you meet him, you will like him very much. Everybody does."

Accordingly we proceeded to arrange the date of the meeting which was fixed for the ensuing Thursday afternoon, subject to my obtaining leave of absence from Sturt and Wopsalls; and then, as an afterthought, Miss Vernet mentioned that Mr. Brodribb would like to bring a friend and fellow lawyer with him. This sounded rather portentous, but I made no objection; and when I went away (having secured the rope on its cleat) I left Miss Vernet happy in having successfully carried out the negotiations on Mr. Brodribb's behalf.

Sturt and Wopsalls raised no difficulties about the afternoon off, it being the first time that I had ever made such a request. I cleared up most of the deliveries in a strenuous morning, and, having made myself as presentable as the resources of my wardrobe permitted, presented myself at the studio punctually at three o'clock in the afternoon. I was the first arrival and thereby was enabled to assist the two ladies in setting out a tea-table that made my mouth water; and I was amused to observe that, of the three, I was the only one who was not in a most almighty twitter.

But even my self-possession sustained a slight jar when the visitors arrived; for Mr. Brodribb had gone beyond the contract and brought two friends with him; both, as I assumed, lawyers. But it appeared that I was mistaken, for it turned out that they were doctors. And yet, later, it seemed as if they were lawyers. It was rather confusing. However, they were all very agreeable gentlemen and they all addressed me as "Mr. Gray," which caused me to swell with secret pride and induced in Miss Brandon a tendency to giggles.

One thing which astonished me was their indifference to the delicacies with which the table was loaded. I had seen such things in pastry cooks' windows and had wondered sometimes if they tasted as well as they looked. Now I knew. The answer was in the affirmative. But these gentlemen trifled negligently with those incredible cakes and pastries as if they had been common 'tommy', and as for Mr. Brodribb he positively ate nothing at all. However, the delicacies weren't wasted. Miss Vernet knew my capacity for disposing of nourishment and kept a supply moving in my direction.

Of course, there were no questions asked while we were having tea. The gentlemen mostly talked with the ladies about pictures and painting and models, and very entertaining their conversation was, only I found myself wishing that Mr. Brodribb had taken something to eat to distract his attention from me. For whenever I glanced at him, I met his bright blue eye fixed on me with an intensity of interest that would have destroyed my appetite if the food had not been so unusually alluring. Not that he was the only observer. I was distinctly conscious that his two friends, Dr. Jervis and Dr. Thorndyke, were 'taking stock of me', as our packer would express it; but they didn't devour me with their eyes as Mr. Brodribb did.

As the closing phases of the meal set in, the conversation turned from the subject of pictures and models in general to Miss Vernet's picture and her model in particular, and while the two ladies were clearing away, I was persuaded to go to

the dressing-room and put on my costume for the visitors' entertainment. When I came forth and took up my pose on the throne, my appearance was greeted with murmurs of applause by all, but especially by Mr. Brodribb.

"It is perfectly amazing," he exclaimed. "I assure you Thorndyke, that the resemblance is positively photographic."

"Do you think," Dr. Thorndyke asked, "that you are making full allowance for the costume and the pose?"

"I think so," Mr. Brodribb answered. "To me the facial resemblance seems most striking. I should like you to see the portrait for yourself. Nothing short of that I know will convince you."

"At any rate," said Dr. Thorndyke, "we can understand how those unfortunate constables were deluded. I am all agog to hear Mr. Gray's account of that comedy of errors."

On this hint I retired once more to shed my gorgeous plumage and when I returned to the studio, I found half a dozen chairs arranged and the audience in waiting.

"Now, Jasper," said Miss Vernet, "you understand that Mr. Brodribb wants you to tell us the story in full detail. You are not to leave anything out."

I grinned a little uncomfortably and felt my face growing hot and red. "There isn't much to tell," I mumbled, "I expect Miss Vernet has told you all there is."

"Never mind," said Mr. Brodribb, "we want the whole story. To begin with, what took you to the River Lea?"

I explained about the parcel and the railway journey, and having thus broken the ice, and got fairly started, I went on to recount the successive events of that day of mingled joy and terror, gradually warming to my task under the influence of the genuine interest and amusement that my audience manifested. So great was their appreciation that—my shyness being now quite dissipated—I was quite sorry when I had brought my adventures down to the moment when I changed into my costume and took up my pose. For that was the end of my story—at least I thought it was. But my legal friends soon undeceived me. The end of the story was the beginning of the cross-examination.

Mr. Brodribb started the ball. "When that convict ran off with your clothes did he take anything of value with them? Anything in the pockets, I mean."

"Yes," I answered. "There was my return ticket in the trousers' pocket and an emerald in a secret pocket at the back of the waistcoat."

"An emerald?" said Mr. Brodribb.

"Well, it was a green stone of some kind and it must have come out of a signet ring, because it had a seal engraved on it; a little castle with a motto underneath—'Strong in Defence'—and above it the head of some sort of animal that looked rather like a crocodile."

"What is known in heraldry as a Wyvern, I think. Now would you recognise an impression of that seal?"

I assured him that I most certainly should, where upon he carefully extracted from a pocket letter-case an envelope on which was a black seal.

"Now," said he, handing it to me, "just look at that seal and tell me if you think it was made with the stone that you had."

I looked at the seal and glanced at the address on the envelope, and then I grinned.

"I am quite sure it was," I answered, "because I made it myself."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Mr. Brodribb. "How was that?"

I described the incident of the dropped letter and was rather surprised at the amount of amusement it created, for I didn't see anything particularly funny in it. But they did; especially Dr. Jervis, who laughed until he had to wipe his eyes.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said he, "but the recollection of the great pow-wow in New Square was too much for me. Mr. Gray had us all guessing that time."

"Yes," chuckled Mr. Brodribb, "we were a trifle out of our depth, though I would remind you that Thorndyke gave us practically the correct solution. But, now, I wonder if you would mind, Mr. Gray, telling us how that seal stone came into your possession?"

I had been expecting this question, and obviously it had got to be answered. For the seal had probably been stolen and I had to make it clear that it had not been stolen by me. It would not be enough merely to say that I had found it.

"I have no objection at all," said I, "but it is rather a long story."

"So much the better," said Dr. Jervis, "if it is as amusing as the last. But tell us the whole of it."

"Yes," urged Dr. Thorndyke, "begin at the beginning and don't be afraid of going into detail. We want to know all about that seal."

My recent experience in Pentecost Grove had completely cured me of any tendency to reticence. Here was an opportunity to expose that nest of criminals and I resolved to take it. Accordingly, in obedience to Dr. Thorndyke's directions, I began with the incident of the truck and the egg-chest and recounted in full detail all the adventures and perils of that unforgettable day.

"Bless the boy!" exclaimed Miss Vernet, as I described my entry into the egg-chest on the schooner's deck, "he is a regular Sindbad the Sailor! But don't let me interrupt."

She did interrupt, nevertheless, from time to time, with ejaculations of astonishment and horror. But what interested me especially was the effect of my story on the three men. They all listened with rapt attention, especially Dr. Thorndyke; and I had the feeling that they were comparing what I was telling them with something that they already knew. For instance, when I described Ebbstein's house and the work-room with the goose on the fire and the sour smell and the big tub of herrings and cabbage, Dr. Jervis seemed to start; and then he turned to Dr. Thorndyke, and looked at him in a most singular way. And Dr. Thorndyke caught his eye and nodded as if he understood that look.

When I came to my escape from Ebbstein's house I hesitated for a moment, being, for some reason, a little unwilling to tell them about Miss Stella. But I had promised to give them the whole story and I felt that perhaps this part, too, might mean more to them than it did to me. So I described the rescue in detail and related how we had escaped together. And very glad I was that I had not held anything back. For I could see at once by Dr. Jervis's manner and expression that there was more in my story than I had understood.

"I hope," Miss Vernet interrupted as I was describing the escape from the empty house, "that you didn't kill that unfortunate wretch. It would really have served him right, but still—"

"Oh, it's all right," I reassured her. "I didn't kill him. I've seen him since."

This statement Dr. Thorndyke noted in a book which he had produced from his pocket and in which I had observed him jotting down short notes from time to time with a view, as I discovered later, to cross-examination, and to avoid interrupting my narrative. He was evidently deeply interested; much more so, I noticed, than Mr. Brodribb, who, in fact, listened with an air of rather detached amusement.

I now went on to describe our meeting with the hansom; and at the mention of that vehicle and the driver's name, Louis, Dr. Jervis uttered an exclamation of surprise or excitement. But the climax, for me, came when I brought my story to a close with our arrival at Miss Stella's house. Then, in an instant, Mr. Brodribb's detached interest gave place to the most intense excitement. He sat up with a jerk, and, having stared at me in astonished silence for a few moments, demanded:

"Dorchester Square, you say? You don't remember the number, I suppose?"

"It was number sixty-three," I replied.

"Ha!" he exclaimed; and then, "You didn't happen to learn the young lady's name?"

"I heard the footman refer to her as Miss Stella."

"Ha!" said Mr. Brodribb again. Then he turned to Dr. Thorndyke and said in a low, deeply impressive tone: "Stella Hardcastle. Paul's daughter, you know."

Dr. Thorndyke nodded. I think he had already guessed who she was—and for a little while no one spoke. It was Mr. Brodribb who broke the silence. "I've been a fool, Thorndyke. For the first—and last—time, I have set my judgement against yours. And I was wrong. I see it plainly enough now. I only hope that my folly has not caused a fatal hindrance."

Dr. Thorndyke looked at him with an extraordinarily pleasant smile as he replied: "We assumed that you would alter your mind when some of the facts emerged, and we have been working on that assumption." Then, turning to me, he said: "I have quite a number of questions to ask you, Mr. Gray. First of all, about that rope. You mentioned that you threw it on the foot board of the cab. Did you leave it there?"

Now, I had already noticed Dr. Thorndyke looking rather hard, now and again, at the rope that hung from the skylight, so I wasn't surprised at his question. But what followed did surprise me most uncommonly.

"No," I answered. "I brought it away with me."

"And what has become of it?"

I grinned (for I was pretty sure that he had 'ogled' it, as our packer would say), and pointed to the rope. "That is it," said I.

"The deuce it is!" exclaimed Dr. Jervis. "And a brown rope, too. This looks like another windfall, Thorndyke."

"It does," the latter agreed; and, rising, he stepped over to the cleat and taking the two ends of the rope in his hands, looked at them closely. Then he brought a magnifying-glass out of his pocket and had a look at them through that.

"Were both of these ends whipped when you found the rope?" he asked as Dr. Jervis took the glass from him and examined the ends through it.

"No," I answered. "Only one end was whipped. I did the other end myself—the one with the white whipping."

He nodded and glanced at Dr. Jervis, who also nodded. Then he asked: "Do you think, Miss Vernet, that we might have this rope down to examine a little more completely?"

"But, of course," she replied. "Jasper will—"

I didn't hear the finish, for I was off, hot-foot for the steps. Evidently there was mystery in the air and it was a mystery that I was concerned with. I had the rope down in a twinkling and handed it to Dr. Thorndyke, who had just taken



possession of the studio yard measure, which he now passed to Dr. Jervis.

"Measure the rope carefully, Jervis, and don't pull it out too taut."

I helped Dr. Jervis to take the measurement, laying the rope on the table and pulling it just taut but not stretching it, while Mr. Brodribb and the two ladies looked on, mightily interested and a good deal puzzled by the proceedings. When we had made the measurement, Dr. Jervis wrote the length down on a scrap of paper and then did the measurement over again with practically the same result. Then he laid the yard measure down and asked: "What do you say the length is, Thorndyke?"

"If the whole remainder is there," was the reply, "it should be forty-six feet, four and a half inches."

"It is forty-six feet, five inches," said Dr. Jervis, "which we may take as complete agreement."

"Yes," said Dr. Thorndyke, "the difference is negligible. We may take it as certain that this is the remainder."

"The remainder of what?" demanded Mr. Brodribb. "I see that you have identified this rope. What does that identification tell you?"

"It tells us," Dr. Thorndyke replied, "that this rope was stolen from Black Eagle Dock, Wapping, when it was sixty feet long; that a piece thirteen feet, seven inches long was cut off it; that that piece was taken in a two-wheeled vehicle—probably a hansom cab—on the night of Sunday, the twenty-first of June, to Number Five, Piper's Row, Stratford. Those facts emerge from the identification of this rope, from Mr. Gray's story and from certain other data that we have accumulated."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Brodribb. "Then this was the very rope! Horrible, horrible! But, my dear Thorndyke, you seem to have the whole of the case cut and dried! Can you give the villain a name?"

"We shall not mention names prematurely," he replied. "But we haven't finished with Mr. Gray yet. I think he has something more to tell us. Isn't it so? You said just now that you had seen the man whom you knocked on the head on some later occasion. Would you mind telling us about that?"

I didn't mind at all. On the contrary, I was only too delighted to put my new knowledge into such obviously capable hands. Therefore I embarked joyfully on a detailed narrative of my journey of exploration, to which Dr. Thorndyke listened with the closest attention, jotting down notes as I proceeded but never interrupting. Others, however, were less restrained, particularly Mr. Brodribb, who, when I had described the murderous attempt of the man with the knife, broke in excitedly: "You say that this man spoke in French to the other."

"Yes, and quite good French, too."

"Then we may take it that you understand French?"

"Yes, I speak French pretty fluently. You see, I was born in France or Belgium—I am not quite sure which—and we lived in France until I was nearly four. So French was the first language that I learnt. And my father speaks it perfectly, and we often converse in French to keep up our knowledge of the language."

He nodded as if the matter were quite important. Then he asked: "You say that this man accused you of having robbed him of a fortune?"

"Yes"; and here I repeated the exact words that the man had used.

"Have you any idea what he meant?"

"Not the least. So far as I know, I had never seen him before."

"You didn't by any chance hear what his name was?"

"Yes, I did. He gave the name of Jacob Silberstein to the policeman. But that was not his name. I heard two of the people call him Mr. Zichlinsky."

At this Mr. Brodribb fairly exploded. I have never seen a man so excited. He spluttered two or three times as if he was going to speak, and then, whisking an envelope out of his pocket, scrawled something on it, and, apologising to the rest of us, passed it to Dr. Thorndyke, who glanced at it and handed it to Dr. Jervis, remarking: "This is extremely valuable confirmation of what we had inferred. It seems definitely to establish the fact that Maurice Zichlinsky is in England—assuming this to be Maurice, of which I have little doubt."

Mr. Brodribb stared at him in astonishment. "How did you know that his name was Maurice?" he demanded.

"We have been looking into matters, you know," said Dr. Thorndyke. "But we mustn't interrupt Mr. Gray or he may overlook something important."

I had not, however, much more to tell, and when that little was told, I waited for the inevitable cross-examination.

"There are one or two points that I should like to have cleared up," said Dr. Thorndyke, glancing at his notes. "First, as to the cab that you saw in the yard. You seem to have had a good look at it. I wonder if you noticed anything unusual about the near wheel?"

"I noticed one thing," said I, "because I looked for it. There was a deep notch on the edge of the tyre. I fancy I made that

notch when I bumped the cab over a sharp corner-stone. The tyre was worn very thin. I wonder that the jolt didn't break the wheel."

"It is a mercy that it didn't," said he. "However, the notch was what we wanted to know about. And now, as to the names and addresses of these people. Can you give us those?"

"The street that I went to is Pentecost Grove. Ebbstein, and Jonas, the coiner, live at Number Forty nine. Gomorrah lives next door, Number Fifty, the house in which I found Miss Stella. Zichlinsky lives there, too. He lodges with Gomorrah. The cab-yard turns out of Pentecost Grove just opposite Ebbstein's house. It is called Zion Place. I don't know where Trout lives."

"He lives in Shadwell," said Dr. Thorndyke. "We have his address." On hearing which, Mr. Brodribb chuckled and shook his head. I think he found the doctor as astonishing as I did. He seemed to know everything. However, this seemed to finish the cross-examination, for Dr. Thorndyke now rose to depart and took leave of the ladies with polite acknowledgments of their hospitality. As he shook hands with me, he gave me a few directions concerning the rope.

"You had better put it away in a safe place," said he, "and remember that it is of the greatest value, as it will be produced in evidence in an important case. When the police take possession of it, which they will probably do very shortly, they will want you to certify to its identity. I will send you a rope to replace it for the skylight."

Finally, he took down my address in case he might have to write to me, and then he turned to Mr. Brodribb.

"You are not coming with us, are you?" he asked. "No," replied Mr. Brodribb. "I want to have a few words with Mr. Gray on another matter. Perhaps, if he is going homeward, I may walk part of the way with him."

On this hint, I, too, made preparations for departure, and we issued forth together in the wake of the two doctors.

"I want you to understand," said Mr. Brodribb as we walked up the mews, "that I am not poking my nose into your affairs from mere curiosity. If I seem to ask impertinent questions, believe me I have very good reasons."

"I quite understand that, sir," said I, wondering what the deuce was coming next. Nothing came for a little while, but at length he opened fire.

"You mentioned just now that you lived abroad in your early childhood. Have you any recollection of how and where you lived?"

"Very little. I was quite a small child when we came to England. I remember seeing dogs harnessed in carts and I have a dim recollection of an old woman in a big white cap who used to look after us. I expect we were very poor, but a little child doesn't notice that."

"No," said Mr. Brodribb with a sigh. "There are many advantages in being young. You don't remember your mother?"

"No. She died when I was quite an infant. But she must have been a very good woman, for my father once said to me that she had been a saint on earth and was now an angel in heaven. I think he was very devoted to her."

Rather to my surprise, Mr. Brodribb appeared to be deeply moved by my reply. For some time he walked on in silence, but at length, he asked: "Did you ever hear what your mother's name was?"

"Yes. Her Christian name was Phillipa."

"Ha!" said Mr. Brodribb in a tone of deep significance; and I wondered why. But I was quite prepared for his next question. "Your father, I take it, is a man of considerable education?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He is quite a learned man. He is a classical tutor—crams fellows for examinations in classics and mathematics."

"Do you happen to know if he was always a tutor, or if he ever had any other vocation?"

"I have an idea," said I, "that he was at one time a clergyman."

"Yes. Probably. Clergymen often do become tutors. You haven't any idea, I suppose, why he abandoned his vocation as a clergyman?"

I hesitated. I didn't like the thought of disclosing poor old Ponty's failings, but I remembered what Mr. Brodribb had said. And, obviously, there was something behind these questions.

"I suppose, sir," I said, at length, "there is no harm in my confiding in you. The fact is that my father is not very careful in the matter of stimulants. He doesn't ever get intoxicated, you know, but he sometimes takes a little more than would be quite good for a clergyman. I expect it is due to the rather dull, lonely life that he leads."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Mr. Brodribb, speaking with a singular gentleness. "I have noticed that classical tutors frequently seem to feel the need of stimulants. And it is, as you say, a dull life for a man of culture."

He paused, and seemed to be in a little difficulty, for after an interval he resumed in a slightly hesitating manner: "I have a sort of idea—rather vague and indefinite—but I have the feeling that I may have been slightly acquainted with your father many years ago, and I should very much like, if it could be managed, to see whether my memory is or is not playing me false. I don't suppose your father cares much for encounters with strangers?"

"No, he does not. He is extremely reserved and solitary."

"Exactly. Now if I could get an opportunity of seeing him without making any formal occasion—just a casual inspection, you know, even by passing him in the street—"

"I think you might have a chance now, sir," said I. "He has a teaching appointment from four to six on Thursdays and usually comes straight home. It is now a few minutes to six, so if we step out, we shall probably meet him. If we do, I will point him out to you and then you would like me to leave you, I expect."

"If you don't mind, I think it would be better," said he; "and if I may make a suggestion, it would be as well, for the present, if you made no mention of this conversation or of your having met me."

I had already reached this conclusion and said so; and for a while we walked on at a slightly quickened pace in silence. As we crossed the top of Queen Square by the ancient pump that stands in the middle of the crossing, I began to keep a sharp look-out, for Ponty was now due; and we had hardly crossed to the corner of Great Ormond Street when I saw the familiar figure turn in from Lamb's Conduit Street and come creeping along the pavement towards us.

"That is my father, sir," said I; "that old gentleman with the stoop and the walking-stick."

"I see," said Mr. Brodribb. "He has something under his arm."

"Yes," I answered; and there being no use in blinking the fact, I added: "I expect it is a bottle. Good evening, sir."

He shook my hand warmly and I ran on ahead and dived into our entry. But I didn't run up the stairs. A reasonable and natural curiosity impelled me to linger and see what came of this meeting. For some thing told me that Mr. Brodribb could, if he chose, enlighten the mystery of my father's past on which I had often vaguely speculated, and that these present proceedings might not be without some significance for me.

From the entry I watched the two men approach one another and I thought they were going to pass. But they did not. Mr. Brodribb halted and accosted Ponty, apparently to ask for some direction, for I saw my father point with his stick. Then, instead of going on his way, Mr. Brodribb lingered as if to ask some further questions. A short conversation followed—a very short one. Then the two old gentlemen bowed to one another ceremoniously and separated. Mr. Brodribb strode away down the street and Pontifex came creeping homeward more slowly than ever with his chin on his breast and something rather dejected in his manner.

He made no reference to the meeting when he entered the room, whither I had preceded him, but silently placed the bottle on the mantelpiece. He was very thoughtful and quiet that evening, and the matter of his thoughts did not appear to be exhilarating. Indeed he seemed to be in such low spirits that I found myself wishing that Mr. Brodribb had taken less interest in our affairs. And yet, as I watched poor old Pontifex despondently broaching the new bottle, my thoughts kept drifting back to that meeting and those few words of conversation; and again the suspicion would creep into my mind that perhaps the shadows of coming events were already falling upon me.

---

## XV. — THORNDYKE'S PLAN OF ATTACK

(DR. JERVIS'S NARRATIVE)

"A MOST astonishing experience, Thorndyke," I commented as we walked away from Miss Vernet's studio after our meeting with Jasper Gray (recorded above in his own words).

"Yes," he agreed; "and not the least astonishing part of it was the boy himself. A truly Olympian errand boy. I have never seen anything like him."

"Nor have I. As an advertisement of democracy he would be worth his weight in gold to a propagandist. If he could be seen strolling across the quadrangle of an Oxford College, old-fashioned persons would point him out as a type of the young British aristocrat. Yet the amazing fact is that he is just a stationer's errand boy."

Thorndyke chuckled. "I am afraid, Jervis," said he, "that as a demonstration of the essential equality of men he would fail, as demonstrations of that kind are apt to do on going into particulars. Our young friend's vocabulary and accent and his manners and bearing, while they fit his personal appearance well enough, are quite out of character with his ostensible social status. There is some mystery in his background. But we needn't concern ourselves with it, for I can see that Brodribb's curiosity is at white heat. We can safely leave the private enquiries to him."

"Yes. And I suspect that he is pursuing them at this moment. But, speaking of Brodribb, I think you rather took his breath away. He was positively staggered at the amount of knowledge that you disclosed. And I don't wonder. He was hardly exaggerating when he said that you had the whole case cut and dried."

"I wouldn't put it so high as that," said Thorndyke. "We can now be confident that we shall lay our hands on the murderer, but we haven't done it yet. We have advanced our investigations another stage and I think the end is in sight. But we have yet another stage before us."

"It is surprising," I remarked, "how our knowledge of the case has advanced step by step, almost imperceptibly."

"It is," he agreed, "and an intensely interesting experience it has been, to watch it closing in from the vaguest generalities to the most complete particularity. We began with a purely speculative probability of murder. Then the murder became an established fact and its methods and procedure ascertained. But the perpetrators remained totally unknown to us and even unguessed at. Then, as you say, step by step, our knowledge advanced. One figure after another came into view, first as mere contacts with the known circumstances, then as possible suspects, until at last we seem to have the whole group in view and can begin to assign to each his place in the conspiracy."

"It seems to me," said I, "that Jasper Gray's information should help us to do that off-hand."

"It is extremely valuable," he replied. "But the enormous importance of what he has told us is really tactical. He has placed an invaluable weapon in our hands."

"What weapon do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean the power to make an arrest whenever we please. And that, when the moment comes, will be the very keystone of our tactics."

"I don't quite see either point; how we have the power or what special value it is. You wouldn't suggest an arrest before you are prepared to prove the murder charge against a definite person."

"But that, I suspect, is precisely what we shall have to do. Let me explain. The abduction of Miss Hardcastle is a new fact. It is very illuminating to us, but we can't prove that it was connected with the murder of Sir Edward. Nevertheless, it is a crime, and we actually know two of the guilty parties, Shemrofsky and Gomorrah. With Gray's assistance, we could lay a sworn information now; and on his and Miss Stella's evidence, we could secure a conviction. Of course, we shall not do anything of the kind. We have got to make sure of the woman who lured the girl away. Brodribb evidently suspects that she is Mrs. David Hardcastle—at least that is what I gathered when he wrote down her maiden name, Marie Zichlinsky, for our information—and I think he is probably right. You remember that she had a brother who was convicted in Russia of a conspiracy to murder. He also thinks that the Zichlinsky who tried to murder Gray is that brother. And again I suspect that he is right.

"But these are only suspicions, and we cannot rush into action on suspicions. We have to prove them right or wrong. If we can turn our suspicions into demonstrable truths, we shall have our whole case complete and can act at once and with confidence."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"First, I propose to settle the question, if I can, as to whether the Zichlinsky of Pentecost Grove is the Maurice Zichlinsky whose finger-prints are in the records at Scotland Yard. If he is the same man, I shall then try to ascertain if the convict, Maurice Zichlinsky, is Mrs. David Hardcastle's brother."

"But I understood Brodribb to say that he was."

"So did I," said Thorndyke. "But I must get a categorical statement with particulars as to the date of the extradition proceedings. If Brodribb can confirm his implied statement, then I shall have to test our suspicion that the woman who

managed the abduction of Miss Stella was Marie Zichlinsky, alias Mrs. David Hardcastle."

"You will have your work cut out," I remarked. "I don't see how you are going to prove either proposition."

"There are no insuperable difficulties in identifying the woman," he replied, "though I have not yet made a definite plan. As to Zichlinsky, I shall ask Singleton to re-examine our finger-print."

"But he has already said that he can't identify it."

"That was not quite what I understood. I gathered that he recognised the print, but then rejected his identification on extrinsic evidence. He realised that a man who is in a Russian prison cannot make a finger print in London. But if I re-submit the print with the information that the man is believed to be in London and that there are circumstances which make it probable that the print was made by him, we may get an entirely different report; especially if I have previously communicated the facts to Miller."

I laughed with malicious glee. "Really, Thorndyke," I chuckled, "I am surprised at you! Actually, you are going to set Miller on to ginger up Singleton and induce him to swear to a doubtful finger-print. And this after all your professions of scepticism regarding finger-print evidence!"

"My dear Jervis," he replied with an indulgent smile, "let us be reasonable. If this finger-print conforms in pattern to the one at the Record Office, it is Zichlinsky's finger-print. There is no question of forgery. It is obviously a real finger-print. The only problem is its identity of pattern. And we are not proposing to ask for a conviction on it. We shall use it merely to enable us to secure the person of Zichlinsky and charge him with the crime. Nor need you be uneasy about Singleton. He won't swear to the print unless he is prepared to prove its identity in court, factor by factor, on an enlarged photograph."

"No, I suppose he won't. But what plan of action is in your mind? Assuming that all our suspicions are confirmed, including the finger-print; what do you propose to do?"

"I propose to make arrangements with Miller that the whereabouts of each of the parties shall be ascertained and an overwhelming force kept ready for action at a moment's notice. Then, at the appointed time, we shall swoop down on the whole crowd simultaneously—Mrs. David, Zichlinsky, Gomorrah, Shemrofsky, Ebbstein, and, if it seems practicable, James Trout."

"But," I protested, "you could never charge all these people with the murder. The magistrate would insist on your making out a prima facie case; and you couldn't do it."

"No," he replied. "But that is where Jasper Gray's information is so invaluable. We don't need a prima facie case for the charge of murder against any of these persons, excepting Zichlinsky. And in his case, the finger-print, which we are assuming to be provable, will be enough. In all the other cases, we shall proceed on different charges, on which we can make out a prima facie case. Mrs. David, Gomorrah and Shemrofsky will be charged with the abduction. Ebbstein—against whom we have nothing but deep suspicion—will be roped in as an accessory of the felonious proceedings of his lodger, Mr. Jonas, the ingenious manufacturer of half-crowns. As to Trout, I am not sure whether we can get him on suspicion of having stolen the rope. I should like to. He would be extremely useful. I must see what Miller thinks about it."

"But when you have got all these people by the heels? What then?"

"Ah, then we shall allow the subject of the murder to leak out; and it will be remarkable if, among this gang of rascals, there is not, at least, one who will be prepared to volunteer a statement. Take the case of Shemrofsky; he was probably a principal in the second degree as to the murder. It is unlikely that he took part in the actual killing; and if he did not, he will probably be very willing to clear himself of the major charge by giving evidence as to who actually committed the murder. Again there is Trout. He probably selected the house at Stratford. He probably stole the rope, and the fisherman's bend and the running bowline look like his work. He is an associate of Gomorrah's, but it is very unlikely that he had a hand in the murder. If he could be charged, he would almost certainly make for safety by putting the onus on the shoulders of the actual murderers."

"It seems a rather unsatisfactory method," I objected. "You are going to depend very largely on bluff."

"It is unsatisfactory," Thorndyke admitted, "but what else can we do? We know that these people conspired together to commit the murder. One or more of them did actually commit the murder; the rest are principals in the second degree. The only proceeding open to us is to charge them all and let them sort themselves out."

"But supposing they don't sort themselves out? What can you prove independently?"

"Let us see," he answered, "what sort of case we could make out. I am assuming that Singleton can identify the finger-print and that Stella and Gray can identify Mrs. David, because without that evidence we should not proceed at all. We should require further investigation. But, assuming those identifications, we shall proceed somewhat thus:

"First, we charge Mrs. David, Shemrofsky and Gomorrah with the abduction; and observe that we here bring into evidence the motive—the elimination of the principal beneficiary under Sir Edward's will, with reversion to the husband of Mrs. David. That charge we can prove conclusively.

"We then charge the whole group with conspiracy to commit murder. Here, again, the motive comes into view. The murder of Sir Edward leaves—or is believed to leave—the succession to the property and title open to the husband of Mrs. David."

"What about David, himself?"

"At present he doesn't seem to come into the picture, though, naturally, he lies under suspicion of complicity. We have no direct evidence against him. But to continue. The abduction, with its apparent motive, connects itself with the murder, of which the motive is similar. Mrs. David stands to gain by the success of both crimes. But we have proved her to be guilty of one of the crimes. This is presumptive evidence of her guilt in respect of the other crime, since the two crimes appear to be parts of the same transaction. Then the evidence against Zichlinsky operates against her since he is her brother and has no motive excepting that of benefiting her.

"Gomorrhah is implicated by the facts that the rope used to hang the deceased is known to have been in his possession; that Zichlinsky was his lodger; that he is proved to have been concerned in the abduction and was therefore a confederate of Mrs. David.

"Shemrofsky was concerned in the abduction and is thus implicated in the conspiracy. We can bring weighty evidence to prove that he was at Piper's Row on the night of Sunday, the twenty-first of June, and that he assisted to convey the body of the victim to that house.

"Zichlinsky is proved, by his finger-print, to have been in the Stratford house and to have handled the chair. He is Mrs. David's brother and so stands to benefit, indirectly, by the deaths of Stella and Sir Edward. His statement, overheard by Jasper Gray, would be admitted as evidence of his being an interested party.

"As to Trout, all that is actually against him is his connection with the rope. But, if the police could definitely connect him with the neighbourhood at Stratford, that would be a material point. The importance of getting him charged is that, although he was almost certainly an accessory, it is most improbable that he had any hand in the murder; and from what Gray has told us as to his efforts to restrain Zichlinsky and Gomorrhah, we may suspect that he disapproved of their violent proceedings and would not be prepared to take any risk in shielding them. He is really an outsider of the gang."

"Well," I said, "you have a better case than I thought, though it isn't up to your usual standard."

"No," he admitted, "but it is the best that we can do. And probably we shall get some further detail. We have not yet ascertained how much Miss Stella will be able to enlarge our knowledge. But, in any event, we have a substantial case to start with. We can prove the fact of the murder and the conveyance of the body to the house at Stratford; and by means of the rope, we can definitely connect this group of persons with the crime. Moreover, we can prove that one, at least, of those persons had a very strong motive for committing the murder and was known to have committed another crime—the abduction—apparently with the same motive."

"To say nothing," said I, "of the fact that the circumstances of the abduction strongly suggest an intention to commit another murder."

"Exactly," he agreed. "Zichlinsky's remark that he had been robbed of a fortune makes that fairly clear."

"I suppose," said I, after a pause, "that you now have a tolerably complete picture in your mind as to the actual course of events?"

"Yes," he replied. "Of course, it is largely inferential; but I think I can reconstruct the whole crime in outline with considerable confidence that my reconstruction is broadly correct. Perhaps it would be helpful to go over it and see exactly what we shall have to prove."

"It would be extremely helpful to me," I said, "seeing that it is, in effect, the case for the prosecution."

"Then," said he, "we will begin quite at the beginning and adopt the narrative style to save words. First some communication was made to Sir Edward, probably verbally and probably by some confidential envoy of Mrs. David's, begging him to grant an interview to some person who was unable to come to him. This person may have been her brother, who, being a fugitive from Russia, might naturally be in hiding and might be living in an otherwise unlikely neighbourhood. Sir Edward consented, with some misgivings, as we may judge from Weeks's description of his preoccupied state when he left home. It was arranged that Mrs. David should meet him with a hansom at an appointed place near his club and convey him to the place where the person was living. The approximate whereabouts of this person's place of abode was mentioned, as suggested by Sir Edward's precautions in leaving his valuables at the club; which also suggests that he was not without suspicions as to the nature of the transaction.

"On his arrival at Pentecost Grove, in Shemrofsky's cab, he was introduced to Zichlinsky; and, probably almost at once, the attack was made on him. I am disposed to think that the original intention was to hang him, but that, suddenly during the struggle, it became necessary to silence him. A knock on the head was not practicable as it would have produced a recognisable injury, and made the pretence of suicide untenable. The alternative, adopted on the spur of the moment, was to thrust his head into the brine tub; and this having been done, he was held there until he was dead."

"They must have been savage brutes!" I exclaimed. "But their savagery was their undoing. If they had hanged him, it would have been difficult to prove the murder, if not impossible."

"Hardly impossible, Jervis," said he. "You will remember that we had virtually decided against suicide before we saw the body. And then there were the shoes and the wheel-tracks. Still, the drowning made the case much more conclusive."

"By the way," said I. "You mentioned that you had a hypothetical explanation of the salt and the herring scales. Was it a brine tub that was in your mind?"

"It occurred to me as a possibility, and the only one I could think of. I happened to know that it is the habit of low-class East European aliens to keep in their living or working rooms a tub of brine containing herrings and cut cabbage. The crime seemed to be associated with that part of London in which colonies of these people are settled, and it had a certain crude atrocity that was unlike English crime. Then the appearances agreed with this supposition and with no other. The man had been drowned, but only his head and neck had been wetted. He might have been held over the side of a boat or a landing-stage; but that theory would not account for the salt and the herring scales. But a receptacle containing salt water and herrings met the conditions exactly. And that little shred of cabbage gave strong confirmation. Still, it was only a hypothesis; and even now it is but an inference. It remains to be proved."

"I don't think there is much doubt of it," said I, "though it had never occurred to me. Of course, when Jasper Gray mentioned the tub of herrings and cabbage floating in brine, the explanation came in a flash. But go on with your reconstruction."

"There isn't much more to say. The body was kept at Gomorrah's house—or Ebbstein's, whichever it was. Ebbstein's house fits the conditions perfectly but Gomorrah's is probably exactly similar—until Sunday night, perhaps because then there would be fewer people about down by the creeks. Then one man—probably Trout—was sent on ahead to get the house open and see that all was clear. The body was put into Shemrofsky's cab—probably it was placed upright, sitting on the seat—and accompanied by one of the murderers, who was almost certainly Zichlinsky. Then, as it had been a wet evening, the glass front could be let down without appearing remarkable, and the two occupants, the living and the dead, would thus be practically invisible from the outside.

"On the arrival of the cab at the house, the advance man—call him Trout—would give the signal 'all clear' and the body and the rope would then be quickly carried in by him and Zichlinsky. Probably Trout made the rope fast to the beam and prepared the noose while Zichlinsky held up the body. As soon as it was suspended, they would turn the chair over and make the other arrangements. Then they would go into the front room, open the window and drop the glove under it. Finally, they would look out to see that there was no one about and then come away and make for the rendezvous where Shemrofsky would be waiting for them with his cab. Or he may have driven straight home, leaving them to follow on foot or in an omnibus.

"That is how I think the plan was carried out, and that is the account that I shall give to Miller as the basis of enquiries and of such questions as he may think fit to put to the prisoners."

"And what do you propose to do at the moment?"

"My first proceeding," he replied, "will be to see Miller and try to get the finger-print question settled. Then I shall consult with Brodribb as to the best way of ascertaining whether the woman who captured Miss Stella was or was not Mrs. David Hardcastle. I have a plan in my mind, but as it involves Brodribb's co-operation, I can't decide on it until I have secured his agreement."

"My impression is," said I, "that Brodribb will agree gladly to anything that you may suggest."

"That is my impression, too," said Thorndyke. And subsequent events proved that we were both right.

---

## XVI. — MRS. DAVID HARDCASTLE

(Jasper Gray's Narrative)

MY premonitions of some impending change in the conditions of my life, dimly associated with Mr. Brodribb, were revived some days later when I saw that gentleman coming out of our office in earnest conversation with Mr. Wopsall. The apparition caused me some surprise, and when Mr. Wopsall beckoned to me, I came forward with alacrity, bubbling over with curiosity.

"You are going off duty for a day or two, Gray," said Mr. Wopsall. "Mr. Brodribb wants you to attend at his office to-morrow and perhaps afterwards. He will give you your instructions, and you will understand that they have my full concurrence; and I need hardly suggest that you smarten yourself up a bit and try to do us credit."

With this he shook hands with Mr. Brodribb and retired to his office, leaving us together; and we drifted out into the street to pursue our business. However, he had not much to say. In effect, he wished me to present myself at his abode in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, punctually at ten o'clock on the following morning, when he would give me more detailed instructions; and having delivered himself of this request and satisfied himself of my ability to find my way to his office, he shook my hand warmly and went his way with an air of deep satisfaction.

As he had given me no hint as to the nature of the business on hand, it was natural that I should spend the remainder of the day in speculating with the most intense curiosity on the circumstances that called for my presence in a place so remote from the scene of my customary activities; and it was equally natural that I should make my appearance in the place of assignation with more than common punctuality. Indeed, the word 'punctuality' understates the case; for, although I had spent a full hour operating on my clothes with a sponge, a nail-brush and a flat iron, I strolled into the Square from Chancery Lane at the moment when the hands of the big clock showed a quarter past nine. (I say 'the hands' advisedly, for the joker who put up that clock had omitted the figures on the dial, substituting for them a dozen exactly similar marks.)

I stood for some time inspecting that eccentric clock-face with mildly surprised interest. Then I transferred my attention

to a fine pear-tree that some rural-minded lawyer had trained up the side of his house; and I was still contemplating this phenomenon when I became aware of a somewhat chubby gentleman in a broad-brimmed straw hat and slippers who was sauntering up the pavement smoking a very large pipe. At the moment, his head was inclined forward so that the hat-brim concealed his face; but as we approached, he raised his head, and, the hat ascending with it, disclosed the countenance of Mr. Brodribb.

"Ha!" he exclaimed as he caught sight of me, "You are a little before your time, which is a good fault, if that is not a contradiction of terms. The early bird catches the worm, as the rather ambiguous proverb has it—ambiguous, I mean, as to the moral to be conveyed. For while the early rising is obviously advantageous to the bird, it is obviously disadvantageous to the worm. He had better have stayed in bed a little longer. However, here you are, and it will be all to the good if we get our arrangements completed in advance."

He pulled out a prosperous-looking gold watch (apparently, he didn't trust the clock) and having looked at it thoughtfully, continued: "I shall want you to sit at a desk in my outer office, and you are to try to look as if you'd been there all your life. You are supposed to be one of my clerks. Do you understand?"

I assured him (but not in those words) that I 'rumbled him', as our packer would say, and he went on: "I am expecting some visitors presently. They will come to the outer office and you will take down their names on a slip of paper and then come into my office and announce them. And while you are taking down their names, I should like you to have a good look at them so that you will be able to recognise them if you should see them again."

This sounded agreeably mysterious, and once more, I assured him—in suitable terms—that I 'ogled' perfectly.

"If anyone asks you any questions," he continued, "be as evasive as you can. Don't give any information."

I remarked that I hadn't much to give, to which he replied that perhaps I had more than I realised. "But in any case," said he, "keep your own counsel. If they should ask you who you are, say you are my clerk."

"That won't be quite correct, sir," I ventured to remind him.

"Bless the boy!" he chuckled, "we aren't as particular as that in the law. But, in fact, you are my clerk. I appoint you to the post this very instant. Will that satisfy your scruples?"

I agreed that it would, though the appointment was obviously a legal fiction, and, the preliminaries being thus arranged, I was presently inducted into the outer office, of which I seemed to be the sole occupant, and installed at a handsome mahogany desk, furnished with blotting-pad, an inkstand with three ink bottles—black, green and red—a pile of paper slips and a number of quill pens.

At ten o'clock precisely, Mr. Brodribb entered his private office and shut the door; and there descended on the premises a profound silence, through which I could hear faintly the sound of movement in the inner office with an occasional squeak of a quill pen; by which I judged that the communicating door was by no means sound-proof. But I discovered later that there was a second, baize-covered door which could be shut when required to ensure privacy.

The minutes ran on. Soon the novelty of the situation exhausted itself. I began to be bored by the continued occupancy of the leather-seated stool and to be sensible of a faint yearning for a parcel to deliver. Sitting still was well enough when one was tired, but it was no sort of occupation for an active youth at ten o'clock in the morning. However, it had to be; so failing any opportunity for physical exercise, I directed my attention to the quill pens and the three bottles of ink. I had never used a quill pen and had no considerable experience of coloured inks. Now I proceeded to make a few experiments and was greatly pleased with the results. Beginning with a spirited portrait of Mr. Gomorrah, I discovered the surprising potentialities of a polychromatic medium. The green ink enabled me to do full justice to his complexion, while the red ink imparted a convincing surgical quality to his bandaged head.

I was adding the finishing touches to this masterpiece of portraiture when I became aware of sounds penetrating the door—not Mr. Brodribb's door, but another which apparently gave access to an adjoining room. The sounds conveyed the impression of several persons moving about on an oil-clothed floor and were accompanied by the dragging of chairs. But after a short time these sounds died away, and I had just returned to my polychrome portrait when the crescendo music of a pair of creaky boots informed me that someone was approaching the outer door. A moment later, that door was flung open and a largish gentleman with a puffy face, not unadorned with pimples, stamped into the room, and having bestowed on me a disparaging stare, demanded: "Is Mr. Brodribb disengaged?"

I sprang up from my stool and spluttered at him ambiguously. Meanwhile he stood, holding the door open and looking out into the lobby.

"Come along!" he exclaimed impatiently addressing some person outside; whereupon the person addressed came along, and in a moment completed my confusion.

I recognised her instantly, which was the more remarkable since she was strikingly changed since I had last seen her; changed as to her habiliments and even in her person, for then her hair had been jet black whereas now it was of a glaring red. But I knew her all the same. Hers was a face that no make-up could disguise. And if her hair had changed, her eyes had not; and now I saw why they had appeared different in colour. The pupil of the left eye, instead of being a round black spot, was drawn out to the shape of a key hole. Nor did her handsome clothing make any essential change in her appearance. From the moment when my glance fell on her as she entered the room, I never had the shadow of a doubt that she was the ill-omened nurse at whom I had peered through the gutter-hole in Pentecost Grove.



I suppose I must have gone even beyond Mr. Brodribb's instructions to 'have a good look at' the visitors, for the odd silence was broken by her voice demanding angrily and with a faint foreign accent: "Well! what are you staring at me like that for?"

I mumbled a semi-articulate apology which she ignored, continuing: "Go at once to Mr. Brodribb and tell him that Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle wish to see him."

I pulled myself together rapidly, but incompletely, and, dimly recalling Mr. Brodribb's directions concerning the slips of paper, I grabbed up the portrait of Gomorrah, and, blundering into his private office without knocking, slapped it down on his writing-table. He regarded it for a moment with a stupefied stare and then exclaimed: "What the dev—"

But at this point his eye caught the two visitors, who, waiving ceremony, now appeared in the doorway. He rose to receive them, and I hastily made my escape, leaving the door open; an omission the enormity of which I realised when I saw—and heard—Mr. Hardcastle ostentatiously slam it.

I crept back to my stool and drew a deep breath, conscious that I had made rather a hash of the business, so far. Well, every man to his trade. One couldn't expect the practice of parcels delivery to produce expertness in the duties of a lawyer's clerk. Still, I must manage the next visitors better; and having formed this resolution, I fell, naturally enough, into deep reflection on the astonishing thing that had just happened.

So this woman's name was Hardcastle. But Miss Stella's name was Hardcastle too. Very odd, this. They must be relatives, but yet they had seemed to be strangers, for Miss Stella had referred to her simply as "a woman." But at this point my train of thought was interrupted by Mr. Hardcastle's voice, penetrating the door. He was speaking in a loud, excited tone—not to say shouting—and I could hear quite distinctly what he was saying.

"But, damn it, Brodribb, the man is dead! Been dead a matter of fifteen years or more. You know that as well as I do."

There followed a sudden silence, and then I heard the thud of a closing door which I judged to be the baize inner door of Mr. Brodribb's office; a conclusion that was confirmed by the fact that, thereafter, Mr. Hardcastle's rather raucous voice percolated through only in a state of extreme attenuation. Even this I tried to ignore, and I had just resumed my speculations on the possible relationship of Mrs. Hardcastle and Miss Stella when I was rendered positively speechless by a new, and even more astonishing, arrival. For, without any warning of premonitory foot-falls, the outer door opened softly and gave entrance to none other than Miss Stella herself.

She was not alone. Closely following her was a very pleasant-looking lady whom I judged, from a recognisable resemblance, to be her mother, and who asked me if Mr. Brodribb was at liberty. Before I could collect my wits to reply, Miss Stella uttered a little cry of surprise and ran to me holding out her hand.

"You haven't forgotten me, have you?" she asked, as I took her hand rather shyly.

"No, indeed, miss," I answered emphatically. "I shouldn't be likely to forget you."

"This is fortunate!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid that I should never see you again and never be able to thank you."

Here she turned to the other lady, who was gazing at us in evident astonishment, and explained: "This is the gentleman who rescued me and brought me home that night. Let me introduce my knight-errant to my mother."

On this, the elder lady darted forward and seized both my hands. I thought she was going to kiss me, and shouldn't have minded if she had. What she was about to say I shall never know, though it is not difficult to guess; for at this moment the door of Mr. Brodribb's office flew open and Mr. Hardcastle's voice, raised to an infuriated shout, was heard proclaiming: "It's a damned conspiracy! You are setting up this impostor for your own ends. But you had better have a care, my friend. You may find it a dangerous game."

He stamped out, purple and gibbering with wrath, and close behind him came his wife. Her ghastly white face was indescribable in its concentrated malice and fury; but as soon as I caught sight of it, I knew why Zichlinsky's face had stirred my memory. She might have been his sister. But this recognition came only in a half-conscious flash, for the sight of her strung me up to readiness for the inevitable clash. And the next moment it came. Mr. Hardcastle had pushed roughly past the two ladies and his wife was following, when, just as they came abreast, Miss Stella turned her head and looked at the woman. As their eyes met, she uttered a cry of terror and shrank back, seizing my arm and making as if she would have taken shelter behind me.

For a moment there was a strange effect of arrested movement in the room, all the figures standing motionless as in a tableau. Mr. Hardcastle had turned and was staring in angry astonishment; his wife stood glaring at the terrified girl, and Mr. Brodribb looked on with frowning curiosity from the doorway of his office. It was he who broke the silence. "What is it, Miss Stella?"

"The woman," she gasped, pointing at Mrs. Hardcastle. "The nurse who took me to that dreadful house."

"What the devil does she mean?" demanded Mr. Hardcastle, looking in bewilderment from Miss Stella to his wife.

"How should I know?" the latter snarled. "The girl is an idiot. Let us get away from this den of swindlers and lunatics."

She moved towards the door with an assumed air of unconcern, though I could see that she was mightily shaken by the encounter. Mr. Hardcastle preceded her and wrenched the door open. Then he stood for a moment with the open door in his hand looking out.

"Don't block up the door like that, man," he said, irritably. "Come in or get out of the way."

The unseen person elected to come in, and having come in, he promptly shut the door and turned the key. Mr. Hardcastle looked at him fiercely and demanded: "What the devil is the meaning of this, sir?"

"I take it," replied the newcomer, "that you are Mr. David Hardcastle?"

"And supposing I am. What then?"

"And this lady is Mrs. David Hardcastle, formerly Marie Zichlinsky?"

Mrs. Hardcastle glared at him with an expression that reminded me of a frightened cat. But she made no reply. The answer came from Mr. Brodribb.

"Yes, Superintendent, she is Mrs. David Hardcastle; and she has been identified by Miss Stella Hardcastle, who is here."

The woman turned on him furiously. "So," she exclaimed, "this is a trap that you had set for us, you sly old devil! Well, Superintendent, what do you want with Mrs. David Hardcastle?"

The Superintendent looked at Miss Stella and asked:

"What do you say, Miss Hardcastle? Do you recognise this lady, and if so, what do you know about her?"

"She is the woman who was dressed as a nurse and who enticed me by false pretences to a house where I was imprisoned and bound with rope and from which this gentleman rescued me."

If a look could have killed, 'this gentleman' would have been a dead gentleman. As it was, he was only a deeply interested gentleman.

"This," exclaimed Mrs. David, "is a parcel of foolery. The girl is mistaking me for some other person if she isn't merely lying."

"We can't go into that here," said the Superintendent. "We are not trying the case. I am a police officer and I arrest you for having abducted and forcibly detained Miss Stella Hardcastle, and I caution you that anything that you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence against you."

Mrs. Hardcastle was obviously terrified but she maintained a certain air of defiance, demanding angrily: "What right have you got to arrest me? Where is your warrant?"

"No warrant is necessary in a case of abduction," the Superintendent explained civilly.

"But you have only a bare statement. You cannot arrest without an information given on oath."

The lady struck me as being remarkably well informed in the matter of police procedure. But the Superintendent knew a thing or two for he replied, still in the same patient and courteous manner: "Miss Hardcastle has already laid a sworn information as to the facts. I assure you that the arrest is perfectly regular and the less difficulties you make, the less unpleasant it will be for us all."

During these proceedings Mr. Hardcastle had looked on with an air of stupefaction. All the bluster had gone out of his manner and his puffy face had suddenly turned white and haggard. He now broke in with the bewildered enquiry: "What is this all about? I don't understand. What are they talking about, Marie?"

She gave him a single wild, despairing look, and then she made a sudden dash for the door of communication. In a moment she had wrenched it open, only to reveal the presence of two massive plain-clothes officers standing just inside. For one moment she stood gazing at them in dismay; then she turned back and faced the Superintendent. "Very well," she said, sullenly. "I will come with you if I must."

"I am afraid you must," said he; "and, if you take my advice, you will not make a disagreeable business worse by any sort of resistance."

He glanced at the two officers and asked: "Have you got a cab waiting?" and on receiving an affirmative reply, he said, addressing the older of them; "Then you will take charge of this lady, and of course, you will avoid any appearance of having her in custody, provided she accompanies you quietly. You know where to go."

As the two officers entered the room and shut the door Mr. Hardcastle turned to the Superintendent. "Is it possible for me to accompany my wife?" he asked.

The Superintendent shook his head. "I am afraid that is quite impossible," said he; "but you can attend at the police court and apply for her to be admitted to bail. I will give you the necessary directions presently."

Here the senior of the two officers indicated to Mrs. Hardcastle that he was ready to start; whereupon her husband stepped towards her, and, laying his hands on her shoulders, kissed her livid cheek. She pushed him away gently without looking at him, and, with a set face and a firm step, followed the first officer out of the room and was in turn followed by the other.

As soon as they were gone Mr. Hardcastle looked at my employer, gloomily, but with none of his former bluster. "Is this your doing, Brodribb?" he asked.

Mr. Brodribb, who looked considerably upset by what had just happened, replied gently: "There was no choice, Mr.

Hardcastle. If there had been, you would have been spared the distress of witnessing this catastrophe."

"Yes," said the Superintendent, who had taken possession of my desk and was writing on one of the paper slips, "we are all very sorry that this trouble has fallen on you. But the trouble was not of our making. Now, here are the particulars that you will want and the directions as to what you had better do. But I must warn you that the magistrate may refuse bail. Still, that is his affair and yours. The police can't accept bail in a case of this kind."

He handed the paper to Mr. Hardcastle, who glanced through it, put it in his pocket, and, without another word, walked dejectedly to the door and passed out of our sight. And with his disappearance there seemed to come a general relaxation of tension. Mr. Brodribb especially appeared to feel the relief, for, as the door closed, he drew a deep breath and murmured: "Thank God that's over!"

"Yes," said Miss Stella's mother, "it was a dreadful experience, though it is difficult to feel any sort of sympathy except for her unfortunate husband. May I take it, Mr. Brodribb, that this was the business that required my presence here and Stella's?"

"Yes," was the reply. "There were some other matters, but they will have to wait. But I shall hope to do myself the honour of calling on you in the course of the next day or two."

"Then our business here is finished for to-day?"

Mr. Brodribb glanced at the Superintendent, who replied: "I shall want Miss Hardcastle to identify one or two of the persons who will be charged with the abduction, but it is not urgent, as we have Mr. Gray here and enough evidence of other kinds to cover the arrests. So we need not detain these two ladies any longer."

The two ladies accordingly made their adieux to Mr. Brodribb and then bade me a very cordial farewell. As she shook my hand, the elder lady said with a smile: "We have found you at last, Mr. Gray, and we are not going to lose sight of you again. We shall hold Mr. Brodribb responsible for you."

With this and a gracious bow to the Superintendent, she passed out of the door which I held open for her, her arm linked in Miss Stella's, and both acknowledged my bow with a valedictory smile.

"Now," said the Superintendent, glancing at his watch, "it is time for us to be moving, Mr. Brodribb. I told Dr. Thorndyke that we should be there by half-past eleven and it's nearly that now."

Mr. Brodribb went into his office where, besides securing his hat and stick, he apparently rang a bell, for a dry-looking gentleman—a genuine clerk—made his appearance from a communicating door and looked at his employer enquiringly.

"I am going now, Bateman," said Mr. Brodribb. "Did you order the cab?"

"The cab is now at the door, sir," replied Mr. Bateman; on which the Superintendent went out and Mr. Brodribb followed, pushing me in front of him. I was naturally somewhat curious as to our destination, but, as I had only to wait until our arrival to satisfy my curiosity, I wasted no effort on speculation, but gave my attention to my fellow passengers' conversation; from which, however, I did not gather very much.

"I don't know why you want me to come," Mr. Brodribb remarked. "I don't know anything but what Dr. Thorndyke has told me."

The Superintendent chuckled. "You are in much the same position as the rest of us," said he. "But you may as well see how far we can confirm his information. We've got most of these birds in the hand now, and it remains to be seen how much we shall get out of them."

"But you can't interrogate prisoners concerning the crimes that they are charged with."

"No, certainly not. But we can let them talk after they have been cautioned, and we can let them make statements if they want to."

"Do you think they will want to?" asked Mr. Brodribb.

"I shall be very surprised if some of them don't. You see, out of this batch, one or two, or perhaps three, are the actual principals. The rest are accessories. But an accessory, when he sees the rope dangling before his nose, is going to take uncommon care that he isn't mistaken for a principal in the first degree. He'll probably lie like Ananias, but it is tolerably easy to sort out the lies and separate the facts."

At this point the cab, which had been rumbling down Whitehall, turned in at a large gateway and drew up at the entrance to a building which I decided to be the police headquarters, judging by the constabulary appearance of all the visible occupants. Here we disembarked and made our way to a barely furnished room containing a large table, furnished with writing materials, and a few chairs. Seated at the table with their backs to the windows were Dr. Thorndyke, Dr. Jervis, and a gentleman whom I did not know. Exactly opposite the table was a door, at each side of which a police officer in uniform stood stiffly on guard, which led me to surmise that 'the birds in hand' were not very far away.

"Now," said the Superintendent when the brief greetings had been exchanged, "the first thing will be for Mr. Gray to identify the various parties. It is a mere formality, but it is necessary to connect his statements with actual persons. You will just look at the prisoners, Mr. Gray, and if you recognise any of them, you will tell us who they are and what you know about them."

With this, he led me to the door, which was then thrown open by one of the guardians.

---

## XVII. — SOME STATEMENTS AND A TRAGEDY

(JASPER GRAY'S NARRATIVE)

AS I stood for a moment in the open doorway and looked through into the large room beyond, I was sensible of an uncomfortable thrill. The grim spectacle on which I looked was an impressive illustration of the omnipotence of the law and its inexorable purpose when once set in motion. The room was as bare as the other, containing only a central table and a number of chairs ranged along the walls, on six of which, spaced at wide intervals, the prisoners were seated, each guarded by two constables. A single comprehensive glance took them all in; and then my eyes wandered back to Mrs. Hardcastle, and I hoped that Mr. Brodribb had not seen her.

She sat, rigid and ghastly, a very image of despair. The misery and deadly fear that her haggard face expressed wrung my heart in spite of my knowledge of her wickedness, though, to be sure, the whole extent of her wickedness was not then known to me. But even if it had been, her dreadful condition would still have shocked me.

"I recognise this lady," I said huskily in answer to the Superintendent's question. "I saw her in Pentecost Grove the day I escaped with Miss Stella Hardcastle. She was then dressed as a nurse."

"It is a lie!" she exclaimed, casting a tigerish glance at me. "This young fool has mistaken me for some stranger."

The Superintendent made no comment and we passed on to the next chair.

"This is James Trout," said I. "All I know about him is that he gave me a bad half-crown and that he tried to prevent the other man from stabbing me."

"Have you ever seen this man before?" the Superintendent asked when we came to the next prisoner. The man looked at me wolfishly, and as I answered in the affirmative, he uttered a sort of snarl. And again I was struck by his resemblance to Mrs. Hardcastle.

"He gave the name of Jacob Silberstein to the policeman," said I, "but I heard some of the people address him as Mr. Zichlinsky."

The three remaining prisoners were Ebbstein, Gomorrah, and the cab-driver, Louis, and when I had identified them we went back to the other room and once more the door was shut. The Superintendent took his seat at the table between Dr. Thorndyke and Mr. Brodribb, the strange gentleman laid a large note-book on the table before him and uncapped a fountain-pen, and I was given a chair next to Mr. Brodribb and provided with a blotting-pad, paper and pens and ink.

"You will listen to any statements that are made, Mr. Gray," said the Superintendent, "and if any of them appear to you to be incorrect you will make no remark but write down the correction for our information later. And I need not say that you are to regard anything that you may hear as strictly secret and confidential."

I signified that I clearly understood this, and the Superintendent then addressed Dr. Thorndyke.

"I think we had better begin with Trout. He is the most likely subject."

As Dr. Thorndyke agreed, the Superintendent gave the name to one of the constables on guard, who then opened the door, and, entering the large room, presently returned accompanied by Trout, who was given a chair opposite the middle of the table and facing the Superintendent. The latter looked at him doubtfully for a moment or two as if considering how he should begin; but Trout solved the problem by opening the proceedings himself.

"You are makin' a rare to-do about that bit of rope, sir," he complained. "I don't see why I've been brought here along o' them foreign crooks. Suppose I did pinch that rope—which I didn't. But suppose I did. It's nothin' to make all this fuss about."

"You are quite right, Trout," said the Superintendent. "The mere stealing of the rope is no great matter. We could let the dock company deal with that. It is a much more serious matter that we are concerned with; and the way the rope question comes into it is this: a piece cut off that rope—how long did you say that piece was, Doctor?"

"Thirteen feet," Dr. Thorndyke replied.

"A piece thirteen feet long was cut off that rope, and this piece was taken to a house at Stratford—Number Five, Piper's Row."

He paused and looked steadily at Trout, who in his turn gazed at the Superintendent with an expression of astonishment and unmistakable alarm.

"The persons who took that piece of rope to that place," the Superintendent continued, "also conveyed there the body of a man who had been murdered and they used the rope to hang that body from a beam."

"But," protested Trout, "that man hadn't been murdered. The inquest found that he hung himself."

"Yes, but we have since ascertained that he was murdered—drowned in a very unusual way. Now wait a moment, Trout. Before you say anything I must caution you that whatever you say will be taken down in writing and may be used in

evidence against you at your trial.”

“My trial!” gasped Trout, now evidently terrified. “What do you mean, sir? Why are you cautioning me like this?”

“Because I now charge you with the murder of this man, Sir Edward Hardcastle, whose body was found in that house.”

“Me!” shrieked Trout, turning as pale as a bladder of lard. “You charge me! Why I don’t know nothin’ about it!”

“You are charged,” the Superintendent continued in calm, even tones, “together with Maurice Zichlinsky, Solomon Gomorrah, Louis Shemrofsky and Marie Hardcastle, with a conspiracy to murder the person I have named. Now, remember my caution. You are not bound to say anything and you had better think carefully before you do say anything. If you wish to make a statement you can do so, and it will be taken down in writing and you will be required to sign it. But there is no need for you to say anything at all.”

Trout reflected with an alarmed eye on the officer. Evidently he was thunderstruck by the turn of events and mightily puzzled how to act. At length, he said cautiously: “Supposing I was prepared to make a statement—though I don’t know nothin’ about the affair, mind you—”

“If you don’t know anything, your statement wouldn’t help us much,” the Superintendent remarked dryly.

“Well, if I was able to tell you anything at all, would you drop this charge against me?”

“No,” was the prompt reply. “I can make no promise or bargain with you. But if you are innocent, it will clearly be to your advantage that the true facts should be known. But don’t decide hastily. You had better go into the other room and think it over; and while you are considering whether you would like to make a statement, we will have Shemrofsky in.”

“Don’t you take no notice of what Shemrofsky says,” Trout implored with obvious apprehension. “He’s the biggest liar as ever drove a cab.”

“Very likely,” said the Superintendent. “But we shall have to listen to him if he wants to say anything. And if he chooses to tell lies, that is his look-out.”

Here the Superintendent nodded to Trout’s custodian and uttered the single word, “Shemrofsky,” whereupon the officer conducted his charge back to the other room and shut the door. There followed a short interval, during which we all sat looking at the closed door, awaiting the emergence of the other prisoner. Suddenly, a murmur of voices and a confused sound of movement was audible from within. Then the door flew open and a constable rushed out.

“The woman prisoner, sir!” he exclaimed in a dismayed tone. “There’s something the matter—”

Before he could finish, the Superintendent and the two doctors had sprung to their feet and darted in through the open doorway. From where I sat I got a glimpse of a row of prisoners and constables craning forward with horrified faces, and opposite to them Mrs. Hardcastle supported by two officers. When I first saw her, she was sitting bent forward with her head nearly on her knees; but then the officers raised her until she leaned back in her chair, when her arms fell down at her side, her head fell back and her chin dropped, leaving her mouth wide open. That was the last that I saw of her, for at that moment the door closed; and when, after a considerable interval, it opened again, her chair was empty.

As the Superintendent and the two doctors returned to their places Mr. Brodribb looked at them enquiringly.

“Too late,” said the Superintendent. “She was dead when the doctor got to her.”

“Dear, dear!” Mr. Brodribb murmured in a shocked tone. “Poor creature! I suppose her death was not—er—”

“Natural?” said Dr. Thorndyke. “No. It was apparently cyanide poisoning. She must have kept a little supply concealed on her person in case of an emergency. Probably one or two tablets.”

“Yes,” growled the Superintendent, “and we might have expected it. Ought to have had her searched. However, it’s too late to think of that now.”

But in spite of these expressed regrets, I had the feeling that he was less disturbed by the tragedy than I should have expected. And so with the others. Even the sensitive, soft-hearted Mr. Brodribb took the catastrophe with singularly calm resignation. Indeed, it was he who gave voice to what was probably the general view.

“A shocking affair. Shocking. And yet, perhaps, in view of what might have been—”

He did not finish the sentence, but I gathered that he was rather more relieved than shocked by what had happened. And, later, I understood why.

After a decent pause, the business was resumed. Once more the door opened and now the cabman, Louis, was led out by an officer and brought up to the table; and a glance at him told me that, on him, at least, the recent tragedy had fallen with shattering effect. His face was blanched to a tallowy white and damp with sweat, his eyes stared and his thin, bandy legs trembled visibly.

The Superintendent regarded him with a critical eye, and addressed him in passionless but not unfriendly tones.

“Sit down, Shemrofsky. The officer who arrested you has cautioned you that anything that you say may be used in evidence against you. Now, bear that caution in mind.”

“Yes,” replied Shemrofsky, “I shall remember. But zere is noding against me. I drive a cab. Zere is no harm to drive a

cab.”

Mr. Miller nodded but made no comment, and Shemrofsky continued: “Zey say I take away ze young lady, but zat is not true. Ze young lady get into ze cab by herself. Madame tell me vere to drive and I drive zere. Ze young lady get out of ze cab and go into ze house. I do not make her go. Madame could tell you I know noding of vot she do. But now Madame is dead and zere is nobody to speak for me.”

“Very well,” said the Superintendent. “We will let that pass. But there is another charge; and I caution you again that anything you say may be used in evidence against you. Don’t forget that.”

Shemrofsky turned, if possible, paler and stared apprehensively at the officer. “Anozzer charge!” he exclaimed.

“Yes. It refers to a gentleman who was brought from Piccadilly, near Dover Street, to Number Fifty Pentecost Grove. In that house he was murdered, and his body was taken to Number Five Piper’s Row, Stratford. The murder was committed by Maurice Zichlinsky, Solomon Gomorrah and certain other persons; and I charge you with being one of those other persons. Now, remember my caution.”

For a few moments Shemrofsky gazed at the Superintendent in speechless consternation. Then he broke out, passionately: “You charge me zat I help to kill zat chentleman! I tell you I haf noding to do vid zat. I did not know zat anybody kill him. Somebody tell you lies about me. If Madame vas here, she vould tell you zat I chust drive ze cab vere I am told. Zat is all. I know noding of vot zey do.”

The Superintendent wrote down these statements, though the gentleman at the end of the table was apparently the official scribe. But he made no remark, and presently Shemrofsky continued: “Somebody have tried to put ze blame on me. But I shall tell you all zat I know. Zen you vill see zat I haf noding to do vid killing zis chentleman.”

“Do you mean,” said the Superintendent, with ill-concealed satisfaction, “that you wish to make a statement? You are not bound to say anything, you know. But if you wish to make a statement, you may; and it will be taken down in writing, and, when you have read it and find it correct, you will be required to sign it. But do exactly as you think best.”

“I shall tell you all vot I know,” said Shemrofsky, whereupon the Superintendent glanced at the recording officer—who took a fresh sheet of paper—and advised the prisoner to stick to the truth and begin at the beginning.

“You had better start,” said he, “by telling us what you know as to how this gentleman came to Pentecost Grove.”

“He came in my cab,” said Shemrofsky. “I vill tell you how it vos. Vun morning—it vas a Vednesday—Madame say to me zat a friend is coming to see Mr. Zichlinsky—zat vas her broder—and as he vould not know ze vay she vould fetch him in my cab. So she get in ze cab and tell me to drive to Dover Street, Piccadilly. Ven ve get zere, I valk ze horse slowly. Zen ze chentleman come. Madame push up ze trap vid her umbrella and I stop. Ze chentleman get into ze cab and I drive to Pentecost Grove as I haf been told. Madame and ze chentleman get out and go into Mr. Ebbstein’s house.”

“Ebbstein’s!” exclaimed the Superintendent. “I understood it was Gomorrah’s.”

“No, it vos Ebbstein’s. Vel, zey go in and I take my cab to ze yard. I see ze chentleman no more and I hear noding about him. Zen, on Sunday, Gomorrah come to me and say zat Mr. Zichlinsky want me to take ze chentleman to Stratford. He tell me to come for him at night a liddle before eleven. Ven I come to ze house—Mr. Ebbstein’s—Gomorrah tell me ze chentleman haf got drunk. He vos very drunk; so Gomorrah and Ebbstein haf to help him out to ze cab.”

“What do you mean by ‘help him out’?” asked the Superintendent. “Was he able to walk?”

“No, he vos too drunk. Zey haf to carry him out. Zey sit him in ze cab and zen Mr. Zichlinsky get in and sit by his side. Zey tell me to let down ze glass front, so I let it down and zen I drive to Stratford. Zey tell me to go up Stratford High Street, and ven I get zere I pull up ze trap and Mr. Zichlinsky tell me vich vay to go. Presently ve come to a row of houses vich seem to be empty, all but vun, vere I see a man standing at an open door. He make a sign to me and I stop and pull up ze glass front. Zen ze man get in and help Mr. Zichlinsky to take ze chentleman out of ze cab and carry him into ze house. Zey shut ze door and I drive away and go home.”

“Was there any light in the house?” the Superintendent asked.

“Zere vos a lantern on ze floor chust inside.”

“With regard to this man,” said Mr. Miller. “Was he anyone that you knew?”

“It vos very dark,” Shemrofsky replied, evasively. “I could not see him plainly.”

“Still,” said the Superintendent, “he was quite close to you when he got into the cab. I don’t want to press you, but if you know who he was you had much better say so.”

“Vell,” Shemrofsky replied, reluctantly, “it vos very dark. I could not see vell, but ze man seem to look a liddle like Mr. Trout.”

“Ha! And what happened after that?”

“Noding. I go home and zat is all I know.” The Superintendent reflected awhile. Then he held out his hand to the scribe, who passed him the written statement. When he had glanced through it he read it slowly aloud, including the questions.

“Now, Shemrofsky,” he said, “is that all you know? Or would you like to add anything to it?”

"Zat is all I know," was the reply; whereupon "the deponent" was provided with a pen, an instrument with which he seemed unfamiliar, but with which he contrived to make some sort of mark, which the Superintendent countersigned as witness. Then Shemrofsky was conducted back to the other room, whence Trout was brought forth to take his place.

"Well, Trout," the Superintendent said, genially. "Have you thought it over?"

"Yus," was the reply: "and I am going to make a statement. I ain't going to lump in with them foreign crooks. I don't 'old with their ways and I've told 'em so over and over again."

"Then I take it that you are going to tell us all that you know about this affair and that you are going to make a true statement."

"I am," replied Trout, "though, mind you, I don't know anything but what I've been told."

"What you have been told," said the Superintendent, "is not evidence. Still, it is your statement, so you can say what you please. You had better begin at the beginning and take the events in their proper order."

"The beginning of the affair, as I understand," said Trout, "was when this gent came to Ebbstein's house. He came in Shemrofsky's cab with Madame—she was Zichlinsky's sister, I believe. They went in together, but Madame came out again almost at once and went into Gomorrah's house. Shemrofsky told me this. The rest of the story I had from Gomorrah.

"It seems that Madame took the gent into Ebbstein's work-room. There was no work being done there that day, so the women what worked for him had been given a day off. There was three men there: Zichlinsky, Ebbstein and Gomorrah; and as soon as Madame was gone, the whole three set about the gent. But he gave 'em more trouble than they had bargained for. They had meant to hang him and they'd got the rope ready, but they couldn't manage him; and all the time, he was fairly raising Cain—hollering 'murder!' fit to fetch the roof off. Just then a woman runs in and says there was two coppers coming up the street. Ebbstein wanted to knife the gent straight away, but Zichlinsky wouldn't let him; but as they was close to the pickle tub, they got him bent down and Zichlinsky shoved his head down into the brine and held it there while the other two lifted his legs. They held on like that until the coppers had passed out of the street, and when they took his head out of the brine he was dead."

"You had better say what you mean by 'the pickle tub'," said the Superintendent.

"It is a big tub of brine what they pickles their herrings and cabbage in. There wasn't much in it but brine just then. They filled it up with fish and cabbage the next day."

"And about this rope that you say they had ready. What do you know about that?"

"It was a bit about a couple of fathoms long that was cut off a rope that belonged to Gomorrah. I don't know where he got it. But I know the rope because he brought the piece to me and asked me to show him how to make a noose in it. That was the day before they did the gent in. Of course, I didn't know what he wanted it for, so I made a running bowline in the end just to show him."

"I see," said the Superintendent (and no doubt he did); "what happened next?"

"Well," replied Trout, "when they'd done him in, they'd got to dispose of the body. For the time being they stowed it away in the cellar, and a rare fright they got while it was there; for some coves brought an egg-chest to the house in a mighty hurry. They thought Powis was inside it, but when they opened it a strange young man popped out. I fancy it was this young gentleman," he added, indicating me, "and a pretty narrow squeak he had; for Ebbstein thought he was a spy, and, being in a blue funk about the body that he'd got in his cellar, he wanted to do the young man in to make things safe. But the bloke what had brought the case wasn't going to be mixed up with any throat slitting—of course, he didn't know anything about the body downstairs—so they locked the young man up in Jonas Markovitch's room, and he got out of the window and hiked off.

"However, that's another story. To come back to this job: the night they did the gent in, Gomorrah comes to me and says that him and Ebbstein is in difficulties. He says the gent was took ill—had a stroke, or somethink—and died suddenly, and they don't know what to do with the body. He asks me if I know of any safe place where they could plant it, where it wouldn't be found for a little while. Of course, he didn't say anything about the murder at that time. If he had, I wouldn't have had anything to do with the business. But as it seemed to be just an accident, I didn't see no harm in giving 'em a bit of advice.

"Now, I happened to know Stratford pretty well. Got a married sister what lives there. And I knowed about those empty houses in Piper's Row, so I told Gomorrah about them and he thought they'd suit to a 'T'. So he asked me to take Zichlinsky and Shemrofsky down to the place and show 'em the way; and he gave me a bunch of skeleton keys and some tools to get in. But I didn't want 'em; for when I went down there that night with Zichlinsky and Shemrofsky and picked out a likely-looking house, I found I could open the door with my own latch-key. So I told Zichlinsky that I would lend him the latch-key when he wanted to get into the house. And I did. I lent him the key on the Sunday afternoon and he give it me back the next morning."

"You didn't go with him to Stratford when he took the body there?"

"Me! Not much. He wanted me to, but I wasn't going to be mixed up in the business."

"Do you know who did go with him?"

"No. I don't know as anybody did. Anyhow, it wasn't me."

"When did you first hear about the murder?"

"Not until after the body was found. When I heard about it being found hanging in the wash'us, I smelt a rat. So I asked Gomorrah about it and then he let on by degrees. He wasn't quite himself just then on account of a knock on the head that he got from this young gentleman. First he put it all on to Zichlinsky, but afterwards I got the whole story out of him."

The Superintendent waited for some further observations, but as none were forthcoming, he asked: "Is that all you've got to tell us?"

"That's the lot, sir," Trout replied with cheerful finality, adding, "and quite enough too."

"Not quite enough, Trout," the Superintendent corrected. "There's one other little matter that we want some information about. Have you got that small object about you, Mr. Brodribb?"

Mr. Brodribb had, and presently produced it from an envelope which he took out of his letter case. As he laid it down on the clean, white blotting pad, I recognised with something of a thrill my long-lost and deeply lamented emerald.

Mr. Trout regarded it stolidly, and, when the Superintendent asked him what he could tell us about it, he promptly replied: "Nothing."

"That isn't much," the officer remarked. "Perhaps if I tell you something about it you'll remember something more. You probably know that Powis is in detention awaiting his trial. Now, this stone was in his possession, and he says that you sold it to him."

"Well," protested Trout, "supposing I did. It ain't got nothin' to do with this other business."

"But it has a great deal," said the Superintendent. "This stone was in a ring which is known to have been on the person of the gentleman who was murdered. This is the ring that it came from;" (here the Superintendent took from his pocket and laid on the blotting pad a rather massive gold ring in which was an empty oval space) "and this ring was found in the possession of Jonas Markovitch, who says that he bought it from you."

"He's a liar," exclaimed Trout, indignantly. "He sold me the stone, himself. He took it out of the ring because it wasn't no good to him, as he was going to melt down the metal. I gave him a bob for it and I sold it to Powis for five bob. Markovitch told me he found the ring on the work-room floor."

"Well, why didn't you say so at first, Trout?" said the Superintendent in a tone of mild reproach.

"I forgot," replied Trout, adding irrelevantly: "besides, I couldn't see that it mattered."

As it appeared that he had nothing further to communicate, his statement was read over to him, and, when he had suggested one or two trifling alterations, he signed it with considerable effort and the addition of two good-sized blots which he endeavoured to lick up. The addition of the Superintendent's signature completed the formalities and the prisoner was then conducted back to the other room. As the door closed behind him, the Superintendent uttered a grunt of satisfaction.

"Not so bad," said he. "With your evidence, Doctor, and Mr. Gray's and these two statements, we may say that we have a complete case."

"You think these two men will be willing to go into the witness box?" asked Mr. Brodribb.

"Oh, they will be willing enough," replied the Superintendent, "seeing that their evidence tends to clear them of being directly concerned in the murder."

"What about Singleton?" Dr. Thorndyke asked. "Will he swear to Zichlinsky's finger-print?"

"Yes," the Superintendent answered. "He would have sworn to it before, only that it seemed impossible, and that he has such a holy terror of you since that Hornby case. But now he is ready to swear to it and give details as to the agreement of the separate features. So we have got a strong case even without these statements. But, Lord! Doctor, you haven't left us much glory. Here is your information," (he took a paper from his pocket and opened it before him) "describing the whole crime in close detail, and here are these two statements; and, making allowance for a few obvious lies, they are identical. The only weak spot was the murder charge against 'Madame,' as they call her; and she has solved that difficulty by throwing in her hand. Her suicide almost amounts to a confession—for although she hadn't been charged with the murder, she must have seen that she was going to be—and it will have put the fear of God into the others."

"Speaking of the others," said Dr. Thorndyke, "do you propose to offer the three principals the opportunity to make voluntary statements?"

"Of course, they can if they like," the Superintendent replied, "but I have advised them to say nothing until they have consulted their Rabbi or a lawyer. As they will be on trial for their lives, it would not be proper to encourage them to talk at this stage. No doubt they will elect to give evidence at their trial, and each of them will try to clear himself by incriminating the others. But that is their look-out."

"With regard to David Hardcastle," said Mr. Brodribb, "I assume that you take the same view as I do: that he had no hand in the affair at all."



"That is so," was the reply. "We have nothing against him. He seems to be right outside the picture. He would be, you know. This is not an English type of crime. It is pretty certain that Madame kept him entirely in the dark about the whole affair. And now, gentlemen, I think we have finished for the present and I am very much obliged to you for your help. You will be kept informed as to any further developments."

With this, the meeting broke up; and as it seemed that my valuable services were no longer in demand at Mr. Brodribb's office, I was released (with a substantial fee for my attendance), after a cordial hand-shake with the four gentlemen, and went forth to view the neighbourhood of Westminster and to reflect upon the surprising circumstances in which I had become involved.

---

## XVIII. — THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

(JASPER GRAY'S NARRATIVE)

TO most of us a retrospect of life presents a picture of a succession of events each of which is visibly connected with those that have gone before. Times change indeed and we change with them; but the changes are gradual, progressive, evolutionary. The child grows up to manhood and in so doing reacts on his environment in such a way as to set up in it responsive changes. But he remains the same person and his environment remains substantially the same environment. Though both alter insensibly from day to day and from year to year, there is no point at which the connection of the present with the past is definitely broken.

This is the common experience; to which my own offers a striking exception. For into my life there came a break with the past so sudden and complete that in a few moments I not only passed into a totally new environment but even seemed, in a sense, to have acquired a new personality.

The break came on the third day after my attendance at the police headquarters. I can recall the circumstances with the most intense vividness; as well I may, for, with the material gain was linked an irreparable loss that has left a blank in my life even unto this day. I was still on leave from Sturt and Wopsalls, 'standing by' at Mr. Brodribb's request, for possible, and unknown, duties, and having nothing to do on this particular morning had taken up my position in a reasonably comfortable chair to listen while Pontifex expounded the Latin language to one of his pupils.

How clearly the picture rises before me as I write! The shabby room, ill-furnished and none too clean; the deal table—its excessive dealiness partially cloaked by a threadbare cover—invitingly furnished with one or two books and a little pile of scribbling paper; and the two figures that faced one another across the table—Pontifex, sitting limply in his Windsor elbow-chair and looking strangely old and frail, and the stolid pupil with eyes sullenly downcast at his book. I watched them both, but especially Pontifex, noting uneasily how he seemed to have aged and withered within the last week or two and wondering how much of the change was attributable respectively to Mr. Brodribb or Johnny Walker; and noting, further, that the latter was conspicuously in abeyance at the moment.

Mr. Cohen, the present recipient of instruction, was not a promising pupil. It was not that he was a fool. By no means. I had seen him conducting the business of the paternal pawnbroker's shop and could certify as to his being most completely on the spot; so much so that my mission (as Ponty's agent) turned out a financial failure. But Mr. Cohen's genius was exclusively commercial. As a classical scholar he was hopeless. Poor Ponty groaned at the sound of his footsteps on the stair.

This morning the subject of study was Virgil's Georgics, Book Four, of which the opening paragraph had been dealt with, painfully and incompletely, in the previous lesson.

"Now, Mr. Cohen," said Pontifex, with a cheerful and encouraging air, "we begin with verse eight, which introduces the subject of the poem. *Principio sedes apibus statioque petenda*. Let us hear how you render that into English."

Mr. Cohen glared sulkily at his book, but rendering there was none beyond certain inward mutterings which had a suspiciously expletive quality. Pontifex waited patiently awhile, and then, as no further sound was forthcoming, he made a fresh start.

"Perhaps we shall simplify matters if we attack the translation word by word. Let us take the first word, *Principio*. How shall we translate *Principio*, Mr. Cohen?"

Mr. Cohen reflected and at length pronounced the word "Principal," possibly influenced unconsciously by some reminiscence of the three golden balls.

"No," said Pontifex, "that will hardly do. Possibly, if you recall the opening sentence of the Gospel of St. John in the Vulgate. *In principio erat verbum*—ahem—" here Ponty pulled up short, suddenly realising that Mr. Cohen was probably not familiar with the Gospel of St. John in the Vulgate or any other form. After a short pause he continued: "Shall we say 'to begin with' or 'in the first place'?"

"Yes," Mr. Cohen agreed promptly, "that's all right."

"Very well," said Ponty. "Now take the next word, *sedes*."

"Seeds," suggested Mr. Cohen.

"Not seeds," Ponty corrected mildly. "We must not allow ourselves to be misled by analogies of sound. Think of the word

sedentary. What is the distinguishing characteristic of a sedentary person, Mr. Cohen?"

"Doesn't take enough exercise," was the reply.

"Very true," Ponty admitted; "and for the reason that he usually occupies a seat. 'Seats' is the word we want, not seeds. 'In the first place seats' *statioque*—seats and a—and a what, Mr. Cohen?"

"Station," was the confident answer.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Ponty. "Perfectly correct. Seats and a station *petenda*," he paused for a moment and then, despairing of Cohen's grammar, translated, "must be procured, or more correctly, sought. In the first place, seats and a station must be sought *apibus* the—for the what, Mr. Cohen?"

"Apes," replied Cohen, promptly.

"No, no," protested Ponty. "Not apes. Similarities of sound are misleading us again. Think of the English word, apiary. You know what an apiary is, Mr. Cohen?"

Mr. Cohen said that he did, and I didn't believe him. "Well now," said Ponty, persuasively, "what does one keep in an apiary?"

"Apes," was the dogged answer.

What the end of it would have been I shall never know, for at this point footsteps became audible, ascending the stairs. Pontifex listened uneasily and laid down his book as they reached the landing. There was a short pause, and then a soft, apologetic tapping at the door. I sprang up, and, crossing the room, threw the door open, thereby disclosing the astonishing apparition of Mr. Brodribb and Miss Stella's mother.

For a moment, I was so disconcerted that I could only stand, holding the door open and staring vacantly at our visitors. Not so Pontifex. At the first glance he had risen and now came forward to receive them with a dignified and rather stiff bow, and having placed chairs for them excused himself and turned to his gaping and inquisitive pupil.

"I am afraid, Mr. Cohen," said he, "that we shall have to suspend our studies for this morning."

"Right you are," replied Cohen, rising with unscholarly alacrity. Gleefully he snatched up his book and was off like a lamplighter. As his boots clattered down the stairs, Pontifex faced Mr. Brodribb with an air of polite and rather frosty enquiry; and the latter, who had not seated himself, showed less than his usual self-possession.

"I feel, sir," he began hesitatingly, "that I should apologize for what must appear like an intrusion, especially after your clearly expressed desire to be left untroubled by visitors."

"You need have no such feeling," replied Pontifex, "since I have no doubt that I am indebted for the honour of this visit to some unusual and sufficient circumstances."

"You are quite right, sir," rejoined Mr. Brodribb. "Circumstances have arisen which have made it imperative that I should communicate with you. I should have hinted at them when I had the pleasure of meeting you the other day, but your reception of me was not encouraging. Now, I have no choice, and I have ventured to ask Mrs. Paul Hardcastle to accompany me in the hope that her presence may—ha—lessen the force of the impact."

Pontifex bowed to the lady and smiled a frosty smile. I looked at him in astonishment. The familiar Ponty seemed to have suffered some strange transformation. This cool, dignified, starchy old gentleman was a new phenomenon. But Mrs. Paul would have none of his starch. Starting up from her chair, she ran to him impulsively and took both his hands.

"Why are you so cold to us, Sir Gervase?" she exclaimed. "Why do you hold us at arm's length in this way? Are we not old friends? It is true that the years have drifted in between us. But we were friends when we were young, and nothing has ever befallen to weaken our friendship. We both loved dear Phillipa and we both treasure her memory. For her dear sake, if for no other, let us be friends still."

Pontifex softened visibly. "It is true, Constance," he said, gently, "that my heart should warm to you for the sake of that sweet saint, of whose devotion I was so unworthy. Pardon a crabbed old man who has made the world his enemy. One does not gather gratefully the harvest of one's own folly. Forgive me, cousin, and let us hear about your mission."

"It is not my mission, Sir Gervase," she replied. "I came because Mr. Brodribb thought that my presence might make things easier for you."

"That was most kind of you," said he. "But why do you call me Sir Gervase?"

"The answer to that question," interposed Mr. Brodribb, "explains the occasion of this visit. I have to inform you with deep regret that your brother, Sir Edward, died some weeks ago. If I had then known your whereabouts, I should, of course, have communicated with you, not only as his brother but as his heir."

Pontifex looked at Mr. Brodribb in a queer, bewildered fashion and then seemed to fall into a sort of half-conscious dreamy state.

"Dear, dear," he muttered, "so brother Edward is gone—and I am left. My old playmate gone and no word of farewell spoken."

Suddenly he came out of his reverie and addressed Mr. Brodribb sharply. "But you spoke of me as his heir. How can that

be? He had children."

"He had one child," said Mr. Brodribb, "a son. That son died some ten years ago. Consequently, the title and the settled estate devolve on you. I may say, have devolved, since there is no question as to the succession."

Pontifex listened to him attentively, but with the same curiously bewildered air. He seemed thunderstruck. After a moment or two he dropped into his chair and sat slowly shaking his head and muttering. Presently he looked up at Mr. Brodribb, and said in a weak, shaky voice: "No, no, Mr. Brodribb. It is too late. This is not for me."

I stood somewhat in the background, watching Pontifex with growing anxiety. Like him, I was astounded by Mr. Brodribb's news. But in that matter I did not feel deeply concerned at the moment. My entire attention was concentrated on the change which had come over my father. It had begun in the very instant when our visitors had appeared in the open doorway. In spite of his cool, stiff bearing, I could see by his sudden change of colour, and the trembling of his hands, that he was intensely agitated. And now, Mr. Brodribb's announcement had inflicted a further shock. It was evident to me that the sudden accession to rank and fortune, so far from giving him pleasure or satisfaction, was profoundly repugnant. And dear Mrs. Paul, with the kindest intentions, did but make matters worse and intensify the shock.

"It is not too late, cousin," said she. "How can it be when there are years of prosperity and ease before you? Think, dear Sir Gervase, think of the bright future which begins from to-day. You will leave all this"—she glanced round the shabby room—"the poverty and ill-paid labour and the struggle for mere daily bread, and go to live in modest affluence in your own fine house with your park and woodlands around you and your servants to minister to your comfort. And you will come back to take your place among your own people in the station of life which properly belongs to you. Think, too, of this dear boy—Phillipa's own boy, and so like her—who, in his turn, shall carry on the honourable traditions of our family. And think of her, who loved you and him and would have been so rejoiced to see you both come back to the inheritance of your fathers."

Pontifex listened to her gravely, and, as she concluded, he looked at me with one of his rare, affectionate smiles.

"Yes, Constance," he said weakly, "you are right. He is Phillipa's own boy. Faithful and loving and good like his mother."

Once more, he lapsed into reverie and I stood gazing at him in dismay with a growing terror at my heart. For a horrible pallor was spreading over his face and even his poor old nose had faded to a sickly mauve. I think my alarm began to be shared by the others, for an uneasy silence settled on the room. And even as we looked at him he seemed to shrink and subside limply into his chair with his chin upon his breast, and so sat for a few moments. Then he rose slowly to his feet, his face turned upward and his trembling hands thrust out before him as one groping in the dark. I heard him murmur, "Domine non sum dignus!" and sprang forward to catch him in my arms as he fell.

\* \* \* \* \*

How shall I write of that time of sorrow and desolation? Of the emptiness that came upon my little world now that my earliest and dearest companion—almost, as he had sometimes seemed, my child—was gone from me for ever? But need I write of it at all? My tale is told; the tale of the destiny that came to me, all unsuspected, in the egg-chest. My father's death wrote Finis to one volume of my life. With that the old things passed away and all things became new. Jasper Gray was dead, and Sir Jasper Hardcastle had stepped into his shoes.

Yet must I not make my exit too abruptly. The world which I had left lived on, and the drama in which I had played my part still claimed me as a dramatis persona. I pass over the quiet funeral and the solemn procession to the great vault in the shadow of the flint-built tower of the village church at Bradstow; my translation to the house at Dorchester Square, where the white-headed footman (whose deceptive powder I now detected) shattered my nerves by addressing me as "Sir Jasper," and where my cousin, Stella, openly worshipped me as her incomparable Galahad. It was all encompassed by an atmosphere of unreality through which I wandered as one in a dream.

More real was the scene at the Old Bailey—the grimly sordid old Sessions House that is now swept away—where I gave my evidence amidst a breathless silence and afterwards, as the representative of the deceased, sat with Mr. Brodribb at the solicitors' table and listened to Dr. Thorndyke as, with deadly clarity, he set forth the crushing tale of incriminating facts. Quite unmoved, I remember, by any qualm of pity, I heard those five wretches frantically striving to cast the guilt on one another and each but hurrying himself to his own doom. Clearly, but still without a qualm, I recall the pusillanimous shrieks for mercy as the black-capped judge consigned the three murderers to the gallows; and the blubberings of Shemrofsky and the sullen protests of Trout as their terms of penal servitude were pronounced.

It was a memorable experience, and it affected me with a curious, impersonal interest. As I sat at the table, I found myself again and again reflecting on the irony of it all; on the singular futility of this crime. For it was the means of defeating, finally and completely, its original object. The wretched woman who, in her greed and impatience to possess, had planned and directed it, had extinguished her husband's claim for ever. If she had but held her hand, poor Pontifex would have lived and died in his hiding-place, his very existence unsuspected, and she would in due course have become the Lady of Bradstow. It was the murder of my uncle Edward that brought my father into view.

The years have rolled away since these events befell. They have been prosperous years of sober happiness; as they must needs have been; for a man can hardly fail to achieve happiness who is a hero in his wife's eyes. And such is my lot, though undeserved. To this day I am Stella's incomparable Galahad.

Yet, though I would not under-value the gifts of Fortune, I am fain often to reflect on the inconsiderable part that mere

material possessions play in the creation of human happiness. As I survey the fine old mansion, the shady park and the wide domain which is all my own, I find them good to look upon and to possess. But, nevertheless, there are times when I feel that I would gladly give much of them to look once more on dear old Ponty, sitting in his shabby dressing-gown, delicately tending the frizzling scallops. How little it cost to give us pleasure in those days! Mr. Weeks's salary would have made us rich, and we could have had scallops every night. But perhaps the habitual scallop would not have had the same flavour.

---

THE END

# THE DISCOVERY WHEN THE ROGUES FALL OUT

## BOOK I: THE 3 ROGUES

### I. — THE BACKSLIDING OF MR. DIDBURY TOKE

THERE is nothing so deceptive as a half-truth. The half that is true has a certain suggestive power that lends to the other half a plausibility and a credibility that it does not possess in its own right. This interesting psychological fact was realized, at least subconsciously, by Mr. Didbury Toke. For Mr. Toke was a collector of antique and other works of art, a connoisseur and a dealer. He really was. It was not a pose or a pretence. He was a bona fide collector, and a connoisseur who had that genuine love of fine and beautiful works that is the indispensable condition of real connoisseurship. But Mr. Toke was also a fence. And that was where the illusory element came in. Any person who, not being a known collector and a recognized dealer, should have been seen, as he frequently was, in the company of definitely shady characters, would inevitably have attracted the attention of the guardians of the law. But everyone knows that the really enthusiastic collector must needs seek his quarry where it is most likely to be found; and there is no need to watch him, for no crook or fence would be so foolish as to sell doubtful merchandise to a collector who is going to expose it forthwith in his show-cases, or a dealer who is going to offer it in the open market. So Mr. Didbury Toke went about his lawful occasions unmolested and unsuspected, and, under the cover of them, did a little unlawful business if it happened to come his way.

It came his way pretty often in these latter days.

But this was a comparatively new development. For many years he had carried on his activities in the most scrupulously correct manner. And so he might have continued to the end, but for some exceptional circumstance. We are all, indeed, the creatures of circumstance. But circumstances are not entirely beyond human control. Their control is, however, largely proportionate to our control of ourselves. And that was where Mr. Toke had failed. At a critical moment he found himself unable to resist a sudden temptation. But let us have done with generalities and consider the circumstances in detail.

The descent to Avernus is proverbially easy; and, in practice, it is usually somewhat gradual. But there are exceptions; and the case of Mr. Didbury Toke furnishes an example. For his start upon that famous decline was the result of an incident quite unforeseen and, to a certain extent, beyond his control. At any rate, the determining cause—or perhaps we should say the predisposing cause—was a convulsion of nature for which he certainly could not be held responsible; being, in fact, no less than a thunderstorm. Mr. Toke did not like thunderstorms. Few of us do; especially when they come on us in the open country, in which the only refuge visible is the illusory shelter offered by scattered hedgerow elms.

At the moment Mr. Toke was pursuing his way along the rather unfrequented road that led from the village in which his house was situated to the neighbouring market town of Packington. As he walked at an easy pace on the grass verge of the road, his thoughts were pleasantly occupied by reflections on a little windfall that he had recently picked up at a country auction; so much so that his immediate surroundings received but the vaguest attention. Suddenly, he was aroused from his meditations by a low rumble from the far distance behind him, and, turning sharply, became aware of an obvious inkiness of the sky, and, low down, an arched edge of blackness surmounting a pale area in which, even as he looked, jagged streaks of light shot up from the dim horizon.

Mr. Toke looked about him uneasily. He had passed no habitation, so far as he could remember, for the last mile; and Packington lay some two miles farther on. But, clearly, it was useless to think of turning back. His only chance of shelter, apart from the treacherous elms, was in some possible inn or cottage that might lurk unseen by the roadside ahead. Accordingly, he resumed his progress in that direction, mending his pace appreciably as his ears were smitten by a sound as if a Brobdingnagian tea-tray had been kicked by a Titanic foot.

Swiftly Mr. Toke padded along the solitary, inhospitable road while the leaves of the elm trees shivered audibly and elemental bangings from behind announced the approach of the storm. And then, just as the first big drops began to fall with an audible plop on the earth, a slight turn of the road revealed a cottage, hitherto hidden by a clump of trees. It was but a humble labourer's dwelling, timber-built and roofed with thatch, but to Mr. Toke's eagerly searching eyes it was more grateful than a baronial mansion. As a resounding crash from behind mingled with the hiss of a sudden deluge, he frantically unfastened the button of the gate and darted up the path to the small porch that sheltered the door. Nor did he come as a mere suppliant doubtful of his welcome; for, on the jamb of the door hung a small board bearing the single word "TEAS." It was a laconic announcement; but brevity is the soul of wit; and to Mr. Toke it was as a charter of freedom conferring the right to enter unquestioned.

The door was opened in response to his rather urgent thumps by an elderly labourer, who looked first at Mr. Toke and then at the sky, as if he suspected the former of some responsibility for the unfavourable state of the weather. But he uttered no word; and, as the rain was playing freely on Mr. Toke's back, that gentleman proceeded bluntly to state his wants.

"Can I have some tea?" asked Mr. Toke.

The man seemed surprised at the request. "Tea, you wants," said he. He took another critical survey of the landscape, and then replied cautiously: "I'll ask the' old woman."

As "the old woman" was plainly in view, sitting by the fire and obviously attentive to the conversation, the precaution seemed hardly necessary. In fact, she anticipated the question.

"Why, certainly, Tom; I can get the gentleman a cup of tea if he wants one." She rose stiffly from her chair and cast an enquiring glance at the kettle which reposed in unpromising silence on the hob.

"You have a notice by your door that you supply teas," Mr. Toke ventured to remark.

"Yes," the master of the house admitted; "that there board was put up by my darter. She's gone and got married, so we don't do much in that line nowadays. Never did, in fact. Oo's coming out 'ere for tea?"

Mr. Toke agreed that the road was not actually congested, and, meanwhile, under the guidance of his host, squeezed himself past an obstructive table towards a Windsor arm-chair which he distinguished with some difficulty in the pervading gloom. For, now that the door was closed, the room was almost in darkness, the small window, obscured by dirt and invading creepers, admitting only a fraction of the feeble light from the inky sky.

"Seems as if we was going to have a bit of rain," the host remarked, by way of making conversation. Mr. Toke agreed that there was a suggestion of moisture in the air, and ventured to express the hope that it would do the country good.

"Ay," said his host, "a bit of rain is allers useful at this time o' year. In reason, mind yer. Yer don't want it a-comin' down like brickbats, a-flattenin' down the crops. A nice, soft, steady rain is what ye wants for the land. Keeps it miste, d'ye see."

Mr. Toke assimilated this lucid explanation as he watched the old woman coaxing the unresponsive kettle with sticks of firewood. By degrees, his eyes were becoming accustomed to the obscurity. Already, he had converted the sound of harsh, metallic ticking into the visual impression of a drum clock, perched on the mantelshef, and now let his glance wander questingly round the dim interior, it was not an idle glance. By no means. Not, it is true, that he was ordinarily much concerned with the simple domestic antique. But all is fish that comes to a collector's net; and experience had taught him that if "Honesty lives in a poor house, like your fair pearl in your foul oyster," so was it occasionally with the treasures that the past has bequeathed to the present. So Mr. Toke had made it a rule of life to "keep his weather eyelid lifting" even in the most unlikely surroundings.

"Main lucky for you, it is," remarked his host, as a resounding crash shook the door and made the window-frames rattle, "that you struck this house in time. There ain't another this side of The Rose and Crown, and that's a good mile and a half further on down the road. You'd a-caught it proper if you'd a-been out in it now."

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Toke. "Holy water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out of doors."

His host did not, apparently, recognize the quotation, for he looked at him suspiciously, and replied in a somewhat surly tone:

"There ain't no holy water in this house. We're Baptisses, we are."

"Ha," said Mr. Toke; "I was merely repeating an old saying. And there is some truth in it, you know."

"So there may be," was the grudging reply. "I don't hold with none of them there superstitions. Lord! Look at that!"

"That" was a blinding flash that flooded the room with violet light, and was instantly followed by a shattering crash directly overhead, as if some aerial three-decker had fired a broadside straight down the chimney. The instantaneous flash, followed by what seemed to the dazzled eye a period of total darkness, left Mr. Toke with a strangely vivid impression of the cottage interior, in which all its details were clearly visible: the seated figure of his host, the old woman, standing by the fire, the tea-pot poised in her hand, the little dresser with its modest crockery set out in an orderly array, and one or two pictures on the wall. But all these things lay, as it were, on the margin of his field of vision, seen, indeed, but only half-consciously perceived. For it happened that, at the moment of the flash, Mr. Toke's eyes had been fixed upon a dim square patch of paleness that was just barely discernible in the darkest corner of the room, and he had been speculating on the nature of the object to which it appertained. The flash solved that problem. The pale, square patch was the dial of a long-case clock. Anyone could have seen that much. But Mr. Toke saw a good deal more. It is true that the object was seen only for an infinitesimal fraction of a second (plus a further sixteenth of a second for what the physiologists call "the persistence of visual impressions"), and that in that instant of time it had revealed little more than a dark silhouette. But a silhouette may be highly significant. It was to Mr. Toke. The square-headed hood, flanked by twisted pillars, the slender body, the low plinth, taken together, suggested a date before the time of good Queen Anne. There were, indeed, two hands—pointing to an impossible hour and clearly indicating that the clock was not a "going concern"—but there was nothing incongruous in this, for two-handed clocks and even eight-day movements, were made before the dawn of the eighteenth century.

But what really did worry Mr. Toke was the appearance of the dial. It was obviously white. Now the seventeenth-century clock-maker had a soul above a painted dial. If this dial was painted, as it appeared to be, there were two possibilities; either the old dial had been barbarously covered with paint, or, at some time, the clock had fallen into the hands of a Philistine and had its original movement replaced by a new one.

It was a momentous question, and Mr. Toke debated it anxiously as he stirred his tea and kept up a rambling conversation with his host. Of course, it was none of his business—at least one would have said so. But one would have been wrong. Mr. Toke intended to make it his business. There are, indeed, some who maintain that to strike a keen bargain with an ignorant man who happens to possess some valuable object is a base act almost tantamount to robbery. This was not Mr. Toke's view. He held most emphatically that the expert was fully entitled to the usufruct of his knowledge. And there is something to be said for this point of view. A man does not become a connoisseur without the expenditure of time, effort, and money; and as to the person who, by chance inheritance, happens to possess a Rembrandt or a Leonardo and elects to use it as a tea-tray or to cover up a damp place on the wall, it is not easy to grow sentimental over his rights. After

all, the base collector rescues the treasure from imminent destruction, and preserves it for the benefit of mankind at large.

At any rate, Mr. Toke, recalling the fugitive vision of that elegant silhouette, kept an acquisitive eye on the dim, pale square, which, like the grin of the Cheshire cat, persisted when all else had vanished, and cast about for some mode of strategic approach to the subject. Presently his host, all unconsciously, gave him an opening.

"You takes your tea early," he remarked (it had just turned half-past three).

Mr. Toke pulled out his watch and glanced at the drum clock on the mantelshelf.

"Is your clock right?" he asked.

"Ay—leastways as near as I can tell. I sets him by the carrier's cart. He go past every morning at nine o'clock, sharp."

"Ha," said Mr. Toke, "and does it keep good time—the clock, I mean?"

"Ay, he do that; wunnerful good time he keeps. And I only give three shillings for him, brand noo."

"Really," said Mr. Toke. "It's surprising how cheap clocks are nowadays."

"Ay," agreed the host, "times has changed. It's what they calls progress. Now, that old clock in the corner, he wasn't never bought for three shillings; no, nor for three pund."

Mr. Toke stared into the dark corner indicated, as if he had not noticed the clock before. But the corner was less dark now; for, with the last crash, the storm seemed to have spent its wrath, and now a gleam of sunshine stole in at the window and so brightened up the room that the shape of the clock became distinctly visible.

"No," Mr. Toke concurred, "there were no three-shilling clocks in the days when that was made. Have you had it long?"

"Had him from my old woman's grandfather. And he had him from the squire what he was coachman to. So he wasn't made yesterday. He's like my old woman and me: he's one of the has-beens."

"Does it keep good time?" Mr. Toke asked, regardless of the wildly erroneous position of the hands.

His host chuckled. "Don't keep no time at all. Won't go. My darter's husband has a tinker at him now and again—he's a plumber and gas-fitter by trade—but it ain't no use. The' old clock's wore out. Takin' up room to no purpose. Chap offered me five shillin' for him, and I'd a-took it. But my old woman said no. So we kep' him."

"It wasn't a very liberal offer," Mr. Toke remarked.

"That's what I thought," said the old woman. "'Twasn't enough for a good old clock, even if it won't go. I said so to Tom at the time."

"Well," growled Thomas, "who's a-going for to pay good money for a clock what won't even tick?"

Mr. Toke decided that the time had come to open negotiations.

"There are such people," said he. "I have a friend who has quite a fancy for old clocks. He would probably be willing to give you a couple of pounds for it."

"Then," said Thomas, "I be glad if you'd send him along this way. What d'you say, Susan?"

"Two pounds 'ud be very useful," replied the old woman. "But I doubt if he'd give it when he see the clock. It be terrible old."

Mr. Toke rose and strolled across to the corner. The light was now quite good, and at close quarters it was possible to make out the details. And at some of those details Mr. Toke's gorge rose, and he half regretted the liberality of his offer. The venerable time-piece had received the most shocking treatment from some Vandal. The case was encrusted with varnish, apparently applied with a tar brush, and the brass dial had received a thick coat of white paint. Yet, through the treachery depths of the varnish and the layer of paint, other details were faintly discernible which he noted with deep satisfaction.

The clock had been an aristocrat in its day. The dark wood of the case was richly ornamented with marquetry, and a framed panel seemed to enclose some initials and a date, though Mr. Toke could not actually decipher them. But their presence hinted at a possibly traceable history, which would greatly enhance the value of the piece. A glance at the dial showed it to be undoubtedly the original one. The corner ornaments—simple cherubs' heads—were quite characteristic of the period, as were the hour and minute figures, where they were distinguishable, and the hands, though their form was obscured by a thick coat of black enamel paint, showed the simple elegance that marks the work of the earlier makers. Mr. Toke, seeking in vain to decipher the maker's name, was reassured. Perhaps, after all, the plumber's contribution did not go beyond the paint and the varnish.

"Do you happen to remember the name of the squire who originally owned the clock?" Mr. Toke enquired.

"His name was Hawkwood," the old woman replied. "Sir John Hawkwood."

Mr. Toke made a mental note of the name and announced: "I am inclined to think that my friend would be willing to give a couple of pounds for this clock, if you are prepared to sell it."

Thomas was undoubtedly prepared to sell, and said so with some emphasis; and the old lady opined that two pounds would be more useful than the clock.

"Very well," said Mr. Toke, "then we will consider the matter settled. How am I to get the clock to my house?"

"Where is your house?" the practical-minded Thomas demanded.

"I live at Hartsden Manor; just outside the village."

"I knows him," said Thomas. "A tumbledown old house just alongside the old church what is shut up. 'Tain't fur from here. A couple of mile. I could run th' old clock down in my barrer."

"When?" asked Mr. Toke.

"Now, if yer like. I suppose yer pays on delivery?"

"Certainly. When I receive the clock, you'll receive the money."

With this stimulus, Thomas awoke to strenuous activity. The clock was hauled out of its corner, and, while Mr. Toke detached the pendulum and secured the weights in a packing of spare garments, old Susan went in search of a blanket, and Thomas retired to fetch the "barrer." In a few minutes all was ready. The clock, decently swathed in the blanket, and faintly suggesting an impending inquest, was tied firmly on the barrow and Thomas signified that the procession was ready to start.

The journey to Hartsden was, for the most part, uneventful. One or two wayfarers on the road greeted the barrow and its burden with surprised grins, and, at the entrance to the village, a group of schoolboys, just released from bondage, formed up into an orderly procession and followed the barrow, two by two, with bare and bowed heads and unseemly giggles; a proceeding that attracted unnecessary attention, and added appreciably to the gaiety of the neighbourhood for the time being.

"Passel o' grinnin' fules," said Thomas, casting a resentful and contemptuous glance at the little party of smiling bystanders as he drew up at the gate of the house while Mr. Toke unfastened it to admit him to the short drive. As the gate swung open, he stooped to grasp the handles of the barrow at the moment when one of the juvenile mourners advanced, with his hand kerchief held to his eyes, to drop a dandelion on the shrouded clock.

The business was soon concluded to mutual satisfaction. The clock was conveyed to a disused room at the back of the house and deposited on a rough table. Then Mr. Toke wrote out a receipt in such terms as amounted to a formal conveyance of the property, and, when the vendor had subscribed his sign manual, two sovereigns were laid on the table.

"Thank ye, sir," said Thomas, transferring them to his pocket. "I hopes the clock will suit your friend. I shouldn't like to think of it being left on your hands."

"He'll have to take it now that I have paid for it," replied Mr. Toke. "But you needn't worry. He'll be quite satisfied."

In point of fact, the "friend" was more than satisfied. A rapid inspection showed that the case was in excellent condition under the crust of varnish; and through the latter, it was now possible to see that the dark walnut was adorned with marquetry of a richness unusual in such early work. For, in the strong light, the date was clearly legible as well as the initials, grouped in a triangle around a heart—J. H. M. 1692, the H being uppermost, and, as Mr. Toke reasonably surmised, representing the name, Hawkwood. The dial and hands, too, were of appropriate style and of the same excellent workmanship; and on the former could now be deciphered, through the paint: "Robert Cooke, Londini, fecit."

From this general, preliminary inspection Mr. Toke proceeded to the consideration of details. He had already noticed that the case was closed at the bottom. Now, on opening the door, he observed a partition closing the interior space at an appreciably higher level. This was rather remarkable, for the position of this upper partition was such as possibly to interfere with the proper fall of the weights. But what was still more remarkable was the way in which it was secured. There were four screws; but, though the wood of the partition appeared to be old, the screws certainly did not. Their bright, clean heads seemed to shout, "Nettlefold."

Mr. Toke was quite interested. Between those two partitions there must be a space. That space might be an ancient hiding-place. But the screws hardly supported that view. At any rate, the question could soon be set at rest. And the first turn of the screwdriver settled it. The readiness with which the screw turned suggested a touch of tallow; and a greasy stain on the wood around the hole was clear confirmation. The other three screws followed with the same ease, and then, by inserting a bradawl into one of the holes, it was possible to prise up the loose partition.

Now, whether this had or had not been an ancient hiding-place, it was quite clear that the contents were modern; consisting of a parcel wrapped in undeniable newspaper. Mr. Toke lifted it out, and, having cut the string, carefully opened it. And then he got the surprise of his life. There were several layers of paper, the innermost being of clean tissue paper; and, when the last of these was turned back, there was revealed to Mr. Toke's astonished gaze a magnificent diamond necklace and a still more magnificent pendant.

For some moments he stood staring at the gorgeous bauble, lost in amazement. Then a slow grin stole over his face. Now he understood how it was that the "tinkerings" of the plumber and gas-fitter had failed to make the clock go. "My darter's husband" had had other fish to fry. But that estimable artisan seemed to have taken unnecessary risks, for the door had a lock. Apparently it was not in working order, and the key was missing (perhaps in the plumber's possession). Common prudence would have suggested a repair to the lock. But, possibly, it had been left for fear of attracting attention. Thomas was not, it had seemed, gifted with a peculiarly enquiring mind. Perhaps the plumber had adopted the more prudent course.



But the obvious question arose, What was to be done? Mr. Toke believed that he recognized the necklace. He thought that he recalled a daring daylight robbery at a great London house when the thief had entered a bedroom by way of a stack-pipe while the family were at dinner and got away unseen with a diamond necklace—presumably this very one—said to be worth £20,000. There would therefore be no difficulty in discovering the owner. Indeed, there was no need for him to do anything of the kind. All that was necessary was to report the discovery to the police. And this was what occurred to Mr. Toke as the obvious thing to do.

But was it so very obvious, after all? Mr. Toke looked at the necklace, and somehow the obviousness of that course of action seemed to grow less. In the course of his rather varied life, Mr. Toke had been connected for a year or two with the diamond and gem trade. That tended strongly to influence his point of view. It was not that he was a great judge of gems. He was not; though, of course, he could price a stone approximately. But the vital fact, in regard to the present transaction, was that he knew the ropes. The man who had stolen this jewel had been reduced to the necessity of hiding it until such time as he should find a “fence” who would take the incriminating treasure off his hand and ask no questions. And what would that fence pay him for it? No more than a paltry fraction of its real value. Now he, Mr. Toke, could dispose of it at something like its market price.

He looked at it with a calculating eye. It was a fine necklace. Probably report had not greatly over estimated its value. Every stone in it was a valuable stone. But there was no one of those fine brilliants that was of spectacular value. Not one of them was of a size that would involve questions or possibly lead to identification. He could safely deal with any of them in the ordinary market.

And, after all, why not? He had not stolen the necklace. So far as he was concerned, it was a case of treasure trove, pure and simple. So he told himself, casuistically trying to smother his not very lively scruples. Of course, he knew quite well that he was contemplating a theft. But, although, up to this time, he had been a least conventionally honest, he was, if not actually avaricious, highly acquisitive by nature, as is apt to be the case with collectors. He had the passion to possess; and, even if he had been unable to dispose of these diamonds, he would still have been reluctant to give them up.

The conflict in his mind was not a long one. There were the diamonds—ten thousand pounds’ worth of them, at a moderate estimate—staring him in the face and inviting him to accept the gifts of Fortune. There was absolutely no danger. The transaction was as simple and safe as an ordinary commercial deal. Suppose the plumber should denounce him to the police. It was wildly improbable; but suppose he did? Well, who was going to prove that the diamonds were ever there? The plumber’s unsupported testimony would go for nothing; and apart from him, there was, presumably, no one who had any knowledge of their whereabouts—unless it was “my darter.” But neither of these was in a position to swear that the diamonds were in the clock-case when it was removed from its late owner’s custody. Mr. Toke’s position was impregnable. He simply knew nothing about the matter.

But he was not going to leave it at that. No sooner had he taken the fateful resolution to treat this gorgeous derelict as treasure trove than the inevitable psychological effect began to manifest itself. The contemplation of a criminal act immediately began to generate the criminal mentality. Safe as the enterprise was, he was going to make it safer. The tracks, already confused, must be further confounded. His intention had been to clean the case himself. He was a fairly expert french polisher. Not that he had contemplated french polishing this old case. On the contrary, his intention had been to un-french-polish it. But now he realized the inexpediency of meddling with it at all. It should go, just as it was, for treatment to some third party. Thus would the issues be further confused.

Having made his decision, he acted promptly. The very next day he conveyed the clock to a roomy closed car that he had lately adopted, and bore it up to town. There he deposited the movement at the premises of a reliable “chamber worker” in Clerkenwell for a careful overhaul, and then carried the case to Curtain Road and handed it to a skilful cabinet-maker with the instruction that it was to be cleaned and wax-polished, but left structurally intact, with the exception of any trifling repairs that might be unavoidable. The lock was to be repaired and fitted with a key of the correct pattern according to the date on the panel.

When he had done this, Mr. Toke felt that he had made his position unassailable. He allowed himself to hope that he would be left in undisputed possession of his treasure trove. But his hopes were tempered by a suspicion that he had not heard the last of the worthy Thomas’s too-ingenuous son-in-law. And subsequent events justified his suspicions.

---

## II. — ENTER MR. HUGHES

IT was a little over a week after his acquisition of the clock that Mr. Toke’s forebodings began to be realized. On that day, about eleven in the forenoon, his house keeper, Mrs. Gibbins, came to him as he sat in his study writing letters, and announced with something of an air of mystery that a man wished to see him.

“A man?” Mr. Toke repeated. “Do you mean a gentleman?”

Mrs. Gibbins made it extremely clear that she did not.

“Did he say what his business was?”

“No, sir. I asked him, but he said he wanted to see you on private business. He wouldn’t say what it was. He is waiting in the hall. I told Margaret to keep an eye on him.” (Margaret was Mrs. Gibbins’s niece and functioned as housemaid.)

"Well," said Mr. Toke, "I suppose you had better bring him in here. But I can't imagine who he can be"; which was not perfectly candid on Mr. Toke's part. He had a strong suspicion that the visitor would turn out to be an exponent of the plumbing and gas-fitting arts. And even so it befell. When Mrs. Gibbins returned, she was accompanied by a somewhat seedy stranger of truculent aspect, whose appearance suggested a Labour agitator or a working man of strongly political leanings.

"Well," said Mr. Toke, when the housekeeper had retired, "what is it that you want to see me about?"

His visitor crept towards him with an air of mystery and secrecy, and replied impressively:

"It's about a clock what you bought off of my father-in-law, Mr. Hobson."

"Yes," said Mr. Toke, "I remember. An old clock, a good deal out of repair. Yes. What about it?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Hobson hadn't got no right for to sell you that clock. 'Twasn't his for to sell. That clock belongs to my wife. It was give to her as a wedding present."

Mr. Toke reflected rapidly. It would be perfectly practicable to restore the clock, since its contents were now securely concealed in an undiscoverable hiding-place. The clock, itself, valuable as it was, had become, by comparisons negligible. Nevertheless, Mr. Toke's strongly acquisitive temperament made him reluctant to disgorge. Besides, to what purpose should he restore the clock? Its return, empty, would not dispose of the business. It was not the clock but the necklace that this worthy craftsman was seeking. And then there was the practical certainty that his statement was a barefaced untruth. No; there was nothing to be gained by an attempt to compromise.

"This is very unfortunate," said Mr. Toke; "but I am afraid you will have to settle the matter with Mr. Hobson. He has the money. I have no doubt that, if you put it to him, he will hand it over to you."

"But my wife don't want to sell the clock, nor more don't I."

"Ha," said Mr. Toke, "that is a pity; because, you see, the clock has been sold. I bought it in a perfectly regular manner, and I have Mr. Hobson's receipt for the price of it."

"But don't I keep telling yer that old Hobson hadn't no right for to sell it?"

Mr. Toke admitted that the matter had been mentioned. "But," he continued, "that is really not my concern. You must settle the affair with your father-in-law."

"Ho, must I? Fat lot of good it 'ud be talking to him. No, Mister, I'm going to settle with you, I am. You've got my clock, and you're going to hand it over. I've got the barrer outside."

Mr. Toke complimented him on his providence, but declined to consider the demand.

"Look here," the stranger exclaimed in a threatening tone, "if you don't want any trouble, you just hand that clock over. I'm going to have it, you know. I'm going to make you hand it over. See? You think I; can't, but I tell you I can."

"I am sure you can," Mr. Toke agreed. "That is just my point. If the clock is yours, you can compel me to return it. All you have to do is to go to your solicitor, give him proof of your title to the property and instruct him to recover it in the ordinary way. He will make no trouble about it."

"Gawd!" exclaimed the other. "I don't want all that trouble and fuss. And I don't want no solicitors. I shall just inform the police."

"Yes," said Mr. Toke, "you could do that. If your father-in-law did actually sell a clock that was not his property, he undoubtedly was guilty of a criminal act. You might prosecute him. So might I, for obtaining money from me by false pretences. But you would have to prove that the clock was yours, in any case. It would be less trouble to instruct a solicitor, and you would avoid the scandal."

Mr. Toke's calm, detached attitude seemed rather to nonplus his visitor, for the latter stood for some time gazing at him, breathing hard but uttering no word. At length he resumed, in a milder, even pacific tone:

"I don't want to make no trouble for old Hobson, seeing as he is my wife's father. And I don't want no truck with solicitors. I'll tell you what I'll do. You hand me back that clock, and I'll give you the two quid what you paid for it. I can't say no fairer than that."

But Mr. Toke shook his head regretfully. "I am sorry, Mr.—I didn't quite catch your name—"

"My name is Dobey, Charles Dobey, if you want to know."

"Thank you. I was saying that I am extremely sorry that I can't accept your offer. But, to begin with, the clock is not here; and as I have already spent a substantial sum of money on it, I should not be prepared to sell it at the price that I gave for it."

"What do you mean about spending money on it?" Mr. Dobey asked with evident uneasiness.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Toke, "in the first place, I had to send the case to a cabinet-maker's—"

"What!" gasped Dobey. Then, controlling himself, he demanded, huskily: "What was the cabinet maker going to do to it? There wasn't nothing the matter with the case."

"Nothing structural," Mr. Toke agreed. "But it wanted a clean up. I told him to clean off all the old varnish and put on a slight wax polish. That was all. And I have had the movement put in order. So you see, the clock is now worth a good deal more than I gave for it."

"And where is it now?" Mr. Dobey asked, gloomily.

"I have sent it to Messrs. Moore and Burgess, the eminent auctioneers, and I understand that it will be put up for sale next Thursday—a week from to-day."

Mr. Dobey reflected on this statement with an expression compounded of dejection and bewilderment. And, meanwhile, Mr. Toke looked him over, critically. He was not much to look at. He presented none of those interesting "stigmata" that distinguish the criminal countenance in the plates of Lombroso's treatises. He was just a common "low-grade" man of the type that may be seen by the dozen, taking the air in the exercise yard of any local prison; with darkish red hair and—not unusually—a nose to match; hands suggestive of deficient washing rather than excessive labour and a noticeably shift and furtive cast of countenance.

At length he pulled himself together for a final effort.

"This is all very well, you know, Mister, but I can't allow you to put up my clock to auction just as if it was your own. You'll have to get it back; and I'll make you an allowance for what you've spent on it."

"I'm afraid I can't agree to that," said Mr. Toke. "You seem to be forgetting that, at present, I am the legal owner of that clock. The receipt that I hold establishes my ownership; and if you claim that the clock is yours, it is for you to produce evidence of ownership. You haven't done that, you know; and, if you haven't any papers to prove that it was given to your wife, I don't think you would be able to do it."

"I could swear a affidavit," said Mr. Dobey.

"M'yes," agreed Mr. Toke. "But you have to be a bit careful about affidavits. There is such a thing as perjury, you know. I shouldn't recommend an affidavit."

Mr. Dobey received this advice with a bewildered stare. He could make nothing of it. Mr. Toke's bland, impersonal attitude left him, for the moment, speechless. At length, he asked, lamely:

"Well, what am I to do? I ought to be able to get my own clock back—leastways, my wife's clock."

"So you are," said Mr. Toke. "There's nothing to prevent you from going to the auction and bidding."

For some moments Mr. Dobey was too much overcome to be capable of any reply. At last, he exclaimed, hoarsely:

"Well, I am blown, I reely am. You've got the blinkin' sauce to tell me to go to the blinkin' auction and buy in my own clock. And you to take the money. I never heard the likes of it!"

"I merely threw out the suggestion," said Mr. Toke. "I thought you were anxious to get the clock. You could always sell it and get your money back, you know."

Futile as the suggestion seemed, it was craftily conceived; and Mr. Toke, furtively watching his visitor, saw that it had taken effect. The aggressive expression faded out of Mr. Dobey's countenance and gave place to one indicative of reflection.

"Where do these auction blokes hang out?" he asked after a longish pause.

Mr. Toke took out from his letter case a card on which was inscribed, "MR. DIBBURY TOKE, 151 QUEEN SQUARE, BLOOMSBURY. TUESDAY AND FRIDAY, 11 to 5, OR BY APPOINTMENT." On the back of this he wrote the address of the auctioneers, and handed it to Mr. Dobey; who, having read what was written, turned the card over and studied the printed inscription.

"I'll have to think over this," he remarked gloomily; and then, as if a new idea had struck him, he demanded:

"What is the name of the cabinet-maker what did the clock up?"

"His name," said Mr. Toke, writing on a slip of paper as he spoke, "is Levy, Maurice Levy, and his place is in Curtain Road."

"Sounds like a sheeny," Dobey remarked, disparagingly.

"He is, as you have guessed, of the Jewish faith," Mr. Toke admitted. "A most excellent workman and a thoroughly honest man."

"Ho," said Mr. Dobey, in a tone of obvious scepticism. But he seemed to get some comfort from the description, nevertheless. He gazed reflectively at the slip of paper for a while, and then, slowly and reluctantly, rose.

"Well," he remarked in an aggrieved tone, "this ain't what I expected, but I suppose there's no use staying here chin-waggin' to no purpose."

He moved dejectedly towards the door, and Mr. Toke piloted him to the hall and launched him with a suave "Good morning" from the front door, watching him with a faint smile as he slouched down the short drive. He was not dissatisfied with the result of the interview. His subtle hint had evidently taken effect. And, though there would certainly be trouble if Dobey really bought the clock, it would be better so than that some other purchaser should have his house burgled, with

the possibility of a capture and awkward explanations.

On the following Wednesday, the day before the sale, Mr. Toke arrived betimes at the rooms of Messrs. Moore and Burgess to watch the company of dealers and connoisseurs who had gathered to view the goods that were to be sold on the following day. There were two large rooms, connected by a wide doorway; and, immediately opposite the doorway, the clock was standing, ticking solemnly in proof of its perfectly restored health. Mr. Toke halted before it and surveyed it with not unpardonable pride. By the joint efforts of Mr. Levy and the Clerkenwell artist, the shabby outcast that had cumbered the floor of Thomas Hobson's cottage had been restored to its rightful status as an aristocrat among clocks. The fine, dark walnut case with its rich marquetry had emerged from the crust of varnish as a butterfly comes forth from its pupa-shell; the brass dial with its cherub-heads and its silver hour-circle had been cleansed of the paint, and yet not cleansed too much, and the hands once more showed the fine, simple workmanship of their period.

Mr. Toke stood and let his eyes travel over its revived beauties with the genuine pleasure of the connoisseur, congratulating himself on having been the means of rescuing it from its unworthy surroundings and the risk of destruction. But, even as he gloated, he kept a watchful eye on the entrance through which new-corners were constantly pouring in; and it was, perhaps, just as well that he did; for, even as he held the narrow door of the clock open and peered in to see that the partition had not been tampered with, the countenance of Mr. Dobey came into view among the little crowd of new arrivals.

Now there was really no reason why Mr. Toke should have made any secret of his presence in the rooms. As a collector, it was quite natural that he should be there. But recent transactions had engendered in him a new furtiveness and secrecy. He didn't want Dobey to see him, and he did want to keep an eye on Dobey. Accordingly, having shut the clock-case, he made his way, as well as the crowded state of the rooms would let him, through the doorway into the other room, and looked about for some means of concealment. A large French armoire seemed to offer the best cover, for, from the shadow behind it, he could get a good view of the adjoining room in a large mirror.

Here, then, he established himself, and soon the bereaved artisan came into view. He was quite respectably dressed, and would have been unnoticeable but for the self-consciousness which caused him to move stealthily and suspiciously among the crowd. Very soon he spied the clock and crept up to it with ill-assumed unconcern. Mr. Toke watched him with grim amusement. Evidently, the changed appearance of the clock puzzled him considerably. The distinctive characteristics, now so striking, had been hidden by the varnish, and were unfamiliar to him. He stared at the clock, and then gazed about in search of another. But this was the only clock in the room. Finally, after a furtive glance to right and left, he ventured to open the door of the case and peer in. Then, evidently, some chord of memory was struck. No doubt the four Nettlefold screws were old friends. At any rate, he closed the door with an air of decision, and once more began to look about him furtively and uneasily, while Mr. Toke watched expectantly to see what his next move would be.

For some time Dobey crept to and fro rather aimlessly, gazing at the exhibits, but keeping in the neighbourhood of the clock, and Mr. Toke had the feeling that he was waiting for someone. And so it turned out, presently. The meeting was singularly unostentatious but Mr. Toke, watching narrowly, noted the mutual recognition. The new-corner was a well-dressed man, obviously of a superior class to Mr. Dobey, who walked in confidently, and, having looked round, glanced at the catalogue that he held and then walked straight up to the clock. He stood before it and surveyed it critically, point by point; tried the lock, opened the door of the case, gazed into the interior and reclosed it. And it was at this moment that the meeting took place. There was no sign of recognition; but, as the stranger stood inspecting the clock, Dobey sidled up, and for a moment stood by his side. Nothing appeared to be said, but the stranger made an entry in his catalogue. Then Dobey moved away, and, after a few vague glances at some of the exhibits, faded away towards the entry and vanished into the outer world.

With the disappearance of Mr. Dobey, concealment became no longer necessary. Mr. Toke emerged boldly, and made his way into the other room with the purpose of getting a closer look at Mr. Dobey's friend. The circumstances were favourable for getting, at least, an unobserved back view; and the observant Mr. Toke, beginning with a minute inspection from the rear, arrived at the decision that the unknown wore a wig. It was an exceedingly good wig; so good and well-fitting as to suggest a bald or shaved head underneath. Having made this interesting observation, Mr. Toke contrived to obtain a view of the stranger's face. It impressed him as a rather curious face; but he presently realized that the peculiarity of expression was due to the absence of eyebrows. Either they were naturally deficient or they had been shaved off. The presence of the wig suggested the former, but the meeting with Mr. Dobey made the latter possibility quite conceivable. At any rate, the dark-brown wig, with eyes to match, and the curiously blank forehead, rendered the stranger easy to recognize; which was satisfactory, as Mr. Toke intended to keep an eye on him, if, as seemed likely, he should turn up at the sale on the following day.

And turn up he did. Mr. Toke, keeping a bright look-out, saw him come in, catalogue in hand, and select a seat well in view of the auctioneer. Mr. Toke saw him fairly seated and then found a place for himself, where he could command an uninterrupted view of the stranger without making himself conspicuous. As he was not going to bid, he had no need to be in a position to catch the auctioneer's eye.

His vigil was not unduly prolonged, for the clock came early in the list. As the number approached, he watched the wigged stranger; but his queer blank face showed no sign of uneasiness. He watched the proceedings stolidly, and did not even glance at his catalogue. Evidently, he was not a jumpy man.

At length the fateful number was reached. The auctioneer cleared his throat and announced, not without gusto:

“Long-case clock by Robert Cooke of London, dated 1692, in a case of fine walnut wood, enriched with elaborate marquetry. A most exceptional lot, this, gentlemen. It is really a museum piece. I have never seen a clock of this early period in such perfect condition. It is virtually untouched. With the exception of a modern partition in the bottom of the case, there are no restorations or repairs. It is in the very condition in which the maker turned it out. And I understand that an authentic history accompanies it. The initials on the case are those of Sir John Hawkwood and the Lady Margaret, his wife. Now, gentlemen, what shall we say for this unique clock?”

Almost before he had finished speaking, a voice answered:

“Fifty pounds.”

Mr. Toke grinned. This was, in effect, an ultimatum. The speaker meant to have the clock, and made no secret of his intention. But he was not the only pebble on the beach, as the vulgar saying has it. His challenge was immediately taken up by another enthusiast.

“Fifty-five.”

“Sixty.”

“Sixty-five.”

The bids followed one another with hardly a moment’s interval, and the price hopped up by fives until it reached a hundred and ninety. Then there was a slight slackening; but still the bidding went on, at a reduced pace. And all the time the gentleman in the wig sat gazing stolidly before him and uttering not a word. Mr. Toke began to be uneasy. Was he not going to bid, after all? Had he merely come to get the name of the purchaser with a view to a subsequent burglary? That was an unpleasant position. Not that it mattered very much; but, still, Mr. Toke didn’t want a burglary. No one could say what disagreeable results might follow. But at this point his anxieties were dissipated by a sudden activity on the part of the wigged gentleman. The price had reached two hundred and five, and, after the last bid, a somewhat lengthy pause occurred. The auctioneer repeated the bid, solemnly, and his hand stole towards his hammer. But at this moment, the wigged stranger looked at the auctioneer and nodded.

“Two hundred and ten,” the latter chanted, and repeated the refrain three times with increasing emphasis. But now there was no answer. The appearance of a new competitor at the eleventh hour was too much for the others. After a long and anxious pause, the hammer came down with a sharp rap and Mr. Toke drew a deep breath.

The name of the wigged gentleman, it transpired, was Hughes. As soon as he had communicated this fact, he rose and walked over to the clock and stood for a while surveying it with apparent satisfaction. Then he turned the key in the lock, put it in his pocket and sauntered out of the room; and, as the purchase of the clock left Mr. Toke with no further interest in the proceedings, he also presently rose and left the premises. And, as he wended his way to his office, he speculated, not without a shade of anxiety, on the probabilities of the immediate future. Messrs Hughes and Dobey were going to suffer a somewhat severe disappointment. It was not likely that they would suffer in silence. He had a strong presentiment that he had not heard the last of that necklace or of its quondam owners. As to Dobey, he was a negligible ass. But Mr. Hughes was in a rather different class. His conduct at the auction showed considerable judgment and self-restraint. He was clearly a gentleman who knew his own mind; a man of courage and resolution.

Mr. Toke was rather sorry that Mr. Hughes had come into the affair.

---

### III. — AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

LOVERS of paradox assure us that it is the unexpected that happens. Perhaps they are right. But the unexpected holds no monopoly. Sometimes the expected happens. It did, for instance, on a certain Friday afternoon—the very day, in fact, after the auction. On that day, in accordance with the announcement on his cards, Mr. Toke was in attendance at his professional premises. At the moment he was seated at the writing-table in the inner room—it was hardly an office—writing one or two letters. He was quite alone, for he had no clerk or secretary. He had no use for one, since his business was entirely personal and his transactions few, though the amounts involved were usually substantial. So there he sat, writing his letters, but by no means engrossed with the matter thereof.

To tell the literal truth, Mr. Toke was just a shade nervous. The auction had not gone quite according to plan. He had reckoned on Mr. Dobey, whereas he now had to deal with Mr. Hughes; which was a slightly different proposition. Accordingly, he sat, making shift to write, but with an attentive ear on the outer door.

It was within a few minutes of five o’clock, and he was preparing for a scrupulously punctual departure, when the expected happened. The outer door opened, and, through the slight opening of the door communicating with the outer room, he saw a man enter. He rose, and, stepping out into the other room found himself confronting Mr. Hughes. The visitor looked at him critically and affirmed:

“I wish to see Mr. Didbury Toke.”

“Fortunate man!” said Mr. Toke. “Your wish is realized even as you utter it. In what way can I be of service to you?”

“I should like to have a few words with you in private,” was the reply.

"Again," said Mr. Toke, with genial facetiousness, by way of keeping up his spirits, "you are favoured. For here we are, solus cum solo, with none to supervise, as the poet expresses it. You can say anything you like and no one will be the wiser."

He led the way into the inner room, and, shutting the communicating door, indicated a chair adjoining the writing-table, resumed his seat at the table, and looked expectantly at his visitor.

"I have come to see you on behalf of Mr. Charles Dobey," said the latter. "My own name is Hughes."

"I hope Mr. Dobey is not unwell," said Mr. Toke.

"He is not," was the reply; "but he wished me to act on his behalf, as being more experienced in business affairs. The matter is this: a short time ago you purchased from a certain Thomas Hobson an antique clock. Dobey states that the clock was actually his property, but I am not going into that. The point is, that there was certain property, which certainly was Dobey's, concealed in that dock. He had been in the habit of using it as a safe."

"What an extraordinarily stupid thing to do!" exclaimed Mr. Toke.

"I agree," said Mr. Hughes. "But he did. He stowed this property in a cavity between two partitions, the upper of which was secured with screws."

"Was this property of any considerable value?" Mr. Toke asked.

"I understand that it was."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Toke, "I wish I had known. May I ask what was its nature?"

"I understand that it consisted of jewellery," replied Mr. Hughes. "But the point is, that it has disappeared. Acting on Dobey's instructions, I bought the clock, and Dobey removed the partition in my presence. The cavity underneath was empty."

"Dear me," said Mr. Toke. "Was it, indeed? Now, I wonder how it can have disappeared."

"Dobey assumes that you removed it, and it seems a reasonable supposition. I have come to ask you what you propose to do about it."

Mr. Toke leaned back in his chair, and, placing his finger-tips together, looked steadily at Mr. Hughes. He had, indeed, been looking at him throughout the interview, and, as the light from the window fell full on the queer, rather sinister face, he had been able to study it advantageously. I use the word "study" advisedly; for at the first glance he had been aware of a faint stirring of memory. Mr. Toke had an exceedingly good memory for faces; and, although this face was strange to him, yet, as he looked, it seemed to set some chord of memory vibrating.

"May I ask what leads you to suppose that I removed this property?" he asked, without any sign of resentment.

"It is obvious enough," Hughes replied. "The property was there when the clock came into your possession, and it isn't there now."

"But," protested Toke, "you seem to be over looking the number of hands through which the clock has passed. There is the cabinet-maker, the clock-maker who fitted the movement to the case, and various unknown persons who had access to it at the auction rooms."

"And there is yourself, the only one of the lot who happens to have the means of disposing of valuable jewellery."

"That is quite true," Mr. Toke agreed. "If Dobey had offered me the jewellery, I could certainly have disposed of it to advantage. Unfortunately, he did not. And you must see that my professional standing has no bearing on the question as to who found the jewellery, assuming it to have been really there. The fact is that I, of course, saw the partition, and I saw that it had no business to be there. But I make it a rule, when I buy a piece with the intention of selling it, to leave it exactly as I find it. And I instructed the cabinet-maker to make no structural changes in the case; otherwise, he would, no doubt, have removed the partition, as it might be thought to stand in the way of the weights. Still, it might be worth while to ask him if he did remove it."

"I have," said Mr. Hughes, "and he states very positively that he did not. And I believe him."

"So do I," said Mr. Toke. "He is a most respectable man, and would, I am sure, have reported to me if he had made any discovery. And so, I think, would the clock-maker. If the property was really there, it must have been abstracted by someone after it was delivered at the auction rooms."

Mr. Hughes received this statement in gloomy silence, but with a lowering of the brows—or, at least, of the region where the brows should have been—that plainly expressed his unbelief. But he did not leave it at mere facial expression. After a somewhat lengthy pause, he said, in low, emphatic tones:

"Look here, Mr. Toke, all this evasion is no good. You have got those jewels. It is of no use your telling me that you haven't. I am perfectly sure that you have."

"Very well," Mr. Toke replied calmly, "then there is no more to be said. You have your legal remedy, you know."

"You know that we have nothing of the sort," replied Hughes. "I realize that you can stick to them if you like. The question is, do you intend to hold on to them, or are you willing to make some sort of arrangement with Dobey?"

Mr. Toke reflected. Once before, when he had discovered the jewels, he had stood at the cross-roads; and he had taken the wrong turning. Now he stood at the cross-roads again. Should he share the loot with these two rascals, or should he accept the gifts of Fortune and snap his fingers at them?

It was a momentous question; more momentous than he knew. If he could have looked into the future and seen the consequences that hung on his decision, that decision might have been very different. But Mr. Toke was like the rest of us. He could be wise enough after the event. But the future was a matter of guess work. And it is always possible to guess wrong. Probably Mr. Toke guessed wrong on this occasion. At any rate, he made the fateful decision; and the future was to show that it was the wrong one.

"I cannot be committed to any opinions that you may have formed," said he. "As to these jewels, I feel no conviction that they were ever there. Mr. Dobey is a plumber and gas-fitter. Now, what has a gas-fitter to do with valuable jewels?"

"We need not go into that," Mr. Hughes said, brusquely.

"Very true. We need not," Mr. Toke agreed. "There is certainly a particular kind of gas-fitter who comes into the possession of valuable jewels. But he is not an honest kind of gas-fitter, whose word could be accepted without proof. I am very doubtful about those jewels."

"Then I take it that you don't mean to make any kind of arrangement?"

"I am willing to make one concession," Mr. Toke replied. "As I assume that you bought the clock for the purpose of recovering the jewels, I am ready to take it back at the price that you paid, subject to its being in the same condition as when it was sold."

"Well," said Hughes, "I suppose we must be thankful for small mercies. We don't want to drop a couple of hundred on an empty shell. I will accept your offer. The clock shall be delivered here in good condition next Tuesday, if that will suit you."

"It will suit me perfectly," replied Mr. Toke. "And as to payment? Will a crossed cheque do?"

"Certainly," Hughes replied; and, for the first time, his rather unprepossessing countenance was illuminated by the ghost of a smile.

Mr. Toke was secretly surprised, but he concealed the fact and rejoined:

"One naturally prefers to draw crossed cheques. Shall I give the cheque to the person who delivers the clock?"

"No," replied Hughes. "I will come with it, or soon after."

Mr. Toke nodded, and, as the other rose to depart, said facetiously, and perhaps a little untactfully:

"I am sorry that things have turned out so unsatisfactorily for Mr. Dobey; but, if he had brought his heirlooms to me, instead of hiding them in a clock in someone else's house, we might have made some mutually satisfactory arrangement—that is, if he wished to dispose of them. You might mention the fact to him for his future guidance."

It was not a tactful thing to say, under the circumstances, and, for a moment, Mr. Hughes looked decidedly vicious. But, if he was an angry man, he was also a politic man. He was not going to let temper stand in the way of self-interest. Just as the great difficulty of the murderer is the disposal of the body, so the great difficulty of those who acquire unlawful goods is the disposal of the loot. Now Mr. Toke undoubtedly had the means of disposing of valuable property. Mr. Hughes had not. For though, like Mr. Toke, he knew the ropes, there were circumstances that hindered his appearance in the places where precious things were bought and sold. Therefore, to Mr. Toke's surprise, instead of resenting the advice, he replied, dryly:

"He will be grateful for the tip. Shall I tell him that you are prepared to waive the question of title deeds?"

Mr. Toke smiled blandly. "When I am offered property for purchase," he said, "I assume that the vendor is the owner. It is a reasonable assumption."

"Quite," agreed Hughes. "But suppose there seems to be a flaw in the title. How would that affect the transaction? I suppose it would be a case of a knock-down price, at any rate?"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Toke, "you know very well that property which is hampered by conditions that hinder its sale in the open market is of less value than property not so hampered. That has to be allowed for in order to leave a reasonable profit to the purchaser. But the allowance need not be excessive."

Hughes reflected with a calculating eye on Mr. Toke. After a considerable pause, he said, rather suddenly:

"Look here, Mr. Toke. I want to ask you a plain question. I don't know a great deal about Dobey's affairs, but I fancy that he sometimes comes by oddments of property—jewellery, for the most part—that are not quite negotiable in the regular markets. I don't know where he picks them up. It isn't my affair. Now the question is, in plain language, would you be prepared to take them off his hands and give him a fair price for them?"

"If I bought them, I should give a fair price, allowing for difficulties of disposal. But I couldn't have Dobey coming here, you know, or at my private house."

"I realize that," said Hughes. "But that could be arranged. May I take it that you would be willing to buy the goods and ask no questions?"

Mr. Toke was a little staggered by the bluntness of the phrase, but he answered with belated caution:

"My business, hitherto, has been of a strictly legitimate kind. My reputation in the trade is spotless. Still, if the affair could be arranged with absolute discretion, I might be prepared to consider a deal of the kind that you propose."

"Very well," said Hughes, "I will tell Dobey. And, if he should happen to pick up any chance trifles, we must consider how the negotiations could be carried out."

With this Mr. Hughes took his leave and departed with very mixed feelings. On the one hand, he was possessed by a murderous hatred of Mr. Toke. That the latter had the diamonds—that he had quietly annexed the product of an almost unique coup—he had no doubt. But he was equally sure that Mr. Toke's position was impregnable. By no means that he could think of could that discreet gentleman be made to disgorge. On the other hand, much to his surprise, Toke seemed quite willing to act as a receiver of stolen property. That was all to the good; for Toke would probably pay better prices than the wretched pittance offered by the regular "fences." And he would be much safer to deal with, provided the transactions were kept on the discreet lines that both of them desired. So Mr. Hughes was not displeased, especially as the arrangement promised, sooner or later, to give him a chance to settle accounts with Mr. Toke.

The latter gentleman, left alone in his office, was also a little surprised at himself. After years of blameless dealing, he had suddenly proposed to embark on the perilous activities of the "receiver." Why this sudden change of outlook? He was a little puzzled, though he dimly perceived the explanation; which was, in reality, fairly simple. He had dismounted the diamonds from their settings, and had made an estimate of their marketable value. The amount that he could safely reckon on pocketing by their sale came out at the highly satisfactory figure of seven thousand pounds. Now, seven thousand pounds takes a great deal of earning by legitimate industry. Naturally he was impressed by this "easy money"—the immemorial lure that has drawn so many on to the broad road that leadeth to destruction. But the really potent influence was the fact that he was already in actual possession of stolen property, and making preparations to dispose of it. The first step had been taken; and, in taking it, he had made a curious discovery. He had discovered that, apart from the attraction of easily won wealth, there was a certain element of excitement and adventure in the acquirement and sale of illicit property that was only feebly present in lawful dealing.

On the following Tuesday the clock was duly delivered, and Mr. Toke was in the act of winding it when Mr. Hughes arrived. His greeting was not effusive, nor was it in any way hostile. He merely stated that he had come for the cheque.

"A crossed cheque, you said, drawn to your own name, I suppose?"

"Yes. Arthur Hughes."

Mr. Toke wrote out the cheque and handed it to Hughes with the remark:

"Well, you've got your money back, at any rate."

"Some of it," responded Hughes, adding: "Are you sure you won't reconsider the other little matter?"

But Mr. Toke's heart was hardened. Already, in effect, he had his hand on that seven thousand pounds.

"If you mean the problem of the alleged lost property in the clock," said he, "I can only repeat that I know nothing about it, and that I am profoundly sceptical as to its having been there, at any rate when the clock came into my possession."

"Very well," said Hughes, "then we must leave it at that. And now as to the other matter—the question of your negotiating some of Dobey's unconsidered trifles. Have you considered the question of procedure?"

"In a general way," replied Mr. Toke. "In the interests of us both, we must avoid jeopardizing my position as a reputable dealer. You realize that?"

Hughes realized it perfectly. Not that he was in the least tender about Mr. Toke's reputation in the abstract, but he saw clearly that a reputable dealer could obtain, and pay, better prices than a common fence. He said so, and Mr. Toke continued:

"To that end, there must be as little contact as possible. I can't have Dobey coming here; and the less you come here, yourself, the better. We must avoid leaving tracks."

"Certainly," Hughes agreed, "if you can see how to avoid leaving them."

"I think I can. We will go into that presently. But there is another point. We shall simplify matters a great deal if we try to treat one another quite fairly and honestly."

Mr. Hughes's thoughts turned, inevitably, towards the despoiled clock, and he grinned openly and undisguisedly. Nevertheless, he assented to the proposition. Mr. Toke observed and interpreted the grin, but continued unabashed:

"What I mean is, that if the vendor and purchaser are each content with actual, realizable values, contacts, even by post, will be reduced to a minimum."

Hughes nodded with the air of one waiting for further details, and Toke continued:

"Supposing, for instance, Dobey submits a parcel of goods with a specified price. Now, if that price is a fair one it can be paid, and there is the end of the matter. But if he makes an excessive claim, the goods must be returned, or there must be a course of bargaining, involving, in either case, an undesirable number of contacts. Or, if he should submit a parcel for an offer, and I make such an offer as, in my judgment, is the best that is practicable; if he accepts that offer without haggling, again contacts are reduced to a minimum. You see my point?"



"Yes, and I agree in principle. One can't do more until one sees how things work out in practice. How do you suggest that samples should be submitted? You don't want them left by hand, and the post is not very safe—an accident is always possible. Have you any plan?"

"A simple method occurs to me," said Mr. Toke "It is this. On receiving notice in some prearranged manner that a sample is to be delivered, I draw my car up at night in a quiet place, opposite a blank wall, with the doors locked, but the rear window open. I then leave it for a few minutes unattended. It would be quite easy for a passer-by to drop a small parcel in at the window unobserved and pass on. A few suitable localities could be designated by numbers for greater safety in making arrangements."

Mr. Hughes considered this proposal, and, on the whole, approved.

"It would work all right," said he, "provided both parties keep to the principle of a square deal. Otherwise, the party who dropped his goods into the other man's window would take a biggish risk."

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Toke. "That is why I emphasized the necessity for scrupulous fair dealing on both sides."

They spent some time in settling a few details and in arranging a simple code for use in unavoidable letters. Then Hughes rose as if to depart. But, as he was turning away from the table, he paused and then sat down again.

"There is one little affair that we might settle as I am here," said he. He unbuttoned his coat and from an inner pocket produced a little wash-leather bag. From this he extracted a ring set with a single large emerald and laid it down on the table.

"Any offers?" he asked.

Mr. Toke took it up and examined it.

"A fine stone," he remarked, approvingly; "a very fine stone. Well cut, too. These step-cut stones often have the table too large. I can offer you thirty pounds for this ring."

"It is worth a good deal more than that," said Hughes.

"It is," agreed Mr. Toke. "It might fetch sixty at a suitable auction. I will give you forty-five if I may sell it publicly and say where I got it. Is that possible?"

"No," replied Hughes. "I am selling it on commission, and I don't know where the vendor got it."

"Then," said Toke, "thirty is the outside price. You see, this is an important stone. Someone is sure to have the particulars of it—the measurements and weight—so it could be identified. If I take it, I shall either have to have it re-cut or put it into store for a year or two. Still, you might get a better price from someone else."

Hughes, however, knew that he certainly would not; having tried a fence, who offered him ten pounds. But he did not mention this fact. He merely replied:

"Very well. I suppose you know best. I'll take thirty, if you can't offer any more."

Accordingly the amount was paid—in cash—and Mr. Hughes took his leave.

We need not pursue the details of the subsequent transactions. The visible parties to those transactions were Toke and Hughes; and, as both of them were reasonable men, the necessary conditions were loyally observed and everything went fairly smoothly. Toke made it a rule to give the best prices that were economically possible; and these were so much better than those obtainable from the regular fences that Hughes found it practicable to purchase illicit goods from certain practitioners other than Dobey, with the result that Mr. Toke was almost embarrassed by the magnitude of the transactions. Yet it was all to the good. For the increased amount of capital at his disposal enabled him not only to make more important purchases in his own legitimate line, but to indulge in the luxury, dear to the true collector's heart, of keeping specially choice pieces which he would otherwise have had to sell.

But it had another effect; and a very queer effect it was. There was a side to Mr. Toke's character which we have not had occasion to mention, because, in the ordinary affairs of life, it did not show itself. But the fact is, that there was in Mr. Toke's mental make-up a very definite streak of the miser. It was very strange. In his daily business of life, and even in his domestic affairs, he was a perfectly normal man, with a banking account and investments, an ordered financial system, and a completely rational sense of values. Yet, behind it all was that queer mental twist; and, when it showed itself, Mr. Didbury Toke was a miser—a genuine miser, too, of the real "Blackberry Jones" brand.

But perhaps it was not so very strange, after all. For Mr. Toke was a born collector; and what is a miser but a collector of a rather irrational kind? A collector whose joy is in mere possession, regardless of the qualities—other than intrinsic value—of the things possessed? At any rate, there it was; and it must be mentioned because certain consequences, directly traceable to it, have to be recorded hereafter. And, for the same reason, it is necessary to describe briefly the ways in which this queer trait manifested itself.

In the good old days before the war, Mr. Toke was accustomed to keep, in one of the rooms adjoining the gallery at the Manor House, in which his collection was lodged, a drawer filled with sovereigns. It was a secret hoard, not provided for current use, but, like the rest of the collection, a treasure to be enjoyed by mere gloating and contemplation. At night, when the gallery door was locked, he would bring it out and set it on the table. Then, in the genuine "Blackberry Jones" manner,

he would sit himself down to gloat over its glittering contents, taking up handfuls of the shining coins or spreading them out on the table in rows or geometrical patterns.

Perhaps there was something to be said for this rather odd pursuit. The Sovereign was a handsome coin, particularly as to the reverse, which displayed Pistrucci's magnificent St. George. But, though Mr. Toke was far from unappreciative of Pistrucci's masterpiece, it was not that work of art which endeared the coins to his heart, as subsequent events proved. For, in the days that followed the war, he was compelled to make inroads on his treasure to carry out some of his foreign deals, and to furnish himself for his journeys abroad. Gradually, the golden contents of the drawer dwindled, until only a hundred or so of the coins were left.

It was at this point that the inflow of ill-gotten wealth came to his relief. The parcels of jewellery that Mr. Hughes dropped periodically in through the window of his car consisted principally of "trade" articles, which, however valuable intrinsically, were of no artistic merit. Mr. Toke's procedure was to pick out the stones and dispose of them through the ordinary trade channels. Their sale yielded him a modest profit, and with this he was content, at least for a time. But presently the gold mountings began to accumulate. If the transactions had been lawful ones, he would simply have taken these mountings to a bullion dealer and realized the value of the gold. But the gold mounts were precisely the most recognizable parts of the "swag." It was quite impracticable to dispose of them in the state in which they came to him.

Then he decided to melt them down; and, to this end, he provided himself with a small crucible furnace that burned coke or charcoal—there was no gas at the Manor House—and was fitted with a foot bellows. He also obtained a few crucibles, one or two jewellers ingot moulds, and the necessary tongs and other implements; and with these appliances he set to work to reduce the miscellaneous collection of stoneless jewellery to neat little ingots, each of which he carefully marked with a punch to show its "fineness" in carats.

But even this did not quite solve the difficulty. For, as we have seen, Mr. Toke was an eminently cautious gentleman, and it was borne in on him that the sale of gold ingots on a somewhat considerable scale was a proceeding that might, in the course of time, lead to inconvenient enquiries. He was known as a dealer in stones. But gold ingots were things that needed to be accounted for. He decided, at least for the present, not to run the risk.

So, by degrees, the ingots accumulated. But Mr. Toke was not disturbed. On the contrary, the larger his stock grew—and it grew apace—the less desirous did he become to dispose of it. For a curious change had come over him. Gradually, the affection that he had felt for the sovereigns transferred itself to the growing pile of ingots; and at nights, when he had turned out the surviving remnants of coins from the drawer, he would bring forth the ingots from the cupboard where they were secreted and lay them out on the table or build them up into little stacks. And as the stacks grew steadily in size and number, he would think of his partners and their mysterious activities with pleasant anticipations of yet further additions to his hoard; which was rapidly becoming more real to him than the less visible wealth that was represented by the figures in his bank books and his lists of investments.

Occasionally he found himself speculating on the part that Mr. Hughes played in this curious, unlawful business. Was he a receiver, pure and simple, or was he an actual operator? On the rare occasions when they met, Hughes maintained the most profound reticence. Mr. Toke's view was that Hughes and Dobey formed a small firm to which Hughes contributed the brains and power of contrivance, and Dobey the manual skill and executive ability.

Possibly he was right. At any rate, as we have said, all went well and smoothly, and Dobey, more fortunate than most of his fellow practitioners, continued to keep out of the clutches of the law.

---

#### IV. — MR. TOKE'S INDISCRETION

IN a remote corridor at the top of a large building in Holborn the rather infrequent visitors might have seen a door, glazed with opaque glass, on which was painted the name of Mr. Arthur Hughes. No further information was vouchsafed; but if the directory had been consulted it would have been ascertained that Mr. Hughes was a patent agent. His practice was not extensive; but still, on certain rare occasions, stray members of that peculiarly optimistic class, prospective patentees, discovered his existence by means of the directory aforesaid, and subjected him to a mild surprise by appearing in his office.

Their visits were not unwelcome; for, though the business that they brought was of little enough value, they rendered possible the keeping of books which could be produced in evidence of a bona fide industry.

The visitor, however, who appeared on a certain afternoon was not one of these clients, nor was he connected with the patent industry; being, in fact, none other than Mr. Didbury Toke. Mr. Toke was a good deal out of breath, having climbed the long staircase as a matter of precaution, and now sat panting across the table behind which Mr. Hughes was seated, regarding him with undisguised impatience.

"It's a devil of a way up," said Mr. Toke.

"It is if you are fool enough to walk," was the ungracious reply. "Why the deuce don't you use the lift?"

"Well," Mr. Toke explained, "one is apt to meet people in a lift, or at least be seen and possibly remembered, by the lift girl, at any rate. It is better to avoid contacts as far as possible."

"You're mighty careful," said Hughes, sourly. "You're glad enough to mop up the profits of our little enterprises, but you

don't mean to take any of the risks."

"Not if I can help it," Toke admitted. "Why should I? And what good would it be if I did?"

The question was so obviously reasonable (since the safety of each member of the firm was essential to the well-being of the others) that Hughes was reduced to a non-committal snort; and might have left it at that had not Toke rather untactfully added: "And I am not aware that you are in the habit of exposing yourself unnecessarily."

Mr. Hughes was apparently in a somewhat irritable state of mind, for he took needless umbrage at this remark.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "so you think so, too, do you?"

"Too?" repeated Toke, interrogatively.

"Yes. You are taking up the same position as that infernal Dobey."

"I hope not," said Mr. Toke. "But what is Dobey's position?"

"In effect the same as yours. He says that he takes all the risks while we take most of the profits."

"I did not say that," Mr. Toke protested. "I admit that I keep out of harm's way to the best of my ability. And, really, I suppose, as a matter of fact, Dobey does take more risks than we do."

"Do you?" snarled Hughes. "How do you know what risks I take?"

Mr. Toke had to admit that he knew very little about the matter. "But," he continued, "there is no use in mutual fault-finding. We each have our respective parts to play, and each of us is indispensable to the others."

"That isn't Dobey's view," said Hughes. "I have discovered that he has been doing some jobs on his own, and what is worse, he has found some other market for the swag. He is a slippery devil. Thanks to me, he has been able to work in safety, and do uncommonly well. Now he thinks he knows all there is to know, and he is going to work on his own and stick to all the stuff that he collects—the ungrateful bounder!"

Mr. Toke expressed his profound disgust at this base conduct of the unappreciative gas-fitter. "But, after all," he added optimistically, "I suppose he is not the only pebble on the beach."

"No," Hughes admitted, "but he is a pretty big pebble, from our point of view. We can't afford to lose his little contributions. But it is not only that. Now that he seems to have gone off on his own, and knows that I have spotted him, he may give us trouble, especially if he should get into a tight place. As I said before, he is a slippery devil. But he had better look out. If I see any signs of his making trouble, I shall make things most unpleasantly lively for him. However, he hasn't starved us out yet. I have got quite a nice little collection from another artist. Got it here, too. I don't usually bring stuff to this place, but I had to, on this occasion. So here it is, all ready for you to take away when we have settled preliminaries."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Toke, "how very unfortunate! I can't possibly take it now. I called to tell you that I am just starting on a longish tour on the Continent."

"Well, you'll just have to put off the start for a day. I can't have the stuff here, and I certainly can't store it while you are browsing about the Continent."

"But," protested Mr. Toke, "I have made all my arrangements. I have shut up the wing of my house where I keep my collection and sealed the doors, and I have notified my solicitor that I have started."

"I suppose you can alter your arrangements if you please. You are your own master."

Mr. Toke shook his head, and was about to add some confirmatory remarks when Hughes suddenly lost what little patience he had and broke out, angrily:

"Look here, Toke, you are going to take that stuff. You have got to. I am not going to keep it in store for months. Besides, I want the money for it. There is a hundred and fifty pounds' worth in this parcel. You can look at it now, and, if you are afraid to take it away with you, I will plant it in your car later."

"But," pleaded Toke, "I haven't got my car. I took it to the garage this morning to be overhauled and taken care of while I am away. I should have to go by train with the confounded stuff in a hand-bag."

Mr. Hughes was on the point of demanding what the occasion of the train journey might be, seeing that the "stuff" was presumably to be deposited either at Mr. Toke's bank or in his safe-deposit. That was how he had always understood that Mr. Toke secured his valuables. But the reference to the train journey seemed to offer a rather curious suggestion. And, Mr. Hughes being a decidedly reticent, not to say secretive, gentleman, refrained from either comment or question. But he stuck to his point, and continued to insist that the property must be transferred. If he had done so in a polite and tactful manner, all might have been well. Unfortunately, he adopted a bullying, hectoring tone that jarred heavily on Mr. Toke's already ruffled feelings. As a result, his customary suavity gave place to a slightly forbidding manner.

"I think," he said stiffly, "you misunderstand the nature of our relations. I purchase from you at my convenience. You are addressing me as if I were some sort of subordinate, as you might address Dobey—who, by the way, doesn't seem to have found your manners endearing."

"He will find them a good deal less endearing if, he doesn't take care, and so will you. Don't you come here with your damned superior airs. You are one of the firm, and I am the boss of the firm, and you have got to understand that."

"And suppose I don't accept that relationship? Suppose I retire from the firm, as you call it, and wash my hands of you? Would that suit you?"

"It wouldn't suit you if the police got to know that the eminently respectable Mr. Didbury Toke had been doing a roaring trade in stolen gems."

Mr. Toke's face hardened. "It is a great mistake to utter threats," he said in a warning tone. And then, in total disregard of the admirable principle that he had just laid down, he continued: "And, in fact, it would not suit you particularly well if the police should be induced to take an interest in you."

"But they couldn't," retorted Hughes. "You couldn't prove anything against me. I've made it my business to see to that. In regard to this swag, the man who collected it is at one end and the man who marketed it—that's you—is at the other. I don't appear in it at all."

Mr. Toke smiled sourly. "I see," he said, quietly, "that you don't remember me. But my memory is better."

"What the devil do you mean?" Hughes demanded angrily, but with a startled expression which he failed to control.

"Of course," Mr. Toke continued, calmly, "I am a good deal changed. So are you since the days when you used to have a sandy moustache and a bushy head of hair. But, all the same, I recognized you at the first glance." (Which was not quite correct. It had taken him some three months to convert a vague sense of familiarity into a definite identification.) "The sight of you carried me back to the time when I used to have connections with the assaying industry, and when a good deal was heard about a certain famous thumb-print."

He stopped rather abruptly—and wished that he had stopped sooner, as he noted the effect of his foolish speech. Hughes did not trouble to contest the statement, but sat gazing fixedly at the speaker; and the concentrated malignity that expressed itself in that look brought Mr. Toke suddenly to his senses. The gentle art of making enemies is an art that is practised only by fools. But Mr. Toke was not a fool, and he certainly did not want to make an enemy of Mr. Hughes. He saw clearly that reconciliation was the necessary policy, and proceeded forthwith to swallow his pride.

"This won't do, Hughes," he said in a conciliatory tone. "We are behaving like a couple of fools. Of course we sink or swim together. I understand that. I was annoyed at having my arrangements upset and lost my temper. Let us have a look at that stuff."

Without a word, Hughes rose and walked across to a small safe which he unlocked and threw open. From some inner recess in it he produced a parcel which he laid on the table. Then he stepped over to the door, and, having slipped the catch of the lock, came back and began methodically to untie the string of the parcel. When the various wrappings were loosened, there was exposed to view a miscellaneous collection of jewellery which Mr. Toke diagnosed as probably the pooled swag from several different robberies. He looked it over with tepid interest, being anxious chiefly to get the business over and bring the rather unpleasant interview to an end.

"Well," he said, "there's nothing sensational about it. You say you want a hundred and fifty for this lot. It's quite enough, but it isn't worth while to haggle over a trifle. I'll give you what you ask. I suppose a cheque won't do for you?"

"No," Hughes replied gruffly, "of course it won't."

"It's infernally inconvenient," Toke grumbled. "This will eat up the greater part of the cash that I had provided for travelling."

He produced a fat wallet from his pocket, and sorted out its contents; a process that was watched by Hughes with a curious, avid interest as he retied the string of the parcel.

"Fifteen tens," said Toke. "Will that do? I would rather keep the fives for use on the road."

As Hughes made no reply, but silently held out his hand, Toke placed in the latter the sheaf of crisp, rustling notes, and closed his wallet, fastening it and returning it to his pocket.

"Now, Hughes," he said as he dropped the parcel into his hand-bag and put on his hat, "let us forget the nonsense that we talked just now and bury the hatchet. We shan't see each other again for a month or two. Don't let us carry away unpleasant memories."

He held out his hand genially, and Hughes, relaxing with an effort the grimness of his expression, took it and gave it a formal shake.

"I suppose," said he, "you will spend the night at Hartsden?"

"No," replied Toke, "I can't do that. I want to catch the night—or rather early morning—train to Dover."

"You will have some trouble in making the various connections," Hughes remarked. "There aren't so very many trains to and from Hartsden. It is a pity that you didn't keep your car for another hour or two."

"Yes," Toke agreed reflectively. "I think you are right. The trains will be an awkward complication. I rather think that I will just get the car out again or borrow another. That will make me independent of trains."

"But what will you do with the car?" asked Hughes, who was beginning to take an interest in Toke's movements.

"I dare say I shall be able to run it down to the garage. Or perhaps I shall be able to get a taxi driver to run it round from

the station. It will only take him a few minutes."

"Yes," Hughes agreed, "that will be quite simple. And the car will enable you to take your own time. Much better than the suburban trains. Well, so long. I hope you will have a pleasant and profitable trip."

He gave a sort of valedictory grin—the nearest that he could get to the semblance of a friendly smile—and accompanied Toke out into the corridor, where he stood, watching the retreating figure of his associate in iniquity. And, even as he looked, the grin faded from his features and was replaced by a scowl of the most intense malice.

He went back into his office, still scowling forbiddingly, and with the air of one wrapped in profound thought. Which was, in fact, his condition. For Mr. Toke's indiscreet outburst had furnished him with the matter for anxious cogitation. That Toke could or would "blow on" the little transactions that took place between them had never occurred to him. Nor did it now. He had made his position at least as safe as that of Mr. Toke himself. Neither of them could effectively blow on the other. But now it appeared that Mr. Toke could, by merely uttering a few words in the proper quarter, send him, Mr. Hughes, to a term of penal servitude. This was quite a different affair. The sudden appearance of Mr. Toke as a potential accuser was, to put it very mildly, an extremely disagreeable surprise. Up to this time, Hughes had believed that one person only in the whole world had penetrated the very effective disguise with which a natural affliction had furnished him as a free gift. For Mr. Hughes's wig was, in any case, a necessity. An attack of the complaint known as Alopecia areata had produced large bald patches which had to be covered up by a wig; and this, together with the loss of his eyebrows, and aided by the removal of his beard and moustache, had so metamorphosed him that, though he avoided all old haunts and old acquaintances, he was almost completely secure from recognition. But, as we have said, there was one person who had appeared, at least, to suspect his identity, and whose existence kept him in a state of constant watchfulness and anxiety. And now there was another.

Mr. Hughes was not a scrupulous man; and if he was a cautious man, he was ready to take a present risk for the sake of future safety. In the very moment when Mr. Toke had foolishly proclaimed his power, he had made a decision. He was not going to walk abroad with this everlasting menace at his elbow. One dangerous enemy was more than enough. Two were more than could be borne. The plain fact was that Mr. Toke knew too much; and that fact pointed to the obvious remedy. So much Hughes had decided even while Toke was speaking. The rest was only a question of ways and means.

Apparently, this question also was in course of being settled, for Mr. Hughes, after pacing up and down the office for a few minutes, began, in a leisurely and deliberate fashion, to make certain changes in his visible characteristics that suggested a definite purpose. It is one of the compensations of being compelled to wear a wig that one can choose one's wig and even, on occasion, change it. Of this privilege Mr. Hughes proceeded to avail himself. From a locked drawer in a locked cupboard he took out a wig of a pronounced red and of a fluffy, rather ragged texture, strikingly different from the sleek, dark brown one that he was wearing. Having locked the door, he put on the new wig, and then produced from the drawer a reddish moustache, a small bunch of hair of the same colour, and a bottle of spirit gum. With some of the latter, he anointed the base of the moustache (which was not one of those artless devices used by the amateur actor, but a workmanlike affair, made by a regular theatrical wig-maker) and carefully affixed it to his upper lip with the aid of a small mirror.

When he had fixed it securely in position he cut off some wisps of hair from the bundle, and, having stuck them along the upper margin of the moustache, combed them over the latter and finally trimmed them off with scissors. The effect was extremely realistic; and when, in the same way, a pair of darkish eyebrows had been attached, the transformation was complete.

But Mr. Hughes was too old a hand to trust a make up, no matter how excellent, farther than was unavoidable. The afternoon was already merging into evening. Another half-hour and the dusk would have fallen. Then not even close inspection would penetrate the disguise. So Mr. Hughes proceeded with caution. Having tidied up the office, he put away the bottle and the other materials and appliances which he had been using, and was in the act of locking the cupboard when he seemed to remember something that he had forgotten, and hastily reopened the door. Then that something was searched for and found in another locked drawer; revealing itself as a sheath-knife of the kind used by old-fashioned sailors (and commonly known as a "Green river knife"), furnished with a narrow waist-strap. Having slipped the knife inside the waistband of his trousers, he secured it in place by means of the strap. Then he took a glance at a time table and jotted down a few figures on a slip of paper which he put in his pocket, after which he walked over to the window and stood for a while, looking down into the fast-emptying street.

Already the daylight was beginning to fade, and the quiet of evening was settling down on the city. Judging that the time had come, he emerged cautiously into the dim corridor, locked the door behind him and set forth. Emulating Mr. Toke's discretion, he avoided the lift, taking his way down the unfrequented staircase, from the bottom of which he hurried along the lower corridors, and so out into the street. Even there he preserved his attitude of caution, threading his way through the quieter back thoroughfares, and maintaining that incessant watchfulness that has to be habitual with those who are on unsatisfactory terms with the law.

By the time that he reached the station the daylight was visibly weakening. He walked confidently to the booking-office, where he took a first-class single ticket to Hartsden Junction, which, as he knew, was some three-quarters of a mile from the hamlet which gave it its name. He was by no means unacquainted with the locality, for, if the truth must be told, he and Dobe had reconnoitred the neighbourhood with the idea of a possible nocturnal visit to Mr. Toke's premises on some occasion when that gentleman was absent on one of his periodical excursions abroad. That visit had never been made, for

the reason that Mr. Toke had let it be very clearly understood that he kept on those premises nothing but the “pieces” that formed his collection—porcelain figures, bronzes, and other objects, valuable enough in themselves, but of no use to merchants of the class to which Hughes and Dobey belonged. All negotiable property, he had explained, was kept securely in the strong room of his bank or in the safe that he rented at the safe-deposit establishment; and this had seemed such an obvious precaution that both rascals had accepted the statement and abandoned the idea of the nocturnal raid.

But now, by the light of the admission that Mr. Toke had so incautiously made, that he was proposing to convey this parcel of stolen property to his house, evidently with the intention of leaving it there during his absence abroad, Mr. Hughes began to reconsider the situation. The main object of his journey was not irreconcilable with certain other transactions; and, as he was borne by the fast express to the neighbourhood of Mr. Toke’s residence, he turned over quite a number of interesting possibilities.

The night had definitely fallen when Mr. Hughes approached the hamlet of Hartsden by the road from the Junction. He looked about him with his habitual wariness, but there was little need; for, as he passed through the single street, not a soul was to be seen, and, but for the lighted windows, the place might have been uninhabited. Beyond the hamlet the old manor house stood in dignified isolation, and adjoining it was the disused churchyard, enclosing the ruinous church—now also disused and replaced by a new building at the other end of the village.

It was towards the churchyard that Hughes directed his steps, making for the gateway without hesitation as if by a considered plan. On arriving there, he paused for a moment to glance down the road—of which the gateway commanded a clear view; then he pushed open the rickety gate and entered. Slowly he walked along the narrow path that led to the church, looking back from time to time to see that he still had an uninterrupted view of the road. Presently the path turned slightly to the right, and, passing into the shadow of a great yew tree, was encompassed by darkness so complete that Hughes was able only with the greatest difficulty to grope his way along it. Here, by the side of a large sarcophagus tomb which stood between the yew tree and the wall, he stopped and looked about him. Finding that the road was now no longer in sight, he slowly retraced his steps until he was, able once more to look out through the gateway along the road that formed the only approach to the village. And here he selected a spot where he could keep a look-out, secure from the observation of any chance wayfarer who might pass along from the village.

He was prepared for a long vigil, for it was possible that Toke might be delayed; and, in any case, the car would take considerably longer to cover the distance than the fast train by which Hughes had travelled. To beguile the time, he produced his cigarette-case and took out a cigarette. But his habitual caution warned him not to light it in view of the road. Accordingly, he retired past the yew tree into the darkest corner of the churchyard, behind the great tomb, and there, crouching low against the plinth of the tomb, he struck a match, held it for a moment to the cigarette and blew it out. But even then he held the cigarette shrouded in his hand; and when he returned to his look-out, he was careful to ensconce himself behind the tall headstone that he had selected as cover so that the glow of the cigarette should not be visible from outside.

But it was a tedious business, waiting in the gloom of the darkening churchyard for the coming of the man who could send him to penal servitude. And it was rendered none the more pleasant by a somewhat acute anxiety. For, though he had a perfectly clear purpose, the carrying into effect of that purpose could not be planned in exact detail. The precise method of procedure must be determined by Mr. Toke’s actions; and these could not be foreseen.

Time ran on. One by one, the lights in the windows of the few houses that were visible from the churchyard went out, and the chime of the clock in the new church at the end of the village, borne faintly on the night air, told out quarter after quarter. It was just striking the hour of ten when Hughes, having lighted his sixth cigarette, came out from behind the sarcophagus tomb and crept back to his look-out; and at that moment the lights of a car came into sight far away down the road.

Hughes was not a nervous man. But the message that those glimmering lights conveyed to him set his heart thumping and his hands trembling so that the cigarette dropped unheeded from his fingers. It is one thing to contemplate an atrocious deed from afar, but quite another to feel the irrevocable moment of action drawing nigh. With a feeling of shuddering dread, but yet never for an instant abandoning his dreadful intent, he watched the lights gradually wax brighter until the approaching car was actually entering the village. Apparently it was fitted with a powerful but silent engine, for no throb or hum of mechanism was borne to his ears.

Suddenly the lights went out, and for a few moments the car was perceptible neither to eye nor ear. Then it became faintly visible as a dim spot of deeper darkness. Nearer and nearer it came, now growing into a defined shape, and recognizable as a large, closed car. Hughes craned out from behind the headstone to watch it as it passed the gate. But it did not pass the gate. Just as it reached the farther wall of the churchyard, it slowed down suddenly and turned off to the left and was instantly lost to view.

To Hughes, in his state of extreme nervous tension, this unexpected behaviour was highly disconcerting. He had assumed that Mr. Toke would drive up to his gate, get out, and open it, and then run the car up the drive to the door of the house. Much puzzled and somewhat alarmed, he crept out from behind the headstone and began to steal softly and cautiously down the path towards the gate. But he had gone only a few steps when he was startled by the sudden appearance of Mr. Toke within a few paces of the gate and walking briskly towards it with the evident intention of entering the churchyard.

Sweating and trembling from the sudden shock, Hughes staggered back to the headstone and crouched down behind it,

cursing silently and for the moment overcome by terror. A step or two more and he must have been seen; and who could say what would have happened then? Toke could hardly have failed to grasp the situation; and Toke was no weakling. It had been a near thing.

From his lurking-place he saw Mr. Toke, hand-bag in hand, walk up the path with the assured manner of a man who is making for a definite destination. When he had passed the headstone Hughes craned out to watch the retreating figure; and, as it disappeared into the darkness under the yew tree, he rose and followed stealthily, crouching low to keep out of sight among the crowded tombstones. Presently he halted just at the edge of the patch of shadow and watched from the shelter of a crumbling tomb that was enclosed by an ivy-covered railing. From the impenetrable darkness under the yew tree there came a faint grinding or creaking sound. It lasted but a few moments, but, after a brief interval it was repeated. After yet another short interval, Hughes rose and came out from behind the railed tomb. Then he, too, disappeared into the darkness under the yew tree.

The minutes passed, but no sound came from that eerie corner of the churchyard over which the yew tree cast its sinister shadow. The clock of the distant church told out a quarter and then another. The reverberations of the bell had just died away when the silence was broken once more by that curious faint grinding or creaking sound. It was followed, almost immediately, by what sounded like a muffled cry. Again there was a brief space of silence. Then the grinding sound was repeated. And, after that, again silence.

The time ran on. Save for the murmur of the trees, as the leaves were gently stirred by the soft breeze, and the faint, indefinite voices of the night, not a sound disturbed the stillness that brooded over the churchyard. Away in the distance, the clock of the new church made its announcements to the sleeping village of the passage of the minutes that perish for us and are reckoned. But among the grey headstones and under the solemn yew tree, nothing stirred and no sound broke in to disturb the peace of the dead.

So the time passed, measured out impassively, quarter by quarter, by the distant chimes. More than an hour had slipped away since those two figures had been swallowed up in the dark cavernous depths under the yew tree, when the silence of the night was at last broken by the faint grinding creak. After the lapse of a few seconds, it was repeated. Then a figure appeared creeping stealthily out of the shadow and down the path towards the gate, which, as it emerged into the dim light, revealed itself as that of Mr. Hughes.

There was something curiously secret and furtive in his demeanour. He walked slowly, setting down his foot at each step with evident care to make no sound, and every few seconds he paused to listen and look about him. Thus he crept down to the gate, where again he halted and stood, listening intently and gazing into the darkness, first up the village street, and then across at the old manor house, sleeping among its trees. But it seemed that in the whole village there was no living creature besides himself waking and moving.

From the gate he turned to the right, and, in the same silent, furtive manner, stole along the wall of the churchyard towards the place into which the car had seemed to disappear. Short as the distance was, it seemed interminable in the agony of suspense that possessed him. For the car was indispensable. It had been the keystone of his plan—the appointed means of safety and escape. But suppose it had been seen, or, still worse, taken away! The fearful possibility brought the sweat afresh to his already clammy brow, and set his trembling limbs shaking so that he staggered like a drunken man.

At length he reached the corner of the wall. Beside the churchyard ran a narrow, leafy lane, enclosed between the high wall and a tall hedgerow, and as dark as a cellar. He peered desperately into the dense obscurity, but at first could see nothing. With throbbing heart he stole up the lane as quickly as he dared, still craning eagerly forward into the darkness, yet still careful not to trip on the rough ground. Suddenly he gave a gasp of relief; for, out of the darkness ahead, a shape of deeper darkness emerged, and, as he hurried forward, he recognized the big covered car with which he had had so many dealings in the past.

Shaken as he was, he still had all his wits about him, and he realized that there must be no false start. Once he was on the move, he must get straight away from the neighbourhood. It would never do to be held up on the road by any failure of the engine or other occasion of delay. Accordingly, he went over all the working parts with the aid of a small electric lamp that he produced from his pocket and satisfied himself that all was in order. Then he threw the light back along the lane to see that the way was clear for steering out in reverse. That was the immediate difficulty. There seemed to be no room to turn round. He would have to back out; and to back out at the first attempt.

At length he prepared for the actual start. Getting into the driver's seat, he switched on the lights and the ignition and pressed the electric starter. Instantly, the silence was shattered by a roar that seemed fit to rouse the whole countryside, and brought the sweat streaming down his face. Still, though the hand that held the steering wheel shook as if with a palsy, he kept his wits under control. The lane was practically straight and the car had been run straight in. By the dim light of the rear lamp he could see through the rear window well enough to back the car down the lane to the road.

At last, he was out in the open, as he could see by the light from the front lamps shining on the corner of the churchyard wall. He put the steering-wheel over and started forward, now quite noiselessly, through the village street and so out on to the London road.

It was getting on for two o'clock when he drove into the small car-park attached to the garage.

"Late, ain't you?" said the night watchman. "They told me Mr. Toke was going to bring her back by half-past eleven. Did he miss his train?"

“No,” replied Hughes. “He caught his train all right. It was my fault. I had to go somewhere else and couldn’t bring her along any sooner.”

“Well,” was the philosophical response, “better late than never.”

“Very much better,” Hughes agreed. “Good night—or rather, good morning.”

He paused for a moment to light a cigarette, and then walked out into the street and was lost to sight.





## BOOK II: INSPECTOR BADGER DECEASED

### V. — THE TRAGEDY IN THE TUNNEL

MR. SUPERINTENDENT MILLER was by no means an emotional man. He had his moments of excitement or irritation, but in general he was a person of a calm exterior, and gave the impression of one not easily ruffled. That was my view of him, born of years of intimacy. But the Superintendent Miller whom I admitted to our chambers in response to a somewhat peremptory knock was a new phenomenon. His flushed, angry face and lowering brow told us at once that something quite out of the ordinary had occurred, and we looked at him expectantly without question or remark. Nor was there any occasion for either; for, without seating himself or even taking off his hat, he came instantly to the point.

"I want you two gentlemen to come with me at once, if you can. I've got a car waiting. And I want you to bring all your wits and knowledge to bear on this case as you never brought them before."

Thorndyke looked at him in surprise. "What is it, Miller?" he asked.

The Superintendent frowned at him fiercely, and replied in a voice husky with passion: "It is Badger. He has been murdered. And I look to you two gentlemen as officers of the law to strain every nerve in helping us to bring the crime home to the villain who committed it."

We were profoundly shocked; and we could easily understand—and indeed share—his wrathful determination to lay hands on the murderer. It is true that Inspector Badger had been no favourite with any of the three of us. His personal qualities had not been endearing. But now this was forgotten. He had been, in a sense, an old friend, if at times he had seemed a little like an enemy. But especially, he was a police officer; and to a normally constituted Englishman, a police officer's life is something even more sacred than the life of an ordinary man. For the police are the guardians of the safety of us all. The risks that they accept with quiet matter-of-fact courage are under taken that we may walk abroad in security and rest at night in peace and confidence. Well may we feel, as we do, that the murder of a police officer is at once an outrage on the community and on every member of it.

"You may take it, Miller," said Thorndyke, "that we are at your command, heart and soul. Where do you want us to go?"

"Greenhithe. That is where the body is lying and where the murder must have been committed. There is a fairly good train in a quarter of an hour, and the car will get us to the station in five minutes. Can you come?"

"We must," was the reply; and without another word Thorndyke rose and ran up to the laboratory to notify our assistant, Polton, of our sudden departure. In less than a minute he returned with his "research case" in his hand, and announced that he was ready to start; and as I had already made the few preparations which were necessary, we went down to the car.

During our brief journey to the station nothing was said. As we arrived at the platform from the booking office, the train came alongside, and the passengers poured out. We took up our position opposite a first-class coach, and, when the fresh passengers had all bestowed themselves and the train was on the point of starting, we entered an empty compartment and shut ourselves in.

"It is very good of you gentlemen," said Miller, as the train gathered speed, "to come off like this at a moment's notice, especially as I have not given you any inkling of the case. But there will be plenty of time for me to tell you all I know—which isn't very much at present. Probably we shall pick up some fresh details at Greenhithe. My present information is limited to what we have heard over the telephone from there and from Maidstone. This is what it amounts to.

"Yesterday morning poor Badger went down to Maidstone to look over a batch of prisoners for the assizes and see if there were any old acquaintances lurking under an alias. But principally his object was to inspect a man who had given the name of Frederick Smith, but whom he suspected of being a certain crook whose real name was unknown to us. We were a good deal interested in this man. For various reasons we associated him with a number of burglaries of a rather clever type—one-man jobs, which are always the most difficult to deal with if they are efficiently carried out. And we had something to go on in one case, for Badger saw the man making off. However, he got away, and neither he nor the stuff was ever traced. So our position was that here was a man whom we suspected of quite an important series of crimes, but who was, so to speak, in the air. He was not even a name. He was just a 'person unknown.' Whether we had his finger-prints under some name we couldn't guess, because nobody knew him by sight excepting Badger; and his opinion was that the man had never been in custody, and couldn't be identified—excepting by himself."

"But," said I, "surely Badger could have put a description of him on record."

"M'yes," replied Miller. "But you know what Badger was like. So beastly secretive. One doesn't like to say it now, but he really didn't play the game. If he got a bit of information, instead of passing it round for the benefit of the force and the public, he would keep it to himself in the hope of bringing off a striking coup and getting some kudos out of it. And he did bring it off once or twice, and got more credit than he deserved. But to come back to this Maidstone business. Badger gleaned something from the reports concerning the prisoners there that made him suspect that this man, Smith, might be the much-wanted burglar. So down he went, all agog to see if Smith was the man he had once got a glimpse of."

"I shouldn't think a recognition of that kind, based on a mere passing glance, would have much value as evidence," I objected.

"Not in court," Miller admitted. "But it would have had considerable weight with us. Badger had a devil of a memory for faces, and we knew it. That was his strong point. He was like a snapshot camera. A single glance at a face and it was fixed on his memory for ever."

"Do you know if he recognized the man?" Thorndyke asked.

"He didn't," replied Miller, "for the man wasn't there. In some way he had managed to do a bolt; and up to the present, so far as I know, they have not been able to find him. It is quite likely that he has got clean away, for, as he was wearing his own clothes, he won't be very easy to track. However, Badger seems to have satisfied himself that the man was really the one he was looking for—probably he thought he recognized the photographs—and this morning he started for Town with the papers—the personal description, photographs, and finger-prints—for examination and comparison at the Criminal Record Office. But he never arrived; and about eleven o'clock his body was found near the middle of the Greenhithe tunnel. The engine driver of an up train saw it lying across the rails on the down side, and reported as soon as he got into Greenhithe. But it seemed that at least one train had been over it by then. I gather that—but there! I don't like to think of it. Poor old Badger!"

"No," Thorndyke agreed sympathetically. "It is too horrible to think of. But still, as we have to investigate and ascertain what really happened, we must put aside our personal feelings and face the facts, terrible as they are. You spoke of his having been murdered. Do you know if there were any signs, apart from the mutilation caused by the train passing over him, that he had met a violent death? Is it clear that it was not an accident?"

"Quite clear, I think," replied Miller. "I know nothing about the condition of the body, but I know that there was no open door on the off side of the train that he travelled by."

"That would seem to be conclusive," said Thorndyke, "if the fact can be established. But it isn't always easy to prove a negative. A passenger, getting into an empty compartment and finding the door open, would naturally shut it and might not report the circumstance. The point will have to be enquired into."

"Yes," Miller agreed; "but I don't think there is much doubt. You must remember that the train passed through Greenhithe station and past the signal boxes both there and at Dartford. An open door on the off side would be very noticeable from the down platforms. Still, as you say, the point will have to be settled definitely. Probably it has been by now. We shall hear what they have to say when we get to Greenhithe. But for my part I have no doubt at all, door or no door. Badger was not the sort of fool who leans out of the window of a moving train without seeing that the door is fastened. It is a case of murder, and the murderer has got to be found and dealt with."

If the Superintendent may have seemed to have formed a very definite opinion on rather slender evidence, that opinion received strong confirmation when we reached Greenhithe. Awaiting us on the platform were a detective sergeant and one of the senior officers from Maidstone Prison. They had travelled up from Maidstone together, apparently comparing notes and making enquiries by the way.

"Well, sir," said the Sergeant, "I think we can exclude the suggestion of accident, positively and certainly. It was unlikely on the face of it. But we have got some definite facts that put it out altogether. This officer, Chief Officer Cummings, whose duties include all matters relating to descriptions and records, handed to Inspector Badger the papers relating to the prisoner, Frederick Smith—finger-prints, description, and photographs—and saw him put them into his letter wallet. Now, I have been through that wallet with the greatest care, and there is not a trace of any of those papers in the wallet or in any of his pockets."

"Ha!" exclaimed Miller in a tone of grim satisfaction, "that settles it. I take it, Cummings, that there is no possible doubt that the Inspector had those papers in his pocket when he started from Maidstone?"

"Not a shadow of doubt, sir," replied Cummings. "I gave him the papers, carefully folded, and saw him put them into his wallet—just into the open wallet, as they were too large to go into the pockets without further folding. He stowed the wallet away in his inside breast pocket and buttoned his coat. And I can swear that it was in his pocket when he started, for I walked with him to the station and actually saw him into the train. He asked me to walk down with him, as there were various questions that he wanted to put to me respecting the prisoners, especially this man, Smith."

"Yes," said Miller, "we shall have to have a talk about Mr. Smith presently. But the fact that the Inspector had those papers on his person when he got into the train, and that they were not on the body, makes it certain that he was not alone in the carriage."

"It does, sir," the Sergeant agreed. "But apart from that, we have got direct evidence that he was not. The station-master at Strood gave us the particulars. The Inspector's train stopped there, and he had to get out and wait a few minutes for the London train. The station-master saw him standing on the platform, and, as they knew each other, he went up to him, and they had a few words together. While they were chatting the London train came in and drew up at the platform. Inspector Badger was just moving off to find a compartment when a man came along from the entrance. As soon as the Inspector saw this man, he stopped short and stood watching him. The man walked rather quickly along the train, looking in at the windows, and got into an empty first-class smoking compartment. But the station-master noticed that, before he got in, he looked into each of the adjoining compartments, which were both empty. As soon as he had got in and shut the door after him, the Inspector wished the station-master 'Good morning,' and began to saunter slowly towards the compartment that the stranger had got into. A few paces away from it he stopped and waited until the guard blew his whistle. Then he walked forward quickly and got into the compartment where the strange man was."

"Could the station-master give you any description of the man?"

"No, sire No description that would be of any use. He said he was a middle-aged man of about medium height, not noticeably stout or thin, moderately well-dressed in a darkish suit, and wearing a soft felt hat. He thought that the man had darkish red hair and rather a red nose. But that isn't very distinctive. And he thought he was clean-shaved."

"Did you ask him if he would know the man again if he saw him?"

"I did, sir, and he said that he might or he might not, but he didn't think he would, and he certainly wouldn't swear to him."

The Superintendent emitted a growl of dissatisfaction, and, turning to the Chief Officer, asked: "What do you say, Cummings? Does the description suggest anything to you?"

The officer smiled deprecatingly. "I suppose, sir, you are thinking of Frederick Smith, and it does seem likely. Smith certainly has darkish red hair and a reddish nose. And he is about that age and about that height and he hasn't got a beard, and when I last saw him he was wearing a darkish suit and a soft felt hat. So it might have been Smith. But as the description would apply to a good many men that you might meet, it isn't much good for identification."

"No," growled Miller, "not enough details. And now that the finger-prints and detailed description are gone, it might be difficult to prove his identity even if we should get hold of him."

"It isn't as bad as that, sir," said Cummings. "As it happens, luckily, we have a duplicate of the finger-prints, at least of some of them. The officer who took the finger-prints made rather a mess of one of the rolled impressions. So he had to waste that form and start over again. Fortunately, the spoiled form wasn't destroyed. So we've got that, and of course we've got the negatives of the photographs, and the officer who took the description can remember most of the items. There will be no difficulty in proving the identity if we can get hold of the man. And that ought not to be so very difficult, either. There are several of us who have seen him and could recognize him."

The Superintendent nodded. "That's all to the good," said he; "but before we can recognize him we've got to find him. The train didn't stop here, I understand."

"No, sir," the Sergeant replied. "The first stop after Strood was Dartford. We've been over there, but we had no luck. There were a lot of people waiting for the train, so the platform was pretty crowded, and it was not easy to see who got out of the train. None of the porters noticed any first-class passengers getting out, though there must have been one, for a first-class ticket was collected—from Maidstone."

"Maidstone!" exclaimed Miller. "Well, that couldn't have been our man. He came onto the Strood platform from the entrance."

"So the station-master says. But the booking-office clerk there doesn't remember issuing any first-class ticket, or any ticket at all to Dartford."

"Hm," grunted Miller. "Looks rather as if he didn't get out at Dartford. May have chanced it and gone on to London. We must have all the tickets checked. Did you make any enquiries from the ticket collector?"

"Yes, sir. But it was no go. He hadn't noticed any of the passengers particularly. Two or three of the men who passed out answered the station-master's description more or less. Of course they would. But he didn't really remember what any of them was like, and he couldn't say whether either of them was a first-class passenger. I suppose he just looked at the tickets and didn't see anything else."

"Yes," Miller agreed. "But we will go into this matter presently. We mustn't keep these gentlemen waiting." He turned to Thorndyke and asked:

"What would you like to do first, Doctor? I suppose you will want to inspect the tunnel, and I should like you to take a look at the body."

"The body has been examined, sir," said the Sergeant, "by one of the local doctors. He was rather cautious in his opinions, but I understood that he found no marks of violence—no wounds or injuries excepting the accidental ones."

"Where is the body?" the Superintendent asked.

"In an empty store, sir, down below. They put it there out of sight until it could be moved to the mortuary."

Miller looked at us enquiringly, and Thorndyke reflected for a few moments.

"I think we had better take the tunnel first and see if we can pick up any traces from which we can gather a hint. It isn't very likely. The inside of the carriage, if we could have identified and examined it, would have been more hopeful as a source of information. However, the carriage is not available and the tunnel is. Will it be safe to explore it now?"

As he asked the question he glanced at the station-master, who took out his watch and consulted it.

"There is a down train due in a couple of minutes," said he. "We had better let that go through. Then the line will be clear for a full hour on the down side."

"You have pretty long intervals," Miller remarked.

"We have," the station-master admitted, "but they will be a good deal shorter when the electrification is completed. At

present only the steam trains come on from Dartford. There goes the signal.”

We waited until the train had drawn up at the platform, discharged its two or three passengers and proceeded on its way. Then we walked on to the end of the platform, descended to the permanent way, and, marching in a procession, headed by the station-master, along the rough side-path, presently entered the mouth of the tunnel, advancing along the space between the down-side rails and the smoke-blackened wall.

There is always something rather eerie about a tunnel, even a comparatively short and straight one like that at Greenhithe, in which the light is never completely lost. It is not the obscurity only or the strange reverberating quality that the vaulted roof imparts to the voice. The whole atmosphere is weird and uncanny, there is a sense of remoteness from the haunts of living men, heightened by the ghostly, whispering sounds which pervade the air, confused and indistinguishable echoes from the far-away world of light and life.

The light from the entrance followed us quite a long way, throwing our indefinitely elongated shadows into the twilight before us until they were lost in the deeper gloom ahead. Gradually, the warm glow of the station-master’s lantern and the whiter circles of light from the electric lamps carried by Thorndyke and the Superintendent replaced the dwindling daylight and told us we were approaching the middle of the tunnel. The combined lights of the three lamps illuminated the ground with a brilliancy that was accentuated by the encompassing darkness, lighting up the rails and sleepers and the stones of the ballast, and bringing into view all the little odds and ends of litter that had been jettisoned from passing trains; scraps of newspaper, match-boxes, spent matches, cigarette-ends—trivial by-products of civilized human life, insignificant and worthless, but each scanned attentively by six pairs of eyes.

It was in the heart of the tunnel that Miller remarked, in a hollow voice with an accompaniment of chattering echoes:

“Someone has chucked away a pretty good cigar. Shocking waste. He hasn’t smoked a quarter of it.”

He spoke feelingly, for it was just the type of cigar that he favoured: a big, dark-coloured cigar of the Corona shape. Thorndyke let the light from his inspection lamp fall on it for an instant, but he made no reply, and we continued our slow progress. But, a few moments later, I suddenly missed the light from his lamp (we were marching in single file and he brought up the rear of the procession), and, looking round, I saw that he had gone back and was in the act of picking up the cigar with his gloved left hand. As he evidently did not wish his proceedings to be noticed by the others, I continued to walk on at a slightly reduced pace until he overtook me, when I observed that he had carefully enclosed the cigar in two of the seed envelopes that he invariably carried, and was now tenderly wrapping it in his handkerchief before disposing of it in his breast pocket.

“Any special significance in that cigar?” I asked.

“It is impossible to say,” he replied. “A half-smoked cigar must have some significance. It is for us to see whether it has any significance for us.”

The answer was a little cryptic and left me with the suspicion that it did not really disclose the motive for his evidently considered act. To one unacquainted with Thorndyke and his methods of research, the salving of this scrap of jetsam must have appeared entirely foolish, for there seemed no more reason for taking and preserving this cigar than for collecting the various empty match-boxes and cigarette that lay strewn around.

But I knew Thorndyke and his ways as no one else knew him. I knew that it was his principle to examine everything. But the word “everything” has to be construed reasonably. There was always some selection in the objects that he examined; and I had the feeling that this cigar had presented to him something more than its mere face value.

So I reflected as we walked on slowly, scanning the ballast by the light of our lamps. But no other object came into view to engage our attention until we reached the spot where the tragedy had occurred. Here we halted with one accord and stood looking down in silence at the gruesome traces of the disaster. Miller was the first to break the silence.

“There seems to have been a lot of blood. Doesn’t that suggest that he was alive when the train went over him?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke, “in a general way, it does. But we shall be able to judge better from an examination of the body.” Then, turning to the station-master, he asked: “How long could he have been lying on the line when the down train came along?”

“Not more than a minute,” was the reply. “Perhaps not that. The two trains passed in the tunnel.”

“And how was the body lying? You came with the search party, I think?”

“Yes, I directed the search party. The body was lying across the rails slantwise with the feet towards the Greenhithe end. It was lying nearly on its back. But, of course, the train passing over it may have changed its position. Still, it is rather curious that the feet should have been pointing that way. If a man steps out of a moving train, his feet come to the ground and catch, and he flies forward head first. The position of the body almost seemed to suggest that he fell out head downwards.”

“Yes,” agreed Thorndyke. “But there isn’t much in it, for he certainly did not step out. And a man who falls out by the unexpected opening of the door may fall, in almost any position. Have you had any detailed report from the driver of the down train?”

“Yes. I had a talk with him when he brought the train back from New Brompton. But he had very little to tell. He never

saw the body at all, and he wouldn't have known of the accident if it hadn't been for the chance that the fireman happened to look over the near side of the foot-plate and caught just a passing glimpse of a pair of feet sticking out from under the engine. He shouted out as soon as he saw them, but of course there was nothing to be done. It was a fast train, and it couldn't have been pulled up in its own length, even if that would have been any good."

"And where did he pass the up train?"

"He was just passing the rear of it when the fireman shouted."

"Did he notice any open door?"

"No. But that is not to say that there was not an open door. He didn't really see the other train at all. They had just opened the furnace door and the light from that must have dazzled him. It was the light from the furnace reflected from the roof and walls of the tunnel that enabled the fireman to see the body."

"It is unnecessary to ask in what part of the train Badger was travelling," said Thorndyke. "He must have been near the front unless it was a very long train."

"It was rather a long train," said the Sergeant. "The station-master at Strood told us that, though he couldn't say exactly how many coaches there were. Of course, we can easily find out, and we shall have to. But he was able to tell us where Inspector Badger's compartment was. It was right up in front, in the second coach—rather an unusual position for a first class compartment."

While this interrogation was proceeding, we had been walking on slowly towards the east end of the tunnel, scrutinizing the ground as we went but without any further result. We now came out into the open in a cutting, and, on the station-master's advice, continued our examination of the permanent way as far as Swanscombe Halt; but nothing came into view that threw any light on the tragedy. At the halt we waited a few minutes for an up train that was then due, in which we travelled back to Greenhithe; an arrangement that not only saved time and effort, but gave Thorndyke the opportunity of observing, with his head out of the window, the conditions of light prevailing in the tunnel and the visibility of one part of the train from the others.

As we came out on to the platform at Greenhithe, Miller looked wistfully at my colleague.

"Did you think of having a look at the body, Doctor?" he asked, adding: "I should feel more satisfied if you would. A local doctor hasn't had the experience of criminal cases that you and Dr. Jervis have."

"I don't suppose that the local doctor would have missed any signs that bore on the cause of death," said Thorndyke. "But still, an additional examination is at least an extra precaution. Perhaps the station-master will direct someone to show us the way."

The station-master elected to show us the way himself, and preceded us down the stairs. Reluctantly, I followed Thorndyke, leaving the others on the platform and, as I descended the stairs, I was, for the first time in my professional life, conscious of a shrinking repugnance to the atmosphere of tragedy and death. After all, a doctor has his human feelings. It is impossible to look on the mutilated corpse of an old acquaintance as the mere "subject" of an investigation. But, as a matter of fact, I took no part in the actual examination. I saw that the body still lay on the tarpaulin-covered stretcher and that part of the clothing had been removed, but I stood aloof by the door, leaving the inspection to Thorndyke; who evidently realized my state of mind, for he made his examination in silence and with no suggestion that I should join him.

One thing, however, I did observe, and with considerable surprise. When he had completed his examination of the body, he opened his research case and took from it the portable finger-print outfit that formed part of its permanent equipment. Taking out the ready-inked copper plate and a couple of cards, he proceeded, in his neat, methodical way, to make a set of ten prints, one of each digit.

"Why are you taking his finger-prints?" I asked. "Does anything hinge on them?"

"Not at present," he replied. "But it is possible that some finger-prints may be found; and, if they may be, it might be very important to be able to say if they were or were not Badger's. So I am securing the means of comparison while they are available."

Thus stated, the motive for the proceeding seemed reasonable enough; but yet the explanation left me wondering if there was not something more definite in Thorndyke's mind. And this vague suspicion was strengthened when, as I helped him to repack the research case, I saw him deposit in it, and pack with extreme care, the derelict cigar which he had picked up in the tunnel. But I made no comment, and as the gruesome business was now completed, I took up the research case and led the way out of the store.

"Apparently," he said as we ascended the stairs, "the local practitioner was right. There are no signs of any injuries that might have been inflicted before he fell on the line. But one thing is clear. He was certainly alive when the train ran over him and for at least a few seconds after."

"Then," said I, "it might really have been an accident."

"So far as the appearances and condition of the body are concerned, it might. But if there was another person in the compartment and that person has not reported an accident, the probabilities are overwhelmingly in favour of either a

crime or what we may call an incriminating misadventure.”

“What do you mean by an incriminating misadventure?” I asked.

“I mean a misadventure which would probably not have been accepted as such. Miller believes that the other passenger was the escaped prisoner, Frederick Smith. Suppose that Miller is right. Suppose that Badger recognized the man and tried to arrest him. That the man resisted and a struggle occurred. I don’t see why it should unless Badger had handcuffs with him and tried to put them on. But suppose a struggle to have occurred, in the course of which the door became unfastened and Badger fell out. That would have been a pure misadventure. But it is not likely that the man would have reported it, for he would realize the improbability of his statement being believed. He would trust rather to the probability of his presence in the carriage being unknown.”

“I have no doubt that he would,” I agreed, “and wisely, too. For no one would believe his statement. He would be charged with murder and most probably convicted. But you don’t entertain the possibility of a misadventure, do you?”

“As a bare possibility, yes. But it is wildly improbable; and still more so if those documents were really in Badger’s pocket and have really disappeared. That is a crucial point. For, if it is certain that they were removed from the wallet, that is not only evidence of a conflict having taken place, but suggests in the strongest possible way that Badger had been rendered unconscious or helpless. But that suggestion at once raises the question, How was he rendered unconscious or helpless? The state of the body seems to exclude physical violence such as throttling or a knock on the head. Yet it is difficult to think of any other means.”

“Very difficult,” I agreed, “particularly in the alleged circumstances—the casual and unexpected meeting of two men in a railway carriage; and if one of those men was, as the theft of the documents seems to imply, a man just escaped from prison, the difficulty is still greater. Such a man would presumably, be unprovided with anything but his fists, indeed the mystery is how he could have procured his ticket.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke assented, “that calls for explanation. But we must not mix up hypothesis and fact. Miller assumes that the man was the prisoner, Smith, and it is possible that he was. But we must not let that possibility influence us. We have to approach the inquiry with a perfectly open mind.”

As he concluded, we came out on to the platform, where we found our friends awaiting us. In a few words Thorndyke communicated to them the results of his inspection, at which Miller was visibly disappointed.

“It is an extraordinary thing,” said he. “Badger was a pretty hefty fellow and a skilled wrestler and boxer. I can’t imagine even a strong man putting him out through the door unless he had disabled him first. And, in any case, you would expect to find some signs of a scrap. Did you propose to make any further examination?”

“It doesn’t seem very necessary,” Thorndyke replied. “But perhaps you might like me to be present when the local doctor does the post-mortem. There are other possibilities besides gross physical injury.”

“That is what I was thinking,” said Miller; “and I should be glad if you could be present at the post mortem. Then I could feel satisfied that nothing had been overlooked. I understand that the inquest is to be held to-morrow afternoon at four o’clock and the post-mortem at two. Can you manage that?”

“I shall have to, if you think it important,” was the reply.

As Miller was making grateful acknowledgments, the station-master approached to convey to us the welcome tidings that a fast train to London was due in a few minutes.

“Are you coming back with us, Superintendent?” Thorndyke asked.

“I may as well,” Miller replied. “The Sergeant will carry on with the case, and I must set some inquiries going at the London end. And, by the way, Cummings, are you returning to Maidstone to-day?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the Chief Officer. “I shall take the next train back.”

“Then,” said Miller, “you had better have those finger-prints of Smith’s photographed and send either the photographs or the original up to Headquarters with the portrait photographs and the personal description. See to it at once, for we may want the information at any moment. In fact we want it now.”

“Very well, sir,” replied Cummings. “I expect the photographs have been done already, but in any case, I will see that you get them some time to-morrow.”

The short remaining interval was occupied by Miller in the delivery of detailed instructions to the Sergeant. Then the train came hissing into the station, and Thorndyke, Miller, and I took our places in a compartment to which we were escorted by our three coadjutors.

---

## VI. — THORNDYKE EXAMINES HIS MATERIAL

ON the way up to Town little was said on the subject of our investigation and that little was mainly contributed by Miller. Thorndyke, unwilling as he always was to go far beyond the ascertained facts, maintained a tactful reticence tempered by a sympathetic interest in the Superintendent’s comments and suggestions.

"What I can't understand," said Miller, "is how that fellow managed to get Badger out of the door. It wouldn't be easy in the case of an ordinary man, but in the case of a man like Badger—a trained police officer and a pretty hefty one at that—it seems incredible."

"It would seem," I suggested, with little conviction, "that he must have been taken unawares."

"But how could he?" retorted Miller. "He knew that he was shut in with an escaped prisoner and that the other man probably knew that he knew it. You can take it that Badger would have watched him like a cat with a mouse. And the other fellow would have had to get the door open. That's rather a noticeable proceeding. No; when you think of the circumstances, it seems impossible that Badger could have been caught off his guard, and in a tunnel, too, of all places. What do you say, Doctor?"

"I agree with you," replied Thorndyke, "that it seems impossible that Badger could have been put out by mere physical violence."

"Are you quite sure that there were no signs of any injury? No bullet wound or marks of a life-preserver or sand-bag, or anything of that sort?"

"I think I can say positively," Thorndyke answered, "that there was no bullet wound and no bruises on the head, though I shall examine the body more minutely to-morrow when I attend at the post-mortem. As to a sand-bag, that would probably leave no external marks. But it is an infinitely unlikely weapon to be used in a railway carriage, even in a tunnel. The carriage was presumably lighted like this one; and although that lamp gives a mere glimmer, hardly visible in daylight, the carriage would not be dark enough to make the use of a sand-bag practicable."

"No," Miller agreed, "it wouldn't. I was just feeling around for some sort of explanation. What about chloroform? Have you considered that?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "and I think we can exclude it. At any rate I could discover no trace of it. But, as a matter of fact, it is really not practicable to administer chloroform forcibly to a strong man. The whiff from a handkerchief, producing instant unconsciousness, appertains to fiction. In practice the forcible use of chloroform involves a rather prolonged struggle, and results in very characteristic marks on the skin around the mouth and nose. There were no such marks in this case, nor any other signs what ever."

"Then," Miller rejoined disconsolately, "I'm done. There must be some sort of explanation, but I'm hanged if I can think of one. Does anything occur to either of you gentlemen?"

For my part, I was as much in the dark as the Superintendent and had to admit it; and Thorndyke, as I expected, refused to commit himself to any speculative opinions.

"There isn't much use in theorizing at this stage," said he. "We want more facts, and we want confirmation of the assumptions that we have been treating as facts. For instance, the identity of the man who was seen to get into the carriage at Strood."

"M'yes," Miller agreed reluctantly. "I don't think there's much doubt, but, as you say, a little direct proof would be more satisfactory. Probably we shall get some more details in the course of a day or two. Meanwhile, I'm afraid I've taken up a lot of your time to very little purpose. We don't know much more than we did when we started."

"Apparently we do not," Thorndyke admitted. "But I don't regret the expedition. It was desirable for our own satisfaction to go over the ground at once and make sure that we had not missed anything."

"I'm glad you take that view, Doctor," said Miller, "but, all the same, you've got mighty little for your pains; nothing, in fact, excepting what you have gleaned from your examination of the body, and that doesn't seem to help us much."

"It doesn't," Thorndyke agreed. "But we must not forget that negative evidence has its value. The exclusion of one possibility after another leaves us eventually with the one that has to be accepted."

Miller received this rather academic observation without enthusiasm, remarking, truly enough, that the early stages of that sort of investigation were apt to be a little discouraging. "Possibly," he added, "some thing new may come out at the inquest, though it isn't likely. And it is just possible that, when we get those finger-prints from Maidstone, we may find that we are dealing with a known criminal. But even that would not prove the fact of the murder."

"As to that," said I, "if it can be proved, as apparently it can, that this man was alone with Badger in the compartment when the disaster occurred, that will create a pretty strong presumption of murder."

"No doubt," agreed Miller. "But presumption is a different thing from proof. If he should give a plausible account of an accident—such as leaning out of the window of an unfastened door—we shouldn't believe him, but we couldn't disprove his statement, and you might find it hard to get a jury to convict. If there is any doubt, the accused is entitled to the benefit of it. What we want is something in the way of positive evidence; and all that we have got is that certain documents have apparently been taken from the person of the deceased."

"I should call that pretty weighty positive evidence," said I, "especially as the documents included the suspect's finger-prints and description. What do you think, Thorndyke?"

"I think," he replied, "that we shall be in a better position to form opinions after the inquest, when we shall know what facts are really available. And, speaking of the inquest, Miller, what is to be done with regard to notes of the evidence? Are

you employing a shorthand reporter, or shall I bring or send my own man?"

"I don't see that either is necessary," replied Miller. "We can get a copy of the depositions if we want one."

"That may meet your requirements," said Thorndyke, "but it may not suit me so well. I think I will send a reporter of my own, and you can have a copy of the notes if you have any use for them."

The Superintendent accepted this offer with suitable acknowledgments, and the subject dropped for the time. As the train moved out of London Bridge Station, however, I ventured to raise another subject of more immediate interest, at least to me.

"What are we going to do in the matter of food, Thorndyke?" I asked. "Does Polton know when to expect us?"

"Obviously not," was the reply, "as we did not know ourselves. I told him that we should get some food on the way, and I suggest that the Coffee Room at the Charing Cross Hotel will be the best place to stake up. Perhaps the Superintendent will join us."

"Very good of you, Doctor," said Miller, "but I think I must get on to my office to finish up one or two odds and ends. Possibly we shall travel down together to-morrow, but, if not, we shall meet at the inquest. By that time I shall probably have seen those finger-prints from Maidstone."

Accordingly, we separated at Charing Cross, Miller striding away towards the entrance while Thorndyke and I made our way to the Hotel Coffee Room, where, with one accord, we demanded whatever might be ready at the moment. The long fast that our various activities had entailed had disposed us both to find a better use for our jaws than conversation. But as the entrée dish emptied and the level in the claret bottle sank, my interest in our quest revived and I began cautiously to put out feelers. It had been evident to me that Thorndyke was not prepared to accept Miller's interpretation of the facts, and the question that I asked myself—and by implication put to him—was, Had he any alternative theory? But my feelers felt nothing but a steady, passive resistance to discussion, which, however, was not entirely unilluminating; for long experience of Thorndyke had taught me that when he was more than usually uncommunicative, he had something up his sleeve.

Now, could he have anything up his sleeve on the present occasion? Was there something that he had seen and the rest of us had overlooked? Naturally, I could not be sure, but there had been so little to see that it seemed hardly possible. His examination of the body could not have yielded any fact that he had not disclosed. It was quite unlike him to withhold any observed fact when he made a report. As I turned over the events of the day, I could recall only two that seemed to involve any obscurity or uncertainty. Thorndyke had taken the dead man's finger-prints. I did not see why. But it was a simple and reasonable proceeding and Thorndyke's explanation had seemed adequate. But was it possible that he had something more definite in his mind?

Again, he had picked up a half-smoked cigar in the tunnel. That I could make nothing of. I could imagine no possible bearing that it could have on the case. The subsequent taking of the finger-prints suggested a suspicion that the cigar had been smoked by Badger. But supposing it had? What light could that fact conceivably throw on the crime? I could perceive no relevancy at all. Nevertheless, the more I reflected on these two incidents, the more strongly did I suspect that they were connected with something definite in Thorndyke's mind; something connected with Badger's finger-prints, or even with those of the other man—which would, indeed, furnish highly relevant and important evidence.

That suspicion deepened when, on our arrival at our chambers, he made his way straight up to the laboratory with an air of evident purpose. There we found our laboratory assistant, Polton, apparently engaged in a post-mortem examination of the dismembered remains of a clock. He greeted us with a crinkly smile of welcome, and, scenting some more alluring activity, abandoned the autopsy and slipped off his stool.

"Is there anything that you are wanting, sir?" he asked, as Thorndyke ran a seeking eye along the shelves.

"Haven't we a holder for objects that are to be photographed?" Thorndyke enquired.

"Yes, sir. The stand forceps," was the reply; and, opening a cupboard, Polton produced an appliance somewhat like an enlarged edition of the stage forceps of a naturalist's microscope—a spring holder supported on a heavy foot and furnished with a universal joint. As Polton set the appliance down on the bench, Thorndyke opened his research case, and, taking from it the envelope containing the cigar, extracted the latter with a pair of forceps and fixed it in the jaws of the holder, which grasped it near the pointed end. Anticipating the next move, I repaired to the cupboard and brought forth an insufflator, or powder spray, and a wide-mouthed bottle filled with a fine, white powder, both of which I placed on the bench without remark. Thorndyke acknowledged the attention with a smile, enquiring:

"What are the odds that we draw a blank?"

"You are gambling on the chance of finding Badger's finger-prints?" I suggested.

"It is hardly a gamble, as we don't stand to lose anything," he replied. "But I thought it worth while to try. There is at least a possibility."

"Undoubtedly," I agreed. "And the probability is not so very remote. What I don't see is the relevancy of their presence or absence. Does it matter to us or to anybody else whether Badger was or was not smoking a cigar when he met his death?"

"That question," he replied, "we may leave until we see what luck we have. The might-have-beens certainly do not



concern us.”

As he was speaking, he filled the container of the spray with the white powder, and, starting the bellows, blew a jet of powder on to the cigar, turning the latter round by degrees until every part of it was covered with a white film. Then, swinging up the arm of the holder until the cigar was upright, he took a little box-wood mallet that Polton had picked out of a rack and handed to him, and began rapidly and lightly to tap the foot of the holder. As the slight concussions were transmitted to the cigar, the film of powder on its surface crept gradually downward, uncovering the dark body by degrees, but leaving a number of light-coloured patches where the powder had adhered more closely. Slowly, as the tapping continued, the loose powder became detached until only the lightest dusting remained; and meanwhile the light patches grew more distinct and defined, and began to show faintly the characteristic linear patterns of finger-prints. Finally, Thorndyke blew gently on the cigar, rotating it as before by means of the universal joint. And now, as the last vestiges of the loose powder were blown away, the finger-prints—or at least some of them—grew suddenly quite clear and distinct.

Polton and I pored eagerly over the curious markings (though it had been almost a foregone conclusion that some finger-prints must appear, since somebody had held the cigar in his fingers) while Thorndyke once more opened his research case and took from it a couple of cards, each bearing five finger-prints and each scribed with the name of Inspector Badger. Laying the two cards on the bench beside the holder, he took a magnifying glass down from a nail on the wall and carefully scanned through it first the prints on the card and then those on the cigar. After several prolonged comparisons he seemed to have reached a conclusion, though he made no remark but silently handed me the glass.

I began with a thorough inspection of the prints on the cards. They were beautifully distinct, having been skilfully executed with finger-print ink, and showed, with the sharpness of an engraving, not only the ridge-pattern but the rows of tiny white dots on the black lines which represented the mouths of the sweat glands. When I had to some extent memorized the patterns, I turned my attention to the cigar, selecting first a rather large print which looked like that of a thumb. It was slightly blurred as if the thumb had been damp, but it was quite legible; and when I compared it with the two thumb prints on the card, I recognized it pretty confidently as that of the left hand.

Having reached a positive result, I felt no further examination was worthwhile. But before giving my decision, I handed the glass to Polton, who took it from me with a crinkle of satisfaction and bent eagerly over the cards. But I think he had already made his observations with the naked eye, for, after a very brief inspection, he delivered his verdict.

“It’s a true bill, sir.” He pointed at the large print with a pencil and added:

“That is Mr. Badger’s left thumb.”

“That was my opinion, too,” I said in confirmation.

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed, “I think there is no doubt of it, though it will have to be verified by a detailed comparison of the separate characters. But it establishes a *prima facie* case. There are a number of other, less distinct prints, but we need not examine them now. The important thing is to secure a permanent record which can be safely handled. How many photographs shall we want, Polton?”

“You will want to show every part of every finger-print free from distortion,” said Polton, stating the problem and slowly rotating the cigar as he spoke. “Six photographs would do it at a pinch, but if it is important, I should do twelve and make it safe. That would give you about four views of each finger-print.”

“Very well, Polton,” said Thorndyke, “we will make twelve exposures. And if you have the plates ready, we will get them done at once.”

As the making of twelve exposures promised to be a tedious business and my assistance was not required, I took one or two sheets of paper from the rack, and, laying them on the work-bench, proceeded to occupy myself usefully in drawing up a summary of the day’s experiences and the facts, such as they were, which had transpired during our investigations. But they were few and apparently not very significant, so that I was not long in coming to the end of my summary; when I laid down my pen and transferred my attention to Thorndyke’s proceedings.

It was evident that the discovery of Badger’s thumb-print had not exhausted his interest in the derelict cigar, for, as each negative was developed and washed, he brought it to the bench, and, holding it over a sheet of white paper under the lamp, scrutinized it through his lens and compared it with the prints on the cards. I did not quite understand the object of this detailed comparison, for the identification of the one print had established the fact that the cigar had been smoked by Badger, whatever the significance of that fact might be. The identification of further prints seemed rather like flogging a dead horse. Eventually I was moved to make a remark to that effect.

“That is true enough,” said he, “but we have to get all the information that our material will yield. As a matter of fact, I am not looking for the remainder of Badger’s prints; I am looking to see if there are any prints which are not his.”

“And are there?”

“Yes, there is at least one and a problematical second one, but that is practically obliterated by the heat from the burnt end. The other is a fairly clear print, apparently a thumb; and it is certainly not either of Badger’s thumbs.”

“From which, I presume, you infer that the cigar was given to Badger by someone else?”

“That is the reasonable inference; and as he was alone with another man in the carriage, the further inference is admissible that the giver of the cigar was that other man. That, however, is only a probability which will have to be

considered in relation to the other facts.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “It might have been given to him at Maidstone to smoke in the train. I don’t see how you are to prove either view, or that you would be much forrarder if you did.”

I was, in fact, rather puzzled by the intense interest that Thorndyke displayed in this cigar. For, surely, nothing could be less distinctive or more hopeless for purposes of identification than a commodity which is manufactured in thousands of identical replicas. But as Thorndyke must necessarily realize this, I could only suppose that there was some point the significance of which I had overlooked; and with this probability in my mind, I followed my colleague’s proceedings closely in the hope that the point which I had missed would presently emerge.

When the last of the negatives had been developed and examined, Thorndyke took the cigar out of the holder and wiped it clean of all traces of the powder.

“That,” he remarked, “is the advantage of carrying out these investigations ourselves. If Miller had seen those finger-prints, he would have insisted on annexing the cigar to produce as an ‘exhibit’ at the trial—if there ever is one. Whereas our photographs, properly attested, are equally good evidence, and the cigar is at our disposal for further examination.”

The advantage was not very obvious to me, but I discreetly abstained from comment, and he continued:

“It is a rather unusual cigar; considerably above the ordinary dimensions. The part which remains is five inches and an eighth long. Judging by the thickness—a full three-quarters of an inch—the complete cigar was probably well over six inches in length. How much over we can’t say. There are some enormously long cigars made for civic banquets and similar functions.”

“No doubt,” said I, “a cigar merchant could identify the type and give us the actual dimensions.”

“Probably,” he agreed. “But it is enough for us to note that it was an exceptionally large cigar and pretty certainly an expensive one. And then, as if the size were not enough, there is the strength of the tobacco. The appearance of the leaf tells us that it is an uncommonly strong weed. Taking the size and the strength together, it would be rather more than enough for an ordinary smoker.”

All of this was doubtless true, but it seemed to have no bearing on the question as to how Inspector Badger had met with his death. I was still puzzling over Thorndyke’s apparently irrelevant proceedings when I received a sudden enlightenment. Having finished his examination of its exterior, Thorndyke laid the cigar on the bench and with a long thin knife, cut it cleanly lengthwise down the middle. The action set a chord of memory vibrating, and incidentally engendered in me a desire to kick myself. For, years ago, I had seen Thorndyke cut open another cigar.

“Ha!” I exclaimed. “You are thinking of that poisoned cheroot that Walter Hornby sent you.”

“That we inferred to have been sent by him,” Thorndyke corrected. “We were pretty certainly right, but we had no actual proof. Yes, it seemed possible that this might be a similar case.”

I looked closely at the cut surfaces of the two halves. In the case of the cheroot, the section had shown a whitish patch where the alkaloid—it was aconitine, I remembered—had dried out of the solution. But nothing of the kind was visible in these sections.

“I don’t see any signs of the cigar having been tampered with,” said I. “There doesn’t seem to be any trace of a hypodermic needle, as there was in the cheroot, or any crystals or foreign matter of any kind.”

“As to the needle,” said Thorndyke, “the heat and the steam from the burning end would probably obliterate any traces. But I am not so sure of the absence of foreign matter. There is certainly no solid material, but the whole of the inside has a greasy, sodden appearance which doesn’t seem quite natural, and the smell is not like that of a normal cigar.”

I picked up one of the halves and cautiously sniffed at it.

“I don’t make out anything abnormal,” said I. “It is devilish strong and rather unpleasant, but I can’t distinguish any smell other than that of virulently rank tobacco.”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “there is no use in guessing. We had better ascertain definitely. And as the foreign matter, if there is any, appears to be a liquid, we will begin by making an attempt to isolate it.”

He glanced at Polton, who, having put the negatives to drain, had now reappeared and was casting wistful glances at the divided cigar.

“Will you want any apparatus prepared, sir, or any reagents?” he asked.

“A fairly wide-mouthed ten-ounce stoppered bottle and some sulphuric ether will do for the start,” replied Thorndyke; and as Polton went to the chemical side of the laboratory in search of these he laid a sheet of paper on the bench, and, placing on it one of the halves of the cigar, proceeded to cut it up into fine shreds. I took possession of the other half and operated on it in a similar manner; and when the whole cigar had been reduced to a heap of dark-brown, clammy “fine-cut” tobacco, we shot it into the bottle, which Thorndyke then half-filled with ether.

“This is going to be a long job,” I remarked, looking a little anxiously at my watch. “This stuff ought to macerate for two or three hours at least.”

“We need not complete the examination to-night,” Thorndyke replied, reassuringly, as he gave the bottle a shake. “If we

can decide whether there is or is not any foreign substance present, that will be enough for our immediate purposes; and we ought to be able to settle that in half an hour."

Thorndyke's estimate seemed to me rather optimistic, unless—as I was disposed to suspect—he had already decided that some foreign substance was present and had formed some opinion as to its nature. But I made no comment, contenting myself with an occasional turn at shaking the bottle or prodding the mass of sodden tobacco with a glass rod.

At the end of half an hour, Thorndyke decanted off the ether—now stained a brownish yellow—into a beaker which he stood in a pan of warm water to hasten the evaporation, while Polton opened the windows and door to let the vapour escape.

"It's an awful waste of material, sir," he remarked, disapprovingly. "We ought to have done this in a retort and recovered the ether."

"I suppose we ought," Thorndyke admitted, "but this is the quicker way, and time is more precious than ether. Dr. Jervis wants to get done and go to bed."

As he was speaking, we all watched the beaker, in which the liquid dwindled in bulk from minute to minute, growing darker in colour as it grew less in volume. At length it was reduced to a thin layer at the bottom of the beaker—less than half a teaspoonful—and as this remained unchanged in volume, and the odour of ether became rapidly less intense, it was evident that evaporation had now ceased. Thorndyke took up the beaker, and, having smelled the contents, turned it from side to side to test the fluidity of the liquid; which flowed backwards and forwards some what sluggishly like a thinnish oil.

"What do you say it is, Jervis?" he asked, handing the beaker to me.

"Probably a mixture," I replied. "But it smells like nicotine and it looks like nicotine, excepting as to the colour; and as it has been extracted from a cigar, I should say that it is nicotine, stained with colouring matter."

"I think you are right," he said, "but we may as well confirm our opinions. The colour test will not answer very well owing to the staining, but it will probably work well enough to differentiate it from coniine, which it resembles in consistency, though not very much in smell. Can we have a white tile, Polton, or the cover of a porcelain capsule?"

From the inexhaustible cupboard Polton produced a small white, enamelled tile which he laid on the bench, while Thorndyke picked up a glass rod which he dipped into the liquid in the beaker and then touched the middle of the tile, leaving a drop on the white surface.

"I have rather forgotten this test," said I, leaning over the tile, "but it seems to me that this drop shows quite a distinct green tint in spite of the staining. Is that what you expected?"

"Yes," he replied. "The green tint is characteristic of nicotine. Coniine would have given a pink colour. But we had better try Roussin's test and settle the question quite definitely. We shall want two test tubes and some iodine."

While Polton was supplying this requisition, Thorndyke took up a clean filter paper and laid it on the drop of liquid on the tile, which it immediately soaked up, producing an oily spot of a distinct green colour.

"That," said he, "further supports the suggestion of nicotine. But it is not conclusive in the way that a chemical test is."

Once more I had the feeling that he was flogging a dead horse, for there seemed to be no reason whatever for doubting that the liquid was nicotine. However, I kept this view to myself, taking the opportunity to refresh my memory as to the procedure of Roussin's test, while Polton followed the experiment with breathless interest.

It was quite a simple test. Into one test tube Thorndyke dropped a few particles of iodine and poured on them a small quantity of ether. While the iodine was dissolving, he poured a little ether into the other test tube, and, with a pipette, dropped into it a few minims of the liquid from the beaker. When the iodine was dissolved, he poured the solution into the other tube. Almost immediately a brownish-red precipitate separated out and began to settle at the bottom of the tube.

"Is that according to plan?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "The result is positive, so far, but we must wait a few minutes for the final answer to our question. If this liquid is nicotine, the precipitate will presently crystallize out in long, slender needles of a very characteristic colour—ruby red by transmitted light and dark blue by reflected light."

He stood the test tube in a stand, and, seating himself on a high stool, proceeded to fill his pipe, while Polton stationed himself opposite the test tube stand and kept an expectant eye on the little mass of sediment. Presently I saw him pick up the magnifying glass, and, having drawn down an adjustable lamp, make a closer inspection. For three or four minutes he continued to watch the test tube through the glass, assisting his observations by placing a sheet of white paper upright behind the stand. At length he reported progress.

"It is beginning to crystallize—long, thin blue crystals."

"Try it against the light," said Thorndyke.

Very slowly and carefully, to avoid disturbing the formation of the crystals, Polton lifted the tube from its stand and held it between the lamp and his eye.

"Now they are red," he reported, "like thin splinters of garnet."

I took the tube from his hand and examined the growing mass of fine, needle-like crystals, crimson against the light and deep blue when the light was behind me, and then passed it to Thorndyke.

"Yes," he said when he had verified our observations, "that is the characteristic reaction. So now our question is answered. The liquid that we extracted from the cigar is nicotine."

"Well," I remarked, "it has been a very interesting experiment, and I suppose it was worth doing, but the result is not exactly sensational. Nicotine is what one might expect to extract from a cigar, though I must say that the amount is greater than I should have expected, especially as we haven't got the whole of it."

Thorndyke regarded me with an indulgent smile.

"My learned friend," said he, "has allowed his toxicology to get a little rusty, and thereby has missed the point of this experiment. It is not a question of quantity; there ought not to have been any nicotine at all."

As I gazed at him in astonishment and was beginning to protest, he continued: "The nicotine that we dissolved out with the ether was free nicotine. But there is no free nicotine in a cigar. The alkaloid is combined with malic acid. If this had been a normal cigar, we should have got no free nicotine until we had treated the cigar—or a decoction of it—with a caustic alkali, preferably caustic potash."

"Then," I exclaimed, "this nicotine had been artificially introduced into the cigar."

"Exactly. It was a foreign substance, although it happened to be a natural constituent of a cigar. Probably it was injected into the open end with a hypodermic syringe. But at any rate there it was; and I think that its presence disposes of Miller's question as to how Inspector Badger was put out of the carriage on to the line."

"You think that he was suffering from nicotine poisoning?"

"I have no doubt of it. We have seen that he smoked at least an inch of this cigar. The cigar contained naturally anything up to 8 per cent of combined nicotine, part of which would pass into the smoke. To this had been added not less than half a fluid drachm of free nicotine. Now, when we consider that the lethal dose of nicotine is not more than two or three drops, and that more than that amount must have been contained in the part that was burned, we are pretty safe in assuming that the smoker would have been reduced, at least, to a state of physical helplessness."

"You have no doubt that he was alive when the train went over him?"

"No. But though he was undoubtedly alive, I think it quite likely that he was moribund. He had apparently taken nearly, if not quite, the full lethal dose."

"It is a little surprising," I remarked, "that he went on smoking so long; that he did not grow suspicious, seeing that he knew who his fellow passenger was, as apparently he did."

"I don't think it is very surprising," replied Thorndyke. "The procedure had been so well calculated to avert suspicion. Let us suppose—as probably happened—that the stranger produces a cigar-case. There are two cigars in it—one, no doubt, bearing a private mark. The stranger takes the marked cigar and holds out the case to Badger. Now Badger, as we know, usually smoked a pipe, but he was very partial to a cigar, and he preferred a strong one. He would certainly have taken the cigar and would have been impressed by its strength. Probably, owing to the presence of the free nicotine, the cigar would not have burned freely. He would have had to draw at it vigorously to keep it alight, and so would have drawn into his mouth a large amount of the vaporized nicotine."

"Presently he would begin to feel unwell, but at first he would feel nothing more than ordinary tobacco-sickness, and before he had time to become suspicious, he would be in a state of collapse. Nicotine, you will remember, is probably, with the exception of hydrocyanic acid, the most rapid of all poisons in its action."

"Yes; but if Badger was really in a moribund state, it would seem that it was a tactical mistake to throw him out on the line. If the murderer had simply sat him up in a corner and got out at the next station, no suspicion of any crime would have arisen. The body might not have been observed until the train reached London, and when it was discovered and examined, death would have appeared to have been due to natural causes, or to excessive smoking, if the nicotine poisoning had been detected."

"I don't think that would have done, Jervis," Thorndyke replied. "Your plan would have involved too many contingencies. The next stop was at Dartford—a fairly busy junction. Someone might quite probably have got in there and seen the murderer getting out. And again, Badger might have recovered. You can usually tell when a man is dead, but it is difficult even for an expert to be certain that an insensible man is dying. No, this man was taking no risks, or as few as possible. And he was a desperate man. Probably, Badger was the only officer who knew him, and he was aware of the fact. His safety depended on his getting rid of Badger."

"I gather," said I, "that you don't accept Miller's view as to the identity of the other passenger. It struck me that he was rather jumping at conclusions."

"He was, indeed," Thorndyke agreed, "in a most surprising manner for so shrewd and experienced an officer. It was a positive obsession. I never entertained the idea for a moment, for, apart from the total absence of evidence, it bristled with impossibilities. The man was a runaway prisoner. He was, it is true, wearing his own clothes, but he would probably have no hat and his pockets would almost certainly be empty. How could such a man have got a first-class ticket? And how could

he have got away from Maidstone to make his appearance so promptly at Strood? The thing is inconceivable.

"But we had better adjourn this discussion. It is past midnight, and Polton is yawning in a way that threatens us with the job of reducing a dislocation of the lower jaw. The rest of the nicotine extraction can wait till the morning, if it is necessary to pursue the question of quantity. The actual amount is of no great consequence. The presence of free nicotine is the essential fact, and we have established that."

"And thereby," said I, as the meeting broke up, "prepared quite a pleasant little surprise for Superintendent Miller."

## VII. — THE PERSISTENCE OF SUPERINTENDENT MILLER

As I undressed, and for the short time that I lay awake, I revolved in my mind the amazing events of the evening; and in the morning, no sooner was I in possession of my waking senses than the question presented itself afresh for consideration. What was it that had impelled Thorndyke to secure and preserve that cigar? It had looked like a mere chance shot. But all my knowledge and experience of Thorndyke and his ways was against any such explanation. Thorndyke was not in the habit of making chance shots. Moreover, the act had been deliberate and considered. He had seen the cigar by the instantaneous flash of the lamp; he had walked on for a few paces, and then he had slipped on a glove and gone back to pick up the cigar and bestow it in his pocket with evident care. In those few instants of reflection, something must have occurred to him to suggest the incredible possibility that had been turned into ascertained fact in the laboratory. Now, what could that something have been?

When we met at the breakfast-table, I proceeded without delay to present my problem for solution.

"I have been wondering, Thorndyke," said I, "what made you pick up that cigar. Evidently, the results of the examination were not entirely unexpected."

I could see that my question, also, was not unexpected. But he did not reply immediately, and I continued:

"That cigar was perfectly normal to look at. Yet it seems as if some intuition had suggested to you the possibility of its amazingly abnormal qualities. It is an utter mystery to me."

"I pray you, Jervis," he replied, smilingly, "not to accuse me of intuitions. I have always assumed that intuitions are for those who can't reason. But let us consider the circumstances surrounding that cigar. We will take first the *prima facie* appearances, disregarding, for the moment, our own personalities and our special knowledge and experience.

"Here was a cigar which had been lighted and thrown away, less than half-smoked. Now, its condition offered evidence, at a glance, of some sudden change in the state of mind of the smoker. That would be true even of a cigarette. Normally, a man either wants a smoke or he does not. If he does, he lights the cigarette and smokes it. If he does not, he doesn't light it. But if he lights it and then throws it away, that act is evidence of a change of purpose; and that change is almost certainly determined by some change in his circumstances or surroundings.

"But what is true of a cigarette, which costs about a penny, is more emphatically true of a cigar of an expensive type, which must have cost at least half a crown. There must have been some definite reason for its having been thrown away. But within a few yards of the place where the cigar was lying, a man had been murdered. There had been two men in a smoking-compartment. If deceased had been smoking a cigar, he would obviously not have finished it; and the same is almost certainly true of the other. Hence there was an appreciable probability that this cigar had some connection with the murder. But, since a cigar which has been smoked is practically certain to bear finger-prints, it would have been reasonable in any case to secure the cigar and see, if possible, whose finger-prints it bore.

"So much for the general aspects of the incident—which I should have thought would have been obvious to Miller. We, however, were not concerned only with the general aspects. We had special knowledge and special experience. I have told you how, in the early days of my practice, when I had little to do, I used to occupy myself in the invention of crimes of an unusual and ingenious kind and in devising methods of detection to counter them. It was time and effort well spent; for each crime that I invented—and circumvented—though it was imaginary, yet furnished actual experience which prepared me to deal with such a crime if I should encounter it in real life. Now, among the criminal methods which I devised was the use of a cigar as the means for administering poison."

"Yes," said I, "I remember; and very fortunate it was for you that you did. The fact that the possibility was in your mind probably saved your life when our friend, Hornby, sent you that poisoned cheroot."

"Exactly," he agreed. "The imaginary case had the effect of a real case; and when the real case occurred, it found me prepared. And now let us apply these facts to the present case. You heard Miller's sketch of the tragedy as he had heard it told through the telephone, and you will remember that he put his finger on the point that most needed explanation. How had Badger been put out of the carriage on to the line? According to the report, no gross injuries had been found. He had not been shot or stabbed or bludgeoned. He seemed simply to have been thrown out. Yet how could such a thing be possible? A Metropolitan police-officer is a formidable man, and Badger was a fine specimen of his class—big, powerful, courageous, and highly trained in the arts of offence and defence. He could not have been off his guard, for he knew that he was travelling with a criminal and must have been prepared for an attack. How then could he have been thrown out? That was Miller's difficulty, and it was a real one, assuming that the report had given the true facts.

"The train journey down gave us time to think it over. That time I employed in turning over every explanation that I

could think of. Since direct violence seemed to be ruled out, the only reasonable supposition was that, in some way, Badger must have been rendered insensible or helpless. But in what way? You heard Miller's suggestions; and you could see that none of them was practicable. To me, it appeared that poison in some form was the most likely method. But how do you set to work to poison a man in a railway carriage?

"I considered the various methods that were physically possible. The most obvious was to offer a drink from a flask. That would be effective enough—but not with a detective inspector of the C.I.D. Badger would have refused to a certainty; and poisoned sweets would have been still more hopeless. Then the possibility of a poisoned cigar occurred to me. The idea seemed a little extravagant; but, still, the method had actually been used within my own experience. And there was no denying that it would have met the case perfectly. The offer of a cigar would have appeared, even to a cautious police officer, a quite unsuspecting action. And we know that Badger liked a cigar and would almost certainly have accepted one. So, in spite of the fact that, as I have said, the suggestion seemed rather far-fetched, I made a mental note to keep the possibility in mind.

"At Greenhithe the absence of any traces of violence was confirmed. Then we went into the tunnel; and behold! almost the first object that we notice is a half-smoked cigar. There was not much need for intuitions."

I admitted a little shamefacedly that there was not. It was the old story. An item of knowledge or experience that was once in Thorndyke's mind was there for ever; and what is more, it was available for use at any moment, and in any set of circumstances. I had not this gift. My memory was good enough; but I had not his constructive imagination. I could only use my experiences when analogous circumstances recurred. The poisoned cheroot had come by post. Thereafter, I should have looked with suspicion on any cigar that arrived by post from an unknown source. But Thorndyke had the idea in his mind, ready to apply it to any new set of circumstances. It was a vital difference.

Having settled this question, I passed on to another that had exercised my mind a good deal.

"You seem," I said, "to have decided pretty clearly how the actual murder was carried out. Have you carried the matter any farther? Have you any theory of the general *modus operandi* of the crime?"

"Only in quite general terms," he replied. "I think we are forced to certain conclusions. For instance, the fact that the murderer had the poisoned cigar available compels us to assume that the crime was not only premeditated but very definitely planned. My impression is that poor Badger was under a delusion. He thought that he was stalking a criminal, whereas, in fact, the criminal was stalking him. I suspect that he knew what was going on at Maidstone, and that he kept Badger in sight. I believe that he saw him into the train at Maidstone and travelled with him in that train to Strood."

"There seem to be at least two objections to that theory," said I. "To begin with, he could hardly have avoided being seen at Maidstone. For, leaving Badger out of the picture, there was Cummings, who certainly knew him by sight and would surely have spotted him at the station."

"I see," said Thorndyke, "that you are adopting Miller's view that the murderer was the man Smith. That view seems to me quite untenable. I have never entertained it for a moment."

"You are not forgetting the resemblance between the two men? That both men had red hair and a noticeably red nose? It would be a remarkable coincidence, if they were different men."

"Very true," he agreed. "But don't let us lose sight of the collateral circumstances. If we assume that this was a carefully planned murder, as it appears to have been, we have to be on the look-out for such ordinary precautions as a murderer would probably take. Now a red nose with red hair is a rather uncommon combination; and, as you say, its occurrence in two men in these peculiar circumstances would be a remarkable coincidence. But there are such things as wigs and rouge and grease-paint; and these are just the circumstances in which we might look to see them used. The very simplest make-up would do. Consider how easy it would have been. Supposing a dark man with close-cropped hair gets into an empty carriage at Maidstone. Just before reaching Strood, he slips on a red wig and gives his nose an infinitesimal touch of rouge. On arriving at Strood, he hops out, and at once makes for the stairs leading to the subway. There, or elsewhere, he waits for the arrival of the London train, and, when it comes in, he emerges, boldly, on to the platform, and lets himself be plainly seen."

"But don't you think Badger would have spotted the wig?" I objected.

"I feel pretty sure that he would," Thorndyke replied. "But why not? The stranger was there for the express purpose of being spotted. And you notice a further use that the make-up would have had. For, after the murder, he could have doffed the wig and cleaned off the rouge; and forthwith he would have been a different person. The description of him, as he had been seen at Strood, no longer applied to him. He could show himself boldly at Dartford and leave no trace. What is the second objection?"

"I was thinking of the fact—if it is a fact—that he took the risk of stealing Smith's finger-print papers from the body. It was a very serious risk. For if he had been stopped and searched and they had been found on his person, that would have convicted him of the murder beyond any question. And, moreover, the very fact that they were taken furnishes evidence, of murder and effectually excludes the possibility of misadventure. The taking of such a risk points to a very strong motive. But they were Smith's finger-prints; and if he were not Smith, what strong motive could he have had for taking them?"

"Admirably argued," Thorndyke commented. "But perhaps we had better postpone the consideration of that point until we have actually ascertained that the papers were really taken from the body. The point is of importance in more than one

respect. As you, very justly remark, the taking away of these papers converts what might have been accepted as a misadventure into an undeniable murder. And the man who took them—if he did take them—could not have failed to realize this. You are certainly right as to the strength of the motive. The question that remains to be solved is, What might have been the nature of that motive? But I think we shall have to adjourn this discussion.”

As he spoke, I became aware of footsteps ascending the stairs, and growing rapidly more audible. Their cessation coincided with a knock at the door, which I instantly recognized as Miller’s. I sprang up and threw the door open, whereupon the Superintendent entered and fixed a mock-reproachful eye on the uncleared breakfast-table.

“Well, gentlemen,” he said, by way of greeting, “I thought I would just drop in and give you the news in case you were starting early. You needn’t. The post-mortem is fixed for two-thirty, and there is nothing else for you to do.”

“Thank you, Miller,” said Thorndyke. “It was good of you to come round. But, as a matter of fact, we are not going—at least, I am not, and I don’t think Jervis is.”

The Superintendent’s jaw dropped. “I am sorry to hear that,” said he in a tone of very real disappointment. “I was rather banking on your getting us some thing definite to go on. We haven’t got much in the way of positive evidence.”

“That,” Thorndyke answered, “is why we are not going. We have got some positive evidence; and we think—and so will you—that we had better keep it to ourselves, at least for the present.”

The Superintendent cast an astonished glance at my colleague.

“You have got some positive evidence!” he exclaimed. “Why; how the deuce—but there, that doesn’t matter. What have you discovered?”

Thorndyke opened a drawer and produced from it a pack of mounted photographs and the two cards bearing Badger’s finger-prints, which he laid on the table.

“You may remember, Miller,” he said, “pointing out to me in the tunnel that someone had thrown away a half-smoked cigar.”

“I remember,” the Superintendent replied. “An uncommon good weed it looked, too. I had half a mind to pick it up and finish it—in a holder, of course.”

“It’s just as well that you did not,” Thorndyke chuckled. “However, I picked it up. I thought there might possibly be some finger-prints on it. And there were. Some of them were Badger’s. But there were some others as well.”

“How were you able to spot Badger’s finger-prints?” Miller demanded in a tone of astonishment.

“I took the records from the body,” Thorndyke replied, “on the chance that we might want them.”

Miller stared at my colleague in silent amazement.

“You are a most extraordinary man, Doctor,” he exclaimed, at length. “You seem to have the gift of second sight. What on earth could have made you—but there, it’s no use asking you. Are these poor Badger’s prints?”

“Yes,” Thorndyke answered, “and these are the photographs of the cigar with the prints developed on it.”

Miller pored eagerly over the photographs and compared them with the prints on the cards.

“Yes,” said he, after a careful inspection, “they are clear enough. There is poor old Badger’s thumb as plain as a pikestaff. And here is one—looks like a thumb, too—that certainly is not Badger’s. Now we are going to see whose it is.”

He spoke in a tone of triumph, and as he spoke, he whisked out of his pocket, with something of a flourish, a large leather wallet. From this he extracted a blue document and spread it out on the table. On it, among other matter, were four sets of finger-prints—the “tips” of the two hands, both sets complete, and the two sets of “rolled impressions,” of which those of the right hand consisted only of two perfect impressions and a smear. Miller confined his attention principally to the tips, glancing backward and forward from them to the photographs, which were spread out on the table. And, watching him, I was sensible of a gradual change in his demeanour. The triumphant air slowly faded away, giving place, first to doubt and bewilderment, and finally to quite definite disappointment.

“Nothing doing,” he reported, handing the paper to Thorndyke. “They are not Smith’s finger-prints. Pity. I’d hoped they would have been. If they had been, they would have fixed the murder on him beyond any doubt. Now we shall have to grub about for some other kind of evidence. At present, we’ve got nothing but the evidence of the station-master at Strood.”

Thorndyke looked at him with slightly raised eyebrows.

“You seem,” said he, “to be overlooking the importance of those other finger-prints. If they are not Smith’s, they are somebody’s; and the person who made them is the person who gave Badger that cigar.”

“No doubt,” Miller agreed. “But what about it? Does it matter who gave him the cigar?”

“As it happens,” Thorndyke replied, “it matters a great deal. We have analysed that cigar and we found that it contained a very large dose of a deadly volatile poison.”

Miller was thunderstruck. For some moments he stood, silently gazing at Thorndyke, literally open-mouthed. At length, he exclaimed in a low, almost awe-stricken tone:

"Good God, Doctor. This is new evidence with a vengeance! Now we can understand how poor old Badger was got out on to the line. But, how in the name of fortune came you to analyse the cigar?"

"There was just the bare possibility," Thorndyke replied. "We thought we might as well make the trial."

Miller shook his head. "It's second sight, Doctor. There's, no other name for it. It looks as if you had spotted the poison in the cigar as it lay on the ground in the tunnel. You are a most astonishing man. But the question is, how the deuce he got hold of that cigar."

"Who?" demanded Thorndyke. "You don't, surely, mean Smith?"

"Certainly I do," Miller replied, doggedly. "Who else?"

"But," Thorndyke protested with a shade of impatience, "you have just ascertained, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the cigar was given to Badger by some other person."

But the Superintendent was not to be moved from the conviction that apparently had possession of his mind. "Those other prints," he insisted, "must be the prints of the man from whom Smith got the cigar. We shall have to find out who he is, of course. But it is the murderer we want. And the murderer is Frederick Smith, or whatever his real name is."

Thorndyke's sense of humour apparently got the better of his vexation, for he remarked with a low chuckle:

"It seems odd for me to pose as the champion of finger-print evidence. But, really, Miller, you are flying in the face of all the visible facts and probabilities. There is absolutely nothing to connect the man Smith with that cigar."

"He may have worn gloves," suggested Miller.

"He may have worn a cocked hat," retorted Thorndyke. "But there is no reason to believe that he did. Why do you cling to the unfortunate Smith in this tenacious fashion?"

"Why," rejoined Miller, "look at the description on his paper and then recall what the station-master at Strood said."

Thorndyke took up the paper and read aloud:

"Height, 67 inches; weight, 158 pounds; rather thick-set, muscular build. Hair, darkish red; eyes, reddish brown; complexion, fresh; nose, straight, medium size, rather thick and distinctly red.' Yes, that seems to agree with the station-master's description. I see that he gives no address, but describes himself as a plumber and gas-fitter."

"Probably that is right," said Miller. "A considerable proportion of the men who take to burglary started life as plumbers and gas-fitters. Their professional training gives them an advantage."

"It must," I remarked a little bitterly, recalling the ravages of a gas-fitter on my own premises. "There seems to be a natural connection between gas-fitting and house-breaking."

"At any rate," said Thorndyke, who was now inspecting the photographs—one profile and one full face—"the description fits the man's presumed avocation, without insisting on the gas-fitting. It is a coarse, common face. Not very characteristic. He might be a burglar or just simply a low-class working-man."

"Exactly," the Superintendent agreed. "It's the sort of mug that you can see by the dozen in the yard at Brixton or in any local prison. Just a common, low-grade man. But that hasn't much bearing on our little problem."

"I don't think I quite agree with you there, Miller," said Thorndyke. "The man's general type and make up seem to have a rather important bearing. We are dealing with a crime that is distinctly subtle and ingenious, and which seems to involve a good deal more knowledge than we should expect an ordinary working-man to possess. The face fits the assumed character of the man; but it does not fit the crime. Don't you agree with me?"

"I'll not deny," the Superintendent conceded, grudgingly, "that there is something in what you say. Probably, we shall find that there was some man of a different class behind Smith."

"But why insist upon Smith at all? The poisoned cigar is the one solid fact that we have and can prove. And, as you have admitted, we have not a particle of evidence that connects him with it. On the contrary, the evidence of the finger-prints clearly connects it with someone else. Why not drop Smith, at least provisionally?"

Miller shook his head with an air of resolution that I recognised as hopeless.

"Theory is all very well, Doctor," he replied, "and I realise the force of what you have pointed out. But you remember the old story of the dog and the shadow. The dog who let go the piece of meat that he had in order to grab the other piece that he saw reflected in the water was a foolish dog. I'm not going to follow his example. This man, Smith, was seen to get into the carriage with Badger. He must have been in the carriage when Badger was killed; and no one else was there. If he didn't murder Badger, it's for him to explain how the thing happened. And I fancy he'll find the explanation a bit difficult."

Thorndyke seemed, for a moment, inclined to pursue the argument. But then he gave up the attempt to convince the Superintendent and changed the subject.

"What was the charge against Smith?" he asked.

"He was charged with uttering counterfeit paper money," Miller replied. "It was a silly affair, really. I can't think how the magistrate came to commit him. It seems that he went into a pub in Maidstone for a drink and tendered a ten-shilling



note. The publican spotted it at once as a bad one and he gave Smith in charge. At the police station he was searched and two more notes were found on him. But they were both genuine and so was the rest of the money that he had about him. His statement was that the note had been given to him in change, and that he did not know that it was bad; which was probably true. At any rate, I feel pretty sure that the Grand Jury would have thrown out the bill. He was a mug to complicate matters by bolting."

"So, as an actual fact, there is no evidence that he was a criminal at all. He may have been a perfectly respectable working-man."

"That is so," Miller agreed rather reluctantly, "excepting that Badger seemed to have been satisfied that he was the crook that he had been on the look-out for."

"As he never saw the man," said Thorndyke, "that is not very conclusive. Do you know how the escape was managed?"

"Only in a general way," replied Miller. "It doesn't particularly concern me. I gather that it was one of those muddles that are apt to occur when prisoners are wearing their own clothes. Got himself mixed up with a gang of workmen. But he'd better have stayed where he was."

"Much better," Thorndyke agreed with some emphasis. "But, to return to the case of the unknown man who prepared the poisoned cigar, I think you will agree with me that we had better keep our own counsel about the whole affair."

"I suppose so," answered Miller. "At any rate, I think you are right to keep away from the inquest. The coroner might ask you to give evidence, and then you'd have to tell all you know, and the story would be in every blessed newspaper in the country. I take it you are prepared to swear to the poison in that cigar?"

"Certainly; and to produce the poison in evidence."

"And you are going to let me have a photograph of those finger-prints?"

"Of course. There is a set ready for you now, including two of Badger's. And, as to those from the cigar, it is just possible that you may find them to be those of some known person."

"It's possible," Miller admitted, "but I don't think it very likely."

"Nor do I," said Thorndyke, with a faint smile; by which I judged that he realized, as I did, that Miller's suspicions, even in the matter of the cigar, were still riveted on the elusive Smith.

"With regard to this paper of Smith's," said Thorndyke, as he handed Miller the set of photographs that had been reserved for him; "I should like to take a copy of it for reference. A photographic copy, I mean, of the portraits and the finger-prints."

Miller looked a little unhappy. "It wouldn't be quite in order," he objected. "An official document, you know, and a secret one at that. Is it of any importance?"

"It is impossible to say, in advance," replied Thorndyke. "But I shall be working at the case on your behalf and in collaboration with you. It might be important, on some occasion, to be able to recognize a face or a finger-print. Still, if it is not in order, I won't press the matter. The chances are that the copy will never be needed."

But Miller had reconsidered the question. He was not going to put any obstacles in Thorndyke's way.

"If you think a copy would be helpful," said he, "I'll take the responsibility of letting you have one. But I can't let the document go out of my possession. Can you take it now?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "It will be only a matter of a minute or two, to make one or two exposures."

Without more ado, he took the document and went off with it to the laboratory. As he disappeared, the Superintendent commented admiringly on the efficiency of our establishment.

"Yes," I replied, with some complacency (though the efficiency was none of my producing), "the copying camera is a great asset. There it is, always ready at a moment's notice to give us a perfect facsimile of any thing that is set before it—an infallible copy that will be accepted in any court of law, But you have quite as good an outfit at the Yard."

"Oh yes," Miller agreed, "our equipment and organization are good enough. But, in a public department, you can't get the flexibility and adaptability of a private establishment like yours, where you make your own rules and use your own judgment as to obeying them. This can't be the Doctor, already."

It was, however. Thorndyke had just made the exposures and left the development to be done later. He now returned the document to the Superintendent, who, having carefully bestowed it in his pocket with the photographs, rose to take his departure.

"I hope, Doctor," he said, as he shook hands with Thorndyke, "that I haven't seemed unappreciative of all that you have done. That discovery of yours was a most remarkable exploit—a positive stroke of genius. And it has given us the only piece of real evidence that we have. Please don't think that I'm not grateful."

"Tut, tut," said Thorndyke, "there is no question of gratitude. We all want to catch the villain who murdered our old friend. Are you going to the inquest?"

"No," replied Miller. "I am not wanted there; and, now that you have given me this new information, I feel, like you, that

I had better keep away, for fear of being compelled to let the cat out of the bag. You said you were sending a shorthand reporter down to take notes for you."

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "Polton has made all the arrangements, and has told our man to type the notes out in duplicate so that you can have a copy."

"Thanks, Doctor," said Miller. "I think they may be useful, after all, particularly the station-master's evidence concerning the man he saw at Strood."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke. "It will be a great point if he can recognize the prison photograph—and an almost equally great one if he cannot."

I seemed to gather from the Superintendent's expression that he did not view the latter contingency with any great enthusiasm. But he made no rejoinder beyond again wishing us "Good morning," and at length took his departure, escorted to the landing by Thorndyke.

---

## VIII. — A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

WHEN Thorndyke re-entered the room, closing the oak door behind him, he appeared to be in a thoughtful and slightly puzzled frame of mind. For a minute or more, he stood before the fireplace filling his pipe in silence and apparently reflecting profoundly. Suddenly he looked up at me and asked:

"Well, Jervis; what do you think of it all?"

"As to Miller? I think that he has his nose glued to the trail of Mr. Frederick Smith."

"Yes," said he. "The Smith idea almost amounts to an obsession; and that is a very dangerous state of mind for a detective superintendent. It may easily lead to a bad miscarriage of justice."

"Still," I said, "there is something to be said for Miller's point of view. The man who got into the train at Strood did certainly agree, at least superficially, with the official description of the man Smith."

"That is quite true," Thorndyke admitted. "The report of the evidence at the inquest will show what sort of description the station-master is prepared to swear to. But I don't feel at all happy as to Miller's attitude. We shall have to watch events closely. For we are deeply concerned in this investigation. And it will be just as well if we go over the facts that are known to us and consider what our own attitude must be."

He took up a pencil and a note-block, and, dropping into an easy chair, lit his pipe and opened the discussion.

"I think, Jervis," he began, "we are justified in assuming that the man who got into the carriage at Strood is the man who murdered Badger."

"I think so," I agreed. "That is, if we assume that it was really a case of murder. Personally, I have no doubt on the subject."

"I am assuming that the document was really in Badger's pocket when he started, and that it was not there when his body was examined by the sergeant. The inquest notes will confirm or exclude those assumptions. At present, our information is to the effect that they are true. And if they are true, the document must have been taken from Badger's pocket; and that fact furnishes *prima facie* evidence of murder. But if Badger was murdered, the Strood man must be presumed to be the murderer, since no other possibility presents itself. Hence, the question that we have to settle, or at least to form a definite opinion on, is, Who was the Strood man?"

"Now, our information is to the effect that he had red or reddish hair and a noticeably red nose. But the man Smith has dark-red hair and a noticeably red nose. Then it is possible that the Strood man may have been Smith. But mere coincidence in these two characteristics does not afford positive evidence that he was. For two men resembling one another in these respects might be otherwise very different."

"That is so," said I. "But you must admit that it is a rather remarkable coincidence. And you have often pointed out, with great justice, that coincidences call for very careful consideration."

"Precisely," said he. "And that is what I am going to insist on now. We have to note the coincidence and ask ourselves what its significance may be. It is, as you say, a quite remarkable coincidence. Neither of these peculiarities is at all common. If you were to examine any considerable collection of men, such, for example, as a battalion of infantry, how many men with dark-red hair would you find in it? Not more than one or two. Perhaps not one. But, of the one or two, or say half a dozen, that you found, how many would have noticeably red noses? Most probably none. Improbabilities become rapidly cumulative as you multiply the characteristics that are postulated as appearing coincidently."

"The position, then, in regard to the Strood man is this: In two salient personal characteristics, he resembled the man Smith. That resemblance can be accounted for by three hypotheses, one of which must be true:

"1. That the Strood man was Smith.

"2. That he was another man who happened to resemble Smith.

"3. That he was another man who had been purposely made up or disguised so as to resemble Smith.

"Those are the only possibilities and, as I said, one of them must be true. Let us take them in order and consider their respective probabilities. We begin with the first hypothesis, that the Strood man was Smith. Now, in order to judge of the probability of this, we have to consider what we know of the personality of Smith and of the Strood man respectively and to decide whether what we know of the one is compatible with what we know of the other.

"Now, what do we know of Smith? First, we have the fact that he described himself as a plumber and gas-fitter. As that description seems to have been accepted by the prison officials, we may assume that it fitted his appearance and manner; and we see that his face is of the type characteristic of the lower class of working-man. We know, further, that he had just escaped from prison, and that he was known and could have been recognized by several persons at the prison, including Chief Officer Cummings. It is probable that when he escaped, his pockets were empty and he may have been hatless.

"Now as to the Strood man. It is almost certain that he had a first-class ticket; that he travelled from Maidstone in Badger's train, and, if so, he must have been on the platform at Maidstone at the same time as Badger and Cummings. He carried in his pocket a cigar which had been treated with a poison which is practically unprocurable commercially and which he must almost certainly have prepared himself. Now, Jervis, does it seem to you possible that those two descriptions could apply to one and the same person?"

"No," I replied, "it certainly does not, though you omitted to mention that Smith is probably a burglar."

"That is not known to us, though I admit that it is not improbable. But it really has no bearing. Even if we knew that he was a burglar, all the obvious discrepancies would remain. I submit that the hypothesis that the Strood man was the escaped prisoner, Smith, must be rejected as untenable.

"We pass on, then, to the next possibility, that the Strood man was not Smith, but was a man who happened to resemble Smith these two physical characteristics. In order to state the probabilities, it is necessary to note that the Strood man was apparently in this train with the premeditated purpose of murdering a police officer, and that a few hours previously a man with dark-red hair and a noticeably red nose had escaped from a Maidstone prison and was still at large. Bearing in mind the rarity of this combination of physical characters, what do you think of the probability of the coincidence?"

"Well," I replied, "obviously, the chances against are a good many thousands to one. But that is not quite the same thing as certainty."

"Very true, Jervis," he agreed, "and very necessary to remember. It is by no means safe to apply the laws of chance to individual cases. A prize of £30,000 in a lottery or sweepstake necessarily implies sixty thousand ten-shilling tickets, of which all but one must be blanks; so that the chances against any ticket holder are fifty-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine to one. Nevertheless, in spite of that enormous adverse chance, someone does win the prize. You are quite right. Long odds against do not exclude a possibility. But, still, we have to bear the odds in mind; and, if we do, we shall be very indisposed to accept this coincidence.

"We are left with the third hypothesis: that the Strood man was an unknown man, deliberately disguised or made up to resemble the escaped prisoner, Smith. This suggestion, though it has certain positive elements of probability, has also certain weighty objections, as I have no doubt you have noticed."

"I see one objection," said I, "that seems to exclude the suggestion altogether. If the Strood man had made up to resemble Smith, he must have had the means with him, provided in advance. He couldn't have gone about, habitually, with a red wig and a bottle of rouge in his pocket. But the escape of Smith was a contingency that couldn't have been foreseen. If we accept the idea of the make-up, we have to suppose that, after hearing of Smith's escape, this man was able to provide himself with the wig and the rouge. That seems to be quite incredible."

Thorndyke nodded, approvingly.

"Very true," said he. "My learned friend has made a palpable hit. It is a very serious objection, and, as you say, it appears, at the first glance, to be insuperable—to render the hypothesis quite untenable. But if you consider the circumstances more thoroughly, you will see that it does not. The probability is that we are dealing with one of those combinations of chance and design that are always so puzzling and so misleading. Let us exercise our imaginations a little further and make one or two more hypotheses. Let us suppose I that this man had already decided to avail himself of Smith's conspicuous peculiarities and to personate him to that extent—presumably for some unlawful purpose. He would then have had the wig and the rouge in readiness. Suppose that he is staying in Maidstone, perhaps keeping a watch on Smith. Smith, however, is in custody, with the certain result that his personal peculiarities will be noticed in detail and recorded.

"This will make him much better worth personating. If the stranger is keeping a watch on Smith, he will know about the prosecution, and he will know that there is a good chance of an acquittal. Suppose, now, at this point, two unforeseen events happen: Smith makes his escape, and then Badger turns up in Maidstone. The stranger has, as the murder pretty clearly proves, some strong reason for getting rid of Badger. But here is a set of unforeseen circumstances that creates a first-class opportunity. The apparent impossibility of the disguise is an additional favourable factor."

I was impressed by my colleague's ingenuity and said so, perhaps with some faint suggestion of irony in my tone.

"Of course," I hastened to add, "all that you suggest is quite possible. The trouble is, that it is quite imaginary. There is not a particle of direct evidence to suggest that it is true—that what you postulate as having possibly happened, really did happen."

"No," Thorndyke admitted, "there is not. It is hypothesis, pure and simple. So far, I do not contest your objection. But I

remind you of our position. We have three hypotheses which represent all the imaginable possibilities. One of the three must be the true one. But we have already excluded two as being quite untenable on the grounds of extreme improbability. The third is admittedly difficult to accept; but it is far less improbable than either of the other two. And you notice that, if we make the assumptions that I suggest, what follows presents a high degree of probability. I mean that a man, setting out to commit a murder, under circumstances in which he must be seen in the company of his prospective victim, would be taking a very ordinary precaution if he should so alter his appearance that a description of the murderer would not be a description of himself. And if he had the opportunity to make up so as to resemble some other person, and that other person an escaped prisoner, it would be very much to his advantage to take it. How great the advantage would be, we can see for ourselves by the attitude of our old friend, the Superintendent."

"Yes, by Jove!" said I. "The deception, if it is one, has operated most effectively on Miller. And, if your suggestion is correct, it will explain another rather incomprehensible thing—I mean the taking from the body of the prison record. That naturally suggested that the murderer was the man whose description was on the stolen document. In fact, my impression is that it is the document as much as the personal resemblance that is sticking in Miller's gullet."

"I think you are right," said Thorndyke. "At any rate, the combined effect of the two facts—the theft of the document and the personal characteristics—is undoubtedly responsible for his state of mind. But, to return to our discussion, I think that, out of the three hypotheses from which we have to choose, we are forced to adopt the third, at least provisionally: that the man who murdered Badger is not Smith, but is some unknown man who had deliberately made up to the end that he might be mistaken for Smith."

"Yes," I agreed. "I suppose we are, since the other two suppositions cannot be reasonably entertained. But I could wish that it were a little more easy to accept. It involves an uncomfortable amount of unproved assumptions."

"So it does," he admitted. "But there it is. All three hypotheses seem to be full of improbabilities. But, as one of them must be the true one, since there are no others, we have no choice but to adopt the one that presents the smallest number of improbabilities and the greatest number of probabilities. Still, as I have said, our acceptance is only provisional. We may have to revise our opinions when we have the evidence of the witnesses at the inquest before us."

In the event, however, we did not. On the contrary, when, late in the evening, our very expert stenographer delivered the copy of his notes—typed in duplicate—the report of the witnesses' evidence tended rather to confirm Thorndyke's conclusions. There was nothing very definite, it is true; but the few additional facts all pointed in the same direction.

There was, for instance, the station-master's evidence. It seemed that, in the interval, he had thought matters over, and his statements were now more decided. He was able, moreover, to amplify his description of the suspected stranger. The latter he described as a well-dressed man of about middle age, carrying a good-sized hand-bag of brown leather, but no stick or umbrella, and wearing a soft felt hat. The man had a rather conspicuously red nose. He had noticed that particularly—"thought the gentleman looked as if he were in the habit of taking a drop." And he was quite clear about the colour of the man's hair. He noticed it as the stranger was getting into the carriage and the sun shone on the back of his head. It was distinctly red; dark red or auburn—not bright red, and certainly not sandy. Probably, in the sunlight, it may have looked rather redder than it really was. But it was definitely red hair.

"Do you think that you would recognise the man if you were to see him?" the coroner asked.

"I don't much think I should," was the cautious reply. "At any rate, I shouldn't be able to swear to him."

Here the coroner apparently produced the prison form with the two photographs and handed it to the witness.

"I want you to look at those two portraits," said he, "and tell us whether you recognize them."

The witness examined them and replied that he did not recognize them.

"Does the face that is shown in those photographs seem to you to resemble the face of the red-haired stranger?"

"I don't see any resemblance," the witness replied.

"Do you mean," the coroner pursued, "that you simply don't recognize the face, or that it seems to you to be a different face?"

"I should say that it is a different face. The man I saw looked more like a gentleman."

"You are definitely of opinion that these photographs are not portraits of the man that you saw. Is that so?"

"Well, sir, I shouldn't like to be positive, but these photos don't look to me like the man I saw on the platform."

That was all that was to be got out of the station-master; and, so far, it tended to support Thorndyke's view; as also did the evidence of the ticket collector at Dartford, who was the next witness. He, like the station-master, seemed to have turned the matter over in his mind, though he was not able to give much more information. He did, however, remember collecting a first-class ticket, and recalled noticing that it was from Maidstone to London.

"That," said the coroner, "is a point of some significance. This passenger started from Maidstone with the intention of going to London, but at Dartford—the next station after Greenhithe—he suddenly changed his mind. It is a fact to be noted. Do you remember what this man was like?"

"I can't say that I remember him very clearly," the witness answered. "You see, sir, I was looking at the tickets. But I do

remember that he was carrying a largish brown hand-bag.”

“Do you remember anything peculiar in his appearance? You have heard the last witness’s description of him. Can you say whether this passenger agreed with that description?”

“I wouldn’t like to say positively whether he did or whether he didn’t. I can only say that I didn’t notice that he had a particularly red nose, and I didn’t notice the colour of his hair. As far as I remember him, he seemed an ordinary, gentlemanly sort of man; the sort of man that you would expect to hand in a first-class ticket.”

So much for the ticket collector. His evidence did not carry us very far. Nevertheless, such as it was, its tendency was to support Thorndyke’s suggestion. There could be little doubt that the man who had given up the first-class ticket was the Strood man; and the fact—though it was only a negative fact and of little weight at that—that the special peculiarities of nose and hair had not been observed, seemed to lend a faint support to Thorndyke’s further suggestion that, as soon as the murder had been committed, those special peculiarities would be eliminated.

There was little else in the evidence that was of interest to us. The engine-driver’s evidence had practically no bearing; for poor Badger’s body was unquestionably on the line, and the details as to how long it could have been there did not affect our enquiry. As to the body itself, the fact that no injuries could be discovered other than those inflicted by the train now caused us no surprise, though, to the coroner, it was naturally rather puzzling. Indeed, the problem that had so exercised the mind of Superintendent Miller was the problem that the coroner discussed at the greatest length and with complete failure to find any plausible solution. I read his very just and reasonable comments with considerable sympathy, not without a twinge of compunction as I reflected on the way in which we had withheld from him the one conclusive and material fact.

“The greatest mystery in this strange case,” he observed, “is the absence of any traces of injury. Here was a powerful, highly trained police-officer, flung out on the line by a man whom he had apparently intended to arrest. He had not been shot, or stabbed, or stunned by a blow on the head, or in any way disabled. He had been simply thrown out. It seemed incredible; but there were the facts. But for the known presence in that carriage of another person, and that person a suspected criminal, the condition of the body would have pointed to an accident of a quite ordinary kind. But the presence of that other man, and especially the fact—which has been quite conclusively proved by the evidence of Chief Officer Cummings—that a certain document was taken from the pocket of the deceased, puts accident entirely out of the question.

“But it adds enormously to the difficulty of understanding how this crime could have been committed. For, obviously, deceased would not have allowed this document to be taken from him without very energetic resistance. The great mystery is how any ordinary man could have taken this document forcibly from this powerful, capable officer and then opened the door and thrown him out on to the line. I must confess that I cannot understand it at all.

“However, our failure to unravel the mystery of the actual method employed by the murderer does not leave us in any doubt as to how deceased met his death; which is the subject of our inquiry. The presence of that unknown man, his immediate disappearance at the very first opportunity, and the theft of that document, are facts that are too significant to allow of any but one interpretation.

“The next question presents much more difficulty—the question as to the identity of that man. If we think that we can give him a name, it is our duty to do so. But it is not the concern of a coroner’s inquest to prove the guilt of any particular person. That is the office of a court of criminal jurisdiction. Unlike such a court, we have the choice of returning an open verdict—open, that is to say, as regards the identity of the criminal. And, if we have any doubt as to his identity, that is our proper course. Now, you have heard the evidence relating to the identity of the man who shared the compartment with deceased. You cannot have failed to notice the conflicting nature of that evidence, nor can you have failed to be impressed by the unlikelihood of an escaped prisoner showing himself openly on the platform of Maidstone Station. Still, if you are satisfied with such proof of his identity as has been given, your finding must be to that effect; but, if you have any doubts, you will be wiser to leave the investigation of that point to the police.”

This eminently judicious advice the jury accepted, eventually returning a verdict of “Murder by some person unknown.”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, as I handed him back the copy of the notes, “has my learned friend any comments to make?”

“Only,” I replied, “that the evidence, such as it is, seems rather to justify your choice of the third hypothesis.”

“Yes,” he agreed. “There is not much that is new. But there is one point that I dare say you noticed. The Strood man was carrying a fair-sized hand-bag. That supports the ‘make-up’ theory to this extent: that a hand-bag would be almost a necessity, seeing that a wig is a rather bulky article, and one that must not be too roughly treated, as it would be by being stuffed in the pocket. Then, the ticket collector’s evidence, little as it was worth, leaned to our side. He did not notice that the passenger had either a red nose or red hair; which might mean either that those characters were not there to notice, or simply that he took no note of the man’s appearance. There isn’t much in it either way.

“But there is one other point that emerges—a slightly speculative point, but very important in its bearing if we accept it, though rather obvious. If we assume that this man was made up to pass, at least in a printed description, as Frederick Smith, that points to some kind of connection between him and Smith. He must, as you very justly observed, have made his preparations in advance. That is to say, he had decided, at least a few days previously, and probably more, to adopt Smith’s peculiarities to cover some unlawful proceedings of his own. Now, it is highly improbable that he would have selected a complete stranger as the model for his disguise; and, as a stranger, he could not have known that Smith was

under suspicion of being a member of the habitual criminal class. But it was this suspicion that gave the disguise its special value. The evident probability is that he had some rather intimate knowledge of Smith."

"That does seem to be so," I agreed. "But, if it is true, another interesting probability emerges. If he knew something about Smith, then there must have been something to know. That is to say, our friend Badger's suspicions of Smith were not without some real foundation. And, again, the connection that you suggest might account for the theft of the finger-print document. It might not suit the murderer to have the finger-prints of his under-study—or over-study—at Scotland Yard."

"I think you are right," said Thorndyke, "as to the probable facts, though I am doubtful about your view of the motive. The theft of the document threw the suspicion at once on Smith, since they were his finger-prints and description. That would appear to have been the object of the theft as it was the object of the disguise."

"If it was," said I, "it was a diabolical scheme."

"Very true," Thorndyke agreed; "but murderers are not a peculiarly scrupulous class, and this specimen seems to have been even below the average in that respect. But, to revert to your suggestion that Badger's suspicions probably had some foundation, you notice that the fact of Smith's having taken the chance to escape tends to confirm your view. Taking his position at its face value, that escape was really not worth while. He was apparently innocent of the offence with which he was charged, and pretty secure of an acquittal. His escape merely complicated the position. But, if he was a regular criminal who ran the risk of being recognized by some visiting detective, it might well have appeared to him to be worth while to try the chance of getting away in the hope that he might keep away."

At this point our discussion was interrupted by the sound of a visitor approaching our landing. A moment later the identity of that visitor was disclosed by a characteristic knock at the door.

"I happened to be passing this way," said Miller, as I let him in, "so I thought I would just drop in and see if your shorthand notes were available. I have seen the newspaper reports of the inquest."

"Then you will have seen that the station-master did not recognise the prison photographs," said Thorndyke, as he handed the Superintendent his copy of the typed notes.

"Yes," growled Miller. "That's rather disappointing. But you can't expect an ordinary, unskilled person to spot a face after just one casual glance. Of course, Badger spotted him. But he was a genius in that way. It was a special gift."

"A rather dangerous one, as it turned out," I remarked.

"It was, under the circumstances," said Miller. "But what made it dangerous was poor Badger's secretiveness. He liked to hold the monopoly—to feel he was the only detective officer who could identify some man who was wanted but unknown. Even in cases that he was not really concerned in, he would keep a criminal's personal description up his sleeve, as it were. I remember, for instance, in that Hornby case—the Red Thumb Mark case, as they called it—how close he was."

"But he wasn't on that case, was he?" I asked.

"No. That was my case, and a pretty mess I made of it. But Badger was in court on another case, and it seems that, for some reason, he kept an eye on that man, Hornby—the one I had a warrant for, you know—while the experts were giving their evidence. Well, as you remember, Hornby slipped off, and I went after him and missed him; and when it came to making out a description of him, I had to apply to you for details. I doubt if I could have spotted him if I had met him in the street. But long afterwards, Badger told me that he had a perfectly clear mental picture of the man's face, and that he was certain that he could spot him at a glance if ever they should meet. And he was like that with quite a number of crooks of the more uncommon kind. He could recognize them when no one else could. It was a valuable gift—to him. Not so valuable to us. And, as you say, it has its dangers. If a really vicious crook got to know what the position was, he might show his teeth, as this man did in the train. Badger would have been wiser in several respects to have shared his information with his brother officers."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "it is not very safe to be the sole repository of a secret that threatens another man's life or liberty. I have had reason to realize that more than once. By the way, have you had an opportunity of getting that strange finger-print examined—the one, I mean, that we found on the cigar?"

"Yes; and drawn another blank. I took it to the Finger-print Bureau, but they haven't got it in any of the files. So your poison-monger is a 'person unknown' at present. What you might expect. Probably sits in the background and supplies his infernal wares to crooks of a less subtle kind. However, your photo has been filed in the 'Scene of the Crime' series of single finger-prints. So we shall be able to place him, if we ever get him in custody. That will be quite a nice little surprise for him. But I mustn't stay here gossiping. I've got a lot to do before I knock off for the day. Among other things, I must go carefully through these notes that you have been so kind as to let me have, though I am afraid there is nothing very helpful in them."

As he retired down the stairs, Thorndyke stood looking after him with a faint smile.

"You observe," he remarked, "that our friend is still under the influence of the Smith obsession. I have never known Miller to be like this before. We have given him a piece of evidence of cardinal importance, and he treats it as something merely incidental. And that thumb-print, which is, almost beyond any doubt, the thumb-print of Badger's murderer, he files away as a thing that may possibly be of some slight interest on some unvisualized future occasion. It is an astonishing state of mind for an officer of his experience and real ability. We shall have to watch this case for his sake as well as our

own. We must try to prevent him from making a false move; and we have got to find poor Badger's murderer, if any efforts of ours are equal to a task that looks so unpromising."

"It certainly looks unpromising enough," said I. "The man whom we have to find is a mere phantom, a disembodied finger-print, so to speak. We don't know his name; we don't even know what he is like, since the only description we have of him is the description of a disguise, not of a man. We can only assume that he has neither red hair nor a red nose. But that description applies to a good many other people."

Thorndyke smiled at my pessimism, but was fain to agree that I had not overstated the case. "Still," he continued, hopefully, "things might have been worse. After all, a finger-print is a tangible asset. We can identify the man if we are ever able to lay hands on him."

"No doubt," I agreed, less hopefully, "but the laying hands on him is the whole problem. And it seems to be a problem with no solution."

"Well," he rejoined, "what we have done before we can do again. We have had to deal with unknown quantities, and we have resolved them into known quantities. It is not the first time that we have been confronted with the uncompleted equation, 'x=?'."

"No, indeed," said I. "You used that very formula, I remember, in the case of that man whom Miller was speaking of just now, Walter Hornby, and on the very occasion he referred to. I recall the incident very vividly. Don't you remember? When you passed me that slip of paper with the scribbled note on it, 'x=Walter Hornby'?"

"I remember it very well," he replied. "And I have quite good hopes that we shall complete the equation in this case, too, if we are patient and watchful."

"Knowing you as I do," said I, "and remembering those other cases, I, also, am not without hope. But I cannot imagine how you are going to get a start. At present there is absolutely nothing to go on."

"We shall have to wait for some new facts," he rejoined, "and remember that the force of evidence is cumulative. At present, as you say, the whole case is in the air. But I have a strong feeling that we have not heard the last of Mr. Frederick Smith. Now that his finger-prints and description are extant, I think we may look for him to make another appearance; and when he does, I suspect that we shall make a step forward."

At the moment, I did not quite perceive the bearing or significance of this statement; but, later, as had so often happened, I looked back on this conversation and marvelled at my obtuseness.

---

## IX. — THORNDYKE DISCOURSES ON FINGER-PRINTS

THORNDYKE'S prediction was verified with a promptitude that neither of us expected, for little more than fortnight had elapsed after our conversation on the subject when the elusive figure of Mr. Frederick Smith once more flitted across our field of vision. It was but a fleeting and spectral appearance and disappearance—at least that was what we gathered from the news paper. Indeed, we might have missed it altogether had not Thorndyke's eye been attracted by the heading of the small and inconspicuous paragraph: "ESCAPED PRISONER BREAKS INTO HOUSE."

"What, already!" he exclaimed; and as I looked up enquiringly he proceeded to read out the brief account.

"A daring robbery—or rather, attempted robbery—was committed yesterday in broad daylight by a man who escaped a short time ago from Maidstone Gaol. The scene of the attempt was a detached house in Sudbury Park, N.W., which had been left unoccupied owing to the owners having gone out for a day's motoring. Apparently the man was disturbed, for he was seen making off hurriedly; but, though he was immediately pursued, he disappeared and succeeded in making good his escape. However, he was seen distinctly by at least two persons, and the description that they were able to give to the police enabled the latter to identify him as the escaped prisoner."

As he laid down the paper, Thorndyke looked at me with a faint smile.

"Well," he said, "what does that announcement convey to my learned friend?"

"Not very much," I replied, "excepting a red head with a red nose affixed to it. Obviously, the observers noted his trade-marks."

"Yes," he agreed. "And you observe that he elected to do this job in broad daylight. He must be a conceited fellow. He seems to be unduly proud of that nose and those auburn locks."

"Still," said I, "he had to enter the house when it was unoccupied, and that happened to be in the day time, when the owners were out in their car. Only, what strikes me is that the identification is not very satisfactory, even allowing for the rarity of red hair in combination with a red nose."

"Wait until you have heard Miller's account of the affair," he rejoined. "I am prepared to hear that the identification was more complete than one would gather from the paper. But we shall see."

We did see, a few days later, and, as usual, Thorndyke was right. When, about eight o'clock at night, the Superintendent's well-known knock sounded on the door, I rose expectantly to admit him; and, as he strode into the room, something of satisfaction and complacency in his manner suggested that he was the bearer of news that he was going to

enjoy imparting to us. Accordingly, I hastened to dispose of the preliminaries—the whisky decanter, the siphon, and the inevitable box of cigars—and when he was comfortably settled in the arm-chair, I gave him the necessary “lead off.”

“I am sorry to see that our friend, Freddy, has been naughty again.”

He looked at me for a moment enquiringly, and then, as the vulgar phrase has it, he “rumbled” me.

“Ah,” said he, “you mean Frederick Smith of Maidstone. Saw the paragraph in the evening paper, I suppose?”

“Yes. And we thought it uncommonly smart of your people to spot Mr. Frederick Smith from the casual description of one or two persons who caught a glimpse of him as he was making off.”

Miller evidently felt himself to be in a position to ignore the hardly veiled sarcasm, for, without noticing it, he replied:

“Ah, but it was a good deal more than that. Of course, when we heard the description, we pricked up our ears. But we soon got some clues that made us independent of the description. I’ve come in to tell you about it, since you are really interested parties.

“I dare say you know this place, Sudbury Park. It is one of the queer old London survivals—a row of detached houses, each standing in its own grounds, with gardens backing on the Regent’s Canal, and little lanes here and there running up from the tow-path between the gardens to the road on which the houses front. The grounds that surround them are mostly pretty thickly wooded—sort of shrubberies—and they are enclosed by fairly high walls, the tops of which are guarded in the old-fashioned way by broken bottles and bits of glass set in cement.

“Now, it seems that our friend first drew attention to himself by breaking one of the back windows and making a good deal of noise in doing it. Then a couple of women, attracted by the noise, saw him trying to get in at the window. They were at a back window of one of the houses on the opposite side of the Canal. Naturally as soon as they saw what he was up to, they raised a philaloo and ran down to the garden to watch him over the wall. Their squawking brought a party of bargees along the tow-path, and when the bargees had been ‘put wise’ about the house-breaker, off they started, full gallop, towards a bridge that crosses the Canal two or three hundred yards farther down.

“Meanwhile, our honest tradesman, hearing the hullabaloo, concluded that the game was up, and came tumbling out through the window like a harlequin, and was in such a hurry that he left his cap inside, and so displayed his beautiful auburn hair to the best advantage. He had been working in his shirt-sleeves, and, when he started to run, the reason was obvious. He wanted his coat—which he carried on his arm—to lay on the broken bottles on the top of the wall so that he could climb over without tearing his trousers. And that is what he did. He laid the coat over the party wall, and over he went into the next shrubbery. But, unfortunately for him, as he dropped down on the farther side, the coat slipped off the wall and dropped down into the garden that he had left. For a moment he seemed disposed to go back for it. But by that time the bargees were running across the bridge, bellowing like bulls of Bashan. So our friend thought better of it, and bolted away into the shrubbery and was lost to sight.”

“Was he not seen by the occupants of that house?” Thorndyke asked.

“No—because there weren’t any. It was an empty house. So all he had to do was to slip up by the side way and go out by the tradesmen’s entrance. But it is odd that no one saw him in the road. You would think that a red-headed man in his shirt-sleeves, legging it up a quiet road, would attract some attention. But, apparently, no one saw him, so he got clear away—for the present, at any rate.

“But we shall have him, sooner or later. Sooner, I fancy. For, I tell you we mean to have him. And the traces that he left will make him a valuable catch when we do get him. A capture will mean a conviction to a dead certainty.”

“That is putting it rather strongly,” I remarked.

“Not too strongly,” he replied, confidently. “Let me tell you what we found. First there was the broken glass. We went through that carefully, and on one of the pieces we found a most beautiful impression of Mr Frederick Smith’s right thumb. And thereby hangs a tale which I will tell you presently. Then there was the coat. That looked hopeful. But what it actually yielded was beyond our wildest hopes. Most of the contents of the pockets were of no particular interest. But there was one treasure of inestimable value—an empty envelope that had apparently been used to carry some hard object, for there were some sharp, rubbed marks on it. But they did not interest us. What set us all agog was the address—Mr. Charles Dobey, 103 Barnard’s Buildings, Southwark.

“I need not tell you that we went off like record-breaking lamplighters to Barnard’s Buildings. There, at the office, we learned that the tenant of number 103, Mr. Dobey, was a gentleman with a red head and a nose to match. So up we went to number 103. We had provided ourselves with a search warrant, and the officer who went with me took with him a little battery of skeleton keys. So we soon had the door open.”

“What kind of key opened it?” asked Thorndyke.

“Oh, just a common pipe key with the bit filed away. The sort you generally use, I expect,” Miller added with a grin. “It was only a common builder’s latch. Well, when we got inside we had a look round, but at first there didn’t seem to be much to see. It was just common, squalid sort of room with hardly any furniture in it. Looked as if it was not regularly lived in; which agreed with what the man in the office said—that he didn’t very often see Mr. Dobey. However, presently we discovered, hidden under the bed, a good-sized oak box. It had a quite good lever lock which gave my colleague no end of trouble to open. But it was worth the trouble. When, at last, he got it open, we saw that we had struck it rich. It was a



regular treasury of evidence.

"First there was a full outfit of good-class burglar's tools, and there were one or two little packets of jewellery which we have since been able to identify from our lists as part of the swag from a burglary at a jeweller's shop. Well, that was all to the good. But the real prize was at the bottom of the box. I wonder if you can guess what it was?"

He looked a little anxiously at Thorndyke, and did not seem particularly gratified when the latter suggested:

"It did not chance to be a document?"

"That is just what it did chance to be," Miller admitted, adding: "You are a devil at guessing, Doctor. But you are quite right. It was the paper that was taken from poor Badger's pocket in that infernal tunnel at Greenhithe. So now we have got conclusive evidence as to who murdered Badger. Of course, we shall have to look into the meaning of that cigar of yours. But we shan't want to produce it in evidence or rely on it in any way for the purposes of the prosecution; which is as well, for it wouldn't have been particularly convincing to the jury. But there is one more point which makes this find extraordinarily complete. It is in connection with this finger-, or rather, thumb-print. You probably know that we started, some time ago, a special collection of finger-prints—mostly single impressions—known as the 'Scene of the Crime Series.' They are either originals or photographs of prints that have been found at places where a crime has been committed, but where the criminal has got away without being recognized. Most of them are, naturally, the prints of known men. But there are a few prints that we cannot associate with any known criminal. We can't put a name to them.

"Now, in this collection we had three sets of prints which had been found on premises that had been broke into, evidently by a burglar of rather exceptional skill and ingenuity, who seemed to have worked alone, and whose technique we thought we recognized in several other jobs in which no finger-prints were found. For some reason, when we got Smith's finger-prints from Maidstone and found that they were not in the general collection, the officer in charge omitted to try them with the 'Scene of the Crime Series.' But, since then he has made the comparison, and it turns out that those three sets of prints are undoubtedly Mr. Charles Dobey's. So, now, we are able to identify him as that peculiarly talented burglar."

"Is there any special advantage in being able to do so?" Thorndyke asked. "I take it that you will proceed on the murder charge."

"Certainly we shall," Miller replied. "But there is the question of identification. We have got to make it quite clear that the man who got into the train at Strood was this same Charles Dobey. And then there is the question of motive. Badger was the only officer who knew Dobey by sight. He went down to Maidstone that very day for the express purpose of identifying him."

"You are not forgetting that you cannot produce any evidence that he ever did identify him?"

"No, I am not forgetting that. But he went down, having judged from the description that Frederick Smith was the man who had committed those various burglaries. And it now turns out that he was right. These finger-prints prove that Dobey was the man."

"It seems to me," said I, "that the fact that the stolen paper was found in his possession will be sufficient, unless it can be rebutted, to establish the case for the prosecution, without referring to the burglaries at all. You can't include them in the indictment—not in an indictment for murder—and if you attempt to introduce them, and if the court allows you to, you will have to prove them, which will complicate the issues."

The Superintendent admitted the truth of this, but said that he was not going to take any chances.

"And, at any rate," he concluded, "you must agree that we have got a remarkably complete case."

Thorndyke did agree, and with so much emphasis that, once more, Miller looked at him with a shade of anxiety.

"I know what you are thinking, Doctor," said he. "You are thinking that it is too good to be true."

"Not at all," Thorndyke disclaimed with a smile, "though you must admit, Miller, that he has made things as easy for you as he could."

"He certainly behaved rather like a fool," Miller conceded; "that is often enough the way with crooks. You don't see any snags, do you?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "It looks all perfectly plain sailing. All you have to do now is to catch your hare; and he doesn't seem to be a particularly easy hare to catch."

"I don't think we shall have very much difficulty about that," said Miller. "He is an easy man to describe, and we shall circulate his description all over the country; in fact, we have done so already."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that was what I meant. You had him placarded at all the police-stations throughout the land, and then you find him engaged in breaking and entering in the very heart of London."

Yet again, Miller glanced with a trace of uneasiness at Thorndyke; but he made no comment on what sounded a little like a rather cryptic hint, and shortly afterwards rose and took his departure.

When he had gone, I was disposed to continue the discussion, but my colleague showed no enthusiasm. Yet I could see that he was reflecting profoundly on what the Superintendent had told us; which encouraged me to make a last effort.

"After all," I said, "we can't ignore plain fact. This story of Miller's is difficult to reconcile with we know—with regard to that cigar, for instance—but it is a consistent body of evidence, each item of which can be proved beyond question. And the discovery of that paper in the man's possession seems conclusive as it is possible for evidence to be. In view of your very convincing argument, it does really appear as if the solution of your problem is, x = Charles Dobey. Or is there some fallacy in Miller's case?"

"There is no obvious fallacy," Thorndyke replied. "The case presents, as you say, a perfectly consistent body of evidence. Taken at its face value, Miller's case is conclusive. The real question is whether the completeness and consistency are the results of unaided chance or of an ingeniously devised plan. It is a question we are, at present, unable to decide. Perhaps, when Dobey is brought to trial, he may be able to produce some new facts that may help us to come to a conclusion."

As this seemed to close the discussion, I knocked out my pipe and glanced at my watch.

"Time for me to be moving on," said I, "if I am to get home within the permitted hours. I told Juliet that I should be home to-night. And, by the way, I have a message for you. I am instructed to remind you that it is quite a long time since you paid your last visit."

"So it is," he admitted. "But we have not had many spare afternoons lately. However, to-morrow afternoon is free. Do you think it would be convenient to Juliet if I were to call and pay my respects then?"

"I happen to know that it will, as I took the precaution to ask what afternoons were unengaged. Then I will tell her to expect you, and you had better turn tip as early as you can. She always looks for a long pow-wow when you come."

"Yes," he replied, "she is very patient of my garrulousness. Then I will come as early as possible, and prepare myself for a special conversational effort. But it is really very gracious of her to care for the friendship of an old curmudgeon like me."

"It is," I agreed. "Odd, too. I can't imagine why she does."

With this Parthian shot, and without waiting for a rejoinder, I took myself off en route for the Temple station.

Here, perhaps, since my records of Thorndyke's practice have contained so little reference to my own personal affairs, I should say a few words concerning my domestic habits. As the circumstances of our practice often made it desirable for me to stay late at our chambers, I had retained there the bedroom that I had occupied before my marriage; and, as these circumstances could not always be foreseen, I had arranged with my wife the simple rule that the house closed at eleven o'clock. If I was unable to get home by that time, it was to be understood that I was staying at the Temple. It may sound like a rather undomestic arrangement, but it worked quite smoothly, and it was not without its advantages. For the brief absence gave to my homecomings a certain festive quality, and helped to keep alive the romantic element in my married life. It is possible for the most devoted husbands and wives to see too much of one another.

Thorndyke redeemed his promise handsomely on the following afternoon, for he arrived shortly after three o'clock, having, I suspect, taken an early lunch to that end; for it presently transpired that he had come straight from Scotland Yard, where he had been conferring with the experts of the Finger-print Bureau.

"Was your pow-wow concerned with any particular case that we have in hand?" I ventured to enquire.

"No," he replied. "I went there to get some further information respecting the new system of dealing with single finger-prints that was devised by Chief Inspector Battley. I have been studying his book on his method of classification and making a few tentative trials. But I wanted to make sure that my application of the method yielded the same results as were obtained by the experts. So I went to Scotland Yard and asked them to check my results."

"I suppose," my wife suggested, "you are still a good deal interested in finger-prints?"

"Yes," he replied, "almost necessarily, since they so constantly crop up in evidence. But apart from, that, they are curious and interesting things in a number of ways."

"Yes," she agreed, "interesting and curious and rather horrible—at least that is how they appear to me. I never hear of a finger-print but my thoughts go back to that awful trial, with Reuben in the dock and poor Aunt Arabella in the witness-box giving evidence about the Thumbograph. What a dreadful time it was!"

I am afraid I was disposed to grin at the recollection, for poor Mrs. Hornby had brought the proceedings as near to farce as is humanly possible in a criminal trial where an honourable gentleman stands indicted for a felony. But I controlled my features, and, as to Thorndyke, he was, as usual, gravely sympathetic.

"Yes," he agreed, "it was an anxious time. I was not at all confident as to how my evidence would be received by the judge and the jury; and, if they had failed to be properly impressed, Reuben would certainly have gone to penal servitude. By the way, we sent the Thumbograph back to Mrs. Hornby after the trial. Do you happen to know what she did with it?"

"She didn't do anything with it," Juliet replied, "because I annexed it."

"What for?" I asked, rather foolishly, perhaps.

"Can't you imagine?" she demanded, flushing slightly. "It was a little sentimental of me, I suppose, but I kept it as a souvenir. And why not? It had been a terrible experience, but it was over, and it had ended happily, for me, at any rate. I have something to thank the Thumbograph for."

"It is very nice of you to say that, Juliet," said I. "But why have you never shown it to me? I have at least as much to be

thankful for, though, to tell the truth, I had overlooked the fact that it was the Thumbograph that introduced us to one another."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "suppose you produce this disreputable little matchmaker and let us revive our memories of those stirring times. I haven't seen a Thumbograph for years."

"I am not surprised," said Juliet. "The report of your evidence at the trial was enough to kill the demand for them for ever. But I will go and fetch it."

She went away and returned in a minute or two with the souvenir, which she handed to Thorndyke; a little oblong volume, bound in red cloth with the name "Thumbograph" stamped in gold on the cover. I looked at it with a new interest as Thorndyke turned over the leaves reminiscently while Juliet looked over his shoulder.

"Doesn't it bring all those horrors back?" said she, "and especially poor Mrs. Hornby's evidence. Here is Miss Colley's thumb-print, which Reuben was supposed to have smeared, and here is Aunt Arabella's, and here is mine, and there is that wretch Walter's."

"Characteristically, the best impression in the book," said Thorndyke. "He was a remarkably capable scoundrel. He did everything well."

"I wonder if we shall ever see him again?" I mused. "When he slipped away from the court, he seemed to vanish into thin air."

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "another instance of his capability. It is not so very easy for a man who is badly wanted by the police to disappear, once and for all, as he did."

He turned over the leaves once more until he came to the one which bore the print of Reuben Hornby's thumb. Underneath it Reuben's name was written in pencil and, below this, the signatures of the two witnesses, "Arabella Hornby" and "Juliet Gibson."

"Do you remember," said Juliet, "the night Aunt Arabella and I brought the Thumbograph to your chambers? It was a thrilling experience to me."

"And to Thorndyke too, I imagine," said I. "For it was then that he knew for certain that the Red Thumb Mark was a forgery. I saw him make the discovery, though I did not know at the time what the discovery was. Wasn't it so, Thorndyke?"

"It was," he replied. "And what was even more important, I thought I had found the means of convincing the court. You are quite right, Juliet; it was a memorable occasion for me."

As he continued to turn over the leaves and scrutinize the various thumb-prints, I reverted to our previous conversation.

"I don't quite understand what you were doing at the Yard to-day," said I. "The classification of finger-prints is interesting enough in its way. But it doesn't specially concern us."

"It doesn't concern us at all," he agreed. "But identification does. And that is where Battley's method is valuable to us. The beauty of it is that, apart from classification for index purposes, it affords a means of rapid identification, and moreover makes it possible to express the distinctive characters of a given finger-print in a formula. Now this is an immense convenience. We often have occasion to identify a finger-print with an original or a photograph in our possession. But we can't always carry the print or photograph about with us. But if we can express the characters of the print in a formula, we can enter that formula in our note-books, and have it ready for reference at any moment."

"But," I objected, "a formula would hardly be sufficiently definite for a reliable identification."

"Not, perhaps, for a final identification to swear to in evidence," he replied, "though you would be surprised at the accuracy that is possible. But that is not the purpose aimed at. The use of the method at the Bureau is principally to enable the searchers to find a given finger-print quickly among the thousands in the collections of single finger-prints. Our use of it will be to form an opinion rapidly on the identity of a print in which we happen to be interested. Remember, we don't have to give evidence. Finger-print evidence, proper, is exclusively the province of the regular experts. We have only to form an opinion for our own guidance. Come," he continued, "I have the apparatus in my bag, which is in the hall, and here is the Thumbograph with a selection of prints to operate on. Why shouldn't we have a demonstration of the method? You will find it quite amusing."

"It does sound rather thrilling," said Juliet; and, thus encouraged by the vote of the predominant partner, Thorndyke went out to find his bag.

"Let me first explain the general principle of the method," said he, when he returned with a small leather bag in his hand. "Like all really efficient methods, it is essentially simple though extremely ingenious. This is the sole apparatus that is necessary."

As he spoke, he opened the bag and took out a magnifying glass, which was mounted on three legs, the feet of which were fixed into a brass ring which enclosed a plate of glass.

"This circular glass plate," he explained, "is the essential part of the instrument. If you look through the lens, you will see that the glass plate has engraved on it and coloured red a central dot surrounded by seven concentric circles. The first

circle is three millimetres from the dot; the other circles are each two millimetres from the next. The central space is denoted by the letter A. The spaces between the other circles are denoted, successively, by the letters B, C, D, E, F, and G; and the space outside the outermost circle is denoted by H. The letters are, of course, not marked on the glass; but I have here a diagram which shows their position."

He laid on the table a card on which were described the seven circles, each marked with its appropriate letter, and then, taking up the Thumbograph, once more turned over the leaves.

"I think," said he, "we will select the estimable Walter's thumb-print as the corpus vile for our experiment. It is the best print in the book, and it has the further advantage of being a peculiarly distinctive type with a rather striking pattern. It has the general character of a whorl with a tendency towards that of a twinned loop—that is, a pair of loops folded into each other with the convexities turned in opposite directions. But we will call it a whorl, and treat it as such, merely noting the alternative character. You will see that the pattern is formed by a number of black lines, which are the impressions of the ridges on the thumb. In this print the centre of the patterns, or 'core,' consists of a pair of little loops, from which the lines meander away in a rather irregular spiral. At a little distance from the core, these lines meet another set of lines at an angle, forming a Y-shaped figure known as a 'delta.' There will be another delta on the opposite side of the thumb, but it is too far round to appear in this print. It would be visible in a 'rolled impression'—that is, a print made by rolling the inked thumb over on a card or paper; but in this print, made by a single contact, only the right delta appears.

"And now as to the use of the instrument. We lay the glass plate on the print, so that the dot just touches the top of the upper loop. And now you see the masterly simplicity of the method. For, since a circle has no right or wrong way up, when once you have set the dot in the appointed place, all the other lines must be correctly placed. Without any further adjustment, they show with absolute accuracy the distance from the centre of any part of the pattern. And this distance can be expressed, quite unmistakably, by a single letter."

He placed the instrument on the thumb-print in the book, and, having carefully adjusted it, drew out his note-book and looked at my wife.

"Now, Juliet," said he, "just look through the lens and tell me the letter that indicates the position of the delta—which is actually the right delta, though it is the only one visible."

Juliet peered through the magnifying glass and studied the print for a while. At length, she looked up a little doubtfully and announced:

"It seems to me that the third line cuts right through it. So it lies half in the space C and half in D. Which of the two would you call it?"

"The rule," he replied, "is that if a character is cut by a line, it is reckoned as lying in the space outside that line."

"Then this delta lies in the space D," she concluded.

"Quite right," said he. "We will mark it D; and, as the other delta is not in the print, we must mark it simply with a query. And now we proceed to the rest of the examination, the ridge-tracing and ridge-counting. We will take the tracing first. What you would have to do if both the deltas were visible would be to follow the ridge that runs from the left delta towards the right. Obviously, it must take one of three courses: it may pass below, or outside, the right delta, or below, or inside, or it may meet, or nearly meet, the corresponding ridge from the right delta. Those are the three categories: outside, inside, or meeting, by the initials, I, M, O."

"But," objected Juliet, "as the left delta is not visible, it is impossible to trace a ridge from it."

"That might be true in some cases," replied Thorndyke, "but it is not in this, for, if you look at the print, you will see that, wherever the left delta may have been, a ridge passing from it towards the right must have passed well outside the right delta."

Juliet examined the print again and agreed that it was so.

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "then we will mark it O, and proceed to the ridge-counting, which will complete the formula. You have to count the ridges between the centre of the core and the delta. Put aside the measuring glass and use my lens instead; and I will give you a point to help you to count the ridges."

He handed her his pocket lens, and produced from his bag what looked suspiciously like a dentist's excavator, with the sharp point of which he indicated the ridges that were to be counted. Then he laid a visiting-card on the print to give a straight line from the centre to the delta, and she proceeded to count along its edge with the point of the excavator. Having gone over the ground twice, she announced the result.

"I make it twelve. But I am not quite sure, as some of the ridges fork, and might be counted as one or two. Will you count them?"

Thorndyke took the excavator from her and rapidly checked her result.

"Yes," said he, "I agree with you. I think we may safely put it down as twelve, though the bifurcations do, as you say, create a slight ambiguity. If the other delta had been visible there would, of course, have been a second circle-reading and a second ridge-count, which would obviously have been an advantage for identification. Still, what we have done gives us the main distinctive characters of this print, and we can express them by a simple formula of a few letters and numbers. Thus,

the type of pattern is a whorl, with something of the character of a twinned loop. Accordingly, we put down a W with T.L. in brackets. The core, or central character—the pair of little loops—lies entirely in the circle A. Now, there are five kinds of ‘A’ cores: the plain eye—just a tiny circle—the eye enclosing some smaller character, the left-hand spiral, the right-hand spiral, and any other ‘A’ form of an unclassifiable type. Now, in this print, the core is a left-hand, or anti-clockwise spiral, and accordingly belongs to the category A3. The delta, we agreed, lies in the space D. The ridge-tracing was outside—O—and the ridge-count twelve. We can express all these facts in a formula, thus:

“Walter Hornby. Right thumb. W (? T.L.), A3, ?, O, D, ?, 12.”

“That is concise enough,” I remarked. “But, after all, it gives you only a skeleton of the pattern. It would not enable you to identify a print with any approach to certainty.”

“It does not aim at certainty,” he replied, “but merely at such a degree of probability as would justify action or further research. But I think you hardly appreciate the degree of probability that this formula expresses. It records five different positive characters and one negative. Now, taking the five only, if we accept the very modest chance of four to one against each of these characters being present in a print which is not Walter Hornby’s, the cumulative effect of the five together yields a chance of over a thousand to one against the print being that of some person other than Walter Hornby.

“But, for our purposes, we are not obliged to stop at these five characters. We can add others; and we can locate those others either by the use of Battley’s circles or by ridge-counting with a direction-line. For instance, in this print, to the left of the core and a little downwards, the seventh ridge shows one of those little loops known as ‘lakes,’ the ninth bifurcates, and the eleventh has another, larger lake. To the right of the core the third ridge has a small lake, the fifth ridge bifurcates, the eighth has a free end, and the tenth bifurcates. There are seven additional characters which we can add to our formula, giving us twelve characters in all, the cumulative effect of which is a probability of over sixteen millions to one against the print being the thumb-print of any person other than Walter Hornby, and that is near enough to certainty for our purpose. It would undoubtedly justify an arrest; and we could leave the final proof or disproof to the experts.”

He added the extra characters to the formula in his note-book, and showed us the completed entry; which certainly afforded convincing testimony to the efficiency of the method. In fact, it impressed me—and my wife, too—so profoundly that, in an access of enthusiasm, we fell upon the Thumbograph forthwith, and with the aid of Chief Inspector Battley’s ingenious instrument, proceeded to construct formulas to express the characters of the other thumb-prints in the book, while Thorndyke smoked his pipe regarded our activities with benevolent interest, seasoned by occasional advice and criticism of the results.

“It is quite an amusing game,” Juliet remarked. “If only the inventors of the Thumbograph had known of it and printed directions in the book, it might have become a fashionable drawing-room pastime, and they would have made a fortune.”

“Perhaps it is as well that they did not,” said I. “The Thumbograph was a dangerous toy, as we discovered—or rather, as Thorndyke did.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed, “it was a mischievous plaything. But don’t forget that it acted both ways. If it supplied the false accusation, it also supplied the conclusive answer. Walter Hornby had more reason than any of us to regret that he ever set eyes on the Thumbograph. And it may be that he has not yet come to the end of those reasons. He has evaded justice so far. But the debt is still outstanding.”



### BOOK III: THE THREE ROGUES

#### X. — MR. WOODBURN'S STORY

INVENTORS are a much-misunderstood class. The common man, in his vanity and egotism, supposes that they exist to supply him with various commodities of which he dimly perceives the need. But this is an entirely mistaken view. The inventor produces his invention because, in the existing circumstances, it has become possible. It is true that he, himself, tends to confuse the issues by persuading himself optimistically that his invention has a real and important utility. His inventive mind goes so far as to create an imaginary consumer, so that he sees life in a somewhat false perspective. The genius who devised a family Bible which could be opened out to form a billiard table, no doubt envisaged a pious type of player who had need of some means of combining the canon of scripture with a cannon off the red; while, to the inventor of a super magic-lantern which could throw pictures on the clouds, the night sky was no more than a suitable background on which to declare the glory of Blunt's Milky Toffee.

But this is mere self-delusion. In reality, the inventor is concerned with his invention. Its use is but a side issue which hovers vaguely on the periphery of his mental field of vision. I emphasise the fact, because it has a bearing on the events which I am recording. For our invaluable laboratory assistant, Polton, was an inveterate inventor, and, being also an accomplished and versatile craftsman, was able to turn out his inventions in a completely realised form.

So it happened that a certain large cupboard in the laboratory was a veritable museum of the products of his inventive genius and manual skill; examples of ingenuity—sometimes fantastically misguided—the utility of which he would expound to Thorndyke and me with pathetic earnestness and appeals to “give them a trial.” There were spectacles which enabled the wearer to see behind him, there was a periscope walking-stick with which you could see round a corner, a large pedometer with movable dials for metres and yards and a micrometer adjustment of impracticable accuracy, and all sorts of clockwork devices and appliances for out-of-the-way photographic operations. But optical instruments were his special passion, whence it followed that most of his inventions took an optical turn.

I am afraid that I did not treat these children of Polton's imagination with the respect that they deserved. Thorndyke, on the other hand, made a point of always examining even the wildest flights of the inventor's fancy with appreciative attention, realizing—and pointing out to me—that their apparent oddity was really due to the absence of appropriate circumstances, and that those circumstances might arise at any moment and give an unexpected value to what seemed to be a mere toy. And that was what happened on the present occasion. One of Polton's most eccentric productions suddenly revealed itself as an invaluable instrument of research. But perhaps I am beginning the story at the wrong end. I had better turn back and take the incidents in their proper order.

It was rather late one afternoon when there arrived at our chambers a dapper, well-dressed gentleman of distinctly horsey appearance, who gave the name of Woodburn, and who, rather to my surprise, turned out to be a solicitor. He presented Mr. Brobribb's card, on which were scribbled a few words of introduction.

“I have come to see you,” he explained, “on the advice of my friend Brodribb. I came up to Town expressly to confer with him on a rather queer case that has turned up in my practice. We talked over the legal issues without coming to any very definite conclusion, but Brodribb thought that there were certain points in the case that were more in your line than in either his or mine. And I am certainly inclined to agree with him to the extent that I am decidedly out of my depth.”

“And what about Mr. Brodribb?” Thorndyke asked. “He is a pretty acute lawyer.”

“He is,” Mr. Woodburn agreed, heartily. “But this is not altogether a question of law. There are some other points on which he thought you would be able to help us. I had better give you an outline of the case. But, first, I had better explain that I am a country practitioner with my principal office at Packington in Kent, and that my clients are chiefly the farmers and country gentlemen of the surrounding district.

“Now, one of these clients is a gentleman named Mr. Didbury Toke. He is a sort of superior dealer in works of art and antiquities. He has an office in Town, but he resides at an ancient house called Hartsden Manor in the village of Hartsden and usually spends a good deal of his time there. But from time to time he has been in the habit of taking more or less prolonged trips to the Continent for the purpose of rooting about for antiques and works of art. On these occasions it has been his custom to shut up that part of the house in which his collection is lodged, and seal all the doors and windows in any way giving access to it.

“Well, about two months ago, he set forth on one of these expeditions, and, according to his usual custom, he locked up and sealed all the approaches to the rooms containing the collection and gave the keys into my custody.”

“What happened to the seal?” asked Thorndyke.

“That I can't tell you,” replied Mr. Woodburn. “He didn't give it to me, but I have an impression that he deposited it at his bank in London. I know that he did on a previous occasion. Still, he may have carried it on his person. I happen to know that it is a large, clumsy, antique ring, which he was certainly not in the habit of wearing.

“Well, as I said, he handed the keys to me, but, at the same time, he gave me very definite instructions—in writing—that the rooms were not on any account to be entered or the seals tampered with in any way. You see that his instructions were quite explicit, and, in fact, decidedly emphatic.”

"Apparently," said Thorndyke, "he allowed you no discretion and provided for no contingencies. Is that not so?"

"That is so," replied Mr. Woodburn. "His instructions amounted to an absolute prohibition of any interference with the seals or any attempt to enter the enclosed rooms. That is the matter which I have been discussing with Mr. Brodribb, and which I want to discuss with you. Because this prohibition has become highly inconvenient. Circumstances have arisen which seem to make it very desirable to enter those enclosed rooms. But before I go into those circumstances, I had better tell you a little more about the arrangements of the house and those particular rooms.

"The main part of the closed premises consists of a very large room—about forty feet long—called the great gallery; but adjoining this are three or four smaller rooms, some of which are used to house part of the collection, and some are kept as workrooms, in which Mr. Toke does his mending and other odd jobs connected with the collection. The great gallery and the rooms attached to it occupy the whole of a wing which runs at right angles to the rest of the house; and, as there is only one door giving access to the gallery and its annexed rooms, the whole group of apartments is completely cut off and isolated.

"Now the circumstances to which I referred are these. Mr. Toke's household ordinarily consists of his housekeeper and her niece, who acts as housemaid; but, when he is away from home, a nephew of the housekeeper usually comes to stay there, so that there may be a man on the premises. He is there now; so there are three persons living in the house; and those three persons are agreed that, from time to time, they have heard sounds at night apparently coming from the great gallery. It sounds incredible, and I must admit that when they first reported the matter to me, I was disposed to be sceptical. I am not entirely unsceptical now. But they are extremely positive, and, as I said, they are all agreed. So I thought it my duty to go over to the manor house and make an inspection; and the result of that inspection was only to make the whole affair still more incomprehensible. For the seals were all intact, and there was not a sign anywhere of anyone having broken into the place."

"You examined the windows, of course?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. There are five large windows, and I examined them all from outside by means of a ladder. They certainly had not been opened, for I could see that the catches were all in their places. But I may say that the windows are all secured from inside with screws, and those screws are sealed. Mr. Toke leaves nothing to chance."

"Could you see into the room?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. The shutters were not closed, but the windows are covered by lace or net curtains, so that, although the gallery is quite light, it is impossible to see in from the outside."

"You have spoken of the collection," said Thorndyke. "Perhaps you had better tell us something about its nature and value."

"As to its value," said Mr. Woodburn, "I believe that is very considerable, but as it consists chiefly of pottery and porcelain, Bow and Chelsea figures, bronzes, and small statuary, it would be of no interest, to a burglar—at least, that is what I understood from Mr. Toke."

"I am not sure that I agree with Mr. Toke," said Thorndyke. "Of course, since you cannot melt down porcelain figures into unrecognizable ingots, they are not suitable for the common type of burglar. The ordinary 'fence' would not trade in them, and they could not be offered in the open market. But they are really valuable things and fairly portable, and they would not be so very difficult to dispose of. The ordinary collector is not always as scrupulous as he might be, but there is one kind of collector who is not scrupulous at all. One may take it that a millionaire who has made his millions by questionable transactions, may be prepared to spend them in a like manner. The point is of some importance; for, whereas the repeated occurrence of these sounds—assuming them to have occurred—is not consistent with the idea of an ordinary burglary, it does suggest the bare possibility of some enterprising persons quietly removing the more valuable parts of the collection piecemeal."

"You do, then, really entertain the possibility that these sounds are not merely imaginary?"

"I have an entirely open mind," replied Thorndyke. "But I understood you to say that you had gone into the question of fact on the spot, and that you were satisfied that the reports were sufficiently convincing to justify serious enquiry."

"That is so," said Mr. Woodburn. "But I may say that Brodribb scouted the idea. He was incredulous as to the sounds having been heard at all, seeing that the closed rooms are so completely isolated and so distant from the rest of the house; and he suggested that if there had been any sounds, they were probably due to rats. I don't agree with him as to the rats. Of course, I enquired whether that could be the explanation, but I think it can be excluded. The noises that rats make are pretty characteristic, and they don't at all agree with the description of the sounds that these people gave. And they tell me that there are no rats in the house, which seems to settle the question; for, although rats will harbour in empty rooms, they don't stay there. They must come out for food. But Brodribb's other objection is more weighty. The great gallery is a good distance from the rest of the house. What do you really think of the probabilities?"

"Well," replied Thorndyke, "the answer to your question involves the statement of a rather bald truism. If there is no access to the closed rooms other than the door of which you spoke, and that door is still locked and the seal is still unbroken, evidently no one can possibly have entered those rooms. On the other hand, if sounds have been heard of such a nature as to make it certain that someone had entered those rooms, then it follows that there must be some means of access to those rooms other than those which are known to you. I apologize for the obviousness of the statement."

"You needn't," said Mr. Woodburn. "It puts the matter into a nutshell. I saw the dilemma myself. But what do you suggest?"

"In the first place," said Thorndyke, "may I ask if it is impossible to get into touch with Mr. Toke?"

"Ah," said Mr. Woodburn, "there you have raised another point. Apparently, it is impossible for me to get into touch with my client; and that is a matter that I am not entirely happy about. Mr. Toke is by no means a good correspondent. But, when he is travelling, as a rule, he sends me a short note now and again, just to give me the chance of communicating with him if the occasion should arise. And he has been in the habit of sending me parcels—purchases that he has made—to put in my strong room or to deposit at his bank. But this time, I have had not a single line from him since he went away. It is really rather strange, for Mr. Toke is a methodical, business-like man, and he must realize that it is most undesirable that his solicitor and man of business should have no means of communicating with him. It might be extremely awkward; even disastrous. It is extremely awkward now. If I could get into touch with him, he would pretty certainly authorize me to break the seals and see if his collection is all as it should be. As he can't, the question arises as to what I ought to do. Should I, for instance, take it that these exceptional circumstances absolve me from the obligation to abide literally by his instructions? Brodribb thought not. What is your view of the case?"

"I am disposed to agree with Brodribb. The difficulty seems to be that you have not established the exceptional circumstances. There is only a suspicion; and Mr. Toke might think, as Brodribb does, that the suspicion was not a reasonable one. You have said that Mr. Toke's instructions were very explicit and even emphatic. He was clearly most anxious that those rooms should not be entered or the seals broken. He has said so, and he has given quite definite instructions on the subject. This being so, we must assume that he had good and sufficient reasons for giving those instructions. We cannot judge what those reasons were, or how strong they were. But it is always safe to assume that a man means what he says, especially when he says it quite clearly and unmistakably.

"Suppose you 'interpret' his instructions and proceed to break the seals and enter the rooms. Suppose you find everything normal, and, at the same time, find something that shows you that the rooms ought not to have been entered by anyone except Mr. Toke himself. That might create a very awkward situation."

Mr. Woodburn laughed. "You think it possible that Mr. Toke may have something hidden in those rooms that he wouldn't like anyone else, to see? Well, of course, it may be so. But I may mention that Mr. Didbury Toke is a most respectable gentleman."

"I am not suggesting the slightest reflection on Mr. Toke's moral character," said Thorndyke, laughing in his turn. "Probably, his motive was nothing more than extreme solicitude for his collection. Still, he may have things locked up in his gallery the existence of which, in that place, he might well wish to keep secret; things, for instance, of great intrinsic value which might invite the attentions of burglars."

"Yes," said Woodburn, "I suppose you are right. He always swore that there was nothing there that a burglar would look at. But that may have been a mere precaution. Which brings us back to the question, What is to be done?"

"I think the answer to that is fairly simple," said Thorndyke. "These statements certainly call for investigation. Two points require to be cleared up. First, is it certain that there is really no possibility of access to these rooms other than the door that you mentioned? And, second, assuming the first to be true, is it certain that access has not been obtained by means of that door?"

"But how could it have been?" Mr. Woodburn exclaimed. "The door is sealed. I examined it most carefully, and I can assure you that the seals are undoubtedly intact."

"That is not absolutely conclusive," Thorndyke replied with a faint smile. "Seals are not difficult to counterfeit. For instance, if, for any legitimate purpose you asked me to enter those rooms and replace the seals when I came out, I should find no difficulty in doing so."

"Really!" exclaimed Mr. Woodburn. Then, subsiding into a grin, he added: "You are a rather dangerous sort of person, but I am not surprised that Brodribb has so much confidence in you. Perhaps you can suggest some way in which I might set about testing the correctness of these statements; or, better still, perhaps you would be willing to undertake the investigation yourself? I do feel that something ought to be done."

"So do I," said Thorndyke. "Incredible as the statements sound, what is stated is by no means impossible. And, if we should find that some persons either could have effected an entrance or had actually done so, the position would be entirely changed. You would then certainly be justified in breaking the seals and entering the rooms."

"And asking you to replace the seals after, eh?" suggested Woodburn, with a broad grin. Apparently, Thorndyke's accomplishments had made a profound impression on him.

Thorndyke smilingly dismissed the suggestion and enquired: "Is there no way, so far as you know, of getting a glimpse into the room from the outside?"

"No way at all," was the reply. "I tried peering in at the windows, but it was impossible to see any thing through the curtains. I even tried the keyhole. There is a monstrous great keyhole in the door. I myself should think the key must be quite a formidable weapon, though I have never seen it. The door is secured by a Chubb lock, of which I have the key. Well, I peered through that keyhole, but all I could see was a patch of wall on the side of the room opposite. Naturally; because the door opens into the room at the extreme end of one side."



"Could you give me a description of the room, or, preferably, a sketch?" Thorndyke asked.

"I have an architect's plan of the house in my bag," Woodburn replied. "I brought it up to show Brodribb, but he was not interested, as he did not believe the story. However, you are not so sceptical. I'll get it out."

He rummaged in his bag and presently produced a small roll of tracing-cloth, on which was a clearly drawn plan of the house and its immediate surroundings.

"The scale of the particular room," he remarked, "is not as large as we should like. But you can see the main features. This crooked corridor leads to the gallery wing, and you see that it ends in a turn at right angles. So, when the door is open, you look in across the end of the room. The door opens inwards, and there are three steps down to the floor level. You can see for yourself that a keyhole in that door is of no use for the purpose of inspection."

"Can you tell us anything about the furniture, or how the floor space is occupied?" Thorndyke asked.

"With the exception of a few chairs and a large table across the farther end of the room, there is practically no furniture excepting the wall-cases. There is range of them along each side wall between the windows, and the two doors that open into the four small rooms at the side of the gallery."

"There seems to be no access to those rooms excepting through the doors from the gallery."

"No, there is not. Those rooms seem to have been originally a corridor, which has been divided up by partitions. They all open into one another—at least, each opens into the next. Two of them have cabinets full of pottery and porcelain, and the other two are work-rooms in which Mr. Toke does jobs such as mending and cleaning the pieces."

"What is there above and below the gallery?" asked Thorndyke.

"Above, I suppose, are lofts. I don't know how you get to them, but I don't think they would help us. You couldn't see through the floor, and you couldn't bore holes in it, as the gallery has a fine seventeenth-century plaster ceiling. Under the gallery is a range of cellars, but they are not accessible, as they are all secured with good padlocks, and both the padlocks and the doors are sealed."

"Mr. Toke was certainly pretty thorough in his methods," Thorndyke remarked. "It would be a serious responsibility to break into his Bluebeard chambers."

"Yes, confound him," Woodburn agreed. "I wish to goodness it was possible to communicate with him and let him take the responsibility. I wonder why the deuce he has never sent me a line. I hope nothing has happened to him abroad. You can never be sure in these days of motors and sudden death."

"When did you say he went away?" Thorndyke asked.

"On the ninth of August," replied Woodburn, "at least that is the date he gave me. He came to my office on the eighth to give me the keys and his final instructions, and he then said that he intended to start for Paris on the following night."

"Do you know if he did actually start then?"

"Well, yes—indirectly. I happen to use the same garage to put up my car, when I come to town, as Mr. Toke uses. He recommended it to me, as a matter of fact. There I ascertained that he deposited his car on the morning of the ninth of August. But, oddly enough, he took it out again in the evening, and it was not returned until some time in the small hours of the following morning."

"Then," I said, "he couldn't have caught his train."

"I think he did. He did not return the car himself. It was brought in by a stranger, whom the night watchman described, picturesquely, as a 'ginger Lushington,' and this person reported that Mr Toke had caught his train, and that the lateness of the delivery of the car was due to some fault of his own."

"I wonder what the watchman meant by a 'ginger Lushington'?" said I.

"Yes," said Woodburn, "it is a quaint expression. I asked him what it meant in common English. Apparently, it was a term of inference. The word 'ginger' referred to the colour of the man's hair, and, as his nose was tinted to match, the watchman inferred the habitual use of stimulants. But apparently Toke caught his train all right."

As Mr. Woodburn interpreted the watchman's description, I caught Thorndyke's eyes for a single instant, and I saw that he had noted the significance of that description. It was probably the merest coincidence, but I knew that it would not pass without close scrutiny. And I could not but perceive that thereafter his interest in Mr. Woodburn's affairs became appreciably more acute.

"Do I understand," he asked, "that you feel an actual uneasiness about your client?"

"Well," was the reply, "I must admit that I am by no means happy about him. You see, this prolonged silence is a complete departure from his usual habit. And time is running on. This is the eleventh of October, and he has made no sign. All sorts of thing may happen to a man who is in a strange country and out of all touch with his friends. I don't like it at all. However, it was not about Mr. Toke that I came to consult you, though I may have to ask for your assistance later. It is about these queer happenings at the Manor House. Now, what do you suggest? I should like you, as an expert, to take up the inquiry yourself. Do you care to do that?"

"I am quite willing to make a preliminary investigation," Thorndyke replied. "That would involve personally interrogating the servants and making a careful survey of the premises. If it seems to be a mare's nest, we can let it drop. But if we discover some hitherto unsuspected means of access to the gallery, or find evidence that some persons have, in fact, entered the premises, we can consider what action is to be taken. Would that meet your views?"

"Perfectly," replied Woodburn. "When could you come down and take a look at the place?"

"I suggest the day after to-morrow, early in the afternoon, if that will suit you."

"It will do quite well," said Woodburn. "There is a good train from Charing Cross at two-thirty. If you can catch that, I will meet you at the station with my car and take you straight on to the house."

Thorndyke made a note of this arrangement, and Mr. Woodburn then took his leave, evidently very well pleased at having transferred some of his anxieties to more capable shoulders.

When he returned from the landing, having seen his visitor safely launched down the stairs, Thorndyke picked up the plan, which Mr. Woodburn had left on the table, and, glancing at it, turned to me with a smile.

"A queer affair, Jervis," said he. "I wonder if there is anything in it?"

"Personally," I replied, "I should be disposed to suspect a mare's nest. There is something a little creepy about a big, old house, especially if a part of it is shut up and sealed. Those servants may easily have got a trifle jumpy and imagined that they heard sounds in the dead of the night."

"That is quite possible," he agreed. "But then we must not overlook the fact that the thing alleged is also quite possible. And it is not so very improbable. Precautions of the kind that Mr. Toke has taken may have a certain boomerang quality. The place is locked, bolted, barred, and sealed. That is all well enough so long as the precautions take their expected effect. But if they fail, they fail with a most horrid completeness. Here, for instance, is a collection of really valuable things. It is all nonsense to say that they are of no interest to burglars. It depends on the burglar. Fine pieces of porcelain and high-class bronzes are easily negotiable in the right markets. The burglar's real difficulty is in getting them away. Silver and gold can be carried away regardless of injury, as they are to be melted down; but these things are fragile, and their value depends on their being uninjured. Now, if it is only possible for a burglar to obtain access to Mr. Toke's gallery, everything else made easy for him. He can work at his leisure and take these things away one or two at a time in the most suitable manner. I think the affair is worth looking into, even on its own merits."

"But you notice that there is another aspect of the case that deserves attention. Woodburn is obviously anxious about Mr. Toke. And not without some reason. In a legal sense, Mr. Toke has disappeared. His whereabouts are unknown to the very man to whom they should be known. Now, suppose that some mishap has befallen him, and suppose that circumstance to be known to some person—some unscrupulous person—who also knows about the collection. That is a bare possibility that has to be considered. And then we have to note the fact that the only evidence that Toke did really catch his train is the statement of an unknown stranger."

"Who happens to have had red hair and a red nose," I remarked.

Thorndyke chuckled. "True," he admitted. "But we mustn't allow ourselves, like Miller, to be obsessed by a mere matter of complexion. Still, we will bear even that fact in mind. And there is one other fact, with a possible inference. Toke's instructions to Woodburn suggest something more than mere caution. They have a suggestion of secrecy. So much so that one asks oneself if it is possible that he may have some property concealed in the gallery of a different kind from the ostensible collection. I find it quite an attractive case, though, as you say, it may easily turn out to be a mare's nest."

"What do you propose to do when you go down to Hartsden?" I asked.

"I have no definite programme," he replied, "beyond making the best possible use of my eyes and ears. The obviously desirable thing would be to get a look at the interior of the gallery, and see if there are any signs of disturbance—whether, for instance, the cases have or have not been emptied."

"Yes," I agreed, "I realize that; but I don't see how you are going to manage it, as, apparently, it is impossible to see in either by the windows or the door."

"It doesn't sound promising, I must admit," said he. "But we shall see when we get there. Perhaps Polton may be able to help us."

"Polton!" I exclaimed. "How do you suppose that he may be able to help?"

"Don't be so scornful," he protested. "Is an inventor and mechanical genius nothing worth? I shall certainly put the problem to him as soon as I am clear about it myself."

In spite of the rather ambiguous phraseology, I suspected that Thorndyke had something quite definite in his mind. But I asked for no particulars long experience had taught me that he preferred to present his ideas in a mature and complete form rather than in that of a preliminary sketch. And, to tell the bald truth, my curiosity was not painfully acute. So I could wait patiently for enlightenment to come in due course.

---

## XI. — HARTSDEN MANOR HOUSE

As the train moved out of the station, Thorndyke lifted his invaluable green canvas research case from the seat to the rack, and then, with the tenderest care, disposed similarly of a walking-stick of the most surpassing hideousness.

"That," I remarked, eyeing it with profound disfavour, "looks like one of Polton's contraptions."

"It is," he replied, "if the word 'contraption' can be accepted as the proper designation of an extremely efficient and ingenious optical instrument. He made it many years ago; but an instrument of virtually identical construction was produced during the war under the name of 'trench periscope.' It is really a modern version of the ancient device of parallel inclined mirrors, which you may see in any old book on physics; only the mirrors are replaced by total-reflection prisms."

"Have you ever used it before?" I asked.

"Yes, on one or two occasions, and found it to answer its purpose perfectly. I have brought it to-day on the chance that we may find some chink or hole through which we can poke it to get a view of the inside of the gallery."

"You won't get it through that keyhole that Woodburn spoke of, large as it is," said I.

"No," he agreed. "But, as to that, we are not at the end of our resources—or rather Polton's. He has devised an instrument for the express purpose of looking through awkwardly placed keyholes. I have it in my case."

He lifted the case down, and, having opened it, produced from it a small cylindrical wooden case with a screw cap. The latter being removed, he was able to draw out what looked like a brass pencil holder.

"This," he explained, "is a little Galilean telescope magnifying about one and a half diameters. In front of the object glass is fixed a small, oblong mirror, which is pivoted so that it can be set at any angle by turning this milled ring at the eyepiece end. Of course, it has to be parallel to the tube when the instrument is passed into the keyhole." He handed it to me, and I put it to my eye, after setting the mirror at a suitable angle.

"It doesn't seem a very efficient affair," I remarked, "it has such a wretchedly small field."

"Yes," he admitted, "that is the trouble with keyholes. But this is only an experimental form. If it seems suitable in principle, we can easily devise something more efficient. What we have to ascertain first of all is whether we can see through the keyhole at all. Looking at the plan, there seems to be nothing structural in the way; but there may be some piece of furniture that will cut off the view of the room. If there is, the keyhole will be of no use to us."

I handed the little toy back to him with a shade of impatience. "But why," I asked, "all this fuss? Why go about a perfectly simple inquiry in this complicated, roundabout way? If there is good reason to believe that someone has entered the room, why not just walk in and investigate in a reasonable, straightforward manner? It seems to me that you and Brodribb are standing on rather pedantic legal scruples."

He shook his head.

"I don't think so, Jervis," said he. "When you get clear instructions, you ought to assume that the instructor means what he says. But there is another matter, which I could only hint at to Woodburn. This man, Toke, is extraordinarily secretive. He has not only fastened up every opening with locks and bolts and screws, and put seals on the fastenings, but he has forbidden his solicitor, in the most emphatic way, to enter those rooms. Now, seals furnish no security against burglars. Their security is against his own trusted man of business. You or I or any reasonable person would have left the seal with Woodburn and asked him to inspect the place from time to time to see that all was well. Why has he shut out Woodburn in this secretive fashion? We must assume that he has his reasons. But what can they be? It may be mere crankiness, or it may not. Mr. Toke may be, and probably is, a most respectable gentleman. But supposing he is not? Supposing that his activities as a dealer in works of art cover some other activities of a less reputable kind? And supposing that the products of those other activities should happen to be hidden in those sealed rooms? It is not impossible."

"But if Woodburn—or we, as his agents—should enter in the face of explicit instructions to the contrary, and discover something illicit, the position would be extremely awkward. Professional secrecy does not cover that kind of thing."

"Still," I objected, "you are prepared to enter if you find evidence that someone else has."

"Certainly," he replied. "We should have to enter or inform the police. But we should then have no choice, whereas we have at present. And that raises another question. If we break in and find traces of unlawful visitors, we shall probably spoil our chances of making a capture. We are not ready now, and our entry would almost certainly leave some traces that would warn them not to reappear. Whereas, if we should discover evidences of visitors before we make our own entry, we should be able to make arrangements to catch them when they make their next visit."

I agreed without much enthusiasm, for it seemed to me that Thorndyke was taking a mere rumour much more seriously than the circumstances justified. In fact, I ventured a hint to that effect.

"That is quite true, Jervis," he admitted. "It is a mere report, at present. Yet I shall be a little surprised if we find a mare's nest. There is something distinctly abnormal about the whole affair. But we shall be better able to judge when we have got a statement from the servants."

"We have heard what they have to say," I replied, still extremely sceptical of the whole affair. "But, possibly, cross-examination may elicit something more definite. As you say, we shall see."

With this the discussion dropped, and we smoked our pipes in silence as we watched, from the window, the gradual

transition from the grey and rather dreary suburbs to the fresh green of the country. At Hartsden Junction, Mr. Woodburn was waiting on the platform, looking more like a smart livery stable keeper than a lawyer, and evidently keenly interested in our arrival.

"I am glad to see you," he said, as we walked out to the approach, "for, the more I think about this affair, the more do I suspect that there is something amiss. And I have been reflecting on what you said about the seals. I had no idea that it was possible to forge a seal."

"I don't think," said Thorndyke, "that you need attach much weight to the forgery question. It is merely a possibility that has to be borne in mind. In the present case, it is highly improbable, as an intruder would have to pass through the house to reach the sealed door."

"Still," objected Mr. Woodburn, "that door seems to be the only way in. Otherwise, why should Mr. Toke have sealed it?"

There was a fairly obvious reply to this, but Thorndyke made no rejoinder; and by this time we had reached the car, into which Mr. Woodburn ushered us and then took his place at the steering-wheel, looking as unsuitable for his post as if he had been at the tiller of a fishing smack.

As the car was of the saloon type, we saw little of our surroundings and nothing of the house until, entering through an open gate, we passed up a shady drive and stopped opposite a handsome stone porch. The door stood open and framed the figure of a pleasant-looking middle-aged woman.

"This," said Mr. Woodburn, introducing us, "is Mr. Toke's housekeeper, Mrs. Gibbins. I have told her about you, and she is as much interested in you as I am."

Mrs. Gibbins confirmed this by a smile and a curtsy. "I am sure, gentlemen," said she, "we shall all be very grateful to you if you can find out what these mysterious sounds are, and put a stop to them. It is very uncomfortable to feel that strangers—and dishonest strangers, too—are creeping about the house in the dead of the night."

"It must be," Thorndyke agreed, warmly. "But, before we start to find out what those sounds are, we want to be quite sure that they really exist."

"There is no doubt about their existing," Mrs. Gibbins rejoined, with intense conviction. "We have all heard them. And they certainly come from the gallery wing, for my nephew, Edward, got out of bed on two occasions and went part of the way down the corridor and listened; and he was quite sure that the sounds came from the gallery or the rooms that open out of it. And it wasn't rats. Everybody knows the kind of sound that rats make, scampering about an empty room. It wasn't like that, at all. It was like someone moving about quietly and, now and again, moving things. But there is another thing that can't be explained away. This house is supplied with water from an Artesian well. The water is pumped up by a windmill into a tank, which is on the level of the top floor, and it runs from the tank into the pipes that supply the house. The tank being so high up, the pressure of the water is quite considerable, and whenever a tap is running in any part of the house, you can hear a distinct hum in the main pipe. Of course, you can hear it much more distinctly at night when every thing else is quiet.

"Now, I am a rather light sleeper, especially towards morning, and, on several occasions—over and over again—I have heard the water humming in the pipe when all the household were in bed and asleep. And always about the same time—just before it begins to get light."

"That is very remarkable, Mrs. Gibbins," said Woodburn. "You did not tell me about the water. It is a most striking fact. Don't you think so, Doctor?"

"I do," replied Thorndyke, "especially when taken with the other sounds. I take it, Mrs. Gibbins, that there is water laid on in the gallery wing?"

"Yes, sir. There is a lavatory with a fixed basin and a cold-water tap over it, and there is also a peculiar sort of sink—Mr. Toke calls it a chemical sink, I believe—in the work-room."

"And you say that the sound of running water occurs always at the same time? Do you never hear it at other times?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "we hear it occasionally at other times. Not very often, though. But it seems to occur always when we have heard the other sounds. It is just as if the person had been doing some job and had a wash before he went away."

Mr. Woodburn laughed cheerfully.

"Tidy fellow, this," said he. "I wonder what he does in there. It's a quaint situation. He'll be ringing for his breakfast next."

"Can you form any idea," Thorndyke asked, "how often these sounds occur?"

"I should say," replied Mrs. Gibbins, "that they happen pretty regularly twice a week—generally on Wednesdays and Fridays."

Mr. Woodburn laughed heartily. Thorndyke's appearance on the scene had evidently acted favourably on his spirits.

"Quite a methodical chap," he chuckled. "Keeps regular hours, and has a wash and brush up before he goes home."

"We mustn't take him too much for granted," Thorndyke reminded him. "We have got to establish his existence as a matter of undoubted fact, though I must admit that Mrs. Gibbins's account is extremely circumstantial and convincing. It

establishes a case for a very thorough investigation and I think we had better begin by having a look at the door of the gallery. What will be about the height of that keyhole that you spoke of?"

Mr. Woodburn indicated the height by reference to a point on his own waistcoat. "But I am afraid the keyhole won't help you much," he added. "As I think I told you, I couldn't see anything through it, excepting a patch of the opposite wall."

"Perhaps we can manage to get a better view," said Thorndyke; "that is, if there is nothing in the way. Probably, Mrs. Gibbins can tell us about that. How was the furniture arranged when you were in there last?"

"There is very little furniture in there, at all," the housekeeper replied, "unless you call the wall-cases furniture. There is a large table across the end of the room, and there are three chairs, one arm-chair and two ordinary dining-room chairs. The arm-chair is behind the table, nearly in the middle, and the other two are at the ends of the table."

"You say they 'are'," Thorndyke remarked. "Do you mean that that is how they were placed when you were last in the room?"

"Yes, sir. But I think they must be like that still, because the last time I was in there was on the day when Mr. Toke went away. I helped him to shut up the room and seal the door. They couldn't very well have been moved after that."

"Apparently not," Thorndyke admitted. "Then, in that case, we may as well go and have a look at the door and see if it is possible to get a glimpse of the inside of the room. And perhaps we had better take a chair with us, as the keyhole is at a rather inconvenient height."

Mr. Woodburn picked up a chair and led the way out of the morning room in which we had been holding our conversation, across the hall and into a narrow passage, which became almost dark as a sharp turn cut off the light from the doorway by which we had entered.

"Queer old place," he remarked as the corridor took another turn. "All holes and corners. I am wondering how you are going to see into that room. I couldn't; but I suppose a man who can produce another man's seal out of a top hat won't make any difficulty about seeing round a corner."

"We have only undertaken to try," Thorndyke reminded him. "Don't let us take credit prematurely."

The disclaimer was not entirely unnecessary; for, when the corridor took yet another abrupt turn and brought us to a blind end in which was a massive door it became clear to me, from the manner both of Mrs. Gibbins and Mr. Woodburn, that there was an expectation of some sort of display of occult powers on Thorndyke's part. So much so that, for the first time, I felt quite grateful to Polton.

"There you are," said Mr. Woodburn, placing the chair in position, and standing back expectantly to watch the proceedings, as if he had some hopes of seeing Thorndyke put his head through the keyhole, "Let us see how you do it."

My colleague seated himself with a deprecating smile, and, laying the research case on the floor, unfastened the catch and raised the lid; whereupon Mr. Woodburn and Mrs. Gibbins craned forward to peer in. Having taken a preliminary peep through the keyhole, Thorndyke produced the little wooden case and drew out Polton's diminutive spy-glass, which he inserted easily enough into the roomy opening. As he applied his eye to the tiny eyepiece and turned the milled ring to adjust the mirror, the two observers watched him with bated breath; as, indeed, did I, and with no small anxiety. For, apart from the importance of the result, a complete failure would have been a shocking anticlimax. Great, therefore, was my relief when Thorndyke announced:

"Well, at any rate, there is no obstruction to the view, such as it is. But it is not easy to make out the arrangement and relative positions of things with such a very restricted field of vision. However, as far as I can see, there are no signs of any appreciable disturbance. I can see the wall-cases at the end of the room, and their shelves are filled with what look like Bow and Chelsea figures. So there has been no robbery there. The cases at the sides of the room are not so easy to see, but I think I can make out the contents, and they appear to contain their full complement. Evidently, so far as the collection is concerned, there has been no robbery on any considerable scale.

"Then the position of the furniture corresponds generally with Mrs. Gibbins's description. There is an arm-chair behind the table and an ordinary dining-chair at each end. I can also see what looks like a shallow box or case of some kind on the table."

"A box on the table?" exclaimed Mrs. Gibbins. "That is curious. I don't remember any box, or anything else, on the table."

"Perhaps Mr. Toke put it there after you left," suggested Mr. Woodburn.

"But he couldn't," Mrs. Gibbins objected. "I went out with him and helped him to seal up the door. He couldn't have gone back after that."

"No. That is obvious," Woodburn admitted. "So it looks as if someone had been in the room, after all."

"Do you say, positively, Mrs. Gibbins, that there was nothing on the table when you left the room with Mr. Toke?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well, sir," the housekeeper replied, "one doesn't like to be too positive, but I certainly thought that there was nothing on the table. In fact, I feel sure that there wasn't."

"That seems pretty conclusive," said Woodburn. "What do you think, Doctor?"

"It is conclusive enough to us," Thorndyke replied, diplomatically. "But, as a lawyer, you will realize the difficulty of coming to a definite decision on negative evidence. To justify you in acting in direct opposition to your client's instructions, you ought to have undeniable positive evidence. We are not considering our own beliefs, but the legal position."

"Yes, that is true," Mr. Woodburn conceded, evidently interpreting Thorndyke's polite hint that ladies are sometimes apt to confuse the subjective with the objective aspects of certainty.

"Do you see any thing else?"

"No. I think that is the sum of my observations, But remember that the room is strange to me. Perhaps if you, who know the room, were to take a look through the instrument, you might detect some change that would not be apparent to me."

To say that Woodburn jumped at the offer would be to understate the case. In his eagerness to occupy the seat of observation, he nearly sat on Thorndyke's lap. But, apparently, Polton's "contraption" did not come up to his expectations, for, after peering in at the eyepiece for some seconds, he said in a tone of slight disappointment:

"I don't seem to make much of it. I can only see a tiny bit at a time, and everything looks in its wrong place. The table seems to be right opposite this door instead of where I know it to be."

"You must disregard the positions of things," Thorndyke explained. "Remember that you are looking into a mirror."

"Oh, I hadn't realized that," said Woodburn, hastily. "Of course, that explains the odd appearance of the room." He reapplied his eye to the instrument, and now was able to manage it better, for he presently reported:

"I think the cases look all right and everything else appears as usual. As to that box, of course, I can say nothing. I have never seen it before, and I can't quite make out what sort of box it is. It looks like metal."

"That was what I thought," said Thorndyke. "Perhaps Mrs. Gibbins may recognize it." The suggestion was evidently acceptable, for the housekeeper "outed" Mr. Woodburn with great promptness, and, having seated herself, applied her eye to the instrument. But she was even less successful than her predecessor, for, after a prolonged stare through the eyepiece, she announced that she could see nothing but the carpet, which appeared, unreasonably, to have affixed itself to the opposite wall. However, Thorndyke came to her aid, and eventually enabled her to see the mysterious box on the table; concerning which she again asserted with deep conviction that, not only was she quite sure that it had not been there when she and Mr. Toke had vacated the room, but that she was equally certain that she had never seen the box before at all.

When she had finished her observations (which seemed to concern themselves principally with the floor and the ceiling), I came into the reversion of the chair, by way, ostensibly, of confirming the previous observations. And, when I came to look through the little instrument in the conditions for which it was designed, I was disposed to be apologetic to Polton. The field of view was, indeed, extremely small, but the little circular picture at which one looked was beautifully clear and bright; and the fine adjustment for moving the mirror enabled one to shift the field of vision gradually and preserve a continuity in the things seen that had, to some extent, the effect of a larger field.

"Well," said Woodburn, as I rose from the chair, "what have we arrived at? Or haven't we arrived at any conclusion?"

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that we must conclude that our observations tend to confirm the suspicion that someone had obtained access to this room. But I do not think that we have enough evidence to justify us in disregarding Mr. Toke's very definite instructions."

"Then," said Woodburn, "what do you suggest that we ought to do?"

"I suggest that we make a careful survey of the house to see if we can find any means of access to this room that the seals do not cover; and if, as I expect, we fail to find any such means, then we must make some more exact and continuous observations from this door."

"You don't suggest that we post someone at this keyhole to keep watch continuously, do you?" exclaimed Woodburn.

"No," replied Thorndyke. "That would be impracticable. But I think we could achieve the same result in another way. At any rate, I will take the preliminary measures before we go away from here, in case they may be needed."

He withdrew the "spy-glass" from the keyhole, and, having put it away in the research case, produced from the latter a small cardboard box which, when the lid was removed, was seen to contain a number of little cylinders of hardwood about six inches long and of varying diameters, from a quarter of an inch up to five-eighths.

"These," he explained, "are gauges that my assistant has made to obtain the exact dimensions of the keyhole, so that he can make a more efficient instrument."

"The instrument that you have got is efficient enough," said Woodburn. "The trouble will be to get someone to stay here to use it."

"Perhaps we can produce an instrument that will do its work without an attendant," replied Thorndyke. "But we will talk about that when we have made our survey. Now, I will just take these measurements."

He seated himself once more and proceeded to pass the larger cylinders one by one through the keyhole. All of them passed through fairly easily excepting the two largest, which were returned to the box.

"The internal diameter of the keyhole," said Thorndyke, "is nearly nine-sixteenths of an inch. Probably it has been a little enlarged by wear, but even so the key must have been an out-size. I shall call it half an inch."

He marked, with a pencil, the approved cylinder, and, having returned it to the box, announced that he was ready to proceed to the next item in the programme.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "we had better take a glance at the lofts which are over the gallery."

Mr. Woodburn looked interrogatively at the housekeeper, who volunteered the information that the entrance to them was at the top of the back staircase, and that the key was on her bunch.

"The entrance to the lofts is not sealed, then?" Thorndyke remarked.

"Apparently not," said Woodburn; "which suggests that we are not likely to find anything of interest in them. Still, we may as well have a look at them and satisfy ourselves."

We followed the housekeeper through a surprising labyrinth of passages and rooms, which seemed to be on all sorts of levels, with steps up and down, which made it necessary to approach all doors with caution to avoid being tripped up or stepping into empty air. Eventually, we came to an unlocked door which gave entrance to the back staircase, up which Mrs. Gibbins preceded us in a dim twilight. At each landing, open doors gave glimpses into dark and mysterious corridors which apparently burrowed among the bedrooms, and the top landing showed us, in addition, a locked door with an enormous keyhole, into which the housekeeper inserted a ponderous key. The door creaked open, and revealed a flight of narrow, ladder-like stairs, up which we crawled painfully and cautiously, Thorndyke bringing up the rear, encumbered with his research case and the Poltonic walking-stick.

There was no door at the top of the stairs (which seemed a lost opportunity on the part of the architect), and only a pretence of a landing outside the narrow doorway which gave entrance to the lofts. Here we stood for a few moments, looking into the long range of well-lighted lofts that stretched away on either side. There was something a little weird and impressive in the aspect of those great, wide attics with their rough oaken floors, littered with the cast-off household gods of forgotten generations, stretching away into the distance among the massive and almost unhewn timber of the great roof. Each of the two ranges—for we stood at the angle of the body and the wing of the house—was lighted by a pair of dormer windows on each side, filled with little panes of greenish glass set in leaded casements, so that we were able to see the whole extent with the exception of a few dark corners at the extreme ends.

"Well," said Woodburn, looking a little distastefully at the littered floor, covered, as it seemed, with the dust of centuries, "is it worth while to go in? Looks a bit dusty," he added, with a glance at his brilliantly polished boots.

"I think I will just walk down the lofts," said Thorndyke, "as a matter of form, though it is pretty clear that there have been no recent visitors. But there is no need for you to come."

That it was but a mere formality became evident as soon as we had started; for, glancing back, I could see that we had left plain and conspicuous footprints in the impalpable dust that lay in an even coating on the bumpy floor. Evidently, we were the first visitors who had trodden that floor for, at least, some years.

"Still," said Thorndyke, when I made a remark to this effect, "we had to establish the fact. If there is some secret way into the gallery, our only chance of discovering it will be by excluding, one by one, all the places in which it is not to be found. This is evidently one of them."

"Well," said Woodburn, as we emerged; "we can write off the lofts, I think. Dust has its uses, after all. What are we going to explore next?"

"I suppose," Thorndyke replied, "we had better examine the outside of the premises."

"Yes," Woodburn agreed, "that seems to be the reasonable thing to do, seeing that, if there have been any visitors, that is where they must have come from. But there is mighty little to see. I can tell you that much, for I have made a thorough inspection, myself."

Mr. Woodburn was right. There was very little indeed to see. The gallery stood above a range of what were now cellars, but had formerly been rooms, as we gathered from the windows, some entirely bricked up, while others were reduced to small openings, glazed with ground glass and protected by stout iron bars. The only approach to them was from within the house, by a massive door at the bottom of a flight of stone steps; and that door was not only sealed, but also secured by a heavy padlock of the Yale type, of which the minute key-slit was covered by a sealed label.

From outside the house, there was no entrance of any kind to the gallery wing. The windows of the gallery, itself, looked on the garden at the back of the house; but an inspection of them by means of the ladder, which had been put there for our convenience, only served to confirm Woodburn's account of them. They were obviously untouched; and the lace curtains on the inside made it impossible to get the faintest glimpse into the room. The windows of the rooms which communicated with the gallery were equally impossible as a means of access. We examined them with the aid of the ladder from the narrow strip of garden that separated the side of the wing from the high wall that enclosed the whole domain. They, also, were evidently intact, and were guarded internally by massive shutters that effectually excluded the possibility of seeing in.

"That seems to be the lot," said Woodburn, as we put the ladder back where we had found it, "unless there is anything else that you would like to see."

Thorndyke looked up at the house, inquisitively, and then glanced along the wall down the garden. "I think," said he, "I understood you to say that there was a churchyard on the other side of that wall."

"Yes. Do you want to see it? I don't know why you should."

"We may as well take a look at it," was the reply. "Any visitors, entering the house at night, would probably come over that wall rather than through the front grounds, particularly if there is a churchyard to take off from. A country churchyard is pretty secluded at night. It would even be possible to use a portable ladder."

"So it would," agreed Woodburn. "And this is a disused churchyard. They have built a new church at the other end of the village, the Lord knows why. They had better have restored the old church. But any visitors to the old churchyard would have the place to themselves at night."

"Then let us go and inspect it," said Thorndyke. "If there have been repeated visits, there ought to be some traces of the visitors."

We went back through the house and out by way of the drive and the front gate. Turning to the right, we walked along the front of the Manor House grounds to the end of the enclosing wall where it was joined by the lower wall of the churchyard. Presently, we came to a dilapidated wooden gate which yawned wide open on its rickety hinges. Passing in through this, we took our way along an overgrown path, past a tall headstone and a decayed altar tomb, enclosed by rusty, ivy-grown railings. In front of us, a great yew tree cast a deep shadow across the path; and beyond, a smallish, ancient-looking church, with gaping windows from which the tracery had disappeared, huddled under a dense mantle of ivy, looking the very picture of desolation and decay. As we walked, Thorndyke looked about him critically, keeping an attentive eye on the ground beside the path, the high, neglected grass which everywhere sprang up between the graves being obviously favourable to a search for "traces."

So we advanced until we entered the gloomy shadow of the great yew tree. Here Thorndyke halted to look about him. "Somewhere in this neighbourhood," said he, "would be the most probable place for a nocturnal operator to make his arrangements. That is the Manor wall in front of us. I can see the roof of the gallery wing through the trees. That big sarcophagus tomb will be nearly opposite the end of the wing."

"Yes," I said. "It seems to mark the position that would be most convenient for negotiating the wall; and if you notice the grass, there seems to be a faint, rather wide track, as if it had been walked over by someone who had been careful not to tread it down all in one place."

"I think you are right," said Woodburn. "Now you mention it, I think I can make out the track quite plainly. It seems to lead towards that tomb."

"The grass has certainly been walked over," Thorndyke agreed, "and I see no signs of its having been trodden anywhere else. But don't let us confuse matters by walking over it ourselves. Let us strike across the graves and approach along the wall."

We followed this course, keeping close to the wall as we approached the great tomb. The latter stood about ten feet from the wall, and, as we drew near, I was surprised to notice that the grass between the tomb and the wall appeared quite untrodden.

Thorndyke had also noticed this rather unexpected circumstance, and, when we were within a yard or two of the tomb, he halted and looked curiously along the ground at the foot of the wall.

"There is certainly no sign of the use of any ladder," he remarked. "In fact, there is no indication of any one having approached close to the wall. The track, if it really is one, doesn't appear to go beyond the tomb."

"That is what it looks like to me," agreed Woodburn, "though I am hanged if I can see any reason why it should. They couldn't have jumped from the top of the tomb over the wall."

"It looks," I suggested, "as if this place had been used rather as a post of observation, or a lurking-place where the sportsman could keep out of sight until the coast was clear." We approached the tomb from the direction of the wall and sauntered round it, idly reading the inscriptions, which recorded briefly the life-histories of a whole dynasty of Greenlees, "late of Hartsden Manor in this Parish," beginning with one John Greenlees who died in 1611. At length he turned away and began to retrace his steps down the path towards the gate.

"They were a turbulent family, these Greenlees," said Woodburn. "Always in hot water. Bigoted Papists in early days, and, of course, Jacobites after the Revolution. From what I have heard, Hartsden Manor House must have seen some stirring times."

While he was speaking, I was glancing through the inscriptions on the back of the tomb. Happening to look down, I noticed a match in the grass at my feet, and stooped to pick it up. As I did so, I observed another; on which I made a search and ultimately salvaged no less than six.

"What have you found, Jervis?" Thorndyke asked, as I rose.

I held out my hand with the six matches in it. "All from the same place at the back of the tomb," said I. "What do you make of that?"

"It might mean five failures on a windy day or night," he replied, "or six separate cigarettes; and the operator may have



come here to get a 'lee side,' or he may have got behind the tomb so that the light should not be seen from the road. But we must not let our imaginations run away with us. There is nothing to show that the person or persons who came to this tomb have any connection with our problem. We are looking for some means of access to the gallery, and, up to the present, we have not found any. The fact, if it were one, that some persons had been lurking about here, waiting for a chance to enter, wouldn't help us. It would not tell us how they got in; which is what we want to know."

Nevertheless, he continued, for some time, to browse round the tomb, dividing his attention between the inscriptions and the grass that bordered the low plinth.

"Well," said Woodburn, "we seem to have exhausted the possibilities, unless there is anything else that you want to see."

"No," replied Thorndyke, "I don't think it is of any use to prolong our search. I suspect that there is some way into the house; but, if there is, it is too well hidden to be discoverable without some guiding hint, which we haven't got. So the answer to our first question is negative, and we must concentrate on the second—does anyone, in fact, effect an entrance to the gallery?"

"And how do you propose to solve that problem?" enquired Woodburn.

"I propose to install an automatic recorder which will give us a series of photographs of the interior of the room."

"And catch 'em on the hop, eh?" said Woodburn. "But it doesn't seem possible. Why, you would have to take a photograph every few minutes; and then you wouldn't bring it off, because the beggars seem to come only at night."

"I am not expecting to get photographs of the visitors themselves," Thorndyke explained. "My idea is that, if any persons do frequent those rooms, they will almost certainly leave some traces of their visits. Even the moving of a chair would be conclusive evidence, if it could be proved, as it could be by the comparison of two photographs which showed it in different positions. I shall send my assistant, Mr. Polton, down to set up the apparatus, and perhaps you will give Mrs. Gibbins instructions to give him all necessary facilities, including the means of locking up the corridor when he has fixed the apparatus and set it going."

To this Mr. Woodburn agreed, gleefully, and, as a train was due in a quarter of an hour, we embarked in his car without re-entering the house.

---

## XII. — THE UNKNOWN COINER

FROM Charing Cross we walked home to the Temple, entering it by way of Pump Court and the Cloisters. As we were about to cross King's Bench Walk, I glanced up at the laboratory window, and caught a momentary glimpse of Polton's head, which, however, vanished even as I looked; and, when we arrived at our landing, the door of our chambers was open, and he was visible within, making a hypocritical pretence of laying the dinner-table, which had obviously been laid hours previously. But his pretended occupation did not conceal the fact that he was in a twitter of anxiety and impatience, which Thorndyke proceeded at once humanely to allay.

"It had to be a cold dinner, as I didn't know what time you would be home," Polton explained; but Thorndyke cut short his explanations and came to the essential matter.

"Never mind the dinner, Polton," said he. "The important point is that your automatic watcher will be wanted, and as soon as you can get it ready."

Polton beamed delightedly on his employer as he replied:

"It is ready now, sir, all except the objective. You see, the clock and the camera were really made already. They only wanted a little adaptation. And I have made an experimental objective, and done some trial exposures with it. So I am ready to go ahead as soon as I have the dimensions of the keyhole."

"I can give you those at once," said Thorndyke, opening the research case and taking out the wooden cylinders. "The keyhole will take a half-inch tube fairly easily."

Polton slapped his thigh joyfully. "There's a stroke of luck!" he exclaimed. "You said it would be about half an inch, so I used a half-inch tube for my experimental objective. But I never dared to hope that it would be the exact size. As it is, all I have got to do is to fix it on to the camera. I can do that tonight and give it a final trial. Then it will be ready to set up in place to-morrow. Perhaps, sir, you will come up presently and see if you think it will do. I shall have got it fixed by the time you have finished dinner."

With this, having taken a last glance at the table, he retired in triumph, with the box of cylinders in his hand.

"What is this 'automatic watcher'?" I asked, as we sat down to our meal. "I assume that it is some sort of automatic camera. But what is its special peculiarity?"

"In its original form," replied Thorndyke, "it consisted of a clock of the kind known as an English Dial, with a magazine camera fixed inside it. There was a simplified striking movement which released the shutter at any intervals previously arranged. It also had an arrangement for recording the time at which each exposure was made. It was quite a valuable appliance for keeping a watch on any particular place. It could be set up, for instance, opposite the door of a strong room or in any similar position."

"But suppose the thief made his visit in the interval between two exposures?"

"That was provided for by a special attachment whereby the opening of the door was made to break an electric circuit and release the shutter. So that whenever the door was opened an exposure was made and the time recorded. But, for our present purpose, although we have retained the principle, we have had to modify the details considerably. For instance, we have separated the clock from the camera, so that it can be fixed far enough away from the door to prevent its tick from being heard in the gallery. The releasing mechanism of the clock is connected with an electromagnet in the camera which actuates the shutter and the film roller. The lens is in a tube five inches long, with a reflecting prism at the farther end, which will, of course, be passed through the keyhole, and the camera screwed on to the door. That is a rough sketch of the apparatus. You will see the details of it when we go up to make our inspection."

"And how often do you propose to make an exposure?" I asked.

"One exposure every twenty-four hours would do for us," he replied, "as we merely want a daily record of the positions of the various objects in the room. But that does not satisfy Polton. He would like an exposure every hour. So we have arrived at a compromise. There will be an exposure every six hours. Of course, those made at night will show nothing, and both of those made in daylight, when the room will be unoccupied, will, presumably, be alike. But I can see that Polton will not be happy if there is not a good string of exposures."

"Supposing the exposures are all alike?" I suggested.

Thorndyke laughed grimly. "Don't be a wet blanket, Jervis," said he. "But I must admit that it would be something of an anticlimax and distinctly disappointing, though not entirely unexpected. For, if there are really visitors, it is quite possible that they do not go to the gallery at all. Their business, what ever it may be, is, quite conceivably, carried on in one of the rooms that open out of the gallery. So a negative result with the camera would not prove that no one had entered the gallery wing."

It was my turn to smile, and I did so. "It is my belief, Thorndyke," said I, "that you don't mean anything to disprove it. You are not approaching the investigation with an open mind."

"Not very open," he admitted. "The housekeeper's statement, together with all the other circumstances of the case, make a very strong suggestion of something abnormal, so strong that, as you say, I am not prepared to be easily satisfied with a negative result. And now, if we have finished, we had better go up to the laboratory and have a look at Polton's masterpiece."

We rose, and were just moving towards the door when a firm tread became audible on the landing, and was followed by a familiar knock on the brass knocker of the inner door.

"Miller, by Jove!" I exclaimed. "How unfortunate! But I can entertain him while you go up to Polton."

"Let us hear what he has to say, first," replied Thorndyke; and he proceeded to throw open the door.

As the Superintendent entered, I was impressed by a certain curious mixture of jauntiness and anxiety in his manner. But the former predominated, especially as he made his triumphant announcement.

"Well, gentlemen, I thought you would be interested to hear that we have got our man."

"Dobey?" asked Thorndyke.

"Dobey it is," replied Miller. "We've got him, we've charged him, and he is committed for trial."

"Come and sit down," said Thorndyke, "and tell us all about it."

He deposited the Superintendent in a comfortable arm-chair, placed on the little table at his elbow the whisky decanter, the siphon, and the box of the specially favoured cigars, and while the tumbler was being charged and the cigar lighted, he filled his pipe and regarded his visitor with a slightly speculative eye.

"Where did you catch him?" he asked, when the preliminary formalities were disposed of.

Miller removed the cigar from his mouth in order the more conveniently to smile.

"It was a quaint affair," he chuckled. "We caught him in the act of picking the lock of his own front door. Rum position, wasn't it? Of course, the key was at the police station at Maidstone. We had been keeping a watch on the flat, but it happened that day that one of our sergeants was going there with a search warrant to have another look over the premises in case anything should have been missed at the first search. When he got up to the landing, there was my nabs, angling at the keyhole with a piece of wire. He was mightily surprised when the sergeant introduced himself, and still more so when he was told what he was charged with."

"Was he charged with the murder or the house breaking?"

"Both. Of course, the usual caution was administered, but, Lord, you might as well have cautioned an oyster."

"Did he say nothing at all?"

"Oh, the usual thing. Expressed astonishment—that was real enough, beyond a doubt. Said he didn't know what we were talking about, but was perfectly sure that he didn't want to make any statement."

"I suppose he pleaded 'not guilty' at the police court?"

"Yes. But he wouldn't say anything in his defence, excepting that he knew nothing about the murder and had never heard of Inspector Badger, until he had got legal advice. So the magistrate adjourned the hearing for a couple of days, and Dobey got a lawyer to defend him—a chappie named Morris Coleman."

"Of Kennington Lane?"

"That's the man. Solicitor and advocate. Hebrew, of course. Downy bird, too, but quite a good lawyer."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "I have seen him in court. A cut above the ordinary police-court advocate. And what did he have to say?"

"Reserved his defence, of course. They always do if the case is going for trial. That's the worst of these police-court solicitors. But it usually means that they haven't got any defence, and of course that is what it means now, so it doesn't matter. But it is a time-wasting plan when they have got a defence, and the judge usually has something to say about it. Still, you can't cure them. They think they get an advantage by springing a defence on the court that nobody expected."

"You say you are proceeding on both the charges. Why are you bringing in the house-breaking?"

"Well, of course," replied Miller, "it is the murder that he will actually be tried for. But we shall have to prove the facts of the house-breaking to explain how the stolen paper came to be found."

As he gave this explanation, the Superintendent stole a slightly furtive glance at Thorndyke, which I understood when the latter remarked, dryly:

"True. And the evidence of the witnesses to the house-breaking may serve to supply the deficiencies of the station-master at Strood. I take it that they will be able to identify Dobey."

"They have. Picked him out instantly from a crowd of thirty other men. And as to that station-master, it's just a silly excess of caution and over-conscientiousness. He didn't look at the man particularly, and so he won't swear to him. But, as his description of the man agrees with that of the witnesses to the house breaking, and they are ready to swear to Dobey, it will, as you say, help matters a bit. But, of course, the finding of the paper in his possession is the really crucial piece of evidence."

"It is more than that," said Thorndyke. "It is the whole of the evidence in regard to the murder. Without it your bill would never get past the Grand Jury. And, as to the house-breaking, as it can't be included in the indictment, I doubt whether the court will allow any reference to it. That, however, remains to be seen."

"Well," rejoined Miller, "it doesn't matter a great deal. The paper fixes the crime on him."

With this, he dipped his nose into his glass and resumed his cigar with the air of having disposed of the subject; and I took the opportunity to raise another point.

"Did you say that Dobey was found picking his lock with a piece of wire?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered with a chuckle. "Quaint situation, wasn't it?"

"It strikes me as more than quaint," I replied. "It is most extraordinary that he should not have provided himself with a key of some sort."

"It is," Miller agreed. "But it was a simple latch, and I expect he was pretty handy with the wire. And I don't suppose he often went to the flat. Still, as you say, he must have been a fool not to get a key."

"He must," said I. "It is a striking example of the criminal mentality."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "they are not a very bright lot." He paused reflectively for a few moments, puffing at his cigar reflectively, and then resumed in a meditative tone: "And yet it doesn't do to rate them too low. We say to ourselves that they are all fools. So they are, or they wouldn't be crooks. Crime is never a really sound economic proposition. But there is one thing that we must bear in mind: there are two kinds of crooks—those that get caught, and those that don't. And a crook that doesn't get caught may never come into sight at all. If he manages well enough, his existence may never be even suspected. I have just heard of a case in which the existence of a man of this class has been disclosed by a mere chance. But we don't know who he is, and we are not very likely to find out. I'll tell you about the case. It's a queer affair."

"Just recently, one of our men who specializes in note forgeries and knows a good deal about money of all kinds, had to spend a week or two on the Continent. When he was about to return, he changed his foreign money into English and got one or two sovereigns. Now, when he got home and had a look at those sovereigns, he thought there seemed to be something queer about one of them. So he got a chemist to weigh it, but the weight was apparently all right—it was only an ordinary shop scale, you know, but it weighed within a fraction of a grain. Then he measured it; but all the dimensions seemed to be correct. But, still, to his expert eye, it didn't look right; and it didn't sound right when he rang it. So he took it to an assayist whom he knew, and the assayist tried its specific gravity and tested it so far as was possible without damaging the coin, and he reported that it was undoubtedly gold of about the correct fineness. But still our man wasn't satisfied. So he took it to the Mint, and showed it to one of the chief officials. And then the murder was out. It wasn't a milled coin at all. It was a casting. An uncommonly good casting and very neatly finished off at the edge, but an undoubted casting to the skilled eye. So they passed it on to the assay department and made a regular assay of it. The result was very quaint. It was gold right enough, and just about 22 carat; but it was not exactly the composition of a sovereign. There was a slight difference in the alloy. That was all. There was no fraud. The proper amount of gold was there. Yet it was a

counterfeit coin. Now, what do you make of that?"

"Nothing," I answered, "unless it was a practical joke."

"Well, it wasn't. The Mint people asked us to look into the matter, and we did. The result was that we found one or two more specimens of this queer, unofficial money—you couldn't call it base coin—in France, Belgium, and Holland. Evidently, there is a regular manufacture."

"But what on earth can be the meaning of it?" I demanded.

Miller chuckled. "We can only guess," said he, "but we can take it that the sportsman who makes those sovereigns doesn't do it for fun. And, if he makes a profit on them, he doesn't buy his gold from the bullion dealers, and he doesn't pay the market price for it. On the other hand, he probably sells it for export at considerably above its nominal value, now that gold is so difficult to get. So, if he steals his gold, or gets it cheap from the thieves, and sells it at a premium, he doesn't do so badly. And he will be mighty hard to catch. For the coins are genuine golden sovereigns, and only a fairly expert person would be able to spot them. And experts are pretty rare, nowadays. Once, every little shopkeeper was an expert; but now there are plenty of people who have never seen a sovereign."

"It is a clever dodge," I remarked, "if the gold is really stolen."

"Clever!" repeated Miller, enthusiastically. "It's a stroke of genius. You see, it avoids all the crook's ordinary difficulties. He can get rid of the stones pretty easily, as they can't be identified separately. But the gold is less easy to dispose of at a decent price. For, if a bullion dealer is willing to buy it—which he probably isn't, if he is a respectable man—the transaction is known, and the vendor has left dangerous tracks; and the ordinary fence will only give a knock down price. He must make a big profit to set off the risk that he takes."

"But there is another case that has just come to light—probably the same man. You know that, for some time past, the Mint has been calling in all real silver money. Now, since this sovereign incident, it occurred to the people there to look over the silver coins that came in; and, at the first cast, they came on a half-crown that turned out to be a casting. But it was silver. Further search brought one or two more to light. Someone was making silver half-crowns."

"Now, here was a paradoxical situation! The coiner was making good silver coin while the Mint was issuing base money. Of course, coining is illegal. But this coiner could not be charged with uttering base coin. It would be hard to prove to a jury that it was counterfeit."

"Here you see the difference between the stupid crook and the clever crook. The fool tries to grab the whole—and doesn't do it. He makes his coin of pewter and probably steals that. They generally used to. If he got half a crown for his pewter snide, it would be all profit. But he doesn't, because it is a duffer. So he has to sell it cheap to the snide man. And he gets caught. But this sportsman puts, say, a shilling's worth of silver into his half-crown, and he doesn't have to pay the snide man. He can pass it quite safely himself. And he doesn't get caught."

"He runs the risk of getting caught if he passes it himself," I objected.

"Not at all," said Miller. "How should he? What you're overlooking is that the coins are good coins. They pass freely, and they will bear assay. Only an expert can spot them, and then only after close examination. But he must make a big profit. He could easily get rid of a hundred a day. There's seven pounds ten shillings profit, even if he buys the silver at the market price, which he probably does not. That silver is most likely burglars' loot—silver tea-pots and candlesticks melted down; stuff that he would have to sell to a fence at about the price of brass. I tell you, Dr. Jervis, that coiner is a brainy customer. He'll want a lot of salt sprinkled on his tail before he'll get caught."

"I think you are rather over-estimating his profits," said I. "He has not only to pass the coins; he has got to make them. Good workmanship like that means time and labour. And there is the gold. Most trade jewellery is made of a lower-grade gold than 22 carat. He would either have to buy fine gold from the bullion dealers to bring his low-grade gold up to standard or to do a good deal of conversion himself."

While Miller was considering this difficulty, the door opened, and Polton's head became visible, his eyes riveted on the Superintendent's back with an expression of consternation. I think he would have with drawn, but that Miller, in some occult manner, became aware of his presence and addressed him.

"Good evening, Mr. Polton. We were just discussing a little problem that is rather in your line. Perhaps you would give us your opinion on it."

On this, Polton advanced with a slightly suspicious eye on the Superintendent, and Miller proceeded to put his case.

"The problem is, how to make sovereigns—castings, you know—out of jewellery composed of low-grade gold. Supposing you had got a lot of rings, for instance, of 18-carat gold. Now, how would you go about turning them into 22-carat sovereigns?"

Polton crinkled at him reproachfully.

"I am surprised at you, Mr. Miller—an officer of the law, too—suggesting such a thing. Of course, I wouldn't do anything of the sort."

"No, no," chuckled Miller, "we know that. It's just a question of method that we want explained. Because somebody has done it, and we would like to know how he managed it."

"Well, sir," said Polton, "there is no particular difficulty about it. He would weigh up the 18-carat gold and take part of it, say a little more than half, flatten it out on the stake or in a rolling mill, if he had one, break it up quite small, and boil it up in nitric acid. That would dissolve out the alloy—the copper and silver—and leave him pure gold. Then he would melt that down with the proper proportion of the 18-carat stuff, and that would give him 22-carat gold."

"And as to making the coins? Would that be much of a job? How many do you think he could make in a day?"

"A man who knew his job," said Polton, "wouldn't make any trouble about it. He would make his mould in a casting flask that would cast, say, twenty at a time, and he would use a matrix that would dry hard and give a good many repeats. There would be a bit of finishing work to do on each coin—cutting off the sprue, where the metal ran in, and making good the edge. But that is not a big job. They make a special edge tool for the purpose."

"Oh, do they?" said Miller, with a sly grin. "You seem to know a good deal about it, Mr. Polton."

"Of course I do," was the indignant response, "seeing that I have been dealing with tool-makers in the metal trade since I was a boy. Not that the respectable makers in Clerkenwell have anything to do with burglars' and coiners' tools. But, naturally, they get to know what is made."

"Yes, I know," said Miller. "Our people get some useful tips from them, now and again. And I shall know where to send them if they want some more, eh, Mr. Polton? Technical tips, I mean, of course."

Polton crinkled indulgently at the Superintendent, and when the latter, having glanced at his watch, suddenly emptied his glass and rose, his expression became positively affectionate.

"I am afraid I have wasted a lot of your time with my gossip," said Miller, apologetically, as he drew on his gloves, "but I thought you would like to have the news. Probably you will look in at the Old Bailey and see how the case goes. The sessions are just beginning now, and I expect the case will come on in the course of a few days."

"We shall certainly drop in if we can," said Thorndyke, "and see what comes of your efforts. Won't you throw away that stump and take a fresh cigar?" he added, holding out the box as the Superintendent essayed to strike a match.

"Seems a waste," replied Miller, turning a thrifty eye on the stump. But he succumbed, nevertheless; and when he had selected a fresh cigar and amputated its point with anxious care, he lit it (with a match that Polton had struck in readiness), shook hands, and took his leave.

As the door closed on the sound of his retiring foot steps, Polton fell to, in his noiseless, dexterous fashion, on the dismantling of the dinner-table; and, as he prepared a tray for transport to the upper regions, he announced:

"The camera is finished, sir, and all ready for inspection, if you have time to come up and have a look at it."

"Then let us go up at once," said Thorndyke; "and perhaps we can take some of the debris with us and save another journey."

He loaded a second tray and followed Polton up the stairs, while I brought up the rear with an empty claret jug and a couple of dish covers.

The "automatic watcher," which its creator exhibited with justifiable complacency, was a singularly ingenious appliance. The clock was enclosed in a small box, on the front of which was a miniature dial; and the almost inaudible tick was further muffled by a pad of felt between its back and the wall. The camera, to which it was connected by an insulated wire, was another small box, fitted with mirror plates to fasten it to the door. From its front projected a brass tube, five inches long, and half an inch thick, at the end of which was an enclosed prism with a circular opening facing at right angles to the axis of the tube.

"There are two film holders," Polton explained, "each taking six yards of cinematograph film, and each enclosed in a light-tight case with a dark-slide, so that it can be taken out and another put in its place. So I can go down and bring away one film for development and leave the other to carry on. I have set the clock to make an exposure every six hours, beginning at twelve o'clock, noon."

"And what about the shutter?" asked Thorndyke. "Does it make much of a click?"

"It doesn't make any sound at all," replied Polton, "because it moves quite slowly. It is just a disc with a hole in it. 'When the clock makes the circuit, the disc moves so that the hole is opposite the lens; and stays there until the circuit is broken. Then it moves round and closes the lens, and, at the same time, the roller makes a turn and winds on a fresh piece of film. I'll make an exposure now.'"

He turned the hand of the clock until it came to six, while Thorndyke and I listened with our heads close to the camera. But no sound could be heard; and it was only by repeating the proceeding with our ears actually applied to the camera that it was possible to detect faint sounds of movement as the shutter-disc revolved.

"I suppose," said Thorndyke, "you focus on the film?"

"Yes," replied Polton; "there's plenty to spare, so I use a piece as a focusing screen and waste it. And the barrel of the lens can be turned so as to get the prism pointing at the right spot. I think it will do, sir."

"I am sure it will," Thorndyke agreed, heartily; "and I only hope that all your trouble and ingenuity and skill will not have been expended in vain."

"That can hardly be, sir," was the cheerful response. "The photographs are bound to show something, though it may not be exactly what you want. At any rate, it's ready; and, with your permission, I will pop down with it to-morrow, as soon as I have finished with the breakfasts."

"Excellent!" said Thorndyke. "Then, if Mrs. Gibbins's belief is well founded, the 'watcher' will be installed in time for the Wednesday-night visit."

---

### XIII. — REX V. DOBEY

DURING the next day or two, I was sensible of a certain tension and unrest that seemed to affect the atmosphere of our chambers in King's Bench Walk. Polton, having successfully installed his apparatus in the corridor at Hartsden Manor House, was in a fever of impatience to harvest the results. I believe that he would have liked to sit down beside his camera and change the film after each exposure. As it was, he had fixed it on Tuesday morning, and, as no result could be expected until Thursday, at the earliest, circumstances condemned him to two whole days of suspense.

But Polton was not the only sufferer. My long association with Thorndyke enabled me to detect changes in his emotional states that were hidden from the eye of the casual observer by his habitually calm and impassive exterior; and, in these days, a certain gravity and preoccupation in his manner conveyed to me the impression that something was weighing on his mind. At first, I was disposed to connect his preoccupation with the affairs of Hartsden Manor; but I soon dismissed this idea. For in those affairs there was nothing that could reasonably cause him any anxiety. And Thorndyke was by no means addicted to fussing unnecessarily.

The explanation came on the Wednesday evening, when we had finished dinner and taken our armchairs, and were preparing the post-prandial pipes.

"I suppose," said he, pushing the tobacco jar to my side of the little table, "you will turn up at the Old Bailey to hear how Dobey fares?"

"When is the trial?" I asked.

"To-morrow," he replied. "I thought you knew."

"No," said I. "Miller didn't mention any date, and I have heard nothing since. I think it would be interesting to hear the evidence, though we know pretty well what it will be."

"Yes, we know the case for the prosecution. But we don't know what Dobey may have to say in reply. That is what interests me. I am not at all happy about the case. I don't much like the attitude of the prosecution—if Miller has represented it fairly—particularly the dragging in of the house affair."

"No," I agreed, "that seems quite irrelevant."

"It is," said he. "And it is a flagrant instance of the old forensic dodge of proving the wrong conclusion. The identification of Dobey by these women is evidently expected to convey to the jury in a vague sort of way that the station-master's refusal to swear to the identity of the Strood man is of no consequence."

"It is quite possible that the judge may refuse to allow the house affair to be introduced at all."

"Quite," he agreed, "especially if the defence objects. But, still, I am not happy about the case. The intention of the prosecution to introduce this irrelevant matter to prejudice the jury and their suppression of the evidence regarding the poisoned cigar—which really is highly relevant—suggests a very determined effort to obtain a conviction."

"I take it that you do not entertain the possibility that Dobey may have committed the murder?"

"No, I don't think I do. As you say, we know the case for the prosecution and we know that it is a bad case. There is a total lack of positive evidence. But, still, there is the chance that they may get a conviction. That would be a disaster; and it would, at once, raise the question as to what we should have to do. Obviously, we couldn't let an innocent man go to the gallows. But it would be a very difficult position."

"What are the chances of a conviction, so far as you can see?"

"That depends on what Dobey has to say. The case for the prosecution rests on the finding of the stolen document in his fiat. There is no denying that that is a highly incriminating circumstance, and, if he can produce nothing more than a mere denial of having taken it, the chances will be decidedly against him."

"It is difficult to see what answer he can give," said L. "The document was certainly taken from Badger, before or after his death; it was certainly found in Dobey's flat; and, apparently, Dobey was the sole occupant of that flat. I don't see how he is going to escape from those facts."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "But we shall hear what he has to say to-morrow; and if he is found guilty, we shall have to consider very seriously what our next move is to be."

With this, the subject dropped. But, at intervals during the evening, my thoughts went back to it, and I found myself wondering whether Thorndyke had not perhaps allowed himself to undervalue the evidence against Dobey. The finding of that document in his rooms would take a great deal of explaining.

My intention to hear the case from the beginning was frustrated by a troublesome solicitor, who first failed to keep an appointment, and then detained me inordinately, so that when, at last, I arrived at the Central Criminal Court and, having hurriedly donned my wig and gown, slipped into the counsels' seats beside Thorndyke, the case for the prosecution was nearly concluded. But by the fact that the finger-print expert was then giving evidence, I knew that the prosecution had succeeded in introducing the house breaking incident. As I listened to the evidence, I looked quickly round the court to identify the various *dramatis personae* and, naturally, looked first at the dock, where the prisoner stood "on his deliverance," listening with stolid calm to the apparently indestructible evidence of the expert.

As I looked him over critically, I was not surprised at the eagerness with which the police had fastened on his salient peculiarities. He was quite a striking figure. Dull and commonplace enough in face and feature, the combination of a rather untidy mop of dark-red hair with a noticeably red nose set in a large pale face made him an ideal subject for identification. From the prisoner I turned to his defending solicitor, Mr. Coleman, who sat at the solicitors' table, listening with sphinx-like impassiveness to the expert's authoritative pronouncements. Equally unmoved was the prisoner's counsel, a good-looking Jew named Lyon, who specialized in criminal practice. The counsel for the prosecution, a Mr. Barnes, was on his feet at the moment, and his junior, Mr. Callow, was industriously taking notes of the evidence.

"Have the defence objected to this evidence?" I asked Thorndyke in a whisper, as the leader for the Crown put what seemed to be his final question.

"No," was the reply. "The judge questioned the relevance of it; but, as the defence did not seem interested, he gave no ruling."

It seemed to me that Mr. Dobey's case was being rather mismanaged; and I was confirmed in this opinion when his counsel rose to cross-examine:

"You have stated that the marks on this window glass are the prints of the prisoner's fingers. Are you quite certain that those marks were not made by the fingers of some other person?"

"The chances against their having been made by the fingers of any person other than the prisoner are several thousand millions."

"But is it not possible that you may have made some mistake in the comparison? You don't, I suppose, claim to be infallible?"

"I claim that the method employed at the Bureau is infallible. It does not depend on personal judgment, but on comparison, detail by detail, of the questioned finger-print with the one which is known. I have made the comparison with the greatest care, and I am certain that I have made no mistake."

"And do you swear, positively, of your certain knowledge, that the marks on this window-glass were made by the fingers of the prisoner?"

"I do," was the reply; whereupon, having thus unnecessarily piled up the evidence against his client, Mr. Lyon sat down with an air of calm satisfaction. I was astonished at the apparent stupidity of the proceeding. It is seldom worth while to cross-examine finger-print experts at all closely, for the more they are pressed, the more do they affirm their absolute certainty. And I noticed that my surprise seemed to be shared by the judge, who glanced with a sort of impatient perplexity from the counsel to the sphinx-like solicitor who was instructing him. It must be an exasperating experience for a judge—who knows all the ropes—to have to watch a counsel making a hopeless muddle of a case.

The next witness was a middle-aged woman who gave the name of Martha Bunsbury, and who was examined by Mr. Barnes in the plain, straightforward fashion proper to a prosecuting counsel.

"Kindly look at the prisoner and tell us whether you recognise him."

The witness bestowed a disdainful stare on the prisoner, and replied, promptly: "Yes. I picked him out of a whole crowd at Brixton Prison."

"Where and when had you seen him before that?"

"I saw him on the second of August, breaking into a house in Sudbury Park. I happened to be at the window at the back of my house when I heard the sound of glass being broken. So I looked out, and then I saw the prisoner getting into the back window of the house in Sudbury Park that is just opposite mine. So I opened the window and called out. Then I ran down to the garden and gave the alarm to two men who were coming along the towing-path of the canal."

"And what happened next?"

"The lady next door to me came out into her garden and she began to call out too. Then the two men started to run along the tow-path towards the bridge, but the prisoner, who had heard us giving the alarm, backed out of the window and ran across the garden with his coat on his arm. When he came to the wall, he laid the coat on the top of it, because the wall has broken glass all along the top, and climbed over. But, as he dropped down outside, the coat dropped down inside. He turned round, and was going to climb back to get it, but, by that time, the two men were running over the bridge. So he left the coat and made off up a side lane between two houses. And that is the last I saw of him."

"Yes. A very excellent description," said Mr. Barnes. "But now I want you to be extremely careful. Look again at the prisoner, and see if you are quite certain that he is really the man whom you saw in the garden of that house. It is most

important that there should be no possibility of a mistake.”

“There isn’t,” was the immediate and confident reply. “I am perfectly certain that he is the man.”

On this, Mr. Barnes sat down and Mr. Lyon rose to cross-examine.

“You have said that you saw the housebreaker from the back window of your house, breaking a back window of a house opposite. How far would that window be from yours?”

“I really couldn’t say. A fair distance. Not so very far.”

“You spoke of a canal. Is the opposite house on the same side of the canal as your house?”

“No, of course it isn’t. How could it be? It is on the opposite side.”

“And how long is your garden?”

“Oh, a moderate length. You know what London gardens are.”

“Should I be right in saying that, at the time that you saw this man, you were separated from him by the length of two gardens and the width of the canal?”

“Yes. That is what I said.”

“And you say that, having seen this total stranger at that very considerable distance, you are quite certain that you are able to recognize and remember him?”

“Yes, I am quite certain.”

“Can you tell us how you are able to identify him with such certainty?”

“Well,” said the witness, “there’s his nose, you see. I could see that.”

“Quite so. You looked upon the nose when it was red.”

“I should think it is always red,” said Mrs. Bunsbury. “At any rate, it was red then, and it is red now. And then there is his hair.”

“Very true. There is his hair. But he is not the only man in the world with a red nose and red hair.”

“I don’t know anything about that,” replied the witness, doggedly. “But I do know that he is the man. I’d swear to him among ten thousand.”

This apparently finished Mr. Lyon, for, having again prejudiced his client’s case to the best of his ability, he sat down with unimpaired complacency.

The next witness, Miss Doris Gray, gave evidence to the same effect, though with somewhat less emphasis; and, when she had been cross-examined and finally vacated the witness-box, Mr. Barnes rose and announced that “that was his case.” As soon as he sat down, Mr. Lyon rose and made his announcement.

“I call witnesses, my lord.”

“Now,” Thorndyke said to me in a low tone, “we are going to see whether there is really a case for the defence.”

“They haven’t made much of it up to the present,” I remarked.

“Exactly,” he replied. “That is what makes me a little hopeful. They have certainly given the prosecution plenty of rope.”

I should have liked to have this observation elucidated somewhat—and so, probably, would Superintendent Miller, who, at this moment, came forth from some inconspicuous corner and took his place at the solicitors’ table; for there was more than a shade of anxiety on his face as he looked expectantly at the witness-box. But there was no opportunity for explanations. Even as Miller took his seat, the first witness for the defence was called, and appeared in the person of a pleasant-looking middle-aged lady wearing the uniform of a trained nurse, and bearing, it transpired, the name of Helen Royden. In reply to a question from Mr. Lyon, she deposed that she was the matron of the cottage hospital at Hook Green, near Biddenden in Kent.

“Will you kindly look at the prisoner and tell us if you recognize him?”

The witness turned her head and cast a smiling glance at the accused (whereupon Mr. Dobey’s rather saturnine countenance relaxed into a friendly grin), “Yes,” she replied, “I recognize him as Mr. Charles Dobey, lately a patient at my hospital.”

“When did you last see him?”

“On the first of October, when he was discharged from hospital.”

“What were the date and the circumstances of his admission?”

“He was brought to the hospital on the thirtieth of July by Dr. Wale, the medical officer of the hospital, suffering from a compound fracture of the left tibia. I understand that the doctor found him lying in the road.”

“Do you remember the exact time at which he was brought in?”



"It was a little before eleven in the forenoon." As the dates were mentioned, I observed the judge and the two prosecuting counsel hurriedly turn over their notes with an expression of astonishment and incredulity, and the jury very visibly "sat up and took notice."

"Did you communicate with any of the patient's relatives?"

"Yes. At the patient's request, I wrote to his wife, who lives at East Malling in Kent, informing her of his admission, and inviting her to come and see him."

"And did she come?"

"Yes. She came the next day, and I allowed her to stay the night at the hospital. After that, she came to see him usually twice a week."

"Have you any doubt that the prisoner is the man whom you have described as your patient, Charles Dobey?"

"No. I couldn't very well be mistaken. He was in the hospital just over two months, and I saw him several times every day, and often had quite long talks with him. Ours is a small hospital, and the patients are rather like a family."

"Did you learn what his occupation was?"

"Yes. He described himself as a plumber and gas-fitter."

"Had you any reason to doubt that that was his real occupation?"

"None whatever. In fact, we had evidence that it was; for, when he was convalescent and able to get about, he repaired all the taps in the hospital, and did a number of odd jobs. He seemed to be quite a clever workman."

"Do you keep a record of admissions and discharges?"

"Yes. I have brought the register with me."

Here she produced from a business-like hand-bag a rather chubby quarto volume which she opened at a marked place and handed to the usher, who conveyed it to the counsel. When the latter had examined it and verified the dates, he passed it up to the judge, who scanned it curiously and compared it with his notes. Finally, it was handed to the prosecuting counsel, who appeared to gaze on it with stupefaction, and returned it to Mr. Lyon, who handed it back to the usher for transmission to the witness. This concluded the examination-in-chief, and Mr. Lyon accordingly thanked the witness and sat down. I waited curiously for the cross-examination, but neither of the Crown counsel made any sign. The judge glanced at them enquiringly, and, after a short pause, the witness was dismissed and her place taken by her successor. The new witness was a shrewd-looking, clean-shaved man, in whom I seemed to recognize a professional brother. And a doctor he turned out to be; one Egbert Wale by name, and the medical officer of the Hook Green Cottage Hospital. Having given the usual particulars, and been asked the inevitable question, he deposed as follows:

"On the thirtieth of last July, at about twenty minutes to eleven in the forenoon, I was driving down a by-road between Headcorn and Biddenden when I saw a man lying in the road. I stopped my car and got out to examine him, when I found that he had sustained a compound fracture of the left leg below the knee. I accordingly dressed the wound, put on a temporary splint, lifted him into my car, and drove him to the Hook Green Cottage Hospital, of which I am visiting medical officer. He gave the name of Charles Dobey, and explained that he had broken his leg in dropping from a motor-lorry on which he had taken a free lift without the knowledge of the driver. I detained him in the hospital for two months, and discharged him as convalescent on the first of October."

"Did Dobey make a good recovery?"

"Yes, excellent. When he left the hospital, the wound was quite healed, and the broken bone firmly united, but there was a large knob of callus, or new bone, which, I hope, will disappear in time."

"Would you recognize the wound if you were to examine it?"

"Certainly I should. I saw it last only about three weeks ago."

"Then, if his lordship will grant his permission, I will ask you to make the examination."

His lordship—bearing in mind; no doubt, the evidence of the finger-print experts—gave his permission readily; whereupon the doctor came out of the witness-box and went over to the dock. There he proceeded dexterously to unwind a length of bandage from the prisoner's leg—which had been exposed by its owner in readiness for the inspection—and examine the member by sight and touch. Then he replaced the bandage and returned to the witness-box.

"What is the result of your examination?" Mr. Lyon asked.

"I find the wound and the fracture in much the same condition as when I saw it last about three weeks ago."

"You have no doubt that it is the same injury?"

"Not the slightest. I recognize every detail of it."

"What is meant by a compound fracture? Is it a very serious injury?"

"A compound fracture is a break in a bone accompanied by a wound of the flesh and skin which communicates with the broken part of the bone and exposes it to the air. It is always a serious injury, even under modern surgical conditions,

because the wound and the fracture have both to be treated, and each may interfere with the treatment of the other.”

“And you have no doubt that the prisoner is the person whom you treated at the hospital?”

“I identify the prisoner as the man of whom I am speaking. I am quite certain that he is the same person.”

On receiving this answer, Mr. Lyon sat down, and the witness looked expectantly at the counsel for the prosecution. But, as before, they made no sign, and, accordingly, the witness was dismissed. As he retired, the foreman of the jury rose and announced that he and his colleagues did not want to hear any more evidence. “The jury are of opinion,” he added, “that this is a case of mistaken identity.”

“It is difficult to avoid that conclusion,” the judge admitted. Then, turning to the prisoner’s counsel, he enquired what further evidence he had proposed to offer. “I had proposed to call the prisoner’s wife, my lord, and then to put the prisoner in the box.”

The judge reflected for a few moments and then, addressing the foreman, said: “I think, in fairness to the prisoner, we should hear the rest of the evidence. You will note that the question of the document has not been cleared up. That document was found, you will remember, on premises belonging to the prisoner. We had better hear the evidence, though it may not be necessary for the learned counsel for the defence to address you.” The jury having agreed to this eminently sensible suggestion, the prisoner’s wife, Elizabeth Dobey, was called and took her place in the witness-box.

“Is the address at East Mailing that you have given your permanent address? Is that your home?” Mr. Lyon asked, when the preliminaries had been disposed of, and the witness had described herself as the wife of Charles Dobey, the prisoner, “Yes. We rent a cottage with a nice bit of garden. My husband is very fond of gardening.”

“With regard to the flat in London, 103 Barnard’s Buildings? Do you spend much of your time there?”

“Me? I have never been there at all. It isn’t a flat. It’s just a place where my husband can sleep and cook a meal when he is in Town, looking for a job.”

“Do you remember when the prisoner first went up to Barnard’s Buildings after he came home from the hospital?”

“He only went up once. That was when the police took him. It was about a week after he came home—on the eighth of October.”

“Did he send anyone else up to the flat, before he went himself?”

“No. There wasn’t anyone to send, and there wasn’t any reason to send them.” This concluded the examination-in-chief. But, this time, as Mr. Lyon resumed his seat, Mr. Barnes rose with remarkable promptitude. “You have said that your husband kept this flat in London to sleep in when he was looking for a job. What kind of jobs would he be looking for?”

“He is a plumber and gas-fitter by trade. He would be looking for jobs in his own line, of course.”

“You have heard the police witnesses state that they found in that flat a number of burglars’ tools, a quantity of stolen jewellery, and a stolen document. Do those tools and that stolen property suggest anything to you as to the kind of jobs that your husband went to London to look for?”

“No, they have got nothing to do with his trade.”

“Can you account for the presence of burglars’ tools and stolen property in the rooms of a plumber and gas-fitter?”

“Yes, I can,” Mrs. Dobey replied, viciously, “after all the false swearing that there has been in this court to-day. If you ask me, I should say that the police put them there.” At this rather unexpected reply a low rumble of laughter filled the court, including the jury box; and a faint, appreciative smile stole over the judge’s face, and was even reflected on the countenance of Mr. Barnes himself.

“I am afraid,” he said, good-humouredly, “that you are taking a prejudiced view. But with regard to this flat; have you ever taken any measures to ascertain what your husband does at those rooms?”

“No,” she replied. “I don’t go spying on my husband. It isn’t necessary. I can trust him, if other people can’t.”

Here it apparently dawned upon Mr. Barnes that he was not going to do his case any good with this witness. Accordingly, he thanked her, and resumed his seat; and, as Mr. Lyon was not disposed to re-examine, Mrs. Dobey retired in triumph, and her husband was conducted from the dock to the witness-box.

When he had been sworn and had given the usual particulars, his counsel directed him to describe his movements after his escape from the prison, which he did with picturesque conciseness.

“As soon as I was clear of the prison, I scooted round a corner into a by-street, and there I saw a motor wagon piled up with empty baskets. The driver was cranking up the engine, and, as there was nobody in sight, I climbed up behind and laid down on the floor among the baskets. Then the driver got up and off she went. When we got out somewhere between Headcorn and Biddenden the wagon turned down a by-lane, and as I thought that we might be getting near the farm that we seemed to be bound for, I decided to hop off. So I did. But she was going faster than I thought, and I came down a cropper and broke my leg. I laid there in the road for about a quarter of an hour, and then the doctor came along and picked me up, and took me off to the hospital. And there I stayed until I was discharged on the first of October.”

“When did you first go up to your London flat?”

"I only went once. That was when I had been at home just over a week—on the eighth of October. The detectives came and collared me just as I was picking the lock to let myself in."

"Why did you have to pick the lock?"

"Because I hadn't got my key. They took all the things out of my pockets at Maidstone police-station. But I had forgotten that I hadn't got my key until I was close to the Buildings, so I had to pop into an ironmonger's shop and get a piece of wire. And I was picking the lock with that piece of wire when the cops nabbed me."

"You have heard about the burglars' tools and the stolen property that the police found in your room. Can you tell us anything about them?"

"No, I don't know anything about them. They were not mine, and I didn't put them there. Somebody must have got into the rooms and planted them there while I was in the hospital."

"Have you any idea who might have planted those things, and for what purpose?"

"I should think anyone could see what they were planted for. It was to put this murder on to me. But, as to who planted them, if the police didn't—and I suppose they didn't, though they do seem to have been working the oracle a bit—it must have been the person who did the murder, seeing that he had got the paper that was taken from the murdered man."

"Do you swear that you never went to the flat after leaving the hospital until the eighth of October?"

"I do. I shouldn't have gone there a second time with a bit of wire to let myself in. I should have got a key."

This was Mr. Lyon's final question, and, as he sat down, Mr. Barnes rose to cross-examine, but with no great show of enthusiasm. He began by pressing the witness for a clearer explanation of the purpose for which he kept the rooms in London. But at this point the foreman of the jury again intervened with a protest that the jury were not interested in the prisoner's occupation, and that they did not want to hear any more evidence; whereupon Mr. Barnes sat down with no appearance of reluctance, and the judge enquired of Mr. Lyon if he desired to address the jury.

"If the gentlemen of the jury have come to a decision," was the reply, "it would be useless for me to occupy the time of the court with an address."

Accordingly, the prisoner was led back to the dock, and the judge proceeded to make a few observations.

"I do not pretend to understand this case," said he. "We have been told that it is an impossibility for two different persons to have identically similar finger-prints. Yet, here, the impossible seems to have happened. Finger-prints which have been identified as those of the prisoner were made in a house in London on the second of August; at which time the prisoner appears to have been lying, with a broken leg, in a hospital some forty miles away. It would seem that there is some person whose finger-prints are identical with those of the prisoner; and, unfortunately for the prisoner, that person appears to be a house-breaker. However, there is no use in trying to resolve this puzzle, for, after all, the question is not relevant to the issue that you are trying. What you have to decide is whether you are prepared to accept as true the evidence of the matron of the hospital and Dr. Wale. If their evidence is true, it is physically impossible that the prisoner could have committed the murder with which he is charged. That is for you to decide, and I do not think that I need say anything more."

When the judge had finished speaking, the grey-wigged clerk of the court rose and put the formal question:

"Are you all agreed upon your verdict, gentlemen?"

To which the foreman replied, promptly: "We are."

"What do you say, gentlemen? Is the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," was the reply, delivered with noticeable emphasis.

The judge briefly expressed his entire concurrence, and then proceeded:

"I understand that the prisoner, having escaped from prison while awaiting his trial, is still in custody, on the original charge. Have you any instructions on the subject?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Mr. Barnes. "It appears that the bill was presented to the Grand Jury at Maidstone on the day on which the prisoner absconded. There would seem to have been some error in presenting the bill; but, at any rate, the Grand Jury threw it out."

"I am glad to hear that," said the judge. Then, addressing the prisoner, he continued: "Charles Dobey, you have been tried for the crime on which you were indicted, and have been found not guilty—very properly, as I think—and, as the bill in respect of the original offence has been thrown out by the Grand Jury at Maidstone, there is now no charge against you, and you are accordingly discharged."

He accompanied the rather dry statement with a smile and a kindly nod, which Dobey acknowledged with a low bow, and, as the gate of the dock was now thrown open, he descended to meet, with a somewhat stolid grin, the effusive greetings of his wife and the congratulations of his friends from the hospital.

"Well," I said, as we rose to depart, "I hope you find the result of the trial satisfactory."

"I do," Thorndyke replied, "but I don't think Miller does. He looks most uncommonly glum. But I do not feel

sympathetic. The police—if they instructed the prosecution—have been hoist with their own petard. They insisted on dragging in these finger-prints and those two women, whose evidence was quite irrelevant and was intended merely to discredit the prisoner, and behold the result. From this time forward, Dobey is practically immune from finger-print evidence and evidence of personal identification. He can prove, from the records of this trial, that there is some person, who is engaged in the practice of house breaking, who is in appearance his exact double, and whose finger-prints are identically similar to his. He can actually quote the judge to that effect.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “Dobey need not trouble to wear gloves now, if he really is a cracksman, as I have no doubt he is. One cannot help admiring the masterly strategy of the defence in egging on the prosecution to play their trump cards and prove those very facts. But, even now, I don’t see how you came to be so certain of Dobey’s innocence. You knew nothing about the alibi. And, apart from that, there was a case against him. Yet, apparently, you never entertained the possibility of his being guilty.”

“I don’t think I did,” he admitted; “and, if you will reconsider the case in general terms and in detail, I think you will see why. Let me recommend you to do this now, as the completion of the case devolves on us. I must stay and have a few words with Miller; and I suggest that you go on ahead and spend half an hour in going over the case with an open mind. You know where to find our notes of the case. Get them out and look them through. Note all the facts that are known to us, consider them separately and as a whole, and see if there does not emerge a perfectly coherent theory of the crime. The evidence that you have heard to-day, inasmuch as it is in agreement with that theory, ought to be helpful to you.”

“When you speak of a theory of the crime,” said I, “do you mean a general theory, or one capable of a particular application?”

“Our function,” he replied, “is to discover the identity of the person who murdered Inspector Badger; and the theory that I refer to is one which is capable of leading us to that discovery.”

With this he stepped out into the body of the court to go in search of the Superintendent, and I made my way to the robing-room to divest myself of wig and gown before issuing forth into places of public resort.

---

#### XIV. — A STARTLING DISCOVERY

ON my way westward from the Old Bailey to the Temple, I turned over in my mind Thorndyke’s last statement. Its exact meaning was not perfectly clear to me; but what I did gather was that he had enough knowledge of the circumstances surrounding Badger’s death to make the belief in Dobey’s guilt untenable. That implied some positive knowledge pointing to the guilt of some other person; but as to whether that other person was an actual individual to whom a name could be given, or a mere abstraction whom we had yet to convert into a reality, I was unable to decide. What did, however, emerge clearly from his statement was that whatever facts were known to him were also known to me. My problem, therefore, was to examine the facts that I already knew, and try to extract their significance, which I had apparently missed up to the present.

When I arrived at our chambers, I became aware, by certain familiar signs, that Polton had returned from his expedition to Hartsden, and was engaged in some kind of photographic work in the laboratory. Presumably, he was developing the films from the “automatic watcher,” and I was tempted to go up and see what luck he had had. But I restrained my curiosity, and, having drawn a chair up to the table and procured a note-block and pencil, I went to the cabinet in which the portfolios of current cases were kept and unlocked it. The one labelled “Inspector Badger, deceased,” was uppermost, with the finger-print measuring-glass lying on its cover. I lifted them out together, and, laying the glass on the table, opened the portfolio and began to glance through its contents, laying the papers out in their order as to the dates.

The first that I picked up I put aside, as it did not appear to belong to the series. It was a rough copy of the entry that Thorndyke had made in his note-book when we were experimenting on the Thumbograph, and had apparently been put in the portfolio out of the way—though it was extremely unlike Thorndyke to put anything in its wrong place. Then I began to go through the various notes, seriatim, trying to refresh my memory as to the order of the events and the way in which the case had developed. But as I turned over the notes, I was aware of a growing sense of disappointment. There was nothing new; nothing that I did not remember quite clearly without their aid. I glanced through the brief notes of our expedition to Greenhithe. It was all fresh in my memory. The description of the body, the examination of the tunnel, the finding of the cigar; then the analysis of the cigar, the report of the inquest, and the evidence of the witnesses. I knew it all, and it conveyed nothing to me but a mysterious crime of which we held not a single clue to guide us to the identity of the perpetrator. There was a brief summary of Miller’s account of the house-breaking incident, which did now, after the event, point pretty definitely to a personation and the making of false finger-prints. But there was no suggestion as to the identity of the personator. To me, the whole case remained in the air.

At the end of the portfolio was a separate folder labelled “finger-prints,” which I took out, doggedly, but with a sense of deep discouragement. Nothing could be much less illuminating than a collection of unidentified finger-prints. Nevertheless, I opened the folder and began to look through the collection. There were Badger’s prints, devoid of any meaning to me, and the photograph of Dobey’s, taken from the official paper that Miller had shown us, which told me nothing at all. Then I opened a smaller folder, labelled “Prints from cigar.” There were two sets of photographs, one the natural size and the other enlarged to about four diameters. Discarding the smaller photographs, I examined the enlargements, and read the inscriptions written below them, with as much attention as I could muster; for, little as they

conveyed to me, I realized that they constituted evidence of the highest importance, if only the opportunity should ever come to apply it.

The first was Inspector Badger's left thumb, remarkably clear for a developed print. But, though it was, in effect, an indictment of murder, it gave me no help, since I knew already that poor Badger had been murdered. I laid it down and took up the next. "Right thumb of person unknown." Having read the inscription, I glanced at the print. This one, too, was admirably clear and distinct. The experts should have no difficulty in identifying it if they could get a known print with which to compare it. Not only was the general pattern—a very distinctive one—perfectly plain, but all the minor "characteristics" were easily legible.

I sat with the print in my hand and my eyes fixed on it musingly, reflecting on all that it meant and all that it did not mean. This thumb-print had been made by the man who had given the poisoned cigar to poor Badger—who had almost certainly murdered him; who had personated Dobey at the sham house-breaking, and who had entered Dobey's flat and there planted the stolen document. It was capable of giving infallible proof of that villain's identity; and yet it offered not the faintest hint as to what manner of man that villain might be. In spite of our possession of this infallible touchstone we might pass this murderer in the street a hundred times without the faintest glimmer of suspicion as to who he was. A finger-print is a poor instrument with which to start the search for an unknown criminal.

As I sat thus, with my eyes fixed only half-consciously on the print, I became aware of a dim sense of familiarity. A finger-print is, to an accustomed eye, much more easy to remember than might be supposed; and, as my eye rested on this print, I began to have the feeling that I had seen it before. At first the feeling was not more than vaguely reminiscent; but yet it was enough to arouse my attention. I looked, now, with a critical and purposeful scrutiny and a definite effort of memory. And then, suddenly, in a flash, the revelation came and left me gazing open-mouthed.

It was amazing, incredible; so incredible that I sought instantly for corroboration or disproof. Snatching up the measuring-glass, and picking out the natural-sized print, I placed the central dot of the scale of circles on the summit of the central character of the core and wrote down on the note-book the measurements shown. The pattern was intermediate between a whorl and a twinned loop; but, remembering Thorndyke's rule, I treated it as a whorl. Then, as it was a left-handed, or anti-clockwise, whorl, and as the "core-character" lay entirely within the centre circle ("Space A"), the whorl was of the type A3. I wrote this down, and then measured the distance to the right delta. The latter was intersected by the circle, C, and therefore, by the rule, lay in the space, D. The ridge tracing was clearly outside the delta, and I therefore wrote down O. The left delta was outside the print, and therefore could not be located. The number of ridges between the centre of the core and the right delta was twelve, while the left ridge-count—since the left delta was outside the print—was unascertainable.

When I had finished, I set out my results in the regular formula, so far as I remembered the method, thus:

Right thumb—Unknown.  
W (? T.L.). Core, A3, ?, O, D, ?, 12.

Then I turned back through the portfolio until I found the slip of paper on which Thorndyke had copied the entry in his note-book. The first eager glance at it I showed me that my memory had not deceived me.

The entry ran:

Walter Hornby. Right thumb.  
W (? T.L.). Core, A3, ?, O, D, ?, 12.

In addition to the formula, Thorndyke had written down a few of the "ridge characteristics" with their ridge-counts from the centre of the core, and a direction-arrow to show their position, thus:

-}3, Lake, 5, Bif., 8, End, 10, Bif.  
{-7, Lake, 9, Bif., 11, Lake.

With intense excitement, I proceeded to verify these characters, not a little surprised at the ease with which they could be recognized and located. Taking first the right direction-arrow, and counting the ridges from the centre of the core, I found in the third ridge one of those little loops, or eyes, known, technically, as "lakes." The fifth ridge divided into a fork, or bifurcation; the eighth ridge terminated abruptly in a free end, and the tenth showed another bifurcation. Then, following the left direction-arrow, the seventh ridge showed a small lake, the ninth a bifurcation, and the eleventh a larger lake. The agreement was complete in every detail.

I laid down the print and reflected on this amazing discovery, still hardly able to credit the evidence of my eyes. For the thing seemed beyond belief. The murderous wretch whose tracks we had been following was none other than Walter Hornby. After all these years, during which I had almost forgotten his very existence, he had suddenly swum into the field of our vision like some strange and horrible apparition. Yet my astonishment was hardly justified; for no detail of his recent villainy was in any way out of character with his past, as it was known to me.

Presently my thoughts took another turn. By what means had Thorndyke been able to identify Badger's murderer as Walter Hornby? It had been no chance shot. The discovery of Hornby's thumb-print in the Thumbograph had been no mere accident. It was now evident to me that Thorndyke had come to our house with the express purpose of seeking that thumb-print, if it was in existence, as was manifest from the fact that he had come equipped with the measuring-glass, and from the anxiety that he had shown as to the fate of the Thumbograph. Clearly, that was the final verification of a theory

that was already complete in his mind. Indeed, he had, in effect, said as much this very day in court. He had spoken of “a coherent theory of the crime,” an expression that would have been quite inapplicable to the chance discovery of a finger-print. Now, how, from the information that we possessed, had he arrived at this astonishing conclusion?

It is proverbially easy to be wise after the event. “Jobbing back,” as this mental exercise is named on the Stock Exchange, is considerably simpler than jobbing forward. So I found it on the present occasion. Now that the conclusion was known to me, I was in a favourable position to consider the processes of reasoning which had led to it. And when I did so, and when I recalled the hints that Thorndyke had dropped from time to time, I was surprised that no inkling of the truth had ever dawned on me. For what Thorndyke had said was perfectly true. When all the facts were considered, separately and as a whole, a consistent theory of the crime emerged, and inevitably brought the figure of Walter Hornby into the picture.

Taking the facts separately there were those that related to technique and method and those that related to motive. The technique in the present crime included the use of a poisoned cigar and of counterfeit finger-prints. But this was the technique employed, years ago, by Walter Hornby; and it was not only a peculiar and distinctive technique; it was absolutely unique. No other criminal, so far as I had ever heard, had employed it. Then the method of employing it was the same in both cases. In the Hornby case—the case of the Red Thumb Mark—an original finger-print (in the Thumbograph) had been obtained from the victim, Reuben Hornby, from which to make, by photo mechanical process, the stamps for the counterfeits. In the Badger case, a sheet of finger-prints had been stolen, evidently for the same purpose. Again, in both cases, the forged finger-prints had been “planted” at the scene of the crime. In short, the technique and method in the Badger case repeated, in the main, those of the Red Thumb Mark case.

Then the motive showed a like similarity in the two cases. When Walter Hornby had tried to murder Thorndyke (by means of a poisoned cigar) his motive was to get rid of the only person who suspected him. As to the motive for the murder of Badger, Miller was almost certainly right, although he had guessed wrong as to the identity of the murderer. Badger’s uncanny memory for faces had made him a dangerous enemy. And we had Miller’s statement that Badger was the only officer who was able to identify Walter Hornby.

Finally, taking the whole set of facts together, the similarity of the two cases was very striking. In each crime, the criminal act had been preceded by a careful preparation to incriminate an innocent person. There had been a systematic scheme of false evidence, thought out and arranged in advance with remarkable completeness and ingenuity, before the criminal had committed himself. Thus, as a whole and in detail, the murder of Inspector Badger virtually repeated a crime which was known to me, and which was utterly unlike any other crime of which I had ever heard. Reluctantly, I had to admit that I had been distinctly “slow in the uptake.”

I had just reached this rather unsatisfactory conclusion when I heard a latchkey inserted in the outer door. A moment later, Thorndyke entered, and, as his eye lighted on the open portfolio, he greeted me with the enquiry:

“Well, what says my learned friend? Has he reached any conclusion?”

By way of answer, I wrote on a scrap of paper: “x=Walter Hornby,” and pushed it along the table towards him.

“Yes,” he said, when he had glanced at it, “history repeats itself. We had this equation once before, you remember.”

“I remember,” said I, “and I ought to have remembered sooner. But, tell me, Thorndyke, when did you first suspect Hornby in this case?”

“The word ‘suspect,’” he replied, “is a little indefinite. But I may say that when we established the fact of a poisoned cigar, the name of Walter Hornby inevitably floated into my mind, especially as the cigar was associated with a stolen sheet of finger-prints which were pretty evidently not those of the person who stole them. In fact, I adopted, provisionally, the hypothesis that the murderer was Walter Hornby, but only as a mere possibility which had to be borne in mind while further developments were being watched for. I argued that if the hypothesis was correct, certain events might be confidently expected to follow. There would be some crime, probably committed in daylight by a man with red hair and a red nose, who would leave Frederick Smith’s finger-prints at the scene of the crime; and the stolen paper would be found in some place connected with Frederick Smith.

“As you know, these events occurred exactly according to plan. Thereupon, the mere hypothesis became a very weighty probability. But the experimentum crucis was made possible by Juliet. When the Thumbograph had spoken the hypothesis passed into the domain of established fact.”

“Yes,” I said; “you have established the murderer’s identity beyond any reasonable doubt. The next thing is to ascertain his whereabouts. At present he is no more than a name.”

“That,” he replied, “is Miller’s problem. The police have all the facilities for finding a wanted man. We have none. By the way, have, you seen Polton?”

“No,” I replied, “but I expect you will see him before long. He always knows, in some occult way, when you come in. In fact, I think I hear him approaching at this moment.”

Almost as I spoke, the door opened and Polton entered, bearing a large vulcanite dish and a long strip of cinematograph film. There was no need to ask for his news, for his face was one large and incredibly crinkly smile of triumph and satisfaction.

“We’ve brought it off, sir,” he announced, gleefully, “first shot. I went down to the Manor House this morning, and I

waited by the camera until I heard the twelve-o'clock exposure go off. Then I took out the roll-holder and put in a fresh one. But I don't think you will want it. I have developed the strip—nine exposures, altogether, but only two of them matter, and those two I have enlarged to half-plate. They are those made at twelve o'clock on Tuesday and twelve o'clock to-day."

He laid the dish on the table, and watched Thorndyke ecstatically as the latter stooped over it to examine the enlargements.

"The top one is the Tuesday exposure," he explained. "Shows the room just as you saw it, with the box on the table. The bottom one is to-day's. You see there's no box there, and the arm-chair has been moved about a couple of inches, as you can see by the sash of the case behind it."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "it is a true bill, Polton. The box is gone from the table; and boxes don't fly away of themselves. By the way, Polton, what do you make of that box?"

"Well, sir," was the reply, "if it didn't seem so unlikely, I should have said that it looked like a casting-box; one of those biggish flasks that silversmiths use for casting the blanks of things like spoons. It is certainly a metal box, and those things at the side look very much like pin-lugs."

"So I thought," said Thorndyke; "but we shall probably know all about it, before long. At any rate, Polton, you have solved our problem for us, and now we can go ahead with confidence. I shall send Mr. Woodburn a letter and a telegram. He will probably get the letter to-morrow morning, but the telegram will make it safer."

"There's the telephone, sir," Polton suggested.

"Yes, I know," said Thorndyke "but when I whisper secrets, I like to know whose ear they are going into."

"What are you going to say to him?" I asked.

"I shall ask him to meet us to-morrow morning and bring the key of the gallery door. That is what we arranged."

"Then you are going to break the seals and explore the rooms?"

"Certainly. There is now no doubt that someone visits those rooms; and as the next visit seems to be due to-morrow night, we may as well be there to give the visitor a hospitable reception."

"Shall you want me to come with you, sir?" Polton enquired, anxiously.

My impression was that Thorndyke did not particularly want him. But the wistfulness of the little man's face proved irresistible.

"I think you had better come, Polton," he said, "and bring a few tools with you. But it would be as well if you went on ahead of us, so that we don't make too large a party. We mustn't be too noticeable."

"No, sir," Polton agreed, undisguisedly jubilant at being included in the expeditionary party; "I will go down by the early train. Are there any tools in particular that you wish me to bring?"

"Well, Polton," Thorndyke replied, "you know what our problem is. Someone has got into these rooms by some means other than an ordinary door. We may have to pick one or two locks, and they may be rather unusual locks. I would not suggest burglars' tools, because, of course, you haven't any. If you had, they might be useful."

Polton crinkled knowingly as he protested "There is nothing improper about burglars' tools in themselves. It is the use that is made of them. The tools are quite innocent if they are used for a lawful purpose."

Having delivered himself of this slightly questionable legal dictum, he departed, leaving the photographs for us to examine at our leisure.

Very curious productions they were. I took up the strip of film and examined the tiny negatives through my pocket lens. Small as they were—barely an inch and a half square—they were full of minute detail, and the enlargements, magnified about four diameters, were as clear as if they had been taken with a full-sized camera. The "Automatic Watcher" had turned out, in respect of its efficiency, far beyond my expectations.

"Yes," said Thorndyke, in reply to my admiring comments, "with first-class lenses, you can get surprising results; in fact, the only limit to enlargement is the grain of the film. But we had better put the photographs away for the present, as I am expecting Miller to drop in at any moment. He is dreadfully disgruntled at the result of the trial, though the fiasco is very largely of his own producing. Still, we shall have to try to comfort him, and it had occurred to me that we might take him into this Hartsden adventure. What do you think? We really ought to have a police officer with us."

"Yes, I think it is rather necessary," I agreed. "We don't want a search warrant, as we are acting with Woodburn's authority, but, as we may have to make an arrest, it would be more regular to have a police officer to direct that part of the business. Besides, we don't know how many we may have to deal with. It looks like a one-man job, but we don't know. It may turn out to be a gang. Let us have Miller's beef and experience, by all means."

On this, Thorndyke took the photographs and retired to the laboratory to write and dispatch his letter and telegram. When he returned, he brought in with him the Superintendent, whom he had encountered on the landing.

"Well," growled Miller, as I placed an arm-chair for him, with the usual creature comforts, "we've brought our pigs to a pretty fine market."

Thorndyke chuckled, but refrained from pointing out that the market was of his own choosing.

"What I can't understand," the Superintendent continued, "is why that fool couldn't have trotted out his infernal alibi when we charged him. Then there needn't have been any trial."

Again we refrained from the obvious answer to this question. Instead, Thorndyke proceeded at once to the "comforting" operation.

"Well, Miller," said he, "now that we have cleared Dobey off the stage, we can give our attention to realities. I suppose you will now agree with me that the man who gave Badger that poisoned cigar is the man who murdered him."

"Yes," Miller admitted, "I'll agree to that much. But it doesn't get us a great deal forrarder. The fellow is a mere abstraction. He isn't even a name. He is just a finger-print that we haven't got on our files."

"Not at all," said Thorndyke. "We can tell you who he is. It will then be for you to find out where he is."

The Superintendent laid down a match that he had just struck, and stared at Thorndyke, open-mouthed.

"You can tell me who he is!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean that you can give him a name?"

"I do," replied Thorndyke. "His name is Walter Hornby."

The Superintendent was thunderstruck. "Walter Hornby!" he gasped in amazement. Then, suddenly, he brought his large hand down heavily on the little table, causing it to rock visibly, to the imminent peril of the whisky decanter. "Now," he exclaimed, "I understand how it happened. Badger told me, himself, that he thought he had seen Walter Hornby, and he was mighty pleased with himself for having spotted him. I gathered that Hornby was either very much changed or else disguised, though Badger didn't actually say so. But I have no doubt that poor old Badger, in his secretive way, kept an eye on him, and probably shadowed him a bit too openly. Then Hornby got alarmed and, in his turn, shadowed Badger, and finally enticed him into that first-class carriage with the cigar all ready in his pocket. But, if you knew, Doctor, why on earth didn't you tell me?"

"My dear Miller," protested Thorndyke, "of course I didn't know in time to prevent the prosecution. I have only just completed the case."

"By the way, Doctor," said Miller, "I suppose I can take it that there is no mistake this time? You are quite sure of your man?"

"I am prepared to sign a sworn information," Thorndyke replied, "and I will undertake to present a convincing case for the prosecution. Naturally, I cannot promise a conviction."

"Of course you can't," said Miller. "But a sworn information from you is good enough for me, to start with. We can go into the evidence another time. But I am hanged if I know how to go about looking for the beggar. I suppose you have no idea what he looks like nowadays?"

"I can only guess," replied Thorndyke. "We can safely assume that he has not red hair or a red nose. Probably he has shaved off his beard and moustache, and, judging from what Badger told you and from the fact that he has certainly worn a wig when personating Dobey, it is likely that he habitually wears a wig of a colour different from the lightish brown of his own hair. But I must admit that those assumptions are not very helpful. Still, you have the finger-prints that I handed to you, so, if you make an arrest on suspicion you will know, at once, whether you have or have not got the right man. And now let us dismiss this case, and have a few words about another one that we want you to help us to work at."

Here Thorndyke gave the Superintendent a brief outline of the mystery of Hartsden Manor House, dwelling principally on the testimony of the servants and, characteristically, keeping his own counsel about the "Automatic Watcher." Consequently, Miller, though deeply interested, was a little disposed to be sceptical.

"It sounds a tall story," he remarked, "though it is by no means impossible. At any rate, it is worth looking into. Of course, if a party of crooks have managed to get in there, they have got ideal premises for some kinds of jobs. Just think of a bank-note forger, for instance, getting the use of a set of sealed rooms where he could work in perfect safety, and leave all his incriminating stuff about with the certainty that no one would stumble on it by chance! Or a maker of bombs, or any other kind of illicit artisan. Yes, I certainly think it is worth looking into. And you think the sportsmen are likely to turn up to-morrow night?"

"That is merely a matter of probability," said Thorndyke. "Apparently, the visitor or visitors keep to regular days for their calls, and Friday is one of those days. So we shall take the chance and spend the night there. I think you had better come, Miller," he added, persuasively "Even if nobody turns up, it will be worth your while to look over the premises. You may be able to spot something that we might miss."

"I don't think you are likely to miss much, Doctor," said Miller, with a faint grin. "However, I'd like to come with you; in fact, the more I think of the job, the more it takes my fancy. There are all sorts of possibilities in it. But, if you don't mind, I think I will bring a couple of spare men, or let them come on later. You see, we may want to post them in some cover outside, in case our sportsmen should happen to spot us first and nip off. They would know the place better than we should, and they might easily get away while we were trying to find the way out. In that case it would be very handy to have a couple of men outside who could hear the alarm and pounce on them as they came out."

We both agreed heartily to this excellent arrangement; and, when we had discussed a few further details and settled the



time for starting in the morning, Miller lighted a fresh cigar and took his departure quite revived in spirits by the prospect of the morrow's adventure.

---

## XV. — THE BREAKING OF THE SEALS

DURING our journey down to Hartsden on the following morning, Superintendent Miller's state of mind seemed to alternate between a rather extravagant optimism and a haunting fear of an anticlimax that might expose him to the derision of his subordinates. And such was his condition when we introduced him to Mr. Woodburn at Hartsden Station.

"Well, sir," said he, "this is a very remarkable affair—if it isn't a mare's nest. I hope it isn't."

"I rather hope it is," replied Woodburn, "though that is not my expectation. But we shall soon know."

He held open the door of the car, and, when we had taken our places, he drove off at a smart pace and soon covered the short distance between the station and the Manor House. There, at the open door, we found Mrs. Gibbins awaiting us, supported by Polton, who seemed to have established himself as the master of ceremonies, and who conveyed to Thorndyke, in a conspiratorial whisper, that the "Automatic Watcher" had been removed and put out of sight. Evidently, he did not intend that his patent should be infringed by the official investigators.

"We may as well go straight to the gallery," said Woodburn. "I've got the key. Shall I show the way?"

Without waiting for an answer, he passed through the narrow doorway that led into the corridor and the rest of the party followed, with the exception of the housekeeper, whose good manners were even greater than her curiosity, and who contented herself with a wistful observation of our departure, following us with her eyes until we were lost in the darkness of the corridor.

"Now," said Woodburn, as we drew up before the massive door of the gallery, "we are going to clear up the mystery, if there is one. And, if there isn't, we are going to catch it from Mr. Toke. At any rate, here goes."

He opened his pocket knife and deliberately cut the stout tape that connected the two seals. Then he inserted the little flat key into the modern lock, grasped the handle of the door, and turned them both together. The door moved slightly, far enough to disengage both the latches, but no farther. He gave one or two vigorous pushes and then looked round at us with a somewhat mystified expression.

"This is very odd," said he. "The door is free of the latches, but it won't open. There seems to be something inside preventing it."

The Superintendent laid his large hand on the door and gave a hearty shove. But still the door refused to move more than half an inch.

"Rum," said he. "Doesn't feel like a solid obstruction. There's a distinct give in it. Shall I throw my weight against the door?"

"Better not," said Woodburn. "There's a flight of steps on the inside."

Here Polton's voice was heard enquiring meekly if it wouldn't be better to lever the door open.

"Certainly it would," replied Miller, "if you know where to find a lever."

"I happen to have a case-opener in my pocket," said Polton, in the matter-of-fact tone of one announcing the possession of a lead pencil or a fountain pen. "I think it would answer the purpose."

"I expect it would," Miller agreed, casting an inquisitive glance at our versatile artificer. "At any rate, you may as well try."

Thus encouraged, Polton advanced to the door and unblushingly produced from a long inside pocket a powerful telescopic jemmy of the most undeniably felonious aspect. Quite unmoved by the Superintendent's stare of astonishment, he first felt the door critically to locate the point of resistance, and then, skilfully insinuating the beak of the jemmy into the rebate of the door-jamb, gave a firm wrench at the long handle of the lever. Immediately, there came a bursting sound from within, and the door swung open, disclosing a short flight of steps leading down to the gallery floor.

The Superintendent tripped down the steps and turned to look for the obstruction.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed. "Your Mr. Toke is a cautious man with a vengeance! He isn't taking any risks. Just look at that."

He pointed to the door-post, on which was a large seal, and, depending from it, a length of strong tape with a mass of sealing-wax adhering to its free end. We came down the steps and stood gazing at this singular phenomenon while Miller swung the door round and exhibited, near its edge, the broken seal from which the tape had torn out.

"Now, why the deuce," demanded Wilier, "should he have wanted to seal the door on the inside? And when he had done it, how the devil did he get out?"

"Exactly," said Thorndyke, "that is what interests us. This inside seal gives a conclusive answer to our principal question. He couldn't have got out by this door, so there must be some other way out. And a way out is a way in."

"M'yes," Miller agreed in a reflective tone. "That is so. But it seems to raise another question. Is it quite certain that Mr. Toke has really gone abroad? Is it certain, for instance, that he is not just keeping out of sight for some private reasons?"

"Of course," Woodburn replied, a trifle stiffly, "there is no absolute proof that he has gone abroad. But he said that he was going abroad; he locked and sealed his premises, and was seen thereafter to go away from his house. He put his car into storage, and he has not since been seen in any of his usual places of resort. I may say further that he is a gentleman of the highest character and repute, and that I can imagine no reasons that should induce him to keep out of sight."

"Then," said Miller, apologetic—but unconvinced, as I suspected—"that settles it. You must excuse me, Mr. Woodburn, but I did not know Mr. Toke. We shall have to look for some other explanation. Probably we shall find it when we have made our examination of the premises; when we have ascertained, for instance, whether there is anything missing. Shall we take a look round and check the property? I suppose you know roughly what there was in these rooms when Mr. Toke went away?"

"Yes," replied Woodburn; "I think I should know if anything of value had been taken away."

With this, Miller and the solicitor proceeded to make a systematic tour of inspection, passing along the range of wall-cases and rapidly glancing at the objects on the shelves and apparently finding the collection intact.

"It's rather queer, you know," said Miller, when they had made the round, "that none of these things should have been taken. I imagine that they are pretty valuable pieces."

"They are," replied Woodburn, "but they wouldn't be much use to a thief, seeing that they could be so easily identified; at least, that was Mr. Toke's opinion. He always considered the collection quite safe, so far as burglars were concerned."

"To a certain extent he was right," said Miller. "This stuff would be no use to an ordinary burglar if there was a hue and cry and a description of the stolen property. But that doesn't apply to the present conditions. If someone has been entering these rooms, he might have taken the whole boiling away and have offered it quite safely at a common auction, in small lots at a time. Because, you see, nobody would have known that it had been taken. And there's plenty of demand for this sort of stuff. What is in this room?" he added, as their peregrinations brought them to a door near the entrance.

"That is where the collection of bronzes is kept," replied Woodburn. "We may as well see if they are all right, too."

Thereupon, he opened the door and entered the room with the Superintendent.

Meanwhile, Thorndyke had been devoting his attention to the seals on the gallery door, making a minute comparison of the outside seal with that on the inside door-post. As Miller and the solicitor disappeared into the adjoining room (closely attended by Polton, who was apparently determined that the Superintendent should not steal a march on his employer), Thorndyke handed me his lens, remarking:

"The seals appear to be identical. I should say that they were both made with the same matrix."

"Is there any reason why they should not be?" I asked in some surprise.

"No," he replied, "I don't think there is." I made a somewhat perfunctory comparison—for Thorndyke's opinion was good enough for me—and then remarked:

"I am in the same case as Miller. I can't imagine what object Toke can have had in sealing the inside of the door. Do you understand it?"

"Not if the seals were affixed by Toke," he replied; "seeing that Toke had access to the whole of the house and could examine the sealed door from the outside to satisfy himself that the seals were intact. But it would be quite understandable if the inside seals were fixed by someone who had not access to the house, but who would wish to be assured that the outside seals had not been broken. Supposing, for instance, there had been no inside seals, and supposing that we made our inspection without disturbing anything and went away, locking the door behind us. There would be no trace of our visit, nor any evidence that the rooms had been entered. But now, if we should go away and our friends should return to-night, they would see at a glance that someone had been here, and, no doubt, they would discreetly clear off and abandon their tenancy."

"Yes," said I. "That seems to be the explanation. It had not occurred to me, nor, apparently to Miller. But there is another point. If the visitors sealed the door on the inside, they must be in possession of the seal."

"Obviously," he agreed. "That is the important point. If it is a fact, it is an extremely significant fact, especially when it is considered in connection with a certain 'Ginger Lushington.'"

At this critical stage, our conversation was interrupted by the Superintendent's voice, hailing us from an adjoining room. At once we hurried into the room which we had seen him enter, but, finding it empty, passed through into a second room, with which it communicated, and so, by another communicating doorway, into a third. This also was empty, save for a company of bronze statuettes on its shelves, but, through the farther doorway, we could see into a fourth, larger room, and thither we made our way.

As we entered, I looked round me with no little surprise. The three small rooms through which we had passed with their glazed wall-cases and rare and curious contents, had the trim, well-kept aspect of an art museum. This fourth room presented a startling contrast. Considerably larger than the others, it had the appearance of a goldsmith's or metal-worker's workshop. In one corner was a large, rectangular chemical sink, and, adjoining it a fixed wash-hand basin. At one

side was a massive crucible-furnace, arranged to burn charcoal and fitted with a foot-bellows. Close by was a massive post, fitted with a flat stake and a jeweller's "sparrowhawk." There were one or two cupboards and enclosed nests of drawers, and a strong bench provided with a serviceable vice. These details my eye took in rapidly, but there was no time for a complete survey, for my attention was instantly riveted on an object on the bench round which our three friends were gathered in a mighty ferment of excitement.

"Here's a discovery, if you like, Doctor!" the Superintendent exclaimed, gleefully. "You remember my telling you about those bogus sovereigns? Well, we've struck the sovereign factory! Just look at this!"

He indicated the object on the bench—which I now recognized as the box that I had seen through the keyhole periscope, resting on the gallery table, and that had been shown in the "Tuesday" photograph.

Polton's diagnosis had been correct. It was a casting box, or "flask,"—an iron frame in two halves, held together in position by pins and eyes at the sides. The upper, or pin, half had now been lifted off, and the mould which filled the interior was displayed. And a very remarkable mould it was, and very illuminating as to the kind of industry that was being carried on in this room. In the smooth, flat surface of the matrix were twenty sunk impressions of sovereigns, each beautifully clear and shiny with graphite. The impressions were connected with one another, and with the "pour" or inlet of the mould, by a deep groove, which was one-half of the channel along which the molten metal was conducted to the impressions.

"Quite a workmanlike outfit," chuckled the delighted Superintendent. "Don't you think so, Mr. Polton?"

Polton crinkled approvingly. "Yes, sir," he replied; "and he knows how to use it. He's no amateur. That is a wonderfully good matrix; hard enough to stand brushing with graphite, and to be used over and over again. I should like to know what it is. There's bone-ash in it, but there's something else on the surface."

"Well," said Miller, "that's more interesting to you than to me. Let us have a look at that other flask."

He indicated a second, similar flask that had been pushed to the back of the bench. Reaching out, he drew it forward and passed it to Polton, who tenderly lifted off the top half and turned it over, laying it beside the lower half and thus exhibiting the two halves of the mould. As he laid it down, he bestowed a crinkly leer on the Superintendent.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" the latter exclaimed. "Half-crowns, too! But I always suspected that the half-crowns and the sovereigns were made by the same man. It was the same idea in both cases. But now we have got to find out where the stuff came from—where he kept his bullion, I mean. We had better go through these cupboards and drawers."

He gave a lead by throwing open a deep cupboard, and, as the door swung out, he uttered the single word, "Moses!" The relevancy of the exclamation was not obvious, but the cause was extremely so. For the deep shelves were occupied by an assemblage of silver articles—candle-sticks, tea-pots, spoons, and the like, mostly a good deal battered, and many of them reduced to small fragments, apparently by means of shears. A second cupboard made a similar sinister display, though the quantity was smaller. But of gold there was no trace.

"He must have kept his gold in the drawers," said Miller. "He couldn't have brought it with him."

"He brought some of it with him, sir," said Polton, who had been pulling out the drawers of a nest and peering in with a school-boy's delight in a treasure-hunt. "Here is a piece of fine gold plate—twenty-four carats—which certainly came from a bullion dealer's."

At this report, Thorndyke, who had hitherto maintained the attitude of a mildly interested observer, suddenly woke up. Taking a pair of pliers from the bench, he went to the drawer which Polton was holding open and carefully lifted out the piece of plate. Having scrutinized it closely on both sides, he held it out for Miller's inspection.

"You had better secure this," said he. "There are some fairly clear finger-prints on it which may be helpful later on, if our friend should fail to keep his appointment to-night."

The Superintendent took the pliers from him, and examined the gold plate, but with less enthusiasm than I should have expected. However, he laid it carefully on a shelf of the cupboard, and then returned to the quest in which he appeared to be specially interested. By this time Polton had made some further discoveries that seemed more relevant, one of which he announced by pulling a drawer out bodily and placing it on the bench.

"Sovereigns, by gosh!" exclaimed Miller, as he looked into the drawer. "Now, I wonder whether these are some of the castings, or the originals that he worked from. What do you think, Doctor?"

Thorndyke picked out one of the coins and examined its edge through his lens, turning it round and inspecting the whole circumference.

"I should say that this is certainly genuine," he reported. "There is no trace of the edge tool. The milling is quite perfect, and it seems to show slight traces of wear. Moreover, the number—there are about two dozen in the drawer—is not more than would be required as models to avoid repetition of a particular coin."

"Yes, I expect you are right," said Miller, "but they will know at the Mint, in any case. Ah!" he exclaimed, as Polton laid another drawer on the bench. "This looks more interesting. No bullion dealer's stuff this time, I fancy."

The drawer contained about a dozen small ingots of gold, each marked by means of a punch with a number—presumably the carats of "fineness." One of these Miller took up and held out for Polton's inspection.

"No, sir," said the latter, "that did not come from a dealer. It was cast in that ingot mould on the shelf, there."

As he spoke, he took the mould down from the shelf and slipped the ingot into it, when it was seen to fit with quite convincing accuracy.

The Superintendent regarded it with profound attention for some moments. Suddenly he turned to Polton and asked impressively:

"I want you to tell me, Mr. Polton, which of these things might have been brought here by an outsider and which must have been put here by Mr. Toke. There is this gold plate. That must have been brought here. But what was it brought for?"

"To melt down with these ingots," replied Polton, "to bring the gold up to 22 carats. The ingots are all 18 carats or less."

"But why couldn't he have used that acid process that you spoke of?"

"Because he would have had to cut up the ingots and hammer the pieces out thin on the stake. But, if he had done that at night, they'd have heard him all over the house. Besides, the fine gold plate would be quicker and less trouble, and it would come to the same thing. He would get his money back. As to what you were asking, I should say that the whole outfit of this place must have been put here by Mr. Toke. The furnace certainly was, and the crucibles and ingot moulds seem to belong to it; in fact, it is a regular metal-worker's shop."

"And what do you make of those ingots?"

Polton crinkled knowingly. "I think, sir," he answered, "they are more in your line than mine. They are not trade ingots, but they are about the fineness of good-class jewellery."

At this point, Thorndyke, who had been listening with rather detached interest to this discussion, sauntered out into the gallery, leaving Polton and Miller to their devices.

"I think," said he, as I followed him out, "we had better get on with our own job. This coining business is no concern of ours."

With this, he went along to the entrance door, on the steps of which he had left his research case, and, picking it up, carried it back to the table and deposited it thereon.

"We may as well begin with the most obvious probabilities," said he, as he opened the case and ran his eye over the contents. "I suppose you noticed this end of the room, as it showed in the photograph?"

I had to admit that I had not taken especial note of it, nor did I now perceive anything particularly striking in its appearance. The end wall was decorated pleasantly enough, by a low elliptical arch of simply moulded oak supported by a pair of oaken pilasters, the surfaces of which were enriched with shallow strap carving in the form of a guilloche with small rosettes in the spaces. There was nothing remarkable about it; and, to tell the truth, I was not quite clear as to what I was expected to see. And Thorndyke's proceedings enlightened me not at all.

"The police methods are good enough for our present purpose," he remarked, as he took out a wide-mouthed bottle and a large camel-hair brush. "The good old Hyd. cum-creta."

Removing the stopper from the bottle, he picked up the latter and the brush, and walked across to the pilaster nearest the window. Dipping the brush into the bottle of powder, he began to paint it lightly over the carved surface. I watched him with slightly bewildered curiosity; and, looking through the door way into the workshop, where I noticed Woodburn listening with an anxious and rather disapproving expression to the comments of our assistant and the Superintendent, I perceived that the two latter had developed a sudden interest in my colleague's activities. Presently Miller came out for a closer inspection.

"I thought you always used a powder-spray," he remarked. "And you needn't worry about finger-prints. Those on the gold plate will tell us all we want to know. And," he added in a lower tone, "let me give you a hint. Your nocturnal stranger is a myth. The name of the chappie who runs the sovereign factory is Toke. Mustn't say so before Woodburn, but it's a fact. It stares you in the face. Mr. Toke is a fence. Dam' clever fence, too. Buys the scrap from the jewel-robbers, sells the stones, and melts down the settings into sovereigns. I take my hat off to him, and I only hope he'll turn up to-night and let me have the pleasure of making his acquaintance."

Thorndyke nodded, but continued to brush the grey powder on to the woodwork in a broad band from near the floor to a little above the eye level. The Superintendent watched him with a slightly anxious expression, and presently resumed: "I don't see why you are so keen on finger-prints, all of a sudden, or why you should expect to find them in this particular and rather unlikely place. At any rate, there don't seem to be any."

"No," said Thorndyke, "we seem to have drawn a blank. Let us try the other side."

He crossed the room and began operations on the second pilaster, watched, not only by Miller, but also by Polton and Woodburn. But this time he did not draw a blank, for, at the first sweep of the brush, the pale-grey of the powder was interrupted by a number of oval shapes, forming an irregular, crowded group close to one side of the pilaster about four feet above the floor. Thorndyke blew away the superfluous powder and examined the group of finger-prints closely. It seemed to be divided into two subgroups, one on the extreme edge of the pilaster and extending round to the side, and the other in the space of one member of the guilloche, around and over the enclosed rosette. After another close inspection, Thorndyke grasped the marked rosette between his fingers and thumb, and tried if it were possible to rotate it. Apparently

it turned quite easily; but, beyond the rotation, no result followed. After a moment's reflection, Thorndyke took a fresh hold, and gave it another turn in the same direction. Suddenly, from within, came a soft click; and then the whole shaft of the pilaster, from the capital to the plinth, swung out a couple of inches like an absurdly tall and narrow door. Thorndyke grasped it by the edge and drew it fully open, when there came into view a small triangular space of floor and a low, narrow opening at the side, with the beginning of a flight of ladder-like steps, the run of which was lost to view in the impenetrable darkness of a passage which seemed to burrow into the substance of the wall.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Miller. "Now, I wonder how you guessed that door was there, Doctor?"

"I only guessed that it might be there," said Thorndyke. "Hence the search for finger-prints. Without them, we might have spent hours trying to find the secret door, and especially the fastening, which was so cleverly concealed. However, we have solved the most difficult part of our problem. The outside opening of this passage is probably as cleverly hidden as the inside one. But it will be hidden from without, whereas we shall approach it from within, where there is probably no concealment."

"I suppose it is worth while to explore that passage," said Miller, looking a little distastefully at the narrow, black chink, "though, really, we want to know who the man is, not how he got in."

"Perhaps," replied Thorndyke, "an exploration of the passage may answer both questions. At any rate, Mr. Woodburn will want to know how the house was entered from the outside."

"Certainly," Woodburn agreed. "That was, in fact, what we came to find out."

As Thorndyke produced from his case a couple of powerful electric inspection lamps, one of which he handed to me, I reflected on his slightly cryptic answer to the Superintendent's question; as also did Miller himself. At least, so I judged from the inquisitive look that he cast at Thorndyke. But he made no remark; and, when he had provided himself with an electric lantern from his bag, he announced that he was ready for the exploration.

Thereupon, Thorndyke turned on his lamp, and, squeezing through the narrow opening, began to descend the steps, followed, at due intervals, by the rest of the expeditionary party.

---

## XVI. — THE VAULT

IN the course of my descent of that interminable stairway, I found myself speculating curiously on the physical characteristics of the dead and gone Greenlees. They must, I decided, have been a thin family; for, surely, no corpulent person, no matter how hard pressed or how deeply embroiled in political machinations, could ever have got down those steps. Vainly did I seek to avoid contact with those slimy, fungus-encrusted walls. They pressed in on me from either side as if I had been sliding down a tube. Not, indeed, that this close contact was without its compensations, for, since there was no hand-rail, and the steps were incredibly steep and narrow, and, like the walls, slippery with slime and fungus, it gave some slight feeling of security.

But it was a hideous experience. Soon the faint glimmer of daylight from the doorway above faded out and gave place to the ghostly light of the electric lamps, which glanced off the shiny, unsavoury walls and ceiling in fitful gleams that dazzled rather than illuminated. Moreover, the air, which at first had seemed only musty and close, grew more and more foul, and pervaded by a strange, cadaverous odour unlike the usual earthiness of underground cellars and passages.

At length, the sudden eclipse of Thorndyke's lamp, followed by that of Miller's, and a faint reflection on the wall, told me that they had turned into some other passage. Then I, bringing up the rear, reached the bottom of that apparently endless flight, and found myself on a small paved space from which opened a low tunnel along which my predecessors were creeping in postures more suited to chimpanzees than to representatives of the law. I lowered my head and shoulders and followed, concentrating my attention on avoiding contact with the unclean ceiling. Presently Miller's voice came rumbling unnaturally along the tube-like passage.

"What does your compass say, Doctor? Which way are we travelling?"

"Due west," was the reply. "Towards the church." I had hardly time to consider the significance of this piece of information when the Superintendent's voice again rang out, this time in a slightly startled tone:

"Why, this is a vault!"

A few moments more, and I was able to confirm the statement. The tunnel ended in a narrow, oblong chamber, barely three feet wide, but more than a dozen feet long, and of a height that, at least, allowed one to stand upright. I availed myself of this advantage, and looked around me with some curiosity and a strong desire to find the way out. For, if the air had been foul on the stairs and in the tunnel, it was here suffocatingly fetid.

The light of the three powerful lamps made it easily possible to see all the details of structure and arrangement. And a strange and gruesome place it looked in that lurid illumination; a long, passage-like chamber, as I have said, paved with stone and enclosed with walls of damp and slimy brick. At the ends, the walls were solid, excepting the arched opening of the tunnel, but the long side walls were each interrupted by a widish arch which opened into a side chamber. Both chambers were fitted with massive stone shelves, something like the bins of a wine-cellar, and on these could be seen the ends of the coffins containing, presumably, mature specimens of the Greenlees vintage. Above, at a height of about ten feet,

the long walls supported what looked like a bottomless brickwork box about eight feet long, the rest of the chamber being roofed in with stone slabs. Under the box, towards one end, a thick iron bar—or what would nowadays be called a girder—crossed the chamber and supported at its middle an upright iron post that seemed to be fixed into the top of the box.

But the feature that interested me most was a flight of steep and narrow, but perfectly practicable, brick steps, which started from the mouth of the tunnel and passed up the left-hand wall above the arch to the base of the box near the end opposite to that which was crossed by the iron bar.

“I don’t quite understand that contraption up there,” said Miller, throwing the light of his lantern on the under-side of the box, “but there’s a flight of steps, so I suppose there’s a way out; and I propose that we try it without delay. The atmosphere of this place is enough to stifle a pole-cat.”

“We mustn’t be precipitate, Miller,” said Thorndyke. “We want to find the way out, but we don’t want to publish it to the world at large. Before we go out, we must send someone up to see that the coast is clear.”

“I suppose we shall be able to get out,” said Woodburn, “though I don’t see very clearly how we are going to do it. But I expect you do, as you nosed out that doorway so readily.”

“I think it is pretty obvious,” replied Thorndyke. “That coffer-like structure up there I take to be the Greenlees tomb in the churchyard. The top slab seems to rotate on that iron pivot and those curved runners that cross on the under-side. But I will run up and make sure of it before we send out our scouts.”

He climbed cautiously up the brick steps, and having reached the top, threw the light of his lamp on the under-side of the slab and examined the simple mechanism.

“Yes,” he reported, “I think it is all plain sailing. The runners are clean and smooth, and both they and the pivot have been kept well oiled. It won’t do to try it, in case there should be anyone in the churchyard. Now, who is going up as scout? I suggest that you go, Woodburn, as you know the tomb; and the Superintendent had better go with you to learn the lie of the land. Take a stick with you, and, if it is all clear, give five distinct taps on the side of the tomb; and be careful not to leave any more tracks than you can help.”

Neither of the scouts showed any reluctance. On the contrary, they both assented with a readiness that I attributed to the influence of the deceased Greenlees. At any rate, they waited for no further instructions, but dived forthwith into the tunnel, whence presently came the echoes of their footsteps as they scrambled up the steps towards the fresh air and the light of day.

As they disappeared, Thorndyke began a systematic exploration of the vault, throwing the light of the lamp into all the darker corners and finally extending his researches into the side chambers.

“Isn’t it rather odd,” said I, “that the air of this place should be so extraordinarily foul? I take it that there have been no recent burials here.”

“If the inscriptions are to be accepted,” he replied, “the last burial took place more than sixty years ago. I agree with you that the physical conditions do not seem to be quite consistent with the inscriptions. Perhaps we may find some explanation.”

He walked slowly round the first chamber that he had entered, throwing the light on the shelves and examining, the latter with minute and suspicious scrutiny, reading each of the coffin-plates, and inspecting each coffin critically as to its condition. Having made his round of the first chamber, he crossed to the second, followed by me and Polton—who had developed a profound and ghoulish interest in the investigation. He had passed along nearly the whole length of the first shelf when I saw him stop and look closely, first at the shelf, then at the ground beneath it, and, finally, at the two adjacent coffins.

“This wants looking into, Jervis,” said he. “These two coffins have been moved quite recently. The thick dust on the shelf has been brushed away—you can see some of it on the floor—but there are clear traces showing that both coffins have been pulled forward. And, if you look closely at the coffins themselves, you will see pretty evident signs of their having been opened at some fairly recent time. This right-hand one has been opened quite roughly, with inadequate tools. The other has been treated more skilfully; but if you look at the screws you can see that they have been withdrawn and replaced quite recently. Parts of the slots have been scraped bright by the screwdriver and the edges of the slots are burred up, particularly on the left side, showing that they were difficult to turn, as you would expect in the case of an old screw that has been in position for years.”

“For what purpose do you suppose the coffins were opened?” I asked.

“Why suppose at all?” he replied, “when the coffins are here, and Polton has a whole burglar’s outfit on his person? Let us get the lids off and see what is inside. I take it that the damaged coffin is the one that was opened first, so we will begin with the other one. Have you a practicable screwdriver about you, Polton?”

The question was hardly necessary, for Polton had already extracted from some secret and illegal pocket a good-sized ratchet screwdriver with a hollow handle containing several spare blades of different sizes. Having taken a glance at the screws, he fitted in a blade of the appropriate size, and then, as we drew out the coffin to the front of the shelf, he fell to work on it.

“The last operator wasn’t much of a hand with the screwdriver,” he grumbled. “He’s scraped away half the slots.”

However, by bearing heavily on the tool, he got the screws started, and, as they came out one by one and were put tidily on a clear space on the shelf, we brought the coffin a stage farther forward to bring the next one within reach. When the last of them had been extracted, the “case-opener” was produced, and its beak inserted under the lid. A slight tweak raised the latter, and it was easily lifted off.

As Polton drew it aside and exposed the interior of the coffin, I uttered a cry of astonishment.

“Why, there are two bodies!” I exclaimed.

“Skeletons, I should call ‘em, sir,” Polton corrected, disparagingly.

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed; “there would hardly have been room for two recent corpses. But they are not so badly preserved, considering that they have been here for close on a century. Now, let us get the other one open, and don’t damage the coffin more than you are obliged to, Polton.”

“Am I right,” I asked, “in supposing that you expected to find two bodies in that coffin?”

“Yes,” he replied. “That was what the circumstances seemed to suggest.”

“And what do you expect to find in the other one?”

“That question, Jervis,” said he, “seems to be answered by the one that we have just opened. Why should a man take a body out of one coffin and cram it into another which is already occupied?”

The answer was certainly pretty obvious. But the discussion came to a premature end: for, in spite of Polton’s care, the damaged lid came loose before all the screws had been extracted. As he lifted it off, I threw the light of my lamp into the cavity; and though it disclosed nothing that I had not expected, I stood for a while, silently gazing into the coffin with horrified fascination.

The bright glare of the lamp fell on the figure of a grey-haired man, fully clothed, even to a crumpled soft felt hat. His age, so far as it was possible to judge, appeared to be from fifty to sixty, and his neat worsted clothes and the quality of his linen suggested a man of some means, reasonably careful of his appearance. As to how he had died there was nothing to show, save for the sinister suggestion of a smear of blood on one sleeve. I was just turning to Thorndyke to ask a question when the deathly silence was broken by five sharp taps from above, which reverberated through the vault with quite startling distinctness.

“There is Woodburn,” said Thorndyke. “Lay the covers on the coffins.”

With this he picked up his lamp and went out into the main vault. Following him, I saw him pick his way carefully up the steep and narrow steps until he reached the little platform at the top. There he paused, and threw his light on the underside of the covering slab. Then, grasping what appeared to be some sort of handle, he gave a pull, first downward and then sideways. Immediately the heavy slab turned on its pivot and runners with a dull grinding sound and a stream of brilliant daylight poured down into the gruesome interior. A moment or two later it was partially obscured as Miller and Woodburn leaned over the edge and peered down curiously into the vault.

“Is it necessary for us to come down again?” Miller enquired. “The air is a good deal fresher up here.”

“I shall want Mr. Woodburn to come down,” said Thorndyke. “We have been making some investigations, and I should like to have his opinion on something that we have discovered. Probably you will be interested too.”

He was—very decidedly. At the mention of a discovery, his long legs swung, one after the other, over the edge of the sarcophagus, and he followed Thorndyke down the steps as rapidly as was consistent with the necessary caution. Close behind him came Woodburn, all agog with curiosity.

“It isn’t so bad here,” he remarked, “now that we have got that cover open. We had better keep it open, and let a little air in.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “Polton had better go up and keep a look-out. We don’t want any other observers. You saw how the slab was moved, Polton. If anyone comes in sight, shut it at once.”

I could see that this duty was not at all acceptable to our ingenious coadjutor, who evidently foresaw dramatic developments in the immediate future. Nevertheless, he climbed the steps and thrust his head out of the opening. But I noticed that one eye and both ears were kept focused on the happenings down below.

“Now, Doctor,” said Miller, “what is this discovery that you have made?”

“I will show you,” said Thorndyke, leading the way into the side chamber. “But I may explain that we found that two of the coffins had been moved, and moved quite recently. But they had not only been moved: they had been opened and resealed. On observing that, we thought it desirable to open them and ascertain why they had been opened. We did so, with this result: we found in one coffin two bodies—two quite ancient bodies; mere skeletons, in fact.”

“Then,” said Woodburn, “you may take it that they are strangers to me, and they are not any concern of mine. So we will take them as read.”

“Very well,” said Thorndyke. “I will not trouble you with that coffin. But I must ask you to look at the other. This is the one.”

He drew the coffin a little farther to the front of the shelf and lifted off the lid, throwing the light of his lamp into the cavity. Mr. Woodburn approached with very evident reluctance, holding his handkerchief to his face, and cast a glance of mingled disgust and apprehension towards the coffin. Suddenly he stopped and then started forward with a half-articulate cry. For a moment he stood staring with incredulous horror. Then, in a voice tremulous with emotion, he exclaimed:

"Great God! It's Mr. Toke!"

For some moments there was a dead silence. Then Thorndyke replaced the coffin lid, and we went back to the main vault. And still, for a while, no one spoke. On Woodburn this revelation had fallen like a thunderbolt, while Miller, whose theory of the criminal doings at the Manor House was suddenly shattered, was wrapped in the most profound cogitation. At length the latter broke the silence.

"How long do you think Mr. Toke has been in that coffin, Doctor?" he asked.

"I should say," replied Thorndyke, "that he has been there ever since the day on which he was supposed to have gone abroad."

"Yes," said Woodburn, "I think you are right. I have had all along a lurking suspicion that he never really went abroad; that something happened to him on that last day. I didn't at all like the garage man's story of that ginger-haired fellow with the red nose."

"Eh!" exclaimed Miller, all agog in a moment. "What story was that?"

Woodburn gave him a brief summary of the incident of the returned car and the "Ginger Lushington," to which he listened with profound attention, and on which he cogitated for a while when Woodburn had finished. Suddenly he turned to Thorndyke, and regarded him eagerly and almost fiercely.

"Now, look here, Doctor," said he, "you have got to tell us what all this means. It is no use for you to try to put us off. You hold all the clues and you know all about it. You have followed this case as if you were running along rails. You knew that someone had been here. I believe you knew about those sovereigns, and you went for that secret door as if you knew exactly where to look for it. And then you came down into this vault and you went straight for that coffin. I have no doubt that you knew Mr. Toke was there. Now, Doctor, I ask you to tell me who killed Mr. Toke, and who was that red-nosed man."

"You are asking me," replied Thorndyke, "to make a statement, whereas I can only offer an opinion. But you can have that opinion for what it is worth; and I may say that I think it is worth a good deal, as it is based on a mass of evidence. I should say that the red-nosed man at the garage and the murderer of Mr. Toke are one and the same person; and that person is named Walter Hornby."

"What!" exclaimed Miller. "The villain who murdered Badger!"

"That is what I believe," said Thorndyke. "But I hope that we shall have the opportunity to settle the question. At any rate, we may fairly take it that the person who has been frequenting these premises is the person who murdered Mr. Toke."

"And you expect that person to come here to-night?"

"It is only a probability," replied Thorndyke. "You know our reasons for expecting him. It may be to-night, or he may choose some other night. But there is very little doubt that he will come sooner or later to finish up the gold that is left, and take away those sovereigns. But it is quite possible that the next visit will be meant to be the last."

"It will be the last," Miller remarked, grimly. "If I stay here till Doomsday, I am going to have him."

There was a brief pause. Then Woodburn asked:

"Where and how do you suppose the murder was committed?"

"I should say," answered Thorndyke, "that the deed was done at the top of those steps. There is what looks very much like a blood-stain on the brick there. As to the circumstances, I should say that they were roughly these: I take it that Mr. Toke, when he took the car out of the garage, had for some reason to come down here, unexpectedly, to fetch something from, or deposit something in, the gallery; and he had reasons for not wishing to enter the house and break the seals. I think that the murderer must have come to know of this intended visit, and have come on in advance and waited for him in hiding somewhere; that he saw Toke arrive, followed him into the churchyard, and saw him enter the tomb by the secret opening. I suspect that he waited for him to come out, and then murdered him as he was emerging from the tomb. Then he explored the vault, hurriedly broke open a coffin, and, having disposed of the body, made an inspection of the premises, the valuable contents of which may have been known to him. At any rate, he would have found the gold, and known then that it would be worth while to come back to take it away. I should think that the sovereigns were probably an afterthought, suggested by the quantity of gold bullion, which would have been rather unsafe to dispose of in the regular way. Moreover, if I am right as to the identity of the man, we must remember that he was an assayer by profession, and would have an expert knowledge of the methods of dealing with gold. But, as to that, we shall know more when we have seen him. And now we may as well relieve Polton and get back to the house. I don't think we have left any traces of our visit down here, and we must be careful to leave none in the churchyard as we go out."

"No," Miller agreed fervently, "for the Lord's sake don't let us spoil our chances by giving him any sort of warning. At present, we seem to have him in the hollow of our hand. It would take ten years off my life if we should let him slip."



"I don't think you need have any misgivings, Miller," said Thorndyke. "He is bound to come back; and we are agreed that we are willing to wait for him to come in his own time. We can only hope that he will not keep us waiting too long."

---

## XVII. — THE VIGIL

WE made our way out of the vault, one by one, creeping cautiously up the narrow brick steps, and climbing over the side of the tomb into the green and sunny churchyard. Woodburn was the first to emerge, and, as he stepped down on to the grass, he drew a deep breath.

"Lord," he exclaimed, "it is good to be back in the world of living men and to breathe the fresh air. That was a horrible experience!"

I sympathized with him, though, naturally, my professional training had made me less sensitive to merely physical unpleasantness. For I realized that, whatever misgivings he might have had respecting his client, it must have been a shocking experience to be brought suddenly, without warning, face to face with his murdered corpse. Even Miller was not unaffected by the tragedy that had been so abruptly sprung upon him.

Thorndyke was the last to come up, having lingered to take a final look round and make sure that no tell tale evidence of our visit had been left to arouse the suspicions of the hoped-for visitor. As soon as he had stepped out, he seized the displaced slab, and, with a vigorous pull, swung it round into its normal position.

"We may as well make sure, before we go," said he, "that we all understand how this arrangement works from the outside. It seems to be quite a simple device. The slab rocks slightly on its pivot. To release the inside catch, the higher end of the slab has to be pressed down. This raises the other end and so frees the catch. You see that, at present, the slab is quite immovable; but when I throw my weight on this end, I am able to swing it round without difficulty."

As he spoke, he demonstrated the mechanism; and when Miller had satisfied himself by actual trial that he had fully grasped the method, we took our way out of the churchyard and walked across to the house. There we were admitted by Mrs. Gibbins in person, who informed us that two officers had arrived, and, further, that lunch would be served in five minutes, and, furthermore, that separate arrangements had been made for Mr. Polton and the two officers.

At the latter announcement Miller smiled grimly. "Artful old puss," was his comment, when she had gone. "Made her arrangements to have Mr. Polton all to herself, and get the latest news. But it doesn't matter. She's an interested party, and it will save me the trouble of giving my men the particulars."

Nevertheless, he introduced us to the two officers, and gave them a few instructions, and then we retired to remove, as far as was possible, the traces of our subterranean activities, before sitting down to lunch.

It was a very leisurely meal; almost intentionally so; for there was little more to do in the way of preparation, and a long interval before the next phase of our adventure could be expected to begin. But there was plenty of material for discussion, especially as Woodburn had to be put in possession of the numerous and complicated antecedents of the case. Then the details of the procedure to be adopted in the actual capture had to be considered, and the course that would have to be taken in the event of the quarry failing to appear. As to the former, Miller showed a disposition to simplify the proceedings by making the arrest in the churchyard.

"You see," he explained, "there's a good deal to be said for catching your hare while you have the chance. If we collar him as soon as he has gone up to the tomb, we shall make sure of him; whereas, if we let him go down, he may disappear into some underground passage that we know nothing about."

But Thorndyke shook his head very decidedly. "No, Miller," said he. "That won't do. It is a bad plan in two ways. In the first place, the churchyard is not secure enough. He would have quite a fair chance of escape in that open space, with its various obstructions to dodge among, and possibly a car waiting close by. In the second place, he ought to be arrested, for evidential reasons, in the gallery. Remember that we have got to identify him with the coiner who has used Mr. Toke's gold, and we are going to charge him with the murder of Mr. Toke. Now, if you arrest him in the churchyard, you have got those charges to prove. You will infer, reasonably enough, that he has come into the churchyard for the purpose of entering the house by way of the secret passage. But in a criminal trial, on a capital charge, evidence is sifted very finely. The defence would deny the intention, and you would have to prove it. But if he is taken actually in the gallery, that fact is evidence in itself of his connection with the coining, and, by fair inference, with the murder of Mr. Toke."

Miller admitted the force of this contention. "But, still," he urged, "we are not dealing with an unknown man. You say you can prove his identity, which connects him with a previous crime, and you have got substantial evidence in regard to the murder of poor Badger."

Thorndyke, however, was firm. "It won't do, Miller," said he. "We shall want every particle of evidence that we can get. At present, all that we have is circumstantial. But, with all respect to the dictum of a certain learned judge, circumstantial evidence is much less satisfactory to a jury than that which is more or less direct."

"Very well," said Miller; "you know more about court work than I do. But what do you suggest—I mean, about planting my men?"

"The best plan, I think," replied Thorndyke, "would be to instruct them to hide behind the yew tree—it must be pitch-

dark there at night—and to wait for the man to arrive. They should let him go down into the tomb, and, as soon as he has disappeared, they should take up their stations at the side of the tomb nearest the steps. There they would have absolute control of him if he should come up again, as he would be standing on the steps.”

“You speak of ‘him,’” Miller remarked. “Supposing there should be a gang?”

“That is very unlikely,” replied Thorndyke, “but, even so, there are four of us, without counting Polton. I think we can take our chance. Are you and your men armed?”

“No,” replied Miller; “we don’t much favour firearms in the force. We’ve brought two or three sets of handcuffs, and, for the rest, we’ve got a pretty serviceable outfit of fists.”

“Well, I took the precaution to bring four automatics,” said Thorndyke. “You had better have one. A man who has two murders to his account is not likely to boggle at one or two more.”

Eventually, the Superintendent accepted Thorndyke’s suggestions, and, when we had finished lunch, the final preparations were made. Thorndyke showed the two officers the secret door, and demonstrated the working of the catch from outside and from within, and then conducted them down the stair-way and through the vault to the opening, at which Polton had been sent to keep a look-out. When they had mastered the working of the movable slab, they were shown the spot behind the yew tree where they were to keep watch later on. Then the whole party returned to the house by way of the vault—to avoid exhibiting themselves to any chance observers in the village.

When the officers had been dismissed to repose and smoke their pipes in Mr. Toke’s study, Thorndyke produced a six-inch ordnance map of the district, and invited the attention of Woodburn and the Superintendent to a narrow lane that appeared to run close beside the churchyard, and, presently to open into a by-road at no great distance.

“It seems probable,” said he, “that our friend, or friends, make the journey here by car, unless they should be local persons; which is most unlikely. And if they do, this lane would be an ideal approach, as it would avoid the village street, and be a most convenient place in which to leave the car—quite close to the churchyard and well out of sight. It might be worth while to go and inspect that lane.”

“I don’t think that is necessary,” said Woodburn, “because the same idea had occurred to me, and I took the opportunity to walk along it this morning. And I have no doubt that you are right. At any rate, someone has been bringing a car up that lane, for there were clear traces of one—a smallish car it seemed to be—especially at a place near the middle, where it is wide enough to turn round. I could see quite plainly the marks on the grass verge where he had backed in to turn. It appeared that he entered the lane from the by-road and stopped short a couple of hundred yards from the village street. So he must have gone back on the reverse until he came to the wide part, and then have turned round and gone out by the by-road.”

“Were these the marks of a single journey,” asked Miller, “or were there more than one set?”

“At the wide part,” answered Woodburn, “on the soft grass verge, there were a number of tracks on top of one another. I couldn’t say how many.”

“Then,” said Miller, “we needn’t trouble to inspect it; which is as well. The less we show ourselves in this neighbourhood the better. I’ll tell my men to keep their ears pricked up for the sound of a motor, though if it is occupied by the parties that we are expecting, it isn’t likely to be a very noisy one.”

“No,” Thorndyke agreed; “but in the silence of the country at night it will certainly be audible, especially if the driver should take the precaution—as he probably would—to turn round as soon as he arrived, so as to be ready to drive straight off in the event of an alarm. So we will hope that he comes in style in his car. It would give a very useful warning to your watchers.”

“Yes,” said Miller, “and it would be rather useful if they could pass the warning on to us in some way. What do you think, Doctor?”

“Of course,” replied Thorndyke, “it would be a great help to us. But I think we shall have to do without it. Any kind of signalling would be extremely unsafe. It might easily give a warning in the wrong quarter.”

Miller acknowledged the truth of this, and the subject dropped. And then began a somewhat tedious period of waiting; for there were yet several hours of daylight to dispose of before our actual vigil would begin. The Superintendent, being an old hand at this sort of business, retired to the study to smoke and “take forty winks”; while Thorndyke, Woodburn, and I whiled away the afternoon by making a complete tour of Mr. Toke’s collection.

A very remarkable collection it was. The gallery was filled mainly with Bow, Chelsea, and other porcelain figures, while the three smaller rooms were occupied by bronze busts and statuettes and a small collection of choice pottery and enamels. The entire contents of the rooms must have been of very great value, for all the pieces seemed to have been selected with the most fastidious taste and obviously expert judgment, without regard to cost. As we walked round and admired them one after another, they suggested two rather curious questions.

First, was it credible that the man who had acquired and treasured all these things of beauty, with such obvious enthusiasm and love for them, could be a mere fence—a receiver of stolen property? Those ingots in the workshop had certainly looked suspicious. Yet how could one believe it? The man who had cherished all these beautiful things so lovingly was no common money-grabber. Every one of them seemed to cry out in vindication of Mr. Toke.

The second question was, How came it that Hornby—if he was indeed the mysterious visitor—should have left this treasure-house intact? Many of the pieces were quite portable, especially to a man with a car. And, as Miller had pointed out, they could have been disposed of quite safely, so long as they had not been missed. The first question could not be discussed in Woodburn's presence, but the second I ventured to put to Thorndyke.

"I think the explanation is fairly simple," he replied. "There appears to have been here an accumulation of gold bullion. How much we cannot guess, nor how it came to be accumulated. But here it was, and its presence was probably known to, or suspected by, the murderer, though it may have been discovered after the murder. My impression—though it is nothing more—is that the murder was not committed ad hoc—as a means to the carrying out of the robbery, but for some reason that is not known to us, and that the gold robbery was, as it were, a by-product.

"Now, the existence of this gold bullion was, almost certainly, known to no one but Mr. Toke. It follows that if the murderer could have simply taken away the gold and then disappeared, he would have left no trace whatever of his having ever been here. The corpse, you remember, is in a coffin in the vault, to which the only access is by secret openings whose existence was unknown to anybody but Mr. Toke. You see the masterly simplicity of the plan. When Mr. Toke failed to return or give any sign of being alive, and leave had been granted by the court to presume death, these rooms would have been opened and everything found apparently intact. There would have been nothing whatever to suggest any crime. It might have been suspected that Mr. Toke had met with foul play. But not here. The scene of his disappearance would have been placed in some unknown locality abroad.

"But now suppose that this man, in addition to taking away the gold, had rifled the collection. Then, as soon as the rooms were entered, it would have been seen that there had been a robbery. But a robbery in conjunction with a disappearance at once suggests a murder. There would have been a search, with the possible, and even probable, discovery of the body. Obviously, it was worth the murderer's while to abstain from tampering with the collection."

The afternoon wore on and merged into evening. The daylight faded, and, as the twilight deepened and the night closed in on the old house, we felt that the time had come to set the watch. For this was a quiet country neighbourhood where people went to rest early and measured time by the sun rather than by the clock. Accordingly, we went forth in search of the Superintendent and found him in the act of mustering his forces, preparatory to placing them at their posts in the churchyard.

"It seems a bit early," said he. "But it won't do to be caught napping. Our friends may turn up earlier than we expect. I'll just go out and see my men posted, and then we will make our arrangements."

With this he departed and we proceeded with the preliminaries that concerned us. First Woodburn instructed Mrs. Gibbins to have all lights out at the usual time—which appeared to be ten o'clock—and advised that the inmates should go to bed when they put out the lights (which I suspected to be a counsel of perfection that was not likely to be followed). Then we made out our programme for the night watch in the gallery. Woodburn not only volunteered, but insisted on joining the party; and Polton, when he was offered the use of a spare bedroom, became, for the first time on record, positively mutinous, absolutely refusing to be driven away from the scene of action. So he had to be put on the roster of the "garrison," and proceeded with us to the gallery to take up our final positions, where we were presently joined by the Superintendent.

"Well," the latter remarked, surveying our party with a grin, "if there is only one man, we ought to be able to manage him. Seven of us, all told. Seems as if we weren't taking many risks. Of course, if there should be more than one, we shan't be too many. And now we've got to settle on our stations, because, when once we have taken them, we must keep them. There must be no moving about. Now, we can't lock that door, as there is no keyhole on the inside, so one or two of us had better take post in the first room—the one that is next to the door. The question is, which of us?"

"I think you had better take that post, Miller," said Thorndyke, "as that is where he, or they, will probably have to be stopped. They will know that the door is unlocked as soon as they discover that someone is in the room, and, as the secret door will be blocked, they will naturally make a burst for the main door."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "I think you are right, Doctor. Then I propose that Mr. Woodburn and I take the end room, and the rest of you take post in the workshop, where you will be close to the secret door."

These arrangements having been agreed to, Thorndyke made a final round to make sure that nothing was visible that might create premature suspicion. First, he inspected the secret door, and set the catch exactly as he had found it, wiping away the last traces of the dusting powder by the light of his lamp (for we had put on no lights in the gallery). Then he went to the main door, and, taking the dangling remains of the seal, heated the wax with a lighted match (which he carefully shrouded with his hand), and stuck it in its original place so that, to a casual glance, it appeared to be unbroken.

"Now, I think we are all ready," said he, "and it is about time that we took our places."

The existing arrangements did not make for luxury, or even common comfort. The Superintendent and Woodburn found in their room one chair, and collected another from the adjoining room. But in the workshop there was but one hideously incommensurable stool, which we all rejected, preferring to seat ourselves on the bench, when we had removed the flasks and other obstructions. It was far from being a comfortable seat, and the shelves behind it offered but an uneasy support to the back. However, Thorndyke reminded us that many a journeyman tailor spent the greater part of his life seated on just such a bench, and added with undoubted truth that it had the virtue of offering a steady resistance to any tendency to drowsiness.

I look back on that long vigil as one of the strangest experiences of my life. It was like that of a big-game hunter, offering a curious combination of tedium and excitement, of wearisome monotony with the need for incessant alertness and the uncertainty as to what the next moment might bring forth, or whether it might bring forth anything. We took our places, very prematurely, at half-past nine; and thereafter we sat in the dark, conversing little, and then in the softest of whispers, and hardly daring to change our positions. It would have been a relief to smoke, but this was, of course, forbidden, though at intervals, a faint sniff, accompanied by the suspicion of a distinctive scent, informed me that Polton was indulging in the mild dissipation of a pinch of snuff. Once, indeed, the cold touch of a metal snuff-box on my hand was accompanied by a whispered invitation to test the virtues of Brown Rappee; an invitation which I half-reluctantly declined.

The tardy minutes crawled on with incredible slowness. Sitting there in the darkness, encompassed, as it seemed, by the silence of the tomb, I was able to mark their passage by the chimes of a clock, somewhere in the village, which were borne faintly to my ear across the quiet countryside. The clock struck the quarters; but each quarter seemed to have the duration of an hour. I fingered the automatic pistol in my pocket and wondered what degree of urgency would induce me to use it. Like Thorndyke, I had a profound dislike of firearms; and none of our party had seemed to show much enthusiasm when he handed them out. Miller had the typical police officer's contempt for a mere assassin's weapon, and had offered his to Polton. But Polton assured him that he had never fired a pistol in his life and should probably hit the wrong man; upon which Miller hastily took it back.

The distant clock had struck half-past ten when the dreariness of our vigil was to some extent mitigated by the appearance of the moon. It first came into view through the curtained window of the gallery which was just visible through the half-open door of the workshop, as a misshapen, coppery disc (for it was a few days past the full), just peeping above the window-sill. Then, by slow degrees, it crept up higher and higher; and, as its dull copper brightened into a warm, ruddy glow and then to a clear, cold, silvery sheen, the shape of the lofty window became traced on the floor in an elongated, luminous patch, on which the pattern of the lace curtains stood out clearly in forms of delicate shadow.

That shape of patterned moonlight came as a welcome distraction which helped to fill the long intervals between the chimes of the distant clock. Like some solitary prisoner in his cell, I followed its infinitely slow progress across the floor, idly calculating the time that it would take to reach the foot of the pilaster in which was the secret door. At present, the pilaster was enveloped in dense, black shadow, and a wide space of floor separated it from the patch of moonlight. I tried to think of that space in terms of angular distance and time, but failed to reach any intelligible result. Then I fell to thinking about the man for whom we were waiting. Was he now on the road, drawing gradually nearer to his doom—or, perchance, ours? If so, how far away was he now? Was he travelling alone or had he companions with whom we should have to reckon? Or was he, even now, comfortably tucked up in bed in some far-away hiding-place with no intention of sallying forth this night? Or was he lurking in the village, fully warned by the sight of us to keep out of the way? To leave us to our profitless vigil until the coming of daylight should send us away, drowsy and defeated?

The silence of the old house was like the silence of some cavern in the heart of a mountain. Save for the infrequent chime of the far-away clock, there was not a sound. Not a window rattled—for it was a still night—not a joist creaked, no mouse “shrieked in the wainscot” or scuttled through its burrow. None of the ordinary night sounds of an old house were audible. It was as still as the inside of a pyramid.

A few minutes had passed since the hardly audible chime of the distant clock had told out the half-hour after eleven when that deathly silence was, for the first time, disturbed by a sound that seemed to come from within the house. And, even then, it was so faint and indefinite that I doubted whether I had, in fact, heard anything. I listened intently. Then, after the lapse of nearly a minute, it was repeated. It conveyed nothing to me. It was just a sound—infinately faint and remote, and so devoid of any recognizable character that I was still doubtful. But at this moment Thorndyke silently slid off the bench and was followed—less silently—by Polton. I, too, slipped my legs over the edge and, as I stood upright beside Thorndyke, I asked in a whisper:

“Did you think you heard anything?”

“Yes,” he replied. “It was the slab turning on its pivot. Listen!”

I strained my ears, but for a few moments I could hear no further sound. Then I became aware of a faint but distinctly audible murmur or rustle as if a number of separate sounds were being confused by echoes. Suddenly it became much more distinct and changed in character; for now I could clearly distinguish footsteps—soft, stealthy footsteps, mingled with their reverberations, but unmistakable.

Nearer and nearer they came, still secret and stealthy, but now recognizable as the tread of feet on the long stairway. Once, the feet slipped or stumbled, and the sound of some hard object striking the steps, followed by a muttered curse, told me that the man was nearer than I had thought. Suddenly on the side of the pilaster, there appeared a bright thread—the light of a lamp from the stairway shining through the crack of the secret door.

With a throbbing heart I watched that thread of light, drawn on the black shadow of the pilaster, as it waxed in brightness from moment to moment. At last plain sounds from within the woodwork told us that our visitor had come. There was a soft scraping like the sound of a groping hand; two successive creaks followed by a sharp click. Then the secret door swung open, and a man stepped out into the room.

At first, he was no more than a dim, dark shape, as he stood in the shadow; but when he moved, I could see that he was hatless, and that he carried a good-sized hand-bag in one hand and in the other what looked like a large electric lamp, the

light of which was switched off. From the door he went across to the table and laid his bag on it. Then he walked softly up the room until he came to the door, where he switched on his lamp and threw its light on the seals. Apparently their appearance satisfied him, for he turned away after a brief glance; but then, as if by an after-thought, he turned back and threw the light on again. Evidently he had detected something amiss, for, after a few moments' inspection, he mounted the steps to examine the seals more closely. As he did so, Thorndyke glided like a shadow from the workshop door to the pilaster, where he halted just in front of the secret opening. Almost at the same moment looking out from the workshop, I saw another shadow glide out of the door of the farther room without a sound and slip round behind the stranger as he ascended the steps.

At this point, I crept silently out into the gallery, for the reflection from the moonlit floor enabled me to recognize this second shadow as the Superintendent, and I knew that the critical moment had come. It had seemed to me that Miller had moved quite noiselessly, but apparently I was wrong; for, at the very moment when his arm stretched out to seize his prey, the stranger turned sharply, and, as the light of his lamp fell on the Superintendent, he uttered a sort of snarl, struck out viciously, and wrenched himself away, springing from the steps and racing down the room, closely pursued by Miller and Woodburn.

As to what followed my recollections are somewhat confused. It all happened so quickly and the light was so imperfect that nothing but a general impression remains. I saw the fugitive adroitly catch up a chair and whirl it back at his pursuers, with the result that Miller staggered heavily sideways, and Woodburn, whose legs it struck, fell sprawling on the floor. The next moment, as the man swerved to pass the workshop door, the light of his lamp fell on Thorndyke. I think that in that instant he must have recognized him, for he uttered a savage cry, checked for a moment, and then threw out his arm. Instantly I realized, though I could not see it, that the hand of that extended arm held a pistol, and I started forward. But at that instant something hurtled past me and struck the stranger in the face with such force that he staggered backward. The report of the pistol rang out sharply, and the missile, whatever it was, clattered heavily on the floor.

It had been a near thing; and, indeed it was not yet over, though Miller had now rushed forward and grasped the pistol arm while I sprang at the other. But our prisoner fought and struggled like a maniac, yet with a settled purpose, for the flash and report of the pistol were repeated again and again, not at random, but always when the weapon could be brought to bear in Thorndyke's direction. Now, however, my colleague, having closed and fastened the secret door, came forward to take a hand with the light of his lamp turned full on the struggling, swaying group, which had now been joined by Woodburn.

Suddenly I heard Thorndyke call out sharply:

"Keep out of the way, Polton!" At the same moment I caught sight of our artificer, skirmishing round at Miller's side, with his eyes riveted on the pistol. Almost as Thorndyke spoke, a pair of large crucible-tongs came into view, reaching out towards the hand which held the weapon. There was a quick but unhurried movement, and the tongs took firm hold of the pistol by its flat stock. Then the long handles were quietly raised and twisted the weapon irresistibly out of the prisoner's grasp.

The removal of the pistol brought the struggle virtually to an end. I did, indeed, feel the hand which I controlled thrusting towards the waist-belt. But I had already detected the presence there of a sheath-knife of formidable size, and I easily circumvented the movement. And, when Thorndyke seized both the prisoner's wrists and held them together, Miller was able to snap on the handcuffs. Even then, our prisoner continued to struggle violently; and it was not until Thorndyke had encircled his legs and pinioned his arms with a couple of document straps (which he had, apparently, put in his pocket for that purpose) that his resistance ceased. Then we sat him in a chair, and, while we recovered our breath, considered the next move.

"I think," said Miller, "I will just run across to the churchyard and relieve my men. They may be able to produce some sort of transport. If not, I shall have to borrow Mr. Woodburn's car. I leave the prisoner in your custody, Doctor."

As soon as he had gone, Woodburn proceeded to light the two hanging lamps which swung by long chains from beams in the gallery ceiling—for there was neither gas nor electric light in the house—when we were able to survey one another and examine our prisoner. Woodburn was the only one of us who had suffered visibly from the encounter, having an undeniable black eye. But the prisoner was a sorry spectacle, and, villain as he was, I could not but feel some twinges of compunction as I looked at him. His face was badly bruised and bleeding; at which I was not surprised, when I picked up the missile that had struck him and recognized it as Polton's "case-opener." But what most contributed to his forlorn and wretched aspect was his bald head, from which the wig had been dislodged during the fray. It was not a common, natural, and decent bald head, which would have been normal enough, but the baldness was in large patches with separating areas of stubble; the condition, in fact, known to our profession as Alopecia areata.

I picked up the wig and carefully replaced it on his head, disregarding his profane and furious protests. Then I went with Thorndyke to the workshop, where the research case had been deposited, to fetch the little first-aid case that was part of its permanent equipment, and, as I was thus engaged, Thorndyke proceeded to moralize.

"That Alopecia is interesting," he remarked. "I mean, as an illustration of the incalculability of human affairs. If he had not been compelled to wear a wig, he would probably never have thought of personating Dobey. Probably, too, he would not have murdered Badger—at any rate not in that way; and he might not have murdered Toke. Evidently, the course of his criminal career has been largely influenced by his Alopecia. He had to wear a wig, but he could wear any kind of wig that he pleased and change it at any time for any other kind that circumstances seemed to require."

"Yes," I agreed; "a disguise which has to be habitually worn naturally suggests additions and variations."

I took the little emergency case and a basin of water, and we went back to the prisoner. As I was mixing some lotion while Thorndyke prepared a dressing, the patient watched him with a glare of the most concentrated malice.

"Don't you touch me, you devil!" he exclaimed, huskily, "or I'll bite you. I ought to have settled with you years ago."

In different circumstances it might have been permissible to remind him that he had made three pretty determined attempts. Nevertheless, as a matter of policy, he was certainly right. But for Thorndyke, he would have been, at this moment, at large and unsuspected.

I had hardly finished attending to his damaged face when Miller returned.

"We shall be able to manage quite well," he announced. "My men discovered a car in that lane—heard it arrive, in fact. So I shan't want Mr. Woodburn's. We can take him to London in his own car."

Here the two officers entered, and, advancing up the gallery, took a long and curious look at the prisoner. Then Miller proceeded to make the formal charge.

"I arrest you, Walter Hornby, for the murder of Mr. Didbury Toke; and I caution you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be used against you—"

"Oh, go to blazes!" interrupted Hornby. "Do you think I am a cackling old woman? I am not going to say anything."

Nevertheless, in spite of his bravado, I had the impression that the nature of the charge came as an appalling shock. I think he had expected to be charged only with breaking and entering, for after this outburst he settled down into sullen silence and submitted passively to being carried away by the two officers. Only once, as he was borne out, he turned his head to bestow on Thorndyke a look of the most concentrated malignancy.

When the grim procession, accompanied by the Superintendent, had passed out and the footsteps had died away, Thorndyke turned to his faithful henchman and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"It was fortunate for me, Polton," said he, "that you would not go to bed. But for that remarkable shot of yours, I think Hornby would have settled his account with me, after all."

Polton crinkled apologetically and gave a little embarrassed cough as he replied:

"Yes, sir, I thought I might be useful. You see, sir, when I was younger, I used to take a good deal of practice at the coco-nuts on Hampstead Heath. I got to be quite a dab at 'em; and the Aunt Sallies, too."

At this moment, the gallery door opened, and Mrs. Gibbins entered spectrally, bearing a lighted candle in a bedroom candlestick.

"I've come to tell you, sir," she said, addressing Woodburn, "that I have laid supper in the dining-room. Mr. Miller is coming back to join you when he has seen the other officers off in the car."

It was an undeniably welcome announcement; and, when Woodburn had extinguished the lamps, we switched on our electric lanterns and followed the housekeeper along the winding corridor.

---

## XVIII. — POSTSCRIPT

WITH the arrest of Walter Hornby, this history—which is that of an investigation—naturally comes to an end. In the course of the events that followed, nothing transpired that could be regarded as a new discovery. Certain details were filled in, and certain conclusions which had been arrived at by inference were confirmed by actual demonstration. Thus, at the inquest, it was proved that Mr. Toke had died from a deep knife wound, and the evidence left no doubt that it had been inflicted, as Thorndyke had suggested, just as he was in the act of emerging from the tomb. The wound corresponded exactly with the knife which was on Hornby's person when he was arrested. And, though that knife had been carefully washed, when Polton, under Thorndyke's supervision, unriveted and removed the wooden handle, considerable traces of blood were discovered; sufficient, in fact, to admit of a biochemical test which showed it to be human blood.

At the trial, there was practically no defence, nor was there any appeal from the conviction and sentence. The prisoner was indicted for the murder of Mr. Toke, the other crime being held back for a further indictment in the unlikely event of an acquittal. But of an acquittal there was never the remotest chance. For, in addition to the profoundly incriminating fact that Hornby had been captured in actual occupation of the murdered man's premises and in command of the secret passages in which the body was concealed, there was the utterly damning fact that Mr. Toke's signet ring was found in his pocket when he was searched after his arrest.

It was unavoidable that the trial and its dreadful sequel should be a cause of pain to many estimable people, including his cousin Reuben—against whom he had hatched such a dastardly plot in the years gone by. To my wife, who had been almost in the position of a relative, the whole sordidly tragic affair was so harrowing that we tacitly agreed not to speak of it. Even I, who had known the man in the days of his prosperity and respectability, could hardly bring myself to contemplate his present terrible plight; and I was almost disposed to resent Thorndyke's calm, impersonal interest in the trial and his satisfaction at the conviction and the sentence. For a man so kindly by nature, this callousness—as it appeared to me—seemed surprising and hardly natural. I think I must have given expression to some such sentiments on the day, I

remember, when the execution had just taken place, and he was calmly collecting the notes and memoranda of the case to put away in the files where the records were kept. His reply was characteristic and, looking back, I am not much disposed to cavil at it.

“I understand, Jervis,” said he, “your personal discomfort in contemplating this tragedy; the shipwreck of a life that started with so much promise and had such potentialities of usefulness and success. But it is a mistake to grow sentimental over the Nemesis that awaits the criminal. The most far-reaching mercy that can be exercised in social life is to safeguard the liberties of those who respect the liberties of others. Believe me, Jervis, the great purveyor of human happiness is not philanthropy, which seeks to soften the lot of the unworthy, but justice, which secures to the worthy the power to achieve their own happiness, by protecting them from the wrong-doer and the social parasite.”

---

THE END

## THE INTERVENTION

### I. — OF A STRANGE TREASURE TROVE AND A DOUBLE LIFE

THE attendant at the cloak room at Fenchurch Street Station glanced at the ticket which had just been handed to him by a tall, hawk-faced and rather anxious-looking man, and ran an inquiring eye over the assemblage of trunks, bags and other objects that crowded the floor of the room.

“Wooden, iron-bound case, you said?” he remarked.

“Yes. Name of Dobson on the label. That looks like the one,” he added, craning over the barrier and watching eagerly as the attendant threaded his way among the litter of packages.

“Dobson it is,” the man confirmed, stooping over the case, and, with an obviously puzzled expression, comparing the ticket that had been pasted on it with the counterfoil which he held in his hand. “Rum affair, though,” he added. “It seems to be your case but it has got the wrong number on it. Will you come in and have a look at it and see that it is all right?”

The presumptive owner offered no objection. On the contrary, he raised the bar of the barrier with the greatest alacrity and took the shortest route among the trunks and portmanteaux until he arrived at the place where the case was standing. And then his expression became even more puzzled than that of the attendant.



"This is very extraordinary," he exclaimed.

"What is?" demanded the attendant.

"Why!" the other explained, "it is the right name and the same sort of case; but this is not the label that I wrote and I don't believe that it is the same case."

The attendant regarded him with a surprised grin and again remarked that "it was a rum affair," adding, after a reflective pause: "It rather looks as if there had been some mistake, as there easily might be with two cases exactly alike and the same name on both. Were the contents of your case of any particular value?"

"They were, indeed!" the owner exclaimed in an agitated tone. "That case contained property worth several thousand pounds."

The attendant whistled and apparently began to see things in a new light, for he asked a little anxiously: "When do you say you deposited the case?"

"Late on Saturday evening."

"Yes, I thought I remembered," said the attendant. "Then the muddle, if there has been one, must have happened yesterday. I wasn't here then. It was my Sunday off. But are you quite sure that this is really not your case?"

"It certainly is not the label that I wrote," was the reply. "But I won't swear that it is a different case; though I don't think that it is the right one. But you see, as the name on the label is my name and the address is my address, it can't be a matter of a simple mistake. It looks like a case of deliberate substitution. And that seems to be borne out by the fact that the change must have been made on a Sunday when the regular attendant was not here."

"Yes," the other agreed, "there's no denying that it does look a bit fishy. But look here, sir; if your name and address is on the label, you are entitled to assume that this is your case. As you say, it is either yours or it is a deliberate substitute, and, in either case, you have the right to open it and see if your property is inside. That will settle the question right away. I can lend you a screw-driver."

The presumptive owner caught eagerly at the suggestion and began forthwith to untie the thick cord which surrounded the case. The screw-driver was produced, and, while the official turned away to attend to two other clients, it was plied vigorously on the eight long screws by which the lid of the case was secured.

The two newcomers, of whom one appeared to be an American and the other an Englishman, had come to claim a number of trunks and travelling-bags; and as some of these, especially those belonging to the American gentleman, were of imposing dimensions, the attendant prudently admitted them that they might identify their packages and so save unnecessary hauling about. While they were carrying out their search he returned to Mr. Dobson and watched him as he extracted the last of the screws.

"Now we shall see whether there has been any jiggery pokery," he remarked, when the screw had been laid down with the others, and Mr. Dobson prepared to raise the lid. And in fact they did see; and a very singular effect the sight had on them both. Mr. Dobson sprang back with a gasp of horror and the attendant uttered the single word "Golly!"

After staring into the case incredulously for a couple of amazed seconds, Dobson slammed down the lid and demanded, breathlessly, "Where can I find a policeman?"

"You'll find one somewhere near the barrier or else just outside the station. Or you could get on the phone and—"

Mr. Dobson did not wait to hear the conclusion of the sentence but darted out towards the barrier and disappeared in the direction of the main entrance. Meanwhile, the two strangers, who had apparently overheard Mr. Dobson's question, abandoned for the time being the inspection of their luggage and approached the case, on which the attendant's eyes were still riveted.

"Anything amiss?" the Englishman asked.

The attendant made no reply but silently lifted the lid of the case, held it up for a moment or two and then let it drop.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the Englishman, "it looks like a man's head!"

"It is a man's head," the attendant confirmed. And, in fact, there was no doubt about it, though only a hairy crown was visible, through a packing of clothes or rags.

"Who is the chappie who has just bolted out?" the Englishman inquired. "He seemed mightily taken aback."

"So would you have been," the attendant retorted, "if you had come to claim a package and found this in its place." He followed up this remark with a brief summary of the circumstances.

"Well!" observed the American, "I have heard it said that exchange is no robbery, but I guess that the party who made this exchange got the best of the deal."

The Englishman grinned. "You are right there, Mr. Pippet," said he. "I've heard of a good many artful dodges for disposing of a superfluous corpse, but I have never heard of a murderer swapping it for a case of jewellery or bullion."

The three men stood silently looking at the case and occasionally glancing round in the direction of the entrance. Presently the American inquired:

"Is there any particular scarcity of policemen in this city?"

The attendant looked round again anxiously towards the entrance.

"He is a long time finding that policeman," said he in reply to the implied comment.

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Pippet; "and I guess that policeman will be a long time finding him."

The attendant turned on him with a distinctly startled expression.

"You don't think he has done a bunk, do you?" he asked uneasily.

"Well," replied Pippet, "he didn't waste any time in getting outside, and he doesn't seem to have had much luck in what he went for. I reckon one of us had better have a try. You know the place better than I do, Buffham."

"Yes, sir, if you would," urged the attendant. "I can't leave the place myself. But I think we ought to have a constable as soon as possible, and it does rather look as if that gent had mizzled."

On this, Mr. Buffham turned and rapidly made his way through the litter of trunks and packages and strode away towards the entrance through which he vanished, while the attendant reluctantly tore himself away from the mysterious case to hand out one or two rugs and suit-cases, and Mr. Pippet resumed his salvage operations on his trunks and portmanteaux. In less than three minutes Mr. Buffham was seen returning with a constable, and the attendant raised the barrier to admit them. Apparently, Mr. Buffham had given the officer a general sketch of the circumstances as they had come along, for the latter remarked, as he eyed the case:

"So this is the box of mystery, is it? And you say that there is a person's head inside it?"

"You can see for yourself," said the attendant; and with this he raised the lid, and, having peered in, he looked at the constable, who, after an impassive and judicial survey, admitted that it did look like a man's head, and produced from his pocket a portentous, black note book.

"The first question," said he, "is about this man who has absconded. Can you give me a description of him?"

The three men consulted and between them evolved a description which might have been illuminating to anyone who was intimately acquainted with the absent stranger, but furnished indifferent material for the identification of an unknown individual. They agreed, however, that he was somewhat tall and dark, with a thin face, a Torpedo beard and moustache, and a rather prominent nose; that he was dressed in dark-coloured clothing and wore a soft felt hat. Mr. Pippet further expressed the opinion that the man's hair and beard were dyed.

"Yes," said the constable, closing his note book, "he seems to have been a good deal like other people. They usually are. That's the worst of it. If people who commit crimes would only be a bit more striking in their appearance and show a little originality in the way they dress, it would make things so much more simple for us. But it's a queer affair. The puzzle is what he came here for, and why, having come, he proceeded to do a bolt. He couldn't have known what was in the case, or he wouldn't have come. And, if the case wasn't his, I don't see why he should have hopped it and put himself under suspicion. I had better take your names and addresses, gentlemen, as you saw him, though you don't seem to have much to tell. Then I think I will get on the phone to headquarters."

He re-opened the note book and, having taken down the names and addresses of the two gentlemen, went out in search of the telephone.

As he departed, Mr. Pippet, apparently dismissing the mysterious case from his mind as an affair finished and done with, reverted to the practical business of sorting out his luggage, in which occupation he was presently joined by Mr. Buffham.

"I am going to get a taxi," said the former, "to take me to my hotel—the Pendennis in Great Russell Street. Can I put you down anywhere? I see you're travelling pretty light."

Mr. Buffham cast a deprecating eye on the modest portmanteau which contained his entire outfit and a questioning eye on the imposing array of trunks and bags which appertained to his companion, and reflected for a moment.

"The taxi-man will jib at your lot," said he, "without adding mine to it."

"Yes," agreed Pippet, "I shall have to get two taxis in any case, so one of them can't complain of an extra package. Where are you putting up?"

"I am staying for a few days at a boarding house in Woburn Place; not so very far from you. But I was thinking that, when we have disposed of our traps, you might come and have some dinner with me at a restaurant that I know of. What do you say?"

"Why, the fact is," said Pippet, "that I was just about to make the very same proposal, only I was going to suggest that we dine together at my hotel. And, if you don't mind, I think it will be the better plan, as I have got a suite of rooms that we can retire to after dinner for a quiet yarn. Do you mind?"

Mr. Buffham did not mind. On the contrary, he accepted with something approaching eagerness. For his own reasons, he had resolved to cultivate the not very intimate acquaintanceship which had been established during the voyage from New York to Tilbury, and he was better pleased to do so at Mr. Pippet's expense than at his own; and the mention of the suite of rooms had strongly confirmed him in his resolution. A man who chartered a suite of rooms at a London hotel must be something more than substantial. But Mr. Pippet's next observation gave him less satisfaction.

"You are wondering, I suppose, what a solitary male like me can want with a suite of rooms all to himself. The explanation is that I am not all by myself. I am expecting my daughter and sister over from Paris tomorrow, and I can't have them hanging about in the public rooms with no corner to call their own. But, until they arrive, I am what they call *en garçon* over there."

Having thus made clear his position, Mr. Pippet went forth and shortly returned accompanied by two taxi-men of dour aspect and taciturn habit, who silently collected the baggage and bore it out to their respective vehicles, which, in due course, set forth upon their journey.

Before following them, we may linger awhile to note the results of the constable's mission. They were not very sensational. In the course of a few minutes, an inspector arrived, and, having made a brief confirmatory inspection, called for the screws and the screwdriver and proceeded in an impassive but workmanlike manner to replace the former in their holes and drive them home. Then he, in his turn, sent out for a taxi-man, by whom the case with its gruesome contents was borne out unsuspectingly to the waiting vehicle and spirited away to an unknown destination.

When Mr. Buffham's solitary portmanteau had been dumped down in the hall of a somewhat seedy house in Woburn Place, the two taxis moved on to the portals of the quiet but select hotel in Great Russell Street, where the mountainous pile of baggage was handed over to the hotel porter with brief directions as to its disposal. Then the two men, after the necessary ablutions, made their way to the dining-room and selected a table in a comparatively retired corner, where Mr. Buffham waited in some anxiety as to the quality of the entertainment. His experience of middle-aged American men had given him the impression that they were not, as a class, enthusiastic feeders, and it was with sensible relief that he discovered in his host the capacity to take a reasonable interest in his food. In fact, the gastronomic arrangements were so much to his satisfaction that, for a time, they engaged his entire attention; for, if the whole truth must be told, this dinner was not an entirely unforeseen contingency, and, as he had providently modified his diet with that possibility in view, he was now in a condition to do complete justice to the excellent fare provided. Presently, however, when the razor-edge had been taken off his appetite, his attention reverted to larger interests and he began cautiously to throw out feelers. Not that an extreme amount of caution was really necessary, for Mr. Pippet was a simple, straightforward, open-minded man; shrewd enough in the ordinary business of life and gifted with a massive common-sense. But he was quite devoid of cunning, and trustful of his fellow-creatures to an extent that is somewhat unusual in citizens of the United States. He was, in fact, the exact opposite in mental and moral type of the man who faced him across the table.

"Well!" said Buffham, raising his newly-refilled glass, "here's to a successful beano. I suppose you contemplate laying a delicate wash of carmine over the British landscape. Or is it to be a full tint of vermilion?"

"Now you are talking in tropes and metaphors," said Pippet, with an indulgent smile, "but, as I interpret the idiom, you think we are going to make things hum."

"I assume that you are over here to have a good time."

"We always like to have a good time if we can manage it, wherever we may be," said Pippet, "and I hope to pass the time pleasantly while I am in the Old Country. But I have come over with a more definite purpose than that; and, if I should tell you what that purpose is, I should make you smile."

"And a very pleasant result, too," said Buffham. "I like to be made to smile. But, of course, I don't want to pry into your private affairs, even for the sake of a smile."

"My private affairs will probably soon be public affairs," said Pippet, "so I need not maintain any particular reticence about them; and, in any case, there's nothing to be ashamed or secret about. If it interests you to know, my visit to England is connected with a claim to an English title and the estates that go with it."

Buffham was thunderstruck. But he did not smile. The affair was much too serious for that. Instead, he demanded in a hushed voice: "Do you mean that you are making a claim on your own behalf?"

Mr. Pippet chuckled. "Sounds incredible, doesn't it? But that is the cold-drawn fact. I am setting up a claim to the Earldom of Winsborough and to the lands and other property that appertain to it, all of which I understand to be at present vacant and calling aloud for an owner."

Mr. Buffham pulled himself together. This looked like a good deal bigger affair than he had anticipated. Indeed, he had not anticipated anything in particular. His professional habits—if we may so designate them—led him to cultivate the society of rich men of all kinds, and by preference that of wealthy Americans making an European tour. Not that the globe-trotting American is a peculiarly simple and trustful soul. But he is in a holiday mood; he is in unaccustomed surroundings and usually has money to spend and a strong inclination to spend it. Mr. Buffham's role was to foster that inclination, and, as far as possible, to collaborate in the associated activities. He had proposed to fasten upon Mr. Pippet, if he could, in a Micawber-like hope that something profitable might turn up. But the prospect opened up by Mr. Pippet's announcement was beyond his wildest dreams.

"I suppose," Mr. Pippet continued after a brief pause, "you are wondering what in creation a middle-aged American in comfortable circumstances wants with an English title and estates?"

"I am not wondering anything of the kind," replied Buffham. "The position of a great English nobleman is one that might well tempt the ambition of an American if he were twenty times a millionaire. Think of the august dignity of that position! Of the universal deference that it commands! Think of the grand old mansions and the parks planted with immemorial

trees, the great town house and the seat in the House of Lords, and—and—”

“Yes, I know,” chuckled Pippet, “I’ve had all that rubbed into me, and, to tell the bald truth, I wouldn’t give a damn for the whole boiling if I had only myself to consider. I don’t want to have people calling me ‘My Lord’ and making me feel like a fool; and I’ve no use for baronial mansions or ancestral halls. A good comfortable hotel where they know how to cook answers all my requirements. But I’ve got to go in for this business whether I like it or not. My womenfolk have got me fairly in tow, especially my sister. She’s just mad to be Lady Arminella—in fact, if I hadn’t put my foot down she’d have settled the matter in advance and taken the title on account, so to speak.”

“I suppose,” said Buffham, “you have got your claim pretty well cut and dried? Got all your evidence, I mean, and arranged with your lawyer as to the plan of campaign?”

“Well, no!” replied Pippet, “at present things are rather in the air. But, if we have finished, perhaps we might take our coffee up in my sitting room. We can talk more freely there. But don’t let me bore you. After all, it isn’t your funeral.”

“My dear sir!” exclaimed Buffham, with genuine sincerity, “you are not boring me. I assure you that I am profoundly interested. If you won’t consider me inquisitive, I should like to hear the whole story in as much detail as you care to give.”

Mr. Pippet nodded and smiled. “Good!” said he, as they ascended the stairs to the private suite, “you shall have all the detail you want. I shall enjoy giving it to you, as it will help to get the affair into my own head a trifle more clearly. It’s a queer story and I must admit that it does not sound any too convincing. The whole claim rests upon a tradition that I heard from my father.”

Mr. Buffham was a little disappointed; but only a little. As his host had said, it—the claim—was not his funeral. A wild cat claim might answer his purpose as well as any other; perhaps even better. Nevertheless, he remarked with an assumption of anxiety: “I hope there is something to go on besides the tradition. You’ll have to deal with a court of law, you know.”

“Yes, I realize that,” replied Pippet, “and I may say that there is some corroborative matter. I’ll tell you about that presently. But there’s this much about the tradition; that it admits of being put to the test, as you’ll see when I give you the story. And I will do that right away.”

“The tradition, then, as I had it from my father from time to time, in rather disjointed fragments, was that *his* father was a very remarkable character; in fact, he was two characters rolled into one, for he led a double life. As my father and mother knew him, he was Mr. Josiah Pippet, the landlord of a house of call in the City of London known as ‘The Fox and Grapes.’ But a persistent tradition had it that the name of Josiah Pippet was an assumed name and that he was really the Earl of Winsborough. It is known that he was in the habit of absenting himself from his London premises from time to time and that when he did so he disappeared completely, leaving no hint of his whereabouts. Now, it seems that the Earl, who was a bachelor, was a somewhat eccentric gentleman of similar habits. *He* also was accustomed periodically to absent himself from the Castle, and he also used to disappear, leaving no clue to his whereabouts. And rumour had it that these disappearances were, as the scientists would say, correlated; like the little figures in those old-fashioned toy houses that foretold the weather. When the old man came out, the old woman went in, and *vice versa*. So it was said that when Josiah disappeared from ‘The Fox and Grapes,’ his lordship made his appearance at Winsborough Castle; and when his lordship disappeared from the Castle, Josiah popped up at ‘The Fox and Grapes.’”

“Is there any record of the movements of the two men?” Buffham asked.

“Well, there is a diary, along with a lot of letters and other stuff. I have just glanced at some of it but I can’t I say of my own observation that there is a definite record. However, my sister has gone through the whole lot and she says that it is all as plain as a pike-staff.”

Buffham nodded with an air of satisfaction that was by no means assumed. He began to see splendid possibilities in his host’s case.

“Yes,” said he, “this is much more hopeful. If you can show that these disappearances coincided in time, that will be a very striking piece of evidence. You have got these documents with you?”

“Yes, I have got them in a deed box in my bedroom. I have been intending to make a serious attack on them and to go right through them.”

“What would be much more to the point,” said Buffham, “would be to hand the box to your lawyer and let him go through them. He will be accustomed to examining documents, and he will see the significance—the legal significance, I mean—of little, inconspicuous facts that might easily escape a non-professional eye. I think you said you had a lawyer?”

“No. That’s a matter that I shall have to attend to at once; and I don’t quite know how to go about it. I understand that they don’t advertise in this country.”

“No,” said Buffham, “certainly not. But I see your difficulty. You naturally want to get a suitable man, and it is most important. You want to secure the services of a solicitor whose position and character would command the respect and confidence of the court, and who has had experience of cases of a similar kind. That is absolutely vital. I recall a case which illustrates the danger of employing a lawyer of an unsuitable kind. It was, like yours, a case of disputed succession. There were two claimants whom we may call ‘A’ and ‘B.’ Now Mr. ‘A’ had undoubtedly the better case. But unfortunately for him, he employed a solicitor whose sole experience was concerned with commercial law. He was an excellent man, but he knew

practically nothing of the intricacies of succession to landed property. Mr. 'B,' on the other hand, had the good fortune to secure a lawyer whose practice had been very largely concerned with these very cases. He knew all the ropes, you see; and the result was that the case was decided in Mr. 'B's' favour. But it ought not to have been. I had it, in confidence, from his lawyer (whom I happened to know rather well) that if he had been acting for Mr. 'A,' instead of for Mr. 'B,' the decision would certainly have gone the other way. 'A' had the better claim, but his lawyer had not realized it and had failed to put it before the court in a sufficiently convincing manner."

Having given this striking instance, Buffham looked anxiously at his host, and was a trifle disappointed at its effect. Still more so was he with that gentleman's comment.

"Seems to me," the latter remarked, "that that court wasn't particularly on the spot if they let your lawyer friend bluff them into giving Mr. 'B' the property that properly belonged to Mr. 'A.' And I shouldn't have thought that your friend would have found it a satisfactory deal. At any rate, I am not wanting any lawyer to grab property for me that belongs to somebody else. As long as I believe in this claim myself, I'm going for it for all I am worth. But I am not going to drop my egg into somebody else's rightful nest, like your Mr. B."

"Of course you are not!" Buffham hastened to reply, considerably disconcerted by his host's unexpected attitude; so difficult is it for a radically dishonest man to realize that his is not the usual and normal state of mind. "But neither do you want to find yourself in the position of Mr. 'A.'"

"No," Pippet admitted, "I don't. I just want a square deal, and I always understood that you could get it in an English court."

"So you can," said Buffham. "But you must realize that a court can only decide on the facts and arguments put before it. It is the business of the lawyers to supply those facts and arguments. And I think you are hardly just to my lawyer friend—his name, by the way, is Gimble—a most honourable and conscientious man. I must point out that a lawyer's duty is to present his client's case in the most forcible and convincing way that he can. He is not concerned with the other man's case. He assumes—and so does the court—that the opposing lawyer will do the same for his client; and then the court will have both cases completely presented. It is the client's business to employ a lawyer who is competent to put his case properly to the court."

Mr. Pippet nodded. "Yes," he said, reflectively, "I see the idea. But the difficulty in the case of a stranger like myself is to find the particular kind of lawyer who has the special knowledge and experience that is required. Now, as to this friend of yours, Gimble; you say that he specializes in disputed claims to property."

"I didn't say that he specialized in them, but I know that he has had considerable experience of them."

"Well, now, do you suppose that he would be willing to take up this claim of mine?"

Mr. Buffham did not suppose at all. He knew. Nevertheless he replied warily:

"It depends. He wouldn't want to embark on a case that was going to result in a fiasco. He would want to hear an about the claim and what evidence there is to support it. And especially he would want to go very carefully through those documents of yours."

"Yes," said Pippet, "that seems to be the correct line, and that is what I should want him to do. I'd like to have an expert opinion on the whole affair before I begin to get busy. I am not out to exploit a mare's nest and make a public fool of myself. But we didn't finish the story. We only got to the Box and Cox business of Josiah and the Earl. It seems that this went on for a number of years, and nothing seems to have been thought of it at the time. But when Josiah's wife died and his son—my father—was settled, he appears to have wearied of the complications of his double life and made up his mind to put an end to them. And the simplest and most conclusive way to write *Finis* on the affair seemed to him to be to die and get buried. And that is what he did. According to the story, he faked a last illness and engineered a sham death. I don't know how he managed it. Seems to me pretty difficult. But the rumour had it that he managed to get people to believe that he had died, and he had a funeral with a dummy coffin, properly weighted with lumps of lead, and that this was successfully planted in the family vault. I am bound to admit that this part of the story does sound a trifle thin. But it seems to have been firmly believed in the family."

It would have been a relief to Mr. Buffham to snigger aloud. But sniggering was not his role. Still, he felt called on to make some kind of criticism. Accordingly, he remarked judicially:

"There do certainly seem to be difficulties; the death certificate, for instance. You would hardly expect a doctor to mistake a live, healthy man for a corpse—unless Josiah made it worth his while. It would be simple enough then."

"I understand," said Mr. Pippet, "that doctors often used to give a certificate without viewing the body. But the lawyer will know that. At any rate, it is obvious that someone must have been in the know; and that is probably how the rumour got started."

"And when did the Earl die?"

"That I can't tell you, off hand. But it was some years after Josiah's funeral."

"And who holds the title and estate now?"

"Nobody; at least, so I understand. The last—or present—Earl went away to Africa or some other uncivilized place, big

game shooting, and never came back. As there was never any announcement of the Earl's death, things seem to have drifted on as if he was alive. I have never heard of any claimant."

"There couldn't be until the Earl's death was either proved or presumed by the permission of the court. So the first thing that you will have to do will be to take proceedings to have the death of the Earl presumed."

"Not the first thing," said Pippet. "There is one question that will have to be settled before we definitely make the claim. The tradition says that Josiah's death was a fake and that his coffin was a dummy weighted with lead. Now, that is a statement of fact that admits of proof or disproof. The first thing that we have got to do is to get that coffin open. If we find Josiah inside, that will settle the whole business, and I shan't care a hoot whether the Earl is alive or dead."

Once again Mr. Buffham was sensible of a slight feeling of disappointment. In a man who was prepared to consider seriously such a manifestly preposterous cock and bull story as this, he had not looked for so reasonable a state of mind. Of course, Pippet was quite right from his own idiotic point of view. The opening of the coffin was the *experimentum crucis*. And when it was opened, there, of course, would be the body, and the bubble would be most effectively burst. But Mr. Buffham did not want the bubble burst. The plan which was shaping itself vaguely in his mind was concerned with keeping that bubble in a healthy state of inflation. And again, his crooked mind found it hard to understand Pippet's simple, honest, straightforward outlook. If he had been the claimant, his strongest efforts would have been devoted to seeing that nobody meddled with that coffin. And he had a feeling that his friend Gimpler would take the same view.

"Of course," he conceded, "you are perfectly correct; but there may be difficulties that you don't quite realize. I don't know how it is in America, but in this country you can't just dig up a coffin and open it if you want to know who is inside. There are all sorts of formalities before you can get permission; and I doubt whether faculty would be granted until you had made out some sort of a case in the courts. So the moral is that you must get as impressive a body of evidence together as you can. Have you got any other facts besides what you have told me? For instance, do you know what these two men—Josiah and the Earl—were like? Do they appear to have resembled each other?"

Mr. Pippet grinned. "If Josiah and the Earl," said he, "were one and the same person, they would naturally be a good deal alike. I understand that they were. That is one of the strong points of the story. Both of them were a bit out-size; well over six feet in height. Both were fair, blue-eyed men with a shaved upper lip and long sandy side-whiskers."

"You can prove that, can you?"

"I can swear that I had information to that effect from my father, who knew one and had seen the other. And there is one other point; only a small one, but every little bit of corroboration helps. My father told me on several occasions that his father—Josiah—had often told him that he was born in Winsborough Castle."

"Ha!" exclaimed Buffham, "that's better. That establishes a definite connexion. It's a pity, though, that he was not more explicit. And now, with regard to these documents that you spoke of; what is the nature of them?"

"To tell you the truth," replied Pippet, "I don't know much about them. I've been used to an active life and I'm not a great reader, so I've not done much more than glance over them. But, as I mentioned, my sister has gone through them carefully and she reckons that they as good as prove that Josiah and the Earl were one and the same person. Would you like to have a look at them?"

A mere affirmative would have been inadequate to express Mr. Buffham's ravenous desire to see whether there was or was not the making of a possible legal case. Nevertheless, he replied in a tone of studied indifference:

"My opinion is not much to the point, but I should certainly like to see what sort of material you will be able to give your lawyer."

Thereupon Mr. Pippet retired to the bedroom, from which he presently emerged carrying a good-sized deed box. This he placed on the table, and, having gone deliberately through a large bunch of keys, eventually selected one and carefully fitted it into the lock while Buffham watched him hungrily. The box being opened, the two men drew their chairs up to the table and peered into its interior; which was occupied by a collection of bundles of papers, neatly tied up with red tape, each bundle being distinguished by means of a label inscribed in an old-fashioned feminine handwriting. In addition, there were seven small, leather-bound volumes.

Buffham picked out the bundles, one after another, and read the labels. "Letters from J.S. to his wife," "Letters from various persons to J.S.," "Copies of letters from J.S. to various persons," "Various tradesmen's bills and accounts," and so on. Having asked his host's permission, he untied one or two of the bundles and read samples of the letters and tradesmen's bills with a feeling of stupefaction, mingled with astonished speculations as to the mental peculiarities of his host's sister.

"Yes," he said, gloomily replacing the last of them, "I dare say a careful analysis of these letters may yield some relevant information, but it will need the expert eye of the trained lawyer to detect the relevancy of some of them. There is, for instance, a bill for two pounds of pork sausages and a black pudding, which seems rather beside the mark. But you never know. Important legal points may be involved in the most unexpected matter. What are those little books? Are they the diaries that you spoke of?"

Mr. Pippet nodded and handed one of them to him, which proved to be the diary for the year 1833. He turned over the leaves and scanned the entries with more interest but still with a feeling of bewilderment. After examining a few sample pages, he handed the volume back to Pippet, remarking a little wearily:

"The late Josiah didn't go into much detail. The entries are very dry and brief and seem to be concerned chiefly with the trivial happenings of his life from day to day and with money paid or received."

"Well, isn't that what diaries are usually filled with?"

Pippet protested, not unreasonably. "And don't you think that those simple, commonplace entries are just the ones to give us the information that we want? My sister said that she learned quite a lot about Josiah's ways of life from those diaries."

"Did she?" said Buffham. "I am glad to hear it; because it suggests that a trained lawyer, going through those diaries with the legal issues in his mind, noting, collating and analyzing the entries, will probably discover significances in the most unexpected places. Which brings us back to the point that you ought to get competent legal assistance without delay."

"Yes, I think you are right," agreed Pippet. "I've got to secure a lawyer sooner or later, so I might as well start right away. Now, to come down to brass tacks, what about this lawyer friend of yours? You say that this case of mine would be in his customary line of business; and you think he would be willing to take it on?"

Mr. Buffham had no doubts whatever, but he did not think it expedient to say so. A retreating tendency on the part of the bait is apt to produce a pursuing tendency on the part of the fish.

"Naturally," said he, "I can't answer for another man's views. He is a busy man, and he might not be prepared to give time to what he might regard as a somewhat speculative case. But we can easily find out. If you like, I will call on him and put the case to him in as favourable a light as possible, and, if he doesn't seem eager to take it up, I might use a little gentle pressure. You see, I know him pretty well. Then, if I am successful, I might arrange for you to have an interview, at which, perhaps, it might be advisable for your sister to be present, as she knows more about the affair than you do. Then he could tell you what he thought of your chances and you could let him know what you are prepared to do. What do you think of that plan?"

Mr. Pippet thought that it seemed to meet the case, provided that it could be carried out without delay.

"You understand," said he, "that my sister and daughter will be arriving here tomorrow, and they will be red-hot to get the business started, especially my sister."

"And quite naturally, too," said Buffham. "I sympathize with her impatience and I promise that there shall be no delay on my part. I will call at Gimbler's office tomorrow morning the first thing, before he has had time to begin his morning's work."

"It's very good of you," said Pippet, as his guest rose to take his leave, "to interest yourself in this way in the affairs of a mere stranger."

"Not at all," Buffham rejoined cheerily. "You are forgetting the romance and dramatic interest of your case. Anyone would be delighted to lend you a hand in your adventure. You may depend on hearing from me in the course of tomorrow. Good night and good luck!"

Mr. Pippet, having provided his guest with a fresh cigar, accompanied him down to the entrance and watched him with a meditative eye as he walked away down the street. Apparently, the dwindling figure suggested a train of thought, for he continued to stand looking out even after it had disappeared. At length he turned with a faint sigh and thoughtfully retraced his steps to his own domain.

---

## II.—MR. BUFFHAM'S LEGAL FRIEND

NO amount of native shrewdness can entirely compensate for deficiency of knowledge. If Mr. Christopher Pippet had been intimately acquainted with English social customs, he would have known that the neighbourhood of Kennington in general and Kennington Grove in particular, is hardly the place in which to look for the professional premises of a solicitor engaged in important Chancery practice. He did, indeed, survey the rather suburban surroundings with a certain amount of surprise, noting with intelligent interest the contrast between the ways of New York and those of London. He even ventured to comment on the circumstance as he halted at the iron gate of a small garden and read out the inscription on a well-worn brass plate affixed to the gate aforesaid; which set forth the name and professional vocation of Mr. Horatio Gimbler, Solicitor and Advocate.

"Buffham didn't tell me that he was an advocate as well as a solicitor," Mr. Pippet remarked, as he pushed the gate open.

"He wouldn't," replied his companion, "but left you to find out for yourself. Of course he knew you would, and then you would give him credit for having understated his friend's merits. It's just vanity."

At the street door, which was closed and bore a duplicate plate, Mr. Pippet pressed an electric bell-push, with the result that there arose from within a sound like the "going off" of an alarm clock and simultaneously the upper half of a face with a pair of beady black eyes appeared for an instant above the wire blind of the adjacent window. Then, after a brief interval, the door opened and revealed an extremely alert youth of undeniably Hebraic aspect.

"Is Mr. Gimbler disengaged?" Mr. Pippet inquired.

"Have you got an appointment?" the youth demanded.

"Yes; eleven o'clock; and it's two minutes to the hour now. Shall I go in here?"

He turned towards a door opening out of the hall and marked "Waiting Room."

"No," the youth replied, hastily, emphatically and almost in a tone of alarm. "That'th for clienth that haven't got an appointment. What name thall I thay?"

"Mr. and Miss Pippet."

"Oh, yeth, I know. Jutht thtep thith way."

He opened an inner door leading into a small inner hall, which offered to the visitors a prospect of a flight of shabbily carpeted stairs and a strong odour of fried onions. Here he approached a door marked "Private Office" and knocked softly, eliciting a responsive but inarticulate roar; whereupon he opened the door and announced: "Mr. and Miss Pippet."

The opened door revealed a large man with a pair of folding pince-nez insecurely balanced on the end of a short, fat nose, apparently writing furiously. As the visitors entered, he looked round with an interrogative frown as if impatient of being interrupted. Then, appearing suddenly to realize who they were, he made a convulsive grimace, which dislodged the eyeglasses and left them dangling free on their broad black ribbon, and was succeeded by a wrinkly but affable smile. Then he rose, and, holding out a large, rather fat hand, exclaimed:

"Delighted to see you. I had no idea that it was so late. One gets so engrossed in these—er—fascinating—"

"Naturally," said Mr. Pippet, "though I thought it was the documents that got engrossed. However, here we are. Let me introduce you to my sister, Miss Arminella Pippet."

Mr. Gimble bowed, and, for a brief space there was a searching mutual inspection. Miss Pippet saw a physically imposing man, large in all dimensions—tall, broad, deep-chested and still more deep in the region immediately below the chest; with a large, massive head, rather bald and very closely cropped, a large, rather fat face, marked with wrinkles suggestive of those on the edge of a pair of bellows, and singularly small pale blue eyes, which tended to become still smaller, even to total disappearance, when he smiled. Through those little blue eyes, Mr. Gimble saw a woman, shortish in stature but majestic in carriage and conveying an impression of exuberant energy and vivacity. And this impression was reinforced by the strong, mobile face with its firm mouth set above the square, pugnacious chin and below a rather formidable Roman nose, which latter gave to her a certain suggestive resemblance to a bird, a resemblance accentuated by her quick movements. But the bird suggested was not the dove. In short, Miss Arminella Pippet was a somewhat remarkable-looking lady with a most unmistakeable "presence." She might have been a dame of the old French noblesse; and Mr. Gimble, looking at her through his little blue eyes and bearing in mind the peerage claim, decided that she looked the part. He also decided—comparing her with her mild-faced brother—that the grey mare was the better horse and must claim his chief attention. He was not the first who had undervalued Mr. Christopher Pippet.

"I suppose," said the latter, sitting down with some care on a rather infirm cane-bottomed chair (Miss Arminella occupied the only easy chair), "Mr. Buffham has given you some idea of the matter on which we have come to consult you?"

"He has done more than that," said Mr. Gimble, "and would have done more still if I had not stopped him. He is thrilled by your romantic story and wildly optimistic. If we could only get a jury of Buffhams you would walk into your inheritance without a breath of opposition."

"And what do you think of our chances with the kind of jury that we are likely to get?"

Mr. Gimble pursed up his lips and shook his massive head.

"We mustn't begin giving opinions at this stage," said he. "Remember that I have only heard the story at second hand from Mr. Buffham; just a sketch of the nature of the case. Let us begin at the beginning and forget Mr. Buffham. You are claiming, I believe, to be the grandson of the late Earl of Winsborough. Now, I should like to hear an outline of the grounds of your claim before we go into any details."

As he spoke, he fixed an inquiring eye on Miss Pippet, who promptly responded by opening her hand-bag and drawing therefrom a folded sheet of foolscap paper.

"This," said she, "is a concise statement of the nature of the claim and the known facts on which it is based. I thought it would save time if I wrote it out, as I could then leave the paper with you for reference. Will you read it or shall I?"

Mr. Gimble looked at the document, and, observing that it was covered with closely-spaced writing in a somewhat crabbed and angular hand, elected to listen to the reading in order that he might make a few notes. Accordingly Miss Pippet proceeded to read aloud from the paper with something of the air of a herald reading a royal proclamation, glancing from time to time at the lawyer to see what kind of impression it was making on him. The result of these inspections must have been a little disappointing, as Mr. Gimble listened attentively with his eyes shut, rousing only at intervals to scribble a few words on a slip of paper.

When she had come to the end of the statement—which repeated substantially, but in a more connected form, the story that her brother had told to Buffham—she laid the paper on the table and regarded the lawyer with an interrogative stare. Mr. Gimble, having opened his eyes to their normal extent, directed them to his notes.

"This," said he, "is a very singular and romantic story. Romantic and strange, and yet not really incredible. But the important question is, to what extent is this interesting tradition supported by provable facts? For instance, it is stated that



when Josiah Pippet used to disappear from his usual places of resort, the Earl of Winsborough made his appearance at Winsborough Castle. Now, is there any evidence that the disappearance of Josiah coincided in time with the appearance of the Earl at the Castle, and *vice versa*?"

"There is the diary," said Miss Pippet.

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Gimbler, genuinely surprised. "The diary makes that quite plain, does it?"

"Perfectly," the lady replied. "Any way, it is quite clear to me. Whenever Josiah was about to make one of his disappearances, he noted in his diary quite unmistakably: 'Going away tomorrow for a little spell at the old place.' Sometimes, instead of 'the old place,' he says plainly 'the Castle.' Then there is a blank space of more than half a page before he records his arrival home at 'The Fox and Grapes.'"

"H'm, yes," said Mr. Gimbler, swinging his folded eyeglass on its ribbon like a pendulum. "And you think that by the expression 'the old place' or 'the Castle' he means Winsborough Castle?"

"I don't see how there can be any doubt of it. Obviously, 'the old place' must have been Winsborough Castle, where he was born."

"It would seem probable," Mr. Gimbler admitted. "By the way, is there any evidence that he *was* born at the castle?"

"Well," Miss Pippet replied a little sharply, "he said he was; and I suppose he knew."

"Naturally, naturally," the lawyer agreed. "And you can prove that he did say so?"

"My brother and I have heard our father repeat the statement over and over again. We can swear to that."

"And with regard to the Earl? Is there any evidence that, when Josiah returned home to 'The Fox and Grapes,' his Lordship disappeared from the Castle?"

"Evidence!" Miss Pippet exclaimed, slapping her hand-bag impatiently. "What evidence do you want? The man couldn't be in two places at once!"

"Very true," said Mr. Gimbler, fixing a slightly perplexed eye on his dangling glasses; "very true. He couldn't. And with regard to the sham funeral. Naturally there wouldn't be any reference to it in the diary, but is it possible to support the current rumour by any definite facts?"

"Don't you think the fact that my father—Josiah's own son—was convinced of it is definite enough?" Miss Pippet demanded, a trifle acidly.

"It is definite enough," Gimbler admitted, "but in courts of law there is a slight prejudice against hearsay evidence. Direct, first-hand evidence, if it is possible to produce it, has a good deal more weight."

"So it may," retorted Miss Pippet, "but you can't expect us to give first-hand evidence of a funeral that took place before we were born. I suppose even a court of law has a little common sense."

"Still," her brother interposed, "Mr. Gimbler has put his finger on the really vital spot. The sham funeral is the kernel of the whole business. If we can prove that, we shall have something solid to go on. And we *can* prove it—or else disprove it, as the case may be. But it need not be left in the condition of what the late President Wilson would have called a peradventure. If that funeral was a sham, there was nothing in the coffin but some lumps of lead. Now, that coffin is still in existence. It is lying in the family vault; and if we can yank it out and open it, the Winsborough Peerage Claim will be as good as settled. If we find Josiah at home to visitors, we can let the claim drop and go for a holiday. But if we find the lumps of lead, according to our program, we shall hang on to the claim until the courts are tired of us and hand over the keys of the Castle. Mr. Gimbler is quite right. That coffin is the point that we have got to concentrate on."

As Mr. Pippet developed his views, the lawyer's eyeglasses, dangling from their ribbon, swung more and more violently, and their owner's eyes opened to an unprecedented width. He had never had the slightest intention of concentrating on the coffin. On the contrary, that obvious means of exploding the delusion and toppling over the house of cards had seemed to be the rock that had got to be safely circumnavigated at all costs. In his view, the coffin was the fly in the ointment; and the discovery that it was the apple of Mr. Pippet's eye gave him a severe shock. And not this alone. He had assumed that the lady's invincible optimism represented the state of mind of both his clients. Now he realized that the man whom he had written down an amiable ass, and perhaps a dishonest ass at that, combined in his person two qualities most undesirable in the circumstances—hard common sense and transparent honesty.

It was a serious complication; and as he sat with his eyes fixed on the swinging eyeglasses, he endeavoured rapidly to shape a new course. At length he replied:

"Of course you are quite right, Mr. Pippet. The obvious course would be to examine the coffin as a preliminary measure. But English law does not always take the obvious course. When once a person is consigned to the tomb, the remains pass out of the control of the relatives and into that of the State; and the State views with very jealous disapproval any attempts to disturb those remains. In order to open a tomb or grave, and especially to open a coffin, it is necessary to obtain a faculty from the Home Secretary authorizing an exhumation. Now, before any such faculty is granted, the Home Secretary requires the applicant to show cause for the making of such an order."

"Well," said Mr. Pippet, "we can show cause. We want to know whether Josiah is in that coffin or not."

"Quite so," said Mr. Gimbler. "A perfectly reasonable motive. But it would not be accepted by the Home Office. They would demand a ruling from a properly constituted court to the effect that the claim had been investigated and a *prima facie* case made out."

"What do you mean by a *prima facie* case?" Miss Pippet inquired.

"The expression means that the claim has been stated in a court of law and that sufficient evidence has been produced to establish a probability that it is a just and reasonable claim."

"You mean to say," said Mr. Pippet, "that a judge and jury have got to sit and examine at great length whether the claim may possibly be a true claim before they will consent to examine a piece of evidence which will settle the question with practical certainty in the course of an hour?"

"Yes," Mr. Gimbler admitted, "that, I am afraid is the rather unreasonable position. We shall have to lay the facts, so far as they are known to us, before the court and make out as good a case as we can. Then, if the court is satisfied that we have a substantial case, it will make an order for the exhumation, which the Home Office will confirm."

"For my part," said Miss Pippet, "I don't see why we need meddle with the coffin at all. It seems a ghoulis proceeding."

"I entirely agree with you, Miss Pippet," said Mr. Gimbler (and there is no possible doubt that he did). "It would be much better to deal with the whole affair in court if that were possible. Perhaps it may be possible to avoid the exhumation, after all. The court may not insist."

"It won't have to insist," said Mr. Pippet. "I make it a condition that we ascertain beyond all doubt whether Josiah is or is not in that coffin. I want to make sure that I am claiming what is my just due, and I shan't be sure of that until that coffin has been opened. Isn't it possible for you to make an application to the Home Secretary without troubling the courts?"

"It would be possible to make the application," Mr. Gimbler replied somewhat dryly. "But a refusal would be a foregone conclusion. Quite properly so, if you consider the conditions. The purpose of the exhumation is to establish the fact of the sham burial. But if that were established, you would be no more forward, or, at least very little. Your claim would still have to be stated and argued in a court of law. Of course, the proof of the sham burial would be material evidence, but still, your claim would stand or fall by the decision of the court. Naturally, the Home Office, since it cannot consider evidence or give a decision, is not going to give a permit until it is informed by the proper authority that an exhumation is necessary for the purposes of justice. Believe me, Mr. Pippet, we should only prejudice our case by trying to go behind the courts; and, moreover, we should certainly fail to get a permit."

"Very well," said Mr. Pippet. "You know best. Then I take it that there is not much more to say at present. We have given you the facts, such as they are, and we shall leave my sister's statement with you, and it will be up to you to consider what is to be done next."

"Yes," agreed Gimbler. "But something was said about documents—some letters and a diary. Are they available?"

"They are," replied Mr. Pippet. "I've got the whole boiling of them in this box. My sister has been through them, as she mentioned to you just now."

"And you?" Mr. Gimbler asked with a trace of anxiety, as he watched his client's efforts to untie the parcel. "Have you examined them thoroughly?"

"I can't truly say that I have," was the reply, as Mr. Pippet deliberately opened a pocket knife and applied it to the string. "I had intended to look through them before I handed them to you, but Mr. Buffham assured me that it would be a waste of labour, as you would have to study them in any case; so, as I am not what you would call a studious man, and they look a pretty stodgy collection, I have saved myself the trouble."

"I don't believe," said Miss Pippet, "that my brother cares two cents whether we succeed or not."

The lady's suspicion was not entirely unshared by her legal adviser. But he made no comment, as, at this moment, Mr. Pippet, having detached the coverings of the parcel, and thereby disclosed the deed box which he had shown to Buffham, inserted a key and unlocked it.

"There," said he, as he threw the lid open, "you can see that the things are there. Those bundles of paper are the letters and the little volumes are the diary. There is no need for you to look at them now. I guess you will like to study them at your leisure."

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Gimbler. "It will be necessary for me to examine them exhaustively and systematically and make a very careful précis of their contents, with an analysis of those contents from an evidential point of view. I shall have to do that before I can give any opinion on the merits of the case, and certainly before I suggest taking any active measures. You realize that those investigations will take some time?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Pippet; "and you will not find us impatient. We don't want to urge you to act precipitately."

"Not precipitately," agreed Miss Pippet. "Still, you understand that we don't want too much of the law's delay."

Mr. Gimbler understood that perfectly; and, to tell the whole truth, looked with much more favour on the lady's hardly-veiled impatience than on her brother's philosophic calm.

"There will be no delay at all," he replied, "but merely a most necessary period of preparation. I need not point out to

you, Madam," he continued after a moment's pause, "that we must not enter the lists unready. We must mature our plans in advance, so that when we take the field—if we decide to do so—it will be with our weapons sharpened and our armour bright."

"Certainly," said Miss Pippet. "We must be ready before we start. I realize that; only I hope it won't take too long to get ready."

"That," replied Mr. Gimbler, "we shall be better able to judge when we have made a preliminary inspection of the documentary material; but I can assure you that no time will be wasted."

Here he paused to clear his throat and adjust his eyeglasses. Then he proceeded: "There is just one other little matter that I should like to be clear on. You realize that an action at law is apt to be a somewhat expensive affair. Of course, in the present case, there is a considerable set-off. If you are successful, the mere material gain in valuable property, to say nothing of the title and the great social advantages, will be enough to make the law costs appear a negligible trifle. Still, I must warn you that the outlay will be very considerable. There will be court fees, fees to counsel, costs of the necessary investigations, and, of course, my own charges, which I shall keep as low as possible. Now, the question is, are you prepared to embark on this undoubtedly costly enterprise?"

He asked the question in a tone as impassive and judicial as he could manage, but he awaited the answer with an anxiety that was difficult to conceal. It was Miss Pippet who instantly dispelled that anxiety.

"We understand all about that," said she. "We never supposed that titles and estates were to be picked up for the asking. You can take it that we shall not complain of any expense in reason. But perhaps you were thinking of our capacity to bear a heavy expense? If you were, I may tell you that my own means would be amply sufficient to meet any likely costs, even without my brother's support."

"That is so," Mr. Pippet confirmed. "But, as I am the actual claimant, the costs will naturally fall on me. Could you give us any idea of our probable liabilities?"

Mr. Gimbler reflected rapidly. He didn't wish to frighten his quarry, but he did very much want to take soundings of the depth of their purse. Eventually, he took his courage in both hands and made the trial cast.

"It is mere guess work," said he, "until we know how much there may be to do. Supposing—to take an outside figure—the costs should mount to ten thousand pounds. Of course, they won't. But I mention that sum as a sort of basis to reckon from. How would that affect you?"

"Well," said Mr. Pippet, "it sounds a lot of money, but it wouldn't break either of us. Only we look to you to see that the gamble is worth while before we drop too much on it."

"You may be quite confident," Gimbler replied in a voice husky with suppressed joy, "that I shall not allow you to embark on any proceedings until I have ascertained beyond a doubt that you have at least a reasonable chance of success. And that," he continued, rising as his visitors rose to depart, "is all that is humanly possible."

He stuck his glasses on his nose to shake hands and to watch Mr. Pippet as he detached the key of the deed box from his bunch. Then he opened the door and escorted his visitors through an atmosphere of fried onions to the street door, where he stood watching them reflectively as they descended the steps and made their way along the flagged path to the gate.

As Mr. Gimbler closed the street door, that of the waiting-room opened softly, disclosing the figure of no less a person than Mr. Buffham. And, naturally, the figure included the countenance; which was wreathed in smiles. Looking cautiously towards the kitchen stairs, Mr. Buffham murmured:

"Did I exaggerate, my little Gimblet? I think not. Methought I heard a whisper of ten thousand pounds. An outside estimate, my dear sir; in fact, a wild overestimate. Hey? What O!"

Mr. Gimbler did not reply. He only smiled. And when Mr. Gimbler smiled—as we have mentioned—his eyes tended to disappear. They did on this occasion. Especially the left one.

---

### III. — MR. PIPPET GIVES EVIDENCE

AMERICAN visitors to London often attain to a quite remarkable familiarity with many of its features. But their accomplishments in this respect do not usually extend to an acquaintance with its intimate geography. The reason is simple enough. He who would know London, or any other great city, in the complete and intimate fashion characteristic of the genuine Town Sparrow, must habituate himself to the use of that old-fashioned conveyance known as "shanks's mare." For the humblest of creatures has some distinctive excellence; even the mere pedestrian, despised of the proud motorist (who classes him with the errant rabbit or the crawling pismire) and ignored by the law, has at least one virtue: he knows his London.

Now, the American visitor is not usually a pedestrian. As his time appears to him more valuable than his money, he tends to cut the Gordian knot of geographical difficulties by hailing a taxi; whereby he makes a swift passage at the sacrifice of everything between his starting-point and his destination.

This is what Mr. Pippet did on the afternoon of the day of his conference with Mr. Gimbler. The hailing was done by the

hotel porter, and when the taxi was announced, Mr. Pippet came forth from the hall and delivered to the driver an address in the neighbourhood of Great Saint Helen's, wherever that might be, and held open the cab door to admit the young lady who had followed him out; who thereupon slithered in with the agility born of youthful flexibility, extensive practice and no clothing to speak of.

"I am not sure, Jenny," said Mr. Pippet, as he took his seat and pulled the door to, "that your aunt was not right. This is likely to be a rather gruesome business, and the place doesn't seem a very suitable one for young ladies."

Miss Jenny smiled a superior smile as she fished a gold cigarette case out of her hand-bag and proceeded to select a cigarette. "That's all bunk, you know, Dad," said she. "Auntie was just bursting to come herself, but she thought she had to set me an example of self-restraint. As if I wanted her examples. I am out to see all that there is to see. Isn't that what we came to Europe for?"

"I thought we came to settle this peerage business," replied Mr. Pippet.

"That's part of the entertainment," she admitted, "but we may as well take anything else that happens to be going. And here we have struck a first-class mystery. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Do you think it will be on view?" she added, holding out the cigarette case.

Mr. Pippet humbly picked out a cigarette and looked at her inquiringly. "Do you mean the head?" he asked.

"Yes. That's what I want to see. You've seen it, you know."

"I don't know much about the ways of inquests in England," he replied, "but I don't fancy that the remains are shown to anyone but the jury."

"That's real mean of them," she said. "I was hoping that it would be on view, or that they would bring it in—on a charger, like John the Baptist's."

Mr. Pippet smiled as he lit his cigarette. "The circumstances are not quite the same, my dear," said he; "but, as I am only a witness, you'll see as much as I shall, though, as you say, I have actually seen the thing, or, at least, a part of it; and I have no wish to see any more."

"Still," persisted Jenny, "you can say that you have really and truly seen it."

Mr. Pippet admitted that he enjoyed this inestimable privilege for what it might be worth, and the conversation dropped for the moment. Miss Jenny leaned back reposefully in her corner, taking occasional "pulls" at the cigarette in its dainty amber holder, while her father regarded her with a mixture of parental pride, affection and quiet amusement. And it has to be admitted that Mr. Pippet's sentiments with regard to his daughter were by no means unjustified. Miss Jennifer Pippet—to give her her full and unabridged style and title—was a girl of whom any father might have been proud. If—as Mr. Gimpler had very properly decided—the majestic Arminella "looked the part" of an earl's sister (which is not invariably the case with the genuine possessors of that title), Mistress Jennifer would have sustained the character of the earl's daughter with credit even on the stage, where the demands are a good deal more exacting than in real life. In the typically "patrician" style of features, with the fine Roman nose and the level brows and firm chin, she resembled her redoubtable aunt; but she had the advantage of that lady in the matter of stature, being, like her father, well above the average height. And here it may be noted that, if the daughter reflected credit on the father, the latter was well able to hold his position on his own merits. Christopher J. Pippet was fully worthy of his distinguished womenkind; a fine, upstanding gentleman with an undeniable "presence."

It was probably the possession of these personal advantages that made the way smooth for the two strangers on their arrival at the premises in which the inquest was to be held. At any rate, as soon as Mr. Pippet had made known his connexion with the case, the officiating police officer conducted them to a place in the front row and provided them each with a chair directly facing the table and nearly opposite the coroner's seat. At the moment, this and the jurymen's seats were empty and the large room was filled with the hum of conversation. For the sensational nature of the case had attracted a number of spectators greatly in excess of that usually found at an inquest; so much so that the accommodation was somewhat strained, and our two visitors had reason to congratulate themselves on their privileged position.

A few minutes after their arrival, a general stir among the audience and an increase in the murmur of voices seemed to indicate that something was happening. Then the nature of that something became apparent as the jurymen filed into their places and the coroner took his place at the head of the table. There was a brief interval as the jurymen settled into their places and the coroner arranged some papers before him and inspected his fountain pen. Then he looked up; and as the hum of conversation died away and silence settled down on the room, he began his opening address.

"The circumstances, gentlemen," said he, "which form the subject of this inquiry are very unusual. Ordinarily the occasion of a coroner's inquest is the discovery of the dead body of some person, known or unknown, or the death of some person from causes which have not been ascertained or certified, but whose body is available for examination. In the present case, while there is indisputable evidence of the death of some person, and certain evidence which may enable us to form some opinion as to the probable cause of death, the complete body is not available for expert examination. All that has been discovered, up to the present, is the head; whereas it is probable that the physical evidence as to the exact cause of death is to be found in the missing portion of the remains. I need not to occupy your time with any account of the circumstances, all of which will transpire in the evidence. All that I need say now is that the efforts of the police to discover the identity of deceased have so far proved fruitless. We are accordingly dealing with an entirely unknown individual. The

first witness whom I shall call is Thomas Crump.”

At the sound of his name, Mr. Crump made his way to the table, piloted thither by the coroner’s officer, and took his stand, under the latter’s direction, near to the coroner’s chair. Having been sworn, he stated that he was an attendant in the cloak room at Fenchurch Street Station.

“Were you on duty in the evening of Saturday the 19th of August?”

“Yes, sir, I was.”

“Do you remember receiving a certain wooden case on that evening? A case which there has been some question about since?”

“Yes. It was brought in about nine twenty; just after the nine fifteen from Shoeburyness had come in.”

“Was there anything on the case to show where it had come from?”

“No, there were no labels on it excepting one with what I took to be the owner’s name and address. I supposed that it had come by the Shoeburyness train, but that was only a guess. If it did, it couldn’t have travelled in the luggage van. The guard wouldn’t have had it without a label.”

“Who brought the case to the cloak room?”

“It was brought in by the gentleman who I took to be the owner. And a rare job he must have had with it, for it weighed close on a hundredweight, as near as I could tell. He staggered in with it, carrying it by a cord that was tied round it.”

“Can you give us any description of this man?”

“I didn’t notice him very particularly, but I remember that he was rather tall and had a long, thin face and a big, sharp nose. He looked a bit on the thin side, but he must have been pretty strong to judge by the way he handled that case.”

“Did you notice how he was dressed?”

“So far as I remember, he had on a dark suit—I fancy it was blue serge but I wouldn’t be sure; but I remember that he was wearing a soft felt hat.”

“Had he any moustache or was he clean shaved?”

“He had a moustache and a smallish beard, cut to a point; what they call a Torpedo beard. His beard and his hair were both dark.”

“About what age would you say he was?”

“He might have been about forty or perhaps a trifle more.”

“And with regard to the case, can you give us any description of that?”

“It was a wooden case, about fifteen inches square and perhaps eighteen inches high. It was made of plain deal strongly put together and strengthened at the corners with iron straps. The top was fitted with hinges and held down by eight screws. The wood was a good deal stained and rubbed, as if it had seen a fair amount of use. It had a label fastened on with tacks; just a plain card with the owner’s name on it—at least, somebody’s name—and an address. The name was Dobson, but I wouldn’t swear to the address.”

“Well,” the coroner pursued, “you took in the case. What happened next?”

“Nothing on that night. I gave the man his ticket and he took it and said he would probably call for the case on Monday. Then he said ‘Good night’ and went off.”

“When did you see him again?”

“That was on Monday evening, about seven o’clock. It happened to be a slack time and I had more time to attend to him. He came and handed me his ticket and asked for the case. He pointed out one which he thought was his, so I went over to it and looked at the label that had been stuck on it, but it was the wrong number. However, he said that his name was on the case—name of Dobson—and I saw that there was a private label with that name on it, so I said he had better have a look at it and see if it really was his case. So he came into the cloak room and examined the case. And then he got into a rare state of excitement. He said it was certainly his name that was on the case and his address, but the label was not the same one that he wrote. But still he thought that the case was his case.

“Then I asked him if the contents of his case were of any particular value, and he said ‘yes.’ They were worth several thousand pounds. Now, when he said that, I began to suspect that there was something wrong, so I suggested that we had better open the case and see if his property was inside.

“He jumped at the offer, so I got a screw-driver, and we took out the screws and lifted the lid. And when we lifted it, the first thing that we saw was the top of a man’s head, packed in with a lot of rags. When he saw it, he seemed to be struck all of a heap. Then he slammed down the lid and asked me where he could find a policeman. I told him that he would find one outside the station, and off he went as hard as he could go.”

Here the coroner held up a restraining hand as he scribbled furiously to keep up with the witness. When he had finished the paragraph, he looked up and nodded.

"Yes; he went out to look for a policeman. What happened next?"

"While we had been looking at the case, there were two gentlemen who had come to collect their luggage and who heard what was going on. When Mr. Dobson—if that was his name—went out, they came over to have a look at the case; and we all waited for Mr. Dobson to come back. But he didn't come back. So, after a time, one of the gentlemen went out and presently came back with a constable. I showed the constable what was in the case, and he then took possession of it."

"Yes," said the coroner, "that is all quite clear, so far. Do you think you would recognize this man, Dobson, if you were to see him again?"

"Yes," replied Crump. "I feel pretty sure I should. He was the sort of man that you would remember. And I did look at him pretty hard."

"Well," said the coroner, "I hope that you will have an opportunity of identifying him. Does any gentleman wish to ask the witness any questions? I think he has told us all that he has to tell. The other witnesses will be able to fill in the details. No questions? Then we will pass on to the next witness. William Harris."

Mr. Harris came forward with rather more diffidence than had been shown by his colleague, which might have been due to his age—he was little more than a youth—or to the story that he had to tell. But, ill at ease as he obviously was, he gave his evidence in a quite clear and straightforward fashion. When he had been sworn and given the usual particulars, he stood, regarding the coroner with a look of consternation, as he waited for the dread interrogation.

"You say," the coroner began impassively, "that you are an attendant in the cloak room at Fenchurch Street Station. How long have you been employed there?"

"Not quite three munce," the witness faltered.

"So you have not had much experience, I suppose?"

"No, sir, not very much."

"Were you on duty on Sunday, the twentieth of August?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was on duty with you?"

"No one, sir. It was Mr. Crump's Sunday off, and, being a slack day, I took the duty by myself."

"On that day, you received a certain wooden case. Do you remember the circumstances connected with it?"

"Yes, sir. The case was brought in about half-past ten in the morning. The man who brought it said that he would be calling for it about tea-time."

"Did this man bring the case himself?"

"Yes, sir. He carried it by a thick cord that was tied round it, and he brought it right in and put it down not far from another case of the same kind."

"Did you examine these cases or read the labels that were on them?"

"No, sir, I can't say that I did. I just stuck the ticket on the case that the man had brought in, but I didn't examine it. But I remember that there was another case near it that looked like the same sort of case."

"Did this man come back for the case?"

"Yes, sir. He came about four o'clock with another man who looked like a taxi-driver. He handed me the ticket and I went with the two men and found the case. Then the man who had brought it told the other man to take it out and stow it in the taxi. Then he pulled a time-table out of his pocket and asked me to look over it with him and see how the trains ran to Loughton and Epping. So we spread out the time-table on the luggage-counter and went through the list of Sunday trains; and while we were looking at it, the taxi-man took up the case and went out of the station. When we had finished with the time-table and the man had taken one or two notes of the trains, he put the time-table back in his pocket, thanked me for helping him and went away."

"Did it never occur to you to see whether he had taken the right case?"

"No, sir. My back was towards the taxi-man when he picked the case up. I saw him carrying it out towards the entrance, but it looked just like the right case, and it never occurred to me that he might have taken the wrong one. And the one that was left looked like the right one and it was in the right place."

"Yes," said the coroner, "it was very natural. Evidently, the exchange had been carefully planned in advance, and very skilfully planned, too. Now, with regard to these two cases: were you able to form any opinion as to the weight of either or both of them?"

"I never felt either of them," the witness replied; "but the one that the man brought in seemed rather heavy, by the way that he carried it. He had hold of it by the cord that was tied round it. The other one seemed a bit heavy, too. But when I saw the taxi-man going out with it, he had got it on his shoulder and he didn't seem to have any difficulty with it."

"And, with regard to these two men. Can you give us any description of them?"

"I hardly saw the taxi-man, and I don't remember what he was like at all, excepting that he was a big, strong-looking man. The other man was rather small, but he looked pretty strong-built, too. When we were looking at the time-tables, I noticed two things about him. One was that he seemed to have a couple of gold teeth."

"Ah!" said the coroner, "presumably gold-filled teeth. Do you remember which teeth they were?"

"They were the two middle front teeth at the top. He showed them a good deal when he talked."

"Yes; and what was the other thing that you noticed?"

"I noticed, when he put his hand on the time-table, that his fingers were stained all brownish yellow, as if he was always smoking cigarettes; and his hand was shaking, even when it was laying on the paper. I didn't notice anything else."

"Can you tell us how he was dressed?"

"He had on an ordinary tweed suit; rather a shabby suit it was. And he was wearing a cloth cap."

"Had he any moustache or beard?"

"No, sir; he was clean shaved—or, at least, not very clean, because he had about a couple of days' growth, and as he was a dark man, it showed pretty plainly."

"How did he strike you as to his station in life? Should you describe him as a gentleman?"

"No, sir, I should not," the witness replied with considerable emphasis. "He struck me as quite a common sort of man, and I got the idea that he might have been a seaman or some kind of waterside character. We see a good many of that sort on our line, so we get to recognize them."

"What sort of men are you referring to?" the coroner asked with evident interest, "and where do they come from?"

"I mean sailors of all kinds from the London and the India Docks, and fishermen and longshoremen from Leigh and Benfleet and Southend and the sea-side places up that way."

"Yes," said the coroner, "this is quite interesting and may be important. Fenchurch Street has always been a sailors' station. However, that is for the police rather than for us. I think that is all that we want to ask this witness, unless any of the gentlemen of the jury wish to put any questions."

He glanced interrogatively at the jury, but none of them expressed any curiosity. Accordingly, the witness was allowed to retire; which he did with undisguised relief.

The next witness was the constable who had been called in to take charge of the case, and, as his evidence amounted to little more than a statement of that fact, he was soon disposed of and dismissed. Then the coroner pronounced the name of Geoffrey Buffham, and that gentleman rose from the extreme corner of the court and worked his way to the table, casting a leer of recognition on Mr. Pippet as he passed. His evidence, also, was chiefly formal; but, when he had finished his account of his search for the constable, the coroner turned to the subject of identification.

"You saw the man who had come to claim the case. Can you add any particulars to those given by the attendant?"

"I am afraid I can't tell you very much about him. The light was not very good, and, of course, until he had gone, there was nothing to make one take any special notice of him. And then it was too late. All I can say is that he was a tallish man with a rather dark beard and a prominent nose."

The coroner wrote this down without comment, and then, apparently judging Mr. Buffham to be worth no more powder and shot, glanced at the jury for a moment and dismissed him. Then he pronounced the name of Christopher J. Pippet, and the owner of that name rose and stepped over to the place that had been occupied by the other witnesses. The coroner looked up at the tall, dignified figure, apparently contrasting it with its rather scrubby, raffish predecessor; and when the preliminaries had been disposed of, he asked apologetically:

"It is of no particular importance, but would you tell us what the 'J' in your name stands for? It is usual to give the full name."

Mr. Pippet smiled. "As I have just been sworn," said he, "I have got to be careful in my statements. My impression is that the 'J' stands for Josiah, but that is only an opinion. I have always been accustomed to use the initial only."

"Then," said the coroner, "we will accept that as your recognized personal designation. There is no need to be pedantic. Now, Mr. Pippet, I don't think we need trouble you to go into details concerning the discovery of this case, but it would be useful if you could give us some further description of the man who came to claim the property. The descriptions which have been given are very sketchy and indefinite; can you amplify them in any way?"

Mr. Pippet reflected. "I took a pretty careful look at him," said he, "and I have a fairly clear mental picture of the man."

"You say you took a pretty careful look at him," said the coroner. "What made you look at him carefully?"

"Well, sir," Mr. Pippet replied, "the circumstances were rather remarkable. From his conversation with the attendant it was clear that something quite irregular had been happening; and when he mentioned the value of the case, it began to look like a serious crime. Then when he rushed out pell mell in search of a policeman, that struck me as a very strange thing to do. What was the hurry about? His own case was gone, and the one that was there wasn't going to run away. But I gathered that there was something in it that oughtn't to have been there. So when he came running out full pelt, I

suspected that the cause of the hurry was behind him, not in front, and, naturally, my attention was aroused."

"You suspected that he might be making off?"

"It seemed a possibility. Anyway, I have never seen a man look more thoroughly scared."

"Then," said the coroner, "as you seem to have taken more notice of him than anyone else, perhaps you can give us a rather more complete description of him. Do you think you would recognize him if you should see him again?"

"I feel pretty sure that I should," was the reply; "but that is not the same as enabling other people to recognize him. I should describe him as a tall man, about five feet eleven, lean but muscular and broad across the shoulders. He had a long, thin face and a long, thin nose, curved on the bridge and pointed at the end. His hair and beard were nearly black, but his skin and eyes didn't seem to match them very well, for his skin was distinctly fair and his eyes were a pale blue. I got the distinct impression that his hair and beard were dyed."

"Was that merely an impression or had you any definite grounds for the suspicion?"

"At first, it was just an impression. But as he was running out he got between me and the electric light for a moment, and the light shone through his beard. Then I caught a glint of that peculiar red that you see in hair that is dyed black when the light shines through it, and that you never see in natural hair; a red with a perceptible tinge of purple in it."

"Yes," said the coroner, "it is very characteristic. But do you feel quite sure that you actually saw this colour? It is a very important point."

"I feel convinced in my own mind," replied Mr. Pippet, "but, of course, I might have been mistaken. I can only say that, to the best of my belief, the hair showed that peculiar colour."

"Well," said the coroner, "that is about as much as anyone could say, under the circumstances. Did you notice anything of interest in regard to the clothing? You heard Mr. Crump's evidence."

"Yes; and I don't think I can add much to it. The man was wearing a well-used dark blue serge suit, a blue cotton shirt with a collar to match, a soft felt hat and dark brown shoes. He had a wrist watch, but he seemed to have a pocket watch as well. Anyway, he had what looked like a watch guard, made, apparently, of plaited twine."

"Is that all you can tell us about him, or is there anything else that you are able to recall?"

"I think I have told you all that I noticed. There wasn't much opportunity to examine him closely."

"No, there was not," the coroner agreed. "I can only compliment you on the excellent use that you made of your eyes in the short time that was available. And, if that is all that you have to tell us, I think that we need not trouble you any further."

He glanced at the foreman of the jury, and as that gentleman bowed to indicate that he was satisfied, Mr. Pippet was allowed to return to his seat, where he received the whispered congratulations of his daughter.

"That," said the coroner, addressing the jury, "concludes the evidence relating to the discovery of the remains. We shall now proceed to the evidence afforded by the remains themselves; and we will begin with that of the medical officer to whom the head was handed for expert examination. Dr. Humphrey Smith."

---

#### IV. — THE FINDING OF THE JURY

THE new witness was a man of about thirty with a clean shaved, studious face, garnished with a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, and a somewhat diffident, uneasy manner. Having advanced to the table and taken his seat on the chair which had been placed for him close to that occupied by the coroner, he produced from his pocket a note book which he held unopened on his knee throughout the proceedings. In reply to the preliminary questions, he stated that his name was Humphrey Smith, that he was a bachelor of medicine, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians.

"You are the Police Medical Officer of this district, I believe," the coroner suggested.

"Temporarily, I hold that post," was the reply, "during the absence on sick leave of the regular medical officer."

"Quite so," said the coroner; "for the purposes of this inquiry, you are the Police Medical Officer."

The witness admitted that this was so, and the coroner proceeded: "You have had submitted to you for examination a case containing a human head. Will you give us an account of your examination and the conclusions at which you arrived?"

The witness reflected a few moments and then began his statement.

"At ten fifteen on the morning of the twenty-second of August, Inspector Budge called on me and asked me to come round to the police station to examine the contents of a case, in which he said were certain human remains. I went with him and was shown a wooden case, strengthened by iron straps. It had a hinged lid which was further secured by eight screws, which, however, had been extracted. On raising the lid, I saw what looked like the top of a man's head, surrounded by rags and articles of clothing which had been packed tightly round it. With the Inspector's assistance I removed the packing material until it was possible to lift out the head, which I then took to a table by the window where I was able to



make a thorough examination.

"The head appeared to be that of a man, although there was hardly any visible beard or moustache and no signs of his having been shaved."

"You say that the head *appeared* to be that of a man. Do you feel confident that deceased *was* a man, or do you think that the head may possibly be that of a woman?"

"I think there is no doubt that deceased was a man. The general appearance was masculine, and the hair was quite short and arranged like a man's hair."

"That," remarked the coroner, "is not a very safe criterion in these days. I have seen a good many women who would have passed well enough for men excepting for their clothes."

"Yes, that is true," the witness admitted, "but I had the present fashion in mind when I formed my opinion; and, although there was extremely little hair on the face, there was more than one usually finds on the face of a woman—a young woman, at any rate."

"Then, are we to understand that this head was that of a young person?"

"The exact age was rather difficult to determine, but I should say that deceased was not much, if any, over thirty."

"What made it difficult to estimate the age of deceased?"

"There were two circumstances that made it difficult to judge the age. One was the physical condition of the head, and the other was the extraordinary facial character of this person."

"By the physical condition, do you mean that it had undergone considerable putrefactive changes?"

"No, not at all. It was not in the least decomposed. It had been thoroughly embalmed, or, at least, treated with preservative substances—principally formalin, I think. There was quite a distinct odour of formalin vapour."

"Then it would appear that it was in quite a good state of preservation, which ought to have helped rather than hindered your examination."

"Yes, but the effect of the formalin was to produce a certain amount of shrinkage of the tissues, which naturally resulted in some distortion of the features. But it was not easy to be sure how much of the distortion was due to the formalin and how much to the natural deformity."

"Was the shrinkage in any way due to drying of the tissues?"

"No. The tissues were not in the least dry. It appeared to me that the formalin had been mixed with glycerine; and, as glycerine does not evaporate, the head has remained perfectly moist, but without any tendency to decompose."

"How long do you consider that deceased has been dead?"

"That," replied the doctor, "is a question upon which I could form no opinion whatever. The head is so perfectly preserved that it will last in its present condition for an almost indefinite time; and, of course, what applies to the future applies equally to the past. One can estimate the time that has elapsed since death only by the changes that have occurred in the interval. But, if there are no changes, there is nothing on which to form an opinion."

"Do you mean to say that deceased might have been dead for a year?"

"Yes, or even longer than that. A year ago the head would have looked exactly as it looks now, and as it will look a year hence. The preservatives have rendered it practically unchangeable."

"That is very remarkable," said the coroner, "and it introduces a formidable difficulty into this inquiry. For we have to discover, if we can, how, when and where this person met with his death. But it would seem that the 'when' is undiscoverable. You could give no limit to the time that has elapsed since death took place?"

"No. I could make no suggestion as to the time."

The coroner wrote this down and looked at what he had written with an air of profound dissatisfaction. Then he turned to the witness and opened a new subject.

"You spoke just now of the remarkable facial peculiarities of deceased. Can you describe those peculiarities?"

"I will try. Deceased had a most extraordinary and perfectly hideous face. The peculiar appearance was due principally to the overgrown condition of the lower part, especially the lower jaw. In shape, the face was like an egg with the small end upwards; and the jaw was not only enormously broad, but the chin stuck out beyond the upper lip and the lower teeth were spread out and projected considerably in front of the upper ones. Then the nose was thick and coarse and the ears stood out from the head; but they were not like ordinary outstanding ears, which tend to be thin and membranous. They were thick and lumpy and decidedly misshapen. Altogether, the appearance of the face was quite abnormal."

"Should you regard this abnormality as a deformity, or do you think it was connected with deceased's state of health?"

"I should hardly like to give an opinion without seeing the rest of the body. There is no doubt about the deformity; but whether it was congenital or due to disease, I should not like to say: There are several rather rare diseases which tend to produce malformations of different parts of the body."

"Well," said the coroner, "medical details of that kind are a little outside the scope of this inquiry. The fact which interests us is that deceased was a very unusual-looking person, so that there ought not to be much difficulty in identifying him. To come to another question; from your examination of this head, should you say that there is any evidence of special skill or knowledge in the way in which the head has been separated from the trunk?"

"I think that there is a suggestion of some skill and knowledge. Not necessarily very much. But the separation was effected in accordance with the anatomical relations, not in the way in which it would have been done by an entirely ignorant and unskilful person. The head had been separated from the spinal column—that is, from the top of the backbone—by cutting through the ligaments that fasten the backbone to the skull; whereas a quite ignorant person would almost certainly have cut through the neck and through the joint between two of the neck vertebrae."

"You think that it would not require much skill to take the head off in the manner in which it was done?"

"No; it would be quite easy if one knew where to make the cut. But most people do not."

"You think, then, that the person who cut off this head must have had some anatomical knowledge?"

"Yes; but a very little knowledge of anatomy would suffice."

"Do you think that such knowledge as a butcher possesses would be sufficient?"

"Certainly. A butcher doesn't know much anatomy, but he knows where to find the joints."

"And now, to take another question; can you give us any information as to the cause of death?"

"No," was the very definite reply. "I examined the head most carefully with this question in view, but I could find no trace of any wound, bruise, or mark of violence, or even of rough treatment. There was no clue whatever to the cause or mode of death."

There was a brief pause while the coroner glanced through his notes. Then, looking up at the jury, he said:

"Well, gentlemen, you have heard what the doctor has to tell us. It doesn't get us on very far, but, of course, that is not the doctor's fault. He can't make evidence. Would any of you like to ask him any further questions? If not, I think we need not occupy any more of his time."

Once more he paused with his eyes on the jury; then, as no one made any sign, he thanked the witness and gave him his dismissal.

The next witness was a smart-looking uniformed inspector of the City Police who stepped up to his post with the brisk, confident air of one familiar with the procedure. He stated that his name was William Budge, and, having rattled through the preliminaries, gave a precise and business-like account of the circumstances in which he made the acquaintance of the "remains" in the cloak room. From this he proceeded to the examination of the case in collaboration with the medical officer. His description of the case tallied with that given by Mr. Crump, but he was able to supply a few further details.

"Mr. Crump referred in his evidence," said the coroner, "to a private label on this case. You examined that, of course?"

"Yes. It was a piece of card—half of a stationer's postcard—fastened to the lid of the case with four tacks. It had a name and address written on it in plain block letters with a rather fine pen. The name was J. Dobson and the address was 401 Argyle Square, King's Cross, London."

"Four hundred and one!" exclaimed the coroner.

The witness smiled. "Yes, sir. Of course, there's no such number, but I went there to make sure."

"You did not extract any other information from the label?"

"I did not make a particular examination of it. I took it off carefully with the proper precautions and handed it to the superintendent."

"You did not test it for finger-prints?"

"No, sir. That would not be in my province."

"Exactly!" said the coroner, "and it is not really in ours." He paused for a few moments and then asked:

"Have you any idea, Inspector, where this case might have come from, or what its original contents might have been?"

"I should say," was the reply, "that it originally contained some kind of provisions and that it formed part of a ship's stores. It is very usual for firms who supply provisions to ships to send them out in cases of this kind. The lids are screwed down for security in transit, but furnished with hinges for convenience when they are in use on board. There was no mark on the wood to indicate where the case came from. The issuer's name and address was probably on a label which has been taken off."

"Did you find anything that seemed to confirm your surmise that this case had formed part of a ship's stores?"

"Yes. When the doctor had taken the head out, I took out the clothes and rags that had been used for packing and went over them carefully. Most of them seemed to be connected with a vessel of some sort. I made out a list, which I have with me."

He produced an official-looking note book, and, at the coroner's request, read out the list of items.

"At the top, immediately surrounding the head, was a very old, ragged blue jersey, such as fishermen wear. There was no mark of any kind on it, but there were some ends of thread that looked as if a linen tab had been cut off. Next, there was a pair of brown canvas trousers, a good deal worn and without any marks or any name on the buttons, and an old brown canvas jumper. Then there were several worn-out cotton swabs such as they use on board ship, three longish ends of inch-and-a-half manilla rope, and, at the bottom of the case, a ragged oil-skin coat. So the whole contents looked like the throw-outs collected from some ship's fo'c'sle, or from the cabin of a barge or some other small craft."

"Do you associate these cast-off things with any particular kind of vessel?"

"As far as the things themselves are concerned, I do not. But the case rather suggests a deep-water craft. A barge or a coaster can pick up her provisions at the various ports of call, and hardly needs the quantity of stores that this case suggests."

"And what about the other case—the case that was stolen? Do you connect it with the one that contained the head?"

The Inspector reflected. "There is not much information available at present," said he, "and what there is you have had in Crump's evidence. It appears that the two cases were exactly alike; and, if that is so, they might have come from the same source. Evidently, the man who brought in the case with the head in it knew all about the other case, and what was in it."

"Which, I take it, is more than you do?"

The Inspector smiled and admitted that the unknown man had the advantage of the police at present; and, with that admission his evidence came to an end and he retired to his seat. There followed a pause, during which the coroner once more looked over his notes and the jury exchanged remarks in an undertone. At length, when he had run his eye over the depositions, the coroner leaned back in his chair, and, taking a general survey of the jury, began his summing-up.

"This inquiry, gentlemen," he began, "is a very remarkable one, and as unsatisfactory as it is unusual in character. It is unsatisfactory in several respects. We are inquiring into the circumstances surrounding the death of a deceased person. But we are not in possession of the body of that person but of only a part of it; and that part gives us no information on either of the three headings of our inquiry—the time, the place and the manner. We are seeking to discover:—first, When this person died; second, In what place he died; and, third, In what manner and by what means he came by his death. But, owing to the incomplete nature of the remains, the strange circumstances in which they were discovered, and the physical condition of the remains themselves, we can answer none of these questions. We do not even know who the deceased is. All that we can do is to consider the whole body of facts which are known to us and draw what reasonable conclusions we can from them.

"Let us begin by taking a glance at the succession of events in the order of their occurrence. First, on the Saturday night, comes a man with a heavy case which, according to his subsequent admission, contains property of great value. He leaves this case in the cloak room for the week-end. Then, on the Sunday, comes another man with another case which appears to be identically similar to the first. He very adroitly manages to exchange this case for the one containing the valuable property. Then, on the Monday, comes the first man to claim his property. He sees that some substitution appears to have occurred, and, in order to make sure, opens the case. Then he discovers the head of the deceased and is, naturally enough, horrified. Instantly, he rushes out of the station, ostensibly in search of a policeman, but actually, to make his escape, as becomes evident when he does not return. That is the series of events which are known to us, and which form, in effect, the whole sum of our knowledge. Let us see what conclusions we can draw from them.

"The first question that we ask ourselves is:—Why did that man not come back? The case which had been stolen contained, according to what was probably a hasty, unguarded statement, property worth several thousand pounds. Without committing ourselves to a legal opinion, we may say that he could have made a claim on the railway company for the value of that property. Yet, at the sight of that dead man's head, he rushed out and disappeared. What are we to infer from that? There are several inferences that suggest themselves. First, although it is evident that the head in the case came to him as a complete surprise, it is possible that, as soon as he saw it, he recognized it as something with which he had a guilty association. That is one possibility. Then there is the question as to what was in his own case. It was property of great value. But whose property was it? There is in the behaviour of this man a strong suggestion that the valuable contents of that case may have been stolen property, of which he was not in a position to give any account. That appears to be highly probable; but it does not greatly concern us, excepting that it suggests a criminal element in the transaction as a whole—a suggestion that is strengthened by the apparent connexion between the two men.

"When we come to the second man, the criminal element is unmistakeable. To say nothing of the theft which he undoubtedly committed, the fact that he was going about with the head of a dead man in a box, definitely puts upon him the responsibility for the mutilation of a human body, to say the least. The question of any further guilt depends on the view that is taken of that mutilation. And that brings us to the question as to the manner in which the deceased came by his death.

"Now, we have to recognize that we have no direct evidence on this point. The doctor's careful and expert examination failed to elicit any information as to the cause of death; which was what might have been expected from the very insufficient means at his disposal. But, if we have no direct evidence as to the actual cause of death, we have very important indirect evidence as to some of the circumstances surrounding his death. We know, for instance, that the body had been mutilated, or at least decapitated; and we know that some person was in possession of the separated head—and, probably, of the mutilated remainder of the corpse.

"But these are very material facts. What does our common sense, aided by experience, suggest in the case of a corpse which has been mutilated and a part packed in a box and planted in a railway cloak room? What is the usual object of dismembering a corpse and of disposing of the dismembered remains in this way? In all the numerous cases which have occurred from time to time, the object has been the same; to get rid of the body of a person who has been murdered, in order to cover up the fact and the circumstances of the crime. No other reason is imaginable. There could be no object in thus making away with the body of a person who had died a natural death.

"That, however, is for you to consider in deciding on your verdict. The other known facts do not seem to be helpful. The singular and rather repulsive appearance of deceased does not concern us, although it may be important to the police. As to the curious use of a preservative, the object of that seems to be fairly obvious. Mutilated remains have been commonly discovered by the putrefactive odour which they have exhaled. If this head had not been preserved, it would have been impossible for it to have been left in the cloak room for twenty-four hours without arousing suspicion. But, as I have said, the fact, though curious, is not material to our inquiry. The material facts are those which suggest an answer to the question, How did deceased come by his death? Those facts are in your possession; and I shall now leave you to consider your verdict."

Thereupon, while the hum of conversation once more pervaded the court room, the jury drew together and compared notes. But their conference lasted only a very few minutes, at the end of which the foreman signified to the coroner that they had agreed on their verdict.

"Well, gentlemen," said the latter, "what is your decision?"

"We find," was the reply, "that deceased was murdered by some person or persons unknown."

"Yes," said the coroner, as he entered the verdict at the foot of the depositions, "that is what common sense suggests. I don't see that you could have arrived at any other decision. It remains only for me to thank you for your attendance and the careful attention which you have given to the evidence, and close the proceedings."

As the court rose, Mr. Buffham emerged hurriedly from the corner in which he had been seated and elbowed his way towards Mr. Pippet and his daughter.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, effusively, "let me offer my most hearty congratulations on the brilliant way in which you gave your evidence. Your powers of observation positively staggered me."

The latter statement was no exaggeration. Mr. Buffham had been not only staggered but slightly disconcerted by the discovery of his friend's remarkable capacity for "keeping his weather eyelid lifted." In the peculiar circumstances, it was a gift that he was disposed to view with some disfavour; and he found himself wondering, a little uncomfortably, whether Mr. Pippet happened to have observed any other facts which he was not expected or desired to observe. But he did not allow these misgivings to interfere with his suave and ingratiating manner. As Mr. Pippet received his congratulations without obvious emotion, he bestowed on Miss Jenny a leer which was intended to express admiring recognition and then turned with an insinuating smile to her father.

"This charming young lady," said he, "is, I presume, the daughter of whom I have heard you speak."

"You have guessed right the first time," Mr. Pippet replied. "This is Mr. Buffham, my dear; but you know that, as you heard him give his evidence."

Miss Jenny bowed, with a faint suggestion of stiffness. The ingratiating smile did not seem to have produced the expected effect. The "charming young lady" was not, in fact, at all favourably impressed by Mr. Buffham's personality. Nevertheless she exchanged a few observations on the incidents of the inquest, as the audience was clearing off, and the three moved out together when the way was clear. Here, however, Mr. Buffham suffered a slight disappointment. For when the taxi which Mr. Pippet hailed drew up at the curb, the hoped-for invitation was not forthcoming, and the cordial handshake and smiling farewell appeared an unsatisfactory substitute.

---

## V. — THE GREAT PLATINUM ROBBERY

THORNDYKE'S rather free and easy custom of receiving professional visitors at unconventional hours tended on certain occasions to result in slightly embarrassing situations. It did, for instance, on an evening in early October when the arrival of our old friend Mr. Brodribb, was followed almost immediately by that of Mr. Superintendent Miller. Both were ostensibly making a friendly call; but both, I felt sure, had their particular fish to fry. Brodribb had almost certainly come for a professional consultation, and Miller's informal chats invariably developed a professional background.

I watched with amused curiosity to see what would happen. Each man would probably give the other a chance to retire, and the question was, which would be the first to abdicate? The event would probably be determined by the relative urgency of their respective fish frying. But the delicate balance of probabilities was upset by Polton, our invaluable laboratory assistant, who happened to be in the room when they arrived; who instantly proceeded to make the arrangements which immemorial custom had associated with each of our visitors. The two cosiest armchairs were drawn up to the fire and a small table placed by each. On one table appeared, as if by magic, the whisky decanter, siphon and cigar box which clearly appertained to Miller, and on the other, three port glasses.

"This is your chair, sir," said Polton, shepherding the Superintendent in the way he should go. "The other is for Mr. Brodribb"; and with this he vanished, and we all knew whither he had gone.

"Well," said Brodribb with slight indecision, as he subsided into his allotted chair and put his toes on the curb, while Thorndyke and I drew up our chairs, "if I shan't be in the way, I'll just sit down and warm myself for a few minutes."

His "defeatist" tone I judged to be due to the fact that Miller, in ready response to my invitation, had mixed himself a stiff jorum, got a cigar alight and apparently settled himself comfortably for the evening. I think the old lawyer was disposed to give up the contest and retire in favour of the Superintendent. But at that moment Polton returned, bearing a decanter of port which he deposited on Mr. Brodribb's table; whereupon the balance of probabilities was restored.

"Ha!" said Brodribb, as Thorndyke filled the three glasses, "it's all very well to sentimentalize about the Last Rose of Summer, but the First Fire of Winter makes more appeal to me."

"You can hardly call it winter at the beginning of October," Miller objected.

"Can't you, by Jove!" exclaimed Brodribb. "Perhaps not by the calendar; but when I came through the Carey Street gateway just now, the wind was enough to nip the nose off a brass monkey. But I haven't got a fire yet. It's only you medico-legal sybarites who can afford such luxuries."

He sipped his wine ecstatically, spread out his toes and blinked at the fire with an air of enjoyment that suggested a particularly magnificent old Tom cat. The superintendent made no rejoinder, and Thorndyke and I filled our pipes and waited curiously for the situation to develop.

"I suppose," said Brodribb, after an interval of silence, "you haven't got any forrarder with that Fenchurch Street mystery; I mean the box with the gentleman's head in it?"

"Gentleman, indeed!" exclaimed Miller. "He was about the ugliest beggar that I ever clapped eyes on. I don't wonder they cut his head off. He must have been a lot better-looking without it."

"Still," said Brodribb, "you've got to admit that the man was murdered."

"No doubt," rejoined Miller; "and if you had seen him, you wouldn't have been surprised. His face was an outrage on humanity."

"So it may have been," retorted Brodribb, "but ugliness is not provocation in a legal sense. You don't mean to say that you have abandoned the case?"

"We never abandon a case at The Yard," replied Miller, "but it's no use fussing about when you've nothing to go on. As a matter of fact, we expect to approach the problem from another direction. For the moment, we are letting that particular box rest while we give a little attention to the other box—the one that was stolen."

"Ha!" said Brodribb. "Yes; very necessary, I should say. But what is your idea about it? You don't think it possible that it contained the body which belonged to the head?"

Miller shook his head. "No," said he. "I think you can rule that out. If the original case had contained a headless corpse, Mr. Dobson would not have been so ready to open the doubtful one in the presence of the attendant. You see, until they got it open, it wasn't certain that it was a different case."

"Then," said Brodribb, "I don't quite see the connexion. You said that you were approaching the problem of the head from another direction—through the stolen box, as I understood."

"That is so," replied Miller; "and you must see that there is evidently some connexion between the two cases. To begin with, the second case, which we may call the head case, was exactly similar to the first one—the stolen case—and we may take it that the similarity was purposely arranged. The head case was prepared as a counterfeit so that it could be exchanged for the other. But from that it follows that the person who prepared the head case must have known exactly what the other case was like, even to what was written on the label; and as he was at a good deal of trouble to steal the first

case, we may take it that he knew what that case contained. So there you have a clear connexion on the one side. As to whether the man, Dobson, recognized the head or knew anything about it, we can't be sure."

"The way in which he made himself scarce when he had seen it," said Brodribb, "rather suggests that he did."

"Not necessarily," Miller objected. "The question is, What was in the stolen case? He stated that the contents were worth several thousand pounds, but in spite of that, he made no attempt at recovery or claim for compensation. It looks as if he was not in a position to say what *was* in the case. But that suggests that the contents were not his lawful property; in fact, that the case contained stolen property—perhaps the loot from some robbery. Now, if that were so, he would have to clear off in any event to avoid inquiries. Naturally, then, when he came on that head, he would have realized that he was fairly in the soup. The fact that he had been in possession of stolen property wouldn't have been a bit helpful if he had been charged with complicity in a murder. I'm not surprised that he bolted."

"Is there any clue to what has become of the stolen case?" Brodribb asked.

"No," replied Miller; "but that is not the question which is interesting us. What we want to know is, not where it went, but where it came from, and what was in it."

"And that, I presume, you don't know at present," said Brodribb.

The Superintendent took a long draw at his cigar, blew out a cloud of smoke and performed the operation that he would have described as "wetting his whistle." Then he set down his glass and replied, cautiously:

"As the Doctor is listening, I mustn't use the word 'know.' But we think we've got a pretty good idea."

"Have you?" Brodribb exclaimed. "Now, I wonder what you have discovered. But I suppose it isn't in order for an outsider like me to pry into the secrets of Scotland Yard."

The Superintendent did not reply immediately, but from something in his manner, I suspected that he had come expressly to discuss the matter with us, but was "inhibited" by Brodribb's presence. At length, Thorndyke broke the silence.

"We are all very much interested, Miller, and we are all very discreet."

"H'm yes," said Miller. "Three lawyers and a detective officer ought to be able to produce a fair amount of discretion between them. And I don't know that it's such a deadly secret, after all. Still, we are keeping our own counsel, so you will understand that what I may mention mustn't go any farther."

"You are perfectly safe, Miller," Thorndyke assured him. "You know Jervis and me of old, and I can tell you that Mr. Brodribb is as close as an oyster."

Thus reassured, Miller (who was really bursting to give us his news) moistened his whistle afresh and began:

"You must understand that we are at present dealing with what the Doctor calls hypothesis, though we have got a solid foundation of fact. As to what was in that stolen case, we have no direct evidence; but we have formed a pretty confident opinion. In fact, we think we know what that case contained. What do you suppose it was?"

I ventured to suggest jewellery, or perhaps bullion. "You are not so far out," said Miller. "We say that it was platinum."

"Platinum!" I exclaimed. "But there was a hundredweight of it! Why, at the present price, it must have been worth a king's ransom!"

"I don't know how much that is," said Miller, "but we reckon the value of the contents at between seventeen and eighteen thousand pounds. That is only a rough estimate, of course. We think that the witness, Crump, was mistaken about the weight, and it was only a guess, in any case. He hadn't tested the weight of the package. At any rate, we can't account for more than about half a hundredweight of platinum."

"You have some perfectly definite information, then?" said Thorndyke.

"Definite enough so far as it goes," replied Miller, "but it doesn't go far enough. We are quite clear that a parcel of platinum weighing about twenty-five kilograms—roughly, half a hundredweight—was stolen and has disappeared. That is actual fact. The rest is inference, or, as the Doctor would say, hypothesis. But I will give you a sketch of the affair, leaving out the details that don't matter.

"Our information is that, about the end of last June, a quantity of platinum was shipped by a Latvian firm at Riga. It was packed in small wooden cases, each containing twenty-five kilos, and consigned to various dealers in Germany, France and Italy. Well, the cases were all duly delivered at their respective destinations, and everything seemed to be in order excepting the contents of one of the Italian cases. That happened to be the last one that was delivered, and, as the ship had made a good many calls on her voyage, it wasn't delivered until the beginning of August. When it was opened, it was found to contain, instead of the platinum, an equal weight of lead.

"Obviously, there had been a robbery somewhere, but, owing to the time which had elapsed, it was difficult to trace. One thing, however, was clear; the job had been done by somebody who was in the know. That was evident from the fact that the case was in all respects exactly like the original case and all the other cases."

"Why shouldn't it have been the original case with the contents changed?" I asked.

"That hardly seems possible. It would have been difficult enough to steal the case; but to steal it, empty it, refill it and put

it back, looks like an impossibility. No, we can be pretty certain that the thieves had the dummy case ready and just made a quick exchange. That must have been the method, whoever did the job; but the puzzle was to discover the time and place of the robbery. The stuff had made a long journey to the port of delivery and the robbery might have taken place anywhere along the route.

“Eventually, suspicion arose with regard to an English yacht, the *Cormorant*, which had berthed close to the *Kronstadt*—that was the name of the ship which carried the stuff while she was taking in her cargo at Riga. It was recalled that she had occupied the next berth to the *Kronstadt* at the time when the platinum was being shipped, and someone remembered that, at that very time, the *Cormorant* was taking stores on board, including one or two big hampers. Accordingly, the Latvian police made some inquiries on the spot, and, though they didn’t discover anything very sensational, the little that they did learn seemed to favour the idea that the platinum might have been taken away on the yacht. This is what it amounted to, together with what we have picked up since.

“The *Cormorant* is a sturdy little yawl-rigged vessel—she appears to be a converted fishing lugger from Shoreham—of about thirty tons. She turned up at Riga on the 21st. of June and took up her berth alongside the quay where the *Kronstadt* had just berthed. She went out from time to time for a sail in the Gulf but always came back to the same berth. Her crew consisted of four men, of whom three seemed to be regular seamen of the fisherman type, while the fourth, the skipper, whose name was Bassett, was a man of a superior class. The description of Bassett agrees completely with that of the man whom we have called Dobson—the man who deposited the case that was stolen from the cloak room; and the description of one of the crew seems to tally with that of the man who stole the case—the man whom we have called ‘the head man.’ Perhaps we had better call him Mr. ‘X’ for convenience.

“Well, as I have said, at the time the platinum was shipped, the *Cormorant* was taking in stores; and her hampers and cases were on the quay at the same time as the cases of platinum and quite close to them. The platinum was unloaded from a closed van and dumped on the quay, and the *Cormorant*’s stores were unloaded from a wagon and also dumped on the quay. Then, as soon as the *Cormorant* had got her stores on board, she put out for a sail in the bay. But she was back in her berth again in about a couple of hours; and there she remained, on and off, for the next five days. It was not until the 26th. of June that she left Riga for good.”

“Doesn’t the fact that she stayed there so long rather conflict with the idea that she had the stolen platinum on board?” I suggested.

“Well,” Miller replied, “on the face of it, it does seem to. But if you bear all the circumstances in mind, I don’t think it does. As soon as all the platinum was on board the *Kronstadt*, the danger of discovery was over. Remember, there was the right number of cases. There was nothing missing. It was practically certain that the robbery would not be discovered until the dummy case was opened by the consignees. Bearing that in mind, you see that it would be an excellent tactical plan to stay on at Riga as if nothing had happened; whereas it might have looked suspicious if the yacht had put to sea immediately after the shipment of the platinum.

“The next thing we hear of the yacht is that she arrived at Southend on the 17th. of August.”

“Have you ascertained where she had been in the interval?” I asked.

“No” he replied, “because, you see, it doesn’t particularly concern us, as our theory is that she still had the platinum on board. But I must admit that, apart from the cloak room incident, we can’t get any evidence that she had. At Southend she was boarded by the Customs Officer, and, as she had just come from Rotterdam and had been cruising up the Baltic and along the German and Dutch coasts, he made a pretty rigorous search, especially for tobacco. He turned out every possible place in which a few cigars or cakes of ‘hard’ could have been stowed, and he even took up the trap in the cabin floor and squeezed down into the little hold. But he didn’t find anything beyond the few trifles that had been declared. So his evidence is negative.”

“It is rather more than negative,” said I. “It amounts to positive evidence that the platinum wasn’t there.”

“Well, in a way, it does,” Miller admitted. “It certainly doesn’t help us. But there was one curious fact that we got from him. It seems that there were still four men on board the yacht; but they were not the same four men. One of them, at least, was different. The Customs man didn’t see anybody corresponding to the description of Mr. ‘X.’ On the other hand, there was a tall, clean shaved, elderly man who didn’t look like a seaman—looked more like a lawyer or a doctor and spoke like a gentleman, or, at least, an educated man, though with a slight foreign accent, and didn’t seem very anxious to speak at all; seemed more disposed to keep himself to himself. But the interesting point to us is the disappearance of Mr. ‘X.’ That seems to give us something like a complete scheme of the whole affair, including the transaction at the cloak room.”

“Were you proposing to let us hear your scheme of the robbery?” I asked.

“Well,” said Miller, “I don’t see why not, as I have told you so much. Of course, you will understand that it is very largely guess-work, but still, it comes together into a consistent whole. I will just give you an outline of what we believe to have been the course of events.

“We take it that this was a very carefully planned robbery, carried out by a party of experienced criminals who must all have had a fair knowledge of sea-faring. One of them, at least—probably the skipper, Bassett—must have had some pretty exact information as to the time and place at which the platinum was shipped and the size and character of the cases that it was stowed in. They must have arrived at the selected berth with a carefully prepared dummy case ready for use at the

psychological moment. Then, when the cases of platinum arrived—and they must have known when to expect them—the dummy was smuggled up to the quay, covered up in some way, and slipped in amongst the genuine cases. Then they must have managed to cover up one of these, and they probably waited until the whole consignment, including the dummy, had been put on board and checked. There would have been the right number, you must remember.

“Well, when all the platinum appeared to have been put on board, there would have been no difficulty in taking the one that they had pinched—still covered up—on to the yacht along with their own stores. As soon as they had got it on board, they cast off and went for a sail in the bay; and during that little trip, they would be able safely to unload the case, break it up and burn it and stow the platinum in the hiding-place that they had got prepared in advance. When they came back to their berth, they had got the loot safely hidden and were ready to submit to a search, if need be. And it must have been an uncommonly cleverly devised hiding-place, for they made no difficulty about letting the Customs officer at Southend rummage the vessel to his heart’s content.”

“It must, as you say, have been a mighty perfect hiding-place,” I remarked, “to have eluded the Customs man. When one of those gentry becomes really inquisitive, there isn’t much that escapes him. He knows all the ropes and is up to all the smugglers’ dodges.”

“You must bear in mind, Jervis,” Thorndyke reminded me, “that he was not looking for platinum. He was looking for tobacco. Do you know, Miller, in what form the metal was shipped? Was it in ingots or bars or plates?”

“It was in plates; thin sheets, in fact, about a millimetre in thickness and thirty centimetres—roughly twelve inches—square; a most convenient form for stowing in a hiding-place, for you could roll up the plates or cut them up with shears into little pieces.”

“Yes,” said Thorndyke, “and the plates themselves would take up very little room. You say the Customs man squeezed down into the hold. Do you know what the ballast was like? In a fishing vessel, it usually consists of rough pigs of iron and square ends of old chain and miscellaneous scrap, in which a few rolled-up plates of metal would not be noticed.”

“Ah!” Miller replied, “the *Cormorant*’s ballast wasn’t like that. It was proper yacht’s ballast; lead weights, properly cast to fit the timbers and set in a neat row on each side of the keelson. So the hold was perfectly clear and the Customs man was able to see all over it from end to end.

“But to return to our scheme. When they had got the platinum safely hidden, our friends decided to stay on in their berth for a few days for the sake of appearances. Then they put to sea and proceeded in a leisurely, yacht-like fashion to make their way home. But during the voyage something seems to have happened. It looks rather as if the rogues had fallen out. At any rate, Mr. ‘X’ seems to have left the ship, and this stranger to have come on board in his place. I don’t understand the stranger at all. I can’t fit him into the picture. But Mr. ‘X’ apparently had a plan for grabbing the loot for himself, and, when he went ashore, he must have left a confederate on board to keep him informed as to when the cargo was going to be landed.

“As to the landing, there wouldn’t have been any difficulty about that. When the Customs man had made his search and found everything in order, the papers would be made out and the ship would be passed as ‘cleared.’ After that, the crew would be at liberty to take any of their goods ashore unchallenged. And the arrangements for getting the platinum landed were excellent. The yacht was brought up in Benfleet Creek, quite close to the railway. Evidently, the case was carried up to the station, and Bassett must have taken it into the carriage with him to avoid having a label stuck on it and giving a clue to the cloak room attendant.

“Why Bassett decided to plant it in the cloak room is not very clear. We can only suppose that he hadn’t any other place to put it at the moment, and that he left it there while he was making arrangements for its disposal. But it gave Mr. ‘X’ his chance. No doubt his pal on board made it his business to find out what became of the case, and gave Mr. ‘X’ the tip; which Mr. ‘X’ acted on very promptly and efficiently. And he and his pal are at this moment some seventeen thousand pounds to the good.

“That is the scheme of the affair that we suggest. Of course, it is only a rough sketch, and you will say that it is all hypothesis from beginning to end, and so it is. But it hangs together.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “it is a consistent story, but it is all absolutely in the air. It is just a string of assumptions without a particle of evidence at any point. You begin by assuming that the case which was stolen from the cloak room contained the missing platinum. Then, from that, you deduce that the case came from the yacht, and therefore the man who deposited it must be Bassett, and the other man must be a member of the crew. And you don’t even refer to the trivial circumstance that a box containing a man’s head was left in exchange.”

“I have already said,” Miller rejoined a little impatiently, “that we are letting the problem of the head rest for the moment, as we have nothing to go on. But it is evidently connected in some way with the stolen case, so we are following that up. If we can connect that with the platinum robbery and lay our hands on Bassett and Mr. ‘X,’ we shall soon know something more about that head. I don’t think your criticism is quite fair, Dr. Jervis. What do you say, Doctor?”

“I agree with you,” said Thorndyke, “that Jervis’s criticism overstates the case. Your scheme is admittedly hypothetical, and there is no direct evidence. So it may or may not be a true account of what happened. But I think the balance of probabilities is in favour of its being substantially true. You don’t know anything about any of these men?”

“No; you see they are only names, and probably wrong names.”



"You found no finger-prints on the address label of the 'head case'?"

"None that we could identify. Probably only those of chance strangers."

"And what has become of the yacht and the crew?"

"The yacht is still lying in Benfleet Creek. Bassett left her in charge of a local boat builder as there is no one on board and the crew have gone away. We got a search warrant and rummaged her thoroughly, but we didn't find anything. So we sealed up the hatches and put on special padlocks and left the keys with the local police."

"Do you know whom she belongs to?"

"She belongs to Bassett. He bought her from a man at Shoreham. And she is now supposed to be for sale; but, as the owner's whereabouts are not known, of course, she can't be sold. For practical purposes she is abandoned, but we are paying the boat builder for keeping an eye on her, pending the re-appearance of Mr. Bassett. Meanwhile we are keeping a look-out for that gentleman and Mr. 'X,' and for the appearance on the market of any platinum of uncertain origin. And that is about all that we can do until we get some fresh information."

"I suppose it is," said Thorndyke; "and, by the way, to return to the mysterious head; what has been done with it?"

"It has been buried in an air-tight case in Tower Hamlets Cemetery, with a stone to mark the spot in case it should be wanted. But we've got a stock of photographs of it which we have been circulating in the provinces to the various police stations. Perhaps you would like me to send you a set."

"Thank you, Miller," Thorndyke replied. "I should like a set to attach to the report of the inquest, which I have filed for reference."

"On the chance that, sooner or later, the inquiry may come into your hands?"

"Yes. There is always that possibility," Thorndyke replied. And this brought the discussion to an end, at least so far as Miller was concerned.

---

## VI. — MR. BRODRIBB'S DILEMMA

THE silence which fell after Thorndyke's last rejoinder lasted for more than a minute. At length it was broken by Brodribb who, after profound meditation, launched a sort of broadcast question, addressed to no one in particular.

"Does anyone know anything about a certain Mr. Horatio Gimbler?"

"Police court solicitor?" inquired Miller.

"That is what I assumed," replied Brodribb, "from his address, which seemed to be an unlikely one for a solicitor in general practice. Then you do, apparently, know him, at least by name."

"Yes," Miller admitted, "I have known him, more or less, for a good many years."

"Then," said Brodribb, "you can probably tell me whether you would consider him a particularly likely practitioner to have the conduct of a claim to a peerage."

"A peerage!" gasped Miller, gazing at Brodribb in astonishment. "Holy smoke! No. I—certainly—should—NOT!" He paused for a few moments to recover from his amazement and then asked: "What sort of a claim is it, and who is the claimant?"

"The claimant is an American and, at present, I don't know much about him. I'll give you some of the particulars presently, but, first, I should like to hear what you know about Mr. Gimbler."

Miller appeared to reflect rapidly, accompanying the process by the emission of voluminous clouds of smoke. At length he replied, cautiously:

"It is understood that what is said here is spoken in strict confidence."

To this reasonable stipulation we all assented with one accord and Miller continued: "This fellow, Gimbler, is a rather remarkable person. He is a good lawyer, in a sense; at any rate, he has criminal law and procedure at his finger ends. He knows all the ropes—some that he oughtn't to know quite so well. He is up to all the tricks and dodges of the professional crooks, and I should think that his acquaintance includes practically all the crooks that are on the lay. If we could only pump him, he would be a perfect mine of information. But we can't. He's as secret as the grave. The criminal class provide his living, and he makes it his business to study their interests."

"I don't see that you can complain of that," said Brodribb. "It is a lawyer's duty to consider the interests of his clients, no matter who they may be."

"That's perfectly true," replied Miller, "in respect of the individual client; but it is not the duty even of a criminal lawyer to grease the wheels of crime, so to speak. However, we are speaking of the man. Well, I have told you what we know of him, and I may add that he is about the downiest bird that I am acquainted with and as slippery as an eel. That is what we *know*."

Here Miller paused significantly with the air of a man who expects to be asked a question. Accordingly, Brodribb ventured to offer a suggestion.

"That is what you know. But I take it that you have certain opinions in addition to your actual knowledge?"

Miller nodded. "Yes," said he. "We are very much interested in Mr. Gimbler. Some of us have a feeling that there may possibly be something behind his legal practice. You know, in the practice of crime there is a fine opening for a clever and crooked brain. The professional crook, himself, is usually an unmitigated donkey, who makes all sorts of blunders in planning his jobs and carrying them out; and when you find the perfect ass doing a job that seems right outside his ordinary capabilities, you can't help wondering whether there may not be someone of a different calibre behind the scenes, pulling the strings."

"Ah!" said Brodribb. "Do I understand that you suspect this legal luminary of being the invisible operator of a sort of unlawful puppet show?"

"I would hardly use the word 'suspect,'" replied Miller. "But some of us—including myself—have entertained the idea. And not, mind you, without any show of reason. There was a certain occasion on which we really thought we had got our hands on him; but we hadn't. If he was guilty—I don't say that he was, mind you—but if he was, he slipped out of the net uncommonly neatly. It was a case of forgery; at least we thought it was. But, if it was, it was so good that the experts wouldn't swear to it, and the case wasn't clear enough to take into Court."

Mr. Brodribb pricked up his ears. "Forgery, you say; and a good forgery at that? You don't remember the particulars, I suppose? Because the question has a rather special interest for me."

"I only remember that it was a will case. The signature of the testator and the two witnesses were disputed, but, as all three were dead, the question had to be decided on the opinions of experts; and none of the experts were certain enough to swear that the signatures might not be genuine. So the will had to be accepted as a genuine document. I suppose I mustn't ask how the question interests you?"

"Well," said Brodribb, "we are speaking in confidence, and I don't know that the matter is one of any great secrecy. It concerns this peerage claim that I was speaking about. I have had a copy of the pleadings, and I see that the claimant relies on certain documents to prove the identity of a very doubtful person. If you would care to hear an outline of the case, I don't think there would be any harm in my giving you a few of the particulars. I really came here to talk the case over with Thorndyke."

"If the pleadings were drawn up by Mr. Gimbler," said Miller, "I should like very much to hear an outline of the case. And you can take it that I shall not breathe a word to any living soul."

"The pleadings," said Brodribb, "were drawn up by counsel, but, of course, on Gimbler's instructions. The facts, or alleged facts, must have been supplied by him. However, before I come to his part in the business, there are certain other matters to consider; so it will be better if I take the case as a whole and in the natural order of events."

"Let me begin by explaining that I am the Earl of Winsborough's man of business. My father and grandfather both acted in the same capacity for former holders of the title, so, naturally, all the relevant documents on the one side are in my keeping. I am also the executor of the present Earl's will, though there is not much in that, as practically everything is left to the heir."

"You speak of the present Earl," said Thorndyke. "But, if there is a present Earl, how comes it that a claim is being made to the earldom? Is an attempt being made to oust the present holder of the title?"

"I spoke of the present Earl," replied Brodribb, "because that is the legal position, and I, as his agent, am bound to accept it. But, as a matter of fact, I do not believe that there is a present Earl of Winsborough. I have no doubt that the Earl is dead. He went away on an exploring and big game hunting expedition to South America nearly five years ago, and has not been heard of for over four years. But, of course, in a legal sense, he is still alive and will remain alive until he is either proved or presumed to be dead. Hence these present proceedings; which began with a proposal on the part of the heir presumptive to apply to the Court for permission to presume death. The heir presumptive is a young man, a son of the Earl's first cousin, who has only recently come of age. As I had no doubt that he was the real heir presumptive—there being, in fact, no other possible claimant known to me—and very little doubt that the Earl was dead, I did not propose to contest the application; but, as the Earl's agent, I could not very well act for the applicant. Accordingly, I turned the business over to my friend, Marchmont, and intended only to watch the case in the interests of the estate. Then, suddenly, this new claimant appeared out of the blue; and his appearance has complicated the affair most infernally."

"You see the dilemma. Both claimants wish to apply for permission to presume death. But neither of them is the admitted heir presumptive, and consequently neither of them has the necessary *locus standi* to make the application."

"Couldn't they make a joint application?" Miller asked, "and fight out the claim afterwards?"

"I doubt whether that could be done," replied Brodribb, "or whether they would be prepared to act in concert. Each would probably be afraid of seeming to concede the claim to the other. The alternative plan would be for them to settle the question of heirship before applying for leave to presume death. But there is the difficulty that, until death is presumed, the present Earl is alive in a legal sense, and, that being so, the Court might reasonably hold that the question of heirship does not arise. And, as the Earl is a bachelor and there are no near relatives, there is no one else to make the application."

"In any event," said I, "the new claimant's case would have to be dealt with by a Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords. Isn't that so?"

"I don't think it is," replied Brodribb. "This is not a case of reviving a dormant peerage. If the American's case, as stated in the pleadings, is sound, he is unquestionably the heir presumptive."

"What does his case amount to?" Thorndyke asked.

"Put in a nutshell," replied Brodribb, "it amounts to this: The American gentleman, whose name is Christopher Pippet, is the grandson of a certain Josiah Pippet who was the keeper of a tavern somewhere in London. But there is a persistent tradition in the family that the said Josiah was living a double life under an assumed name, and that he was really the Earl of Winsborough. It is stated that he was in the habit of going away from his home and his usual places of resort and leaving no address. It is further stated that during these periodical absences—which often lasted for a month or two—he was actually in residence at Winsborough Castle; that, when Josiah was absent from home, the Earl was in residence at the Castle, and when Josiah was at the tavern, the Earl was absent from the Castle."

"And did Josiah and the Earl die simultaneously and in the same place?" I inquired.

"No," said Brodribb. "The double life was brought to an end by Josiah, who is said, after the death of his wife and the marriage of his sons and daughter, to have grown weary of it. He wound up the affair by a simulated death, a mock funeral and the burial of a dummy coffin weighted with lumps of lead, after which he went to the Castle and took up his residence there for good. That is the substance of the story."

The Superintendent snorted contemptuously. "And you tell us, sir," said he, "that this man, Gimpler, is actually going to spin that yarn in a court of law. Why, the thing's grotesque—childish. He'd be howled out of Court."

"I agree," said Brodribb, "that it sounds wild enough. But it is not impossible. Few things are. It is just a question of what they can prove. According to the pleadings, there are certain passages in a diary of the late Josiah which prove incontestably that he and the Earl were one and the same person."

"That diary," said Miller, "will be worth a pretty careful examination, having regard to the circumstances that I mentioned."

"Undoubtedly," Brodribb agreed; "though it seems to me that it would be extremely difficult to interpolate passages in a diary. There is usually no space in which to put them."

"Does the claimant propose to produce the dummy coffin with the lumps of lead in it?" I asked.

"Nothing has been said on that subject up to the present," Brodribb answered. "It would certainly be highly relevant; but, of course, they couldn't produce it without an exhumation order."

"I think you can take it," said Miller, "that they will leave that coffin severely alone—if you let them."

"Probably you are right," said Brodribb. "But the difficulty that confronts us at present is that it may be impossible to proceed with the case. When it comes on for hearing, the Court may refuse to consider the application until one of the applicants has established his *locus standi* as a person competent to make it; and it may refuse to hear evidence as to the claim of either party to be the heir on the grounds that, inasmuch as the Earl has been neither proved nor presumed to be dead, he must be presumed to be alive, and that, therefore, in accordance with the legal maxim, *Nemo est heres viventis*, neither of the applicants can be the heir."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is undoubtedly a possible contingency. But judges are eminently reasonable men and it is not the modern practice to favour legal hair-splittings. We may assume that the Court will not raise any difficulties that are not unavoidable; and this is a case which calls for some elasticity of procedure. For the difficulty which exists today might conceivably still exist fifty years hence; and, meanwhile, the title and the estates would be left derelict. What are the proceedings that are actually in contemplation, and who is making the first move?"

"The American claimant, Pippet, is making the first move. Gimpler has briefed Rufus McGonnell, K.C. as his leader with Montague Klein as junior. He is proposing to apply for permission to presume the death of the Earl. I am contesting his application and challenging his claim to be the heir presumptive. That, he thinks, will enable him to produce his evidence and argue his claim as an issue preliminary to and forming part of the main issue. But I doubt very much whether the Court will consent to hear any evidence or any arguments that are not directly relevant to the question of the probability of the Earl's death. It is a very awkward situation. Pippet's claim looks like a rather grotesque affair; and if he is depending on the entries in a diary, I shouldn't think he has the ghost of a chance. Still, it ought to be settled one way or the other for the sake of young Giles Engleheart, the real heir presumptive, as I assume."

"Why shouldn't Engleheart proceed with his application?" said I.

"Because," replied Brodribb, "the same difficulty would arise. The other claimant would challenge his competency to make the application. It is a ridiculous dilemma. There are two issues, and each of them requires the other to be settled before it can be decided. It is very difficult to know what to do."

"The only thing that you can do," said Thorndyke, "is what you seem to be doing; let things take their own course and wait upon events. Pippet is making the first move. Well, let him make it; and, if the Court won't hear him, it will be time for you to consider what you will do next. Meanwhile, it would be wise for you to assume that the Court will allow him to

produce evidence of his competency to make the application. It is quite possible; and if you are supporting Mr. Engleheart's claim, you ought to be ready to contest the other claim."

"Yes," said Brodribb, "that is really what I came to talk to you about; and the first question is, do you know anything about these two counsel, McGonnell and Klein? I don't seem to remember either of them."

"You wouldn't," replied Thorndyke. "They are both almost exclusively criminal practitioners. But, in their own line, they are men of first class capabilities. You can take it that they will give you a run for your money if they get the chance, in spite of their being rather off their usual beat. Have you decided on your own counsel?"

"I have decided to secure your services, in any event. Would you be prepared to take the brief?"

"I will take it if you wish me to," replied Thorndyke, "but I think you would be better advised to employ Anstey. For this reason. If the case comes into court, it is possible that certain questions may arise on which you might wish me to give expert evidence. I think you would do well to let me keep an eye on the technical aspects of the case and let Anstey do the actual court work."

Brodribb looked sharply at Thorndyke but made no immediate reply; and, in the ensuing silence, a low chuckle was heard to proceed from the Superintendent.

"I like the delicate way the Doctor puts it," said he, by way of explaining the chuckle. "The technical aspects of this case will call for a good deal of watching; and I need not tell you, Mr. Brodribb, that, if the Doctor's eye is on them, there won't be much that will pass unobserved. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised to learn that the Doctor has got one or two of them in his eye already."

"Neither should I," said Brodribb. "Nothing surprises me where Thorndyke is concerned. At any rate I shall act on your advice, Thorndyke. One couldn't ask for a better counsel than Anstey; and it is not necessary for me to stipulate that you go over the pleadings with him and put him up to any possible dodges on the part of our friend Mr. Gimbler. Remember that I am retaining you, and that you do as you please about pleading in court."

"I understand," said Thorndyke. "You will keep Anstey and me fully instructed, and I shall give the case the most careful consideration in regard to any contingencies that may arise. As Miller has hinted, there are a good many possibilities, especially if Mr. Gimbler should think it necessary to throw a little extra weight into the balance of probabilities."

"Very well," said Brodribb, "then we will leave it at that. If you have the case in hand, I shall feel that I can go ahead in confidence; and I only hope that McGonnell will be able to persuade the Court to hear the evidence on his client's claim. It would be a blessed thing if we could get that question settled so that we could go straight ahead with the other question—the presumption of death. I am getting a little worried by the more or less derelict condition of the Winsborough estates and it would be a relief to see a young man fairly settled in possession."

"You are rather taking it for granted that the American's claim will fall through," I remarked.

"So I am," he admitted. "But you must allow that it does sound like a cock and bull story, and none too straightforward at that. However, we shall see. If I get nothing more out of it, I have had an extremely pleasant evening and a devilish good bottle of wine, and now it's about time that I took myself off and let you get to bed."

With this he rose and shook hands; and the Superintendent, taking the rather broad hint conveyed in the concluding sentence, rose too, and the pair took their departure together.

---

## VII. — THE FINAL PREPARATIONS

MOST of us have wit enough to be wise after the event, and a few of us have enough to be wise before. Thorndyke was one of these few, and I, alas! was not. I am speaking in generalities, but I am thinking of a particular case—the Winsborough Peerage Claim. That case I could not bring myself to take seriously. The story appeared to me, as it had appeared to Miller, merely grotesque. Its improbabilities were so outrageous that I could not entertain it as a problem for serious consideration. And then, such as it was, it was a purely legal case, completely outside our ordinary line of practice. At least, that is how it appeared to me.

Now, Thorndyke made no such mistake. Naturally, he could not foresee developments in detail. But subsequent events showed that he had foreseen, and very carefully considered, all the possible contingencies, so that when they arose they found him prepared. And he also saw clearly that the case might turn out to be very much in our line.

As I was unaware of his views—Thorndyke being the most uncommunicative man whom I have ever known—I looked with some surprise on the obvious interest that he took in the case. So great was that interest that he actually adopted the extraordinary habit of spending week-ends at Winsborough Castle. What he did there I was unable to make out. I heard rumours of his having gone over the butler's accounts and some of the old household books and papers with Brodribb, which seemed a not unreasonable proceeding, though more in Brodribb's line than ours. But most of his time he apparently spent rambling about the country with a note book, a small camera and a set of six inch ordnance maps. And he evidently covered a surprising amount of ground, as I could see by the numbers of photographs that he brought home, and which he either developed himself or handed to our invaluable laboratory assistant, Polton, for development. Over those photographs, when they were printed, I pored with a feeling of stupefaction. They included churches, both inside and out,

windmills, inns, churchyards, and quaint village streets; all very interesting and many of them charming. But what had they to do with the peerage case? I was completely mystified.

On one occasion I accompanied him, and a very pleasant jaunt it was. The Castle was rather a delusion, though there were some mediaeval ruins of a castellated building; but the mansion was a pleasant, homely brick house of the late seventeenth century in the style of Wren's country houses. But our ramblings about the house and the adjoining gardens and park yielded no information—excepting as to the mental condition of a former proprietor, as suggested by the costly and idiotic additions that he had made to the mansion.

These were, I must admit, perfectly astounding. On a low hill in the park near to the house was a stupendous brick tower—a regular Tower of Babel—from the summit of which we could look across the sea to the white cliffs of the coast of France. It stood quite alone and appeared to have no purpose beyond the view from the top, but the cost of its construction must have been enormous. But “George's Folly,” to give the tower its appropriate local name, was not the most astonishing of these works. When we came down from the roof, Thorndyke produced a bunch of large keys, which he had borrowed from the butler, and with one of them opened a door in the basement. Then he switched on a portable electric lamp, by the light of which I perceived a flight of stone steps apparently descending into the bowels of the earth. Picking our way down these, we reached an archway opening into a roomy brick-walled passage, and making our way along this for fully a hundred yards, at length reached another door which, being unlocked, gave entrance to a large room, lighted by a brick shaft that opened on the surface. A moth-eaten carpet still covered the floor and the mouldering furniture remained as it had been left, presumably, by the eccentric builder.

It was a strange and desolate-looking apartment, and the final touch of desolation was given by a multitude of bats which hung, head downwards, from the ceiling ornaments or fluttered silently in circles in the dark corners or in the dim light under the opening of the shaft.

“This is a weird place, Thorndyke,” I exclaimed. “What do you think could have been the object of building it?”

“So far as I know,” he replied, “there was no particular object. It was the noble lord's hobby to build towers and underground apartments. This is not the only one. The door at the other end of the room opens into another passage which leads to several other large rooms. We may as well inspect them.”

We did so. In all, there were five large rooms connected by several hundred yards of passages, and three or four small rooms, all lighted by shafts and all still containing their original furniture and fittings.

“But,” I exclaimed, as we threaded our way along the interminable passages back to the tower, “this man must have been a stark lunatic.”

“He was certainly highly eccentric,” said Thorndyke, “though we must make some allowance for an idle rich man. But you see the significance of this. Supposing that the peerage claim were to be tried by a jury, and supposing that jury were brought here and shown these rooms and passages. Do you think Mr. Pippet's story would appear to them so particularly incredible? Don't you think that they would say that a man who could busy himself in works of this kind would be capable of any folly or eccentricity?”

“I think it very likely,” I admitted; “but for my own part, I must say that I cannot imagine his lordship as landlord of a London pub. Playing the fool in your own park is a slightly different occupation from drawing pints of beer for thirsty labourers. I wonder if the Kenningtonian Gimble knows about these works of imagination.”

“He does,” said Thorndyke. “A description of them was included in the ‘material facts’ set forth in the pleadings. And he has examined them personally. He applied to Brodribb for permission to view the mansion, and, naturally, Brodribb gave it.”

“I don't see why ‘naturally.’ He was not called on to assist the claim which he was opposing.”

“He took the view—correctly, I think—that he ought not to hinder, in any way, the ascertainment of the material facts; facts, you must remember, that he does not dispute. And, really, he can afford to deal with the American claimant in a generous and sporting spirit. Mere evidence of eccentricity on the part of the late Earl will not do more than establish a bare possibility. A positive case has to be made out. The burden of proof is on Cousin Jonathan.”

“That is, if the case ever comes into court. I doubt if, it will.”

“Then you need doubt no longer,” said he. “The case is down for hearing next week.”

“The deuce it is!” I exclaimed. “Do you know what form the proceedings will take?”

“It is to be heard in the Probate Court. Ostensibly, it is an application by Christopher Pippet for permission to presume the death of Percy Engleheart, sixth Earl of Winsborough. Brodribb, acting in virtue of a power of attorney, opposes the application and challenges the *locus standi* of the applicant. Of course, we cannot say how far the case will be allowed to proceed; but I take it that it is proposed to allow Pippet to produce evidence establishing his *locus standi* as a person having such an interest in the estate as would entitle him to make the application. That is to say, he will be allowed to present the case on which he bases his claim to be the heir presumptive to the Earl. I certainly hope he will. There are all sorts of interesting possibilities in the case.”

“Interesting, no doubt, in a legal sense; but I don't see where we come in.”

"Perhaps we shan't come in at all," he replied with a faint smile. "But I rather suspect that we shall. The special interest of the case to me lies in the fact that Mr. Pippet's counsel will be instructed by Mr. Horatio Gimble." "

Something in Thorndyke's manner, as he made this last statement, seemed to suggest some special significance. But what that significance might be I was unable to guess, beyond the fact that the said Gimble, being neither an infant nor a man of irreproachable reputation, might adopt some slightly irregular tactics. But I suspected that there was something more definite than this in my colleague's mind. However, the conversation went no farther on this occasion, and I was left to turn the problem over at my leisure.

Thorndyke's announcement had come to me as a complete surprise, for I had never believed that this fantastic case would actually find its way into the courts. But the case furnished a whole series of surprises, of which the first was administered on the day when the proceedings opened, and was connected with the personality and behaviour of the claimant. I had assumed that Mr. Christopher Pippet was an American adventurer who had come over to tell this cock and bull story in the hope of getting possession of a valuable English estate. Probably the idea arose—not quite unreasonably—from the fact that the claimant made his appearance under the guidance of a slightly shady police-court solicitor. In my mind I had written him down an impostor, and formed a picture of a hustling, brazen vulgarian, suitable to the part and appropriate to his company. The reality was surprisingly different.

On the morning of the hearing, Brodribb appeared at our chambers accompanied by his clients, Mr. Giles Engleheart and his mother, to whom he presented us in his old-fashioned, courtly manner.

"I thought it best," he explained, "that you should not meet in court as strangers. I have introduced Anstey already, and I think he is going to join us here. So we shall be able to make our descent on the Halls of Justice in a united body and thereby impress the opposition."

"I suspect," said Mrs. Engleheart, "that the opposition is not so easily impressed. But my boy and I will feel some encouragement if we arrive escorted by our champions. Have we plenty of time?" she added, glancing a little anxiously at her watch.

"We have," replied Brodribb, "if Anstey doesn't keep us waiting. Ah! here he is"; and, as a quick footstep was heard on the stair, he strode over to the door and threw it open, when our leading counsel entered with an exaggerated pretence of haste, holding his watch in his hand.

"Come," he exclaimed, "this won't do. We ought to be starting."

"But," said Mrs. Engleheart, "we have been waiting for you, Mr. Anstey."

"Exactly," he retorted, "that is what I meant." Then, as the lady, unaccustomed to his whimsicalities, looked at him in some perplexity, he continued, briskly: "It is always desirable to be in court early on the opening day. Are we all ready? Then let us go forth and make our way to the scene of conflict. But not too much like a procession. And I want to have a few words with you, Thorndyke, *en route*."

With this, he took Thorndyke's arm and led the way out. Brodribb followed with Mrs. Engleheart and I brought up the rear with her son.

As we walked at a leisurely pace—set by Anstey—across the precincts by way of the Cloisters and Pump Court, I took the opportunity to consider my companion as to his appearance and personality in general; and in all respects I was very favourably impressed, as I had been by the gentle dignity of his mother. Giles Engleheart was not only a fine, strapping, handsome young man and very unmistakeably a gentleman, but—like his mother—he conveyed the impression of a kindly, generous and amiable disposition. But, unlike his mother, he seemed disposed to regard the legal proceedings as a gigantic joke.

"Well, Mr. Engleheart," I said, by way of making conversation, "I think we shall make pretty short work of your American rival."

"Do you?" said he. "I don't think Mr. Brodribb is so confident; and for my part, I rather hope you won't make it too short. He ought to have a run for his money—and he may give us a run for ours. After all, you know, sir, his statements are pretty definite, and we've no right to assume that he is a liar. And, if he isn't, his statements are probably true. And, if they are true, we've got to imagine George Augustus, fourth Earl of Winsborough, with his sleeves rolled up and a black linen apron on his tummy, pulling at the handles of the beer engine in a London pub. It's a quaint idea. I'm all agog to hear his counsel tell the story and trot out his evidence."

"For my part," said I, "I can't bring myself to view the claim as anything more than a gross and crude imposture, and I shouldn't be surprised if the case ended in a charge of perjury."

"Do you mean against Mr. Pippet?" he asked.

"I don't know anything about Pippet," I replied, "but I look with considerable suspicion on his solicitor."

Engleheart laughed cheerfully. "You are like Mr. Brodribb," said he. "The very mention of the name of Gimble makes him spit—metaphorically—whereas I never hear it without thinking of Jabberwocky and the Slithy Toves."

"What is the connexion?" I asked, rather foolishly. "Don't you remember, sir?" said he. "The Slithy Toves 'did gyre and gimble in the wabe.' Therefore they were gimbles. Q.E.D."

"Perhaps," said I, laughing at his schoolboy joke, "Mr. Brodribb has noticed the connexion and suspects our friend of an intention to 'gyre and gimble' in a legal sense. And perhaps he is right. Time will show. But here we are at what Anstey calls 'the scene of conflict.'"

Entering the great doorway, we followed our friends along the rather gloomy passages until Anstey pushed open a heavy swing door and stood, holding it open while Mrs. Engleheart and the rest of us passed through. Then he and Thorndyke and I retired to the robing room and hastily donned our wigs and gowns.

When we returned to the court, the clock showed that there was still a quarter of an hour to spare, and, with the exception of one or two reporters, a few spectators in the gallery, and a stray barrister, we had the place to ourselves. But not for long. Even as the quarter was chiming, the heavy and noisy swing doors were pushed open and a party of strangers entered.

There was no doubt as to who they were, for, though I had not recognized the name of Gimbler, I recognized the man, having seen him on several occasions at the Central Criminal Court; a big, burly man with a large, rather fat face, and small, furtive eyes; a sly-looking fellow, I decided, and forthwith wrote him down a knave. But the other members of the party gave me quite a little surprise. There were three of them—two women and a man; and the out-standing fact which instantly impressed me was their imposing appearance. It was not only that they were all well above the average of good looks, though that was a fact worth noting; but they all had the unmistakeable appearance and bearing of gentlefolk.

Of course, my surprise was quite unreasonable, being due to an entirely gratuitous pre-conceived idea. But still more unreasonable was the instant change in my state of mind in regard to the claim. Looking at the claimant—as I assumed him to be, seeing that there was no other man—I found myself talking a revised view of the case. Clearly, this fine, upstanding gentleman with his clear-cut, strong, reposeful face, was an entirely different creature from the raffish cosmopolitan adventurer of my imagination, who had come over to "tell the tale" and try to snatch a stray fortune.

The two parties—our own and "the opposition"—took an undissembled interest in one another, and Mr. Giles conveyed his sentiments to me in an undertone.

"Good-looking crowd, sir, aren't they? If that young lady is a fair sample of an American girl, I am going to emigrate if we lose the case."

"And if you don't lose the case?" I asked.

"Well, sir," he replied, smilingly evading the question, "I shall be able to pay my lawyer, which will be pleasant for us both."

Here my attention was diverted by what looked like a difference between Mr. Gimbler and his client. The solicitor appeared distinctly annoyed and I heard him say, almost angrily:

"I do certainly object. It would be entirely out of order."

"No doubt you are right, as a lawyer," was the calm reply; "but I am not a lawyer"; and, with this, he turned away from his legal adviser, and, to that gentleman's evident dismay, began to move across in our direction. As he was obviously bearing down on us with intent, we all, excepting Mrs. Engleheart, stood up, and I could hear Brodribb muttering under his breath.

Having saluted us with a comprehensive bow, the stranger addressed himself to our old friend.

"I believe you are Mr. Brodribb."

"At your service, sir," was the reply, accompanied by a bow of such extreme stiffness that I seemed to hear him creak.

"I understand," said Mr. Pippet, "that I am committing a gross breach of legal etiquette. But etiquette is made for man, especially for European man, and I am venturing to take an aboriginal view of the matter. Would it appear particularly shocking if I were to ask you to do me the honour of presenting me to your clients?"

"I think," replied Brodribb, recovering himself somewhat, "that I should survive the shock, and my clients, I am sure, will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

With this he proceeded, with the air of a Gold-Stick-in-Waiting approaching a royal personage, to present the American to Mrs. Engleheart.

"This is most kind of you, Mr. Pippet," the lady exclaimed with a gracious smile. "Mr. Brodribb is quite right. I am delighted to make your acquaintance, and so, I am sure, will my son be. May I introduce him?"

Here Giles stepped forward and the two men shook hands heartily.

"It is very good of you, sir, to make this friendly move," said he, "seeing that our presence here is not exactly helpful to you."

"But," said Mr. Pippet, "that is just my point. All this talk of fights and battles and contests that I have been hearing from my solicitor makes me tired. I am not here to fight anybody, and neither, I take it, are you. There are certain matters of alleged fact that I am submitting for the consideration and judgment of the court. I don't know whether they are true or not. That is for the court to find out. My lawyers will argue that they are, and yours will argue that they are not. Let us leave it to them. There's no need for us to have any unfriendly feeling about it. Isn't that so, Mr. Brodribb?"

"There is no reason," Brodribb replied cautiously, "why opposing litigants should not be personally friendly—without prejudice, of course. But you are not forgetting that these proceedings involve certain consequences. If the decision is in your favour, you obtain possession of a title of nobility and property of great value, which Mr. Engleheart thereby loses; and *vice versa*."

"Not quite *vice versa*, Mr. Brodribb," Mr. Pippet corrected. "The cases are not identical. If the court decides that my respected grandfather was not the Earl of Winsborough, Mr. Engleheart steps into the late Earl's shoes as soon as the death has been presumed, and I retire out of the picture. But, if it is decided that my grandfather was the Earl, then, as I have no male descendants, Mr. Engleheart has only to wait for those shoes until I step out of them."

I could see that this statement made a considerable impression on both Mr. Brodribb and Mrs. Engleheart; and it did certainly ease the situation materially from their point of view. Brodribb, however, made no comment, and it fell to Mrs. Engleheart to make the acknowledgments.

"Thank you, Mr. Pippet," said she, "for letting us know the position. I won't pretend that I am not very much relieved to know that it is only a question of postponement for my son. But, whichever way the decision goes, I hope it will be a long time before a vacancy is declared in those shoes. But you haven't completed the introductions. Is that very charming girl your daughter?"

"She is, Madam," was the reply. "My only child; and, with the exception of my sister, who is with her, my only kin in the world—unless it should transpire that I have the honour to be related to you and your son."

"Well," said Mrs. Engleheart, "if your kinsfolk are not very numerous, you have reason to be proud of them, as I dare say you are. Do you think they would care to know us?"

"I have their assurance that they would like very much to make your acquaintance," Mr. Pippet replied; on which Mrs. Engleheart rose and was requesting to be taken to them when they were seen to be moving in our direction, apparently in response to some subtle telegraphic signals on the part of Mr. Pippet. As they approached, I looked them over critically and had to admit that their appearance was at least equal to their pretensions. The elder lady—like the late Queen Victoria—combined a markedly short stature with a most unmistakeable "presence," aided not a little by the strong, resolute face and a somewhat out-size Roman nose; while the younger was a tall, handsome girl, noticeably like her father and her aunt both in features and in the impression of dignity and character which she conveyed. And both ladies had that un-selfconscious ease of manner that is usually associated with the word "breeding."

The introductions were necessarily hurried, for the time for the opening of the proceedings was drawing nigh. The clerk had taken his seat at his desk, the reporters were in their places, the ushers had taken up their posts, a few more spectators were drifting into the seats in the public gallery and the counsel had established themselves in their respective places and were now turning over the pages of their briefs—excepting Thorndyke and myself, who had no briefs but were present merely in a watching capacity. Mr. Pippet returned to the place where his solicitor sat glumly by the solicitor's table, but the two ladies remained with our party, Miss Pippet sitting by Mrs. Engleheart and the young lady (who, I gathered, bore the picturesque old English name of Jenifer) by Mr. Giles.

They had hardly settled themselves when the judge entered and took his seat on the bench. Having laid some papers on his desk, he leaned back in his seat and ran his eye with undissembled interest over the parties to the proceedings.

"Now," Miss Jenifer remarked in a low tone to her companion, "we are going to hear whether we are cousins or only friends."

"Or both," added Giles.

"Of course," said she. "That was what I meant. But we mustn't talk. The play is going to begin; and that nice-looking old gentleman in that quaint wig has got his eye on us."

Thereupon she subsided into silence, and Mr. McGonnell proceeded to open the case.

---

## VIII. — THE OPENING OF THE CASE

"THIS, my lord," said Mr. McGonnell, rising and turning an ingratiating eye on the bench, "is an application by Mr. Christopher Josiah Pippet, a citizen of the United States, for permission to presume the death of Percy Engleheart, sixth Earl of Winsborough, but there are certain peculiar and unusual features in the case. The application is opposed by the representatives of the Earl, who challenge the *locus standi* of the applicant on the ground that he is, as they allege, a stranger having no legitimate interest or concern in the estate of the said Earl. The applicant, on the other hand, affirms, and is prepared to prove, that he is the direct descendant of the fourth Earl of Winsborough, and that he is, in effect, the heir presumptive to the earldom and the settled estate.

"Accordingly, the applicant petitions to be allowed to produce evidence of his title to the estate and to obtain a decision on that issue as an issue antecedent to the application for permission to presume death."

The judge looked keenly at the counsel during the making of this statement and then he turned a slightly curious glance on Mr. Pippet and from him to his solicitor.

"I must be perfectly clear," said he, "as to the scope of this further application. There appears to be a claim to a title and



to the settled property associated with it. Now, I need not remind you that claims in respect of titles of honour lie within the jurisdiction of the House of Lords through a Committee of Privileges.”

“We realize that, my lord,” said Mr. McGonnell.

“But we are not seeking a final and conclusive decision in this court on the question whether the applicant, Christopher Pippet, is or is not entitled to succeed the present tenant, Earl Percy, but merely whether he has such an interest in the estate as will give him the *locus standi* necessary to entitle him to make an application to presume the death of the said Earl Percy.”

“That application,” said the judge, “implies certain further proceedings, including, perhaps, a petition to the House of Lords.”

“That is so, my lord,” counsel agreed. “But we are in a difficulty, and we ask your lordship to exercise a discretion in the matter of procedure. Our difficulty is this: There is reason to believe that Earl Percy is dead; but no direct evidence of his death exists. Consequently, he is, in a legal sense, a living person; and, since no one can be the heir of a living person, it is not possible for Mr. Pippet to initiate proceedings in the House of Lords. Before any such proceedings could become possible it would be necessary for the death of Earl Percy to be either proved or presumed.

“Therefore, the applicant applies for the permission of the court to presume the death. But his right to make this application is contested on the grounds that I have mentioned. Thus he is in this dilemma: He cannot prove his claim until death is presumed, and he cannot apply for permission to presume death until he has proved his claim. But this dilemma, it is submitted, is contrary to the interests of justice; and we accordingly ask your lordship to hear such evidence as shall establish the applicant’s position as a person having such an interest in the estate as renders him competent to make the application.”

“It is not perfectly clear,” said the judge, “that the fact of his having this belief in his title to succeed does not constitute him an interested party to that extent. But we need not go into that, as the issue is not raised. What is the position of the Earl’s representatives in regard to the heir presumptive?”

“Our position, my lord,” said Anstey, rising as the other counsel sat down, “is that the heir presumptive is Mr. Giles Engleheart, the only son of the late Charles Engleheart, Esquire, who was the Earl’s first cousin. Apart from Mr. Pippet’s claim, there is no doubt whatever about Mr. Engleheart’s position. It is not contested. And I may say, if it is permissible, that we are in full agreement with what my learned friend has just said with regard to the applicant’s claim. Since the question has been raised, we submit that it is desirable that the applicant be permitted to produce such evidence as may establish the existence or non-existence of a *prima facie* case. We agree with my learned friend that the present impasse is against the interests of justice.”

“Yes,” said the judge, “there ought certainly to be some escape from the dilemma which the learned counsel for the applicant has mentioned. The actual claim will, no doubt, have to be decided in another place; but there is no objection to such provisional proof as may be necessary for the purposes of the present application. I am therefore prepared to hear the evidence in support of the applicant’s claim.”

He looked at Mr. McGonnell, who thereupon rose and proceeded to open the preliminary case, by a recital of the alleged facts in much the same terms as the sketch which I had heard from Mr. Brodribb, but in somewhat greater detail; and, as I listened, with my eyes on the judge’s face, to the unfolding of that incredible and ridiculous story, I was once more astonished that anyone should have the confidence to tell it seriously in a court of law. How it impressed the judge it was impossible to tell. Judges, as a class, are not easily surprised, nor are they addicted to giving facial expression to their emotions; and the present specimen was a particularly wooden-faced old gentleman. All that I could gather from my observations of his countenance was that he appeared to be listening with close attention and placid interest.

“That, my lord,” said Mr. McGonnell, when he came to the end of the “story” with a description of the sham funeral, “is an outline of what are alleged to be the facts of the applicant’s case; and it would be useless to deny that, taken at its face value, the whole story appears wildly incredible. If it rested only on the family tradition, no one would entertain it for a moment. But it does not rest only on that tradition. It is supported by a considerable body of evidence, including certain very significant entries in a diary kept by Josiah Pippet and certain facts relating to the Earl, George Augustus, who, it is claimed, was the *alter ego* of the said Josiah. Perhaps it will be well to glance at the latter first.

“The thesis on which Mr. Christopher Pippet’s claim is based is that the said Earl, George Augustus, was in the habit of leaving his mansion from time to time and going to ‘The Fox and Grapes’ Inn, where he assumed the name and style of Josiah Pippet and lived the life and carried out the activities of an inn-keeper. Now, it will naturally be asked, ‘Is it credible that any man in the possession of his senses would conduct himself in this manner?’ And the answer obviously is that it is not. But here the question arises, ‘Was the said Earl in the possession of his senses?’ And the answer to that is that, apparently, he was not. At any rate, his conduct in general was so strange, so unusual and erratic, that it would be difficult to name any eccentricity of which he might not have been capable. Let us see what manner of man this was.

“In the first place, he appears to have been a man who had no fixed habits of life. He would live for months at his mansion, busying himself in certain works which we shall consider presently, and then, apparently without notice, he would disappear, leaving no clue to his whereabouts. He would stay away from home for months—in some cases for more than a year—and then would suddenly make his appearance at the mansion, unannounced and unexpected, giving no account of himself or his doings during his absence. And it is worth notice that his alleged double, Josiah Pippet, had

similar peculiarities of behaviour. He also was in the habit of making mysterious disappearances and leaving no clue to his whereabouts."

"Is it ascertained," the judge asked, "that the disappearances of the two men coincided in time?"

"That is what is alleged, my lord," was the reply. "Naturally, after the many years that have elapsed, it is difficult to recover the dates as exactly as might be desired."

"No doubt," his lordship agreed; "but the point is highly material."

"Certainly, my lord," counsel admitted. "Its importance has been fully realized and the point has been carefully examined. Such evidence as has been available goes to prove that the disappearances synchronized."

"But these strange disappearances are not the only, or even the most striking evidences of the Earl's eccentricity. Still more suggestive of an unbalanced mind is the way in which he occupied himself in the intervals of those disappearances, when he was in residence at the mansion. Nothing in the traditional story which I have recited is more incredible than the history of his doings when he was at home. For then, it appears, he was in the habit of assembling an army of workmen, and, at enormous expense, employing them in carrying out works on the most gigantic scale and of the most preposterous character. In one part of his grounds, he set up an immense and lofty tower, with no ascertainable purpose except the view from the summit. From the base of this tower, a flight of steps was constructed leading down into the bowels of the earth, and communicating with a great range of subterranean passages of an aggregate length of close upon a mile. Connected with these passages were several large subterranean rooms, lighted from the surface by shafts and elaborately furnished. No reason is known for the construction of these rooms, though it appears that the Earl was accustomed, from time to time, to retire to them with a stock of provisions and pass a few days underground, hidden from the sight of men. These strange burrows and the great tower are still in existence and will be described in detail by a witness who, by the courtesy of the Earl's representatives, was enabled to make a thorough examination of them. But the slight description of them which I have given is sufficient to demonstrate that the Earl George Augustus was a man who, if not actually insane, was so strange and erratic in his behaviour that there is hardly any eccentricity of which he might not have been capable. The objection, therefore, to the traditional story, that it postulates an unbelievable degree of eccentricity in the Earl George Augustus, has no weight; since the said Earl did, in fact, give evidence of an unbelievable degree of eccentricity."

"I will say no more on the subject of this strange man's personality, though further details of his peculiarities will be given in evidence. But, before finishing with him, it will be material to note the salient facts of his life. George Augustus, fourth Earl of Winsborough, was born on the 9th of August in the year 1794 and he died unmarried in 1871, aged 77. He had no brothers. He was succeeded by his cousin, Francis Engleheart, who died in 1893 and was succeeded by his only son—and only child—then twenty-six years of age, the present Earl Percy."

"We now pass to the alleged double of the Earl George Augustus, Josiah Pippet. Of his personal character we have less direct information, but, on the other hand, we have an invaluable and unimpeachable source of evidence in a diary which he kept for many years, and up to the date of his death. From this, we, at least, gather one highly suggestive fact; that he, like the Earl, was in the habit of disappearing at intervals from his home and from his usual places of resort, of staying away for months at a time, and on two occasions for over a year, and, so far as we are able to discover, leaving no clue as to the place to which he had gone or where he was living."

"When I say that he left no clue to his whereabouts, I mean that he gave no information to his wife or family. Actually, the diary furnishes quite a considerable number of clues; and it is a very striking fact that these clues all refer to the same locality, and that the locality referred to happens to be the very one in which Winsborough Castle is situated. But not only is the locality referred to; there are actual references to the Castle itself, and in such terms as to leave no doubt that the writer was, at the time, in residence there. As the diary will be put in evidence, I need not occupy the time of the court with quotations at this stage, but will proceed to the few but important facts that are known respecting Josiah Pippet."

"The first fact that I shall mention—and a very striking and suggestive fact it is—is that, although the date of Josiah's birth is known, no entry recording it appears in any known register. Exhaustive search has been made at Somerset House and elsewhere, but, so far as can be discovered, no record whatever exists of this man's birth. He seems to have dropped from the skies."

"But, as I have said, the date of his birth is known, for it is stated with great exactness on the vault in which his coffin was deposited. Above the entrance to that vault is a marble tablet on which is carved this brief but significant inscription: 'JOSIAH PIPPET, died the 12th day of October 1843, aged 49 years, 2 months and 3 days.'"

"Now here is a very exact, though rather roundabout statement, from which we can compute the very day of his birth. And what was that day? A simple calculation shows that it was the 9th of August 1794—the very same day on which George Augustus, Fourth Earl of Winsborough, was born!"

"If this is a coincidence, it is a most amazing one. The Earl and his alleged double were born on the same day. And not only that. The birth of the double is unrecorded. There is no evidence that it ever took place. Which is precisely what we might expect in the case of a double. The birth of the Earl duly appears in the register at Somerset House; and I submit that it is a reasonable inference that that entry records the birth, not only of George Augustus Engleheart, but also of Josiah Pippet. That those two men were, in fact, one and the same person; or, in other words, that Josiah Pippet was a purely imaginary and fictitious person."

“But the mysterious circumstances connected with the birth of these two persons—or these two aspects of the same person—are repeated in connexion with their deaths. Just as only one of them is known, and can be proved, to have been born, so only one of them can be proved to have died. It is true that, in the case of Josiah, there was a funeral and a coffin which was solemnly interred. But there was a current belief that the funeral was a sham and that the coffin contained no human remains. And that belief is supported by the fact that there was no medical certificate. The death certificate was signed only by ‘Walter Pippet, the son of the alleged deceased, as was possible in those days, before the passing of the Medical Act of 1858. There is nothing to show that the alleged deceased was attended by any medical practitioner or that there was anything to prevent the sham funeral from taking place with the collusion of the said Walter Pippet. The circumstances of the death, I repeat, like those of the birth, are fully compatible with the belief that there were not two persons at all, but only one person enacting two alternating parts. In other words, that Josiah Pippet was a mythical personage, like John Doe, created for a specific purpose.

“Nevertheless, when we come to the matter of the applicant’s ancestry and descent, we must treat the said Josiah as a real person, since he is the applicant’s visible ancestor. And he has undeniably the qualities of a real person inasmuch as, in the character of Josiah Pippet, he married and had children. In the year 1822, in the church of St. Helen’s, Bishopsgate, he was married to Martha Bagshaw, spinster, he being then 28 years of age, and, according to the register, following the occupation of a ship’s steward. The exact date at which he became landlord of the ‘Fox and Grapes’ is not certain, but he is so described in the register where the birth of his eldest child is recorded.

“There were three children of this marriage; Walter, the eldest, born in 1824, Frederick William, born in 1826 and Susan, born in 1832. Susan married and died in 1897. Walter carried on the ‘Fox and Grapes’ after his father’s real or fictitious death, and died unmarried in 1865. Frederick William took to a sea-faring life and eventually settled, in the year 1853, at the age of 27, in the United States, in the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There he began business by opening a small shop, which grew by degrees into a large and important department store. In 1868 he married Miss Elizabeth Watson, the daughter of a well-to-do merchant of Philadelphia, by whom he had two children, a son, Christopher Josiah, the present applicant, and a daughter Arminella. He lost his wife in 1891, and he died in 1905, leaving the bulk of his large fortune to his daughter and the residue together with the business to his son; who carried on the concern until 1921, when, having made a further considerable fortune, he sold out and retired. It was then that, for the first time, he began seriously to consider raising the claim to what he believes—justly, as I submit—to be his legitimate heritage.

“Before proceeding to call witnesses, I venture, my lord, to recapitulate briefly the points of the case which favour the belief that Josiah Pippet and the Earl George Augustus, Fourth Earl of Winsborough, were one and the same person.

“First, that the said Earl was a man of such wildly eccentric habits and conduct that he might credibly have behaved in the manner alleged.

“That his habit of absenting himself from home for long periods and disappearing from his known places of resort, would have rendered the alleged impersonation easily possible.

“That the man called Josiah Pippet was in the same way addicted to absences and disappearances.

“That the said Josiah is reported to have claimed to be the Earl.

“That, whereas both these persons were born on the same day, there is evidence of the birth of one only.

“That, in like manner, there is evidence of the death of only one of them, the circumstances being such as to support the rumour which was current that the coffin which was interred contained no corpse.

“Those, my lord, are the facts on which the applicant’s claim is based; and I submit that if they can be proved—as they will be by the testimony of the witnesses whom I shall call—they constitute a case sufficiently convincing for the purpose of this application.”

Here Mr. McGonnell paused and inspected his brief while the judge shifted his position in his chair and the usher pronounced the name of Christopher Josiah Pippet. Thereupon Mr. Pippet moved across to the witness-box, and, having been sworn, gave his name and the usual particulars. Then his counsel proceeded to open the examination in chief.

---

## IX. — THE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTOPHER J. PIPPET

“CAN you remember, Mr. Pippet,” the counsel asked, “when you first became aware that you were possibly the direct descendant of the Earl of Winsborough?”

“No, sir, I cannot,” was the reply. “It must have been when I was quite a small boy.”

“From whom did you receive the information?”

“From my father, Frederick William Pippet.”

“Did he refer to the matter on more than one occasion?”

“Yes; on a great many occasions. It was rather a favourite subject with him.”

“Did you gather that he believed in the truth of the tradition?”

“I didn’t have to gather,” replied the witness, with a dry smile. “He said in perfectly unmistakable terms that he regarded

it as pure bunkum.”

“Do you know what reasons he had for taking that view?”

“There were several reasons. In the first place, he didn’t care a dime whether it was true or not. He was a prosperous American citizen, and that was good enough for him. But I think his beliefs were influenced by the character and personality of his father, Josiah Pippet. Josiah was a very peculiar man; very erratic in his behaviour, and, my father thought, not particularly reliable in his statements. Then he was an inveterate joker and much addicted to what is now called leg-pulling. I gathered that my father regarded the whole story as a leg-pull. But he did express surprise that Josiah should have kept the joke up so long and that so many people seemed to have been taken in by it.”

“What people was he referring to?”

“The people who were connected with the ‘Fox and Grapes’ and those who frequented the place. He made a trip to England soon after the death of his brother Walter to see to the disposal of the family property. He had to go to the ‘Fox and Grapes’ to arrange about the sale of the good-will and effects; and there he found a general belief among the staff and the regular frequenters of the house that there was some mystery about Josiah. It was then, too, that he heard the rumour of the bogus funeral.”

“Did he tell you what, exactly, it was that the staff and the other people believed?”

“A good deal of it seemed to be rather vague, though they all agreed that Josiah was not what he appeared to be—just an inn-keeper—but that he was a member of some noble house, masquerading as a publican for some unknown reasons. And they all appeared to believe that he was not really dead, but that he had arranged a sham funeral in order to bring the masquerade to an end without disclosing his real personality.”

“But apart from these vague rumours, was there anything more definite?”

“Yes; there were some very definite statements, particularly those made by Walter’s manager, who succeeded him. He professed to have been on terms of close intimacy with Josiah and to have received confidences from him which were made to no one else. Among these was the categorical statement that he, Josiah Pippet, was actually the Earl of Winsborough; that he had been born in the Castle at Winsborough and that he intended, if possible, to die there. And he, the manager, expressed himself as quite certain that Josiah was not dead, giving as his reason a number of reports which had reached him from time to time. One man, he stated, who was a frequenter of the ‘Fox and Grapes,’ had seen Josiah coming out of the town mansion in Cavendish Square and stepping into a carriage. Another customer, a Channel pilot, had met Josiah riding along the road across the sand-hills from Sandwich to Deal. He was perfectly certain that the man was Josiah Pippet, having often been served by him with liquor at the bar of the ‘Fox and Grapes.’ Another customer, who occasionally had business at Sandwich in Kent, happened to walk out from that town to Winsborough, and there he saw Josiah Pippet riding out of the main gate of the Castle grounds, followed by a mounted groom. He also was quite certain that the man he saw was really Josiah. And there were several other instances of persons who had seen Josiah since his alleged death which were mentioned by the manager, but my father could not remember the particulars.”

“And did not all these circumstantial statements make any impression on your father?”

“No, none whatever. His opinion was that Josiah had amused himself by throwing out mysterious hints and that these had been repeated over and over again, growing with each repetition, until this story had taken definite shape.”

“And as to the reports that Josiah had actually been seen in the flesh?”

“His explanation of that was that Josiah and the Earl were probably a good deal alike; and he suspected that Josiah’s hints arose from that circumstance. He remarked that Josiah certainly came from that part of the country, and that he probably knew the Earl by sight.”

“You do not, I presume,” said the counsel, slightly disconcerted, I thought, by the witness’s tone, “take quite the same view as your father.”

“I am trying to keep an open mind,” the witness replied, calmly, “but I am telling you what my father thought, if his opinions have any bearings on the case.”

“It is not clear that they have,” said the judge. “We are, I believe, endeavouring to elicit facts.”

“I would submit, my lord,” the counsel replied, “that they have this bearing; that the statements being those of an entirely unconvinced man, they may be assumed to be quite free from any suspicion of exaggeration. The speaker’s bias was clearly against the truth of the reports and his testimony has, accordingly, an added value.”

The judge acknowledged this “submission” with a grave nod but made no further comment, and the counsel resumed his examination.

“When your father used to speak to you about Josiah’s story, did he give you any particulars as to what Josiah had told him?”

“He did occasionally. But most of Josiah’s talk on the subject took the form of vague boastings to the effect that his real station was very different from what it appeared. But now and again he let himself go with a straight statement. For instance, on one occasion he said quite definitely that Pippet was not his real name; that he had assumed it because it seemed to be a good name for an inn-keeper. I don’t know what he meant by that.”

"He gave no hint as to what his real name was?"

"No. The nearest approach to a disclosure of an identity other than that of Josiah Pippet was in his parting words to my father when the latter was starting on a long voyage a few months before Josiah's death. He then said—I am quoting my father as well as I can remember his words—'When you come back, you may not find me here. If you don't, you can look for me down at Winsborough, near Sandwich in Kent, and you will probably find me living at the Castle.' That was the last time that my father saw him."

"You have referred to the alleged bogus funeral of your grandfather, Josiah Pippet, and to a dummy coffin weighted with lead. In the accounts which you received, was any mention made of the kind of lead used—whether, for instance, it was lead pipe, or bars, or lead pig?"

"Most of the accounts referred simply to lead; but one—I forgot who gave it—mentioned a roll of roofing-lead and some plumber's oddments, left after some repairs. But I am not very clear about it. I can't quote any particular account."

"Are there any other facts or statements known to you tending to prove that the man known as Josiah Pippet was in fact the Earl of Winsborough?"

"No. I think you have got them all except those contained in the diary."

"Then," said the counsel, "in that case, we will proceed to consider the entries in the diary which seem relevant." With this, he produced seven small, antique-looking, leather-bound volumes and passed them across to the witness.

"What do you say these volumes are?" he asked. "To the best of my belief," was the reply, "they are the diary kept by my grandfather, Josiah Pippet."

"How did they come into your possession?"

"They were among the effects of my late father, Frederick William Pippet. They were obtained by him, as he informed me, when he was disposing of the effects of his deceased brother, Walter. He found them in a deed box with a large number of letters, the whole being tied together and docketed 'Diary and letters of Josiah Pippet, deceased.' As the surviving son, he took possession of them and the letters."

"You have no doubt that these volumes are the authentic diary of Josiah Pippet?"

"No, I have not. His name is written in each volume and my father always referred to them as his father's diary, and I have no reason to doubt that that is what they are."

"Are they, in all respects, in the same condition as when they came into your possession?"

"They were up to the time that I handed them to my solicitor, and I have no doubt that they are still. They were always kept in the deed box in which my father found them, together with the letters. I handed the whole collection in the deed box to my solicitor for him to examine."

"Would it be correct to say that it was the study of this diary that led you seriously to entertain the possibility that Josiah Pippet was really the Earl of Winsborough?"

"It would—with the proviso that the studying was not done by me. It was my sister who used to study the diary, and she communicated her discoveries to me."

"Since you have been in England, have you made any attempts to check the accuracy of the entries in the diary?"

"I have, in the few cases in which it has been possible after all these years."

"There is an entry dated the 3rd of September, 1839: 'Home on the brig *Harmony*. Got aground on the Dyke, but off next tide.' Have you been able to check that? As to the locality, I mean."

"Yes, I find that the Dyke is the name of a shoal by the side of a navigation channel called The Old Cudd Channel, leading to Ramsgate Harbour. I find that it is used almost exclusively by vessels entering or leaving Ramsgate Harbour or Sandwich Haven. At Sandwich I was allowed to examine the old books kept by the Port authorities, and, in the register of shipping using the port I found, under the date 1st September, 1839, a note that the brig *Harmony* sailed out of the Haven in ballast, bound for London."

"What significance do you attach to that entry?"

"As Sandwich is only a mile and a half from Winsborough, and is the nearest port, the fact of his embarking there is consistent with the supposition that Winsborough was the place in which he had been staying."

"There is a previous entry dated the 12th of June, 1837: 'Broached an anker of prime Dutch gin that I bought from the skipper of the *Vriendschap*.'"

"I checked that at the same time in the same register. There was an entry relating to a Dutch galliot named the *Vriendschap* which discharged a general cargo, including a quantity of gin. She arrived at Sandwich on the 10th of April and cleared outward on the 25th of the same month. At that time, the diary shows that Josiah was absent from home."

"Is there anything to show where he was at that time?"

"There is an entry made just after he arrived home. I am not sure of the date."

"Are you referring to the entry of the 6th of May, 1837: 'Home again. Feel a little strange after the life at the Castle'?"

"Yes. Taking the two entries together, it seems clear that the castle referred to was Winsborough Castle and that he was in residence there."

"I will take only one more passage from the diary—that of the 8th of October, 1842: 'Back to the Fox. Exit G. A. and enter J. P., but not for long.' What does that convey to you?"

"The meaning of it seems to me to be obvious. The initials are those of the Earl, George Augustus, and himself, Josiah Pippet. It appears plainly to indicate that George Augustus now retires from the stage and gives place to Josiah Pippet. And, as the entry was made within ten months of his alleged death, or final disappearance, the expression, 'not for long,' seems to refer to that final disappearance."

On receiving this answer, counsel paused and glanced over his brief. Apparently finding no further matter for examination, he said: "I need not ask you anything about the passages from the diary which I quoted in my opening address. The diary is put in evidence and the passages speak for themselves."

With this he sat down and Anstey rose to cross-examine.

"You have told us, Mr. Pippet," he began, "that you were led to entertain the belief in the dual personality of your grandfather, Josiah Pippet, by your study of certain passages in his diary."

"Not my study," was the reply. "I said that my sister studied the diary and communicated her discoveries to me."

"Yes. Now, which of these passages was it that first led you to abandon the scepticism which, I understand, you formerly felt in regard to the story of the double life and the sham funeral?"

"I cannot remember distinctly, but my impression is that my sister was strongly influenced by those passages which imply, or definitely state that Josiah, when absent from his London home, was living at the Castle."

"But what caused you to identify 'the Castle' as Winsborough Castle? There is nothing in the diary to indicate any castle in particular. The words used are simply 'The Castle.' How did you come to decide that, of all the castles in England, the reference was to this particular castle?"

"I take it that we were influenced by what we had both heard from our father. The stories that he had been told referred explicitly to Winsborough Castle. And the inquiries which I have made since I have been in England—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Anstey, "but those inquiries are not relevant to my question. We are speaking of your study of the diary when you were at your home in America. I suggest that you then had very little knowledge of the geography of the county of Kent."

"We had practically none."

"Then I suggest that, apart from what you had heard from your father, there was nothing to indicate that the words, 'The Castle,' referred to Winsborough Castle."

"That is so. We applied what my father had told us to the entries in the diary."

"Then, since the connexion was simply guess-work, is it not rather singular that the mere reference to The Castle should have made so deep an impression on you?"

"Perhaps," the witness replied, with a faint smile, "my sister may have been prepared to be impressed, and may have communicated her enthusiasm to me."

To this answer Anstey made no rejoinder, but, after a short pause and a glance at his brief, resumed:

"There is this entry of the 8th of October, 1842: 'Back to the Fox. Exit G. A. and enter J. P., but not for long.' Did that passage influence you strongly in your opinion of the truth of the story of Josiah's double life?"

The witness did not answer immediately, and it seemed to me that he looked a little worried. At length he replied:

"It is a remarkable fact, but I have no recollection of our ever having discussed that entry. It would almost seem as if my sister had overlooked it."

"Do you remember when your attention was first drawn to that entry?"

"Yes. It was at a consultation with my solicitor, Mr. Gimble, when he showed me a number of passages which he had extracted from the diary; which he considered relevant to the case, and which he wished me to try to verify if possible."

"Have you, since then, discussed this passage with your sister?"

"Yes; and she is as much surprised as I am that it did not attract her attention when she was reading the diary."

"So far as you know, did she read the entire diary?"

"I understood that she read the whole seven volumes from cover to cover."

"Has she ever made a definite statement to you to that effect?"

"Yes. A short time ago, I put the question to her explicitly and she assured me that, to the best of her belief, she had read every word of the diary."

"And you say that she had no recollection of having noticed this particular entry?"

"That is what she told me."

Here the judge interposed with a question.

"I don't understand why we are taking this hearsay testimony from the witness as to what his sister read or noticed. Is not the lady in court?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Anstey; "but I understand that it is not proposed to call Miss Pippet."

The judge turned and looked inquiringly at Mr. McGonnell, who rose and explained:

"It was not considered necessary to call Miss Pippet as she is not in possession of any facts other than those known to her brother."

With this he sat down. But, for some seconds, the judge continued to look at him fixedly as if about to ask some further question, a circumstance that seemed to occasion the learned counsel some discomfort. But, if his lordship had intended to make any further observations, he thought better of it, for he suddenly turned away, and, leaning back in his chair, glanced at Anstey; who thereupon resumed his cross-examination.

"Now, Mr. Pippet," said he, taking up the last volume of the diary (the seven volumes had been passed to him at the conclusion of the examination in chief) and opening it at a place near the end, "I will ask you to look at this entry, dated the 8th of October, 1842." (Here the open book was passed across to the witness.) "You will see that there is a blank space between the last entry made before the writer went away from home and this, the first entry made after his return. Is that so?"

"It is," replied Mr. Pippet.

"And does it not appear to you that this entry is in a very conspicuous position—in a position likely to catch the eye of any person glancing over the page?"

"It does," the witness agreed.

"Then I put it to you, Mr. Pippet: Here is a diary which is being searched by an intelligent and attentive reader for corroboration of the story of Josiah's alleged double life. Here is an entry which seems to afford such corroboration. It is in a conspicuous position, and not only that; for, being the first entry after Josiah's return from his mysterious absence, it is in the very position in which an intelligent searcher would expect to find it. Now, I ask you, is it not an astounding and almost incredible circumstance that this entry should have been overlooked?"

"I have already said so," Mr. Pippet replied, a little wearily, delivering the open diary to the usher, who handed it up to the judge. There was a short pause while Anstey turned over the leaves of his brief and the judge examined the diary; which he did with undissembled interest and at considerable length. When he had finished with it, he returned it to the usher, who brought it over to Anstey, by whom it was forthwith delivered into the hands of Thorndyke.

I watched my colleague's proceedings with grim amusement. If, in Anstey's cross-examination, certain hints were to be read between the lines, there was no such reticence on Thorndyke's part. Openly and undisguisedly, he scrutinized the entry in the diary, with the naked eye, with his pocket-lens, and finally with a queer little squat, double-barrelled microscope which he produced from a case at his side. Nor was I the only observer. The proceeding was watched by his lordship, with a sphinx-like face but a twinkling eye, by the two opposing counsel, and especially Mr. Gimble, who seemed to view it with considerable disfavour. But my attention was diverted from Thorndyke's activities by Anstey, who now resumed his cross examination.

"You have referred to the alleged bogus funeral of your grandfather, Josiah Pippet, and to a dummy coffin weighted with lead. Now, so far as you know, is that coffin still in existence?"

"I have no doubt that it is. I visited the cemetery, which is at a place near Stratford in the east end of London, and examined the vault from the outside. It appeared to be quite intact."

"Is the cemetery still in use?"

"No. It was closed many years ago by Act of Parliament and is now disused and deserted."

"Had you any difficulty in obtaining admission?"

The witness smiled. "I can hardly say that I was admitted," said he. "The place was locked up and there was nobody in charge; but the wall was only about six feet high. I had no difficulty in getting over."

"Then," said Anstey, "we may assume that the coffin is still there. And if it is, it contains either the body of Josiah Pippet or a roll of sheet lead and some plumber's oddments. Has it never occurred to you that it would be desirable to examine that coffin and see what it does contain?"

"It has," the witness replied, emphatically. "When I came to England, my intention was to get that coffin open right away and see whether Josiah was in it or not. If I had found him there, I should have known that my father was right and that the story was all bunk; and if I had found the lead, I should have known that there was something solid to go on."

"What made you abandon that intention?"

"I was advised that, in England, it is impossible to open a coffin without a special faculty from the Home Secretary, and that no such faculty would be granted until the case had been heard in a court of law."

"Then we may take it that it was your desire to have this coffin examined as to its contents?"

"It was, and is," the witness replied, energetically. "I want to get at the truth of this business; and it seems to me, being ignorant of law, that it is against common sense to spend all this time arguing and inferring when a few turns of a screw-driver would settle the whole question in a matter of minutes."

The judge smiled approvingly. "A very sensible view," said he; "and not such particularly bad law."

"So far as you know, Mr. Pippet," said Anstey, "have any measures been taken to obtain authority to open the vault and examine the coffin?"

"I am not aware of any. I understood that, until the court had given some decision on the case, any such measures would be premature."

"Are you aware that it is within the competency of this court to make an order for the exhumation of this coffin and its examination as to its contents?"

"I certainly was not," the witness answered.

Here the judge interposed with some signs of impatience.

"It seems necessary that this point should be cleared up. We are trying a case involving a number of issues, all of which are subject to one main issue. That issue is: Did Josiah Pippet die in the year 1843 and was he buried in a normal manner? Or was his alleged death a fictitious death and the funeral a sham funeral conducted with a dummy coffin weighted with lead? Now, as Mr. Pippet has most reasonably remarked, it seems a strange thing that we should be listening to a mass of evidence of the most indirect kind—principally hearsay evidence at third or fourth hand—when we actually have within our grasp the means of settling this issue conclusively by evidence of the most direct and convincing character. Has the learned counsel for the applicant any instructions on this point?"

While the judge had been speaking, a hurried and anxious consultation had been taking place between Mr. Gimbler and his leading counsel. The latter now rose and replied:

"It was considered, my lord, that, as these proceedings were, in a sense, preliminary to certain other proceedings possibly to be taken in another place, it might be desirable to postpone the question of the exhumation, especially as it seemed doubtful whether your lordship would be willing to make the necessary order."

"That," said the judge, "could have been ascertained by making the application; and I may say that I should certainly have complied with the request."

"Then in that case," said Mr. McGonnell, "we gratefully adopt your lordship's suggestion and make the application now."

"Very well," the judge rejoined, "then the order will be made, subject to the consent of the Home Secretary, which we may assume will be given."

As he concluded, he glanced at Anstey, but, as the latter remained seated, and no re-examination followed, Mr. Pippet was released from the witness-box.

Of the rest of the evidence I have but a dim recollection. The sudden entry, like a whiff of fresh air, into this fog of surmise and rumour, of a promise of real, undeniable evidence, made the testimony of the remaining witnesses appear like mere trifling. There was an architect and surveyor who described and produced plans of the old Earl's underground chambers; and there was an aged woman whose grandfather had been a potman at the "Fox and Grapes" and who gave a vague account of the strange rumours of which she had heard him speak. But it was all very shadowy and unreal. It merely left us speculating as to whether the story of the bogus funeral might or might not possibly be true. And the speculation was not worth while when we should presently be looking into the open coffin and able to settle the question definitely, yes or no.

I think everyone was relieved when the sitting came to an end and the further hearing was adjourned until the result of the exhumation should be made known.

---

## X. — JOSIAH?

THE last resting-place—real or fictitious—of the late Josiah Pippet was a somewhat dismal spot. Not that it mattered. The landscape qualities of a burial ground cannot be of much concern to the inmates. And in Josiah's day, when he came here prospecting for an eligible freehold, the aspect of the place was doubtless very different. Then it must have been a rural burial ground adjoining some vanished hamlet (it was designated on the Ordnance map "Garwell Burial Ground") hard by the Romford Turnpike Road. Now, it was a little grimy wilderness, fronting on a narrow street, flanked by decaying stable-yards and cart sheds, and apparently utterly neglected and forgotten of men. The only means of access was a rusty iron gate, set in the six-foot enclosing wall, and at that gate Thorndyke and I arrived a full half-hour before the appointed time, having walked thither from the nearest station—Maryland Point on the Great Eastern. But early as we were, we were not early enough from Thorndyke's point of view; for, not only did we find the rusty gate unlocked (with a brand-new key



sticking out of the corroded lock), but, when we lifted the decayed latch and entered, we discovered two men in the very act of wrenching open the door of a vault.

"This," said Thorndyke, regarding the two men with a disapproving eye, "ought not to have been done until everyone was present and the unopened door had been inspected."

"Well," I said, consolingly, "it will save time."

"No doubt," he admitted. "But that is not what we are here for." We approached the operators, one of whom appeared to be a locksmith and the other an official of some kind, to whom, at his request, we gave our names and explained our business.

"I expect," said Thorndyke, "you had your work cut out, getting that door unlocked."

"It was a bit of a job, sir," the locksmith replied. "Locks is like men. Gets a bit stiff in the joints after eighty years. But it wasn't as bad as I'd expected. I'd got a good strong skeleton key filed up and a tommy to turn it with; and when I'd run in a drop of paraffin and oil, she twisted round all right."

As he was speaking, I looked around me. The burial ground was roughly square in shape, enclosed on three sides by a six-foot brick wall, while the fourth side was occupied by a range of the so-called vaults; which were not, strictly speaking, vaults at all, but sepulchral chambers above ground. There were six of them, each provided with its own door, and over each door was a stone tablet on which was inscribed brief particulars of the inmates. Josiah alone had a chamber all to himself, and, running my eye along the row of tablets and reading the dates, I noted that he appeared to be the last of the tenants. At this moment, the sound of a motor car in the street outside caused us to step back to bring the gate within view; when, to my surprise—but not, apparently, to Thorndyke's—our old friend, Mr. Superintendent Miller, was seen entering. As he approached and greeted us, I exclaimed:

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miller. What brings you here? I didn't know that the police were interested in this case."

"They are not," he replied. "I am here on instructions from the Home Office just to see that the formalities are complied with. That is all. But it is a quaint business. What are we going to find in that coffin, Doctor?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "is an open question, at present."

"I know," said Miller. "But I expect you have considered the probabilities. What do you say? Bones or lead?"

"Well, as a mere estimate of probabilities," replied Thorndyke, "I should say lead."

"Should you really!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "I would have wagered fifty to one on a body. The whole story of the bogus funeral sounded to me like 'sheer bunk,' as Pippet would express it."

"That would certainly have been my view," said Miller, "but I expect we are both wrong. We usually are when we disagree with the Doctor. And there does seem to be a hint of something queer about that inscription. 'Josiah Pippet, died on the 12th day of October, 1843, aged 49 years, 2 months and 3 days.' If he was so blooming particular to a day, why couldn't he have just given the date of his birth and have done with it?"

While we had been talking, the official and his assistant had produced two pairs of coffin trestles, which they set up side by side opposite the open door of the vault; and they had hardly been placed in position when the sound of two cars drawing up almost at the same moment announced the arrival of the rest of the party.

"My eye!" exclaimed Miller, as the visitors filed in and the official—beadle, or whatever he was—advanced to meet them and lock the gate after them; "it's a regular congregation."

It did look a large party. First there was Mr. Pippet with his sister and daughter and his solicitor and Mr. McGonnell; and then followed Mrs. Engleheart and her son with Mr. Brodribb. But, once inside the burial ground, the two groups tended to coalesce while mutual greetings were exchanged, and then to sort themselves out. The two elder ladies decided to wait at a distance while "the horrid business" was in progress, and the rest of us gathered round the half-open door, the two young people drawing together and seeming, as I thought, to be on uncommonly amicable terms.

"I leave the conduct of this affair in your hands, Thorndyke," said Mr. Brodribb, casting a wistful glance at the two ladies, who had retired to the farther side of the enclosure. "Is there anything that you want to do before the coffin is removed?"

"I should like, as a mere formality, to inspect the interior of the vault," was the reply; "and perhaps the Superintendent, as a disinterested witness, might also take a glance at it."

As he spoke, he looked inquiringly at Mr. Gimbley, and the latter, accepting the suggestion, advanced with him and Miller and threw the door wide open. There was nothing very sensational to see. The little chamber was crossed by a thick stone shelf on which rested the coffin. The latter had a very unattractive appearance, the dark, damp oak—from which every vestige of varnish had disappeared—being covered with patches of thick, green mildew and greasy-looking stains, over which was a mantle of impalpably fine grey dust. A layer of similar dust covered the shelf, the floor and every horizontal surface, but nowhere was there the faintest sign of its having been disturbed. On coffin and shelf and floor it presented a perfectly smooth, unbroken surface.

"Well, Doctor," said Miller, when he had cast a quick, searching glance round the chamber, "are you satisfied? Looks all right."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "But we will just take a sample or two of the dust for reference, if necessary."

As he spoke, he produced from his pockets a penknife and two of the inevitable seed-envelopes which he always carried about him. With the former he scraped up a little heap of dust on the coffin lid and shovelled it into one envelope, and then took another sample from the shelf; a proceeding which was observed with a sour smile by Mr Gimber and with delighted amusement by the Superintendent.

"Nothing left to chance, you notice," chuckled the latter. "Thomas a Didymus was a credulous man compared with the Doctor. Shall we have the coffin out now?"

As Thorndyke assented, the beadle and his assistant approached and drew the coffin forward on the shelf. Then they lifted the projecting end, but forthwith set it down again and stood gazing at it blankly.

"Moses!" exclaimed the locksmith. "He don't seem to have lost much weight in eighty years! This is a four-man job."

Thereupon, Miller and I stepped forward, and, as the two men lifted the foot end of the coffin, we took the weight of the other end; and as we staggered to the trestles with our ponderous burden, Miller whispered to me:

"What's the betting now, Dr. Jervis?"

"There may be a lead shell," I suggested, but without much conviction. However, there was no use in speculating, seeing that the locksmith had already produced a screw-driver from his tool-bag and was preparing to set to work. As he began, I watched him with some interest, expecting that the screw would be rusted in immovably. But he was a skilful workman and managed the extraction with very little difficulty, though the screw, when at last he got it out and laid it on the coffin lid, was thickly encrusted with rust. Thorndyke picked it up, and, having looked it over, handed it to Miller with the whispered injunction:

"Take charge of the screws, Miller. They may have to be put in evidence."

The Superintendent made no comment, though I could see that he was a little puzzled; as also was I, for there appeared to be nothing unusual or significant in the appearance of the screw. And I think the transaction was observed—with some disfavour—by Mr. Gimber, though he took no notice, but kept a watchful and suspicious eye on Thorndyke; who, during the extraction of the other screws, occupied himself with an exhaustive examination of the exterior of the coffin, including the blackened brass name-plate (the fastening-screws of which he inspected through a lens) and the brass handles and their fastenings.

At length the last of the eight screws was extracted—and pocketed by Miller—and the locksmith, inserting his screw-driver between the lid and the side, looked round as if waiting for the word. We all gathered round, making space, however, for Mr. Pippet, his daughter and Mr. Giles.

"Now," said Mr. Pippet, "we are going to get the answer to the riddle. Up with her."

The locksmith gave a single wrench and the lid rose. He lifted it clear and laid it on the other trestles, and we all craned forward and peered into the coffin. And then, at the first glance, we had the answer. For what we saw was an untidy bundle of mouldy sacking. We could not see what the bundle contained; but it certainly did not contain the late Josiah Pippet.

The excitement now reached its climax and found expression in low-toned, inarticulate murmurs, in the midst of which Mr. Pippet's calm, matter-of-fact voice was heard directing the locksmith to "get that bundle open and let's see what's inside." Accordingly, with much tugging at the unsavoury sacking, the bundle was laid open and its contents exposed to the light of day—a small roll of whitened sheet lead and four hemispherical lumps of the same metal, apparently the remainders from a plumber's melting-pot.

For some moments there was a complete silence as nine pairs of fascinated eyes remained riveted on the objects that reposed on the bottom of the coffin. It was broken, not quite harmoniously, by the voice of Mr. Gimber.

"A roll of sheet lead and some plumber's oddments."

As he spoke, he turned, with a fat, wrinkly and rather offensive smile to Mr. Giles Engleheart.

"Yes," the latter agreed, "it fits the description to a T." He held out his hand to Mr. Pippet and continued: "It's heads up for you, sir. I congratulate you on a fair win, and I wish you a long life to enjoy what you have won."

"Thank you, Giles," said Mr. Pippet, shaking his hand warmly. "I am glad to have your congratulations first—even if they should turn out premature. We mustn't be too previous, you know."

He spoke in a singularly calm, unemotional tone, without a trace of triumph or even satisfaction. Indeed, I could not but be impressed (and considerably surprised) by the total absence of any sign of elation on the part either of the claimant or his daughter. It might have been simply good manners and regard for the defeated rival. But it looked uncommonly like indifference. Moreover, I could not but notice that, in the midst of the congratulations, Mr. Pippet was keeping an attentive eye on Thorndyke; and, indeed, my colleague's proceedings soon began to attract more general notice.

When the leaden objects were first disclosed, he had viewed them impassively with what had almost looked like a glance of recognition. They were, in fact, as I knew, exactly what he had expected to see. But after a general, searching glance, he proceeded to a closer inspection. First, he lifted out the roll of sheet lead, and, having looked it over, critically, laid it on the coffin-lid. Then he turned his attention to the "oddments," of which there was one appreciably larger than the other three,

having apparently come from a bigger melting-pot. This mass, which looked like the half of a metallic Dutch cheese, he lifted out first, and, in spite of its great weight, he seemed to handle it without any difficulty as he turned it about to examine its various parts. When he had inspected it all over, he laid it on the coffin-lid beside the roll of sheet lead, and then, dipping into the coffin once more, took up one of the smaller "remainders."

And it was at this moment that I became aware that "something had happened." How I knew it, I can hardly say, for Thorndyke was a perfectly impossible subject for a thought-reader. But my long association with him enabled me to detect subtle shades of expression that were perceptible to no one else. And something of the kind I had seen now. As he lifted the lump of lead, he had checked for a moment and seemed to stiffen, and a sudden intensity of attention had flashed into his eyes, to vanish in an instant, leaving his face as immobile and impassive as a mask of stone.

What could it be? I could only watch and wait for developments. As he turned the mass of lead over in his hands and pored over every inch of its surface, I caught the twinkling eye of Superintendent Miller and a low chuckle of appreciative amusement.

"Nothing taken for granted, you observe," he murmured.

But the others were less indulgent. As Thorndyke laid the last of the leaden pot-leavings on the coffin-lid, Mr. McGonnell interposed, a little stiffly.

"Is there anything more, Dr. Thorndyke? Because, if not, as we seem to have done what we came here to do, I suggest that we may consider the business as finished."

"That is," said Mr. Pippet, "if Dr. Thorndyke is satisfied. Are you satisfied, Doctor?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "I am not satisfied with this lead. It purports to have been placed here in 1843, and part of it—the sheet lead—was then old. It was said to have been old roofing-sheet. Now, I am not satisfied that this lead is of that age. This sheet lead looks to me like modern milled lead."

"And how do you propose to settle that question?" McGonnell asked.

"I propose that an assay of the lead should be made to determine, if possible, its age."

McGonnell snorted. "This is Thomas Didymus, with a vengeance," he exclaimed. "But I submit that it is mere hair-splitting; and I don't believe that any assayist could give an opinion as to the age of the lead, or that the court would pay any attention to him if he did. What do you say, Gimbler?"

Mr. Gimbler smiled his queer, fat, wrinkly smile, to the entire extinction of his little blue eyes, and swung his eye-glasses on their ribbon like a pendulum.

"I say," he replied, oracularly, "that the proposal is inadmissible for several reasons. First, the objection is frivolous. We came here to find out whether this coffin contained a body or some lumps of lead. We find that it contained lead. Now Dr. Thorndyke doubts whether it is the original lead. He thinks it may be some other lead of a later vintage. But if it is, how came it here? What does he suggest?"

"I suggest nothing," said Thorndyke. "My function in this case is the purely scientific one of ascertaining facts."

"Still," persisted Gimbler, "there is a suggestion implied in the objection. But I let that pass. Next, I assert that an assay would not produce any evidence that the court would take seriously. The proposed proceeding is merely vexatious and obstructive. It would occasion delay and increase the costs to no useful purpose. And, finally, the order of the court does not authorize us to make an assay of the lead. It merely authorizes us to open the coffin and ascertain whether it contains a body. We have done that and we find that it does not contain a body."

Here Mr. Brodribb, who had been showing signs of increasing discomfort, intervened in the discussion.

"I am inclined, Thorndyke," said he, "to agree with Mr. Gimbler. Your proposal to make an assay of the lead does seem to go beyond the powers conferred by the judge's order. Of course, if it is necessary, we could make a special application. But is it necessary? Do you say definitely that this lead is not of the age that it is assumed to be?"

"No," replied Thorndyke, "I do not. I merely say that I am not satisfied that it is."

"Then," said Brodribb, "I suggest that we waive the question of the assay, at least for the present. I should much prefer to do so, especially as there is no denying that your proposal does imply certain suggestions which should not be lightly made."

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments, and I waited curiously for his decision. Finally, he rejoined:

"Very well, Brodribb; I will not press the matter against your sense of the legal proprieties. We will waive the assay—at any rate, for the present."

"I think you are wise," said McGonnell. "It would have seemed an extravagant piece of scepticism and couldn't have led to any result. And now," he added, looking anxiously at his watch, "I suppose we have finished our business. I hope so. Have we got to see to the re-placing of the coffin?"

"No, sir," replied Miller. "That is my business, as official master of the ceremonies. There is nothing to detain you."

"Thank goodness for that," said McGonnell, and began, forthwith, to move towards the gate, while Mr. Pippet, the two

solicitors and the two young people advanced up the path to meet the two elder ladies and give them the latest news of the discoveries. Then the beadle unlocked the gate, and, as the procession moved towards it, we joined the party to exchange polite greetings and see them into their cars (in which the opposing litigants got mixed up in the most singular and amicable manner).

“Can I give you two a lift?” inquired Brodribb, as he held the door of his car open.

“No, thank you,” replied Thorndyke. “We have a little business to transact with Miller.”

Thereupon Brodribb wriggled, with some difficulty into his car; and we re-entered the gate, which the beadle locked after us, and rejoined the Superintendent.



## XI. — PLUMBER'S ODDMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS

AS Thorndyke and I returned from the gate, the Superintendent met us with a peculiarly knowing expression on his countenance.

"Well, Doctor," said he, "what about it?" And, as this slightly ambiguous question elicited no reply beyond an indulgent smile, he continued: "When I hear a gentleman of your intellect propose to assay a lump of old lead to ascertain the exact vintage year, experience tells me that that gentleman has got something up his sleeve. Now, Doctor, let's hear what it is."

"To tell you the truth, Miller," Thorndyke replied, "I don't quite know, myself. But you are wrong about the lead. The age of a piece of lead can be judged fairly accurately by the silver content. If you find a piece of sheet lead with a silver content of, say, ten ounces to the ton, you can be pretty sure that it was made before Pattinson's process for the desilverization of lead was invented. Still, you are right to the extent that the question of age was not the only issue that I had in my mind. There were other reasons why the assay should be made."

"But you have abandoned the assay," objected Miller, "and very surprised I was to hear you give way so easily."

"I gave way in your favour," said Thorndyke, with a cryptic smile. "*You* are going to have the assay carried out."

"Oh, am I?" exclaimed the Superintendent. "It's as well to know these things in advance." We turned into a side path to get a little farther from the beadle and his mate, and Miller continued: "Now, look here, Doctor; I want to be clear about this business. This is a civil case, and it is no concern of mine, as a police officer. What's the game? You seem to be dumping this blooming lead on me, and then there are these screws. Why did you want me to take charge of them?" He drew out of his pocket the rusty handful and looked at them disparagingly. "I don't see anything special about them. They look to me like ordinary screws such as you could buy at any ironmonger's."

Thorndyke chuckled. "They are common-looking screws, I must admit," said he. "But don't despise them. Like many other common-looking things, they have their value. I want you to put them into an envelope and seal it with your official seal; and write on the envelope, 'Screws extracted in my presence from the coffin of Josiah Pippet,' and sign it. Will you do that?"

"Yes," replied Miller, "I don't see any objection to that, though I am hanged if I can guess what you want them for. But with regard to this lead. You want me to have it assayed on my own initiative, as a police officer. But I must have something to go on. The judge's order doesn't cover me. Now, I know quite well that you have got something perfectly definite in your mind; and, knowing you as I do, I am pretty sure that it is not a delusion. Can't you tell me what it is?"

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments. "The fact is," he said at length, "I am in a difficulty. My position in this case is that of a counsel instructed by Brodribb." Here Miller indulged in a broad grin, but made no comment, beyond something like a wink directed towards me, and Thorndyke continued: "You saw that Brodribb disliked the idea of the assay. He is a very acute lawyer, but he is a most scrupulously courteous old gentleman, and he was obviously unwilling to seem to throw the slightest doubt on the good faith of the other side, even Gimpler. Now, I could not act against Brodribb's wishes, and there was no need. I had given the other side their chance, and they didn't choose to take it."

"So now," said Miller, "you want, in effect, to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. And I am the hounds. Isn't that the position?"

Thorndyke regarded the Superintendent with an appreciative smile. "Very neatly put, Miller," said he, "and I won't deny that it does seem to state the position. Nevertheless, I am going to ask you to help me, and to take on trust my assurance that, if you act on what I will call my suggestions, you will, in your official capacity, 'learn something to your advantage,' as the solicitors express it."

"Still," urged Miller, "if you don't care to let the cat out of the bag, you might at least show us her head, or even her tail, so that we may see what sort of animal is in the bag."

Once more, Thorndyke reflected for a few moments before replying. At length he said: "I fully appreciate your difficulty, Miller. You can't, as a detective officer, start an investigation in the air. But you have known me long enough to feel certain that I should not send you off in search of a mare's nest."

"I am quite clear on that point," Miller agreed, warmly. "I only want reasonable cover."

"Very well," rejoined Thorndyke; "I can give you that, if you will take my information on trust without the production of evidence."

"Let's hear the information," said Miller, cautiously.

"It is this," said Thorndyke; "and I am prepared to give you the information in writing, if you want it."

"I don't," said Miller. "I only want a definite statement."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I will give you one. I declare, positively, that, if this is the original coffin, it has, at some time after the date of the burial, as set forth on the tomb and on the coffin, been opened and reclosed; and that the objects which we have found in it are not its original contents. But I am of opinion that this is not the original coffin, but a new coffin substituted with the intent to commit a fraud. Will that do for you?"

"Yes," replied Miller. "That is good enough for a start; and not a bad start, either. If there has been a fraudulent substitution for the purpose of obtaining possession of valuable property, that brings the matter fairly within my province. And, what is more, it seems to bring Mr. Horatio Gimble within reach of my claws. But I have a sort of feeling that this faked coffin is not the whole of the business. How's that for a guess?"

"I will say, as the children say in the game of Hot Boiled Beans, that you are 'getting warm.' And I would rather not say any more. I want to start you on an independent investigation and keep out of it, myself, as counsel in this case. But I shall expect that, if you bring any facts to light that have a bearing on that case, you will bring them to my notice."

At this, Miller turned to me with a chuckle of delight.

"Just listen to him, Dr. Jervis!" he exclaimed, waggishly. "Isn't it as good as a play? He stipulates that I shall bring the facts to his notice; when you and I know perfectly well that he has got the whole pack of cards up his sleeve at this very moment. I wouldn't use the word 'humbug' in connexion with a gentleman for whom I have such a profound respect. But—well, what do you want me to do, Doctor?"

"The first thing," said Thorndyke, "is to get rid of those two men. We don't want any witnesses. As this ground is closed for burials and is not open to the public, there is no reason why you should not take possession of the keys. You will want to seal the vault and to have access to it in case any further inspection is necessary. The beadle won't make any difficulty."

He did not. On the contrary, he accepted his release gratefully and gave up the keys without a word. But, before dismissing the men, we replaced the coffin on the shelf, and, for the sake of appearances, we returned the lead to its interior and laid the lid on top.

"There is no need to screw it down," the Superintendent explained. "It may have to be re-examined, and I am going to seal up the vault."

With this he sent the two men off with a small donation for the provision of refreshments, accompanying them to the gate and watching their disappearance down the street. Then they were out of sight, he signalled to the driver of his car—a big, roomy, official vehicle—and, when it had drawn up at the gate, he returned, and we began operations.

"I understand," said he, as we lifted off the coffin lid, "that we have got to shift this stuff to some assayist's."

"I don't think we need take the sheet lead," said Thorndyke, "though that would furnish the best evidence on the question of age."

"Then let's take the whole boiling," said Miller. "May as well do the thing thoroughly."

Accordingly, he seized the roll of lead and carried it to the gate, where he deposited it on the rear seat of the car. I followed with the biggest of the pot-leavings. The driver of the car came back with Miller, and he, Miller and Thorndyke took the other three leavings. The whole collection took up a good deal of the accommodation; but Thorndyke occupied the seat next to the driver, in order to give directions, and Miller and I packed ourselves in amongst the lead as well as we could.

"I wish the Doctor wasn't so deuced secretive," Miller remarked, as the car trundled away westward with a misleading leisurely air. "Of course, it doesn't really matter as we shall know all about it presently; but I am on tenterhooks of curiosity."

"So am I, for that matter," said I; "but I am used to it. To work with Thorndyke is a fine training in restraint."

After what seemed an incredibly short journey, we drew up at a large building in Bishopsgate. Here Thorndyke alighted and disappeared into the entry; and the Superintendent's patience was subjected to a further trial. At length, our friend reappeared, accompanied by an alert-looking elderly gentleman, while three workmen in white aprons emerged from the doorway and lurked in the background. The elderly gentleman, whom I recognized as a Mr. Daniels, a very eminent assayist and metallurgist, approached, and, when he had been introduced to Miller, stuck his head in at the window of the car and surveyed our collection.

"So that's the stuff you want an opinion on," said he. "Queer-looking lot. However, the first thing to do is to get it moved up to the laboratory."

He made a sign to his three myrmidons, who forthwith came forward, and, grabbing up the ponderous samples, tucked them under their arms as if they had been lumps of cork and strolled off into the building. We followed them through the weighing rooms on the ground floor to a staircase and up to one of the great laboratories, flanked on one side by a row of tall windows, and on the other by a long range of cupel furnaces. Here, on a bench under the windows, our treasures had been dumped down, and, once more, Mr. Daniels ran his eye over them.

"What's the problem with regard to this?" he asked, indicating the roll of lead.

"It is merely a question of age," replied Thorndyke. "We can leave that for the present."

"And what is this?" asked Daniels, lifting the large pot-remainder and turning it over in his hands.

"It is supposed to be lead, eighty years old," said Thorndyke.

"Well, it may be," said Daniels, laying it down and giving it a tap with a hammer and eliciting the dull sound characteristic of lead. "And what are these other lumps supposed to be?"

"They are supposed to be lead, too," replied Thorndyke.

"Well, they are not," said Daniels. "Anyone can see that." He gave one of them a tap with the hammer, and the peculiar sharp chink spoke at once of a hard, brittle metal. On this, he laid down the hammer and took the lump of metal in his hands. And then there came over him the very change that I had noticed in the case of Thorndyke, though there was now no disguise. As he lifted the mass of metal, he suddenly paused and stood quite still with his eyes fixed on Thorndyke and his mouth slightly open. Then he said: "You knew that this was not lead, Doctor."

"Yes," Thorndyke admitted.

"What do you suppose it is?"

"I don't suppose," said Thorndyke. "I have brought the Superintendent to you in order that you may ascertain what it is and give him a confidential report on the subject."

"What do *you* suppose it is?" asked Miller.

"I don't suppose either," replied Daniels with a faint grin. "I am an assayist, and it is my business to find out."

The Superintendent smiled sourly and looked at me. "These men of science don't mean to give themselves away," he remarked.

"Well," said Daniels, "what is the use of guessing, and perhaps guessing wrong, when you are going to make a test? We have our reputations to consider. Now, what do you want me to do about this stuff?"

"The Superintendent," said Thorndyke, "wants you to make a trial assay, just to let him know what the material is. You will report to him what you find; and remember, this is a confidential matter, and the Superintendent, acting for the Criminal Investigation Department, is your employer."

"And what about you?" Daniels asked.

"If the matter concerns me in any way," Thorndyke replied, "I have no doubt that the Superintendent will communicate the substance of your report to me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Daniels, with a broad smile, "and what a surprise it will be to you. Ha! Ha!"

"Yes," growled Miller; "the Doctor is a regular impostor. Of course, he knows all about it, without either of us telling him. How long will this job take?"

"It will take some little time," replied Daniels, "as you will want some sort of rough estimate of quantities besides the mere qualitative test. Will five o'clock do? And shall I report to you on the phone?"

Miller considered the question. "I am not fond of telephone messages on confidential business," said he. "You never know who is at the other end, or in the middle. I think I had better run across in the car. Then we can go into the affair in more detail, and safe from eavesdroppers. If I am here at five o'clock, I can depend on getting your report?"

"Yes; I shall have everything cut and dried by then," Daniels assured him; and, the arrangements being thus concluded, we shook hands and took our departure.

As we emerged into Bishopsgate, I noticed that Miller seemed to look a little disparagingly at the big car that was drawn up at the curb, and, instead of entering at once, he turned to Thorndyke and asked:

"What do you say, Doctor, to walking home? There are one or two matters connected with this case that I should like to talk over with you, and the car isn't very convenient; and then there is the driver. We could talk more freely if we walked."

Naturally, Thorndyke, who was an inveterate pedestrian, agreed readily; and, when Miller had informed the driver of our decision, we set forth, shortening the distance and securing more quiet by striking "across country" through the by-streets. As soon as we were clear of the main thoroughfare with its bustle and din, Miller proceeded to open the discussion.

"I suppose, Doctor, you are quite clear that there has been some faking of that coffin? You've got something solid to go on?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I have no doubt on the subject, and I am prepared to say so in the witness-box."

"That seems to settle it," said Miller. "But there are some queer features in the case. You saw the dust in the vault? But I know you did, for I spotted you taking samples of it. But it really did look as if it had not been disturbed for the best part of a century. Was there anything in that dust that looked to you suspicious, or did you take those samples just as a routine precaution?"

"I should have taken a sample in any case," replied Thorndyke. "But in this case, it was not merely a routine precaution. That dust did not appear to me to agree with the conditions in which it was found. The dust that would accumulate in the course of eighty years in a vault above ground would be very miscellaneous in its origin. It would consist of particles of all sorts of materials which were light enough to float in the air, and in still air at that. They would be mostly minute fragments of fibres derived from textiles, and these would naturally be of all sorts of different colours. The result of such a miscellaneous mixture of different-coloured particles, aided by the fading effect of time, would be a dust of a completely neutral grey. But this dust was not of a completely neutral grey. It had a recognizable colour; very faint and very nearly neutral, but yet there was just a shadowy trace of red. And this subtle, almost indistinguishable, tint of red pervaded the

whole mass. It was all alike. To what the colour may have been due, I cannot judge until I have examined the sample under the microscope; but the suggestion—the very strong suggestion—is that this dust was all derived from the same source; which, as I have said, is irreconcilable with the ostensible conditions.”

Thorndyke’s explanation seemed to furnish the Superintendent with considerable food for thought, for he made no immediate answer, but appeared to be wrapped in profound cogitation. At length, he remarked:

“You are a wonderful man, Doctor. Nothing seems to escape you, and you let nothing pass without consideration and a confirmatory test. I wish, now, that we had put you on that damned head—you know the one I mean—the human head that was found in a case at Fenchurch Street Station.”

“I remember,” said Thorndyke. “It was an odd affair, but I fancy that the head was only a by-product. The purpose of the man who left it was to get possession of the case containing property worth several thousand pounds. He happened to have a human head on his hands, and he, very wisely, took the opportunity to get rid of it and so kill two birds with one stone.”

“That may be,” said Miller; “but I am not taking that head so calmly as you are. It has been the bane of our lives at the Yard, with all the newspaper men shouting ‘unsolved mystery’ and ‘another undetected murder’ and asking perpetually what the police are doing. And it really was a mysterious affair. I have been surprised to notice how little interest you have taken in that head. I should have thought it would have been a problem exactly in your line. But you medical jurists are a cold-blooded lot. You were speaking just now of this man ‘having a human head on his hands’ as if it were a worn-out umbrella or an old pair of boots.”

Thorndyke smiled indulgently. “I am not disparaging the head, Miller,” said he. “It presented quite an interesting problem. But it was not my problem. I was a mere disinterested onlooker.”

“You don’t usually take that sordid view,” grumbled Miller. “I have generally found you ready to take an interest in a curious problem for its own sake.”

To this Thorndyke made no rejoinder, and for some time we walked on in silence. Suddenly, the Superintendent stopped short and stood gazing across the road.

“By the immortal Jingo!” he exclaimed. “Talk of the Devil—”

He broke off and started to run across the road; and, following his movements with my eyes, I saw, on the opposite pavement, a newspaper boy bearing a poster on which was printed in enormous type:

#### HORRIBLE DISCOVERY. HEADLESS CORPSE BY ROADSIDE.

It was certainly curiously apropos of the subject of our conversation, and I so far shared the Superintendent’s excitement that I was about to follow him when I saw that he had secured three copies of the paper and was coming back to us with them in his hand. He distributed his gifts rapidly, and then, backing into the wide entry of a draper’s shop, proceeded eagerly to devour the paragraph indicated by the “scare” headlines. Following him into his retreat, I opened the paper and read:

“Some months ago the public was horrified by the discovery in the cloak room at Fenchurch Street Station of a human head packed in a wooden case. No solution of the mystery surrounding this terrible relic was forthcoming at the inquest, nor were the police ever able to discover any clue to its origin or the identity of the murderer. The matter was allowed to lapse into oblivion, to be added to the long list of undiscovered murders. But questions relating to this tragedy have been revived by a strange and shocking discovery which was made this morning by the side of the arterial road known as the Watling Street, which passes from London through Dartford to Rochester. Between three and four miles on the Rochester side of Dartford, the road passes through a deep cutting, which was made to reduce the gradient of the hill, the sides of which are in two stages, there being, about half-way up, a shelf several feet wide. As this shelf is some thirty feet above the road, its surface is entirely invisible to anyone passing along the latter, though it is, of course, visible from above. But the hill through which the road is cut is covered with dense woodland, seldom trodden by the foot of man. Thus, for months at a time, this shelf remains unseen by any human eye.

“But this morning Fate guided the footsteps of an observer to this spot, so remote and yet so near. A local archaeologist, a Mr. Elmhurst of Gravesend, happened to be making a sketch-map of the features of the wood when his wanderings took him to the edge of the cutting. Looking down the cliff-like descent, he was horrified to observe, lying on the shelf immediately below him, the headless and perfectly nude body of a man. Its huddled attitude suggested that it had rolled down the steep slope and been arrested by the shelf; and, even from the distance at which he stood, it was evident that it had been lying exposed for a considerable time.

“Mr. Elmhurst did not stay to make any further observations, but, taking the shortest way to the road, hailed an approaching motorist, who very obligingly conveyed him to Gravesend, where he notified the police of his discovery. An ambulance was at once procured, and, guided by the discoverer, proceeded to the spot, whence—after a careful examination by the police—the body was conveyed to Dartford, where it now lies in the mortuary awaiting an inquest.

“The body appears to be that of a youngish man, rather short and exceptionally muscular; and the condition of the strong and well-shaped hands suggests that the deceased was a skilled workman of some kind. The inquest will be opened tomorrow.”

As I reached the end of the account, I glanced at the Superintendent and remarked:



"A very creditable piece of journalism. The reporter hasn't wasted much time. What do you think of it, Miller?"

"Well, I'm very relieved," he replied. "I've been waiting for this for months. I'm fairly sick of all the talk about the unsolved mystery, and the undiscovered murder. Now, we may be able to get a move on, though I must admit that it doesn't look like a very promising case. It's a long time since the man was murdered, and there doesn't seem much to go on. Still, it's better than a head in a box with no clue to the owner. What do you think of it, Doctor? I suppose you've been expecting it, too?"

"I wouldn't say 'expecting,'" Thorndyke replied. "The possibility of something of this kind had occurred to me. But you must bear in mind that the head, being preserved and packed in a case, offered no suggestions as to the time or place of death. As this body was apparently not preserved, it will be possible to arrive at an approximate date of death; and, as it was found in a particular place, some idea of locality may be formed. But any conclusions as to the locality in which the murder took place will have to be very cautiously considered, having regard to the ease with which, in these days, bodies can be carried away long distances from the scene of the crime. And, again, the body is nude, so that there will be no help from the clothing towards identification; and, as it appears to have been exposed in the open for months, its own condition will make identification difficult. I agree with you, Miller. It does not look a very promising case."

The Superintendent nodded and growled an inarticulate assent. But, in spite of Thorndyke's rather cold comfort, he still seemed disposed to be optimistic; and when we parted at the Inner Temple gate, he walked away with a springy step and an almost jaunty air.

---

## XII. — THORNDYKE BECOMES INTERESTED

MILLER'S intense interest in the "horrible discovery" did not surprise me at all. But Thorndyke's did. For what the Superintendent had said was perfectly true. The mysterious "head in a box" had aroused in him only the most languid curiosity. Which, again to quote Miller, was entirely unlike him. It is true that he liked, if possible, to be officially appointed to investigate an interesting case. But, appointment or no appointment, from sheer professional enthusiasm, he always kept himself informed on, and followed with the closest interest, any criminal case that presented unusual or obscure features.

Now, the "head in the box" case had appeared to me eminently unusual and obscure. It had seemed to imply an atrocious crime which combined with its atrocity a remarkable degree of callous ingenuity. And the mystery surrounding it was undeniable. Excepting some vague connexion with the great platinum robbery (itself an unsolved mystery) it offered not a single clue. Yet Thorndyke had seemed to dismiss it as a mere oddity. He could not have been less moved if it had been a wax-work head—which it certainly was not.

His own explanation did not seem to me to be entirely satisfactory. It was true, as he had said, that there was a total lack of data; and "a mere mystery, without a single leading fact is not, to a medical jurist, worth powder and shot." The fact that the head was preserved and practically imperishable excluded any inferences as to time or place. It might, for any evidence to the contrary, have been the head of a person who had died in Australia twenty years ago.

So he had dismissed it into the region of the unknowable; at least, so I had understood; though I had never felt quite sure that he had not, in his queer, secret fashion, just docketed it and packed it away in some pigeon-hole of his inexhaustible memory, there to repose until such time as the "leading fact" should come into view, unrecognized by anyone but himself.

This faint suspicion now tended to revive. For though the headless body looked as hopeless a mystery as the bodyless head, there was clearly no question of dismissing it as "not worth powder and shot." That powder and shot were already being expended, I ascertained that very evening, when, returning to our chambers after a lengthy consultation, I found on the table a six-inch Ordnance map, a boxwood scale, a pair of dividers and a motor road-map.

The purpose of the latter was obvious on inspection. The Ordnance map was dated 1910 and did not show the arterial road. The motor map showed the new road—and mighty little else; but as much, no doubt, as interested the average motorist. From the road-map, the new road had been transferred in pencil to the Ordnance map, which was thus brought up to date while retaining all the original topographical features; and the locality shown left no doubt as to the nature of the investigation.

I was still looking at the maps and reflecting as above when the door opened and my colleague entered.

"I thought you were out, Thorndyke," said I.

"No," he replied; "I have been up in the laboratory, having a chat with Polton about a job that I want him to do. I see you have been inspecting what the reporters will call 'the scene of the tragedy.'"

"I see that you have," I retorted, "and have been speculating on your change of front. The 'head in the box' apparently left you cold, but you seem to be developing quite a keen interest in this problem. Why this inconsistency?"

"My dear fellow," he replied, "there is no inconsistency. The case is entirely altered. We have now a number of facts from which to start an inquiry. From the state of the body, we can form an approximate judgment as to the date about which death occurred. Perhaps the cause of death may transpire at the inquest. We knew where the body was found; and even if it may have been conveyed thither from a distance, the selection of the place where it was deposited suggests some local knowledge. The spot was extremely well-chosen, as events have proved."

"Yes; but it was a queer idea to dump it there. A sort of ghastly practical joke. Just think of it, Thorndyke. Think of that great procession of traffic of all kinds—cars, motor coaches, lorries, cyclists—streaming along that road by the thousand, day after day, month after month; and all the time, within a biscuit-toss of them, that gruesome thing lying there open to the sky."

"Yes," he agreed, "there is certainly an element of the macabre in the setting of this crime, though I don't suppose it was intentional."

"Neither do I. Nor do I suppose that the horrible picturesqueness of the setting is what is attracting you. I wonder what is."

Thorndyke did not reply immediately but sat regarding me with a sort of appraising expression (which I recognized, and had come by experience, to associate with some special exhibition of thick-headedness on my part). At length he replied:

"I don't see why you should. The problem of this headless body abounds in elements of interest. All sorts of questions arise out of it. There is that embalmed head for instance. That seems to have an obvious connexion with this body."

"Very obvious indeed," said I, with a grin; "and the connexion was still closer when the head was on the body."

He smiled indulgently and continued: "Disregarding the suggested anatomical connexion, there is the connexion of action and motive. What, for instance, is the connexion of the man who deposited the head in the cloak-room with this body? We don't know how he came by that head. The fact that he had it in his possession is an incriminating fact, but it is not evidence of murder. It is not even certain that he knew what was in the case. But whether he did or not, he is obviously involved in a complex of circumstances which includes this body. However, it is premature to discuss the case until we have the additional facts that will probably transpire at the inquest. Meanwhile," he concluded, with an exasperating smile, "I recommend my learned friend to go carefully over all the facts in his possession, relating both to the embalmed head and the headless body. Let him consider those facts critically as to their separate value and in relation to one another. If he does this, I think he will find that some extremely interesting conclusions will emerge."

It is unnecessary to say his opinion was not justified by results. I did, indeed, chew the cud of the few, unilluminating facts that were known to me. But the only conclusion that emerged was that, in some obscure way of which I could make nothing, this headless corpse was connected with the mystery of the stolen platinum. But this, I felt sure, was not the conclusion that was in Thorndyke's mind. And at that, I had to leave it.

On the following morning, Thorndyke went forth to attend at the inquest. I was not able to go with him, nor did I particularly wish to, as I knew that I should get full information from him as to the facts elicited. He started, as I thought, unnecessarily early and he came back unexpectedly late. But this latter circumstance was presently explained by the appearance on the Ordnance map of a pencilled cross at the roadside, indicating the spot on which the body had been lying when it was first seen. Later in the evening, when giving me particulars of the inquest, he mentioned that he had visited the site of the discovery and "gone over the ground, roughly," having taken his bicycle down by train for that purpose.

"Did you pick up anything of interest at the inquest?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "it was quite a good inquest. The coroner was a careful man who knew his business and kept to it, and the medical witness had made a thorough examination and gave his evidence clearly and concisely. As to the facts, they were simple enough, though important. The body was, of course, a good deal the worse for exposure to the weather. As to the date of death, the doctor wisely declined to make a definite statement, but he estimated it at not less than three months ago. The body appeared to be that of a man between thirty and forty years of age, five feet, six inches in height, broad-shouldered and muscular, with rather small, well-shaped hands, which showed a definite, but not considerable, thickening of the skin on the palms; from which, and from the dirty and ill-kept finger-nails, the doctor inferred that deceased was a workman of some kind, but not a labourer.

"The head had been separated from the spinal column with a knife, leaving the atlas intact, and, to this extent, the separation had been effected skilfully."

"Yes," said I. "That point was made, I remember, at the inquest on the head. It would require some skill and the knowledge as to where the joint was to be found. By the way, was the question of the head raised?"

"Yes. Naturally a juryman wanted to question the doctor on the subject, but the witness very properly replied that his evidence dealt only with facts observed by himself, and the coroner supported him. Then the question was raised whether the head should not be produced for comparison with the body; but the doctor refused to go into the matter, and the coroner pointed out that the head had already been examined medically and that all the facts were available in the depositions of the witnesses. He did, however, read out some of the depositions from the previous inquest and asked the doctor whether the facts set forth in them were consistent with the belief that the head and the headless body were parts of one and the same person; to which the doctor replied that the mode of separation was the same in both and that the parts which were missing in the one were present in the other, but beyond that he would give no opinion."

"Did he give any opinion as to the cause of death?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Thorndyke. "There was no mystery about that. There was a knife-wound in the back, near the angle of the left scapula, penetrating deeply and transfixing the heart. It appeared to have been inflicted with a large, single-edged knife of the 'Green River' type, and obviously with great force. The witness stated, confidently, that it could not have been self-inflicted."

"That seems to be pretty obvious, too," said I. "At any rate, the man could not have cut his own head off."

"A very capable detective sergeant gave evidence," Thorndyke resumed, dismissing—to my secret amusement—the trivial and uninteresting detail of the manner in which this unfortunate creature had been done to death. "He stated that the wood had been searched for the dead man's clothing. But I suspect that it was a very perfunctory search, as he was evidently convinced that it was not there; remarking, plausibly enough, that, since the clothing must have been stripped off to prevent identification, it would not be reasonable to expect to find it in the vicinity. He was of opinion that the body had been brought from a distance in a car or van, and that, probably, two or more persons were concerned in the affair."

"It seems likely," I said, "having regard to the remoteness of the place. But it is only a guess."

"Exactly," Thorndyke agreed. "There was a good deal of guessing and not many facts; and the few facts that were really significant do not seem to have been understood."

"What are the facts that you regard as really significant?" I asked. Not that I had the slightest expectation that he would tell me. And he did not. His inevitable reply was:

"You know what the known facts are, Jervis, and you will see for yourself, if you consider them critically, which are the significant ones. But, to return to the inquest. The coroner's summing-up was excellent, having regard to the evidence that had been given. I took shorthand notes of some of it, and I will read them to you. With reference to the embalmed head he remarked:

"It has been suggested that the head which was found at Fenchurch Street Station ought to have been brought here for comparison. But to what purpose? What kind of comparison is possible? If the head is broken off a china figure and the two parts are lost and subsequently found in different places, the question as to whether they are parts of the same figure can be settled by putting them together and seeing whether the fractured surfaces fit each other. But with a detached human head—especially after the lapse of months—this is not possible. If the preserved head had been exhumed and brought here, we could have learned nothing more from it than we can learn from the depositions of the medical witness, which I have read to you. Accordingly, we must fall back on our common sense; and I think we shall find that enough for our purpose.

"Let us look at the facts. A headless body has been found in one place, and a body-less head in another. The doctor has told us that they might be—though he doesn't say that they are—the head and body of one and the same person. They agree in the peculiar and unusual mode of separation. The parts which are absent in the one are present in the other. There is no part missing, and no part redundant. If that head had been cut off this, body, the appearances would be exactly what they are.

"Now, gentlemen, if headless human bodies and body-less human heads were quite common objects, we might have to search further. But, fortunately, they are so rare and unusual that we may almost regard these remains as unique. And if they are not parts of the same person, then there must be, somewhere, an undiscovered body belonging to the head, and, somewhere else, an undiscovered head belonging to this body. But, I submit, gentlemen, that common sense rejects such enormous improbabilities and compels us to adopt the obvious and simple explanation that the head and the body are those of one and the same person.

"As to the cause of death, you have heard the doctor's evidence. Deceased was killed by a knife-wound, which he could not have inflicted himself, and which was therefore inflicted by some other person. And with that I leave you to consider your verdict."

"An excellent summing-up," said I, "and very well argued. The verdict was Wilful Murder, of course?"

"Yes. 'By some person or persons unknown.' And the jury could hardly have come to any other conclusion. But, as you see, the case is, from the police point of view, left in the air."

"Yes," I agreed. "If Miller is taking up the case, as I assume that he is, he has got his work cut out. I don't see that this body was such a wind-fall as he seemed to think. Scotland Yard may catch some more trouble from the Press if something fresh does not turn up."

"Well," Thorndyke rejoined, by way of winding up the conversation, "we must hope, like medico-legal Micawbers, that something will turn up."

For the next few days, however, the case remained "in the air." But it was not alone in this respect. Presently I began to be conscious that there were other matters in the air. For instance, our invaluable assistant, Polton, suddenly developed a curious, stealthy, conspiratorial manner of going about, or locking himself in the laboratory, which experience had taught me to associate with secret activities foreshadowing some important and dramatic "move" on Thorndyke's part. Then, on the fourth day after the inquest, I detected my colleague in the suspicious act of pacing the pavement at the lower, and more secluded, end of King's Bench Walk, in earnest conversation with Mr. Superintendent Miller. And the *prima facie* suspiciousness of the proceeding was confirmed by the eagerness and excitement that were evident in the face and manner of our friend, and even more by the way in which he suddenly shut up, like a snapped snuff-box, as I approached.

And, that very evening, Thorndyke exploded the mine.

"We have got an expedition on, tomorrow," he announced.

"Who are we?" I asked.

"You and I, Miller and Polton. I know you have got the day free."

"Where are we going to?" I demanded.

"To Swanscombe Wood," was the reply.

"What for?"

"To collect some further facts relating to the headless body," he replied.

As a mere statement, it did not sound very sensational. But to one who knew Thorndyke as I knew him, it had certain implications that gave it a special significance. In the first place, Thorndyke tended habitually to under-statement; and, in the second, he took no one into his confidence while his investigations were at the tentative stage. As Miller expressed it, "The Doctor would never show a card until he was ready to take the trick." Whence there naturally arose in my mind a strong suspicion that the "further facts" which we were to collect were already in Thorndyke's possession.

And events proved that I was not so very far wrong.

---

### XIII. — THE DENE HOLE

THE products of Polton's labours impressed me as disappointing and hardly worthy of his mechanical ingenuity, consisting of nothing more subtle than an immense coil of rope, rove through two double blocks and forming a long and powerful tackle, a tripod formed of three very stout iron-shod seven-foot poles, and a strong basket such as builders use, furnished with strong rope slings. There was one further item, which was more worthy of its producer; a large electric lamp, fitted with adjustable lenses, and, to judge by the suspension arrangements, designed to throw a powerful beam of parallel rays vertically downwards.

But if Polton's productions were of an unexpected kind, the vehicle in which the Superintendent drove up to our entry was even more so. For, though it bore no outward distinguishing marks, it was an undeniable motor ambulance. However, if less dignified and imposing than the official car, it was a good deal more convenient. The unwieldy tripod, tackle and basket were easily disposed of in its roomy interior, still leaving ample accommodation for me and Polton and the detective sergeant whom Miller had brought as an additional assistant. The Superintendent, himself, was at the steering wheel, and Thorndyke took the seat beside him to give directions as we approached our destination.

I asked no questions. The character of our outfit told me pretty plainly what kind of job we had in hand; and I felt a malicious satisfaction in tantalizing Polton, who was, so to speak, bursting with silence and secrecy and the desire to be questioned. So, little was said—and nothing to the point—while the ambulance trundled out at the Tudor Street gate, crossed Blackfriars Bridge, threaded its way through the traffic of the South London streets, and presently came out upon the Dover Road. A few minutes later, as we mounted a steep rise, the sergeant, who, hitherto, had uttered not a word, removed his pipe from his mouth, remarked, "Shooter's Hill" and replaced it as if it were a stopper.

The ambulance bowled smoothly along the straight line of the old Roman road. Welling, Crayford and Dartford were entered and left behind. A few minutes after leaving Dartford, the road began a long ascent and then, after a short run on the level, fell away somewhat steeply. At this point, the sergeant once more removed his pipe, nodded at the side window, and, having affirmed, stolidly, "That's the place," reinserted the stopper.

The ambulance now began to slow down, and, a minute or two later, drew in by the side of the road and halted. Then, as Thorndyke and the Superintendent alighted, we also got out, and the sergeant proceeded to occupy the driver's seat.

"You and Polton had better stay here for the present," said Thorndyke. "The Superintendent and I are going to locate the spot. When we have found it, he will remain there while I come back and help you to carry the gear."

He produced from his pocket a marching-compass and a card, on one side of which a sketch-plan had been drawn while a number of bearings were written on the other. After a glance at the latter, he set the direction line of the compass and started off along a rough foot-path, followed by the Superintendent. We watched their receding figures as they ascended the hill and approached the wood by which it was covered. At the margin of the latter, Thorndyke paused and "turned to take a last, fond look" at his starting-point and check his compass bearings. Then he faced about, and, in a few seconds, he and the Superintendent disappeared into the wood.

Waiting is usually a tedious business, and is still more so when the waiter is on the tip-toe of expectation and curiosity. Vainly, I endeavoured to repress a tendency to useless and futile speculation as to what Thorndyke was seeking (or, more probably, had already found and was now about to disclose). As for Polton, if he could have been furnished with an emotional pressure-gauge, it would certainly have burst. Even the stolid sergeant was fain to come off his perch and pace up and down by the roadside; and once he actually went so far as to take out the stopper and remark that "it seemed as if the Doctor had made some sort of discovery."

Anon our sufferings were somewhat alleviated by the arrival of a police patrol, who came free-wheeling down the hill from the direction of Dartford. As he approached us, he slowed down more and more and eventually dismounted to make a circuit of our vehicle, with the manner of a dog sniffing at a suspicious stranger. Apparently, its appearance did not satisfy him, and he proceeded to interrogate.

"What's going on?" he asked, not uncivilly. "This looks like an ambulance but I see you have got some lifting gear inside."

Here the sergeant interposed with a brief and unluuid explanation of our business, at the same time producing his credentials; at the sight whereof the patrol officer was visibly impressed, and showed an unmistakeable tendency to linger, which the sergeant by no means sought to discourage.

"Can I give any assistance?" the patrol man asked, a little wistfully.

"Well," the sergeant replied, promptly, "if you could spare the time to give an eye to this car, that would release me to lend the Superintendent a hand."

It was obvious that the patrol man would have preferred to transpose these functions, but, nevertheless, he agreed readily; and at this moment Thorndyke reappeared from the wood and came striding swiftly towards us along the foot-path. As he came up, the sergeant explained the new arrangements with some anxiety as to whether they would be approved. To his evident relief, Thorndyke accepted them readily.

"We shall be none the worse for an extra hand," said he. "Now we shall be able to carry the whole kit up in one journey."

Accordingly, we proceeded to get the gear out of the ambulance and distribute the items among the party. Thorndyke and I took the tripod on our shoulders—and a deuce of a weight it was. The sergeant got the great coil of rope on to his back with the aid of a spare sling; and Polton brought up the rear with the basket, in which was stowed the lamp, while the patrol man kept a look-out with a view to heading off any inquisitive strangers who might be attracted by the queer aspect of our procession.

Appreciation of the beauties of the countryside is not favoured by the presence on one's shoulder of three massive ash poles with heavy iron fittings. The character of the ground was what chiefly occupied my attention, particularly after we had entered the wood; where I got the impression that some ingenious sylvan devil had collected all the brambles from miles around and arranged them in an interminable series of entanglements, compared with which the barbed-wire defences of a German trench were but feeble and amateurish imitations. But we tramped on, crashing through the yellow and russet leafage, Thorndyke leading with his compass in his unoccupied hand and trudging forward in silence, save for an occasional soft chuckle at my lurid comments on the landscape.

Suddenly, I heard Miller's voice informing us that "here we were," and we nearly collided with him at the edge of a small opening. Here we set down the tripod, opening it enough to enable it to stand upright.

"You didn't have to blow your whistle," said Thorndyke. "I suppose you heard us coming?"

"Heard you coming!" exclaimed Miller. "It was like a troop of blooming elephants—to say nothing of Dr. Jervis's language. Hallo, Sergeant! I thought I told you to stay with the car."

The sergeant hastily explained the arrangements, adding that "The Doctor" had concurred; on which the Superintendent, having also approved, set him to work at getting the gear ready.

A glance around the little opening in which we were gathered showed me that my diagnosis of the purpose of the expedition had been correct. Near the middle of the opening, half concealed by the rank undergrowth, yawned the mouth of one of those mysterious pits known as dene holes which are scattered in such numbers over this part of Kent. Cautiously, I approached the brink and peered down into the black depths.

"Horrible, dangerous things, these dene holes are," said Miller. "Ought to be fenced in. How deep do you say this pit is, Doctor?"

"This one is just about sixty feet, but many of them are deeper. Seventy feet is about the average."

"Sixty feet!" exclaimed Polton, with a fascinated eye on the yawning hole. "And anyone coming along here in the dark might step into it without a moment's warning. Horrible! Did I understand you, sir, to say that it was dug a very long time ago?"

"It has been there as you see it," replied Thorndyke, "for thousands of years. How many thousands we can't say. But there seems to be no doubt that these dene holes were excavated by the men of the Old Stone Age."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Polton. "Thousands of years! I should have thought that, by this time, they would have been full to the brim of the people who had tumbled into them."

While these exclamations and comments were passing, the preparations were in progress for the exploration. The tripod was set up over the hole (which was some three feet in diameter and roughly circular, like the mouth of a well), the tackle securely hooked on and the lamp suspended in position. The Superintendent switched on the light by means of a push at the end of a cord, and, grasping the tripod, leaned over the hole and peered down the well-like shaft.

"I can't make out very much," he remarked. "I seem to see what looks like a boot, and that's about all."

"It is a long way down," said Thorndyke, "and it doesn't matter much what we can see from above. We shall soon know exactly what there is down there."

As he spoke, he switched off the lamp and hooked the basket on to the tackle by means of a pair of clip-hooks, provided with a safety catch. Then he produced a candle from his pocket and proceeded to light it.

"I don't like the idea of your going down, Doctor," said the Superintendent. "It's really our job."

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke, drawing the basket to the edge of the hole and stepping into it. "I proposed the

exploration and undertook to carry it out. Besides, I want to see what the bottom of this dene hole is like.”

“Don’t you think, sir,” Polton interposed, earnestly, “that it would be better for me to go down? I am so much lighter and should put less strain on the tackle.”

“My dear Polton,” said Thorndyke, regarding his devoted henchman with an appreciative smile, “this tackle would bear a couple of tons, easily. There isn’t any strain. But I will ask you to pay out the rope as steadily as you can, and keep an eye on this candle. If it goes out, you had better haul up at once without waiting for a signal, as you will know that I have dropped into foul air. Now, I am ready if you are.”

He steadied himself by lightly grasping two of the tackle-ropes and I took a turn round the trunk of a birch tree with the “fall” by passing the big coil round. Then Miller and the sergeant hauled on the rope while I gathered in the slack; the tackle grew taut, the basket began to rise from the ground and swung directly over the black hole.

“Now, pay out steadily and not too fast,” said Thorndyke; and as we began to ease out the rope, he slowly sank, like a stage demon, and disappeared into the bowels of the earth, while Polton, grasping the tripod and leaning over the hole, watched his descent with starting eyes and an expression of horror.

Owing to the great power of the tackle, the weight on the fall was quite trifling. I could, alone, have paid it out easily with the aid of the turn round the tree. So we were able, in turn, to leave it to satisfy our curiosity and relieve our anxiety by a glance down the shaft; which now looked even more alarming than when we had looked into the mere, impenetrable blackness of the hole. For now, as we peered down the well-like shaft, at our friend—already grown small in the distance—faintly illuminated by the glimmer of the candle, we were able to realize the horrible depth to which this strange memorial of a forgotten race sank into the earth.

But the unflinching glimmer of the candle-light—though it had now dwindled to a mere distant spark—reassured us; for, apart from the possibility of “choke damp,” there was really no appreciable danger. Notwithstanding which, Polton was fain, from time to time, to relieve his overwrought feelings by hailing the now invisible explorer with the inquiry, “All right, sir?” to which a strange, sepulchral, but surprisingly loud voice replied: “All right, Polton.”

After an almost interminable paying-out, the diminishing remainder of rope warned us that Thorndyke must have nearly reached the bottom, and then a sudden relaxation of the tension informed us that he had already done so. Immediately afterwards, that uncanny, megaphonic voice announced the fact and directed us to switch on the light and throw down the spare sling. I at once complied with the first order and was about to carry out the other when it occurred to me that a stout rope sling might fall with unpleasant force after a drop of sixty feet. Accordingly, I coiled it loosely round the tackle-ropes, and, securing the ends with a hitch, let go; when I saw it slide smoothly down the ropes to the bottom.

“I wonder what he wants with that sling,” Miller speculated, grasping the tripod and leaning over to peer down. But, as the only result was to obscure the light of the lamp and throw the shaft into shadow, he withdrew and waited for events to enlighten him. Then the voice came reverberating up the shaft, commanding us to hoist.

If the paying-out had been a long business, the hauling up was longer. There seemed to be no end to that rope; and as I hauled and hauled, I found myself wishing that Thorndyke had been a little less cautious and contented himself with a less powerful but quicker tackle. From time to time, Miller was impelled by the intensity of his curiosity to thrust his head over the hole to see what was coming up; but, as his head cut off the light of the lamp and rendered the ascending object invisible, he retired each time, defeated and muttering. At length, as the accumulating coils of rope told us that our freight must be nearing the surface, he succeeded in catching a glimpse of the object. But so far was that glimpse from allaying his curiosity that it reduced him to a frenzy of excitement.

“It looks like a body!” he exclaimed. “A man’s body. But it can’t be!”

It was, however. As we hauled in the last few feet of the rope and made fast to the tree, there arose out of the hole the body of a tall, well-dressed man which had been suspended from the hook of the tackle by the sling, passed round the chest under the arms. Miller helped me to haul it away from the hole, when we unfastened the sling and let the body fall on the ground.

“Well,” said the Superintendent, surveying it gloomily, “this is a disappointment. We have come all this way and taken all this trouble just to salve the body of a poor devil who has stumbled into this infernal pit by accident and who is no concern of ours at all. Of course, it is not the Doctor’s fault. He discovered that there was something down there and he drew the very natural conclusion, though it happened to be the wrong one. Let the damn tackle down again as fast as you can and get the Doctor up. I expect he is as sick as I am.”

The lowering of the tackle was a slow and tedious business, for, as there was now no weight to pull it down, it had to be “overhauled.” Fortunately, Polton had oiled the sheaves so that they turned smoothly and easily; but it was a long time before the voice from below notified us that the lower block had reached the bottom. Its reverberations had hardly died away when the order came up to hoist, and we straightway began to haul, while Polton coiled down the rope as it was gathered in. Presently I noticed a puzzled expression on the Superintendent’s face, and, as I looked at him inquiringly, he exclaimed:

“This can’t be the Doctor. He’s a bigger man than that poor beggar, but there doesn’t seem to be any weight on the rope at all.”

I had noticed this, myself, and now suggested that we might take advantage of the light weight by hauling up more

quickly; which we did with such a will that Miller's opinion was presently confirmed by the appearance of the basket at the mouth of the pit. As it came into view, the Superintendent gazed at it in astonishment.

"Why, it's the clothes, after all!" he exclaimed, seizing the basket and turning its contents out on to the ground, "and the right ones, too, by the look of them. A complete outfit; suit, shirt, underclothing, socks, boots—everything but the hat. He must have had a hat, and so must the other fellow. Perhaps the Doctor will bring them up with him."

Having emptied the basket, we sent it down again; and now being able to judge the distance, we let it run down by its own weight, only checking it as it neared the bottom. After a very brief interval, the hollow voice from below directed us to haul up, and once again we began to gather in the rope and coil it down.

"This is queer," said Miller, as he took his turn at the rope. "It is no heavier than it was last time. I wonder what he is sending up now."

In his impatience to solve this new mystery, he hauled with such energy that beads of sweat began to appear on his forehead. But it is difficult to hurry a four-fold tackle and it was a long time before the basket came into view. When, at last, it became visible a few feet down, its appearance evidently disappointed him, for he exclaimed, in a tone of disgust:

"Hats. Two hats. I should have thought he might have brought them up with him and saved a journey."

"There is something in it besides the hats," said I, as the basket rose out of the mouth of the pit and I drew it aside on to the ground, while the others gathered round. I seized the two hats and lifted them out; and then I stood as if petrified, with the hats in my hands, too astounded to utter a sound.

"My God!" Miller exclaimed, huskily. "A man's head! Now what the blazes can be the meaning of this?"

He stood, staring in amazement—as, indeed, we all did—at the horrible relic that lay at the bottom of the basket. Suddenly he seized the latter and turned it upside down, when the head rolled out on the ground. Then he flung the basket into the hole and gruffly ordered us to "let go."

There was no interval this time, for, almost as the rope slackened, informing us that the basket had settled on the bottom, the hollow voice from below commanded us to haul up. And as soon as we had taken in the slack, we knew by the weight that Thorndyke was at the other end of the tackle. Accordingly, I once more took a turn round the tree to prevent the chance of a slip or jerk and the others hauled steadily and evenly. Even now, the weight seemed comparatively trifling, but what we gained from the tackle in lifting power we lost in speed. In mechanics as in other things you can't have it both ways. However, at long last, Polton, grasping the tripod and craning over the hole, was able to announce that "the Doctor" was nearly up; and after another couple of minutes he appeared rising slowly above ground, when Polton carefully drew the basket on to the solid earth and helped him to step out.

"Well, Doctor," said Miller, "you've given us a bit of a surprise, as you generally do. But," he added, pointing to the head, which lay with its shrunken, discoloured face turned up to the sky, "what are we to make of that? We've got a head too many."

"Too many for what?" asked Thorndyke.

"For what we were inquiring into," Miller replied testily. "See what you have done for us. We find a head in a box at Fenchurch Street Station. Then we keep a look-out for the body belonging to it, and at last it turns up. Then you bring us here and produce another head; which puts us back where we started. We've still got a spare head that we can't account for."

Thorndyke smiled grimly. "I am not under a contract," said he, "to supply facts that will fit your theory of a crime. We must take the facts as they come; and I think there can be no doubt that this head belongs to the body that was found on the shelf a few yards from here."

"Then what about the other head?" demanded Miller. "Where is the body belonging to that?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "That is another story," said he. "But the immediate problem is how these remains are to be disposed of. We can't carry them and the gear down to the ambulance without assistance."

Here the sergeant interposed with a suggestion.

"There is a big electric station a little farther down the road. If I were to run the patrol man down there, he could get on the phone to his head-quarters, and perhaps, meanwhile, they could lend us one or two men from the works. We've got a folding stretcher in the car."

"Good," said Miller. "That will do to a T, Sergeant. You cut along as fast as you can, and perhaps Mr. Polton might go with you to take charge of the patrol man's bicycle."

As Polton and the sergeant retired along the now plainly visible track, Miller turned to Thorndyke with a puzzled and questioning air.

"I can't quite make this out, Doctor," said he. "You brought us here, as I understood, in the expectation of probably finding that poor devil's clothes. Had you any expectation of finding anything else?"

"I thought it probable," replied Thorndyke, "that if we found the clothes, we should probably find the head with them. But I certainly did not expect to find that body. That came as quite a surprise."

"Naturally," said Miller. "A queer coincidence that he should have happened to tumble in, just about the same time. Still, he isn't in the picture."

"There," said Thorndyke, "I think you are mistaken I should say that he is very much in the picture. My very strong impression is that he is none other than the murderer."

"The murderer!" exclaimed Miller. "What makes you think that? Or are you just guessing?"

"I am considering the obvious probabilities," Thorndyke replied. As he spoke, he stooped over the dead man and drew up first the jacket and then the waistcoat. As the latter garment rose, there came into view, projecting up from within the waist-band of the trousers, the haft of an undeniable Green River knife. Thorndyke drew the weapon out of its leather sheath, glanced at it and silently held it out for our inspection. No expert eye was needed to read its message. The streaks of blackened rust on the blade were distinctive enough, but much more so was the shiny black deposit at the junction of the steel and the wooden handle.

"Yes," said Miller, as Thorndyke replaced the knife in its sheath, "that tells the tale pretty well. And exactly the kind of knife that the doctor described at the inquest." He cogitated profoundly for a few moments and then asked: "How do you suppose this fellow came to fall into the pit?"

"I should say," Thorndyke replied, "that the affair happened somewhat in this way: The murderer either enticed his victim into this wood, or he murdered him elsewhere and brought his body here. We shall probably never know which, and it really doesn't matter. Obviously, the murderer knew this place pretty well, as we can judge by his acquaintance with the dene hole. Having committed the murder, or deposited the body, near the edge of the wood close to the road, he stripped the corpse and carried the clothes through the wood to the hole and dropped them down. And when we bear in mind that this must, almost certainly, have been done at night, we must conclude that, not only must the murderer have been familiar with the locality, but he had probably planned the crime in advance and reconnoitred the ground.

"Having dropped the clothes down the pit, he returned to the corpse. And now he had the most difficult part of his task to do. He had to detach the head; and he had to detach it in a particular way—and in the dark, too."

"Why did he have to?" Miller asked.

"Let us leave that question for the moment. It was part of the plan, as the case presents itself to me. Well, having detached the head, he dragged the nude and headless corpse the short distance to the edge of the cutting and pushed it over, knowing that it would roll down only as far as the shelf. Then he carried the head to the dene hole.

"Now, we may assume that he was a man of pretty strong nerves, but, by the time he had murdered this man, stripped the corpse and cut off the head—in a public place, mind you, in which discovery was possible at any moment—he must have been considerably shaken. He was walking in the dark with the dead man's head in his hands, over ground which, as Jervis can testify, is a mass of traps and entanglements. In his terror and agitation he probably hurried to get rid of his dreadful burden, and, just as he approached the hole, he must have caught his foot in a bramble and fallen, sprawling, right into the pit. That is how I picture the course of events."

"Yes," said I, "it sounds pretty convincing as to what probably did happen, though I am in the same difficulty as Miller. I don't quite see why he did it. Why, for instance, he didn't throw the body, itself, down the pit."

"We must go into that question on another occasion," said Thorndyke; "but you will notice that—but for this investigation of ours—he did actually secure a false identification of the body."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "he had us there. We had fairly fixed the body on to that Fenchurch Street head."

Once more the Superintendent fell into a train of cogitation, with a speculative eye on the body that lay on the ground at his feet. Suddenly, he roused, and, turning to Thorndyke, asked:

"Have you any idea, Doctor, who these two people are?"

"I have formed an opinion," was the reply, "and I think it is probably a correct opinion. I should say that this," indicating the dead man, "is the person known as Bassett, or Dobson, the man who deposited the case of stolen platinum at the cloak room; and this man," pointing to the head, "is the one who stole the case and left the embalmed head in exchange."

Thorndyke's answer, delivered in calm, matter-of-fact tones, fairly took my breath away. I was too astonished to make any comment. And the Superintendent was equally taken by surprise, for he, too, stood for a while gazing at my colleague without speaking. At length he said—voicing my sentiments as well as his own:

"This is a knock-out, Doctor! I wasn't aware that you knew anything about this case, or were taking any interest in it. Yet you seem to have it all cut and dried. Knowing you, I assume that this isn't just a guess. You've got something to go on?"

"In respect of the identification? Certainly. Without going into any other matters, there is the appearance of these remains. In both cases it corresponds exactly with the description given at the inquest. The man who stole the case—"

"And left the box with the human head in it," interpolated Miller. "You are ignoring that trivial detail."

"Yes," Thorndyke admitted. "We are dealing with the robbery, in which they were both concerned. Well, that man was described by the attendant as dark, clean-shaved, and having conspicuous gold fillings in both central incisors. If you look at that head, you can see the gold fillings plainly enough, as well as the other, less distinctive characteristics."



"In the case of this other man the correspondence is much more striking. Here is the long, thin face with the long, thin, pointed nose, curved on the bridge, and the dark, nearly black hair. The fair complexion and pale blue eye colour are not now clearly distinguishable. But there is one very impressive correspondence. You remember that the witness, Mr. Pippet, was strongly of opinion that the hair and beard were dyed. Now, if you take my lens and examine the roots of the hair and beard, you will see plainly that it is light brown hair dyed black."

Miller and I took the lens in turn and made the examination; with the result that the condition was established beyond any possible doubt.

"Yes," Miller agreed handing back the lens, "that is dyed hair, right enough, and it seems to settle the identification."

"But we needn't leave it at that," pursued Thorndyke. "The very clothing agrees perfectly. There is the blue serge suit, the brown shoes, the wrist watch, and the additional pocket watch with its guard of plaited twine."

He took hold of the latter and drew out of the pocket a large silver watch of the kind used by navigators as a "hack watch."

"Yes," said Miller. "It's a true bill. You are right, Doctor, as you always are. These are the two men to a moral certainty."

"Isn't it rather strange," said I, "that this man should have gone about with his dyed hair and beard and the very clothes that had been described at the inquest? He must have known that there would be a hue and cry raised after him."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that the explanation is that this affair must have taken place within a day or two of the discovery at the station."

Miller nodded, emphatically. "I'm pretty certain you are right, Doctor," said he. "And that would account for the fact that no trace of these men was ever found. We had their descriptions circulated and the police looking for them everywhere, but nobody ever got a single glimpse of either of them. Naturally enough, as we can see now. They were lying at the bottom of this pit."

At this moment, sounds of trampling through the wood became audible and rapidly grew more distinct. At length, the sergeant and Polton emerged into the opening, followed by the patrol man and four athletic figures in blue dungaree suits, of whom two carried a folded stretcher.

"I've made all the arrangements, sir," said the sergeant, saluting as he addressed the Superintendent. "We can take the remains and the clothing in the ambulance and hand them over to the police at Dartford; and the manager of the works has kindly lent us a car to take you and the doctors to Dartford Station."

"As to me," said Miller, "I shall go on to Dartford with the ambulance. There are two suits of clothes to be examined. I want to go through them thoroughly before I return to town. What do you say, Doctor? Are you interested in the clothes?"

"I am interested," Thorndyke replied, "but I don't think I want to take part in the examination. I dare say you will let me know if anything of importance comes to light."

"You can trust me for that," said Miller. "Then I take it that you will go on to Dartford Station."

With this, we parted; Miller remaining to superintend the removal of the remains and the gear, while Thorndyke, Polton and I retraced our way along the well-trodden track down to the road where the manager's car was waiting.

---

#### XIV. — DR. THORNDYKE'S EVIDENCE

THE adjourned hearing in the Probate Court opened in an atmosphere which the reporters would have described as "tense." The judge had not yet learned the result of the exhumation (or he pretended that he hadn't) and when Mr. Gimbler took his place in the witness-box, his lordship regarded him with very evident interest and curiosity. The examination in chief was conducted by Mr. McGonnell's junior, this being the first chance that he had got of displaying his forensic skill—and a mighty small chance at that. For Gimbler's evidence amounted to no more than a recital of facts which were known to us all (excepting, perhaps, the judge) with certain inevitable inferences.

"You were present at the opening of the vault containing the coffin of Josiah Pippet, deceased?"

"I was."

"What other persons were present?"

Mr. Gimbler enumerated the persons present and glanced at a list to make sure that he had omitted none.

"When the vault was opened, what was the appearance of the interior?"

"The whole interior and everything in it was covered with a thick coating of dust."

"Was there any sign indicating that that dust had ever been disturbed?"

"No. The surface of the dust was perfectly smooth and even, without any mark or trace of disturbance."

"What happened when the vault had been opened?"

"The coffin was brought out and placed upon trestles. Then the screws were extracted and the lid was removed in the

presence of the persons whom I have named.”

“Was the body of deceased in the coffin?”

“No. There was no body in the coffin.”

“What did the coffin contain?”

“It contained a roll of sheet lead and certain plumber’s oddments; to wit, four lumps of lead of a hemispherical shape, such as are formed when molten lead sets in a plumber’s melting-pot.”

“Do those contents correspond with the traditional description of this coffin?”

“Yes. It was stated in evidence by Mr. Christopher Pippet that the traditional story told to him by his father was to the effect that the coffin was weighted with a roll of sheet lead and some plumber’s oddments.”

Having elicited this convincing statement, Mr. Klein sat down; and, as Anstey made no sign of a wish to cross-examine the witness, Mr. Gimbler stepped down from the witness-box with a hardly-disguised smirk, and McGonnell rose.

“That is our case, my lord,” said he, and forthwith resumed his seat. There was a brief pause. Then Anstey rose and announced:

“I call witnesses, my lord,” a statement that was almost immediately followed by the usher’s voice, pronouncing the name,

“Dr. John Thorndyke.”

As my colleague stepped into the witness-box with a small portfolio under his arm, I noticed that his appearance was viewed with obvious interest by more than one person. The judge seemed to settle himself into a position of increased attention, and Mr. McGonnell regarded the new witness critically, and, I thought, with slight uneasiness; while Mr. Gimbler, swinging his eyeglass pendulum-wise, made a show of being unaware of the witness’s existence. But I had observed that he had taken in, with one swift glance, the fact that the usher had deposited the seven volumes of Josiah’s diary, at Anstey’s request, on the latter’s desk. Remembering the double-barrelled microscope, I viewed those volumes with sudden interest; which was heightened when Anstey picked up one of them, and, opening it, sought a particular page and handed the open volume to Thorndyke.

“This,” said he, “is a volume of the diary which has been identified in evidence as the diary of Josiah Pippet. Will you kindly examine the entry dated the 8th of October, 1842.”

“Yes. It reads: ‘Back to the Fox. Exit G. A. and enter J. P., but not for long.’”

“Have you previously examined that entry?”

“Yes. I examined it at the last hearing very carefully with the naked eye and also with the Comparison Microscope invented by Albert S. Osborn of New York.”

“Had you any reason for making so critical an examination of this passage in the diary?”

“Yes. As this is the only passage in the diary in which the identity of the Earl, George Augustus, with Josiah Pippet is explicitly stated, it seemed necessary to make sure that it was really a genuine entry.”

“Had you any further reason?”

“Yes. The position of this entry, after a blank space, made it physically possible that it might have been interpolated.”

“And what opinion did you form as a result of your examination?”

“I formed the opinion that this entry is not part of the original diary, but has been interpolated at some later date.”

“Can you give us your reasons for forming that opinion?”

“My principal reason is that there is a slight difference in colour between this entry and the rest of the writing on this page, either preceding it or following it. The difference is hardly perceptible to the naked eye. It is more perceptible when the writing is looked at through a magnifying lens, and it is fairly distinct when examined with the differential microscope.”

“Can you explain, quite briefly, the action of the differential, or Comparison Microscope?”

“In effect, this instrument is a pair of microscopes with a single eyepiece which is common to both. The two microscopes can be brought to bear on two different letters or words on different parts of a page and the two magnified images will appear in the field of the eyepiece side by side and can be so compared that very delicate differences of form and colour can be distinguished.”

“Was your opinion based exclusively on the Comparison Microscope?”

“No. On observing this difference in colour, I applied for, and received the permission of the court to have a photograph of this page made by the official photographer. This was done, and I have here two sets of the photographs, one set being direct prints from the negative, and the other enlargements. In both, but especially in the enlargements, the difference in colour is perfectly obvious.”

Here Thorndyke produced from his portfolio two sets of photographs which he delivered to the usher, who passed one

pair up to the judge and handed the remainder to Mr. McGonnell and the other interested parties, including myself. The judge examined the two photographs for some moments with profound attention. Then he turned to Thorndyke and asked:

"Can you explain to us why differences of colour which are hardly distinguishable by the eye appear quite distinct in a photograph?"

"The reason, my lord," replied Thorndyke, "is that the eye and the photographic plate are affected by different rays; the eye by the luminous rays and the plate by the chemical rays. But these two kinds of rays do not vary in the same proportions in different colours. Yellow, for instance, which is very luminous, gives off only feeble chemical rays, while blue, which is less luminous, gives off very powerful chemical rays. So that a yellow device on a rather deep blue ground appears to the eye light upon dark, whereas, in a photograph, it appears dark upon light."

The judge nodded. "Yes," said he, "that makes the matter quite clear."

"In what way," Anstey resumed, "does this difference in colour support your opinion that this passage has been interpolated?"

"It shows that this passage was written with a different ink from the rest of the page."

"Is there any reason why Josiah Pippet should not have used a different ink in writing this particular passage?"

"Yes. In 1842, the date of this entry, there was only one kind of black ink in use, excepting the Chinese, or Indian, ink used by draughtsmen, which this is obviously not. The common writing ink was made with galls and copperas—sulphate of iron—without any of the blue colouring which is used in modern blue-black ink. This iron-gall ink may have varied slightly in colour according to whether it was freshly made or had been exposed to the air in an ink-pot. But these differences would disappear in the course of years, as the black tannate and gallate of iron changed into the reddish-brown oxide; and, there being no difference in composition, there would be no difference in the photographic reaction. In my opinion, the difference shown in the photographs indicates a difference in composition in the two inks. But a difference in composition is irreconcilable with identity in the date of this passage and the rest of the page."

"Would the difference of composition be demonstrable by a chemical test?"

"Probably, but not certainly."

"You do not question the character of the handwriting?"

"I prefer to offer no opinion on that. I detected no discrepancy that I could demonstrate."

"And now, coming from matters of opinion to demonstrable fact, what are you prepared to swear to concerning this entry in the diary?"

"That it was written with a different ink from that used in writing the rest of the page."

Having received and noted down this answer, Anstey turned over a leaf of his brief and resumed his examination.

"We will now," said he, "pass on to an entirely different subject. I believe that you have made certain investigations in the neighbourhood of Winsborough. Is that so?"

"It is."

"Perhaps, before giving us your results, it might be well if you were to tell us, in a general way, what was the object of those investigations and what led you to undertake them."

"It appeared to me," Thorndyke replied, "when I considered the story of the double life of Josiah Pippet and the Earl, George Augustus, that, although it was not impossible that it might be true, it was highly improbable. But it also seemed highly improbable that this story should have been invented by Josiah out of his inner consciousness with nothing to suggest it or give it a start. It seemed more probable that the story had its origin in some peculiar set of circumstances the nature of which might, at some later time, be entirely misunderstood. On further consideration, I found it possible to imagine a set of circumstances such as might have given rise to this kind of misunderstanding. Thereupon, I decided to go down to Winsborough and see if I could ascertain, by investigation on the spot, whether such circumstances had, in fact, existed."

"When you went to Winsborough you had certain specific objects in view?"

"Yes. I sought to ascertain whether there existed any evidence of the birth of Josiah Pippet, as a separate individual, and whether he was, in fact, born at the Castle, as alleged. Further, as subsidiary question, I proposed to find out, if possible, whether there was, in the neighbourhood, any ancient inn of which the sign had been changed within the last eighty years."

As Thorndyke gave this last answer, the judge looked at him with a slightly puzzled expression. Then a slow smile spread over his face and he settled himself comfortably in his chair to listen with renewed attention.

"Did your investigations lead to any discoveries?" Anstey asked.

"They did," Thorndyke replied. "First, with regard to the inns. There are two inns in the village, both of considerable age. One has the sign of the Rose and Crown, which is probably the original sign. The other has the sign of the Earl of Beaconsfield; but, as this house bears the date, 1602, and was evidently built for an inn, and, as Benjamin Disraeli was created Earl of Beaconsfield only in 1876, it follows that the sign must have been altered since that date. But I could find

nobody who knew what the sign had formerly been.

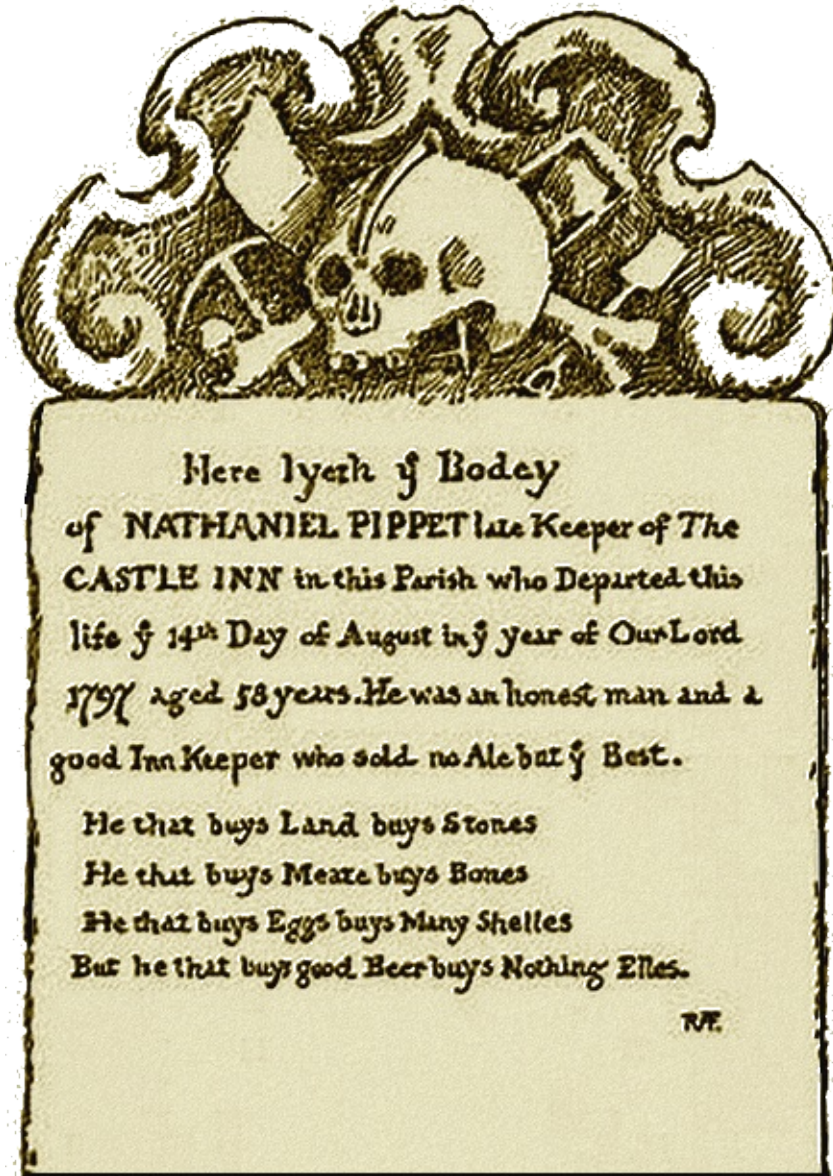
"I next turned my attention to the church register, and first I looked up the entry of the 9th of August 1794. On that day there were born in this small village no less than three persons. One was George Augustus, the son of the Earl of Winsborough, born at Winsborough Castle. The second was Elizabeth Blunt, daughter of Thomas Blunt, carpenter, and third was Josiah Bird, son of Isabella Bird, spinster, serving-maid to Mr. Nathaniel Pippet of this parish; and there was a note to the effect that the said Josiah was born in the house of the said Nathaniel Pippet.

"I followed the entries in the register in search of further information concerning these persons. Three years later, on the 6th of June, 1797, there was a record of the marriage of Nathaniel Pippet, widower, and Isabella Bird, spinster. Two months later, on the 14th of August, 1797, there was recorded the death of Nathaniel Pippet of this parish, inn-keeper; and three months after this, on the 8th of November, 1797, was an entry recording the birth of Susan Pippet, the posthumous daughter of Nathaniel Pippet deceased. This child lived only four days, as her death is recorded in an entry dated the 12th of November, 1797.

"As none of these entries gave any particulars as to the residence of Nathaniel Pippet, I proceeded to explore the churchyard. There I found a tombstone the inscription on which set forth that 'Here lieth the body of Nathaniel Pippet, late keeper of the Castle Inn in this parish, who departed this life the 14th day of August, 1797.' As there was no other entry in the register, this must have been the Nathaniel Pippet referred to in the entry which I have mentioned. I took a photograph of this tombstone and I produced enlarged copies of that photograph."

As he spoke, Thorndyke opened his portfolio and took out a number of mounted enlargements which he delivered to the usher, who handed one to the judge and passed the others round to the various interested parties. Looking round the court, I was amused to note the expressions with which the different parties regarded the photograph. The judge inspected it with deep interest and an obvious effort to maintain a becoming gravity. So also with Brodribb, whose struggles to suppress his feelings produced a conspicuous heightening of his naturally florid complexion. Mrs. Engleheart viewed the photograph with polite and unsmiling indifference; the young people, Mr. Giles and Miss Jenifer (who, for some reason, known only to the usher, had a single copy between them), giggled frankly; Mr. Gimbler and his two counsel examined the exhibit with wooden-faced attention. The only person who made no attempt to "conceal or cloak" his amusement was Mr. Christopher Pippet; who inspected the photograph through horn-rimmed spectacles and laughed joyously.

When the photograph reached me the cause of his hilarity became apparent. It happens often enough that the designs on ancient rural tombstones are such as tend "to produce in the sinful a smile." But it was not the work of the artless village mason that was the cause of Mr. Pippet's amusement. The joke was in the inscription, which ran thus:



*The Tombstone*

"Here lyeth ye Bodey of NATHANIEL PIPPET late Keeper of The CASTLE INN in this Parish who Departed this Life ye 14th Day of August in ye Year of Our Lord 1797 Aged 58 years.

"He was an Honest Man and a good Inn Keeper who sold no Ale but the Best.

"He that buys Land buys Stones  
He that buys Meate buys Bones  
He that buys Egges buys Many Shelles  
But He that buys Good Beer buys Nothing Elles."

The verses were certainly unconventional and tended to engender the suspicion that the jovial Nathaniel might have embodied them in certain testamentary dispositions. But, however that may have been, the inscription was profoundly significant.

Having given time for the inspection of the photographs, Anstey resumed his examination.

"What inferences do you deduce from these facts which you have discovered?" he asked. But, at this point, Mr. McGonnell rose and objected that the witness's inferences were not evidence.

"The learned counsel is technically correct," said the judge, "and I must allow his objection if he insists; though, in the case of an expert witness, where an investigation has been made *ad hoc*, it is customary to allow the witness to explain the

bearing of the facts which he has elicited.”

The learned counsel was, however, disposed to insist and the question was accordingly ruled out.

“Apart from any inferences,” said Anstey, “what facts have your investigations disclosed?”

“They have disclosed the fact,” replied Thorndyke, “that on the 9th of August, 1794, the day on which the Earl, George Augustus was born at Winsborough Castle, there was born at ‘The Castle’ at Winsborough an individual named Josiah whose mother subsequently married Nathaniel Pipet.”

“That fact is the sum of what you discovered?”

“Yes.”

“And what relation does that bear to the imaginary set of circumstances of which you have told us?”

“The circumstances that thus came to light were substantially identical with those which I had postulated theoretically.”

Anstey noted down this answer and then proceeded:

“You were present at the exhumation of the coffin of Josiah Pipet with the other persons who have been mentioned?”

“I was.”

“Did the appearances which you observed seem to you to agree with the conditions which were assumed to exist—that this coffin had lain undisturbed in this vault for eighty years?”

“No. In my opinion, the appearances were not reconcilable with that assumption.”

“In what respect did the appearances disagree with the ostensible conditions?”

“There were three respects in which the appearances disagreed with the conditions which were assumed to exist. The disagreements were concerned with the dust in the vault, the coffin, and the contents of the coffin.”

“Let us take those disagreements in order. First, as to the dust. Do you say that there were signs that it had been disturbed?”

“No. The dust that was there had not been disturbed since it was deposited. But it had not the characteristics of ancient dust, or of any dust which might have become deposited in a vault above ground which was situated in an open burial ground, remote from any dwelling house.”

“What are the distinguishing peculiarities of such ancient dust?”

“The dust which would be deposited in a vault over a period of eighty years would consist of very light and minute particles of matter, such as would be capable of floating in still air. There would be no mineral particles excepting excessively minute particles of the lighter minerals, and very few of these. Practically the whole of the dust would consist of tiny fragments of organic matter, of which a large part would be derived from textiles. As these fragments would be of all sorts of colours, the resulting dust would be of no colour at all; that is to say, of a perfectly neutral grey. But this dust was not of a perfectly neutral grey. It had a very faint tinge of red; and this extremely faint tinge of colour was distinguishable in the whole of the dust, not only in one part. I accordingly took two samples for examination, one from the coffin and one from the shelf on which it rested; and I have since made a microscopical examination of each of these samples separately.”

“And what conclusion did you arrive at as a result of your examination?”

“I came to the conclusion that the whole of this dust had been derived from a single room. That room was covered with a carpet which had a red ground with a pattern principally of green and blue with a little black. There was also in this room a cotton drapery of some kind—either a table-cloth or curtains—dyed a darkish blue.”

“Those are your conclusions. Can you give us the actual facts which you observed?”

“On examining the dust through the microscope, I observed that it consisted chiefly of woollen fibres dyed a bright red. There were also woollen fibres dyed green and blue, but smaller in number than the red, and a still smaller number of woollen fibres dyed black, together with a few cotton fibres dyed a darkish blue. In addition to the fibres there were rather numerous particles of coal and some other minerals, very small in size, but much too large to float in still air. I have here two samples of the dust mounted and arranged in small hand microscopes. On holding the microscopes up to the light, it is quite easy to see the fibres which I have described and also one or two particles of coal.”

He handed the two little instruments (in which I recognized the handiwork of the ingenious and indefatigable Polton) to the usher, who passed them up to the judge. His lordship examined each of them with deep interest and then returned them to the usher, by whom they were handed, first to McGonnell and then to the other parties to the case. Eventually, they came to me; and I was surprised to see how efficiently these little instruments served their purpose. On turning them towards the window, the coloured fibres were visible with brilliant distinctness, in spite of the low magnification. And their appearance, corresponding exactly with Thorndyke’s description, was absolutely convincing, as I gathered from the decidedly glum expression that began to spread over Mr. McGonnell’s countenance.

When the dust had been inspected, Anstey resumed his examination.

“Can you account for the presence of this dust in the vault?”

"Only in general terms. Since it was obviously not derived from anything in the vault, itself, or the immediate neighbourhood of the vault, it must have been brought there from some other place."

"Can you suggest a method of procedure which would have produced the appearances which you observed?"

"A possible method, and the one which I have no doubt was employed, would be this: First, the sweepings from the room, or more probably the accumulations from the receiver of a vacuum-cleaner, would be collected and conveyed to the vault. There, the dust could be blown into the air of the upper part of the vault by means of a vacuum-cleaner with the valve reversed, or more conveniently by means of a common pair of bellows, the dust being fed into the valve-hole. If it were blown up towards the roof, it would float in the air and settle down slowly, falling eventually in a perfectly even manner on the coffin, the shelf, and the floor, producing exactly the appearance that was seen."

"You are not prepared to swear that this was the method actually employed?"

"No; but it would be a possible method, and I cannot think of any other."

"Well," said Anstey, "the method is not important. We will let it go and come to another matter."

"You referred to three discrepancies in the appearances; the dust, the coffin, and the contents of the latter. In what way did the coffin disagree with the ostensible conditions?"

"The coffin was assumed to have been lying undisturbed in the vault for eighty years. That was not the case. If this was the original coffin, it had certainly been opened and re-closed since the year 1854."

"How are you able to fix the date so exactly?"

"By the screws with which the lid was fastened down. These screws are in the possession of Detective-Superintendent Miller, who is now in court."

Here the Superintendent rose, and, producing an envelope, handed it to the usher, who passed it up to the judge. He then evicted Thorndyke from the witness-box, and, taking his place, was duly sworn, and, in reply to a question from Anstey, declared that the screws in the envelope were the screws which had been extracted in his presence from the coffin of Josiah Pippet.

The judge opened the envelope and tipped the screws out into the palm of his hand. Then he remarked—in almost the very words that I had heard the Superintendent use—that he did not see anything at all unusual about them. "To my unsophisticated eye," he concluded, "they look like the kind of screws that one could buy at any ironmonger's."

"That, my lord," said Thorndyke—who had, in his turn, evicted the Superintendent and resumed his place in the witness-box—"is exactly what they are, and that is the fact which gives them their evidential importance. This coffin was supposed to have been screwed down in the year 1843. But in that year you could *not* have bought screws like these at any ironmonger's. There were no such screws in existence. At that time, wood screws were like metal screws, excepting as to their threads. They were flat-ended, so that, in order to drive them in, it was necessary to bore a hole as deep as the screw was long. But, about 1850, an American inventor devised and patented a sharp-pointed, or gimlet-ended screw, which would find its own way through wood, regardless of the depth of the hole. Later, he came to England to dispose of his patent rights, and in 1854 he sold them to Chamberlain and Nettlefolds, who thereupon acquired the virtual monopoly of the manufacture of wood screws; for, owing to the great superiority of the sharp-pointed screw, the old, blunt-ended screw went completely out of use. I am able, by the kindness of the Master of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers, to show a set of the old type of screws, the date of manufacture being 1845."

Here he produced a wooden tablet to which were secured six screws of various sizes with blunt, flattened ends like the screws still used by metal workers. The tablet was passed up to the judge, who inspected it curiously and compared the screws on it with those from the envelope.

"It is always easy," he moralized, "to be wise after the event; but it does really seem astonishing that mankind should have had to wait until 1854 for so obvious an improvement."

With this he returned the coffin screws to the envelope and handed the latter and the museum tablet to the usher, who proceeded to pass them round for inspection. I watched their progress with considerable interest, noting their effect on the different parties to the case. Particularly interested was I to observe the expression on Mr. McGonnell's face as he compared the two exhibits. There was no question as to his recognition of their significance; and, by the flush that rose to his face, and the unmistakeable expression of anger, I judged that Mr. Gimble had not taken him into his confidence and that these revelations were coming to him as a very disagreeable surprise.

When the screws had been inspected by the principal parties, Anstey resumed his examination.

"When you stated the latest date at which this coffin could have been screwed down, you used the qualification, 'If this *was* the original coffin.' Did you mean to express a doubt that this was the original coffin?"

"Yes. My opinion is that it is not the original coffin, but a new one to which the brass name plate and other metal 'furniture' from the original coffin have been screwed. The plate and handles appeared to me to be the original ones, and they appeared to be fastened on with the original brass screws. The slots of those screws showed clear indications of their having been unscrewed quite recently."

"What were your reasons for believing that this was a new coffin rather than the old one, opened and reclosed?"

"There were several reasons. First, there were the screws. These were modern screws, apparently artificially rusted. At any rate, they were rusty. But if the original coffin had been opened and re-closed, it would be natural for the screws which had been extracted to be used to fasten down the lid. There would be no object in obtaining rusty screws to use in their place. Then the coffin did not look old. It was much discoloured; but the discolouration did not look like the effect of age but rather like that of staining. Further, the coffin was covered, both inside and out with a thick coating of mildew. But there was nothing to account for this mildew. The wood was not damp, and it had the character of new wood. The mildew had the appearance of having been produced artificially by coating the surface with some substance such as size, mixed with sugar or glycerine. Moreover, on the assumption that some substitution had been made—which all the appearances indicated—it would obviously be more convenient to use a new coffin than to open and remove the contents of the old, particularly if the old one should have happened to contain a body. But that is a matter of inference. Taking only the appearances observed, I consider that they indicated that this was a new coffin."

"Then," said Anstey, "we now come to the third set of disagreements, the contents of the coffin. What have you to tell us about those?"

"The contents of the coffin," Thorndyke replied, "were, according to the traditional account, a roll of sheet lead and some plumber's oddments, which had been left over from some repairs. Now, sheet lead, removed in 1843, or earlier, from the roof of a house, would, even then, be old lead. It would certainly be cast sheet—cast upon a sand casting table; and it would certainly contain a considerable proportion of silver. But the sheet of lead which was found in the coffin was the ordinary milled sheet which has, in recent times, replaced the old cast sheet. As to the amount of silver that it contained, I could form no opinion. I therefore suggested that an assay should be made to ascertain the silver content. This proposal was contested by Mr. Gimble on the ground that we had no authority to make an assay, and by Mr. McGonnell on the ground that the evidence was of a kind that would not be taken seriously by the court. And Mr. Brodribb objected, apparently on the ground that the proceeding would seem to throw doubt on the good faith of the applicant. Accordingly, I did not press my proposal, but I made a careful examination of the contents of the coffin, with very surprising results. In addition to the sheet lead, the coffin contained four hemispherical lumps of metal which had apparently solidified in a plumber's melting pot, which we may call pot-leavings. There were four of these; one large and three smaller. The large one had the appearance and all the visible and palpable properties of lead, and I had no doubt that it was lead. The other three were evidently not lead, but had the appearance and properties of an alloy of lead and some other metal."

"Did you form any opinion as to the nature of the other metal?"

"I did, but with the reservation that the inference seemed so incredible that I was doubtful about accepting it."

"What was the opinion that you formed as to the nature of these lumps of lead alloy?"

"I was forced to the conclusion that they were composed of an alloy of lead and platinum."

"Platinum!" exclaimed the judge. "But is not platinum a very rare and precious metal?"

"It is always a precious metal," Thorndyke replied, "and since the war it has become extremely scarce and its value has gone up to an extravagant extent. At present, it is several times more valuable than gold."

"And how much platinum did you consider to be present in these lumps of alloy?" the judge asked.

"I estimated the weight of the three lumps together at about a hundredweight, and, about half that weight appeared to be platinum."

"Half a hundredweight of platinum!" exclaimed the judge. "It does indeed seem incredible. Why, it is a fortune. What do you suppose the value of that amount would be?"

"At the present inflated prices," replied Thorndyke, "I should put it at anything from fifteen to seventeen thousand pounds."

"It is beyond belief," said the judge. "However, we shall see," and with this he sat back in his chair and glanced at Anstey.

"As this opinion seems to be so utterly incredible, even to yourself," said Anstey, resuming his examination, "perhaps you might explain to us how you arrived at it."

"It was principally a question of weight," Thorndyke replied.

"But," said Anstey, "have you had sufficient experience to be able to detect platinum in an alloy by the sense of weight to the hand?"

"No," Thorndyke answered, "but it was not a case of absolute weight, or I should have been still less confident. There was a term of comparison. When I picked up the big lump, it felt just as I should expect a lump of lead of that size to feel. But when I then picked up the first of the smaller ones, I received a shock; for, though it was little more than half the size of the big one, it was nearly as heavy. Now, there are not many metals that are much heavier than lead. For practical purposes, ignoring the rare metals, there are only two—gold and platinum. This did not look like gold, but it might have been; a mass of gold, for instance, with a lead casing. On the other hand, its colour—a faint, purplish grey—was exactly that of a lead-platinum alloy. So there seemed to be no escape from the conclusion that that was what it was."

While this evidence was being given, I kept my eyes on Mr. Gimble and his leading counsel. The latter listened in undisguised astonishment and little less disguised displeasure. Obviously, he had begun to smell a rat; and, as it was not



his rat, he naturally resented its presence. But even Gimpler failed to maintain the aspect of wooden indifference that he had preserved hitherto. This disclosure had evidently sprung on him a complete surprise; and, as I looked at him and noted the dismay which he struggled in vain to conceal, I found myself wondering whether, by any chance, the expression of consternation on his face might have some significance other than mere surprise. But my speculations were cut short by Anstey, who was continuing his examination.

"Have you anything more to tell us about the contents of this coffin?"

"No," was the reply. "That is all the information that I have to give."

On receiving this reply, Anstey sat down and McGonnell was rising to cross-examine when the judge interposed.

"Before we pass on to other matters," said he, "we ought to be a little more clear about the nature of this metal which was found in the coffin. That is a question which is highly relevant to the issues which are before the court. But it is also relevant to certain other issues concerned with public policy. Dr. Thorndyke is not prepared to say definitely that this is actually platinum; but he is evidently convinced—and on apparently sufficient grounds—that it is. But the question cannot be left at that. It can be settled with certainty, and it should be. Do I understand that this metal, worth, possibly, many thousands of pounds, is still lying in that coffin?"

This question was addressed to Thorndyke, who accordingly replied:

"No, my lord. As my proposal of an assay was rejected, and in view of the questions of public policy to which your lordship has referred, I informed Mr. Superintendent Miller that, in my opinion, an examination of the pot-leavings would yield information of great importance to the police. The Superintendent thereupon took possession of the whole of the contents of the coffin and conveyed them to the premises of Mr. Daniels, the eminent assayer, and left them there for an assay to be made."

"And has an assay been made?" the judge asked.

"I believe it has, my lord, but I have no information as to the result. Mr. Superintendent Miller is now in court."

Here the Superintendent rose and approached the solicitor's table carrying a small but obviously heavy box, which he laid on the table.

"I think," said the judge, "that what the Superintendent has to tell us should go in evidence."

Accordingly, Miller once more evicted Thorndyke from the witness-box, and the judge continued: "You have already been sworn, Superintendent. Will you now give the *facts*, so far as they are known to you, concerning the contents of this coffin?"

The Superintendent stood at "attention" and delivered himself of his evidence with a readiness born of long practice.

"In consequence of certain information communicated by Dr. Thorndyke, I took possession of the contents of the coffin alleged to be that of Josiah Pippet deceased and conveyed them forthwith to the premises of Mr. Daniels in Bishopsgate and delivered them to him with instructions to make a trial assay and report to me what he found. On the same evening, I received a report from him in which he informed me that he had ascertained the following facts:— the roll of sheet lead was practically pure lead almost completely free from silver, and was probably of recent manufacture. The large pot-leaving was also pure lead of the modern silver-free type. The three smaller pot-leavings were composed of a lead-platinum alloy, of which about half by weight was platinum. On receiving this report, I directed Mr. Daniels to recover the whole of the platinum in a pure state and deliver it to me. He did this, and I have here, in the box on the table, the platinum which I received from him and which he assured me is practically the whole of the platinum which was contained in the pot-leavings. It amounts, roughly, to just under half a hundredweight."

As he concluded, he stepped down from the witness-box, and, approaching the table, unlocked a small padlock of the Yale type by which the hasp of the box was secured and opened the lid. Then, from the interior, he lifted out, one after another, eight little bright, silvery-looking bars, or ingots, and laid them in a row on the table. Picking up the end one, he handed it up to the judge; who weighed it in the palm of his hand, looking at it with a faint smile of amusement. When he received it back from the judge, Miller carried it round the court and allowed each of the interested parties to take it in his hand; and, when it came to my turn, and the Superintendent handed it to me (with something exceedingly like a wink, and a sly glance at Thorndyke), I understood the judge's smile. There was something ridiculous in the monstrous disproportion between the size of the little bar and its weight; for, small as it was, it had the weight of a good-sized iron dumbbell.

When Miller had returned the bars to the box and locked the padlock, he went back to the witness-box to await further questions or cross-examination; but, as neither of the counsel made any sign, the judge dismissed him and then announced the adjournment of the hearing. "I regret," he added, "that, in consequence of other and more urgent business, it will have to be adjourned for a week. The delay is unfortunate; but," here he glanced at McGonnell with a faint smile, "it will have the advantage that learned counsel will have time to consider their cross-examination of Dr. Thorndyke."

Hereupon the court rose and we all prepared to take our departure. Glancing at "the other side," I observed Mr. Pippet looking a little wistfully in our direction as if he would have liked to come and speak to us. But apparently his native wisdom and good sense told him that the occasion was inopportune, and, after a momentary hesitation, he turned away with a somewhat troubled face and followed his legal representatives out of the court.

---

## XV. — A JOURNEY AND A DISCUSSION

"THIS adjournment," remarked the Superintendent as he attached a strong leather rug-strap to his precious box, "is a piece of luck for me—at least I am hoping that it is. You'll have tomorrow free I suppose, Doctor?"

"I have got plenty to do tomorrow," Thorndyke answered, "but I haven't any appointments, as I expected to be here. Why do you ask?"

"Because," replied Miller, "I have had a bit of luck of another sort. I told you that the suspected yacht was laid up in Benfleet Creek with her hatches sealed and a local boat-builder told off to keep an eye on her. Well, it seems that this man—his name is Jaff—spotted some Johnnie trying to break into her in the cool of the evening, about eleven p.m. So Mr. Jaff collared the said Johnnie after a bit of a tussle, and handed him over to the local police.

"Then the police had a brain-wave—quite a good one too. They phoned down to Southend for the Customs officers who had rummaged the yacht when she arrived from her voyage. So the Preventive men—there were two of them—hopped into the train and came over to have a look at the chappie who had been nabbed; and they both recognized him, at once, as one of the three men they had seen on board the yacht when they rummaged her. And one of them remembered his name—Bunter; and when it was mentioned, he didn't deny it, though he had given a false name, as the police had already assumed, when he said it was John Smith. Of course, there are people in the world named John Smith. Plenty of them. But the crook is apt to exaggerate the number.

"Well, when we got notice of the capture, we thought at first of having him sent up to the Yard to see if we could get a statement from him. But then I thought it would be better for me to go down and have a talk with him on the spot and just have a look at the yacht at the same time. And that's where you come in; at least I hope you do, as you seem to be like one of those blooming spiders that I've heard about that have got eyes all over them. What do you say? I think you would find it an interesting little jaunt."

Thorndyke appeared to think so, too, for he accepted the invitation at once and included me in the acceptance, as I also had the day at my disposal. Accordingly, we settled the program, much to the Superintendent's satisfaction, and, having arranged to meet on the following morning at Fenchurch Street Station, we escorted Miller, with his precious burden, to his car and bade him *au revoir*.

"I agree with Miller," said I, as, having achieved the perilous crossing of the Strand, we strolled towards the Temple Gate. "This is a bit of luck. A nice little trip to the seaside instead of a day in that stuffy court. And it will probably be quite amusing."

"I hope it will be more than amusing," said Thorndyke. "We ought to be able to pick up some useful facts. We want them badly enough, for there are a lot of gaps that we have to fill up."

"What gaps are you referring to?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "look at our case as it stands. It is a mere collection of disconnected facts. And yet we know that those facts must be connected, and that we have got to establish the connexion. Take this platinum, for instance. It disappears from the cloak room and is lost to view utterly. Then it reappears in the coffin; and the problem is, how did it get there, where has it been in the interval, and what is Gimbler's connexion with it?"

"Aren't we rather guessing about that platinum?" I objected. "We all seem to be assuming that this platinum is the platinum that was stolen."

"And reasonably so, I think," said Thorndyke. "Consider the probabilities, Jervis. If it had been a case of an ounce, or even a pound, there might have been room for doubt. But half a hundredweight, at a time when every grain of platinum is precious and worth many times its weight of gold, and at a time when that very weight of platinum has been stolen and is still missing—well, we may be mistaken, but we are justified in accepting the overwhelming probabilities. And, after all, it is only a working hypothesis."

"Yes," I admitted, "I suppose you are right; and we shall soon know if you are on the wrong track. But you are also assuming that Gimbler has some connexion with it. You haven't much to go on."

Thorndyke laughed. "You are a regular Devil's advocate, Jervis," said he. "But you are right, so far. We haven't much to go on. Still, I suppose you will agree that we have fair grounds for assuming that Gimbler has some connexion with that bogus coffin."

"Yes," I was forced to admit, "I will concede that much, as the coffin appears to have been planted there to furnish evidence in support of his case. But I am not so clear as to the connexion between Gimbler and that platinum. He seemed mighty surprised when you mentioned it."

"He did," Thorndyke agreed; "and there is certainly something extremely odd about the whole affair. But you see the position. Gimbler arranges for a dummy coffin to be planted, and that dummy coffin is found to contain the proceeds of a robbery. There is thus established a connexion of some sort between Gimbler and this stolen property. We cannot guess the nature of the connexion. It may be of the most indirect kind. Apparently, Gimbler had no suspicion of the nature of the metal in the coffin. But some kind of connexion between that loot and Mr. Gimbler there must be. And it is not impossible that the platinum may eventually be the means of pointing the way to some unguarded spot in Gimbler's defences; for I

take it that there will be considerable difficulty in getting direct evidence of his part in the planting of the coffin.”

His conclusion brought us to our doorstep, at which point the discussion lapsed. But I felt that it was only an adjournment; for something in the Superintendent’s manner had suggested to me that he, also, had certain questions to propound.

And so it turned out. On our arrival on the platform at Fenchurch Street, I perceived the Superintendent doing “sentry-go” before the door of an empty first-class smoking compartment, and I suspected that he had made certain private arrangements with the guard. At any rate, we had the compartment to ourselves, and when we had passed the first few stations in safety, he proceeded to fire his first shot.

“I’ve been puzzling my brains, Doctor, about those pot-leavings.”

“Indeed?” said Thorndyke. “What is the difficulty?”

“The difficulty is how the deuce they became pot-leavings. I have always understood that platinum was almost impossible to melt. Isn’t that so?”

“Platinum is very difficult to melt,” Thorndyke agreed. “It has the highest melting-point of all metals, excepting one or two of the rare metals. The melting-point is 1710 Centigrade.”

“And what is the melting-point of cast iron?”

“1505 Centigrade,” Thorndyke answered.

“Then,” exclaimed Miller, “if it takes about two hundred degrees more to melt platinum than it does to melt iron, how the devil was it possible to melt the platinum in a common plumber’s melting-pot which is made of cast iron? It would seem as if the pot should melt before the platinum.”

“So it would, of course, if the metal had been pure,” Thorndyke replied with a smile that suggested to me that he had been expecting the question, and that something of importance turned on it. “But it was not pure. It was an alloy; and alloys exhibit all kinds of queer anomalies in respect to their melting-points. However, with your permission, we will postpone the discussion of this point, as we shall have to consider it in connexion with certain other matters that we have to discuss. You have not told us whether those clothes from the two dead men yielded any information.”

“They gave us the means of identifying the two men, as you will have learned from the reports of the inquest; and the names were apparently their real names, or at least their usual aliases. The murderer, Bassett, the skipper of the yacht, was a local man, as you guessed. He lived at Swanscombe, and seems to have been a Swanscombe man, which accounts, as you suggested, for his knowledge of the dene hole. The man he killed, Wicks, was living at Woolwich at the time, but he seemed to be a bird of passage. That is all that I got out of the clothes excepting the name and address of a man called Samuels, who describes himself as a gold refiner and bullion dealer, but who may be a fence. We know him by name, but we haven’t anything against him, though we bear him in mind. These small bullion dealers have to be kept in view, as they have so many facilities for getting rid of stolen jewellery and plate.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed; “and, in the special circumstances, any refiner and bullion dealer is of interest to us. It seems likely that Bassett intended to approach this man, Samuels, on the object of the disposal of the platinum, if he hadn’t already made some arrangements with him. You’ll have to continue to keep Mr. Samuels in view. But now tell us a little more about this present business.”

“There isn’t much more to tell you,” said Miller. “It seems that Mr. Jaff, the boat-builder gent, was cruising about Benfleet Creek in his dinghy—he lives afloat, himself—when he saw our friend, Bunter, trying to prise open the yacht’s fore scuttle; whereupon, having a natural prejudice against people who break into yachts, he pulled alongside, stepped on board, and, creeping silently along the deck in his rubber mud-boots, grabbed Bunter and hauled him into his dinghy, where they seem to have had a mighty scrap until another mariner came along and lent a hand. Then they got him ashore and handed him over to the local police as I have told you.”

“What do you suppose could have been his object in trying to break into the vessel?” I asked. “There wasn’t anything of value left on board, was there?”

“There was not supposed to be,” said Miller, with a knowing look, “but I have an idea that there may have been. My notion is that there may have been more platinum than we thought, and that he had come to snap up what was left. What do you say, Doctor?”

Thorndyke shook his head. “I don’t think so, Miller,” he replied. “You have recovered practically all the platinum that was said to have been stolen. My impression is that, as our friend Mr. Pippet might express it, you are barking up the wrong tree.”

“Am I?” said Miller. “Then if you will point out the right tree, I’ll bark up that. What do you think was his object in trying to break in?”

“My idea is,” Thorndyke replied, “that he supposed that the whole of the platinum was still on board.”

“But,” protested Miller, “how could he? He knew that Bassett had carted the bulk of it away.”

Thorndyke chuckled. “My impression is, Miller,” said he, “that it was at this point that the chapter of accidents began;

and it is here that the answer to the question that you raised just now comes in."

"About the melting-pot?" demanded Miller.

"Yes. I have a theory that the whole mystery of the murder and the appearance of the platinum in the coffin hinges on that question. Perhaps, as we have some time at our disposal, there would be no harm in my giving the reins to my fancy and sketching out my hypothetical scheme of the events as I believe they occurred."

"Do, by all means," Miller exclaimed, eagerly, "for, if your imaginary scheme satisfies you, it is likely to satisfy me."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I will begin with what I believe to have been the hiding-place in which the platinum was concealed on the yacht."

"But, good Lord, Doctor" Miller exclaimed, "you've never seen the yacht!"

"It wasn't necessary," Thorndyke replied. "I had your description of the yacht and of the search made by the Customs officer, and they seemed to me to indicate an excellent hiding-place. When you described how that officer crept down into the hold and found it all perfectly clear and empty with the exception of the lead ballast-weights, it occurred to me that it was quite possible that the platinum was staring him in the face all the time. Remember that he was not looking for platinum but for tobacco."

"Do you suggest that the platinum was hidden in the ballast-weights?" Miller demanded.

"That is exactly what I do suggest," replied Thorndyke; "and I will describe to you what I believe to have been the method used in concealing it. You will remember that these weights were proper yacht's ballast; lead weights cast to a correct shape to fit the timbers and sits comfortably along the keelson. Each would probably weight about half a hundredweight, that being the usual and most convenient weight. Now, my theory is that our friends took with them a mould of the ballast-weights—an ordinary sand-flask would do, though a fireclay mould would be more convenient—so that they could cast new weights whenever they might want them. Possibly they also took some spare lead with them."

"Now, as soon as they had got possession of the platinum—which, you will remember, was in thin sheets—they cut it up into suitably sized pieces, or rolled or folded it up to a size that would go easily into the mould. They put the pieces into the mould, probably propping them up a little with some pieces of lead to keep them off the bottom, so that the platinum should not be visible on the surface. Then they melted some spare lead, or one of the ballast-weights and poured the molten lead into the mould. When the lead set solid, there would be a quite ordinary-looking ballast-weight. Then they did the same with the rest of the platinum, producing a second ballast-weight; and the two could be laid down with the rest of the weights alongside the keel. If there was any lead left over, that would be thrown overboard together with the mould."

"Yes," said Miller, "that sounds quite convincing. Deuced ingenious, too. Uncommonly neat. That's how they were able to walk past the customs in the way they did. But where does the chapter of accidents come in?"

"It came in at that point," said Thorndyke. "Somebody had made a trifling miscalculation. I don't say that Bassett made the mistake, though I suspect that he did. But someone did. You know, Miller, as well as I do that people who embark on a fake of any kind need to have a good deal of knowledge. And usually they haven't. Our friend, Gimble, didn't know enough about dust; and the craftsman who made the bogus coffin didn't know enough about screws. And I suspect that the downy bird who invented the ballast-weight dodge didn't know enough about platinum."

"The rock, I think, on which these gentry split was this: most people know, as you know, that platinum is one of the most infusible of metals. It cannot be melted in any ordinary furnace. Only a very special furnace, or the most powerful type of blowpipe will melt it. Now, to a person who knew that, and no more, it would naturally seem that platinum, put into a mould and then covered up with melted lead, would simply be imbedded in lead. And, since lead is very easily fusible—it melts at the comparatively low temperature of 325° Centigrade—it would naturally seem that, when it was required to recover the platinum, all that would be necessary would be to melt the lead weight and pick out the platinum."

"Yes," agreed Miller; "that seems perfectly feasible. What's the snag?"

"The snag is," replied Thorndyke, "that platinum has one most singular property. Everyone knows that you can melt lead in an iron ladle or pot; and it would be quite natural to infer that, since platinum is more difficult to melt than iron, it would be equally easy to melt lead in a platinum ladle or pot. But the inference would be quite wrong. If you were to try to melt lead in a platinum pot, the bottom of the pot would drop out. In spite of its enormously high melting-point, platinum dissolves freely in melted lead."

"The deuce it does!" exclaimed Miller. "That is most extraordinary."

"It is," Thorndyke agreed; "and it is a property of the metal that would be totally unexpected by anyone who did not happen to know it. And now you will see how this curious fact affects our problem. Supposing the platinum to have been put into the mould as I have described, and the melted lead poured in on top of it; and supposing the thieves—or some of them—to be unacquainted with this property of the metal. They would expect, as I have said, that when they wanted to recover the platinum, all they would have to do would be to melt the lead weight and pick out the platinum with tongs."

"Now our friend Wicks, who made the exchange at the cloak room was evidently 'in the know.' He knew what was in the case that he stole; and he had come to get that case. The relic that he left in exchange was, I feel sure, merely a by-product. It may even have furnished the means or the suggestion for the exchange. Obviously, he had the thing on his hands, and it was the kind of thing that he would naturally wish to get rid of; and, if he was able to get a suitable case, as he evidently

was, the exchange was a quite masterly tactical plan. But I think we may take it that it was the case—worth fifteen thousand pounds—that he had come for.

“We will assume that he knew the platinum to be concealed in the lead weights. It is practically certain that he did. He was one of the yacht’s crew, or gang, and the thing must have been known to all of them. Probably he had seen the job carried out; but, at any rate, he knew what had been done. Accordingly, as soon as he had got his booty into a safe place, he proceeded to melt down the lead weights to get at the platinum.

“And then it was, I suggest, that the fatal mistake occurred. As the weights melted, he looked for the platinum to appear. Apparently, he fished for it with a ladle and then transferred the molten metal by degrees to some empty pots. But when he had ladled the whole of it into the other pots, there was still no sign of the platinum. To his eye, the pots contained nothing but melted lead.

“Now, what would he be likely to think, under the circumstances? He might have thought that Bassett had made a mistake and put the wrong weights into the case; but more probably (seeing that he had tried to rob the gang and snatch the whole of the booty for himself and the confederate who had helped him to carry off the case) he would think that he had been suspected and that ‘the boss’ had deliberately laid a booby-trap for him by planting a couple of the plain lead weights in the case. At any rate, he had, apparently, got nothing but a quantity of lead. What did he do with that lead? We have no means of judging. He may have thrown it away in disgust or he may have sold it to a plumber for a few pence. But, if we accept this hypothetical construction of the course of events, we can see how these lumps of lead-platinum alloy came into being.”

“Yes,” Miller agreed, “it all fits the facts perfectly, even to the murder of Wicks. For, of course, each of these two rascals, Wicks and Bassett, thought the other had nobbled the whole of the swag. My eye! What a lark it is!” He laughed grimly and then added: “But I begin to have an inkling of the way you dropped on that dene hole so readily. You’d been keeping an account of the case all along. I wonder if you can make any suggestion as to how that stuff got into the coffin, and who put it there.”

“I am afraid not, Miller,” Thorndyke replied. “You see that the hypothetical sketch that I have given you is based on known facts and fair probabilities. But the facts that we have do not carry us much farther. Still, there is one fact that we must not overlook.”

“What is that?” Miller demanded, eagerly.

“You will admit, I think,” said Thorndyke, “that the faking of that coffin must have been carried out on the initiative and under the direction of Gimbler. There is really no reasonable alternative.”

“Unless Mr. Pippet did the job himself; which doesn’t seem at all likely, though he may have been a party to it. But I agree with you. Gimbler must have been the moving spirit, and probably Pippet knows nothing about it.”

“That is my own view,” said Thorndyke. “Tippet impresses me as a perfectly honest man, and I have no doubt that the planting of the coffin was exclusively Gimbler’s scheme, carried out by certain agents. But one of these agents must have had these lumps of alloy in his possession—unconscious, of course, of their nature. But that agent must have been in touch, directly or indirectly, with Wicks. Now, it ought not to be impossible to discover who that agent was. There are several ways of approach to the problem. One of them, perhaps, is Mr. Bunter. Since Wicks was not on board the yacht when Bassett took away the case of platinum, he must have had a confederate who was. Now, there were only two men left when Bassett had gone—not counting the man whom the Customs officer saw, who seems to have been a stranger who had probably taken a passage on the yacht and is not really in the picture at all. As Bunter was one of those two, there is, at least, an even chance that he was Wicks’s confederate; and, when you come to have a talk with him, you must bear in mind that he, also, may be assumed to be unaware of the change that the platinum would undergo when the melted lead was poured on to it.”

“Yes, by Jove!” Miller agreed. “I begin to hope that we may get something really useful out of Mr. Bunter, if we deal with him tactfully. But Lord! What a stroke of luck it was for me that you were able to come with me on this jaunt. If it hadn’t been for what you have just told us, I might have missed the whole point of his story, even if he was prepared to tell one. I shouldn’t have known any more about it than he did.”

As Miller concluded this frank and generous acknowledgment, the train began to slow down and presently drew up at Benfleet Station. A sergeant of the local police was waiting on the platform; and, when we had introduced ourselves, he took us in charge and conducted us out of the station. A few steps took us to the waterside, where we halted to survey the interminable levels of Canvey Island and the winding creek, now full of water, with its amazing assemblage of house boats and floating shacks of all kinds.

“That’s the *Cormorant*,” said the sergeant, pointing to a sturdy-looking, yawl-rigged yacht that was moored some distance down the creek. “I suppose you will not be wanting to go on board her?”

“Not at present,” replied Miller, “and probably not at all. But we will hear what Bunter has to say.”

“I’m afraid, sir,” said the sergeant, “you’ll find that he hasn’t very much to say. We haven’t found him particularly ready to talk. But perhaps he’ll let himself go a bit more with you.”

We turned away from the water, and, under the sergeant’s guidance, entered the little town, or village, and headed towards the police station.

---

## XVI. — THE STATEMENT OF FREDERICK BUNTER

"WELL, Bunter," the Superintendent remarked, cheerfully, as the prisoner was brought into the little office and given a seat at the table, "here you are."

"Yes," Bunter agreed, gloomily, "here I am. But I don't see why they wanted to run me in. I wasn't doing no harm."

"You were trying to break into a yacht," Miller ventured to remind him. "That isn't quite according to Cocker, you know."

"I was trying to get on board," said Bunter, "and I'm not denying it. But you seem to be forgetting that I was a member of the crew of that yacht. All I wanted was to get some of my kit what I had left behind. I've told the sergeant so."

"That's right, sir," the sergeant confirmed. "He said he had left his pocket-knife behind; and we did find a pocket-knife on board—a big knife with a cork-screw and a marlin-spike in it, such as he had described. But he could have got it from us without breaking into the vessel."

"Yes," said Miller, "that's so. Still, it's a point in his favour. However, it isn't the burglary that we are interested in. If everything else was satisfactory we might let that pass, as he didn't actually break in and he has some sort of explanation. But you know, Bunter, what the real business is, and what we want to ask you about. It's that platinum job."

"What platinum job?" demanded Bunter. "I don't know nothing about any platinum."

"Now, Bunter," the Superintendent remonstrated, "don't be silly. We know all about that job, and we know that you were in it with Bassett and Wicks and the other man."

As he spoke, he drew a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, and, taking one out, pushed it across the table with a box of matches. Bunter accepted the gift with a grunt of acknowledgment but maintained his unaccommodating attitude.

"If you know all about it," said he, "there ain't no need for you to ask me no questions."

"Oh, yes, there is," said Miller. "We know enough for the purpose of the prosecution. But there are certain matters that we should like to clear up for other reasons. Still, you are not obliged to say anything if you don't want to. I suppose you have been cautioned. If you haven't, I caution you now that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be used in evidence at the trial. But I don't want you to say anything that might make the case any worse against you. I want some particulars, as I told you, for other reasons. What you may tell us won't do your two pals any harm, as they are both dead. And I think I may say that we are not inclined to be vindictive to you as no very great harm has been done to anybody, seeing that we have recovered the swag."

At the moment when Miller made this last statement, the prisoner was in the act of striking a match to light his cigarette. But, as the words were spoken, the action became arrested and he sat with his mouth open and the unheeded match burning—until the flame reached his finger, when he dropped it with an appropriate observation. "Did you say," he demanded, speaking slowly and in a tone of the utmost amazement, "that you had recovered the swag?"

"I did," Miller replied, calmly, proceeding to fill his pipe.

"Do you mean the platinum?" Bunter persisted, gazing at the Superintendent with the same expression of amazed incredulity.

"I do," replied Miller. "Pass the matches when you have lit up."

Bunter lit his cigarette perfunctorily and pushed the match-box across the table.

"How did you get hold of it?" he asked.

"We got it," Miller replied, with a twinkle of enjoyment, "from someone who had it from Wicks."

"Get out!" exclaimed Bunter. "You couldn't. Wicks never had it. You are fooling me. I don't believe you've got it at all."

"Look here, Bunter," the Superintendent said, stiffly, "I am not bound to tell you anything. But, if I do tell you anything, you can take it that it's the truth. I'm not in the habit of making false statements to prisoners, nor is any other police officer. I tell you that we have got all that platinum back, so you can take that as a fact and steer your course accordingly."

"But," persisted Bunter, "you couldn't have got it from Wicks. I tell you he never had it."

"Nonsense, Bunter," said Miller. "Didn't he pinch that case from the cloak room at Fenchurch Street? You know he did."

"Yes, I know all about that," rejoined Bunter, "and I know that he thought the stuff was in that case. But it wasn't."

"That's what he told you," said Miller, hardly able to conceal his enjoyment of this contest of wits, and the consciousness that he had the trumps securely up his sleeve. "But it was he that was doing the fooling. He meant to keep the whole of the swag for himself."

"Now that's where you're mistaken," said Bunter. "You think I am going on what he told me. But I ain't. I *know* the stuff wasn't in that case."

"How do you know?" demanded Miller.

"That's my business, that is," was the reply.

"Well," said Miller, "I don't know that it matters so very much. We have got the stuff back, which is the important thing. But, of course, we like to fill in the details if we can."

Bunter re-lit his cigarette and reflected. No one likes a misunderstanding or cross-purposes, and Bunter evidently felt that he was being misunderstood. Furthermore, he was intensely curious as to how the platinum could possibly have been recovered. At length, he said.

"Supposing I was to tell you the whole story, would you let the prosecution drop?"

The Superintendent shook his head, "No, Bunter," he replied promptly. "I can't make any promises. The man who makes a promise which he doesn't mean to keep is a liar, which is what no police officer ought to be; and the man who keeps a promise that he oughtn't to have made, in a case like this, is guilty of bribery. The English law is dead against compounding felonies or any other crimes. But you know quite well that, if you choose to help us, you won't do yourself any harm."

Bunter took a little more time for reflection, and eventually reached a conclusion.

"Very well," he said, "I will tell you the whole blooming story, so far as it is known to me; and I look to you not to take advantage of me from what I have told you."

"I think you are wise, Bunter," said the Superintendent, obviously much relieved at the prisoner's decision. "By the way, Sergeant, what time did Bunter have his breakfast?"

"About seven o'clock, sir," was the reply.

"Then," said Miller, "if he is going to make a longish statement, he won't be the worse for a little refreshment. What do you say, Bunter?"

Mr. Bunter grinned and admitted that "he could do with a beaver."

"Very well," said Miller, "perhaps we could all do with a beaver—say, a snack of bread and cheese and a glass of beer. Can you manage that, Sergeant?"

The sergeant could, and, being provided with the wherewith in the form of a ten-shilling note, went forth to dispatch an underling in search of the materials for the said "beaver." Meanwhile, Bunter, having been furnished with a fresh cigarette, lighted it and began his narrative.

"You must understand," said he, "that this job was run by Bassett. The rest of us carried out orders, and we didn't know much more about the job than what he told us; and he didn't tell us any more than we was bound to find out for ourselves. We didn't even know that the stuff was platinum until Wicks spotted it by its weight. All that we knew was that we were going to lift some stuff that was pretty valuable; and I doubt if the fourth man, Park, knew even that."

"How did you come to know Bassett?" the Superintendent asked.

"He came to my house—leastways my brother-in-law's house at Walworth—and said he had been recommended to me by a gentleman; but he wouldn't say who the gentleman was. Whoever he was, he must have known something about me, because he knew that I had been to sea on a sailing barge, and he knew about a little trouble that I had got into over some snide money that some fool gave me for a joke."

"Ah!" said Miller, "and how did that trouble end?"

"Charge dismissed," Bunter replied, triumphantly. "No evidence of any dishonest intent. Of course there wasn't."

"Certainly not," Miller agreed. "Of course you explained about the practical joke?"

"Rather—at least my lawyer did. He talked to the beak like a father, I can tell you."

"Yes," said Miller, "I can imagine it. These Jew advocates are uncommonly persuasive."

"He wasn't a Jew," Bunter exclaimed, indignantly. "No blooming sheenies for me. He was an English gentleman."

"Oh!" said Miller. "I thought all the police court solicitors were Jews. What was this gentleman's name?"

"His name," Bunter replied, haughtily, "was Gimbler; and a first-class man at his business he was. Knew all the ropes like an A.B."

"Yes," said Miller. "But to return to Bassett; had Wicks known him previously?"

"No. Bassett called on him, too. Got his address from a gentleman who knew him. Same gentleman, I expect, as Bassett wouldn't say who he was. But he knew that Wicks had been brought up as a waterman, and I think he knew a bit more about him—more than I did, for Wicks was a stranger to me, and he didn't let on much as to what he did for a living. So there was four of us on the yacht; Bassett, Wicks, me and a bloke named Park, but he wasn't really in the swim. He was a bawleyman out of Leigh; a simple sort of cove, but a rare good seaman. He wasn't told nothing about the job, and I fancy he thought it was some sort of smuggling racket—nothing for a honest man to mind."

"And what was the arrangement as to pay, or shares?"

"We all got monthly pay at the ordinary yachtman's rate, and there was to be a bonus at the end of the voyage. Park was to have fifty pounds, and me and Wicks was to have two hundred each if we brought the job off and landed the swag."

Here the "beaver" arrived, and Bunter was allowed to refresh himself with a glass of beer; which he did with uncommon

gusto. But the narrative proceeded without interruption, excepting such as was due to slight impairment of articulation when the narrator took an extra liberal mouthful; which we shall venture to ignore.

"I can't tell you exactly how the actual job was done at Riga, as I was down below at the time. Bassett and Wicks did the sleight of hand on the quay, but I think it was done something like this: We had been in the habit of getting our provisions on board in a big hamper, and this used to be left about on the quay so as to get the people there used to seeing it. Now, on the day when the job was done, Bassett put into the hamper the little dummy case that he had got ready with half a hundredweight of lead in it. I don't know how he got the particulars for making up the case, but I reckon he must have had a pal on the spot who gave him the tip. Anyway, he made up the dummy case and put it in the hamper wrapped up in a waterproof sheet. Then it was took up and dumped down on the quay close to where the cases of platinum was being dumped down by the men who brought them out of the van. Then, I understand, someone gave an alarm of fire; and, while everyone was looking at the place where the fire was supposed to be, the dummy was put out on the quay and the waterproof sheet flicked off the dummy and over one of the real cases, and the dummy was shoved nearer to the other cases. Then Bassett sat down on the case that he had covered with the sheet and lit his pipe. Then they waited until all the cases, dummy and all, had been put on board the ship. Then they lifted the case, still covered with the waterproof sheet, into the hamper and brought it on board the yacht.

"As soon as it was on board, Park and me was told to cast off the shore ropes and get the yacht out of her berth and put out into the bay; which we did, though, as it was nearly a dead calm, she crept out mighty slowly. When we had got the sails set, I left Park at the helm and went below to lend a hand; and then it was that I found out how the swag was to be disposed of—and a mighty clever wheeze it was, and it worked out to a T.

"You must know that our inside ballast was a lot of lead weights, all cast to the same size—about half a hundredweight each and forty of them, all told. Now, as soon as we was fairly under way, Bassett and Wicks lighted a big Primus stove and set a large melting-pot on it; and into the pot they put one of the lead weights from the hold. Then Bassett brought out of the lazarette a fireclay mould like the one that the weights had been cast in. It was an open mould what you just poured the lead in; and when it had set, you turned it over and the weight dropped out with the top surface rough as it had set.

"While the lead was melting, me and Bassett and Wicks opened the case and took out the platinum, which was in thin sheets about a foot square. We cut the sheets up with tinman's snips into narrow strips what would go snugly into the mould. Then Bassett put a bit of cold lead into the mould for the strips of platinum to rest on, and then we laid the strips in the mould, fitting them in carefully so as to get as many in as possible. Then, when we had got them in and the lead in the pot was melted, Bassett takes a ladle, dips it into the pot and pours it into the mould. He had made the lead a bit extra hot, so that it should not be cooled by the cold platinum. Well, when we had filled up the mould and covered up the platinum, we had to wait while it was setting; and Bassett put another ballast-weight in the pot to melt. When the lead in the mould was set, we turned it out, and there was an ordinary-looking ballast weight what you wouldn't have known from any other ballast-weight.

"We did the same with the rest of the platinum, and that just made up another weight. Then we marked the numbers on them with punches—all the ballast-weights were numbered and laid in their regular order, 1 to 40. These two weights were numbered 22 and 25; and when we had marked them, we laid them down in their proper places in the hold. Then we cleaned up. The lead what was left over we chucked overboard, and the fireclay mould went after it. The case what the platinum had come in, we broke up and shoved the pieces in the galley fire; so now there was no trace left of this little job, and we didn't mind if the police came on board and rummaged the ship. There wasn't nothing for them to find. So we sailed back to our berth and made fast; and there we stayed for five days to give them a chance to come on board and rummage if they wanted to. But they never came. Naturally. Because nothing had been found out. So, on the sixth day, we put to sea for the voyage home.

"But we didn't come straight home. We kept up the appearances of a cruising yacht. You won't want particulars of the voyage, but there is one little incident that I must mention. It was at Rotterdam, our last port of call, on the morning when we started for home. We had got the sails loosed and was just about to cast off, when a cove appeared on the quay and hailed Bassett, who was on deck giving orders. Bassett replied as if he had expected this bloke, and reached up and took the man's luggage—a small suit-case and a brown-paper parcel with a rug-strap fastened to it—and helped the covey down the ladder. Then we cast off and put out to sea; so we could see that this stranger had arranged with Bassett for a passage to England.

"Shortly after we had started, Bassett sends me to the fore peak for one of the empty cases what our provisions had been stowed in. I took it to the cabin, but I didn't know what it was wanted for until I saw the passenger stowing it in the locker what belonged to his berth. Later, I found the brown paper from the parcel and a big bit of oiled silk which seemed a bit damp and had a nasty smell; so I chucked it overboard. I don't know whether Bassett knew what was in that parcel, but none of us ever guessed.

"Now, when we was about abreast of the Swin Middle light-ship, we met a stumpy barge what was bound, as it turned out, from London to Colchester. Bassett hailed her, and, when we was near enough, he asked the skipper if he would take a passenger. The skipper wanted further particulars, so Wicks and Park went off to the barge in the boat, taking the passenger's case with them. Apparently it was all right, for Wicks waved his hand and Park started to row back to the yacht."

"Had Wicks or Bassett told you anything about this business?" the Superintendent asked.



"No. Not a word was said at the time; but Wicks told me all about it afterwards, and I may as well tell you now. It seems that the passenger—his name was Sanders—had got Bassett's permission to make an arrangement with Wicks to smuggle the case ashore and take it to Fenchurch Street Station and leave it in the cloak room. He gave Wicks ten pounds for the job and a pound for the barge skipper; and a rare mug he must have been to pay Wicks in advance. Well, the skipper took Wicks with him up the Colne and put him ashore, after dark, somewhere between Rowhedge and Colchester; and Wicks took a walk inland with his case and picked up a motor bus that took him into Colchester. He stayed there a day or two, having a bit of a beano, because he wasn't due to dump the case in the cloak room until the following Monday, so that it shouldn't be waiting there too long. But on Saturday evening he took the train to London and went straight to the house of my brother-in-law, Bert Wallis, where I was in the habit of living."

"Why did he go there?" asked Miller.

"Ah!" said Bunter, "that's another story, and I may as well tell you that now. You must know that, after Wicks found out about the platinum, he got very discontented. He reckoned that the swag might be worth anything from ten to twenty thousand pounds; and he said we'd been done in the eye. Two hundred pounds apiece, he said, wasn't anything like a fair share, seeing that we'd taken an equal share of the risk. And he was very suspicious of Bassett. He doubted whether he was a perfectly honest man."

"What a horrible suspicion!" Miller exclaimed with a grin.

"Yes," agreed Bunter. "But I believe he was right. He suspected that Bassett meant to clear off with the whole of the swag and not pay us anything. And so did I; so we arranged that I should keep an eye on Bassett and see that he didn't get away with it."

"Now, when we had done with the Customs at Southend—of course they didn't twig nothing—we ran up into Benfleet Creek and took up moorings. Then, on Saturday, Bassett said he was going to take the stuff up to a dealer what he knew of and wouldn't be back for a day or two. So, in the evening, I helped him to carry the case, with the two doctored weights in it, up to the station and saw him into a first-class carriage and shut him in. But I didn't go back to the yacht. I'd taken the precaution to get a ticket in advance, and given Park the tip that I mightn't be back that night; so, when I left Bassett, I went to the rear of the train and got in. I travelled up to town in that train, and I followed Bassett and saw him stow the case in the cloak room. Then, when I had seen him out of the station, I nipped straight off home to Bert Wallis's place at Walworth."

"It happened that I got there only a few minutes after Wicks had turned up. I told him what had happened, and we talked over what we should do to keep our eyes on the case of platinum. But, at the moment, Wicks was all agog to know what was in Mr. Sanders's case. I pointed out to him that it was no business of his, but he said if it was worth all the money and trouble that had been spent on it, there must be something of value inside, and he was going to see what that something *was*, and whether it was worth while to take it to the cloak room at all."

"Well, I got him a screwdriver and he had the screws out in a twinkling and pulled up the lid. And then he fairly hollered with surprise and I was a bit took aback, myself. You know what was inside—a man's head, packed in some of our old duds. I tell you, Wicks slammed the lid down and ran the screws in faster than he took them out. Then I asks him what he was going to do about it. 'Do!' says he. 'I'm going to plant the damn thing in the cloak room tomorrow morning and get clear of it; and I'll send the ticket on to Sanders at Benfleet Post Office as I promised. I've been paid, and I'm going to carry out my contract like a honest man.'"

"But the sight of that man's head seemed to have given him something to think about, for he was mighty thoughtful for a while. Then, all of a sudden, something seemed to strike him, for he turns to me and asks: What sort of case did Bassett pack them two weights in?' 'Why,' I says, 'one of the provision cases; same sort as that head is packed in.' 'Then, by gum,' says he, 'we are going to steal a march on that dishonest blighter, Bassett, if we can manage it. Do you know what marks there were on that case?' Now, it happened that I did; for I had taken the precaution to make a copy of the label. I showed it to Wicks and he got a card like the one I had seen on Bassett's case and wrote the name and address on it from my copy and tacked it on to Sanders's case."

"'And now,' says he, 'the question is how we are going to get that case here from the station. We might take a taxi, but that wouldn't be very safe. We don't want to leave no tracks.' Then I thought of Joe Wallis, Bert Wallis's brother, what had a shop a couple of doors off and kept a motor van for carting timber about."

"What is his trade?" Miller asked.

"He is a carpenter what does work for some small builders. He served his time as a undertaker, but he give that up. Said it wasn't cheerful enough. He didn't mind the coffins, but he couldn't stick the corpses. Well, the end of it was that Wicks persuaded Joe to take on the job. I don't know what story he told him, Of course, Joe didn't know what was in either of the cases, but he is a big, strong chap and Wicks made it worth his while. Being Sunday, he put on a leather coat and a cap like a taxi-driver, for the sake of appearances."

"Well, Wicks got rid of Sanders's case all right and posted the ticket off to Benfleet; and then, in the afternoon, he set off to do the more ticklish job of swapping Sanders's case for Bassett's. But he brought it off all right and got the right case safely to Bert's crib. Being Sunday, Bert wasn't doing nothing, so we had the run of his workshop to do our little job in."

"What is Bert's trade?" the Superintendent asked.

"He is a plumber," replied Bunter. "That's what he is."

"Oh!" said Miller, with a sly look. "Doesn't do anything in the pewter and plaster mould line, I suppose?"

"I said he was a plumber," Bunter replied, haughtily; "and, consequentially, he'd got a workshop with a big gas ring and some melting-pots; which was just what we wanted."

"Well, we opened Bassett's case and there, sure enough, was the two lead weights. And they seemed to be the right ones, by the punch marks on them—22 and 25. So we took the biggest melting-pot, which was half full of lead, and, when we had tipped the lump of lead out on the floor, we put the pot on the ring and lighted up; and then we shoved one of the lead weights in it."

"Now," says Wicks, 'we are going to make our fortunes. But we shall have some difficulty in getting rid of this stuff. We shall have to go slow.' So he sat on a chair by the gas ring and watched the weight and made all sorts of plans for getting rid of the platinum. The weight was a long time before it showed any signs of melting; but, at last it began to slip down the pot, and me and Wicks leaned over the pot and watched for the bits of platinum to stick out. But we couldn't see no sign of them. We watched the weight as it slipped down further and further until it had crumpled up and was all melted. But still we couldn't see nothing of the platinum. Then Wicks got a iron rod and raked about in the melted lead to see if he could feel the bits of platinum. But he couldn't. Then he got a ladle and tried to fish out the bits that he couldn't see; and, I tell you, he was fair sweating with anxiety, and so was I for that matter. For nothing came up in the ladle but melted lead."

"Then I suggested that we should ladle out the whole of the lead, a little at a time, into another pot, and I got three small empty pots and set them alongside the big one; and Wicks ladled out the lead from the big one into the little ones. But still we didn't come to the platinum. And at last we come to the bottom of the pot; and then we could see that there wasn't no platinum there."

"By this time Wicks was nearly blue with rage and disappointment, and I was pretty sick, myself. However, we emptied the last drop of lead out of the big pot and started to melt the other weight. But it was the same story with that one. We ladled the lead out into the small pots, and, by way of doing the thing thoroughly, took the big pot up by its handle and drained the very last drop of lead out of it into the small pots. And there wasn't a grain of platinum to be seen anywhere."

"My eye! You ought to have seen Wicks's face when he had done with the second weight and tried it right out. His language was something awful, And no wonder. For you see it wasn't no mistake. The numbers on the weights was all right. It was a fair do. Bassett had deliberately sold us a pup. He'd got a pair of the plain lead weights, hammered the numbers out, and punched fresh numbers on them. It was a dirty trick, but I suppose he must have suspected Wicks and got this plant ready for him. At any rate, Wicks saw red, and he swore he would do Bassett in. We'd got Bassett's address at Swanscombe, because we had got to go there for the money that was owing to us when the swag should have been disposed of; and, on the Tuesday, Wicks went off to see if Bassett was at home, and, if he was, to have a few words with him. And that was the last I ever saw of Wicks. When he didn't come home, I supposed he had made himself scarce on account of the hue and cry about the head in the case. Now I know that he must have tried to do Bassett in, and Bassett must have got his whack in first. And that's all I know about the business."

"Good," said Miller. "You've made a very straightforward statement, and I can tell you that you have not done yourself any harm and what you have told us will probably be quite helpful to us. I'll write it out presently from my notes and you can read it, and, if you are satisfied with it, I'll get you to sign it. In the meantime, I want to ask you one or two questions. First of all, about this man Sanders; can you give us any description of him?"

"He was a tall man," replied Bunter; "a good six foot if he had stood up straight—which he didn't, having a stoop at the shoulders. I should put his age at about fifty. He had dark hair and beard and he wore spectacles."

"What kind of spectacles?" Thorndyke asked.

"I dunno," replied Bunter. "Spectacles is spectacles. I ain't a optician."

"Some spectacles are large," said Thorndyke, "and some are small. Some are round and some are oval, and some have a line across as if they had been cracked. Would his fit any of those descriptions?"

"Why, yes, now you come to mention it. They was big, round spectacles with a sort of crack across them. But it couldn't have been a crack because it was the same in both eyes. I'd forgotten them until you spoke."

I noticed that Miller had cast a quick look at Thorndyke and was now eagerly writing down the description. Evidently, he "smelt a fox," and so did I. For, though Thorndyke had not really put a "leading question," he had mentioned a very uncommon kind of spectacles—the old-fashioned type of bi-focal, which is hardly ever made now, having been superseded by the cemented or ground lunette. I had no doubt, nor, I think, had Miller, that he was describing a particular pair of spectacles; and this suspicion was strengthened by his next questions.

"Bid you notice anything peculiar in his voice or manner of speaking?"

"Nothing extraordinary," replied Bunter. "He'd got a squeaky voice, and there's no denying it. And he didn't speak quite proper English, like you and me. Seemed to speak a bit like a Dutchman."

I surmised that Mr. Bunter used the word "Dutchman" in a nautical sense, meaning any sort of foreigner who was not a "Dago"; and so, apparently, Thorndyke interpreted it, for he said:

"He spoke with a foreign accent? Was it a strong accent, or only slight?"

"Oh, it was nothing to notice. You'd hardly have taken him for a foreigner."

"Did you notice his nose?"

"You couldn't help noticing it. Lord! It was some boko. Reminded me of a parrot. And it had got a pretty strong list to starboard."

"You would say that he had a large, curved, or hook nose, which was bent towards the right. Is that so?"

"That's what I said."

"Then, Superintendent," said Thorndyke, "I think we have a working description of Mr. Sanders. Shall we take a note of Mr. Bert Wallis's address?"

"I don't see what you want with that," Bunter objected. "He didn't have nothing to do with the job. We used his workshop, but he didn't know what we wanted it for."

"We realize that," said Thorndyke, "and we have nothing whatever against him. But he may be able to give us some information on some other matters. By the way, speaking of that lead that you ladled out of the pot; what did you do with it?"

"Nothing. It wasn't no good to us. We just left it in the pots for Bert, in case he had any use for it."

"And Bert's address is—?"

"Sixty-four Little Bolter Street, Walworth. But don't you go worrying him. He don't know nothing what he didn't ought to."

"You needn't be afraid of our giving him any trouble," said Miller. "We may not have to call on him at all, but, in any case it will only be a matter of a few questions which he won't mind answering. And now, perhaps you'd like another fag to smoke while I am writing up your statement."

Mr. Bunter accepted the "fag" readily and even hinted that the making of statements was dry work; on which Miller directed the sergeant to provide him with a further half-pint. Meanwhile, Thorndyke and I, having no concern with the formalities of the statement, went forth to stretch our legs and take a more detailed survey of the waterside. When we returned, the statement had been transcribed and duly signed by Mr. Frederick Bunter. And this brought to an end a very satisfactory day's work.



## XVII. — THE UNCONSCIOUS RECEIVERS

DURING the return journey, the Superintendent showed a natural disposition to discuss the bearings of what we had learned from Bunter and reckon up his gains in the matter of evidence.

"It was a pleasant surprise to me," said he, "to hear Bunter let himself go in the way he did. I was afraid, from what the sergeant said, that we shouldn't get much out of him."

"Yes," said I, "he was rather unexpectedly expansive. I think what started him was your insistence that Wicks had got possession of the platinum, when he knew, as he supposed, that Bassett had planted the wrong weights. He was mightily staggered when you told him that the swag had been recovered. Still, we've a good deal more to learn yet before we shall know exactly what did happen."

"That is true," agreed Miller. "We've learned a lot from Bunter, but there is a lot more that we don't know, and that Bunter doesn't know. The question is, how much do we know? What do you say, Doctor? I should like to hear you sum up what we have gained by this statement, and tell us exactly how you think we stand."

"My feeling," said Thorndyke, "is that we have advanced our knowledge considerably. We have shortened the gap between the two parts of the problem which are known to us. When we came down, our knowledge of the platinum ceased with its disappearance from the cloak room and began again with its reappearance in the coffin. That was a big gap. But, as I have said, that gap is now to a great extent filled up. The problem that remains is to trace those lumps of alloy from Bert Wallis's workshop to the false coffin; and I don't think that we shall have much difficulty in doing it. But, before we proceed to count up our gains, we had better consider what it is that we want to know."

"Now, I remind you that there are two distinct problems, which we had better keep quite separate: the platinum robbery and the substituted coffin. Bunter's statement bears on both, but we must not get them confused. Let us take the robbery first. My impression is that we now know all that we are likely to know about it. We all have probably formed certain suspicions; but suspicions are of no use unless there is some prospect of confirming them. And I do not think that there is. But, after all, is there any object in pursuing the matter? The two visible principals in the robbery are dead. As to poor Bunter, he was a mere spectator. He never knew any of the details."

"He was, at least, an accessory after the fact," said Miller.

"True. But is he worth powder and shot? Remember, this robbery was committed outside British jurisdiction. It will be an extradition case, unless you charge Bunter with complicity in the theft from the cloak room. It will be for the Latvian police to make the first move, which they probably will not, as the property has been recovered and the principal offenders are dead."

Miller reluctantly admitted the cogency of this argument.

"Still," he insisted, "there is more in it than that. Didn't it strike you that certain parts of Bunter's statement seemed to suggest the possibility that the robbery had been planned and engineered by our friend, Gimbler?"

"It did," Thorndyke admitted. "That was what I meant when I spoke of certain suspicions that we have formed. It would be possible, from Bunter's statement, to build up quite a plausible argument to prove that Gimbler was probably the moving spirit in that robbery. But it would be a mere academic exercise; very entertaining, but quite unprofitable, since the principals are dead and Bunter knows less than we do. There are no means by which our suspicions could be put to the proof or our knowledge enlarged."

"I expect you are right," Miller agreed, gloomily; "but I should like to hear the argument, all the same."

"It will be a waste of time," said Thorndyke. "However, our time is not very valuable just now, and there will be no harm in assembling the relevant facts. Let us take them in order."

"1. Bunter had been defended on a criminal charge by Gimbler.

"2. Bunter was introduced to Bassett by 'a gentleman,' who must have, therefore, known them both.

"3. A gentleman—apparently the same gentleman—introduced Wicks to Bassett, and, therefore, knew Wicks.

"4. The said gentleman—assuming him to be the same in both cases—was, therefore, acquainted with three persons who are known to us as having been engaged in crime.

"5. One of these three persons—Bunter—was acquainted with Gimbler.

"6. The unknown 'gentleman,' who was acquainted with three criminals, took an active and helpful part in the robbery inasmuch as he introduced Bassett to persons who would be likely to agree to assist in the carrying out of a criminal enterprise."

Those are the principal facts; and now as to their application. The appearance of this mysterious 'gentleman,' acquainted with criminals and apparently acting, at least as an accessory, strongly suggests someone in the background directing, and possibly planning, this robbery. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that someone connected with the robbery must have had a substantial amount of capital available. The yacht, even if bought quite cheap, must have cost not less than a hundred pounds; and then there were the considerable out-goings in respect of the provisioning and fitting-out for the

cruise, and the payments of wages which seem to have been made, apart from the final 'bonus,' which might have been paid out of the proceeds of the robbery. Of course, Bassett may have had the money; but it is not probable. Persons who get their livelihood by crime are not usually capitalists. There is a strong suggestion that the 'gentleman' was behind the robbery in a financial sense as well as furnishing the brains and management. This is all reasonable inference—though of no evidential value. But when we try to give a name to this mysterious 'gentleman,' our inferences become highly speculative. However, let us speculate. Let us propose the hypothesis that the hidden hand behind this robbery was the hand of Mr. Horatio Gimpler, What is there to support that hypothesis?

"First, there is the coffin. It contained the proceeds of this robbery. Gimpler was not aware of the fact; but the circumstance that it was there establishes the fact of some sort of contact between Gimpler and the persons who were concerned in the robbery. The persons whom he dealt with in the preparation of the coffin had dealings with the persons who carried out the robbery."

"There isn't much in that," I objected. "It might have been pure chance."

"So it might," he agreed, "and there is very little in it, as you say. But circumstantial evidence is made up of little things. I merely assert that some sort of connexion is established."

"The next point is that, of the three criminals engaged in this robbery, the only one known to us—Bunter—was acquainted with Gimpler. But Bunter was also acquainted with the unknown gentleman. There isn't much in that, taken alone; but it points in the same direction as the other facts."

"And now let us consider how Gimpler fits the character of the hypothetical person who may have directed and financed the robbery."

"First, this hypothetical person must have had a somewhat extensive acquaintance with members of the criminal class in order to be able to select suitable persons to carry out this rather peculiar and specialized piece of work. Criminals with a practical knowledge of seamanship cannot be very common. But Gimpler has a very extensive acquaintance with the criminal class."

"The next point is that this hypothetical person must have had a modest amount of capital at his disposal, say two or three hundred pounds. We do not know much of Gimpler's circumstances, but it would be very remarkable if he were not able to produce that amount to finance a scheme which was likely to yield a profit of thousands. But, as there must be innumerable persons in the same financial position, this argument has no significance. It is merely an argument."

"Finally, our hypothetical person must have combined considerable ingenuity with extreme dishonesty. Here there is undoubted agreement; but, unfortunately, Gimpler is in this respect far from unique."

"That is the argument; and, as you see, though it is enough to allow of our entertaining a suspicion of Gimpler, it is not enough to establish the most flimsy *prima facie* case. If Gimpler was the hidden director of this crime, he was extremely well hidden, and I think he will remain hidden. Probably, Bassett was the only person who knew the whole of the facts."

"Yes," Miller agreed, glumly, "I'm afraid you are right. Unless the Latvian police raise an outcry, it will probably be best to let the matter drop. After all, the robbery failed and we have got the stuff back. Still, I feel in my bones that Gimpler engineered the job, and I should have liked to lay my hands on him. But, as you say, he kept out of sight and is out of sight still. He always does keep out of sight, damn him!"

"Not always," said Thorndyke. "You are forgetting the other case—the counterfeit coffin. That is an entirely different matter. There he is already in full view. A manifest fraud has been committed, and there are only two persons who could possibly be suspected of having committed it—Gimpler and Pipet. Actually, I suppose, no one suspects Pipet. But he is the claimant in whose interest—ostensibly—the fraud was perpetrated, and it is certain that Gimpler will try to put it on him. If it were not for Pipet, you could arrest Gimpler tomorrow and be confident of a conviction. As it is, direct evidence against Gimpler is a necessity, and it is for you, Miller, to secure that evidence. I think you will not have much difficulty, with the facts now in our possession."

"No," said Miller, "we seem to have got a pretty good lead from Bunter; but, all the same, I should like to hear your views on the evidence that we have."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "let us approach the problem from both ends. At one end we have four lumps of metal, one lead and three alloy, in the workshop of a plumber, Bert Wallis. At the other we have the same four lumps of metal in a coffin; and the problem is to bridge the interval between the two appearances."

"Now, the fact that those four lumps appeared together in the coffin is evidence that the interval was quite short. There were no intermediate wanderings during which they might have become separated. We may be sure that the passage from the workshop to the coffin was pretty direct; in effect, we may assume that the man who prepared the coffin got his lead from Bert Wallis. The next inference is very obvious, though it may be erroneous. But when we consider that a couple of doors from Bert Wallis's premises were those of a man who had served his time as an undertaker, and who was, therefore, capable of making a perfectly correct and workmanlike coffin; who had a motor van and who was Bert Wallis's brother; it is impossible to ignore the probability that the coffin was made by Joe Wallis. He had all the means of carrying out the substitution—you will remember that there was a cart shed adjoining the wall of the burial ground, in which a van could be conveniently hidden, and from which the coffin could be easily passed over the wall—and, if he had done the job, he would presumably have got his lead from his brother whose premises were close by. The only weak place in the argument is that

we are accusing a man, who may be a perfectly honest and reputable tradesman, of being concerned in a crime."

"I don't think you need worry yourself about that," said Miller. "You heard what I said to Bunter on the subject of pewter and plaster moulds. He knew what I meant. There had been some suspicion that Mr. Bert Wallis occasionally turned his hand to the manufacture of counterfeit coin. It was never brought home to him; but the fact that Bunter—who lives with him when he is at home—had been charged with issuing counterfeit money (which I had not heard of before) gives colour to the suspicion. And Bunter, himself, as we know, is a decidedly shady customer. I don't think we need have any scruples of delicacy in giving Mr. Joseph Wallis a little attention. I'll call and have a friendly talk with him."

"I shouldn't do that," said Thorndyke; "at least, not in the first place. It would be much better to make the initial attack on Bert. There, you have something definite to go on. You know that the metal was in his workshop. And, if he has not heard of the facts disclosed in the Probate Court, or has not connected them with the metal that he had, you will have a good opening for an inquiry as to what has become of certain valuable property which is known to have been in his possession. When he learns what the value of that metal was, I fancy you may look for an explosion which may give you the leading facts before he has realized the position. Besides, there is the possibility that he gave away or sold the metal without any knowledge of its origin."

"So there is," agreed Miller, leaning back to laugh with more comfort, "in fact, it is quite probable. My eye! What a lark it will be! I shall go straight on from Fenchurch Street. Couldn't I persuade you to come with me and do some of the talking?"

Thorndyke required no persuading, nor did I, for the interview promised to be highly entertaining. Accordingly, the arrangement was made and the plan of campaign settled; and, on our arrival at the terminus, after a brief halt at the buffet for a sandwich and a glass of beer, we made our way to the tube railway, by which we were conveyed to the "Elephant and Castle."

"By the way," said I, as Miller struck out towards the Walworth Road, "I suppose you have got the address?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I got it from Bunter when he signed the statement. It's in East Street. I made a note of the number."

He brought out his note-book and glanced at it as we threaded our way through the multitude that thronged the pavement. Presently he turned to the left down a side street and walked on with his eyes on the numbers of the houses.

"This is the show," he said, at length, halting before a seedy-looking plumber's shop, the façade of which bore the inscription, 'A. Wallis.' "Shop looks as if it was open."

It was, technically, although the door was closed; but it yielded to a push, announcing the fact by the jangling of a bell, which brought a man out of the parlour at the back. Apparently, we had disturbed him at a meal, for his jaws were working as he came out, and he looked at us inquiringly without speaking. Perhaps "inquiringly" hardly expresses the kind of look that he gave us. It was a mere coincidence, but it happened that we were, all three, over six feet in height, and Miller, at least, looked a good deal like what he was.

The Superintendent opened the ball. "You are Mr. Bert Wallis, I think?"

Mr. Wallis nodded, chewing frantically. Finally, he bolted his mouthful and replied: "Yes, that's who I am. What about it?"

"My friend here, Br. Thorndyke, who is a lawyer, wants to make a few inquiries of you."

Mr. Wallis turned to Thorndyke but made no comment, having, apparently, some slight arrears to dispose of in the matter of chewing.

"My inquiries," said Thorndyke, "have reference to certain valuable property which came into your possession some time ago."

"Valuable property in my possession," said Wallis. "It's the first I have heard of it. What property are you talking about?"

"It is a quantity of metal," replied Thorndyke. "You had it from two men named Wicks and Bunter."

Wallis stared at Thorndyke for a few seconds; and, gradually, the look of apprehension faded from his countenance and gave place to one of amusement. His mouth extended laterally until it exhibited an undeniable grin.

"I know what you are talking about, now," he chuckled; "but you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick altogether. I'll tell you how it happened. Them two silly fools, Wicks and Bunter, thought they had got hold of some valuable stuff. I don't know what they thought it was, but they asked me to let them melt it down in my workshop. I didn't much like the idea of it, because I didn't know what stuff it was or how they had got it; but, as Bunter is my wife's brother and I knew Wicks, I didn't quite like to refuse. So I let them have the run of my workshop on a Sunday night when I was out, and they did the job. They melted down this here valuable stuff; and what do you suppose it turned out to be, after all?"

Thorndyke shook his head and waited for the answer.

"It was *lead*!" Wallis exclaimed with a triumphant giggle. "Just think of it! These two silly asses had put themselves to no end of trouble and expense to get hold of this stuff—I don't know how they did get hold of it—and when they come to melt it down, it was just lead, worth about twopence a pound! But, my aunt! Wasn't they blooming sick! You ought to have heard the language that Wicks used!"

The recollection of this anticlimax amused him so much that he laughed aloud and had perforce to wipe his eyes with a handkerchief which might once have been clean.

"And what became of this lead?" asked Thorndyke. "Did they take it away with them?"

"No," replied Wallis. "It wasn't no good to them. They just left it in the pots."

"And is it in your workshop still?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, it ain't. I sold it to a builder for five bob, which paid for the gas that they had used and left a bit over."

"Do you know what the builder wanted it for?"

"Said he wanted some lead for to fix some iron railings in their sockets."

"Did he take the whole of it?"

"Yes; he took the whole boiling of it, and a small roll of sheet lead as well. But the sheet wasn't included in the five bob."

"Do you mind telling us the name of this builder?" Thorndyke asked.

Wallis looked rather hard at Thorndyke, and the slightly apprehensive expression reappeared on his face.

"I don't see as his name is neither here nor there," said he. "What's all the fuss about? You was speaking of valuable property. Lead ain't valuable property."

"For legal reasons," said Thorndyke, "I wish to trace that lead and see where it went to. And there is no reason for you to be secret about it. The transaction between you and the builder was a perfectly lawful transaction; but I should like to ascertain from the builder exactly what he did with the lead."

The plumber was evidently still a little uneasy, but the question was so simple and straightforward that he could hardly refuse to answer.

"Well," he replied, grudgingly, "if you must know, the builder what I sold the lead to was my brother, Joe Wallis, what lives a couple of doors further up the street."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. Then, turning to Miller, he said: "That is all I wanted to know. Probably Mr. Joe Wallis will be able to help us a stage further. Is there anything that you want to ask?"

"No," replied Miller; "that seems to be all plain sailing. I don't think we need trouble Mr. Wallis any further."

With this, Thorndyke thanked the plumber for the assistance that he had given and we took our departure. As soon as we were outside, the Superintendent broke out into low-voiced self-congratulations—low-voiced—by reason of the fact that Mr. Wallis had taken his post at the shop door to observe our further movements.

"It was just as well," said Miller, "that you were able to get the information without letting the cat out of the bag. It has saved a lot of chin-wagging. But I expect we shan't have such an easy job with our friend Joseph. Bert had nothing to conceal; but Joseph must have been in the swim to some extent. This is his house."

The premises, which bore the superscription, "J. Wallis, Builder and Decorator," were divided into two parts, a carpenter's shop and an office. We entered the latter, and, as it was at the moment unoccupied, the Superintendent thumped on the counter with his stick; which brought out from some inner lair a very large youth of about eighteen who saluted us with an amiable grin.

"Dad in?" inquired Miller, making a chance shot; which was justified by the result, as the youth replied:

"Yes. What's it about?"

"This gentleman, Dr. Thorndyke, wants to see him on important legal business," Miller replied; whereupon the youth grinned again and retired. In about a minute he returned and requested us to "walk this way," indicating the direction by walking in advance. We followed him across a hail and up a flight of stairs to a door, which he opened, and, having seen us enter, once more departed.

The room was quite an interesting survival—a typical example of a Victorian tradesman's drawing room, with the typical close, musty smell. As we entered, I noticed that Thorndyke cast his eyes down and then took a quick glance at the window. But there was no time for detailed observation, for we were almost immediately followed by a man whom I judged from his stature and a certain family resemblance to be "Dad." But the resemblance did not extend to the amiable grin. On the contrary, the newcomer viewed us with an expression compounded of a sort of foxy curiosity and a perceptible tinge of hostility.

"Which of you is Dr. Thorndyke?" he inquired.

My colleague introduced himself, and the inevitable question followed.

"And who are these other two gentlemen?"

"This," replied Miller, indicating me, "is Dr. Jervis, also a lawyer; and"—here he produced a professional card and pushed it across an 'occasional table,' "that's who I am."

Mr. Wallis studied the card for a few moments, and the hostility of his expression became more pronounced.

Nevertheless, he said with gruff civility: "Well, you may as well sit down," and gave us a lead by sitting down, himself, in an arm-chair.

"Now," said he, "what's this important legal business?"

"It is concerned," said Thorndyke, "with certain property which came into your hands and which you had from your brother, Albert Wallis."

"Property what I had from my brother Albert Wallis!" our friend repeated in obviously genuine surprise. "I haven't had no property from him. What do you mean?"

"I am referring to certain pieces of metal which you bought from him about three months ago."

Mr. Joseph continued to stare at Thorndyke for some seconds.

"Pieces of metal!" he repeated, at length. "I haven't bought no pieces of metal from him, You've made a mistake."

"The metal that I am referring to," said Thorndyke, "consisted of a roll of sheet lead and some remainders from melting-pots."

"Gawd!" exclaimed Joseph, contemptuously, "you don't call that property, do you? I gave him five bob for the lot, and that was more than it was worth."

"So I understood," said Thorndyke. "But we have reasons for wishing to trace that metal. We have managed to trace it to you, and we should be greatly obliged if you would tell us what has become of it, supposing it not to be still in your possession."

At this persistence on Thorndyke's part, the hostility expressed in Joseph's countenance became tinged with unmistakeable uneasiness. Nevertheless, he answered truculently enough:

"I don't see what business it is of yours what I do with the material that I buy. But, if you must know, I used that sheet lead for making a damp-course, and the other stuff for fixing some iron railings in a stone kerb."

"Then," said Miller, "somebody has got some pretty valuable iron railings."

Wallis looked at him inquiringly, and from him to Thorndyke.

"Perhaps," said the latter, "I had better explain. Some time ago, two men, one of whom was named Wicks, stole a case containing a quantity of platinum from the cloak room at Fenchurch Street. They took it to the house of your brother Albert, who, not knowing what it was, or anything about it, allowed them to melt it down in his workshop. But, when they had melted it down, they did not recognize it. They thought it was lead, and that they had taken the wrong case. So they left the lumps in the melting-pots for your brother to do what he pleased with. But he, also, did not recognize the metal. He, also, thought that it was lead; and he sold the whole consignment to you for five shillings. And I take it that you, like the others, mistook it for lead."

Mr. Wallis had suddenly become attentive and interested.

"Certainly, I took it for lead," said he. "And you say it was platinum. That's rather expensive stuff, isn't it?"

"The little lot," said Miller, "that you bought for five shillings has been valued at just under eighteen thousand pounds."

That "knocked him," as they say in the Old Kent Road, For some seconds he sat speechless, clutching the arms of his chair and staring at Miller as if he had been some dreadful apparition.

"Eighteen thousand pounds!" he exclaimed, at length, in something approaching a screech. "Eighteen—thousand—pounds! And to think—"

"Yes," said Miller, "to think of those iron railings. We shall have to see that you don't go rooting them up."

Mr. Wallis made no reply. As with the dying gladiator, "his thoughts were far away," and I had little doubt whither they had strayed. I do not profess to be a thought-reader; but the expression on Joseph's face conveyed clearly to me that he had, in that moment, decided, as soon as the night fell, to make a bee-line for Josiah Pippet's vault. His reverie was interrupted by Thorndyke.

"So, Mr. Wallis," said he, "you will understand our natural anxiety to find out where this metal went to."

"But I've told you," said Wallis, rousing himself from dreams of sudden opulence, "so far as I can recollect, that I used the stuff to plant some iron railings."

As we seemed to have got into a blind alley, the Superintendent abruptly changed his tone.

"Never mind about those iron railings," he said, sharply. "We want to know what you did with that stuff. Are you going to tell us?"

"I have told you," Wallis replied doggedly. "You can't expect me to remember what I did with every bit of lead that I bought."

"Very well," said Miller, "then perhaps it might help your memory if we were to do a bit of supposing. What do you say?"

"You can if you like," Joseph replied, sulkily, "so long as you don't ask me to help you."



"Now, Wallis," said Miller, "you've got to bear this in mind. Those two fools didn't know this stuff when they had got it in their hands, and neither did you or Bert. But there were other people who knew what was in that case. Bassett, the man who murdered Wicks, knew, because he put the stuff in the Case. And there was another man, a very artful gentleman, who kept out of sight but who knew all about it. We mustn't mention names, so we will just call him Mr. Rumbler, because he rumbled what had happened."

"Now, supposing this Mr. Rumbler, knowing where the stuff had been left by those two gabeys, had a bright idea for getting hold of it without showing his hand. Supposing he went to a certain undertaker whose place was close to Bert's and pitched him a yarn about wanting a dummy coffin weighted with lead. Supposing he employed him to make that coffin, knowing that he would be certain to get his lead from Bert, and plant it in a nice convenient vault in a disused burial ground—say, somewhere out Stratford way—where he could get at it easily with a big skeleton key and a tommy to turn it with. How's that? Mind you, I am only supposing."

As Miller recited his fable, a cloud fell on Mr. Wallis's countenance. The dream of sudden opulence was dissipated. The resurrection job was obviously "off." But, glum as the expression of Joseph's face became, the effect produced was not quite the one on which Miller had based his calculations.

"If you know where the coffin is," was the natural comment, "why don't you go and open it and take the stuff out?"

"Because," Miller replied, impressively, "the stuff isn't there. Somebody has had the coffin open and taken it out."

Even this did not answer. Wallis looked sulky enough, but he had not gorged the bait.

"I don't believe there is any coffin," said he. "You've just invented it to try to get me to say something."

I detected an expression of grim amusement on Thorndyke's face. Perhaps he was contrasting—as I was—Miller's present proceedings with the lofty standard of veracity among police officers that he had presented to Bunter. But I was also aware of some signs of impatience. As a matter of fact, all these artful probings on Miller's part were getting us nowhere. Moreover, we had really ascertained nearly all that we wanted to know.

"Perhaps," said Thorndyke, "as I am not a police officer, I may venture to be a little more explicit with Mr. Wallis. We are not interested in the present whereabouts of this platinum. We know where it is; but we want to know exactly how it got there. As to the coffin, we have evidence that it was made by you, Mr. Wallis, and planted by you in the vault. But this coffin was made to some person's order, and we want to know with certainty who that person is. At present, our information is to the effect that it was made to the order of a Mr. Gimbley, a solicitor who resides in the neighbourhood of Kennington. But Mr. Gimbley has managed to keep, to some extent, out of sight and put the whole responsibility on you. Even the dust that was found in the vault was your dust. It came from this very room."

At this latter statement, Wallis started visibly, and so did Miller.

"Yes, by Jove!" the latter exclaimed, after a glance at the floor and another at the window, "here is the identical carpet that you described in court, and there are the blue cotton curtains."

"So you see, Mr. Wallis," Thorndyke continued, "you have nothing to conceal respecting the coffin. The facts are known to us. The question is, are you prepared to tell us the name of the person to whose order this coffin was made?"

"If you know his name," was the reply, "you don't want me to tell you."

"Your evidence," said Thorndyke, "would save us a good deal of trouble, and perhaps it might save you some trouble, too. Are you prepared to tell us who this person was?"

"No," was the dogged reply. "I'm not going to tell you nothing. The least said the soonest mended. I don't know nothing about any coffin, and I don't believe there ever was any coffin."

At this reply Miller's face hardened, and I think he was about to pursue the matter farther; but Thorndyke calmly and civilly brought the interview to a close.

"Well, Mr. Wallis," said he, "you must do as you think best. I feel that you would have been wiser to have been more open with us; but we cannot compel you to give us information which you choose to withhold."

With this, he rose, and Miller reluctantly followed suit, looking distinctly sulky. But nothing further was said until, shepherded by our host, we had descended to the office and had been thence launched into the street. Then Miller made his protest.

"I think, Doctor," said he, "that it is a pity you didn't let me play him a little longer. I believe he would have let on if we had kept rubbing into him that he had been used as a cat's paw by Gimbley to get hold of that platinum."

"I don't think he would," said Thorndyke. "He is an obstinate man, and he evidently doesn't like the idea of turning upon his employer; and we can hardly blame him for that. But, after all, Miller, what would have been the use of going on with him? We have got a complete train of evidence. We have got Bunter's written and signed statement that he left the platinum in Bert Wallis's workshop. We have got Bert Wallis's statement, made before witnesses, that he sold the stuff to his brother Joe Wallis. We have got Joe Wallis's statement, made before witnesses, that he bought the stuff from Bert. We know that Joe is a coffin maker, and that the stuff was found in a coffin, together with certain dust which came from a room which was identical in character with Joe Wallis's drawing room. The agreement is complete, even without the dust."

"So it is," Miller agreed; "but it proves the wrong thing. We can fix this job on Joseph all right. But it isn't Joseph that we want. He is only the jackal; but we want the lion—Gimble. And if Joseph won't talk, we've got no direct evidence against Gimble."

Thorndyke shook his head. "You are magnifying the difficulties, Miller," said he. "I don't know what you, or the Public Prosecutor, may propose to do; but I can tell you what I am going to do, if you don't. I am going to lay a sworn information charging Gimble with having conspired with Joseph Wallis to commit certain fraudulent acts including the manufacture of false evidence, calculated and intended to defeat the ends of justice. We have enough evidence to convict him without any assistance from Wallis; but I think you will find that Joseph, when he discovers that he is involved in a fraud of which he knew nothing, will be far from willing to share the burden of that fraud with Gimble. I think you can take it that Joseph will tell all that he knows (and perhaps a little more) when we begin to turn the screw. At any rate, I am quite satisfied with my case against Gimble."

"Well, Doctor," said Miller in a less gloomy tone, "if you see your way to a conviction, I have nothing more to say. It's all I want."

Here the subject dropped; and the effect of the sandwiches having by this time worn off, we agreed with one accord to seek some reputable place of entertainment to make up the arrears in the matter of nourishment. As those arrears were somewhat considerable, the settling of them occupied our whole attention for a time; and it was not until our cravings had been satisfied and the stage of coffee and pipes had been reached that Miller suddenly raised a question which I had been expecting, and which I had secretly decided to raise, myself, at the first opportunity.

"By the way, Doctor," said he, "what about that head in the box? All these alarms and excursions in chase of that blooming platinum had driven it out of my head. But, now that we have done with the metal, at least for the present, supposing we have a word about the box. From the questions that you put to Bunter, it is clear to me that you have given the matter more attention than I had supposed; and it is obvious that you know something. I wonder how much you know."

"Not very much," replied Thorndyke; "but I shall probably know more when I have made a few inquiries. You are so far right that I have given the affair some attention, though not a great deal. But when I heard of the discovery in the cloak room, and afterwards read the account of the inquest, I formed certain opinions—quite speculatively, of course—as to what the incident probably meant; and I even formed a still more speculative opinion as to the identity of one, at least, of the persons who might be concerned in the affair. Bunter's account of the passenger with the parcel seemed to agree with my hypothesis, and his answers to my questions seemed to support my identification of the person. That is all. Of actual, definite knowledge I have none."

"And your opinions," said Miller, a trifle sourly, "I suppose you are going to keep to yourself."

"For the present, I propose to," Thorndyke replied, suavely. "You can see, from what Bunter said, that the affair is of no importance to you. If a crime has been committed, it has not been committed within your jurisdiction. But leave the matter in my hands for a little longer. I believe that I shall be able to elucidate it; and you know that you can depend on me to keep nothing from you that ought, as a matter of public policy, to be communicated to you."

"Yes, I know that," Miller admitted, grudgingly, "and I see that the case is not what we supposed it to be. Very well, Doctor. Have it your own way, but let us have the information as soon as it is available."

Thorndyke made the required promise; and, if the Superintendent was not as satisfied as he professed to be, it was only because, like me, he was devoured with curiosity as to what the solution of the mystery might be.

---

## XVIII. — THE END OF THE CASE AND OTHER MATTERS

THE proceedings in the Probate Court at the third hearing of the Winsborough Peerage Case were brief but somewhat dramatic. As soon as the judge had taken his seat, Mr. McGonnell rose and addressed him to the following effect:

"I have, this morning, my lord, to bring to your lordship's notice certain facts which would seem to make it unnecessary to proceed with the case which has been before the court. That case was an application by Mr. Christopher Pippet for permission to presume the death of Percy Engleheart, Sixth Earl of Winsborough. Now, in the interval since the last hearing, information has reached the Earl's representatives that the said Earl Percy died about three years ago."

"You say 'about' three years ago," said the judge.

"The exact date, my lord, has not been ascertained, and is not, apparently, ascertainable, but it is believed that the Earl's death took place some time in March, 1918. The uncertainty, however, relates only to the time when the death occurred; of the fact that it did occur there appears to be no doubt at all. I understand that the body has been recovered and identified and is being sent to England. These facts were communicated to me by Mr. Brodribb; and perhaps the Earl's representatives might more properly inform your lordship as to the exact circumstances in which the Earl's death occurred."

Here McGonnell sat down and Anstey took up the tale.

"The tidings of the Earl's death, my lord, were conveyed to us in a letter written by a certain Major Pitt at Pará and dated

the 13th of last October. The facts set forth in that letter were briefly these:

"In the latter part of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, Major Pitt and the Earl were travelling together in the neighbourhood of the River Amazon, shooting, collecting and exploring. About the middle of January, 1918, the Earl announced his intention to explore the tract of country inhabited by the Munderucu Indians; and, as Major Pitt had planned a journey along the main stream of the Amazon, they separated and went their respective ways. That was the last time that Major Pitt saw the Earl alive, and for three years he had no knowledge of the Earl's whereabouts or what he was doing. The Major, himself, made a long journey and was several times laid up for long periods with severe attacks of fever. It was not until the spring of the present year that he, at last, got tidings as to what had befallen his friend. Then, taking the Munderucu country on his way back to the coast, he learned from some natives that a white man had come to the country some three years previously and had died from fever soon after his arrival, which would be about March, 1918.

"On this, Major Pitt made more particular inquiries, the result of which was to leave no doubt that the man who had died could be none other than the Earl Percy. However, the Major, realizing the importance of accurate information, not only assembled the dead man's effects—a considerable part of which he was able to recover, and which he was, of course, able to identify—but he went so far as to cause the body to be disinterred. Naturally, it was, in the ordinary sense, unrecognizable; but by the stature and by certain characters, particularly the teeth, some of which had been filled with gold, he was able to identify it with certainty as the body of Earl Percy.

"But, to make assurance doubly sure, he commissioned the natives—who have great skill in preserving bodies—to preserve this corpse, in so far as there was anything to preserve, so that it could be sent to England for further examination if such examination should seem necessary or expedient. But the Major's description of the body, the clothing, the weapons, scientific instruments and other effects, together with the natives' description of the man, the time of his arrival, and all the other circumstances, leave no doubt whatever that this man was really the Earl Percy."

"In that case," said the judge, "if the fact of the Earl's death is to be accepted as proved, the application for permission to presume death necessarily lapses, automatically. And the applicant's claim to be the heir presumptive also lapses. He will now claim to be the heir; and that claim will have to be preferred in another place."

"I understand, my lord," said McGonnell, "that it is not proposed to proceed with the claim. That is what I am informed by Mr. Pippet."

The judge glanced at the vacant solicitors' table and then asked:

"Was that decision reached on the advice of his solicitor?"

"No, my lord. Mr. Gimbler is not in court, and, I believe, is absent from his residence. I understand that he has been unexpectedly called away from home."

The judge received this piece of information with an inscrutable face.

"It is not for me to express an opinion," he remarked, "as to whether Mr. Pippet is well or ill advised to abandon his claim; but I may point out that the crucial question is still in suspense. According to the evidence which we have heard, the coffin which was examined was not the coffin of Josiah Pippet, and, consequently, the question whether the funeral was a real or a sham funeral has not been settled. It is unfortunate that that important issue should have been confused by what look like highly irregular proceedings; concerning which I may say that they will call for further investigation and that I shall consider it my duty to hand the papers in this case to the Director of Public Prosecutions."

This rather ominous observation brought the proceedings to an end; and, as we were no longer litigants, the whole party trooped out of the court to gather in the great hail for more or less friendly, unofficial discussion. Mr. Pippet was the first to speak.

"His lordship," he remarked, "was extremely delicate in his language. I should call the proceedings in regard to that coffin something more than irregular."

"His lordship," McGonnell remarked, "was probably bearing in mind that all the facts are not known. He, no doubt, has his suspicions as to what has happened and who is responsible; but, until the suspicions have been verified, it is as well not to be too explicit in assigning responsibility to individuals."

Mr. Pippet smiled grimly. "It is well for you to say that, Mr. McGonnell," said he, "seeing that both you and I are involved in those suspicions. But I am not inclined to take this business lying down, if you are. Gimbler was acting as my agent and I suppose I am responsible for whatever he chose to do, ostensibly in my interests. But I presume I have some remedy. Is it possible for me to prosecute him? You are my legal adviser. I put the question to you. What remedy have I for being involved in this discreditable affair?"

Mr. McGonnell looked uncomfortable, as well he might, for he was in an unpleasant position in more than one respect. After a few moments' reflection, he replied:

"I have as little reason as you have to be pleased with the turn of events. If a fraud has been committed in this case, that will not enhance my professional reputation. But I must again remind you that we have not got all the facts. It does certainly appear as if that coffin had been tampered with; and if it had, the responsibility lies between you and me and Mr. Gimbler. Evidently, the suspicion lies principally on Gimbler. But, having regard to the fact that a quantity of stolen property—which was certainly not his—was found in the coffin, there is a clear possibility that the coffin may have been

tampered with by some persons for their own purposes and without his knowledge. We have to bear that in mind before we make any direct accusations.”

“That is a very ingenious suggestion,” said Mr. Pippet, “but it doesn’t seem to commend itself to me. I should leave it to him to prove, if he can.”

McGonnell shook his head. “That is not the position, at all, Mr. Pippet,” said he. “If you assert that Gimbler planted a sham coffin in the vault, it will be for you to prove that he did, not for him to prove that he did not. But I think that you had better take the advice of a solicitor on the subject, or, at any rate, of some lawyer other than me. You will understand that I shall naturally be reluctant to be the first to set up a hue and cry after a man who has been my colleague in this case. If he has committed a fraud, I hope that he will receive the punishment that he will have deserved; but I should rather that some hand other than mine delivered the blow.”

“I understand and respect your point of view,” said Pippet, “but it leaves me high and dry without any legal guidance.”

Here Thorndyke interposed. “If I might venture to offer you a word of advice, Mr. Pippet,” said he, “it would be that you do nothing at all. If any offence against the law has been committed, you may rely on the proper authorities to take the necessary measures.”

“But suppose they regard me as the offender?”

“When you are accused, it will be time to take measures of defence. At present, no one is accusing you—at least, I think I may say so. Am I right, Superintendent?” he asked, turning to Miller, who had been unostentatiously listening to the conversation.

The Superintendent was guarded in his reply. “Speaking personally,” said he, “I am certainly not accusing Mr. Pippet of any complicity in this fraud, if there has really been a fraud. Later, I may have to apply to him for some information as to his relations with Mr. Gimbler; but that is in the future. For the present, your advice to him is the best. Just wait and see what happens.”

“And meanwhile,” said Thorndyke, “if it appears that Mr. Gimbler has withdrawn himself from among us permanently, I am sure that Mr. Brodribb will consent to take charge of your affairs so far as recovery of documents and other winding up details are concerned.”

To this, Brodribb agreed readily, to Mr. Pippet’s evident relief.

“Then,” said the latter, “as we have disposed of business matters, I am going to propose that we make up a little luncheon party to celebrate the end of the Winsborough Peerage Case. I’d like to have the whole crowd, but I suspect that there are one or two who will cry off.”

His suspicions were confirmed on particular inquiry. McGonnell had business at the Central Criminal Court; Mrs. Engleheart and Miss Pippet had some secret mission, the nature of which they refused to divulge, and Anstey had other legal fish to fry.

“Am I to have the pleasure of your lordship’s company at lunch?” Pippet inquired, fixing a twinkling eye on Mr. Giles, and obviously convinced that he was not.

Giles laughed, knowingly. “I should have been delighted,” said he, “to lunch with my noble cousin, or uncle, or whatever he is, but I have an engagement with another noble cousin. I am taking Jenny to the Zoo to show her the new chimpanzee, and we shall get our lunch on the way.”

Mr. Pippet shook his head resignedly and turned to the faithful few, consisting of Thorndyke, Brodribb Miller and myself, and suggested an immediate adjournment. Thorndyke and I retired to the robing room to divest ourselves of our legal war-paint, and, on emerging, rejoined the party at the main gate, where two taxis were already waiting, and were forthwith conveyed to Mr. Pippet’s hotel.

Throughout these proceedings and those of the subsequent luncheon, I was aware of a rather curious feeling of pleased surprise at our host’s attitude and apparent state of mind. Especially did I admire the sporting spirit in which he accepted his defeat. He was not in the least cast down; and, apart from the discreditable incidents in the conduct of the case, he appeared perfectly satisfied with the result. But the oddest thing to me was his friendly and even deferential attitude towards Thorndyke. A stranger, unacquainted with the circumstances, might have supposed my colleague to be the leading counsel who had achieved a notable victory for Mr. Pippet, instead of an expert witness who had, vulgarly speaking, “put the kybosh” on Mr. Pippet’s case. Any pique that he might, quite naturally, have felt seemed to be swallowed up by a keen sporting interest in the manner in which he had been defeated; and I was not surprised when, as the luncheon approached the coffee and cigar stage, he began to put out feelers for more detailed information.

“This trial,” said he, “has been to me an education and an entertainment. I’ve enjoyed every bit of it, and I’m only sorry that we missed the judge’s summing-up and reasoned decision. But the real tit-bit of the entertainment was Dr. Thorndyke’s evidence. What delighted me was the instantaneous way in which every move in the game was spotted and countered. Those screws, now; it was all obvious enough when it was explained. But the astonishing thing was that, not only was the character of those screws observed, but the significance of that character appreciated in a moment. I want you to tell me, Doctor, how you manage to keep your eyes perpetually skinned, and your brain skinned at the same time.”

Thorndyke smiled appreciatively as he thoughtfully filled his pipe.

"You are giving me more credit than is due, Mr. Pippet," said he. "You are assuming that certain reactions were instantaneous which were, in fact, quite deliberate, and that certain deceptive appearances were exhibited to unprepared eyes whereas they had been carefully considered in advance. I have no doubt that the person who prepared the evidence made a similar mistake."

"But," objected Mr. Pippet, "I don't see how you could consider in advance things that you didn't know were going to happen."

"It is possible to consider in advance," Thorndyke replied, "those circumstances which may conceivably arise as well as those which will certainly arise. You seem to think that the little surprise packets which the manipulator of evidence devised for our undoing found us all unprepared. That was certainly the intention of the manipulator; but it was very far from what actually happened."

"Why call him 'the manipulator'?" Mr. Pippet protested. "His name is Horatio Gimbler, and we all know it."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "then we will throw legal caution to the winds and call him Gimbler. Now, as I said, Gimbler made his little arrangements, expecting that they would come on us with all the charm of novelty and find us unprepared to give them that exhaustive consideration which would be necessary to ascertain their real nature, but which would be impossible in the course of proceedings in court. He would assume that, whatever vague suspicions we might have, there would be neither the time nor the opportunity to test the visible facts presented. What he had overlooked was the possibility that the other players might try the moves over in advance. But this is exactly what I did. Would it interest you to have some details of my procedure?"

"It would interest me very much," Brodribb interposed, "for, as you know, I sat on the bird-lime like a lamb—if you will pardon the mixed metaphor. Perhaps I might say 'like a fool' and be nearer the mark."

"I hope you won't, Mr. Brodribb," said Pippet, "because the description would include the lot of us, except the Doctor. But I am sure we should all like to hear how that rascal, Gimbler, was unmasked."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "let us begin by noting what our position was. This was a claim advanced by an unknown person to a title and some extremely valuable property. The claimant was an American, but there was nothing significant in that. All Americans of English origin have, of course, English ancestors. What was significant was the fact that this stranger had elected to employ a police court solicitor to conduct his case. Taking all the circumstances together, there was quite a fair probability that the claim was a false claim; and if that were so, we should have to be on the look-out for false evidence."

"That was my function in the case; to watch the evidence, particularly in regard to the physical characteristics of any objects produced as 'exhibits' or put in evidence. The purely legal business was in the hands of Mr. Brodribb and Mr. Anstey, whereas I was a sort of Devil's Advocate, in an inverted sense, concerned, not with the legal issues, but with illegal attempts to tamper with the evidence. Now, in the criminal department of my practice, I have been in the habit, from the first, of using what I may call a synthetic method. In investigating a known or suspected crime, my custom has been to put myself in the criminal's place and ask myself what are the possible methods of committing that crime, and, of the possible methods, which would be the best; how, in fact, I should go about committing that crime, myself. Having worked out in detail the most suitable procedure, I then change over from the synthetic to the analytic method and consider all the inherent weaknesses and defects of the method, and the means by which it would be possible to detect the crime."

"That is what I did in the present case. I began by assuming that wherever the evidence was insufficient or adverse, that evidence would be falsified."

"Sounds a bit uncharitable," Mr. Pippet remarked, with a smile.

"Not at all," retorted Thorndyke. "There was no accusation. It was merely a working hypothesis which I communicated to nobody. If there had been no falsification, nothing would ever have been said and nobody would ever have known that the possibility had been entertained. But supposing falsification to be attempted, what form would it take? Apart from mere oral tradition and rumour, the value of which the judge would be able to assess, there was very little evidence. Of real, demonstrable evidence there were only two items—the diary and the coffin. Let us take the diary first. In what respects was falsification of the diary possible?"

"There were two possibilities. The entire diary might be a fabrication. This was extremely unlikely. There were seven volumes, extending over a great number of years. The fabrication of such a diary would be a gigantic and very difficult task. Still, it was possible; but if the diary was in fact a fabrication from beginning to end, the falsification would almost certainly have been the work of the claimant, himself. But when one considers that the latest volume of this diary was alleged to have been written eighty years ago, it is obvious that the difficulties surrounding the production of a new work which could possibly be passed off as genuine would be practically insurmountable. I need not consider those difficulties or the means by which the fraud could be detected, since the case did not arise. On inspection, it was obvious that the diary was a genuine document."

"The second possibility was the insertion of a false entry; and this was not only quite practicable but, in the known circumstances, not very improbable. The question was, therefore, supposing a false entry to be inserted, would that entry have any special characteristics for which one could be on the look-out? And the answer was that it almost certainly would."

"As to the forgery, itself; it would certainly be a good forgery. For, if it had been executed by the claimant, it would have to be good enough to satisfy Mr. Gimbler. That gentleman was too experienced a lawyer to attempt to pass off an

indifferent forgery in a court of law. But if it were not the work of the claimant, it would have to be produced either by Gimpler, himself, or under his superintendence. In either case it would certainly be a first-class forgery; and, as the passage would probably be quite short—possibly only a few words—it would be almost impossible to detect by mere examination of the written characters. In a short passage, the forger's attention need never flag, and no effects of fatigue would become apparent. The forger could try it over and over again until he could execute it perfectly. But in such a case, even the greatest experts—such as Osborn, in America, or Mitchell or Lucas in this country—could give no more than a guarded opinion. For, however eminent an expert may be, he cannot detect differences that do not exist.

“But if the imitation of the hand-writing were too good for detection to be possible, were there any other, extrinsic, characters that we could be on the look-out for? Evidently, by the nature of the case, there must be three. First, if a passage were inserted, it would have to be inserted where insertion was possible; that is to say, in a blank space. Accordingly, we should have to keep a look-out for blank spaces. And, if those blank spaces were of any considerable size, we should look for the interpolated passage or passages either at the beginning or end of the blank space or spaces.

“The second character of an interpolated passage would be the matter contained in it. It would contain some matter of high evidential value which was not contained in any of the genuine entries; for, if it did not, there would be no object in inserting it. As to the nature of this matter; since the crucial issue in this case was whether the two persons, Josiah and the Earl, were one and the same person, an interpolated passage would almost certainly contain matter supporting the belief that they were.

“The third character would be an unavoidable difference between the ink used for the forgery and that used by the writer of the genuine entries. They could not be the same unless the writer of the diary had elected to use carbon ink; which was infinitely improbable, and, in fact was not the case. If he used ordinary writing ink—the iron-gall ink of the period—that ink would have become changed in the course of over eighty years. The original black tannate or gallate of iron would have become converted into the faint reddish-brown of the oxide of iron. Now, the forged writing would have to imitate the colour of this old writing. But a new ink of the same colour as the old would necessarily be of a different chemical composition. Probably it would contain no iron, but would be one of the modern brown drawing inks, treated to match the colour exactly.

“In this difference of chemical composition would lie the means of detecting and exposing the forgery. A chemical test would probably be objected to, though it could be insisted on if the forgery were definitely challenged. But, for the reasons that I gave in my evidence, a photograph would be nearly certain to demonstrate the difference in the chemical composition of the ink. And to a photograph there could be no objection.

“Thus, you see, the whole matter had been examined in advance, so that, if a forgery should be offered in evidence, we knew exactly what it would be like. And when it did appear, it corresponded perfectly with the hypothetical forgery. We heard McGonnell read out, in his opening statement, a number of quotations from the diary, all very vague and unconvincing; and then, at the end, a single short entry of an entirely different character, explicitly implying the identity of the two persons, Josiah and the Earl. Here was one of the characters of the possible forgery; and when Anstey had elicited in cross-examination that neither you nor your sister had seen it before the book went into the hands of Mr. Gimpler, it became a probable forgery. Then, on inspection, it was seen to have another of the postulated characters; it was at the end of a blank space. Finally, on closer examination, it was found to have the third character; it was written in an ink which was different from that used in the rest of the diary.

“So much for the forgery. In the case of the coffin a similar method was used. I put myself in Gimpler's place and considered the best way in which to carry out the substitution.”

“But,” objected Mr. Pippet, “Gimpler had never suggested any examination of the coffin. On the contrary he had decided to avoid any reference to an examination until the case went to the House of Lords. I thought he was giving that coffin as wide a berth as he could.”

“Exactly,” said Thorndyke. “That was the impression that he managed to convey to us all. And it was that which made me suspect strongly that a substitution was intended. It looked to me like a very subtle and admirable tactical manoeuvre. For, you see, the examination could not be avoided. It was impossible to burke the coffin, and Gimpler knew it. Not only was it the one piece of definite and undeniable evidence in the case; it contained the means of settling conclusively the whole issue that was before the court. If Gimpler did not produce the coffin, himself, it would certainly be demanded by the other side or by the judge.

“But now observe the subtlety of Gimpler's tactics. The crude thing to do would have been to make the substitution and then apply for an order of the court to have the coffin examined. But in that case, the coffin would have been approached by the other side with a certain amount of suspicion, and minutely scrutinized. But when Gimpler seemed to have been taken by surprise, and to agree reluctantly to the examination of the coffin, the suspicion that he had got it all ready and prepared for the examination would be unlikely to arise. ‘The other side’ would be caught off their guard.”

“Yes, by Jove!” chuckled Brodribb, “and so they were. I was quite shocked and embarrassed when I saw you sniffing round that coffin and openly showing that you suspected a fraud; and McGonnell was really and genuinely indignant.”

“Yes,” said Pippet, “he very much resented the implied doubt as to his good faith, and I must admit that I thought the Doctor a trifle over-sceptical. But don't let me interrupt. I want to hear how you anticipated so exactly what Gimpler would do.”

"As I said," Thorndyke resumed, "it was by putting myself in Gimpler's place and considering how I should go about making this substitution. There were two possible methods. One was to open the old coffin and take out the body, if there was one there; the other was to prepare a new coffin to look like an old one. The first method was much the better if it could have been properly carried out. But there were one or two serious difficulties. In the first place, there would, presumably, have been a corpse to dispose of, and the operators might have objected to handling it. But the most serious objection was the possibility of a mishap in opening the coffin. It was an old coffin, and the wood might be extensively decayed. If, in the process of opening it, the lid should have broken or some other damage should have been done, the fraud would have been hopelessly exposed. For no repair would be possible. But in any case, an ancient coffin could not have been opened without leaving some plainly visible traces.

"The second plan had several advantages. The new coffin could be prepared at leisure and thoroughly examined, and the proceedings on the spot could be quite short. You remember that there is, adjoining the burial ground, a stable yard with an empty cart shed in which a van could be housed while the substitution was being made. There would be little more to do than drive into the yard, exchange the coffins and drive away again. I considered both plans in detail and eventually decided that the second one was the one that would be more probably adopted.

"Now, suppose that it was; what would the exact procedure be, and what pit-falls lay in wait for the operators? What would they have to do, and what mistakes would they probably make in doing it? In the first place, the coffin would pretty certainly be made by a regular coffin-maker; and the chances were a hundred to one, or more, that he would use modern screws and try to produce the appearance of age by rusting them. If he did, the coffin would be definitely labelled as a fabrication beyond any possible dispute.

"Then there was the sheet-lead. What he would put in would most probably be modern, silver-free milled lead, whereas the original would almost certainly have been cast sheet. Still, he might have got some old sheet lead; and in any case the discrepancy would not have been conclusive or very convincing to the judge. We could not have given a definite date, as in the case of the screws.

"The next pit-fall would be the dust. In that vault, everything would be covered with a mantle of dust of eighty years' growth. But if once that dust were disturbed—as it necessarily would be in moving the coffin—there would be no possibility of obliterating the marks of disturbance. There would be nothing for it but to sweep the vault out clean and blow in a fresh supply of dust which would settle down in a smooth and even layer. And there one could confidently expect that a serious mistake would be made. To most persons, dust is just simply dust; a material quite devoid of individual character. Few people realize consciously that dust is merely a collection of particles detached from larger bodies, and that when those particles are magnified by the microscope, they reveal themselves as recognizable fragments of those bodies. If our friends blew dust into the vault, it would be dust that had been collected *ad hoc* and would be demonstrably the wrong sort of dust.

"That was how I reasoned the matter out in advance; and you will see that, when I came to the vault, all that I had to do was to note whether the appearances were normal or whether they corresponded to the false appearances which were already in my mind. As soon as I saw the screws, the question was answered. It remained only to look for additional details of evidence such as the dust and anything that might be distinctive in the character of the lead."

"The platinum, I take it," said Pippet, "had not been included in your forecast?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "That was a free gift of Providence. It came as a complete surprise; and I might easily have missed it but for the rule that I have made to let nothing pass without examination. In accordance with this routine procedure, I took up each piece of lead and inspected it to see if it showed any peculiarities by which it would be possible to date it. As soon as I lifted the first lump of platinum alloy, I realized that Providence had delivered the gay deceiver into our hands."

"Yes," said Pippet, "that was a stroke of pure luck. But it wasn't necessary. I can see that your method of playing a trial game over in advance—of ascertaining what your adversary may do, instead of waiting to see what he does do—brings you to the table with all the trumps up your sleeve, ready to be produced if the chance occurs."

He reflected awhile, stirring his coffee thoughtfully, and, apparently turning something over in his mind. At length, he looked up at Thorndyke and disclosed the subject of his cogitations.

"You have told us, Doctor," said he, "that you got this vanishing coffin stunt worked out in advance in all its details. But there is one little matter that you have not referred to, and it happens to be one which interests me a good deal. I am wondering what has become of Josiah. It may seem only a matter of sentiment; but he was my grandfather, and I feel that it is up to me to see him put back in his proper residence in accordance with his wishes and the arrangements which he made during his life. Now, did the advance scheme that you drew up include any plans for disposing of Josiah?"

"Certainly," replied Thorndyke, "Assuming a new coffin to be used, the disposal of the old one was an important part of the problem; important to those who had to carry out the proceedings, and to us who had to prove that they had been carried out. The recovery and production of the old coffin would be conclusive evidence for the prosecution."

"Well, now," said Pippet, "tell us how you proposed to dispose of Josiah and how you intend to go about getting him back."

"There were two possible methods," said Thorndyke, "of getting rid of the old coffin. First, since a van or cart must have been used to bring the new coffin to the vault, it would have been available to take the old one away. This would have been

a bad method, both for the plotters and for us; for it would have left them with the coffin on their hands, and us with the task of finding out where it had been hidden. So we will leave it until we have dealt with the more obvious and reasonable plan. I did not propose to bring the coffin away at all."

"You don't mean that you proposed to bury it?" said Pippet.

"No," replied Thorndyke. "There was no need to. You have forgotten the arrangement of the place. There were six vaults, each secured only by a large, simple lock. Now, our friends must have had a big, strong skeleton key to open Josiah's vault. With the same key they could have opened any of the other vaults; and there was a perfectly excellent and convenient hiding-place."

"Gee!" chuckled Mr. Pippet. "That's a quaint idea! To think that, while we were poring over that dummy coffin, Josiah, himself, was quietly reposing next door! But I guess you are right, Doctor; and the question is, what are you going to do about it?"

Thorndyke looked at the Superintendent.

"It is your move, Miller," said he. "You have got the skeleton key, and you have the Home Office authority."

"That is all very well," Miller replied, cautiously, "but the judge's order doesn't authorize us to break into any of the other vaults."

"The judge's order," said Thorndyke, "doesn't say anything about a particular vault. It authorizes and directs you to open and examine the coffin of Josiah Pippet. But you haven't done anything of the sort. You opened the wrong coffin. You have not complied with the judge's order, and it is your duty to do so without delay."

Miller grinned and glanced knowingly at Mr. Pippet.

"That's the sort of hair-pin the Doctor is," he said, admiringly. "Thomas a Didymus combined with a casuist of the deepest dye. He could argue the hind leg off a donkey; and that donkey would have nothing for it but to get a wooden leg."

Here Mr. Brodribb intervened with some warmth. "You are doing Dr. Thorndyke an injustice, Superintendent," said he. "There is nothing casuistical in his argument. He has stated the legal position quite correctly, not only in the letter but in the spirit. The judge made an order for the examination of the coffin of Josiah Pippet for the declared purpose of ascertaining the nature of its contents. But we have not examined that coffin, and we still do not know the nature of its contents. You will remember that the judge, himself, pointed that out at this morning's proceedings."

Miller was visibly impressed by these observations from the very correct and experienced old lawyer; and I could see that he was quite willing to be impressed, for he was as keen on the examination as any of us. But he was a police officer, and, as such, Josiah Pippet was not his pigeon. Civil cases were not in his province.

Thorndyke evidently saw the difficulty, and proceeded adroitly to turn his flank.

"Besides, Miller," he said, "you seem to be overlooking the importance of this matter in relation to a possible prosecution. A police officer of your experience is lawyer enough to realize the great difference in value between positive and negative evidence. Now, at present, all that we can do is to show cause for the belief that the coffin that we found in the vault was not Josiah's coffin. But suppose that we are able to produce the actual coffin of Josiah Pippet. That would leave the defence nothing to say. And, in any case, for the sake of your own reputation and that of the C.I.D., that coffin has got to be found; and common sense suggests that we begin the search in the most likely place."

This argument disposed effectually of Miller's difficulties.

"You are quite right, Doctor," he agreed. "We shall be expected to produce that coffin, or, at least, to prove its existence and its whereabouts; and I certainly agree with you that the vault is the most likely place in which to look for it. I hope we are both right, for, if it isn't there, we may be let in for a mighty long chase before we get hold of it."

Agreement on the principle having been reached, it remained only to settle the details. Mr. Pippet, with characteristic American eagerness to "get on with it," would have started forthwith for the burial ground; but, as Miller, naturally, had not got the keys about him, and as Thorndyke had certain preparations to make, it was arranged that the parties to the expedition should meet at the latter's chambers at ten o'clock on the following morning.

---

## XIX. — JOSIAH?

THERE was something distinctly furtive and conspiratorial in the appearance and bearing of the party of six which filed into the burial ground under the guidance of Superintendent Miller. At least, so it seemed to me, though the impression may have been due to Polton; who carried a small suit-case with a secretive and burglarious air, persisted in walking on tip-toe, and generally surrounded himself with the atmosphere of a veritable Guy Fawkes.

As soon as we were all in, the Superintendent closed the gate and locked it from the inside, putting the key in his pocket. Then he followed us to the neighbourhood of the vaults, where we were screened from the gaze of possible onlookers.

"Well," he remarked, stating an undeniable truth, "here we are, and here are the vaults. We've got five to choose from, and the chances are that we shall open four wrong ones before we come to the right one—if there is a right one. What do you say, Doctor? Any choice?"



"On general grounds," said Thorndyke, "it would seem that one is as likely as another; but on psychological grounds, I should say that there is a slight probability in favour of the sixth vault."

"Why?" demanded Miller.

"Because," replied Thorndyke, "although, as a hiding-place, any one vault would be as good as any other, I think there would be a tendency to get as far as possible from the vault in which the dummy coffin had been planted. It is merely a guess; but, as we have nothing else to guide us, I would suggest that we begin with number six."

"While the brief discussion had been taking place, Polton had been peering into the keyholes with the aid of a small electric lamp and inspecting the edges of the respective doors. He now reported the results of his observations. "I think you are right, sir," said he. "There seems to be a trace of grease in the inside of the lock of the last door, and there is something that looks rather like the mark of a jemmy on the jamb of the door. Perhaps Mr. Miller might take a look at it."

Mr. Miller, as an expert on jemmy-marks, accordingly did take a look at it, and was inclined to confirm our artificer's opinion; on which it was decided to begin operations on number six. The big skeleton key was produced from the Superintendent's pocket and handed to Polton, by whom it was tenderly anointed with oil. Then a dressing of oil was applied to the rusty wards of the lock by means of a feather poked in through the keyhole, and the key inserted. As it refused to turn, in spite of the oil, Polton produced from his case a "tommy"—a steel bar about a foot long—which he passed through the bow of the key and worked gently backwards and forwards to distribute the oil and avoid the risk of wrenching off the bow. After a few trials, the key made a complete turn, and we heard the rusty bolt grate back into the lock.

"I expect we shall have to prise the door open," said Polton, after one or two vigorous tugs at the key, using the tommy as a handle. He threw back the lid of his suit-case, which was lying on the ground at his side, and looked into it—as, also, did the Superintendent.

"Well, I'm sure, Mr. Polton!" the latter exclaimed. "Are you aware that it is a misdemeanour to go abroad with housebreaking implements in your possession?"

Polton regarded him with a cunning and crinkly smile.

"May I ask, Mr. Miller," he demanded, "what you would use to force open a jammed door? Would you use a corkscrew or a sardine opener?"

Miller chuckled, appreciatively. "Well," he said, as Polton selected a powerful telescopic jemmy from his outfit, "I suppose the end justifies the means."

"You can take it, sir," said Polton, sententiously, "that people whose business it is to open doors have found out the best tools to do it with."

Having delivered himself of this profound truth, he inserted the beak of the jemmy between the door and the jamb, gave it one or two tweaks at different levels, and then, grasping the key and the tommy, pulled the complaining door wide open.

The first glance into the mouldy and dusty interior showed that Thorndyke's selection had been correct. There were two names on the stone slab above the vault, but there were three coffins; two lying in orderly fashion on the stone shelf, and a third flung untidily across them. That the latter was the coffin which we were seeking was at once suggested by the fact that the handles and name-plate were missing, though the spaces which they had occupied and the holes for the screws were conspicuously visible.

"That is Josiah's coffin right enough," said Mr. Pippet, pointing to these marks. "There can't be a shadow of doubt."

"No," agreed Thorndyke, "but we mustn't leave it at that. We must put the two coffins side by side and make an exact comparison which can be described in evidence in terms of actual measurement. I noticed that the beadle had not taken away the trestles. We had better set them up and put this coffin on them. The other one can be put on the ground alongside."

We fetched the trestles, and, having set them up, the four tallest of us proceeded to hoist out the coffin.

"He's a mighty weight," Mr. Pippet remarked, as he lowered his end carefully to the trestles.

"Probably there is a lead shell," said Miller. "There usually was in the better class coffins. I'm surprised they didn't put one in the dummy to make it a bit more convincing."

While the removal was being effected, Polton, armed with the skeleton key—the jemmy was not required—had got the door of the other vault open. Thither we now proceeded, and, lifting out the empty and comparatively light dummy, carried it across and laid it on the ground beside the trestles.

"The first thing," said Thorndyke, "will be to take off the name-plate and try it on the old coffin. An actual trial will be more convincing to a judge or jury than the most careful measurements."

"Is it of any great importance," Mr. Pippet asked, "to prove that the dummy was faked by using the old coffin furniture?"

"It is absolutely vital," Thorndyke replied. "How else are we to prove that this is the coffin of Josiah Pippet? There is no mark on it by which it could be identified, and we find it in a vault which is not Josiah's. Moreover, in the vault which is his, there is a coffin bearing his name-plate which is alleged to be his coffin, and which we are trying to prove is not his

coffin.”

“I thought you had done that pretty effectually already,” said Pippet.

“We can’t have too much evidence,” Thorndyke rejoined; “and in any case, we have got to produce positive evidence of the identity of this coffin. At present we are only guessing, though I have no doubt that we are guessing right. But if we can prove that the nameplate on that coffin was removed from and belonged to this one, we shall have proved the identity of this one and the fraudulent character of the other.”

While Thorndyke had been arguing this rather obvious point, Polton had been engaged in carefully and methodically extracting, with a clock-maker’s screw-driver, the six screws with which the name-plate was attached to the dummy coffin-lid. He now held one of them up for his employer’s inspection, remarking:

“You see, sir, that they used the original brass screws—the old, flat-ended sort; which will be better for testing purposes, as they won’t go into a hole that wasn’t properly bored for them.”

While the screw was being passed round and examined, he proceeded with the testing operations. First, he lifted the plate from its bed, whereupon there was disclosed an oblong patch of new, unstained wood, which he regarded with a contemptuous crinkle.

“Well!” he exclaimed, “if I had been faking a coffin, I’d at least have finished the faking before I screwed on the plate and not have given the show away like this.”

With this, he picked up the plate and laid it on the old coffin-lid in the vacant space, which it fitted exactly. Then, with a fine awl, he felt through one of the corner holes of the plate for the corresponding hole in the wood, and, having found it, dropped in one of the screws and ran it lightly home. Next, in the same manner, he probed the hole in the opposite corner of the plate, dropped in the screw and drove it home. Then, discarding the awl, he dropped in the other four screws, all of which ran in quite smoothly.

“There, Mr. Pippet,” said Thorndyke, “that establishes the identity of the coffin. The six holes in the brass plate coincide exactly with the six holes in the wood; for, as Polton points out, the screws, being blunt-ended, would not enter the wood if the holes were not precisely in the right place. So you can now take it as an established fact that this is really the coffin of your grandfather, Josiah Pippet. Does that satisfy you? Or is there anything else that you wish to have done?”

Pippet looked at him in surprise. “Why!” he exclaimed, “we’ve only just begun! I thought we came here to find out exactly what is in that coffin. That is what I came for. I had made up my mind before I came to England that the first thing that I would do would be to find out whether Josiah was or was not in that coffin. Then I should have known whether to haul off or go ahead.”

“Exactly,” said Thorndyke; “but are you sure that you still want to know?”

I looked quickly at Thorndyke, and so did Mr. Pippet. The question was asked in the quietest and most matter-of-fact tone; and yet I had the feeling that it carried a significance beyond either the tone or the words. And this, I think, was noticed also by our American friend, for he paused a few moments with his eyes fixed on Thorndyke before he replied:

“It doesn’t matter so much now, as I’ve dropped the claim. But, still, if it doesn’t seem irreverent, I think I should like to have a look at Josiah. I hate to leave a job unfinished.”

“Very well,” said Thorndyke; “it’s your funeral in a literal as well as allegorical sense. You would like to have the coffin opened?”

“I should, though I don’t quite see how you are going to manage it. There don’t seem to be any screws.”

“The screws are plugged,” Thorndyke explained, “as they usually are in well-finished coffins. They are sunk in little pits and the pits are filled up with plugs of wood, which are planed off clean so as to show an uninterrupted surface. Possibly those plugs were the deciding factor in the question as to whether the old coffin should be opened and faked, or a new one made. You can see that it would be impossible to get those plugs out and replace them without leaving very visible traces.”

This statement was illustrated by Polton’s proceedings. From the inexhaustible suit-case he produced a cabinet-maker’s scraper, with which he set to work at the edge of the lid, scraping off the old surface, thereby bringing into view the little circular inlays which marked the position of the screws, of which there were eight. When they were all visible, he attacked them with a nose bit set in a brace, and quickly exposed the heads of the screws. But then came the tug of war. For the rust of eighty years seemed to have fixed the screws immovably; and by the time that he had managed, with the aid of a driver bit in his brace, to get them out, his crinkly countenance was streaming with perspiration.

“All right this time,” said Mr. Pippet, picking up one of the screws and inspecting its blunt end. “I guess I’ll take these screws to keep as a memento. Ah! You were right, Doctor,” he added, as Polton prised up the lid and lifted it clear. “It was the lead shell that made it so blamed ponderous.”

Here Mr. Brodribb, casting a slightly apprehensive glance at the leaden inner coffin, announced, as he selected a cigar from his case,

“If you are going to open the shell, Thorndyke, I think I will take a little stroll and survey the landscape. I haven’t got a medical jurist’s stomach.”

Thorndyke smiled, unsympathetically, but, nevertheless, offered him a light; and as he moved away, exhaling fragrant clouds, Polton approached the coffin with a formidable hooked knife and a pair of tinman's shears.

"Do you want to see the whole of him, sir?" he asked, bestowing a crinkly smile on Mr. Pippet, "or do you think his head will be enough?"

"Well, Mr. Polton," was the guarded reply, "perhaps his head will be enough—to begin with, anyway."

Thereupon, Polton, with a few gentle taps of a hammer, drove the point of the knife through the soft lead and began to cut a line in a U shape round the head end of the shell. When he had extended it sufficiently, he prised up the end of the tongue-shaped piece enclosed by the incision and turned it back like a flap. We stood aside respectfully to allow Mr. Pippet to be the first to look upon the long-forgotten face of his ancestor; and he accordingly advanced and bent down over the dark opening. For an appreciable time he remained looking silently into the cavity, apparently overcome by the emotions natural to the occasion. But I must confess that I was somewhat startled when he gave expression to those emotions. For what he said—and he said it slowly and with the strongest emphasis—was:

"Well—I'm—damned!"

Now, when a gentleman so scrupulously correct in speech as was Mr. Pippet, makes use of such an expression, it is reasonable to assume that something unusual has occurred. As he withdrew his head from the opening, mine and Thorndyke's met over it (and I am afraid mine was the harder). But in spite of the collision, I saw enough in a single glance to account for Mr. Pippet's exclamation. For what met that glance was no shrivelled, mummified human face, but the end of a slender roll of canvas embedded in time-discoloured sawdust.

"Now," commented Miller, when he had made his inspection, "isn't that just like a blinking crook! They are all fools, no matter how artful they may be. And they can't imagine the possibility of anyone else being honest. Of course, Gimbler thought that the coffin story was all bunkum, so he pitched the old coffin away without troubling to open it and see what was really in it. If he had only left it alone, Mr. Pippet's claim would have been as good as established."

"It would certainly have been important evidence," said I. "But, for that matter, it is still. The story of the bogus funeral is now proved beyond any possible doubt to be true. And, though the claim has lapsed for the moment, it lapsed only on a technical point. What do you say, Brodribb?" I asked as that gentleman, in the course of his perambulations, passed the vault at a respectful distance.

"What do I say to what?" he demanded, reasonably enough.

"We have opened the shell and we find that it does not contain a body."

"What does it contain?" he asked.

"Something wrapped in canvas and packed in sawdust," I replied.

"That is not a very complete account," he objected, approaching cautiously to take a peep into the interior of the shell. "It certainly does not look like a body," he admitted after a very brief inspection, "but it might be. A very small one."

"It would be a very small one, indeed," said Thorndyke. "But I agree with you Brodribb. We ought to ascertain exactly what the contents of the coffin are."

On this, Polton re-inserted the hooked knife and prolonged the incision on one side to the foot of the shell and carried it across. Then he raised the long flap and turned it back, exposing the whole of the mass of sawdust and the long roll of canvas which was embedded in it. The latter, being lifted out and laid on the coffin-lid, was seen to be secured with three strands of twine or spun-yarn. These Polton carefully untied—they were fastened with reef-knots—and, having thus released the canvas, unrolled it and displayed its contents; which consisted of a small roll of sheet lead, a portion of a battered rain head and a flattened section of leaden stack-pipe.

"This is interesting," said Brodribb. "It corresponds with the description more closely than I should have expected."

"And you notice, sir," Polton pointed out, "that the sheet lead is proper cast sheet, as the Doctor said it would be."

"I take your word for it, Polton," said Brodribb. "And that is a further agreement; which, I may add—since we are all friends—is not without its evidential significance."

"That is the point that we were discussing," said I. "The bearing of this discovery on Mr. Pippet's claim."

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Jervis," Mr. Pippet interposed, "but there isn't any claim. My sister and I agreed some time ago to drop the claim if we got a chance. And Dr. Thorndyke gave us a very fair chance, and we are very much obliged to him."

"I am glad to hear that," said Brodribb, "because this discovery does really confuse the issues rather badly. On this new evidence it would be possible to start a long and complicated law-suit."

"That," said Mr. Pippet, "is, I guess, what the Doctor meant when he asked me if I still wanted to know what was in the coffin. But a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse; and I was that blind horse. I rather wish I had left that durned coffin alone and taken it for granted that Josiah was inside. Still, we have got the monopoly of the information. Is there any reason why we should not keep it to ourselves? What do you say, Superintendent?"

"The fact," replied Miller, "that there was no body in the coffin is of no importance to the prosecution, but I don't see how it can be burked. We shall have to produce the original coffin—or prove its existence. We needn't say that we have

opened it; but the question might be asked in cross-examination, and we should have to answer it. But what is the objection to the fact being known? You have dropped the claim, and you don't intend to re-open it. Nobody will be any the worse."

"But I am afraid somebody may be," Mr. Pippet rejoined. He reflected a few moments and then continued: "We are all friends, as Mr. Brodribb has remarked, so I needn't mind letting you see how the land lies—from my point of view. You see, I embarked on this claim under the impression that the estates were going begging. I knew nothing of any other claimant. But when my sister and I saw Mr. Giles and his mother, we were a little sorry that we had started the ball. However, we had started it, and, after all, there was my girl to consider. So we went on. But very soon it became evident that our two young people were uncommonly taken with each other; and then my sister and I were still more sorry, and we began to hope that our case might fall through. While matters were in suspense, however, Giles made no formal advances though there was no concealment of his feelings towards my girl. But in the evening of the day when the Doctor obligingly knocked the bottom right out of my case, and showed us who the genuine heir-presumptive was, Giles asked my daughter to marry him, and, naturally she said 'yes.'"

"And now you will see my point. Giles, with proper, manly pride, waited until he had something to offer besides his own very desirable person. He didn't want to come as a suitor with empty hands. When the prize was practically his, he asked Jennifer to share it with him. And I should have liked to leave it at that. And that was why I wanted that coffin opened. I had taken it as a cinch that Josiah was inside; and if he had been, that would have settled the question for good. Instead of which I have only confused the issues, as Mr. Brodribb says."

"Now, see here. I want this affair kept dark if it possibly can be. I want Giles to feel that the title and estates that he asked Jenny to share with him are his own by right, and not by anyone's favour. But that would be all spoiled if he got to know about this damned lead. For then he might reasonably suspect that I had voluntarily surrendered this claim for his benefit when I could, if I had pleased, have carried it to a successful issue. Of course, I couldn't have done anything of the kind. But that is what he might think. And he mustn't. There must be no fly in his ointment; and I look to you all to keep it out."

It is needless to say that we all listened with the greatest sympathy to Mr. Pippet's explanation, and we promised, so far as was possible, to suppress the fact that the coffin had been opened; which we were able to do with a clear conscience, since that fact was neither material nor even relevant to the charge of fraud against Gimbley.

"Naturally," said Mr. Pippet, when he had thanked us, "you will say that I ought to have thought of all this before I asked to have the coffin opened, but I am not so long-sighted as the Doctor. If you would like to call me a fool I shan't contradict you."

"Thank you," laughed Thorndyke; "but I don't think I will avail myself of the permission. Still, I will remark that you allowed yourself to entertain a complete fallacy. You have spoken of my having knocked the bottom out of your case by my exposure of Gimbley's fraud. But that was not the position at all. The coffin which Gimbley produced as Josiah's coffin was not Josiah's coffin. Therefore it had no relevance to the issue. It proved nothing, one way or the other, as to the condition of the real coffin. The effect of my evidence was purely negative. It simply rebutted Gimbley's evidence and thus restored the *status quo ante*. The judge, if you remember, drew your attention to this fact when he reminded you that Josiah's coffin had not been examined, and that the bogus funeral had been neither proved nor disproved."

"Well," said Mr. Pippet, "it has been proved now; and what I should like to know, just as a matter of curiosity, is what it really and truly means. Is it possible that the whole story was true, or was this just one of Josiah's little jokes?"

"I am afraid you will never know now," said Thorndyke.

"No," Pippet agreed. "Josiah has got us guessing. Of course, it doesn't matter now whether he was an earl or an inn-keeper, but if you have any opinion on the subject, I should like to hear it."

"Mere speculative opinions," said Thorndyke, "formed in the absence of real evidence, are not of much value. I really have nothing that one could call an opinion. All I can say is that, though the balance of probabilities for and against the truth of the story is nearly even, there seems to be a slight preponderance against, since, added to the general improbability of the story, is the very striking coincidence of Nathaniel Pippet of *The Castle* at Winsborough. But I am afraid we shall have to return an open verdict."

"And keep it to ourselves," added Pippet. "And now the practical question arises, what are we to do with this coffin?"

"I suggest," said Thorndyke, "that Polton closes it up as neatly as possible and that we then put it, with Gimbley's masterpiece, in the vault to which it properly belongs. We may hope that it may not be necessary to disturb that vault again; in which case no one need ever know that the coffin has been opened."

This suggestion being generally approved, was duly carried out. The two coffins were placed, side by side, on the shelf, and then Miller locked the door and dropped the key into his pocket. This done, the procession moved out of the burial ground; and the incident was formally closed when Miller slammed the outer gate and turned the key in the rusty lock.

We went back in the same order as that in which we had come. Mr. Pippet and Brodribb travelled in the former's car, and the rest of us occupied the roomy police car, Polton, at his own request, occupying the seat next to the driver where he could observe the mechanical arrangements and the operator's methods.

---

## XX. — THORNDYKE RESOLVES A MYSTERY

MODERN transport appliances have certain undeniable advantages, particularly to those who are principally concerned with rapidity of transit. But these advantages, like most of the gifts of "progress," have to be purchased by the sacrifice of certain other advantages. The Superintendent's car was, in respect of speed, incomparably superior to a horse carriage; but in the opportunity that it afforded for sustained conversation it compared very unfavourably with that obsolete type of vehicle. Thorndyke, however, not yet, perhaps, emancipated from the hansom cab habit, chose to disregard the inevitable interruption, and, as the car trundled smoothly westward, remarked to Miller:

"The subject of coffins, with which our minds are at present occupied, suggests, by an obvious analogy, that of a head in a box. I promised, a little while ago, to pass on to you any facts that I might unearth respecting the history of that head. I have looked into the matter and I think I now have all the material facts; and I may say that the affair turns out to be, in effect, what I had, almost from the first, supposed it to be."

"I didn't know," said Miller, "that you supposed it to be anything. I thought you were quite uninterested in the incident."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "you were mistaken. I watched the developments with the keenest interest. At first, when the head was discovered in the cloak room, I naturally assumed, as everyone did, that it was a case of murder and mutilation. But when I read the account of the inquest I began to suspect strongly that it was something quite different, and when I saw that photograph that you were so kind as to send me, I had very little doubt of it. You remember that photograph, Jervis?"

"Indeed I do," I replied. "A most extraordinary and abnormal mug that fellow had. There seemed to me to be a suggestion of acromegaly."

"A suggestion!" Thorndyke exclaimed. "It was a perfect type. That photograph might have been used as the frontispiece of a monograph of acromegaly. Its appearance, together with the physical and anatomical facts disclosed at the inquest, seemed to me quite distinctive. I came to the conclusion that this head was no relic of a crime, but simply a museum specimen which had gone astray."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Miller, gazing at Thorndyke in amazement. I did not share his surprise, but merely felt an urgent desire to kick myself. For the thing was so ridiculously obvious—as soon as it was stated. But that was always the way with Thorndyke. He had the uncanny gift of seeing all the obvious things that everyone else overlooked.

"But," Miller continued, after a pause, "you might have given us the tip."

"My dear Miller," Thorndyke protested, "I had no tip to give. It was merely an opinion, and it might have been a wrong opinion. However, as I said, I watched developments most attentively, for there were at least two possibilities which might be foreseen; one by no means unlikely, the other almost fantastically improbable. The first was that some person might be accused of a murder which had never been committed; the other was that some real murderer might take advantage of the extraordinary opportunity that the circumstances offered. Curiously enough, it was the wildly improbable possibility that was actually realized."

"What was the opportunity that was offered?" Miller asked.

"It was the opportunity to commit a murder with almost perfect security from detection; with a whole set of false clues ready made; with the equivalent in time of a nearly watertight alibi."

"A murderer's chief difficulty," said Miller, "is usually in getting rid of the body. I don't see that the circumstances helped him in that."

"They helped him to the extent that he had no need to get rid of the body," Thorndyke replied. "Why does a murderer have to conceal the body? Because if it is found it will be recognized as the body of a particular person. Then the relations of the murderer to that person will be examined, with possibly fatal results. But supposing that a murderer could render the body of his victim totally unrecognizable. Then it would be the body of an unknown person; and all the persons related to it would be equally unknown. If he could go a step further and not only render the body unrecognizable but give it a false identity, he would be absolutely secure; for the body would now be related to a set of circumstances with which he had no connexion."

"This is the kind of opportunity that was offered by the discovery of this head. Let us study the conditions in the light of what actually happened. On a certain day in August, Wicks deposited in the cloak room a human head. Now, obviously, since it was brought there by Wicks, it could not be Wicks's head. Equally obviously, it must have been the head of some person who had died while Wicks was still alive. Thus the death of that person was clearly dated in one direction; and since the head had been treated with preservatives, the date of death must have been some time anterior to that of its deposition in the cloak room. Again, obviously, there must be somewhere a headless body corresponding to this body-less head."

"Now, Bassett evidently intended to murder Wicks, for, as we saw, the murder was clearly premeditated. See, then, what a perfect opportunity was presented to him. If he could contrive to murder Wicks, to strip and decapitate the body and deposit it in a place where it would probably remain undiscovered for some time; when it was discovered, it would, quite naturally, be assumed to be the body belonging to the embalmed head. In other words, it would be assumed to be the body of some person who could not possibly be Wicks, and who had been murdered at some time when he, Bassett, was on the high seas. No slightest breath of suspicion could possibly fall on Bassett."

"But, as so constantly happens in the case of carefully planned crimes, one little point had been overlooked, or, rather, was unknown to the intending murderer. Strangely enough, it seems also to have been overlooked by everyone else, with the result that Bassett's scheme was within a hair's-breadth of working out exactly according to plan."

"As he was at the bottom of the dene-hole," remarked Miller, "it didn't matter much to him whether it did or not."

"Very true," Thorndyke agreed. "But we are considering the plan of the crime. Now, when I read the report of the finding of the headless body, I realized that the fantastic possibility that I had hardly ventured to entertain had actually come to pass."

"You assumed that the headless body was a fake," said Miller, "and not the body belonging to the cloak room head. Now, I wonder why you assumed that."

"I did not," replied Thorndyke. "There was no assumption. The excellent newspaper report made it perfectly clear that the body found by the Watling Street could not possibly be the body belonging to the embalmed head. That head, let me remind you, was the head of a person who suffered from acromegaly. The body of that person would have been distinguished by atrophied muscles and enormous, mis-shapen hands and feet. But our admirable reporter specially noted that the body was that of a muscular man with strong, well-shaped hands. Then he certainly was not suffering from acromegaly."

"You see what followed from this. If this body did not belong to the cloak room head, it must belong to some other head. And that head was probably not far away. For, as no one suspected its existence, there was no need for any elaborate measures to hide it. As I happened to be aware of the existence of a number of dene-holes in the immediate neighbourhood, it occurred to me that one of them probably contained the head and the clothes. Accordingly, I examined the six-inch map of the district, on which the dene-holes are shown, and there I found that one of them was within four hundred yards of the place where the body was discovered. To that dene-hole I paid a visit after attending the inquest, having provided myself with a compass, a suitable lamp and a pair of night-glasses. I was not able to see very much, but I saw enough to justify our expedition. You know the rest of that story."

"Yes," replied Miller, "and a very interesting story it is. And now I should like to hear about these new facts that you have unearthed."

"You shall have them all," said Thorndyke, "though it is only a case of filling in details. I have told you what I decided—correctly, as it turns out—as to the nature of the mysterious head; that it was simply a pathological specimen illustrating the rare disease known as acromegaly, which had got into the wrong hands."

"Now, when one thinks of acromegaly, the name of Septimus Bernstein almost inevitably comes into one's mind. Dr. Bernstein is a world-famous authority on giantism, dwarfism, acromegaly and other affections and anomalies of growth connected with disorder of the pituitary body. He is an enthusiast in his subject and gives his whole time and energy to its study. But what was still more important to me was the fact that he has a private museum devoted to the illustration of these diseases and anomalies. I have seen that museum, and a very remarkable collection it is; but, when I visited it, although it contained several gigantic and acromegalous skulls, there was no specimen of a head in its complete state."

"Naturally, then, I was disposed to suspect some connexion between this stray specimen and Dr. Bernstein. But this was pure hypothesis until I heard Bunter's statement. That brought my hypothesis concerning the head into the region of fact. For Bunter's description of the passenger on the yacht was a fairly exact description of Dr. Bernstein; and, on the strength of it I was in a position to take the necessary measures to clear the matter up."

"Accordingly I called on Bernstein. I did not, in the first place, ask him any questions. I simply informed him that a preserved human head which he had imported, apparently from Holland, had been causing the police a good deal of trouble, and that it was for him to give a full and candid explanation of all the circumstances connected with it. The alternative was for the police to charge him with being in unlawful possession of certain human remains."

"My statement seemed to give him a severe shock—he is a nervous and rather timid man—but, though greatly alarmed, he seemed, in a way, relieved to have an opportunity to explain matters. Evidently, the affair had kept him in a state of constant apprehension and expectation of some new and horrible development, and he consented almost eagerly to make a full statement as to what had really happened. This is what his story amounts to:

"He had for years been trying to get possession of the head of some person who had suffered from acromegaly; partly for the purpose of studying the pituitary body more thoroughly and partly for the enrichment of his museum with a specimen which completely illustrated the effects of the disease. What he especially wanted to do was to remove the pituitary body without injuring the head and mount it in a specimen jar to accompany the jar containing the head, so that the abnormal condition of the pituitary and its effects on the structure of the face could be studied together."

"By the way," Miller asked, "what is the pituitary body?"

"It is a small body," Thorndyke explained, "situated at the base of the brain and lodged in a cavity in the base of the skull. Its interest—for our present purpose—lies in the fact that it is one of the so-called ductless glands and produces certain internal secretions which contain substances called hormones which are absorbed into the blood and seem to control the processes of growth. If the pituitary—or, at least, its anterior part—becomes overgrown, it appears that it produces an excess of secretion, with the result that either the whole body becomes overgrown and the sufferer develops into a giant, or certain parts only of the body, particularly the face and the extremities, become gigantic while the rest of the body remains

of its normal size. That is a very rough account of it, just enough to make the matter intelligible.”

“I think I have taken in the idea,” said Miller, “and I’m glad you explained it. Now, I am able to feel a bit more sympathetic towards Dr. Bernstein. He isn’t such an unmitigated cannibal as I thought he was. But let us hear the rest of the story.”

“Well,” Thorndyke resumed, “a short time ago, Bernstein heard from a Dutch doctor of a set of specimens, the very description of which made his mouth water. It appeared that an unclaimed body had been delivered for dissection at a medical school in a certain town in Holland. Bernstein asked to be excused from giving the name of the town, and I did not press him. But, of course, if it is essential, he is prepared to disclose the further particulars. On examining this body, it was found to present the typical characters of acromegaly; whereupon the pathologist decided to annex the head and extremities for the hospital museum and return the remainder in the coffin. At the time when the information reached Bernstein, the specimens had not been put in the museum but were in the curator’s laboratory in course of preparation.

“Thereupon, Bernstein started off, hot-foot, to see if he could persuade the pathologist to let him have the head. And his mission was obviously successful. What methods of persuasion he used, and what was the nature of the deal, he preferred not to say; and I did not insist, as it is no particular concern of ours. It would seem as if it must have been slightly irregular. However, he obtained the head, and, having got it, embarked on the series of foolish proceedings about which Bunter told us. A bolder and more self-confident man would probably have had no serious difficulty. He would have travelled by an ordinary passenger ship and simply declared the head at the Customs as a pathological specimen. The Customs people might have communicated with the police, and there might have been some inquiries. But if there had been no secrecy there would have been no trouble.”

“No,” Miller agreed. “Secrecy was the stupidest thing possible under the circumstances, Why the deuce didn’t he notify us, when the thing was found in the cloak room? It would have saved us a world of trouble.”

“Of course that is what he ought to have done,” said Thorndyke; “but the discovery took him unawares, and, when he suddenly found himself involved in a murder mystery, he got in a panic and made things worse by trying to keep out of sight. He is in a mighty twitter now, I can assure you.”

“I expect he is,” said Miller; “and the question is, what is to be done? It’s a queer case, in a legal sense. Have you any suggestion to make?”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “I think you should first consider what the legal position really is. You will admit that no crime has been committed.”

“Apparently not,” Miller agreed; “at any rate, not in British jurisdiction.”

“Furthermore,” pursued Thorndyke, “it is not clear to me that any offence against the law has been committed. Admittedly, Bernstein evaded the Customs; but, as a human head is not a customable commodity, there was no offence against the Revenue. And so with the rest of his proceedings; they were very improper, but they do not appear to amount to any definite legal offence.”

“So I take it,” said Miller, “that you think we might as well let the matter drop. I don’t quite like that, after all the fuss and outcry there has been.”

“I was hardly suggesting that,” said Thorndyke. “I certainly think that, for the credit of the Force, the mystery ought to be cleared up in a more or less public manner. But, since you invite me to make a suggestion, I will make one. Perhaps it may surprise you a little. But what I think would be the best way to bring the case to a satisfactory conclusion would be for you to disinter the specimen—which I believe was buried temporarily, in the case in which it was found, in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery—have it examined and reported on by some authorized persons, verify Bernstein’s statements so far as may be necessary, and, if you find everything correct, hand the specimen back to Bernstein.”

“My eye!” exclaimed Miller, “that’s a pretty large order! But how could we? The head is no lawfully his property. No one is entitled to the possession of human remains.”

“I am not sure that I can agree to that,” Thorndyke dissented; “not, at any rate, without certain reservations. The legal status of anatomical and pathological specimens in museums is rather obscure; and perhaps it has been wisely kept obscure. It is not covered by the Anatomy Act, which merely legalizes the temporary possession of a human body for the purpose of dissection. As you say, no one can establish a title to the possession of a human body, or part of one, as an ordinary chattel. But you know as well as I do, Miller, that sensible people turn a blind eye to this question on suitable occasions. Take the case of the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons. There, the anatomical and pathological collections are filled with human remains, all of which must have been acquired by methods which are not strictly legal. There are even the remains of entire individuals, some of whom are actually known by name. Now, if they were challenged, what title to the possession of those remains could the Council of the College establish? In practice, they are not challenged. Reasonable people tacitly assume a title.

“And that is what you would do, yourself. Supposing that someone was to steal the skeleton of the late Corporal Byrne, or O’Brian, the Irish Giant, which is in that museum, and supposing you were able to recover it; what would you do? Why, of course, you would hand it back to the museum, title or no title.”

“Yes,” Miller admitted, “that is so. But Bernstein’s case is not quite the same. His is a private museum, and he wants this head as a personal chattel.”

"The principle is the same," Thorndyke rejoined. "Bernstein is a proper person to possess this head; he wants it for a legitimate purpose—for the advancement of medical knowledge, which is for the benefit of all. I insist, Miller, that, as a matter of public policy, this specimen ought to be given back to Bernstein."

Miller looked at me with an undissembled grin. "The Doctor can be mighty persuasive on occasion," he remarked.

"Still," I urged, "it is a perfectly reasonable proposition. You are concerned, primarily, with crime, but ultimately with the public welfare. Now, there hasn't been any crime, or any criminal intent; and it is against the public welfare to put obstacles in the way of legitimate and useful medical research."

"Well," Miller rejoined, "the decision doesn't rest with me. I must see what the Commissioner has to say. I will give him the facts, and you can depend on me to tell him what you say and to put your case as strongly as I can. He is not out to make unnecessary trouble any more than I am. So we must leave it at that. I will let you know what he says. If he falls in with your view, he will probably want your assistance in fixing up the details of the examination and the inspection of the specimen. You may as well give me Bernstein's address."

Thorndyke wrote the name and address down on one of his own cards and handed it to the Superintendent. And this brought the business to an end. The latter part of the conversation had been carried on in the stationary car, which had been drawn up in King's Bench Walk opposite our chambers. We now shook hands with Miller and got out; and, as the car turned away towards Crown Office Row, we entered the wide doorway and ascended the stairs to our own domain.

---

## XXI. — JERVIS COMPLETES THE STORY

THE time has come for us to gather up the threads of this somewhat discursive history. They are but ends, and short ones at that; for, in effect, my tale is told. But even as the weaver's work is judged by the quality of the selvedge, so the historian's is apt to be judged by its freedom from loose ends and uncompleted episodes.

But since the mere bald narration of the few outstanding incidents would be but a dull affair, I shall venture (on the principle that the greater includes the less) to present an account of them all under cover of that which most definitely marked the completion of our labours; the establishment of the young Earl and his Countess in firm possession of the ancestral domain. For, however thrilling may have been the alarums and excursions that befell by the way, they were but by-products and side issues of the Winsborough Peerage Case. With the settlement of that case we could fairly say that our work was done; and, if disposed to tags or aphorisms, could take our choice between *Nunc dimittis* and *Finis coronat opus*.

It was a brilliant morning in that most joyous season of the year when late spring is merging into early summer; and the place was the spot upon the earth's surface where that season develops its most perfect loveliness—the south-east corner of Kent; or, to be more precise, the great lawn at the rear of the unpretentious mansion "known as and being" Winsborough Castle. Thither Thorndyke and my wife and I, together with Brodribb (who came also in his official capacity) had been invited to the house-warming on the return of the young Earl and Countess from their prolonged honeymoon. But we had not come as mere visitors, or even friends. The warm-hearted Jennifer had formally adopted us as members of the family, and as no one could ask for more delightful relatives, we had accepted the position gratefully.

As we strolled together across the sun-lit lawn, I glanced from time to time at the young couple with that sober pleasure which a middle-aged man feels in contemplating the too-rare spectacle of a pair of entirely satisfactory human beings. They were both far beyond the average in good looks; of splendid physique, gay and sprightly in temperament and gifted with the faultless manners that spring from natural kindness and generosity coupled with quick intelligence. Looking at them, one could not but reflect pensively on the might-have-been; and think what a pleasant place the world would be if it could be peopled with their like.

"I wonder," said Jenny, "what has become of Pap and Uncle John." ("Uncle John" was Thorndyke)

"I don't," said Giles, "because I know, I saw them sneaking off together towards the churchyard. My impression is that they are trying to make a complete and exhaustive collection of ancestral Pippets."

Jenny laughed delightedly. "Inquisitive old things!" she exclaimed. "But I don't see why they need fuss themselves. There are no particular points about the ancestral Pippets. They never did anything worth speaking of excepting that they sold good beer—and, incidentally, they produced me."

"Not incidentally," Giles objected. "It was their crowning achievement. And I don't know what more you would have. I call it a deuced good effort."

The girl glanced at me with sparkling eyes. "Conceited young feller, isn't he, Uncle Kit? He will persist in thinking that his goose is a swan."

"He knows that she is," retorted Giles. "But, I say, Jenny. You'll have to keep an eye on Dad. What do you think he has done?"

She looked at him in mock alarm. "Break it gently," she pleaded.

"To my certain knowledge," said Giles, "he has taken over the lease of the *Earl of Beaconsfield* and he is having the sign changed back to *The Castle Arms*. What do you make of that?"



"My prophetic soul!" she exclaimed. "I see it all. He's going to have 'by C. Pippet' written underneath the sign. If we don't mind our eyes, we shall have him behind the bar before we can say 'knife.' 'What's bred in the bone,' you know."

Giles laughed in his delightful school-boy fashion.

"My word, yes!" he agreed. "We shall have to take a strong hand. We are not going to spend our lives under the Upas shadow of the *Fox & Grapes*. But I must hook off. Mr. Brodribb has got the bailiff chappie here—Mr. Solly—and they are going to rub my nose on all the things that they say a land-owner ought to understand. Brodribb insists that there is no eye like the master's eye, and I expect he is right, though I fancy I know an eye that is better still; to wit, the eye that adorns the countenance of the master's Pa-in-law. What are you going to do?"

"I," replied Jenny, "am going to extract a statement from Uncle Kit on the subject of the various happenings since we had Mr. Brodribb's summary. I want to know how it all ended."

"Good!" said Giles; "and when you have wormed all the facts out of him, you can pass them on to me. Now I'm off."

With a flourish of his hat and a mock-ceremonial bow, he turned and strode away across the turf towards the old brick porch, the very type and embodiment of healthy, virile youth. Jenny followed him with her eyes until he disappeared into the porch; then she opened her cross-examination.

"Now, Uncle K., you've got to tell me all you know about everything."

"Yes," I agreed, "that seems to offer some scope for conversation. Would you like to begin anywhere in particular?"

"I want, first of all, to know just exactly what has happened to poor Mr. Gimbler."

"Poor Mr. Gimbler!" I exclaimed. "You needn't waste your sympathy on a rascal like that."

"I know," said she. "Of course he is a rascal. But he did manage things so bee-yutifully."

Her tone jarred upon me slightly, and I think she must have observed something in my expression, for she continued:

"You think I am taking a purely selfish view of the case, and I must admit that, as events have turned out, I am the greatest gainer by what Giles calls 'Mr. Gimbler's gimblings.' But I assure you, Uncle Kit, that Mr. Gimbler did the very best for us all. Pap loves him. He says he is going to give him a pension when he comes out of chokee—if that is where he is, I suppose it is."

"Yes," I replied. "Chokee is his present address,"

"I was afraid it *was*," said she. "The benefactor of humanity is languishing in a dungeon, and you don't care a hoot. You seem even to feel a callous satisfaction in his misfortunes. But see here, now, Uncle K., I want you to understand the benefits that he has showered on us. And, first of all, you've got to understand my father's position. You have got to realize that he never wanted the earldom at all. Pap is a thorough-bred American. He had no use for titles of nobility; and he was very clear that he didn't want to stand in the way of anyone else who had."

"But Auntie Arminella and I didn't take that view at all. We were as keen as mustard on an English title and a beautiful English estate, and Auntie started to stir my father up. He didn't take much stirring up. As soon as he realized that I wanted 'this toy,' as he called it, and had ascertained, as he thought, that the title and estates were lying derelict and unclaimed, he decided to go for them all out. And when Pap makes a decision, he usually gets a move on, right away."

"Now, the first shock that he got was when he discovered that there was another claimant. Then he met Giles and his mother, and he fell in love with them both at first sight, as Auntie and I did. He didn't know how poor Giles was—he was actually working in a stockbroker's office, if you will believe me—but he realized that the decision of the court meant a lot more to Giles than it did to him, and he would have liked to back out of the claim."

"Why didn't he?" I asked.

"He couldn't. When once the claim had been raised, it had got to be settled. Giles didn't want the earldom as a gift, and Mr. Brodribb wouldn't have let the case drop, with the chance of its being re-opened in the future. So it had to go on. And now see what Mr. Gimbler did for us. Supposing he hadn't changed the coffins; and supposing the real one had been found to be stuffed with lead. It might have been. That would have gone a long way towards establishing my father's claim. Supposing the decision had gone in his favour. Then he would have been the Earl of Winsborough. And he would have hated it. Supposing I had married Giles—and I guess I should have had to ask him, myself, as he was a poor man and as proud as Lucifer—what would Pap's position have been? He would have defeated his own plans. He would have got the title for himself, and he would have kept his daughter and her husband out of it during his lifetime. But now, thanks to Mr. Gimbler, we have all got what we wanted. Pap has escaped the title, and he has the satisfaction of seeing his girl Countess of Winsborough."

I smiled at her quaint and somewhat wrong-headed Way of looking at the case. But I refrained from pointing out that "Mr. Gimbler's gimblings" might easily have produced the undesired results but for Thorndyke's intervention. It was a dangerous topic, with my secret knowledge of what was in the real coffin, so I held my peace; or rather, led the conversation away from possible shoals and quicksands.

"By the way," I said, "if Giles had no money, who was going to pay his costs if he had lost the case?"

"I don't know," she replied. "We suspect dear old Brodribb. He told Giles and his mother that 'there were funds

available,' but he wouldn't say what they were. Of course, it is all right now. But you haven't told me what happened to Mr. Gimbler."

"You will be relieved to hear that he was let off quite lightly. Three years. It might easily have been seven, or even fourteen. Probably it would have been if we had included the forgery in the charges against him."

"I suppose it really was a forgery?"

"Yes, it was undoubtedly. For your father's satisfaction, we tested it chemically—but not until after the conviction. The ink was a modern synthetic drawing-ink. But it was a wonderfully skilful forgery."

"Pity," Jenny commented. "He is a really clever and ingenious man. Why couldn't he have run straight? But now tell me about the other people. There was an undertaker man, who made the coffin. What happened to him?"

"Joseph Wallis was his name. He also had better luck than he deserved, for he got only three months. It was originally proposed to charge him and Gimbler together with conspiracy. But there is this awkward peculiarity about an indictment for conspiracy in which only two persons are involved; if one of them is acquitted, the other is acquitted automatically. For a conspiracy is like a quarrel; it can't be a single-handed job. A man can't conspire with himself. So if, of two alleged conspirators, one is found innocent, it follows that there was no conspiracy, and the other man must be innocent, too.

"Now, Joseph pleaded that he had no knowledge of the purpose for which the coffin was required; thought it was a practical joke or a wager. And this plea was supported by Gimbler, who, in a statement to the police, declared that he never told Joseph what the coffin was really wanted for. Which seems likely enough. So the conspiracy charge against Joseph was dropped; and, of course, it had also to be dropped in respect to Gimbler."

"I am glad," said Jenny, "that The Slithy Tove, as Giles calls him, was man enough to clear his confederate."

"Yes, it is something in his favour; though we must bear in mind that the Tove was a criminal lawyer—in more senses than one—and knew all about the law of conspiracy. Is there anything else that you want to know?"

"There was a man named Bunter; but I don't think he was much concern of ours, was he?"

"He was an invaluable link in the chain of evidence," I replied, "though he seems rather outside the picture. However, I can report favourably on his case, for he got off altogether. Nobody wanted his blood. The police accepted his explanation of his attempt to break into the yacht, *Cormorant*, for, though it was probably untrue, it was quite plausible. There remained only his complicity in the platinum robbery. But that had been committed outside British jurisdiction; and, as the platinum had been recovered and restored to its lawful owners, and as the principal robbers were dead, no one was inclined to move in the matter. Accordingly, Mr. Frederick Bunter was released and went on his way rejoicing, with only one or two slight stains on his otherwise spotless character. And I think that completes the list, unless you can think of anything more."

"No," she answered, "I think that finishes up the history of the Winsborough Peerage Case. A queer story it is, looking back on it, with its ups and downs, its hopes and anxieties, to say nothing of one or two ugly passages."

"Yes," I agreed, "there have been some anxious moments. But all's well that ends well."

"Very true," said she. "And it has ended very well indeed; for me and for Giles, for our parents and for Arminella. We have all got what we wanted most, we are all happy and contented, and we are all tremendously pleased with one another. It couldn't have ended better. And to think that we owe it all to poor Mr. Gimbler!"

I smiled, but I didn't contradict her. It was a harmless delusion. Perhaps it was not a delusion at all. At any rate, one might fairly say of Mr. Horatio Gimbler that he builded better than he knew.

---

THE END

## **FOR THE DEFENCE**

---

### **I. — THE LETTER**

IT was about four o'clock on a summer afternoon when Andrew Barton, pipe in mouth and garden shears in hand, suspended for a moment his operations on the privet hedge in his front garden to glance down the lane at the postman, who had just turned into it from the road at the end. It was a glance of no special interest. He was not expecting any communication. But as there was no other house in the lane—which presently petered out into a foot-path across fields—it was obvious that his own residence was the goal of the postman's peregrinations.

He observed the man's approach intermittently, punctuating his observations with perfunctory snips at the hedge and speculating vaguely and incuriously on the source of the letter which the messenger was presumably coming to deliver. He was not particularly interested. Yet even a rural postman, though less portentous than the telegraph boy, embodies untold potentialities of good or evil, of joy or sorrow, of fortune or disaster. But Andrew was not particularly interested; and thus he watched, unmoved and unsuspecting, the approach of Fate's special messenger, charged with a message the significance of which was only by degrees to be unfolded.

The man strode up to the gate with a letter in his hand and ran his eye critically over the half-cropped hedge. "I see you

are havin' a bit of a tidy-up, sir," he remarked as he handed the letter over the gate; "and none too soon. He was getting rare straggly. But Lord! How the stuff do grow this weather! 'Tis out of bounds almost afore you've done a-trimmin' of it."

As Andrew showed no sign of rising to this conversational bait, beyond a vague assent, the postman wished him "good afternoon", took another glance at the hedge and turned back down the lane, a little disconcerted by Mr. Barton's unwonted taciturnity. "Didn't seem to like the look of that letter," he mused as he swung along in his heavy, nailed boots. "Someone dunning him for money, maybe."

It was a simple and reasonable explanation of the sudden change in Andrew's expression as he read the address on the envelope and glanced at the postmark, and not so very wide of the truth. But "dunning" was not quite the right word, since that implies a demand for payment of a lawful debt. Of such demands Andrew Barton had no experience, being a scrupulously prompt paymaster. But a glance at the too-familiar handwriting prepared him for a demand of another kind, and the only question was, "How much does he want this time?" He tore the envelope open with angry impatience and read the answer to that question.

*"16, Barleymow Street, Crompton-on-Sea. 21st August, 1928.*

*"My dear Old Chappie,*

*"What a time it is since I had the felicity of looking at your blessed old mug! Years and years! I am just pining for the sight of you; and no doubt you are equally pining for the sight of me. I hope so. Because I am going to satisfy my yearning and I should like to satisfy yours at the same time. In short, I propose to pop over this day week and shed the light of my countenance on you and Molly. I shall turn up to lunch.*

*"Your affectionate and devoted, though unfortunate cousin,*

*"RONALD.*

*"P.S. I have just got the offer of a top-hole job in the North. £300 a year and commission. But the fly in the ointment is that they want me to deposit £50, and I haven't got it. I hope you will be able to help me to that extent, for it would be a thousand pities to miss a chance like this. Of course, I shall be able to let you have it back in a month or two, with five per cent interest if you like. Further particulars when we meet. By the way, if you should be writing to me, please address me as Mr. Walter Green. I am adopting that name temporarily, for business reasons. R.B."*

Andrew read the letter through twice, returned it to its envelope and put it away in his pocket-book. Then he resumed his operations on the hedge, with increased energy but diminished attention, whereby its symmetry was somewhat impaired but the job was more speedily completed. When the last savage snip had done its work, he hastily raked the cuttings together, conveyed them to the destructor in the back garden and deposited the shears and the rake in the tool-shed. Then he sauntered down to the studio which he had built at the bottom of the garden and let himself in with his key. A half-finished picture stood on the water-colour easel, the palette, brushes and water-dipper reposed invitingly on the table alongside, and the Windsor chair seemed silently to offer its services. He sat down wearily. He even dipped a brush in the water. But it would not do. Painting is no occupation for a mentally preoccupied man. Finally he rose, and, leaving the studio, walked up to the house, where he scribbled a note to his wife and laid it on the hall table, (they kept no maid, and the daily "help" had gone after lunch,) put on his hat and went forth, turning to the right as he emerged from the gate and taking his way along the foot-path that led across the fields.

His cousin's letter had given him matter for serious and somewhat difficult thought. As to the money, the nominal loan—which would certainly never be repaid—was an inconvenience to a man of his modest means. But it was not that which disturbed him. He was used to being "milked" periodically by this thriftless scallywag, who was always in low water and always on the point of making his fortune. But these transactions had been conducted through the post. They involved no personal contact. It was the threatened visit that was the cause of his trouble and that gave him so difficult a problem to solve. For on one point he was resolved; that visit must not be allowed to take place. And, furthermore, Molly must not become aware that it had been proposed. He would, if it must be, submit to the extortions of this wastrel, if not with pleasure, at least with resignation. But he would not have him in his house. And thereby hangs a tale which may as well be told now, to the end that the reader of this narrative may start with a clear understanding of all the circumstances.

Andrew Barton's life lay under the shadow of a tragedy. The origin of that tragedy was insignificant even to triviality. But so it is in the affairs of men; from the merest trifles consequences develop which bear no reasonable proportion to their determining antecedents. The chance burrowing of a mole robbed a nation of its king; a trivial error of our most remote ancestress "Brought death into the world and all our woe." The tragedy that darkened Andrew Barton's life was due to nothing more impressive than a misplaced cricket ball.

But, on occasion, a cricket ball can be a formidable missile. This one, driven by a vigorous stroke of the bat, impinged with a terrific impact on Andrew's face between the eyes, just below the level of the brows, and laid him on the field insensible and gory. Perhaps something in the way of plastic surgery might have been done; but, for a time, his condition was so critical as to occupy the whole of the doctor's attention in the effort to save his life; and when at length his recovery

was assured it was too late. The fractured nasal bones had united firmly in their displaced position.

It was a tragedy indeed. The Andrew Barton who had gone to the cricket match was a rather strikingly handsome young man. The convalescent who came out of the hospital was one at whom the passing wayfarer cast one curious glance and then looked away. The fine Grecian nose was flattened level with the cheek-bones, excepting the uninjured tip, which jutted out from the face like a sparrow's beak.

The disfigurement alone was tragedy enough, especially to an artistic young man who had been accustomed to take an innocent pleasure in his own good looks. But his exaggerated disgust of his uncomely face and the self-consciousness that it engendered were not the worst results of the disaster. There was his wife. To do her justice, she made heroic efforts, in her pity and sympathy, to appear unaware of the change. But her efforts to seem not to notice the disfigurement were misinterpreted. To him, with his morbid conviction that he was a curiosity of hideousness, the fact that she seemed to avoid looking at his battered nose conveyed the impression that she could not bear the repulsive spectacle. In short, in respect of his personal appearance, Andrew suffered in an intense degree from what it is fashionable to call "an inferiority complex"; and that complex led him to take a perverted view of his relations with his wife.

The marriage had been a typical love-match; but, in its beginnings, very largely based on physical attraction. The beautiful girl and the handsome young man had fallen in love with each other's good looks; which, as they were both amiable, kindly and pleasant mannered, was not a bad start. But at that their relations had tended to remain. They continued to be lovers, mutually devoted; but the deeper comradeship of man and wife seemed slow to develop.

The fault was undoubtedly with Molly. Unconsciously, she made the fatal mistake of failing to enter into her husband's chief interest. Andrew was devoted to his art. She was aware of the fact and took it for granted, but she made no attempt to share his artistic interests. She admired his pictures, was pleased with the recognition that they received and praised them in somewhat inexperienced terms; indeed, the rather naive and ignorant comments that she made jarred on him, so that he unobtrusively discouraged her from frequenting the studio. So she tended to live her woman's life apart, treating the studio and its activities as matters outside her province. The love and mutual admiration that had brought them together had continued unchanged and undiminished during their married life up to the time of the accident; nor was there, even then, any sign of a change. But still, they were little more than lovers.

Hence, it was not perhaps unnatural that, when the misfortune befell, Andrew should experience a certain sense of having failed to keep his covenant. Molly had married a handsome man and had given her beauty in exchange. And now the bargain was, on his side, unfulfilled. He still received, but had nothing to give. Still, he could delight in her loveliness and charm; but she must put up with a husband who was a monster of ugliness. It was rather unreasonable and perverse, and it was largely untrue. But that was what he felt. And he felt it bitterly.

But his fatal misadventure had yet another unfortunate effect; which brings us back to our story. Andrew had but one near relative—his cousin Ronald. Ronald, however, was a very near relative indeed. He was, in fact, a cousin twice over; for, not only was his father a brother of Andrew's father, but his mother was a sister of Andrew's mother. In view of this double relationship, it is not surprising that the two men were a good deal alike. Actually they were as much alike as a pair of twins. But the remarkable resemblance was masked to some extent by the one point of difference. Andrew's nose had been of the straight, or Grecian type; Ronald's was curved on the bridge—a definite Roman nose. Now, a Roman nose imparts a very distinctive character to a face, particularly in profile; and hence this really trifling difference served effectually to disguise the fact that these two men were almost identically alike.

Nor was the resemblance limited to the facial characteristics. As in the case of twins, it pervaded the whole personality. They were of much the same colouring, stature and figure. Their voices and intonations were recognizably similar; and even in those elusive muscular habits which express themselves in pose and gait, there was in each man a suggestion of the other.

Their mental similarity was less marked. But yet it was distinguishable. For Ronald was not devoid of artistic aptitude. He painted in a somewhat dilettante fashion, and could have done better if he had taken more trouble; and in other respects he showed a certain mental affinity to his cousin. But just as the almost uncanny physical resemblance was masked by a single salient dissimilarity, so, but in a much more marked degree, were the mental resemblances masked by a profound contrast in the moral qualities. It seemed as if, in Ronald, some "recessive" moral taint, which had lain dormant for a generation or two, had suddenly come to the surface. He was an undeniably "bad egg". To the precise, thrifty, conscientious Andrew, his thriftless, slippery cousin was an object of puzzled contempt, and, moreover, a source of constant anxiety. For Ronald Barton was an inveterate cadger, a confirmed borrower; and, as is the way of the habitual borrower, as soon as the loan had been obtained, the transaction was finished and the incident closed so far as he was concerned. Thus it happened that at the end of each year, Andrew found his bank balance substantially eaten into by the "trifling loans" that this plausible rascal had wheedled out of him.

But, as we have already hinted, it was not the drain on his resources that was troubling him now. He had accepted Ronald—his only near kinsman—as a sort of troublesome younger brother and was resigned to his extortions. What was disturbing him so profoundly was the fear that he might not be able to stave off the proposed visit. He loathed the very idea of having his cousin under his roof; and especially did he loathe the idea of any association between Ronald and Molly.

That was the real trouble. It was not that he was in general a jealous man or that he had the slightest mistrust of his wife. But he distrusted Ronald profoundly. Of that gentleman's mode of life he knew nothing; but he suspected a good deal. And he was very clearly convinced that this shabby knave was no fit associate for Molly. And there were certain special reasons

why he disliked the idea of their meeting.

They had met twice. The first time was shortly after the wedding, and, then, Andrew had been not displeased by Molly's warm admiration of his cousin. For Ronald was an undeniably fine-looking young man, and he had been on his best behaviour.

But the second meeting had been a very different affair. The experience had been one of which Andrew could not bear to think. It had occurred soon after the accident, when the "inferiority complex" was at its worst, and Andrew had found himself constantly following Ronald with his eyes, noting with envy the strikingly handsome face and the swaggering, confident carriage, and contrasting them with his own hideousness and insignificance. And he suspected that Molly was making a like comparison, and he knew that Ronald was. For, on this occasion, that gentleman had been somewhat less discreet. Ostentatiously respectful, with a certain oily civility, he was nevertheless disposed to assert the privileges of cousinship with an insinuating familiarity that made Andrew squirm. And, beneath his deferential manner there seemed a sinister suggestion of a new consciousness of power; a suggestion that he had discovered a new way to put on the screw if the need should arise. Andrew had then and there determined that he should never come into the house again.

To that resolution he still held firmly. But the problem that he had to solve was how, decently, to evade the proposed visit. He could not write bluntly refusing it, and, even if he did, the thick-skinned Ronald would pretty certainly come, notwithstanding. In any case, there would be a letter in reply, which Molly would probably see; and then he would have to tell her of the proposal, and it would be difficult to explain his objection. But he wanted to keep the whole affair from her knowledge. In this he was, perhaps, unwise. It would certainly have been simpler to accept the visit and prepare Molly with a few words of advice and caution. But he could not do it. Deep down in his soul was a feeling that bade him keep Ronald completely out of her life.

Thus he turned his difficulties over and over as he strode along the foot-path through the fields. And gradually a plan shaped itself in his mind. It was quite a simple one. He would first send Ronald a postcard acknowledging his letter but making no comment. Then, on the day before that of the proposed visit he would send a letter stating that he had some business in Crompton—which was only thirty miles distant—and would call on Ronald to talk over the financial situation. There would be no time for an answer to his letter, and, if he agreed to the "loan"—which experience told him he probably would—the matter would be settled and the reason for the unwelcome visit would cease to exist.

There was only one detail at which he boggled. If he went to Crompton, he would be away from home all day, and he would have to give Molly some sort of explanation of his absence. And it could not be a true explanation. It seemed a small matter. But Andrew hated the making of a directly untrue statement at any time, and especially did he hate the idea of telling his wife a lie. However, it seemed that there was no choice. The only way in which his day's absence from home could be simply and naturally explained would be by saying that he was going up to London to show some of his work to a dealer; and that was the course that he decided to adopt.

When he arrived home, he found, rather to his relief, that Molly had not yet returned. With his decision fresh in his mind, he went straight to the writing table in the sitting-room and wrote a brief note to Ronald, acknowledging his letter. Having sealed and stamped it, he dropped it into his pocket, ready for posting later, and then went into the little kitchen to make preparations for tea. But still, as he filled the kettle and set it on the gas ring, collected the tea-things and arranged them on the tray, his perplexities and the plans he had made to solve them continued to revolve in his mind as a sort of background to his present occupation. Impatiently, he tried to dismiss them. He had decided what to do, and further thought was but a useless, purposeless travelling back and forth over the same ground. But the emotional jar that Ronald's letter had inflicted, with its vivid revival of unpleasant memories, had disturbed him profoundly; and, strive as he would to concentrate his attention on what he was doing, he could not silence the running accompaniment of futile reflection. Nevertheless, he carried out his task quite efficiently and with careful consideration of Molly's very definite views on the niceties of the tea-table. The embroidered tea-cloth was spread on the table in the sitting-room in exactly the correct manner and garnished with little top-heavy flower glasses, artfully disposed so as to develop the maximum of inconvenience and liability to capsize. The tray, symmetrically set with its proper appointments—excepting the teapot and hot-water jug, which lurked in the kitchen awaiting the co-operation of the kettle—was placed at the head of the table. Biscuit box, cake basket, butterdish, jam and preserve jars and other minor articles of "family plate" were posted with the strictest regard to their customary stations (and with no regard at all to the fact that the biscuit box was empty and there was no cake). In Molly's mind the "five o'clock tea" tradition still lingered, and the occasion was one of some ceremony.

When he had laid the table, Andrew surveyed his work critically, and, having decided that all was in order, proceeded to cut some wafery slices of brown bread and butter, which he adroitly rolled up into little sausage-like scrolls. Of these he prepared quite an imposing pile, in view of Molly's partiality for them and of the fact that she usually returned from her expeditions in a state of ravenous hunger (she had gone over for an afternoon's shopping to the little town of Bunsford, some two miles away).

At length he laid down his knife, and, having taken a glance at the kettle, went out to the garden gate and looked down the lane. His wife had just turned into it from the road and was now advancing briskly with an enormous parcel in either hand and a smaller one tucked under her arm. For a moment he was disposed to run and meet her and relieve her of her burdens, but, experience having taught him that Molly's parcels usually ran to bulk rather than weight, he turned back into the house, leaving the garden gate and the front door ajar, and went to the kitchen to make the tea.

He had just placed the silver teapot and hot-water jug on the tray when he heard her coming up the garden path,

whistling cheerfully to announce her approach. He went out into the hall to welcome her, and, when she had held up her face for the customary kiss, she tenderly deposited her parcels on the hall table. "You seem to have been going it," Andrew remarked, with an eye on the parcels.

"I have," she admitted. "I've had a lovely time—a regular beano. They were simply giving the things away, so, of course, economy suggested that one should take the opportunity. And I did. I've bought no end of things. You shall see what I have brought with me, presently; the rest are being sent. Do I smell tea? I hope so, for I am simply starving."

She entered the sitting-room and stood for a moment regarding the arrangements with smiling approval. "How nicely you've laid the table, Andy," she exclaimed, "and, my word! what a heap of roly-polys you've cut."

She picked one up and bit off half. Then she continued, with slightly impaired enunciation: "There are some pastries in a box on the hall table. Puffs and things. I hope I haven't squashed them under my arm. I was nearly eating them in the train. Shopping does make you hungry."

Andrew fetched in the box and transferred its contents—bilious little tarts and cakes and three-cornered puffs, apparently produced with the aid of a pair of bellows—to the cake-basket. Then he lifted Molly's hat off—it came off quite easily, being of the coalscuttle-extinguisher type then in vogue—while she placidly poured out the tea with one hand and fed herself with the other, continuing her cheerful babbling, punctuated with mastication.

Andrew sat down at the table, and, as he sipped his tea, looked thoughtfully at his wife. Perhaps a little furtively, too, with an unpleasant and guilty consciousness of the letter in his pocket. But principally his mind was occupied, half-unconsciously, in admiring contemplation of his beautiful wife. Her charm seemed to him always new, as something freshly discovered. To look at her was a pleasure that never staled. It was not only that he was as much, or even more, in love with her as ever, but as an artist, and a figure-painter at that, he was peculiarly sensitive and appreciative of human beauty, and especially the beauty of women. "So you've had a good day's sport," said Andrew.

"Rather!" she replied, in a tone of deep satisfaction. "Of course, Bunsford is not like London, but there are quite a lot of good shops there. And didn't I turn them upside down! And didn't I make the money fly! You'll have to hurry up and sell some more pictures or we shall be on the rocks."

Now, Andrew knew quite well that this was all nonsense. Molly's little raids on the Bunsford shops were dissipations of the most inexpensive sort. She never nearly spent the hundred pounds a year that had come to her on her father's death. Nevertheless, he seized the opportunity. "Yes," said he, "it is about time I raked in some fresh supplies. There are one or two small things that I have got on hand, ready for the market. I must take them up to Montagu and turn them into cash."

"You needn't, Andy," she said, with one of her delightful dimpling smiles. "I was only joking. I didn't really spend much, and I've got quite a lot in the bank."

"I know, dear," he replied. "I wasn't such a mug as to take you seriously. But still, I think I may as well take those things up to Monty. It's no use keeping stuff in the studio cupboard. I think I will go up one day next week, probably Tuesday."

She made no comment on this proposal, and their talk drifted into other channels. After tea she produced the two hats—the principal spoils of the raid—and exhibited them to Andrew; who looked at them as Lord Dundreary looked at the chimpanzee, with surprise and incomprehension. (The feminine hat is usually outside the scope of the masculine intellect, and the hats of that period were beyond belief as things intentionally created.) Then Molly went about her lawful domestic occasions, and Andrew sneaked out to drop his letter into the post-box down in the village. It was a harmless letter, devoid of significance and committing him to nothing. Yet, as he held it in the slit of the post-box, he felt an unaccountable reluctance to let it go; and when at length he released it and heard it fall to the bottom of the box, he had the sense of having done something portentous and irrevocable.

---

## II. — ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

THE days that followed slipped by slowly and wearily, charged for Andrew with anxiety and unhappiness. Unhappiness because he had, for the first time in his married life, a secret which he was withholding from Molly. And in his heart he felt that it was a discreditable secret, of which he would be ashamed if it should ever leak out. This was the chief occasion of his anxiety. For there was the chance that something might upset his plan; and, if it did, he would have to explain. But what could he say? To Molly it would appear as if he distrusted her, and who could say that she would be wrong? Was there not some distrust implied in his repugnance to her meeting Ronald? It was a dreadful thing to think of, for, hitherto, the most perfect confidence had existed between him and his wife; and no woman could be more irreproachable in her conduct than Molly.

Still he went on making the few preparations that were necessary. From his bank at Bunsford he drew out fifty pounds in cash (paying in an equivalent cheque on his London bank) in case Ronald should be unable to deal with a cheque; and, to meet the alternative case, he drew a cheque on the London account to the order of Ronald Barton, Esq., and put it in the attache case that he kept in the studio cupboard. Then, with great care, he drafted the letter which he proposed to send to Ronald. He dated it the 26th of August—Sunday—though, in fact, he proposed to post it early on Monday, so that it should be delivered on Monday evening or by the first post on Tuesday morning—in either case in time to prevent Ronald from coming, but not in time to allow of a reply. It was but a short letter, and, in its final form, ran thus:

*"Willow Cottage, Fairfield.  
26th August, 1928.*

*My dear Ronald,*

*It happens by a fortunate chance that I have to run over to Crompton on business. I say 'fortunate' because we shall have certain matters of a rather private nature to discuss and we can do that better in your rooms than here.*

*"I don't know quite how long my business will take, but I shall turn up at your diggings punctually at one o'clock, when we may, perhaps, go somewhere and get some lunch, before beginning our discussions.*

*"Yours ever,  
"ANDREW."*

It was not without some qualms that he concocted this mendacious epistle, and when he had finished it and addressed and stamped the envelope, he hid it away securely in the attache case until the time should come for posting it. Finally, into the same receptacle he put one or two small and trivial paintings—little more than sketches—which he had hardly thought worth offering to his dealer. Of course, he was not going to offer them now. Their presence in the attache case was merely a concession to sentiment. He didn't want to tell more lies than were absolutely necessary.

Now that he had made all his preparations, it would have seemed reasonable for him to dismiss the matter from his mind until the time for action should arrive. But this he was quite unable to do. The emotional upset, which was at the root of the whole rather foolish business, kept his mind unsettled and exaggerated the effect of his guilty consciousness of his secret and his anxiety lest some unforeseen hitch should occur. The result was that he found himself everlastingly revolving the details of his plan, considering what he should say to Ronald and what he should do if, by any disastrous chance, his scheme should miscarry and his deception should become known to Molly.

In order to be alone and free to think his futile thoughts, he spent much of his time in the studio. He tried to work. He had a rather important picture well started, and, in his normal state of mind, it would have been easy and pleasant to carry on. But after a single attempt he had to desist for fear of spoiling what he had already done.

In the evenings, his restlessness and a curious shyness of his wife's society drove him out to stride impatiently across the fields or along the little-frequented road, chewing the cud of useless and purposeless reflection. He had better have stayed at home and listened to Molly's cheerful gossip, for thereby he would have avoided a world of trouble. But no man can foresee the little surprises that Fate has in store for him; and so it was that Andrew, taking his way along the darkening road, walked straight into the ambush that chance had prepared.

The week had nearly run out, for it was the Monday evening, the evening before the appointed day of his visit to Crompton, when he set forth in his old studio jacket, hatless and unadorned by the spectacles that he wore in more populous places to mitigate the effects of his disfigurement, to tramp along the road and think out once again the details of his proceedings on the morrow. He had posted his letter to Ronald in time for the eleven o'clock collection and everything was ready for his journey. By this time to-morrow, he thought, his difficulties would be over. He would have paid out the money, have disposed of his wastrel cousin and would be free to take up again the normal course of his life.

Thus preoccupied he swung along, taking little note of his surroundings. At long intervals the head-lights of an approaching car started out of the gathering gloom, glared on him for a moment and were gone; or overtaking him, cast his attenuated shadow along the lighted surface of the road with increasing intensity until it culminated in an instant of dazzle, a whizz, a hum of mechanism and a dwindling red light fading into the darkness.

It was at the cross roads, known locally as Kibble's Cross, that the incredible affair happened. Preoccupied as he was, a stationary car drawn up at the corner of the side road made little impression on him, though he saw it and could hear the engine running, and was dimly aware of two men lurking near the car. But wrapped in his own thoughts, he gave them but a passing, inattentive glance and straightway forgot their existence. A few moments later, a bright light streamed past him from behind, then a car came abreast of him and drew up abruptly with a shriek of the brakes and an irritable voice demanded: "Well, what is it?"

Andrew gazed in astonishment at the speaker—a hard-faced elderly man who appeared to be addressing him—and stepped up to the open window to ask what he meant. As he put his head in at the window, the light of an electric torch flashed full in his face; but in spite of the dazzling light he could see that the man had his other hand thrust into his hip pocket. He could also see a middle-aged woman grasping the driving wheel and staring at him with an expression of consternation. He was about to put his question—in fact he had begun to speak—when he felt both his wrists seized in a vice-like grip and held together behind his back. Simultaneously, a hand grasping a pistol was thrust over his shoulder and a voice from behind him commanded: "Put 'em up. Both of you."

Exactly what happened during the next few seconds Andrew never clearly knew. As he felt his wrists grasped, he struggled to turn round and became aware of two men whose faces were hidden by black masks. At the same moment, the man in the car made a quick movement with his farther hand. An instant later there was a double report with the sound of



shattering glass; a piercing scream from the woman, a grinding noise from the engine, and the car leaped forward. In another moment it had gathered speed and was receding swiftly into the darkness. As the reports rang out, Andrew felt his wrists released, and, turning quickly, he saw the two men running furiously towards their car and heard a whimpering voice exclaim: "You blasted fool! Couldn't you see it was the wrong man? And you've done him in."

Andrew stood, bewildered and half-stupefied, looking at the retreating bandits. They were still talking excitedly but he could not hear what they were saying. Soon, they reached their car, tumbled in hurriedly and slammed the door. Again, there was a grinding sound; the car started forward, turned up the side road, and was quickly lost to sight between the hedgerows. The hum of the engine, soon died away and Andrew was left standing alone in the silence of the deserted road.

He tried to collect his scattered wits and to realize what had happened. It was an astounding affair. The audacity of these ruffians in attempting a highway robbery in the presence of a witness seemed amazing. Yet, but for the circumstance that the passenger in the car had been armed, it might easily have been done. The presence of an unarmed stranger would have offered no hindrance to two armed and masked men.

But what had really happened? Was it true that that stern-faced elderly man had been "done in", or was this only a frightened man's conjecture? Almost certainly the latter, for there had been no time to ascertain the effects of the shot. Perhaps there was no harm done, after all, beyond the smashing of the wind-screen. Meanwhile, the question arose as to what he ought to do. At first he was disposed to hurry back to Fairfield and give information to the police; but on reflection, that seemed a futile thing to do, for, long before he could reach the village, the woman who was driving the car would have reported the outrage to the police at the next town. Moreover, there was no police station at Fairfield and only a police patrol who was sent out to the village from Bunsford. Finally, he decided to notify the police at Bunsford on the morrow, though even that would be of little use, seeing that he would be totally unable to identify either of the men or give any description of them.

While he had been turning these questions over in his mind, he had been retracing his steps along the road; for the shock that he had sustained had effectually diverted his thoughts from his domestic troubles and the solitary countryside ceased to attract him. Presently he came to a stile at the entrance to a foot-path which led in a nearly straight line to the village. Here he paused for a few moments and looked back along the road. In the far distance the head-lights of a car appeared as bright sparks of light on the dark background. He watched them, as he stood with one foot on the lower step of the stile, with a feeling of faint dislike. At the moment, the idea of a motor-car seemed to have unpleasant associations. After looking for a few seconds at the distant lights, which grew brighter as he looked, he mounted the stile, and, stepping down on to the foot-path, set forth on the short cut across the fields.

There was no lack of matter for conversation with Molly that night. As he poured out the thrilling story of his adventure, she almost lost interest in the hat, on which she was performing some kind of minor operation, in the wonder and horror of the tale. "But what impudence and bravado!" she exclaimed. "They seem to have gone on just as if you hadn't been there."

"I shouldn't have been much good in any case," said Andrew. "They were probably both armed. At any rate one of them was, and he was pretty ready with his pistol."

"Yes," said she, "I am glad you weren't able to interfere. You might have been lying dead at this moment. I wonder if that poor man in the car was really killed."

"I hope not," said Andrew, "but I am afraid he was hit. He could hardly fail to have been seeing that the muzzle of the pistol was within a foot of him. I suppose I had better drop in to-morrow morning at the police station at Bunsford and give my name and address in case they want to call me as a witness."

Molly laid down her work and looked at him anxiously. "Do you know, Andy," she said, "I don't think I would if I were you. Why say anything about it to anybody? You have got nothing to tell that would help the police. You wouldn't know the men again if you saw them. It is a horrible affair. There may have been murder done. Don't you think it would be better for you to keep right out of it? Nobody knows that you were there, and nobody need ever know."

"The woman in the car saw me, you know," said Andrew.

"Yes," retorted Molly, whisking about with that mental agility which is the peculiar gift of woman, "and she probably took you for one of the gang. And if she did, she will swear through thick and thin that you were. You know how positive women are when they have got an idea into their heads."

He did—Molly, herself, having contributed some striking instances; and he realized that she had put her finger on the one possible complication. Nevertheless, he did not like the idea of lying low when it was certain that inquiries would presently be made. "Well," she urged, when he pointed this out, "wait till they are made, and see what sort of inquiries they are. If the police advertise for the witness who saw the attack, you can come forward. In the meantime, keep your own counsel; and don't go out of the house without your spectacles."

The serious view that she took of the matter tended to transfer itself to him, though the conclusion of their talk still left the question unsettled in his mind. But as to the wisdom of her advice in regard to the spectacles he had no doubt. Until he announced himself, he had better remain unrecognized. And the spectacles were a very efficient disguise, having, in fact, been designed expressly for that purpose. The horn rims enclosed lenses which were virtually plain glass, to offer the least possible obstruction to Andrew's excellent vision. The part of them which really functioned was the bridge; which was

provided with a broad, saddle-shaped guard of flesh-coloured celluloid which occupied the hollow where the bridge of the nose should have been, and, to a great extent, concealed the deficiency. He almost invariably wore them out of doors; and it was due only to the failing light and his mentally disturbed state that he had gone out this evening without them.

The morning found him still undecided as to what he should do, though Molly renewed her admonitions during breakfast. But now the unpleasant business that he had in hand once more began to occupy his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. The guilty consciousness of the deception that he was practising on his wife worried him intensely and made him impatient to be gone. Immediately after breakfast, he fetched his attache case-packed in readiness on the previous day-from the studio, put on his spectacles and made ready to depart. "I suppose, dear," said Molly, as she accompanied him to the outer door and gave him a farewell kiss, "you won't be very late home to-night?"

"I don't expect to be," he replied. "Still, you had better not stay up if I am not home by about ten."

With this he kissed her again, and, turning away, strode briskly down the path. At the gate he looked back and waved his hand. Then he started at a good pace towards the station, with a sense of relief at having got so far without a mishap. Only a few hours more, now, and he would be clear of his worries and would be his own man again. And once again as he swung along, he debated whether he should or should not call at Bunsford police station.

But the question was decided for him by circumstance. As the train on the little branch line from Fairfield drew up in Bunsford Station, he found that a train from London to Crompton was signalled and already in sight down the line. It was a full three-quarters of an hour earlier than the one that he had intended to travel by and would bring him to Crompton that much before his time. Nevertheless, in his impatience to get clear of his own neighbourhood, he welcomed it, and hurried across to the booking office. A couple of minutes later, the train drew up at the platform. It was only moderately full and he was able to secure a first-class smoking compartment to himself. While the train lingered in the station, he peered out anxiously, but no one came to disturb the solitude for which he yearned. At length, the guard's whistle sounded and the train began to move.

He heaved a deep sigh of relief, and as the train gathered speed he proceeded deliberately to fill his pipe. Then he took out Ronald's letter from his letter-case, read it through slowly from the address to the signature and tore it into minute fragments, which he allowed to flutter out of the window. Then he opened his attache case and carefully checked its contents; and when he had done this, he leaned back, relighted his pipe and once more began to revolve in his mind the problem of how he should deal with Ronald.

The money question did not trouble him appreciably. He had in the attache case, in two blank envelopes, a cheque for fifty pounds drawn to Ronald's order and a bundle of fifty pound notes. He took it for granted that one of those two envelopes would be transferred to Ronald—preferably the cheque; or, if it had to be the notes, he would tear up the cheque and cancel the counterfoil. That was all plain sailing, and, though it irked him to pour his earnings into the bottomless pocket of this worthless spendthrift, he would accept the loss with resignation. The real problem was how to keep Ronald away from Fairfield. Supposing that even after the money had been paid, he should persist in his intention of making the visit? What was to be done? Could Andrew tell him bluntly that his presence would not be acceptable? It would be very uncomfortable. And even so, Ronald was uncommonly thick-skinned.

He would not be easily put off if he wanted to come... It was a difficult problem; and Andrew had not solved it satisfactorily when the train rolled into the station at Crompton and came to rest at the platform.

---

### III. — IN THE MIDST OF LIFE

ANDREW'S first proceeding on coming out of the station was to make inquiries at the baker's shop, which was also a post office, for the address of a picture dealer. Of course he knew that there would be no picture dealer, as he understood the term, in a town like Crompton; nor had he any expectation of transacting any business whatever. The inquiry, like the pictures in his attache case, was a mere concession to sentiment. He had told Ronald that he had business in Crompton, and he felt that he must make some pretence of business. It was mere foolish make-believe, and he knew it; but to a man habitually truthful, as he was, there is perhaps a shade of difference between a statement, true in the letter though false in the spirit, and one without even a foundation of truth. At any rate, that was how he felt about it. "A picture dealer," the woman in the shop repeated, reflectively, "I don't know of any regular picture dealer in Crompton. There's Mr. Cooper in the High Street, he sells pictures. He calls himself a carver and gilder. He's the only one I know of."

"I expect he will do," said Andrew, with literal truth this time, and, having thanked the woman, he went forth in search of the High Street and Mr. Cooper.

The former was found easily enough, and the latter after a very brief exploration. Andrew stood for a while outside the shop and examined the contents of the window. There were a few brushes and tubes of colour, several empty frames and half a dozen "original water colours". As the most ambitious of these was priced at eighteen shillings the pair, including the frames, the prospect of any business grew still more remote. Nevertheless, Andrew entered the shop, and, by way of breaking the matter gently, began with the request for a tube of Winsor and Newton's cobalt. When this had been handed to him, he laid his attache case on the counter and opened his "business". "Do you do anything in the way of buying pictures?" he asked.

Mr. Cooper was cautious. "I don't buy a lot," said he, "but I am always ready to look at samples. Have you got any with

you?"

Andrew opened his case and produced his "samples", which the dealer took in his hands and looked at suspiciously. "Are these originals?" he asked. "They look like reproductions."

"No," replied Andrew, "they are originals; my own work."

Mr. Cooper examined them again with renewed interest. After a prolonged inspection, he inquired: "How much?"

"Five guineas each," Andrew replied.

The dealer stiffened and cast a startled glance at the artist. "Did you say five guineas each?" he demanded, incredulously.

Andrew repeated the statement, whereupon the dealer hastily deposited the paintings in the open attache case and shook his head sadly but emphatically. "I don't say they may not be worth it," said he, "but I have to sell pictures cheap, and find the frames myself. Five shillings a drawing is my outside price."

Andrew was not surprised or disappointed. The interview had served its purpose. It had been a business transaction and had conferred a quality of literal truth on his statement to Ronald. Satisfied with this make-believe, he repacked his pictures and closed his attache case. Then, after a few minutes' amicable chat with the dealer, he wished him "good morning" and took his leave.

His premature arrival at Crompton left him with a full hour to dispose of before keeping his tryst at Ronald's lodgings. He was not inclined to call there before he was due, with the chance of finding his cousin absent and being brought into undesired contact with the landlady; and, moreover, he still had the foolish urge to consider over again what he would say to Ronald at the coming interview. Accordingly, he spent the time rambling up and down the streets, looking with rather wandering attention into the shop windows and examining the general features of the town.

First he proceeded to ascertain the whereabouts of the street in which his cousin lived, and, having found it, to locate approximately the number, 16. Barleymow Street was a respectable though rather shabby street, mostly consisting of private houses with a few shops. Near one end was an archway leading into a kind of alley, and, above the arch was a blue lamp bearing the words, "Police Station," while, on the space of wall beside the arch was a large board covered with printed bills containing announcements of persons missing, wanted or found drowned, and other similar police notices. Here he lingered for a while, reading these rather gruesome advertisements and once more considering irresolutely whether he ought not to step in and make his report of the incident of the previous night.

It was a more momentous question than he realized; but, fortunately, he took the right decision, though whether that decision was due to Molly's admonitions or his preoccupation with his present business it is impossible to say. At any rate, he decided to wait until he was back in his own neighbourhood and turned away in search of further objects of interest.

Such an object he found near the opposite end of the street, and the oddity of it diverted his attention for the moment from his immediate anxieties and preoccupations. It was in a large window—a sort of hybrid between a shop and a private house—and consisted of a hand-written placard executed in bold Roman capitals announcing that these premises were occupied by no less a person than Professor Booley, late of Boston, U.S.A. (popularly believed to be the hub of the universe). It set forth that the said Professor was a specialist in the beautification of the Human Countenance, and gave in emphatic and even dictatorial terms a number of items of advice coupled with reasoned suggestions. Thus:

**GOOD LOOKS ARE THE SUREST PASSPORTS TO SUCCESS.  
IF NATURE HASN'T GIVEN THEM TO YOU,  
COME IN AND LET ME MAKE GOOD HER FAILURE.  
  
WHY HAVE EYEBROWS ALL AWRY WHEN  
THE SPECIALIST CAN SET THEM FAIR AND EVEN?  
  
WHY HAVE A WRINKLED FACE? DON'T.  
COME RIGHT IN AND HAVE YOUR SKIN  
MADE AS SMOOTH AS A BABY'S.  
  
WHY HAVE A CROOKED NOSE?  
DON'T. LET ME STRAIGHTEN IT OUT.  
  
DON'T BE CONTENT WITH A BACK SEAT  
BECAUSE YOU WERE BORN HOMELY.  
COME INTO MY PARLOR AND BE MADE FIT  
FOR A PLACE IN THE FRONT ROW.**

Andrew stood before the window, reading these adjurations and commands with a faint smile, in which, however, there was more of wistfulness than amusement. Doubtless, the Professor was a quack of the deepest dye; but he had set forth a truth of which no one could be more sensible than the spectacled reader who stood before the window. Dimly as he had realized the value of good looks when the precious gift was his, his loss had made it but too clear. What most men experience only with advancing years, he had experienced in the hey-day of his manhood.

He sauntered on, musing whimsically on the Professor's procedure. How did that redoubtable operator go about

smoothing out wrinkles? A flat iron hardly seemed to meet the case. And how did he straighten out a crooked nose? The question evoked a ridiculous picture of the Professor tapping out the patient's proboscis on an anvil, or bringing it to a straight line by means of a screw clamp. If only the Professor's claims could be taken seriously! Though, to be sure, even Professor Booley had not claimed to be able to create a new nose on the foundations of one that had been battered out of existence.

Slowly his saunterings and shop-gazings consumed the time, as he noted by an occasional glance at his watch; and punctually at two minutes to one he turned again into Barleymow Street. There was no need for him to check the numbers afresh, for, at the middle of the street, where he had located number sixteen, his cousin was already waiting, slowly pacing up and down before his doorway, and at the moment with his back turned towards Andrew. Then he swung round, and, catching sight of his cousin, started forward briskly with a smile of recognition and greeting.

As the two men approached, they regarded each other critically, and Andrew noted with something like a pang of envy what a really fine-looking man his cousin was; such a man as he, himself, had been but a year or two ago. "Here you are, then," said Ronald, grasping his hand effusively, "punctual to the minute as usual. You ought to have been a business man instead of an artist."

"There is no reason why one should not be both," said Andrew.

"Answered with your customary wisdom," rejoined Ronald. "And, speaking of business, have you polished off the little affair that brought you to the unlikely region of Crompton-on-Sea?"

As he asked the question, Ronald's face exhibited a faint smirk which brought an angry flush to his cousin's cheek. Obviously, Ronald was slightly sceptical of the business appointment; but he might have kept his scepticism to himself. "Yes," Andrew replied, "it didn't take more than a few minutes."

"I hope you brought off the deal," said Ronald.

"No," replied Andrew, "there was nothing doing; at least, not at my price. Better luck next time, perhaps. Do you know of a likely place where we can get some lunch?"

"I know a place that will suit us exactly," answered Ronald. "But you won't want to lug that attache case about with you all day. We shall probably go for a walk after lunch. Shall I plant it in my digs until you want it again?"

Andrew accepted the suggestion gladly, having already had enough of the case, and handed it to Ronald, who let himself into the house with a latchkey and disappeared for a few moments. When he reappeared, he linked his arm in Andrew's and led him a way in the direction of the approved restaurant, which was situated at the farther end of the High Street and turned out to be a place of some pretensions. As they walked, Ronald chatted with the easy volubility of an accomplished salesman or cheap-jack on every subject but the one which was the occasion of their meeting, while Andrew listened half impatiently but with a certain grim amusement. He knew this trick of Ronald's of old. That slippery gentleman could never be brought to make a plain statement of the circumstances which called for the particular loan which he happened to be seeking. Instead, he managed with really remarkable skill to keep up a sort of conversational solo on all kinds of indifferent topics, always discreetly avoiding the one concerned with the financial transaction.

On this occasion, he got an excellent start as they passed the arched opening that led to the police station; for, at that moment, a bare-headed policeman was engaged in sticking a new bill on the notice board. They had only a glimpse of it in passing, but they were able to see that it was headed in bold type: "Wanted for Murder." That bill furnished Ronald with material for discourse—one could hardly call it conversation—until they reached the restaurant.

Andrew made no attempt to counter these manoeuvres. In a contemptuous way he was slightly amused by his cousin's evasions; and he had no curiosity as to the "top hole opening" which was the nominal occasion of the need for fifty pounds. Probably it was a myth covering some gambling transaction. That was really of no consequence. He had brought the money with him and he knew that presently he would hand it over. The only thing that mattered was that there should be no arrangement for a visit to Fairfield.

The lunch was a complete success. Andrew, himself, was pretty sharp set and Ronald's exploits suggested a recent period of abstemiousness. In fact, his concentration on alimentary activities hindered his conversation to an extent that enabled Andrew to get in a question or two on the subject of the "opening". But Ronald was not to be drawn. "Yes, old chappie," said he, "we shall have to talk things over presently, though it's all pretty simple to a man of your business acumen. We might take a stroll in the country where we can talk at our ease. There's some quite pleasant country along the north coast. Quiet, too. Most of the visitors seem to keep to the south. By the way, those spectacles of yours are an excellent idea. You hadn't got them when I saw you last. I suppose you don't really want them for your eyesight, but that wide bridge covers up the scar so that you look quite like your old self."

Andrew noted the evasion with amused exasperation, but he made no further attempt to "get down to brass tacks". He sipped his coffee and assented passively to Ronald's suggestion of a green Chartreuse "to give the festivity a final kick". Then he paid the bill and went forth with his companion to see what the country walk might bring in the way of explanations.

It brought what he had expected; an endless stream of talk on the most diverse topics with a discreet avoidance of any references to the golden opportunity. Only once was that subject approached, and then merely in respect of that aspect of the transaction which to Ronald was the only one that mattered. "By the way, old chappie," he said when Andrew had put

out another feeler, "I suppose you have brought the rhino with you?"

"I have brought a cheque," Andrew replied.

Ronald's face fell. "That's a bit awkward," said he. "The fact is I haven't got a banking account at the moment. Didn't find my bank satisfactory and haven't got a new one yet."

Andrew made no comment; but a vision of the initials "R.D." arose before "the eye of his mind". Bankers are apt to develop an "unsatisfactory" attitude towards customers whose cheques have to be "referred to drawer", which, as Andrew knew, had happened in Ronald's case on more than one occasion. "You see," Ronald continued, "it would hardly look well if I had to hand in your cheque for my deposit. They'd see that I had no banking account of my own, and that's just what I don't want them to know. I want to give the impression of a financially substantial person, as I shall have some of their money passing through my hands."

Andrew noted mentally the appropriateness of the phrase, "passing through my hands," and saw unpleasant possibilities looming in the future. He only hoped that "they", whoever they were—supposing them to have any real objective existence—would make suitable arrangements for "their" own security.

Meanwhile he replied: "It is an open cheque; but if that doesn't quite meet the case, I dare say I could manage to let you have cash. But I should like to know a little more about the business."

"Of course you would," Ronald agreed heartily, "though the essential fact is that I have to lay down fifty pounds as security before I can take up the appointment. Look at that jolly old windmill. What a pity they have taken the sails off! Makes it look such a ruinous affair. But they nearly always do, if they don't pull the whole thing down. Soon there won't be a complete windmill in the whole country."

Here he broke off into a discourse on windmills in particular and the deterioration of the countryside in general, and, for the time being, the subject of the security lapsed. It being obvious that he did not mean to be drawn into any intelligible account of the business transaction, real or imaginary, Andrew resigned himself to the inevitable and accepted the conversational lead; with the reservation that no arrangements for a visit to Fairfield were entertained.

Apart from its unpleasant antecedents, the walk was agreeable enough. They had soon left the little town behind, and the country, though not romantically beautiful, offered a pleasant rural prospect. The cornfields, it is true, were denuded of their crops, which now, in the form of rows of ricks, lined the hedgerows at the bottom of the fields. But the stubble, now faded to a soft purplish grey, was enriched by the daisies that had sprung up since the harvest, and the groups of scarlet poppies. The only drawback to the landscape was the scarcity of trees and the lack of any relief from the glare of the hot afternoon sun. For, late as it was in the year, the summer continued with unabated heat and brilliancy. The sky was cloudless, a tremulous haze hung over the ground, and the sea, which was visible over the edge of the cliffs, was still of the clear summer blue. "It's deuced hot," said Ronald, taking off his hat to wipe his forehead. "How would it be to get down to the beach and have a stroll along the sands? It would be fresher there than up here."

"Can we get down?" asked Andrew.

"Yes," replied Ronald. "There is a sunken road leading to a gap-way that opens out on to the beach. I found it by following a couple of seaweed carts, and I've been there once or twice since for a bathe. Nobody ever seems to come there, so you don't have to bother about bathing suits."

He turned off the road and led the way across a stubble field, and, after walking about a quarter of a mile, they came to a shallow sunken road, marked by deep ruts in its chalky surface made by the wheels of the heavily laden seaweed carts. Gradually the road sank deeper as it declined towards the sea level until it took on the character of a narrow gully enclosed by lofty walls of chalk. Down this gully the two men picked their way over the rough road in the deep, cool shadow until they reached the bottom of the slope and stood looking out on the sun-lit sands.

Ronald cast a glance at the two lofty headlands which enclosed the little bay and remarked: "We shan't be able to walk very far along the beach. The tide is coming in, and it won't be long before it is up to the cliffs where they jut out. We mustn't get caught on the hop."

"Well," said Andrew, "there's a good stretch of smooth sand in the bay. It will be quite pleasant to walk up and down by the sea without going out of the bay; and it will seem cooler by the water's edge, even if it isn't."

"Yes," Ronald agreed, "there is something cooling in the very sound of the waves breaking on the beach. But I don't see why we need stop at the sound. A dip would be a good deal more refreshing. What do you say? The sea looks just perfect for a bathe."

Andrew cast an approving glance at the calm blue sea and the lines of creamy white where the little surf broke with a gentle murmur on the shore. "It does look rather inviting," he admitted; "but it seems a bit primitive—no bathing suits and no towels."

"As to the suits," said Ronald, beginning to slip off his jacket, "you can see for yourself that the place is as solitary as the Sahara; and what do you want with towels when you have got a roasting sun like this to dry you?"

He settled the question by backing into a shallow recess in the cliff and proceeding rapidly to divest himself of his clothes, when Andrew, after a moment's hesitation, followed suit. As both men were rather scantily clad in the ubiquitous grey flannel suits that were then the vogue, the process was not a long one. In a couple of minutes they were scampering

across the sand towards the surf in a condition which Mr. Titmarsh would have described as “naked as a pair of Hottentots”, Ronald taking a certain satisfaction in the defiance of convention and Andrew slightly self-conscious.

The breach of the proprieties, however, was only potential, for Ronald’s description of the place was so far justified that the nearest approach to a spectator was a small fishing lugger with dark brown sails which was beating up the coast some three or four miles away. Meanwhile the two cousins swam up and down in the calm water outside the surf, with intervals of resting and wallowing in the shallows or basking in the sun on the dry sand before once more splashing into the water.

In these disports the best part of an hour passed. At length, Andrew suggested that it was time to be turning homeward, and they emerged for the last time, shaking themselves as they stepped out on to the wet sand, and took their way across the beach to the place where their clothes were deposited close under the cliff. Ronald led the way at a brisk run, and, on arrival at the “dressing station”, sat down and reclined at his ease on one of the heaps of clothes—it happened to be Andrew’s, and the similarity of the two suits may possibly have misled him; but the enjoyment with which he rubbed his wet body on the dry garments strongly suggested an intentional “mistake”. It would have been like Ronald. Andrew followed, shivering slightly, and sat down on the other heap in an upright posture, to catch as much of the sun’s heat as possible; for the afternoon was drawing out and the sun was now appreciably lower.

For some time neither of the two men spoke. Ronald lay stretched at full length with his eyes closed, enjoying the warmth of the sunlight which played on his rapidly drying skin, while Andrew sat absently watching the fishing lugger, now tacking out to sea and now going about to make a tack in-shore. At length, Ronald spoke, in a drowsy tone and without opening his eyes. “So you think you will be able to manage cash in place of that cheque? I hope you will. It will be a lot more convenient for me.”

“Well,” replied Andrew, “I’ll see what can be done. But you haven’t given me any particulars, you know.”

“What’s the good?” protested Ronald. “I don’t know much about it myself. It’s an insurance job. I shall have to rout out new clients and, when I get a bite, I shall have to take the first premium. That’s why they want a deposit. So that I shan’t mizzle with the takings. Isn’t that enough for you?”

As it was all the information he was likely to get, Andrew assented with a grunt and once more fixed his eyes on the distant lugger. Another interval of silence followed. Then Ronald inquired, sleepily: “Molly send me any message?”

“She doesn’t know I was going to see you; and I don’t want her to know anything about this transaction. She mightn’t be best pleased at my dropping money in this way.”

“Don’t you believe it, dear boy,” said Ronald, with a faint smile. “Molly is quite fond of her cousin. She would be only too delighted to help him out of a difficulty. She knows what an affection he has for her. And, by Jove! What a good-looking girl she is! I don’t know of any girl that I admire so much. You’re a lucky beggar. But I’ll remember that mum’s the word when I come over to see you.”

“I think,” Andrew said, huskily, “that it would be as well if you did not come over just at present. In fact, I would rather you did not.”

Ronald opened his eyes and looked curiously at his cousin. Then he shut them again and smiled a smile of deep cunning. “So that’s how you feel, is it?” said he. “I suspected something of the kind when you had this very opportune business appointment in Crompton. However, I can take a hint. I should be devilish obtuse if I couldn’t take one of that breadth.”

He spoke without anger but in a tone of undisguised contempt which brought the hot blood to Andrew’s cheeks and which made it clear that he grasped the position exactly. Andrew squirmed with shame and anger; shame of the paltry, unreasonable jealousy of which Ronald evidently suspected him, and anger at the suspicion. For a moment he looked down at the face of the man beside him, with its closed eyes and the sinister, cunning, insolent smile; and an impulse surged through him to batter it with his fists until it was even as his own. But he conquered the impulse and looked away, fixing his eyes once more on the lugger, which was now tacking in-shore and would soon be hidden by the projecting headland. He followed it with a dull interest as it drew nearer and nearer to the headland, idly watching for the moment when it should pass into eclipse, or should go about and head again out to sea.

Gradually the distance between the vessel’s bows and the jutting promontory contracted, and Andrew still watched with a strange, foolish eagerness to see whether she would vanish or turn about. At last the dwindling space dwindled to extinction and the boat’s bows and the dark brown mainsail began to slip out of sight behind the promontory; and at that moment, Andrew was startled by a heavy thud at his side, a rattle and clatter above and around him and a volley of falling fragments of chalk, one of which struck him a shrewd blow on the shoulder. With a cry of alarm, he scrambled to his feet and raced away for dear life across the sand, pausing only to look round when he had run a full thirty yards.

What he saw when he did at last look round, seemed to turn him to stone. Beside the place where he had been sitting was a litter of fragments of chalk and one great block which rested where Ronald’s head had been. Out of the litter the naked legs projected, moving with a slow, twitching, purposeless motion which was horrible to look on, and which, even as he looked, slowly died away and gave place to a dreadful limp stillness.

For some moments, Andrew stood gazing with starting eyes at this awful spectacle without conscious or intelligible thought. He was literally stunned. Presently, regaining some semblance of consciousness, he began to creep back towards the place where his cousin lay with some vague idea of help or rescue. But when he drew nearer, that idea faded from his mind. The way in which the great block sat on the flattened clothing, to say nothing of the gory oozings around it, told the

horrible story. That block, weighing perhaps a hundredweight, had come down on the smiling face with the closed eyes with the impact of a steam hammer. It was useless to think of trying to move it, even if that had been within the compass of one man's strength. The head that had been there was a head no longer.

Still confused and bewildered by the suddenness of the catastrophe, Andrew stood with his eyes riveted on the great block, shaking like a man in the cold stage of an ague. He was aware of a dreadful feeling of faintness and nausea and of a cold sweat that had broken out on his face and trickled down in chilly drops. But, for a time, his power of thought seemed to be in total abeyance. He could only stand and stare vacantly at the great block and the naked, motionless legs.

Suddenly, he became conscious of his own nude condition; and with that consciousness his faculties awoke. With a nervous glance up the face of the cliff to the white patch which marked the spot from which the block had fallen, he ran to the heap of clothes, and, snatching them up, backed away from the cliff and began to huddle them on as quickly as his shaking limbs would permit. But still, his actions were those of an automaton, for, all the while, his eyes strayed continually to the motionless form under the litter of chalk fragments and the great block which rested where, but a few minutes ago, had been that comely head with the closed eyes and the sinister, insolent, smiling face.

When he had dressed himself, he looked around for his hat, but he could only see Ronald's panama. His own hat must be somewhere under that gory heap, which he would not even dare to approach. With a shudder at the very thought, he picked up the panama and flung it on his head, careless of the fact that it came down nearly to his ears. Then, with a last look at the figure that reposed with such dreadful stillness at the foot of the cliff, he turned and walked away quickly towards the gap that opened on to the sunken road. As he entered the now sombre and gloomy gully, the dark silhouette of the lugger stole out from behind the headland and began to shape a course towards the bay.

---

#### IV. — THE SHADOW OF THE GALLOWS

ANDREW stumbled up the rough sunken road with an appearance of haste and speed which was in curious contrast with his actual lack of conscious purpose. Vaguely, there was in his mind an intention to give information to somebody of the terrible mishap, and a desire to get back to the town to that end. But he was still shaken by the horror of what he had seen, was still haunted by the vision of that great block of chalk resting so flatly where a head had been that there had seemed to be no space underneath it. Quickly as he went, his knees trembled weakly, the faintness and nausea were only beginning to subside and a chaotic whirl of thoughts surged through his mind. To the bearing on the future of the thing that had happened, he was as yet unable to give any consideration. His whole attention was focused on the dreadful disaster that had befallen in the twinkling of an eye; the heavy thud of the falling block, the rattling down of the fragments, and, above all, the sight of those horrible, twitching legs.

When the sunken road at length reached the surface, it strayed away across the fields as a rough, chalky cart-track which seemed to lead in the direction of a distant farm. As it was the only road visible, Andrew followed it automatically without giving any thought to its direction. At least, it led away from the sea and that terrible haunted bay. As to the whereabouts of the town he had only a confused idea; for during the walk out with Ronald, his mind had been so preoccupied that he had taken no note of the way they had come. Ronald had selected the route and he had followed Ronald. Now nothing impinged on his vision with any kind of familiarity. So, for a time, he walked on rather like one in a dream, clearly conscious of nothing and only dimly aware of a certain feeling of discomfort, particularly in his feet.

He had followed the cart-track for close upon a mile when it opened on a road; a small by-road enclosed by dust-whitened hedgerows. The necessity of deciding which way he should turn aroused him from his dreamy, half-conscious state. He wanted to get to Crompton, but he had only the vaguest idea as to the direction in which it lay; and the sinuous road, curving away on either hand, gave little indication as to whither it eventually led. After a few moments of hesitation, he turned towards the right and once more set forth at a quick pace, spurred on to haste by the agitation of his mind rather than by any conscious purpose.

He hurried on along the road for more than half a mile before he met any human creature. Truly, Ronald had been right as to the scarcity of wayfarers in this part of the country. At length there appeared at a bend of the road a miller's cart with its tarpaulin cover raised, in the old-fashioned way, on a sort of ridge-pole, and the driver dimly visible in the dark triangle underneath. As it came in sight, Andrew decided to hail the driver and ask for a direction to Crompton; and then, becoming aware for the first time that his spectacles were not on his face, he instinctively thrust his hand into the pocket in which he usually carried them. But they were not there. Instead, he brought out a cigarette case which was certainly not his.

For a few moments he stood staring foolishly at the case in his hand and wondering how it could have come into his pocket. Then his eye caught the wristband of the shirt which projected from the end of his sleeve; and he saw that the shirt also was not his. On this, with a sudden suspicion that something was amiss, he examined critically the clothes which he was wearing, including the shoes. Of them all, not a single item was his own. In his hurry and agitation, he had put on Ronald's clothes; indeed, he could not have done otherwise, for his own were under that dreadful heap which he could never have brought himself to disturb.

The discovery gave him a shock which was somewhat disproportionate to the occasion. Naturally, he was surprised; but there was really nothing in the affair that need have disturbed him. The clothes were almost exactly like his own, and they fitted him well enough to pass without attracting notice. The error could be easily explained, and he would probably be

able to recover his own clothes, or at least the contents of the pockets. But the incident jarred on his already strained nerves as if there were something incriminating in it. Perhaps the need for explanation which would presently arise unnerved him; and certainly the loss of his spectacles and the necessity for going abroad with his hated disfigurement exposed affected him profoundly. So much so that he let the miller's cart pass unhalted and started forward once more, trusting to chance to find the right direction.

By this time, his thought had become a little more coherent, and he began to look about him with some anxiety; for the afternoon was waning, and, at this time of year, the evenings begin to draw in. It was, therefore, with a sense of relief that he found himself approaching a cross-road and perceived at the crossing a four-armed finger-post. But, if he was relieved at the prospect of getting a reliable direction, he was rather disconcerted when he reached the post and read the inscription on the pointer; for it then became clear that he had been walking almost directly away from Crompton from the time when he emerged from the sunken road.

He turned away from the post and started on what appeared to be the direct road to the town, though even this was only a larger by-road. But its surface was better than that of the one on which he had been travelling, and he set forth at a swinging pace to cover the three miles that, according to the finger-post, lay between him and the town, regardless of the slight discomfort due to the strange shoes. In spite of the unpleasant surprise of finding himself in the wrong clothes, the halt and the necessity for thought had done him good by diverting his attention from the horrors of his late experience to his present condition and the question as to what he would be called upon to do. He had found a wrist-watch in one of the pockets of the coat, and, as he now strapped it on his wrist and noted the lateness of the hour, he turned this latter question over in his mind.

Someone would have to be informed of the accident, and, when he asked himself. Who? the obvious answer was, the police. He knew where to find the police station, and he decided to make straight for it as soon as he entered the town. The story that he had to tell was perfectly simple. There would be no need for any elaborate questioning on the part of the police. At least, he hoped not; for he was conscious of a very definite shrinking from any discussion of his relations with Ronald. Perhaps he might take the opportunity to mention the incident of the motor bandits. He considered this point, and, possibly influenced by Molly's warning, eventually decided that he had better keep to the subject of the accident and say nothing of the other matter.

Presently another question intruded itself on his mind. At the time of the disaster, the tide was coming in and the margin of the advancing waters was not so very distant from the base of the cliffs. Would there be time for the body to be recovered? And, if there were not; if the corpse should be borne away by the waves and carried out to sea, how would that affect the position? He considered this point at some length and not without a shade of uneasiness, but could arrive at no conclusion, excepting that it would involve disagreeable explanations to Molly. But, in any case, he would have to account for his presence at Crompton.

So, as he strode along the road, his thoughts rambled from one to another of the innumerable consequences of the tragedy that came crowding into his consciousness. Mostly, they were unpleasant to contemplate; and if, in the dim background of his thoughts, there was some faint feeling of relief at the disappearance from his life of this troublesome parasite, he put it away from him with something like a sense of guilt.

When, at last, he entered the town the light was already failing. Nevertheless, he pulled his hat even further down over his face as he yearned for the protection of the lost spectacles, and looked about him furtively. At first, the place seemed to him completely unfamiliar; but, after wandering up one thoroughfare and down another, he came into the High Street and was then able to take his bearings. The police station, he knew was at the end of Barleymow Street and thither he at once directed his steps. He found it without difficulty and turned into it gratefully out of the glare of the High Street with its illuminated shop windows. He crept along in the shade of the houses, glancing uncomfortably at Number 16 as he passed it, and thinking of the fine, manly figure that he had seen standing outside it when he arrived, and of the corpse around which the waves were perhaps already clamouring. But he hurried on and presently came to the archway that led into the passage or alley in which the station was situated.

Here he paused irresolutely, suddenly aware of an unaccountable feeling of nervousness and a reluctance to speak to strangers of the awful thing which he had witnessed. The lamp had been lit outside the arch and it cast its light brilliantly on the notice board and the various bills that were pasted or tacked on it. Conspicuous among these was the bill that he had seen the constable sticking up as he and Ronald had passed. Again his eye caught the heading, printed in bold type: "Wanted for Murder," but he was too much preoccupied with his present business to feel any curiosity as to this crime, whatever it might be; in fact, he was on the point of turning away when two other words in large type arrested his attention. Half-way down the sheet, occupying an entire line, were the words, "KIBBLE'S CROSS". Then there had been a murder; and he was a principal witness.

He turned back and rapidly ran his eye down the bill. Not the whole way though. After a brief and dry statement of the actual circumstances, the announcement went on: "It is believed that more than one man was concerned in the crime, but the only one who was seen was the man who actually fired the shot. He is described as a somewhat fair man with grey eyes, about thirty years of age and easily recognizable by reason of a remarkably deformed nose, which appears to have been broken and is completely flat excepting at the tip, which is rather prominent."

He read no farther, but, backing away hastily from the area of light under the lamp, crept into the shadow of the houses and stole along the darkened street, trembling so violently that his legs seemed ready to double up beneath him. The



description in the bill had struck him with the force of a thunderbolt. For the moment, he was on the point of mental and physical collapse, conscious of nothing but an overwhelming terror and a horrible feeling of sickness; indeed, so near was he to actually fainting that he was fain to lean against the wall of a house and rest awhile on the low sill of a darkened window.

His terror was natural enough and not without ample cause. For, stunned as he was, the essential position presented itself clearly and unmistakably. There had been two persons in that car. One of them was dead—murdered; and the other, the woman, believed that she had seen him commit the murder. Even in his dazed condition, Molly's words recurred to him; when a woman holds a belief, she knows no doubts. This woman would be ready to go into the witness-box and swear that she saw him fire the shot that had killed her companion. But what answer could there be to the testimony of an eye-witness? There could be none. Nor could there be any extenuation. It had been a cold-blooded murder without provocation or excuse of any kind. He had but to be caught to be set forthwith on the direct road to the gallows. And caught he would assuredly be. The woman had given a correct description of him and she would recognize him instantly and with certainty. And as to escape; how was a man to escape arrest whose face advertised his identity to any chance stranger?

He rose shakily from the window-sill and began once more to creep along the street in the shadow, pulling down his hat over his eyes and lowering his head when he came within the range of a street lamp. His state was pitiable. He was as one already condemned. Hope he had none. He saw the rope dangling before his eyes, the drop of the gallows yawning at his feet. Like some hunted animal, he looked around wildly for some place in which to hide. But where could he hide in this wilderness of men? where every stranger was a possible enemy? Supposing he should make his way back to the country and lurk in the unfrequented fields? To what purpose? Sooner or later he must be found. Someone would see him and report his meeting with the man with "the remarkably deformed nose". He could not hide in the fields for ever. He must have food and drink; unless he could find some remote and obscure place where he could lie in hiding until he should die of starvation. It was a poor chance, though perhaps it was better than being hanged.

As his thoughts rambled on thus, he continued to creep cautiously along the street. In so far as his mind was capable of forming a decision, he had decided to make his way out of the town, and he began to look warily ahead and scan the corner of the street as he approached it; and at this moment he found himself passing a half-lighted window which he recognized by the still visible placards as that of the Beauty Specialist.

He paused and gazed at the placards. There was not enough light to read the inscriptions, but he had no need to read them. He remembered them quite clearly. And as he recalled those ridiculous promises and exhortations, a wild hope sprang up in his heart. Of course, the fellow was a mere quack. But was it possible that he could do something? It mattered not in the least what he did. An additional disfigurement even would answer the purpose if only his appearance could be in some way changed so that his face should cease to be the face which that woman had seen at the window of the car. It was a chance—the only chance that he could see of escape from the gallows.

He looked up and down the street. Not a living creature was in sight. He made an effort to pull himself together. The pallor of his face he could not control, but he could try to muster up some composure of manner. But even in that moment of agitated expectation, one cautionary idea stole into his mind. Supposing the Professor had seen the bill outside the police station! He must be prepared for that contingency. Nevertheless, he determined to take the risk. After another glance up and down the street, he approached the door, and, gripping the handle firmly to control the tremor of his hand, turned it deliberately, pushed open the door, entered and closed it after him. As he turned away from the door, he confronted a pleasant-faced elderly man in shirt-sleeves and a white apron, who was busily engaged in packing one or two large trunks, by the rather dim light of a single electric lamp.

At the sound of the closing door, the man looked up, and a shade of impatience or annoyance stole over his face. Andrew noted it with some misgiving as he inquired nervously: "Are you Professor Booley?"

"I am," was the reply; "or, perhaps, I should say I was, as my professional career in this country has now come to an end. I am just putting my goods together ready for a start to-morrow morning. In twenty-four hours, I hope to be in Liverpool, if not actually on board ship. May I ask what you wanted with me?"

At the Professor's announcement Andrew's heart sank. For a few moments he was unable to answer; but, at length, recovering his outward composure with an effort, he replied: "I had come to ask for your professional help, and I hope you will not refuse to do what you can for me.

"I am afraid that is what I shall have to do," the Professor rejoined in a tone of courteous regret. "You see how things are with me. I have finished up and am just making my preparations for departure. I thought I had fastened the door when I turned the lights out. I am real sorry not to be able to do your business, whatever it is. By the way, what was it that you wanted me to do for you?"

"If you will look at my face," said Andrew, "I think that will answer your question; and I do hope you will try to help me if the thing is not absolutely impossible."

The Professor looked at him a little curiously; then, suddenly, his attention sharpened and a somewhat startled expression appeared on his face; whereat Andrew experienced a spasm of alarm. Had this man seen the police bill, and was he recognizing "the man with the remarkably deformed nose?" His terror was not diminished when the Professor strode forward and fixed a look of intense scrutiny on that unfortunate member. But the next question reassured him to some extent. "You were not born like that?"

"No," replied Andrew. "I once had quite a decent-looking nose. This is the result of a blow from a cricket-ball."

"Ah!" said the Professor, "nasty, dangerous things. You must have been a fairly good-looking fellow before you caught that biff."

"I believe I was," Andrew replied, modestly.

The Professor continued to scrutinize the injured nose with the most profound interest and attention. Then from inspection he proceeded to palpation. With an unmistakably expert finger and thumb he explored the sunken bridge, delicately tracing the edges of the flattened nasal bones and pinching up the loose skin which lay over them. "It's an absolutely ideal case," he murmured, rather with the manner of a man speaking to himself. "A good firm base of solid bone and a fair amount of spare skin, all free, without any adhesions to the bone underneath. It's a case in a million."

Recognizing these observations as being of the nature of a soliloquy, Andrew forbore to interrupt. But when the Professor, subsiding into silence, stepped back a pace and stood, still with his eyes riveted on the deformed feature, as if taking in the general effect in relation to the rest of the face, he ventured once more to urge his case. "I hope you are going to relent, Professor," he pleaded, "and give me the benefit of your skill. It means a lot to me, as you can judge for yourself."

How much it meant to him, the Professor was, naturally, unable to judge, having, apparently, not seen the police bill. But the hideous disfigurement of an otherwise comely young man must have seemed to him a matter of sufficient urgency, for he replied in a tone of kindly sympathy: "I can see it does, sonny; and I can't find it in my heart to send you away like that when a bit of trouble on my part may make life a different thing for you. No, sir! We have our duties to one another; and my duty is to let the packing go to blazes and put all the skill and knowledge that I have at your disposal."

Andrew drew a deep breath of relief, and, with a heart bursting with gratitude, he began to stammer out his thanks, when the Professor interrupted him. "Don't be too previous," said he. "When I tell you what I propose to do, perhaps you'll think better of it. If I get busy, you won't enjoy it a little bit. I tell you, it will hurt like blazes. It might be possible to use a local anaesthetic such as dentists use. I do sometimes, but I don't want to in this case because it might easily happen that the anaesthetic would just turn the scale the wrong way and make the operation a failure. And I don't want it to fail. But I give you fair warning. While I am working, you will feel as if you had molten lead running into your nose. And, mind you, you'll have to stick it and not move a muscle or the whole thing will be a failure. Now, what do you say? Can you stick it? It's up to you to decide."

Andrew had no hesitation. What the Professor was going to do, and what the result would be, he had no idea. But whatever the result might be, if only it were to alter his appearance, he would be saved from his present horrible peril. "You can take it," said he, "that I am prepared to put up with any pain that you have to inflict; and I promise you that I will keep absolutely still until you have finished."

"Good!" said the Professor. "I take you at your word; and I think it will be worth your while. But there is one other warning that I ought to give you. There is just the possibility that something may go wrong after the operation. It isn't at all likely, but it has happened in one or two cases, so I think it only right to mention it. Will you take the risk? It's only a small one."

Even to Andrew, the change in the Professor's attitude was apparent. From reluctance to be disturbed in his preparations for his journey, it had changed into an evident eagerness to proceed with the operation, whatever that might be; and, when Andrew replied that he was fully prepared to accept the risk of subsequent failure and to hold the Professor unaccountable for any such failure, his answer was received with a grunt of satisfaction. "We won't want to be disturbed," said Booley, when this point had been settled, "so I will just lock up and switch out the light."

He locked the front door and retired into an inner room where he switched on the light and invited his patient to enter. Then, having extinguished the light in the outer premises, he closed the inner door. "Now," said he, "let me just explain in a general way what I propose to do. The method that I am going to employ is what is known as the subcutaneous wax method. I'll show you." He opened the drawer of a cabinet and took out a circular cake of a colourless, glassy-looking material, which he exhibited to his patient. "Now, see here," said he, tapping the round mass with his knuckles, "this is paraffin wax; quite a hard substance, as you see, but not in the least brittle. Now, paraffin wax is a very remarkable material. It is one of the most inert substances known. It never changes of itself, it has practically no effect on any other substance, and it is not affected by contact with other materials. And it can be reduced to a liquid by heat—rather a lot of heat, unfortunately, in the case of hard wax like this. Now, what I am going to do is this: I shall melt some of this wax, and, when it is quite liquid, I shall inject a quantity of it into the space under the loose skin of your nose. That will produce a shapeless swelling over the place where the bridge ought to be. Then while the wax is still soft, I shall model that shapeless lump to the shape that you want your nose to be. And now you will see why I am telling you this. I have got to do all the modelling while the wax is soft enough to pinch up into shape. When once it has set solid, it is finished for better or worse. Nothing more can be done. And it is only a matter of seconds before it sets. Consequently, the success or failure is in your hands. No matter how much it hurts, it is up to you to keep quite still until I have finished the modelling. You realize that?"

"Quite," replied Andrew; "and you can rely on me to stick it without moving, however bad it is."

"I believe I can," said the Professor. "You looked in a most almighty funk when you first came in; but, you seem to be your own man now. Which is rather singular. Most people are as bold as brass at first, but get the horrors when it comes to actual business."

The Professor was quite correct in his observations; but he was not in possession of all the facts. What had revived Andrew's confidence was the information that, in any case, there would be some sort of hump over the sunken bridge of his nose. As to the shape of that hump he was not very much concerned. Any kind of hump would transform him so that the woman's description of him would be totally inapplicable. And the mere pain dismayed him not at all. Doubtless it would be extremely disagreeable; but it would be a good deal less disagreeable than being hanged.

Having delivered himself of the above admonitions, the Professor inducted the patient into a sort of modified dental chair and then proceeded to light the gas ring under a water-bath in which was a porcelain vessel containing a quantity of wax shavings. While the water was heating he made his other preparations, beginning by washing his hands very thoroughly in a lavatory basin and then laying out his instruments on a small swivel table such as dentists use. The most conspicuous of them was a hypodermic syringe of large size but fitted with a rather fine needle. From time to time he examined a chemical thermometer which he had placed in the vessel containing the wax, and, meanwhile, carried on encouraging conversation. "By the way," said he, "we haven't settled on the sort of nose that you would like me to build up. We must be quite clear on that point before we start. What was your nose like before that cricket-ball came bumbling along? Was it a straight nose, or was there a curve on the bridge?"

Even while the question was being propounded, Andrew had come to a decision, and a perfectly natural and reasonable one in the special circumstances. In his terror of the gallows, his one object was to shake off his identity—the identity of the man who was "wanted for murder". He would not go back even to what that man had been, if that had been possible. He wanted to break all connection with that man. "It was a slightly curved nose," he replied.

"I thought so," said the Professor; "a moderate Roman. And very becoming it must have been—and will be again. You'll think it cheap at the price of a few minutes' discomfort."

He bent down over the porcelain vessel and again inspected the thermometer. Apparently, the correct temperature had been reached, for he now turned out the gas and placed the water-bath on the little table, which he swung round close to the patient's head. Having lighted a spirit-lamp on the table, he held the needle of the syringe in the flame for a few seconds. Then, dipping the needle into the melted wax, he slowly filled the syringe, emptied it into the vessel, and very slowly and carefully re-filled it. "Now," said he, "get a grip on the arms of the chair and make up your mind to put up with a bit of pain. It will be over in less than a minute. Better shut your eyes."

The Professor had not exaggerated. It was an appalling experience. First, Andrew was aware of the prick of the needle in the loose skin over the nose. That was nothing to complain of. But it was followed immediately by the most horrible pain that he had ever experienced. The Professor's words exactly described it. He felt as if molten lead were being poured into his nose. In his agony, he held his breath and clutched the arms of the chair until his knuckles seemed to be bursting through the skin. His eyes were closed, but the tears welled up between the lids and trickled down his face in a little stream towards his ears. But, by a supreme effort, he resisted the natural impulse to shrink away from the torturing hand. Throughout the whole proceeding, he held his head rigidly still and uttered not a sound.

Meanwhile, the Professor, murmuring at intervals little phrases of sympathy and encouragement, went about his work with unhurried skill and concentrated attention, but yet with a certain air of suppressed excitement. Having completed the injection, he laid aside the syringe and made a critical inspection of the rounded, blister-like swelling which had arisen over the sunken bridge of the nose. After a few seconds, he began cautiously to manipulate it at the edges, persuading the liquid wax towards the middle line. Then, as the wax began to thicken, he proceeded quickly and deftly to model it to the desired shape, darting from one side of the chair to the other to view the growing member from its different aspects. Yet, in spite of his eagerness and excitement, his movements were quite deliberate and controlled. Evidently, in his mind, he had a perfectly clear picture of the state of the invisible wax, and, as its consistency increased and it gradually approached the solid condition, the touch of the flexible, sensitive fingers became firmer and more decisive.

It was, as he had said, only a matter of seconds, but to the unfortunate patient, sitting with the muscles of his neck contracted into tense cords and his hands holding the arms of the chair in a vice-like grip, it seemed hours before the Professor, straightening himself up with a gentle sigh, announced: "There, my son; that's finished. The wax is set solid, though it won't be quite hard for an hour or two. How is it feeling?"

"Not as bad as it did," Andrew replied, faintly, "but it still hurts a good deal."

"I've no doubt that it does," the Professor rejoined, sympathetically, "but it will soon be all right now. You've been a good lad. You stuck it like a Trojan."

"What does it look like?" Andrew asked, without much eagerness and with his eyes still shut.

"You shall see for yourself presently," the Professor replied in a tone of deep satisfaction, regarding his work with his head on one side. "But don't move just for a minute. I must touch up the colour a trifle so that it shan't be too noticeable. At present it's as red as a strawberry."

Having recourse once more to the inexhaustible cabinet, he produced therefrom a stick of yellowish grease-paint and a little jar of powder. With the former he laid a fairly thick tint of opaque yellowish white over the restored nose (to the patient's extreme discomfort), smoothing it out with the tip of his finger until the tint was perfectly even. Then, with a tiny puff, he covered the greasy surface with a thin coating of powder, finishing off with a few delicate touches of a ball of cotton wool. "There," he said, "I think that will do. It looks quite a natural colour now. When the irritation from the heat goes off and the redness dies away, it will look a bit queer and tallowy. Then you'll have to wash the paint off. And I need not warn

you that, although the wax will be quite hard and firm, you've got to be careful in the way you handle that nose. It will stand any ordinary treatment in reason; but you've got to remember that it's only a lump of wax after all, and that if you knock it out of shape, it's going to remain out of shape. It can't be melted soft again."

"Yes," said Andrew, "I realize that; and you may take it that I shall keep out of the way of cricket-balls in the future. Can I see what it is like, now?"

"You can," replied the Professor, who still showed a tendency to dodge about from side to side of the chair and take ecstatic glances at the new nose from various points of view. "I am going to show it to you this instant."

As he spoke, he wheeled away the swivel table, and in its place wheeled up an appliance somewhat like a reading-stand with a largish mirror in the position usually occupied by the book-rest. Deliberately, he trundled it up to the side of the chair, arranged the mirror at exactly the correct angle, and then swung the brass arm round so as to bring the glass precisely opposite the patient's face. "Now," said he triumphantly, "tell me what you think of the result."

---

## V. — BLACK MAGIC

IN response to the Professor's invitation, Andrew sat up in the chair and looked into the mirror. But, as his eyes were still full of water, he got but a blurred impression of what was before him. Even so, he was aware that the face which confronted him was not the face to which he had of late years become accustomed—the face of the "man with the remarkably deformed nose".

He took out his handkerchief and carefully and thoroughly wiped away the still-exuding tears, while the Professor hovered around, watching him in a transport of delighted expectancy. When he had dried his eyes as completely as was possible in the circumstances, he looked again into the mirror. And then he sustained yet another shock. It is impossible to guess what he had expected—if he had expected anything. But most assuredly he had not expected what he saw. For the face that looked out at him from the mirror was the face of his cousin Ronald.

He stared at it in blank amazement with a bewildered sense of being in a dream, or suffering some sort of hallucination, or being the subject of some kind of wizardry or enchantment. And the Professor, watching him eagerly, rubbed his hands and smiled.

The thing was astounding, incredible. It was no mere resemblance or similarity. The face was Ronald's face, Doubtless, if Ronald had been there to furnish a comparison, some difference might have been discoverable. But Andrew could perceive none; and when he moved his head from side to side, exhibiting the half-profile with a view of the Roman nose, the effect was even more impressive. For that was the view of Ronald's face that he had always found most striking and characteristic.

The Professor, watching him with an expectant smile, noted his astonishment and was deeply gratified. Well might the patient be astonished at the miracle that had been wrought in the space of a few minutes. But his kindly soul yearned for something more than astonishment; and the joy that he had looked for did not seem to be there. "Well," he asked, at length, "what do you think of it? Will it do?"

Andrew pulled himself together with an effort and came back to the realities of the situation. "I beg your pardon," said he; "but I was so amazed at the result of your skill that I could find no words to thank you. I can't even now. When I look into the mirror, I can't believe my eyes."

"Your eyes are all right," said the Professor, "or will be when they have done watering. Meanwhile, you can trust mine; and I tell you that you have got a nose that any man might be proud of. And, if you don't mind me saying so—I'm talking business, not paying compliments—you are an uncommonly good-looking young man."

The compliment, which his own eyesight confirmed, fell pleasantly on Andrew's ears even in the midst of his confusion. Why not? His repulsive ugliness had been the haunting trouble of his later life, and he had known the satisfaction of conscious good looks in the golden past. It was pleasant to realize that he would have no more to sneak about in spectacles and hide himself from the common gaze. But, furthermore, and especially, the change assured him that his main purpose was achieved. The deadly peril that had encompassed him was dissipated. He was saved. That woman might now shout from the house-tops her vivid description of the murderer. The more vivid and exact it was, the less would it apply to him. "The man with the remarkably deformed nose" had ceased to be. The police might search for him as they pleased; it was no concern of Andrew's. "Naturally, I don't mind your saying so," he replied, "since the good looks—which I can see for myself—are your own creation. I only wish I could find words to thank you sufficiently. You can hardly imagine the misery of going about, an object of pity and disgust to every person whom one may meet, and the relief of having that disfigurement removed. I assure you that I am more grateful than I can tell you; and I do think it most generous of you to have put aside your own urgent affairs to render me this great service."

"Not in the least," said the Professor. "It has been a delight to me to exercise my art to such excellent purpose. We all like to succeed in what we try to do, and I feel that I have had a great success to-night, and I don't mind admitting that I'm mighty pleased with myself."

A less appreciative listener than Andrew might have felt a slight suspicion that the brilliant success was a somewhat novel experience for the Professor. But as the splendour of the achievement dawned on him by degrees and he realized its

beneficent consequences, Andrew had no room in his mind for anything but gratitude. "You have reason to be," he replied. "It must be a glorious thing to wield the power to change for the better the whole course of a fellow creature's life. I shall be your debtor to my dying day, and I shall never forget what I owe you. Which reminds me that, apart from the debt of gratitude, which I can never repay, I am in your debt in a pecuniary sense. May I ask what the amount is? I know in advance that whatever your fee is, it is quite inadequate to the value of the benefit bestowed."

Even as he uttered the words, he experienced a sudden pang of alarm. For in that moment he remembered that he was not wearing his own clothes. He had not yet searched the pockets of the suit that he had put on in error, but, as they were those of his thriftless and chronically impecunious cousin, it was quite conceivable that they might not contain the wherewith for him to pay even a modest fee. Hurriedly, he thrust his hand into the breast pocket of the coat and brought out the small wallet that he felt there. When he opened it he discovered, to his intense relief, that it contained two pound notes. They might not be enough, but they would be better than nothing.

As a matter of fact, they were more than enough; for the Professor, glancing at the wallet and possibly noting its scanty contents, held up his hand. "Put it away, sonny," said he. "There isn't any fee. It has been a labour of love, and I am not going to spoil it for myself by taking money for it. Let me have the luxury of giving you a free and willing service."

Andrew was disposed to demur, but the Professor would listen to no protests, and, as he was obviously in earnest, Andrew refrained from pressing him any further. "Very well," said he. "I am so much in your debt that a little more makes no difference. But it would give me very great pleasure if you would come as my guest and let us celebrate your triumph and my resurrection with a little dinner—or perhaps we might call it supper. You won't refuse me, will you?"

The Professor reflected, with a gloating eye still fixed on his masterpiece. "I'd enjoy a little celebration," he said, at length, "if only for the pleasure of looking at you. But it will have to be a short one as far as I am concerned, for I still have my packing to finish. Where did you propose to dine?"

"I leave that to you," replied Andrew, "as you probably know the town better than I do."

The Professor knew of a respectable Italian cafe in the High Street close by; and, when he had doffed his apron, turned down his shirt-sleeves and put on a coat and hat, they went forth together, the guest leading the way and the host submitting to be led and secretly hoping that the cafe would not turn out to be the one at which he had lunched with Ronald. Not that it mattered much, since he had then been wearing his spectacles. But he was still under the influence of the police bill and accordingly anxious to avoid any connection with the man who was "wanted".

It was not the same restaurant, but a more modest establishment of the familiar Italian type. It resembled the other, however, in one respect; its walls were lined with large mirrors, to the evident satisfaction of Professor Booley, who was thus enabled to inspect his masterpiece from several points of view; which he did with such persistence that he appeared to consume his food by a mere mechanical and half-conscious act of ingestion.

To Andrew that dinner was a most uncanny experience. His mind was still in a whirl of confusion from the crowding events and the repeated shocks that he had sustained, and, above all, from the glimpse of his cousin's face looking out at him from the mirror. He had still the feeling of being in a dream or under some sort of spell of enchantment, of moving in a world of unrealities. The change that had been wrought in him had been too sudden and profound for complete realization. In the space of less than an hour he had become a different person. It was no mere matter of disguise. He was actually a different person. The Andrew Barton who had set forth from Fairfield that morning, had ceased to exist. In his place had been born an entirely new individual; and that individual was himself. It is not unnatural that an idea so opposed to all human experience should have been difficult to accept as a thing that had actually happened. It was not only amazing. It was incredible.

The sense of being in a dream or under some hallucination was intensified by the immediate circumstances. As he sat at the table he had a wall-mirror on either hand. By turning his head slightly in either direction, he was able to observe his cousin Ronald dining with Professor Booley. It was extremely uncanny. The first time he caught sight of that familiar figure, he started violently and looked away only to find that same apparition presented to his view in the mirror at his other hand. By degrees, however, his nervous tension relaxed and his mind became less confused, under the reviving influence of food and drink. He had, in fact, been badly in need of refreshment after his long walk, together with the repeated mental shocks finishing up with the severe pain of the operation; and though the latter had now subsided to a dull ache and a tenderness which made mastication slightly uncomfortable, he found distinct physical satisfaction in disposing of the carefully chosen dishes and the contents of a small bottle of claret.

He was but half-way through his meal when the Professor looked at his watch and stood up. "Don't let me disturb you," said he. "Make a good dinner and don't eat too fast. But I must run away now and finish my packing. I am sorry that you did not come to me sooner, so that I could have seen a bit more of you. But I'm mighty glad that you came at last. I shall look back on this as a red-letter day. You've given me the greatest opportunity I ever had. No; don't get up. Finish your dinner quietly, and, as I told you before, be careful how you handle that nose."

The two men shook hands heartily, and, after cordial expressions of mutual good will, said a final "goodbye", when the Professor bustled away, pausing only for an instant at the door for a last fond look at his masterpiece.

When he had gone, Andrew resumed his attack on the food with a growing sense of bodily well-being. He even ordered a coffee and liqueur, and, while these were being obtained, he stood up and stepped over to the mirror to view himself at close quarters; to the indulgent amusement of the elderly waiter, who wrote him down a vain young dog—but not without

some excuse for his vanity.

He gazed long and earnestly at the tall handsome man who looked out at him from the mirror. But his original impression remained unshaken. The man was Ronald—and yet the man was himself. Well as he knew his cousin, he could see in the reflection not a single appreciable point of difference. He and Ronald had been as like as twins, excepting for their differently shaped noses. And now the wizardry of Professor Booley had extinguished even that difference.

He went back to his seat, and, as he sipped his coffee and the liqueur, lit one of Ronald's cigarettes and set himself to consider the amazing situation, and his own course of action whereby to meet it. And, even then, he began to have some dawning perception of the complications that this situation might involve. But he was far from perceiving that the control of his future had passed out of his hands; that events were already shepherding him irresistibly in a particular direction without regard to his inclinations or desires. It was only by degrees, as he began to make his plans, that he realized how little choice he had; how completely he had become the creature of circumstance.

The first shock of discovery came to him when he essayed to settle his immediate proceedings. He had looked out the trains on the previous day and he knew that there was a train leaving Crompton at half-past nine. That would get him home about eleven. By that time Molly would have gone to bed, and, as he had no latch-key, he would have to knock her up. But the consideration that he had no latch-key—that his latch-key was in the clothes which were now, perhaps, washing about in the sea—brought him up against the realities of the situation. Suddenly, he realized that the Andrew who would appear at his door was not the Andrew who had left it in the morning. The figure that faced him in the mirror was the figure that would face Molly at the door. He would have to explain what had happened. But as the thought came to him, he put it away. The thing was impossible, absurd. Molly was not an intellectual woman, but she had a massive common sense. How would she react to the amazing story that he had to tell? He could not have a moment's doubt. She would see, standing on the door-step, a man who, to all outward seeming, was cousin Ronald. She would hear him explain that he was her husband, strangely metamorphosed; that, having started for London, he had returned from Crompton; that he had, in error, put on another man's clothes, and that he had, in the course of a few hours, grown a new nose. Whether she would ever listen to such a statement was an open question; but it was quite certain that she would not allow him to enter the house at eleven o'clock at night.

Such being the case, it was obviously useless to think of going home that night. He would have to stay at Crompton; and he would have to make some arrangements for the night's lodging. As he debated this question, it suddenly occurred to him that Ronald's lodgings were available. He would have to go there to retrieve his attache case; for that case contained a hundred pounds, and he began to perceive that he might want that hundred pounds rather badly in the course of the next few days. He felt in his pocket for the latch-key which he had seen Ronald use, and, having found it, took it out, inspected it curiously and returned it. But, simple as it seemed to enter this house and take his place as the tenant, he viewed the project a little apprehensively and considered it at some length. And all the time, as he sat there considering, the clock of Destiny was ticking on; the clock which no man can put back.

At last, when he had screwed up his courage to the sticking point, he beckoned to the waiter, and, having paid his bill, took up his hat and went out. He found his way easily back to Barleymow Street, and, entering that secluded thoroughfare, walked briskly towards the house. Suddenly, it occurred to him that he was not certain as to which rooms his cousin had occupied. When Ronald had run in with the attache case, he had been absent for but a few moments, and Andrew, looking in at the ground floor window, had thought that he saw someone moving within. But he was not quite certain; and the doubt gave him pause. It would be very awkward if he let himself into the house and then was unable to find his rooms.

He slowed down his pace to a saunter while he turned the problem over in his mind. As he passed Number 16 on the opposite side of the street, he looked across and noted a light moving about in a first-floor window. Otherwise, the house was in darkness. Still he could not bring himself to make the plunge; and, as he wandered on irresolutely, he came to the archway leading to the police station. The lamp still threw its light on the portentous bill, and he was moved, partly by curiosity and partly by a certain bravado, to stop and read it. He could do so now with perfect safety.

At this moment three men issued forth from the police station, one of whom looked like a fisherman while the other two were policemen; and the latter carried between them a folded stretcher. They advanced together and came out of the archway, when the two stretcher-bearers halted, opened the stretcher, fixed its struts and deposited it on the pavement. Then the three men turned and looked up the street. "They ought to be here in a minute or two," said the fisherman. "I left 'em coming into the High Street." He stared into the gloom of the ill-lighted street for a few more seconds and then announced: "I think I hears 'em coming. Yes, here they are."

As he spoke, Andrew became aware of a faint rumbling in the distance, which suddenly grew more distinct as a dark object accompanied by a moving light appeared at the end of the street. With a sudden suspicion as to what that dark object might be, Andrew turned away from the archway and began to saunter up the street. Very soon the dark shape resolved itself into a two-wheeled farm cart, of which the horse was being led by a labourer, while two men, apparently fishermen, one of whom carried a ship's anchor-light, walked at the side.

As the rather funereal procession passed him, Andrew looked at it with a strangely detached interest. He could not see what was in the cart, but a few wisps of sea-wrack that clung to the spokes of the wheel told him that it was a seaweed-cart; on which, he turned once more and slowly retraced his steps.

The cart drew up opposite to the stretcher, which the policemen, one of whom was a sergeant, dragged close alongside. Then the three fishermen and the labourer proceeded to draw from the cart an elongated object wrapped in a boat sail

which they carried to the stretcher and deposited thereon with elaborate care; notwithstanding which, the canvas became slightly displaced and a bare foot projected at the end. The sergeant, observing the foot, stooped and tenderly replaced the canvas covering. Then he turned back the canvas at the other end, glanced inside, ejaculated "Good God!" and hurriedly replaced it.

Meanwhile one of the fishermen had climbed into the cart and now descended with a bundle of clothing in his arms. "Here's his clothes," said he, addressing the sergeant. "You'll want them to find out who he is."

"Yes, by the Lord!" the sergeant agreed. "There won't be much chance of identification otherwise. Bring them along."

Andrew watched with profound interest as the fisherman handed the clothes, garment by garment, to the sergeant, who, as he received them, laid them over the shrouded figure on the stretcher, excepting the shoes and the crushed hat, which he tucked under his arm. "That seems to be the lot," he remarked, as he took these last articles. "There was nothing else? No walking stick?"

"No; that's the lot," was the reply. "I suppose you don't know what is in the pockets?"

"No," the fisherman replied rather gruffly. "'Twasn't no business of ourn. We just grabbed 'em up and stowed 'em in the boat. Another five minutes and they'd have been awash."

"Well," said the sergeant, "we will go through them when we get them inside. Do you mind lending a hand with the stretcher as I've got these things to carry?"

The fisherman took his place at the foot end between the handles as the constable took his at the head. The latter gave the word, when they both stooped, grasped the handles and lifted, and then the whole procession moved off under the arch and disappeared down the alley, excepting the carter, who remained in charge of the horse and was now engaged in adjusting the nosebag.

When he had seen the last of the procession, Andrew turned away and began to walk slowly up the street, his retreat being somewhat accelerated by signs of impending conversation on the part of the carter. It had been a strange experience and he was conscious of a certain surprise at his own state of mind. As the clothes—his own clothes—had been transferred, he had watched with a curiously detached interest, checking each garment and making a mental note of the contents of its pockets, not without a passing thought as to the information that they would convey to the observer who should presently turn them out. Yet he had felt no sense of proprietorship in them. Once they had been his; but now they belonged to the corpse on which they lay. They appertained to a past which had been blotted out and had no connection with the present—at least with his present. And his mental attitude towards the corpse, itself, also surprised him in a vague way. The thrill of horror which had affected him at the time of the catastrophe had now no counterpart. In the whirl of events which had followed it, the tragedy had dwindled to a mere incident, which concerned him only in respect of its consequences. And these consequences were what he would presently have to consider. But, for the moment, there was the immediately important question of the night's lodging. When he arrived at the middle of the street, he perceived that there was now a light in the window of the ground-floor room of Number 16. This rather disconcerted him; but, since the thing had to be done sooner or later, he screwed up his courage to make the attempt forthwith. Taking the key out of his pocket, he crossed the road and walked boldly up to the door.

It was evidently the right key, for it entered and turned in the lock without difficulty. He pushed the door open softly and stepped into the hall. There was no light in it excepting what came through the open door of the room. He looked into the latter, which appeared to be a bed-sitting room, for it contained a bedstead, an easy-chair and a good-sized table. On the table was a shaded oil lamp and, what was of much more importance to him, his own attache case.

As there could be no doubt that this was Ronald's room, he walked in confidently and was about to shut the door when a voice from somewhere upstairs called out: "Is that you, Mr. Green?"

He was on the point of replying "No," when he fortunately remembered Ronald's alias; whereupon he answered: "Yes."

"Oh!" said the voice, "so you have come back. I began to think you had gone for good."

The voice did not impress Andrew as an amicable voice; and when it took visible shape as a rather slatternly-looking middle-aged woman, the impression was confirmed. "I thought that perhaps you'd hopped off," she explained, standing in the doorway and regarding him with a truculent eye.

"Now, why should you think that?" he asked in a conciliatory tone and wondering what the deuce her name was.

"Well," she replied, "you are not usually so late as this. Mighty punctual for your meals you are as a rule, and nearly a fortnight's board and lodging owing, and no luggage to speak of excepting this"—indicating the attache case—"if it belongs to you. I haven't seen it before."

Andrew thought it best not to discuss this point; but the arrears (which did not surprise him in the least) had better be settled at once. The difficulty was that the money was in the case, and, as his ownership had been questioned, it might be a little awkward to produce it from that source in the lady's presence. "I am sorry to be so behind hand," he said, meekly, "but I can settle up now if you would be so kind as to let me have an account of what is owing."

"I gave you my bill days ago," said she. "You know I did."

"Yes," said Andrew, "but that was only for last week. I think I had better settle up for the fortnight, Would you mind

making out a fresh bill?"

"Up to Thursday, the day after to-morrow? That will be the fortnight."

"Yes, I think that will be best."

The lady thought so too, by the light of experience, and in a slightly mollified frame of mind retired, shutting the door after her.

As soon as she was gone, Andrew proceeded with some anxiety to open the case, which, fortunately in the circumstances, had no lock. But his anxiety was relieved by the first glance. Whatever the landlady's shortcomings were, dishonesty was not one of them, for the contents of the case were exactly as he had left them. Hurriedly, he took ten of the pound-notes from the bundle and, having shut the case, bestowed the notes in his wallet. Then he began rapidly to consider his future movements.

There was no object in his remaining at Crompton and there was a very good reason why he should go up to London without delay. His main banking account was kept at the head office in Cornhill, and he was accustomed to keep a rather large balance there. The account at the Bunsford branch was only for local expenditure and he fed it with cheques on the London office. He had had to pay in a London cheque to get the fifty pound-notes.

Now, the cheque that he had drawn for Ronald was drawn on the London office, and there he would have to go to cash it. He did not know much about banking, but it occurred to him that if he was to cash that cheque, he must do so without delay. On the morrow at some time there would be a rumour of his death, and he presumed that with the death of the drawer the cheque would be unpayable at the bank; and he did not want to be referred to the executors. What he would do about the question of his death, was a matter that he would have to consider later. At that moment, it was vitally important that he should have that fifty pounds.

By which it will be seen that his power of coherent thinking was reviving and also that he was beginning, even if half-unconsciously, to realize the compelling force of events.

The landlady's bill was not a masterpiece of calligraphy, but it supplied some indispensable information. It set forth that Mr. W. Green was indebted to Mrs. Sarah Baxter in the sum of four guineas, being two weeks' board residence at the rate of two guineas per week. It seemed a modest charge, and he suspected that Mrs. Baxter had not made an extravagant profit. He handed over the sum and, when the bill had been receipted, he dropped it into the attache case. "Shall you be staying on after Thursday?" Mrs. Baxter asked.

"Well, no," he replied. "I have finished my business in Crompton and I have to go up to London to-morrow. Probably I shall have to stay there some time, so I shall take my luggage with me. If I should have occasion to come back, I will write to you."

"I can't keep the rooms vacant, you know," said she.

"Of course you can't," he agreed. "I must take my chance. Do you know how the morning trains for London go?"

"There's a fast train at eight-thirty-five," she replied. "It's the best train in the day; gets to London at a quarter to ten. I should go by that if I was you."

"I think I will," said he, "if my going so early will not inconvenience you."

She looked at him with amused surprise. "You're mighty considerate all of a sudden," she remarked. "But, Lord bless you, I am up before six every morning. You'll have your breakfast by seven o'clock and, if you'll put your shoes outside the door, I'll give them a brush. They look as if they wanted it."

Andrew thanked her (but not too profusely, as she seemed unaccustomed to excessive manifestations of politeness) whereupon she wished him "good night" and retired.

When he was once more alone, he sat down in the easy-chair and tried to think out his position. But the fatigues and agitations of the day, combined with the effects of his recent meal, began to make themselves felt. A comfortable drowsiness stole over him. The cigarette which he had lighted, went out and fell from his fingers. His thoughts grew muddled, and he felt a growing desire for sleep. After nodding in his chair for half an hour he got up, searched for Ronald's pyjamas and, having found them hidden under the bedclothes, undressed and turned into bed.

---

## VI. — TWO INQUESTS

IT was but a quarter of an hour after the time for opening when Andrew presented himself at the bank. He entered with a studiously assumed air of unconcern, but with a curious feeling of unreality and a distinct and unpleasant consciousness of the fact that he was falsely personating the payee of the cheque which he was about to present for payment. He knew the place well—his own bank, where he had kept an account for years and where he had at this moment some four hundred pounds to his credit—and most of the clerks and cashiers knew him well enough by sight. Yet he was entering in the guise of a stranger; for though some of the cashiers had seen Ronald, it was unlikely that any of them would remember him.

Nevertheless, he maintained a calm exterior and, selecting a cashier who was a stranger to him, laid his cheque on the counter and pushed it under the brass screen. He had already endorsed it with a copy from memory of the too-familiar



signature.

The cashier took up the cheque, looked at the signature, turned it over to see that it was endorsed, and then retired, presumably to compare it with the recorded signature in the book. But Andrew watched him with a shade of uneasiness lest there should be some other kind of investigation. He had not seen the morning paper and could not, therefore, judge whether his assumed death had yet become publicly known, or whether, if it had, the bank would take notice of it. Hence he waited in anxious suspense while the formalities were being disposed of; and he breathed a sigh of relief when the man, reappearing from behind a screen, approached the counter, laid the cheque on it and opened the drawer in evident preparation to pay. "How would you like it?" the cashier asked. "Five pound notes?"

"Thank you," said Andrew, "but I think pound-notes would be more convenient."

"Yes," the cashier agreed, "five pound Bank of England notes are not quite what they were when you could change them into gold."

He counted the notes out from a new bundle and passed them across the counter to Andrew; who counted them and bestowed them in his wallet. Then he wished the cashier "Good morning" and took his departure with a faint sense of having received yet another push from "circumstance" in a direction which was not that of his own choice. He had cashed Ronald's cheque, and thereby he had tacitly assumed the identity of the payee.

The sense of compulsion became more pronounced as he turned over once again the question of his immediate future. He had already decided that it was not practicable for him to go home at once. The identity of his clothes would have been already ascertained from the letters and visiting cards in the pockets, and, by this time, it was probable that the police had communicated with Molly. He might even find them at the house and become involved in the inquiries. But the very thought of any kind of contact with the police filled him with horror. The risk was not to be entertained for a moment.

But after the initial inquiries, there would be the inquest. Of course, Molly would have to attend; and she would have to identify the body. That consideration gave him pause, for it opened up fresh possibilities. He knew of no recognizable differences between Ronald and himself, apart from their respective faces; and as the body had, apparently, no recognizable face, comparison in that respect was impossible. But might it be that he had some bodily peculiarity which Ronald had not, whereby Molly would be able to decide that the body was not that of her husband? The thing was conceivable. It was not even so very improbable. And if she did so decide, or even express a doubt as to the identity of the corpse, matters would be greatly simplified for him in regard to his explanations to her, though a doubt as to the identity of the body would be an element of danger.

The conclusion which emerged was that he had better wait and see what happened at the inquest. Meanwhile, he had to make some arrangements for food and lodging. Hotels he dismissed on the score of expense and especially of publicity-for he still had an instinctive urge to keep out of sight as far as was possible. The alternative was a bed-sitting-room or furnished apartments; and, having decided on the latter, he bought a morning paper and betook himself to a tea-shop to study the advertisements over a cup of coffee.

His choice settled on three sets of apartments, all in the neighbourhood of Hampstead, a locality with which he had been familiar before he married. Having finished his coffee, he tucked the newspaper under his arm and made his way to the Broad Street terminus, where he took a ticket for the Heath Station and, selecting an empty compartment, opened the newspaper and searched its pages vainly for some notice of the Crompton tragedy. Apparently the news had not reached London when the paper went to press.

In the matter of lodgings he was fortunate, for his first essay brought him to a pleasant, old-fashioned house in a small close off the High Street, where he was offered a ground-floor room, with a bedroom over it, which seemed in every respect so desirable that he engaged them at once. Then, having paid a deposit to establish the tenancy, he returned to town to lunch and to collect his scanty luggage from the cloakroom at Cannon Street Station.

The latter part of the programme, however, he deferred until later in the day, for he had no object in returning to his lodgings before the evening, and he found some relief in walking about the crowded city streets while he turned over again and again the various possibilities of escape from the perplexities in which he was involved. He looked in, for a while, at the Guildhall Art Gallery and found some comfort in the companionship of the pictures. Then he had a late and leisurely tea, after which he repaired to Cannon Street Station, and, having redeemed his luggage—Ronald's suit-case and his own attache case—made his way to Broad Street Station. And here he had a most surprising and disturbing experience.

As he reached the top of the broad staircase, he observed that a train was waiting at the platform and he judged by the hiss of escaping steam that it was ready to start; an opinion that was confirmed by the ticket collector who urged him to "look sharp" as "she was just off". On this, he started forward at a run, threading his way as well as he could through a dense crowd of people who were waiting for the next train. But he nearly missed his passage, for, as he struggled towards the open door of an empty compartment, the engine-driver sounded his whistle and the train began to move. He barely managed to fling his luggage in at the open door and scramble up to the foot-board as the protesting guard rushed at him, pushed him in and slammed the door.

As soon as he was shut in, he turned and thrust his head out of the window to compare his wrist-watch with the station clock. But the comparison was never made; for at that moment he met the eyes of a woman at the edge of the crowd and then only a few feet away, who was gazing at him with a most singular expression. As their eyes met, she uttered an exclamation and started forward, making as if she were about to try to board the train. She did, in fact, run alongside for a

short distance until a porter, suspecting her intentions, firmly headed her off; and then Andrew, gazing at her in the utmost astonishment, saw her standing, still staring at him with that strange expression, until distance and a curve of the line hid her from his view.

It was an amazing affair. Who could she be? She was a total stranger to him—that is, to Andrew Barton. But he was Andrew Barton no longer. The reflection was a distinctly uncomfortable one. He had taken over the reversion of Ronald's nose. Might there be some other reversions of which he knew nothing? It seemed far from improbable, judging by the little that he knew of his late cousin's moral character and manner of life.

He tried to recall the woman's appearance. It was not difficult, for she was a somewhat unusual-looking woman; rather big, with a marked suggestion of energy and muscular strength and by no means uncomely. She had a good deal of hair of a coppery tint and eyes of a pale, bluish grey. Certainly not a woman whose appearance would be easily forgotten.

But what was the meaning of that singular expression? Astonishment undoubtedly. But the flushed face and the truculent grey eyes suggested emotions other than surprise. There was no denying that the woman's expression and manner had been definitely hostile. She was an unmistakably angry woman.

The incident, with its uncomfortable implications, supplied him with matter for thought until he reached his lodgings. And when he had unpacked the suit-case and went forth for a walk on the Heath, it continued to intrude itself as an added complication to the difficulties of his other problems.

But as he turned into the High Street on his way home, his attention was brought back to the main issues by the voice of a paper-boy announcing the contents of the late evening paper. As the boy came nearer, the generalized howl resolved itself into the words: "Kibble's Cross Murder: Inquest."

In an instant the woman was forgotten, blotted out by the picture of the lonely road, the car with its two occupants, and the figures of the flying bandits. With a thrill of mingled curiosity and terror, Andrew stopped the boy, bought a copy of the paper, and, having folded it and stowed it in an inner pocket, stole into his lodgings to read it in secret.

The report was complete to the inevitable verdict, for the inquest had been held in the morning and the proceedings had been comparatively brief. The deceased was a Mr. Oliver Hudson, the publisher of a technical journal, and the woman who was with him was his secretary. Miss Kate Booth. She, naturally, was the principal witness, and her evidence was taken first, and was to the following effect.

In the evening of Monday, the 27th of August, she was driving Mr. Hudson from his office to his home at Lenham. She was accustomed to drive him daily to and from his office and knew the road well. On the night of the murder, as they were approaching Kibble's Cross, she saw a closed car drawn up at the corner with its head pointing towards the side road. She thought she saw a man standing by it, but was not certain, as, owing to the speed at which she was driving—about forty miles an hour—she had to keep her attention fixed on the road. But someone must have made a signal of some kind for her car to stop, though she did not see it, for deceased exclaimed: "Confound them! Pull up and see what they want."

She put on the brakes and stopped the car. A man came to the window and deceased said: "Well, what is it?" and put his hand into the pocket in which he carried his revolver. The man said: "Put 'em up, both of you," and pointed a revolver at deceased, who, almost at the same moment, drew his revolver from his pocket.

She had only a rather confused recollection of what followed. Both revolvers seemed to go off almost at the same moment, and the bullet from one—it must have been Mr. Hudson's—made a hole through the wind-screen. Deceased uttered a cry and lurched up against her. When the revolvers were fired, she instinctively put down the accelerator pedal and the car jumped forward. She did not look back through the rear window as she had accelerated to over fifty miles an hour and she had to keep her eyes on the road.

At Padsworth, four miles farther on, she halted at the Welbeck Hotel and sent for a doctor and the police; but deceased was already dead. A police patrol came in a few minutes and she told him what had happened. "Can you describe the man whom you saw at the window?" the coroner asked.

"Yes," she replied, "I saw him very distinctly, because, as he appeared at the window, deceased threw the light of a torch full on his face, and it was a most extraordinary face—one that I could never forget. His nose appeared to have been broken; at any rate, it had no bridge. It was perfectly flat excepting at the tip, which was of the ordinary length and stuck out from his face like a bird's beak. He had grey eyes and I should say he was about thirty years of age."

"Could you see how he was dressed?"

"No; at least, I didn't notice anything about his clothing excepting that he had no hat on."

"Was he the only person present, or were there others?"

"I had an impression that there was someone behind him, but I did not actually see anyone. My eyes were fixed on the face that was lighted up by the torch."

"Are you quite sure that the man whom you have described is the man who fired the shot?"

"Yes, quite sure. There was no one else that I could see. And I saw the revolver pushed in over the edge of the window."

"Do you think you would recognize this man if you were to see him again?"

"I am certain that I should. It was a face that you could never forget."

"Did deceased usually carry a revolver?"

"Only, I think, when he was motoring at night. Then he always did; and he declared that he meant to use it if he was stopped by an armed robber."

"Do you know of any reason for this attack? Had you anything of value in the car?"

"No; there was nothing of any value in the car beyond the money in our pockets."

"Did you notice if any cars overtook and passed you on the road?"

"Yes; several cars overtook us and passed ahead near London. I always drive at a very moderate speed until I am clear of the town and let the faster cars go by."

"Do you remember any car in particular?"

"Yes, there was one which passed us at great speed just as we were approaching the open country road. Mr. Hudson remarked upon it as it flew past."

That was the sum of the secretary's evidence. It was followed by that of the medical witness; who deposed that death was due to a gun-shot wound penetrating the heart, and must have been practically instantaneous. Then came the patrol officer, who had not much to tell, and finally a detective-inspector with a remarkable gift for keeping his own counsel. But if somewhat elusive in regard to matters of fact, he was prepared to offer certain rather guarded opinions. Thus, when asked by the coroner if the circumstances of the attack were not very unusual and surprising, he agreed, and continued in explanation: "The police are inclined to believe that the whole affair was a mistake. There is reason for suspecting that it was a carefully planned robbery concerned with certain very valuable property which was being conveyed in a car along this road at about this time; but, at the last moment, the thieves got flurried and attacked the wrong car. It is a pity," the inspector added, "that deceased produced his revolver, because that probably flurried them still more, and led to the disaster."

The coroner discreetly refrained from further questions on this subject, but, turning to another, asked: "With regard to the man who has been stated to have fired the fatal shot; is there any clue to his identity?"

Here, the inspector became once more distinctly elusive, but he was of opinion that, having regard to the man's very unusual and distinctive appearance, there ought not to be much difficulty in finding him; and, once found, the witness, Miss Booth, would be able to identify him beyond any reasonable doubt.

This completed the evidence. If the police knew any more about the case, they were reserving their knowledge, and the coroner was wise enough to ask no questions that were not strictly relevant to the inquiry. There was no doubt as to how deceased had met his death, and the verdict of wilful murder by a person unknown was a foregone conclusion.

The reading of this report had no other effect upon Andrew than to confirm him in his resolve to abandon for ever his original personality. The guarded tone of the inspector's evidence left him in little doubt that "the man with the deformed nose" had already been identified as Mr. Andrew Barton, and that the police were in hot pursuit. What would have happened if they had been able to run him to earth? The woman, Booth, was evidently prepared to swear that she saw him fire the fatal shot; and to this, the clear testimony of a competent eye-witness, there appeared to him no possible answer. Of course he was wrong; and in his peculiar state of mind, he was ignoring the strength of his defence. But even if he was mistaken as to his position if he were brought to trial, who can say that he was wrong in his choice of action? Who would accept the chances of a trial for murder—and an atrocious murder at that—when he could, by lying perdu, avoid even the accusation. In the character of Ronald Barton he lay under no suspicion whatever. His security was complete. If there were any incidental disadvantages, he had yet to discover them.

When he had finished the report, he turned over the leaves of the paper in search of some notice of the discovery of Ronald's body. He found it near the bottom of the page, headed, "A mystery of the Sea," and the brief account read as follows: "Yesterday afternoon, a party of fishermen, sailing along the coast near Crompton, made a strange and gruesome discovery. Looking shorewards, they saw what appeared to be a pair of nude human legs protruding from under a heap of chalk which seemed to have fallen recently from the cliff. On this, they ran their boat in-shore and landed to investigate, when they found the nude body of a man buried under a mass of chalk fragments. The largest of the fragments, a mass weighing fully a hundredweight, had fallen on his head and crushed it so completely as to render the face unrecognizable. The man had apparently been bathing, as a complete set of clothes was under the body, and from articles found in the pockets, it is inferred that the remains are those of Mr. Andrew Barton, of Fairfield near Bunsford. The inquest is to be held at Crompton to-morrow."

He laid the newspaper aside and fell into a train of deep but uneasy thought. And once again, the sense of unreality, of illusion, which had never quite left him since Professor Booley had waved the magician's wand to such amazing purpose, came over him with renewed intensity. He repeated the statement to himself: "The inquest is to be held to-morrow." The inquest! The inquiry into his own death! And he, the deceased, would read the report of the proceedings! It was an incredible situation; and the more he thought of it, the more impossible and unbelievable did it appear.

Yet he knew that it was a reality; and presently, as his thoughts settled down into a more orderly train, he began to be aware of certain possibilities which might affect his future and influence his conduct most profoundly. At present the

position was that the body of Mr. Andrew Barton had been found on the shore. The identification by the clothing was not legally conclusive; but it would have occurred to nobody to doubt whose body it was. And the suggestion which had influenced others would doubtless take effect also on Molly. Her husband was missing; and here was a dead man—unrecognizable, but of similar age, size and general appearance—who had been wearing her husband's clothes. Would the idea that this might possibly be another man even enter her head? It was practically certain that it would not. She, like the others, would take the appearances at their obvious face value; unless—

He sat up with suddenly sharpened attention to consider the position more critically. Yes, undoubtedly there were counter possibilities that had to be reckoned with. A single item of positive evidence would shatter the whole illusion. It need be but the merest trifle; a mole, a wart, a scar, a tattoo mark; any permanent characteristic on that body, which was not on the body of Andrew Barton, would be enough to destroy the suggestion effect of the clothing. And when once the question of identity was raised, all the mysterious and abnormal circumstances would combine to confirm the suspicion of a substitution.

And how would that affect him? On the whole, favourably; for it would simplify his task when he sought to convince Molly of his changed identity. True, it would set the police once more searching for the man with the deformed nose. But that need cause him no concern. That man was dead. If he had not died at the foot of the cliffs, he had at least died in Professor Booley's "beauty parlour". And, mercifully, the Professor would be on the high seas before the inquest opened.

But when the report of the inquest appeared, it raised questions of a somewhat different kind from those which Andrew had anticipated. The evening paper of Thursday contained only the opening of the proceedings; but the Daily Telegraph of the following morning had a full report, given in considerable detail, and this Andrew studied with the closest attention.

The first witness was Samuel Sharpin, the skipper of the fishing lugger, who deposed as follows: "On Tuesday, the 28th of August, I was aboard my boat, the Sunflower. We was beating up for Meregate Cove, where we berths. About four o'clock in the afternoon we was opposite Hunstone Gap when I noticed that some of the cliff had fallen down and I remarked to my mate that it was a good job that no one was underneath when it came down. Then the apprentice, Joe Todd, said he thought someone had been underneath, because he seemed to see what looked like a pair of legs sticking out from under the heap of chalk. So I got my glass and looked; and then I saw a pair of naked legs sticking out. So we put the boat about and turned her head inshore; and, when we was near enough in, we dropped the anchor and pulled ashore in the dinghy. Then we saw a man lying under a heap of chalk with his legs sticking out. It wasn't a big fall. But one large lump of chalk, nearly half the size of a fish trunk, had come right down on the man's head; and there it sat, resting on his face, with the blood and stuff oozing out at the sides.

"My mate, who is a pretty hefty lad, hove the block of chalk off the man's face, though it must have weighed well over a hundredweight, and then we could see that his head was smashed as flat as a turbot and his face hadn't got no more features than a skate. It was an awful sight. Gave us all a reg'lar turn.

"We took up the body and carried it to the dinghy—it wasn't far to go, for the tide was up and beginning to wash round the corpse when we came ashore. Then we carefully collected the clothes and put them in the boat; and then we just had a look round before we went back aboard."

The coroner: "You had a look round. What were you looking for?"

Witness: "We wanted to see if the man had come to the place by himself. Because, as he was naked, and seemed to have been bathing and sitting on his clothes to dry himself, it seemed funny that he should have come there all by himself. So we had a look round."

"And what did you find?"

"We found that he hadn't. There was only a small strip of clear sand left opposite the Gap, but we could see quite plainly that there were two sets of footmarks coming down to the shore from the cart-track that leads down to the Gap, but there was only one set going up. So he must have come there with someone else."

Coroner: "This is very remarkable and very important. Are you quite sure about the two sets of footprints? I mean, are you sure that they were the footprints of two persons walking together and not merely the footprints of two persons who had come to the place separately?"

Witness: "No; they looked like the footprints of two persons who were walking together. So far as we could see them, they went on side by side, keeping at the same distance—about two foot apart.

"Well, when we had got the body on board, we up anchor and beat up for Meregate Cove. When we got there, we brought up at our berth and I sent Joe Todd up to Meregate Farm and told him to ask Farmer Blewitt for the loan of a seaweed cart to take the body into Crompton. So Mr. Blewitt he sends a man down with a cart and we brought the body into Crompton and handed it and the clothes over to the police."

The coroner thanked the witness for the clear way in which he had given his evidence and was about to dismiss him when Mrs. Barton, the wife of the deceased (if the identification is correct) asked to be allowed to put a question to him.

Coroner: "Certainly you may. What is it that you wish to ask?"

Mrs. Barton: "He has said that he saw two sets of footprints going down to the shore. I want to ask him if either of those two sets were the footprints of the-the deceased."

The coroner looked interrogatively at the witness, who replied: "Well, ma'am, I really can't say. How would I know whether they were his footprints or no?"

Mrs. Barton: "You found the shoes with the body. Did you not compare those shoes with the footprints?"

Witness: "No, ma'am, I never thought of it, like a dam' fool—begging your pardon."

Coroner: "What makes you ask that question? Is there anything special in your mind?"

Mrs. Barton: "Yes. I find it impossible to believe that my husband came there of his own free will."

Coroner: "We must consider that question presently. I think there is nothing more that we need ask this witness."

The next witnesses were the rest of the crew of the Sunflower who, however, had nothing fresh to tell. They merely confirmed the evidence of the skipper. They were followed by Mrs. Barton, the dead man's wife. As she took her place, the coroner expressed his sympathy and that of the jury, and his regret at having to subject her to the distress of giving evidence on so painful an occasion. He then proceeded with his examination. "You have seen the body of deceased. Do you recognize it as the body of your husband, Andrew Barton?"

"No. It might be his body, but the dreadful injuries make it impossible for me to recognize it."

"Have you any doubt that it is the body of your husband?"

Here the witness was somewhat overcome but, after a pause, she replied: "No, I am afraid not. The clothes are his, and the things from the pockets are his; and the body might be his. There is nothing to suggest that it is not. But it is all very mysterious."

"In what way mysterious?"

"That he should be there at all, in that strange place. He left home in the morning to go to London on definite business, taking with him an attache case containing some of his paintings; and he is found here, miles away from home and from London, apparently behaving in a way in which I don't believe he would ever have behaved—I mean bathing without bathing-clothes or towels—and accompanied by at least one unknown person. And the attache case seems to be missing. I think there is something very suspicious about the whole affair."

"When you say 'suspicious', do you mean to suggest that your husband met with foul play?"

"That is what it looks like to me."

"But do you think that the mode of death is compatible with such a suspicion?"

"I don't know what to think. It is all so strange and unnatural."

"We can quite understand your feeling about it. The circumstances are, in fact, very remarkable. But now, to pass on to another matter, can you give us a description of your husband?"

"He was just under thirty years of age, about five feet eleven in height, of medium complexion with grey eyes and darkish brown hair. His nose had been struck by a cricket-ball which broke the bridge and caused some little disfigurement."

"I am sorry to have to refer to a subject that will be painful, but which is relevant to this inquiry. Are you aware that a man answering to the description of your husband has been accused of complicity in an attack on a motor-car when a Mr. Hudson was killed?"

"Yes. A police officer called on me to make inquiries and I told him all I knew about the affair. Of course, it is a mistake. The thing is ridiculous. My husband was a gentleman of reputation and of substantial means. He happened to be present when the attack was made. He told me all about it when he came home that night; and I repeated what he told me to the police officer."

"When he came home that night, did he seem at all agitated?"

"Not in the least. Of course, he was rather excited, though, at that time, he did not know that any one had been killed."

"And in the morning when he left home?"

"He was in his usual spirits. I understood that he proposed to call at the police station to report what he had seen."

"And do you connect his disappearance with the circumstances of that crime?"

"Certainly not. There was no reason why he should run away. He had nothing to fear."

"Is there anything more that you can tell us that would help the jury in arriving at their verdict?"

"No; I have told you all I know."

"Then I think we need not trouble you any further. We thank you for the very clear way in which you have given your evidence in circumstances which must have been very painful to you, and we should wish once more to offer you our most sincere sympathy."

The rest of the evidence was of little significance. The medical witness gave a brief description of the injuries and stated that death must have been practically instantaneous. The police superintendent described the reception of the body and the articles found in the pockets, by which the remains were identified in the first place, and mentioned as a curious

coincidence that a bill containing the description of the deceased was posted up outside the station when the body was brought in. He was the last witness; and, when he had given his evidence, the coroner proceeded to sum up the case for the jury to the following effect: "This inquiry is in some respects perfectly simple and in others rather obscure. Death was obviously caused by the fall of a heavy mass of chalk on the head of deceased; and it is difficult to see how the fall of that mass could be other than accidental. On the other hand, an element of obscurity is introduced into the case by the fact that deceased was apparently accompanied to the shore by some other person; that that person never reported the accident and has not come forward to give any information. There is no denying that the behaviour of that person to some extent justifies the suspicion that has been expressed by the wife of the deceased. If the cause of death were such as to admit of the idea of homicide, the conduct of that person would expose him to the gravest suspicion. As no such idea appears possible, his behaviour is quite incomprehensible.

"With regard to the strange conduct of deceased, the circumstances connected with the murder of Mr. Hudson may offer some explanation. The superintendent has told us that at the very moment when the body was brought to the station, there was a bill posted outside giving a description of deceased and stating that he was wanted for the murder. Such bills must have been posted outside all other police stations, and it may easily have happened that deceased had seen one. Then, even though he were innocent, he might have become seized by panic and fled to hide himself. It is rather an alarming thing to see one's description outside a police station and to learn that one is wanted for murder.

"That, however, is only a surmise. What we have to decide is when, where and by what means deceased met his death. You have heard the evidence, and on that you must form your decision."

The jury eventually returned an open verdict. They were not entirely satisfied, the foreman said, that it was a case of death by misadventure. The presence of an unknown person, who had absconded and made no sign, suggested that there might be more in the case than met the eye. And to this, after some demur, the coroner assented.

---

## VII. — MOLLY

ANDREW had read the report of the inquest on his own supposed remains with profound interest but with rather mixed feelings. The possibilities which he had envisaged had not been realized, and certain facts which he had overlooked had come into view. The double set of footprints, for instance, introducing an undoubted element of suspicion, came to him as a something quite unexpected. His attention had been so completely focused on the question of identity that he was unprepared for the new issues that had been raised.

Another matter of surprise to him was the shrewdness and strength of character displayed by his wife. It dawned on him that he had considerably under-rated her intelligence. In spite of the agitation that she must have suffered from the terrible circumstances in which she was suddenly placed, she had not only kept her wits unclouded but had shown a quick perception of the significance of the facts which had transpired. She had, indeed, accepted the identity of the corpse—no reason had been shown for doubting it—but, with her ready common sense, she had instantly detected the abnormal character of the whole set of circumstances, and refused to take them at their face value.

The conclusions, then, which emerged were these. First, Molly had no doubt that her husband was dead. Second, that she utterly refused to regard that death as due to a mere accident. She was clearly convinced that some unknown person or persons were implicated in it. In short, that there had been some sort of foul play. Incidentally, it was clear that she did not take the murder charge seriously. To her, it appeared simply as a ridiculous mistake which would be instantly disposed of when suitable explanations were given. That he could have taken fright at the accusation and gone into hiding would appear to her incredible.

These were the data which he had to consider in forming his decision as to what line of action he should adopt. Hitherto he had responded passively to the pressure of events. He had simply gone whither he had been driven. But he could drift passively no longer. He had got to make up his mind as to what course he would steer through the amazing complications with which he was encompassed. So, for the first time, he set himself fairly to face the realities and decide what it was possible to do.

But to all his cogitations, as he tramped along the secluded paths of the Heath where he could think uninterrupted, and turned over one plan after another, there was a permanent background. The tremendous shock that he had sustained from the police bill at Crompton had established in his mind an abiding horror—a sort of "gallows-phobia". And not, perhaps, quite unreasonably. Innocent men have been hanged on worse evidence than that which Miss Booth was prepared confidently to swear to. The man whom she had described had been identified as the artist, Andrew Barton; and since Andrew Barton was conveniently dead, dead he had got to remain. That was the undeniable postulate on which all his plans were based. There could be no resurrection of Andrew; for the instant he appeared, the police would pounce on him. But that postulate seemed to block every avenue of escape.

Thus, the idea of going home and taking up the old life was obviously unthinkable; for Molly's husband was dead, and he was a visibly different person. The explanation which would have made it possible could not be given; for that would bring Andrew to life—and death. Some other plan would have to be thought of—when he had made things clear to Molly. And the question was, how was that to be done?

His first idea was to write her a long letter telling her all that had happened, signing his own name and announcing his

intention to come home. She would recognize his handwriting, and that would make the story credible enough to prepare her for his changed appearance. But would she recognize his handwriting? It was not so very characteristic, and there was an awkward complication. It often happens that a similarity of handwriting runs in families; and his was a case in point. Ronald's handwriting had borne a distinct resemblance to his. Molly had noticed it and remarked on it. Then the handwriting would not be conclusive, and the fantastic story would have to rest on its merits. Then there was the complication of Ronald's character. Molly had admired Ronald, and had been indulgent in regard to his faults. Perhaps she liked him; but she had no delusions as to his character. She knew him to be a slippery rascal whose word was of no value whatever. She might—and probably would—reject the letter as an impudent imposture; an attempt on Ronald's part to personate her dead husband. And when he appeared, miraculously transformed into the outward semblance of Ronald, her suspicions would be instantly confirmed, and she would probably refuse to let him enter the house or to listen to anything that he might wish to say.

But that was not the worst. Molly had expressed her suspicion that there had been foul play of some kind. Now, if he wrote such a letter, he would have to admit that he had been on the shore at the time of the catastrophe; in short, that one of the sets of footprints had been his. What more likely than that she should suspect him (in the character of Ronald) of having made away with her husband? And, once the suspicion of foul play was aroused, the letter, itself, would seem to supply the motive for the crime. It would suggest to her that Ronald, relying on his resemblance to her husband, had made away with Andrew with the deliberate purpose of stepping into Andrew's shoes.

Then what would she do? There was very little doubt. Molly had certain very pronounced feminine characteristics; she was quick to decide, confident when she had decided, and quick to act on her decision. If she disbelieved the wildly improbable story and wrote the letter down as a fraudulent attempt on Ronald's part to personate her husband, she would, without waiting for him to appear in person, at once communicate her suspicions to the police and show them the letter.

And what then? In spite of his anxieties, Andrew smiled grimly at the thought of the dilemma which would be created. He would stand to be accused of having murdered himself; and his only defence would be to prove his real identity—that of a person who was already accused of having murdered someone else.

Evidently, the letter would not do; nor would an unannounced visit, with verbal explanations, be much safer. The story that he had to tell was so preposterous that she would probably dismiss it off-hand as an imposture; and then there would be the same trouble as in the case of the letter.

So, once again, Andrew found himself shepherded by inexorable circumstance in the direction in which he did not want to go. For, in the end, he had to fall back on a compromise, and not a very good one at that. He decided, instead of committing himself either by letter or word of mouth, to feel his way cautiously and see if any opportunity offered. He would write to Molly, signing himself "Ronald", and proposing to call on her. When he met her, he would be better able to judge what was possible. Perhaps it might be easier than it looked. It was actually possible that she might recognize him in spite of the disguise. He had examined himself repeatedly in the mirror and had thought he had detected some small differences between himself and Ronald. Perhaps, after all, they were not so much alike as he had thought; and there might be some little peculiarities in his own face and person of which he was not aware, but which might be familiar to her. At any rate, he would see what happened; and if he failed the first time, at least he would not be landed in the net of the police.

But he would not write for a day or two. He would give her time to settle down after the inquest. And then, of course, there was the funeral. The funeral! He had not thought of that before. Now the idea came upon him with devastating effect, imparting a horrible reality to the whole hideous farce. It was an appalling thing to think of his beloved wife standing in tears beside the grave of what was in effect a dummy corpse. It was an obscene outrage. But even in his anger, he realized how that dreadful farce seemed to set the seal of finality on his changed condition; what a formidable obstacle it raised to his attempts to dispel the illusion.

A couple of days later he dispatched the momentous letter; quite a short one, suggesting a call about tea-time on the following Wednesday; which elicited a still briefer reply agreeing to the date and time. Brief and rather colourless as it was, Andrew read it again and again. For it was Molly's own writing; and though it was addressed to a fictitious person, yet it seemed to bring him, for the first time since the transformation, into some sort of touch with real life—his own real life.

The days passed in a fever of impatience mingled with anxiety; of longing to stand once more within his own house and to see and talk with the woman who had become to him the centre and focus of life; of anxiety lest he should, after all, fail to break the spell that circumstance had cast over him. And when at last the day of the visit came, he set forth on his adventure thrilling with the strangest mixture of emotions; with love and yearning for the woman who was at once his wife and his lover, with hope and apprehension and even a queer, irrational tinge of jealousy. For it was Ronald, and not he, who was going to meet and talk with Molly. Any tokens of kindness or affection that she might bestow would be for Ronald, not for him. And thus his thoughts, swaying back and forth to the contending pull of two opposing sets of emotions, oscillated continually between the intense yearning to give expression to the love that was welling up in his heart and a jealous fear lest the rival whom he was impersonating should be received with undue warmth.

At Bunsford, he changed on to the branch line, and, alighting presently at the little wayside station of Fairfield, set forth to walk the familiar road that led to his home. It was a strange experience, that walk from the station. He had the feeling of a traveller, returning after a long absence, treading the well-remembered ways and looking on the familiar scenes of long ago. It seemed as if years had passed since he last turned into the lane. He found it unbelievable that it was but a week and

a day since he had kissed Molly at the door and waved his hand to her from the gate. Once more the sense of illusion and enchantment came over him; and, as he approached the cottage and his eyes were greeted by the fresh gashes that his hastily-wielded shears had made in the privet hedge, the conflict between his inner sensations and the visible and undeniable facts became positively bewildering.

Like a man in a dream, he opened the gate, stole unsteadily up the path, and plied the little knocker with a shaking hand. And all the while, he was trying confusedly to think what he should say to her, while in the background of his consciousness there lurked a dim hope that she might recognize him despite the transformation.

A few seconds passed. Then a light footstep in the hall, at the sound of which his heart seemed to stand still. The door opened and there she stood, his dearest Molly, his own beloved wife, garbed in a simple black dress, and looking pale and tired, but sweeter and more lovely than ever. At the sight of her, a flood of passionate love surged through him; a wild impulse to take her in his arms and kiss the roses back into her cheeks. It was but a momentary impulse, instantly choked, not only by reason but by something in the way in which she looked at him. She greeted him cordially enough, but yet there was in her manner something new to him; a quiet self-possession with, perhaps, just a shade of chilliness.

He took the proffered hand with a deep sense of anticlimax. She had not recognized him. Of course she had not. How could he have expected it? But the initial failure left him with all his difficulties before him. He could do no more than wait and see if any opening offered. "Go and sit down, Ronald, while I make the tea," she said in a friendly, matter-of-fact tone, still with that faint suggestion of coolness, "I won't be a minute. You know the way. No, you don't, though. You have never been in this house before. It's in here."

She threw open the door of the dining-room and bustled away towards the kitchen, leaving him to enter alone. He stepped in through the open doorway and stood for a few seconds at the threshold, looking, with a lump in his throat, at the familiar room—his own room, where he had passed so many delightful hours, and where he now stood, a mere visitor, almost a stranger.

He ran his eye over the table, fondly taking in all the little, trivial details; the foolish little flower vases, the cake-basket, the biscuit-box, the jam-jars; all set out in correct array just as he, himself, had set them out on that dies irae in the irrevocable past when Fate, in the garb of a postman, had delivered his summons. And yet Fate had not been unkindly. For its messenger had forestalled another kind of summons, uttered in the King's name to the jingling of hand-cuffs. The reflection came to him as an opportune reminder just as Molly entered with the teapot and hot-water jug on the little tray.

She took her seat at the head of the table and he drew up his chair; but as he did so, he noted that it was not his own particular chair, in which he had always been used to sit. That was drawn back against the wall. And the place that was "laid" for him was not his customary place, but was on the opposite side of the table. It was a small matter but it defined his position as a visitor. "It is nice of you to come and see me, Ronald," she said, as she poured out the tea. "I couldn't write to you because I didn't know your address. I suppose you saw it in the papers?"

"Yes," he replied. "It was a dreadful shock, even to me. I can't bear to think of what it must have been to you."

She made no comment on this, and he continued: "I would have written sooner but I thought it better to wait until the—er—the—"

"Yes," she replied quietly, "I understand. It was on Saturday. In Fairfield churchyard. I brought him from Crompton. Everybody was awfully kind, especially the police."

She finished a little unsteadily with a catch in her voice, and Andrew, deeply moved, stole a furtive glance at her, marvelling admiringly at her quiet dignity and self-restraint. She made no parade of grief nor showed any outward sign other than the pale, weary face, the set composure of which smote him to the heart.

For some time neither of them spoke. She sipped her tea mechanically, seeming to be wrapped in thought while he searched his mind frantically for some suitable words but could think of none. At length she asked: "When did you see him last?"

He started, and his gorge rose at the lie that he would have to tell. But he made it as near the truth as he could. "I think," he faltered, "it was about two years ago, when I met him by chance in London."

"I remember," said she. "He told me he had met you. But I thought you might have seen him recently. I noticed that he had drawn a cheque for you—I am his executrix, you know—so I thought you might have met. He never mentioned the cheque to me."

"No," stammered Andrew, "I suppose he would not. It was a—a loan, you know, to enable me to—a—to pay a deposit. But I must refund it as soon as I can."

"You needn't worry, Ronald," she replied. "I don't suppose he intended you to repay it. At any rate, there is nothing to show that it was a loan, and if there were, I, as executrix, can use my own discretion in regard to debts. And I shall do what he would have wished me to do."

"That is very good of you, Molly," he said. "But things are different now. I ought to repay that loan when I am able to—though," he added, with a sudden realization of his present plight, "I don't know when that will be."

"As to that, Ronald," she said, in the same curiously quiet, level tone, "you know there is something to come to you when the will has been proved; or had you forgotten?"



He did know, of course; but he had completely forgotten until this moment. Now he gazed at her in dismay as she went on, without raising her eyes from her teacup: "There is a legacy of five hundred pounds. It was a separate insurance that he made in your favour in case he should die before you. He knew that his death would rob you of a faithful and generous friend, and this was to compensate you."

Andrew was thunderstruck. Here was an appalling complication! This money would presently be paid to him. He could not refuse it without disclosing the whole deception. Yet to accept it was to commit a blatant fraud on the Insurance Society; a fraud for which, if it were discovered, he could be sent to penal servitude. And that was not all. There was the principal insurance, which would be paid to Molly with his connivance. The whole affair was plainly and grossly fraudulent.

He was so overwhelmed by this new complication that he could only mumble incoherent acknowledgments and then once more subside into silence. Molly, having given the explanation, let the subject drop; and, since he sat in dumb confusion, she made shift to keep up some sort of conversation, with long intervals of silence, avoiding, as far as possible, any references to the tragedy or her own immediate affairs. She spoke just in the colourless way in which she might have spoken to some chance stranger who had come to make a ceremonial call.

Meanwhile Andrew, returning such banal answers as fitted the indifferent, semi-formal character of the conversation, was inwardly fermenting with suppressed emotion; with surprise, bewilderment and exasperation. The position was preposterous. The woman who was making polite conversation and so obviously, though tactfully, holding him at arm's length, was his wife! His own wife, whom he loved passionately and who loved him with answering passion! He was starving for her love, filled with a devouring desire to fold her in his arms, to cover her pale face with kisses and murmur into her ear those soft endearments that had always evoked such sweetly frank response. If only he could shake off this bewitchment, how gladly and with what lavish affection would she fall into his arms! He knew it; and yet he could only sit like a fool, talking commonplace drawing-room stuff and even doing that badly.

But he could see no way out. The opening for which he had hoped had failed to present itself. Not only had there been no glimmer of recognition, but, what was worse, she had accepted him as Ronald without a sign of doubt, or hesitation. And civil and even kindly as was her bearing towards him, she was evidently on her guard. He could see clearly that she did not trust cousin Ronald: and he realized that she had understood that gentleman's character better than he had supposed.

But this wariness on her part was a complete bar to the revelation that he wanted to make. At the first word her suspicion would light up, and, as the preposterous tale unfolded, she would listen—if she listened at all—with angry impatience to what would seem like a mere crude, silly imposture. It was useless to think of making the attempt, for failure seemed inevitable; and the probable consequences of failure were too appalling to contemplate.

Nevertheless, he tried to pull himself together and at least find something to say. From time to time, as they had been talking, he had caught her looking at him with a rather curious expression; an expression of faint surprise, as if she were "sizing him up" and found something in his manner a little puzzling. This he put down to his deplorably bad acting, for assuredly the real Ronald—the voluble, ready talker, suave, genial and self-possessed—would not have sat mumchance at the table opposite his pretty cousin. He must rouse himself, and, if he could not be Andrew, then he must be a reasonably convincing Ronald. "I suppose," he ventured, "you will shut up the studio now?"

"No," she answered, "I have taken it as my sitting-room."

He was slightly surprised. She had always left him in undisputed possession of the studio as a place that was entirely outside her province. "I have never seen this studio," said he (reconciling the blatant untruth to his conscience by the fiction that he was speaking in the character of Ronald). "Would you let me have a look at it presently? Andrew's pictures were always a great delight to me."

"Were they?" she exclaimed, in evident surprise. "I didn't know that you took any interest in them at all. Certainly, I will show you the studio. We will go down there as soon as we have finished tea. Can I give you another cup?"

"No, thank you," he replied. "I have finished."

"Then," said she, rising, "we may as well go now; and I shall be able to show you one or two of his later works."

As they made their way to the back door and down the garden path, Andrew was impressed by a distinct change in her manner. She was still grave and a trifle prim, but, ever since his reference to the pictures, a new note of cordiality had come into her voice. At the studio door, she produced her little key-wallet, and, taking from it the well-remembered Yale key, inserted it, turned it, and pushed the door open. "You see," she said, as they entered, glancing at him for a moment with a wan smile, "I am keeping the nest warm."

He looked round the place, choking with emotion. Everything in it hailed him in a familiar voice and called to him to come back. Nothing was changed—with one exception. Formerly, the walls had borne only a few sketches given him by brother artists, and one or two of their paintings which he had bought from Montagu. Now these had been removed, and every available space was occupied by his own work. Every finished picture of his that they possessed had been collected from the house—excepting those which he, himself, had hung in the drawing-room—and put on the wall; and a number of sketches from his portfolio had been affixed to the match-boardings with drawing-pins—carefully placed at the edges to avoid making holes in the paper—and he noted with surprise the judgment with which they had been selected. His workshop had become a one-man exhibition.

Otherwise the place was just as he had left it. The half-finished picture stood on the easel, protected by its paper dust-cover; the "models" that he had been using—an old wooden-faced clock, the dismembered remains of another clock and a number of tools and implements—were on a side table, together with the studies that he had made for the details of the picture. His big folding palette lay on the table beside the painting-chair with the brushes set out tidily on the rough wooden rack that he had made. Even the water dipper, he noticed, was full of clean water. "This is the picture he was at work on when he went away," said Molly, carefully turning back the dust-cover. "I think it was to be called 'The Clock-Jobber'. I don't know where he did the sketch for the interior, but the old man is our village cobbler. It is quite a good likeness, too."

Andrew looked at the picture with profound interest, trying vainly to realize that he had actually been working at it but little more than a week ago. The figure and part of the detail were nearly finished, but the background, the general lighting and colour scheme were only indicated. The most interesting part of the work was waiting to be done—waiting for him, who had the completed picture in his mind's eye. Would it wait for ever?

He made a few appreciative but critical comments on the picture, to which she listened respectfully, and then (still in the character of Ronald) said: "I suppose his pictures have always been a great interest and pleasure to you."

"No," she replied. "That is what I now look back on with astonishment and bitter self-reproach. I never interested myself in his work, though it meant so much to him. Somehow, I let it become a thing apart, outside my own life and personal interests. I used to let him go off to this studio to do his day's work, just as if he were going off to a bank or an office. I was satisfied to hear what he had done and to see the pictures when they were finished; and I feel that I didn't understand them or appreciate them a bit. They were just our livelihood; and I used to see them packed up to go to Mr. Montagu—the dealer, you know—without a pang of regret. It seems very strange now when I think of it. It was a great opportunity. I might have been his good comrade in what he cared for most. And I let it go."

As she concluded, her voice sank almost to a whisper and her eyes filled with tears. He looked at her with adoring sympathy, and a flood of affectionate yearning surged through him. The impulse to take her in his arms and kiss away her tears was almost irresistible. He could hardly restrain himself. And yet his reason held him back. He realized that this was no opportunity; that her very preoccupation with her lost husband would make her proof against the grotesque story that he had to tell.

But what an exasperating absurdity it was! She was his own wife, his sweet Molly, sweeter than ever and still more dear; and he was her loved husband for whom her poor heart was hungering. And here they stood, held apart by this preposterous make-believe! The thing was monstrous! "I suppose," she resumed, reflectively, "it was because he was so interesting in himself and so sympathetic; because he entered so keenly into all my little feminine pleasures and interests as if they were his own, that I never realized that he might want some sympathy from me in the work that he loved. And he never obtruded his own personal affairs on me. There was not a grain of egotism in his nature. And, oh! Ronald! he was such a perfect husband, such a dear companion! In all the years of our married life, never an unkind word passed between us."

"No," Andrew said, huskily, "I know how fond he was of you and how happy you made him. He would like to think of you living here with his pictures to keep you company."

"Yes," she said, "that is just what they do. When I look round at them, I feel that he isn't quite lost to me. Because each of them is, in a way, a part of himself. The little figures in them were his friends, his children. They are acting his thoughts, just as he used to express them in words. And the places—the rooms and gardens and inn-parlours—are places that he knew, because he built them up out of his own imaginings. They, too, are really part of him."

"Yes," said Andrew, "that is quite true. A picture is, in a way, a detached piece of the painter's personality, just as a book is a sort of spiritual bud or outgrowth from the mind of the man who wrote it. And I think you will find the pictures grow more friendly and intimate the longer you live with them."

"But I do!" she exclaimed. "Already, I am beginning to see them with a new eye. At first it was the little stories that they tell that impressed me most. But now I begin to see that the story was only the subject, the peg, as it were, on which the real picture was hung. And I try to see how he did them and what he was thinking about and aiming at as he worked."

"Yes," said Andrew, "that is the way to look at pictures. Try to see what the artist had in his mind, what he wanted to do and what he wanted you to see; especially the composition, the pattern of form and colour and light and shade—the effect of the picture as a whole."

"That is what I am trying to do," said she, "and I think I am getting on." She glanced fondly round at the walls and murmured: "The dear things! They grow on me from day to day."

When they had examined the unfinished painting, she brought out the portfolio and they looked through the collection of sketches and studies, one or two of which he picked out to replace some of those on the wall. She adopted his suggestions readily and listened attentively to his comments and criticisms. "I didn't realize, Ronald," she said, "that you knew so much about painting. I never heard you talk about it to Andrew."

From the subject of pictures the conversation turned to her own domestic affairs, directed thereto by Andrew. But she was not very expansive and, somehow, her new-born cordiality of manner seemed to fade somewhat, especially when he ventured to proffer his assistance in setting her affairs in order. And, indeed, he was conscious of the incongruity of such a

suggestion coming from the feckless, unthrifty Ronald. "I really don't need any help," she said. "Andrew had made such complete provision for me and left his affairs in such perfect order that there is hardly anything for me to do."

"Well," he said, "if I can't give you any help in that way, I hope you will let me look you up from time to time. I think we ought to see more of each other in the future than we have in the past."

She did not reply immediately, but he could see that the suggestion was not received enthusiastically, and that she was rather carefully considering her answer. At length in an earnestly apologetic tone, she replied: "Later, perhaps, Ronald, but not just at present. It was kind of you to come and I am glad you came. But it has been a painful experience. You are so dreadfully like Andrew. I had no idea you were so much alike. I suppose when I saw you together I only noticed the differences, but now everything about you reminds me of him, and I feel I can hardly bear it."

"But," he urged, "don't you like to be reminded of him?"

"In some ways," she replied. "In his pictures, for instance. But they are really himself. But this resemblance is different. There is something awful and uncanny about it, something ghostly and unreal. You've no idea, Ronald, how strangely like him you are. Even your face is his face."

"I should have thought we were quite unlike in that respect," he said.

"You are thinking of that dent on his nose," said she, "that troubled him so much, poor boy. But he exaggerated the disfigurement. It was only an accidental mark. It really didn't make any difference, at least to me. I was sorry that he let it worry him so much—principally on my account, I am afraid. And now, as I look at you, I see how little difference it did make. But you are like him in every way. You move like him, you write like him—your handwriting is his handwriting, and your voice! When you speak, I could shut my eyes and believe it was Andrew speaking."

His heart leapt. She had recognized him, after all! True, she thought she had only recognized his ghost. She was deluded by the false circumstances. But he could explain them away. His opportunity had come. And as she continued, he tried to think how he should approach the revelation. "You mustn't misunderstand me, Ronald. It is not that I am not your friend as I always was. Try to put yourself in my place. Remember what Andrew was to me—my dear husband, my faithful and loving friend, the very centre and focus of my life—and think what it must be to me to be in the presence of a counterfeit of him—now that he has gone for ever—mimicking his looks, his movements, the very tones of his dear voice. Don't you understand how it wrings my heart?"

He listened, entranced and yet bewildered, still fumbling for the words which would enable him to open his revelation without setting up an immediate barrier of suspicion. "It is hard enough to bear," she went on, "to know that I shall never see him again, without having it driven home by a presence which mocks at my grief—a presence which seems to be his and yet is not his. Forgive me if I am unreasonable, but I am a broken woman. I have been robbed of all that I cared for and I cannot endure it patiently. My soul is in revolt. I ask myself: Can there be a God of Justice if such horrible wickedness is permitted?"

Her sudden change of mood disconcerted him. "You mean," he stammered feebly, "that dreadful, most deplorable accident?"

"Accident!" she repeated; and her voice, ringing out like a pistol-shot, made him start as if he had been struck. "No! I mean that crime. You don't suppose it was an accident, do you?"

"That was what I understood," he murmured uncomfortably. "I thought a block of chalk fell on him."

"A block of chalk was found resting on his poor battered head, and they assumed that it fell on him by chance. But did it? I don't believe it for a moment. A man—a good, kind fisherman—was able to lift it off by himself. Then another man could have lifted it on—to cover up the marks of murder. That is what happened. I am convinced of it."

"Why are you?" he asked.

"Why!" she repeated. "Because everything about the horrible affair shouts of murder. You know he was not alone. The footprints prove that two sets going to the place and only one coming away. Somebody was with him. Who was it? Who was that secret wretch who sneaked away and hid himself like Cain? Nobody knows. But he shall be found. I will never rest, or let the police rest, until he is found. And when we find him, he shall pay his debt. He shall pay it to the uttermost farthing!"

Andrew looked at her in astonishment and dismay. This was a new Molly who confronted him with blazing eyes and hard-set mouth as she poured out her fierce denunciations. Never before had he seen her even ruffled; and he found it hard to realize that this stern-faced, resolute woman was his soft, gentle, girlish wife. But, as he gazed at her, all his new-born confidence and optimism melted away like snow before the sunshine. For he saw clearly that his opportunity—if there had ever been one—was gone. How, after what he had heard, could he tell her that he had been there? That those retreating footprints were his footprints? He dared not. As to the rest of his fantastic story, if she listened to it at all—which she probably would not—she would dismiss it with angry contempt, and denounce him to the police.

There was nothing more to say or do. His mission had failed; and, since he had received more than a hint that his presence was not acceptable, there was no reason for prolonging his visit. Silently and gloomily he followed his unconscious wife up the garden to the house and, without re-entering the dining-room, prepared to take his leave. "If I mustn't come and see you, Molly," he said, as he took up his hat and stick, "I hope you will let me write to you sometimes. I

hate the idea of dropping out of your life."

"Oh, I didn't mean that, Ronald," she replied. "Don't think I want to cut you. Perhaps, later, when I have got more used to—to my new condition, I shall be able to see and talk with you without having this awful ghostly feeling. At any rate, there is no reason why you should not send me a letter now and again. I should like to hear how you are getting on."

With this she opened the outer door and, apparently with some not unnatural feeling of compunction, shook his hand quite cordially, though her eyes remained averted from his face. He held her hand for a second or two, gazing, with a bursting heart, into the pale, sweet face that he was forbidden henceforth to look upon. Then, with a huskily murmured "Good-bye!" he turned away and plunged down the flagged path, pausing, by habit, at the gate to look back and wave his hand in the old familiar way.

It was a grievous journey to the station. All the well-remembered objects that had greeted his arrival, now seemed, as he passed them and left them behind, to give him a sad and solemn farewell; and, when he turned out of the homely little lane into the road, it was with something of the feeling of our earliest ancestors when they passed out through the gates of Paradise.

---

## VIII. — THE DESERTED WIFE

IT was in a mood of the deepest depression, combined with a sort of angry bewilderment, that Andrew reviewed his affairs as the train bore him back to London. To a permanent separation from Molly his mind refused assent as a thing to be seriously considered. He could not, and did not, for a moment entertain the idea of giving her up. Yet what could he do? For the time being, the barrier that she had placed between them seemed insurmountable. One plan only seemed possible; and for a few moments he was actually disposed to adopt it—the plan of going boldly to the police, proclaiming his identity, and taking the chances of his trial for the murder of Mr. Hudson.

But a very brief reflection convinced him of the futility of any such proceeding. For he was still obsessed with the infallibility of an eye-witness. There, at his trial, would be Miss Booth, who would swear that she actually saw him commit the murder. What answer could he give to that but a bare denial? And what weight would that denial have? It would have none. He would be found guilty and most certainly hanged.

No. There was no escape that way. He would have to put up with his false identity, even for Molly's sake. For she was, at least, better off as the widow of a man who had possibly been murdered than as the widow of one who had certainly been hanged. So he must wait and hope that some other way of escape from his intolerable dilemma might present itself.

But it was a maddening situation. Apart from the hideous illusion which cut him off from his wife, were other incidental and subordinate perplexities. There was, for instance, the life insurance. If he allowed the money to be paid, he would be not merely a party but the principal in a most blatant fraud. Yet he could not prevent the payment without disclosing his identity. Again, there was the probate of the will. It must be a criminal offence to connive at the probate of the will of a living man.

It was all very bewildering. Little did Professor Booley foresee the intricate train of consequences that the stroke of his syringe had set in motion! Nor was it possible for Andrew, himself, to foresee what further links in this extraordinary chain of causation might presently come into view; and as he realized this; he was disposed to speculate very uncomfortably on the possible surprises that might yet be awaiting him in the incalculable future.

But at least one good result followed from his disappointing visit. The sight of his studio and his pictures had set his thoughts moving along the old, familiar channels. The artist in him had awakened. Once more, he was aware of the impulse to paint. And the impulse was not only artistic. He would have to earn his living somehow, and he knew that he could earn it by his brush. The painting would come, not only as a relief but as the necessary means of livelihood. Before he had reached the end of his journey, he had decided to set to work without delay.

Thus deeply preoccupied with his present difficulties and his plans for the future, he walked unguardedly into the first ambush that Fate had prepared for him. From Cannon Street he took his way through the fast-emptying streets to the terminus of the North London Railway, where he bought a first-class ticket for Hampstead Heath. Still wrapped in profound thought, he ascended the stairs to the platform and, worming his way through the throng of passengers, sought an empty compartment in the waiting train.

The guard was slamming the doors in preparation for departure as he reached the forward part of the train. Selecting one of several vacant compartments, he entered it and shut himself in. As he sat down, by a natural train of association, his thoughts reverted to the curious incident that had occurred on the last occasion when he had travelled on this line. He was even tempted to rise and look out of the window to see if that strange woman was by any chance on the platform.

But there was no need. At the very moment when the shrill screech of the guard's whistle rang out and the train began to move, a woman darted at the door, wrenched it open, bounced into the carriage and slammed the door after her. Then she sat down in the seat opposite his and fixed her eyes on him with an unwinking, truculent stare.

He had recognized her in the first, instantaneous glance, and immediately averted his gaze to look out of the window. Not that he expected that manoeuvre to be of any avail. And it was not. There she sat, facing him with a stare as immovable as that of a waxwork figure. He avoided looking at her; but he was fully conscious of that basilisk stare, and it seemed to

stir the very marrow of his bones. As the train gathered speed, he waited in fearful expectation for the next development.

It came after some three minutes of appalling silence. "Well. Haven't you anything to say to me?"

The voice was not unmusical, but it had a peculiar suppressed, menacing quality, as if the speaker were restraining herself with difficulty from shouting. Andrew turned his head and met the gaze of the pale, truculent, wide-open eyes. "I think, madam," he replied, fully conscious of the futility of his answer, "that you must be mistaking me for some other person. I have no recollection of having had the honour of meeting you before."

The effect was very much what he had expected. She gave a shrill yelp of extremely mirthless laughter and then exclaimed: "Well, I'm damned! I really am, Tony! I knew you had the cheek of the devil, but this is a record performance, even for you. So you have no recollection of having had the honour of meeting your lawful wife before! Haven't you, indeed? Don't happen to remember meeting her at the prison gate at Wormwood Scrubbs on Easter Sunday three years ago, when she wasn't too thin-skinned to ask for Mr. Septimus Neville, the swindler, then due for discharge? Eh? You recognized her quickly enough then, didn't you, when she took you home and gave you your first square meal? But now your memory has given out. You are looking pretty prosperous. Perhaps you have got another wife, with a bit of money. Hey? Have you?"

As she ran off this string of questions, Andrew looked at her with very mixed feelings. For himself, he was frankly terrified; but he would have given a great deal to be able to speak some comforting words to her. For, in spite of her harsh tones and fierce manner, there was a faint undertone of tenderness in her voice and a suggestion of wistfulness in the way she looked in his eyes. He was profoundly sorry for her, and it was with real regret that he repeated—unavoidably—his futile disclaimer. "I assure you, most solemnly, Mrs. Neville—if that is your name—"

"Oh, drop it, Tony!" she interrupted impatiently. "Don't be a fool! What's the use of this play-acting? There's nobody here but ourselves. Now, listen to me. If I had any sense, I should be only too glad to be quit of you. But I'm not. Women are fools, and I'm one of the biggest of them. You've been a regular bad egg. You had all my money and spent it—and you know how that money was got; you've given me the slip over and over again and left me to get my own living as best I could; you've gone off philandering with other women, and you may have one or two other wives for all I know. I ought to hate you but, as I said, I am a fool. I am ready now to forget it all if you will only come back to me."

As she paused, Andrew gazed at her helplessly, utterly at a loss what to say. He was deeply moved and would have offered consolation, but that, he realized, would only have enraged her. But his silence and the sympathy and pity that his looks expressed led only to further misunderstanding. The fierceness died out of her face and her eyes filled. "Come back to me, Tony," she urged in soft, coaxing tones, "and we will let bygones be bygones. I won't reproach you with what is past. You used to be fond of me, and I've never ceased to be fond of you. Come back and let us be as we were in the old days. I've got quite a decent job in the City, and I've made a nice little home out Brondesbury way. Come back to me, Tony, and I'll promise to make you as happy as you used to be. What do you say, Tony dear?"

The pitiful appeal in her swimming eyes and in the soft, wheedling tones of her voice wrung his heart. But he had to say something; and what could he say? It was a dreadful situation. At length, he stammered: "My dear lady, pray try to believe me when I assure you that there is some strange mistake, due no doubt, to an extraordinary resemblance. On my honour, you are a complete stranger to me."

The result was inevitable and clearly foreseen. In a moment all the softness faded out of her eyes; the blood rushed to her face and she drew herself up, formidable and menacing. "Now, listen," she commanded in a stern voice. "I give you one more chance, and it is the last. Drop this foolery instantly and do as I said. The door is still open. But go on with this mumming for another instant and the door will slam. And, by God, it is not the only door that will slam. You know what I mean; and you know me well enough to be aware that when I start to fight, the gloves are off. Now, what do you say?"

"I can only say what I said before," he replied miserably. "If you would only try to believe—"

"That will do!" she interrupted furiously. "I've given you fair warning; and now it's a fight to a finish."

She flung herself back on her seat and for the short remainder of the journey sat silent, crimson-faced and scowling, perfectly still, but with a stillness suggestive of violence repressed to bursting-point. Andrew felt as if he were travelling with a Mills bomb.

As the train approached his destination, he watched her with furtive anxiety. His expectation was that when he got out, she would follow him to ascertain where he lived. But, to his surprise and relief, she did not. When the train stopped at Hampstead Heath station and he rose to alight, she made no move; and when he opened the door and wished her a civil "good evening," she gave him one quick glance of concentrated anger and hatred and then averted her face.

Nevertheless, he walked very slowly along the platform, lingering at the farther end to see the train start; and it was not until it was well on the move that he turned towards the exit. And, even then, he waited at the foot of the stairs to see her carriage pass, and caught a fleeting glimpse of her face at the window, now glaring out at him like the face of some avenging Fury.

He drew a deep breath when the guard's van passed out and left the station empty. At least she was fairly out of his neighbourhood—for the present—and he was at liberty to consider precautions to avoid any future meetings. But so deep was the impression that she had made on him that, on leaving the station, instead of making his way directly to the town, he took the foot-path that leads past the ponds and made a wide detour of the Heath, approaching the town—or "village"—

eventually from the Vale of Health. And as he strode across the open expanse of the Heath, with an occasional nervous glance behind him, and sneaked back towards his lodgings, he turned over in his mind the possible significance, as to the past and the future, of this ominous encounter; so ominous as, for the moment, to oust from his thoughts all his other difficulties and embarrassments.

Who was this woman?—this Mrs. Septimus Neville, if that was her name? He could have little doubt. She was Ronald's wife; and, therefore, in the existing circumstances, his wife. It was a very awkward situation. As he reflected on the grim farce, he could not but be struck by the malignant perversity of Fate. From what insignificant causes do the most portentous consequences ensue! When Professor Booley had consulted him as to the type of nose that was to be created, he had hardly taken the question seriously. He had expected no more than a more or less shapeless lump; and all that he had desired in that moment of panic was to be made as unlike Andrew Barton, the missing murderer, as might be. And so he had asked for a curved nose—and had straightway been transformed into the likeness of his cousin Ronald. It had turned out to be a fatal decision. If he had only asked for a straight nose, all would have been well. He would have ceased to be the murderer and yet he would have been no one else; merely a person with a good deal of resemblance to the late Andrew Barton. Then he would probably have had no difficulty with Molly; and with her help he could have lived, under an assumed name, in peace and security.

However, the deed was done and could not be undone. In slipping out of his own personality, he had slipped into that of another person; and thereby had taken over the reversion of that other person's crop of wild oats. And it seemed that those wild oats were now ripe for the harvest. This woman certainly meant mischief; very naturally, as Andrew felt. And she was no contemptible antagonist. She was a fine woman, picturesque and rather handsome in a way, and obviously strong, energetic and resolute. Obviously too, a woman of strong passions.

What was she planning to do? In his ignorance of her past—and his own, in his new character—he found her threats somewhat obscure. She had hinted darkly at some unlawful acts on his part, and had referred to the slamming of doors. What doors? The most probable answer was not a pleasant one.

His instinctive caution was not relaxed even when he approached his lodgings. On entering the little close, instead of going straight to the house in which he lived, he walked on to the extreme end that he might look back at the entrance and make sure that he had not been followed. And here he made a very welcome discovery. He had supposed that the close was a cul-de-sac with only one entrance. Now, he found at what he had thought to be the blind end, an arched opening like a doorway, giving entrance to a narrow alley. Following this, he emerged into a quiet by-street which presently brought him to Well Walk and so out on to the Heath. Having explored thus far, he retraced his steps, greatly encouraged; for here was almost complete security from the possibility of being followed, and tracked to his abode. He decided henceforth to adopt this approach to his lodgings and avoid the danger of entering the close from the High Street.

In the peace and security of his pleasant sitting-room he spent the evening in considering his position and making plans to meet the new complications that had arisen. Prudence suggested that he would be wise to migrate from Hampstead to some safer locality. But he was unwilling to move. His present quarters suited him perfectly. His landlady, Mrs. Pendlewick, was a delightful old woman with whom he was already on terms that were almost affectionate; and, in view of his intention to resume his painting, the little old house was quite a valuable asset. The old-world room in which he sat, with its picturesque bay window and antique furniture, gave him an ideal cottage interior which would supply the backgrounds for a dozen pictures. So he decided to stay where he was, at least for the present, and avoid, as far as possible, exposing himself to view in frequented places; and having reached this decision, he spent the rest of the evening in making out a list of the things which he would need to enable him to get to work.

On the following morning, with the list in his pocket, he set forth (after a cautious inspection of the close from his bay window) by way of the back exit and the alley and along the open Heath to the tram terminus; walking warily, like a Red Indian upon the warpath, with an alert and suspicious eye on every human being who came into sight, especially on those of the feminine gender. Arrived at the terminus, he took up a sheltered and retired position to watch the waiting tram and observe the passengers as they took their places; and only when it was on the point of starting did he enter and select a seat near the door, whence he could escape easily if the need should arise.

It was all very irksome and disturbing to the mind, this furtiveness and incessant watchfulness. As he sat in his corner with the feeling of a fugitive from justice, while the tram rumbled on its way southward, Andrew reflected almost incredulously that but a fortnight ago he had been a reputable gentleman, living an ordered, peaceful life without a single enemy in the world. However, as the journey passed without incident, his mind became gradually more at ease, and he alighted in the Hampstead Road opposite the premises of the artist's colourman ready to give his attention to the business of the moment.

The outfit of a water-colour painter is a good deal more portable than that of a painter in oil, but as Andrew's purchases amounted to the entire stock-in-trade, including a substantial folding easel, a stool, drawing-boards, palette, brushes, tubes of colour, a supply of paper and various other items, they resulted in two bulky and heavy parcels; burdened with which he went forth (having regretfully declined the salesman's offer to send them, as that would have involved disclosing his address) and waited in some anxiety for the tram. The chances that his pursuer—as he assumed her to be—would happen to be on that tram were infinitesimal to the point of absurdity. Nevertheless, when the vehicle drew up in response to his hail, he scanned the faces of the female passengers nervously as he stepped up to the footboard.

Similarly, but with more reason, he looked about him apprehensively as he alighted at the terminus; and disregarding

the weight of his burden, struck out across the Heath with elaborate precaution and an occasional glance to the rear, before making the final turn into Well Walk. At the mouth of the alley he paused for a moment to make sure that the close contained no enemy and that no one was looking in from the High Street; and when, at length, he let himself in with his latchkey and closed the door, he experienced a sense of relief which he himself recognized as slightly ridiculous.

Having deposited his parcels in his sitting-room, he walked through to the back room, half-kitchen and half-parlour, to report his return and exchange a few-words with his landlady. And here he had a genuine stroke of luck. At intervals, amidst his distractions, he had been trying to think of a subject to fit into the background of his own room. Now, as he opened the door, after a perfunctory tap with his knuckles, behold a subject almost ready made. By the low, small-paned window sat Mrs. Pendlewick in a Windsor arm-chair with a little gate-leg table by her side and a lace pillow on her lap.

She looked up with a smile of welcome, viewing him over the tops of her spectacles as he stood in the doorway regarding her with delighted surprise. She made a charming picture. Figure, lighting and accessories made up just such an ensemble as the old "genre" painters would have loved; and Andrew, being a belated survivor of that school, felt a like enthusiasm. For a while he stood, taking in the effect of the group—the old-world figure with its silky-white hair and antique cap, the black pillow with its covering of lace and rows of bobbins, the simple, elegant chair and the ancient table—until the old lady became quite puzzled. "I am taking the liberty of admiring you, Mrs. Pendlewick," he said at length.

"Law!" she exclaimed, "I thought I had got beyond that."

"But this is a new accomplishment," said he. "I didn't know you were a lace-maker."

"New!" she chuckled. "I was a lace-maker before I was eight year old. Had my own pillow and bobbins and used to play at making lace. All the girls did down at my home; began it as child's play, and that's how we learnt. Down where I come from—I'm a Buckinghamshire woman, born and brought up at Wendover—down there you wouldn't meet a woman, no, nor a girl over ten, that couldn't make bone lace. They usually began to learn when they were about four or five."

"Why do you call it bone lace?" he asked.

"It's on account of these," she explained, indicating the bewildering multitude of little bobbins that dangled by their threads from the edge of the work. "They were mostly made of bone, though sometimes they used horn or hard wood. But bone was the regular thing because it was easy to come by. The lads used to make 'em for their sweethearts; carved 'em out with their pocket knives, they did, and some of them were uncommonly pretty bits of work. There's one that my grandfather made when he was courting my grandmother more than a hundred years ago; and it's as good as new now."

She picked out the historic bobbin—a little bone stick elaborately decorated with shallow carving—and held it up proudly for his inspection; and as he examined it she babbled on: "Yes, we're all of a piece, me and my belongings. We are all getting on. This chair that I'm sitting in was made by my Uncle James. He was a chair maker at High Wycombe, and they used to work out in the open beech-woods. And this little table was made by my grandfather—him that made that bobbin. He was a wheelwright, but he used to make furniture in the winter when the wagons was laid up and work was slack."

So she rambled on, but not to the hindrance of her work; for, as she talked, her fingers were busy with their task, the right hand managing the pins while the left manipulated the bobbins, and all with an effortless dexterity that was delightful to watch. Nor were her babblings of the old country life in the Vale of Aylesbury without interest; and Andrew, looking on and listening, found himself gathering the sentiment and atmosphere that he hoped presently to express in his picture.

After a spell of somewhat one-sided conversation, he ventured cautiously to approach the subject of that picture. But his caution was unnecessary, for Mrs. Pendlewick was all agog to "have her likeness drawn", as she expressed it. "Not but what I should have thought," she remarked, "that you might have found someone better worth drawing. Who wants to look at the likeness of an old woman like me?"

"You are too modest, Mrs. Pendlewick," he replied. "You don't appreciate your own beauty. Wait until you see my picture; you'll be surprised to find how handsome you are."

With this he retired—leaving her chuckling over her work—to unpack his parcels and to spend what was left of the morning in straining a sheet of paper on one of the boards and making one or two preliminary sketches to settle the composition and arrangement of the projected picture. Then, after the simple mid-day meal, he set up his easel in the kitchen, arranged the accessories, and, while Mrs. Pendlewick went about her household activities, he drew in the background—the interior of the room, the window and the furniture; finishing with a short sitting until it was time for the model to lay the pillow on the table, spread a handkerchief over her face, and compose herself for her afternoon nap.

The painting of that picture did Andrew a world of good. It kept him indoors during the daylight hours and enabled him partly to forget the Avenger who was on his track; and, as a normal and customary occupation, it brought him back out of the nightmare world in which he had been living, into the region of sane and ordinary human life. He worked with intense enjoyment. Painting was at all times the passion of his life; but now, to the pleasure that he always found in his work, was added a certain feeling of novelty, due to the nightmare interregnum. And, as the work progressed and he perceived with some surprise that he was painting "at the top of his form", the discovery engendered a sense of power which was very pleasant in contrast to the sense of feebleness and futility by which he had been oppressed.

He worked steadily for four days, by which time the background was well advanced and the figure practically finished; and a most excellent portrait of the old lady it turned out, though he had not specially aimed at a likeness. They had been happy days, days of blessed relief from his troubles and distractions. But now, as the finishing work could be done at his

own time without the model's assistance, his thoughts turned to an out-door subject or a study which would serve as the background for a studio composition. By this time his terror of the mysterious woman had subsided to a great extent. After all, what was the risk of her shadowing him? She lived at Brondesbury and she had a job in the City. It was hardly possible that she could be haunting the neighbourhood of Hampstead.

Thus reassuring himself, and tempted out by a brilliant autumn morning, he set forth with his sketching kit to look for a subject. Sneaking out with his usual caution by the back way, he made for Well Walk and then struck out across the Heath to the Vale of Health. Here, on the high ground above the pond, he paused to look about him and consider which direction he should take, laying down his easel and stool the more conveniently to fill his pipe. But as he felt for his pouch, its lean and deflated condition reminded him that his stock of tobacco had run out.

It was very annoying, for his tobacconist's shop was at the lower end of High Street, a locality which he preferred to avoid by daylight. However, his stock would have to be replenished, and, as he habitually smoked as he worked, he decided to brave the terrors of the High Street rather than go on with an empty pouch. Accordingly he picked up his easel, and, turning his face westward, re-entered the village by way of Heath Street, walking quickly down that thoroughfare and the High Street and keeping a bright look-out for any suspicious figures of the feminine gender.

Having arrived safely at the tobacconist's and made his purchase, he began once more to turn over in his mind the most likely spots in which to look for a subject; and as the High Street and its northward continuations would, if he followed them, eventually bring him to the West Heath, he decided to explore that locality and particularly the neighbourhood of the Leg of Mutton Pond, in spite of the fact that this route involved the passage of close upon a mile of fairly frequented streets and roads. But the acute alarm which had affected him on the day following the encounter in the train had to a great extent subsided; notwithstanding which, as he strode along, pipe in mouth, he kept a wary eye ahead and around and even paused from time to time to look back and scrutinize such wayfarers as happened to be coming in the same direction. It was only when he had at length emerged from the village on to the rustic road known as Rotten Row, with the open Heath on all sides of him, that he was able to dismiss from his mind the idea of a possible "shadower" and give his attention to the search for a subject.

The search did not, in fact, take up very much time. He knew the place pretty well and was able to make his way almost at once to a suitable spot, which he found within a short distance from the pond. Here he spent a quarter of an hour circling round and trying various points of view with the aid of a little cardboard view-finder; and having, at length, decided on the most satisfactory composition, he set up his easel and stool, refilled his pipe and set to work with his open satchel hitched to the foot of the easel so that his materials were all conveniently within reach.

For upwards of an hour he worked away in uninterrupted peace, becoming more and more absorbed in his occupation as he proceeded from the preliminary drawing to the stage of colour. From time to time, solitary wayfarers had passed along the road below him and once a horseman had gone by at a canter. But although they all looked up at him as they passed, they had made no nearer approach. His pitch might have been in some remote country district rather than in a populous London suburb.

But his peace was not to remain entirely undisturbed. Pausing in his work to squeeze out on to his palette a fresh supply of colour from a tube, he became aware of a phenomenon familiar to out-door painters and designated in the slang of the craft a "snooper". The peculiarity of this type of onlooker is in his mode of approach. The simple rustic spectator regards the artist frankly as a public entertainer. He approaches boldly, takes up his position with an air of permanence and stares with undissembled wonder, sometimes at the painting but more usually at the painter. Not so the snooper. His approach is devious and unpredictable as to direction—excepting that it will inevitably bring him within a yard or so of the easel. He maintains an ostentatious unawareness of the painter's existence until, by some unforeseen chance, his sinuous advance (at a gradually diminishing speed) has brought him abreast of the easel; when he takes one long, hungry, side-long look and passes on.

As he squeezed out the little blob of pigment, Andrew observed a man approaching from the high ground above him, and, by the manner of his advance was able to make a provisional diagnosis. Not that he minded in the least. He had no prejudice against the snooper; who, after all, is actuated only by a reasonable curiosity tempered by good manners. It is only the unseasoned amateur who quails at the snooper's approach.

The man drew nearer by degrees, meandering down the slope, and still profoundly unconscious of Andrew's existence, until he had reached the inevitable spot a yard or two from the artist's pitch; when he suddenly "unsnooped" (if I may use the expression) and became a normal spectator. "Mind my having a look?" he asked civilly, with his eye on the painting.

"Not at all," Andrew replied; "but there isn't much to look at. I have only just begun."

With this permission, the man stepped forward and took up a position close beside the artist, making a show of examining the painting, though, in fact, he seemed more interested in the painter, judging by the frequent and somewhat furtive glances that he stole at Andrew's profile. "A lovely scene!" he remarked. "Don't you think so?"

"Well," replied Andrew, "I would rather say 'pleasant'. It is not romantically beautiful."

"No," the other agreed; "not romantic, but, as you say, very pleasant; extremely so. You are making a pretty big sketch, aren't you?"

"It isn't a sketch," Andrew explained; "it is going to be a rather detailed study, so it has to be a good size."



"I see. But there will be a lot of work in it, won't there? If you are going to paint all the detail?"

"Yes," Andrew replied, "there will be plenty to do. But I rather like a subject with a fair amount of matter in it."

"But won't it take a deuce of a time to do? I should think there will be a week's work in it, at least."

"No," said Andrew, "not as much as that. I shall probably get it finished in three or four sittings."

"Will you, indeed? Three or four sittings? And how long do you generally work at a sitting?"

"As long as the light will let me," Andrew replied. "Three hours, at the outside. It doesn't do to go on too long, or you get the light and shade all wrong."

Here Andrew paused rather definitely. He was a naturally polite and civil man, but he disliked interruptions of his work and he felt that the conversation had gone on long enough. Apparently, he had managed to convey a hint to this effect, for the man stepped back a pace and remarked apologetically: "I am afraid I am hindering you, and that won't do. Perhaps I shall be passing this way again before you have finished your study. I should like to see the completed work. In the meantime I will wish you 'Good morning' and many thanks for letting me see it in its early stage."

With this he turned away and walked off towards the road; and Andrew, glancing at his retreating figure, was struck by the contrast between the brisk, purposive manner of his retirement and his aimless, sauntering approach. Apparently he was making up for the time that he had spent in the conversation; and Andrew, turning once more to his painting, proceeded to do likewise.

But in spite of his growing interest in his work as the picture progressed, the incident had left a slightly disagreeable impression. Perhaps it was natural that the disturbing and insecure circumstances in which he was living should cause him to view with a critical and suspicious eye any chance contacts with strangers. So he persuaded himself and tried to dismiss the matter from his thoughts. Nevertheless, he could not quite get rid of the impression. Little details of the incident tended obstinately to recur. He recalled the elaborate, leisurely, snooperesque manoeuvres by which the man had managed to establish the contact, and then the quick, definite way in which he had departed, with the air of having accomplished some specific object. Again there was the rather futile conversation. Obviously, the man neither knew nor cared anything about painting. Yet he had made a very evident pretext to open the conversation.

Then there was the appearance of the man. Once or twice as they were talking Andrew had looked in his face, and his artist's eye had been quick to note certain slight anomalies. The hair was sleek and black and had somewhat the appearance of a wig; and the eyebrows were black and heavy, like little moustaches. But the eyes were pale blue and the skin was fair and slightly freckled. Now, the black-haired blond is a recognized type, and is not so very rare. Still, there was an anomaly; and to a man in Andrew's circumstances, it tended to attract uneasy notice. Oddly enough, the one really significant point in the incident escaped him entirely. It was only by the light of subsequent events that he was able to perceive the relevancy of that apparently futile conversation.

He worked on for nearly an hour beyond his allotted time in order to get the painting well started; and, by degrees, as he became more and more engrossed in his task, the incident faded into the background of his mind. But the impression tended to revive when, the day's work finished, he packed up his kit and started on his way home; manifesting itself in a long detour, punctuated by searching glances around, before the final plunge into Well Walk.

---

## IX. — THE AXE FALLS

ANDREW'S forecast was so far correct that, by the end of the third sitting, his picture was virtually finished. Another short sitting to "pull it together" would see the work complete. He leaned back on his stool and viewed the painting critically and not without satisfaction. For the work of one who was not a professed landscape painter, it was quite a creditable performance; and, as the material for future studio subjects, it should be of some value.

He had sat thus for a minute or two, inspecting his work and comparing it with the landscape before him when he became conscious of someone standing behind him. Assuming that it was some stranger who had crept up to have a look at the painting, he took no notice and remained still, in the hope that the spectator would presently depart without attempting to open a conversation. But as the time ran on and the onlooker remained immovable, he began unostentatiously to put his kit together; for he had finished work, and certain internal sensations associated themselves pleasantly with the lamb cutlets which he happened to know would be awaiting him at his lodgings.

He disposed of his colours, put the brushes away tidily in their case, emptied the dipper and put it into its special pocket, and still the person behind him made no move. Finally, he took the pin-frame board, on which the painting was stretched, off the easel and slipped it into its compartment in the satchel. Then he stood up and turned round to face the spectator; and, instantly, he realized that some kind of mischief was brewing. There was not one spectator, but three; two tall, massive men and one shorter; and though the latter had close-cropped reddish hair and no eyebrows to speak of, Andrew had no difficulty in recognizing the "snooper" of two days ago.

The shorter man looked at him insolently and asked: "Well, have you quite finished?"

"I have finished work for to-day," Andrew answered.

"Good!" the other rejoined. "Now we can get to business. I don't think you spotted me a couple of days ago."

"I did not," Andrew replied, "and I don't spot you now. Who are you?"

The man laughed, contemptuously. "Well, I'm damned. Tony!" he exclaimed. "Lizzie's right. You've got the cheek of the devil. Pretending to my face that you don't know who I am!"

"It is no pretence at all," said Andrew. "You are a complete stranger to me."

The man laughed again, more savagely, and was about to make some further rejoinder when one of the tall men interposed. "There's no use in wasting time on talk," said he. "Is this the man?"

"Yes," was the reply. "This is the man."

Thereupon the tall man took a pace forward, and, touching Andrew lightly on the arm, said:

"I am a police officer, and I arrest you, Anthony Kempster, on a charge of fraud and personation."

"But," protested Andrew, "my name is not Anthony Kempster."

"That may be," replied the officer, "but my information is that you are Anthony Kempster and I hold a warrant for your arrest. You can see it if you like."

"There is no need," said Andrew. "I am not disputing your authority to arrest Anthony Kempster. My point is that I am not Anthony Kempster. This gentleman has made a mistake."

"Well, you know," the officer replied, not uncivilly, "we can't go into that here. You must come with me to the station. Then the Inspector will read the charge over to you and you can say anything that you want to say. I can't listen to any statements. My duty is simply to arrest you and hand you over to the proper authorities. And you had better not say anything until you get to the station. May I take it that you are coming along quietly?"

Andrew smiled sourly. "It doesn't seem as if I had much choice," said he. "I'm certainly not going to make a scene, and I hope you are not going to."

"No," replied the officer, "you will not be subjected to any unnecessary indignities if you don't give any trouble. We've got a car waiting down the road. We shan't have to walk you through the streets. Are you ready?"

"I shall be when I have strapped my easel and stool together," Andrew replied.

"Very well," the officer agreed. "Be as quick as you can."

Andrew folded up the easel and the stool and strapped them together. Then, grasping the handle of the strap, and slinging the satchel over his shoulder, he turned to the officer. "I am at your service now," said he; whereupon the two officers placed themselves one on either side, and, as the informer walked on ahead down the slope, they followed in his wake. Looking forward in the direction which the red-headed man was taking, Andrew now saw, on the road below, just at the entrance to Rotten Row, a large car, and, a few yards ahead of it, a taxi-cab. As they bore down on the car, Andrew observed that the driver, who wore some kind of official uniform, had emerged from his place by the wheel and was standing by the door, which he was holding open; and, glancing at the taxi-cab, he could see, though not very distinctly the face of some person peering out through the rear window. But he had not much time for observation, for when they reached the car one of the officers immediately stepped in and directed him to follow, which he did. Then the other officer

entered and was shut in by the driver, who now walked round to the front and took his place at the wheel; and Andrew, glancing out through the front window, saw the redheaded man getting into the taxi, which started as he slammed the door. After a few seconds the car—the engine of which was already running—started forward and the mysterious and not very promising journey had commenced.

It was not in any sense an agreeable journey. Sitting jammed in between the two rather bulky officers, Andrew's bodily discomfort was swallowed up by his mental distress. For he could not view the immediate future without the gravest forebodings. He had disclaimed all knowledge of the red-headed man, but, as he recalled his features and his colouring, he was conscious of a distinct reminiscence of the woman who had threatened him with retribution. With those threats he naturally associated the present proceedings; and although the whole affair was founded on a mistake, he had grave misgivings as to the possibility of rectifying that mistake. "I take it," said he, "that that man who was with you is not a police officer?"

"No," was the reply, "he is a civilian. Name of Blake. Said you knew him."

"I don't know either the name or the man," said Andrew.

"Well," the officer rejoined, "he knew you—unless, as you say, he has made a mistake. However, we'd better not discuss that now; and if you take my advice you won't do any talking until we get to the station, because whatever you may say will be taken down in writing and used in evidence, and then, perhaps, you will wish you hadn't spoken."

Andrew thanked the officer for his advice, and in pursuance of it relapsed into silence. He had plenty to think about; but, oddly enough, his thoughts tended principally to concern themselves with Mrs. Pendlewick. At this moment she was probably laying aside her lace pillow and considering, with an eye on the old wooden-faced clock, whether it was yet time to commence operations on the lamb cutlets. His direct, physical interest in those cutlets had suddenly become extinct; but his thoughts turned wistfully to the peaceful little room, the table with its snowy cloth and immaculate china and the picturesque little brown jug which gave the beer an added flavour. He could see it all vividly in his mind's eye, and already he began to wonder gloomily when he should look on it again in the flesh.

But his chief concern was for Mrs. Pendlewick. He thought of her with all her preparations made for his entertainment, awaiting him, at first impatiently, then anxiously, and then, as the time ran on, and it became evident that something out of the ordinary had happened, in real alarm. He was very troubled about her and wondered vaguely what she would do when night came and still he did not return. Would she set inquiries on foot? And if so, how would she go about it? Perhaps she would apply to the police. He hoped not; because it was his intention, at present, not to disclose the whereabouts of his abode. He didn't want the police to get access to his rooms to rummage among his possessions and possibly establish a connection between Molly and the alleged Anthony Kempster. That would be intolerable in any case; but, if he should be unable to dispel the illusion as to his identity, it would be absolutely disastrous.

So his thoughts rambled on until the slowing down of the car in a rather narrow street recalled him suddenly to his present business. He had taken no note of the route that the car had followed and had no idea as to his present whereabouts; but when the car stopped opposite a building with a large doorway and a constable in the uniform of the City Police came forward to open the door, he realized that he must be somewhere in the City of London.

The senior officer stepped out and halted to wait for him, and he followed immediately with the other officer close on his heels. They entered through the wide doorway and passed into a large, bare room furnished with some benches and a few plain Windsor chairs. On two of the latter were seated the only occupants of the room; the red-headed man and the woman whom he had met in the train. The former greeted him with an insolent stare and a half-suppressed grin; the latter—to whom he bowed stiffly, raising his hat—gave him one swift glance and averted her face. It was evident to him that she was greatly distressed and agitated, for not only were there traces of tears on her pale and drawn face, but her hands, resting on her lap, trembled visibly. It was easy to see that already she was being torn by pangs of remorse.

The senior officer had gone out of the room immediately on their arrival. He now returned and took charge of Andrew, beckoning to the woman to follow. "Not you," he added, as the red-headed man rose from his chair. "You stay where you are. I'll send for you if I want you."

With this, he conducted Andrew out of the room, along a passage and into a large, barely furnished office where an inspector sat at a desk with a number of papers before him; a grave, scholarly-looking man with a bald head and a pair of round-eyed, horn-rimmed spectacles. As they entered, he motioned the woman to a chair and cast an inquisitive glance at Andrew. "Is this Kempster?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Has he made any statement?"

"No, sir, excepting that he denies that he is Anthony Kempster."

The inspector nodded, and, pulling out a drawer of the desk, selected a paper from a number of other documents and turned to Andrew. "You will want to know exactly what you are charged with. I will read out the charge and then hear if you have anything to say. It is that you, Anthony Kempster, did, on the 20th of April, 1919, and on divers other occasions, falsely personate one Francis Redwood deceased, for the purpose of effecting a fraudulent life insurance. That is the charge. Now, is there anything that you wish to say? You are not bound to say anything, but if you do, I have to caution you that anything that you may say will be taken down in writing and used in evidence."

"All that I have to say," said Andrew, "is that I am not Anthony Kempster."

The inspector looked round at the woman and asked: "What do you say to that, Mrs. Kempster? Is this man your husband or is he not?"

"I say that he is," she replied in a low voice.

The inspector turned to Andrew. "Now," said he, "what do you say to that? Do you say that this lady is making a false statement?"

"No, not at all," Andrew replied earnestly. "I have not the least doubt that she is speaking in perfect good faith. But she is mistaken. She is, indeed. I can only suppose that I bear a remarkable resemblance to her husband, but I assure you that I never met her until a few days ago when she spoke to me in the train. I beg you, madam, to look at me again and see if you are not mistaken."

As he spoke, he looked appealingly in the woman's face; and as he did so, he saw that it had taken on a very curious expression—an expression of which he could make nothing. Whether it denoted doubt or hope or relief or merely bewilderment he was unable to judge. But it was a very singular expression: so singular that the inspector noticed it, for he remarked: "I suppose there isn't any mistake? I don't see how there could be, but still, we want to be sure. Are you sure, Mrs. Kempster?"

She hesitated for a few moments and then replied, doggedly: "Yes. He is Anthony Kempster."

The inspector turned once more to Andrew and said in a patient, persuasive tone: "You hear that. What do you say now?"

"I say again that this lady is mistaken."

"Very well," said the inspector, in the same quiet, persuasive tone, "let us suppose that she is. Then, you see, if you are not Anthony Kempster, you must be someone else. You see that, don't you?"

Andrew had to admit that the inspector's logic was unimpeachable. "Then," the inspector pursued, "all that you have got to do is to prove that you are someone else and we shall know that you can't be Anthony Kempster. Come, now. Tell us who you are."

Andrew was, naturally, not unprepared for this question, and had already decided on his reply. "I think," he said, "that, under the present circumstances, I would rather not give my real name."

"Very well," said the inspector, without the slightest trace of irritation, "then, for the present, we will call you Anthony Kempster. Any objection to telling us where you live?"

"I would rather not give any address, at present," Andrew replied.

"Quite so," said the inspector. "Not a very communicative gentleman. But if you won't tell us anything about yourself, we shall have to find out as best we can. Perhaps you have got something in your pockets that will help us."

He glanced significantly at the officer who was standing by; who immediately stepped forward and laid an expert hand on Andrew's coat in the region of the right breast. "What's this?" said he. "Feels like a pocket-book."

He slipped his hand into the pocket and adroitly fished out a wallet, which he handed to the inspector; and, as Andrew saw it transferred, his heart sank. For it was Ronald's wallet; the one which he had found in the pocket of the coat on that fatal day at Crompton. He had used it ever since, but merely as a receptacle for notes; and exactly what else it now contained he had no clear idea. There were one or two closed compartments, which he had opened and glanced into in case one of them should contain his own or any other letter which might have to be burned. But there were no letters; and the few scraps of crumpled paper that were in them he had carelessly left there unexamined. It was a singularly foolish thing to have done, as he now realized; and he watched the inspector's proceedings with growing alarm. "Four pound-notes," the latter remarked, laying them out on the desk. "Clean ones. Look as if they had come from a bank." He looked into the open compartments, and, seeing that they were empty, went on to the two closed ones. Opening one, he apparently drew a blank, for he reclosed it and passed on to the other. From this he extracted three crumpled pieces of thin paper, one of which he smoothed out carefully and studied with evident interest. Turning to Mrs. Kempster, he asked: "Do you know the names Bailey and Warman?"

"Yes," she replied. "They are wine merchants at Ipswich."

"Did you ever live at Ipswich? And if so, at what address?"

"I lived at Ipswich with my husband at Number 23, Beckton Street."

The inspector nodded. Then, taking up the piece of paper, he held it out towards Andrew for his inspection. "Just take a glance at that," said he.

Andrew took a glance at it; and instantly realized that he was lost. It was a tradesman's bill ("account rendered"), and it set forth that A. Kempster, Esq., 23, Beckton Street, was a debtor to Bailey and Warman, Wine and Spirit Merchants, Ipswich, in the sum of four pounds. "Well," said the inspector, "that seems to dispose of the mistaken identity racket. I presume you agree with me?"

"I agree with you that it seems to," Andrew replied. "But I still maintain that I am not Anthony Kempster."

The inspector smiled sardonically. "You certainly know your own mind," said he; "but you have got to explain how you come to have a bill in your pocket addressed to A. Kempster, Esq. Can you explain that?"

"I am afraid I can't," Andrew had to admit.

"No," said the inspector. "I don't suppose you can. And that, I think, completes our business for the present. You will remember, Mrs. Kempster, that you are bound over to give evidence. You had better come back here about three o'clock. We shall take Kempster before the magistrate as soon as possible. Say a quarter to three."

While these directions were being given Andrew looked at his alleged wife. Her expression had changed and was more inscrutable to him than ever. There was nothing in it in the least suggestive of elation or triumph. Rather did it suggest disappointment and the most profound dejection. As the inspector finished speaking, she rose, and, without a glance at Andrew, turned away and walked slowly towards the door. Suddenly she snatched out her handkerchief and held it to her face; and there came to his ear the sound of muffled sobs.

The inspector followed her with an impassive, but not unkindly eye, and, as she disappeared, he proceeded to moralize. "Women," he remarked, "are kittle cattle. She started the ball, all agog to get it moving; and now she'd like to stop it. And she can't. She doesn't know her own mind as well as you do, Kempster."

He smoothed out the other pieces of paper, and, having glanced at them, attached them to certain other documents which he put away in a tray. Then he copied on a slip of paper the numbers of the notes, and, having put this slip with the other papers, replaced the notes in the wallet and handed the latter back to Andrew. "You may as well keep that for the present," he remarked. "You will be detained here until we are able to bring you before the magistrate, which we shall do this afternoon."

With this, he drew his chair up to the desk and resumed the studious pursuits in which he had been "discovered", as the playwrights express it, and Andrew reverted to the custody of the attendant officer, who proceeded to pilot him out of the room, and presently to transfer him to the care of a uniformed constable; who conducted him to a passage in which were a couple of rows of black-painted doors, each distinguished by a number. One of these doors the constable unlocked and opened; and, having thrust in his head and sniffed, shut it again and passed on to the next. Here, the result being apparently satisfactory, he threw the door wide open and invited Andrew to enter. "I may as well relieve you of your kit," he remarked, assisting his charge to remove the satchel from his shoulder and taking possession of the easel and stool. "The things will be taken care of and given back to you at the proper time. And I must just see what you have got in your pockets. It is only a formality; but there are certain things that you are not allowed to have about you while you are in custody. Just put them out on the table and let me look through them."

Andrew emptied his pockets, laying the various objects on the little fixed table. These the constable glanced through, and, having satisfied himself that the pockets had been really emptied, selected from the collection a pocket knife and a small bundle of string. "You can put the rest back for the present," said he, "and I hope you'll be able to keep them and have the others back. And now, what about grub? When did you have your last meal?"

"About eight o'clock this morning," Andrew replied. "But I don't really feel as if I could manage any food."

The constable shook his head. "That won't do," said he. "Mustn't give way. You'll be going before the magistrate presently, and you'd better not go on an empty stomach. Take my advice and get a square meal while you can. You'll feel better after it. You have got some money, and you can have anything in reason that you want. Better let me send out for something."

Andrew accepted the well-meant and obviously sensible advice, handing over the modest sum that his custodian suggested as sufficient. Then the constable retired, locking the door and leaving him to his own reflections. Those reflections were, naturally, not of the most agreeable kind and were singularly confused. The attitude of the constable impressed him with mild surprise. He might have been a nurse or attendant in some Erewhonian convalescent home for moral invalids, so solicitous did he seem for the welfare of his charge. And even the dry, impersonal civility of the other officers was not what he would have expected.

But, once more, his thoughts reverted to Mrs. Pendlewick. By this time, the lamb cutlets were ruined beyond redemption, but she would not have given him up. He pictured her sitting, working automatically at her lace, looking up from time to time at the clock and painfully aware of the aroma of the half-cremated cutlets.

His meditations were interrupted by the arrival of his meal; and, acting on the further exhortations of the constable, he made a determined and moderately successful effort to dispose of it, with the result foreseen by that experienced officer. He felt better in a bodily sense. The physical depression left him, and even his mental state seemed to be improved.

But his mind was still in a state of utter confusion. Presently he would be brought before a magistrate and charged with a crime that he knew nothing about. What was he to say? Of course, he would declare his innocence, and he would continue to deny that he was the person charged. That he must do, since it was the actual truth. But he realized the utter futility of it. The wine merchant's bill had labelled him Anthony Kempster, and to that "attribution" he had no answer. It was even doubtful whether he would not further prejudice his case by saying anything at all.

At any rate, there was nothing that he could do. When the time came, he would have to stand passively and watch this tragedy of errors working itself out to its illogical conclusion. He felt like a swimmer in some swift stream, borne along by the irresistible force of the torrent. Ahead of him the rapids were roaring; but he could do no more than drift passively to

his destruction.

---

## X. — GAOL

As Andrew took his place in the dock at the police court, he looked around him with a sort of dull, impersonal curiosity. He had never been in a police court before and had but a vague idea as to the nature of the proceedings that were conducted in such places. First, he noted the persons present. Of those whom he knew, the one who instantly caught his eye was his accuser, Mrs. Kempster; and as he looked commiseratingly at her pale, haggard face and the restless hands that were incessantly clasping and unclasping themselves, he realized the truth of the inspector's remarks. It was easy to see that she would have given a good deal to be able to undo the knot that she had tied.

Sitting beside her on the same bench was the redheaded man; and, now that he saw them together, the likeness between them which he had detected at the morning's meeting was still more noticeable. From them his eyes wandered to the inspector and the two officers who had arrested him and, passing quickly over the background of mostly squalid strangers who had loafed in to look on, he looked lastly at the magistrate, a wooden-faced elderly man of a pronounced legal type.

The proceedings were opened by a senior police officer, apparently a superintendent. He began by intimating that he was proposing only to produce evidence of arrest and identification and that he would ask for a remand to enable the necessary evidence to be obtained and the witnesses notified. Then he went on to give a general outline of the case; to which Andrew listened with profound interest, having, up to this time only the most obscure notion as to what he was accused of. "This," said the superintendent, "is a prosecution under the False Personation Act. The prosecutors are the Griffin Insurance Society, but it has not been possible for them to be represented on this occasion. The facts of the case are, in broad outline, as follows:

"In February, 1919, the accused, Anthony Kempster, came to live as a boarder with Mr and Mrs. Francis Redwood at Colchester. Francis Redwood was a retired builder who had given up his business on account of bad health. He was more or less an invalid, and, in addition, he suffered from an aneurism, from which it appeared certain that he would die in the course of a year or two. He had saved a little money, on which he lived, but his means were very small and he took a boarder to eke them out. In view of his bad health, and especially of the aneurism, he had some time previously made a will, leaving the little property that he had to his wife and making her sole executrix.

"When the accused had been living with them about a month, he began to urge Mrs. Redwood to insure her husband's life, pointing out how very little provision there was for her under the will. But, of course, Redwood was uninsurable by reason of his aneurism, as she explained to him, the question of insurance having been already considered. Then Kempster suggested to her that he thought he could manage the insurance if she left the business to him, but stipulated that nothing should be said about the matter to her husband. She did not at all clearly understand what it was that he proposed to do, but, as he assured her that he would take the whole responsibility, she agreed and promised to keep the affair secret from her husband.

"Then Kempster left Colchester for a time and went to live at Dartford under the name of Francis Redwood. There he consulted a Dr. Croft about his health—which was quite good—and mentioned that he was thinking of insuring his life. Now, Dr. Croft was the local examiner for the Griffin Insurance Society, and he naturally recommended his office and, at Kempster's request, gave him a proposal form. This Kempster filled up—in the name of Francis Redwood—giving the name of Dr. Croft as his ordinary medical attendant. Then he went up to the London office for the medical examination and in the end managed to effect an insurance in the sum of two thousand pounds.

"As soon as the business was concluded, he went back to Colchester and took up residence with the Redwoods. After a month or two, he notified the Insurance Company of his change of address, still in the name of Francis Redwood, although he had by now resumed his own name of Anthony Kempster, imitating Redwood's signature as he had done on the proposal form.

"In April, 1921, shortly after the second premium had been paid, Francis Redwood died. But he did not die of the aneurism. He died of pneumonia following influenza, and a death certificate was given to that effect. Accordingly, as there was nothing unusual in the circumstances of the death, no inquiries were made but when the will was proved, the two thousand pounds were paid to the executrix in the ordinary way.

"About six months after the death of Francis Redwood, Kempster proposed marriage to the widow, Elizabeth Redwood, and was accepted. They were married at Ipswich and went to live there, having sold the Colchester house. After the marriage, Kempster managed to persuade his wife to allow him to put all their money into his bank with a view to making some investments. But those investments were never made. What became of the money, Mrs. Kempster never knew. In some way it disappeared; and then Kempster himself disappeared; and from that time until a week or two ago she never set eyes on him again.

"Then one day she got a passing glimpse of him getting into a train and was subsequently able, with the assistance of her brother, Joseph Blake, to locate him as living in the neighbourhood of Hampstead. There he was arrested this morning by Detective Sergeant Morton. On his arrest, he stated that his name was not Anthony Kempster and that he had never heard of such a person. At the police station he was confronted with Mrs. Kempster, who identified him as her husband, Anthony Kempster, but he still denied that that was his name and insisted that she was mistaking him for someone else."

"Apart from the identification by Mrs. Kempster," said the magistrate, "is there any evidence that he is Anthony Kempster?"

"Yes, your worship," replied the superintendent. "As he refused to give any name or address or any sort of account of himself, it was necessary to search him. Then there was found in his pocket a bill addressed to A. Kempster; but he still denied that that was his name. That is a summary of the case, your worship, and I shall now call the witnesses to prove the arrest and the identity."

The first witness was Detective Sergeant Roger Morton who deposed that, acting on information received, he had that morning proceeded to Hampstead Heath where he had arrested the accused, who was then engaged in making a sketch of the Heath, in execution of a warrant. He had administered the usual caution and the accused had made no statement beyond a flat denial that he was the person named in the warrant. Accused had not, however, resisted arrest.

The next witness was Inspector Frank Butt. He deposed that the accused had been brought to the station by the last witness at 1.45 pm. He (the inspector) had read the charge to him and administered the usual caution. The accused was then confronted with Elizabeth Kempster, who identified him as her husband, Anthony Kempster. The accused declared that she was mistaken and that he was not Kempster, but he would not say who he was or give any address or any account of himself whatever. He was then searched and there was found in his pocket a wine merchant's bill (produced and handed to the magistrate), addressed to A. Kempster. He could not account for his having this bill in his pocket, but he still maintained that the charge was a mistake and that he was not Kempster.

When the inspector had retired, the superintendent intimated that that was all the evidence that he was producing on this occasion; that he was asking for a remand to enable him to produce the other evidence and summon the witnesses, and that, as the accused refused to give any account of himself and his place of abode was unknown, he opposed bail.

The magistrate looked curiously at Andrew for a few moments and then said: "You have heard the evidence that has been given. Do you wish to say anything? You are not bound to. But—" and here followed the inevitable caution.

"I don't wish to say anything at present," Andrew replied, "excepting that my name is not Anthony Kempster and that Mrs. Kempster is mistaken in believing me to be her husband."

"What do you say that your name is?" the magistrate asked.

"I prefer not to give my name, at present," Andrew answered.

"Nor your address or occupation?"

"No, your worship."

"Then," said the magistrate, in the calm, impersonal tones to which Andrew was becoming accustomed, "you will have to be remanded in custody. You are remanded for seven days."

Thereupon Andrew was taken in custody by two constables and removed from the court. But he was not taken back to the police cells. Instead, he was conducted out of the building by a side passage and, on emerging into the street, found a prison van drawn up at the kerb. Passing—like a wedding guest, but with certain differences—between two rows of spectators, he was conducted to the van and assisted up the back steps into the dim and rather malodorous interior.

He had often wondered what the inside of a prison van was like. Now his curiosity was satisfied. It consisted of a dark and narrow passage with a row of doors on either side. Each door was furnished with a keyhole and a small grated window like the inspection trap in a convent gate. When one of the doors was opened, it disclosed a narrow compartment suggesting something between a sentry box and an extremely ascetic sedan chair, with a fixed seat, polished by friction with the persons of dynasties of disreputable occupants, and a small space in front of it to accommodate the feet of the sitter. On this uncommodious seat Andrew sat down gingerly, not without some uncomfortable speculations as to the characteristics and personal habits of the last occupant; and as soon as he was seated, the door was closed and locked.

It was a strange experience and far from an agreeable one. On the closing of the door, he seemed to be plunged into almost total darkness, excepting a faint glimmer from a ventilator over his head and the little square of twilight before him which indicated the position of the tiny grated window. For the back door of this criminal omnibus, when it was closed, admitted no more light than what was able to struggle through a very moderate-sized grated opening, and even this was largely obscured by the person of the "conductor".

But any deficiency in the matter of light was more than made up in smell. The whole vehicle was pervaded by the peculiar and distinctive odour of unwashed humanity; and, as the van proceeded on its round, picking up from time to time fresh consignments (which were fresh only in a limited sense), the flavour of the "imperfect ablutioner" became ever more pronounced. Yet these halts were not altogether unwelcome; for then, for a few moments, the back door was flung open and the depressing darkness was relieved by a flood of light, by which Andrew, peering out through the little grating, could get a glimpse of the new arrivals and could observe that the few other gratings which were within the range of his vision were each occupied by an eye similarly engaged in inspecting the new tenants.

But even the round of a prison van comes at last to an end. The termination of this journey was indicated to Andrew by a slowing down of the vehicle, a sudden increase of darkness, and then, as the van stopped, a clang from the rear as of the shutting of a heavy gate. After a brief interval there came a sound from the front like the opening of another gate; the van moved on, the light reappeared, the gate—now behind—clanged to and its closure was immediately followed by the click of

a large lock. Finally, the van stopped once more, the back door was opened, the doors of the respective cells were unlocked, and the process of unloading began.

As he took his place in the queue that filed in at the prison gate, Andrew glanced curiously at his fellow sufferers. Assuming with more probability than charity that they were mostly criminals, their appearance was no advertisement for crime as a profession. Nor did it suggest that the profession was favoured by the elite of mankind. Manifest poverty and physical unclean-ness were the distinguishing characteristics of the immense majority and, taken as a random sample of the population, even this small group was noticeably below the average both in physique and in the outward signs of intelligence. It looked as if crime were not a “paying proposition”, though, to be sure, it might be argued that the present assembly represented only the unsuccessful practitioners.

Meditating this question as he followed the shuffling crowd, Andrew was yet again impressed by the civil and tolerant attitude of the officials. In the reception ward, the officer who presided over the ceremonies instructed him quite kindly in the necessary preparations; and the doctor who examined him might have been the medical referee of an insurance office. Nevertheless, the general atmosphere of the place was unspeakably grim and forbidding. Never for a moment was the inmate allowed to forget that he was a prisoner in the custody of the law. As he followed the warder from “Receptions” to his final resting-place in a faraway gallery, every one of the innumerable light iron gates which they passed had to be unlocked to admit them and was immediately locked behind them; and when, tramping along the iron-floored gallery, they came to a door bearing a number corresponding to that on the label which had been attached to his coat, that door had to be unlocked to admit him to his cell, though being furnished with a spring lock, it fastened him in without the aid of a key. But before it was closed the warder, having gathered that he was a “green hand”, lingered to give him a few general instructions, to explain the use of the bell by which an attendant could be summoned and to caution him against the improper use of this important appliance. Then he retired from the cell; the heavy door slammed, the spring lock snapped audibly, and the sounds from the galleries without suddenly became muffled and remote.

When Andrew was left alone he proceeded to do what every man probably does when he finds himself in prison for the first time; he made a tour of inspection of his apartment and examined its furniture and appointments. There was little of the picturesque dungeon in the appearance of the cell. It was just a small, bare room with whitewashed walls and a fair-sized iron-framed window with very small panes. The furniture consisted of a small fixed table, a solid stool and a plank bed, with the bedding—mattress, pillow, blanket, sheets, rug and pillow-slip—neatly rolled up into a cylindrical bundle, not without regard to the decorative possibilities of the variously-coloured items. There was a tin jug, filled with water, a drinking vessel (officially known as a “pint”), a tin plate, a salt cellar and a wooden spoon. Other conveniences included a tin basin, a comb and brush, a dust pan, a queer little sweeping brush like a tiny besom without a handle, and a slate with a stump of pencil attached by a length of string. A bell push communicated with the warder’s room and actuated a sort of semaphore arm outside the cell; and, lastly, the massive door was furnished with a tiny round window of thick glass covered by a sliding shutter—but the shutter was outside and beyond the prisoner’s control.

Having made his inspection, he looked round for other objects of interest. The slate did not attract him. As a writing or drawing medium it was a poor substitute for the excellent paper to which he was accustomed; and the stump of pencil was worn to a shapeless end which repelled him. He would have liked to sharpen it, but his knife had been taken from him. Then he transferred his attention to the walls of the cell. In one respect they conformed to the traditional ideas of a dungeon, for they were covered with the comments and lamentations inscribed by former tenants; and, as these were written in lead pencil, it was obvious that they were the work of “remands” like himself. He wandered round idly reading them and filled with an ever-increasing wonder at their amazing puerility and the almost incredibly low intelligence that they suggested. He was surprised, too, to notice the almost complete absence of any tendency to obscenity in them. They seemed to be just the harmless outpourings of perfectly vacant minds. Most of them might have been the work of backward children of eight or nine.

Some were mere pathetic expressions of self-pity, such as “Poor old Blower”, repeated more than a dozen times on different parts of the walls. Others gave bald particulars of their offences with rough estimates of their expectations. Thus, “Joe Viney from Wood Green expects a stretch for stabbing”; “Moley from Upper Rathbone Place, Oxford St. W. Committed for trial North London Sessions for a Byke”; “Nobble in for a bust”; “Jim Brads from Rathbone Place fullied for a bust”; “T. Savage from Chapel St expects 6 wks.”; “J. Williams expects 3 years”; and so on. Others made complaints or accusations; as “Charles Kemp was put away for deserting by Mr. Goldstein of Hackney road”, or “Jackson is the one. Hurry up and catch HIM. Jackson you have ruined me. Jackson will get 300 years”; while yet others merely recorded names, as “Mikey from the Boro.”, written in reverse in six places with several unfinished attempts, and “Hymey from Brick Lane and Ginger Jim”.

Andrew studied these curious memorials gravely and with deep interest. They were certainly quaint, and to some they might have been amusing. But not to Andrew. To him their significance was too sinister. They labelled their writers the refuse, the “throw-outs”, of humanity. And what was he but one of them? He drew the stool up against the wall to provide a back, and, seating himself, fell into a train of vague reflection on the dismal prospects that were opening out before him. His feeling was one of utter helplessness. He was the victim of a whole complex of illusions, and he did not in the least see how those illusions could be dispelled. Perhaps some ideas might come to him later. There was plenty of time to think over matters—seven days before he had to make his next appearance before the magistrate. And so his mind rambled off to other subjects, to thoughts of Molly and especially to Mrs. Pendlewick.

His reflections were interrupted by the arrival of his supper; a hunk of brown bread and a mug of cocoa, both excellent



and very welcome. Refreshed by his meal, he took a little exercise pacing up and down his cell. Finally, having laid his mattress and made his bed, he took off his shoes and some of his clothes and laid himself down on his not very resilient couch.

Naturally, in the early part of the night, he slept little if at all. The day's excitements and the unusual surroundings tended to keep him awake, as did the lack of the customary darkness; for, when the daylight faded, the cell was lighted by a square of ground glass illuminated by a lamp outside the cell, which threw in its unwelcome rays throughout the night. And then there was the "Judas"—the little round spy-hole in the door. To Andrew that was the most disturbing influence of all. He found himself continually watching it with expectant nervousness and straining his ears to catch the foot-falls of the warder on his rounds and to be ready to see it open. Later he learned that the night warders wear shoes with list soles, which explained why, on each occasion, the uncanny, secret "blink" of the Judas-like the opening and closing of a bird's eye-startled him by occurring silently and without warning. And each time it left him more nervous and more profoundly humiliated.

But even a prisoner's night is not endless. He heard midnight strike on some clock in the world of freedom without, and then he knew no more until he was roused to clean up his cell and get ready for breakfast. And so began a day which was like all the succeeding days. He washed himself in the tin basin and even brushed his hair gingerly with the official brush. When he was summoned out for exercise, he tidied himself up as well as he could, and, having taken his number label, or badge, down from the hook on which it hung when he was "in residence", he attached it to his coat in the prescribed manner and was ready to take his place in the ranks of the other occupants of the gallery and be marched off to the prison yard.

The process of taking exercise was doubtless beneficial, but it was not exhilarating. The surroundings of the exercise ground of a local prison are hardly romantic. Still, to Andrew, on his first morning, the experience had the charm of novelty. He found himself embedded in a long and squalid procession trailing interminably at a quick, mechanical stride along narrow, sinuous paved paths just wide enough to accommodate the single file that moved along them; supervised by a number of warders, each of whom stood, statue-like, on a low stone pedestal, from which he could look over the heads of the exercisers. Nominally, the march was conducted in absolute silence. Actually, there was a more or less continuous hum of conversation of a very curious ventriloquial quality due to the fact that the "old hand" can talk without moving his face. From time to time a warder would call out sternly to the conversationalists to "stop that talking"; but still the mumble went on. Even the most experienced officer is baffled by a talker who stares straight before him and preserves a face of wood.

The experiences of this first day included two that were not repeated. The first was connected with the prison photographer; who, having looked him over critically, proceeded to execute a couple of portraits of him, one full face and one in profile. The other brought him within the province of the officer who took the finger-prints of His Majesty's guests and entered their descriptions and other "particulars" on the prescribed form for deposit at the Criminal Record Office; to all of which procedure Andrew submitted without demur, although, as an unconvicted, and therefore nominally innocent man, he was entitled to object. But he saw no reason for objecting; indeed, he was fast settling down into a state of dull fatalism, apprehensive of the future but hopeless of any means of controlling it.

This fatalistic attitude was viewed with deep disapproval by the fatherly middle-aged officer who looked after him by day. Andrew, as we have said, was a naturally polite man, instinctively suave and courteous in manner, with the obvious appearance and habits of a gentleman, circumstances which commended him to Officer Bolton, who had been in the army and had something of the old soldier's social exclusiveness. Moreover, Andrew gave no trouble. He obeyed the rules, accepted the discipline, made no complaints as to his food or otherwise, and was in all respects a model prisoner, and, as such, was duly appreciated by the staff who had to deal with him.

But his passive attitude, apparently taking no measures for his defence, caused the good-natured warder great concern; and, in the course of his official visitations, he took the opportunity to offer advice and admonitions which became more urgent as the days passed. "Look here, Kempster," he said, "you ought to have legal assistance. Get a decent solicitor, tell him all about it and let him make out the best case he can."

"I don't see what he could do for me," replied Andrew, "as I don't choose to give my real name."

"I can understand that," said Bolton (who, to Andrew's astonishment, seemed quite prepared to entertain his innocence). "But it's no use being thin-skinned. The name is bound to come out, sooner or later, if you get sent to prison. You know, you are not taking this affair seriously enough. You are charged with personation. Now, that's a felony; and the magistrate can't deal with it. He will commit you for trial at the Old Bailey if you can't make a proper defence, and you may get a nasty sentence. Don't wait for that. Get a solicitor and tell him the whole truth. Don't you see, my lad, it's no use your going into court and telling them that you didn't commit the crime and they've arrested the wrong man. That's what every accused man says, and nobody takes any notice. You've got to get someone who knows the ropes to manage your little business. And you've got to look sharp about it. Time's running on. In three days more the remand expires, and then you'll be up before the magistrate for the second hearing; and, if you haven't got something definite to say, you'll be fullied as the crooks call it—committed for trial. Now, you think over what I've said, and don't take too long thinking over it."

Accordingly, Andrew did think over it; but his thinking brought him no more forward. Once more he considered the advisability of boldly proclaiming his real identity. But the plan did not commend itself for two reasons. First, it would be useless. No one would believe him. There was Elizabeth Kempster, ready to swear to him as her husband and probably there would be other witnesses who would swear to his identity as Anthony Kempster. And what evidence could he

produce in support of his statement that he was the late Andrew Barton? To call Molly would be obviously useless. Her manner towards him when he had visited her had shown evident mistrust. She would certainly scout his claim to be her dead husband as a transparent and impudent fraud. The only witness who would be of any use—Professor Booley—was on the high seas or in some inaccessible part of the United States.

But even if he were able to prove his real identity; how would that help him? He would merely prove that instead of Anthony Kempster, charged with personation, he was Andrew Barton, charged with murder. It was the old dilemma; and, so far as he could see, there was no way out.

So, once more, he was thrown back on his original position. Fate had him fast in its clutches. He had no choice but to accept whatever might befall. And in this frame of mind he waited in dull expectation for the second hearing; waited to see what Fate really had in store for him.

The second hearing impressed him as something compounded of a nightmare and a chapter from *The Arabian Nights*. In spite of Bolton's exhortations, he was unrepresented by a lawyer. As he did not mean to disclose his identity, he had nothing to tell the solicitor, and he could make his bald denial without legal aid.

But it was a strange and bewildering experience. Standing in the dock, he listened to the evidence with a feeling of stupefaction. He heard a gentleman from the insurance office read out the proposal form for the insurance of Francis Redwood and give the particulars of the transaction, including the payment of £2,000. He heard the doctor from Dartford identify him as the man whom he had treated under the name of Francis Redwood, to whom he had given a proposal form made out in the same name; whom he had examined in connection with the said proposal form and whom he had, in the character of the proposer's usual medical attendant, certified as a first class life, still under the name of Francis Redwood. He heard a person of the name of Baines, who appeared to be Redwood's successor in the business, describe the late Francis Redwood, whom he had known long and intimately, as a feeble, sickly man, extremely unlike the accused, and further declare most positively that the accused was certainly not Francis Redwood but was one Anthony Kempster, well known to him as a man who had lodged in Redwood's house.

And so on. It was a most conclusive and convincing mass of evidence, and the mere fact that it was all totally untrue was known to Andrew alone, and could not be communicated by him to anyone else excepting in the unconvincing form of a comprehensive denial. But it was all rolled out with exhaustive and tedious thoroughness. Each deposition was taken down verbatim by the clerk, read over to the witness and signed by him as well as by the magistrate. And even that was not the end of it; for when the whole of the evidence had been given, the depositions of all the witnesses were solemnly read over again for Andrew's special benefit. Then the magistrate addressed him in the usual formal terms. "Having heard the evidence, do you wish to say anything in answer to the charge? You are not obliged to say anything unless you desire to do so; but whatever you say will be taken down in writing and may be given in evidence upon your trial. And you are also clearly to understand that you have nothing to hope from any promise of favour, and nothing to fear from any threat which may have been holden out to you to induce you to make any admission or confession of your guilt; but whatever you now say may be given in evidence against you upon your trial, notwithstanding such promise or threat."

"All I wish to say," replied Andrew, with a perfect recognition of the fatuousness of his reply, "is that I am not Anthony Kempster, and that the evidence which has been given does not apply to me."

The magistrate wrote this down and then asked: "Do you wish to say who you are?"

"Not on this occasion," Andrew answered.

"Nor to give any account of yourself?"

"No," was the hopeless reply; on which the magistrate, having written down the answers and signed them, informed the accused that he stood committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, and he was forthwith removed from the dock and taken back "to the place from whence he had come".

---

## XI. — THE LAST STRAW

As Andrew sat in his cell, recalling again and again the incredible proceedings of the police court, he was conscious of the first stirrings of revolt against the malignity of Fate. The wild absurdity of the whole affair tended to dispel his apathy and rouse a spirit of resistance.

After all, the final blow had not fallen. He was not condemned; he was only committed for trial. There was still time for him to set up a defence; and Bolton's indelicately broad hints as to what he might expect from the judge if he made no reasonable defence spurred him on to reconsider his tactics. It was no question, the worthy officer pointed out, of a few months in prison. The crime of false personation is a felony and may carry a substantial term of penal servitude. That was an appalling prospect. It meant several years cut out of the best part of his life, to say nothing of the misery of those years; and at the end of it he would be no better off. For he would come out of prison with the label of Anthony Kempster affixed to him immovably and for ever.

Something would have to be done. But the question was, what? Perhaps there was something in Bolton's idea after all. To a reputable solicitor he could safely tell his story, for a lawyer is entitled to hold sacred the secrets of his client. But when he had told his story, what then? His lawyer would be involved in the old dilemma. His client was either Anthony

Kempster or Andrew Barton. If he was Kempster, he was guilty of personation; if he was Barton, he was guilty of the murder of Oliver Hudson. It was a hopeless position, and he did not see how any amount of legal acumen could steer a course between the two impossible alternatives.

So, ineffectively, he struggled to find a way out of the labyrinth of perplexities in which he had become involved. How long he would have continued to struggle and what he would eventually have done, it is impossible to say. For the problem of Anthony Kempster suddenly receded into the background. Fate had another little selection from its repertoire to offer for his consideration and a new problem to submit for solution.

It was the second day after the police court hearing, early in the afternoon, when the door of his cell was thrown open, disclosing his usual custodian and a couple of gentlemen standing in the gallery outside, one of whom he recognized as Inspector Butt and the other as Superintendent Barnes, the officer who had opened the case against him at the first hearing. The two men entered the cell and the warder retired into the gallery, leaving the door ajar. It was the superintendent who addressed him. "We have come here," said he, "to discharge a disagreeable duty; to convey to you the information that you are charged with murder."

"With murder!" Andrew exclaimed, gazing at the officer in amazement. He could hardly believe his ears.

It seemed incredible that even the police should have penetrated his disguise. This was the very last thing that he had expected or been prepared for. "The charge is," the officer continued, "that on the 28th of August, 1928, at a place called Hunstone Gap, you, Ronald Barton, alias Anthony Kempster, alias Walter Green, feloniously did kill and murder one Andrew Barton. That is the charge. I don't know whether you wish to say anything, but it is my duty to caution you that anything you may say will be taken down in writing and used in evidence at your trial."

As the superintendent read out the charge, Andrew's feelings underwent a curious revulsion. Somehow, he experienced a sense of relief, almost of amusement. For the thing was so utterly preposterous. He was actually accused of having murdered himself! "May I ask," he said, "what reasons there are for supposing that I murdered Andrew Barton?"

"A summary of the evidence against you," the superintendent replied, "will be supplied for your use or that of your lawyers, if you obtain legal assistance, as I suppose you will, and as you certainly ought to; but I will give you the main facts that are in the possession of the police."

"First, on the day of Andrew Barton's death, you were seen in his company, and you appear to have been the last person who saw him alive, as you were seen walking with him in the direction of Hunstone Gap."

"Second, there was found in your possession, in your lodgings at Hampstead, an attache case containing ninety pounds in money and certain valuable property. This case, and the property in it, has been identified as the property of the deceased Andrew Barton, which he had with him on the day of his death. It has also been ascertained that this case was seen in your possession, in your lodgings at Crompton on the evening of that same day."

"Third, it is known that, on the day following the death of deceased, you cashed a cheque at deceased's London bank, which cheque was either in the case or on the person of deceased when he left home. Those are the principal points in the evidence at present available; and I now ask you if you wish to make any statement, bearing in mind the caution that I have just given you."

Andrew reflected rapidly. He was not disposed to make any statement until he had given some thought to the new developments. But there was one thing which instantly struck him. The case must have been identified by Molly; and, if that were so, she would be called to give evidence as to its identity at his trial. But the idea was so repugnant to him that he was prepared to compromise himself to some extent if by so doing he could prevent her from being called. "May I ask who identified the case?" he inquired.

"Mrs. Barton, the wife of the deceased," was the reply; "and she is prepared to swear that the case was in deceased's possession when he left home on the morning of his death."

"Yes," said Andrew. "It will be very disagreeable for her to appear as a witness. Would it simplify matters if I were to admit that the case is the property of Andrew Barton? Would that render it unnecessary for her to be called?"

"It might," the superintendent replied, "but I can give no promise or make any kind of conditions. Do I understand that you admit that the case that was found in your lodgings at Hampstead was the property of the late Andrew Barton?"

Again Andrew reflected, with a new mental alertness. He could not accept the superintendent's wording but yet he did not wish to alter it conspicuously until he had considered his course of action. Eventually he said: "I admit that the case which you found in my rooms at Hampstead is the case which Andrew Barton was carrying when he left home on the morning of the 28th of August. Will you write that down?"

The superintendent, with a look of obvious surprise, wrote the statement down in his note-book and then asked: "Do you wish to state how the case came into your possession?"

"No," Andrew replied, "I do not wish to make any further statement."

"Very well," said the superintendent, "then I will ask you to read the statement and, if you find it correct, to sign your name underneath."

He handed the book and his fountain pen to Andrew, who read the statement and, finding it faithfully set down in his

own words, affixed his signature and returned the book to its owner, who, having added his own signature, as a witness, pocketed it. "I think that is all there is to say at present," said the superintendent. "You will be given all necessary facilities for preparing your defence if you apply to the Governor of the prison, and you will be brought before the magistrate as soon as possible. You are sure you don't want to make any further statement?"

"Quite sure," Andrew replied; whereupon the two officers retired, and Bolton, with a wistful look into the cell, slammed the door and left the prisoner to his own thoughts.

The immediate effect of this bolt which had fallen, not, indeed, out of the blue, but out of an uncommonly stormy sky, was to bring Andrew abruptly to his senses. Curiously enough, he was not particularly alarmed by this new charge. He was still under the influence of Miss Booth's accusation and was more afraid of being charged with the murder of Mr. Hudson than with that of Andrew Barton. Nevertheless, he realized that this was a charge of murder and that, if he made no effective answer to it, he stood to be hanged. And to being hanged he had as great an objection as ever. To a term of imprisonment he might have resigned himself if there had been no way of avoiding it. But to the rope he could not resign himself at all. Some effective defence he would have to set up, though at the moment he could think of none, seeing that the evidence that the superintendent had recited was all true in fact; but already he was beginning dimly to recognize that he was receiving yet another shove from circumstance; that Miss Booth's accusation notwithstanding, he would be forced to make an effort to recover his own identity.

Indeed, the more he reflected on the matter the more did the motor crime tend to recede into a second place. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. The murder of Andrew Barton was a criminal charge that was very much in the hand, whereas the Hudson murder was still in the bush, even though that bush was uncomfortably near. Moreover, as he compared the two cases, he began to see that the new charge was the more formidable of the two. For the first time, he realized that Miss Booth's accusation was opposed to all reasonable probabilities and that he really had something weighty and material to offer in reply. In fact, with the clarity of vision that the new danger had produced, he began to suspect that he might have exaggerated the former danger.

On the other hand, the more he considered the new charge, the more did its formidable character tend to make itself felt. For here all the probabilities were against him. The absurdity of the charge was beside the mark; indeed, it was an added element of danger when the incredible nature of his own story was taken into consideration. Now that it had been ascertained that he had been present at Hunstone Gap when the death occurred and that he had "sneaked away like Cain", as Molly had expressed it, he could see that his subsequent conduct in keeping out of sight and offering no word of explanation was in the highest degree suspicious.

These cogitations led him to the inevitable conclusion. He would have to proclaim his real identity and he would have to tell the whole of his preposterous story. He would tell it to a lawyer and trust to his capacity to present it to the court in as plausible and credible a form as was possible. But the difficulty was that the lawyer would, at least in his own mind, reject it as a mere silly fable. It was even possible that a reputable lawyer might refuse to undertake a defence which was based on such a mass of absurdities, while the type of lawyer who would be ready to undertake any kind of case, good or bad, would probably have neither the skill nor the personal credit which would be necessary to give so unconvincing a case a fair chance. And there was the further difficulty that he knew no lawyers excepting his family solicitor, Mr. Wakefield; a respectable provincial practitioner who had no experience of criminal practice and who would pretty certainly flatly refuse to have anything to do with a man whom he would regard as his late client's murderer.

Eventually, he decided, as a preliminary measure, to discuss the position with Bolton. But it presently appeared that that kindly and conscientious officer, in his anxieties at the new position, had made representations in higher quarters. The fact transpired when the Medical Officer made one of his periodical visits to inspect his charge and inquire if there were "any complaints". When he had finished his professional business, instead of bustling away in his usual fashion, he lingered with a somewhat hesitating air and a thoughtful eye on his patient, and at length opened the subject that was in his mind. "I don't want to meddle in your affairs, Barton—your name is Barton, isn't it?"

"Yes," Andrew replied, "my name is Barton."

"Well," said the doctor, "as I said, I don't want to meddle, but your day officer, Bolton, is rather concerned about you, and he has spoken to me, suggesting that I might have a few words with you. He thinks that you have not given yourself a chance, so far; that you have had no legal assistance and taken no measures for your defence. Now, if that is so, it is a serious matter. Judges and magistrates will do all they can to see that you get fair play, but they can't conduct your defence. You have got to help them by giving them the facts on your side; facts which are known only to you. But perhaps you would rather that I did not interfere."

"On the contrary," Andrew replied, earnestly, "I am most grateful to you, and would thankfully accept your advice if you are not compromising yourself officially by giving it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the doctor, "of course I am not. Everyone wants you to have a fair trial. Even the police don't want a conviction against an innocent man; and as to me, it is perfectly correct for me, or any other prison official, to advise a prisoner if he wants advice."

"I am glad of that," said Andrew, "because I want advice very badly. I realize that I ought to have legal assistance, but appearances are so hopelessly against me that I doubt if a lawyer could help me."

"But," the doctor protested, "the more appearances are against you, the more do you need the help of a lawyer. I take it

that you are not going to plead guilty?"

"Certainly not. I am absolutely innocent of both of the charges against me."

"Then," said the doctor, "if you are innocent, there must be facts producible which would form an answer to the charges."

"There are," said Andrew, "but they are known only to me; and they are so extraordinary and incredible that no one would believe them. That is my difficulty. I have a perfectly complete and consistent story; but if I should tell that story to a lawyer, he would think I was merely romancing."

"Your lawyer isn't going to try you," the doctor remarked, adding with a queer, one-sided smile, "and you mustn't misunderstand his position. The function of an advocate is not to experience belief in his own person but to be the occasion of belief in others."

"Still," Andrew persisted, "it is rather hopeless to be defended by a lawyer who believes one to be guilty. I should have liked to convince him that, at least, I might possibly be innocent."

"Naturally, and very properly. But why not? The truth of those facts which are known to you must be susceptible of proof or disproof. If they are true, it is for your lawyer to ascertain and demonstrate their truth." He paused for a moment and then, speaking with marked emphasis, said: "Now tell me, Barton, supposing a competent lawyer should undertake your defence, would you be prepared to give him all the facts in your possession—to tell him everything that you know, truthfully and without any reservation whatever?"

"Certainly," Andrew replied. "I would promise to hide nothing from him."

The doctor reflected for a few moments. Then he asked: "Have you any lawyer in your mind whom you would like to consult?"

"No," Andrew answered. "I know of no lawyer. That is a point on which I was going to ask for your advice. Is there anyone whom you can recommend me to apply to?"

"I think there is," the doctor replied, "but I am not quite sure whether all the circumstances are suitable. When I was a student I had the good fortune to be the pupil of a very great man. His name is Dr. John Thorndyke—perhaps you may have heard of him."

"I seem to have heard the name," said Andrew, "but I know nothing about him. I take it that he is a doctor, not a lawyer."

"He is both, and he was our lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence—that is the legal aspect of medicine or the medical aspect of law. He practices as a barrister but he is not an advocate in the sense in which I was speaking just now. His speciality is the examination and analysis of evidence, and it seems to me that your case might interest him. You see, Barton, that I am taking your statement at its face value; I am assuming that you are an innocent man who is the victim of misleading appearances."

"That," said Andrew, "I swear most solemnly is the absolute truth."

"I hope it is, and I accept your statement. Now, would you like me to see Dr. Thorndyke and explain your position and find out whether he would be prepared to consider the question of his conducting your defence?"

"I should be profoundly grateful if you would. But do you think he would believe my story?"

The doctor smiled his queer, lop-sided smile. "I don't think, Barton. I know. He wouldn't. But neither would he disbelieve it. He would just treat it as material for investigation. He would pick out the alleged facts which were capable of being verified or disproved and he would proceed to verify or disprove them. If he found your statements to be true, he would go on with the case. If he found them untrue, he would decline the brief and pass you on to a counsel who would conduct the defence without prejudice as to his personal convictions."

"That seems to me a very reasonable and proper method," said Andrew. "I ask for nothing more. But I don't see how he is going to find out whether my story is true or false."

"You can leave that to him," the doctor replied. "But," he added, emphatically, "understand once and for all, Barton, I am assuming that your story, whatever it is, is a true story. If it isn't, don't send me on a fool's errand. I assure you that it is impossible to bluff Thorndyke. If he starts on the case, he will have you turned inside out in a twinkling; and if you tell him anything that isn't true, you'll be bowled out first ball. Now, Barton, what do you say? Would you like me to put the case to him?"

"If you would be so very kind," replied Andrew. "It seems to me that Dr. Thorndyke is exactly the kind of lawyer that I want."

"I am glad to hear you say that," the doctor rejoined, with obvious satisfaction. "Then I will call on him without delay and use what persuasion I can. But I shall want a written authority from you to offer him the brief. A leaf of my note-book will do to write it on. He won't be unduly critical of the stationery in the special circumstances."

With this and a trace of his quaint smile, he produced his note-book and a fountain pen; and when Andrew had drawn up the stool to the little fixed table and seated himself, he dictated a brief authorization which Andrew wrote and signed "Ronald Barton", enclosing the signature between quotation marks. Then he turned the book and pen to their owner who glanced through the few lines of writing and then looked up sharply. "Why have you put your signature between inverted

commas?" he asked. "Because I am signing as a prisoner in my prison name, which is not my real name. I am not Ronald Barton."

"Oh, aren't you?" said the doctor, in a tone of surprise and looking at Andrew a little dubiously. "I thought you said your name was Barton."

"So it is," replied Andrew, "but not Ronald."

The doctor continued for some seconds to look at him with a puzzled and somewhat dissatisfied expression. At length he said, as he put away the note-book: "Well, the facts of the case are no concern of mine; but I hope you will be able to make them clear to Dr. Thorndyke, if he is willing to listen to them."

With this parting remark, of which the dry and even dubious tone was not lost on Andrew, the doctor pushed open the door, which had (necessarily since there was no inside keyhole) stood ajar during the interview, and, stepping out, closed it behind him.

The clang of the closing door and the snap of the lock suddenly put Andrew back in his place, from which the brief spell of civilized conversation seemed for the time to have liberated him; even as the loop of key-chain that peeped below the hem of the doctor's coat as he retired, served to remind him that this kindly gentleman was, after all, a prison officer, one of whose duties was to hold the captive in secure custody.

---

## XII. — DR. THORNDYKE

THE visible results of the doctor's mission appeared early in the afternoon of the following day when the door of Andrew's cell was thrown open and Bolton looked in on his charge. "Your lawyer is waiting down below," said he. "Just tidy yourself up a bit and come along with me. And look sharp."

There was not much to be done, since razors were forbidden by the regulations. Andrew gave his hair a perfunctory brush, extended the operation to his coat and announced that he was ready. "You've forgotten your badge," said the officer; and Andrew, with a grim smile, took it down from its hook and fastened it to his coat, remarking that "one might as well look the part". Then they set forth on their journey by innumerable iron staircases and through a long succession of iron gates, each of which had to be unlocked to give them passage and locked again when they had passed. Eventually, they reached their destination, a smallish, very bare room with one door, of which the upper half consisted of a single panel of plate glass through which the warder, posted outside, could keep the prisoner under observation without intruding on the conference. Here, Bolton delivered his charge and shut him in.

There were two persons in the room. One was the doctor and the other was a tall stranger, at whom Andrew looked with deep interest and a certain amount of awe. For this stranger was a very impressive person with a distinctly imposing presence, due not alone to the stature, the upright, dignified carriage and the suggestion of physical strength. In the handsome, intellectual face was a subtle quality that instantly conveyed the impression of power; an impression that was reinforced by a singularly quiet, contained, reposeful and unemotional bearing. His hair was tinged with grey, but the calm, unlined face was almost that of a young man. "Well, Barton," the Medical Officer said as Andrew entered, "Dr. Thorndyke is willing to listen to your story, or as much of it as may be necessary to make clear the nature of the defence; and, as I have done my part by inducing him to come, I will take myself off and leave you to your consultation."

With this he took his departure, carefully shutting the door after him and pausing to say a few words to the warder who was posted outside. Then Dr. Thorndyke drew one of the two chairs up to the table, and, indicating the other, said: "Pray be seated, Mr. Barton," (Andrew noted the "Mr." appreciatively), "and draw your chair close to the table so that we need not raise our voices." He opened a case which looked like a small suit-case, and, taking out a block of ruled paper, placed it on the table before him and continued: "Dr. Blackford, your Medical Officer, has indicated to me in very general terms the nature of your difficulties, and I understand from him that you have a remarkable and rather incredible story to tell me. We must have that story in detail presently; but before we begin, there is one point which I should like to have cleared up. In this authorization which you gave Dr. Blackford,—here he laid it on the table—"you have signed your name, Ronald Barton, between inverted commas; and the doctor quoted you as having explained this on the ground that Ronald Barton is not your name. Is that correct?"

"Quite correct, sir. My name is not Ronald Barton."

"Then," said Dr. Thorndyke, "let us start fair with the genuine name."

"My name," replied Andrew, a little hesitatingly and in uncommon trepidation now that the climax was reached, abruptly and all unprepared, "my name is Andrew Barton."

Dr. Thorndyke looked slightly surprised. "Your name, then," said he, "is the same as that of the man whom you are accused of having murdered."

"Not only the same name, sir," said Andrew, with his heart in his mouth. "The same person. I am Andrew Barton. The man who was killed was Ronald Barton."

On receiving this statement. Dr. Thorndyke laid down his pen, leaned back in his chair and regarded Andrew with an expression that made his flesh creep. "I read the report of the inquest at Crompton," he said, in quiet, level tones, "and I

filed it. Last night, after seeing Dr. Blackford, I read it again with great care. I noted that Andrew Barton was described—by his wife—as a man whose nose had been injured by an accident, with the result that the bridge was broken and rendered completely fiat. I need not point out that that description does not apply to you.”

“No, it does not,” Andrew admitted, “and that is the cause of all the confusion and error.”

“Then you still maintain,” said Dr. Thorndyke, “in spite of the total disagreement between your appearance and the description, that you are Andrew Barton, the husband of the woman who gave that description.”

“I do,” replied Andrew, “because it is the literal truth.”

“And are you proposing to offer a reasonable explanation of this extraordinary discrepancy between the description and the visible facts?”

“Certainly I am,” Andrew replied. “It is the essence of my defence. Shall I give you the explanation first, or shall I take it in its proper place in my story?”

“I think,” said Thorndyke, “that, as your statement appears to postulate an impossibility, no useful purpose would be served by going into any other matters until this apparent contradiction in facts has been disposed of. Let us begin with the explanation.”

Accordingly Andrew launched out into a detailed account of his dealings with Professor Booley, beginning with his panic on reading the description of himself in the police notice and finishing with the shock that he sustained on looking at his reflection in the mirror. To this account Dr. Thorndyke listened with the closest attention, jotting down an occasional note on his pad but uttering no word until the whole story was told. Then he put one or two questions, including the exact whereabouts of Professor Booley’s premises, and wrote down the answers, finally requesting Andrew to put his finger on the spot at which the Professor had inserted the needle. “That,” said he, “is a very remarkable story. Before we go any further, I should like to make a preliminary examination of your nose. You understand that I am a doctor of medicine as well as a lawyer?”

He opened the case on the table and took from it a small electric lamp, and, by the light of this, and with the aid of a pocket lens, he made a minute examination of the bridge of Andrew’s nose, especially in the region in which the entry of the needle had been indicated. Then, laying the edge of his open hand on the bridge of the nose, he brought the lamp close to one side while he scrutinized the other. Finally, he put the lamp on the table and proceeded to explore the nose with the tips of his fingers, winding up by taking the base of the bridge between his finger and thumb (a proceeding that was observed with profound astonishment by the warder on duty outside).

Having made his examination, Dr. Thorndyke went back to his chair and made one or two brief notes. Then he looked up; and Andrew, catching his eye, was sensible of a subtle change of expression. And he thought he detected a similarly subtle change of tone when Dr. Thorndyke said: “And now let us have the story.”

Andrew hesitated in some slight embarrassment. “I hardly know where to begin,” said he. “It is rather a long story.”

“You had better begin,” said Thorndyke, “with the first event which had any causal bearing on your present predicament. What took you to Crompton?”

“I went to see my cousin about a letter that he had written to me.”

“Then begin with that letter. And never mind the length of the story. We have got to have it all, either now or in instalments. But I want now at least an outline of the whole set of circumstances.”

Thus encouraged, Andrew embarked on the strange history of his misadventures from the moment when the fatal letter had been put into his hands. As before, Dr. Thorndyke listened without comment or question but making numerous notes—in shorthand, as Andrew subsequently learned. Only twice did he interrupt the narration. The first time was shortly after it had started and was in the nature of a general instruction. “Don’t epitomize, Mr. Barton,” said he. “Tell the story in detail, and don’t be afraid of being prolix. The details may be more significant than they appear to you.”

The second interruption occurred when Andrew was recounting the meeting in the train with Elizabeth Kempster. “She was very angry and indignant,” he was saying, “and reproached me for my ingratitude for all that she had done for me—”

It was at this point that Thorndyke held up his hand. “That won’t do, Mr. Barton,” he exclaimed. “I want the conversation verbatim; the very words that were spoken by you and by her—especially by her. You must try to recall them, fully and accurately.”

Andrew had little difficulty in doing so, for that terrible interview had burned itself into his memory, though he felt some qualms in retailing to another that unfortunate woman’s emotional outpourings. But Dr. Thorndyke had no such qualms, for he took down a verbatim report of the entire conversation with a care and minuteness that seemed to Andrew beyond the merits of the matter.

When the narrative came to an end with the narrator’s committal for trial. Dr. Thorndyke remarked: “A very strange story, Mr. Barton; and I certainly agree with you that it is not one to put to a jury in its raw state. And not such a very long story; but we will now proceed to amplify it a little.”

With this he glanced over his notes and then opened a cross-examination, taking the narrative point by point from the beginning. And a very curious cross-examination Andrew thought it. For, to him, it appeared that Dr. Thorndyke passed

over all the important points and dredged deep for the most exhaustive details of things which did not matter at all. To the murder of Mr. Hudson he made no reference whatever, nor did he show any special interest in the tragic events that befell at Hunstone Gap. But his interest in the history and relationships of the Barton family was so profound that, having elicited all that Andrew knew, he not only wrote it down but illustrated it with a sketched pedigree.

Then he was strangely inquisitive as to Andrew's professional career, and especially as to the details of his dealings with Mr. Montagu; and his interest in Mrs. Pendlewick and her bone lace and the sittings she had given him for his picture filled Andrew with astonishment. What on earth could Mrs. Pendlewick have to do with the alleged murder at Hunstone Gap? Nevertheless, he answered the questions with conscientious completeness; and if he was puzzled by their apparent irrelevance to the great issue, he never had a moment's doubt that some good purpose, invisible to him, lay behind them.

When the cross-examination was finished and Thorndyke, having collected his notes, stood up, Andrew plucked up courage to inquire: "You have now heard my story, sir. May I ask if you find it possible to believe that it is a true story?"

Thorndyke looked at him for a few moments without speaking; and for the first time, his impassive, rather severe face relaxed into a faint smile which seemed to let some inner, unsuspected kindness show for a moment on the surface. "I am not going to let you cross-examine me, Mr. Barton," said he. "And I am not committing myself to any opinions until I have checked and verified certain facts affirmed in your statement. You have told me a complete and consistent story and I have at present no reason to disbelieve it. But remember that, even if my investigations convince me of its truth, that is only a beginning. The problem will be to transfer my conviction to those who will have to make the decision."

It was a cautious statement, but, somehow, Andrew was not discouraged by its tone of caution. And as to the checking of his alleged facts, since he had told nothing but the truth, they were all in his favour. "Before I go," said Thorndyke, "I must ask you to sign one or two little documents. I want your written authority to conduct your defence, if I decide to do so, and to make all arrangements to that end at my sole discretion. Then I want your authority to take custody of any of your property at present held by the police, if necessary and if they consent; and I want a similar authority in respect of property of yours in Mrs. Pendlewick's possession. The arrangements for the defence will include the selection of a solicitor. In this case it is a mere formality, but the usage in English practice is that a counsel must be instructed by a solicitor. I will arrange with a friend to instruct me, in a technical sense."

He wrote out the three documents and presented them to Andrew for his signature. When he had signed them, Andrew ventured to raise another question. "We have said nothing about the financial arrangements," said he, and was about to enlarge on the unsatisfactory nature of his resources when Thorndyke interrupted him. "We had better leave those matters for the present," he suggested. "I shall take it for granted that you will discharge your liabilities if you are in a position to do so. But the costs are really a side issue. And now I must be off. I shall proceed at once with the necessary verification of your statements and when I see you again I shall be able to tell you exactly how we stand."

With this he picked up his case and, being released by the warder, took his departure; and Andrew was, in due course, conducted back to his apartment, where he presently consumed his evening meal of brown bread and cocoa with unwonted relish and thereafter spent the short remainder of the prison day in curious tranquillity of spirit.

This state of mental relief, with a new-born feeling of hope and security, was surprising even to himself. To what was it due? Certainly, he had at last unbosomed himself of his preposterous story and had not been denounced as a liar and an impostor. He had been given a hearing and promised an investigation. That was all to the good. But that did not account for the strange manner in which his fears and his anxieties seemed suddenly to have gone to rest. What was it? And when he asked himself the question, the answer that came to him was—Dr. Thorndyke.

And yet it was strange. Nothing could have been more unemotional than the bearing of this calm, quiet, self-contained man. Not a word of sympathy or encouragement had he uttered. By no hair's breadth had he deviated from the most strictly judicial attitude. There he had sat with a face like a mask of stone, listening impassively without sign of belief or disbelief, speaking only to put some searching question or to check some statement. Only one when, for a moment, that faint smile had lighted up his face with a gleam of kindness, had he manifested any trace of human feeling. And yet, in some mysterious way, some virtue had come out of him and communicated itself to Andrew. Behind that immovable calm, he had had a sense of power, of energy and of incorruptible justice; of justice that would try him impartially in the balance; of power to enforce it, if he was not found wanting.

This restful feeling of having, in a sense, passed on his troubles and responsibilities to another, remained in the days that followed. In the results of Dr. Thorndyke's investigations he had perfect confidence, for he knew that they must, of necessity, confirm the truth of his story. So, as the time passed, he waited patiently with sustained courage for the next developments. But it was not until the fifth day that his patience was rewarded by the announcement of Thorndyke's decision.

On entering the room in which the previous interview had taken place, he found Dr. Thorndyke in company with another tall and athletic-looking gentleman who was introduced to him as Dr. Jervis. Both men shook hands with him and Dr. Thorndyke proceeded to state the position. "I have checked such of your statements as it was possible to check and have been able to confirm them and am now satisfied that the story you told me is a true story. Accordingly, I am prepared to undertake your defence and I have, in fact, made all the necessary arrangements. My friend, Mr. Marchmont, a very experienced solicitor, has agreed to act for you and I have asked him to call here and make your acquaintance. So everything is now in order. I suppose you have not thought of anything else that you wish to tell me? No additions to or amplifications of your statement?"



"No," replied Andrew; "I think you squeezed me pretty dry last time."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "I have no questions to ask, but perhaps Mr. Marchmont may want some detail filled in. A solicitor sees a case from a slightly different angle and has his own special experiences. And here, I think, he is."

As he spoke, the footsteps of two persons were heard approaching down the corridor, and the warder on guard threw open the glazed door; through which another warder ushered the visitor and then retired after shutting him in.

Mr. Marchmont was an elderly gentleman, prim, precise but suave in manner and a lawyer to the finger-tips. When the introductions had been effected and a few civilities exchanged, he turned to Thorndyke. "I have read your summary," said he, "and note that my role is that of a figure-head, as it usually is when I act with you. But there are one or two points on which I want more information. First, as to procedure. I presume that the preliminary investigation will take place before the justices at Crompton and the trial at the Maidstone Assizes. Is that so?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "The case has been transferred to the Central Criminal Court—"

"By a writ of certiorari?"

"No. Under the new procedure provided for in the Criminal Justice Act of 1925."

"Ah!" said Marchmont, "I had overlooked that. Criminal practice is rather out of my province. And as to the preliminary investigation?"

"There isn't going to be any. I am informed that the Director of Public Prosecutions intends to present a voluntary bill to the Grand Jury."

"But that is rather unusual, isn't it?" said Marchmont.

"It will save a great deal of time and trouble and expense," replied Thorndyke, "and I, certainly, shall not complain. It extricates us from quite an awkward dilemma."

"What dilemma?" asked Marchmont.

"My difficulty," Thorndyke replied, "was this: If there had been an investigation before a magistrate, I should have had either to produce all my evidence, which I should not want to do, or to reserve my defence, which I should not have been justified in doing and could not, in fact, have done."

Dr. Jervis chuckled softly and, glancing at Marchmont, remarked: "It is a let-off from Thorndyke's point of view. Can't you imagine how he would have hated letting the cat out of the bag prematurely?"

Marchmont laughed in a dry, forensic fashion. "Yes," he agreed, "it wouldn't have suited his tactics; for when once the cat is out, she is out. You can't put her back and repeat the performance. But the effect of this move on the Director's part is that the trial may begin quite soon. However, I shall receive due notice of the date. And now, having made our client's acquaintance and gleaned these particulars, I will take myself off and leave you to your occupations, whatever they may be."

He shook hands with them all round, and as the warder, observing this sign of farewell, opened the door, he hustled out and was taken in tow by the other officer. He had hardly disappeared when yet another official arrived with a message for Thorndyke to the effect that "Dr. Blackford sends his compliments and the room is now available."

Andrew looked inquiringly at Thorndyke, who explained briefly: "The doctor has kindly given us facilities for certain experiments which may help us. You will hear all about them later if their bearing is not apparent at the moment." Then, addressing the officer, he asked: "Do we come with you?"

"If you please, sir," was the reply; and the procession, having formed up, was personally conducted by the officer on a tour of the prison, coming to a halt at last in the neighbourhood of the infirmary where Dr. Blackford was awaiting them. "I have had all your traps put into this room," he said, opening a door as he spoke. "If you should want me, I shall be close at hand."

"Aren't you coming in with us?" asked Jervis. "No," replied the doctor. "I should like to, for I am devoured with curiosity as to what the deuce you are going to be up to. But I am not sure that it would be quite in order. And, besides, it is just as well for me not to know too much about Barton's affairs."

This was evidently Thorndyke's view for, without comment beyond a few words of thanks, he led Andrew into the room and, when Jervis had followed, shut the door.

It was a rather small room, apparently some kind of annexe to the infirmary, to judge by its appointments; which included a plain deal table and a bare, ascetic-looking couch with a distinct suggestion of surgery in its appearance. Looking about him curiously, Andrew noted that the table bore a pile of about a dozen large black envelopes and that at the head of the couch was reared a formidable-looking apparatus of which he could make nothing (scientific knowledge was not his strong point), but which aroused a faint and rather uncomfortable reminiscence of Professor Booley.

He watched, with the rather vague interest of the entirely non-scientific person, while his two friends busied themselves with various preparations and adjustments of the apparatus, speculating a trifle uneasily on the nature of the experiment which was about to be performed and of which it seemed that he was to be the subject. He saw Dr. Thorndyke take two of the black paper envelopes from the table and place them carefully on a slab of wood that lay near the head of the couch,

and he noted that the envelopes were rigid as if they contained plates of metal or some hard substance. Then he saw him adjust the position of a rather odd-looking electric lamp-bulb, which was fixed on a movable arm, placing it with great care immediately above the black envelopes. At length it appeared that all the preparations were complete, for Thorndyke, stepping back from the couch and taking a last fond look at the apparatus, announced: "I think we are all ready now, and I suggest that we begin with you, Jervis. What do you say?"

"Yes," replied Jervis. "It is always wise to begin by trying it on the dog. And Barton can watch the procedure."

He took a small rug from the foot of the couch and, folding it, laid it on the black envelopes. Then he lay down on the couch, resting his head on the folded rug. Thorndyke raised the corner of the rug, apparently to ascertain the position of the head on the envelopes, and once more made a slight adjustment of the lamp overhead. "Ready?" said he, with his hand on a switch, and as Jervis responded, he turned the switch with a snap. Instantly the apparatus emitted a growl which rapidly rose up the scale until it settled into a high-pitched droning like the piping of a giant mosquito. At the same moment the lamp began to glow with a green light at the centre of which appeared a bright spot of red. "Keep perfectly still, Barton," said Thorndyke, who stood rigid as a statue with his watch in his hand. "It is most important that there should not be the slightest vibration."

Andrew stood, resting with one hand on the table, listening to the curious high-pitched hum of the apparatus, wondering what these mysterious rites and ceremonies might have to do with a charge of murder and sensible of a perverse desire to change his position. At length Thorndyke put away his watch and turned the switch; whereupon the light of the lamp faded out, the whine of the apparatus swept down an octave or two until it died away in a low growl, and Jervis rose from the couch. "Quite a harmless proceeding, you see, Barton," said he. "Nothing of the Booley touch about us."

He took the two envelopes from the couch and, having written his name with a pencil on each, added his signature and the date and handed them to Thorndyke, who counter-signed them and placed them apart on the table, while Jervis took another two of the envelopes and, having placed them in position on the couch laid the folded rug on them. "Now, Barton," said Thorndyke, "you saw what Dr. Jervis did. Go thou and do likewise. And remember that you have to keep perfectly still; to which end, you must settle yourself comfortably in a position which you can maintain without effort."

Accordingly Andrew laid himself down on the couch in as restful a pose as he could manage; and when Thorndyke had made some slight alteration in the placing of the head, the switch was turned, the apparatus uttered its plaintive whine, the mysterious green light glowed afresh, and the previous proceedings were repeated. "You heard what we were saying to Mr. Marchmont," said Thorndyke, when Andrew had risen from the couch and the envelopes had been signed and put away. "The trial may open quite soon; and in the meanwhile, I would urge you to be very careful to keep your own counsel. Give no information to anybody either as to what we have been doing here or as to anything in any way connected with your case. The special arrangements for presenting the bill of indictment direct to the Grand Jury give us the advantage of going into court without having disclosed the details of the defence. Let us keep that advantage. There may be nothing in it. But it is usually good tactics to let the enemy bring his heavy guns to bear on the place that you don't need to defend. So I say again, don't discuss your case with anybody, no matter how friendly."

Andrew promised to bear this caution in mind, adding: "I suppose I shall get due notice of the date of the trial."

"Certainly," replied Thorndyke. "You will be kept informed of everything that you ought to know; and if you should want to confer with me or Dr. Jervis or Mr. Marchmont, you have only to send one of us a line to that effect. Is there anything that you would like to be advised upon now?"

"Yes," Andrew replied, "there is one rather important question that does not seem to have been raised. It is concerned with the Hudson case. When Andrew Barton disappeared, he had been accused of having committed that murder. If he should reappear, it would seem that that accusation will be revived. Isn't that so?"

"No," Thorndyke replied promptly. "You can dismiss the Hudson case from your mind, and you need never have taken the charge seriously. At first, the police, naturally enough, took Miss Booth's statement at its face value. But as soon as they began to make inquiries they realized that she had made a mistake—the common mistake of confusing what she had seen with what she had inferred. She saw a face at the window and she saw a revolver; and she inferred that the revolver and the face appertained to the same person. But when the police ascertained that the face was that of Mr. Andrew Barton, and when they had heard his wife's account of the affair, they were satisfied that he was merely a chance spectator of the crime. As a matter of tact, they had some fairly definite information as to who the perpetrators really were. So Andrew Barton's connection with the case will be no more than that of a witness."

Andrew breathed a sigh of relief. "You have lifted a great weight off my mind," said he. "It may have been unreasonable of me, but I think I was more afraid of that accusation than of the charge that has actually been brought against me. It is an immense relief to know that I am free of it."

"I can easily understand that," said Jervis. "One doesn't want to step down from the dock after a triumphant acquittal, to fall into the arms of a detective-sergeant with a fresh warrant. And that isn't going to happen, Barton. When you are acquitted, you will be acquitted completely. Both indictments, murder and personation; for the greater includes the less and our evidence covers both. So keep a good heart and don't be discouraged or alarmed by any signs of preparation, such as identification parades or other movements of the enemy."

"You speak," said Andrew, "as if you were quite confident of an acquittal."

"I am," said Jervis, "and so, I think, is my learned senior. Aren't you, Thorndyke?"

"I certainly expect an acquittal," replied Thorndyke. "The case for the prosecution can't be a strong one, in any event. In fact," he added, with a smile, "my principal anxiety is lest the Grand Jury should throw out the bill."

"That would be rather an anti-climax," said Jervis, "and would crab a most promising defence. But still, it would be, in effect, equivalent to an acquittal."

"Not altogether," Thorndyke dissented, "for it would not cover the personation charge. But you see, Jervis, that a mere acquittal would not be enough for us. We are concerned with something more than the alleged murder. You remember the old schoolboy verses, *Pistor erat quondam*, which were, I think, rendered: 'There was a baker heretofore, with labour and great pain, Did break his neck and break his neck and break his neck again.'

"Now that is what Barton has done. He has gone on piling illusions and false appearances on top of one another until he has got himself charged with his own murder; and we, like the baker's medical attendant, have got to deal with the whole series. We have got to reduce, not only the final fracture, but all the others as well. And the defence to the murder charge will give us the opportunity we want."

"Then," said Jervis, picking up the signed envelopes and bestowing them tenderly in a suit-case, "let us hope the Grand Jury will not be too critical in respect of the evidence for the prosecution."

---

### XIII. — PRISONER AT THE BAR

THE sands of time, which trickle out grudgingly enough within the prison walls alike for the just and the unjust, had run through the glass to the last grain; and it was Jervis's hopes rather than Thorndyke's fears that had been justified by circumstances. For the Grand Jury had returned a true bill, and Andrew Barton stood in the dock at the Central Criminal Court to answer the charge of Wilful Murder.

His state of mind was very peculiar for that of a prisoner arraigned on such a charge. He realized it, himself, and was faintly surprised at it, particularly when he contrasted the abject panic of the terror-stricken wretch who had staggered away from the police bill at Crompton with the serenity of the prisoner at the bar who stood waiting to watch the throw of the dice in the game which was presently to be played between Thorndyke and his accusers; a game of which his life was the stake. The bare possibility that this thing might happen had then paralysed him with horror; and now that the reality was upon him, he seemed to face the terrible chances almost unmoved.

He looked about the court with somewhat of the interest of a spectator. He had never before been in a criminal court and the various objects and persons and the solemn procedure all had the attraction of novelty. He inspected the scarlet-robed judge approvingly, excepting as to his wig, which he found disappointing. Like most uninformed persons, he had supposed that judges wore full-bottomed wigs when they sat in court. He observed the Clerk of the Court sitting in wig and gown behind his desk below the judge's dais; he counted the jury, who were waiting to be sworn, and noted that two of them were women. Then his eye roamed along the counsels' seats, where Dr. Thorndyke sat placidly looking over his brief, and he endeavoured to pick out Sir Oliver Blizzard, who, he had been informed, was to lead for the prosecution; eventually fixing—correctly, as it turned out—upon a clerical-looking gentleman with a monocle firmly jammed in his eye unsecured by any cord or other support.

But all the time he was imperfectly conscious of his actual position. The old feeling of unreality still possessed him; the sense of being in a dream or under some sort of spell, which had first come on him when he looked into Professor Booley's mirror and saw the face of his cousin Ronald looking out at him. Only at intervals, by some special occurrence—as, for instance, when a woman juror asked to be excused from serving, on the grounds that she objected to capital punishment—was he startled out of his curious mental lethargy into a vivid realization of his actual position.

At length his wandering thoughts were interrupted by the Clerk of the Court, who had risen and was addressing him, apparently in the words of a document which lay before him on his desk. "Ronald Barton, you are charged with the murder of Andrew Barton on the twenty-eighth of August, nineteen twenty-eight. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," Andrew replied.

The Clerk noted the answer and then once more addressed him. "Prisoner at the Bar, if you wish to object to any of the persons whose names I am about to call to form the jury to try you, you must do so as they severally come to the book to be sworn, and before they are sworn, and you will be heard."

There being obviously nothing to say to this, Andrew bowed to the Clerk and resumed his reflections, but in a somewhat more disturbed frame of mind. For there was something deadly realistic in the wording of the charge, and the address which had followed brought home to him vividly that the men and women whose names were now being called out would presently hold his life in the hollow of their hands. They were to be his judges who would decide whether he was or was not guilty of the crime with which he was charged. On their intelligence and capacity to understand evidence, even on their individual temperaments, would depend the decision whether he should go forth a free man or should be hauled away to the gallows. It was not a very comfortable thought. As each juror "came to the book", Andrew scanned his or her face anxiously for indications of stupidity, or, still worse, of obstinacy. One man or woman who "knew his or her own mind" might turn the scale against him.

Thus he was reflecting when the process of swearing in came to an end. The jury were then counted and asked by the Clerk of the Court if they were all sworn. When these formalities had been completed, an official of the Court (the Bailiff and Crier) rose and proclaimed in resonant tones and with profound gravity of manner: "If any one can inform my Lords the King's Justices, or the King's Attorney General, ere this Inquest be taken between our Sovereign Lord the King and the Prisoner at the Bar, of any Treasons, Murders, Felonies, or Misdemeanours, done or committed by the Prisoner at the Bar, let him come forth, and he shall be heard, for the Prisoner now stands at the Bar on his deliverance. And all persons who are bound by recognizance to prosecute or give evidence against the Prisoner at the Bar, let them come forth, prosecute and give evidence, or they shall forfeit their recognizances. God save the King!"

To this proclamation Andrew listened with profound interest tempered with a slightly uncomfortable feeling of awe. For the old world dignity and solemnity of the phrasing served but to emphasize and intensify the tone of menace that ran through it, and to bring home to "the Prisoner at the Bar" the dreadful reality of his position.

Almost as the tones of the Crier's voice died away, the witnesses filed into the Court and took their places in the seats reserved for them. And at this point he was really startled by the appearance of Molly, who had just entered and was being ushered across to her seat. For some reason, he had assumed that she would avoid being present at his trial, and he had admitted the ownership of the attache case to the express end that she might not have to be called as a witness; and he now speculated anxiously as to what had brought her there and whether she would have to give evidence against him. Apparently she would, since she had come in with the other witnesses; and, as she walked across the floor of the Court, he followed her wistfully with his eyes. As she sat down, she took one quick glance at him and looked away. But brief as was the moment in which their eyes met, the expression in hers was unmistakable. There was no gleam of pity or compunction. Her pale face was grave and stern and hard as a mask of stone.

He was pondering on her state of mind and how it would be affected by the evidence which he was presently to give when his thoughts were interrupted by the voice of the Clerk of the Court; who had risen, and, turning towards the jury, proceeded to "give the Prisoner in charge" to them. "Members of the jury, the Prisoner at the Bar is charged with the murder of Andrew Barton on the 28th August, 1928. To this indictment he has pleaded 'Not Guilty' and it is your charge to inquire, having heard the evidence, whether he be guilty or not."

This was the end of the preliminaries. The Clerk sat down behind his desk and the judge, who had inspected the prisoner narrowly from time to time, now turned towards the counsels' bench, and, with a little formal bow, invited the leader for the Crown to open his case. Thereupon, Sir Oliver Blizzard rose, and, having fixed his monocle securely in position, looked steadily across at the jury and began: "The case, my Lord and members of the jury, which you are about to try has certain unusual features to which I wish to draw your attention before entering into any details. In the majority of cases of murder, the fact of the homicide is obvious and undeniable; and the matter in issue is the connection of the accused person with that homicide. A body is found, or a person is known to have died, and the condition of the body is such that it is obvious that the death was caused by the act of some person; and the question that the jury have to decide is whether the prisoner is, or is not, the person who committed or did that act.

"But in the case which you are going to try, the conditions are exactly the converse of those which I have described. Here, there is no question as to the connection of the prisoner with the death of the deceased Andrew Barton. If Andrew Barton was murdered, there can be no reasonable doubt that he was murdered by the prisoner. The matter in issue, the question on which you have to form a decision, is whether Andrew Barton did, in fact, meet his death by the homicidal act of some person or whether that death was due to what old-fashioned people call 'the act of God', that is, to some natural accident.

"To this question, which is the crucial question in the case, the medical witness can give no decisive answer. He can tell us that Andrew Barton died a violent death; but there is nothing in the appearance of the body that enables him to decide whether the violence was due to human or to natural agencies. Either is equally possible; from which it follows that the question of murder, on the one hand, or a natural accident on the other, will have to be decided by you from a most careful consideration of all the attendant conditions. You will have to examine the strange circumstances in which Andrew Barton met his death; and you will have to consider the conduct of the prisoner at the time of that death and subsequently, and ask yourselves whether such conduct is or is not consistent with his innocence.

"I have put the position before you at the start so that you may realize that your decision is to be formed on all the facts taken together; and I shall now proceed to put you in possession of those facts, first as relating to the deceased Andrew Barton and then as relating to the prisoner. I think it better to take them separately in the first place, as we shall thus get a clearer impression of the sequence of events.

"We begin, then, by following the movements of Andrew Barton on that fatal day at the end of August. And at the very outset, we are confronted by a mystery which we have no means of solving. For on the morning of that day, this unfortunate man set forth from his home on a definite mission and with a specific purpose which he never attempted to accomplish. The object of his journey, as he informed his wife, was to take some pictures to his dealer in London. But instead of taking the train to London, he took one to Crompton-on-Sea. Why he made this curious change in his plans we shall probably never know. Whether something unforeseen happened after he had left home, or whether he had, for some reason, deliberately misinformed his wife, we can only speculate. But he certainly had the paintings in the attache case which he carried with him, and his wife will tell you that he was, in general, a most scrupulously truthful man. At any rate, he set out from home carrying an attache case in which were not only the paintings but, as we now know, a cheque for fifty pounds drawn in favour of his cousin, Ronald Barton, and a bundle of fifty pound-notes. The suggestion certainly is that he

expected to meet his cousin, but, as I have said, we shall never know; and the point is, in fact, more curious than important.

“His movements on arriving at Crompton are also rather mysterious, for he appears to have made his way direct to the shop of a frame-maker named Cooper, where he made a small purchase and then offered his paintings for Cooper’s inspection; which was a very singular proceeding if we remember that a Bond Street dealer was prepared to take the whole of his work and pay high prices for it. But again, this mystery has no direct bearing on the question which you have to decide. The real importance of the incident is that Mr. Cooper, having had some conversation with deceased, was able later to identify him and to give a most weighty piece of evidence.

“Our next view of Andrew Barton is at the Excelsior Restaurant, where he lunched in company with the prisoner. The waiter, Albert Wood, who waited on the two men, will describe their appearance to you, and evidence will be given that he picked the prisoner out without hesitation from a row of over twenty. Both he and Mr. Cooper noticed the deceased particularly on account of the rather peculiar spectacles that he wore. I may mention in passing that Andrew Barton had suffered an injury to his nose which resulted in considerable disfigurement, concerning which he was rather sensitive, and these spectacles were specially made to cover up the disfigurement by means of an extra broad bridge.

“On leaving the restaurant, the two men, the prisoner and deceased, appear to have gone for a walk in the country, along a road which leads to Hunstone Gap, a place of which you will hear more presently. It is here that Mr. Cooper’s evidence is of such vital importance. For this gentleman happened to have some business at the outskirts of the town; and just as he came out into the street after finishing his business, he saw the two men passing on the opposite side of the road. He recognized Andrew Barton instantly, and his attention was attracted to the other man by the curious resemblance between the two men, which was noticeable in spite of the spectacles. When they had passed and he got a back view of them, the resemblance was so remarkable that he walked some distance after them the better to observe it. These two men were not only dressed almost exactly alike, and of the same height, colour and figure, but they seemed to him to have precisely the same gait or manner of walking. This similarity in the two men is of no special interest for us, excepting in that it attracted the attention of this witness and caused him to make some further observations which are of the most vital interest. For, following them to observe their gait and gestures, he saw that they took the road which leads out into the country and to Hunstone Gap; and, at the corner of the road, he stood watching them until they disappeared round a bend. And thus, members of the jury, did Andrew Barton pass for ever out of human ken. Thereafter, no eye, save that of the prisoner, looked upon him as a living man. The next eye that looked on him saw, not a young man in the very prime of life, full of vitality and manly strength, but a battered corpse, lying in a dreadful solitude at the foot of a cliff in a remote little bay called Hunstone Gap.

“The discovery was made late in the afternoon by the master of a fishing lugger called the Sunflower. Sailing past the Gap, he noticed that there had been a fall of chalk from the cliff; and when he came to examine the place through his glass, he saw a pair of naked legs protruding from under the heap of fragments. Thereupon he steered his craft inshore, and, when she was near enough, he put out the boat and rowed ashore. And there, at the foot of the cliff, he saw the nude body of a man lying on the beach, partly covered with fragments of chalk and with one large block resting on the face. They removed the fragments and then the mate of the lugger, William Cox, lifted the great block off the face, when it was seen that the dead man’s head was so horribly battered that it was practically flat. They carried the body to the boat and they then collected the clothing—the dead man had apparently been bathing—and they put the body and the clothes on board the lugger. But before he returned on board, the skipper, Samuel Sharpin by name, and a most intelligent man, had the good sense to examine the beach to see if the dead man had come there alone, or whether he had had any companions. There was only a small space of sand left, for the tide was rising and had already covered the greater part of the beach. But the little patch that was still left uncovered was quite smooth, and on that smooth surface were clearly visible two tracks of human feet. One track consisted of the footprints of two persons, walking side by side and advancing from the sunken road which led down to the beach towards the sea; the other track consisted of the footprints of one person only, and that person was returning across the beach towards the sunken road.

“Now, whose footprints were these? Since there were no others, it is evident that one set of them must have been the footprints of Andrew Barton; and, since he never came away from that fatal place, it is obvious that the returning footprints could not have been his. Two men walked down together into the Gap and one of them returned from the Gap alone. One of those two men was certainly Andrew Barton. Who was the other—the one who came away alone? Can there possibly be a moment’s doubt? When Andrew Barton was last seen alive, he was seen walking towards Hunstone Gap in company with the prisoner. I affirm that it is certain, in so far as certainty is possible in human affairs, that the person who walked down into the Gap with Andrew Barton and who afterwards stole away alone, was the prisoner, Ronald Barton.

“We have followed Andrew Barton to the place where he met his death. There is little more to tell. The body was conveyed by these good fishermen to the place where they berthed the lugger and there they put it ashore. Then they borrowed a seaweed cart and in this they carried the corpse into the town and delivered it to the police together with the clothing. And by the police it was deposited in the mortuary.

“And now let us, in the same manner, follow the movements of the prisoner on that fatal day and thereafter. His first appearance in this tragic history is at the Excelsior Restaurant where the waiter, Albert Wood, saw him as I have described, lunching with the deceased. Then we see him again, as described by Mr. Cooper, walking with deceased towards Hunstone Gap. After this, there is an interval of several hours, for it is not until late in the evening, about nine o’clock, that we hear of him again. At this time, he was seen by one Frederick Barnard, a waiter at Mason’s Restaurant, to enter that establishment

and take his seat at a table. Now, however, he was not alone. He was accompanied by an American who was known to Barnard by sight but not by name but who has since been identified as a beauty specialist who described himself as Professor Booley. Unfortunately, this person is not available as a witness as it has been ascertained that he left Crompton on the following morning for Liverpool, where he embarked to return to America.

"The connection of the prisoner with this man Booley is rather mysterious, but there is some suggestion that he may have received some sort of treatment from this charlatan. Barnard observed that the American was the prisoner's guest and that he seemed to take a remarkable interest in the prisoner's appearance, for he watched him almost continuously and with a curious air of satisfaction. Moreover, after the American had left—which he did quite early—Barnard saw the prisoner rise from his chair, walk up to a large mirror and examine himself in it with extraordinary interest and attention.

"However, as I have said, the connection between the prisoner and Booley remains somewhat of a mystery. Presently we shall consider whether it has any bearing on the problem which you have to solve. Of more interest to us are certain other observations made by the observant Barnard. Thus, he noticed instantly when the prisoner entered that he looked ill and distressed and showed evident signs of fatigue; that he hardly spoke a word to his guest; that he improved remarkably in appearance after a substantial meal and a small bottle of wine; and that after dinner, while he was taking his coffee and a liqueur, he seemed to be wrapped in deep and anxious thought.

"The next appearance of the prisoner is most surprising and significant. For it seems that, on leaving the restaurant, he must have made his way directly to the police station. At any rate, there he was seen by no less than four persons and in the most astonishing circumstances. We have seen that the fishermen brought the body of Andrew Barton to the town in a seaweed cart and delivered it to the police. But the skipper, Samuel Sharpin, hurried on in advance to give notice of what had happened and of the approach of the cart with its tragic burden. On receiving this notice, the sergeant procured a stretcher which he and a constable, accompanied by Sharpin, carried out and laid in readiness on the pavement. And there, incredible as it may appear, they found the prisoner, ostensibly reading the notices on the wall, but apparently waiting for the arrival of the cart. For, as the cart turned into the street and the rumble of the wheels became audible, the prisoner turned and looked directly up the street; in fact, he walked part of the way as if to meet it, turning about when he met it and walking with it to its halting-place. And there, members of the jury, he stood, placidly watching while the body of his cousin was lifted from the cart and placed on the stretcher; noting the several garments as they were handed out, each of which he must have recognised; and making no sign and speaking no word. Indeed, when the poor remains had been carried away and the carter who stood by the horse approached to talk to him, he turned away and walked up the street.

"The account sounds incredible, but it is true. This secret watcher was seen by four persons, each of whom has since identified him without hesitation. There can be no doubt that this astonishing thing really happened. It is vouched for by the evidence of Sharpin, of Sergeant Steel, of Constable Willis and of the carter, Walter Hood.

"From the police station, the prisoner seems to have gone straight to his lodgings, which were in the same street, and where he was living under the name of Walter Green. And here also some very significant events befell. His landlady, Mrs. Baxter, will tell you that at this time, Mr. Walter Green was nearly a fortnight in arrear in his rent. She had made several applications for payment, but her lodger was, at the moment, not in a position to pay the very modest sum that he owed. When he came in on this evening, she reminded him of the debt. But now his attitude was entirely different. He seemed to be hard up no longer; for not only was he ready to pay what was owing, but he offered to pay in advance for the remainder of the fortnight; an offer which she discreetly accepted and was duly paid with clean, new Treasury notes.

"Now, this sudden change from penury to comparative affluence would in itself be remarkable. But much more so are the accompanying circumstances. It was on this occasion that Mrs. Baxter noticed for the first time an attache case in the prisoner's possession. She had never seen it before, and when she mentioned the fact to him and asked if it was his, he returned no answer. But the answer to her question can be given to us by Andrew Barton's banker. Those clean, new notes with which Mr. Green paid his rent were selections from a bundle of fifty pound-notes which had been paid to Andrew Barton by his banker at Bunsford. They were a consecutive series the numbers of which had been noted and their issue to customers recorded; and the police have since been able to trace the four pound-notes paid by the prisoner to Mrs. Baxter.

"From this witness we also learn that the prisoner suddenly changed his plans. He decided to leave his lodgings on the following morning and go to London; and he was very anxious to catch an early train. That he did catch that train we have other evidence; for, on the following morning, the 29th of August, he presented himself at the London office of Andrew Barton's bank in Cornhill shortly after the doors had been opened. He endorsed and presented an open cheque drawn in favour of Ronald Barton, Esq., for the sum of fifty pounds and signed Andrew Barton; and, having received that sum in Treasury notes, he left the bank.

"From thence he seems to have gone straight to Hampstead, where he engaged lodgings at a house in Vineyard Place occupied by a Mrs. Martha Pendlewick; and there he was living up to the time of his arrest. But, before coming to this closing scene, we have to note one more incident which, if it is of no great importance, is of considerable interest. This was his visit to his cousin's widow. He wrote to her from Hampstead proposing to call, and on Wednesday, the 6th of September, he made his appearance at her house.

"We need not go into details of what passed at that visit. But there are two incidents which we may notice. The first is that, when Mrs. Barton asked him when he had last seen her husband, he considered for a while and then mentioned a date about two years previously. Thus, in effect, he denied having met him at Crompton. The other incident occurred shortly before he left. He then suggested that he should repeat his visit at an early date, and expressed the hope that they

would see more of each other than they had done in the past. To which Mrs. Barton replied quite frankly that she would rather that he did not repeat his visit, at least for a considerable time. The reason that she gave for this wish on her part was that his remarkable resemblance to her dead husband made his presence painful to her. That is what she said, and what she still says, and it is quite understandable; but members of the jury may feel, as I confess I do, that there may have been something more subtle in her dislike to having this man in her presence.

“We now come to his arrest; and concerning the circumstances in which that arrest took place it would not be proper for me to say more than that he was arrested when he was engaged calmly in making a sketch on Hampstead Heath. And now, having followed his movements from the moment when he was first seen in company with Andrew Barton, to that when he was taken into custody, we are in a position to take a general view of the whole set of circumstances and consider their significance in relation to the charge which has been brought against him. The prisoner is accused of having murdered his cousin, Andrew Barton, at Hunstone Gap; and the question that you have to decide is: Do all these circumstances, taken together, lead convincingly to the conclusion that he is guilty of that crime, or do they not? If you decide that they do, it will be your duty to return a verdict to that effect. If, on the other hand, you feel any reasonable doubt as to whether he did commit that crime, it will be your duty to give him the benefit of that doubt and pronounce him Not Guilty. Let us now examine these circumstances and see what conclusion emerges from them.

“We have seen that Andrew Barton met his death by violence; but the medical witness cannot tell us with certainty whether that violence was inflicted by natural agencies or by the murderous act of some person. Either is possible, and both are equally consistent with the appearance of the body as observed by the medical examiner. Then, since the most expert examination cannot furnish a decision as to whether death was due to accident or homicide, we must consider what light is thrown on the question from other directions.

“First there is the conduct of the prisoner. Was it that of an innocent or of a guilty man? Remember that when Andrew Barton met his death, the prisoner was present. Of that there can be no doubt. If Andrew Barton’s death was due to an accident the prisoner saw that accident happen. If Andrew Barton was murdered, he was murdered by the prisoner. Now I ask: What was the behaviour of the prisoner on that terrible occasion? Was it the behaviour of a man who has witnessed a dreadful accident? Or was it that of a man who has committed a crime?

“How would a man behave in these respective circumstances? Let us take the case of an accident. Supposing, that the prisoner had seen that great block of chalk fall with a crash on his cousin’s head. What would it have been natural for him to do? Would he not have hurried away in search of help, or at least have given notice of the dreadful thing that had happened? Why should he not? No one would have suspected him of being in any way to blame. Indeed, no suspicion did arise in this case until it was engendered by the prisoner’s own conduct. We may say with confidence that if the prisoner had gone at once to the police station and given information, this charge would never have been brought against him.

“But suppose that the prisoner had murdered Andrew Barton. How would he have behaved? Doubtless, if he had been a man of sufficient nerve and sufficient judgment, he would have gone and reported an alleged accident. But that is not usually the way of those who commit crimes. The instinct of the criminal is to keep out of sight; to avoid the appearance of any connection with the crime.

“Now let us observe the prisoner’s behaviour. With his cousin’s battered corpse lying under the cliff, he steals away secretly and is lost to sight for several hours. He makes no communication to anyone. The tide is rising, and presently the waves will be washing round that corpse. But he takes no measures for its recovery before it shall be borne out to sea. He just steals away alone and hides himself.

“He next comes into view several hours later at Mason’s Restaurant; and at once we are impressed by certain remarkable and significant facts. First, his appearance as described by the waiter, Barnard, is that of a man who has been exposed to some unusual strain. He shows signs of fatigue and exhaustion. He looks ill and seems to be suffering from mental distress, but he revives under the influence of food and wine. Then he is accompanied by a stranger who turns out to be what is called a ‘beauty doctor’; and Barnard’s evidence suggests in the strongest manner that there had been some professional transactions between this man Booley, and the prisoner. Booley appeared to be intensely interested in the prisoner’s face. He kept his eyes riveted on it to the neglect of his own food. But it was not the beauty doctor only who was interested in the prisoner’s face. When Booley had gone, the prisoner was seen to walk up to the mirror and make a minute inspection of his own countenance.

“Now what can this mean? The suggestion is, as I have said, that Booley had done something to the prisoner’s face. But what could he have done? If you will look at the prisoner, you will see that he has no need of the services of a beauty doctor. What, then, could it be that Booley had done to the prisoner’s face? Could it be that the tragedy that had been enacted at Hunstone Gap had left its traces on the prisoner’s face? That those tell-tale marks had prevented him from giving information of the catastrophe? And that he had invoked the aid of the beauty doctor—skilled in the art of make-up—to paint out, or otherwise obliterate those incriminating marks? That, I submit, is the inference which instantly arises in the mind of any reasonable person. Andrew Barton was a young and strong man and, unless he had been taken completely by surprise, he would assuredly have left some marks of the conflict on his assailant. Admittedly, this is only an inference. But it is a reasonable inference; and the facts seem to admit of no other explanation.

“I pass over the further fact that, after Booley had left, the prisoner remained wrapped in profound thought; for he had matter enough for reflection if no murder had been committed. Let us proceed to the amazing, the appalling incident described by Sergeant Steel and the others in connection with the arrival of the body in the seaweed cart. I have told you

what happened; and no comment seems adequate or necessary. You have to think of this man standing there, a calm and unmoved spectator, while the mutilated corpse of his cousin is lifted from the cart and borne away to the mortuary; looking on with the detached interest of a chance stranger and keeping his knowledge of the dead man's identity locked in his own breast. Think of this amazing callousness and secrecy, and ask yourselves what can be the explanation of it. Is this the conduct of a man who has seen his kinsman killed by a natural accident? Or is it that of one whose guilty knowledge bids him hold his peace? Is it, in short, the conduct of an innocent man? Or is it that of a murderer who is looking on the corpse of his victim?

"When he has seen his cousin's body disposed of, he goes home to his lodgings and forthwith proceeds to take possession of the dead man's property. Andrew Barton's attache case is already on his table. When or how it came there we do not know; but we do know that, within a few minutes of his return, even while the unburdened seaweed cart was rumbling back up the street, he had possessed himself of some of its contents. For it was with Andrew Barton's money that he paid his debt to the landlady. The cheque we may admit to have been his lawful property; but the cheque had not been cashed. The money with which Mrs. Baxter's bill was paid was money that had been stolen from the dead. And again I ask: Is this calm and callous appropriation of the dead man's money the act of an innocent man?

"But the same eager greed is apparent in the actions which followed. As soon as he had paid the landlady, he came to the sudden decision to go to London early on the following morning. For the cheque had to be cashed before the tidings of Andrew Barton's death reached his bank. Otherwise it would have been returned to the payee endorsed 'Drawer deceased'. And, once out of the neighbourhood, he decided to stay out. Regardless of his cousin's corpse, lying in the mortuary, and of the poor wife, waiting for the husband whose voice she was never to hear again, he goes off to Hampstead, there to lie in hiding until things had settled down and all danger might be considered to be over.

"The sordid avidity for money that we have noted on the part of the prisoner leads us to another point. The will of Andrew Barton contains a clause bequeathing to the prisoner the sum of five hundred pounds. The widow, who is the executrix, will tell you that her husband had been in the constant habit of making loans to the prisoner; loans which, it may be remarked, were never repaid and never expected to be repaid. Now, it seems that Andrew Barton, having regard to the fact that, if he should die, these gifts would necessarily cease, decided to make a provision for his cousin. Accordingly, he effected a separate insurance on behalf of his cousin in the sum of five hundred pounds and in his will directed that this sum should be paid to the prisoner. Thus the prisoner, who was aware of the provision, knew that he stood to benefit by the death of Andrew Barton to the extent of five hundred pounds; a fact which, when we consider his avaricious seizure of his dead cousin's money, we cannot but find profoundly significant.

"And now, to sum up in a few words: Taking the prisoner's conduct as a whole, is it that of an innocent man who has nothing on his conscience, or is it that of a man who has a burden of guilt on his conscience and is harbouring in his soul a guilty secret? Did Andrew Barton die by the chance fall on him of a block of chalk? Or was that block used by murderous hands as a terrible weapon to cover the traces, and perhaps complete the work, of some other weapon? The body has no decisive message for us. We must decide from the conduct of the prisoner. And I submit that the prisoner's conduct answers the question conclusively, especially when considered in connection with the substantial sum of money which he stood to gain by his cousin's death. He had a motive—a strong motive to an avaricious man; he was present when the death occurred—he had the opportunity to commit murder; and when the death had occurred, he stole away and instantly laid hands on the dead man's property, thereafter not only hiding himself but denying to his cousin's widow that he had seen that dead man for many months. I repeat, he had a motive to commit the crime, he had the opportunity to commit it, and his subsequent conduct has been, in a striking degree, that of a man who has committed a crime.

"Accordingly, I submit that you can come to no other conclusion but that he did, in fact, commit that crime, and that it will be your duty to return a verdict of 'Guilty'."

---



#### XIV. — THE EVIDENCE FOR THE PROSECUTION

THE conclusion of Sir Oliver's opening speech was succeeded by a brief pause before the calling of the witnesses, during which Andrew reflected in a dull, bewildered fashion on what he had heard. It was all surprisingly plausible, even convincing, and the speaker had contrived, in spite of a studied moderation, to convey the feeling that he, himself, was convinced of the prisoner's guilt. Of course, it was all quite unreal; but no one besides himself—and perhaps Thorndyke—knew the real facts. Sir Oliver had in no respect exaggerated or distorted the known facts, and the conclusion that he had suggested as inferable from those facts was a fair, reasonable and logical conclusion.

And now the witnesses would be called; and Andrew knew in advance what they would say. They would fully bear out the counsel's statement; and what they would say would be the truth which no cross-examination would shake. It did not look promising, but yet Dr. Thorndyke (who knew all that the prosecution knew) had seemed to be quite confident. But at this point, his reflections were broken in upon by a voice, calling the name of Mary Barton. His eyes had been resting almost continuously on her, and he now saw her rise from her seat and walk resolutely towards the witness-box. He noted that she was pale and haggard and obviously distressed, but her face was set in an expression of hard, stern resolution that he found it difficult to connect with the gentle, kindly Molly whom he had known in the days of his happy and peaceful married life.

Her evidence, as elicited by the "examination in chief", followed the lines of Sir Oliver's opening. There was a brief reference to the Hudson murder and to a visit on the 28th of August of a certain Inspector Sands, who had come to make inquiries as to the personal appearance, habits and occupation of her husband, and whom she had referred to her husband's banker in London and to Mr. Montagu, his agent and dealer. Then there was the more tragic reference to another visit from the inspector on the following morning, to inform her of the finding of a body believed to be that of her husband, and to request her to go to Crompton to confirm the identification; and her dreadful experiences in the Crompton mortuary when she was confronted with that terrible corpse.

The examination was conducted with the utmost delicacy and consideration that was possible; and Molly rose bravely to the occasion, though now and again there came a break in the clear voice, and her steady answer petered out into something very like a sob. But the counsel passed as quickly as he could over the most distressing incidents, and, when he proceeded to the prisoner's visit to Fairfield, she recovered her self-possession completely. "When the prisoner came to see you," said Sir Oliver, "did he mention when he had last seen your husband?"

"Yes, I asked him. At first he seemed not to remember, but afterwards he said that he had not seen him for about two years."

"With reference to the benefit which the prisoner receives under your husband's will; was anything said about that?"

"Yes. I reminded him of the special life insurance that my husband had effected on his behalf."

"You say you reminded him. That seems to imply that he knew that the arrangement had been made. Can you say, of your own knowledge, that he was aware of it?"

"Yes. When my husband took out the policy and made his will, he wrote to his cousin, Ronald, and told him exactly what he had done. I saw the letter and read it."

"In that letter, was the amount mentioned?"

"Yes. It was clearly stated that, in the event of my husband dying before Ronald, the latter would receive five hundred pounds free of legacy duty."

"In the course of your interview with the prisoner on this occasion—on the 6th of September—was anything said about future visits?"

"Yes. He said that he should come and see me again soon, and that he thought we ought to see more of each other than we had done in the past."

"And what did you reply to that?"

"I told him that I would rather that he did not come to see me again just at present, as I found that his great resemblance to my husband made his presence painful to me."

"You found it painful to be in his society?"

"Yes. His likeness to my husband got on my nerves. I felt that I could not bear to have him in the house."

"Are you sure that it was the likeness only that caused this feeling of repulsion? Was there nothing else in your mind?"

"I know of nothing else. He seemed unconsciously to be mimicking my husband, and I felt that I could not bear it."

On receiving this reply, Sir Oliver paused to take a glance at his brief. Then he reached down below the bench and produced an attache case which he handed to an attendant who conveyed it to the witness. "Can you tell us anything about the case which has just been handed to you?" the counsel asked.

"It belonged to my husband," was the reply. "He was carrying it when he left home on the morning of the 28th of

August."

"You have no doubt that it was your husband's case?"

"None whatever. The letters stamped on the lid are his initials, A. B. He stamped them himself with book-binder's letters. I have the tools here, and you can see that they fit the stamped initials."

She produced from a hand-bag three brass "handled letters", an A, a B, and a stop, which were taken by the attendant, with the attache case, and passed round for inspection by the judge and jury. "Can you tell us," Sir Oliver continued, "what the case contained when your husband left home?"

"I understood that it contained one or two small water colours, but I did not see them. Of the other contents I know nothing."

The case and the tools made their round, being eventually deposited as "exhibits". Meanwhile, Sir Oliver took another glance at his brief, and finding, apparently, that he had exhausted his matter, sat down; whereupon Dr. Thorndyke rose to cross-examine. "You have told us," he began, "that on the 29th of August, you went to Crompton mortuary for the purpose of inspecting and, if possible, identifying a body which was lying there and which was believed to be the body of your husband, Andrew Barton. I deeply regret the necessity of recalling to your memory what must have been a very terrible experience, but it is essential that we should be quite clear as to the facts. Were you able to identify that body?"

"No," Molly replied, with a visible shudder. "It was quite unrecognizable. But the clothes were my husband's clothes."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "You identified the clothes as your husband's; but, apart from the clothes, were you able to form any opinion as to whether the body was or was not that of your husband?"

"No," Molly replied. "I was not. I said so."

"So far as you know, was any evidence as to the identity of the body, apart from the clothing, given at the inquest?"

"No. The identity of the body was established by means of the clothing."

"You referred just now to a severe injury to the nose from which your husband had suffered. Did the medical witness at the inquest mention having found any traces of that injury?"

"No. I don't think he knew about it when he made his examination. At any rate, he said nothing about it."

"Did you ever learn what was the exact nature of that injury?"

"Yes. The surgeon at the hospital gave me a certificate for the insurance office. It described the injury as a depressed and comminuted fracture of the nasal bones."

"You have spoken of your alarm when your husband did not come home on the night of the 28th of August. May we take it that he was not in the habit of staying away from home without notice?"

"He never stayed away from home without notice," Molly replied, emphatically. "He hardly ever stayed away at all."

"Did he ever stay away from home, and away from you, for a considerable period; say for more than a month?"

"Never. We used, occasionally, to go away together, but he never went away by himself for longer than a week-end."

"Now, Mrs. Barton," Thorndyke said in a persuasive tone, "I want you to try to give me a statement of your husband's whereabouts on a particular date. Can you remember where he was on Good Friday in the year 1925?"

Molly looked at him in evident surprise, but replied, after a few moments' thought: "I believe he was at home; at any rate, I have no recollection of our having been away at that time."

Thorndyke was manifestly dissatisfied with the reply and pressed for a more precise answer. "Take a little time to think," he urged, "and see if you cannot recall the circumstances. It is only three years ago, and Good Friday is a very distinctive date. You will surely be able to remember where you spent your Easter."

Again she reflected with knitted brows. Suddenly she exclaimed: "Oh, yes, I remember. He was at home."

"Something has recalled it to your memory," he suggested.

"Yes. In that year I undertook to decorate the parish church, and my husband helped me. In fact, he did most of the decoration."

Thorndyke paused to make a note of the answer and then proceeded: "With reference to the prisoner's visit to you on the 6th of September; you have said that his resemblance to your husband was so close as to cause you great distress. In what respect did he appear to resemble your husband?"

"In every respect," Molly replied, "excepting, of course, that his nose was different. Otherwise, he seemed exactly like my husband; even in the face, in spite of the difference in the shape of the nose. And his figure was the same and he had the same tricks of movement with his hands and the same rather unusual way of picking up his tea-cup without using the handle."

"And what about the voice?"

"That was the worst of all. It was exactly like my husband's. If I had shut my eyes, I could have thought that it was my

husband speaking."

"To what extent had you been acquainted with Ronald Barton? Had you previously seen much of him?"

"No. I had met him only twice, when he came to see us. The second occasion was a little over two years ago."

"When you were in his society on that occasion, were you greatly impressed by his resemblance to your husband?"

"Not so much. I could see, of course, they were very much alike, but the resemblance did not strike me as so very extraordinary when I saw them together and could compare them."

"When the prisoner came to see you in September, did his great resemblance to your husband come upon you in any way as a surprise?"

"Yes, very much so. I had no idea that the two men were so much alike. It was quite a shock to me."

"Did it appear to you that he was in any respects different from the Ronald Barton whom you remembered? Did he seem to have changed in any way?"

"Yes, he did seem to have changed in some respects. He was quieter in manner; less boisterous. In fact, he was not boisterous at all, as he used to be. But I put that down to the sad circumstances in which his visit was made. It was only a few days after the funeral."

"Did you notice any other differences from what you remembered of him previously?"

"There was one thing that surprised me. He seemed to know so much more about pictures and painting than I had supposed he did; and he was so much more interested in them. On the previous occasions, he had not seemed to be interested at all in my husband's work or in painting in general."

"Then, taking your impressions as a whole, would it be correct to say that the Ronald Barton who came to see you in September did not seem to be quite the same kind of person as the Ronald Barton whom you remembered having met formerly?"

"Yes, I think that would be correct."

"And would it further be correct to say that such changes as seemed to have occurred, increased his resemblance to your husband?"

"Yes, I think that is so."

On receiving this answer, Thorndyke sat down; and Andrew took a deep breath. He was beginning to understand his counsel's tactics. But he was the only person present who did. Throughout the cross-examination, the judge had listened attentively with an obviously puzzled expression, and Sir Oliver and his junior, Mr. Horace Black, had looked frankly bewildered. Even Molly, though she answered readily and with conscientious care, was evidently surprised at the apparent irrelevancy of the questions. There was no re-examination, the two prosecuting counsel being clearly of the opinion that no point had been made and that there was nothing to contest. Accordingly, Molly was released from the witness-box and went back to her seat.

The next witness was Mr. Cooper, the carver and gilder, whose evidence repeated in detail the account which had been given by Sir Oliver in his opening address. Having regard to the importance and damaging character of that evidence, it was obviously a matter of surprise to the judge and the prosecuting counsel that Thorndyke allowed the witness to leave the box without any attempt at cross-examination. He was followed by Albert Wood, the waiter at the Excelsior Restaurant, whose evidence was also ignored by Thorndyke. Then the name of Samuel Sharpin was called, and a copper-faced elderly man in a stiff suit of blue cloth, rolled into the witness-box and fixed a seafaring blue eye on Sir Oliver's monocle. In much the same terms as he had used at the inquest, he described the circumstances in which he had observed the body through his glass, had put inshore and salved it and had conveyed it in the seaweed cart to the police station at Crompton. When the narrative was completed, Sir Oliver, having taken out his monocle, wiped it with his handkerchief and refixed it securely, addressed the witness in quiet but impressive tones, pointing his hand towards the dock. "Look attentively at the prisoner and tell me if you have ever seen him before."

The witness turned slowly and with seeming reluctance and cast a commiserating glance at the prisoner. "Yes," he said. "I've seen him before."

"Where did you see him?" Sir Oliver demanded, with something of a dramatic flourish.

"I see him," replied Sharpin, "in the prison yard, yonder, along of a lot of other fellows in a row. I was told to see if I could pick him out."

"And could you?" asked Sir Oliver, making the best of the slight anti-climax.

"Easily," replied Sharpin. "He was the only decent-looking man there."

"And where and when had you seen him before that?"

"I see him the night we brought the dead man in from Hunstone Gap. He was a-standing on the pavement outside the police station, a-watching of us as we unloaded the dead man out of the cart and set him on the stretcher."

"Are you certain that the prisoner is the man you saw watching you as you took the body out of the cart?"

"Yes," Sharpin replied doggedly. "He's the man."

"Do you swear that he is the man whom you saw there on that night?"

"I ain't much given to swearing," said Sharpin. "Don't hold with it. I've said he is the man, and he is the man."

"Did that man speak to anybody when you were moving the body?"

"Never spoke a word to nobody," was the slightly ambiguous reply.

"Did he seem agitated or upset in any way?"

"He didn't seem to be, but I didn't notice him very much. I was attending to what I was doing."

Having noted this reply. Sir Oliver relinquished his prey and Thorndyke rose. "When you came ashore and saw the block of chalk resting on the dead man's head, did you look up to see where the block had come from?"

"Yes, I did, in case there might be some more coming down. You could see where the block had broken out. Left a sort of square hole."

"And did you notice whether that hole was straight over the body, or whether it was to one or other side?"

"It was straight overhead; and I kept an eye on the place while we was a-moving of the body."

"You said that your mate, William Cox, lifted the rock off the dead man's head. Should you describe Cox as a strong man?"

"Ay. Will Cox is an uncommon beefy lad."

"Should you say that he is an unusually strong man?"

"Yes, strong as a young elephant he is. I gives him all the heavy jobs to do, and he don't never turn a hair and he don't never grumble."

"You seem to be fortunate in your mate," Thorndyke remarked with a smile.

"I am that," agreed Sharpin. "Worth his weight in gold is Will Cox; and he turns the scale at fourteen stun."

This completed Samuel Sharpin's evidence and on his retirement he was succeeded by his much-appreciated mate; a good-looking young giant with a mahogany complexion, bright blue eyes and a mop of curly hair. His skipper's commendations, which he had necessarily overheard, seemed to have covered him with confusion, for he swung shyly into the witness-box and, having taken up a negligent pose, greeted the judge with an embarrassed grin and then fixed an expectant eye on Sir Oliver; being, apparently, like his skipper, fascinated by the learned counsel's "dead-light".

But whatever might have been his worth to his commander, he was of little to the prosecution; and when they observed the way in which Thorndyke pounced on him, they may have regretted the necessity for calling him. His evidence merely confirmed and amplified that of the previous witness; and after a brief and matter-of-fact examination, Sir Oliver resigned him to the defence. "You have said," Thorndyke began, "that you lifted the block of chalk off the dead man's head. Did you find it easy to lift?"

"No, I did not," replied Cox, with a shake of his curly head. "'Twas most uncommon awkward to lift. Heavy, too, it was."

"You are accustomed, I suppose, to lifting heavy weights? Fish-trunks, for instance?"

"Ay, but, d'ye see, fish-trunks is fitted with rope becketts for to catch hold of. They are easy enough for to hoist. 'Tis only a matter of weight. But this here block of chalk wasn't no sort of shape. There wasn't nothing for to lay hold of or to hook your fingers under."

"What are the usual weights of fish-trunks?"

"They runs five, seven, eight or ten stone."

"And a stone, in your trade, is how many pounds?"

"Fourteen pounds goes to a stone of fish."

"What should you say was the weight of that block of chalk?"

"Somewhere between eight and nine stone, as near as I can judge."

"And how near can you judge a weight of this kind; say a fish-trunk?"

"I can judge the weight of a trunk of fish within two or three pounds."

"You say that you found that block difficult to lift. How high did you lift it from the ground?"

"Only an inch or two. I just hoisted it clear and dropped it alongside."

"Could you have lifted it higher, so far as you could judge? Say two or three feet above the ground?"

"I might have been able to, but I shouldn't have liked to try. Not more than a foot, anyway. He was mighty slippery and difficult to hold, and you don't want eight or nine stone of chalk on your toe."

"Do you find any difficulty in lifting a ten stone trunk?"

"Lord, no sir! Wouldn't be much good in our trade if I did. But, as I was telling you, a trunk has got beackets—rope handles, you know—and if you've got hold of them, the trunk can't slip."

"So you can lift ten stone—a hundred and forty pounds—without difficulty?"

"Yes, and a tidy bit more if need be and if I'd got a proper hand-grip."

Having received and noted this answer, Thorndyke sat down and Sir Oliver rose to re-examine. "Does it require a specially strong man to lift an ordinary fish-trunk?"

"Not if he's used to it. Them as ain't don't make much of it."

"Take the case of an eight stone trunk. Do you say that a young man of the prisoner's height and build would have any difficulty in lifting it?"

"No, I suppose he could lift it if he put his back into it. But he'd find it a tidy weight if he wasn't used to hoisting."

Apparently, Sir Oliver judged it wise to let well alone for, having got this qualified assent to his question, he sat down. Then William Cox descended from the witness-box and the name of Frederick Barnard was called.

Frederick Barnard, having been sworn, deposed that he was the senior waiter at Mason's Restaurant, Crompton-on-Sea. He had identified the prisoner among a number of other men at the prison. He recognized him as a man who had come to the restaurant at about half-past eight in the evening of the 28th of August. He had noticed him particularly because he looked pale and ill and had a drawn expression as if he were in pain or in some serious trouble. He also looked very tired. Seemed "dead beat". His manner was peculiar. He had a companion with him but hardly spoke a word to him. He improved very much when he had taken some food and wine, but he ate very slowly and carefully, as a man might who had a tender tooth, and he used his napkin as if he was afraid of hurting his mouth.

His companion was an American gentleman whom witness knew well by sight as he had frequently come to the restaurant, sometimes alone and sometimes with a friend. Witness did not, at that time, know the American gentleman's name, but he had since ascertained from the friend who used to come with him that he was a Professor Booley, who described himself as a beauty specialist.

"Do you know what Professor Booley did for a living?"

"I only know what his friend told me; that his work consisted principally in making up ladies' faces; touching up their complexions and eyebrows and covering up any blemishes."

"Did you notice anything peculiar in Booley's behaviour?"

"Yes, his manner was very peculiar. He ate very little, but very fast, and he hardly talked at all. But he sat looking at the prisoner's face as if he couldn't take his eyes off it. It was most singular. Sometimes he would lean back or move his head sideways to get a different view; and sometimes he would look in the big mirror on the wall and then back at the prisoner's face as if he was comparing the reflection in the glass with the original. And he seemed to be extraordinarily pleased with both of them and quite excited about them."

"And did the prisoner show any special interest in his face?"

"Yes. I saw him looking at himself in the glass from time to time and, after Mr. Booley had gone—which he did before the prisoner had finished his dinner—he got up from the table and walked up to the mirror and stood there looking at himself for quite a long time."

"And what did he do after that?"

"He sat for close on half an hour over his coffee and a green Chartreuse. He looked quite natural by this time, but he seemed to have something on his mind; at least, he looked as if he was thinking very hard about something."

"Did you see anything about the prisoner's face that might have accounted for the interest that he and Professor Booley seemed to take in it?"

"I didn't then. I just thought that he was a good-looking young man who was rather pleased with himself. I didn't know who Professor Booley was, then. But since I've known what his trade was, I've been disposed to suspect that—"

"Ah!" Sir Oliver interrupted, "but you mustn't tell us what you suspect, though I daresay you may be right. We are dealing with the facts that are known to you. We must not go beyond what you saw or heard."

"Well," said Barnard, slightly crestfallen and even huffy, "I've told you all I saw and heard. I can't remember anything more."

Thereupon Sir Oliver sat down and proceeded thoughtfully to polish his eye-glass. The judge cast an inquiring glance towards Thorndyke, but as the latter made no sign, the witness was released and the name of Thomas Steel was called.

The new witness was a sergeant in the Crompton police force and he gave his evidence with professional tidiness and precision. But it did not amount to very much. He had picked the prisoner out of a row of twenty men, and he identified him as the man who had stood outside the police station watching the removal of the body from the seaweed cart. That man had made no sign of recognizing the body and had not spoken to anyone. Did not appear in any way agitated or greatly concerned. Had seemed to be just an ordinary spectator. Witness was quite sure prisoner was the man. Was used to

recognizing persons, and prisoner was a rather striking person who would be easy to remember and recognize.

From this incident Sir Oliver turned his attention to Professor Booley, referring to the evidence of Frederick Barnard. "Do you know anything about this man Booley?"

"I knew him by name and by sight," the sergeant replied, "and I knew his premises in Barleymow Street. He described himself as a beauty specialist and he had a big card in his window setting forth what he could do. I took a photograph of it to keep in case any question of fraud or false pretences should be raised."

"Have you got a copy of that photograph?"

"Yes. I have here an enlarged copy from the small negative." He produced from an attache case a whole-plate photograph which was passed across to Sir Oliver, who took out his eye-glass to read it, and then, with an indulgent smile, returned it to the usher who passed it up to the judge. From his lordship it was conveyed to the jury, who studied it with broad and appreciative grins, and back to the Counsels' bench, finding its way eventually to the Clerk's table, where it remained. "Have you any knowledge," Sir Oliver asked, "as to the success of the Professor's methods? Have you, for instance, met anyone who had had a crooked nose straightened out by him?"

The sergeant admitted, amidst a murmur of merriment, that he had not. "But," he added, "I know that he was very clever at painting out black eyes."

"Did you ever see a specimen of his skill?"

"Yes. Our court missionary got a black eye when he was trying to separate two drunken sailors. It was such a bad one that he didn't like to show his face out of doors. But one of our constables took him round to Booley's to have it painted out with grease-paint, and when he came back you couldn't see a trace of the discolouration. It looked perfectly natural."

"So far as you know, did Booley get much work of this kind?"

"I have no personal knowledge beyond this one case. The constable told me that Booley did an extensive trade in painting out black eyes and bruises and pimples and blotches, but I can't verify his statement from my own knowledge."

This concluded the examination in chief. When Sir Oliver sat down, Thorndyke rose to cross-examine. "You have said that when you came out of the police station with the stretcher, you found the prisoner waiting there and making a show of reading a bill that was affixed to the notice board. Do you recall anything remarkable about that bill?"

"Yes. By a most extraordinary coincidence, that bill contained a description of the man whose body was in the seaweed cart."

"What was the heading of that bill?"

"It was headed, 'Wanted for Murder.'"

"And who was it that was wanted for murder?"

"The dead man; Andrew Barton."

"For the murder of whom was he wanted?"

"For the murder of Mr. Hudson at Kibble's Cross."

"Can you remember the exact terms of the description?"

"I cannot remember the exact wording, but I could give you the substance of it."

"I will read you a portion of the bill and you shall tell me whether what I have read is correct. This is the passage:

"It is believed that more than one man was concerned in the crime, but the only one who was seen was the man who actually fired the shot. He is described as somewhat fair man with grey eyes, about thirty years of age and easily recognizable by reason of a remarkably deformed nose, which appears to have been broken and is completely flat excepting at the tip, which is rather prominent."

"Is that a correct quotation from the bill?"

"To the best of my recollection and belief it is quite correct."

"You say that the description in the bill was that of the dead man, Andrew Barton. When did you first learn that the man described in the bill was Andrew Barton?"

"On the following morning, the 28th. A telephone message came through from Bunsford directing us to take down the bill and call in any copies that we had circulated. I took the telephone call."

"Was any reason given for the withdrawal of the bill?"

"Not officially. But I had a few words with the officer at the other end and was informed by him that inquiries had been made and that it appeared that there had been some mistake. It turned out that the man described in the bill was not concerned in the murder at all. I then reported the finding of the body of Andrew Barton of Fairfield, and the officer at Bunsford then informed me that Andrew Barton of Fairfield was the man described in the bill."

"So far as you know, was any public announcement made by the police that the accusation of Andrew Barton was a

mistake due to an error in identification?"

"No such announcement ever came to my knowledge; and, as no name had been mentioned, and the man was dead, it would seem to have been unnecessary."

"That," remarked the judge, "seems to be a rather easy-going view to take. There had been a public accusation of a particular person and there ought to have been a public withdrawal of it."

The sergeant agreed that some such announcement ought to have been made, but pointed out that he had merely said that he was not aware of its having been made. It was possible that there had been a public withdrawal which had escaped his notice; and this observation brought his evidence to an end.

The next witness was Mrs. Susan Baxter of 16, Barleymow Street, Crompton, who identified the prisoner as her late lodger, Mr. Walter Green. She deposed that, on the night of the 28th of August, Mr. Green who had previously been quite impecunious and unable to pay his rent, seemed suddenly to have become flush of money and anxious to discharge his debt. He paid her with four pound notes which were quite clean and new but she had not noticed their numbers and could not identify them. On that occasion she had seen an attache case on the table in prisoner's room. She had never seen it before and was certain that it had not been in the room until that night. Had asked prisoner if it was his but he had not answered. The case produced and handed to her was like the one she had seen, but she would not swear that it was the same one. Prisoner announced that night that he was going to London the next day and he seemed very anxious to catch an early train. He went away next morning at a little past eight o'clock and she had not seen him since until she picked him out of a row of men at the prison.

When the examination in chief was finished, Thorndyke rose. But he raised only a single point. "When you were talking to the prisoner on that last night, did you notice anything in his manner that was unusual or different from what you had been accustomed to?"

"Well, yes, I did," Mrs. Baxter replied. "He was quieter in his way of speaking, and much more polite and considerate. I noticed it particularly, because he had usually been rather loud-spoken and gave his orders like a lord. And he was a decidedly selfish and inconsiderate lodger."

"Did you notice a great difference in his manner on this occasion?"

"I did. He spoke like a perfect gentleman; most respectful and polite. And he was quite anxious not to put me out by going away so early. I was quite took aback. He seemed like a different gentleman."

Having elicited this answer, Thorndyke sat down; and once more the judge cast a speculative and rather puzzled glance in his direction. Evidently his Lordship was endeavouring to trace through these seeming irrelevancies some intelligible line of defence. To him, as to the prosecuting counsel, these questions of Thorndyke's must have seemed to have no bearing whatever on the issue which was being tried. But experience would have told him that Dr. John Thorndyke was not a gentleman who asked irrelevant questions; and a suspicion may have begun to filter into his judicial mind that the defence was going to take the form of a counter-attack—and a flank attack at that. Andrew alone, listening with growing interest and a queer sense of detachment, could recognize the logical structure which his champion was building up, brick by brick.

The evidence of Mrs. Baxter was followed by that of the cashier at the London Bank, and, when this had been disposed of, Sir Oliver proceeded to bring up his big gun. And a very big gun it was; and, to tell the truth, the gunner seemed just a shade nervous about "letting it off". For—to drop metaphor—the new witness was no less a person than Sir Artemus Pope, M.D., F.R.S., the eminent pathologist; and the evidence of Sir Artemus Pope was the foundation on which the whole super-structure of the prosecution rested. And the counsel's opening address had made it clear that Sir Artemus was neither an enthusiastic nor a pliable witness. It was certain in advance that he would not budge a hair's-breadth from bald, literal, demonstrable fact.

Sir Oliver approached him cautiously with the introductory questions. "You have made an examination of the body of the deceased, Andrew Barton, whose death is the subject of the present proceedings. Is that so?"

"Yes," replied Sir Artemus. "On the 6th of November, acting on instructions from the Home Office, I conducted an exhumation at Fairfield Churchyard of the body of Andrew Barton and made a careful examination of the said body."

"What was the object of the examination?"

"To check the findings of the medical witness at the inquest and to determine, if possible, the cause of death, particularly in connection with the present proceedings."

"Were you given full particulars of the circumstances in which the death occurred?"

"Yes, including the depositions taken at the inquest."

"What were the conditions that your examination revealed?"

"I found extensive multiple fractures of the skull and the bones of the face. Practically all the bones were broken and the head appeared to have been crushed flat. The injuries were of such a kind as would have been produced by an extremely heavy blow from some hard and ponderous object, delivered when the head was lying on the ground, face upwards."

"What conclusions did you reach as to the cause of death?"

"If the man were alive at the moment when the blow took effect, it would certainly have killed him instantly. As there was nothing to suggest that he was not alive at that moment, I concluded that the blow was the cause of death."

"Would the very gross injuries which you have described be sufficient to cover up and obliterate the traces of any lesser injuries which might have been previously inflicted?"

"That would depend on the nature of the previous injuries. If they had been inflicted with a sharp instrument, such as an axe, the incised wounds would be recognizable even after the subsequent smashing. But if they had been inflicted with a blunt implement, all traces of them would probably have been obliterated by the blow which flattened the skull."

"Is it possible that such previous injuries may actually have been inflicted and their traces destroyed by the major injuries?"

"It is possible," Sir Artemus replied, with distinct emphasis on the final word.

"From your examination did you form any opinion as to whether the injuries were due to accident or homicide?"

"The examination informed me only of the nature of the injuries. I have no personal knowledge of the circumstances in which they were inflicted. The information supplied to me set forth that they were produced by a block of chalk, weighing about a hundredweight, which had fallen from the cliff. If it had fallen on to the head of deceased when he was lying face upwards, it would have produced injuries such as those which I found. And in that case, death would be due to accident."

"Precisely," said Sir Oliver. "That is one possibility. Now let us consider another. Suppose that the block had already fallen and was lying on the beach. Suppose that deceased had been killed or rendered insensible by a blow on the head with a heavy stone or some other blunt instrument. Suppose, then, that his assailant picked up the block of chalk and dropped it on his head as he lay. In that case, would the appearances be such as you found?"

"No," replied Sir Artemus. "A man could not lift such a block more than two or three feet, and a fall from that height would not smash the skull into fragments as I found it to be smashed."

"Not with one single blow. But suppose the blow to have been repeated several times?"

"In that case, it is possible that the skull might ultimately have been completely crushed."

"And would it then have presented the appearance which you observed when you examined it?"

"Probably it would, so far as I can judge. But that is merely an opinion. I cannot say definitely that it would."

"Is it possible that the injuries which you found could have been produced by homicidal violence?"

"It is physically possible that they might have been."

"You agree that the appearances which you observed were consistent with the theory that the death of the deceased was due to homicidal violence?"

Sir Artemus did not appear to like the form of the question, but eventually gave a grudging assent; on which Sir Oliver, having got the utmost agreement that he was likely to get, promptly sat down, and Thorndyke rose to cross-examine. "You have said that the injuries which you found were such as would have been produced if the block of chalk had fallen on the head of deceased when he was lying face upwards. Did you find anything that was in the least degree inconsistent with the belief that death was caused in that way?"

"I did not," Sir Artemus replied, promptly.

"It has been suggested that death or insensibility may have been caused by a blow, or blows, with a blunt instrument. Did you find any traces or any appearances of any kind which led you to believe that such blow, or blows, might have been inflicted?"

"I did not."

"Did you observe anything which suggested to you that the injuries had been produced by human agency rather than by the accidental fall of the block?"

"I did not."

"Did you observe anything, or ascertain any fact, which offered a positive suggestion that death might have been due to homicide?"

"I did not."

"Would it be correct to say that the conditions which you found were entirely consistent with death by accident?"

"It would."

"And that your examination disclosed no positive evidence or any suggestion of any kind that death was due to homicide?"

"Yes. That would be quite correct."

Thorndyke, having squeezed the witness dry (and he had not seemed unwilling to be squeezed), noted the replies and then proceeded: "Were you supplied with a description of the person of deceased?"



"I was given a copy of the depositions taken at the inquest. They contained a description of the person of deceased."

"Had you any instructions to verify the identity of deceased?"

"No. My instructions were to ascertain the cause of death and consider the possible alternatives of accident or homicide. The question of identity was not raised. The body which I examined was described to me as the body of Andrew Barton, and such I assumed it to be."

"But you had a description of the person of Andrew Barton. Now, when you made your examination, did you find that the body which you were examining corresponded completely with that description?"

The question seemed to put Sir Artemus on the alert, and he gave himself a few seconds to consider it. But he was not the only person who roused at the question. The judge seemed to have found a possible clue to the mystery that had been puzzling him, for he leaned forward with eager interest to catch the reply. The prisoner in the dock, too, perceived a ray of light from an unexpected quarter, and, glancing at Molly, he saw that she had fixed a startled eye on the questioner. "What do you say, Sir Artemus?" Thorndyke inquired, placidly.

"The deceased," Sir Artemus replied cautiously, "was personally unknown to me, so I was dependent on the description. There did appear to me to be a slight discrepancy between that description and the body which I was examining. The description set forth that deceased had suffered from a severe injury to the nose resulting in complete flattening of the bridge. The conditions which I found were not exactly what I should have expected from that description."

"You have heard the evidence which was given by Mrs. Barton that the surgeon's certificate described the injury as a depressed and comminuted fracture of the nasal bones?"

"Yes, I heard that evidence. It agrees with the description that was given to me."

"Did you make a careful examination of the nasal bones of deceased?"

"I did. They were both fractured, but not very extensively. They had been driven bodily into the nasal cavity."

"In a case of comminuted fracture with a depression which remained permanently, what conditions would you expect to find?"

"As the fragments must have united in a false position, I should expect to find the bones distorted in shape and associated with a good deal of callus or new bone."

"What did you actually find?"

"The bones were fractured, as I have said. But when the fragments were put together, they did not appear to be in any way abnormal. I was not able to recognize any callus or traces of repair."

"What conclusions did your observations suggest?"

"I concluded that the original injury could not have been as great as had been supposed; that there must have been some exaggeration, due to error."

"Does that conclusion seem to you to be supported by the evidence which you have heard to-day?"

"I am hardly prepared to pronounce an opinion on that question. My examination was not concerned with the issue of identity, which you seem to be raising, and I did not give it sufficient attention to enable me to make a perfectly definite statement."

"Are you prepared to admit that, if the description given to you of the person of Andrew Barton was a true and faithfully correct description, the body which you examined could not have been the body of Andrew Barton?"

"That seems rather sweeping," the witness objected. "I don't think I can commit myself to that. But I will admit that, if the description was correct, there were disagreements between that description and the visible facts which I am unable to account for."

As this amounted, in effect, to an affirmative answer to the question, Thorndyke pushed the cross-examination no farther. As he resumed his seat, Sir Oliver rose to re-examine; and as he could evidently make nothing of Thorndyke's later questions, he set himself to mitigate the effects of the earlier ones. "You have said, Sir Artemus, that you found no positive indications of homicide. Did you find any positive indications that excluded homicide?"

"I did not," was the reply.

"Can you say whether Andrew Barton met his death by accident or by homicide?"

"I cannot. I have said that either is physically possible. I have no means of comparing the probabilities."

Sir Oliver noted the reply. Then, turning towards the judge, he informed the court that "that was his case". Thereupon Thorndyke rose and announced: "I call witnesses." and a few seconds later the name of Ronald Barton was called, and the prisoner was conducted from the dock to the witness-box.

---

## XV. — THE WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENCE

As Andrew made his short journey across the court from the ignominy of the dock to the comparative respectability of the witness-box, he was aware of a curious and unexpected sense of confidence. For now, at last, he was about to make his long-dreaded revelation; to tell, before judge and jury and the crowded court, his preposterous story with all its outrageous improbabilities. And yet, to his surprise, he did not shrink from the ordeal. What had once seemed almost an impossibility had now come within the compass of the possible.

But his surprise was unwarranted, as he himself partially realized. For there is all the difference in the world between making an astounding revelation to an audience that is utterly unprepared for it and making the same revelation to hearers who are already waiting for the solution of a puzzle. And that was his position now. By his skilfully conducted cross-examination, Thorndyke had thoroughly prepared the way for Andrew's statement; ignoring the apparently important issues and building up a fabric of evidence which would immediately drop into its place as soon as Andrew began to tell his story. And when he stood up and faced his witness, it was not the judge alone who leaned forward all agog to hear what the defence really was. "You are indicted," he began, "in the name of Ronald Barton for the murder of Andrew Barton. Is your name Ronald Barton?"

"No," replied Andrew, "it is not."

"What is your real name?"

"My name is Andrew Barton."

As the answer was given, a startled cry mingled with the universal murmur of astonishment. Glancing quickly at Molly, Andrew could see that she had swung round on her seat and was gazing at him with an expression of the wildest amazement. The judge, after a quick glance towards the interrupter, fixed a look of critical scrutiny on the witness. "Is this a coincidence in names?" he asked, "or do you mean that you are the Andrew Barton whom you are accused of having murdered?"

"I am that Andrew Barton, my lord," was the reply.

"The same Andrew Barton whose description has been read out to us from the police bill?"

"The same, my lord."

The judge continued to look at him for two or three seconds. Then, with a slight shrug, he bowed to Thorndyke with a manner that seemed to invite him to "get on with it". Meanwhile the jury, suddenly reminded of the police bill, looked first at the prisoner and then at one another, some with frank incredulity and others with undisguised grins. Unperturbed by those grins, Thorndyke proceeded: "The evidence relating to the alleged crime of which you are accused covers a certain period of time and a certain succession of events. What is the starting-point of that series of events?"

"They began with a letter which I received from my cousin Ronald. It was dated the 21st of August and reached me on the 23rd. Its principal purpose was to ask for a loan of fifty pounds, but it also announced his intention to pay me a visit on the 28th." Andrew then went on, urged by Thorndyke, to give the minutest details, even to the cutting of the privet hedge, of the circumstances connected with the letter and his difficulties in staving off Ronald's visit.

"What was your objection to this visit?"

"From what I knew and suspected of my cousin's mode of life, I did not consider him a suitable person to associate with my wife; and I had also found his manner towards her distinctly objectionable."

"Why did you not tell your wife about this letter?"

"I was afraid that she would misunderstand my motives in objecting to Ronald's visit; that she might feel that I had not complete confidence in her discretion in dealing with him."

"Had you any such fear as to her discretion?"

"Not the least. I had perfect confidence in her. But I thought she did not quite realize what kind of man Ronald was, and might not be completely on her guard if he should try to establish relations of a kind that I considered undesirable."

When the arrangements for the pretended visit to London had been described, Thorndyke proceeded to the incident of the murder of Mr. Hudson and led Andrew through it in the closest detail. "When you went home after the attack, were you at all alarmed or uneasy as to your connection with the affair?"

"Not at all. I did not know that any murder had been committed and, of course, I was only a spectator. I told my wife exactly what had occurred and we discussed what I had better do. I was inclined to go over to Bunsford and give information at once. But my wife thought that, as I could not tell the police anything that they did not know already, I had better wait until some inquiries were made. But I intended to call on the police on the following day and tell them what I knew; and I should have done so had not the train come in sooner than I had expected."

There followed a description of the visit to Crompton in the same minute detail, including the inspection of Professor Booley's window and the remarkable announcements on his advertisement card; of which Andrew was able to remember nearly the whole, and the recital of which was received with murmurs of amusement. "When you read the list of Professor Booley's accomplishments, did it occur to you to give him a trial and see if you could not dispense with the spectacles which you have described to us?"

"No. I did not take his claims seriously. I thought he was merely an advertising quack."

The account of the day's doings, almost from minute to minute, was continued until the incident of the seabathing at Hunstone Gap was reached. Then Thorndyke pressed for even more exhaustive details. "You say that your cousin ran up before you to the place where your clothes were lying and that he took possession of the heap that belonged to you. Is it not remarkable that he should have mistaken your clothes for his own?"

"I don't think so. The outer clothes were almost exactly alike in the two suits. But I don't think that it was really a mistake on his part. I think it was a practical joke. It was just the kind of joke that I should have expected from him."

"What makes you think that it was a joke?"

"I have since remembered that, before sitting down, he turned the clothes over, putting the coat on top. And then he proceeded to wipe himself on my coat."

"Can you account for the circumstance that you did not notice that you were sitting down on the wrong clothes?"

"As I have said, the two suits were almost exactly alike. They were both ordinary grey flannels. But apart from that, I was in a very disturbed state of mind. I was trying to think how I could decently put him off the visit to Fairfield, which he still seemed to be bent on."

The account now approached the tragic incident of the falling block of chalk. The silence in the court was profound; and still Thorndyke insisted on tracing events from moment to moment. "Did you actually see the block fall?"

"No. I was much agitated by the unpleasant turn the conversation had taken and was avoiding looking at my cousin. I was watching a fishing lugger which was beating up the bay. When the chalk came rattling down, I jumped up and ran away from the cliff. When I stopped and looked round, Ronald was lying in the same place, covered with small lumps of chalk and with the large block resting on his head."

"Was he already dead?"

"He must have been; but his legs were moving slightly with a sort of twitching movement. They continued to move for nearly half a minute."

"Can you explain how it happened that you did not notice that you were putting on the wrong clothes?"

"There was not much to notice. The clothes were almost identical with my own, and they fitted me. But I was so shaken and horrified by what had just happened that I hardly knew what I was doing. As I was dressing, I still had my eyes on the corpse. The only thing that I noticed was the hat, and I did not stop to ask myself how it happened that Ronald was lying on mine."

Andrew then described how he had hurried away from the Gap intending to seek assistance or give information, and how he had missed the road and wandered about in the country, reaching Crompton only after night had fallen, and how he had made his way straight to the police station and had encountered the police notice.

"Did you stop to read the bill?"

"No. I was feeling very confused and shaken and I stopped to think over what I had to tell, and how I should explain my presence in Crompton, and also whether I ought to say anything about the affair of the motor bandits. Then, as I was standing opposite the bill, my eye caught the words, 'Kibble's Cross,' and I glanced quickly through the notice to see what had happened. Then I saw the heading, 'Wanted for Murder,' and reading down further, I read the description of myself and the statement that I had been seen to fire the shot."

"You read the notice which directly accused you of having committed the murder. Were you particularly alarmed?"

"I was terrified. For the notice not only accused me but stated, on the evidence of an eye-witness, that I had been seen to fire the shot that had killed the man."

"Did you think that you were likely to be convicted of this murder?"

"I thought that I was certain to be. This lady was prepared to swear that she had seen me fire the shot, and I had no answer but a bare denial. I thought that if I was caught I was bound to be condemned."

"And did you think it likely that you would be caught?"

"I considered it a certainty that I should be, as the disfigurement of my nose, which was described on the bill, made me so very easy to recognize. Anyone who had read the bill who should see me would know instantly who I was. And my spectacles, which were the only means of any sort of disguise, were in the pocket of the clothes that had been under the body of my cousin."

The account went on to relate how Andrew had sneaked up the dark street, keeping in the deepest shadow and avoiding the street lamps, and how he had stumbled on the premises of Professor Booley and had then had the sudden idea that the Professor might be able to produce some sort of disguise. "Had you anything definite in your mind when you decided to apply to Professor Booley?"

"No. I realized that the disfigurement of my nose was the great source of danger as I could not cover it up and anyone would notice it at the first glance. I thought it possible that Professor Booley might be able to do something—even a

temporary disguise—which would give me a chance to escape.”

“So you decided to see if he could do anything for you. Now tell us exactly what happened.”

Andrew proceeded with the description of his interview with the Professor, brought up repeatedly by Thorndyke for the filling in of some apparently trivial detail. He spoke confidently and clearly; and, as he told that strange story, the entire court, judge, jury and spectators alike, listened in breathless silence. He described the Professor’s reluctance, changing suddenly into enthusiasm and even eagerness; the consulting-room with its chair and instruments and the cake of wax that had been shown to him and the various preparations for the operation, the operation itself, his agonies in the operating-chair, and the climax, when the Professor bade him look in the mirror. “And when you looked in the mirror, what did you see?”

“I saw the face of my cousin Ronald.”

“You mean that your face now resembled the face of your cousin?”

“That, I suppose, is the fact. It must have been. But the resemblance was so complete that it seemed like some magical illusion. What I saw was not my own face but Ronald’s. I could hardly believe my eyes.”

“Do you now think that the transformation was so very wonderful?”

“No. Since I have had time to think it over, I have realized that it was quite natural. Ronald and I were extraordinarily alike in every respect but our noses. Ronald had a Roman nose and my nose was straight; and after my accident, the difference was much more striking. But Professor Booley, in filling up the notch in my nose, happened to model the patch which he put in so that the repaired bridge was almost exactly the shape of Ronald’s. The result was that the only appreciable difference between us was done away with. If Ronald had been alive, he and I would have looked like a pair of twins.”

“Professor Booley’s magic has had some rather embarrassing effects. What did you do when you recovered from the operation?”

Andrew described the visit to the restaurant and his examination of himself in the mirror, and explained how the complete transformation in his appearance made it impossible for him to go home; how the necessity for recovering his attache case compelled him to go to Ronald’s lodgings, and how, while waiting for an opportunity to enter unobserved, he had halted at the police station to read the bill and had thus been present when the cart arrived bearing his cousin’s body. With occasional assistance from Thorndyke in explaining and elucidating the incidents and emphasizing their significance, he continued the narrative, including his life at Hampstead, his visit to Molly, his meeting with Mrs. Kempster and so on up to the moment of his arrest and his committal for trial on the charge of fraud and personation.

When the examination in chief had thus brought the story up to his consignment to prison, Thorndyke sat down and Sir Oliver rose to cross-examine; and Andrew realized that the period of plain sailing was over. He had to brace himself up for some difficult questions. The learned counsel discreetly refrained from challenging statements of fact and attacked the evidence from the psychological side. “Your explanation of the mystery that was made about the visit to Crompton is difficult to follow. What prevented you from giving your wife a straightforward statement of what you intended to do?”

“Nothing but my own stupidity,” replied Andrew. “There was not the least necessity for any deception.”

“You have described your state of extreme panic on reading the police notice. But what occasion was there for panic? You would surely know that a charge of this kind could not be entertained in the case of a man of good position and known respectability?”

“I did not know it. I supposed that the sworn evidence of a respectable eye-witness would be conclusive. This lady said that she saw me kill Mr. Hudson. There seemed no answer to that!”

“Can you explain why, in all this time, you made no attempt to communicate with your wife?”

“Seeing that I was wanted for murder, I did not dare to disclose my identity. I felt sure that, if I told this story to her, she would reject it as an attempt at imposture and communicate with the police; and I could not risk any dealings with them.”

“Again, you actually state that you had an interview with your wife and that she did not recognize you, though she noticed your resemblance to her husband. It seems perfectly incredible that she should have failed to recognize her own husband. But allowing that she did, what prevented you from simply telling her who you were?”

“In the first place, she evidently recognized me as Ronald, and she appeared to be distinctly distrustful of Ronald. Then she believed that she had seen the dead body of her husband, and she had attended his funeral only a few days before. Moreover, I found that she was convinced that the person who was with him at Hunstone had murdered him. But I should have had to begin by telling her that I was one of the two persons who were at Hunstone. I thought, and still think, that she would have gone straight out and informed the police.”

“There is then the case of the woman, Elizabeth Kempster. You admit that she, having seen and talked with you, was firmly convinced that you were her husband, Anthony Kempster. You admit that there can be no doubt that Anthony Kempster and Ronald Barton are one and the same person. You admit that this woman still believes that you are her husband, Ronald Barton. See, then, what it is that you are asking us to believe. On the one hand, you assert that you had a long interview with your own wife and that she never even suspected that you were her husband. On the other hand, you

had an interview of some length with Elizabeth Kempster and she was then convinced, and still remains convinced, that you are her husband. And both these women are convinced that you are Ronald Barton. Do you still maintain and ask the jury to believe that you are not Ronald Barton, which both of these women are convinced that you are, and that you are Andrew Barton, which Andrew Barton's wife is convinced that you are not?"

"I have declared on oath, and I repeat, that I am Andrew Barton."

The learned counsel raised his eyebrows (whereby it became necessary for him to catch his eyeglass as it dropped from his eye; which he did with an expertness born of long practice), and, after a pause to give effect to that gesture of incredulity, continued his cross-examination, skilfully picking out all the improbabilities and apparent contradictions. It was cleverly done and it served, at least, to save the face of the prosecution. But it was all very inconclusive since it left all the evidence on the main questions of fact untouched. Those questions Sir Oliver was too wise to attack. His long experience in the courts would have taught him that technical evidence from Dr. John Thorndyke was best left alone. Moreover, he probably suspected that Thorndyke had not played his last card.

And so it turned out when the long cross-examination was ended. For the next witness whose name was called was Dr. Christopher Jervis; and it soon appeared that Dr. Jervis belonged to the heavy division of the defence's artillery. Having elicited his name and qualifications, Thorndyke began: "Can you tell us anything about the block of chalk which was found on the body of the dead man who has been described as Andrew Barton?"

"Yes. On the 13th of November I went to Hunstone Gap with the witness, William Cox. He showed me the place where the body was found and the position of the head, which was marked by some splashes of blood which had soaked into the chalk at the foot of the cliff. He also showed me the block of chalk, which was still lying where he had dropped it. Looking up the cliff, I could see the spot from which the block had broken away. It was quite clearly distinguishable as a squarish cavity. I measured, with a sextant, the height of this cavity above the beach and found it to be sixty-three feet. I tested, with a plumb-line, the position of this cavity in relation to the blood-mark at the foot of the cliff and found that they were both exactly in the same vertical line. The head of the deceased must, therefore, have been exactly on the spot on to which the block would have fallen. I tested the weight of the block by lifting it. With great difficulty, I was able to lift it a few inches from the ground, but was able to hold it for only a very few seconds owing to the absence of anything for the fingers to grasp."

"Could you have lifted it two or three feet?"

"No, certainly not."

"Are you a fairly strong man?"

"Yes. I am rather above the average of strength for a man of my size. I am just under six feet two inches in height."

"You have heard the suggestions of the prosecution as to the method employed in committing this alleged murder. Do you consider, judging by your experience of the block, that the method suggested is physically practicable?"

"No. I am certain that it would be impossible for even a strong man to lift that block two or three feet from the ground several times in succession."

"Were you present when Sir Artemus Pope made his examination of the body which is alleged to be that of Andrew Barton?"

"Yes; and I was authorized to make any independent examination that I considered necessary."

"What observations did you make?"

"I paid particular attention to the condition of the nasal bones. The description of Andrew Barton made it clear that he had suffered from a severe depressed fracture of the nasal bones, caused by a blow from a cricket-ball. I searched carefully for traces of that fracture and the callus thrown up in the processes of bone repair. I could find no such traces. The bones were fractured in several places, but these were new fractures. There was not a sign that the bones had ever been fractured before. I carefully separated out the broken pieces and fitted them together on a wax support. I had no authority to bring them away to produce in evidence but I made a plaster cast of the joined fragments on the wax. I produce the cast for inspection; and I have also brought a normal skull for comparison. The cast shows clearly the new fractures in the bones, but it also shows clearly that there are no traces whatever of any old fractures or of any callus or signs of repair. The bones in the cast are perfectly normal, as can be seen by comparing them with the uninjured bones of the skull."

"What do you infer from this?"

"I infer that it is quite impossible that the body which I examined could have been the body of Andrew Barton."

"Are you quite certain that it was not the body of Andrew Barton?"

"I am quite certain that it was not. It is a physical impossibility that his nasal bones could have been perfectly normal in appearance as the bones are seen to be in the cast."

On receiving this answer, Thorndyke paused for a few moments to complete his notes and then proceeded: "Have you made any examination of the prisoner?"

"Yes. I have examined his nose with the naked eye, with ordinary electric light and with X-rays and also by the sense of

touch. To the naked eye it appears to be a completely normal nose of the Roman type with a rather high bridge. To the sense of touch it is hard and smooth in the upper part with some irregular masses at the base. I was unable to feel the lower edges of the nasal bones or the median cartilage. On examination with electric light or sunlight, it is seen that the bridge of the nose is not composed of bone but of some translucent substance which I believe to be paraffin wax."

"What are your reasons for believing it to be paraffin wax?"

"It has all the properties of paraffin wax and no other substance is known to me which could be introduced into that situation and formed into that shape."

"What methods did you use in respect of the X-rays?"

"I took an X-ray photograph of the prisoner and another of myself for comparison as our noses are somewhat alike in shape. I produce those photographs. Each is signed by me and countersigned by John Thorndyke and I swear that they are the photographs of the persons whose names are written on them. On the one of myself it can be seen that the nasal bones are clearly visible occupying the bridge of the nose and corresponding to its outline. In the photograph of the prisoner the outline of the bridge is faintly seen but there are no nasal bones there. At the base is an irregular mass of bone which corresponds to no normal structure. It looks like an old depressed fracture of which the fragments are cemented together with callus, or new bone."

"What conclusions do you draw from these photographs?"

"The photograph of the prisoner shows a condition which exactly agrees with the description of Andrew Barton, plus the shadowy indication of the mass of wax forming the bridge. Disregarding the wax, which is really a foreign body and no part of the prisoner's person, the photograph is that of a man who is identical in appearance with Andrew Barton, according to the various descriptions of him which have been given in evidence, including the surgeon's certificate referred to by Mrs. Barton."

This completed the examination in chief. As Thorndyke sat down, Mr. Horace Black, Sir Oliver's junior, rose to cross-examine. But he had a thankless task, for Jervis's evidence dealt almost entirely with observed facts which could not be disputed or even questioned; and when the learned counsel mildly hinted at errors of observation or mistaken inferences, Jervis blandly offered him the cast or the photographs, which the counsel smilingly waved away as matters outside the province of a mere lawyer.

The next witness came as a surprise to most of the persons present, including Andrew; for the name that was called was that of Elizabeth Kempster. As the lady stepped into the box and looked nervously at Thorndyke, a certain redness around the eyes and a handkerchief held in the hand suggested that the occasion was, for her, not a happy one. When the preliminaries had been disposed of, Thorndyke opened his examination with the request: "Will you kindly look at the prisoner, Mrs. Kempster, and tell us whether you recognize him?"

The witness cast a deprecating glance at Andrew and replied: "Yes, I recognize him."

"Can you tell us who he is?"

"I don't think I can," she replied. "He looks like my husband, Anthony Kempster, but from what I have just heard, he can't be."

"But, disregarding the evidence that you have heard, who do you say he is?"

"Well, he looks exactly like my husband."

"Have you previously identified him on oath as your husband?"

"Yes. I swore to him as my husband at the police station and in the police court. But," she added with a catch in her voice and an application of her handkerchief to her eyes, "I didn't know that I was letting him in for this."

"When you identified him at the police court, had you at any time any doubt that he was really your husband?"

"Yes. I did think, just for a moment or two, that I might have made a mistake. But then they found in his pocket-book a tradesman's bill addressed to A. Kempster, Esq., and that convinced me that I was not mistaken."

"What was it that caused you that momentary doubt?"

"It was the way he spoke and behaved. He was quite polite to me, and he didn't reproach me for having given information against him. That was not at all like my husband. He was accustomed to talk loud and bluster when he was put out."

"And what about the voice? Was it exactly like your husband's?"

"No, it was rather like, but not exactly. I noticed then that it seemed a little different from what I remembered, and I noticed it again when he was giving evidence."

"I need not ask you whether your husband was in the habit of absenting himself from home, but I should be glad if you could give us some information as to a particular date. Do you know where your husband was on Good Friday in the year 1925?"

"Yes, I remember very well. He was in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison. He came out on Easter Sunday."

Here the judge interposed, though without any great emphasis. "It is hardly necessary for me to remind learned counsel that it is not admissible to refer to previous convictions or delinquencies of the prisoner until the jury have given their verdict."

"That is so, my lord," Thorndyke agreed. "But the submission is that the prisoner is not the person named in the indictment and that the previous convictions of that person do not, therefore, affect him. And I may say that the point which I am trying to elicit is highly material to the defence."

"If you say that the point is material to the defence," the judge rejoined, "I must allow the questions to be put."

Whereupon Thorndyke resumed his examination. "Do you know how long your husband had been in prison?"

"Yes. Six months. I had notice when he was going to be discharged and I went and met him at the prison gate."

"Have you any doubt that the man whom you met at the prison gate was your husband?"

"No, none whatever. I recognized him and he recognized me, and I took him home and gave him a good dinner. Besides I had been present in the police court when he got his sentence."

"At the police court and in the prison, was he known by the name of Anthony Kempster?"

"No. When he was arrested, he gave the name of Septimus Neville, and he stuck to it. They never knew his real name."

"You speak of his real name. Do you know what his real name was, or is?"

"I am not sure. He married me under the name of Anthony Kempster, but I sometimes suspected that that was not his real name. He was very much in the habit of changing his name."

"Did you ever meet with the name of Barton in connection with him?"

"Yes. I think he had a cousin of that name. He was very secret about his letters, as a rule; but I happened to see one that he had left in the pocket of a coat that I had to mend for him, and I saw that it was signed: 'Your affectionate cousin, Andrew Barton.' But, of course, I didn't know that his name was the same as his cousin's."

This concluded Thorndyke's examination; and, as the prosecution had no inkling of the bearing of this witness's evidence on the issue, the cross-examination was tentative and brief. When it was finished and Mrs. Kempster left the box, with a commiserating glance at the prisoner and a final wipe of her eyes, the court, and Andrew, had another surprise; for the witness who followed her was no less a person than Andrew's old friend, Mr. Samuel Montagu.

The new witness, having given his name, deposed that he was a dealer in works of art and that his premises were in New Bond Street. He was a good judge of pictures—he had to be—and his own personal preference was for water-colour paintings, especially interiors and subject pictures of high finish and fine execution. When he had got so far, Thorndyke produced from under his bench a framed and glazed water-colour painting which was conveyed to the witness-box, and handed to the witness; who examined it with profound attention and evident interest. "Have you ever seen that picture before, Mr. Montagu?" Thorndyke asked.

"I have not," was the reply.

"There is, as you see, no signature to the picture. Can you give any opinion as to who the painter was?"

"I can. This picture was painted by Andrew Barton."

"You speak quite positively, as if you were certain."

"I am certain. I was for many years Andrew Barton's agent and dealer. Nearly all of his work passed through my hands, and I have always had a great admiration for it. I have two of his paintings in my permanent gallery and three of them in my private house."

"You feel that you can say quite definitely that this picture was painted by Andrew Barton?"

"Yes. Quite definitely. I have not the shadow of a doubt."

At this point, Thorndyke sat down and Mr. Horace Black rose to cross-examine. At his request, the picture was passed across to him and he examined it critically for a while before beginning. At length, he opened fire on the witness.

"You have stated, as if it were a fact known to you, that this picture was painted by Andrew Barton. Are you not offering us a mere conjecture as a statement of fact?"

"It is not a conjecture," replied Montagu. "It is an expert opinion, and a very expert opinion considering my great experience of Andrew Barton's work. And I feel perfectly certain that it is a correct opinion."

"You are extremely confident. But, looking at this picture, it seems to me that there is nothing very highly distinctive about it. It seems to me to be a picture of the kind that is sometimes called photographic, such as could be produced by any skilful draughtsman."

"The people," said Montagu, "who call highly finished paintings photographic are people who don't know much about either painting or photography. There is no analogy between a work of imagination and a photograph."

"Still, I submit that a simple, realistic style like this could be easily imitated by any competent painter."

"That is not so," said Montagu. "A first-class professional copyist might be able to make a copy of this picture which would deceive any person but an expert. But imitation is quite a different matter from copying. To begin with, every artist has his own manner of thinking and working. Now the imitator would have to drop his own manner—which he couldn't do—and adopt, not only the technique but the mental and emotional character of the man he was imitating. And then, if he was trying to imitate a first-class artist like Andrew Barton, he would have to be a first-class artist, himself. But if he were, he wouldn't want to imitate anybody; and what's more, he couldn't do it, because he would have an unmistakable style of his own."

"And do you say that this simple, literal representation of an old woman making lace shows an unmistakable style which nobody could possibly imitate?"

"I do. I say that any genuine expert could pick out Andrew Barton's work at a glance. Of course, he was not like some of the present-day painters who play monkey tricks to give the art critics something to write about. It was genuine, honest painting done as well as he could do it; and nobody could do it better."

"We are straying away from the issue," said the counsel. "I am not contesting the quality of the work. My point is that you have sworn that this picture was painted by Andrew Barton, a fact which cannot possibly be within your knowledge since you admit that you never saw the picture before. Do you still swear that it was painted by Andrew Barton?"

"I said I felt certain, and I do feel certain; and I am ready to buy it for fifty pounds with the certainty of being able to sell it at a profit."

Here the counsel smilingly abandoned the contest and sat down. The picture was handed up to the judge, who inspected it with deep interest, and Mr. Montagu retired triumphantly from the box.

The next name called was less of a surprise to Andrew, who had been following closely the drift of the evidence; and the name of Martha Pendlewick associated itself naturally with the picture. The old lady stepped up into the box with a bland smile on her face and, having curtsied to the judge—who graciously acknowledged the salutation—turned and saluted the prisoner in the same deferential manner. "I want you, Mrs. Pendlewick," said Thorndyke, "to look at the prisoner and tell us whether you recognize him."

"Lord bless you, yes, sir," said Mrs. Pendlewick. "The poor young gentleman was lodging with me at the very time that the police arrested him. And a nicer and more considerate lodger no one could wish for."

As the old lady was speaking, the judge repeatedly glanced from her to the picture, which he was still holding, and back, apparently comparing the real with the painted figure; and meanwhile he listened attentively to the evidence. Then, at Thorndyke's request, the picture was handed down and presented to the witness, who nodded at it with a smile of friendly recognition. "Have you ever seen that picture before?" Thorndyke asked.

"To be sure I have," she replied with a surprised air. "Why 'tis a likeness of myself a-making bone lace in my own kitchen."

"Do you know who painted that picture?"

"Certainly I do. 'Twas the young gentleman, himself, Mr. Barton."

"Can you tell us when he painted it?"

"He took several days over it. I can't give you the exact date, but he finished it only a few days before the police made that unfortunate mistake."

"Can you say positively that you saw him paint the whole of it from beginning to end?"

"Yes. I saw him begin it on the white paper and draw it with a lead pencil. And then he put on the colours. It took him the best part of a week and he finished it, as I said, a few days before he was took away to prison."

Mrs. Pendlewick's evidence was listened to with intense interest by the Court and spectators alike. But its effect on Mr. Montagu was most remarkable. From his place among the "witnesses in waiting" he craned forward with bulging eyes to stare, first at Mrs. Pendlewick and then at the prisoner. Evidently, he was in a state of complete mental bewilderment. He had sworn that the picture could have been painted by no one but Andrew Barton. But clearly it had been painted since Andrew Barton's death; and it had been painted by the Roman-nosed gentleman in the dock. He could make nothing of it.

His bewilderment did not escape the notice of Thorndyke who, even while he was questioning the witnesses, kept a sharp eye, not only on the jury but also on the spectators. For long experience had taught him that, in practice, the final test of evidence is its effect on the non-expert listener. Now, Mr. Montagu was in a dilemma. The evidence of his eyesight told him that the picture had been painted by Andrew Barton. But it also told him that the man in the dock was not the Andrew Barton whom he had known. Yet there seemed no escape from Mrs. Pendlewick's evidence that the picture had been painted by the man in the dock. It was a puzzle to which he could find no solution.

Thorndyke then noted Mr. Montagu's state of mind and congratulated himself on having taken the precaution to put Montagu in the box before Mrs. Pendlewick; for, evidently, if he had gone into the box after her, his evidence would have been worth nothing. He would never have sworn to the authorship of the picture. The observation, therefore, of Montagu's apparent immunity to the evidence of the change of personality came as a very useful reminder that that evidence had still to be driven home to the jury, and further, that it must be driven home to them through the evidence of their own eyesight.



Fortunately, the next witness gave him the opportunity.

That witness was a quiet, resolute-looking gentleman who gave the name of Martin Burwood and stated that he was an Inspector in the Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police. His duties were connected with the keeping of Criminal Records at Scotland Yard and especially with the Finger-print Department. "When the prisoner was arrested," said Thorndyke, "were his finger-prints taken?"

"They were," replied the inspector.

"Were those finger-prints already known to you?"

"They were not. On receiving them from the prison, I examined them and I then searched the files to see whether we had any duplicates. I found that there were no duplicates in the files."

"What does that prove?"

"It proves that the prisoner has never previously been convicted of any offence."

"Have you in your records any relating to a man named Septimus Neville? And, if so, of what do those records consist?"

"We have the records of Septimus Neville in the files. They consist of descriptive and other particulars, a complete set of finger-prints and two photographs, one in profile and one full face."

"Have you compared the finger-prints of Septimus Neville with those of the prisoner?"

"I have. They are not the same finger-prints."

"Are you quite sure that they are not the same?"

"I am perfectly sure. There is not even any resemblance."

"Is it possible that Septimus Neville and the prisoner can be one and the same person?"

"It is quite impossible."

"Have you compared the record photographs of Septimus Neville with those of the prisoner?"

"I have."

"Do you find anything remarkable about them?"

"I do. The photographs show that the two men are extraordinarily alike. They are so much alike that it is hardly possible to distinguish one from the other. I produce the photographs of both men."

He did so, and they were passed up to the judge, who inspected them with amused surprise. They were then handed round to the jury who, in their turn, viewed them with undisguised astonishment. "You have shown us," said Thorndyke, when he had examined them and passed them on to the other counsel, "four photographs, two of each of these men. They appear exactly alike, but you say that they are the photographs of two different men. Do you swear that they cannot be four photographs of the same man?"

"I do. The finger-prints, which were taken at the same time as the photographs, prove conclusively that they must be two different men."

Thereupon Thorndyke sat down; and Mr. Black, with more valour than discretion, rose to cross-examine. But it was quite futile; for the evidence was unshakeable and the officer was a seasoned and experienced witness. The usual questions were asked as to the possible fallibility of finger-prints, and received the usual answers. As a wind-up, the counsel asked: "Do you swear that it is impossible for two men to have the same, or similar, finger-prints?"

"I swear that it is quite impossible," was the withering reply.

"And I suppose," the judge interposed dryly, "that we may assume it to be impossible for one man to have two different sets of finger-prints?"

The witness grinned and agreed that it was impossible; and the learned counsel, hiding his blushes under an appreciative smile, hurriedly sat down.

Then Thorndyke rose and, having announced that all the witnesses for the defence had now been heard, prepared to address the jury.

---

## **XVI. — THORNDYKE'S ADDRESS TO THE JURY**

"IN view," Thorndyke began, "of the mass of evidence that has been produced and of its remarkable and convincing character, it seemed almost unnecessary that I should address you. But this is a trial on a capital charge and the prisoner's life is forfeit if it should be held to have been proved against him. I cannot, therefore, take any risks of a miscarriage. I shall, however, occupy as little time as possible. You are sworn to give a true verdict according to the evidence; and I shall confine myself to an examination of that evidence and to pointing out what has actually been proved. The prisoner is indicted in the name of Ronald Barton for the murder of Andrew Barton. The words of the indictment, therefore, contain four affirmative propositions:

"1. That a murder has been committed. 2. That the person who was murdered was Andrew Barton. 3. That he was murdered by Ronald Barton. 4. That the prisoner is Ronald Barton.

"Now, in order that a verdict of guilty should be returned against the prisoner, it is necessary that each and all of those propositions should be proved to be true. If any one of them should be proved to be untrue, the case against the prisoner would fall to the ground. I am not referring to any legal questions which might arise in respect of defects in the indictment; on which subject His Lordship will give you the necessary direction. I shall deal with the plain and simple issue, whether the prisoner is or is not guilty of the crime with which he is charged. To enable you to decide on that question, I shall ask you to examine critically those four propositions.

"First, has it been proved that a murder was, in fact, committed? So far as direct evidence is concerned, I can dismiss that question quite summarily; for no direct evidence was produced. You heard Sir Artemus Pope declare definitely that, not only did he find no positive evidence that deceased met his death by homicide, but that he found nothing that tended to suggest or raise any suspicion of homicide. There is, therefore, no direct evidence that any murder was, in fact, committed; and I submit that on that alone, the prisoner is entitled to a verdict of Not Guilty.

"We now come to the indirect evidence; which consists in certain considerations of motive and conduct. The motives that are suggested for the alleged murder are, first, that Ronald Barton stood to gain five hundred pounds by the death of Andrew Barton and, second, that Andrew Barton had in his possession certain valuable property which Ronald coveted and subsequently stole, and which was found in the prisoner's possession when he was arrested. It is further suggested that the conduct of the prisoner was such as to lead to the belief that he had murdered the man whose body was found at Hunstone Gap.

"And now we see the importance of the other three propositions. For if the person whose body was found was not Andrew Barton, then no insurance was payable, and the suggested motive ceases to exist. Again, if the prisoner is not Ronald Barton, he is entitled to no benefit under Andrew's will; and again the motive disappears. Further, if the prisoner is proved to be Andrew Barton, the property found in his possession is his own lawful property, and the other motive disappears.

"Thus, you will see that the issue that you are trying is really the issue of personal identity. The questions which you have to decide are; first, who was the person whose body was found at the foot of the cliff at Hunstone Gap? and, second, who is the prisoner? I will take these questions in their order.

"First, who was the dead man? Now, we have the evidence of Mr. Cooper that two men were seen walking towards Hunstone Gap, and we may accept it as certain that the body which was found there was the body of one of these two men. For with that body was found the clothing of a man who corresponds exactly in appearance to one of them and who is known to have been in Crompton on that day and to have worn similar clothing.

"Of those two men, one had a broken nose and wore spectacles to conceal the disfigurement. The other had a normal and well-shaped Roman nose. The clothing was that of the man with the broken nose. But was the body also his? That is what you have to decide. Now I wish to impress on you the fact, which seems to have been somewhat overlooked, that that body was never identified. Mrs. Barton saw it and was unable to say whether it was or was not the body of her husband, and there was no one else who was competent to give an opinion. The clothes which were found with it were the clothes of Andrew Barton. Of that there can be no doubt. And from that fact the reasonable inference was drawn that the body was that of Andrew Barton. But I repeat that the body itself was not identified.

"Later, that body was re-examined by Sir Artemus Pope and by Dr. Jervis. Sir Artemus was naturally unwilling to pronounce on the identity of the body since his examination was not concerned with that question. But he admitted that the conditions which he found seemed to be irreconcilable with the personal description of Andrew Barton. On the other hand, Dr. Jervis, who examined the body with the express purpose of ascertaining its identity, gave a clear, definite and emphatic statement that the body was that of a man with a normal and uninjured nose; and furthermore, he produced a plaster cast of the dead man's nasal bones, which was shown to you and from which, by comparison with the normal skull which was also shown to you, it was quite evident that the nasal bones of the deceased had never been broken until the chalk block fell on them. On these facts, Dr. Jervis declared positively that the body could not possibly be the body of Andrew Barton. The evidence before you, therefore, of your own eyesight, confirmed by the testimony of an expert witness, is that the body found at Hunstone Gap could not possibly have been the body of Andrew Barton.

"But, so far, we have decided only who he was not. We have now to consider the question, who he was. And here you will see that I am not depending on the prisoner's evidence to decide questions of fact. That evidence is, of course, entitled to the same credit as that of the other witnesses; but I think you will agree with me that it will be more satisfactory if I can show you that the facts can be proved by independent evidence, reserving that of the prisoner to co-ordinate and explain facts that are otherwise difficult to understand.

"Now who was this dead man? We have agreed that he was one of the two men who were seen walking towards Hunstone Gap. All the known facts support this belief. Two men had been bathing in the Gap, for we find the nude body of one and the clothes of the other. The clothes were Andrew Barton's but the body was not his body. Then, since there were no other clothes, it is clear that Andrew must have gone off in the other man's clothes. That he could hardly have done so by deliberate choice but presumably by mistake, suggests that those clothes were, in size and appearance similar to his own. But the two men who were seen together were extremely similar in size and figure and were dressed in almost exactly similar clothes. Thus everything goes to prove that the body was that of one of these two men.

“Now of these two men, one is known, and has been proved to have been Andrew Barton. Who was the other? From the evidence of the only two witnesses who saw the two men, Mr. Cooper and the waiter, Albert Smith, we know that the other man—Andrew Barton’s companion—was extraordinarily like the prisoner; so like that both these witnesses instantly identified the prisoner and swore that he was the man whom they had seen. But the prisoner is indistinguishably like Ronald Barton. So like that Mrs. Barton, when he visited her at her house, had no doubt that he was Ronald Barton, and still had no doubt when she was giving evidence in this court.

“The unavoidable conclusion is that the man who was seen with Andrew Barton must have been Ronald Barton. And this conclusion is strongly supported by the fact that Ronald and Andrew were cousins. It was a natural and probable circumstance that Andrew’s companion should be his cousin Ronald.

“But if the body that was found was that of Andrew’s companion, then it was the body of Ronald Barton; in which case it is unnecessary to point out that the prisoner cannot be Ronald Barton, but must be some other person.

“And now let us approach this question from another direction. The prisoner was arrested, in the first place, in the name of Anthony Kempster on an information sworn by Elizabeth Kempster, who identified him as her husband, Anthony Kempster, and swore to his identity as such. It is, therefore, obvious that the prisoner is either Anthony Kempster or someone who is indistinguishably like him. But who is Anthony Kempster? He is someone who is the indistinguishable double of the prisoner. But the prisoner is indistinguishably like Ronald Barton. Then it follows that Kempster must also be indistinguishably like Ronald Barton. As such indistinguishable likenesses are excessively rare, there is an obvious probability that these three men, Kempster, Ronald and the prisoner, are one and the same person; namely, Ronald Barton. And the fact that Kempster had a cousin named Andrew Barton confirms this probability so far that we may conclude confidently that Kempster was, or is, Ronald Barton.

“The question that we now have to decide is whether or not the prisoner is Anthony Kempster. For if we agree that Kempster is Ronald and the prisoner is Kempster, then the prisoner must be Ronald Barton. But we have evidence that Anthony Kempster served a term of imprisonment under the name of Septimus Neville. There is no doubt that Septimus Neville and Anthony Kempster are one and the same person, for we have the evidence of Kempster’s wife to that effect. But we have the evidence of the officer from the Fingerprint Department that Neville and the prisoner cannot possibly be the same person. The prison photographs show these two men were extraordinarily alike; so much so that it would have been hardly possible to distinguish one from the other. But their finger-prints are totally different. It is therefore certain that the prisoner cannot possibly be Septimus Neville. But since Neville and Kempster are one and the same person, the prisoner cannot be Anthony Kempster; and since Kempster is Ronald Barton, the prisoner cannot be Ronald Barton.

“So far, we have answered the question, Who is the prisoner? from the negative side. We have shown who he cannot be. He cannot be the person in whose name he stands indicted. Now let us approach the question from the positive side. Who can the prisoner be? Who is it possible for him to be?

“He is not Ronald Barton; but he is someone so like Ronald that those who knew Ronald well, including his wife, have mistaken him for Ronald. The prisoner and Ronald have that curious resemblance that is usually associated with what are called ‘identical twins’. Now there is only one person who is known to us who has this strange resemblance to Ronald—his cousin, Andrew. The only possible inference seems, therefore, to be that the prisoner is Andrew Barton. For, if he is not, then he must be some third person who is indistinguishably like the other two. But this is against all reasonable probabilities. It is a sufficiently strange coincidence that we should have this pair of identical twins. It would be outrageous to turn them into identical triplets by postulating the existence of a hypothetical third person who is indistinguishably like them both.

“But we have still more convincing evidence that the prisoner must be Andrew Barton. We know that Andrew suffered from a depressed fracture of the nasal bones. Now, to the eye, the prisoner appears to have a well-shaped Roman nose. But the X-ray photograph shows that he has suffered, and still suffers, from a depressed fracture of the nasal bones; that the symmetrical appearance of the nose is due to a filling of a translucent substance, which must be paraffin wax since there is no other known substance which it can be, which fills up the deep notch caused by the injury and has restored the bridge of the nose. In short, the X-ray photograph shows us a condition of the nasal bones which is known to have existed in Andrew Barton; which was peculiar to him, and by which he could be distinguished from all other human beings. Even alone, it would be enough to identify him as Andrew Barton.

“Thus you see that, without referring to the prisoner’s evidence, the case against him has been completely disproved. With that evidence I do not propose to deal. It would be useless for me to occupy your time by flogging a dead horse. You heard his evidence and it will be fresh in your memories. All that it is necessary for me to do is to point out to you that, strange as was the story that he told you, it was an entirely consistent story and that you have every reason to believe that it was a true story. It did not conflict in any way with any other evidence that you have heard. On the contrary, its truth has been confirmed in the most striking manner by the evidence of all the other witnesses; not only of the witnesses for the defence, but also of those for the prosecution, and even by the able opening address of my learned friend, the counsel for the Crown. I shall, therefore, conclude by reminding you briefly of the facts which have been proved.

“The charge against the prisoner is that he, Ronald Barton, murdered his cousin, Andrew Barton. What has been proved is:

“First, that there is not the slightest reason to believe that any murder was committed by anybody.

"Second, that the body which was found was not the body of Andrew Barton.

"Third, that the prisoner is not Ronald Barton.

"Fourth, that he is Andrew Barton, the person whom he is accused of having murdered.

"Thus the charge set forth in the indictment has been disproved at every point and in every detail. It has been made abundantly and convincingly clear that the prisoner is innocent of the crime named in that charge; and I, accordingly, claim for him a verdict of Not Guilty."

---

## XVII. — THE VERDICT

As Thorndyke sat down, a low murmur pervaded the court, and the judge glanced furtively and a little wistfully towards the jury. After a brief interval, Sir Oliver rose without alacrity and proceeded to polish his eyeglass with a thoughtful and somewhat hesitating air. As Thorndyke had really left him nothing to say, his reply could be little more than an empty formality, and he was apparently considering how he could best dispatch it when the foreman of the jury came to his relief with the intimation that the jury had heard as much as they considered necessary for their purpose. Thereupon, the Clerk of the court rose and inquired whether they had agreed on their verdict; to which the foreman replied that they had. The Clerk then put the momentous question: "Do you find the prisoner Guilty or Not Guilty?"

"Not Guilty," was the reply, delivered with some emphasis; and even as the words were spoken, the court resounded with thunders of applause and Molly buried her face in her handkerchief. After a few moments, the judge held up his hand and the applause instantly died away, giving place to a profound silence. Then His Lordship leaned back in his chair and, regarding Andrew with a quizzical smile, addressed him thus:

"Mr. Barton—I can safely address you by that name, though I will not venture to be more particular—the jury have found you to be Not Guilty of the crime with which you were charged. I consider it a very proper verdict and I concur unreservedly. You are accordingly discharged and are free to go your ways; and I hope that your troubles are now at an end. There are a few loose strands which you will have to gather up with the Insurance Society, and perhaps with the Probate Court; but they will probably present no serious difficulties. But, before you depart, I will counsel you most earnestly, the next time you are accused of murder or any other crime, to seek legal assistance rather more promptly than you did on the last occasion."

He concluded with a smile and a friendly nod; the gate of the dock was thrown open; the officer at Andrew's side wished him "good luck", and the prisoner stepped down to the floor of the court where Molly was waiting for him. While the judge had been speaking, she had risen and stolen across to the dock; and now, as he stepped down, she raised her eyes to his and silently held out her hands. Both were too overwhelmed for speech, or even to be conscious of the multitude of inquisitive eyes that were eagerly watching them. Passively, they allowed themselves to be shepherded by the discreet Jervis—who was acutely conscious of the curious though sympathetic spectators—out of the court and into a small room that opened off from the great corridor. Only then, when Jervis had slipped away with an excuse, did Molly trust herself to speak. "Oh, Andy!" she exclaimed shakily, "is it really you? Can it really be you, or is this only a tantalizing dream?"

"It isn't a dream, Molly dear," he replied. "It is an awakening from a nightmare; a nightmare of my own creating. I am the very prince of idiots. Say your husband is a fool, Molly."

She laughed a little hysterically. "Shall I?" she said. "Then I will. Andy, you have, really and truly, behaved like a—perfect—old—DONKEY! But never mind that, darling. Only a few hours ago, I was a miserable widow. And now—"

She broke off with a sob and, laying her head on his shoulder, wept quietly and happily.

At this moment the door opened and Jervis entered, accompanied by Thorndyke, bearing the attache case and the picture and followed by Mrs. Kempster. The latter, still red-eyed and somewhat emotional, advanced shyly and addressed herself to Andrew: "I have come," said she, "to ask for your forgiveness for all the mischief I have made. I never supposed —"

"Forgiveness!" interrupted Molly, seizing both her hands impulsively. "Why, you dear creature, you have been our good angel! It was you who broke the spell and brought us all back to realities. We can never be grateful enough to you. And don't forget that you are our cousin."

Here the door opened again to admit two more visitors; none other than Sir Oliver and his junior, Mr. Black. They both shook Andrew's hand heartily, and Sir Oliver, having carefully inserted his eyeglass, spoke for them both. "We congratulate you most warmly, Mr. Barton. You have given us a magnificent entertainment and we glory in our defeat. Your champion has displayed his usual invincible form; and we, the Philistines, have been smitten hip and thigh. But NOT with the jawbone of an ass."

---

THE END

**THE PENROSE MYSTERY**  
**BOOK I**  
**BEING THE NARRATIVE OF ERNEST LOCKHART, BARRISTER AT LAW**  
**I. — A GOSSIPY CHAPTER IN WHICH COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE THEM**

I have been asked to make my contribution to the curious history of the disappearance of Mr. Daniel Penrose, and I accordingly do so; but not without reluctance and a feeling that my contribution is but a retailing of the smallest of small beer. For the truth is that of that strange disappearance I knew nothing at the time, and, even now, my knowledge is limited to what I have learned from those who were directly concerned in the investigation. Still, I am assured that the little that I have to tell will elucidate the accounts which the investigators will presently render of the affair, and I shall, therefore, with the above disclaimer, proceed with my somewhat trivial narrative.

Whenever my thoughts turn to that extraordinary case, there rises before me the picture of a certain antique shop in a by-street of Soho. And quite naturally; for it was in that shop that I first set eyes on Daniel Penrose, and it was in connection with that that my not very intimate relations with Penrose existed.

It was a queer little shop; an antique shop in both senses. For not only were the goods that it contained one and all survivors from the past, but the shop was an antique in itself. Indeed, it was probably a more genuine museum piece than anything in its varied and venerable stock, with its small-paned window bulging in a double curve—as shop-fitters could make them in the eighteenth century—and glazed with the original crown glass, greenish in tone and faintly streaked, like an oyster-shell, with concentric lines. I dated the shop at the first half of the eighteenth century, basing my estimate on a pedimented stone tablet at the corner of the street; which set forth the name, “Nassau Street in Whetten’s Buildings,” and the date, 1734. It was a pleasant and friendly shop, though dingy; dignified and reticent, too, for the fascia above the window bore only, in dull gilt letters, the name of the proprietor, “D. Parrott.”

For some time I remained under the belief that this superscription referred to some former incumbent of the premises whose name was retained for the sake of continuity, since the only persons whom I encountered in my early visits were Mrs. Pettigrew, who appeared to manage the business, and, more rarely, her daughter, Joan, a strikingly good-looking girl of about twenty; a very modern young lady, frank, friendly and self-possessed, quite well informed on the subject of antiques, though openly contemptuous of the whole genus.

Presently, however, I discovered that Parrott, so far from being a mere disembodied name, was a very real person. He was, in fact, the mainspring of the establishment, for he was not only the buyer—and an uncommonly good buyer—but he had quite a genius for converting mere dismembered carcasses into hale and hearty pieces of furniture. Somewhere in the regions behind the shop he had a workshop where, with the aid of an incredibly aged cabinet-maker named Tims, he carried out the necessary restorations. And they were real restorations, not fakes; honest repairs carried out for structural reasons and left open and undisguised. I came to have a great respect for Mr. Parrott.

My first visit was undoubtedly due to the ancient shop-front. But when I crossed the narrow street to examine it and discovered in the window a court cupboard and a couple of Jacobean chairs, I decided to avail myself of the courteous invitation, written on a card, to enter and inspect and indulge a mild passion for ancient furniture.

There were three persons in the shop; a comely woman of about fifty, who greeted me with a smile and a little bow, and thereafter took no further notice of me; a stout, jovial, rather foxy-looking gentleman who was inspecting a trayful of old silver; and a small clerical-looking gentleman who appeared to be disembowelling a bloated verge watch and prying into its interior through a watchmaker’s eye-glass, which stuck miraculously in his eye, giving him somewhat the appearance of a one-eyed lobster.

“Now,” said the stout gentleman, “that’s quite an elegant little milk-jug, in my opinion. Don’t you agree with me, Mrs. Pettigrew?”

I looked at him in some surprise. For the thing was not a milk-jug. It was a coffee-pot. However, Mrs. Pettigrew did not contest the description. She merely agreed that the shape was pleasant and graceful.

“I am glad, Mrs. Pettigrew,” said the stout gentleman, regarding the coffee-pot with his head on one side, “that you regard the lactiferous receptacle with favour. I am encouraged and confirmed. The next question is that of the date of its birthday. I am reluctant to interrupt the erudite Mr. Polton in his studies of the internal anatomy of the Carolean warming-pan, but I have no skill in galactophorous genealogies. May I venture?”

He held out the coffee-pot engagingly towards the small gentleman, who thereupon laid the watch down tenderly, removed the eye-glass from his eye and smiled. And I found Mr. Polton’s smile almost as astonishing as the other gentleman’s vocabulary. It was the most amazingly wrinkly smile that I have ever seen, but yet singularly genial and pleasant. And here I may remark that this amiable little gentleman was for some time a profound mystery to me. I could make nothing of him. I could not place him socially or otherwise. By his appearance, he might—in different raiment—have been a dignitary of the Church. His deferential manner suggested some superlative kind of manservant, but his hands and his comprehensive and inexhaustible knowledge of the products of the ancient crafts hinted at the dealer or expert collector. It was only after I had known him some months that the mystery was resolved through the medium of a legal friend, as will be related in due course. To return to the present incident, Mr. Polton took the coffee-pot in his curiously prehensile hands, beamed on it approvingly, and, having stuck his eye-glass in his eye, examined the hall-mark and the maker’s “touch.”

"It was made," he reported, "in 1765 by a man named John Hammond, who had a shop in Water Lane, Fleet Street. And an excellent tradesman he must have been."

"There, now!" exclaimed the stout gentleman. "Just listen to that! It's my belief that Mr. Polton carries in his head a complete directory of all the artful craftsmen and crafty artists who ever made anything, with the dates of every piece they made. Don't you agree, Mrs. Pettigrew?"

"Yes, indeed!" she replied. "His knowledge is perfectly wonderful. Perhaps," she added, addressing Mr. Polton, "you can tell us something about that watch. It is said to have belonged to Prince Charlie, and, of course, that would add to its value if it were really the fact. What do you think, Mr. Polton?"

"Well, ma'am," was the cautious reply, "I see no reason why it should not have belonged to him, if he was not a very punctual gentleman. It was made in Edinburgh in 1735, and there is a crucifix engraved inside the outer case. I don't know what the significance of that may be."

"Neither do I," said the lady. "What do you think, Mr. Penrose?"

"I should say," replied the stout gentleman, "that the evidence is conclusive. Charles Edward, being a Scotchman, would have a Scottish watch; and being a papistical Romanist would naturally have a crucifix engraved in it. Q.E.D."

Mrs. Pettigrew smiled indulgently, and, as Mr. Penrose had indicated his adoption of the coffee-pot, she proceeded to swathe it in tissue-paper and make it up into a presentable parcel; and, meanwhile, I browsed round the premises and inspected those specimens of the stock which were more particularly within my province. But it was not a very peaceful inspection, for Mr. Penrose persisted in accompanying me and expounding and commenting upon the various pieces in terms which I found rather distracting. For Mr. Penrose, as the reader has probably observed, was a wag, and his waggery took the form of calling things by quaintly erroneous names and of using odd and facetious circumlocutions; which was all very well at first and was even mildly amusing, but it very soon became tiresome. A constant effort was necessary to arrive at what he really meant.

However, in the end, I lighted upon a bible-box of dark-brown oak, pleasantly carved and bearing the incised date, 1653, and, as the little chest rather took my fancy and the price marked on the attached ticket seemed less than its value, I closed with Mrs. Pettigrew, and, having paid for my purchase and given the address to which it was to be sent, took my departure. And, as I strolled at a leisurely pace in the direction of Wardour Street, I reflected idly on my late experience, and especially on the three rather unusual persons whose acquaintance I had just made. I am not in general a curious man, but I found in each of these three persons matter for speculation. There was Mrs. Pettigrew, for instance. Admirably as she played her part in the economy of the shop, she did not completely fit her surroundings. One is accustomed nowadays to finding women of a very superior class serving in shops. But not quite of Mrs. Pettigrew's type. She gave me the impression of being very definitely a lady; and I found myself speculating on the turn of the wheel of Fortune that had brought her there.

Then there was the enigmatical Mr. Polton with his strangely prehensile hands and his astonishing memory for hall-marks. And there was the facetious Penrose. And at this point, being then about halfway along Gerrard Street, the subject of my reflections overtook me and announced himself characteristically by expressing the hope that I was pleased with my bacon cupboard. I replied that I was quite pleased with my purchase and had thought it decidedly cheap.

"So did I," said he. "But our psittacoid friend has the wisdom to temper the breeze to the shorn collector."

"Our psittacoid friend?" I repeated.

"I refer to the tropic bird who presides over the museum of domestic archaeology," he explained, and, as I still looked at him questioningly, he added, by way of elucidation: "The proprietor of the treasure-house of antiquities in which you discovered the repository of ancestral piety."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "You mean Mr. Parrott."

"Certainly!" he replied. "Did I not say so?"

"Perhaps you did," I admitted, with a slightly sour laugh; at which he smiled his peculiar, foxy smile, looking at me out of the corners of his eyes, and evidently pleased at having "stumped" me. It was a pleasure that he must have enjoyed pretty often.

"I take it," he resumed, after a short pause, "that you, like myself, are a devotee of St. Margaret Pie?"

I considered this fresh puzzle and decided that the solution was "magpie"; and apparently I was right as he did not correct me.

"No," I replied, "there is nothing of the magpie about me. I don't accumulate old things for the sake of forming a collection. I buy old furniture and use it. One must have furniture of some kind, old or new, and I prefer the old. It was made by men who knew all about it and who enjoyed making it and took their time. It is much more companionable to live with than new machine-made stuff, turned out by the thousand by people who don't care a straw what it is like. But my object is quite utilitarian. I am no collector."

"Ah!" said he, "that isn't my case. I am a convinced disciple of the great John Daw, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, a hoarder of miscellaneous treasure. Nothing comes amiss to me, from a blue diamond to a Staffordshire dog."

"Have you no special fancy?" I asked.

"I have a special fancy for any relic of the past that I can lay hands on," he replied. "But perhaps, like the burglars, I have a particular leaning towards precious stones—those and the other kind of stones—the siliceous variety—with which our impolite forefathers used to fracture one another's craniums."

"Your collection must take up a lot of space," I remarked.

"It does," said he. "That's the trouble. John Daw's nest has a tendency to overflow. And still they come. I'm always finding fresh treasures."

"By the way," said I, "where do you find the stuff?"

"Oh, call it not stuff," he protested, regarding me with a foxy smile. "I spoke of treasures. As to where I discover them; well, well, surely there is a mine for silver and a place for gold where they refine it; a place also—many places, mostly cottage parlours, that no bird of prey knoweth, neither hath the travelling dealer's eye seen them, where may be found ancestral Wrotham pots and Staffordshire figures, to say nothing of venerable tickers and crocks from far Cathay. These the wise collector makes a note of—and locks up the note."

I was half amused and half exasperated by his evasive verbiage and his unabashed, and quite unnecessary caution. A mighty secretive gentleman, this, I reflected; and proceeded to fire a return shot.

"In effect," said I, "you go rooting about in cottage parlours, snapping up rustic heirlooms, probably at a fraction of their value."

"Undoubtedly," he agreed, with a snigger. "That is the essence of the sport. I once, in a labourer's cottage, picked up a genuine 'Vicar and Moses' by Ralph Wood for five shillings. But that was a windfall."

"It wasn't much of a windfall for the owner," I remarked.

"He was quite satisfied," said Penrose, "and so was I. What more would you have? But windfalls are not frequent, and when they fail I fall back on the popinjay."

"The pop—Oh, you mean Mr. Parrott?"

"Exactly," said he. "Our friend Monsieur le Perroquet. Actually, I let him do most of the rooting about. He knows all the ropes, and, as we agreed, he doesn't demand payment through the proboscis."

"No," said I, "he doesn't appear to be grasping, to judge by the price of my own purchase; and I gather that you have got most of your stuff—I beg pardon; treasure—from him."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," he replied. "Mere purchase from a dealer is a dull affair, though necessary. But one wants the sport as well, the pleasure of the chase, not to mention those of the pick and shovel."

"The pick and shovel!" I repeated. "That sounds as if you did a little in the resurrection line. You are not a tomb-robber, I trust?"

I was, of course, only jesting, but he took me up quite seriously.

"But why not? We may grant the impropriety of disturbing the repose of the freeholders in Finchley Cemetery. Besides, they have nothing but their bones, which, at present, are not collector's pieces. But our rude forefathers had a foolish—but, for us, convenient—habit of taking their goods and chattels to bed with them, so to speak. Now, a man's title to his goods, after his decease, does not extend to an indefinite period. When a deceased gentleman has enjoyed the possession of his chattels for a couple of thousand years or more, I think he ought to be satisfied. His title has lapsed by the effluxion of time; and my title, by right of discovery, has come into being. The expression 'tomb-robber' is not applicable to an archaeological excavator. Don't you agree?"

I admitted that excavation for scientific purposes seemed to be a permissible proceeding, though I had secret doubts as to whether the expression was properly applicable to his activities. He did not impress me as a scientific investigator.

"But," I asked, "what sort of things do you turn up when you go a-digging?"

"All sorts of things," he replied. "Mostly preposterous stone substitutes for cutlery, decayed and fragmentary pots and pans, with an occasional—very occasional—torque or brooch and portions of the deceased proprietor. But I leave those. I don't collect proprietors."

"And I suppose," said I, "that when you find a gold or silver ornament you notify the coroner of the discovery of treasure trove?"

"That," he replied with his queer, foxy smile, "is indispensable. But you seem to be interested in my miscellaneous gleanings. I wonder if you would care to cast a supercilious eye on my little hoard. I don't often display my treasures because your regular collector is usually a man of one idea—indefinitely repeated—and he is disappointed to find that I am not. But you, like myself, are more eclectic in taste and I should have great pleasure in introducing you to Aladdin's Cave, if you would care to inspect its contents."

I was not, really, particularly interested, but yet I was faintly curious as to the nature of his "hoard." It sounded like a very queer collection, and might include some objects of real interest. Besides which, the man, himself, despite his exasperating verbosity and obscurities of speech, rather attracted me. Accordingly, I accepted his invitation, and, when we had exchanged visiting cards and arranged the day and hour of my visit, we separated; he shaping a course in a westerly

direction and I bearing east, towards my chambers in Lincoln's Inn.

---

## II. — ALADDIN'S CAVE

Mr. Penrose's residence or John Daw's Nest, as he would have called it, was situated in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, and, what is more, it was one of the few remaining original houses, dating back to the time when residents could look out of their windows through the open end of the square, across the meadows to the heights of Highgate. Appropriately to the house of a collector of antiquities, its door was garnished with a pair of link-extinguishers, as well as with a fine brass knocker and an old-fashioned bell-handle.

A flourish on the knocker, reinforced by a hearty tug at the bell-pull, resulted in the opening of the door and the appearance thereof of an elderly man of depressed and nephritic aspect, with puffy eyelids and a complexion like that of a suet pudding. He received the announcement of my identity with resignation, and, having admitted me, took my hat and stick and silently introduced me to a small room, the window of which commanded a view of the leaden statue of Her late Majesty, Queen Anne. At this window I had taken up a position from which I could contemplate that rather neglected example of an extinct art when the door opened briskly and Mr. Penrose entered.

"Ha!" said he, "I see you are admiring the mimic rendering of our proverbially deceased twenty-shilling Lady."

"I am afraid," said I, as we shook hands, "that your paraphrase fails in precision. You would have to pay thirty shillings to-day to buy a sovereign, if you could find one."

"There," he retorted, "is exemplified the pedantic accuracy of the legal mind. But I spoke in terms of the past. The aureous reality is now as dead as madame herself. But what think you of that masterpiece of the plumber's art? I rather like it; and it is the genuine metal. I have tried it with my pocket-knife. To tell you a little secret, I had thought of making an offer for it."

"Do you mean," I exclaimed, "that you want to buy it?"

"If it should come into the market," he replied. "Unfortunately it has not, up to the present."

"But what on earth could you do with a leaden statue?" I protested.

"Put it in my gallery," he replied, "if the floor would stand it."

"You can take it," said I, "that it would not. Why, the thing must weigh tons. Besides, it is much better in the place that it was made to occupy and which it does really adorn in its rather mouldy way."

"In short," said he, "you think me a bit of a vandal" (which was the literal truth). "Well, you needn't be alarmed. It is safe from my acquisitive instincts for the present."

He turned to a nondescript piece of furniture, half cupboard and half armoire, and, opening a door, took out a decanter and two glasses, which he placed on the table.

"Before we venture into Aladdin's Cave," said he, taking out the stopper of the decanter, "shall we fortify ourselves with a morsel of cake?"

He looked at me interrogatively as he picked up the decanter. Of course, there was no cake visible; but my growing skill in interpreting his verbal puzzles enabled me to diagnose the dark-brown wine as Madeira.

Without giving me time to refuse, he filled the two glasses, and, having handed me one, proceeded in a very deliberate and workmanlike fashion to empty the other.

"The vintages of the Fortunate Isles," said he, as he refilled his glass, "have always commended themselves to me, rivalled only in my affection by the product of the vines of Xeres" (he pronounced the name in the Spanish manner, "Hereth," as a slight additional precaution against being too readily understood), "preferably the elderly and fuscous variety."

I noted the fact—while he filled his third glass—as explaining the vinous aroma which I had noticed in Parrott's shop as apparently exhaling from his person. It turned out later to be not without significance. Madeira and old brown sherry by no means share the innocuousness of what Penrose would probably have called "the celestial herb."

When I had resolutely declined a refill, he reluctantly returned the decanter to its abiding-place and locked the door thereof.

"And now," said he, "we shall proceed to explore the secret recesses of the cavern."

He conducted me out into the fine, spacious hall, from which a noble staircase gave access to the upper floors. In one swift glance I noted that the appointments were not worthy of the architecture, for the furniture—of which there was a good deal too much—consisted of undeniable "dentist's oak," and there were one or two shabby-looking busts, the obvious plaster of which had been varnished by some optimist in the hope that they might thereby be mistaken for bronze. But I had little opportunity for detailed inspection, for my host threw open, with something of a flourish, an adjacent door and motioned to me to enter; which I did, and found myself in one of a pair of great, lofty communicating rooms, and forthwith began my tour of inspection.



I had expected to find Mr. Penrose's collection something of an oddity, but the reality far exceeded my expectations. It was an amazing hoard. Alike, in respect of matter and manner, it was astonishing and bewildering. Of the ordinary collector's fastidious selection, prim tidiness and orderly arrangement there was no trace. The things that jostled one another on the crowded shelves and tables were in every respect incongruous; for, on the one hand, rare and valuable pieces, such as the "Vicar and Moses" and a fine slip-ware tyg, stood cheek by jowl with common, worthless oddments, and, on the other, the objects themselves were devoid of any sort of kinship or relation. The "Vicar," for instance, was accompanied by a broken Roman pot, a few worthless fragments of Samian ware, a dried crab covered with acorn barnacles and half a dozen horse-brasses; while the tyg had as its immediate neighbour a Sheffield coffee-pot, a Tunbridge-ware wafer-box, a pewter candlestick and one or two flint implements.

The confusion and disorder that prevailed were perfectly astounding. These fine old rooms, with such splendid possibilities, suggested nothing more or less than the store of some curio dealer or the premises of an auctioneer on the day preceding a sale of miscellaneous property. I ventured tentatively to comment on the lack of arrangement.

"You have certainly got a very remarkable collection," said I, "but don't you think that its interest would be increased if you adopted some sort of classification? Here, for instance, is a wine-glass, a Jacobite glass, apparently."

"Not apparently," he objected. "Actually. An undoubtedly genuine piece. An appropriate memorial, too. 'Charlie loved good ale and wine.'"

"So he did, as 'his nose doth show' in the portraits. But why put this glass next to that barbaric-looking pot? There is no relation whatever between the two things."

"There is the relation of unlikeness," he replied. "And don't disparage that rare and precious pot. It is extremely ancient. Prehistoric. Neolithic, I believe, is the correct word."

"But why not put all the prehistoric pots together instead of mixing them up with table-glass and Scandinavian carvings?"

"That would seem a dull arrangement," said he. "You would lose the effect of variety, the thrill of unexpectedness. How delightful, for instance, after considering this book of hours and this highly ornate sternutatorium"—he indicated a handsome tortoise-shell snuff-box—"to come upon these siliceous relics of the childhood of the race—also neolithic, I believe—the products of my own fossatory activities."

The "relics" referred to consisted of half a dozen rough flint nodules which looked as if they might have been gathered from a road-mender's heap. They may have been genuine flint implements, but they were certainly not neolithic. No one with the most elementary knowledge of stone implements could have supposed that they were. But my host's easy-going acceptance of them, and his indifference as to the actual facts, brought home to me a state of mind at which I wondered more and more as I examined this amazing collection.

For, in the first place, Mr. Penrose displayed the most complete and comprehensive ignorance of "antiques" of every kind. He knew no more of them than their names, and he frequently got those wrong. But not only was he ignorant. He was quite indifferent. He seemed to be totally devoid of interest in the individual things which he had accumulated; and the question that I asked myself was what earthly object he could have had in making this enormous and miscellaneous collection. Apparently, he was possessed by an insatiable acquisitiveness, with no other motive behind it. Mere possession seemed to be the object of his desire; and with mere possession he appeared to be satisfied. Not without reason had he likened himself to "The Great John Daw."

My long tour of inspection came at last to an end. I had examined the collection very thoroughly, not only to please my host—though he was evidently gratified and flattered by the interest that I displayed in his "hoard"—but because it contained, mingled with a good deal of rubbish, many curious and beautiful objects that invited examination. The last piece that I inspected was an ancient gold brooch, richly decorated with gilt filigree work and set with garnets. I lifted it tenderly from the dusty scrap of paper (marked in pencil with the number 963) on which it rested and carried it to the window to look at it in a better light.

"This is a very fine piece of work, Mr. Penrose," I remarked.

"Ha!" said he, "the papistical fibula commends itself. I am glad you like it."

"A Roman fibula!" I exclaimed in surprise. "I should have taken it for a Saxon brooch."

"You may be right," he admitted; "in fact, I am inclined to think that you are. At any rate, it is one or the other."

"But," I protested, "surely you keep some sort of record. I see that the pieces are numbered. Haven't you a catalogue?"

"To be sure I have," he replied. "Excellent idea! We'll get out the Domesday Book and see which of us is right."

He pulled out the drawer of a table and produced therefrom a manuscript book which he opened and began to turn over the leaves. Still holding the brooch, I stepped across to him and looked over his shoulder. And then I got a fresh surprise, though I ought to have been prepared for something unusual. For if the collection was eccentric, the catalogue was positively fantastic. It seemed to be (and probably was) expressly designed to be as completely unintelligible as possible. The brief entries, scribbled illegibly in pencil, were apparently worded in Mr. Penrose's peculiar, cryptic dialect, and, for the most part, I could make nothing of them. Running my eye down the pages, I deciphered with difficulty such entries as: "Up +. Mudlarks," "Sammy. Pot sand. Sinbad," "Funereal flower-pot, Julie-Polly," "Carver, Jul. Pop."

I stood gazing in speechless astonishment at this amazing record while Penrose slowly turned the leaves, glancing slyly at me from time to time, apparently to see how I took it. At length—at unnecessary length—Number 963 was found; but it was not very illuminating—to me—for it consisted only of the laconic statement, “Sweeney’s resurrection.” Apparently, however, it conveyed something to him, for he said, “Yes, you are right. I recollect now.” But he did not enter into any particulars.

I laid the brooch down on its slip of paper and began to think of departing; and meanwhile he looked at me with a very odd expression; an expression of mingled anxiety and hesitation.

“I have to thank you, Mr. Penrose,” said I, “for a very pleasant and profitable afternoon. It was very good of you to let me see all your treasures. I have seen them all, I suppose?”

He did not reply for a few moments, but continued to look at me in that queer, anxious, irresolute fashion. Suddenly, his hesitation gave way and he burst out in low, impressive tones, in a manner of the deepest secrecy:

“The fact is that you haven’t. There is another little hoard, which I don’t show to any one, but just float over in secret. I don’t even mention its existence. But, somehow I feel tempted to make an exception in your case. What do you say? Would you like to have a peep at the contents of Bluebeard’s chamber?”

“This sounds rather alarming,” said I. “Were there not certain penalties for undue curiosity?”

“I hold you immune from those,” he replied. “Only I stipulate that this private view shall be a really private view, to be spoken of to nobody. I can rely on you to keep my secret?”

I did not much like this. Like most lawyers, I am a cautious man, and cautious men do not care to be made the unprivileged repositories of other people’s secrets. But I could hardly refuse; and when I had, rather reluctantly, given the required undertaking, he moved off towards a door in a corner of the room and I followed, wondering anxiously what he was going to show me and whether it would commit me to any unlawful knowledge.

The room into which he led me—and of which he closed and bolted the door—was a smallish apartment, at one end of which was a massive mahogany cupboard or armoire. When he had unlocked this and thrown open the doors, there was revealed the steel front of a large safe or small strong-room. Apparently the safe-key was not in his bunch, for he returned the latter to his pocket and then, retiring a few paces, stood with his back to me while he dived into some secret recesses of his clothing. In a few moments he turned round, rather red from his exertions, and stepped up to the safe with the key in his hand, while I watched with growing curiosity.

The lock clicked softly, a turn of the handle withdrew the bolts and the ponderous door swung open, disclosing a range of shallow drawers which occupied the whole of the interior. My host, first withdrawing the key and slipping it into his waistcoat pocket, proceeded to pull out the top drawer and carry it to a table under the window. And then I breathed a sigh of relief. There was nothing incriminating, after all. The drawer was simply filled with jewellery, looking, indeed, like a tray from a jeweller’s window. My host’s secrecy was naturally and reasonably explained by the value of his treasures and their highly portable and negotiable character.

I looked over the contents of the drawer with keen interest, for I am rather fond of gems, though I have no special knowledge of them. My host, too, showed a pleasure and enthusiasm in regard to the things, themselves, which contrasted strikingly with the indifference that he had displayed towards the general collection.

Yet, even here, there was no glimmer of connoisseur-ship. His manner suggested mere miserly gloating; and his ignorance of these beautiful baubles astonished me. It was suggested by the absence of any classification, by the way in which totally unrelated stones were jumbled together, and the suggestion was confirmed by his comments. For instance, in this first drawer were two cat’s-eyes placed side by side; but they belonged to totally different categories. One, a dark yellowish-green stone with a bright band of bluish light, was a cymophane or true cat’s-eye—a chrysoberyl. The other, a charming stone of the hue known as “honey yellow,” was a quartz cat’s-eye and should have been placed with the other quartz gems. I ventured to comment on the fact, referring to the cymophane as a chrysoberyl, but he interrupted me with the protest:

“Chrysoberyl! Violin-bows, my dear sir! Gall not the optic of the fair Tabitha a chrysoberyl.”

As he obviously knew—and cared—nothing of the actual characters of precious stones, I did not pursue the question, but continued my inspection of the really interesting and remarkable collection. The admiration that I expressed evidently gave him considerable pleasure and he also made admiring comments from time to time, though without much appearance of taste or discrimination. But his enthusiasm did really wake up when he brought forth the third drawer, which was devoted entirely to opals, and as these beautiful gems are special favourites of mine, we examined them with sympathetic pleasure.

It was a really magnificent collection, and what rather surprised me (considering the collector’s comprehensive ignorance) was its genuinely representative character. There were specimens of every variety of the gem. Of the noble, or precious, opal a long range of examples was shown, of all the varied rainbow hues and of various sizes up to nearly an inch in diameter; some in plain mounts but most of them encircled with borders of rose diamonds or brilliants. There were harlequin opals, Mexican fire opals, glowing like blazing coals, black opals, a large series of the common, non-prismatic form, of various hues, and one or two examples of the dark, pitchy “root” or matrix streaked and speckled with points of prismatic colour.

But the gem of the collection, in interest if not in beauty, was a cameo, cut in a disc of precious opal embedded in its dark matrix. The oval slab of matrix, carrying the glowing cameo, was worked into a pendant with a broad border of small rose diamonds and coloured stones forming the design of a rose, a thistle and a central star, while, at the bottom, worked in tiny diamonds, was the word "Fiat"; which, with the engraved portrait of a middle-aged gentleman in a wig, gave a clue to the significance of the jewel.

As I pored over this curious memorial, Penrose watched me with a smile of evident gratification.

"My favourite child," he remarked, taking it out of its compartment and handing it to me, together with a magnifying glass. "Just look at the detail of the face."

I examined it through the lens and was greatly impressed by the perfection of the modelling on so minute a scale.

"Yes," I said, "it is quite a wonderful piece of work. One gets the impression that it might be a really good portrait. And now I know," I added, as I returned the jewel to him, "why you swore me to secrecy."

He paused with the trinket in his hand, looking at me with a distinctly startled expression.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Well," I replied, "you must admit that it is a rather incriminating object to have in your possession."

He gazed at me uneasily, almost with an appearance of alarm, and rejoined: "I don't understand you. How, incriminating?"

I chuckled with mischievous satisfaction. For an inveterate joker, he seemed decidedly "slow in the uptake."

"Doesn't it occur to you," I replied, "that a portrait of James Francis Edward, the King over the water, cherished secretly by a presumably loyal subject of His Majesty George the Fifth, tends to suggest highly improper political sentiments? I call it rank sedition."

"Oh, I see what you mean," said he, with an uneasy laugh, apparently relieved—and slightly annoyed—at my schoolboy jest, "but sedition of that kind is a trifle threadbare in these days."

He returned the jewel to its place in the drawer and carried the latter back to the safe. As he slid it in, he remarked:

"That's the last of the gem collection. The other drawers contain coins. You may as well see them, too."

I went through the coin collection and was rather surprised at its range, for it included ancient coins, Greek, Roman, Gaulish and British and English coins from the Middle Ages down to the late spade guineas. But all that remains in my memory concerning them is that the different periods seemed to be mixed up, with an almost total lack of order, and that there appeared to be an abnormal proportion of gold coins. When the last of the drawers had been examined and returned and the safe and its enclosing cupboard had been closed and locked, I began once more to think of taking my leave. But my host pressed me to stay and take a cup of tea with him, and, when I had accepted his invitation, he conducted me back through the large gallery to the room into which I had first been shown. Here, the melancholy manservant—who answered to the name of Kickweed—presently brought us tea and drew a couple of arm-chairs up to the table.

"This collection of yours," I remarked, as my host poured out the tea, "must represent a large amount of sunk capital."

"I hardly regard it as sunk," he replied, "seeing that I have the use and enjoyment of my treasures; but the collection is worth a lot of money—at least, I hope it is. It has cost a lot."

"So I should suppose," said I; "and it must cost you something quite substantial in the matter of insurance."

"Ah!" said he, "I am glad you raised that question. For the fact is that the collection is not insured at all. I have intended to go into the matter, but there are certain difficulties that have put me off. Now, I dare say you know a good deal about insurance."

"I know something about the legal aspects," I replied, "and such knowledge as I possess is at your disposal. You certainly ought to be secured against what might be a very heavy loss. What are the difficulties that you refer to?"

"Well," he answered in a low voice, leaning across the table, "I don't want to go about proclaiming myself as the owner of a priceless collection. Might arouse interest in the wrong quarter, you see. And as to the gems, as I told you, they are a secret hoard the existence of which I disclose to nobody excepting yourself. You are the only person to whom I have shown them."

"But," I protested, "somebody must have sold them to you and must be aware that you have them."

"They know that I have—or had—the individual jewels that they sold me, but they don't know that I have a great and valuable collection. And I don't want them to know; but that is the difficulty about the insurance. Before I could insure the collection, I should have to get it valued; and the valuer would have to see the gems; and then the cat would be out of the bag. At least, that is what I suppose. Perhaps I am wrong. Could I effect an insurance for a certain definite sum without calling in a valuer?"

"You mean," I replied, "on a declaration that you had certain property of a certain value? No. I think a Company would want evidence that the property insured actually existed and was of the value alleged; and in the event of a fire or a burglary, they certainly would not pay on property alleged to have been lost but which had never been proved to exist. But I

think you are raising imaginary difficulties. You could stipulate that the valuation should be a strictly confidential transaction. Remember that the company's interests are the same as your own. If they insure you against burglary, they won't want you to be burgled."

"No, that is true," he admitted. "And you think I could rely on the secrecy of the valuer?"

"I have no doubt of it," I replied, "particularly if you made clear your reasons for insisting on secrecy."

"I am glad you think that," said he, "and I shall act on your advice without delay. I will put the case to the manager of the Society which has insured this house."

"I think you ought to do so at once," I urged. "There must be many thousands of pounds' worth of property in your collections and a fire or a burglary might sweep away the bulk of it in a night."

He repeated, with emphasis, his intention to attend to the matter without further delay, and the subject then dropped. After a little more desultory conversation, I rose to take my leave; and the lugubrious Kickweed, having presented me with my hat and stick, let me out at the street door with the air of admitting me to the family vault.

As I wended homewards I found ample matter for reflection in the incidents of my visit; but chiefly my thoughts concerned themselves with my eccentric host. Mr. Penrose was certainly a very strange man, and the more I thought about him, the less did I feel able to understand him. He had so many oddities, and each of them suggested problems to which I could find no solution. There was the collection, for instance. Including the gems and coins, it must have been of very great value, and its accumulation must have entailed a vast expenditure of time and effort, to say nothing of the prodigious sums of money that must have been spent. But with what object? He had none of the ordinary collector's expertness and enthusiasm. He had no special knowledge of any single class of objects, not even of the gems for which he professed so much affection. The motive force that impelled him to collect seemed to be simple acquisitiveness, the mere cupiditas habendi.

But the outstanding feature of his character was secretiveness. He was a secret man of the very deepest dye. His inveterate habit of secrecy coloured every word and action. The ridiculous jargon that he used, his silly circumlocutions and ellipses and paraphrases, were but phases of the tendency, as if he grudged to disclose the whole of his meaning. Even the preposterous catalogue revealed the same trait, for, while it seemed to have been made deliberately unintelligible, it was clear that the absurd entries held some hidden meaning which was intelligible to him.

It was not an endearing trait. None of us likes a secret man. And very naturally. For secrecy implies distrust; and, moreover, we are apt—again very naturally—to assume some reason for the secrecy, and to suspect that it is a discreditable reason. Thus it was with me in the present case; and my general dislike of the secret habit of mind was aggravated by the fact that I had become involved in the secrecy. The promise that had been exacted from me in regard to the gems recurred to me with a certain distaste and resentment. I was committed to the concealment of a fact which was no concern of mine and of the bearings of which I knew nothing. The explanations that Penrose had given for keeping secret his precious hoard were not unreasonable. But suppose there were other reasons. The thing was possible. Some collectors are not over-scrupulous; and I recalled not for the first time, the singular, startled expression with which he had looked at me when I made my foolish joke about the Jacobite jewel.

In short, I was not quite comfortable about that promise. There is something a little disturbing about a secret hoard of valuable gems; and, but for the fact that Penrose was obviously a man of ample means, my professional experiences might have caused me to ask myself whether this very odd collection might not cover some activities of a more questionable kind.

---

### III. — EXIT MR. PENROSE

I did not see Penrose again for about a fortnight. Then, having occasion to call at Parrott's shop to inquire after a gate-leg table which I had purchased and which was undergoing some necessary restorations, I encountered him, standing opposite to a lantern clock which had been fixed on a temporary bracket and was ticking cheerfully with every sign of robust health. Noting his evident interest in the venerable timepiece, I stopped to discuss it with him.

"You are looking at that clock, Mr. Penrose," said I, "as if you contemplated making an investment."

"I don't contemplate," he replied. "I investigated in it some time ago. It is a poor thing, but mine own."

"I shouldn't call it a poor thing," said I. "It is quite a good clock and it looks to me as if it were absolutely intact and in its original condition. Which is unusual in the case of lantern clocks. People will tinker at them and spoil them. You were lucky to find an untouched specimen."

"I didn't," said he. "When it came to me—through the usual psittacoid channel—it was a mere wreck. Some misbegotten Daedalus had eviscerated it and wrought havoc with its entrails. Thereupon I sought medicinal advice for the invalid and had it put under treatment."

"You sent it to a clockmaker?" I suggested.

"I did not," he replied. "It had had too much clockmaker already. I consulted the erudite and podophthalmate horologist, and behold!—it has renewed its youth like the eagle."

I must confess that this stumped me for the moment, until a flash of supernatural intelligence associated the word “podophthalmate” with Mr. Polton’s protuberant eye-glass.

“I didn’t know that Mr. Polton was a practical mechanic,” I remarked.

“Oh, don’t call him that!” Penrose protested. “He is a magician, a wizard, a worker of miracles. By the way, Mrs. Pettigrew, I rather expected to find him here. He promised to see this clock safely established in my gallery.”

“He is here,” replied Mrs. Pettigrew. “He is in the workshop, doing something to Mr. Tims’s lathe. Would you like to walk across and let him know that you have arrived? You know the way. And perhaps, Mr. Lockhart, you would like to go and inspect your table? I think Tims wants you to see it.”

I accepted the invitation and, following Penrose, passed out at the back of the shop and crossed a small paved yard to a wide doorway. Passing through this, I entered a roomy workshop, lighted by a skylight and littered with articles of ancient furniture in all stages of decay and dismemberment. There were three persons in the workshop. First, there was Mr. Tims, a tall, aged man, frail and decrepit of aspect—until he picked up a tool; when he seemed suddenly to develop fresh strength and vitality. Next, there was Mr. Polton in shirt-sleeves and an apron (which appeared by its length to have been borrowed from Tims), engaged at the moment in re-fixing the head-stock of a wood-turner’s lathe. The third person was Mr. Parrott, as I learned when Penrose greeted him; and, as this was the first time that I had encountered him in the flesh, I looked at him with some curiosity.

“Monsieur le Perroquet” was a somewhat unusual-looking man and not at all the type of a shopkeeper. Dark, clean-shaved and blue-jowled, he had rather the appearance of an actor; and this suggestion was heightened by a certain precision of speech and clearness of enunciation, and especially by a tendency to the use of studied and appropriate gestures. Obviously, he was not only an educated man but what one would call a gentleman; easy and pleasant in manner, with that combination of deference and dignity that is attainable only by a well-bred man.

When I had introduced myself, Mr. Tims produced the dismembered table and exhibited the repairs on the damaged leg.

“You see, sir,” he explained, “I’ve cut out the worm-eaten part and let in a patch of sound oak. Do you think he’ll do?”

“Do you propose to stain the patch?” I inquired.

“That’s as you please,” replied Tims. “I wouldn’t. A mend’s a mend, but a stained mend looks like a fake.”

“I think Tims is right,” said Parrott. “Better leave the patch to darken naturally.”

To this I assented, and thereupon Mr. Tims proceeded to assemble the separated parts while Parrott and I looked on, and Penrose divided his attention between the table and Mr. Polton’s operations on the lathe.

“By the way, Mr. Penrose,” said I, suddenly remembering our last conversation, “how goes the insurance scheme? Have you solved the difficulty of the valuer?”

Penrose turned to me quickly with a look of annoyance, so that I was sorry I had spoken.

“There is nothing to report at present,” he replied with unwonted shortness of manner; and, as if to close the subject, he stepped across to the lathe and manifested a sudden and not very intelligent interest in its mechanism. However, Mr. Polton’s job was apparently completed, for, when he had replaced the band on the pulley, tested the centres and given the fly-wheel a trial spin, he proceeded to shed the apron and put on his coat, and was forthwith spirited away by Penrose.

I had noticed that when I spoke of the insurance Mr. Parrott had seemed to prick up his ears (which, perhaps, explained the annoyance of the secretive Penrose). But he made no remark while the latter was present, though he had evidently heard and noted what had been said, for, when Penrose had gone, he asked:

“Do I understand that Mr. Penrose has actually decided to insure his collection? I have repeatedly urged him to, but he has always agreed with me and then let the matter slide.”

“I am afraid,” said I, “that my experience is the same as yours. I advised him to insure without delay, but you heard what he said.”

“I heard what he said,” Parrott replied, “but it didn’t convey much to me, excepting that he is still putting the business off. Which is rather foolish of him. His collection is of no great value, as collections go, but still, it represents a good deal of money, and he would suffer a substantial loss if he had a fire.”

“Or a burglary,” I suggested.

“There is not much risk of that,” said he. “Burglars wouldn’t be tempted by a collection of miscellaneous bric-a-brac, most of it identifiable and none of any considerable value. Burglars like more portable goods and things that are intrinsically valuable, such as precious metals and jewellery.”

“You have seen his collection, of course?” said I.

“Yes. As a matter of fact, I supplied the greater part of it. And I gather that you have seen it, too?”

“Yes. He was good enough to show me his treasures. That was how I came to advise him about the insurance. It seemed to me very unsafe for valuable property like that to be quite unprotected.”

“I shouldn’t have called it very valuable property,” said he. “But perhaps he has some things that I haven’t seen. It would

be like Mr. Penrose to keep his court-cards up his sleeve. Did he show you any really valuable pieces?"

Now, here was the very difficulty that I had foreseen. Obviously, Parrott was unaware of the existence of the hoard of jewels and coins, but he evidently suspected Penrose of possessing something more than he had disclosed. It was very unpleasant, but my promise of secrecy left me no choice. I must either lie or prevaricate.

"It is difficult for me to estimate values," said I, adopting the less objectionable alternative, "but some of the things that I saw must have been worth a good deal of money. There was a Saxon gold ornament, for instance. Wouldn't that be rather valuable?"

"Oh, certainly," he agreed, "but only in a modest way. I don't know what such a thing would fetch, say, at Christie's. But I think you said he was employing a valuer, and having some difficulty with him, apparently?"

"No," I replied. "His difficulty is that a regular valuation would have to be made, which would involve an inspection of his goods and the making of an inventory. He seems to object to having a valuer nosing round his premises."

"He would, naturally," said Parrott. "I have never met such an extraordinarily secretive man. But really, the valuer would not be necessary. I could draw up an estimate that would satisfy the Company—that is, if the property to be insured is only what I have seen. But, as I said, he may have some other things which he has not disclosed to me. Do you think he has?"

Here I must needs prevaricate again; but I kept as near to the truth as I could.

"It is impossible for me to guess what property he has," I said. "You know the man. I know only what he showed me."

Parrott looked dissatisfied with my answer, which was, indeed, pretty obviously evasive, and he seemed disposed to press the matter further; but, at this point, Mr. Tims, having completed the assembling of the parts of the table, offered the completed work for my inspection and approval. I looked it over quickly, and, having pronounced it satisfactory, took the opportunity to make my escape before Parrott should have time to propound any more questions.

As I re-entered the shop from the yard, Penrose and Polton were just passing out at the front door, the latter carrying the body of the clock and the former bearing a large parcel, which presumably contained the weights, the pendulum and the bracket. I went to the door and watched them receding down the street until they reached the corner, when Penrose, happening to glance back, observed me and greeted me with a flourish of his free hand. Then they turned the corner and disappeared from my sight; and thus, though I little guessed it at the time, did Mr. Penrose pass out of my ken for ever.

For I never saw him again. A few days later, I joined the South-Eastern circuit, and thenceforth, for the next few months, passed most of my time in the county towns in which the assizes were held; and when I came back, Mr. Penrose had disappeared.

The fact was communicated to me by Mrs. Pettigrew, who, in her kindly and discreet fashion, tried to minimise the abnormal features of the affair.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Pettigrew," I exclaimed, "that he has gone away from his home and left no address or indication as to where he is to be found?"

"So I understand," she replied, "but I don't really know any of the particulars."

"But," said I, "it is a very extraordinary affair."

"It would be," said she, "in the case of any ordinary man. But you know what Mr. Penrose is. It would be quite like him, if he had occasion, say, to go abroad, to go and keep his own counsel as to where he had gone to. I believe he has done it before, though not for so long a time. I understand that on more than one occasion he has gone out in his car and driven away into the country without saying anything to his servant as to his intentions—just gone out and returned after a few days, saying nothing to anybody as to where he had been."

"Amazing!" said I. "He can't be quite in his right mind. But this affair seems rather different from the other escapades. You say he has been gone for a couple of months. It looks very much as if he had gone for good."

"It does," she agreed; and then, after a pause, she continued: "It has been a great blow to Mr. Parrott, for Mr. Penrose was by far our best customer. He was really the mainstay of the business; and now that he has gone and that we have lost poor Mr. Tims, it is very doubtful if we can carry on."

"Why, what has happened to Tims?" I asked.

"He is dead, poor old thing," she replied. "He got influenza and went out like the snuff of a candle. He was very old and frail, you know. But he was invaluable to Mr. Parrott. He was such a wonderful workman."

"Still," I said, "I suppose he can be replaced."

"Mr. Parrott thinks not," said she, "and I am afraid he is right. It is very difficult to find a real cabinet-maker in these days. The few that are left are mostly old men, and even they don't understand old furniture as Mr. Tims did. But, without a skilled restorer, we can't get on at all. Mr. Parrott is an excellent judge, but he is no workman."

In short, what the absent Penrose would have called "the psittacoid emporium" was in a bad way. It had never been a very prosperous concern, I gathered, and indeed, I had seldom seen a stranger in the shop; but with the aid of Penrose's numerous purchases (or "investigations," as he would have described them) and the prestige of Tims's skilful restorations, it had just managed to keep afloat.

"I do hope," Mrs. Pettigrew said, rather dismally, "that we shall be able to struggle on. It will be an awful disaster for poor Joan and me if the business collapses. Of course, Mr. Parrott has not been in a position to pay me much of a salary, but Joan and I have the use of the rooms over the shop, and with her earnings as a secretary we have rubbed along quite comfortably. But it will be very different if I am earning nothing and we have only her little salary to live on, and rent to pay as well. And it will be so unfair to the poor girl, who ought to be considering her own future, to have to carry the burden of a superannuated mother."

I was very sorry for Mrs. Pettigrew and I tried to present a more hopeful picture of the financial possibilities. I also reminded her that she had my address and that it was the address of a friend. And so we parted. A little way down the street—but on the opposite side—I met Miss Joan wending homewards and observed her with a new interest. With her short hair and short skirts, her horn-rimmed spectacles and her attache case, she was the typical Miss Twentieth Century. But as she swung along manfully, she conveyed a pleasant impression of pluck and energy and buoyant spirits, with mighty little of the "poor girl" in her aspect or bearing; and, raising my hat in response to her friendly nod, I hoped that the gathering clouds might pass over her harmlessly.

But, when I next visited London the blow had fallen. I made my way to the dingy little street, only to find a gang of painters disfiguring the empty shop with garish adornments. The Tropic Bird had flown. The Popinjay was no more. The vacant window greeted me with a dull, unwelcoming stare. The pleasant little rendezvous had gone out, like poor Mr. Tims, with hardly a final flicker; and Mrs. Pettigrew and Joan and Penrose and the mysterious Mr. Polton seemed to have faded out of my life like the actors in a play when the curtain has fallen.

---

## BOOK II. — NARRATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.

### IV. — THE BURGLARY AT QUEEN SQUARE

My introduction to the strange and puzzling circumstances connected with the disappearance of Mr. Daniel Penrose occurred in a rather casual, almost accidental fashion. On a certain evening, at the close of the day's work in the Law Courts, I had walked up with my colleague, Dr. John Thorndyke, to New Square, Lincoln's Inn, to restore to our old friend, Mr. Brodribb, some documents which it had been necessary to produce in Court. Finding Mr. Brodribb in his office, apparently up to his eyes in business, we handed the documents to him, and, when he had checked them, were about to depart when our friend laid down his pen, took off his spectacles and held up his hand to detain us.

"One moment, Thorndyke," said he. "Before you go, there is a little matter that I should like to take your opinion on. I'll just pop on my hat and walk with you to the corner of the Square. It is quite a trifling affair—at least—well, I'll tell you about it as we go." He rose and, putting on the immaculate top hat which he invariably wore in defiance of modern fashions, stepped through into the outer office.

"I shall be back in a few minutes, Jarrett," said he, addressing his managing clerk, and with that he led the way out.

"The matter," he began, as we emerged on to the broad pavement of the Square, "relates to a burglary, or attempted burglary, at the house of a man whom I may call my client; a man named Daniel Penrose, though, actually, I am being consulted by his executor, a Mr. Horridge."

"Penrose, then, I take it, is deceased," said Thorndyke.

"No. Penrose is alive, but he is absent from his home and no one knows where he is at the moment. So Horridge is assuming that his position as executor authorises him to take action in the absence of the testator."

"That doesn't seem a very sound position," Thorndyke remarked. "But what action does he propose to take?"

"I had better explain the circumstances," said Brodribb. "In the first place, the man Penrose, who has a biggish house in Queen Square, is the owner of a collection; a very miscellaneous collection, I understand; all sorts of trash from old clocks to china dogs. This stuff is kept in two large rooms on the ground floor, but adjoining the main rooms is a small room which contains nothing but a table, a chair and a large cupboard or armoire. This room is usually kept locked, but, by a fortunate chance, when Penrose went away he left the key in the door, and the butler, a man named Kickweed, finding it there, very properly took possession of it.

"Now, the alleged burglary occurred about ten days ago. It seems that Kickweed, making his morning round of the premises, unlocked the door of the small room to go in and inspect, when, to his astonishment, he found it bolted on the inside. Thereupon he took a pair of library steps round to the side of the house where the window of the small room looks on a narrow uncovered passage. On climbing up the steps he found the window unfastened and was able to slide it up and step over into the room. There he confirmed the fact that the door was bolted on the inside, but that, and the unfastened window, were the only signs of anything out of the ordinary. The cupboard was perfectly intact, with no traces whatever of its having been tampered with; and, although there were some scratches on the table by the window, as if some hard objects had been put on it and moved about, there was nothing to show when those marks had been made."

"The cupboard, I presume, was locked?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes, and with a Chubb lock."

"And what was in the cupboard?"

"Ah!" said Brodribb, "that is the problem. No one knows what it contained or whether it contained anything. But, having regard to the facts that Penrose is a collector, that he always kept this room locked and that the cupboard was fitted with a Chubb lock, the reasonable assumption is that it contained something of value."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "that seems probable. But what does Mr. Horridge propose to do?"

"He would like, with my consent—I am co-executor—to have the lock picked and explore the inside of the cupboard."

"That plan seems to present difficulties," said Thorndyke. "To say nothing of the fact that a Chubb lock takes a good deal of picking, there is the objection that, as you don't know what was in the cupboard, you couldn't judge whether anything had been taken. Suppose you find it empty; you don't know that it was not empty previously. Suppose you find valuable property in it; you still don't know that nothing has been taken, and, by having forced the lock, you assume a slightly uncomfortable responsibility for the safety of the contents. Why not just seal the cupboard and let Penrose do the investigating when he returns?"

"Yes," said Brodribb, with a rather dissatisfied air, as he halted at the corner of the Square and looked up at the clock above the library. "But suppose he doesn't return?" He paused for a few moments and then burst out: "The fact is, Thorndyke, that this burglary is only an incident in a most complicated and puzzling affair. There is no time to go into it now, but I should very much like, some time when you have an hour or so to spare, to put the whole case before you and hear what you have to suggest."



"I shall have an hour or so to spare—for you—this evening," said Thorndyke, "if that will suit you."

Brodrigg brightened visibly. "It will suit me admirably," said he. "I will get a bit of dinner and then I will trot along to King's Bench Walk."

"You needn't do that," said Thorndyke. "Jervis and I are dining at our chambers this evening. Come along and join us. Then we shall be able to get into our conversational stride with the aid of food and a glass of wine."

Brodrigg accepted gleefully, and, when we had settled the time for him to arrive, he turned away towards his office. But suddenly he stopped, searching frantically in a bulging pocket-book.

"Here," said he, holding out a small piece of paper, "is something to occupy your mighty brains until we meet at dinner, when I will ask you to let me have it back."

As Thorndyke took the paper from him, he broke out into a broad smile, and, turning away once more, hurried off to relieve the waiting Jarrett. My colleague looked at the paper, considered for a few moments, turned it over to glance at the back, held it up to the light and passed it to me without comment. It was a small scrap of paper—about three inches square—apparently cut off a sheet with a paper-knife, and it bore three words untidily scribbled on it with a hard pencil: "Lobster (Hortus petasafus)."

"Well," I exclaimed, gazing at the paper with mild astonishment, "I suppose this has some meaning, but I'm hanged if I can make any sense of it. Can you?"

He shook his head, and, taking the little document from me, put it away carefully in his wallet.

"Do you suppose it is some sort of clue?" I asked.

"I don't suppose anything," he replied. "Let us wait and hear what Brodrigg has to say about it. His expression suggested what school-boys call a leg-pull. But I suspect that he has something quite interesting to tell us about the absent Penrose."

Thorndyke's suspicion turned out to be correct, for, when Mr. Brodrigg arrived at our chambers, dressed immaculately and accompanied by a clerk carrying a brown-paper parcel, he gave us to understand that he had some rather surprising facts to communicate.

"But," he added, "I haven't come here just to eat your dinner and waste your time with idle talk. I want you to regard this as a professional consultation."

"We will consider that question later," said Thorndyke. "Our immediate purpose is to dine, but, meanwhile, I will return your rather cryptic document. I have kept a copy of it in case it may have a bearing on anything, and Jervis has made a minute study of its ostensible meaning."

"I am glad you say 'ostensible,'" chuckled Brodrigg, as he stowed the document away in his pocket-book. "And what conclusions has the learned Jervis arrived at?"

"My conclusions," said I, "are not very illuminating. Broadly speaking, the inscription is damned nonsense."

"I am with you there," said Brodrigg.

"Then, as to the ostensible meaning, I take it that the word 'Lobster' means—well, it means lobster—"

"I'll take my bible oath it doesn't," Brodrigg interposed.

"And as to the Latin words, hortus, of course, is a garden and petasatus according to the erudite Dr. William Smith, means 'having on a travelling cap' or, alternatively, in more general terms, 'dressed in readiness for a journey.' Which doesn't make any sort of sense. You can't imagine a garden wearing a travelling-cap or being dressed in readiness for a journey."

"Perhaps it was the lobster that wore the cap," Thorndyke suggested, regardless of syntax. "But what is the significance of this document? I presume that it has some connection with the burglary."

"Yes, it has," Brodrigg replied; "and if we could only find out what the devil it means, it might be quite an important clue. The paper was found by Kickweed, when he was examining the small room, under the table by the window. He thinks that it came from inside the cupboard; and if he is right, it furnishes evidence that the cupboard had been opened. And if we could only make any sense of the damned thing, it might give us a hint as to what had been taken."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "but this is all very hypothetical. There is no evidence as to when the paper was dropped. It is quite possible that it may have been dropped by Penrose, himself. But as to this cryptic inscription. As Jervis says, it probably has some meaning. Does it convey anything at all to you?"

"As to meaning, most emphatically NO. But," Brodrigg continued, grasping his wine-glass fiercely, "it impresses on me what I have always thought; that Daniel Penrose is an exasperating ass!"

At this outburst, Polton (our laboratory assistant and general factotum), who had just removed the covers and was in the act of re-filling Brodrigg's glass, looked at the speaker with an expression of surprised interest. He even seemed disposed to linger; but as there was no excuse for his doing so, he retired slowly as if reluctant to go.

"Perhaps," Thorndyke suggested when Polton had withdrawn, "that statement might be amplified and its bearings explained. You seem to imply that the cryptic inscription was written by Penrose."

"Undoubtedly it was," Brodribb replied. "It is typical of the man. Let me explain to you what sort of fellow Penrose is; and I want you to bear his peculiarities in mind when I come to tell you my story, because they probably have an important bearing on it. Now, Penrose has two outstanding oddities of character. In the first place, he is an inveterate joker. He seems incapable of speaking seriously; and the form that his facetiousness takes is in calling everything by its wrong name. The tendency seems to have grown on him until it has become a fixed habit and now his conversation is a sort of everlasting cross-word puzzle. You have to cudgel your brains when he is speaking, to guess what he really means, and the only certainty that you have is that whatever he says, you know that he means something else."

"It sounds a bit confusing," said I. "But I suppose there is some method in his madness. Could you give us an illustrative example?"

"His method," replied Brodribb, "consists in using allusive phrases, equivalents in sound or sense, or distortions or perversions of words. He would not invest his money: he would investigate it. He would not call our friend John Thorndyke; he would probably describe him as Giovanni Brambleditch."

"I must bear that name in mind," said I, "for use on suitable occasions. But I think I grasp the principle. It is a sort of mixture of puns and metaphors."

"Yes," agreed Brodribb, "that is roughly what it amounts to. And now as to his other eccentricity. Penrose is an extraordinarily secret man. I use the word 'extraordinarily' advisedly. We are all, as lawyers, in the habit of keeping our own counsel. But we don't make secrets of our common and simple doings. If Thorndyke wants to go to the Law Courts, he doesn't sneak out on tip-toe when there is nobody about and leave no information as to where he has gone. But that is what Penrose would do. His habit of secrecy is as inveterate as his habit of facetiousness. He has been known to set forth from his house in his car without giving any notice to his butler or anybody else, to drive away into the country and stay away for several days—probably rooting about for bargains for his collection—and come back without a word of explanation as to where he had been. I assure you that when I had to draft his will I had the greatest difficulty in extracting from him any intelligible particulars of the property that was to be disposed of."

"It is rather remarkable," said Thorndyke, "that he should have made a will at all."

"It is," agreed Brodribb. "Men of that type usually die intestate. And thereby hangs another part of the tale that I have to tell. But I repeat that it is most necessary to bear these oddities of character in mind in connection with what has happened. And now, I will drop Penrose for the present and let you finish your dinners in peace."

I think that Brodribb's resolution to change the subject occasioned some disappointment to Polton; for that cunning artificer developed an unprecedented degree of attentiveness, which caused him to make frequent incursions into the room for the ostensible purpose of filling wine-glasses and performing other unnecessary services. His obvious interest in our rather trivial conversation caused me some slight surprise at the time. But later events explained his curiosity.

When we had finished dinner, and before removing the debris, he drew the three easy chairs up to the fire, placed a small table by that which was assigned to Brodribb and deposited on it the invariable decanter of port and three wine-glasses. Then he proceeded to clear the table by small instalments and by methods strikingly at variance with his usual swift economy of time and labour. But his procrastination was all in vain; for not until the table was cleared to the last vestige and Polton had made his final and reluctant disappearance, did Brodribb make the slightest allusion to the subject of our consultation.

Then, when the door had closed, the glasses had been filled and Thorndyke and I had produced our pipes, he extracted a slip of paper from his pocket-book and laid it on the table by his side, fortified himself with a sip of wine and opened the proceedings.

---

## V. — MR. BRODRIBB PROPOUNDS A PROBLEM

"The circumstances connected with Penrose's disappearance," Mr. Brodribb began, "are so complicated that I hardly know in what order I should present them."

"Probably," suggested Thorndyke, "the simplest plan would be to deal with the events in their chronological sequence."

"Yes," Brodribb agreed, "that would probably be the best way. I can refer back to previous occurrences if necessary. Then we will begin with the seventeenth of last October, roughly three months ago. On that day, in the early afternoon, he started out from home in his car and, contrary to his usual practice, he told Kickweed that he did not expect to be back until rather late. He directed that no one should sit up for him, but that a cold supper should be left in the dining-room. As to where he was going or on what business, he naturally gave no hint, but we are justified in assuming that he started forth with the intention of returning that night. But he did not return; and, so far as we know, he was never seen again by anybody who was acquainted with him."

"Your description," said Thorndyke, "seems to suggest that he is a bachelor."

"Yes," replied Brodribb, "he is a bachelor, and, with the exception of an aged father, to whom I shall refer presently, he seems to have no very near relations. Horridge, his executor, is a somewhat distant cousin and a good deal younger man. Well, then, to repeat; on the day that I have mentioned, having given this very vague information to his butler, he went off to his garage, got his car out, closed up the garage and departed. Kickweed saw him drive away past the house; and that

was the last that was seen of him by any person who knew him.

"His next appearance was in very remarkable circumstances. At midnight on that same day, or in the early hours of the next, a gentleman, a resident of Gravesend, who was returning home from Chatham in his car, saw a man lying face downwards on a heap of gravel by the roadside. The gentleman pulled up and got out to see what had happened; and as the man seemed to be either dead or unconscious, and there was nobody about excepting a rather squiffy labourer, he carefully lifted the man, with the labourer's assistance, put him into his car and conveyed him to the hospital at Gravesend, which was about a mile and a half from the place where he picked him up. At the hospital it was found that the man was alive though insensible, and on this the gentleman, a Mr. Barnaby, went away, leaving the hospital authorities to give information to the police.

"The injured man appeared to be suffering from concussion. He had evidently fallen on the gravel with great violence, for his face was a mass of bruises and both his eyes were completely closed by the swelling due to the contusions. There was a deep, ragged wound across his right eyebrow in which the house surgeon had to put a couple of stitches; and there were various other bruises about his person, suggesting that he had been knocked down by some passing vehicle, but there appeared to be no broken bones or other severe injuries. The visiting surgeon, however, seems to have suspected the existence of a fracture of the base of the skull, and, on this account, directed that the patient should be kept very quiet and not questioned or disturbed in any way.

"The next day he still appeared to be unconscious, or nearly so, though he took the small amount of nourishment that was offered. But he answered no questions, and, by reason of the suspected fracture, no particular attempts were made to rouse him. And so the day passed. On the following day, the nineteenth, he remained in much the same condition; speechless and somnolent, lying nearly motionless, taking no notice of anything that was occurring around him and giving no answers to questions.

"But about eight o'clock at night he roused quite suddenly and very completely, for he seemed at once to be in full possession of his senses. But what is more, he proceeded to get out of bed, and demanded his clothes, declaring that he was quite well and intended to leave the hospital and go about his business. As you may suppose, there was a mighty hubbub.

"The house surgeon absolutely forbade the patient to leave the hospital and at first refused to let him have his clothes. But the man persisted that he was going, clothes or no clothes. Well, of course, they had no power to detain him, so the end of it was that they produced his clothes, and when he had dressed himself they gave him a light meal and took the particulars of his name and address and what little he could tell them of the circumstances of his accident. But of this he knew practically nothing. All he could tell them was that some vehicle had come on him from behind and knocked him down, and he remembered no more.

"When he had finished his meal and made his statement, such as it was, he asked for his overcoat. But there was no overcoat with his clothes, though the ward sister remembered that he was wearing one when he was brought in. Apparently, a patient who had been discharged earlier in the evening must have taken it by mistake, for there was a spare overcoat of the same kind—the ordinary raincoat, such as you may see by the dozen in any street; and it was suggested that he should take this in exchange for his own. But he would not agree to this, and eventually, as it was a mild night, he was allowed to go as he was.

"Now, he had not been gone more than an hour when the man who had taken the wrong coat brought it back. He had discovered his mistake by finding in the pocket a motorist's driving licence. But the odd thing was that the name and address on the licence did not agree with those that the departed patient had given. And yet there seemed to be no doubt that it was the missing coat, for the night nurse remembered the daubs of mud that she had noticed on it when she had undressed the patient. Moreover, she now recalled that the collar which she had taken off him had borne the initials 'D.P.,' in Roman capitals, apparently written with a marking-ink pencil.

"But there was an evident discrepancy. The patient had given the name of Joseph Blewitt, with an address somewhere in Camden Town; but the name on the licence was Daniel Penrose and the address was his address in Queen Square.

"It was certainly a facer. The coat had to be returned to its owner. But who was its owner? The secretary decided that it was not his business to solve that problem; and, moreover, as there seemed to be something a trifle queer about the affair, he thought it best to communicate with the police. But as it was rather late and there seemed to be no urgency in the matter, he put it off until the following morning; and when the morning came, the police saved him the trouble by calling to make inquiries. And then something still more queer came to light.

"That morning, early, a patrol had discovered an abandoned car backed into the bushes at the bottom of an unfrequented lane leading down to the marshes a mile or so outside Gravesend. On making inquiries, he learned that it had been there all the previous day, for it had been seen by some boys who had gone down to the marshes on their probably unlawful occasions. They had taken no special notice of it, assuming that the owner had gone off on some business into the village in the irresponsible way that motorists have of leaving their cars unattended. But the boys could not say when it had arrived, as they had not been to the marshes on the day before. However, when the patrol pushed his inquiries in the village, he heard of the accident and of the man who had been picked up on the road not very far away. Thereupon, he took possession of the car and brought it into the town, lodging it, for the time being, in the garage belonging to the police station. And then he came on to the hospital to interview the injured man. But the bird had flown and only the coat with the driving licence remained.

"And then, once more, the plot thickened. For the name on the insurance certificate which was found in the car was the same as that on the licence; and if—as seemed nearly certain—the coat belonged to the departed patient, then that patient had given a false name and address. And this turned out to be the fact. No such person as Joseph Blewitt was known at the Camden Town address; and on inquiring at Daniel Penrose's house, it was ascertained that the said Daniel had left home in his car in the early afternoon of the day on which the injured man had been brought into the hospital and had not since been seen or heard of.

"As to what had become of that injured man, all that they could discover was that he—or, at least, a man with two black eyes and generally answering to the description—had taken a first-class ticket to London shortly after the time at which the patient had left the hospital, and that a man, apparently the same, had got out at New Cross. But they could get no farther. From the time when he passed the barrier at New Cross all trace of him was lost."

"Did the police make any efforts to follow him up?" Thorndyke asked.

"At the moment, I don't think they did. Why should they? So far as they then knew, the man had committed no offence. He was no business of theirs. If he chose to vamoose, he was quite entitled to."

"I need not ask if you know of any reason that he may have had for disappearing?"

"Ah!" said Brodribb, "now we come to the inwardness of the affair. I have told the story in the actual order of events, and, at the time when he bolted from the hospital, there seemed no reason for his sneaking off and hiding himself. But, a day or two later, some other facts transpired which threw an entirely new light on his behaviour.

"It appeared that early in the morning of the eighteenth, the day after that on which he left home—and, incidentally, was picked up on the road—the dead body of an old woman was found in a dry ditch at the side of a by-road leading to the main road from Ashford to Maidstone. From the condition of the body as to rigor mortis and temperature, the police surgeon inferred that she had been dead about six hours; which, as the body was discovered at about five o'clock in the morning, roughly fixes the time of her death at eleven o'clock on the previous night. Of the cause of death there seemed to be no doubt. She had been knocked down by a motor, the driver of which had either been unaware of what had happened or had cleared off to avoid trouble. The latter seemed the more probable, for, not only must the force of the impact have been terrific to fling the poor old creature right across the grass verge into the ditch, but the tracks of a car, which were plainly visible in the lane, showed it to have been zigzagging wildly and to have actually struck the grass verge at the point where the accident must have occurred.

"At first, it looked as if the motorist had got away without leaving a recognisable trace. But when the police came to make inquiries, they picked up some important information from the attendant at a filling station at Maidstone. He recalled that, a little after eleven o'clock on the night of the old woman's death, a car had come to his establishment for a refill of petrol. It was apparently travelling from the direction of Ashford; and there were certain circumstances connected with the car and the driver which had attracted his attention. He had noticed, for instance, that the near-side mudguard was badly bent, and there was earth on the wheels, as if the car had been run over a ploughed field. He had also observed that the driver—who was alone in the car—looked rather pale and shaken, and seemed to be excited or agitated. Moreover, he smelt strongly of drink; and the man was of opinion that the liquor was not whisky, but smelt more like 'sherry wine.' These facts, taken together, made him suspect that the motorist had been in trouble and he very wisely made a note of the number of the car and had a good look at the driver. His description of the man is not very illuminating, excepting that he noticed the muddy state of the raincoat, which the nurse had mentioned. But the number of the car gave all the necessary information. It was that of Daniel Penrose's car; and, sure enough, in confirmation of the identity, was the fact that the left mud-guard of Penrose's car was badly bent and there was a quantity of earth on the wheels. And there is a bit of further evidence, for it appears that Penrose was stopped by a police patrol on the top of Bluebell Hill, on the Maidstone-Rochester Road, and asked to show his licence; which explains how the licence came to be in his raincoat pocket. When you consider the devil of a hurry that he was in, you can understand that he would just shove it into the nearest pocket.

"Well, the final phase of the affair—so far—was the inquest on the old woman. Naturally, when they had heard the evidence of the police and the man from the petrol-filling station, the jury found a verdict of manslaughter against some person unknown."

"Unknown!" I repeated. "Then they did not mention Penrose by name?"

"No," replied Brodribb. "The coroner knew his business better than many coroners do. He directed the jury to confine their finding to the facts that had been definitely proved and leave the identification of the offender to the police. But I need not say that the police are keeping a bright look-out for Daniel Penrose.

"So there, you see, we have an explanation of the initial disappearance. Perhaps, not a very reasonable one; but then Penrose is not a very reasonable man. But that explanation does not quite clear up the mystery. He disappeared about three months ago and since then has made no sign. Now, we can understand his bolting off in a panic, but it is less easy to understand his remaining in hiding. On reflection he must have seen that he was really in no great danger, even if he did actually knock the poor old woman down, which is by no means certainly the case. There were no witnesses of the accident. If he chose to deny that he was in any way concerned in it, it would be impossible to prove that he was. He might even have denied that he was ever on that particular road at all."

"You mentioned," said Thorndyke, "that there were distinct tracks of motor tyres. Probably they would be identifiable."

"That would not be conclusive," Brodribb replied. "It would only prove that the tyres were of the same make. But, even if he admitted that he had caused the old woman's death, still, in the absence of witnesses, he could give any account that he pleased of the disaster. Carelessness on the part of the pedestrian is usually quite satisfactory to a coroner or his jury."

"I don't think the matter is as simple as that," Thorndyke objected. "I agree with you that there has been a most amazing indifference to the value of human life since the coming of the motor car. But this was an exceptionally bad case. The man had been drinking; he must have known that he had knocked the woman down, but yet he drove on callously, leaving her to die uncared for, and did not even report the accident. Whatever the coroner's verdict might have been, the police would certainly have prosecuted, and the man would almost inevitably have been committed for trial. But at the assizes he would have had to deal with a judge; and judges, as a rule—to which there are, I admit, one or two remarkable exceptions—take a reasonable and legal view of the killing of a human being."

"Well, even so," Brodribb rejoined, "what does it amount to? Supposing he had been convicted of manslaughter? It might have been a matter of six months' hard labour, or even twelve. It could hardly have been more. Killing with a motor car is accepted as something different from any other kind of killing."

"But," said I, "he would not be particularly keen on twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour."

"No," Brodribb agreed, "but what is the alternative? To say nothing of the fact that he is pretty certain to be caught, sooner or later, what is his present condition? He—a well-to-do man, accustomed to every luxury, is a wanderer and a fugitive, hiding in obscure places by day and sneaking out in terror by night. It must be a dreadful existence; and how the devil he is living and what he is living on, is beyond my powers to imagine, seeing that, when he went off, he had, presumably, nothing more about him than the few pounds that he would ordinarily carry in his pockets."

"I suppose," Thorndyke said, reflectively, "it has not occurred to you to connect that fact with the burglary?"

Brodribb looked at him in evident surprise.

"I don't think," said he, "that I quite understand what you mean. What connection could there be?"

"I am only throwing out the suggestion," replied Thorndyke, "as a bare possibility. But the house seems undoubtedly to have been entered, and entered by a person who appears to have been acquainted with it. The entry was made into the small room; and that room was clearly the objective, as is proved by the fact that the door was bolted on the inside. Then the person who entered apparently knew what was in that room. But, so far as we know, the contents of that room were known only to Penrose. If the cupboard was opened, it was opened with a key; for it is practically impossible to pick a Chubb lock, and a burglar would not have tried. He would have used his jemmy and forced the door."

"By Jove, Thorndyke!" Brodribb exclaimed, slapping the table, at the risk of spilling the wine, "you have solved the mystery! It never occurred to me that the burglar might be Penrose, himself. But your suggestion fits the case to a T. Here is poor old Penrose, penniless and perhaps starving. He knows that in that cupboard is portable property of very substantial value. He has the key of the cupboard in his pocket and he knows that he can get into the room easily by just slipping back the catch of the window with a knife. Of course it was Penrose. I was a damned blockhead not to have thought of it before. But you see, Thorndyke, I haven't got your criminal mind."

But Thorndyke, having made the suggestion, proceeded to sprinkle a little cold water on Brodribb's enthusiasm.

"It isn't a certainty," said he, "and we mustn't treat it as one. It is a reasonable and probable hypothesis, but we may think of others when we consider the matter further. However, the immediate question is what you want me to do."

"You can guess that," chuckled Brodribb, as I refilled his glass. "What do I always want you to do when I come here taking up your valuable time and drinking your excellent port? I want you to perform miracles and do impossibilities. It seems a pretty large order, I admit, even for you, seeing that the police are unable to locate Penrose, but I am going to ask you to exercise your remarkable power of resolving insoluble riddles and just tell us where he is."

"But why trouble to hunt him up?" Thorndyke objected. "He probably knows his own business best."

"I am not so sure that he does," Brodribb retorted. "But, in any case, it is not his business that is specially agitating me. There are some other people whose interests are affected and one of them is keeping me very effectively stirred up. However, I suppose I mustn't inflict on you details of the purely civil aspects of the case."

It was easy to gather from the apologetic tone of the concluding sentence and the wistful glance that he cast at Thorndyke, that he wanted very much to inflict those details, and I was not surprised when my colleague replied:

"It wouldn't be an infliction, Brodribb. On the contrary, it would be both interesting and helpful to have a complete picture of the case."

"I suspect," said Brodribb, "that you are only being beastly polite, but I will take you at your word. After all, the civil aspects are part of the problem and they may be more relevant than I realise. So here goes."

"I spoke just now of Daniel Penrose's aged father and I mentioned that there were no other near relations. Now, Penrose Senior, Oliver by name, is a very remarkable old gentleman. He is over ninety years of age, but surprisingly well preserved. Up to a week or two ago, he was, mentally and physically, the equal of an ordinary man of sixty. That was his condition at the time of Daniel's disappearance; lively and active, apparently going strong for his hundredth birthday."

"But, within the last fortnight, the old man has been taken ill—a slight touch of influenza. It appeared at first, that

seemed to offer no particular cause for anxiety. But you know what these hale and robust nonagenarians are. They dodder along peacefully, looking as if they were going to live for ever, until, one fine day, something gives them a shake up and puts them out of their stride; and then they just quietly fade away. Well, that is what is happening to old Penrose. He doesn't seem particularly ill. But he shows no sign of recovering. Suddenly, the weight of his years seems to have descended on him and he is gradually fading out. It is practically certain that he will die within the next few weeks; and, when he does die, some very curious complications are going to arise.

"Oliver Penrose is what we humble professional people would call a rather rich man. Nothing on the commercial scale of wealth. Nothing of the millionaire order. But there will be an estate, mostly personal, of over a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. And, so far as we know, that estate is not disposed of by will. The old man was rather obstinate about it, though there was some reason in his contention that it was a waste of trouble to make a will leaving the estate to the next of kin, who would inherit without a will. However, that question is of no importance, for, in any case, Penrose Junior would come into the property. If there is a will, he will be the principal beneficiary, and if there is no will, he is the next of kin, and, being the only child, will take the bulk of the estate.

"And now you see the difficulty. Daniel has made a will leaving a considerable proportion of his property to his cousin, Francis Horridge, who is also one of the executors and the residuary legatee. Daniel is not as rich as his father, but they are a well-to-do family and he has some fifty thousand pounds of his own. So Horridge will not do so badly if he should survive Daniel, which he is likely to do, as he is over twenty years younger. But he wants to do better. On the old man's death, the bulk of his property will, as I said, come to Daniel; and, as Daniel's will at present stands, it will fall into the residue of the estate and thus, eventually, come to Horridge.

"But there is a snag. Daniel has disappeared, but the old man is still alive. Now, suppose that Daniel elects to disappear for good. The thing is possible. He may have some resources that are unknown to us. It would be like him to have a secret banking account in a false name; and he may be in such a funk of criminal prosecution that he may never dare to come to the surface again. Well, suppose he remains in hiding. Suppose he has gone abroad or into some entirely new surroundings and has the means to go on living there; just see what a hideous mess will be created. In the first place, there will be an indefinite delay in distributing the old man's estate. Daniel is the next of kin (or else the principal beneficiary, if there should be a will). But his share cannot be allotted until it is proved that he is alive, and it cannot be otherwise disposed of until he is either proved or presumed to be dead. And, similarly, his own will cannot be administered so long as he is presumably alive."

"If he remains absent long enough," Thorndyke remarked, "the interested parties will probably apply for permission to presume his death."

"Well," retorted Brodribb, "they certainly wouldn't get it at present, or for a long time to come. If Daniel remains in hiding, the whole business may be hung up for years. But, even if they do, later, succeed in getting his death presumed, another and still worse complication will have to be dealt with. For, of course, the question of survivorship will be raised. Oliver's next of kin will naturally contend that Daniel died before the old man and that he could, therefore, not have inherited the old man's property; in which case, Horridge stands to lose the best part of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. And that, I may say, is where I come in. Horridge is in a most frightful twitter for fear Daniel should slip away for good and perhaps die somewhere under a false name. He wants to find Daniel, or at least ascertain that he is alive; and he is prepared to spend untold gold on the search. He has tried to ginger up the police and induce them to set up a hue and cry, regardless of poor old Daniel's feelings. But the police are not enthusiastic, as they have no conclusive evidence against him, even if they were able to locate him. So he has fallen back on me, and I have fallen back on you. And now the question is, are you prepared to take up the case?"

I had expected that Thorndyke would return a prompt refusal, for there seemed absolutely nothing to go on. To my surprise, he replied with a qualified acceptance, though he was careful to point out the difficulties.

"It is not very clear to me," said he, "that I can give you much help. You must see for yourself that this is really a police case. For the tracing of a missing man, the police have all the facilities as well as the necessary knowledge and experience. I have no facilities at all. Any inquiries that I may wish to make I must make through them."

"Yes, I see that," said Brodribb, "and, of course, I am not really asking you to perform miracles. I don't expect you to go outside and put your nose down on the pavement and forthwith make a bee-line for Daniel's hiding-place. But it occurs to me that you may be able to approach the matter from a different direction and by different methods from those of the police."

"That is possible," Thorndyke admitted, "but even a medico-legal investigator cannot get on without evidence of some kind, and there seems to be practically nothing to lay hold of. Do you know where the car is?"

"In Daniel's garage. It was taken there and locked up as soon as the police had made their examination of it."

"Do you know whether anything was found in it?"

"I have heard of nothing excepting a large empty flask which had, apparently, once contained brown sherry."

"Do you know whether the car has been cleaned since it was returned?"

"I am pretty sure that it has not. Penrose was his own chauffeur and did all the cleaning himself."

"Then you spoke of a raincoat. What has become of that?"

"It is in the parcel that I brought with me and which I put on the table in the lobby. It was delivered at Daniel's house by the police when they had looked it over, and Kickweed handed it to Horridge, who at once locked it up, and later, at my request, transferred it to me. I knew you would want to see it."

"Was anything found in the pockets?"

"There was the driving licence, as I told you. Beyond that there was nothing but the stump of a lead pencil, a wooden cigarette-holder and what looked like a fragment of a broken flower-pot. And I may say that those things are still in the pockets. So far as I know, the coat is in exactly the condition in which it was found."

"We will have a look at it presently," said Thorndyke, "though it doesn't seem likely that we shall extract much information from it."

"It certainly does not," I agreed, heartily, "and the little information it may yield can hardly have much bearing on what we want to know. It won't tell us what Penrose's intentions may have been, or where he is now."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Brodribb. "I had hoped that Thorndyke would practise some of his wizardry on that coat and make it tell us all that we want to know about Daniel. And I hope so still, notwithstanding your pessimism. At any rate," he added, glancing at my colleague, "you are going to give us a run for our money? You agree to that?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, "just as a forlorn hope. It is nothing more, and it is unlikely that I shall have more success than the police. Still, I will sort out the facts, such as they are, and see if they offer us any kind of opening for an investigation. I suppose I can see the car?"

"Certainly, you can. I will tell Kickweed to let you have the key of the garage and to give you any help that you may ask for. Is there anything that you will want me to do?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that, as Penrose is quite unknown to me, I had better have a description of his person, and it should be as minute and exhaustive as possible; and if a photograph of him is available, I should like to have that, too."

"Very well," said Brodribb, "I will get a description of Daniel from Horridge and Kickweed, separately, and write out another from my own observations. I will let you have the three, so that you can compare them, and I will try to get you a photograph. And that," he concluded, emptying his glass with relish, and rising, "is all, for the present; and I may say that, despite Jervis's pessimism, you have taken a load of anxiety off my shoulders. Experience has taught me that when John Thorndyke starts an investigation, the problem is as good as solved."

---

## VI. — THORNDYKE EXAMINES THE RELICS

As we returned from the landing, to which we had escorted Mr. Brodribb, I took up the parcel from the lobby table and conveyed it to the sitting-room.

"Well, Thorndyke," I remarked, as I deposited it on the table under the electric light, "you seem to have let yourself in for a proper wild-goose chase."

He paused in the act of digging out his pipe to regard me with an approving smile.

"That is rather happily expressed, Jervis," said he, "having regard to the personal peculiarities of our quarry. But we are not actually committed to chasing him."

"I can't imagine why you undertook the case," I continued. "There is absolutely nothing to go on."

"That is how it strikes me," he agreed placidly, blowing through the pipe preparatory to refilling. "But we couldn't refuse Brodribb."

"The few facts that we have," I went on doggedly, "are all totally irrelevant. Our information stops short exactly at the point where the problem begins. Take this coat, for instance. Here is a fool—and a frightened, artful, secretive fool at that—who does a bolt and leaves his coat behind; and we are offered that coat as a guide to the particular bolt-hole that he has gone down. The thing is ridiculous. If it had been a question of where he had come from, the coat might have told us something. But obviously it can bear no traces of the place that he intended to go to."

"That is perfectly true," Thorndyke admitted, "but it might be worth while to find out whence he had come, if that were possible."

"I don't see why," I objected, adding hurriedly, to anticipate the inevitable reply: "Of course you will say that the significance of a fact cannot be judged until the fact is known; but still, I really cannot see any possible connection between the place whence he came and the place whither he went, especially as the circumstances had changed in the interval."

"Nor can I," said Thorndyke. "But yet it is possible that there may be some connection. It is evident that Penrose started out with a definite objective. He was going to a particular place with some defined purpose; and it seems to me at least conceivable that if we could discover whither he went and on what business, that knowledge might be helpful. Of course, it probably would not; but seeing that we know nothing of the habits and mode of life of this curious, eccentric and secretive man, our only course is to pick up any stray facts concerning him that may come within our reach."

"Yes," I agreed, without much conviction, "and I take it that what is in your mind is that when he bolted he probably

made for some place that was known to him and where he believed that he could hide in safety."

"Exactly," Thorndyke agreed. "If we could discover some of his haunts, we might have a clue to a possible hiding-place."

"It may be so," I rejoined, "and if that is your view, I suppose you will begin by seeing what you can glean from this coat"; and with this I proceeded to untie the string and open the parcel.

The coat, when I lifted it out and unrolled it, was seen to be amazingly dirty. It was not merely splashed with mud. On the sleeves and around the bottom of the skirt were great daubs of thick dirt mingled with a number of whitish marks such as might have been produced by contact with wet chalk.

"It is extraordinary," said I, holding the coat up for Thorndyke's inspection. "The fellow seems to have been positively wallowing in the mire."

"Not exactly in the mire," said Thorndyke, looking closely at the great daubs. "This is not road dirt. It is earth; and the earth seems to have been mixed with particles of chalk. Perhaps we had better empty the pockets before we proceed with the examination of the coat."

I thrust my hand into the two pockets and drew out from one the driving licence, crumpled, smeared, and marked with the prints of dirty fingers, and from the other a stump of lead pencil, a cigarette-holder and what looked like a fragment of a broken tile. But it was so encrusted with earth that it was difficult to see exactly what it was.

"Brodrigg's description," said I, as I handed it to Thorndyke, "doesn't seem to fit. This is certainly not a fragment of a flower-pot. It is too dark in colour. It looks to me more like part of a tile."

Thorndyke took it from me and examined it closely in the bright light of the electric lamp.

"I don't think it is a tile, Jervis," said he, "but we shall see better when we get it clean. The interesting point about it is that the earth in which it is embedded seems to be similar to that on the coat; a mixture of loam and small fragments of chalk—a sort of chalk rubble. We will brush off the earth when we have looked over the other things."

He laid it in a small cardboard tray and put it aside on the mantel-shelf. Then he turned his attention to the cigarette-tube which I held in my hand.

"There," said I, handing it to him, "is another example of excellent but quite irrelevant clues."

"How irrelevant?" he asked. "And irrelevant to what?"

"To the subject of our inquiry," I replied. "Here is a highly distinctive object, for it was certainly never bought at a shop. As evidence in a case of doubtful identity, it would be quite valuable. But it is of no use to us. It gives us no hint as to where its owner is at present hiding."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently. "We mustn't expect too much, Jervis," said he; "in fact, we have no reason to expect anything. We are just looking over this jetsam as a matter of routine to note any facts that it may seem to suggest, without regard to their apparent relevancy or irrelevancy to our inquiry. You cannot judge the relevancy of an isolated fact. Experience has taught me, and must have taught you, that the most trivial, commonplace and seemingly irrelevant facts have a way of suddenly assuming a crucial importance by connecting, explaining or filling in the detail of later discoveries."

"Take this cigarette-tube, for instance. It appears to be the property of Daniel Penrose. But how did he come by it? As you say, it was certainly not bought in the ordinary way at a shop. There is no suggestion of mass-production about it. It is an individual thing made by a particular person, and probably there is not another like it in the world. But if we look at it attentively, we can form some idea of the kind of person who made it and can even suggest the probable circumstances in which it was made. Thus, it is composed of a very hard, heavy, black wood, much like ebony in character but with a slight brownish tinge instead of the characteristic dead black. Probably it is African ebony. It is competently turned but with no special display of skill. The mouthpiece has been shaped with a chisel, whereas you or I would have used a file on such a very hard material. The suggestion is that the chisel was a tool to which the maker was accustomed and which he used with facility. Then the rather artless but quite pleasant decoration consists of a pattern of circular white spots, each an eighth of an inch in diameter, made, apparently, by boring holes probably with a Morse drill—right through the half finished piece and driving into them little dowels of holly or some other white hardwood, which would be cut off flush when the work was finished in the lathe. Then there is the suggestion that the tube was made from odd scrap of wood, left over from some larger work."

"How do you arrive at that? I asked.

"I think," he replied, "it is suggested by this little streak of sapwood. It is a distinct blemish, and one feels that it would have been avoided if a larger piece of wood had been available. So you see that the impression we get is of a workman who was handy with a paring-chisel but also had some skill as a turner; possibly a joiner or cabinet-maker who had a lathe in his workshop."

"Yes," I agreed, "he may have been, and, on the other hand, he may not. I don't see that it matters. He is not our pigeon. What seems to me of more interest—though mighty little at that—is that there is a good-sized stump of a cigarette still in the tube. It looks as if Penrose had dropped the holder in his pocket with the cigarette still alight; and if he did that—in a motor car, with plenty of petrol vapour about—he must have been either drunk or frightened out of his wits."

"What is the next proceeding?"



"I think," said he, as he deposited the licence, the cigarette-tube and the stump of pencil provisionally in a cardboard box, "we had better collect as much earth as we can get off the coat to examine at our leisure. We shall want one or two photographic dishes, a clean toothbrush, a glass funnel, a wide-mouthed jar and a few filter-papers. Do you mind getting them while I damp the coat?"

I ran up to the laboratory and collected these articles, and when I returned with them I found Thorndyke with the coat spread out on the table, cautiously damping the larger mud-stains with a sponge; and we at once fell to work on the rather dirty and not very thrilling task of transferring the mud from the coat to one of the dishes, which I had partly filled with water. But the quantity that we collected by scraping with a paper-knife and brushing off into the water was quite surprising; and when, from the state of liquid mud in the dish, it was transformed into wet earth on a filter-paper, it at once took on the character of a definite and recognisable type of soil.

"That," said Thorndyke as he carefully removed the filter-paper from the funnel and set it on a blotting-pad to drain, "we can examine later and, if necessary, with the aid of an expert geological opinion. It appears to be a rather fine reddish loam a little like the Thanet sands, with a few minute white particles, apparently chalk. But we shall see. And now let us take a look at Brodribb's alleged flower-pot."

He brought the tray from the mantelpiece and, taking out the fragment, cautiously wetted its surface. Then, having first carefully washed the toothbrush, he proceeded to brush the earth from the pottery fragment into a small dish until it was completely clean, and, having dried its surface with blotting-paper and his handkerchief, put it aside while he collected the detached earth-on a filter-paper.

"You notice, Jervis," said he as he opened out the filter-paper on the blotting-pad, "that it seems to be the same soil as that on the coat. There are more chalk particles and they are larger; but that is what we should expect, as the larger particles would have less tendency to adhere to the coat. And now let us have your considered opinion on this fragment."

I took it from him and examined it with a decent pretence of interest (and an inward conviction that it didn't matter tuppence what it was).

"I still think," said I, "that it looks like a piece of tile. The material is as coarse as brick and it has a slight curvature like that of an old hand-made tile. But I don't quite understand what those marks are. They are evidently not accidental."

"No," he agreed, "and I think they exclude your diagnosis, and so does the definite thickening at the edge. But let us proceed systematically. I find it a help to a thorough examination of an object to describe it in detail as if one were preparing an entry in a museum catalogue."

I agreed warmly and invited him to go ahead.

"Very well," said he, "if you feel unequal to the effort, the task devolves upon me. We will take the physical properties in regular order, beginning with the general character.

"This is a fragment of pottery of excessively coarse and crude quality, consisting of a reddish buff matrix in which are embedded numerous angular white particles which have the appearance of burnt flint. The texture is somewhat porous and there is no trace of a glaze on either surface. On taking it in the hand, and allowing for the fact that it is wet, we find it noticeably heavy.

"Size and shape. The fragment forms an irregular oblong, approximately an inch and a half long by three-quarters wide. Of the four sides, three are fractured—recently, you notice—and the fourth—one of the long sides—is thickened into a definite flange or rim, roughly T-shaped in section. The thickness, as shown by the calliper gauge, varies from five thirty-seconds of an inch at the thinnest broken edge to eleven thirty-seconds on the thick unbroken edge.

"On the thick edge are five indented marks such as might have been made with a blunt knife on the soft clay, roughly a quarter of an inch apart; and on the convex surface, next to the long broken edge, are four similar linear indentations, roughly half an inch apart and at right angles to the thickened edge.

"The fragment is curved in both diameters, rather irregularly, but still quite definitely. Let us see, approximately, what those curvatures amount to."

He took a sheet of writing-paper and placed the fragment on it, standing up on its thick edge, and, with a sharp pencil, carefully traced the outline. The tracing showed the curvature very distinctly; and it became still more obvious when he placed a straightedge against the concave side and connected the two ends with a ruled line. Then he produced a pair of compasses furnished with a pencil, and, setting the pencil-point on one end of the ruled line, was able, after one or two trials, to strike an arc which passed through both ends of the line and followed the curve of the tracing. On measuring the distance from the centre to the arc, it was found to be three inches and an eighth.

"We see, then," said he, "that the curve has a radius of three inches and an eighth, so that it seems to be part of a circle, six inches and a quarter in diameter. Now, let us try the other curvature."

He stood the fragment up on one of its short ends and made a tracing as before. Measurement of this showed a curve with a radius of two inches and three-quarters.

"We can't take this last measurement very seriously," said he, "as the curve is so very short and irregular. But you see that we now have the material for a fairly reliable reconstruction of the object of which this fragment formed a part. It appears to have been an earthenware vessel of the very coarsest and crudest type, with curved sides—some kind of bowl or

pot—approximately six inches across the top, or mouth, and possibly about three inches high. But the height is a matter of mere guess-work. The irregularity in the curvature of the mouth makes it pretty certain that the vessel was built by hand, not thrown on the wheel; and this suggestion is confirmed by the extremely crude and primitive decoration. The thickened rim of the mouth is ornamented by a series of linear markings about a quarter of an inch apart, made, apparently, by indenting with a blunt knife, or perhaps a long thumb-nail, on the soft clay; and there is another series of similar markings, a little wider apart, which encircles the vessel about half an inch below the rim.

“There, Jervis, is a summary of the characteristics which enable us to form a reasonably exact picture of the object which yielded this fragment. Taking them together and in conjunction with the fact that the fragment was found in the pocket of a man who is known to be a collector of antiquities, what conclusion do you arrive at?”

“Concerning the object? Well, I suppose we must conclude that the pot or bowl must have been an extremely ancient vessel, perhaps prehistoric. It would hardly be Roman.”

“No,” he agreed. “Roman pottery was the product of a developed industry with quite advanced technical methods. This was quite a primitive piece of work; certainly pre-Roman, I should say, and more probably neolithic than Bronze Age. But that is a question which we can easily settle by inquiries or reference to published work.”

“Yes,” said I; “and when you have settled it, you will be exactly where you are now, so far as the abiding-place of Daniel Penrose is concerned, and where you were before you carried out this very interesting little investigation. You will have established a fact that can have no possible bearing on the problem that you are asked to solve.”

“Who knows?” he retorted. “We have learned that Penrose had in his pocket a fragment of ancient pottery. It is not likely that he picked it up by chance on the road; and if he did not, it is possible that we may have here a clue to the purpose with which he set out on his travels on the day when he disappeared.”

“But,” I persisted, “even if you knew that, you would be no more forward. He certainly did not set out with the purpose of killing an old woman and becoming a fugitive from the law. You would just have another irrelevant fact.”

He smiled as he dropped the fragment into the box, together with the two filter-papers. “It is quite likely that you are right, Jervis,” said he. “But we have already agreed that the relevancy of a fact often fails to be perceived until the appearance of some further facts brings its significance into view. It is always much easier to be wise after the event.”

With this, he deposited the cardboard box in the drawer of a cabinet, while I hung the wet coat on a peg in the lobby. Then we disposed ourselves in our respective chairs to smoke the final pipe before turning in and, dismissing the affairs of Daniel Penrose, chatted somewhat discursively on the morning’s doings in court. But, in the intervals of our talk I found my thoughts drifting back to the cardboard box and to the occupations with which it was associated. And not only then but in the days that followed did that curious little investigation furnish me with matter for reflection.

Of course, Thorndyke was perfectly right in his contention. It is impossible to decide in advance whether a particular item of knowledge may or may not prove at some future time to be of value; and it was a fact that Thorndyke made a rule of acquiring every item of knowledge that was obtainable in connection with a case, without regard to its apparent relevancy. But, still, I had the feeling that, in this present case, he was not merely acting on this rather academic principle. The care and thoroughness and the appearance of interest with which he had made this examination conveyed to me the impression that the facts elicited meant more to him than they did to me.

Yet what could they mean? The disappearance of Penrose had the hospital as its starting-point, or, at the earliest, the accident to the old woman. But the mud and the pottery fragment were related to events that had occurred before the accident, and which were, therefore, totally unconnected with the disappearance. Then how could they possibly throw any light on the present whereabouts of the missing man, which was the problem that we had to solve?

That was the question that I asked myself again and again. But by no amount of cogitation could I find any answer.

---

## VII. — A VISIT OF INSPECTION

The dubious and slightly bewildered state of mind to which I have referred induced me to observe Thorndyke’s proceedings with a little closer attention than was usual with me. Not that there was really any occasion, for Thorndyke appeared to go out of his way to make me a party to any doings connected with the Penrose case; which tended to increase my suspicion that I had missed some point of evidential importance.

It was some two or three days after Brodribb’s visit to us, when we seemed to have a few hours at our disposal, that Thorndyke suggested a call at Queen Square to examine Penrose’s car. I had been expecting this suggestion, and, with the hope of getting some new light on the purpose of his investigations, assented cheerfully. Accordingly, when Thorndyke had slipped a good-sized note-book and some other small necessities into his pocket, we set forth on our quest.

I have always liked Queen Square, and have watched, regretfully, its gradual deterioration—or “improvement,” as the optimistic modern phrase has it. When I first knew the place, it was nearly intact, with its satellites, Great Ormond Street, The Foundling Hospital and the group of other pleasant old squares adjacent. As we walked towards it we discussed the changes that the years had wrought. Thorndyke, as an old Londoner, sympathised warmly with my regrets.

“Yes,” he agreed, “the works of man tell us more about him than we can gather from volumes of history. Every

generation leaves, in the products of its activities, a faithful picture of its capabilities, its standard of taste and its outlook on life. The people who conceived and created these delightful, dignified haunts of peace and quiet, had never heard of town-planning and did not talk much about architecture. But they planned towns by instinctive taste and they built charming houses, the dismembered fragments of which we can now study in our museums. There is a beautiful wooden portico at South Kensington which I used to admire when it stood in Great Ormond Street."

"I remember it," said I. "But in the museum they have scraped off the paint and gilding to show the construction; which is all very interesting and instructive, but is not quite what the architect had in view when he designed it. It is rather as if one should offer the anatomical exhibits in the Hunterian museum as illustrations of the beauty of the human figure. They might have restored the painting and gilding so that visitors could see what a fine London door-way was like in the time of Good Queen Anne."

As I spoke, we turned out of Great Ormond Street and crossed the square, passing the ancient pump with its surmounting lantern and its encircling posts, and directing our steps towards Penrose's house, which had been described as nearly opposite the statue of Queen Anne. As we approached the latter, Thorndyke remarked, continuing our discussion:

"There is another example of what is practically a lost art. It seems to me a pity that leadwork should have been allowed to fall into such a state of decay. Lead may not be an ideal material for statues, but it is imperishable, it is cheap and it is easy to work. In the eighteenth century, the Piccadilly foundries, from which this statue probably came, turned out thousands of works—urns and vases, shepherds and shepherdesses and other rustic figures for use in parks and formal gardens or as architectural ornaments. But they have nearly all gone; melted down, I suppose, to form sheet lead or water pipes. This looks like the house, and a fine old house it is; one of the last survivors of its family."

We ascended to the broad door-step, enclosed by forged railings bearing a pair of link-extinguishers and the standard for an oil lamp, gave a tug at the old-fashioned bell-pull and executed a flourish on the handsome brass knocker. After a decent interval, the door was opened by a smart-looking maid-servant to whom Thorndyke communicated the purpose of our visit.

"We have called to see Mr. Kickweed on certain legal business. I think he is expecting a visit from me. I am Dr. Thorndyke."

On this the maid opened the door wide, and, inviting us to enter, conducted us to a small room adjacent to the hall, where she requested us to wait while she informed Mr. Kickweed of our arrival. When she had gone, I cast an inquisitive glance round the room, which contained a table, two chairs and a piece of furniture which might have been regarded either as a cupboard or as some kind of sideboard.

"This can hardly be the room in which the burglary took place," said I, "though it fits the description to some extent, but the window seems in the wrong place."

"Very much so," said Thorndyke, "as it looks out on the square and is over the area. And it is the wrong sort of cupboard with the wrong sort of lock. No, this is not the mysterious chamber."

Here the door opened slowly and discreetly to admit a pale-faced, rather unwholesome-looking elderly man who bowed deferentially and introduced himself by name as Mr. Kickweed; though the introduction was hardly necessary, for he might have served, in a museum of social anthropology, as a type specimen of the genus, upper manservant.

"Mr. Brodribb wrote to me, sir," he continued in a melancholy tone, "to say that you would probably call and instructing me to give you any assistance that I could. In what way can I have the pleasure of carrying out those instructions?"

"My immediate object," replied Thorndyke, "is to inspect Mr. Penrose's car. Has anything been done to it since it came back?"

"Nothing whatever, sir," Kickweed replied. "I suppose it ought to be cleaned, but I know nothing about cars. Mr. Penrose always attended to it himself excepting when it went out for repairs, and he always kept the garage locked up. In fact, it was locked when they brought the car back."

"Then how did you get the car in?" Thorndyke asked.

"The police officer, sir, who came with the car, fortunately had a few odd keys with him, and one of them happened to fit the lock. He was good enough to leave it with me, so I shall be able to let you in. If you would like to go round there now I will just get my hat and show you the way."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "If it is not troubling you—"

"It is no trouble at all, sir," interrupted Kickweed, and thereupon he stole out of the room with the light, noiseless tread that seems to be almost characteristic of heavy, bulky men. A few minutes later he reappeared in correct morning dress, including a slightly rusty top hat, and we set forth together. The garage was not far away, being situated in a sort of mews, approached from Guilford Street. As we halted at the door and Kickweed produced the key, I noticed that Thorndyke cast an inquisitive glance at it, and I guessed what was in his mind, because it was also in mine. But we were both wrong. The key was not of the filed or skeleton variety but was just a normal warded key of a simple type. However, it turned in the lock, after a good deal of persuasion, and, the doors being flung open, we entered.

It was a roomy place and fairly well lighted by a wide window above the doors. The car stood in the middle, leaving ample space on either side and still more at the end, where a rough bench had been placed, with a vice and a number of

rather rusty tools together with various oddments in the way of bolts, nuts and miscellaneous scrap.

"I take it," said Thorndyke, glancing at the littered bench, "that Mr. Penrose is not a skilled mechanic."

"No, sir," Kickweed admitted. "I don't think he is much of a workman. And yet he used to spend a good deal of time here. I don't know what he would have been doing."

"You did not assist him, then?"

"No, sir. I have only been in here once or twice, and then only for a few minutes with Mr. Penrose. I never came here by myself, nor, I think, did anybody else. There was only one key, until I got this one, and Mr. Penrose kept that himself, and has it still."

"I suppose you don't know of any reason why he should have objected to your coming here alone?"

"No, sir. And I don't think there was any. It was just his way. He has rather a habit of making secrets of nothing."

"So I have understood," said Thorndyke, "and a very bad habit it is, leading to all sorts of unnecessary suspicions and surmises. However, we came here primarily to inspect the car, so perhaps we had better get on with that."

Accordingly, he proceeded to make a systematic and detailed survey of the vehicle, beginning with the bent mudguard, the leading edge of which he examined minutely with the aid of a lens. But, if there had ever been any fibres or other traces of the collision, they had been removed by the police. He then transferred his attention to the wheels, and, after a preliminary glance at them, produced one or two envelopes from his pocket and laid them on the bench.

"The dirt on the face of the tyres," he remarked, "is of no interest to us, as it will have changed from moment to moment. But that on the inside and on the rims of the wheels is more significant. Its presence there suggests that, at one time, the car had been driven over quite soft earth; and that earth was a natural soil, not a road material; a reddish loam similar to that on the coat."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is evident that the wheels sank in pretty deep by the quantity of soil on the rims. And I think," I added, stooping low to look under the car, "that I can see a leaf sticking to the rim of the wheel."

With some difficulty I managed to reach in and pick it off together with the lump of dry loam in which it was embedded.

"A dead leaf," Thorndyke pronounced when I handed it to him; "I mean a last year's leaf, and it looks like a hornbeam. But we shall see better when we wet it and flatten it out."

He deposited the leaf and earth in an envelope, on which he wrote a brief memorandum of the source of the specimen, and then continued his examination. But there was nothing more to be seen from the outside excepting a general dirtiness, suggestive of a not very fastidious owner. Nor was there anything very significant to be seen when I opened the door. The interior showed no signs of anything unusual. The floor was moderately clean excepting that under the driver's seat, which was thickly plastered with loam. But this was what we should have expected; and the evidence that it furnished that there was almost certainly only one person in the car during that last drive, merely confirmed what we already knew. There were no loose articles in any of the pockets or receptacles other than the insurance certificate and the rather scanty outfit of tools. In fact, the only discovery—and a very modest one at that—was another dead leaf, apparently also hornbeam, trodden flat into the dirt by the driver's seat.

Having finished with the car, Thorndyke once more glanced round the garage and I could see that he was making a mental inventory of the various objects that it contained. But his next question reverted to the car.

"I understood," said he, "that the police found an empty flask in the car."

"Yes, sir," replied Kickweed. "I took that away to wash it and polish it up. It is a silver flask and it seemed a pity to leave it in the dirty state in which it was found. I have cleaned it thoroughly and put it away among the plate. Did you wish to see it?"

"No," replied Thorndyke, "but I should like a few particulars. About how much does it hold?"

"It holds the best part of a bottle. About an imperial pint."

"That is a large flask," Thorndyke remarked. "Did Mr. Penrose usually carry it in the car?"

"Do you know, sir, I really can't say. I have only seen it once before. That was about two years ago when I happened to be brushing Mr. Penrose's overcoat and found it in the pocket. But I have the impression that he usually carried it with him when he went away from home. He would be likely to because he is rather fastidious about his wine. He drinks nothing but Madeira and old brown sherry; and you can't get good Madeira or brown sherry at roadside inns."

"And as to quantity? It has been stated that when he was last seen he appeared to be under the influence of liquor. Was that at all usual?"

Kickweed shook his head emphatically. "No, sir," he replied. "That must have been a mistake. He may have smelt of sherry. He often does. But sherry has a very strong aroma and a little of it goes a long way in the matter of smell. But in all the years that I have known Mr. Penrose, I have never seen him in the slightest degree the worse for drink. He does certainly take a good deal, as I can judge by the wine merchant's deliveries and the empty bottles, but then he takes no beer or spirits or any other kind of wine. They must have been misled by the odour."

"That seems quite likely," said Thorndyke. "By the way, I notice a couple of hazel twigs hanging up there under that hat. Do you happen to know whether Mr. Penrose is a dowser?"

"A dowser, sir?" Kickweed repeated with mystified air.

"A water-finder," Thorndyke explained. "That is what those forked twigs are used for." He took the hat from the peg and laid it on the bench, and, taking down one of the twigs, held it by its two ends and continued: "The specially gifted persons—known as dowsers—who search for underground streams or springs, hold the twig in this way and walk to and fro over the land where they expect to find water; and when they pass over a hidden spring—so it is stated—they become aware of the presence of underground water by a movement of the twig in their hands. It looks as if Mr. Penrose had practised the dowser's art.

"Ah!" exclaimed Kickweed, "I remember now that Mr. Penrose once showed me one of these things and told me about it. But I thought it was one of his little jokes; for it was not water that he professed to be able to find with it. He said that it was an infallible guide to buried treasure. It would show the treasure-seeker exactly where to dig. But I never supposed that he was speaking seriously. You see, sir, Mr. Penrose is rather a jocular gentleman and it is sometimes a little difficult to be quite sure what he really does mean."

"So I understand," said Thorndyke, "and he may have been joking in this case. But the idea of digging seems to have been in his mind. Now, so far as you know, did he ever engage in any sort of digging activities in his search for antiquities?"

"Well, sir," replied Kickweed, "it is rather difficult to say. He is so very facetious. But I have known him to bring home certain articles—lumps of flint and bits of crockery, they looked like to me—which were covered with earth and which I have helped him to scrub clean at the scullery sink. I supposed that he must have dug them up somewhere as he referred to them as 'Treasure Trove' and 'the resurrectionist's loot' and other similar expressions."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "those expressions and the condition of the objects certainly suggest something in the way of excavations. But I don't see any tools suitable for the purpose; and I should suppose that if he had had any he would have kept them here. Do you happen to remember having seen any picks, shovels or similar tools here or elsewhere?"

Mr. Kickweed reflected as he ran an inquiring glance round the walls. "As I said, sir," he replied, "I have only been in here once or twice before Mr. Penrose went away. But I seem to remember a sort of pick—I think it is called a trenching tool—which I don't see now. And there was a small spade, pointed like the ace of hearts, with a leather case for the blade. But I don't see that either. It hung, I think, on one of those pegs. But that was over a year ago."

"It looks," I suggested, remembering the pottery fragment, "as if Mr. Penrose may have taken them with him when he left home. They were not in the car when it was found, but it had then been lying unattended for a couple of days. Loose property has rather a way of disappearing from derelict cars."

"It is quite possible," said Thorndyke; and he then appeared to dismiss the subject, for he replaced the hazel twig on its peg and picked up the hat to return that also, but paused, looking with a faint smile into its dusty and decayed interior.

"Mr. Penrose," he remarked, "seems to have attached undue value to this relic. But perhaps the marking was done when it was in a more presentable condition."

He exhibited the interior of the hat, on the crown of which the name "D. Penrose" had been carefully printed with a rubber stamp.

"Yes, sir," said Kickweed, "the name was probably stamped when the hat was new. Not that that would have made any difference, for Mr. Penrose stamped his name on everything that he possessed; not only on his underclothing and handkerchiefs and the things that are usually marked, but his hats, shoes, books, paper-knives—everything that was movable. It always seemed to me a little inconsistent."

"How inconsistent?" I asked.

"I mean," replied Kickweed, "he is in general a very secret gentleman. He makes a secret of the most simple and ordinary things. And yet he prints his full name, not just his initials as most men do, inside his hat and his shoes and his waistcoat lining, and even on his pocket-knife. Now, if a stranger asked him his name he would probably avoid telling him; but yet, as soon as he takes his hat off, he discloses his identity to all the world."

"I take it," said Thorndyke, "that he usually does the stamping himself?"

"Lord bless you, yes, sir! That rubber stamp has always been kept under lock and key as if it had been the Koh-i-noor, or as if it could have been used for forging his signature. I have never even seen it. But, of course, that signifies nothing. It is just his way."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "and you are a wise man, to accept his harmless oddities and not let them worry you." He hung the hat on its peg and then, turning to Kickweed, opened a fresh subject.

"Mr. Brodribb consulted me about a burglary that occurred in your house a short time ago. There was a question of calling in the police and getting the cupboard opened. How does that suggestion strike you?"

"It strikes me," Kickweed replied severely, "as an improper and a foolish suggestion. It would be improper to tamper with Mr. Penrose's property in his absence and without his consent, sir, and it would be foolish because we should be none the wiser when we had opened the cupboard as we don't know what it contained, or whether it contained anything."

Here I interposed rather rashly.

"The suggestion has been made that it is just possible that the person who entered the room may have been Mr. Penrose himself."

Kickweed looked, and professed to be, deeply shocked. But I had, nevertheless, a strong suspicion that that was his own opinion.

"But, you know, Mr. Kickweed," said I, "there is nothing immoral or even improper in a gentleman's entering his own house to take his own property if he happens to have need of it. Most men, it is true, would prefer to enter by the front door. But Mr. Penrose was not like most men; and if he preferred the window, he was entirely within his rights. It was his own window."

I had the feeling that my observations were received with approval and even with some relief. But Mr. Kickweed, if he secretly concurred, as I believed that he did, was not committing himself.

"No doubt, sir," said he, "you are perfectly right. But I couldn't imagine Mr. Penrose doing anything so undignified, especially as he had the key of the front door in his pocket. And," he added, with a pensive smile, "it was his own front door."

"You were saying just now," said Thorndyke, "that nothing is known as to the contents of that cupboard. Have you no idea at all as to what it contained, or contains?"

"I said knowledge, sir," replied Kickweed. "I know nothing at all as to what is, or has been, in that cupboard."

He spoke with an emphasis that gave us clearly to understand that he was not going beyond his actual knowledge. He was going to hazard no opinions.

"And it is the fact, Mr. Kickweed," Thorndyke pursued, "that there is no one in the world who knows, or could form any reasonable judgement as to what that cupboard did, does or might contain?"

Mr. Kickweed reflected, a trifle uneasily, I thought. But Thorndyke's question admitted of no evasion, and he at length replied with some reluctance:

"Well, sir, I wouldn't say that, for there is one person who may possibly know. I have not spoken of him to any one hitherto, because Mr. Penrose was very secret about that room, and he is my employer and it is my duty to abide by his wishes, whether expressed or not. But you ask me a definite question and I suppose you are entitled to an answer. I think it possible that Mr. Penrose may have confided his secret to a certain friend of his; a gentleman named Lockhart."

"What makes you think that Mr. Lockhart may know what is or was, in the cupboard?" Thorndyke asked.

"The discovery—if it was one—" Kickweed replied, "was quite accidental. Mr. Lockhart came to the house by appointment to look over the collection, and Mr. Penrose took him into the great gallery. When they had been there some considerable time, I ventured to look in to ask if I should bring them up some tea. But when I entered the big gallery they were not there; but I could hear them talking, and the voices seemed to come from the small room, though the door of that room was shut. But they must have been in there because there was no other room that opened out of the great gallery. Now the small room contained nothing but the cupboard, so that if Mr. Penrose took Mr. Lockhart into that room, it could only have been to show him what was in the cupboard. And I did, in fact, hear sounds of movement in the room as if drawers were being pulled out. But, of course, as soon as I realised what was happening, I went away."

"But there was another circumstance that made me think that Mr. Penrose might have let Mr. Lockhart into the secret of the small room. When they had finished with the collection they went into the morning-room—the little front room that you went into—and I took them up some tea; and there they were for quite a long time before Mr. Lockhart went away. Afterwards I learned from Mr. Penrose, himself, that Mr. Lockhart had been advising him about insuring the collection, which made it seem likely that Mr. Lockhart had been shown all that there was to insure."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that seems a reasonable inference. Is Mr. Lockhart connected with insurance business?"

"No, sir. He is a legal gentleman, a barrister."

"Ah!" said Thorndyke. "Lockhart. Now I wonder if that would be—you don't happen to know what inn he belongs to?"

"Yes, sir. He belongs to Lincoln's Inn, at least, that is his address. I happen to know by having seen a card of his which Mr. Penrose left on his dressing-table."

"Is Mr. Lockhart an intimate friend of Mr. Penrose?"

"No, sir. Quite a recent acquaintance, I believe, though Mr. Penrose seemed to take to him more than he usually does to strangers. Still, I was rather surprised at his taking him into the small room. I have never known him to do such a thing before."

Thorndyke made no immediate rejoinder, but stood apparently considering this last statement and letting his glance travel about the place as if searching for some further objects of interest. But it seemed that he had squeezed both the garage and Mr. Kickweed dry, for he said, at length:

"Well, I think we have learned all that there is to learn here; and I must thank you, Mr. Kickweed, for having been so extremely helpful."

Kickweed smiled a somewhat dreary smile. "I hope I have not been too much so, sir," said he. "I am not a willing helper, though I feel bound to carry out Mr. Brodribb's instructions. I understand from him that you are trying to find out where Mr. Penrose has gone to; and, if you will pardon me for saying so, I hope you won't succeed."

Thorndyke smiled appreciatively. "Now, why do you say that?" he asked.

"Because, sir," Kickweed replied earnestly, "I feel that this pursuit is not justifiable. Mr. Penrose, as I understand, has had a little mishap and thinks it best to keep out of sight for a time. But if he thinks so, it is his own affair, and I don't consider it just or proper that other people, for their own purposes, should hunt him up and perhaps get him into difficulties."

I must confess that I sympathised heartily with Mr. Kickweed's sentiments, and so, apparently, did Thorndyke, for he replied:

"That is precisely what I pointed out to Mr. Brodribb. But there are legal reasons for ascertaining Mr. Penrose's whereabouts, though there are none for disclosing them to others. You may take it from me, Mr. Kickweed, that nothing which may come to my knowledge will be used in any way to his disadvantage."

"I am very relieved to hear you say that, sir," Kickweed rejoined with evident sincerity, "because I have felt that there are others who take a different view. Mr. Horridge, for instance, has, to my knowledge, been in communication with the police."

"Well," I said, as we retired from the garage and Kickweed locked the door, "I don't suppose he has done any harm if he has no more to tell them than we have been told."

As our way home led through Queen Square, we walked thither with Mr. Kickweed, and Thorndyke took the opportunity to ask a few questions concerning Mr. Penrose's collection.

"I don't know much about the things," said Kickweed, "excepting that there is a rare lot of them and that they take a terrible amount of dusting. I do most of it with a pair of bellows when Mr. Penrose is not about. But if you feel any interest in them, why not step in, as you are here, and have a look at them yourself?"

Now I have no doubt whatever that this was precisely what Thorndyke had intended to do, but, in his queer, secretive way, had preferred that the inspection should seem to occur by chance. At any rate, he accepted the invitation, and we followed Kickweed to the door of the house and were by him admitted to the hall.

---

## VIII. — MR. HORRIDGE

Mr. Kickweed, as has been mentioned, had a light tread, and his movements in general tended to be silent. Thus our entry into the hall of the old house and the subsequent closing of the door were almost noiseless. Nevertheless, our arrival was not unobserved; for, even as Kickweed was pocketing his latch-key, the door of the morning-room opened slowly and quietly and a large, distinctly fat gentleman appeared framed in the doorway.

There was something slightly odd and even ridiculous in the sudden and silent manner in which he became visible, and in the sly, inquisitive glance that he turned on us; as if he had been a plain-clothes officer and we a surprised party of burglars.

"How did you know I was here, Kickweed?" he demanded.

"I didn't, sir," was the reply.

"Oh," rejoined the other, "I thought these gentlemen might have come on some business with me."

"No, sir. They have been inspecting the car. They are Dr. Thorndyke and Dr. Jervis."

The fat man bowed stiffly. "Ah!" said he, "they have inspected the car. And now?"

"Dr. Thorndyke thought he would like to take a look at the collection," Kickweed replied frigidly, evidently resentful of the other man's manner, "so I invited him to step in and look over it."

"Ha!" said the fat gentleman. "You thought it quite in order to do that? Well, if Dr. Thorndyke wants to see the collection, there is no reason why he should not. I will show him round the gallery, myself. My name," he added, turning to us, "is Horridge. You have probably heard of me. I am Mr. Penrose's executor, and, in his absence, am keeping an eye on his property."

Now, the tone of his remarks filled me with a burning desire to kick Mr. Horridge; but that being impracticable, I should certainly, if left to myself, have told him to go to the devil and forthwith walked out of the house. Thorndyke, however, was completely unruffled; and having once more thanked Kickweed, who was slinking away in dudgeon, he accepted the invitation with a suavity bordering on meekness (whereby I judged that he had definite reasons for wishing to see the collection).

"So," said Mr. Horridge, as he conducted us along the hall, "you have been examining the car. Now, what did you expect to find out from the car?"

"I did not expect anything," Thorndyke replied.

Horridge giggled. "And did your examination answer your expectations?" he inquired.

"Substantially," replied Thorndyke, "I may say that it did."

Horridge giggled again, and, throwing open a door which opened from the hall, invited us to enter. We accordingly passed in and found ourselves in an immense and lofty room communicating with another of similarly magnificent proportions by an opening from which the original folding doors had been removed.

I looked around me with surprise and extreme distaste, for the noble apartments had been degraded to the status of a mere lumber-room. Of the trim and orderly character of a museum there was not a trace. The walls were occupied by interminable ranges of open shelves and the floor was crowded with plain deal tables, coarsely stained and varnished to disguise their humble material; and shelves and tables were littered with a chaos of miscellaneous objects, all exposed baldly to the air and dust. There was not a single glazed case in the room and the only article of comely furniture was a lantern clock, perched on a bracket, which ticked sedately and actually showed the approximately correct time.

"This is a very singular collection," Thorndyke remarked, casting a puzzled glance over the shelves and tables. "One doesn't quite see what its purpose is; what it is intended to illustrate."

Horridge giggled again in his unpleasant way. "Whatever the intention is," said he, "it illustrates very perfectly poor old Pen's usual state of mind—muddle. But may I ask what is the object of this inspection? Is it just a matter of curiosity or is it connected with the inquiry into Pen's disappearance? Because I don't see how the inspection is going to help you."

"It is not very obvious, certainly," Thorndyke admitted. "But one never knows what light chance facts may throw on the problem. I think it will be worth while for me to see what things Mr. Penrose has collected and where he obtained them."

Horridge grinned—and the explanation of the grin was presently forthcoming. Meanwhile he rejoined:

"Well, cast your eye over the oddments and see what takes your fancy. Then you can go into the question of where they came from. What would you like to start with?"

Thorndyke glanced once more along the shelves and then announced his choice.

"I see there is a good deal of ancient pottery, mixed up with other exhibits. Perhaps it would be well to sort that out and see where the pieces were found. Now, here is a little dish of Gaulish red ware. The slip of paper that it rests on bears the number, 201. That, I presume, refers to a catalogue."

"It does," replied Horridge, giggling delightedly. "I will get you the catalogue and then you will be able to find out all about the specimen."

He went to a table near the end of the room and pulled out a drawer from which he extracted a stout quarto volume. This he brought to Thorndyke and, having handed it to him with something of a flourish, stood looking at him and giggling like a fool. But the reason for his merriment became apparent when Thorndyke opened the book and turned to the number. Observing the slow smile which spread over my colleague's face, I looked over his shoulder and read the entry, scrawled, not very legibly, in pencil:

201. Sammy. Pot Sand. Sinbad.

"This is not very illuminating," Thorndyke remarked; on which Horridge burst into a roar of laughter.

"Oh, don't say that!" he gurgled. "I understood from old Brodribb that you could see through a brick wall. Well, here's your chance. The whole catalogue is written in the same damn silly sort of jargon. Of course, Pen knows what it means, but he doesn't intend that any one else shall. Perhaps you would like to note down a few samples to think over at your leisure."

Thorndyke instantly grasped the opportunity.

"Thank you," said he. "A most excellent suggestion. If you will be so very kind as to show Dr. Jervis the collection, I will make a few notes on the pottery and extract the entries from the catalogue. If we could identify some of the localities, we might get quite a useful hint."

This suggestion did not at all meet the views of Mr. Horridge, who was evidently as curious as to Thorndyke's proceedings as I was, myself. But he could not very well refuse; for Thorndyke, seeing a chance of carrying out his investigations—whatever they might be—uninterrupted by Horridge's chatter and free from his inquisitive observation, was quietly persistent and, of course, had his way, as he usually did.

"Very well," Horridge at length agreed, with a rather bad grace, "then I'll just take Dr. Jervis round the shelves and show him the curios. But I don't know much about them, and I don't suppose he cares much."

Accordingly, we set forth on a voyage of exploration round the crowded, disorderly shelves; and, realising that my function was to keep Horridge's attention distracted from Thorndyke's activities, I plied him with questions about the exhibits and commented on their interest and beauty with the utmost prolixity and tediousness at my command. But it was a wretched make-believe on both sides; for, while Horridge was answering my questions (usually quite ignorantly and all wrong, as even I knew) he kept one eye cocked in Thorndyke's direction, and my own attention was similarly occupied.

But Thorndyke gave us but a poor entertainment. Drawing a chair up to a table near the window, he seated himself with his back to us and the catalogue before him. This he pored over for some time, making occasional entries in his note-book. Then he rose, and, having taken a survey of the shelves, began to select pieces of pottery, each of which he took in turn to



the table where he examined it critically, compared it with the entry in the catalogue and copied the latter into his notebook. He began with the Roman pottery, but, from long acquaintance with his habits and methods, I suspected that this was only a tactical move to conceal from Horridge his actual purpose. For I knew that it was his invariable habit, when he had to work in the presence of inquisitive observers, to confuse the issues in their minds by actions which had no bearing on the matter in hand.

As to his real purpose, I had no doubt that it was in some way connected with the fragment which we had examined; and as Horridge conducted me round the loaded shelves, I kept a sharp look-out for pottery exhibits which might correspond to the hypothetical vessel which Thorndyke had sketched in his reconstruction. There were two pieces (in different places and among totally unrelated objects) which, so far as I could see without close inspection, answered the description; one, a largish, rather shallow bowl of which a large part was missing, and the other a deeper pot which had been broken and rather unskillfully mended and which was complete save for a small part of the rim. This pot corresponded very closely both in shape and size with Thorndyke's reconstruction, and it seemed to me, even, that the piece which was missing from the rim was about the size of our fragment. Accordingly, I gave that pot my special attention.

One after another Thorndyke gravely examined specimens of Roman, Saxon and Iron Age pottery in which I felt sure he could have no interest whatever. At last, after circling round, so to speak, he arrived at this pot, picked it up, and with a glance at the number on its paper, bore it over to the table. As he set it down and seated himself, I saw him take something from his pocket, but as his back was towards us I could not see what it was, or what he did with it. I assumed, however, that it was some measuring instrument and that he was ascertaining the dimensions of the piece that was missing. At any rate, his examination was quite brief, and, when he had copied the entry in the catalogue, he carried the pot back to its place and proceeded to look about for further objects for study.

By this time, however, Horridge had begun to be rather bored and was disposed to make no secret of the fact.

"I should think," said he, with an undisguised yawn, "that you've got enough material to occupy you for a month or two; and I'll wager that you don't make any sense of it then."

Thorndyke looked thoughtfully at his open notebook. "Perhaps you are right," he agreed. "These entries will take a good deal of deciphering and probably will yield no information, after all. I don't think we need trespass on your patience any longer."

"Oh, that's all right," said Horridge, "but, before you go—if you've seen all that you want to see—perhaps you might as well have a look at the small room—the one that was broken into, you know. You heard about that burglary, I think? Old Brodribb said he was going to consult you about it."

"Mr. Brodribb did consult me," Thorndyke replied, "on the question of opening the cupboard by force or otherwise. I advised him that, in the absence of Mr. Penrose, it would not be proper to force the cupboard and that, as the contents of the cupboard were unknown, the proceeding would be useless as well as improper."

"But what about calling in the police?" Horridge suggested.

"I don't think the police would force a cupboard, without the owner's knowledge or consent, if it were locked and showed no signs of having been tampered with."

"Well," Horridge grumbled, "it's very unsatisfactory. Some one may have got away with a whole lot of valuable property and able to dispose of it at their leisure. However—if you have finished with the catalogue, do you mind putting it back in its drawer?"

As Thorndyke complied with this rather odd request, our host walked quickly up the long room to a door in the corner, and I had the impression that he inserted a key and turned it. But, as he stood half turned towards us and in front of the handle and keyhole, I could not see distinctly, nor did I give the matter any particular attention.

"It is odd," he remarked, still standing before the door, grasping the handle, "that Pen should have left the key in this door when he went away. He was always so deadly secret about Bluebeard's chamber, as he called it in his silly way. He never let me see into it. I always thought he had something very precious in it; and I'm inclined to think so still."

With this, he opened the door and we all entered the mysterious chamber; a smallish room and very bare of furniture, for it contained only a single chair, a mahogany table, placed under the window, and a massive cupboard, also of mahogany, with a pair of doors like a wardrobe.

"So this is the famous cupboard," said Thorndyke, standing before it and looking it over critically; "the repository of hidden treasure, as you believe. Well, looking at it, one would say that whatever precious things were once in it, are in it still. But one might be wrong."

Having made this rather ambiguous pronouncement, he proceeded to a more particular inspection. The escutcheon of the Chubb lock was examined with the aid of a lens, and the interior of the keyhole with the tiny electric lamp that he always carried. From the lock he transferred his attention to the cupboard itself, closely examining the sides, standing on the chair to inspect the top, and, finally, setting his shoulder to one corner and his foot against the skirting of the wall, tried to test its weight by tilting it. But beyond eliciting a complaining creak, he could make no impression on it. "I've tried that," said Horridge. "It's like shoving against the Eddystone lighthouse. The thing is a most ungodly weight, unless it is screwed to the floor. It can hardly be the stuff inside."

"Unless," I suggested, "Mr. Penrose indulged in the hobby of collecting gold ingots. But even a collection of plate can be pretty heavy if there is enough of it."

"At any rate," said Thorndyke, "one thing is clear. That cupboard has not been opened unless it was opened with its own key."

"Don't think the lock could have been picked?" said Horridge.

Thorndyke shook his head. "Burglars don't try to pick Chubb locks," said he. "They use the jemmy, or else cut the lock out with centre-bits."

Horridge grunted and then amplified the grunt with the remark:

"Looks a bit as if our friend Kick had raised a false alarm."

"That can hardly be," Thorndyke objected. "I understood that he found the door bolted on the inside and had to enter through the window."

"Yes, that was what he said," Horridge admitted grudgingly in a tone that seemed to imply some scepticism as to the statement.

"It is conceivable," Thorndyke suggested, "that the visitor may have been disturbed, or that he gave up the attempt when he found it impossible to pick the lock. You see, there is no evidence that he was a skilled burglar. No difficulties were overcome. He simply opened the window and stepped in. The really astonishing thing is that Penrose should have left the place so insecure—that is, assuming that there actually was some valuable property here. The window, as you can see, has no shutters, or even screws or stops, and it looks on to an alley which I understand is invisible from the street. Let us see what that alley is like."

He moved the table away from the window, glancing at a number of parallel scratches on its polished surface, slid up the window and looked out.

"It is quite remarkable," said he. "The window is only a few feet from the ground and the alley is closed by a small wooden gate which has no bolt or latch and seems to be secured only by a lock; which is probably a simple builder's lock which could be easily opened with a skeleton key or a common pick-lock. There is no security whatever. That stout bolt on the room door is, of course, useless, as it is on the inside; and the lock is probably a simple affair."

As he spoke, he opened the door and plucked out the key, which he held out for our inspection.

"You see?" he said. "Just a plain warded lock which a skilled operator could turn with a bit of stiff wire. Penrose seems to have pinned his faith to the Chubb lock; and perhaps events have justified him."

He slipped the key back into the lock; and this seemed to bring the proceedings to an end. After a few perfunctory expressions of hope that our visit had satisfied us and that we had seen all that we wished to see, our host escorted us through the great gallery and the hall and finally launched us into the street.

---

## IX. — THORNDYKE TESTS A THEORY

As we took our way homeward I tried to arrange in my mind the rather confusing experiences of the last hour or two. Those hours, it seemed to me, had been virtually wasted, for we had learned nothing new that bore directly on our problem. This view I ventured to propound to Thorndyke, beginning, naturally, with Mr. Horridge, who had made a deep and disagreeable impression on me.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "he is not a prepossessing person. A bad-mannered man and distinctly sly and suspicious. You probably noted his mental attitude towards Kickweed."

"Yes, distinctly hostile; and I gathered that he is inclined to suspect him of having faked that burglary for his own ends. I suppose, by the way, that it is not possible that he may be right?"

"It is not actually impossible," Thorndyke replied, "but there is nothing to support such a suspicion. Kickweed impressed me very favourably, especially by his loyalty to Penrose. If he is not a liar, the position with regard to the small room is this: some one entered that room; that some one either knew or thought he knew what it contained. He either failed to open that cupboard or he opened it with its own key. The only evidence that he did open it is the piece of paper that was found, which, you notice, was similar to the slips of paper under the specimens in the gallery, excepting that it bore no catalogue number but had an inscription similar to those in the catalogue. That paper strongly suggests that the cupboard had been opened, but is not conclusive, since it might have been dropped by Penrose on some other occasion. But, as I said, its presence is strongly suggestive of a hurried opening of the cupboard at night. There were one or two other points that probably did not escape you."

"You mean the extraordinary weight of the cupboard? That certainly impressed me as significant though I am not quite clear as to what it signifies. It might be due to some ponderous contents, but it seemed to me to suggest an iron safe inside."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that is undoubtedly the explanation. The cupboard is a mere wooden case enclosing a large iron safe. That was quite clear from the construction, which is very much like that of an organ case. The sides and top are fixed

in position by large screws instead of being keyed in with proper cabinet-maker's joints. The wooden case was built on after the safe had been placed in position."

"Then," said I, "the Chubb lock is a mere hollow pretence."

"Exactly. The wooden case could have been taken off with a common screw-driver. You noticed the scratches on the table?"

"Yes. But, of course, there is no evidence as to when they were made."

"No," he agreed. "Probably they were made at various times. But they are of interest in relation to the arrangement of the cupboard. You must have noticed that they were in two groups, roughly two feet six inches apart and all approximately parallel. They looked like the scratches that would be made by the runners of drawers of that width; and comparing them with the cupboard, one saw that, allowing for the space taken up by the wooden case, there would just be room for a range of drawers of that width. The reasonable inference is that the iron safe houses a range of largish drawers and that these have been taken out from time to time and placed on the table so that their contents could be looked at by the light from the window."

I agreed that this appeared to be the case, but I could not see that it mattered very much whether it was so or not.

"It seems to me," I added, "that we are acquiring a lot of oddments of information none of which has the slightest bearing on the one question that we are asked to answer: Where is Penrose hiding at the present moment?"

"It would be safer," said he, "to say, 'seems to have'. I am picking up all the information that I can in the hope that some of it may turn out to have a bearing on our problem."

"By the way," said I, "why were you so keen on seeing the collection? You were, you know, or you would not have put up with Horridge's insolence. You had some definite point to clear up respecting that pottery fragment. What was it?"

"The point," he replied, "was this. To an archaeologist, that fragment alone would have been an object of interest, since, as you saw, it was possible to make from it a rough, but quite reliable reconstruction. But Penrose is not an archaeologist. He is, as we understood, a mere collector of curios. To such a man, a tiny fragment would be of no interest by itself."

"On the other hand, to an archaeologist, a broken pot is, practically, of the same scientific value as a complete pot. But to the mere collector, or curio-monger, the completeness of a specimen is a matter of cardinal importance. If he has an incomplete specimen, he will spare no trouble or expense to make it complete. He is not concerned with its scientific interest but with its value as a curio."

"Knowing, then, what we did of Penrose, it occurred to me as a bare possibility that this apparently worthless fragment that we found in his pocket might be the product of a definite search ad hoc. That he might have re-visited some place from which he had obtained an incomplete specimen with the express purpose of searching for the fragment which would make it complete. The edges of the fragment were freshly fractured. It had been broken off the pot in the course of digging it out. Therefore, the missing piece of the pot was still in the place where the digging had taken place and was certainly recoverable. It was just a speculative possibility, but it was worth testing as we are so short of data, so I decided to look over the collection when I got a chance."

"And I gather," said I, "that you obtained confirmation of your very ingenious theory?"

"I am hoping that I did," he replied; "but we shall see when we get home. If I have, we shall have some sort of a clue to the place from which that disastrous homeward journey started."

I forbore to remark that it did not seem to me to matter two straws where it started from, since it was evident that he thought the information worth acquiring. So I merely asked what the clue amounted to.

"Unfortunately," he replied, "it amounts to very little. This is the entry in the catalogue corresponding to the pot which I examined."

He indicated the entry in his note-book, and I read:

"Moulin a vent. Julie (Polly)."

"What a perfect and complete ass the fellow must be," I exclaimed, returning the note-book in disgust, "to write meaningless twaddle like that in what purports to be a museum catalogue!"

"I agree with you most warmly," he replied. "But the man's oddities are an element in our problem. And, of course, these preposterous entries in the catalogue are not meaningless. They have a meaning which is deliberately concealed and which we have got to extract."

"In the case of this one?" I asked, "can you make any sense of it? Can you, for instance, discover any connection between an earthen pot and a windmill?"

"Yes," he replied, "I think that is fairly clear, though it doesn't help us much. There is a place in Wiltshire, near Avebury, known as Windmill Hill, where a certain distinctive kind of neolithic pottery has been found and which has been named the Windmill Hill type. Probably, this pot is an example of that type, but that is a question that we can easily settle, though it doesn't seem to be an important one. The information that we want is probably contained in the other two words; and, at present, I can make nothing of them."

"No," I agreed, "they are pretty obscure. Who is Julie? What is she? And likewise: Who is Polly? Good God! What damned nonsense it is!"

He smiled at my exasperation. "You are quite right, Jervis," said he. "It is monstrous that two learned medical jurists should have to expend their time and intellect in solving a set of silly puzzles. But it is part of our present job."

"Do you find any method in this fellow's madness?" I asked. "I noticed you copying out a lot of this balderdash."

"There is a little method," he replied. "Not much. But this entry, relating to that little embossed red ware dish that you saw, will illustrate Penrose's method. You see, it reads: 'Sammy. Pot Sand. Sinbad.' Now, this Gaulish red ware is usually described as Samian ware, so we may take it that 'Sammy' means 'Samian.' The interpretation of 'Pot Sand' is also fairly obvious. There is a shoal in the Thames Estuary off Whitstable on which it is believed that a Roman ship, laden with pottery, went aground and broke up. From time immemorial, oyster dredgers working over that shoal have brought up quantities of Roman pottery, including Samian ware, whence the shoal has been named The Pan Sand, and is so marked on the Admiralty charts. Penrose's 'Pot Sand' is therefore, presumably The Pan Sand; and as to Sinbad, we may assume him to have been a sailor, probably an oyster dredger or a whelk fisher."

"I have no doubt that you are right," said I, "but it is difficult to consider such childish twaddle with patience. I should like to kick the fellow."

"I should be delighted if you could," said he, "for, since you would have to catch him before you could kick him, that would mean that our problem would be solved. By the way, we shall have to contrive, somehow, to make the acquaintance of Mr. Lockhart. I wonder if Brodribb knows him."

"You think he could tell us what was in that small room. But I doubt if he would. Penrose would probably have sworn him to secrecy, and, in any case, it would be a matter of professional confidence. But it seems to me that the burglary is a side issue, though I know you will say that we can't judge which issues are side issues."

"At any rate," he retorted, "the burglary is not one. It is very material. For, if Penrose was the burglar, he must be in possession of property which he intends to dispose of, by which, if we knew what it was, we might be able to trace him. And if the burglar was not Penrose, we should very much like to know who he was."

I did not quite see why; but, as our discussion had now brought us to our doorstep, there was no opportunity to pursue the question; for, as I had expected, Thorndyke made straight for the laboratory, and I followed, with mild curiosity as to the test that I assumed to be in view. As we entered, the sound of Polton's lathe in the adjacent workshop informed us that he had some job on hand there, but his quick ear had noted our arrival and he came in at once to see if his services were required.

"I need not disturb you, Polton," said Thorndyke. "It is only a matter of a small plaster mould."

"You are not disturbing me, sir," replied Polton. "I am just turning up a few spare tool handles to pass the time. You would like the quick-setting plaster, I suppose?"

"If you please," Thorndyke replied; and as Polton retired to fetch the materials, he produced from his pocket a small tin box from which he tenderly shook out into his hand a slab of moulding wax. Looking at it as it lay on his palm, I saw that it was a "squeeze" of the edge of the pot, the gap in the broken rim being represented by a wart-like swelling of the shape of the missing piece. Noting the exact correspondence, I remarked:

"You hardly want the plaster. The shape of the squeeze is exact enough for comparison."

"Yes," he agreed, "but an actual measurement is always better than a judgement of resemblance."

Here, Polton returned with ajar of the special plaster, a rubber bowl, a jug of water and the other necessities for the operation. Unobtrusively, but firmly taking possession of the squeeze, he laid it in one of the little paper trays that he used for making small moulds or casts, brushed it over lightly with a camel-hair brush containing a trace of oil, and then proceeded to mix the plaster. This had to be done quickly, since the special plaster set solid in about five minutes; and I could not but admire the calm, unhurried way in which Polton carried the process through its various stages. At exactly the right moment, the plaster was dropped on to the squeeze, blown with the breath into all the interstices, and then the remainder poured on until the little tray was full to the brim; and even as the last drops were being persuaded out of the bowl with a spoon, the change began which transformed the creamy liquid into a white solid like the "icing" on a wedding cake.

At this point Thorndyke retired to fetch the fragment, and Polton and I took the opportunity to clean the bowl and spoon and spread on the bench a sheet of newspaper to receive the inevitable crumbs and scrapings; a most necessary precaution, for plaster, in spite of its delicate whiteness, is one of the dirtiest of materials. The particles which detach themselves from a cast seem to spread themselves over a whole room, with a special predilection for the soles of shoes, whence they distribute impressions on stairs and passages in the most surprising and unexpected fashion. But a sheet of paper collects the particles and enables them to be removed tidily before they have the opportunity to develop their diabolical tendencies.

When Thorndyke returned our labours were completed, and the little tray reposed on the paper with the plaster tools beside it.

"Is it hard enough to open?" Thorndyke asked.

Polton tested with his finger-nail the smooth, white mass that bulged up from the tray, and, having reported that it was "set as hard as stone," proceeded carefully to shell it out of the paper container. Then he scraped away the projecting edges until the wax was free all round. A little cautious persuading with the thumb induced the squeeze to separate from the plaster, when Polton laid them down side by side and looked expectantly at Thorndyke. The cast was now clearly recognisable as the replica of a portion of the outside surface of the pot, including the rim and the gap where a piece of the rim had been broken away.

Thorndyke now produced the fragment of pottery, and, holding it delicately between his finger and thumb—for the plaster was still moist and tender—very carefully inserted it into the gap; and as it dropped in, exactly filling the space, with a perfect fit at every point, he remarked:

"I think that settles the question of identity. This fragment is the piece that is missing from the museum pot."

"Yes," I agreed. "The proof is absolutely conclusive. What is not quite obvious to me is the importance of the fact which is proved. I see that it strongly supports your theory that the fragment was the product of a definite search, but it is not clear to me that even the confirmation of your theory has any particular value."

"It has now very little value," he replied. "The importance of the fact which this experiment has established is that it carries us out of the region of the unknown into that of the known. If this fragment was part of the museum pot, then the place from which that pot came is the place from which this fragment came."

"Yes," said I, "that is clear enough. And it is fair to assume that the place whence this fragment came is the place from which Penrose started on his homeward journey. But, as we don't know where the pot came from, I can't see that we have got so very far from the unknown. We have simply connected one unknown with another unknown."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently. "You are a proper pessimist, Jervis," said he. "But you will, at least, admit that we have narrowed the unknown down to a very small area. We have got to find out where that pot came from; and I don't think we shall have very much difficulty. Probably the catalogue entry embodies some clue."

"But," I persisted, "even if you discover that, I don't see that you will be any further advanced. You will know where Penrose came from, but that knowledge will not help you to discover where he has gone to. At least, that is how it appears to me. But perhaps there is some point that I have overlooked."

"My impression is," Thorndyke replied, "that you have not given any serious consideration to this curious and puzzling case. If you would turn it over in your mind carefully and try to see the connections between the various facts that are known to us, you would realise that we have got to begin by re-tracing that last journey to its starting-point."

With this, he picked up the cast with the embedded fragment of pottery to put them into the box with the other "exhibits"; and, as he retired, Polton (who had been listening with a curious intentness to our conversation) gathered up the newspaper and the plaster appliances and went back to his lathe.

---

## X. — INTRODUCES MR. CRABBE

Thorndyke's rather cryptic observation gave me considerable food for thought. But it was not very nourishing food, for no conclusion emerged. He was quite right in believing that I had given little serious consideration to the case of Daniel Penrose. It had not greatly interested me, and I had seen no practical method by which the problem could be approached. Nor did I now; and the only result of my cogitations was to confirm my previous opinion that I had missed some crucial point in the evidence and to make me suspect that there was in this case something more than met the eye.

This latter suspicion deepened when I reflected on Thorndyke's concluding statement: "You would realise that we have got to begin by re-tracing that last journey to its starting-point." But I did not realise anything of the sort. The problem, as I understood it, was to discover the present whereabouts of Daniel Penrose; and to this problem, the starting-point of his last known journey seemed completely irrelevant. But in that I knew that I must be wrong; a conviction which merely brought me back to the unsatisfactory conclusion that I had failed to take account of some vital element in the case.

But it was not only in respect of that disastrous return journey that I was puzzled by Thorndyke's proceedings. There was his unaccountable interest in the burglary at Queen Square. Apparently, he believed the burglar to have been Penrose himself; and in this I was disposed to concur. But suppose that we were able to establish the fact with certainty; what help would it give us in tracing Penrose to his hiding-place? So far as I could see, it would not help us at all; and Thorndyke's keenness in regard to the burglary only increased my bewilderment.

Naturally, then, I was all agog when, a few days later, Thorndyke announced that Mr. Lockhart was coming in to smoke a pipe with us on the following evening; for here seemed to be a chance of getting some fresh light on the subject. Lockhart was being lured to our chambers to be pumped, little as he probably suspected it, and if I listened attentively, I might catch some of the drippings.

"You haven't forgotten," said I, "that Miller is likely to call to-morrow evening?"

"No," he replied, "but we have no appointment so he may choose some other time. At any rate, we must take our chance; and it won't matter so very much if he does drop in."

It seemed to me that the superintendent would be very much in the way and I sincerely hoped that he would choose

some other evening for his visit. But Thorndyke presumably knew his own business.

"How did you get hold of Lockhart?" I asked. "Did Brodribb know him?"

"I didn't ask him," Thorndyke replied. "I saw Lockhart's name in the list of cases at the Central Criminal Court so I dropped in there and introduced myself. When I told him that I was looking into Penrose's affairs, he was very ready to come in and hear all about the case."

I laughed aloud. "So," said I, "this poor deluded gentleman is coming with the belief that he is going to be the recipient of information. It is a rank imposition."

"Not at all," he protested. "We shall tell him what we know of the case, and no doubt we shall learn something from him in exchange. At least, I hope we shall."

"Then," said I, "you are an optimist. If he knows anything that you don't, you can be pretty certain that he learned it under the seal of the confessional."

Thorndyke agreed that I was probably right. "But," he added hopefully, "we shall see. It is sometimes possible to learn something from what a man refuses to disclose."

I made a mental note of this observation and kept it in mind when our visitor arrived on the following evening, for it suggested to me that Thorndyke's questions might be more illuminating than the answers that they might evoke, particularly if our friend should turn out to be uncommunicative. But this did not, at first, appear to be the case, for, after a little general conversation, he led up to the subject of Daniel Penrose of his own accord.

"I did not quite gather what it was," said he, "that your clients expected you to do. If it is a permissible question, what sort of inquiry are you engaged in?"

"It is a perfectly permissible question," replied Thorndyke. "I can tell you all about the case without any breach of professional confidence as the main facts are already in the public domain. What I am expected to do is to discover the place in which Mr. Penrose is at present hiding, or at least to locate him sufficiently to make it possible to produce him, if necessary."

"And apparently he doesn't want to be produced? But why not? Why has he gone into hiding? My very discreet informant told me that he had gone away from home and left no address, but she didn't mention any reasons for his disappearing. Are there any substantial reasons?"

"He thinks that there are," replied Thorndyke. "But, if you are interested, I will give you a sketch of the circumstances of his disappearance, so far as they are known to me."

"I am very much interested," said Lockhart. "Penrose is a queer fellow—the sort of fellow who might do queer things—and I don't know that I am so violently fond of him. But he always interested me as a human oddity, and I should like to hear what has happened to him."

Thereupon, Thorndyke embarked on a concise but detailed account of the strange circumstances which surrounded Penrose's disappearance from human ken; and I listened with almost as much attention as Lockhart himself. For Thorndyke's clear summary of the events in their due order was a useful refresher to my own memory. But, what specially amused and delighted me was the masterly tactical approach to the cross-examination which I felt pretty sure was to follow. Thorndyke's perfectly open and unreserved narrative, treating the whole affair as one generally known, in respect of which there was not the slightest occasion for secrecy, was an admirable preparation for a few discreet questions. It would be difficult for Lockhart to adopt a reticent attitude after being treated with such complete confidence.

"Well," said Lockhart, when the story was told, "it is a queer affair, but, as I remarked, Penrose is a queer fellow. Still, there are some points that rather surprise me."

"For instance?" Thorndyke suggested.

"It is a small matter," replied Lockhart, "and I may be mistaken in the man, but I shouldn't have expected him to be the worse for liquor. You seemed to imply that he was definitely squiffy."

"It is only hearsay," Thorndyke reminded him, "and an inexperienced opinion at that. The report may have been exaggerated. But, in your experience of him, should you say that he is a strictly temperate man?"

"I wouldn't go so far as that," said Lockhart. "He is most uncommonly fond of what he calls 'the vintages of the Fortunate Isles' and the 'elderly and fuscous wine of Jerez,' and I should think that he gets through a fair amount of them. But he impressed me as a man who would take a glass, or two or three glasses, of sherry or Madeira pretty often, but not a great quantity at once. Your regular nipper, especially of wine, doesn't often get drunk."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "though sherry and Madeira are strong wines. What were the other points?"

"Well," replied Lockhart, "doesn't it strike you that the actions of Penrose are rather disproportionate to the cause? He seems to have been abnormally funky. After all, it was only a motor accident, and there isn't any clear evidence that it was his car. He could have denied that he was there. And, in any case, it doesn't seem worth his while to bolt off and abandon his home and all his worldly possessions. If he had committed a murder or arson or something really serious, it would have been different."

"It was manslaughter," I remarked; "and a rather bad case. And the vintages of the Fortunate Isles didn't make it any less culpable. He might have got a longish term of hard labour, even if he escaped penal servitude."

"I don't think it was as bad as that," said Lockhart. "At any rate, if I had been in his place, I would have stayed and faced the music; and I would have left it to the prosecution to prove that I was on that road."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is a matter of temperament. From your knowledge of Penrose, should you have taken him for a nervous, panicky man?"

Lockhart reflected for a few moments. "You speak," said he, "of my knowledge of Penrose. But, really, I hardly know him at all. I made his acquaintance quite recently, and I have not met him half a dozen times."

"You don't know his people, then?"

"No. I know nothing about his family affairs. Our acquaintance arose out of a chance meeting at a curio shop in Soho. We walked away from the shop together, discussing collecting and antiques, and he then invited me to go and inspect his treasures. Which I did; and that is the only occasion on which I was ever in his house. But I must say that it was a memorable experience."

"In what way?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well," replied Lockhart, "there was the man, himself; one of the oddest fishes that I have ever encountered. But I dare say you have heard about his peculiarities."

"I understand that he is a most inconveniently secretive gentleman, and also that he has an inveterate habit of calling things by their wrong names."

"Yes," said Lockhart, "that is what I mean. He speaks, not in parables, but in a sort of cross-word puzzles, leaving you to make out his meaning by the exercise of your wits. You can imagine what it was like to be shown round a collection by a man who called all the specimens by utterly and ridiculously inappropriate names."

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "rather confusing, I should suppose. But you did see the collection; and perhaps he showed you the catalogue too?"

"He did. In fact, he made a point of letting me see it in order, I think, to enjoy my astonishment. What an amazing document it is! If ever he should have to plead insanity, I should think that the production of that catalogue would make medical testimony unnecessary. I take it that you have seen it and the collection, too?"

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "I examined the catalogue and made a few extracts with notes of the pieces to which they referred. And I was shown round the collection by Mr. Horridge, Penrose's executor. But I have an idea that he did not show us the whole collection. We saw only the collection in the great gallery; but probably you were more favoured, as you were shown round by the proprietor?"

The question was very adroitly thrown out; but, at this point, Mr. Lockhart, as I had expected, developed a sudden evasiveness.

"It is impossible for me to say," he replied; "as I don't know what the whole collection consisted of. I assumed that he had shown me all that there was to see."

"Probably you were right," said Thorndyke; and then, coming boldly to the real issue, he asked: "Did he show you the contents of the small room?"

For some moments Lockhart did not reply, but sat looking profoundly uncomfortable. At length, he answered in an apologetic tone: "It's a ridiculous situation, but you know what sort of man Penrose is. The fact is that when he showed me his collection, he made it a condition that I should regard the transaction as a strictly confidential one and that I should not discuss his possessions or communicate their nature or amount to any person whatsoever. It is an absurd condition, but I accepted it and consequently I am not in a position to tell you what he did actually show me. But I don't suppose that it is of any consequence. I take it that you have no special interest in his collection."

"On the contrary," said Thorndyke, "we have a very special interest in the collection, and particularly that part of it which was kept in the small room. Since Penrose went away, there has been a burglary—or a suspected burglary—at his house. The small room was undoubtedly entered one night, and there is a suspicion that the big cupboard was opened. But, if it was, it was opened with a key, as there was no trace of any injury to the doors. On the other hand, it is possible that the burglar failed to pick the lock and was disturbed. But Penrose has the only key of the cupboard, so there are no means of ascertaining, without picking the lock or forcing the door, whether there has or has not been a robbery; and we have decided that it would not be admissible to do either in Penrose's absence. Nevertheless, it is important for us to know what was in that cupboard."

"I don't see why," said Lockhart. "If it is not admissible to force the door—and I entirely agree with you that it is not—I don't see that it would help you to know what was in the cupboard—or whether it contained anything at all. Supposing that it had certain contents, you cannot ascertain, without opening it, whether those contents are still there or whether they have been stolen. But, if you say that the lock has not been picked nor the door forced, and Penrose has the only key, doesn't that prove pretty conclusively that no burglary has taken place?"

At this moment, a familiar sound came to justify my fears of an interruption. I had taken the precaution to shut the outer

oak door when Lockhart had entered. But the light from our windows must have been visible from without. At any rate, the well known six taps with a walking-stick—in three pairs, like the strokes of a ship's bell—spelled out the name of the visitor who stood on our threshold. Accordingly, I rose and threw open the doors, closing them again as the superintendent walked in.

"Now, don't let me disturb any one," exclaimed Miller, observing that, at his entrance, Lockhart had risen with the air of taking his departure. "I am only a bird of passage. I have just dropped in to collect those documents and hear if the doctor has any remarks to make on them."

Thorndyke walked over to a cabinet, and, unlocking it, took out a small bundle of papers which he handed to the superintendent.

"I can't give a very decided opinion on them," said he. "It is really a case for a handwriting expert. All that I can say is that there are none of the regular signs of forgery; no indications of tracing or of very deliberate writing. The separate words seem to have been written quickly and freely. But I got the impression—it is only an impression—that there is a slight lack of continuity, as if each word had been executed as a separate act."

"I don't quite follow that," said Miller.

"I mean," Thorndyke explained, "that—assuming it, for the moment, to be a forgery—the forger's method might have been, instead of copying words continuously from an original, to take one word, copy it two or three times so as to get to know it thoroughly, then write it quickly on the document and go on to the next word. Written in that way, the words would not form such completely continuous lines as if the whole were written at a single operation. But you had better get the opinion of a first-class expert."

"Very well," said Miller, "I will; and I will tell him what you have suggested. And now, I had better take myself off and leave you to your conference."

"You need not run away, Miller," Thorndyke protested, very much to my surprise. "There is no conference. Fill up a glass of grog and light a cigar like a Christian."

He indicated the whisky decanter and siphon and the box of cigars, which had been offered to, and declined by, Lockhart, and drew up a chair.

"Well," said Miller, seating himself and selecting a cigar, "if you are sure that I am not breaking in on a consultation, I shall be delighted to spend half an hour or so in your intellectual society." He thoughtfully mixed himself a temperate whisky and soda, and then, with a quizzical glance at Thorndyke inquired:

"Was there any little item of information that you were requiring?"

"Really, Miller," Thorndyke protested, "you under-estimate your personal charms. When I ask for the pleasure of your society, need you look for an ulterior motive?"

Miller regarded me with a crafty smile and solemnly closed one eye.

"I'm not looking for one," he replied. "I merely asked a question."

"And I am glad you did," said Thorndyke, "because you have reminded me that there was a little matter that I wanted to ask you about."

Miller grinned at me again. "Ah," he chuckled. "Now we are coming to it. What was the question?"

"It was concerned with a man named Crabbe. Jonathan Crabbe of Hatton Garden. Do you know him?"

"He is not a personal friend," Miller replied. "And he is not Mr. Crabbe of Hatton Garden just at present. He is Mr. Crabbe of Maidstone jail. What did you want to know about him?"

"Anything that you can tell me. And you needn't mind Mr. Lockhart. He is one of the Devil's own, like the rest of us."

"I know Mr. Lockhart very well by sight and by reputation," said the superintendent. "Now, with regard to this man Crabbe. He had a place, as you say, in Hatton Garden where he professed to carry on the business of a diamond broker and dealer in precious stones. I don't know anything about the diamond brokery, but he was a dealer in precious stones all right. That's why he is at Maidstone. He got two years for receiving."

"Do you remember when he was convicted?"

"I can't give you the exact date off hand," replied Miller. "It wasn't my case. I was only an interested onlooker. But it was somewhere about the end of last September. Is that near enough?"

"Quite near enough for my purpose," Thorndyke replied. "Do you know anything more about him? Is he an old hand?"

"There," replied Miller, "you are asking me a question that I can't answer with certainty. There were no previous convictions against him, but it was clear that he had been carrying on as a fence for a considerable time. There was definite evidence of that. But there was another little affair which never got beyond suspicion. I looked into that myself; and I may say that I was half inclined then to collar the worthy Jonathan. But when we came to talk the case over, we came to the conclusion that there was not enough evidence and no chance of getting any more. So we put our notes of the case into cold storage in the hope that something fresh might turn up some day. And I still hope that it may, for it was an important case



and we got considerable discredit for not being able to spot the chappies who did the job.”

“Is there any reason why you should not tell us about the case?” Thorndyke asked.

“Well, you know,” Miller replied, “it was only a case of suspicion, though, in my own mind, I feel pretty cock-sure that our suspicions were justified. Still, I don’t think there would be any harm in my just giving you an outline of the case, on the understanding that this is in strict confidence.”

“I think you can take that for granted,” said Thorndyke. “We are all lawyers and used to keeping our own counsel.”

“Then,” said Miller, “I will give you a sketch of the case; what we know and what I think. It’s just possible that you may remember the case as it made a good deal of stir at the time. The papers referred to it as “The Billington Jewel Robbery.”

“I have just a faint recollection of the affair,” Thorndyke replied; “but I can’t recall any of the details.”

“It was a remarkable case in some respects,” Miller proceeded, “and the most remarkable feature was the ridiculous softness of the job. Billington was a silly fool. He had an important collection of jewellery, which is a stupid thing in itself. No man ought to keep in a private house a collection of property of such value—and portable property, too—as to offer a continual temptation to the criminal class. But he did; and what is more, he kept the whole lot of jewels in a set of mahogany cabinets that you could have opened with a pen-knife. It is astonishing that he went on so long without a burglary.

“However, he got what he deserved at last. He had gone across to Paris, to buy some more of the stuff, I believe, when, some fine night, some cracksmen dropped in and did the job. It was perfectly simple. They just let themselves in, prised the drawers open with a jemmy, cleared them out and went off quietly with the whole collection. Nobody knew anything about it until the servants came down in the morning and found the drawers all gaping open.

“Then, of course, there was a rare philaloo. The police were called in and our people made a careful inspection of the premises. But it had been such an easy job that anybody might have done it. There was nothing that was characteristic of any known burglar. But, on taking impressions of the jemmy-marks and a few other trifles, we were inclined to connect it with one or two other jobs of a similar type in which jewels had been taken. But we had not been able to fix those cases on any particular crooks, though we had a growing suspicion of two men who were also suspected of receiving. Of those two men, one was Jonathan Crabbe and the other was a man named Wingate. So we kept those two gentlemen under pretty close observation and made a few discreet inquiries. But it was a long time before we could get anything definite; and when, at last, we did manage to drop on Mr. Crabbe, it was only on a charge of receiving. The Billington job still remained in the air. And that’s where it is still.”

“And what about Wingate?” asked Thorndyke.

“Oh, he disappeared. Apparently, he rumbled the fact that he was getting a bit of attention from the police, and didn’t like it. So he cut his connection with Crabbe and went away.”

“And have you lost sight of him?” Thorndyke asked.

“Yes. You see, we never had anything against him but his association with Crabbe, and that may have been a perfectly innocent business connection. And our inquiries seemed to show that he belonged to quite a respectable family, and the man, himself, was of a decidedly superior type; a smart, dressy sort of fellow with a waxed moustache and an eye-glass. Quite a toff, in fact. The only thing about him that seemed at all fishy was the fact that he was using an assumed name. But there was not so very much even in that, for we ascertained that he had been on the stage for a time, and he had probably taken the name of Wingate in preference to his family name, which was rather an odd one—Deodatus Pettigrew.”

“You never traced any of the proceeds of the robbery?” Thorndyke suggested.

“No. Of course, jewellery is often difficult to trace if the stones are taken out of their settings and the mounts melted down. But these jewels of Billington’s ought to have been easier than most to trace, as a good many of them were quite unusual and could only have been disguised by re-cutting, which would have brought down their value a lot. And there was one that couldn’t have been disguised at all. I remember the description of it quite well. It was rather a famous piece, known as the Jacobite Jewel. It consisted principally of a lump of black opal matrix with a fire opal in the centre, and on this fire opal was carved a portrait of the Old Pretender, who called himself James the Third. I believe there was quite a little history attached to it. But the whole collection was rather famous. Billington was particularly keen on opals, and I believe that his collection of them was one of the finest known.”

“Had you any inkling as to what had become of this loot?” Thorndyke asked. “The thieves could hardly have been able to afford to put the whole of it away into storage for an indefinite time.”

“No,” agreed Miller. “They would have had to get rid of the stuff somehow. We thought it just possible that there might be some collector behind the affair.”

“But,” I objected, “a collector would probably know all about the specimens in other collections and particularly a famous piece like this Jacobite Jewel. And he would be almost certain to have heard of the robbery. It would be a matter of special interest to him.”

“Yes, I know,” said Miller. “But collectors are queer people. Some of them are mighty unscrupulous. When a man has got the itch to possess, there is no saying what he will not do to gratify it. Some of the rich Americans who have made their

fortunes by pretty sharp practice, are not above a little sharp practice in spending them. And your millionaire collector is dead keen on getting something that is unique; something of which he can say that it is the only one of its kind in the world. And if it has a history attached to it, so much the better. I shouldn't be at all surprised if that Jacobite Jewel had been smuggled out of the country together with the great collection of opals. It is even possible that Crabbe had negotiated the sale before the robbery was committed; but, of course, it is also possible that I may be mistaken and that Crabbe may have had nothing to do with the robbery. We are all liable to make mistakes."

Here the superintendent, having come to the end of his story, emptied his glass, re-lit his cigar and looked at his watch.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "how the time does go when you are enjoying intellectual conversation—especially if it is your own. It's time I made a move. No, thank you; not another drop. But, well, yes, I will take another of these excellent cigars. You have listened very attentively to my yarn, and I hope you have picked up something useful from my chatter."

"I always pick up something useful from your chatter, as you call it," replied Thorndyke, rising as the superintendent rose to depart; "but on this occasion you have given me quite a lot to think about."

He walked to the door with Miller and even escorted him out on to the landing; and meanwhile, I occupied myself in restraining, with exaggerated hospitality, a strong tendency on the part of our guest to rise and follow the superintendent. For I could not let him go until I had seen what Thorndyke's next move was to be.

The superintendent's narrative had given me a very curious experience, in respect of its effect on Lockhart. At first, he had listened with lively interest, probably comparing the Billington collection with that of Penrose. But presently he began to look distinctly uncomfortable and to steal furtive glances at Thorndyke and me. I kept him unobtrusively under observation, and Thorndyke, I know, was watching him narrowly, though no one who did not know him would have suspected it, and we both observed the change of manner. But when Miller mentioned the Jacobite Jewel and went on to describe its appearance, the expression on Lockhart's face was unmistakable. It was that of a man who has suffered a severe shock.

Having seen the last of the superintendent, Thorndyke closed both the doors and went back to his chair.

"That was a queer story of Miller's," he remarked, addressing Lockhart. "One does not often hear of a receiver including burglary in his accomplishments. I am disposed to think that Miller's surmise as to the destination of the swag from the Billington robbery is about correct. What do you think, Lockhart?"

"You mean," the latter replied, "that it was smuggled out of the country."

"No," said Thorndyke, "I don't mean that, Lockhart, and you know I don't. What I am suggesting is that the Billington opals, including the Jacobite Jewel, are, or were, in Penrose's possession; that they were in the cupboard in the small room and that you saw them there."

Lockhart flushed hotly, but he kept his temper, replying with mild facetiousness:

"Now, you know, Thorndyke, it's of no use for you to try the suggesting dodge on me. I am a practising barrister, and I have used it too often myself. I have told you that I gave an undertaking to Penrose not to discuss his collection with anybody; and I intend to honour that undertaking to the letter and in the spirit."

"Very well, Lockhart," Thorndyke rejoined, "we will leave it at that. Probably, I should adopt the same attitude if I were in your position, though I doubt if I should have given the undertaking. We will let the collection go, unless you would consider it admissible to discuss the source of some of the things in the big room, which we all saw. The question as to where he got some of those things has a direct bearing on the further question as to where he is lurking at the present moment."

"I don't see the connection," said Lockhart, "but if you do, that is all that matters. What is it that you want to know?"

"I should like to know," Thorndyke replied, "what his methods of collection are. Has he been in the habit of attending farmhouse auctions, or prowling about in labourer's cottages? Or did he get his pieces through regular dealers?"

"As to that," said Lockhart, "I can only tell you what he told me. He professed to have discovered many of his treasures in cottage parlours and in country inns and elsewhere, and to have practised on quite an extensive scale what he called 'resurrectionist activities,' but he was mighty secret about the actual localities. My impression is that his explorations were largely bunkum. I suspect that the bulk of his collection came from the dealers, and particularly from the antique shop that I mentioned to you. In fact, he almost admitted as much, for he told me that when his explorations drew a blank, he was accustomed to fall back on the Popinjay."

"The Popinjay?" I repeated.

"The proprietor of the antique shop was a man named Parrott, but I need not say that Penrose never referred to him by that name. He was-always 'our psittacoid friend,' or 'Monsieur le Perroquet' or 'the Popinjay.' You will even find him referred to in those terms in the catalogue."

"That is useful to know," said Thorndyke. "I met with some entries containing the words, 'Psitt', 'le Perro' and 'Pop' and could make nothing of them. Now I realise that they represented purchases from Mr. Parrott. And there was an entry, 'Sweeney's resurrection.' That, I suppose, had a similar meaning. Do you know who Sweeney is?"

Lockhart laughed as he replied: "No, I have never heard of him, though I remember the entry. The only thing that I feel

sure of is that his name is not Sweeney. Possibly it is Todd; and he is probably a dealer in antiquities. The piece, I remember, is an Anglo-Saxon brooch; and we may guess that Mr. Sweeney Todd got it from a Saxon burial ground in the course of some unauthorised excavations."

"That seems likely," said Thorndyke. "I must look up the list of dealers in antiquities in the directory and see if I can find out who he is."

"But does it matter who he is?" asked Lockhart. "If you are trying to discover the whereabouts of our elusive friend, I don't quite follow your methods."

"My dear Lockhart," Thorndyke replied, "my methods are of the utmost simplicity. I know practically nothing about Penrose, his habits and his customs, and I am out to pick up any items of information on the subject that I can gather, in the hope that some of them may prove to have some bearing on my quest. After all, it is only the ordinary legal method which you yourself, are in the habit of practising."

"I suppose it is," Lockhart admitted. "But, fortunately for me, I have never had a problem of this kind to deal with. I can't imagine a more hopeless task than trying to find a very artful, secretive man who doesn't mean to be found."

At this moment, I heard the sound of a key being inserted in the outer door. Then the inner door opened and Polton entered with an apologetic crinkle.

"I have just looked in, sir," he announced, "to see if there is anything that you wanted before I go out. I shall be away about a couple of hours."

"Thank you, Polton," Thorndyke replied. "No, there is nothing that I shall want that I can't get for myself."

As Thorndyke spoke, Lockhart looked round quickly and then stood up, holding out his hand.

"This is a very unexpected pleasure, Mr. Polton," said he. "I didn't know that you were a denizen of the Temple; and I was afraid that I had lost sight of you for good, now that Parrott's is no more." He shook hands heartily with our ingenious friend and explained to us: "Mr. Polton and I are quite old acquaintances. He also, was a frequenter of Parrott's establishment, and the leading authority on clocks, watches, hallmarks and other recondite matters."

"You speak of Parrott's shop," said Thorndyke, "as a thing of the past. Is our psittacoid friend deceased, or has he gone out of business?"

"Parrott is still to the good, so far as I know," replied Lockhart, "but the business is defunct. I suspect that it was never more than half alive. Then poor Parrott had a double misfortune. Penrose, who was by far his best customer, disappeared; and then his cabinetmaker—a remarkably clever old man named Tims—died and could not be replaced. So there was no one left to do the restorations which were the mainstay of the business. I was sorry to find the shop closed when I came back from my travels on circuit. It was quite a loss, wasn't it, Mr. Polton?"

"It was to me," replied Polton, regretfully. "Many a pleasant and profitable hour have I spent in the workshop. To a man who uses his hands, it was a liberal education to watch Mr. Tims at work. I have never seen any man use wood-working tools as he did."

With this, Polton wished our guest "Good evening!" and took himself off. As the outer door closed, Lockhart asked:

"If it is not an impertinent question, what is Mr. Polton's connection with this establishment? He has always been rather a mystery to me."

"He is rather a mystery to me," Thorndyke replied, with a laugh. "He says that he is my servant. I say that he is my faithful friend and Jervis's. Nominally, he is our laboratory assistant and artificer. Actually, since he can do or make anything and insists on doing everything that is to be done, he is a sort of universal fairy godmother to us both. And, I can assure you that he is not unappreciated."

"I am glad to know that," said Lockhart. "We all—the frequenters of Parrott's, I mean—held him in the greatest respect, and none more so than Penrose."

"Oh, he knew Penrose, did he?" said I, suddenly enlightened as to Polton's interest in our conversations respecting the missing man. "He has never mentioned the fact."

"Perhaps you have never given him an opening," Lockhart suggested, not unreasonably. "But they were quite well acquainted; in fact, the very last time that I saw Penrose, he and Mr. Polton were walking away from the shop together, carrying a lantern clock that Mr. Polton had been restoring."

We continued for some time to discuss Polton's remarkable personality and his versatile gifts and abilities, in which Lockhart appeared to be deeply interested. At length the latter glanced at his watch and rose.

"I have made an unconscionably long visit," said he, as he prepared to depart; "but it is your fault for making the time pass so agreeably."

"You certainly have not out-stayed your welcome," Thorndyke replied, "and I hope you will stay longer next time."

With this exchange of civilities, we escorted our guest out to the landing, and, having wished him "Good night!" returned to our chamber to discuss the events of the evening.

---

## XI. — RE-ENTER MR. KICKWEED

When I had closed the door and drifted back towards my chair, I cast an expectant glance at Thorndyke; but, as he maintained a placidly reflective air, and thoughtfully re-filled his pipe in silence, I ventured to open the inevitable discussion.

"May I take it that my revered senior is satisfied with the evening's entertainment?"

"Eminently so," he replied; "in fact, considerably beyond my most sanguine expectations. We have made appreciable progress."

"In what direction?" I asked. "Does Miller's story throw any light on the case?"

"I think so," he answered. "What he told us, in conjunction with what Lockhart refused to tell us, seems to help us to this extent; that it appears to disclose a motive for the burglary, or the attempt."

"Do you mean that it establishes the probability that there was something there worth stealing and that somebody besides Penrose knew of it?"

"No," he replied, "though that also is true. But, what is in my mind is this: When Penrose disappeared, either for good or for some considerable time, there arose the probability that, sooner or later, the cupboard in the small room would be opened for inspection by Horridge or some other person claiming authority. But if that cupboard contained—as I have no doubt it did—a quantity of stolen property, the identifiable proceeds of a known robbery, a very awkward situation would be created."

"Yes," I agreed, "it would be awkward for Penrose when Miller caught the scent. There would be a hue and cry with a vengeance. And it might be unpleasant for Mr. Crabbe if any connection could be traced between him and Penrose. I suppose there can be no doubt that the stuff was really there?"

"It is only an inference," Thorndyke replied, "but I am convinced that the Billington jewels were in that cupboard and that Lockhart saw them there. Everything points to that conclusion. You saw how intensely uncomfortable Lockhart looked when Miller described the stolen jewels; and you must have noticed that he was perfectly willing to discuss the general collection. From which we may reasonably infer that his promise of secrecy referred only to the contents of the small room. Besides, if the stolen jewels had not been there, or he had not seen them, he would certainly have said so when I challenged him. The denial would have been no breach of his promise."

"No," I agreed, "I think you are right in assuming that he saw them, though how Penrose could have been such an idiot as to show them at all is beyond my comprehension—that is, if he knew that they were stolen goods, which I gather is your opinion."

"It is not by any means certain that he did," said Thorndyke. "Evidently he is quite ignorant of the things that he collects. The promise may have been only a manifestation of his habitual secrecy, accentuated by the knowledge that he had acquired the jewels from some rather shady dealer. The evidence seems a little contradictory."

"At any rate," said I, "it was a lucky chance that Miller happened to drop in this evening. Or wasn't it a chance at all? There was just a suspicion of arrangement in the way things fell out. Did you know that Miller would select this evening for his call?"

"In effect, I may say that I did. I had good reason to believe that he would call this evening, and, as you suggest, I made my arrangements accordingly. But those arrangements did not work out according to plan, for I knew nothing of the Billington robbery. Miller's disclosure was a windfall and it made the rest of my plan unnecessary."

"Then what had you proposed to do?"

"My intention was," Thorndyke replied, "to demonstrate to Lockhart that there had been transactions between Crabbe and Penrose. Of course, I could have done this without Miller's help, but I thought that if he heard of Crabbe's misdeeds from a police officer he would be more impressed and, therefore, more amenable to questions. But, as I said, Miller's story did all that was necessary."

"Then," said I, "there was a connection between Crabbe and Penrose, and that connection was known to you. How did you find that out? And, by the way, how did you come by your knowledge of Mr. Crabbe? I had never heard of him until you mentioned his name."

Thorndyke chuckled in his exasperating way. "My learned friend is forgetting," said he. "Are we not decipherers of cross-word puzzles and interpreters of dark sayings?"

"I am not," said I. "So you may as well come straight to the point."

"You have not forgotten the scrap of paper with the cryptic inscription which was found in the small room?"

"Ha!" I exclaimed, suddenly recalling the ridiculous inscription, "I begin, as Miller would say, to rumble you. But not very completely. The inscription read: 'Lobster: hortus petasatus.' But I still don't see how you arrived at it. Crabs are not the only crustaceans—besides lobsters."

"Very true, Jervis," said he. "Lobster is ambiguous as to its possible alternatives. Evidently, the more specific character

was contained in the other term, 'hortus petasatus.' Now, the learned Dr. Smith translates petasatus as 'wearing, or having on, a travelling-cap; ready for a journey.' But the word 'petasus' means either a cap or a hat, so the adjective, petasatus, may be rendered as 'hatted' or 'having a hat on.'"

"Yes, I see," said I, with a sour grin. "So hortus petasatus would be a hat on garden. But what puerile balderdash it is. That man, Penrose, ought to be certified."

"Still," said Thorndyke, "you see that it was worth while to study his jargon, for, when I had deciphered the inscription so far, the rest of the inquiry was perfectly simple. I looked up Hatton Garden in the directory and ran through the names of occupants in search of one that seemed related to the term 'lobster.' Among them I found the name of Jonathan Crabbe (the only one, in fact, who answered the description); and as he was described as a diamond broker and dealer in precious stones, I decided that he was probably the man referred to by Penrose. Accordingly, I paid a visit to Hatton Garden and made a few discreet inquiries, which elicited the fact that Mr. Crabbe was absent from his premises and was in some sort of trouble in connection with a charge of receiving. Whereupon I made arrangements to give Lockhart a shock."

"And very completely you succeeded," said I. "He is in a deuce of a twitter, and well he may be, knowing quite well that he is making himself an accessory after the fact."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "he is in a very unpleasant dilemma. But I don't think we can interfere, at least for the present. He is a lawyer and knows exactly what his position is; and, meanwhile, his reticence suits us well enough. I don't want a premature hue and cry raised."

Here the discussion appeared to have petered out; but it seemed that the evening's experiences were not yet finished, for, in the silence which followed Thorndyke's rejoinder, there came to my ear the sound of soft and rather stealthy footsteps ascending the stairs, and at the same moment I suddenly remembered that I had not shut the outer door when we came in after seeing Lockhart off.

The steps continued slowly to ascend. Then they crossed the landing and paused opposite our door. There was a brief interval followed by a very elaborate flourish, softly and skilfully executed, on the little brass knocker of the inner door, very much in the style of the old-fashioned footman's knock. I rose, and, striding across the room, threw open the door, when my astonished gaze encountered no less a person than Mr. Kickweed. He broke out at once into profuse apologies for disturbing us at so untimely an hour. "But," he explained, "the matter seemed to me of some importance, and I thought it best not to call in the daytime in case you might not wish my visit to become known."

This sounded rather mysterious, so, in accordance with his hint, I closed both the doors before ushering him across the room to the chair lately vacated by Miller.

"You needn't be apologetic, Mr. Kickweed," said Thorndyke, as he shook his visitor's hand. "It is very good of you to turn out at night to come and see us. Sit down and mix yourself a whisky and soda. Will you light a cigar as an aid to business discussion?"

Kickweed declined the refreshments but was obviously gratified by the manner of his reception; and, having expressed his thanks, he came at once to the object of his visit.

"I am the bearer of news, sir, which I think you will be glad to hear. I have received a letter from Mr. Penrose."

There did not, to me, appear to be anything particularly surprising in this statement. But it was evidently otherwise with Thorndyke, for he received the announcement with more astonishment than I had ever known him to show; though, even so, it needed my expert and accustomed eye to detect his surprise.

"When did you receive the letter?" he asked.

"It came by the first post this morning," Kickweed replied. "I thought you would like to know about it, and, perhaps, like to see it, so I have brought it along for your inspection."

He produced from his pocket a bulging letter-case from which he extracted a letter in its envelope and handed it to Thorndyke, who took out the letter, opened it and read it through. When he had finished the reading, he proceeded, according to his invariable custom when dealing with strange letters, to scrutinise its various parts, especially the signature and the date, to examine the paper, holding it up to the light, and, finally, to make a minute inspection of the envelope.

"The letter, I see," said he, "is dated with yesterday's date but gives no address; but the postmark is Canterbury and is dated yesterday afternoon. Do you suppose Mr. Penrose is staying at Canterbury?"

"Well, no, sir," replied Kickweed, "I do not, though he used rather frequently to stay there. But, from my knowledge of Mr. Penrose, I don't think he would have posted the letter in the town where he was staying. Still, he can hardly be far away from there. I think he knows that neighbourhood rather well."

"Does any one else know about this letter?"

"No, sir. I took it from the letter-box myself, and I have not spoken of it to anybody."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that Mr. Brodribb ought to be told. In fact I think that the letter ought—with your consent—to be handed to him for safe keeping. You probably realise that it may become of considerable legal importance."

"Yes, sir, I realise that and that it ought to be taken great care of. What I proposed was to hand it to you, if you will take

custody of it. Of course, you will dispose of it as you think best, but I brought it to you because you seemed to take a more sympathetic view of poor Mr. Penrose than any one else has done. And I may say, sir, that I should be more happy if you would keep it in your possession for the present. I shouldn't like it to be used to help the police to worry Mr. Penrose by searching in his neighbourhood."

"Very well, Mr. Kickweed," said Thorndyke. "I will keep the letter for the present on the understanding that it shall be produced only if circumstances should arise which would make its production necessary in the interests of justice. Do you agree to that?"

"Oh, certainly, sir," replied Kickweed. "You will, of course, make any use of it that you think proper and necessary, other than the one I mentioned."

"You may take it," said Thorndyke, "that no attempt will be made by me, or with my connivance, to harass Mr. Penrose, and that you may safely leave the letter in my custody. And I may say that I am greatly obliged to you for letting me have it and for having taken the trouble to report the matter to me."

Kickweed mildly deprecated these acknowledgments, and Thorndyke continued: "On reading this letter I am struck by certain peculiarities on which I should like to hear your opinion. It is a rather odd letter."

"It is," Kickweed admitted, "but then you know, sir, Mr. Penrose is a rather odd man, if I may venture to say so."

Here Thorndyke handed me the document and I rapidly read it through. It was certainly a very odd letter. Secretly, I pronounced it the letter of a born fool or a lunatic, but I made no audible comments. Its precious contents were as follows:

"26th March, 1935.

"CERASTIUM VULGATUM, ESQ,

"RESPECTED CER,

"These presents are to inform you that, some time after my departure from Her Deceased Majesty's Equilateral Rectangle, I dish-covered that the key of the small room was not in my pocket. Thereupon I reflected, and after profound cogitation decided that it must be somewhere else. Peradventure, when I sarahed forth on that infelicitous occasion, I may have left it in the door, where it may have presented itself to your penetrating vision and been taken into protective custody. This is my surmise; and if I have reason and you are now seised or possessed of the said key, I will ask you to convey the same to my bank and deliver it into the hand of the manager, in my name, to have and to hold until such time as I shall demand it from him. But first, fasten the window and lock the door. The room contains nothing but a few unconsidered trifles of merely scentimental value, but I wish it to remain undisturbed until I shall return carrying my sheaves and ready to do justice to the obese calf.

"Hoping that you are in your usual boisterous spirits

"Yours in saecula saeculorum,

"DANIEL PENROSE."

"You will agree with me, Jervis," said Thorndyke, when I returned the document, "that this is a very odd letter?"

I agreed with him in the most emphatic and unmistakable terms.

"We are all, by now," he continued, "accustomed to Mr. Penrose's oddities of speech. But this seems to go rather beyond even his usual eccentricity. What do you think, Mr. Kickweed?"

"I am disposed to think you are right, sir," replied Kickweed, a little to my surprise; for the letter contained just the sort of twaddle that I should have expected from Penrose.

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that you mentioned, when we last met, having noticed a gradual change in Mr. Penrose; a growing tendency to oddity and obscurity of speech."

"I think I did say," replied Kickweed, "that the habit of jocularly had been growing and becoming more confirmed. But habits usually do tend to grow, and I don't know that he was changed in any other respect. And as to this letter, we must bear the circumstances in mind. He is probably very much upset and he may have been a little more facetious than usual by way of keeping up his spirits."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that has to be considered. But a tendency to increasing eccentricity is a very significant thing, especially in the case of a man who has rather unaccountably disappeared. Any recent change in Mr. Penrose's mental condition might have an important bearing on his recent conduct, and I am inclined to believe that there has been some such change. Now, take this letter. Is it the kind of letter that you have been in the habit of receiving from him?"

"Well, no, sir," Kickweed admitted. "He did not often have occasion to write to me, and when he did, his letters were usually quite short and to the point. They were not written in a jocular vein."

"In this letter," Thorndyke continued, "he addresses you by the style and title of Cerastium Vulgatum, Esq. Has he ever done that before?"

"No, sir; and it doesn't convey much to me now."

"Cerastium vulgatum," said Thorndyke, "is the botanical name of the common chickweed."

"Oh, indeed," said Kickweed, with a sad and rather disapproving smile. "I supposed it was some kind of a joke, but I did not connect it with my somewhat unfortunate name."

"Has Mr. Penrose ever before made any kind of joke on your surname?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, sir," Kickweed replied, promptly and emphatically. "Mr. Penrose has his oddities, but he is a gentleman, and in all his dealings with me he has always been scrupulously correct and courteous. I am almost disposed to think that you may be right, sir, after all, in believing that his troubles have affected his mind."

Evidently, the botanical joke had produced a profoundly unfavourable impression.

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "have you delivered the key to the bank manager?"

"Not yet," replied Kickweed. "Of course, I must carry out Mr. Penrose's instructions, but I don't at all like the idea of having a locked room—possibly containing valuable property—with no means of access in case of an emergency."

"No," said Thorndyke, "it is a bad and unsafe arrangement. I suppose you have kept the key in your own possession?"

"Always," was the reply, "excepting on one occasion when I let Mr. Horridge have it for a few minutes to examine the window of the room. I was just going out to post a letter when he asked for it, and he gave it back to me when I returned from the post."

"I certainly think," said Thorndyke, "that you ought to have the means of access to that room. Do you happen to have the key about you?"

By way of reply, Kickweed thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and withdrew them holding a key, which he held out to Thorndyke, who took it from him and inspected it.

"An extraordinarily simple key," he remarked, "for the lock of so important a room. It looks very like the key of my office cupboard. Would you mind if I tried it in the lock?"

"Not in the least," replied Kickweed; whereupon Thorndyke bore the key away to the office, the door of which he closed after him; a proceeding that somehow associated itself in my mind with the idea of moulding wax. In a couple of minutes he returned, and, handing the key back to Kickweed, announced:

"It fits the lock quite fairly; which is not surprising as it is of quite a common pattern. But it is a fortunate circumstance, for now, if the need should arise, I could supply you with a key that would open the small room door."

"That is very kind of you, sir," said Kickweed, "and I will bear your offer in mind. And now I mustn't detain you any longer. It is exceedingly good of you to have given me so much of your time."

With this he rose, and once more declining our offer of refreshment, took up his hat and stick and was duly escorted out on to the landing. When he had gone, and we were once more within closed doors, I delivered myself of a matter that had rather puzzled me.

"There seems to be something a little queer about that key. You haven't forgotten that Horridge had it—or a duplicate—in his possession when he showed us the small room?"

"I remember that he had a key," replied Thorndyke; "and the feeble and clumsy efforts that he made to keep it out of sight made me suspect that it was a duplicate. Now we know that it was."

"I presume that you took a squeeze of Kickweed's key?"

"Yes," he replied, "and I shall ask Polton to make a key from the pattern. If it is good enough for Horridge to have a duplicate, it is good enough for us to have one, too."

"Why do you suppose Horridge had his made?"

"It is difficult to say. Horridge, as you observed, is convinced that the mysterious cupboard contains something of enormous value—which it undoubtedly did at one time, and may still—and he is highly suspicious of Kickweed. He may want to try the cupboard lock at his leisure, or he may simply want to see that Kickweed does not. I doubt whether he has any very definite purpose."

"You seem," said I, "to be pretty confident that the Billington jewels were in that cupboard and that they are not there now. Have you formed an opinion as to who the burglar was?"

"We haven't much to go on," he replied. "We know that Crabbe could not have been the man, as he was in prison when the burglary occurred; and we know—or may fairly assume—that the Chubb key was in Penrose's possession. Those are all the facts that we have, and they lead to no certain conclusion. But now we have another problem to consider."

"You mean that idiot Penrose's letter. But what is its importance, apart from the internal evidence that the writer is certainly a fool and possibly a lunatic?"

"That is precisely what we have to discover. How important is it? Perhaps we had better begin with the obituary columns of *The Times*."

We did not keep a complete file of *The Times* on account of its enormous bulk, but it was our custom to retain our copies for three months, which usually answered our purpose. And it did on this occasion; for, on opening the file and scanning

the obituary columns, we presently came upon a notice announcing that Oliver Penrose passed away peacefully in his sleep on the 16th of March, a few days before his ninetieth birthday.

"There," said Thorndyke, carefully replacing the papers and closing the file, "you have the answer to our question. Penrose's letter is dated—and was posted—ten days after his father's death. That is a fact of cardinal importance. It anticipates any possible question of survivorship. If Penrose should never be heard of again; if he should die and neither the time nor place of his death should ever be known, this letter could be produced as decisive proof that he was alive ten days after his father's death. Its immediate effect is to enable Brodribb to deal with Oliver's estate. If there is a will, it can be proved and administered; if there is no will, the intestacy proceedings can be set going."

"Yes," I said, "it is a mighty important letter in spite of its ridiculous contents, and its arrival will be hailed with profound relief by Brodribb. But it is a remarkably opportune letter, too. Doesn't it strike you as rather singularly opportune?"

"It does," he replied. "That is what immediately impresses one. So much so that one asks oneself whether its arrival can be no more than a coincidence."

"To me," said I, "it suggests that Penrose is not such a fool as his letter would imply. He has been keeping his eye on the obituary columns of *The Times*, and, when he read the notice of the old gentleman's death, he made a pretext to write to Kickweed and thus put it on record that he was alive. That is how it strikes me. And that view is supported by the letter, itself. It was a perfectly unnecessary letter. Kickweed had had the key for months and there was no reason why he should not have continued to keep it, and every reason why he should. It looks as if the key had been a mere pretext for writing a letter. Don't you agree with me?"

"I do," he replied, "so far as the character of the letter is concerned. But we have to remember that when Penrose went away, his father was quite well, so that there was no need for him to watch the obituary columns. However, this is all rather speculative. The material fact is that the letter has arrived, and that fact will have to be communicated to Brodribb. I shall take the letter round and show it to him to-morrow morning."

---

## XII. — MR. ELMHURST

Between Thorndyke and me there existed a rather queer convention, which the reader of this narrative may have noticed. In the cases on which we worked together, he was always most scrupulous in keeping me informed as to the facts, and making me, if possible, a partner in the investigation by which they were ascertained. But he expected me to make my own inferences. Any attempt of mine to elicit from him a statement of opinion, or of his interpretation of the facts that were known to us both, met with the inevitable response: "My dear fellow, you know as much about the case as I do, and you have only to make use of your excellent reasoning faculties to extract the significance of what is known to us." The convention had been established when I first joined Thorndyke as his partner or understudy, as part of my training in the art and science of medico-legal investigation. But, apparently, my education was to continue indefinitely, for Thorndyke's attitude continued unchanged. He would tell me everything that he knew, but he was uncommunicative, even to secretiveness, as to what he thought.

But a habit of secretiveness sets up certain natural reactions. If Thorndyke would not tell me what he thought, it was admissible for me to find out, if I could; and I occasionally got quite a useful hint by observing the books that he was reading. For, unlike most lawyers, he dealt comparatively little in legal literature. His peculiar type of practice demanded a wide range of knowledge other than legal; and frequently it happened that his knowledge required amplification on some particular point. But, by observing the direction in which he was seeking to enlarge his knowledge, I was able, at least, to judge which of the facts seemed to him the most significant.

Now, I had noticed, of late, the appearance in our chambers of a number of books on prehistoric archaeology, a subject in which, so far as I knew, Thorndyke was not specially interested. There was, for instance, Jessup's *Archeology of Kent*, into which I dipped lightly; and there was a copy of the *Archaeological Journal*, containing a paper by Stuart Piggott on the "Neolithic Pottery of the British Isles." In this a slip of paper had been inserted as a book-mark, and, on opening it, I found that it was marked at the section headed "Pottery of the Windmill Hill Type," and opposite, a page of drawings representing the characteristic forms of vessels and their decorative markings. And there were others of different characters, but all agreeing in giving descriptions and illustrations of neolithic pottery.

From these facts it was evident to me that Thorndyke's attention was still occupied by the ridiculous fragment of pottery that we had found in the pocket of Penrose's raincoat; and the object of his researches was, I had no doubt, the discovery of some likely place from which that fragment might have come. But why he wished to discover that place or what light it would throw, if found, on the present whereabouts of Daniel Penrose, I was utterly unable to imagine. That the question was one of importance I did not doubt for a moment. Thorndyke was not in the least addicted to the finding of mares' nests or the pursuit of that interesting phenomenon, the Will-of-the-Wisp. He wanted to discover the place which had been the starting-point of that wild journey in the motor car. Therefore, the identity of that place had some profound significance; and for several days I continued, at intervals, to cudgel my brains in a vain effort to reason out its bearing on our quest.

About a week after the receipt of the mysterious letter from Mr. Penrose, our inquiry entered on a new stage. Hitherto, Thorndyke's attitude had been mainly that of a passive observer. The visit to Queen Square, the examination of the coat and the pottery fragment, and the unearthing of Mr. Crabbe were the only instances of anything like active investigation.



Otherwise, he had listened to the reports from Brodribb, Miller and Lockhart, and, while he had, no doubt, turned them over thoroughly in his mind, had made no positive move. But now he showed signs of a kind of activity which I associated, by the light of experience, with a definite objective.

I became aware of the change when, on a certain evening, coming home after a long day's work, I found a visitor seated by the fire, apparently in close consultation with Thorndyke. A glance at the little table with the decanter, wine glasses and box of cigars told me that he was certainly a welcome and probably an invited guest; and a sheet of the six-inch ordnance map, on which lay the pottery fragment, hinted at the nature of the consultation.

The visitor, who rose as I entered, was a young man of grave and studious aspect, whose face—adorned with an impressive pair of tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles—seemed familiar, but yet I could not place him until Thorndyke came to my aid.

"You haven't forgotten Mr. Elmhurst, surely, Jervis?" said he.

"Of course, I haven't," I replied, as we shook hands. "You are the dene hole gentleman and the discoverer of headless corpses."

Mr. Elmhurst did not repudiate the dene hole, but protested that he had not actually made a habit of discovering headless corpses, at least in the recent state. "The corpses that come my way," he explained, "are usually prehistoric corpses, in which the presence or absence of the head is of no special significance."

"In short," said Thorndyke, "Mr. Elmhurst is an archaeologist who is kindly allowing us to benefit by his special knowledge, as we did in the case of the dene hole."

"That," said Elmhurst, "is very nicely put, but it gives me undeserved credit. I am not an altruist at all. I am agreeing to do something that I have long wanted to do, but have been deterred by the cost. But now Dr. Thorndyke wants this thing done and is prepared to bear the expense, or at least part of it. You see, it is a case of enlightened self-interest on both sides."

"And what is this job?" I asked. "Something in the resurrection line, I suspect."

"Yes," said Elmhurst, "it is an excavation. The doctor has here a fragment of what seems to have been a neolithic pot of the Windmill Hill type, as it is usually described. He thinks it possible that this fragment was found in a certain long barrow in Kent. I don't know why he thinks so, but it is not improbable that he is right. At any rate, if that barrow contains any pottery, it is pretty certain to be of this type."

"That doesn't carry you very far," said I. "Supposing you found some pottery of this kind in the barrow, would that enable you to say that this fragment must have come from that barrow?"

"No," he replied. "It would only enable one to say that this fragment was of the same type as that it found in the barrow."

"But you know that already," said I.

"Believe," Elmhurst corrected.

"You said it was pretty certain to be of this type; and if you would repeat that on oath in the witness-box, I should think it would be sufficient. The excavation seems to be unnecessary."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Elmhurst. "You would degrade me from the rank of an investigator to that of a mere expert witness."

"My learned friend," said Thorndyke, "in spite of his great experience in court, seems to fail to appreciate the vast difference, in their effects on a jury, between an expert opinion—and a qualified one at that—and a pair of exhibits which the expert can declare, and the jury can see for themselves, are identically similar."

"Still," I persisted, "even if you could prove them to be identically similar, that would not be evidence that they came from the same barrow. You admit that, Elmhurst?"

"I admit nothing," he replied. "You know more about evidence than I do. But Dr. Thorndyke wants that barrow excavated and I want to do the excavation. And I may say that all the necessary preliminaries have been arranged. As the barrow is scheduled as an ancient monument, I have had to apply for, and have been granted by the Office of Works, a permit authorising me to excavate and examine the interior of the tumulus situated by the river Stour near Chilham in Kent and commonly known as Julliberrie's Grave."

"Whose grave?" I demanded with suddenly-aroused interest; for as he pronounced the name there flashed instantly into my mind the words of Penrose's ridiculous entry: "Moulin-a-vent; Julie: Polly."

Elmhurst cast a quick, inquisitive glance at me and then proceeded to explain:

"Julliberrie's. There is a local tradition that the mound is the burial-place of a more or less mythical person named Jul Laber, or Julaber, said to have been either a witch or a giant. If he was a giant we may be able to confirm that tradition, but I am afraid that a witch—in the fossil state—would defy diagnosis."

"And has this mound never been excavated, so far as you know?" I asked.

"It was excavated tentatively," he replied, "in 1702 by Heneage Finch, whose report is extant; but it appears that nothing

was found beyond a few animal bones. Then an aerial photograph, taken only a week or two ago, shows signs of some more recent disturbance of the surface. Apparently some one has been doing a little unauthorised digging, which may account for this fragment of the doctor's. But still, we hope to find the burial chamber intact."

I reflected on the possible means by which Thorndyke had managed to locate this barrow and once more speculated on his inexplicable interest in this locality. And then suddenly I recalled Penrose's mysterious letter and the postmark on it.

"You say," said I, "that this mound is near Chilham. Isn't that somewhere in the Canterbury district?"

"Yes," he replied. "Quite near. Not more than half a dozen miles from Canterbury."

This began to be a little more understandable, though I was still unable to make out exactly what was in Thorndyke's mind. But I now had something like a clue which I could consider at my leisure; and meanwhile I returned to the subject of the excavation.

"I gather," said I, "that you are practically ready to begin operations. Is the date of the expedition fixed?"

"That is what we were discussing when you came in," replied Elmhurst. "Of course, there is no need for the doctor or you to attend the function. I can let you know if any pottery is found, and produce it for your inspection. But I hope you will both be able to come at least once while the work is in progress. One doesn't often get the chance of seeing a complete excavation of a virtually intact long barrow. If you can only make one visit, I would recommend you to wait until we are ready to expose the burial chamber. That is the most thrilling moment."

"It sounds like quite a big job," I remarked. "How long do you think it will take?"

"I should say from three to four weeks," he replied.

"My word!" I exclaimed. "Four weeks! Why, it will cost a small fortune. Of course, you will have to employ a gang of labourers."

"We shall want five men," said he, "in addition to the volunteers, and I reckon that sixty pounds will cover it easily."

I whistled. "I suspect, Thorndyke," said I, "that you will have to find that sixty pounds yourself. You won't get Brodribb to include archaeological researches in the costs. But do you tell me, Elmhurst, that this colossal work is necessary just to find out what sort of pottery there is in the barrow?"

"Perhaps not," he replied. "But, you see, the position is this: Julliberrie's Grave is scheduled as an Ancient Monument. No one may—lawfully—disturb it without a permit from the Office of Works. Now, they are perfectly willing to grant a permit to genuine archaeologists who are known to them as such, but subject to very rigorous conditions. They won't grant permits for mere casual digging. Their conditions are that, if you want to excavate, you must excavate completely and exhaustively so that the mound need never be touched again. All finds must be preserved and labelled and a detailed account of the excavation must be published; and when the work is finished, the barrow must be restored completely to its original condition. I explained all this to the doctor."

I must confess that I was staggered. The means seemed to be so disproportionate to the end. But Thorndyke seemed quite satisfied to pay sixty pounds for a few specimens of pottery and Elmhurst made no secret of his unholy joy at the prospect of a first-class "dig."

"Are you proposing to take part in this super-resurrection, Thorndyke?" I asked sourly.

"I am not proposing to join the diggers," he replied, "but I shall take the opportunity to see how a thorough excavation is done. I want to see the burial chamber opened, but I am also rather curious to see how the work is begun, and what the barrow looks like when the turf is removed and the mound exposed as it appeared when it was newly made. When do you reckon that you will have the barrow uncovered?"

"I expect," Elmhurst replied, "that we shall begin skinning off the turf on Thursday. We start operations, as I told you, on Tuesday morning, and there will be a full two days' work on the preliminaries—pegging out the site, putting up an enclosing fence and preparing the dumps. I think, if you come down on Thursday—not too early—I can promise you that you will see the barrow as its builders saw it. I could, if you liked, meet you at Maidstone or Canterbury and personally conduct you to the scene of the operations."

"That isn't necessary," said Thorndyke. "We have the map, and you will want to be early at work. Moreover, I think I shall take the opportunity to do some prospecting on my way and I may be a little late in arriving at the barrow."

"That will be all to the good," said Elmhurst. "The later you arrive the more we shall have ready to show you."

This brought the discussion on ways and means to an end; and shortly afterwards our guest, having a train to catch, rose and took his leave.

During the week that intervened, very little was said either by Thorndyke or me on the subject of the expedition. Not that I was not keenly interested; for Thorndyke's reference to his "prospecting" intentions made it clear to me that he had something in his mind beyond the mere search for pottery. It seemed that now, for the first time, he was going to take some active measures to locate the elusive Penrose. But I asked no questions. I was going to take part in the prospecting operations and I hoped that their nature would throw some light on the methods by which Thorndyke proposed to attempt what looked like an impossibility.

One discovery I made, however; which was that Polton had in some way managed to attach himself to the expeditionary force. The fact was revealed to me when I found him in the act of pasting a couple of sheets of the six-inch ordnance map on thin mounting board. Observing that one of them included Chilham and our tumulus on Julliberrie Downs, I ventured to make inquiries.

"Why are you mounting them, Polton?" I asked. "You are not proposing to frame them and hang them on the wall?"

"No, sir," he replied. "When they are dry, I am going to cut them up into sections nine inches by six, that is four sections to a sheet. Then I shall number them and make a case to carry them in. You see, sir, a map is awkward to carry, even if you fold it, and most inconvenient to use out of doors if there is any wind. But by this method you can just take out the one or two sections that you are using, and the whole lot will go easily into my poacher's pocket, or the doctor's either, for that matter. I'm getting them ready for our little trip next Thursday."

"Oh!" said I, "you are coming with us, are you?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, with a complacent crinkle. "The doctor mentioned to me that he was going down into Kent on some sort of exploring job, so I persuaded him to let me come and lend a hand. I understood him to say that they were going to dig up that old grave that is marked on the map—Julliberrie's Grave."

"That is quite correct, Polton," I assured him.

"Ah!" said he, with a crinkle of ghoulish satisfaction. "That will be very interesting. Do you happen to know when the party was buried?"

"I understand," I replied, "that the burial took place at some time from four to ten thousand years ago."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Polton. "Ten thousand years! Well, well! I should have thought that if he has been there as long as that they might have let him stay there. There can't be much of him left."

"That is what we are going to find out," said I; and with this I retired, leaving him to his pasting and his reflections.

---

### XIII. — THE TRACK OF THE FUGITIVE

IN the course of my long association with Thorndyke, I had often been impressed by the number of things that he appeared to carry in his pockets. He reminded me somewhat of The White Knight. But there was this essential difference; that whereas that unstable equestrian was visibly encumbered with a raffle of things that he could never possibly want, Thorndyke was invisibly provided with the things that he did want. If the need arose for any instrument, appliance or material, forthwith the desiderated object was produced from his pocket even as the parlour magician produces the required guinea-pig or goldfish. So, after all, the appearances may have been illusory; they may have been due, not to the gross quantity of things carried, but to an accurate prevision of the probable requirements.

The matter is recalled to my mind by the astonishing stowage capacity that Polton developed on the morning of our expedition to Chilham. Not only did the special outfit for the day's work—six-inch map, one-inch map, prismatic compass, telescope, surveyor's tape and other oddments, laid out for Thorndyke's inspection—vanish into unsuspected pockets, leaving no trace, but, as appeared later, his lading included a substantial meal, a big flask of sherry and a nest of aluminium drinking cups. And even then he didn't bulge perceptibly.

Of the details of our travels on that day I have but a confused recollection. It was all very well for Thorndyke, who had apparently transferred the six-inch map bodily to his consciousness; he knew exactly where he was at any given moment. But to me, when once we had left the plain high road, all sense of direction was lost and I was aware only of a bewildering succession of abominably steep lanes, cart-tracks and footpaths, which we scrambled up or stumbled down until we became finally and hopelessly submerged in a wood.

However, I will make an effort to give an intelligible account of this "prospecting" expedition, with apologies in advance for the somewhat nebulous topography. From Charing Cross we proceeded uneventfully to Ashford, where we got out of the train and took our places in a motor omnibus which was lurking in the vicinity and which was bound for Canterbury. Apparently it had been awaiting the arrival of the train, for as soon as we and one or two other train passengers had settled ourselves, the conductor, having taken a last fond look at the station, gave the signal to the driver, who thereupon started the vehicle with a triumphant hoot.

We rumbled along the main road for about six miles (as I afterwards ascertained) and then, shortly after crossing a small river, drew up at a village which the conductor announced as Godmersham. Here we got out and walked forward until we came to the cross-roads beyond the village, where Thorndyke turned to the right and led the way along the by-road. Presently we passed under a railway line and then, as the road made a sharp turn to the right, followed it along the bottom of a valley nearly parallel to the railway. About half a mile farther on, another by-road led off to the left, and, as Thorndyke turned off into it, my sense of direction began to get somewhat confused. It was quite a good road and fairly level, but its windings made it difficult to keep a "dead reckoning," and when, half a mile along it, yet another by-road led off from it to the left at right angles—into which Thorndyke turned confidently—and then made a right-angle turn to the right, I abandoned all attempts to keep count of our direction.

Along this road we trudged for three-quarters of a mile, still keeping fairly on the level, but then the ground began to rise sharply and the road zig-zagged more than ever. A mile or so farther on we passed through a village, and I found myself casting a slightly wistful glance at a couple of rustics who were seated on a bench outside the inn, sustaining themselves with beer and conversation. But Thorndyke plodded on relentlessly, and when, a few hundred yards beyond the village, we came to yet another cross-roads, he finished me off by taking the turning to the left.

"I suppose, Thorndyke," said I, when we had toiled up this road for about half a mile and he halted to look around, "you know where you are."

"Oh, yes," he replied. "That village that we passed through just now is Sole Street. I will show you on the map where we are. Let us have the six-inch, Polton."

The latter dived into the interior of his clothing, whence he produced the case of mounted sections and handed it to his principal.

"Here we are," said Thorndyke, when he had picked out the appropriate card. "That is the village at the bottom and this is the road we are on. You see that it peters out, more or less, when it enters the wood."

I compared the section of map with the visible objects and was able to identify a farm-house across the fields on our right and a considerable wood which we were approaching.

"Yes," I said, "it is clear enough so far, though it doesn't mean much to me. What is the significance of that pencilled cross by the roadside?"

"That," he replied, "marks the spot, as nearly as I could locate it from the evidence at the inquest, where the old woman was killed."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "So this is where the chapter of accidents began, or, at least, a few yards farther up. Then I may assume that the purpose of this prospecting expedition is to retrace the route of Penrose's car?"

"That is so," he admitted; "and presently we must begin to look for traces. At the moment, we don't need them, as there seems to be no doubt that the car came down this road. It was seen—or, at least, a car was seen—to come flying round the

corner into the village and past the inn. Of course, it may not have been Penrose's car. But the time, the outrageous speed, and the wild manner in which it was being driven, all seem to connect it with the disaster."

"But," I objected, "even if it was the car that killed the woman, that is no evidence that it was Penrose's car. It seems to me that the argument against Penrose moves in a circle. Penrose is proved to have killed the old woman by the fact that he was on the road where she was killed; and he is proved to have been on that road by the fact that he killed the old woman. I respectfully suggest that my learned senior may probably be tracing, laboriously and with characteristic skill, the movements of a motor car in which we are not interested at all."

Thorndyke chuckled appreciatively. "Admirably argued, Jervis; and the point that you make is clearly realised by the police. There is very little doubt that it was Penrose's car, but there is no positive evidence that it was. And the police know, and we know, that you can't secure a conviction on mere probabilities. That is a further purpose of the prospecting expedition; not only to ascertain which way, and from whence, the car was travelling, but also, if possible, to establish what car it was."

As we continued to toil upwards towards the wood, I cogitated on this statement with considerable surprise. It seemed inconsistent with what I had supposed to be Thorndyke's object and especially with his assurance to Kickweed that no action was contemplated which might compromise Penrose or menace his safety. Yet here he was, by his own admission, industriously searching for the one missing item of evidence which could secure Penrose's conviction. Unless, indeed, he had any reason to believe that the wrong car had been identified; which his words did not in the least suggest. Incidentally, I was utterly unable to imagine how he proposed to identify a car which had passed down the road months ago, or even pick up its tracks. The road was extraordinarily unfrequented. We had met not a single car, and only one farm cart, since we had passed under the railway. But still it was a metalled road, showing only slight traces of the carts and wagons that had passed over it; and obviously none of those traces had anything to tell us.

When we entered the wood, I noticed that Thorndyke kept a close watch on the borders of the road though he did not slacken his pace.

"I presume," said I, "that you are looking for the tracks of the car. But isn't that rather hopeless, seeing that it is about six months since Penrose passed down this road—if he ever did actually pass down it?"

"Of course," he replied, "it would be futile to look for tracks on the road, or even on the margins. But what I am looking for—though I don't expect to find it here—is some sign of a car having driven or backed off the road into the wood and along one of the footpaths. The marks made by a car entering the wood over the soft soil would be deep and they would remain visible for years. Moreover, they would be unique. They would not be confused with other tracks, as in the case of any kind of road."

"You have reasons, then, for believing that Penrose backed his car into the wood?"

"We have reasons, Jervis," he replied. "You saw the car and the dead leaves and earth on the wheels; and you will remember that the earth was of the same type as the surface soil here; a loam of the Thanet Sands type. Besides, there is the fact that, if Penrose was engaged, as the evidence suggests, in digging in the barrow, he must have left the car somewhere. But it appeared at the inquest that nobody had seen the car until it passed through Sole Street."

"There isn't much in that," said I. "We seem to have this tract of country all to ourselves. A car might remain parked by the side of this road for hours without being noticed."

He admitted the truth of this, "but," he added, "don't forget the state of the car, or the fact that Penrose was engaged in an unlawful act."

"And have you any idea," I asked, "where the car was probably left?"

"I have settled on a spot which seems likely," he replied. "But it is little more than a guess; and if I am wrong we shall have to give up the quest. We can't search the whole area of woodland."

Half a mile farther on, we came to a fork in the road, the left-hand branch being little more than a cart-track. Into this Thorndyke turned unhesitatingly; and by the care with which he scrutinised the margins, I judged that we were approaching the "likely spot." But the issue was rather confused by the fact that the rough, unmetalled road was fairly deeply rutted, having evidently been used by various carts and wagons. This road, however, after crossing a considerable open space, took a sharp, right-angle turn to the left opposite a pair of cottages, but its original direction was continued by a broad footpath. Thorndyke first followed the road in its new direction where it entered and crossed a narrow strip of wood, but, after a careful examination of the ruts in the wood, he came back and explored the footpath. And here it was that we struck the first trace of what might have been a car-track.

The footpath passed along the front of the cottages, still in the open, but presently it skirted the edge of the wood. It was an old path, never disturbed by the plough, and its surface was trodden down hard by years of use. Moreover, its margins showed faint impressions of wheels, which had been nearly obliterated by the feet of the wayfarers who had walked over them.

"They don't look to me like the tracks of a car," I remarked as we all stooped to examine them.

"No," he agreed, taking a rough measurement with his stick. "The gauge is much too wide. Probably they are the tracks of some woodman's cart or timber-carriage. But a hard path like this would scarcely show an impression of a pneumatic tire

excepting after heavy rain.”

We continued our progress slowly for another hundred yards, keeping a close watch on the faint ruts beside the path. Then we all halted simultaneously. For here we could see the faint, but clearly distinguishable, tracks of some wheeled vehicle which had turned off the path on to the rough turf of the open field.

“This looks more likely,” I remarked; and Polton supported me with the opinion that “the Doctor’s got him this time, as I knew he would.”

Thorndyke made no comment but, producing from his pocket a steel tape, carefully measured the space between the wheel-marks.

“The measurement is correct,” he announced, “but that is only an agreement. It would apply to thousands of other cars. However, we will see whither these tracks lead us.”

We followed the tracks, not without difficulty, across the wide meadow until we readied another belt of woodland. Here the tracks entered the wood by a footpath and were easy enough to follow on the soft earth. The path continued for about a furlong and then emerged into the open, where it crossed a small grass-covered space; and, following it, we were still able to distinguish the wheel-tracks by its sides. When it reached the edge of the wood, the footpath turned sharply to the right, keeping in the open. But here the tracks left the path and plunged straight into the wood, which was fairly free from undergrowth. Following the comparatively deep ruts which the wheels had made in the soft leaf-mould, we advanced by a rather tortuous route about a couple of hundred yards into the wood. And then, once more, we halted; for we had apparently come to the end of the tracks.

There seemed to be no doubt about it; but, as the last year’s leaves lay here more deeply, and the undergrowth had suddenly grown denser, I went on a few yards to make sure that the tracks did not reappear beyond the place where they had seemed to end. With difficulty I forced my way through the bushes and was further impeded by the brambles and spreading roots; and I had not gone more than a few yards when my foot was caught by some hard, angular object—obviously not a root or a bramble—whereby, after staggering forward a pace or two, I fell sprawling among the tangle of vegetation.

At the sound of the fall, and the accompanying pious ejaculations, Thorndyke hurried towards me to see what had happened. I picked myself up, and, having wiped my hand, proceeded to search for the object which had tripped me up. Cautiously probing with my foot in a clump of nettles, I brought to light what looked like the haft of an axe; but, when I seized it and drew it out, it proved to be a trenching tool.

It was at this moment, as I stood with it in my hand, trying to connect it with some vague stirring of memory, that Thorndyke appeared through the bushes.

“I hope you are not hurt, Jervis,” he said, anxiously. “That would be a nasty thing to fall upon.”

I assured him that I had come to no harm beyond a few scratches. “But,” I added, “I am not quite clear about the significance of this thing. I have a vague idea that something was said by somebody about a trenching tool, but I can’t remember what or who it was.”

“The somebody,” he replied, “was Kickweed. Don’t you remember our interview in the garage when he told us, among other items, that he had a vague recollection of having seen a trenching tool there?”

“Yes, of course, I remember now. Then it is quite possible that this is the very tool he was speaking of?”

By way of answer, he took the tool from me, and, having run his eye along the handle and turned it over, placed his finger on a spot near to the blade and held it out to me. Looking at it closely, I was able to make out in very faded lettering the name “D. Penrose,” apparently printed with a rubber stamp.

I must confess that I was profoundly impressed. Once more Thorndyke had achieved what had seemed to me an impossibility. Not only had he traced the route that the car had followed, but he had clearly established the identity of the car. Moreover, he had settled the place from which the car started in a country which he had never seen, working by inference and aided only by the map. It was a remarkable performance even for Thorndyke.

But here my reflections were interrupted by a hail from Polton in a tone of high excitement. For he, too, had been “prospecting”; and as we returned to the end of the track, he met us, fairly bubbling with exultation and carrying his treasure trove in the form of a small spade and a leather case.

“Here is an astonishing thing, sir!” he exclaimed. “I found these in the bushes, and they’ve both got Mr. Penrose’s name stamped on them. I could hardly believe my eyes. But there,” he added, “I don’t suppose, sir, that you are surprised at all. I expect you knew they were there before we started from home.”

Thorndyke smilingly disclaimed the omniscience with which his admiring henchman credited him (though, in fact, Polton was not so very wide of the mark), and taking from him the spade and case, looked them over and verified the marks of ownership.

“You notice, Jervis,” said he, “that these things correspond exactly with Kickweed’s description; a small, light spade, pointed at the end, and a leather sheath or case to protect the point. The spade and the trenching tool appear to have been Penrose’s equipment for his clandestine digging expeditions.”

"Yes," I said, "and their presence here demonstrates that you were right in your inference as to the place where he parked his car. By the way, how did you arrive at it?"

"I can hardly say that I arrived at it," he replied. "As I said, it was little more than a guess. I started with the hypothesis—a very well-supported one—that Penrose went forth that day with the intention of digging in Julliberrie's Grave, and that he did dig there. If that were so, he would park his car as near to the place as possible; and the more so since he knew that he was committing an unlawful act and might have to clear out of the neighbourhood in a hurry. For the same reason he would wish to leave his car where it would not be seen. But examination of the map showed this excellent place of concealment, less than half a mile from the barrow."

"Yes," I said, "it looks perfectly simple and obvious now that you have explained matters. But these tools, thrown away into the bushes, seem to suggest that the contingency that you mentioned did actually arise. Apparently, he did have to clear out of the neighbourhood in a hurry. Probably he was spotted in the act of digging and had to do a bolt, which would account for his having got rid of the incriminating tools. At any rate, it looks as if the panic had started here and not after the accident."

"Exactly," Thorndyke agreed. "The killing of the old woman was not the cause but the consequence of the panic. And now, as we have finished this part of our quest, we may as well move on and see how Elmhurst is progressing—unless there is anything more that you would like to see."

"There is," I replied with emphasis. "What I should like to see, above all other things in the world, is a good hospitable pub with oceans of beer and mountains of bread and cheese. As you seem to have memorised the whole neighbourhood, perhaps you know where one is to be found."

"I am afraid," said Thorndyke, "that there is nothing nearer than the Wool-pack at Chilham."

But here Polton, crinkling ecstatically, proceeded to unbutton his coat.

"No need for a pub, sir," said he. "We're provided. And we can do something better than bread and cheese and beer."

With this he fished out of his inexhaustible pockets a flat parcel—found to contain a veal and ham pie—a large flask of sherry, a nest of three aluminium drinking-cups and a shoe-maker's knife in a leather sheath wherewith to carve the pie. There were no forks, but the need of them was not felt as the thickness of the flat pie had been thoughtfully adapted to the dimensions of a moderately-opened human mouth. Joyfully, we selected a place as free as possible from brambles and nettles and there seated ourselves on the ground; and while Polton, by his unerring craftsman's eye, divided the pie into three equal parts, Thorndyke and I filled our cups and toasted the giver of the feast.

When the banquet was finished and the empty flask, the cups and the knife had vanished into the receptacles whence they came, Polton thriftily utilised the wrapping-paper to disguise the naked form of the trenching tool. Then, with the aid of the compass, Thorndyke led the way through the wood and presently brought us out on to a stretch of rough pasture where, some three hundred yards away, we could see the excavators at work.

---

#### XIV. — JULLIBERRIE'S GRAVE

The scene on which I looked as we came out of the wood rather took me by surprise; though, to be sure, Elmhurst's lucid and detailed account of the proposed operations ought to have prepared me. But to an uninformed person like myself, excavation is just a matter of digging, and I had hardly taken in the elaborate preliminaries that exact scientific procedure demands.

Looking along the brow of the steep hill-side, one could see the barrow—a long, oval, grassy mound about fifty yards in length—standing out plainly against a background of trees that were just about to burst into leaf. Past it, to the left, down in the river valley, rose the tall white shape of Chilham Mill, while farther to the left and more distant was the town or village of Chilham. At ordinary times it must have been a rather desolate and solitary place, for no habitation was visible nearer than the distant mill, but now it was a scene of strenuous activity, peopled by busy workers.

The preparatory operations had apparently been nearly completed. The barrow was surrounded by a substantial pile fence—evidently new—which marked off a rectangular enclosure. Inside this, two rows of surveying pegs had been driven into the ground and a theodolite stand set up over one of them suggested a survey in progress. Outside the enclosure was a methodically spread dump of turf, and a trackway of planks was being laid to another spot, apparently the site of a dump for the chalk and earth which would be removed from the mound as the excavation proceeded. There was also a stack of half a dozen metal wheelbarrows, and, hard by, a small shepherd's hut, in which a stoutly-built gentleman, apparently the surveyor, was at the moment depositing what looked like a theodolite case; which he did carefully, with a proper respect for the instrument, and then, having shut the door of the hut, strode away briskly down the hill towards the village.

We seemed to have timed our arrival rather fortunately, for the work of uncovering the barrow had already commenced. Within the fenced enclosure two parties of workers were engaged, from opposite sides, in cutting out strips of turf and rolling them up like lengths of stair carpet. Of the two parties, one consisted of four labourers, who went about their work with the leisurely ease born of long experience, while the other party was, with the exception of one labourer, evidently composed of volunteers, among whom I distinguished, with some difficulty, our friend Elmhurst, transformed into the likeness of a coal-miner with leanings towards tennis.

We halted near the edge of the wood to observe the procedure without interrupting the work. Presently Elmhurst, having accumulated a goodly heap of turf-rolls, loaded them into a wheelbarrow, which was promptly seized by one of his two assistants—a fair-haired young viking in a blue jersey and a pair of the most magnificent orange-red trousers of the kind known by fishermen as “fear-noughts”—who trundled it off through an opening in the fence and unloaded it neatly on to the turf dump on top of the already considerable stack that occupied it. Then he returned at a brisk trot, and, having set down the empty wheel-barrow, picked up his spade and fell to work again on the cutting out of a fresh load.

It was at this moment that Elmhurst, happening to glance in our direction, not only observed our presence but evidently recognised us, for he laid down his spade and began to walk towards us; whereupon we hurried forward to meet him. As we approached, I noticed that he cast an inquisitive eye on the tools which Polton was carrying, and, as soon as we had exchanged greetings, he inquired:

“Are you proposing to take an active part in the proceedings? I see that you are provided with the necessary implements.”

“The appearance is illusory,” Thorndyke replied. “We did not bring these tools with us. They are the products of our prospecting activities in the wood hard by. And they are not going to be used on this occasion. It seems advisable to preserve them in the condition in which they were found.”

Elmhurst regarded the tools with intelligent interest and, I thought, with some disfavour.

“I see,” he said reflectively; “you connect those tools with the piece of pottery that you showed me?”

Thorndyke admitted that the connection seemed to be a reasonable one.

“Yes,” said Elmhurst. “A pick and a spade do certainly seem to connect themselves with traces of unlawful digging in the neighbourhood. And they are quite workmanlike tools, especially the spade. I only hope that your friends have not been too workmanlike. In one respect they certainly have not. They have made a very poor job of replacing the turf.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “you have found evidence that the mound has really been dug into?”

“Yes,” was the reply. “There is no doubt whatever. But they seem only to have made a short, irregular trench, and, as they were nowhere near the burial chamber, I am still hopeful of finding that intact. But we shall see better how far they went when we get the turf off. As you see, we have got all the margin unturfed and we are just starting on the mound itself. We shall soon get that done with eight workers besides myself; and, meanwhile, I can take you round and show you the arrangements for excavating a barrow.”

“You mustn’t let us waste your time,” said Thorndyke, “and leave your colleagues to do all the work; though I must say, they seem to enjoy it.”

“Yes, by Jove!” I agreed. “They are proper enthusiasts. I have been watching that sea rover in the decorative trousers and wondering what those labourers think of him. But perhaps they are not Union men.”

Elmhurst smiled a cryptic smile but expressed complete satisfaction both with the labourers and his volunteer assistants. “I think,” he added, “that my friends would like to make the acquaintance of the benefactor who has given us this very great pleasure.”

Accordingly we proceeded towards the fenced enclosure and entered it by one of the openings left for the wheelbarrows to pass in and out.

“You notice,” said Elmhurst, “that we have driven in a row of pegs all round the tumulus to define its edges. Those are for use in marking our plan and to guide us when we come to rebuild the mound. It has to be restored exactly to its original shape and size.”

“You speak of rebuilding the mound,” said I. “You don’t mean that you are going to move the entire structure?”

“Certainly we are,” he replied. “The essence of a complete excavation is in the thorough examination of every part of it. The whole of it will be moved excepting a narrow longitudinal wall, or spine, along the middle, which has to be left to preserve the contour and serve as a guide to build up to. We shall move one half at a time and the earth—or chalk rubble, as it will be in this case—that we take out will be carefully deposited in one of those dumps. Each dump will have a revetment of chalk blocks to prevent the piled earth from slipping away and getting scattered.”

“Yes,” said Thorndyke, “it is all very thorough and methodical; a very different thing from the slovenly methods of the casual digger. By the way, which side do you propose to begin with?”

“The right-hand side,” replied Elmhurst. “That is the side on which your friends operated, and we are rather anxious to settle once for all what they really did in the way of excavation and how much damage they have done. My colleagues are now beginning to peel off the turf from that side of the mound.”

As he spoke, we rounded the end of the barrow and came in sight of the two volunteers and the labourer, all busily engaged in cutting lines in the turf with implements like cheese-cutters set on long handles. As we approached, the owner of the fear-noughts looked up and rather disconcerted me by disclosing an extremely comely feminine countenance; which accounted for Elmhurst’s cryptic smile and caused me hurriedly to re-examine the other “gentleman,” only to discover that the breeches which I had innocently accepted as diagnostic of masculinity, appertained to a lady.



The introductions, effected by Elmhurst with a ceremonious bow and a grin of malicious satisfaction, informed us that the two ladies were, respectively, Miss Stirling—the wearer of the nautical garments—and Miss Bidborough, and that both were qualified and enthusiastic archaeologists (this was Elmhurst's statement, and neither denied it on behalf of the other); and that both were profoundly grateful to Thorndyke.

"It is the chance of a life-time," said Miss Stirling, "to carry out a complete excavation of a neolithic barrow; and such a famous one, too. I have often come here and looked at Julliberrie's Grave and thought how interesting it would be to turn it out thoroughly and see what it really contained. But we are in an awful twitter about those tomb-robbers who have been hacking at the mound. It will be a tragedy if they have reached the important part of the barrow."

"Yes," Miss Bidborough agreed, severely. "These clandestine diggers are the bane of scientific archaeology. They confuse all the issues by disturbing the stratification, they break or damage valuable relics, and, worst of all, they sneak off secretly with things of priceless scientific value and never record what they have found. Do you happen to know who these people were, Dr. Thorndyke, who broke into this barrow?"

"The only person," replied Thorndyke, "known to me as being under suspicion is an amateur—a very amateur—collector of antiques."

"They usually are," said Elmhurst, gloomily; "and this fellow must have been worse than usual. Just look at the way he put the turf back!"

He pointed indignantly to an irregular area on the side of the mound in which even my inexperienced eye could detect the ragged lines which marked the untidy replacement. From my knowledge of the man (and my distinct prejudice against him) it was just what I should have expected; and I was indiscreet enough to say so.

"By the way," said Miss Bidborough, addressing Elmhurst, "I am in hopes that we shall have a visit from Theophilus. He has to come down to Canterbury to-day, and I think he intends to come on here and see how we are getting on with the work. I hope he will. I know he would like to meet Dr. Thorndyke."

Thorndyke looked inquiringly at Elmhurst. "Do I know Mr. Theophilus?" he asked.

"His name isn't really Theophilus," Elmhurst explained. "That is only a term of affection among his friends. He is actually Professor Templeton."

"Then I do know him, at least by repute," said Thorndyke. "And now I suggest that we move on and let these ladies proceed with their work and see what enormities the unauthorised diggers have committed."

With this we bowed to the fair excavators, and as they picked up their cheese-cutters to renew their assault on the turf, we resumed our personally conducted tour, passing round the head of the mound (where Elmhurst pointed out to us the probable position of the burial chamber) to inspect the works on the other side. As we came out on to the lower side, whence we could see the whole hill-side and the river valley below, we observed a figure in the distance striding up the steep ascent with a purposeful air suggesting a definite objective.

"Here is Theophilus, himself," remarked Elmhurst (whose power of recognising distant persons did credit to his spectacles). "We may as well go down and meet him and get the introductions over before we come to the scene of the operations."

Accordingly, we proceeded down the hill-side, but at a leisurely pace, as we had to come up again, and, in due course, came within hail of the visitor, who viewed us with undisguised interest; which, indeed, was mutual; for a man who gets called by an affectionate nickname by his juniors probably merits respectful consideration. And this gentleman—a tall, athletic, eminently good-looking man, very unlike the popular conception of a professor—made a definitely pleasant impression.

When we at length met, he shook hands cordially with Elmhurst and then looked at Thorndyke.

"I think," said he, "that I can diagnose the giver of this archaeological feast. You are Dr. Thorndyke, aren't you?"

Thorndyke admitted his identity, but protested:

"I am really getting a great deal of undeserved credit for this excavation. Actually, I am greatly indebted to Elmhurst for all the trouble that he is taking, since I am hoping to get some useful information from the opening of the barrow."

Professor Templeton looked at him somewhat curiously.

"Of course," said he, "you know your own business—uncommonly well, as I understand—but I can't imagine what information you expect to get by the excavation that we couldn't have given you without it."

"Probably you are right," Thorndyke admitted, "at least in a scientific sense. But in legal practice, and in relation to a particular set of circumstances, an ascertained fact is usually of more weight than even the most authoritative opinion."

"Yes," said the professor, "I appreciate that. But when Elmhurst told me about the project, I wondered—and am still wondering—whether there might not be some—what shall we say?—some *arriere-pensee*, some expectation that the digging operations might yield some extra-archaeological facts. You see, your reputation has preceded you."

He smiled genially, and Thorndyke was evidently in no wise disconcerted by the implied suspicions; and I was just beginning to wonder, for my part, whether there might not be some justice in those suspicions when my colleague

addressed Elmhurst.

"I think," said he, "your presence is required at the diggings. Some rather urgent signals are being made."

We all looked up towards the barrow, and there, sure enough, was a picturesque, red-trousered figure standing on the summit of the mound, beckoning excitedly; and, even as we looked, a labourer came down the hill at a heavy trot, and, when he had arrived within earshot, announced that Miss Stirling asked Mr. Elmhurst to return at once.

In compliance with this unmistakably urgent summons, Elmhurst immediately started up the hill at something between a walk and a trot, and we turned and followed at a more convenient pace.

"Those girls have apparently found something out of the common," the professor remarked. "I wonder what it can be. They can't have struck the burial chamber, for they have only begun peeling the turf off; and you don't look for anything important so near the surface."

We watched Elmhurst run round the end of the mound, where he disappeared for the moment. But in a very short time he reappeared, hurrying in our direction; and, as we, thereupon, quickened our pace, we met within a short distance of the mound.

"My colleagues," he announced in his usual sedate, self-contained manner, though a little breathlessly, "have found something, Doctor, which is rather more in your line than in ours. Apparently, there is some one buried just under the surface in the place where the unauthorised digging has been carried out."

"You say 'apparently,'" said Thorndyke. "Then I take it that you have not uncovered a body?"

"No," replied Elmhurst, as we turned to accompany him back. "What happened was this: Miss Stirling was rolling up a strip of turf when she saw what looked like the toe of a boot showing through the surface soil! So she scraped away some of the soil with her spade and I uncovered the greater part of a boot; and then the toe of a second boot came into view; whereupon she ran up the mound and signalled for me to come."

"You are sure that they are not just a pair of empty boots?" Thorndyke asked.

"Quite sure," was the reply. "I scraped away the earth enough to see the bottoms of a pair of trousers and then came on to report. But there is no doubt that there are feet in those boots."

Nothing more was said as we walked quickly up the hill, but I caught a significant glance from the professor's eye, and I noticed that Polton had developed a new and lively interest in the proceedings. As to Thorndyke, it was impossible to judge whether the discovery had occasioned him any surprise; but I suspected—and so, evidently did the professor—that the possibility had been in his mind. Indeed, I began to ask myself if this gruesome "find" did not represent the actual purpose of the excavation.

On arriving at the barrow, we passed round the foot end and came in sight of the scene of the discovery, where a broad patch of the chalky soil had been uncovered by the removal of the turf. The two ladies stood close by it, backed by the gang of labourers who had been attracted to the spot by the report of the discovery; and the eyes of them all were rivetted on a shallow depression at the bottom of which a pair of whitened boots projected through the chalk rubble.

"Would you like me to get the body out?" Thorndyke asked. "As you said, it is more in my line than yours."

"I didn't mean that," replied Elmhurst. "I'll dig it out. But, as I have had no experience of the exhumation of recent remains, you had better see that I go about it in the right way."

With this, he selected a suitable pick and spade, and, having placed a wheelbarrow close by to receive the soil, fell to work.

We watched him cautiously and skilfully pick away the clammy chalk rubble in which the corpse was embedded, and, as each new part became disclosed, attention and curiosity quickened. First the legs, looking almost as if modelled in chalk, then the skirt of a rain-coat, and one whitened, repulsive-looking hand. Then, partly covered by the body, an object was seen, the nature of which was not at first obvious; but when Elmhurst had carefully disengaged it from the soil and drawn it out, it appeared as the whitened and shapeless remains of a felt hat, which was at once handed to Thorndyke; who restored it, as far as possible, to a recognisable shape, wiped its exterior with a bunch of turf, glanced into its interior, and then put it down on the side of the mound.

Gradually the corpse was uncovered and disengaged from its chalky bed until, at length, it lay revealed as the body of a stoutish man who, so far as could be judged, was on the shady side of middle age. Naturally, six months of burial in the clammy chalk had left uncomely traces and obscured the characteristics of the face; but when Thorndyke had gently cleaned the latter with a wisp of turf, the chalk-smears, sodden features still retained enough of their original character to render identification possible by one who had known the man. In fact, it was not only possible. It was actually achieved. For, as Thorndyke stood up and threw away the wisp of turf, Polton, who had watched the procedure with fascinated eyes, suddenly stooped and gazed with the utmost astonishment into the dead man's face.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "it looks like Mr. Penrose!"

"You think it does?" said Thorndyke, without the slightest trace of surprise.

"Of course, sir," replied Polton, "I couldn't be positive. He's so very much changed. But he looks to me like Mr. Penrose;

and I feel pretty certain that that is who he is."

"I have no doubt that you are right, Polton," said Thorndyke. "The hat is certainly his hat; and the fact that you recognised the body seems to settle the question of identity. And now another question arises. How is the body to be disposed of? The correct procedure would be to leave it where it is and notify the police. What do you say to that, Elmhurst?"

"You know best what the legal position is," was the reply. "But it won't be very comfortable carrying on the work with that gruesome object staring us in the face. Is there any legal objection to its being moved?"

"No, I think not," replied Thorndyke. "There are competent witnesses as to the circumstances of the discovery, and the soil is going to be thoroughly examined, so that any objects connected with the body are certain to be found."

"Quite certain," said Elmhurst. "The soil will not only be examined. That from this part will be sifted. And, of course, any objects found will be carefully preserved and reported. Still, we don't want to do anything irregular."

"I will take the responsibility for moving the body," said Thorndyke, "if you will find the means. But I think it would be as well to send a messenger in advance to the police so that they may be prepared."

"Very well," Elmhurst agreed. "Then I will send a man off at once and, if Mr. Polton will come and lend me a hand, we can rig up an extemporised stretcher from some of the spare fencing material."

With this he went off, accompanied by Polton, in search of the necessary material; the ladies migrated to the farther end of the mound, where they resumed their turf-cutting operations, and the labourers returned to their tasks.

When we were alone, the professor stood for a while looking thoughtfully at the ghastly figure, lying at the bottom of its trench. Presently he turned to Thorndyke and asked:

"Has it occurred to you, Doctor—I expect it has—that the person who buried this poor creature showed very considerable foresight?"

"You mean in selecting a scheduled monument as a burial-place?"

"Yes—but I see that you have considered the point. It is rather subtle. According to ordinary probabilities, a scheduled tumulus should be the safest of all places in which to dispose of a dead body. It is actually secured by law against any disturbance of the soil. But for your intervention, this place might have remained untouched for a century."

"Very true," Thorndyke agreed, "but, of course, there is the converse aspect. If suspicion arises in respect of a given locality, the very security of a barrow from chance disturbance makes it the likeliest place for a suspected burial."

"I suppose," the professor ventured, "that an ordinary exhumation order would not have answered your purpose?"

"It would not have been practicable," Thorndyke replied. "I did not know that the body was here. I did not even know for certain that there was a dead body; and I don't suppose that either the Home Office or the Office of Works would have agreed to the excavation of a scheduled tumulus to search for corpse whose existence was purely hypothetical. The only practicable method was a regular excavation by competent archaeologists; which would not only settle the question whether the body was there or not, but, in the event of a negative result, would not have raised any troublesome issues or disclosed any suspicions which might possibly turn out to be unfounded."

"Yes," the professor agreed. "I admire your tact and discretion. You have done valuable service to archaeology and you have managed very neatly to harness the unsuspecting Elmhurst to your legal chariot."

"I am not sure," said I, "that Elmhurst was quite so unsuspecting as you think. But he also is a discreet gentleman. He wanted to excavate the barrow and was willing to do it and ask no questions. But I fancy that he expected to find something more significant than neolithic pottery."

Here our discussion was brought to an end by the arrival of Elmhurst and Polton, bearing a sort of elongated hurdle formed very neatly by lashing together a number of stout rods. This they deposited opposite the place where the body was lying in readiness to receive its melancholy burden.

"I think, Jervis," said Thorndyke, "that the next proceeding devolves upon us. Will you lend us a hand, Polton? The body ought to be lifted as evenly as possible to avoid any disturbance of the joints."

Accordingly, we placed ourselves by the side of the trench, Thorndyke taking the head and shoulders, I taking the middle, while Polton supported the legs and feet. At the word from Thorndyke, we all very carefully lifted the limp, sagging figure and carried it to the hurdle on which we gently lowered it. As we rose and stood looking down at the poor shabby heap of mortality, Polton, who appeared to be deeply moved, moralised sadly.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed, "what a dreadful and grievous thing it is. To think that that miserable, dirty mass of rags and carrion is all that is left of a fine, jovial, happy gentleman, full of energy and enjoying every moment of his life. There is a heavy debt against somebody, and I hope, sir, that you will see that it is paid to the uttermost farthing."

"I hope so, too, Polton," said Thorndyke. "That, you know, is what we are here for. Can we find anything to cover the body? It is a rather gruesome object to carry down into the village."

As he spoke, the four labourers who had volunteered as bearers approached carrying a bundle of sacks; and with these, laid across the hurdle, the wretched, unseemly remains were decently covered up. Then the four men lifted the hurdle

(which, with its wasted burden, must have been quite light) and moved away round the foot of the barrow, watched, not without evident relief, by Elmhurst and his two colleagues.

"I suppose," said Elmhurst, as we prepared to follow, "you won't be coming back here?"

"Not to-day," replied Thorndyke. "But we shall have to attend the inquest, either as witnesses or to watch the proceedings, so we shall have an opportunity to see your work in a more advanced stage. Don't think that our interest in it is extinct because we are no longer concerned with neolithic pottery."

With this we took leave of our friends and, starting off down the hill-side, soon overtook and passed the bearers and made our way to the foot-bridge over the river near the mill. A few yards farther on, we met our messenger returning in company with a police sergeant, and halted to give the latter the necessary particulars.

"I suppose," he remarked, "you ought, properly, to have left the body where it was and reported to us. Still, as you say, there's nothing in it as the witnesses are available. I'll just note your addresses and those of any other persons that you know of who may be wanted at the inquest."

We accordingly gave our own names and addresses (at which I noticed that the sergeant seemed to prick up his ears), and Thorndyke gave those of Brodribb, Horridge and Kickweed. And this concluded the day's business. Of the spade and the trenching tool Thorndyke said nothing, evidently intending to examine them at his leisure before handing them over to the police.

I may say that the discovery had given me one of the greatest surprises of my life. The idea that Penrose might be dead had never occurred to me. And yet, as soon as the discovery had been made, I began to realise how all the facts that were known to us pointed in this direction, and I also began to see the drift of the many hints that Thorndyke had given me. But, although, over a very substantial tea at the Wool-pack Inn, we discussed the various and stirring events of the day, I did not think it expedient to enter into the details of the case in Polton's presence. Not that, in these days, we had many secrets from Polton. But there were certain other matters, as yet undisclosed, that it seemed better to reserve for discussion when we should be alone.

---

## XV. — WHAT BEFELL AT THE WOOL-PACK

The inquest on the body of Daniel Penrose yielded nothing that was new to us. The coroner had been provided by Thorndyke with a brief synopsis of the known facts of the case (which my colleague had, apparently, prepared in advance) to serve as a guide in conducting the inquiry; but he was a discreet man who understood his business and avoided extending the proceedings beyond the proper scope of a coroner's inquest. Nor had we been able to increase our knowledge of the case; for neither the spade nor the trenching tool furnished any information whatever. All our attempts to develop finger-prints failed utterly, and the most minute examination of the tools for traces of hair or blood was equally fruitless. Which was not surprising; for even if such traces had originally existed, six months exposure to the weather would naturally have dissipated them.

But if the coroner was not disposed to go beyond the facts connected with the discovery, there was another person who was. We had put up for the night at the Wool-pack in Chilham in order to be present at the post-mortem (by the coroner's invitation), and were just finishing a leisurely breakfast when the coffee-room door opened to admit no less a person than Mr. Superintendent Miller. He had come down by an early train for the express purpose of getting an outline of the case from Thorndyke to assist him in following the proceedings at the inquest.

"Well, Doctor," he said, cheerfully, seating himself without ceremony at our table, "here we are, and both on the same errand, I take it."

"We are," Thorndyke replied, "if you have come to attend the inquest on poor Penrose."

"Exactly," rejoined Miller. "We have a common purpose—which isn't always the case. Lord, Doctor! What a pleasure it is to find myself, for once in a way, on the same side of the board with you, playing the same game against the same opponent! You won't mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "But the first question is, have you had breakfast?"

"Well, I have, you know," said Miller, "but it was a long time ago. I think I could pick a morsel, since you mention the matter."

Accordingly, Thorndyke rang the bell, and, having given an order for a morsel in the form of a gammon rasher and a pot of coffee, prepared himself for the superintendent's assault.

"Now, Doctor," the latter began, in his best cross-examining manner, "it is perfectly clear to me that you know all about this case."

"I wish it were as clear to me," said Thorndyke.

"There, now. Dr. Jervis," exclaimed Miller, "just listen to that. Isn't he an aggravating man? He has got all the facts of the case up his sleeve, as he usually has, and now he is going to pretend—as he usually does—that he doesn't know anything about it. But it won't do, Doctor. The facts speak for themselves. Here were our men trapesing up and down the country,

looking for Daniel Penrose to execute a warrant on him, and all the time you knew perfectly well that he was safely tucked away in a barrow—though why the deuce they call the thing a barrow when it is obviously just a mound of earth, I can't imagine."

"That is a wild exaggeration, you know, Miller," Thorndyke protested. "After six months' study of the case, I came to the conclusion that Penrose was probably buried in this barrow. But I was so far from certainty that I had to take this roundabout way of settling the question whether I was or was not mistaken. It happened that my conclusion was correct."

"It usually does," said Miller. "And I expect you have formed some conclusions as to who planted that body in the barrow. And I expect those conclusions will happen to be right, too. And I should very much like to know what they are."

"Really, Miller," I exclaimed, "I am surprised at you. Have you known Thorndyke all these years without discovering that he never lets the cat out of the bag until he can let her right out? No protruding heads or tails for him. But, when everything is finished and the course is clear, out she comes."

"Yes, I know," said Miller, gloomily, "I know his beastly secret ways. I think that, in some previous state of existence, he must have been an oyster. Still, doctor, you needn't be so close with an old friend."

"But my dear Miller," protested Thorndyke, "you are entirely mistaken. I am withholding nothing that could properly tell you. What Jervis has said, though crudely put, is the strict truth. If I knew who had committed this crime, of course I should tell you. But I don't know. And if I have any half-formed suspicions, I am going to keep them to myself until I am able to test them. In short, Miller, I will tell you all I know. But I tell nobody what I think. So now ask me any questions you please."

I must admit that it was not very encouraging for Miller. My experience of Thorndyke was fairly expressed in what he had just said. He would tell you all the facts (which you usually knew already and which were more or less common property) but the general truths which were implicit in those facts he would leave you to discover for yourself; which you never did until the final conclusions emerged; when it was surprising how obvious they were.

"Well, to begin with," said Miller. "There was that chappie at the hospital whom we all supposed to be Penrose. Have you any idea who he really was? You obviously spotted the fact that he was not Penrose."

"No," replied Thorndyke, "I have no idea who he was. My suspicion that he was not Penrose was based on his behaviour, especially on the fact that he appeared particularly anxious to avoid being seen or recognised by any one who knew Penrose. As a matter of fact, he was not then recognisable at all, and nobody knows what he was really like. But I don't think that there is any utility in going into details of the case at that stage. Remember that my investigations were then concerned with the questions: Is Penrose alive or dead? And if he is dead, what has become of his body? Now, I have settled those questions and their solution has evolved the further questions: Was he murdered? And, if so who murdered him? The first question will be answered at the inquest—pretty certainly in the affirmative; and we shall then address ourselves to the second. And as you say, we have a common purpose and shall try to be mutually helpful."

"Now, I have given the coroner a synopsis of the case from the beginning, and I have a copy of it which I am going to hand to you. I suggest that you study it, and then, if anything occurs to you in connection with it, and you like to ask me any questions on matters of fact, I will give you all the information that I possess. How will that do for you?"

I suspected that it was not at all what Miller would have liked; but he saw clearly, as I did, that Thorndyke was not going to disclose any theories that he might have formed as to where we might look for the possible murderer. Accordingly, he accepted the position with as good a grace as he could, and, when he had finished a very substantial breakfast, he demanded the synopsis, which Thorndyke fetched from his room and placed in his hands.

"Are you coming to watch the post-mortem, Jervis?" my colleague asked.

"No," I replied. "I shall hear all about it at the inquest; so I think I shall improve the shining hour by taking a walk up to the barrow to see how the work is progressing."

"Ha!" said Miller. "Then perhaps you wouldn't mind my walking with you. I have never seen a barrow. Never heard of one until I read the report in the paper."

Of course, I had to agree; not unwillingly, in fact, for I liked our old friend. But I knew quite well what the proposal meant. As nothing was to be got out of Thorndyke, Miller intended to apply a gentle squeeze to me. And to this also I had no objection, for I was still in the dark as to how Thorndyke had reached his very definite conclusions and was quite willing to have my memories of the investigation stirred up.

The process began as soon as we were fairly outside the inn.

"Now, look here, Dr. Jervis," said the superintendent, "it's all very well for the doctor to pretend that he hasn't anything to go on, but there are certain obvious questions that arise when a well-to-do man like Penrose gets murdered. The first is: Who benefits by its death?"

"The answer to that," I replied, "is quite simple. Penrose made a will by which practically the whole of his property goes to a man named Horridge."

"Then," said Miller, "it will be worth while to give a little attention to Mr. Horridge. Do you know anything about him?"

"Not very much," I replied. "But I know this much; that he is about the most unlikely man in the world to have murdered

Penrose."

"Why do you say that?" demanded Miller.

"Because, if Penrose died when we believe he did, Horridge stands to lose something like a hundred and fifty thousand pounds by his death. Penrose was the principal heir of his father, who was quite a rich man. But when Penrose died—if he did die on the date which we are assuming—his father was alive and consequently the father's estate would not pass to him. But Horridge was Penrose's heir and would have inherited the father's property, as well as Penrose's, under the latter's will. So it didn't suit Horridge at all for Penrose to die when he did."

"And is the old man still alive?"

"No. He died quite recently."

"Ha!" said Miller. "Then somebody else benefits by Penrose's death. Do you happen to know who that will be?"

"No," I replied. "I understand, but do not know for certain, that the old man died intestate. In that case, the next of kin will benefit. They will benefit very considerably, as their expectations would have been quite small if Penrose had been alive when his father died. But I have no idea who they are."

"Well, we shall have to find that out," said Miller. "It seems that somebody had a perfectly understandable motive for getting rid of Penrose while the old man was still alive."

As Miller continued his interrogations, asking uncommonly shrewd questions and making equally shrewd comments, I began to feel an unwonted sympathy with Thorndyke in respect of his habitual reticence and secretiveness. For his approach to a criminal problem was quite different from Miller's, and there might easily arise some conflict between the two. Miller was evidently on the look-out for a suspect, and was considering the problem in terms of persons; whereas Thorndyke's practice was to watch, unseen and unsuspected, while he collected and sifted the evidence, and above all, to avoid alarming the suspected persons until he was ready to make the final move.

But our arrival at the top of Julliberrie Downs put an end, for the time being, to Miller's bombardment; for here we came in sight of the barrow, now stripped of its turf and presenting the smooth, white, rounded shape on which its builders had looked a couple of thousand years or more before the coming of the Romans. I explained its nature and its great antiquity to Miller, who was deeply impressed, but who, nevertheless, showed a strong inclination to "cut the cackle and get back to the case." But as we approached, the eagle-eyed Elmhurst observed us and came forward to do the honours of the excavation.

Under his guidance we went round to the farther side of the mound which was in the process of being cut away like a gigantic cheese, and the chalk rubble, stored in the dump, was mounting to the magnitude of a considerable hill. At this point, the superintendent's interest in the barrow awakened surprisingly, for an excavation was more or less in his line, and he took the opportunity to pick up a few technical tips. He was particularly impressed by a builder's sieve which had been set up at the dump.

"I see," he remarked to Elmhurst, "that you don't mean to miss anything. I shall bear your methods in mind the next time I have to direct a search. And speaking of a search, have you turned up anything that seems to be connected with the body that you found?"

"Yes," replied Elmhurst. "We found, near the place where the body was lying, quite an interesting thing, and, I should say, decidedly connected with that body—a small bronze pestle, apparently belonging to an ancient drug-mortar. I'll show it to you. Miss Stirling, have you got that pestle?"

As the lady addressed turned round and greeted me with a friendly nod, the superintendent whispered to me in an awe-stricken tone:

"Good gracious! That young person in the fisherman's trousers is a female! And I believe the other one is, too. Well, I never!"

"You would hardly expect them to wear evening dress for a job like this," I remarked; to which the superintendent assented, but continued to watch the ladies furtively and with fascinated eyes.

The pestle was presently produced from the shepherd's hut and offered for our inspection; a smallish pestle of bronze—now covered with a thick green patina—with a bulbous end and a rather elaborately decorated handle surmounted by a bearded head of the classical type which I assumed to represent Esculapius. Attached to it was a small tie-on label on which was written a note of its precise "find-spot" in the mound.

Miller took it in his hand and executed a warlike flourish with it, by way of testing its weight.

"It's of no great size," he remarked, "but it is quite a formidable weapon. Uncommonly handy, too, and as portable as a life-preserver. Perhaps I had better take charge of it."

He was about to slip it into his pocket when Elmhurst interposed firmly.

"I think I must keep it for the present. I am summoned to give evidence at the inquest and I shall have to produce this. Besides, I am personally responsible to the Office of Works for all objects found during the excavation."

With this he quietly resumed possession of the pestle, which Miller reluctantly surrendered, and as the latter had no

further interest in the excavation, and made no secret of the fact, we presently took our leave and resumed our perambulations, with a running accompaniment of interrogation on the part of the superintendent which caused me to hail the luncheon hour with a certain sense of relief.

The superintendent, of course, lunched with us, and when at the table he continued his quest for knowledge, beginning, naturally, with inquiries as to the result of the post-mortem.

"The cause of death is obvious enough," said Thorndyke. "There is a depressed fracture of the skull at the left side and towards the back; not very large, but deep, and suggesting a very violent blow. The shape of the depression—a fairly regular oval concavity—implies a blunt weapon of a smooth, rounded shape."

"Such as a pestle, for instance," Miller suggested.

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, "a pestle would agree with the conditions. But why do you suggest a pestle?"

"Because your excavating friends have found one; a bronze pestle; quite a handy little weapon, and portable enough to go quite easily into an ordinary pocket."

Here he gave a very excellent and concise description of the weapon, to which Thorndyke listened with deep interest.

"So you see," Miller concluded, "that it is a thing that ought to be quite easy to identify by any one who had ever seen it. Dr. Jervis thinks that it would not be likely to be the property of a chemist or apothecary. What do you say to that?"

"I agree with him," Thorndyke replied. "That is to say, it does not definitely suggest an apothecary as would have been the case if it had been a Wedgwood pestle. Bronze mortars and pestles are not now in general use; and this is pretty evidently an ancient pestle."

"A sort of curio, in fact," said Miller, "and rather suggestive of a collector or curio monger?"

Thorndyke agreed that this was so, but he made no further comment, though the connection of a curio with the late Daniel Penrose was fairly significant. But my recent experiences of Miller's eager and persistent cross-examinations enabled me to understand the sort of defensive reticence that they tended to engender. Moreover, the connection, though significant, was not very clear as to its bearing. It would have been more obvious if Penrose had been the murderer.

The inquest was held in a large room at the inn, normally reserved for gatherings of a more festive character, and when we entered and took our places the preliminaries of swearing in the jury and viewing the body had already been disposed of. I looked round the room and noted that in the seats set apart for the witnesses, not only Elmhurst and his two coadjutors were present but also Kickweed and Horridge. Both of the latter showed evident signs of distress, but more especially Horridge. Which rather surprised me. The grief of the lugubrious, red-eyed Kickweed was understandable enough; for not only had he manifested a genuine affection and loyalty towards his dead master, but the death of Penrose was a very material loss to him. But I could not reconcile Horridge's condition with the callous selfishness that he had shown previously. It is true that the apparent date of the death put an end to his hopes of inheriting the fortune of the lately deceased Penrose senior, but, on the other hand, he stood to gain forthwith the very respectable sum of fifty thousand pounds, for which he might reasonably have expected to wait for years. Nevertheless, he was obviously extremely upset, and it was evident from his pale, haggard face and his restless movements, that this sudden, unforeseen catastrophe had come on him as an overwhelming shock.

The first witness called was Miss Stirling, who gave a brief, matter-of-fact description of her discovery, to which the jury listened with absorbed interest. She was followed by Elmhurst, who amplified her statement and described his disinterment of the body and the appearance and position of the latter. He also explained the methods of excavation and the procedure after the body had been removed.

"In the soil which was taken away after the removal of the body," the coroner inquired, "did you find any objects that seemed to be connected with it?"

"Yes," replied Elmhurst. "I found this pestle, which could certainly not have been among the original contents of the barrow."

Here he produced the pestle wrapped in a handkerchief, and, having removed the latter, handed the "find" to the coroner, who inspected it curiously and then passed it on to the foreman of the jury.

"This," he remarked, "does not look like a modern pestle. As you are an authority on antiquities, Mr. Elmhurst, perhaps you can tell us something about it."

"I am not much of an authority on recent antiquities," Elmhurst disclaimed modestly, "but I should judge that this pestle belonged to a bronze drug-mortar of the kind that was in use in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century."

"You would not regard it as probably part of the outfit of a chemist's shop?"

"No," replied Elmhurst. "I understand that, since the introduction of grinding machinery, the practice of grinding hard drugs in metal mortars is quite extinct."

"Can you form any idea how long this object has been buried?"

"I could not judge the exact time; but, assuming it to have been bright, or at least clean, when it was buried, I should say that it must have been lying in the ground for several months."

That concluded Elmhurst's evidence, and, as he retired to his seat, the name of the medical witness was called.

"You have made an examination of the body of the deceased?" the coroner began, when the preliminaries had been disposed of. "Can you give any opinion as to how long deceased has been dead?"

"My examination," the witness replied, "led me to the belief that he had been dead at least six months."

"Did you arrive at any conclusion as to the cause of death?"

"The cause of death was an injury to the brain occasioned by a heavy blow on the head. There is a small but deep depressed fracture of the skull on the left side just above and behind the ear, which appears to have been produced by a blunt, smooth weapon with a rounded end."

"Please look at this pestle, which you have heard was found near the place where the body had been lying. Could the injuries which you found have been produced by this?"

The doctor examined the pestle and gave it as his opinion that it corresponded completely with the shape of the fracture.

"I suppose that it is a mere formality to ask whether the injuries could have been self-inflicted or due to an accident?" the coroner suggested.

"They certainly could not have been self-inflicted," the witness replied. "As to an accident, one doesn't like to use the word impossible, but I cannot imagine my kind of accident which would have produced the injuries that were found."

This completed the medical evidence proper, but Thorndyke was called to give confirmatory testimony.

"You have heard the evidence of the doctor. Have you any observations to make on it?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "I am in complete agreement with everything that my colleague has said."

"We may take it," said the coroner, "that you know more about this affair than anybody else. Can you throw any light on the actual circumstances in which the tragedy occurred?"

"No," Thorndyke replied. "My investigations have been concerned with the question whether Daniel Penrose was alive or dead; and, if he was dead, when and where his death occurred. I can make no suggestion as to the identity of the person who killed him."

"As to the date of his death; have you arrived at any conclusion on that point?"

"Yes. I have no doubt that deceased met his death at some time in the evening of the seventeenth of last October. I base that conclusion principally on the fact that his car was seen coming away from the neighbourhood of the place where his body was found, and that it was evidently being driven by some other person."

"And have you formed any opinion as to who that other person may have been?"

"I have not. At present I have no evidence pointing to any particular person."

"Well," said the coroner. "I hope you will now take up this further question, and that your efforts will be as successful in this as in the problem which you have solved in such a remarkable manner. Is there any question that any member of the jury would like to ask?"

Apparently there was not. Accordingly Thorndyke returned to his seat and the name of Francis Horridge was called. And, as he walked up to the table, I was once more impressed by his extraordinarily agitated and shaken condition. It was noticed also by the coroner, who, before beginning his examination, offered a few words of sympathy.

"This, Mr. Horridge," said he, "must be a very painful and distressing experience for you, as an intimate friend of the deceased."

"It is," replied Horridge. "I had not the faintest suspicion that my old friend was not alive and well. It has been a terrible shock."

"It must have been," the coroner agreed, "and I am sorry to have to trouble you with questions. But we have to solve this dreadful mystery if we can, or at least find out as much as possible about it. You have seen the body of deceased. Could you identify it?"

"Yes. It is the body of Daniel Penrose."

"Yes," said the coroner, "there seems to be no doubt as to the identity of the body. Now, Mr. Horridge, the medical evidence makes it clear that deceased met his death by the act of some unknown person. It is very necessary to discover, if possible, who that person is. You were an intimate friend of deceased and must know a good deal about his personal affairs. Do you know of anything that might throw any light on the circumstances surrounding his death?"

"No," was the reply. "But I did not know so very much about his personal habits or his friends and acquaintances."

"I understand that deceased had made a will. Do you know anything about that?"

"Yes. I am the executor of his will."

"Then you can tell us whether there was anything in connection with it which might give rise to trouble or enmity. In rough, general terms what are the provisions of the will?"



"They are quite simple. There is a handsome, but well-deserved legacy to his butler, Kickweed, amounting to two thousand pounds. Beyond that, the bulk of the property is devised and bequeathed to me."

"So you and Mr. Kickweed are the persons who benefit most in a pecuniary sense by the death of deceased?"

"Yes; and I am sure we should both very gladly forgo the benefit to have our friend back again."

"I am sure you would," said the coroner. "But can you tell us if there are any other persons who would benefit materially in any way by the death of deceased?"

"Yes, there are," replied Horridge. "Quite recently, deceased's father died and left a considerable fortune. If deceased had been alive at that time, the bulk of that fortune would have come to him. As it is, it will be distributed among his next of kin. Consequently, those persons will benefit very considerably by deceased's death if that death occurred on the date given by Dr. Thorndyke. I do not know who they are; and, of course, I do not suspect any of them of being concerned in this crime."

"Certainly not," the coroner agreed. "But one naturally looks round for some persons who might have had a motive for making away with deceased. But you know of no such persons? You do not know of any one with whom deceased was on terms of enmity or who had any sort of grudge against him?"

"No. So far as I know, he had no enemies whatever. He was not likely to have any. He was a kindly man and on pleasant terms with every one with whom he came in contact."

"May the same be said of us all when our time comes," the coroner moralised. "But there is another motive that we ought to consider. That of robbery. Do you know whether deceased was in the habit of carrying about with him—on his person I mean—property of any considerable value?"

"I have no idea," replied Horridge. "He must have done so at times, for he was a great collector and was in the habit of going about the country making purchases. I had supposed that his last journey was made with that object, and I am disposed to think so still. He used to come down to this neighbourhood to visit a dealer named Todd who has a shop at Canterbury."

"You say that he was a collector. What kind of things did he collect?"

"It was a very miscellaneous collection, but I have always believed that, in addition to the oddments that were displayed in the main gallery, he had a collection of jewels of much more considerable value which were kept in a small room. That room was always kept locked, and deceased would never say definitely what it contained."

Here Horridge gave a description of the small room as we had seen it on the occasion of our visit of inspection, and he also gave an account of the supposed burglary, to which the coroner—and Superintendent Miller—listened with profound interest.

"This," said the former, "seems to be a matter of some importance. What is the precise date on which the supposed burglary took place?"

"The second of last January."

"That," said the coroner, "would be nearly three months after the death of deceased, if Dr. Thorndyke is correct as to the date on which that death occurred. And you say that, if the cupboard was opened, it must have been opened with its own proper key, since the lock is unpickable and the cupboard had not been broken open. Is there any reason to believe that the cupboard was actually opened?"

"I think there is," replied Horridge. "It is certain that some one entered the room on that night, and it is practically certain that he entered the premises by the side gate, as there is no other way of approaching the window. But that gate was always kept locked, and it was found to be locked on the morning after the supposed burglary. So it seems that the burglar must have had the key of the gate, at least."

"And who usually had possession of that key?"

"Mr. Penrose. It seems that he sometimes used that gate and he kept the key in his own possession. There was no duplicate."

"When you went to the mortuary to identify the body, did you look over the effects of deceased which had been taken from the pockets?"

"No; but I asked the coroner's officer if any keys had been found and he told me that there had not."

The coroner nodded gravely and Miller remarked to me in a whisper that we were beginning to see daylight.

"It is unfortunate," the former observed, "that we have no clear evidence as to whether a burglary did or did not take place. However, that is really a matter for the police. But the question is highly significant in relation to the problem of the motive for killing deceased. Do you know whether, apart from this burglary, there were any attempts to rob deceased?"

"Yes," replied Horridge; "but I think it was only a chance affair. Deceased told me on one occasion that his car had been stopped on a rather solitary road by a gang of men who were armed with revolvers and who made him deliver up what money he had about him. But, apparently, his loss was only trifling as he had nothing of value with him at the time."

This concluded Horridge's evidence; and when the coroner's officer, who turned out to be the police sergeant whom I had met, had deposed to having examined the contents of deceased's pockets and found no keys among them, the name of Edward Kickweed was called.

---

## XVI. — MR. KICKWEED SURPRISES THE CORONER

THE evidence given by our friend, Horridge, had been listened to with keen interest, not only by the coroner and the jury, but especially by Superintendent Miller. For, though it comprised nothing that we did not already know, it had elicited the important fact that the body of Penrose had apparently been rifled of his keys. But striking and significant as this fact was, it was left to Kickweed to contribute the really sensational item of evidence.

But this came later. The early part of his evidence seemed to be little more than a series of formalities, confirming what had already been proved. When he took his place at the table, his lugubrious aspect drew from the coroner a kindly expression of sympathy similar to that with which he had greeted Horridge, after which he proceeded with his examination.

"You have seen the body which is lying in the mortuary, Mr. Kickweed. Were you able to identify it?"

"Yes," groaned Kickweed. "It is the body of my esteemed and beloved employer, Mr. Daniel Penrose."

"How long had you known deceased?"

"I have known him practically all his life. I was in his father's service and when he grew up and took a house of his own, he asked me to come to him as butler. So I came gladly, and have been with him ever since."

"Then you probably know a good deal about his manner of life and the people he knew. Can you tell us whether there was any one who might have had any feelings of enmity towards him?"

"There was not," Kickweed replied confidently. "Deceased was a rather self-contained man, but he was a kind, courteous and generous man and I am sure that he had not an enemy in the world."

"You confirm Mr. Horridge's estimate," said the coroner, "and a very satisfactory one it is; and it seems to dispose of revenge or malice as the motive for killing him. By the way, it is not of much consequence, but do you recognise these objects?"

Here he took from behind his chair the spade and trenching tool which we had found in the wood and laid them on the table for Kickweed's inspection.

"Yes," said the witness, "they belonged to deceased. He used to keep them in the garage. I am not quite sure what he used them for, but I know that he occasionally took them with him when he went out in the country in his car."

"Were you aware that he had taken them with him when he last left home?"

"I was not. But afterwards, when I saw that they were not in their usual place, I assumed that he had taken them with him."

The coroner entered this not very illuminating statement in the depositions, and then, noting that the witness's eyes were fixed on the pestle which lay on the table, he picked it up, and, holding it towards him, said:

"I suppose it is needless to ask you if you recognise this object?"

"I do," was the totally unexpected reply. "It belongs to a small bronze mortar which forms part of Mr. Penrose's collection."

"This is very extraordinary!" the coroner exclaimed. "You are sure that you recognise it?"

"Perfectly sure," replied Kickweed. "The pestle and mortar stood together on a shelf in the great gallery and I have often, when dusting the things in the collection, given this pestle and the mortar a rub with the cloth. I know it very well indeed."

"Well," the coroner exclaimed, "this is indeed a surprise! The weapon is actually the property of the deceased!"

There was a short interval of silence, in which I could hear Miller cursing softly under his breath.

"There," he muttered, "is another promising clue gone west!"

Then the coroner, recovering from his astonishment, resumed his examination of the witness.

"Can you explain by what extraordinary chance deceased came to have this thing with him on the day when he was killed?"

"Yes. It was his usual custom, when he went out in his car and was likely to be on the road late, to slip the pestle in his pocket before he started. The custom arose after he had been stopped on the road by robbers, as Mr. Horridge has mentioned. I urged him to get a revolver or some other means of defending himself. But he had a great dislike of fire-arms, so I suggested a life-preserver. But then he happened to see me polishing this pestle, and it occurred to him that it would do as well as the life-preserver, and, as he said, would be a more interesting thing to carry. So he used to take it with him, and he did on this occasion, as I discovered a few days after he had gone, when I saw the mortar on the shelf without the

pestle.”

“Well,” said the coroner, “there is evidently no doubt that this pestle really belonged to deceased, and that fact may have a rather important bearing on the case.”

He paused, and, having entered Kickweed’s last statement in the depositions, turned to him once more.

“Apparently, Mr. Kickweed, of all the persons who knew deceased, you are the one who last saw him alive. Can you recall the circumstances of his departure from his home?”

“Yes,” the witness replied, “very clearly. At lunch-time on the seventeenth of last October, deceased informed me that he should presently be starting for a run in the country in his car. He was not sure about the time when he would return, but he thought he might be rather late; and he directed that no one should sit up for him, but that a cold supper should be left for him in the dining-room. He left the house a little before three to go to the garage, and, about a quarter of an hour later, I saw him drive past the house in his car. That would be about three o’clock.”

“And after that, did you ever see him again?”

“I never saw him again. I sat up until past midnight, but, of course, he never came home.”

“Did you then suspect that any mischance had befallen him?”

“I was rather uneasy,” Kickweed replied, “because he had apparently intended to come home. Otherwise, I should not have been, as he often stayed away from home without notice.”

“When did you first learn that there was something wrong?”

“It was in the afternoon of the twentieth of October. Mr. Horridge had called to see him, and we were just discussing the possible reasons for his staying away when a police officer arrived, carrying deceased’s raincoat, and told us that deceased had apparently absconded from the hospital at Gravesend. And that was all that I ever knew of the matter until I heard Dr. Thorndyke’s evidence.”

“Then,” said the coroner, “to repeat; you saw him drive away on the seventeenth of October and you never saw him, or had any knowledge of him, again. Is that not so?”

“I never saw him again. But as to having any further knowledge of him, I am rather doubtful. I received a letter from him.”

“You received a letter from him!” the coroner repeated in evident surprise. “When did you receive that letter?”

“It was delivered on the morning of the twenty-seventh of last March.”

A murmur of astonishment arose from the jury and the coroner exclaimed in a tone of amazement:

“Last March! Why, the man had been dead for months!”

“So it appears,” Kickweed admitted; “and I am glad to believe that the letter was not really written by him.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because,” Kickweed replied, “it was not a very creditable letter for a gentleman of Mr. Penrose’s character. It was a foolish letter and not as polite as it should have been.”

“Have you that letter about you?”

“No. I handed it to Dr. Thorndyke, and I believe he has it still. But I can remember the substance of its contents. It directed me to lock up the small room and deposit the key at Mr. Penrose’s bank.”

“And did you do so?”

“Certainly, I did, though Dr. Thorndyke seemed rather opposed to my doing so. But, at the time, I supposed it to be a genuine letter from my employer and, of course, I had no choice but to carry out his instructions.”

“Have you formed any opinion as to who might have written that letter?”

“No, I have not the faintest idea. Until I heard Dr. Thorndyke’s evidence, I still supposed it to be a genuine letter from deceased.”

“Well,” said the coroner, “it is a most extraordinary affair. I, think we had better recall Dr. Thorndyke and hear what he can tell us about it.”

Accordingly, as Kickweed had apparently given all the information that he had to give, and no one wished to ask him any questions, he was allowed to return to his seat and Thorndyke was recalled.

“Will you tell us what you know about this very remarkable letter that Mr. Kickweed received?” the coroner asked.

“I first heard of that letter when Mr. Kickweed called at my chambers late in the evening of the twenty-seventh of last March. He then informed me that he had received that letter and gave it to me to read. I read and examined it and at once came to the conclusion that it was a forgery. I took a photograph of it—of which I have a copy here—and carried the original to Mr. Brodribb, deceased’s solicitor, to whom I handed it for safe custody and to whom I stated my opinion that it was a forgery.”

“You decided at once that the letter was a forgery. What led you to that decision?”

“My decision was based on the circumstances and on the character of the letter itself. As to the circumstances, I had by that time formed the very definite opinion that Daniel Penrose was dead and that he had died on the seventeenth of the previous October. The letter itself presented several suspicious features. The matter of it was quite unreasonable and inadequate. The room was already locked up and the key was in the very safe custody of deceased’s trusted and responsible servant, and had been for months. The directions in the letter appeared to be merely a pretext for writing and suggested some ulterior purpose. Then the manner of the letter was quite out of character with that of the supposed writer—a gentleman addressing his confidential servant. It was written in a tone of coarse, jocular familiarity with a most ill-mannered caricature of Mr. Kickweed’s name. It impressed me as a grotesque, overdone attempt to imitate deceased’s habitually facetious manner of speech. And, on questioning Mr. Kickweed, who was obviously hurt and surprised by the rudeness of this letter, I learned that deceased had always been in the habit of addressing him in a strictly correct and courteous fashion.”

“Apart from these inferences, was there anything visible that marked this letter as a forgery?”

“I did not discover anything. Of the handwriting I could not judge as I was not familiar with deceased’s writing. But there were no signs of tracing or other gross indications of forgery. But I may say that Mr. Brodribb was of opinion that the writing did not look, to him, like that of deceased.”

“You say that the matter of this letter suggested to you that a mere pretext had been made for writing and that there was some ulterior purpose. Can you suggest what that ulterior purpose might have been?”

“I suggest that its purpose was to make it appear that deceased was alive.”

“That seems to imply that the unknown writer of the letter knew that he was dead, though no one but yourself had any suspicion that he was not still alive. There would seem to be no object in trying to prove that a man was alive when nobody supposed that he was dead. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke; “that seems to be the natural inference.”

“I suppose you cannot offer any suggestion as to who the writer of the letter may have been?”

“I cannot. It seems clear that whoever he may have been, he must have been well acquainted with deceased, for the phraseology of the letter, although greatly exaggerated, was a recognisable imitation of deceased’s rather odd manner of expressing himself. But I cannot give him a name.”

“There was one matter that we overlooked when you were giving your evidence. You ascertained in some mysterious manner that deceased was buried in Julliberrie’s Grave. But is that the place where he met his death, or was his body brought from some other place?”

“I should say that there is no doubt that he was killed close to the place where his body was found. The implements which we found in the wood and which have been identified as his property suggest very strongly that he came to Julliberrie’s Grave of his own accord with the intention of searching for antiquities for his collection. Probably he had actually done some excavation in the mound and the cavity that he had dug offered the facilities for disposing of his body. And the finding of the weapon with which he was apparently killed, near to the body, supports this view.”

“Yes,” said the coroner, “I think you have made it clear that the death occurred in the neighbourhood of the barrow and that the body was not brought there from a distance. And that, I think, gives us all the evidence that we need.”

He bowed to Thorndyke, and, as the latter returned to his seat, he began a brief and very sensible summing up.

“The disappearance of Mr. Daniel Penrose involves a long and complicated story. But with that story we are not concerned. This is a coroner’s inquest; and the function of such an inquiry is to answer certain questions relating to a dead body which has been found within our jurisdiction. Those questions are: Who is the dead person? and where, when and by what means did deceased meet with his death? We are not concerned with the person, if any, who caused the death of deceased unless such person should be plainly and evidently in view. We have to decide whether or not a crime has been committed, but it is not our function to bring that crime home to any particular person. That duty appertains to the police.

“Now, in respect of those questions which I have mentioned, we have no difficulty. The evidence which we have heard enables us to answer them quite confidently. The body has been identified as that of a gentleman named Daniel Penrose; and it has been clearly proved that he met his death at a place called Julliberrie’s Grave on the seventeenth of last October and that his death was caused by violence inflicted by some unknown person. These are matters of fact which have been proved; and the only question which you have to decide is that of the nature of the act by which the death was caused. Deceased was killed by a heavy blow on the head inflicted with a bronze pestle. The person who struck that blow killed deceased and, therefore, undeniably committed an act of homicide. But there are many kinds of homicide, varying in their degree of culpability. A man may justifiably kill another in defence of his own life. Then there is no crime. Or he may kill another quite accidentally, when, again, there is no crime. Or he may kill another in the course of a struggle, by violence which was not intended to cause death. Here the act of homicide amounts only to manslaughter; and the degree of criminality will depend on the particular circumstances. Again, a man may kill another with the deliberate and considered intention of killing him—that is with what the law calls malice. Such deliberate and premeditated killing constitutes wilful murder.

"Now, in the present case, we have to consider the circumstances in which the death of deceased occurred; and of those circumstances we have very imperfect knowledge. A striking fact is that the weapon with which deceased was killed was his own property and must, apparently, have been brought to the place by himself. We have learned, also, that he habitually carried this weapon for the purpose of self-defence. There is thus the suggestion that he may have so used it on the occasion when he was killed. That is to say, there is a distinct suggestion of a struggle, and the actual possibility that deceased may have been the aggressor, killed by the unknown in self-defence.

"On the other hand, the unknown, having killed deceased, buried the body secretly and hurried away from the place—incidentally killing another person on his way—and has since given no information and made no sign, unless we assume that the very mysterious letter that Mr. Kickweed received emanated from him. And it is, perhaps, worth while to give that letter a brief consideration, as it seems to have some bearing on the question which we are trying to decide.

"Who was the writer of that letter and for what purpose was the letter written? From Dr. Thorndyke we learn that the writer must have been some person who was well acquainted with deceased. That is an important matter, but we are not concerned with the actual identity of the writer. We are concerned with his connection with the death of deceased; and that connection seems to be suggested by the purpose of the letter. That purpose seems to be indicated quite clearly by Dr. Thorndyke. It was to create the belief that deceased was still alive. But nobody—excepting the doctor—had any doubt that he was alive. No suggestion had been made by anybody that he might be dead. Then why should the writer of this letter have sought to create a belief which was already universally held? The only possible answer seems to be that he, himself, knew that deceased was dead and he wished, in the interests of his own safety, to forestall any suspicions that might arise that deceased might be dead.

"Thus the consideration of this letter suggests to us, first, that the writer knew that deceased was dead, and, second, that he had reasons for desiring that the fact of the death should not become known or suspected. But the fact of the death could have been known only to the person who killed deceased; and his anxiety to conceal the fact suggests strongly that he had no reasonable defence if he should be charged with the murder of deceased.

"That, I think, is all that I need say. Deceased was evidently killed by some unknown person; and it is for you to decide whether the circumstances, so far as they are known to us, suggest excusable homicide, accidental homicide, manslaughter, or wilful murder."

On the conclusion of the summing up, the jury consulted together for a few minutes. Then the foreman announced that they had agreed on their finding.

"And what decision have you arrived at?" the coroner asked.

"We find that the deceased was murdered by some person unknown."

"Yes," said the coroner, "I think that it is the only reasonable conclusion at which you could have arrived. I will record a verdict of wilful murder by some person unknown, and we may hope that the police will presently be able to discover who that unknown person is and bring him to justice."

He entered the verdict in the depositions and this brought the proceedings to an end.

---

## **XVII. — THORNDYKE RETRACES THE TRAIL**

As the court rose and we all stood up, Miller turned on me fiercely.

"You never told me about that letter," he exclaimed; "and there was not a word about it in the synopsis that the doctor gave me."

"As to me," said I, "there is no question of reservations. I did not refer to it because I had not regarded it as having any particular bearing on the case."

"No bearing!" exclaimed Miller. "Why, it hits you in the face. But if you think it has no bearing, I'll warrant that is not the doctor's view."

"Naturally," I replied, "I don't know what his views are, but he is here and can answer for himself."

"Well," said Miller, "what about it, Doctor? You knew about that letter and you must know quite well who wrote it and why he wrote it."

"Now, Miller," said Thorndyke, "don't let us misuse words. We don't know who wrote that letter. We may have our opinions, and they may be right—or wrong. But in any case they will be pretty difficult to turn into evidence."

"I suspect you have done that already," grumbled Miller, "and you are keeping that evidence to yourself."

"You are quite wrong," Thorndyke replied. "I have no evidence beyond the facts which are known to you. Actually, I have given very little attention to the letter. It threw no light on the problem which I was trying to solve; whether Penrose was alive or dead, and, if he was dead, where we might look for his body."

"I should have thought it was highly relevant," Miller objected. "If it was good enough for some one to forge a letter to prove that Penrose was alive, when nobody supposed otherwise, that would suggest pretty strongly that the forger knew he was dead."

"So it would," Thorndyke agreed, "but that was of no use to me. I was not out for opinions or beliefs but for demonstrable facts."

"Well," said Miller, "you have produced your demonstrable facts all right, and you have solved your problem. And now, I suppose, you are going on to the next problem: Who murdered Daniel Penrose? And the solution of that problem is to be found in that letter; and as we are both working to the same end, I think you ought to put me in possession of any facts that are known to you."

"But, my dear Miller," Thorndyke protested, "I have no facts respecting this letter that are not known to you. I will hand you the photograph, and you can have an enlargement if you want to employ handwriting experts, or you can have the original. That is all I can do for you."

He produced his letter-case, and, taking the photograph of the forged letter from it, handed it to Miller, who slipped it into his wallet and buried the latter in the depths of an internal pocket. As he did so he looked round sharply and exclaimed:

"What is the matter, Mr. Horridge? Are you not feeling well, sir?"

I looked at our friend, who seemed to be groping his way towards the door, and certainly the inquiry was justified. His aspect was ghastly. His face was blanched to a tallowy white, his hands trembled visibly, and he had the dazed, bewildered appearance suggestive of a severe mental shock.

"No," he replied unsteadily. "I am not feeling at all well. This awful affair has been too much for me. It was all so horrible and so unexpected."

"Yes," Miller agreed sympathetically. "I expect it has given you a bad shake-up. Better come along with me to the bar and have a good stiff whisky. Don't you think so, Doctor?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that a hot meal and a glass of wine would be better, if Mr. Horridge is returning to town this evening."

"I am," said Horridge, "but I couldn't look at food just now. Besides, my train is due in less than half an hour."

"Well, then," urged Miller, "come along to the bar and have a good stiff drink. That will pick you up and fit you for the journey home. I happen to be going by that train, myself, so I can see you safely to Charing Cross, and into a cab if necessary."

I think Horridge would sooner have been without the proffered escort, but Miller left him no choice, and accordingly allowed himself passively to be led away in the direction of the bar.

Thorndyke watched the two men disapprovingly as they passed out, and when they had disappeared, he remarked:

"I am afraid Miller is going to be a nuisance to us. His activity is premature."

"Yes," I agreed, "he is in full cry after Horridge and he thinks that he is on a hot trail. Obviously, he is convinced that Horridge wrote that letter, and I think he is right."

"I have no doubt that he is," said Thorndyke. "The obvious purpose of that letter was to create evidence that Penrose was alive after Oliver's death, and so would inherit his property. But it would be impossible to prove that Horridge wrote it."

"So it may be," said I. "But Miller has got him at a disadvantage, and he is going to push his opportunity for all that it is worth. If he lets on that he is a police officer, Horridge will probably collapse altogether. He is in a fearful state of panic."

"And well he may be," Thorndyke rejoined, "if he wrote that letter. For, quite apart from the suggestion of guilty knowledge that it offers, the mere writing and uttering of that letter is a serious crime. It is a forgery in the fullest sense. It was done with intent to deceive, and the purpose of the deception was grossly fraudulent. If Miller can frighten him into an admission of having written the letter, he will be absolutely certain of securing a conviction."

"On the charge of forgery," said I. "But that is not Miller's objective. You heard what he said. He is all out on the capital charge."

"Yes, I realise that," said Thorndyke. "Which is why I say that he is going to be a nuisance to us. Because he won't be able to prove his case and he will have set up a disturbance just at the moment when what is needed is a little masterly inactivity combined with careful observation. It is a pity that Miller will not trust us more. He will butt in when the case is not ready for police methods. However, I am glad he is not travelling up with us. His eagerness to acquire knowledge becomes rather fatiguing."

"We are not going up by that train, then?"

"No. We may as well have a little early dinner and take the motor omnibus to Canterbury."

We adopted this plan, and, after a comfortable and restful meal, caught the omnibus and were duly deposited in the main street of Canterbury, not far from the cathedral. As we proceeded thence towards the station, we noticed an "antique" shop, the fascia of which bore the single word "Todd."

"This," I remarked, halting to glance at the antiquities—mostly of the prehistoric type—which were displayed in the window, "seems to be the shop that Horridge referred to as a favourite resort of poor Penrose. Probably some of the things

that we saw in the collection came from here.”

“One of them almost certainly did,” said Thorndyke. “Don’t you remember that Saxon brooch? The entry in the catalogue noted its origin as ‘Sweeney’s Resurrection.’”

“I remember the entry, now you mention it. Lockhart suggested that ‘Sweeney’ probably meant Todd, and apparently he was right.”

We went on our way, discussing the late Daniel Penrose and his harmless oddities, of which I had been so intolerant, and eventually reached the station in time to select our compartment at our leisure. There were few passengers besides ourselves, so that we were able to secure a first-class smoking-compartment of which we were the sole occupants, a matter to which I attended with some anxiety. For the train ran through to Charing Cross without a stop, and the long, uninterrupted journey would afford an opportunity for certain explanations which I felt were now overdue. With this view Thorndyke apparently agreed, for, when I presently opened my examination with a tentative question, he replied quite freely, without a sign of his customary reticence and evasiveness.

“Of course,” I began, “when Penrose’s body was found, I realised at once, in general terms, how I had managed to miss the essential points of the case. The possibility that Penrose might be dead never occurred to me; and it ought. It looks obvious enough now. But still I don’t quite see how you contrived to establish the fact of his death—which you evidently did—and locate the place of his burial.”

“It was all very hypothetical,” he replied, “even up to the last stage. Until Elmhurst reported the discovery I was not certain that my theory of the course of events might not contain some fallacy that I had overlooked. Hence my rather elaborate provisions to cover up a possible failure. But to come back to your own case; the initial mistake that you made was in disregarding the good old Spencerian principle that when certain facts are presented as proving a particular thesis, we should consider, not only that which is presented, but that, also, which is not presented. In other words, we should at once separate fact from inference.

“Now, when Brodribb gave us his narrative of the disappearance of Penrose, he honestly believed that his story was a recital of facts; whereas it was really a mixture of fact and inference. It had not occurred to him that the hospital patient might be some person other than Penrose, and he accordingly presented that patient as Penrose. And you accepted that presentation as a statement of fact, whereas it was only an inference. Hence you made a false start and got on the wrong track from the beginning.

“I was fortunate enough to avoid this pitfall; for even while Brodribb was telling us his story, I made a mental note that the identity of the patient had been taken for granted, and that it would have to be considered, before any action could be taken. But as soon as I began to consider the question, it became clear to me that the balance of probability was against the patient’s being Penrose.”

“Did it really?” I exclaimed. “Now, I should have said that all the known facts pointed to his being Penrose. And so it seems to me still.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “let us argue the question. We will take two hypotheses: A, that the patient was Penrose; and B, that he was some other person, and examine the evidence in support of each.

“Let us begin with hypothesis A. What evidence was there that the patient was Daniel Penrose?

“There were five principal items of evidence. 1. The car was certainly Penrose’s car. 2. The patient had been in possession of that car. 3. The coat, which was undeniably the patient’s coat, had Penrose’s driving licence in its pocket. 4. The initials on the patient’s collar were Penrose’s initials. 5. A fragment of an ancient object was found in the pocket of the patient’s coat. But Penrose was a collector of antiquities and there was reason to believe that he had gone out that day for the purpose of acquiring some such objects.

“Now, you will notice that the first three items are what we may call extrinsic. They afford no evidence of personal identity. They merely prove that the patient was in possession of Penrose’s property, and they are thus of very little weight. The other two items we may call intrinsic. They are connected with the actual personality of the patient.

“Of these, the initials on the collar furnished by far the more weighty evidence of identity.”

“I should have assumed them to be quite conclusive,” said I.

“Then you would have been wrong,” he replied, “for you would have been assuming that Penrose was the only man in the world whose initials were D. P. Still, the fact that the patient’s initials were D. P. established a very high probability that he was Daniel Penrose.”

“I should have put it higher than that,” said I. “It would have seemed to me as nearly as possible a certainty. For if he were not Penrose the coincidence would be, as it was, such an amazing one.”

“I think you exaggerate the abnormality,” he rejoined. “It was a very remarkable coincidence; but there are two things that we should bear in mind. First, the adverse chances were not so enormous as you seem to imply. There are great numbers of men whose initials are D. P. And, secondly, that the laws of probability relate to large numbers. They must be applied with great caution to particular cases. The tendency to assume that because a thing is improbable, it will not happen, is a mistake. Improbabilities and coincidences are constantly occurring, and we have to allow for that fact.

“Nevertheless, it had to be admitted that those initials made it, in a very high degree, probable that the patient was Daniel Penrose. But now let us take the alternative hypothesis and see what the probabilities were on the other side. And first, consider the conduct of the patient. Owing to his black eyes and contused face, he was completely unrecognisable. Nobody could form any idea what he was like. But when his injuries cleared up he would have been recognisable; and the extraordinary and determined way in which he absconded from the hospital at a carefully-chosen time, is very suggestive. Evidently, during his simulated unconsciousness, he had been watching for an opportunity to get away at night when his odd appearance would be less observed. His behaviour was like that of a man who sought to escape before recognition should be possible.

“Then, there was the man’s previous behaviour. Apparently he had abandoned his car. But a car which is abandoned is usually a stolen car. Again, the car which killed the old woman was being driven wildly and furiously. We knew then of no reason why Penrose should have been driving in that manner. But a stranger in unlawful possession of a car would probably have sufficient reasons; and in fact, persons who steal cars usually do drive furiously. Then, if Penrose had knocked down the old woman he would probably have stopped and reported the accident. He was a responsible, decent gentleman and there was no reason why he should not have stopped. But a stranger, in possession of a stolen car—in effect, a fugitive—could not afford to stop and be interviewed.

“Furthermore, if this man had been in unlawful possession of a car, something must have happened to the owner of that car at some place. The stranger would have good reasons for getting away from that neighbourhood as quickly as possible. Thus, the furious driving both before and after the accident would be sufficiently explained.

“So, looking at the case as a whole, you will see that, on the assumption that the patient was Penrose, his conduct was utterly unreasonable and inexplicable; on the assumption that he was not Penrose, his behaviour was in every respect exactly what we should have expected it to be. For if he was not Penrose, he was under strong suspicion of having made away with Penrose, for the reasons: 1. That Penrose had unaccountably disappeared, and; 2. That the stranger was in possession of Penrose’s car and his driving licence. Taking all the facts together, I came to the conclusion that, in spite of the initials, the balance of probability was against his being Penrose.

“Nevertheless, those initials presented a formidable objection to the view that I was disposed to adopt, and I decided that the question whether they were Penrose’s initials or those of some other person must be settled before any further investigation would be worth while. It was not a difficult question to dispose of, and it turned out to be easier than I had expected. You remember how we obtained the answer?”

“Indeed, I don’t,” I replied. “I never knew that the question had been raised.”

“You never followed this case very closely, for some reason,” said Thorndyke, “but if you will recall our visit to the garage, you will remember that I was able, quite easily, to extract a statement from Kickweed which settled the question definitely.

“We learned from him that Penrose was in the habit of marking all his portable property, including his collars and handkerchiefs, with his name, D. Penrose, by means of a rubber stamp.”

I grinned rather sheepishly. “I remember quite well now you mention it, but I am afraid that, at the time, I merely wondered, like a fool, why you were going into such trivialities at such length.”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “you will now see that our conversation with Kickweed cleared up all our difficulties. Penrose’s collars were marked ‘D. Penrose’ with a rubber stamp; the patient’s collar was marked ‘D. P.’ with a marking-ink pencil. Therefore, the evidence of the collar supported all the other evidence; it went to prove that the patient was not Penrose.

“Then, at once, arose two other questions: If he was not Penrose, who was he? And what had become of Penrose? The first question had to be left until we had answered the second. Penrose had disappeared. What had happened to him? Was he alive or dead?

“Now, having regard to the strange and sinister circumstances: the disappearance of one man, the appearance of another man in possession of his property and the anxiety of that other man to escape without being identified, there was only one reasonable conclusion that we could come to. The overwhelming probability was that Penrose was dead and that his body had been concealed by burial or otherwise.

“Adopting this view, as I did, the next questions were: Where did Penrose meet his death? And where was his body concealed? The latter question was the more important, but the answer to both was probably the same. And both questions were contained in the further question: From what place did the car start on that wild journey home?

“Now, in regard to this problem—the starting-point of the car’s journey—we had two clues, and they were both very imperfect. The place where the woman was killed was in the Canterbury district and the car was travelling via Maidstone towards Gravesend. But the speed at which it was travelling made it difficult to judge how far it might have come, especially as we had no exact information as to the time at which it started. All that we knew was that the car advanced towards the Canterbury-Ashford road from some place to the south and east.

“The other clue was the very distinctive pottery fragment. But this also was a very ambiguous clue. The pocket in which we found it was not Penrose’s pocket; and we did not know how long it had been in that pocket. However, when we came to examine these difficulties, they did not appear insuperable. Thus, notwithstanding that the fragment was in another man’s possession, I was disposed to associate it with Penrose for two reasons; first, that Penrose was a collector of antiquities, and, second, that, when he started from home, he took with him—as we learned from Kickweed—two digging tools and



was, apparently, intending to do some sort of excavation. As to the second difficulty, the earth in which the fragment was embedded was of the same kind as that which we scraped from the coat and that which we found later on the car. So it appeared practically certain that the fragment was the product of that day's digging.

"The next question was: Whence had that fragment come? That was a vitally important question; for there could be little doubt that the place where that fragment was dug up was the place where Penrose had met his death and where his body was concealed. But how was that question to be answered? It seemed that the only possible method was that which I had adopted in regard to the other questions; to form a working hypothesis and see whither it led. Now, the broken edges of the fragment showed fresh fractures. It had been broken off the pot at the time of the excavation; and as the digging had probably been done after dark, by a very imperfect light, the fragment had apparently been overlooked, the new fracture of the pot being mistaken for an ancient one. It followed that, somewhere, there was a broken pot with a space in it corresponding to this fragment, by which it could infallibly be recognised. If we could find that pot it would-probably be possible to ascertain where it had been dug up.

"But where were we to look for that pot? The only possible place known to us was Penrose's collection; and circumstances created an initial probability that it was there. But, further, I had a theory, as I mentioned to you, that the expedition on which Penrose had embarked that day possibly had the express purpose of recovering this fragment to make the imperfect pot complete. Accordingly, I took an opportunity of inspecting the collection, and I took with me my invaluable box of moulding wax.

"You know the result. The pot was there, easily recognisable at sight and conclusively identified by the wax squeeze. There was also a catalogue entry, presumably describing the piece and recording the source whence it had been obtained. But the wording of the entry was so obscure as to present a fresh puzzle. Nevertheless, it was a great advance; for the information was there, if we could only extract the meanings of the words.

"Those words were, you will remember: 'Moulin a vent; Julie; Polly.' Now, the first term was obvious enough; the piece was a 'Windmill Hill' pot. By the study of other entries in the catalogue, I reached the conclusion that 'Julie' probably represented the locality, and 'Polly' the person from whom the pot was obtained. Accordingly, the first thing to be done was to ascertain, if possible, the meaning of the word 'Julie.'

"To this end, I procured and read various works dealing with neolithic pottery; and, since our pot had almost certainly been dug out of a long barrow, I gave attention to those also. But the result, for a time, was very disappointing. I read through quite a large number of books and papers on barrows and pottery without meeting with any name resembling "Julie." At last, I struck the clue in Jessup's Archeology of Kent. There, in the chapter dealing with neolithic remains, I found a reference to a long barrow known as Julliberrie's Grave, in the neighbourhood of Chilham. Looking it up on the ordnance map, I saw at once that its situation fitted the circumstances exactly, for it was quite close to the known track of the car. Thereupon I decided that Julliberrie's Grave was almost certainly the place for which I had been searching, the starting-point of the car's wild career and the place in which the body of Daniel Penrose was probably reposing.

"The question then arose: What was to be done? I had not a particle of definite evidence to support my belief. My whole case was just a train of hypothetical reasoning—guess-work, if you will; and guess-work was not good enough either for the Home Office or the Office of Works. Besides, as you acutely observed, I didn't want to let the cat out of the bag prematurely. Yet it was impossible to get any further in the investigation until the barrow had been explored.

"There was only one thing to do—to organise a scientific excavation of the barrow by skilled and trained archaeologists. That would ensure an absolutely exhaustive exploration without injury to the barrow and without any disclosure of my suspicions if they should prove to be unfounded. Accordingly, I looked up our invaluable friend, Elmhurst, and, to my great satisfaction, found that he had both the means and the will to carry out the excavation if I were prepared to finance the work.

"You know the rest. Everything went according to plan and the first stage of our investigation was brought to a triumphant conclusion. I only hope that the second stage will go as well. It ought to; for we have now a solid foundation of established fact to build on."

"Yes," I agreed. "We know that Penrose is dead and that somebody killed him. But I don't see much of a lead towards the conclusion as to who that somebody may have been. But I expect that you do. Perhaps the word 'Polly' in that ridiculous catalogue entry, suggests something to you. Apparently, it refers to a person, though it is hardly safe to say even that. The only thing that is certain is that it doesn't mean Polly."

"The meaning of that word," he replied, "really belongs to the second stage of our inquiry, on which we are now embarking; the identification of the person whom we may call 'the murderer'—though the fact of murder is not established. Penrose was killed with his own weapon, which, as the coroner justly observed, suggests a struggle or conflict. But as to the identity of that person, I have not yet formed a definite opinion. There is one essential question that has to be settled before we begin to theorise. We have got to know whether the alleged burglary at Queen Square was an actual burglary and whether the cupboard in the small room was actually opened."

"You mean," said I, "that, if the cupboard was opened, it must have been opened with Penrose's keys, as you have always maintained, and that, therefore, the person who opened it must have been the murderer."

"I would hardly go as far as that," he replied. "If some person did actually enter that room and open the cupboard, he must have opened it with Penrose's keys or with duplicates made from them. That would suggest that he was either the

murderer or in league with the murderer. But even if he opened the cupboard, that would not be conclusive evidence that he stole the jewels. He might have found the cupboard empty. That is not probable, but it has to be borne in mind. And then we have to remember that the only evidence of the room's having been entered is the unsupported statement of one person."

"Yes," said I, "and not an entirely unsuspected person. Our friend, Horridge, seems to have had considerable misgivings as to the discreet and melancholy Kickweed; but I didn't think that you had any suspicions in that direction."

"I don't say that I have," replied Thorndyke, "or that I entertain seriously the various possibilities that I have mentioned. I am merely pointing out that we have got a good many eggs in our basket. A sensible man keeps in his mind all the possibilities, no matter how remote; but he also gives his special attention, in the first place, to those that are least remote. And, meanwhile, we have got to begin our quest by settling definitely whether that cupboard has or has not been opened. We have very little doubt as to what was in it when Penrose was alive, and Lockhart will now have to make an explicit statement. If the things are not there, we shall have a definite fact and can consider what follows from it; and if we find the collection intact—well, I shall be very much surprised."

---

## **XVIII. — THE OPENING OF THE SAFE**

On suitable occasions, Thorndyke could lie remarkably low and exhibit a most masterly inactivity.

But also, on suitable occasions he could act with surprising promptitude. And the matter of the alleged burglary at Queen Square presented such an occasion. Armed with an authority from Mr. Brodribb, as joint executor, he proceeded to call on Chubbs and make all necessary arrangements for the opening of the safe in the small room; and then, as I gathered, he had an interview with Lockhart. What passed at that interview I did not learn, but I suspect that there was some rather plain speaking. Not that it should have been necessary, for Lockhart was a lawyer and knew in what a very questionable position he stood. But whatever passed on that occasion, he was quite amenable. He frankly admitted that he had seen in the small room a collection of jewels which were almost certainly the Billington jewels, and he gave Thorndyke a written statement to that effect. Further, he wrote a letter to Miller, in somewhat ambiguous terms, referring him to Thorndyke for fuller particulars, and agreed to be present when the safe was opened.

Naturally, this letter brought Miller, hotfoot, to our chambers, and a preliminary discussion was unavoidable in spite of Thorndyke's efforts to stave it off.

"Now, Doctor," the superintendent began a little truculently, "this is the sort of thing that I was complaining of. You knew those jewels were there, but you didn't let on the faintest hint to me."

"I did not know," Thorndyke protested. "I only suspected; and I don't profess to communicate mere suspicions."

"Well," rejoined Miller, "there they were, at any rate, and we can take it as a certainty that they are not there now."

"I expect you are right," said Thorndyke, "but why not leave the discussion until we know?"

"For all practical purposes, we do know," replied Miller. "We can take it that there was either a real or a pretended burglary, and in either case the stuff is pretty certainly gone; and the question is, who lifted it?"

"You remember," said Thorndyke, "that the keys were stolen from Penrose's body. Presumably, they were taken for the purpose of being used; and they could have been used only by entering the premises. Moreover, if the cupboard was opened, it could have been opened only with Penrose's keys."

"Yes, that's a fact," Miller agreed. "But suppose the murderer did enter the premises, how do we know that he found the stuff there? Or, for that matter, how do we know that the place was ever entered? We have got only one man's word for it. And, to an experienced eye, it looks a bit like an indoor job."

"I don't quite see what is in your mind," said Thorndyke. "You are not letting your thoughts run on Horridge?"

Miller grinned sourly. "No," he replied, "though I must admit that I did suspect him very considerably in connection with the murder. But I have squeezed him pretty dry—and I can tell you he didn't like being squeezed. But in the end, he was able to produce an undeniable alibi—a club dinner that he attended on the seventeenth of October at which all the members signed their names. So Horridge is now out of the picture."

"He was never in," said Thorndyke. "The proceedings at the inquest made that perfectly clear."

"What proceedings do you mean?" Miller demanded.

"I am referring to Kickweed's evidence," Thorndyke replied. "If you had not been so preoccupied with the forged letter, you would have seen that it excluded Horridge from any possible suspicion in regard to the murder. Kickweed deposed that on the twentieth of October, three days after the murder, and the very day after the flight of the presumed murderer from Gravesend Hospital, Horridge called at Queen Square to see Penrose; and the two of them, Horridge and Kickweed, interviewed a police officer who had come to bring the coat that was assumed to belong to Penrose. Now, if Horridge had been the murderer, he must also have been the hospital patient. But the patient had two very bad black eyes and a severe wound across his right eyebrow. Obviously, he would have been in no condition for paying calls; and you will remember that the police officer was looking for a man with two black eyes and a cut across his right eyebrow."

"Yes," Miller admitted, "I had overlooked that. But it did look as if Horridge had written that letter. Have you any idea who did write it? We have got to find that out."

"My dear Miller," Thorndyke said, a little impatiently, "you had better forget that letter. It is a criminal matter, but it has no bearing on the crime which we are investigating. But if you have dropped Horridge, what do you mean by suggesting that this burglary may have been an indoor job?"

"Well, you know," replied Miller, "this burglary rests on the story told by Mr. Kickweed; and Mr. Kickweed strikes me as a decidedly downy bird."

"He couldn't have been the murderer, you know," said Thorndyke. "But it was presumably the murderer who had the keys."

"I know," rejoined Miller. "But he was in the house; and there is such a thing as wax."

"You can take it," said Thorndyke, "that Penrose was not in the habit of leaving his keys about."

"No, probably not," Miller agreed, "but I suppose he had a bath sometimes, and I don't suppose he took his clothes into the bathroom with him."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently at the superintendent and admonished him in mock solemn tones:

"Now, my dear Miller, let me urge you to beware of obsessions. At the inquest you allowed yourself to become letter-minded, and so you missed a vitally important item of evidence. And now you seem inclined to let yourself become Kickweed-minded. Why not leave Kickweed alone and address yourself to the more obvious lines of inquiry?"

"Still, you know, Doctor," Miller persisted, "somebody must have known that those jewels were there."

"There is not a particle of evidence that Kickweed did. You must remember that Penrose kept their existence absolutely secret from everybody excepting Lockhart; and he swore him to secrecy before he showed them. So far as we know, their existence was known only to two persons; Lockhart, and the man, whoever he was, who supplied them."

"Yes," said Miller, "the chappie who supplied them to Penrose certainly knew that they were there. It would be interesting, quite apart from the murder business, to know who he was. I wonder if it could have been Crabbe, after all."

"You needn't wonder, Miller," said Thorndyke. "It was Crabbe. I think there can be no doubt about that."

Miller sat up in his chair and turned a rather startled face to my colleague.

"Hallo, Doctor!" he exclaimed. "You seem to know a mighty lot about it. And how did you manage to dig up Mr. Crabbe? I've been wondering about that ever since that evening when you asked me about him."

"There was a document," replied Thorndyke; "a scrap of paper, apparently a descriptive label, which was found in the small room, on the morning after the alleged burglary. That was what enabled me to connect Crabbe with Penrose's collection."

"Then," Miller exclaimed excitedly, "we have got actual, tangible evidence against Crabbe. Who has got that scrap of paper?"

"Brodrigg has the original, but I kept a copy. You shall see it;" and, with this, he rose and went to the cabinet in which the Penrose dossier was kept. Taking out from the collection of notes and papers the copy of Mr. Penrose's cryptogram, he brought it over and gravely handed it to Miller, who stared at it aghast while I watched him with unholy glee.

"I can't make anything of this," the superintendent grumbled. "'Lobster: hortus petasatus.' It doesn't make sense. Besides, a lobster isn't a crab; and what in creation is a hortus petasatus?"

Thorndyke expounded the meaning of the inscription, explaining the late Mr. Penrose's peculiarities of speech, and Miller listened with incredulous astonishment.

"Well, Doctor," he commented. "I take off my hat to you. That thing would have conveyed nothing to me. It's like some damn' silly puzzle game. And you might have passed it all round the C.I.D. and no one would have been an atom the wiser. But I am afraid it wouldn't do as evidence in a court of law."

"Possibly not," Thorndyke admitted; "but I am not concerned with the robbery charge against Crabbe. I am investigating the murder of Daniel Penrose; and I am assuming that there was a burglary, that the burglar was in possession of Penrose's keys and that he knew what the cupboard in the small room contained. Of course, if we find the jewels still in the cupboard, we shall know that those assumptions were wrong."

"Yes," Miller agreed, "but we shan't. Burglary or no burglary, those jewels have been pinched. I'd lay my bottom dollar to that. But you realise, Doctor, that, even if there was a burglary, the burglar couldn't have been Crabbe. He was in chokee at the time when it was supposed to have occurred."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "I had noted that fact; so we shall have to look round for some other person who knew that the jewels were there. And no such person is actually known to us, if we except Lockhart, and I suppose we can hardly suspect him."

Miller grinned faintly at the suggestion and then became thoughtful. After a few moments of profound reflection he remarked:

"Those locksmiths will make hay with poor old Penrose's safe. Are you going to be present to see how the job is done?"

I was instantly struck by this abrupt change of subject and I could see that it was also noticed by Thorndyke, who, however, followed the superintendent's lead.

"No," he replied. "I shall not turn up until they have had time to get the job finished. But Polton will be there to watch the proceedings and pick up a few tips on the correct method of opening a safe."

"Ah!" said Miller, "I shall have to keep an eye on Mr. Polton if he is going to qualify as an expert safe-breaker. He is mighty handy already in the matter of locks and skeleton keys and house-breaker's tools."

He pursued this facetious and quite irrelevant topic at considerable length and with no tendency whatever to revert to the subject of the Queen Square burglary. And then he pulled out his watch and, having bestowed on it a single startled glance, sprang up, declaring that, if he didn't look sharp, he would be late for an important appointment. And with this he took his departure hurriedly and with a distinctly purposive air.

"Miller has got a bright idea of some kind." I remarked when he had gone.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "and he thinks he has got it all to himself. You noticed his sudden anxiety to switch the conversation off the subject of Mr. Crabbe. Well, it is all to the good if he doesn't get busy prematurely. I suppose you are coming to swell the multitude at Queen Square to-morrow?"

"If there is room," I replied, "I should like to see the fateful question decided. But it will be a bit of an anti-climax if the stuff is there after all, though I don't suppose Horridge will complain."

"He will have a bad disappointment," said Thorndyke, "if we find the jewels there and he is then told that they are stolen property. However, there is no use in speculating. To-morrow we shall know whether they were or were not stolen, and until we know that, neither Miller nor I can decide on the next move."

When, on the following morning, we arrived at the house in Queen Square and were admitted by Kickweed, we learned from him that the locksmiths had started their work on the safe about an hour previously and that the operations were still in progress. Our friend shook his head despondently as he showed us into the morning-room and remarked that it was a dreadful business and very disturbing.

"Would you like to wait here until they are ready," he asked, "or will you join the—er—assembly in the great gallery?"

We elected to join the assembly, whereupon he ushered us into the gallery, announcing us with due solemnity as he threw open the door. The word "assembly" appeared to represent Mr. Kickweed's state of mind rather than the actual facts, for there were only three persons present; Lockhart, Miller and Horridge, the latter very subdued, care-worn and decidedly gloomy. The cause of his depressed state was made evident presently when he took us apart, leaving Lockhart and Miller amicably discussing the legal position of an accessory after the fact.

"This is a nice state of affairs," Horridge complained. "Do you know that this detective fellow actually accused me, in so many words, of having murdered poor old Pen? Me, his old and trusted friend and an executor of his will! And, if I hadn't had a conclusive alibi, I believe he would have run me in. And now he tells me that even if we find the jewels intact, it will be of no advantage to me because they are all stolen property; which I don't believe. I ask you, is it likely that a man of Pen's character would have been guilty of trafficking in stolen goods?"

"I should, say, certainly not," replied Thorndyke, "if he knew that the goods were stolen. But the point is hardly worth discussing if the goods in question have disappeared."

Here our conversation was interrupted by Polton who entered to announce that the work on the lock was completed and that the safe door was free and ready to be opened. Thereupon we followed him into the small room where we found two very superior artificers standing on guard over the remains of a large iron safe, the massive door of which was disclosed by the opening of the wooden case. Miller's prognostications had certainly not over-stated the results of the locksmith's activities. To say nothing of the wooden door with its shattered detector lock, those artificers had undoubtedly "made hay with" the safe, itself.

"Now, Mr. Horridge," said Miller, "you, as executor, are the proper person to open the safe."

Horridge, however, deputed his functions to one of the workmen who accordingly took hold of the battered door and swung it wide open, disclosing a range of shallow drawers like those of an entomological cabinet.

"Are these drawers in the condition in which you saw them when Mr. Penrose showed you his collection?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, so far as I can see," Lockhart replied. "He took them out, one by one, in their proper order from above downwards, and carried each over to that table by the window so that we could see the contents better."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "we had better do the same."

But it was not necessary; for when the top drawer was pulled out it was seen to be undeniably empty. Horridge exhibited its vacant interior to the assembled company, turned it upside-down and shook it, and glumly returned it to its place. The case was the same with the second drawer and also with the third, excepting that when it was inverted some small object was heard to fall out on to the floor. Miller picked it up and exhibited it in the palm of his hand, when it was seen to be a

small opal and was dropped back into the drawer. But that little opal was the solitary occupant of the cabinet. Apart from it and a plentiful covering of dust, the whole range of drawers from top to bottom was empty.

"That burglar," Lockhart commented as the last of the drawers was slid back into its place, "was pretty thorough in his methods. He made a clean sweep of the whole collection; not only the gems but the coins as well. And he must have been fairly heavily laden when he went away, for most of the coins were gold and I should say there were some hundreds of them."

"I don't fancy those coins were gold," said Miller. "I think I know where they came from, and, if I am right, they were electros—copper, gilt. Still, even copper electros weigh something. But it's surprising what a lot of coins and jewellery you can stow away about your person if you have the right sort of pockets. And it's pretty certain that he had an overcoat as well."

"Do you remember, Lockhart," Thorndyke asked, "whether, when you saw the jewels, there were any labels attached to them?"

"Not attached," Lockhart replied. "There were no fixed labels; only slips of paper like those on the shelves of the gallery."

"Did you notice what was written on those slips of paper? Were they descriptive labels?"

Lockhart grinned. "You know what Penrose's descriptions were like," he replied, "and you have seen the catalogue. So far as I could make out, the descriptions on the labels were similar to those in the catalogue; apparently, unintelligible nonsense."

"You can't recall any of them?" Thorndyke asked.

"I remember one, because I tried to puzzle out what it could mean, and failed utterly. It was 'Decapod; jardin a chapeau'. Does that convey anything to you?"

"It does to me, thanks to the doctor's explanations," said Miller, who had been listening eagerly to the questions and answers. "I don't know what a decapod is but I've got enough French to infer that jardin de chapeau is much the same as hortus petasatus. And the doctor can tell you what that means."

"What does it mean?" Lockhart demanded; and Thorndyke—not very willingly, I thought—gave the required explanation.

"Yes," Lockhart chuckled, "I see now, though I hadn't your ingenuity. Poor old Penrose! What nonsense he did write and speak! But I think I also see the point of your questions."

"And an uncommonly good point it is," said Miller. "That chappie was careful to take away the labels as well as the goods, and if he hadn't dropped one of them we should know a good deal less than we do. It's a very significant point, indeed."

"And now," said Thorndyke, "as we have done what we came to do, perhaps we had better leave Mr. Horridge to discuss the question of repairs. Are you walking in our direction, Miller?"

The superintendent was not. He was proposing, he said, to make a slight survey of the premises to elucidate the circumstances of the burglary, but I suspected that he was unwilling to run the risk of an interrogation by Thorndyke. So we left him to his survey, and, having once more condoled with Horridge, we set forth in company with Lockhart, leaving Polton to spy on the superintendent and worm out any trifles in the way of technical tips and trade secrets that he could from the locksmiths.

---

## XIX. — THORNDYKE'S DILEMMA

I HAVE REFERRED MORE THAN once to Thorndyke's habitual unwillingness to discuss uncompleted cases, excepting in relation to questions of fact, or to disclose any opinions or theories that he had built on the facts which were known to us both. I had come to accept this reticence as a condition of our friendship and usually refrained from any attempts to discover what lines his thoughts were pursuing or what inferences he had drawn. But when we met at our chambers in the evening after our visit to Queen Square, I found him in a mood of unwonted expansiveness, apparently ready to discuss our present case without any reservations.

The discussion opened with a question that I put tentatively, half expecting the usual invitation to exercise my own admirable faculty of deduction.

"I noticed that you and Miller seemed to attach great importance to the circumstance that the burglar had carefully removed all the labels from the drawers. I don't quite see why. Would not a burglar ordinarily take away any labels that might furnish a clue to what had been stolen?"

"I don't see why he should," Thorndyke replied. "An ordinary burglar would assume that the contents of the drawers were known, so that the labels would give no additional information. But these were not ordinary descriptive labels. They gave very definite information as to the person who had supplied the jewels; and as those jewels were the proceeds of a robbery which was known to the police, the information would be very dangerous to the person named. But that would not concern an ordinary burglar. The labels would furnish no clue to his identity. Of course, we know that he was not an

ordinary, casual burglar, since he had Penrose's keys. But the point is that, whoever he was, he seemed to consider it a matter of importance that the identity of the person who sold the jewels to Penrose should not become known."

"But the jewels were sold to Penrose by Crabbe."

"Yes."

"But Crabbe could not have been the burglar. He was in prison at the time."

"Exactly," Thorndyke rejoined. "That is the importance of the discovery. The labels implicated Crabbe. But Crabbe could not have been the burglar. It seems to follow that they implicated some one besides Crabbe; and as the burglar was in possession of Penrose's keys and would thus appear to have been either the murderer or an accessory to the murder, it would be very interesting to know whom those labels could have implicated. I fancy that Miller has a very definite opinion on the subject; and I am disposed to think that he is right."

"The deuce you are!" I exclaimed. "Then it seems to me that you have got the investigation much farther advanced than I had imagined. I had supposed that the search for the murderer had still to be begun. But it seems that there is already a definite suspect. Is that so?"

He reflected for a few moments and then replied:

"The word 'suspect' is perhaps a little too strong. My conclusions as to the possible identity of the murderer are at present on an entirely hypothetical plane. I have considered the whole complex of circumstances connected with the murder and have noted the persons who seem to have made any sort of contact with those circumstances; and I have considered each of those persons in relation to the questions whether he could possibly be the murderer and whether his known characteristics agree with those of the murderer."

"But," I demanded, "what do we know of the characteristics of the murderer?"

"Very little," he replied, "but still enough to enable us to apply at least a negative test in conjunction with the other considerations. Thus we can exclude Kickweed and Horridge because, although they make certain contacts, neither could have been present at the place and time of the murder. But let us take a glance at the positive aspects."

"We begin with the justifiable assumption that the hospital patient was the murderer. Now, what do we know about him? Of his personal characteristics we have no description whatever. All that we know is that his collar bore the letters D.P., which were presumably the initial letters of his name, and that he had a deep wound crossing his right eyebrow which must have left a rather conspicuous permanent scar. So you see that, little as we know, we have the means of excluding or accepting any given individual. If his characteristics agree with those of the patient, he is a possible suspect; if they do not agree, he is not possible."

"And do you know of any person whose characteristics do agree with those of the patient?"

"Up to a certain point," he replied. "The ascertainment of the scar would involve a personal examination. That will have to come later as a final test. For the present, we must be content with agreement so far as is known."

"But you have some such person in view?"

Again he reflected for a few moments. At length, he replied:

"I am in a rather odd dilemma. I have two theoretically possible suspects and I can make no sort of choice between them."

"And do the names of both of them begin with D.P.?" I asked, imagining that I was putting a poser.

"But," he exclaimed, "that is the extraordinary thing. They do. There is a coincidence for you if you like. It was a striking coincidence that the murderer should have the same initials as the victim. But this is more than striking. It is almost incredible."

"I suppose we name no names," I suggested humbly.

"I don't know why not," he replied. "We keep our own counsel until we can turn hypothesis into proof. Well, my two possible suspects are Deodatus Pettigrew and David Parrott."

"Parrott!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "I don't see where he comes into it; or Pettigrew either for that matter."

"It is just a question of the contacts that they make with the circumstances of the murder," he replied. "Let us take them separately and see what those contacts are. The odd and confusing thing is that their contacts are entirely separate and from different sides."

"Is it possible that they were both concerned in the murder?" I suggested; "that they may have been confederates?"

"I have considered that," he answered. "It is possible, but, I think, unlikely. The crime has all the appearances of a one-man job. Moreover, I can find no evidence of any contact between these two men. So far as I know, they were strangers to each other and they persistently remain completely separate. So we will consider them separately."

"Now, as to Parrott. The hospital patient had in his pocket a fragment of pottery which almost certainly came from Julliberrie's Grave. That fragment had been broken off a pot which was in Penrose's museum and which had come from Julliberrie's Grave. The entry in the catalogue relating to that pot consisted of the usual three terms; the description of the

piece—'Moulin de vent'—the place whence it came—'Julie'—and a third term—'Polly'—which presumably indicated the person who supplied it."

"Yes," I agreed, "that seems to have been Penrose's custom. So now the question is: Who is Polly? What is she? Have you found an answer to it?"

"I infer, having regard to Penrose's cryptic terminology, that 'Polly' indicates Mr. Parrott."

"Of course," I exclaimed. "I ought to have spotted that. Poll parrot. Pretty Polly. But still, you know, Thorndyke, it is only a guess, after all."

"It is a little more than that," he objected. "Parrott is referred to frequently in the catalogue, and always by some allusive name, such as Perroquet, Psittacus, or Popinjay. Penrose may well have tried to find a new variant. But I admit your objection. This is not proof; it is only hypothesis. That is all I claim. At present we are only looking for some one whom it would be possible to suspect, as a guide to further investigation. Parrott is such a person, and so is Pettigrew, whose case is equally hypothetical. But you will note that Parrott agrees with the hospital patient in the initials of his name and that we have reason to believe that he knew Julliberrie's Grave and had actually dug into it.

"Now let us consider Pettigrew. He does not appear to be in any way connected with Julliberrie's Grave, or, so far as I know, with Penrose. But there are reasons for connecting him with the burglary. The burglar knew of the existence of the Billington jewels and apparently knew where they were kept. Moreover, he was at pains to take away the labels which contained evidence that the jewels had been supplied by Crabbe. Apparently, he was anxious that Crabbe's guilt should not be revealed. But why? He certainly was not Crabbe himself. What was his interest in the matter?"

"You remember that Miller strongly suspected Crabbe of the Billington robbery. And it was not mere suspicion. He had enough evidence to make him consider seriously the possibility of a prosecution, though he decided that the evidence was not sufficient. The difficulty was that the jewels had disappeared and could not be traced. But now they have been traced and are known to have been sold to Penrose by Crabbe. So there is probably a complete case against the latter. But you will also remember that Miller's case against Crabbe included Pettigrew, for the reason—and no other—that Pettigrew was associated with Crabbe at the time of the robbery.

"Now, that robbery was committed by Crabbe, or by his agents—but almost certainly by Crabbe himself. Whether Pettigrew did or did not take part in the robbery, we don't know. But we do know that he was associated with Crabbe at the time, that that association put him under suspicion, and that if Crabbe should be proved guilty, he, Crabbe's associate, would certainly be implicated. You see, therefore, that Pettigrew agrees completely with the special characteristics that we have assigned to the burglar, and we know of no one else who does.

"But that burglar was in possession of Penrose's keys and was, therefore, either the murderer himself or a confederate of the murderer."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is a very complete case so far as it goes. But it is only a string of hypotheses, after all."

"Not entirely," he replied. "The association of Crabbe and Pettigrew is a fact, if we accept Miller's statement. There is really a definite case of suspicion against Pettigrew, at least that is my opinion; and it is certainly Miller's. If I am not greatly mistaken, the superintendent is in full cry after Deodatus. But you see the curious dilemma that we are in. Here are two men each of whom agrees in certain respects with the characters of the murderer. But the characters with which they agree are not the same. Parrott is connected with Julliberrie's Grave but seems to have no connection with the burglary. Pettigrew is connected with the burglary but seems to have no connection with Julliberrie's Grave. But the murderer must have been connected with both."

"It almost seems," said I, "that you will have to accept—at least provisionally—the idea of confederacy. The assumption that both men were concerned in the murder would release you from your dilemma."

"That is quite true," he replied. "But it would be a gratuitous assumption. There is nothing to support it. The two men are separate and there is no apparent connection between them; nothing to suggest that they were even acquainted. And again I must say that I have the strongest feeling that the murder was the work of one man absolutely alone."

"It certainly has that appearance," I admitted, "but still—"

I paused as the sound of footsteps on our landing caught my ear. A moment later, an old-fashioned flourish on the little brass knocker of our inner door at once announced the arrival of a visitor and declared his identity. I rose, and, crossing the room, threw open the door; whereupon Mr. Brodribb bounced in, looking, with his glossy silk hat and his faultless morning dress, as if he had just bounced out of a band-box.

"Now," said he, holding up his hand, "don't let me create any disturbance. I am only a bird of passage. Off again in two or three minutes."

"But why?" said Thorndyke. "Polton will be bringing in our dinner by that time. Why not stay and season the feast with your illustrious presence?"

"Very good of you," replied Brodribb, "and very nicely put. I should love to. But I have got a confounded engagement. However, I will sit down for a minute or two and say what I have to say. It isn't very important."

He placed his hat tenderly on the table and then continued:

"My principal object in calling, I don't mind admitting, is to bespeak the good offices of the incomparable Polton. I've got a fine old bracket clock—belonged to my grandfather; made for him by Earnshaw, and I set considerable store by it. Now, something has gone wrong with its strike and I don't like to trust it to a common clock-jobber. So I thought I would ask Polton to have a look at it. Probably he can do all that is necessary, and, if he can't, he will be able to give me the name of one of his Clerkenwell friends who is equal to dealing with a fine bracket clock."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "I will undertake the commission on his behalf. He will be delighted, I am sure, to do what he can for pure love of a good clock, to say nothing of his love of the owner."

"Does he love me?" asked Brodribb. "Well, I hope he does, for I have the greatest admiration and regard for him. Then that is settled. And now to the other matter. I thought you would be interested to know that I have got the intestacy proceedings in re Penrose well under way."

"You haven't lost much time," I remarked in some surprise.

"Oh, I don't mean that I have got it settled," said he. "That will be a work of months, at least. But I have got the essentials in train. As soon as I got your note informing me that Daniel Penrose was dead and that he died on the seventeenth of October, I set the machinery going. Seemed a bit callous, with the body still above ground, but I don't believe in wasting time. None of the law's delay for me if I can help it. So I put out the necessary advertisements at once. You see, it was pretty plain sailing as I had a copy of the Penrose pedigree. That told me at once who the principal next of kin were, though, of course, I didn't know where to find them. But I was able to give names and particulars which were likely to catch the attention of interested parties. And they did. As a matter of fact, there are only two persons who matter and I have got into touch with them both. They are descendants of a certain Elizabeth Penrose, an aunt of Oliver's, who married a man named John Pettigrew. What their exact relationship is to each other, I have forgotten, but they are both named Pettigrew. One of them is a young lady named Joan; a nice girl, poor as a church mouse but very independent and industrious. Works for her living and supports her mother—secretary to some professor fellow. And the mother is quite a nice lady. She had a job as manageress of some sort of antique shop, but the proprietor went bust and she lost the billet. It is pleasant to think of these two worthy ladies coming in for a bit of luck."

"You have seen them, apparently," said Thorndyke.

"Yes, they turned up two days after the advertisement appeared, and I liked the look of both of them. The girl, Joan, is very much on the spot and very modern—short skirts, head like a mop, you know the sort of thing. But I like her. She's a good girl and she has evidently been a good daughter."

"And the other person?" Thorndyke asked.

"The other is a man, Deodatus Pettigrew. Quaint name, isn't it? I hope he will justify it, but I have my doubts. Joan and her mother knew him, but they were mighty reticent about him. Rather evasive, in fact. Made me suspect that he might be a sheep of the brunette type. But we shall see. In any case, his personal character is no concern of mine."

"You haven't met him yet?" Thorndyke suggested.

"No. He didn't seem keen on an interview. Joan and her mother turned up in person, but he just wrote and seemed to want to do the whole business by correspondence. Of course, I couldn't have that in the case of a big estate like this. Must know the people I am dealing with."

"What do you reckon these two persons are likely to receive?" Thorndyke asked.

"The whole estate is about a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and, as there are practically no other claimants, they can hardly get less than fifty thousand apiece."

"Fifty thousand pounds," I remarked, "ought to be worth the trouble of an interview."

"So I told him," said Brodribb, "and, in effect, he agreed. So he is coming up to see me to-morrow."

"At what time?" Thorndyke asked.

"The appointment is for twelve o'clock, noon, sharp. But why do you ask that?"

"Because I rather want to see Mr. Pettigrew."

"Ho, ha!" said Brodribb. "So you know something about him."

"Not very much," replied Thorndyke. "I am interested. I should like to have a look at him in a good light to see if he agrees with a description that I had of a person of that name. Can you manage that?"

"I can and I will. Would you like an introduction?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "I don't want to know him and I don't wish him to know who I am. I just want to have a good look at his face."

"Ha!" exclaimed Brodribb. "I scent a mystery. But I ask no questions. You will bear me out in that, Jervis. I ask no questions though I am bursting with curiosity. I just do what I am asked to do. I shall arrange for you to be shown into the waiting-room—where, by the way, the clock is. Pettigrew will come to the clerk's office, but when he goes away I shall let him out through the waiting-room. So, if you sit or stand close to the outer door, which is by the window, you will have a good view of him in an excellent light. I wonder why the devil you want to see him. But I don't ask. No, not at all. I know



my place.”

Here Brodribb consulted a fat gold watch. Then, as he sprang up and seized his hat, he concluded:

“Now I must really be off. To-morrow at noon; and don’t forget to tell Polton about the clock.”

When he had gone, I reopened our previous discussion with the inevitable comment.

“This communication of Brodribb’s throws a fresh and lurid light on the case and lets you out of your dilemma. It looks as if Parrott might be dismissed from the role of suspect.”

“It does,” Thorndyke agreed. “But we mustn’t exaggerate the significance of these new facts. Because a man stands to benefit by another man’s death, it doesn’t follow that he is prepared to murder that other man.”

“True,” I replied. “But that is not quite the position. It is not merely a case of a man standing to benefit by the death of another. The benefit was actually created by the murder. If Penrose had not been murdered, he would have taken practically the whole estate and the others would have received nothing. There is no blinking the fact that the murder of Daniel Penrose was worth fifty thousand pounds to Pettigrew, and that without the murder he would have got nothing. I should say that you might pretty safely forget Parrott.”

“You may be right, Jervis,” he rejoined. “You are, certainly, in regard to the reality of the motive. But that motive is no answer to the positive evidence that seems to implicate Parrott.”

Here Polton stole silently into the room (having let himself in with his key), bearing the advance guard of the materials for dinner, and the discussion was necessarily suspended. Thorndyke lapsed into silence, and, as his invaluable henchman laid the table in his quietly efficient fashion, he watched him thoughtfully, as if noting his noiseless, unhurried dexterity. As Polton retired to fetch a fresh consignment, he rose, and, stepping over to the cabinet, pulled out a drawer and took from it the cardboard box in which the pottery fragment and its mould and the other objects from the pocket of the hospital patient had been deposited. From the box he picked out the cigarette-tube—the existence of which I had forgotten—turned it over in his fingers, looking at it curiously, and replaced the box in the drawer. Then he walked over to the table, and, having laid the tube on the white cloth, went back to his chair.

I watched the proceeding with a good deal of curiosity but I made no comment. For the immediate purpose was plain enough and it remained only to await the further developments. And I had not long to wait. Presently Polton returned with the remainder of the materials for our meal on a tray. The latter he set down on the table and was about to begin unloading it when the cigarette-tube caught his eye. He looked at it very hard and with evident surprise for a few moments and then picked it up and turned it over as Thorndyke had done, examining every part of it with the minutest scrutiny.

“Well, Polton,” said Thorndyke, “what do you think of it?”

Polton looked at him with a cunning and crinkly smile and replied comprehensively in a single word:

“Tims.”

“Tims,” I repeated. “What on earth are Tims?”

“Mr. Tims, sir,” he explained, “now deceased. Mr. Parrott’s cabinet-maker.”

“You think it once belonged to Mr. Tims?” Thorndyke suggested.

“I don’t think,” Polton replied. “I know. I saw him make it. The way it came about was this; there was a little cabinet of African ebony sent to the workshop for some repairs, and the owner of it sent with it a piece of the same wood that he had managed to get hold of—queer-looking stuff of a sort of brownish-black, rather like a lump of pitch, with a streak of grey sap-wood running through it.

“Well, Tims did the repairs and he was mighty economical with the wood because there was none too much of it. However, when the job was finished, there was a small bit left over, mostly sap-wood. But Tims cut most of that away and then put the piece in the lathe and turned up this tube, finishing the mouthpiece with a paring chisel; and he made these white dots by-drilling holes and driving little holly-wood dowels into them before he finished the turning. He was quite pleased with it when it was done.”

“Did he keep it for his own use?” Thorndyke asked, “or did he sell it?”

“That I can’t say, sir. But he would hardly have kept it, because he didn’t smoke cigarettes. I supposed at the time that he had made it to give to Mr. Parrott, who smoked cigarettes a lot and always used a tube; and the one that he had was burned to a stump. Still, Tims may have given it or sold it to some one else. Might I ask, sir, how it came into your hands?”

“We found it,” Thorndyke replied, “in the pocket of a raincoat that was left by the unknown man who was in possession of Mr. Penrose’s car.”

“Oh, dear!” said Polton. “Then I am afraid it has been in bad company.”

He laid it down on the table and resumed the business of unloading the tray. Then, having removed the covers, he made a little bow to intimate that dinner was served, and retired, apparently wrapped in profound thought.

“There, Jervis,” said Thorndyke, picking up the tube and restoring it to its abiding-place, “you see how the evidence oscillates back and forth and still keeps a rough balance. Here we are, back in the old dilemma. First comes Brodribb and

weights the balance heavily against Pettigrew; so heavily that you are disposed to drop Parrott overboard. But then comes Polton and weights the balance heavily against Parrott—and, by the way, I think he has his own suspicions of the Popinjay. He looked mighty thoughtful after I had answered his question.”

“Yes,” said I, “it seemed to me that your answer had given him something to think about. But with regard to this tube. There is not a particle of evidence that it was ever in Parrott’s possession.”

“Not of direct evidence,” he admitted. “But just look at the *prima facie* appearances as a whole. Here was a man who was evidently intimately acquainted with Penrose, for they had been digging together in the barrow. He had in his pocket an object which had been dug up in that barrow and which was part of another object, dug up from the same barrow, and almost certainly dug up by Parrott and sold by him to Penrose. That, at least, suggests the possibility—even a probability—that the man was Parrott. Now we find in that same man’s pocket an object that was certainly made in Parrott’s workshop. That is a very striking fact. It makes, at least, another connection between Parrott and the hospital patient. And then there is the very strong probability that Tims made the thing as a gift to his employer; that it was actually Parrott’s property. By the ordinary rules of circumstantial evidence, all these agreements create a very definite probability that the man was Parrott.”

I had to admit the truth of this. “But,” I objected, “this suspicion of Parrott is no answer to the positive evidence against Pettigrew. If you refuse to entertain the idea of a joint crime by two confederates—which still seems to me the only way out—you are left in a hopeless dilemma. You have got evidence suggesting that Tweedledum is the guilty party and evidence that Tweedledee committed the crime; and yet—on your one-man theory—they can’t both be guilty. I don’t quite see how you are going to resolve the puzzle.”

“Don’t forget, Jervis,” said he, “that there are certain final tests which, if we can only apply them, will carry us out of the region of inference into that of demonstrable fact. If our inferences are correct, one of these men is pretty certainly in possession of the Billington jewels. And there are other confirmatory tests equally conclusive. The purpose of our hypothetical reasoning is to discover the persons to whom the tests may be applied.”

---

## XX. — THE DILEMMA RESOLVED

It wanted some minutes to the appointed time when Thorndyke and I, accompanied by Polton and a burglarious-looking handbag, arrived at Mr. Brodribb’s premises in New Square, Lincoln’s Inn. The visitor, we learned from the chief clerk, had not yet made his appearance, and we were shown at once into the private office, where we found Brodribb seated at his writing-table sorting out a heap of letters and documents. He rose as we were announced, and, taking off his spectacles, proceeded to the business on which we had come.

“You had better come out into the ante-room at once,” said he, “as Pettigrew will come in through the clerks’ office. I don’t think you will have so very long to wait. The interview needn’t be a very protracted affair as there isn’t much to discuss. It is really only a matter of my making his acquaintance.”

He opened a small, light door and ushered us through into the ante-room, a rather long, narrow chamber, lighted by a large window at one end which was close to the door of exit. A large office table occupied a good deal of the floor space and extended to the neighbourhood of the window, leaving a space just sufficient for a couple of chairs.

“There,” said Brodribb, indicating the latter, “if you take those chairs you will be close to the window and the door. He will have to pass quite near to you and you will be able to inspect him in an excellent light. And I think this table will do for you, Polton. There is your patient on the mantelpiece. He is ticking away all right but, when he tries to strike, he makes a most ungodly noise.”

Polton walked round to the mantelpiece and surveyed the clock with a friendly and appreciative crinkle.

“It’s a noble old timepiece,” said he. “They don’t make clocks like that nowadays. Don’t want ‘em, I suppose, now that you can get the time by counting the hiccups from a loud-speaker.”

He listened for a few moments, with his ear close to the dial and then lifted the clock, cautiously and with loving care, on to the table. The keys were in the front and back doors, and, when he had unlocked and opened them, he placed his bag on the table and began to discharge its cargo of tools and appliances. First, he took out a roll of clean, white paper, which he spread on the table, weighting it with one or two tools and a couple of *lignum-vitae* bowls. Then he started the strike, which was accompanied by the most horrid asthmatical wheezing, and having listened critically to these abnormal sounds, he took off the pendulum and fell to work with a screwdriver to such effect that, in a jiffy, the clock was out of its case and lying on its back on the sheet of paper.

At this point a clerk appeared at the door of the private office and announced that Mr. Pettigrew had arrived, whereupon Mr. Brodribb directed him to show the visitor in, and, after a last, anxious glance at the clock, went back into his office and shut the communicating door.

But the latter, as I have said, was by no means a massive structure, and, in fact, hardly seemed to meet the requirements of a lawyer’s office in the matter of privacy. Brodribb’s voice, indeed, was hardly audible, but I heard quite distinctly the visitor’s reply: “Yes, sir. I am Mr. Pettigrew.”

But I was not the only person who heard that reply. As Pettigrew spoke, I noticed that Polton seemed to pause for an

instant in his operations and listened with a rather odd expression of interest and attention. And so, as the interview proceeded, each time that Pettigrew spoke, Polton's movements were arrested and he sat with his mouth slightly open, listening, without any disguise, to the voice that penetrated the door.

It was a rather peculiar voice, resonant, penetrating and clear; and its quality was reinforced by the deliberate manner and distinct enunciation. The disjointed sentences that came through the door might have been spoken by an actor or by a man making a set speech. But I think that Brodribb must have done most of the talking, for the sounds that came through took the form, generally, of an indistinct rumble which certainly did not proceed from Pettigrew.

The interview was not a long one, but to me the inaction, coupled with an ill-defined expectancy, made the time pass slowly and tediously. Thorndyke relieved the tedium of waiting by following Polton's operations and discussing—almost in a whisper—the construction of the striking mechanism and the symptoms of its disorder. The latter did not appear to be very serious, for, presently, Polton began to reassemble the dismembered parts of the movement, applying here and there, with a pointed style, a delicate touch of oil.

He had got the greater part of the striking movement together when the sound, from the private office, of a chair being drawn back seemed to herald the termination of the interview. Thereupon Thorndyke went back to his chair and Polton, softly laying down a pair of flat-nosed pliers, suddenly became immobile and watchful. Then the door opened an inch or two and Brodribb's voice became audible.

"Very well, Mr. Pettigrew," he said, "you shall not be troubled with unnecessary journeys. I shall let you know, from time to time, how matters are progressing and not ask for your personal attendance unless it is absolutely necessary."

With this he threw open the door and ushered his client into the ante-room, filling up the doorway with his own rather bulky person as if to prevent any retreat. I glanced with natural curiosity at Pettigrew and saw a rather large man, dark-complexioned and wearing a full beard and moustache, the latter turned up fiercely at the ends in a fashion slightly suggestive of wax. Apparently, he had supposed the room to be empty, for he looked round with quick, uneasy surprise. And then his glance fell on Polton; and I could see at once that he recognised him and was rather disconcerted by the recognition. But he made no sign after the first startled glance, walking straight up the room in the narrow space between the table and the fireplace, looking neither to the right nor left. But just as he had advanced midway, Polton rose suddenly and exclaimed:

"Why, it's Mr. Parrott! Bless me, sir, I hardly knew you with that beard."

Pettigrew cast a malignant glance at the speaker and replied, gruffly:

"My name is Pettigrew."

"Ah!" said Polton, "I suppose Parrott was the business name."

Pettigrew made no reply, but stalked up the room until he passed between our chairs and the table to reach the door. And then he suddenly clapped on his hat. But not soon enough. For I had already noted—and so certainly had Thorndyke—an irregular, rather recent, scar crossing his right eyebrow. And when I saw that, I realised what Thorndyke had meant by "the final tests."

As Pettigrew grasped the handle of the door, he cast a swift, apprehensive glance at my colleague. Then he opened the door quickly, and, when he had passed out, shut it after him. Instantly, Thorndyke rose and followed him, and, of course, I followed Thorndyke; and so we came out in a sort of procession into the Square.

As we emerged from the house, I became aware of a man loitering on the pavement at its northern end. He was a stranger to me, but I diagnosed him at once as a plain-clothes police officer. So, perhaps had Pettigrew, for he turned in the other direction, towards the Searle Street gate. But that path also was guarded, and by no less a person than Superintendent Miller. When I first saw him, he was standing in the middle of the pavement, apparently studying a document. But as we turned in his direction, Thorndyke took off his hat; whereupon Miller hastily pocketed the paper and awaited the approach of his quarry.

It was evident that Pettigrew viewed the superintendent with suspicion for he turned and crossed the road to the railings of the garden; and when the superintendent also crossed the road, with the evident purpose of intercepting him, the position was unmistakable. Pettigrew paused for a moment irresolutely, thrusting his hand into his pocket. Then, as Miller rushed towards him, he drew out a revolver and fired at him nearly point blank. The superintendent staggered back a couple of paces but did not fall; and when Pettigrew, having fired his shot, dodged across to the pavement and broke into a run, he clapped his hand to his thigh and followed as well as he could.

The swift succession of events has left an indelible impression on my memory. Even now I can see vividly with my mind's eye that strange picture of hurry and confusion that disturbed the peace and repose of New Square: the terrified fugitive, racing furiously down the pavement with Thorndyke and me in hot pursuit; the plain-clothes man clattering noisily behind; and the superintendent hobbling after us with a blood-stained hand grasping his thigh.

But it was a short chase. For hardly had Pettigrew—running like a hare and gaining on us all—covered half the distance to the gate when suddenly he halted, flung away his revolver and sank to the ground, rolling over on to his back and then lying motionless. When we reached him and looked down at the prostrate figure, his aspect—wretch as he was—could not but evoke some feelings of pity and compunction. The ghastly face, the staring, terrified eyes, the retracted lips, and the hands, clutching at the breast, presented the typical picture of angina pectoris.

But this, too, was but a passing phase. Before any measures of relief could be thought of, it was over. The staring eyes relaxed, the mouth fell open, and the hands slipped from the breast and dropped limply to the ground.

The superintendent, hobbling up, still grasping his wounded thigh, looked down gloomily at his prisoner.

"Well," he commented, "he made a game try, and he has given us the slip, sure enough. It's a pity, but it's no one's fault. We couldn't have got him any sooner. Hadn't we better move him indoors before a crowd collects?"

It did seem desirable; for the pistol shot and the sounds of hurrying feet had brought startled faces to office windows and now began to bring curious spectators from office doorways.

"Do you mind if we carry him into your anteroom?" Thorndyke asked, turning to Brodribb, who had just come up with Polton.

"No, no," Brodribb replied. "Take the poor creature in, of course. Is he badly hurt?"

"He is dead," Thorndyke announced as I hastened with the assistance of the plain-clothes officer to lift the body.

"Dead!" exclaimed Brodribb, turning as pale as his complexion would permit. "Good God! What a shocking thing! Just as he was coming into a fortune too. How perfectly appalling!"

He followed the gruesome procession as the officer and I, now aided by Thorndyke, bore the corpse back along the pavement to the doorway from which we had emerged but a minute or two previously and finally laid it down on the ante-room floor; and he stole softly into the room and shrank away with a horrified glance at the ghastly figure. And his agitation was natural enough. There was something very dreadful in the suddenness of the catastrophe. I was sensible of it myself as I rose from laying down the corpse and my glance lighted on the clock and the litter of tools on the table, lying just as the dead man had seen them when he passed to the door.

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that we had better telephone for an ambulance to take away the body and convey the superintendent to the hospital. Where is he?" he added anxiously.

The question was answered by Miller in person, who limped into the room, his gory hand still grasping his wound and a trickle of blood running across his boot.

"My God, Miller!" exclaimed Brodribb, gazing at him in consternation, "you too! But aren't you going to do something for him, Thorndyke?"

"We had better see what the damage is," said I, "and at least control the bleeding."

"I don't think it is anything that matters," said Miller, "excepting to Mr. Brodribb's carpet. However, you may as well have a look at it."

I made a rapid examination of the wound and was relieved to find that his estimate was correct. The bullet had passed through the outer side of the thigh leaving an almost imperceptible entrance wound but a rather ragged wound of exit which was bleeding somewhat freely.

"You haven't any bandages or dressing material, I suppose?" said I.

"I have not," replied Brodribb, "but I can produce some clean handkerchiefs, if they will do. But bring him into my private office. I can't bear the sight of that poor creature lying on the floor."

We accordingly moved off to the private office where, with Brodribb's handkerchiefs, I contrived a temporary dressing which restrained the bleeding.

"There," said I, "that will serve until the ambulance comes. Some one has telephoned, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Brodribb, "the police officer sent a message. And now tell me what it is all about. I heard a pistol shot. Who was it that fired?"

"Pettigrew," Thorndyke answered. "The position is this: the superintendent came here on my information to arrest Pettigrew and charge him with the murder of Daniel Penrose, and Pettigrew fired at Miller in the hope of getting away."

Brodribb was horrified. "You astound me, Thorndyke!" he exclaimed. "I have actually been conferring with poor Penrose's murderer. And not only that. I have been aiding and abetting him in getting possession of the plunder. But I don't understand how he comes to be dead. What killed him?"

"It was a heart attack," Thorndyke replied, "Angina, brought about by the excitement and the intense physical effort. But I think I hear the ambulance men in the ante-room. That sounded like a stretcher being put down."

He opened the door and we looked out. At the table Polton was seated, apparently engrossed in his work upon the clock and watched with grim amusement by the plain-clothes officer, while the ambulance men, having lifted the body on to the stretcher, were preparing to carry it away. I was about to help Miller to rise from his chair when Thorndyke interposed.

"Before you go, Miller," said he, "there is one little matter to be attended to. You had better get Pettigrew's address from Mr. Brodribb; and you had better lose no time in sending some capable officer there with a search warrant. You understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly," replied Miller. "But there isn't going to be any sending. I shall make that search myself, if I have to go down

in an ambulance.”

“Very well, Miller,” Thorndyke rejoined. “But remember that you have got only two legs and that you can’t afford to part with either of them.”

With this warning he assisted the superintendent to rise; and when the latter had received and carefully pocketed the slip of paper on which Brodribb had written Pettigrew’s address, we escorted him out to the ambulance and saw him duly dispatched en route for Charing Cross Hospital.

As we turned to re-enter the house, our ears were saluted by the cheerful striking of a clock; and passing into the ante-room, we found Polton, still seated at the table, surveying with an admiring and crinkly smile the venerable timepiece, now completely reconstructed and restored to its case.

“He’s all right now, sir,” he announced triumphantly. “Just listen to his strike.” He moved the minute hand round, and, having paused a moment for the “warning,” set it at the hour and listened ecstatically as the hammer struck out six silvery notes.

“Clear as the day he was born,” he remarked complacently; and forthwith moved the hand round to the next hour.

“You must stop that noise,” exclaimed Brodribb. “I can’t bear it. Have you no sense of decency, to be making that uproar in the house of death, you—you callous, indifferent little villain?”

Polton regarded him with a surprised and apologetic crinkle (and moved the hand round to the next hour).

“But, sir,” he protested, “you can’t set a striking clock to time any other way, unless you take the gong off. Shall I do that?”

“No, no,” replied Brodribb. “I’ll go outside until you’ve finished. And I apologise for calling you a villain. My nerves are rather upset.”

We accompanied him out into the Square and walked up and down the pavement for a few minutes giving him some further explanations of the recent events. Presently Polton made his appearance, carrying his bag, and announced that the clock was now set to time and established in its place on the mantelpiece. Brodribb thanked him profusely and apologised still more profusely for his outburst.

“You must forgive me, Polton,” he said. “My nerves are not equal to this sort of thing. You understand, don’t you?”

“I understand, sir,” replied Polton, “and I suppose I was callous. But he was a bad man, not worth troubling about, and the world is the better without him. I never liked him and I always suspected him of fleecing poor Mr. Penrose.”

“Probably you were right,” rejoined Brodribb, “but we must talk about that when I am more myself. And now I will get back to my business and try to forget these horrors.”

He shook hands with us and retired into his entry while we turned away and set a course for the Temple.

“I suppose, Thorndyke,” I said presently, “you were not surprised by our friend’s recognition of Parrott. I am judging by the fact that you took the opportunity of having Polton with us.”

“No,” he replied, “I was not. The assumption that Parrott and Pettigrew were one and the same person seemed to offer the only way out of my dilemma if I rejected—as I certainly did—the idea of confederacy. There were the two men, making separate appearances. Each of them seemed, by the evidence, to be the murderer. But there was only one murderer. The only solution of the problem was the assumption that they were the same man. That was a perfectly reasonable assumption and there was nothing against it.”

“Nothing at all,” I admitted. “In fact, it is rather obvious—when once it is suggested. But I have found this case rather confusing from the first; it has seemed to me a bewildering mass of disjointed facts.”

“That is a mistake, Jervis,” said he. “The facts form a perfectly coherent sequence. Some time, we will go over the ground again, and then I think you will see that your confusion was principally due to your having made a false start.”

---

## XXI. — AFTERTHOUGHTS

“It seems to me,” Lockhart suggested, “that this case is, to a certain extent, left in the air. The essential facts, in a legal sense, are perfectly clear. But there is a lot that we don’t know, and, I suppose, never shall know.”

The remark—which fairly expressed my own view—was made on the occasion of a little dinner-party at our chambers, arranged partly to celebrate the completion of the case, and partly to enable Lockhart—who had developed unexpected archaeological sympathies—to make the acquaintance of Elmhurst. The dinner was supplied by the staff of a neighbouring tavern, an arrangement which not only relieved Polton of culinary labours but included him in the festivities; for he was enabled thereby to entertain, in his own apartments adjacent to the laboratory, no less a person than Mr. Kickweed.

Both of our guests had been, in a sense, parties to the case; but each had made contact with it at only a single point. It was natural, then, that when the meal had reached its more leisurely and less manducatory stage, the desultory conversation should have subsided into a more definite discussion, with a demand from both for a complete exposition of the investigation. And it was then, when Thorndyke readily complied with the demand, that I was able, for the first time, to

realise how clearly he had grasped the essentials of the problem from the very beginning and how steadily and directly he had proceeded, point by point, to unravel the tangle of false appearances.

I need not report his exposition. It contained nothing but what is recorded in the foregoing narrative of the events. It consisted, in fact, of a condensed summary of that narrative with the events presented in their actual sequence with a running accompaniment of argument demonstrating their logical connections. When he had come to the end of the story with an account of its tragic climax, he paused to push round the decanters and then proceeded reflectively to fill his pipe; and it was then that Lockhart made the observation which I have recorded above.

"That is quite true," Thorndyke agreed. "For legal purposes—for the purpose of framing an indictment and securing a conviction—the case was as complete as it could well be. But the death of Pettigrew has left us in the dark on a number of points on which we should probably have been enlightened if he had been brought to trial and had made a statement in his defence. At present, the circumstances surrounding the murder—if it was a murder—and the motive—if there was a clear-cut motive—are more or less wrapped in mystery."

"Are they?" Elmhurst exclaimed in evident surprise. "To me it looks like a simple murder, deliberately planned in cold blood, for the plain purpose of getting possession of a very large sum of money. Fifty thousand pounds would seem to furnish a very sufficient motive to a man of Pettigrew's type. But you don't take that view?"

"No," replied Thorndyke, "I do not. I am even inclined to doubt whether the money was a factor in the case at all. We must not lose sight of the conditions prevailing at the time. When Penrose left home, that is to say on the day of his death, his father was alive and well and the question of the disposition of his property had not arisen. At that time, the only persons who knew the state of affairs were Penrose, Horridge and Brodribb; and even they knew it very imperfectly. Brodribb, himself, was not certain whether there was or was not a will. As to Pettigrew, there is no evidence, or any reason for believing, that he had any knowledge, or even suspicion, that Oliver's estate was not duly disposed of by a will."

"Penrose knew, more or less, how matters stood," said Lockhart, "and he may have 'let on' to Pettigrew."

"That is possible," Thorndyke admitted, "though it would be rather unlike the secretive Penrose to babble about his private affairs to a comparative stranger. For it seems pretty certain that he had no idea as to who Parrott was. Mrs. Pettigrew almost certainly knew who he was, but she must have been sworn to secrecy, and she kept the secret loyally. Still, we must admit the possibility of Penrose having made some unguarded statements to Parrott, unlikely as it seems."

"Then," said Lockhart, "if you reject the money as the impelling motive, what is there left? What other motive do you suggest?"

"I am not in a position to make any definite suggestion," replied Thorndyke, "but I have a vague feeling that there may have been a motive of another kind; a motive that would fit in better with the circumstances of the murder—or homicide—in so far as they are known to us."

"I am not sure that I quite follow you," said Lockhart.

"I mean," Thorndyke explained, "that the money theory of motive would imply a deliberate, planned, unconditional murder with carefully prepared means of execution; and the method would involve the necessary detail of taking the victim unaware and forestalling any possibility of resistance. But that is not what happened. The weapon with which Penrose was killed was not brought there by his assailant. It was his own weapon. So that the method of homicide actually used must have been improvised. And Penrose must have been either on the defensive or offensive. There was an encounter. But it was a deadly encounter, as we can judge by the formidable weapon used, not a mere chance 'scrap'. And the deadliness of that encounter implies something more than a sudden disagreement. There is a suggestion of something involving a fierce and bitter enmity. Perhaps it is possible to imagine some cause of deadly strife between these two men. But I knew very little of either of them; and before I offer even a tentative suggestion, I would ask you, Lockhart, who at least knew them better than I did, if anything occurs to you."

"They were both practically strangers to me," said Lockhart. "I knew nothing of their relations except as buyer and seller. But could you put your question a little more definitely?"

"I will put it quite definitely," Thorndyke replied. "Looking back on your relations with these two men, and considering them by the light of what we now know, does it appear to you that there was anything that might have been the occasion of enmity between them or that might have caused one of them to go in fear of the other?"

Lockhart looked at Thorndyke in evident surprise, but he did not reply immediately. He appeared to be turning the question over in his mind and considering its bearing. And then a little frown appeared on his brow as if some new and rather surprising idea had occurred to him.

"I think I see what is in your mind, Thorndyke," he replied, at length; "and I am not sure that you aren't right. The idea had never occurred to me before; but now, looking back as you say, by the light of what we know, I am disposed to think that there may have been some occasion of enmity, and especially of fear. But you don't want my opinions. I had better relate the actual experiences that I am thinking of."

"I have told you about my visit to Penrose when he showed me his collection of jewels, which we now know to have been the stolen Billington collection."

"Do you think," Thorndyke asked, "that Penrose knew they were stolen property?"

"I can hardly think that," Lockhart replied, "or he would surely never have let me see them. But I do think that he had some uneasy suspicions that there may have been something a little fishy about them. I have told you how startled he seemed when I jocosely suggested that the Jacobite Jewel was a rather incriminating possession. My impression is that he may have got the collection comparatively cheap, on the condition that no questions were to be asked."

"Which," I remarked, "usually means that the goods are stolen property."

"Yes," Lockhart admitted, "that is so. But I am afraid that your really acquisitive collector is not always extremely scrupulous. However, there the things were, obviously property of considerable value, and I naturally raised the question of insurance. Penrose was quite alive to the desirability of insuring the jewels. But he was in a difficulty. Before they could be insured, they would have to be valued; and he had an apparently unaccountable objection to their being seen by a valuer. I put this down to his inveterate habit of secrecy. Now, of course, we know that he was doubtful of the safety of letting a stranger—and an expert stranger, too—see what they were. But he agreed in principle and promised to think over the problem of the valuer."

"Now, on the only occasion when I met Parrott in the flesh, it happened that Penrose was present. The meeting occurred in Parrott's workshop when I was waiting for a table that poor Tims had been repairing and Penrose was waiting for Mr. Polton. By way of making conversation, I rather foolishly asked Penrose what he was doing about the valuer. I saw instantly that I had made a faux pas in referring to the matter before Parrott, for Penrose—usually a most suave and amiable man—snapped out a very short answer and was obviously extremely annoyed."

"At the moment, Parrott made no comment and seemed not to have noticed what had passed. But as soon as Penrose had gone, he opened the subject of the insurance and the valuer; and as I, having been sworn to secrecy, was necessarily evasive in my answers, he pressed the matter more closely and went on to question me in the most searching and persistent fashion as to what I had seen and whether Penrose had shown me anything more than the contents of the large gallery. It was very awkward as I could not give him a straight answer, and eventually I had to cut the interrogation short by making a hasty retreat."

"Looking back on this interview, I now see a new significance in it. Parrott was undoubtedly angry. He was quiet and restrained, but I detected an undercurrent of deep resentment, the occasion of which I entirely misunderstood, putting it down to mere pique on his part that Penrose should have contemplated employing a strange valuer when he, Parrott, could have managed the business quite competently. And I also misunderstood the drift of his questions, for I assumed that he knew nothing of the jewels and was merely curious as to whether Penrose had any things of value which had been obtained through some other dealer. Now I see that he suspected Penrose of having shown me the jewels and was trying to find out definitely whether he had or had not. And I think that my evasive answers must have convinced him I had seen the jewels."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "I think you are right. And what do you infer from that?"

"Well," replied Lockhart, "by the light of what we now know, certain conclusions seem to emerge. The jewels were sold to Penrose by Crabbe, but I think we are agreed that Parrott—I will still call him Parrott as that is the name by which I knew him—was the go-between who actually negotiated the deal. Now, as these jewels were a complete collection, instantly identifiable by any one who had seen them, and of which the police had a full description, I think it follows that they must have been sold to Penrose with the condition that he should maintain inviolable secrecy as to their being in his possession and that he should neither show them nor disclose their existence to anybody. Do you agree?"

"I do, certainly," Thorndyke replied. "It seems impossible that they could have been sold on any other conditions."

"Moreover," Lockhart continued, "there is nothing improbable in such a condition. Penrose wanted the things, not for display, but for the purpose of gloating over in secret. In consideration of a low price, he would be quite willing to accept the condition of secrecy. Very well, then; we are agreed that Penrose must have been bound by a promise of secrecy to Parrott, on the faithful performance of which Parrott's safety depended. Consequently, when it appeared to Parrott that Penrose had broken his promise by showing me the jewels and that he was actually contemplating their disclosure to a valuer (who would almost certainly recognise them), he would suddenly see himself placed in a position of great and imminent danger. Penrose's indiscretion threatened to send him to penal servitude. In your own phrase, Parrott must thenceforth have gone in fear of Penrose. But when a man of a criminal type like Parrott goes in fear of another, there has arisen a fairly adequate motive for the murder of that other. I think that answers your question."

"It does, very completely," said Thorndyke. "It brings into view exactly the kind of motive for which I have been looking. The money motive, even if Pettigrew had known about the intestacy, would have seemed hardly sufficient. Deliberate, planned murder for the purpose of pecuniary profit is rare. But murder planned and committed for the purpose of removing some person whose existence is a menace to the safety of the murderer, is relatively common. The motive of fear is understandable, and, in a sense, reasonable. It may even be, in certain circumstances, justifiable. But in any case, it is a strong and urgent motive, impelling to immediate action and making it worth while to take risks. You don't remember the date of your interview with Parrott, I suppose?"

"I don't," replied Lockhart, "but it must have been quite a short time before Penrose's disappearance, for, when I came back to London, he had been absent for a month or two. It looks as if the murder had followed pretty closely on that interview."

"And now, Thorndyke," said I, "that you have heard Lockhart's story, what is your final conclusion? Apparently you exclude the money motive altogether."

"I would hardly say that," he replied, "because, after all, we have no certain knowledge. But I see no reason to suppose that Pettigrew knew anything about his position as next of kin until he saw Brodribb's advertisement. On the other hand, from the moment when he became a party to the sale of the jewels, he was at Penrose's mercy; and as soon as he formed the definite suspicion that Penrose was not keeping faith with him, he had a perfectly understandable motive for making away with Penrose."

"Then," said I, "you think it was a deliberate, premeditated murder?"

"I think that is the conclusion that we are driven to," he replied. "At any rate, we must conclude that Pettigrew lured Penrose to that place with the idea of murder in his mind. The intention may have been conditional on what happened there; on whether, for instance, Penrose could or would clear himself of the charge of bad faith. But the remarkable suitability of the time and place, both for the murder, itself, and for the secure disposal of the body, seems to imply a careful selection and a considered intention."

"What makes you suggest that the intention may have been conditional?" Lockhart asked.

"There are two facts," Thorndyke replied, "which seem to offer that suggestion. The piece of pottery that we found in Pettigrew's pocket shows clearly that an excavation was actually carried out by the two men. There would certainly have been no collecting of pottery after the murder. Then the fact that Penrose was killed with his own weapon suggests a quarrel, and a pretty violent one, for Penrose must, himself, have produced his weapon. But when Pettigrew had got possession of that weapon, his behaviour was unmistakable. He struck to kill. It was no mere tap on the head. It was a murderous blow into which the assailant put his whole strength."

"So, taking all the facts into account, I think our verdict must be wilful murder, not only in the legal sense—which it obviously was—but in the sense in which ordinary men use the words. But it is an impressive and disturbing thought that only by a hair's-breadth did he miss escaping completely. He had abandoned and hidden the car and was sneaking off in the darkness to disappear for ever, unknown and unsuspected. But for the incalculable chance of his being knocked down by that unknown car or lorry, he would have got away without leaving a trace, and we should still be looking for the missing Penrose."

There was a short interval of silence when Thorndyke had concluded. Then Elmhurst remarked:

"It is rather a gruesome thought, that of the two men digging away amicably into the barrow when one of them must have known that the other was almost certainly digging his own grave."

"It is," I agreed. "But Thorndyke's interpretation of the facts suggests some other strange and gruesome pictures; that, for instance, of the murderer reading Brodribb's advertisement and realising that his murderous blow had been worth fifty thousand pounds; and his visit to New Square to collect his earnings."

"Yes, indeed," moralised Elmhurst, "and he collected them truly enough. It is a satisfaction to think of that moment of disillusionment when he saw his ill-gotten fortune turn to dust and ashes and realised that, for him as for others, the wages of sin was death."

---

THE END



**FELODE SE? - THE DEATH AT THE INN**  
**PART I. — THE GAMBLER: NARRATED BY ROBERT MORTIMER**

---

**I. — THE MAN IN THE PORCH**

THERE is something almost uncanny in the transformation which falls upon the City of London when all the offices are closed and their denizens have departed to their suburban homes. Throughout the working hours of the working days, the streets resound with the roar of traffic and the pavements are packed with a seething, hurrying multitude. But when the evening closes in, a strange quiet descends upon the streets, and the silent, deserted by-ways take on the semblance of thoroughfares in some city of the dead.

The mention of by-ways reminds me of another characteristic of this part of London. Modern, commonplace, and dull as is the aspect of the main streets, in the areas behind and between them are hidden innumerable quaint and curious survivals from the past; antique taverns lurking in queer, crooked alleys and little scraps of ancient churchyards, green with the grass that sprang up afresh amidst the ashes of the Great Fire.

With one of these curious “hinterlands”—an area bounded by Cornhill, Gracechurch Street, Lombard Street, and Birchin Lane, and intersected by a maze of courts and alleys—I became intimately acquainted, since I usually crossed it at least twice a day going to and from the branch of Perkins’s Bank at which I was employed as a cashier. For the sake of change and interest, I varied my route from day to day—all the alleys communicated and one served as well as another—but the one that I favoured most was the very unfrequented passage which took me through the tiny churchyard of St. Michael’s. I think the place appealed to me specially because somewhere under the turf reposes old Thomas Stow, grandfather of the famous John, laid here in the year 1527 according to his wish “to be buried in the litell Grene Churchyard of the Parysshe Church of Seynt Myghel in Cornehyll, betwene the Crosse and the Church Wall, nigh the wall as may be.” Many a time, as I passed along the paved walk, had I tried to locate his grave; but the Great Fire must have made an end of both Cross and wall.

I have referred thus particularly to this “haunt of ancient peace” because it was there, on an autumn even in the year 1929, that there befell the adventure that has set me to the writing of this narrative; an adventure which, for me, changed the scene in a mom from a haunt of peace to a place of gruesome and tragic memories.

It was close upon eight o’clock when I emerged from the bank and started rather wearily on my way homeward. It had been a long day, for there had been various arrears to dispose of which had kept us hard at work hours after the bank had closed its doors; and it had been a dull, depressing day, for the sky had been so densely overcast that no single gleam of sunlight had been able to break through, and we had perforce kept the lamps alight all day. Even now, as I came out and shut the door behind me, twilight seemed to have descended on the City, though the sun had barely set and it was not yet time for the street lamps to be lit.

I stood for a moment looking up the gloomy, twilit street, hesitating as to which way to go. Our branch was in Gracechurch Street close to the corner of Lombard Street, and both thoroughfares were equally convenient. Eventually, I chose Gracechurch Street, and, crossing to the west side, walked up it until I came to the little opening of Bell Yard. Turning into the dark entry, I trudged up the narrow passage, cogitating rather vaguely and wishing that I had provided some thing better than the scanty cold supper that I knew awaited me at my lodgings. But I was tired and chilly and empty; I had not had enough food during the day, owing to the pressure of work; so that the needs of the body tended to assert themselves to the exclusion of more elevated thoughts.

At the top of the yard I turned into the little tunnel-like covered passage that led through into Castle Court and brought me out by the railings of the churchyard. Skirting them, I went on to the entrance to the paved walk and passed in up a couple of steps and through the open gateway, noting that even “the litell Grene Churchyard” looked dull and drab under the lowering sky and that lights were twinkling in the office windows beyond the grass plot and in those of the tavern at the side.

At the end of the paved walk is a long flower-bed against the wall of St. Michael’s Church, and, just short of this, the arched entrance to another tunnel-like covered passage into which, near its middle, the deep south porch of the church opens. I was about to step down into the passage—which is below the level of the churchyard—when I noticed a hat lying on the flower-bed close up in the corner. It lay crown downwards with its silk lining exposed, and, as it appeared to be in perfectly good condition, I picked it up to examine it. It was quite a good hat; a grey soft felt, nearly new, and the initials A. W., legibly written on the white lining, suggested that the owner had set some value on it. But where was the owner? And how on earth came this hat to belying abandoned by the wayside? A man may drop a glove or a handkerchief or a tobacco pouch and be unaware of his loss; but surely the most absent-minded of men could hardly lose his hat without noticing the fact. And then the further question arose: what does one do with a derelict hat? Of course, I could have dropped it where I had found it; but from this my natural thriftiness and responsibility revolted. It was too good a hat to have been casually flung away by its owner, and, since Fate had appointed me its custodian, the duty seemed to devolve on me to restore it.

I stood for a few moments holding the hat and looking through the dark passage at the shape of light at the farther end, but no one was in sight; and I now recalled that I had not met a soul since I entered Bell Yard from Gracechurch Street.

Still wondering how I should set about discovering the owner of the hat, I stepped down into the passage and began to walk along it; but when I reached the middle and came opposite the church porch, my problem seemed to solve itself in a rather startling fashion; for, glancing into the porch, I saw, dimly but quite distinctly in its shadowy depths, a man sitting on the lowest of the three steps that lead up to the church door. He was leaning back against the jamb limply and helplessly as if he were asleep or, more probably, drunk, the latter probability being rather confirmed by a stout walking-stick with a large ivory knob, which had fallen beside him, and what looked like a rimless eyeglass which lay on the stone floor between his feet. But what was more to my present purpose was the fact that not only was he bare-headed, but that no hat was visible. This, then, was doubtless the owner of the derelict.

Holding the latter conspicuously, I stepped into the cavern-like porch, and, addressing the man in a rather loud tone, enquired whether he had lost a hat. As he made no reply or any sign of having heard me, I was disposed to lay the hat down by his side and retire, when it occurred to me that he might possibly have had some kind of fit or seizure. On this I approached closer, and, stooping over him, listened for the sound of his breathing. But I could hear nothing nor could I make out any movement of his chest.

As he was sitting, or sprawling, with his legs spread out, his shoulders supported by the jamb of the door and his head drooping forward on his chest, his face was almost hidden from me. But I now knelt down beside him, and, taking my petrol lighter from my pocket, held it close to his face. And then, as the gleam of the flame fell on him, I sprang up with a gasp of horror. The man's eyes were wide open, staring before him with an intensity that was in hideous contrast to his limp and passive posture. And the face was unmistakably the face of a dead man.

Dropping the hat by his side, I ran through the passage into St. Michael's Alley and down this to Cornhill. At the entrance to the alley I stood for a moment looking up and down the street. In the distance, near the Royal Exchange, I could see a white-sleeved policeman directing the traffic, and I was about to start off towards him when, glancing eastward, I saw a constable approaching along the pavement. At once I hurried away in his direction and we met nearly opposite St. Peter's Church. A few words conveyed my information and secured his very complete attention. "A dead man, you say. Whereabouts did you see him?"

"He is lying in the south porch of St. Michael's Church, just up the alley."

"Well," said he, "you had better come along and show me"; and without further parley he started forward with long, swinging strides that gave me some trouble to keep up with him. Back along Cornhill we went and up the alley until we came to the arched entrance to the passage, and here the constable produced his lantern and switched on the light. As we came opposite the porch and my companion threw a beam of light into it, the cave-like interior was rendered clearly visible with the dead man sitting, or reclining, just as I had left him.

"Yes," said the constable, "there don't seem to be much doubt about his being dead." Nevertheless, he put his ear close to the man's face, raising the head gently, and felt for the pulse at the wrist. Then he stood up and looked at me.

"I'd better get on the phone," said he, "and report to the station. They'll have to send an ambulance to take him to the mortuary. Will you stay here until I come back? I shan't be more than a minute or two."

Without waiting for an answer, he strode out of the passage and disappeared down the alley, leaving me to pace up and down in the gathering gloom or to stand and gaze out on the darkening churchyard. It was a dismal business, and very disturbing to the nerves I found it; for I am rather sensitive to horrors of any kind, and, being now tired and physically exhausted, I was more than ordinarily susceptible. I had suffered a severe shock, and its effect was still with me as I kept my vigil, now glancing with horrid fascination at the shadowy figure in the dark porch, and now stealing away to the entrance to be out of sight of it. Once, a man came in from the offices across the churchyard, but he hurried through into the alley, brushing past me and all unaware of that dim and ghostly presence.

After the lapse of two or three incredibly long minutes the constable reappeared, and, almost at the moment of his arrival, the lights were switched on and a lamp in the vault of the passage exactly opposite the porch threw a bright light on the dead man.

"Ah!" the officer commented cheerfully, "that's better. Now we can see what we are about." He stepped up to the body, and, stooping over it, cast the light from his lantern on the step behind it.

"There's something there on the stone step," he remarked; "some broken glass and some metal things. I can't quite see what they are, but we'd better not meddle with them until the people from the station arrive. But while we are waiting for the ambulance I'll just jot down a few particulars." He produced a large note-book, and, taking an attentive look at me, added: "We'll begin with your name, address and occupation."

I gave him these, and he then enquired how I came to discover the body. I had not much to tell, but, such as my story was, he wrote it down verbatim in his note book and made me show him the exact spot where I had found the hat; of which spot he entered a description in his book. When he had completed his notes, he read out to me what he had written; and on my confirming its correctness, he handed me his pencil and asked me to add my signature.

He had just returned the note-book to his pocket when an inspector appeared at the alley entrance of the passage, closely followed by two constables carrying a stretcher and one or two idlers who had probably been attracted by the ambulance. The inspector walked briskly up to the porch, and, having cast a quick glance at the dead man, turned to the constable.

"I suppose," said he, "you have got all the particulars. Which is the man who discovered the body?"

"This is the gentlemen, sir," the constable replied, introducing me; "Mr. Robert Mortimer; and this is his statement."

He produced his note-book and presented it, open, to his superior; who stood under the lamp and ran his eye over the statement.

"Yes," he when he had finished reading and returned the book to its owner, "that's all right. Not much in it except the hat. Just show me where you found it."

I conducted him up into the churchyard and pointed out the corner of the flower-bed where the hat had been lying. He looked at it attentively and then glanced down the passage, remarking that the dead man had apparently come down from Castle Court. "By the way," he added, "I suppose you don't recognise him?"

"No," I replied, "he is a total stranger to me."

"Ah, well," said he, "I expect we shall be able to find out who he is in time for the inquest."

His reference to the inquest prompted me to ask if I should be wanted to give evidence.

"Certainly," he replied. "You haven't much to tell, but the little that you have may be important."

We were now back at the porch, on the floor of which the stretcher had been placed. At a word from the inspector the two bearers lifted the corpse on to it, and, having laid the hat on the body and covered it with a waterproof sheet, grasped the handles of the stretcher, stood up, and marched away with their burden, followed by the spectators.

The raising of the body had brought into view the objects which the constable had observed and which now appeared to be the fragments of a broken hypodermic syringe. These the inspector collected with scrupulous care, spreading his handkerchief on the upper step to receive them and picking up even the minute splinters of glass that had scattered when the syringe was dropped. When he had gathered up every particle that was visible, and taken up some drops of moisture with a piece of blotting-paper, he made his collection into a neat parcel and put it in his pocket. Then he cast a rapid but searching glance over the floor and walls of the porch, and, apparently observing nothing worth noting, began to walk towards the alley.

"I wonder," he said as we turned into it and came in sight of the waiting ambulance, "how long that poor fellow had been lying there when you first saw him. Not very long, I should say. Couldn't have been. Somebody must have noticed him. However, I expect the doctor will be able to tell us how long he has been dead. And you had better note down all that you can remember of the circumstances so that you can be clear about it at the inquest."

Here we came out into Cornhill, where the ambulance had been drawn up opposite the church, and the inspector, having wished me "good night," pushed his way through the considerable crowd that had collected and took his place in the ambulance beside the driver. Just as the vehicle was moving away and I was about to do the same, a voice from behind me enquired:

"What's the excitement? Motor accident?"

I seemed to recognise the voice, which had a slight Scottish intonation, and when I turned to answer I recognised the speaker. He was a Mr. Gillum, one of the bank's customers with whom I had often done business.

"No," I replied, "I don't know what it was, but the dead man looked perfectly horrible. I can't get his face out of my mind."

"Oh, but that won't do," said Gillum. "It has given you a bad shake up, but you've got to try to forget it."

"I know," said I, "but just now I'm rather upset. This affair caught me at the wrong time, after a long, tiring day."

"Yes," he agreed, "you do look a bit pale and shaky. Better come along with me and have a drink. That will steady your nerves."

"I am rather afraid of drinks at the moment," said I. "You see, I have had a long day and not very much in the way of food."

"Ah!" said he, "there you are. Horrors on an empty stomach. That's all wrong, you know. Now I'm going to prescribe for you. You will just come and have a bit of dinner and a bottle of wine with me. That will set you up and will give me the great pleasure of your society."

Now I must admit that a bit of dinner and a bottle of wine sounded gratefully in my ears, but I was reluctant to accept hospitality which my means did not admit conveniently of my returning. A somewhat extravagant taste in books absorbed the surplus of my modest income and left me rather short of pocket-money. However, Gillum would take no denial. Probably he grasped the position completely. At any rate, he brushed aside my half-hearted refusal without ceremony and, even while I was protesting, he hailed a prowling taxi, opened the door and bundled me in. I heard him give the address of a restaurant in Old Compton Street. Then he got in beside me and slammed the door.

"Now," said he, as the taxi trundled off, "for 'the gay and festive scenes and halls of dazzling light'; and oblivion to the damned unpleasant body."

---

## II. — JOHN GILLUM

AS the taxi pursued its unimpeded way westward through the half-populated streets, I reflected on the curious circumstances that had made me the guest of a man who was virtually a stranger to me, and I was disposed to consider what I knew of him. I use the word "disposed" advisedly, for, in fact, my mind was principally occupied by my late experiences, and the considerations which I here set down for the reader's information are those that might have occurred to me rather than those that actually did.

I had now been acquainted with John Gillum for some six months; ever since, in fact, I had been transferred to the Gracechurch Street branch of the bank. But our acquaintance was of the slightest. He was one of the bank's customers and I was a cashier. His visits to the bank were rather more frequent than those of most of our customers and on slack days he would linger to exchange a few words or even to chat for a while. Nevertheless, our relations hardly tended to grow in intimacy; for though he was a bright, gay, and rather humorous man, quite amusing to talk to, his conversation persistently concerned itself with racing matters and the odds on, or against, particular horses, a subject in which I was profoundly uninterested. In truth, despite our rather frequent meetings, his personality made so little impression on me that, if I had been asked to describe him, I could have said no more than that he was a tallish, rather good-looking man with black hair and beard which contrasted rather noticeably with his blue eyes, that he spoke with a slight Scotch accent and that two of his upper front teeth had been rather extensively filled with gold. This latter characteristic did, indeed, attract my notice rather unduly; for, though gold is a beautiful material (and one that a banker might be expected to regard with respectful appreciation), these golden teeth rather jarred on me and I found it difficult to avoid looking at them as we talked.

Yet even in those days I felt a certain interest in our customer; but it was a purely professional interest. As cashier, I naturally knew all about his account and his ways of dealing with his money, and on both, and especially his financial habits, I occasionally speculated with mild curiosity. For his habits were not quite normal, or at least were not like those of most other private customers. The latter usually make most of their payments by cheque. But Gillum seemed to make most of his in cash. It is true that he appeared to pay most of his tradespeople by cheque, but from time to time, and at pretty frequent intervals, he would present a "self" cheque for a really considerable sum—one, or even two or three hundred pounds, and occasionally a bigger sum still—and take the whole of it away in pound notes.

It was rather remarkable, in fact very much so when I came to look over the ledger and note the fluctuations of his account. For at fairly regular intervals he paid in really large cheques—up to a thousand pounds—mostly drawn upon an Australian bank, which for a time swelled his account to very substantial proportions. But, by degrees, and not very small degrees, his balance dwindled until he seemed on the verge of an overdraft, and then another big cheque would be paid in and give him a fresh start.

Now there is nothing remarkable in the fluctuation of an account when the customer receives payment periodically in large sums and pays out steadily in the small amounts which represent the ordinary expenses of living. But when I came to cast up Gillum's account, it was evident that the great bulk of his expenditure was in the form of cash. And it seemed additional to the ordinary domestic payments, as I have said; and I found myself wondering what on earth he could be doing with his money. He could not be making investments, or even "operating" on the Stock Exchange, for those transactions would have been settled by cheque. Apparently he was making some sort of payments which had to be made in cash.

Of course it was no business of mine. Still, it was a curious and interesting problem. What sort of payments were these that he was making? Now when a man pays away at pretty regular intervals considerable sums in cash, the inference is that he is having some sort of dealings with someone who either will not accept a cheque or is not a safe person to be trusted with one. But a person who will not accept payment by an undoubtedly sound cheque is a person who is anxious to avoid evidence that a payment has been made. Such anxiety suggests a secret and probably unlawful transaction; and in practice, such a transaction is usually connected with the offence known as "demanding money with menaces." So, as I cast up the very large amounts that Gillum had drawn out in cash, I asked myself, "Is he a gambler, or has he fallen into the clutches of a blackmailer?" The probability of the latter explanation was suggested by certain large withdrawals at approximately quarterly periods, and also by the fact that Gillum not only took payment almost exclusively in pound notes, but also showed a marked preference for notes that had been in circulation as compared with new notes, of the serial numbers of which the bank would have a record. Still, the two possibilities were not mutually exclusive. A gambler is by no means an unlikely person to be the subject of blackmail.

Such, then, were the reflections that might have occupied my mind had it not been fully engaged with my recent adventure. As it was, the short journey was beguiled by brief spells of scrappy and disjointed conversation which lasted until the taxi drew up opposite the brilliantly lighted entrance of the restaurant and a majestic person in the uniform of a Liberian admiral hurried forward to open the door. We both stepped out, and when Gillum had paid the taxi-driver—extravagantly, as I gathered from the man's demeanour—we followed the admiral into a wide hail where we were transferred to the custody of other and less gorgeous myrmidons.

Giamborini's Restaurant was an establishment of a kind that was beyond my experience, as it was certainly beyond my means. It oozed luxury and splendour at every pore. The basin of precious marble in which I purged myself of the by-products of the London atmosphere was of a magnificence that almost called for an apology for washing in it; the floor of delicate Florentine mosaic seemed too precious to stand upon in common boots; while as to the dining-saloon, I can recall it only as a bewildering vision of marble and gilding, of vast mirrors, fretted ceilings and stately columns—apparently composed of gold and polished gorgonzola—and multitudinous chandeliers of a brilliancy that justified Dick Swiveller's

description, lately quoted by Gillum. I found it a little oppressive and was disposed to compare it (not entirely to its advantage) with the homely Soho restaurants that I remembered in the far-off pre-war days.

A good many of the tables were unoccupied, though the company was larger than I should have expected, for the hour was rather late for dinner but not late enough for theatre suppers. Of the guests present, the men were mostly in evening dress, and so, I suppose, were the women, judging by the considerable areas of their persons that were uncovered by clothing. As to their social status I could form no definite opinion, but the general impression conveyed by their appearance was that they hardly represented the cream of the British aristocracy. But perhaps I was prejudiced by the prevailing magnificence.

"What are you going to have, Mortimer?" my host asked as we took our seats at the table to which we had been conducted. "Gin and It, cocktail, or sherry? You prefer sherry. Good. So do I. It is wine that maketh glad the heart of man, not these chemical concoctions."

He selected from the wine list the particular brand of sherry that commended itself to him and then gave a few general directions which were duly noted. As the waiter was turning away, he added: "I suppose you haven't got such a thing as an evening paper about you?"

The waiter had not. But there was no difficulty. He would get one immediately. Was there any particular paper that would be preferred?

"No," replied Gillum, "any evening paper will do." Thereupon the waiter bustled away with the peculiar quick, mincing gait characteristic of his craft; a gait specially and admirably adapted to the rapid conveyance of loaded trays. In a minute or two he came skating back with a newspaper under his arm and a tray of hors-d'oeuvres and two brimming glasses of sherry miraculously balanced on his free hand. Gillum at once opened the paper, while I fixed a ravenous eye on the various and lurid contents of the tray. As I had expected, he turned immediately to the racing news. But he did not read the column. After a single brief glance, he folded up the paper and laid it aside with the remark, uttered quite impassively: "No luck."

"I hope you haven't dropped any money," said I, searching for the least inedible contents of the tray.

"Nothing to write home about," he replied. "Fifty."

"Fifty!" I repeated. "You don't mean fifty pounds?"

"Yes," he replied calmly. "Why not? You can't expect to bring it off every time."

"But fifty pounds!" I exclaimed, appalled by this horrid waste of money. "Why, it would furnish a small library."

He laughed indulgently. "That's the bookworm's view of the case but it isn't mine. I've had my little flutter and I'm not complaining; and let me tell you, Mortimer, that I have just barely missed winning a thousand pounds."

I was on the point of remarking that a miss is as good as a mile, but, as that truth has been propounded on some previous occasions, I refrained and asked: "When you say that you have just barely missed winning a thousand pounds, what exactly do you mean? How do you know that you nearly won that amount?"

"It is perfectly simple, my dear fellow," said he. "I laid fifty pounds on the double event at twenty to one against. That is to say, I backed two particular horses to win two particular races. Now, one of my horses won his race all right. The other ought to have done the same. But he didn't. He came in second. So I lost. But you see how near a thing it was."

"Then," said I, "if you had backed the two horses separately, I suppose you would have won on the whole transaction?"

"I suppose I should," he admitted, "but there would have been nothing in it. The horse that won was the favourite. But the double event was a real sporting chance. Twenty to one against. And you see how near I was to bringing it off."

"Nevertheless," I objected, "you lost. And you went into the business with the knowledge, not only that you might lose, but that the chances that you would lose were estimated at twenty to one. I should have supposed that no sane man would have taken such a chance as that."

He looked at me with a broad smile that displayed his golden teeth to great disadvantage.

"Thus saith the banker," he commented. "But you are taking a perverted view of the transaction. You are considering it as an investor might; as a means of realising the greatest profit with the smallest risk. That is the purely commercial standpoint. But I am not engaged in commerce; I am engaged in sport—in gambling, if you prefer the expression. Now the essence of the sport of gambling is the possibility that you may lose. If you were certain to win every time, it might be highly profitable but it would be uncommonly poor fun. Believe me, Mortimer, the heart and soul of the game is the chance of losing."

He spoke quite gravely and earnestly and the statement put me, for the moment, rather at a loss for a reply. For, in its mad way, it was true, and yet, from a practical point of view, it was nonsense. Meanwhile, the waiter brought and placed before us a strangely sophisticated dish, based, I believe, on fish, and then proceeded to fill our glasses with champagne. It was, I think, quite good champagne, though I am no authority, my extreme dissipation, in the ordinary way, not going beyond the traditional "chop and a pint of claret." At any rate, it was highly stimulating, and when Gillum had raised his glass and, with a toast "to the next double event," emptied it and insisted on my doing likewise, the last traces of my depression vanished.

"I admit, Gillum," said I, resuming the discussion, "that there is a certain amount of truth in what you say. But we must try to keep some sense of proportion. Fifty pounds is a devil of a price for the fun of a little flutter. Surely you could have got your sport at a cheaper rate than that."

"But that is just what you can't do," said he. "What you don't seem to realise is that the intensity of the thrill is strictly proportionate to the amount of the possible loss, and, of course, of the possible gain. I could have laid five shillings on the double event and been secure from appreciable loss. But then I should have stood to gain a mere flyer. No, my young friend, you can't get a respectable thrill for five bob. And there is another thing that you are over-looking. You speak as if I lost every time. But I don't. Sometimes I win. If I never won, it would be a dull game and I expect I shouldn't go on."

"I think you would," said I. "You would always be hoping that at last you would get your money back."

"Perhaps you are right," he conceded. "It is certainly the fact that a genuine gambler is not put off by a succession of losses. The oftener he loses the more dogged he becomes."

"So I have always understood," said I. "But to come to your own case, you say that sometimes you win. How often do you win? Taking your betting transactions as a whole, how does the balance stand? Are you in pocket or out?"

"Out, of course," he replied promptly. "Every body is, excepting the bookies. And they don't do it for sport, but just as a cold-blooded matter of business. They don't lose, in ordinary circumstances, and they don't win to a considerable extent. They just balance their books and make a comfortable living. But, of course, the fact that the bookies are in pocket by the transaction is clear proof that the backers, as a whole, must be out."

There seemed to me something very odd and rather abnormal in the reasonable and lucid way in which he discussed this absurdity. I had the sort of feeling that one might have had in discussing insane delusions with a lunatic. But I returned to the charge, futile as I knew the discussion to be.

"Very well," said I, "you agree that the balance of profit and loss is against you. How much, you know better than I do, but I suspect that your losses, from month to month, are pretty heavy." (Of course, I did not "suspect." I knew. The bank's books told the story.) "You must be paying very considerable sums for your little flutters and I put it to you, isn't it a most monstrous waste of money?"

He laughed cheerfully and refilled our glasses.

"I see," he replied, "that you are an incorrigible financier. You are taking a completely perverted view of the matter. You speak of waste of money. But what, after all, is money?"

"If you are asking me that as a banker," I replied, "I can only say that I don't know. I know what money was before the war, but now that the politicians and financial theorists have taken it over, it has become something quite different and I don't profess to understand it."

"That isn't quite what I meant," said he. "I was referring to money in general terms. What is it? It is simply a means of obtaining certain satisfactions or pleasures. No one wants money for itself excepting a miser."

"You can rule out misers," said I. "They are an extinct race. A miser doesn't hoard paper vouchers which have only a conventional and temporary value."

"No, I suppose not," he agreed. "At any rate, I am not a miser," (which was most unquestionably true), "and I have no use for money excepting as a means of obtaining satisfactions. And that is the rational use of money. I put it to you, Mortimer, if a man has money and there are certain things that he desires and that money will buy, is it not obviously reasonable that he should exchange the thing that he doesn't want for the things that he does? You speak of waste of money. But is it wasted when it is being used for the very purpose for which it exists? Take, for instance, this bottle of champagne—which, by the way, is getting low and needs replacing. Now, I think we like champagne."

"I do, certainly," I admitted.

"I am glad you do. So do I. And we can get it in exchange for your despised paper vouchers. Accordingly, like sensible men, we make the exchange; and I submit that it is a reasonable and profitable transaction. For if, as you suggest, the money is a mere fleeting convention, the champagne for which we have exchanged it isn't. It is real champagne."

Seeing that we had already emptied one bottle, the cogency of this argument did not impress me. Probably I should have proceeded to rebut it, but at this point an interruption occurred and the discussion broke off.

When we had entered the room, I had noticed a party of three persons, two men and a woman, at a table in a corner. They had caught my attention because we had evidently caught theirs. But I don't think that Gillum observed them; and when we had seated ourselves, as his back was towards them, they were outside his range of vision whereas I was nearly facing them; and throughout our meal I found myself from time to time looking in their direction, attracted as before by the occasional glances that they cast in ours. It seemed to me that they must be acquainted with Gillum, for there was otherwise nothing noticeable in our appearance. At any rate, they were obviously interested in us and I received the impression that we were being discussed.

They did not prepossess me favourably. I cannot say exactly why, but there was an indefinable something about them that jarred on me. The men did not look like gentlemen, and the woman, dressed in the extreme of an unbecoming fashion, was so heavily and coarsely made up as to extinguish any good looks that she might have had. Everything about her

seemed to be artificial. Her hair was of an unnatural colour, her cheeks were visibly painted, and her lips were plastered with crude vermilion like the lips of a circus clown.

That these people were acquaintances of Gillum's became evident when they rose to depart, for they steered a course across the room which brought them opposite our table. And here they halted; and, for the first time, Gillum became aware of their presence. His expression did not convey to me that he was overjoyed, but as the lady bestowed on him the kind of leer that is known as "giving the glad eye," he made shift to produce a responsive smile.

"Now, don't let us interrupt your dinner," said she, as he rose to shake hands. "But, as you cut us dead when you came in, we have just come across to say 'howdy' and let you know that we saw you. We are now off to the club. Shall you be coming along presently?"

Gillum was inclined to be evasive.

"I don't quite know what the programme is," he replied. "It depends on what my guest would like to do."

"Bring him along with you," said she, "and let him see the ball roll. I'm sure he'd enjoy it, wouldn't you?"

As she asked the question, she turned to me with the peculiar cat-like grin that one sees in newspaper portraits of young women, with a distinct tendency to the "glad eye"; and I noticed that it seemed a rather tired eye and slightly puffy about the lower lids.

"I am not really an enthusiast in regard to billiards," I replied, "and I am no player. But it is interesting enough to look on at a good game."

Apparently I had said something funny, for the lady greeted my answer with a gay—and rather strident—laugh, and the two men, who had been looking on in silence, broke into sour grins. But Gillum, also smiling, evidently wished to get rid of his acquaintances for he interposed with the air of closing the conversation.

"Well, we shall see what we feel like when we have dined. I won't make any engagement now."

The lady took the hint graciously enough. "Very well, Jack," said she. "We will leave you in peace and hope to see you later;" and with this and another smile which embraced us both, she moved off with her two companions, neither of whom seemed to take any notice of Gillum.

"What was the joke?" I asked when they had gone. "And what club was she referring to?"

"It isn't really a club," replied Gillum. "It is what, I suppose, you would call a gambling hell; a place where you can stake your money at trente et quarante, rouge et noir, chemin de fer, or any of the regular gambling games. The joke was that the ball she meant was not a billiard ball but the little ball that rolls round the roulette wheel. It is not a particularly amusing joke."

"No," I agreed. "And are these people connected with the club?"

"Very much so," he replied. "That tall chappie—the one with the squint—runs the place, and I should think he does fairly well out of it. He is a Frenchman of the name of Foucault."

"He doesn't look a particularly amiable person," I remarked, recalling the rather sulky way in which he had looked on at the interview.

Gillum laughed. "He is a silly ass," said he, "as jealous as the devil; and as Madame's manners are, as you saw, of the distinctly coquettish, slap and tickle order, there is pretty constant trouble. But he needn't worry. There is no harm in the fair Marie. Her engaging wiles are all in the way of business."

"Do you spend much time at the club?" I asked.

"I drop in there pretty frequently," he replied.

"And I suppose you drop a fair amount of money."

"I suppose I do. But not so much as you would think. You orthodox financiers seem to imagine that a gambler always loses, but that is quite a mistake. The luck isn't always on the one side. Sometimes I pick up a little windfall that pays my expenses for quite a long time."

"Still," said I, "the balance must be against you in the long run."

"I have already admitted," he replied, "that I lose on my gambling transactions as a whole, and probably I lose, in the long run, at the club, though it isn't so easy to keep accounts of what I do there. But supposing that the balance is against me. What about it? Foucault runs the club to make a profit. But he can only make a profit if the players make a loss. What they lose to the bank is, in effect, their payment to him for the entertainment that he supplies. Hang it all, Mortimer, you can't expect to get your fun for nothing."

"Some people do," said I, "the people, I mean, who have infallible systems. I gather that you don't use a system."

"Well," he replied cautiously, "I haven't managed yet to devise a system that really works, but I have given some thought to the matter. There ought to be some way of ascertaining how the laws of chance operate, and if one could discover that, one would have the means of circumventing them."

"You haven't tried the plan of doubling the stakes when you lose?"

"Yes, I have; and I must admit that, for sheer excitement there is nothing like it. Your real, rabid gambler loves it—and usually cleans himself out. But for a sane and sober gambler it is not practicable. There are too many snags. To begin with, at the best you only get your money back plus the amount of the lowest stake. Consequently, the first stake must be a fairly large one or there is nothing in it. But if you start with a substantial stake and the luck is against you, you are up in enormous figures before you know where you are. For instance, supposing you are playing roulette and you lay a hundred pounds on *manque* or *impair* or any of the even chances. If you lose four times in succession, which would not be extraordinary, you have dropped fifteen hundred pounds; and the danger is that you may empty your pocket before the winning coup comes round. Then you have lost the lot. But there is another snag. The bank won't let you go on doubling as long as you like. There is a limit set to each kind of bet, and when you reach that limit you are not allowed to double any more. If you go on playing you have got to go back to a flat stake, in which case it is impossible for you to win back what you have lost. So, regarded as a serious method of play, the doubling racket is no go."

"It seems astonishing," said I, "that anyone should practise it. But perhaps they don't."

"Oh, don't they?" said Gillum. "You must understand, Mortimer, that to the real, perfect gambler, the charm of the game is the risk of losing. The bigger the risk, the greater the thrill. Plenty of people at the club, particularly the roulette players, double the stakes when they lose; and there is a temptation, you know, when you have lost, to take another chance in the hope of getting your money back. But it is a bad plan, because you stand to lose so much more than you stand to gain."

"Don't some people double on their winnings?" I asked.

"Ah," said he, "but that is quite a different kind of affair. There is some sense in that because it is quite the opposite of the other method. If you win you win, you don't merely get your money back; and if you eventually lose, you have only lost your original stake—plus your winnings, of course. Supposing you take an even chance at roulette, say you put a hundred pounds on red and you win; and suppose that you leave the stake and the winnings—two hundred pounds—on the table as a fresh stake. If the red turns up again you take up four hundred, of which one hundred is your original stake. You have won three hundred. But if you lose, you have only lost a hundred, plus the three that you had won. From a gambler's point of view it is quite a sound method."

"Yes," I agreed, "I see that, at least, you start with the knowledge of the amount that you stand to lose. But the whole thing is beyond my comprehension. I can't begin to understand the state of mind of a man who is prepared to risk his money in a transaction over which he has no control and in respect to which no judgement, calculation or prevision is possible."

He laughed gaily and refilled our glasses. "You are a banker to the finger-tips, Mortimer," said he; "and, as you happen to be my banker, I am not disposed to quarrel with your eminently correct outlook. I suppose you have never seen a gambling den."

"Never," I replied; "and I am an absolute ignorant on the subject of gambling. I hardly know how to play the common card games."

"I think you ought to know what these shows are like," said he. "I can assure you that, as a mere spectacle, a regular gaming house is worth seeing. What do you say to strolling round to the club with me when we have had our coffee? It's too late to do anything else."

It was really too late to do anything but go home and to bed. But I could hardly, in the circumstances, suggest that course. Nor, in fact, was I particularly disposed to; for the excellent dinner and the equally excellent wine had produced a state of exhilaration that made me not disinclined for adventure. In my normal state, nothing would have induced me to set foot in a gambling den. Now I fell in readily enough with Gillum's suggestion.

"But shan't I be expected to play?" I enquired. "Because I am not going to."

"That will be all right," he replied. "I shall explain to Madame, and she will see that you are left in peace. But you understand that this is an unregistered club and that you will keep your own counsel about your visit there. I shall have to guarantee your secrecy."

I gave the necessary undertaking and Gillum then held the wine bottle up to the light.

"There's half a bottle left," said he, making as if to refill my glass. "Won't you really? Not another half-glass? Well, I don't think I will, either. We will just have our coffee and a cognac and then toddle round to the club and see the ball roll."

---

### III. — THE GAMING HOUSE

FROM Giamborini's we strolled forth into Wardour Street, and, proceeding in a southerly direction, promptly turned into Gerrard Street. I knew the place slightly and on my occasional passage through it had found a certain bookish interest in contrasting its recent faded and shabby aspect with that which it must have presented in the days when Dryden was a resident, and, later, when the Literary Club with Johnson, Reynolds, Goldsmith and Gibbon, held its meetings here.

"Queer old street," Gillum commented, looking about him disparagingly. "Quite fashionable, I believe, at one time, but it is down on its luck nowadays. Very mixed population, too. All sorts of odd clubs, British and foreign, and tradesmen who



seem to have survived from the Stone Age. There is a fellow some where along here who makes spurs. Think of it. Spurs! In the twentieth century. This is our show."

He halted at a doorway which, shabby and grimy as it was, yet preserved some vestiges of its former dignity, and having run his eye over an assortment of bell handles, put his finger on an electric button which surmounted them and pressed several times at irregular intervals.

"Are you ringing out a code message?" I asked.

"Well, yes, in a way," he replied. "There is a particular kind of ring that the regular members give just to let the people upstairs know that it isn't a stranger. There is always the possibility of a raid and our friends like to have time to make the necessary arrangements."

The idea of a police raid was not a pleasant one and the suggestion tended rather to damp my enthusiasm. I expressed the hope that this would not happen to be the occasion of one.

"No, indeed," said Gillum, "it would be unfortunate for you. Wouldn't increase your prestige at the bank. But you needn't worry. There has never been any trouble since I have known the place. I have sometimes suspected that Foucault has some sort of discreet understanding with the authorities, but in any case, I know there is a bolt hole through into the next house where an Italian club has its premises."

This did not sound very reassuring. I felt the exhilarating effects of the champagne evaporating rapidly; and when at length the door was opened, the aspect of the janitor did not produce a favourable impression. He was a big, powerful man, with a heavy jaw and beetling brows and a strong suggestion of the professional pugilist. He carried an electric lamp, the light of which he cast on us while he inspected us critically. Then the truculent expression faded suddenly from his face and a cheerful Irish voice exclaimed:

"Whoy, it's Mr. Gillum. Good evening, sorr. And the other gentleman, would he be a friend of yours?"

"Yes," replied Gillum, "it's all right, Cassidy. All's well and the lights are burning brightly, sir."

Mr. Cassidy chuckled as he let us in and shut the door. "Many's the time," said he, "as I've spoken them same wurds in the days when I used the sea. What did ye say the gentleman's name was?"

"His name is Mortimer," replied Gillum.

"To be sure it is," said Cassidy, adding, as he threw his light downwards: "Kape your oyes on the stairs, sorr. There's a tread loose at the turn."

The stairs were, in fact, in somewhat indifferent repair, but I noticed as the light flickered over them that this had once been quite a handsome staircase though a trifle narrow; and even now the fine moulded handrail and the graceful twisted balusters redeemed its extreme shabbiness. At the top of the second flight we came to a bare landing with a door facing us. This Cassidy opened, and, having admitted us, passed in himself, crossed the room and disappeared through mother doorway, presumably to report our arrival and identity.

I looked round the room which we had entered and was conscious of a faint sense of anti-climax. It was so very ordinary and so very innocent; much like the interior of the cheaper kind of old-fashioned Soho restaurant. At the farther end of the room was a large sideboard, presided over by a man in a white coat and cap and piled with a variety of food, including a ham, a number of different types of sausage, a great stack of sandwiches and long French loaves. On a shelf behind was a long row of bottles of mineral waters but on the sideboard I noted several champagne bottles, a few of whisky, and some of absinthe and other liqueurs.

The room was moderately full of people; full enough to have given Mr. Cassidy considerable occupation if they had been admitted separately. Some of them were lounging about, talking; others were seated at little tables, taking food rather hurriedly, and some were actually drinking ginger ale, though most of them were provided with wine, whisky or Dutch gin. One or two of the tables were furnished with chess-boards and sets of dominoes, but none of them appeared to be in use. Apparently their function was purely psychological. They were part of the "make-up" of the establishment.

I had not much time to examine the company, but a rapid inspection conveyed to me the impression that they were all rather abnormal and slightly disreputable. There was an air of eagerness, anxiety and excitement about them, mingled, in some cases, with a sort of wild hilarity. Those at the tables gobbled their food as if they were hastily stoking up and were anxious to get the business over. Particularly I noticed a group of four men standing by the sideboard devouring sandwiches wolfishly and gulping champagne from tumblers. But, as I said, I had little time to observe them, for, after a brief pause and a curious glance round the room, Gillum conducted me to a door near the farther end from which Cassidy emerged as we approached.

There was certainly nothing innocent about the room that we now entered. A single glance convicted it. The roulette table alone furnished evidence to which there could be no answer, and the groups of haggard, intent men and women gathered round the card tables that filled most of the room, if less conclusive to a possible raider, were unmistakable, seen as I saw them.

From one of these tables the lady of the restaurant rose, and laying down her cards, came to meet us.

"So you have persuaded Mr. Mortimer to come," she said, bestowing a gracious smile on me and offering an extensive

sample of teeth for my inspection (apparently she had got my name from Mr. Cassidy).

"Yes," replied Gillum, "but he has only come as a spectator. I have just brought him round to show him the ropes in case he may feel disposed for an evening's sport later on."

"That is very good of you, Jack," said she. "Of course, he can please himself as to whether he plays or not. Perhaps, when he has looked on for a while, he may feel inclined to try his luck. People who come to look on very often do."

"I have no doubt they do," said Gillum with a sly smile. "The complaint is catching and fools who come to scoff remain to play."

"I hope Mr. Mortimer hasn't come to scoff," said she; and when I had protested with more emphasis than sincerity she asked: "Where is your pupil going to take his first lesson?"

"Well," he replied, "as he knows practically nothing about card games, I think roulette will suit him best. Besides, it is the beginner's game and it is the most typical game of chance."

"That's true," Madame agreed, "though it seems to me a dull game, if you can call it a game at all. Let me find a couple of chairs so that you and your pupil can sit together; and then, when Mr. Mortimer is comfortably settled, I want to have a few words with you."

We secured two chairs and placed them in a vacant place at the end of the table by the compartment distinguished by a red lozenge on the green cloth. Then Madame introduced me to the croupier, whom she addressed as Hyman—his surname I found later to be Goldfarb—and when Gillum had placed his hat on his chair, she linked her arm with his and led him away among the multitude of card tables.

Left to myself, I first disposed of my hat and stick under my chair, as I noticed that several other men had done, though there was a large hat rack in the adjoining room. Then I proceeded to make my observations.

There was plenty to observe, and it was all strange and novel to me. There were, for instance, the various players, most of them seated at the table, though some preferred to stand and hover about behind the chairs, and there was the croupier, a pleasant faced Jew, calm, impassive and courteous, though obviously very much "on the spot"; and there were the parties of players at the card tables, most of whom I could see from my position without appearing to spy on them.

I considered them one by one. My next neighbour was an elderly woman whom I judged to be French, who sat like a graven image, silently and immovably intent on her game. She seemed to have the disease in a chronic form, for she played mechanically without a sign of satisfaction when she won or annoyance when she lost. At each spin of the wheel she laid a ten-shilling note on the space before which she sat—that marked with the red lozenge. If she won, she put the note that she had gained into a little hand bag and held the other in readiness for the next turn of the wheel; if she lost, she fished a note out of the bag for the next coup. So she went on as long as I observed her; always the same stake on the same spot. It looked deadly dull, and it was not gambling at all in any proper sense; for, by the ordinary laws of chance, it was almost impossible for her either to win or lose to an appreciable extent. So fatuous her proceedings seemed that I almost felt more respect for her next-door neighbour, a small German who might, from his appearance, have been a waiter. He certainly took risks, for his formula was two numbers "a cheval," and he kept to the same two numbers. As the odds against him were seventeen to one, he naturally lost with great regularity; and when he lost cursed under his breath—not very far under—shook his head and grimaced angrily. I think he must have been pretty near the end of his resources, for I saw him take out a wallet and look into it anxiously. But at this moment his magic number was announced, whereat he gave a yell of ecstasy, grabbed up his winnings, stuffed them into his wallet excepting one pound note, which he laid on the same spot as before and lost within a minute.

From the roulette table my attention wandered to the other occupants of the room and occasionally to Gillum and Madame, who walked slowly to and fro at the end of the room conversing earnestly. Nor was I the only observer. Several of the card-players cast a glance from time to time at the pair, and the three occupants of the table from which Madame had risen made no secret of their interest. Two of these I could not see very well but M. Foucault sat facing me; and never have I seen a more evil expression than that which his countenance bore as he watched them. He was not a pleasant-looking man at the best, and a slight squint did not improve matters; but now his aspect was positively villainous.

Not that his manifest anger was without provocation, for Madame's oglings and her caressing manner towards Gillum, regardless of the company, would have been offensive to the most tolerant of husbands. She might have been Gillum's lover—and not a very reticent lover at that. It is true that Gillum took it all very coolly with no sign of responsive demonstrations; but I felt that he was being more than indiscreet. Obviously, in his association with this woman, who seemed of set purpose to exasperate her husband, he was taking the risk of serious trouble.

Presently, to my relief they strolled over to Foucault's table and while Madame resumed her seat, Gillum drew up a spare chair and sat down facing her husband. Apparently the lady was giving some sort of explanation for she spoke volubly, leaning across the table to avoid raising her voice, while the others leaned forward to listen, and Foucault appeared to be gazing simultaneously at his wife and Gillum—an optical illusion, of course, due to his "swivel eye."

The discussion did not last long, and it was evidently quite an amicable affair, for when Gillum stood up, he shook hands with them all, including the grim-faced Foucault, before turning away to rejoin me; and I noted the leave-taking with considerable satisfaction, for it was getting alarmingly late and I began to feel that I had had enough of this not very thrilling form of entertainment.

"Yes," Gillum agreed, when I ventured on a hint to that effect, "time's getting on and you've to be at the bank as fresh as a lark to-morrow morning. But we must have one little flutter before we go. What shall it be? Shall we try an experiment with the doubling plan that we were discussing at dinner?"

Without waiting for an answer he laid a pound note on the red beside the ten-shilling note that the elderly lady had just put down. I watched with unexpected in as the revolving wheel was checked and the little white ball clattered round the dial, and was sensibly disappointed when it settled at last in compartment 21. For 21 happened unfortunately to be black. But Gillum was as indifferent as the old lady, and while Mr. Goldfarb raked in the bank's winning's and paid out to the players who had won, he calmly selected two fresh notes from his bulging wallet.

Once more the wheel was spun, the ball was thrown out on to the revolving surface, then the croupier chanted "Rien ne va plus" and checked the wheel, Gillum laid down his two notes, and a dozen pairs of eyes anxiously followed the travels of the dancing ball. At length it dropped into compartment 32—black again; and Gillum sorted out four pound notes from his wallet.

So it went on for a while. Regardless of the law of probability, the ball persisted in dropping into black compartments, and at each failure Gillum doubled his stake. I watched the proceedings with ridiculous anxiety. At the fourth losing coup when the croupier raked in eight of Gillum's pound notes, I noted mentally that my friend was already fifteen pounds out of pocket. If he lost the next coup, that fifteen would become thirty-one. It was positively harrowing to a thrifty man like myself; accustomed to keep a rigid account of every shilling that I spent.

However, he did not lose this time. My anxious eye following the ball, saw it eventually settle in compartment four which was red; and the croupier's rake, instead of sweeping away Gillum's sixteen pounds, added to them another sixteen.

"There, you see," said Gillum; "I am one pound to the good; and that is all I should have gained if I had gone on till doomsday. But I am a gainer to the extent that I have got back what I had lost."

He began to pick up the notes, counting them as he did so. Among them there had been four ten-shilling notes, but now there were only three; the explanation of which was that the old lady, when she had gathered up her two notes, had quietly added to them one of Gillum's. I saw her do it, and so did he; and he now ventured, with the utmost delicacy, to point out the little inadvertency. The lady gazed at him stonily, and I think was about to contest the matter, but at this moment a shout from the farther end of the room, followed by a crash and the sound of shattering glass, effectually diverted our attention.

I looked round quickly and saw two men, each grasping the other by the hair and both yelling like Bedlamites, one accusing the other—in Italian—of being a cheat and the other retorting—in French—that his accuser was a liar. A table and two chairs had been capsized, and very soon, as the combatants gyrated wildly and clawed at each other, more tables were capsized. Then the occupants of those tables joined in the fray with suitable vocal accompaniments and in a moment pandemonium reigned in the previously quiet room. As Foucault and his two friends sprang up and charged into the midst of the mêlée, the door burst open and Cassidy rushed in like an angry bull.

"We'd better clear out of this," said Gillum. "If they keep up this hullabaloo they'll bring the police up." As I agreed heartily, he grabbed up his winnings (but I observed that there were now only two ten-shilling notes) and we retrieved our hats from under the chairs and stole out as well as we could through the little crowd of spectators from the restaurant-room who had gathered round the door to look on at the battle. With the aid of my pocket lamp we made the perilous passage of the stairs—not forgetting the loose tread—and at last emerged safely into the street.

"My word!" exclaimed Gillum, as we crossed the road the more completely to sever our connection with the club, "how those dagoes do yell when they have a bit of a scrap. Just listen to them."

There was not much need to listen for the uproar was such that windows were opening and various night-birds were appearing from the doors of adjacent houses. Evidently, it was desirable for us to get out of the neighbourhood as quickly as possible; which we did, walking briskly but with no outward sign of undue hurry until we were safely out in Wardour Street, where we turned to the left and headed for Leicester square. Here we had the good fortune to encounter prowling, nocturnal taxi, the driver of which Gillum hailed by voice and gesture. As the vehicle drew up to the kerb he turned to me and asked: "Whereabouts do you hang out, Mortimer?"

"I live at Highbury," I replied.

"Yes, but that's a trifle vague. What's the exact address?" I gave him my full postal address which he communicated to the driver. "And," he added, "you can drop me at Clifford's Inn Passage, opposite the Inner Temple Gate. Will that do for the whole journey?"

"That" appeared to be a ten-shilling note and the driver replied that "it would do very well, thank you, sir"; whereupon we got in and the cab trundled away towards the Strand. I made some ineffectual efforts to refund my share of the payment, but Gillum declared that the calculation was beyond his arithmetic and suggested that we should work it out on some more suitable occasion. We were still arguing the point when the cab stopped in the shadow of St. Dunstan's Church and Gillum got out.

"Well, good night, Mortimer," said he, "or good morning, to be more exact. I hope you have had a pleasant and instructive evening. You have certainly had a full one what with corpses, illegal gambling, and the battle of the dagoes."

He shut the door and waved his hand, and the taxi resumed its journey, turning up Fetter Lane and later heading for

Gray's Inn Road. Now that I was alone, I felt a strong disposition to go to sleep; but by an effort I managed to keep awake and watch the familiar landmarks as they slipped by until, in a surprisingly short time, the taxi drew up at the gate of the eligible suburban residence which enshrined the two rooms that served me as a home. The driver actually got out to open the door for me—possibly suspecting some temporary disability, or perhaps as a demonstration of his satisfaction with the fare. At any rate, he gave me a cheerful "good night" and I inserted my latch-key with ease and precision as the clock of a neighbouring church was striking two.

---

#### IV. — ABEL WEBB, DECEASED

THE events of the evening which I had spent with Gillum gave me a good deal to think about. There was no longer any mystery as to what he did with the large sums that he drew from the bank. He just gambled them away. As to how much it was possible for an inveterate gambler like Gillum to drop in any one transaction, I could form no guess. Apparently there was no limit excepting the total amount that the gambler possessed. I had heard and read of players who had lost thousands in a single game, but it had always seemed to me incredible. Now, however, judging by what I had seen, and still more by what Gillum had said, I felt that nothing could overstate the monstrous truth.

The reflection was a sad and depressing one. It made me quite unhappy. For Gillum was no longer a mere customer. He had become an acquaintance, almost a friend, and I had found him a pleasant, likeable man, and apparently a man of good intelligence apart from his insane hobby. It really distressed me to think of a man with his brilliant opportunities frittering away the means of achievement in this puerile sport. And then, what of the future? If his source of supply was a permanent one he might go on indefinitely, simply flinging away his income as fast as he received it. But suppose it were not a stable, continuing income. Suppose it should dwindle or cease? What then? It was pretty certain that this relatively wealthy man would very soon be reduced to actual poverty.

But the mystery of Gillum's expenditure was not completely solved. Apart from the big drafts in cash at irregular intervals there were those regular, periodic drafts which I had regarded with such suspicion. Had our evening's experiences thrown any light on them? I could not say positively that they had. And yet there was at least a suggestion. The whole atmosphere of that sordid gaming house with its deeply shady frequenters: the sinister-looking proprietor—manifestly hostile to Gillum—the painted Jezebel, his wife, the ruffian Cassidy, obviously a paid bully, and finally, Gillum's long and mysterious conference with Madame; if these did not actually offer a suggestion of blackmail, they did at least suggest the very conditions in which blackmail is apt to occur.

From Gillum and his affairs my thoughts turned at intervals to the dead man who had been the means of our introduction. I had read a brief notice of the discovery in the morning paper and had expected to receive on the same day a summons to attend the inquest. Actually, I did not receive it until the evening of the second day, when I found it awaiting me at my lodgings, requiring my attendance on the following day at two o'clock in the afternoon. Accordingly, on my arrival at the office in the morning, I showed it to our manager, and, having received his authority to absent myself from the bank, duly presented myself at the time and place appointed.

The body had been identified as that of a man named Abel Webb, and that was all that was said about him in the first place. Further particulars were left to transpire in the evidence.

There is no need for me to describe the proceedings in detail apart from the essentials. The coroner opened with a concise statement of the matter which formed the subject of the inquiry, the jury were then conducted to the mortuary to view the body, and when they had returned and taken their places the coroner proceeded to deal with the evidence.

"I think," said he, "that we had better begin by calling Mr. Mortimer. His evidence is of no great importance but it comes first in the order of time."

My name was accordingly called, and when I had given the necessary particulars concerning myself, the coroner said: "Now, Mr. Mortimer, just tell us how you came to be connected with the subject of this inquiry. We can ask any necessary questions later."

Thus directed, I gave a plain and rather bald account of my discovery of the body and the circumstances leading thereto, to which the jury listened with eager interest; naturally enough, since the coroner's statement had given but the barest indication of the nature of the case.

"We understand," said the coroner, "that you did not recognise deceased as a person whom you had ever seen before?"

"That is so," I replied. "The man was a stranger to me."

"Would it have been possible for anyone passing along the alley as you did to fail to notice the body?"

"Yes," I replied, "and not only possible but rather probable. It was dark in the alley and still darker in the church porch. I am not sure that I should have seen the body myself but for the fact that I had found the hat and was on the look-out for the owner. Moreover, I was walking very slowly at the moment when I saw the body."

"You think, then, that a person walking at an ordinary pace and not closely observing his surroundings, might have passed the porch without seeing the body?"

"I think it extremely likely," I answered. "In fact, while I was waiting for the constable, a man did actually pass through

without noticing the body. He was certainly in a great hurry, but I think if he had not been, he still might not have noticed anything."

"That," said the coroner, addressing the jury, "is, of course, only an opinion, but it agrees with the facts to which the witness has deposed; and the point may be of some importance. Does anything further occur to you, Mr. Mortimer, or do you think that you have told us all that you have to tell?"

"I think I have told you all I know about the matter," I replied; whereupon the coroner, having invited the jury to ask any questions that they wished to ask and receiving no response, the depositions were read and signed and the next witness called.

Constable Walter Allen of the City Police, having completed the preliminaries, deposed as follows: "I was on duty in Cornhill on the evening of Monday the ninth of September. At eight-two p.m. on that evening I was accosted by the last witness, Mr. Robert Mortimer, who informed me that he had seen the dead body of a man lying in the passage leading from St. Michael's Alley to the churchyard. I went with him at once to the place mentioned and there saw the body of deceased in the church porch. The body was partly sitting and partly lying. It was seated on the lowest of the three steps and was leaning back in the corner against the church door. I examined the body sufficiently to assure myself that the man was really dead and then I went away and telephoned to the station in Old Jewry, reporting the discovery and returned to the passage to wait until I was relieved."

"You have heard what the last witness said about the darkness of the passage," said the coroner. "Do you agree that it would have been possible for anyone to pass through the passage without noticing the body?"

"Yes," the constable replied, "I do. It was growing dark out in the street, and in the passage, which is a sort of tunnel, the light was very dim; and in the porch, which is about eight feet deep, it was practically dark. A person might easily have passed through the covered passage without seeing the body in the porch."

This completed the constable's evidence, and as he retired, the name of Inspector Pryor was called; whereupon that officer came forward, and having been sworn, proceeded to give his testimony with professional conciseness and precision. Taking up the thread of the constable's story, he confirmed the description of the body and its position in the porch and agreed that it might have been lying there unnoticed for some time—perhaps as long as half an hour—before it was discovered.

"Were you able," the coroner asked, "to form any opinion as to how deceased met with his death?"

"Yes. When the body had been put on the stretcher, I examined the place where it had been lying and there I found the pieces of a broken hypodermic syringe and some drops of liquid on the stone step. The fragments of the syringe gave off a smell rather like bitter almonds and so did the liquid, which I took up with a piece of clean blotting-paper. The fragments of the syringe are in this box but the blotting-paper was handed to the medical officer."

He handed a small cardboard box to the coroner who opened it, peered in, sniffed at it, and passed it on to the jury. Then he asked: "Were there any finger-prints on the fragments of the syringe?"

"Only a few smears that were quite undecipherable. I examined the button of the plunger very carefully, but even there I could find nothing but a smear."

"You were able to ascertain the identity of deceased?"

"Yes, there were a number of letters in his pocket addressed to Abel Webb, Esq. which enabled us to make the necessary enquiries."

"Besides the syringe, did you find anything on the spot that could throw light on this mysterious affair? Any signs of a struggle, for instance?"

"Nothing whatever," was the reply. "But as to a struggle, seeing that the floor of the passage is paved and that of the porch tiled, there would hardly be any traces even if a struggle had occurred."

"No," said the coroner, "I suppose there would not." He reflected for a few moments, and then, as there was apparently nothing more to be got out of the Inspector, he intimated that the examination was concluded; and when the depositions had been read and signed, the officer retired.

"I think," said the coroner, "that, as I see that Dr. Ripley is present, we had better take the medical evidence next so as not to detain the doctor unnecessarily."

The new witness, a small, very alert-looking gentle man, having been sworn and having stated his name and professional qualifications, looked enquiringly at the coroner; who, after a brief glance at his notes, opened the examination.

"Perhaps, Doctor," said he, "it would save time if you were to give us your evidence in the form of a statement. You saw the body, I think, shortly after the discovery."

"Yes," replied the witness "On Monday evening, the ninth of September, at eight-fifty-six, I received a summons by telephone from the police to go to the mortuary to examine a body which had just been brought in. I went at once and arrived there at five minutes past nine. There I found the body of the deceased which had been undressed and laid on the mortuary table. At the first glance I formed the provisional opinion that deceased had died as a result of poisoning by hydrocyanic acid or some cyanide compound. The face, and especially the lips, were of a distinct violet colour. The eyes

were wide open, set in a fixed stare. The jaws were firmly closed and there was slight stiffening of the muscles at the back of the neck. The hands were tightly clenched and the finger nails were blue. These are the usual appearances in cases of cyanide poisoning, but the froth on the lips, which nearly always occurs in such cases, was absent.

"I examined the body for bruises or other signs of violence, but there were none, excepting that on the left thigh, a couple of inches from the groin, was a very distinct puncture which looked as if it had been made with a hypodermic needle of unusually large size. I was shown a broken syringe which had been found close to the body. It was not an ordinary hypodermic syringe but a larger kind; what is known as a serum syringe; and the needle was not a regular serum needle, but a longer and stouter form with a larger bore, such as is used by veterinary surgeons. I produce for your inspection an exactly similar syringe, but fitted with an ordinary serum needle, which you can compare with the broken syringe that was handed to you by the inspector."

He laid the syringe on the table and paused while the coroner and the jury compared it with the fragments in the box. When they had made the comparison and put the two syringes aside, he resumed: "The broken syringe and the needle both contained minute quantities of a clear liquid, which I collected in a pipette for subsequent analysis. But, at the time, I could tell by the characteristic smell of bitter almonds that it was one of the cyanide compounds."

"So that, in effect," said the coroner, "you had then established the cause of death."

"Yes," was the reply, "there was practically no room for doubt. The body showed the distinctive appearances of cyanide poisoning. There was no froth on the lips, which suggested that the poison had not been swallowed. There was the mark of a hypodermic needle, and there was a syringe containing traces of a cyanide compound. It was all perfectly consistent."

"You subsequently made a post mortem examination?"

"Yes; and, as it is very important in cases of poisoning by hydrocyanic acid or cyanide, I made the post-mortem the same night. But first I analysed the liquid in the pipette; which I found to be a concentrated solution of potassium cyanide."

"Did the post-mortem throw any fresh light on the case?"

"Not very much, but it converted the inference into an ascertained fact. I can say with certainty that deceased died from the effects of a very large dose of potassium cyanide injected into the upper part of the thigh—the region which is known as Scarpa's Triangle. But one, possibly important, fact came to light, which was that the needle of the syringe entered the great vein of the thigh—the femoral vein."

"In what respect is that fact of importance?" the coroner asked.

"In its bearing on the rapidity with which the poison will have taken effect. Five grains of potassium cyanide will, if swallowed, produce death in about a quarter of an hour. The same quantity injected hypodermically would cause death in a minute or two at the most; while if it were injected into one of the great veins, death would probably follow in a matter of seconds. Now, in the present case, a much larger quantity was discharged directly into this great vein; from which I infer that death must have occurred practically instantaneously."

"Is it possible to say how much was injected?"

"Not in exact terms. I made only a qualitative analysis. Anything like an exact estimate of quantity would have involved a long and complicated procedure and it would have served no useful purpose. But I can say confidently, that the amount of cyanide injected was at least ten grains."

"When you first saw the body, did you form any opinion as to how long deceased had been dead?"

"Yes. Judging principally by the temperature of the body, I should say that he had been dead about an hour."

"You mentioned some stiffening of the muscles—apparently rigor mortis. Would that occur so soon after death?"

"The clenching of the jaws and hands was not due to rigor mortis. It was really cadaveric spasm and will have occurred at the moment of death. But the stiffening of the neck muscles did indicate the beginning of rigor mortis and was, of course, much earlier than in the average of cases. But there is nothing remarkable in this early onset. It very commonly occurs in cases of violent death and especially of suicide. I don't think deceased had been dead more than about an hour."

The coroner wrote down this statement and appeared to scan the preceding evidence before putting the next question. At length he looked up and turned to the witness.

"You say that death was due to poison injected by means of a syringe. Could that injection have been administered by deceased himself?"

"Yes. The site chosen was not a very convenient one for self-administration but it was well within reach, and self-administration would not have been difficult."

"So far as you could judge from your examination, was there anything that suggested either that deceased had or had not administered the poison to himself?"

"In a medical sense and in terms of mere physical possibility, there was no evidence one way or the other."

The coroner looked at the witness critically, and then remarked: "I seem to detect a note of doubt and reservation in your answer. Is that not so?"

"Perhaps it is," the doctor replied. "But I am here as a medical witness and my evidence is properly restricted to what I know, or can reasonably infer from my examination of the body."

"That is a highly correct attitude, doctor," said the coroner with a faint smile, "but I don't think we need be quite so particular. Have you any opinion, medical or other, as to whether deceased did or did not administer the poison to himself?"

"I have," the witness replied promptly. "My opinion is that he did not administer the poison to himself."

"That is perfectly definite," said the coroner, "and I am sure the jury would like to hear your reasons for that opinion, as I should myself."

"My opinion," said Dr. Ripley, "is based upon the circumstances of the deceased's death. Either he killed himself or was killed by some other person. There is no question of accident or misadventure. It is either suicide or homicide. If we consider the theory of suicide, we are confronted by two anomalies.

"The first is the syringe. Why should deceased have used a hypodermic syringe? There is no reason at all. In the case of morphia there would be a reason; for the poison acts comparatively slowly, and large doses, if swallowed, tend to cause vomiting and so defeat the suicide's ends. But cyanide poisons act very rapidly and tend to produce death before the stomach becomes disturbed. Suicide by means of potassium cyanide is not uncommon, but the usual method is to swallow one or more tablets; and this is quite efficient for the purpose. I have never before heard of a syringe being used for this poison.

"The conditions in the case of homicide are exactly the reverse. You can't compel a man to swallow a tablet or even a liquid poison. But you can stick a hypodermic needle into him even if he has time to resist. And then the peculiarities of this particular syringe are adapted to homicide but not at all to suicide. The big veterinary needle would cause considerable pain in insertion. Its only advantage, its large bore, enabling the syringe to be discharged rapidly, would be of no benefit to the suicide; but it would be of vital importance to a murderer, who would want to get the business over as quickly as possible and make off.

"The other anomaly is the place where the death occurred. Why should a suicide, having provided himself with the poison and the syringe, go forth to use them in a public thoroughfare when he could have done the business without disturbance in his own premises? And why, if he chose a public place, should he have selected a dark corner in an unfrequented passage? To a suicide, the solitude and obscurity of the place would offer no advantage. But to a murderer, those conditions would be essential; for he would want to get clear of the neighbourhood before the body was discovered. In short, the mode of death, the means used, and the place selected, were all unadapted to suicide, but perfectly adapted to homicide."

As the doctor concluded his exposition, a murmur of approval arose from the jury, and the coroner, who also appeared to be deeply impressed, commented "Dr. Ripley has given us, in a very ingenious and cogent argument, his reasons for taking a particular view of this case, and I am sure that when we come to consider the evidence as a whole, we shall give them due weight. And now, as he is a busy man, I think we ought not to detain him any longer, unless any of you wish for further information."

He looked enquiringly at the jury, and the foreman, in response to the implied invitation, signified that he would like to put a question.

"The doctor," said he, "has referred to the solitude and obscurity of the place where the body was found. I should like to ask him if he has any personal acquaintance with that place."

"Yes," replied the witness, "I know it very well indeed. My practice is in the City of London and I am perfectly familiar with all the courts and alleys that form the short cuts from one main thoroughfare to others. As to St. Michael's Alley, I think that hardly a week passes in which I do not pass through it at least once."

"And if you pass through it," said the foreman, "I suppose other people do."

"Undoubtedly," the witness agreed; "and in the day a fair number of people pass up and down the alley, although after business hours, when the City has emptied, it is very little frequented. But the point is that when I go up the alley I go straight up to Castle Court; I don't turn off through the covered passage. And other people do the same, and for the same reason, which is that the covered passage also leads to Castle Court but by a less direct route. The only people who habitually use the covered passage are those who are employed in the office building that faces the churchyard. When they have gone, there are probably periods of half an hour or more during which not a soul passes through that passage."

The foreman expressed himself as quite satisfied with the explanation and thanked the witness, who was then released to go about his business. When he had departed, the name of Alfred Stowell was called and a middle-aged, gentlemanly man came forward and took his place at the table. Mr. Stowell, having been sworn, gave his particulars, describing himself as the manager of The Cope Refrigerating Company, of Gracechurch Street, London.

"You have viewed the body of deceased," said the coroner. "Did you recognise it as that of anyone whom you knew?"

"Yes. It is the body of Mr. Abel Webb, lately my assistant manager."

"How long had he been with you?"

"Less than two months. He took up his duties with us on the twenty-second of last July."

"Do you know how he was employed before he came to you?"

"He was in the service of the Commonwealth and Dominion Steamship Company and had been for about ten years. He had served as purser on several of their ships and it was on account of his experience in that capacity that my firm engaged him."

"I don't quite follow that. In what way is a purser's experience of value to you?"

"The ships of the Commonwealth Line are engaged in the frozen meat trade, and Mr. Webb had a rather special knowledge of refrigerating plant, as well as of the trade in general."

"What sort of person was deceased—as to temperament, I mean? Did he strike you as a man who might possibly take his own life?"

"Most certainly not," the witness replied. "He was of a singularly cheerful and happy disposition and very pleased with his new occupation after the long years at sea."

"Have you any reason to suppose that he was in financial difficulties or in any way troubled about money?"

"No reason at all. Quite the contrary, in fact. I gathered from certain remarks that he let fall that he was in very comfortable circumstances. He was a bachelor without any dependants or responsibilities and had been steadily saving money all the time that he was at sea. That is what I understood from him. Of course, I have no first-hand knowledge of his affairs."

"So far as you know, had deceased any enemies?"

"I am not aware that he had, and I have no reason to suppose that he had. In the excellent testimonial from his late employers he was described as an amiable and kindly man who was universally liked. I know no more than that."

"Do you know of anything that could throw light on the manner and circumstances of his death?"

"Nothing whatever," was the reply; and as this seemed to conclude the evidence, the coroner asked the jury the usual question, and when the depositions had been signed the witness was released.

For some time after he had retired, the coroner sat scanning his notes with a manifestly dissatisfied air. At length he confided his difficulties to the jury.

"There is no denying," said he, "that the evidence which we have heard has left this mysterious affair to a great extent unelucidated; and the question arises as to whether it is advisable to adjourn the inquiry and endeavour to obtain further evidence. On the whole, as the police have not succeeded in discovering any of deceased's relatives, I am disposed to think that nothing would be gained by an adjournment. The further elucidation, if it is possible, seems to lie outside our province and within that of the police. Accordingly, I think it will be best for us to try to find a verdict on the evidence which is before us."

"It is unnecessary for me to recapitulate that evidence. It was all very clearly given and you have followed it closely and attentively. The question that you have to decide is: Who injected the poison? If deceased injected it himself; it is obviously a case of suicide. If you decide that it was injected by some other person you will have to find a verdict of wilful murder, since the injection could not have been given for any lawful purpose."

"The difficulty of deciding between suicide and murder is that there is no positive evidence of either. The medical evidence is to the effect that suicide was physically possible and that murder was physically possible. That is all that we have in the way of positive evidence. And in considering the medical evidence we must be careful to keep the facts separate from the opinions. The facts sworn to by the medical witness we can accept confidently; but the witness's opinions, weighty though they are, can be accepted only so far as your judgment confirms them. It is you who have to find the verdict, and that verdict must be based on the evidence which you have heard and on nothing else. That, I think, is all I need say, except to remind you that you are not in the position of a jury at a criminal trial, who are bound to decide yes or no, guilty or not guilty. If, having considered the evidence, you find it insufficient to enable you to decide between the alternatives of murder and suicide, you are at liberty to say so."

When the coroner had finished speaking, the members of the jury drew together and engaged in earnest and anxious consultation. It was a difficult question that they had to settle and they very properly took their time in debating it. At length the foreman announced that they had agreed on their verdict, and in reply to the coroner's question stated "We find that deceased died from the effects of a poison injected into his body with a syringe, but whether the injection was administered by himself or by some other person there is no evidence to show."

"Yes," said the coroner, "I don't see that you could have found otherwise. I shall record an open verdict and any further inquiries that may be necessary or possible will be conducted by the police."

The proceedings having now come to an end, the audience and the witnesses rose and filed out into the street; and as I took my way back to the bank I reflected a little uncomfortably on what I had heard. It was a horrible affair and profoundly mysterious. If I had been a member of the jury my verdict would have been the same as that had been recorded. But it would not have expressed my inward convictions. The doctor's convincing exposition, which still rang in my ears, had but confirmed in my mind an already formed belief.



The circumstance of the tragedy seemed to whisper 'Murder'; and as I entered Ball Court (instinctively avoiding the neighbourhood of the fatal passage) and threaded the maze of alleys into George Yard and Lombard Street, I looked about me with a shuddering interest, speculating on the way that poor Webb had gone to his death and wondering whether the callous murderer—with the charged syringe ready in his pocket—had walked at his side or had waylaid him in the covered passage.

---

## V. — CLIFFORD'S INN

THE events of the evening which I had spent with John Gillum, though they threw a good deal of light on his financial affairs, by no means diminished my interest in, or curiosity concerning, those affairs. On the contrary, having now clearly established the principal channel through which his money flowed—virtually into the gutter—I found myself the more concerned with the question whether that was the sole channel or whether he might perchance be dropping money in ways even less desirable than gambling. I have mentioned that at intervals of about a month he was accustomed to present a "self" cheque for a considerable amount, never less, though usually more, than five hundred pounds. It might be that this represented merely "the sinews of war" for the month's gambling. But to my eye it looked like something different, something suggesting a definite periodic payment; and this view was strengthened by the fact that other drafts, often for large sums, were presented at irregular intervals. These, from their irregularity in time and amount, seemed much more likely to represent his gaming losses.

The periodic cheque was usually drawn about the fourteenth day of the month (rather suggesting a payment on the fifteenth) and it was Gillum's custom to notify the bank a day in advance of the amount of cash that he intended to withdraw. Accordingly, as the day drew near, I awaited the notification with some expectancy; and sure enough, on the morning of the thirteenth—two days after the inquest—it was delivered at the bank and shown to me by the manager, as Gillum usually elected to transact his business with me. This time the amount was six hundred and fifty pounds; and as Gillum had a preference for notes that had been in circulation, some sorting out of the stock was necessary.

On the morning of the fourteenth, soon after the bank had opened, he made his appearance, and coming straight over to my "pitch," laid his cheque on the counter.

"I'm afraid I'm the bane of your life, Mortimer," said he, "with my big cash drafts. You ought to have a note-counting machine—turn a handle, shoot 'em out by the dozen and show the number on a dial."

"It would be a convenience," I admitted, "though I doubt whether a court of law would accept the reading of the machine as evidence. But it is no great trouble to count a few hundred notes, and at any rate, it is what I am here for."

I brought out the bundles of notes that I had prepared in readiness for the payment and having re-counted them, passed the bundles across to him.

"You had better check them," said I as he picked them up and stuffed them into his pocket.

"No need," he replied. "I'll take them as read. I'm not equal to your lightning manipulation, and if we differed I should be sure to be wrong."

He paused to distribute the seven bundles more evenly and then, as there were no customers waiting at the moment, lingered to gossip. "I hope," said he, "you were none the worse for our little dissipation."

"Thank you, no," I replied. "A little sleepy the next morning, but I am quite convalescent now."

"Good," said he. "We must have another outing soon, not quite so boisterous. We might go and hear some music."

"That is quite a good idea," said I, "and it reminds me that an opportunity presents itself this very day. Do you care for organ music?"

"I like it in church," he replied; "not so much in a concert hall. The appropriate atmosphere seems to be lacking."

"Then," said I, "perhaps you would like to come with me this evening to St. Peter's, Cornhill. There is to be an organ recital from six to seven by Dr. Dyer. I am going, and if you can manage it, I can promise you a musical treat."

He considered for a few moments and then replied: "It sounds rather alluring and I've got the evening free. So I accept subject to conditions; which are that after the recital you come along to my chambers and join me in a little rough bachelor dinner. I can't do you in Giamborini's style but you won't starve. When we have fed, we can either smoke a pipe and yarn or go out somewhere. What do you say?"

I accepted promptly, for the proposed entertainment was much more to my taste than a restaurant dinner; and when we had made the necessary arrangements he took his leave and I reverted to my duties.

At half-past five he reappeared at the bank and found me waiting outside, and we strolled together up Gracechurch Street, looking in at Leadenhall Market on our way, and took our seats in the church at five minutes to the hour. The fame of the organist had drawn a surprisingly large number of men and women to the recital, and it was evident by the instant hush that fell as soon as the music began that Dr. Dyer had a genuinely appreciative audience.

And I was interested, and a little surprised, to note that Gillum not only enjoyed but—as I gathered from his whispered comments in the intervals—followed the rather austere and technical works that were played with manifest sympathy and

understanding. One would hardly have associated the gambling den and the racecourse with a refined taste for music. But Gillum was a rather queer mixture in many respects.

When the recital came to an end, we set forth on foot to stretch our legs and sharpen our appetites with the walk of a little over a mile from Cornhill to Clifford's Inn, beguiling the short journey with a discussion of the music that we had been listening to, and comments on objects of interest that we observed by the way. In Fleet Street Gillum gave me another mild surprise by halting me opposite Anderton's Hotel and bidding me note the fine silhouette that St. Dunstan's Church and the Law Courts made against the sunset sky.

"I always stop here to look at the view," said he, "and although the shapes are always the same, the picture is different every time I see it. There is a lot of fine scenery of a kind in the streets of London."

Once more, as we walked on, I reflected on the strange contradictions and inconsistencies of my companion's temperament. Somehow, he managed to combine a sensitiveness to the picturesque and beautiful with a singular tolerance of the sordid and unlovely.

A few yards farther on we turned up Fetter Lane, and crossing the road, made for an iron gate set in a row of railings and now standing wide open. Entering, we found ourselves in the precincts of Clifford's Inn and seemed in a moment to have passed out of the clamorous twentieth century into the quiet and dignified repose of a bygone age. I knew the place slightly from having occasionally ventured in to explore and I now looked round with friendly recognition of the pleasant old red brick houses and the slightly faded grass and trees in the garden.

"This is my lair," said Gillum, indicating an arched doorway lighted by a hanging lantern and surmounted by a tablet bearing the inscription "P.R.G. 1682." Within the deep portal a shadowy flight of stairs faded away into profound obscurity, and when Gillum led the way in and up the stairs, he too, faded into the darkness and became a mere black shape against the dim light from the landing above. I groped my way up after him (for the lamp at the entry was not yet lit) and presently emerged on to the landing where I found my host inserting a key into a massive iron-bound door above which was painted in black letters on a faded white ground, "Mr. John Gillum." The forbidding, gaol-like door swung open heavily disclosing a lighter inner door garnished with an ordinary handle and a small brass knocker. Gillum turned the handle, and throwing open the door, invited me to enter; and as soon as I was inside, he pulled to the outer door, which closed with the snap of a spring latch and a resounding clang suggestive of the door of a prison cell.

"Just as well to sport the oak," said Gillum. "Not that anyone ever comes after business hours, but it is more pleasant to feel that you can't be interrupted."

He switched on the light and I was instantly impressed, by the contrast of the cheerful, cosy interior with the rather grim approach. A fire—well banked and enclosed by a guard—was burning in the grate, a couple of easy chairs faced each other companionably, and the table, covered with a spotless white cloth, was laid with all the necessary appointments for a meal.

Gillum was a good host. This was a simple, informal "feed" and I was not a guest but a pal who had dropped in. He established the position at once by setting me to work at decanting the bottle of claret that had been stood on the mantel shelf to get the chill off, while he attended to the fire.

"May as well make a bit of a blaze," said he, "though it isn't a cold evening. But a fire is a companionable thing."

He tipped the remaining contents of the scuttle into the grate and then, after a hesitating glance at the empty receptacle, put it down.

"Where do you keep your coal?" I asked, with a view to replenishment.

"In the larder, or cellar or store-room," he replied. "It's that door across the landing, and a most excellent larder it makes; perfectly cool even in the height of summer. And that reminds me that we shall want the butter and cheese and perhaps we might as well get out a bottle of Chablis to go with the lobster—and, by the way, the lobster is in there, too."

He went to the door and I followed to give assistance in carrying the goods. Not unnecessarily, as it turned out, for the door across the landing was fitted, not only with a night latch, but also with a rather strong spring, fixed to the inside of the door, as the latter opened outwards. I stood with my back against the open door and received the butter and the lobster, holding them until Gillum collected the cheese and the wine and came out, when I moved away and the door closed with a slam and a click of the lock.

"Now, Mortimer," said Gillum, when he had deposited our burdens on the table, "you are the wine waiter. Just open the chablis while I go into the kitchen and hot up the soup."

He retired through one of two small doorways which faced each other at the farther side of the room and I began operations on the capsule of the bottle. But at this moment the empty coal-scuttle caught my eye, and at the same time it occurred to me that we must have left the key in the larder door, since we had both come away with our hands full. With the double purpose of retrieving the key and replenishing the scuttle, I picked up the latter and carried it out to the landing; and, sure enough, there was the key in the door. I turned it, and bearing the spring in mind, when I had pulled the door open I set the scuttle against it while I went in and switched on the light. Then I took up the scuttle, carefully easing the door to, so that it remained unlatched (though there was a knob on the inside by which I could have let myself out), and proceeded to prospect. There was no difficulty in locating the coal, for a large bin or locker that extended right along the farther wall was so well filled that its lid gaped and displayed its contents.

I threw up the lid of the locker, and, taking the scoop from the scuttle, began rapidly to shovel out the coal, my movements rather accelerated by the unpleasant cellar-like atmosphere, which struck an uncomfortable chill in contrast with the warm dining-room. I soon had the scuttle filled, but in my haste a few lumps of coal fell on the floor. Having put the scoop back in its socket, I stooped to pick up the stray lumps with my fingers. And at that moment I was conscious of a sudden feeling of giddiness and a loud ringing noise in my ears. Whether it was due to my position or to the abrupt change of temperature I cannot say; but as the place seemed to whirl around me and I felt myself swaying as if I were about to fall, I hastily grabbed the edge of the locker, pulled myself upright and staggered out on to the landing.

As I emerged from the larder, letting the door slam behind me, Gillum appeared at the door of the living room and stared at me in dismay.

“Good God, Mortimer!” he exclaimed. “What on earth is the matter?”

Without waiting for an explanation, he hustled me into the living-room, threw up the window, and dragging a chair towards it, sat me down in the full draught.

“What was it?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “I just stooped to pick up a lump of coal and then I suddenly turned giddy.”

“Strange,” said he, looking at me anxiously. “Have you ever had any attacks like this before?”

“Never,” I answered; “and I can’t imagine what brought it on now. I suppose it was the sudden stooping.”

“But that won’t do, Mortimer,” said he. “You’ve no business to get giddy from stooping at your age. I don’t believe you take proper care of yourself. You’d better let me get you a nip of whisky.”

“No, thank you,” said I. “The fresh air has done the business. I am all right now excepting a slight headache, and I expect that will go off in a few minutes. By the way, I left the light on in the larder.”

“I’ll go and switch off and get the coal-scuttle,” said he, “and then we will have some grub. That will complete the cure, with a glass of wine.”

He went out and presently returned with the scuttle, shutting the “oak” behind him. Then he fetched the soup from the kitchen and we drew our chairs up to the table and proceeded to business.

It was a pleasant little dinner, and not so very little, for when we had disposed of the lobster, the raising of a couple of covers revealed a cold roast fowl and a pile of sliced ham, the produce, as I learned, of an invaluable shop in Fetter Lane. Moreover, as the food was cold it lent itself to leisurely consumption and the free flow of conversation. And conversation with Gillum naturally tended to drift in the direction of betting and play.

“How is the infallible system progressing?” I asked.

“Slowly,” he admitted, “but still, I think the thing is possible. I don’t make much of it from the mathematical direction, so I am falling back on the excellent method of trial and error. I have got a miniature roulette box and I find it invaluable for trying out schemes of chances. I’ll show it to you.”

He produced a beautifully made little wooden box, and placing it on the table, affectionately twisted the ivory spindle.

“Yes,” I agreed, “it is an excellent contraption, for you can play any odds you like against yourself and win in any event. I should advise you to stick to it. Do your gambling at home—and let the Foucaults have a rest.”

He laughed, rather grimly I thought.

“Perhaps,” said he, “it might rather be a question of their letting me have a rest. But your advice is futile, as you know perfectly well. Solo roulette is well enough for experimental purposes, but it isn’t sport and it isn’t gambling. You can’t gamble if you don’t stand to win or lose.”

Of course, I knew this and his reply left me with nothing to say; so I reverted to the roast fowl and inwardly speculated on the possibility of a connection between the Foucaults and the morning’s transaction at the bank. He had spoken as if they gave him more attention than he cared for, but obviously the subject was one that I could not even approach. When, searching for some new topic, I suddenly remembered the circumstances of our first meeting and their later developments, in which Gillum might probably be interested.

“I intended,” said I, “to bring you a copy of The Telegraph which I kept for you. It contains a full report of the inquest on that poor fellow whose body I discovered. But perhaps you have seen it.”

“I have,” he replied. “I saw a pretty full account of it in an evening paper. Extraordinary affair. Rather horrible, too. I liked the way in which that doctor fellow let out. He knew his own mind.”

“Yes, he was remarkably outspoken for a medical witness. But I certainly agreed with him, and so, I think, did the jury. If he hadn’t been so downright I suspect the verdict would have been suicide while temporarily insane.”

“Very likely. But what was there to suggest insanity?”

“Nothing that I know of,” I replied. “I was only repeating the usual formula. When a man commits suicide it is generally assumed that he was temporarily insane when he did it.”

"I know," said Gillum. "But it is just a convention, and a silly convention which ought to be dropped. Really, it is a theological survival. The pretence of insanity is for the purpose of proving that deceased was not aware of the nature of his act and that there fore he was not guilty of *felo de se* and did not die in a state of mortal sin. It was quite well meant, but it was always a false pretence; and now that we have outgrown theological crudities of that sort, the formula ought to be abolished excepting in cases where there is actual evidence of insanity."

He spoke with an amount of feeling that rather surprised me. For it did not appear to me that the point was of any importance. Nor did I entirely agree with his view of the matter, and accordingly proceeded to contest it.

"I don't think that is quite the position, Gillum," I objected. "No doubt there is a theological factor, but the usual verdict is based on the assumption that the very act of suicide constitutes evidence of mental unsoundness; and I think it is quite a reasonable assumption."

"Why do you think so?" he demanded.

"Because," I replied, "the impulse of self-preservation—the preservation of one's own life—is so universal and so deep-seated as to amount to one of the fundamental instincts of intelligent living beings. But an act which is in opposition to a natural instinct is an abnormal act and affords evidence of an abnormal state of mind."

"I admit the instinct," he rejoined. "But man is a reasoning animal and is not completely dominated by his instincts. If in a particular case he is convinced that the following of those instincts is to his disadvantage, surely it will be reasonable for him to disregard them and adopt the action which he knows is to his advantage. Let us take an instance. Suppose a man to be suffering from a painful and incurable form of malignant disease. He knows that it is going to kill him within a measurable time. He knows that until death releases him he will suffer continual pain. Is he going to drag on a miserable existence, waiting for the inevitable death, or will he not, if he is a man, anticipate that death and cut short his sufferings?"

He had put his case with such cogency that I was rather at a loss. Nevertheless, I objected, somewhat weakly: "The instance you give is a very exceptional one. The conditions are quite abnormal."

"Exactly," he rejoined. "That is my point. The conditions being abnormal, the common rules of normal conduct do not apply. The conduct is adjusted to the conditions and consequently is rational. But that is true, I think, in a large proportion of suicides. If you consider them in detail with an open mind you must come to the conclusion that the act is a reasonable response to the existing conditions."

"I doubt that," said I. "The case that you have cited I should be disposed to admit, but I can think of no other."

"The point is," said he, "whether the conduct is or is not adapted to the existing conditions. If it is it is rational conduct. And a man is entitled to estimate those conditions for himself to decide whether they are or are not acceptable; whether, in those conditions, he would rather be alive or not. Whether, in short, life is or is not worth living. If he decides that it is not, then it is reasonable for him to bring it to an end."

"My point is," I rejoined, "that a normal man would always rather be alive than not."

"Then, Mortimer," said he, "I think you are mistaken. Let us take a concrete case. Suppose a man, like yourself, an employee of a bank, tied down to a particular place. Suppose he has a quarrelsome wife who makes his life a misery and perhaps gets him into debt, and a family who are a constant trouble and disgrace to him. What is he to do? He can't escape because he is tied to his job. If he finds life intolerably unpleasant under these conditions, which he cannot alter, what could be more reasonable than for him to bring it to an end? Or again, take the case of a man who has inherited a fortune and has had a roaring good time enjoying all sorts of expensive pleasures. The natural result is that he steadily gets through his money. Now when he comes down to his last shilling what is the prospect before him? What is the natural thing for him to do?"

"The most reasonable thing," I replied, "would be to turn over a new leaf; to get a job, work hard at it and live within his means."

Gillum shook his head. "No, Mortimer," said he. "That would not be possible to the type of man that I am describing. He couldn't do it, and he wouldn't try. If he was absolutely broke, he could try to live by sponging, by borrowing, by fraud or by some other form of crime, but either method would bring him, sooner or later, to disaster; and almost certainly, in the end, to suicide. But I contend that the more reasonable plan would be to anticipate and avoid all these troubles. When once his money was gone and the only kind of life that he cared for had become impossible, I say that the sane and sensible thing for him to do would be to recognise the facts and make his quietus—though not with a bare bodkin."

"But," I exclaimed, "do you mean to tell me seriously that is what you would do, as a considered act, in the circumstances that you mention?"

He laughed and shook a finger at me in mock reproof. "Now, Mortimer," said he, "you know that is quite an improper question. We are considering a hypothetical case, and in effect, a certain question of principle. But you immediately—and quite irrelevantly—turn it into a personal question. What I, personally, might do is beside the mark."

"I don't see that it is," I objected. "If you really mean what you say, I understand that if ever you should go stony broke with no possible chance of recovery you would proceed at once, as a matter of considered policy, to hang yourself or cut your throat."

"No, no, Mortimer," he protested, "I said nothing about hanging or throat-cutting. That would be temporary insanity

with a vengeance. No, pray do me the justice of believing that, if the occasion arose, I should perform the coil-shuffling operation with decency, dignity, and the maximum of personal corn fort. The rope and the carving knife are the wretched resources of the mere lunatic or moron. There is no excuse for such barbarities when, as we know, there are certain medicinal substances which are perfectly efficient for the purpose and which are not only painless but rather agreeable in their operation."

To this I made no reply, for there had come on me a sudden dislike to the turn that the discussion had taken. He had spoken semi-facetiously, but yet there was an underlying seriousness that gave his words a rather gruesome quality. So I let the discussion drop and, after a short silence, directed our talk into a fresh channel.

After dinner Gillum brewed a pot of excellent coffee and we then adjourned to the easy chairs to smoke our pipes and talk; and as I listened to my host's comments and observations on the various topics that we discussed, I was surprised—having regard to the outrageous folly of his conduct—not only at the range of his knowledge and general information but especially at the shrewdness and sanity of his outlook. Moreover, he was a man of some culture. I had already noticed his interest in the more serious forms of music and his lively appreciation of the fine grouping and skyline of the buildings of Fleet Street, and it now appeared that he shared my affection for the quaint nooks and corners and antique survivals of the older parts of London and seemed to have a quite extensive acquaintance with them. Indeed, so pleasant and sympathetic was our gossip and so agreeably did the time slip away that I was quite taken aback when St. Dunstan's clock, reinforced by the more distant bells of St. Clement's, announced the hour of eleven and bade me set forth on my journey homewards.

"I will pilot you out as far as Fleet Street," said Gillum, as he helped me into my overcoat. "Next time you will know your way; and I hope the next will be quite soon."

"You have given me every inducement to repeat the offence," I replied. "It has been a jolly evening. Quite a red-letter day for me."

We sallied forth from the dark entry—but it was dark no longer now that the lamp was alight—and, crossing the courtyard, plunged into the tunnel which passes the Hall, and, crossing the little courtyard, entered Clifford's Inn Passage. The main gate was shut and the night porter sat on a chair by the wicket, holding a newspaper and conversing with a spectacled gentleman who was formally arrayed in a frock coat and tall hat and supported himself on an umbrella.

"That is Mr. Weech," said Gillum, "the Inn porter; a queer old bird, quite a character in his way and a complete Victorian survival. I'll introduce you as you like antiques."

As we approached, Mr. Weech opened the wicket for us and gave my companion "good evening."

"Good evening, Mr. Weech," said Gillum. "Taking a last look round to see that we are all safe before you turn in?"

"That is so," replied Mr. Weech. "It is my custom to conclude the day's duty with a perambulation of the precincts to see that everything is in order."

"A very wise precaution," said Gillum. "It's of no use to have a locked gate if the doubtful characters are lurking inside. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Mortimer, who has been spending the evening with me, so that you may know him in future as an accredited visitor. This is Mr. Weech, the custodian of the Inn and the faithful guardian of our security. As you see, he carries an umbrella as a symbol of his protective functions. Isn't that so, Mr. Weech? I notice that you are never without it."

Mr. Weech chuckled and glanced fondly at the symbol.

"I suppose I am not," he admitted. "When I put on my hat I take up the umbrella automatically. It has become a habit and I do it without thinking. *Consuetudo alterius naturum*, as the saying is."

"Well," said I, as I stepped through the wicket, "it is a wise habit in a fickle climate like ours. Good-night, Mr. Weech."

He raised his hat with an old-fashioned flourish as he returned my valediction, and Gillum and I walked slowly down the passage to Fleet Street.

"An odd fish is Mr. Weech," Gillum remarked. "Quite a good sort but odd. I believe he takes that umbrella to bed with him. And he's a devil for Latin. I suspect he keeps a book of quotations and primes himself with them for conversation. Well, good night, Mortimer. Take care of yourself and come again soon."

As I made my way homewards to my lodgings I turned over the events of the evening. It had been a pleasant experience and Gillum had been a most agreeable companion. Indeed, I had been rather surprised at the way in which he had improved on better acquaintance and I was still puzzled by the contrast between his obvious intelligence and culture and the idiotic manner in which he was wasting his life and his substance. But as I recalled our conversation there was one item that jarred on me badly. Gillum's defence of suicide may have been partly playful. Evidently, he rather inclined to the role of the Devil's Advocate and took a perverse pleasure in arguing and defending a paradox. But still, I had an unpleasant feeling that the views that he had expressed really represented his convictions. And what made the recollection of his argument especially disturbing to me was the fact that one of the cases that he had cited in illustration was alarmingly like what his own case might be. At present, it is true, his wild expenditure was balanced by his very ample income. He never overdrew; and as long as his income continued at its present rate, he would remain solvent and merely waste his possessions.

But suppose some day, his source of income should dry up. Then he would soon be penniless and would quite possibly

fall into debt. And if he did, the very conditions that he had postulated as justifying suicide would be brought into being. It was a profoundly disturbing thought; and though I tried to put it away, it recurred again and again, not only during my journey home, but at intervals in the days that followed.

---

## VI. — THE PASSING OF JOHN GILLUM

HITHERTO I have followed in rather close detail the circumstances of my association with John Gillum. This I have done advisedly; since the purpose of this narrative is to present as clear a picture as I am able of his personality and manner of life. But, having done this, I shall now pass more lightly over the events that occurred during the remainder of our association. That association, which extended over a period of about ten months, was fairly intimate and tended to become more so as the time ran on. Gillum was an entirely acceptable companion; cheerful, lively, humorous, and extremely well-informed. And, apparently, he liked my society, for he took every opportunity of cultivating it. The result was that we met as frequently as could be expected in the case of two rather self-contained men, each of whom had his own particular interests and occupations.

Sometimes he would call for me at the bank, but more commonly our rendezvous was Clifford's Inn, where we would take tea and then sally forth to spend the evening at a concert or a play or in a voyage of discovery into the lesser-known parts of the London in which we were both so much interested. Once, on an off day, I accompanied him to a race meeting, where he narrowly missed winning a considerable sum but actually—as I learned later—dropped about a hundred pounds. But this was the only occasion on which I came into contact with his gambling activities. He had, in his tactful, accommodating way, accepted the fact that betting and games of chance were outside the sphere of my interests and such evidence as came to me of his exploits at the tables or on the turf was in the nature of hearsay. But the books of the bank furnished direct evidence that, whatever those exploits may have been, the net result was displayed on the debit side of his account.

As the period of our friendship lengthened I began to be aware of a rather curious fact; which was that, intimate as we seemed to be, I really knew nothing about him. It was rather remarkable. In respect of his present mode of life and his daily doings he was—or, at least, appeared to be—open even to expansiveness. But of his past life or his antecedents, not a word was ever dropped. Gradually I came to realise that, under this appearance of free and frank confidence, lay a profound secretiveness. It was not a pleasing trait; and it occasioned a certain amount of reflection on my part. And when I came to consider it, I began to perceive that the secretiveness was not limited to the past; for, with all his expansiveness, he never made the slightest references to those periodical drafts on which I had looked—and still looked—with so much suspicion. In short, it began gradually to dawn on me that the confidences that he made with so much apparent openness were in fact limited to what I, in my capacity as his banker, already knew.

Of course, I asked no questions. But, naturally, as I reflected on this secretive habit, amounting virtually to concealment, it aroused some curiosity. I am not in general an inquisitive person. But when I came to consider that this man, with whom I was on terms of daily intimacy, was an absolute stranger to me; that I knew nothing whatever of his past, of his relations, of the places where he had lived, of his profession or calling, if he had any, or of how he passed his time or whether he had any occupation other than gambling; it could not but appear very remarkable. And these reflections inevitably led to others. If his past life was never referred to, could there be any reason for this reticence? Was there anything in his past that made concealment necessary?

The question was not entirely without relevance. The periodical drafts, which had always seemed to me to suggest periodical payments, had raised a suspicion that he was being blackmailed and as time went on, this suspicion tended to grow. But how should he come to be blackmailed? There is no smoke without fire. It is usually impossible to blackmail a man unless there is something in his life that he is unwilling to disclose. Could it be that his past was in some respects unpresentable? Or could it be that, even now, he was engaged in some activities that would not bear the light of day?

These questions presented themselves unsought and unwelcomed. For I liked the man and was unwilling to think ill of him or to harbour suspicions concerning him. Still, there were the facts, and I had to recognise them though the process of recognition cost me some mental discomfort. But presently I began to have anxieties of a different kind. I had always assumed that Gillum's income was derived from a permanent source. The large sums that he had paid in at approximately regular intervals had appeared to represent something in the nature of dividends or an annuity. But in the last month of my acquaintance with him this regularity had become suddenly disturbed. One or two large cheques—unusually large ones—had been paid in, but the balance created by them had begun immediately to melt away. I waited in expectation of the usual credit payment. But the time when it should have become due passed and no such payment was made; and Gillum's account began to show an uncomfortably small balance. It looked rather alarmingly like a failure of the source of supply.

Now, so long as his income was regular, his ridiculous expenditure merely kept him poor when he should have been rich. But with the failure of the supply and the continuance of the expenditure, a very different situation was created. As I scanned his account in our books and noted the growing tendency for the debit to overgrow the credit, I felt that—unless there were some change in the conditions—sooner or later, and probably sooner rather than later, some sort of crash was to be looked for; and, knowing what his ideas were as to the way to meet a crash, I had already dimly envisaged the kind of disaster which actually occurred, and of which I shall now proceed to relate the circumstances.

It was in the early afternoon of a rather sultry day in July that a tall, sunburnt, athletic-looking man came to the bank

and asked to see the manager, explaining that he had been sent by Mr. Penfield and that his business was connected with the affairs of our customer, Mr. John Gillum. On this I pricked up my ears, and when he had been ushered into the manager's room, I waited expectantly for the summons which seemed almost inevitable, having regard to my known intimacy with Gillum; and sure enough, in a few minutes, the bell rang and the clerk who went in to answer it returned to inform me that the manager wished to speak to me. Accordingly I went in and found the manager and the visitor seated on opposite sides of a small table.

"This," said the former, introducing me, "is Mr. Arthur Benson, a cousin of Mr. Gillum's, who has called to make some enquiries; and as you know Mr. Gillum personally as well as officially, you will probably be able to give him more information than I can. Mr. Mortimer is, I think I may say, a fairly intimate friend of your cousin's, Mr. Benson, and may be able to tell you what you want to know."

Mr. Benson shook hands heartily and proceeded at once with his enquiries.

"I am in rather a difficulty, Mr. Mortimer," said he, "and I may add, a little puzzled and worried by the way in which my cousin is behaving. But I had better begin by explaining the circumstances. I have just come from Australia, where I run a sheep farm in which my cousin, Gillum, is to some extent interested. I have been in regular correspondence with him about our affairs and have sent him cheques from time to time, which have been duly acknowledged. Now, as the business which has brought me to England arose quite unexpectedly, I wrote to him from Sydney telling him that I should be coming on by the next boat and asking him either to meet me at Tilbury or to send a letter to the ship there telling me where and when I should find him. Well, he didn't meet me at Tilbury, but he sent a letter which was handed to me as soon as the ship brought up in the river. In this he asked me to come straight on to his chambers in Clifford's Inn.

"Accordingly, I did so; but when I called at his chambers, I could not get any answer to my knock. The place was all shut up, and though I hammered at the iron-bound door with my stick for some time, nothing happened. It was evident that he was not at home.

"This seemed a bit queer and not at all what I should have expected of him. However, I went off and got fixed up at an hotel, and then I came back to the Inn and made another attack on the door. But still there was no sign of life; so I gave it up for the time and went back to my hotel and spent the night there. Next day, I went to the Inn again and had another try. But still there was no result. The place was as still as the grave.

"It was really very extraordinary and I began to wonder whether there could be anything amiss. So I went on to Mr. Penfield, who acted for us in our business transactions, and asked him if he knew anything about Gillum's movements. But he knew nothing at all, not having seen my cousin for some months, but he recommended me to come along here and see whether you knew anything about him or could give me any advice. So here I am; and the question is, can you give me any sort of help or tell me where I may be likely to find him?"

The manager looked at me. "What do you say, Mortimer? You know Mr. Gillum's haunts pretty well, I think. Have you any idea where he is likely to be found?"

"Not the least," I replied. "I should have expected him to be at his chambers, especially as he had made an appointment with Mr. Benson. That is where he lives, and I had always supposed that he, at least, spent the night there."

"When did you see him last?" the manager asked.

"I haven't seen him for nearly a fortnight," I replied. "The last time that I saw him was when he came to the bank last Friday week to cash a cheque. I had a few words with him then but he did not say anything about his intended movements; and, in fact, he could not have had any intention of going away as he had made this appointment with Mr. Benson."

The manager looked thoughtful and rather puzzled. "It really does seem a little queer," said he, "and I think we ought to try to help Mr. Benson as he is a stranger in London. What do you suggest, Mortimer?"

"I hardly know what to suggest," I replied. "It is certainly an odd affair. Perhaps it might be worth while for me to run round with Mr. Benson to Clifford's Inn and try the door again and if we still can't get any answer we might drop in at the lodge and see if we can get any information from Mr. Weech, the porter of the Inn. He might be able to tell us something."

"Yes," said the manager, "that seems about the best thing to do. At any rate, it is worth trying. So perhaps you will kindly take Mr. Benson in tow and see what you can do for him."

With this he stood up and shook hands with Benson, and the latter then accompanied me into the outer office, and when I had got my hat and stick we sallied forth together.

It is no great distance from Gracechurch Street to Clifford's Inn and we agreed to walk; Benson for the advantage of seeing the town and I for the opportunity to think things over and possibly get a little additional information. For, as I have hinted, I was more disturbed by the strange state of affairs than I had admitted either to the manager or to our visitor. I had not mentioned to them the amount of the cheque which had been cashed less than a fortnight ago, but it came to my mind now with a slightly ominous suggestiveness. The amount had been two hundred pounds, which I had paid in one-pound notes; and that payment had not only cleared out the balance but had left the account a few pounds overdrawn.

Reflecting on this, I ventured to make one or two discreet enquiries though avoiding direct questions.

"Your name is fairly familiar to me," I began as a cautious lead off.

"I suppose it is," he replied. "You must have had a good many of my cheques through your hands."

"Yes," said I. "They have come in at pretty regular intervals until just lately. But I don't think I have seen one for over three months. However, the last one was quite a big cheque, if I remember rightly."

"It was," said he; "eleven hundred pounds. That was the final payment."

"Indeed!" said I, rather startled. "Then it was not a continuing transaction?"

"No," he replied. "The payments were instalments of purchase money. The sheep farm that I run originally belonged to Gillum. But he had a fancy to come to England and I was connected with a meat-exporting establishment; so he proposed that I should take over the farm and pay for it by instalments out of income while he should buy with the proceeds, or part of them, a partnership in a firm of meat importers in London. He thought that we could work things to our mutual advantage, and so did I. So I fixed up the deal with him and he came to England and arranged the partnership; and I paid off my debt as well as I could out of income. But after nearly two years I thought that it had gone on for long enough, so I raised a loan and paid off the final instalment in one sum."

"By the way," said I, "did it not occur to you to go round to his firm and ask if he had been there?"

"It did," he replied. "I went there before I went to Mr. Penfield. And then I got another surprise. It seemed that he didn't take to the meat-importing trade and about six months ago he sold his interest in the concern to the other partner and they have not seen anything of him since. It is curious that he should not have said anything about it to me in his letters."

"Very curious," I agreed. And it certainly was very remarkable. But it was not the oddity of his behaviour that principally impressed me. What instantly struck me with devastating force was the appalling fact that, at this moment, John Gillum must be absolutely penniless. Those big cheques had been paid in to my knowledge and had produced a most impressive balance; but that balance had been dribbling away ever faster and faster as the "self" cheques were turned into cash to provide the means for his insane expenditure. And now, as I have said, he had not only drawn out the last penny of his balance but was actually in debt to the bank.

It was a terrible position; and when I reflected on it by the light of his expressed views on the appropriate way to meet a financial crash, the behaviour disclosed by Benson's experiences assumed an undeniably sinister aspect. I said nothing to my companion as to what was in my mind, but, as we approached the neighbourhood of Clifford's Inn, my forebodings became so profound as to engender a very definite distaste for the errand on which I was bent.

We entered the Inn by the postern gate in Fetter Lane, and, crossing the little quadrangle which I knew so well, made our way straight to the rather forbidding entry. As we plunged into the shadow which enclosed the staircase, I could hear the typewriters in the ground-floor office ticking away, conveying a sense of human life and activity which seemed to contrast almost uncannily with the silence and aloofness of the—presumably—empty room upstairs.

We groped our way up the dim staircase and came out on the rather sordid and ill-lighted landing where the empty dust-bin confirmed the suggestion of an absent tenant. But we did not stop to examine the landing. Walking up to the grim iron-bound door, above which the name of Mr. J. Gillum could be read on a painted label, now rather faded and dirt-stained, we listened for a few moments and then tapped on the massive oak panel. Perhaps the word "tapped" is inadequate, for Benson, who carried a stout stick of some hard and heavy wood, applied it in the manner of a battering-ram with such effect that the place resounded with the blows and I expected some protest from the office below.

"Well," said Benson, after banging away for a couple of minutes, "I think we may take it that there is no one at home. Shall we go round and hear what your porter man has got to tell us?"

"I think we had better," I replied; and forthwith led the way down the steep stairs, my state of mind by no means improved by the unpleasant fashion in which the noise of Benson's hammerings had echoed through the building. In fact, I found myself growing distinctly nervous and, as we made our way towards the passage in which the porter's lodge was situated, I began to consider what we had better do if we could get no more satisfactory tidings of the missing man. But I still had some hopes that the porter might be able to resolve the mystery or at least give us a hint of some kind.

A hearty pull at the pendent handle outside the lodge door elicited a cheerful jangle from within; and in a few moments the door opened and Mr. Weech appeared, fully attired as usual in his long frock coat and tall silk hat. Whether he slept in that hat I cannot guess, but it seemed that he wore it constantly from the time when he arose in the morning until he retired at night. At least, that was my impression, for I never saw him without it. He now regarded me benevolently through his spectacles and then cast an enquiring glance at my companion.

"We have called, Mr. Weech," said I, "to make one or two enquiries and see if you can help us. A rather unaccountable thing has happened. My friend, Mr. Gillum, seems to be absent from his chambers. We have hammered at his door and can't get any answer, and my friend here, Mr. Benson, tried yesterday and the day before, but he also could not make anybody hear."

Mr. Weech retired for a few moments, apparently to fetch an umbrella, for he reappeared with one in his hand; and thus fortified, he again inspected me, first through his spectacles and then over them and replied in a tone of mild protest:

"But what about it, Mr. Mortimer? A gentleman is not bound to stay in his chambers if he doesn't want to. He isn't under any contract to be in residence excepting at his own convenience and by his own choice. Probably he has gone out of town for a few days. Gentlemen frequently do; and they are not under any obligation to give notice of their intentions. That is the



advantage of living in chambers.”

“Yes,” I replied, “but that is not quite the position. Mr. Gillum had an appointment with Mr. Benson at his chambers and it was a rather special one, definitely made by letter. Mr. Gillum could hardly have gone away for a holiday and ignored this engagement.”

Here I gave Mr. Weech a slight sketch of the circumstances to which he listened with interest and growing attention.

“M’yes,” he agreed, when I had finished, “it does sound a little remarkable, the way you put it. Of course, he might have overlooked the matter, but that doesn’t seem likely. Still, I certainly have not seen him about the Inn for the last day or two.”

“When did you last see him?” Benson asked.

Mr. Weech considered for a few moments. “Now, let me see,” said he. “I met him one evening just outside the Hall. He was coming down towards Fleet Street. Now, when would that be? I should say it would be about ten days ago.” He reflected again and then confirmed his estimate with the definite statement: “Yes. Ten days ago it was. I can fix it by the fact that one of our tenants, who was a bit in arrears with his rent, came to the lodge to settle up. And very glad I was. The Court don’t like rents to get behindhand.”

“Very well, Mr. Weech,” said I. “You haven’t seen him for ten days. Now is that at all unusual?”

Mr. Weech, having duly considered the question, decided that it was slightly unusual. “You see,” he explained, “I am pretty constantly up and down the Inn and I tend to run up against the resident tenants, particularly if they are fairly regular in their habits, as Mr. Gillum is. I should think I must have met him nearly every day since he came here. And he is a rather sociable man and likes to stop for a bit of a chat.”

“Then,” said I, “that seems to confirm our idea that there is something unusual about this affair. I suppose you don’t happen to have a duplicate key of his chambers?”

Mr. Weech seemed to stiffen at my suggestion. “We don’t usually keep duplicate keys of gentle men’s chambers,” he replied. “The agreements stipulate that the tenants shall have full use and enjoyment of their premises, which would not be the case if we reserved either the right or the means of entry. But, as a matter of fact, I have a duplicate key of Mr. Gillum’s chambers. I offered it to him, but he said that he had no use for a second key, and he thought that it might be as well for me to keep it in case he might lose his or in the event of some emergency arising. But why do you ask?”

“Well,” I said a little diffidently, “it occurred to me that it might be as well, if you had a key, just to look in and see that all is as it should be.”

Mr. Weech shook his head decidedly. “No, sir,” said he, “I have no right to enter the chambers of any of our tenants without his express permission and authority.”

I realised Mr. Weech’s point of view and fully agreed as to its propriety. But, having ascertained that a key was available, I made up my mind quite definitely that those chambers had got to be entered.

“That is true enough in ordinary circumstances,” said I. “But the circumstances are not ordinary. You must see that something unusual has happened, and I may say that Mr. Benson and I are extremely uneasy. Supposing Mr. Gillum should have been taken ill or had some sort of accident.”

Mr. Weech was visibly impressed though he made no reply, and I proceeded to press my advantage.

“What would people say if it should become known that he had been left in his chambers without help simply because of a mere scruple of official etiquette?”

“Yes,” Mr. Weech admitted, “there is something in that. It would be very awkward for him, shut up there, solus cum soli, if he was seriously ill. But we don’t know that he is.”

“We don’t,” I agreed, “but we can easily find out. Come, now, Mr. Weech, don’t stand on mere pedantic ceremony. Do the reasonable thing. Mr. Gillum may be, at this moment, lying in there, helpless, waiting for someone to succour him. We ought to go and see whether he is or not. And I am not suggesting anything irregular. Mr. Benson is his cousin and I am a responsible friend. I am only asking you to do what he would have expected you to do. You say that he left the key in your custody in case any emergency should arise. Well, an emergency has arisen and you have got the key.”

“I should hardly call it an emergency,” Mr. Weech objected, “but still I don’t want to be obstinate. You have shown cause why a visit of inspection might reasonably be made, and, if you and Mr. Benson will take the responsibility, I will get the key and go round with you to the chambers. Then you will be able to see for yourselves whether there is or is not any foundation for your anxieties.”

With this he went back into the lodge and presently returned carrying on his finger a couple of keys on a string loop to which was attached a wooden label.

Together we passed up the outer passage, across the small courtyard, through the covered way (not to call it a tunnel) on which the door of the Hall opened, and, crossing the inner courtyard, approached Gillum’s entry. Our previous visit with its very audible accompaniments had evidently not passed unnoticed, for, as we walked into the entry, the door of the typewriting office opened slightly and a face appertaining to an elderly woman appeared, surveying us with an interest that

was not entirely benevolent.

On arriving at the landing, Mr. Weech transferred his umbrella from his right hand to the left, the better to manipulate the keys, the larger of which he inserted into the lock. It was not a very good fit, but, after a few tentative turns, he succeeded in shooting back the bolt; having done which, he drew the door outwards a couple of inches and sniffed audibly. Taking the key out of the door, he drew the latter wide open and was preparing to insert the key into the lock of the inner door when he observed that the latter was slightly ajar; whereupon he pushed it open and stepped into the room.

But he took only one two steps, and then, as he passed the open door, he stopped short, and ejaculating, "God save us!" hastily backed out. And, at the same moment, I became aware of a strange, musty, cadaverous odour.

With all my forebodings intensified and a feeling of extreme distaste, I nevertheless ventured to step in at the open door to see what it was that had given such a shock to Mr. Weech. But my stay was little longer than his, though in that instant my eyes took in a tableau that rises vividly before me as I write. As I cleared the edge of the door, I came into view of a couch drawn up by the Window, whereon reclined a pyjama-clad figure whose aspect confirmed the worst of my fears.

It was a horrible spectacle, that motionless figure, half strange and half familiar, with its discoloured face and the open mouth from which the two gold teeth seemed to stare out as they gleamed in the bright afternoon sunlight. I stood, as I have said, gazing at it for but a few seconds and then, sick with the horror of the sight and the the effluvium that filled the room, I hurried out and joined Mr. Weech, who stood at the head of the stairs holding a handkerchief to his nose.

As I came out, Benson looked at me, but he asked no question. I suppose he guessed what we had seen, but his nerves were evidently stronger than ours for he strode into the room without hesitation, and pushing the door right back, opened the view into the room so far that I could see him stooping over that dreadful figure, regardless of the foul atmosphere and the obscene flies that buzzed around. He made a long and critical examination of the corpse and then turned to a small table that was placed beside the couch. This, I now noticed, bore a decanter, apparently containing whisky, a siphon, a tumbler, and a small corked bottle; and each of these objects Benson scrutinised minutely.

At length he came out, shutting the inner door after him, and looking very grim and solemn. Evidently he was deeply moved, but, though he was a shade pale, he was quite calm and self-possessed, in striking contrast to Weech and me, whose nerves were quite unstrung by the horrid experience. He closed the outer door, and, taking the key out of the lock, silently handed it to Mr. Weech.

"Well," he said, "what is to be done now?"

"I suppose," said Weech, "I had better communicate with the police. They have a telephone in the office below and I dare say they will let me use it."

"Yes," Benson agreed, "that will be the best thing to do; and you had better ask the police how soon they can send someone up. We shall have to wait here and see them, as they will want some particulars and we may as well get the business over at once."

We went down to the ground floor and once more were the objects of interested scrutiny from the half-opened door. Then Mr. Weech made his request and was admitted forthwith while Benson and I went out into the quadrangle to wait for him. Presently he came out and joined us, with the information that an officer was being sent up and would be at the Inn in the course of a few minutes. Then he invited us to come to the lodge to await the officer's arrival; an offer which Benson promptly declined, explaining that he wanted to talk things over with me before the officer should arrive. Accordingly, Mr. Weech excused himself and went off in the direction of the lodge, and Benson and I turned into the quiet alley between a row of ancient houses and the garden railings.

"This is a very astounding affair, Mortimer," said Benson, when Mr. Weech was out of earshot. "Doesn't it seem so to you?"

I hesitated for a moment, but as there was no reason for secrecy, and as I should certainly have to make a statement to the police, or at the inquest, I replied: "It is a very dreadful business, but I can't say that I am so greatly surprised."

"Aren't you?" he exclaimed. "Now, I should have said that Jack Gillum was the very last person I should have expected to take his life. Why do you say that you are not surprised?"

"Well," I replied, "I have known a good deal about his way of living and the muddle that he has got his affairs into; and, of course, I have certain special knowledge which it would not be permissible for me to refer to."

"If you mean knowledge that you have obtained in your capacity as an employee of his bank," said Benson, "there is nothing in it. He was your customer and you had to keep his affairs secret. But now that he is dead, his executor is your customer."

"He made a will, then?" said I, somewhat surprised.

"Yes, by special arrangement. Mr. Penfield is his executor and I am the sole beneficiary under the will. So I am, in effect, your customer and am entitled to know how his affairs stand."

I was not at all satisfied that this view was technically correct. But, as it was certain that poor Gillum's affairs would have to be more or less completely disclosed at the inquest, I felt it to be unreasonable to withhold the information from one who was so clearly entitled to know all the facts. Accordingly I replied: "I am not sure that you are right, but I am prepared

to waive the strict letter of the law if you will promise to regard as absolutely confidential anything that I may tell you about Gillum's financial position."

"Certainly I will," said he. "But surely his financial position was perfectly satisfactory?"

"On the contrary," said I, "it was profoundly unsatisfactory; in fact, I don't think I am exaggerating if I say that he was absolutely penniless."

Benson stopped and gazed at me with a frown of astonishment. "Penniless!" he exclaimed. "But he should have been a rich man, comparatively speaking. When he came to England, he had his very substantial savings, which I know he sent to Mr. Penfield to be deposited in a bank—your bank, I suppose."

"Yes," said I. "Mr. Penfield opened the account in Gillum's name with a deposit of three thousand pounds."

"Very well. Then he had payments from me from time to time, including the eleven hundred pounds that I sent him a little over three months ago. And he must have got something from the business, to say nothing of the purchase price of his partnership, whatever that may have been. But, of course, you know all about that."

"Yes," said I. "All those big cheques have been paid in, and the amounts have gone out nearly as fast as they have come in, and the position now is that there is not only no balance, but the account is a pound or two overdrawn."

Benson continued to stare at me with the utmost amazement. "But," he exclaimed, "where the devil has the money gone? Do you suppose he has been playing the fool on the Stock Exchange?"

"I don't," I replied. "I know where the bulk of the money has gone. It has been frittered away in gambling; some of it on the turf and a good deal on cards and roulette and various other fooleries. I have sometimes suspected that there might be a blackmailer in the background, but I have no knowledge to that effect. I only know that the bulk of the money was drawn out in cash and that he usually asked to have his 'self' cheques cashed in notes of small denomination—preferably in Treasury notes. It looked as if he wanted to secure himself against the possibility of the notes being traced."

Benson reflected on this statement in silence for a few moments, still looking at me with an expression of angry incredulity. At length he rejoined: "We shall have to go into this in more detail later on. Obviously, as you are in possession of the actual facts, what you tell me must be true. But yet I find it beyond belief. The whole affair, including this suicide—for that is evidently what it is—is so utterly opposed to all that I know of Jack Gillum—and I have known him since he was a boy—that I can make nothing of it."

"Then," I suggested, "he was not always a gambler?"

"No," Benson replied, though without much emphasis. "No, I wouldn't call him a gambler. He liked a game of cards, and he liked to play rather higher than I cared about, and he had a way of betting in a small way and making wagers. But his play was never on a great scale, and his ordinary management of his financial affairs was perfectly reasonable. The amount that he had saved speaks for itself, and you can be sure that I should not have been willing to enter into the arrangements that existed between us if he had been a spendthrift and a wild gambler."

Benson's account of his cousin did not very greatly surprise me. It had been obvious to me that his habits could not always have been such as those that were known to me, or he would never have had any money at all. The gambling habit must have grown on him by frequent indulgence. So it appeared to me, and I answered to that effect.

"My acquaintance with your cousin," said I, "extends only to a short time, only about a year, or rather less. And when I first met him these new habits were already formed, so I never knew him otherwise. But even so, it has been a matter of surprise to me that a man, in other respects so sensible and capable, should have behaved in this idiotic manner. But what you have just told me makes it even more surprising. We can only suppose that the new surroundings, when he came to live in London, must have exerted some peculiar influence over him. And it may be that he fell into the society of people who had a bad effect on him. I happen to know that he was acquainted with some pretty shady characters, though how he came to know them I have no idea."

"There may be something in what you say," said Benson, "in fact, there must be. But the gambling alone doesn't seem to be a satisfactory explanation. I am inclined to suspect that you are right in your suggestion of a possible blackmailer. The way in which the money was drawn out in untraceable notes seems to support that view very strongly. There is no reason why a simple, straightforward gambler should take precautions against having his payments traced. However, we shall have to adjourn this discussion. That gentleman looks like the police officer."

As he spoke, Mr. Weech appeared emerging from the covered way in company with a tall, brisk-looking man in civilian clothes who carried a largish attaché case. The two men approached us and Mr. Weech effected a concise introduction.

"There is no need for you two gentlemen to come up with me," said the officer; "in fact it would be better for me to go alone so that I can make my observations undisturbed. But I will ask you to be good enough to wait here until I have seen what there is to see. I shall want to take a few particulars for the purposes of the inquest."

With this he departed under Mr. Weech's guidance in the direction of Gillum's entry, the approach of the pair closely observed from the window of the type writing office. When they had gone, I rather expected Benson to resume our conversation. But apparently what had been said already gave him sufficient food for thought, for he paced up and down the alley at my side uttering no word and evidently deep in his own reflections, which, to judge by his stern, gloomy expression, were of a highly disagreeable kind.

The officer's observations took rather longer than I had expected. At each turn of our walk when we came to the end of the alley and in view of Gillum's chambers, I could see Mr. Weech at the open landing window, gazing out discontentedly across the quadrangle, and at the office window below watchful heads appeared from time to time over the wire blind. But the officer remained hidden from our sight.

At length, at about the twentieth turn, as we came to the corner of the alley, I observed that Mr. Weech had disappeared from his post at the window, and a moment later he came into view in the obscurity of the staircase and then emerged into the open, followed closely by the officer, whereupon Benson and I walked forward to meet them.

"Well, gentlemen," said the officer, "it seems quite a straightforward case from my point of view, but I may as well have a few particulars for the guidance of the coroner's officer in preparing the details of the inquest. I will begin by taking your names and addresses and your relations with deceased."

He looked from one of us to the other, and Benson, as an actual relative, opened the proceedings by giving his name and address and stating his relationship.

"Ah!" said the officer, "you are deceased's cousin. Then you will be the proper person to identify the body. Not that it is of any importance as there is no question as to who he is. But you have seen the body. Can you identify it positively?"

"Yes," replied Benson. "It is the body of my cousin, John Gillum."

"Exactly," said the officer. "Now, is there anything that you can tell us that would throw any light on the suicide—assuming it to be a suicide?"

"No," replied Benson. "I can't account for it at all. But I haven't seen deceased for about two years, so I haven't any very recent information about him. This gentleman, Mr. Mortimer, knows a good deal more about his affairs than I do."

Thereupon the officer turned to me and asked me to give him any information that might guide him as to the kind of evidence that would be required at the inquest and the names of any witnesses who might have to be called. Accordingly I told him who I was but pointed out that, as an employee of deceased's bank, I was not at liberty to give any information as to his financial affairs.

"No," he agreed, "not in the ordinary way. But the customer's death releases the bank from its obligations of secrecy. However, I won't press you. Any information that the bank may be able to supply will have to be given at the inquest if it is relevant. Should you say that it would be relevant? I mean in relation to the motive for the suicide—assuming it to be a suicide?"

"Yes," I replied, "I think I may say that much. But perhaps you had better see the manager. He knows the ropes better than I do."

"Or Mr. Penfield," Benson suggested. "He is Gillum's executor and was his man of business and as he is a lawyer he will know exactly what information he ought to give."

The officer agreed to this and took down the addresses of the manager and Mr. Penfield. "And that," said he, "is all for the present. Now I must see about getting the body removed to the mortuary. I had better keep the keys until the inquest is over as we don't want the rooms disturbed, and there may be some letters or papers which ought to be examined either by me or by Mr. Penfield. I will hear what he has to say about that. So I will wish you gentlemen good afternoon."

With this he bustled away and Benson and Weech and I walked down to the lodge where, declining an invitation to go in and rest a few minutes, Benson and I left the porter and made our way out into Fleet Street. My companion was still silent and gloomy, uttering scarcely a word as we walked down towards Ludgate Circus. Only just before we parted at the corner did he make any observation on the tragedy.

Then, in a tone of almost passionate grief; he exclaimed: "It is a miserable business, and what makes it more awful to me is the feeling that I have been, in a manner, the cause of the disaster. It looks very much as if poor Gillum had funk'd meeting me."

I could not but admit that the same idea had occurred to me. It would certainly have been a very awkward meeting, involving some exceedingly uncomfortable explanations.

"But he needn't have funk'd it," said Benson. "Of course, I should have been pretty sick. But I shouldn't have reproached him and I should not have let him down. He could have come back with me and helped me to run the farm and got back to his natural way of life. However, it is no use thinking now of what might have been. Good-bye, Mortimer. You know where to find me if you should want me."

He shook my hand heartily and turned away down Farringdon Street, and, as it was now too late to go back to the bank, I made my way towards my own place of abode.

---

## VII. — THE CORONER'S INQUEST

IF the facts which were disclosed by the evidence of witnesses at the inquest on the body of John Gillum were mostly new to me only to the extent that they were facts, for most of them had already existed in my mind in the form of suspicions. Nevertheless, the grim proceedings had for me the melancholy interest that now, when all the contributory circumstances

of the final catastrophe were assembled, I was able to realise the enormity of that catastrophe. It was really beyond belief. That a man who had seemed to have been the especial favourite of fortune should have mismanaged his affairs so unutterably as to bring himself to actual destitution and to a pauper suicide's grave, appeared, and was, an incredible instance of human folly and perversity. But I need not moralise on the tragedy, the facts deposed to in evidence tell their own tale.

The first witness was Mr. Weech, who gave a slightly verbose but very impressive description of the discovery. When he had finished and in answer to a question, had stated the date on which he had last seen deceased alive, he was dismissed and his place taken by Arthur Benson.

"You were present with Mr. Weech when the body was discovered," said the coroner. "Were you able to identify the body?"

"Yes," was the reply, "it was the body of my cousin, John Gillum."

"The identity of the body is not in question," said the coroner, "but may we take it that you are certain that it was the body of your cousin?"

"I am quite certain," replied Benson. "The circumstances were so remarkable that I had at first some doubt whether it could really be John Gillum, so I examined it closely and carefully. There is no doubt whatever that it was John Gillum's body."

"Naturally," said the coroner, "you were greatly shocked at what had happened, but were you surprised?"

"I was astounded," replied Benson. "John Gillum was the last man in the world whom I should have expected to have committed suicide. But I had not seen him for nearly two years, when he was leaving Australia to come to England. Up to that time he had been working on a sheep farm and had seemed to be a happy, capable, well-balanced man. But I learn that since he came to this country his habits and even his character seem to have undergone a radical change. Of that, of course, I know nothing."

Here the coroner put one or two questions concerning Gillum's antecedents, to which Benson answered in much the same terms as those in which he had replied to mine, as recorded in the last chapter. And these details of Gillum's pecuniary position formed the remainder of his evidence.

The next witness was Detective-Sergeant Edmund Waters, who stepped up to the place appointed for witnesses and gave his evidence with professional readiness and precision.

"On Wednesday the eighteenth of July, I was informed that a telephone message had been received reporting the finding of the dead body of a man in a room at 64, Clifford's Inn. I proceeded there forthwith, going first to the porter's lodge where I met Mr. Weech, who had sent the message, Mr. Benson and Mr. Mortimer. Mr. Weech conducted me to the room, which was in a set of chambers on the first floor, and unlocked the door to admit me.

"On entering the room, I saw the dead body of a man lying on a couch close to a window. From the appearance of the body and a very foul odour which pervaded the air of the room, I judged that the man had been dead several days. I inspected the body without disturbing it but could see no injuries or any sign of violence or any indication of a struggle. The man was lying on the couch in an easy posture, as if he had fallen asleep there and nothing in the room appeared to be disturbed. By the side of the couch was a small table on which was a decanter containing whisky, a siphon of soda-water, a tumbler, and a small bottle labelled 'Tablets of morphine hydrochloride; gr. 1/2.' and containing a number of white tablets. The description on the label was written with a pen in block capital letters.

"I took possession of the bottle and then I examined the tumbler. There were quite a large number of finger-prints on it and most of them were perfectly distinct. There were also finger-prints on the bottle, but these were not so distinct and I had to develop some of them up, especially those on the label, before I could be sure of the pattern. As I had my finger print apparatus with me, I proceeded very carefully to take a set of the finger-prints of the body to compare with those on the tumbler and the bottle. When I made the comparison, it became perfectly clear that all the prints on both vessels were made by deceased. Those on the tumbler were prints of the fingers of deceased's right hand and those on the bottle were principally prints of the left hand with one or two of the right."

"You are sure," said the coroner, "that there were no other finger-prints?"

"Quite sure," replied the sergeant. "The prints were all recognisable and I compared each one separately with the prints that I had taken from the body."

"That is very important," said the coroner, "and it seems quite conclusive. Did you make any examination of the room?"

"Not a minute examination. I just looked round to see if there were any signs of anything unusual, but there were not. Everything looked perfectly normal."

"Have you made any further investigation since then?"

"Yes. I went to the chambers with Mr. Bateman, who was acting for the executors, to see if there were any papers or documents that might throw any light on the affair. We found the keys in the pockets of deceased's clothes and with them we opened the drawers of the writing-table. In one of the drawers we found several letters in their envelopes tied up in a bundle. We read these letters and we both formed the opinion that they were blackmailer's letters. Mr. Bateman took

possession of them and I believe he has them still.”

“Then,” said the coroner, “as Mr. Bateman is here and will be giving evidence, we need not go into the question of the letters now. Is there anything else that you have to tell us?”

“No,” replied the sergeant, “excepting that I notified the coroner—yourself—that I had the bottle of tablets and, in accordance with instructions, handed it to Dr. Sidney.”

“Then,” said the coroner, “we need not trouble you further unless any member of the jury wishes to ask any questions. No questions? Then we had better next take the medical evidence.”

Accordingly, the medical witness, Dr. Thomas Winsford, was called and, having given his name and qualifications, deposed, in answer to the coroner’s question: “I have made a careful examination of the body of deceased. It is that of a man about forty years of age, well-developed and muscular and free from any signs of disease. I examined it in relation to the questions of the date of death and its cause. With regard to the first, there was a slight difficulty owing to the condition of the body, which was definitely in a state of incipient putrefaction. But, taking into account the temperature of the room in which it had been lying, I should say that deceased had been dead from six to eight days.”

“You speak of the heat of the room. Had you any personal knowledge of the conditions in that room?”

“Yes. I obtained the key of the chambers from Sergeant Waters and went there in the afternoon. The sun was shining in at the window and the room was very hot. I took the temperature with a thermometer and found it to be eighty-one degrees Fahrenheit. That would account for the rather advanced state of putrefaction in the time that I have mentioned, and I am inclined to the opinion that deceased had not been dead more than six or seven days.”

“Yes,” the coroner remarked, “that seems to agree with what Mr. Weech has told us. He saw deceased alive ten days before the discovery of the body. And what do you say as to the cause of death?”

“From the inspection of the body, it was difficult to assign any cause of death. There were no injuries or external marks of any kind or any abnormal appearances whatever. But I had been informed of the finding of the bottle of morphine tablets and I examined the body for signs of morphine poisoning.”

“And did you find any such traces?”

“Morphine does not ordinarily leave very pronounced traces, and the condition of the body was not favourable for discovering the more minute signs. But I found a somewhat contracted state of the pupils, and this, with the absence of any other signs indicating death from any other cause, confirmed the suggestion that death was due to poisoning with morphine. But I can only say that all the appearances were consistent with morphine poisoning and that I could not discover any other cause of death.”

“Did you take any measure, to settle this question?”

“Yes. I removed from the body certain of the internal organs and put them in chemically clean jars which I closed and sealed and affixed to each a label on which I wrote the particulars and the date, and signed my name. These jars, in accordance with instructions, I handed personally to Dr. Walter Sidney for analysis.”

This concluded the doctor’s evidence. He was followed by Dr. Walter Sidney, who deposed that he was a pathologist and an analytical chemist, and that he had received from the preceding witness certain jars containing various organs from a human body which he was informed had been removed from the body of deceased. He had also received from Sergeant Waters a bottle containing a number of white tablets and labelled with a written label: “Morphine hydrochloride, gr. 1/2.” He had analysed four of the tablets and found that they were composed of morphine hydrochloride and that each tablet contained half a grain of the drug. He had also made a chemical examination of the organs from the jars and had obtained from them a little over two and a quarter grains of morphine. He estimated the amount of morphine present in the whole body at, at least, four grains, but probably more.

“What do you consider a poisonous dose of morphine?” the coroner asked.

“It varies considerably in different persons,” the witness replied. “Half a grain has been known to cause death, but that is very unusual. One grain would be very likely to cause death in a person who was not accustomed to the drug, and two grains would ordinarily be a lethal dose.”

“Then four grains is definitely a lethal dose?”

“Yes. It would almost certainly cause death in a person who was not in the habit of taking the drug.”

“Did your examination enable you to form any opinion as to whether deceased had been in the habit of taking morphine?”

“I should not like to give a very definite opinion. All the organs, including the liver, were quite healthy; which would hardly have been the case if deceased had been in the habit of dosing himself with morphine. I can only say that I found no signs that suggested the habitual taking of the drug. And Dr. Winsford’s evidence, in which he stated that deceased appeared to be a strong, healthy man, is quite inconsistent with the idea that deceased was a morphine addict.”

“As a result of your examination, can you make any suggestion as to the cause of death?”

“Inasmuch as a lethal dose of morphine was found in the body, and as no other cause of death was discoverable, I should

say that there is no doubt that deceased died from poisoning by morphine.”

“Thank you,” said the coroner; “that is what we want to know; and I think that, if you have nothing more to tell us, we need not detain you any longer.”

He glanced enquiringly at the jury, and, as neither the jury nor the witness volunteered any remark, the latter withdrew to his seat.

The next witness was Mr. Alfred Bateman, a gentle man of typically legal aspect whose acquaintance I had already made. Having been sworn, he deposed that he was the managing clerk of Mr. Penfield, a solicitor and executor of the will of deceased, for whom he also acted as man of business.

“Are you in possession of any facts that explain, or have any bearing on, the death of deceased?” the coroner asked.

“I am in possession of certain facts which seem to me to be relevant to the subject of this inquiry,” the witness replied. “In the first place, deceased had, in less than two years, got through a fortune, and was, at the time of his death, so far as I can ascertain, absolutely penniless and in debt. In the second place, he was, at the time of his death, being harassed by blackmailers.”

“Yes,” said the coroner, “those facts certainly seem to be relevant to the subject of this inquiry. Perhaps you might give us a few particulars without going into unnecessary detail.”

“As to the financial question,” said Bateman, “the facts, in outline, are these: Nearly two years ago—on the sixteenth of April, 1928, to be exact—deceased wrote to Mr. Penfield stating that he was coming to England to live and remitting a sum of three thousand pounds which he asked Mr. Penfield to deposit in a suitable bank in his, deceased’s, name, five hundred to be placed to the current account and the remainder on deposit. I dealt with this matter myself, under Mr. Penfield’s instructions, and placed the money in Perkins’s Bank. Three months after the receipt of this letter, that is, on the eighteenth of September, deceased called at our office to announce his arrival. There were certain business transactions connected with the purchase of a partnership which I think I need not describe in detail as they seem to have no bearing on recent events. When these were concluded, and deceased had deposited his will with Mr. Penfield, I accompanied him to the bank and introduced him to the manager. Thereafter our contact with him practically ceased. He came to the office once or twice afterwards, and then, as we had finished with his affairs and he had kept the partnership deed in his own possession, we lost sight of him; and, excepting that his address in Clifford’s Inn was known to us—he having given Mr. Penfield as a reference when he applied for the chambers—we knew nothing of what he was doing or how he lived.

“He next came into view, so to speak, when his cousin, Mr. Benson, called at our office to ask if we could give him any information as to where he could find deceased. That was on the seventeenth of this month. As we knew nothing, we referred him to deceased’s bank, and, as he has deposed, he went there. On the evening of the eighteenth, Mr. Benson called at the office and informed me—as Mr. Penfield had already left—of the discovery of the body in the chambers. He also informed me that the keys of the chambers were in the possession of Sergeant Waters. Thereupon, as I knew that Mr. Penfield was the executor of deceased’s will, I thought it best to see the sergeant without delay and accordingly went forthwith to the police station where I was fortunate enough to find the sergeant. He suggested that we had better go to the chambers and see if there were any letters or papers which might throw any light on the motives for the assumed suicide.

“I agreed that it was desirable and we accordingly went together to the chambers and made the search. In a drawer in the writing-table we found a considerable number of letters and other documents, all neatly tied into bundles and docketed. There was one bundle tied with red tape and labelled ‘Horse-leech’ and this we examined first. It consisted of eleven letters, each enclosed in its envelope. They were all in a similar, and apparently disguised, handwriting, none of them bore any signature or contained any reference to any person by name, and none of them was dated, though the date could be inferred from the postmark on the envelope.

“On reading them, we came to the conclusion that they were undoubtedly from a blackmailer. Ten of them were quite short and were simply reminders that a payment was due. The other one, which appeared to be the first of the series, plainly demanded money with menaces. I produce the letters for your inspection.”

Here the witness drew from his pocket a bundle of letters tied together with red tape and laid them on the table before the coroner.

“I think,” said the latter, “that it would be better for you to read them to us, or, at least, the first letter and one of the others. The jury can inspect them afterwards if they wish to.”

Accordingly, Mr. Bateman untied the bundle, and, taking the two outside letters, opened one of them and read its contents aloud: “With reference to our little friendly talk last night, as you did not seem able to make up your mind, I will see if I can help you. To put the matter in a nutshell, I want £500 from you as a first instalment. The others we can arrange later, but I must have this at once; and I warn you that I am not going to stand any nonsense. If this is not handed over by Sunday night at the latest, the consequences which I mentioned to you will follow without further notice.

“The money is to be paid in pound notes (not new ones) and the parcel is to be handed personally either to me or to the party whom you know and whose name I mentioned to you.

“This is the final offer and I advise you to take it. You will be sorry if you don’t.”

“I agree with you,” said the coroner, “as to the character of that letter. It is a typical blackmailer’s letter. What is the date

on the envelope?"

"The postmark is dated the sixteenth of September, 1929. Shall I read the last letter?"

"If you please," the coroner replied, whereupon the witness drew the other letter from its envelope, and, glancing at the latter, said: "This is dated by the post-mark the fourth of this present month of July and the contents are as follows: 'In case you should forget to look at your calendar, as you did last time, I am sending you this little reminder. And don't forget that the notes must be old ones which have seen some service. There were several brand new notes in the last instalment which had to be kept for use on the turf. Don't let that happen again.'"

As he finished reading, Bateman laid the two letters on the table and the coroner, after glancing through them, passed them to the foreman of the jury.

"Beyond these blackmailing letters," said he, addressing the witness, "did you find anything that might throw light on what has happened?"

"Not in the way of letters," Bateman replied. "All the others were just normal business correspondence and letters from his cousin, Mr. Benson, sent from Australia. But we found also in that drawer the pass-book from deceased's bank, and the entries in that were very significant. We began by looking up the entries corresponding to the dates of the blackmailing letters, and, from what we could see, it appeared that deceased had been paying out £500 every quarter, excepting the last. On the date corresponding to the last letter the amount drawn out was only £200. But when we looked through the entries other than those corresponding to the dates of the blackmailing letters, it was clear that a large number of sums of money had been drawn out in the form of cash, for what purpose we were, of course, unable to guess."

"You found no evidence of any other blackmailers?" the coroner asked.

"No evidence," Bateman replied, "but it looked highly suspicious. The 'self' cheques appeared at very frequent intervals and some of them were for considerable amounts. However, we could not make very much of the pass-book, but, from what we could see, it looked as if deceased had spent his money as fast as he received it; and the cheques that were entered to his credit were for quite large amounts.

"But it was on the following day, the nineteenth, that I learned the full enormity of the affair. On that day I accompanied Mr. Penfield to the bank, where we had an interview with the manager. He presented us with a statement of his transactions with deceased and showed us how the account stood. I need not trouble you with details, but the position amounted to this; that deceased had drawn out every penny that he possessed and was actually in debt to the bank, though to only a small amount."

"You say that deceased had received considerable sums of money. We don't want details, but, roughly speaking, about how much had he spent and how long had he been in spending it?"

"The total amount that he had held to his credit, including the original deposit, was just over £13,000. And he had got through the whole of this between the end of September, 1928, and the middle of this present month; a period of one year and ten months."

"Did you learn at the bank whether he appeared to have been operating on the Stock Exchange?"

"I think we may definitely infer that he had not. Settlements on the Stock Exchange are made by cheque, and there were no records of any cheques payable to stockbrokers. The comparatively few cheques that appeared in the ledger were mostly small in amount and appeared to have been payable to tradesmen or other persons concerned with the ordinary, normal expenditure. What had exhausted the account was the large number of cheques payable to himself in cash."

"Well," said the coroner, addressing the jury, "there is no object in our enquiring further into the details of this astonishing instance of reckless prodigality. We have the material fact that in less than two years this unfortunate man flung away what most of us would have regarded as a fortune. We also know that, at the time of his death, he was penniless and in debt, and that he was the victim of a particularly rapacious set of blackmailers. I think Mr. Bateman has given us some most illuminating information and that we might now thank him for the clear and lucid way in which he has given his evidence and not detain him any longer. Unless any member of the jury wishes for any further information."

One member of the jury, apparently thrilled by the vast sums that had been mentioned, would have sought further details, but was politely suppressed by the coroner; whereupon Bateman was released and retired to his seat. There was a short interval during which the coroner glanced through the depositions, and then, as I had expected, my name was called.

"You have heard Mr. Bateman's evidence," said the coroner, when the preliminaries had been disposed of. "As a member of the staff of the bank, you will probably consider yourself prohibited from giving any particulars of deceased's financial affairs. But can you tell us if you endorse what the last witness has stated?"

"I endorse it completely," I replied. "I was present with the manager when the particulars were given to him. And I may say that I am fully authorised by the executor—in whom the account is now vested—and the manager, to give any information that may be required as to our late customer's dealings with the bank."

"Then," said the coroner, "as you, in your capacity of cashier, knew exactly what monies deceased received and what he drew out, and in what form, perhaps you can tell us what opinions you held as to his very unusual manner of conducting his affairs. Did you ever suspect that he was being blackmailed?"



"I did."

"What circumstances in particular led you to form that suspicion?"

"In the first place, there were the very large sums which he drew out in cash. It is very unusual for customers to draw out in cash more than quite modest amounts and these large drafts in cash were, in themselves, rather suggestive of some slightly irregular transactions. But what specially tended to arouse my suspicions was the fact that deceased usually asked expressly for old notes; notes that had been in circulation and were more or less soiled."

"What did you infer from that?"

"As the only possible advantage of a note that has been used is that it cannot be traced, I inferred that the notes were to be used for making payments of a secret, and possibly unlawful, character."

"Is it unusual for customers to ask for used notes?"

"It is rather unusual, though some customers prefer the used notes because they are less liable to stick together than the new. But usually, customers express a marked preference for new, clean notes."

"But the new notes are more easy to trace?"

"They are quite easy to trace. Usually, when a customer presents a bearer cheque for a considerable amount, he is paid in notes which have been newly issued and supplied direct to the bank. Such an issue is in the form of a series of notes of which the numbers are consecutive, and the numbers of the series are entered, not only in our own books but in the books of the bank of issue. Moreover, the numbers of the notes paid to the customer are also recorded; so that, if any question arises, it is possible to say with certainty that a particular note was paid to a particular person on a known date."

"You inferred, then, that these notes were being used to make payments of a questionable kind? What led you to suspect blackmail in particular?"

"It is common knowledge that blackmailers always refuse cheques and insist on being paid in cash; and their objection to cheques would equally apply to a series of newly issued notes. The only other kind of persons known to me who demand payment in untraceable cash are either thieves or receivers of stolen goods. But in the case of deceased, blackmailers were more probable than thieves or receivers. And there was another circumstance that strongly suggested a blackmailer. In addition to the smaller drafts which were presented at irregular intervals, there were certain larger drafts which were presented periodically and pretty regularly at intervals of three months. This suggested that someone was being paid a quarterly allowance; and, having regard to the mode of payment, I felt very little doubt that that person was a blackmailer."

"You speak of a blackmailer. It has been suggested that there may have been more than one. What do you say to that?"

"I can only say that I think it highly probable. I have always, from the first, suspected a blackmailer in the background, simply by reason of the large cash withdrawals. But I had nothing more definite than that to go on until the large periodical drafts began last September. If there were any other blackmailers they must have been paid at irregular intervals, and, I should say, in smaller amounts. But it is possible that the irregular cash drafts merely represented what deceased spent on gambling. I know that his expenditure on betting and play was very large."

"But would he have needed used notes for that purpose? Gambling is a foolish pursuit, but it is not usually unlawful."

"No; but it may be associated with other acts which are unlawful. This was certainly the case in the one instance in which I accompanied him to one of his gambling resorts. It was a most disreputable place and the persons present seemed to me to be of the shadiest type. And drink was being sold freely on unlicensed premises and during prohibited hours. The place might have been, at any moment, raided by the police, and, in that case, deceased would not have wished that any evidence should exist that he had been associated with it, if he had happened not to be there at the time of the raid."

"Is it actually known to you that deceased gambled to a really serious extent?"

"Yes. I was present on two occasions; the one that I have mentioned and another at a horse-race. On the first occasion he played very little as he was merely showing me the place and the people. But at the race he plunged rather heavily and lost—as he informed me—about a hundred pounds. But he was quite unconcerned about it. He seemed to consider the dropping of a hundred pounds as quite a negligible loss."

"Did he know that you were aware of the extent to which he gambled?"

"Oh, yes. He made no secret of it. I spoke to him very seriously on several occasions and pointed out to him how his capital was wasting. But he was incorrigible. He took my lectures quite amiably, but he would promise no reform. He was quite confident that he would get all his losses back presently."

The coroner reflected for a few moments on this statement. Then, in a grave and emphatic tone, he said: "As you were a friend of deceased's and the only person who appears to know much of his affairs, I am going to ask you two questions. The first is: Have you any inkling as to the identity of the person who was blackmailing him?"

Now I had expected this question and had carefully considered the reply that I ought to make. I had a very definite suspicion as to who the blackmailer was. But it was only a guess; and a guess is not an inkling in the sense intended. I was prepared to communicate my suspicions to the police, but I had no intention of making guesses in sworn testimony with the certainty of publicity. Accordingly, I replied with strict truth: "I have no knowledge whatsoever. Deceased made no

confidences to me, and I never hinted to him what I suspected."

The coroner, whatever he may have thought, accepted this answer without comment and wrote it down. Then he put his second question.

"Had you ever any reason to think it possible that deceased might take his life?"

"Yes," I replied, "I have had that possibility in mind for some time, and, as soon as I heard that he was missing, I suspected what had happened."

"What led you to that belief?"

"It was something that deceased himself had said. On a certain occasion we happened to be speaking of suicide and I remarked that, to me, it seemed that the fact of suicide was in itself evidence of an unsound state of mind. With this he disagreed emphatically. He contended that suicide was a perfectly rational proceeding in appropriate circumstances; and when I asked him what he considered appropriate circumstances, he mentioned as an example, total and irremediable financial ruin. From that time, since his affairs were obviously tending in that direction, I have always had an uneasy expectation that, when the crash came, he would take that course for solving his difficulties."

"You had that expectation," said the coroner, "but was it based on the mere opinion that he had expressed, or on some more definite indication of intention? I mean, did he ever convey to you that he actually contemplated suicide as an act possible to himself?"

"He conveyed to me quite definitely the view that, if he were reduced to abject poverty, life would not be worth living, and that he would take measures to bring it to an end. He seemed to consider that it was the natural and reasonable thing to do."

The coroner pondered this statement for a while. Then he looked towards the jury.

"Are there any further questions that you would like to ask this witness?" he enquired. "It seems to me that he has given us all the material facts."

That was apparently the view of the jury, for no further questions were suggested. Accordingly, when the depositions had been completed, I was released and returned to my seat, and, as there were no other witnesses, the coroner proceeded to sum up briefly but quite adequately.

"You have now heard all the evidence," he began, "and you will have noticed that it all seems to establish a single conclusion. The medical evidence is quite clear. Deceased died from the effects of a large dose of morphine, or morphia, as it is more commonly called. On the question whether the poison was administered by himself or some other person, we have the evidence of the sergeant that the finger-prints on the drinking-vessel and on the poison bottle were those of deceased himself and that there were no signs of the presence of any other person. Then we have the clear evidence of Mr. Mortimer that deceased had contemplated suicide as a means of escape from the consequences of financial ruin; and we have the evidence of both Mr. Bateman and Mr. Mortimer that financial ruin had actually occurred on a scale that almost takes one's breath away. So you see that the drift of the evidence is all in the same direction; and I will leave you to consider it with the feeling that you will have no difficulty in finding your verdict."

Apparently the coroner's feeling was a just one, for the jury, after a very brief consultation, communicated their verdict through the foreman. It was to the effect that deceased died from the effects of a large dose of morphine, administered by himself.

"That," said the coroner, "is a verdict of suicide. What do you say as to the state of deceased's mind 'at the time of the act?'"

The decision of the jury, in direct contradiction of poor Gillum's own view, was that he was insane at the time when the act was committed. And when this finding had been recorded the proceedings came to an end.

I lingered after the court had risen to exchange a few words with Benson, to whom I had taken a rather strong liking, and presently we were joined by Mr. Bateman, who apparently wanted to learn how his client had been affected by the incidents of the inquiry.

"A most amazing story," he commented, "the evidence in this case has brought to light. I have never heard anything more astonishing. The finding of the jury as to the state of mind of deceased at the time of the act might fairly be extended to all his other acts. The conduct that the evidence has disclosed is the conduct of a sheer lunatic. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Benson?"

"I do indeed," Benson admitted gloomily.

"And I think," pursued Bateman, "that you will also agree that, however incomprehensible poor Gillum's conduct may seem to a sane man, the fact that he did act in that insane manner has been established beyond any possible doubt. A consistent story has been elicited and established on an undeniable basis of ascertained fact."

He looked a little anxiously, as I thought, at Benson, who reflected a few moments before replying, but, at length, gave a qualified assent to Bateman's proposition.

"As to the facts which were proved in evidence," said he, "they seem to admit of no doubt or denial. But I still have the

feeling that there is something behind all this that I don't understand. The whole affair is too abnormal."

"As to its abnormality," said Bateman, "I am entirely with you. But, abnormal as it is, I think we have got to accept it as a sequence of events that actually happened. Surprise is natural enough, but doubt would seem to be unreasonable."

He paused and looked questioningly at Benson, and, as the latter did not reply immediately, he asked: "You are not contemplating any further action in the matter, are you? Any sort of private or unofficial inquiry? I hope not, for I feel that nothing could come of it; nothing, that is to say, but the dredging up of a quantity of unprofitable and unsavoury details. And inquiries of this kind are apt to prove costly out of all proportion to their value."

"It would certainly be proper," Benson replied, "for me to give very respectful consideration to your advice, seeing that your experience is so much greater than mine. But I must confess that I am not satisfied. Still, I will not take any decision without earnest consideration of what you have said. I will think things over for a day or two, and I will let you know whether I decide to accept this mysterious affair at its face value or to see if any sort of unravelment is possible."

"Very well," rejoined Bateman. "We will leave it at that. If, in the end, you decide to open the matter further, we have the material. Mr. Penfield has carried out your instructions. We had, as you may have noticed, our Mr. James—a very skilful shorthand reporter—in court to-day to make a complete verbatim report of everything that was said, in evidence or otherwise. So that we are independent of the newspaper reports and we shall have no need to ask for access to the depositions. But I hope that neither will be required."

With this, Mr. Bateman took his leave and bustled away; and, as Benson appeared more disposed for reflection than conversation, and I had my own business to attend to, I parted from him at the entrance to the building and we went our respective ways.

And here my narrative comes to its natural end. Its purpose was to give an account of my association with John Gillum, and this I have done; and if my story is not without an epilogue, that epilogue will issue from a pen other than mine.

---

**PART II. — THE CASE OF JOHN GILLUM, DECEASED:  
NARRATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.**

---

**VIII. — IS THERE A CASE?**

THE George and Vulture Inn has always been I associated in my mind with the historic case of Bardell and Pickwick and those extremely astute gentlemen, Messrs. Dodson and Fogg of Freeman's Court hard by. But nowadays that venerable tavern associates itself more especially with the very queer case of John Gillum, deceased, and a less famous but much more respectable practitioner of the law. For it was at the George and Vulture that I—together with my colleague, John Thorndyke—became introduced to the queer case aforesaid, and the introducer was no less a person than Mr. Joseph Penfield.

There was nothing surprising in our encounter there at lunch-time with Mr. Penfield, for his office in George Yard was but a few doors from the tavern. Probably it was his daily resort; at any rate, as we entered the grill-room, there he was, seated at a table gravely contemplating a grilled chop which the waiter had just set before him. He observed us as we entered and immediately indicated a couple of vacant chairs at his table.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said he as we took possession of the chairs. "Isn't the City of London rather outside your radius?"

"No place is outside our radius," replied Thorndyke. "But we have just come from the Griffin Life Office where we have been conferring with our old friend, Mr. Stalker. The Griffin retains me permanently."

"As medical referee, I suppose?" Mr. Penfield ventured.

"No," replied Thorndyke. "As medico-legal adviser; I might almost say as adviser in doubtful cases of suicide, for that is the kind of problem that is usually submitted to me."

"Ha!" said Penfield; "and I presume that Mr. Stalker's bias is usually towards an affirmative view."

"Naturally," Thorndyke agreed, "but he doesn't expect me to share that bias. On the contrary, my usual function is rather to shatter his hopes and to convince him of all the things that he doesn't want to believe."

"Yes," said Penfield, "and a very useful function, too. If more people would seek the services of an expert destructive critic, there would be a good deal less litigation."

With this he returned to the consideration of his lunch while I, having secured the waiter's attention, communicated to him our joint requirements. Mean while, Mr. Penfield proceeded methodically with his meal, dropping an occasional remark but chiefly leaving the conversational initiative to Thorndyke and me. But as I watched him skilfully dissecting his chop and noted his reflective expression, I had the feeling that he was cogitating some matter arising out of Thorndyke's explanation and his own rejoinder, and I waited expectantly for it to rise to the surface. And at length (as Pepys would have expressed it) "out it come."

"Your description," said he, "of your connection with the Griffin has brought to my mind a matter that is causing me some embarrassment. In short, to be quite honest, it has raised the hope that I may be able to transfer the burden of it from my shoulders to yours. You may consider the case as being within your province. It certainly isn't within mine."

"That suggests to me," said Thorndyke, "that it is a criminal case."

"Yes," replied Penfield, "it is. Highly criminal. A nasty, unsavoury, disreputable affair, and, legally, quite impossible at that. I will just indicate its nature, though I expect you know something of it already from the newspapers. Probably you heard of a case of suicide that occurred in Clifford's Inn about a month ago."

"I remember it quite well," said Thorndyke, "and I recall that you were the dead man's solicitor."

"Then," said Penfield, "you will remember that the dead man, John Gillum by name, having wasted his substance in riotous living, to wit, in gambling, and having—presumably by his own folly—become the victim of blackmailers, proceeded to overdraw his accounts at the bank and then to commit suicide."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "I remember that."

"Very well," said Penfield. "Now deceased had a cousin who was much too good for him; a most estimable Australian gentleman named Benson. I speak of him with sympathy and respect although he is now the bane of my life. He was present when Gillum's body was discovered and he at once formed the opinion that there was something abnormal about the affair; something more than met the eye. And so there may have been. However, he asked me to send shorthand writer to attend the inquest and make a verbatim report of the proceedings, which I did; and I can let you have a transcript of that report if it is of any use. But I must admit that, on reading it, I was utterly unable to see anything in the case that was not perfectly normal, the circumstances being what they were. And that is still my position, and I have tried to impart that view to Benson. But he is still unsatisfied and he continues to stir me up from time to time with demands that some kind of action shall be taken."

"What does he want you to do?" Thorndyke asked.

"To tell you the truth," replied Penfield, "I am not quite clear. But, primarily, he wants the blood of those blackmailers."

"Naturally," said Thorndyke, "and very properly. But is there any clue to their identity?"

"Not the slightest," replied Penfield. "He expects me, in some mystic manner, by employing private detectives or other agents, to discover who the blackmailers are and to drag them forth from their lairs and bring them to justice."

"You say that he has nothing to go on. Nothing at all?"

"Nothing," replied Penfield, "but a few letters in a disguised hand, dated only by the postmarks, unsigned, of course, and mentioning nobody by name nor hinting at any locality."

"And have you no letters or documents that might be of assistance?"

"I have Gillum's will. Benson is the sole beneficiary; and the sole benefit that he has enjoyed has been a small debt to the bank, which he has insisted on paying. I have also one or two of Gillum's letters to me, but they are simple business letters making no reference to his private affairs."

"And what do you want me to do?" Thorndyke asked.

"I should like," replied Penfield, "to bring him to you and let him state his case and say what he wants. If you think that it is possible to do anything for him, well and good; and if you think otherwise, I should suggest that you give him some of the medicine that you tell me you administer to Mr. Stalker for the cure of unreasonable optimism."

Thorndyke did not reply immediately, but I could see that the case, unpromising as it looked, was riot without its attractions for him. For, unlike Penfield, he was stimulated rather than discouraged by apparent difficulties. Still, even Thorndyke could not embark on a case without data of some sort. Eventually, he replied without committing himself to any definite course of action: "I think it would be worth while to hear what Mr. Benson has to say. He may know more than he is aware of; and I recall that at the inquest a friend of Gillum's gave evidence, a man named Mortimer. He seemed to know more about deceased's affairs than anybody else. Perhaps we might get some information from him."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Penfield, obviously delighted at the prospect of shifting his burden on to Thorndyke's shoulders. "Excellent. I can put you into touch with Mr. Mortimer, and I am sure he will give you any assistance that he can. And now, as we seem to have finished our lunch, perhaps you will walk down to my office with me and I will hand you the report. It contains all the positive information that I think you are likely to get."

Accordingly, when we had settled our score, we set forth from the tavern down George Yard to Mr. Penfield's office. There we observed a rack of deed-boxes the lids of which were decorated, rather like coffin-plates, with the names of Mr. Penfield's clients. One of these, bearing the name of "John Gillum Esq.," our friend let down, when he had unlocked the box, displaying a small collection of documents within. From these he selected a large envelope, and having opened it and verified its contents, handed it to Thorndyke.

"That," said he, "is the report. If you decide to undertake the case, I shall, if you wish it and Mr. Benson agrees, transfer the deed-box with its contents to you. And now, perhaps we can make an appointment for your meeting with Mr. Benson. Will you come here, or shall I bring him to your chambers?"

"I don't see why you should bring him," said Thorndyke, "unless you would prefer to. I suggest that he calls on me one evening by appointment, for an informal talk, and if he can bring Mr. Mortimer with him, we shall be able to see exactly how we stand."

"Thank you," said Mr. Penfield. "It will suit me much better to send him than to bring him, so, if you will give me a date, I will make the appointment."

"I will give you two dates," said Thorndyke, "and you can notify me when to expect the visit. One will be the day after tomorrow at eight o'clock in the evening, if that will suit you, Jervis, and the other two days later."

"Both these dates will do for me," said I; on which Mr. Penfield entered them in his book with undissembled satisfaction.

"I must thank you again," said he, accompanying us out into George Yard. "You have really rendered me a great service."

He shook hands cordially with us both and even stood watching us as we walked away up the court towards Cornhill. And thus was set rolling the ball whose evolutions I was to watch with so much interest during the next few months. None of Thorndyke's cases ever started less hopefully, and few developed in a more surprising fashion.

Mr. Benson chose the earlier of the two dates and arrived at our chambers punctually at eight in the evening thereof; so punctually that the Temple clock was actually striking the hour as the knock on our door was heard. He was accompanied by another gentleman, and when I let him in, mutual introductions were effected and followed by mutual inspection. Like Mr. Penfield, we were pleasantly impressed by our visitor, indeed by both our visitors. Benson was a typical Australian; tall, well set up and athletic looking, with a fresh, weather-beaten face and a frank, agreeable manner. His companion, Mr. Mortimer, was of a quite different type; a quiet, sedate man with something rather studious and bookish in his appearance.

"I suppose," said Benson, when the conversational preliminaries had been disposed of, "Mr Penfield has given you a general outline of the business?"

"He has given me the report of the inquest," replied Thorndyke, "and I and my colleague, Dr. Jervis, have read it most

carefully. So now we probably know as much as to the facts of the case as you do, and are in a position to discuss them. Mr. Penfield informs me that you wish some action to be taken, and the first question is what kind of action you contemplate."

This very definite question seemed rather to disconcert Benson, for he answered in a somewhat hesitating manner: "Well, you see, I have had all along the feeling that this dreadful affair was perfectly unnatural and that there was something behind it that was never brought out by the inquest. In the first place, my cousin, Gillum, was the very last person whom I should have expected to commit suicide."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is frequently said by witnesses at inquests and probably quite truly. But let us be definite. There are only two possibilities in the case of your cousin's death. Either he committed suicide or he was murdered. The jury decided that he killed himself. Do you contest the fact of the suicide?"

"Well, no," replied Benson. "I don't see how I can. I heard all the evidence; and, unwilling as I am to believe that he killed himself, I don't see that there is any escape from the facts."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "that is how it appears to me. Then, if we accept, as we seem bound to do, the fact that John Gillum died by his own hand, we can pass on to the next point. What is the further question that you want to raise?"

"The further question," replied Benson, "is, why did he commit suicide? Mortimer thinks that he killed himself because he had gambled away all his money, but I don't believe that. It isn't a sufficient reason. And we know that he was being harassed by blackmailers. Now, my feeling is that it was not the loss of his money that drove him to suicide, but the agony of mind that he was suffering on account of these blackmailing devils."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is a perfectly reasonable view, and I am inclined to agree with you. But what practical effect do you propose to give to your belief?"

"If John Gillum was driven to his death by these wretches," Benson replied with some heat, "they are virtually his murderers. I know that, in law, they are not chargeable with murder. But, even legally, they are guilty of a very serious crime, and I want them found and brought to justice."

"That, again," said Thorndyke, "is a perfectly reasonable position, and I view your desire very sympathetically. But there are two points that I think it necessary to put to you. The first is that what you propose is as nearly as may be an impossibility. So far as I know at present, there is no clue whatever to the identity of these people, nor—so far as I am aware—is anything known as to the circumstances in which the payments were made."

"I think," said Benson, "Mortimer can tell us something about that, and I believe he has some suspicions as to who these people are."

"We will hear what Mr. Mortimer has to tell us presently," said Thorndyke. "Meanwhile let us consider the second point. That raises the question whether it is, in fact, expedient to take any action, even with a chance of success."

"Expedient?" Benson repeated. "Is there any thing against it besides the difficulty?"

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that if we consider the circumstances as they are known to us, we shall see certain objections to taking the kind of action that you contemplate. May I ask whether your cousin was at all a nervous or timorous man? A man easily intimidated?"

"Most certainly not," replied Benson. "He was a decidedly bold, self-reliant man."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "then consider his position at the time of his death. He was being blackmailed by at least one person, and that at the rate of two thousand pounds a year. Now, you know, Mr. Benson, it is not usually possible to levy blackmail on a person who has nothing to conceal unless that person is more than ordinarily easily frightened. But your cousin was not easily frightened; and yet he was paying this enormous amount. More over, as you believe, he was so distressed by his position that he took his life to escape from the persecution. What are we to infer from this? Is it possible to resist the inference that there was something in his life that he was compelled to conceal at any price?"

Benson was evidently a good deal taken aback by Thorndyke's blunt statement of the case. He remained silent for some moments; then he replied: "It had occurred to me that some mud might be stirred up if we were to bring the blackmailers to justice, but I hadn't put it as strongly as you have."

"It is necessary to face the facts squarely," said Thorndyke, "and those facts suggest very strongly that your cousin was concealing something highly discreditable; and it could have been no trivial scandal. In that case he could have appealed to the police and would have been given ample protection without any inquisition. The amount which he paid suggests something of extreme gravity; something which he dared not allow to come to light. Therefore, I ask you again, would it not be wiser to let sleeping dogs lie?"

Once more Benson reflected before replying, but he was not long in coming to a decision. "It might be wiser," he admitted, "but it would be against justice and common morality. As to the scandal, poor old Jack is dead, so it won't affect him. And I don't suppose it was anything that would lessen my respect for him. At any rate, I feel strongly that those devils who drove him to a miserable death ought to be dragged out into the light of day and made to pay their debt."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "I think you are right in principle. But I must finally remind you of the difficulties of the case. Remember that, not only are we without any clue as to who these people were—unless Mr. Mortimer can supply one—but, even if we could discover them, the principal witness—the vital witness, in fact—is dead, and it might easily turn out to be

impossible to make out a case against them, or, at any rate, to prove it. Furthermore, the proceedings, involving the employment of private enquiry agents, might prove to be extremely costly; and in the very probable event of total failure, a vast amount of money would have been wasted."

"I know," said Benson, "and it is very good of you to put the matter so clearly. But my mind is made up. Whatever it costs, if you are prepared to undertake the case, I should like you to get on with it. I am a man of ample means, and I am a bachelor; and if I spend every penny that I have, and even if we fail after all, I shall feel that the money was well spent in trying to bring Jack Gillum's murderers to the punishment that they deserve."

I could see that Benson's attitude had secured Thorndyke's warm sympathy, as, indeed, it had secured mine. But I think both of us rather regretted that he should have embarked on an enterprise that was almost certain to end in disappointment.

"Well, Benson," my colleague said cordially, "I congratulate you on your courage and your very proper desire for justice. I will certainly do what I can to get you satisfaction; but I warn you that, if the case turns out to be quite impossible, I shall not waste my time and your money in pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp."

"Thank you," replied Benson. "I put myself entirely in your hands, and I promise you to abide loyally by your decision."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "as we are agreed on the conditions, we may as well make a start and see exactly what our position is. You said that Mr. Mortimer could give us some useful information. Perhaps we had better begin with that."

He looked enquiringly at Mortimer, who, in his turn, looked a little sheepish.

"I am afraid," said he, "that I haven't much to tell. It is only a matter of suspicion."

"Suspensions," remarked Thorndyke, "are of no use as evidence, but they may be quite useful as indicating a line of enquiry. At any rate, let us have them."

"They relate," said Mortimer, "to some people named Foucault who run a gaming house in Gerrard Street. I went there with Gillum on one occasion; on the very night, in fact, when I first made his acquaintance in a social sense. They were an obviously shady lot; but what specially struck me was that Madame Foucault made a dead set at Gillum—flirted with him, or made a show of doing so, in the most ostentatious, almost indecent, manner before the whole roomful of gamblers."

"And was Gillum responsive?" Thorndyke asked.

"Not in the least," replied Mortimer. "But Monsieur Foucault was. He watched them closely the whole of the time that they were together, and his expression as he looked at Gillum was positively murderous. And I gathered that there had been some trouble on previous occasions, for Gillum remarked to me on Foucault's jealousy and made rather a joke of it. And there was no mistaking Foucault's hostility to Gillum. I noticed it when we met in the restaurant before we followed them to the gambling den."

"Have you any further knowledge of these people?" Thorndyke asked.

"No," Mortimer answered. "That was the only occasion on which I met them, and I know nothing more than what I have told you. I must confess that there doesn't seem to be very much in it."

"I am inclined to agree with you," said Thorndyke. "A little made-up scandal of the kind that you suggest might account for an attempt at blackmail on a modest scale. But the one which we are considering seems to have been something much more formidable. Still, I will get you to let me have the names and address of these people so that we may make a few enquiries. And now, as we have squeezed Mr. Mortimer dry, let us hear what Mr. Benson has to tell us."

"I am afraid," said Benson, "that I have nothing at all to tell. You see, it is two years since Gillum left Australia and I know nothing about his doings or way of living since he came to England."

"No," said Thorndyke, "we have to depend on Mr. Mortimer for that. But there is his life in Australia. I want you to review that. Blackmail is usually related to the past, and often to a rather remote past. I ask you to try to recall the circumstances of Gillum's life in Australia and consider whether there may not have been some incident which could have been the subject of blackmail."

"I will think that question over," said Benson, "but, at the moment, I can recall nothing that could possibly have been used against him to extort money. He had no enemies, he never, to my knowledge, had any troubles with women, and I never heard of any sort of scandal."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "turn the question over at your leisure. Now, as we seem to have drawn a blank in Australia, let us take the next stage, his voyage to England. Do you know anything of the incidents of that voyage?"

"Not in much detail," replied Benson; "but I came to England in the same ship, and I had some talk about him with the captain and the first officer."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "try to recall what you learned from them and consider whether there was anything—in his relations with the other passengers, for instance—that might be worth enquiring into."

"I don't think he had much to do with the other passengers. There were only a few of them—the ship was chiefly a cargo ship—and they were mostly men in the meat trade. I gathered that Gillum spent most of his time playing cards with the doctor and the purser in their cabins, particularly in the purser's room. Those two men were his special cronies, and, by all

accounts, he struck up a very close friendship with them both."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "they ought to be able to tell us all about the voyage and who the other passengers were."

"Why do you suppose anything happened on the ship?" Benson asked.

"I am merely considering it as a possibility," Thorndyke replied. "Remember, Benson, that something happened somewhere. That blackmail was not paid for nothing; and as we have not yet found a starting-point for an inquiry, we must trace Gillum's doings and his contacts with other persons as well as we can. Probably these two men are at present not available for inquiries. I suppose the ship is now outward bound?"

"Yes," replied Benson, "but neither of those men is on board. Both of them left the ship and the service at the end of the voyage. I learned that when I was on board."

"You mean that they both left the ship at the same time as Gillum?" Thorndyke asked.

"Not actually at the same time," Benson replied. "Gillum went ashore at Marseilles and travelled over land, making a leisurely journey across France so as to see something of the country. I think he arrived in England about six weeks or two months after the others. But I know that the doctor and the purser both left the service at the end of the voyage, when they had settled their business with the owners."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "it is possible that their relations with Gillum may have continued during the time of his residence in England, in fact, it is rather likely. You don't, I suppose, know where it would be possible to find them?"

"I asked about them at the shipping office," replied Benson. "As to the doctor, they knew nothing but that he had some idea of going into practice or else getting a job on a different line. But the purser is certainly beyond our reach. He is dead. They told me about him when I called at the office. It seems that he died under rather mysterious circumstances, for there was some uncertainty as to whether he had committed suicide or had been murdered. But I don't know any of the details. As the man was a stranger to me, I didn't go into the matter."

"No," said Thorndyke, "but I think we shall have found out what the circumstances were. A suicide, and still more a murder, seems to demand investigation. Do you remember the purser's name?"

"Yes," replied Benson, "his name was Abel Webb."

"Abel Webb!" Mortimer exclaimed in a tone of the utmost astonishment. "Why, that was the name of the man whose body I discovered in the porch of St. Michael's Church. It is a most astonishing coincidence. And what makes it still more so is the fact that the finding of that body was the occasion of my making Gillum's acquaintance."

"You had better tell us about that," said Thorndyke. "I mean as to Gillum's connection with your discovery. The case itself I remember quite clearly."

"It happened this way," said Mortimer. "I had seen the police carry the body down to the ambulance and was standing there in the crowd waiting to see it move off when someone came up and asked me what the excitement was about and whether it was a motor accident. I turned round to answer, and then I recognised the questioner as one of the bank's customers, Mr. Gillum. I told him what had happened, and I also told him, and he could see for himself that I was a good deal upset by the affair. He was extremely kind and sympathetic and eventually insisted on taking me off in a taxi to dine with him at a restaurant. And it was that same evening after dinner, that I went with him to the gaming house that I told you about."

"I take it," said Thorndyke, "that you did not know at the time who the dead man was."

"No," answered Mortimer. "I learned that first at the inquest."

"Did Gillum come forward to give any evidence as to deceased at the inquest or afterwards?"

"He couldn't have come forward before the inquest because the identity of the deceased had not been disclosed. But I should say that he never did."

"Do you know whether Gillum ever learned who the dead man was?"

"I know he did, for I discussed the case with him. He had read a very full report of the inquest and seemed to remember all about the evidence. And the report contained not only the name of the deceased but his description as a former purser of one of the Dominion Line ships."

"Did he tell you much about his relations with Webb?"

"No," replied Mortimer, "the astonishing thing is that he never let drop the faintest hint that he had ever heard of the man before. In our talk about the inquest, he spoke of the dead man as if he had been a complete stranger."

"That is very extraordinary," exclaimed Benson.

"It is," Mortimer agreed, "though Gillum's reticence in this case is less remarkable than another man's would have been, for he was reticent about everything; I might almost say, secretive. He never told me anything about himself—excepting his gambling exploits. He was confidential enough about those. But he was extraordinarily close respecting his private affairs. You will hardly believe it, but until after his death I never knew that he had been in Australia."

When Mortimer had finished speaking, a rather curious silence fell on us all. Benson looked puzzled, but he made no



remark and put no question to Mortimer. But I could see that the latter's statement had made a deep impression on Thorndyke, as it had on me; and when the discussion was resumed, the drift of his questions made it clear to me that what had struck me had also struck him.

"I think," said he, "that Webb's death occurred about a year ago. Do you happen to remember the approximate date, Mortimer?"

"I remember the exact date," was the reply. "It was the ninth of last September."

Thorndyke made a note of the date and then remarked: "The fact that Abel Webb met a violent death makes it necessary to look rather more closely into the incidents of the voyage to England. Of course, there may be no connection; but it is an abnormal circumstance and we are bound to take note of it. And as Abel Webb has gone out of our ken, the only person left from whom we could get any in is the doctor. Benson can't tell us where he is to be found, but a doctor is usually easy to trace, as he is bound to keep the Registrar informed as to changes of address. What was his name?"

"His name was Peck," replied Benson. "Augustus Peck."

"I will look him up in the directory," said Thorndyke "or at the Registrar's office and see if we can get into touch with him. And now, Mortimer, to return to the evidences of blackmail. Apart from the large drafts that you have mentioned, evidently connected with the letters that were found, is there any positive suggestion of other payments, earlier in date. It is important that we should fix, if possible, the time when the blackmailing began. Can you tell us anything definite about that?"

"Yes," replied Mortimer, "I think I can. Quite recently I have gone into the question afresh. Benson has kindly lent me Gillum's pass-book so that I could study it at home. I have gone through it very carefully, and it occurred to me that if I made a graph of the dates and amounts, any small periodic fluctuations would be made visible."

"Excellent," said Thorndyke. "And what did your graph show?"

"It showed a small periodic rise corresponding roughly with the ordinary quarter days. This began quite early, within a month of the opening of the account, and it went on until the big drafts began."

"Do you say," Thorndyke asked, "that the small rises ceased when the large drafts began, or were you unable to ascertain that?"

"I am disposed to think that the small rises ceased when the large quarterly payments began, though they might have become merged in higher rises of the curve due to the big payments. But, allowing for the possibility of this confusion, the smaller payments ceased and were replaced by the larger."

"What were the amounts of the smaller payments?"

"So far as I could judge, the excess above the ordinary withdrawals would be about two hundred pounds a quarter."

"What did you infer from this? Did it seem to you to suggest that there was more than one blackmailer?"

"No," replied Mortimer. "My reading of it was that there was only one; that for about a year he had been satisfied with a payment of something like eight hundred a year, and that he had then suddenly raised his demands. That would account for the smaller payments ceasing when the larger ones began."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "that appears to be a reasonable inference. But it is difficult to judge. We really want to know more about Gillum's private life and habits; but I don't see where we are to gain the knowledge."

"I think," said Benson, "that Mortimer may be able to help you in that. He is writing some sort of account of his connection with my cousin. How are you getting on with it, Mortimer?"

"I have finished it," Mortimer replied, "but I don't think it would be of much use to Dr. Thorndyke. You see," he continued in response to an enquiring glance from my colleague, "it occurred to me after the inquest that it would be rather interesting to put on record, while the facts were still fresh in my memory, the whole incident of my acquaintance with John Gillum; and I have found it quite interesting to write, but I don't think it would be very thrilling to read. And I doubt whether it would be of any use to you, for I wrote it without any thought of an inquiry such as you are engaged in."

"But, my dear fellow," said Thorndyke, "that is precisely its most valuable quality. A man writing an account with the conscious intention of throwing light on some question tends unconsciously to select the facts which appear to him to be important and to ignore other facts which seem to have no bearing. But his selection may be all wrong. He may omit something of vital importance through having failed to realise its significance. Whereas your little history gives the facts impartially without selection. Would it be possible for us to have the privilege of reading it?"

Mortimer smiled rather shyly. "It is a poor performance in a literary sense," said he, "but, of course, you can see it if you wish to. I rattled it off on the typewriter, and, as I did it in duplicate, you can have one copy to keep as long as you like. I will post it off to you to-night."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "I shall read it with interest even if it throws no further light on the case. And there are two other matters that may be mentioned before we adjourn this meeting. Who has the blackmailer's letters?"

"They are in Penfield's custody at present," replied Benson. "He has all the documents."

"The other matter," said Thorndyke, "refers to Gillum's chambers. Who has possession of them? You, I suppose, are the

nominal tenant.”

“Yes, I am the tenant until Michaelmas or until they are let. Why do you ask?”

“I merely wanted to know whether they would be available if it should seem desirable to make an inspection.”

“What use would an inspection be?” Benson asked.

“It is impossible to say,” replied Thorndyke. “Probably none. But some point may arise from the reading of Mortimer’s manuscript which may be elucidated by looking over the premises.”

“Well, you know best,” said Benson. “At any rate, I will send you the keys in case you should want them. And I think that finishes our business for the present. It is very good of you to have given us so much of your time; but, before we go, there is one question that I should like to ask. You have gone very patiently into the case to-night. From what you have learned from us, do you think you will be disposed to do what I am hoping you will; to prosecute a search for those wretches who are responsible for poor Jack Gillum’s death?”

“I am prepared to look into the case,” Thorndyke replied. “If I find that we come to an absolute dead end, I shall advise you to abandon the inquiry. But if I see any prospect whatever of bringing it to a successful conclusion, I shall place my services unreservedly at your disposal. Will that satisfy you?”

“It will more than satisfy me,” replied Benson, “and, for my part, I promise to be guided by your advice, whatever you may decide.”

With this, the two men rose, and, when we had escorted them to the landing and seen them safely launched on the stairs, we wished them good-night and re-entered our chambers.

---

## IX. — THE EMPTY NEST

“WELL, Thorndyke,” I said when we had re-entered and closed the door, “this has been quite an entertaining interview. I fancy that your drag net brought up rather more than you expected. A mighty queer catch, in fact.”

“Yes,” he agreed, as he dug out his pipe with a thoughtful air, “a decidedly queer catch. And it will need some sorting out. What do you make of it?”

“It seems to me,” I replied, “that we have identified one of the blackmailers and accounted for the other.”

“That is the result in a nutshell,” said he. “But I should like to hear how you arrived at it.”

“The argument,” I replied, “consists in stating the facts in their natural sequence. To begin with Abel Webb. I remember the case quite clearly. It was that cyanide injection case; and when we discussed it, we agreed that suicide could not be entertained. It was a blatant case of murder.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed. “I accept that.”

“Then we agree that Abel Webb was murdered. He was murdered on the ninth of September. At that time Gillum was being blackmailed at the rate of eight hundred a year. But exactly a week after the murder, on the sixteenth of September, the blackmail suddenly jumped up to the rate of two thousand a year.

“At, or about, the time of the murder, Gillum is known to have been in the neighbourhood, within a few yards of the place where it was committed; and, after the murder, although he and Mortimer discussed it in detail, he concealed from Mortimer the fact that he had been acquainted with Webb. You agree to that?”

“Yes,” Thorndyke replied. “Mortimer referred to it as reticence, but reticence to that extent amounts to concealment.”

“Those, then,” said I, “are the facts, and my interpretation of them is this: Abel Webb was blackmailing Gillum to the tune of eight hundred a year. Possibly he was also becoming troublesome. At any rate, Gillum got tired of it and took an opportunity to kill Abel Webb. For that I don’t blame him, although his methods were not pretty. But then Gillum had bad luck. Somebody knew more than he was aware of and promptly put on the screw; and put it on so forcibly that when Gillum came to the end of his resources, he committed suicide rather than face the consequences of not being able to pay. That is my reading of the case, and I rather think it is yours too.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed, “that is what the facts seem to suggest, and I am prepared to accept your theory as a working hypothesis. Without prejudice, however, as our friend Penfield would say. I mean that, while adopting it as a working hypothesis, we must not lose sight of its hypothetical nature. Fresh facts may lead us to modify our views.”

“Yes, that is true,” I admitted; “but you speak of a working hypothesis. But how does it work? The problem is to find the principal blackmailer. But I don’t see that what we have learned gets us any more forward on that quest.”

“There,” said Thorndyke, “I disagree entirely. Assuming your interpretation of the facts to be correct, we have a most important clue to the identity of the chief blackmailer. You have said it yourself. ‘Somebody knew more than he was aware of.’ But what did that somebody know? He must have known, not only of the connection between Gillum and Webb, but that Webb was blackmailing Gillum. That implies that the blackmailer must have known Webb pretty intimately; but if Webb was really a blackmailer, the suggestion is that the matter which supported the blackmail was something connected with the voyage from Australia to England. But that, in its turn, seems to connect the unknown blackmailer with the

voyage; and if we are right in inferring such a connection, we have a very valuable hint as to where to look for further information."

"You mean the ship's doctor?"

"Yes. If the blackmail arose out of any incident that occurred on board ship, and still more if the blackmailer should have been one of the other passengers, the doctor could hardly fail to have some knowledge of the matter, or some knowledge of the circumstances out of which the blackmail arose. Even if he had no suspicion of the blackmailing transaction, he must know what the general conditions were on the voyage. There isn't much privacy on board ship, especially on a long voyage."

"Yes," I agreed, "the doctor should be a useful witness. Benson's knowledge of the matter is based on hearsay, but Dr. Peck's is first-hand, so that we could cross-examine him in detail. But the question is, how are we to get into touch with him? He may be in India or China by this time."

"That is a possibility," said Thorndyke, "but we had better begin by finding out his permanent address from the Medical Directory."

He went into the office and returned with the volume in his hand. Laying it down on the table, he turned over the leaves until he found the entry, which he read put.

"Augustus Peck, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., L.D.S., Surgeon, Commonwealth and Dominions Line. Permanent address, 87, Staple Inn."

"Staple Inn," I repeated. "It is rather odd that this case should be connected with the only two remaining inns of Chancery. And I notice that he has the dental as well as the medical qualification."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "and quite a useful combination for a ship's surgeon. I suppose our next move must be to call at Staple Inn and see if we can discover his present whereabouts. But there is no hurry. We shall have Mortimer's manuscript in the morning and it may be that we shall pick up some hint from that."

This ended our discussion for the time being; and if it had not carried us far, it, and the preceding interview, had yielded more matter for investigation than Penfield's dismal account of the case had led us to expect.

On the following morning, Mortimer's manuscript arrived, and the same post brought a package from Benson containing two keys tied together and bearing a parchment label inscribed, "64, Clifford's Inn, 1st floor." As Thorndyke was occupied during the morning and I was free, I took possession of the manuscript and read through the seven chapters of which it consisted with close attention and growing disappointment. For I had expected that Mortimer's story would furnish us with some new facts; whereas it seemed to me merely to repeat at greater length what he had already told us or what we had gathered from the report of the inquest.

But in this, as appeared later, I was mistaken; and as Mortimer's history contained practically all that we ever knew of the period that it described, I have attached it as a preface to this record and shall hence forth assume that the reader is fully acquainted with its contents. And it may be that he, or she, more discerning than I, will already have noted certain points the significance of which I failed to appreciate.

Certain suspicions did, indeed, cross my mind on the subject, especially when I noted the deep interest and attention with which Thorndyke studied the document. But then my colleague was a man who habitually gave his whole attention to even the simplest matters; and I could see that this case, with all its obscurities and ambiguities, had taken a strong hold on him. It was the kind of puzzle that he really enjoyed; and he was going to spare no pains in seeking out the solution.

About a week after the arrival of the manuscript I ventured to ask his views on it, with the above suspicions in mind.

"What do you make of Mortimer's history?" said I. "To me it seems rather barren of matter. I have not extracted from it anything that I did not already know."

"Nor have I," he replied, "in the sense of new facts of a fundamental order. I hardly expected to. But the story has its value in that it gives us a lively picture of the man, Gillum. It shows us a shrewd, ingenious, rather subtle man, with a distinctly casuistical type of mind; and it enables us to contrast his apparent intelligence with his amazingly foolish conduct."

"But we were able to do that already," I objected; "and as to the main problem, the identity of the principal blackmailer, it gives us not the faintest hint."

"That is true," said Thorndyke. "But perhaps the immediate problem is rather the occasion of the blackmail; what it was that Gillum had done to render him susceptible to blackmail. Mortimer throws no light on that question either. Whatever we are to learn from his story must be gathered by reading between the lines and considering the possible significance of apparently trivial things and events."

"You mean, in relation to our working hypothesis?" I suggested.

"Yes," he replied. "But let us not be obsessed by our hypothesis. It may be entirely erroneous; and while we are using it as the only instrument of investigation which we possess, we should scrutinise every new fact, as well as the old ones, to see whether any alternative hypothesis is suggested. Read Mortimer's history again, Jervis, and ask yourself in respect of Gillum's sayings and doings and the little trivial occurrences which Mortimer chronicles, whether they support our

hypothesis or whether they seem to be consistent with some different meaning.”

As this implied that Thorndyke had already taken his own prescription, I decided to study the manuscript afresh. Meanwhile, by way of “getting some of my own back,” I remarked with a grin: “There is one thing that I have been expecting ever since Mortimer’s document turned up; and I’m still expecting it.”

“What is that?” he asked, regarding me suspiciously.

“I have been expecting that you would want to go across to Clifford’s Inn and nose round the empty chambers.”

“And why not?” said he. “I think it is an excellent suggestion. It would be quite interesting to fill in Mortimer’s picture with its appropriate background; and as we have the afternoon free, I propose that we put your idea into execution forth with. We will go over as soon as we have had lunch.”

Of course, I agreed (noting that Thorndyke, according to his habit, had planted his “idea” on me); and, when we had dispatched our meal, and Thorndyke had provided himself with his invaluable research-case and his graduated walking-stick, we went forth, and passing out of the Inner Temple gate, crossed Fleet Street, and walking up Clifford’s Inn Passage, came out into the courtyard by the garden.

“Sic transit,” Thorndyke remarked, regretfully, as he cast a disparaging eye on the garish new buildings that were beginning to replace the pleasant old houses. “John Penhallow’s chambers have gone and soon all the others will follow; and then all that will remain to show posterity the quiet sumptuousness and dignity of London chambers in the seventeenth century will be Penhallow’s rooms in the Victoria and Albert Museum.”

He stood for a few moments running a reflective eye over the exterior of Number 64, observed by a pair of inquisitive eyes from the window of the type writing office on the ground floor; then he plunged into the dim entry and I followed him up the stairs until we emerged into the daylight of the first-floor landing.

“This is rather gruesome,” said I, as we threw open the inner door and looked into the room. “With the exception of the corpse, the place is just the same as it appeared to Mortimer when he and Benson and Weech discovered the body. Nothing seems to have been moved.”

“No,” Thorndyke agreed. “We have only to imagine the body lying on the couch and we have the tableau that Mortimer described.”

We went in and looked curiously at the couch, the pillow of which still bore the impression of the dead man’s head, and the little table by its side with the siphon, the tumbler, and the decanter, all bearing the very distinct prints of the dead man’s fingers.

“We may as well preserve these,” said Thorndyke, slipping on a pair of loose gloves. “They are not likely to help us, but you never know. It is a good rule never to destroy evidence.”

“I don’t see what evidence they could furnish,” said I, “seeing that they were proved to be Gillum’s own finger-prints.”

“But that is evidence,” he replied. “Prints like these are Gillum’s; and prints unlike them are those of somebody else. As we are seeking an unknown person, that kind of evidence may be quite material. And you notice that there is a nearly complete set of both hands.”

He looked about the room, and observing a built-in cupboard by the fireplace, turned the key which was in the lock, and opened the door. One of the shelves was nearly empty, and as the height was sufficient to take the siphon, he transferred that and the tumbler and the smooth, patternless decanter from the table to the vacant space and closed the door.

“We will lock the cupboard and take the key when we go,” said he. “Meanwhile, we may find some other things which we may think fit to put in it.”

He went back to the couch and ran his eye over the cushions and the pillow, stooping over the latter and examining it more closely.

“This is worth noticing,” said he. “The man’s head could have rested on this pillow only a few hours while he was alive and capable of movement, but yet there are no less than three hairs sticking to the fabric.”

“He may have used the pillow on other occasions,” I suggested; to which Thorndyke assented.

“At any rate,” he added, “we may as well collect these hairs, as we can assume them to be authentic samples of Gillum’s hair.”

“I suppose so,” I agreed, though without enthusiasm; for it would have been more to the point if they had been authentic samples of the blackmailer’s hair. Thorndyke noted the tone of my remark and smiled as he opened his research case, which he had deposited on the table.

“You think,” said he, “that we are collecting all the things that don’t matter. Probably you are right; but it is better to provide yourself with useless material than to throw away things that may later be badly needed.”

He took out of the case a pair of forceps and one of his invaluable seed envelopes, and with the former picked out the three hairs—two black and one white—and transferred them to the envelope, on which he wrote a brief description, before returning it to the case. Then he began a leisurely perambulation of the room, inspecting its various contents and making occasional remarks on them. The bookcase seemed to interest him, for he stood before it running his eye along the rows of

volumes and apparently reading their titles.

"In general," said he, "the books seem to confirm Mortimer's estimate of Gillum's character and tastes. There are six works on London topography, catalogues of the National Gallery, the Tate, and the Wallace Collection, a book on games of chance, and one on the theory of probability. Those are according to expectation and so is the book on Modern Organ Music; but Staunton's Chess is not. I don't think that chess-players are usually interested in games of chance."

He turned away from the bookcase and resumed his travels round the room, halting presently before a rather elegantly turned roulette box.

"This," said he, "is the box that Mortimer speaks of. Apparently, Gillum used it for experiments in connection with his projected system. But it is possible that he may have used it for actual play with some of his visitors. Perhaps it would be as well to put it away with the other specimens."

He took it up in his gloved hands and carried it over to the cupboard where he placed it on the shelf with the objects from the table. Then, having exhausted the interest of the living-room, he passed through into the bedroom.

It was a small room, simply and rather barely furnished, but clean and orderly with the tidiness of a ship's cabin, a fact which attracted Thorndyke's attention as well as mine, for he remarked: "The late Gillum seems to have been a tidy, methodical man. You noticed evidences of that in the living-room, and it is still more striking here. The bed, you observe, has been carefully made; and he made it himself; though he must have known that he was never going to sleep in it. And no cast-off clothes lying about or even hanging on the pegs. I suppose, when he undressed, he put them into the wardrobe."

He verified the surmise by opening the doors of the wardrobe; which showed, in the one division, the clothes that Gillum must have taken off hanging on the side pegs, while, in the other division, which was fitted with shelves, were stored clean shirts, collars, handkerchiefs, several pairs of shoes and three hats. These things he considered attentively, and especially the cast-off clothes, which he took down from the pegs and, having looked them over, turned out the pockets, returning the contents of each after having examined them. But Gillum seemed to have carried few things in his pockets, and of those which we found none appeared to be of any interest. A bank-note case—empty—a handful of silver and bronze coins, a pocket-knife and a set of well-worn dice formed the principal items.

"Not much to be learned from those," Thorndyke remarked as he closed the wardrobe, "excepting that he respected his clothes and avoided bulging pockets."

He walked across the room to the large chest of drawers that stood in the corner near the bed, lifting the valance of the latter and revealing a sponge bath underneath. As we reached the chest, I observed in the dark corner between it and the wall a good sized cylindrical basket which had apparently served as a rubbish dump, and drew Thorndyke's attention to it as a possible mine of evidential wealth. He ignored the irony of my tone and, promptly adopting my suggestion, picked up the basket and turned out its contents on to the bed. It was certainly a very miscellaneous collection and as I regarded it with a faint grin I wondered what Mr. Penfield would have thought if he could have seen my colleague systematically sorting it out and placing each article after inspection at the foot of the bed. Over some of these, such as three obviously superannuated socks and a couple of slightly frayed collars, he passed lightly with a single glance; but most of the things he inspected attentively, little as they seemed to merit his attention, evidently considering what inferences they suggested. I watched him curiously, my tendency to be amused by the apparent triviality of the proceedings restrained by the recollection of the surprising results of similar examinations in the past; and, as I looked on, I made a mental inventory of the collection with a view to possible results in the future.

Besides the socks and collars, a pair of worn fabric gloves and a broken shoe-lace, the "find" included an empty tin which had once contained an antiseptic tooth powder, which Thorndyke opened, and sniffed at the pinch of powder which still clung to the box; two empty "Milk of Magnesia" bottles, a worn-out toothbrush (which Thorndyke examined closely and also smelt), an empty bottle labelled "Bromidia", which seemed to suggest that Gilum had suffered from insomnia, another empty bottle labelled "Cawley's Cleansing Fluid," from which Thorndyke drew out the cork in order to smell at what remained of the contents, several crumpled-up tradesmen's bills, and a small, heavy object wrapped up in a sheet of writing-paper. This Thorndyke took up and carefully opening out the paper displayed a small bolt with a fly nut attached.

"Now," said he, "I wonder what that might have belonged to. A one-inch, square-headed eighth-inch bolt with what looks like a Whitworth thread and a fly nut. Apparently part of some mechanism; but we have not come across any mechanism to which it corresponds."

He smoothed out the paper and examined it on both sides, but there was no writing on it to give any clue to the use of the bolt. Finally he wrapped the latter up again in its paper and dropped it into his pocket, presumably for further consideration at his leisure. And having thus exhausted the material from the basket, he gathered the derelicts together and returned them to their receptacle.

The chest of drawers had apparently served the purpose of a dressing-table in conjunction with a good-sized looking-glass which hung on the wall beside the window. Like the rest of the room, it was quite tidy though now covered with dust, and the objects set out on it represented the bare necessities for the toilet. On a china tray were two toothbrushes and a small tin of "Odonto" dentifrice, and beside the tray were a pair of nail scissors, a button-hook, and a turned wooden box containing spare collar-studs—one gold and several ivory—and a pair of cheap rolled gold links. There was also an earthenware bowl and a pair of hairbrushes. The latter Thorndyke took up, and, separating them, looked them over in his queer, inquisitive way. They were good brushes, though old and much worn as to the bristles, with ebony backs in which

the initials "J.G." had been inlaid in silver, but they appeared not to have been cleaned very lately, for the bristles held a considerable quantity of hair.

"I think," said Thorndyke, "we will take these and sort out the hairs. Probably they are all Gillum's but it is possible that the brushes may have been used by some of his visitors, if he ever had any, and we may learn something about them."

He put the brushes in his coat pocket and then took up the bowl, which was of red earthenware, fitted with a cover bearing a highly-coloured label with the inscription: "Dux Super-fatted Shaving Soap."

"Rather a nice bowl," said Thorndyke, holding it out at arm's length to view it; "a pleasant shape and very suitable to the plain earthen body. But I am surprised that Gillum didn't soak off that label."

He lifted the lid of the bowl, and finding it empty save for a few drops of moisture at the bottom, sniffed at it and passed it to me.

"It smells to me," said I, "like chlorine, or perhaps chlorinated soda; some lotion of the Eusol type."

"Yes," he agreed, "something of that kind. Apparently it came from the bottle of antiseptic cleansing solution that we found in the tidy."

He put the bowl back in its place and then pulled out the drawers of the chest in succession. All of them seemed to be filled with articles of clothing, neatly folded and smelling slightly of camphor. These he glanced at but without disturbing them, and, when he had pushed in the last of the drawers, he turned away and stood a while, looking thoughtfully around the room, apparently memorising its contents and their arrangement. There was not very much to see. The mantelpiece was bare save for a couple of candlesticks carrying rather large stearine candles. There remained only the large porcelain sink in the corner; a deep, rectangular sink of the kind used in chemical laboratories, but which here seemed, by the bracket over it bearing a soap dish, a nailbrush, and a bath sponge, to have served the purpose of a lavatory basin as well as a means of emptying the bath.

When we had inspected the sink, Thorndyke drew my attention to a mouse-hole in the corner beneath it which had been very neatly and effectively filled with Portland cement.

"That," said he, "suggests a man with a practical and efficient mind. Some people will go on for ever setting traps, regardless of the rate at which rodents increase. But in old buildings the only effective method is to stop the holes with Portland cement, preferably mixed with an 'aggregate' of sand or powdered glass. That is Polton's plan, and it keeps our chambers practically free from mice."

From the bedroom we passed through a narrow doorway into the kitchen, and here we noticed the same appearance of order and tidiness as in the other rooms. It was a small place, but very completely equipped. There was a little gas cooker mounted on a stand and bearing a large aluminium kettle, a range of shelves on which the china was neatly disposed, the plates on edge and the cups inverted and all spotlessly clean; another shelf bore a row of covered jars and tins, each labelled with the name of its contents; several dish covers of wire gauze or aluminium hung from nails on the wall with a frying-pan and a couple of small saucepans, and a carpet-sweeper in the corner accounted for the conspicuous cleanness of the floor. And here, too, I noticed a couple of neatly stopped mouse-holes.

The kitchen communicated with another room by a narrow doorway. The door was locked, but as the key was in the lock we were able to open it and pass through into the adjoining room, which I recognised as the larder that Mortimer had described.

It was smaller even than the kitchen, being only about eight feet by six; and this small space was further reduced by the great coal-bin, which occupied the whole of the longer side of the room. But like the kitchen it was admirably arranged. There were two shelves on one of which lay three bottles of claret and one of sauterne, while the other was occupied by one or two dishes protected by wire covers through which could be seen—and smelt—some mouldy remains of food. In addition to the open shelves there was a tall, narrow, meat-safe through the wire gauze panels of which a mouldy, cadaverous odour exhaled. I opened the door and looked in, but as the odour then became more pronounced, I was about to shut it when Thorndyke stooped to examine the bottom shelf and then, reaching in, brought out from the back of the shelf a basin which was thickly encrusted with Portland cement and in which a rough bone spatula still stuck.

"I see," said Thorndyke, "that he used the same 'aggregate' that Polton favours—powdered glass. It is more effective than sand."

"Yes," said I, "and I notice that he has infringed another of Polton's copyrights—the utilisation of worn out toothbrushes by shaving off the bristles."

I broke the spatula off the cement and scraped it clean with my pocket-knife, when it revealed itself as a bone handled dental-plate brush from which he bristles had been cleanly shaved off leaving a broad, blunt blade perfectly suited for the purpose for which it had been used.

"It is really remarkable," I commented, "that a man of so much common sense and capacity in small things should have been such a fool in the things that seriously matter."

"It is," he agreed, "but Gillum's case is by no means unique in that respect."

He turned away from the safe and transferred his attention to the coal-bin.

"I think," he remarked, "that this is the largest bin that I have ever seen in a set of chambers. Coal storage is not usually their strong point."

He measured the principal dimensions roughly with his graduated stick and then continued: "Eight feet long by thirty inches wide and twenty-nine inches deep—roughly fifty cubic feet. I don't know what that represents in coal, but it would seem to be a fairly liberal allowance for a man living alone and cooking by gas."

"Yes," I agreed. "Nearly a year's supply, I should think. And it seems," I added, as I lifted the lid and found the bin nearly full, "as if he had replenished his stock shortly before his death. Which appears an odd proceeding when we remember what the weather was like at that time. But perhaps he took advantage of the low summer prices to lay in his year's supply."

"Possibly," Thorndyke agreed, "that is to say, if it is really all coal. The quantity seems rather incredible."

He thrust his stick down into the loose coal, and at a few inches of depth found it stopped by an obviously solid obstruction.

"There seems to be a false bottom," I remarked. "Convenient enough for keeping the coal within easy reach, but rather a waste of space."

"Perhaps he didn't waste the space," said Thorndyke. "Let us see."

With the scoop that lay on top of the coal, he began to shovel the latter away from the right-hand end, piling it in a heap at the left end. This soon brought the false bottom into view, and with it an iron ring sunk into the board near the right-hand end. Further shovelling disclosed a crack across the bottom near the middle, that divided it into two halves. Taking down a brush that hung from a nail on the wall, and that had manifest traces of coal dust on its hair, Thorndyke proceeded to brush away the small coal and dust until the surface of the false bottom was comparatively clean. Then he slipped his finger through the ring and lifted the right half of the bottom out bodily.

"The space wasn't wasted, you see," he said. "It seems to have been used as a store for things that were only occasionally wanted."

As he spoke, he threw the light of his pocket-lamp into the dark cavity, revealing a number of tins of various sizes, apparently containing tongue and other preserved foods, and seven or eight bottles of port and sherry.

"There was a good deal of space wasted nevertheless," said I. "The cavity looks about eighteen inches deep, and only four or five have been used."

Thorndyke dipped his stick into the cavity and read off the measurement. "Nineteen inches from the top of the supporting blocks to the floor. It would have held a good deal more than he put into it, but it was not a very handy container as the coal had to be moved every time it was opened. But it looks as if the contrivance had been put in by Gillum, himself. The bin is obviously old, perhaps as old as the house, but the false bottom and the blocks that support it look quite fresh and new. Evidently, they were a recent addition."

He put the false bottom back in its place and then, taking a last look round, stepped up to the window. Apparently, a sash cord had broken and not been repaired, for the lower half of the sash was held up as far as it would go by a piece of wood on either side, which had been jammed into the groove and fixed with screws. It looked a makeshift arrangement, but as Thorndyke pointed out, it had been adopted deliberately, for the little wooden props had been neatly planed and fitted their place exactly, and the holes for the screws had been properly countersunk.

"I think," he said, "that there is no need to assume a broken sash line. It looks like an arrangement to fix the window open permanently so as to make sure of constant ventilation. You notice the row of holes at the foot of the door, evidently bored for the same purpose, and apparently by Gillum, himself to judge by the fresh, unstained wood inside them."

We let ourselves out by the door which opened on to the landing and which, presumably for that reason, had been fitted with a Yale night-latch and a spring. When we had come out and closed the door, Thorndyke stood for a few moments hesitating.

"I suppose," he said, "that is all, excepting the key of the cupboard." He unlocked the living-room door and re-entered, and when he had locked the cupboard and pocketed the key, looked about the room to see if there was anything that we had omitted to examine.

"What about the writing-table?" said I. "Oughtn't we to see what is in the drawers?"

"I expect Bateman took away all the papers," he replied. "Still, we may as well take a glance at them."

We went over to the table and tried the drawers, but they were all locked, excepting the top one, and we had no key; and the top drawer contained nothing but Gillum's stock of note-paper and envelopes, of each of which Thorndyke took a sample before closing the drawer.

"And that," said he as he folded the paper neatly and slipped it into the envelope, "I think completes the inspection, for the time being, at any rate; unless you can suggest anything further."

"I can suggest lots of things," I replied with a grin. "For instance, you might take the legs off the tables and chairs as the police did in Poe's story of 'The Purloined Letter'; and you might go over the walls and furniture for finger-prints. And then there is the floor. You might set Polton to work on it with a vacuum cleaner and examine with the microscope the dust that

he collected. This has been quite a superficial inspection."

He smiled indulgently at my rather feeble joke, but the result of it was not quite what I had expected.

"I think," he replied, "that we will leave the furniture intact and reserve the finger-print hunt for some future occasion. But, really, your suggestion of the vacuum cleaner is an excellent one, though Gillum's sweeper may have left us a rather meagre gleanings. I will get Polton to go over the floors, and hope that Gillum was not too thorough in his use of the sweeper."

This reply to my facetious suggestion took me aback completely. For my knowledge of Thorndyke told me that he was, according to a playful habit of his, crediting me with an idea which was already in his own mind. He had certainly intended to collect the dust from those floors for examination. But I could not imagine why. Considering the nature of our problem, the proceeding seemed to be completely futile and purposeless. Yet I knew that it could not be. And so the old familiar feeling came over me; the feeling that he had seen farther into this case than I had; that he had already some theory and was not groping in the dark as I was, but was even now seeking an answer to some definite question.

---

## X. — MR. WEECH DISAPPROVES

AS we came out of the entry into the courtyard, we became aware of our old acquaintance, Mr. Weech, the porter of the Inn, hovering in the back ground, whence he had probably observed us at the landing window. Mr. Weech had always interested me. He was a complete and unabridged survival from the Victorian age, alike in his dress, his habits and in a certain subtle combination of dignity and deference in this bearing towards his social superiors. His costume invariably included a tall silk hat and a formal frock coat. Formerly, perchance, but not in my time, the hat may have borne a gold-laced band, and the coat have been embellished with gilt buttons. But nowadays the hat and coat were distinctive enough in themselves; and even the umbrella which was his constant companion, his sceptre and staff of office, seemed not quite like modern umbrellas.

In speech he was singularly precise and careful in his choice of words, though, unfortunately, his judgement was not always equal to his care. For he loved to interlard his sentences with Latin tags; and, as he obviously had no acquaintance with that language, the results were sometimes a little startling.

As we came into view, then, Mr. Weech quickened his pace and advanced towards us with the peculiar splay-footed gait characteristic of men who stand much and walk little, and peering at us inquisitively through his spectacles, essayed cautiously to ascertain what our business was.

"I am afraid," said he, "that you will have found poor Mr. Gillum's chambers locked up—if it was his chambers that you wanted."

"Thank you, Mr. Weech," Thorndyke replied, "but we have the keys. Mr. Benson has lent them to us."

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Weech, in a tone of mild surprise and still milder disapproval.

"We just wanted to look over the chambers," Thorndyke explained.

"Did you indeed, sir?" said Mr. Weech with rather more definite disapproval. "Not, I venture to hope, for professional reasons?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Weech," Thorndyke replied suavely, "but it must be admitted that our interest in the chambers has a slight professional taint. The fact is that Mr. Benson has asked me to make certain enquiries concerning his late cousin."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Weech, now undisguisedly disapproving. "Has it come to that? I had hoped that we had heard the last of that dreadful business. Don't tell me that these quiet, respectable precincts are to be involved in another scandal."

"I'll tell you all about it," said Thorndyke. "There is no need to be evasive with an old friend like you; and I know that I can trust to your discretion."

"Undoubtedly you can," replied Mr. Weech, evidently mollified by Thorndyke's candour (he didn't know my colleague as well as I did).

"Well," said Thorndyke, "the position is this: the evidence at the inquest disclosed the existence of certain blackmailers who had been preying on Mr. Gillum. Now, Mr. Benson holds those blackmailers accountable for his cousin's death, and he wants them identified and, if possible, brought to justice."

"M'yes," said Mr. Weech, clearly sceptical and unsympathetic. "I don't see why. What's the use, even if it were possible? Poor Mr. Gillum is beyond their reach now. Your protection of him has come—or would come, if it came at all—too late. It's a case of post bellum auxilium."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Mr. Weech," Thorndyke replied, "but it is not my choice. Mr. Benson wants these rascals found and prosecuted, and he has engaged my professional services to that end; and it is my duty to render those services to the best of my ability."

"Certainly, sir," Mr. Weech agreed; "and I don't say that I would not be glad to hear that those wretches had been brought to justice, if it were possible—which I don't believe it is."



"And I am sure," said Thorndyke, "that you would give me any help that you could, as a matter of public policy."

"I would for old acquaintance sake," replied Weech, "though I can't pretend that I am anxious for you to succeed, seeing what a rumpus there would be if you did. And I really don't see how I can help you."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that you could help me by supplying certain information that I should like to have. For instance, as a rather important point, you could tell me what visitors Mr. Gillum received."

"But I don't know," Weech protested. "How should I? Both gates are open all day and strangers pass in and out unquestioned. My impression is that he had very few visitors, but that is only a guess. As far as actual knowledge goes, I can recall only two. One was a Mr. Mortimer, who, I think, came to him several times—"

"We know Mr. Mortimer," interrupted Thorndyke. "Who was the other?"

"I have no idea," replied Weech. "I know about him because he spoke to me when I was standing at the gate by the lodge. That would be about the beginning of last September. He asked me if a Mr. John Gillum lived in the Inn. I replied 'Yes,' and gave him the number of the chambers; whereupon he bustled off. I didn't go with him, as he couldn't make any mistake, there being only the one set of chambers in that building."

"Can you describe him?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "Curiously enough, I remember him quite well, perhaps because he was little out of the ordinary. He was a short, stocky man with a sallow face, a small moustache, waxed at the ends, and bushy black eyebrows. He wore a rather queer kind of single eyeglass. It had no rim and no cord; it was just a plain glass, stuck in his eye with no kind of support. How he kept it there I can't imagine. Then, as he walked off up the passage, I noticed that he had a slight limp and that he used a stick to help himself along; and a most uncommonly fine stick it was; a thick malacca with a silver band and a big ivory knob."

Thorndyke jotted down in his note-book the points of this excellent description and then asked: "Do you know how long he stayed with Mr. Gilum?"

"I don't. I never saw him again; but he might have gone out by the Fetter Lane gate. It couldn't have been a long interview because, about a quarter of an hour later, I saw Mr. Gillum come out of his chambers alone, and I thought he looked a little annoyed and upset."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "you mentioned just now that there is only one set of chambers in that building. But there is a second floor."

"Yes," Mr. Weech explained, "but it is not suitable for chambers. We use it as a general lumber room for the Inn, and it is always kept locked."

As the conversation had developed, we had moved away from the window of the typewriting office on the ground floor and began slowly to pace up and down the courtyard, but I noticed that every time that we re-passed the window there happened to be some person looking out of it. Apparently we were being kept under observation.

"I am wondering," Thorndyke said after a pause, "by what chance Mr. Gillum, an Australian, strange to England, should have happened to discover such a retired backwater as Clifford's Inn. Did he ever tell you?"

"He did not, because, in fact, he did not discover it. Being a stranger, he very wisely employed an agent to find him rooms."

"Do you mean a regular house-agent?"

"I don't know what he was, but I had an idea that he was a personal friend of Mr. Gillum's. At any rate, he not only carried out all the negotiations but he furnished the chambers and got them ready for the tenant by the time he wanted them."

"I wonder," said Thorndyke, "whether you would mind giving us a more circumstantial account of this transaction."

"Well," Mr. Weech replied, "let me see. It happened, so far as I can remember, somewhat like this. One morning, towards the end of August, 1928, a man came to the lodge to enquire about some chambers that we had to let at that time. He seemed to think that Number 64, which was empty, might suit him; so I gave him the keys and he went off to have a look at them. Presently he came back and said that they would suit him perfectly and that he would like to take a lease of them. But then he explained that they were not for himself but that he was acting as agent for a gentleman of means, and that he was fully authorised to execute an agreement and to furnish references and to pay whatever deposit I might think necessary. I would rather have dealt direct with the prospective tenant, but he produced a written authority from his principal, Mr. Gillum, who, he assured me, was a gentleman of good position and ample means, and he referred me to Mr. Gillum's solicitor and his bank; but he did suggest that it would be better not to take up the references until the tenant came and entered into residence."

"Did he give any reason for that suggestion?"

"Yes, and quite a sound one. He said that Mr. Gillum had lived abroad for some years and was still abroad and that his relations with both his solicitor and his bank had been conducted by correspondence and that neither of them knew him personally. Well, he was willing to pay half a year's rent in advance and to sign a provisional agreement per procurationem,

I closed with him. He paid the money—twenty-five pounds—signed the agreement, and I handed him the keys. He wanted them because Mr. Gillum had asked him to get the rooms furnished so far as to be ready for immediate occupation. And that, in fact, is what he did. He took possession and had the chambers furbished up and some odd jobs done, and he ordered in enough furniture to enable Mr. Gillum to go into residence at once.”

“I am rather surprised that you agreed to the deal,” said I.

“I don’t see why,” he retorted. “It was a slightly unusual transaction, but it was quite straightforward. The man couldn’t run away with the chambers. What possible danger of injury was there? *Ad quod damnum*, as the lawyers would say.” (He pronounced the last word “damn ‘em.”) “At any rate, the transaction turned out all right, so my action was justified by the results.”

“Yes,” I replied, “that has to be admitted. *Finis coronat opus*.”

“Exactly,” he rejoined eagerly (and, I suspect, make a mental note of the tag with a view to future use). “The proof of the pudding is in the eating, as the vulgar saying has it.”

“When Mr. Gillum arrived,” said Thorndyke, “was he introduced to you by the agent?”

“No,” replied Weech. “As I understood from the night porter, the two gentlemen came to the Inn together at night between nine and ten. He mentioned the matter to me the next morning, because the agent had asked him to. When they knocked at the wicket, he opened it, and, as he knew the agent by sight, having seen him once before, he let them pass through, and they went up the passage. Presently the agent came back alone and said: ‘By the way, that gentleman is Mr. Gillum, the new tenant of Number 64. You might mention to Mr. Weech that he has come to take possession.’ Which, as I have told you, he did.”

“Did he mention to you how long the agent stayed that night?”

“No. But, you see, that was no business of mine.”

“And when did you first meet Mr. Gillum?”

“The very next morning. I made it my business to. I looked in at the chambers about eleven in the forenoon, and the door was opened by Mr. Gillum himself. I told him who I was and asked him if he acknowledged the agreement signed by his agent. He said ‘yes,’ but that he would rather have a new agreement signed by himself to put things on a regular basis. I thought he was quite right; and, as I had the agreement with me and some forms in my pocket, we filled in a new form, and, when he had signed it, we tore up the old one. Then he gave me his references and that finished the business.”

“By the way,” said Thorndyke, “you didn’t mention the agent’s name.”

“I’m not sure that I remember it,” replied Weech. “But does it matter?”

“It might matter,” Thorndyke replied, “if it should seem desirable to get into touch with him, as I think it may be.”

“Well,” said Weech, “I seem to remember that it was something like Baker or Barber, or it may have been Barker—something of, that sort.”

“Of that sort!” I protested. “But there is all the difference in the world between a man who bakes your bread and one who shaves you or barks at you.”

Mr. W smiled deprecatingly. “I was referring to the sound,” said he. “They are a good deal alike. And really, his name did not arise, excepting when he signed the agreement; and his signature was not very distinct.”

“But,” objected Thorndyke, “there was the cheque and the receipt that you gave him.”

“There was no cheque,” replied Weech. “He paid in five five-pound notes. And the receipt was made out, at his request, to Mr. John Gillum. So, you see, his name was never mentioned; and I only saw it once in writing.”

“Perhaps,” Thorndyke suggested persuasively, “you might give us some idea as to what this gentleman was like. I am rather interested in him because he must know more about Mr. Gillum than most of my informants seem to.”

“Well,” Weech replied musingly, “I don’t remember much about him. He was a tallish man—about my height—and he was a fair man, with a light-brown, tawny beard and moustache and blue eyes. He was quite a gentlemanly man with a pleasant, persuasive manner, not to say plausible. And that is really all that I can remember about him. You see, I only saw him once to speak to, and only once or twice at a distance when he was furnishing the chambers; and I have never seen him since. He may have been here to see Mr. Gillum on some occasions, but, if so, I never happened to see him.”

Thorndyke reflected on this statement for a few moments. Then he asked, apparently apropos of nothing in particular: “I noticed that some carpenter’s work had been done in the rooms at Number 64; some alterations to the coal-bin and the larder door. Do you happen to know whether they were done by Mr. Gillum or by the agent?”

“They were done by the agent—Mr. Barker, we’ll call him. I only heard of it afterwards from Mr. Wing, the carpenter, of Fetter Lane, who does most of the odd jobs about the Inn. He ought really to have got permission to have the alterations made, though there isn’t much in it. The false bottom to the coal-bin was a distinct improvement, but I did think the holes in the larder door a trifle *ultra vires*.” (Mr. Weech made “*vires*” rhyme with fires; but we knew what he meant.)

Then there was a brief pause, and, as we passed the window of the typewriting office, I observed a lady in a hat, putting

on her gloves. Then Thorndyke resumed the conversation with the question: "Did you find Mr. Gillum a satisfactory tenant?"

"Very," Mr. Weech replied. "A model tenant. Paid his rent promptly on quarter day, kept his chambers clean and tidy, and gave no trouble in any way. I greatly regret his loss, and so, I am sure, does Miss Darby, the lady who has the ground floor."

"Why?" I asked, scenting a romance.

"Well, you see," he replied, "the gentleman who had Mr. Gillum's chambers before him was terribly untidy, particularly in the matter of food, which is what matters in chambers. He used to leave food uncovered on his table and even in the larder, and the crumbs from his meals all over the floor. The natural consequence was that the place was overrun with mice; and, of course, they overflowed into the ground floor and kept the lady's nerves fairly on edge. But when Mr. Gillum took over, the nuisance stopped at once. The mice disappeared like magic. Of course, it was quite simple. Mr. Gillum used to sweep up his crumbs after each meal and keep all food in the larder under covers or in tins or jars with lids. There was nothing for the mice to feed on. And what is more, he stopped up all the mouse-holes. Here is Miss Darby, and I am sure she will bear out what I have said."

At this point the lady whom I had seen at the window emerged from her entry and met us on our return march. Mr. Weech raised his hat with the kind of flourish which is possible only with a "topper" and accosted her. "We were just speaking of the way poor Mr. Gillum cleared the mice out of his chambers. You remember, I dare say."

"Indeed I do," she replied emphatically. "Before he came, my rooms simply swarmed with the nasty little creatures. The man on the first floor must have lived like a pig—kept a regular restaurant for mice. It was awful. I had great difficulty in getting the young ladies to stay with me. But when Mr. Gillum came, the little beasts disappeared completely. We never saw a mouse. I can't tell you how grateful we were."

"Very naturally," said Thorndyke. "Mice are pretty little animals, but they are most unpleasant in their habits. However, I hope that your mice have gone for good. I suppose you are still clear of them?"

"Well, you know," Miss Darby replied with a slight frown, "the rather curious thing is that we are not. Just lately, one or two have made their appearance again. I can't understand it. Of course, we have our teas in the office, and sometimes our lunches. But we used to do that before. And we are most careful to sweep up all crumbs and to leave no food about. It is really rather strange."

"It is," Thorndyke agreed. "But perhaps you would get rid of your uninvited guests if you were to adopt Mr. Gillum's plan; stop up the holes with Portland cement mixed with powdered glass. I strongly recommend you to try that remedy."

Miss Darby thanked him for the advice and then, with a smile and a little bow, bustled away and disappeared into the tunnel-like passage that ran past the hail door. And thither we shortly followed her, as it appeared that Thorndyke had squeezed his informant dry—with mighty little result, as it seemed to me. But then you could never tell what was in Thorndyke's mind or what might be the significance to him of trivial facts that seemed to have no significance at all.

Mr. Weech walked with us down the passage to Fleet Street and finally dismissed us with another impressive flourish of his hat, which we returned punctiliously and then crossed the road to the Inner Temple gate.

As we walked down the lane past the church I reflected on what we had heard and seen. Presently I remarked "Weech's description of the unknown visitor at the Inn seemed to me to correspond pretty closely with that of Abel Webb."

"So I thought," replied Thorndyke; "and, for the present, I am assuming that he was Abel Webb, though we shall have to get confirmation if possible."

"I don't quite see how," said I. "But assuming him to have been Webb, how does that square with what we have been inferring about the relations between him and Gillum? It seems to me to be rather a misfit. If the man was Webb, that must have been his first visit to Gillum as he had to inquire of Weech and was not sure of the address or that Gillum did actually live there. Now that visit was made only a few days before his death. But we inferred—at least, I did—that Webb had been blackmailing Gillum for the best part of a year. There seems to be a radical disagreement. You can hardly blackmail a man whose address you do not know."

"It is not actually impossible," said Thorndyke, "but I agree with you that it is extremely difficult to see how it could be done. However, we are not certain that this man was Webb, and, before we make any further inferences, we must get more evidence. The whole question of the relations of these two men needs to be elucidated; for if we were wrong in our original inferences we may have to recast our theory of the circumstances of Webb's death. Obviously, the first thing to do is to ascertain, if possible, whether the man who came to the inn was really Abel Webb."

---

## XI. — A FRESH PUZZLE

MY colleague's remark that it would be necessary to test our belief as to the identity of the visitor to Gillum's chambers rather puzzled me. For, apparently, Mr. Weech was the only person who had seen that visitor, and he had told us all that he had to tell; and I could not think of any means by which we could check his description. But, on the very next day, Thorndyke reopened the subject and disposed of my difficulties. "I think," said he, "that it is desirable that we should

confirm or disprove our assumptions as to the identity of Gillum's visitor at the Inn. At present our belief is founded entirely on Mortimer's not very precise description of the stick and the eye glass. That is not enough. The question whether Abel Webb did or did not go to Gillum's chambers is a very important one and we ought to settle it more definitely. Indeed, the whole of the Abel Webb incident requires clearing up."

"And how do you propose to set about it?" I asked.

"I propose," he replied, "to go to the place where Webb was employed and get a description of his person. We have an excellent one from Weech with which to compare it. And perhaps, if we are fortunate, we may pick up some additional information. We want it badly enough."

"Yes," I agreed; "the Abel Webb business is rather in the air."

"Very much so," said he. "We have adopted the provisional theory that John Gillum, a most respectable gentleman, murdered Webb. That is a theory that wants clearing up, one way or the other. So, as the matter is of some urgency, I am proposing to devote the afternoon to it as we are both free and I hope that the expedition will interest you. What do you say?"

Of course I agreed, with some enthusiasm; and, as there were no preparations to make, we set forth within a few minutes.

It was characteristic of Thorndyke that, in making his way to Webb's place of business, he should choose the route that carried us over the scene of the tragedy. Leaving, the Temple by the Tudor Street gate, we made for the Temple Station and travelled to the bank, whence we started along the south side of Cornhill until we reached the Church of St. Michael. Here we turned up the alley, and, in a few paces, came to the arched entrance to the covered passage that Mortimer had described. A few steps along this brought us to the cavern-like south porch of the church; and here we both halted to reconstitute the picture that Mortimer had drawn so vividly, though the appearance of the place, in the bright afternoon light, was not easily reconciled with his description.

"It is an astounding affair," said Thorndyke; as he gazed into the now well-lighted porch. "By whomsoever that murder was committed, it was a remarkable exploit; and the murderer must have been a remarkable man—a man of iron nerve who combined the utmost audacity with caution and sound judgment. Not a man in ten thousand would have dared to take the risk; but yet, apart from that momentary risk, the crime was absolutely safe from detection. The actual murder can have been but a matter of seconds; and the instant the blow was struck the murderer could slip out into the alley, quietly walk down into Cornhill, and there instantly become merged into the indistinguishable population of the street. For a premeditated murder, which it must have been, it was the boldest and the most skilfully managed crime that I have ever known."

"I don't know," said I, "that I am so much impressed with his judgment. It was a terrific gamble and he took a frightful risk. It doesn't seem to me that he made such a very good choice of the place."

"I am rather assuming," Thorndyke replied, "that he had not much choice. The suggestion to me is that of a desperate man who felt an immediate need to dispose of Webb; who had no time to make suitable arrangements but had to seize the one opportunity that presented itself. It was an opportunity, and he took it, and the result justified him in accepting the risk."

I was disposed to smile at Thorndyke's ultra-professional view of this murder, which he was evidently considering purely in terms of efficiency; putting himself, in his queer way, in the murderer's shoes and debating the appropriate technique. But I suppressed my amusement, and, following his own train of thought, asked: "How do you suppose the murder was actually carried out?"

"I should assume," he replied, "that the murderer knew that Webb would pass through this passage at a certain time and that—greatly favoured by the unusual darkness of the evening—he lurked here, keeping a look-out from either end for possible wayfarers who might be approaching. Then, when Webb appeared at the entrance—the coast being clear at the moment—he made his attack. Probably Webb saw him, and there was a brief struggle, as suggested by the hat in the churchyard. But when they came opposite the porch the murderer thrust in the syringe, pushed his victim down on the steps, and walked away down St. Michael's Alley. But the point of interest to us is that the murderer seems to have been familiar with Webb's habits. Perhaps we may get some further light on that point from our enquiries at Cope's."

With this we turned away from the porch, and, stepping up into the churchyard, took our way along the paved walk, out into Castle Court and through the little covered passage into Bell Yard. At the entrance of the yard into Gracechurch Street, Thorndyke paused and ran his eye along the houses on the south side of the street until it rested on a building which bore in large gilded letters the inscription, "The Cope Refrigerating Company," when we crossed the road and bore down on it.

On entering by the main doorway, we found ourselves in a large showroom filled with a bewildering assortment of various types of refrigerators, and were confronted by a member of the staff.

"I think," said Thorndyke, addressing him, "that the late Mr. Abel Webb was employed here."

"Yes," was the reply, "but not in this department. We deal here with refrigerating apparatus and plant. Mr. Webb was in the solid carbonic acid department. That is next door. You turn to the right as you go on."

Following this direction we entered a small doorway adjoining the main entrance and came into a long, narrow shop or

warehouse fitted with a counter which ran from end to end. Behind this were two men, one at the farther end, who was delivering one or two large and heavy packages to a carman, and the other, nearer to us, who appeared to be disengaged. To the latter Thorndyke repeated his former question, and thereby immediately captured his attention.

"Yes," he replied, "poor Mr. Webb was employed here. He was assistant manager. Most of his time was spent in the manufacturing section, which adjoins this warehouse, and it was there that I knew him. I only came out into the retail department a short time before his death."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "as you knew him fairly well, perhaps you could tell us what sort of a man he was to look at. Would you mind?"

"Certainly not," was the cordial reply. "But may I ask, if it is not an impertinence, whether you two gentlemen are connected with the police?"

"We are not," Thorndyke replied. "My friend and I are lawyers; but I may say that our interest in Mr. Webb is a professional interest. We are trying to get some fresh light on the circumstances of his death."

"I am glad to hear that," said the assistant. "It's time someone did. The police came here once or twice after the inquest, but, of course, we couldn't tell them much, and they didn't seem particularly keen. But I don't think the affair ought to have been let drop in the way that it was. Now, as to what Mr. Webb was like. He was rather a noticeable man, though short. He was a bit of a dandy, always well-dressed and smartly turned out; waxed the ends of his moustache and wore a single eyeglass. Quite a nut in his way."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "and to come to particulars; was he dark or fair, fat or thin?"

"He was dark. Sallow face, black moustache and eyebrows—bushy eyebrows like young moustaches; and I wouldn't call him fat. He was just stoutly built, and looked stouter because of his shortness."

"You spoke of an eyeglass. What was that like?"

"It was just an eyeglass. No rim or frame, no cord or ribbon. Just a plain glass. He used to carry it in his waistcoat pocket, and, when he wanted it, he would take it out and fix it in his eye, and there it stuck as if it were glued in."

"When he was out of doors, did he carry an umbrella or a stick?"

"A stick, always. He had just a slight limp—I think one leg was a little shorter than the other. That was why he gave up the sea. Found it a trifle inconvenient on board ship. So he used a stick for a bit of extra support. And a rare fine stick it was; a very thick malacca with a silver band and an ivory knob like a young billiard ball. And that, I think, is all that I can tell you about Mr. Webb."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke, "you have given us a very admirable and complete description." He paused for a few moments and appeared to be reflecting. Then he opened a new topic. "I notice that you seem to reject the idea that Mr. Webb committed suicide."

"That I certainly do," was the reply. "Webb was not the man to commit any foolishness of that kind. Besides, it was a plain case of murder. Anyone could see that from the way it was done—and the place, too, for that matter."

"What is the significance of the place?" Thorndyke asked.

"The significance is that anyone waiting at that place at the right time would have been sure of meeting him. He used to get on his bus at the Royal Exchange and he always walked there by the same route; through Bell Yard, Castle Court and the churchyard and out into Cornhill by St. Michael's Alley. Always the same way; he told me so, himself, one day when I walked that way with him. He that he liked the walk through the churchyard. And he was wonderfully punctual, too. He would stay on here finishing up the day's work after the rest of the staff had gone; but at seven-thirty, sharp, he would take his stick and hat and off he would go. Anyone waiting for him in that dark passage could have been certain of him to half a minute. It would have been perfectly easy if there happened to be nobody about."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "that is quite an important point. But you see that the idea of some person lying in wait there suggests the further idea someone who had an intimate knowledge of Mr. Webb's habits. Can you think of any persons who had that knowledge?"

"No. I don't know that anyone besides myself knew what his habits were; and even if any of our people knew, there is none of them that I could possibly suspect."

Thorndyke agreed cordially with the latter statement and again paused with a reflective air, and I got the impression that he was feeling about for a new opening. Apparently he found one, for he proceeded to put a fresh case. "Looking back on that time—the time just before Mr. Webb's death—can you recall any incident that could possibly be, in any way, regarded as suspicious?"

Our friend weighed the question seriously for some seconds but finally concluded that he really did not think that he could. But yet I seemed to detect a certain hesitancy in his reply as if he did not absolutely reject the suggestion. And this was evidently perceived also by Thorndyke, for he returned to the attack with his customary persistence, tempered by suavity.

"You must forgive me for pressing you, Mr.—"

"My name is Small."

"Mr. Small. But, looking back by the light of what happened, can you think of any incident—we won't say actually suspicious; perhaps quite trivial and commonplace, but which, considered retrospectively, might conceivably have had some connection with the tragedy. Any strangers, for instance, who might have called to see Mr. Webb, or who might have met him by chance. Now, what do you say?"

Mr. Small was still hesitant and slightly evasive.

"You see," said he, "when an awful thing like that has happened, it tends to upset your judgment and sense of proportion. You look back on what went before and you are apt to magnify every little simple thing that occurred and think that it might have had something to do with the disaster."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "And so it might have had. Don't forget that. It is by the close scrutiny of little simple things that we sometimes get a valuable hint. Now, Mr. Small, I can see that there is something in your mind that you have given some thought to, but that you are shy of mentioning because of its apparent triviality. Let us have it. Perhaps it may not appear so trivial to me; and if it does, there will be no harm done."

"Well," Mr. Small replied with some reluctance, "it is really a very trivial incident, but yet I have thought it rather odd. It just amounts to this: One evening, not very long before closing time, a man—a gentleman, I might call him—came here to buy some four-pound blocks of snow—solid carbonic acid, you know—and he had brought a sort of suit-case to carry it away in. Now, I had got the blocks, wrapped in a rough insulated packing, and was just handing them to him when Mr. Webb came in through that door and stopped to look up at the shelves, standing about where the other assistant is standing now. Well, what attracted my notice was this; as Mr. Webb came through the doorway, the customer glanced at him, and then he looked again very hard with an expression as if he was surprised or startled. And at that moment Mr. Webb noticed him, and *he* looked very hard at him. But he couldn't get a very good view of him, for the customer turned away so that his back was towards Mr. Webb while he was packing the blocks in his vase. And when he had got them in, as he had already paid for them, he said 'good 'evening' and walked out. When he had gone Mr. Webb asked me if I knew who the customer was, and I said I didn't. 'Well,' he said, 'the next time that he comes, find out his name if you can,' and I said I would."

"And did you?" Thorndyke asked.

"No," replied Small, "because he never came again, and I have never seen him since."

"Do you remember, roughly, the date on which this incident occurred?"

"I should say that it was from ten days to a fortnight before Mr. Webb's death; and that happened on the ninth of September. That is what has made it stick in my memory. I have often wondered whether it could have had any connection with that dreadful affair."

"Naturally," said Thorndyke; "and it does not appear so very improbable that it had. It might be useful to have a description of that customer if you could remember what he was like."

"I can't remember much about him," said Small, "though I should know him if I met him, but, of course, I didn't notice him particularly. I know that he was a rather tall man, say about five foot ten, and dark; black hair and a smallish black beard with a close-clipped moustache; and that is about all that I do remember."

"You didn't by any chance notice what his teeth were like?"

Mr. Small seemed to start, and gazed at Thorndyke in evident surprise. "Well, now," he exclaimed, "that's curious; because, now that you come to mention it, I did notice his teeth, when he smiled at something that I said. His upper front teeth had been stopped with gold; pretty extensively, too; and those stoppings were no ornament. I wonder he let the dentist disfigure him in that way. But you seemed to know the man, to judge by your question."

"It was only a shot," replied Thorndyke. "I remembered a man who might have been surprised at seeing Mr. Webb here. But, as that man is now dead, there isn't much in it."

As Thorndyke seemed to have elicited the information that he had come for, I ventured to seek a little on my own account.

"What sort of people use those blocks that you were speaking of," I asked, "and what do they use them for?"

"All sorts of people use the solid carbonic acid," replied Small. "The standard twenty-five-pound blocks are mostly used by brewers and mineral water manufacturers. The small four-pound blocks were made in the first place principally for the convenience of the ice-cream tricycles, to keep their stuff cold. But nowadays those blocks are used for a number of purposes. Doctors use them for freezing warts and moles, and engineers and motor repair men use them quite a lot."

"What on earth do engineers want carbonic acid now for?" I asked.

"Principally," he replied, "for shrinking metal. Say you have got a bush that is just too big to drive into its hole. Well, you can get it in either by expanding the piece with the hole in it by making it hot, which may be a big job, or you can shrink the bush by freezing it with the dioxide snow, which is much more convenient."

Hitherto, fortunately for us, the warehouse had been so nearly empty that the other assistant had been able to deal with

the business. But now several customers came in, and their arrival brought our conversation to an end. Mr. Small apologised for having to leave us in order to attend to them, and accordingly, when we had thanked him for having given us so much of his time, we wished him good afternoon and retired.

We took our way back by the way we had come, through Bell Yard and the paved walk beside the little grass plot, lingering a while in the quiet and seclusion of the churchyard to discuss the results of the expedition.

"That was a bold shot of yours," I remarked, "with respect to the teeth. What made you think that the man might be Gillum—for there can be no doubt that it was he?"

"Practically none," he replied. "But the reasons that made me chance the suggestion were, first, that the circumstances seemed to make it probable that the man was Gillum, and, second, the description that Small gave fitted Gillum perfectly, as far as it went."

"I don't quite see the probability that you mention," said I; "in fact, I find these new developments rather bewildering. I can't fit them into our scheme. Small's description almost suggests an unexpected meeting, which might be natural enough on Webb's part, but hardly on Gillum's. For, as he was neither an ice-cream vendor nor a doctor nor an engineer, it would seem that the purchase of the blocks was merely a pretext for going to Webb's place of business and getting into touch with him. But that doesn't seem to fit in with our theory at all; and neither does Webb's visit to Clifford's Inn—for that visitor certainly was Webb."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "Small's description corresponds exactly with Weech's. But you are quite right, Jervis. These new facts do not fit our theory in its original form. We shall have to modify it. But you notice that our new discoveries, so far from exonerating Gillum, tend to confirm our suspicion that he was responsible for Webb's death. What we shall have to reconsider is the possible motive for the murder. We assumed that Webb was a blackmailer. We may have been right, but these two meetings, as you say, do not fit comfortably into the group of events that we assumed. We must have another try. But what will be much better than speculating on the possible alternatives, will be the collection of some further data. There are still some unexplored territories in which we may possibly make new discoveries."

"Yes," I agreed; "there is, for instance, Dr. Peck. He might be able to give us some useful information. But the question is: where is he? He may be in the middle of the Pacific."

"True," Thorndyke admitted; "but, on the other hand, he may not. I think that your question has to be answered, and I propose that we seek the answer without delay."

---

## XII. — THE PURSUIT OF DR. PECK

THORNDYKE'S decision that an immediate answer must be found to my question, "Where is Dr. Peck?" was given effect on the very following morning; when, as our engagements permitted, we set forth together for the pleasant old precinct of Staple Inn. As our business was with the porter, and he was most likely to be found in his lodge by the main gate, we took our way up Fetter Lane and along Holborn until we reached the arched entrance in the ancient timber houses through which the wayfarer in the busy street can get a glimpse of the quiet, secluded quadrangle. And here, passing under the archway, we found the lodge door open and the porter plainly visible within.

Observing that we had halted with an air of business, he came to the door and asked, civilly, what he could do for us.

"I want," said Thorndyke, "to get into communication with one of your tenants; a certain Dr. Peck."

"Ah!" the official replied, "then you have made a bull's eye at the first shot; though he is not one of our tenants now. But I can give you his address."

This he proceeded to do, writing it down on a slip of paper which my colleague offered for the purpose. And, with this, it seemed to me that our business had come to an unexpectedly swift conclusion, and that we might forthwith go about "getting into communication" with our quarry. But this was evidently not Thorndyke's view, for having put the slip of paper in his pocket-book, he developed an unmistakeable tendency to open a conversation and to start the porter talking. From which I inferred that he hoped to gather up a few unconsidered trifles of a biographical nature which might be dropped in the course of a properly directed gossip.

"I came here," said he, "because this was given as his address in the Medical Directory; though I hadn't much hope of finding him, as he spends most of his time at sea."

"No," replied the porter, "and if you had come a little earlier you wouldn't have found him or got any news of him either. He seems to have been all over the world this last trip, not on an ordinary voyage out and home, but changing about from one ship to another and going into all sorts of unheard-of places."

"But I suppose," said Thorndyke, "he kept in touch with you so that you could send on his letters?"

"Not a bit," was the reply. "He couldn't. He never knew where he was going to next, and he never stayed long in any place. He meant this to be his last trip at sea, and he was determined to see as much of the world as he could before he settled down ashore. And he did. It must have been a regular Captain Cook's voyage."

"And he never gave you any place to send his letters to all the time that he was away? There must have been a pretty

considerable accumulation when he came home."

"I expect there was. But I never collected them from his chambers as I had no place to send them to. In fact, he told me to leave them where they dropped through the letter slit."

"I suppose you heard from him from time to time, when the rent became due, for instance?"

"No, he never wrote. There was nothing to write about. He had always left an order with his banker to pay his rent as it became due, when he was away at sea, and he did the same this time."

"It seems a wasteful arrangement," said Thorndyke, "to have kept a set of chambers empty, month after month, while the tenant was wandering about the earth. Don't you think so?"

"I do, and I told him so. But he said that a doctor has to have a permanent address to keep his name on the register; and he liked to have a place to come to when he returned from a voyage. But this last trip did really seem to me out of all reason. He was away close upon two years; and all that time there were the chambers lying empty and the rent going on just the same as if he had been living in them. It happened to be a low rent, because he was an old tenant. He came here years ago when he was a medical student. We used to have a lot of students in those days, mostly from Barts, and when one qualified and gave up his chambers, he was allowed to hand them on to a new student. So Dr. Peck had been living here more years than I can remember, and I suppose he didn't like the idea of giving up his old chambers. But still, as you said, two years' rent for unoccupied chambers does seem a wicked waste."

"Perhaps," Thorndyke suggested, "he didn't expect to be away so long."

"Oh yes, he did. He told me that he might be away for as much as a couple of years. He meant to go overland to Marseilles and there pick up some kind of foreign tramp and go with her wherever she might be going, and after a time, change over to another ship and make a voyage somewhere else. And he made mighty preparations so that he should be as comfortable as possible. He got a brand new cabin trunk, in addition to his old ones, and he had a couple of portable bookcases made so that he could have his library with him."

"He must have reckoned that those tramps would have pretty liberal cabin space," I remarked. "You couldn't get many bookcases into an ordinary tramp's cabin, so far as my experience goes."

"Oh, but these were quite small things," the porter explained. "Only about three foot high by a couple of foot wide. And uncommonly cleverly they were planned, too, at least, so I thought. You see, they were intended to travel with the books in them. They had moveable fronts fixed on with a dozen long screws, well greased so that they would come out easily, and lying flush so that there was nothing projecting to catch when they were travelling. And when you had got them into your cabin, all you had to do was to take out the screws and the front was free. You could just take it off and slip it behind the case out of the way, and there was your bookcase with all your books properly arranged and ready for use. I thought it a mighty neat idea."

"So it was," Thorndyke agreed. "Extremely convenient, not only for use on board ship, but for travelling on land. Did you see the cases?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I saw them in Mr. Crow's workshop just before he delivered them, and I complimented him on having made such a good job of them. He had got them stained and varnished so that they looked quite smart, although they were only made of deal, you understand."

"Mr. Crow, I take it," said Thorndyke, "is a local craftsman."

"Yes, he lives close by in Baldwin's Gardens, so we give him all the jobs that we want done about the Inn. And a real good tradesman he is. I always recommend him whenever I can. It's a kindness to him and to the customer, too."

"It is, indeed," said Thorndyke, "especially to the customer. Really skilful and dependable tradesmen are getting scarce, and it is no small advantage to know where one can find such a man on occasion. I shall make a note of Mr. Crow's address, and perhaps call on him. I am quite impressed by your description of those bookcases."

"Well, I think you would find them handy if you travel much," said the porter, apparently much gratified by the impression he had made. "Dr. Peck did, as he told me; and they took the fancy of the captain of his last ship to such an extent that when the doctor left the ship at Marseilles to come home overland, the skipper insisted on buying the cases, books and all."

"Then you have seen Dr. Peck since he came home?"

"Lord, yes," the porter chuckled, "and I didn't recognise him at first. You see, he had shaved off his beard; and when a beaver does a clean shave, the results are apt to be surprising. But he was quite right. A beard is the thing on board ship, where shaving isn't very convenient and not at all necessary, but, as he said very truly, when a man is in practice as a doctor, he doesn't want a bunch of hair on his chin to stick in his patient's face. Yes, he came here to give notice and settle up, and to move his things out of the chambers."

"When did he arrive in England?"

"Ah!" was the reply, "that I can't say, exactly. I didn't know that he was back until he turned up here, as I have told you. That was about three weeks ago. But he must have been in England some time before that, seeing that he had taken a house, and perhaps a doctor's business as well."



"Then he never came back here to live?"

"No. Which makes the waste of money seem worse than ever. He appears to have taken his new premises, furniture and all, and settled there at once. So I understood."

"And he is now engaged in medical practice at the address you gave me just now?"

"Well," the porter replied with a faint grin, "That's as may be. If he bought a going concern, I suppose he is. But if he just took the premises without any goodwill, he is probably squatting there and waiting for business to turn up. However, in either case, he has got a brass plate at the address I gave you: and there you'll find him, and he will be able to give you the particulars about himself better than I am."

I seemed to detect in the final sentence a subtle hint that our friend thought that he had asked questions, and so, apparently, did Thorndyke, for he accepted the hint—the more readily, I suspect, because he had no further questions to ask—and brought the interview to an end by thanking our friend for the address and wishing him good morning.

As this dialogue had proceeded, I had become and more puzzled. For I had supposed mission had the simple purpose of finding out, if possible, the whereabouts of Dr. Peck; and I had imagined that our business with Peck was to elicit from him whatever he might be able to tell us about the incidents of the voyage from Australia as affecting John Gillum. But it seemed that neither of these suppositions was true. Thorndyke was not interested only in what Peck might be able and willing to tell us; he was interested in Peck, himself. The apparently trivial conversation to which I had listened was, I felt sure, a carefully conducted examination designed to elicit certain facts. But what facts? I had listened attentively and even curiously; but not a single fact of any apparent significance seemed to have transpired. Yet something had transpired, unperceived by me. Thorndyke's behaviour had convinced me of that. The way in which he had, almost abruptly, closed the conversation, told me that, whatever might be the item of information which he had been seeking, that item was now in his possession. But I could not form the vaguest guess as to what it could be.

My confusion of thought was rather increased by Thorndyke's conduct when we emerged from the Inn; for, halting at the edge of the pavement and looking across the road, he said, meditatively:

"Baldwin's Gardens. I think that turns out of the Gray's Inn Road a little way down on the right, doesn't it?"

"Yes," I replied. "About the third turning. Were you thinking of paying a visit to the ingenious Mr. Crow?"

"Why not?" said he. "We may as well look him up now, as we are so near."

"But," I protested, "why look him up at all? Those bookcases were very ingenious and handy for the purpose for which they were made, but you have no use for such things. You don't make sea voyages or even prolonged journeys away from home; and if you did, you would hardly want to take your library with you."

"But they would be useful for carrying other things besides books," he replied; "apparatus and reagents, for instance. At any rate, I should like to get particulars of construction and dimensions."

"With a view," said I, "to pinching Mr. Crow's copyright and having a pirated edition turned out by Polton."

"Not at all," he retorted. "If I decided to have one, or a pair, made, I should certainly commission Mr. Crow to make them."

As he had evidently got some kind of unreasonable fancy for those bookcases, I said no more. We crossed the road and in two or three minutes found ourselves at the corner of Baldwin's Gardens, whence we began a perambulation of the street. It was some time before we were able to locate Mr. Crow's premises, but eventually we discovered, at the corner of a side passage, a painted board inscribed with the name of "William Crow, Carpenter and Joiner" and the intimation that his workshop would be found on the right up the passage. We accordingly followed the direction and, coming to a door on which the description was repeated, pushed it open and entered a spacious, well-lighted workshop in which a tall, elderly man was engaged in planing up the edge of a board. At the sound of our entry, he turned and looked at us over the tops of his spectacles, and then, laying his plane down on the bench, enquired politely what he could do for us.

Thorndyke briefly stated the purpose of our visit, whereupon Mr. Crow took off his spectacles to get a better view of us and appeared to meditate on what my colleague had said.

"A pair of bookcases, you say, sir, made for a gentleman in Staple Inn of the name of Peck. Yes, I seem to remember a-making of them, but I can't rightly recollect exactly what they were like. Small cases, I think you said?"

"Yes; about three feet by two."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Crow—very reasonably, I thought—"if you will tell me just what you want, I can take down the particulars and make the articles without troubling about those other ones."

But this simple plan apparently did not commend itself to Thorndyke, for he objected: "I am not sure that I have got the full particulars and I rather wanted to see the construction and dimensions of those that you made for Dr. Peck. Don't you keep an account in your books of work that you have in hand?"

"Oh, yes," replied Crow, "I've got the particulars all right if I only knew where to look for them. But you see, it's a longish time ago and my memory ain't what it was. I suppose, now, you couldn't tell me about when those cases were made?"

"I can't give you the exact date," said Thorndyke, "but I should say that it would have been some time in September,

1928, probably the early part of the month. Or it might have been the latter part of August. What do you say, Jervis?"

"I expect you are right," I replied, "though I don't quite see how you arrived at the date."

But however he had arrived at it, the date turned out to be correct; for when Mr. Crow, having resumed his spectacles, had picked out from a row of trade books a shabby-looking folio volume and opened it on the bench, the required entry came into view almost at once.

"Ah!" said Crow, "here we are. Twenty-eighth of August, 1928. I see the order is marked 'urgent.' Things wanted as soon as possible. They usually are. So I treated it as urgent and delivered the goods at the Inn on the thirty-first, in the evening, as soon as I had got them finished."

"That was a fairly quick piece of work," I remarked.

"Yes," he replied, "I got a move on with 'em. But there was not a lot of work in 'em, as you can see by the drawings. No dovetails and no gluing up except for the backs. They were just screwed together and stained and brush-varnished. It wasn't a job to take up much time. I have written the dimensions on the drawings, so you can see exactly what the cases were like."

We looked over the drawings, which were quite neatly executed, though rapidly sketched in, with the dimensions marked on them in clear legible figures notwithstanding which, Mr. Crow proceeded to expound them and the details of construction.

"The cases," said he, "were of yellow deal, stained and varnished; three foot three high by twenty inches wide and fourteen inches deep, all outside measurements; and as the stuff was full one-inch board, the inside measurements would be two inches less in height and width and one inch less in depth. There were three shelves in each case, equal distances apart, so you have got four spaces of a little under nine inches each, as the shelves were only half-inch stuff. All the parts were fastened together with screws, excepting the shelves, and they slid freely in grooves. The fronts were the same size as the backs, and they were just laid on and fixed in position by twelve two-and-a-half-inch number eight screws, which had to be well greased with tallow so that they would come out easily. It was quite a handy arrangement for, you see, you just filled the case up with books and then you put on the front and ran in the screws and you'd got a thoroughly secure packing-case with no hinges or other projections to get in the way when it was being stowed. Then, when you had got it in the place where it was to be, such as the cabin, all you had got to do was to draw out the screws, take off the front, and slip it behind the case, and there you were with all your books ready to hand."

"Wouldn't it have been stronger," I suggested, "if the top and bottom had been dovetailed to the sides?"

"Yes, it would," he agreed, "and that is what I wanted to do. But he wouldn't have it. He said that all the parts were to be screwed together with greased screws so that it could be taken to pieces if necessary for stowage or storing."

"I don't see much utility in that," I remarked.

"There isn't," he agreed, "excepting that, if the cases should be out of use at any time, they could be taken apart, and then the pieces would lie flat and take up less room than the assembled cases."

"I certainly think it a good method of construction," said Thorndyke. "The case would be strongly bound together by the back and front when it was travelling, and when it was not travelling, the extra strength would not be wanted."

"Then," said Crow, "you'd like yours made the same way, I suppose. Did you wish me to make one case or two?"

"You may as well make two while you are about it," answered Thorndyke, "and I think you had better make them in every way similar to those that you have in your day book and of the same dimensions. They are quite suitable and I don't think they could be improved on. But I may say that this order is not urgent. You can take your own time over them."

Mr. Crow thanked him for his consideration, and when he had booked the order in the current book and taken Thorndyke's name and address, we took our leave and made our way homeward. During our walk along Holborn and down Fetter Lane very little was said by either of us. Thorndyke appeared to be cogitating on the morning's experiences, and my own reflections were principally concerned with speculations on the nature of his. For, as far as I could see, the only tangible result of the expedition was that we had got Peck's address and had secured two bookcases which we did not want. In addition, we had picked up a number of rather trivial personal particulars relating to Peck and his comings and goings, none of which seemed to have the slightest bearing on the problem which we were endeavouring to solve. But I suspected that there was more in it than this; that, out of the porter's trifling reminiscences, Thorndyke had gathered some thing, the significance of which was evident to him although it had, for the present, escaped me.

We entered the Temple by Mitre Court and, as we emerged into the upper end of King's Bench Walk, we observed a figure advancing up the pavement from the direction of our chambers, which, as we drew nearer, resolved itself into that of our friend Benson. He recognised us at the same moment and quickened his pace to meet us.

"I have taken the liberty," said he, when he had shaken hands heartily, "to drop in at your rooms, as I was in the neighbourhood, not to detain you and waste your time, but just to ask if there were any news of our case."

"There is nothing definite to report," replied Thorndyke. "I am making various enquiries and picking up such facts as I can, but, so far, the result is a rather miscellaneous collection which will want a good deal of sorting out and collation. But I am by no means hopeless. Won't you come back and have a bit of lunch with us? There are one or two questions that I

wanted to ask you, and we might discuss them over the lunch table.”

Benson looked at his watch. “I should like to,” said he, “but I think I had better not. I have an appointment at half-past two, and I mustn’t be late. Could I answer your questions now?”

“I think so,” replied Thorndyke. “It is just a matter of personal description. You see, as I never saw John Gillum and have only the vaguest idea as to what he was like, I shall be rather at a loss if I have occasion to trace his movements. I can give no description of him. Could you sketch out a few personal characteristics by which he could be described or identified?”

Benson reflected as we turned to walk slowly down the pavement.

“Let me see,” said he. “Now, what do you call personal characteristics? There is his height. He was rather a tall man; about five feet ten. In colour he was a mixture—dark and fair. His hair and beard were black, but his skin was fair and his eyes were blue; you know the type of black-haired blond. But probably the most striking and distinctive characteristic, and the most useful for identification would be the peculiarity of his teeth. You have heard, I think, that his upper front teeth were extensively filled with gold and as they showed a good deal, they were a very serious disfigurement.”

“Yes, I have heard of those teeth,” said Thorndyke, “and I have rather wondered why a fairly good-looking man, as I understood him to be, should have allowed himself to be disfigured in that way. Were his other teeth filled extensively in the same way?”

“No,” replied Benson, “that was the exasperating feature of the case. He had an exceptionally fine, sound set of teeth; not a stopping among the whole lot, I believe. It was bad luck that the only unsound ones should have happened to be those that were constantly on view. And I have an impression that they were really sound; that the spots of decay on them were started by some kind of blow or injury. But I think the dentist might have done something better for him.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “A competent man would not have used a gold filling at all. He would have put in a porcelain inlay.”

“To return to the hair,” said Thorndyke. “You described it as black. Do you mean actually black, or very dark brown?”

“I mean black. There was no tinge of brown in it, to the best of my belief. It seemed to be dead black, with just a tiny sprinkling of grey. But the grey was hardly noticeable, except, perhaps, on the temples above the ears. Otherwise, there was only a white hair here and there; single hairs that you would scarcely notice and that did not interfere with the general effect of black hair.”

“Thank you,” said Thorndyke, “Your description is quite helpful. But what would be still more helpful would be a portrait. If you can show a portrait and say, ‘Is this the man whom you saw?’ the identification is much more definite. I suppose you don’t happen to have a photograph of your cousin?”

“Not here,” Benson answered; and then, as with a sudden afterthought, he said, “Wait, though. I have got something that will possibly answer your purpose. You must know that I am an amateur in a small way. I run a pocket camera, and I have a sort of a book file for the film negatives. That file I have brought with me and it is in one of my trunks. Among the old films are one or two of Gillum, mostly in groups, but I don’t suppose that will matter. They are not very good portraits—you know what snapshot portraits are like—and of course, they are rather small. But they could be enlarged. Do you think they would be of any use to you?”

“They would be of the greatest use,” Thorndyke replied. “They could not only be enlarged, but they could be retouched to get rid of the exaggerated shadows, which are the principal cause of the bad likeness in outdoor snapshots. Will you let me have one or two of them?”

“Certainly,” said Benson. “I will look them over and pick out a few of the best and clearest and send them to you. And I have got a photograph that the first officer gave me, which he took on the former voyage. It is a group of officers and passengers, including a fairly good portrait of Gillum. I will send that too. And now,” he added, once more glancing at his watch, “I think I must really be running away. There wasn’t anything more that you wanted to ask me, was there?”

“No,” replied Thorndyke, “I think that was all. If you send me the photographs and they are reasonably good ones, my difficulties in the matter of identification will be disposed of.”

With this we both shook hands with him and stood awhile, watching him as he strode away towards Crown Office Row, the picture of health and strength and energy. Then, as our fancies lightly turned to thoughts of lunch, we walked back to our entry and ascended to our chambers where we found the table already laid and Polton on the look-out for our arrival.

---

### XIII. — DR. AUGUSTUS PECK

OF certain men we are apt to say that once seen they are never forgotten. They are not mere samples of the human race, turned out from the common mould, but executed individually as special orders and never repeated. Such were Paganini and the great Duke of Wellington, recognisable by us all from their mere counterfeit presentments after the lapse of a century.

Now Mr. Ethelbert Snuper was exactly the reverse. He might have been seen a thousand times and never remembered. So exactly was he like every other ordinary person that he might have come straight out of a text-book of “The Dismal Science”—the Economic Man, now for the first and only time enjoying a concrete existence. Often as I met him, I

recognised him with doubt. And the worst of it was that when at last I thought that I had committed his impersonality to memory, behold! the very next time I met him he was somebody else. It was quite confusing. There was a sort of unreality about the man. His very name was incredible, so exactly did it define his status and his "place in Nature," (but one meets with these coincidences in real life. I once knew a ritualist clergyman named Mummery).

For Mr. Snuper was a private inquiry agent and, especially, a professed and expert shadower; a vocation to which his personal peculiarities (or should I say, his impersonal unpeculiarities?) adapted him with a degree of perfection usually met with only in the lower creation. Even as the cylindrical body of the mole answers to the form of his burrow, and the flatness of *Cimex lectularius* (Norfolk Howard) favours unostentatious movements beneath a wallpaper, so Mr. Snuper's total lack of individual character enabled him to walk the streets a mere unnoticed unit of the population.

I had often met him about our premises, for Thorndyke had employed him from time to time to make such enquiries and observations as were obviously impossible to either of us; and now, the day after our visit to Staple Inn, I met him once more, descending our stairs, and should certainly have passed him if he had not stopped to wish me "good afternoon." As he had evidently just come from our chambers, I assumed that there was something afoot and was a little curious as to what it might be, and the more so as we had no case on hand which seemed to need Mr. Snuper's services.

Of course, I could not put any questions to the gentleman himself, but I had no such delicacy with Thorndyke. As soon as I entered our chambers I proceeded to make a few private enquiries on my own account.

"I met Snuper on the stairs," said I. "Is there anything doing in his line?"

"It is just a matter of one or two enquiries," Thorndyke replied. "I have set him to collect a few data concerning Peck."

"What sort of data?" I asked.

"Oh, quite simple data," he replied; "what sort of practice he has, whether he lives on the premises, how he spends his time, what bank he patronises, and so on. You see, Jervis, we know nothing about Peck, and it would be useful to have a few facts in our possession when we call on him."

"I don't see that the kind of facts that you mention have much relevance to our inquiry," I objected.

He admitted the objection. "But," he added, "your experience in cross-examination will have taught you that an irrelevant question, to which you know the answer, may be a valuable means of testing the general truth of a witness's statements."

To this I had to assent, but I was not satisfied. Such extremely vague enquiries would have suggested that Thorndyke was at a loose end, which I did not believe he was.

"You are not connecting Peck with the blackmailing business, are you?" I asked.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"But the thing is impossible," I exclaimed. "The man was absent from England during the whole of the material time."

"Which is a fact worth noting," said he. "But what do you call the material time? When we were discussing Abel Webb, we agreed that the clue to this business was to be sought in the events of the voyage from Australia. Peck was present then."

"But he was on the other side of the world when the great blackmailing took place, after Abel Webb's death and apparently connected with it. However," I concluded, "it is of no use discussing the matter. I expect you have perfectly good reasons for what you are doing and are keeping them to yourself."

He smiled blandly at this suggestion, and the subject dropped; and as we had several court cases which kept us employed during the fortnight which followed, the Gillum mystery fell into abeyance, or, at least, appeared to. Mr. Snuper made no further appearances (but then he never did in the course of an inquiry, reports by post being more safe from observation); and the case had nearly faded out of my mind when my interest in it was suddenly revived by Thorndyke's announcement that he proposed to call on Dr. Peck on the following day shortly before noon.

"By the way," said I, "where is he carrying on his practice?"

"His premises are in Whitechapel High Street," Thorndyke replied.

"Whitechapel High Street!" I repeated in astonishment. "What an extraordinary place to have pitched upon."

"It does seem a little odd," he admitted, "but somebody must practise in Whitechapel; and there are some advantages in a poor neighbourhood. At any rate, that is where he is, and I hope we shan't find him too busy for an interview. I don't much think we shall, judging from Snuper's reports of the practice."

How far Mr. Snuper's estimate was correct I was unable to judge when we arrived at the premises on the following morning. From a brass plate on a jamb of the side door of a tailor's trimming warehouse I learned that Augustus Peck, Physician and Surgeon, had consulting-rooms on the first floor and was to be found in them between the hours of 10.30 a.m. and 1, and in the afternoon from 2 to 6 p.m. Accordingly, it being then about 11.30 a.m., we entered the doorway and ascended a flight of rather shabby stairs to a landing on which two doors opened, one of which bore the doctor's name in painted lettering with the instruction: "Ring and enter"; which we did, and found ourselves in a large room covered with floor-cloth and provided with a considerable number of chairs, but otherwise almost unfurnished. However, we had no

time to inspect this apartment—of which we were the sole occupants—for, almost as we entered, a communicating door opened and a rather tall, well-dressed man invited us to come through into the consulting-room. We followed him into the sanctuary, and, when he had shut the door and placed a couple of chairs for us, he seated himself at his writing-table, and, having bestowed on us a look of more than ordinary attention, asked:

“Which of you is the patient?”

Thorndyke smiled apologetically as he replied: “Neither of us is. We have not come for medical advice, but in the hope—rather a forlorn hope, I fear—that you may be able and willing to assist us in some inquiries that we have in hand.”

Dr. Peck smiled. “I was afraid,” said he, “that you were too good to be true. My practice doesn’t include many members of the aristocracy. But what kind of inquiries are you referring to? And, if you will pardon me, whom have I the honour of addressing?”

Thorndyke took out his card-case, and, extracting a card, said, as he handed the latter to Peck: “This will introduce me. My friend is Dr. Jervis, who is collaborating with me.”

Dr. Peck took the card from him and glanced at it, at first rather casually; but then he looked at it again with such evidently awakened interest that I felt sure that he had recognised the name. Indeed, he said so when he had pondered over it a while, for, as I offered him my card and he took it from me, laying Thorndyke’s down on the table, he asked: “Are you the Dr. Thorndyke who used to lecture at St. Margaret’s on medical jurisprudence?”

Thorndyke admitted that he was the person referred to. “But,” he added, “I don’t remember you. Were you ever at St. Margaret’s?”

“No,” replied Peck, “I am a Bart’s man. But I remember your name, as our lecturer used to quote you rather freely. And that brings us back to the question of your inquiry. What is its nature, and how do you think I can help you?”

“Our inquiry,” said Thorndyke, “is concerned with a man named John Gillum who came from Australia to England about two years ago. Do you remember him?”

“Oh, yes,” replied Peck, “I remember him quite well. He was a passenger on the Port Badmington, of the Commonwealth and Dominions Line, of which I was medical officer. He came on board, I think, at Perth and travelled with us to Marseilles. What about him?”

“Did you know that he is dead?”

“Dead!” exclaimed Peck. “Good Lord, no. When did he die?”

“He was found dead in his chambers in Clifford’s Inn nearly three months ago. Apparently, he had committed suicide—at least, that was the verdict of the coroner’s jury.”

“Dear, dear!” Peck exclaimed in a tone of deep concern. “What a dreadful affair! Poor old Gillum! A most shocking affair, and surprising, too. I can hardly believe it. He was such a cheerful soul, so gay and happy and so full of the high old times that he was going to have when he got to England. I suppose there is no doubt that he really did make away with himself?”

“There seemed to be no doubt whatever,” replied Thorndyke; “but I can speak only from hearsay. I had no connection with the case at the time.”

“And now that you are connected with the case,” said Peck, “what is the nature of your inquiry? What do you want to know?”

“The answer to that question,” said Thorndyke, “involves a few explanations. From what transpired at the inquest, it appeared that Gillum had been driven to suicide by the loss of his entire fortune. It was only a modest fortune—about thirteen thousand pounds—but he had got through every penny of it. Part of it he had wasted by betting and other forms of gambling, but a quite considerable portion of what had been lost appeared to have been paid away to blackmailers.”

“Blackmailers!” Peck repeated in a tone of the utmost astonishment. “It seems incredible. The gambling I can understand to some extent, though that surprises me. For, though he certainly did like a little flutter at cards, I should hardly have called him a gambler. But blackmail! I can’t believe it. Who on earth could have blackmailed Gillum? And what possible chance could he have given them to do it?”

“Precisely,” said Thorndyke. “That is our problem. Gillum’s relatives are convinced that it was the blackmail, and not the mere gambling losses, that was the determining cause of the suicide; and they have commissioned me to make such inquiries as may establish the identity of the blackmailers and bring them within reach of the law.”

“Very proper, too,” said Peck, “but it doesn’t look a very hopeful job. Have you anything to go on?”

“Not very much,” Thorndyke replied. “There is this and there are some other letters, but, as you will see, they are not very helpful.”

As he spoke he took from his pocket a little portfolio, from which he drew out a single sheet of paper and handed it to Peck; who read its contents slowly and with deep attention and then asked:

“Is this the original letter?”

“No,” Thorndyke replied. “One doesn’t hawk original documents about, which may have to be produced in court. This is

a copy, but it is certified correct. The attestation is on the back."

Peck turned the sheet over and glanced at the certificate; then he turned it back and once more read through the letter.

"It's an astonishing thing," said he. "The blackmail works out at two thousand a year. Gillum must have had some pretty hefty secrets if he was prepared to pay that. But I don't quite see where I come in."

"You come in," said Thorndyke, "at precisely the point which you, yourself have indicated: the identity of the blackmailer and the subject of the blackmail."

Peck looked at him in astonishment. "I don't understand what you mean," said he. "This man, Gillum, travelled on my ship from Australia to Europe. He came on board a complete stranger to me; he went ashore at Marseilles, and I never saw him again. Moreover, I have been abroad for nearly two years, and I came back only a couple of months ago. How could I know anything about Gillum or his blackmailers?"

"It had occurred to me," Thorndyke replied, "that the blackmailers might have been some of his fellow passengers on that voyage, and that the blackmail might have been based on some incidents that had occurred on board. What do you say to that?"

"It is quite possible," replied Peck, "but I know of nothing to support the idea. Gillum seemed to be on good terms with everybody, and, as to the other passengers, I knew very little about them. A much more likely source of information would be the purser, if you could get into touch with him. He knew Gillum better than I did, and he knew more about the passengers. Get hold of him if you can. His name is Webb. Abel Webb."

"Abel Webb is dead," said Thorndyke. "He was found dead about a week after the date of that letter."

Dr. Peck stared at Thorndyke, round-eyed and open-mouthed. "Good God!" he exclaimed. "Found dead! Don't tell me that he committed suicide, too."

"It was suggested that he did," Thorndyke replied, "but it is more probable that he was murdered. The jury returned an open verdict."

For some seconds Peck sat motionless and silent, his wide-open blue eyes fixed, with an expression of horror, on Thorndyke's face. At length he said in a low tone, as if deeply moved: "You are making my flesh creep, doctor. Two of the ship's company cut off by violence in a few months! I almost ask myself if it will be my turn next."

There was a long pause, during which Peck and Thorndyke looked at each other in silence and I continued my observation of the former. He was a rather good-looking man, clean-shaved and well groomed, with close-cropped light-brown hair and clear blue eyes. His manners were easy and pleasant, and he had an undeniably engaging personality. And yet, somehow, I did not very much like him; and I liked him least when he smiled and exposed an unpleasing array of false teeth, mingled with one or two rather discoloured "aboriginals." He had better have kept his moustache.

"Well, doctor," he said, suddenly recovering himself and handing the letter back to Thorndyke—who replaced it in the portfolio—"you see what my position is. I should have liked to help you, but I really have no connection with the business at all."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "that appears to be the case. But I am not greatly disappointed. It was, as I said, only a forlorn hope. Nevertheless," he added, as he rose and pocketed the portfolio, "I am greatly obliged to you for having received us so kindly and given us so much of your time."

"Not at all," Peck replied, opening the side door, which gave access to the landing, "I am only sorry that your time has been occupied to so little purpose. Good morning, doctor. Good morning, Dr. Jervis." He bowed and dismissed us with a genial smile, and we retreated down the shabby stairs and out into the busy High Street.

---

#### XIV. — FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

THE advantages of modern transport do not include facilities for conversation. The fact was recognised by us both as we sat in the motor omnibus which bore us at lightning speed—when it was not held up by an immovable jam of other lightning speeders—from the cosmopolitan region in which Dr. Peck had pitched his tent towards the less picturesque but more respectable west. But even in a motor-bus thought is possible; and thus I was able to beguile the—intermittently—swift journey by cogitating upon our recent interview.

As to the results achieved, they were, so far as I was concerned, exactly what I had expected. The man had been absent from England during the whole of the blackmailing period and had nothing whatever to tell. And if Thorndyke had learned anything of his personality—which I had not—the knowledge could be only curious and irrelevant. For the one fact that had emerged was that, for the purposes of our inquiry, Dr. Peck was completely outside the picture.

When the bus delivered us at Holborn Circus and we strode away along the broad pavement, I ventured to present my views as aforesaid, adding: “It doesn’t seem to me that Snuper’s inquiries have helped us very much, but, of course, I don’t know what discoveries he made.”

“They were not very sensational,” Thorndyke replied, “and mainly they agree with our own. Peck has just squatted in Whitechapel. His practice consists, at present, of a brass plate and an empty waiting-room, and his arrangements dispense with the inconveniences of a night-bell.”

“He doesn’t live there, then?”

“No. He lives at Loughton, on the skirts of Epping Forest, quite accessible to East London, and very delightful in the summer but rather bleak and muddy in the winter.”

“It is not very obvious why he gave up his chambers,” said I. “Staple Inn is nearer to Whitechapel than Loughton. What else did Snuper find out about him?”

“Very little. He ascertained that Peck seems to be a solitary man with no discoverable friends or acquaintances; that he spends his spare time in wandering about the far east of London or in long walks in the forest; and also—which is the most curious discovery—that he, apparently, has three banks, and that he visits each of them regularly twice a week.”

“That really is odd,” said I. “What on earth can he want with three banks? And for what purpose can he make these regular visits? If he has no practice there can be no cash to pay in, and he can’t draw out twice a week, and from three banks, too.”

Thorndyke smiled in his exasperating way. “There, Jervis,” said he, “is quite a pretty little problem for you to excogitate. Why should a man who has no visible cash income pay in to three banks at once; or, alternatively, why should a man whose visible expenditure is negligible draw out twice a week from three banks?”

“Is there any answer to it?” I asked dismally as we turned into Fetter Lane.

“There must be,” he replied. “Probably several, and one of them will be the right one. I strongly recommend the problem for your consideration. Attack it constructively. Think of all possible explanations, and then consider which of them is applicable to the present case. And, meanwhile, I suggest that we drop in at Clifford’s Inn and see how Polton is progressing.”

“What is Polton doing at Clifford’s Inn?” I asked.

“My dear fellow,” he replied, “he is carrying out your own suggestion; collecting dust for microscopical examination.”

I smiled acidly at this outrageous fiction; for, of course, my suggestion had been made ironically as an example of superlative futility. The idea had been Thorndyke’s own; and since there must have been some reasonable purpose behind it, I was now all agog to discover what that purpose was. It was not discoverable, however, from Polton’s activities, for they exhibited only the method of procedure, which was, characteristically, orderly and systematic. The vacuum cleaner that he was using consisted of a sort of steel jar, into which the suction tube opened, the latter having a nozzle on which a gauze bag could be fastened. Thus, when the air-tight lid was on the jar and the machine was set working, a stream of dust-laden air was discharged into the bag, which detained the dust and let the air escape through its pores. Polton had provided himself with half a dozen or so of these bags, and, by the time when we arrived—letting ourselves in with a duplicate key of his manufacture—most of them had been filled and now stood in a row on the mantelpiece, each fitted with a label describing the source of its contents and referring to a sketch plan of the premises.

“You see, sir, I have nearly finished,” said Polton, as Thorndyke glanced along the row of bags and scanned the labels. “I’ve done the bedroom, the kitchen and the larder, and now I am going over this room in sections. But,” he added gloomily, “I’m afraid it will be a poor harvest. The floors are terribly clean. That carpet-sweeper must have taken off the cream of the really valuable dust, and they seem to have used it to a most unnecessary extent. However,” he concluded, “I’ve got what I could out of that sweeper. I’ve combed the brushes and vacuumed the inside thoroughly.”

“That was a capital idea,” said Thorndyke. “The sweeper is probably quite a storehouse of ancient dust, and of the most useful kind for our purpose. By the way, did you have time to make that key?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Polton. “I’ve got it here. It’s only a skeleton. There was no use in fiddling about with wards, so I just cut

the middle of the bit right out. But it opens the lock all right. I've tried it."

With this, he produced from his pocket a monstrous skeleton key, such as might have been fabricated by Jack Sheppard to open the gates of Newgate, and handed it to Thorndyke, who remarked as he took it that "they liked good, substantial keys in the days when these houses were built."

"What key is it?" I asked.

"It belongs to—or rather, it opens—the door on the landing, which I have assumed to be that of the staircase leading up to the lumber-room above which you heard Mr. Weech refer to. I hope there isn't another locked door at the top. Shall we go and see?"

I assented and followed him out to the landing, speculating on his object—if he had one—in surveying the lumber-room. But I asked no question and made no comment. His proceedings in this case were getting out of my depth.

The big key seemed to fit the lock snugly and shot the bolt back with unexpected ease, but the ancient hinges groaned when Thorndyke pulled the door open and exposed the bottom of a flight of rude steps, a sort of compromise between stairs and a ladder. Only the lower steps were visible, for they rapidly faded upward into the total darkness of the chimney-like cavity, but we both noticed that they bore distinct footprints on their dusty treads. Thorndyke went first, lighting our way with the little electric lamp that he always carried, until we were near the top, when a faint glimmer from above mitigated the darkness, and increased as we ascended.

There was no landing at the top, but just a space cut out of the floor to accommodate the steps, so that we came up into the room like a couple of stage demons rising through a trap. When he reached the floor level Thorndyke stepped sideways, clear of the well, and stood motionless, peering into the dim interior. I followed him in the same way, to avoid having the dangerous staircase well behind me, and stood beside him, looking about me with mild curiosity.

It was a rather eerie place; a great, bare room, little lighter than the staircase. For, though there were three large windows, they were all closely shuttered, and what vestiges of light there were filtered in through the cracks and joints at the hinges and folds. But to our accustomed eyes the general features of the place were visible in the dim twilight; the disorderly piles of "junk," ranged along the sides of the room, shadowy forms of chairs, cupboards, baths, tables, rejected and forgotten and probably ruinous, chandeliers, lengths of water-pipe, and multitudinous indistinguishable objects, the accumulations, it might be, of a century or more. But it was not the "junk" that had attracted Thorndyke's attention. Along the clear space in the middle of the room a double row of footprints could be seen, extending from the head of the staircase and fading away into the darkness at the farther end.

"Someone has been up here comparatively recently," said he, "and went directly to the farther end either to fetch or to deposit something. Perhaps we shall be able to judge which. But before we disturb anything I think we had better take a record of these footprints. Polton has the small camera downstairs as there were one or two photographs to take. I'll just go and fetch him up. And, meanwhile, you might open one set of shutters, if you can get at the window."

He handed me his lamp, and, when I had seen him safely on to the steps, I approached the only accessible window and investigated the fastenings of the shutters. They were simple enough, consisting of a thick wooden bar resting in wooden sockets and requiring merely to be lifted out; and when I had done this I was able to pull back the shutters and let in the light of day. And now I could see how the footprints had come to be so surprisingly distinct on the bare floor. In the years during which this room had lain undisturbed, the dust had been settling continuously until it now formed a thick grey mantle on every horizontal surface and the footprints were almost as clear as if they had been in snow or on a sandy shore. In some the very brads in the soles and heels could be seen.

I was still examining them and speculating on Thorndyke's unaccountable interest in them, when the staircase became brightly illuminated and my colleague appeared carrying an inspection lamp and followed by Polton with the camera slung over his shoulder and the tripod under his arm. Apparently he had his instructions, for he proceeded at once to walk along parallel to the tracks, minutely examining each footprint until he found one that satisfied him. Then he opened the tripod, fixed the camera to the attachment specially designed for the purpose, laid a footrule down beside the print, and proceeded to focus them both.

When he had made the exposure—carefully timed by his watch—and changed the film, he picked up the rule and moved along a few paces, when he halted by a specially clear impression of a left foot, and, having drawn Thorndyke's attention to its remarkable sharpness, fetched the camera and repeated his former procedure.

"And now," said Thorndyke, as Polton carefully re-packed his apparatus, "let us see if we can find out what was the object of this visit; to take something away or to get rid of some unwanted article. The latter seems the more probable."

He followed the double line of footprints to a dark corner at the farther end of the room, where they became confused with various large objects—including a big copper bath—which had evidently been moved, as we could see by the marks on the dusty floor. Behind these, and close to the wall, was a pile of dismembered remains—a small cupboard door, a broken table-top, some odd shelves, pieces of board and fragments of some kind of box or case. A glance at the pile made it evident that the collection had been disturbed, for there were traces of finger-marks on some of the fragments and others seemed to have been wiped, while the heap, as a whole, was free from the thick mantle of dust which shrouded all the untouched objects in the room. Apparently this pile had been the object of the unknown visitor's activities.

"It is evident," said Thorndyke, "that all these things have been moved, and that they were piled up as we see them by the



person who made the footprints. Now, the question is: did he take something away or did he add something to the pile? And if he added something, what is it that he added?"

"It is impossible to say," I replied, "whether he took anything away, but some of those pieces of wood at the bottom look newer than the rest, and, if they are, they are probably what he added, though it is curious that they should be at the bottom. What do you say, Polton, as a practical wood-worker?"

"If you mean those bits of a chest or case," he replied, "I should say they are not more than six months old, and the broken edges are quite fresh. Shall I get them out?"

Without waiting for an answer he scrambled over the obstructions and proceeded to lift off the upper members of the pile, handing them to Thorndyke and me as he removed them, until he came down to six pieces of board, the clean surfaces of which contrasted noticeably with the ancient grime of the objects that had been removed. When he had handed these out he scrambled back, and he and Thorndyke began a systematic examination of the fragments—rather to my surprise; for there was nothing remarkable in their appearance. They seemed to be just the remains of a broken box or case of some kind.

"What puzzles me," said Polton, who was keenly interested because he saw that Thorndyke was, "is how these pieces got broken. Sound one-inch board like this takes some breaking. It couldn't have been an accident; yet why should anyone want to, break up a good piece of board?"

"What do you suppose it was, originally?" I asked. "Was it some sort of packing-case?"

"No, sir," he replied, "it couldn't have been that. The stuff is too good—prime yellow deal, excepting that bit of American white wood—and so is the workmanship. You see that there are three glued joints and they have all held. It was the wood that broke, not the joints; which means that whoever made it was a proper tradesman who could plane a joint true. Besides, all these pieces were stained on both sides and varnished on one, which must have been the outside. I should say it was a permanent case made to carry some particular thing. You see, there are three grooves in the side piece, so there were three partitions. But whatever it was meant to carry must have been pretty heavy to require one inch board throughout. And just look at the screw-holes. Number eight screws they will have been, and plenty of them, too."

"I suppose they are all parts of the same thing?" said I.

"They seem to be," he replied, running his footrule along one piece and then resting them upright on the floor. "They are all one length—thirty-nine inches—and these three broken pieces fit together to make a complete top or bottom twenty inches wide, while the other two broken ones seem to make two-thirds of a similar top or bottom; and the screw-holes in them correspond to those in what must have been one of the long sides. That's what I make of them, sir."

As he concluded, he looked enquiringly at Thorndyke, who agreed that the reconstruction appeared to be correct. "But," he added, "I think we might consider them more conveniently in our own premises. I suppose you have a bit of string about you, Polton?"

"Do you propose to annex them, then?" I asked, as Polton produced the inevitable hank of string and proceeded to lash the pieces of board together.

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "It is a little irregular, but I shall call on Weech and explain matters."

But the explanatory call proved unnecessary. For, almost as Thorndyke was speaking, we became aware of sounds from the staircase as of someone ascending the steps, slowly and by no means easily. As the sounds drew nearer we turned to see who the intruder might be, and presently there arose out of the well, first a chimney-pot hat, then a pair of spectacles, and finally the entire person of Mr. Weech, complete with umbrella. When he reached the floor level he stood for a few moments gazing at us, steadily. Then he advanced towards us with an expression of something less than his usual cordiality.

"I happened to notice," he said, rather dryly, "as I passed, that the shutters of one window were open; and as the only key of these premises is at this moment hanging on the key-board in the lodge, I concluded that some person, or persons, had obtained access to the said premises without authority and by some irregular means. Apparently I was right."

"You were perfectly right, Mr. Weech," said Thorndyke, "as you always are. We are entirely unauthorised intruders. I ought to have applied to you for authority to inspect this room, but as I happened to have a key that fitted the lock, and as I merely wanted to look round, I—well, I waived the formality, thinking that I would mention the matter the next time we met."

"Yes," said Mr. Weech, fixing a stony gaze on the pieces of board under Polton's arm. "Quite so. Perhaps it would have been more regular to obtain the authority before the event rather than after. May I ask why you wished to inspect this room?"

Now this was precisely the question that I had been asking myself. But I had not the slightest hope of enlightenment. My learned senior was not in the least addicted to disclosing his motives. Nevertheless, I was curious to see how he would avoid this rather awkward question.

"I wished," he replied, "for certain reasons connected with my inquiries, to ascertain whether this apparently disused room is, in fact, really disused, or whether it is ever visited or made use of."

"I could have told you that if you had asked me," said Weech. "It is not. I could have told you that nobody has entered this room for several years."

"Then, Mr. Weech," Thorndyke retorted, "you would have told me what is not true. For I have just ascertained that it has been entered within the last six months; and that it was entered, apparently, for the purpose of depositing these remains of an obviously new box or case."

"Which," said Weech, with a sly smile, "I see you have taken possession of and are carrying away without authority. However," he concluded with a return to his usual geniality, "I raise no objection. The things are of no value, and *de minimus non curat lex*. I don't understand what you want them for, but that is your affair. Have you finished your explorations?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "we were just about to retire; and you had better let me hand you your umbrella when you are safely at the bottom of the steps."

Mr. Weech gratefully accepted this offer, and, when he had closed the shutters, he embarked on the perilous descent and we followed. He lingered on the landing to wait for us, and, when Polton had let himself into the chambers, he strolled in and looked round.

"I see you are having a spring clean," said he, glancing at the vacuum cleaner. "Not very necessary, I should think, but perhaps just as well after what has happened."

He wandered through the rooms while Thorndyke retired to the bedroom—where I caught a glimpse of him making a survey of the late John Gillum's shoes—and eventually accompanied us down to the court yard, when we departed for home and a rather belated lunch, attended by Polton with the camera and the purloined wood. We paused for a minute or so outside the entry to exchange a few final words with Mr. Weech, and it was at this moment that a rather curious thing happened.

As we were standing there, almost facing the covered passage that connected the two courtyards, I saw a man come through it and appear at the arched entrance. And there he halted. But only for a moment. For, having taken a single quick glance at us, he turned about, looked at his watch, and hurried away back through the passage. It was but an instantaneous glimpse that I had of him; but yet, in that instant, it seemed to me that the man was extraordinarily like Dr. Peck. Obviously, it could be no more than a chance resemblance, for we had left that gentleman established in his consulting-room waiting for the arrival of patients. But yet his was a face that one would remember, and the resemblance had certainly been rather remarkable.

I was still reflecting on the coincidence when another man came up the passage and emerged from the arch. Preoccupied as I was with the first man, I hardly noticed him, for, unlike the other, he was quite, undistinctive—he might have been a solicitor's clerk or a superior type of traveller. Subconsciously, I was aware that he wore horn-rimmed spectacles, that he carried a small bag and an umbrella and that he walked with a slight limp. Only as he passed close to us on his way to the Fetter Lane gate did I become conscious of a feeling that I had seen him somewhere before; and that feeling might have been due to the fact that, as he passed us, he gave a quick look at Thorndyke, who seemed to return an instantaneous glance of recognition.

When we had shaken off Mr. Weech at the door of the lodge, I raised the question. "Did you recognise that man who passed us in the Inn?"

"Hardly," Thorndyke replied with a laugh. "Not until he looked at me. Did you?"

"I seemed to have seen him before, but I can't give him a name."

"You weren't meant to," Thorndyke chuckled. "That was our invaluable and Protean friend, Mr. Snuper."

"Of course!" I exclaimed. "But I never can spot that fellow. He looks different every time I see him. But there was another man who came up the passage and who produced exactly the opposite effect. I thought I recognised him though I must have been mistaken. Did you notice him?"

"Yes," he replied. "What was your impression of him?"

"I thought he was extraordinarily like Dr. Peck."

"So I thought," said Thorndyke.

"Then it was a real resemblance and not a mere illusion. But it is a queer coincidence; for, of course, the man couldn't have been Peck. The thing is impossible."

"It isn't impossible," he replied. "Only wildly improbable. He had no apparent reason for following us as he had our cards and knew where we lived. But if he had wanted to follow us, it was actually possible for him to have done it. Snuper did."

"Snuper!" I exclaimed. "You say that Snuper followed us! How do you know that he did?"

"I saw him in Whitechapel High Street as we came away from Peck's."

---

## XV. — SERMONS IN DUST

THE appearance of the party that gathered that same evening round the table in our sitting-room to examine Polton's gleanings from John Gillum's chambers struck me at the time as slightly ludicrous. And that is still my impression when I recall the scene. In the middle of the table was a collection of the labelled bags, containing the floor-sweepings, or vacuum-cleanings, from the respective rooms. Before each of the three investigators was a microscope with triple nose-piece, flanked by a large photographic dish, a jar for waste, and a small covered glass pot for "reserved specimens"; and the appointed procedure consisted in scanning the material with a very low magnifying power, examining objects of interest with the higher powers, and the preservation of special "finds" for subsequent consideration.

We began by each taking a bag and turning out its contents on to the dish; the said contents forming an unsavoury heap of the material known to housewives as "flue"—the sort of stuff that you can rake out from under a chest of drawers or a neglected bedstead. From the heap a pinch was taken up with forceps, spread out on the glass plate and rapidly inspected through the microscope. If it contained nothing of interest, it was cast into the waste jar and a fresh pinch taken.

"Are we looking for anything in particular?" I asked as I turned out my mass of flue into the dish; "or do we report everything?"

"You know what is likely to turn up in a floor sweeping," Thorndyke replied. "We can ignore the inevitable wool fibres from the carpet, and cotton and linen fibres. Everything else had better be noted."

With this we all fell to work, stimulated at first by the hope of turning up something interesting or curious. But, as the things which we were to ignore appeared to be the only things discoverable, the occupation began presently to pall, and I don't mind admitting that I found it rather tedious. By the time that my heap was reduced to a mere handful, I had observed—apart from the ubiquitous fibres—nothing more thrilling than a few minute particles of what looked like broken glass.

"Yes," said Thorndyke, when I mentioned my discovery, "I have found some, too. It isn't quite obvious what they are, but we had better keep them. Possibly we may come on a larger fragment with a more definite character."

Accordingly, I picked out the grains with fine forceps, aided by a pointed sable brush, moistened at the tip, and deposited them in the glass pot. Having done this, I was about to reach for a second bag when Polton announced a discovery.

"I've found a hair," said he. "It looks like a moustache hair, but it must have been a funny sort of moustache. It seems to have been dyed. Must have been. But did you ever see a man with a violet moustache?"

He passed the slide to Thorndyke, who confirmed the discovery.

"Yes," said he, "it is a moustache hair—a rather fair one—dyed black."

"But," protested Polton, "it's violet."

"Hardly violet," said Thorndyke. "A dull, bluish purple, I should call it. That is the appearance of a single hair, seen under the microscope by a strong transmitted light. Seen in a mass by the naked eye and by reflected light, it would appear jet black."

"Would it, now," said Polton. "Think of that. The microscope is a wonderful instrument, but you mustn't believe all that it tells you."

He took back his slide, and picking the hair out daintily with his forceps, deposited it in the glass pot, while I, encouraged by his success, began an attack on a fresh bagful of flue.

This time, I had considerably better luck. At the first cast I struck an object which looked like a coarse and rather irregular thread of glass; and, as I could make nothing more of it than that, I passed the slide to Thorndyke for a "further opinion."

"Ha!" said he, when he had taken a look at it, "now we know what those other particles were. This is undoubtedly a fibre of silicate wool, or slag-wool, as it is sometimes called. It is made from the slag from the smelting furnaces, which is really a kind of crude glass."

"And what is it used for?"

"For a variety of purposes. As it is cheap and incombustible, is unaffected by acids—excepting hydrofluoric acid—or by moisture, and is a bad conductor of heat, it is useful for packing, and especially for packing hot or cold substances."

"I wonder what Gillum used it for," said I.

"We had better defer speculations and inferences," Thorndyke replied, "until we have examined the whole of the material"; and with this he took a fresh bag and resumed his observations.

My good fortune did not stop at the slag-wool fibre. Presently there came into the field of the microscope a hair, obviously a scalp hair and probably from a man's head, though the sex is not so easy to decide in these days of shingling and Eton cropping. At any rate, it was a short hair and had been recently cut; and as it had been dyed the same dull purple colour as Polton's moustache hair, it was reasonable to infer that it came from the same person. Accordingly, I considered it attentively in its bearing on that person's natural characteristics. The dye did not, of course, extend to the root. There was a space of perhaps, a twelfth of an inch above the neck of the bulb—representing the growth since the last application of the dye—which was of the natural colour; and from this I was able to infer that the man was of a medium complexion,

inclining to be fair rather than dark; that the hair had been originally of a somewhat light brown tint. This was also Thorndyke's opinion, based on an inspection of my "find" and of another scalp hair which he had found in his own material.

"So," he concluded, "we now know that this was a rather blond man who wore a moustache. What we don't know is whether he shaved his chin or wore a beard."

"Begging your pardon, sir," Polton interposed, "I think we do. I have just found another hair, a thick, rather wavy one. It isn't a moustache hair and it doesn't look like a hair of the head. I think it must be a beard hair. Will you just take a look at it, sir?"

Thorndyke took the slide from him, and having made a brief examination of the specimen, decided that it was undoubtedly a beard hair; a decision that I confirmed when the slide had been submitted to me.

"So," said I, "we now have a fairly complete picture of this man, and the question is: Who can he have been? Do you think it possible that Benson could have been mistaken? That what he took for natural black hair was really dyed hair?"

"No," Thorndyke replied, decidedly. "That is impossible for two reasons. First, Benson had known Gillum since his boyhood—practically the whole of his life. But the second reason is absolutely conclusive. You remember that Benson described Gillum's hair as being slightly streaked with grey; that is to say, there was a slight sprinkling of white hairs among the black. And he expressly stated that he had examined the hair of the corpse to see whether the proportion of white hairs had increased, and that he found them apparently unchanged. Moreover, there are the hairbrushes that we found in the chambers—apparently Gillum's brushes. I have examined some of the hairs from those brushes and found them to be natural black hairs with a very few white ones. So these dyed hairs are not Gillum's, but those of some other person who had frequented those chambers."

"Yes," I agreed, "that is perfectly clear. I wonder who he can have been. Is it possible that we have struck the actual villain—the blackmailer, himself?"

"It seems quite possible," Thorndyke replied; "but we had better get on with our search and see what the other bags have to tell us."

We worked on steadily for another hour, making no further comments but transferring all new finds to the glass pots. By this time we had dealt with all the bags excepting the two small ones containing the material from the sweeper and the coal-bin; and the net result was, five more dyed hairs, one natural black hair and seven fibres of slag-wool. Of the two small bags, I took the one labelled "coal-bin," while the other was divided between Polton and Thorndyke, the latter taking the extracted dust while Polton was awarded the fibrous mass that he had so industriously combed from the sweeper's brushes.

As for my material, I approached it with no expectation of any discovery, whatever. In a coal-bin one may reasonably anticipate the presence of coal. And coal there certainly was. When I turned the bag out into my dish, the contents presented an undeniable heap of coal-dust, a trial sample of which I took up with the blade of my pocket-knife and sprinkled over the glass plate. But when I applied my eye to the microscope, the appearance of that sprinkling came as a considerable surprise. Undoubtedly there was coal galore; a scattered mass of black, opaque, characterless fragments. But everywhere in the spaces between the particles of coal, the glass surface was covered with a multitude of slag-wool fragments of all sizes from quite considerable lengths of thread down to mere grains of glassy dust. I announced my discovery to Thorndyke and passed the slide to him, but when he had examined it, with evident interest, he handed it back to me with no comment beyond the suggestion that it seemed desirable to preserve the whole of the material from the bin.

His own portion of sweeper dust yielded nothing but a single dyed hair and a few particles of slag-wool, but Polton's combings from the sweeper-brushes were quite rich in material so far as quantity went. But they contained nothing new. There were no less than seven hairs, all dyed, one or two threads of slag-wool, and a number of particles of no interest such as crumbs of bread or biscuit, tobacco ash, a piece of cotton thread and some shavings from a lead pencil. The combings were, in fact, but a sort of condensed epitome of the general "floor-sweep."

"Well, Thorndyke," I said, as I rose and stretched myself, "I think my brilliant and original idea has justified itself by the results. But I'm hanged if I understand them. The gent with the purple hair has deposited well over a dozen samples in different parts of the premises, including the sweeper, whereas John Gillum has dropped only one. But Gillum was the resident. The other fellow could only have been a visitor, even if Gillum put him up. It seems quite inconsistent, unless we assume that the purple chappie was moulting; which I am not prepared to do."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "we shall have to find some explanation more plausible than that. And now, if you and Polton will clear away the remains while I jot down a few particulars of the evening's work, we shall all be ready for supper. I presume," he added, addressing Polton, "that the contingency has been foreseen."

It had. There could be no doubt of that, though Polton's only reply was a smile which converted his countenance into the likeness of one of good Abbot Mendel's famous wrinkled peas. But even that smile understated the gorgeous reality. A cold boiled fowl and a ham were mere incidents in the Sybaritic menu. As Polton deposited "the goods" on the table with another smile—which left the Mendelian pea nowhere—I was once more impressed by the queer contradictions in his character. For Polton, himself a spare-living, almost ascetic little man, was apt, when Thorndyke was concerned, to manifest his devotion by developing a sort of vicarious gluttony. He would contemplate Thorndyke's robust appreciation of

good food and wine with the sympathetic joy of a fond mother administering delicacies to a beloved child.

Of course, we made him join us at the feast. He could not be allowed to go away and feed in the laboratory, as he had proposed; and when he had taken his place at the table and I had filled his glass with Chambertin (I believe he would rather have had ginger beer), the cup of his happiness was literally full. It was a glorious ending to what had been, for him, a red-letter day.

When the banquet had passed through its final stages and Polton had retired triumphant to his own dominions, Thorndyke and I drew up our chairs to a rather premature but highly acceptable fire and filled our pipes. And, naturally, my thoughts reverted to the evening's researches and their rather surprising results. My colleague had seemed unwilling to discuss them at the time, though we had few secrets from Polton in these days, but now that we were alone, I thought he might be less reticent, and accordingly I ventured to reopen the topic.

"The presence in Gillum's chambers," I began, "of that mysterious stranger with the dyed hair seems to be a new discovery. At least, it is new to me. Have you any idea who he was?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "I think that the facts in our possession enable us to form a fairly definite opinion as to his identity."

"You say 'the facts in our possession.' Shouldn't you rather say 'in your possession'?"

"Not at all," he replied. "Whatever is known to me is known also to you. As to the actual observed facts, we are on an equal footing. Any difference between us is in their interpretation."

This was so manifestly true that it left me nothing to say. It was the old story. I lacked that peculiar gift that Thorndyke had by virtue of which he was able to perceive, almost at a glance, the relations of facts which appeared to be totally unrelated. For some time I smoked my pipe in silence, reflecting on this unsatisfactory difference between us. Presently I remarked: "You have put in a good deal of work on this case. Does it seem to you that you have made any real progress?"

"Yes," he replied. "I am quite satisfied."

"And have you marked out any further line of investigation?"

"No," he answered. "I am making no further investigations. I have finished. The details can be filled in by the police."

I looked at him in amazement. "Finished!" I exclaimed. "Why, I imagined that you had hardly begun. Do you mean to say that you have identified the blackmailer?"

"I believe so," he replied. "Indeed, I may say that I have no doubt. But there is one point at which I have an advantage over you which must be redressed at once."

He rose, and, opening the cabinet in which the "exhibits" connected with the case were kept, took out two sheets of paper, which he laid on the table.

"Now," said he, "here is the blackmailer's letter, which you have seen; and here is a sheet of paper which you have also seen. We found it in the tidy in Gillum's bedroom with a little bolt and nut wrapped in it. Do you remember?"

"I remember. But I thought it was the bolt and nut that were the objects of interest."

"So they were at the time," said he. "But I had a look at the paper, too, and then that became the object of interest. I have flattened it out in the press to get rid of the creases, so that it is now easy to compare it with the letter. See what you think of it."

I took up the two sheets and compared them. It was at once obvious that they were very similar. Both had been torn off a writing-pad; they appeared to be of the same size; the paper seemed to be the same in both—a thin, rather low-quality paper, ruled, with very faint lines. When I held them up to the light, I could see in each a portion of what was evidently the same watermark; and the ruled lines were exactly the same distance apart in both.

"Your point," said I, "is that these two pieces of paper are identically similar. I agree to that. But is the similarity of any great significance? Writing-pads such as these sheets were torn from are made by the thousand. There must have been thousands of persons using pads indistinguishably similar to these at the time when this letter was written."

"That is perfectly true," Thorndyke agreed. "But now make another comparison. I put the two sheets of paper together, thus, both face upwards, as we can tell by the watermark. Now, see if all four of their edges coincide."

"So far as I can see, they all coincide perfectly."

"Very well. Now I turn one sheet over face down wards and again put the two together. Can you still make all four edges coincide?"

I tried, but found it impossible. "No," I replied. "They agree everywhere but at the bottom. One of them must be a little out of the square."

"Not one of them, Jervis," he corrected. "They must be both equally out of the square since all four edges coincided when they were both face upwards. And in fact they are. Test each of them with this set-square. You see that, in each, the bottom edge is out of the square with the sides, and in both to the same amount. I measured them with a protractor and found the deviation in both to be just under one degree. The reasonable inference is that they are both from the same pad."

"Reasonable," I agreed, "but not conclusive. The whole batch of pads must have presented the same peculiarity of shape."

"True," he admitted. "But consider the probabilities. Either these two sheets were from the same pad, or they were from two different pads in the possession of two different persons. Now, which is the more probable?"

"Oh, obviously, as a mere question of probability, they would appear to be from the same pad. But you seem to be suggesting that the blackmailer was Gillum himself; which is so improbable that it cancels the other probabilities. I shouldn't admit that the coincidence in the shape of these sheets is enough to support such an extraordinary conclusion."

"I agree with you, Jervis," he rejoined. "The coincidence alone would not justify that conclusion. But it is not alone. From facts known to us both I had already concluded that the blackmailing letters had been written by Gillum himself. The evidence of these two sheets is merely corroborative. But, as corroboration, it is enormously weighty."

"When you speak of facts known to us both," I said hopelessly, "you leave me stranded. I know of no such facts. But apparently you have worked out a complete case. What is your next move?"

"I am sending Miller the report of the inquest on Gillum's body and informing him that I propose handing the case over to him. That will probably bring him here by to-morrow evening at the latest to get the particulars. Then I shall, in effect, lay a sworn information."

"An information!" I exclaimed. "But against whom? You say that the blackmailer is a myth—that Gillum pretended to blackmail himself. But Gillum is dead; and if he were not, he would have committed no legal offence. It was a pretence, according to your assertion; but it was not, in a legal sense, a fraud."

"Now, Jervis," said he, "to-morrow evening I shall show you the suggested indictment before Miller sees it. But I should like you, in the interval, to make a final effort to work this case out for yourself. You have all the facts. Turn them over in your mind without reference to any preconceived theory, and read Mortimer's narrative once again. If you do that, I think you will be forced to the conclusion that I shall propound to Miller."

I could do no less than agree to this. But I foresaw the inevitable result. Doubtless, I had all the facts. But alas! I had not Thorndyke's unique power of inference and synthetic reasoning.

---

## XVI. — THE DISCLOSURE

A TELEPHONE call shortly before midday making an appointment for eight o'clock in the evening, informed us that Mr. Superintendent Miller had "caught on." Indeed, he was distinctly curious and would have liked a few particulars in advance, but as his call was answered by Polton, in Thorndyke's absence, these were not available. I sympathised with Miller and should have "liked a few particulars" myself; for I had re-read Mortimer's narrative before going to bed and cogitated on the case all the morning, and was as much in the dark as ever.

I saw little of Thorndyke during the day, for he went abroad alone, and even seemed to make a point of doing so. But we went out together in the evening for a rather early dinner at a tavern in Devereux Court; and it was on our way home that I had the unique experience of recognising Mr. Snuper. We were just about to enter through the little iron gate that leads from Devereux Court into New Court when a man emerged from a doorway in the former and came along at a quick pace behind us. He followed us into New Court and there overtook us, and as he passed ahead, I observed him, though with no particular attention, noting, in fact, no more than that he was a nondescript sort of person and that he carried a large parcel.

It was this parcel that brought him to my notice; for, when he had got some little distance ahead, he seemed to get into difficulties with it and nearly dropped it; whereupon he halted to make some readjustments, allowing us to pass him. And it was at this moment, when he turned his face towards us and the light from a lamp fell on him, that I suddenly realised who he was.

Almost at the instant of the recognition Thorndyke seemed to change his direction. He had appeared to be heading for the passage that leads through into Essex Court; but now he turned sharply to the right and led the way down into Fountain Court, which he crossed to the left into Middle Temple Lane, following the Lane down as far as Crown Office Row and passing along the latter until we emerged into King's Bench Walk. And all the way I could hear the footsteps of Mr. Snuper padding along behind us, and still, to judge by the occasional stoppages, wrestling with his parcel. When we came out into King's Bench Walk he passed us once more, and, turning to the right, made for the pavement at the lower end, where presently he vanished into one of the entries.

It was a mysterious affair for the man appeared to be shadowing us; which was a manifest absurdity. I was about to seek enlightenment from Thorndyke when he forestalled my enquiries by producing from his pocket a small folded paper which he handed to me.

"That," said he, "is a copy of the statement that I am going to hand to Miller. You had better look through it before the interview so that you may be in a position to join in the discussion."

I took the little document very gladly; for it would have been rather humiliating if I had had to expose my ignorance to Miller. And it was none too soon; for even as we passed in at our entry, fully five minutes before our time, I caught a

glimpse of the superintendent bearing down on us from the direction of Tanfield Court.

I hurried up the stairs to my bedroom and eagerly took out the paper, all agog to learn what Thorndyke's conclusions were. My expectations had been of the vaguest, but whatever they may have been, a glance at the little document blew them to the winds. I read it through again and again, hardly able to believe my eyes. For what it affirmed was not only astounding, it was bewildering and incredible. If the statement that it set forth was true, I had never even begun to understand the nature of the problem.

Slipping the paper back into my pocket, I ran down to the sitting-room where I found Miller already established in an easy chair with a big whisky and soda at his side and a cigar of corresponding size between his fingers. He greeted me with an affable smile as I entered and struck a match by way of getting the cigar going.

"Well, Doctors both," said he, "here we are again with another prime mystery in the offing. But I can't imagine what it may be."

"You have read the report of the inquest on John Gillum?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes," replied Miller. "I haven't had time to read Mortimer's screed, but I have gone through the inquest carefully; and I have come to the same conclusion as the jury—a perfectly straightforward and obvious case of suicide. And I suppose I am wrong. Isn't that the position?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, "at least, that is my position."

"You are not suggesting that it was a case of murder?"

"I am not suggesting anything," replied Thorndyke, producing a small sheet of paper from his wallet. "I am making a perfectly definite statement. This is what I say, and what I am prepared to prove; and you can have it in the form of a sworn information if you like."

With this he handed the paper to Miller, who took it, opened it, and read through the short statement. Then he read it through again, with deep attention and much wrinkling of the brow. Finally, he laid down his cigar and faced Thorndyke with an air of perplexity.

"I don't quite understand this," said he. "Of course the dates are all wrong. Clerical error, I suppose."

"The dates are perfectly correct," Thorndyke assured him.

"But they can't be," the superintendent protested. "It's an absurdity. What you say is that you accuse Augustus Peck, a registered medical practitioner, that he did, on the night of the 17th of September, 1928, at 64, Clifford's Inn, London, maliciously and feloniously kill and murder one John Gillum. Do you say that you really mean that?"

"Certainly, I do," replied Thorndyke.

"But, my dear doctor," Miller protested, plaintively, "the thing that you are alleging is an impossibility. Gillum's body was discovered on the 18th of July, 1930. That is nearly two years after the date which you give as that of the murder. You admit that?"

"Of course I do," Thorndyke replied. "It is the simple fact."

"But the thing is impossible," persisted Miller. "You are alleging, in effect, that the body which was discovered had been dead nearly two years."

"Not only in effect," said Thorndyke. "That is my definite statement."

The superintendent groaned. "But, doctor," he urged, "that statement is not reasonable, and what is more, it isn't true. It is contrary to all the known facts. That body was examined by a very competent medic witness who deposed at the inquest that it had been dead from six to eight days."

"Appeared to have been dead from six to eight days," Thorndyke corrected. "That is what he said, and I agree to the appearance."

"Very well," said Miller. "Appeared if you like. But the time he stated was about correct, for the man had been seen alive only ten days previously by Mr. Weech; and Mortimer had seen him alive only a few days before that."

"My position is," said Thorndyke, "that neither Weech nor Mortimer had ever set eyes on John Gillum."

"Never set eyes on him!" exclaimed Miller. "Why, they both knew him intimately, and had known him for—" He paused suddenly. Then, directing an intent look at Thorndyke, he added, slowly: "Unless you mean—"

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "That is what I do mean. Weech and Mortimer and Penfield knew a certain man by the name of John Gillum. But he was not John Gillum. He was Augustus Peck, made up so far as was necessary to play the part. And he played the part successfully as long as it was possible; and when it became impossible, he quietly disappeared leaving John Gillum's body to carry on the illusion."

Miller was profoundly impressed, but he was evidently not convinced, for he returned to the charge with further objections.

"You say he left the body on view when he disappeared. Then he must have had it in his possession. Where was it all that

time?"

"It was lying hidden in a large coal-bin in the chambers at Clifford's Inn."

"But how was it that it didn't—well, you know, a dead body tends to undergo a good deal of change in two years. But the doctor said that it looked as if it had been dead not more than eight days. How do you account for that?"

"My dear Miller," said Thorndyke, "we live in a scientific age; an age in which natural processes are largely under our control. We can, if we please, prevent dead bodies from decomposing. And we do. In the Paris Morgue, bodies which have not been identified are now put into storage and kept, in a perfectly fresh state, ready for further inspections. I don't know how long they are kept, but, physically, there is no limit to the possible time."

"Yes," said Miller, "I see. Of course, you have got an answer to every objection. You would have. I might have known that you wouldn't propose an impossible case. But now, doctor, let us come down to the immediate business. As I mentioned when I phoned, I am not free to-night. In fact," he added, looking at his watch, "I must be off in a few minutes, but I should like to fix things up before I go. You have given me the substance of the case, a sort of sketch of an indictment. Now, I needn't tell you that that's no use even if you swore to it and signed it. Before I can make an arrest, I must have enough evidence to establish a *prima facie* case. When can I have that evidence? The sooner, the better, if we are not to risk a misfire."

"I agree with you as to the of the matter," said Thorndyke, "for I suspect that our friend, Peck, has smelt a rat. I have him under close observation, but I fancy he has me under observation, too."

"The devil, he has!" exclaimed Miller. "I don't like that. What do you mean by having him under close observation?"

"I have got Snuper and a couple of assistants watching him night and day. You know Snuper?"

"Yes," replied Miller, "a capital fellow, a genius in his own line. But he doesn't meet the present case. He has no *locus standi*. He couldn't make an arrest unless he caught Peck committing some overt criminal act. And we don't want that. You had better give me his address and then I can detail one or two of our men to take over or act with him."

Thorndyke wrote the address on a slip of paper and handed it to the superintendent, who put it into his note-case and then resumed: "We mustn't let the grass grow, doctor. Watching is all very well, but we ought to get that gentleman under lock and key. If your statement is true he must be a pretty slippery customer. When can I have that evidence?"

"Can you come in to-morrow evening?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "I've got the whole evening free."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "what I propose is this: I ask you to arrange, if you can, for Anstey to lead for the prosecution, as he is used to working with me."

"The choice of counsel doesn't rest with us," replied Miller. "The Director of Public Prosecutions decides that, subject to the Attorney General. But I expect the Director will be willing to appoint Mr. Anstey as you will be the principal witness. What then?"

"I shall assume that Anstey will be appointed and I shall get him to meet you here to-morrow night. I know that he will be able to. Then I shall lay before you a complete scheme of the evidence. How will that do?"

"It will do perfectly," replied Miller.

"I should like, also, if you agree," said Thorndyke, "to have Benson and Mortimer here. We can rely on their secrecy and discretion."

The superintendent was inclined to demur to this proposal. "It doesn't seem to be quite in order," he objected. "They will both be witnesses."

"They are not witnesses yet," retorted Thorndyke. "And you want to know what yours are prepared to say and swear to. But apart from that, I think they may be able to give us some valuable help by answering questions on matters of fact."

"Very well," Miller agreed. "I don't much like it, but it's your funeral."

With this, he finished his whisky, and having been provided with a fresh cigar, rose to take his leave.

"And, look here, doctor," he said, as he shook hands; "don't you go taking too much outdoor exercise. If this fellow has rumbled you, it's a case for minding your eye and seeing that you don't make a target of the principal witness for the prosecution. We shall want you when the day comes, and for that matter I expect you'll want yourself. Keep an eye on him Dr. Jervis, and by the same token, keep an eye on his invaluable coadjutor."

He shook hands again, and having lit the new cigar, bustled away. And as his footsteps receded down the stairs, we heard him apparently trying to whistle and smoke at same time.

---

## XVII. — A SYMPOSIUM

THE instinctive sense of simple hospitality which was the gift alike of Thorndyke and his devoted follower Polton, tended to impart a pleasant informality to what were essentially professional conferences. I noted it, not for the first time, when,



on the evening following Miller's visit, we gathered round a cheerful fire to "hearken to the evidence" that my colleague had promised to expound to us. To an onlooker we should have seemed more like a party of cronies who had assembled for gossip and the exchange of "yarns" than a gathering of lawyers and police concerned with the detection and punishment of a capital crime.

Nevertheless, the attention of us all was concentrated on the business of the evening; and when Polton had provided for the comforts of all the guests, and, having placed on the table three wooden objects, one resembling an elongated brush-box and two shorter, upright boxes, had retired to the adjoining office (leaving the communicating door ajar) and the social preliminaries appeared to be getting unduly prolonged, Miller interposed with the blunt suggestion that Thorndyke "had better get on with it"; whereupon my colleague began his exposition without further preamble.

"I have considered," said he, "the most suitable way in which to present the scheme of evidence in this case and it has seemed to me that the best plan will be to follow the line of my own investigation; to produce to you the items of evidence in the order in which they became apparent to me. Do you agree to that, Anstey?"

"Undoubtedly I do," replied Anstey, "as that will be the order in which they will be best presented to the jury in the opening address."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "then I will proceed on those lines. You have all read the report of the inquest on John Gillum's body and Mortimer's narrative of his relations with Gillum, and as those documents contain all the facts with which I started, I can refer to those facts as matters known to you all.

"The original inquiry was concerned with the identity of the persons who had blackmailed Gillum. That was the problem that Benson submitted to me. But though he did not contest the suicide—which seemed to have been conclusively proved—I could see that, at the back of his mind, there was a feeling that things were not as they appeared; that, behind the apparent facts of the case, there was something that had never come to light.

"Now, as soon as I began to look into the case, I had precisely the same feeling. The whole affair had a curiously abnormal appearance; so much so that it at once suggested to me the question whether the ostensible facts might not cover something of an entirely different nature. There were unexplained discrepancies. For instance, of the large sum of money that had been thrown away, no less than three thousand pounds had been money saved by Gillum in the course of his business in Australia. One naturally asked oneself how such a man ever came to have any savings at all. The result of these reflections was that I postponed the blackmailing problem and proceeded to a critical consideration of the case as a whole."

Now, the outstanding fact of the case was that a sum of about thirteen thousand pounds had disappeared in less than two years. It had been drawn out of the bank in cash—in currency notes and, by special request, in notes which had been circulated and of which the serial numbers were unrecorded, and which it was, therefore, impossible to trace. The explanation offered for this procedure was that this untraceable money was to be used for payments to blackmailers and for discharging gambling debts.

"So far as the blackmail was concerned, this explanation was reasonable enough; but not in connection with gambling. Why should a man take such elaborate precautions to make it impossible to trace the money with which he had paid his gambling debts? There was no reason at all. Gambling debts can be, and usually are, paid by cheque. Why not? Such payments are not unlawful and there is no valid reason for secrecy. Therefore I decided that the explanation offered was not adequate. It was really no explanation at all. But if one rejected the explanation, the original problem reappeared. Thirteen thousand pounds had disappeared, leaving no trace. Of that sum, about two thousand could be accounted for by blackmail. But what of the remaining ten or eleven thousand? Had it really been gambled away, or was it possible that the gambling was a mere pretext, covering the disposal of the money in some other way? Having regard to the inadequacy of the explanation, I was disposed to suspect that this might be the case; and this suspicion was strengthened by the fact that Mortimer—the only witness as to the gambling—had no first-hand knowledge of the matter at all. His belief on the subject was based on what Gillum had told him; and in reading his narrative I could not but be struck by the way in which Gillum had posed as a reckless and desperate gambler and the pains that he had taken to impress that view of himself on Mortimer.

"From this it appeared that there was really no evidence that any gambling—on a considerable scale—had ever occurred; and there was a reasonable suspicion that it was a myth invented and maintained to cover some other kind of activity. But what kind of activity? The entertainment of that suspicion raised a new problem. What reason—apart from blackmail—could a man have for drawing large sums of money out of his bank in such a form that it could never be traced? I turned this question over in my mind and I could think of only one case in which a man might behave in this way. It was that of a man who had got temporary control of another man's banking account. Such a man—obviously a dishonest man—would naturally seek to get permanent possession of the money under his temporary control. But how could he do this? He could not simply draw cheques in his own favour and pay them into another bank, for those cheques could be traced and the money recovered. And the same would be true of bank notes of which the serial numbers were known. The only plan possible to him would be that adopted by Gillum. He would have to draw the money out in untraceable cash. That cash he could pay into another bank or store for future disposal.

"That was the only alternative that I could think of to the gambling theory, and it appeared to be totally inapplicable to the present case. For the banking account was Gillum's own banking account and the money in the bank was his own money which he had himself paid in. What object could he have had in transferring that money to another bank, or hoarding it? I could imagine none.

“Nevertheless, I did not immediately abandon the idea, for the alternative—the gambling theory—was almost as difficult to accept; and there was a general queerness and abnormality about the case that disposed one to consider unlikely explanations. There was the suicide, for instance. Apparently it was a genuine suicide, but there had been no positive proof that it was. Actually, it was possible that it might have been a skilfully arranged murder. Accordingly, I decided to consider this imaginary case in detail and see whether it was as completely inapplicable as it seemed.

“First, I asked myself the question, how would it be possible for a man to get control of another person’s banking account? Apparently, the only possible method would be that of personating the real owner. The case, then, which I had imagined involved, necessarily, the idea of personation. Accordingly, I set up the working hypothesis of personation and proceeded to apply it to the case of John Gillum to see how it fitted and whither it led.

“Now, when one sets up a hypothesis and proceeds to test it and deduce consequences from it, if the hypothesis is untrue it very soon comes into conflict with known facts and leads to manifestly false conclusions. But when I began to apply the personation hypothesis to the Gillum case, instead of conflicting with known facts it developed unexpected agreements with them; instead of evoking fresh difficulties, it tended to dispose of the difficulties that had at first appeared.

“The theory of personation involved the idea of two separate individuals; the personator and the personated. It was thus necessary, for the purposes of the argument, to decompose the person, John Gillum, into two hypothetical individuals: John Gillum of Australia and John Gillum, the tenant of Clifford’s Inn. They had been assumed to be one and the same person. We had now to see what evidence there was to support that assumption.

“But the first glance showed that there was no evidence at all. The identification had been illusory. In effect, there had been no identification. Benson had identified the body as that of Gillum of Australia—whom we will call simply Gillum—but he had not identified it as that of the tenant of the Inn—hereinafter called the Tenant. And Weech and Mortimer and Bateman gave evidence referring to the Tenant, but their evidence furnished no proof that the body was the Tenant’s body. There were really two sets of witnesses. There was Benson, who knew Gillum but had never seen the Tenant; and there were Weech, Mortimer, Bateman and Penfield, who knew the Tenant but had never seen Gillum.

“Thus the personation hypothesis did not conflict with the known facts. No evidence had been produced to prove that Gillum of Australia and Gillum the Tenant were one and the same person. Therefore, it was possible that they were different persons. But as soon as this possibility was established, two rather striking agreements with it came into view. Let us consider them.

“First there was the time of Benson’s arrival in England. He arrived immediately after the suicide; or, to put it the other way round, the suicide occurred immediately before his arrival. But not only was it known that he was coming; the actual date on which he would arrive was known. Now, on the personation theory, the Tenant of the Inn was some unknown stranger who was falsely personating John Gillum. He could not possibly have confronted Benson, for the fraud would then have been instantly detected. He would have had to clear out. But if he had simply disappeared, suspicion would have been aroused, whereas the presence of the body and the apparent suicide continued the illusion of the personation. Indeed, it did much more. For when Benson had identified the body as that of John Gillum, and that body had been accepted by Mortimer and Weech as that of the Tenant of the Inn, the personation seemed to be covered up for ever beyond any possibility of discovery.

“The second striking agreement is the state of the Tenant’s finances. At the inquest it transpired that deceased was absolutely penniless and that he had no expectations whatever. The last payment of the purchase money for the sheep farm had been paid into the bank and drawn out. All the money was gone and there was no more to come.

“Now see how perfectly this agrees with the personation theory. What could have been the object of the personation? Obviously, to obtain possession of the ten thousand pounds paid for the sheep farm and the three thousand forming Gillum’s savings. Well, at the time of the suicide this had been done. The whole sum of thirteen thousand pounds had been drawn out. There was not a penny left in the bank and there were no more payments to come. Then the personator’s object had been achieved and there was no occasion to continue the personation any longer. It was time for the personator to disappear; and disappear he did. Benson’s arrival simply accelerated matters and fixed the date of the disappearance.

“So far, then, the results seemed to be positive. The more the personation theory was examined, the more did it appear to agree with the known facts. But there were other difficulties; and the most formidable of them was the body. If there had been personation, it must have begun immediately on Gillum’s arrival in England and it had been maintained for nearly two years. But where was Gillum all this time? He could hardly have been alive; but if he was dead his body must have been preserved and kept somewhere ready to be produced at the psychological moment. For the pretended suicide must be assumed to have been an essential feature of the scheme.

“Of course, there was no physical difficulty. It is quite easy to preserve a dead body indefinitely, given the suitable means and appliances. The problem was how it could have been done in the circumstances of this particular case. But even while I was puzzling over this difficulty I received sudden enlightenment from Mortimer’s narrative. You will remember that, on the occasion of his first visit to Clifford’s Inn, he had a very remarkable seizure. From his admirable description it is evident that his symptoms were exactly those of rather acute carbonic acid poisoning; and he notes that the room—the larder, or storeroom—in which the attack occurred was noticeably cold. Further, he mentions that, just before the attack, he had been shovelling up coal from a bin which he describes as occupying the whole of one side of the room.

“Now this combination of low temperature with a considerable concentration of carbonic acid gas was very impressive. It

immediately suggested the presence, somewhere in the room, of a substantial quantity of solid carbonic acid; and as the gas appeared to issue from the coal-bin, it seemed probable that the solid acid was contained in the bin. But if that bin was of the size that Mortimer's description conveyed, it would be easily large enough to contain a dead body."

"But Mortimer says that it was full of coal," Anstey objected.

"It appeared to be," Thorndyke corrected. "But there might be room for a false bottom under the coal, and still room for the body under that. A false bottom would be a necessary feature of the arrangement."

"I think," said Anstey, "that we had better be clear about this solid carbonic acid. You know all about it, but we don't. Could you just give us a few particulars as to what it is like and what is its bearing on the case?"

"A very few particulars will be enough for our purposes," replied Thorndyke. "I need not go into the method of production. The substance, itself, is a white solid, rather like block table salt. It is simply frozen carbonic acid, just as ice is frozen water. And as ice has a maximum temperature of 0 degrees Centigrade—commonly known as freezing point—and becomes a liquid if it is raised above that temperature, so solid carbonic acid—sometimes called carbonic acid snow, from its resemblance to ordinary snow—has a temperature of minus 79 degrees Centigrade, that is, 79 degrees Centigrade below the freezing point of water. But unlike ice, it doesn't melt into liquid when its temperature is raised. It changes directly into gas, intensely cold gas, which hangs round it and protects it from contact with warm air. If we were to place a block of it on the table, it would simply dwindle in size until it disappeared altogether, but it would not leave the slightest trace of moisture. And it would dwindle remarkably slowly; for the gas into which the solid snow changes is a very heavy gas and a specially bad conductor of heat."

"Thank you," said Anstey. "That is quite clear. There is only one other question. Is carbonic acid snow obtainable without any great difficulty?"

"It is quite easy to obtain," replied Thorndyke. "The snow is now manufactured on a considerable scale, as it is used for a variety of purposes. It is sold in two forms; the standard twenty-five-pound blocks, which are the most commonly used, and smaller, four-pound blocks, made principally for use in ice-cream tricycles to keep the cream frozen. You can buy the blocks, retail, without any difficulty, and they will probably be delivered in packages enclosed in insulating material such as silicate wool, or slag-wool. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly clear," replied Anstey. "Now we can return to the argument."

"Well," Thorndyke resumed, "you will now see the significance of the presence in this very cold room of free carbonic acid gas in conjunction with a very large coal-bin. It suggested a perfectly simple and efficient method of preserving a dead body for a practically unlimited time, and it thus disposed of what had been my principal difficulty. I was so much impressed by this new agreement that I abandoned the rather academic attitude in which I had considered the personation theory. For that theory was no longer a merely tenable hypothesis. It agreed with the facts much more closely than did the gambling theory. Indeed, it offered a perfectly reasonable explanation of those facts, which the gambling theory did not; and I began to feel that it was probably the true explanation of those facts.

"But there were still some difficulties; not very formidable ones, but still they had to be disposed of before the personation theory could be definitely accepted. There was, for instance, the question of resemblance and disguise. How far was it necessary for the personator to resemble John Gillum, and what amount and kind of disguise would be required to secure the resemblance? Now, it is important to realise that no very exact likeness was necessary. However much the personator had been like the personated and however skilfully he had been disguised, it would have been impossible for him to deceive any person who had really known John Gillum. On the other hand, in the case of persons like Penfield, Mortimer and Weech, who had never seen John Gillum, no resemblance at all was necessary.

"Yet, for other reasons, the personator would have had to bear a general likeness to the man whom he personated. The production of the body, for instance, must have been an essential part of the scheme; and its production involved the idea of its identification as the body of the Tenant. Therefore, the Tenant must have been so far like John Gillum that the body of the one could be mistaken for the body of the other. But for this purpose it would be sufficient for the two men to be alike in their salient characteristics.

"Now what were the salient characteristics of John Gillum? He was a tallish man—about five feet ten—with blue eyes, black hair and beard and upper front teeth which were very conspicuously filled with gold. He also, apparently, spoke with a slight Scotch accent. In all these respects, as we know from Mortimer's narrative, the Tenant resembled John Gillum; and as the body presented the salient physical features common to the two men, it was naturally recognised by Mortimer and Weech as the Tenant's body in the single hasty glance that they took.

"But how many of those characteristics must have been natural to the personator? Evidently, the stature and the eye-colour must have been real. The personator would have to be a rather tall man with blue eyes. But the other characteristics could have been produced artificially. Whatever might have been the natural colour of the hair and beard, they could easily have been dyed black. The only real difficulty would have been the teeth. But, even in their case, there would be no physical difficulty. It would be perfectly easy for the personator to have his front teeth filled with gold, or, preferably, covered with a removable gold plating; while, if he should happen to have false teeth, there would be no difficulty at all. He would simply have a duplicate plate made with gold-filled teeth in front. But either of these methods would require the services of a skilled dentist; and that was the fatal objection to them. They would involve an accomplice. But, since the personation would not only be a serious crime in itself, but would seem inevitably to involve a previous murder, the existence of an

accomplice would constitute an appalling danger.

"However, as I have said, there was no physical impossibility or even any difficulty, and, accordingly, I accepted it provisionally as a practicable method, reserving further consideration of it until more facts were available.

"The next question was, assuming personation to have occurred, who could have been the personator? On this point, neither the report nor Mortimer's narrative gave any help beyond furnishing certain dates. But one saw at a glance that the personation would have had to begin almost on the very day of Gillum's arrival in England; for, immediately afterwards, the Tenant appeared in the Inn and at Penfield's office. From this it seemed to follow that, since Gillum knew nobody in England, the personator must be somebody who had travelled with him from Australia to England. Of such persons, only two were known to me. I learned from Benson that Gillum had had two cronies on board the ship; the purser, Abel Webb, and the ship's surgeon, Dr. Peck; and as both these men had left the ship on its arrival in England, either of them might possibly have been the personator. There was no positive reason for suspecting either; but both fulfilled what appeared to be the necessary conditions. They had been Gillum's shipmates during the voyage, and both had left the ship for good at about the same time as Gillum.

"Of these two, poor Abel Webb was clearly out of the picture; and even if he had not died, he would still have been impossible as the personator. He was the wrong size, the wrong shape, and the wrong colour. There remained, then, Dr. Peck, the only person known to us whom we could possibly suspect; and it was desirable to get into touch with him for two reasons; first, to ascertain whether his size, form, and colour were such as to render the personation possible, and second, to get some information from him respecting the passengers and personnel of the ship.

"This brings us to the end of what I may call the first stage of the inquiry. Up to this point I had been concerned with the original sources of information; with a critical examination of the report of the inquest, of Mortimer's narrative, and of the information supplied by Benson. The inquiry had started as a search for a hypothetical blackmailer. But examination of the material had brought into view a problem of an entirely different character; and the result of the first stage of the inquiry was the establishment of a *prima facie* suspicion of false personation against some person unknown. We now enter on the second stage, that of investigation proper; the search for new facts which might either confirm or rebut that suspicion."

---

## XVIII. — CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

"HITHERTO," Thorndyke resumed after a brief interval, "I have followed the enquiry in the chronological order of events. But now, as we are dealing with an investigation *ad hoc*, it will be more convenient to consider it in terms of the particular items of evidence brought to light, maintaining the chronological sequence only so far as is practicable. The first stage of the inquiry had left us with certain matters of fact which required verification and certain others which had to be ascertained. Among the former was Mortimer's description of the coal-bin. From it I gathered that the bin was amply large enough to contain a human body, and I assumed that it probably had a false bottom to preserve an empty space under the coal. These were matters of vital importance; for if the bin should prove to be too small, or to have been kept completely filled with coal, my theory as to the disposal and preservation of the body would fall to the ground.

"Accordingly, my first proceeding was to get the keys of Gillum's chambers from Benson. Then Jervis and I went across to the Inn and made a preliminary tour of inspection. To come at once to the bin, we found it, as Mortimer had said, to occupy the whole length of the wall, and, on measurement, it proved to be of these dimensions: eight feet long, thirty inches from back to front and twenty-nine inches deep. It appeared to be brimful of coal; but when I took soundings through the coal with my stick, I came to a firm bottom nine inches from the top. Thereupon, we shovelled the coal away to one end, when there was brought into view a tray, or false bottom, of stout board, which we ascertained to be of the full length and width of the bin. A transverse crack showed it to be divided into two equal parts, and each half was furnished with a sunk iron ring. We brushed away the coal dust with a brush that hung close by—apparently for this purpose, as its hair was full of coal dust—and then lifted one half by means of the ring, when we found that the tray was of comparatively new wood, that it was supported by small wooden blocks which had been screwed on to the sides of the bin, and that its removal disclosed a cavity underneath nineteen inches deep and of the full length and width of the bin.

"Here, then, was a receptacle with a capacity amply sufficient to accommodate, not only a body, but also the mass of insulating material that would be necessary if that body was to be kept in a frozen state. The question of possibility was disposed of. It remained to ascertain whether there was any positive evidence that a body had actually been preserved in the manner which I have suggested.

"Having finished with the bin, we examined the little room in which it was situated. It had evidently been intended for a larder or storeroom and it had no fireplace or other outlet and only one window, which was about two feet six inches high by eighteen inches wide. But this window was fixed permanently as wide open as possible. The lower sash was pushed right up and secured in position by two wooden supports screwed to the jambs. Further, we found that a row of holes, each one inch in diameter, had been bored in the foot of the door; which, together with the permanently opened window, must have maintained a very free draught of air through this small room. And I may say that we learned from Mr. Weech that the holes had been made and the window supports and the false bottom of the bin added by the Tenant—or rather by the Tenant's agent—at the beginning of the tenancy."

"The Tenant's agent!" exclaimed Miller. "Who was he?"

"Ah!" replied Thorndyke, "who was he? That is a very curious and interesting question. But the answer to it does not belong to this part of the story. We shall go into that at a later stage. At present we are considering the evidence bearing on the subject of refrigeration by means of solid carbonic acid.

"To resume: In the course of our survey of the chambers we found several mouse-holes which had been most carefully and efficiently stopped with Portland cement. There appeared nothing remarkable in this, as the Tenant had evidently taken pains to keep all food in metal or earthenware containers so as to avoid harbouring mice. But later, in conversation with Mr. Weech, we got quite a new light on the matter. It seemed that he had learned from the lady who conducts the typewriting establishment on the ground floor that, up to the time when Mr. Gillum came to the Inn, the house swarmed with mice to such an extent that she had seriously considered giving up her premises. But, as soon as Mr. Gillum's tenancy began, the mice suddenly disappeared, and disappeared so completely that not a single mouse was ever to be seen. While we were talking, the lady herself came out of her office and fully corroborated Mr. Weech's statement. Then it occurred to me to ask her whether her premises were still free from mice; to which she answered with natural surprise that they were not. Since Mr. Gillum's death they had begun to reappear.

"This was a very remarkable fact. The disappearance of the mice might reasonably have been assumed to be due to the Tenant's care to keep all food covered, and especially to the very thorough stopping of all mouse-holes. But their reappearance after Gillum's death made it clear that there must be some other explanation; for the holes were still stopped and all the conditions were precisely the same. The disappearance had evidently been due to something connected with the Tenant himself."

"Yes," Anstey agreed, "that seems to be so. What do you wish us to infer from this fact?"

"I suggest that the behaviour of the mice is exactly what we should expect in the conditions which I have postulated. Let us see what those conditions would be. I assume that the bin contained a dead body kept frozen by means of solid carbonic acid. New supplies of the snow would be constantly fed into it, and this snow would be slowly but continually converted into the gas. Thus the bin would be filled with the icy gas which would be constantly increasing in quantity and finding its way out. Now, carbonic acid gas is an extremely heavy gas. It behaves almost like a liquid. You can fill a tumbler with it and you can pour it from one tumbler to another as if it were water. Like all gases, it diffuses upwards into the air, but while it is pure, it falls by its own weight.

"Thus, as the bin filled up with the gas, this would be constantly overflowing on to the floor and would tend to pour down through the cracks between the boards and especially to trickle down through the mouse-holes into the burrows, so that these and the spaces between the joists would be full of the gas. In such conditions, it would be impossible for mice to exist. They would all be either killed or driven away.

"My conclusion is, therefore, that these facts are completely consistent with the presence of solid carbonic acid in the bin and that there seems to be no other explanation."

"Yes," said Anstey, "I am prepared to admit that. What do you say, superintendent?"

"I agree," replied Miller, "that it seems to establish the point, subject to the condition that the theory is supported by other evidence."

"That is all I ask," rejoined Thorndyke. "This is only a single point. The charge against Peck rests on the whole body of evidence. But I have not completed the case for the carbonic acid snow. While we are on the subject, I may as well produce the rest of the evidence.

"Shortly after our visit to the Inn, Jervis and I made a call at the premises of the Cope Refrigerating Company. My object was twofold. First, I wanted to verify a description of Abel Webb, which, I may say, I did. But we will leave the case of Webb for consideration later. The other object was to ascertain whether the man known as John Gillum had ever had any dealings with Copes. I had reason to believe that he had obtained at least a part of his supplies from them and in this it turned out that I was right. For, when I interviewed a very intelligent gentleman named Small, I learned, among other interesting matters, that a man corresponding to the description of the Tenant had, on at least one occasion, purchased from him some four-pound blocks of solid carbonic acid; which, I also learned, were delivered in parcels roughly packed in insulating material. I ask you to note the insulated packing since the material used for that purpose is almost invariably silicate wool, or, as it is sometimes called, slag-wool.

"With regard to the identification, I may say that it does not seem to admit of any doubt. The man whom Mr. Small served resembled the Tenant, as Mortimer has described him, not only in size and general appearance but even in respect of his teeth. Mr. Small particularly noticed the extensive filling of the front teeth with gold and commented on the disfigurement that it caused.

"This completes the case for the carbonic acid snow, and you see that it is based on a remarkable body of evidence. There is the illness of Mortimer, exactly resembling carbonic-acid poisoning, occurring in a very cold room and close to the bin; the mysterious affair of the mice; and the direct evidence of the purchase by the Tenant of carbonic acid snow in blocks of a size exactly suitable for use in the manner that I have suggested. I submit that it constitutes conclusive proof that the Tenant had something in that bin which he was preserving by means of carbonic acid snow."

Both Anstey and Miller appeared to be profoundly impressed by this demonstration and the latter expressed the hope that the rest of the evidence would be equally convincing.

"Perhaps," said Anstey, "one might hesitate to use the word 'conclusive'; but even if one should not put it quite as high as that, still, it is difficult to imagine any alternative explanation. And I take it that the refrigeration theory is supported by other evidence."

"It is amply supported," Thorndyke replied; "and I shall now proceed to the consideration of some of the other evidence. To return to the chambers. My primary object in visiting them was to verify the dimensions of the bin. But there was another question to which I was anxious to find an answer, but had very little expectation of finding it. That question was whether or not the Tenant had artificial teeth. It was an important question, for there would obviously be great difficulty in fixing a false gold filling to natural teeth, though it would not be impossible. But with a dental plate there would be no physical difficulty at all. The only difficulty would be that the making of such a plate—obviously for the purpose of disguise—would involve the very dangerous complicity of a dentist. But that danger would exist equally in the case of 'faked' natural teeth.

"However, I had better luck than I had expected. In a rubbish basket I found an empty bottle labelled 'Cawley's Cleansing Fluid,' which is a sort of detergent lotion, principally used for filling the bowls in which wearers of false teeth put their dental plates at night so that they may be clean by the morning. Then, on the chest of drawers which served as a dressing-table, I found an earthenware bowl labelled 'Super-fatted Shaving Soap.' But, as the Tenant, whoever he was, wore a beard, he evidently had no use for shaving soap. And, in fact, the bowl was empty. But there were in it traces of the cleansing fluid, plainly recognisable by the smell. Apparently, the bowl had been used as a receptacle for a dental plate during the night; and, in confirmation of this, we found in the larder the handle of a dental plate brush, which had been used as a spatula for mixing Portland cement.

"Here, again, you will probably demur to the use of the word 'conclusive'; but the fluid, the bowl, and the brush, taken together, furnish very convincing evidence that the Tenant wore a dental plate. But if he did, he could not have been John Gillum, since it is known that Gillum had a full set of natural teeth and certainly did not wear a denture. I may add that we found a worn-out toothbrush of the ordinary kind and a small tin which had contained a toothpowder, as is used for cleaning natural teeth. So that, judging by these observations, it would appear that the occupant of these chambers was a man who had some natural teeth but also wore a dental plate. And I repeat, that man could not have been John Gillum.

"We made some other discoveries which I shall not deal with now. Among them was a piece of paper which was so exactly like the paper on which the blackmailer's letter was written that it was nearly certain that it was derived from the same writing-pad. But I leave that for your consideration later with the other letters and documents. You will probably decide to have these examined by an expert; and, at any rate, they form no part of my present case.

"The next stage of the investigation deals with the identity of the personator. I have already explained that Dr. Peck was the only person known to me who could possibly have personated John Gillum. There was no positive reason for suspecting him; but he fulfilled the conditions that made the personation possible, and it was necessary that some enquiries should be made concerning him. Accordingly, I began by looking him up in the Medical Directory; and then the interesting fact emerged that he was not only a qualified medical practitioner, but also a fully qualified dentist. So that, in his case, the difficulty of getting the counterfeit gold teeth made did not exist. He could do whatever was necessary himself. This was, of course, no evidence against him; but it was another rather striking agreement.

"Dr. Peck's permanent address was given as Staple Inn; and thither Jervis and I went to pursue our enquiries. We were fortunate enough to find the porter of the Inn a rather talkative person, so that a few discreet questions, just to help his conversational powers, soon put us in possession of all the facts that we wanted. And very striking facts some of them were. I need not reconstitute the conversation but will give you the substance of what we elicited.

"In the first place, we were glad to learn that Dr. Peck was in England. He had just returned from a long voyage; a very long voyage, for it had taken him close upon two years. And what instantly struck me when I made a rough estimate of the dates was that he appeared to have started on his voyage just about the time when John Gillum's tenancy at Clifford's Inn began and that he had returned a short time after John Gillum's death. This must be admitted to be a very remarkable coincidence. And there were certain other circumstances that were at least rather singular. For instance, he went away with a full beard and moustache and came back clean-shaved; and he had not come back to Staple Inn although he had chambers there ready to receive him, and which he had always kept so that he should have some place to come to when he returned from a voyage. Instead of this, he had gone straight, as soon as he had landed, to some premises in Whitechapel where he had put up a brass plate and started in practice.

"All this was rather odd; but, of the facts disclosed by the porter's rambling discourse, I was most interested in certain preparations which Dr. Peck had made before he had started on his voyage. These included a pair of portable bookcases in which he proposed to carry his travelling library, packed for transport and yet instantly available for use. Of these, the porter was able to give us fairly exact particulars; and, as he gave us the name and address of the man who had made them, I had—and took—the opportunity to fill in the precise details. And, as those details are highly material to the subject of our inquiry, I ask you to give very particular attention to them, both in regard to dimensions and construction.

"These bookcases were very ingeniously planned. The idea was that they could be filled with books in their proper order on the shelves and could then be closed by simply screwing on the fronts; when they would be ready for transport either by rail or sea. On arrival at their destination, they could be stowed in the doctor's cabin and the fronts removed, and they would be ready for immediate use. Furthermore, they could, if necessary, be quite easily taken apart for storage. There were no dovetails or other permanent joints. The parts were simply screwed together with well-greased screws, and when

these had been withdrawn, the cases could be resolved into a collection of boards which would lie flat for stowage and take up a minimum of space.

"Now, as to the alleged disposal of these cases. They were delivered by the maker, Mr. Crow, of Baldwin's Gardens, at Peck's chambers in Staple Inn, and, so far as I could learn, were never seen again. The statement is that Peck took them with him when he started on his voyage—he is said to have travelled overland to Marseilles and embarked there on a foreign ship—to have had them in use throughout that voyage, and finally to have sold them, with the books that they contained, to the captain of the ship from which he landed at Marseilles.

"That is the story. Now we return to the cases. They were made throughout of one-inch board, excepting the three equidistant shelves, which were of half-inch stuff and slid freely in grooves. Each case was three feet three inches high, twenty inches wide and fourteen inches deep. The depth, you notice, was inconveniently great, as the books which would stand in the nine-inch spaces between the shelves would not be more than six or seven inches deep. But the dimensions as a whole interested me profoundly. I wonder whether you notice anything significant in them."

"I certainly do not," said Anstey, glancing enquiringly at Miller, who shook his head with a hopeless expression; "in fact, I cannot imagine what possible bearing these cases can have on the matter that we are considering."

"Their significance," Thorndyke explained, "lies in the possibility of their conversion into something totally different. Each is three feet three inches high; the two placed end to end with the shelves and the adjoining ends removed, would form a long case with an interior capacity of six feet four inches by eighteen inches by thirteen inches. Such a case would hold quite conveniently the body of a tall man; and it would go into the coal-bin with eighteen inches to spare in the length, ten inches in the width and fifteen inches in the depth; of which ten inches must be subtracted for the false bottom, leaving a space of five inches. The two halves of the case could be secured together firmly enough for practical purposes by screwing to each side a short board such as one of the shelves."

Anstey looked at me with a somewhat wry smile. "This is ingenuity with a vengeance," said he. "It almost looks like perverted ingenuity; for even the Great Unraveller must admit that there are plenty of quite innocent containers which would accommodate a human body perfectly well. The mere suitability is of no evidential value excepting as corroboration of evidence showing that it was in fact so used."

"Exactly," Thorndyke agreed. "But at present I am merely proving that such a container existed. The other evidence comes later."

"But," Anstey objected, "the container appears to have been disposed of at Marseilles and to be, at present, somewhere on the high seas."

"My thesis," Thorndyke rejoined, "is that Peck's voyage was a myth; that the cases never went to sea at all, but were simply dismantled and conveyed piecemeal to Clifford's Inn. But may I suggest that my learned friend should allow me to produce my evidence in the appointed order and to defer argument until the facts have been presented?"

"I am sat upon," said Anstey. "Deservedly. I admit it. Let the demonstration proceed."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that you hardly appreciate the extraordinary suitability of these cases for the use that I suggest. I thought it might be so, and I have accordingly asked Polton to make a set of scale models—two inches to the foot—to help your imaginations, and, if necessary, to produce in court. The models are on the table, but we shall have to find Polton to demonstrate the method of conversion."

The necessity of finding Polton, however, did not arise, for even as Thorndyke spoke, he emerged unblushingly from the office and enquired if anything was wanted. Miller greeted his arrival with a broad grin and bluntly accused him of eavesdropping; to which Polton made no reply beyond a bland and crinkly smile, but, producing from his pocket a pair of forceps and a watchmaker's screwdriver, bore down on the models.

"We will begin with the coal-bin," said Thorndyke, picking up the long, narrow box and handing it to Polton, "and I shall refer to the real dimensions, of which all these models are exactly one-sixth—two inches to the foot. This bin is eight feet long by thirty inches wide and twenty-nine inches deep. On opening the lid, you see the false bottom with a cavity above it nine inches deep—deep enough to accommodate a good supply of coal. But I need not continue the description. You can see the details for yourselves."

Our friends watched with profound interest while Polton picked up with his forceps the little sunk rings in the false bottom and lifted the latter out in its two halves, displaying in the cavity underneath a number of flat pads of cotton wool, which he picked out and laid on the table.

"What are those little pads?" Anstey asked.

"They represent the pads of insulating material," Thorndyke replied. "You will see their use presently. The actual pads were almost certainly made of silicate wool."

Having passed the bin round, Polton took up one of the model bookcases, and with his screwdriver extracted the little screws from the front, when the latter came off, displaying the interior with its three shelves. When he had repeated the operation on the other one, and passed both round for inspection, Thorndyke replaced them on the table.

"You have seen these cases," said he, "in their ostensible character as bookcases, and you will agree that their appearance is quite convincing. Now we shall see the transformation."

It was very interesting to observe how complete the transformation was. Polton began by drawing out the shelves, which slid freely in their grooves. Then, having extracted the lower screws, he let the bottom of each fall out. Next, laying the two cases on their backs, he brought the two open ends together, when they formed a long, narrow box, similar in shape to, but smaller than, the bin. Then he took two of the shelves, each of which was perforated by six holes, and laying them on either side of the long box across the junction of the two halves, fixed them in position with screws. Lifting the box, he demonstrated that the two cases had now become united to form a single structure with a continuous cavity.

When this had been passed round and examined, he took up one or two of the pads and laid them on the floor of the bin. Then he placed the box inside the bin, packed some more of the pads at the ends and sides, put the fronts on, laid the rest of the pads over them, and finally replaced the false bottom, which dropped comfortably into its place on top of the pads.

"You now see for yourselves," said Thorndyke, "how perfectly these cases are adapted to the purpose that I have suggested. The adaptability seems too perfect to be accidental. Not only is the long case exactly the right size and shape to accommodate the body of a tall man; it is also exactly the right size and shape to lie in the bin with enough space around it for the insulating pads and still room enough for the false bottom. There is not an inch to spare in any direction. Those cases have the appearance of having been carefully designed for this very purpose. And I submit that they were."

We were all deeply impressed by the demonstration, and Anstey expressed the sentiments of us all when he remarked: "You were wise, Thorndyke, to have these models made. Seeing is not only believing; it is understanding. No amount of verbal description could have conveyed the extraordinary fitness of these cases for the purpose that you suggest. I take off my hat to you and Polton. I am even prepared to take off my wig; but I will defer that until you have produced the rest of the evidence."

The demonstration completed, Polton made as if to retire to the office, but before he could escape, Miller grabbed him and pulled him into a chair. "What's the use of pretending, Mr. Polton?" said he. "You know you have been listening all the time. Better sit here and listen in comfort"; which view, being endorsed by Thorndyke, was duly carried into effect.

"The fact that we have established," said Thorndyke, "is that these bookcases were capable of being converted into a receptacle which would hold the body of a tall man and which would fit the interior of the coal-bin. The objection to the suggestion that they were so used is that they are said to have been taken overseas and never brought back. I now proceed to deal with that objection.

"On the floor above Gillum's chambers at Clifford's Inn is a large lumber-room which has been used by the authorities of the Inn for storing old furniture and other bulky rubbish left by outgoing tenants in their chambers; but I learn that it has been out of use and undisturbed for some years. Now, it occurred to me, as a bare possibility, that the Tenant might, at the end of his tenancy when his proceedings would necessarily be somewhat hurried, find himself burdened with some objects which he would not wish to leave in the chambers but which he had no opportunity to take away or destroy; and, in fact, I had these very cases in mind. Accordingly, I decided to take a look round the lumber-room and see if anything appeared to have been deposited there; and did so, assisted by Jervis and Polton."

"Wasn't the room locked?" asked Miller.

"It was," Thorndyke replied. "A common builder's lock which could have been turned with a stiff wire. We actually used a provisional key."

Miller chuckled delightedly. "A provisional key," he repeated. "I must remember that expression. Sounds so much better than skeleton key. Yes, doctor; and, of course, you did find something."

"We did," Thorndyke replied. "Perhaps Polton will be so good as to produce our gleanings for your inspection."

Thereupon Polton retired to the office and immediately returned bearing a bundle of pieces of board which he laid out in order on the table.

"These," said Thorndyke, "we found hidden under a pile of much older lumber. The wood is obviously comparatively new and the broken edges quite fresh. Let us fit those broken edges together and see what results. Here, for instance, are three pieces which fit together perfectly and form a rectangle with finished edges. It is three feet three inches long by twenty inches wide, the exact dimensions of the front or back of Peck's bookcases. Moreover, there are twelve countersunk screw-holes, each of which fits a number eight screw, and those screws are not only the same size as those in Peck's cases, but have the same distribution; namely, four equidistant holes on each side and two at either end.

"Then, here are two pieces which evidently formed part of a similar structure. They fit together exactly and their screw-holes are the same size and have the same distribution. Finally, here is a complete piece which corresponds completely with the sides of Peck's cases. It is three feet three inches long, thirteen inches wide, it has three equidistant half-inch grooves, and the screw-holes in the edges correspond exactly in size and position with those on the back and the front. But there is in addition an extremely interesting feature. At one end of this side are three holes which have been made by screws, showing that something, not part of the original structure, had been screwed on to the outside. Now, if you will look at Polton's model of the long case, you will see that the two halves are secured together by screwing on one of the shelves on either side, forming a sort of fish-plate; and I submit that these screw-holes afford evidence that a precisely similar procedure had been followed in the cases of which these fragments are part."

Miller and Anstey were both greatly impressed. Nevertheless, the latter objected: "What you have proved, Thorndyke—and proved most conclusively—is that these fragments are parts of some structure which was exactly like one of Peck's



bookcases. But you haven't proved that it actually was one of his cases."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "I admit the objection, and I shall now proceed to dispose of it. I sent Polton with the complete back to show it to Mr. Crow, who made Peck's cases. He shall tell you what Mr. Crow said."

"I went to Mr. Crow," said Polton, "and showed him the three pieces and we put them together on his bench. Then he looked up his book and compared the dimensions and the size and position of the screw-holes, and he said that the three pieces made up some thing that was exactly like the back or front of one of the cases that he had made for Dr. Peck. I told him that we knew that, and I asked him if he couldn't be more definite. So he took another look at the pieces, and then he noticed this bit of American white wood,"—here Polton pointed out the strip of foreign wood—"and that brought the job back to his memory. He remembered that he had then had a small piece of good American white wood left over from another job, and as the case was going to be stained, he thought he might as well use it up. So he did; and by that piece of white wood he was able to swear, and he was prepared to swear, that these pieces were actually the back of one of the cases that he had made for Dr. Peck."

"I think that is good enough," said Miller; and, as Anstey agreed, the evidence as to the cases was accepted as complete, so far as it went.

"We are agreed, then," said Thorndyke, "as to the identity of the cases, and that somebody brought them from Staple Inn to Clifford's Inn. The next question that we have to settle is: Who brought them? Fortunately, we have some fairly conclusive evidence on that point. I have mentioned that the lumber-room had not been disturbed, or even entered, for at least several years. Apart from Weech's statement, this was evident from the appearance of the place. Everything in it, including the floor and the steps leading up to it, was covered with a thick, even coating of dust, almost like a thin covering of snow. Now, when we started to ascend the steps, we could see on them the very distinct footprints of some person who had gone up a short time previously; and when we reached the room, we could see a double line of footprints extending from the head of the steps to the farther end of the room—actually, as we found later, to the pile of lumber under which the fragments of the cases were hidden.

"As the dust must have been something like an eighth of an inch thick, these footprints were extraordinarily distinct. Like footprints in the snow, they were actual impressions, having a sensible depth and showing some detailed characters of the feet that made them; and their distinctness emphasised the fact that there was no trace whatever of any other footprints. As it happened that Polton had a camera with him in the chambers below, I asked him to photograph two of the footprints, a right and a left, selecting those which showed the most detail.

"This he did, laying a footrule beside each print to give a measuring standard and including the rule in the photograph. I produce here enlargements of the two photographs of the footprints, and I also produce photographs to the same scale, likewise including a footrule, of a pair of house-shoes which I found in the bedroom of the chambers and which seemed to correspond to the footprints. If you examine the two sets of photographs, you will see that the correspondence is quite unmistakable, even to the position of the brads in the soles and heels, which, as well as the various dimensions, you can verify with a pair of dividers and the footrule. I have done this, and I am prepared to swear, and to prove, that the footprints were made by these shoes. Whence it follows—since there were no other footprints, and the cases must have been deposited after the last previous visit to the room—that the fragments of the cases must have been put where we found them by the Tenant, whoever he may have been. Do you agree to that?"

"It is impossible not to agree," replied Anstey. "The proof is absolutely conclusive."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "we will consider the cases as disposed of, and I shall now pass on to another investigation which yielded evidence on two separate aspects of our inquiry. On Jervis's suggestion, I decided to make a systematic collection of dust from the floor of Gillum's chambers. The collection was carried out by Polton with a vacuum cleaner; and he not only kept the dust from the different areas separate, but, finding that the Tenant had used a carpet-sweeper, he extracted the dust from that and also carefully combed out its brushes. The same evening, we formed a sort of committee, with three microscopes, and went through the entire collection of dust. I need not trouble you with details of the procedure. Of the objects brought to light by our microscopes, there were only two kinds that are of interest to us; human hairs and particles of silicate wool."

"Silicate wool!" exclaimed Miller. "That sounds rather significant."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed, "but the hairs are, perhaps, even more illuminating, so we will deal with them first. We found, in all, nineteen hairs, of which seventeen were from the scalp, one a moustache hair and one a hair from a beard. Three of the hairs were taken by me from the pillow on which the head of Gillum's corpse had rested. Two of these were natural black hairs and one was white. We found, in the dust from the sitting-room floor, one other natural black hair. Of the other fifteen hairs, all were rather fair hairs dyed black."

"My eye!" exclaimed Miller. "Fifteen dyed hairs out of a total of nineteen! I suppose it isn't possible that they could have been Gillum's?"

"It is quite impossible," replied Thorndyke. "Not only were the black hairs from the pillow natural black, but one of them was white. And Benson will tell you that John Gillum's hair, both during life and after death, was black streaked with white. I need not point out to you that the presence of white hairs is incontestable evidence that the hair is not dyed.

"Let us, then, consider what we are compelled to infer from these dyed hairs. And first as to their number. Of the four

natural hairs, three were from the pillow and had evidently come from the head of the corpse, while the fourth came from the floor of the same room. It had probably been detached when the corpse was moved either to or from the couch. At any rate, it was only a single hair. But there were fifteen dyed hairs collected from a fairly clean and habitually well-swept room. The unavoidable inference is that the owner of those dyed hairs was the person who occupied those chambers. Of Gillum himself there is no trace excepting four hairs, three of which certainly, and the fourth most probably, came from the corpse. But there are abundant traces of a rather fair man with hair, moustache, and beard dyed black. In other words, of a man who was not Gillum, but who was disguised so as to resemble Gillum."

"Amazing!" said Anstey; "and all this impressive evidence from a few handfuls of dust!"

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "but we have not finished with the dust. Besides the hairs, we found, as I told you, particles of silicate wool. In the living-room they were few in number and mostly broken quite small by having been repeatedly trodden on. But Polton made a separate operation of the coal-bin; and when we came to examine the dust from that, we found it to consist entirely of coal and silicate wool. And the wool was not only present in large quantities; it consisted to a considerable extent of recognisable lengths of fibre."

"I need hardly ask," said Anstey, "whether you have preserved these tell-tale dust particles for production in evidence?"

"They have all been kept intact," replied Thorndyke, "so that they can be shown direct as well as by enlarged photographs; indeed, all possible exhibits have been carefully preserved. And now, you will be relieved to hear, I am getting near to the completion of my case. Only two more points of evidence remain to be considered, and I will take first that relating to the beginning of the tenancy at Clifford's Inn. I had the particulars from Mr. Weech, and this is what he told me.

"One morning, towards the end of August, 1928, a man came to the lodge to enquire about some chambers that were to let. He thought that Number 64, which was empty, might suit him, so he was given the keys, and presently he returned and announced that the chambers would suit him and that he would like to take a lease of them. But he then explained that he was not taking them for himself but that he was acting as agent for a gentleman of means who was, at the moment, abroad, but wanted a set of chambers made ready for him to come home to. He was fully authorised to execute an agreement, to furnish references, and to pay whatever deposit might be thought necessary.

"As he produced a written authority from his principal, Mr. John Gillum, and referred Weech to Mr. Gillum's solicitor and banker, and was willing to pay a half-year's rent in advance, Weech accepted the tenancy. A provisional agreement was signed, the money paid, the keys handed to the agent to enable him to proceed with the furnishing and repairs, and the transaction was closed with one exception. The agent suggested that the references should not be taken up until Mr. Gillum came into residence."

"Why did he stipulate that?" asked Anstey.

"His explanation—quite a reasonable one—was that Mr. Gillum had lived abroad for some years and had done all his business with his solicitor and banker by correspondence and that neither of them knew him personally. This satisfied Weech and the agent was allowed to take possession of the chambers and get on with the furnishing and the repairs. And it is interesting to note that those repairs included the false bottom to the coal-bin, the fixed window in the larder, and the holes in the larder door."

"What was the agent's name?" Miller asked.

"Weech is a little obscure on that point. He thinks it was either Baker or Barker or Barber."

"But," said Anstey, "there is the agreement with his signature."

"That agreement was destroyed when Gillum arrived and a new one executed."

"Then," said Anstey, "there was the agent's cheque. That ought to be traceable."

"There was no cheque," replied Thorndyke. "The money—twenty-five pounds—was paid in five five-pound notes."

"Then there must have been a receipt."

"There was; but it was made out to John Gillum. Mr. Baker, as we will call him, left no trace whatever. But let us finish with Mr. Weech's story.

"About three weeks after the signing of the agreement—on the seventeenth of September, to be exact—John Gillum came to the Inn, and the circumstances of his arrival were these, as related to Weech by the night porter: That night, between nine and ten, someone knocked at the gate, and when he had opened the wicket, he saw two gentlemen, one of whom was Mr. Baker, whom he had seen once before. Accordingly he let them pass through and they went up the passage. Presently Mr. Baker came back alone and said: 'By the way, that gentleman is Mr. Gillum, the new tenant of Number 64. You might mention to Mr. Weech that he has come.'

"The porter did so in the morning, and Mr. Weech then called at the chambers. The door was opened by the man thereafter known as John Gillum; Mr. Weech introduced himself and a new agreement was then executed and, the old one torn up. So the tenancy began, and the mysterious Mr. Baker was seen no more."

"How long did he stay that night?" asked Miller.

"There is no answer to that question. The night porter saw him go back into the Inn, and so far as I can learn he was never seen again."

"Did you get any description of him?" Miller asked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "Weech described him as a tallish man, about his own height—that is, about five feet ten—fair complexioned, with light-brown hair, a tawny beard and moustache and blue eyes; apparently a gentleman with a pleasant, persuasive manner and a rather engaging personality. You notice that if his fair hair and beard had been dyed black, he would have seemed to correspond completely to Mortimer's description of the man whom he knew as John Gillum.

"I now come to the last stage of the investigation, and I must admit that I approached it with some anxiety. For if the result should not be what I expected, I should be left with the greater part of the inquiry to be begun afresh with no data to work from. I had assumed that Dr. Augustus Peck was the personator of John Gillum, and that Mr. Baker and Dr. Peck were one and the same person. If these propositions were true, it followed that Dr. Peck must be a man of about five feet ten inches in height, of blond complexion with blue eyes and light-brown hair. Further more, I should expect him to have some false upper front teeth. If he did not agree with this description, then he could not be the man; and I should have to look for another person to fill the role of personator.

"I need not describe our interview with him at length. When Jervis and I called on him, we were confronted by a rather spare man about five feet ten inches in height with light-brown hair and blue eyes. As he was clean-shaved, the colour of his beard was not ascertainable; but it could reasonably be assumed to agree with that of his hair. While we were conversing I was able to observe his teeth, as he had a short upper lip and showed them a good deal; and it was quite easy to see that there were several false teeth in the upper jaw and that these included the four upper incisors—the very teeth that had contained the gold fillings.

"Thus, you see, Dr. Peck's physical characteristics agreed in every respect with those of the Tenant of the Inn, of the man whom Mortimer knew as John Gillum, and of the mysterious Mr. Baker; and I affirm his actual identity with those persons. And I further affirm that, in view of that identity and of the body of evidence which I have presented, I have proved that Augustus Peck is the man who, on the night of the seventeenth of September, murdered John Gillum and thereafter falsely personated him at the Inn and elsewhere.

"And, as we say in court, that is my case."

---

## XIX. — RE-ENTER MR. SNUPER

FOR some time after Thorndyke had finished speaking, a profound silence prevailed in the room. We were all deeply impressed by the ingenuity with which the complicated train of evidence had been constructed and presented. And yet there was probably the same thought in the minds of us all. Despite the completeness and conclusiveness of the demonstration, the case seemed to be pervaded by a certain unreality. Something seemed to be lacking.

It was Anstey who broke the silence and put our thoughts into words.

"You have presented us, Thorndyke," said he, "with a most remarkable scheme of circumstantial evidence. I have never heard anything finer of its kind. The proof of your thesis appears to be absolutely conclusive, and it would seem almost ungracious for me to offer any criticisms. But, after all, the superintendent and I are practical men who have to deal with realities. It will fall to us to translate this scheme of evidence into action. And we are at once confronted with a serious practical difficulty. I dare say you realise what it is."

"Your difficulty, I presume," replied Thorndyke, "is that the whole case, from beginning to end, rests on circumstantial evidence."

"Exactly," said Anstey. "If we arrest this man and charge him with the murder, we have not a particle of direct evidence to produce against him. Now, the late Lord Darling once said that circumstantial evidence is more conclusive than direct evidence. But juries don't take that view, and I think the juries are right. If we bring this man to trial on the evidence that you have given us, we may easily fail to get a conviction; and there is even the possibility that some fact might be produced by the defence which would upset our case completely. You see the difficulty?"

"I do," replied Thorndyke. "I have seen it all along; and I have provided the means to meet it. Hitherto, I have dealt exclusively with the train of circumstantial evidence because that is really what the case rests upon. But I have borne in mind the need for some direct evidence to impart a quality of concrete reality to the other evidence; and I am able to produce two items which I think will satisfy you and Miller. The first is a set of photographs which Polton has prepared and which I will ask him to hand to me that I may show them to you."

Here Polton paid another visit to the office and came back carrying a small portfolio which he delivered to Thorndyke, who took from it two ten-by-eight mounted photographs and resumed: "These two photographs are enlargements from small originals lent to me by Mr. Benson. The first is a group taken by Mr. Benson, himself; in Australia, and enlarged from the negative. I chose it because it had been taken in the shadow of a building and the faces were quite well lighted. What do you think of it, Benson? Is the likeness fairly good?"

Benson took the photograph from him, and having looked at it, replied: "It is an excellent likeness. The enlargement has brought it out wonderfully."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "pass it to Mortimer."

"Has Mortimer seen it before?" asked Anstey.

"No," Thorndyke replied. "I thought it best that you should see the actual trial."

"You are pretty confident," said Anstey; and the thought had occurred to me. But apparently his confidence was justified, for, after a prolonged and careful examination of the photograph, Mortimer announced: "There is nobody that I know in this group."

"The man with the beard is John Gillum," said Benson.

"So I had supposed," replied Mortimer. "But I don't recognise him. He appears to be a complete stranger to me."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "we come to the second photograph. That is an enlargement from a small print and is not quite so clear as the other. It was taken by the first officer of the ship and shows a group of four men, one of whom is John Gillum. Look at the group carefully, Mortimer, and see if you can recognise Gillum this time."

Mortimer took the photograph and examined it attentively; and as he did so he appeared to become more and more surprised.

"This is really very curious," said he. "I recognised him at a glance. I suppose this must be a better likeness than the other."

"Show Benson which is John Gillum," said Thorndyke.

Mortimer turned to Benson, holding out the photograph and pointing to one of the figures.

"I say that this is Gillum," said he.

"Then," replied Benson, "you are wrong. That is the ship's surgeon, Dr. Peck. The man standing next him is Jack Gillum."

Mortimer looked at him in astonishment—though I didn't quite see why, after what we had heard. Then, after another look at the photograph, he exclaimed:

"So that man is Dr. Peck! Then the man I knew as John Gillum must have been Dr. Peck, for the likeness is quite unmistakable. It is rather an appalling thought, though, considering the sort of terms we were on."

Miller rubbed his hands. "Now," said he, "we are getting down to brass tacks." (apparently he regarded the circumstantial tacks as being of an entirely different metal). "Mr. Mortimer's evidence seems pretty convincing, but I think you said, doctor, that you had another item up your sleeve."

"I have," replied Thorndyke, "and I think it will be particularly acceptable to you."

He rose, and stepping across to a cabinet, opened it and took out an object which I recognised as the little roulette box that I had seen in Gillum's chambers. Having briefly explained its nature and origin, he continued: "I have fixed it to this board with a spot of glue so that it can be handled without being touched. You will see that it is marked all over with a multitude of finger-prints, many of them superimposed and most of them undecipherable. The grey powder with which I developed them doesn't show up at all well to the eye, but it photographs admirably; so I suggest that you give your attention to the excellent photographs which Polton has made of this box, which show the prints much more distinctly than they appear in the original."

He took from the portfolio a number of prints on glossy bromide paper and passed them to Miller, who examined them with eager interest.

"But these are not so bad, doctor," he said, when he had looked them over. "I can pick out at least half a dozen which our experts could identify quite easily. But what is the point about them? What do they prove?"

"The point is," Thorndyke replied, "that they are the prints of someone who had handled this box. But the box was the property of the Tenant of the Inn and the prints are presumably the prints of his fingers. At any rate, they were made by somebody who had been in those chambers; and Mortimer actually saw the Tenant handling this box. They furnish evidence, therefore, that the person who made them must, at some time, have been in John Gillum's chambers. And now cast your eye over this other collection."

As he spoke, he took out of the portfolio a sheet of paper on which there were two groups of finger-prints, apparently made with printing ink and accompanied by a signature of the same intense black. Miller took the paper and, after a careful scrutiny, compared the prints on it with those shown in the photographs.

"There is no doubt," said he, "that these finger prints are the same as those that came from the box. But whose are they, and what are they? I should have taken them for lithographs. And what is this signature? That looks like a lithograph, too."

"It is a lithograph," replied Thorndyke, taking yet another paper from the portfolio. "I will explain how it was made. Here, you see, is a copy of the famous blackmailer's letter. I wrote it out myself on a carefully prepared sheet of lithographic transfer paper. When we called on Dr. Peck, I gave it to him to read. When he had read it, I drew his attention to the attestation on the back, whereupon he turned it over, read the attestation, and turned it back. Thus his fingers and thumbs touched the paper at three different points, all of which I carefully avoided when I took the letter from him."

"Later, I called on a very skilful lithographer and got him to transfer both sides of the letter to the one and take off a few proofs. But first I asked him to write his signature on the letter with lithographic chalk so that it would ink up with the finger-prints and enable him to swear to the proofs."

"Then," said Miller, "these are Peck's finger-prints, excepting those at the upper corners, which I presume are your own, and it follows that the prints on the box are his, too. But that seems to put the coping-stone on your case, doctor, though, as this is a murder case, we could still do with a bit more evidence."

"You will find plenty of further evidence," said Thorndyke, "when you get to work with regular enquiries; evidence from the banks, from Copes and from various other sources. But you now have enough to enable you to arrest Peck. These finger-prints prove that he was in Gillum's chambers at the very time when, according to his own story, he was on the high seas at the other side of the world. Are you satisfied, Anstey?"

"Perfectly," he replied. "I should go into court confidently on what we have now, without depending on the further evidence that the police will be able to rake together. I see the shadow of the rope already."

It was at this point that Mortimer interposed a question.

"I have been expecting," said he, "to hear some reference to poor Abel Webb. Doesn't he come into the scheme of evidence?"

"He did," Thorndyke replied, "for the purposes of my investigation, but he does not for the purposes of the prosecution. I have not the slightest doubt that Peck murdered him. But I can't prove it; and without proof it would be useless to introduce any reference to the murder."

"Can you form any guess as to why Peck should have murdered him?"

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Thorndyke, "it is not a matter of guessing. It is obvious. Abel Webb was intimately acquainted with both John Gillum and Augustus Peck. Now, it happened that he saw Peck at his place of business, and he must have recognised him and have noticed that his hair was dyed black—that, in fact, he was disguised so as to resemble Gillum. He seems to have got Gillum's address—probably from the shipping office—and he certainly called at Gillum's chambers, apparently to make enquiries. There he met Peck, disguised and obviously impersonating Gillum. Then the murder was out. Peck had the choice of two alternatives; either to kill Webb or to abandon his scheme and disappear. Naturally, being Peck, he elected to murder Webb; and, accordingly, Webb was murdered immediately after his visit to the Inn—apparently on the very same day."

"While we are on the subject of explanations," said Benson, "could you give us just an outline of the actual events? A sort of condensed narrative of Peck's proceedings? I am not perfectly clear as to how the crime was carried out."

"To put it very briefly," Thorndyke replied, "I take it that the sequence of events was this: During the voyage, Peck learned a good deal about Gillum's affairs and, among other matters, two very important facts. First, that Gillum was coming into a large sum of money, accruing in instalments, and second, that he was a total stranger to England; that he knew nobody there and that nobody knew him. These two circumstances suggested to him the possibility of making away with Gillum, personating him while the instalments were being paid, and getting the money into his own possession."

"During the rest of the voyage, he must have devoted himself to finding out everything that he could about Gillum and his affairs and establishing himself as Gillum's intimate friend. Perhaps Gillum may have commissioned him to find a residence for him in London. At any rate, when Gillum went ashore at Marseilles, the friendship was already established and the two men must have been in communication while Gillum was travelling in France. That is clear from the fact that Peck knew when he would arrive in England and was able to meet him and bring him to the Inn, either as a guest or as the actual tenant of the chambers."

"As soon as Peck arrived in England, he set about the preparations to carry out his scheme; and he had the extraordinary good luck to find a set of chambers which contained an enormous coal-bin in an isolated room. When he had secured those chambers, his difficulties were practically over. He had merely to execute the necessary details; to have the bin made suitable for his purpose, to get a container to hold the body with the refrigerating material, to lay in a supply of slag-wool and solid carbon dioxide, to prepare the denture with the gold-filled teeth, and to obtain a suitable hair dye. All this he was able to do without committing himself in any way. If the scheme should prove impossible, he could simply call it off. He had done nothing unlawful or even irregular."

"Then, when Gillum arrived, everything was ready, even to the refrigerating chamber lying on its bed of slag-wool, enclosed in the insulating material, and already charged with carbonic acid snow. The unsuspecting victim was led into the chambers, the oak was shut, and Peck proceeded quietly to convert the living man into a corpse. Probably he gave him food and as much liquor as he would take, with a moderate dose of morphia mixed in with it; and when this had taken effect and Gillum had fallen asleep, he administered the lethal dose with a hypodermic syringe."

"No marks of an injection were found at the post mortem," Anstey remarked.

"They were not looked for," replied Thorndyke. "But it would be easy for a doctor to give an injection to a sleeping man so that the marks would not be discovered. However, the point is not material. The poison was administered, and when this had been done, Gillum was, in effect, a dead man. Peck was now irrevocably committed. He had burned his boats; and the instant, pressing necessity, was to get rid of the corpse. For if he should be found there with the dead man, he was lost. Probably, he proceeded with the disposal as soon as Gillum was quite unconscious; he stripped the body, put it into the

container with the carbonic acid snow, closed the lid, covered it with the slag-wool pads, fitted the false bottom over it, and emptied a scuttle or two of coal on to the false bottom."

"Do you mean to suggest," Anstey exclaimed, "that he put the living man into the refrigerator?"

"He wouldn't be a living man very long," replied Thorndyke, "in an atmosphere some fifty degrees below freezing-point. But that is what he must have done. As long as the dead body was visible in the chambers, he was in deadly peril; but as soon as it was put out of sight and covered up, he was safe. He could spend the rest of the night dyeing his hair and completing his arrangements for the morning. And when his hair was dry and his dental plate with the gold teeth substituted for the one that he had been wearing, he was ready to begin the personation and to carry it on as long as should be necessary in perfect safety, provided that he should never meet any person who knew Dr. Peck or John Gillum, or, still worse, both of them.

"Moreover, you will note the completeness of his arrangements. Sooner or later, he would have to bring the personation to an end. What was he to do then? A simple disappearance would not answer at all. It would give rise to enquiries. But no disappearance would be necessary. At the appointed time, he could simply produce the body, properly staged for a suicide, and the exit of John Gillum would be perfectly natural. But he did not leave it even at that. He created in advance the expectation of suicide so as to forestall enquiries; and he prepared the blackmailing letters with such skill and foresight that they not only agreed with his drafts on the bank, but, if any suspicion should have arisen as to his connection with the murder of Abel Webb, they agreed with that, too. Actually, Jervis and I did, at first, connect the blackmail with that murder.

"Then, finally, observe the forethought displayed in the production of the body. As it was managed, it was practically certain that the corpse would lie undiscovered for several days at the least. But in that time it would undergo such changes as would effectually cover up any traces of either the murder or the refrigeration. Looking at the case as a whole, one has to admit that it was a most masterly crime; amazingly ingenious in design and conception and still more astonishing in the forethought, the care and caution, combined with daring and resolution displayed in its execution."

"That is true," said Anstey, "but what strikes me more is the callous villainy of the scheme and the way it was carried out. I am glad you told us the story, Thorndyke, because it has brought home to me what an inhuman monster we have to deal with. If he escapes the rope, it will not be from any lack of effort on my part."

We continued for some time rather discursively to debate the various features of this extraordinarily villainous crime. At length, Miller, having looked at our clock and then at his watch, remarked that "time was getting on" and stood up; and the others, taking this as an indication that the proceedings were adjourned, rose also.

"We will see you safely out of the precincts," said Thorndyke. "It has been a long sitting and we shall all be the better for a breath of fresh air."

Accordingly we set forth together, and having discharged Anstey at his chambers, sauntered by way of Tanfield Court to the Inner Temple Gate, where we took leave of our guests. As we turned to retrace our steps, I noticed two men whom I had previously observed loitering opposite our chambers in the shade of Paper Buildings. Apparently they had followed us and seemed to be doing so still, for as we turned, they retired, and slipping round the corner of Goldsmith Building, moved away along the walk towards the cemetery. I drew Thorndyke's attention to them but, of course, he had already noticed them.

"I wonder," said I, "whether that will be Snuper and one of his myrmidons."

"It is quite possible," he replied. "I know that Snuper is keeping an eye on me. He divides his attention between me and Peck. But they may be a couple of Miller's men. The Superintendent is nearly as anxious about me as Snuper is."

He had hardly finished speaking when two shots rang out—sharp, high-pitched reports, suggesting an automatic pistol. At the moment we were crossing Tanfield Court and the sound seemed to come from the direction of the covered passage that leads through to the Terrace.

"That will be Peck," Thorndyke remarked quietly, and forthwith started off at a run towards the passage. It was extremely uncomfortable; for, though I would have much preferred to take cover and raise an alarm there was nothing for it but to keep close to Thorndyke. As we raced down the echoing passage, I caught, faintly, the sound of quick footsteps ahead, and almost at the same moment, similar but louder sounds from our rear, punctuated by the shrieks of a police whistle.

At the moment when we emerged from the passage on to the Terrace, I had a fleeting glimpse of a man running furiously, but even as I looked, he shot round the corner into Fig Tree Court and was lost to view. Here I would very willingly have called a halt to discuss tactics; for Fig Tree Court, with its two covered passages, both leading into Elm Court, afforded perfect opportunities for an ambush. It was about as dangerous a place as could be imagined for the pursuit of a man armed with an automatic and evidently bent on murder. But there was no choice. Thorndyke was leading; and when another shot sounded from ahead, accompanied by the shattering of glass, he merely noted the direction and bore down straight on the left-hand passage.

It was in Elm Court that the pursuit came to a sudden end. As we rushed out of the passage we saw two men sprawling on the pavement, engaged in a fierce and deadly struggle. One of them grasped a pistol and was trying to turn its muzzle towards his adversary, who, clinging tenaciously with both hands to the wrist that controlled the pistol, concentrated his

attention on the weapon. But it was an unequal contest, for, even as we emerged, the man with the pistol was groping with his free hand under the skirt of his coat.

Thorndyke went straight for the pistol, and seizing it with both hands, wrenched it out of the holder's grasp; while I gripped the free arm at wrist and elbow and pinned it to the ground. And none too soon; for, as I straightened out the arm, I saw that the hand held one of those deadly, double-edged surgical knives known as Catlins.

But the struggle was by no means over, for our prisoner seemed to have the strength of twenty men and the ferocity of a hundred. He writhed and twisted and kicked and even tried to bite. As I looked at his mouthing, distorted face in the dim lamplight—the face, it seemed, of a maniac or a wild beast—I found it difficult to connect it with the calm and dignified Dr. Peck of our Whitechapel interview, but easy enough to recognise the murderer of Abel Webb and poor, confiding John Gillum.

The struggle ended as suddenly as the pursuit. It was only a matter of seconds, though it seemed an hour, before our two followers came flying out of the passage and instantly fell upon the prisoner. As one of them helped Thorndyke and me to drag the hands together—with an anxious eye upon the knife—the other produced a pair of handcuffs and expertly snapped them on to the wrists.

"There," said he in a soothing, persuasive tone, "that's fixed you up. It's no use wriggling, and you'd better let me have that knife"; which, in fact, he took possession of by a method which caused the prisoner suddenly to drop it.

Apparently, Peck realised the futility of further resistance, for he allowed his captors to raise him to his feet, when he stood glowering sullenly at Thorndyke, breathing hard but uttering not a word; while his original antagonist, who had risen unaided, regarded him with mild satisfaction and cast an occasional pensive glance at a ragged hole in his own sleeve through which issued a little oozing of blood. Noticing this, I exclaimed anxiously:

"I hope you are not seriously hurt."

"Oh, no," he replied, turning to me with a smile, "it's just a matter of sticking-plaster and a tailor" and as he spoke and looked at me, I suddenly realised who he was. It was Mr. Snuper.

We accompanied the two officers and their prisoner up to the Inner Temple Gate and stood by until a police car arrived in response to a telephone call. Then as the door slammed and the car moved away, we turned back once more towards our chambers. Mr. Snuper would have said goodnight and faded away in his usual inscrutable fashion. But Thorndyke would have none of this.

"No, no, Snuper," said he. "You come back with us. We owe it to you that we are still alive and you were very near to giving your own life for ours. Neither of us is likely to forget your courage and devotion. But now you have got to come and undergo the necessary repairs."

The repairs were executed by me assisted by Polton (who positively grovelled at Snuper's feet when he heard the story) while Thorndyke attended to the hospitality; and, speaking as a surgeon, I am not sure that his methods were quite orthodox, even though it really was little more than a matter of sticking-plaster.

---

## XX. — EPILOGUE

THE trial of Augustus Peck lies outside the scope of this narrative. To follow it in detail would be merely to repeat what the reader has already been told. For there was practically no defence; ingenious and convincing as the scheme of the crime had been, directly the alleged and presumed facts were challenged the whole edifice of deception collapsed. So overwhelming was the evidence for the prosecution that the jury agreed on their verdict of "Guilty" after less than ten minutes' deliberation.

The case for the Crown was based mainly, as Thorndyke had predicted, on the complete train of circumstantial evidence. But his prediction turned out to be correct in another respect. No sooner had systematic enquiries been set afoot by the police than an imposing mass of confirmatory evidence was brought into view. Inquiries, for instance, at Copes and other manufacturers of refrigerating material elicited the fact that Peck had kept himself regularly supplied with blocks of solid carbon dioxide. And an examination by experts of the various documents, including Gillum's holograph will, showed that the will and the letters received from Australia were clearly distinguishable from the skilfully forged documents executed by Peck; and this examination (together with Thorndyke's sheet of blank paper) enabled the experts to testify that the blackmailer's letters had undoubtedly been written by Peck, himself.

But perhaps the most striking corroborative evidence came from the three banks at which Peck had kept accounts. When Miller, armed with an order of the Court, called on them to make enquiries, it was revealed that Peck had been in the habit of paying into each bank some thirty pounds a week in cash—mostly old one-pound notes—ostensibly the receipts from his Whitechapel practice, though, in fact, it was proved that the said practice was a pure fiction. As the money accumulated at the banks, it was promptly converted into gilt-edged securities, which Peck retained in his own possession and which were found locked up in his writing-table at Whitechapel.

But even more striking were the discoveries which were made in the strong-rooms of those banks; which included three large dispatch boxes, each crammed with old one-pound notes, evidently forced in under heavy pressure and forming a solid, compact mass. On counting them, the total amount contained in them was found to be just over ten thousand pounds; which, together with the securities and the combined credit balance, came near to accounting for the whole sum of thirteen thousand pounds which had been withdrawn from Gillum's bank.

"If one were disposed to moralise," said Thorndyke, as he laid down the newspaper in which an account of Peck's execution was printed, "one would lament the misuse of the remarkable gifts with which Augustus Peck was undeniably endowed. He was a very unusual type of criminal. I do not recall any other quite like him. He was clearly a man of some culture; he was gifted with a constructive imagination of a high order and with inexhaustible ingenuity and resourcefulness. He avoided risks whenever they could be avoided, and when they could not be, he took them with a courage and resolution that would be admirable in any other circumstances. Consider his murder of Abel Webb. The risk of committing a murder in a public thoroughfare was enormous. But yet, as a matter of mere policy, the risk was justified. For when he had taken the immediate risk and escaped, the very publicity of the crime was a safeguard so complete that though we were certain that he had committed the crime, we could never have brought it home to him. And Abel Webb was silenced for ever.

"Nevertheless, he suffered from the inherent folly that is characteristic of all criminals. The paltry thirteen thousand pounds was not worth the risk that he took; and his ridiculous attempt to murder you and me—when, I suppose, he had to some extent lost his nerve—was sheer imbecility. For he still had a sporting chance of escape.

"But, at any rate, the world is better without him, and I am not dissatisfied to have been the means of his elimination."

"No," I agreed. "You have done a brilliant piece of work, and as to the result of your labours, as Mr. Weech would express it: *Finis coronat opus*."

---

THE END



**THE STONEWARE MONKEY**  
**BOOK I**  
**NARRATED BY JAMES OLDFIELD, M.D.**  
**CHAPTER I. — HUE AND CRY**

THE profession of medicine has a good many drawbacks in the way of interrupted meals, disturbed nights and long and strenuous working hours. But it has its compensations, for a doctor's life is seldom a dull life. Compared, for instance, with that of a civil servant or a bank official, it abounds in variety of experience and surroundings, to say nothing of the intrinsic interest of the work in its professional aspects. And then it may happen at any moment that the medical practitioner's duties may lead him into the very heart of a drama or a tragedy or bring him into intimate contact with crime.

Not that the incident which I am about to describe was, in the first place, directly connected with my professional duties. The initial experience might have befallen anyone. But it was my medical status that enlarged and completed that experience.

It was about nine o'clock on a warm September night that I was cycling at an easy pace along a by-road towards the town, or village, of Newingstead, in which I was temporarily domiciled as the locum-tenens of a certain Dr. Wilson. I had been out on an emergency call to a small village about three miles distant and had taken my bicycle instead of the car for the sake of the exercise; and having ridden out at the speed that the occasion seemed to demand, was now making a leisurely return, enjoying the peaceful quiet of the by-way and even finding the darkness restful with a good headlight to show the way and a rear light to secure me from collisions from behind.

At a turn of the lane, a few twinkling lights seen dimly through spaces in the hedgerow told me that I was nearing my destination. A little reluctant to exchange the quiet of the countryside for the light and bustle of the town, I dismounted, and, leaning my bicycle against a gate, brought out my pipe and was just dipping into my pocket for my tobacco pouch when I heard what sounded to me like the call of a police whistle.

I let go the pouch and put away my pipe as I strained my ears to listen. The sound had come from no great distance but I had not been able exactly to locate it. The cart track from the gate, I knew, skirted a small wood, from which a footpath joined it, and the sound had seemed to come from that direction. But the wood was invisible in the darkness, though I could judge its position by a group of ricks, the nearest of which loomed vaguely out of the murk.

I had switched off the lamps of my machine and was just considering the expediency of walking up the cart track to explore, when the unmistakable shriek of a police whistle rang out, considerably nearer than the last and much shorter, and was succeeded by the sound of voices—apparently angry voices—accompanied by obscure noises as of bodies bursting through the undergrowth of the wood, from the direction of which the sounds now clearly proceeded. On this I climbed over the gate and started up the cart track at a quick pace, treading as silently as I could and keeping a bright lookout. The track led through the groups of ricks, the great shapes of which loomed up one after another, looking strangely gigantic in the obscurity, and near the last of them I passed a farm wagon and was disposed to examine it with my flashlight, but then judged it to be more prudent not to show a light. So I pushed on with the flashlight in my hand, peering intently into the darkness and listening for any further sounds.

But there were none. The silence of the countryside—now no longer restful, but awesome and sinister—was deepened rather than broken by the faint sounds that belonged to it; the half-audible "skreek" of a bat, the faint murmur of leaves and, far away, the fantastic cry of an owl.

Presently I was able to make out the wood as a vague shape of deeper darkness and then I came on the little footpath that meandered away towards it. Deciding that this was the right direction, I turned on to it and followed it—not without difficulty, for it was but a narrow track through the grass—until I found myself entering the black shadows of the wood. Here I paused for a moment to listen while I peered into the impenetrable darkness ahead. But no sounds came to my ear save the hushed whisper of the trees. Whatever movement there had been was now stilled, and as I resumed my advance toward the wood I began to ask myself uneasily what this strange and sudden stillness might portend. But I had not gone more than a score of paces and was just entering the wood when the question was answered. Quite suddenly, almost at my feet, I saw the prostrate figure of a man.

Instantly I switched on my flashlight and as its beam fell on him it told the substance of the tragic story in a single flash. He was the constable whose whistle I had heard—it was still hanging loose at the end of its chain. He was bareheaded and at the first glance I thought he was dead; but when I knelt down by his side I saw that he was still breathing, and I now noticed a small trickle of blood issuing from an invisible wound above his ear. Very carefully I sought the wound by a light touch of my finger and immediately became aware of a soft area of the scalp, which further cautious and delicate palpation showed to be a depression of the skull.

I felt his pulse—a typical brain-compression pulse—and examined his eyes, but there was no doubt as to his condition. The dent in the skull was compressing his brain and probably the compression was being increased from moment to moment by internal bleeding. The question was, what was to be done? I could do nothing for him here, but yet I could hardly leave him to go in search of help. It was a horrible dilemma; whatever could be done for him would need to be done quickly, and the sands of his life were running out while I knelt helplessly at his side.

Suddenly I bethought me of his whistle. The sound of it had brought me to the spot and it must surely bring others. Picking it up, I put it to my lips and blew a loud and prolonged blast, and, after a few moments' pause, another and yet another. The harsh, strident screech, breaking in on the deathly stillness of the wood and setting the sleeping birds astir, seemed to strike my overstrung nerves a palpable blow. It was positive pain to me to raise that hideous din, but there was

nothing else to do. I must keep it up until it should be heard and should attract someone to this remote and solitary place.

It took effect sooner than I had expected, for I was in the act of raising the whistle once more to my lips when I heard sounds from within the wood as of someone trampling through the undergrowth. I threw the beam of my flashlight in that direction but took the precaution to stand up until I should have seen who and what the newcomer might be. Almost immediately there appeared a light from the wood which flashed out and then disappeared as if a lantern were being carried among tree trunks. Then it became continuous and was evidently turned full on me as the newcomer ran out of the wood and advanced towards me. For a few moments I was quite dazzled by the glare of his light, but as he came nearer, mine lighted him up and I then saw that he was a police constable. Apparently he had just observed the figure lying at my feet, for he suddenly quickened his pace and arrived so much out of breath that, for a moment or two, he was unable to speak, but stood with the light of his lantern cast on his unconscious comrade, breathing hard and staring down at him with amazement and horror.

"God save us!" he muttered at length. "What the devil has been happening? Who blew that whistle?"

"I did," I replied, upon which he nodded, and then, once more throwing his light on me, and casting a searching glance at me, demanded:

"And who are you, and how do you come to be here?"

I explained the position very briefly and added that it was urgently necessary that the injured man should be got to the hospital as quickly as possible.

"He isn't dead, then?" said he. "And you say you are a doctor? Can't you do anything for him?"

"Not here," I answered. "He has got a deep depressed fracture of the skull. If anything can be done, it will have to be done at the hospital; and he will have to be moved very gently. We shall want an ambulance. Could you go and fetch one? My bicycle is down by the gate."

He considered for a few moments. Apparently he was in somewhat of a dilemma, for he replied:

"I oughtn't to go away from here with that devil probably lurking in the wood. And you oughtn't to leave this poor chap. But there was another man coming along close behind me. He should be here any minute if he hasn't lost his way. Perhaps I'd better go back a bit and look for him."

He threw the beam from his lantern into the opening of the wood and was just starting to retrace his steps when there sounded faintly from that direction the voice of someone apparently hailing us:

"Is that you, Mr. Kempster?" the constable roared.

Apparently it was, though I could not make out the words of the reply, for a minute or so later a man emerged from the wood and approached us at a quick walk. But Mr. Kempster, like the constable, was a good deal the worse for his exertions, and, for a time, was able only to stand panting, with his hand to his side, while he gazed in consternation at the prostrate form on the ground.

"Can you ride a bicycle, Mr. Kempster?" the constable asked.

Mr. Kempster managed to gasp out that he could, though he wasn't much of a rider.

"Well," said the constable, "we want an ambulance to take this poor fellow to the hospital. Could you take the doctor's bicycle and run along to the police station and just tell them what has happened?"

"Where is the bicycle?" asked Kempster.

"It is leaning against the gate at the bottom of the cart track," I replied, adding, "You can have my flashlight to find your way and I will see you down the path to the place where it joins the track."

He agreed, not unwillingly, I thought, having no great liking for the neighbourhood, so I handed him my flashlight and conducted him along the path to its junction with the cart track, when I returned to the place where the constable was kneeling by his comrade, examining him by the light of his lantern.

"I can't make this out," said he as I came up. "He wasn't taken unawares. There seems to have been a considerable scrap. His truncheon's gone. The fellow must have managed to snatch it out of his hand, but I can't imagine how that can have happened. It would take a pretty hefty customer to get a constable's truncheon out of his fist, especially as that's just what he'd be on his guard against."

"He seems to have been a powerful ruffian," said I, "judging by the character of the injury. He must have struck a tremendous blow. The skull is stove in like an egg-shell."

"Blighter!" muttered the constable. Then, after a pause, he asked:

"Do you think he is going to die, Doctor?"

"I am afraid his chances are not very good," I replied, "and the longer we have to wait for that ambulance, the worse they will be."

"Well," he rejoined, "if Mr. Kempster hustles along, we shan't have very long to wait. They won't waste any time at the station."

He stood up and swept the beam of his lantern around, first towards the wood and then in the direction of the ricks. Suddenly he uttered an indignant snort and exclaimed, angrily:

"Well, I'm damned! Here's Mr. Kempster coming back." He kept the light of his lantern on the approaching figure, and as it came within range he roared out: "What's the matter, sir? We thought you'd be half way there."

Mr. Kempster hurried up, breathing hard and looking decidedly resentful of the constable's tone.

"There is no bicycle there," he said, sulkily. "Somebody must have made off with it. I searched all about there but there was not a sign of it."

The constable cursed as a well trained constable ought not to curse.

"But that's put the lid on it," he concluded. "This murderous devil must have seen you come up, Doctor, and as soon as you were out of sight, he must have just got on your machine and cleared out. I suppose you had a headlight."

"I had both head and rear light," I replied, "but I switched them both off before I started up the cart track. But, of course, if he was anywhere near—hiding behind one of those ricks, for instance—he would have seen my lights when I came up to the gate."

"Yes," the constable agreed, gloomily, "it was a bit of luck for him. And now he's got clean away; got away for good and all unless he has left some sort of traces."

Mr. Kempster uttered a groan. "If he has slipped through your fingers," he exclaimed, indignantly, "there's about ten thousand pounds' worth of my property gone with him. Do you realize that?"

"I do, now you've told me," replied the constable, adding unsympathetically, "and it's bad luck for you; but still, you know, you are better off than my poor mate here who was trying to get it back for you. But we mustn't stop here talking. If the man has gone, there is no use in my staying here. I'll just run back the way I came and report at the station. You may as well wait here with the doctor until I come back with the ambulance."

But Mr Kempster had had enough of the adventure.

"There is no use in my waking here," said he, handing me my flashlight. "I'll walk back through the wood with you and then get along home and see exactly what that scoundrel has taken."

The constable made no secret of his disapproval of this course, but he did not actually put it into words. With a brief farewell to me, he turned the light of his lantern on the entrance to the wood and set off at a pace that kept his companion at a brisk trot. And as the light faded among the trees and the sound of their footsteps died away in the distance, I found myself once more alone with my patient, encompassed by the darkness and wrapped in a silence which was broken only by an occasional soft moan from the unconscious man.

It seemed to me that hours elapsed after the departure of the constable; hours of weary expectation and anxiety. I possessed myself of my patient's lantern and by its light examined him from time to time. Naturally, there was no improvement; indeed, each time that I felt his pulse it was with a faint surprise to find it still beating. I knew that, actually, his condition must be getting worse with every minute that passed, and it became more and more doubtful whether he would reach the hospital alive.

Then my thoughts strayed towards my bicycle and the unknown robber. We had taken it for granted that the latter had escaped on the machine, and in all probability he had. Yet it was possible that the cycle might have been stolen by some tramp or casual wayfarer and that the robber might be still lurking in the neighbourhood. However, that possibility did not disturb me, since he could have no object in attacking me. I was more concerned about the loss of my bicycle.

From the robber, my reflections drifted to the robbed. Who and what was Mr. Kempster? And what sort of property was it that the thief had made off with? There are not many things worth ten thousand pounds which can be carried away in the pocket. Probably the booty consisted of something in the nature of jewelry. But I was not much interested. The value of property, and especially of such trivial property as jewelry, counts for little compared with that of a human life. My momentarily wandering attention quickly came back to the man lying motionless at my feet, whose life hung so unsteadily in the balance.

At last my seemingly interminable vigil came to an end. From the road below came the distinctive clang of an ambulance bell, and lights winked over the unseen hedgerow. Then the glare from a pair of powerful headlamps came across the field, throwing up the ricks in sharp silhouette, and telling me that the ambulance was passing in through the gate. I watched the lights growing brighter from moment to moment; saw them vanish behind the ricks and presently emerge as the vehicle advanced up the cart track and at length turned on to the footpath.

It drew up eventually within a few paces of the spot where the injured man was lying, and immediately there descended from it a number of men, including a police inspector and the constable who had gone with Kempster. The former greeted me civilly, and, looking down on his subordinate with deep concern, asked me a few questions while a couple of uniformed men brought out a stretcher and set it down by the patient. I helped them to lift him on to the stretcher and to convey the latter to its place in the ambulance. Then I got in, myself, and, while the vehicle was being turned round, the inspector came to take a last look at the patient.

"I am not coming back with you. Doctor," said he. "I have got a squad of men with some powerful lights to search the

wood.”

“But,” said I, “the man has almost certainly gone off on my bicycle.”

“I know,” said he. “But we are not looking for him. It’s this poor fellow’s truncheon that I want. If the thief managed to snatch it away from him, there are pretty certain to be finger-prints on it. At any rate, I hope so, for it’s our only chance of identifying the man.”

With this, as the ambulance was now ready to start, he turned away; and as we moved off towards the cart track, I saw him, with the constable and three plain-clothes men advancing towards the wood which, by the combined effects of all their lights, was illuminated almost to the brightness of daylight.

Once out on the road, the smoothly-running ambulance made short work of the distance to the hospital. But yet the journey had not been short enough. For when the stretcher had been borne into the casualty room and placed on the table, the first anxious glance showed that the feebly-flickering light had gone out. In vain the visiting surgeon—who had been summoned by telephone—felt the pulse and listened to the heart. Poor Constable Murray—such, I learned, was his name—had taken his last turn of duty.

“A bad business,” said the surgeon, putting away his stethoscope and passing his fingers lightly over the depression in the dead man’s skull. “But I doubt whether we could have done much for him even if he had come in alive. It was a devil of a blow. The man was a fool to hit so hard, for now he’ll have to face a charge of wilful murder—that is, if they catch him. I hope they will.”

“I hope so, too,” said I, “but I doubt whether they will. He seems to have found my bicycle and gone off on it, and I gather that nobody saw him near enough to recognize him.”

“H’m,” grunted the surgeon, “that’s unfortunate; and bad luck for you, too, though I expect you will get your cycle back. Meanwhile, can I give you a lift in my car?”

I accepted the offer gladly, and, after a last look at the dead constable, we went out together to return to our respective homes.



## CHAPTER 2. — THE INQUIRY

IT was on the fourth day after my adventure that I received the summons to attend the inquest—which had been kept back to enable the police to collect such evidence as was available—and in due course presented myself at the little Town Hall in which the inquiry was to be held. The preliminaries had already been disposed of when I arrived, but I was in time to hear the coroner's opening address to the jury. It was quite short, and amounted to little more than the announcement of his intention to take the evidence in its chronological order; a very sensible proceeding, as it seemed to me, whereby the history of the tragedy would evolve naturally from the depositions of the witnesses. Of these, the first was Mr. Arthur Kempster, who, by the coroner's direction, began with a narrative of the events known to him.

"I am a diamond merchant, having business premises in Hatton Garden and a private residence at The Hawthorns, Newingstead. On Friday, the 16th of September, I returned from a trip to Holland and came direct from Harwich to The Hawthorns. At Amsterdam I purchased a parcel of diamonds and I had them in a paper packet in my inside waistcoat pocket when I arrived home, which I did just about dinner time. After dinner, I went to my study to examine the diamonds and to check their weight on the special scales which I keep for that purpose. When I had finished weighing them and had looked them over, one by one, I put away the scales and looked about for the lens which I use to examine stones as to their cutting. But I couldn't find the lens. Then I had a faint recollection of having used it in the dining room, which adjoins the study, and I went to that room to see if I might have left it there. And I had. I found it after a very short search and went back with it to the study. But when I went to the table on which I had put the diamonds, to my amazement I found that they had vanished. As nobody could possibly have come into the study by the door, I looked at the window; and then I saw that it was open, whereas it had been shut when I went to the dining room.

"I immediately rushed out through the dining room to the front door, and as I came out of it I saw a man walking quickly down the drive. He was nearly at the end of it when I ran out, and, as soon as he heard me, he darted round the corner and disappeared. I ran down the drive as fast as I could go, and, when I came out into the road, I could see him some distance ahead, running furiously in the direction of the country. I followed him as fast as I could, but I could see that he was gaining on me. Then, as I came to a side turning—Bascombe Avenue—I saw a policeman approaching along it and quite near. So I hailed him and gave the alarm; and when he ran up, I told him, very briefly, what had happened; and, as the thief was still in sight, he ran off in pursuit. I followed as well as I could, but I was already out of breath and couldn't nearly keep up with him. But I saw the thief make off along the country road and get over a gate nearly opposite Clay Wood; and the policeman, who seemed to be gaining on the fugitive, also got over the gate, and I lost sight of them both.

"It seemed to me that it was useless to try to follow them, so I turned back towards the town to see if I could get any further assistance. Then, on the main road, I met Police Constable Webb and told him what had happened, and we started off together to the place where the thief had disappeared. We got over the gate, crossed a field, and entered the wood. But there we rather lost ourselves as we had missed the path. We heard a police whistle sounding from the wood while we were crossing the field; and we heard another shorter one just after we had entered. But we couldn't make out clearly the direction the sounds had come from, and we still couldn't find the path.

"Then, after a considerable time, we heard three long blasts of a whistle and at the same moment we saw a glimmer of light; so we ran towards the light—at least the constable did, for I was too blown to run any farther—and at last I found the path and came out of the wood and saw Dr. Oldfield standing by the deceased, who was lying on the ground. Constable Webb suggested that I should take Dr. Oldfield's bicycle and ride to the police station and the doctor gave me his flashlight to light me down the cart track to the gate where he had left the bicycle. But when I got to the gate, there was no sign of any bicycle, so I returned and reported to the constable, who then decided to go, himself, to the station, and we went back together through the wood. When we got back to the field he ran on ahead and I went back to my house."

"When you went to the dining room," said the coroner, "how long were you absent from the study?"

"About two minutes, I should say. Certainly not more than three."

"You say that the study window was closed when you went out of the room. Was it fastened?"

"No. It was open at the top. I opened it when I came in after dinner as it was a warm night and the room seemed rather close."

"Was the blind down?"

"There is no blind; only a pair of heavy curtains. They were drawn when I came into the room, but I had to pull them apart to open the window and I may not have drawn them close afterwards; in fact, I don't think I did."

"Do you think that anyone passing outside could have seen into the room?"

"Yes. The study is on the ground floor—perhaps a couple of feet above the level of the ground—and the window sill would be about the height of a man's shoulder, so that a man standing outside could easily look into the room."

"Does the window face the drive?"

"No. It looks on the alley that leads to the back premises."

"You, apparently, did not hear the sound of the window sash being raised?"

"No, but I shouldn't, in the dining room. The sash slides up easily and I have all the sash pulleys of my windows kept oiled to prevent them from squeaking."

"Were the diamonds in an accessible position?"

"Yes, quite. They were lying, all together, on a square of black velvet on the table."

"Were they of any considerable value?"

"They were, indeed. The whole parcel would be worth about ten thousand pounds. There were fifteen of them, and they were all very exceptional stones."

"Would you be able to recognize them if they could be traced?"

"I could easily identify the complete parcel, and I think I could identify the individual stones. I weighed each one separately and the whole group together, and I made certain notes about them of which I have given a copy to the police."

"Was anything taken besides the diamonds?"

"Nothing, not even the paper. The thief must have just grabbed up the stones and put them loose in his pocket."

This completed Mr. Kempster's evidence. Some of the jury would have liked more detailed particulars of the diamonds, but the coroner reminded them gently that the inquiry was concerned, not with the robbery but with the death of Constable Alfred Murray. As there were no other questions, the depositions were read and signed and the witness was released.

Following the chronological sequence, I succeeded Mr. Kempster, and, like him, opened my evidence with a narrative statement. But I need not repeat this, or the examination that amplified it, as I have already told the story of my connection with the case. Nor need I record Constable Webb's evidence, which was mainly a repetition of Kempster's. When the constable had retired, the name of Dr. James Tansley was called and the surgeon whom I had met at the hospital came forward.

"You have made an examination of the body of deceased," said the coroner when the preliminary questions had been answered. "Will you tell us what conditions you found?"

"On external examination," the witness replied, "I found a deep depression in the skull two and a quarter inches in diameter starting from a point an inch and a half above the left ear, and a contused wound an inch and three quarters in length. The wound and the depressed fracture of the skull both appeared to have been produced by a heavy blow from some blunt instrument. There was no sign of more than one blow. On removing the cap of the skull I found that the inner table—that is, the hard inner layer of the skull—had been shattered and portions of it driven into the substance of the brain, causing severe lacerations. It had also injured one or two arteries and completely divided one, with the result that extensive bleeding had occurred between the skull and the brain, and this would have produced great pressure on the surface of the brain."

"What would you say was the cause of death?"

"The immediate cause of death was laceration and compression of the brain, but, of course, the ultimate cause was the blow on the head which produced those injuries."

"It is a mere formality, I suppose, to ask whether the injury could have been self-inflicted?"

"Yes. It is quite impossible that the blow could have been struck by deceased himself."

This was the substance of the doctor's evidence. When it was concluded and the witness had been released, the name of Inspector Charles Roberts was called, and that officer took his place by the table. Like the preceding witnesses, he began, at the coroner's invitation, with a general statement.

"On receiving Constable Webb's report, as the Chief Constable was absent, I ordered the sergeant to get out the ambulance and I collected a search party to go with it. When we arrived at the spot where the deceased was lying, I saw him transferred to the ambulance under the doctor's supervision, and when it had gone, I took my party into the wood. Each member of the party was provided with a powerful flashlight, so that we had a good light to work by.

"We saw no sign of anyone hiding in the wood, but near the path we found deceased's helmet. It was uninjured and had probably been knocked off by a branch of a tree. We searched especially for deceased's truncheon and eventually found it quite near to the place where he had been lying. I picked it up by the wrist strap at the end of the handle and carried it in that way until we reached the station, when I examined it carefully and could see that there were several finger-prints on it. I did not attempt to develop the prints, but hung up the truncheon by its strap in a cupboard, which I locked. On the following morning I delivered the key of the cupboard to the Chief Constable when I made my report."

"Did you find any traces of the fugitive?"

"No. We went down to the gate and found marks there on the earth where the bicycle had stood; and we could see where it had been wheeled off on to the road. But we were unable to make out any visible tracks on the road itself."

"Has the bicycle been traced since then?"

"Yes. Two days after the robbery it was found hidden in a cart shed near the London Road, about three miles from Clay

Wood, towards London. I went over it carefully with developing powder to see if there were any finger-prints on it, but, although there were plenty of finger-marks, they were only smears and quite unidentifiable."

This was the sum of the inspector's evidence; and as there were no questions, the officer was released and was succeeded by Chief Constable Herbert Parker, who took up and continued the inspector's account of the dead constable's truncheon.

"The key of the cupboard at the police station was delivered to me by Inspector Roberts as he has deposed. I unlocked the cupboard and took out the truncheon, which I examined in a good light with the aid of a magnifying lens. I could see that there were, on the barrel of the truncheon, several finger-prints; and by their position and grouping, I judged that they had been made by the thief when he snatched the truncheon out of deceased's hand. They were quite distinct on the polished surface, but not sufficiently so to photograph without development; and I did not attempt to develop them because I thought that, having regard to their importance, it would be better to hand the truncheon intact to the experts at Scotland Yard. Accordingly, I packed the truncheon in such a way that the marked surfaces should be protected from any contact and took it up to the finger-print department at Scotland Yard, where I delivered it to the Chief Inspector, who examined it and developed the fingerprints with a suitable powder.

"It was then seen that there were four decipherable prints, evidently those of a left hand; one was a thumb-print and was perfectly clear, and the others, of the first three fingers, though less perfect, were quite recognizable. As soon as they had been developed, they were photographed; and when the photographs were ready, they were handed to the expert searchers who took them to the place where the collections are kept and went through the files with them. The result of the search was to make it certain that no such finger-prints were in any of the files; neither in those of the main collection nor in those containing single finger-prints."

"And what does that amount to?"

"It amounts to this: that, since these finger-prints are not in the principal files—those containing the complete sets taken by prison officers—it is certain that this man has never been convicted; and since they are not in the single finger-print files, there is no evidence that he has ever been connected with any crime. In short—so far as the finger-prints are concerned—this man is not known to the police."

"That is very unfortunate," said the coroner. "It would seem as if there were practically no chance of ever bringing the crime home to him."

"There is little," he began, "that I need say to you, members of the jury. You have heard the evidence, and the evidence tells the whole sad story. I do not suppose that you will have any doubt that the gallant officer whose tragic and untimely death is the subject of this inquiry, was killed by the runaway thief. But I have to point out to you that if that is your decision, you are legally bound to find a verdict of wilful murder against that unknown man. The law is quite clear on the subject. If any person, while engaged in committing a felony, and in furtherance of such felony, kills, or directly causes the death of any other person, he is guilty of wilful murder, whether he did or did not intend to kill that person.

"Now, there is no evidence that this fugitive desired or intended to kill the constable. But he dealt him a blow which might have killed him and which, in fact, did kill him; and the fugitive was at the time engaged in committing a felony. Therefore, he is guilty of wilful murder. That is all, I think, that I need say."

The jury had apparently already made up their minds on the subject, for after but the briefest whispered consultation with them, the foreman announced that they had agreed on their verdict.

"We find," he continued as the coroner took up his pen, "that deceased was murdered in Clay Wood by the unknown man who entered Mr. Kempster's house to commit a robbery."

The coroner nodded. "Yes," he said, "I am in entire agreement with you and I shall record a verdict of wilful murder against that unknown man; and I am sure you will concur with me in expressing our deepest sympathy with the family of this gallant officer whose life was sacrificed in the performance of a dangerous duty."

Thus, gloomily enough, ended the adventure that had brought me for the first time into intimate contact with serious crime. At least, it appeared to me that the adventure was at an end and that I had heard the last of the tragedy and of the sinister, shadowy figure that must have passed so near to me on the margin of the wood. It was a natural belief, since I had played but a super's part in the drama and seemed to be concerned with it no more, and since my connection with Newingstead and its inhabitants would cease when my principal, Dr. Wilson, should return from his holiday.

But it was, nevertheless, a mistaken belief, as will appear at a later stage of this narrative.

---

### CHAPTER 3. — PETER GANNET

A PROBLEM that has occasionally exercised my mind is that of the deterioration of London streets. Why do they always deteriorate and never improve? The change seems to be governed by some mysterious law. Constantly we meet with streets, once fashionable but now squalid, whose spacious houses have fallen from the estate of mansions, tenanted by the rich and great, to that of mere tenements giving shelter to all grades of the poverty-stricken, from the shabby genteel to the definitely submerged; streets where the vanished coaches have given place to the coster's barrow and the van of the yelling coal vendor. But never, in my experience, does one encounter a street that has undergone a change in the reverse direction; that has evolved from obscurity to fashion, from the shabby to the modish.

The reflection is suggested to me by the neighbourhood in which I had recently taken up my abode, on the expiration of my engagement at Newingstead. Not that Osnaburgh Street, Marylebone, could fairly be described as squalid. On the contrary, it is a highly respectable street. Nevertheless, its tall, flat-faced houses with their spacious rooms and dignified doorways are evidently survivors from a more opulent past, and the whole neighbourhood shows traces of the curious subsidence that I have referred to.

The occasion of my coming to Osnaburgh Street was the purchase by me of a "death vacancy"; very properly so described, for there was no doubt of the decease of my predecessor, and the fact of the vacancy became clearly established as I sat, day after day, the undisturbed and solitary occupant of the consulting room, incredulously turning over the pages of the old ledgers and wondering whether the names inscribed therein might perchance appertain to mythical persons, or whether those patients could, with one accord, have followed the late incumbent to his destination in Heaven or Gehenna.

Yet there were occasional calls or messages, at first from casual strangers or newcomers to the district; but presently, by introduction and recommendation, the vacancy grew into a visible "nucleus," which, expanding by slow degrees, seemed to promise an actual practice in the not too far distant future. The hours of solitary meditation in the consulting room began more frequently to be shortened by welcome interruptions, and my brisk, business-like walks through the streets to have some purpose other than mere geographical exploration.

Principally my little practice grew, as I have said, by recommendation. My patients seemed to like me and mentioned the fact to their friends; and thus it was that I made the acquaintance of Peter Gannet. I remember the occasion very clearly, though it seemed so insignificant at the time. It was a gloomy December morning, some three months after my departure from Newingstead, when I set forth on my "round" (of one patient), taking a short cut to Jacob Street, Hampstead Road, through the by-streets behind Cumberland Market and contrasting the drab little thoroughfares with the pleasant lanes around Newingstead. Jacob Street was another instance of the "law of decay" which I have mentioned. Now at the undeniably shabby genteel stage, it had formerly been the chosen resort of famous and distinguished artists. But its glory was not utterly departed; for, as several of the houses had commodious studios attached to them, the population still included a leavening of artists, though of a more humble and unpretentious type. Mr. Jenkins, the husband of my patient, was a monumental mason, and from the bedroom window I could see him in the small yard below, chipping away at a rather florid marble headstone.

The introduction came when I had finished my leisurely visit and was about to depart.

"Before you go, Doctor," said Mrs. Jenkins, "I must give you a message from my neighbour, Mrs. Gannet. She sent her maid in this morning to say that her husband is not very well and that she would be glad if you would just drop in and have a look at him. She knows that you are attending me and they've got no doctor of their own. It's next door but one; Number 12."

I thanked her for the introduction, and, having wished her good morning, let myself out of the house and proceeded to Number 12, approaching it slowly to take a preliminary glance at the premises. The result of the inspection was satisfactory as an index to the quality of my new patient, for the house was in better repair than most of its neighbours and the bright brass knocker and door-knob and the whitened door-step suggested a household rather above the general Jacob Street level. At the side of the house was a wide, two-leaved gate with a wicket, at which I glanced inquisitively. It seemed to be the entrance to a yard or factory, adapted to the passage of trucks or vans, but it clearly belonged to the house, for a bell-pull on the jamb of the gate had underneath it a small brass plate bearing the inscription, "P. Gannet."

In response to my knock, the door was opened by a lanky girl of about eighteen with long legs, a short skirt, and something on her head which resembled a pudding cloth. When I had revealed my identity, she conducted me along a tiled hall to a door, which she opened, and having announced me by name, washed her hands of me and retired down the kitchen stairs.

The occupant of the room, a woman, of about thirty-five, rose as I entered and laid down some needlework on a side table.

"Am I addressing Mrs. Gannet?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "I am Mrs. Gannet. I suppose Mrs. Jenkins gave you my message?"

"Yes. She tells me—which I am sorry to hear—that your husband is not very well."

"He is not at all well," said she, "though I don't think it is anything that matters very much, you know."



"I expect it matters to him," I suggested.

"I suppose it does," she agreed. "At any rate, he seems rather sorry for himself. He is sitting up in his bedroom at present. Shall I show you the way? I think he is rather anxious to see you."

I held the door open for her, and when she passed through, I followed her up the stairs, rapidly sorting out my first impressions. Mrs. Gannet was a rather tall, slender woman with light brown hair and slightly chilly blue eyes. She was decidedly good-looking but yet I did not find her prepossessing. Comely as her face undoubtedly was, it was not—at least to me—a pleasant face. There was a tinge of petulance in its expression, a faint suggestion of unamiability. And I did not like the tone in which she had referred to her husband.

Her introduction of me was as laconic as that of her maid. She opened the bedroom door and standing at the threshold, announced:

"Here's the doctor." Then, as I entered, she shut me in and departed.

"Well, Doctor," said the patient, "I'm glad to see you. Pull up a chair to the fire and take off your overcoat."

I drew a chair up to the fire gladly enough, but I did not adopt the other suggestion; for already I had learned by experience that the doctor who takes off his overcoat is lost. Forthwith he becomes a visitor and his difficulties in making his escape are multiplied indefinitely.

"So you are not feeling very well?" said I, by way of opening the proceedings.

"I'm feeling devilish ill," he replied. "I don't suppose it's anything serious, but it's deuced unpleasant. Little Mary in trouble, you know."

I didn't know, not having heard the expression before, and I looked at him inquiringly, and probably rather vacantly.

"Little Mary," he repeated. "Tummy. Bellyache, to put it bluntly."

"Ha!" said I, with sudden comprehension. "You are suffering from abdominal pain. Is it bad?"

"Is it ever good?" he demanded, with a sour grin.

"It certainly is never pleasant," I admitted. "But is the pain severe?"

"Sometimes," he replied. "It seems to come and go—Whoo!"

A change of facial expression indicated that, just now, it had come. Accordingly, I suspended the conversation until conditions should be more favourable, and, meanwhile, inspected my patient with sympathetic interest. He was not as good-looking as his wife, and his appearance was not improved by a rather deep scar which cut across his right eyebrow, but he made a better impression than she; a strongly-built man, though not large, so far as I could judge, seeing him sitting huddled in his easy chair, of a medium complexion and decidedly lean. He wore his hair rather long and had a well-shaped moustache and a Vandyke beard. Indeed, his appearance in general was distinctly Vandykish, with his brown velvet jacket, his open, deep-pointed collar, and the loose bow with drooping ends which served as a necktie. I also noted that his eyes looked red and irritable like those of a long-sighted person who is in need of spectacles.

"Phoo!" he exclaimed after a spell of silence. "That was a bit of a twister, but it's better now. Going to have a lucid interval, I suppose."

Thereupon I resumed the conversation, which, however, I need not report in detail. I had plenty of time and could afford to encourage him to enlarge on his symptoms, the possible causes of his illness, and his usual habits and mode of life. And as he talked, I looked about me, bearing in mind the advice of my teacher, Dr. Thorndyke, to observe and take note of a patient's surroundings as a possible guide to his personality. In particular I inspected the mantelpiece which confronted me and considered the objects on it in their possible bearings on my patient's habits and life history.

They were rather curious objects; examples of pottery of a singularly uncouth and barbaric type which I set down as the gleanings gathered in the course of travel in distant lands among primitive and aboriginal peoples. There were several bowls and jars, massive, rude and unshapely, of a coarse material like primitive stoneware, and presiding over the whole collection, a crudely modeled effigy of similar material, apparently the artless representation of some forest deity, or, perhaps a portrait of an aboriginal man. The childish crudity of execution carried my thoughts to Darkest Africa or the Ethnographical galleries of the British Museum, or to those sham primitive sculptures which have recently appeared on some of the public buildings in London. I looked again at Mr. Gannet and wondered whether his present trouble might be the aftermath of some tropical illness contracted in the forests or jungles where he had collected these strange and not very attractive curios.

Fortunately, however, I did not put my thoughts into words, but in pursuance of another of Dr. Thorndyke's precepts to "let the patient do most of the talking," listened attentively while Mr. Gannet poured out the tale of his troubles. For, presently, he remarked, after a pause:

"And it isn't only the discomfort. It's such a confounded hindrance. I want to get on with my work."

"By the way, what is your work?" I asked.

"I am a potter," he replied.

"A potter!" I repeated. "I didn't know that there were any pottery works in London—except, of course, Doultons."

"I am not attached to any pottery works," said he. "I am an artist potter, an individual worker. The pieces that I make are what is usually called studio pottery. Those are some of my works on the mantelpiece."

In the vulgar phrase, you could have knocked me down with a feather. For the moment I was bereft of speech and could only sit like a fool, gazing round-eyed and agape at these amazing products of the potter's art, while Gannet observed me gravely, and, I thought, with slight disfavour.

"Possibly," he remarked, "you find them a little over-simplified."

It was not the expression that I should have used, but I grasped at it eagerly.

"I think I had that feeling at the first glance," I replied; "that and the—er—the impression that perhaps—ha—in the matter of precision and—er—symmetry—that is, to an entirely inexperienced eye—er—"

"Exactly!" he interrupted. "Precision and symmetry are what the inexperienced eye looks for. But they are not what the artist seeks. Mechanical accuracy he can leave to the ungifted toiler who tends a machine."

"I suppose that is so," I agreed. "And the—" I was about to say "image" but hastily corrected the word to "statuette"—"that is your work, too?"

"The figurine," he corrected; "yes, that is my work. I was rather pleased with it when I had it finished. And apparently I was justified, for it was extremely well received. The art critics were quite enthusiastic, and I sold two replicas of it for fifty guineas each."

"That was very satisfactory," said I. "It is a good thing to have material reward as well as glory. Did you give it any descriptive title?"

"No," he replied. "I am not like those anecdote painters who must have a title for their pictures. I just called it 'Figurine of a monkey.'"

"Of a—oh, yes. Of a monkey. Exactly!"

I stood up, the better to examine it and then discovered that its posterior aspect bore something like a coil of garden hose, evidently representing a tail. So it obviously was a monkey and not a woodland god. The tail established the diagnosis; even as, in those sculptures that I have mentioned, the absence of a tail demonstrates their human character.

"And I suppose," said I, "you always sign your works?"

"Certainly," he replied. "Each piece bears my signature and a serial number; and, of course, the number of copies of a single piece is rigidly limited. You will see the signature on the base."

With infinite care and tenderness, I lifted the precious figurine and inverted it to examine the base, which I found to be covered with a thick layer of opaque white glaze, rather out of character with the rough grey body but excellent for displaying the signature. The latter was in thin blue lines as if executed with a pen and consisted of something resembling a bird, supported by the letters, "P.G." and underneath, "Op. 571 A."

"The goose is, I suppose," said I, "your sign manual or personal mark—it is a goose, isn't it?"

"No," he replied, a little testily. "It's a gannet."

"Of course it is," I agreed, hastily. "How dull of me not to recognize your rebus, though a gannet is not unlike a goose."

He admitted this, and watched me narrowly as I replaced the masterpiece on the little square of cloth which protected it from contact with the marble shelf. Then it occurred to me that perhaps I had stayed long enough, and as I buttoned my overcoat, I reverted to professional matters with a few parting remarks.

"Well, Mr. Gannet, you needn't be uneasy about yourself. I shall send you some medicine which I think will soon put you right. But if you have much pain, you had better try some hot fomentations or a hot water bottle—a rubber one, of course; and you would probably be more comfortable lying down."

"It's more comfortable sitting by the fire," he objected; and as it appeared that he was the best judge of his own comfort, I said no more, but having shaken hands, took my departure.

As I was descending the stairs, I met a man coming up; a big man who wore a monocle and was carrying a glass jug. He stopped for a moment when he came abreast, and explained:

"I am just taking the invalid some barley water. I suppose that is all right? He asked for it."

"Certainly," I replied. "A most suitable drink for a sick person."

"I'll tell him so," said he, and with this we went our respective ways.

When I reached the hall, I found the dining room door open, and as Mrs. Gannet was visible within, I entered to make my report and give a few directions, to which she listened attentively though with no great appearance of concern. But she promised to see that the patient should take his medicine regularly, and to keep him supplied with hot water bottles, "though," she added, "I don't expect that he will use them. He is not a very tractable invalid."

"Well, Mrs. Gannet," said I, pulling on my gloves, "we must be patient. Pain is apt to make people irritable. I shall hope

to find him better tomorrow. Good morning!”

At intervals during the day, my thoughts reverted to my new patient, but not, I fear, in the way that they should have done. For it was not his abdomen—which was my proper concern—that occupied my attention but his queer pottery and above all, the unspeakable monkey. My reflections oscillated between frank incredulity and an admission of the possibility that these pseudo-barbaric works might possess some subtle quality that I had failed to detect. Yet I was not without some qualifications for forming a judgment, for mine was a distinctly artistic family, Both my parents could draw, and my maternal uncle was a figure painter of some position who, in addition to his pictures, executed small, unpretentious sculptures in terra-cotta and bronze; and I had managed, when I was a student, to spare an evening a week to attend a life class. So I, at least, could draw, and knew what the human figure was like; and when I compared my uncle’s graceful, delicately-finished little statuettes with Gannet’s uncouth effigy, it seemed beyond belief that this latter could have any artistic quality whatever.

Yet it doesn’t do to be too cocksure. It is always possible that one may be mistaken. But yet, again, it doesn’t do to be too humble and credulous; for the simple, credulous man is the natural prey of the quack and the impostor. And the quack and the impostor flourish in our midst. The post-war twentieth century seems to be the golden age of “bunk.”

So my reflections went around and around and brought me to no positive conclusion; and meanwhile, poor Peter Gannet’s abdomen received less attention than it deserved. I assumed that a dose or two of bismuth and soda, with that fine old medicament, once so overrated and now rather under-valued—Compound Tincture of Cardamoms—would relieve the colicky pains and set the patient on the road to recovery; and having dispatched the mixture, I dismissed the medical aspects of the case from my mind.

But the infallible mixture failed to produce the expected effect, for when I called on the following morning, the patient’s condition was unchanged. Which was disappointing (especially to him) but not disturbing. There was no suspicion of anything serious; no fever and no physical signs suggestive of appendicitis or any other grave condition, I was not anxious about him, nor was he anxious about himself, though slightly outspoken on the subject of the infallible mixture, which I promised to replace by something more effectual, repeating my recommendations as to hot water bottles or fomentations.

The new treatment, however, proved no better than the old. At my third visit I found my patient in bed, still complaining of pain and in a state of deep depression. But even now, though the man looked definitely ill, neither exhaustive questioning nor physical examination threw any light either on the cause or the exact nature of his condition. Obviously, he was suffering from severe gastro-intestinal catarrh. But why he was suffering from it, and why no treatment gave him any relief, were mysteries on which I pondered anxiously as I walked home from Jacob Street, greatly out of conceit with myself and inclined to commiserate the man who had the misfortune to be my patient.



## CHAPTER 4. — DR. THORNDYKE TAKES A HAND

IT was on the sixth day of my attendance on Mr. Gannet that my vague but increasing anxiety suddenly became acute. As I sat down by the bedside and looked at the drawn, haggard, red-eyed face that confronted me over the bedclothes, I was seized by something approaching panic. And not without reason. For the man was obviously ill—very ill—and was getting worse from day to day; and I had to admit—and did admit to myself—that I was completely in the dark as to what was really the matter with him. My diagnosis of gastro-enteritis was, in effect, no diagnosis at all. It was little more than a statement of the symptoms; and the utter failure of the ordinary empirical treatment convinced me that there was some essential element in the case which had completely eluded me.

It was highly disturbing. A young, newly established practitioner cannot afford to make a hash of a case at the very outset of his career, as I clearly realized, though to do myself justice, I must say that this was not the consideration that was uppermost in my mind. What really troubled me was the feeling that I had failed in my duty towards my patient and in ordinary professional competence. My heart was wrung by the obvious suffering of the quiet, uncomplaining man who looked to me so pathetically for help and relief—and looked in vain. And then there was the further, profoundly disquieting consideration that the man was now very seriously ill and that if he did not improve, his condition would presently become actually dangerous.

"Well, Mr. Gannet," I said, "we don't seem to be making much progress. I am afraid you will have to remain in bed for the present."

"There's no question about that, Doctor," said he, "because I can't get out, at least I can't stand properly if I do. My legs seem to have gone on strike and there is something queer about my feet; sort of pins and needles, and a dead kind of feeling, as if they had got a coat of varnish over them."

"But," I exclaimed, concealing as well as I could my consternation at this fresh complication, "you haven't mentioned this to me before."

"I hadn't noticed until yesterday," he replied, "though I have been having cramps in my calves for some days. But the fact is that the pain in my gizzard occupies my attention pretty completely. It may have been coming on before I noticed it. What do you suppose it is?"

To this question I gave no direct answer. For I was not supposing at all. To me the new symptoms conveyed nothing more than fresh and convincing evidence that I was completely out of my depth. Nevertheless, I made a careful examination which established the fact that there was an appreciable loss of sensibility in the feet and some abnormal conditions of the nerves of the legs. Why there should be I had not the foggiest idea, nor did I make any great effort to unravel the mystery; for these new developments brought to a definite decision a half-formed intention that I had been harbouring for the last day or two.

I would seek the advice of some more experienced practitioner. That was necessary as a matter of common honesty, to say nothing of humanity. But I had hesitated to suggest a second opinion since that would not only have involved the frank admission that I was graveled—an impolitic proceeding in the case of a young doctor—but it would have put the expense of the consultant's fee on the patient; whereas I felt that, since the need for the consultation arose from my own incompetence, the expense should fall upon me.

"What do you think, Doctor, of my going into a nursing home?" he asked, as I resumed my seat by the bed.

I rather caught at the suggestion, for it seemed to make my plan easier to carry out.

"There is something to be said for a nursing home," I replied. "You would be able to have more constant and skilled attention."

"That is what I was thinking," said he; "and I shouldn't be such a damned nuisance to my wife."

"Yes," I agreed, "there's something in that. I will think about your idea and make a few inquiries; and I will look in again later in the day and let you know the result."

With this I rose, and having shaken his hand, took my departure, closing the door audibly and descending the stairs with a slightly heavy tread to give notice of my approach to the hall. When I arrived there, however, I found no sign of Mrs. Gannet and the dining room door was shut; and glancing towards the hat-rack on which my hat was awaiting me, I noted another hat upon an adjoining peg and surmised that it possibly accounted for the lady's non-appearance. I had seen that hat before. It was a somewhat dandified velour hat which I recognized as appertaining to a certain Mr. Boles—the man whom I had met on the stairs at my first visit and had seen once or twice since—a big, swaggering, rather good-looking young man with a noisy, bullying manner and a tendency to undue familiarity. I had disliked him at sight. I resented his familiarity, I suspected his monocle of a merely ornamental function, and I viewed with faint disapproval his relations with Mrs. Gannet—though, to be sure, they were some sort of cousins, as I had understood from Gannet, and he obviously knew all about their friendship.

So it was no affair of mine. But still, the presence of that hat gave me pause. It is awkward to break in on a tete-a-tete. However, my difficulty was solved by Boles himself, who opened the dining room door a short distance, thrust out his head, and surveyed me through his monocle—or perhaps with the less-obstructed eye.

"Thought I heard you sneaking down, Doc," said he. "How's the sufferer? Aren't you coming in to give us the news?"

I should have liked to pull his nose. But a doctor must learn early to control his temper—especially in the case of a man of Boles's size. As he held the door open, I walked in and made my bow to Mrs. Gannet, who returned my greeting without putting down her needlework. Then I delivered my report, briefly and rather vaguely, and opened the subject of the nursing home. Instantly, Boles began to raise objections.

"Why on earth should he go to a nursing home?" he demanded. "He is comfortable enough here. And think of the expense."

"It was his own suggestion," said I, "and I don't think it a bad one."

"No," said Mrs. Gannet. "Not at all. He would get better attention there than I can give him."

There followed something like a wrangle between the two, to which I listened impassively, inwardly assessing their respective motives. Obviously the lady favoured the prospect of getting the invalid off her hands, while as to Boles, his opposition was due to mere contrariety; to an instinctive impulse to object to anything that I might propose.

Of course, the lady had her way—and I had intended to have mine in any case. So, when the argument had petered out, I took my leave with a promise to return some time later to report progress.

As I turned away from the house, I rapidly considered the position. I had no further visits to make, so for the present, my time was my own; and as my immediate purpose was to seek the counsel of some more experienced colleague, and as my hospital was the most likely place in which to obtain such counsel, I steered a course for the nearest bus route by which I could travel to its neighbourhood. There, having boarded the appropriate omnibus, I was presently delivered at the end of the quiet street in which St. Margaret's Hospital is situated.

It seemed but a few months since I had reluctantly shaken from my feet the dust of that admirable institution and its pleasant, friendly medical school, and now, as I turned into the familiar street, I looked about me with a certain wistfulness as I recalled the years of interesting study and companionship that I had spent here as I slowly evolved from a raw freshman to a fully qualified practitioner. And as, approaching the hospital, I observed a tall figure emerge from the gate and advance towards me, the sight brought back to me one of the most engrossing aspects of my life as a student. For the tall man was Dr. John Thorndyke, a lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence, perhaps the most brilliant and the most popular member of the teaching staff.

As we approached, Dr. Thorndyke greeted me with a genial smile and held out his hand.

"I think," said he, "this is the first time we have met since you fluttered out of the nest."

"We used to call it the incubator," I remarked.

"I think 'nest' sounds more dignified," he rejoined. "There is something rather embryonic about an incubator. And how do you like general practice?"

"Oh, well enough," I replied. "Of course, it isn't as thrilling as hospital practice—though mine happens, at the moment, to be a bit more full of thrills than I care for."

"That sounds as if you were having some unpleasant experiences."

"I am," said I. "The fact is that I am up a tree. That is why I am here. I am going to the hospital to see if one of the older hands can give me some sort of tip."

"Very wise of you, Oldfield," Thorndyke commented. "Would it seem impertinent if I were to ask what sort of tree it is that you are marooned in?"

"Not at all, sir," I replied, warmly. "It is very kind of you to ask. My difficulty is that I have got a rather serious case, and I am fairly graveled in the matter of diagnosis. It seems to be a pretty acute case of gastro-enteritis, but why the fellow should have got it and why none of my treatment should make any impression on it, I can't imagine at all."

Dr. Thorndyke's kindly interest in an old pupil seemed to sharpen into one more definitely professional.

"The term 'gastro-enteritis,'" said he, "covers a good many different conditions. Perhaps a detailed description of the symptoms would be a better basis for discussion."

Thus encouraged, I plunged eagerly into a minute description of poor Gannet's symptoms—the abdominal pain, the obstinate and distressing nausea and physical and mental depression—with some account of my futile efforts to relieve them; to all of which Dr. Thorndyke listened with profound attention. When I had finished, he reflected for a few moments and then asked:

"And that is all, is it? Nothing but the abdominal trouble? No neuritic symptoms, for instance?"

"Yes, by Jove, there are!" I exclaimed. "I forgot to mention them. He has severe cramps in his calves and there is quite distinct numbness of the feet with loss of power in the legs; in fact, he is hardly able to stand, at least so he tells me."

Dr. Thorndyke nodded, and after a short pause, asked:

"And as to the eyes—anything unusual about them?"

"Well," I replied, "they are rather red and watery, but he put that down to reading in a bad light; and then he seems to have a slight cold in his head."

"You haven't said anything about the secretions," Dr. Thorndyke remarked. "I suppose you made all the routine tests?"

"Oh yes," I replied, "most carefully. But there was nothing in the least abnormal; no albumen, no sugar, nothing out of the ordinary."

"I take it," said Thorndyke, "that it did not occur to you to try Marsh's test?"

"Marsh's test!" I repeated, gazing at him in dismay. "Good Lord, no! The idea never entered my thick head. And you think it may actually be a case of arsenic poisoning?"

"It is certainly a possibility," he replied. "The complex of symptoms that you have described is entirely consistent with arsenic poisoning, and it doesn't appear to me to be consistent with anything else."

I was thunderstruck. But yet no sooner was the suggestion made than its obviousness seemed to stare me in the face.

"Of course!" I exclaimed. "It is almost a typical case. And to think that I never spotted it, after attending all your lectures, too! I am a fool. I am not fit to hold a diploma."

"Nonsense, Oldfield," said Thorndyke, "you are not exceptional. The general practitioner nearly always misses a case of poisoning. Quite naturally. His daily experience is concerned with disease, and as the effects of a poison simulate disease, he is almost inevitably misled. He has, by habit, acquired an unconscious bias towards what we may call normal illness; whereas an outsider, like myself, coming to the case with an open mind, or even a bias towards the abnormal, is on the lookout for suspicious symptoms. But we mustn't rush to conclusions. The first thing is to establish the presence or absence of arsenic. That would be a good deal easier if we had him in hospital, but I suppose there would be some difficulty —"

"There would be no difficulty at all, sir," said I. "He has asked me to arrange for him to go to a nursing home."

"Has he?" said Thorndyke. "That almost seems a little significant; I mean that there is a slight suggestion of some suspicions on his own part. But what would you like to do? Will you make the test yourself, and carry on, or would you like me to come along with you and have a look at the patient?"

"It would be an enormous relief to me if you would see him, sir," I replied, "and it is awfully good of you to—"

"Not at all," said Thorndyke. "The question has to be settled, and settled without delay. In a poisoning case, the time factor may be vital. And if we should bring in a true bill, he should be got out of that house at once. But you understand, Oldfield, that I come as your friend. My visit has no financial implications."

I was disposed to protest, but he refused to discuss the matter, pointing out that no second opinion had been asked for by the patient. "But," he added, "we may want some reagents. I had better run back to the hospital and get my research case, which I had left to be called for, and see that it contains all that we are likely to need."

He turned and retraced his steps to the hospital where he entered the gateway, leaving me to saunter up and down the forecourt. In a few minutes he came out, carrying what looked like a small suitcase covered with green Willesden canvas; as there happened to be a disengaged taxi at the main entrance, where it had just set down a passenger, Thorndyke chartered it forthwith. When I had given the driver the necessary directions, I followed my senior into the interior of the vehicle and slammed the door.

During the journey Dr. Thorndyke put a few discreet questions respecting the Gannet household, to which I returned correspondingly discreet answers. Indeed, I knew very little about the three persons—or four, including Boles—of whom it consisted and I did not think it proper to eke out my slender knowledge with surmises. Accordingly I kept strictly to the facts actually known to me, leaving him to make his own inferences.

"Do you know who prepares Gannet's food?" he asked.

"To the best of my belief," I replied, "Mrs. Gannet does all the cooking. The maid is only a girl. But I am pretty sure that Mrs. Gannet prepares the invalid's food; in fact, she told me that she did. There isn't much of it, as you may imagine."

"What is Gannet's business or profession?"

"I understand that he is a potter; an artist potter. He seems to specialize in some sort of stoneware. There are one or two pieces of his in the bedroom."

"And where does he work?"

"He has a studio at the back of the house; quite a big place, I believe, though I haven't seen it. But it seems to be bigger than he needs, as he lets Boles occupy part of it. I don't quite know what Boles does, but I fancy it is something in the goldsmithing and enamelling line."

Here, as the taxi turned from Euston Road into Hampstead Road, Thorndyke glanced out of the window and asked:

"Did I hear you mention Jacob Street to the driver?"

"Yes, that is where Gannet lives. Rather a seedy-looking street. You don't know it, I suppose?"

"It happens that I do," he replied. "There are several studios in it, relics of the days when it was a more fashionable neighbourhood. I knew the occupant of one of the studios. But here we are, I think, at our destination."

As the taxi drew up at the house, we got out and he paid the cabman while I knocked at the door and rang the bell. Almost immediately the door was opened by Mrs. Gannet herself, who looked at me with some surprise and with still more at my companion. I hastened to anticipate questions by a tactful explanation.

"I've had a bit of luck, Mrs. Gannet. I met Dr. Thorndyke, one of my teachers at the hospital, and when I mentioned to him that I had a case which was not progressing very satisfactorily, he very kindly offered to come and see the patient and give me the benefit of his great experience."

"I hope we shall all benefit from Dr. Thorndyke's kindness," said Mrs. Gannet, with a smile and a bow to Thorndyke, "and most of all my poor husband. He has been a model of patience, but it has been a weary and painful business for him. You know the way up to his room."

While we were speaking, the dining room door opened softly and Boles's head appeared in the space, adorned with the inevitable eye-glass through which he inspected Thorndyke critically and was not, himself, entirely unobserved by the latter. But the mutual inspection was brief, for I immediately led the way up the stairs and was closely followed by my senior.

As we entered the sickroom after a perfunctory knock at the door, the patient raised himself in bed and looked at us in evident surprise. But he asked no question, merely turning to me interrogatively; whereupon I proceeded at once concisely to explain the situation "It is very good of Dr. Thorndyke," said Gannet, "and I am most grateful and pleased to see him, for I don't seem to be making much progress. In fact, I seem to be getting worse."

"You certainly don't look very flourishing," said Thorndyke, "and I see that you haven't taken your arrowroot, or whatever it is."

"No," said Gannet, "I tried to take some, but I couldn't keep it down. Even the barley water doesn't seem to agree with me, though I am parched with thirst. Mr. Boles gave me a glassful when he brought it up with the arrowroot but I've been uncomfortable ever since. Yet you'd think that there couldn't be much harm in barley water."

While the patient was speaking, Thorndyke looked at him thoughtfully as if appraising his general appearance, particularly observing the drawn, anxious face and the red and watery eyes. Then he deposited his research case on the table, and remarking that the latter was rather in the way, carried it, with my assistance, away from the bedside over to the window, and in place of it drew up a couple of chairs. Having fetched a writing pad from the research case, he sat down, and without preamble, began a detailed interrogation with reference to the symptoms and course of the illness, writing down the answers in shorthand and noting all the dates. The examination elicited the statement that there had been fluctuations in the severity of the condition, a slight improvement being followed by a sudden relapse. It also transpired that the relapses, on each occasion, had occurred shortly after taking food or a considerable drink. "It seems," Gannet concluded, dismally, "as if starvation was the only possible way of avoiding pain."

I had heard all this before, but it was only now, when the significant facts were assembled by Thorndyke's skilful interrogation, that I could realize their unmistakable meaning. Thus set out they furnished a typical picture of arsenic poisoning. And so with the brief but thorough physical examination. The objective signs might have been taken from a text-book case.

"Well, Doctor," said Gannet, as Thorndyke stood up and looked down at him gravely, "what do you think of me?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that you are very seriously ill and that you require the kind of treatment and attention that you cannot possibly get here. You ought to be in a hospital or a nursing home, and you ought to be removed there without delay."

"I rather suspected that myself," said Gannet; "in fact, the doctor was considering some such arrangement. I'm quite willing."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "if you agree, I can give you a private ward or a cubicle at St. Margaret's Hospital; and as the matter is urgent, I propose that we take you there at once. Could you bear the journey in a cab?"

"Oh, yes," replied Gannet, with something almost like eagerness, "if there is a chance of some relief at the end of it."

"I think we shall soon be able to make you more comfortable," said Thorndyke. "But you had better just look him over, Oldfield, to make sure that he is fit to travel."

As I got out my stethoscope to listen to the patient's heart, Thorndyke walked over to the table, apparently to put away his writing pad. But that was not his only purpose. For as I stooped over the patient with the stethoscope at my ears, I could see him (though the patient could not) carefully transferring some arrowroot from the bowl to a wide-mouthed jar. When he had filled it and put in the rubber stopper, he filled another jar from the jug of barley water and then quietly closed the research case.

Now I understood why he had moved the table away from the bed to a position in which it was out of the range of the patient's vision. Of course, the specimens of food and drink could not have been taken in Gannet's presence without an explanation, which we were not in the position to give; for although neither of us had much doubt on the subject, still, the actual presence of arsenic had yet to be proved.

"Well, Oldfield," said Thorndyke, "do you think he is strong enough to make the journey?"

"Quite," I replied, "if he can put up with the discomfort of traveling in a taxi."

As to this, Gannet was quite confident, being evidently keen on the change of residence.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "perhaps you will run down and explain matters to Mrs. Gannet; and it would be just as well to send out for a cab at once. I suppose Madame is not likely to raise objections?"

"No," I replied. "She has already agreed to his going to a nursing home; and if she finds our methods rather abrupt, I must make her understand that the case is urgent."

The interview, however, went quite smoothly so far as the lady was concerned, though Boles was disposed to be obstructive.

"Do you mean that you are going to cart him off to the hospital now?" he demanded.

"That is what Dr. Thorndyke proposes," I replied.

"But why?" he protested. "You say that there is no question of an operation. Then why is he being hustled off in this way?"

"I think," said I, "if you will excuse me, I had better see about that cab," and I made a move towards the hall, whereupon Mrs. Gannet intervened, a little impatiently.

"Now, don't waste time, Fred. Run along and get a taxi while I go up with the doctor and make Peter ready for the journey."

On this, Boles rather sulkily swaggered out into the hall, and without a word, snatched down the velour hat, jammed it on his head and departed on his quest, slamming the street door after him. As the door closed, Mrs. Gannet turned towards the staircase and began to ascend and I followed, passing her on the landing to open the bedroom door.

When we entered the room, we found Thorndyke standing opposite the mantelpiece, apparently inspecting the stoneware image; but he turned, and bowing to the lady, suavely apologized for our rather hurried proceedings.

"There is no need to send any clothes with him," said he, "as he will have to remain in bed for the present. A warm dressing-gown and one or two blankets or rugs will do for the journey."

"Yes," she replied. "Rugs, I think, will be more presentable than blankets." Then turning to her husband, she asked: "Is there anything that you will want to take with you, Peter?"

"Nothing but my attache case," he replied. "That contains all that I am likely to want, excepting the book that I am reading. You might put that in, too. It is on the small table."

When this had been done, Mrs. Gannet proceeded to make the few preparations that were necessary while Thorndyke resumed his study of the pottery on the mantelpiece. The patient was assisted to rise and sit on the edge of the bed while he was inducted into a thick dressing gown, warm woollen socks and a pair of bedroom slippers.

"I think we are all ready, now," said Mrs. Gannet. Then, as there seemed to be a pause in the proceedings, she took the opportunity to address a question to Thorndyke.

"Have you come to any conclusion," she asked, "as to what it is exactly that my husband is suffering from?"

"I think," Thorndyke replied, "that we shall be able to be more definite when we have had him under observation for a day or two."

The lady looked a little unsatisfied with this answer—which certainly was rather evasive—as, indeed, the patient also seemed to note. But here the conversation was interrupted, providentially, by the arrival of Boles to announce that the cab was waiting.

"And now, old chap," said he, "the question is, how are we going to get you down to it?"

That problem, however, presented no difficulty, for when the patient had been wrapped in the rugs, Thorndyke and I carried him, by the approved ambulance method, down the stairs and deposited him in the taxi, while Boles and Mrs. Gannet brought up the rear of the procession, the latter carrying the invaluable attache case. A more formidable problem was that of finding room in the taxi for two additional large men; but we managed to squeeze in, and amidst valedictory hand wavings from the two figures on the doorstep, the cab started on its journey.

It seemed that Thorndyke must have given some instructions at the hospital for our arrival appeared to be not unexpected. A wheeled chair was quickly procured and in this the patient was trundled, under Thorndyke's direction, through a maze of corridors to the little private ward on the ground floor which had been allotted to him. Here we found a nurse putting the finishing touches to its appointments, and presently the sister from the adjacent ward came to superintend the establishment of the new patient. We stayed only long enough to see Gannet comfortably settled in bed, and then took leave of him; and in the corridor outside we parted after a few words of explanation.

"I am just going across to the chemical laboratories," said Thorndyke, "to hand Professor Woodfield a couple of samples for analysis. I shall manage to see Gannet tomorrow morning, and I suppose you will look in on him from time to time."



“Yes,” I replied. “If I may, I will call and see him tomorrow.”

“But of course you may,” said he. “He is still your patient. If there is anything to report—from Woodfield, I mean—I will leave a note for you with Sister. And now I must be off.”

We shook hands and went our respective ways; and as I looked back at the tall figure striding away down the corridor, research case in hand, I speculated on the report that Professor Woodfield would furnish on a sample of arrowroot and another of barley water.



## CHAPTER 5. — A TRUE BILL

IMPELLED by my anxiety to clear up the obscurities of the Gannet case, I dispatched the only important visit on my list as early on the following morning as I decently could and then hurried off to the hospital in the hope that I might be in time to catch Thorndyke before he left. It turned out that I had timed my visit fortunately, for as I passed in at the main entrance, I saw his name on the attendance board and learned from the hall porter that he had gone across to the school. Thither, accordingly, I directed my steps, but as I was crossing the garden, I met him coming from the direction of the laboratories and turned to walk back with him.

"Any news yet?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "I have just seen Woodfield and had his report. Of the two samples of food that I gave him for analysis, one—some of the arrowroot that you saw—contained no arsenic. The other—a specimen of the barley water—contained three-quarters of a grain of arsenic in the five fluid ounces of my sample. So, assuming that the jug held twenty fluid ounces, it would have contained about three grains of arsenic—that is, of arsenious acid."

"My word!" I exclaimed. "Why, that is a fatal dose, isn't it?"

"It is a possibly fatal dose," he replied. "A two grain dose has been known to cause death, but the effects of arsenic are very erratic. Still, we may fairly well say that if he had drunk the whole jugful, the chances are that it would have killed him."

I shuddered to think of the narrow escape that he—and I—had had. Only just in time had we—or rather Thorndyke—got him away from that house.

"Well," I said, "the detection of arsenic in the barley water settles any doubts that we might have had. It establishes the fact of arsenic poisoning."

"Not quite," Thorndyke dissented. "But we have established the fact by clinical tests. Woodfield and the House Physician have ascertained the presence of arsenic in the patient's body. The quantity was quite small; smaller than I should have expected, judging by the symptoms. But arsenic is eliminated pretty quickly; so we may infer that some days have elapsed since the last considerable dose was taken."

"Yes," said I, "and you were just in time to save him from the next considerable dose, which would probably have been the last. By the way, what are our responsibilities in this affair? I mean, ought we to communicate with the police?"

"No," he replied, very decidedly. "We have neither the duty nor the right to meddle in a case such as this, where the patient is a responsible adult in full control of his actions and his surroundings. Our duty is to inform him of the facts which are known to us and to leave him to take such measures as he may think fit."

That, in effect, is what we did when we had made the ordinary inquiries as to the patient's condition—which, by the way, was markedly improved.

"Yes," Gannet said, cheerfully, "I am worlds better; and it isn't from the effects of the medicine, because I haven't had any. I seem to be recovering of my own accord. Queer, isn't it? Or perhaps it isn't. Have you two gentlemen come to any conclusion as to what is really the matter with me?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "We have ascertained that your illness was due to arsenic poisoning."

Gannet sat up in bed and stared from one to the other of us with dropped jaw and an expression of the utmost astonishment and horror.

"Arsenic poisoning!" he repeated, incredulously. "I can't believe it. Are you sure that there isn't some mistake? It seems impossible."

"It usually does," Thorndyke replied, drily. "But there is no mistake. It is just a matter of chemical analysis, which can be sworn to and proved, if necessary, in a court of law. Arsenic has been recovered from your own body and also from a sample of barley water that I brought away for analysis."

"Oh!" said Gannet, "so it was in the barley water. I suppose you didn't examine the arrowroot?"

"I brought away a sample of it," replied Thorndyke, "and it was examined, but there was no arsenic in it."

"Ha!" said Gannet. "So it was the barley water. I thought there was something wrong with that stuff. But arsenic! This is a regular facer! What do you think I ought to do about it, Doctor?"

"It is difficult for us to advise you, Mr. Gannet," Thorndyke replied. "We know no more than that you have been taking poisonous doses of arsenic. As to the circumstances in which you came to take that poison, you know more than we do. If any person knowingly administered that poison to you, he, or she, committed a very serious crime; and if you know who that person is, it would be proper for you to inform the police."

"But I don't," said Gannet. "There are only three persons who could have given me the arsenic, and I can't suspect any one of them. There is the servant maid. She wouldn't have given it to me. If she had wanted to poison anybody, it would have been her mistress. They don't get on very well, whereas the girl and I are on quite amiable terms. Then there is my

wife. Well, of course, she is outside the picture altogether. And then there is Mr. Boles. He often brought up my food and drink, so he had the opportunity; but I couldn't entertain the idea of his having tried to poison me. I would as soon suspect the doctor—who had a better opportunity than any of them." He paused to grin at me, and then summed up the position. "So, you see, there is nobody whom I could suspect, and perhaps there isn't any poisoner at all. Isn't it possible that the stuff might have got into my food by accident?"

"I wouldn't say that it is actually impossible," Thorndyke replied, "but the improbability is so great that it is hardly worth considering."

"Well," said Gannet, "I don't feel like confiding in the police and possibly stirring up trouble for an innocent party."

"In that," said Thorndyke, "I think you are right. If you know of no reason for suspecting anybody, you have nothing to tell the police. But I must impress on you, Mr. Gannet, the realities of your position. It is practically certain that some person has tried to poison you, and you will have to be very thoroughly on your guard against any further attempts."

"But what can I do?" Gannet protested. "You agree that it is of no use to go to the police and raise a scandal. But what else is there?"

"The first precaution that you should take," replied Thorndyke, "would be to tell your wife all that you know, and advise her to pass on the information to Mr. Boles—unless you prefer to tell him, yourself—and to anyone else whom she thinks fit to inform. The fact that the poisoning has been detected will be a strong deterrent against any further attempts, and Mrs. Gannet will be on the alert to see that there are no opportunities. Then you will be wise to take no food or drink in your own house which is not shared by someone else; and, perhaps, as an extra precaution, it might be as well to exchange your present maid for another."

"Yes," Gannet agreed, with a grin, "there will be no difficulty about that when my wife hears about the arsenic. She'll send the girl packing at an hour's notice."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I think we have said all that there is to say. I am glad to see you looking so much better, and if you continue to improve at the same rate, we shall be able to send you out in a few days to get back to your pottery."

With this, he took leave of the patient, and I went out with him in case he should have anything further to say to me; but it was not until we had passed out at the main entrance and the porter had duly noted his departure, that he broke the silence. Then, as we crossed the court-yard, he asked:

"What did you make of Gannet's statement as to the possible suspects?"

"Not very much," I replied; "but I rather had the feeling that he was holding something back."

"He didn't hold it back very far," Thorndyke commented, with a smile. "I gathered that he viewed Mr. Boles with profound suspicion and that he was not unwilling that we should share that suspicion. By the way, are you keeping notes of this case?"

I had to admit that I had nothing beyond the entries in the Day Book.

"That won't do," said he. "You may not have heard the last of this case. If there should, in the future, be any further developments, you ought not to be dependent on your memory alone. I advise you to write out now, while the facts are fresh, a detailed account of the case, with all the dates and full particulars of the persons who were in any way connected with the affair. I will send you a certified copy of Woodfield's analysis, and I should be interested to see your memoranda of the case to compare with my own notes."

"I don't suppose you will learn much from mine," said I.

"They will be bad notes if I don't," said he. "But the point is that if anything should hereafter happen to Gannet—anything, I mean, involving an inquest or a criminal charge—you and I would be called, or would volunteer, as witnesses, and our evidence ought to agree. Hence the desirability of comparing notes now when we can discuss any disagreements."

Our conversation had brought us to the cross roads; and here, as our ways led in opposite directions, we halted for a few final words and then parted, Thorndyke pursuing his journey on foot and I waiting at the bus stop for my omnibus.

During Gannet's stay in the hospital, I paid him one or two visits, noting his steady improvement and copying into my notebook the entries on his case sheet. But his recovery was quite uneventful, and after a few days, I struck him off my visiting list, deciding to await his return home to wind up the case.

But in the interval I became aware that he had, at least in one particular, acted on Thorndyke's advice. The fact was conveyed to me by Mrs. Gannet, who appeared one evening, in a very disturbed state, in my consulting room. I guessed at once what her mission was, but there was not much need for guessing as she came to the point at once.

"I have been to see Peter this afternoon," said she, "and he has given me a most terrible shock. He told me—quite seriously—that his illness was really not an illness at all, but that his condition was due to poison. He says that somebody had been putting arsenic into his food, and he quotes you and Dr. Thorndyke as his authorities for this statement. Is he off his head or did you really tell him this story?"

"It is perfectly true, Mrs. Gannet," I replied.

"But it can't be," she protested. "It is perfectly monstrous. There is nobody who could have had either the means or the

motive. I prepared all his food with my own hands and I took it up to him myself. The maid never came near it—though I have sent her away all the same—and even if she had had the opportunity, she had no reason for trying to poison Peter. She was really quite a decent girl and she and he were on perfectly good terms. But the whole thing is impossible—fantastic. Dr. Thorndyke must have made some extraordinary mistake.”

“I assure you, Mrs. Gannet,” said I, “that no mistake has been made. It is just a matter of chemical analysis. Arsenic is nasty stuff, but it has one virtue; it can be identified easily and with certainty. When Dr. Thorndyke saw your husband, he at once suspected arsenic poisoning, so he took away with him two samples of the food—one of arrowroot and one of barley water—for analysis.

“They were examined by an eminent analyst and he found in the barley water quite a considerable quantity of arsenic—the whole jugful would have contained enough to cause death. You see, there is no doubt. There was the arsenic in the barley water. It was extracted and weighed, and the exact amount is known; and the arsenic itself has been kept and can be produced in evidence if necessary.”

Mrs. Gannet was deeply impressed—indeed, for the moment, she appeared quite overwhelmed, for she stood speechless, gazing at me in the utmost consternation. At length she asked, almost in a whisper:

“And the arrowroot? I took that up to him, myself.”

“There was no arsenic in the arrowroot,” I replied; and it seemed to me that she was a little relieved by my answer, though she still looked scared and bewildered. I could judge what was passing in her mind, for I realized that she remembered—as I did—who had carried the barley water up to the sickroom. But whatever she thought, she said nothing, and the interview presently came to an end after a few questions as to her husband’s prospects of complete recovery and an urgent request that I should come and see him when he returned from the hospital.

That visit, however, proved unnecessary, for the first intimation that I received of Gannet’s discharge from the hospital was furnished by his bodily presence in my wailing room. I had opened the communicating door in response to the “ting” of the bell (“Please ring and enter”) and behold! there he was with velveteen jacket and Vandyke beard, all complete. I looked at him with the momentary surprise that doctors and nurses often experience on seeing a patient for the first time in his ordinary habiliments and surroundings; contrasting this big, upstanding, energetic-looking man with the miserable, shrunken wretch who used to peer at me so pitifully from under the bedclothes.

“Come to report, sir,” said he, with a mock naval salute, “and to let you see what a fine job you and your colleagues have made of me.”

I shook hands with him and ushered him through into the consulting room, still pleasantly surprised at the completeness of his recovery.

“You didn’t expect to see me looking so well,” said he.

“No,” I admitted. “I was afraid you would feel the effects for some time.”

“So was I,” said he, “and in a sense I do. I am still aware that I have got a stomach; but apart from that dyspeptic feeling, I am as well as I ever was. I am eternally grateful to you and Dr. Thorndyke. You caught me on the hop—just in time. Another few days and I suspect it would have been a case of *Hic jacet*. But what a rum affair it was. I can make nothing of it. Can you? Apparently, it couldn’t have been an accident.”

“No,” I replied. “If the whole household had been poisoned, we might have suspected an accident, but the continued poisoning of one person could hardly have been accidental. We are forced to the conclusion that the poison was administered knowingly and intentionally by some person.”

“I suppose we are,” he agreed, “But what person? It’s a regular corker. There are only three, and two of them are impossible. As to Boles, it is a fact that he brought up that jug of barley water and he poured out half a tumblerful and gave it me to drink. And he has brought me up barley water on several other occasions. But I really can’t suspect Boles. It seems ridiculous.”

“It is not for me to suggest any suspicions,” said I. “But the facts that you mention are rather striking. Are there any other facts? What about your relations with Boles? There is nothing, I suppose, to suggest a motive?”

“Not a motive for poisoning me,” he replied. “It is a fact that Boles and I are not as good friends as we used to be. We don’t hit it off very well nowadays, though we remain, in a sort of way, partners. But I suspect that Boles would have cut it and gone off some time ago if it had not been for my wife. She and he have always been the best of friends—they are distant cousins of some kind—and I think they are quite attached to each other. So Boles goes on working in my studio for the sake of keeping in touch with her. At least, that is how I size things up.”

It seemed to me that this was rather like an affirmative answer to my question, and perhaps it appeared so to him. But it was a somewhat delicate matter and neither of us pursued it any farther. Instead, I changed the subject and asked:

“What do you propose to do about it?”

“I don’t propose to do anything,” he replied. “What could I do? Of course, I shall keep my weather eyelid lifting, but I don’t suppose anything further will happen now that you and Dr. Thorndyke have let the cat so thoroughly out of the bag. I shall just go on working in my studio in the same old way, and I shall make no difference whatever in my relations with

Boles. No reason why I should as I really don't suspect him."

"Your studio is somewhere at the back of the house, isn't it?" I asked.

"At the side," he replied, "across the yard. Come along one day and see it," he added, cordially, "and I will unfold the whole art and mystery of making pottery. Come whenever you like and as soon as you can. I think you will find the show interesting."

As he issued this invitation (which I accepted gladly) he rose and picked up his hat; and we walked out together to the street door and said farewell on the door-step.



## CHAPTER 6. — SHADOWS IN THE STUDIO

PETER GANNET'S invitation to me to visit his studio and see him at work was to develop consequences that I could not then have foreseen; nor shall I hint at them now, since it is the purpose of this narrative to trace the course of events in the order in which they occurred. I merely mention the consequences to excuse the apparent triviality of this part of my story.

At my first visit I was admitted by Mrs. Gannet, to whom I explained that this was a friendly call and not a professional visit. Nevertheless, I loitered awhile to hear her account of her husband and to give a few words of advice. Then she conducted me along the hall to a side door which opened on a paved yard, in which the only salient object was a large galvanized dust-bin. Crossing this yard, we came to a door which was furnished with a large, grotesque, bronze knocker and bore in dingy white lettering the word "Studio."

Mrs. Gannet executed a characteristic rat-tat on the knocker, and without waiting for an answer, opened the door and invited me to enter; I did, and found myself in a dark space, the front of which was formed by a heavy black curtain. As Mrs. Gannet had shut the door behind me, I was plunged in complete obscurity, but groping at the curtain, I presently drew its end aside and then stepped out into the light of the studio.

"Excuse my not getting up," said Gannet, who was seated at a large bench, "and also not shaking hands. Reasons obvious," and in explanation he held up a hand that was plastered with moist clay. "I am glad to see you, Doctor," he continued, adding, "Get that stool from Boles's bench and set it alongside mine."

I fetched the stool and placed it beside his at the bench, and having seated myself, proceeded to make my observations. And very interesting observations they were, for everything that met my eye—the place itself and everything in it—was an occasion of surprise. The whole establishment was on an unexpected scale. The studio, a great barn of a place, evidently, by its immense north window, designed and built as such, would have accommodated a sculptor specializing in colossal statues. The kiln looked big enough for a small factory; and the various accessories—a smaller kiln, a muffle furnace, a couple of grinding mills, a large iron mortar with a heavy pestle, and some other appliances—seemed out of proportion to what I supposed to be the actual output.

But the most surprising object was the artist, himself, considered in connection with his present occupation. Dressed correctly for the part in an elegant gown or smock of blue linen, and wearing a black velvet skull cap, "The Master" was, as I have said, seated at the bench, working at the beginnings of a rather large bowl. I watched him for a while in silent astonishment, for the method of work used by this "Master Craftsman" was that which I had been accustomed to associate with the Kindergarten. It was true that the latter had simply adopted, as suitable for children, the methods of ancient and primitive people, but these seemed hardly appropriate to a professional potter. However, such as the method was, he seemed to be quite at home with it and to work neatly and skilfully; and I was interested to note how little he appeared to be incommoded by a stiff joint in the middle finger of the right hand. Perhaps I might as well briefly describe the process.

On the large bench before him was a stout, square board, like a cook's pastry board, and on this was a plaster "bat," or slab, the upper surface of which had a dome-like projection (now hidden) to impart the necessary hollow to the bottom of the bowl. This latter (I am now speaking from subsequent experience) was made by coiling a roll, or cord, of clay into a circular disc, somewhat like a Catharine-wheel, and then rubbing the coils together with the finger to produce a flat plate. When the bottom was finished and cut true, the sides of the bowl were built up in the same way. At the side of the pastry board was an earthenware pan in which was a quantity of the clay cord, looking rather like a coil of gas tubing, and from this the artist picked out a length, laid it on top of the completed part of the side, and, having carried it round the circumference, pinched it off and then pressed it down lightly, and rubbed and stroked it with his finger and a wooden modelling tool until it was completely united to the part below.

"Why do you pinch it off?" I inquired. "Why not coil it up continuously?"

"Because," he explained, "if you built a bowl by just coiling the clay cord round and round without a break, it would be higher one side than the other. So I pinch it off when I have completed a circle; and you notice that I begin the next tier in a different place, so that the joins don't come over each other. If they did, there would be a mark right up the side of the bowl."

"Yes," I agreed, "I see that, though it hadn't occurred to me. But do you always work in this way?"

"With the clay coils?" said he. "No. This is the quick method and the least trouble. But for more important pieces, to which I seek to impart the more personal and emotional qualities and at the same time to express the highest degree of plasticity, I dispense with the coil and work, as a sculptor does, with simple pellets of clay."

"But," said I, "what about the wheel? I see you have one, and it looks quite a high-class machine. Don't you throw any of your work on it?"

He looked at me solemnly, almost reproachfully, as he replied:

"Never. The machine I leave to the machinist; to the mass-producer and the factory. I don't work for Woolworth's or the crockery shops. I am not concerned with speed of production or quantity of output or mechanical regularity of form. Those things appertain to trade. I, in my humble way, am an artist; and though my work is but simple pottery, I strive to infuse into it qualities that are spiritual, to make it express my own soul and personality. The clay is to me, as it was to other and

greater masters of the medium—such as Della Robbia and Donatello—the instrument of emotional utterance.”

To this I had nothing to say. It would not have been polite to give expression to my views, which were that his claims seemed to be extravagantly disproportionate to his achievements. But I was profoundly puzzled, and became more so as I watched him; for it appeared to me that what he was doing was not beyond my own powers, at least with a little practice, and I found myself half-unconsciously balancing the three obvious possibilities but unable to reach a conclusion.

Could it be that Gannet was a mere impostor, a pretender to artistic gifts that were purely fictitious? Or was he, like those mentally unbalanced “modernists” who honestly believe their crude and childish daubings to be great masterpieces, simply suffering from a delusion? Or was it possible that his uncouth, barbaric bowls and jars did really possess some subtle aesthetic qualities that I had failed to perceive merely from a lack of the necessary special sensibility? Modesty compelled me to admit the latter possibility. There are plenty of people to whom the beauties of nature or art convey nothing, and it might be that I was one of them.

My speculations were presently cut short by a thundering flourish on the knocker, at which Gannet started with a muttered curse. Then the door burst open and Mr. Frederick Boles swaggered into the studio, humming a tune.

“I wish you wouldn’t make that damned row when you come in, Boles,” Gannet exclaimed, irritably.

He cast an angry glance at his partner, or tenant, to which the latter responded with a provocative grin.

“Sorry, dear boy,” said he. “I’m always forgetting the delicate state of your nerves. And here’s the doctor. How de do, Doc? Hope you find your patient pretty well. Hm? None the worse for all that arsenic that they tell me you put into his medicine? Ha ha!”

He bestowed on me an impudent stare through his eyeglass, removed the latter to execute a solemn wink, and then replaced it; after which, as I received his attentions quite impassively (though I should have liked to kick him), he turned away and swaggered across to the part of the studio which appeared to be his own domain, followed by a glance of deep dislike from Gannet which fairly expressed my own sentiments.

Mr. Boles was not a prepossessing person. Nevertheless, I watched his proceedings with some interest, being a little curious as to the kind of industry that he carried on; and presently, smothering my distaste—for I was determined not to quarrel with him—I strolled across to observe him at close quarters. He was seated on a rough, box-like stool, similar to the one which I had borrowed, at an ordinary jeweler’s bench fitted with a gas blowpipe and a tin tray in place of the usual sheep-skin. At the moment he was engaged in cutting with an engraving tool a number of shallow pits in a flattened gold object which might have been a sketchy model of a plaice or turbot. I watched him for some time, a little mystified as to the result aimed at, for the little pits seemed, themselves, to have no determinate shape nor could I make out any plan in their arrangement. At length I ventured on a cautious inquiry.

“Those little hollows, I suppose, form the pattern on this—er—object?”

“Don’t call it an object. Doc,” he protested. “It’s a pendant, or it will be when it is finished; and those hollows will form the pattern—or more properly, the surface enrichment—when they are filled with enamel.”

“Oh, they are to be filled with enamel,” said I, “and the spots of enamel will make the pattern. But I don’t quite see what the pattern represents.”

“Represents!” he repeated, indignantly, fixing his monocle (which he did not use while working) to emphasize the reproachful stare that he turned on me. “It doesn’t represent anything. I’m not a photographer. The enamel spots will just form a symphony of harmonious, gem-like colour with a golden accompaniment. You don’t want representation on a jewel. That can be left to the poster artist. What I aim at is harmony—rhythm—the concords of abstract colour. Do you follow me?”

“I think I do,” said I. It was an outrageous untruth, for his explanation sounded like mere meaningless jargon. “But,” I added, “probably I shall understand better when I have seen the finished work.”

“I can show you a finished piece of the same kind now,” said he; and laying down his work and the scorer, he went to the small cupboard in which he kept his materials and produced from it a small brooch which he placed in my hand and requested me to consider as “a study in polychromatic harmony.”

It was certainly a cheerful and pleasant-looking object but strangely devoid of workmanship (though I noticed, on turning it over, that the pin and catch seemed to be quite competently finished); a simple elliptical tablet of gold covered with irregular-shaped spots of many-coloured enamel distributed over the surface in apparently accidental groups. The effect was as if drops of wax from a number of coloured candles had fallen on it.

“You see,” said Boles, “how each of these spots of colour harmonizes and contrasts with all the others and reinforces them?”

“Yes, I see that,” I replied, “but I don’t see why you should not have grouped the spots into some sort of pattern.”

Boles shook his head. “No,” said he, “that would never do. The intrusion of form would have destroyed the natural rhythm of contrasting colour. The two things must be kept separate. Gannet is concerned with abstract form mainly uncomplicated with colour. My concern is with abstract colour liberated from form.”

I made shift to appear as if this explanation conveyed some meaning to me and returned the brooch with a few

appreciative comments. But I was completely fogged; so much so that I presently took the opportunity to steal away in order that I might turn matters over in my mind.

It was quite a curious problem. What was it that was really going on in that studio? There was a singular air of unreality about the industries that were carried on there. Gannet, with his archaic pottery, had been difficult enough to accept as a genuine artist; but Boles was even more incredible. And different as the two men were in all other respects, they were strangely alike in their special activities. Both talked what sounded like inflated, pretentious nonsense. Both assumed the airs of artists and virtuosi. And yet each of them appeared to be occupied with work which—to my eye—showed no sign of anything more than the simplest technical skill, and nothing that I could recognize as artistic ability.

Yet I had to admit that the deficiency might be in my own powers of perception. The curious phase of art known as “modernism” made me aware of widespread taste for pictures and sculpture of a pseudo-barbaric or primitive type; and the comments of the art critics on some of these works were not so very unlike the stuff that I had heard from Boles and Gannet. So perhaps these queer productions were actually what they professed to be and I was just a Philistine who couldn’t recognize a work of art when I saw it.

But there was one practical question that rather puzzled me. What became of these wares? Admittedly, neither of these men worked for the retail shops. Then how did they dispose of their works, and who bought them? Both men were provided with means and appliances on a quite considerable scale and it was to be presumed that their output corresponded to the means of production; moreover, both were apparently obtaining a livelihood by their respective industries. Somewhere there must be a demand for primitive pottery and barbaric jewelry. But where was it? I decided—though it was none of my business—to make a few cautious inquiries.

Another matter, of more legitimate interest to me, was that of the relations of these two men. Ostensibly they were friends, comrades, fellow-workers, and in a sense, partners. But real friends they certainly were not. That had been frankly admitted by Gannet; and even if it had not been, his dislike of Boles was manifest and hardly dissembled. And, of course, it was natural enough if he suspected Boles of having tried to poison him, to say nothing of the rather doubtful relations of that gentleman with Mrs. Gannet. Indeed, I could not understand why, if he harboured this suspicion—of which Thorndyke seemed to entertain no doubt—he should have allowed the association to continue.

But if Gannet’s sentiments towards Boles were unmistakable, the converse was by no means true. Boles’s manners were not agreeable. They were coarse and vulgar—excepting when he was talking “high-brow”—and inclined to be rude. But though he was a bounder he was not consciously uncivil, and—so far as I could at present judge—he showed no signs of unfriendliness towards Gannet. The dislike appeared to be all on the one side.

Yet there must have been something more than met the eye. For if it was the fact—and I felt convinced that it was—that Boles had made a deliberate, cold-blooded attempt to poison Gannet, that attempt implied a motive which, to put it mildly, could not have been a benevolent one.

These various problems combined to make the studio a focus of profound interest to me, and as my practice at this period was productive principally of leisure, I spent a good deal of my time there; more, indeed, than I should have if Gannet had not made it so plain that my visits were acceptable. Sometimes I wondered whether it was my society that he enjoyed, or whether it might have been that my frequenting the studio gave him some sort of feeling of security. It might easily have been so, for, whenever I found him alone, I took the opportunity to satisfy myself that all was well with him. At any rate, he seemed always glad to see me, and for my part, I found the various activities of the two workers interesting to watch, quite independently of the curious problems arising out of their very odd relations.

By degrees my status changed from that of a mere spectator to something like that of a co-worker. There were many odd jobs to be done requiring no special skill and in these I was able to “lend a hand.” For instance, there was the preparation of the “grog”—why so-called I never learned, for it was a most unconvivial material, being simply a powder made by pounding the fragments of spoiled or defective earthenware or broken saggars and used to temper the clay to prevent it from cracking in the fire. The broken pots or saggars were pounded in a great iron mortar until they were reduced to small fragments, when the latter were transferred to the grog mill and ground to powder. Then the powder was passed through a series of sieves, each marked with the number of meshes to the inch, and the different grades of powder—coarse, medium and fine—stored in their appropriate bins.

Then there was the plaster work. Both men used plaster, and I was very glad to learn the technique of mixing, pouring and trimming. Occasionally, Gannet would make a plaster mould of a successful bowl or jar (much to my surprise, for it seemed totally opposed to his professed principles) and “squeeze” one or two replicas; a process in which I assisted until I became quite proficient. I helped Boles to fire his queer-looking enamel plaques and to cast his uncouth gold ornaments and took over some of the pickling and polishing operations. And then, finally, there was the kiln, which interested me most of all. It was a coal-fired kiln and required a great deal of attention both before and during the firing. The preparation of the kiln Gannet attended to himself, but I stood by and watched his methods; observed the way in which he stacked the pieces, bedded in ground flint or bone-ash—he mostly used bone-ash—in the “saggars” (fire-clay cases or covers to protect the pieces from the flames) and at length closed the opening of the kiln with slabs of fire-clay.

But when the actual firing began, we were all kept busy. Even Boles left his work to help in feeding the fires, raking out the ashes and clearing the hearths, leaving Gannet free to control the draught and modify the fire to the required intensity. I was never able to observe the entire process from start to finish, for even at this time my practice called for some attention; but I was present on one occasion at the opening of the kiln—forty-eight hours after the lighting of the fires—and



noted the care with which Gannet tested the temperature of the pieces before bringing them out into the cool air.

One day when I was watching him as he built up a wide-mouthed jar from a rough drawing—an extraordinarily rough drawing, very unskilfully executed, as I thought—which lay on the bench beside him, he made a new suggestion.

“Why shouldn’t you try your hand at a bit of pottery, Doctor?” said he. “Just a simple piece. The actual building isn’t difficult and you’ve seen how I do it. Get some of the stoneware body out of the bin and see what sort of job you can make of it.”

I was not very enthusiastic about built pottery, for recently I had purchased a little treatise on the potter’s art and had been particularly thrilled by the directions for “throwing” on the wheel. I mentioned the fact to Gannet, but he gave me no encouragement. For some reason he seemed to have an invincible prejudice against the potter’s wheel.

“It’s all right for commercial purposes,” said he, “for speed and quantity. But there’s no soul in the mechanical stuff. Building is the artist’s method; the skilled hand translating thought directly into form.”

I did not contest the matter. With a regretful glance at the wheel, standing idle in its corner, I fetched a supply of the mixed clay from the bin and proceeded to roll it into cords on the board that was kept for the purpose. But it occurred to me as an odd circumstance that, hating the wheel as he appeared to, he should have provided himself with one.

“I didn’t buy the thing,” he explained, when I propounded the question. “I took over this studio as a going concern from the executors of the previous tenant. He was a more or less commercial potter and his outfit suited his work. It doesn’t suit mine. I don’t want the wheel or that big mixing mill and I would sooner have had a smaller, gas-fired kiln. But the place was in going order and I got it dirt cheap with the outfit included, so I took it as it was and made the best of it.”

My first attempt, a simple bowl, was no great success, being distinctly unsymmetrical and lopsided. But Gannet seemed to think quite well of it—apparently for these very qualities—and even offered to fire it. However, it did not satisfy me, and eventually I crumpled it up and returned it to the clay-bin, whence, after re-moistening, it emerged to be rolled out into fresh coils of cord. For I was now definitely embarked on the industry. The work had proved more interesting than I had expected, and as usually happens in the case of any art, the interest increased as the difficulties began to be understood and technical skill developed and grew.

“That’s right, Doctor,” said Gannet. “Keep it up and go on trying; and remember that the studio is yours whenever you like to use it, whether I am here or not.” (As a matter of fact, he frequently was not, for both he and Boles took a good many days off, and rather oddly, I thought, their absences often coincided.) “And you needn’t trouble to come in through the house. There is a spare key of the wicket which you may as well have. I’ll give it to you now.”

He took a couple of keys from his pocket and handed me one, whereby I became, in a sense, a joint tenant of the studio. It was an insignificant circumstance, and yet, as so often happens, it developed unforeseen consequences, one of which was a little adventure for the triviality of which I offer no apology since it, in its turn, had further consequences not entirely irrelevant to this history.

It happened that on the very first occasion on which I made use of the key, I found the studio vacant, and the condition of the benches suggested that both my fellow tenants were taking a day off. On the bench that I used was a half-finished pot, covered with damp cloths. I removed these and fetched a fresh supply of moist clay from the bin with the intention of going on with the work, when the wheel happened to catch my eye; instantly I was assailed by a great temptation. Here was an ideal opportunity to satisfy my ambition; to try my prentice hand with this delightful toy, which, to me, embodied the real romance of the potter’s art.

I went over to the wheel and looked at it hungrily. I gave it a tentative spin and tried working the treadle, and finding it rather stiff, fetched Boles’s oil can and applied a drop of oil to the pivots. Then I drew up a stool and took a few minutes’ practice with the treadle until I was able to keep up a steady rotation. It seemed quite easy to me, as I was accustomed to riding a bicycle, and I was so far encouraged that I decided to try my skill as a thrower. Placing a basin of water beside the wheel, I brought the supply of clay from the bench, and working it into the form of a large dumpling, slapped it down on the damped hardwood disc, and having wetted my hands, started the rotation with a vigorous spin.

The start was not a perfect success, as I failed to centre the clay ball correctly and put on too much speed, with the result that the clay flew off and hit me in the stomach. However, I collected it from my lap, replaced it on the wheel-head, and made a fresh start with more care and caution. It was not so easy as it had appeared. Attending to the clay, I was apt to forget the treadle, and then the wheel stopped; and when I concentrated on the treadle, strange things happened to the clay. Still, by degrees, I got the “hang” of the process, recalling the instructions in my handbook and trying to practice the methods therein prescribed.

It was a fascinating game. There was something almost magical in the behaviour of the revolving clay. It seemed, almost of its own accord, to assume the most unexpected shapes. A light pressure of the wet hands and it rose into the form of a column, a cylinder or a cone. A gentle touch from above turned it miraculously into a ball; and a little pressure of the thumbs on the middle of the ball hollowed it out and transformed it into a bowl. It was wonderful and most delightful. And all the transformations had the charm of unexpectedness. The shapes that came were not designed by me; they simply came of themselves, and an inadvertent touch instantly changed them into something different and equally surprising.

For more than an hour I continued, with ecstatic pleasure and growing facility, to play this incomparable game. By that time, however, signs of bodily fatigue began to make themselves felt, for it was a pretty strenuous occupation, and it

occurred to me that I had better get something done. I had just made a shallow bowl (or, rather, it had made itself), and as I took it gently between my hands, it rose, narrowed itself, and assumed the form of a squat jar with slightly in-turned mouth. I looked at it with pleased surprise. It was really quite an elegant shape and it seemed a pity to spoil it by any further manipulation. I decided to let well alone and treat it as a finished piece.

When I took my foot off the treadle and let the wheel run down, some new features came into view. The jar at rest was rather different from the jar spinning. Its surface was scored all over with spiral traces of "the potter's thumb," which stamped it glaringly as a thrown piece. This would not quite answer my purpose, which was to practice a playful fraud on Peter Gannet by foisting the jar on him as a built piece. The telltale spirals would have to be eliminated and other deceptive markings substituted.

Accordingly, I attacked it cautiously with a modelling tool and a piece of damp sponge, stroking it lightly in vertical lines and keeping an eye on one of Gannet's own jars, until all traces of the wheel had been obliterated and the jar might fairly have passed for a hand-built piece. Of course, a glance at the inside, which I did not dare to touch, would have discovered the fraud, but I took the chance that the interior would not be examined.

The next problem was the decoration. Gannet's usual method—following the tradition of primitive and barbaric ornament—was either to impress an encircling cord into the soft clay or to execute simple thumb-nail patterns. He did not actually use his thumb-nail for this purpose. A bone mustard-spoon produced the same effect and was more convenient. Accordingly I adopted the mustard-spoon, with which I carried a sort of rude guilloche round the jar, varied by symmetrically placed dents, made with the end of my clinical thermometer. Finally, becoming ambitious for something more distinctive, I produced my latch-key, and, having made a few experiments on a piece of waste clay, found it quite admirable as a unit of pattern, especially if combined with the thermometer. A circle of key impressions radiating from a central thermometer dent produced a simple but interesting rosette which could be further developed by a circle of dents between the key-marks. It was really quite effective, and I was so pleased with it that I proceeded to enrich my masterpiece with four such rosettes, placing them as symmetrically as I could (not that the symmetry would matter to Gannet) on the bulging sides below the thumb-nail ornaments.

When I had finished the decoration and tidied it up with the modelling tool I stood back and looked at my work, not only with satisfaction but with some surprise. For, rough and crude as it was, it appeared to my possibly indulgent eye quite a pleasant little pot; and comparing it with the row of Gannet's works which were drying on the shelf, I asked myself once again what could be the alleged subtle qualities imparted by the hand of the master?

Having made a vacancy on the shelf by moving one of Gannet's pieces from the middle to the end, I embarked on the perilous task of detaching my jar from the wheel-head. The instrument that I employed was a thin wire with a wooden handle at each end, which we used for cutting slices of clay; a dangerous tool, for a false stroke would have cut the bottom off my jar. But Providence, which—sometimes—watches over the activities of the tyro, guided my hand, and at last the wire emerged safely, leaving the jar free of the surface to which it had been stuck. With infinite care and tenderness—for it was still quite soft—I lifted it with both hands and carried it across to the shelf, where I deposited it safely in the vacant space. Then I cleaned up the wheel, obliterating all traces of my unlawful proceedings, threw my half-finished built piece back into the clay-bin, and departed, chuckling over the surprise that awaited Gannet when he should come to inspect the pieces that were drying on the shelf.

As events turned out, my very mild joke fell quite flat, so far as I was concerned, for I missed the denouement. A sudden outbreak of measles at a local school kept me so busy that my visits to the studio had to be suspended for a time, and when at last I was able to make an afternoon call, the circumstances were such as to occupy my attention in a more serious and less agreeable manner. As this episode was later to develop a special significance, I shall venture to describe it in some detail.

On this occasion, I did not let myself in, as usual, by the wicket, for at the end of Jacob Street I overtook Mrs. Gannet and we walked together to the house, which I entered with her. It seemed that she had some question to ask her husband, and when I had opened the side door, she came out to walk with me across the yard to the studio. Suddenly, as we drew near to the latter, I became aware of a singular uproar within; a clattering and banging, as if the furniture were being thrust about and stools overturned, mingled with the sound of obviously angry voices. Mrs. Gannet stopped abruptly and clutched my arm.

"Oh, dear," she exclaimed, "there are those two men quarreling again. It is dreadful. I do wish Mr. Boles would move to another workshop. If they can't agree, why don't they separate?"

"They don't hit it off very well, then?" I suggested, listening attentively and conscious of a somewhat unfortunate expression—for they seemed to be hitting it off rather too well.

"No," she replied, "especially since—you know. Peter thinks Mr. Boles gave him the stuff, which is ridiculous, and Mr. Boles—I think I won't go in now," and with this she turned about and retreated to the house, leaving me standing near the studio door, doubtful whether I had better enter boldly or follow the lady's discreet example and leave the two men to settle their business.

It was very embarrassing. If I went in, I could not pretend to be unaware of the disturbance. On the other hand, I did not like to retreat when my intervention might be desirable. Thus I stood hesitating between considerations of delicacy and expediency until a furious shout in Boles's voice settled the question.

"You're asking for it, you know!" he roared; whereupon, flinging delicacy to the winds, I rapped on the door with my knuckles and entered. I had opened the door deliberately and rather noisily and I now stood for a few moments in the dark lobby behind the curtain while I closed it after me in the same deliberate manner to give time for any necessary adjustments. Sounds of quick movement from within suggested that these were being made, and when I drew aside the curtain and stepped in, the two men were on opposite sides of the studio. Gannet was in the act of buttoning a very crumpled collar and Boles was standing by his bench, on which lay a raising hammer that had a suspicious appearance of having been hastily put down there. Both men were obviously agitated: Boles, purple-faced, wild-eyed and furiously angry; Gannet, breathless, pale and venomous.

I greeted them in a matter-of-fact tone as if I had noticed nothing unusual, and went on to excuse and explain the suspension of my visits. But it was a poor pretense, for there were the overturned stools and there was Boles, scowling savagely and still trembling visibly, and there was that formidable-looking hammer the appearance of which suggested that I had entered only just in time.

Gannet was the first to recover himself, though even Boles managed to growl out a sulky greeting, and when I had picked up a fallen stool and seated myself on it, I made shift to keep up some sort of conversation and to try to bring matters back to a normal footing. I glanced at the shelf, but it was empty. Apparently the pieces that I had left drying on it had been fired and disposed of. What had happened to my jar, I could not guess and did not very much care. Obviously, the existing circumstances did not lend themselves to any playful interchanges between Gannet and me, nor did they seem to lend themselves to anything else; and I should have made an excuse to steal away but for my unwillingness to leave the two men together in their present moods.

I did not, however, stay very long; no longer, in fact, than seemed desirable. Presently, Boles, after some restless and apparently aimless rummaging in his cupboard, shut it, locked its door, and with a sulky farewell to me, took his departure; and as I had no wish to discuss the quarrel and Gannet seemed to be in a not very sociable mood, I took an early opportunity to bring my visit to an end.

It had been a highly disagreeable episode, and it had a permanent effect on me. Thenceforward, the studio ceased to attract me. Its pleasant, friendly atmosphere seemed to have evaporated. I continued to look in from time to time, but rather to keep an eye on Gannet, than to interest myself in the works of the two artists. Like Mrs. Gannet, I wondered why these two men, hating each other as they obviously did, should perversely continue their association. At any rate, the place was spoiled for me by the atmosphere of hatred and strife that seemed to pervade it, and even if the abundance of my leisure had continued—which it did not—I should still have been but an occasional visitor.

---

## CHAPTER 7. — MRS. GANNET BRINGS STRANGE TIDINGS

THE wisdom of our ancestors has enriched us with the precept that the locking of the stable door fails in its purpose of security if it is postponed until after the horse has been stolen. Nevertheless (since it is so much easier to be wise after the event than before) this futile form of post-caution continues to be prevalent; of which truth my own proceedings furnished an illustrative instance. For having allowed my patient to be poisoned with arsenic under my very nose, and that, too, in the crudest and most blatant fashion, I now proceeded to devote my leisure to an intense study of Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology.

Mine, however, was not a truly representative case. The actual horse had indeed been stolen, but still the stable contained a whole stud of potential horses. I might, and probably should, never encounter another case of poisoning in the practice of a life-time. On the other hand, I might meet with one tomorrow; or if not a poisoning case, perhaps some other form of crime which lay within the province of the medical jurist. There seemed to be plenty of them, judging by the lurid accounts of the authorities whose works I devoured, and I began almost to hope that my labours in their study would not be entirely wasted.

It was natural that my constant preoccupation with the detection and demonstration of crime should react more or less on my habitual state of mind. And it did. Gradually I acquired a definitely Scotland Yardish outlook and went about my practice—not neglectful, I trust, of the ordinary maladies of my patients—with the idea of criminal possibilities, if not consciously present, yet lurking on the very top surface of the subconscious. Little did my innocent patients or their equally innocent attendants suspect the toxicological balance in which symptoms and ministrations alike were being weighed; and little did the worthy Peter Gannet guess that, even while he was demonstrating the mysteries of stoneware, my perverted mind was canvassing the potentialities of the various glazes that he used for indirect and secret poisoning.

I mention these mental reactions to my late experience and my recent profound study of legal medicine in explanation of subsequent events. And I make no apology. The state of mind may seem odd, but yet it was very natural. I had been caught napping once and I didn't intend to be caught again; and that involved these elaborate precautions against possibilities whose probability was almost negligible.

It happened on a certain evening that in the intervals of my evening consultations, my thoughts turned to my friend, Peter Gannet. It was now some weeks since I had seen him, my practice having of late made a temporary spurt and left me little leisure. I had also been acting as locum tenens for the Police Surgeon, who was on leave; this further diminished my leisure and possibly accentuated the state of mind that I have described. Nevertheless, I was a little disposed to reproach myself, for, solitary man as he was, he had made it clear that he was always pleased to see me. Indeed, it had seemed to me that I was the only friend that he had, for certainly Boles could not be regarded in that light; and if the quarrel between them had given me a distaste for the studio, that very occurrence did, in fact, emphasize those obligations of friendship which had led me at first visit to the studio.

I had then felt that it was my duty to keep an eye on him, since some person had certainly tried to poison him. That person had some reason for desiring his death and had no scruple about seeking to compass it; and as the motive, presumably, still existed, there was no denying that, calmly as he had taken the position, Peter Gannet stood definitely in peril of a further and more successful attempt—to say nothing of the chance of his being knocked on the head with a raising hammer in the course of one of his little disagreements with Boles. I ought not to have left him so long without at least a brief visit of inspection.

Thus reflecting, I decided to walk round to the studio as soon as the consultations were finished and satisfy myself that all was well; and as the time ran on and no further patients appeared, my eye turned impatiently to the clock, the hands of which were creeping towards eight, when I should be free to go. There were now only three minutes to run and the clock had just given the preliminary hiccup by which clocks announce their intention to strike, when I heard the door of the adjoining waiting room open and close, informing me that a last minute patient had arrived.

It was very provoking; but after all it was what I was there for. So dismissing Gannet from my mind, I rose, opened the communicating door and looked into the waiting room.

The visitor was Mrs. Gannet and at the first glance at her my heart sank. For her troubled, almost terrified, expression told me that something was seriously amiss; and my imagination began instantly to frame lurid surmises.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Gannet?" I asked, as I ushered her through into the consulting room. "You look very troubled."

"I am very troubled," she replied. "A most extraordinary and alarming thing has happened. My husband has disappeared."

"Disappeared!" I repeated in astonishment. "Since when?"

"That I can't tell you," she answered. "I have been away from home for about a fortnight, and when I came back I found the house empty. I didn't think much of it at the time, as I had said, when I wrote to him, that I was not certain as to what time I should get home, and I simply thought that he had gone out. But then I found my letter in the letter box, which seemed very strange, as it must have been lying there two days. So I went up and had another look at his bedroom, but everything was in order there. His bed had not been slept in—it was quite tidily made—and his toilet things and hair brushes were in their usual place. Then I looked over his wardrobe, but none of his clothes seemed to be missing excepting

the suit that he usually wears. And then I went down to the hall to see if he had taken his stick or his umbrella, but he hadn't taken either. They were both there; and what was more remarkable, both his hats were on their pegs."

"Do you mean to say," I exclaimed, "that there was no hat missing at all?"

"No. He has only two hats, and they were both there. So it seems as if he must have gone away without a hat."

"That is very extraordinary," said I. "But surely your maid knows how long he has been absent."

"There isn't any maid," she replied. "Our last girl, Mabel, was under notice and she left a week before I went away; and, as there was no time to get a fresh maid, Peter and I agreed to put it off until I came back. He said that he could look after himself quite well and get his meals out if necessary. There are several good restaurants near."

"Well, I waited all yesterday in hopes of his return and I sat up until nearly one in the morning, but he never came home, and there has been no sign of him today."

"You looked in at the studio, I suppose?" said I.

"No, I didn't," she replied almost in a whisper. "That is why I have come to you. I couldn't summon up courage to go there."

"Why not?" I asked.

"I was afraid," she answered in the same low, agitated tone, "that there might be something—something there that—well, I don't quite know what I thought, but you know—"

"Yes, I understand," said I, rising—for the clock had struck and I was free. "But that studio ought to be entered at once. Your husband may have had some sudden attack or seizure and be lying there helpless."

I went out into the hall and wrote down on the slate the address where I was to be found if any emergency should arise. Then Mrs. Gannet and I set forth together, taking the short cuts through the back streets, with which I was now becoming quite familiar. We walked along at a quick pace, exchanging hardly a word, and as we went, I cogitated on the strange and disquieting news that she had brought. There was no denying that things had a decidedly sinister aspect. That Gannet should have gone away from home hatless and unprovided with any of his ordinary kit, and leaving no note or message, was inconceivable. Something must have happened to him. But what? My own expectation was that I should find his dead body in the studio, and that was evidently Mrs. Gannet's, too, as was suggested by her terror at the idea of seeking him there. But that terror seemed to me a little unnatural. Why was she so afraid to go into the studio, even with the expectation of finding her husband dead? Could it be that she had some knowledge or suspicion that she had not disclosed? It seemed not unlikely. Even if she had not been a party to the poisoning, she must have known, or at least strongly suspected who the poisoner was; and it was most probable that she had been able to guess at the motive of the crime. But she would then realize, as I did, that the motive remained and might induce another crime.

When we reached the house, I tried the wicket in the studio gate, but it was locked, and the key which Gannet had given me was not in my pocket. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gannet had opened the street door with her latch-key and we entered the house together.

"Are you coming into the studio with me?" I asked, as we went through the hall to the side door that opened on the yard.

"No," she replied. "I will come with you to the door and wait outside until you have seen whether he is there or not."

Accordingly, we walked together across the yard, and when we came to the studio door, I tried it. But it was locked; and an inspection by means of my flashlight showed that it had been locked from the inside and that the key was in the lock.

"Now," said I, "what are we to do? How are we going to get in?"

"There is a spare key," she replied. "Shall I go and get it?"

"But," I objected, "we couldn't get it into the lock. There is a key there already. And the wicket is locked, too. Have you got a spare key of that?"

She had, so we returned to the house, where she found the key and gave it to me. And as I took it from her trembling hand, I could see—though she made no comment—that the locked door with the key inside had given her a further shock. And certainly it was rather ominous. But if the wicket should prove also to be locked from the inside, all hope or doubt would be at an end. It was, therefore, with the most acute anxiety that I hurried out into the street, leaving her standing in the hall, and ran to the wicket. But to my relief, the key entered freely and turned in the lock and I opened the little gate and stepped through into the studio. Lighting myself across the floor with my flashlight I reached the switch and turned it on, flooding the place with light. A single glance around the studio showed that there was no one in it, alive or dead. Thereupon, I unlocked the yard door and threw it open, when I perceived Mrs. Gannet standing outside.

"Well, he isn't here," I reported, whereupon she came, almost on tiptoe, into the lobby and peered round the curtain.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed, "what a relief! But still, where can he be? I can't help thinking that something must have happened to him."

As I could not pretend to disagree with her, I made no reply to this, but asked: "I suppose you have searched the house thoroughly?"

"I think so," she replied, "and I don't feel as if I could search any more. 'But if you would be so kind as to take a look round and make sure that I haven't overlooked anything—"

"Yes," said I, "I think that would be just as well. But what are you going to do tonight? You oughtn't to be in the house all alone."

"I couldn't be," she replied. "Last night was dreadful, but now my nerves are all on edge. I couldn't endure another night. I shall go to my friend, Miss Hughes—she lives in Mornington Crescent—and see if she will come and keep me company."

"It would be better if she would put you up for the night," said I.

"Yes, it would," she agreed. "Much better. I would rather not stay in this house tonight. As soon as you have made your inspection, I will run round and ask her."

"You needn't wait for me," said I. "Go round to her at once, as it is getting late. Give me the number of her house and I will call on my way home and tell you whether I have discovered any clue to the mystery."

She closed with this offer immediately, being, evidently, relieved to get away from the silent, desolate house. I walked back with her across the yard, and when I had escorted her to the street door and seen her start on her mission, I closed the door and went back into the house, not displeased to have the place to myself and the opportunity to pursue my investigations at my leisure and free from observation.

I made a very thorough examination, beginning with the attics at the very top of the house and working my way systematically downwards. On the upper floors there were several unoccupied rooms, some quite empty and others more or less filled with discarded furniture and miscellaneous lumber. All these I searched minutely, opening up every possible—and even impossible—hiding-place, and peering, with the aid of my pocket flashlight, into the dim and musty recesses of the shapeless closets in the corners of the roof or under the staircases. In the occupied bedrooms I knelt down to look under the beds, I opened the cupboards and wardrobes and prodded the clothes that hung from the pegs to make sure that they concealed no other hanging object. I even examined the chimneys with my lamp and explored their cavities with my walking-stick, gathering a little harvest of soot up my sleeves but achieving no other result and making no discoveries, excepting that, when I came to examine Gannet's bedroom, I noticed that the pots and pans and the effigy of the monkey had disappeared from the mantelpiece.

It was an eerie business and seemed to become more so (by a sort of autosuggestion) as I explored one room after another. By the time I had examined the great stone-paved kitchen and the rather malodorous scullery and searched the cavernous, slug-haunted cellars, even probing the mounds of coal with my stick, I had worked myself up into a state of the most horrid expectancy.

But still there was no sign of Peter Gannet. The natural conclusion seemed to be that he was not there. But this was a conclusion that my state of mind made me unable to accept. His wife's statement set forth that he had disappeared in his ordinary indoor apparel, in which it was hardly imaginable that he could have gone away from the house. But if he had not, then he must be somewhere on the premises. Thus I argued, with more conviction than logic, as I ascended the uncarpeted basement stairs, noting the surprisingly loud sound that my footsteps made as they broke in on the pervading silence.

As I passed into the hall, I paused at the hat-stand to verify Mrs. Gannet's statement. There were the two hats, sure enough; a shabby, broad-brimmed, soft felt which I knew well by sight, and a rather trim billycock which I had never seen him wear, but which bore his initials in the crown, as I ascertained by taking it down and inspecting it. And there was his stick, a rough oak crook, and his umbrella with a legible P. G. on the silver band. There was also another stick which I had never seen before and which struck me as being rather out of character with the Bohemian Gannet; a smart, polished cane with a gilt band and a gilt tip to the handle. I took it out of the stand, and as it seemed to me rather long, I lifted out the oak stick and compared the two, when I found that the cane was the longer by a full inch. There was nothing much in this, and as the band bore no initials, I was putting it back in the stand when my eye caught a minute monogram on the gilt tip. It was a confused device, as monograms usually are, but eventually I managed to resolve it into the two letters F. and B.

Then it was pretty certain that the stick belonged to Frederick Boles. From which it followed that Boles had been to the house recently. But there was nothing abnormal in this, since he worked pretty regularly in the studio and usually approached it through the house. But why had he left his stick? And why had Mrs. Gannet made no mention of it, or, indeed, of Boles himself? For if he had been working here, he must have known when Gannet was last seen, for unless he had a latch-key, he must have been admitted by Gannet himself. Turning this over in my mind, I decided, before leaving the house, to take another look at the studio. It had certainly been empty when I had looked in previously, and there were no large cupboards or other possible hiding places. Still there was the chance that a more thorough examination might throw some light on Gannet's activities and on the question as to the time of his disappearance. Accordingly, I passed out by the side door, and crossing the yard, opened the studio door, switched on the lights, drew aside the curtain and stepped in.



## CHAPTER 8. — DR. OLDFIELD MAKES SURPRISING DISCOVERIES

ON entering the studio, I halted close by the curtain and stood awhile surveying the vast, desolate, forbidding interior with no definite idea in my mind. Obviously, there was no one there, dead or alive, nor any closed space large enough to form a hiding place. And yet as I stood there, the creepy feeling that had been growing on me as I had searched the house seemed to become even more intense. It may have been that the deathly silence and stillness of the place, which I had known only under the cheerful influence of work and companionship, cast a chill over me.

At any rate, there I stood, vaguely looking about me with a growing uncomfortable feeling that this great, bare room which had been the scene of Gannet's labours and the centre of his interests, had been in some way connected with his unaccountable disappearance.

Presently my vague, general survey gave place to a more detailed inspection. I began to observe the various objects in the studio and to note what they had to tell of Gannet's recent activities. There was the potter's wheel, carefully cleaned—though never used—according to his invariable orderly practice, and there was a row of "green" unfired jars drying on a shelf until they should be ready for the kiln. But when I looked at the kiln itself, I was struck by something quite unusual, having regard to Gannet's habitual tidiness. The fire-holes which led into the interior of the kiln were all choked with ash; and opposite to each was a large mound of the ash which had been raked out during the firing and left on the hearths. Now, this was singularly unlike Gannet's practice. Usually, as he raked out the ash, he shovelled it up into a bucket and carried it out to the ash-bin in the yard; and as soon as the fires were out, he cleared each of the fireplaces of the remaining ash, leaving them clean and ready for the next firing.

Here, then, was something definitely abnormal. But there was a further discrepancy. The size of the mounds made it clear that there had been a rather prolonged firing and a "high fire." But where were the fired pieces? The shelves on which the pots were usually stored after firing were all empty and there was not a sign of any pottery other than the unfired jars. The unavoidable conclusion was that the "batch" must be still in the kiln. But if this were so, then Gannet's disappearance must have coincided with the end of the firing. But that seemed entirely to exclude the idea of a voluntary disappearance. It was inconceivable that he should have gone away leaving the fires still burning and the kiln unopened.

However, there was no need to speculate. The question could be settled at once by opening the kiln if it was sufficiently cool to handle. Accordingly, I walked over to it and cautiously touched the outside brick casing, which I found to be little more than lukewarm, and then I boldly unlatched and pulled open the big iron, fire-clay lined door, bringing into view the loose fire-bricks which actually closed the opening. As these, too, were only moderately warm, I proceeded to lift them out, one by one, which I was able to do the more easily since they had been only roughly fitted together.

It was not really necessary for me to take them all out, for, as soon as the upper tier was removed, I was able to throw the beam of my flashlight into the interior. And when I did so, I discovered, to my astonishment, that the kiln was empty.

The mystery, then, remained. Indeed, it grew more profound. For not only was the problem as to what had become of the fired pottery still unsolved, but there was the remarkable fact that the kiln must have been opened while it was still quite hot; a thing that Gannet would never have done, since a draught of cold air on the hot pottery would probably result in a disaster. And when I took away the rest of the fire-bricks and the interior of the kiln was fully exposed to view, another anomaly presented itself. The floor of the kiln, which during the firing would be covered with burnt flint or bone-ash, was perfectly clean. It had been carefully and thoroughly swept out, and this while the kiln was hot and while the fire-holes remained choked with ash.

As to the missing pottery, there was one possibility, though an unlikely one. It might have been treated with glaze and put into the glost oven. But it had not, for when I opened the oven and looked in, I found it empty and showing no sign of recent use.

It was all very strange; and the strangeness of it did nothing to allay my suspicion that the studio held the secret of Gannet's disappearance. I prowled round with uneasy inquisitiveness, scrutinizing all the various objects in search of some hint or leading fact. I examined the grog mill and noted that something white had been recently ground in it, and apparently ground dry, to judge by the coating of fine powder on the floor around it. I looked into the big iron mortar and noted that some white material had been pounded in it. I examined the rows of cupels on the shelves by Boles's little muffle, noted that they were badly made and of unusually coarse material, and wondered when Boles had made them. I even looked into the muffle—finding nothing, of course—and observing that the floor of the studio seemed to have been washed recently, speculated on the possible reason for this very unusual proceeding.

But speculation got me no more forward. Obviously, there was something abnormal about the kiln. There had been a prolonged and intense fire, but of the fired ware there was not a trace. What conceivable explanation could there be of such an extraordinary conflict of facts? The possibility occurred to me that the whole batch might have been disposed of by a single transaction or sent to an exhibition. But a moment's reflection showed me that this would not do. There had not been time for the batch to be cooled, finished, glazed and refired, for the kiln was still quite warm inside.

The rough, box-like stool that Gannet had made to sit on at the bench was standing near the kiln. I slipped my hand through the lifting hole and drew the stool up to the open door in order more conveniently to examine the interior. But the examination yielded nothing. I threw the beam of light from my flashlight into every corner, but it simply confirmed my original observation. The kiln was empty, and no trace of its late contents remained beyond the few obscure white smears

that the brush had left on the fire-clay floor.

I sat there for some minutes facing the open door and reflecting profoundly on this extraordinary problem. But I could make nothing of it, and at length, I started up to renew my explorations. For it had suddenly occurred to me that I had forgotten to examine the contents of the bins. But as I rose and turned round, I noticed a small white object on the floor which had evidently been covered by the stool before I had moved it. I stooped and picked it up, and at the first glance at it all my vague and formless suspicions seemed to run together into a horrible certainty.

The little object was the ungual phalanx, or terminal joint, of a finger—apparently a forefinger—burned to the snowy whiteness characteristic of incinerated bone. It was unmistakable. For if I lacked experience in some professional matters, at least my osteology was fresh; and as the instant recognition flashed on me, I stood as if rooted to the ground, staring at the little relic with a shuddering realization of all that it meant.

The mystery of the absent pottery was solved. There had never been any pottery. That long and fierce fire had burned to destroy the evidence of a hideous crime. And the other mysteries, too, were solved. Now I could guess what the white substance was that had been ground in the grog mill; how it came that the hastily-made cupels were of such abnormally coarse material; and why it had been necessary to wash the studio floor. All the anomalies now fell into a horrid agreement and each served to confirm and explain the others.

I laid the little fragile bone tenderly on the stool and proceeded to re-examine the place by the light of this new and dreadful fact. First I went to the shelves by Boles's muffle and looked over the cupels, taking them in my hand the better to examine them. Their nature was now quite obvious. Instead of the finely powdered bone-ash of which they were ordinarily composed, they had been made by cramming fragments of crushed, incinerated bone into the cupel press; and the cohesion of these was so slight that one of the cupels fell to pieces in my hand.

Laying the loose fragments on the shelf, I turned away to examine the bins, of which there was a row standing against the wall. I began with the clay-bins, containing the material for the various "bodies"—stoneware, earthenware and porcelain. But when I lifted the lids, I saw that they contained clay and could contain nothing else. The grog-bins were nearly empty and showed nothing abnormal, and the same was true of the plaster-bin, though I took the precaution of dipping my hand deeply into the plaster to make sure that there was nothing underneath. When I came to the bone-ash-bin I naturally surveyed it more critically; for here, with the aid of the mill, the residue of a cremated body could have been concealed beyond the possibility of recognition.

I lifted off the lid and looked in, but at the first glance perceived nothing unusual. The bin was three parts full, and its contents appeared to be the ordinary finely powdered ash. But I was not prepared to accept the surface appearances. Rolling my sleeve up above the elbow, I thrust my hand deep down into the ash, testing its consistency by working it between my fingers and thumb. The result was what the cupels had led me to expect. About eight inches from the surface, the feel of the fine, smooth powder gave place to a sensation as if I were grasping a mixture of gravel and sand with occasional fragments of appreciable size. Some of these I brought up to the surface, dropping them into my other hand and dipping down for further specimens until I had collected a handful, when I carried them over the cupel shelves and, having deposited them on a vacant space, picked out one or two of the larger fragments and carried them across to the modelling stand to examine them by the light of the big studio lamp.

Of course, there could be no doubt as to their nature. Even to the naked eye, the characteristic structure of bone was obvious, and rendered more so by the burning away of the soft tissues. But I confirmed the diagnosis with the aid of my pocket lens, and then, having replaced the fragments on the shelf, I put the lid back on the bin and began seriously to consider what I should do next. There was no need for further exploration. I had all the essential facts. I now knew what had happened to Peter Gannet, and any further elucidation lay outside my province and within that of those whose business it is to investigate crime.

Before leaving the studio, I looked about for some receptacle in which to pack the little finger bone; for I knew that it would crumble at a touch, and that, as it was the one piece of undeniable evidence, it must be preserved intact at all costs. Eventually I found a nearly empty match box, and, having tipped out the remaining matches and torn a strip from my handkerchief, I rolled the little relic in this, packed it tenderly in the match box and bestowed the latter in my breast pocket. Then I took up my stick and prepared to depart; but just as I was starting towards the door, it occurred to me that I might as well take a few of the small fragments from the bin to examine more thoroughly at my leisure. Not that I had any doubts as to their nature, but the microscope would put the matter beyond dispute. Accordingly, I collected a handful from the shelf, and having wrapped them in the remainder of my handkerchief, put the little parcel in my pocket and then made my way to the door, switched off the lights and went out, taking the door-key with me.

Coming out from the glare of the studio into the darkness, I had to light myself across the yard with my flashlight, and, as I flashed it about, its beam fell on the big rubbish-bin which stood in a corner waiting for the dustman. For a moment, I was disposed to stop and explore it; but then I reflected that it was not my concern to seek further details, and as it was getting late and I still had to report to Mrs. Gannet, I went on into the house, and passing through the hall, let myself out into the street.

The distance from Jacob Street to Mornington Crescent is quite short; all too short for the amount of thinking that I had to do on the way thither. For it was only when I had shut the door and set forth on my errand that the awkwardness of the coming interview began to dawn on me. What was I to say to Mrs. Gannet? As I asked myself the question, I saw that it involved two others. The first was, how much did she know? Had she any suspicion that her husband had been made away



with? I did not for a moment believe that she had been privy to the gruesome events that the studio had witnessed, but her agitation, her horror at the idea of spending the night in the house, and above all, her strange fear of entering the studio, justified the suspicion that, even if she knew nothing of what had happened, she had made some highly pertinent surmises.

Then, how much did I know? I had assumed quite confidently that a body had been cremated in the kiln and that the body was that of Peter Gannet. And I believed that I could name the other party to that grim transaction. But here I recalled Dr. Thorndyke's oft-repeated warnings to his students never to confuse inference or belief with knowledge and never to go beyond the definitely ascertained facts. But I had done this already; and now when I revised my convictions by the light of this excellent precept, I realized that the actual facts that I had ascertained (though they justified my inferences) were enough only to call for a thorough investigation.

Then should I tell Mrs. Gannet simply what I had observed and leave her to draw her own conclusions? Considered, subject to my strong distrust of the lady, this course did not commend itself. In fact, it was a very difficult question, and I had come to no decision when I found myself standing on Miss Hughes's door-step, and in response to my knock, the door was opened by Mrs. Gannet herself.

Still temporizing in my own mind, I began by expressing the hope that Miss Hughes was able to accommodate her.

"Yes," she replied, as she ushered me into the drawing room, "I am glad to say that she can give me the spare bedroom. She has been most kind and sympathetic. And how have you got on? You have been a tremendous time. I expected you at least half an hour ago."

"The search took quite a long time," I explained, "for I went through the whole house from the attics to the cellars and examined every nook and corner."

"And I suppose you found nothing, after all?"

"Not a trace in any part of the house."

"It was very good of you to take so much trouble," said she. "I don't know how to thank you and you such a busy man, too. I suppose you didn't go into the studio again?"

"Yes," I replied. "I thought I would have another look at it, in rather more detail, and I did pick up some information there as to the approximate time when he disappeared, for I opened the big kiln and found it quite warm inside. I don't know how long it takes to cool. Do you?"

"Not very exactly," she answered, "but quite a long time, I believe, if it is kept shut up. At any rate, the fact that it was warm doesn't tell us much more than we know. It is all very mysterious, and I don't know what on earth to do next."

"What about Mr. Boles?" I suggested. "He must have been at the studio some time quite lately. Wouldn't it be as well to look him up and see if he can throw any light on the mystery?"

She shook her head, disconsolately. "I have," she said. "I went to his flat yesterday and again this morning, but I could get no answer to my knocking and ringing. And the caretaker man in the office says that he hasn't seen him for about a week, though he has been on the lookout for him on account of a parcel that the postman left. He has been up to the flat several times, but could get no answer. And there hasn't been any light in the windows at night. So he must be away from home."

"Did he know when you would be returning?"

"Yes," she replied. "And there is another strange thing. I wrote and told him what day I should be back and asked him to drop in and have tea with me. But he not only never came, but he didn't even answer my letter."

I reflected on this new turn of events, which seemed less mysterious to me than it appeared to her. Then I cautiously approached the inevitable proposal.

"Well, Mrs. Gannet," said I, "it is, as you say, all very mysterious. But we can't just leave it at that. We have got to find out what has happened to your husband; and as we haven't the means of doing it ourselves, we must invoke the aid of those who have. We shall have to apply for help to the police."

As I made this proposal, I watched her attentively and was a little relieved to note that it appeared to cause her no alarm. But she was not enthusiastic.

"Do you think it is really necessary?" she asked. "If we call in the police, it will be in all the papers and there will be no end of fuss and scandal; and after all, he may come back tomorrow."

"I don't think there is any choice," I rejoined, firmly. "The police will have to be informed sooner or later, and they ought to be notified at once while the events are fresh and the traces more easy to follow. It would never do for us to seem to have tried to hush the affair up."

That last remark settled her. She agreed that perhaps the police had better be informed of the disappearance, and to my great satisfaction, she asked me to make the communication.

"I don't feel equal to it," said she, "and as you have acted as police surgeon and know the officers, it will be easier for you. Hadn't you better have the latch-key in case they want to look over the house?"

"But won't you want it yourself?" I asked.

"No," she replied. "Miss Hughes has invited me to stay with her for the present. Besides, I have a spare key and I brought it away with me; and of course, if Peter should come back, he has his own key."

With this she handed me the latch-key and when I had pocketed it I took my leave and set forth at a swinging pace for home, hoping that I should find no messages awaiting me and that a substantial meal would be ready for instant production. I was very well pleased with the way in which the interview had gone off and congratulated myself on having kept my own counsel. For now I need not appear in the investigation at all. The police would, of course, examine the studio, and the discoveries that they would make, on my prompting, could be credited to them.

When I let myself in, I cast an anxious glance at the message slate and breathed a benediction on the blank surface that it presented. And as a savoury aroma ascending from the basement told me that all was well there, too, I skipped off to the bathroom, there to wash and brush joyfully and reflect on the delight of being really hungry—under suitable conditions.

As I disposed of the excellent dinner—or supper—that my thoughtful housekeeper had provided, it was natural that I should ruminate on the astonishing events of the last few hours. And now that the excitement of the chase had passed off, I began to consider the significance of my discoveries. Those discoveries left me in no doubt (despite Thorndyke's caution) that my friend, Peter Gannet, had been made away with; and I owed it to our friendship, to say nothing of my duty as a good citizen, to do everything in my power to establish the identity of the murderer in order that he—or she—might be brought within the grasp of the law.

Now who could it be that had made away with my poor friend? I had not the faintest doubt as to, at least, the protagonist in that horrid drama. In the very moment of my realization that a crime had been committed, I had confidently identified the criminal. And my conviction remained unshaken. Nevertheless, I turned over the available evidence as it would have to be presented to a stranger and as I should have to present it to the police.

What could we say with certainty as to the personality of the murderer? In the first place, he was a person who had access to the studio. Then he knew how to prepare and fire the kiln. He understood the use and management of the grog mill and of the cupel press, and he knew which of the various bins was the bone-ash-bin. But, so far as I knew, there was only one person in the world to whom this description would apply—Frederick Boles.

Then, to approach the question from the other direction, were there any reasons for suspecting Boles? And the answer was that there were several reasons. Boles had certainly been at the house when Gannet was there alone, and had thus had the opportunity. He had now unaccountably disappeared, and his disappearance seemed to coincide with the date of the murder. He had already, to my certain knowledge, violently assaulted Gannet on at least one occasion. But far more to the point was the fact that he was under the deepest suspicion of having made a most determined attempt to kill Gannet by means of poison. Indeed, the word "suspicion" was an understatement. It was nearly a certainty. Even the cautious Thorndyke had made no secret of his views as to the identity of the poisoner. It was at this stage of my reflections that I had what, I think, Americans call a 'hunch'—a brain wave, or inspiration. Boles had made at least one attempt to poison poor Gannet. We suspected more than one attempt, but of the one I had practically no doubt. Now one of the odd peculiarities of the criminal mind is its strong tendency to repetition. The coiner, on coming out of prison, promptly returns to the coining industry; the burglar, the forger, the pickpocket, all tend to repeat their successes or even their failures. So, too, the poisoner, foiled at a first attempt, tries again, not only by the same methods, but nearly always makes use of the same poison.

Now Boles had been alone in the house with Gannet. He had thus had the opportunity, and it might be assumed that he had the means. Was it possible that he might have made yet another attempt and succeeded? It was true that the appearances rather suggested violence, and that this would be, from the murderer's point of view, preferable to the relatively slow method of poisoning. Nevertheless, a really massive dose of arsenic, if it could be administered, would be fairly rapid in its effects; and after all, in the assumed circumstances, the time factor would not be so very important.

But there was another consideration. Supposing Boles had managed to administer a big, lethal dose of arsenic, would any trace of the poison be detectable in the incinerated remains of the body? It seemed doubtful, though I had no experience by which to form an opinion. But it was certainly worth while to try; for if the result of the trial should be negative, no harm would have been done, whereas if the smallest trace of arsenic should be discoverable, demonstrable evidence of the highest importance would have been secured.

I have mentioned that, since the poisoning incident, I had taken various measures to provide against any similar case in the future, and among other precautions, I had furnished myself with a very complete apparatus for the detection of arsenic. It included the appliances for Marsh's test—not the simple and artless affair that is used for demonstration in chemistry classes, but a really up-to-date apparatus, capable of the greatest delicacy and precision. And as a further precaution, I had made several trial analyses with it to make sure that, should the occasion arise, I could rely on my competence to use it.

And now the occasion had arisen. It was not a very promising one, as the probability of a positive result seemed rather remote. But I entered into the investigation with an enthusiasm that accelerated considerably my disposal of the rest of my dinner, and as soon as I had swallowed the last mouthful, I rose and proceeded forthwith to the dispensary which served also as a laboratory. Here I produced from my pocket the match box containing the finger bone and the parcel of crushed fragments from the bin. The match box I opened and tenderly transferred the little bone to a corked glass tube with a plug of cotton wool above and below it, and put the tube away in a locked drawer. Then I opened the parcel of fragments and embarked on the investigation.

I began by examining one or two of the fragments with a low power of the microscope and thereby confirming beyond all doubt my assumption that they were incinerated bone; and having disposed of this essential preliminary, I fell to work on the chemical part of the investigation. With the details of these operations—which, to tell the truth, I found rather tedious and troublesome—I need not burden the reader. Roughly, and in bare outline, the procedure was as follows: First, I divided the heap of fragments into two parts, reserving one part for further treatment if necessary. The other part I dissolved in strong hydrochloric acid and distilled the mixture into a receiver containing a small quantity of distilled water; a slow and tedious business which tried my patience severely, and which was, after all, only a preliminary to the actual analysis. But at last, the fluid in the retort dwindled to a little half-dry residue, whereupon I removed the lamp and transferred my attention to the Marsh's apparatus. With this I made the usual preliminary trial to test the purity of the reagents and then set the lamp under the hard glass exit tube, watching it for several minutes after it had reached a bright red heat. As there was no sign of any darkening or deposit in the tube, I was satisfied that my chemicals were free from arsenic—as indeed I knew them to be from previous trials.

And now came the actual test. Detaching the receiver from the retort, I emptied its contents—the distilled fluid—into a well-washed measure glass and from this poured it slowly, almost drop by drop, into the thistle funnel of the flask in which the gas was generating. I had no expectation of any result—at least, so I persuaded myself. Nevertheless, as I poured in the “distillate” I watched the exit tube with almost tremulous eagerness. For it was my first real analysis; and after all the trouble that I had taken, a completely negative result would have seemed rather an anticlimax. Hence the yearning and half-expectant eye that turned ever towards the exit tube.

Nevertheless, the result, when it began to appear, fairly astonished me. It was beyond my wildest hopes. For even before I had finished pouring in the distillate, a dark ring appeared on the inside of the glass exit tube, just beyond the red hot portion, and grew from moment to moment in intensity and extent until a considerable area of the tube was covered with a typical “arsenic mirror.” I sat down before the apparatus and watched it ecstatically, moved not only by the natural triumph of the tyro who has “brought it off” at the first trial, but by satisfaction at the thought that I had forged an instrument to put into the hands of avenging justice.

For now the cause of poor Gannet's death was established beyond cavil. My original surmise was proved to be correct. By some means, the murderer had contrived to administer a dose of arsenic so enormous as to produce an immediately fatal result. It must have been so. The quantity of the poison in the body must have been prodigious; for even after the considerable loss of arsenic in the kiln, there remained in the ashes a measurable amount, though how much I had not sufficient experience to judge.

I carried the analysis no farther. The customary procedure is to cut off the piece of tube containing the “mirror” of metallic arsenic and subject it to a further, confirmatory test. But this I considered unnecessary and, in fact, undesirable. Instead, I carefully detached the tube from the flask and, having wrapped it in several layers of paper, packed it in a cardboard postal tube and put it away with the finger bone in readiness for my interview with the police on the morrow.

---

## CHAPTER 9. — INSPECTOR BLANDY INVESTIGATES

ON the following morning, as soon as I had disposed of the more urgent visits, I collected the proceeds of my investigations—the finger bone, the remainder of the bone fragments, and the glass tube with the arsenic mirror—and bustled off to the police station, all agog to spring my mine and set the machinery of the law in motion. My entry was acknowledged by the sergeant, who was perched at his desk, with an affable smile and the inquiry as to what he could do for me.

“I wanted rather particularly to see the Superintendent, if he could spare me a few minutes,” I replied.

“I doubt whether he could,” said the sergeant. “He’s pretty busy just now. Couldn’t I manage your business for you?”

“I think I had better see the Superintendent,” I answered. “The matter is one of some urgency and I don’t know how far it might be considered confidential. I think I ought to make my communication to him, in the first place.”

“Sounds mighty mysterious,” said the sergeant, regarding me critically, “however, we’ll see what he says. Go in, Dawson, and tell the Superintendent that Dr. Oldfield wants to speak to him and that he won’t say what his business is.”

On this, the constable proceeded to the door of the inner office, on which he knocked, and having been bidden in a loud, impatient voice to “come in,” went in. After a brief delay, occupied probably by explanations, he reappeared, followed by the Superintendent, carrying in one hand a large note-book and in the other a pencil. His expression was not genial, but rather irritably interrogative, conveying the question, “Now, then. What about it?” And in effect, that was also conveyed by his rather short greeting.

“I should like to have a few words with you, Superintendent,” I said, humbly.

“Well,” he replied, “they will have to be very few. I am in the middle of a conference with an officer from Scotland Yard. What is the nature of your business?”

“I have come to inform you that I have reason to believe that a murder has been committed,” I replied.

He brightened up considerably at this, but still he accepted the sensational statement with disappointing coolness.

“Do you mean that you think, or suspect, that a murder has been committed?” he asked in an obviously sceptical tone.

“It is more than that,” I replied. “I am practically certain. I came to give you the facts that are known to me; and I have brought some things to show you which I think you will find pretty convincing.”

He reflected for a moment; then, still a little irritably, he said:

“Very well. You had better come in and let us hear what you have to tell us.”

With this, he indicated the open door, and when I had passed through, he followed me and closed it after us.

As I entered the office I was confronted by a gentleman who was seated at the table with a number of papers before him. A rather remarkable-looking gentleman, slightly bald, with a long, placid face and a still longer, and acutely pointed nose, and an expression in which concentrated benevolence beamed on an undeserving world. I don’t know what his appearance suggested, but it certainly did not suggest a detective inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department. Yet that was his actual status, as appeared when the Superintendent introduced him to me—by the name of Blandy—adding:

“This is Dr. Oldfield who has come to give us some information about a case of suspected murder.”

“How good of him!” exclaimed Inspector Blandy, rising to execute a deferential bow and beaming a benediction on me as he pressed my hand with affectionate warmth. “I am proud, sir, to make your acquaintance. I am always proud to make the acquaintance of members of your learned and invaluable profession.”

The Superintendent smiled sourly and offered me a chair.

“I suppose, Inspector,” said he, “we had better adjourn our other business and take the doctor’s information?”

“Surely, surely,” replied Blandy. “A capital crime must needs take precedence. And as the doctor’s time is even more valuable than ours, we can rely on him to economize both.”

Accordingly, the Superintendent, with a distinct return to the “what about it?” expression, directed me shortly to proceed, which I did; and bearing in mind the Inspector’s polite hint, I plunged into the matter without preamble.

I need not record my statement in detail since it was but a repetition, suitably condensed, of the story that I have already told. I began with the disappearance of Peter Gannet, went on to my search of the house (to which the Superintendent listened with undissembled impatience) and then to my examination of the studio and my discoveries therein, producing the finger bone and the packet of fragments in corroboration. To the latter part of my statement both officers listened with evidently aroused interest, asking only such questions as were necessary to elucidate the narrative; as, for instance, how I came to know so much about the kiln and Gannet’s method of work.

At the conclusion of this part of my statement, I paused while the two officers pored over the little bone in its glass container and the open package of white, coral-like fragments. Then I prepared to play my trump card. Taking off the paper wrapping from the cardboard case, I drew out from the latter the glass tube and laid it on the table.

The Superintendent glared at it suspiciously while the Inspector picked it up and regarded it with deep and benevolent

interest.

"To my untutored eye," said he, "this dark ring seems to resemble an arsenic mirror."

"It is an arsenic mirror," said I.

"And what is its connection with these burnt remains?" the Superintendent demanded.

"That arsenic," I replied, impressively, "was extracted from a quantity of bone fragments similar to those that I have handed to you;" and with this, I proceeded to give them an account of my investigations with the Marsh's apparatus, to which the Superintendent listened with open incredulity.

"But," he demanded, when I had finished, "what on earth led you to test these ashes for arsenic? What suggested to you that there might be arsenic in them?"

Of course, I had expected this question, but yet, curiously enough, I was hardly ready for it. The secret of the poisoning had been communicated to Gannet, but otherwise I had, on Thorndyke's advice, kept my own counsel. But now this was impossible. There was nothing for it but to give the officers a full account of the poisoning affair, including the fact that the discovery had been made and confirmed by Dr. Thorndyke.

At the mention of my teacher's name, both men pricked up their ears, and the Superintendent commented:

"Then Dr. Thorndyke would be available as a witness."

"Yes," I replied, "I don't suppose he would have any objection to giving evidence on the matter."

"Objection be blowed!" snorted the Superintendent, "He wouldn't be asked. He could be subpoenaed as a common witness to the fact that this man, Gannet, was suffering from arsenic poisoning. However, before we begin to talk of evidence, we have got to be sure that there is something like a prima facie case. What do you think, Inspector?"

"I agree with you, Superintendent, as I always do," the Inspector replied. "We had better begin by checking the doctor's observations on the state of affairs in Gannet's studio. If we find the conditions to be as he has described them—which I have no doubt that we shall—and if we reach the same conclusions that he has reached, there will certainly be a case for investigation."

"Yes," the Superintendent agreed. "But our conclusions on the primary facts would have to be checked by suitable experts; and I suppose an independent analysis would be desirable. The doctor's evidence is good enough, but counsel likes to produce a specialist with a name and a reputation."

"Very true," said the Inspector. "But the analysis can wait. It is quite possible that the arsenic issue may never be raised. If we find clear evidence that a human body has been burned to ashes in that kiln, we shall have the very strongest presumptive evidence that a murder has been committed. The method used doesn't really concern us, and an attempt to prove that deceased was killed in some particular manner might only confuse and complicate the case."

"I was thinking," said the Superintendent, "of what the doctor has told us about the attempt to poison Gannet. The presence of arsenic in the bones might point to certain possible suspects, considered in connection with that previous attempt."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the Inspector, "if we could prove who administered that arsenic. But we can't. And if Gannet is dead, I don't see how we are going to, he being the only really competent witness. No, Superintendent. My feeling is that we shall be wise to ignore the arsenic, or at any rate keep it up our sleeves for the present. But to come back to the immediate business, we want to see that studio, Doctor. How can it be managed without making a fuss?"

"Quite easily," I replied. "I have the keys, and I have Mrs. Gannet's permission to enter the house and to admit you, if you want to inspect the premises. I could hand you the keys if necessary, but I would much rather admit you myself."

"And very proper, too," said the Inspector. "Besides, we should want you to accompany us, as you know all about the studio and we don't. Now when could you manage the personally conducted exploration? The sooner the better, you know, as the matter is rather urgent."

"Well," I replied, "I have got several visits to make, and it is about time that I started to make them. It won't do for me to neglect my practice."

"Of course it won't," the Inspector agreed. "If duty calls you must away; and after all, a live patient is better than a dead potter. What time shall we say?"

"I think I shall be clear by four o'clock. Will that do?"

"It will do for me," replied the Inspector, glancing inquiringly at his brother officer; and as the latter agreed, it was arranged that they should call at my house at four o'clock and that we should proceed together to the studio.

As I rose to depart, my precious mirror tube—despised by Blandy but dear to me—caught my eye, and I proceeded unostentatiously to resume possession of it, remarking that I would take care of it in case it should ever be wanted. As neither officer made any objection, I returned it to its case; and the packet of bone ash having served its purpose, I closed it and slipped it into my pocket with the tube.

On leaving the police station, I glanced rapidly through the entries in my visiting list, and having planned out a

convenient route, started on my round, endeavouring—none too successfully—to banish from my mind all thoughts of the Gannet mystery that I might better concentrate my attention on the clinical problems that my patients presented. But if I suffered some distraction from my proper business, there was compensation in the matter of speed, for I dispatched my round of visits in record time, and even after a leisurely lunch, found myself with half an hour to spare before my visitors were due to arrive. This half hour I spent with my hat on, pacing my consulting room in an agony of apprehension lest an inopportune professional call should hinder me from keeping my appointment. But fortunately no message came, and punctually at four o'clock Inspector Blandy was announced and conducted me to a large roomy car which was drawn up outside the house.

"The Superintendent couldn't come," Blandy explained, as he ushered me into the car. "But it doesn't matter. This is not a case for the local police. If there is anything in it, the C.I.D. will have to carry out the investigation."

"And what are you proposing to do now?" I asked.

"Just to check your report," he replied. "Personally, having seen you and noted your careful and exact methods, I accept it without any hesitation. But our people take nothing on hearsay if they can get observed facts, so I must be in a position to state those facts on my own knowledge and the evidence of my own eyesight; though as you and I know, my eyesight would have been of no use without yours."

I was beginning a modest disclaimer, suggesting that I was but an amateur investigator, but he would have none of it, exclaiming:

"My dear Doctor, you undervalue yourself. The whole discovery is your own. Consider now what would have happened if I had looked into the studio as you did. What should I have seen? Nothing, my dear sir, nothing. My mere bodily senses would have perceived the visible objects but their significance would never have dawned on me. Whereas you, bringing an expert eye to bear on them, instantly detected the signs of some abnormal happenings. By the way, I am assuming that I am going to have the benefit of your co-operation and advice on this occasion."

I replied that I should be very pleased to stay for a time and help him (being, in fact, on the very tip-toe of curiosity as to his proceedings), on which he thanked me warmly, and was still thanking me when the car drew up opposite the Gannets' front door. We both alighted, Blandy lifting out a large, canvas covered suit-case, which he set down on the pavement while he stood taking a general view of the premises.

"Does that gate belong to Gannet's house?" he asked, indicating the wide, double-leaved studio door.

"Yes," I replied. "It opens directly into the studio. Would you like to go in that way? I have the key of the wicket."

"Not this time," said he. "We had better go in through the house so that I may see the lie of the premises."

Accordingly, I let him in by the front door and conducted him through the hall, where he looked about him inquisitively, giving special attention to the hat-rack and stand. Then I opened the side door and escorted him out into the yard, where again he inspected the premises and especially the walls and houses which enclosed the space. Presently he espied the rubbish-bin, and walking over to it, lifted its lid and looked thoughtfully into its interior.

"Is this domestic refuse?" he inquired, "or does it belong to the studio?"

"I think it is a general dump," I replied, "but I know that Gannet used it for ashes and anything that the dustmen would take away."

"Then," said he, "we had better take it in with us and look over the contents before the dustman has his innings."

As I had by this time got the studio door unlocked, we took the bin by its two handles and carried it in. Then, at the Inspector's suggestion, I shut the door and locked it on the inside.

"Now, I suppose," said I, "you would like me to show you round the studio and explain the various appliances."

"Thank you, Doctor," he replied, "but I think we will postpone that, if it should be necessary after your singularly lucid description, and get on at once with the essential part of the inquiry."

"What is that?" I asked

"Our present purpose," he replied, beaming on me benevolently, "is to establish what the lawyers call the corpus delicti. To ascertain whether a crime has been committed, and if so, what sort of crime it is. We begin by finding out what those bone fragments really amount to. I have brought a small sieve with me, but probably there is a better one here; preferably a fairly fine one."

"There is a set of sieves for sifting grog and other powders," said I. "The coarser ones are of wire gauze and the finer of bolting cloth, so you can take your choice. The number of meshes to the linear inch is marked on the rims."

I took him across to the place where the sieves were stacked, and, when he had looked through the collection, he selected the finest of the wire sieves, which had twenty meshes to the inch. Then I found him a scoop, and when he had tipped the contents of one grog bin into another and placed the empty bin by the side of that containing the bone-ash, he spread out on the bench a sheet of white paper from his case, laid the sieve on the empty bin and fell to work.

For a time, the proceedings were quite uneventful, as the upper part of the bin was occupied by the finely-ground ash, and when a scoopful of this was thrown on to the sieve, it sank through at once. But presently, as the deeper layers were

reached, larger fragments, recognizable as pieces of burnt bone, began to appear on the wire-gauze surface, and these, when he had tapped the sieve and shaken all the fine dust through, the Inspector carefully tipped out on to the sheet of paper. Soon he had worked his way down completely past the deposit of fine powder, and now each scoopful consisted almost entirely of bone fragments; and as these lay on the gauze surface, Blandy bent over them, scrutinizing them with amiable intentness and shaking the sieve gently to spread them out more evenly.

"There can be no doubt," said he, as he ran his eye over a fresh scoopful thus spread out, "that these are fragments of bone; but it may be difficult to prove that they are human bones. I wish our unknown friend hadn't broken them up quite so small."

"You have the finger bone," I reminded him. "There's no doubt that that is human."

"Well," he agreed, "if you are prepared to swear positively that it is a human bone, that will establish a strong probability that the rest of the fragments are human. But we want proof if we can get it. In a capital case, the court isn't taking anything for granted."

Here he stooped closer over the sieve with his eyes riveted on one spot. Then very delicately with finger and thumb, he picked out a small object, and laying it on the palm of his other hand, held it out to me with a smile of concentrated benevolence. I took it from his palm, and placing it on my own, examined it closely, first with the naked eye and then with my pocket lens.

"And what is the diagnosis?" he asked, as I returned it to him.

"It is a portion of a porcelain tooth," I replied. "A front tooth, I should say, but it is such a small piece that it is impossible to be sure. But it is certainly part of a porcelain tooth."

"Ha!" said he, "there is the advantage of expert advice and cooperation. It is pronounced authoritatively to be certainly a porcelain tooth. But as the lower animals do not, to the best of my knowledge and belief, ever wear porcelain teeth, we have corroborative evidence that these remains are human. That is a great step forward. But how far does it carry us? Can you suggest any particular application of the fact?"

"I can," said I. "It is known to me that Peter Gannet had a nearly complete upper dental plate. I saw it in a bowl when he was ill."

"Excellent!" the Inspector exclaimed. "Peter Gannet wore porcelain teeth, and here is part of a porcelain tooth. The evidence grows. But if he wore a dental plate, he must have had a dentist. I suppose you cannot give that dentist a name?"

"It happens that I can. He is a Mr. Hawley of Wigmore Street!"

"Really, now," exclaimed the Inspector, "you are positively spoiling me. You leave me nothing to do. I have only to ask for information and it is instantly supplied."

He laid the fragment of tooth tenderly on the corner of the sheet of paper and made an entry in his note-book of the dentist's address. Then, having tipped the contents of the sieve on to the paper, he brought up another scoopful of bone fragments and shook it out on the gauze surface.

I need not follow the proceedings in detail. Gradually we worked our way through the entire contents of the bone-ash-bin, finishing up by holding the bin itself upside down over the sieve and shaking out the last grains. The net result was a considerable heap of bone fragments on the sheet of paper and no less than four other pieces of porcelain. As to the former, they were for the most part, mere crumbs of incinerated bone with just a sprinkling of lumps large enough to have some recognizable character. But the fragments of porcelain were more informative, for close examination and a few tentative trials at fitting them together left little doubt that they were all parts of the same tooth.

"But we won't leave it at that," said Blandy, as he dropped them one by one into a glass tube that he produced from his case. "We've got a man at Headquarters who is an expert at mending up broken articles. He'll be able to cement these pieces together so that the joins will hardly be visible. Then I'll take the tooth along to Mr. Hawley and see what he has to say to it."

He slipped the tube into his pocket and then, having produced from his case a large linen bag, shovelled the bone fragments into it, tied up its mouth and stowed it away in the case.

"This stuff," he remarked, "will have to be produced at the inquest; if we can identify it definitely enough to make an inquest possible. But I shall go over it again, a teaspoonful at a time, to make sure that we haven't missed anything; and then it will be passed to the Home Office experts. If they decide that the remains are certainly human remains, we shall notify the coroner."

While he was speaking his eyes turned from one object to another, taking in all the various fittings of the studio, and finally his glance lighted on Boles's cupboard and there remained fixed.

"Do you happen to know what is in that cupboard?" he asked.

"I know that it belongs to Mr. Boles," I replied, "and I think he uses it to keep his materials in."

"What are his materials?" the Inspector asked.

"Principally gold and silver, especially gold. But he keeps some of his enamel material there and the copper plates for his

plaques.”

The Inspector walked over to the cupboard and examined the keyhole narrowly.

“It isn’t much of a lock,” he remarked, “for a repository of precious metals. Looks like a common ward lock that almost any key would open. I think you said that Mr. Boles is not available at the moment?”

“I understand from Mrs. Gannet that he has disappeared from his flat and that no one knows where he is.”

“Pity,” said Blandy. “I hate the idea of opening that cupboard in his absence, but we ought to know what is in it. And, as I have a search warrant, it is my duty to search. H’m! I happen to have one or two keys in my case. Perhaps one of them might fit this very simple lock.”

He opened his case and produced from it a bunch of keys, and very odd-looking keys they were; so much so that I ventured to inquire:

“Are those what are known as skeleton keys?”

He beamed on me with a slightly deprecating expression.

“The word ‘skeleton,’” said he, “as applied to keys, has disagreeable associations. I would rather call these simplified keys; just ordinary ward keys without wards. You will see how they act.”

He illustrated their function by trying them one after another on the keyhole. At the third trial the key entered the hole, whereupon he gave it a turn and the door came open.

“There, you see,” said he. “We break nothing, and when we go away we leave the cupboard locked as we found it.”

The opened door revealed one or two shelves on which were glass pots of the powdered enamels, an agate mortar and a few small tools. Below the shelves were several small but deep drawers. The Inspector pulled out one of these and looked inquisitively into it as he weighed it critically in his hand.

“Queer-looking stuff, this, Doctor,” said he, “and just feel the weight of it. All these lumps of gold in a practically unlocked cupboard. Are these the things that Mr. Boles makes?”

As he spoke he turned the drawer upside down on the paper that still covered the bench and pointed contemptuously to the heap of pendants, rings and brooches that dropped out of it.

“Did you ever see such stuff?” he exclaimed. “Jewelry, indeed! Why, it might have been made by a plumber’s apprentice. And look at the quantity of metal in it. Look at that ring. There’s enough gold in it to make a bracelet. This stuff reminds me of the jewelry that the savages produce, only it isn’t nearly so well made. I wonder who buys it. Do you happen to know?”

“I have heard,” I replied, “that Mr. Boles exhibits it at some of the private galleries, and I suppose some of it gets sold. It must, you know, or he wouldn’t go on making it.”

Inspector Blandy regarded me with a rather curious, cryptic smile, but he made no rejoinder. He simply shot “the stuff” back into the drawer, replaced the latter, and drew out the next.

The contents of this seemed to interest him profoundly for he looked into the drawer with an expression of amiable satisfaction and seemed to meditate on what he saw as if it conveyed some new idea to him. At length he tipped the contents out on to the paper and smilingly invited me to make any observations that occurred to me. I looked at the miscellaneous heap of rings, brooches, lockets and other trinkets and noted that they seemed to resemble the ordinary jewelry that one sees in shop windows excepting that the stones were missing.

“I don’t think Mr. Boles made any of these,” said I.

“I am quite sure he didn’t,” said Blandy, “but I think he took the stones out. But what do you make of this collection?”

“I should guess,” I replied, “that it is old jewelry that he bought cheap to melt down for his own work.”

“Yes,” agreed Blandy, “he bought it to melt down and work up again. But he didn’t buy it cheap if he bought from the trade. You can’t buy gold cheap in the open market. Gold is gold, whether old or new. It has its standard price per ounce and you can’t get it any cheaper; and you can always sell it at that price. I am speaking of the open market.”

Once more he regarded me with that curious, inscrutable smile, and then, sweeping the jewelry back into its drawer, he passed on to the next.

This drawer contained raw material proper: little ingots of gold, buttons from cupels or crucibles, and a few pieces of thin gold plate. It did not appear to me to present any features of interest, but evidently Blandy thought otherwise, for he peered into the drawer with a queer, benevolent smile for quite a considerable time. And he did not tip out its contents on to the bench. Instead, he took a pair of narrow-nosed pliers from one of the shelves and with these he delicately picked out the pieces of gold plate, and having examined them on both sides, laid them carefully on the paper.

“You seem to be greatly interested in those bits of plate,” I remarked.

“I am,” he replied. “There are two points of interest in them. First there is the fact that they are pieces of gold plate such as are supplied to the trade by bullion dealers. That goes to show that he bought some of his gold from the dealers in the



regular way. He didn't get it all second hand. The other point is this."

He picked up one of the pieces of plate with the pliers and exhibited it to me, and I then observed that its polished surface was marked with the impression of a slightly greasy finger.

"You mean that finger-print?" I suggested.

"Thumb-print," he corrected, "apparently a left thumb; and on the other side, the print of a forefinger. Both beautifully clear and distinct, as they usually are on polished metal."

"Yes," said I, "they are clear enough. But what about it? They are Mr. Boles's finger-prints. But this is Mr. Boles's cupboard. We knew that he had used it and that he had frequented this studio. I don't see that the finger-prints tell you anything that you didn't know."

The Inspector smiled at me, indulgently. "It is remarkable," said he, "how the scientific mind instantly seizes the essentials. But there is a little point that I think you have missed. We find that Mr. Boles is a purchaser of second-hand jewelry. Now, in the Fingerprint Department we have records of quite a number of gentlemen who are purchasers of second-hand jewelry. Of course, it is quite incredible that Mr. Boles's finger-prints should be among them. But the scientific mind will realize that proof is better than belief. The finger-print experts will be able to supply the proof."

The hint thus delicately expressed conveyed a new idea to me and caused me to look with rather different eyes on the contents of the next, and last drawer. These consisted of three small cardboard boxes, which, being opened, were found to contain unmounted stones. One was nearly half-filled with the less precious kinds; moonstones, turquoises, garnets, agates, carnelians and the like. The second held a smaller number of definitely precious stones such as rubies, sapphires and emeralds, while the third contained only diamonds, mostly quite small. The Inspector's comments expressed only the thought which had instantly occurred to me.

"These stones," said he, "must have been picked out of the secondhand stuff. I shouldn't think he ever buys any stones from the dealers, for only two of his pieces are set with gems, and those only with moonstone and carnelian. He doesn't seem to use stones often; too much trouble; easier to stick on a blob of enamel. So he must sell them. I wonder who buys them from him."

I could offer no suggestion on this point, and the Inspector did not pursue the subject. Apparently the examination was finished, for he began to pack up the various objects that we had found in the drawers, bestowing especial care on the pieces of gold plate.

"As Mr. Boles seems to have disappeared," said he, "I shall take these goods into my custody. They are too valuable to leave in an unoccupied studio. And I must take temporary possession of these premises, as we may have to make some further investigations. We haven't examined the dust-bin yet, and it is too late to do it now. In fact, it is time to go. And what about the key, Doctor? I shall seal these doors before I leave—the wicket on the inside and the yard door on the outside—and the place will have to be watched. I should take it as a favour if you would let me have the key so that I need not trouble Mrs. Gannet. You won't be using it yourself."

As I saw that he meant to have it, and as it was of no further use to me, I handed it to him, together with the spare key of the wicket, on which he thanked me profusely and made ready to depart.

"Before we go," said he, "I will just make a note of Mrs. Gannet's present address in case we have to communicate with her, and you may as well give me Mr. Boles's, too. We shall have to get into touch with him, if possible."

I gave him both addresses, rather reluctantly as to the former, for I suspected that Mrs. Gannet was going to suffer some shocks. But there was no help for it. The police would have to communicate with her if only to acquaint her with the fact of her husband's death. But I was sorry for her, little as I liked her and little as I approved of her relations with Boles.

When the Inspector had locked, bolted and sealed the wicket, he took up his case and we went into the yard, where he locked the door with the key that I had left in it, pocketed the latter and sealed the door. Then we went out to the car, and, when the driver had put away his book and his cigarette, we started homeward and arrived at my premises just in time for my evening consultations.



## CHAPTER 10. — INSPECTOR BLANDY IS INQUISITIVE

MY forebodings concerning Mrs. Gannet were speedily and abundantly justified. On the morning of the third day after the search of the studio, an urgent note from Miss Hughes, delivered by hand, informed me that her guest had sustained a severe shock and was in a state of complete nervous prostration. She had expressed a wish to see me and Miss Hughes hoped that I would call as soon as possible.

As the interview promised to be a somewhat lengthy one, I decided to dispose of the other patients on my modest visiting list and leave myself ample time for a leisurely talk, apart from the professional consultation. As a result, it was well past noon when I rang the bell at the house in Mornington Crescent. The door was opened by Miss Hughes herself, from whom I received forthwith the first instalment of the news.

"She is in an awful state, poor thing," said Miss Hughes. "Naturally, she was a good deal upset by her husband's extraordinary disappearance. But yesterday a gentleman called to see her—a police officer he turned out to be, though you'd never have suspected it to look at him. I don't know what he told her—it seems that she was sworn to secrecy—but he stayed a long time, and when he had gone and I went into the sitting room, I found her lying on the sofa in a state of collapse. But I mustn't keep you here talking. I made her stay in bed until you'd seen her, so I will take you up to her room."

Miss Hughes had not overstated the case. I should hardly have recognized the haggard, white-faced woman in the bed as the sprightly lady whom I had known. As I looked at her pallid, frightened face, turned so appealingly to me, all my distaste of her—it was hardly dislike—melted away in natural compassion for her obvious misery.

"Have you heard of the awful thing that has happened. Doctor?" she whispered when Miss Hughes had gone, discreetly shutting the door after her. "I mean what the police found in the studio."

"Yes, I know about that," I replied, not a little relieved to find that my name had not been mentioned in connection with the discovery. "I suppose that the officer who called on you was Inspector Blandy?"

"Yes, that was the name, and I must say that he was most polite and sympathetic. He broke the horrible news as gently as he could and told me how sorry he was to be the bearer of such bad tidings; and he did seem to be genuinely sorry for me. I only wished he would have left it at that. But he didn't. He stayed ever so long telling me over and over again how sincerely he sympathized with me, and then asking questions; dozens of questions he asked until I got quite hysterical. I think he might have given me a day or two to recover a little before putting me through such a catechism."

"It does seem rather inconsiderate," said I, "but you must make allowances. The police have to act promptly and they naturally want to get at the facts as quickly as possible."

"Yes. That is the excuse he made for asking so many questions. But it was an awful ordeal. And although he was so polite and sympathetic, I couldn't help feeling that he suspected me of knowing more about the affair than I admitted. Of course he didn't say anything to that effect."

"I think that must have been your imagination," said I. "He couldn't have suspected you of any knowledge of the—er—the tragedy, seeing that you were away from home when it happened."

"Perhaps not," said she. "Still, he questioned me particularly about my movements while I was away and wanted all the dates, which, of course, I couldn't remember off-hand. And then he asked a lot of questions about Mr. Boles, particularly as to where he was on certain dates; and somehow he gave the impression that he knew a good deal about him."

"What sort of questions did he put about Mr. Boles?" I asked with some curiosity, recalling Blandy's cryptic reference to the fingerprint files at Scotland Yard.

"It began with his asking me whether the two men, Peter and Fred, were usually on good terms. Well, as you know, Doctor, they were not. Then he asked me if they had always been on bad terms; and when I told him that they used to be quite good friends, he wanted to know exactly when the change in their relationship occurred and whether I could account for it in any way. I told him, quite truthfully, that I could not; and as to the time when they first fell out, I could only say that it was some time in the latter part of last year. Then he began to question me about Mr. Boles's movements; where he was on this and that date, and, of course, I couldn't remember, if I had ever known. But his last question about dates I was able to answer. He asked me to try to remember where Mr. Boles was on the 19th of last September. I thought about it a little and then I remembered, because Peter had gone to spend a long week-end with him and I had taken the opportunity to make a visit to Eastbourne. As I was at Eastbourne on the 19th of September, I knew that Peter and Mr. Boles must have been at Newingstead on that date."

"Newingstead!" I exclaimed, and then stopped short.

"Yes," said she, looking at me in surprise. "Do you know the place?"

"I know it slightly," I replied, drawing in my horns rather suddenly as the finger-print files came once more into my mind. "I happen to know a doctor who is in practice there."

"Well, Mr. Blandy seemed to be very much interested in Mr. Boles's visit to Newingstead and particularly with the fact that Peter was there with him on that day; and he pressed me to try to remember whether that date seemed to coincide

with the change in their feelings to each other. It was an extraordinary question. I can't imagine what could have put the idea into his head. But when I came to think about it, I found that he was right, for I remember quite clearly that when I came back from Eastbourne I saw at once that there was something wrong. They weren't a bit the same. All the old friendliness seemed to have vanished and they were ready to quarrel on the slightest provocation. And they did quarrel dreadfully. I was terrified, for they were both strong men and both inclined to be violent."

"Did you ever get any inkling as to what it was that had set them against each other?"

"No. I suspected that something had happened when they were away together, but I could never find out what it was. I spoke to them both and asked them what was the matter, but I couldn't get anything out of either of them. They simply said that there was nothing the matter; that it was all my imagination. But I knew that it wasn't, and I was in a constant state of terror as to what might happen."

"So I suppose," said I, "that the—er—the murder has not come as a complete surprise?"

"Oh, don't call it a murder!" she protested. "It couldn't have been that. It must have been some sort of accident. When two strong and violent men start fighting, you never know how it will end. I am sure it must have been an accident—that is, supposing that it was Mr. Boles who killed Peter. We don't know that it was. It's only a guess."

I thought that it was pretty safe guess but I did not say so. My immediate concern was with the future. For Mrs. Gannet was my patient and I chose to regard her as my friend. She had been subjected to an intolerable strain, and I suspected that there was worse to come. The question was, what was to be done about it?

"Did the Inspector suggest that he would require any further information from you?" I asked.

"Yes. He said that he would want me to come to his office at Scotland Yard one day pretty soon to make a statement and sign it. That will be an awful ordeal. It makes me sick with terror to think of it."

"I don't see why it should," said I. "You are not in any way responsible for what has happened."

"You know that I am not," said she, "but the police don't; and I am absolutely terrified of Mr. Blandy. He is a most extraordinary man. He is so polite and sympathetic and yet so keen and searching and he asks such unexpected questions and seems to have such uncanny knowledge of our affairs. And as I told you, I am sure he suspects that I had something to do with what has happened."

"I suppose he didn't seem to know anything about that mysterious affair of the arsenic poisoning?" I suggested.

"No," she replied, "but I am certain that he will worm it out of me when he has me in his office; and then he will think that it was I who put the poison into poor Peter's food."

At this point she broke down and burst into tears, sobbing hysterically and mingling incoherent apologies with her sobs. I tried to comfort her as well as I could, assuring her—with perfect sincerity—of my deep sympathy. For I realized that her fears were by no means unfounded. She probably had more secrets than I knew; and once within the dreaded office in the presence of a committee of detective officers, taking down in writing every word that she uttered, she might easily commit herself to some highly incriminating statements.

"It is a great comfort to me. Doctor," said she, struggling to control her emotion, "to be able to tell you all my troubles. You are the only friend that I have; the only friend, I mean, that I can look to for advice and help."

It wrung my heart to think of this poor, lonely woman in her trouble and bereavement, encompassed by perils at which I could only guess, facing those perils, friendless, alone and unprotected save by me—and who was I that I could give her any effective support? As I met the look of appeal that she cast on me, so pathetic and so confiding, it was borne in on me that she needed some more efficient adviser and that the need was urgent and ought to be met without delay.

"I am very willing," said I, "to help you, but I am not very competent. The advice that you want is legal, not medical. You ought to have a lawyer to protect your interests and to advise you."

"I suppose I ought," she agreed, "but I don't know any lawyers; and I trust in you because you know all about my affairs and because you have been such a kind friend. But I will do whatever you advise. Perhaps you know a lawyer whom you could recommend."

"The only lawyer whom I know is Dr. Thorndyke," I replied.

"Is he a lawyer?" she exclaimed in surprise. "I thought he was a doctor."

"He is both," I explained, "and what is more to the point, he is a criminal lawyer who knows all the ropes. He will understand your difficulties and also those of the police. Would you like me to see him and ask him to advise us?"

"I should be most grateful if you would," she replied, earnestly. "And you may take it that I agree to any arrangements that you may make with him. But," she added, "you will remember that my means are rather small."

I brushed this proviso aside in view of Thorndyke's known indifference to merely financial considerations and the fact that my own means admitted of my giving material assistance if necessary. So it was agreed that I should seek Thorndyke's advice forthwith and that whatever he might advise should be done.

"That will be a great relief," said she. "I shall have somebody to think for me, and that will leave me free to think about all that has to be done. There will be quite a lot of things to attend to. I can't stay here for ever, though dear Miss Hughes

protests that she loves having me. And then there are the things at the gallery. They will have to be removed when the exhibition closes. And there are some pieces on loan at another place—but there is no hurry about them.”

“What exhibition are you referring to?” I asked.

“The show at the Lyntondale Gallery in Bond Street. It is a mixed exhibition and some of Peter’s work is being shown and a few pieces of Mr. Boles’s. Whatever is left unsold will have to be fetched away at once to make room for the next show.”

“And the other exhibition?” I asked, partly from curiosity and partly to keep her attention diverted from her troubles.

“That is a sort of small museum and art gallery at Haxton. They show loan collections there for the purpose of educating the taste of the people, and Peter has lent them some of his pottery on two or three occasions. This time he sent only a small collection—half a dozen bowls and jars and the stoneware figure that used to be on his bedroom mantelpiece. I daresay you remember it.”

“I remember it very well,” said I. “It was a figure of a monkey.”

“Yes, that was what he called it, though it didn’t look to me very much like a monkey. But then I don’t understand much about art. At any rate, he sent it, and as he set a good deal of value on it, I took it myself and delivered it to the director of the museum.”

As we talked, principally on topics not directly connected with the tragedy, her agitation subsided by degrees until, by the time when my visit had to end, she had become quite calm and composed.

“Now don’t forget,” said I, as I shook her hand at parting, “that you have nothing further to fear from Inspector Blandy. You are going to have a legal adviser, and he won’t let anybody put undue pressure on you.”

Her gratitude was quite embarrassing, and as she showed signs of a slight recrudescence of emotion, I withdrew my hand (which she was pressing fervently) at the first opportunity and bustled out of the room.

On my way home, I considered my next move. Obviously, no time ought to be lost in making the necessary arrangements. But, although I had the afternoon free, Thorndyke probably had not. He was a busy man and it would be futile for me to make a casual call on the chance of finding him at home and disengaged. Accordingly, as soon as I had let myself in and ascertained that there were no further engagements, I rang him up on the telephone to inquire when I could have a few words with him. In reply, a voice, apparently appertaining to a person named Polton, informed me that the doctor was out; that he would be in at three-thirty and that he had an engagement elsewhere at four-fifteen. Thereupon I made an appointment to call at three-thirty, and having given my name, rang off, and proceeded without delay to dispatch my immediate business, including the dispensing of medicine, the writing up of the Day Book and the wash and brush up preliminary to lunch.

As I had no clear idea of the geography of the Temple, I took the precaution of arriving at the main gate well in advance of the appointed time; with the result that having easily located King’s Bench Walk, I found myself opposite the handsome brick portico of Number 5A at the very moment when a particularly soft-toned bell ventured most politely to suggest that it was a quarter past three.

There was, therefore, no need to hurry. I whiled away a few minutes inspecting the portico and surveying the pleasant surroundings of the dignified old houses—doubtless still more pleasant before the fine, spacious square had become converted into a parking lot—then I entered and took my leisurely way up the stairs to the first floor landing, where I found myself confronted by a grim-looking, iron bound door, above which was painted the name “Dr. Thorndyke.” I was about to press the electric bell at the side of the door when I perceived, descending the stairs from an upper floor, a gentleman who appeared to belong to the premises; a small gentleman of a sedate and even clerical aspect, but very lively and alert.

“Have I the honour, sir, of addressing Dr. Oldfield?” he inquired, suavely.

I replied that I was, in fact, Dr. Oldfield. “But,” I added, “I think I am a little before my time.”

Thereupon, like Touchstone, he “drew a dial from his poke,” and regarding it thoughtfully (but by no means “with a lacklustre eye”), announced that it was now twenty-four minutes and fifteen seconds past three. While he was making his inspection I looked at the watch, which was a rather large silver timepiece with an audible and very deliberate tick, and as he was putting it away, I ventured to remark that it did not appear to be quite an ordinary watch.

“It is not, sir,” he replied, hauling it out again and gazing at it fondly. “It is an eight-day pocket chronometer; a most admirable timepiece, sir, with the full chronometer movement and even a helical balance spring.”

Here he opened the case and then, in some miraculous way, turned the whole thing inside out, exhibiting the large, heavy balance and an unusual-looking balance spring which I accepted as helical.

“You can’t easily see the spring detent,” said he, “but you can hear it; and you will notice that it beats half-seconds.”

He held the watch up towards my ear and I was able to distinguish the peculiar sound of the escapement. But at this moment he also assumed a listening attitude; but he was not listening to the watch, for after a few moments of concentrated attention, he remarked, as he closed and put away the chronometer:

“You are not much too early, sir. I think I hear the doctor coming along Crown Office Row and Dr. Jervis with him.”

I listened attentively and was just able to make out the faint sound of quick footsteps which seemed to be approaching; but I had not my small friend's diagnostic powers, which, however, were demonstrated when the footsteps passed in at the entry, ascended the stairs and materialized into bodily forms of Thorndyke and Jervis. Both men looked at me a little curiously but any questions were forestalled by my new acquaintance.

"Dr. Oldfield, sir, made an appointment by telephone to see you at half-past three. I told him of your engagement at four-fifteen."

"Thank you, Polton," said Thorndyke. "So now, Oldfield, as you know the position, let us go in and make the best use of the available half-hour; that is, if this is anything more than a friendly call."

"It is considerably more," said I, as Mr. Polton opened the two doors and ushered us into a large room. "I have come on quite urgent business, but I think we can dispatch it easily in half an hour."

Here, Mr. Polton, after an interrogative glance at Thorndyke, took himself off, closing after him both the inner and outer doors.

"Now, Oldfield," said Jervis, setting out three chairs in a triangle, "sit down and let the engine run."

Thereupon we all took our seats facing one another and I proceeded, without preamble, to give a highly-condensed account of the events connected with Gannet's disappearance with a less-condensed statement of Mrs. Gannet's position in relation to them. To this account Thorndyke listened with close attention, but quite impassively and without question or comment. Not so Jervis. He did, indeed, abstain from interruptions; but he followed my recital with devouring interest, and I had hardly finished when he burst out:

"But, my good Oldfield, this is a first-class murder mystery. It is a sin to boil it down into a mere abstract. I want details, and more details, and, in short—or rather, in long—the whole story."

"I am with you, Jervis," said Thorndyke. "We must get Oldfield to tell us the story in extenso. But not now. We have an immediate and rather urgent problem to solve; how to protect Mrs. Gannet."

"Does she need protecting?" demanded Jervis. "The English police are not in the habit of employing 'third degree' methods."

"True," Thorndyke agreed. "The English police have usually the desire and the intention to deal fairly with persons who have to be interrogated. But an over-zealous officer may easily be tempted to press his examination—in the interests of justice, as he thinks—beyond the limits of what is strictly admissible. We must remember that, under our system of police procedure in the matter of interrogation, the various restrictions tend to weight the dice rather against the police and in favour of the accused person."

"But Mrs. Gannet is not an accused person," I protested.

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "But she may become one, particularly if she should make any indiscreet admissions. That is what we have to guard against. We don't know what the views of the police are, but one notes that our rather foxy friend, Blandy, was not disposed to be over-scrupulous. To announce to a woman that her husband has been murdered and his body burned to ashes, and then, while she is still dazed by the shock, to subject her to a searching interrogation, does not impress one as a highly considerate proceeding. I think her fear of Blandy is justified. No further interrogation ought to take place excepting in the presence of her legal adviser."

"She isn't legally bound to submit to any interrogation until she is summoned as a witness," Jervis suggested.

"In practice, she is," said Thorndyke. "It would be highly improper for her to withhold from the police any assistance that she could give them. And it would be extremely impolitic, as it would suggest that she had something serious to conceal. But it would be perfectly proper for her to insist that her legal adviser should accompany her and be present at the interrogation. And that is what will have to be done. She will have to be legally represented. But by whom? Can you make any suggestion, Jervis? It is a solicitor's job."

"What about the costs?" asked Jervis. "Is the lady pretty well off?"

"We can waive that question," said I. "The costs will be met. I will make myself responsible for that."

"I see," said Jervis. "Your sympathy takes a practical form. Well, if you are going to back the bill, we must see that it doesn't get too obese. A swagger solicitor wouldn't do; besides, he would be too busy to attend in person. But we should want a good man. Preferably a young man with a rather small practice. Yes, I think I know the very man. What do you say, Thorndyke, to young Linnell? He was Marchmont's managing clerk, but he has gone into practice on his own account and he has distinct leanings towards criminal work."

"I remember him," said Thorndyke. "A very promising young man. Could you get into touch with him?"

"I will see him today before he leaves his office and I think there is no doubt that he will undertake the case gladly. At any rate, Oldfield, you can take it that the matter is in our hands and that the lady will be fully protected, even if I have to accompany her to Scotland Yard myself. But you must play your hand, too. You are her doctor, and it is for you to see that she is not subjected to any strain that she is not fit to bear. A suitable medical certificate will put the stopper even on Blandy."

As Jervis ceased speaking, the soft-voiced bell of the unseen clock, having gently chimed the quarters, now struck (if one may use so violent an expression) the hour of four. I rose from my chair, and, having thanked both my friends profusely for their help, held out my hand.

“One moment, Oldfield,” said Thorndyke. “You have tantalized us with a bare precis of the astonishing story that you have to tell. But we want the unabridged edition. When are we to have it? We realize that you are rather tied to your practice. But perhaps we could look in on you when you have some time to spare, say, one evening after dinner. How would that do?”

“Why after dinner?” I demanded. “Why not come and dine with me and do the pow-wow after?”

“That would be very pleasant,” said Thorndyke. “Don’t you agree, Jervis?”

Jervis agreed emphatically; and as it appeared that both my friends were free that very evening, it was settled that we should meet again at Osnaburgh Street and discuss the Gannet case at length.

“And remember,” said I, pausing in the doorway, “that consultation hours are usually more or less blank, so you can come as early as you like.”

With this parting admonition, I shut the door after me and went on my way.



## CHAPTER 11. — MR. BUNDERBY EXPOUNDS

AS I emerged from the Temple gateway into Fleet Street I was confronted by a stationary omnibus, held up temporarily by a block in the traffic; and glancing at it casually, my eye caught, among the names on its rear board, those of Piccadilly and Bond Street. The latter instantly associated itself with the gallery of which Mrs. Gannet had spoken that morning, and the effect of the association was to cause me to jump on to the omnibus just as it started to move. I had nearly two hours to spare and in that time could easily inspect the exhibition of Gannet's work.

I was really quite curious about this show, for Gannet's productions had always been somewhat of a mystery to me. They were so amazingly crude and so deficient, as I thought, in any kind of ceramic quality. And yet I felt there must be something more in them than I had been able to discover. There must be some deficiency in my own powers of perception and appreciation; for it was a fact that they had not only been publicly exhibited but actually sold, and sold at quite impressive prices; and one felt that the people who paid those prices must surely know what they were about. At any rate, I should now see the pottery in its appropriate setting and perhaps hear some comments from those who were better able than I to form a judgment.

I had no difficulty in finding the Lyntondale Gallery, for a flag bearing its name hung out boldly from a first floor window; and when I had paid my shilling entrance fee and a further shilling for a catalogue, I passed in through the turnstile and was straightway spirited aloft in an elevator.

On entering the principal room of the gallery I was aware of a knot of people—about a dozen—gathered before a large glass case and appearing to surround a stout, truculent-looking gentleman with a fine, rich complexion and a mop of white hair which stood up like the crest of a cockatoo. But my attention was more particularly attracted by another gentleman, who stood apart from the knot of visitors and appeared to be either the proprietor of the gallery or an attendant. What drew my attention to him was an indefinite something in his appearance that seemed familiar. I felt that I had seen him somewhere before. But I could not place him; and while I was trying to remember where I might have seen him, he caught my eye and approached with a deferential smile.

"You have arrived quite opportunely, sir," said he. "Mr. Bunderby, the eminent art critic, is just about to give us a little talk on the subject of Peter Gannet's very remarkable pottery. It will be worth your while to hear it. Mr. Bunderby's talks are always most illuminating."

I thanked him warmly for the information, for an illuminating talk on this subject by a recognized authority was precisely what I wanted to hear; and as the cockatoo gentleman—whom I diagnosed as Mr. Bunderby—had just opened a show case and transferred one of the pieces to a small revolving stand, like a modeler's turntable, I joined the group that surrounded him and prepared to "lend him my ears."

The piece that he had placed on the stand was one of Gannet's roughest; an uncouth vessel, in appearance something between a bird's nest and a flower pot. I noticed that the visitors stared at it in obvious bewilderment and Mr. Bunderby watched their expressions with a satisfied smile.

"Before speaking to you," said he, "of these remarkable works, I must say just a few words about their creator. Peter Gannet is a unique artist. Whereas the potters of the past have striven after more and yet more sophistication, Gannet has perceived the great truth that pottery should be simple and elemental, and with wonderful courage and insight, he has set himself to retrace the path along which mankind has strayed, back to that fountainhead of culture, the New Stone Age. He has cast aside the potter's wheel and all other mechanical aids, and relies solely on that incomparable instrument, the skilled hand of the artist.

"So in these works, you must not look for mechanical accuracy or surface finish. Gannet is, first and foremost, a great stylist, who subordinates everything to the passionate pursuit of essential form. So much for the man. And now we will turn to the pottery."

He paused a few moments and stood with half-closed eyes and his head on one side, contemplating the bowl on the stand. Then he resumed his discourse.

"I begin," said he, "by showing you this noble and impressive work because it is typical of the great artist by whose genius it was created. It presents in a nutshell" (he might have said a coconut shell) "the aims, the ambitions and the inmost thoughts and emotions of its maker. Looking at it, we realize with respectful admiration the wonderful power of analysis, the sensibility—at once subtle and intense—that made its conception possible; and we can trace the deep thought, the profound research—the untiring search for the essentials of abstract form."

Here a lady, who spoke with a slight American intonation, ventured to remark that she didn't quite understand this piece. Mr. Bunderby fixed her with his truculent blue eye and replied, impressively:

"You don't understand it! But of course you don't. And you shouldn't try to. A great work of art is not to be understood. It is to be felt. Art is not concerned with intellectual expositions. Those it leaves to science. It is the medium of emotional transfer whereby the soul of the artist conveys to kindred spirits the reactions of his own sensibility to the problems of abstract form."

Here another Philistine intervened with the objection that he was not quite clear as to what was meant by "abstract

form.”

“No,” said Mr. Bunderby, “I appreciate your difficulty. Mere verbal language is a clumsy medium for the expression of those elusive qualities that are to be felt rather than described. How shall I explain myself? Perhaps it is impossible. But I will try.

“The words ‘abstract form,’ then, evoke in me the conception of that essential, pervading, geometric sub-structure which persists when all the trivial and superficial accidents of mere visual appearances have been eliminated. In short, it is the fundamental rhythm which is the basic aesthetic factor underlying all our abstract conceptions of spatial limitation. Do I make myself clear?”

“Oh, perfectly, thank you,” the Philistine replied, hastily, and forthwith retired deep into his shell and was heard no more.

I need not follow Mr. Bunderby’s discourse in detail. The portion that I have quoted is a representative sample of the whole. As I listened to the sounding phrases with their constantly recurring references to “rhythm” and “essential abstract form,” I was conscious of growing disappointment. All this nebulous verbiage conveyed nothing to me. I seemed merely to be listening to Peter Gannet at second hand (though probably it was the other way about; that I had, in the studio talks, been listening to Bunderby at second hand). At any rate, it told me nothing about the pottery; and so far from resolving my doubts and misgivings, left me only still more puzzled and bewildered.

But enlightenment was to come. It came, in fact, when the whole collection seemed to have been reviewed. There was an impressive pause while Mr. Bunderby passed his fingers through his crest, making it stand up another two inches, and glared at the empty stand.

“And now,” said he, “as a final *bonne bouche*, I am going to show you another facet of Peter Gannet’s genius. May we have the decorated jar, Mr. Kempster?”

As the name was uttered, my obscure recognition of the proprietor was instantly clarified. But close as his resemblance was to the diamond merchant of Newingstead, he was obviously not the same man. Indeed he could not have been. Nevertheless, I observed him with interest as he advanced with slow steps, treading delicately and holding the precious jar in both hands as if it had been the Holy Grail or a live bomb. At length he placed it, with infinite care and tenderness, on the stand; slowly withdrew his hands and stepped back a couple of paces, still gazing at it reverentially.

“There,” said Bunderby, “look at that!”

They looked at it and so did I,—with bulging eyes and mouth agape. It was amazing—incredible. And yet it was impossible that I could be mistaken. Every detail of it was familiar, including the marks of my own latch-key and the little dents made by the clinical thermometer. Eagerly I awaited Bunderby’s exposition; and when it came it surpassed even my expectations.

“I have reserved this, the gem of the collection, to the last because, though at first glance it is different from the others, it is typical. It affords the perfect and unmistakable expression of Peter Gannet’s artistic personality. Even more than the other it testifies to the rigorous, single-minded search for essential form and abstract rhythm. It is the fine flower of hand-built pottery. And mark you, not only does its hand-built character leap to the eye (the expert eye, of course), but it is obvious that by no method but that of direct modelling by hand could it have been created.

“Then consider the ornament. Note this charming guilloche, executed with the most masterly freedom with the thumb-nail—just the simple thumb-nail; a crude instrument, you may say; but no other could produce exactly this effect, as the ancient potters knew.”

He ran his finger lovingly over the mustard-spoon impressions and continued:

“Then look at these lovely rosettes. They tell us that when the artist created them he had in his mind the idea of ‘what o’clocks’—the dandelion head. Profoundly stylized as the form is, generalized from the representational plane to that of ultimate abstraction, we can still trace the thought.”

As he paused, one of the spectators remarked that the rosettes seemed to have been executed with the end of a key.

“They do,” Bunderby agreed, “and it is quite possible that they were. And why not? The genius asks for no special apparatus. He uses the simple means that lie to his hand. But that hand is the hand of a master which transmutes to gold the very clay that feels its touch.

“So it has done in this little masterpiece. It has produced what we feel to be a complete epitome of abstract three-dimensional form. And then the rhythm! The rhythm!”

He paused, having apparently exhausted his vocabulary (if such a thing were possible). Then suddenly he looked at his watch and started.

“Dear me!” he exclaimed. “How the time flies! I must be running away. I have four more galleries to inspect. Let me thank you for the courteous interest with which you have listened to my simple comments and express the hope that some of you may be able to secure an example of the work of a great and illustrious artist. I had intended to say a few words about Mr. Boles’s exquisite neo-primitive jewelry but my glass has run out. I wish you all good afternoon.”

He bowed to the assembly and to Mr. Kempster and bustled away, and I noticed that with his retirement all interest in



the alleged masterpieces seemed to lapse. The visitors strayed away to other parts of the gallery and the majority soon strayed towards the door.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kempster took possession of the jar and carried it reverently back to its case. I followed him with my eyes and then with the rest of my person. For, like Mr. Tite Barnacle (or, rather, his visitor), I “wanted to know, you know.” I had noticed a red wafer stuck to the jar, and this served as an introduction.

“So the masterpiece is sold,” said I. “Fifteen guineas, according to the catalogue. It seems a long price for a small jar.”

“It does,” he admitted. “But it is a museum piece; hand-built and by an acknowledged master.”

“It looks rather different from most of Gannet’s work. I suppose there is no doubt that it is really from his hand?”

Mr. Kempster was shocked. “Good gracious, no!” he replied. “He drew up the catalogue himself. Besides—”

He picked up the jar quickly (no Holy Grail touch this time) and turned it up to exhibit the bottom.

“You see,” said he, “the piece is signed and numbered. There is no question as to its being Gannet’s work.”

If the inference was erroneous, the fact was correct. On the bottom of the jar was Gannet’s distinctive mark; a sketchy gannet, the letters “P. G.” with the number, Op. 961. That disposed of the possibility which had occurred to me that the jar might have been put among Gannet’s own works by mistake, possibly by Mrs. Gannet. The fraud had evidently been deliberate.

As he replaced the jar on its shelf, I ventured to indulge my curiosity on another point.

“I heard Mr. Bunderby mention your name. Do you happen to be related to Mr. Kempster of Newingstead?”

“My brother,” he replied. “You noticed the likeness, I suppose. Do you know him?”

“Very slightly. But I was down there at the time of the robbery; in fact, I had to give evidence at the inquest on the unfortunate policeman. It was I who found him by the wood.”

“Ah, then you will be Dr. Oldfield. I read the report of the inquest, and, of course, heard all about it from my brother. It was a disastrous affair. It appears that the diamonds were not covered by insurance and I am afraid that it looks like a total loss. The diamonds are hardly likely to be recovered now. They are probably dispersed, and it would be difficult to identify them singly.”

“I was sorry,” said I, “to miss Mr. Bunderby’s observations on Mr. Boles’s jewelry. It seems to me to need some explaining.”

“Yes,” he admitted, “it isn’t to everybody’s taste. My brother, for instance, won’t have it at any price, though he knows Mr. Boles and rather likes him. And speaking of Newingstead, it happens that Mr. Boles is a native of that place.”

“Indeed. Then I suppose that is how your brother came to know him?”

“I can’t say, but I rather think not. Probably he made the acquaintance through business channels. I know that he has had some dealings—quite small transactions—with Mr. Boles.”

“But surely,” I exclaimed, “Mr. Boles doesn’t ever use diamonds in his neolithic jewelry?”

“Neo-primitive,” he corrected with a smile. “No, I should think he was a vendor rather than a buyer or he may have made exchanges. Like most jewelers, Mr. Boles picks up oddments of old or damaged jewelry, when he can get it cheap, to use as scrap. Any diamonds or faceted stones would be useless to him as he uses only simple stones, cabochon cut, and not many of those. But that is only a surmise based on remarks that Mr. Boles has let fall; I don’t really know much about his affairs.”

At this moment I happened to glance at a clock at the end of the gallery, and to my dismay saw that it stood at ten minutes to six. With a few words of apology and farewell, I rushed out of the gallery, clattered down the stairs and darted out into the street. Fortunately, an unoccupied taxi was drifting towards me and slowed down as I hailed it. In a moment I had given my address, scrambled in and slammed the door and was moving on at a pace that bid fair to get me home within a minute or two of six.

The short journey gave me little time for reflection. Yet in those few minutes I was able to consider the significance of my recent experiences sufficiently to be conscious of deep regret and disillusionment. Of the dead, one would wish not only to speak but to think nothing but good; and though Peter Gannet had been more an acquaintance than a friend, and one for whom I had entertained no special regard, I was troubled that I could no longer even pretend to think of him with respect. For the doubts that I had felt and tried to banish were doubts no longer. The bubble was pricked. Now I knew that his high pretensions were mere clap-trap, his “works of art” a rank imposture.

But even worse than this was the affair of “the decorated jar.” To pass off as his own work a piece that had been made by another—though that other were but an incompetent beginner—was unspeakably shabby; to offer it for sale was sheer dishonesty. Not that I grudged the fifteen guineas, since they would benefit poor Mrs. Gannet, nor did I commiserate the “mug” who had paid that preposterous price. Probably, he deserved all he got—or lost. But it irked me to think that Gannet, whom I had assumed to be a gentleman, was no more than a common rogue.

As to Bunderby, obviously, he was an arrant quack. An ignoramus, too, if he really believed my jar to have been hand-built, for a glance at its interior would have shown the most blatant traces of the wheel. But at this point my meditations

were interrupted by the stopping of the taxi opposite my house. I hopped out, paid the driver, fished out my latch-key and had it in the keyhole at the very moment when the first—and, as it turned out, also the last—of the evening's patients arrived on the door-step.



## CHAPTER 12. — A SYMPOSIUM

TO the ordinary housewife, the casual invitation to dinner of two large, able-bodied men would seem an incredible proceeding. But such is the way of bachelors; and perhaps it is not, after all, a bad way. Still, as I immured the newly-arrived patient in the waiting room, it did dawn on me that my housekeeper, Mrs. Gilbert, ought to be notified of the expected guests. Not that I had any anxiety, for Mrs. Gilbert appeared to credit me with the appetite of a Gargantua (and, in fact, I had a pretty good "twist"), and she seemed to live in a state of chronic anxiety lest I should develop symptoms of impending starvation.

Having discharged my bombshell down the kitchen stairs, I proceeded to deal with the patient—fortunately, a "chronic" who required little more than a "repeat"—and having safely launched him, bottle in hand, from the door step, repaired to the little glory-hole, known as "the study," to make provision for my visitors. Of their habits I knew nothing; but it seemed to me that a decanter of whiskey, another of sherry, a siphon and a box of cigars would meet all probable exigencies; and I had just finished these preparations when my guests arrived.

As they entered the study, Jervis looked at the table on which the decanters were displayed and grinned.

"It's all right, Thorndyke," said he. "Oldfield has got the restoratives ready. You won't want your smelling salts. But he is evidently going to make our flesh creep properly."

"Don't take any notice of him, Oldfield," said Thorndyke. "Jervis is a perennial juvenile. But he takes quite an intelligent interest in this case, and we are both all agog to hear your story. Where shall I put my note-book? I want to take rather full notes."

As he spoke, he produced a rather large block of ruled paper and fixed a wistful eye on the table; whereupon, having, after a brief discussion, agreed to take the restoratives as read, we transferred the whole collection—decanters, siphon and cigar box—to the top of a cupboard and Thorndyke laid his block on the vacant table and drew up a chair.

"Now, Oldfield," said Jervis, when we had all taken our seats and filled our pipes, "fire away. Art is long but life is short. Thorndyke is beginning to show signs of senile decay already, and I'm not as young as I was."

"The question is," said I, "where shall I begin?"

"The optimum place to begin," replied Jervis, "is at the beginning."

"Yes, I know. But the beginning of the case was the incident of the arsenic poisoning, and you know all about that."

"Jervis doesn't," said Thorndyke, "and I only came in at the end. Tell us the whole story. Don't be afraid of repetition and don't try to condense."

Thus directed, I began with my first introduction to the Gannet household and traced the history of my attendance up to the point at which Thorndyke came into the case, breaking off at the cessation of my visits to the hospital.

"I take it," said Jervis, "that full notes and particulars of the material facts are available if they should be wanted."

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, "I have my own notes and a copy of Woodfield's, and I think Oldfield has kept a record."

"I have," said I, "and I had intended to send you a copy. I must write one out and send it to you."

"Don't do that," said Jervis. "Lend it to me and I will have a typewritten copy made. But get on with the story. What was the next phase?"

"The next phase was the return home of Peter Gannet. He called on me to report and informed me that, substantially, he was quite fit."

"Was he, by Jove?" exclaimed Jervis. "He had made a pretty rapid recovery, considering the symptoms. And how did he seem to like the idea of coming home? Seem at all nervous?"

"Not at all. His view was that, as the attempt had been spotted and we should be on our guard, they wouldn't risk another. And apparently he was right—up to a certain point. I don't know what precautions he took—if he took any. But nothing further happened until—but we shall come to that presently. I will carry the narrative straight on."

This I did, making a brief and sketchy reference to my visits to the studio and the activities of Gannet and Boles. But at this point Jervis pulled me up.

"A little vague and general, this, Oldfield. Better follow the events more closely and in full detail."

"But," I protested, "all this has really nothing to do with the case."

"Don't you let Thorndyke hear you say that, my child. He doesn't admit that there is such a thing as an irrelevant fact, ascertainable in advance as such. Detail, my friend, detail; and again I say detail."

I did not take him quite literally, but I acted as if I did. Going back to the beginning of the studio episode, I recounted it with the minutest and most tedious circumstantiality, straining my memory in sheer malice to recall any trivial and unmeaning incident that I could recover, and winding up with a prolix and exact description of my prentice efforts with the potter's wheel and the creation of the immortal jar. I thought I had exhausted their powers of attention, but to my surprise

Thorndyke asked:

"And what did your masterpiece look like when you had finished it?"

"It was very thick and clumsy, but it was quite a pleasant shape. The wheel tends to produce pleasant shapes if you let it."

"Do you know what became of it?"

"Yes. Gannet fired it and passed it off as his own work. But I will tell you about that later. I only discovered the fraud this afternoon."

He nodded and made a note on a separate slip of paper and I then resumed my narrative; and as this was concerned with the discovery of the crime, I was genuinely careful not to omit any detail, no matter how unimportant it might appear to me. They both listened with concentrated attention, and Thorndyke apparently took my statement down verbatim in shorthand.

When I had finished with the gruesome discoveries in the studio, I paused and prepared to play my trump card, confident that, unlike Inspector Blandy, they would appreciate the brilliancy of my inspiration and its important bearing on the identity of the criminal. And I was not disappointed, at least as to the impression produced, for as I described how the "brain wave" had come to me, Thorndyke looked up from his note-book with an appearance of surprise and Jervis stared at me, open-mouthed.

"But, my dear Oldfield!" he exclaimed, "what in the name of Fortune gave you the idea of testing the ashes for arsenic?"

"Well, there had been one attempt," I replied, "and it was quite possible that there might have been another. That was what occurred to me."

"Yes, I understand," said he. "But surely you did not expect to get an arsenic reaction from incinerated bone?"

"I didn't, very much. It was just a chance shot; and I must admit that the result came quite as a surprise."

"The result!" he exclaimed. "What result?"

"I will show you," said I; and forthwith I produced from a locked drawer the precious glass tube with its unmistakable arsenic mirror.

Jervis took it from me and stared at it with a ludicrous expression of amazement, while Thorndyke regarded him with a quiet twinkle.

"But," the former exclaimed, when he had partially recovered from his astonishment, "the thing is impossible. I don't believe it!" Whereupon Thorndyke chuckled aloud.

"My learned friend," said he, "reminds me of that German professor who, meeting a man wheeling a tall cycle—a thing that he had never before seen the like of—demonstrated conclusively to the cyclist that it was impossible to ride the machine for the excellent reason that, if you didn't fall off to the right, you must inevitably fall off to the left."

"That's all very well," Jervis retorted, "but you don't mean to tell me that you accept this mirror at its face value?"

"It is certainly a little unexpected," Thorndyke replied, "but you will remember that Soderman and O'Connell state definitely that it has been possible to show the presence of arsenic in the ashes of cremated bodies."

"Yes. I remember noting their statement and finding myself unable to accept it. They cited no instances and they gave no particulars. A mere ipse dixit has no evidential weight. I am convinced that there is some fallacy in this case. What about your reagents, Oldfield? Is there a possibility that any of them might have been contaminated with arsenic?"

"No," I replied, "it is quite impossible. I tested them exhaustively. There was no sign of arsenic until I introduced the bone ash."

"By the way," Thorndyke asked, "did you use up all your material, or have you some left?"

"I used only half of it, so if you think it worth while to check the analysis, I can let you have the remainder."

"Excellent!" said Thorndyke. "A control experiment will settle the question whether the ashes do, or do not, contain arsenic. Meanwhile, since the mirror is an undeniable fact, we must provisionally adopt the affirmative view. I suppose you told the police about this?"

"Yes, I showed them the tube. Inspector Blandy spotted the arsenic mirror at a glance, but he took a most extraordinary attitude. He seemed to regard the arsenic as of no importance whatever; quite irrelevant, in fact. He would, apparently, like to suppress it altogether; which appears to me a monstrous absurdity."

"I think you are doing Blandy an injustice," said Thorndyke. "From a legal point of view, he is quite right. What the prosecution has to prove is, first, the fact that a murder has been committed; second, the identity of the person who has been murdered; and third, the identity of the person who committed the murder. Now the fact of murder is established by the condition of the remains and the circumstances in which they were found. The exact cause of death is, therefore, irrelevant. The arsenic has no bearing as proof of murder, because the murder is already proved. And it has no bearing on the other two questions."

"Surely," said I, "it indicates the identity of the murderer, in view of the previous attempt to poison Gannet."

"Not at all," he rejoined. "There was never any inquiry as to who administered that poison and there is no evidence. The court would not listen to mere surmises or suspicions. The poisoner is an unknown person, and at present the murderer is an unknown person. But you cannot establish the identity of an unknown quantity by proving that it is identical with another unknown quantity. No, Oldfield, Blandy is perfectly right. The arsenic would only be a nuisance and a complication to the prosecution. But it would be an absolute godsend to the defense."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Well," he replied, "you saw what Jervis's attitude was. That would be the attitude of the defense. The defending counsel would pass lightly over all the facts that had been proved and that he could not contest, and fasten on the one thing that could not be proved and that he could make a fair show of disproving. The element of doubt introduced by the arsenic might wreck the case for the prosecution and be the salvation of the accused. But we are wandering away from your story. Tell us what happened next."

I resumed my narrative, describing my visit to the police station and Blandy's investigations at the studio, dwelling especially on the interest shown by the Inspector in Boles's works and materials. They appeared to arouse a similar interest on the part of my listeners, for Jervis commented:

"The plot seems to thicken. There is a distinct suggestion that the studio was the scene of activities other than pottery and the making of modernist jewelry. I wonder if those finger-prints will throw any light on the subject?"

"I rather suspect that they have," said I, "judging by the questions that Blandy put to Mrs. Gannet. He had got some information from somewhere."

"I don't want to interrupt the narrative," said Thorndyke, "but when we have finished with the studio, we might have Blandy's questions. They probably represent his views on the case, and as you say, they may enable us to judge whether he knows more about it than we do."

"There is only one more point about the studio," said I, "but it is a rather important one, as it seems to bear on the motive for the murder." And with this I gave a detailed account of the quarrel between Gannet and Boles, an incident that, in effect, brought my connection with the place and the men to an end.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "that is important, for all the circumstances suggest that it was not a mere casual falling out but the manifestation of a deep-seated enmity."

"That was what I thought," said I, "and so, evidently, did Mrs. Gannet; and it was on this point that Blandy's questions were so particularly searching. First, he elicited the fact that the two men were formerly quite good friends and that the change had occurred quite recently. He inquired as to the cause of the change, but she was quite unable to account for it. Then he wanted to know when the change had occurred, but she was only able to say that it occurred some time in the latter part of last year. The next questions related to Boles's movements about that time, and naturally, she couldn't tell him very much. And then he asked a most remarkable question, which was, could she remember where Boles was on the 19th of last September? And it happened that she could. For at that time Gannet had gone to spend a week-end with Boles and she had taken the opportunity to spend a week-end at Eastbourne. And as she remembered clearly that she was at Eastbourne on the 19th of September, it followed that on that date Boles and Gannet were staying together at a place called Newingstead."

At the mention of Newingstead, Thorndyke looked up quickly, but he made no remark, and I continued:

"This information seemed greatly to interest Inspector Blandy, especially the fact that the two men were at Newingstead together on that date; and he pressed Mrs. Gannet to try to remember whether the sudden change from friendship to enmity seemed to coincide with that date. The question naturally astonished her; but on reflection, she was able to recall that she first noticed the change when she returned from Eastbourne."

"There is evidently something significant," said Jervis, "about that date and that place, but I can't imagine what it can be."

"I think," said I, "that I can enlighten you to some extent, for it happens that I also was at Newingstead on the 19th of last September."

"The deuce you were!" exclaimed Jervis. "Then it seems that you did not begin your story at the beginning, after all."

"I take it," said Thorndyke, "that you are the Dr. Oldfield who gave evidence at the inquest on Constable Murray?"

"That is so. But how do you come to know about that inquest? I suppose you read about it in the papers? But it is odd that you should happen to remember it."

"It isn't, really," said Thorndyke. "The fact is that Mr. Kempster—the man who was robbed, you remember—consulted me about the case. He wanted me to trace the thief, and if possible, to trace the diamonds, too. Of course, I told him that I had no means of doing anything of the kind. It was purely a police case. But he insisted on leaving the matter in my hands and he provided me with a verbatim report of the inquest from the local paper. Don't you remember the case, Jervis? I know you read the report."

"Yes," replied Jervis. "I begin to have a hazy recollection of the case. I remember now that a constable was murdered in a wood; killed with his own truncheon, wasn't he?"

"Yes," I replied; "and some very distinct finger-prints were found on the truncheon—finger-prints from a left hand, with a particularly clear thumb-print."

"Ha!" said Jervis. "Yes, of course, I remember; and I think I begin to 'rumble' Mr. Blandy, as Miller would say. Did you see those finger-prints on the gold plate?"

"I just had a look at them, though I was not particularly interested. But they were extremely clear—they would be, on polished gold plate. There was a thumb on one side and a forefinger on the reverse."

"Do you know whether they were left or right?"

"I couldn't tell; but Blandy said they were from a left hand."

"I expect he was right," said Jervis. "I am not fond of Blandy, but he certainly does know his job. It looks as if there were going to be some startling developments in this case. What do you think, Thorndyke?"

"It depends," replied Thorndyke, "on what Blandy found at the studio. If the finger-prints on the gold plate were the same as those found on the truncheon, they can be assumed to be those of the man who murdered the constable; and as Blandy will have assumed—quite properly—that they were the finger-prints of Boles, we can understand his desire to ascertain where Boles was on the day of the murder, and his intense interest in learning from Mrs. Gannet that Boles was actually at Newingstead on that very day. Further, I think we can understand his disinclination to have any dealings with the arsenic."

"I don't quite see why," said I.

"It is partly a matter of legal procedure," he explained. "Boles cannot be charged with any crime until he is caught. But, if he is arrested, and his finger-prints are found to be the same as those on the truncheon, he will be charged with the murder of the constable. He may also be charged with the murder of Gannet. Thus when it comes to the trial, there will be two indictments. But, whereas—in the circumstances that we are assuming—the evidence against him in the matter of the murder at Newingstead appears to be conclusive and unanswerable, that relating to the murder of Gannet is much less convincing; in fact, there is hardly enough at present to support the charge."

"Hence it is practically certain that the first indictment would be the one to be proceeded with; and as this would almost certainly result in a conviction, the other would be of no interest. The police would not be willing to waste time and effort on preparing a difficult and inconclusive case which would never be brought to trial. That is how the matter presents itself to me."

"Yes," Jervis agreed, "that seems to be the position. But yet we can't dismiss the Gannet murder altogether. Boles is the principal suspect, but he hasn't the monopoly. He might have had an accomplice—an accessory, either before or after the fact. As I see the case, it seems to leave Mr. Boles fairly in the soup and Mrs. Gannet, so to speak, sitting on the edge of the tureen. But I may be wrong."

"I think you are," said I, with some warmth. "I don't believe that Mrs. Gannet has any guilty knowledge of the crime at all."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Oldfield," said Thorndyke. "But I think Jervis was referring to the views of the police, which may be different from ours."

At this moment the clock in the adjacent consulting room struck eight, and, before its reverberations had died away, the welcome sound of the gong was heard summoning us to dinner. I conducted my guests to the dining room, and a quick glance at the table as I entered assured me that Mrs. Gilbert had been equal to the occasion. And that conviction deepened as the meal proceeded and evidently communicated itself to my guests, for Jervis remarked, after an appreciative sniff at his claret glass:

"Oldfield seems to do himself pretty well for a struggling G.P."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "I think we may congratulate him on his housekeeper."

"And his wine merchant," added Jervis. "I propose a vote of thanks to them both."

I bowed my acknowledgments and promised to convey the sentiments of the company to the proper quarters (which I did, subsequently, to our mutual satisfaction), and we then reverted to the activities proper to the occasion. Presently Jervis looked up at me as if a sudden thought had struck him.

"When you were describing Gannet's method of work, Oldfield, you didn't give us a very definite idea of the result. I gather that he posed as a special kind of artist potter. Did you consider that his productions justified that claim?"

"To tell the truth," I replied, "I didn't know what to think. To my eye his pottery looked like the sort of rough, crude stuff that is made by primitive people—but not so good—or the pottery that children turn out at the kindergartens. But you see I am not an expert. It seemed possible that it might have some subtle qualities which I was too ignorant to detect."

"A very natural state of mind for a modest man," said Thorndyke, "and a perfectly proper one; but a dangerous one, nevertheless. For it is just that self-distrust, that modest assumption that 'there must be something in it, after all,' that lets in the charlatan and the impostor. I saw some of Gannet's pottery in his bedroom, including that outrageous effigy, and I am afraid that I was less modest than you were, for I decided definitely that the man who made it was no potter."

"And you were absolutely right," said I. "The question has been settled conclusively, so far as I am concerned, this very day. I have just visited an exhibition of Gannet's works, and the bubble of his reputation was burst before my eyes. I will give you the particulars. It was quite a quaint experience."

With this I produced the catalogue from my pocket and having read to them Bunderby's introduction, I gave them a full description of the proceedings, including as much of Bunderby's discourse as I could remember, and finishing up with the amazing incident of the "decorated jar." They both listened with deep interest and with appreciative chuckles, and when I had concluded, Jervis remarked:

"Well, the jar incident fairly puts the lid on it. Obviously, the whole of the pottery business was what the financiers call a ramp. And I should say that Bunderby was in it up to the neck."

"That is not so certain," said Thorndyke. "He is either an ignoramus or a sheer impostor, and possibly both. It doesn't matter much, as he is apparently not our pigeon. But the affair of the jar—a mere beginner's experiment—is more interesting, for it concerns Gannet, who is our pigeon. As Jervis says, it explodes Gannet's pretensions as a skilled artist, and thus convicts him of deliberate imposture, but it also proves him guilty of an act, not only mean but quite definitely dishonest. For the jar might conceivably be sold."

"It is sold," said I, "for fifteen guineas."

"Which," Jervis pronounced, oracularly, "illustrates the proverbial lack of cohesion between a fool and his money. I wonder who the mug is."

"I didn't discover that; in fact, I didn't ask. But I picked up some other items of information. I had quite a long chat with Mr. Kempster, the proprietor of the gallery."

"Mr. Kempster?" Thorndyke repeated, with a note of interrogation.

"Yes, but not your Mr. Kempster. This man is the brother of your client and a good deal like him. That is how I came to speak to him."

"And what did you learn from Mr. Kempster?" Thorndyke asked.

"I learned, in the first place, that Boles is a Newingstead man; that he is acquainted with your Mr. Kempster, and that they have had certain business transactions."

"Of what kind?" asked Thorndyke.

"Either the sale or exchange of stones. It seems that Boles buys up oddments of old or damaged jewelry to melt down for his own work. If they contain any diamonds, he picks them out and passes them on to Kempster, either in exchange for the kind of stones that he uses, or else, I suppose, for cash. Apparently the transactions are on quite a small scale."

"Small or large," said Jervis, "it sounds a bit fishy. Wouldn't Blandy be interested?"

"I don't quite see why," said I. "Blandy is all out on the murder charge. It wouldn't help him if he could prove Boles to be a receiver, or even a thief."

"I think you are wrong there," said Thorndyke. "If you recall the circumstances of the diamond robbery, which led to the murder of the constable, you will see that what you have told us has a distinct bearing. It was assumed that the thief was a chance stranger who had strayed into the premises. But a man who was suspected of being either a receiver or a thief, who had had dealings with Kempster—possibly in that very house—and knew something of his habits, and who happened to be in Newingstead at the time of the robbery, would fit into the picture much better than a chance stranger. However, that case really turns on the finger-print. If the print on the truncheon is Boles's print, Boles will hang if he is caught; and if it is not, he is innocent both of the murder and of the robbery."

I did not pursue the topic any farther, and the conversation drifted into other channels. But suddenly it occurred to me that nothing had been said on the very subject that had occasioned the present meeting.

"By the way," said I, "you haven't told me what has been done about poor Mrs. Gannet. I hope you have been able to make some arrangements."

"We have," said Jervis. "You need have no further anxiety about her. I called on Linnell this afternoon and put the proposal to him, and he agreed, not only quite willingly but with enthusiasm, to undertake the case. He is keen on criminal practice, and for a solicitor he has an unusual knowledge of criminal law and procedure. So we can depend on him in both respects. He will see that Mrs. Gannet's rights and interests are properly safeguarded, and on the other hand, he won't obstruct and antagonize the police."

"I am relieved to hear that," said I, "for I was most distressed to think of the terrible position that this poor lady finds herself in. I feel the deepest sympathy for her."

"Very properly," said Thorndyke, "as her medical adviser, and I think I am disposed to agree with your view of the case. But we must be cautious. We must not take sides. In the words of a certain ecclesiastic, 'we must keep a warm heart and a cool head.' You will remember that when the arsenic poisoning occurred, both you and I, having regard to Mrs. Gannet's relations with Boles, felt that she was a possible suspect, either as an accessory or a principal. That view was perfectly correct and I must remind you that nothing has changed since then. The general probabilities remain. I do not believe that

she had any hand in this crime, but you and I may both be wrong. At any rate, the police will consider all the possibilities, and our business is to see that Mrs. Gannet gets absolutely fair treatment; and that we shall do."

"Thank you, sir," said I. "It is most kind of you to take so much interest, and so much trouble, in this case, seeing that you have no personal concern in it. Indeed, I don't quite know why you have interested yourselves in it in the way that you have done."

"That is easily explained," replied Thorndyke. "Jervis and I are medico-legal practitioners, and here is a most unusual crime of the greatest medico-legal interest. Such cases we naturally study for the sake of the knowledge and experience that may be gleaned from them. But there is another reason. It has repeatedly happened that when we have studied some unusual case from the outside for its mere professional interest, we have suddenly acquired a personal interest in it by being called on to act for one of the parties. Then we have had the great advantage of being able to take it up with full and considered knowledge of most of the facts."

"Then," I asked somewhat eagerly, "if you were asked to take up this case on behalf of Mrs. Gannet, would you be willing—assuming, of course, that the costs would be met?"

"The costs would not be an essential factor," he replied. "I think that if a charge should be brought against Mrs. Gannet, I would be willing to investigate the case—with an open mind and at her risk as to what I might discover—and if I were satisfied of her innocence, to undertake her defense."

"Only if you were satisfied of her innocence?"

"Yes. Reasonably satisfied when I had all the facts. Remember, Oldfield, that I am an investigator. I am not an advocate."

I found this slightly disappointing, but as no charge was probable, and as Thorndyke's view of the case was substantially similar to my own, I pursued the subject no farther. Shortly afterwards, we adjourned to the study and spent the remainder of the evening discussing Gannet's pottery and the various aspects of modernist art.





## CHAPTER 13. — THE INQUIRY

THE results of Mr. Linnell's activities on Mrs. Gannet's behalf were slightly disappointing, though she undoubtedly derived great encouragement from the feeling that his advice and support were always available. But Inspector Blandy was quietly but doggedly persistent in his search for information. Characteristically, he welcomed Linnell with almost affectionate warmth. It was such a relief to him to know that this poor lady now had a really competent and experienced legal adviser to watch over her interests. He had formerly been so distressed at her friendless and solitary condition. Now he was quite happy about her, though he deplored the necessity of troubling her occasionally with tiresome questions.

Nevertheless, he returned to the charge again and again in spite of Linnell's protests that all available information had been given. There were two points on which he yearned for more exact knowledge. The first related to the movements of Mr. Boles; the second to her own movements during the time that she had been absent from home. As to the first, the last time she had seen Boles was about a week before she went away, and she then understood that he was proposing to take a short holiday to Burnham-on-Crouch. Whether, in fact, he did go to Burnham she could not say. She had never seen or heard from him since that day. As to his usual places of resort, he had an aunt at Newingstead with whom he used to stay from time to time as a paying guest. She knew of no other place which he was in the habit of visiting, and she had no idea whatever as to where he might be now.

As to her own movements, she had been staying at Westcliff-on-Sea with an old servant who had a house there and let lodgings to visitors. While there, she had usually walked along the sea front to Southend in the mornings and returned to tea or dinner. Sometimes she spent the whole day at Southend and went to a theatre or other entertainment, coming back at night by train. Naturally she could not give exact dates or say positively where she was at a certain time on a given day, though she tried to remember. And when the questions were repeated on subsequent occasions, the answers that she gave inevitably tended to vary.

From these repeated questionings, it was evident to Linnell (from whom, as well as from Mrs. Gannet, I had these particulars) that, in the intervals, Blandy had checked all these statements by exhaustive inquiries on the spot; and further, that he had been carefully studying the fast train service between Southend and London. Apparently he had discovered no discrepancy, but yet it seemed that he was not satisfied; that he still harboured a suspicion that Mrs. Gannet knew more about the affair than she had admitted and that she could, if she chose, give a useful hint as to where Boles was in hiding.

Such was the state of affairs when I received a summons to attend and give evidence at an inquest "on certain remains, believed to be human, found on the premises of No. 12 Jacob Street." The summons came rather as a surprise, and on receiving it I gave very careful consideration to the questions that I might be asked and the evidence that I should give. Should I, for instance, volunteer any statements as to the arsenic poisoning and my analysis of the bone-ash? As to the latter, I knew that Blandy would have liked me to suppress it, and my own enthusiasm on the subject had largely evaporated after witnessing Jervis's open incredulity. But I would be sworn to tell the whole truth, and as the analysis was a fact, it would have to be mentioned. However, as will be seen, the choice was not left to me; the far-sighted Blandy had anticipated my difficulty and provided the necessary counterblast.

On the morning of the inquest, I made a point of calling on Mrs. Gannet to satisfy myself that she was in a fit state to attend and to ascertain whether Linnell would be there to represent her. On both points I was reassured; for, though naturally a little nervous, she was quite composed and prepared to face courageously what must necessarily be a rather painful ordeal.

"I can never be grateful enough to you and Dr. Thorndyke," said she, "for sending Mr. Linnell to me. He is so kind and sympathetic and so wise. I should have been terrified of this inquest if I had had to go to it alone; but now that I know Mr. Linnell will be there to support me, I feel quite confident. For you know I really haven't anything that I need conceal."

"Of course you haven't," I replied, cheerfully, though without any profound conviction, "and there is nothing at all for you to worry about. You can trust Mr. Linnell to keep Inspector Blandy in order."

With this I took my departure, greatly relieved to find her in so satisfactory a state, and proceeded to dispatch my visits so as to leave the afternoon clear. For my evidence would probably occupy a considerable time and I wanted, if possible, to hear the whole of the inquiry; I managed this so successfully that I was able to present myself only a few minutes late and before the business had actually commenced.

Looking round the room as I entered, I was surprised to find but a mere handful of spectators; not more than a dozen, and these occupied two benches at the back, while the witnesses were accommodated on a row of chairs in front of them. Before seating myself on the vacant chair at the end, I glanced along the row, which included Blandy, Thorndyke, Jervis, Mrs. Gannet, Linnell and one or two other persons who were unknown to me.

I had hardly taken my seat when the coroner opened the proceedings with a brief address to the jury.

"The general nature of this inquiry," said he, "has been made known to you in the course of your visit to the studio in Jacob Street. There are three questions to which we have to find answers. First, are these fragments of burnt bones the remains of a human being? Second, if they are, can we give a name and identity to that person? And third, how did that person come by his death? To these questions the obvious appearances and the known circumstances suggest certain answers; but we must disregard all preconceived opinions and consider the facts with an open mind. To do that, I think the

best plan will be to trace, in the order of their occurrence, the events which seem to be connected with the subject of our inquiry. We will begin by taking the evidence of Dr. Oldfield."

Here I may say that I shall not follow the proceedings in detail since they dealt with matters with which the reader is already acquainted; and for such repetition as is unavoidable, I hereby offer a comprehensive apology.

When the preliminaries had been disposed of, the coroner opened his examination with the question:

"When, and in what circumstances, did you first meet Peter Gannet?"

"On the 16th of December, 1930," I replied. "I was summoned to attend him professionally. He was then an entire stranger to me."

"What was the nature of his illness?"

"He was suffering from arsenic poisoning."

"Did you recognize the condition immediately?"

"No. The real nature of his illness was discovered by Dr. Thorndyke, whom I consulted."

Here, in answer to a number of questions, I described the circumstances of the illness up to the time when Peter Gannet called on me to report his recovery.

"Were you able to form any opinion as to whom administered the poison to Gannet?"

"No. I had no facts to go upon other than those that I have mentioned."

"You have referred to a Mr. Frederick Boles as being in attendance on Gannet. What was his position in the household?"

"He was a friend of the family and he worked with Gannet in the studio."

"What were his relations with Gannet? Were they genuinely friendly?"

"I thought so at the time, but afterwards I changed my opinion."

"What were the relations of Boles and Mrs. Gannet?"

"They were quite good friends."

"Should you say that their relations were merely friendly? Nothing more?"

"I never had any reason to suppose that they were anything more than friends. They seemed to be on the best of terms, but their mutual liking was known to Gannet and he used to refer to it without any sign of disapproval. He seemed to accept their friendship as quite natural and proper."

The questions now concerned themselves with what I may call the second stage; my relations with Gannet up to the time of the disappearance, including the quarrel in the studio which I had overheard. This evidently produced a deep impression and evoked a number of searching questions from the coroner and from one or two of the jury. Then came the disappearance itself, and as I told the story of my search of the house and my discoveries in the studio, the profound silence in the court and the intent looks of the jury testified to the eager interest of the listeners. When I had finished the account of my doings in the studio, the coroner (who I suspected had been primed by Blandy) asked:

"What about the sample of bone-ash that you took away with you? Did you make any further examination of it?"

"Yes. I examined it under the microscope and confirmed my belief that it was incinerated bone; and I also made a chemical test to ascertain whether it contained any arsenic."

"Had you any expectation that it would contain arsenic?"

"I thought it just possible that it might contain traces of arsenic. It was the previous poisoning incident that suggested the examination."

"Did you, in fact, find any arsenic?"

"Yes. To my surprise, I discovered a considerable quantity. I don't know how much, as I did not attempt to estimate it, but I could see that there was a comparatively large amount."

"And what conclusion did you reach from this fact?"

"I concluded that deceased, whoever he was, had died from the effects of a very large dose of arsenic."

"Is that still your opinion?"

"I am rather doubtful. There may have been some source of error which is not known to me, but the arsenic was certainly there. Really, its significance is a matter for an expert, which I am not."

This, substantially, brought my evidence to an end. I was followed by Sir Joseph Armadale, the eminent medico-legal authority, acting for the Home Office. As he took his place near the coroner, he produced and laid on the table a shallow, glass-topped box. In reply to the coroner's question, he deposed:

"I have examined a quantity of fragments of incinerated bone submitted to me by the Commissioner of Police. Most of

them were too small to have any recognizable character, but some were large enough to identify as parts of particular bones. These I found, in every case, to be human bones."

"Would you say that all these fragments are the remains of a human being?"

"That, of course, is an inference, but it is a reasonable inference. All I can say is that every fragment that I was able to recognize as part of a particular bone was part of a human bone. It is reasonable to infer that the unrecognisable fragments were also human. I have picked out all the fragments that were identifiable and put them in this box, which I submit for your inspection."

Here the box was passed round and examined by the jury, and while the inspection was proceeding, the coroner addressed the witness.

"You have heard Dr. Oldfield's evidence as to the arsenic that he found in the ashes. Have you any comments to make on his discovery?"

"Yes. The matter was mentioned to me by Inspector Blandy and I accordingly made an analysis to check Dr. Oldfield's findings. He is perfectly correct. The ashes contain a considerable quantity of arsenic. From two ounces of the ash I recovered nearly a tenth of a grain."

"And do you agree that the presence of that arsenic is evidence that deceased died from arsenic poisoning?"

"No. I do not associate the arsenic with the body of deceased at all. The quantity is impossibly large. As a matter of fact, I do not believe that, if deceased had been poisoned even by a very large dose of arsenic, any trace of the poison would have been discoverable in the ashes. Arsenic is a volatile substance which changes into a vapour at a comparatively low temperature—about 300 degrees Fahrenheit. But these bones had been exposed for hours to a very high temperature—over 2000° Fahrenheit. I should say that the whole of the arsenic would have been driven off in vapour. At any rate, the quantity which was found in the ashes was quite impossible as a residue. The arsenic must have got into the ashes in some way after they had become ashes."

"Can you suggest any way in which it could have got into the ashes?"

"I can only make a guess. Inspector Blandy has informed me that he found a jar of arsenic in the studio among the materials for making glazes or enamels. So it appears that arsenic was one of the materials used, in which case it would have been possible for it to have got mixed with the ashes either in the grinding apparatus or in the bin. But that is only a speculative suggestion. There may be other possibilities."

"Yes," the coroner agreed. "But it doesn't matter much. The important point is that the arsenic was not derived from the body of deceased, and you are clear on that?"

"Perfectly clear," replied Sir Joseph; and that completed his evidence.

The next witness was Mr. Albert Hawley, who described himself as a dental surgeon and deposed that he had attended Mr. Peter Gannet professionally and had made for him a partial upper denture which included the four incisors. The coroner then handed to him a small stoppered tube which I could see contained a tooth, remarking:

"I think you have seen that before, but you had better examine it."

"Yes," the witness replied as he withdrew the stopper and shook the tooth out into the palm of his hand. "It was shown to me by Inspector Blandy. It is a porcelain tooth—a right upper lateral incisor—which has been broken into several fragments and very skilfully mended. It is of the type known as Du Trey's."

"Does it resemble any of the teeth in the denture which you made for Peter Gannet?"

"Yes. I used Du Trey's teeth in that denture, so this is exactly like the right upper lateral incisor in that denture."

"You can't say, I suppose, whether this tooth actually came from that denture?"

"No. The teeth are all alike when they come from the makers, and if I have to make any small alterations in adjusting the bite, no record is kept. But nothing seems to have been done to this tooth."

"If it were suggested to you that this tooth came from Gannet's denture, would you have any reason to doubt the correctness of that suggestion?"

"None whatever. It is exactly like a tooth in his denture and it may actually be that tooth. Only I cannot say positively that it is."

"Thank you," said the coroner. "That is all that we could expect of you, and I think we need not trouble you any further."

Mr. Hawley was succeeded by Inspector Blandy who gave his evidence with the ease and conciseness of the professional witness. His description of the researches in the studio and the discovery of the fragments of the tooth were listened to by the jury with the closest interest, though in the matter of sensation I had rather "stolen his thunder." But the turning out of Boles's cupboard was a new feature and several points of interest arose from it. The discovery, for instance, of a two-pound jar of arsenic, three-quarters full, was one of them.

"You had already learned of Dr. Oldfield's analysis?"

"Yes. He showed me the tube with the arsenic deposit in it, but I saw at once that there must be some mistake. It was too

good to be true. There was too much arsenic for a cremated body."

"Did you gather what the arsenic was used for?"

"No. The cupboard contained a number of chemicals, apparently used for preparing enamels and fluxes, and I presumed that the arsenic was used for the same purpose."

The discovery of the finger-prints raised some other interesting questions, particularly as to their identity, concerning which the coroner asked:

"Can you say whose finger-prints those were?"

"Not positively. But there were quite a lot of them on various objects, on bottles and jars, and some on tool-handles, and they were all from the same person; and as the cupboard was Boles's cupboard and the tools and bottles were his, it is fair to assume that the finger-prints were his."

"Yes," the coroner agreed, "that seems a reasonable assumption. But I don't see the importance of it, unless the finger-prints are known to the police. Is it expedient to ask whether they are?"

"I don't want to go into particulars," said Blandy, "but I may say that these finger-prints are known to the police and that their owner is wanted for a very serious crime against the person; a crime involving extreme violence. That is their only bearing on this case. If they are Boles's finger-prints, then Boles is known to be a violent criminal; and there seems to be evidence in this case that a violent crime has been committed."

"Have you had an opportunity of interviewing Mr. Boles?" the coroner asked.

The Inspector smiled, grimly. "No," he replied. "Mr. Boles disappeared just about the time when the body was burned, and so far, he has managed to keep out of sight. Apparently he doesn't desire an interview."

That was the substance of the Inspector's evidence, and, as he was disposed to be evasive and reticent, the coroner discreetly refrained from pressing him. Accordingly, when the depositions had been read and signed, he was allowed to retire to his seat and the name of Letitia Gannet was called. As she advanced to the table, where a chair was placed for her, I watched her with some uneasiness; for though I felt sure that she knew nothing that she had not already disclosed, the atmosphere of the court was not favourable. It was easy to see that the jury regarded her with some suspicion, and that Blandy's habitually benevolent expression but thinly disguised a watchful attention which was not entirely friendly.

As I had expected, the coroner began with an attempt to get more light on the incident of the arsenic poisoning, and Mrs. Gannet recounted the history of the affair in so far as it was known to her.

"Of what persons did your household consist at that time?" the coroner asked.

"Of my husband, myself and one maid. Perhaps I should include Mr. Boles as he worked in the studio with my husband and usually took his meals with us and was at the house a good deal."

"Who prepared your husband's food?"

"I did while he was ill. The maid did most of the other cooking."

"And the barley water? Who prepared that?"

"Usually I did; but sometimes Mr. Boles made it."

"And who took the food and drink to your husband's room?"

"I usually took it up to him myself, but sometimes I sent the maid up with it and occasionally Mr. Boles took it up."

"Is the maid still with you?"

"No. As soon as I heard from my husband that there had been arsenic in his food, I sent the girl away with a month's wages in lieu of notice."

"Why did you do that? Did you suspect her of having put the arsenic in the food?"

"No, not in the least, but I thought it best to be on the safe side."

"Did you form any opinion as to who might have put it in?"

"No, there was nobody whom I could suspect. At first I thought that there must have been some mistake, but when Dr. Oldfield explained to me that no mistake was possible, I supposed that the arsenic must have got in by accident; and I think so still."

The next questions were concerned with the relations existing between Gannet and Boles and the time and circumstances of the break-up of their friendship.

"As to the cause of this sudden change from friendship to enmity—did you ever learn from either of the men what the trouble was?"

"Neither of them would admit that there was any trouble, though I saw that there must be. But I could never guess what it was."

"Did it ever occur to you that your husband might be jealous on account of your intimacy with Mr. Boles?"

"Never, and I am sure he was not. Mr. Boles and I were relatives—second cousins—and had known each other since we were children. We were always the best of friends, but there was never anything between us that could have occasioned jealousy on my husband's part, and he knew it. He never made the least objection to our friendship."

"You spoke of Mr. Boles as working with your husband in the studio. What, precisely, does that mean? Was Mr. Boles a potter?"

"No. He sometimes helped my husband, particularly in firing the kiln; but his own work, for the last year or two, was the making of certain kinds of jewellery and enamels."

"You say 'for the last year or two'—what was his previous occupation?"

"He was originally a dental mechanic; but when my husband took the studio, as it contained a jeweler's and enameleer's plant, Mr. Boles came there and began to make jewellery."

Here I caught the eye of Inspector Blandy, and a certain fluttering of the eyelid recalled his observations on Mr. Boles's "neo-primitive" jewelry. But a dental mechanic is not quite the same as a plumber's apprentice.

The inquiry now proceeded to the circumstances of Peter Gannet's disappearance and the dates of the various events.

"Can you remember exactly when you last saw Mr. Boles?"

"I think it was on Tuesday, the 21st of April; about a week before I went away. He came to the studio and had lunch with us, and then he told us that he was going to spend a week or ten days at Burnham in Essex. I never saw or heard from him after that."

"You say that you went away. Can we have particulars as to when and where you went?"

"I left home on the 29th of April to stay for a fortnight at Westcliff-on-Sea with an old servant, Mrs. Hardy, who has a house there and lets rooms to visitors in the season. I returned home on Thursday, the 14th of May."

"Between those two dates, were you continuously at Westcliff, or did you go to any other places?"

To this she replied in the same terms that she had used in her answers to Blandy, which I have already recorded. Here again I suspected that the coroner had received some help from the Inspector for he inquired minutely into the witness's doings from day to day while she was staying at Westcliff.

"In effect," said he, "you slept at Westcliff, but you frequently spent whole days elsewhere. During that fortnight, did you ever come to London?"

"No."

"If you had wished to spend a day in London, could you have done so without your landlady being aware of it?"

"I suppose so. There is a very good train service. But I never did."

"And what about Burnham? That is not so very far from Westcliff. Did you ever go there during your stay?"

"No. I never went farther than Southend."

"During that fortnight, did you ever write to your husband?"

"Yes, twice. The first letter was sent a day or two after my arrival at Westcliff and he replied to it a couple of days later. The second letter I wrote a few days before my return, telling him when he might expect me home. I received no answer to that, and when I got home I found it in the letter box."

"Can you give us the exact dates of those letters? You see that they are important as they give, approximately, the time of the disappearance. Can you remember the date of your husband's reply to your first letter? Or perhaps you have the letter itself."

"I have not. It was only a short note, and when I had read it I tore it up. My first letter was written and posted, I am nearly sure, on Monday, the 4th of May. I think his reply reached me by the first post on Friday, the 8th, so it would have been sent off on Thursday, the 7th. My second letter, I remember quite clearly, was written and posted on Sunday, the 10th of May, so it would have been delivered at our house early on Monday, the 11th."

"That is the one that you found in the letter box. Is it still in existence?"

"No. Unfortunately, I destroyed it. I took it from the letter box and opened it to make sure that it was my letter, and then, when I had glanced at it, I threw it on the fire that I had just lit. But I am quite sure about the date."

"It is a pity you destroyed the letter," said the coroner, "but no doubt your memory as to the date is reliable. Now we come to the incidents connected with the disappearance. Just give us an account of all that happened from the time when you arrived home."

In reply to this, Mrs. Gannet told the story of her alarming discovery in much the same words as she had used in telling it to me, but in greater detail, including her visit to me and our joint examination of the premises. Her statement was amplified by various questions from the coroner, but her answers to them conveyed nothing new to me with one or two exceptions. For instance, the coroner asked: "You looked at the hall stand and noticed that your husband's hats and stick were there. Did you notice another walking-stick?"

"I saw that there was another stick in the stand."

"Did you recognize it as belonging to any particular person?"

"No, I had never seen it before."

"Did you form any opinion as to whose stick it was?"

"I felt sure that it did not belong to my husband. It was not the kind of stick that he would have used; and as there was only one other person who was likely to be the owner—Mr. Boles—I assumed that it was his."

"Did you take it out and examine it?"

"No, I was not interested in it. I was trying to find out what had become of my husband."

"But you assumed that it was Mr. Boles's stick. Did it not occur to you as rather strange that he should have left his stick in your stand?"

"No. I suppose that he had gone out of the studio by the wicket and had forgotten about his stick. He was sometimes inclined to be forgetful. But I really did not think much about it."

"Was that stick in the stand when you went away from home?"

"No. I am sure it was not."

"You have mentioned that you called at Mr. Boles's flat. Why did you do that?"

"For two reasons. I had written to him telling him when I should be home and asking him to come and have tea with us. As he had not answered my letter and did not come to the house, I thought that something unusual must have happened. But especially I wanted to find out whether he knew anything about my husband."

"When you found that he was not at his flat, did you suppose that he was still at Burnham?"

"No, because I learned that he had returned about a week previously at night and had slept at the flat and had the next day gone away again."

"Did you know, or could you guess, where he had gone?"

"No, I had not the least idea."

"Have you any idea as to where he maybe at this moment?"

"Not the slightest."

"Do you know of any places to which he is in the habit of going?"

"The only place I know of is his aunt's house at Newingstead. But I understand from Inspector Blandy that inquiries have been made there and that his aunt has not seen or heard of him for some months. I know of no other place where he might be."

"When you were describing your search of the premises, you said that you did not look in the studio. Why did you not? Was it not the most likely place in which he might be?"

"Yes, it was. But I was afraid to go in. Since my husband and Mr. Boles had been on bad terms, they had quarrelled dreadfully. And they were both rather violent men. On one occasion—which Dr. Oldfield has mentioned—I heard them actually fighting in the studio, and I think it had happened on other occasions. So, when I could find no trace of my husband in the house, I began to fear that something might have happened in the studio. That was why I was afraid to go there."

"In short, you were afraid that you might find your husband's dead body in the studio. Isn't that what you mean?"

"Yes, I think that was in my mind. I suspected that something awful had happened."

"Was it only a suspicion? Or did you know that there had been some trouble?"

"I knew nothing whatever about any trouble. I did not even know whether the two men had met since I went away. And it was hardly a suspicion; only, remembering what had happened in the past, the possibility occurred to me."

When the coroner had written down this answer, he sat for a few moments looking reflectively at the witness. Apparently, he could think of nothing further to ask her, for, presently, turning to the jury, he said:

"I think the witness has told us all that she knows about this affair, but possibly some members of the jury might wish to ask a further question."

There was a short pause, during which the members of the jury gazed solemnly at the witness. At length one enterprising jurymen essayed a question.

"Could we ask Mrs. Gannet if she knows, or has any idea, who murdered her husband?"

"I don't believe," the coroner replied with a faint smile, "that we could ask that question, even if it were a proper one to put to a witness, because we have not yet decided that anyone murdered Peter Gannet, or even that he is dead. Those are precisely the questions that you will have to answer when you come to consider your verdict."

He paused and still regarded the jury inquiringly, but none of them made any sign; then, after waiting for yet a few more moments, he read the depositions, took the signature, released the witness, and pronounced the name of her successor, Dr. Thorndyke; who came forward and took the place which she vacated. Having been sworn, he deposed, in answer to the coroner's question:

"I attended Peter Gannet in consultation with Dr. Oldfield last January. I formed the opinion that he was suffering from arsenic poisoning."

"Had you any doubt on the subject?"

"No. His symptoms were the ordinary symptoms of poisoning by arsenic, and, when I had him in the hospital under observation, it was demonstrated chemically that there was arsenic in his body. The chemical tests were made by Professor Woodfield and by me."

He then went on to confirm the account which I had given, including the analysis of the arrowroot and the barley water. When he had finished his statement, the coroner asked, tentatively:

"I suppose you were not able to form an opinion as to how, or by whom, the poison was administered, or whether the poisoning might have been accidental?"

"No. I had no first-hand knowledge of the persons or the circumstances. As to accidental poisoning, I would not say that it was impossible, but I should consider it too improbable to be seriously entertained. The poisoning affected only one person in the house, and when the patient returned home after the discovery it did not recur. Those facts are entirely opposed to the idea of accidental poisoning."

"What do you say about the arsenic that Dr. Oldfield found in the ashes?"

"I agree with Sir Joseph Armadale that there must have been some contamination of the ashes. I do not associate the arsenic with the body of the person who was burned—assuming the ashes to be those of a burned human body."

"On that matter," said the coroner, "perhaps you will give us your opinion on the fragments which Sir Joseph Armadale has shown us."

He handed the box to Thorndyke, who took it and examined the contents with an appearance of the deepest interest, assisting his eyesight with his pocket lens. When he had—apparently—inspected each separate fragment, he handed the box back to the coroner, who asked, as he replaced it on the table:

"Well, what do say about those fragments?"

"I have no doubt," replied Thorndyke, "that they are all fragments of human bones."

"Would it be possible to identify deceased from these fragments?"

"I should say that it would be quite impossible."

"Do you agree that the ashes as a whole may be assumed to be the remains of a burned human body?"

"That is an obviously reasonable assumption, though it is not susceptible of proof. It is the assumption that I should make in the absence of any reasons to the contrary."

That concluded Thorndyke's evidence, and when he retired, his place was taken by Professor Woodfield. But I need not record the Professor's evidence since it merely repeated and confirmed that of Thorndyke and Sir Joseph. With the reading and signing of his depositions the body of evidence was completed and when he had returned to his seat, the coroner proceeded to his summing up.

"In opening this inquiry," he began, "I said that there were three questions to which we had to find answers. First, are these ashes the remains of a human being? Second, if they are, can we identify that human being as any known person? And third, if we can so identify him, can we decide how he came by his death?"

"Let us take these questions in their order. As to the first, it is definitely answered for us by the medical evidence. Sir Joseph Armadale and Dr. Thorndyke, both authorities of the highest eminence, have told us that all the fragments which are large enough to have any recognizable characters are undoubtedly portions of human bones; and they agree—as, indeed, common sense suggests—that the unrecognisable remainder of the ashes must also be presumed to be fragments of human bones. Thus our first question is answered in the affirmative. The bone ashes found in the studio are the remains of a human being.

"The next question presents much more difficulty. As you have heard from Dr. Thorndyke, the fragments are too small to furnish any clue to the identity of deceased. Our efforts to discover who this person was must be guided by evidence of another kind. We have to consider the persons, the places and the special circumstances known to us.

"As to the place, these remains were found in the studio occupied by Peter Gannet; and we learn that Peter Gannet has disappeared under most mysterious circumstances. I need not repeat the evidence in detail, but the fact that when he disappeared he was wearing only his indoor clothing, seems to preclude the possibility of his having gone away from his home in any ordinary manner. Now the connection between a man who has mysteriously disappeared, and unrecognisable human remains found on his premises after his disappearance, appears strongly suggestive and invites the inquiry, What is the nature of the connection? To answer this, we must ask two further questions: When did the man disappear and when

did the remains make their appearance?

“Let us take the first question. We learn from Mrs. Gannet’s evidence that she received a letter from her husband on the 8th of May. That letter, we may presume, was written on the 7th. Then she wrote and posted a letter to him on the 10th of May, and we may assume that it was delivered on the 11th. Most unfortunately, she destroyed that letter, so we can not be absolutely certain about the date on which it was delivered, but we can feel little doubt that it was delivered in the ordinary way on the 11th of May. If that is so, we can say with reasonable confidence that Peter Gannet was undoubtedly alive on the 7th of May; but inasmuch as Mrs. Gannet found her letter in the letter box, we must conclude that at the date of its delivery, Peter Gannet had already disappeared. That is to say that his disappearance occurred at some time between the 7th and the 11th of May.

“Now let us approach the problem from another direction. You have seen the kiln. It is a massive structure of brick and fire-clay with enormously thick walls. During the burning of the body, we know from the condition of the bones that its interior must have been kept for several hours at a temperature which has been stated in evidence as well over 2000° Fahrenheit; that is to say, at a bright red heat. When Dr. Oldfield examined it, the interior was just perceptibly warm. Now I don’t know how long a great mass of brick and fire-clay such as this would take to cool down to that extent. Allowing for the fact that it had been opened to extract the ashes, as it had then been reclosed, its condition was undoubtedly favourable to slow cooling. We can confidently put down the time taken by the cooling which had occurred at several days; probably somewhere about a week. Now Dr. Oldfield’s inspection was made on the evening of the 15th. A week before that was the 8th. But we have seen that the disappearance occurred between the 7th and the 11th of May; and the temperature of the kiln shows that the burning of the body must have occurred at some time before the 11th and almost certainly after the 7th. It thus appears that the disappearance of Peter Gannet and the destruction of the body both occurred between those two dates. The obvious suggestion is that the body which was burned was the body of Peter Gannet.

“Is there any evidence to support that conclusion? There is not very much. The most striking is the discovery among the ashes of a porcelain tooth. You have heard Mr. Hawley’s evidence. He identifies that tooth as one of a very distinctive kind, and he tells us that it is identically and indistinguishably similar to a tooth on the denture which he supplied to Peter Gannet. He will not swear that it is the same tooth; only that it is the exact facsimile of that tooth. So you have to consider what are the probabilities that the body of some unknown person should have been burned in Peter Gannet’s kiln and that that person should have worn a denture containing a right upper lateral incisor of the type known as Du Trey’s, in all respects identical with that in Peter Gannet’s denture; and how such probabilities compare with the alternative probability that the tooth came from Peter Gannet’s own denture.

“There is one other item of evidence. It is circumstantial evidence and you must consider it for what it seems to be worth. You have heard from Dr. Oldfield and Dr. Thorndyke that some months ago Peter Gannet suffered from arsenic poisoning. Both witnesses agree that the suggestion of accidental poisoning cannot be entertained. It is therefore practically certain that some person or persons administered this poison to Gannet with the intention of causing his death. That intention was frustrated by the alertness of the doctors. The victim survived and recovered.

“But let us see how those facts bear on this inquiry. Some unknown person or persons desired the death of Peter Gannet and sought, by means of poison, to compass it. The attempted murder failed; but we have no reason to suppose that the motive ceased to exist. If it did not, then Peter Gannet went about in constant peril. There was some person who desired his death and who was prepared, given the opportunity, to take appropriate means to kill him.

“Apply these facts to the present case. We see that there was some person who wished Gannet to die and who was prepared to realize that wish by murdering him. We find in Gannet’s studio the remains of a person who may be assumed to have been murdered. Gannet has unaccountably disappeared, and the date of his disappearance coincides with that of the appearance of these remains in his studio. Finally, among these remains, we find a tooth of a rather unusual kind which is in every respect identical with one known to have been worn by Peter Gannet. Those are the facts known to us, and I think you will agree with me that they yield only one conclusion: that the remains found in Peter Gannet’s studio were the remains of Peter Gannet, himself.

“If you agree with that conclusion, we have answered two of the three questions to which we had to find answers. We now turn to the third: How, and by what means, did deceased come by his death? It appears almost an idle question, for the body of deceased was burned to ashes in a kiln. By no conceivable accident could this have happened, and deceased could not have got into the kiln by himself. The body must have been put in by some other person and deliberately destroyed by fire. But such destruction of a body furnishes the strongest presumptive evidence that the person who destroyed the body had murdered the dead person. We can have no reasonable doubt that deceased was murdered.

“That is as far as we are bound to go. It is not our function to fix the guilt of this crime on any particular person. Nevertheless, we are bound to take notice of any evidence that is before us which seems to point to a particular person as the probable perpetrator of the crime. And there is, in fact, a good deal of such evidence. I am not referring to the arsenic poisoning. We must ignore that, since we have no certain knowledge as to who the poisoner was. But there are several important points of evidence bearing on the probable identity of the person who murdered Peter Gannet. Let us consider them.

“In the first place, there is the personality of the murderer. What do we know about him? Well, we know that he must have been a person who had access to the studio, and he must have had some acquaintance with its arrangements; knew where the various appliances were to be found, which of the bins was the bone-ash-bin, and so on. Then he must have



known how to prepare and fire the kiln and where the fuel was kept; and he must have understood the use and management of the appliances that he employed—the grinding-mills and the cupel press, for instance.

“Do we know of any person to whom this description applies? Yes, we know of one such person, and only one—Frederick Boles. He had free access to the studio, for it was also his own workshop and he had the key. He was familiar with all its arrangements, and some of the appliances, such as the cupel press, were his own. He knew all about the kiln, for we have it in evidence that he was accustomed to helping Gannet light and stoke it when pottery was being fired. He agrees completely with the description, in these respects, which we know must have applied to the murderer; and, I repeat, we know of no other person to whom it would apply.

“Thus there is a *prima facie* probability that the murderer was Frederick Boles. But that probability is conditioned by possibility. Could Boles have been present in the studio when the murder was committed? Our information is that he had been staying at Burnham. But he came home one night and passed that night at his flat and then went away again. What night was it that he spent at the flat? Now, Mrs. Gannet came home on the 14th of May, and she called at Boles’s flat on the following day, the 15th. There she learned that he had come to the flat about a week previously, spent the night there and gone away the next day. Apparently, then, it would have been the night of the 8th that he spent at the flat; or it might have been the 7th or the 9th. But Gannet’s death occurred between the 7th or the 11th. Consequently, Boles would appear to have been in London at the time when the murder was committed.

“But is there any evidence that he was actually on these premises at this time? There is. A walking-stick was found by Dr. Oldfield in the hall-stand on the night of the 15th. You have seen that stick and I pass it round again. On the silver mount of the handle you can see the initials ‘F. B.’—Boles’s initials. Mrs. Gannet had no doubt that it belonged to Boles, and indeed there is no one else to whom it could belong. But she has told us that it was not in the hall-stand when she went away. Then it must have been deposited there since. But there is only one day on which it could have been deposited; the day after Boles’s arrival at the flat. We thus have clear evidence that Boles was actually on the premises on the 8th, the 9th, or the 10th, that is to say, his presence on these premises seems to coincide in time with the murder of Peter Gannet; and we further note the significant fact that at the time when Boles came to the house, Gannet—if still alive—was there all alone.

“Thus the circumstantial evidence all points to Boles as the probable murderer and we know of no other person against whom any suspicion could rest. Add to this the further fact that the two men—Boles and the deceased—are known to have been on terms of bitter enmity and actually, on at least one occasion, to have engaged in violent conflict; and that evidence receives substantial confirmation.

“I think I need say no more than this. You have heard the evidence and I have offered you these suggestions as to its bearing. They are only suggestions. It is you who have to decide on your verdict; and I think you will have little difficulty in answering the three questions that I mentioned in opening this inquiry.”

The coroner was right up to a certain point. The jury had apparently agreed on their verdict before he had finished speaking, but found some difficulty in putting it into words. Eventually, however, after one or two trials on paper, the foreman announced that he and his fellow jurors had reached a conclusion; which was that the ashes found in the studio were the remains of the body of Peter Gannet, and that the said Peter Gannet had been murdered by Frederick Boles at some time between the 7th and the 11th of May.

“Yes,” said the coroner, “that is the only verdict possible on the evidence before us. I shall record a verdict of wilful murder against Frederick Boles.” He paused, and glancing at Inspector Blandy, asked the latter: “Is there any object in my issuing a warrant?”

“No, sir,” Blandy replied. “A warrant has already been issued for the arrest of Boles on another charge.”

“Then,” said the coroner, “that brings these proceedings to an end, and I can only hope that the perpetrator of this crime may shortly be arrested and brought to trial.”

On this, the court rose. The reporters hurried away, intent on gorgeous publicity; the spectators drifted out into the street; and the four experts (including myself for this occasion only), after a brief chat with the coroner and the Inspector, departed also and went their respective ways. And here it is proper for me to make my bow to the reader and retire from the post of narrator. Not that the story is ended, but that the pen now passes into another, and I hope more capable, hand. My function has been to trace the antecedents and describe the intimate circumstances of this extraordinary crime, and this I have done to the best of my humble ability. The rest of the story is concerned with the elucidation, and the centre of interest is now transferred from the rather drab neighbourhood of Cumberland Market to the historic precinct of the Inner Temple.

**BOOK II**  
**NARRATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.**

**CHAPTER 14. — DR. JERVIS IS PUZZLED**

THE stage which the train of events herein recorded had reached when the office of narrator passed to me from the hands of my friend Oldfield, found me in a state of some mental confusion. It seemed that Thorndyke was contemplating some kind of investigation. But why? The Gannet case was no concern of ours. No client had engaged us to examine it, and a mere academic interest in it would not justify a great expenditure of valuable time and effort.

But further, what was there to investigate? In a medico-legal sense there appeared to be nothing. All the facts were known, and though they were lurid enough, they were of little scientific interest. Gannet's death presented no problem, since it was a bald and obvious case of murder; and if his mode of life seemed to be shrouded in mystery, that was not our affair, nor, indeed, that of anybody else, now that he was dead.

But it was precisely this apparently irrelevant matter that seemed to engage Thorndyke's attention. The ostensible business of the studio had, almost certainly, covered some other activities, doubtful if not actually unlawful, and Thorndyke seemed to be set on ascertaining what they were; whereas, to me, that question appeared to be exclusively the concern of the police in their efforts to locate the elusive Boles.

I had the first inkling of Thorndyke's odd methods of approach to this problem on the day after our memorable dinner at Osnaburgh Street. On our way home, he had proposed that we should look in at the gallery where Gannet's pottery was on view, and I had agreed readily, being quite curious as to what these remarkable works were really like. So it happened naturally enough that when, on the following day, we entered the temple of the fine arts, my attention was at first entirely occupied with the exhibits.

I will not attempt to describe those astonishing works for I feel that my limited vocabulary would be unequal to the task. There are some things that must be seen to be believed, and Gannet's pottery was one of them. Outspoken as Oldfield had been in his description of them, I found myself totally unprepared for the outrageous reality. But I need not dwell on them. Merely remarking that they looked to me like the throw-outs from some very juvenile handiwork class, I will dismiss them—as I did, in fact—and proceed to the apparent purpose of our visit.

Perhaps the word "apparent" is inappropriate, for in truth, the purpose of our visit was not apparent to me at all. I can only record this incomprehensible course of events, leaving their inner meaning to emerge at a later stage of this history. By the time that I had recovered from the initial shock and convinced myself that I was not the subject of an optical illusion, Thorndyke had already introduced himself to the gallery proprietor, Mr. Kempster, and seemed to be discussing the exhibits in terms of the most extraordinary irrelevance.

"Having regard," he was saying, as I joined them, "to the density of the material and the thickness of the sides, I should think that these pieces must be rather inconveniently ponderous."

"They are heavy," Mr. Kempster admitted, "but you see they are collector's pieces. They are not intended for use. You wouldn't want, for instance, to hand this one across the dinner table."

He picked up a large and massive bowl and offered it to Thorndyke, who took it and weighed it in his two hands with an expression of ridiculous earnestness.

"Yes," he said, as he returned it to Mr. Kempster, "it is extremely ponderous for its size. What should you say it weighs? I should guess it at nearly eight pounds."

He looked solemnly at the obviously puzzled Kempster, who tried it again and agreed to Thorndyke's estimate. "But," he added, "there's no need to guess. If you are interested in the matter, we can try it. There is a pair of parcel scales in my office. Would you like to see what it really does weigh?"

"If you would be so kind," Thorndyke replied; whereupon Kempster picked up the bowl and we followed him in procession to the office, as if we were about to perform some sacrificial rite, where the uncouth pot was placed on the scale and found to be half an ounce short of eight pounds.

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "it is abnormally heavy even for its size. That weight suggests an unusually dense material."

He gazed reflectively at the bowl, and then, producing a spring tape from his pocket, proceeded carefully to measure the principal dimensions of the piece while Mr. Kempster looked on like a man in a dream. But not only did Thorndyke take the measurements. He made a note of them in his note-book together with one of the weight.

"You appear," said Mr. Kempster, as Thorndyke pocketed his note-book, "to be greatly interested in poor Mr. Gannet's work."

"I am," Thorndyke replied, "but not from the connoisseur's point of view. As I mentioned to you, I am trying, on Mrs. Gannet's behalf, to elucidate the very obscure circumstances of her husband's death."

"I shouldn't have supposed," said Kempster, "that the weight of his pottery would have had much bearing on that. But of course you know more about evidence than I do; and you know—which I don't—what obscurities you want to clear up."

Mr. Kempster bowed. "You may take it, Doctor," said he, "that, as a friend of poor Gannet's, though not a very intimate

one, I shall be glad to be of assistance to you. Is there anything more that you want to know about this work?"

"There are several matters," Thorndyke replied; "in fact, I want to know all that I can about his pottery, including its disposal and its economic aspects. To begin with, was there much of it sold? Enough, I mean, to yield a living to the artist?"

"There was more sold than you might have expected, and the pieces realized good prices; ten to twenty guineas each. But I never supposed that Gannet made a living by his work. I assumed that he had some independent means."

"The next question," said Thorndyke, "is what became of the pieces that were sold? Did they go to museums or to private collectors?"

"Of the pieces sold from this gallery—and I think that this was his principal market—one or two were bought by provincial museums, but all the rest were taken by private collectors."

"And what sort of people were those collectors?"

"That," said Kempster, with a deprecating smile, "is a rather delicate question. The things were offered for sale in my gallery and the purchasers were, in a sense, my clients."

"Quite so," said Thorndyke. "It was not really a fair question; and not very necessary as I have seen the pottery. I suppose you don't keep any records of the sales or the buyers?"

"Certainly I do," replied Kempster. "I keep a Day Book and a ledger. The ledger contains a complete record of the sales of each of the exhibitors. Would you like to see Mr. Gannet's account?"

"I am ashamed to give you so much trouble," Thorndyke replied, "but if you would be so very kind—"

"It's no trouble at all," said Kempster, stepping across to a tall cupboard and throwing open the doors. From the row of books therein revealed, he took out a portly volume and laid it on the desk, turning over the leaves until he found the page that he was seeking.

"Here," he said, "is a record of all of Mr. Gannet's works that have been sold from this gallery. Perhaps you may get some information from it."

I glanced down the page while Thorndyke was examining it and was a little surprised at the completeness of the record. Under the general heading, "Peter Gannet Esq." was a list of the articles sold, with a brief description of each, and in separate columns, the date, the price and the name and address of each purchaser.

"I notice," said Thorndyke, "that Mr. Francis Broomhill of Stafford Square has made purchases on three occasions. Probably he is a collector of modernist work?"

"He is," replied Kempster, "and a special admirer of Mr. Gannet. You will observe that he bought one of the two copies of the figurine in stoneware of a monkey. The other copy, as you see, went to America."

"Did Mr. Gannet ever execute any other figurines?" Thorndyke asked.

"No," Kempster replied. "To my surprise, he never pursued that form of art, though it was a striking success. Mr. Bunderby, the eminent art critic, was enthusiastic about it, and as you see, the only copies offered realized fifty guineas each. But perhaps if he had lived he might have given his admirers some further examples."

"You speak of copies," said Thorndyke, "so I presume that they were admittedly replicas, probably squeezed in a mould or possibly slip-casts? It was not pretended that they were original modellings?"

"No, they couldn't have been. A small pottery figure must be made in a mould, either squeezed or cast, to get it hollow. Of course it would be modelled in the solid in the first place and the mould made from the solid model."

"There was a third specimen of this figurine," said Thorndyke, "I saw it in Gannet's bedroom. Would that also be a squeeze, or do you suppose it might be the original? It was certainly stoneware."

"Then it must have been squeezed from a mould," replied Kempster. "It couldn't have been fired solid; it would have cracked all to pieces. The only alternative would have been to excavate the solid original; which would have been extremely difficult and quite unnecessary, as he certainly had a mould."

"From your recollection of the figurines, should you say that they were as thick and ponderous as the bowls and jars?"

"I can't say, positively," replied Kempster, "but they could hardly have been. A figure is more likely to crack in the fire than an open bowl or jar, but the thinner it is, in reason, the safer it is from fire cracks. And it is just as easy to make a squeeze thin as thick."

This virtually brought our business with Mr. Kempster to an end. We walked out into the gallery with him, when Thorndyke had copied out a few particulars from the ledger, but our conversation, apart from a brief discussion of Boles's jewellery exhibits, obviously had no connection with the purpose of our visit—whatever that might be. Eventually, having shaken his hand warmly and thanked him for his very courteous and helpful treatment of us, we took our departure, leaving him, I suspect, as much puzzled by our proceedings as I was myself.

"I suppose, Thorndyke," said I, as we walked away down Bond Street, "you realize that you have enveloped me in a fog of quite phenomenal density?"

"I can understand," he replied, "that you find my approach to the problem somewhat indirect."

"The problem!" I exclaimed. "What problem? I don't see that there is any problem. We know that Gannet was murdered and we can fairly assume that he was murdered by Boles. But whether he was or not is no concern of ours. That is Blandy's problem; and in any case, I can't imagine that the weight and density of Gannet's pottery has any bearing on it, unless you are suggesting that Boles biffed deceased on the head with one of his own pots."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently as he replied:

"No, Jervis. I am not considering Gannet's pots as possible lethal weapons, but the potter's art has its bearing on our problem, and even the question of weight may be not entirely irrelevant."

"But what problem are you alluding to?" I persisted.

"The problem that is in my mind," he replied, "is suggested by the very remarkable story that Oldfield related to us last night. You listened to that story very attentively and no doubt you remember the substance of it. Now, recalling that story as a whole and considering it as an account of a series of related events, doesn't it seem to you to suggest some very curious and interesting questions?"

"The only question that it suggested to me was how the devil that arsenic got into the bone-ash. I could make nothing of that."

"Very well," he rejoined, "then try to make something of it. The arsenic was certainly there. We agree that it could not have come from the body. Then it must have got into the ash after the firing. But how? There is one problem. Take it as a starting point and consider what explanations are possible; and further, consider what would be the implications of each of your explanations."

"But," I exclaimed, "I can't think of any explanation. The thing is incomprehensible. Besides, what business is it of ours? We are not engaged in the case."

"Don't lose sight of Blandy," said he. "He hasn't shot his bolt yet. If he can lay hands on Boles, he will give us no trouble, but if he fails in that, he may think it worth while to give some attention to Mrs. Gannet. I don't know whether he suspects her of actual complicity in the murder, but it is obvious that he does suspect her of knowing and concealing the whereabouts of Boles. Consequently, if he can get no information from her by persuasion, he might consider the possibility of charging her as an accessory either before or after the fact."

"But," I objected, "the choice wouldn't lie with him. You are surely not suggesting that either the police or the Public Prosecutor would entertain the idea of bringing a charge for the purpose of extorting information—virtually as a measure of intimidation?"

"Certainly not," he replied, "unless Blandy could make out a *prima facie* case. But it is possible that he knows more than we do about the relations of Boles and Mrs. Gannet. At any rate, the position is that I have made a conditional promise to Oldfield that if any proceedings should be taken against her I will undertake the defense. It is not likely that any proceedings will be taken, but still it is necessary for me to know as much as I can learn about the circumstances connected with the murder. Hence these inquiries."

"Which seem to me to lead nowhere. However, as Kempster remarked, you know—which I do not—what obscurities you are trying to elucidate. Do you know whether there is going to be an inquest?"

"I understand," he replied, "that an inquest is to be held in the course of a few days and I expect to be summoned to give evidence concerning the arsenic poisoning. But I should attend in any case, and I recommend you to come with me. When we have heard what the various witnesses, including Blandy, have to tell, we shall have a fairly complete knowledge of the facts, and we may be able to judge whether the Inspector is keeping anything up his sleeve."

As the reader will have learned from Oldfield's narrative—which this account overlaps by a few days—I adopted Thorndyke's advice and attended the inquest. But though I gained thereby a knowledge of all the facts of the case, I was no nearer to any understanding of the purpose that Thorndyke had in view in his study of Gannet's pottery; nor did I find myself entirely in sympathy with his interest in Mrs. Gannet. I realized that she was in a difficult and trying position, but I was less convinced than he appeared to be of her complete innocence of any complicity in the murder or the very suspicious poisoning affair that had preceded it.

But his interest in her was quite remarkable. It went so far as actually to induce him to attend the funeral of her husband and even to persuade me to accept the invitation and accompany him. Not that I needed much persuasion, for the unique opportunity of witnessing a funeral at which there was no coffin and no corpse—where "our dear departed brother" might almost have been produced in a paper bag—was not to be missed.

But it hardly came up to my expectations, for it appeared that the ashes had been deposited in the urn before the proceedings began, and the funeral service took its normal course, with the terra-cotta casket in place of the coffin. But I found a certain grim humour in the circumstance that the remains of Peter Gannet should be enshrined in a pottery vessel of obviously commercial origin which in all its properties—in its exact symmetry and mechanical regularity—was the perfect antithesis of his own masterpieces.

---

## CHAPTER 15. — A MODERNIST COLLECTOR

MY experiences at Mr. Kempster's gallery were only a foretaste of what Thorndyke could do in the way of mystification, for I need not say that the most profound cogitation on Oldfield's story and on the facts which had transpired at the inquest had failed completely to enlighten me. I was still unable to perceive that there was any real problem to solve, or that, if there were, the physical properties of Gannet's pottery could possibly be a factor in its solution.

But obviously I was wrong. For Thorndyke was no wild goose hunter or discoverer of mare's nests. If he believed that there was a problem to investigate, I could safely assume that there was such a problem; and if he believed that Gannet's pottery held a clue to it, I could assume—and did assume—that he was right. Accordingly, I waited, patiently and hopefully, for some further developments which might dissipate the fog in which my mind was enshrouded.

The further developments were not long in appearing. On the third day after the funeral, Thorndyke announced to me that he had made, by letter, an appointment, which included me, with Mr. Francis Broomhill of Stafford Square, for a visit of inspection of his famous collection of works of modernist art. I gathered, subsequently, by the way in which we were received, that Thorndyke's letter must have been somewhat misleading, in tone if not in matter. But any little mental reservations as to our views on contemporary art were, I suppose, admissible in the circumstances.

Of course I accepted gleefully for I was on the tiptoe of curiosity as to Thorndyke's object in making the appointment. Moreover, the collection included Gannet's one essay in the art of sculpture; which, if it matched his pottery, ought certainly to be worth seeing. Accordingly, we set forth together in the early afternoon and made our way to the exclusive and aristocratic region in which Mr. Broomhill had his abode.

The whole visit was a series of surprises. In the first place, the door was opened by a footman, a type of organism that I supposed to be virtually extinct. Then, no sooner had we entered the grand old Georgian house than we seemed to become enveloped in an atmosphere of unreality suggestive of Alice in Wonderland or of a nightmare visit to a lunatic asylum. The effect began in the entrance hall, which was hung with strange, polychromatic picture frames enclosing objects which obviously were not pictures but appeared to be panels or canvases on which some very extravagant painter had cleaned his palette. Standing about the spacious floor were pedestals supporting lumps of stone or metal, some—to my eye—completely shapeless, while others had faint hints of obscure anthropoidal character such as one might associate with the discarded failures from the workshop of some Easter Island sculptor. I glanced at them in bewilderment as the footman, having taken possession of our hats and sticks, solemnly conducted us along the great hall to a fine pedimented doorway, and opening a noble, many-panelled, mahogany door, ushered us into the presence.

Mr. Francis Broomhill impressed me favourably at the first glance; a tall, frail-looking man of about forty with a slight stoop and the forward poise of the head that one associates with near sight. He wore a pair of deep concave spectacles mounted in massive tortoise-shell frames; looking at those spectacles with a professional eye, I decided that without them his eyesight would have been negligible. But though the pale blue eyes, seen through those powerful lenses, appeared ridiculously small, they were kindly eyes that conveyed a friendly greeting, and the quiet, pleasant voice confirmed the impression.

"It is exceedingly kind of you," said Thorndyke, when we had shaken hands, "to give us this opportunity of seeing your treasures."

"But not at all," was the reply. "It is I who am the beneficiary. The things are here to be looked at and it is a delight to me to show them to appreciative connoisseurs. I don't often get the chance; for even in this golden age of artistic progress, there still lingers a hankering for the merely representational and anecdotal aspects of art."

As he was speaking, I glanced round the room and especially at the pictures which covered the walls, and as I looked at them they seemed faintly to recall an experience of my early professional life when, for a few weeks, I had acted as locum-tenens for the superintendent of a small lunatic asylum (or "mental hospital" as we say nowadays). The figures in them—when recognizable as such—all seemed to have a certain queer psychopathic quality as if they were looking out at me from a padded cell.

After a short conversation, during which I maintained a cautious reticence and Thorndyke was skilfully elusive, we proceeded on a tour of inspection round the room under the guidance of Mr. Broomhill, who enlightened us with comment and exposition, somewhat in the Bunderby manner. There was a quite considerable collection of pictures, all by modern artists—mostly foreign, I was glad to note—and all singularly alike. The same curious psychopathic quality pervaded them all, and the same odd absence of the traditional characteristics of pictures. The drawing—when there was any—was childish, the painting was barbarously crude, and there was a total lack of any sort of mental content or subject matter.

"Now," said our host, halting before one of these masterpieces, "here is a work that I am rather fond of though it is a departure from the artist's usual manner. He is not often as realistic as this."

I glanced at the gold label beneath it and read: "Nude. Israel Popoff"; and nude it certainly was—apparently representing a naked human being with limbs like very badly made sausages. I did not find it painfully realistic. But the next picture—by the same artist—fairly "got me guessing," for it appeared to consist of nothing more than a disorderly mass of streaks of paint of various rather violent colours. I waited for explanatory comments as Mr. Broomhill stood before it, regarding it fondly.

"This," said he, "I regard as a truly representative example of the Master; a perfect piece of abstract painting. Don't you agree with me?" he added, turning to me, beaming with enthusiasm.

The suddenness of the question disconcerted me. What the deuce did he mean by "abstract painting"? I hadn't the foggiest idea. You might as well—it seemed to me—talk about "abstract amputation at the hip-joint." But I had got to say something, and I did.

"Yes," I burred incoherently, gazing at him in consternation. "Certainly—in fact, undoubtedly—a most remarkable and—er—" (I was going to say "cheerful" but mercifully saw the red light in time) "most interesting demonstration of colour contrast. But I am afraid I am not perfectly clear as to what the picture represents."

"Represents!" he repeated in a tone of pained surprise. "It doesn't represent anything. Why should it? It is a picture. But a picture is an independent entity. It doesn't need to imitate something else."

"No, of course not," I spluttered mendaciously. "But still, one has been accustomed to find in pictures representations of natural objects—"

"But why?" he interrupted. "If you want the natural objects, you can go and look at them; and if you want them represented, you can have them photographed. So why allow them to intrude into pictures?"

I looked despairingly at Thorndyke but got no help from that quarter. He was listening impassively; but from long experience of him, I knew that behind the stony calm of his exterior his inside was shaking with laughter. So I murmured a vague assent, adding that it was difficult to escape from the conventional ideas that one had held from early youth; and so we moved on to the next "abstraction." But warned by this terrific experience, I maintained thereafter a discreet silence tempered by carefully prepared ambiguities, and thus managed to complete our tour of the room without further disaster.

"And now," said our host as we turned away from the last of the pictures, "you would like to see the sculptures and pottery. You mentioned in your letter that you were especially interested in poor Mr. Gannet's work. Well, you shall see it in appropriate surroundings, as he would have liked to see it."

He conducted us across the hall to another fine door which he threw open to admit us to the sculpture gallery. Looking around me as we entered, I was glad that I had seen the pictures first; for now I was prepared for the worst and could keep my emotions under control.

I shall not attempt to describe that chamber of horrors. My first impression was that of a sort of infernal Mrs. Jarley's; and the place was pervaded by the same madhouse atmosphere as I had noticed in the other room. But it was more unpleasant, for debased sculpture can be much more horrible than debased painting; and in the entire collection there was not a single work that could be called normal. The exhibits ranged from almost formless objects, having only that faint suggestion of a human head or figure that one sometimes notices in queer-shaped potatoes or flint nodules, to recognizable busts or torsos; but in these the faces were hideous and bestial and the limbs and trunks misshapen and characterized by a horrible obesity suggestive of dropsy or myxoedema. There was a little pottery, all crude and coarse, but Gannet's pieces were easily the worst.

"This, I think," said our host, "is what you specially wanted to see."

He indicated a grotesque statuette labelled "Figurine of a Monkey: Peter Gannet," and I looked at it curiously. If I had met it anywhere else it would have given me quite a severe shock; but here, in this collection of monstrosities, it looked almost like the work of a sane barbarian.

"There was some question," Mr. Broomhill continued, "that you wanted to settle, was there not?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, "in fact, there are two. The first is that of priority. Gannet executed three versions of this figurine. One has gone to America, one is on loan at a London Museum, and this is the third. The question is, which was made first?"

"There ought not to be any difficulty about that," said our host. "Gannet used to sign and number all his pieces and the serial number should give the order of priority at a glance."

He lifted the image carefully, and having inverted it and looked at its base, handed it to Thorndyke.

"You see," said he, "that the number is 571 B. Then there must have been a 571 A and a 571 C. But clearly, this must have been the second one made, and if you can examine the one at the museum, you can settle the order of the series. If that is 571 A, then the American copy must be 571 C, or vice versa. What is the other question?"

"That relates to the nature of the first one made. Is it the original model or is it a pressing from a mould? This one appears to be a squeeze. If you look inside, you can see traces of the thumb impressions, so it can't be a cast."

He returned it to Mr. Broomhill who peered into the opening of the base and then, having verified Thorndyke's observation, passed it to me. I was not deeply interested, but I examined the base carefully and looked into the dark interior as well as I could. The flat surface of the base was smooth but unglazed and on it was inscribed in blue around the central opening "Op. 571 B P. G." with a rudely drawn figure of a bird, which might have been a goose but which I knew was meant for a gannet, interposed between the number and the initials. Inside, on the uneven surface, I could make out a number of impressions of a thumb—apparently a right thumb. Having made these observations, I handed the effigy back to Mr. Broomhill who replaced it on its stand, and resumed the conversation.

"I should imagine that all of the three versions were pressings, but that is only an opinion. What is your view?"

"There are three possibilities, and bearing in mind Gannet's personality, I don't know which of them is the most probable. The original figure was certainly modelled in the solid. Then Opus 571 A may either be that model, fired in the solid, or that model excavated and fired, or a squeeze from the mould."

"It would hardly have been possible to fire it in the solid," said Mr. Broomhill.

"That was Mr. Kempster's view, but I am not so sure. After all, some pottery articles are fired solid. Bricks, for instance."

"Yes, but a few fire cracks in a brick don't matter. I think he would have had to excavate it, at least. But why should he have taken that trouble when he had actually made a mould?"

"I can imagine no reason at all," replied Thorndyke, "unless he wished to keep the original. The one now at the museum was his own property and I don't think it had ever been offered for sale."

"If the question is of any importance," said our host—who was obviously of opinion that it was not—"it could perhaps be settled by inspection of the piece at the museum, which was probably the first one made. Don't you think so?"

"It might," Thorndyke replied, "or it might not. The most satisfactory way would be to compare the respective weights of the two pieces. An excavated figurine would be heavier than a pressing, and, of course, a solid one would be much heavier."

"Yes," Mr. Broomhill agreed with a slightly puzzled air, "that is true. So I take it that you would like to know the exact weight of this piece. Well, there is no difficulty about that."

He walked over to the fireplace and pressed the bell-push at its side. In a few moments the door opened and the footman entered the room.

"Can you tell me, Hooper," Mr. Broomhill asked, "if there is a pair of scales that we could have to weigh this statuette?"

"Certainly, sir," was the reply. "There is a pair in Mr. Laws's pantry. Shall I bring them up, sir?"

"If you would. Hooper—with the weights, of course. And you might see that the pan is quite clean."

Apparently the pan was quite clean, for in a couple of minutes Hooper reappeared carrying a very spick and span pair of scales with a complete set of weights. When the scales had been placed on the table with the weights beside them, Mr. Broomhill took up the effigy with infinite care and lowered it gently on to the scale pan. Then, with the same care to avoid jars or shocks, he put on the weights, building up a little pile until the pan rose, when he made the final adjustment with a half-ounce weight.

"Three pounds, three and a half ounces," said he. "Rather a lot for a small figure."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "but Gannet used a dense material and was pretty liberal with it. I weighed some of his pottery at Kempster's gallery and found it surprisingly heavy."

He entered the weight of the effigy in his note-book, and, when the masterpiece had been replaced on its stand and the scales borne away to their abiding place, we resumed our tour of the room. Presently Hooper returned, bearing a large silver tray loaded with the materials for afternoon tea, which he placed on a small circular table.

"You needn't wait, Hooper," said our host. "We will help ourselves when we are ready." As the footman retired, we turned to the last of the exhibits—a life-sized figure of a woman, naked, contorted and obese, whose brutal face and bloated limbs seemed to shout for thyroid extract—and having expatiated on its noble rendering of abstract form and its freedom from the sickly prettiness of "mere imitative sculpture," our host dismissed the masterpieces and placed chairs for us by the table.

"Which museum is it," he asked, as we sipped the excellent China tea, "that is showing Mr. Gannet's work?"

"It is a small museum at Hoxton," Thorndyke replied, "known as 'The People's Museum of Modern Art.'"

"Ah!" said Broomhill, "I know it; in fact, I occasionally lend some of my treasures for exhibition there. It is an excellent institution. It gives the poor people of that uncultured region an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the glories of modern art; the only chance they have."

"There is the Geffrye Museum close by," I reminded him.

"Yes," he agreed, "but that is concerned with the obsolete furniture and art of the bad old times. It contains nothing of this sort," he added, indicating his collection with a wave of the hand. Which was certainly true. Mercifully, it does not.

"And I hope," he continued, "that you will be able to settle your question when you examine the figurine there. It doesn't seem to me to matter very much, but you are a better judge of that than I am."

When we had taken leave of our kind and courteous host and set forth on our homeward way we walked for a time in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. As to Thorndyke's ultimate purpose in this queer transaction, I could not make the vaguest guess and I gave it no consideration. But the experience, itself, had been an odd one with a peculiar interest of its own. Presently I opened the subject with a question.

"Could you make anything of this stuff of Broomhill's or of his attitude to it?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "No," he replied. "It is a mystery to me. Evidently Broomhill gets a positive pleasure from

these things, and that pleasure seem to be directly proportionate to their badness; to the absence in them of all the ordinary qualities—fine workmanship, truth to nature, intellectual interest and beauty—which have hitherto been considered to be the essentials of works of art. It seems to be a cult, a fashion, associated with a certain state of mind; but what that state of mind is, I cannot imagine. Obviously it has no connection with what has always been known as art, unless it is a negative connection. You noticed that Broomhill was utterly contemptuous of the great work of the past, and that, I think, is the usual modernist attitude. But what can be the state of mind of a man who is completely insensitive to the works of the accomplished masters of the older schools, and full of enthusiasm for clumsy imitations of the works of savages or ungifted children, I cannot begin to understand.”

“No,” said I, “that is precisely my position,” and with this the subject dropped.

---



## CHAPTER 16. — AT THE MUSEUM

"It is curious to reflect," Thorndyke remarked, as we took our way eastward along Old Street, "that this, which is commonly accounted one of the meanest and most squalid regions of the town, should be, in a sense, the last outpost of a disappearing culture."

"To what culture are your referring?" I asked.

"To that of the industrial arts," he replied, "of which we may say that it is substantially the foundation of all artistic culture. Nearly everywhere else those arts are dead or dying, killed by machinery and mass production, but here we find little groups of surviving craftsmen who still keep the lamp burning. To our right in Curtain Road and various small streets adjoining, are skilled cabinet makers, making chairs and other furniture in the obsolete tradition of what Broomhill would call the bad old times of Chippendale and his contemporaries; near by in Bunhill Row the last of the makers of fine picture frames have their workshops, and farther ahead in Bethnal Green and Spitalfields a remnant of the ancient colony of silk weavers is working with the hand-loom as was done in the eighteenth century."

"Yes," I agreed, "it seems rather an anomaly; and our present mission seems to rub in the discrepancy. I wonder what inspired the founders of The People's Museum of Modern Art to dump it down in this neighbourhood and almost in sight of the Geffrye Museum?"

Thorndyke chuckled softly. "The two museums," said he, "are queer neighbours; the one treasuring the best work of the past and the other advertising the worst work of the present. But perhaps we shan't find it as bad as we expect."

I don't know what Thorndyke expected, but it was bad enough for me. We located it without difficulty by means of a painted board inscribed with its name and description set over what looked like a reconstructed shop front, to which had been added a pair of massive folding doors. But those doors were closed and presumably locked, for a large card affixed to the panel with drawing pins bore the announcement, "Closed temporarily. Re-open 11:15."

Thorndyke looked at his watch. "We have a quarter of an hour to wait," said he, "but we need not wait here. We may as well take a stroll and inspect the neighbourhood. It is not beautiful, but it has a character of its own which is worth examining."

Accordingly, we set forth on a tour of exploration through the narrow streets where Thorndyke expounded the various objects of interest in illustration of his previous observations. In one street we found a row of cabinet makers' shops, through the windows of which we could see the half-finished carcasses of wardrobes and sideboards and "period" chairs, seatless and unpolished; and I noticed that the names above the shops were mostly Jewish and many of them foreign. Then, towards Shoreditch, we observed a timber yard with a noble plank of Spanish mahogany at the entrance, and noted that the stock inside seemed to consist mainly of hardwoods suitable for making furniture. But there was no time to make a detailed examination for the clock of a neighbouring church now struck the quarter and sent us hurrying back to the temple of modernism, where we found that the card had vanished and the doors stood wide open, revealing a lobby and an inner door.

As we opened the latter and entered the gallery we were met by an elderly, tired-looking man who regarded us expectantly.

"Are you Mr. Sancroft?" Thorndyke asked.

"Ah!" said our friend, "then I was right. You will be Dr. Thorndyke. I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"Only a matter of minutes," Thorndyke replied, in his suavest manner, "and we spent those quite agreeably."

"I am so very sorry," said Sancroft, with evidently genuine concern, "but it was unavoidable. I had to go out, and as I am all alone here, I had to lock up the place while I was away. It is very awkward having no one to leave in charge."

"It must be," Thorndyke agreed, sympathetically. "Do you mean that you have no assistant of any kind, not even a doorkeeper?"

"No one at all," replied Sancroft. "You see, the society which runs this museum has no funds but the members' contributions. There's only just enough to keep the place going, without paying any salaries. I am a voluntary worker, but I have my living to earn. Mostly I can do my work in the curator's room—I am a law writer—but there are times when I have to go out on business, and then—well, you saw what happened this morning."

Thorndyke listened to this tale of woe, not only with patience but with a concern that rather surprised me.

"But," said he, "can't you get some of your friends to give you at least a little help? Even a few hours a day would solve your difficulties."

Mr. Sancroft shook his head wearily. "No," he replied, "it is a dull job, minding a small gallery, especially as so few visitors come to it, and I have found nobody who is willing to take it on. I suppose," he added, with a sad smile, "you don't happen to know of any enthusiast in modern art who would make the sacrifice in the interests of popular enlightenment and culture?"

"At the moment," said Thorndyke, "I can think of nobody but Mr. Broomhill, and I don't suppose he could spare the

time. Still, I will bear your difficulties in mind, and if I should think of any person who might be willing to help, I will try my powers of persuasion on him."

I must confess that this reply rather astonished me. Thorndyke was a kindly man, but he was a busy man and hardly in a position to enter into Mr. Sancroft's difficulties. And with him a promise was a promise, not a mere pleasant form of words; a fact which I think Sancroft hardly realized for his expression of thanks seemed to imply gratitude for a benevolent intention rather than any expectation of actual performance.

"It is very kind of you to wish to help me," said he. "And now, as to your own business. I understand that you want to make some sort of inspection of the works of Mr. Gannet. Does that involve taking them out of the case?"

"If that is permissible," Thorndyke replied. "I wanted, among other matters, to feel the weight of them."

"There is no objection to your taking them out," said Sancroft, "for a definite purpose. I will unlock the case and put the things in your custody for the time being. And then I will ask you to excuse me. I have a lease to engross, and I want to get on with it as quickly as I can."

With this he led us to the glass case in which Gannet's atrocities were exposed to view, and having unlocked it, made us a little bow and retired into his lair.

"That lease," Thorndyke remarked, "is a stroke of luck for us. Now we can discuss the matter freely."

He reached into the case and lifting out the effigy, began to examine it in the closest detail, especially as to the upturned base.

"The questions, as I understand them," said I, "are, first, priority, and second, method of work; whether it was fired solid, or excavated, or squeezed in a mould. The priority seems to be settled by the signature. This is 571 A. Then it must have been the first piece made."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "I think we may accept that. What do you say as to the method?"

"That, also, seems to be settled by the character of the base. It is a solid base without any opening, which appears to me to prove that the figure was fired solid."

"A reasonable inference," said Thorndyke, "from the particular fact. But if you look at the sides, you will notice on each a linear mark which suggests that a seam or join had been scraped off. You probably observed similar marks on Broomhill's copy, which were evidently the remains of the seam from the mould. But the question of solidity will be best determined by the weight. Let us try that."

He produced from his pocket a portable spring balance and a piece of string. In the latter he made two "running bowlines," and, hitching them over the figure near its middle, hooked the "bight" of the string on to the balance. As he held up the latter, I read off from the index, "Three pounds, nine and a half ounces. If I remember rightly, Broomhill's image weighed three pounds, three and a half ounces, so this one is six ounces heavier. That seems to support the view that this figure was fired in the solid."

"I don't think it does, Jervis," said he. "Broomhill's copy was undoubtedly a pressing with a considerable cavity and not very thick walls. I should say that the solid figure would be at least twice the weight of the pressing."

A moment's reflection showed me that he was right. Six ounces obviously could not account for the difference between a hollow and a solid figure.

"Then," said I, "it must have been excavated. That would probably just account for the difference in weight."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, but a little doubtfully, "so far as the weight is concerned, that is quite sound. But there are these marks, which certainly look like the traces of a seam which has been scraped down. What do you say to them?"

"I should say that they are traces of the excavating process. It would be necessary to cut the figure in halves in order to hollow out the interior. I say that these marks are the traces of the join where the two halves were put together."

"The objection to that," said he, "is that the figure would not have been cut in halves. When a clay work, such as a terra-cotta bust, is hollowed out, the usual practice is to cut off the back in as thin a slice as possible, excavate the main mass of the bust, and when it is as hollow as is safe, to stick the back on with slip and work over the joins until they are invisible. And that is the obvious and reasonable way in which to do it. But these marks are in the middle, just where the seams would be in a pressing, and in the same position as those in Broomhill's copy. So that, in spite of the extra weight, I am disposed to think that this figure is really a pressing, like Broomhill's. And that is, on other grounds, the obvious probability. A mould was certainly made, and it must have been made from the solid figure. But it would have been much more troublesome to excavate the solid model than to make a squeeze from the mould."

As he spoke, he tapped the figure lightly with his knuckle as it hung from the balance, but the dull sound that he elicited gave no information either way, beyond proving—which we knew already from the weight—that the walls of the shell were thick and clumsy. Then he took off the string, and having offered the image to me for further examination (which I declined), he put it back in the case. Then we went into the curator's room to let Mr. Sancroft know that we had finished our inspection, and to thank him for having given us the facilities for making it.

"Well," said he, laying aside his pen, "I suppose that now you know all about Peter Gannet's works, which is more than I

do. They are rather over the heads of most of our visitors, and mine, too."

"They are not very popular, then," Thorndyke ventured.

"I wouldn't say that," Sancroft replied with a faint smile. "The monkey figure seems to afford a good deal of amusement. But that is not quite what we are out for. Our society seeks to instruct and elevate, not to give a comic entertainment. I shan't be sorry when the owner of that figure fetches it away."

"The owner?" Thorndyke repeated. "You mean Mrs. Gannet?"

"No," replied Sancroft, "it doesn't belong to her. Gannet sold it, but as the purchaser was making a trip to America he got permission to lend it to us until such time as the owner should return and claim it. I am expecting him at any time now; and as I said, I shall be glad when he does come, for the thing is making the gallery a laughing stock among the regular visitors. They are not advanced enough for the really extreme modernist sculpture."

"And suppose the owner never does turn up?" Thorndyke asked.

"Then I suppose we should hand it back to Mrs. Gannet. But I don't anticipate any difficulty of that sort. The purchaser—a Mr. Newman, I think—gave fifty pounds for it, so he is not likely to forget to call for it."

"No, indeed," Thorndyke agreed. "It is an enormous price. Did Gannet himself tell you what he sold it for?"

"Not Gannet. I never met him. It was Mrs. Gannet who told me when she brought it with the pottery."

"I suppose," said Thorndyke, "that the owner, when he comes to claim his property, will produce some evidence of his identity? You would hardly hand over a valuable piece such as this seems to be, to anyone who might come and demand it, unless you happen to know him by sight?"

"I don't," replied Sancroft. "I've never seen the man. But the question of identity is provided for. Mrs. Gannet left a couple of letters with me from her husband which will make the transaction quite safe. Would you like to see them? I know you are interested in Mrs. Gannet's affairs."

Without waiting for a reply, he unlocked and pulled out a drawer in the writing table, and having turned over a number of papers, took out two letters pinned together.

"Here they are," said he, handing them to Thorndyke, who spread them out so that we could both read them. The contents of the first one were as follows:

"12, Jacob Street.

"April 13th, 1931.

"Dear Mr. Sancroft,

"In addition to the collection of pottery, for exhibition on loan, I am sending you a stoneware figurine of a monkey. This is no longer my property as I have sold it to a Mr. James Newman. But as he is making a business trip to the United States, he has given me permission to deposit it on loan with you until he returns to England; this he expects to do in about three months' time. He will then call on you and present the letter of introduction of which I attach a copy; and you will then deliver the figurine to him and take a receipt from him which I will ask you kindly to send on to me.

"Yours sincerely,

"Peter Gannet."

The second letter was the copy referred to, and read thus:

"Dear Mr. Sancroft,

"The bearer of this, Mr. James Newman, is the owner of the figurine of a monkey which I deposited on loan with you. Will you kindly deliver it to him, if he wants to have possession of it, or take his instructions as to its disposal? If he wishes to take it away with him, please secure a receipt for it before handing it over to him.

"Yours sincerely,

"Peter Gannet."

"You see," said Sancroft, as Thorndyke returned the letters, "he wrote on the 13th of April, so, as this is the 7th of July, he may turn up at any moment; as he will bring the letter of introduction with him, I shall be quite safe in delivering the figure to him, and the sooner the better. I am tired of seeing the people standing in front of that case and sniggering."

"You must be," said Thorndyke. "However, I hope Mr. Newman will come soon and relieve you of the occasion of sniggers. And I must thank you once more for the valuable help that you have given us; and you may take it that I shall not forget my promise to try to find you a deputy so that you can have a little more freedom."

With this, and a cordial handshake, we took our leave; once more I was surprised and even a little puzzled by Thorndyke's promise to seek a deputy for Mr. Sancroft. I could understand his sympathy with that overworked curator, but really, Mr. Sancroft's troubles were no affair of ours. Indeed, so abnormal did Thorndyke's attitude appear that I began to ask myself whether it was possible that some motive other than sympathy might lie behind it. No one, it is true, could be more ready than Thorndyke to do a little act of kindness if the chance came his way, but on the other hand, experience had taught me that no one's motives could be more difficult to assess than Thorndyke's. For there was always this difficulty—that one never knew what was at the back of his mind.

## CHAPTER 17. — MR. SNUPER

WHEN we arrived at our chambers we were met on the landing by Polton, who had apparently observed our approach from an upper window, and who communicated to us the fact that Mr. Linnell was waiting to see us.

"He has been here more than half an hour, so perhaps you will invite him to stay to lunch. I've laid a place for him, and lunch is ready now in the breakfast room."

"Thank you, Polton," said Thorndyke, "we will see what his arrangements are," and as Polton retired up the stairs, he opened the oak door with his latch-key and we entered the room. There we found Linnell pacing the floor with a distinctly unrestful air.

"I am afraid I have come at an inconvenient time, sir," he began, apologetically, but Thorndyke interrupted:

"Not at all. You have come in the very nick of time; for lunch is just ready, and as Polton has laid a place for you, he will insist on your joining us."

Linnell's rather careworn face brightened up at the invitation, which he accepted gratefully, and we adjourned forthwith to the small room on the laboratory floor which we had recently, for labour-saving reasons, adopted as the place in which meals were served. As we took our places at the table, Thorndyke cast a critical glance at our friend and remarked:

"You are not looking happy, Linnell. Nothing amiss, I hope?"

"There is nothing actually amiss, sir," Linnell replied, "but I am not at all happy about the way things are going. It's that confounded fellow, Blandy. He won't let matters rest. He is still convinced that Mrs. Gannet knows, or could guess, where Boles is hiding; whereas, I am perfectly sure that she has no more idea where he is than I have. But he won't leave it at that. He thinks that he is being bamboozled and he is getting vicious—politely vicious, you know—and I am afraid he means mischief."

"What sort of mischief?" I asked.

"Well, he keeps letting out obscure hints of a prosecution."

"But," said I, "the decision for or against a prosecution doesn't rest with him. He is just a detective inspector."

"I know," said Linnell. "That's what he keeps rubbing in. For his part, he would be entirely opposed to subjecting this unfortunate lady to the peril and indignity of criminal proceedings—you know his oily way of speaking—but what can he do? He is only a police officer. It is his superiors and the Public Prosecutor who will decide. And then he goes on, in a highly confidential, friend-of-the-family sort of way, to point out the various unfortunate (and, as he thinks, misleading) little circumstances that might influence the judgment of persons unacquainted with the lady. And after all, he remarked to me in confidence, he found himself compelled to admit that if his superiors should decide (against his advice) to prosecute, they would be able, at least, to make out a *prima facie* case."

"I doubt whether they could," said I, "unless Blandy knows more than we know after attending the inquest."

"That is just the point," said Thorndyke. "Does he? Has he got anything up his sleeve? I don't think he can have; for if he had knowledge of any material facts, he would have to communicate them to his superiors. And as those superiors have not taken any action so far, we may assume that no such facts have been communicated. I suppose Blandy's agitations are connected with Boles?"

"Yes," Linnell replied. "He keeps explaining to me, and to Mrs. Gannet, how the whole trouble would disappear if only we could get into touch with Boles. I don't see how it would, but I do think that if Blandy could lay his hands on Boles, his interest in Mrs. Gannet would cease. All this fuss is to bring pressure on her to make some sort of statement."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that seems to be the position. It is not very creditable, and very unlike the ordinary practice of the police. But there is this to remember: Blandy's interest in Boles, and that of the police in general, is not connected with the murder in the studio, but with the murder of the constable at Newingstead. Blandy's idea is, I suspect—assuming that he seriously entertains a prosecution—that if Mrs. Gannet were brought to trial, she would have to be put into the witness box and then some useful information might be extracted from her in cross-examination. He is not likely to have made any such suggestions to his superiors, but seeing how anxious the police naturally are to find the murderer of the constable, they might be ready to give a sympathetic consideration to Blandy's view, if he could make out a really plausible case. And that is the question. What sort of case could he make out? Have you any ideas on that subject, Linnell? I take it that he would suggest charging Mrs. Gannet as an accessory after the fact."

"Yes, he has made that clear to both of us. If the Public Prosecutor decided to take action, the charge would be that she, knowing that a felony had been committed, subsequently sheltered or relieved the felon in such a way as to enable him to evade justice. Of course, it is the only charge that would be possible."

"So it would seem," said I. "But what facts has he got to support it? He can't prove that she knows where Boles is hiding."

"No," Linnell agreed, "at least, I suppose he can't. But there is that rather unfortunate circumstance that, when her husband was missing, she was—as she has admitted—afraid to enter the studio to see if he was there. Blandy fears that her behaviour might be interpreted as proving that she had some knowledge of what had happened."

"There isn't much in that," said I. "What are the other points?"

"Well, Blandy professes to think that the relations between Boles and Mrs. Gannet would tend to support the charge. No one suggests that their relations were in any way improper, but they were admittedly on affectionate terms."

"There is still less in that," said I. "The suggestion of a possible motive for doing a certain act is no evidence that the act was done. If Blandy has nothing better than what you have mentioned, he would never persuade a magistrate to commit her for trial. What do you say, Thorndyke?"

"It certainly looks as if Blandy held a remarkably weak hand," he replied. "Of course, we have to take all the facts together; but even so, assuming that he has nothing unknown to us in reserve, I don't see how he could make out a prima facie case."

"He has also," said Linnell, "dropped some obscure hints about that affair of the arsenic poisoning."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is pure bluff. He would not be allowed to mention it, and he knows he wouldn't. He said so explicitly, to Oldfield. It looks as if the threat of a prosecution were being made to exert pressure on Mrs. Gannet to make some revelation. Still, it is possible that he may manage to work up a case sufficiently plausible to induce the authorities to launch proceedings. Blandy is a remarkably ingenious and resourceful man, and none too scrupulous. He is a man whom one has to take seriously."

"And suppose he does manage to get a prosecution started," said Linnell, "what do you advise me to do?"

"Well, Linnell," Thorndyke replied, "you know the ordinary routine. We are agreed that the lady is innocent and you will act accordingly. As to bail, we will settle the details of that later, but we can manage any amount that may be required."

"Do you think that she might be admitted to bail?"

"But why not?" said Thorndyke. "She will be charged only as an accessory after the fact. That is not a very grave crime. The maximum penalty is only two years' imprisonment, and in practice, the sentences are usually quite lenient. You will certainly ask for bail, and I don't see any grounds on which the police could oppose it."

"And now as to the general conduct of the case, I advise you very strongly to play for time. Delay the proceedings as much as you can. Find excuses to ask for remands, and in all possible ways keep the pot boiling as slowly as you can contrive. The longer the date of the final hearing can be postponed, the better will be the chance of finding a conclusive answer to the charge. I will tell you why, following Blandy's excellent example by taking you into my confidence."

"I have been examining this case in considerable detail, partly in Mrs. Gannet's interests and partly for other reasons; and I have a clear and consistent theory of the crime, both as to its motive and approximate procedure. But at present it is only a theory. I can prove nothing. The one crucial fact which will tell me whether my theory is right or wrong is still lacking. I cannot test the truth of it until certain things have happened. I hope that they may happen quite soon, but still, I have to wait on events. If those events turn out as I expect, I shall know that my construction of the crime has been correct; and then I shall be able to show that Mrs. Gannet could not possibly have been an accessory to it. But I can give no date because I cannot control the course of events."

Linnell was visibly impressed, and so was I—though less visibly. I was still in the same state of bewilderment as to Thorndyke's proceedings. I still failed to understand why he was busying himself in a case which did not seem to concern him—apart from his sympathy with Mrs. Gannet. Nor could I yet see that there was anything to discover beyond what we already knew.

Of course I had realized all along that I must have missed some essential point in the case, and now this was confirmed. Thorndyke had a consistent theory of the crime, which, indeed, might be right or wrong. But long experience with Thorndyke told me that it was pretty certainly right, though what sort of theory it might be I was totally unable to imagine. I could only, like Thorndyke, wait on events.

The rest of the conversation concerned itself with the question of bail. Oldfield we knew could be depended on for one surety, and by a little manoeuvring, it was arranged that Thorndyke should finance the other without appearing in the transaction. Eventually Linnell took his departure in greatly improved spirits, cheered by Thorndyke's encouragement and all the better for a good lunch and one or two glasses of sound claret.

Thorndyke's "confidence," if it mystified rather than enlightened me, had at least the good effect of arousing my interest in Mrs. Gannet and her affairs. From time to time during the next few days I turned them over in my mind, though with little result beyond the beneficial mental exercise. But in another direction I had better luck, for I did make an actual discovery. It came about in this way.

A few days after Linnell's visit, I had occasion to go to the London Hospital to confer with one of the surgeons concerning a patient in whom I was interested. When I had finished my business there and came out into the Whitechapel Road, the appearance of the neighbourhood recalled our expedition to the People's Museum, and I suddenly realized that I was within a few minutes' walk of that shrine of the fine arts. Now I had occasionally speculated on Thorndyke's object in making that visit of inspection and on his reasons for interesting himself in Sancroft's difficulties. Was it pure benevolence or was there something behind it? And there was the further question, had his benevolent intentions taken effect? The probability was that they had. He had given Sancroft a very definite promise, and it was quite unlike him to leave a promise unfulfilled.

These questions recurred to me as I turned westward along the Whitechapel Road, and I decided that at least some of them should be answered forthwith. I could now ascertain whether any deputy for Mr. Sancroft had been found, and if so, who that deputy might be. Accordingly, I turned up Commercial Street and presently struck the junction of Norton Folgate and Shoreditch; and, traversing the length of the latter, came into Kingsland Road and so to the People's Museum.

One of my questions was answered as soon as I entered. There was no sign of Mr. Sancroft, but the priceless collection was being watched over by a gentleman of studious aspect who was seated in an armchair—a representative specimen of Curtain Road Chippendale—reading a book with the aid of a pair of horn-framed spectacles. So engrossed was he with his studies that he appeared to be unaware of my entrance, though, as I was the only visitor, I must have been a rather conspicuous object and worthy of some slight notice.

Taking advantage of his preoccupation, I observed him narrowly; and though I could not place him or give him a name, I had the distinct impression that I had seen him before. Continuing a strategic advance in his direction under cover of the glass cases, and still observing him as unobtrusively as I could, I had a growing sense of familiarity until, coming within a few yards of him, I suddenly realized who he was.

"Why," I exclaimed, "it is Mr. Snuper!"

He lowered his book and smiled, blandly. "Mr. Snuper it is," he admitted. "And why not? You seem surprised."

"So I am," I replied. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"To tell the truth," said he, "I am doing very little. You see me here, taking my ease and spending my very acceptable leisure profitably in reading books that I usually have not time to read."

I glanced at the book which he was holding and was not a little surprised to discover that it was Bell's British Stalk-eyed Crustacea. Observing my astonishment, he explained, apologetically:

"I am a collector of British Crustacea in a small way, a very small way. The beginnings were made during a seaside holiday, and now I occasionally secure small additions from the fishmongers' shops."

"I shouldn't have thought," said I, "that the fishmongers' shops would have yielded many rare specimens."

"No," he agreed, "you wouldn't. But it is surprising how many curious and interesting forms of life you may discover among the heaps of shell-fish on a fishmonger's slab; especially the mussels and winkles. Only the day before yesterday, I obtained a nearly perfect specimen of *Stenorhynchus phalangium* from a wrinkle stall in the Mile End Road."

Now this was very interesting. I have often noticed how the discovery of some unlikely hobby throws most unexpected light on a man's character and personality. And so it was now. The enthusiastic pursuit of this comparatively erudite study presented a feature of Mr. Snuper's rather elusive personality that was quite new to me, and somewhat surprising. But I had not come here to study Mr. Snuper, and it suddenly occurred to me that that very discreet gentleman might be making this conversation expressly to divert my attention from other topics. Accordingly, I returned to my business with a direct question.

"But how do you come to be here?"

"It was Dr. Thorndyke's idea," he replied. "You see there was nothing doing in my line at the moment, and Mr. Sancroft was badly in need of someone who could look after the place while he went about his business, so the doctor suggested that I might as well spend my leisure here as at home, and do a kindness to Mr. Sancroft at the same time."

This answer left me nothing to say. The general question that I had asked was all that was admissible. I could not pursue the matter further, for that would have been a discourtesy to Thorndyke, to say nothing of the certainty that the discreet Snuper would keep his own counsel if there were any counsel to keep. So I brought the conversation gracefully to an end with a few irrelevant observations, and having wished my friend good day, went forth and set a course for Shoreditch Station.

But if it was not admissible for me to question Snuper, I was at liberty to turn the matter over in my mind. But that process had the effect rather of raising questions than of disposing of them. Snuper's account of his presence at the gallery was perfectly reasonable and plausible. Thorndyke had no use for him at the moment and Sancroft had. That seemed quite simple. But was it the whole explanation? I had my doubts, and they were based principally on what I knew of Mr. Snuper.

Now Mr. Snuper was a very remarkable man. Originally he had been a private inquiry agent whom Thorndyke had employed occasionally to carry out certain observation duties which could not be discharged by either of us. But Snuper had proved so valuable—so dependable, so discreet, and so quick in the uptake—that Thorndyke had taken him on as a regular member of our staff. For apart from his other good qualities, he had a most extraordinary gift of inconspicuousness. Not only was he at all times exactly the kind of person whom you would pass in the street without a second glance, but in some mysterious way he was able to keep his visible personality in a state of constant change. Whenever you met him, you found him a little different from the man whom you had met before, with the natural result that you were constantly failing to recognize him. That was my experience, as it had been on this very occasion. I never discovered how he did it. He seemed to use no actual disguise (though I believe that he was a master of the art of make-up), but he appeared to be able, in some subtle way, to manage to look like a different person.

But whatever his methods may have been, the results made him invaluable to Thorndyke, for he could keep up a

continuous observation on persons or places with practically no risk of being recognized.

Reflecting on these facts—on Mr. Snuper's remarkable personality, his peculiar gifts and the purposes to which they were commonly applied—I asked myself once more, could there be anything behind his presence at the People's Museum of Modern Art? And—so far as I was concerned—answer there was none. My discovery had simply landed me with one more problem to which I could find no solution.



## CHAPTER 18. — MR. NEWMAN

THE premonitory rumblings which had so disturbed Linnell continued for some days, warning him to make all necessary preparations for the defense; and in spite of the scepticism which we all felt as to the practicability of a prosecution, the tension increased from day to day.

And then the bombshell exploded. The alarming fact was communicated to us in a hurried note from Linnell which informed us that a summons had been served on Mrs. Gannet that very morning, citing her to appear at the Police Court on the third day after that on which it was issued to answer to the charge of having, as an accessory after the fact of the murder of Peter Gannet, harboured, sheltered, or otherwise aided the accused person to evade justice.

Thorndyke appeared to be as surprised as I was, and a good deal more concerned. He read Linnell's note with a grave face and reflected on it with what seemed to me to be uncalled for anxiety.

"I can't imagine," said I, "what sort of evidence Blandy could produce. He can't know where Boles is, or he would have arrested him. And if he doesn't, he couldn't have discovered any evidence of any communications between Boles and Mrs. Gannet."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "that seems quite clear. There can have been no intercepted letters from her, for the obvious reason that such letters would have had to be addressed in such a way as to reach him and thus reveal his whereabouts. And yet one feels that the police would not have taken action unless Blandy had produced enough facts to enable them to make out a *prima facie* case. Blandy might have been ready to gamble on his powers of persuasion, but the responsible authorities would not risk having the case dismissed by the magistrate. It is very mysterious. On my theory of the crime, it is practically certain that Mrs. Gannet could not have been an accessory either before or after the fact."

These observations gave me some clue to Thorndyke's anxiety; for they conveyed to me that Blandy's case, if he really had one, would not fit Thorndyke's theory. I put the suggestion to him in so many words, and he agreed frankly.

"The trouble is," said he, "that my scheme of the crime is purely hypothetical. It is based on a train of deductive reasoning from the facts which are known to us all. I am in possession of no knowledge other than that which is possessed equally by Blandy and by you. The reasoning by which I reached my conclusions seems to me perfectly sound. But I may have fallen into some fallacy, or it may be that there are some material facts which are not known to me, but which are known to Blandy. One of us is mistaken. Naturally, I hope that the mistake is Blandy's; but it may be mine. However, we shall see when the prosecution opens the case."

"I assume," said I, "that you will attend at the hearing."

"Undoubtedly," he replied. "We must be there to hear what Blandy has to say, if he gives evidence, and what sort of case the prosecution proposes to make out; and then we have to give Linnell any help that he may require. I suppose you will lend us the support of your presence?"

"Of course I shall come," I replied. "I am as curious as you are to hear what the prosecution has to say. I shall make a very special point of being there."

But that visit to the Police court was never to take place, for on that very night the "events" on which Thorndyke had been waiting began to loom up on our horizon. They were ushered in by the appearance at our chambers of a young man of Jewish aspect and secretive bearing who, having been interviewed by Polton, had demanded personal audience of Thorndyke and had refused to indicate his name or business to any other person. Accordingly, he was introduced to us by Polton, who, having conducted him into the presence, stood by and kept him under observation until he was satisfied that the visitor had no unlawful or improper designs; then he retired and shut the door.

As the door closed, the stranger produced from an inner pocket a small packet wrapped in newspaper which he proceeded to open; and, having extracted from it a letter in a sealed envelope, silently handed the letter to Thorndyke; who broke the seal and read through the evidently short note which it contained.

"If you will wait a few minutes," said he, placing a chair for the messenger, "I will give you a note to take with you. Are you going straight back?"

"Yes," was the reply. "He's waiting for me."

Thereupon Thorndyke sat down at the writing table, and having written a short letter, put it in an envelope, which he sealed with wax and handed to the messenger, together with a ten shilling note.

"That," said he, "is the fee for services rendered so far. There will be another at the end of the return journey. I have mentioned the matter in my letter."

The messenger received the note with an appreciative grin and a few words of thanks, and having disposed of it in some secret receptacle, wrapped the letter in the newspaper which had enclosed the other, stowed it away in an inner pocket and took his departure.

"That," said Thorndyke, when he had gone, "was a communication from Snuper, who is deputizing for Sancroft at the People's Museum. He tells me that the owner of Gannet's masterpiece is going to call tomorrow morning and take possession of his property."



"Is that any concern of ours?" I asked.

"It is a concern of mine," he replied. "I am anxious not to lose sight of that monkey. There are several things about it which interest me, and if it is to be taken away from the museum, I want to learn, if I can, where it is going, in case I might wish at some future time to make a further examination of it. So I propose to go to the museum tomorrow morning and try to find out from Mr. Newman where he keeps his collection and how the monkey is to be disposed of. It is possible, for instance, that he may be a dealer, in which case there would be the danger of the monkey's disappearing to some unknown destination."

"I shouldn't think that he is a dealer," said I. "He would never get his money back. Probably he is a sort of Broomhill, but, of course, he may live in the provinces or even abroad. At what time do you propose to turn up at the museum?"

"The place opens at nine o'clock in the morning and Snuper expects Mr. Newman to arrive at about that time. I have told him that I shall be there at half-past eight."

Now on the face of it, the transaction did not promise any very thrilling experiences, but there was something a little anomalous about the whole affair. Thorndyke's interest in that outrageous monkey was quite incomprehensible to me, and I had the feeling that there was something more in this expedition than was conveyed in the mere statement of Thorndyke's intentions and objects. Accordingly, I threw out a tentative suggestion. "If I should propose to make one of the party, would my presence be helpful or otherwise?"

"My dear fellow," he replied, "your presence is always helpful. I had, in fact, intended to ask you to accompany me. Up to the present you have not seemed to appreciate the importance of the monkey in this remarkable case; but it is possible that you may gather some fresh ideas on the subject tomorrow morning. So come by all means. And now I must go and make the necessary preparations, and you had better do the same. We shall start from here not later than a quarter to eight."

With this he went up to the laboratory floor, whence, presently, I heard the distant tinkle of the telephone bell. Apparently he was making some kind of appointment, for shortly afterwards his footsteps were audible on the stairs descending to the entry, and I saw him no more until he came in to smoke a final pipe before going to bed.

On the following morning, Polton, having aroused me by precautionary and (as I thought, premature) thumpings on my door, served a ridiculously early breakfast and then took his stand on the door-step to keep a lookout for the taxi which had been chartered overnight. Evidently he had been duly impressed with the importance of the occasion, as apparently had the taxi man, for he arrived at half-past seven and his advent was triumphantly reported by Polton just as I was pouring out my second cup of tea. But after all there was not so very much time to spare, for in Fleet Street, Cornhill and Bishopsgate, all the wheeled vehicles in London seemed to have been assembled to do us honour and retard our progress; it was a quarter past eight when we alighted opposite the Geffrye Museum, and having dismissed the taxi, began to walk at a leisurely pace northward along the Kingsland Road.

When we were a short distance from our destination, I observed a man walking towards us, and at a second glance, I actually recognized Mr. Snuper. As soon as he saw us, he turned about and walked back to the People's Museum, where he unlocked the door and entered. On our arrival we found the door ajar and Mr. Snuper lurking just inside, ready to close the door as soon as we had passed in.

"Well, Snuper," said Thorndyke, as we emerged from the lobby into the main room, "everything seems to have gone according to plan so far. You didn't give any particulars in your letter. How did you manage the adjournment?"

"It didn't require much management, sir," Snuper replied. "The affair came off by itself quite naturally. Mr. Sancroft didn't come to the museum yesterday. He had to go out of town on business and, of course, as I was here, there was no reason why he shouldn't go. So I was here all alone when Mr. Newman came just before closing time. He told me what he had come for and showed me the letter of introduction and the receipt which he had written out and signed. But I explained to him that I was not the curator and had no authority to allow any of the exhibits to be taken away from the museum. Besides, the case was locked and Mr. Sancroft had the key of the safe in which the other keys were kept, so I could not get the figure out even if I had been authorized to part with it.

"He was very disappointed and inclined to be huffy, but it couldn't be helped, and after all, he had only to wait a few hours. I told him that Mr. Sancroft would be here today and would arrive in time to open the museum as usual, so I expect Newman will turn up pretty punctually about nine o'clock. Possibly, he will be waiting outside when Mr. Sancroft comes to let himself in."

This forecast, however, was falsified a few minutes later, for Mr. Sancroft arrived before his time and locked the door when he had entered. Naturally, he knew nothing of what had been happening in his absence and was somewhat surprised to find Thorndyke and me in the museum. But whatever explanations were called for must have been given by Snuper, who followed Sancroft into the curator's room and shut the door behind him; and, judging by the length of the interview, I assumed that Sancroft was being put in possession of such facts as it was necessary for him to know.

While this conference was proceeding, Thorndyke reconnoitered the galleries in what seemed to me a very odd way. He appeared to be searching for some place whence he could observe the entrance and the main gallery without being himself visible. Having tried one or two of the higher cases, and apparently finding them unsuitable, owing to his exceptional stature, he turned his attention to the small room which opened from the main gallery and was devoted entirely to water colours. The entrance of this room was exactly opposite the case which contained the "Figurine of a Monkey," and it also

faced the main doorway. But it seemed to have a further attraction for Thorndyke; for, on the wall nearly opposite to the entrance, hung a large water colour painting, the glass of which, taken at the proper angle, reflected the whole of the principal room, the main doorway, and the case in which the monkey was exhibited. I tried it when Thorndyke had finished his experiments, and found that, not only did it reflect a perfectly clear image, owing to the very dark colouring of the picture, but that the observer looking into it was quite invisible from the main gallery, or indeed, to anyone who did not actually enter the small room.

This was an interesting discovery, in its way. But the most interesting part of it was Thorndyke's motive in seeking this secret point of observation. Once more I decided that things were not quite what they had seemed. As I had understood the programme, Thorndyke was going to introduce himself to Mr. Newman and try to ascertain the destination and future whereabouts of the monkey. But with this purpose, Thorndyke's present proceedings seemed to have no connection.

However, there was not much time for speculation on my part, for, at this point Mr. Snuper emerged from the curator's room and, walking up the gallery, unlocked the front door and threw it open; and, as he returned, accompanied by a man who had slipped in as the door opened, I realized that the proceedings, whatever they might be, had begun.

"Keep out of sight for the present," Thorndyke directed me in a whisper; and, forthwith, I flattened myself against the wall and fixed an eager gaze on the picture as well as I could without obstructing Thorndyke's view. In the reflection I could see Snuper and his companion advance until they were within a few yards of the place where we were lurking, and then I heard Snuper say:

"If you will give me the letter and the receipt, I will take them in to Mr. Sancroft and get the key of the case, unless he wishes to hand the figure to you himself."

With this, he retired into the curator's room and shut the door; and as he disappeared, the stranger—presumably Mr. Newman—who, I could now see, carried a largish hand-bag, advanced to the case which contained the monkey and stood peering into it with his back to us, and so near that I could have put out my hand and touched him. As he stood thus, Thorndyke put his head round the jamb of the doorway to examine him by direct vision, and after a few moments' inspection, stepped out, moving quite silently on the solid parquet floor, and took up a position close behind him. Whereupon I, following his example, came out into the middle of the doorway and stood behind Thorndyke to see what was going to happen next.

For a few moments nothing happened; but just then I became aware of two men lurking in the lobby of the main entrance, half hidden by the inner door and quite hidden from Newman by the case at which he was standing. Suddenly Newman seemed to become conscious of the presence of someone behind him, for he turned sharply and faced Thorndyke. Then I knew that something critical was going to happen, and I realized, too, that Thorndyke had got his "one crucial fact." For as the stranger's eyes met Thorndyke's, he gave one wild stare of horror and amazement and his face blanched to a deathly pallor. But he uttered no word; and after that one ghastly stare, turned about and appeared to resume his contemplation of the figurine.

Then three things happened in quick succession: First, Thorndyke took off his hat; then the door of the curator's room opened and Snuper and Sancroft emerged; and then the two men whom I had noticed came out of the lobby and walked quickly up to the place where Newman and Thorndyke were standing. I looked at them curiously as they approached, and recognized them both. One was Detective Sergeant Wills of the C.I.D. The other was no less a person than Detective Inspector Blandy.

By this time Newman seemed, to some extent, to have recovered his self-possession, whereas Blandy, on the contrary, looked nervous and embarrassed. The former, ignoring the police officers, addressed himself to Sancroft, demanding the speedy conclusion of his business. But here Blandy intervened, with little confidence but more than his usual politeness.

"I must ask you to pardon me, sir," he began, "for interrupting your business, but there are one or two questions that I want you to be so kind as to answer."

Newman looked at him in evident alarm but replied gruffly:

"I have no time to answer questions. Besides, you are a stranger to me, and I don't think I have any concern in your affairs."

"I am a police officer," Blandy explained, "and I—"

"Then I am sure I haven't," snapped Newman.

"I wanted to ask you a few questions in connection with a most unfortunate affair that happened at Newingstead last September," Blandy continued persuasively; but Newman cut him short with the brusque rejoinder:

"Newingstead? I never heard of the place, and of course I know nothing about it."

Blandy looked at him with a baffled expression and then turned an appealing face to Thorndyke.

"Can you give us something definite, sir?" he asked.

"I thought I had," Thorndyke replied. "At any rate, I now accuse this man, Newman, as he calls himself, of having murdered Constable Murray at Newingstead on the 19th of last September. That justifies you in making the arrest; and then—well, you know what to do."

But still Blandy seemed undecided. The man's evident terror and the glare of venomous hatred that he cast on Thorndyke, proved nothing. Accordingly, the Inspector, apparently puzzled and unconvinced, sought to temporize.

"If you would allow me, Mr. Newman," said he, "to take an impression of your left thumb, any mistake that may have been made could be set right in a moment. Now what do you say?"

"I say that I will see you damned first," Newman replied fiercely, edging away from the Inspector and thereby impinging on the massive form of Sergeant Wills, which occupied the only avenue of escape.

"You've got a definite charge, you know, Inspector," Thorndyke reminded him in a warning tone, still narrowly watching the accused man; and something significant in the way the words were spoken helped Blandy to make up his mind.

"Well, then, Mr. Newman," said he, "if you won't give us any assistance, it's your own look-out. I arrest you on the charge of having murdered Police Constable Murray at Newingstead on the 19th of last September and I caution you that—"

The rest of the caution faded out, for Newman made a sudden movement and was in an instant clasped in the arms of Sergeant Wills, who had skilfully seized the prisoner's wrists from behind and held them immovably pressed against his chest. Almost at the same moment, Blandy sprang forward and grasped the prisoner's ears in order to secure his head and defeat his attempts to bite the sergeant's hands. But Newman was evidently a powerful ruffian, and his struggles were so violent that the two officers had the greatest difficulty in holding him, even when Snuper and I tried to control his arms. In the narrow interval between two glass cases, we all swayed to and fro, gyrating slowly and making uncomfortable contacts with sharp corners. Presently Blandy turned his streaming face towards Thorndyke and gasped: "Could you manage the print, Doctor? You can see I can't let go. The kit is in my right hand coat pocket."

"I have brought the necessary things, myself," said Thorndyke, producing from his pocket a small metal box. "It is understood," he added, as he opened the box, "that I am acting on your instructions."

Without waiting for a reply, he took out of the box a tiny roller which had been fixed by its handle in a clip, and having run it along the inside of the lid, which formed an inking-plate, he approached the squirming prisoner; waiting his opportunity, he suddenly seized the left thumb, and holding it steady, ran the little roller over its bulb. Then he produced a small pad of smooth paper, and again watching for a moment when the thumb was fixed immovably, quickly pressed the pad on the inked surface. The resulting print was not a very perfect impression, but it showed the pattern clearly enough for practical purposes.

"Have you got the photograph with you?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Blandy, "but I can't—could you take hold of his head for a moment?"

Thorndyke laid the pad on the top of the nearest case and then, following Blandy's instructions, grasped the prisoner's head so as to relieve the Inspector; Blandy then stepped back, and having taken up the pad, thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out a photograph mounted on a card. For a few moments he stood, eagerly glancing from the pad to the photograph and evidently comparing them point by point.

"Is it the right print?" Thorndyke asked.

Blandy did not answer immediately but continued his scrutiny with evidently growing excitement. At length he looked up, and forgetting his usual bland smile, replied, almost in a shout:

"Yes, by God! It's the man himself."

And then came the catastrophe.

Whether it was that the sergeant's attention was for the moment distracted by the absorbing interest of Blandy's proceedings, or that Newman had been watching his opportunity, I cannot say, but, after a brief cessation of his struggles, as if he had become exhausted, he made a sudden violent effort and twisted himself out of his captors' grasp, darting instantly into the passage between two cases. Thither the sergeant followed, but the prisoner, with incredible quickness and dexterity, delivered a smashing blow on the chest which sent the officer staggering backwards; the next moment, the prisoner was standing in the narrow space with an automatic pistol covering his pursuers.

I will do Blandy the justice (which I am glad to do, as I never liked the man) to say that he faced the deadly danger without a sign of fear or a moment's hesitation. How he escaped with his life I have never understood, for he dashed straight at the prisoner, looking into the very muzzle of the pistol. But by some miracle the bullet passed him by, and before another shot could be fired, he had grabbed the man's wrist and got some sort of control of the weapon. Then the sergeant and Snuper and I came to his assistance, and the old struggle began again, but with the material difference that each and all of us had to keep a wary eye on the barrel of the pistol.

Of the crowded and chaotic events of the next minute I have but the obscurest recollection. There comes back to me a vague idea of violent, strenuous effort; a succession of pistol shots with a sort of infernal obbligato accompaniment of shattering glass; the struggles of the sergeant to reach a back pocket without losing his hold on the prisoner; and the manoeuvres of Mr. Sancroft, at first ducking at every shot and finally retreating hurriedly—almost on all fours—into his sanctum. Nor when the end came, am I at all clear as to the exact manner of its happening. I know only that the firing ceased, and that almost as the last shot was fired, the writhing, struggling body became suddenly still and began limply to sag towards the floor; and that I then noticed in the man's right temple a small hole from which issued a little trickle of blood.

Blandy rose, and looking down gloomily at the prostrate body, cursed softly under his breath.

"What infernal luck!" he exclaimed. "I suppose he is dead?"

"I am afraid there is no doubt of that," I replied, as the last faint twitchings died away.

"Infernal luck," he repeated, "to have him slip through our fingers just as we had made sure of him."

"It was the making sure of him that did it," growled the sergeant. "I mean the finger-prints. We ought to have waited for them until we had got the darbies on."

"I know," said Blandy. "But you see I wasn't sure that we had got the right man. He didn't seem to me to answer to the description at all."

"The description of whom?" asked Thorndyke.

"Of Frederick Boles," replied Blandy. "This is Boles, isn't it?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "This is Peter Gannet."

Blandy was thunderstruck. "But," he exclaimed, incredulously, "it can't be. We identified Gannet's remains quite conclusively."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, blandly, "that is what you were intended to do. The remains were actually those of Boles—with certain additions."

Blandy smiled sourly. "Well," said he, "this is a knockout. To think that we have been barking up the wrong tree all the time. But you might have given us the tip a bit sooner, Doctor."

"My dear Blandy," Thorndyke protested, "I told you all that I knew as soon as I knew it."

"You didn't tell us who this man Newman was."

"But, my dear Inspector," Thorndyke replied, "I didn't know myself. When I came here today, I suspected that Mr. Newman was Peter Gannet. But I didn't know until I had seen the man and recognized him and seen that he recognized me. I told you last night that it was merely a case of suspicion."

"Well, well," said Blandy, "it's no use crying over spilt milk. Is there a telephone in the office? If there is, you had better ring up the Police Station, Sergeant, and tell them to send an ambulance along as quickly as they can."

The tinkle of the telephone bell answered Blandy's question, and while the message was being sent and answered, Thorndyke and I proceeded to lay out the body, in view of the probability of premature rigor mortis. Then we adjourned to the curator's room, where Blandy showed a tendency to revert to the topic of the might-have-been. But our stay there was short, for the ambulance arrived in an almost incredibly short time; and when the body had been carried out by the stretcher bearers and the outer door shut, the Inspector and the Sergeant made ready to depart.

"There are some other particulars, Doctor," said Blandy, "that we shall want you to give us, if you will; but now I must get back to the Yard and report what has happened. They won't be over-pleased, but at least we have cleared up a rather mysterious case."

With this, he and the Sergeant went forth to their car, being let out by Mr. Sancroft, who, having affixed a notice to the main door, shut it and locked it. Then he came back to the room and gazed round ruefully at the wreck of the People's Museum of Modern Art.

"The Lord knows," said he, "who is going to pay for all this damage. Seven glass cases smashed and the nose knocked off Israel Popoff's Madonna. It has been a shocking business; and there is that damned image—if you will excuse me—which has been the cause of all the trouble, still standing in one of the few undamaged cases. But I will soon have it out of there; only the question is, what on earth is to be done with it? The beastly thing seems to be nobody's property now."

"It is the property of Mrs. Gannet," said Thorndyke. "I think it would be best if I were to take custody of it and hand it over to her. I will give you a receipt for it."

"You need not trouble about a receipt," said Sancroft, hauling out his keys and joyfully unlocking the case. "I accept you as Mrs. Gannet's representative and I am only too delighted to get the thing out of the museum. Shall I make it up into a parcel?"

"There is no need," replied Thorndyke, picking up Gannet's bag from the floor, on which it had been dropped when the struggle began. "This will hold it, and there is probably some packing inside."

He opened the bag, and finding it lined with a thick woollen scarf, took the figure from the open case, carefully deposited it in the folds of the scarf and shut the bag.

That seemed to conclude our business, and after a few more words with the still agitated Sancroft and a brief farewell to Mr. Snuper, we accompanied the former to the door, whence we were let out into the street.

---

## CHAPTER 19. — THE MONKEY REVEALS HIS SECRET

BY lovers of paradox we are assured that it is the unexpected that will always happens. But this is, to put it mildly, an exaggeration. Even the expected happens sometimes. It did, for instance, on the present occasion, for when we passed into the entry of our chambers on our return from the museum, and began to ascend the stairs, I expected that Thorndyke would pass by the door of our sitting room and go straight up to the laboratory floor. And that is precisely what he did. He made directly for the larger workshop, and having greeted Polton as we entered, laid Gannet's bag on the bench.

"We need not disturb you, Polton," said he, noting that our assistant was busily polishing the pallets of a dead beat escapement appertaining to a "regulator" that he was constructing. But Polton had already fixed an inquisitive eye on the bag, and, coupling its presence with our mysterious expedition, had evidently sniffed something more exciting than clockwork.

"You are not disturbing me, sir," said he, laying the pallets on the table of the polishing lathe and bearing down with a purposeful air on the bag. "The clock is a spare time job. Can I give you any assistance?"

Thorndyke smiled appreciatively, and opening the bag, carefully took out the figure and stood it up on the bench.

"There, Polton," said he, "what do you think of that for a work of art?"

"My word!" exclaimed Polton, regarding the figure with profound disfavour, "but he is an ugly fellow. Now what part of the world might he have come from? South Sea Islands he looks like."

Thorndyke lifted the image, and turning it up to exhibit the base, handed it to Polton, who examined it with fresh astonishment.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it seems to have been made by a civilized man! It's English lettering, though I don't recognize the mark."

"It was made by an Englishman," said Thorndyke. "But do you find anything abnormal about it apart from its ugliness?"

Polton looked long and earnestly at the base, turned the figure over and examined every part of it, finally tapping it with his knuckles and listening attentively to the sound elicited.

"I don't think it is solid," said he, "though it is mighty thick."

"It is not solid," said Thorndyke, "We have ascertained that."

"Then," said Polton, "I don't understand it. The body looks like ordinary stoneware. But it can't be if it's hollow. There is no opening in it anywhere. But it couldn't have been fired without a vent-hole of some kind. It would have blown to pieces."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "That is the problem. But have another look at the base. What do you say to that white glazed slip on which the signature is written?"

Polton inspected it afresh, and finally stuck a watchmaker's eyeglass in his eye to assist in the examination.

"I don't know what to make of it," said he. "It looks a little like a tin glaze, but I don't think it is. I don't see how it could be. What do you think it is, sir?"

"I suspect that it is some kind of hard white cement—possibly Keene's—covered with a clear varnish."

Polton looked up at him, and his expressive countenance broke out into a characteristic crinkly smile.

"I think you have hit it, sir," said he; "and I think I begin to ogle, as Mr. Miller would say. What are we going to do about it?"

"The obvious thing," said Thorndyke, "is to make what surgeons would call an exploratory puncture; drill a small hole in it and see what the base is really made of and what its thickness is."

"Would a drill go into stoneware?" I asked.

"No," replied Thorndyke, "not an ordinary drill. But I do not think that there is any stoneware in the middle of the base. You remember Broomhill's specimen? There was a good-sized elliptical opening in the base, and I imagine that this figure was originally the same, but that the opening has been filled up. What we have to ascertain is what it has been filled with and how far the filling goes into the cavity."

"We had better do it with a hand-drill," said Polton, "and steady the image on the bench, as it wouldn't be safe to fix it in the vise. Then it will be convenient if we want to enlarge the hole."

He wrapped the "image" in one or two thick dusters and laid it on the bench, when I took charge of it and held it as firmly as I could to resist the pressure of the drill. Then, having fitted an eighth-inch Morse into the stock, he began operations, cautiously, and with only a light pressure; but I noticed that at first the hard drill-point seemed to make very little impression.

"What do you suppose the filling consists of, sir?" Polton asked, as he withdrew the drill to examine the shallow pit its point had made, "and how far do you suppose it goes in?"

"My idea is," replied Thorndyke—"but it is only a guess—that there is a comparatively thin layer of Keene's cement and then a plug of plaster, perhaps three or four inches thick. Beyond that, I should expect to come to the cavity. I hope I am right, for if it should turn out to be Keene's cement all the way, we shall have some trouble in making a hole large enough for our purpose."

"What is our purpose?" I asked. "To see if there is anything in the cavity, I presume."

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, "though it is practically certain that there is. Otherwise, there would have been no object in stopping up the opening."

Here Polton returned to the charge, now sensibly increasing the pressure. Still, for a while, the drill seemed to make little progress. Then quite suddenly, as if some obstruction had been removed, it began to enter freely and had soon penetrated as far as the chuck would allow it to go.

"You said, three or four inches, I think, sir?" Polton remarked, as he withdrew the drill and examined the white powder in the grooves.

"Yes," Thorndyke replied, "but possibly more. A six-inch drill would be best; and you might use a stouter one—say a quarter-inch—to avoid the risk of its bending."

Polton made the necessary change and resumed operations with the larger drill, which soon enlarged the opening and then began quickly to penetrate the softer plaster. When it had entered about four inches, even this slight resistance seemed to cease, for it ran in suddenly right up to the chuck.

"Four inches it is, sir," said Polton, with a triumphant crinkle, as he withdrew the drill and inspected the grooves. "How big an opening will you want?"

"An inch might do," replied Thorndyke, "but an inch and a half would be better. I think that is possible without encroaching on the stoneware body. But you will see."

On this, Polton produced a set of reamers and a brace, and beginning with one which would just enter the hole, turned the brace cautiously while I continued to steady the figure. Meanwhile, Thorndyke, having cut off a piece of stout copper wire about eight inches long, fixed it in the vise, and with an adjustable die, cut a screw thread about an inch long on one end.

"We may as well see what the conditions are," said he, "before we go any further."

He took the wire out of the vise, and as Polton withdrew the third reamer—which had enlarged the hole to about half an inch—he passed the wire into the hole and began gently to probe the bottom of the cavity. Then he pressed it in somewhat more firmly and gave it one or two turns, slowly drawing it out while he continued to turn. When it finally emerged, its end held a small knob of cotton wool from which a little twisted strand of the same material extended into the invisible interior. I watched its emergence with profound interest and a certain amount of self-contempt; for obviously he had expected to find the interior filled with cotton wool as was demonstrated by the making of the cotton wool holder. And yet I, who knew as much of the essential facts as he did, had never guessed, and even now had only a vague suspicion of what its presence suggested.

As the operations with the reamers progressed, it became evident that the larger opening was possible, for the material cut through was still only cement and plaster. When the full inch and a half had been reached, Thorndyke fixed his wire in the chuck of the hand-drill, and passing the former into the wide hole, pressed the screw end into the mass of cotton wool, and began to turn the handle, slowly withdrawing it as he turned. When the end of the wire appeared at the opening, it bore a ball of cotton wool from which a thick strand, twisted by the rapid rotation of the wire into a firm cord, extended to the mass inside; and as Thorndyke slowly stepped back, still turning the handle, the cord grew longer and longer until at last its end slipped out of the opening, showing that the whole of the cotton wool had been extracted.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "let us see what all that cotton wool enclosed."

He laid aside the drill, and carefully lifting the figure, held it upright over the bench, when there dropped out a small, white paper packet tied up with thread. Having cut the thread, he laid the packet on the bench and opened it, while Polton and I craned forward inquisitively. I suppose we both knew approximately what to expect, and I was better able to guess than Polton; but the reality was quite beyond my expectations, and as for Polton, he was, for the moment, struck dumb. Only for the moment, however, for recovering himself, he exclaimed impressively, with his eyes fixed on the packet:

"Never in all my life have I seen the like of this. Fifteen diamonds and every one of them a specimen stone. And look at the size of them! Why, that little lot must be worth a king's ransom!"

"I understand," said Thorndyke, "that they represent about ten thousand pounds. That will be their market price; and you can add to that three human lives—not as their value, which it is not, but as their cost."

"I take it," said I, "that you are assuming these to be Kempster's diamonds?"

"It is hardly a case of assuming," he replied. "The facts seem to admit of no other interpretation. This was an experiment to test the correctness of my theory of the crime. I expected to find in this figure fifteen large diamonds. Well, we have opened the figure and here are the fifteen large diamonds. This figure belonged to Peter Gannet, and whatever was in it was put in by him, as is shown by the sealing on the base which bears his signature. But Peter Gannet has been proved to

be the murderer of the constable, and that murderer was undoubtedly the man who stole Kempster's diamonds; and these diamonds correspond in number and appearance with the diamonds which were stolen. However, we won't leave it at a mere matter of appearance. Kempster gave me full particulars of the diamonds, including the weight of each stone, and of course the total weight of the whole parcel. We need hardly take the weight of each stone separately, but if we weigh the whole fifteen together and we find that the total weight agrees with that given by Kempster, even my learned and sceptical friend will admit that the identity is proved sufficiently for our present purposes."

I ventured mildly to repudiate the alleged scepticism but agreed that the verification was worth while; and when Thorndyke had carefully closed the packet, we all adjourned to the chemical laboratory, where Polton slid up the glass front of the balance and went through the formality of testing the truth of the latter with empty cans.

"What weight shall I put on, sir?" he asked.

"Mr. Kempster put the total weight at 380.4 grains. Let us try that."

Polton selected the appropriate weights, and when they had been checked by Thorndyke, they were placed in the pan and the necessary "rider" put on the beam to make up the fraction. Then Polton solemnly closed the glass front and slowly depressed the lever; and as the balance rose, the index deviated barely a hair's breadth from the zero mark.

"I think that is near enough," said Thorndyke, "to justify us in deciding that these are the diamonds that were stolen from Kempster."

"Yes," I agreed; "at any rate, it is conclusive enough for me. What do you propose to do with them? Shall you hand them to Kempster?"

"No," he replied. "I don't think that would be quite in order. Stolen property should be delivered to the police, even if its ownership is known. I shall hand these diamonds to the Commissioner of Police, explain the circumstances, and take his receipt for them. Then I shall notify Kempster and leave him to collect them. He will have no difficulty in recovering them as the police have a complete description of the stones. And that will finish the business, so far as I am concerned. I have more than fulfilled my obligations to Kempster and I have proved that Mrs. Gannet could not possibly have been an accessory to the murder of her husband. Those were the ostensible objects of my investigation, apart from the intrinsic interest of the case, and now that they have both been achieved, it remains only to sing *Nunc Dimittis* and celebrate our success with a modest festivity of some kind."

"There is one other little matter that remains," said I. "Today's events have proved that your theory of the crime was correct, but they haven't shown how you arrived at that theory, and I have only the dimmest ideas on the subject. But perhaps the festivity will include a reasoned exposition of the evidence."

"I see nothing against that," he replied. "It would be quite interesting to me to retrace the course of the investigation; and if it would also interest you and Oldfield—who must certainly be one of the party—then we shall all be pleased."

He paused for a few moments, having, I think, detected a certain wistfulness in Polton's face, for he continued:

"A restaurant dinner would hardly meet the case, if a prolonged and necessarily confidential pow-wow is contemplated. What do you think, Polton?"

"I think, sir," Polton replied, promptly and with emphasis, "that you would be much more comfortable and more private in your own dining room, and you'd get a better dinner, too. If you will leave the arrangements to me, I will see that the entertainment does you credit."

I chuckled inwardly at Polton's eagerness. Not but that he would at any time have delighted in ministering, in our own chambers, to Thorndyke's comfort and that of his friends. But apart from these altruistic considerations, I felt sure that on this present occasion the "arrangements" would include some very effective ones for enabling him to enjoy the exposition.

"Very well, Polton," said Thorndyke. "I will leave the affair in your hands. You had better see Dr. Oldfield and find out what date will suit him, and then we will wind up the Gannet case with a flourish."

---

## CHAPTER 20. — THORNDYKE REVIEWS THE EVIDENCE

OUR invitation to Oldfield came very opportunely, for he was just preparing for his holiday and had already got a locum-tenens installed. So when, on the appointed evening, he turned up in buoyant spirits, it was as a free man, immune from the haunting fear of an urgent call.

Polton's artful arrangements for unostentatious eavesdropping had come to naught, for Thorndyke and I had insisted on his laying a place for himself at the table and joining us as the colleague that he had actually become in late years, rather than the servant that he still proclaimed himself to be. For the gradual change of status from servant to friend had occurred quite smoothly and naturally. Polton was a man in whom perfect manners were inborn; and as for his intellect, well, I would gladly have swapped my brain for his.

"This is very pleasant," said Oldfield, as he took his seat and cast an appreciative glance round the table, "and it is most kind of you, sir, to have invited me to the celebration, especially when you consider what a fool I have been and what a mess I made of my part of the business."

"You didn't make a mess of it at all," said Thorndyke.

"Well, sir," Oldfield chuckled, "I made every mistake that was humanly possible, and no man can do more than that."

"You are doing yourself a great injustice, Oldfield," Thorndyke protested. "Apparently you don't realize that you were the actual discoverer of the crime."

Oldfield laid down his knife and fork to gaze at Thorndyke.

"I, the discoverer!" he exclaimed; and then, "Oh, you mean that I discovered the ashes. But any other fool could have done that. There they were, plainly in sight, and it just happened that I was the first person to go into the studio."

"I am not so sure even of that," said Thorndyke. "There was some truth in what Blandy said to you. It was the expert eye which saw at once that something strange had happened. Most persons, going into the studio, would have failed to observe anything abnormal. But that is not what I am referring to. I mean that it was you who made the discovery that exposed the real nature of the crime and led to the identification of the criminal."

Oldfield shook his head, incredulously, and looked at Thorndyke as if demanding further enlightenment.

"What I mean," the latter explained, "is that here we had a crime, carefully and subtly planned and prepared in detail with admirable foresight and imagination. There was, only a single mistake, and but for you, that mistake would have passed unnoticed and the scheme would have worked according to plan. It very nearly did, as you know."

Oldfield still looked puzzled, as well he might; for he knew, as I did, that all his conclusions had been wrong; and I was as far as he was from understanding what Thorndyke meant.

"Perhaps," Oldfield suggested, "you will explain in a little more detail what my discovery was?"

"Not now," replied Thorndyke. "Presently, we are going to have a reasoned analysis of the case. You will see plainly enough then."

"I suppose I shall," Oldfield agreed, doubtfully, "but I should have said that the entire discovery was your own, sir. I know that it came as a thunder-bolt to me, and so I expect it did to Blandy. And he must have been pretty sick at losing his prisoner, after all."

"Yes," said I, "he was. And it was unfortunate. Gannet ought to have been brought to trial and hanged."

"I am not sorry that he wasn't, all the same," said Oldfield. "It would have been horrible for poor Mrs. Gannet."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "a trial and a hanging would have ruined her life. I am inclined to feel that the suicide, or accident, was all for the best, especially as there are signs that very warm and sympathetic relations are growing up between her and our good friend Linnell. One likes to feel that the future holds out to her the promise of some compensation for all the trials and troubles that she has had to endure."

"Still," I persisted, "the fellow was a villain and ought to have been hanged."

"He wasn't the worst kind of villain," said Thorndyke. "The murder of the constable was, if not properly accidental, at least rather in the nature of 'chance medley.' There could have been no intention to kill. And as to Boles, he probably offered considerable provocation."

From this point the conversation tended to peter out, the company's jaws being otherwise engaged. What there was ranged over a variety of topics—including Polton's magnum opus, the regulator, now in a fair way of being completed—and kept us entertained until the last of the dishes had been dealt with and removed and the port and the dessert had been set on the table. Then, when Oldfield and I had filled our pipes (Polton did not smoke but took an occasional, furtive pinch of snuff), Thorndyke, in response to our insistent demands, put down his empty pipe and proceeded to the promised analysis.

"In order," he began, "to appreciate the subtlety and imagination with which this crime was planned, it is necessary to recall the whole sequence of events and to note how naturally and logically it evolved. It begins with a case of arsenic poisoning; a perfectly simple and ordinary case with all the familiar features. A man is poisoned by arsenic in his food.



That food is prepared by his wife. The wife has a male friend to whom she is rather devoted, and she is not very devoted to her husband. Taken at its face value, there is no mystery at all. It appears to be just the old, old story.

"The poisoning is detected, the man recovers and returns home to resume his ordinary habits. But any observer, noting the facts, must feel that this is not the end. There will surely be a sequel. A murder has been attempted and has failed; but the will to murder has been proved, and it presumably still exists, awaiting a fresh opportunity. Anyone knowing what has happened, will naturally be on the lookout for some further attempt.

"Then, during his wife's absence at the seaside, the man disappears. She comes home and finds that he is missing. He has not gone away in any ordinary sense, for he has taken nothing with him, not even a hat. In her alarm she naturally seeks the advice of the doctor. But the doctor, recalling the poisoning incident, at once suspects a tragedy, and the more so since he knows of the violent enmity existing between the husband and the wife's friend. But he does not merely suspect a tragedy in the abstract. His suspicions take a definite shape. The idea of murder comes into his mind, and when it does it is associated naturally enough with the man who was suspected of having administered the poison. He is not, perhaps, fully conscious of his suspicions; but he is in such a state of mind that in the instant when the fact of the murder becomes evident, he confidently fills in the picture and identifies not only the victim but the murderer, too.

"Thus, you see how perfectly the stage had been set for the events that were to follow; how admirably the minds of all who knew the facts had been prepared to follow out a particular line of thought. There is the preliminary crime with Boles as the obvious suspect. There is the expectation that, since the motive remains, there will be a further attempt—by Boles. Then comes the expected sequel, and instantly, by the most natural and reasonable association, the *dramatis personae* of the first crime are transferred, in the same roles, to the second crime. It is all quite plain and consistent. Taking things at their face value, it seemed obvious that the murdered man must be Peter Gannet and his murderer, Frederick Boles. I think that I should have been prepared to accept that view, myself, if there had been nothing to suggest a different conclusion.

"But it was just at this point that Oldfield made his valuable contribution to the evidence. Providence inspired him to take a sample of the bone-ash and test it for arsenic; and to his surprise, and still more to mine, he proved that the ash did contain arsenic. Moreover, the metal was present, not as a mere trace but in measurable quantities. And there could be no doubt about it. Oldfield's analysis was carried out skilfully and with every precaution against error, and I repeated the experiment with the remainder of the sample and confirmed his results.

"Now here was a definite anomaly, a something which did not seem to fit in with the rest of the facts; and I am astonished that neither Blandy nor the other investigators appreciated its possible importance. To me an anomalous fact—a fact which appears unconnected, or even discordant with the body of known facts—is precisely the one on which attention should be focused. And that is what I did in this present case. The arsenic was undeniably present in the ashes, and its presence had to be accounted for.

"How did it come to be there? Admittedly, it was not in the body before the burning. Then it must have found its way into the ashes after their removal from the kiln. But how? To me there appeared to be only two possible explanations, and I considered each, comparing it with the other in terms of probability.

"First, there was the suggestion made at the inquest that the ashes might have become contaminated with arsenic in the course of grinding or transference to the bin. That, perhaps, sounded plausible if it was only a verbal formula for disposing of a curious but irrelevant fact. But when one tried to imagine how such contamination could have occurred, no reasonable explanation was forthcoming. What possible source of contamination was there? Arsenic is not one of the potter's ordinary materials. It would not have been present in the bin, nor in the iron mortar nor in the grinding mills. It was a foreign substance, so far as the pottery studio was concerned, and the only arsenic known to exist in the place was that which was contained in a stoppered jar in Boles's cupboard.

"Moreover, it had not the character of a mere chance contamination. Not only was it present in a measurable quantity; it appeared to be fairly evenly distributed throughout the ashes, as was proved by the fact that the Home Office chemist obtained results substantially similar to Oldfield's and mine. After a critical examination of this explanation, I felt that it explained nothing, that it did not agree with the facts, and was itself inexplicable.

"Then, if one could not accept the contamination theory, what was the alternative? The only other explanation that could be suggested was that the arsenic had been intentionally mixed with the ashes. At the first glance this did not look very probable. But, if it was not the true explanation, it was at least intelligible. There was no impossibility; and in fact, the more I considered it, the less improbable did it appear.

"When this hypothesis was adopted provisionally, two further questions at once arose: if the arsenic was intentionally put into the ashes, who put it there and for what purpose? Taking the latter question first, a reasonable answer immediately suggested itself. The most obvious purpose would be that of establishing a connection between the present crime and the previous arsenic poisoning; and when I asked myself what could be the object of trying to establish such a connection, again a perfectly reasonable answer was forthcoming. In the poisoning crime, the victim was Peter Gannet, and the would-be murderer was almost certainly Frederick Boles. Then the introduction of the arsenic as a common factor linking together the two crimes would have the purpose of suggesting a repetition of the characters of victim and murderer. That is to say, the ultimate object of putting the arsenic into the ashes would be to create the conviction that the ashes were the remains of Peter Gannet, that he had been murdered by means of arsenic, and that the murderer was Frederick Boles.

“But who would wish to create this conviction? Remember that our picture contains only three figures: Gannet, his wife and Boles. If the arsenic had been planted, it must have been planted by one of those three. But by which of them? By Mrs. Gannet? Certainly not, seeing that she was under some suspicion of having been an accessory to the poisoning. And obviously Boles would not wish to create the belief that he was the murderer.

“Thus, of the three possible agents of this imposture, we had excluded two. There remained only Gannet. The suggestion was that he was dead and, therefore, could not have planted the arsenic. But could we accept that suggestion? The arsenic was (by the hypothesis) admittedly an imposture. But with the evidence of imposture, we could no longer take the appearances at their face value. The only direct evidence that the remains were those of Gannet was the tooth that was found in the ashes. It was, however, only a porcelain tooth and no more an integral part of Gannet’s body than his shirt button or his collar stud. If the arsenic had been planted to produce a particular belief, it was conceivable that the tooth might have been planted for the very same purpose. It was in fact conceivable that the ashes were not those of Gannet and that consequently Gannet was not dead.

“But if Gannet had not been the victim of this murder, then he was almost certainly the murderer; and if Boles had not been the murderer, then he must almost certainly have been the victim. Both men had disappeared and the ashes were undoubtedly the remains of one of them. Suppose the remains to be those of Boles and the murderer to be Peter Gannet? How does that affect our question as to the planting of the arsenic?

“At a glance we can see that Gannet would have had the strongest reasons for creating the belief that the remains were those of his own body. So long as that belief prevailed, he was absolutely safe. The police would have written him off as dead and would be engaged in an endless and fruitless search for Boles. With only a trifling change in his appearance—such as the shaving off of his beard and moustache—he could go his way in perfect security. Nobody would be looking for him; nobody would even believe in his existence. He would have made the perfect escape.

“This result appeared to me very impressive. The presence of the arsenic was a fact. The hypothesis that it had been planted was the only intelligible explanation of that fact. The acceptance of that hypothesis was conditional on the discovery of some motive for planting it. Such a motive we had discovered, but the acceptance of that motive was conditional on the assumption that Peter Gannet was still alive.

“Was such an assumption unreasonable? Not at all. Gannet’s death had rather been taken for granted. He had disappeared mysteriously, and certain unrecognisable human remains had been found on his premises. At once it had been assumed that the remains were his. The actual identification rested on a single porcelain tooth; but as that tooth was no part of his body and could, therefore, have been purposely planted in the ashes, the evidence that it afforded as to the identity of the remains was not conclusive. If any grounds existed for suspecting imposture, it had no evidential value at all. But apart from that tooth there was not, and never had been, any positive reasons for believing that those ashes were the remains of Peter Gannet.

“The completeness and consistency of the results thus arrived at, by reasoning from the hypothesis that the arsenic had been planted, impressed me profoundly. It really looked as if that hypothesis might be the true one and I decided to pursue the argument and see whither it led; and especially to examine one or two other slight anomalies that I had noticed.

“I began with the crime itself. The picture presented (and accepted by the police) was this: Boles had murdered Gannet and cremated his body in the kiln, after dismembering it, if necessary, to get it into the cavity. He had then pounded the incinerated bones and deposited the fragments in the bone-ash-bin. Then, after having done all this, he was suddenly overcome by panic and fled.

“But why had he fled? There was no reason whatever for him to flee. He was in no danger. He was alone in the studio and could lock himself in. There was no fear of interruption, since Mrs. Gannet was away at the seaside, and even if any chance visitor should have come, there was nothing visible to excite suspicion. He had done the difficult and dangerous part of the work and all that remained were the few finishing touches. If he had cleaned up the kiln and put it into its usual condition, the place would have looked quite normal, even to Oldfield; and as to the bone fragments, there was not only the grog-mill but also a powerful edge-runner mill in which they could have been ground to fine powder. If this powder had been put into the bone-ash-bin—the ordinary contents of which were powdered bone ash—every trace of the crime would have been destroyed. Then Boles could have gone about his work in the ordinary way or taken a holiday if he had pleased. There would have been nothing to suggest that any abnormal events had occurred in the studio or that Gannet was not still alive.

“Contrast this with the actual conditions that were found. The kiln had been left in a state that would instantly attract the attention of anyone who knew anything about the working of a pottery studio. The incinerated bones had been pounded into fragments, just too small to be recognizable as parts of any known person, but large enough to be recognized, not only as bones, but as human bones. After all the risk and labour of cremating the body and pounding the bones, there had still been left clear evidence that a man had been murdered.

“I think you will agree that the suggested behaviour of Boles is quite unaccountable; is entirely at variance with reasonable probabilities. On the other hand, if you consider critically the conditions that were found, they will convey to you, as they did to me, the impression of a carefully arranged tableau. Certain facts, such as the murder and the cremation, were to be made plain and obvious, and certain issues, such as the identities of victim and murderer, were to be confused. But furthermore, they conveyed to me a very interesting suggestion, which was that the tableau had been set for a particular spectator. Let us consider this suggestion.

"The crime was discovered by Oldfield, and it is possible that he was the only person who would have discovered it. His potter's eye, glancing at the kiln, noted its abnormal state and saw that something was wrong. Probably there was a good deal of truth, as well as politeness, in Blandy's remark that if he had come to the studio without his expert guide and adviser, though he would have seen the visible objects, he would have failed to interpret their meaning. But Oldfield had just the right knowledge. He knew all about the kiln, he knew the various bins and what was in them, and what the mills were for. So, too, with the little finger bone. Most persons would not have known what it was; but Oldfield, the anatomist, recognizes it at once as the ungual phalanx of a human index finger. He would seem to have been the pre-appointed discoverer.

"The suggestion is strengthened by what we know of the previous events; of Gannet's eagerness to cultivate the doctor's friendship, to induct him into all the mysteries of the studio and all the routine of the work that was carried on there. There is an appearance of Oldfield's being prepared to play the part of discoverer—a part that would naturally fall to him, since it was certain that when the blow fell, Mrs. Gannet would seek the help and advice of the doctor.

"The suggestion of preparation applies also to the arsenic in the ashes. If that arsenic was planted, the planting of it must have been a mere gamble, for it was most unlikely that anyone would think of testing the ashes for arsenic. But if there was any person in the world who would think of doing so, that person was most assuredly Oldfield. Any young doctor who has the misfortune to miss a case of arsenic poisoning is pretty certain thereafter to develop what the psychological jargonists would call 'an arsenic complex.' When any abnormal death occurs, he is sure to think first of arsenic.

"The whole group of appearances then suggested that Oldfield had been prepared to take a particular view and to form certain suspicions. But did not that suggestion carry us back still farther? What of the poisoning affair itself? If all the other appearances were false appearances, was it not possible that the poisoning was an imposture, too? When I came to consider that question, I recalled certain anomalies in the case which I had observed at the time. I did not attach great importance to them, since arsenic is a very erratic poison, but I noted them and I advised Oldfield to keep full notes of the case; and now that the question of imposture had arisen, it was necessary to reconsider them, and to review the whole case critically.

"We had to begin our review by reminding ourselves that practically the whole of our information was derived from the patient's statements. The phenomena were virtually all subjective. Excepting the redness of the eyes, which could easily have been produced artificially, there were no objective signs; for the appearance of the tongue was not characteristic. Of the subjective symptoms we were told; we did not observe them for ourselves. The abdominal pain was felt by the patient, not by us. So with the numbness, the loss of tactile sensibility, the tingling, the cramps and the inability to stand; we learned of their existence from the patient and we could not check his statements. We accepted those statements as there appeared to be no reason for doubting them; but it was quite possible for them all to have been false. To an intelligent malingerer who had carefully studied the symptoms of arsenic poisoning, there would have been little difficulty in making up a quite convincing set of symptoms."

"But," Oldfield objected, "there really was arsenic in the body. You were not forgetting that?"

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "That was the first of the anomalies. You will remember my remarking to you that the quantity of arsenic obtained by analysis of the secretions was less than I expected. Woodfield and I were both surprised at the smallness of the amount; which was, in fact, not much greater than might have been found in a patient who was taking arsenic medicinally. But it was not an extreme discrepancy, since arsenic is rapidly eliminated, though the symptoms persist, and we explained it by assuming that no considerable dose had been taken quite recently. Nevertheless, it was rather remarkable, as the severity of the symptoms would have led us to expect a considerable quantity of the poison.

"The next anomaly was the rapidity and completeness of Gannet's recovery. Usually, in severe cases, recovery is slow and is followed by a somewhat long period of ill-health. But Gannet began to recover almost immediately, and when he left the hospital he seemed to be quite well.

"The third anomaly—not a very striking one, perhaps—was his state of mind on leaving hospital. He went back home quite happily and confidently, though his would-be murderer was still there; and he would not entertain any sort of inquiry or any measures to ascertain that murderer's identity. He seemed to assume that the affair was finished and that there was nothing more to fear.

"Now, looking at the case as a whole with the idea of a possible imposture in our minds, what did it suggest? Was there not the possibility that all the symptoms were simulated? That Gannet took just enough arsenic to supply the means of chemical demonstration (a fairly full daily dose of Fowler's solution would do) and on the appropriate occasion, put a substantial quantity of arsenic into the barley water? In short, was it not possible that the poisoning affair was a deception from beginning to end?

"The answer to this question obviously was that it was quite possible, and the next question was as to its probability. But the answer to this also appeared to be affirmative; for on our hypothesis, the appearances in the studio were false appearances, deliberately produced to create a certain erroneous belief. But those appearances were strongly supported by the previous poisoning crime and obviously connected with it. The reasonable conclusion seemed to be that the poisoning affair was a deception calculated to create this same erroneous belief (that an attempt had been made to murder Gannet) and to lead on naturally to the second crime.

"Now let us pause for a moment to see where we stand. Our hypothesis started with the assumption that the arsenic had

been put into the ashes for a definite purpose. But we found that the only person who could have had a motive for planting it was Peter Gannet. Thus we had to conclude that Gannet was the murderer and Boles the victim. We have examined this conclusion, point by point, and we have found that it agrees with all the known facts and that it yields a complete, consistent and reasonable scheme of the studio crime. Accordingly, we adopt that conclusion—provisionally, of course, for we are still in the region of hypothesis and have, as yet, actually proved nothing.

“But assuming that Gannet had committed this murder, it was evident that it must have been a very deliberate crime; long premeditated, carefully planned and carried out with extraordinary foresight and infinite patience. A crime of this kind implies a proportionate motive; a deep seated, permanent and intense motive. What could it have been? Was there anything known to us in Gannet’s circumstances that might seem to account for his entertaining murder as a considered policy? Taking the usual motives for planned and premeditated murder, I asked myself whether any of them could apply to him. We may put them roughly into five categories: jealousy, revenge, cupidity, escape and fear. Was there any suggestion that Gannet might have been affected by any of them?

“As to jealousy, there was the undeniable fact that Mrs. Gannet’s relations with Boles were unusual and perhaps indiscreet. But there was no evidence of any impropriety and no sign that the friendship was resented by Gannet. It did not appear to me that jealousy as a motive could be entertained.

“As to revenge, this is a common motive among Mediterranean peoples but very rare in the case of Englishmen. Boles and Gannet disliked each other to the point of open enmity. An unpremeditated murder might easily have occurred, but there was nothing in their mere mutual dislike to suggest a motive for a deliberately planned murder. So, too, with the motive of cupidity; there was nothing to show that either stood to gain any material benefit by the death of the other. But when I came to consider the last two motives—escape and fear—I saw that there was a positive suggestion which invited further examination; and the more it was examined, the more definite did it become.”

“What, exactly, do you mean by escape?” I asked.

“I mean,” he replied, “the desire to escape from some intolerable position. A man, for instance, whose life is being made unbearable by the conduct of an impossible wife, may contemplate getting rid of her, especially if he sees the opportunity of making a happy and desirable marriage; or who is haunted by a blackmailer who will never leave him to live in peace. In either case, murder offers the only means of escape, and the motive to adopt that means will tend to develop gradually. From a mere desirable possibility, it will grow into a definite intention; and then there will be careful consideration of practicable and safe methods of procedure. Now in the present case, as I have said, it appeared to me that such a motive might have existed; and when I considered the circumstances, that impression became strongly confirmed. The possible motive came into view in connection with certain facts which were disclosed by Inspector Blandy’s activities, and which were communicated to me by Oldfield when he consulted me about Mrs. Gannet’s difficulties.

“It appeared that Blandy, having finished with the bone fragments, proceeded to turn out Boles’s cupboard. There he found fairly conclusive evidence that Boles was a common receiver, which was not our concern. But he also found a piece of gold plate on which were some very distinct finger-prints. They were the prints from a left hand, and there was a particularly fine and clear impression of a left thumb. Of this plate Blandy took possession with the expressed intention of taking it to the Finger-print Department at Scotland Yard to see if Boles happened to be a known criminal. Presumably, he did so, and we may judge of the result by what followed. Two days later he called on Mrs. Gannet and subjected her to a searching interrogation, asking a number of leading questions, among which were two of very remarkable significance. He wanted to know where Boles was on the 19th of last September, and when it was that his friendship with Gannet suddenly turned to enmity. Both these questions she was able to answer; and the questions and the answers were highly illuminating.

“First, as to the questions. The 19th of September was the date of the Newingstead murder; and the murdered constable’s truncheon bore a very distinct print of a left thumb—evidently that of the murderer. At a glance, it appeared to me obvious that the thumb-print on the gold plate had been found to correspond with the thumb print on the truncheon and that Boles had been identified thereby as the murderer of the constable. That was the only possible explanation of Blandy’s question. And this assumption was confirmed by the answer; by which it transpired that Boles was at Newingstead on that fatal day and that, incidentally, Gannet was with him, the two men, apparently, staying at the house of Boles’s aunt.

“Blandy’s other question and Mrs. Gannet’s answer were also profoundly significant; for she recalled, clearly, that the sudden change in the relations of the two men was first observed by her when she met them after their return from Newingstead. They went there friends; they came back enemies. She knew of no reason for the change; but those were the facts.

“Here we may pause to fill in, as I did, the picture thus presented to us in outline. There are two men (whom we may conveniently call A and B) staying together at a house in Newingstead. On the 19th of September, one of them, A, goes forth alone. Between eight and nine in the evening he commits the robbery. At about nine o’clock he kills the constable. Then he finds Oldfield’s bicycle and on it he pedals away some four miles along the London Road. Having thus got away from the scene of the crime, he dismounts and seeks a place in which to hide the bicycle. He finds a cart shed, and having concealed the bicycle in it, sets out to return to Newingstead. Obviously, he would not go back by the same route, with the chance of encountering the police, for he probably suspects that he has killed a man, and at any rate, he has the stolen diamonds on his person. He must necessarily make a detour so as to approach Newingstead from a different direction, and

his progress would not be rapid, as he would probably try to avoid being seen. The cart shed was over four miles from Newingstead along the main road, and his detour would have added considerably to that distance. By the time that he arrived at his lodgings it would be getting late; at least eleven o'clock and probably later. Quite a late hour by village standards.

"The time of his arrival home would probably be noted by B. But there is something else he would note. A had been engaged in a violent encounter with the constable and could hardly fail to bear some traces of it on his person. The constable was by no means passive. He had drawn his truncheon and was using it when it was snatched away from him. We may safely assume that A's appearance, when he sneaked home and let himself into the house, must have been somewhat unusual.

"By the next morning the hue and cry was out. All the village knew of the robbery and the murder, and it would be inevitable that B should connect the crime with A's late homecoming and disordered condition. Not only did the times agree but the man robbed, Arthur Kempster, was known to them both, and known personally at least by one of them. Then came the inquest with full details of the crime and the vitally important fact that a clear finger-print, left by the murderer, was in the possession of the police. Both the men must have known what was proved at the inquest for a very full report of it was published in the local paper, as I know from having read a copy that Kempster gave me. Both men knew of the existence of the thumb-print; and one knew, and the other was convinced, that it was A's thumb-print.

"From these facts it was easy to infer what must have followed. For it appears that it was just at this time that the sudden change from mutual friendship to mutual enmity occurred. What did that change (considered in connection with the aforesaid facts) imply? To me it suggested the beginning of a course of blackmail. B was convinced that A was the robber and he demanded a share of the proceeds as the price of his silence. But A could not admit the robbery without also admitting the murder. Consequently, he denied all knowledge of either.

"Then began the familiar train of events that is characteristic of blackmail; that so commonly leads to its natural end in either suicide or murder. B felt sure that A had in his possession loot to the value of ten thousand pounds and he demanded, with menaces, his share of that loot; demands that A met with stubborn denials. And so it went on with recurring threats and recriminations and violent quarrels.

"But it could not go on forever. To A the conditions were becoming intolerable. A constant menace hung over him. He lived in the shadow of the gallows. A word from B could put the rope round his neck; a mere denunciation without need of proof. For there was the deadly thumb-print, and they both knew it. To A a simple accusation showed the way directly to the execution shed.

"Was there no escape? Obviously, mere payment was of no use. It never is of use in the case of blackmail. For the blackmailer may sell his silence but he retains his knowledge. If A had surrendered the whole of the loot to B he would still not have been safe. Still B would have held him in the hollow of his hand, ready to blackmail again when the occasion should arise. Clearly, there was no escape that way. As long as B remained alive, the life of A hung upon a thread.

"From this conclusion the corollary was obvious. If B's existence was incompatible with the safe and peaceful existence of A, then B must be eliminated. It was the only way of escape. And having come to this decision, A could give his attention, quietly and without hurry, to the question of ways and means; to the devising of a plan whereby B could be eliminated without leaving a trace, or, at any rate, a trace that would lead in the direction of A. And thus came into being the elaborate, ingeniously devised scheme which I had been examining and which looked, at that time, so much like a successful one.

"The next problem was to give a name to each of the two men. A and B represented Boles and Gannet; but which was which? Was Boles, for instance, A the murderer, or B the blackmailer? By Blandy, Boles was confidently identified as the Newingstead murderer. But then Blandy accepted all the appearances at their face value. In his view Gannet was not in the picture. He was not a person: he was a mere basketful of ashes. The thumb-print had been found in Boles's cupboard on Boles's own material. Therefore it was Boles's thumb-print.

"But was this conclusion in accordance with ordinary probabilities? From Blandy's point of view it may have been, but from mine it certainly was not. So great was the improbability that it presented that, even if I had known nothing of the other facts, I should have approached it with profound scepticism. Consider the position: Here is a man whose thumb-print is filed at Scotland Yard. That print is capable of hanging him, and he knows it. Then is it conceivable that, if he were not an abject fool—which Boles was not—he would be dabbling that print on surfaces that anyone might see? Would he not studiously avoid making that print on anything? Would he not, when working alone, wear a glove on his left hand? And if by chance he should mark some object with that print, would he not be careful to wipe it off? Above all, if he were absconding as he was assumed to have absconded, would he leave a perfect specimen of that incriminating print in the very place which the police would be quite certain to search for the express purpose of discovering finger-prints? The thing was incredible. The very blatancy of it was enough to raise a suspicion of imposture.

"That, as I have said, is taking the thumb-print apart from any other facts or deductions. But now let us consider it in connection with what we have deduced. If we suggest that the thumb-print was Gannet's and that he had planted it where it was certain to be found by the police, at once we exchange a wild improbability for a very striking probability. For thus he would have contrived to kill an additional, very important, bird with the same stone. He has got rid of Boles, the blackmailer. But now he has also got rid of the Newingstead murderer. He has attached the incriminating thumb-print to the person of Boles, and as Boles has ceased to exist, the fraud can never be discovered. He has made himself absolutely

safe; for the police have an exact description of Boles—who was at least three inches taller than Gannet and had brown eyes. So that even if, by some infinitely remote chance, Gannet should leave his thumb-print on some object and it should be found by the police, still he would be in no danger. They would assume as a certainty that it had been made by a tall, brown-eyed man, and they would search for that man—and never find him.

“Here, then, is a fresh agreement; and you notice that our deductions are mounting up, and that they conform to the great rule of circumstantial evidence; that all the facts shall point to the same conclusion. Our hypothesis is very largely confirmed, and we are justified in believing it to be the true one. That, at least, was my feeling at this stage. But still there remained another matter that had to be considered; an important matter, too, since it might admit of an actual experimental test. Accordingly I gave it my attention.

“I had concluded (provisionally) that Gannet was the Newingstead murderer. If he were, he had in his possession fifteen large diamonds of the aggregate value of about ten thousand pounds. How would he have disposed of those diamonds? He could not carry them on his person, for apart from their great value, they were highly incriminating. Merely putting them under lock and key would hardly be sufficient, for Boles was still frequenting the house and he probably knew all about the methods of opening drawers and cupboards. Something more secure would be needed; something in the nature of an actual hiding place. But he was planning to dispose of Boles and then to disappear; and naturally, when the time should come for him to disappear, he would want to take the diamonds with him. But still he might be unwilling to have them on his person. How was this difficulty to be met?

“Here, once more, enlightenment came from the invaluable Oldfield. In the course of his search of the deserted house he observed that the pottery which had been on the mantelpiece of Gannet’s bedroom had disappeared. Now this was a rather remarkable circumstance. The disappearance of the pottery seemed to coincide with the disappearance of Gannet, and one naturally asked oneself whether there could be any connection between the two events, and if so, what the nature of that connection might be. The pottery consisted, as I remembered, of a number of bowls and jars and a particularly hideous stoneware figure. The pots seemed to be of no special interest. But the figure invited inquiry. A pottery figure is necessarily made hollow, for lightness and to allow of even shrinkage during the firing; and the cavity inside would furnish a possible hiding place, though not, perhaps, a very good one, if the figure were of the ordinary type.

“But this figure was not of the ordinary type. I ascertained the fact from Oldfield, who had examined it and who gave me an exact description of it. And a most astonishing description it was; for it seemed to involve a physical impossibility. The figure, he informed me, had a flat base covered with some sort of white enamel on which was the artist’s signature. There was no opening in it, nor was there any opening either at the back or the top. That was according to his recollection, and he could hardly have been mistaken, for he had examined the figure all over and he was certain that there was no hole in it anywhere.

“Now, here was a most significant fact. What could be the explanation? There were only two possibilities, and one of them could be confidently rejected. Either the figure was solid or an opening in it had been filled up. But it could not be solid, for there must be some cavity in a pottery figure to allow for shrinkage without cracking. But if it was hollow, there must have been some opening in it originally. For a hollow figure in which there was no opening would be blown to pieces by the expansion of the imprisoned air during the firing. The only possible conclusion was that an opening originally existing had been filled up; and this conclusion was supported by the condition of the base. It is there that the opening is usually placed, as it is hidden when the figure is standing; and there it had apparently been in this case; for the white, glazed enamel looked all wrong, seeing that the figure itself was salt-glazed, and in any case, it was certainly an addition. Moreover, as it must have been added after the firing, it could hardly have been a ceramic enamel but was more probably some kind of hydraulic cement such as Keene’s. But whatever the material may have been, the essential fact was that the opening had been filled up and concealed, and the open cavity converted into a sealed cavity.

“Here, then, was an absolutely perfect hiding place, which had the additional virtue of being portable. But if it contained the diamonds, as I had no doubt that it did, it was necessary to find out without delay what had become of it. For wherever the diamonds were, sooner or later Gannet would be found there. In short, it seemed that the stoneware monkey might supply the crucial fact which would tell us whether our hypothesis was true or false.

“There was no difficulty in tracing the monkey, for Oldfield had learned that it had been sent, with the other pottery, to a loan exhibition at a museum in Hoxton. But before going there to examine it and check Oldfield’s description, I had to acquire a few preliminary data. From Mr. Kempster of the Bond Street gallery I obtained the name and address of the owner of a replica of the figure; and as the question of weight might arise, I took the opportunity to weigh and measure one of Gannet’s bowls.

“The owner of the replica, a Mr. Broomhill, gave us every facility for examining it, even to weighing it. We found that it was hollow, and judging by the weight, that it had a considerable interior cavity. There was an oval opening in the base of about an inch and a half in the longer diameter, through which we could see the marks of a thumb, showing that the figure was a squeeze from a mould; and it was a little significant that all the impressions appeared to be those of a right thumb.

“Armed with these data, we went to the museum, where we were able to examine, handle and weigh Gannet’s figure. It corresponded completely with Oldfield’s description, for there was no opening in any part of it. The appearance of the base suggested that the original opening had been filled with Keene’s cement and glazed with cellulose varnish. That the figure was hollow was proved by its weight, but this was about six ounces greater than that of Broomhill’s replica; a difference that would represent, roughly, the weight of the diamonds, the packing and the cement stopping. Thus the observed facts

were in complete agreement with the hypothesis that the diamonds had been concealed in the figure; and you will notice that they were inexplicable on any other supposition.

"We now went into the office and made a few inquiries, and the answers to these—quite freely and frankly given by the curator, Mr. Sancroft—disclosed a most remarkable and significant group of facts. It appeared that the figure had been sold a short time before it had been sent to the museum. The purchaser, Mr. James Newman, had then gone abroad but expected to return in about three months, when he proposed to call at the museum and claim his property. The arrangements to enable him to do so were very simple but very interesting. As Mr. Newman was not known personally to Mr. Sancroft (who also, by the way, had never met Peter Gannet, he would produce a letter of introduction and a written order to Mr. Sancroft to deliver the figurine to Newman, who would then give a receipt for it.

"These arrangements presented a rather striking peculiarity. They involved the very minimum of contacts. There was no correspondence by which an address would have had to be disclosed. Mr. Newman, a stranger to Sancroft, would appear in person, would present his order, receive his figurine and then disappear, leaving no clue as to whence he had come or whither he had gone. The appearances were entirely consistent with the possibility that Mr. Newman and Peter Gannet were one and the same person. And this I felt convinced was the fact.

"But if Newman was Gannet, what might we predict as to his personal appearance? He would almost certainly be clean shaven and there might be a certain amount of disguise. But the possibilities of disguise off the stage are very limited, and the essential personal characteristics remain. Stature cannot be appreciably disguised, and eye colour not at all. Gannet's height was about five feet eight and his eyes were of a pale grey. He had a scar across his left eyebrow and the middle finger of his right hand had an ankylosed joint. Neither the scar nor the stiff joint could be disguised, and it would be difficult to keep them out of sight.

"We learned from Sancroft that the three months had expired and that Mr. Newman might be expected at any moment. Evidently, then, whatever was to be done must be done at once. But what was to be done? The final test was the identity of Newman, and that test could be applied only by me. I had to contrive, if possible, to be present when Newman arrived, for no subsequent shadowing of him was practicable. Until he was identified as Gannet he could not be stopped or prevented from leaving the country.

"At first it looked almost like an impossible problem, but certain peculiar circumstances made it comparatively easy. I was able to install my man, Snuper, at the museum to hold the fort in my absence. I gave him the description of Gannet and certain instructions which I need not repeat in detail as it never became necessary to act on them. By good luck it happened that Newman arrived in the evening when Snuper was in charge alone. He had no authority to deliver up the figure so he made an appointment for the following morning. Then he sent me a message stating what had happened and that Mr. Newman seemed to answer my description; whereupon I got into communication with Blandy and advised him to come to the museum on the chance that Newman might be the man whom he wanted for the Newingstead affair.

"You know the rest. Jervis and I were at the museum when Newman arrived and Blandy was lurking in the entry. But, even then, the case was still only a train of hypothetical reasoning. Nothing had really been proved. Even when I stood behind Newman waiting for him to discover my presence, it was still possible that he might turn and reveal himself as a perfectly innocent stranger. Only at the very last moment, when he turned to face me and I recognized him as Gannet and saw that he recognized me, did I know that there had been no flaw in my reasoning. It was a dramatic moment, and a more unpleasant one I hope never to experience."

"It was rather horrible," I agreed. "The expression on the poor devil's face when he saw you, haunts me to this day. I was almost sorry for him."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "it was a disagreeable duty. The pursuit had been full of interest, but the capture I would gladly have left to the police, if that had been possible. But it was not. Our mutual recognition was the crucial fact.

"And now, after all this logic chopping, perhaps a glass of wine would not come amiss. Let us pledge our colleague, Oldfield, who set our feet on the right track. And I may remark, Polton, that one fluid drachm is not a glass of wine within the meaning of the act."

The abstemious Polton crinkled guiltily and poured another thirty minims into the bottom of his glass. Then we solemnly pledged our friend, who received the tribute with a rather sheepish smile.

"It is very good of you, sir," said he, "to give me so much undeserved credit, and most kind of you all to drink my health. I realize my limitations, but it is a satisfaction to me to know that, if my wits are none of the most brilliant, I have at least been the occasion of wit in others."

There is little more to tell. The repentant Blandy, by way of making amends to his late victim (and possibly of casting a discreet veil over his own mistakes, so arranged matters with the coroner that the inquest on "a man who called himself James Newman" was conducted with the utmost tact and the minimum of publicity; whereby the future of Mrs. Gannet was left unclouded and the susceptibilities of our friend Linnell unoffended.

As to the monkey, it experienced various vicissitudes before it finally came to rest in appropriate surroundings. First, by Mrs. Gannet, it was presented to Thorndyke "as a memorial." But we agreed that it was too ugly even for a memorial, and I secretly took possession of it and conveyed it to Oldfield; who accepted it gleefully with a cryptic grin which I did not, at the time, understand. But I understood it later when he informed me—with a grin which was not at all cryptic—that he had presented it to Mr. Bunderby.

## MR. POLTON EXPLAINS

### INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS BY MR. POLTON

FRIENDS of Dr. Thorndyke who happen to have heard of me as his servant and technical assistant may be rather surprised to see me making my appearance in the character of an author. I am rather surprised, myself; and I don't mind admitting that of all the tools that I have ever used, the one that is in my hand at the present moment is the least familiar and the most unmanageable. But mere lack of skill shall not discourage me. The infallible method, as I have found by experience, of learning how to do any thing is to do it, and keep on doing it until it becomes easy. Use is second nature, as a copy-book once informed me.

But I feel that some explanation is necessary. The writing of this record is not my own idea. I am acting on instructions; and the way in which the matter arose was this. My master, the Doctor, was commissioned to investigate the case of Cecil Moxdale deceased, and a very queer case it was. So queer that, as the Doctor assures me, he would never have been able to come to a definite conclusion but for one little fact that I was able to supply. I think he exaggerates my importance and that he would have found it out for himself. Still, that one little fact did certainly throw a new light on the case, so, when the time came for the record of it to be written, both the Doctor himself and Dr. Jervis decided that I was the proper person to set forth the circumstances that made the final discovery possible.

That was all very well, but the question was, What were the circumstances and when did they begin? And I could find no answer; for as soon as I thought that I had found the beginning of the train of circumstances, I saw that it would never have happened if something had not happened before it. And so it went on. Every event in my life was the result of some other event, and, tracing them back one after the other, I came to the conclusion that the beginning of the train of circumstances was also the beginning of me. For, obviously, if I had never been born, the experiences that I have to record could never have happened. I pointed this out to the Doctor, and he agreed that my being born was undoubtedly a contributory circumstance, and suggested that perhaps I had better begin with that. But, on reflection, I saw that this was impossible; for, although being born is undeniably a personal experience, it is, oddly enough, one which we have to take on hearsay and which it would therefore be improper to include in one's personal recollections.

Besides, although this history seems to be all about me, it is really an introduction to the case of Cecil Moxdale deceased; and my little contribution to the solving of that mystery was principally a matter of technical knowledge. There were some other matters; but my connection with the case arose out of my being a clock-maker. Accordingly, in these recollections, I shall sort out the incidents of my life, and keep, as far as possible, to those which present me in that character.

There is a surprising amount of wisdom to be gathered from copy-books. From one I learned that the boy is father to the man, and from another, to much the same effect, that the poet is born, not made. As there were twenty lines to the page, I had to repeat this twenty times, which was more than it merited. For the thing is obvious enough, and, after all, there is nothing in it. Poets are not peculiar in this respect. The truth applies to all other kinds of persons, including fools and even clock-makers; that is, if they are real clock-makers and not just common men with no natural aptitude who have drifted into the trade by chance.

Now, I was born a clock-maker. It may sound odd, but such, I am convinced, is the fact. As far back as I can remember, clocks have always had an attraction for me quite different from that of any other kind of things. In later years my interests have widened, but I have still remained faithful to my old love. A clock (by which I mean a mechanical time-keeper of any kind) still seems to me the most wonderful and admirable of the works of man. Indeed, it seems something more: as if it were a living creature with a personality and a soul of its own, rather than a mere machine.

Thus I may say that by these beautiful creations my life has been shaped from the very beginning. Looking down the vista of years, I seem to see at the end of it the old Dutch clock that used to hang on the wall of our kitchen. That clock, and certain dealings with it on a particular and well-remembered day, which I shall mention presently, seem to mark the real starting-point of my journey through life. This may be a mere sentimental delusion, but it doesn't appear so to me. In memory, I can still see the pleasant painted face, changing in expression from hour to hour, and hear the measured tick that never changed at all; and to me, they are the face and the voice of an old and beloved friend.

Of my first meeting with that clock I have no recollection, for it was there when my Aunt Gollidge brought me to her home, a little orphan of three. But in that curious hazy beginning of memory when the events of our childhood come back to us in detached scenes like the pictures of a magic lantern, the old clock is the one distinct object; and as memories become more connected, I can see myself sitting in the little chair that Uncle Gollidge had made for me, looking up at the clock with an interest and pleasure that were never exhausted. I suppose that to a child any inanimate thing which moves of its own accord is an object of wonder, especially if its movements appear to have a definite purpose.

But of explanations I have given enough and of apologies I shall give none; for if the story of my doings should appear to the reader as little worth as it does to me, he has but to pass over it and turn to the case to which it forms the introduction.



## PART I. THE ANTECEDENTS

### I. THE YOUNG HOROLOGIST

“DRAT that clock!” exclaimed my Aunt Judy. “Saturday night, too. Of course, it would choose Saturday night to stop.”

She looked up malevolently at the stolid face and the motionless pendulum that hung straight down like a plumb-bob, and then, as she hopped up on a chair to lift the clock off its nail, she continued: “Get me the bellows, Nat.”

I extricated myself with some difficulty from the little arm-chair. For dear Uncle Gollidge had over looked the fact that boys grow and chairs do not, so that it was now a rather tight fit with a tendency to become, like a snail’s shell, a permanent attachment. The separation accomplished, I took the bellows from the hook beside the fire-place and went to my aunt’s assistance; she having, in her quick, brisk way, unhooked the pendulum and opened the little side doors of the case. Then I held the clock steady on the table while she plied the bellows with the energy of a village blacksmith, blowing out a most encouraging cloud of dust through the farther door-opening.

“We will see what that will do,” said she, slapping the little doors to, fastening the catches and hooking on the pendulum. Once more she sprang up on the chair, replaced the dock on its nail, gave the pendulum a persuasive pat, and descended.

“What is the time by your watch, Dad?” she asked. Old Mr. Gollidge paused in the story that he was telling and looked at her with mild reproach. A great story-teller was old Mr. Gollidge (he had been a ship’s carpenter), but Aunt Judy had a way of treating his interminable yarns as mere negligible sounds like the ticking of a clock or the dripping of a leaky tap, and she now repeated her question; whereupon the old gentleman, having contributed to a large spittoon at his side, stuck his pipe in his mouth and hauled a bloated silver watch from the depths of his pocket as if he were hoisting out cargo from the lower hold.

“Watch seems to say,” he announced, after looking at it with slight surprise, “as it’s a quarter past six.”

“Six!” shrieked Aunt Judy. “Why, I heard the church clock strike seven a full half-hour ago.”

“Then,” said the old gentleman, “‘twould seem to be about three bells, say half-past seven. Watch must have stopped.”

He confirmed the diagnosis by applying it to his ear, and then, having fished up from another pocket an old-fashioned bronze, crank-shaped key, opened the front glass of the watch, which had the winding-hole in the dial like a clock, inserted the key and proceeded to wind as if he were playing a little barrel-organ.

“Half-past seven, you say,” said he, transferring the key to the centre square preparatory to setting the hands.

Aunt Judy looked up at the clock, which was still sluggishly wagging its pendulum but uttering no tick, and shook her head impatiently.

“It’s no use guessing,” said she. “We shall want to know the time in the morning. If you put on your slipper, Nat, you can run round and have a look at Mr. Abraham’s clock. It isn’t far to go.”

The necessity for putting on my slipper arose from a blister on my heel which had kept me a bootless prisoner in the house. I began cautiously to insinuate my foot into the slipper and had nearly completed the operation when Aunt Judy suddenly interposed.

“Listen,” said she; and as we all froze into immobility, the silence was broken by the church clock striking eight. Then old Mr. Gollidge deliberately set the hands of his watch, put it to his ear to make sure that it was going, and lowered it into his pocket; and Aunt Judy, mounting the chair, set the clock to time, gave the pendulum a final pat, and hopped down.

“We’ll give it another chance,” she remarked, optimistically; but I knew that her optimism was unfounded when I listened for the tick and listened in vain; and, sure enough, the oscillations of the pendulum slowly died away until it hung down as motionless as the weight.

In the ensuing silence, old Mr. Gollidge took up the thread of his narrative.

“And then the boy comes up from the cuddy and says he seemed to hear a lot of water washin’ about down below. So the mate he tells me for to sound the well, which I did; and, of course, I found there was a foot or two of water in it. There always was. Reg’ler old basket, that ship was. Always a-drainin’ in, a-drainin’ in, and the pumps a-goin’ something crool.”

“Ought to have had a windmill,” said Uncle Gollidge, taking a very black clay pipe from his mouth and expectorating skilfully between the bars of the grate, “same as what the Dutchmen do in the Baltic timber trade.”

The old gentleman shook his head. “Windmills is all right,” said he, “if you’ve got a cargo of soft timber what’ll float anyway. But they won’t keep a leaky ship dry. Besides—”

“Now, Nat,” said Aunt Judy, hooking a Dutch oven on the bar of the grate, “bring your chair over and keep an eye on the black pudding; and you, Sam, just mind where you’re spitting.”

Uncle Sam, who rather plumed himself on his marksmanship, replied with a scornful grunt; I rose to my feet (the chair rising with me) and took up my station opposite the Dutch oven, the back flap of which I lifted to make an interested inspection of the slices of black pudding (longitudinal sections, as the Doctor would say) which were already beginning to

perspire greasily, in the heat. Meanwhile, Aunt Judy whisked about the kitchen (also the general sitting-room) busily making ready for the morrow, and old Mr. Gollidge droned on tirelessly like the brook that goes on for ever.

Of the morrow's doings I must say a few words, since they formed a milestone marking the first stage of my earthly pilgrimage. It had been arranged that the four of us should spend the Sunday with Aunt Judy's younger Sister, a Mrs. Budgen, who lived with her husband in the country out Finchley way. But my unfortunate blistered heel put me out of the party, much to my regret, for these excursions were the bright spots in my rather drab existence. Aunt Budgen was a kindly soul who gave us the warmest of welcomes, as did her husband, a rather taciturn dairy-farmer. Then there was the glorious drive out of London on the front seat of the Finchley omnibus with its smart, white-hatted driver and the third horse stepping out gaily in front with jingling harness and swaying swingle-bar.

But the greatest delight of these visits was the meeting with my sister, Maggie, who had been adopted by Aunt Budgen at the time when Aunt Judy had taken me. These were the only occasions on which we met, and it was a joy to us both to ramble in the meadows, to call on the cows in the shippin, or to sit together on the brink of the big pond and watch the incredible creatures that moved about in its depths.

However, there were to be compensations. Aunt Judy expounded them to me as I superintended the black pudding, turning the Dutch oven when necessary to brown the opposite sides.

"I'm leaving you three pork sausages; they're rather small ones, but you are rather a small boy; and there are some cold potatoes which you can cut into slices and fry with the sausages, and mind you don't set the chimney on fire. Then there is a baked raisin pudding—you can hot that up in the oven—and a whole jar of raspberry jam. You can take as much of that as you like, so long as you don't make yourself ill; and I've left the key in the book-cupboard, but you must wash your hands before you take any of the books out. I am sorry you can't come with us, and Maggie will be disappointed, too; but I think you'll be able to make yourself happy. I know you don't mind being alone a bit."

Aunt Judy was right. I was a rather solitary boy; a little given to day-dreaming and, consequently, partial to my own society. But she prophesied better than she knew. Not only was I able to make myself happy in my solitude; but that Sunday stands out as one of the red-letter days of my life.

To be sure, the day opened rather cheerlessly. As I stood on the doorstep with my single boot and bandaged foot, watching the departure, I was sensible of a pang of keen disappointment and of something approaching loneliness. I followed the receding figures wistfully with my eyes as they walked away down the street in their holiday attire, Aunt Judy gorgeous in her silk dress and gaily-flowered bonnet and the two men in stiff black broadcloth and tall hats, to which old Mr. Gollidge's fine, silver-topped malacca gave an added glory. At the corner Aunt Judy paused to wave her hand to me; then she followed the other two and was lost to view.

I turned back sadly into the house, which, when I had shut the door, seemed dark and gloomy, and made my way to the kitchen. In view of the early start to catch the omnibus, I had volunteered to wash up the breakfast things, and I now proceeded to get this job off my hands; but as I dabbled at the big bowl in the scullery sink, my thoughts still followed the holiday makers. I saw them mounting the omnibus (it started from St. Martin's Church), and visualized its pea-green body with the blessed word "Finchley" in big gold letters. I saw the driver gather up the reins and the conductor spring up to the monkey-board; and then away the omnibus rattled, and my thoughts went on ahead to the sweet countryside and to Maggie, waiting for me at the stile, and waiting in vain. That was the most grievous part of the affair, and it wrung my heart to think of it; indeed, if it had not been beneath the dignity of a young man of nine to shed tears, I think I should have wept.

When I had finished with the crockery, put the plates in the rack and hung the cups on their hooks, I tidied up the sink and then drifted through into the kitchen, where I looked about me vaguely, still feeling rather miserable and unsettled. From the kitchen I wandered into the parlour, or "best room", where I unlocked the book cupboard and ran my eye along the shelves. But their contents had no attractions for me. I didn't want books; I wanted to run in the fields with Maggie and look on all the things that were so novel and strange to a London boy. So I shut the cupboard and went back to the kitchen, where, once more, I looked about me, wondering what I should do to pass the time. It was too early to think of frying the sausages, and, besides, I was not hungry, having eaten a substantial breakfast.

It was at this moment that my wandering glance lighted on the clock. There it hung, stolid-faced, silent, and motionless. What, I wondered, could be the matter with it? Often enough before had it stopped, but Aunt Judy's treatment with the bellows had always set it ticking again. Now the bellows seemed to have lost their magic and the clock would have to have something different done to it.

But what? Could it be just a matter of old age? Clocks, I realized, grow old like men; and, thinking of old Mr. Gollidge, I realized also that old age is not a condition that can be cured. But I was loth to accept this view and to believe that it had "stopped short, never to go again", like Grandfather's Clock in the song.

I drew up a high chair, and, mounting it, looked up earnestly at the familiar face. It was a pleasant old clock, comely and even beautiful in its homely way, reflecting the simple, honest outlook of the Black Forest peasants who had made it; the wooden dial painted white with a circle of fine bold hour-figures ("chapters" they call them in the trade), a bunch of roses painted on the arch above the dial, and each of the four corner-spaces, or spandrels, decorated with a sprig of flowers, all done quite skilfully and with the unerring good taste of the primitive artist.

From inspection I proceeded to experiment. A gentle pat at the pendulum set it swinging, but brought no sound of life

from within; but when I turned the minute-hand, as I had seen Aunt Judy do, while the pendulum still swung, a faint tick was audible; halting and intermittent, but still a tick. So the clock was not dead. Then I tried a gentle pull at the chain which bore the weight, whereupon the tick became quite loud and regular, and went on for some seconds after I ceased to pull, when it once more died away. But now I had a clue to the mystery. The weight was not heavy enough to keep the clock going; but since the weight had not changed, the trouble must be something inside the clock, obstructing its movements. It couldn't be dust because Aunt Judy had blown it out thoroughly. Then what could it be?

As I pondered this problem I was assailed by a great temptation. Often had I yearned to look into the clock and see what its mysterious "works" were really like, but beyond a furtive peep when the bellows were being plied, I had never had an opportunity. Now, here was a perfect opportunity. Aunt Judy, no doubt, would have disapproved, but she need never know; and, in any case, the clock wouldn't go, so there could be no harm. Thus reasoning, I unhooked the weight from the chain and set it down on the chair, and then, not without difficulty, reached up, lifted the clock off its nail, and, descending cautiously with my prize, laid it tenderly on the table.

I began by opening the little side doors and the lifting them bodily off the brass hooks that served as hinges. Now I could see how to take off the pendulum, and, when I had done this, I carried the clock to the small table by the window, drew up a chair, and, seating myself, proceeded to study the interior at my ease. Not that there was much to study in its simple, artless mechanism. Unlike most of these "Dutch" clocks, it had no alarum (or perhaps this had been removed), and the actual "train" consisted of no more than three wheels and two pinions. Nothing more perfect for the instruction of the beginner could be imagined. There were, it is true, some mysterious wheels just behind the dial in a compartment by themselves and evidently connected with the hands, but these I disregarded for the moment, concentrating my attention on what I recognized as the clock, proper.

It was here that my natural mechanical aptitude showed itself, for by the time that I had studied the train in all its parts, considering each wheel in connection with the pinion to which it was geared, I had begun to grasp the principle on which the whole thing worked. The next proceeding was to elucidate the matter by experiment. If you want to know what effects a wheel produces when it turns, the obvious thing is to turn the wheel and see what happens. This I proceeded to do, beginning with the top wheel, as the most accessible, and turning it very gently with my finger. The result was extremely interesting. Of course, the next wheel turned slowly in the opposite direction, but, at the same time, the wire pendulum-crutch wagged rapidly to and fro.

This was quite a discovery. Now I understood what kept the pendulum swinging and what was cause of the tick; but, more than this, I now had a clear idea as to the function of the pendulum as the regulator of the whole movement. As to the rest of the mechanism, there was little to discover. I had already noticed the ratchet and pawl connected with the pulley, and now, when I drew the chain through, the reason why it moved freely in the one direction and was held immovable in the other was perfectly obvious; and this made clear the action of the weight in driving the clock.

There remained the group of wheels in the narrow space behind the dial. From their position they were less easy to examine, but when I turned the minute-hand and set them in motion, their action was quite easy to follow. There were three wheels and one small pinion, and when I moved the hand round they all turned. But not in the same direction. One wheel and the pinion turned in the opposite direction to the hand, while the other two wheels, a large one and a much smaller one, turned with the hand; and as the large one moved very slowly, being driven by the little pinion, whereas the small one turned at the same speed as the hand, I concluded that the small wheel belonged to the minute-hand, while the large wheel turned the hour-hand. And at this I had to leave it, since the actual connections could not be ascertained without taking the clock to pieces.

But now that I had arrived at a general understanding of the clock, the original problem reappeared. Why wouldn't it go? I had ascertained that it was structurally complete and undamaged. But yet when it was started it refused to tick and the pendulum did nothing but wag passively and presently cease to do even that. When it had stopped on previous occasions, the bellows had set it going again. Evidently, then, the cause of the stoppage had been dust. Could it be that dust had at last accumulated beyond the powers of the bellows? The appearance of the inside of the clock (and my own fingers) lent support to this view. Wheels and case alike presented a dry griminess that seemed unfavourable to easy running. Perhaps the clock simply wanted cleaning.

Reflecting on this, and on the difficulty of getting at the wheels in the narrow space, it suddenly occurred to me that my tooth-brush would be the very thing for the purpose. Instantly, I hopped off to my little bedroom and was back in a few moments with this invaluable instrument in my hand. Pausing only to make up the fire, which was nearly out, I fell to work on the clock, scrubbing wheels and pinions and what ever the brush would reach, with visible benefit to everything, excepting the brush. When the worst of the grime had been removed, I blew out the dislodged dust with the bellows and began to consider how I should test the results of my efforts. There was no need to hang the clock on its nail (and, indeed, I was not disposed to part with it so soon), but it must be fixed up somehow so that the weight and the pendulum could hang free. Eventually, I solved the problem by drawing the small table towards the large one, leaving a space of about nine inches between them, and bridging the space with a couple of narrow strips of wood from a broken-up packing-case. On this bridge I seated the clock, with its chain and the re-hung pendulum hanging down between the strips. Then I hooked on the weight and set the pendulum swinging.

The result was disappointing, but yet my labour had not been all in vain. Start of itself the clock would not, but a slight pull at the chain elicited the longed-for tick, and thereafter for a full minute it continued and I could see the scape wheel

turning. But there was no enthusiasm. The pendulum swung in a dead-alive fashion, its excursions growing visibly shorter, until, at length, the ticking stopped and the wheel ceased to turn.

It was very discouraging. As I watched the pendulum and saw its movements slowly die away, I was sensible of a pang of keen disappointment. But still I felt that I had begun to understand the trouble and perhaps I might, by taking thought, hit upon some further remedy. I got up from my chair and wandered restlessly round the room, earnestly cogitating the problem. Something in the clock was resisting the pull of the weight. Now, what could it be? Why had the wheels become more difficult to turn?

So delightfully absorbed was I in seeking the solution of this mystery that all else had faded out of my mind. Gone was all my depression and loneliness. The Finchley omnibus was forgotten; Aunt Budgen was as if she had never been; the green meadows and the pond, and even dear Maggie, had passed clean out of my consciousness. The clock filled the field of my mental vision and the only thing in the world that mattered was the question, What was hindering the movement of its wheels?

Suddenly, in my peregrinations I received an illuminating hint. Stowed away in the corner was Aunt Judy's sewing-machine. Now sewing-machines and clocks are not very much alike, but they both have wheels; and it was known to me that Aunt Judy had a little oil-can with which she used to anoint the machine. Why did she do that? Obviously, to make the wheels run more easily. But if the wheels of a sewing-machine needed oil, why should not those of a clock? The analogy seemed a reasonable one, and, in any case, there could be no harm in trying. Cautiously, and not without some qualms of conscience, I lifted the cover of the machine, and, having found the little, long-snouted oil-can, seized it and bore it away with felonious glee.

My proceedings with that oil-can will hardly bear telling; they would have brought tears to the eyes of a clock-maker. I treated my patient as if it had been an express locomotive with an unlimited thirst for oil. Impartially, I flooded every moving part, within and without: pallets, wheel-teeth, pivots, arbors, the chain-pulley, the "motion wheels" behind the dial, and the centres of the hands. I even oiled the pendulum rod as well as the crutch that held it. When I had finished, the whole interior of the clock seemed to have broken out into a greasy perspiration, and even the woodwork was dark and shiny. But my thoroughness had one advantage: if I oiled all the wrong places, I oiled the right ones as well.

At length, when there was not a dry spot left any where, I put down the oil-can, and "in trembling hope" proceeded to make a fresh trial; and even now, after all these years, I can hardly record the incident without emotion. A gentle push at the pendulum brought forth at once a clear and resonant tick, and, looking in eagerly, I could see the scape wheel turning with an air of purpose and the centre wheel below it moving steadily in the opposite direction. And it was no flash in the pan this time. The swing of the pendulum, instead of dying away as before, grew in amplitude and liveliness to an extent almost beyond belief. It seemed that, under the magical influence of the oil-can, the old clock had renewed its youth.

To all of us, I suppose, there have come in the course of our lives certain moments of joy which stand out as unique experiences. They never come a second time; for though the circumstances may seem to recur, the original ecstasy cannot be recaptured. Such a moment was this. As I sat and gazed in rapture at the old clock, called back to vigorous life by my efforts, I enjoyed the rare experience of perfect happiness. Many a time since have I known a similar joy, the joy of complete achievement (and there is no pleasure like it); but this was the first of its kind, and, in its perfection, could never be repeated.

Presently, there broke in upon my ecstasy the sound of the church clock, striking two. I could hardly believe it, so swiftly had the hours sped. And yet certain sensations of which I suddenly became conscious confirmed it. In short, I realized that I was ravenously hungry and that my dinner had yet to be cooked. I set the hands of the clock to the incredible time and rose to seek the frying-pan. But, hungry as I was, I could not tear myself away from my darling, and in the end I compromised by substituting the Dutch oven, which required less attention. Thus I alternated between cookery and horology, clapping the pudding in the large oven and then sitting down once more to watch the clock until an incendiary sausage, bursting into flame with mighty sputterings, recalled me suddenly to the culinary department.

My cookery was not equal to my horology, at least in its results; yet never have I so thoroughly enjoyed a meal. Black and brittle the sausages may have been and the potatoes sodden and greasy. It was no matter. Hunger and happiness imparted a savour beyond the powers of the most accomplished chef. With my eyes fixed adoringly on the clock (I had "laid my place" where I could conveniently watch the movement as I fed), I devoured the unprepossessing viands with a relish that a gourmet might have envied.

Of the way in which the rest of the day was spent my recollection is rather obscure. In the course of the afternoon I washed up the plates and cleaned the Dutch oven so that Aunt Judy should be free when she came home; but even as I worked at the scullery sink, I listened delightedly to the tick of the clock, wafted to my ear through the open doorway. Later, I made my tea and consumed it, to an obligato accompaniment of raspberry jam, seated beside the clock; and, when I was satisfied unto repletion, I washed the tea-things (including the tea-pot) and set them out tidily in their places on the dresser. That occupied me until six o'clock, and left me with a full three hours to wait before Aunt Judy should return.

Incredibly long hours they were, in strange contrast to the swift-footed hours of the morning. With anxious eyes I watched the minute hand creeping sluggishly from mark to mark. I even counted the ticks (and found them ninety-six to the minute), and listened eagerly for the sound of the church clock, at once relieved and disappointed to find that it told the same tale. For now my mood had changed somewhat. The joy of achievement became mingled with impatience for its

revelation. I was all agog to see Aunt Judy's astonishment when she found the clock going and to hear what she would say. And now, in my mind's eye, the progress of the Finchley omnibus began to present itself. I followed it from stage to stage, crawling ever nearer and nearer to St. Martin's Church. With conscious futility I went out, again and again, to look up the street along which the revellers would approach, only to turn back for another glance at the inexorable minute-hand.

At length, the sound of the church clock striking eight admonished me that it was time to return the clock to its place on the wall. It was an anxious business, for, even when I had unhooked the weight, it was difficult for me, standing insecurely on the chair, to reach up to the nail and find the hole in the back-plate through which it passed. But at last, after much fumbling, with up-stretched arm and my heart in my mouth, I felt the clock supported, and, having started the pendulum, stepped down with a sigh of relief and hooked on the weight. Now, all that remained to do was to put away the oil-can, wash my tooth-brush at the scullery and take it back to my bedroom; and when I had done this and lit the gas, I resumed my restless fittings between the kitchen and the street door.

Nine had struck when, at long last, from my post on the doorstep, I saw the home-corners turn the corner and advance up the lamp-lighted street. Instantly, I darted back into the house to make sure that the clock was still going, and then, returning, met them almost on the threshold. Aunt Judy greeted me with a kindly smile and evidently misinterpreted my eagerness for their return, for, as she stooped to kiss me, she exclaimed: "Poor old Nat! I'm afraid it has been a long, dull day for you, and we were all sorry that you couldn't come. However, there is something to make up for it. Uncle Alfred has sent you a shilling and Aunt Anne has sent you some pears; and Maggie has sent you a beautiful pocket-knife. She was dreadfully disappointed that she couldn't give it to you herself, because she has been saving up her pocket-money for weeks to buy it, and you will have to write her a nice letter to thank her."

Now this was all very gratifying, and when the big basket was placed on the kitchen table and the treasures unloaded from it, I received the gifts with proper acknowledgements. But they aroused no enthusiasm, not even the pocket-knife, for I was bursting with impatience for someone to notice the clock.

"You don't seem so particularly grateful and pleased," said Aunt Judy, looking at me critically; and then, as I fidgeted about restlessly, she exclaimed, "What's the matter with the boy? He's on wires!"

She gazed at me with surprise, and Uncle Sam and the old gentleman turned to look at me curiously. And then, in the momentary silence, Aunt Judy's quick ear caught the tick of the clock. She looked up at it and then exclaimed: "Why, the clock's going; going quite well, too. Did you start it, Nat? But, of course, you must have done. How did you get it to go?"

With my guilty consciousness of the tooth-brush and the borrowed oil-can, I was disposed to be evasive.

"Well, you see, Aunt Judy," I explained, "it was rather dirty inside, so I just gave it a bit of a clean and put a little oil on the wheels. That's all."

Aunt Judy smiled grimly, but asked no further questions.

"I suppose," said she, "I ought to scold you for meddling with the clock without permission, but as you've made it go we'll say no more about it."

"No," agreed old Mr. Gollidge, "I don't see as how you could scold the boy for doing a useful bit of work. The job does him credit and shows that he's got some sense; and sense is what gets a man on in life."

With this satisfactory conclusion to the adventure, I was free to enter into the enjoyment of my newly-acquired wealth; and, having sampled the edible portion of it and tested the knife on a stick of fire-wood, spent the short remainder of the evening in rapturous contemplation of my new treasures and the rejuvenated clock. I had never possessed a shilling before, and now, as I examined Uncle Alfred's gift and polished it with my handkerchief visions of its immense potentialities floated vaguely through my mind; and continued to haunt me, in company with the clock, even when I had blown out my candle and snuggled down into my narrow bed.

---

## II. THE PICKPOCKET'S LEAVINGS

IT was shortly after my eleventh birthday that I conceived a really brilliant idea. It was generated by a card in the shop window of our medical attendant, Dr. Pope (in those days, doctors practising in humble neighbourhoods used to keep what were euphemistically described as "Open Surgeries", but which were, in effect, druggists' shops), bearing the laconic announcement, "Boy wanted." I looked at the card and debated earnestly the exact connotation of the word "wanted". It was known to me that some of my schoolfellows contrived to pick up certain pecuniary trifles by delivering newspapers before school hours or doing small jobs in the evenings. Was it possible that the boy wanted by Dr. Pope might thus combine remunerative with scholastic industry? There would be no harm in enquiring.

I entered, and, finding the Doctor secretly compounding medicine in a sort of hiding-place at the end of the counter, proceeded to state my case without preamble.

The Doctor put his head round the corner and surveyed me somewhat disparagingly.

"You're a very small boy," he remarked.

"Yes, sir," I admitted, "but I am very strong for my size."

He didn't appear much impressed by this, but proceeded to enquire:

"Did Mrs. Gollidge tell you to apply?"

"No, sir," I replied, "it's my own idea. You see, sir, I've been rather an expense to Aunt Judy—Gollidge, I mean—and I thought that if I could earn a little money, it would be useful."

"A very proper idea, too," said the Doctor, apparently more impressed by my explanation than by my strength. "Very well. Come round this evening when you leave school. Come straight here, and you can have some tea, and then you can take a basket of medicine and see how you get on with it. I expect you will find it a bit heavy."

"It will get lighter as I go on, sir," said I; on which the Doctor smiled quite pleasantly, and, having admonished me to be punctual, retired to his hiding-place, and I departed in triumph.

But the Doctor's prediction turned out to be only too correct; for when I lifted the deep basket, stacked with bottles of medicine, I was rather shocked by its weight and had to remind myself of my own prediction that the weight would be a diminishing quantity. That was an encouraging reflection. Moreover, there had been agreeable preliminaries in the form of a Gargantuan tea, including a boiled egg and marmalade, provided by Mrs. Stubbs, the Doctor's fat and jovial housekeeper. So I hooked the basket boldly on my arm—and presently shifted it to the other one—and set forth on my round, consulting the written list provided for me and judiciously selecting the nearest addresses to visit first and thereby lighten the basket for the more distant ones.

Still, there was no denying that it was heavy work for a small boy, and when I had made a second round with a fresh consignment, I felt that I had had enough for one day; and when I returned the empty basket, I was relieved to learn that there was nothing more to deliver.

"Well," said the Doctor as I handed in the basket, "how did you get on?"

"All right, thank you, sir," I replied, "but I think it would be easier if I put rather less in the basket and made more journeys."

The Doctor smiled approvingly. "Yes," he agreed, "that's quite a sensible idea. Give your legs a bit more to do and save your arms. Very well; you think you can do the job?"

"I am sure I can, sir, and I should like to."

"Good," said he. "The pay will be three and sixpence a week. That suit you?"

It seemed to me an enormous sum, and I agreed gleefully; which closed the transaction and sent me homewards rejoicing and almost oblivious of my fatigue.

A further reward awaited me when I arrived home. Aunt Judy, it is true, had professed disapproval of the arrangement as interfering with my "schooling"; but the substantial hot supper seemed more truly to express her sentiments. It recognized my new status as a working man and my effort to pull my weight in the family boat.

The next day's work proved much less arduous, for I put my plan into operation by sorting out the bottles into groups belonging to particular localities, and thus contrived never to have the basket more than half full. This brought the work well within my powers, so that the end of the day found me no more than pleasantly tired; and the occupation was not without its interest, to say nothing of the dignity of my position as a wage-earner. But the full reward of my industry came when, returning home on Saturday night, I was able to set down my three shillings and sixpence on the kitchen table before Aunt Judy, who was laying the supper. The little heap of silver coins, a florin, a shilling, and a sixpence, made a quite impressive display of wealth. I looked at it with proud satisfaction—and also with a certain wistful curiosity as to whether any of that wealth might be coming my way. I had faint hopes of the odd sixpence, and watched a little anxiously as Aunt Judy spread out the heap with a considering air. Eventually, she picked up the florin and the sixpence, and, pushing the shilling towards me, suddenly put her arm round my neck and kissed me.

"You're a good boy, Nat," said she; and as she released me and dropped the money in her pocket, I picked up my shilling and turned away to hide the tears that had started to my eyes. Aunt Judy was not a demonstrative woman; but, like many undemonstrative persons, could put a great deal of meaning into a very few words. Half a dozen words and a kiss sweetened my labours for many a day thereafter.

My peregrinations with the basket had, among other effects, that of widening the range of my knowledge of the geography of London. In my early days that knowledge was limited to the few streets that I traversed on my way to and from school, to certain quiet back waters in which one could spin tops at one's convenience or play games without undue interruption, and certain other quiet streets in which one was likely to find the street entertainer: the acrobat, the juggler, the fire-eater, or, best of all, the Punch and Judy show.

But now the range of my travels coincided with that of Dr. Pope's practice and led me far beyond the limits of the familiar neighbourhood; and quite pleasant these explorations were, for they brought me into new streets with new shops in them which provided new entertainment. I think shops were more interesting then than they are in these days of mass-production and uniformity, particularly in an old-fashioned neighbourhood where the crafts were still flourishing. A special favourite was Wardour Street, with its picture-frame makers, its antique shops filled with wonderful furniture and pictures and statuettes and gorgeous clocks.

But the shop that always brought me to a halt was that of M. Chanot, the violin-maker, which had, hanging on the door-jamb by way of a trade sign, a gigantic bow (or fiddlestick, as I should have described it). It was stupendous. As I gazed at it with the fascination that the juvenile mind discovers in things gigantic or diminutive, my imagination strove to picture the kind of fiddle that could be played with it and the kind of Titan who could have held the fiddle. And then, as a foil to its enormity, there hung in the window an infant violin, a "kit" such as dancing-masters were wont to carry in the skirt pockets of their ample frock-coats.

A few doors from M. Chanot's was the shop of a second-hand bookseller which was also one of the attractions of the street; for it was from the penny and twopenny boxes that my modest library was chiefly recruited. On the present occasion, having paid my respects to the Lilliputian fiddle and the Brobdingnagian bow, I passed on to see what treasures the boxes had to offer. Naturally, I tried the penny box first as being more adapted to my financial resources. But there was nothing in it which specially attracted me; whereupon I turned my attention to the twopenny box.

Now, if I were disposed to moralize, I might take this opportunity to reflect on the momentous consequences which may emerge from the most insignificant antecedents. For my casual rooting about in the twopenny box started a train of events which profoundly influenced my life in two respects, and in one so vitally that, but for the twopenny box, this story could never have been written.

I had turned over nearly all the contents of the box when from the lowest stratum I dredged up a shabby little volume the spine of which bore in faded gold lettering the title, "Clocks and Locks; Denison." The words instantly rivetted my attention. Shifting the basket to free both my hands, I opened the book at random and was confronted by a beautiful drawing of the interior of a common house-clock, clearly displaying the whole mechanism. It was a wonderful drawing. With fascinated eyes I pored over it, comparing it rapidly with the well-remembered Dutch clock at home and noting new and unfamiliar features. Then I turned over the leaves and discovered other drawings of movements and escapements on which I gazed in rapture. I had never supposed that there was such a book in the world.

Suddenly I was assailed by a horrible doubt. Had I got twopenny? Here was the chance of a lifetime; should I have to let it slip? Putting the basket down on the ground, I searched feverishly through my pockets; but search as I might even in the most unlikely pockets, the product amounted to no more than a single penny. It was an awful predicament. I had set my heart on that book, and the loss of it was a misfortune that I shuddered to contemplate. Yet there was the grievous fact; the price of the book was two pence and I had only a penny.

Revolving this appalling situation, I thought of a possible way out of the difficulty. Leaving my basket on the pavement (a most reprehensible thing to do; but no one wants to steal medicine, and there were only three bottles left), I stepped into the shop with the book in my hand and deferentially approached the book-seller, a stuffy-looking elderly man.

"I want to buy this book, sir," I explained, timorously, "but it is twopenny, and I have only got a penny. Will you keep it for me if I leave the penny as a deposit? I hope you will, sir. I very much want to have the book."

He looked at me curiously, and, taking the little volume from me, glanced at the title and then turned over the leaves.

"Clocks, hey," said he. "Know anything about clocks?"

"Not much, sir," I replied, "but I should like to learn some more."

"Well," said he, "you'll know all about them when you have read that book; but it is stiffish reading for a boy."

He handed it back to me, and I laid my penny on it and put it down on the counter.

"I will try to call for it this evening, sir," said I, "and pay the other penny; and you'll take great care of it, sir, won't you?"

My earnestness seemed to amuse him, but his smile was a kindly and approving smile.

"You can take it away with you," said he, "and then you will make sure of it."

Tears of joy and gratitude rose to my eyes, so that I had nearly taken up the penny as well as the book. I thanked him shyly but warmly and, picking up the precious volume, went out with it in my hand. But even now I paused to take another look at my treasure before resuming charge of the neglected basket. At length I bestowed the book in my pocket, and, returning to my proper business, took up the basket and was about to sort out the remaining three bottles when I made a most surprising discovery. At the bottom of the basket, beside the bottles, lay a leather wallet. I gazed at it in astonishment. Of course, it was not mine, and I had not put it there, nor, I was certain, had it been there when I went into the shop. Some one must have put it in during my short absence. But why should anyone present me with a wallet? It could hardly have been dropped into the basket by accident; but yet—I picked it out and examined it curiously, noting that it had an elastic band to keep it closed but that nevertheless it was open. Then I ventured to inspect the inside, but, beyond a few stamps and a quantity of papers, it seemed to contain nothing of interest to me. Besides, it was not mine. I was still puzzling over it when I became aware of a policeman approaching down the street in company with a short, wrathful looking elderly gentleman who appeared to be talking excitedly while the constable listened with an air of resignation. Just as they reached me, the gentleman caught sight of the wallet and immediately rushed at me and snatched it out of my hand.

"Here you are, Constable," he exclaimed, "here is the stolen property and here is the thief, taken red-handed."

"Red-handed be blowed," said the constable. "You said just now that you saw the man run away, and you've led me a dance a-chasing him. You had better see if there is anything missing."

But the wrathful gentleman had already seen that there was.

"Yes!" he roared, "there were three five-pound notes, and they're gone! Stolen! Fifteen pounds! But I'll have satisfaction. I give this young villain in charge. Perhaps he has the notes on him still. We'll have him searched at the station."

"Now, now," said the constable, soothingly, "don't get excited, sir. Softly, softly, you catch the monkey. You said that you saw the man run off."

"So I did; but, of course, this young rascal is a confederate, and I give him in charge."

"Wait a minute, sir. Let's hear what he's got to say. Now, young shaver, tell us how you came by that pocket-book."

I described the circumstances, including my absence in the shop, and the constable, having listened patiently, went in and verified my statement by questioning the bookseller.

"There, sir, you see," said he when he came out, "it's quite simple. The pickpocket fished the notes out of your wallet and then, as he was making off, he looked for some place where he could drop the empty case out of sight, and there was this boy's basket with no one looking after it, just the very place he wanted. So he dropped it in as he passed. Wouldn't have done to drop it in the street where some one might have seen it and run after him to give it back."

The angry gentleman shook his head. "I can't accept that," said he. "It's only a guess, and an unlikely one at that."

"But," the constable protested, "it's what they always do: drop the empty purses or pocket-books in a doorway or a dark corner or post them in pillar-boxes—anywhere to get the incriminating stuff out of sight. It's common sense."

But the gentleman was obdurate. "No, no," he persisted, "that won't do. The common sense of it is that I found this boy with the stolen property in his possession, and I insist on giving him in charge."

The constable was in a dilemma, but he was a sensible man and he made the best of it. "Well, sir," he said, "if you insist, I suppose we must walk round to the station and report the affair. But I can tell you that the inspector won't take the charge."

"He'll have to," retorted the other, "when I have made my statement."

The constable looked at him sourly and then turned to me almost apologetically.

"Well, sonny," said he, "you'll have to come along to the station and see what the inspector has to say."

"Can't I deliver my medicines first?" I pleaded. "The people may be wanting them, and there are only three bottles."

The policeman grinned but evidently appreciated my point of view, for he replied, still half-apologetically: "You're quite right, my lad, but I don't suppose they'll be any the worse for a few minutes more without their physic, and the station is quite handy. Come, now; step out."

But even now the irate gentleman was not satisfied.

"Aren't you going to hold him so that he doesn't escape?" he demanded.

Then, for the first time, the patient constable showed signs of temper. "No, sir," he replied, brusquely, "I am not going to drag a respectable lad through the streets as if he had committed a crime when I know he hasn't."

That settled the matter, and we walked on with the manner of a family party. But it was an uncomfortable experience. To a boy of my age, a police station is a rather alarming sort of place; and the fact that I was going to be charged with a robbery was a little disturbing. However, the constable's attitude was reassuring, and, as we traversed Great Marlborough Street and at last entered the grim doorway, I was only moderately nervous.

The proceedings were, as my constabulary friend had foreseen, quite brief. The policeman made his concise report to the inspector, I answered the few questions that the officer asked, and the gentleman made his statement, incriminating me.

"Where did the robbery take place?" the inspector asked.

"In Berwick Street," was the reply. "I was leaning over a stall when I felt myself touched, and then a man moved away quickly through the crowd; and then I missed my wallet and gave chase."

"You were leaning over a stall," the inspector repeated. "Now, how on earth did he get at your wallet?"

"It was in my coat-tail pocket," the gentleman explained.

"In your coat-tail pocket!" the inspector repeated, incredulously; "with fifteen pounds in it, and you leaning over a stall in a crowded street! Why, sir, it was a free gift to a pickpocket."

"I suppose I can carry my wallet where I please," the other snapped.

"Certainly you can—at your own risk. Well, I can't accept the charge against this boy. There is no evidence; in fact, there isn't even any suspicion. It would be only wasting the magistrate's time. But I will take the boy's name and address and make a few inquiries. And I will take yours too and let you know if anything transpires."

He took my name and address (and my accuser made a note of them), and that, so far as I was concerned, finished the business. I took up my basket and went forth a free boy in company with my friend the police man. In Great Marlborough Street we parted, he to return to his beat, and I to the remainder of my round of deliveries.



So ended an incident that had, at one time, looked quite threatening. And yet it had not really ended. Perhaps no incident ever does truly end. For every antecedent begets consequences. Coming events cast their shadows before them; but those shadows usually remain invisible until the events which have cast them have, themselves, come into view. Indeed, it befalls thus almost from necessity; for how can a shadow be identified otherwise than by comparison with the substance?

But I shall not here anticipate the later passages of my story. The consequences will emerge in their proper place. I may, however, refer briefly to the more immediate reactions, though these also had their importance later. The little book which I had purchased (and paid for the same evening) was a treatise on clocks and locks by that incomparable master of horology and mechanism, Edmund Beckett Denison (later to be known as Lord Grimthorpe). It was an invaluable book, and it became my chiefest treasure. Carefully wrapped in a protective cover of brown paper, the precious volume was henceforth my constant companion. The abstruse mathematical sections I had regretfully to pass over, but the descriptive parts were read and re-read until I could have recited them from memory. Even the drawings of the Great Westminster Clock, which had at first appeared so bewildering, became intelligible by repeated study, and the intricacies of gravity escapements and maintaining powers grew simple by familiarity.

Thus did the revered E. B. Denison add a new delight to my life. Not only was every clock-maker's window a thing of beauty and a provider of quiet pleasure, but an object so lowly as the lock of the scullery door—detached by Uncle Sam and by me carefully dismembered—was made to furnish an entertainment compared with which even the Punch and Judy show paled into insignificance.

---

### III. OUT OF THE NEST

A CERTAIN philosopher, whose name I cannot recall, has, I understand, discovered that there are several different kinds of time. He is not referring to those which are known to astronomers, such as sidereal mean or apparent time, which differ only in terms of measurement, but to time as it affects the young, the middle-aged and the old.

The discovery is not a new one. Shakespeare has told us that "Time travels in divers paces with divers persons", and, for me, the poet's statement is more to the point (and perhaps more true) than the philosopher's. For I am thinking of one "who Time ambles withal", or even "who he stands still withal"; to wit, myself in the capacity of Dr. Pope's bottle-boy. That stage of my existence seemed, and still seems, looking back on it, to have lasted for half a life-time; whereas it occupied, in actual fact, but a matter of months.

It came to an end when I was about thirteen, principally by my own act. I had begun to feel that I was making unfair inroads on the family resources, for, though the school that I attended was an inexpensive one, it was not one of the cheapest. Aunt Judy had insisted that I should have a decent education and not mix with boys below our own class, and accordingly she had sent me to the school conducted by the clergy man of our parish, the Reverend Stephen Page, which was attended by the sons of the local shop-keepers and better-class working men. But modest as the school fees were, their payment entailed some sacrifice; for, though we were not poor, still Uncle Sam's earnings as a journeyman cabinet-maker were only thirty shillings a week. Old Mr. Gollidge, who did light jobs in a carpenter's shop, made a small contribution, and there was half-a-crown a week from my wages; but, when all was said, it was a tight fit and must have taxed Aunt Judy's powers of management severely to maintain the standard of comfort in which we lived.

Moved by these considerations (and perhaps influenced by the monotonous alternation of school and bottle-basket), I ventured to put the case to Aunt Judy and was relieved to find that she took my suggestions seriously and was obviously pleased with me for making them.

"There is something in what you say, Nat," she admitted. "But remember that your schooling has got to last you for life. It's the foundation that you've got to build on, and it would be bad economy to skimp that."

"Quite right," Uncle Sam chimed in. "You can't make a mahogany table out of deal. Save on the material at the start and you spoil the job."

"Still," I urged, "a penny saved is a penny earned," at which Aunt Judy laughed and gave me a playful pat on the head.

"You are a queer, old-fashioned boy, Nat," said she, "but perhaps you are none the worse for that. Well, I'll see Mr. Page and ask him what he thinks about it, and I shall do exactly what he advises. Will that satisfy you?"

I agreed readily enough, having the profoundest respect and admiration for my schoolmaster. For the Reverend Stephen Page, though he disdained not to teach the sons of working men, was a distinguished man in his way. He was a Master of Arts—though of what arts I never discovered—and a Senior Wrangler. That is what was stated on the School prospectus, so it must have been true; but I could never understand it, for a less quarrelsome or contentious man you could not imagine. At any rate, he was a most unmistakable gentleman, and, if he had taught us nothing else, his example of good manners, courtesy and kindness would have been a liberal education in itself.

I was present at the interview, and very satisfactory I found it. Aunt Judy stated the problem and Mr. Page listened sympathetically. Then he pronounced judgement in terms that rather surprised me as coming from a schoolmaster.

"Education and schooling, Mrs. Gollidge, are not quite the same thing. When a boy leaves school to learn a trade, he is not ending his education. Some might say that he is only beginning it. At any rate, the knowledge and skill by which he will

earn his living and maintain his family when he has one, and be a useful member of society, is the really indispensable knowledge. Our young friend has a good groundwork of what simple folk call book-learning, and, if he wants to increase it, there are books from which he can learn. Meanwhile, I don't think that he is too young to begin the serious business of life."

That question, then, was settled, and the next one was how the beginning was to be made. As a temporary measure, "while we were looking about", Uncle Sam managed to plant me on his employer, Mr. Beeby, as workshop boy at a salary of five shillings a week. So it came about that I made my final round with the bottles, handed in the basket for the last time, drew my wages and, on the following morning, set forth in company with Uncle Sam en route for Mr. Beeby's workshop in Broad Street. There was only one occupant when we arrived: a round-shouldered, beetle browed, elderly man with rolled-up shirt-sleeves, a linen apron and a square brown-paper cap such as work men commonly wore in those days, who was operating with a very small saw on a piece of wood that was clamped in the bench-vice. He looked up as we entered and remarked:

"So this is the young shaver, is it? There ain't much of him. He'll have to stand on six pennorth of coppers if he is going to work at a bench. Never mind, youngster. You'll be a man before your mother," and with this he returned to his work with intense concentration (I discovered, presently, that he was cutting the pins of a set of dovetails), and Uncle Sam, having provided me with a broom, set me to work at sweeping up the shavings, picking up the little pieces of waste wood and putting them into the large open box in which they were thriftily stored for use in odd jobs. Then he took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and put on his apron and paper cap; in which costume he seemed to me to be invested with a new dignity; and when he fell to work with a queer-looking, lean-bodied plane on the edge of a slab of mahogany, miraculously producing on it an elegant moulding, I felt that I had never properly appreciated him. Presently the third member of the staff arrived, a young journeyman named Will Foster. He had evidently heard of me, for he saluted me with a friendly grin and a few words of welcome while he was unrobing and getting into working trim. Then he, too, set to work with an air of business on his particular job, the carcass of a small chest of drawers; and I noticed that each of the three men was engaged on his own piece of work, independently of the others. And this I learned later was Mr. Beeby's rule, so far as it was practicable. "If a man carries his own job right through," he once explained to me, "and does it well, he gets all the credit; and if he does it badly, he takes all the blame." It seemed a sensible rule. But that was an age of individualism.

I shall not follow in detail my experiences during the few months that I spent in Mr. Beeby's workshop. My service there was but an interlude between school and my real start in life. But it was a useful interlude, and I have never regretted it. As I was not an apprentice, I received no formal instruction. But little was needed when I had the opportunity of watching three highly expert craftsmen and following their methods from the preliminary sketch to the finished work; and I did, in fact, get a good many useful tips besides the necessary instruction in my actual duties.

As to these, they gradually extended as time went on from mere sweeping, cleaning and tidying to more technical activities, but, from the first, the glue-pots were definitely assigned to me. Once for all, the whole art and mystery of the preparation and care of glue was imparted to me. Every night I emptied and cleaned the glue-pots and put the fresh glue in to soak, for Mr. Beeby would have nothing to do with stale glue; and every morning, as soon as I arrived, I set the pots of fresh glue on the workshop stove. Then, by degrees, I began to learn the use of tools; to saw along a pencil line, to handle a chisel and a jack-plane (with the aid of an improvised platform to bring my elbows to the bench level) and to use the marking gauge and the try-square, so that, presently, I became proficient enough to be given small, rough jobs of sawing and planing to save the time of the skilled workmen.

It was all very interesting (what creative work is not?), and I was happy enough in the workshop with its pleasant atmosphere of quiet, unhurried industry. I liked to watch these three skilful craftsmen doing difficult things with unconscious ease and a misleading appearance of leisureliness, and I learned that this apparently effortless precision was really the result of habitual concentration. The fact was expounded to me by Mr. Beeby on an appropriate occasion.

"You've given yourself the trouble, my lad, of doing that twice over. Now the way to work quickly is to work carefully. Attend to what you are doing and see that you make no mistakes." It was a valuable precept, which I have never forgotten and have always tried to put into practice; indeed, I find myself, to this day, profiting from Mr. Beeby's practical wisdom.

But though I was interested and happy in my work, my heart was not in cabinet-making. Clocks and watches still held my affections, and, on most evenings, the short interval between supper and bedtime was occupied in reading and re-reading the books on horology that I possessed. I now had a quite respectable little library; for my good friend, Mr. Strutt, the Wardour Street bookseller, was wont to put aside for me any works on the subject that came into his hands, and I suspect that, in the matter of price, he frequently tempered the wind to the shorn lamb.

Thus, though I went about my work contentedly, there lurked always at the back of my mind the hope that some day a chance might present itself for me to get a start on the career of a clock-maker. Apprenticeship was not to be thought of, for the family resources were not equal to a premium. But there might be other ways. Meanwhile, I tended the glue-pots and cherished my dream in secret; and in due course, by very indirect means, the dream became a reality.

The chance came, all unperceived at first, on a certain morning in the sixth month of my servitude, when a burly, elderly man came into the workshop carrying a brown-paper parcel. I recognized him instantly as Mr. Abraham, the clock-maker, whose shop in Foubert's Place had been familiar to me since my earliest childhood, and I cast an inquisitive eye on the parcel as he unfastened it on the bench, watched impassively by Mr. Beeby. To my disappointment, the unwrapping disclosed only an empty clock-case, and a mighty shabby one at that. Still, even an empty case had a faint horological

flavour.

"Well," said Mr. Beeby, turning it over disparagingly, "it's a bit of a wreck. Shockingly knocked about, and some fool has varnished it with a brush. But it has been a fine case in its time, and it can be again. What do you want us to do with it? Make it as good as new, I suppose."

"Better," replied Mr. Abraham with a persuasive smile.

"Now, you mustn't be unreasonable," said Beeby. "That case was made by a first-class tradesman and no one could make it any better. No hurry for it, I suppose? May as well let us take our time over it."

To this Mr. Abraham agreed, being a workman himself; and, after some brief negotiations as to the cost of the repairs, he took his departure. When he had gone, Mr. Beeby picked up the "wreck", and, exhibiting it to Uncle Sam, remarked:

"It wants a lot of doing to it, but it will pay for a bit of careful work. Care to take it on when you've finished that table?"

Uncle Sam took it on readily, having rather a liking for renovations of good old work; and when he had clamped up some glued joints on his table, fell to work forthwith on the case, dismembering it, as a preliminary measure, with a thoroughness that rather horrified me, until it seemed to be reduced to little more than a collection of fragments. But I realized the necessity for the dismemberment when I saw him making the repairs and restorations on the separated parts, unhampered by their connections with the others.

I followed his proceedings from day to day with deep interest as the work grew; first, when all the old varnish had been cleaned off, the cutting away of damaged parts, then the artful inseting of new pieces and their treatment with stain until from staring patches they became indistinguishable from the old. So it went on, the battered old parts growing newer and smarter every day with no visible trace of the repairs, and, at last, when the fresh polish was hard, the separated parts were put together and the transformation was complete. The shabby old wreck had been changed into a brand-new case.

"Well, Sam," said Mr. Beeby, looking at it critically as its restorer stood it on the newly finished table, "you've made a job of that. It's good now for another hundred years. Ought to satisfy Abraham. Nat might as well run round presently and let him know that it's finished."

"Why shouldn't he take it with him?" Uncle Sam suggested.

Mr. Beeby considered the suggestion and eventually, having admonished me to carry the case carefully, adopted it. Accordingly, the case was wrapped in one or two clean dusters and tied up with string, leaving the gilt top handle exposed for convenience of carrying, and I went forth all agog to see how Mr. Abraham would be impressed by Uncle Sam's wizardry.

I found that gentleman seated at his counter writing on a card, and, as the inscription was in large Roman capitals, my eye caught at a glance the words, "Smart youth wanted." He rounded off the final D and then looked up at me and enquired: "You are Mr. Beeby's apprentice, aren't you? Is that the case?"

"This is the case, sir," I replied, "but I am not an apprentice. I am the workshop boy."

"Oh!" said he, "I thought you were an apprentice, as you were working at the bench. Well, let's see what sort of a job they've made of the case. Bring it in here."

He preceded me into a small room at the back of the shop which was evidently the place where he worked, and here, having cleared a space on a side bench, he took the case from me and untied the string. When the removal of the dusters revealed the case in all its magnificence, he regarded it with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"It looks a bit different from what it did when you saw it last, sir," I ventured to remark.

He seemed a little surprised, for he gave me a quick glance before replying.

"You're right, my boy; I wouldn't have believed it possible. But there, every man to his trade, and Mr. Beeby is a master of his."

"It was my uncle, Mr. Gollidge, that did the repairs, sir," I informed him, bearing in mind Mr. Beeby's rule that the doer of a good job should have the credit. Again Mr. Abraham looked at me, curiously, as he rejoined: "Then your uncle is a proper tradesman and I take my hat off to him."

I thanked him for the compliment, the latter part of which was evidently symbolical, as he was bareheaded, and then asked: "Is that the clock that belongs to the case, sir?" and I pointed to a bracket clock with a handsome brass, silver-circled dial which stood on a shelf, supported by a movement-holder.

"You're quite right," he replied. "That's the clock; all clean and bright and ready for fixing. Would you like to see it in its case? Because, if so, you may as well help me to put it in."

I agreed, joyfully, and as he released the movement from the holder, I unlocked and opened the back door of the case and "stood by" for further instructions, watching intently every stage of the procedure. There was not much for me to do beyond steadying the case and fetching the screws and the screwdriver; but I was learning how a bracket clock was fixed into its case, and when, at last, the job was finished and the fine old clock stood complete in all its beauty and dignity, I had the feeling of at least, having been a collaborator in the achievement.

It had been a great experience. But all the time, a strong under-current of thought had been running at the back of my

mind. "Smart youth wanted." Was I a smart youth? Honest self-inspection compelled me to admit that I was not. But perhaps the smartness was only a rhetorical flourish, and in any case, it doesn't do to be too modest. Eventually I plucked up courage to ask: "Were you wanting a boy, sir?"

"Yes," he replied. "Do you know of one who wants a job?"

"I was wondering, sir, if I should be suitable."

"You!" he exclaimed. "But you've got a place. Aren't you satisfied with it?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I'm quite satisfied. Mr. Beeby is a very good master. But I've always wanted to get into the clock trade."

He looked down at me with a broad smile. "My good boy," said he, "cleaning a clockmaker's window and sweeping a clockmaker's floor won't get you very far in the clock trade."

It sounded discouraging, but I was not put off. Experience had taught me that there are boys and boys. As Dr. Pope's bottle boy I had learned nothing and gained nothing but the weekly wage. As Mr. Beeby's workshop boy I had learned the rudiments of cabinet-making and was learning more every day.

"It would be a start, sir, and I think I could make myself useful," I protested.

"I daresay you could," said he (he had seen me working at the bench), "and I would be willing to have you. But what about Mr. Beeby? If you suit him, it wouldn't be right for me to take you away from him."

"Of course, I should have to stay with him until he had got another boy."

"And there is your uncle. Do you think he would let you make the change?"

"I don't think he would stand in my way, sir. But I'll ask him."

"Very well," said he. "You put it to him, and I'll have a few words with Mr. Beeby when I call to settle up."

"And you won't put that card in the window, sir," I urged.

He smiled at my eagerness but was not displeased; indeed, it was evident to me that he was well impressed and very willing to have me.

"No," he agreed, "I'll put that aside for the present."

Much relieved, I thanked him and took my leave; and as I wended homeward to dinner I prepared myself a little nervously, for the coming conference.

But it went off more easily than I had expected. Uncle Sam, indeed, was strongly opposed to the change ("just as the boy had got his foot in and was beginning to learn the trade"), and he was disposed to enlarge on the subject of rolling stones. But Aunt Judy was more understanding.

"I don't know, Sam," said she, "but what the boy's right. His heart is set on clocks, and he'll be happier working among things that he likes than going on with the cabinet-making. But I'm afraid Mr. Beeby won't be pleased."

That was what I was afraid of. But here again my fears proved to be unfounded. On the principle of grasping the nettle, I attacked him as soon as we returned to the workshop after dinner; and certainly, as he listened to my proposal with his great eyebrows lowered in a frown of surprise, he seemed rather alarming, and I began to "look out for squalls". But when I had finished my explanations, he addressed me so kindly and in such a fatherly manner that I was quite taken aback and almost regretful that I had thought of the change.

"Well, my son," said he, "I shall be sorry to lose you. If you had stayed with me I would have given you your indentures free, because you have got the makings of a good workman. But if the clock trade is your fancy and you have a chance to get into it, you are wise to take that chance. A tradesman's heart ought to be in his trade. You go to Mr. Abraham and I'll give you a good character. And you needn't wait for me. Take the job at once and get a start, but look us up now and again and tell us how you are getting on."

I wanted to thank Mr. Beeby, but was too overcome to say much. However, he understood. And now—such is human perversity—I suddenly discovered an unsuspected charm in the workshop and an unwillingness to tear myself away from it; and when "knocking-off time" came and I stowed my little collection of tools in the rush basket to carry away, my eyes filled and I said my last "good night" in an absurd, tremulous squeak.

Nevertheless, I took Mr. Abraham's shop in my homeward route and found it still open; a fact which I noted with slight misgivings as suggestive of rather long hours. As I entered, my prospective employer rose from the little desk at the end of the counter and confronted me with a look of enquiry; whereupon I informed him briefly of the recent developments and explained that I was now a free boy.

"Very well," said he; "then I suppose you want the job. It's five shillings a week and your tea—unless," he added as an afterthought, "you'd rather run round and have it at home. Will that suit you? Because, if it will, you can come to-morrow morning at half-past eight and I will show you how to take down the shutters."

Thus, informally, were my feet set upon the road which I was to tread all the days of my life; a road which was to lead me, through many a stormy passage, to the promised land which is now my secure abiding place.

---

#### IV. THE INNOCENT ACCESSORY

THE ancient custom of hanging out a distinctive shop sign still struggles for existence in old-fashioned neighbourhoods. In ours there were several examples. A ham-and-beef merchant proclaimed the nature of his wares by a golden ham dangled above his shop front; a gold-beater more appropriately exhibited a golden arm wielding a formidable mallet; barbers in different streets displayed the phlebotomist's pole with its spiral hint of blood and bandages; and Mr. Abraham announced the horologer's calling by a large clock projecting on a bracket above his shop.

They all had their uses, but it seemed to me that Mr. Abraham's was most to the point. For whereas the golden ham could do no more for you than make your mouth water, leaving you to seek satisfaction within, and the barber's offer to "let blood" was a pure fiction (at least, you hoped that it was), Mr. Abraham's sign did actually make you a free gift of the time of day. Moreover, for advertising purposes the clock was more efficient. Ham and gold leaf supply only occasional needs; but time is a commodity in constant demand. Its sign was a feature of the little street observed by all wayfarers, and thus conferred distinction on the small, antiquated shop that it surmounted.

At the door of that shop the tenant was often to be seen, looking up and down the street with placid interest and something of a proprietary air; and so I found him, refreshing himself with a pinch of snuff, when I arrived at twenty-six minutes past eight on the morning after my engagement. He received me with unexpected geniality, and, putting away the tortoise shell snuff-box and glancing up approvingly at the clock, proceeded forthwith to introduce me to the art and mystery of taking down the shutters, including the secret disposal of the padlock. The rest of the daily procedure—the cleaning of the small-paned window, the sweeping of the floor, and such dusting as was necessary—he indicated in general terms, and, having shown me where the brooms and other cleaning appliances were kept, retired to the little workshop which communicated with the retail part of the premises, seated himself at the bench, fixed his glass in his eye, and began some mysterious operations on a watch. I observed him furtively in the intervals of my work, and when I had finished, I entered the workshop for further instructions; but by that time the watch had dissolved into a little heap of wheels and plates which lay in a wooden bowl covered by a sort of glass dish-cover, and that was the last that I saw of it. For it appeared that, when not otherwise engaged, my duty was to sit on a stool behind the counter and "mind the shop".

In that occupation, varied by an occasional errand, I spent the first day; and mighty dull I found it after the life and activity of Mr. Beeby's establishment, and profoundly was I relieved when, at half-past eight, Mr. Abraham instructed me to put up the shutters under his supervision. As I took my way home, yawning as I went, I almost wished myself back at Beeby's.

But it was a false alarm. The intolerable dullness of that first day was never repeated. On the following morning I took the precaution to provide myself with a book, but it was not needed; for, while I was cleaning the window, Mr. Abraham went forth, and presently returned with an excessively dirty "grandfather" clock—without its case—which he carried into the workshop and at once began to "take down" (i.e., to take to pieces). As I had finished my work, I made bold to follow him and hover around to watch the operation; and, as he did not seem to take my presence amiss, but chatted in quite a friendly way as he worked, I ventured to ask one or two questions, and meanwhile kept on the alert for a chance to "get my foot in."

When he had finished the "taking down" and had put away the dismembered remains of the movement in a drawer, leaving the two plates and the dial on the bench, he proceeded to mix up a paste of rotten-stone and oil, and then, taking up one of the plates, began to scrub it vigorously with a sort of overgrown tooth brush dipped in the mixture. I watched him attentively for a minute or two, and then decided that my opportunity had come.

"Wouldn't it save you time, sir, if I were to clean the other plate?" I asked.

He stopped scrubbing and looked at me in surprise. "That's not a bad idea, Nat," he chuckled. "Why shouldn't you? Yes, get a brush from the drawer. Watch me and do exactly as I do."

Gleefully, I fetched the brush and set to work, following his methods closely and observing him from time to time as the work progressed. He gave an eye to me now and again, but let me carry out the job completely, even to the final polishing and the "pegging out" of the pivot-holes with the little pointed sticks known as peg-wood. When I had finished, he examined my work critically, testing one or two of the pivot-holes with a clean peg, and finally, as he laid down the plate, informed me that I had made quite a good job of it.

That night I went home in a very different frame of mind. No longer did I yearn for Beeby's. I realized that I had had my chance and taken it. I had got my foot in and was now free of the workshop. Other jobs would come my way and they would not all be mere plate-cleaning. I should see to that. And I did. Cautiously and by slow degrees I extended my offers of help from plates to wheels and pinions, to the bushing of worn pivot-holes and the polishing of pivots on the turns. And each time Mr. Abraham viewed me with fresh surprise, evidently puzzled by my apparent familiarity with the mechanism of clocks, and still more so by my ability to make keys and repair locks, an art of which he knew nothing at all.

Thus, the purpose that had been in my mind from the first was working out according to plan. My knowledge of the structure and mechanism of time-keepers was quite considerable. But it was only paper knowledge, book-learning. It had to be supplemented by that other kind of knowledge that can be acquired only by working at the bench, before I could hope to become a clock-maker. The ambition to acquire it had drawn me hither from Mr. Beeby's, and now the opportunity seemed to be before me.

In fact, my way was made unexpectedly easy, for Mr. Abraham's inclinations marched with mine. Excellent workman as he was, skilful, painstaking and scrupulously conscientious, he had no enthusiasm. As Mr. Beeby would have said, his heart was not in his trade. He did not enjoy his work, though he spared no pains in doing it well. But by nature and temperament he was a dealer, a merchant, rather than a craftsman, and it was his ability as a buyer that accounted for the bulk of his income. Hence he was by no means unwilling for me to take over the more laborious and less remunerative side of the business, in so far as I was able, for thereby he was left with more free time to devote to its more profitable aspects.

Exactly how he disposed of this free time I could never quite make out. I got the impression that he had some other interests which he was now free to pursue, having a deputy to carry on the mere retail part of the business and attend to simple repairs. But how ever that may have been, he began occasionally to absent himself from the shop, leaving me in charge; and as time went on and he found that I managed quite well without him, his absences grew more frequent and prolonged until they occurred almost daily, excepting when there were important repairs on hand. It seemed an anomalous arrangement, but there was really nothing against it. He had instructed me in the simple routine of the business, had explained the artless "secret price marks" on the stock, and ascertained (I think from Beeby) that I was honest and trustworthy, and if he was able to employ his free time more profitably, there was nothing further to be said.

It was on the occasion of one of these absences that an incident occurred which, simple as it appeared to be at the time, was later to develop unexpected consequences. This was one of the days on which Mr. Abraham went down into the land of Clerkenwell to make purchases of material and stock. Experience had taught me that a visit to Clerkenwell meant a day off; and, there being no repairs on hand, I made my arrangements to pass the long, solitary day as agreeably as possible. It happened that I had recently acquired an old lock of which the key was missing; and I decided to pass the time pleasantly in making a key to fit it. Accordingly, I selected from the stock of spare keys that I kept in my cupboard a lever key the pipe of which would fit the drill-pin of the lock, but of which the bit was too long to enter; and with this and a small vice and one or two tools, I went out into the shop and prepared to enjoy myself.

I had fixed the vice to the counter, taken off the front plate of the lock (it was a good but simple lock with three levers), clamped the key in the vice and was beginning to file off the excess length of the bit, preparatory to cutting the steps, when a man entered the shop, and, sauntering up to the counter, fixed an astonished eye on the key.

"Guvnor in?" he enquired.

I replied that he was not.

"Pity," he commented. "I've broke the glass of my watch. How long will he be?"

"I don't think he will be back until the evening. But I can fit you a new glass."

"Can you, though?" said he. "You seem to be a handy sort of bloke for your size. How old are you?"

"Getting on for fourteen," I replied, holding out my hand for the watch which he had produced from his pocket.

"Well, I'm blowed," said he; "fancy a blooming kid of fourteen running a business like this."

I rather resented his description of me, but made no remark. Besides, it was probably meant as a compliment, though unfortunately expressed. I glanced at his watch, and, opening the drawer in which watch-glasses were kept, selected one of the suitable size, tried it in the bezel after removing the broken pieces, and snapped it in.

"Well, I'm sure!" he exclaimed as I returned the watch to him. "Wonderful handy cove you are. How much?"

I suggested sixpence, whereupon he fished a handful of mixed coins out of his pocket and began to sort them out. Finally he laid a sixpence on the counter and once more fixed his eyes on the vice.

"What are you doing to that lock?" he asked.

"I am making a key to fit it," I replied.

"Are you, reely?" said he with an air of surprise. "Actooally making a key? Remarkable handy bloke you are. Perhaps you could do a little job for me. There is a box of mine what I can't get open. Some thing gone wrong with the lock. Key goes in all right but it won't turn. Do you think you could get it to open if I was to bring it along here?"

"I don't know until I have seen it," I replied. "But why not take it to a locksmith?"

"I don't want a big job made of it," said he. "It's only a matter of touching up the key, I expect. What time did you say the guvnor would be back?"

"I don't expect him home until closing time. But he wouldn't have anything to do with a locksmith's job, in any case."

"No matter," said he. "You'll do for me. I'll just cut round home and fetch that box"; and with this he bustled out of the shop and turned away towards Regent Street.

His home must have been farther off than he had seemed to suggest, for it was nearly two hours later when he reappeared, carrying a brown-paper parcel. I happened to see him turn into the street, for I had just received a shop dial from our neighbour, the grocer, and had accompanied him to the door, where he paused for a final message.

"Tell the governor that there isn't much the matter with it, only it stops now and again, which is a nuisance."

He nodded and turned away, and at that moment the other customer arrived with the unnecessary announcement that

"here he was ". He set the parcel on the counter, and, having untied the string, opened the paper covering just enough to expose the keyhole; by which I was able to see that the box was covered with morocco leather and that the keyhole guard seemed to be of silver. Producing a key from his pocket, he inserted it and made a show of trying to turn it.

"You see?" said he. "It goes in all right, but it won't turn. Funny, isn't it? Never served me that way before."

I tried the key and then took it out and looked at it, and, as a preliminary measure, probed the barrel with a piece of wire. Then, as the barrel was evidently clean, I tried the lock with the same piece of wire. It was a ward lock, and the key was a warded key, but the wards of the lock and those of the key were not the same. So the mystery was solved; it was the wrong key.

"Well, now," my friend exclaimed, "that's very singler. I could have sworn it was the same key what I have always used, but I suppose you know. What's to be done? Do you think you can make that key fit?"

Now, here was a very interesting problem. I had learned from the incomparable Mr. Denison that the wards of a lock are merely obstructions to prevent it from being opened with the wrong key, and that, since the fore edge of the bit is the only acting part of such a key, a wrong key can be turned into a right one by simply cutting away the warded part and leaving the fore edge intact. I had never tried the experiment; but here was an opportunity to put the matter to a test.

"I'll try, if you like," I replied, "that is, if you don't mind my cutting the key about a little."

"Oh, the key is no good to me if it won't open the lock. I don't care what you do to it."

With this, I set to work gleefully, first making a further exploration of the lock with my wire and then carrying the key into the workshop, where there was a fixed vice. There I attacked it with a hack-saw and a file, and soon had the whole of the bit cut away excepting the top and fore edge. All agog to see how it worked, I went back to the shop with a small file in my hand in case any further touches should be necessary, and, inserting the key, gave a gentle turn. It was at once evident that there was now no resistance from the wards, but it did not turn freely. So I withdrew it and filed away a fraction from the fore edge to reduce the friction. The result was a complete success, for when I re-inserted it and made another trial, it turned quite freely and I heard the lock click.

My customer was delighted (and so was I). He turned the key backwards and forwards several times and once opened the lid of the box; but only half an inch—just enough to make sure that it cleared the lock. Then he took out the key, put it in his pocket, and proceeded to replace the paper cover and tie the string.

"Well," said he, "you are a reglar master craftsman, you are. How much have I got to pay?"

I suggested that the job was worth a shilling, to which he agreed.

"But who gets that shilling?" he enquired.

"Mr. Abraham, of course," I replied. "It's his shop."

"So it is," said he, "but you have done the job, so here's a bob for yourself, and you've earned it."

He laid a couple of shillings on the counter, picked up his parcel and went out, whistling gleefully.

Now, all this time, although my attention had been concentrated on the matter in hand, I had been aware of something rather odd that was happening outside the shop. My customer had certainly had no companion when he arrived, for I had seen him enter the street alone. But yet he seemed to have some kind of follower; for hardly had he entered the shop when a man appeared, looking in at the window and seeming to keep a watch on what was going on within. At first he did not attract my attention—for a shop window is intended to be looked in at. But presently he moved off, and then returned for another look; and while I was working at the key in the workshop, I could see him on the opposite side of the street, pretending to look in the shop windows there, but evidently keeping our shop under observation.

I did not give him much attention while I was working at my job; but when my customer departed, I went out to the shop door and watched him as he retired down the street. He was still alone. But now, the follower, who had been fidgeting up and down the pavement opposite, and looking in at shop windows, turned and walked away down the street, slowly and idly at first, but gradually increasing his pace as he went, until he turned the corner quite quickly.

It was very queer; and, my curiosity being now fairly aroused, I darted out of the shop and ran down the street, where, when I came to the corner, I could see my customer striding quickly along King Street, while the follower was "legging it" after him as hard as he could go. What the end of it was I never saw, for the man with the parcel disappeared round the corner of Argyll Place before the follower could come up with him.

It was certainly a very odd affair. What could be the relations of these two men? The follower could not have been a secret watcher, for there he was, plainly in view of the other. I turned it over in my mind as I walked back to the shop, and as I entered the transaction in the day-book ("key repaired, 1/-") and dropped the two shillings into the till, having some doubt as to my title to the "bob for myself". (But its presence was detected by Mr. Abraham when we compared the till with the day-book, and it was, after a brief discussion, restored to me.) Even when I was making a tentative exploration of the shop dial and restoring the vanished oil to its dry bearings and pallets, I still puzzled over this mystery until, at last, I had to dismiss it as insoluble.

But it was not insoluble, though the solution was not to appear for many weeks. Nor, when my customer disappeared round the corner, was he lost to me for ever. In fact, he re-visited our premises less than a fortnight after our first meeting,

shambling into the shop just before dinner-time and greeting me as before with the enquiry:

"Guvnor in?"

"No," I replied, "he has just been called out on business, but he will be back in a few minutes." (He had, in fact, walked round, according to his custom about this time, to inspect the window of the cook's shop in Carnaby Street.) "Is there anything that I can do?"

"Don't think so," said he. "Something has gone wrong with my watch. Won't go. I expect it is a job for the guvnor."

He brought out from his pocket a large gold watch, which he passed across the counter to me. I noted that it was not the watch to which I had fitted the glass and that it had a small bruise on the edge. Then I stuck my eyeglass in my eye, and having opened, first the case and then the dome, took a glance at the part of the movement that was visible. That glance showed me that the balance-staff pivot was broken, which accounted sufficiently for the watch's failure to go. But it showed me something else—something that thrilled me to the marrow. This was no ordinary watch. It was fitted with that curious contrivance that English watchmakers call a "tourbillon"—a circular revolving carriage on which the escapement is mounted, the purpose being the avoidance of position errors. Now, I had never seen a tourbillon before, though I had read of them as curiosities of advanced watch construction, and I was delighted with this experience, and the more so when I read on the movement the signature of the inventor of this mechanism, Breguet á Paris. So absorbed was I with this mechanical wonder that I forgot the existence of the customer until he, somewhat brusquely, drew my attention to it. I apologized and briefly stated what was the matter with the watch.

"That don't mean nothing to me," he complained. "I want to know if there's much wrong with it, and what it will cost to put it right."

I was trying to frame a discreet answer when the arrival of Mr. Abraham relieved me of the necessity. I handed him the watch and my eyeglass and stood by to hear his verdict.

"Fine watch," he commented. "French make. Seems to have been dropped. One pivot broken; probably some others. Can't tell until I have taken it down. I suppose you want it repaired."

"Not if it is going to be an expensive job," said the owner. "I don't want it for use. I got a silver one what does for me. I bought this one cheap, and I wish I hadn't now. Gave a cove a flyer for it."

"Then you got it very cheap," said Mr. Abraham.

"S'pose I did, but I'd like to get my money back all the same. That's all I ask. Care to give me a flyer for it?"

Mr. Abraham's eyes glistened. All the immemorial Semitic passion for a bargain shone in them. And well it might. Even I could tell that the price asked was but a fraction of the real value. It was a tremendous temptation for Mr. Abraham.

But, rather to my surprise, he resisted it. Wistfully, he looked at the watch, and especially at the hall-mark, or its French equivalent, for nearly a minute; then, with a visible pang of regret, he closed the case and pushed the watch across the counter.

"I don't deal in second-hand watches," said he.

"Gor!" exclaimed our customer, "it ain't second hand for you. Do the little repairs what are necessary, and it's a new watch. Don't be a mug, Mister. It's the chance of a lifetime."

But Mr. Abraham shook his head and gave the watch a further push.

"Look here!" the other exclaimed, excitedly, "the thing's no good to me. I'll take four pund ten. That's giving it away, that is. Gor! You ain't going to refuse that! Well, say four pund. Four blooming jimmies! Why, the case alone is worth more than double that."

Mr. Abraham broke out into a cold sweat. It was a frightful temptation, for what the man said was literally true. But even this Mr. Abraham resisted; and eventually the owner of this priceless timepiece, realizing that "the deal was off", sulkily put it in his pocket and slouched out without another word.

"Why didn't you buy it, sir?" I asked. "It was a beautiful watch."

"So it was," he agreed, "and a splendid case—twenty-two carat gold; but it was too cheap. I would have given him twice what he asked if I had known how he came by it."

"You don't think he stole it, sir, do you?" I asked.

"I suspect someone did," he replied, "but whether this gent was the thief or only the receiver is not my affair."

It wasn't mine either; but as I recalled my former transaction with this "gent" I was inclined to form a more definite opinion; and thereupon I decided to keep my own counsel as to the details of that former transaction. But circumstances compelled me to revise that decision when the matter was reopened by someone who took a less impersonal view than that of Mr. Abraham. That someone was a tall, military-looking man who strode into our shop one evening about six weeks after the watch incident. He made no secret of his business, for, as he stepped up to the counter, he produced a card from his pocket and introduced himself with the statement:

"You are Mr. David Abraham, I think. I am Detective Sergeant Pitts."



Mr. Abraham bowed graciously, and, disregarding the card, replied that he was pleased to make the officer's acquaintance; whereupon the sergeant grinned and remarked: "You are more easily pleased than most of my clients."

Mr. Abraham smiled and regarded the officer with a wary eye. "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?" he asked.

"That's what I want to find out," said the sergeant. "I have information that, on or about the thirteenth of May, you made a skeleton key for a man named Alfred Coomey, alias John Smith. Is that correct?"

"No," Abraham replied, in a startled voice, "certainly not. I never made a skeleton key in my life. Don't know how to, in fact."

The officer's manner became perceptibly more dry. "My information," said he, "is that on the date mentioned, the said Coomey, or Smith, brought a jewel case to this shop and that you made a skeleton key that opened it. You say that is not true."

"Wait a moment," said Abraham, turning to me with a look of relief; "perhaps the sergeant is referring to the man you told me about who brought a box here to have a key fitted when I was out. It would be about that date."

The sergeant turned a suddenly interested eye on me and remarked:

"So this young shaver is the operator, is he? You'd better tell me all about it; and first, what sort of box was it?"

"I couldn't see much of it, sir, because it was wrapped in brown paper, and he only opened it enough for me to get at the keyhole. But it was about fifteen inches long by about nine broad, and it was covered with green leather and the keyhole plate seemed to be silver. That is all that I could see."

"And what about the key?"

"It was the wrong key, sir. It went in all right, but it wouldn't turn. So I cut away part of the bit so that it would go past the wards and then it turned and opened the lock."

The sergeant regarded me with a grim smile.

"You seem to be a rather downy young bird," said he. "So you made him a skeleton key, did you? Now, how did you come to know how to make a skeleton key?"

I explained that I had read certain books on locks and had taken a good deal of interest in the subject, a statement that Mr. Abraham was able to confirm.

"Well," said the sergeant, "it's a useful accomplishment, but a bit dangerous. Don't you be too handy with skeleton keys, or you may find yourself taking a different sort of interest in locks and keys."

But here Mr. Abraham interposed with a protest.

"There's nothing to make a fuss about, Sergeant. The man brought his box here to have a key fitted, and my lad fitted a key. There was nothing incorrect or unlawful in that."

"No, no," the sergeant admitted, "I don't say that there was. It happens that the box was not his, but, of course, the boy didn't know that. I suppose you couldn't see what was in the box?"

"No, sir. He only opened it about half an inch, just to see that it would open."

The sergeant nodded. "And as to this man, Coomey; do you think you would recognize him if you saw him again?"

"Yes, sir, I am sure I should. But I don't know that I could recognize the other man."

"The other man!" exclaimed the sergeant. "What other man?"

"The man who was waiting outside;" and here I described the curious proceedings of Mr. Coomey's satellite and so much of his appearance as I could remember.

"Ha!" said the sergeant, "that would be the foot man who gave Coomey the jewel-case. Followed him here to make sure that he didn't nip off with it. Well, you'd know Coomey again, at any rate. What about you, Mr. Abraham?"

"I couldn't recognize him, of course. I never saw him."

"You saw him later, you know, sir, when he came in with the watch," I reminded him.

"But you never told me—" Abraham began, with a bewildered stare at me; but the sergeant broke in, brusquely: "What's this about a watch, Mr. Abraham? You didn't mention that. Better not hold anything back, you know."

"I am not holding anything back," Abraham protested. "I didn't know it was the same man;" and here he proceeded to describe the affair in detail and quite correctly, while the sergeant took down the particulars in a large, funereal note-book.

"So you didn't feel inclined to invest," said he with a sly smile. "Must have wrung your heart to let a bargain like that slip."

"It did," Abraham admitted, "but, you see, I didn't know where he had got it."

"We can take it," said the sergeant, "that he got it out of that jewel-case. What sort of watch was it? Could you recognize it?"

"I am not sure that I could. It was an old watch. French make, gold case, engine-turned with a plain centre. No crest or initials."

"That's all you remember, is it? And what about you, young shaver? Would you know it again?"

"I think I should, sir. It was a peculiar watch; made by Breguet of Paris, and it had a tourbillion."

"Had a what!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Sounds like some sort of disease. What does he mean?" he added, gazing at Mr. Abraham.

The latter gave a slightly confused description of the mechanism, explaining that he had not noticed it, as he had been chiefly interested in the case; whereupon the sergeant grinned and remarked that the melting-pot value was what had also interested Mr. Coomey.

"Well," he concluded, shutting up his note-book, "that's all for the present. I expect we shall want you to identify Coomey, and the other man if you can; and when the case comes up for the adjourned hearing, you will both have to come and give evidence. But I will let you know about that later." With this and a nod to Mr. Abraham and a farewell grin at me, he took his departure.

Neither to my employer nor myself was the prospect of visiting the prison and the court at all alluring, especially as our simultaneous absence would entail shutting up the shop; and it was a relief to us both when the sergeant paid us a second, hurried visit to let us know that, as the accused men had decided to plead guilty, our testimony would not be required. So that disposed of the business so far as we were concerned.

---

## V. MR. PARRISH

IT has been remarked, rather obviously, that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and also that one man's meat is another man's poison. The application of these samples of proverbial wisdom to this history is in the respective effects of a severe attack of bronchitis upon Mr. Abraham and me. The bronchitis was his, with all its attendant disadvantages, an unmitigated evil, whereas to me it was the determining factor of a beneficial change.

While he was confined to his bed, under the care of the elderly Jewess who customarily "did for him", my daily procedure was, when I had shut up the shop, to carry the contents of the till with the day-book to his bedroom that he might compare them and check the day's takings; and it was on one of these occasions, when he was beginning to mend, that the change in my prospects came into view.

"I have been thinking about you, Nat," said he. "You're an industrious lad, and you've done your duty by me since I've been ill, and I think I ought to do something for you in return. Now, you're set on being a clock-maker, but you can't get into the trade without serving an apprenticeship in the regular way. Supposing I were willing to take you on as my apprentice, how would you like that?"

I jumped at the offer, but suggested that there might be difficulties about the premium.

"There wouldn't be any premium," said he. "I should give you your indentures free and pay the lawyer's charges. Think it over, Nat, and see what your uncle and aunt have to say about it."

It didn't require much thinking over on my part, nor, when I arrived home in triumph and announced my good fortune, was there any difference of opinion as to the practical issue, though the respective views were differently expressed. Uncle Sam thought it "rather handsome of the old chap" (Mr. Abraham was about fifty-five), but Aunt Judy was inclined to sniff.

"He hasn't done badly all these months," said she, "with a competent journeyman for five shillings a week; and he'd be pretty well up a tree if Nat left him to get another job. Oh, he knows which side his bread's buttered."

There may have been some truth in Aunt Judy's comment, but I thought there was more wisdom in old Mr. Gollidge's contribution to the debate.

"It may be a good bargain for Mr. Abraham," said he, "but that don't make it a worse bargain for Nat. It's best that both parties should be suited."

In effect, it was agreed that the offer should be accepted; and when I conveyed this decision to Mr. Abraham, the necessary arrangements were carried through forthwith. The indentures were drawn up, on Mr. Abraham's instructions, by his solicitor, a Mr. Cohen, who brought them to the shop by appointment; and when they had been submitted to and approved by Aunt Judy, they were duly signed by both parties on a small piece of board laid on the invalid's bed, and I was then and there formally bound apprentice for the term of seven years to "the said David Abraham hereinafter called the Master", who, for his part, undertook to instruct me in the art and mystery of clock-making. I need not recite the terms of the indenture in detail, but I think Aunt Judy found them unexpectedly liberal. To my surprise, I was to be given board and lodging; I was to receive five shillings a week for the first year and my wages were to increase by half-a-crown annually, so that in my last year I should be receiving the full wage of a junior journeyman, or improver.

These were great advantages; for henceforth not only would Aunt Judy be relieved of the cost of maintaining me, but she would now have an additional room to dispose of profitably. But beyond these material benefits there were others that I appreciated even more. Now, as an apprentice, I was entitled to instruction in that part of the "art and mystery" which was

concerned with the purchase of stock and material. It is true that, at the time, I did not fully realize the glorious possibilities contained in this provision. Only when, a week or so later, Mr. Abraham (hereinafter called the Master) was sufficiently recovered to descend to the shop, did they begin to dawn on me.

"We seem to be getting short of material," said he after an exploratory browse round the workshop. "I am not well enough to go out yet, so you'll have to run down to Clerkenwell and get the stuff. We'd better draw up a list of what we want."

We made out the list together, and then "the Master" gave me the addresses of the various dealers with full directions as to the route, adding, as I prepared to set forth: "Don't be any longer than you can help, Nat. I'm still feeling a bit shaky."

The truth of the latter statement was so evident that I felt morally compelled to curtail my explorations to the utmost that was possible. But it was a severe trial. For as I hurried along Clerkenwell Road I found myself in a veritable Tom Tiddler's Ground. By sheer force of will, I had to drag myself past those amazing shop windows that displayed—better and more precious than gold and silver—all the wonders of the clock-maker's art. I hardly dared to look at them. But even the hasty glance that I stole as I hurried past gave me an indelible picture of those unbelievable treasures that I can recall to this day. I see them now, though the years have made familiar the subjects of that first, ecstatic, impression: the entrancing tools and gauges, bench-drills and wheel-cutters, the lovely little watch maker's lathe, fairer to me than the Rose of Sharon or the Lily of the Valley, the polishing heads with their buffs and brushes, the assembled movements, and the noble regulator with its quicksilver pendulum, dealing with seconds as common clocks do with hours. I felt that I could have spent eternity in that blessed street.

However, my actual business, though it was but with dealers in "sundries", gave me the opportunity for more leisured observations. Besides Clerkenwell Road, it carried me to St. John's Gate and Clerkenwell Green; from which, at last, I tore myself away and set forth at top speed towards Holborn to catch the omnibus for Regent Circus (now, by the way, called Oxford Circus). But all the way, as my carriage rumbled sleepily westward, the vision of those Aladdin caves floated before my eyes and haunted me until I entered the little shop and dismissed my master to his easy-chair in the sitting-room. Then I unpacked my parcels, distributed their contents in the proper receptacles, put away the precious price-lists that I had collected for future study, and set about the ordinary business of the day.

I do not propose to follow in detail the course of my life as Mr. Abraham's apprentice. There would, in deed, be little enough to record; for the days and months slipped by unreckoned, spent with placid contentment in the work which was a pleasure to do and a satisfaction when done. But apart from the fact that there would be so little to tell, the mere circumstances of my life are not the actual subject of this history. Its purpose is, as I have explained, to trace the antecedents of certain events which occurred many years later when I was able to put my finger on the one crucial fact that was necessary to disclose the nature and authorship of a very singular crime. With the discovery of that crime, the foregoing chapters have had at least some connection; and in what follows I shall confine myself to incidents that were parts of the same train of causation.

Of these, the first was concerned with my Uncle Sam. By birth he was a Kentish man, and he had served his time in a small workshop at Maidstone, conducted by a certain James Wright. When his apprenticeship had come to an end, he had migrated to London; but he had always kept in touch with his old master and paid him occasional visits. Now, about the end of my third year, Mr. Wright, who was getting too old to carry on alone, had offered to take him into partnership; and the offer being obviously advantageous, Uncle Sam had accepted and forthwith made preparations for the move.

It was a severe blow to me, and I think also to Aunt Judy. For though I had taken up my abode with Mr. Abraham, hardly an evening had passed which did not see me seated in the familiar kitchen (but not in my original chair) facing the old Dutch clock and listening to old Mr. Gollidge's interminable yarns. That kitchen had still been my home as it had been since my infancy. I had still been a member, not only of the family, but of the household, absent, like Uncle Sam, only during working hours. But henceforth I should have no home—for Mr. Abraham's house was a mere lodging; no family circle, and, worst of all, no Aunt Judy.

It was a dismal prospect. With a sinking heart I watched the preparations for the departure and counted the days as they slid past, all too quickly; and when the last of the sands had run out and I stood on the platform with my eyes fixed on the receding train, from a window of which Aunt Judy's arm protruded, waving her damp handkerchief, I felt as might have felt some marooned mariner following with despairing gaze the hull of his ship sinking below the horizon. As the train disappeared round a curve, I turned away and could have blubbered aloud; but I was now a young man of sixteen, and a railway station is not a suitable place for the display of the emotions.

But in the days that followed, my condition was very desolate and lonely; and yet, as I can now see, viewing events with a retrospective eye, this shattering misfortune was for my ultimate good. Indeed, it yielded certain immediate benefits. For, casting about for some way of disposing of the solitary evenings, I discovered an institution known as the Working Men's College, then occupying a noble old house in Great Ormond Street; whereby it came about that the homely kitchen was replaced by austere but pleasant class rooms, and the voice of old Mr. Gollidge recounting the mutiny on the Mar' Jane by those of friendly young graduates explaining the principles of algebra and geometry, of applied mechanics and machine-drawing.

The next incident, trivial as it will appear in the telling, had an even more profound effect in the shaping of my destiny; indeed, but for that trifling occurrence, this history could never have been written. So I proceed without further apologies.

On a certain morning at the beginning of the fourth year of my apprenticeship, my master and I were in the shop together reviewing the stock when a rather irate-looking elderly gentleman entered, and, fixing a truculent eye on Mr. Abraham, demanded:

“Do you know anything about equatorial clocks?” Now, I suspect that Mr. Abraham had never heard of an equatorial clock, all his experience having been in the ordinary trade. But it would never do to say so. Accordingly he temporized.

“Well, sir, they don’t, naturally, come my way very often. Were you wanting to purchase one?”

“No, I wasn’t, but I’ve got one that needs some slight repair or adjustment. I am a maker of philosophical instruments and I have had an equatorial sent to me for overhaul. But the clock won’t budge; won’t start at all. Now, clocks are not philosophical instruments and I don’t pretend to know anything about ‘em. Can you come round and see what’s the matter with the thing?”

This was, for me, a rather disturbing question. For our visitor was none other than the gentleman who had accused me of having stolen his pocket-book. I had recognized him at the first glance as he entered, and had retired discreetly into the background lest he should recognize me. But now I foresaw that I should be dragged forth into the light of day. And so it befell.

“I am afraid,” Mr. Abraham said, apologetically, “that I can’t leave my business just at the moment. But my assistant can come round with you and see what is wrong with your equa—with your clock.”

Our customer looked at me, disparagingly, and my heart sank. But either I had changed more than I had supposed in the five years that had elapsed, or the gentleman’s eyesight was not very acute (it turned out that he was distinctly near-sighted). At any rate, he showed no sign of recognition, but merely replied gruffly: “I don’t want any boys monkeying about with that clock. Can’t you come yourself?”

“I am afraid I really can’t. But my assistant is a perfectly competent workman, and I take full responsibility for what he does.”

The customer grunted and scowled at me.

“Very well,” he said, with a very bad grace. “I hope he’s better than he looks. Can you come with me now?”

I replied that I could; and, having collected from the workshop the few tools that I was likely to want, I went forth with him, keeping slightly in the rear and as far as possible out of his field of view. But, to my relief, he took no notice of me, trudging on doggedly and looking straight before him.

We had not far to go, for, when we had passed half way down a quiet street in the neighbourhood of Oxford Market, he halted at a door distinguished by a brass plate bearing the inscription, “W. Parrish, Philosophical Instrument Maker,” and, inserting a latch-key, admitted himself and me. Still ignoring my existence, he walked down a long passage ending in what looked like a garden door but which, when he opened it, proved to be the entrance to a large workshop in which were a lathe and several fitted benches, but, at the moment, no human occupants other than ourselves.

“There,” said he, addressing me for the first time, but still not looking at me, “that’s the clock. Just have a look at it, and mind you don’t do any damage. I’ve got a letter to write, but I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

With this he took himself off, much to my satisfaction, and I proceeded forthwith to make a preliminary inspection. The “patient” was a rather large telescope mounted on a cast-iron equatorial stand. I had never seen an equatorial before except in the form of a book-illustration, but from this I was able easily to recognize the parts and also the clock, which was perched on the iron base with its winding-handle within reach of the observer. This handle I tried, but found it fully wound (it was a spring-driven clock, fitted with governor balls and a fly, or fan), and I then proceeded to take off the loose wooden case so as to expose the movement. A leisurely inspection of this disclosed nothing structurally amiss, but it had an appearance suggesting long disuse and was desperately in need of cleaning.

Suspecting that the trouble was simply dirt and dry pivots, I produced from my bag a little bottle of clock-oil and an oiler and delicately applied a small drop of the lubricant to the empty and dry oil-sinks and to every point that was exposed to friction. Then I gave the ball-governor a cautious turn or two, whereupon my diagnosis was immediately confirmed; for the governor, after a few sluggish revolutions as the oil worked into the bearings, started off in earnest, spinning cheerfully and in an obviously normal fashion.

This was highly satisfactory. But now my curiosity was aroused as to the exact effect of the clock on the telescope. The former was geared by means of a long spindle to the right ascension circle, and on this was a little microscope mounted opposite the index. To the eyepiece of this microscope I applied my eye, and was thrilled to observe the scale of the circle creeping almost imperceptibly past the vernier. It was a great experience. I had read of these things in the optical text books, but here was this delightful mechanism made real and active before my very eyes. I was positively entranced as I watched that slow, majestic motion; in fact I was so preoccupied that I was unaware of Mr. Parrish’s re-entry until I heard his voice; when I sprang up with a guilty start.

“Well,” he demanded, gruffly, “have you found out—Oh, but I see you have.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, eagerly, “it’s running quite well now, and the right ascension circle is turning freely, though, of course, I haven’t timed it.”

"Ho, you haven't, hey?" said he. "Hm. Seem to know all about it, young fellow. What was the matter with the clock?"

"It only wanted a little adjustment," I replied, evasively, for I didn't like to tell him that it was only a matter of oil. "But," I added, "it really ought to be taken to pieces and thoroughly cleaned."

"Ha!" said he, "I'll let the owner do that. If it goes, that is all that matters to me. You can tell your master to send me the bill."

He still spoke gruffly, but there was a subtle change in his manner. Evidently, my rapid performance had impressed him, and I thought it best to take the undeserved credit though I was secretly astonished that he, a practical craftsman, had not been able to do the job himself.

But I had impressed him more than I realized at the time. In fact, he had formed a ridiculously excessive estimate of my abilities, as I discovered some weeks later when he brought a watch to our shop to be cleaned and regulated, and stipulated that I should do the work myself "and not let the old fellow meddle with it". I assured him that Mr. Abraham (who was fortunately absent) was a really skilful watchmaker, but he only grunted incredulously.

"I want the job done properly," he insisted, "and I want you to do it yourself."

Evidently Mr. Abraham's evasions in the matter of equatorial clocks had been noted and had made an unfavourable impression. It was unreasonable—but Mr. Parrish was an unreasonable man—and, like most unreasonable beliefs, it was unshakable. Nor did he make any secret of his opinion when, on subsequent occasions during the next few months, he brought in various little repairs and renovations and sometimes interviewed my principal. For Mr. Parrish had no false delicacy—nor very much of any other kind. But Mr. Abraham took no offence. He knew (as Aunt Judy had observed) which side his bread was buttered; and as he was coming more and more to rely on me, he was willing enough that my merits should be recognized.

So, through those months, my relations with Mr. Parrish continued to grow closer and my future to shape itself invisibly. Little did I guess at the kind of grist that the Mills of God were grinding.

---

## VI. FICKLE FORTUNE

"THE best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley." The oft-quoted words were only too apposite in their application to the plans laid by poor Mr. Abraham for the future conduct of his own affairs and mine. Gradually, as the years had passed, it had become understood between us that, when the period of my apprenticeship should come to an end, I should become his partner and he should subside into the partial retirement suitable to his increasing age.

It was an excellent plan, advantageous to us both. To him it promised a secure and restful old age, to me an assured livelihood, and we both looked forward hope fully to the time, ever growing nearer, when it should come into effect.

But, alas! it was never to be. Towards the end of my fourth year, his old enemy, bronchitis, laid its hand on him and sent him, once more, to his bedroom. But this was not the customary sub-acute attack. From the first it was evident that it was something much more formidable. I could see that for myself; and the doctor's grave looks and evasive answers to my questions confirmed my fears. Nor was evasion possible for long. On the fifth day of the illness, the ominous word "pneumonia" was spoken, and Miriam Goldstein, Mr. Abraham's housekeeper, was directed to summon the patient's relatives.

But, promptly as they responded to the call, they were too late for anything more than whispered and tearful farewells. When they arrived, with Mr. Cohen the solicitor, and I conducted them up to the sick room, my poor master was already blue-faced and comatose; and it was but a few hours later, when they passed out through the shop with their handkerchiefs to their eyes, that Mr. Cohen halted to say to me in a husky under tone, "You can put up the shutters, Polton," and then hurried away with the others.

I shall not dwell on the miserable days that followed, when I sat alone in the darkened shop, vaguely meditating on this calamity, or creeping silently up the stairs to steal a glance at the shrouded figure on the bed. Of all the mourners, none was more sincere than I. Quiet and undemonstrative as our friendship had been, a genuine affection had grown up between my master and me. And not without reason. For Mr. Abraham was not only a kindly man; he was a good man, just and fair in all his dealings, scrupulously honest, truthful and punctual, and strict in the discharge of his religious duties. I respected him deeply and he knew it; and he knew that in me he had a faithful friend and a dependable comrade. Our association had been of the happiest and we had looked forward to many years of pleasant and friendly collaboration. And now he was gone, and our plans had come to nought.

In those first days I gave little thought to my own concerns. It was my first experience of death, and my mind was principally occupied by the catastrophe itself, and by sorrow for the friend whom I had lost. But on the day after the funeral I was suddenly made aware of the full extent of the disaster as it affected me. The bearer—sympathetic enough—of the ill tidings was Mr. Cohen, who had called to give me my instructions.

"This is a bad look-out for you, Polton," said he. "Mr. Abraham ought to have made some provision on your behalf, and I think he meant to. But it was all so sudden. It doesn't do to put off making your will or drafting a new one."

"Then, how do I stand, sir?" I asked.

"The position is that your apprenticeship is dissolved by your master's death, and I, as the executor, have to sell the business as a going concern, according to the provisions of the will, which was made before you were apprenticed. Of course, I shall keep you on, if you are willing, to run the business until it is sold; perhaps the purchaser may agree to take over your indentures or employ you as assistant. Meanwhile, I will pay you a pound a week. Will that suit you?"

I agreed, gladly enough, and only hoped that the purchaser might not make too prompt an appearance. But in this I was disappointed, for, at the end of the third week, Mr. Cohen notified me that the business was sold, and on the following day brought the new tenant to the premises; a rather raffish middle-aged man who smelt strongly of beer and bore the name of Stokes.

"I have explained matters to Mr. Stokes," said Mr. Cohen, "and have asked him if he would care to take over your indentures; but I am sorry to say that he is not prepared to. However, I leave you to talk the matter over with him. Perhaps you can persuade him to change his mind. Meanwhile, here are your wages up to the end of the week, and I wish you good luck."

With this he departed, and I proceeded, forthwith, to try my powers of persuasion on Mr. Stokes. "It would pay you to take me on, sir," I urged. "You'd get a very cheap assistant. For, though I am only an apprentice, I have a good knowledge of the trade. I could do all the repairs quite competently. I can take a watch down and clean it; in fact, Mr. Abraham used to give me all the watches to clean."

I thought that would impress him, but it didn't. It merely amused him.

"My good lad," he chuckled, "you are all behind the times. We don't take watches down, nowadays, to clean 'em. We just take off the dial, wind 'em up, wrap 'em in a rag soaked in benzine, and put 'em in a tin box and let 'em clean, themselves."

I gazed at him in horror. "That doesn't seem a very good way, sir," I protested. "Mr. Abraham always took a watch down to clean it."

"Ha!" Mr. Stokes replied with a broad grin, "of course he would. That's how they used to do 'em at Ur of the Chaldees when he was serving his time. Hey? Haw haw! No, my lad. My wife and I can run this business. You'll have to look elsewhere for a billet."

"And about my bedroom, sir. Could you arrange to let me keep it for the present? I don't mean for nothing, of course."

"You can have it for half-a-crown a week until you have found another place. Will that do?"

I thanked him and accepted his offer; and that concluded our business, except that I spent an hour or two showing him where the various things were kept, and in stowing my tools and other possessions in my bedroom. Then I addressed myself to the problem of finding a new employer; and that very afternoon I betook myself to Clerkenwell and began a round of all the dealers and clock-makers to whom I was known.

It was the first of many a weary pilgrimage, and its experiences were to be repeated in them all. No one wanted a half-finished apprentice. My Clerkenwell friends were all master craftsmen and they employed only experienced journeymen, and the smaller tradesmen to whom the dealers referred me were mostly able to conduct their modest establishments without assistance. It was a miserable experience which, even now, I look back on with discomfort. Every morning I set out, with dwindling hope, to search unfamiliar streets for clockmakers' shops or to answer obviously inapplicable advertisements in the trade journals; and every evening I wended—not homewards, for I had no home—but to the hospitable common room of the Working Men's College, where, for a few pence, I could get a large cup of tea and a slab of buttered toast to supplement the scanty scraps of food that I had allowed myself during the day's wanderings. But presently even this was beyond my means, and I must needs, for economy, buy myself a half-quarter "household" loaf to devour in my cheerless bedroom to the accompaniment of a draught from the water-jug.

In truth, my condition was becoming desperate. My tiny savings—little more than a matter of shillings—were fast running out in spite of an economy in food which kept me barely above the starvation level. For I had to reserve the rent for my bedroom, that I might not be shelterless as well as famished, so long as any fraction of my little hoard remained. But as I counted the pitiful collection of shillings and sixpences at the bottom of my money-box—soon they needed no counting—I saw that even this was coming to an end and that I was faced by sheer destitution. Now and again the idea of applying for help to Aunt Judy or to Mr. Beeby drifted through my mind; but either from pride or obstinacy or some more respectable motive, I always put it away from me. I suppose that, in the end, I should have had to pocket my pride, or whatever it was, and make the appeal; but it was ordained otherwise.

My capital had come down to four shillings and sixpence, which included the rent for my bedroom due in five days' time, when I took a last survey of my position. The end seemed to be fairly in sight. In five days I should be penniless and starving, without even a night's shelter. I had sought work in every likely and unlikely place and failed ever to come within sight of it. Was there anything more to be done? Any possibility of employment that I had overlooked? As I posed the question again and again, I could find no answer but a hopeless negative. And then, suddenly, I thought of Mr. Parrish. He at least knew that I was a workman. Was it possible that he might find me something to do?

It was but a forlorn hope; for he was not a clock-maker, and of his trade I knew nothing. Nevertheless, no sooner had the idea occurred to me than I proceeded to give effect to it. Having smartened myself up as well as I could, I set forth for Oxford Market as briskly as if I had a regular appointment; and having the good luck to find him at home, put my case to him as persuasively as I was able in a few words.

He listened to me with his usual frown of impatience, and, when I had finished, replied in his customary gruff manner:

“But, my good lad, what do you expect of me? I am not a clock-maker and you are not an instrument-maker. You’d be no use to me.”

My heart sank, but I made one last, despairing effort. “Couldn’t you give me some odd jobs, sir, such as filing and polishing, to save the time of the skilled men? I shouldn’t want much in the way of wages.”

He began to repeat his refusal, more gruffly than before. And then, suddenly, he paused; and my heart thumped with almost agonized hope.

“I don’t know,” he said, slowly and with a considering air. “Perhaps I might be able to find you a job. I’ve just lost one of my two workmen and I’m rather short-handed at the moment. If you can use a file and know how to polish brass, I might give you some of the rough work to do. At any rate, I’ll give you a trial and see what you can do. But I can’t pay you a workman’s wages. You’ll have to be satisfied with fifteen shillings a week. Will that do for you?”

Would it do! It was beyond my wildest hopes. I could have fallen on his neck and kissed his boots (not simultaneously, though I was fairly supple in the joints in those days). Tremulously and gratefully, I accepted his terms, and would have said more, but he cut me short.

“Very well. You can begin work to-morrow morning at nine, and you’ll get your wages when you knock off on Saturday. That’s all. Off you go.”

I wished him “good morning!” and off I went, in an ecstasy of joy and relief reflecting incredulously on my amazing good fortune. Fifteen shillings a week! I could hardly believe that my ears had not deceived me. It was a competence. It was positive affluence.

But it was prospective affluence. My actual possessions amounted to four shillings and sixpence; but it was all my own, for the half-crown that had been ear marked for rent was now available for food. Still, this was Monday morning and wages were payable on Saturday night, so I should have to manage on nine pence a day until then. Well, that was not so bad. In those days, you could get a lot of food for ninepence if you weren’t too particular and knew where to go. At the cook’s shop in Carnaby Street where I used to buy Mr. Abraham’s mid-day meal and my own, we often fed sumptuously on sixpence apiece; and now the recollection of those simple banquets sent me hurrying thither, spurred on by ravenous hunger and watering at the mouth as imagination pictured that glorious, steamy window.

As I turned into Great Marlborough Street, I encountered Mr. Cohen, just emerging from the Police Court, where he did some practice as advocate. He stopped to ask what I was doing; and, when I had announced my joyful tidings, he went on to cross-examine me on my experiences of the last few weeks, listening attentively to my account of them and looking at me very earnestly.

“Well, Polton,” he said, “you haven’t been putting on a great deal of flesh. How much money have you got?”

I told him, and he rapidly calculated the possibilities of expenditure.

“Ninepence a day. You won’t fatten a lot on that. Where did you get the money?”

“I used to put by a little every week when I was at work, sir,” I explained; and I could see that my thrift commended itself to him.

“Wise lad,” said he, in his dry, legal way. “The men who grow rich are the men who spend less than they earn. Come and have a bit of dinner with me. I’ll pay,” he added, as I hesitated.

I thanked him most sincerely, for I was famished, as I think he had guessed, and together we crossed the road to a restaurant kept by a Frenchman named Paragot. I had never been in it, but had sometimes looked in with awe through the open doorway at the sybarites within, seated at tables enclosed in pews and consuming unimaginable delicacies. As we entered, Mr. Cohen paused for a few confidential words with the proprietor’s sprightly and handsome daughter, the purport of which I guessed when the smiling damsel deposited our meal on the table and I contrasted Mr. Cohen’s modest helping with the Gargantuan pile of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and baked potatoes which fairly bulged over the edge of my plate.

“Have a drop of porter,” said Mr. Cohen. “Do you good once in a way;” and, though I would sooner have had water, I thought it proper to accept. But if the taste of the beer was disagreeable, the pleasant pewter tankard in which it was served was a refreshment to the eye. And I think it really did me good. At any rate, when we emerged into Great Marlborough Street, I felt like a giant refreshed; which is something to say for a young man of four feet eleven.

As we stood for a moment outside the restaurant, Mr. Cohen put his hand in his pocket and produced a half sovereign.

“I’m going to lend you ten shillings, Polton,” said he. “Better take it. You may want it. You can pay me back a shilling a week. Pay at my office. If I am not there, give it to my clerk and make him give you a receipt. There you are. That’s all right. Wish you luck in your new job. So long.”

With a flourish of the hand, he bustled off in the direction of the Police Court, leaving me grasping the little gold coin and choking with gratitude to this—I was going to say “Good Samaritan”, but I suppose that would be a rather left-handed compliment to an orthodox Jew with the royal name of Cohen.

I spent a joyous afternoon rambling about the town and looking in shop windows, and, as the evening closed in, I repaired to a coffee-shop in Holborn and consumed a gigantic cup of tea and two thick slices of bread and butter ("pint of tea and two doorsteps", in the vernacular). Then I turned homeward, if I may use the expression in connection with a hired bedroom, resolving to get a long night's rest so as to be fresh for the beginning of my new labours in the morning.

---

## VII. INTRODUCES A KEY AND A CALENDAR

WHEN I entered the workshop which was to be the scene of my labours for the next few months, I found in it two other occupants: an elderly workman who was engaged at a lathe and a youth of about my own age who was filing up some brass object that was fixed in a vice. They both stopped work when I appeared, and looked at me with evident curiosity, and both greeted me in their respective ways; the workman with a dry "good morning", and the other with a most peculiar grin.

"You're the new hand, I suppose," the former suggested, adding, "I don't know what sort of a hand you are. Can you file flat?"

I replied that I could, whereupon he produced a rough plate of brass and handed it to me.

"There," said he, "that casting has got to be filed smooth and true and then it's got to be polished. Let's see what you can do with it."

Evidently, he had no extravagant expectations as to my skill, for he watched me critically as I put my tool-bag on the bench and selected a suitable file from my collection (but I could see that he viewed the bag with approval); and every few minutes he left his work to see how I was getting on. Apparently, the results of his observations were reassuring, for his visits gradually became less frequent, and finally he left me to finish the job alone.

During that first day I saw Mr. Parrish only once, for he did his own work in a small private workshop, which was always kept locked in his absence, as it contained a very precious dividing machine, with which he engraved the graduations on the scales of measuring instruments such as theodolites and sextants. This, with some delicate finishing and adjusting, was his province in the business, the larger, constructive work being done by his workmen. But on this occasion he came into the main workshop just before "knocking-off time" to hear the report on my abilities.

"Well, Kennet," he demanded in his gruff way, "How has your new hand got on? Any good?"

Mr. Kennet regarded me, appraisingly, and after a brief consideration, replied: "Yes, I think he'll do."

It was not extravagant praise; but Mr. Kennet was a man of few words. That laconic verdict established me as a permanent member of the staff.

In the days that followed, a quiet friendliness grew up between us. Not that Mr. Kennet was a specially prepossessing person. Outwardly a grey-haired, shrivel led, weasel-faced little man, dry and taciturn in manner and as emotionless as a potato, he had his kindly impulses, though they seldom came to the surface. But he was a first-class craftsman who knew his trade from A to Z, and measured the worth of other men in terms of their knowledge and skill. The liking that, from the first, he took to me, arose, I think, from his observation of my interest in my work and my capacity for taking pains. At any rate, in his undemonstrative way, he made me aware of his friendly sentiments, principally by letting me into the mysteries and secrets of the trade and giving me various useful tips from the storehouse of his experience.

My other companion in the workshop was the youth whom I have mentioned, who was usually addressed and referred to as Gus, which I took to represent Augustus. His surname was Haire, and I understood that he was some kind of relation of Mr. Parrish's; apparently a nephew, as he always spoke of Mr. Parrish as his uncle, though he addressed him as "Sir." His position in the workshop appeared to be that of a pupil, learning the business—as I gathered from him—with a view to partnership and succession. He lived on the premises, though he frequently went away for the week-ends to his home, which was at Malden in Essex.

The mutual liking of Mr. Kennet and myself found no counterpart in the case of Gus Haire. I took an instant distaste of him at our first meeting; which is rather remarkable, since I am not in the least addicted to taking sudden likes or dislikes. It may have been his teeth, but I hope not; for it would be unpardonable to allow a mere physical defect to influence one's judgment of a man's personal worth. But they were certainly rather unpleasant teeth and most peculiar. I have never seen anything like them, before or since. They were not decayed. Apparently, they were quite sound and strong, but they were covered with brown spots and mottlings which made them look like tortoise-shell. They were also rather large and prominent; which was unfortunate, as Gus was distinctly sensitive about them. Whence the remarkable grin which had so impressed me when we first met. It was habitual with him, and it startled me afresh every time. It began as a fine broad grin displaying the entire outfit of tortoise-shell. Then suddenly, he became conscious of his teeth, and in an instant the grin was gone. The effect was extraordinary, and not by any means agreeable.

Still, as I have said, I hope it was not the teeth that prejudiced me against him. There were other, and much better, reasons for my disliking him. But these developed later. My initial distaste of him may have been premonitory. In some unimaginable way, I seemed instinctively to have recognized an enemy.

As to his hardly-concealed dislike of me, I took it to be merely jealousy of Kennet's evident preference. For that thorough-going craftsman had no use for Gus. The lad was lazy, inattentive, and a superlatively bad workman; faults enough to damn him in Kennet's eyes. But there were other matters, which will transpire in their proper place.



In these early days I was haunted by constant anxiety as to the security of my position. There was really not enough for me to do. Mr. Parrish was getting on in years and some of his methods were rather obsolete. Newer firms with more up-to-date plant were attracting orders that would formerly have come to him, so that his business was not what it had been. But even of the work that was being done I could, at first, take but a small share. Later, when I had learned more of the trade, Kennet was able to turn over to me a good deal of his own work, so that I became, in effect, something like a competent journeyman. But in the first few weeks I often found myself with nothing to do, and was terrified lest Mr. Parrish should think that I was not earning my wage.

It was a dreadful thought. The idea of being set adrift once more to tramp the streets, hungry and despairing, became a sort of permanent nightmare. I worked with intense care and effort to learn my new trade and felt myself making daily progress. But still "Black Care rode behind the horseman". Something had to be done to fill up the hours of idleness and make me seem to be worth my pay. But what?

I began by taking down the workshop clock and cleaning it. Then I took off the lock of the workshop door, which had ceased to function, and made it as good as new; which seemed at the time to be a fortunate move, for, just as I was finishing it, Mr. Parrish came into the workshop and stopped to watch my proceedings.

"Ha!" said he, "so you are a locksmith, too. That's lucky, because I have got a job for you. The key of my writing-table has broken in the lock and I can't get the drawer open. Come and see what you can do with it."

I picked up my tool-bag and followed him to his workshop (which also served as an office), where he showed me the closed drawer with the stem of the broken key projecting about a quarter of an inch.

"There must be something wrong with the lock," said he, "for the key wouldn't turn, and when I gave it an extra twist it broke off. Flaw in the key, I expect."

I began by filing a small flat on the projecting stump, and then, producing a little hand-vice from my bag, applied it to the stump and screwed it up tight. With this I was able to turn the key a little backwards and forwards, but there was evidently something amiss with the lock, as it would turn no further. With my oiler, I insinuated a touch of oil on to the bit of the key and as much of the levers as I could reach and continued to turn the key to and fro, watched intently by Mr. Parrish and Gus (who had left his work to come and look on). At last, when I ventured to use a little more force, the resistance gave way and the key made a complete turn with an audible click of the lock.

As I withdrew the key, Mr. Parrish pulled out the drawer, which, as I saw, contained, among other things, a wooden bowl half-filled with a most untidy collection of mixed money: shillings, half-crowns, coppers, and at least two half-sovereigns. I looked with surprise at the disorderly heap and thought how it would have shocked poor Mr. Abraham.

"Well," said Mr. Parrish, "what's to be done? Can you make a new key?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, "or I could braze the old one together."

"No," he replied, "I've had enough of that key. And what about the lock?"

"I shall have to take that off in any case, because the ironmonger won't sell me a key-blank unless I show the lock. But it will have to be repaired."

"Very well," he agreed. "Take it off and get the job done as quickly as you can. I don't want to leave my cash-drawer unlocked."

I had the lock off in a few moments and took it away, with the broken key, to the workshop, where I spent a pleasant half-hour taking it to pieces, cleaning it, and doing the trifling repairs that it needed; and all the time, Gus Haire watched me intently, following me about like a dog and plying me with questions. I had never known him to be so interested in anything. He even accompanied me to the ironmonger's and looked on with concentrated attention while I selected the blank. Apparently, locksmithing was more to his taste than the making of philosophical instruments.

But the real tit-bit of the entertainment for him was the making of the new key. His eyes fairly bulged as he followed the details of the operation. I had in my bag a tin box containing a good-sized lump of stiff moulding-wax, which latter I took out, and, laying it on the bench, rolled it out flat with a file-handle. Then, on the flat surface, I made two impressions of the broken key, one of the profile of the bit and the other of the end, showing the hole in the "pipe"; and, having got my pattern, I fell to work on the blank. First, I drilled out the bore of the pipe, then I filed up the blank roughly to the dimensions with the aid of callipers, and, when I had brought it to the approximate size, I began carefully to shape the bit and cut out the "steps" for the levers, testing the result from time to time by fitting it into the impressions.

At length, when it appeared to fit both impressions perfectly, I tried it in the lock and found that it entered easily and turned freely to and fro, moving the bolt and levers without a trace of stiffness. Naturally, I was quite pleased at having got it right at the first trial. But my satisfaction was nothing compared with that of my watcher, who took the lock from me and turned the key to and fro with as much delight as if he had made it himself. Even Kennett, attracted by Gus's exclamations, left his work (he was making a reflecting level—just a simple mirror with a hole through it, mounted in a suspension frame) to come and see what it was all about.

But Gus's curiosity seemed now to be satisfied, for, when I took the lock and the new key to Mr. Parrish's workroom, he did not accompany me. Apparently, he was not interested in the mere refixing of the lock; whereas Mr. Parrish watched that operation with evident relief. When I had finished, he tried the key several times, first with the drawer open and then

with it closed, finally locking the drawer and pocketing the key with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Where's the broken key?" he demanded as I prepared to depart. "I'd better have that."

I ran back to the workshop, where I found Gus back at his vice, industriously filing something, and Kennet still busy with his level. The latter looked round at me as I released the key from the hand-vice, and I explained that I had forgotten to give the broken key to Mr. Parrish. He nodded and still watched me as I retired with it in my hand to return it to its owner; and when I came back to the workshop he put down his level and strolled across to my bench, apparently to inspect the slab of wax. I, also, inspected it, and saw at once that it was smaller than when I had left it; and I had no doubt that the ingenious Gus had "pinched" a portion of it for the purpose of making some private experiments. But I made no remark; and, having obliterated the key-impressions with my thumb, I peeled the wax off the bench, squeezed it up into a lump, and put it into my bag. Whereupon Kennet went back to his level without a word.

But my suspicions of Master Gus's depredations were confirmed a few days later when, Kennet and I happening to be alone in the workshop, he came close to me and asked, in a low tone: "Did you miss any of that wax of yours the other day?"

"Yes, I did; and I'm afraid I suspected that Gus had helped himself to a bit."

"You were right," said Kennet. "He cut a piece off and pocketed it. But before he cut it off, he made two impressions of the key on it. I saw him. He thought I didn't, because my back was turned to him. But I was working on that level, and I was able to watch him in the mirror."

I didn't much like this, and said so.

"More don't I," said Kennet. "I haven't said anything about it, because it ain't my concern. But it may be yours. So you keep a look-out. And remember that I saw him do it."

With this and a significant nod he went back to the lathe and resumed his work.

The hardly-veiled hint that "it might be my concern" was not very comfortable to reflect on, but there was nothing to be done beyond keeping my tool-bag locked and the key in my pocket, which I was careful to do; and as the weeks passed, and nothing unusual happened, the affair gradually faded out of my mind.

Meanwhile, conditions were steadily improving. I had now learned to use the lathe and even to cut a quite respectable screw, and, as my proficiency increased, and with it my value as a workman, I began to feel my position more secure. And even when there was nothing for me to do in the workshop, Mr. Parrish found me odd jobs about the house, repairing locks, cleaning his watch, and attending to the various clocks, so that I was still earning my modest wage. In this way I came by a piece of work which interested me immensely at the time and which had such curious consequences later that I venture to describe it in some detail.

It was connected with a long-case, or "grandfather" clock, which stood in Mr. Parrish's workroom a few feet from his writing-table. I suspect that it had not been cleaned within the memory of man, and, naturally, there came a time when dirt and dry pivots brought it to a standstill. Even then, a touch of oil would probably have kept it going for a month or two, but I made no such suggestion. I agreed emphatically with Mr. Parrish's pronouncement that the clock needed a thorough overhaul.

"And while you've got it to pieces," he continued, "perhaps you could manage to fit it with a calendar attachment. Do you think that would be possible?"

I pointed out that it had a date disc, but he dismissed that with contempt.

"Too small. Want a microscope to see it. No, no, I mean a proper calendar with the day of the week and the day of the month in good bold characters that I can read when I am sitting at the table. Can you do that?"

I suggested that the striking work would be rather in the way, but he interrupted: "Never mind the striking work. I never use it. I hate a jangling noise in my room. Take it off if it's in the way. But I should like a calendar if you could manage it."

Of course, there was no difficulty. A modification of the ordinary watch-calendar movement would have answered. But when I described it, he raised objections.

"How long does it take to change?" he asked.

"About half an hour, I should think. It changes during the night."

"That's no use," said he. "The date changes in an instant, on the stroke of midnight. A minute to twelve is, say, Monday; a minute after twelve is Tuesday. That ought to be possible. You make a clock strike at the right moment; why couldn't you do the same with a calendar? It must be possible."

It probably was; but no calendar movement known to me would do it. I should have to invent one on an entirely different principle if my powers were equal to the task. It was certainly a problem; but the very difficulty of it was an attraction, and in the end I promised to turn it over in my mind, and meanwhile I proceeded to take the clock out of its case and bear it away to the workshop. There, under the respectful observation of Gus and Mr. Kennet, I quickly took it down and fell to work on the cleaning operations; but the familiar routine hardly occupied my attention. As I worked, my thoughts were busy with the problem that I had to solve, and gradually my ideas began to take a definite shape. I saw, at once, that the

mechanism required must be in the nature of an escapement; that is to say, that there must be a constant drive and a periodical release. I must not burden the reader with mechanical details, but it is necessary that I should give an outline of the arrangement at which I arrived after much thought and a few tentative pencil drawings.

Close to the top of the door of the case I cut two small windows, one to show the date numbers and the other the days of the week. Below these was a third window for the months, the names of which were painted in white on a band of black linen which travelled on a pair of small rollers. But these rollers were turned by hand and formed no part of the mechanism. There was no use in complicating the arrangements for the sake of a monthly change.

And now for the mechanism itself! The names of the days were painted in white on a black drum, or roller, three inches in diameter, and the date numbers were painted on an endless black ribbon which was carried by another drum of the same thickness but narrower. This drum had at each edge seven little pins, or pegs; and the ribbon had, along each edge, a series of small eyelet holes which fitted loosely on the pins, so that, as the drum turned, it carried the ribbon along for exactly the right distance. Both drums were fixed friction-tight on a long spindle, which also carried at its middle a star wheel with seven long, slender teeth, and at its end a ratchet pulley over which ran a cord carrying the small driving-weight. Thus the calendar movement had its own driving-power and made no demands on that of the clock.

So much for the calendar itself; and now for its connection with the clock. The mechanism "took off" from the hour-wheel which carries the hour-hand and makes a complete turn in twelve hours, and which, in this clock, had forty teeth. Below this, and gearing with it, I fixed another wheel, which had eighty teeth, and consequently turned once in twenty-four hours. I will call this "the day-wheel." On this wheel I fixed, friction-tight, so that it could be moved round to adjust it, what clockmakers call a "snail"; which is a flat disc cut to a spiral shape, so that it looks like the profile of a snail's shell. Connecting the snail with the calendar was a flat, thin steel bar (I actually made it from the blade of a hack saw) which I will call "the pallet-bar." It moved on a pivot near its middle and had at its top end a small pin which rested against the edge of the snail and was pressed against it by a very weak spring. At its lower end it had an oblong opening with two small ledges, or pallets, for the teeth of the star-wheel to rest on. I hope I have made this fairly clear. And now let us see how it worked.

We will take the top end first. As the clock "went," it turned the snail round slowly (half as fast as the hour-hand); and as the snail turned, it gradually pushed the pin of the pallet-bar, which was resting against it, farther and farther from its centre, until the end of the spiral was reached. A little further turn and the pin dropped off the end of the spiral ("the step") down towards the centre. Then the pushing-away movement began again. Thus it will be seen that the rotation of the snail (once in twenty-four hours) caused the top end of the pallet-bar to move slowly outwards and then drop back with a jerk.

Now let us turn to the lower end of the pallet-bar. Here, as I have said, was an oblong opening, interrupted by two little projecting ledges, or pallets. Through this opening the star-wheel projected, one of its seven teeth resting (usually) on the upper pallet, and held there by the power of the little driving weight. As the snail turned and pushed the top end of the pallet-bar outwards, the lower end moved in the opposite direction, and the pallet slid along under the tooth of the wheel. When the tooth reached the end of the upper pallet, it dropped off on to the lower pallet and remained there for a few minutes. Then, when the pin dropped into the step of the snail, the lower pallet was suddenly withdrawn from under the tooth, which left the wheel free to turn until the next tooth was stopped by the upper pallet. Thus the wheel made the seventh of a revolution; but so, also, did the two drums which were on the same spindle, with the result that a new day and date number were brought to their respective windows; and the change occupied less than a second.

The above is only a rough sketch of the mechanism, omitting the minor mechanical details, and I hope it has not wearied the reader. To me, I need not say, the work was a labour of love which kept me supremely happy. But it also greatly added to my prestige in the workshop. Kennet was deeply impressed by it, and Gus followed the construction with the keenest interest and with a display of mechanical intelligence that rather surprised me. Even Mr. Parrish looked into the workshop from time to time and observed my progress with an approving grunt.

When the construction was finished, I brought the case into the workshop and there set the clock up—at first without the dial—to make the final adjustments. I set the snail to discharge at twelve noon, as midnight was not practicable, and the three of us used to gather round the clock as the appointed hour approached, for the gratification of seeing the day and date change in an instant at the little windows. When the adjustment was perfect, I stopped the clock at ten in the morning and we carried it in triumph to its usual abiding place, where, when I had tried the action to see that the tick was even, I once more stopped the pendulum and would have left it to the care of its owner. But Mr. Parrish insisted that I should come in in the evening and start it myself and further, that I should stay until midnight and see that the date did actually change at the correct moment. To which I agreed very readily; whereby I not only gained a supper that was a banquet compared with my customary diet and had the satisfaction of seeing the date change on the very stroke of midnight, but I received such commendations from my usually undemonstrative employer that I began seriously to consider the possibility of an increase in my wages in the not too distant future.

But, alas! the future had something very different in store for me.

---

## VIII. MR. PARRISH REMEMBERS

FOR a month or two after the agreeable episode just recounted, the stream of my life flowed on tranquilly and perhaps rather monotonously. But I was quite happy. My position in Mr. Parrish's establishment seemed fairly settled and I had the

feeling that my employer set some value on me as a workman. Not, however, to the extent of increasing my salary, though of this I still cherished hopes. But I did not dare to raise the question; for at least I had an assured livelihood, if a rather meagre one, and so great was my horror of being thrown out of employment that I would have accepted the low wage indefinitely rather than risk my security. So I worked on contentedly, poor as a church mouse, but always hoping for better times.

But at last came the explosion which blew my security into atoms. It was a disastrous affair and foolish, too; and what made it worse was that it was my own hand that set the match to the gunpowder. Very vividly do I recall the circumstances, though, at first, they seemed trivial enough. A man from a tool-maker's had come into the workshop to inspect a new slide-rest that his firm had fitted to the lathe. When he had examined it and pronounced it satisfactory, he picked up the heavy bag that he had brought and was turning towards the door when Mr. Parrish said:

"If you have got the account with you, I may as well settle up now."

The man produced the account from his pocket-book and handed it to Mr. Parrish, who glanced at it and then, diving into his coat-tail pocket, brought out a leather wallet (which I instantly recognized as an old acquaintance) and, extracting from it a five-pound note, handed the latter to the man in exchange for the receipt and a few shillings change. As our visitor put away the note, Mr. Parrish said to me: "Take Mr. Soames's bag, Polton, and carry it out to the cab."

I picked up the bag, which seemed to be filled with tool-makers' samples, and conveyed it out to the waiting "growler", where I stowed it on the front seat, and, waiting with the door open, saw Mr. Soames safely into the vehicle and shut him in. Returning into the house, I encountered Mr. Parrish, who was standing at the front door; and then it was that some demon of mischief impelled me to an act of the most perfectly asinine folly.

"I see, sir," I said with a fatuous smirk, "that you still carry your wallet in your coat-tail pocket."

He halted suddenly and stared at me with a strange, startled expression that brought me to my senses with a jerk. But it was too late. I saw that the fat was in the fire, though I didn't guess how much fat there was or how big was the fire. After a prolonged stare, he commanded, gruffly:

"Come into my room and tell me what you mean." I followed him in, miserably, and when he had shut the door, I explained:

"I was thinking, sir, of what the inspector at the police station said to you about carrying your wallet in your tail pocket. Don't you remember, sir?"

"Yes," he replied, glaring at me ferociously, "I remember. And I remember you, too, now that you have reminded me. I always thought that I had seen you before. So you are the young rascal who was found in possession of the stolen property."

"But I didn't steal it, sir," I pleaded.

"Ha!" said he. "So you said at the time. Very well. That will do for the present."

I sneaked out of the room very crest-fallen and apprehensive. "For the present!" What did he mean by that? Was there more trouble to come? I looked nervously in at the workshop, but as the other occupants had now gone to dinner, I took myself off and repaired to an a-la-mode beef shop in Oxford Market, where I fortified myself with a big basinful of the steaming compound and "topped up" with a halfpennyworth of apples from a stall in the market. Then I whiled away the remainder of the dinner hour rambling about the streets, trying to interest myself in shop windows, but unable to rid myself of the haunting dread of what loomed in the immediate future.

At length, as the last minutes of the dinner hour ran out, I crept back timorously, hoping to slink unnoticed along the passage to the workshop. But even as I entered, my forebodings were realized. For there was my employer, evidently waiting for me, and a glance at his face prepared me for instant dismissal. He motioned to me silently to follow him into his room, and I did so in the deepest dejection; but when I entered and found a third person in the room, my dejection gave place to something like terror. For that third person was Detective Sergeant Pitts.

He recognized me instantly, for he greeted me drily by name. Then, characteristically, he came straight to the point.

"Mr. Parrish alleges that you have opened his cash drawer with a false key and have, from time to time, taken certain monies from it. Now, before you say any thing, I must caution you that anything you may say will be taken down in writing and may be used in evidence against you. So be very careful. Do you wish to say anything?"

"Certainly I do," I replied, my indignation almost overcoming my alarm. "I say that I have no false key, that I have never touched the drawer except in Mr. Parrish's presence, and that I have never taken any money whatsoever."

The sergeant made a note of my reply in a large black note-book and then asked: "Is it true that you made a key to fit this drawer?"

"Yes, for Mr. Parrish; and he has that key and the broken one from which it was copied. I made no other key."

"How did you make that key? By measurements only, or did you make a squeeze?"

"I made a squeeze from the broken key, and, as soon as the job was finished, I destroyed it."

"That's what he says," exclaimed Mr. Parrish, "but it's a lie. He kept the squeeze and made another key from it."

The sergeant cast a slightly impatient glance at him and remarked, drily: "We are taking his statement," and continued:

"Now, Polton, Mr. Parrish says that he marked some, or all, of the money in that drawer with a P. scratched just behind the head. If you have got any money about you, perhaps you would like to show it to us."

"Like, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Parrish. "He'll have to be searched whether he likes it or not."

The sergeant looked at him angrily, but, as I proceeded to turn out my pockets and lay the contents on the table, he made no remark until Mr. Parrish was about to pounce on the coins that I had laid down, when he said, brusquely: "Keep your hands off that money, Mr. Parrish. This is my affair."

Then he proceeded to examine the coins, one by one, laying them down again in two separate groups. Having finished, he looked at me steadily and said:

"Here, Polton, are five coins: three half-crowns and a shilling and a sixpence. All the half-crowns are marked with a P. The other coins are not marked. Can you explain how you came by those half-crowns?"

"Yes, sir. I received them from Mr. Parrish when he paid me my wages last Saturday. He gave me four half-crowns, two shillings and a shilling; and he took the money from that drawer."

The sergeant looked at Mr. Parrish. "Is that correct?" he asked.

"I paid him his wages—fifteen shillings—but I don't admit that those are the coins I gave him."

"But," the sergeant persisted, "did you take the money from that drawer?"

"Of course I did," snapped Parrish. "It's my petty-cash drawer."

"And did you examine the coins to see whether they were marked?"

"I expect I did, but I really don't remember."

"He did not," said I. "He just counted out the money and handed it to me."

The sergeant gazed at my employer with an expression of bewilderment.

"Well, of all—" he began, and then stopped and began again: "But what on earth was the use of marking the money and then paying it out in the ordinary way?"

The question stumped Mr. Parrish for the moment. Then, having mumbled something about "a simple precaution", he returned to the subject of the squeeze and the key. But the sergeant cut him short.

"It's no use just making accusations without proof. You've got nothing to go on. The marked money is all bunkum, and as to the key, you are simply guessing. You've not made out any case at all."

"Oh, haven't I?" Parrish retorted. "What about that key and the lock that he repaired and the stolen money? I am going to prosecute him, and I call on you to arrest him now."

"I'm not going to arrest him," said the sergeant; "but if you still intend to prosecute, you'd better come along and settle the matter with the inspector at the station. You come, too, Polton, so that you can answer any questions."

Thus did history repeat itself. Once more, after five years, did I journey to the same forbidding destination in company with the same accuser and the guardian of the law. When we arrived at the police station and were about to enter, we nearly collided with a smartly dressed gentleman who was hurrying out, and whom I recognized as my late benefactor, Mr. Cohen. He recognized me at the same moment and stopped short with a look of surprise at the sergeant.

"Why, what's this, Polton?" he demanded. "What are you doing here?"

"He is accused by this gentleman," the sergeant explained, "of having stolen money from a drawer by means of a false key."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mr. Cohen. "Nonsense. He is a most respectable lad. I know him well and can vouch for his excellent character."

"You don't know him as well as I do," said Mr. Parrish, viciously.

Mr. Cohen turned on him a look of extreme disfavour and then addressed the sergeant.

"If there is going to be a prosecution, Sergeant, I shall undertake the defence. But I should like to have a few words with Polton and hear his account of the affair before the charge is made."

To this Mr. Parrish was disposed to object, muttering something about "collusion", but, as the inspector was engaged at the moment, the sergeant thrust my adviser and me into a small, empty room and shut the door. Then Mr. Cohen began to ply me with questions, and so skilfully were they framed that in a few minutes he had elicited, not only the immediate circumstances, but also the material antecedents, including the incident of the wax squeeze and Mr. Kennet's observations with the reflecting level. I had just finished my recital when the sergeant opened the door and invited us to step into the inspector's office.

Police officers appear to have astonishing memories. The inspector was the same one who had taken—or rather refused—the charge on my former visit, and I gathered that not only was his recognition of accused and accuser instantaneous, but

that he even remembered the circumstances in detail. His mention of the fact did not appear to encourage Mr. Parrish, who began the statement of his case in a rather diffident tone; but he soon warmed up, and finished upon a note of fierce denunciation. He made no reference to the marked coins, but the sergeant supplied the deficiency with a description of the incident to which the inspector listened with an appreciative grin.

"It comes to this, then," that officer summed up. "You have missed certain money from your cash-drawer and you suspect Polton of having stolen it because he is able to make a key."

"And a very good reason, too," Mr. Parrish retorted, defiantly.

"You have no proof that he did actually make a key?"

"He must have done so, or he wouldn't have been able to steal the money."

The inspector exchanged glances of intelligence with the sergeant and then turned to my adviser.

"Now, Mr. Cohen, you say you are acting for the accused. You have heard what Mr. Parrish has said. Is there any answer to the charge?"

"There is a most complete and conclusive answer," Mr. Cohen replied. "In the first place I can prove that Polton destroyed the wax squeeze immediately when he had finished the key. Further, I can prove that, while Polton was absent, trying the key in the lock, some other person abstracted a piece of the wax and made an impression on it with the broken key. He thought he was unobserved, but he was mistaken. Someone saw him take the wax and make the squeeze. Now, the person who made that squeeze was a member of Mr. Parrish's household, and so would have had access to Mr. Parrish's office in his absence."

"He wouldn't," Mr. Parrish interposed. "I always lock my office when I go away from it."

"And when you are in it," the inspector asked, "where is the key?"

"In the door, of course," Mr. Parrish replied impatiently.

"On the outside, where anyone could take it out quietly, make a squeeze and put it back. And somebody must have made a false key if the money was really stolen. The drawer couldn't have been robbed when you were in the office."

"That is exactly what I am saying," Mr. Parrish protested. "This young rogue made two keys, one of the door and one of the cash-drawer."

The inspector took a deep breath and then looked at Mr. Cohen.

"You say, Mr. Cohen, that you can produce evidence. What sort of evidence?"

"Absolutely conclusive evidence, sir," Mr. Cohen replied. "The testimony of an eye-witness who saw Polton destroy his squeeze and saw the other person take a piece of the wax and make the impression. If this case goes into Court, I shall call that witness and he will disclose the identity of that person. And then I presume that the police would take action against that person."

"Certainly," replied the inspector. "If Mr. Parrish swears that money was stolen from that drawer and you prove that some person, living in the house, had made a squeeze of the drawer-key, we should, naturally, charge that person with having committed the robbery. Can you swear, Mr. Parrish, that the money was really stolen and give particulars of the amounts?"

"Well," replied Mr. Parrish, mightily flustered by these new developments, "to the best of my belief—but if there is going to be a lot of fuss and scandal, perhaps I had better let the matter drop and say no more about it."

"That won't do, Mr. Parrish," my champion said, sharply. "You have accused a most respectable young man of a serious crime, and you have actually planted marked money on him and pretended that he stole it. Now, you have got, either to support that accusation—which you can't do, because it is false—or withdraw the charge unconditionally and acknowledge your mistake. If you do that, in writing, I am willing to let the matter drop, as you express it. Otherwise, I shall take such measures as may be necessary to establish my client's innocence."

The pretty obvious meaning of Mr. Cohen's threat was evidently understood, for my crestfallen accuser turned in dismay to the inspector with a mumbled request for advice; to which the officer replied, briskly:

"Well. What's the difficulty? You've been guessing, and you've guessed wrong. Why not do the fair thing and admit your mistake like a man?"

In the end, Mr. Parrish surrendered, though with a very bad grace; and when Mr. Cohen had written out a short statement, he signed it, and Sergeant Pitts attested the signature and Mr. Cohen bestowed the document in his wallet; which brought the proceedings to an end. Mr. Parrish departed in dudgeon; and I—when I had expressed my profound gratitude to Mr. Cohen for his timely help—followed him, in considerably better spirits than when I had arrived.

But as soon as I was outside the police station, the realities of my position came back to me. The greater peril of the false charge and possible conviction and imprisonment, I had escaped; but the other peril still hung over me. I had now to return to my place of employment, but I knew that there would be no more employment for me. Mr. Parrish was an unreasonable, obstinate man, and evidently vindictive. No generous regret for the false accusation could I expect, but rather an exacerbation of his anger against me. He would never forgive the humiliation that Mr. Cohen had inflicted on

him.

My expectations were only too literally fulfilled. As I entered the house, I found him waiting for me in the hail with a handful of silver in his fist.

"Ha!" said he, "so you have had the impudence to come back. Well, I don't want you here. I've done with you. Here are your week's wages, and now you can take yourself off."

He handed me the money and pointed to the door, but I reminded him that my tools were in the workshop and requested permission to go and fetch them.

"Very well," said he, "you can take your tools, and I will come with you to see that you don't take any thing else."

He escorted me to the workshop, where, as we entered, Kennet looked at us with undissembled curiosity, and Gus cast a furtive and rather nervous glance over his shoulder. Both had evidently gathered that there was trouble in the air.

"Now," said Mr. Parrish, "look sharp. Get your things together and clear out."

As the order was given, in a tone of furious anger, Gus bent down over his bench and Kennet turned to watch us with a scowl on his face that suggested an inclination to take a hand in the proceedings. But if he had had any such intention, he thought better of it, though he continued to look at me, gloomily, as I packed my bag, until Mr Parrish noticed him and demanded, angrily:

"What are you staring at, Kennet? Mind your own business and get on with your work."

"Polton got the sack?" asked Kennet.

"Yes, he has," was the gruff reply.

"What for?" Kennet demanded with equal gruffness.

"That's no affair of yours," Parrish replied. "You attend to your own job."

"Well," said Kennet, "you are sending away a good workman, and I hope he'll get a better billet next time. So long, mate." and with this he turned back sulkily to his lathe, while I, having now finished packing my bag, said "good-bye" to him and was forthwith shepherded out of the workshop.

As I took my way homeward—that is, towards Foubert's Place—I reflected on the disastrous change in my condition that a few foolish words had wrought. For I could not disguise from myself the fact that my position was even worse than it had been when poor Mr. Abraham's death had sent me adrift. Then, I had a reasonable explanation of my being out of work, Just now I should not dare to mention my last employer. I had been dismissed on suspicion of theft. It was a false suspicion and its falsity could be proved. But no stranger would go into that question. The practical effect was the same as if I had been guilty. I should have to evade any questions as to my last employment.

A review of my resources was not more encouraging. I had nine shillings left from my last wages and the fifteen shillings that Mr. Parrish had just paid me, added to which was a small store in my money-box that I had managed to put by from week to week. I knew the amount exactly, and, casting up the entire sum of my wealth, found that the total was two pounds, three shillings and sixpence. On that I should have to subsist and pay my rent until I should obtain some fresh employment; and the ominous question as to how long it would last was one that I did not dare to consider.

When I had put away my tool-bag in the cupboard and bestowed the bulk of my money in the cash-box, I took a long drink from the water-jug to serve in lieu of tea and set forth towards Clerkenwell to use what was left of the day in taking up once more the too-familiar quest.

---

## IX. STORM AND SUNSHINE

OVER the events of the succeeding weeks I shall pass as lightly as possible. There is no temptation to linger or dwell in detail on these dismal recollections, which could be no more agreeable to read than to relate. Nevertheless, it is necessary that I should give at least a summary account of them, since they were directly connected with the most important event of my life.

But it was a miserable time, repeating in an intensified form all the distressing features of that wretched interregnum that followed Mr. Abraham's death. For then I had at least begun my quest in hope, whereas now something like despair haunted me from the very beginning. I knew from the first how little chance I had of finding employment, especially since I could not venture to name my last employer; but that difficulty never arose, for no one ever entertained my application. The same old obstacle presented itself every time: I was not a qualified journeyman, but only a half-time apprentice.

Still I went on doggedly, day after day, trapesing the streets until I think I must have visited nearly every clockmaker in London and a number of optical-instrument makers as well; and as the days passed, I looked forward with ever-growing terror to the inevitable future towards which I was drifting. For my little store of money dwindled steadily. From the first I had cut my food down to an irreducible minimum.

Tea and butter I never tasted; but even a loaf of bread with an occasional portion of cheese, or a faggot or a polony, cost something; and there was the rent to pay at the end of every week. Each night, as I counted anxiously the shrinking

remainder which stood between me and utter destitution, I saw the end drawing ever nearer and nearer.

Meanwhile, my distress of mind must have been aggravated by my bodily condition; for though the meagre scraps of food that I doled out to myself with miserly thrift were actually enough to support life, I was in a state of semi-starvation. The fact was obvious to me, not only from the slack way in which my clothes began to hang about me, but from the evident signs of bodily weakness. At first I had been able to tramp the streets for hours at a time without resting, but now I must needs seek, from time to time, some friendly doorstep or window-ledge to rest awhile before resuming my fruitless journeyings.

Occasionally, as I wandered through the streets, realizing the hopelessness of my quest, there passed through my mind vaguely the idea of seeking help from some of my friends: from Mr. Beeby or Mr. Cohen, or even Aunt Judy. But always I put it off as a desperate measure only to be considered when everything else had failed; and Aunt Judy I think I never considered at all. I had last written to her just after I had finished the calendar: a buoyant, hopeful letter, conveying to her the impression that a promising future was opening out to me, as I indeed believed. She would be quite happy about me, and I could not bear to think of the bitter disappointment and disillusionment that she would suffer if I were to disclose the dreadful reality. Besides, she and dear, honest Uncle Sam were but poor people, living decently, but with never a penny to spare. How could I burden them with my failure? It was not to be thought of.

But, in fact, as the time ran on, I seemed to become less capable of thought. My alarm at the approaching catastrophe gave place to a dull, fatalistic despair almost amounting to indifference. Even when I handed Mr. Stokes my last half-crown for rent—in advance—and knew that another week would see me without even a night's shelter, I seemed unable clearly to envisage the position. There still remained an uncounted handful of coppers. I was not yet penniless.

But there was something more in my condition than mere mental dulness. At intervals I became aware of it myself. Not only did my thoughts tend to ramble in a confused, dreamlike fashion, mingling objective realities with things imagined; I was conscious of bodily sensations that made me suspect the onset of definite illness: a constant, distressing headache, with attacks of shivering (though the weather was warm) and a feeling as if a stream of icy water were being sprayed on my back. And now the gnawing hunger from which I had suffered gave place to an intense repugnance to food. On principle, I invested the last but one of my pence in a polony. But I could not eat it; and when I had ineffectively nibbled at one end, I gave up the attempt and put it in my pocket for future use. But I had a craving for a drink of tea, and my last penny was spent at a coffee-shop, where I sat long and restfully in the old-fashioned "pew" with a big mug of the steaming liquor before me.

That is my last connected recollection of this day. Whither I went after leaving the coffee-shop I have no idea. Hour after hour I must have wandered aimlessly through the streets, for the night had fallen when I found myself sitting on the high step of a sheltered doorway with my aching head supported by my hands. A light rain was pattering down on the pavement, and no doubt it was to escape this that I had crept into the doorway. But I do not remember. Indeed, my mind must have been in a very confused state, for I seemed to wake up as from a dream or a spell of unconsciousness when a light shone on me and a voice addressed me.

"Now, young fellow, you can't sit there. You must move on."

I raised my head and received the full glare of the lantern in my face, which caused me instantly to close my eyes. There was a short pause, and then the voice resumed, persuasively: "Come, now, my lad, up you get."

With the aid of my hands on the step, I managed to rise a little way, but then sank down again with my back against the door. There was another pause, during which the policeman—now faintly visible—stooped over me for a closer inspection. Then a second voice interposed: "What's this? He can't be drunk, a kid like that."

"No, he isn't," the first officer replied. He grasped my wrist, gently, in a very large hand, and exclaimed: "God! The boy's red-hot. Just feel his wrist."

The other man did so and brought his lantern to bear on me. Then they both stood up and held a consultation of which I caught only a few stray phrases such as, "Yes, Margaret's is nearest," and, finally, "All right. Run along to the stand and fetch one. Four-wheeler, of course."

Here, one of the officers disappeared, and the other, leaning over me, asked in a kindly tone what my name was and where I lived. I managed to answer these questions, the replies to which the officer entered in a book, but the effort finished me, and I dropped forward again with my head in my hands. Presently a cab drew up opposite the doorway, and the two officers lifted me gently and helped me into it, when I saw by the light of its lamps that they were a sergeant and a constable. The latter got in with me and slammed the door with a bang that seemed like the blow of a hammer on my head, and the cab rattled away noisily, the jar of its iron tyres on the granite setts shaking me most abominably.

Of that journey I have but the haziest recollection. I know that I huddled in the corner with my teeth chattering, but I must have sunk into a sort of stupor, for I can recall nothing more than a muddled, dream like, consciousness of lights and people, of being lifted about and generally discommoded, of having my clothes taken off, and, finally, of being washed by a white-capped woman with a large sponge—a proceeding that made my teeth chatter worse than ever.

Thenceforward time ceased to exist for me. I must have lain in a dull, torpid condition with occasional intervals of more definite consciousness. I was dimly aware that I was lying in a bed in a large, light room in which there were other people, and which I recognized as a hospital ward. But mostly my mind was a blank, conscious only of extreme bodily discomfort



and a dull headache that never left me a moment of ease.

How long I continued in this state, indifferent to, and hardly conscious of my surroundings, but always restless, weary and suffering, I have no idea (excepting from what I was told afterwards). Days and nights passed uncounted and unperceived, and the memory of that period which remains is that of a vague, interminable dream.

The awakening came, I think, somewhat suddenly. At any rate, I remember a day when I, myself, was conscious of a change. The headache and the restlessness had gone, and with them the muddled, confused state of mind. I was now clearly aware of what was going on around me, though too listless to take particular notice, lying still with my eyes closed or half-closed, in a state of utter exhaustion, with a sensation of sinking through the bed. Vaguely, the idea that I was dying presented itself; but it merely floated through my mind without arousing any interest. The effort even of thinking was beyond my powers.

In the afternoon of this day the physician made his periodical visit. I was aware of droning voices and the tread of many feet as he and the little crowd of students moved on from bed to bed, now passing farther away and now coming nearer. Presently they reached my bed, and I opened my eyes sleepily to look at them. The physician was a short, pink-faced gentleman with upstanding silky white hair and bright blue eyes. At the moment he was examining the chart and case paper and discussing them with a tall, handsome young man whom I recognized as one of the regular disturbers of my peace. I took no note of what they were saying until he handed the chart-board to a white-capped lady (another of the disturbers) with the remark: "Well, Sister, the temperature is beginning to remit, but he doesn't seem to be getting any fatter."

"No, indeed," the sister replied. "He is an absolute skeleton, and he's most dreadfully weak. But he seems quite sensible to-day."

"H'm. Yes," said the physician. Then, addressing the students, he continued: "A rather difficult question arises. We are in a dilemma. If we feed him too soon we may aggravate the disease and send his temperature up; if we don't feed him soon enough we may—well, we may feed him too late. And in this case there is the complication that the patient was apparently in a state of semi-starvation when he was taken ill; so he had no physiological capital to start with. Now, what are we to do? Shall we take the opinion of the learned house physician?" He smiled up at the tall young gentleman and continued: "You've had him under observation, Thorndyke. Tell us what you'd do."

"I should take what seems to be the lesser risk," the house physician replied, promptly, "and begin feeding him at once."

"There!" chuckled the physician. "The oracle has spoken, and I think we agree. We usually do agree with Mr. Thorndyke; and when we don't, we're usually wrong. Ha! ha! What? Very well, Thorndyke. He's your patient, so you can carry out your own prescription."

With this, the procession moved on to the next bed; and I closed my eyes and relapsed into my former state of dreamy half-consciousness. From this, however, I was presently aroused by a light touch on my shoulder and a feminine voice addressing me.

"Now, Number Six, wake up. I've brought you a little supper, and the doctor says you are to take the whole of it."

I opened my eyes and looked sleepily at the speaker, a pleasant-faced, middle-aged nurse who held in one hand a glass bowl, containing a substance that looked like pomade, and in the other a spoon; and with the latter she began to insinuate very small quantities of the pomade into my mouth, smilingly ignoring my feeble efforts to resist. For though the taste of the stuff was agreeable enough, I still had an intense repugnance to food and only wanted to be left alone. But she was very patient and very persistent, giving me little rests and then rousing me up and coaxing me to make another effort. And so, I suppose, the pomade was at last finished; but I don't know, for I must have fallen asleep and must have slept several hours, since it was night when I awoke and the ward was in semi-darkness. But the pomade had done its work. The dreadful sinking feeling had nearly gone and I felt sufficiently alive to look about me with a faintly-awakening interest; which I continued to do until the night sister espied me and presently bore down on me with a steaming bowl and a feeding cup.

"Well, Number Six," said she, "you've had quite a fine, long sleep, and now you are going to have some nice, hot broth; and perhaps, when you have taken it, you'll have another sleep." Which turned out to be the case, for though I recall emptying the feeding-cup, I remember nothing more until I awoke to find the sun light streaming into the ward and the nurse and Mr. Thorndyke standing beside my bed.

"This is better, Number Six," said the latter. "They tell me you have been sleeping like a dormouse. How do you feel this morning?"

I replied in a ridiculous whisper that I felt much better; at which he smiled, pleasantly, and remarked that it was the first time he had heard my voice, "if you can call it a voice," he added. Then he felt my pulse, took my temperature, and, having made a few notes on the case-paper, departed with another smile and a friendly nod.

I need not follow my progress in detail. It was uninterrupted, though very slow. By the end of the following week my temperature had settled down and I was well on my way to recovery. But I was desperately weak and wasted to a degree of emaciation that I should have supposed to be impossible in a living man. However, this seemed to be a passing phase, for now, so far from feeling any repugnance to food, I hailed the appetizing little meals that were brought to me with voracious joy.

As my condition improved, Mr. Thorndyke's visits tended to grow longer. When the routine business had been

dispatched, he would linger for a minute or two to exchange a few words with me (very few on my side and mostly playful or facetious on his) before passing on to the next bed; and whenever, during the day or night, he had occasion to pass through the ward, if I were awake, he would always greet me, at least, with a smile and a wave of the hand. Not that he specially singled me out for these attentions, for every patient was made to feel that the house physician was interested in him as a man and not merely as a "case".

Nevertheless, I think there was something about me that attracted his attention in a particular way, for on several occasions I noticed him looking me over in an appraising sort of fashion, and I thought that he seemed especially interested in my hands. And apparently I was right, as I learned one afternoon when, having finished his round, he came and sat down on the chair by my bedside to talk to me. Presently he picked up my right hand, and, holding it out before him, remarked:

"This is quite a lady-like hand, Polton;" (he had dropped "Number Six") "very delicate and soft. And yet it is a good, serviceable hand, and I notice that you use it as if you were accustomed to do skilled work with it. Perhaps I am wrong; but I have been wondering what your occupation is. You are too small for any of the heavy trades."

"I am a clockmaker, sir," I replied, "but I have put in some time at cabinet-making and I have had a turn at making philosophical instruments, such as levels and theodolites. But clockmaking is my proper trade."

"Then," said he, "Providence must have foreseen that you were going to be a clockmaker and furnished you with exactly the right kind of hands. But you seem to have had a very varied experience, considering your age."

"I have, sir, though it wasn't all of my own choosing. I had to take the job that offered itself, and when no job offered, it was a case of wearing out shoe-leather."

"Ha!" said he, "and I take it that you had been wearing out a good deal of shoe-leather at the time when you were taken ill."

"Yes, sir. I had been having a very bad time."

I suppose I spoke somewhat dismally, for it had suddenly dawned on me that I should leave the hospital penniless and with worse prospects than ever. He looked at me thoughtfully, and; after a short pause, asked: "Why were you not able to get work?"

I considered the question and found it difficult to answer; and yet I wanted to explain, for something told me that he would understand and sympathize with my difficulties, and we all like to pour our troubles into sympathetic ears.

"There were several reasons, sir, but the principal one was that I wasn't able to finish my apprenticeship. But it's rather a long story to tell to a busy gentleman."

"I'm not a busy gentleman for the moment," said he with a smile. "I've finished my work for the present; and I shall be a very interested gentleman if you care to tell me the story. But perhaps you would rather not recall those bad times."

"Oh, it isn't that, sir. I should like to tell you if it wouldn't weary you."

As he once more assured me of his interest in my adventures and misadventures, I began, shyly and awkwardly, to sketch out the history of my apprenticeship, with scrupulous care to keep it as short as possible. But there was no need. Not only did he listen with lively interest; but when I became unduly sketchy he interposed with questions to elicit fuller details, so that, becoming more at my ease, I told the little story of my life in a consecutive narrative, but still keeping to the more significant incidents. The last, disastrous, episode, however, I related at length—mentioning no names except that of Mr. Cohen—as it seemed necessary to be circumstantial in order to make my innocence perfectly clear; and I was glad that I did so, for my listener followed that tragedy of errors with the closest attention.

"Well, Polton," he said when I had brought the narrative up to date, "you have had only a short life, but it has been a pretty full one—a little too full, at times. If experience makes men wise, you should be bursting with wisdom. But I do hope you have taken in your full cargo of that kind of experience."

He looked at his watch, and, as he rose, remarked that he must be getting back to duty; and having thanked me for "my most interesting story," walked quickly but silently out of the ward, leaving me with a curious sense of relief at having unburdened myself of my troubles to a confessor so kindly and sympathetic.

That, however, was not the last of our talks, for thenceforward he adopted the habit of making me little visits, sitting on the chair by my bedside and chatting to me quite familiarly without a trace of patronage. It was evident that my story had greatly interested him, for he occasionally put a question that showed a complete recollection of all that I had told him. But more commonly he drew me out on the subject of clocks and watches. He made me explain, with drawings, the construction and mode of working of a gravity escapement and the difference between a chronometer and a lever watch. Again, he was quite curious on the subject of locks and keys and of instruments such as theodolites, of which he had no experience; and though mechanism would seem to be rather outside the province of a doctor, I found him very quick in taking in mechanical ideas and quite keen on acquiring the little items of technical knowledge that I was able to impart.

But these talks, so delightful to me, came to a rather sudden end, at least for a time; for one afternoon, just as he was leaving me, he announced: "By the way, Polton, you will be handed over to a new house physician tomorrow. My term of office has come to an end." Then, observing that I looked rather crestfallen, he continued: "However, we shan't lose sight of each other. I am taking charge of the museum and laboratory for a week or two while the curator is away, and, as the

laboratory opens on the garden, where you will be taking the air when you can get about, I shall be able to keep an eye on you."

This was some consolation for my loss, and something to look forward to, and it begot in me a sudden eagerness to escape from bed and see what I could do in the way of walking. Apparently, I couldn't do much; for when the sister, in response to my entreaties, wrapped me in a dressing-gown, and, with a nurse's aid, helped me to totter to the nearest armchair, I sat down with alacrity, and, at the end of half an hour, was very glad to be conducted back to bed.

It was not a very encouraging start, but I soon improved on it. In a few days I was crawling about the ward unassisted, with frequent halts to rest in the armchair; and by degrees the rests grew shorter and less frequent, until I was able to pace up and down the ward quite briskly. And at last came the joyful day when the nurse produced my clothes (which appeared to have been cleaned since I last saw them) and help me to put them on; and, it being a warm, sunny morning, the sister graciously acceded to my request that I might take a little turn in the garden.

That was a red-letter day for me. Even now I recall with pleasure the delightful feeling of novelty with which I took my journey downwards in the lift, swathed in a dressing-gown over my clothes and fortified by a light lunch (which I devoured, wolfishly), and the joy with which I greeted the sunlit trees and flower-beds as the nurse conducted me along a path and deposited me on a seat. But better still was the sight of a tall figure emerging from the hospital and advancing with long strides along the path. At the sight of him my heart leaped, and I watched him anxiously lest he should take another path and pass without seeing me. My eagerness surprised me a little at the time; and now, looking back, I ask myself how it had come about that Mr. Thorndyke was to me so immeasurably different from all other men. Was it some prophetic sense which made me dimly aware of what was to be? Or could it be that I, an insignificant, ignorant lad, had somehow instinctively divined the intellectual and moral greatness of the man? I cannot tell. In a quiet, undemonstrative way he had been gracious, kindly and sympathetic; but beyond this there had seemed to be a sort of magnetism about him which attracted me, so that to the natural respect and admiration with which I regarded him was unaccountably added an actual personal devotion.

Long before he had drawn near, he saw me and came straight to my seat. "Congratulations, Polton," he said, cheerfully, as he sat down beside me. "This looks like the beginning of the end. But we mustn't be impatient, you know. We must take things easily and not try to force the pace."

He stayed with me about five minutes, chatting pleasantly, but principally in a medical strain, advising me and explaining the dangers and pitfalls of convalescence from a severe and exhausting illness. Then he left me, to go about his business in the laboratory, and I followed him with my eyes as he entered the doorway of a range of low buildings. But in a few moments he reappeared, carrying a walking-stick, and, coming up to my seat, handed the stick to me.

"Here is a third leg for you, Polton," said he; "a very useful aid when the natural legs are weak and unsteady. You needn't return it. It is an ancient derelict that has been in the laboratory as long as I have known the place."

I thanked him, and, as he returned to the laboratory, I rose and took a little walk to try the stick, and very helpful I found it; but even if I had not, I should still have prized the simple ash staff for the sake of the giver, as I have prized it ever since. For I have it to this day; and the silver band that I put on it bears the date on which it was given.

A few days later Mr. Thorndyke overtook me as I was hobbling along the path with the aid of my "third leg."

"Why, Polton," he exclaimed, "you are getting quite active and strong. I wonder if you would care to come and have a look at the laboratory."

I grasped eagerly at the offer, and we walked together to the building and entered the open doorway—left open, I presumed when I was inside, to let out some of the smell. The premises consisted of the laboratory proper, a large room with a single long bench and a great number of shelves occupied by stoppered glass jars of all sizes, mostly filled with a clear liquid in which some very queer-looking objects were suspended (one, I was thrilled to observe, was a human hand). On the lower shelves were ranged great covered earthenware pots which I suspected to be the source of the curious, spirituous odour. Beyond the laboratory was a work room furnished with a lathe, two benches and several racks of tools.

When he had shown me round, Mr. Thorndyke seated me in a Windsor armchair close to the bench where he was working at the cutting, staining and mounting of microscopical sections for use in the medical school. When I had been watching him, for some time, he looked round at me with a smile.

"I suspect, Polton," said he, "that you are itching to try your hand at section-mounting. Now, aren't you?"

I had to confess that I was; whereupon he, most good-naturedly, provided me with a glass bowl of water and a pile of watch-glasses and bade me go ahead, which I did with the delight of a child with a new toy. Having cut the sections on the microtome and floated them off into the bowl, I carried out the other processes in as close imitation of his methods as I could, until I had a dozen slides finished.

"Well, Polton," said he, "there isn't much mystery about it, you see. But you are pretty quick at learning—quicker than some of the students whom I have to teach."

He examined my slides with the microscope, and, to my joy, pronounced them good enough to go in with the rest; and he was just beginning to label them when I perceived, through the window, the nurse who had come to shepherd the patients in to dinner. So, with infinite regret, I tore myself away, but not until I had been rejoiced by an invitation to come again on the morrow.

The days that followed were among the happiest of my life. Every morning—and, later, every afternoon as well—I presented myself at the laboratory and was greeted with a friendly welcome. I was allowed to look on at, and even to help in, all kinds of curious, novel and fascinating operations. I assisted in the making of a plaster cast of a rickety boy's deformed legs; in the injecting with carmine gelatine of the blood-vessels of a kidney; and in the cutting and mounting of a section of a tooth. Every day I had a new experience and learned something fresh; and in addition was permitted and encouraged to execute repairs in the workroom on various invalid instruments and appliances. It was a delightful time. The days slipped past in a dream of tranquil happiness.

I have said "the days," but I should rather have said the hours that I spent in the laboratory. They were hours of happiness unalloyed. But with my return to the ward came a reaction. Then I had to face the realities of life, to realize that a dark cloud was rising, ever growing darker and more threatening. For I was now convalescent; and this was a hospital, not an almshouse. My illness was over and it was nearly time for me to go. At any moment now I might get my discharge; and then—but I did not dare to think of what lay before me when I should go forth from the hospital door into the inhospitable streets.

At last the blow fell. I saw it coming when, instead of sending me out to the garden, the sister bade me stay by my bed when the physician was due to make his visit. So there I stood, watching the procession of students moving slowly round the ward with the feelings of a condemned man awaiting the approach of the executioner. Finally, it halted opposite my bed. The physician looked at me critically, spoke a few kindly words of congratulation, listened to the sister's report, and, taking the chart-board from her, wrote a few words on the case paper, returned the board to her and moved on to the next bed!

"When do I go out, Sister?" I asked, anxiously, as she replaced the board on its peg.

She evidently caught and understood the note of anxiety, for she replied very gently, with a quick glance at my downcast face, "The day after to-morrow," and turned away to rejoin the procession.

So the brief interlude of comfort and happiness was over and once more I must go forth to wander, a wretched Ishmaelite, through the cheerless wilderness. What I should do when I found myself cast out into the street, I had no idea. Nor did I try to form any coherent plan. The utter hopelessness of my condition induced a sort of mental paralysis, and I could only roam about the garden (whither I had strayed when sentence had been pronounced) in a state of vague, chaotic misery. Even the appetizing little supper was swallowed untasted, and, for the first time since the dawn of my convalescence, my sleep was broken and troubled.

On the following morning I presented myself as usual at the laboratory. But its magic was gone. I pottered about in the workroom to finish a repairing job that I had on hand, but even that could not distract me from the thought that I was looking my last on this pleasant and friendly place. Presently, Mr. Thorndyke came in to look at the instrument that I was repairing—it was a rocking microtome—but soon transferred his attention from the instrument to me.

"What's the matter, Polton?" he asked: "You are looking mighty glum. Have you got your discharge?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. "I am going out to-morrow."

"Ha!" said he, "and from what you have told me, I take it that you have nowhere to go."

I admitted, gloomily, that this was the case.

"Very well," said he. "Now I have a little proposal that I want you to consider. Come and sit down in the laboratory and I'll tell you about it."

He sat me in a Windsor armchair, and, seating himself on the bench stool, continued: "I am intending to set up in practice; not in an ordinary medical practice, but in that branch of medicine that is connected with the law and is concerned with expert medical and scientific evidence. For the purposes of my practice I shall have to have a laboratory, somewhat like this, with a workshop attached; and I shall want an assistant to help me with the experimental work. That assistant will have to be a skilled mechanic, capable of making any special piece of apparatus that may be required, and generally handy and adaptable. Now, from what you have told me and what I have seen for myself I judge that you would suit me perfectly. You have a working knowledge of three crafts, and I have seen that you are skilful, painstaking and quick to take an idea, so I should like to have you as my assistant. I can't offer much of a salary at first, as I shall be earning nothing, myself, for a time, but I could pay you a pound a week to begin with, and, as I should provide you with food and a good, big bed sitting room, you could rub along until something better turned up. What do you say?"

I didn't say anything. I was speechless with emotion, with the sudden revulsion from black despair to almost delirious joy. My eyes filled and a lump seemed to rise in my throat.

Mr. Thorndyke evidently saw how it was with me, and, by way of easing the situation, he resumed: "There is one other point. Mine will be a bachelor establishment. I want no servants; so that, if you come to me, you would have to render a certain amount of personal and domestic services. You would keep the little household in order and occasionally prepare a meal. In fact, you would be in the position of my servant as well as laboratory assistant. Would you object to that?"

Would I object! I could have fallen down that instant and kissed his boots. What I did say was that I should be proud to be his servant and only sorry that I was not more worthy of that honourable post.

"Then," said he, "the bargain is struck; and each of us must do his best to make it a good bargain for the other."

He then proceeded to arrange the details of my assumption of office, which included the transfer of five shillings “to chink in my pocket and pay the cabman,” and, when all was settled, I went forth, at his advice, to take a final turn in the garden; which I did with a springy step and at a pace that made the other patients stare.

As I entered the ward, the sister came up to me with a rather troubled face.

“When you go out to-morrow, Number Six, what are you going to do? Have you any home to go to?”

“Yes, Sister,” I replied, triumphantly. “Mr. Thorndyke had just engaged me as his servant.”

“Oh, I am so glad,” she exclaimed. “I have been rather worried about you. But I am quite happy now, for I know that you will have the very best of masters.”

She was a wise woman, was that sister.

I pass over the brief remainder of my stay in hospital. The hour of my discharge, once dreaded, but now hailed with joy, came in the middle of the forenoon; and, as my worldly goods were all on my person, no preparations were necessary. I made the round of the ward to say farewell to my fellow-patients, and, when the sister had given me a hearty handshake (I should have liked to kiss her), I was conducted by the nurse to the secretary’s office and there formally discharged. Then, pocketing my discharge ticket, I made my way to the main entrance and presented myself at the porter’s lodge.

“Ah!” said the porter when I had introduced myself “so you are Mr. Thorndyke’s young man. Well, I’ve got to put you into a hansom and see that you know where to go. Do you?”

“Yes,” I answered, producing the card that my master had given me and reading from it. “The address is ‘Dr. John Thorndyke, 5A King’s Bench Walk, Inner Temple, London, E.G.’”

“That’s right,” said he; “and remember that he’s Doctor Thorndyke now. We call him Mister because that’s the custom when a gentleman is on the junior staff, even if he is an M.D. Here’s a hansom coming in, so we shan’t have to fetch one.”

The cab came up the courtyard and discharged its passenger at the entrance, when the porter hailed the driver, and, having hustled me into the vehicle, sang out the address to which I was to be conveyed and waved his hand to me as we drove off and I returned his salutation by raising my hat.

I enjoyed the journey amazingly, surveying the busy streets over the low doors with a new pleasure and thinking how cheerful and friendly they looked. I had never been in a hansom before and I suppose I never shall again. For the hansom is gone; and we have lost the most luxurious and convenient passenger vehicle ever devised by the wit of man.

That cabman knew his business. Londoner as I was, the intricacies of his route bewildered me completely; and when he came to the surface, as it were, in Chancery Lane, which I recognized, he almost immediately finished me off by crossing Fleet Street and passing through a great gateway into a narrow lane bordered by ancient timber houses. Half-way down this lane he turned into another, at the entrance to which I read the name, “Crown Office Row,” and this ended in a great open square surrounded by tall houses. Here I was startled by a voice above my head demanding:

“You said Five A, didn’t you?”

I looked up, and was astonished to behold a face looking down on me through a square opening in the roof; but I promptly answered “Yes,” whereupon the face vanished and I saw and heard a lid shut down, and a few moments later the cab drew up opposite the portico of a house on the eastern side of the square. I hopped out, and, having verified the number, asked the cabman what there was to pay; to which he replied, concisely, “Two bob,” and, leaning down, held out his hand. It seemed a lot of money, but, of course, he knew what his fare was, so, having handed up the exact amount, I turned away and stepped into the entry, on the jamb of which was painted: “First pair, Dr. John Thorndyke.”

The exact meaning of this inscription was not quite clear to me, but as the ground floor was assigned to another person, I decided to explore the staircase; and having ascended to the first-floor landing, was reassured by observing the name “Dr. Thorndyke” painted in white lettering over a doorway, the massive, iron-bound door of which was open, revealing an inner door garnished by a small and very tarnished brass knocker. On this I struck a single modest rap, when the door was opened by Dr. Thorndyke, himself.

“Come in, Polton,” said he, smiling on me very kindly and shaking my hand. “Come into your new home—which is my home, too; and I hope it will be a happy one for us both. But it will be what we make it. Perhaps, if your journey hasn’t tired you, you would like me to show you over the premises.”

I said that I was not tired at all, so he led me forth at once and we started to climb the stairs, of which there were four flights to the third-floor landing.

“I have brought you to the top floor,” said the Doctor, “to introduce you to your own domain. The rest of the rooms you can explore at your leisure. This is your bedroom.”

He threw open a door, and when I looked in I was struck dumb with astonishment and delight. It was beyond my wildest dreams—a fine, spacious room with two windows, furnished in a style of which I had no previous experience. A handsome carpet covered the floor, the bed surpassed even the hospital beds, there were a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, a set of book shelves, a large table by one of the windows and a small one beside the bed, a fine easy chair and two other chairs. It was magnificent. I had thought that only noblemen lived in such rooms. And yet it was a very picture of homely comfort.

I was struggling to express my gratitude when the Doctor hustled me down to the second floor to inspect the future laboratory and workshop. At present they were just large, empty rooms, but the kitchen was fully furnished and in going order, with a gas-cooker and a dresser filled with china, and the empty larder was ready for use.

"Now," said the Doctor, "I must run off to the hospital in a few minutes, but there are one or two matters to settle. First, you will want some money to fit yourself out with clothes. I will advance you ten pounds for that purpose. Then, until we are settled down, you will have to get your meals at restaurants. I will give you a couple of pounds for those and any stores that you may lay in, and you will keep an account and let me know when you want any more money. And remember that you are a convalescent, and don't stint your diet. I think that is all for the present except the latch-keys, which I had better give you now."

He laid the money and the two keys on the table, and was just turning to go when it occurred to me to ask if I should get an evening meal prepared for him. He looked at me with a smile of surprise and replied: "You're a very enterprising convalescent, Polton, but you mustn't try to do too much at first. No, thank you. I shall dine in the board-room to-night and get home about half-past nine."

When he had gone, I went out, and, having taken a substantial lunch at a restaurant near Temple Bar, proceeded to explore the neighbourhood with a view to household stores. Eventually I found in Fetter Lane enough suitable shops to enable me to get the kitchen and the larder provided for a start, and, having made my purchases, hurried home to await the delivery of the goods. Then I spent a delightful afternoon and evening rambling about the house, planning the work shop, paying repeated visits to my incomparable room, and inaugurating the kitchen by preparing myself an enormous high tea; after which, becoming extremely sleepy, I went down and paced up and down the Walk to keep myself awake.

When The Doctor came home I would have expounded my plans for the arrangement of the workshop. But he cut me short with the admonition that convalescents should be early birds, and sent me off to bed; where I sank at once into a delicious slumber and slept until it was broad daylight and a soft-toned bell informed me that it was seven o'clock.

This day is the last that I shall record; for it saw the final stage of that wonderful transformation that changed the old Nathaniel Polton, the wretched, friendless outcast, into the pampered favourite of Fortune.

When I had given the Doctor his breakfast (which he praised, warmly, but begged me to remember in future that he was only one man) and seen him launched on his way to the hospital, I consumed what he had left on the dish—one fried egg and a gammon rasher—and, having tidied up the Doctor's bedroom and my own, went forth to wind up the affairs of Polton, the destitute, and inaugurate Polton, the opulent; to "ring out the old and ring in the new". First, I visited a "gentlemen's outfitters", where I purchased a ready-made suit of a sober and genteel character (I heard the shopman whisper something about "medium boy's size") and other garments appropriate to it, including clerical grey socks, a pair of excellent shoes and a soft felt hat. The parcel being a large and heavy one I bought a strong rug-strap with which to carry it, and so was able, with an occasional rest, to convey it to Foubert's Place, where I proposed to settle any arrears of rent that Mr. Stokes might claim. However, he claimed none, having let my room when I failed to return. But he had stored my property in an attic, from which he very kindly assisted me to fetch it, so that I had, presently, the satisfaction of seeing all my worldly goods piled up on the counter: the tool-chest that I had made in Mr. Beeby's workshop, my whole collection of clockmaker's tools, and my beloved books, including Mr. Denison's invaluable monograph. When they were all assembled, I went out and chartered a four-wheeled cab, in which I stowed them all—chest, tools, books, and the enormous parcel from the out-fitters. Then I bade Mr. Stokes a fond farewell, gave the cabman the address (at which he seemed surprised; and I am afraid that I was a rather shabby little ragamuffin) shut myself in the cab and started for home.

Home! I had not known the word since Aunt Judy and Uncle Sam had flitted away out of my ken. But now, as the cab rattled over the stones until it made my teeth chatter, I had before me the vision of that noble room in the Temple which was my very own, to have and to hold in perpetuity, and the gracious friend and master whose presence would have turned a hovel into a mansion.

As soon as we arrived, I conveyed my goods—in relays—upstairs; and when I had paid off the cabman, I proceeded to dispose of them. The tools I deposited in the future workshop as the first instalment of its furnishing, the books and parcel I carried up to my own apartment. And there the final scene was enacted. When I had arranged my little library lovingly in the bookshelves, I opened the parcel and laid out its incredible contents on the bed. For a while I was so overcome by their magnificence that I could only gloat over them in ecstasy. I had never had such clothes before, and I felt almost shy at their splendour. However, they were mine, and I was going to wear them; and so reflecting, I proceeded boldly to divest myself of the threadbare, frayed and faded habiliments that had served me so long until I had stripped to the uttermost rag (and rag is the proper word). Then I inducted myself cautiously into the new garments, finishing up (in some discomfort) with a snowy and rather stiff collar, a silk neck-tie, and the sober but elegant black coat.

For quite a long time I stood before the mirror in the wardrobe door surveying, with something of amused surprise and a certain sense of unreality, the trimly-dressed gentleman who confronted me. At length, I turned away with a sigh of satisfaction, and, having carefully put away the discarded clothing for use in the workshop, went down to await the Doctor's return.

And here I think I had better stop, leaving Dr. Jervis to relate the sequel. Gladly would I go on—having now got into my stride—to tell of my happy companionship with my beloved master, and how he and I fitted out the workshop, and then, working on our joiner's bench, gradually furnished the laboratory with benches and shelves. But I had better not. My tale is told; and now I must lay down my pen and hold my peace. Yet still I love to look back on that wonderful morning in the

hospital laboratory when a few magical words banished in an instant the night of my adversity and ushered in the dawn.

But it was not only the dawn; it was the sunrise. And the sun has never set. A benevolent Joshua has ordained that I shall live the days of my life in perpetual sunshine; and that Joshua's name is John Thorndyke.

---

## PART II. THE CASE OF MOXDALE DECEASED.

*Narrated by Christopher Jervis, M.D.*

---

### X. FIRE

To an old Londoner, the aspect of the town in the small hours of the morning, in “the middle watch” as those dark hours are called in the language of the mariner, is not without its attractions. For however much he may love his fellow-creatures, it is restful, at least for a time, to take their society in infinitesimal doses, or even to dispense with it entirely, and to take one’s way through the empty and silent streets free to pursue one’s own thoughts undistracted by the din and hurly-burly that prevail in the daylight hours.

Thus I reflected as I turned out of Marylebone Station at about half-past two in the morning, and, crossing the wide, deserted road, bore away south-east in the direction of the Temple. Through what side streets I passed I cannot remember, and in fact never knew, for, in the manner of the born-and-bred Londoner, I simply walked towards my destination without consciously considering my route. And as I walked in a silence on which my own footfalls made an almost startling impression, I looked about me with something like curiosity and listened for the occasional far-off sounds which told of some belated car or lorry wending its solitary way through some distant street.

I was approaching the neighbourhood of Soho and passing through a narrow street lined by old and rather squalid houses, all dark and silent, when my ear caught a sound which, though faint and far-away, instantly attracted my attention: the clang of a bell, not rung, but struck with a hammer and repeating the single note in a quick succession of strokes—the warning bell of a fire-engine. I listened with mild interest—it was too far off to concern me—and compared the sound with that of the fire-engines of my young days. It was more distinctive, but less exciting. The bell gave its message plainly enough, but it lacked that quality of urgency and speed that was conveyed by the rattle of iron tyres on the stones and the sound of galloping horses.

Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. The sound was more distinct. Then the engine must be coming my way; and even as I noted the fact, the clang of another bell rang out from the opposite direction, and suddenly I became aware of a faintly pungent smell in the air. Then, as I turned a corner, I met a thin cloud of smoke that was drifting up the street and noticed a glow in the sky over the house-tops; and presently, reaching another corner, came into full view of the burning house, though it was still some distance away, near the farther end of the street.

I watched it with some surprise as I walked quickly towards it, for there seemed to be something unusual in its appearance. I had not seen many burning houses but none that I had seen had looked quite like this one. There was a furious intensity in the way that it flared up that impressed me as abnormal. From the chimneys, flames shot up like the jets from a gas-blowpipe, and the windows emitted tongues of fire that looked as if they were being blown out by bellows. And the progress of the fire was frightfully rapid, for even in the short time that it took me to walk the length of the street there was an evident change. Glowing spots began to appear in the roof flames poured out of the attic windows, and smoke and flame issued from the ground floor, which seemed to be some kind of shop.

No crowd had yet collected, but just a handful of chance wayfarers like myself and a few policemen, who stood a little distance away from the house, looking on the scene of destruction and listening anxiously to the sounds of the approaching engines, now quite near and coming from several different directions.

“It’s a devil of a blaze,” I remarked to one of the constables. “What is it? An oil-shop?”

“It’s worse than that, sir,” he replied. “It’s a film dealer’s. The whole place chock full of celluloid films. It’s to be hoped that there isn’t anybody in the house, but I’m rather afraid there is. The caretaker of the offices next door says that there is a gentleman who has rooms on the first floor. Poor look-out for him if he is in there now. He will be burned to a cinder by this time.”

At this moment the first of the engines swung round the corner and swept up to the house with noiseless speed, discharging its brass-helmeted crew, who began immediately to prepare for action: opening the water-plugs, rolling out lengths of hose, and starting the pumps. In a minute or two, four other engines arrived, accompanied by a motor fire-escape; but the latter, when its crew had glanced at the front of the house, was trundled some distance up the street out of the way of the engines. There was obviously no present use for it, nor did there seem to be much left for the engines to do, for, almost at the moment when the first jet of water was directed at the flaming window-space, the roof fell in with a crash and a roar, a volume of flame and sparks leaped up into the sky, and through the holes which had once been windows an uninterrupted sheet of fire could be seen from the top of the house to the bottom. Evidently, the roof in its fall, had carried away what had been left of the floors, and the house was now no more than an empty shell with a mass of flaming debris at its base.

Whether the jets of water that were directed in through the window-holes had any effect, or whether the highly inflammable material had by this time all been burnt, I could not judge, but, after the fall of the roof, the fire began almost suddenly to die down, and a good deal of the firemen’s attention became occupied by the adjoining house, which had already suffered some injury from the fire and now seemed likely to suffer more from the water. But in this I was not



greatly interested, and, as the more spectacular phase of the disaster seemed to have come to an end, I extricated myself from the small crowd that had now collected and resumed my progress towards the Temple and the much-desired bed that awaited me there.

To a man who has turned in at past four o'clock in the morning, competition with the lark is not practicable. It was getting on for eleven when I emerged from my bedroom and descended the stairs towards the breakfast-room, becoming agreeably conscious of a subtle aroma which memory associated with bacon and coffee.

"I heard you getting up, sir," said Polton with a last, satisfied glance at the breakfast-table, "and I heard you come in last night, or rather this morning, so I have cooked an extra rasher. You did make a night of it, sir."

"Yes," I admitted, "it was rather a late business, and what made me still later was a house on fire some where near Soho which I stopped for a while to watch. A most tremendous blaze. A policeman told me that it was a celluloid film warehouse, so you can imagine how it flared up."

I produced this item of news designedly, knowing that it would be of interest; for Polton, the most gentle and humane of men, had an almost morbid love of the horrible and the tragic. As I spoke, his eyes glistened, and he commented with a sort of ghoulish relish: "Celluloid films! And a whole warehouse full of them, too! It must have been a fine sight. I've never seen a house on fire—not properly on fire; only just smoke and sparks. Was there a fire-escape?"

"Yes, but there was nothing for it to do. The house was like a furnace."

"But the people inside, sir. Did they manage to get out in time?"

"It's not certain that there was anybody in the house. I heard something about a gentleman who had rooms there, but there was no sign of him. It is not certain that he was there, but if he was, he is there still. We shall know when the firemen and salvage men are able to examine the ruins."

"Ha!" said Polton, "there won't be much of him left. Where did you say the place was, sir?"

"I can't tell you the name of the street, but it was just off Old Compton Street. You will probably see some notice of the fire in the morning paper."

Thereupon, Polton turned away as if to go in search of the paper, but at the door he paused and looked back at me.

"Speaking of burning houses, sir," said he, "Mr. Stalker called about half an hour ago. I told him how things were, so he said he would probably look in again in an hour's time. If he does, will you see him downstairs or shall I bring him up?"

"Oh, bring him up here. We don't make a stranger of Mr. Stalker."

"Yes, sir. Perhaps he has come to see you about this very fire."

"He could hardly have got any particulars yet," said I. "Besides, fire insurance is not in our line of business."

"No, sir," Polton admitted; "but it may be about the gentleman who had the rooms. A charred body might be in your line if they happen to know that there is one among the ruins."

I did not think it very likely, for there had hardly been time to ascertain whether the ruins did or did not contain any human remains. Nevertheless, Polton's guess turned out to be right; for when Stalker (having declined a cup of coffee and then explained, according to his invariable custom, that he happened to be passing this way and thought he might as well just look in) came to the point, it appeared that his visit was concerned with the fire in Soho.

"But, my dear Stalker," I protested, "we don't know anything about fires."

"I know," he replied with an affable smile. "The number of things that you and Thorndyke don't know anything about would fill an encyclopaedia. Still, there are some things that you do know. Perhaps you have forgotten that fire at Brattle's oil-shop, but I haven't. You spotted something that the fire experts had overlooked."

"Thorndyke did. I didn't until he pointed it out."

"I don't care which of you spotted it," said he. "I only know that, between you, you saved us two or three thousand pounds."

I remembered the case quite well, and the recollection of it seemed to justify Stalker's attitude.

"What do you want us to do?" I asked.

"I want you just to keep an eye on the case. The question of fire-raising will be dealt with by the Brigade men and the Salvage Corps. They are experts and they have their own methods. You have different methods and you bring a different sort of expert eye to bear on the matter."

"I wonder," said I, "why you are so Nosey-Parkerish about this fire. There hasn't been time for you to get any particulars."

"Indeed!" said he. "We don't all stay in bed until eleven o'clock. While you were slumbering I was getting a report and making enquiries."

"Ha!" I retorted. "And while you were slumbering I was watching your precious house burning; and I must say that it did you credit."

Here, in response to his look of surprise, I gave him a brief account of my morning's adventure.

"Very well," said he when I had finished. "Then you know the facts and you can understand my position. Here is a house, full of inflammable material, which unaccountably bursts into flames at three o'clock in the morning. That house was either unoccupied or had a single occupant who was presumably in bed and asleep, as he apparently made no attempt to escape."

I offered a vague suggestion of some failure of the electric installation such as a short circuit or other accident, but he shook his head.

"I know that such things are actually possible," said he, "but it doesn't do to accept them too readily. A man who has been in this business as long as I have acquires a sort of intuitive perception of what is and what is not a normal case; and I have the feeling that there is something a little queer about this fire. I had the same feeling about that oil-shop case, which is why I asked Thorndyke to look into it. And then there are rumours of a man who was sleeping in the house. You heard those yourself. Now, if that man's body turns up in the debris, there is the possibility of a further claim, as there was in the oil-shop case."

"But, my dear Stalker!" I exclaimed, grinning in his face. "This is foresight with a vengeance. This fire may have been an incendiary fire. There may have been a man sleeping in the house and he may have got burned to death; and that man may have insured his life in your Society. How does that work out by the ordinary laws of chance? Pretty long odds, I think."

"Not so long as you fancy," he replied. "Persons who lose their lives in incendiary fires have a tendency to be insured. The connection between the fire and the death may not be a chance connection. Still, I will admit that, beyond a mere suspicion that there may be something wrong about this fire, I have nothing to go on. I am asking you to watch the case 'ex abundantia cautelarum' as you lawyers say. And the watching must be done now while the evidence is available. It's no use waiting until the ruins have been cleared away and the body—if there is one—buried."

"No," I agreed; "Thorndyke will be with you in that. I will give him your instructions when I see him at lunch-time, and you can take it that he won't lose any time in collecting the facts. But you had better give us something in writing, as we shall have to get authority to inspect the ruins and to examine the body if there is one to examine."

"Yes," said Stalker, "I'll do that now. I have some of our letter-paper in my case."

He fished out a sheet, and, having written a formal request to Thorndyke to make such investigations as might be necessary in the interests of the Griffin Assurance Company, handed it to me and took his departure. As his footsteps died away on the stairs, Polton emerged from the adjacent laboratory and came in to clear away the breakfast-things. As he put them together on the tray, he announced:

"I've read the account of the fire, sir, in the paper, but there isn't much more than you told me. Only the address—Billington Street, Soho."

"And now," said I, "you would like to go and have a look at it, I suppose?"

"Well," he admitted, "it would be interesting after having heard about it from you. But you see, sir, there's lunch to be got ready. The Doctor had his breakfast a bit earlier than you did, and not quite so much of it."

"Never mind about lunch," said I. "William can see to that." (William, I may explain, was a youth who had lately been introduced to assist Polton and relieve him of his domestic duties; and a very capable under-study he had proved. Nevertheless, Polton clung tenaciously to what he considered his privilege of attending personally to "The Doctor's" wants, which, in effect, included mine.) "You see, Polton," I added by way of overcoming his scruples, "one of us ought to go, and I don't want to. But The Doctor will want to make an inspection at the earliest possible moment and he will want to know how soon that will be. At present, the ruins can't have cooled down enough for a detailed inspection to be possible, but you could find out from the man in charge how things are and when we could make our visit. We shall want to see the place before it has been considerably disturbed, and, if there are any human remains, we shall want to know where the mortuary is."

On this Polton brightened up considerably. "Of course, sir," said he, "if it could be of any use, I should like to go; and I think William will be able to manage, as it is only a cold lunch."

With this he retired, and a few minutes later I saw him from the window hurrying along Crown Office Row, carefully dressed and carrying a fine, silver-topped cane and looking more like a dignitary of the Church than a skilled artificer.

When Thorndyke came in, I gave him an account of Stalker's visit as well as of my own adventure.

"I don't quite see," I added, "what we can do for him or why he is in such a twitter about this fire."

"No," he replied. "But Stalker is enormously impressed by our one or two successes and is inclined to over-estimate our powers. Still, there seem to be some suspicious features in the case, and I notice, on the placards, a rumour that a man was burned to death in the fire. If that is so, the affair will need looking into more narrowly. But we shall hear more about that when Polton comes back."

We did. For when, just as we had finished lunch, our deputy returned, he was able to give us all the news up to the latest developments. He had been fortunate enough to meet Detective Sergeant Wills, who was watching the case for the police, and had learned from him that a body had been discovered among the debris, but that there was some mystery about its

identity, as the tenant of the rooms was known to be away from home on a visit to Ireland. But it was not a mere matter of hearsay, for Polton had actually seen the body brought out on a stretcher and had followed it to the mortuary.

"You couldn't see what its condition was, I suppose?" said I.

"No, sir," he replied, regretfully. "Unfortunately, it was covered up with a waterproof sheet."

"And as to the state of the ruins; did you find out how soon an examination of them will be possible?"

"Yes, sir. I explained matters to the Fire Brigade officer and asked him when you would be able to make your inspection. Of course, everything is too hot to handle just now. They had the greatest difficulty in getting at the corpse; but the officer thought that by to-morrow morning they will be able to get to work, and he suggested that you might come along in the forenoon."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that will do. We needn't be there very early, as the heavier material—joists and beams and the debris of the roof—will have to be cleared away before we shall be able to see anything. We had better make our visit to the mortuary first. It is possible that we may learn more from the body than from the ruins. At any rate, it is within our province, which the ruins are not."

"Judging from what I saw," said I, "there will be mighty little for anyone to learn from the ruins. When the roof fell, it seemed to go right through to the basement."

"Will you want anything got ready, sir?" Polton asked, a little anxiously.

Thorndyke apparently noted the wistful tone, for he replied: "I shall want you to come along with us, Polton; and you had better bring a small camera with the adjustable stand. We shall probably want photographs of the body, and it may be in an awkward position."

"Yes, sir," said Polton. "I will bring the extension as well; and I will put out the things that you are likely to want for your research-case."

With this, he retired in undissembled glee, leaving us to discuss our arrangements.

"You will want authorities to examine the body and the ruins," said I. "Shall I see to them? I have nothing special to do this afternoon."

"If you would, Jervis, it would be a great help," he replied. "I have some work which I should like to finish up, so as to leave to-morrow fairly free. We don't know how much time our examinations may take."

"No," said I, "especially as you seem to be taking the case quite seriously."

"But, my dear fellow," said he, "we must. There may be nothing in it at all, but, in any case, we have got to satisfy Stalker and do our duty as medico-legal advisers to The Griffin."

With this he rose and went forth about his business, while I, having taken possession of Stalker's letter, set out in quest of the necessary authorities.

---

## XI. THE RUINS

IN the medico-legal mind the idea of horror, I suppose, hardly has a place. It is not only that sensibilities tend to become dulled by repeated impacts, but that the emotions are, as it were, insulated by the concentration of attention on technical matters. Speaking, however, dispassionately, I must admit that the body which had been disinterred from the ruins of the burned house was about as horrible an object as I had ever seen. Even the coroner's officer, whose emotional epidermis might well have grown fairly tough, looked at that corpse with an undisguised shudder, while as to Polton, he was positively appalled. As he stood by the table and stared with bulging eyes at the dreadful thing, I surmised that he was enjoying the thrill of his life. He was in a very ecstasy of horror.

To both these observers, I think, Thorndyke's proceedings imparted an added touch of gruesomeness; for my colleague—as I have hinted—saw in that hideous object nothing but a technical problem, and he proceeded in the most impassive and matter-of-fact way to examine it feature by feature and note down his observations as if he were drawing up an inventory. I need not enter into details as to its appearance. It will easily be imagined that a body which had been exposed to such intense heat that not only was most of its flesh reduced to mere animal charcoal, but the very bones, in places, were incinerated to chalky whiteness, was not a pleasant object to look on. But I think that what most appalled both Polton and the officer was the strange posture that it had assumed: a posture suggesting some sort of struggle or as if the man had been writhing in agony or shrinking from a threatened attack. The body and limbs were contorted in the strangest manner, the arms crooked, the hands thrust forward, and the skeleton fingers bent like hooks.

"Good Lord, sir!" Polton whispered, "how the poor creature must have suffered! And it almost looks as if someone had been holding him down."

"It really does," the coroner's officer agreed; "as if somebody was attacking him and wouldn't let him escape."

"It does look rather horrid," I admitted, "but I don't think you need worry too much about the position of the limbs. This contortion is almost certainly due to shrinkage of the muscles after death as the heat dried them. What do you think,

Thorndyke?"

"Yes," he agreed. "It is not possible to draw any conclusions from the posture of a body that has been burned to the extent that this has, and burned so unequally. You notice that, whereas the feet are practically incinerated, there are actually traces of the clothing on the chest; apparently a suit of pyjamas, to judge by what is left of the buttons."

At this moment the door of the mortuary opened to admit a newcomer, in whom we recognized a Dr. Robertson, the divisional surgeon and an old acquaintance of us both.

"I see," he remarked, as Thorndyke laid down his tape-measure to shake hands, "that you are making your examination with your usual thoroughness."

"Well," Thorndyke replied, "the relevant facts must be ascertained now or never. They may be of no importance, but one can't tell that in advance."

"Yes," said Robertson, "that is a sound principle. In this case, I don't much think they are. I mean data in proof of identity, which are what you seem to be collecting. The identity of this man seems to be established by the known circumstances, though not so very clearly, I must admit."

"That seems a little obscure," Thorndyke remarked. "Either the man's identity is known, or it isn't."

The divisional surgeon smiled. "You are a devil for accuracy, Thorndyke," said he, "but you are quite right. We aren't here to make guesses. But the facts as to the identity appear to be pretty simple. From the statement of Mr. Green, the lessee of the house, it seems that the first-floor rooms were let to a man named Gustavus Haire, who lived in them, and he was the only person resident in the house; so that, when the business premises closed down for the day and the employees went home, he had the place to himself."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "do we take it that this is the body of Mr. Gustavus Haire?"

"No," replied Robertson, "that is where the obscurity comes in. Mr. Haire has—fortunately for him—gone on a business visit to Dublin, but, as Mr. Green informs us, during his absence he allowed a cousin of his, a Mr. Cecil Moxdale, to occupy the rooms, or at least to use them to sleep in to save the expense of an hotel. The difficulty is that Moxdale was not known personally to Mr. Green, or to anybody else, for that matter. At present, he is little more than a name. But, of course, Haire will be able to give all the necessary particulars when he comes back from Ireland."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "but meanwhile there will be no harm in noting the facts relevant to the question of identity. The man may have made a will, or there may be other reasons for establishing proof of his identity independently of Haire's statements. I have made notes of the principal data, but I am not very happy about the measurements. The contorted state of the body makes them a little uncertain. I suggest that you and Jervis take a set of measurements each, independently, and that we compare them afterwards."

Robertson grinned at me, but he took the tape measure without demur and proceeded quite carefully to take the principal dimensions of the contorted body and the twisted limbs, and, when he had finished, I repeated the measurements, noting them down in my pocket-book. Then we compared our respective findings—which were in substantial agreement—and Thorndyke copied them all down in his note-book.

"When you came in, Robertson," said he, "we were discussing the posture of the body, and we had concluded that the contortion was due to shrinkage and had no significance. Do you agree?"

"I think so. It is not an unusual condition, and I don't see what significance it could have. The cause of death is practically established by the circumstances. But it certainly is a queer posture. The head especially. The man looks as if he had been hanged."

"He does," Thorndyke agreed, "and I want you to take a careful look at the neck. I noticed Jervis looking at it with a good deal of interest. Has my learned friend formed any opinion?"

"The neck is certainly dislocated," I replied, "and the odontoid process is broken. I noted that, but I put it down to the effects of shrinkage of the neck muscles, and possibly to some disturbance when the body was moved."

Robertson stooped over the body and examined the exposed neck-bones narrowly, testing the head for mobility and finding it quite stiff and rigid.

"Well," said he, "the neck is undoubtedly broken, but I am inclined to agree with Jervis, excepting that, as the neck is perfectly rigid, I don't think that the dislocation could have been produced by the moving of the body. I should say that it is the result of shrinkage; in fact, I don't see how else it could have been caused, having regard to the circumstances in which the body was found."

Thorndyke looked dissatisfied. "It always seems to me," said he, "that when one is examining a particular fact, it is best to forget the circumstances; to consider the fact without prejudice and without connection with anything else, and then, as a separate proceeding, to relate it to the circumstances."

The divisional surgeon chuckled. "This," said he, "is what the Master instils into his pupils. And quite right, too. It is sound doctrine. But still, you know, we must be reasonable. When we find the body of a man among the debris of a house which has been burned out, and the evidence shows that the man was the only occupant of that house, it seems a little pedantic to enquire elaborately whether he may not have died from the effects of manual strangulation or homicidal

hanging.”

“My point,” Thorndyke rejoined, as a parting shot, “is that our function is to ascertain the objective facts, leaving their interpretation to the coroner and his jury. Looking at that odontoid process, I find that the appearance of the fragments where the break took place is more consistent with the fracture having occurred during life than after death and during the subsequent shrinkage. I admit that I do not see how the fracture can have happened in the known—or assumed—circumstances, and I further admit that the appearances are not at all decisive.”

I took another careful look at the fractured bone and was disposed to agree with Thorndyke; but I had also to agree with Robertson when he closed the discussion with the remark: “Well, Thorndyke, you may be right, but in any case the point seems to be of only academic interest. The man was alone in the house, so he couldn’t have died from homicide; and I have never heard of anyone committing suicide by dislocating his neck.”

Nevertheless, he joined us in a very thorough examination of the body for any other traces of injury (of which I need hardly say there were none) and for any distinctive appearances which might help to determine the identity in case the question should arise. I noticed him closely examining the teeth, and as they had already attracted my attention, I asked: “What do you make of those teeth? Is that roughening and pitting of the enamel due to the heat, or to some peculiarity of the teeth, themselves?”

“Just what I was wondering,” he replied. “I think it must be the result of the fire, for I don’t recognize it as a condition that I have ever seen on living teeth. What do you think, Thorndyke?”

“I am in the same position as yourself,” was the reply. “I don’t recognize the condition. It is not disease, for the teeth are quite sound and strong. On the other hand, I don’t quite understand how that pitting could have been produced by the heat. So I have just noted the appearance in case it should have any significance later.”

“Well,” said Robertson, “if Thorndyke is reduced to an open verdict, I suppose we may follow suit,” and with this we returned to the general examination. When we had finished, he helped us to lift the stretcher, on which the body had been left, from the table to the floor to enable Polton to expose the photographs that Thorndyke required as records, and, when these had been taken, our business at the mortuary was finished.

“I suppose,” said Robertson, “you are going to have a look at the ruins, now. It seems a trifle off the medico-legal track, but you may possibly pick up some information there. I take it that you are acting for the insurance company?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke, “on instructions. As you say, it seems rather outside our province, as the company appears to be interested only in the house. But they asked me to watch the case, and I am doing so.”

“You are indeed,” Robertson exclaimed. “All that elaborate examination of the body seems to be completely irrelevant, if the question is only, How did the house catch fire? You carry thoroughness to the verge of fanaticism.”

Thorndyke smiled. “Not fanaticism,” said he; “merely experience, which bids us gather the rosebuds while we may. The question of to-day is not necessarily the question of to-morrow. At present we are concerned with the house; but there was a dead body in it. A month hence that body may be the problem, but by then it will be underground.”

Robertson grinned at me. “’Twas ever thus,” he chuckled. “You can’t get a rise out of Thorndyke—for the reason, I suppose, that he is always right. Well, I wish you luck in your explorations and hope to meet you both at the inquest.”

With this, he took his departure, and, as Polton had now got his apparatus packed up, we followed him and made our way to what the papers described as “the Scene of the Conflagration.”

It was a rather melancholy scene, with a tinge of squalor. The street was still wet and muddy, but a small crowd stood patiently, regardless of the puddles, staring up at the dismal shell with its scorched walls and gaping windows—the windows that I had seen belch forth flames but which now showed only the cold light of day. A rough hoarding had been put up to enclose the ground floor, and at the wicket of this a Salvage Corps officer stood on guard. To him Thorndyke addressed himself, producing his authority to inspect the ruins.

“Well, sir,” said the officer, “you’ll find it a rough job, with mighty little to see and plenty to fall over. And it isn’t over-safe. There’s some stuff overhead that may come down at any moment. Still, if you want to look the place over, I can show you the way down.”

“Your people, I suppose,” said Thorndyke, “have made a pretty thorough inspection. Has anything been discovered that throws any light on the cause or origin of the fire?”

The officer shook his head. “No, sir,” he replied. “Not a trace. There wouldn’t be. The house was burned right out from the ground upwards. It might have been lighted in a dozen places at once and there would be nothing to show it. There isn’t even part of a floor left. Do you think it is worth while to take the risk of going down?”

“I think I should like to see what it looks like,” said Thorndyke, adding, with a glance at me, “but there is no need for you and Polton to risk getting a brick or a chimney-pot on your heads.”

Of course, I refused to be left out of the adventure, while, as to Polton, wild horses would not have held him back.

“Very well, gentlemen,” said the officer, “you know your own business,” and with this he opened the wicket and let us through to the brink of a yawning chasm which had once been the cellars. The remains of the charred beams had been mostly hauled up out of the way, but the floor of the cellars was still hidden by mountainous heaps of bricks, tiles, masses

of charred wood and all-pervading white ash, amidst which three men in leather, brass-bound helmets were working with forks and shovels and with their thickly-gloved hands, removing the larger debris such as bricks, tiles, and fragments of boards and joists, while a couple of large sieves stood ready for the more minute examination of the dust and small residue.

We made our way cautiously down the ladder, becoming aware of a very uncomfortable degree of warmth as we descended and noting the steam that still rose from the wet rubbish. One of the men stopped his work to look at us and offer a word of warning.

"You'd better be careful where you are treading," said he. "Some of this stuff is still red underneath, and your boots aren't as thick as mine. You'd do best to stay on the ladder. You can see all there is to see from there, which isn't much. And mind you don't touch the walls with your hands."

His advice seemed so reasonable that we adopted it, and seated ourselves on the rungs of the ladder and looked about the dismal cavern as well as we could through the clouds of dust and steam.

"I see," said Thorndyke, addressing the shadowy figure nearest to us, "that you have a couple of sieves. Does that mean that you are going to sift all the small stuff?"

"Yes," was the reply. "We are going to do this job a bit more thoroughly than usual on account of the dead man who was found here. The police want to find out all they can about him, and I think the insurance people have been asking questions. You see, the dead man seems to have been a stranger, and he hasn't been properly identified yet. And I think that the tenant of the house isn't quite satisfied that everything was according to Cocker."

"And I suppose," said Thorndyke, "that whatever is found will be kept carefully and produced at the inquest?"

"Yes. Everything that is recovered will be kept for the police to see. The larger stuff will be put into a box by itself, and the smaller things which may be important for purposes of identification are to be sifted out and put into a separate box so that they don't get mixed up with the other things and lost sight of. But our instructions are that nothing is to be thrown away until the police have seen it."

"Then," Thorndyke suggested, "I presume that some police officer is watching the case. Do you happen to know who he is?"

"We got our instructions from a detective sergeant—name of Wills, I think—but an inspector from Scotland Yard looked in for a few minutes this morning; a very pleasant-spoken gentleman he was. Looked more like a dissenting minister than a police officer."

"That sounds rather like Blandy," I remarked; and Thorndyke agreed that the description seemed to fit our old acquaintance. And so it turned out; for when, having finished our survey of the cellars, we retired up the ladder and came out of the wicket, we found Sergeant Wills and Inspector Blandy in conference with the officer who had admitted us. On observing us, Blandy removed his hat with a flourish and made demonstrations of joy.

"Well, now," he exclaimed, "this is very pleasant. Dr. Jervis, too, and Mr. Polton with photographic apparatus. Quite encouraging. No doubt there will be some crumbs of expert information which a simple police officer may pick up."

Thorndyke smiled a little wearily. Like me, he found Blandy's fulsome manner rather tiresome. But he replied amiably enough: "I am sure, Inspector, we shall try to be mutually helpful, as we always do. But at present I suspect that we are in much the same position: just observers waiting to see whether anything significant comes into sight."

"That is exactly my position," Blandy admitted. "Here is a rather queer-looking fire and a dead man in the ruins. Nothing definitely suspicious, but there are possibilities. There always are when you find a dead body in a burned house. You have had a look at the ruins, sir. Did you find anything suggestive in them?"

"Nothing whatever," Thorndyke replied; "nor do I think anyone else will. The most blatant evidences of fire-raising would have been obliterated by such total destruction. But my inspection was merely formal. I have no expert knowledge of fires, but, as I am watching the case for the Griffin Company, I thought it best to view the ruins."

"Then," said Blandy with a slightly disappointed air, "you are interested only in the house, not in the body?"

"Officially, that is so; but, as the body is a factor in the case, I have made an examination of it, with Dr. Robertson, and if you want copies of the photographs that Polton has just taken at the mortuary, I will let you have them."

"But how good of you!" exclaimed Blandy. "Certainly, Doctor, I should like to have them. You see," he added, "the fact that this dead man was not the ordinary resident makes one want to know all about him and how he came to be sleeping in that house. I shall be most grateful for the photographs; and if there is anything that I can do—"

"There is," Thorndyke interrupted. "I learn that you are, very wisely, making a thorough examination of the debris and passing the ashes through a sieve."

"I am," said Blandy, "and what is more, the sergeant and I propose to superintend the sifting. Nothing from a pin upwards will be thrown away until it has been thoroughly examined. I suppose you would like to see the things that we recover."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "when you have finished with them, you might pass them on to me."

Blandy regarded Thorndyke with a benevolent and slightly foxy smile, and, after a moment's pause, asked deferentially:

"Was there anything in particular that you had in your mind, Doctor? I mean, any particular kind of article?"

"No," Thorndyke replied. "I am in the same position as you are. There are all sorts of possibilities in the case. The body tells us practically nothing, so we can only pick up any stray facts that may be available, as you appear to be doing."

This brought the interview to an end. Blandy and the sergeant disappeared through the wicket, and we went on our way homewards to see what luck Polton would have with his photographs.

---

## XII. LIGHT ON THE MYSTERY

FOR the reader of this narrative, the inquest on the body that had been recovered from the burnt house will serve, as it did to me, to present the known facts of the case in a coherent and related group—a condition which had been made possible by the stable and mummified state of the corpse. For, as the body was now virtually incorruptible, it had been practicable to postpone the inquiry until the circumstances had been investigated by the police and the principal facts ascertained, at least sufficiently for the purpose of an inquest.

When we arrived, the preliminaries had just been completed; the jury, having viewed the body, had taken their places and the coroner was about to open the proceedings. I need not report his brief address, which merely indicated the matters to be inquired into, but will proceed to the evidence. The first witness was Mr. Henry Budge, and he deposed as follows: "On the 19th of April, about a quarter to three in the morning, I started with my neighbour, James Place, to walk home from the house of a friend in Noel Street, where we had been spending the previous evening playing cards. My way home to Macclesfield Street lay through Billington Street, and Mr. Place walked that way with me. All the houses that we passed were in darkness with the exception of one in Billington Street in which we noticed a light showing through the Venetian blinds of two of the windows. Mr. Place pointed them out to me, remarking that we were not the only late birds. That would be about three o'clock."

"Was the light like ordinary lamp, or electric light? the coroner asked.

"No. It looked more like fire-light—rather red in colour and not very bright. Only just enough to make the windows visible."

"Will you look at this photograph of the house, in which the windows are marked with numbers, and tell us which were the ones that were lighted up?"

The witness looked at the photograph and replied that the lighted windows were those marked 8 and 9, adding that the one marked 7 seemed to be quite dark.

"That," said the coroner, "is important as showing that the fire broke out in the bed-sitting room on the first floor. Number seven is the window of the store or workroom. Yes?"

"Well, we didn't take any particular notice. We just walked on until we came to Little Pulteney Street, where Place lives, and there we stopped at a corner talking about the evening's play. Presently, Place began to sniff, and then I noticed a smell as if there was a chimney on fire. We both crossed the road and looked up over the tops of the houses, and then we could see smoke drifting across and we could just make out the chimney that it seemed to be coming from. We watched it for a few minutes, and then we saw some sparks rising and what looked like a reddish glow on the smoke. That made us both think of the house with the lighted window, and we started to walk back to have another look. By the time we got into Billington Street we could see the chimney quite plain with lots of sparks flying out of it, so we hurried along until we came opposite the house, and then there was no mistake about it. All three windows on the first floor were brightly lighted up, and in one of them the Venetian blinds had caught; and now small flames began to show from the top of the chimney. We consulted as to what we should do, and decided that Place should run off and find a policeman while I tried to knock up the people of the house. So Place ran off, and I crossed the road to the front door of the house at the side of the shop."

"And did you make a considerable noise?"

"I am afraid I didn't. There was no proper knocker, only one of these new things fixed to the letter-box. I struck that as hard as I could and I pressed the electric bell, but I couldn't tell whether it sounded or not. So I kept on with the silly little knocker."

"Did you hear any sounds of any kind from within the house?"

"Not a sign, though I listened at the letter-box."

"How long were you there alone?"

"Three or four minutes, I should think. Perhaps a little more. Then Place came running back with a policeman, who told me to go on knocking and ringing while he and Place roused up the people in the houses next door. But by this time the house was fairly alight, flames coming out of all three first-floor windows and a light beginning to show in the windows of the floor above. And then it got too hot for me to stay at the door, and I had to back away across the street."

"Yes," said the coroner, glancing at the jury, "I think the witness has given us a very clear and vivid description of the way and the time at which the fire broke out. The rest of the story can be taken up by other witnesses when we have heard Mr. Place."

The evidence of James Place, given quite briefly, merely confirmed and repeated that of Mr. Budge, with the addition of his description of his meeting with the policeman. Then the latter, Edwin Pearson by name, was called and, having been sworn, deposed that on the 19th of April at about 3.14 a.m. he was accosted at the corner of Meard Street, Soho, by the last witness, who informed him that there was a house on fire in Billington Street. He immediately ran off with Place to the nearest fire alarm and sent off the warning. That was at 3.16 a.m. by his watch. Then he and the last witness hurried off to Billington Street, where they found the house alight as Mr. Budge had described it, and had endeavoured to rouse the inmates of the burning house and the two adjoining houses, and were still doing so when the first of the engines arrived. That would be about 3.24 a.m.

Here the narrative passed to the officer in charge of the engine which had been the first on the scene; and, when he had been sworn, the coroner remarked: "You realize that this is an inquiry into the death of the man whose body was found in the burnt house. The information that we want is that which is relevant to that death. Otherwise, the burning of the house is not specially our concern."

"I understand that," replied the witness—whose name had been given as George Bell. "The principal fact bearing on the death of deceased is the extraordinary rapidity with which the fire spread, which is accounted for by the highly inflammable nature of the material that the house contained. If deceased was asleep when the fire broke out, he might have been suffocated by the fumes without waking up. A mass of burning cellulose would give off volumes of poisonous gas."

"You have made an examination of the ruins. Did you find any evidence as to how the fire started?"

"No. The ruins were carefully examined by me and by several other officers, but no clue to the origin of the fire could be discovered by any of us. There was nothing to go on. Apparently, the fire started in the first-floor rooms, and it would have been there that the clues would be found. But those rooms were completely destroyed. Even the floors had been carried away by the fall of the roof; so that there was nothing left to examine."

"Does it appear to you that there is anything abnormal about this fire?"

"No. All fires are, in a sense, abnormal. The only unusual feature in this case is the great quantity of inflammable material in the house. But the existence of that was known."

"You find nothing to suggest a suspicion of fire-raising? The time, for instance, at which it broke out?"

"As to the time, there is nothing remarkable or unusual in that. The beginning of a fire may be something which makes no show at first: a heap of soot behind a stove or a spark on some material which will smoulder but not burst into flame. It may go on smouldering for quite a long time before it reaches some material that is really inflammable. A spark on brown paper, for instance, might smoulder slowly for an hour or more; then, if the glowing part spread and came into contact with a celluloid film, there would be a burst of flame and the fire would be started; and in such a house as this, the place might be well alight in a matter of minutes."

"Then you have no suspicion of incendiarism?"

"No, there is nothing positive to suggest it. Of course, it can't be excluded. There is simply no evidence either way."

"In what way might the fire have originated?"

The witness raised his eyebrows in mild protest, but he answered the rather comprehensive question without comment.

"There are a good many possibilities. It might have been started by the act of some person. That is possible in this case, as there was a person in the house, but there is no evidence that he started the fire. Then there is the electric wiring. Something might have occurred to occasion a short circuit—a mouse or a cock roach connecting two wires. It is extremely uncommon with modern wiring, and in this case, as the fuses were destroyed, we can't tell whether it happened or not. And then there is the possibility of spontaneous combustion. That does occur occasionally. A heap of engineer's cotton waste soaked with oil will sometimes start burning by itself. So will a big bin of sawdust or a large mass of saltpetre. But none of these things are known to have been in this house."

"As to human agency. Suppose this person had been smoking in bed?"

"Well, that is a dangerous habit; but, after all, it would be only guess-work in this case. I have no evidence that the man was smoking in bed. If there is such evidence, then the fire might have been started in that way, though, even then, it would not be a certainty."

This concluded Mr. Bell's evidence, and, when he had been allowed to retire, the coroner commented: "As you will have observed, members of the jury, the expert evidence is to the effect that the cause of the fire is unknown; that is to say that none of the recognized signs of fire-raising were found. But possibly we may get some light on the matter from consideration of the circumstances. Perhaps we had better hear what Mr. Green can tell us before we take the medical evidence."

Accordingly, Mr. Walter Green was called, and, having been sworn, deposed: "I am the lessee of the premises in which the fire occurred, and I carried on in them the business of a dealer in films of all kinds: kine films, X-ray films and the ordinary films for use in cameras. I do not manufacture but I am the agent for several manufacturers; and I also deal to some extent in projectors and cameras, both kine and ordinary. I always kept a large stock of films. Some were kept in the ground-floor shop for immediate sale, and the reserve stock was stored in the rooms on the second and third floors."



"Were these films inflammable?"

"Nearly all of them were highly inflammable."

"Then this must have been a very dangerous house. Did you take any special precautions against fire?"

"Yes. The store-rooms were always kept locked, and the rule was that they were only to be entered by daylight and that no smoking was allowed in them. We were naturally very careful."

"And were the premises insured?"

"Yes, both the building and the contents were fully insured. Of course, the rate of insurance was high in view of the special risk."

"How many persons were ordinarily resident in the house?"

"Only one. Formerly the premises used to be left at night entirely unoccupied, but, as there was more room than we needed, I decided to let the first floor. I would sooner have let it for use as offices, but my present tenant, Mr. Gustavus Haire, applied for it as a residential flat, and I let it to him, and he has resided in it for the last six months."

"Was he in residence at the time of the fire?"

"No. Fortunately for him, he was absent on a visit to Ireland at the time. The gentleman who met his death in the fire was a relative of Mr. Haire's to whom he had lent the flat while he was away."

"We will come to the question of deceased presently, but first we might have a few particulars about Mr. Haire; as to his occupation, for instance."

"I really don't know very much about him. He seems to be connected with the film and camera trade, mostly, I think, as a traveller and agent for some of the wholesale firms. But he does some sort of dealing on his own account, and he seems to be something of a mechanic. He has done some repairs on projectors for me, and once he mended up a gramophone motor that I bought second hand. And he does a little manufacturing, if you can call it by that name: he makes certain kinds of cements and varnishes. I don't know exactly how much or what he does with them, but I presume that he sells them, as I can't think of any use that he could have for the quantities that he makes."

"Did he carry on this industry on your premises?"

"Yes, in the small room that adjoined the bedroom, which he also used as a workroom for his mechanical jobs. There was a cupboard in it in which he used to keep his stocks of varnish and the solvents for making them—mostly acetone and amyl acetate."

"Aren't those solvents rather inflammable?"

"They are very inflammable; and the varnish is still worse, as the basis is cellulose."

"You say that you don't know how much of this stuff he used to make in that room. Haven't you any idea?"

"I can't suggest a quantity, but I know that he must have made a good deal of it, because he used to buy some, at least, of his material from me. It consisted mostly of worn-out or damaged films, and I have sold him quite a lot from time to time. But I believe he had other sources of supply."

"And you say he used to store all this inflammable material—the celluloid, the solvents and the varnish—in that small room?"

"Yes; but I think that when the little room got full up, he used to overflow into the bedroom—in fact, I know he did, for I saw a row of bottles of varnish on the bedroom mantelpiece, one of them a Winchester quart."

"Then you have been into Mr. Haire's rooms? Perhaps you could give us a general idea as to their arrangement and what was in them."

"I have only been in them once or twice, and I didn't take very much notice of them, as I just went in to talk over some matters which we had been discussing. There were two rooms; a small one—that would have the window marked 7 in the photograph. It was used as a workroom and partly as a store for the cements and varnishes. It contained a smallish deal table which had a vice fixed to it and served as a work bench. It was littered with tools and bits of scrap of various kinds and there was a gas-ring on a sheet of iron. Besides the table, there was a stool and a good-sized cupboard, rather shallow and fitted with five or six shelves which seemed to be filled principally with bottles."

"The other room was quite a fair size—about twenty feet long and twelve feet wide. It was used as a bed-sitting room and was quite comfortably furnished. The bed was at the end opposite window number 9, with the dressing-table and washstand near it. At the other end was a mahogany table, a small side board, a set of book-shelves, three single chairs, an easy chair by the fireplace, and a grandfather clock against the wall in the corner. There was some sort of carpet on the floor and a rug before the fireplace. That is all I remember about the furniture of the room; but what dwells in my memory is the appalling untidiness of the place. The floor was littered with newspapers and magazines, the mantelpiece and the sideboard were filled up with bottles and boxes and pipes and all sorts of rubbish, and there were brown-paper parcels all over the place: stacked along the walls and round the clock and even under the bed."

"Do you know what was in those parcels?"

"I don't know, but I strongly suspect that they contained his stock of films. I recognized one as a parcel that he had had from me."

The coroner looked at the witness with a frown of astonishment.

"It seems incredible," he exclaimed. "These rooms must have been even more dangerous than the rest of the house."

"Much more," the witness agreed; "for, in the business premises, the films were at least securely packed. We didn't keep them loose in paper parcels."

"No. It is perfectly astonishing. This man, Haire, might as well have been living and sleeping in a powder magazine. No wonder that the fire started in his flat. The necessary conditions seem to have been perfect for the start of a fire. But still we have no evidence as to what actually started it. I suppose, Mr. Green, you have no suggestion to offer on that question?"

"Of course, I have no certain knowledge, though I have a very definite suspicion. But a suspicion is not evidence."

"No, but I suppose that you had something to go on. Let us hear what you suspect and why you suspect it."

"My opinion is based on a conversation that I had with Mr. Haire shortly before he went away. It occurred in a little restaurant in Wardour Street where we both used to go for lunch. He was telling me about his proposed visit to Dublin. He said he was not sure how long he might be away, but he thought it would be as well for him to leave me his address in case anyone should call on any matter that might seem urgent. So he wrote down the address of the firm on whom he would be calling and gave it to me, and I then said, jestingly, that, as there would be no one in the house while he was away, I hoped he would deposit his jewellery and plate and other valuable property in the bank before he left.

"He smiled and promised that he would, but then he remarked that, in fact, the house would probably not be empty, as he had agreed to let a cousin of his have the use of the rooms to sleep in while he was away. I was not very pleased to hear this, and I remarked that I should not much care to hand the keys of any rooms of mine to another person. He agreed with me, and admitted that he would rather have avoided the arrangement; 'but,' he said, 'what could I do? The man is my cousin and quite a decent fellow. He happens to be coming up to town just at the time when I shall be away, and it will be a great convenience to him to have a place where he can turn in and save the expense of an hotel. He may not use the rooms after all, but if he does, I don't expect that you will see much of him, as he will only be coming to the rooms to sleep. His days will be occupied in various business calls. I must admit,' he added, 'that I wish him at Halifax, but he asked me to let him have the use of the rooms, and I didn't feel that I could refuse.'

"Well," I said, 'I should have refused. But he is your cousin, so I suppose you know all about him.'

"Oh, yes," he replied; 'he is quite a responsible sort of man; and I have cautioned him to be careful.'

"That struck me as a rather curious remark, so I said: 'How do you mean? What did you caution him about?' and he replied: 'Oh, I just cautioned him not to do himself too well in the matter of drinks in the evening, and I made him promise not to smoke in bed.'

"Does he usually smoke in bed?" I asked; and he replied: 'I think he likes to take a book to bed with him and have a read and a smoke before going to sleep. But he has promised solemnly that he won't.'

"Well," I said, 'I hope he won't. It is a shockingly dangerous habit. He might easily drop off to sleep and let his cigarette fall on the bed-clothes.'

"He doesn't smoke cigarettes in bed," said Haire. 'He smokes a pipe; his favourite is a big French clay bowl in the form of a death's head with glass eyes and a cherry-wood stem. He loves that pipe. But you need not worry; he has sworn not to smoke in bed.'

"I was not very happy about the affair, but I didn't like to make a fuss. So I made no further objection."

"I think," said the coroner, "that you ought to have forbidden him to lend the rooms. However, you didn't. Did you learn what this man's name was?"

"Yes, I asked Mr. Haire, in case I should see the man and have occasion to speak to him. His name was Moxdale—Cecil Moxdale."

"Then we may take it that the body which is the subject of this inquiry is that of Cecil Moxdale. Did you ever see him?"

"I think I saw him once. That would be just before six in the evening of the 14th of April. I was standing inside the doorway of my premises when Mr. Haire passed with another man, whom I assumed to be Mr. Moxdale from his resemblance to Mr. Haire. The two men went to the street door which is the entrance to Mr. Haire's staircase and entered together."

"Could you give us any description of Moxdale?"

"He was a biggish man—about five feet nine or ten—with dark hair and a rather full dark moustache. That is all I noticed. I only took a passing glance at him."

"From what you said just now," the coroner suggested, "I suppose we may assume that you connect the outbreak of the fire with this unfortunate man?"

"I do," the witness replied. "I have no doubt that he lit up his pipe notwithstanding his promise, and set his bedclothes

on fire. That would account for everything, if you remember that there were a number of parcels under the bed which were almost certainly filled with inflammable films."

"Yes," the coroner agreed. "Of course, it is only a surmise, but it is certainly a very probable one. And that, I suppose, Mr. Green, is all that you have to tell us."

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "that is about all I know of the case."

The coroner glanced at the jury and asked if there were any questions, and, when the foreman replied that there were none, the witness was allowed to retire when the depositions had been read and signed.

There was a short pause, during which the coroner glanced at the depositions and, apparently, reflected on the last witness's evidence. "I think," he said at length, "that, before going further into the details of this deplorable affair, we had better hear what the doctors have to tell us. It may seem, having regard to the circumstances in which deceased met his death and the condition of the body, that the taking of medical evidence is more or less of a formality; but, still, it is necessary that we should have a definite statement as to the cause of death. We will begin with the evidence of the divisional surgeon, Dr. William Robertson."

As his name was mentioned, our colleague rose and stepped up to the table, where the coroner's officer placed a chair for him.

---

### XIII. THE FACTS AND THE VERDICT

"You have, I believe," said the coroner when the preliminary questions had been answered, "made an examination of the body which is now lying in the mortuary?"

"Yes, I examined that body very thoroughly. It appears to be that of a strongly-built man about five feet ten inches in height. His age was rather difficult to judge, and I cannot say more than that he was apparently between forty and fifty, but even that is not a very reliable estimate. The body had been exposed to such intense heat that the soft tissues were completely carbonized, and, in some parts, entirely burned away. Of the feet, for instance, there was nothing left but white incinerated bone."

"The jury, when viewing the body, were greatly impressed by the strange posture in which it lay. Do you attach any significance to that?"

"No. The distortion of the trunk and limbs was due to the shrinkage of the soft parts under the effects of intense heat. Such distortion is not unusual in bodies which have been burned."

"Can you make any statement as to the cause of death?"

"My examination disclosed nothing on which an opinion could be based. The condition of the body was such as to obliterate any signs that there might have been. I assume that deceased died from the effects of the poisonous fumes given off by the burning celluloid—that he was, in fact, suffocated. But that is not properly a medical opinion. There is, however, one point which I ought to mention. The neck was dislocated and the little bone called the odontoid process was broken."

"You mean, in effect," said the coroner, "that the neck was broken. But surely a broken neck would seem to be a sufficient cause of death."

"It would be in ordinary circumstances; but in this case I think it is to be explained by the shrinkage. My view is that the contraction of the muscles and the soft structures generally displaced the bones and broke off the odontoid process."

"Can you say, positively, that the dislocation was produced in that way?"

"No. That is my opinion, but I may be wrong. Dr. Thorndyke, who examined the body at the same time as I did, took a different view."

"We shall hear Dr. Thorndyke's views presently. But doesn't it seem to you a rather important point?"

"No. There doesn't seem to me to be much in it. The man was alone in the house and must, in any case, have met his death by accident. In the circumstances, it doesn't seem to matter much what the exact, immediate cause of death may have been."

The coroner looked a little dissatisfied with this answer, but he made no comment, proceeding at once to the next point.

"You have given us a general description of the man. Did you discover anything that would assist in establishing his identity?"

"Nothing beyond the measurements and the fact that he had a fairly good set of natural teeth. The measurements and the general description would be useful for identification if there were any known person with whom they could be compared. They are not very specific characters, but if there is any missing person who might be the deceased, they might settle definitely whether this body could, or could not, be that of the missing person."

"Yes," said the coroner, "but that is of more interest to the police than to us. Is there anything further that you have to tell us?"

"No," replied the witness, "I think that is all that I have to say."

Thereupon, when the depositions had been read and signed the witness retired and his place was taken by Thorndyke.

"You examined this body at the same time as Dr. Robertson, I think?" the coroner suggested.

"Yes, we made the examination together, and we compared the results so far as the measurements were concerned."

"You were, of course, unable to make any suggestion as to the identity of deceased?"

"Yes. Identity is a matter of comparison, and there was no known person with whom to compare the body. But I secured, and made notes of, all available data for identification if they should be needed at any future time."

"It was stated by the last witness that there was a dislocation of the neck with a fracture of the odontoid process. Will you explain that to the jury and give us your views as to its significance in this case?"

"The odontoid process is a small peg of bone which rises from the second vertebra, or neck-bone, and forms a pivot on which the head turns. When the neck is dislocated, the displacement usually occurs between the first and the second vertebra, and then, in most cases, the odontoid process is broken. In the case of deceased, the first and second vertebrae were separated and the odontoid process was broken. That is to say that deceased had a dislocated neck, or, as it is commonly expressed, a broken neck."

"In your opinion, was the neck broken before or after death?"

"I should say that it was broken before death; that, in fact, the dislocation of the neck was the immediate cause of death."

"Do you say positively that it was so?"

"No. I merely formed that opinion from consideration of the appearances of the structures. The broken surfaces of the odontoid process had been exposed to the fire for some appreciable time, which suggested that the fracture had occurred before the shrinkage. And then it appeared to me that the force required to break the process was greater than the shrinkage would account for. Still, it is only an opinion. Dr. Robertson attributed the fracture to the shrinkage, and he is as likely to be right as I am."

"Supposing death to have been caused by the dislocation, what significance would you attach to that circumstance?"

"None at all, if the facts are as stated. If the man was alone in the house when the fire broke out, the exact cause of death would be a matter of no importance."

"Can you suggest any way in which the neck might have been broken in the circumstances which are believed to have existed?"

"There are many possible ways. For instance, if the man was asleep and was suddenly aroused by the fire, he might have scrambled out of bed, entangled the bedclothes, and fallen on his head. Or again, he might have escaped from the bedroom and fallen down the stairs. The body was found in the cellar. There is no evidence as to where the man was when death took place."

"At any rate, you do not consider the broken neck in any way incompatible with accidental death?"

"Not in the least; and, as I said before, Dr. Robertson's explanation may be the correct one, after all."

"Would you agree that, for the purposes of this inquiry, the question as to which of you is right is of no importance?"

"According to my present knowledge and belief, I should say that it is of no importance at all."

This was the sum of Thorndyke's evidence, and, when he had signed the depositions and returned to his seat, the name of Inspector Blandy was called; whereupon that officer advanced to the table and greeted the coroner and the jury with his habitual benevolent smile. He polished off the preliminaries with the readiness born of long experience and then, having, by the coroner's invitation, seated himself, he awaited the interrogation.

"I believe, Inspector," the coroner began, "that the police are making certain investigations regarding the death of the man who is the subject of this inquiry. Having heard the evidence of the other witnesses, can you give us any additional facts?"

"Nothing very material," Blandy replied. "The inquiries which we are making are simply precautionary. A dead man has been found in the ruins of a burnt house, and we want to know who that man was and how he came to be in that house, since he was admittedly not the tenant of the premises. As far as our inquiries have gone, they have seemed to confirm the statement of Mr. Green that the man was the one referred to by Mr. Haire as Cecil Moxdale. But our inquiries are not yet complete."

"That," said the coroner, "is a general statement. Could you give us the actual facts on which your conclusions are based?"

"The only facts bearing on the identity of deceased have been obtained by an examination of various things found among the ashes of the burned house. The search was made with the greatest care, particularly that for the smaller objects which might have a more personal character. When the larger objects had been removed, the fine ash was all passed through sieves so that nothing should be overlooked. But everything that was found has been preserved for further examination if it should be necessary."

"You must have got a rather miscellaneous collection," the coroner remarked. "Have you examined the whole lot?"

"No. We have concentrated on the small personal articles, and these seem to have yielded all the information that we are likely to get, and have practically settled the question of identity. We found, for instance, a pair of cuff-links of steel, chromium plated, on which the initials C.M. were engraved. We also found a clay pipe-bowl in the form of a death's head which had once had glass eyes and still had the remains of the glass fused in the eye-sockets. This had the initials C.M. scratched deeply on the under-surface of the bowl."

"That was a very significant discovery," the coroner remarked, "having regard to what Mr. Green told us. Yes?"

"There was also a stainless-steel plate which seemed to have belonged to an attaché-case or a suit-case and which had the initials C.M. engraved on it, and a gold watch, of which the case was partly fused, but on which we could plainly make out the initials G.H."

"G.H.," the coroner repeated. "That, then, would be Mr. Haire's watch. Isn't that rather odd?"

"I think not, sir," replied Blandy. "These were Mr. Haire's rooms, and they naturally contained articles belonging to him. Probably he locked up this valuable watch before going on his travels."

"Did you find any other things belonging to him?"

"Nothing at all significant. There was a vice and some tools and the remains of an eight-day clock which apparently belonged to him, and there were some other articles that might have been his, but they were mixed up with the remains of projectors and various things which had probably come from the shop or the stores above. But the small personal articles were the really important ones. I have brought those that I mentioned for your inspection."

Here he produced from his attaché-case a small glass-topped box in which the links, the steel name plate, the death's-head pipe-bowl, and the half-fused gold watch were displayed on a bed of cotton wool, and handed it to the coroner, who, when he had inspected it, passed it to the foreman of the jury.

While the latter and his colleagues were poring over the box, the coroner opened a fresh line of inquiry.

"Have you tried to get into touch with Mr. Haire?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "and I am still trying, unsuccessfully up to the present. The address that Mr. Haire gave to Mr. Green was that of Brady & Co, a firm of retail dealers in photographic materials and appliances. As soon as I got it from Mr. Green, I communicated with the Dublin police, giving them the principal facts and asking them to find Mr. Haire, if they could, and pass on to him the information about the fire and also to find out from him who the man was whose body had been found in the burnt house.

"The information that I have received from them is to the effect that they called on Bradys about mid-day on the 19th, but Mr. Haire had already left. They learned that he had made a business call on Bradys on the morning of the 16th, having arrived in Dublin the previous night. He called again on the 18th, and then said that he was going on to Cork, and possibly from there to Belfast. In the interval, it seemed that he had made several calls on firms engaged in the photographic trade, but Bradys had the impression that he had left Dublin on the evening of the 18th.

"That is all that I have been able to discover so far, but there should be no great difficulty in tracing Mr. Haire; and even if it should not be possible, he will probably be returning from Ireland quite soon, and then he will be able to give us all the particulars that we want about this man, Cecil Moxdale—if that is his name."

"Yes," said the coroner, "but it will be too late for this inquiry. However, there doesn't seem to be any great mystery about the affair. The man's name was given to us by Mr. Green, and the identity seems to be confirmed by the initials on the articles which were recovered from the ruins; particularly the pipe, which had been described to us by Mr. Green as belonging to Cecil Moxdale. We know practically nothing about the man; but still we know enough for the purpose of this inquiry. It might be expedient to adjourn the proceedings until fuller particulars are available, but I hardly think it is necessary. I suppose, Inspector, you have nothing further to tell us?"

"No, sir," replied Blandy. "I have told you all that I know about the affair."

"Then," said the coroner, "that completes the evidence; and I think, members of the jury, that there is enough to enable you to decide on your verdict."

He paused for a moment, and then proceeded to read the depositions and secure the signature, and, when this had been done and Blandy had retired to his seat, he opened his brief summing up of the evidence.

"There is little that I need say to you, members of the jury," he began. "You have heard the evidence, all of which has been quite simple and all of which points plainly to the same conclusion. You have to answer four questions: Who was deceased? and where, when, and by what means did he come by his death?"

"As to the first question, Who was he? The evidence that we have heard tells us no more than that his name was Cecil Moxdale and that he was a cousin of Mr. Gustavus Haire. That is not much, but, still, it identifies him as a particular individual. As to the conclusiveness of the evidence on this point, that is for you to judge. To me, the identity seems to be quite clearly established.

"As to the time and place of his death, it is certain that it occurred in the early morning on the 19th of April in the house

known as 34, Billington Street, Soho. But the question as to how he came by his death is not quite so clear. There is some conflict of opinion on the part of the two medical witnesses respecting the immediate cause of death. But that need not trouble us; for they are agreed that, whatever might have been the immediate cause of death, the ultimate cause—with which we are concerned—was some accident arising out of the fire. There appears to be no doubt that deceased was alone in the house at the time when the fire broke out; and, that being so, his death could only have been due to some misadventure for which no one other than himself could have been responsible.

“There is, indeed, some evidence that he may, himself, have been responsible both for the outbreak of the fire and for his own death. There is a suggestion that he may, in spite of his promise to Mr. Haire, have indulged in the dangerous practice of smoking in bed. But there is no positive evidence that he did, and we must not form our conclusions on guesses or inferences.

“That is all that I need say; and with that I shall leave you to consider your verdict.”

There was, as the coroner had justly remarked, very little to consider. The facts seemed quite plain and the conclusion perfectly obvious. And that was evidently the view of the jury, for they gave the matter but a few minutes’ consideration, and then returned the verdict to the effect that the deceased, Cecil Moxdale, had met his death by misadventure due to the burning of the house in which he was sleeping.

“Yes,” the coroner agreed, “that is the obvious conclusion. I shall record a verdict of Death by Misadventure.”

On this, the Court rose; and, after a few words with the coroner and Robertson, Thorndyke and I, accompanied by Polton (who had been specially invited to attend), took our departure and shaped a course for King’s Bench Walk.

---

#### **XIV. A VISIT FROM INSPECTOR BLANDY**

WITH the close of the inquest, our connection with the case of the burnt house in Billington Street and Cecil Moxdale, deceased, seemed to have come to an end. No points of doubt or interest had arisen, or seemed likely to arise hereafter. We appeared to have heard the last of the case, and, when Thorndyke’s notes and Polton’s photographs had been filed, we wrote it off as finished with. At least, I did. But later events suggested that Thorndyke had kept it in mind as a case in which further developments were not entirely impossible.

My view of the case was apparently shared by Stalker; for when, being in the City on other business, we dropped in at his office, he expressed himself to that effect.

“An unsatisfactory affair from our point of view,” he commented, “but there was nothing that we could really boggle at. Of course, when an entire insured stock is destroyed, you have to be wary. A trader who has a redundant or obsolete or damaged stock can make a big profit by burning the whole lot out and recovering the full value from the insurance society. But there doesn’t seem to be anything of that kind. Green appears to be perfectly straight. He has given us every facility for checking the value of the stock, and we find it all correct.”

“I suppose,” said I, “you couldn’t have raised the question of negligence in allowing a casual stranger to occupy a bedroom in his box of fireworks. He knew that Moxdale wasn’t a very safe tenant.”

“There is no evidence,” Thorndyke reminded me, “that Moxdale set fire to the house. He probably did, but that is a mere guess on our part.”

“Exactly,” Stalker agreed, “and even if he did, he certainly did not do it consciously or intentionally. And, by the way, speaking of this man Moxdale, it happens, oddly enough, that his life was insured in this office. So he has let us in for two payments.”

“Anything considerable?” Thorndyke asked.

“No. Only a thousand.”

“Have you paid the claim?”

“Not yet; in fact, no claim has been made up to the present, and it isn’t our business to hunt up the claimants. But we shall have to pay, for I suppose that even you could not make out a case of suicide.”

“No,” Thorndyke admitted, “I think we can exclude suicide. At any rate, there was nothing to suggest it. You accept the identity?”

“There doesn’t seem to be much doubt,” replied Stalker, “but the next of kin, or whoever makes the claim, will have to confirm the statements of Green and Haire. But I don’t think there is anything in the question of identity. Do you?”

“So far as I know, the question was fairly well settled at the inquest, and I don’t think it could be contested unless some positive evidence to the contrary should be produced. But we have to bear in mind that the identity was based on the statement of Walter Green and that his evidence was hearsay evidence.”

“Yes,” said Stalker, “I will bear that in mind when the claim is put in, if it ever is. If no claim is made, the question will not be of any interest to me.”

So that was the position. Stalker was not interested and, consequently, we, as his agents, had no further interest in the

case; and, so far as I was concerned, it had passed into complete oblivion when my recollection of it was revived by Thorndyke. It was at breakfast time a week or two after our conversation with Stalker that my colleague, who was, according to his habit, glancing over the legal notices in *The Times*, looked up at me and remarked: "Here is a coincidence in a small way. I don't remember having ever met with the name of Moxdale until we attended the late inquest. It certainly is not a common name."

"No," I agreed, "I don't think I ever heard it excepting in connection with Cecil Moxdale deceased. But what is the coincidence?"

"Here is another Moxdale, also deceased," he replied, handing me the paper and indicating the paragraph. It was an ordinary solicitor's notice beginning, "Re. Harold Moxdale deceased who died on the 3 of April 1936", and calling on creditors and others to make their claims by a certain specified date; of no interest to me apart from the mere coincidence of the name. Nor did Thorndyke make any further comment, though I observed that he cut out the notice, and, having fixed it with a dab of paste to a sheet of paper, added it to the collection of notes forming the Moxdale dossier. Then, once more, the "case" seemed to have sunk into oblivion.

But a few days later it was revived by no less a person than Inspector Blandy; and the manner of its revival was characteristic of that extremely politic gentleman. It was about half past eight one evening when, after an early dinner, Thorndyke, Polton and I were holding a sort of committee meeting to review and re-classify the great collection of microscope slides of hairs, fibres and other "comparison specimens" which had accumulated in the course of years. We had just finished the first of the new cabinets and were labelling the drawers when an unfamiliar knock, of an almost apologetic softness, was executed on the small brass knocker of the inner door.

"Confound it!" I exclaimed, impatiently. "We ought to have shut the oak. Who the deuce can it be?"

The question was answered by Polton, who, as he opened the door and peered out, stepped back and announced: "Inspector Blandy."

We both stood up, and Thorndyke, with his customary suavity, advanced to greet the visitor and offer him a chair.

"Pray, gentlemen," exclaimed Blandy, casting an inquisitive glance over the collection on the table, "do not let me disturb you, though, to be sure, I can see that I am disturbing you. But the disturbance need be only of the briefest. I have come—very improperly, without an appointment—merely to tender apologies and to make all too tardy amends. When I have done that, I can go, and leave you to pursue your investigations."

"They are not investigations," said Thorndyke. "We are just going over our stock of test specimens and re-arranging them. But what do you mean by apologies and reparations? We have no grievance against you."

"You are kind enough to say so," replied Blandy, "but I am, nevertheless, a defaulter. I made a promise and have not kept it. *Mea culpa*." He tapped his chest lightly with his knuckles and continued: "When I had the pleasure of meeting you in the ruins of the burned house I promised to let you have an opportunity of examining the various objects that were retrieved from the debris. This evening, it suddenly dawned on me that I never did so. I was horrified, and, in my impulsive way, I hurried, without reflection, to seek your forgiveness and to make such amends as were possible."

"I don't think, Blandy," said Thorndyke, "that the trifling omission mattered. We seemed to have all the information that we wanted."

"So we did, but perhaps we were wrong. At any rate, I have now brought the things for you to see, if they are still of any interest. It is rather late, I must admit."

"Yes, by Jove!" I agreed. "It is the day after the fair. But what things have you brought, and where are they?"

"The exhibits which you saw at the inquest, I have here in my attaché-case. If you would like me to leave them with you for examination at your leisure, I can do so, but we shall want them back. The other things are a box in my car, and, as we have finished with them, you can dispose of them as you please when you have examined them, if you think the examination worth while."

"I take it," said Thorndyke, "that you have been through them pretty thoroughly. Did you find any thing in any way significant?"

The inspector regarded Thorndyke with his queer, benevolent smile as he replied: "Not significant to me; but who knows what I may have overlooked? I could not bring to bear on them either your intellect, your encyclopaedic knowledge, or your unrivalled means of research." Here he waved his hand to wards the table and seemed to bestow a silent benediction on the microscopes and the trays of slides. "Perhaps," he concluded, "these simple things might have for you some message which they have withheld from me."

As I listened to Blandy's discourse, I found myself speculating on the actual purpose of his visit. He could not have come to talk this balderdash or to deliver the box of trash that he had brought with him. What object, I wondered, lay behind his manoeuvres? Probably it would transpire presently; but, meanwhile, I thought it as well to give him a lead.

"It is very good of you, Blandy," said I, "to have brought us these things to look at, but I don't quite see why you did it. Our interest in the affair ended with the inquest, and I take it that yours did too. Or didn't it?"

"It did not," he replied. "We were then making certain inquiries through the Irish police, and we have not yet obtained

the information that we were seeking. The case is still incomplete.”

“Do you mean,” Thorndyke asked, “that Mr. Haire has not been able to tell you all that you wanted to know?”

“We have not been able to get into touch with Mr. Haire; which is a rather remarkable fact, and becomes still more remarkable as the time passes and we get no news of him.”

“In effect, then,” said Thorndyke, “Mr. Haire has disappeared. Have you taken any special measures to trace him?”

“We have taken such measures as were possible,” replied Blandy. “But we are in a difficult position. We have no reliable description of the man, and, if we had, we could hardly proceed as if we were trying to trace a ‘wanted’ man. It is curious that he should not have turned up in his usual places of resort, but there is nothing incriminating in the fact. We have no reason to suppose that he is keeping out of sight. There is nothing against him. No one could suspect him of having had any hand in starting the fire, as he was not there and another man was. But still, it is a little mysterious. It makes one wonder whether there could have been something that we overlooked.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed, “there does certainly seem to be something a little queer about the affair. As I understand it, Haire went away with the stated intention of making a short visit to Dublin. He was known to have arrived there on a certain day and to have made two calls at a business house. He is said to have announced his intention to go on to Belfast, but it is not known whether he did, in fact, go there. Nothing at all is known as to his movements after he had left the dealer’s premises. From that moment, no one, so far as we know, ever saw him again. Isn’t that the position?”

“That is the position exactly, sir,” replied Blandy, “and a very curious position it is if we remember that Haire was a man engaged in business in London and having a set of rooms there containing his household goods and personal effects.”

“Before the fire,” I remarked. “There wasn’t much left of either after the flare up. He hadn’t any home then to come back to.”

“But, sir,” Blandy objected, “what reason is there for supposing that he knew anything about the fire? He was somewhere in Ireland when it happened. But a fire in a London by-street isn’t likely to be reported in the Irish papers.”

“No,” I admitted, “that is true; and it only makes the affair still more queer.”

There was a short silence. Then Thorndyke raised a fresh question. “By the way, Inspector,” said he, “there was a legal notice in *The Times* a few days ago referring to a certain Moxdale deceased. Did you happen to observe it?”

“Yes, my attention was called to it by one of my colleagues, and, on the chance that there might be some connection with the other Moxdale deceased, I called on the solicitors to make a few enquiries. They are quite a respectable firm—Home, Croner, and Home of Lincoln’s Inn—and they were as helpful as they could be, but they didn’t know much about the parties. The testator, Harold Moxdale, was an old gentleman, practically a stranger to them, and the other parties were nothing more than names. However, I learned that the principal beneficiary was the testator’s nephew, Cecil Moxdale, and that, if he had not had the misfortune to be burned, he would have inherited a sum of about four thousand pounds.”

“It is possible,” I suggested, “that it may not be the same Cecil Moxdale. You say that they did not know anything about him. Did you try to fix the identity?”

“It wasn’t necessary,” replied Blandy, “for the next beneficiary was another nephew named Gustavus Haire; and as we knew that Haire and Moxdale were cousins, that settled the identity.”

As Blandy gave this explanation, his habitual smile became tinged with a suggestion of foxiness, and I noticed that he was furtively watching Thorndyke to see how he took it. But there was no need, for my colleague made no secret of his interest.

“Did you learn whether these two bequests were in any way mutually dependent?” he asked.

Blandy beamed on him almost affectionately. It was evident that Thorndyke’s reactions were those that had been desired.

“A very pertinent question, sir,” he replied. “Yes, the two bequests were mutually contingent. The entire sum to be divided between the two nephews was about six thousand pounds. Of this, four thousand went to Cecil and two thousand to Gustavus. But it was provided that if either of them should pre-decease the testator, the whole amount should go the survivor.”

“My word, Blandy!” I exclaimed. “This puts quite a new complexion on the affair. As Harold Moxdale died, if I remember rightly, on the 30th of April, and Cecil died on the 19th of the same month, it follows that the fire in Billington Street was worth four thousand pounds to Mr. Gustavus Haire. A decidedly illuminating fact.”

Blandy turned his benign smile on me. “Do you find it illuminating, sir?” said he. “If you do, I wish you would reflect a few stray beams on me.”

Thorndyke chuckled, softly. “I am afraid, Jervis,” said he, “that the inspector is right. This new fact is profoundly interesting—even rather startling. But it throws no light whatever on the problem.”

“It establishes a motive,” I retorted.

“But what is the use of that?” he demanded. “You, as a lawyer, know that proof of a motive to do some act is no evidence, by itself, that the person who had the motive did the act. Haire, as you imply, had a motive for making away with Moxdale.



But before you could even suggest that he did actually make away with him, you would have to prove that he had the opportunity and the intention; and even that would carry you no farther than suspicion. To support a charge, there would have to be some positive evidence that the act was committed."

"Exactly, sir," said Blandy; "and the position is that we have not a particle of evidence that Haire had any intention of murdering his cousin, and there is clear evidence that he had no opportunity. When the fire broke out, he was in Ireland and had been there five days. That is, for practical purposes, an absolutely conclusive alibi."

"But," I persisted, "aren't there such things as time-fuses or other timing appliances?"

Blandy shook his head. "Not in a case like this," he replied. "Of course, we have considered that question, but there is nothing in it. In the case of a man who wants to set fire to a lock-up shop or empty premises, it is possible to use some such appliance—a time-fuse, or a candle set on some inflammable material, or an alarm clock—to give him time to show himself a few miles away and establish an alibi; and even then the firemen usually spot it. But here you have a flat, with somebody living in it, and the owner of that flat on the other side of the Irish Channel, where he had arrived five days before the fire broke out.

"No, sir, I don't think Mr. Haire is under any suspicion of having raised the fire. The thing is a physical impossibility. And I don't know of any other respect in which he is under suspicion. It is odd that we can't discover his whereabouts, but there is really nothing suspicious in it. There is no reason why he should let anyone know where he is."

I did not contest this, though my feeling was that Haire was purposely keeping out of sight, and I suspected that Blandy secretly took the same view. But the inspector was such an exceedingly downy bird that it was advisable not to say too much. However, I now understood—or thought I did—why he had made this pretext to call on us; he was at a dead end and hoped to interest Thorndyke in the case and thereby get a lead of some kind. And now, having sprung his mine, he reverted to the ostensible object of his visit.

"As to this salvage stuff," said he. "Would you like me to leave these small things for you to look over?"

I expected Thorndyke to decline the offer, for there was no mystery about the things, and they were no affair of ours in any case. But, to my surprise, he accepted, and, having checked the list, signed the receipt which Blandy had written out.

"And as to the stuff in the box; perhaps Mr. Polton might show my man where to put it."

At this, Polton, who had been calmly examining and sorting the test-slides during the discussion (to which I have no doubt he had given close attention), rose and suggested that the box should be deposited in the laboratory in the first place; and when Thorndyke had agreed, he departed to superintend the removal.

"I am afraid," said Blandy, "that you will find nothing but rubbish in that box. That, at least, is what it appeared like to me. But, having studied some of your cases, I have been deeply impressed by your power of extracting information from the most unpromising material, and it is possible that these things may mean more to you than they do to me."

"It is not very likely," Thorndyke replied. "You appear to have extracted from them all the information that one could expect. They have conveyed to you the fact that Cecil Moxdale was apparently the occupant of the rooms at the time of the fire, and that is probably all that they had to tell."

"It is all they had to tell me," said Blandy, rising and picking up his attaché-case, "and it is not all that I want to know. There is still the problem of how the fire started, and they throw no light on that at all."

"You have got the clay pipe," I suggested. "Doesn't that tell the story?"

He smiled at me with amiable reproach as he replied:

"We don't want the material for plausible guesses. We want facts, or at least a leading hint of some kind, and I still have hopes that you may hit on something suggestive."

"You are more optimistic than I am," replied Thorndyke; "but I shall look over the material that you have brought, and, if it should yield any facts that are not already known to you, I promise to let you have them without delay."

Blandy brightened up appreciably at this, and, as he turned to depart, he expressed his gratitude in characteristic terms.

"That, sir, is most generous of you. It sends me on my way rejoicing in the consciousness that my puny intelligence is to be reinforced by your powerful intellect and your encyclopaedic knowledge. I thank you, gentlemen, for your kindly reception of an intruder and a disturber of your erudite activities, and I wish you a very good evening."

With this, the inspector took his departure, leaving us both a little overpowered by his magniloquence and me a little surprised by Thorndyke's promise which had evoked it.

---

## XV. POLTON ON THE WAR PATH

As the inspector's footsteps died away on the stairs, we looked at one another and smiled.

"That was a fine peroration, even for Blandy," I remarked. "But haven't you rather misled the poor man? He is evidently under the delusion that he has harnessed you firmly to his chariot."

"I only promised to look over his salvage; which I am quite ready to do for my own satisfaction."

"I don't quite see why. You are not likely to learn anything from it; and even if you were, this affair is not our concern."

"I don't know that we can say that," he replied. "But we needn't argue the point. I don't mind admitting that mere professional curiosity is a sufficient motive to induce me to keep an eye on the case."

"Well, that would be good news for Blandy, for it is obvious that he is completely stumped; and so am I, for that matter, assuming that there is anything abnormal about the case. I don't feel convinced that there is."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke; "that is Blandy's difficulty. It is a very odd and puzzling case. Taking the group of circumstances as a whole, it seems impossible to accept it as perfectly normal; but yet, when one examines the factors separately, there is not one of them at which one can cavil."

"I am not sure that I follow that," said I. "Why can we not accept the circumstances as normal? I should like to hear you state the case as it presents itself to you."

"Well," he replied, "let us first take the facts as a whole. Here is a house which, in some unknown way, catches fire in the small hours of the morning. In the debris of that house is found the body of a man who has apparently been burned to death."

"Yes," I agreed, with a grin, "the body certainly had that appearance."

"It transpires later," Thorndyke continued, disregarding my comment, "that the death of that man, A, benefits another man, B, to the extent of four thousand pounds. But the premises in which the fire occurred belong to and are controlled by B; and they had been lent by B to A for his occupation while B should be absent in Ireland. The event by which the benefit accrues to B—the death of Harold Moxdale—has occurred quite a short time after the fire. Finally, the tenant, B, who had ostensibly gone away from his residence to make a short visit to Ireland, has never returned to that residence or made any communication to his landlord—has, in fact, disappeared."

"Blandy doesn't admit Haire has disappeared," I objected

"We mustn't take Blandy's statements too literally. In spite of his disclaimers, it is evident that he is hot on the trail of Mr. Gustavus Haire; and the fact is that, in the ordinary sense of the word, Haire has disappeared. He has absented himself from his ordinary places of resort, he has communicated with nobody, and he has left no traces by which the police could discover his whereabouts."

"But now take the facts separately. The origin of the fire is a mystery, but there is not a particle of evidence of incendiarism. The only person who could have been suspected had been overseas several days before the fire broke out."

"Do you consider that his absence at the time puts him quite outside the picture? I mean, don't you think that the fire could have been started by some sort of timing apparatus?"

"Theoretically, I have no doubt that it could. But it would have had to be a rather elaborate apparatus. The common alarm clock would not have served. But really the question seems to be of only academic interest for two reasons. First, the fire experts were on the look-out for some fire-raising appliance and found no trace of any; second, the presence of Moxdale in the rooms seems to exclude the possibility of any such appliance having been used, and, third, even the appliance that you are postulating would not have served its purpose with anything like calculable certainty."

"You mean that it might not have worked, after all?"

"No. What I mean is that it could not have been adjusted to the actual purpose, which would have been to cause the death of the man. It would have been useless to fire the house unless it were certain that the man would be in it at the time and that he would not be able to escape. But neither of these things could be foreseen with any degree of certainty. No, Jervis, I think that, on our present knowledge, we must agree with Blandy and the others that no suspicion of arson stands against Gustavus Haire."

"That is what he says, but it is obvious that he does suspect Haire."

"I was speaking in terms of evidence," Thorndyke rejoined. "Blandy admits that he has nothing against Haire and therefore cannot treat the disappearance as a flight. If he met Haire, he couldn't detain him or charge him with any unlawful act. But he feels—and I think quite rightly—that Haire's disappearance is a mystery that needs to be explained. Blandy, in fact, is impressed by the case as a whole; by the appearance of a connected series of events with the suggestion of a purpose behind it. He won't accept those events as normal events, brought about merely by chance, but he sees no way of challenging them so as to start an inquiry. That is why he came to us. He hopes that we may be able to give him some kind of leading fact."

"And so you are proposing to go over the box of rubbish that he has brought on the chance that you may find the leading fact among it?"

"I think we may as well look over it," he replied. "It is wildly improbable that it will yield any information, but you never know. We have, on more than one occasion, picked up a useful hint from a most unlikely source. Shall we go up and see what sort of rubbish the box contains?"

We ascended to the laboratory floor, where we found Polton looking with undissembled distaste at a large packing-case

filled to the brim with miscellaneous oddments, mostly metallic, and all covered with a coating of white ash.

"Looks as if Mr. Blandy has turned out a dust bin," Polton commented, "and passed the contents on to us. A rare job it was getting it up the stairs. Shall I put the whole of the stuff out on the bench?"

"You may as well," replied Thorndyke, "though I think Blandy might have weeded some of it out. Door-handles and hinges are not likely to yield much information."

Accordingly, we all set to work transferring the salvage to the large bench, which Polton had tidily covered with newspaper, sorting it out to some extent as we did so, and making a preliminary inspection. But it was a hopeless-looking collection, for the little information that it conveyed we possessed already. We knew about the tools from the little workshop, the projectors and the remains of gramophones and cinematograph cameras, and, as to the buttons, studs, keys, pen-knives, and other small personal objects, they were quite characterless and could tell us nothing.

Nevertheless, Thorndyke glanced at each item as he picked it out of its dusty bed and laid it in its appointed place on the bench, and even Polton began presently to develop an interest in the proceedings. But it was evidently a merely professional interest, concerning itself exclusively with the detached fragments of the gramophone motors and other mechanical remains and particularly with the battered carcase of the grandfather clock, and I strongly suspected that he was simply on the look-out for usable bits of scrap. Voicing my suspicion, I suggested:

"This ought to be quite a little windfall for you, Polton. A lot of this clockwork seems to be quite sound—I mean as to the separate parts."

He laid down the clock (as tenderly as if it had been in going order) and regarded me with a cunning and crinkly smile.

"It's an ill wind, sir, that blows nobody good. My reserve stock of gear-wheels and barrels and other spare parts will be all the richer for Mr. Blandy's salvage. And you can't have too many spares; you never know when one of them may be the very one that you want. But might I suggest that, as this is a rather dirty job, you let me finish setting the things out and come and look over them at your leisure in the morning, when I have been through them with a dusting-brush."

As I found the business not only dirty but rather boresome—and in my private opinion perfectly futile—I caught at the suggestion readily, and Thorndyke and I then retired to the sitting-room to resume our operations on the test-slides, after cleansing our hands.

"We seem to have been ejected," I remarked as we sat down to the table. "Perhaps our presence hindered the collection of scrap."

Thorndyke smiled. "That is possible," said he. "But I thought that I detected an awakening interest in the inspection. At any rate, it will be as well to let him sort out the oddments before we go through them. He is a good observer, and he might notice things that we should overlook and draw our attention to them."

"You don't really expect to get any information out of that stuff, do you?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "The inspection is little more than a formality, principally to satisfy Blandy. Still, Jervis, we have our principles, and one of them—and a very important one—is to examine everything, no matter how insignificant. This won't be the first rubbish-heap that we have inspected; and it may be that we shall learn something from it, after all."

Thorndyke's suggestion of "an awakening interest" on Polton's part was curiously confirmed on the following day and thereafter. For, whereas I made my perfunctory inspection of the rubbish and forthwith—literally—washed my hands of it, and even Thorndyke looked it over with little enthusiasm, Polton seemed to give it a quite extraordinary amount of attention. By degrees, he got all the mechanical oddments sorted out into classified heaps, and once I found him with a small sieve, carefully sifting the ash and dirt from the bottom of the box. And his interest was not confined to the contents of that unclean receptacle; for, having been shown the gold watch which the inspector had left with us, he skilfully prised it open and examined its interior through his eyeglass with the most intense concentration.

Moreover, I began to notice something new and unusual in his manner and appearance: a suggestion of suppressed excitement and a something secret and conspiratorial in his bearing. I mentioned the matter to Thorndyke, but, needless to say, he had noticed it and was waiting calmly for the explanation to transpire. We both suspected that Polton had made some sort of discovery, and we both felt some surprise that he had not communicated it at once.

And then, at last, came the disclosure; and a most astonishing one it was. It occurred a few mornings after Blandy's visit, when Thorndyke and I, happening to go up together to the laboratory, found our friend at the bench, poring over one of the heaps of mechanical fragments with a pair of watchmaker's tweezers in his hand.

"Well, Polton," I remarked, "I should think that you have squeezed the inspector's treasures nearly dry."

He looked up at me with his queer, crinkly smile and replied: "I am rather afraid that I have, sir."

"And now, I suppose, you know all about it?"

"I wouldn't say that, sir, but I know a good deal more than when I started. But I don't know all that I want to know."

"Well," I said, "at any rate, you can tell us who set fire to that house."

"Yes, sir," he replied, "I think I can tell you that, without being too positive."

I stared at him in astonishment, and so did Thorndyke. For Polton was no jester, and, in any case, was much too well-

mannered to let off jokes at his principals.

"Then," said I, "tell us. Who do you say it was?"

"I say that it was Mr. Haire," he replied with quiet conviction.

"But, my dear Polton," I exclaimed. "Mr. Haire was in Dublin when the fire broke out, and had been there five days. You heard the inspector say that it was impossible to suspect him."

"It isn't impossible for me," said Polton. "He could have done it quite well if he had the necessary means. And I am pretty sure that he had the means."

"What means had he?" I demanded.

"Well, sir," he replied, "he had an eight-day long-case clock."

Of course, we knew that. The clock had been mentioned at the inquest. Nevertheless, Polton's simple statement impinged on me with a quite startling effect, as if some entirely new fact had emerged. Apparently it impressed Thorndyke in the same way, for he drew a stool up to the bench and sat down beside our mysterious little friend.

"Now, Polton," said he, "there is something more than that. Tell us all about it."

Polton crinkled nervously as he pondered the question.

"It is rather a long and complicated story," he said, at length. "But I had better begin with the essential facts. This clock of Mr. Haire's was not quite an ordinary clock. It had a calendar movement of a very unusual kind, quite different from the simple date disc which most of these old clocks have. I know all about that movement because it happens that I invented it and fitted it to a clock; and I am practically certain that this is the very clock."

"However, that doesn't matter for the moment, but I must tell you how I came to make it and how it worked. In those days, I was half-way through my time as apprentice, and I was doing some work for a gentleman who made philosophical instruments—his name was Parrish. Now, Mr. Parrish had a clock of this kind—what they call a 'grandfather' nowadays—and it had the usual disc date in the dial. But that was no use to him because he was rather near-sighted. What he wanted was a calendar that would show the day of the week as well as the date, and in good big characters that he could read when he was sitting at his writing-table; and he asked me if I could make one. Well, of course, there was no difficulty. The simple calendar work that is sometimes fitted to watches would have done perfectly. But he wouldn't have it because it works rather gradually. It takes a few minutes at least to make the change."

"But," said I, "surely that is of no consequence."

"Not the slightest, sir. The change occurs in the night when nobody can see it, and the correct date is shown in the morning. But Mr. Parrish was a rather precise, pernicketty gentleman, and he insisted that the change ought to be made in an instant at the very moment of midnight, when the date does really change. So I had to set my wits to work to see what could be done; and at last I managed to design a movement that changed instantaneously."

"It was quite a simple affair. There was a long spindle, or arbor, on which were two drums, one having the days of the week in half-inch letters on it and the other carrying a ribbon with the thirty-one numbers painted the same size. I need not go into full details, but I must explain the action, because that is what matters in this case. There was a twenty-four hour wheel—we will call it the day-wheel—which took off from the hour-wheel, and this carried a snail which turned with it."

"You don't mean an actual snail, I presume," said I.

"No, sir. What clockmakers call a snail is a flat disc with the edge cut out to a spiral shape, the shape of one of those flat water-snails. Resting against the edge of the snail by means of a projecting pin was a light steel bar with two pallets on it, and there was a seven-toothed star-wheel with long, thin teeth, one of which was always resting on the pallets. I may say that the whole movement excepting the day-wheel was driven by a separate little weight, so as to save the power of the clock."

"And now let me explain how it worked. The day-wheel, driven by the clock, made a complete turn in twenty-four hours, and it carried the snail round with it. But as the snail turned, its spiral edge gradually pushed the pallet-bar away. A tooth of the star-wheel was resting on the upper pallet; but when the snail had nearly completed its turn, it had pushed the bar so far away that the tooth slipped off the upper pallet on to the lower one—which was quite close underneath. Then the snail turned a little more and the pin came to the end of the spiral—what we call 'the step'—and slipped off, and the pallet-bar dropped back and let the tooth of the star-wheel slip off the lower pallet. Then the star-wheel began to turn until the next tooth was stopped by the upper pallet; and so it made a seventh of a turn, and, as it carried the two drums round with it, each of those made the seventh of a turn and changed the date in less than a second. Is that clear, sir?"

"Quite clear," replied Thorndyke (speaking for himself), "so far as the mechanism goes, but not so clear as to your deductions from it. I can see that this quite innocent calendar movement could be easily converted into a fire-raising appliance. But you seem to suggest that it was actually so converted. Have you any evidence that it was?"

"I have, sir," replied Polton. "What I have described is the calendar work just as I made it. There is no doubt about that, because when I took off the copper dial, there was the day-wheel with the snail on it still in place. Perhaps you noticed it."

"I did, but I thought it was part of some kind of striking-work."

"No, sir. The striking-work had been removed to make room for the calendar-work. Well, there was the day-wheel and the snail, and I have found the pallet-bar and the star-wheel and some of the other parts, so it is certain that the calendar movement was there. But there was something else. Somebody had made an addition to it, for I found another snail and another pallet-bar almost exactly like those of the calendar. But there was this difference: the day-snail had marked on it twelve lines, each denoting two hours; but this second snail had seven lines marked on it, and those seven lines couldn't have meant anything but seven days."

"That is a reasonable assumption," said Thorndyke.

"I think, sir, that it is rather more than an assumption. If you remember that the star-wheel and the spindle that carried the two drums made one complete revolution in seven days, you will see that, if this snail had been fixed on to the spindle, it would also have made a revolution in seven days. But do you see what follows from that?"

"I don't," said I, "so you may as well explain."

"Well, the day-snail turned once a day and, at the end of its turn, it suddenly let the pin drop into the step, released the star-wheel and changed the date in an instant. But this second snail would take a week to turn, and, at the end of the week, the pin would drop into the step, and in an instant some thing would happen. The question is, what was it that would have happened?"

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "that is the question, and first, can you think of any normal and innocent purpose that the snail might have served?"

"No, sir. I have considered that question, and I can't find any answer. It couldn't have been any thing connected with the calendar, because the weeks aren't shown on a calendar. There's no need. When Sunday comes round, you know that it is a week since last Sunday; and no one wants to number the weeks."

"It is conceivable," I suggested, "that someone might have had some reason for keeping count of the weeks, though it does seem unlikely. But could this addition be connected with the phases of the moon? They are sometimes shown on clocks."

"They are, usually, on these old clocks," replied Polton, "but this movement would have been of no use for that purpose. The moon doesn't jump from one phase to the next. It moves gradually; and the moon-disc on a clock shows the changes from day to day. Besides, this snail would have been unnecessary. A moon-disc could have been taken directly off the spindle and moved forward one tooth at each change of date. No, sir, I can think of no use for that snail but to do some particular thing at a given time on a given day. And that is precisely what I think it was made for."

I could see that Thorndyke was deeply impressed by this statement, and so was I. But there were one or two difficulties, and I proceeded to point them out.

"You speak, Polton, of doing something at a given time on a given day. But your calendar gave no choice of time. It changed on the stroke of midnight. But this fire broke out at three o'clock in the morning."

"The calendar changed at midnight," replied Polton, "because it was set to that time. But it could have been set to any other time. The snail was not fixed immovably on the pivot. It was held fast by a set-screw, but if you loosened the screw, you could turn the snail and set it to discharge at any time you pleased."

"And what about the other snail?" Thorndyke asked.

"That was made in exactly the same way. It had a thick collet and a small set-screw. So you see, sir, the movement was easily controllable. Supposing you wanted it to discharge at three o'clock in the morning in five days' time; first you set the hands of the clock to three hours after midnight, then you set the day-snail so that the step was just opposite the pin, and you set the week-snail so that the pin was five marks from the step. Then both the snails would be in the correct position by the day-wheel, and at three in the morning on the fifth day both snails would discharge together and whatever you had arranged to happen at that time would happen to the moment. And you notice, sir, that until it did happen, there would be nothing unusual to be seen or heard. To a stranger in the room, there would appear to be nothing but an ordinary grand father clock with a calendar—unless the little windows for the calendar had been stopped up, as I expect they had been."

Here Thorndyke anticipated a question that I had been about to put; for I had noticed that Polton had described the mechanism, but had not produced the parts for our inspection, excepting the carcass of the clock, which was on the bench.

"I understand that you have the two snails and pallet-bars?"

"Yes, sir, and I can show them to you if you wish. But I have been making a model to show how the mechanism worked, and I thought it best for the purposes of evidence, to make it with the actual parts. It isn't quite finished yet, but if you would like to see it—"

"No," replied Thorndyke, instantly realizing, with his invariable tact and sympathy, that Polton wished to spring his creation on us complete, "we will wait until the model is finished. But to what extent does it consist of the actual parts?"

"As far as the calendar goes, sir, almost entirely. The day-wheel was on the clock-plate where you saw it. Then I found the snail and the spindle with the star-wheel still fixed to it. That is practically the whole of it excepting the wooden drums, which, of course, have gone.

"As to the week-mechanism, I have got the snail and the pallet-bar only. There may not have been much else, as the week-snail could have been set on the spindle and would then have turned with the star-wheel."

"There would have had to be a second star-wheel, I suppose," Thorndyke suggested.

"Not necessarily, sir. If it was required for only a single discharge, a pivoted lever, or something that would drop right out when the pallet released it, would do. I have found one or two wheels that might have been used, but they may have come from the gramophone motors or the projectors, so one can't be sure."

"Then," said I, "you can't say exactly what the week-mechanism was like, or that your model will be a perfect reproduction of it?"

"No, sir," he replied, regretfully. "But I don't think that really matters. If I produce a model, made from the parts found in the ruins, that would be capable of starting a fire, that will dispose of the question of possibility."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "I think we must admit that. When will your model be ready for a demonstration?"

"I can promise to have it ready by to-morrow evening," was the reply.

"And would you be willing that Inspector Blandy should be present at the demonstration?"

The answer was most emphatically in the affirmative; and the gratified crinkle with which the permission was given suggested keen satisfaction at the chance of giving the inspector a shock.

So the matter was left; and Thorndyke and I retired, leaving our ingenious friend to a despairing search among the rubbish for yet further traces of the sinister mechanism.

---

## XVI. POLTON ASTONISHES THE INSPECTOR

POLTON'S revelation gave us both a good deal of material for thought, and, naturally, thought generated discussion.

"How does Polton's discovery impress you?" I asked. "Is it a real one, do you think, or is it possible that he has only found a mare's nest?"

"We must wait until we have seen the model," Thorndyke replied. "But I attach great weight to his opinions for several reasons."

"As, for instance—?"

"Well, first there is Polton himself. He is a profound mechanic, with the true mechanic's insight and imagination. He reads a certain function into the machine which he has mentally reconstructed, and he is probably right. Then there is the matter which we were discussing recently: the puzzling, contradictory nature of the case. We agreed that the whole group of events looks abnormal; that it suggests a connected group of events, intentionally brought about, with an unlawful purpose behind it, but there is not a particle of positive evidence connecting anyone with those events in the character of agent. The crux of the matter has been from the first the impossibility of connecting Haire with the outbreak of the fire. His alibi seemed to be unchallengeable; for not only was he far away, days before the fire broke out; not only, was there no trace of any fire-raising appliance; but the presence of the other man in the rooms seemed to exclude the possibility of any such appliance having been used.

"But if Polton's discovery turns out to be a real one, all these difficulties disappear. The impossible has become possible and even probable. It has become possible for Haire to have raised the fire while he was hundreds of miles away; and the appliance used was so ordinary in appearance that it would have passed unnoticed by the man who was living in the rooms. If Polton is right, he has supplied the missing link which brings the whole case together."

"You speak of probability," I objected. "Aren't you putting it too high? At the most, Polton can prove that the mechanism could have been used for fire-raising; but what is the evidence that it was actually so used?"

"There is no direct evidence," Thorndyke admitted. "But consider all the circumstances. The fire, itself, looked like the work of an incendiary, and all the other facts supported that view. The fatal objection was the apparent physical impossibility of the fire having been purposely raised. But Polton's discovery—if we accept it provisionally—removes the impossibility. Here is a mechanism which could have been used to raise the fire, and for which no other use can be discovered. That, I say, establishes a probability that it was so used; and that probability would remain even if it could be proved that the mechanism had some legitimate function."

"Perhaps you are right," said I. "At any rate, I think Blandy will agree with you. Is he coming to the demonstration?"

"Yes. I notified him and invited him to come. I couldn't do less; and, in fact, though I have no great love for the man, I respect his abilities. He will be here punctually at eight o'clock to-night."

In effect, the inspector was more than punctual, for he turned up, in a state of undisguised excitement, at half-past seven. I need not repeat his adulatory greeting of my colleague nor the latter's disclaimer of any merit in the matter. But I noted that he appeared to be genuinely grateful for Thorndyke's help and much more frank and open in his manner than he had usually been.

As the demonstration had been arranged for eight, we occupied the interval by giving him a general outline of the

mechanism while he fortified himself with a glass of sherry (which Thorndyke had, in some way, ascertained to be his particular weakness) and listened with intense attention. At eight o'clock, exactly, by Polton's newly-completed regulator, the creator of that incomparable time-keeper appeared and announced that the model was ready for inspection, and we all, thereupon, followed him up to the laboratory floor.

As we entered the big workroom, Blandy cast an inquisitive glance round at the appliances and apparatus that filled the shelves and occupied the benches; then he espied the model, and, approaching it, gazed at it with devouring attention.

It was certainly an impressive object, and at the first glance I found it a little confusing, and not exactly what I had expected; but as the demonstration proceeded, these difficulties disappeared.

"Before I start the movement," Polton began, "I had better explain one or two things. This is a demonstration model, and it differs in some respects from the actual mechanism. That mechanism was attached to an eight-day clock, and it moved once in twenty-four hours. This one moves once in an abbreviated day of thirty seconds."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Blandy. "How marvellous are the powers of the horologist! But I am glad that it is only a temporary arrangement. At that rate, we should all be old men in about twenty minutes."

"Well, sir," said Polton, with an apologetic and crinkly smile, "you wouldn't want to stand here for five days to see it work. But the calendar movement is exactly the same as that in Mr. Haire's clock; in fact, it is made from the actual parts that I found in your box, excepting the two wooden drums and the ratchet pulley that carries the cord and weight. Those I had to supply; but the spindle that carries the drums, I found with the star-wheel on it.

"As we haven't got the clock, I have made a simple little clock to turn the snail, like those that are used to turn an equatorial telescope. You can ignore that. But the rest of the movement is driven by this little weight, just as the original was. Then, as to the addition that someone had made to the calendar, I have fixed the week-snail to the end of the spindle. I don't suppose that is how it was done, but that doesn't matter. This shows how the snail and pallet-bar worked, which is the important point."

"And what is that contraption in the bowl?" asked Blandy.

"That," Polton replied a little evasively, "you can disregard for the moment. It is a purely conjectural arrangement for starting the fire. I don't suggest that it is like the one that was used. It is merely to demonstrate the possibility."

"Exactly," said Blandy. "The possibility is the point that matters."

"Well," Polton continued, "that is all that I need explain. I have fitted the little clock with a dial and one hand so that you can follow the time, and, of course, the day of the week and the day of the month are shown on the two drums. And now we can set it going. You see that the day-drum shows Sunday and the date-drum shows the first, and the hand on the dial shows just after three o'clock; so it has just turned three o'clock on Sunday morning. And, if you look at the week-snail, you will see that it is set to discharge on the fifth day—that is, at three o'clock on Friday morning. And now here goes."

He pulled up the little weight by its cord and released some sort of stop. Forthwith the little conical pendulum began to gyrate rapidly, and the single hand to travel round the dial, while Polton watched it ecstatically and chanted out the events as they occurred.

"Six a.m., nine a.m., twelve noon, three p.m., six p.m., nine p.m., midnight."

Here he paused with his eye on the dial, and we all watched expectantly as the hand moved swiftly towards the figure three. As it approached there was a soft click accompanied by a slight movement of the two drums. Then the hand reached the figure and there was another click; and, immediately, the two drums turned, and Sunday, the first, became Monday, the second.

So the rather weird-looking machine went on. The little pendulum gyrated madly, the hand moved rapidly round the dial, and at each alternate three o'clock there came the soft click, and then the two drums moved together and showed a new day. Mean while, Polton continued to chant out his announcements—rather unnecessarily, as I thought, for the thing was obvious enough.

"Tuesday, the third; Wednesday, the fourth; Thursday, the fifth, six a.m., nine a.m., noon, three p.m., six p.m., nine p.m., midnight—now, look out for Friday morning."

I think we were all as excited as he was, and we gazed at the dial with the most intense expectancy as the hand approached the figure, and the first warning click sounded. Then the hand reached the hour mark, and, immediately, there was a double click, followed by a faint whirring sound; and suddenly a cloud of white smoke shot up from the bowl and was instantly followed by a sheet of flame.

"My word!" exclaimed Blandy, "there's no nonsense about that. Would you mind showing us how that was done, Mr. Polton?"

"It was quite a simple and crude affair," Polton replied, apologetically, "but, you see, I am not a chemist."

"The simpler, the better," said Blandy, "for it was quite effectual. I wish you had shown it to us before you let it off."

"That's all right, sir," said Polton. "I've got another ready to show you, but I thought I would like you to see how it worked before I gave you the details."

"Quite right, too, Polton," said I. "The conjurer should always do the trick first, and not spoil the effect by giving the explanation in advance. But we want to see how it was done, now."

With a crinkly smile of satisfaction, Polton went to a cupboard, from which he brought out a second enamelled iron bowl, and, with the greatest care, carried it across to the bench.

"It is quite a primitive arrangement, you see," said he. "I have just put a few celluloid films in the bowl, and on the top one I have put a ring of this powder, which is a mixture of loaf sugar and chlorate of potash, both finely powdered and thoroughly stirred together. In the middle of the ring is this little wide mouthed bottle, containing a small quantity of strong sulphuric acid. Now, as soon as any of the acid touches the mixture, it will burst into flame; so all that is necessary to start the fire is to capsize the bottle and spill the acid on the chlorate mixture."

"You see how I did that. When the escapement discharged, it released this small wheel, which was driven by a separate spring, and the wheel then began to spin and wind up this thin cord, the other end of which was attached to this spindle carrying this long wire lever. As soon as the cord tightened up, it carried the lever across the bowl until it struck the little bottle and knocked it over. You notice that I stood the bottle inside an iron washer so that it couldn't slide, but must fall over when it was struck."

"A most remarkable monument of human ingenuity," commented Blandy, beaming benevolently on our gratified artificer. "I regard you, Mr. Polton, with respectful astonishment as a worker of mechanical miracles. Would it be possible to repeat the experiment for the benefit of the less gifted observer?"

Polton was only too delighted to repeat his triumph. Removing the first bowl, in which the fire had now died out, he replaced it with the second one and then proceeded to wind up the separate spring.

"There is no need to set it to the exact day," said he, "as it is only the ignition that you want to see. I will give you notice when it is ready to discharge; and you had better not stand too close to the bowl in case the acid should fly about. Now, there are two days to run; that is one minute."

We gathered round the bowl as near as was safe, and I noticed with interest the perfect simplicity of the arrangement and its infallible efficiency—so characteristic of Polton. In a couple of minutes the warning was given to "look out" and we all stepped back a pace. Then we heard the double click, and the cord—actually bookbinder's thread—which had fallen slack when the spring had been re-wound—began to tighten. As soon as it was at full tension the spindle of the long wire lever began to turn, carrying the latter at increasing speed towards the bowl. Passing the rim, it skimmed across until it met the bottle, and, giving it a little tap, neatly capsized it. Instantly, a cloud of white smoke shot up; the powder disappeared and a tongue of flame arose from the heap of films at the bottom of the bowl.

Blandy watched them with a smile of concentrated benevolence until the flame had died out. Then he turned to Polton with a ceremonious bow.

"Sir," said he, "you are a benefactor to humanity, an unraveller of criminal mysteries. I am infinitely obliged to you. Now I know how the fire in Billington Street arose, and who is responsible for the lamented death of the unfortunate gentleman whose body we found."

Polton received these tributes with his characteristic smile, but entered a modest disclaimer. "I don't suggest, sir, that this is exactly the method that was used."

"No," said Blandy, "but that is of no consequence. You have demonstrated the possibility and the existence of the means. That is enough for our purposes. But as to the details; have you formed any opinion on the methods by which the fire was communicated to the room from its starting-point?"

"Yes, sir," Polton replied; "I have considered the matter and thought out a possible plan, which I feel sure must be more or less right. From Mr. Green's evidence at the inquest we learned that the whole room was littered with parcels filled with used films; and it appeared that these parcels were stacked all round the walls, and even piled round the clock and under the bed. It looked as if those parcels, stacked round and apparently in contact, formed a sort of train from the clock round the room to the heap under the bed."

"Now, I think that the means of communication was celluloid varnish. We know that there was a lot of it about the room, including a row of bottles on the mantelpiece. This varnish is extremely inflammable. If some of it got spilt on the floor, alight, it would run about, carrying the flame with it and lighting up the films as it went. I think that is the way the fire was led away from the clock. You probably know, sir, that the cases of these tall clocks are open at the bottom. The plinth doesn't make a watertight contact with the floor; and, even if it did, it would be easy to raise it an eighth of an inch with little wedges. My idea is that the stuff for starting the fire was in the bottom of the clock-case. It must have been; for we know that the mechanism was inside the clock, and there couldn't have been anything showing outside. I think that the bottom of the clock was filled with loose films, but underneath them were two or three bottles of celluloid varnish, loosely corked, and on top, the arrangement that you have just seen, or some other."

"When the escapement tipped the bottle over—or started the fire in some other way—the films would be set alight, and the flames would either crack the varnish-bottles right away or heat the varnish and blow out the corks. In any case, there would be lighted varnish running about inside the clock, and it would soon run out under the plinth, stream over the floor of the room and set fire to the parcels of films; and when one parcel was set alight, the fire would spread from that to the next, and so all over the room. That is my idea as to the general arrangement. Of course, I may be quite wrong."



"I don't think you are, Polton," said Thorndyke, "at least in principle. But, to come to details; wouldn't your suggested arrangement take up a good deal of space? Wouldn't it interfere with the pendulum and the weights?"

"I think there would be plenty of room, sir," replied Polton. "Take the pendulum first. Now, these tall-case clocks are usually about six feet high, sometimes a little more. The pendulum is about forty-five inches over all and suspended from near the top. That brings the rating-nut to about twenty-four inches above the floor level—a clear two feet to spare for the films and the apparatus. Then as to the weights; there was only one weight, as the striking-gear had been taken away. It is a rule that the weight ought not to touch the floor even when the clock is quite run down. But supposing it did; there would be about four feet from the bottom of the weight to the floor when the clock was fully wound—and we can assume that it was fully wound when the firing mechanism was started. As the fall per day would be not more than seven inches, the weight would be thirteen inches from the floor at the end of the fifth day, or at three a.m. on the fifth day, twenty inches.

"That leaves plenty of room in any case. But you have to remember that the weight, falling straight down, occupies a space of not more than four inches square. All round that space there would be the full two feet or even more at the sides, keeping clear of the pendulum. I don't think, sir, that the question of space raises any difficulty."

"I agree with you, Polton," said Thorndyke. "You have disposed of my objection completely. What do you say, Inspector?"

The inspector smiled benignly and shook his head. "What can I say?" he asked. "I am rendered almost speechless by the contemplation of such erudition, such insight, and such power of mental synthesis. I feel a mere dilettante."

Thorndyke smiled appreciatively. "We are all gratified," said he, "by your recognition of Mr. Polton's merits. But, compliments apart, how does his scheme strike you?"

"It strikes me," replied Blandy, subsiding into a normal manner (excepting his smile, which was of the kind that "won't come off"), "as supplying an explanation that is not only plausible but is probably the true explanation. Mr. Polton has shown that our belief that it was impossible for Mr. Haire to have raised the fire was a mistaken belief, that the raising of the fire was perfectly possible, that the means and appliances necessary for raising it were there, and that those means and appliances could have no other purpose. From which we are entitled to infer that those means were so used, and that the fire was actually raised, and was raised by Mr. Gustavus Haire."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "I think that is the position; and with that we retire, temporarily, at any rate, and the initiative passes to you. Mr. Haire is a presumptive fire-raiser. But he is your Haire, and it is for you to catch him, if you can."

---

## XVII. FURTHER SURPRISES

THE air of finality with which Thorndyke had, so to speak, handed the baby back to Inspector Blandy might have been deceptive; but I don't think it even deceived the inspector. Certainly it did not deceive me. Never had I known Thorndyke to resign from an unsolved problem, and I felt pretty certain that he was at least keeping this particular problem in view, and, in his queer, secretive way, trying over the various possible solutions in his mind.

This being so, I made no pretence of having dismissed the case, but took every opportunity of discussing it, not only with Thorndyke but especially with Polton, who was the actual fountain of information. And there were, about this time, abundant opportunities for discussion, for we were still engaged, in our spare time, in the great work of re-arranging and weeding out our large collection of microscopical slides for which Polton had recently made a new set of cabinets. Naturally, that artist assisted us in sorting out the specimens, and it was in the intervals of these activities that I endeavoured to fill in the blanks of my knowledge of the case.

"I have been thinking," I remarked on one of these occasions, "of what you told us, Polton, about that clock of Mr. Haire's. You are of opinion that it is actually the clock to which you fitted the calendar for Mr. Parrish. I don't know that it is a point of any importance, but I should like to know what convinces you that this is the identical clock, and not one which might have been copied from yours, or invented independently."

"My principal reason for believing that it is the same clock is that it is made from the same kind of oddments of material that I used. For instance, I made the pallet-bar from an old hack-saw blade which I happened to have by me. It was not specially suitable, and an ordinary clock-maker would almost certainly have used a strip of brass. But the pallet-bar of this clock has been made from a hack-saw blade."

He paused and seemed to reflect for a while. Then he continued: "But there is another point; and the more I have thought about it the more it has impressed me. Mr. Parrish had a nephew who lived with him and worked as a pupil in the workshop; a lad of about my own age or a little younger. Now this lad's name was Haire, and he was always called Gus. I supposed at the time that Gus stood for Augustus, but when I heard at the inquest the name of Gustavus Haire, I wondered if it might happen to be the same person. You can't judge by a mere similarity of names, since there are so many people of the same name. But when I saw this clock, I thought at once of Gus Haire. For he was in the workshop when I made the calendar, and he watched me as I was working on it and got me to explain all about it; though the principle on which it worked was obvious enough to any mechanic."

"Should you describe Gus Haire as a mechanic?" I asked.

"Yes, of a sort," Polton replied. "He was a poor workman, but he was equal to a simple job like the making of this

calendar, especially when he had been shown; and certainly to the addition that had been made to it."

"And what sort of fellow was he—morally, I mean?" Polton took time to consider this question. At length he replied: "It is not for me to judge any man's character, and I didn't know very much about him. But I do know this as a fact: that on a certain occasion when I was making a new key for Mr. Parrish's cash drawer to replace one which was broken, Gus pinched a piece of my moulding wax and took a squeeze of the broken key; and that, later, Mr. Parrish accused me of having opened that drawer with a false key and taken money from it. Now, I don't know that Gus made a false key and I don't know that any money was actually stolen; but when a man takes a squeeze of the key of another man's cash drawer, he lays himself open to a reasonable suspicion of an unlawful intention."

"Yes, indeed," said I. "A decidedly fishy proceeding; and from what you have just told us, it looks as if you were right—as if the clock were the original clock and Mr. Gustavus Haire the original Gus, though it is not quite clear how Mr. Parrish's clock came into his possession."

"I don't think, sir," said he, "that it is difficult to imagine. Mr. Parrish was his uncle, and, as he was an old man even then, he must be dead long since. The clock must have gone to someone, and why not to his nephew?"

"Yes," I agreed, "that is reasonable enough. However, we don't know for certain, and, after all, I don't see that the identity of either the clock or the man is of much importance. What do you think, Thorndyke?"

My colleague removed his eye from the microscope, and, laying the slide in its tray, considered the question. At length he replied: "The importance of the point depends on how much Polton remembers. Blandy's difficulty at the moment is that he has no description of Gustavus Haire sufficiently definite for purposes of identification. Now, can we supply that deficiency? What do you say, Polton? Do you think that if you were to meet Gus Haire after all these years you would recognize him?"

"I think I should, sir," was the reply. And then he added as an afterthought: "I certainly should if he hadn't lost his teeth."

"His teeth!" I exclaimed. "Was there anything very distinctive about his teeth?"

"Distinctive isn't the word, sir," he replied. "They were most extraordinary teeth. I have never seen anything like them. They looked as if they were made of tortoiseshell."

"You don't mean that they were decayed?"

"Lord, no, sir. They were sound enough; good strong teeth and rather large. But they were such a queer colour. All mottled over with brown spots. And those spots wouldn't come off. He tried all sorts of things to get rid of them—Armenian bole, charcoal, even jeweller's red stuff—but it was no use. Nothing would shift those spots."

"Well," I said, "if those teeth are still extant, they would be a godsend to Blandy, for a written description would enable a stranger to identify the man."

"I doubt if it would, sir," Polton remarked with a significant smile. "Gus was extremely sensitive about those teeth, and showed them as little as possible when he talked or smiled. In those days he couldn't produce much in the way of a moustache, but I expect he does now, and I'll warrant he doesn't crop it too close."

"That is so," Thorndyke confirmed. "The only description of Haire that the police have, as I understand, is that given by Mr. Green and that of the man who interviewed Haire in Dublin. Green's description is very vague and sketchy, while the Dublin man hardly remembered him at all except by name, and that only because he had kept the card which Haire had presented. But both of these men mentioned that Haire wore a full, drooping moustache."

"Still," I persisted, "the teeth are a very distinctive feature, and it would seem only fair to Blandy to give him the information."

"Perhaps it might be as well," Thorndyke agreed. Then, returning to the subject of Polton's old acquaintance, he asked: "You say that Gus lived with his uncle. Why was that? Was he an orphan?"

"Oh, no, sir. Only his people lived in the country, not very far away, for he used to go down and stay with them occasionally at week-ends. It was somewhere in Essex. I have forgotten the name of the place, but it was a small town near the river."

"It wouldn't be Maldon?" Thorndyke suggested.

"That's the place, sir. Yes, I remember now." He stopped suddenly and, gazing at his principal with an expression of astonishment, exclaimed: "Now, I wonder, sir, how you knew that he lived at Maldon."

Thorndyke chuckled. "But, my dear Polton, I didn't know. I was only making a suggestion. Maldon happens to agree with your description."

Polton shook his head and crinkled sceptically. "It isn't the only waterside town in Essex," he remarked, and added: "No, sir. It's my belief that you knew that he lived at Maldon, though how you knew I can't imagine."

I was disposed to agree with Polton. There was something a little suspicious in the way in which Thorndyke had dropped pat on the right place. But further questions on my part elicited nothing but an exasperating grin and the advice to me to turn the problem over in my mind and consider any peculiarities that distinguished Maldon from other Essex towns; advice that I acted upon at intervals during the next few days with disappointingly negative results.

Nevertheless, Polton's conviction turned out to be justified. I realized it when, one morning about a week later, I found Polton laying the breakfast-table and placing the "catch" from the letter-box beside our respective plates. As I entered the room, he looked at me with a most portentous crinkle and pointed mysteriously to a small package which he had just deposited by my colleague's plate. I stooped over it to examine the typewritten address, but at first failed to discover anything significant about it; then, suddenly, my eye caught the postmark, and I understood. That package had been posted at Maldon.

"The Doctor is a most tantalizing person, sir," Polton exclaimed. "I don't mind admitting that I am bursting with curiosity as to what is in that package. But I suppose we shall find out presently."

Once more he was right; in fact, the revelation came that very evening. We were working our way through the great collection of test specimens, examining and discussing each slide, when Thorndyke looked up from the microscope and electrified Polton and me by saying:

"By the way, I have got a specimen of another kind that I should like to take your opinion on. I'll show it to you."

He rose and stepped across the room to a cabinet, from which he took a small cardboard box of the kind that dentists use for the packing of dental plates. Opening this, he took from it the wax model of an upper denture, complete with teeth, and laid it on the table.

There was a moment's silence as we both gazed at it in astonishment and Thorndyke regarded us with a quizzical smile. Then Polton, whose eyes seemed ready to drop out, exclaimed:

"God bless my soul! Why, they are Mr. Haire's teeth!"

Thorndyke nodded. "Good!" said he. "You recognize these teeth as being similar to those of Gus Haire?"

"They aren't similar," said Polton; "they are identically the same. Of course, I know that they can't actually be his teeth, but they are absolutely the same in appearance: the same white, chalky patches, the same brown stains, and the same little blackish-brown specks. I recognized them in a moment, and I have never seen anything like them before or since. Now, I wonder how you got hold of them."

"Yes," said I, "that is what I have been wondering. Perhaps the time has come for the explanation of the mystery."

"There is not much mystery," he replied. "These teeth are examples of the rare and curious condition known as 'mottled teeth'; of which perhaps the most striking feature is the very local distribution. It is known in many different places, and has been studied very thoroughly in the United States, but wherever it is met with it is confined to a quite small area, though within that area it affects a very large proportion of the inhabitants; so large that it is almost universal. Now, in this country, the most typically endemic area is Maldon; and, naturally, when Polton described Gus Haire's teeth and told us that Gus was a native of Essex, I thought at once of Maldon."

"I wonder, sir," said Polton, "what there is about Maldon that affects people's teeth in this way. Has it been explained?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "It has been found that wherever mottled teeth occur, the water from springs and wells contains an abnormal amount of fluorine, and the quantity of the fluorine seems to be directly related to the intensity of the mottling. Mr. Ainsworth, whose admirable paper in the British Dental Journal is the source of my information on the subject, collected samples of water from various localities in Essex and analysis of these confirmed the findings of the other investigators. That from Maldon contained the very large amount of five parts per million."

"And how did you get this specimen?" I asked.

"I got into touch with a dental surgeon who practises in Maldon and explained what I wanted. He was most kind and helpful, and, as he has taken an interest in mottled teeth and carefully preserved all his extractions, he was able to supply me not only with this model to produce in court if necessary, but with a few spare teeth for experiments such as section-cutting."

"You seem to have taken a lot of trouble," I remarked, "but I don't quite see why."

"It was just a matter of verification," he replied. "Polton's description was clear enough for us as we know Polton; but for the purposes of evidence, the actual identification on comparison is infinitely preferable. Now we may say definitely that Gus Haire's teeth were true mottled teeth; and if Gus Haire and Gustavus Haire are one and the same person, as they appear to be, then we can say that Mr. Haire has mottled teeth."

"But," I objected, "does it matter to us what his teeth are like?"

"Ah!" said he, "that remains to be seen. But if it should turn out that it does matter, we have the fact."

"And are we going to pass the fact on to Blandy? It seems to be more his concern than ours."

"I think," he replied, "that, as a matter of principle, we ought to, though I agree with Polton that the information will not be of much value to him. Perhaps we might invite him to drop in and see the specimen and take Polton's depositions. Will you communicate with him?"

I undertook to convey the invitation; and when the specimen had been put away in the cabinet, we dismissed the subject of mottled teeth and returned to our task of revision.

But that invitation was never sent; for, on the following morning, the inspector forestalled it by ringing us up on the

telephone to ask for an interview, he having, as he informed us, some new and important facts which he would like to discuss with us. Accordingly, with Thorndyke's concurrence, I made an appointment for that evening, which happened to be free of other engagements.

It was natural that I should speculate with some interest on the nature of the new facts that Blandy had acquired. I even attempted to discuss the matter with Thorndyke, but he, I need not say, elected to postpone discussion until we had heard the facts. Polton, on the other hand, was in a twitter of curiosity, and I could see that he had made up his mind by hook or by crook to be present at the interview; to which end, as the hour of the appointment drew near, he first placed an easy-chair for the inspector, flanked by a small table furnished with a decanter of sherry and a box of cigarettes, and then covered the main table with a portentous array of microscopes, slide-trays, and cabinets. Having made these arrangements, he seated himself opposite a microscope and looked at his watch; and I noticed thereafter that the watch got a good deal more attention than the microscope.

At length, punctually to the minute, the inspector's modest rat-tat sounded on the knocker, and Polton, as if actuated by a hidden spring, shot up from his chair like a Jack-in-the-box and tripped across to the door. Throwing it open, with a flourish, he announced "Inspector Blandy"; whereupon Thorndyke and I rose to receive our guest, and, having installed him in his chair, filled his glass and opened the cigarette-box while Polton stole back to his seat and glued his eye to the microscope.

My first glance at the inspector as he entered assured me that he expected to spring a surprise on us. But I didn't intend to let him have it all his own way. As he sipped his sherry and selected a cigarette from the box, I anticipated his offensive and took the initiative. "Well, Blandy, I suppose we may assume that you have caught your Haire?"

"I deprecate the word 'caught' as applied to Mr. Haire," he answered, beaming on me, "but, in fact, we have not yet had the pleasure of meeting him. It is difficult to trace a man of whom one has no definite description."

"Ah!" said I, "that is where we are going to help you. We can produce the magic touchstone which would identify the man instantly."

Here I took the denture-box from the table, where it had been placed in readiness, and, having taken out the model, handed it to him. He regarded it for a while with an indulgent smile and then looked enquiringly at me.

"This is a very singular thing, Dr. Jervis," said he. "Apparently a dentist's casting-model. But the teeth look like natural teeth."

"They look to me like deuced unnatural teeth," said I, "but, such as they are, they happen to be an exact facsimile of Mr. Haire's teeth."

Blandy was visibly impressed, and he examined the model with a new interest.

"I am absolutely astounded," said he; "not so much at the strange appearance of the teeth, though they are odd enough, as by your apparently unbounded resources. May I ask how you made this extraordinary discovery?"

Thorndyke gave him a brief account of the investigation which Polton confirmed and amplified, to which he listened with respectful attention.

"Well," he commented, "it is a remarkable discovery and would be a valuable one if the identity had to be proved. In the existing circumstances it is not of much value, for Mr. Haire is known to wear a moustache, and we may take it that his facial expression is not at all like that of the Cheshire Cat. And you can't stop a stranger in the street and ask him to show you his teeth."

He handed the model back to me, arid, having refreshed himself with a sip of wine, opened the subject of his visit.

"Speaking of identity, I have learned some new facts concerning the body which was found in Mr. Haire's house. I got my information from a rather unexpected source. Now, I wonder whether you can guess the name of my informant."

Naturally, I could not, and, as Thorndyke refused to hazard a guess, the inspector disclosed his secret with the air of a conjuror producing a goldfish from a hat box. "My informant," said he, "is Mr. Cecil Moxdale."

"What!" I exclaimed, "the dead man!"

"The dead man," he repeated; "thereby refuting the common belief that dead men tell no tales."

"This is most extraordinary," said I, "though, as a matter of fact, the body was never really identified. But why did Moxdale not come forward sooner?"

"It seems," replied Blandy, "that he was travelling in the South of France at the time of the fire and, naturally, heard nothing about it. He has only just returned, and, in fact, would not have come back so soon but for the circumstance that he happened to see a copy of The Times in which the legal notice appeared in connection with his uncle's death."

"Then I take it," said Thorndyke, "that he made his first appearance at the solicitor's office."

"Exactly," replied Blandy; "and there he learned about his supposed death, and the solicitors communicated with me. I had left them my address and asked them to advise me in the case of any new developments."

There was a short pause, during which we all considered this "new development." Then Thorndyke commented: "The reappearance of Moxdale furnishes conclusive negative evidence as to the identity of the body. Could he give any positive

evidence?"

"Nothing that you could call evidence," replied Blandy. "Of course, he knows nothing. But he has done a bit of guessing; and there may be something in what he says."

"As to the identity of the body?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes. He thinks it possible that the dead man may have been a man named O'Grady. The relations between Haire and O'Grady seem to have been rather peculiar; intimate but not friendly. In fact, Haire appears to have had an intense dislike for the other man, but yet they seem to have associated pretty constantly, and Moxdale has a strong impression that O'Grady used to 'touch' Haire for a loan now and again, if they were really loans. Moxdale suspects that they were not; in short, to put it bluntly he suspects that Haire was being blackmailed by O'Grady."

"No details, I suppose?"

"No. It is only a suspicion. Moxdale doesn't know anything and he doesn't want to say too much; naturally, as Haire is his cousin."

"But how does this bear on the identity of the body?"

"Doesn't it seem to you to have a bearing? The blackmailing, I mean, if it can be established. Blackmailers have a way of dying rather suddenly."

"But," I objected, "it hasn't been established. It is only a suspicion, and a rather vague one at that."

"True," he admitted, "and very justly observed. Yet we may bear the suspicion in mind, especially as we have a fact which, taken in connection with that suspicion, has a very direct bearing on the identity of the body. Moxdale tells me that O'Grady had an appointment with Haire at his, Haire's, rooms in the forenoon of the fourteenth of April; the very day on which Haire must have started for Dublin. He knows this for a fact, as he heard O'Grady make the appointment. Now, that appointment, at that place and on that date, strikes me as rather significant."

"Apparently, Moxdale finds it significant, too," said I. "The suggestion seems to be that Haire murdered O'Grady and went away, leaving his corpse in the rooms."

"Moxdale didn't put it that way," said Blandy.

"He suggested that O'Grady might have had the use of the rooms while Haire was away. But that is mere speculation, and he probably doesn't believe it himself. Your suggestion is the one that naturally occurs to us; and if it is correct, we can understand why Haire is keeping out of sight. Don't you think so?"

The question was addressed to Thorndyke with a persuasive smile. But my colleague did not seem to be impressed.

"The figure of O'Grady," he said, "seems to be rather shadowy and elusive, as, in fact, does the whole story. But perhaps Moxdale gave you a more circumstantial account of the affair."

"No, he did not," replied Blandy. "But my talk with him was rather hurried and incomplete. I dropped in on him without an appointment and found him just starting out to keep an engagement, so I only had a few minutes with him. But he voluntarily suggested a further meeting to go into matters in more detail; and I then ventured to ask if he would object to your being present at the interview, as you represent the insurance people, and he had no objection at all."

"Now, how would you like me to bring him along here so that you could hear his account in detail and put such questions as you might think necessary to elucidate it? I should be glad if you would let me, as you know so much about the case. What do you say?"

Thorndyke was evidently pleased at the proposal and made no secret of the fact, for he replied: "It is very good of you, Blandy, to make this suggestion. I shall be delighted to meet Mr. Moxdale and see if we can clear up the mystery of that body. Does your invitation include Jervis?"

"Of course it does," Blandy replied, heartily, "as he is a party to the inquiry; and Mr. Polton, too, for that matter, seeing that he discovered the crucial fact. But, you understand that Moxdale knows nothing about that."

"No," said Thorndyke; "but if it should seem expedient for the purposes of the examination to let him know that the fire was raised by Haire, do you agree to my telling him?"

The inspector looked a little dubious. "We don't want to make any unnecessary confidences," said he. "But, still, I think I had better leave it to your discretion to tell him anything that may help the inquiry."

Thorndyke thanked him for the concession, and, when one of two dates had been agreed on for the interview, the inspector took his leave, wreathed in smiles and evidently well satisfied with the evening's work.

---

## XVIII. THORNDYKE ADMINISTERS A SHOCK

"I WONDER, sir," said Polton, as the hour approached I for the arrival of our two visitors, "how we had better arrange the room. Don't want it to look too much like a committee meeting. But there's rather a lot of us for a confidential talk."

"It isn't so particularly confidential," I replied. "If there are any secrets to be revealed, they are not Moxdale's. He didn't

pose as a dead man. The deception was Haire's."

"That's true, sir," Polton rejoined with evident relief. "Still, I think I won't make myself too conspicuous, as he may regard me as an outsider."

The plan that he adopted seemed to me to have exactly the opposite effect to that intended, for, having arranged four chairs around the fireplace with a couple of small tables for wine and cigars, he placed a microscope and some trays of slides on the large table, drew up a chair and prepared to look preoccupied.

At eight o'clock precisely our visitors arrived, and, as I admitted them, I glanced with natural curiosity at "the deceased", and was impressed rather favourably by his appearance. He was a good-looking man, about five feet nine or ten in height, broad-shouldered, well set-up, and apparently strong and athletic; with a pleasant, intelligent face, neither dark nor fair, a closely-cropped dark moustache and clear grey eyes. He greeted me with a friendly smile, but I could see that, in spite of Polton's artful plans, he was a little taken aback by the size of the party, and especially by the apparition of Polton, himself; seated necromantically behind his microscope.

But Thorndyke soon put him at his ease, and, when the introductions had been effected (including "Mr. Polton, our technical adviser"), we took our seats and opened the proceedings with informal and slightly frivolous conversation.

"We should seem to be quite old acquaintances, Mr. Moxdale," said Thorndyke, "seeing that I have had the honour of testifying to a coroner's jury as to the cause of your death. But that sort of acquaintanceship is rather one-sided."

"Yes," Moxdale agreed, "it is a queer position. I come back to England to find myself the late Mr. Moxdale and have to introduce myself as a resurrected corpse. It is really quite embarrassing."

"It must be," Thorndyke agreed, "and not to you alone; for, since you have resigned from the role of the deceased, you have put on us the responsibility of finding a name for your understudy. But the inspector tells us that you can give us some help in our search."

"Well," said Moxdale, "it is only a guess, and I may be all abroad. But there was someone in that house when it was burned, and, as I was not that someone, I naturally ask myself who he could have been. I happen to know of one person who might have been there, and I don't know of any other. That's the position. Perhaps there isn't much in it, after all."

"A vulgar saying," Blandy remarked, "has it that half a loaf is better than no bread. A possible person is at least something to start on. But we should like to know as much as we can about that person. What can you tell us?"

"Ah!" said Moxdale, "there is the difficulty. I really know nothing about Mr. O'Grady. He is little more than a name to me, and only a surname at that. I can't even tell you his Christian name."

"That makes things a bit difficult," said Blandy, "seeing that we have got to trace him and find out whether he is still in existence. But at any rate, you have seen him and can tell us what he was like."

"Yes, I have seen him—once, as I told you—and my recollection of him is that he was a strongly-built man about five feet nine or ten inches high, medium complexion, grey eyes, dark hair and moustache and no beard. When I saw him, he was wearing a black jacket, striped trousers, grey overcoat, and a light-brown soft felt hat."

"That is quite a useful description," said Blandy, "for excluding the wrong man, but not so useful for identifying the right one. It would apply to a good many other men; and the clothes were not a permanent feature. You told me about your meeting with him. Perhaps you wouldn't mind repeating the account for Dr. Thorndyke's benefit."

"It was a chance meeting," said Moxdale. "I happened to be in the neighbourhood of Soho one day about lunch-time and it occurred to me to drop in at a restaurant that Haire had introduced me to; Moroni's in Wardour Street. I walked down to the further end of the room and was just looking for a vacant table when I caught sight of Haire, himself; apparently lunching with a man who was a stranger to me. As Haire had seen me, I went up to him and shook hands, and then, as I didn't know his friend, was going off to another table when he said: 'Don't go away, Cecil. Come and take a chair at this table and let me introduce you to my friend, O'Grady. You've heard me speak of him and he has heard me speak of you.'"

"Accordingly, as O'Grady stood up and offered his hand, I shook it and sat down at the table and ordered my lunch; and in the interval before it arrived we chatted about nothing in particular, especially O'Grady, who was very fluent and had a rather pleasant, taking manner. By the time my food was brought, they had finished their lunch, and, having got their bills from the waiter, settled up with him. Then O'Grady said: "'Don't let me break up this merry party, but Time and Tide, you know—I must be running away. I am glad to have had the pleasure of meeting you, Moxdale, and turning a mere name into a person.'"

"With this he got up and put on his overcoat and hat—I noticed the hat particularly because it was rather a queer colour—and when he had shaken hands with me, he said to Haire, just as he was turning to go: "'Don't forget our little business on Thursday. I shall call for you at eleven o'clock to the tick, and I shall bring the stuff with me. Better make a note of the time. So long.' and with a smile and a wave of the hand to me, he bustled away."

"When he had gone, I remarked to Haire that O'Grady seemed to be rather a pleasant, taking sort of fellow. He smiled grimly and replied: "'Yes, he is a plausible rascal, but if you should happen to meet him again, I advise you to keep your pockets buttoned. He is remarkably plausible.'"

"I tried to get him to amplify this statement, but he didn't seem disposed to pursue the subject and presently he looked at

his watch and then he, too, took his departure. That is the whole story, and there isn't much in it excepting the date of the appointment. The Thursday referred to would be the fourteenth of April, and that, I understand, is the day on which Haire started for Dublin."

"You say, you understand," said Thorndyke. "Have you not seen the account of the inquest?"

"No. But Mr. Home, my solicitor, has given me a summary of it with all the material facts, including my own untimely decease. But I needn't have said I understand, because I happen to know."

"That Mr. Haire did start on that day?" Thorndyke queried.

"Yes. I actually saw him start."

"That is interesting," said Blandy. "Could you give us the particulars?"

"With pleasure," replied Moxdale "It happened that on that day—or rather that night—I was starting for the South of France. I had left my luggage in the cloak-room at Victoria, earlier in the day, as I had some calls to make, and when I had done all my business, I strolled to Wardour Street and dropped in at Moroni's for a late dinner or supper. And there I found Haire, who had just come in on the same errand. He was taking the night train for Holyhead, and as I was travelling by the night train to Folkestone, we both had plenty of time. So we made our dinner last out and we dawdled over our coffee until it was past ten o'clock. Then Haire, who had a heavy suit-case with him, said he thought he would take a taxi across to Euston, so, when we had paid our bills, we went out together to look for a cab. We found one disengaged in Shaftesbury Avenue, and, when Haire had put his suit-case inside, he called out 'Euston' to the driver, got in, said 'good-night' to me and off he went."

"Did he say whether O'Grady had kept his appointment?" Thorndyke asked.

"He just mentioned that he had called. Nothing more; and of course I asked no questions."

"You seemed to think," said Thorndyke, "that the body that was found after the fire might be that of O'Grady. What made you think that?"

"Well, really," Moxdale replied, "I hardly know. It was just an idea, suggested, I suppose, by the fact that O'Grady went to the rooms and I didn't know of anybody else. I thought it possible that Haire might have let him use the rooms while he was away, as O'Grady lives out of town—somewhere Enfield way."

The inspector looked dissatisfied. "Seems rather vague," he remarked. "You were telling me some thing about a suspicion of blackmailing. Could you give us some particulars on that subject?"

"My dear Inspector," exclaimed Moxdale, "I haven't any particulars. It was just a suspicion, which I probably ought not to have mentioned, as I had nothing definite to go upon."

"Still," Blandy persisted, "you must have had some reasons. Is Haire a man who could be blackmailed?"

"That I can't say. He isn't a pattern of all the virtues, but I know of nothing that a blackmailer could fix on. And he is my cousin, you know. I think what raised the suspicion was the peculiar relations between the two men. They were a great deal together, but they were not really friends. Haire seemed to me to dislike O'Grady intensely, and I gathered from chance remarks that he let drop that O'Grady had got a good deal of money out of him from time to time. In what way I never knew. It may have been in the form of loans, but if not, it would rather look like blackmail."

There was a short silence. Then Blandy, dropping his oily manner for once, said, rather brusquely:

"Now, Mr. Moxdale, you have suggested that the burned body might have been that of O'Grady. You have told us that O'Grady was in those rooms on the fourteenth of April, and you have suggested that O'Grady was blackmailing Haire. Now I put it to you that what you really suspect is that, on that day, Haire made away with O'Grady and concealed his body in the rooms."

Moxdale shook his head. "I never suspected any thing of the kind. Besides, the thing wasn't practicable. Is it likely that he would have gone off to Ireland leaving the body in his rooms?"

"You are not forgetting the fire," Blandy reminded him.

"I don't see that the fire has anything to do with it. Haire couldn't foresee that someone would set his rooms on fire at that particularly opportune moment."

"But that is precisely what he did foresee," said Thorndyke. "That fire was not an accident. It was carefully prepared and started by a timing mechanism on a pre-arranged date. That mechanism was discovered and reconstructed by our colleague, Mr. Polton."

The statement was, no doubt, a startling one, but its effect on Moxdale was beyond what I should have expected. He could not have looked more horrified if he had been accused of setting the mechanism himself.

"So you see," Thorndyke continued, "that Haire is definitely implicated; and, in fact, the police are prepared to arrest him on charges connected with both the fire and the body."

"Yes," said the inspector, "but the trouble is that we have no photograph or any sufficient description by which to identify him."

"Speaking of identification," said Thorndyke, "we learn that his teeth are rather peculiar in appearance. Can you tell us anything about them?"

Moxdale looked distinctly uncomfortable at this question, though I could not imagine why. However, he answered, somewhat hesitatingly: "Yes, they are rather queer-looking teeth; as if they were stained by tobacco. But it isn't tobacco-staining, because I remember that they were just the same when he was a boy."

Having given this answer, he looked from Blandy to Thorndyke, and, as neither asked any further question, he remarked, cheerfully: "Well, I think you have squeezed me pretty dry; unless there is something else that you would like me to tell you."

There was a brief silence. Then Thorndyke said in a very quiet, matter-of-fact tone: "There is one other question, Mr. Moxdale. I have my own opinion on the subject, but I should like to hear your statement. The question is, What made you go to Dublin after you had killed Mr. Haire?"

A deathly silence followed the question. Moxdale was thunder-struck. But so were we all. Blandy sat with dropped jaw, staring at Thorndyke, and Polton's eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets. At length, Moxdale, pale as a corpse, exclaimed in a husky voice:

"I don't understand you, sir. I have told you that I saw Mr. Haire start in a taxi for Euston."

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "But at the moment when you saw Mr. Haire get into the cab, his dead body was lying in his rooms."

Moxdale remained silent for some moments. He seemed completely overwhelmed; and, watching him, I saw that abject terror was written in every line of his face. But he made one more effort. "I assure you, sir," he said, almost in a whisper, "that you have made some extraordinary mistake. The thing is monstrous. You are actually accusing me of having murdered my cousin!"

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "I said nothing about murder. I referred simply to the physical fact that you killed him. I did not suggest that you killed him feloniously. I am not accusing you of a crime. I merely affirm an act."

Moxdale looked puzzled and yet somewhat reassured by Thorndyke's answer. But he was still evasive.

"It seems," said he, "that it is useless for me to repeat my denial."

"It is," Thorndyke agreed. "What I suggest is that you give us a plain and truthful account of the whole affair."

Moxdale looked dubiously at the inspector and said in a half-interrogative tone: "If I am going to be charged with having compassed the death of my cousin it seems to me that the less I say, the better."

The inspector, thus appealed to, suddenly recovered his self-possession, even to the resumption of his smile; and I could not but admire the quickness with which he had grasped the position. "As a police officer," he said, "I am not permitted to advise you. I can only say that if you choose to make a statement you can do so; but I have to caution you that any statement that you may make will be taken down in writing and may be used in evidence against you. That doesn't sound very encouraging; but I may remind you that you are, at present, not charged with any offence, and that a statement made voluntarily in advance is more effective than the same statement made in answer to a charge."

"And I," said Thorndyke, "not being a police officer, may go farther and suggest that a statement may possibly obviate the necessity for any charge at all. Now, come, Mr. Moxdale," he continued, persuasively, taking from his pocket a foolscap envelope, "I will make you a proposal. In this envelope is a signed statement by me setting forth briefly my reconstruction, from evidence in my possession, of the circumstances of Mr. Haire's death. I shall hand this envelope to the inspector. Then I suggest that you give us a straight forward account of those circumstances. When he has heard your account, the inspector will open the envelope and read my statement. If our two statements agree, we may take it that they are both true. If they disagree, we shall have to examine the discrepancies. What do you say? I advise you, strongly, to give us a perfectly frank statement."

The persuasive and even friendly tone in which Thorndyke spoke evidently made a considerable impression on Moxdale, for he listened attentively with a thoughtful eye on the speaker, and when Thorndyke had finished he reflected awhile, still keeping his eyes fixed on my colleague's face. At length, having made up his mind, he said, with something like an air of relief: "Very well, sir, I will take your advice. I will give you a full and true account of all that happened on that dreadful day, suppressing nothing."

He paused for a few moments to collect his thoughts and then continued: "I think I should begin by telling you that my cousin stood to gain four thousand pounds by my death if I should die before my uncle, Harold Moxdale."

"We knew that," said Blandy.

"Ah! Well, then, there is another matter. I don't like to speak ill of the dead, but the truth is that Haire was an unscrupulous rascal—a downright bad man."

"We knew that, too," said Blandy, "when we learned that he had set fire to the house."

"Then I need not dwell on it; but I may add that he had a deep grudge against me for being the more favoured beneficiary of my uncle's will. In fact, his jealousy had induced a really virulent hatred of me which was apt to break out at



times, though we usually preserved outwardly decent relations.

“And now to come to the actual incident. I am the part proprietor of a sort of international trade directory and I do a good deal of the canvassing for advertisements, particularly in France. I live out at Surbiton and only go to the office occasionally. Now, a few days before the disaster—the eleventh of April, I think it was—I had a letter from Haire telling me that he was making a business trip to Dublin to try to arrange some agencies and suggesting that he should do some business for me at the same time. I wasn’t very keen, as I knew that I was not likely to see any of the money that he might collect. However, I agreed, and eventually arranged to meet him on the fourteenth, on which day I proposed to start by a night train for the South of France. He suggested that he should call for me at my office at half-past four, that we should have some tea and then go to his rooms to talk things over.

“In due course, he turned up at the office; I finished my business, took my bag, and went with him to some tea-rooms, where we had a leisurely tea, and we then went on to his rooms, which we reached about ten minutes to six. As we passed the entrance of the business premises, I saw a man standing just inside, and he saw us, too, for he called out ‘good evening’ to Haire, who returned his greeting, addressing him as Mr. Green; and it struck me that Mr. Green looked rather hard at me, as if he thought he recognized me. Then Haire opened the street door with his latch-key and conducted me up the stairs to the first-floor where he opened the door of his rooms with another latch-key, which looked like a Yale.

“Now, all the time that I had been with Haire, and especially at the tea-rooms, I had been aware of something rather queer in his manner; a suggestion of suppressed excitement, and he seemed nervous and jumpy. But when we got inside his rooms and he had shut the door, it grew much more marked; so much so that I watched him rather closely, noticing that he appeared restless and flustered, that there was a wild look in his eyes and that his hands were trembling quite violently.

“I didn’t like the look of him at all, and I don’t mind admitting that I began to get the wind up; for I couldn’t forget that four thousand pounds, and I knew that poor old Uncle Harold was in a bad way and might die at any moment. But he was not dead yet. There was still time for me to die before him. So I kept an eye on Haire and held myself in readiness in case he really meant mischief.

“But he nearly had me, after all. He had given me a list of the Dublin firms to look at, and, while I was reading it, he got behind me to look over my shoulder. Suddenly, he made a quick move and I felt him slip a noose of soft cord over my head. I was only just in time to thrust my right hand up inside the noose when he pulled it tight. But, of course, he couldn’t strangle me while my hand was there, and, seeing that, he made violent efforts to drag it away while I struggled for my life to keep hold of the noose.

“It was a horrible business. Haire was like a mad man. He tugged and wrenched at the cord, he clawed at me with his free hand, he kicked me and drove his knee into my back while I hung on for dear life to the noose. By degrees I worked round until I faced him, and tried to grab his arm with my left hand while he tugged with all his might at the cord. Then we began to gyrate round the room in a kind of hideous waltz, each pounding at the other with his free hand.

“At last; in the course of our gyrations, we collided with a chair, and he fell backwards on the seat with me on top of him, his head overhanging the seat and my left hand at his throat. When we fell, the whole of my weight must have been on that left hand, for it slid under his chin and thrust it violently upwards. And as his chin went up, I felt and heard a faint click; his head fell loosely to one side, and, in a moment, his grasp on the cord relaxed. For an instant or two his arms and legs moved with a sort of twitching motion, then he lay quite still.

“Cautiously, I picked myself up and looked down at him. He was sprawling limply across the chair, and a glance at his face told me that he was dead. Evidently, the sudden drive of my left hand had broken his neck.

“Shaken as I was, I drew a deep breath of relief. It had been a near thing. An instant’s hesitation with my right hand and I should now have been lying with blackening face and starting eyes and the fatal noose secured tightly around my neck. It was a horrible thought. Only by a hair’s-breadth had I escaped. Still, I had escaped; and now I was free of that peril for ever.

“But my relief was short-lived. Suddenly, I realized that, if I had escaped one danger, I was faced by another. Haire was dead; but it was my hand that had brought about his death. Who was to know that I had not murdered him? Very soon, relief gave way to alarm, alarm to panic. What was I to do for my own safety? My first impulse was to rush out and seek a policeman; and that is what I ought to have done. But I dared not. As I took off the noose and held it in my hand, it seemed to whisper a terrible warning of what might yet befall me.

“Suppose I were just to steal away and say nothing to anyone of what had happened. Haire lived alone. No one ever came to his rooms. It might be months before the body should be discovered. Why not go away and know nothing about it? But, no; that wouldn’t do. Mr. Green had seen me enter the rooms and perhaps he knew who I was. When the body was found, he would remember that I had been with Haire the last time he was seen alive.

“I sat down with my back to the corpse and thought hard, trying to decide what I should do. But for a while I could think of no reasonable plan. The figure of Mr. Green seemed to block every way of escape. Suddenly, my wandering gaze lighted on the list of Dublin firms lying where I had dropped it. I looked at it idly for a few moments; then, in a flash, I saw a way of escape.

“Haire had intended—so he had told me—to start for Ireland that very night. Well, he should start—by proxy. The people

whom he was going to call on were strangers, for he had never been in Dublin before. I would make those calls for him, announcing myself by his name and presenting his card. Thus Haire would make an appearance in Dublin, and that appearance could be cited as evidence that he was alive on that day. Then, when at some later date, his body should be found, it would be beyond question that he must have died at some time after his return from Ireland. My connection with his death would have disappeared and I could snap my fingers at Mr. Green.

"As soon as the scheme was clear in my mind I set to work to execute it; and as I worked, I thought out the details. First I stripped the corpse and dressed it in the pyjamas from the bed. Then, having thrown the bed-clothes into disorder, I placed the body half in the bed, half outside, with the head bent sideways and resting on the floor. The obvious suggestion would be that he had fallen out of bed and broken his neck—a mere accident implicating nobody.

"When I had folded his clothes and put them away tidily on a chair, I looked at my watch. It was barely twenty past six. The whole of this horrid drama had been played out in less than half an hour. I sat down to rest awhile—for it had been a strenuous affair while it lasted—and looked about the room to see that I was leaving no traces, but there were none, excepting my bag, and that I should take away with me. The Venetian blinds were lowered—I had noticed that when we came in—and I decided to leave them so, as that was probably how Haire was accustomed to leave them when he went away. So I sat and thought out the rest of my plan. The place was strangely quiet, for, by now Mr. Green and his people had apparently shut up their premises and gone away, and there was not a sound in the room save the solemn tick of the big clock in the corner.

"Presently I rose and began, at my leisure, to complete my preparations. There was no need for hurry. It was now only half-past six by the big clock, and I knew that the Holyhead express did not leave Euston until eight forty-five. I looked over an open bureau and took from it a few of Haire's business cards and a little sheaf of his bill-heads. When I had stowed these in my bag, I had finished; and as all was still quiet, I picked up the bag, turned away with a last, shuddering glance at the grotesque figure that sprawled over the side of the bed, let myself out as silently as I could, and stole softly down the stairs.

"I need not follow the rest of my proceedings in detail. I caught my train and duly arrived in Dublin about seven o'clock the next morning. I went to a small private hotel—Connolly's—where I wrote in the visitors' book, 'G. Haire, Billington Street, London', and when I had washed and shaved and had breakfast, I went out and made the first of my calls, Brady & Co., where I stayed quite a long time gossiping with the manager. We didn't complete any definite transaction, but I left one of Haire's cards with some particulars written on the back. I made two more calls on that day, the 15th, and, during the next three days I visited several other firms, always leaving one of Haire's cards. I stayed in Dublin until the 18th, which I thought was long enough to give the proper impression of a business tour, and, in the evening of that day, just before closing time, I made a second call at Brady's, to impress myself on the manager's memory. Then, having already settled up at the hotel, I went straight to the station and caught the 7.50 train which runs in connection with the Holyhead express. I arrived at Euston in the early morning, about 5.55, and took a taxi straight across to Victoria, where, after a wash and a leisurely breakfast, I caught the nine o'clock Continental train, embarking at Folkestone about eleven.

"After that I followed my usual route and went about my ordinary business, canvassing the Bordeaux district for renewals. But I didn't complete the tour, for it happened that in an hotel at Bordeaux I came across a rather out-of-date copy of The Times, and, glancing through the legal notices, I was startled to see that of Home, Cronin & Home, announcing the death of my uncle. As this was some weeks old, I thought I had better pack up and start for home at once to get into touch with the solicitors.

"But I had to go warily, for I didn't know what might have happened while I had been abroad. Had Haire's body been discovered? And, if so, what had been done about it? These were questions that would have to be answered before I could safely present myself at Home's office. I thought about it during the journey and decided that the first thing to do was to go and have a look at the house and see whether the Venetian blinds were still down; and if they were not, to try to pick up some information in the neighbourhood. So when I got to Victoria I put my bag in the cloak room and took a bus to Piccadilly Circus, from whence I made my way to Billington Street. I walked cautiously down the street, keeping a sharp look-out in case Mr. Green should be at his door, and avoiding the appearance of looking for the house. But my precautions were unnecessary, for, when I came to the place, behold! there was no house there! Only some blackened walls, on which the housebreakers were operating with picks.

"As I was standing gazing at the ruins, an idler approached me.

"Proper old blaze, that was, Mister. Flared up like a tar barrel, it did.'

"Ah!' said I, 'then you actually saw the fire?'

"Well, no,' said he, 'I didn't see it, myself; but I heard all about it. I was on the coroner's jury.'

"The coroner's jury!' I exclaimed. 'Then there were some lives lost?'

"Only one,' he replied; 'and the queer thing was that he wasn't the proper tenant, but just a stranger what had had the rooms lent to him for a few days. He was identified by a clay pipe what had his initials, C.M., scratched on it.'

"C.M.!' I gasped. 'What did those letters stand for?'

"Cecil Moxdale was the poor chap's name; and it seemed that he had been smoking that pipe in bed and set the bed-clothes alight. Probably a bit squiffy, too.'

"Now, here was a pretty state of affairs. Mysterious, too. For the clay pipe wasn't mine. I never smoke a pipe. But, obviously, my calculations had been completely upset, and I was in a pretty tight place, for my trip to Dublin had only introduced a fresh complication. I should have to announce myself as alive, and then the fat would be in the fire. For if the body wasn't mine, whose was it? If the dead man was Haire, then who was the man in Dublin? And if the man in Dublin was Haire, then who the deuce was the dead man? It was a regular facer.

"Of course, I could have maintained that I knew nothing about the affair. But that wouldn't do; for there was that infernal Mr. Green. No, I should have to make up some story that would fit the facts; and, turning it over in my mind, I decided to invent an imaginary person and let the police find him if they could. He must be virtually a stranger to me, and he must be sufficiently like me to pass as the man whom Green saw going into the rooms with Haire. So I invented Mr. O'Grady and told a pretty vague story about him—but I needn't say any more. You know the rest; and now, Inspector, what about that statement that you have?"

Blandy smiled benignly, and, opening the envelope, drew from it a single sheet of paper; and when he had quickly glanced at its contents, he positively beamed. "Dr. Thorndyke's statement," said he, "is, in effect, a very brief summary of your own."

"Well, let's have it," said Moxdale.

"You shall," said Blandy, and he proceeded, with unctuous relish, to read the document.

"Summary of the circumstances attending the death of Gustavus Haire as suggested by evidence in my possession.

"Haire had planned to murder Cecil Moxdale, presumably, to secure the reversion of a bequest of four thousand pounds, and then, by means of a certain mechanism, to start a fire in the rooms while he was absent in Dublin. He prepared the rooms by filling them with inflammable material and planted certain marked, unflammable objects to enable Moxdale's body to be identified. On the 14th of April, he set the mechanism to discharge in the early morning of the 19th. At about six p.m. on the 14th he brought Moxdale to the rooms and attempted to murder him. But the attempt failed; and in the struggle which ensued, Haire's neck became dislocated. Then Moxdale, knowing that he had been seen to enter the premises with Haire, and fearing that he would be accused of murder, decided to go to Dublin and personate Haire to make it appear that Haire was then alive. He started for Dublin in the evening of the 14th and remained there until the evening of the 18th, when he apparently returned to England.'

"That is all that is material," Blandy concluded, "and, as your statement is in complete agreement with Dr. Thorndyke's—which I have no doubt is supported by conclusive evidence—I, personally, accept it as true."

Moxdale drew a deep breath. "That is a blessed relief," he exclaimed. "And now what is to be done? Are you going to arrest me?"

"No," replied Blandy, "certainly not. But I think you had better walk back with me to Head Quarters and let us hear what the senior officers propose. May I take your summary with me, Doctor?"

"By all means," Thorndyke replied; "and make it clear that I am ready to produce the necessary evidence."

"I had taken that for granted, Doctor," said Blandy as he put the envelope in his pocket. Then he rose to depart, and Moxdale stood up.

"I am thankful, sir," said he, "that I took your advice, and eternally grateful to you for having dissipated this nightmare. Now, I can look to the future with some sort of confidence."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "I don't think that you need feel any great alarm; and I wish you an easy passage through any little difficulties that may arise."

With this, Moxdale shook our hands all round, and, when the inspector had done likewise, the two men moved towards the door, escorted by Polton.

---

## XIX. THE EVIDENCE REVIEWED

"BRILLIANT finish to a most remarkable case," I commented as our visitors' footsteps died away upon the stairs, "and a most magnificent piece of bluff on the part of my revered senior."

Thorndyke smiled and Polton looked shocked.

"I shall not contest your description, Jervis," said the former, "but, in fact, the conclusion was practically a certainty."

"Probability," I corrected.

"In practice," said he, "we have to treat the highest degrees of probability as certainties; and if you consider the evidence in this case as a whole, I think you will agree that only one possible conclusion emerged. The element of bluff was almost negligible."

"Probably you are right," I admitted. "You usually are, and you certainly were in this case. But the evidence was so complex and conflicting that I find it difficult to reconstitute it as a whole. It would interest me very much to hear you sort it out into a tidily arranged argument."

"It would interest me, too," said he, "to retrace our investigation and observe the curious way in which the different items of evidence came to light. Let us do so, taking the events in the order of their occurrence and noting the tendency of the evidence to close in on the final conclusion.

"This was a very singular case. The evidence did not transpire gradually but emerged in a number of successive and perfectly distinct stages, each stage being marked by the appearance of a new fact which reacted immediately on our previous conclusions. There were seven stages, each of which we will examine separately, noting how the argument stood at the end of it.

"The first is the inquest, including the post mortem. Perhaps we had better deal with the body first. There were only two points of interest, the neck and the teeth. The dislocation of the neck appeared to me to have occurred before death and I took it to be, most probably, the immediate cause of death. As to the teeth, there was nothing very striking in their appearance; just a little pitting of the enamel. But from the arrangement of the little pits in irregular transverse lines, corresponding roughly to the lines of growth, I did not believe them to have been due to the heat but to have existed during life. I thought it possible that deceased might have had mottled teeth which had been bleached out in the fire; but, as I had never seen a case of mottled teeth, I could not form a definite opinion. I just noted the facts and satisfied myself that the pitting showed clearly in Polton's photograph of the dead man's face.

"And now let us consider the body of evidence which was before us when the inquest was finished and the inferences that it suggested. To me—and also to Blandy—the appearances as a whole conveyed the idea of deliberate arson; of a fire which had been arranged and started for a definite purpose. And since the death of Cecil Moxdale seemed to be part of the plan—if there was a plan—it was reasonable to suspect that this was the purpose for which the fire was raised.

"What especially led me to suspect arson was the appearance of preparation. The room, itself crammed with highly inflammable material, seemed to have been expressly prepared for a fire. But most suspicious to me was the information given by Haire to Green. It seemed designed to create in Green's mind (as it actually did) the fear that a fire might occur. But more than this; it prepared him, if a fire should occur, to decide at once upon the way in which it had been caused. Nor was that all. Haire's statement even suggested to Green the possibility of a fatal accident; and in the event of such a fatality occurring, it provided Green in advance with the data for identifying any body that should be found.

"Then there were the objects found in the ruins which confirmed Green's identification. They were marked objects composed of highly refractory material."

"They would have to be," I objected, "if they were found. All the combustible objects would have been destroyed."

"True," he admitted. "But still it was a striking coincidence that these imperishable objects should happen to bear the initials of a man whose corpse was unrecognizable. The clay pipe was especially significant, seeing that people do not usually incise their initials on their pipe-bowls. But a clay pipe is, as nearly as possible, indestructible by heat. No more perfect means of identification, in the case of a fire, could be devised than a marked clay pipe. To me, these most opportune relics offered a distinct suggestion of having been planted for the very purpose which they served.

"But there is one observation to make before finishing with the positive aspects of the case. It was assumed that the man who was in the house when the fire broke out was a live man; and it was agreed that that live man was Cecil Moxdale. Now, I did not accept, unreservedly, either of these assumptions. To me, the appearances suggested that the man was already dead when the fire started. As to the identity, the probability seemed to be that the man was Moxdale; but I did not regard the fact as having been established conclusively. I kept in my mind the possibility of either a mistake or deliberate deception.

"And now, what conclusions emerged from these considerations? To me—and to Blandy—they suggested a crime. My provisional hypothesis was that Haire had made away with Moxdale and raised the fire to cover the murder; that the crime had been carefully planned and prepared; and that, for some reason, Haire was especially anxious that the body should be identified as that of Cecil Moxdale. That, as I said, was the positive aspect of the case. Now let us look at the negative.

"There were two facts that conflicted with my hypothesis. The first was that when the fire broke out, Haire was in Dublin and had been there for five days. That seemed to be an unanswerable alibi. There was no trace of any sort of fire-raising apparatus known to the experts or the police; indeed, no apparatus was known which would have been capable of raising a fire after an interval of five days. The large and complicated appliances used for the automatic lighting of street lamps do not come into the problem; they would not have been available to Haire, and, in fact, no trace of anything of the kind was found. Apparently, it was a physical impossibility that the fire could have been started by Haire.

"The second objection to my hypothesis was in the nature of the injury. A dislocation of the neck is, in my experience, invariably an accidental injury. I have never heard of a homicidal case. Have you?"

"No," I answered; "and, in fact, if you wanted to dislocate a man's neck, I don't quite know how you would go about it."

"Exactly," he agreed. "It is too difficult and uncertain a method for a murderer to use. So that, in this case, if the broken neck was the cause of death, the man would appear to have died from the effects of an accident.

"Thus, the position at the end of the first stage was that, although the case as a whole looked profoundly suspicious, there was not a particle of positive evidence of either arson or murder.

"The second stage was introduced by the disappearance of Haire. This was most mysterious. Why did Haire not return at the expected time? There was no reason why he should not, even if my hypothesis were true. For if he had raised a fire to

cover a murder, his plan had succeeded to perfection. The fire had been accepted as an accident, the body had been identified, and the man's death had been attributed to misadventure. And not only was there no reason why Haire should not have come home; there was a very good reason why he should. For his absence tended to start inquiries, and inquiries were precisely what he would have wished to avoid. I could think of no explanation of his disappearance. There was a suggestion that something had gone wrong; but there was no suggestion whatever as to what it was. Nevertheless, the fact of the disappearance tended to make the already suspicious group of events look even more suspicious.

"The third stage was reached when we learned that Moxdale senior was dead and heard of the provisions of his will. Then it appeared that Haire stood to benefit to the extent of four thousand pounds by the death of Cecil Moxdale. This, of course, did not, by itself, establish a probability that Haire had murdered Moxdale; but if that probability had already been suggested by other facts, this new fact increased it by supplying a reasonable and adequate motive. At this stage, then, I definitely suspected Haire of having murdered Moxdale, though still not without some misgivings. For the apparently insuperable difficulty remained. It seemed to be a physical impossibility that Haire could have started the fire.

"Then came Polton's astonishing discovery; and immediately the position was radically altered. Now, it was shown, not only that it was possible for Haire to have started the fire, but that it was nearly certain that he had done so. But this new fact reacted on all the others, giving them an immensely increased evidential value. I had now very little doubt that Haire had murdered Moxdale.

"But the mystery of Haire's disappearance remained. For he was all unaware of Polton's discovery. To him, it should have seemed that all had gone according to plan and that it was perfectly safe for him to come back. Then why was he keeping out of sight? Why did he not return, now that his uncle was dead and the stake for which he had played was within his grasp? I turned this problem over and over in my mind. What was keeping him away? Some thing had gone wrong. Something of which we had no knowledge. What could it be?

"Once more, that dislocated neck presented itself for consideration. It had always seemed to me an anomaly, out of character with the known circumstances. How came Moxdale to have a broken neck? All the evidence pointed to a murder, long premeditated, carefully planned, and elaborately prepared. And yet the murdered man seemed to have died from an accidental injury.

"Here another point recurred to me. The body had been identified as that of Cecil Moxdale. But on what evidence? Simply on the hearsay evidence of Green and the marked objects found in the ruins. Of actual identification there had been none. The body probably was Moxdale's. The known facts suggested that it was, but there was no direct proof. Suppose, after all, that it were not. Then whose body could it be? Evidently, it must be Haire's, for our picture contained only these two figures. But this assumption involved an apparent impossibility; for, at the time of the fire, Haire was in Dublin. But the impossibility disappeared when we realized that again there had been no real identification. The men whom Haire called upon in Dublin were strangers. They knew him as Haire simply because he said that he was Haire and presented Haire's card. He might, quite easily, have been some other man, personating Haire. And if he were, that other person must have been Moxdale.

"It seemed a far-fetched suggestion, but yet it fitted the facts surprisingly well. It agreed, for instance, with the dislocated neck; for if Haire had been killed, he had almost certainly been killed accidentally. And it explained the disappearance of the Dublin 'Haire'; for Moxdale's object in personating Haire would have been to prove that Haire had been alive after the 14th of April, when the two men had been seen to enter Haire's premises together; and for this purpose it would be necessary only for him to 'enter an appearance' at Dublin. When he had done that, he would naturally return from Ireland to his ordinary places of resort.

"Thus the fourth stage of the investigation left us with the virtual certainty that Haire had raised the fire, the probability that he had murdered Moxdale, but the possibility that the murder had failed and that Haire had been killed accidentally in the struggle. There were two alternatives, and we had no means of deciding which of them was the true one.

"Then, once more, Polton came to our help with a decisive fact. Haire had mottled teeth and was a native of Maldon. Instantly, as he spoke, I recalled the teeth of the burned corpse and my surmise that they might have been mottled teeth. At once, I got into communication with a dental practitioner at Maldon, who, though I was a stranger to him, gave me every possible assistance, including a wax denture of mottled teeth and some spare teeth for experimental purposes. Those teeth I examined minutely, comparing them with those of the body as shown in Polton's enlarged photograph of the face; and, disregarding the brown stains, which the fire had bleached out, the resemblance was perfect. I did, as a matter of extra precaution, incinerate two of the spare teeth in a crucible. But it was not necessary. The first comparison was quite convincing. There was no doubt that the burnt body was that of a man who had mottled teeth and very little doubt that it was Haire's body."

"But," I objected, "Moxdale might have had mottled teeth. He was Haire's cousin."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "there was that element of uncertainty. But there was not much in it. The mere relationship was not significant, as mottled teeth are not transmitted by heredity but are purely environmental phenomena. But, of course, Moxdale might also have been born and grown up at Maldon. Still, we had the definite fact that Haire was known to have had mottled teeth and that the dead man had had teeth of the same, very rare, kind. So this stage left us with the strong probability that the body was Haire's, but the possibility that it might be that of Moxdale.

"But at the next stage this question was settled by the reappearance of Moxdale in the flesh. That established the identity

of the body as a definite fact. But it also established the identity of the personator. For if the dead man was Haire, the live man at Dublin must have been Moxdale. There appeared to be no alternative possibility.

"Nevertheless, Moxdale essayed to present us with one in the form of a moderately plausible story. I don't know whether Blandy believed this story. He professed to; but then Blandy is—Blandy. He was certainly puzzled by it, as we can judge by his anxiety to bring Moxdale here that we might question him, and we have to remember that he did not know what we knew as to the identity of the body. For my part, I never entertained that story for a moment. It sounded like fiction pure and simple; and a striking feature of it was that no part of it admitted of verification. The mysterious O'Grady was a mere shadow, of whom nothing was known and nothing could be discovered, and the alleged blackmailing was not supported by a single tangible fact. Moreover, O'Grady, the blackmailer, did not fit the facts. The murder which had been so elaborately prepared was, specifically, the murder of Cecil Moxdale. Not only was it Moxdale whose identification was prepared for; the motive for the murder was connected with Moxdale.

"However, it doesn't do to be too dogmatic. One had to accept the infinitely remote possibility that the story might be true, at least in parts. Accordingly I grasped at Blandy's suggestion that he should bring Moxdale here and give us the opportunity to put the story to the test of comparison with the known facts.

"We need not consider that interview in detail. It was an ingenious story that Moxdale told, and he told it extremely well. But still, as he went on, its fictional character became more and more pronounced and its details more and more elusive. You probably noticed that when I asked for a description of O'Grady, he gave an excellent one—which was an exact description of himself. It had to be; for O'Grady must needs correspond to Green's description of the man whom he saw with Haire, and that description applied perfectly to Moxdale.

"I followed the narrative with the closest attention, waiting for some definite discrepancy on which one could fasten. And at last it came. Moxdale, unaware of what we knew, made the inevitable false step. In his anxiety to prove that Haire was alive and had gone to Dublin, he gave a circumstantial account of his having seen Haire into the taxi en route for Euston at past ten o'clock at night. Now, we knew that Haire had never gone to Dublin. Moreover we knew that, by ten o'clock, Haire had been dead some hours; and we knew, also, that, by that time, the personator must have been well on his way to Holyhead, since he appeared in Dublin early the next morning.

"Here, then, was a definitely false statement. It disposed at once of any possibility that the story might be true; and its effect was to make it certain that the Dublin personator was Moxdale, himself. I was now in a position to tax Moxdale with having killed Haire and carried out the personation, and I did so with studied abruptness in order to force him to make a statement. You see there was not very much bluff about it, after all."

"No," I admitted. "It was not really bluff. I withdraw the expression. I had not realized how complete the evidence was. But your question had a grand dramatic effect."

"That, however, was not its object," said Thorndyke. "I was anxious, for Moxdale's own sake, that he should make a true and straightforward statement. For if he had stuck to his fictitious story, he would certainly have been charged with having murdered Haire; and, as Blandy very justly observed, a story told by an accused man from the witness-box is much less convincing than the same story told voluntarily before any charge has been made. Fortunately, Moxdale, being a sensible fellow, realized this and took my advice."

"What do you suppose the police will do about it?" I asked.

"I don't see why they should do anything," he replied. "No crime has been committed. A charge of manslaughter could not be sustained, since Moxdale's action was purely defensive and the death was the result of an accident."

"And what about the question of concealment of death?"

"There doesn't seem to be much in that. Moxdale did not conceal the body; he merely tried to dissociate himself from it. He did not, it is true, report the death as he ought to have done. That was rather irregular and so was the personation. But I think that the police will take the view that, in the absence of any criminal intention, there is no need, on grounds of public policy, for them to take any action."

Thorndyke's forecast proved to be correct. The Assistant Commissioner asked us for a complete statement of the evidence, and when this had been supplied (including a demonstration by Polton) he decided that no proceedings were called for. It was, however, necessary to amend the finding of the coroner's jury, not only for the purposes of registration, but for that of obtaining probate of Harold Moxdale's will. Accordingly, Thorndyke issued a certificate of the death of Gustavus Haire, and thereby put the finishing touch to one of the most curious cases that had passed through our hands.

---

THE END

## THE JACOB STREET MYSTERY - THE UNCONSCIOUS WITNESS

### PART I. — A PLOT IN THE MAKING

#### I. — THE EAVESDROPPER

ON a pleasant, sunny afternoon near the end of May, when the late spring was just merging into early summer, Mr. Thomas Pedley (Tom Pedley to his friends, or more usually plain Tom) was seated on a substantial sketching stool before a light bamboo easel on which was fixed an upright canvas measuring eighteen inches by twelve. To an expert eye, his appearance, his simple, workmanlike outfit, the leisurely ease with which he handled his brush, and the picture which was growing into shape on the canvas, would all have suggested a competent and experienced landscape painter.

And such, in fact, was Tom Pedley. From his early boyhood, some forty-odd years ago, drawing and painting had been his one absorbing passion, coupled with that love of the countryside that marks the born landscape artist. To him that countryside, largely unspoiled in his early days, was an inexhaustible source of delight and a subject of endless study and meditation. In his daily rambles through meadow or woodland, by farmyards or quiet hamlets, every journey was a voyage of exploration yielding fresh discoveries; new truths of characteristic form and subtle, unexpected colour to be added to his growing store of knowledge of those less obvious aspects of nature which it is the landscape painter's mission to reveal. And as the years passed and the countryside faded away under the withering touch of mechanical transport, that knowledge grew more and more precious. Now, the dwindling remnants had to be sought and found with considered judgment and their scanty material eked out with detail brought forth from the stores of the remembered past.

The picture which was shaping itself on the canvas was an example of this application of knowledge gained by experience. On the wall of a gallery it would have suggested to the spectator an open glade in some vast woodland. In fact, the place was no more than a scrubby little copse, the last surviving oasis in the squalid desert of a "developing" neighbourhood. From his "pitch," ensconced in a clump of bushes, Tom could hear, faint and far away, the strident hoots of motor cars, the rumble of omnibuses, and the clatter of lorries; and but a hundred yards distant was the path by which he had come, a rutted track that led from a half-built street at one end to a dismantled farmyard at the other.

Nevertheless, apart from the traffic noises, the place was strangely peaceful and quiet, its silence accentuated by the natural sounds that pervaded it. Somewhere in the foliage hard by, a thrush sang joyously, and on a branch just overhead a chaffinch repeated again and again his pleasant little monotonous song. And the solitude was as perfect as the quiet. The rough path seemed to be untrodden by the foot of man, for, during the two hours that Tom had been at work, not a soul had passed along it.

At length, as he paused to fill his pipe and take a thoughtful survey of his picture, the sound of voices was followed by the appearance of two men walking slowly along the path, conversing earnestly though in low tones. Tom could not hear what they were saying, though the impression conveyed to him was that their manner was rather the reverse of amicable. But in fact he gave them little attention beyond noting the effect of the dark, sharply defined shapes against the in definite background; and even this interested him but little as his subject required no figures, and certainly not one in a bowler hat. So he continued filling his pipe and appraising his afternoon's work as they walked by without noticing him—actually, he was almost invisible from the path—and as they passed out of sight he produced his matchbox and was about to strike a light when a third figure, that of a woman, made its appearance, moving in the same direction as the others.

This time Tom's attention was definitely aroused, and he sat motionless with the unlighted match in his hand, peering out through the chinks in the bushes which concealed him. The woman's behaviour was very peculiar. She was advancing rather more quickly than the two men, but with a silent, stealthy tread; and from her movements she seemed to be listening and trying to keep the men in sight while keeping out of sight, herself.

Tom watched her disapprovingly. He disliked "snoopers" of all sorts, but especially those who were eavesdroppers as well. However, this was none of his business, and, when she had passed out of his field of vision, he lit his pipe, took up his brush, and straightway forgot all about her.

But he had not finished with her after all. He had been painting but a few minutes when she reappeared; and now her behaviour was still more odd. She was returning at a quicker pace but with the same stealthy movements, listening and looking back over her shoulder with something like an air of alarm. Suddenly, when she was nearly opposite Tom's pitch, she slipped into an opening in the bushes and disappeared from his sight.

This was really rather queer. Once more he transferred his brush to the palette hand, and, as he listened intently, felt in his pocket for the matchbox; for, of course, his pipe had gone out, as a painter's pipe continually does. Very soon his ear caught the sound of footsteps; light, quick footsteps approaching from the direction of the farmyard. Then a man came into view, walking quickly but with a soft and almost stealthy tread and looking about him watchfully as he went.

Tom, sitting stock-still in his leafy ambush, followed the retreating figure with an inquisitive eye, recognizing him as the shorter of the two men who had passed down the path and wondering what had become of the other. Then the man disappeared in the direction of the street; and still Tom sat like a graven image, waiting to see if there were any further developments.

He had not long to wait. Hardly had the sound of the man's footsteps died away when the woman stole forth from her hiding-place and stood for a few seconds listening intently and peering up the path in the direction in which the man had

gone. Then she began slowly and warily to follow; and presently she, too, passed out of sight among the trees.

Tom thoughtfully lit his pipe and reflected. It was a queer affair. What was it all about? The woman was obviously spying on the men; apparently listening to their talk, and mighty anxious to keep out of sight. That was all there was to it so far as he was concerned; and as he was not really concerned in it at all, he decided that it was a "dam' rum go" and dismissed it from his mind.

But the dismissal was not quite effective. The incident had broken the continuity of his ideas and he found it difficult to start afresh. For a few minutes he struggled to pick up the threads, adding a touch here and there; then, once more, he leaned back and surveyed his work, finally getting up from his stool and stepping back a pace or two to see it better as a whole. Now, one of the most important things that experience teaches a painter is when to leave off; and Tom, having considered his picture critically, decided that the time had come. He had painted steadily for a full two hours, and he was a rapid worker in spite of his leisurely manner; rapid because he knew what he wanted to do, made few mistakes, and painted very directly with a rigid economy of work.

Having decided that his picture was finished, excepting perhaps for a little work in the studio to "pull it together," he proceeded forthwith to pack up, closing the folding palette and stowing it in the light wooden colour box, strapping the painting in the canvas carrier, and rolling the used brushes in the painting rag. When he had put these things tidily in his satchel, he folded up the easel and stool, fixed them in the carrying-strap, slung the satchel on his shoulder, and, having taken a last look at his subject, pushed his way through the undergrowth towards the path.

Arriving at the rutted track, he stood for a few seconds looking up and down it as he refilled his pipe. He was not an inquisitive man, but he felt a mild curiosity as to what had become of the man who had passed and had not returned. His previous explorations had given him the impression that the path, or cart track, came to a dead end where the wood petered out and the new devastations began. Apparently, he had been wrong; there must be some continuation of the track, perhaps holding out possibilities for the landscape painter.

Having lit his pipe, he strolled along the path for some three hundred yards until he emerged from the shade of the wood into open daylight. And then both his questions were disposed of. The track, or at least the cart-ruts, was visible, passing through the remains of a gateway and meandering through the devastated farmyard towards an area in which stacks of bricks and dumps of various building material foreshadowed a new eruption of houses similar to those that were to be seen beyond. Hard by, on his right hand, was an old, rat-eaten hayrick, and, a few yards farther away, a ruinous cart-shed of which the thatched roof had rotted away, exposing the decayed rafters. At these melancholy relics of the vanished farm Tom glanced regretfully; then he turned back and retraced his steps along the path.

He had trudged some two hundred yards when there was borne to his ear the sound of horse's hoofs and the rumble of wheels, evidently approaching from the direction of the Street; and as he came nearly opposite his "pitch," a two-wheeled cart appeared round a curve. He stopped to watch it and to note the interesting effect of the rustic-looking vehicle on the winding track, standing out sharply in dark silhouette against its back ground of sun-lighted foliage. As it drew near, he backed into the wood to make way for it and exchanged greetings with the man who was leading the horse; and when it had passed, he turned to look at it and make a mental note of its changed appearance in the altered conditions of light, until it disappeared round a bend of the track; whereupon he resumed his advance towards the town, stepping out briskly and becoming aware of an increasing interest in the meal which was awaiting him at the end of his journey. At the top of the path where it opened on the half-built street, he paused for a few moments to look disparagingly on the unlovely scene, which but a year ago had still been country; then, having exchanged a few words with an elderly bricklayer who appeared to be standing guard over a stack of bricks, he strode away towards the main road to take up his position at the bus stop.

Here he had a considerable time to wait, and he spent it pacing up and down, looking expectantly at each turn in the direction whence the omnibus would come. From a young policeman who presently strolled past, he obtained a rather vague statement as to the time when it was due, with the discouraging addition that the last one had passed about five minutes ago. So Thomas resumed his sentry-go and meanwhile turned over in his mind once again that very queer episode in the wood; and he was still cogitating on it when the omnibus appeared and put a welcome end to his vigil.

It was not a long journey, in terms of modern transport, and the rather squalid domain of the speculative builder soon gave place to the established town. Tom's natural stopping-place would have been the Hampstead Road, but he elected to alight at Marylebone Church and approach his destination by way of Osnaburgh Street and Cumberland Market; whereby he presently emerged into a quiet, shabby street of tall, shabby, but commodious old houses, and so to a green-painted wooden gate bearing the number 38A and flanked by a small brass plate on the jamb inscribed "T. Pedley" and surmounted by a big brass bell-pull.

As Thomas inserted his latch-key and opened the gate, he disclosed a feature common to many of the adjacent houses; a narrow passage opening into a paved yard. For Jacob Street was largely a street of studios. Once it had been a fashionable street, the abode of famous painters and sculptors. Now, the famous artists had gone, but the studios remained; some tenanted by artists of humbler status, but most of them converted into workshops. In either case, Jacob Street was a highly eligible place for persons of small means who wanted roomy premises; for, as studios are in little demand nowadays and are useless for residential purposes, the rents were surprisingly low, though the accommodation was, of its special kind, admirable.

The studio into which Tom admitted himself after crossing the yard was better adapted for residence than some of the others, being more moderate in height, and he had further adapted it by erecting a light wooden partition in one corner,



enclosing a large cubicle which served him as a bedroom. With this and a tall folding screen to enclose the fireplace in winter, or to conceal the sink and the gas cooking-stove when he had visitors, Tom had converted the great bare studio into a convenient and fairly comfortable flat.

Having cleaned his palette, washed his brushes, and washed himself in a big bowl in the sink, he opened a hay-box (disguised by an upholstered top to look like, and serve as, an ottoman) and took out a couple of casseroles which he set on the neatly laid dinner table, opened a bottle of beer and decanted the contents into a fine white stoneware jug, drew up a chair, sat down with a sigh of contentment, and lifted off the lids of the casseroles; one of which proved to contain potatoes (cooked in their jackets) and the other a nondescript kind of stew based on a dismembered fowl.

The table and its appointments offered a summary of Tom Pedley's character and personality. His simple philosophy of life was fairly expressed in his own statement that "a man's wealth can be estimated in terms of what he can do without." Now, the things that Tom could do without were the luxuries and extras that consume money. For entertainments other than museums and public galleries he had no use. He had hardly ever ridden in a taxi, he never smoked cigars, and his single bottle of whisky had lain unopened for a couple of years. He lived plainly, spent little, wasted nothing, and took care of what he had.

By thus thriftily ordering his life, he was able to indulge himself in the things that mattered to him. The beer-jug was a museum piece, as was also the fine ale-glass with its charming engraved design of hops and barley. The little French cheese reposed in a covered dish of Moorcroft ware, the pile of apples in a hand some bowl of beaten bronze, and a finely carved wooden trencher supported the brown loaf. Every object on the table, even including the casseroles, was pleasant and comely to look at, though not necessarily costly, and had been the subject of carefully considered choice. For Tom was an artist to his finger-tips. To him art was no Sunday religion. He loved to have beautiful things around him, not merely to look at but to live with; and he could afford to indulge his fancy, since he did his own domestic work and knew that his treasures were safe from the devastating duster of servant maid or charwoman.

So Tom sat in the fine "Chippendale Windsor" chair at the picturesque gate-leg table and consumed his dinner with placid enjoyment, keeping himself entertained, as is the way of solitary men, with a train of reflections. Principally, his thoughts tended to concern themselves with the curious episode in the wood, which seemed to haunt him to a quite unreasonable extent. For it had been but a trivial affair, and he was not deeply interested in it. Nevertheless, his memory persisted in recalling the incident and filling in details of which he had been unaware at the time, until he was able to visualize a curiously complete picture of the scene and the action. Then his lively imagination took charge and wove a little story around those three figures; and this interested him so much that it presently occurred to him that here was the making of quite a good subject picture of a simple kind, and he decided to try an experimental sketch and see what he could make of it.

When he had finished his dinner, he proceeded to wash up, still turning the project over in his mind. The washing up was not a protracted business, for he had learned to economize in the use of plates and dishes. There was, in fact, only one plate and a knife and fork, and, when these had been dealt with and tidily stowed away, together with the casseroles, in a great French armoire, he was ready to begin. Taking his fresh painting from the canvas-carrier, he set it on an easel, and, selecting a smaller spare canvas, put that on another easel alongside, set his palette and fell to work, first roughing in some of the background from his painting and then proceeding to the disposition of the figures.

The subject of the projected picture was to be "The Eavesdropper," and this seemed to require that the woman should be the principal figure, placed as near as possible in the foreground and painted in some detail on a sufficient scale. Accordingly, he began with her, first blocking in a flat grey silhouette to get the form and the pose and then proceeding to colour and detail. And as he worked he was surprised to find how much he remembered and how little he had to invent. The gleam of sunlight which had fallen on the woman as she retired, lighting up her hair like burnished gold and picking out bright spots on her clothing, came back to him vividly, and when he had put in a few lively touches of positive colour to render the effect, there seemed little more to do. Roughly as the figure was indicated, it recalled the appearance of the woman exactly as he had seen her.

The same was true of the male figures, though as they were more distant they could be painted more simply. In their definitely urban dress they were not very pictorial, but, as this was only a preliminary sketch, Tom decided to keep to the actual facts. And here again he was surprised to note how much he had seen in those casual glances without conscious observation. In fact, when he had put in the two figures from memory not only had he rendered admirably the argumentative pose and action but he had put in more distinctive detail than the distance of the figures required.

For over an hour he worked away with great enjoyment until the little sketch was completed so far as it need be. Then he "knocked off," cleaned his palette, washed his brushes, and, after a glance at the old "hood" clock on the wall, proceeded to smarten him self up with a view to an informal call on his bachelor friend, Dr. Oldfield, who lived hard by in Osnaburgh Street; with whom it was his custom to spend an occasional evening in pleasant, companionable gossip and perhaps a game of chess. But they were not often reduced to that resource, for the doctor was something of an artist, and they had plenty of material for interesting and sympathetic conversation.

When he had refilled his tobacco pouch from a tin and brushed his hat, Tom stood awhile before the easel considering critically the newly finished sketch. It had been interesting enough in the doing but, now that it was done, he found it a little disappointing. As a subject picture, it was somewhat indefinite and lacking in matter; in short, it was hardly a subject picture at all, but rather a landscape with figures. However, it could be reconsidered and perhaps elaborated if that should

seem worth while; and, having reached this conclusion, Tom took his gloves and stick and set forth en route for Osnaburgh Street.

---

## II. — MR. BLANDY

ONE afternoon about a week after his expedition to the wood, Tom Pedley was engaged in his studio in tidying up the painting that he had done on that occasion. At the moment he was working with a sharp scraper, cutting off objectionable lumps of paint and generally levelling down the surface preparatory to some further touches to "pull the painting together." He had just stepped back to take a look at the picture as a whole when the jangling of the studio bell in the yard outside announced a visitor; whereupon he went out, and, traversing the yard and the passage, threw open the large outer gate, disclosing a small person carrying a leather bag.

"Why, it's Mr. Polton," he exclaimed in a tone of relief.

"Yes, sir," said the small gentleman, greeting him with a pleasant and curiously crinkly smile. "I thought I might take the liberty of calling—"

"Now, don't talk nonsense," Tom interrupted. "You know quite well that I am always delighted to see you. Come along in."

"It is very good of you, sir, to say that," said Polton, as Tom shut the gate and led the way down the passage, "but I hope I am not disturbing you. I see," he added with a glance at the scraper, "that you are at work."

"Only doing a scrape down," said Tom, "and you wouldn't disturb me if I wanted to go on. But it's close on tea-time. I should have been knocking off in any case."

As he spoke, he glanced up at the old clock, and Polton, following his glance, drew out a large watch and remarked that the clock was about ten seconds fast; "Which," he added, "is not bad going for a timepiece that is nearly three hundred years old."

As Tom proceeded to fill the kettle and put a match to the gas-ring, Polton placed his bag on the table, and, opening it, brought forth a green baize bundle tied up with tape. Unfastening this, he produced a brilliantly burnished tankard which, after a gentle rub with his handkerchief, he held out for Tom's inspection.

"This, sir," said he, "is what brought me here. You said some time ago that you were on the look-out for a pewter tankard, and you made a drawing, if you remember, sir, to show me the shape that you wanted. Now I happened to see this one on a junk-stall in Shoreditch, so I ventured to get it for you."

"But how good of you to think of me!" exclaimed Tom. "And what a perfectly magnificent specimen! And a junk-stall, too, of all unlikely places. By the way, what am I in your debt for it?"

"I got it for a shilling," Polton replied.

Tom looked at him in amazement. "A shilling!" he repeated incredulously. "You don't really mean a shilling. Why, it's quite a valuable piece."

"Well, you see, sir," Polton explained in an apologetic tone, "it had had some bad usage. It was very dirty and it had been all battered out of shape, so it really was not worth more than a shilling. I didn't take advantage of the man. But pewter is a kindly material if you know how to deal with it. I just took out the bruises, put it back into shape, and cleaned up the surface. That was all. I am glad you like it, sir."

"I am perfectly delighted with it," said Tom. He paused, and for one instant—but only one—he thought of offering a consideration for the time and labour that had wrought the transformation. Then he continued, "Here is the shilling, Polton. But it isn't payment. I take the tankard as a gift. You have turned a bit of worthless junk into a museum piece which will be an abiding joy to me, and I am more grateful than I can tell you."

Polton crinkled shyly, and, by way of closing the subject, wandered round to the easel to inspect the painting. For some seconds he stood, regarding the picture with a sort of pleased surprise. At length he remarked:

"A wonderful art, sir, is that of the painter. To me it looks almost like a kind of magic. Here is a beautiful woodland glade that you have made to appear so real that I seem to feel as if I could walk into it. You must have gone a long way from the bricks and mortar to find a scene like that."

Tom laughed. "A very natural delusion, Polton, but, as a matter of fact, I was almost in sight of the bricks and mortar when I was painting. That bit of woodland is just the last remnant of the country in the midst of a new housing estate. It is within a bus ride of this place, and not a long ride at that."

"Indeed, sir," exclaimed Polton. "Now whereabouts would that be?"

"It is out Hendon way. A place called Linton Green; and the wood is still known by its old name, Gravel-pit Wood."

As Tom spoke the name, Polton started and gazed at the picture with a most singular expression.

"Gravel-pit Wood, Linton Green," he repeated in a strange hushed voice; "the very wood in which that poor gentleman was murdered!"

"Oh!" said Tom in a tone of mild interest. "I never heard of that. How long ago was it?"

"The murder was committed last Tuesday."

"Last Tuesday!" Tom repeated incredulously. "Why, that is the day on which I painted the picture. Do you know what time it happened?"

"It would have been somewhere about four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Then," Tom exclaimed, "I must have actually been in the wood at the very time when the murder was being committed!"

"Yes, sir," Polton agreed. "I rather thought you must when you mentioned the wood, because the police have issued a description of a man who was seen there about that time; and it seems to be a description of you."

The two men looked at each other in silence for some moments; then Tom commented with a grim smile:

"Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish. Do you happen to remember any of the details? I hardly ever see a newspaper, so this is the first that I have heard of the affair."

"I remember all about it," replied Polton, "but I needn't trust to my memory, as I have cut out all the reports of the case and I have got the cuttings in my pocket. You see, sir," he added deprecatingly, "I am rather interested in murders. Perhaps it is because I have the honour of serving a very eminent criminal lawyer. At any rate, I always cut out the reports and paste them into a book for reference."

With this explanation, he produced from his pocket a large wallet from which he extracted a sheaf of newspaper cuttings. Sorting them out rapidly, he selected one, which he handed to Tom.

"That, sir," said he, "is one the which will serve your purpose best. It is from a weekly paper and it gives a summary of the case with all that is known at present. Perhaps you would like to glance through it while I get the tea ready. I know where you keep all the things."

Tom thanked him and sat down to study the cutting while Polton, having examined the kettle, opened the big armoire and began noiselessly to set out the tea-things on the table. The report was headed "Mysterious Crime in a Wood," and ran as follows:

"In the new and rising suburb of Linton Green, near Hendon, there still exists a small patch of woodland, now little more than a dozen acres in extent, known as Gravel-pit Wood. Here, about five o'clock in the afternoon of last Tuesday, a most shocking discovery was made by a labourer who was engaged on the new buildings. This man, Albert Whiffin by name, was sent by the foreman with a message to the clerk of the works whose temporary office was in the half-built street on the other side of the wood. He approached along the cart-track which crosses the wood and had nearly reached the entrance when his attention was attracted by a white object among the grass at the corner of a disused cart-shed, and he went off the path to see what it was. Drawing near, he saw that it was the ivory handle of an umbrella and naturally advanced to pick it up; but as he reached the corner of the shed and was just stooping to pick up the umbrella, he was horrified to perceive the body of a man lying among the nettles and rubbish in one of the stalls of the shed. A single glance convinced him that the man was dead, and he made no further examination, but hurried away with the umbrella in his hand, ran across the wood, and reported his discovery to the clerk of the works. The latter sent off a messenger on a bicycle to the police station, and within a few minutes a sergeant and an inspector arrived and were conducted by Whiffin to the shed where the body was lying. It was seen to be that of a well-dressed man about sixty years of age, and the identity was at once established by visiting cards in the pocket, confirmed by the initials engraved on the silver band of the umbrella. These showed the deceased to be Mr. Charles Montagu, of The Birches, Hall Road, Linton Green.

"But how had he met with his death? The circumstances plainly pointed to murder; and this was confirmed by evident signs of a struggle in the nettles and the long grass. But, strangely enough, there were no wounds or other injuries. The clothing was somewhat disordered, the collar was crumpled, and there appeared to be slight bruises on the neck; but nothing that would serve to account for death. When, however, the divisional surgeon arrived and made his examination, he decided, provisionally, that death was due to poisoning either by prussic acid or some cyanide. Thereupon a search was made for some container, which resulted in the discovery among the nettles of a small bottle bearing traces of a liquid which had the smell of bitter almonds.

"As to the time at which death occurred, as the surgeon made his examination at 5.35 p.m. and he decided that deceased had been dead not more than two hours, it would seem that it must have taken place about four o'clock. The time is important in connection with the only clue to the mystery. About half-past four, a carter taking a load of bricks along the track through the wood, met a man coming from the direction of the cart-shed. This man was seen also by a bricklayer's labourer, emerging from the wood into the half-built street; and he was seen again by a young constable, who noticed him particularly and has given a description of him which agrees exactly with that of the other two witnesses, and which has been circulated by the police, with a request to the man to communicate with them.

"The description is as follows: Height about five feet ten, strongly built, age from forty-five to fifty, grey eyes, brown hair and short brown moustache, dressed in a buff tweed knickerbocker suit with buff stockings and brown shoes, buff soft felt hat with rather broad brim; brown canvas satchel over left shoulder, folding stool and some kind of stand or easel strapped together and carried by a handle in the left hand and a couple of wooden frames, apparently picture canvases, in a holder carried in the right hand.

"The constable, who encountered the man at the bus stop in the Linton Green Road, waiting for the east-bound omnibus, reports that he seemed to be rather anxious to get on, as he inquired when the next omnibus was due and was apparently annoyed to learn that the last one had only just passed. He spoke in a deep, strong voice with the accent of an educated man. The conductor of the omnibus also noticed the man and remembered that he alighted at Marylebone Church but did not see which way he went after alighting.

"At the inquest, which was held on Friday, little further light was thrown on the mystery. The medical evidence proved that deceased died from poisoning by a strong solution of potassium cyanide, either taken by himself or forcibly administered by some other person. There were slight bruises on the neck but nothing to indicate extreme violence, and, in a medical sense, there was nothing to show that the poison was not taken by deceased himself. The police evidence, however, was more definite. The poison bottle bore a number of finger-prints, but although these were very imperfect, the experts were able to say, positively, that they were not those of deceased or of any person known to the police. This fact, as the coroner pointed out in his summing-up, taken with the signs of a struggle, made it nearly certain that the poison was forcibly administered to deceased by some other person. The coroner also commented on the significance of deceased's profession. Mr. Montagu was a financier; in effect, a moneylender; and a moneylender is apt to have enemies with strong reasons for compassing his death. In the present case, no such person was at present known. As to the mysterious artist, his identity had not yet been ascertained as he had not been traced and had not come forward, and nothing was known of his connection, if any, with the tragedy.

"At the conclusion of the summing-up, the jury promptly returned a verdict of Wilful Murder by some person or persons unknown; and that is how the matter stands. Perhaps, when the police are able to get in touch with the elusive artist, some fresh facts may come to light."

As Tom finished his reading, he handed the cutting back to Polton, who returned it carefully to his wallet, and, having put the teapot on the table, silently awaited comments.

"Well," said Tom, "as I remarked before, it's a pretty kettle of fish. I am the mysterious and elusive artist and a possible for the title of murderer. However, the elusiveness can be mended. I had better pop along to the police station to-morrow morning and let them know who I am."

"Yes, sir," Polton agreed earnestly. "That is very necessary. But why wait till to-morrow? Why not go round this evening? The police may succeed at any moment in tracing you, and it would be so much better if you were to go to them of your own accord than to leave them to find you. Don't forget that they have reasonable grounds for suspicion. This murder has been the talk of the town for nearly a week. The papers have been full of it, including the excellent description of you. Probably you are the only person in London who has not heard of it."

Tom laughed, grimly. "By Jove, Polton," said he, "you are talking like a prosecuting counsel. But you are quite right. I am a suspected person, and it won't do for me to look as if I were in hiding. I will amble round to the police station this very evening."

But Tom's wise decision came too late. Less than half an hour later, when they had finished tea, and Polton, having insisted on washing up, was in the act of stowing the tea-things in the great armoire, the jingling of the studio bell was heard from without and Tom went forth to answer the summons. When he opened the gate he discovered on the threshold a tall, clerical-looking man, who saluted him with a deferential bow and a suave smile.

"Have I the pleasure," the stranger inquired, "of addressing Mr. Thomas Pedley?"

"You have," Tom replied with a faint grin. "At any rate, I am Thomas Pedley."

"So I had supposed," the other rejoined, glancing at the brass plate, "and I am delighted to make your acquaintance, as I believe that you may be able to help me in certain investigations in which I am engaged. Perhaps I should explain that I am a police officer, and if you would like to see my authority—"

"No, thanks," replied Tom. "I think I know what your business is, and, in fact, I was going to call at the police station this very evening. However, this will be better. Come along in."

He preceded the officer across the yard and ushered him into the studio, where Polton was discovered standing on a stool setting the clock to time by his watch.

"Well, I'm sure!" the officer exclaimed. "Here is a delightful surprise. My old and esteemed friend, Mr. Polton! And what a singular coincidence. Have you known Mr. Pedley long?"

"A good time," replied Polton. "We first met in an antique shop in Soho; Parrott's. You remember Parrott—his name was really Pettigrew, and he was the villain who murdered Mr. Penrose."

"I remember the case," said the officer, "though I was not concerned in it. But there is another coincidence; for, by a strange chance, it is a murder case that is the occasion of my visit here."

Tom did not quite perceive the coincidence but he made no remark, waiting for the officer to open the proceedings. Meanwhile Polton tentatively approached his hat, with the suggestion that "perhaps they would rather discuss their business alone."

"You needn't go on my account," said the officer. "There are no secrets"; and as Tom expressed himself to the same effect, Polton gladly relinquished the hat and sat down with undisguised satisfaction to listen.

"Now, Mr. Pedley," the officer began, "I am going to ask you a few questions, and it is my duty to explain that you are not bound to answer any if the answer would tend—in the silly official phrase—to incriminate you."

"I'll bear that in mind," said Tom, with a broad grin.

"Yes," said the officer, with a responsive smile. "Ridiculous expression, but we must observe the formalities. Well, as a start; can you remember where you were and what you were doing on Tuesday, the eighteenth of May?"

"Last Tuesday. Yes. In the afternoon I was in Gravel-pit Wood, Linton Green. I got there about two o'clock and I came away about half-past four, or perhaps a little earlier. In the interval I was painting a picture of the wood, which I will show you if you care to see it."

"Thank you," said the officer. "I should like very much to see it, presently. But meanwhile another question arises. It appears from what you tell me that you must actually have been in the wood while the murder was being committed, and yet, although there was an urgent broadcast appeal for information and similar appeals in the Press, you never came forward or made any sign whatever; not even though those appeals were coupled with a description of yourself, and so, in effect, addressed to you personally. Now, why did you not communicate with the police?"

"The explanation is perfectly simple," replied Tom. "Until a couple of hours ago, when Mr. Polton told me about it, I had no knowledge that any murder had been committed."

The officer received this statement with a bland and benevolent smile.

"A perfectly simple explanation," he agreed; "and yet, if I were disposed to cavil—which I am not—I might think of the broadcast and the daily papers with their staring headlines and wonder—but, as I say, I am not."

"I dare say," said Tom, "that it sounds odd. But I have no wireless and I hardly ever see a paper. At any rate, it is the fact that I had never heard of the crime until Mr. Polton mentioned it and showed me an account of it which he had cut out of a newspaper."

Here Polton interposed with a deferential crinkle. "If it would not seem like a liberty, sir, I should like to say that Mr. Pedley showed me the picture and told me where and when he had painted it; and he seemed very much shocked and surprised when I informed him about the murder."

The officer regarded the speaker with a smile of concentrated benevolence.

"Thank you, Mr. Polton," said he. "Your very helpful statement disposes of the difficulty completely. Now, perhaps, I may have the privilege of seeing the picture."

Tom rose, and, fetching a rough studio frame from a stack by the wall, slipped the canvas into it and replaced it on the easel.

"There it is," said he; "not quite finished but perhaps all the better for that as a representation."

"Yes," the officer agreed, "as my interest in it is merely topographical, though I can see that it is a very lovely work of art." He stood before the easel beaming on the picture as if pronouncing a benediction on it, but nevertheless scrutinizing it minutely. Presently he produced from a roomy inner pocket a small portfolio from which he took a section of the six-inch Ordnance map pasted on thin card. "Here, Mr. Pedley," said he, "is a large-scale map of the wood. Do you think you could show me the position of the spot which this picture represents?"

Tom took the map from him and studied it for a few moments while he felt in his pocket for a pencil.

"I think," said he, indicating a spot with the pencil point, "that this will be the place. I am judging by the curve of the footpath, as the individual trees are not shown. Shall I make a mark?"

"If you please," the officer replied; and when Tom had marked a minute cross and handed the card back to its owner, the latter produced a boxwood scale and a pair of pocket dividers, with which he took off the distance from the cross to the nearest point on the path and measured it on the scale.

"A hundred and seven yards, I make it," said he. "What do you say to that?"

"Yes," Tom answered, "that seems about right."

"Very well. You were about a hundred yards from the path. From where you were, could you see any person that might pass along that path?"

"I could, and I did. Not very clearly, because I was sitting on a low stool and I could only see out through the chinks in the foliage. But while I was working there I saw three persons pass down the path, and two of them came back."

"And do you suppose that those persons saw you?"

"I am pretty certain that they didn't. They couldn't, you know. Sitting low among the bushes, as I was, I must have been quite invisible from the path."

"Yes," the officer agreed; "but you could see them. Now, what can you tell me about them?"

"All I can tell you is that they behaved in a rather queer way. At least, one of them did;" and here Tom proceeded to give a minute and circumstantial account of what he had seen.

"But, my dear Mr. Pedley," the officer exclaimed, beaming delightedly on the narrator, "this is most important and illuminating. The woman is a new feature of the case. By the way, did anyone else pass?"

"No. These were the only people that I saw until just as I was coming away, when I met a man bringing a cart full of bricks through the wood."

"Then there can be no doubt as to who those people were. One was Mr. Montagu, the other was the murderer, and the woman must have been connected with one or both of the men. What time was it when they passed down?"

"About four o'clock or perhaps a few minutes earlier. It would be about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour later when the man came back."

"Yes," said the officer, "that seems to agree with the evidence. And now we come to the most important point of all; can you give us any description of them, and do you think you would recognize them if you saw them again?"

"As to recognizing them, I am very doubtful. Certainly I couldn't swear to any of them. And I don't think I could give much of a description. They were a good distance away and I saw them only through the chinks between the branches, and wasn't taking very much notice. However, I will see what I can remember."

With this he embarked on a description of the three persons, rather vague and general though helped out by questions from the officer, who jotted down the answers in his note-book.

"Yes," the latter remarked as Tom concluded, "not so bad. But yet, Mr. Pedley, I feel that you must have seen more than that. You are not an ordinary observer. You are a painter. Now, a painter's eye is a noticing eye and a remembering eye. Supposing you were to try to paint the scene from memory—"

"By Jove!" Tom interrupted, "I'm glad you said that, for it happens that that is just what I did do, and on the very day, while my memory was fresh. I thought the incident might make the subject for a picture, 'The Eavesdropper,' and that evening I roughed out a trial sketch. I will show it to you."

From a collection of unfinished works on a shelf he produced the sketch and set it on the easel beside the larger picture, from which the background had been copied.

"Ha!" said the officer. "Now you see that I was right. The brush is mightier than the word. This tells us a lot more than your description. It shows us what the people really looked like. This figure is evidently Mr. Montagu, hat and coat quite correct, and you have even shown the ivory handle of the umbrella. And the other two are not mere figures; they look like particular persons."

"Yes," agreed Polton, who had been gazing at the sketch with delighted interest, "Mr. Blandy is quite right. But it is really very wonderful. Those two men have their backs to us, and the woman's face has practically no features; and yet I feel that they are real persons and that I should know them again if I were to meet them. Can you explain it, Mr. Pedley?"

"Well," Tom replied, "I can only say that this is an impression of the scene at a particular moment, and that is how these people looked at that moment. You identify a person not only by his face but by his size, shape, proportions, and characteristic posture and movements. You can often recognize a man by his walk long before you can distinguish his features."

"Exactly," said Blandy, "and that is why our recognizing officers like to watch the remand prisoners in the exercise yard. They can often spot a disguised man by his general make-up and the way he walks or stands, and I am inclined to think that this sketch might be useful to a specialist of that kind. Would it be possible to borrow it and have a photograph made to accompany your description?"

Before Tom could reply, Polton broke in eagerly.

"Why not let me do the photograph for you, Inspector? I could bring my camera here so that you wouldn't have to borrow the sketch. I should like to do it, if you'd let me."

Inspector Blandy beamed on him with ineffable amiability.

"How very good of you, Mr. Polton," said he. "Always so helpful. But it would be a good photograph, and you would have a copy to add to your little collection. I am inclined to accept gratefully if Mr. Pedley will grant us permission."

Mr. Pedley granted his permission without demur, whereupon the inspector, having arranged a date of delivery with Polton, prepared to take his leave.

"By the way," said he, picking up his hat and putting it down again, "there are two little points that we may as well clear up. First, as to the stature of the unknown man and the woman. The man looks distinctly shorter than Mr. Montagu, who was about five feet ten. What do you say?"

"Yes," replied Tom. "I should put him at about five feet seven. The woman looked taller, but then women do. I should say that she was about the same height."

The inspector made a note of the answer and then said:

"When you met the carter, you seemed to be coming from the bottom of the wood."

"I was. As one of the men had not come back, it seemed that the path, which I had supposed ended at the bottom of the

wood, must continue beyond, so I went down to see if it did. When I saw that it crossed the farmyard I came back and started homeward."

"Then you must have passed the cart-shed. Isn't it rather remarkable that you should not have noticed the body, or, at any rate, the umbrella?"

"Not at all. There is an old hayrick between the path and the cart-shed. I never saw more than a corner of the shed, and it was the wrong corner. Whiffin, you remember, was coming from the farmyard."

"Yes," said the inspector. "I had forgotten the rick; but I suspect the lady found it useful for stalking purposes. Well," he added, once more taking up his hat, "I think that is all; excepting that it remains for me to offer my most humble and hearty thanks for your invaluable help. It has been a great privilege for me to listen to your very illuminating observations and to be made the beneficiary of your remarkable technical knowledge and skill."

With this final flourish he made his way to the door escorted by Tom, who conducted him to the gate and launched him into the outer world.

"Rather an oily customer, that, for a police officer," Tom remarked when he returned to the studio, to find Polton still gloating over the sketch. "Don't you think so?"

Polton crinkled knowingly, as he replied:

"Mr. Blandy is an exceedingly polite gentleman. But he is a very able detective officer; as sharp as a needle and as slippery as an eel. You've got to be very careful with Mr. Blandy. I hope, sir, that you didn't mind my offering to do the photograph. You see, sir, I thought it best that a valuable thing like that should not go out of your possession."

"That was very good of you, Polton. But, bless you, it isn't a valuable thing. It is practically a throw-out."

"Oh, don't say that, sir. I have been admiring it and thinking what a charming little picture it is and how wonderfully full of interest. When will it be convenient for me to come and take the photograph?"

"You needn't trouble to bring the camera here. Take the canvas with you and do the job in your own place; and, as it seems to have taken your fancy, you had better keep it and let me have a photograph, in case I should decide to paint the subject. The photograph will do just as well for me."

Polton was disposed to protest, but Tom stolidly wrapped the canvas in paper and handed it to him, and a few minutes later he departed, crinkling with pleasure and gratitude, with the little parcel under his arm.

---

### III. — MRS. SCHILLER

IN all the busy town that seethed around him, there can have been but few persons whose lives were as untroubled as was that of Thomas Pedley. He had, in fact, not a care in the world. His work yielded a modest income which was more than enough to supply his modest needs, and the doing of that work was a pleasure that time could not stale. He never tired of painting. If he had come into a fortune, he would still have gone on painting for the mere joy of the occupation, and might then have missed the added satisfaction of living by his industry. At any rate, he craved no fortune and envied no one, except, perhaps, those artists whose work he considered better than his own.

Thus, through the uneventful years, Tom pursued "the noiseless tenor of his way" in quiet happiness and perfect contentment, up to the period at which this history now arrives, when we have to record the appearance of a cloud upon his usually serene horizon. It was only a small cloud; but its little shadow was enough to cause a sensible disturbance of his habitually placid state of mind.

The trouble was not connected with the Gravel-pit Wood incident. That had never occasioned him any anxiety, even though he had been aware—with a slightly amused interest—that the police had by no means forgotten his existence. But as the weeks had passed and the "Unsolved Mystery" had gradually faded from the pages of the daily papers, so had it faded from his own memory and ceased to be of any concern to him.

The cloud was, in fact, a feminine cloud. His troubles, like those of Milton Perkins, were connected with the female of his species. For Tom, as the reader has probably inferred, was a bachelor; and it was his considered intention to remain a bachelor. Wherefore, though he liked women well enough, he avoided all feminine intimacies and kept a wary eye on any unattached spinsters who came his way, and as for widows, he viewed them with positive alarm.

Now it happened that, on a certain afternoon, Tom was working with great enjoyment at a subject picture which his dealer had commissioned when the jangling of the studio bell announced a visitor. With a snort of annoyance he laid down his palette and brushes and went forth to confront the disturber of his peace; when he discovered on the threshold a rather tall woman, dressed—and painted—in the height of fashion, who turned at the sound of the opening gate, and greeted him with a smile that made his flesh creep.

"You are Mr. Pedley, I think," said she.

Tom was of the same opinion, and said so.

"I hope you won't consider me troublesome," she said in a wheedling tone, "but I should be so grateful if you would lend me a sheet of Whatman. I have a piece of work to do, and I want to start on it at once, but I have run out of paper."

Now, if the smile had made Tom's flesh creep, the request positively made it crawl. For he knew—and so must she if she were a painter—that there was an excellent artists' colourman's shop within five minutes' walk of the place where they were standing, from whence, indeed, Tom got most of his supplies. It looked suspiciously like a pretext for making his acquaintance.

"Perhaps I should explain," she continued, "that I am your next-door neighbour—Mrs. Schiller."

Tom bowed. He had observed the recent appearance of a brass plate bearing this name, and was now slightly reassured. At least, she was a married woman—unless she was a widow! In any case, he couldn't keep her waiting on the doorstep.

"I'll let you have a sheet with pleasure," said he. "Won't you come in?"

She complied with alacrity, and, as he conducted her along the passage, he asked: "What sort of surface would you like? I generally use 140, Net."

"That will do perfectly, if you can spare me a sheet. I will let you have it back; at least, not the same sheet, you know, but an equivalent."

"You needn't," said Tom, with a view to heading her off from another visit. "I have a good stock. Just laid in a fresh quire, and I don't use a lot as I work mostly in oil. This is my show."

He indicated the open door, and, as she stepped into the studio, his visitor looked around with a little squeak of surprise.

"But how enormous!" she exclaimed. "And how magnificent! I do envy you. My studio isn't really a studio at all. It is just my sitting-room, though it is quite a good room, with a nice big window. You must let me show it to you, sometime."

Tom groaned inwardly. A very pushing young person, this. He began to suspect that she must be a widow, and decided that he must "mind his eye."

"Well," he replied, "you don't really need a place of this size to paint in, though, of course, it's a convenience to have plenty of elbow-room."

He went to a set of wide shelves and, drawing out the imperial size portfolio in which he kept his stock of paper, opened it on the table and selected a sheet, which he rolled slightly and secured with a turn of string.

Meanwhile, his visitor had taken her stand before the easel and was inspecting the nearly finished picture; a simple, open-air subject such as Tom liked to paint, showing a group of gipsies on a heathy common, tending their fire, with a couple of vans in the background.

"But how wonderful!" she exclaimed. "And how curious and interesting."

Tom paused in the act of tying the knot and looked round suspiciously.

"Why curious?" he asked.

"I mean," she explained, "the extraordinary representationalism. It might almost be a photograph. Do you always paint like this?"

Now Tom held privately the opinion that the comparison of a finished, realistic painting to a photograph was the hallmark of the perfect ignoramus. But he did not say so. He merely answered the question.

"I try to get as near as I can to the appearances of nature; but, of course, the best of us fall a long way short."

"Exactly," said she. "Imitative painting must be very difficult, and after all, you can't compete with the photographer. That is the advantage of abstract art. You are not trying to imitate anything in particular; you just let your personality express itself in terms of abstract form and colour. Have you ever experimented in the new progressive art?"

"No," replied Tom. "This is the way I paint, and it seems to me to be the right way; and I suppose my dealers and private clients take the same view, as they are willing to buy my pictures at a fair price. At any rate, such as it is, I had better get on with it."

By way of enforcing this blunt refusal of the attempted discussion, he held out the roll of paper and glanced wistfully at his palette.

"Yes," she agreed, taking the paper from him with an engaging smile, "I mustn't waste your time now, though I should like to talk this question over with you some day. But now I will take myself off, and thank you so much for the loan of the paper. I promise faithfully to repay it."

Once more Tom assured her that no repayment was necessary, though he now realized, hopelessly, that the promise would certainly be kept. Nevertheless, as he bade her adieu on the doorstep and watched her trip round to her own door, he resolved afresh to "mind his eye" and ward off any attempt to establish more definitely intimate relations; an admirable resolution but one which, to a scrupulously polite gentleman such as Tom Pedley, presented certain difficulties in practice, as he was very soon to discover. For, of course, the loan of the paper was repaid promptly; on the following day, in fact; and Tom's efforts, as he received the rolled sheet, to "close the incident" failed ignominiously. He did not on this occasion invite his fair visitor to come in. But though he conducted the transaction on the doorstep, the closure of the incident was but the prelude to the opening of another.

"I won't detain you now," said she with a smile that displayed between her scarlet lips a fine set of teeth, "but I do want



you to see my studio, and especially I want you to tell me what you think of my work. A few words of criticism from an experienced artist like you would be so helpful. Now, you will come, won't you? Any time that suits you. This afternoon if you like, say about four o'clock. How would that do?"

Of course, it wouldn't do at all if there were any possibility of escape. But there was not. Tom looked at her helplessly, mumbling polite acknowledgments and thinking hard. But what could he say? Obviously he could not refuse; and this being clear to him, he decided to get the visit over at once and take precautions against its repetition.

"Very well," said she, "then we will say four o'clock; and if you are very good and don't slate my pictures too much, I will give you a nice cup of tea."

With a friendly nod and a further display of teeth she tripped away briskly in the direction of Hampstead Road, and Tom, muttering objurgations, retired to bestow the sheet of paper in the portfolio.

It need hardly be said that the afternoon's visit did nothing towards "closing the incident." As she opened the street door in response to his ring at the bell, removing a cigarette to execute a smile of welcome, his hostess received him as though he had been "the companion of her childhood and the playmate of her youth." She shook his hand with affectionate warmth, and, still holding it, led him into a large front room where a brand new easel, flanked by a small table, stood close to the window. Tom cast a comprehensive glance around and rapidly assessed the occupant in professional terms. Apart from the easel and the colour-box, brushes and water-pot on the table, it was just a typical woman's sitting-room, in which the tea-table with its furnishings seemed more at home than the easel.

"This is my humble workshop," said his hostess; "a poor affair compared with your noble studio, but still—"

"It would probably have been good enough for Turner or DeWint," said Tom. "It's the painter that matters, not the studio. Shall we have a look at some of your work?"

"Yes, let's," she replied brightly, leading him towards the easel. "This is my latest. I am not quite satisfied with it but I don't think I will carry it any further for fear of spoiling it. What do you think?"

Tom stared at the object on the easel and gibbered inarticulately. A half-sheet of Whatman had been pinned untidily on a board and covered with curved streaks of bright colour, evidently laid, very wet, on damped paper, producing an effect like that of an artist's colourman's sheet of samples.

"Well," he stammered, recovering himself slightly, "I don't see what more you could do to it. Perhaps the—er—the subject is—er—just a little obscure. Not perfectly obvious, you know. Possibly—er—"

"Oh, there isn't any subject," she explained; "not in an imitative sense, that is. It is just an essay in abstract colour. I propose to call it 'A Symphony in Green and Blue.' Do you think it sounds pretentious to call it a symphony?"

"I wouldn't say pretentious," he replied, "but I don't much like calling things by wrong names. It isn't a symphony, you know. A symphony is a combination of sounds, whereas this work is a—is a—well, it's a painting."

Mrs. Schiller laughed softly. "You were going to say 'it's a picture,' and then you thought better of it. Now didn't you?"

"Well," Tom admitted with an apologetic grin, "it isn't quite what I should call a picture, but then I really don't know anything about this new form of art. I suppose it is an abstract picture."

"That is just what it is; an entirely non-representational abstraction of colour. Rather an extreme example, perhaps, so we will change it for something more representational."

She fished out a portfolio from under a settee and took from it a small mounted drawing which she stood up on the easel.

"The first one," she explained, "is a study of abstract colour. Now this one is an essay in abstract form. But it has a subject. I have called it 'Adam and Eve.' How do you like it?"

Tom considered this new masterpiece with knitted brows and a feeling of growing bewilderment. It represented two human figures such as might have been drawn by an average child of nine or ten with no natural aptitude for art, in a heavy, clumsy pencil outline filled in with daubs of colour; As the serious production of a sane adult, the thing was incredible.

"They are a good deal alike," Tom remarked, by way of saying something.

"Yes," she agreed, "but of course they would be, as they haven't any clothes, poor things. The bigger one would naturally be Adam, though it really doesn't matter. The title is only a convention. The picture is really a study in essential form."

"I see," said Tom, though he didn't; but he continued to gaze at the work with bulging eyeballs while the lady looked over his shoulder with a curious cryptic smile—which vanished instantly when he turned towards her. After a prolonged inspection with no further comment, he cast a furtive glance at the portfolio, whereupon his hostess removed the figure subject and replaced it by another painting, apparently representing a human head and shoulders, and, in character, very much like those "portraits" with which untalented schoolchildren adorn blank spaces in their copybooks. Such, in fact, Tom at first assumed it to be, but the artist hastily corrected him.

"Oh, no," said she. "It is not imitative. I have called it 'Madonna,' but it is just a study in simplification based on the architectural structure of the human head, with all the irrelevant details eliminated."

"Yes," Tom commented, "I noticed that there had been a good deal of elimination. Those brown patches, I suppose,

represent the hair?"

"They don't represent it," she replied. "They merely acknowledge and connote its existence. Perhaps, in a non-representational work, they are really superfluous, but they are useful in elucidating the pattern."

This explanation left Tom speechless as did the other selections from the portfolio. They were all much of the same kind; either meaningless streaks of colour or childish drawings of men and animals. Some of them he judged to be landscapes from the appearance in them of green, mop-like shapes, which might have "connoted" trees, and in one the simplified landscape was inhabited by abstract animals suggesting the cruder productions of a toy-shop.

"Well," said Mrs. Schiller as she returned the last of them to the portfolio, "that is my repertoire; and now that you have seen them all, I want you to tell me frankly what you think of them. You need not mind being outspoken. Candid criticism is what I want from you."

"But my dear Mrs. Schiller," Tom exclaimed despairingly, "I am quite incompetent to criticize your work. I know nothing whatever about this modernist art excepting that it is a totally different thing from the art which I have always known and practised. And we can't discuss it because we are not speaking the same language. When I paint a picture I aim at beauty and interest; and since there is nothing so beautiful as nature, I keep as close to natural appearances as I can. And as a picture is a work of imagination and not a mere representation like an illustration in a scientific textbook, I try to arrange my objects in a pleasing composition and to make them convey some interesting ideas. But, apparently, modernist art avoids truth to nature and any kind of intellectual or emotional interest. I don't understand it at all."

"But," she objected, "don't you find beauty in abstract form?"

"I have always supposed," he replied, "that abstract form appertains to mathematics, whereas painting and sculpture are concerned with visible and tangible things. But really, Mrs. Schiller, it's of no use for me to argue the question. We are talking and thinking on different planes."

"I suppose we really are," she agreed, "but it's rather disappointing. I had hoped to profit by your experience, but I see now that it has no bearing on modern art. But never mind, we will drown our disagreements in the teapot. Will you take this chair while I boil the kettle, or would you prefer a softer one?"

"I like a hard chair," replied Tom.

"So do I. Odd, isn't it, that women seem to want a chair stuffed like a feather bed and piled up with cushions? I could never understand why, seeing that they are lighter than men, as a rule, and better covered."

"Perhaps," Tom suggested, as he subsided on to the wooden-seated chair, "it is because they wear less clothes and want the cushions for warmth."

"Well, at any rate," said she, as she put a match to the gas-ring on the hearth which supported a handsome copper kettle, "we are on the same plane in the matter of chairs, so we have one agreement to start with."

She drew up a light mahogany armchair, and, seating herself, gave her attention to the kettle; and while it was heating she continued the discussion with a whimsical mock-seriousness that Tom found quite pleasant. In fact, there was no denying that Mrs. Schiller's personality was distinctly attractive if one could forget the atrocities of her painting; and Tom, who liked women well enough so long as they did not want him to marry them, realized with some surprise that he was finding the little informal function quite agreeable (though he was still resolved that this visit should "close the incident"). The excellent China tea was brewed to perfection, the table appointments, including the kettle, were pleasant to look on, and his hostess's bright flippancies kept him mildly amused.

Presently the conversation reverted to the subject of painting, and Tom ventured to seek some solution of the mystery that had perplexed him.

"Have you always painted in the modernist manner?" he asked.

"Always!" she repeated with a smile. "I haven't always painted at all. It is a completely new venture on my part, and it came about quite by chance; a very odd chance it seems when I look back on it. A girl friend of mine asked me to go with her to a show at a gallery in Leicester Square; an exhibition of works of modern masters. I didn't want to go, because I had never felt the least interest in pictures and didn't know anything about them, but she insisted that I must go because everybody was talking about these pictures, and the art critics declared they were the latest discoveries in art."

"So I went, and, to my surprise, I was tremendously impressed and interested. The pictures were so different from anything that I had ever seen before; so quaint and curious. They looked as if they might have been done by children. I was really charmed with them; so much so that I decided to try if I could do anything like them. And I found that I could. Isn't it strange? I had never drawn or painted before, and yet I found it quite easy to do. Don't you think it is very remarkable?"

"Very remarkable," Tom agreed quite sincerely, though not quite in the sense that she meant. For him the mystery was now completely solved, though there were other matters concerning which he was curious.

"Do you send in to the exhibitions?" he asked. "It is rather necessary if you expect to make a living by your work."

"I haven't actually exhibited," she replied, "but I am getting a collection together in readiness, and I go to see the modernist shows to see what sort of prices works of my kind fetch, or, at least, are offered at. They seem to me rather high, but I notice that very few of the pictures are sold."

"Yes," said Tom, "there are not many picture-buyers nowadays, and the few picture-lovers who do buy mostly prefer work of the traditional kind. But your best plan would be to try some of the dealers who specialize in modernist works. They would know what your pictures are worth in their market, and they might be able to give you some useful advice. They might even buy some of your works—at their own price, of course."

"That's an excellent idea," said she. "I will certainly try it. Perhaps you could give me the names of one or two dealers. Would you?"

Tom shook his head. "My dealers would be no good for you. They are old-fashioned fellows who deal in old-fashioned work. No modernist stuff for them. They'd be afraid of frightening away their regular customers."

"That doesn't sound very encouraging," she remarked with a wry smile.

"I suppose it doesn't," Tom admitted; and in the pause that followed it was suddenly borne in on him that these comradely confidences were not very favourable to the "closure of the incident." And then, in the vulgar but convenient phrase, he "put the lid on it."

"You appear," said he, "to work exclusively in water colour. Do you find that more suitable than oil?"

"The truth is," she replied, "that I have never tried oil painting because I don't quite know how to go about it; I mean as to mixing the paint and putting it on with those queer-looking stiff-haired brushes. But I should like to paint in oil, or at least give the medium a trial." She paused for a few moments. Then in an insinuating tone she continued, "I wonder whether my kind and helpful neighbour would come to my assistance."

Tom looked at her apprehensively. "I suppose I'm the neighbour," said he, "but I don't quite see what you want me to do."

"It is only a modest request," she urged, "but I should be so grateful if, sometime when you are at work, you would let me come and look on."

"But to what purpose?" he demanded. "My painting and your painting are not the same kind of thing at all."

"I know," she agreed. "But, after all, modernist painters use the same materials and implements as artists of the more old-fashioned type. Now, you know all about the methods of oil painting, and, if I could watch you when you are working, I should see how you do it, and then I should be able, with a little practice, to do it myself. Won't you let me come once or twice? I promise not to waste your time or interrupt you by talking."

Tom looked at the smiling, wheedlesome face and realized that he was cornered. It would be churlish to refuse, and indeed, utterly unlike him to withhold any help from a fellow artist, no matter how bad. But still it was necessary for him to "mind his eye." It would never do to give this enterprising young woman the run of his studio.

"When I am at work," he said at length, "I like to be alone and concentrate on what I am doing, but I shall be very pleased to give you a demonstration of the technique of oil painting. What I would suggest is that you bring in one of your pictures, and that I make a copy of it in oil, while you look on. Then you can ask as many questions as you please and I will give you any tips as to the management of the medium that seem necessary. How will that do?"

"But it is the very thing that I would have asked for if I had dared. I am delighted, and more grateful than I can tell you. Perhaps you will let me know when I may come for the demonstration."

"I will," he replied. "It won't be for a day or two, but when I have finished the picture that I have in hand, I will drop a note into your letter-box giving one or two alternative dates. And I hope," he continued as he rose to depart, "that you will like the medium and do great things in it."

As he re-entered his studio and occupied himself in cleaning his palette and brushes and doing a few odd jobs, he cogitated profoundly on the events of the afternoon. One thing was plain to him; the "closure of the incident" was "off." The good lady had fairly taken possession of him. Already she had established herself definitely as an acquaintance, and he saw clearly that the next interview would put her on the footing of a friend. It was an unfortunate affair, but he must make the best of it and continue to "mind his eye"—if the word "continue" was strictly applicable.

As to the woman herself, he was completely puzzled. He could make nothing of her. Was she simply an impostor or did she suffer from some extraordinary delusion? The plain and obvious facts were that she could not draw at all, that her water-colour painting was that of an untalented child and that she seemed to have no artistic ideas or the capacity to invent a subject. But was it possible that she had some kind of artistic gifts which he was unable to gauge? The supposition seemed to be negated by her own admission that she had never felt any interest in pictures. For the outstanding characteristic of real talent is the early age at which it shows itself. Pope "lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came;" Mozart and Handel were accomplished musicians, and even composers, when they were small children; John Millais was a masterly draughtsman at the age of five; Bonington died in the twenties with a European reputation; and so with Fred Walker, Chantrey, and a host of others. No, a person who reaches middle age without showing any sign of artistic aptitude is certainly not a born artist.

The only possible conclusion seemed to be that Mrs. Schiller was either a rank impostor or the subject of some strange delusion; and at that he had to leave it. After all, it was not his affair. His concern was to see that he was not involved in any entanglements; and the lady's masterful ways promised to give him full occupation in that respect without troubling about her artistic gifts.

---

#### IV. — MR. VANDERPUYE

THERE are persons, unfortunately too common, who seem to be incapable of doing anything well. Impatience to get the job finished and inability to concentrate on the doing, beget slipshod work and faulty results. Conversely, there are some more happily constituted who cannot bring themselves to do anything badly. Of this type Tom Pedley was a representative specimen. To the simplest task he gave his whole attention and would not leave it until it was done to a finish, even though the task was no more than the washing of a teacup or the polishing of a spoon. Hence the demonstration of oil technique, though he secretly regarded it as a waste of time, was carried out with as much thoroughness as if Mrs. Schiller had been a pupil of the highest promise.

"I have brought two of my pictures," the lady explained when she made her appearance on the appointed day; "the Symphony in Green and Blue the Adam and Eve subject. Which do you think will be the more suitable?"

"May as well do them both," replied Tom, "as one has some sort of shape in it and the other hasn't. We'll begin with the Symphony. You seem to have used mighty big brushes and kept the paper uncommonly wet."

"Oh, I didn't use any brushes at all. I just soaked the paper in water, mixed up some emerald oxide and French ultramarine in separate saucers and poured it on in long streaks. When I tilted the board, of course, the streaks ran together and produced those subtle gradations of colour that I have tried to express by the word Symphony."

"I see," said Tom with an appreciative grin. "Deuced good method. Labour-saving, too. Well, you can't do that sort of thing in oil. Got to do the blending with the brush unless you work with the knife. I'll show you."

He set up the "Symphony" on the easel with a fourteen by twelve canvas by its side. Then, on a clean palette, he squeezed out three blobs of colour, emerald oxide, French ultramarine and flake white, and, taking up the palette knife, mixed one or two tints to match those of the "Symphony."

"We'll follow your methods as far as we can in oil," said he. "We begin with streaks of the deepest colour, add lighter tints at the edges, and then paint them into one another to produce the subtle gradations. Like this."

He fell to work with a couple of large brushes, keeping an attentive eye on the "Symphony" and giving from time to time a few words of explanation as to the management of the brush and the mixing of the tints. At the end of a quarter of an hour's work he had produced a copy of the "Symphony" which might have been a facsimile but for the difference in the medium. His pupil watched him and listened to his explanations without saying a word until he had finished. Then, as he stepped back and laid down his palette, she exclaimed:

"How extraordinary! You've made a perfect copy; and so quickly, too. It is really wonderful; and it looks so easy."

"Easy!" Tom repeated. "Of course it's easy. Any—er—anyone—" (he had nearly said "any fool") "can put streaks of colour on a canvas and paint their edges into one another. But, of course," he added hurriedly, "you've got to invent the streaks. Now we'll have a go at Adam and Eve."

This, however, presented more difficulty. Try as he would, he could not quite attain the childish effect of the original. His figures persisted in looking slightly human and even in differentiating themselves into a recognizable man and woman.

"There," he said as he stepped back and regarded his performance with a grim smile, "I think that will do, though it isn't a fair copy. I seem to have missed some of the 'essential form,' but that doesn't matter. You see the method. And now, as a wind up, I'll just show you how to work with the knife. That may suit you better than the brush."

He placed on the easel a slab of millboard, and, taking a couple of small, thin-bladed, trowel-shaped knives, rapidly executed another rendering of the "Symphony," while his pupil watched with delighted surprise. Finally, he showed her how to clean the palette and wash the brushes, admonishing her that a tidy worker takes care of his tools and doesn't waste his materials.

"And now," he concluded, "you know all about it. Facility will come with practice, and the ideas you have already, so all you've got to do is to provide yourself with the materials and fire away."

"I will certainly do that," said she. "But I can't tell you how grateful I am." She came close up to him, looking earnestly in his face and laying her hands on his arms (and for one awful moment he thought she was going to kiss him) and exclaimed: "It was so kind of you to take all this trouble for a mere stranger. I think you are a perfect dear. But we aren't really strangers, are we?"

"Well," Tom admitted cautiously, "I've certainly seen you before."

"Now, don't be an old bear," she protested smilingly. "Seen me before, indeed! But never mind. You haven't done with me yet. I want you to come with me to the artists' colourman and show me what I must get for a start. You will do that for me, won't you? Say yes, like a duck."

"Can't very well do that," objected Tom, "as I've never heard a duck say yes; but I'll come to the shop with you and see that you don't waste your money on foolishness. Might as well nip along now and get it done with. Shop's close by. Only take us a few minutes. What do you say?"

She said "yes" with a sly and very understanding smile; and Tom realized too late that his studied gruffness, so far from

fending her off, had only put her on a more intimate footing. So they went forth together, and when Tom had superintended her purchases and seen her provided with the bare necessities for a beginning, he took up the bulky parcel and escorted her home; and as he handed her the parcel and said "good-bye" on her doorstep, the effusiveness of her gratitude made him thankful that the farewells were exchanged in a public thoroughfare.

He turned away with a troubled face and a sinking heart. No self-delusion was now possible. He had failed utterly to "mind his eye" and had been definitely adopted, willy-nilly, by this remarkable young woman as her special friend and comrade. And there seemed to be no escape. A coarser and less genial man would have administered an effective rebuff; but Tom was a kindly soul, courteous and considerate by nature and habit and with all the old bachelor's deference to women. Unwillingly, he had to accept the conviction that this unwanted friendship was an established fact to which, henceforth, his old simple, self-contained way of life should be subject.

And so it proved. His new friend was not actually intrusive. She recognized that he was a solitary man who liked to work alone. But somehow it happened that hardly a day passed in which she did not make some kind of appearance. Of course, he had to go in to see her experiments in the new medium (at which he gazed stolidly, his capacity for astonishment having been exhausted) and give her further purely technical advice. Then she would drop in at the studio now and again to ask a question, to offer some little service or to bring some small gift, and the number of chance meetings in the neighbouring streets was such as to confound all the known laws of probability. Thus, insensibly, the intimacy grew and with it the space which she occupied in his life.

Tom observed the process with anxious foreboding and cursed the ill luck that had brought her into his orbit. But presently he began to realize that things were not so bad as he had feared. In the first place, she was not a widow. There was a husband in the background—apparently a German background; a dim figure, but still an undeniable bar to matrimony. So the principal danger was excluded. Then certain other reassuring facts became evident. At first her astonishing familiarity had horrified him, and the endearing phrases and epithets she used had seemed positively alarming, but he soon grew accustomed to being addressed as "Tom" or even "Tommy"; and as to the endearments, they appeared to be no more than a playful habit. He realized this as he noted the essential correctness of her conduct when they were together. Never was there the slightest tendency to sentimentality or philandering.

She might call him "my dear" or "duck" or even "Tommy, darling," but the mere words seemed harmless enough—though foolish—in view of her perfectly matter-of-fact behaviour; and Tom, now reassured and satisfied that no real entanglement threatened, made shift to put up with what he regarded as a "damn silly and rather objectionable habit."

As to the woman herself, her personality was not unpleasing. Sprightly, humorous and amusing, she might have been a quite acceptable companion if he had wanted one—which he emphatically did not—and if she had shown any glimmer of sensibility to art as he understood it. But, though she soon dropped the art-journalist's jargon and tried to interest herself in his work, she really knew nothing and cared nothing about normal art; and lacking that interest, they had nothing in common.

Her appearance, on the other hand, rather interested him, and, in his capacity as an occasional portrait painter, he gave it some attention. He would have described her as a luridly picturesque woman; blonde, showy, and made up in the height of an ugly fashion, with vermilion lips, rouged and powdered cheeks, pencilled eyebrows, and a remarkable mass of fuzzy hair, which had apparently once been bobbed and was now in process of being unbobbed. That hair interested him especially. He had never seen anything quite like it. In colour it was a very light brown, approaching flaxen, but there was something unusual in its texture; something that gave it a peculiar shimmering character when it caught the light and seemed to make the colour variable. Considering the problem of rendering it in a portrait, Tom studied its changing lights and compared it with the greenish hazel eyes and as much of the complexion as he could make out; finally reaching the conclusion that it was some sort of fake, but what sort of fake he could not imagine.

For the rest, she was a rather tall woman, perhaps five feet seven without her high heels, fairly good-looking, with rather small features but a prominent chin and a strong lower jaw. Her most attractive aspect was undoubtedly the profile, and Tom, studying this with a professional eye, decided that it would make quite a good medallion. He even made one or two trial sketches from memory in his notebook with a half-formed intention of offering to paint a medallion portrait; but he abandoned that idea as he realized that the necessary sittings would tend further to cement a friendship that was already too close.

By which it will be seen that Tom was still, so to speak, fighting a rearguard action; still seeking to limit this unsought intimacy. Although he now knew that she could have no matrimonial designs on him, and he no longer feared any attempt to establish a questionable relationship, he disliked the association. He had never wanted a female friend and he resented the way in which this woman had attached herself to him. An eminently self-contained and rather solitary man, his principal wish was to be left alone to live his own life, and, as time went on, he found it more and more irksome to have that life pervaded by another personality, and not even a sympathetic one at that. But he saw no prospect of escape, short of a definite snub, of which he was incapable; and in the end he gave up the struggle, and, with a sigh of regret for the peace and freedom that were gone, resigned himself to making the best of the new conditions.

But the hour of his deliverance was at hand, little as he could have foreseen it, and little as he suspected the benign character of the agent when he arrived bearing, all unknown, the order of release. And as the darkest hour is that before the dawn, so the beginning of his emancipation occurred at a moment when he felt that the nuisance of this forced intimacy was becoming intolerable.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon and the lady had just dropped in at the studio with an invitation to tea, which he had firmly declined.

"Oh, rubbish," she protested. "You are always too busy to come and have tea with me; at least you say you are, and I don't believe you. It's just an excuse. Is it my tea or my society you that don't like?"

"My dear Mrs. Schiller—" Tom began, but she cut him short.

"Oh, not Mrs. Schiller! Haven't I told you again and again not to call me by that horrible name? Call me Lotta. I'm sure it's a very nice name."

"It's a most admirable name. Well—er—Lotta—"

"Well, my dear, if you won't come to have tea with me, I shall stay here and make yours for you and help you to drink it; and then I'll take myself off and leave my darling old bear to the peaceful enjoyment of his den. You'll let me stay, Tom, dear, won't you?"

It was at this moment that the studio bell, jangling imperatively out in the yard, broke into the discussion.

"Shall I run out and see who it is?" asked Lotta.

"No. I'd better go. May be able to settle the business on the doorstep."

He strode out along the passage, hoping that it might be so. But when he opened the door and discovered on the threshold his old friend, Mr. Polton, accompanied by a stranger, he knew that no evasion was possible. He would have to invite them in.

"Good afternoon, sir," said Polton, greeting him with a cheerful and crinkly smile. "I have taken the liberty of bringing you a client who would like you to paint his portrait. Am I right in using the word 'client'?"

"Well, we usually call them sitters, though that does sound a little suggestive of poultry. But it doesn't matter. Won't you come in?"

They came in, and as they walked slowly along the passage, Polton completed the introductions. The prospective sitter, a light-coloured, good-looking African gentleman, was a Mr. William Vanderpuye, a native of Elmina on the Gold Coast, who was at present attending a course of lectures on Medical Jurisprudence at St. Margaret's Hospital.

"He is also doing some practical work in our laboratory," Polton explained further, "as Dr. Thorndyke's pupil. That is how I came to have the pleasure of making his acquaintance."

At this point they reached the studio door, which Tom threw open, inviting them to enter. Accordingly they entered, and then, becoming aware of the other occupant of the studio, they both stopped short, and, for a moment, three inquisitive pairs of eyes made a rapid mutual inspection. Sweating with embarrassment and cursing under his breath, Tom haste to introduce his three guests, and then, by way of giving the lady an opportunity to retire, explained:

"Mr. Vanderpuye is going to do me the honour of sitting to me for his portrait."

"Oh, how interesting!" she exclaimed. "But now I expect you will want to arrange about the sittings, so I suppose I had better run away and leave you to your consultation."

As she spoke, she directed a subtly appealing glance at Mr. Vanderpuye, who replied instantly and with emphasis:

"Not at all, Mrs. Schiller. You mustn't let me drive you away. We are not going to talk secrets but just to arrange about the portrait. Besides," he added, a little ambiguously, "it seems that you paint yourself, so you may be able to advise us."

"That is very gracious of you," said she; "and if you would really like me to stay, I should be delighted to hear all about the portrait; and I will make you a nice cup of tea as a thank offering for the invitation."

She began, forthwith, to set out the tea-things while Polton filled the kettle and put it on the gas-ring, and Tom looked on with mixed feelings which changed from moment to moment. He could easily have dispensed with Lotta's company; but as he noted the way in which his new patron's eyes followed her movements, he began to suspect that it might be all for the best. Apparently, he was Lotta's only male friend. It would be a great relief to him if she should get another.

With this idea in his mind, he observed the trend of events while tea was being consumed (as also did Mr. Polton, to whom the lady was a startling mystery) and found it encouraging. Of a set purpose, as it seemed, Lotta kept the ball of conversation rolling almost entirely between herself and Mr. Vanderpuye, addressing him in a tone of deference which he evidently found flattering. Indeed, the African gentleman was obviously much impressed by the fair Lotta, and openly admiring; which was not unnatural, for she was a good-looking woman (if one did not object to the "abstract colour"), who could make herself extremely agreeable when she tried. And she was obviously trying now.

"I am inclined to envy Mr. Pedley his opportunity," said she. "You are such an admirable subject for a portrait."

"Do you really think so?" he exclaimed, delighted. "I was rather afraid that the complexion—and the hair, you know—"

"Oh, but that is what I meant by the opportunity. Your warm olive complexion creates all sorts of possibilities in the way of colour harmonies; so unlike the pale, relatively colourless European face. Perhaps," she continued reflectively, "that may account for the fact that the African peoples seem to be born colourists. Don't you think so?"

"It may be so," Vanderpuye agreed. "They certainly like colour, and plenty of it. My steward, at home, used to wear a scarlet flannel suit and green carpet slippers."

"But what a lovely combination!" exclaimed Lotta. "Such a subtle and delicate contrast! Don't you agree with me?"

Mr. Vanderpuye was prepared to agree to anything, and did so with a genial smile; thereby revealing such a set of teeth as seldom gladdens the eye of the modern European.

"But, of course," he added, "I don't know much about the matter except that I like bright colours myself, whereas you are an artist and have, no doubt, studied the subject profoundly."

"I have," she admitted. "Colour is the engrossing interest of my life. So much do I love it that I am often impelled to paint pictures consisting entirely of colour without any other motive. Symphonies and concertos in colour, you know."

"They must be very beautiful, I am sure," said Vanderpuye, "though I don't quite understand how you can make a picture of colour alone. Perhaps, some day, I may have the privilege of seeing your works."

"Would you like to? If you would, I should be only too proud and delighted to show them to you. I live next door to Mr. Pedley, so you could easily drop in sometime after one of your sittings."

"It would be better to make an appointment," suggested Vanderpuye. "What time would you like me to attend for the sitting, Mr. Pedley?"

"I should prefer the morning light," replied Tom; "say from nine to twelve. How would that suit you, Mr. Vanderpuye?"

"Admirably," was the reply. "And as to the date? When would you like to begin?"

"The sooner the better, so far as I am concerned. How would to-morrow do?"

"It would do perfectly for me. Then we will say to-morrow morning at nine. And as to you, Mrs. Schiller; if I should look in at your studio shortly after twelve, would that be convenient?"

"Quite," she replied. "I shall have just finished my morning's work. And now," she added, "as we have emptied the teapot, and I expect that you have some further arrangements to discuss, I had better make myself scarce."

She rose and, having shaken hands with the two visitors and announced that she would let herself out, bestowed a parting smile on Mr. Vanderpuye and bustled away.

The sound of the closing outer door brought the conversation back to the portrait and the "further arrangements"; but with the details of these we are not concerned. Finally it was decided that the portrait should be a three-quarter length presenting the subject in his barrister's wig and gown, standing with a brief in his hand as if addressing the court; and having settled this and the question of costs, the two visitors rose to depart.

"Au revoir, then," said Mr. Vanderpuye, "or, as the Hausa men say in my country, Sei Gobe"—'Until To-morrow.' Nine o'clock sharp will see me on your doorstep."

"And twelve o'clock sharp on Mrs. Schiller's," added Tom, with a sly smile.

Mr. Vanderpuye smiled in return. Whether he also blushed there was no means of judging.



## V. — A TRIVIAL CHAPTER, BUT NOT IRRELEVANT

THE vague hopes which Tom Pedley had conceived that a friendship between his new patron and Lotta Schiller might relieve him to some extent of the lady's society were more than fulfilled. For very soon it began to appear that Mr. Vanderpuye was not merely to share the burden of that intimacy; he had in effect stepped into the reversion of Tom's status as Lotta's sole male friend. Not that Tom was totally discarded by her. She still made occasional appearances in the studio; but those appearances tended in a most singular manner to coincide with the presence there of Mr. Vanderpuye.

There was no mistaking the position, nor, indeed, was there any concealment of it. The impulsive and susceptible African gentleman made no secret of his admiration of the fair and sprightly Lotta or of the fact that they spent a good deal of time together; while, as to the lady herself, she was at no pains whatever to disguise the new relationship. Thus Tom, guided by the light of experience, watched with grim amusement the development of the familiar symptoms; noted that Mr. William Vanderpuye had been promoted to the style and title of Billy—with or without the customary enrichments—and that Mrs. Lotta Schiller had ceased to command a surname.

The portrait progressed steadily, but, being a nearly complete life-size figure with some accessories, its execution involved a considerable number of sittings, though Tom often saved time by working at the accessories in the intervals; and as it grew towards completion its quality began to show itself. It was a tactful and sympathetic portrait. There was no flattery. The likeness was faithfully rendered, but it was an eminently becoming likeness, presenting the sitter at his best; and if there was any tendency to stress the more favourable points, that merely reflected Tom Pedley's ordinary attitude towards his fellow creatures.

From time to time Lotta dropped in at the studio (usually about twelve) to inspect and criticize, and Tom listened to her with delighted amusement. Gone was all the clap-trap about representationalism and imitative art. She was now the frank and honest Philistine. Unlike the art critics from whom she had borrowed her "highbrow" phrases, who dismiss the "mere resemblance" in a portrait as a negligible irrelevancy, she was out for the likeness and nothing but the likeness and as it approached the final stage, even she was satisfied.

"Do you think it is like me, Lotta?" Vanderpuye asked anxiously as they stood before the canvas. "I hope it is, but it seems a little flattering."

"You are a silly, self-deprecating little ass, Billy," said she (Billy stood a trifle over six feet in his stockings). "You don't realize what a good-looking fellow you are."

"Well, my dear," he rejoined, regarding her with a fond smile, "I am always willing to learn, especially from you."

"Then," said she, "you can take it from me that the handsome legal gentleman in the picture is a faithful representation of my friend Bill, and not flattered in the least. Isn't that so, Tom?"

"I think so," he replied. "I have painted him as I see him and as his friends see him, and I hope I have done him impartial justice."

Tom's view was confirmed by another of "Bill's" friends, to wit, Mr. Polton, who made occasional visits and followed the progress of the work with the deepest interest; a sort of proprietary interest, in fact, for it transpired that it was at his instigation that the portrait had been commissioned when photographs had been tried and found wanting (photographs of coloured people tend to be eminently unflattering). The confirmation came on a certain occasion when the four interested parties were gathered around the portrait, now practically finished, to discuss its merits.

"The art of painting," Mr. Polton moralized, "seems to me almost like a supernatural power. Of course, I can do scale drawings to work from, but they are only diagrams. They don't look like the real objects; whereas with this picture, if I stand a little way off and look at it with one eye closed, I seem to be actually looking at Mr. Vanderpuye."

"Yes," Lotta agreed, "it is a perfect representation; almost as perfect as a photograph."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," Polton objected, "but it is a good deal more perfect. You can't do this sort of thing by photography."

"Not the colour, of course, but I meant the representation of form."

"But, ma'am," Polton persisted, "there is something more than form in this portrait; something that photography can't do. I tried one or two photographs of Mr. Vanderpuye when I was teaching him the technique, but they were quite a failure. The form was perfectly correct and they would have been excellent for identification; but there was something lacking, and that something was what we might call the personality. But that is just what the portrait has got. It is Mr. Vanderpuye himself, whereas the photographs were mere representations of his shape."

Tom nodded approvingly. "Mr. Polton is right," said he. "Photography can give a perfect representation of an object, such as a statue or a building, which is always the same. But a living person changes from moment to moment. A photograph can only show the appearance at a given instant, but the portrait painter must disregard the accidents of the moment and seek out the essential and permanent character."

This seemed to be quite a new idea to Lotta, for she exclaimed:

"Really! Now I never thought of that; and I am rather sorry, too, because I had meant to ask Mr. Polton to take a



photograph of Bill just as he is posed for the painting. But if it would not be a true likeness, I shouldn't care to have it. Still, it's very disappointing."

"There's no need for you to be disappointed, ma'am," Polton interposed. "If Mr. Pedley would allow me to take a photograph of the painting, you would have a portrait with all the qualities of the original except the colour. It would be a true copy."

Lotta was delighted, and most profuse in her thanks. She even informed Mr. Polton, much to his surprise, that he was a duck.

"What size, ma'am," he asked when the permission had been obtained, "would you wish the photograph to be?"

"Oh, quite small," she replied, "so that I could have it mounted in a little case that I could carry about with me, or perhaps in a brooch or pendant that I could wear. Would that be possible, Mr. Polton?"

"Oh, certainly, ma'am; but, if you will excuse my mentioning it, a brooch or a pendant would not be so very suitable for your purpose because, when you were wearing it, the portrait would be visible to everybody but yourself."

Lotta laughed. "Of course," said she. "How silly of me; and exhibiting the sacred portrait to strangers is just what I don't want to do. But what would you suggest?"

"I think," he replied, "that the old-fashioned locket would answer the purpose best."

"A locket," interposed Vanderpuye. "What is a locket? You will pardon me, but I am only a poor ignorant African."

"A locket, sir," Polton explained, "is a sort of pendant, usually of gold, forming a little flat case which opens by a hinge, and displays two little frames. Sometimes there used to be two portraits, one in each frame, but more commonly one frame contained a portrait and the other a lock of the—er—the selected person's hair either plaited and made up into a tiny coil or arranged in a flat spiral."

Vanderpuye chuckled gleefully. "I like the idea of the locket," said he, "but I am afraid you would get into difficulties with my hair."

"Not at all, sir," replied Polton. "Each of your hairs forms a natural spiral like a little watch-spring. That is one of the African racial characteristics. Shall I show you?"

He produced from his pocket a pair of watchmaker's tweezers and a pair of folding scissors, and, having picked up a single hair from Vanderpuye's wool, cut it off neatly, laid it on a white card, and passed it round for inspection.

"How perfectly lovely!" Lotta exclaimed. "It is, as you say, exactly like a tiny watch-spring. Yes, I will certainly have a locket."

"If you wished to extend the spiral," Polton suggested, "so as to fill the frame, it could easily be done by using two or three hairs."

"Oh, but that would spoil it," she protested, "and it is so beautiful. No, just one perfect little watch-spring in the middle of the space. Don't you agree with me, Bill?"

"Certainly, my dear," he replied with a broad smile, "especially as it would exhibit a racial characteristic. But how are we going to get the locket? Are they still to be obtained in the shops?"

"I expect they are. But I don't want a shop locket. It would be a soulless, machine-made thing, unworthy of my beloved Bill and his charming little watch-spring. What do you suggest, Mr. Polton? I suppose you couldn't make a locket for me, yourself?"

"So far as the mere construction is concerned, of course, I could make a locket. But I am not a goldsmith. The design would have to be made by an artist. If Mr. Pedley would make the design, I would carry it out for you with great pleasure."

"Oh, but how kind of you, Mr. Polton! You are really too sweet. I think I have already remarked that you are a duck."

"I think you have, ma'am," he replied with a somewhat wry crinkle, "and I beg to thank you for the—er—for the compliment."

"Not at all, Mr. Polton. And now, Tom, about this locket. Can you design it?"

"Yes," he replied. "I have done some designing for goldsmith's work and a simple locket would present no difficulty, especially as I should be collaborating with Mr. Polton. If you like, I will make one or two sketches for you to see, and we can then discuss the question of ornament."

"Yes, that would be very nice of you, Tom; and you must let me know what it will cost."

"That is not your concern, Lotta," said Vanderpuye. "It is to be a gift from me."

"How very noble of you, Bill. Of course that will make it much more precious, and I accept gratefully on one condition; which is that you have a locket, too, and that you let me give it to you."

"But men don't wear lockets, do they?" he asked.

"They used to," said Tom, "before the arrival of the wrist-watch. The locket was usually suspended from the watch-chain."

"Well," said Vanderpuye, "as you see, I carry a pocket watch on a chain, as a wrist-watch is not very suitable for the Tropics, so I am eligible for a locket, and I should very much like to have one with a portrait of Lotta and a lock of her beautiful golden hair. Would you two gentlemen accept the commission?"

The two gentlemen agreed that they would, where upon Lotta objected:

"But you have no business to offer the commission. That is my affair, seeing that the locket is to be a gift from me."

Vanderpuye smiled blandly. "The commission," said he, "was offered and accepted without prejudice as we say in the law. The other question is for separate consideration. Now we have to arrange details. The locket is to contain a portrait and a lock of golden hair. The hair presents no difficulty, as it is obviously available. But what about the portrait? Should we ask Mr. Polton to do us a little photograph?"

"No you don't," exclaimed Lotta; "and I am surprised at you, Bill, when you've just heard what these two experts said about portrait photographs. No, it shall be a real painted portrait. I will paint it myself; and then I shall ask dear Mr. Polton to make a little photograph of the painting, and I am sure he won't refuse."

"Certainly not, ma'am," said Polton. "It will give me great pleasure, and I think it a most excellent idea. It will be a memento in a double sense; a portrait of the giver and a specimen of her handiwork."

Vanderpuye, however, was less enthusiastic. (He had seen "the giver's handiwork" and Polton hadn't.) "Why not let me commission Mr. Pedley to paint a portrait?" he suggested.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she replied. "The locket is to be my gift and I want the portrait to be my very own work."

There was nothing more to be said. Vanderpuye looked a little glum, and Tom, too good-natured to be simply amused, was regretful. A vivid recollection of "The Madonna" suggested breakers ahead and a disappointment for Mr. Vanderpuye. But he made no comment. Perhaps the future might develop some way out of the dilemma.

A few days later at the last of the sittings a few final touches were added; and the portrait being now entirely finished, Tom escorted the sitter to the frame maker's to advise him as to a suitable frame. When this business had been disposed of, Tom produced one or two sketches which he had roughed out in the interval showing alternative designs for the two lockets. The one for the standing figure was a rather long ellipse, while the other, to hang on the watch-guard, was considerably smaller and circular in shape. Both forms were shown with alternative designs of decoration, in simple embossed metal, in coloured enamel, and with set stones.

"If you will be seeing Mrs. Schiller you might show her the sketches," said Tom, "and talk them over with her; and if you both approve of the circular shape for the smaller one, you might remind her to design her portrait to fill the circular space so that the head is not too small."

"I shall be seeing her in about half an hour's time," said Vanderpuye. "We are lunching at a place which she has discovered in Soho, so we shall have an opportunity to discuss the designs. But I think we should both like take your advice on the matter."

"Yes," Tom agreed, "a little discussion and explanation might be useful as the sketches are rather slight. Perhaps, when Mrs. Schiller has finished her portrait, we might all four meet at the studio and make the final arrangements."

"I will suggest that to her," said Vanderpuye, "and I will let you and Mr. Polton know when the portrait is ready. I wish," he added, confidentially, "that she had agreed to your painting it. Her style of work doesn't seem to me very suitable for a portrait; but, of course, I am no judge. What do you think?"

Tom's opinions on the subject were perfectly definite; but his reply was discreetly evasive.

"I have never seen a portrait by her, so I can hardly judge; but we will hope for the best."

With this, by way of avoiding a dangerous topic, he shook Vanderpuye's hand cordially and the two men went their respective ways.

The meeting took place about a week later, the day and hour having been decided by Polton, and, somewhat before the appointed time that cunning artificer made his appearance and forthwith set to work. From one of his numerous and capacious pockets he produced a small folding camera which, when it was opened, was seen to be fitted with a level and a sighting frame.

"I haven't brought a stand," said he, "as I thought that an easel would be more convenient and more rigid. Can you lend me one?"

"Yes," replied Tom. "I have one unoccupied; a heavy one with a lifting screw, which will answer your purpose perfectly. It is as steady as a rock."

He drew it out from its corner and trundled it across to a place opposite the portrait, when Polton took charge of it, placing his camera on the tray, and, with the aid of the sighting frame, adjusting the relative positions of the camera and the portrait until the latter exactly filled the space of the frame. Then he made the exposure, and was in the act of winding on the exposed film when the sound of the studio bell announced the arrival of the other two parties to the symposium. As they entered and Polton made his bow, it seemed to him that Vanderpuye's expression lacked its usual geniality; in fact, the African gentleman looked undeniably sulky. On the other hand, the fair and volatile Lotta was in the best of spirits, and

apparently quite pleased with herself.

"Why," she exclaimed as she bounced into the studio, "here is my dear Mr. Polton, improving the shining hour like a pre##-punctual duck and all ready to begin work." She shook his hand warmly and continued, "And what a darling little camera. But isn't it rather small for that big portrait?"

"It is going to be quite a small photograph, you will remember, ma'am; not more than an inch and a half high."

"Yes, of course. How silly of me. Are you going to take the photograph now?"

"I have taken it already, ma'am, and I shall have great pleasure in taking your own when it is available."

"It is available now," said Lotta, opening her handbag and taking out an envelope about eight inches by six. "I made it quite a small painting as you see, but I dare say it will be big enough."

"The size is amply sufficient," Polton replied, "as it has to be reduced so much."

He took the envelope which she handed to him, and, opening the flap, tenderly drew out a small mounted water-colour, which he regarded with a reverential smile. It emerged with the back uppermost, but, as he quickly turned it over, the smile faded from his countenance and gave place to an expression of astonishment and dismay. For some moments he stood speechless and rigid, staring incredulously at the thing which he held in his hand. Then he cast a furtive glance at the artist and was reassured to find her watching him with a sly smile. Obviously it was a joke, he decided, but he was too discreet to say so. He would lie low and let the situation develop.

"Well, Mr. Polton," said Lotta, "how do you like it?"

"Since you ask me, ma'am," he replied with a cautious crinkle, "I really don't think you have done yourself justice."

"You wouldn't have me flatter myself, would you?" she demanded.

"Oh, no, ma'am," he replied. "But there was no need to. You had only to represent yourself exactly as you are to produce a very charming portrait."

Lotta laughed gaily. "Thank you, Mr. Polton, for a very neatly turned compliment."

"It's no compliment at all," Vanderpuye burst in. "Mr. Polton is perfectly right. What I wanted was a likeness; but this portrait isn't like you a bit. I should never have recognized it. What do you say, Mr. Pedley?" But Tom, who was looking at the portrait over Polton's shoulder, emulated the latter gentleman's caution.

"Of course," said he, "it is not a literal representation. But then it isn't meant to be."

"Exactly," Lotta agreed. "The mere physical resemblance is not what I was aiming at. This portrait is not a work of imitative art. It is a work of self-expression."

The argument between Lotta and Vanderpuye was pursued for some time with some heat, not to say bitterness. But it led nowhere. Lotta was immovable, and Vanderpuye had at length to retire defeated. Meanwhile Polton, having realized to his amazement that this preposterous thing had to be taken seriously, took it seriously, and, without further comment, stuck it up on the easel beside the other portrait and gravely proceeded with the photograph. When he had finished and handed the portrait back to its creator, the sketches for the lockets were produced and discussed at some length; the conclusion reached being that both should be decorated with a simple design in champlevé enamel and that the details should be left to the designer and the executant.

"And that appears to be all," said Lotta, bestowing the "self-portrait" in her handbag.

"Excepting the hair, ma'am," Polton reminded her. "If I may be permitted to take a sample for each locket I shall be able to get on with the work without troubling you further."

From his inexhaustible pockets he brought forth a couple of seed envelopes, a pair of tweezers, and a pair of folding scissors, all of which he laid on the table. Then, beginning with Vanderpuye, he separated one of the little crisp curls and cut it off flush with the skin, putting it at once into one of the envelopes, on which, having sealed it, he wrote, "W. Vanderpuye, Esq."

Lotta watched him with a smile and commended his caution.

"It would be a bit awkward if you had two unlabelled envelopes and didn't know which was which. Now, how much of mine do you want? Be thrifty, if you please. I can't have you leaving a bald patch."

"Certainly not, ma'am," Polton assured her. "A dozen hairs will be enough, and they will never be missed."

By way of confirmation, he counted them out one by one, and then, gathering up the little strand, cut it through close to the roots. Having twisted the strand into a loose yarn, he coiled it neatly and slipped it into the envelope, which he sealed and inscribed with the name of "Mrs. Lotta Schiller."

This brought the proceedings to an end, and, when Polton had put the two precious envelopes into a stout leather wallet and stowed the latter in a capacious inner pocket, Lotta and Mr. Vanderpuye rose together to take their departure, and, having shaken hands with Polton, went out escorted by their host.

When the latter returned to the studio, he discovered his collaborator seated opposite the clock, apparently regarding it

with intense concentration. He looked round as Tom entered, and, gazing at him with wrinkled brows, exclaimed solemnly:

"This is a most extraordinary thing, sir."

"What is?" asked Tom, looking at the clock and not perceiving anything unusual about it.

"I am referring, sir, to this portrait of Mrs. Schiller's. I am utterly bewildered. At first, I took for granted that it was a joke."

"Vanderpuye didn't," Tom remarked with a grin.

"No, indeed. But do you understand it, sir? To me, it looked exactly like the sort of portraits that I used to draw when I was a boy of ten, and that other little boys used to draw. But I suppose I must have been mistaken. Was I, sir?"

"No," replied Tom. "You were perfectly right."

"But," Polton protested, "Mrs. Schiller is a professional artist, as I understand. Can she really paint or draw?"

"Since you ask me, Polton, I should say that she can't. She draws in that way because she can't draw in any other."

"But what an amazing thing, sir. If she can't draw or paint, how does she manage to practise as an artist?"

"I don't know," replied Tom, "that it is quite correct to describe her as practising as an artist. She has never sold any of her work and never exhibited any. By the term 'practising artist' one usually means an artist who gets a living by his work. Still, there are painters whose work is no better than hers who exhibit and even sell. You can see their stuff in the various freak exhibitions that appear from time to time in London. That is how Mrs. Schiller got her ideas. She went to one of these freak shows which was being boosted by the art journalists, and she thought that the stuff looked so easy to do that she decided to try whether she couldn't do something like it. So she tried, and found that she could. Naturally. Anyone could; even a child; and some children can do a good deal better."

"But does anyone take these works seriously?"

"Seriously!" exclaimed Tom. "My dear Polton, you should read the art critics' notices of them and then see the mugs, who want to be thought 'highbrow,' crowding into the galleries and staring, open-mouthed, at what they believe to be the last word in progressive art. But, to do them justice, they don't often buy any of the stuff."

"And the painters, sir, who produce them; are they impostors or only cranky?"

"It is difficult to say," replied Tom. "The early modernists were, I think, quite sincere cranks. Some of them were admittedly insane. But nowadays it is impossible to judge. For the mischief is, you see, Polton, that if once you accept incompetent, childish, barbaric productions as genuine works of art, you have thrown the door wide open to impostors."

"And what about Mrs. Schiller, sir?"

"Well, Polton, you have seen her. She certainly isn't mad, and she certainly can't paint; and my impression is that she knows it as well as you and I do. But what her motive may be for keeping up the pretence is known only to herself."

Polton pondered awhile on this answer; then he raised another question.

"I am rather puzzled, sir, as to her relations with Mr. Vanderpuye. She is, I understand, a married woman, so those relations are not very proper in any case. But there seems to me something rather unreal about them. From their behaviour you would take these two persons for very devoted friends, if not actually lovers, and that, I feel sure, is genuinely the case with Mr. Vanderpuye. But I have my doubts about the lady; and if she is an impostor in one thing, she can be in another. But I am like you; I can't imagine a motive for imposture. Of course, Mr. Vanderpuye is a rich man, but I don't, somehow, suspect her of trying to get money out of him. And yet I can't think of any other motive. In fact, I can't make it out at all."

"Is there any need to make it out?" asked Tom. "It isn't our affair, you know."

"Excepting that Mr. Vanderpuye is my friend, and a very worthy, lovable gentleman. I shouldn't like him to get involved in any unpleasantness."

"Quite right, Polton," Tom agreed, "but I don't see what you can do beyond keeping your weather eyelid lifting; and that you seem to have been doing."

Which observation having closed the discussion, the two parties to it transferred their attention to the sketches and the consideration of the technical details connected with the goldsmith's art.

---

## VI. — THE FOREST OF ESSEX

ON a certain evening early in November Tom Pedley, having put down his canvas-carrier to free one hand, inserted his latch-key and pushed the gate open. Then, according to his invariable custom, he withdrew the key and pocketed it before entering; and as he did so, happening to glance up the street, he perceived Lotta Schiller and her friend Billy just turning the corner and approaching. He had not seen either of them for more than a fortnight; not, in fact, since the frame-maker had carted away the portrait and the two lockets had been delivered to their respective owners. So he thought it proper to pause at the open gate to exchange greetings, especially as they had already seen him and notified the fact.

"Where have you been all this time, Tom?" exclaimed Lotta as they met on the doorstep. "I haven't seen you for ages."

"Well, I haven't been in the same place all the time," Tom replied. "To-day I have been in Epping Forest. Doing a bit of landscape painting for a change after the portrait."

"Epping Forest," repeated Lotta. "How delightful. I've never been to Epping Forest. May we come in and have a look at what you've been painting?"

"Do, by all means," Tom replied heartily. "The picture isn't finished, but it will give you an idea of the place."

They entered together, and Tom, having unstrapped the carrier, placed the canvas on the easel at an angle to the great window.

"The light isn't very good," said he, "but you can see what the forest is like."

"Yes, indeed," she exclaimed enthusiastically, "and it is perfectly lovely. It looks like a real forest."

"It is a real forest," said Tom. "It is a surviving remnant of the primeval forest of Britain; and there is quite a lot of it, still."

"But how thrilling! A primeval forest! Have you ever seen a primeval forest, Bill?"

"Yes," said Vanderpuye. "I have seen the great forest that covers Ashanti, and it is something like this painting. The African forest. trees are probably a good deal more lofty than these, but it is difficult to judge from a picture."

"It is almost impossible," said Tom, "without figures or animals to give a scale. I think of putting in one or two deer."

"But there aren't really any deer there, are there?" asked Lotta.

"Bless you, yes," he replied. "Deer, foxes, badgers, and all sorts of wild beasts. It is a genuine forest, not a mere park. And there are two ancient British camps. I pass one of them on the way to my pitch."

"It sounds like a most heavenly place!" said Lotta. "And to think that I have never seen it, though it is so near London. It would be delightful to spend a day there. Don't you think so, Bill?"

Bill agreed with enthusiasm, as he usually did to Lotta's suggestions.

"Then that is settled. We will have a day rambling and picnicking in the forest, and Tom shall show us the way. Oh, you needn't look like that. We shan't hang about and hinder you."

"I wasn't looking like that," Tom protested. "I shall be very pleased to show you the way there and start you on your ramble. My picture will be ready to go on with in three or four days; say next Thursday. How will that suit you?"

"It will suit me perfectly," she replied; and Bill having concurred, she added: "I suppose we shall have to take some food with us. How do you manage, Tom?"

"I take my lunch with me, but you needn't. There is an excellent inn near High Beach called the King's Oak, where you can get refreshment for man and beast."

"I don't quite like that expression," said Lotta, "as only one of us is a man. But never mind. Now let us settle our arrangements. I think we had better meet and start from here, as I am here already and Bill isn't a Londoner. Give us a time, and then we will go and leave you in peace."

Tom suggested nine o'clock on Thursday morning, and, this having been agreed to, his visitors departed; whereupon, having cleaned his palette and washed his brushes and himself, he proceeded to lay the table—including in its furnishings Polton's incomparable tankard—opened the haybox, and settled himself with deep satisfaction to the disposal of his evening meal.

Punctually, on Thursday morning, the two ramblers made their appearance at the rendezvous, and a few minutes later the party set forth for Fenchurch Street, Vanderpuye carrying the strapped stool and easel. An empty first-class compartment being easily obtainable at this time in the day, they took possession of one, and, having deposited Tom's impedimenta on the hat rack, lit pipes and cigarettes and prepared to enjoy the journey. And a very pleasant journey it was (excepting the stop at Stratford, when mephitic fumes from some chemical works poured into the compartment and caused them hastily to pull up the window-glasses). Lotta was in buoyant spirits and rattled away gaily between the puffs of her cigarette, while the two men smoked their pipes and allowed themselves to be entertained.

"For a painter, Tom," she remarked, as the train drew out of Woodford Station, "I consider you extraordinarily unobservant. You actually haven't noticed my beautiful new locket."

As a matter of fact he had, and thought it slightly unsuitable to the occasion.

"You are quite wrong, Lotta," said he. "My eyes have been glued to it ever since we started, and I have been thinking what a remarkable genius the fellow must have been who designed it."

"Now listen to that, Bill," said she, selecting a fresh cigarette from her case. "Isn't he a conceited fellow? Brazenly fishing for a compliment; and he won't get one."

"I knew that," retorted Tom, "so I supplied the compliment myself. But it really does look rather fine, thanks to the brilliant way in which Polton carried it out."

Lotta laughed scornfully. "Now he's pretending to be modest. But it's no use, Tom. We know you. Still, I agree that the little man did his part beautifully, and I am grateful to both of you, to say nothing of the generous giver."

Here she bestowed an affectionate smile on the gratified Vanderpuye, who smiled in return as a man can afford to smile who has such a magnificent set of teeth. There followed a brief interlude in Lotta's babblings while she lit and smoked the fresh cigarette. A few minutes later the train slowed down, and Tom, reaching down his property from the rack and slipping the strap of the satchel over his shoulder, announced:

"This is our station," and prepared to open the door.

As the train came to rest, Vanderpuye once more relieved Tom of the folded easel and the three emerged on to the platform. Passing out of the station, they walked up the rather dull village street until they came to a large pond on the border of the forest. Here Tom turned off into a path which skirted the pond and presently entered a broad green ride. A short distance along this he entered a narrow green ride that led off to the left up a gentle incline and then down across the end of a little valley, the marshy bottom of which was covered with beds of rushes.

"This hollow," Tom announced, "is called Debden Slade. May as well remember the name in case you have to ask the way. This path—what they call in the forest a green ride—leads, as you see, up the hill and directly to the corner of the ancient British fortification, called Loughton Camp, and passes round two sides of it."

"But you are going to show us the way to it," Lotta stipulated.

"Yes, I am coming with you as far as the camp, and, when you have seen it, I will set you on your road before we separate."

"I suppose," said Vanderpuye, "you know your way about the forest quite well?"

"Yes," Tom replied. "I have done a lot of sketching and painting here in the last few years. It is quite easy to find your way about the forest after a little experience, but at first I always used to bring a large-scale map and a compass. This is the camp that we are approaching; the south side. We shall pass round it to the north-west side, and there our roads diverge."

"But I don't see any camp," said Lotta, looking vaguely into the dense wood which seemed to close the green path that they had been ascending. "I can only see a high bank covered with a mass of funny little trees that look as if they wanted their hair cut."

"It isn't very distinct," Tom admitted, "except on the map. But you must bear in mind that it was built two or three thousand years ago or more, and that it has probably not been occupied since the Roman invasion. In all those centuries the forest has grown over it and more or less covered it up. But you can make it out quite well if you climb up the bank through the trees and let yourself down into the enclosure. Then you can see that there is a roughly four-sided space enclosed by high earth walls or ramparts. But as it is all covered by a dense mass of those small trees, you can only see it a bit at a time."

"But why are the trees so small?" Lotta asked. "There doesn't seem to be a single full-grown tree among them, though, from what you say, they have had plenty of time to grow."

"They are not young trees," said Tom. "They are old dwarfs. The people of this manor used to have lopping rights. Consequently all the trees, as they grew up, were pollarded, and, every year the new branches that sprouted from the crown were lopped off for firewood, with the result that the trees are gnarled and stunted. They are rather uncanny in appearance, but not very beautiful."

"No," agreed Lotta, "uncanny is the word. They look like little witches with their hair standing on end. But the whole place is rather weird and solemn, especially when one thinks of the dead and gone Britons and the centuries that the camp has been lying desolate and forgotten. Those holes in the bank, I suppose, have been made by animals of some kind."

"Yes. The small holes are usually rabbit burrows; the larger ones are fox earths."

As they had been talking they had walked slowly along the green path in the deep shade cast by the pollard beeches that crowded the high bank of the old rampart. Presently they turned the corner of the camp and passed along the north-western side, until they reached a more open space where the green ride grew broader and turned sharply to the left while a narrower path led on straight ahead. At the point where the two paths separated Tom halted and held out his hand for the easel which Vanderpuye was still carrying.

"This is where we part company," said he. "My way is by the little green path to Great Monk Wood, about three-quarters of a mile farther on. Yours is by the green ride along the crest of the hill; a pleasant walk with a delightful view all the way."

"Yes," said Lotta, looking across the open forest that stretched away from the foot of the hill, "it is a lovely view; and it seems a relief to be out in the open, away from that gloomy old camp and those unearthly, weird little trees. And yet, somehow, I find a curious fascination in that ancient fortress. I should like to get inside the walls and see what a British camp was really like. Wouldn't you like to explore it, Bill?"

The amiable and accommodating Bill expressed the strongest desire to explore the camp and the profoundest interest in the Ancient Britons and their works.

"Well," said Tom, "you can't explore it to-day, because you would want a map and a compass and you ought to have a copy of the plan that was made when the Essex Field Club surveyed the camp. I have one filed away somewhere, so, if you

propose to make a serious exploration, I can lend it to you with a map of the forest and a compass. But now you had better stroll across to High Beach and learn to find your way about."

"Yes," agreed Vanderpuye, "that will be best, especially as we have brought no refreshment, and you say that there is an inn at High Beach where we can get some lunch. But we shall want you to direct us."

"It is perfectly plain sailing," replied Tom. "You see that clump of elms in the distance?"

"I see a clump of trees, and I take your word for it that they are elms."

"Well, they are at High Beach, so, if you keep your eye on them you can't go wrong. You have to follow this green ride along, the crest of the hill. About half a mile from here you will cross the Epping Road and half a mile farther on you will come to a green ride at right angles to this. Turn to the left and go along it and you will come to the King's Oak inn, where you can stoke up if you want to. High Beach is only a few minutes' walk from the pub along the same ride. So now you know all about it."

He put the easel and canvas-carrier down on the turf and shook hands with the two ramblers, wishing them adieu and a pleasant journey. Lotta smiled slyly as she shook his hand and remarked to her companion:

"That means that he has had enough of our society, so we had better make ourselves scarce. Come along, Bill."

The pair turned away to start on their walk, but Tom did not immediately resume his journey. His hands being free, he took the opportunity to fill his pipe in a leisurely fashion. But when it was full and ready for lighting, he still stood at the parting of the ways, following with a meditative eye the progress of the two adventurers as they stepped out briskly along the broad green ride. Once more Polton's question recurred to him. What were the relations of these two persons? They had the manner of an engaged couple which they certainly were not; but were they lovers or only friends? In his own case, Lotta's behaviour—apart from the verbal endearments—had been scrupulously correct. True, he had given her no opening for anything different, but still the fact remained that she had never made the slightest approach. Were her relations with Vanderpuye of the same platonic order? It seemed doubtful, for the conditions were not the same. Vanderpuye was no unwilling partner to this intimacy. From the first he had been Lotta's ardent admirer; but from admiration to passion is but a short step; and passion, in his case and hers, could but lead straight to disaster.

Thus Tom cogitated as he stood looking at the two receding figures. Many a time in the months that followed did that scene recur to him; the long, straight, grassy ride with the figures of the man and woman stepping forward gaily and now growing small in the distance. And still his eyes followed them with an interest which he could not explain, until they reached a point where the ride described a curve; and here Lotta, glancing back and seeing him still standing there, waved her hand to him, and Vanderpuye executed a flourish with his hat. Tom returned their farewell greeting, and a few moments later they entered the curve and vanished behind the roadside bushes; where upon he lit his pipe, picked up his fardels, and set forth along the little green path for his pitch in Great Monk Wood.

He had told himself, and Polton, that the nature of Lotta's relations with her African friend was no affair of his. And it was not. Nevertheless, as he strode along the narrow track through the silent and lonely forest, the question still occupied his thoughts; especially the question as to what was to be the end of it. For neither of the pair—and certainly not for Lotta—had he any strong personal regard; but he was a kindly man and it irked him to think of these two, heading, as he feared, for trouble. Particularly was he concerned for Vanderpuye; who, as an African, probably passionate and impulsive, and inexperienced in European ways, was the more likely to get himself into difficulties and to bear the brunt of any unpleasant consequences. For he was a barrister with a position to maintain and a future to consider. It would be a grievous thing if he should be involved in a scandal at the very start of his career.

At this point in his reflections he arrived at the forest opening which was the subject of his painting. He laid down his burdens, took off his satchel, and, having identified the holes in the ground made at his last sitting by the feet of his stool and easel, unpacked the latter and set them up in the old position. Then he fixed up the canvas, set his palette, made a careful and critical survey of his subject and compared it with the half-finished painting; and straightway Lotta Schiller and her African friend faded from his thoughts and left him to the untroubled consideration of his work.

It was a lovely day despite the lateness of the month, and a beautiful scene. The noble beeches still bore many of their leaves, though these had now exchanged the tender green of summer for the gorgeous tints—all too fleeting—that marked the waning year. For four delightful hours Tom worked industriously, painting at the top of his form and enjoying every moment. Not a human creature came near him in all that time, though he received occasional visits from the non human people of the forest, as the landscape painter commonly does. An inquisitive squirrel played peep-bo with him round a tree and then came down and danced around him within a few feet of the easel. A pair of friendly blackbirds pursued their business close by, and once or twice a couple of the dark-coated forest deer stole across the opening, apparently oblivious of his presence.

At the end of the second hour he took what workmen call a "beaver"; a modest meal of bread and cheese (whereby the squirrel benefited to the extent of some morsels of bread and a piece of cheese rind), with a draught of beer from a large flask. Then once more he took up his palette and brushes and worked away steadily until the changing light told him that it was time to go; when he packed up tidily, lit his pipe, picked up his kit, and started back by the way he had come. At the junction of the two paths he paused to look along the green ride, though the afternoon was still young and his friends would hardly be returning so early. Nevertheless, as he took his way round the camp and back past the pond, he kept a half-unconscious look-out for them, and even at the station as he paced the platform they were still in his mind until the

train came in and bore him away alone.

During the next few days his thoughts turned occasionally to his two friends, with vague speculations as to how they had fared in the forest. He had rather expected a visit from Lotta, and, on the strength of that speculation, had looked out the map, the compass, and the plan of the camp to hand to her when she should call. But to his surprise—almost to his disappointment—she made no appearance, and, eventually he decided that she had given up the project of exploring the camp, and, having put the things back in their usual receptacles, he dismissed the matter from his mind.

Yet, as the days passed without the expected visit or even the customary chance meetings in the street, her complete disappearance from his orbit impressed him as a little odd. He was even faintly displeased; a state of mind which he, himself, recognized as rather strange and perverse. For it was only a few weeks ago, when he had been the unwilling cher ami, that his chief desire in life had been to be rid of her; whereas now, though he felt no great concern, still, he would have been quite pleased to find her on his doorstep. Once he had even contemplated calling to make inquiries, but discretion prevailed. He had no desire to revive that troublesome intimacy.

It is probable that, if nothing further had happened, the passing of Lotta out of his life would have been accepted and presently ceased to be noticed. But a new circumstance tended to revive his curiosity. Returning one day by way of Cumberland Market, and thus passing her house, he noticed that her brass plate was not in its usual place. It was not a fixed plate permanently secured to the wall, but was held in place by removable fastenings, and it had been Lotta's custom to take it down in the evening and replace it in the morning. Thus, when he noticed its absence, he assumed that she had merely forgotten to fix it up and thought no more about it. But, happening on the following day to glance at her door and again noting the absence of the plate, he gave the matter more attention; with the result that, after several daily observations, he decided that the plate had disappeared for good. Then, again, he had thought of calling, but now he was restrained by a fresh consideration. Possibilities which he had dimly envisaged might have become realized, and if so, it were well for him not to meddle in Lotta's affairs. On the other hand, he was now definitely anxious and a little disturbed, particularly on Vanderpuye's account, and it seemed to him that a few discreet inquiries through a third party might elicit the facts without committing him in any way.

Now the obvious third party was Mr. Polton. He was in touch with Vanderpuye and was certainly keeping an eye on the course of events. But the question was, how to get at Mr. Polton. Tom had never ventured to call on him as he resided on the premises of his employer, Dr. Thorndyke, and an uninvited visit would have seemed somewhat of an intrusion. Of course, he could have written to Mr. Polton, but that would have involved a direct inquiry, which he wished to avoid. His idea was that if he could contrive a meeting with his ingenious friend, the required information could be made to transpire naturally in a judiciously managed conversation, without his asking any questions at all.

The problem was, therefore, to find a pretext for a visit to Polton; a convincing pretext which would account for his having called rather than written. To the solution of this problem Tom addressed himself, and, being an eminently straightforward man, little addicted to pretexts of any kind, he had to give it a disproportionate amount of attention. And then the problem solved itself. Happening to pull out a drawer in which he kept miscellaneous oddments, he discovered in it the pedometer which he had been accustomed to carry on his expeditions in search of landscape subjects. For years it had served him well, but latterly it had become erratic in its action and so unreliable that he had ceased to carry it. So he had put it aside, intending some time to take Mr. Polton's opinion on it. But out of sight had been out of mind and the matter had been forgotten. Now, however, it gave him not a mere pretext but a reasonable occasion for the visit.

Accordingly he dispatched a short note to Polton, announcing his intention to call, and, if an interview should not be convenient, to leave the pedometer for a diagnostic inspection; to which Polton replied by return with a cordial invitation and the necessary directions to his domain in the premises.

---

## VII. — OF A PEDOMETER AND A TRAGEDY

AT four o'clock precisely, on a bright December afternoon, Tom Pedley arrived at the entry of Number 5A King's Bench Walk, having made his way thither very pleasantly through the old-world courts of the Temple.

For a few moments he paused to examine with an artist's appreciation the fine red brick portico (commonly attributed to Wren), then he entered, and, following Polton's directions, ascended the stairs to the landing of the "Second Pair." As he reached it a door opened and his host came out to meet him.

"This is very pleasant, sir," said Polton, shaking hands warmly. "I don't often have a visitor, being a solitary worker like yourself, so your visit will be quite a little treat for me. Will you come into the laboratory? We are going to have tea in my room upstairs, but I am boiling the kettle here to avoid smoking it on the fire."

As they entered the large room Tom glanced about him curiously, noting that some of the appointments, such as a joiner's bench, a lathe, and a large copying camera, hardly accorded with his conception of a laboratory, and that a handsome copper kettle, mounted on a tripod over a Bunsen burner and a fine old silver teapot seemed to have strayed in from elsewhere.

"Perhaps, sir," suggested Polton, "we might have a look at the pedometer while the kettle is getting up steam."

Tom fished the instrument out of his pocket and handed it to him, whereupon, having opened the glass back, he stuck a



watchmaker's eyeglass in his eye and examined the visible part of the mechanism.

"There doesn't seem to be much amiss with it," he reported, dancing the instrument up and down to test the lever; "just a matter of wear. The little spring click has worn short and tends to slip over the teeth of the ratchet wheel. That is a fatal defect, but it's easily mended; and I may find some other faults when I come to take it down, as we say in the trade—that is, take it to pieces. At any rate it will be none the worse for a clean up and a touch of fresh oil."

"I am afraid I am giving you a lot more trouble than I expected," said Tom.

Polton looked up at him with his queer, crinkly smile.

"Trouble, sir!" he exclaimed. "It is no trouble; it isn't even work. It will give me several hours' pleasant entertainment, and I am much obliged to you for bringing me the instrument."

In confirmation he produced from one of his innumerable pockets a small portable screwdriver and seemed about to attack the pedometer forthwith, when the kettle intervened by blowing out a jet of steam; whereupon he replaced the cap of the screwdriver, returned it to his pocket, and proceeded methodically to make the tea.

As he led the way upstairs, carrying the teapot while his guest followed with the kettle, Tom remarked on the comeliness of the latter.

"Yes, sir," replied Polton, "it's a fine old kettle. They don't make them like that nowadays. I found it in a marine store in Portugal Street. Came from some old lawyer's chambers in Lincoln's Inn, I expect; and very shabby and battered it was, but I put a bit of work into it and made it as good as new. You see, sir, I rather take after you; I like the common things that I use and live with to be good and pleasant to look at."

His statement was borne out by the aspect of the spacious room on the "Third Pair" which they now entered, where a tea-table, flanked by two easy chairs, stood before the fire. Tom, having deposited the kettle on a trivet, out of reach of the smoke or flame, sat down in the chair allocated to him and surveyed the prospect, while Polton did the honours of the tea-table; noting the well-filled book-shelves, the one or two pictures on the walls (including his sketch for "The Eavesdropper," simply but tastefully framed) and a four-fold screen which he suspected of concealing a bed. It was all simple and plain, but the room and everything that was in it appealed quietly to Tom's rather fastidious taste, even to the quaint old cottage clock that hung on the wall and hardly disturbed the silence by its homely tick.

"This is my private domain, sir," said Polton, "but I don't spend much time in it. The laboratory is really my home. I am an inveterate mechanic, always happiest at my bench. That pedometer of yours is quite a wind fall for me. May I ask how long you have had it?"

"I should say about a dozen years," replied Tom.

"And do you find it fairly accurate? The experts on surveying dismiss the pedometer as a mere useless toy. What is your experience of it?"

"It is accurate enough for my purpose," Tom replied. "I'm not a surveyor. I don't deal in inches, but I find that it agrees pretty closely with maps and milestones, and that is enough for me."

"The reason that I asked is that I had thought of getting one for Mr. Vanderpuye to take back with him. There won't be many milestones in his country."

"Is Mr. Vanderpuye going back to Africa soon?" Tom asked with suddenly awakened interest.

"Not very soon," replied Polton, "because he has joined the Bar Mess at the Central Criminal Court and is attending the court regularly; that is, he has been since Mrs. Schiller went away."

"Oh, she has gone away, has she?" asked Tom, considerably startled.

"Yes, sir; and I hope she will stop away, for, before she went, he used to neglect his work terribly. I am very much relieved that she has gone."

"Do you know whether she has gone for good?"

"I am afraid not, sir. Of course, I couldn't ask any questions, but I gathered from Mr. Vanderpuye that she had gone to stay with some friends at Birmingham. How long she will be away I have no idea, and I don't believe he has."

"I suppose you don't know whether he corresponds with her?"

"I don't actually know, sir, but I think not. My impression is that he doesn't even know her address. Queer, isn't it? But then she's a queer woman. With all her flighty ways, she is uncommonly good at keeping her own counsel."

This last observation rather impressed Tom; for now, reflecting on it, he suddenly realized how very little he knew about this strange woman. However, she was not his concern now that his anxieties on Vanderpuye's account had been dispelled; and, as he had obtained the information that he had come to seek, he began to consider whether it was not time for him to go. Polton had duties of some kind, and a prolonged visit might be inconvenient. But when he made tentative signs of departure, his host protested:

"You are not going on my account, sir, I hope; because the Doctor is dining out to-night and I've got the evening to myself. Besides, now that he has given me an understudy to carry on in my absence, I am much freer than I used to be. Of

course, I mustn't detain you if you can't spare the time, but—"

In effect, Tom was very glad to stay, and said so, and, accordingly, having filled his pipe (at Polton's invitation), settled down to spend a very pleasant and interesting evening. For his host, although "an inveterate mechanic," possessed a wealth of information on all sorts of curious and unexpected subjects; and when they had examined the remarkable technical library, the pictures on the wall, and the picturesque old clock (Polton's chiefest treasure; a relic of the home of his childhood, which had come to him on the demise of a certain Aunt Judy), they subsided into their respective chairs to gossip discursively on the various subjects in which they had a common interest, with a general leaning towards "antiques."

"To return to your pedometer, sir," said Polton, when Tom finally rose to depart, "I shall look it over in my spare time, but it won't take long. When it is done I will bring it round to your studio, if you will tell me when I shall find you at home."

"It's very good of you, Polton, but I think you had better settle the time. I can always stay in if I want to."

"Then, sir, I would suggest next Thursday, about three o'clock if that will suit you."

"It will suit me perfectly," said Tom, taking up his hat and stick; and, having thus made the assignation, he shook hands with his host who, nevertheless, escorted him as far as the laboratory floor where they parted, Tom to make his way homeward and Polton, probably, to launch the attack on the pedometer.

During the next few days Tom gave only an occasional passing thought to Lotta. He was completely reassured. There had been no elopement or scandal of any kind, and that was all that mattered to him. As to the woman herself, he could only echo Polton's wish that she might stay away as long as possible; and if she should never come back, her absence would create a void not entirely unacceptable. In fact he began to hope that she had passed out of his life, that he had, at last, really finished with her; and from vaguely hoping came gradually to believe that it might be so.

The disillusionment was sudden and violent. It synchronized with the arrival on the appointed day of his pedometer-bearing friend. At three o'clock to the minute on Thursday afternoon the studio bell rang, and Tom, hurrying out at the summons, found Mr. Polton on the wide doorstep. But he was not alone. Sharing the doorstep with him was an anxious-looking woman whom he recognized as his next-door neighbour, Mrs. Mitchens, who was also Lotta's landlady. He had been on bowing terms with her for some years but had never spoken to her except to wish her good morning, and he now wondered what her business with him might be. But he was soon enlightened, for almost as he appeared at the door she asked in an agitated tone:

"Could I have a few words with you, Mr. Pedley?" (On which Polton tried to efface himself and prepared to slink in by the half-open door.) "It's about Mrs. Schiller, sir."

As she spoke the name Polton halted suddenly, and tried to look as if he were not listening.

"I have come to you, Mr. Pedley," Mrs. Mitchens continued, "because you were a friend of hers and I thought you might know what has become of her. I haven't seen or heard of her for quite a long time."

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Mitchens," Tom answered cheerfully. "She has just gone away to stay with some friends at Birmingham."

But Mrs. Mitchens did not look satisfied. "It's very strange," she objected. "She never said anything to me about going away, and the rent hasn't been paid, though she was always so punctual. You are sure she has gone to Birmingham?"

Tom reflected for a moment and then, turning to Polton, asked:

"What do you say? Are we sure?"

"Well, sir," was the reply. "I wouldn't put it as high as that. I was told by Mr. Vanderpuye that Mrs. Schiller had told him that she was going to stay with friends at Birmingham. That is all. We don't actually know whether she has or has not gone."

"Then," said Mrs. Mitchens, "I am afraid she has not gone."

"Why do you say that?" Tom asked.

Mrs. Mitchens appeared to be in difficulties. "I hardly know how to express it," she replied, "but there's something wrong in her rooms. My husband and I have both noticed it, and it seems to be getting worse."

"I don't quite understand," said Tom. "What is getting worse?"

"It is difficult to explain," she replied, "but if you will be so good as to step into the hall, you will understand what I mean."

Tom showed no eagerness to accept this invitation, but Polton, now all agog, requested the lady to lead the way and followed her with a purposeful air while Tom brought up the rear, and watched her gloomily as she inserted her latch-key.

But Mrs. Mitchens was right. No sooner had they entered the hall and shut the outer door than they both understood perfectly what she had meant. But the realization affected them differently. Tom shrank back with an expression of horrified disgust towards the outer door, whereas Polton, having sampled the air by a little diagnostic sniff, took the definite initiative.

"I presume, madam," said he, "that this door is locked?"

"Yes," she replied. "Locked from the inside."

"Well," said Polton, "that room ought to be entered; at once."

"That is what my husband said, and he tried it with one of our keys, but unfortunately the key is in the lock, and he didn't like to break the door open."

"No," Polton agreed, "it is better to use a key if possible. May I ask whether the lock has been used much?"

"Yes," she replied, "constantly. Mrs. Schiller always locked the door at night and whenever she went out."

"Ha," said he, "then it should turn pretty easily. It is sometimes possible," he continued reflectively, with his hand in an inner pocket, "to persuade a key round from the outside if it isn't too stiff. Now, I wonder if I happen to have anything in my pocket that would answer the purpose."

Apparently he had; for as he stooped to peer into the keyhole, his hand came out of the pocket holding an object that looked somewhat like a rather unusual pocket corkscrew fitted with some stout angular wire levers. One of these he inserted into the keyhole and pried about the interior of the lock while Mrs. Mitchens gazed expectantly at his hand, which concealed both the keyhole and the instrument.

"Yes," said he, "the 'thing'; and, as he spoke, the lock clicked, the instrument was withdrawn (disappearing instantly into the pocket whence it had come), and Polton turned the handle and tried the door, shutting it again immediately.

"It isn't bolted, you see, madam," said he, stepping back to make way for her.

She showed a natural reluctance to enter that mysterious and ominous room, but after a few moments' hesitation she grasped the knob, turned it softly, opened the door and stepped in. But even as she entered she uttered a low scream and stood stock still with the doorknob in her hand, staring before her with an expression of horror.

"Oh, the poor thing!" she exclaimed. "She has made away with herself. Do, please, come in and look at her."

On this, Polton entered the room followed by Tom, and for a while both stood by the door gazing at the tragic figure sitting limply with dropped head in a little elbow chair that had been drawn up to the table. The right arm hung straight down while the left lay on the table, and, close to the discoloured hand was an empty tumbler, and, a few inches away, a small glass water-jug and a little bottle containing white tablets.

"Poor creature!" moaned Mrs. Mitchens. "I wonder why she did it, so bright and cheerful as she always seemed. And how dreadful she looks, poor dear. I should never have recognized her."

Polton, meanwhile, had cast a keen glance round the room, and now, stepping forward, leaned over the table to scrutinize the tumbler and the bottle of tablets.

"What is in that bottle?" Tom asked.

"Cyanide of potassium," was the reply.

"That is a strong poison, isn't it?"

"A most deadly poison," Polton replied, "and extremely rapid in its action; quite easy to obtain, too, as you see from the label on this bottle—'Photographic Tablets'; easy to get and hard to trace."

"The tracing of them won't be of much importance in this case," remarked Tom, "as she poisoned herself. The question is, Why on earth did she do it?"

From the poison Polton turned his attention to the corpse; and, as he stood gazing at the dead woman, an expression of surprise and perplexity stole over his face. At this moment a beam of pale autumn sunlight shone in through the window, lighting up the fair hair to the brightness of burnished gold. This appearance seemed further to surprise Polton, for, with a distinctly startled expression, he stepped close to the corpse, and, delicately picking up a small tress of the golden hair, held it close to his face and scrutinized it intently. Then as if still unsatisfied, he gently raised the bowed head and looked long and intently into the poor bloated, discoloured face. Tom and the landlady both watched him in astonishment, and the former demanded:

"What is it, Polton?"

Polton, still holding the head erect, replied impressively:

"This woman, sir, is not Mrs. Schiller."

"Not Mrs. Schiller!" the landlady echoed. "But she must be. Who else could she be, locked in here in Mrs. Schiller's room?"

"This is certainly not Mrs. Schiller," Polton persisted. "I ask you, sir, to come and see for yourself. You knew her better than I did. You will see that the hair is the wrong colour and the features are different."

"I noticed the hair when the sun shone on it," said Tom, "and it struck me as being somehow changed. But as to the features, I should say that they are quite unrecognizable."

"Not at all, sir," replied Polton. "The skin is bloated, but there is the nose. That is unchanged, and so, more or less, is the

chin. And there are the ears; they are hardly affected at all. You had better come and have a look at her as the identification is most important."

Thus urged, Tom plucked up courage to make a close inspection; and as Polton held the head up, he examined first the profile and then the ears. A very brief scrutiny satisfied him, for, as he backed away from the corpse, he announced:

"Yes, Polton, you are right. This is not Lotta Schiller. The nose and chin look the wrong shape, but the ears are quite conclusive. They are of an entirely different type from Lotta's, and differently set on the head."

"You really think, sir," said the landlady, "that this poor creature is not Mrs. Schiller?"

"I feel no doubt whatever," he replied; "and very much relieved I am that she is not."

"So am I, for that matter," said Mrs. Mitchens. "But how on earth does she come to be here? Locked herself in, too. It's an absolute mystery."

"It certainly is," Tom agreed. "But it isn't our mystery. It will be for the police to solve it."

"That is true, sir," said Polton, "though perhaps it may be more of our mystery than you think. But, of course, the police will have to be informed at once, and it will be for them to find out who this poor woman is, and how she came to be here. But there is one question that I should like to settle now; that is whether she took the poison herself, or whether it was given to her by someone else."

"But," Tom objected, "the police will deal with that question. It isn't our affair."

"It is not, sir," Polton admitted. "But I should like to know, just for my own satisfaction. Do you happen to have a piece of fairly stiff smooth paper about you?"

With a rather puzzled air Tom brought out of his pocket the artist's notebook that he always carried.

"Will that do?" he asked. "If it will, you can tear a leaf out, but don't take one with a drawing on it."

"I won't tear the leaf out," said Polton. "It will be handier in the book, and I shan't want to keep it."

He took the little canvas-bound volume, and, watched curiously by Tom and the landlady, went over to a small writing-table on which lay, beside the blotter, a rubber stamp and an inking-pad.

Taking up the latter, he carried it across to the table at which the dead woman was sitting, when he once more examined the tumbler as well as he could without touching it.

"The finger marks," he observed, "look like those of a left hand; and as the left hand is near the tumbler we will try that first."

Very gently, to avoid disturbing the body, he raised the hand, and, grasping the thumb, pressed it on the inking-pad. Then, laying down the pad and taking up the book, he brought the inked thumb over a blank page, pressed it down lightly and withdrew it. In the same way he took an impression of each of the four fingers, the group of prints being arranged in a line in their correct order, and, as soon as he had finished, he carefully wiped the traces of ink from the fingertips with his handkerchief. Softly laying down the hand, he placed the open book by the side of the tumbler and carefully compared the prints on each.

"Well," said Tom, "what do you make of it?"

"The prints on the tumbler are her finger-prints all right," replied Polton. "Would you like to see them?"

Tom's principal desire now was to escape from the charnel-house atmosphere of this room, but, as Polton evidently wished him to see the prints, he went over to the table.

"My prints are very poor, smeary impressions," said Polton, "but you can see the patterns quite well. Look at the thumb-print with that spiral whorl on it, and compare it with the one on the tumbler. You can see plainly that it is the same pattern."

"Yes," Tom agreed, "I can make that out quite clearly; but the patterns of the fingers don't seem so distinctive."

"No," Polton admitted, "they are rather indistinct for some reason, especially in the middle of each print. But still, if you compare them with the tumbler, you can see that the patterns are the same."

"I'll take your word for it," said Tom, "as you know more about it than I do. And, after all, it isn't our affair whether she took the poison herself or not. Of course, the police will settle that question, and if you take my advice, you will say nothing about these finger-prints. The authorities don't much like outside interference."

"I think Mr. Pedley is right," said Mrs. Mitchens. "We don't want to appear officious or meddlesome, and we certainly don't want to offend the police."

"No, ma'am," Polton agreed, "we do not. It will be much better to keep our own counsel; which, in fact, is what I had intended to suggest. I made the trial just to satisfy my curiosity as to whether it was a case of suicide or murder."

"Well," said Tom, edging towards the door, "now we know; and the next question is, who is to inform the police?"

As he raised the question he looked significantly at Mrs. Mitchens, who replied gloomily, as they retired to the hail:

"I suppose, as I am the householder and Mrs. Schiller's landlady, I had better go. But I can't tell them much, and I expect they will want to question you about Mrs. Schiller."

"I expect they will," said Tom, "but, meanwhile, I think you are the proper person to give the information."

With this view Polton agreed emphatically, and, by way of closing the discussion, softly drew the key out of the lock, closed the door, and, having locked it, withdrew the key and handed it to the landlady. Then he and Tom, after a few words of condolence with Mrs. Mitchens, took their leave and made their way to the studio.

"Pah!" exclaimed Tom, taking several deep breaths as they emerged into the open air. "What a horrible affair! But I suppose you are used to this sort of thing."

"To some extent, sir," replied Polton. "I have learned from the Doctor not to allow my attention to be distracted by mere physical unpleasantness. But what a mysterious affair this is. I can make nothing of it. Here is a woman, apparently a stranger, locked in Mrs. Schiller's room with Mrs. Schiller's key. All sorts of questions arise. Who is she? How did she get that key? Why did she come to that place to commit suicide—if she really did commit suicide? And where is Mrs. Schiller? The police will want to find answers to those questions, and some of them will take a good deal of answering, I fancy."

"Yes," Tom agreed gloomily, "and they'll look to us to find some of the answers. It is going to be an infernal nuisance."

When they had washed—which Tom did with exhaustive thoroughness—in a big bowl in the studio sink, they resumed the discussion while they laid the table for tea and boiled the kettle. But nothing came of it beyond bringing to light, the curious difference in their points of view. To Tom, the tragedy was repulsively horrible and his connection with it profoundly distasteful. Interest in it or curiosity he had none.

Polton, on the other hand, so far from being shocked or disgusted, seemed to savour the details with a sort of ghoulish relish and fairly to revel in the mystery and obscurity of the case; so much so that Tom's repeated efforts to divert the conversation into more agreeable channels failed utterly, and, for the first time in his experience, he was almost relieved when the time came for Polton to return to his duties.

"Well, sir," the departing guest remarked as he wriggled into his overcoat, "this has been an eventful afternoon. I have enjoyed it immensely." Here he paused suddenly in his wriggings, gazing at Tom in ludicrous consternation. "God bless me, sir," he exclaimed, "I had nearly forgotten the pedometer. I have cleaned it up and put it in going order, and I have fitted a new regulator with a micrometer screw and attached a watch-key to turn it with. You will see at once how it works, but I have written down a few directions."

He produced the instrument, wrapped in tissue paper, and laid it with the little document on the table. Then, deprecating Tom's grateful acknowledgments, he shook hands and bustled away, en route for the Temple.

---

## VIII. — REVELATIONS

WHEN Polton's departure had left him to the peaceful enjoyment of his own society, Tom Pedley tried to dismiss from his mind the gruesome experience of the afternoon and settle down to his ordinary occupations. But try as he would to forget it, that dreadful figure, seated at the table, intruded constantly into his thoughts and refused to be dislodged; and when, later in the evening, the studio bell announced a visitor, he resigned himself to the inevitable, and went out to the gate, where, as he had expected, he found a police officer waiting on the threshold.

"You'll guess what I have come about, sir," the latter said, genially, as Tom conducted him to the studio; "just to make a few preliminary inquiries. I am the coroner's officer and it is my job to find out what evidence is available for the inquest."

"Well, Sergeant," said Tom, "I will give you all the help I can, though I am afraid it will be mighty little. However, if you will take a seat and tell me what you want to know, I'll do my best. Perhaps a glass of beer might be helpful."

The sergeant agreed that it might; and when he had been settled in an easy chair by the fire with a jug of beer and a couple of glasses on a small table by his side, and had—by invitation—filled and lighted his pipe, the inquisition began.

But we know what Tom's information amounted to. Of the material facts of the case he knew nothing. The dead woman was a stranger to him, and even Lotta Schiller was little more; indeed, as he strove vainly to answer the sergeant's questions, he was surprised to find how completely ignorant he was of her antecedents, her position in the world, her friends and relations, of everything, in fact, concerning her except the little that he had gathered from direct observation.

"Seems rather a mysterious sort of lady," the sergeant remarked as Tom refilled his glass. "Pretty discreet, too; not given to babbling. Is there anybody that knows more about her than you do?"

Tom suggested Mr. Vanderpuye, but as the latter's address was unknown to him, he referred the sergeant to Mr. Polton.

"That's the gentleman who unlocked the door from the outside," commented the sergeant. "Handy gentleman he must be. Yes, I'd like to have a word with him if you would tell me where to find him."

"He is a laboratory assistant to Dr. Thorndyke of 5A King's Bench Walk, and he lives on the premises."

At the mention of "The Doctor's" name the sergeant pricked up his ears.

"Oh, that's who he is," said he. "Would be a handy gentleman, naturally. I'll just pop along and see what he can tell me."

Do you think it is too late to call on him to-night?"

Bearing in mind Polton's intense interest in the case, Tom thought that it was not; whereupon the sergeant, having finished his beer and reloaded his pipe, prepared to depart.

"We shall want his evidence," said he as he moved towards the door, "to prove that the door was really locked from the inside; and as to yourself, sir, although you don't seem to have much to tell, I expect you'll get a summons. Something new might arise which you could throw light on. However, the inquest won't be opened for some days as time has to be allowed for the analysis after the post mortem."

Events justified the sergeant's forecast. In due course the summons was served, and, at the appointed place and time Tom presented himself to give evidence if called upon. He arrived a little before time and thereby secured a reasonably comfortable Windsor armchair, in which he sat at his ease and observed the arrival of the other witnesses, among whom were Mrs. Mitchens, his friend, Dr. Oldfield, Polton and Vanderpuye—who arrived together—and last, no less a person than his old acquaintance, Detective-inspector Blandy.

"Hallo, Pedley," said the doctor, taking the adjoining chair, "sorry to see you mixed up in a disreputable affair like this. Extraordinary business, though, isn't it? Ha, here comes the coroner and the jury; they've been to view the body, I suppose, and look as if they hadn't enjoyed it. Well, how are you? I haven't seen anything of you for quite a long time; not since you took up with that painted Judy that I have seen you gadding about with."

Tom reddened slightly. He had, in fact, rather neglected his friends since Lotta had taken possession of him. However, there was no opportunity to rebut the accusation, for the coroner, having taken his seat and glanced round at the witnesses and the reporters, proceeded to open the inquiry with a brief address. It was a very brief address; no more than a simple statement that "we are here to inquire into the circumstances in which a woman, whose name appears to be Emma Robey, met with her death. I need not," he continued, "go into any particulars, as these will transpire in the depositions of the witnesses; and by way of introducing you to the circumstances I will begin by taking the evidence of Sergeant Porter."

On hearing his name mentioned, Tom's new acquaintance took up his position at the table and stood at attention while he disposed of the preliminaries with professional swiftness and precision and waited for the next question.

"I think, Sergeant," said the coroner, "that you had better just tell us what you know about this affair"; whereupon the officer proceeded, with the manner of one reading from a document, to recite the facts.

"On Thursday the 30th of December 1930 at 3.46 p.m., Mrs. Julia Mitchens came to the police station and reported that she had found in a room in her house the dead body of a woman who was a stranger to her, and who had apparently committed suicide by taking poison. She stated that the room had been let to, and was ordinarily occupied by, a Mrs. Schiller, but that the said tenant had been absent from her rooms for some time and that her present whereabouts was unknown. In answer to certain questions from me, she gave the following further particulars"—here the sergeant gave a more detailed account of the events, including the unlocking of the door by Mr. Polton "with some kind of instrument," which we need not report since they are already known to the reader.

On receiving these particulars, he had accompanied Mrs. Mitchens to her house and had been admitted by her to the room, where he found the corpse and the other objects as she had described them. Having given a vivid and exact description of the room, the seated corpse, the tumbler and the poison bottle, he continued:

"As the circumstances were very remarkable, I decided to make no detailed examination without further instructions, and, accordingly I came away, having locked the door and taken possession of the key, and returned to the station, where I made my report to the Superintendent. When he had heard it, he decided that it would be advisable to inform the authorities at headquarters of the facts so far known and directed me to telephone to the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard, which I did, and was informed in reply that an officer was being dispatched immediately. I also telephoned to the Divisional surgeon, acquainting him with the facts and asking him to attend as soon as possible.

"In about twenty minutes, Inspector Blandy of the C.I.D. arrived by car, and, almost at the same moment, the Divisional Surgeon, Dr. Oldfield. Acting on instructions, I conducted them to the house, number thirty-nine Jacob Street, and admitted them to the room. When the doctor had made his examination he went away, but I stayed for about ten minutes to assist the inspector with his examination. Then I handed him the key and came away, leaving him to continue his investigations."

At this point the sergeant made a definite pause, looking inquiringly at the coroner, who said, in answer to the implied question:

"Yes, Sergeant; and, as Inspector Blandy is here to give evidence, I don't think we need trouble you for any further particulars, unless the jury wish to ask any questions."

The jury did not, and accordingly, when the depositions had been read and signed, the sergeant retired to his place behind the coroner, and the name of the next witness, Dr. Oldfield, was called.

The doctor, like the sergeant, made short work of the preliminaries, and, having been accommodated with a chair and started by the coroner, reeled off his evidence with similar ease and precision. But we need not report it verbatim. The general description of the corpse and its surroundings merely repeated that of the previous witness, but from this the doctor continued:

"I examined the body carefully as I found it, especially in relation to its position in the chair. It seemed very insecurely balanced, in fact it appeared to be supported almost entirely by the arm which was extended on the table. When I lifted this clear and let it hang down, the body slipped forward in the chair and would have slid to the floor if I had not propped it up."

"You seem to attach some significance to this condition," said the coroner. "What did it suggest to you?"

"I think it is a fact worth noting," the doctor replied cautiously, "but I would rather not go beyond that, except to say that it seemed somewhat against the probabilities. I should have expected that at the moment of death, when all the muscles suddenly relaxed, the body would have slipped forward out of the chair."

The coroner pondered this careful answer for a few moments and then asked:

"Could you judge how long deceased had been dead?"

"Only approximately. I would say about three weeks."

"Did you discover anything further?"

"Not on this occasion, but I examined the body very thoroughly at the mortuary and drew up a detailed description, mainly for use by the police. Do you wish me to give those details?"

"It is not actually necessary," the coroner replied, "but perhaps it would be as well to put the description on record in the depositions. Yes, let us have the full details."

The witness accordingly proceeded: "The body was that of a woman of about thirty, apparently married, as she was wearing a wedding ring, but there were no indications of her having borne a child. Her height was five feet six and a quarter inches, weight one hundred and twenty-four pounds—eight stone twelve. Figure spare, in fact definitely thin. Complexion fair, hair flaxen or golden. Its length suggested that it had been bobbed some time ago; now a little below the shoulders. Eyes apparently grey, but it was impossible to judge the exact tint owing to the condition of the body. For the same reason, the features were a little obscure but it could be seen that the nose was rather small, of the concave type with a slight prominence on the bridge. The mouth medium sized and apparently well shaped. The ears were more distinctive and less changed; they were slightly outstanding, thin in all parts with hardly any lobule, and set obliquely on the head. The line of the jaw was also markedly slanting and the chin was pointed and slightly receding.

"As to the identity of deceased, I was present when the clothing was removed from the body and I examined each garment. Two of them were marked in ink with the initials 'ER.'; one was marked in ink 'E. Robey'; and a small fancy handkerchief in the skirt pocket bore the name 'Emma' embroidered in white silk. That completes the description of deceased."

"Yes," said the coroner, "and a very full and clear description it is. There ought not to be any difficulty in getting the body identified. And now we come to the question of the cause of death. Were you able to ascertain that?"

"Yes. The cause of death was poisoning by potassium cyanide. The dose taken was very large, fully sixty grains, and death probably occurred almost instantaneously, or, at most, within a minute or two."

"Is potassium cyanide a very powerful poison?"

"Yes, very. It contains prussic acid in a concentrated form and acts in the same way and with the same violence and rapidity."

"What is the lethal dose?"

"It is usually given as less than five grains, probably as little as two and a half grains, but, as in the case of most poisons, the effects vary in different individuals. But a dose of sixty grains is enormous."

"Did you make the analysis yourself?"

"Yes, in conjunction with Professor Woodfield. When I made the post mortem, I removed the organs and took them in sealed and marked receptacles to the laboratory of St. Margaret's Hospital, where the professor and I made the analysis together."

"The poison was derived, I suppose, from the tablets of which we have heard?"

"So one would have assumed, and analysis proved that the tablets were really composed of potassium cyanide. But when we came to make the examination, a very curious fact transpired. The quantity of the poison taken was at least sixty grains; the tablets were shown by the label on the bottle to contain five grains each, and we verified this by analysis. The quantity taken was therefore equal to twelve tablets. But there were not twelve tablets missing from the bottle. The label showed that the bottle, when full, had contained fifty tablets of five grains each, so that if twelve had been consumed there should have remained thirty eight. But there were forty-three, or five more than there should have been."

"That doesn't seem to me very conclusive," the coroner objected. "There might have been some error in filling the bottle. Don't you think so?"

"No, sir," Oldfield replied firmly. "We excluded that possibility. I purchased two fresh bottles from the makers, and the professor and I each counted the tablets. There were exactly fifty in each bottle; and the important fact is that each bottle was quite full. Neither would hold another tablet. Then we tried the bottle that was found on the deceased's table, and the

result was the same; it would hold fifty tablets and not one more. A single extra tablet prevented the complete insertion of the cork."

The coroner appeared deeply impressed. "It is a most extraordinary thing," said he, "but there seems to be no doubt of the facts. Can you suggest any explanation?"

"The only explanation that occurs to me is that the poison taken was not derived from the tablets at all. Part of it certainly was not, and if a part came from another source it is most probable that the whole of it did. The facts suggest to me that a solution of the cyanide was prepared in advance, and that it was this solution which was swallowed by deceased. But that is only my opinion."

"Exactly. But if your view is correct, why were the tablets there?"

"That," Oldfield replied, "is not strictly a medical question."

"No," the coroner agreed with a smile, "but we needn't be too pedantic. You have considered the question, I think, and we should like to hear your conclusion."

"Then I may say that the tablets appeared to me to have been put there designedly to support the idea of suicide."

The coroner apparently considered this a rather lame conclusion, for he did not pursue the subject, but returned to the analysis.

"Did your chemical examination bring out anything more?"

"Yes, another very significant fact. At my suggestion, Professor Woodfield tested the material for morphine, and I assisted him. The result was that we discovered undoubted traces of the drug, though the condition of the body did not admit of anything like a reliable estimate of quantity. But morphine was certainly there, and in an appreciable amount, as was proved by our getting a positive reaction. A very small quantity would not have been discoverable at all."

"Can you give us any idea as to the amount that had been taken?"

"We agreed that our results suggested a full, but not very large dose; not more than a third of a grain, or at the outside, half a grain."

"But isn't half a grain rather a large dose?"

"It is a very large dose if given hypodermically, but not so excessive if swallowed. Still, one doesn't usually give more than a quarter of a grain."

"You said just now that the morphine test was made at your suggestion. What made you suspect the presence of morphine?"

"It was hardly a suspicion. The possibility occurred to me, and it seemed worth while to test it."

"But what suggested the possibility?"

"The idea arose from a consideration of the extraordinary circumstances of this case. Taken at their face value, the appearances point definitely to suicide. But yet it is impossible to rule out the alternative of homicide by the forcible administration of poison. It is very difficult, however, to compel a person to swallow even a liquid against his will, and the attempt would involve considerable violence, which would leave its marks on the body. But if the victim could be given a full dose of morphine beforehand, he would become so lethargic and passive that the poison could be administered quite easily."

"In this case, I searched carefully for bruises or other signs of violence but I found none; which seemed to exclude the suggestion of homicide, but only on the condition that no narcotic had been taken. It was then that I decided to test for the most likely and most suitable narcotic—morphine."

"And having found it, what do you infer? You seem to imply that its presence suggests homicidal poisoning."

"I would not put it as high as that; but if there should be other evidence creating a presumption of homicide, the presence of the morphine would be strong corroboration."

This completed the doctor's evidence, and, when the depositions had been read and signed, he was informed that he was free to go about his business. He elected, however, to return to his seat to hear the rest of the evidence, and to jot down a few notes.

"I think," said the coroner, "that if we take the inspector's evidence next, we shall have all the known facts of the case and can fill in details later from the evidence of the other witnesses."

Accordingly, Inspector Blandy, having, at the coroner's invitation, taken possession of the vacated chair, bestowed a benevolent smile on the jury and ran off the preliminaries with the air of one pronouncing a benediction. Then, in reply to the opening question, he introduced his evidence by a general statement which, in effect, repeated those of the preceding witnesses. Having described the room, the corpse, the table, and the various objects on it, he continued:

"When the doctor had finished his examination, I proceeded with my own, beginning with the tumbler and the water-jug. On these were a number of finger prints, mostly very distinct, and apparently, all made by the same hands. Those on the water-jug were from a right hand and those on the tumbler were from the left. I took the finger-prints of deceased on



small cards and compared them with those on the tumbler and the water-jug, and I can say, positively, that they were the same. All the prints on the jug and the tumbler were certainly those of deceased's fingers, and there were no others."

"Would you regard that as conclusive evidence that deceased took the poison herself?"

"No, certainly not. Anyone having control of the dead body could easily have taken the finger-prints of deceased on the jug and the glass. The evidential value of the finger-prints is dependent on the other evidence."

"You have heard that deceased was locked in the room and that the key was on the inside."

"Yes," the inspector agreed, beaming benignly on the coroner, "but I have also heard that the door was unlocked from the outside by Mr. Polton; and he could as easily have locked it from the outside, leaving the key inside. In fact, the thing is frequently done by criminals, especially by hotel thieves, who have a special instrument made for the purpose, somewhat like a dentist's root-forceps. With this they can grasp the key from the outside, unlock the door, commit their robbery, and, when the go away, relock the door from outside, leaving the key inside."

"Have you any reason to believe that the door of the deceased's room was locked from the outside in this way?"

"Not with the instrument that I have mentioned. That instrument, having roughened jaws, usually leaves little scratches on the key. I examined the key for scratches, but there were none. Nevertheless, I believe that the door was locked from the outside and that a very simple improvised apparatus was used. Perhaps I had better explain the method before giving the reasons for my belief. The procedure—which is well known to the police—is this: The key is placed in the lock so that a quarter turn will be enough to shoot the bolt; then a small rod such as a thick match, a skewer, or a lead pencil, is passed through the bow, or handle, of the key and a loop at the end of a length of string is hitched on to the rod. The string has to be kept fairly tight to prevent the loop from falling off. The operator now goes out, closing the door after him, keeping the tightened string in the space between the edge of the door and the jamb, and well above the level of the key; then he gives a steady pull at the string with the result that the leverage of the little rod turns the key and shoots the bolt of the lock. When the key has made a quarter turn and locked the door, the loop slips off the rod, the string is pulled out through the crack of the door, and the little rod either drops on the floor or is flicked out of the key and falls some distance away."

The coroner looked a little dubious. "It sounds very ingenious," said he, "but rather risky for a person who has just committed a murder. Suppose the plan should fail."

"But it couldn't fail, sir," the inspector replied. "If it did not work the first time, all he would have to do would be to open the door and try again. Perhaps a demonstration will make it clear."

He opened the attaché-case that he had brought with him and took out a flat slab of wood to which a lock had been attached and a through keyhole made. Inserting a key, he produced a thick match and a length of string with a loop at the end. Passing the match through the bow of the key, he held it there while he slipped the loop over it and drew the string fairly taut.

"Now," said he, "observe what happens. The key is towards you and I am on the outside of the door."

He held the slab firmly on the table, brought the tightened string round to the back, and gave a steady pull. Instantly, the key was seen to turn, the bolt shot out, the loop slipped off the match, and the latter, flicked out of the key, flew along the table.

The effect of the experiment was unmistakable. The jurymen smiled and nodded, and even the coroner admitted his conviction.

"And now, sir," said the inspector, picking up the match and viewing it through a lens, "I will ask you to examine this match. Near the middle you will see a little indented curved line on one side, and, on the opposite side, about half an inch nearer the head, a smaller, less distinct mark. Then, at the other end of the match, where the loop of the string caught it, you will see four little dents, one at each corner; and if you place the match in the key, as it was when I pulled the string, you will see that the two dents on the side correspond exactly with the sharp edges of the key-bow."

He illustrated the method and then passed the match together with his magnifying glass to the coroner, who examined it with intense interest and then passed it to the jury.

"Well, Inspector," said the coroner when the match had gone the round, "you have given us a most conclusive demonstration, and I am sure that we are all convinced of the practicability of the method. The next question is, Have you any evidence that it was actually used?"

The inspector's answer was to open once more his attaché-case and take from it a corked glass tube containing a single large match, the end of which bore a spot of red sealing-wax. Then from his pocket he produced a key, and, taking the match from its tube, laid it and the key on the table before the coroner.

"This match," said he, "which I have marked with sealing-wax to prevent mistakes, is, as you see, a large-size Bryant and May. I found it on the floor of the room (which I will call 'deceased's room') under a small cabinet, two feet, three inches from the door. This is the key with which that door was locked. On the match are six indentations exactly like those on the other match, which you have. The two side indentations correspond exactly with the sharp edges of the key-bow. I have no doubt that this match was used to lock that door; and I am confirmed in this by having found on the arsis, or sharp corner of the edge of the door, an indented mark at exactly the spot where the string would have passed round, as proved by actual trial. I can't produce the door, but I have here a heel-ball rubbing which shows the mark distinctly."

He handed the sheet of paper to the coroner, who, having examined the rubbing, and passed it to the foreman of the jury, turned once more to the witness.

"You have given us, Inspector, a very complete and convincing demonstration; and there now arises from it another question. This key which you have shown us apparently belongs to the door of the room in which the body of deceased was found. But whose property is it? The presumption is that it belongs to the tenant of the room, Mrs. Schiller. But is it actually her key, or only one similar to hers? Can you tell us that?"

"Only by hearsay. I am informed by Mrs. Mitchens that this key is the actual key that she gave to Mrs. Schiller. She can identify it by a mark that was made on it. As she is one of the witnesses, she can give you the particulars first-hand; but I think there is no doubt that this is Mrs. Schiller's own key."

"Then the next question is, Where is Mrs. Schiller?"

The inspector smiled a pensive smile. "I wish," he replied, "that I could answer that question. Ever since the discovery, we have been trying to get into touch with her, but we cannot learn anything as to her whereabouts. She is said to be in Birmingham, but that is a rather vague address even if it is correct. We have advertised in the papers, asking her to communicate with us, but there has been no reply."

"In effect, then, she has disappeared?"

"That is what it seems to amount to. At any rate she is missing."

"The importance of the matter is," said the coroner, "that if this is her key, there must have been some kind of contact between her and deceased."

"Precisely, sir," Blandy agreed. "That is why we are so anxious to get into touch with her."

This was the inspector's final contribution, and, when he had signed the depositions and retired to his seat, the name of Julia Mitchens was called, and that lady proceeded to give her evidence, which was largely negative. She had never seen or heard of a person named Emma Robey. Of her tenant, Mrs. Schiller, she knew practically nothing. The lady had engaged the ground-floor rooms, furnished, but had added some furniture. No references were given but the rent was paid—in cash—monthly, in advance. She had said that she needed no attendance but wanted to be left alone to do her work, which was that of an artist. Witness seldom saw her excepting when she paid the rent. She was pleasant in manner but not intimate. She had a separate electric bell with a small brass name-plate under it, and a removable brass plate on the wall, which she took down every evening. She had her own latch-key and keys of the bedroom and the sitting-room. The bedroom door was kept locked, and she always locked the sitting-room door when she went out.

Witness never saw any visitors except Mr. Pedley and a coloured gentleman, and them very rarely. Had known Mr. Pedley by sight for some years. Does not know whether Mrs. Schiller ever stayed away from home. Had noticed the absence of the plate from the wall for about three weeks, and, later, had become aware of an unpleasant odour in the hall.

"To come back to the subject of the keys," said the coroner. "A key was found in the lock of the sitting-room door. If Inspector Blandy will lend us that key for a moment, can you tell us for certain whether it is the one that you gave to Mrs. Schiller?"

"I am sure I can, sir," was the reply.

Here the inspector produced the key, and, having taken the precaution to tie a small piece of string round the bow, passed it to the coroner who handed it to the witness.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Mitchens after a single glance at it, "this is Mrs. Schiller's own key."

"You speak quite confidently," said the coroner. "How are you able to distinguish this key from all other keys?"

"It is this way, sir," she replied. "When Mrs. Schiller engaged the rooms there was a big old-fashioned lock on the sitting-room door with a large clumsy key. Mrs. Schiller found this very inconvenient, so I got the locksmith to fix a more modern lock with a smaller key. He supplied two keys with the lock and I decided to keep one in reserve in case the other should be lost; but I thought it better to mark the two keys to prevent mistakes, so my husband filed a nick on the handle of the one that Mrs. Schiller was to have, and two nicks on the other to show that it was the duplicate. This key has one nick, so it must be Mrs. Schiller's, and here is the duplicate with the two nicks on it."

As she spoke, she took a key from her handbag and laid it, with the other, on the table.

The coroner took up the two keys and having rapidly compared their bows, passed them to the jury, from whom they presently found their way back to their respective owners.

"This evidence," said the coroner, "is very important and perfectly conclusive. We now know for certain that the key which was found in the door was Mrs. Schiller's own key. How it came there, Mrs. Schiller alone can explain. I suppose," he added, turning to the witness, "you cannot give us any hint as to where she may possibly be?"

"No, indeed, sir," was the reply. "I had no idea that she had gone away; and when I first noticed the—er—unpleasantness, I thought she was lying dead in her room."

"By the way, you had the duplicate key. Why did you not try to enter that room?"

"We did try, sir; but the other key was in the lock."

"Yes, of course. Well, Mrs. Mitchens, you have given us some very important evidence, and now, if nothing else occurs to you I think we need not detain you any longer."

The next witness was Tom Pedley. But Tom knew nothing about anything, and said so. To his relief no questions were asked about Lotta's artistic abilities; and the only contribution that he made was a brief history of his acquaintance with Lotta, a very definite statement of his relations with her and a rather sketchy description of the expedition to Epping Forest, that being the last occasion on which he had seen her. He was followed by Nathaniel Polton, who testified that the door was undoubtedly locked when he tried it, and, from the smoothness with which the key turned, he inferred that the lock had been kept oiled. He had had no difficulty in unlocking it with a simple bent wire appliance (which he had unfortunately forgotten to bring with him) and could with equal ease have re locked it. He knew nothing of Mrs. Schiller, who was virtually a stranger to him.

The evidence of the last two witnesses had been "harkened to" by the jury with somewhat languid interest; but when the name of the next witness was called and the rather commanding figure of Mr. William Vanderpuye arose, attention was visibly sharpened. Realizing this, the new witness, striking in appearance and faultlessly "turned out," seemed, naturally, a little self-conscious as he walked across to the table; but, having been sworn, he stated his personal particulars—as a barrister of the Inner Temple—confidently enough and thereafter gave his evidence clearly and with perfect dignity and composure.

Of the tragedy, itself, he knew nothing and had heard of it first from the coroner's officer. He had never seen or heard of a person named Emma Robey, and the circumstances connected with her death were entirely unknown to him. This closed the first part of his examination and the rest of his evidence was concerned exclusively with Lotta Schiller. Having described the opening of his acquaintance with her in Tom Pedley's studio, he answered the coroner's questions frankly and fully though he volunteered nothing.

"Did you see much of Mrs. Schiller?" the coroner asked.

"Yes; for a time I used to see her almost daily, and we often spent whole days together."

"And how did you spend your time on these occasions?"

"Principally in seeing the sights of the town: theatres, concerts, cinemas, museums and picture galleries. We took our meals at restaurants."

"Did you usually meet by appointment?"

"No, I nearly always called for her at her rooms, and saw her home at night."

"When you saw her home, did you go into the house?"

"No, never. I just saw her to her door. When I called for her I used sometimes to go in for a few minutes, but never at night."

"I am going to ask you a question which you are not bound to answer if you have any reasons for objecting. It is this: What were your exact relations with Mrs. Schiller? Were you just friends, or were you on affectionate terms, or were you, in effect, lovers? Remember, I am not pressing you for an answer."

"There is nothing that I need conceal," Vanderpuye replied calmly. "We were rather more than ordinary friends. I may say that our relations were affectionate, at least on my side; I can't answer for her, though she seemed rather devoted to me. But we certainly were not lovers."

"You were not, for instance, on kissing terms?"

"No, I never kissed her. She made it quite clear that kissing was not permissible."

"Reference has been made to certain lockets that were exchanged. You would not regard them as love-tokens?"

"No. They were made at her suggestion to serve as souvenirs when I should have gone back to Africa."

"When did you last see Mrs. Schiller?"

"On the eighteenth of November, the day of our trip to Epping Forest which Mr. Pedley has spoken of."

"Would you give us some particulars of what happened after you parted from Mr. Pedley?"

"We walked across to High Beach, as he had directed us, and had lunch at the King's Oak. Then we went for a ramble in the forest and soon lost our way. After wandering about for a long time we met a forester who directed us to Loughton, and, with some difficulty, as it was then getting dark, we found our way there and eventually caught a train to London. I saw her home and said good-night to her on her doorstep at about half-past nine. It was in the train that she first told me that she was going to stay with some friends at Birmingham."

"Did she give you her address there?"

"No. She said that it would be best that no letters should pass between us and that she might be visiting friends elsewhere; but she promised to let me know when she would be returning, though she did not know when that might be. Since then I have neither seen her nor heard from her."

This was the substance of Vanderpuye's evidence, and, after one or two further questions, which elicited nothing new,

the coroner glanced through his notes.

"I think the witness has told us all that he knows about this strange affair, and, unless the members of the jury wish to put any questions, we need not detain him any longer."

He glanced inquiringly at the jurors, and, as no one made any sign, the depositions were read, the signature added, and the coroner, having thanked the witness for the frank and helpful way in which he had given his evidence, released him; whereupon he retired to his chair beside Mr. Polton.

The next witness—who proved also to be the last—was a small elderly woman of somewhat foxy aspect who advanced to the table with a complacent smirk and gave her evidence readily and with obvious enjoyment. Her name was Jane Bigham, address, 98 Jacob Street, no occupation except that she supplemented the small income left to her by her late husband by knitting socks and other articles for sale. She usually sat at the window, partly for the sake of the light, but principally because, being an expert knitter who had no need to keep her eyes on her work, she could entertain herself by observing what was going on in the street. She knew all her neighbours by sight and a good deal about their habits and doings; and as her house was exactly opposite that of Mrs. Mitchens, she had often seen Mrs. Schiller. She remembered that lady moving in with her little bits of furniture about six months ago, and the brass plate being fixed up ("which I went across the very same day to read the name on it").

"You seem to have taken an interest in Mrs. Schiller," the coroner remarked with a smile.

"I did sir. I wondered what a woman like her was doing in our quiet street with her paint and her powder and her high-heeled shoes; in fact I suspected that she was no better than she ought to be."

"Very few of us are, Mrs. Bigham," said the coroner, "but it is not a crime to wear high-heeled shoes or to paint and powder. Most women do nowadays."

"So they do, sir, the more shame to them. At any rate, within a week of her coming, I saw her go to Mr. Pedley's door and ring the bell, and when he opened the door I could see that he didn't know her, and looked as if he didn't want to. But she went in and stayed half an hour. After that she often used to go there, and once or twice Mr. Pedley went to her rooms about tea-time, and sometimes they used to come home together as if they'd met somewhere."

"Then, a month or two later, a coloured gentleman appeared on the scene—the one that has just given evidence, Mr. Vanderboy. At first he used to go to Mr. Pedley's, and she seemed to know that he was there for she would slip round and ring the bell and then she and Mr. Vanderboy would come out together. Then he took to calling for her and they would go off together and not come back until night—sometimes quite late."

Here an intelligent juryman protested that "we had all this before," and the coroner agreed that "we had better get on. Will you kindly tell us," he continued, "when you last saw Mrs. Schiller."

The witness directed a baleful glance at the juryman and replied after a resentful sniff:

"About three weeks ago, it would be. I saw her come home with Mr. Vanderboy about half-past nine at night, and, by the look of her I reckoned she's had a drop too much."

"What made you think that?" the coroner demanded.

"Well, sir, she looked a bit unsteady on her legs, and she held on to his arm; which was not her 'abit. And then when they came to the door, it was him that put in the latch-key and opened it and helped her in."

"Did, he go into the house?"

"Yes, and he stayed there about an hour and a half, for I saw him come out at a few minutes past eleven. I just chanced to go to the window at that time" (the coroner smiled grimly at the coincidence) "and there he was coming out carrying a bag—or a small suitcase it might have been—which he hadn't got when he went in; and mighty careful he was not to make a noise, for, instead of slamming the door, he put in the latch-key and closed the door without a sound. Which was curious, for it seemed as if he had a latch-key of his own."

"Did you ever see Mr. Vanderpuye go into the house on any other occasion?"

"Well, I can't say that I ever did. But if he had a latch-key—"

Here the intelligent juryman interrupted with the question:

"Can the witness swear, sir, that the man she saw was Mr. Vanderpuye?"

"What do you say, Mrs. Bigham?" the coroner asked. "Are you perfectly certain that the man was Mr. Vanderpuye?"

"Well, sir, he certainly looked like him. Besides, who else could he have been?"

"The question is, did you clearly and definitely recognize him as Mr. Vanderpuye?"

"Why, as to clearly and definitely recognizing a person across the street on a dark December night, and no street lamp near, it's hardly possible. Of course, I couldn't see the colour of his features, but he looked to me like Mr. Vanderboy. Besides, who else could he—"

"Never mind who he might be. Can you swear that he was Mr. Vanderpuye and not some other man; Mr. Pedley, for instance?"

“Lord! I never thought of that. Perhaps you’re right, sir, being next door, too. But no, it couldn’t have been, because I saw him walk away towards Hampstead Road.”

“I was not suggesting that the man was Mr. Pedley. I was merely giving an instance. The fact is that you did not actually recognize him at all. You assumed that he was Mr. Vanderpuye. Is that not so?”

The witness reluctantly admitted that it was; and the coroner then proceeded to the identification of the woman with a similar result. There had been no actual recognition. The witness had taken it for granted that she was Mrs. Schiller because “she certainly looked like her, and then who else could she be?” etc.

By this time the coroner and the jury had had enough of Mrs. Bigham, who was, accordingly, dethroned and sent back regretfully to her chair. Then Mrs. Mitchens and Vanderpuye were recalled and briefly re-examined, but neither could throw any light on the incident. Mrs. Mitchens and her husband were early birds and usually retired to their bedroom in the second-floor back at ten o’clock; and Vanderpuye repeated his statement that he had never entered the house at night. This completed the evidence and the coroner proceeded at once to his brief but lucid summing up.

“I need not, members of the jury,” he began, “weary you with a recapitulation of the evidence which you have listened to so attentively, but merely suggest to you the conclusions which seem to emerge from it. Our function is to ascertain when, where, and how deceased, a woman of whom we know nothing but that her name was Emma Robey, came by her death. The place we know was 39 Jacob Street; the exact date is less certain; but the death occurred about three weeks before the discovery of the body on the thirtieth of December, that is approximately on the ninth of December. The cause of death was a very large dose of potassium cyanide either taken by deceased herself, or given to her by some other person. If she took the poison, herself, she may have done so inadvertently, or with the deliberate intention of taking her own life. If it was given to her by some other person, that person is guilty of wilful murder.

“There are thus three possibilities: accident, suicide, and murder. Accident we may dismiss since there is no evidence suggesting it; and we are left with the alternatives of suicide and murder. Now what evidence is there to support the theory of suicide? There are two facts which, taken together, seem at the first glance to point conclusively to self-destruction. First, the finger-marks on the tumbler and water-jug were undoubtedly those of deceased’s own fingers. Secondly, deceased was found alone in a locked room with the key on the inside of the door. These two facts, as I have said, seem to furnish convincing evidence of suicide. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that an experienced police surgeon and an experienced detective-inspector both appear to have suspected from the first and in spite of that evidence that this was a case, not of suicide but of murder; and when they came to give evidence, they gave substantial reasons for their suspicions. Let us consider first the evidence of Inspector Blandy. From him we learn that the evidence of the finger-prints is practically worthless since they could easily have been made by a murderer from the victim’s fingers after death.

“Then we come to the locked door. Now, the fact that Mr. Polton unlocked that door from the outside and could as easily have locked it destroys at once the conclusive significance of that item of evidence. It proves that it was possible for the door to have been locked from the outside. But the inspector’s evidence goes further. It goes to prove that the door was, in fact, locked from the outside. I need not remind you of his convincing demonstration, but I must impress on you the enormous evidential value of the match which he found. That match bore marks that exactly fitted the bow of that particular key and also the clear impression of a loop of string. It was found close to the door in the position in which one would have expected to find it if it had been used in the way which he described and demonstrated; and the door, itself, bore a mark of the exact kind and in the exact place in which it would have been made by a taut string used in that way. On the supposition that the door had been locked from the outside with a match and string, all those appearances are perfectly consistent and understandable. On any other supposition they are completely incomprehensible. I submit that there is no escape from the evidence of that match. We are compelled to believe that the door was locked from the outside and therefore that it could not have been locked by deceased.

The doctor’s evidence concerning the morphia—or morphine, as it is now usually called—which he found in the body, and the significance which he attached to it, was very striking; but it became much more so when we had heard the evidence of Mrs. Bigham. We may disregard her identification of the two persons whom she saw as a mere guess, and probably wrong at that. But what her evidence did prove was that on a certain dark night about three weeks before the discovery of the body (which had been dead about three weeks), a man and a woman entered that house by means of a latch-key.

“Now, who were these two persons? Let us first consider the woman. Mrs. Bigham assumed that she was Mrs. Schiller, from which we may infer that she either was Mrs. Schiller or a woman who might have been mistaken for her. But deceased was actually mistaken for Mrs. Schiller by Mrs. Mitchens and Mr. Pedley, both of whom knew the latter well. It is thus possible that the woman seen by Mrs. Bigham was Emma Robey; and it is here that the doctor’s evidence is so important. The woman looked to Mrs. Bigham as if she were the worse for drink; and the medical witness swore that deceased had taken a considerable dose of morphia. But a person under the influence of morphia might easily be mistaken for one under the influence of alcohol. So that the evidence establishes a rather strong probability that the woman Mrs. Bigham saw was actually the deceased.

“Now let us consider the man. Of his personal appearance we can say no more than that Mrs. Bigham took him to be Mr. Vanderpuye and that there was probably some general resemblance as to age and figure. That, however, is a mere surmise. But there are three facts which seem to be profoundly significant. This man opened the door with a latch-key; but as he might have received it from the woman, that circumstance has no great importance. The three strikingly significant facts

that I allude to are: first, that he still had the key in his possession when he came out; second, that he took extraordinary precautions against noise by easing the door to with the key; third, that when he came out he was carrying a bag or suitcase which he was not carrying when he went in.

"What was he doing with that latch-key, which was certainly not his, whoever he was? The strong suggestion is that he had kept it for the express purpose of shutting the door silently. But why that strange, stealthy exit? Why was he so anxious that his departure should not be known to the inmates of the house? Finally, whose bag was it that he was carrying, and what was in it? When we ask ourselves those questions, remembering that this man had been in the house, apparently alone with the woman, for an hour and a half, the answer seems to be that his behaviour is singularly suggestive of that of one escaping from the scene of a crime and taking with him certain incriminating objects connected with it. That, I say, is the suggestion. It is nothing more, taken alone. But taken together with the evidence of the doctor and the inspector, it is, perhaps, more than suggestion. That is for you to judge. When you consider your verdict you will have to decide between two alternatives: did deceased meet her death by her own act or by the act of another; did she commit suicide or was she murdered? That is the issue, and I leave you to consider it."

The silence that settled down on the court as the coroner concluded his address was of short duration; so short as to suggest that the jury had already made up their minds; for within a couple of minutes the foreman announced that they had agreed on their verdict.

"We find," said he, in answer to the coroner's question, "that deceased died from the effects of poison, administered to her by some person unknown."

"Yes," said the coroner, "that is a verdict of wilful murder. I shall enter it as such, and I may say that I am in full agreement with you."

This brought the proceedings to an end. The witnesses, spectators, and reporters rose and began to file out of the court: Dr. Oldfield bustled out to his waiting car with the inspector, and Tom Pedley, Polton, and Vanderpuye went off together en route for the studio.

---

## IX. — WHERE IS LOTTA?

THE inquest and the events which had preceded it had broken in on the quiet current of Tom Pedley's life leaving him somewhat unsettled, and as the day following the inquiry found him disinclined for regular work he devoted it to a survey of his stock of materials and the drawing up in his note-book of a list of deficiencies. The process disclosed the fact that the book which he was using was nearly full and that he had no other to replace it. Now, Tom's note-books were no mere ready-made productions which could be bought when required. They had been designed by him with careful thought as to suitability of size, shape, thickness, and binding, and were specially made for him, of a selected paper which was good for pen or pencil, or, at a pinch, a wash of colour, by the artists' colourman in the Hampstead Road. He usually ordered a dozen at a time, and each one, as it became used up, was provided with a date label on the back and was stowed away on a shelf with its predecessors to form part of an ever-growing series.

It was an admirable plan; for not only did the series furnish a store of material for reference, but, since Tom invariably dated his sketches no matter how slight, and even the written notes, the collection served as a fairly complete diary and a record of his doings and his whereabouts on a given date. Accordingly, having added to his list a dozen of the indispensable note books, he set forth at once for the establishment of the provider.

As he turned the corner of Jacob Street into the Hampstead Road, he perceived, a short distance ahead, his old acquaintance Inspector Blandy in earnest conversation with Mrs. Bigham; and as he had no desire for a meeting with either the inspector or Mrs. Bigham (whom he privately regarded as an inveterate "Nosy Parker"), he mended his pace and assumed an air of intense preoccupation. But it was of no use. Both saw him at the same moment; and the inspector, hastily detaching himself from the lady, advanced to meet him, holding out his hand and beaming with benevolence.

"This is a stroke of good fortune for me," he exclaimed, pressing Tom's hand affectionately, "I have been wanting to have a word with you and now here you are."

Tom agreed, cautiously, that there he was and waited for developments.

"The matter is this," the inspector explained: "We have been trying to get into touch with Mrs. Schiller but we haven't succeeded. Either she hasn't seen our advertisements or she is keeping out of the way; and, as she won't, or at least, doesn't, come forward, we must take more active measures. To do that, we must have a full and exact description of her, and the question has arisen, how are we to get it? Now, as soon as that question arose, my thoughts naturally turned to you. Mr. Pedley, I said, with his remarkable powers of observation and his wonderful visual memory, will be able to give us a description that will be as good as, or even better than, a photograph."

"Is Mrs. Schiller under suspicion?" Tom asked, warily.

"Suspicion!" the inspector repeated in a shocked tone. "Certainly not. Why should she be? But she could give us invaluable information respecting that key, for instance, and perhaps about Mrs. Robey and those other unknown persons. I trust you won't refuse us your help. It is to her interest as well as being a matter of public policy that this mystery should be cleared up."

"I shouldn't be prepared to give a description offhand," said Tom.

"Of course you wouldn't," Blandy agreed. "The visual memory must have time to operate—but not too much time, as the matter is urgent. I suggest that you think it over and jot down a few notes."

"And post them to you," Tom suggested, hopefully; but the inspector amended:

"Hand them to me, personally. You see, they might need some explanation and amplification. Would it be possible for me to call for them at your studio this evening?"

Deciding that it would be best to get the business over at once, Tom assented, and, when the hour of 7.30 had been agreed on, he shook the inspector's hand and left him to rejoin Mrs. Bigham (who had been lurking observantly in the offing) while he hurried away to the shop of the artists' colourman.

Having transacted his business there, he came away, and turning northward, started on a brisk walk through the quiet squares to consider the situation. The whole affair was extremely distasteful to him. He had no love for Lotta Schiller, but she had been in a sense his friend, and his natural loyalty revolted against the idea of his aiding the police in their pursuit of her; for that was what it amounted to in spite of Blandy's indignant protest. Obviously, she was under suspicion; but to what extent and how justly Tom did not like to ask himself. However, he had no choice. A crime had been committed and it was his duty as a good citizen to give what help he could to the police in their investigation of it; and having reached this conclusion, he turned his face homeward to give effect to it.

Once embarked on the description, he carried it out with his customary thoroughness. On one of the few remaining pages of his note-book, he jotted down his recollections of Lotta, point by point, referring back to the memory sketches that he had made of her for details of the profile, and trying to visualize her as completely as was possible. The result rather surprised him; for though he had seen her often enough and observed her with a certain disapproving interest, he had not expected that his memory would have yielded a description so vivid and so full of detail.

When he had completed his notes, he took a sheet of paper and wrote out a fair copy, thereby making the production of the note-book unnecessary; and he had but just finished this when, punctually to the minute, the studio bell rang, whereupon he pocketed the note book and went out to admit the inspector.

"This is extraordinarily kind of you, Mr. Pedley," said Blandy as he entered and smiled a general benediction on the premises, "to let me take up your valuable time in this way. But I mustn't take up too much of it. Are these the notes?"

He picked up the copy which Tom had placed on the table, and, laying down a portfolio that he had brought (which Tom instantly recognized as Lotta's) glanced rapidly through the notes, while Tom speculated anxiously on the significance of the portfolio.

"Astonishing!" Blandy exclaimed as he finished the preliminary reading. "One might have thought that you had the lady before you as you wrote. What a wonderful thing is the artist's visual memory. You seem to have observed and remembered everything, even to the difference between the two ears. By the way, what exactly does a Darwinian tubercle look like? Perhaps a slight sketch on the back of this paper—"

Tom took the copy from him, and, turning it over made a rapid but careful pencil sketch of a right ear, showing the feature in question.

"Oh, thank you," said Blandy, taking the paper from him. "I see. This little projection on the edge is the tubercle. But tell me; does this drawing represent that particular ear in other respects?"

"It does as nearly as I can remember."

"That is good enough for me. And now with regard to the hair; I am not quite clear about that. You say, 'Hair unusual in colour; between light brown and flaxen, but of a peculiar texture which makes the colour seem variable.' Could you amplify that description?"

"Well," said Tom, "I am not very clear about it myself, as I have never seen any other hair quite like it. I might compare it to shot silk. You know what that looks like; changes in colour when you move it about and let the light fall on it differently; green, it may be, in one position, and violet in another. Of course, Mrs. Schiller's hair doesn't change to that extent, but it does seem to change; quite golden in one light and almost brown in another."

"You don't think it may have been dyed or faked in some way?"

"That is possible. Light hair dyed black sometimes looks red or purple when the light shines through it, but I never got the impression that her hair was dyed. However, I expect you know more about faked hair than I do."

The inspector admitted that it might be so, and, having entered the "amplification" on the back of the sheet, put one or two questions concerning the other items of the description. When these had been disposed of, he carefully put away the document, and, after a few moments' reflection, asked:

"By the way, Mr. Pedley, when did you last see Mrs. Schiller?"

"On the day of the Epping Forest jaunt, I parted from her and Vanderpuye close by the Ancient British camp, they taking the green ride towards High Beach and I going on to Great Monk Wood. We said 'good bye' at the corner, and I never saw her again."

"Rather odd, that. Don't you think so?"

"I did at the time, but then I didn't know she was going away. In fact, I expected that she would look me up within a day or two, and I even got out a map of the forest and a large-scale plan of the British camp to show or lend her."

"Why did you do that?" asked Blandy.

"I thought she intended to make another visit there. She seemed greatly interested in the camp, and she proposed to Vanderpuye that they should come another day and explore it; and, as he agreed, I took it as a settled thing."

"You don't happen to know whether they did make another visit there?"

"They couldn't have done, as Vanderpuye never saw her again after that night. You heard him say so at the inquest. But what I can't understand is why she made the proposal when she had already decided to go to Birmingham."

"Yes," the inspector agreed, thoughtfully, "it does seem a bit inconsistent. I wonder—"

But what he wondered never transpired, as he left the sentence unfinished and Tom did not pursue the subject. A brief silence followed. Then the inspector said, taking up the portfolio:

"I am going still further to trespass on your forbearance. Would you be so very kind as to look at these paintings of Mrs. Schiller's and give me your opinion of them?"

"I am not a critic, you know, Inspector," Tom protested. "My job is to paint pictures, not to judge other people's work."

"I know," said Blandy, "and I understand your delicacy. But the point is this: is Mrs. Schiller an artist at all or is she an impostor? Now, look at that." He drew forth the painting of Adam and Eve and laid it on the table. "It looks to me like a child's drawing, and not a clever child at that."

Tom had to admit that it did, "but," he added, "there is a new fashion in art which accepts childish drawing as the real thing. I don't understand it, but the highbrow journalists do. Why not get an opinion from an art critic?"

Blandy shook his head. "That is no use to me, Mr. Pedley. I don't want to hear a man expound theories or spin phrases. I am out for facts. Now you are a genuine artist. I can see that for myself. You know what a competent artist is like, and I ask you to tell me, in confidence, whether Mrs. Schiller is a bona fide artist or only an impostor. Remember, I am a police officer seeking information, and I think you ought to be frank with me."

"Well, Inspector," said Tom, "if it will help you, I will tell you what I know, but I don't want to offer mere opinions. I know that Mrs. Schiller can't draw and can't paint, and that she seems to have no natural aptitude for painting. Whether she is or is not an impostor, I can't tell you. If she honestly believes that she is an artist, she is suffering from a delusion; if she knows that she is not an artist, but pretends that she is, she is an impostor. That is all I can say."

"It's enough for me," said Blandy. "I can answer the other question for myself. And now I will just pop round and put this portfolio back where I found it; and I can't thank you enough, Mr. Pedley, for the generous way in which you have placed at my disposal your vast stores of knowledge and experience and your really astonishing powers of memory."

With this final flourish, he shook Tom's hand affectionately and allowed himself to be escorted to the gate.

Having launched his visitor into the street, Tom returned to the studio breathing more freely and hoping that he had now heard the last of the unpleasant affair in which he had become involved. And, in the days that followed, that hope seemed to be justified. Gradually he drifted back into his ordinary ways of life, now working in the studio at a new subject picture and now going forth in overcoat and warm gloves to make a rapid winter sketch in some accessible country district. An occasional glance at a newspaper told him that the mysterious Emma Robey was still unidentified and that the search for the equally mysterious Mrs. Schiller had yielded no results. But, beyond a faint curiosity as to what part Lotta had played in the crime and a hope that she was not in for serious trouble, he was not much interested. His principal desire was to be left alone to get on with his painting.

About three weeks later he made a fresh contact with the case, but it was such a slight one that, at the moment, it caused him no concern. It is true that when, in answer to the summons of the bell, he went out to the gate and found Inspector Blandy on the threshold, he was slightly disturbed until that officer announced his harmless mission.

"I am ashamed, Mr. Pedley, to come pestering you in this way, but I won't detain you a minute. You were so kind as to mention, when I last called on you, that you had put out a plan of the British camp at Loughton to show or lend to Mrs. Schiller. Now I have come to ask if you would be so very good as to let me see that plan."

"But, of course, Inspector," Tom replied, ushering him into the studio. "Do you want to look at it here, or would you like to take it away with you to study at your leisure?"

"That is a most generous suggestion, sir," said Blandy (who had obviously come to borrow the plan). "I didn't dare to make it myself, but if you would be so extremely kind—"

"Not at all," Tom replied, opening a cupboard and running his eye along the shelves. "Ah, here we are. It's really a pamphlet, you see, with a folded plan bound up with the text, so you've got all the information together. I hope you will find it useful, and you needn't be in any hurry about returning it."

He handed the little volume to the inspector, who, having glanced at it, slipped it into his pocket and then tactfully retired, discharging volleys of thanks on the way to the gate. When he had gone, Tom returned to the studio and prepared



to resume his work; but, for once, his curiosity was definitely aroused. It had really been a rather odd transaction. For what purpose could the inspector require the plan? And why had he suddenly developed this curious "interest" in the British camp? These questions Tom continued to revolve in his mind at intervals for the rest of the evening, but answer there was none. He could make nothing of it, and at last put it away with the reflection that he could only wait and see what came of it.

He had not long to wait. On the following morning when he went forth to do his modest shopping, he was confronted with a staring poster outside the newsagent's announcing in enormous type: "Jacob Street Murder: Dramatic Development," and straightway went in and bought a paper. A single glance at the scare headlines on the front page enlightened him sufficiently as to the purpose of the inspector's visit and he folded up the paper and pocketed it for more leisurely perusal when he had finished his shopping.

At length, having completed his round, he re-entered the studio; deposited his parcels on the table, drew out the paper, and subsiding into the easy-chair, read through the account in all its detail. Omitting the typographical flourishes, it ran as follows:

"Yesterday morning a forester, making his round through that part of Epping Forest which constitutes Loughton Manor, made a startling discovery. Following the green path that skirts the ancient British earthworks known as Loughton Camp, he noticed among the roots of the trees half-way up the bank, and nearly hidden by the fallen leaves, a lady's handbag. Climbing up the bank and brushing aside the leaves, he picked it up, and, having noted the initials, L. S., on the outside, opened it to see if it bore any clue to the identity of the owner. Inside it he found, among other things, a leather card-case containing a number of visiting cards, and on drawing one out he read on it, 'Mrs. L. Schiller, 39 Jacob Street, Hampstead Road, London.'"

"Recognizing the name from the Press notices that he had read, he immediately realized the importance of the discovery and proceeded without delay to Loughton Police Station where he delivered the bag to the officer in charge and described exactly the place where he had found it. A preliminary inspection showed that the bag contained, in addition to the visiting cards, two objects of considerable interest. One was a small blue handkerchief bearing the name, 'Lotta,' embroidered in blue silk, in one corner, and closely resembling the handkerchief found on the person of the murdered woman, Emma Robey; the other was a leather key-pouch with a separate swivel for each key. There were six swivels but only four keys; and it could be seen, by the distinct impressions on the leather, that the two missing keys were, respectively, a latch-key and the key of a room door or the door of a large cupboard. Having made his inspection, the superintendent reported by telephone to headquarters at Scotland Yard, and meanwhile dispatched a detective officer to accompany the forester to the place where the bag was found, to mark the spot and to keep it under observation until he was relieved.

"In reply to the telephone message, the superintendent was informed that a C.I.D. officer was being sent down to conduct inquiries; and about an hour later a police car arrived bearing Detective-inspector Blandy and Sergeant Hill, both of the C.I.D. These two officers, having seen and taken possession of the bag, were conducted to the spot where the local detective was waiting, and, with his assistance and that of the forester, they made a systematic search of the immediate locality. As nothing further came to light there, they climbed the bank and descended into the area of the camp, where they separated and carried out a methodical search of the ground, which was covered by a dense growth of pollard hornbeams and a thick mantle of dead leaves.

"For some time the search was without result; but at length it was rewarded by a new and most significant discovery. Tucked away in a hollow between the roots of a small hornbeam, the sergeant espied a gold locket, whereupon he signalled to the inspector and meanwhile made a distinguishing mark on the tree. Examination of the locket showed it to be a handsome and valuable trinket, richly ornamented with enamel and bearing the engraved initials, 'L. S.,' and when it was opened, one side was seen to be occupied by a portrait of a coloured gentleman in a wig and gown while the other held what at first looked like the hair-spring of a watch but was in fact a single coiled hair of the African type, presumably from the head of the legal gentleman.

"The rest of the search yielded no further discoveries, but these two relics of the missing woman furnish abundant material for speculation; for instance—"

Here the writer illustrated the point by various speculative suggestions, which we need not quote, and to which Tom paid little attention as they contained nothing that he did not know. But as he reflected on the facts disclosed, certain uncomfortable questions presented themselves and demanded answers.

What had really happened to Lotta? Had she been lured to that solitary place and made away with? That was the plain suggestion; and it seemed to be the one adopted by the police, judging by the inspector's sudden interest in the plan—after the finding of the locket—which hinted at a further and more thorough exploration. But what could she have been doing in the forest? When and why had she gone there? Who was her companion, and what was the connection between the new tragedy and the murder of Emma Robey? That there was some connection seemed to be proved by the vanished keys and the curious resemblance of the two handkerchiefs; and this latter seemed to hint at some complicity on Lotta's part.

But it was all very obscure and confusing. Tom could make nothing of it and finally decided to wait for further developments, and meanwhile to avoid as far as was possible letting his thoughts dwell on it. Which was a decision more easily formed than carried out. For though he had never had any great liking for Lotta, it troubled him deeply to think that any mischance might have befallen her and still more to suspect her of a guilty connection with a most atrocious crime.

---

## X. — THE CAMP REVISITED

ONCE again, Tom Pedley stood at the parting of the ways outside the ancient British camp looking thoughtfully along the broad green ride that leads towards High Beach. Under the grey winter sky the scene lacked the beauty and gaiety that had charmed him when he had last looked on it, with the late autumn sunshine lighting up the gorgeous raiment of the beech-trees and sprinkling the bushes with gold and the turf with emerald, yet the picture came back to him, not for the first time, with singular vividness; the two figures stepping out gaily and babbling cheerfully as they went, dwindling to the eye with every pace, and at last, halting at the curve to make their farewells. Little had he thought as he returned Lotta's greeting that he was looking his last on her; that the wave of her hand was a final farewell and that as she turned and disappeared round the bend, she had passed out of his ken for ever.

His presence in the forest was not entirely voluntary. He had not wanted to come. But his friend, Polton, had entreated him so earnestly to seize this opportunity (which he, the said Polton, had secured), that Tom had not the heart to disappoint him. So here he was, taking as little advantage of the opportunity as he could decently manage with due regard to his friend's feelings.

The occasion was the complete and final exploration of the ten or twelve acres of land enclosed by the ramparts, with the object of clearing up the mystery of Lotta Schiller's disappearance. The *prima facie* appearances strongly suggested that she had been murdered; and if she had, the overwhelming probability was that her body had been concealed in this enclosed space. Hence, the police, feeling that all doubts on the subject should be set at rest as soon as possible, had decided that the suspected area must be examined with such conclusive thoroughness as to settle the question finally.

But there was a difficulty. Since the camp was scheduled as an ancient monument, promiscuous digging was inadmissible. That difficulty, however, was easily disposed of. To an expert eye, any disturbance of the surface, no matter how artfully disguised, is instantly discernible, and there is no lack of expert eyes in the Criminal Investigation Department. Eventually it was arranged that the Office of Works should send a representative and that the C.I.D. officers, under Inspector Blandy, should be assisted by certain competent volunteers from the Essex Field Club, and by Mr. Elmhurst, the eminent Kentish archaeologist, whose great experience in the excavation of ancient sites had commended him both to the police and the Office of Works. Thus was ensured a most complete exploration of the precincts with security against possible damage to the camp from an antiquarian point of view.

Now, it happened that Mr. Polton got wind of the proposed investigation and was forthwith all agog to be present; for that cunning artificer had followed with eager, almost ghoulish, interest every phase of the crime whose discovery he had witnessed. And now the final act of the tragedy was about to be played with the possible exhumation of a corpse as its climax. It was too much for him. By hook or by crook he must manage to secure a front seat. And he did. By an artful and persuasive offer to his old acquaintance, Inspector Blandy, of assistance in the matter of photography and plaster moulding, he succeeded in extracting an invitation from that suave and polite officer. But more than this; representing to the inspector the invaluable service that Tom Pedley might render in identifying objects or remains (and really convincing him this time), he got the invitation extended, much more to his own satisfaction than to Tom's. So here they were with the assembled explorers, Polton following every movement with devouring interest while Tom browsed about in the neighbourhood of the camp and made occasional visits of inspection.

The examination was conducted with professional thoroughness. The precincts being marked out into sections by pencil lines on the plan, each section was pegged out on the ground and dealt with exhaustively before passing on to the next. No labourers were employed, the whole procedure being carried out by the skilled explorers, who tenderly removed the thick mantle of dead leaves, almost leaf by leaf, to ensure that the actual surface should be exposed quite undisturbed. And it was well that they did; for the very first section uncovered showed the traces, faint but quite recognizable, of two pairs of feet, those of a man and a woman.

"They are not very good prints," said Blandy when Polton offered to take casts and a photograph. "Made through the leaves, apparently. We'll cover them up for the present and see if anything better turns up."

Accordingly an empty sack was laid, carefully, on the footprints and the examination proceeded. The next section showed more prints, but these also were rather shallow and blurred, suggesting some thickness of dead leaves between the feet and the earth; and so it went on for two more sections, each showing faint impressions of the two pairs of feet, and all of them displaying the prints of those feet in parallel pairs, implying that the two persons were walking side by side.

At this point the inspector, who had been anxiously poring over the plan, called out to Sergeant Hill:

"Aren't we getting near the tree that we marked, Sergeant? I put a pencilled cross on the plan, but that was only guesswork, away from the place."

"I think you are right, sir," the sergeant replied, "it was somewhere about here. I'll just go on ahead and see if I can find it."

He walked forward, treading delicately on the russet carpet of leaves and peering among the weird-looking dwarf beeches and hornbeams that jostled one another in the precincts, like a crowd of fantastic hamadryads, and spread out their contorted roots over the surface. Then he disappeared into the miniature forest, and for a time, soft rustlings from the coppice announced his unseen activities. Suddenly, a louder sound, as of a falling body, with expletory accompaniments, was borne to the inspector's ears, and a few moments later the sergeant reappeared with a slightly uneven gait.

"Tripped over one of those damned roots," he explained, stooping to rub his right foot, "but I found the tree, sir, and laid my handkerchief at the foot of the trunk so that we can't possibly miss it."

Meanwhile the explorers went on steadily with their work, and, having at length uncovered the surface of the whole section and minutely examined every square inch of it, proceeded to peg out the next under the direction of Mr. Elmhurst, who wielded a surveyor's tape and entered the particulars on his copy of the plan. In the course of his measurements he encountered the marked tree, which was contained in the new section and which, having been exactly located by means of the land-tape, acquired "a local habitation and a name" on the plan.

"Now," said the sergeant, "we ought to see what that locket meant. Something must have happened, and it must have happened just about here; and I think it would be as well to lay down some sacks for the workers to stand on."

This suggestion was adopted, and, when the sacks had been spread on the ground, the whole company of explorers concentrated on this region, clearing a broad track towards the tree and scrutinizing each handful of leaves as it was removed. The ground thus uncovered still bore the imprints, faint and blurred, of the two pairs of feet, which continued evenly side by side until they had been traced to a point within a few yards of the tree. Then there was a sudden change in two respects. No longer dim and faint, the footprints were now clear, sharp, and deeply impressed in the moist, clayey soil; and in place of the orderly, parallel lines, there appeared a confused welter of footprints pointing in all directions and overlapping and partially obliterating one another over a considerable area. From this a line of prints led in the direction of the tree, but although both pairs of feet could be distinguished, they were no longer side by side. Both led straight ahead and both had conspicuously deep toe-marks; but whereas the woman's footprints were in some places trodden into, those of the man were all whole and undisturbed.

"Seem to tell their story pretty plainly, don't they?" said the sergeant, viewing the whole group critically from his sack, and addressing Mr. Elmhurst.

"So it appears to me," the latter replied. "My reading of them is that the couple walked together to this place, side by side and apparently quite amicably; then the man made a sudden attack and there was a struggle which ended in the woman escaping and running off, pursued by the man."

"That's about what it amounts to," the sergeant agreed; "and now the question is, what was the next act? For the Lord's sake be careful in uncovering the rest of the tracks."

But the caution was unnecessary, for all the explorers were now on the tiptoe of expectation, and the position of the tracks being known, they were able to work from the sides and avoid the risk of treading on the prints.

"It is a bit of luck for us, sir," the sergeant remarked to Blandy, "that the prints that matter most should happen to be the clearest. The ground here must have been uncovered at the time, and the leaves blown over it afterwards. I only hope the rest of the tracks will be as distinct."

"It's of no great importance," the inspector replied. "We know they were here, and we know who one of them was. The real question is, What has become of the woman?"

A couple of minutes later, that question seemed on the way to being answered; for, opposite the marked tree and extending several yards beyond it, was an area of heavily trampled ground on which the impressions of the two pairs of feet were so intermingled and confused that hardly a complete footprint was distinguishable. And the sergeant's hopes were realized. The imprints had evidently been made on bare ground and the few that were whole were deep and remarkably distinct.

"Well, sir," said the sergeant, "there seems to have been a pretty considerable dust-up. He didn't have it all his own way. I wonder how—"

He did not finish the sentence, for the inspector was not listening. His sharp eye had apparently noticed something ahead, for after one long and intent look accompanied by the inevitable smile, he advanced over the uncleared leaves with a sack in either hand to a spot beyond the tree where the clearance was still in progress. Here he laid down one sack, and standing on it, stooped low and pore over the ground at his feet. After a full minute's scrutiny, he stood up and looked significantly at the sergeant, who had followed him.

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant, "I see what you mean. This is where it ended. There's a clean-cut groove made by her heel as she slipped, and there are two marks that show, plainly, the heel ends of her shoes. She must have been lying down on her back to make those marks. And I seem to make out an impression of the body."

"Seem," the inspector repeated impatiently. "It's as plain as a pikestaff. She came down on that group of footprints and flattened some of them out. You can see where her shoulders came, and beyond them a faint mark where the head would have been; and right underneath us is a slight flattening of the footprints where the hips would have rested. It is not very clear but it is just in the right place."

He drew a spring tape from his pocket and, stooping down, measured the distance from the two heel impressions to the middle of the ill-defined flattening.

"Yes," he reported with his thumb on the tape, "thirty-three inches, and her height was about five feet seven. And now the question is, What happened next? She couldn't have got up without making some very characteristic foot-marks; and there aren't any. But there are one or two very distinct prints of the man's feet and they seem to be on top of the others. Let

us see where they go to.”

He picked up his sacks, and, followed by the sergeant, moved forward over the heaped-up leaves by the side of the uncovered track, following eagerly with his eyes the footprints that the clearance had disclosed, until he reached the place where the work of clearing was still going on.

“Only a single line of footprints, you see,” he remarked. “Not a sign of the woman, though, if she had come this way, her heels at least would have shown plainly. What do you think of these prints? Do they strike you as specially deep?”

“I was just wondering,” the sergeant replied. “They ought to be if he was carrying a woman who might have been nearly as heavy as himself. But it’s rather hard to judge.”

“It is,” Blandy agreed; “and when you have judged, it’s only an opinion. What we want is an actual measurement. I wonder if Mr. Polton has brought his plaster outfit.”

“If he hasn’t, we have,” said the sergeant, who slightly resented the presence of the unofficial interloper; “and we are quite competent to do the job.”

“Of course we are,” said Blandy, tactfully using the first person, “but Polton isn’t only competent, he is a first-class expert. We must see if he has brought his kit.”

There was no difficulty in finding out, for Polton, thrilled by the discovery of the “signs of a struggle,” had been unobtrusively following the inspector with a gloating eye fixed on the tell-tale markings. When the inspector broached the subject to him, his eyes glistened.

“Yes, sir,” he replied eagerly. “I’ve got a good supply of the best sculptor’s plaster and enough water to start with. As you want the moulds for measurement, it will be necessary to include the surface of the ground immediately surrounding the footprint.”

“Exactly,” replied Blandy; “that’s the idea. Give us an edge that can be measured.”

“And as to a control, sir? When I have made a mould of one of these prints, would you like me to do one of those where the two parties were walking together?”

“Certainly, if you will be so good. We must have the means of comparison to ascertain whether these prints are deeper than the others.”

With these instructions, Polton hastened away to the entrance to the camp, where he had deposited his kit, and returned carrying a heavy suitcase and a three-pint can of water. The inspector selected a sample footprint, Mr. Elmhurst marked its position on his copy of the chart, with a distinguishing letter, and Polton opened his case and fell to work. Meanwhile, the explorers, still following the tracks, had uncovered another fifty yards, along which the solitary walker could be traced, now with difficulty where he had apparently tramped over the thick coating of leaves, now quite easily where he had trodden on the bare earth. But for the moment the inspector let them work unheeded while he and the sergeant and Mr. Elmhurst stood by and watched Polton’s rapid and skilful manipulation of the plaster.

“Don’t you usually spray some varnish into the footprint before pouring the plaster?” the inspector asked.

“Not in clay, sir,” Polton replied. “Clay—moist clay like this—takes the plaster quite kindly and gives a beautifully sharp mould. Besides, sir, there are the measurements. They will be very delicate, and even a thin film of varnish might affect them.

“Very true, Mr. Polton,” Blandy agreed. “We must be correct to a hair’s breadth.”

Accordingly the moulder proceeded with his task, and having poured the plaster and put in the iron wire reinforcements was watching the surface as it solidified when one of the explorers approached hurriedly, holding some object daintily between his finger and thumb.

“We found this, Inspector, among the leaves just at the foot of the bank,” he announced as he delivered the object—a painted wooden button—to Blandy. “I thought I had better bring it along at once.”

“You are extremely kind,” said Blandy, taking the button from him and regarding it with mild interest. “Then you have actually reached the bank?”

“Yes; and there are footmarks on it—rather indistinct but quite unmistakable—and there is a broken branch which seems to have given way when the man caught hold of it climbing up the slope.”

“And the footmarks? Any trace of the woman?”

“No; unless that button belonged to her, which seems rather probable.”

“It does,” said Blandy, “but probability isn’t much good.” He looked at the button reflectively and then held it out towards Polton, who took it from him and, having examined it minutely, handed it back.

“I can’t identify it, sir,” he announced regretfully; “but then I shouldn’t be likely to, having seen so little of the lady. But Mr. Pedley might. He used to see her pretty often—and there he is, coming up the track at this very moment.”

As Tom approached rather wearily along the uncleared border of the track, the inspector hailed him and held out the button; whereupon Tom quickened his pace.

"This button has just been picked up, Mr. Pedley," said Blandy. "Can you tell us anything about it?"

Tom took it from him, and after one brief glance, replied,

"Yes. It is a button from Mrs. Schiller's jacket."

"You speak quite positively," said Blandy. "Do you mean that she had buttons of this kind on her jacket or that you can definitely identify this button? To me, it looks like an ordinary trade button such as you can see at Woolworth's."

"That is what it was, originally," replied Tom; "just a plain wooden button covered with a pink cellulose glaze. But she had a fancy for decorating the set with a painted design, and she consulted me about the method of doing it. I recommended her to use ordinary oil paint varnished with copal; and when she had painted them, as she hadn't any copal varnish, she brought them to me and I put a coat of varnish over them. This is certainly one of those buttons. I recognized it at a glance by the material, the technique, and the design, which I think represents some sort of flower."

"Then," said Blandy, "you could swear, positively, in a court of law, that this button was actually on Mrs. Schiller's jacket?"

"Certainly I could," Tom replied. "I saw the buttons on the jacket—which, by the way, was a green jacket; and here is a thread of green silk still sticking in the eye of the button."

"Yes," said the inspector, verifying the fact as Tom returned the button, "very complete, very conclusive. I wish some of the other evidence was as good."

He carefully wrapped the button in an envelope from his wallet, and having bestowed it in an inner pocket, turned to the volunteer who had brought it.

"I will come back with you and get you to show me exactly where you found this button. Have they completed the clearance of the bank?"

"No, Inspector. They had only begun; but we could see the footmarks on the slope as the leaves hadn't settled there very thickly."

"Then perhaps there may be something more to see by this time," said Blandy; and with that he started off along the edge of the track, accompanied by his informant and followed by the sergeant and Mr. Elmhurst, but not by Polton, who dared not leave his half-made mould.

When the party arrived at the bank, the inspector's hopeful surmise was justified. The footmarks on the steep slope, indistinctive as they were, told their story plainly enough. The unknown man had climbed the bank more than once, apparently helping himself by the lower branches of a pollard beech, one of which had broken under his weight. In one place, an elongated mark showed where he had slipped, and in another, deep heel-marks furnished evidence that he had descended the bank into the camp at least once.

"Looks as if he had gone to the top of the bank to see if all was clear on the other side," the sergeant remarked, "and then come back to fetch something; and we can guess what that something was."

"There is no need to guess," said Blandy. "Look at this."

Standing on the swept-up leaves at the side, he pointed to two small and faint impressions on the cleared ground, each of which was accompanied by a little sharp-edged dent.

"You're right, sir," agreed the sergeant, craning forward eagerly. "Those are the prints of the back parts of a pair of feet, and those little sharp-edged marks show that they were a woman's feet. No man's heel would make a mark like that."

At this moment Polton came bustling up with his suitcase and water-can. Setting the former down on the leaves, he opened it and took out a bundle of lint, from which he extracted the newly made mould, and offered it for inspection.

The sergeant looked at it and chuckled. "It's quite uncanny," said he; "looks just like the sole of a white shoe, and for purposes of comparison it is as good as the shoe itself. How would it be, sir, for Mr. Polton to make a plaster mould of these two impressions?"

"Just what I was thinking, sergeant. What do you say, Mr. Polton? Have you got a fair supply of plaster?"

"I've got enough for three or four more moulds if I'm careful," Polton replied; "and these little shallow impressions wouldn't take much. I should have plenty for those other prints that have to be done."

"Thank you," said Blandy. "It's rather important, as the moulds will probably show the forms of the heels more clearly."

Accordingly, Polton set to work at once while the inspector resumed his examination of the bank, climbing to the top and scrutinizing the ground narrowly. Here he found obscure traces of something having been dragged across the top, and, what was more significant, a tiny thread of green silk caught on the ragged end of a broken twig. This he put in the envelope with the button and wrote on the outside a short descriptive note. Then he descended the outer slope of the bank and anxiously surveyed the ground at its base. But here the appearances were unpromising in the extreme, for he was now on the green ride, the ancient and well-trodden turf of which yielded no impressions what ever, as he ascertained by walking a few paces and noting the total absence of any resulting footprints.

"Well," he said gloomily to Mr. Elmhurst, who, with the sergeant, had followed him down, "this looks like the end of the

trail. Can you see which way he went?"

Elmhurst shook his head. "Nothing lighter than a horse would leave visible traces on this turf. We shall have to try to pick up the tracks farther afield, if he really carried the body out of the camp. It isn't certain that he did. We haven't finished clearing the surface yet, and until the whole of the camp has been examined we can't be sure that the body is not concealed in it, after all."

But the inspector was not comforted by this faint encouragement.

"No," he admitted, "but we've followed the tracks to the top of the bank and it's pretty clear that he came out that way. Still, you are quite right. We mustn't leave any possibility untested."

The pursuit was accordingly suspended for the moment. Elmhurst went back to the explorers and resumed the systematic examination of the camp; Polton, having finished the small moulds (which showed clearly the backs of a woman's high-heeled shoes) returned along the tracks and made a "control" mould of the man's footprints, where he was walking with his companion, one of the woman's at the same place, and one of the two feet of the prostrate figure near the tree; and in all these cases he photographed the impressions before making the moulds.

All this, with necessary adjournments for refreshment, took time, and the daylight was already failing when Mr. Elmhurst sought out the inspector to make his report.

"Well, Inspector," said he, "she isn't here. Every inch of the camp has been examined, and there is no trace whatever of any disturbance of the surface. Of course, this elaborate procedure was hardly necessary, but it is all to the good. It settles the question beyond any possible doubt."

"It does," Blandy agreed gloomily. "But it is a disappointing result."

"I am afraid it is," Elmhurst admitted. "Still, it is conclusive, and it doesn't close the inquiry. If she isn't here, she must be somewhere else; and," he added encouragingly, "you've got all the rest of the forest, with the ponds and lakes, as a possibility."

Blandy smiled, less benevolently than usual. "The idea of a man," said he, "strolling about the forest, even at night, carrying the body of a good-sized woman, doesn't appeal to me. However, I suppose we shall have to consider the possibility."

Thus, unsatisfactorily, ended the exploration which had seemed in the morning so promising. It was not the end of the search. On succeeding days, the police, aided by the foresters and local members of the field club, roamed through glades and thickets, now carpeted with fallen leaves, seeking in vain some trace of the missing woman. The ponds at the Cuckoo Pits and various other sheets of water were dragged, the margins of streams searched for footprints, but nothing came of it. When all was done, and the search was at last abandoned, Inspector Blandy's verdict was justified. The marks on the summit of the rampart were "the end of the trail." There Lotta Schiller, dead or alive, had vanished; whither or in what state no man could tell. She had gone, taking with her the secret (if it had been known to her) of the mysterious death of Emma Robey and of the name of her murderer.

Doubtless the police kept her in mind and continued their inquiries; but if so, no faintest whisper of any discovery ever transpired. To Mr. Polton with his dossier of newspaper cuttings, now tidily put away its appropriate shelf, the failure was a deep disappointment which he hoped was not final. To Tom Pedley it was something of a relief; and as the weeks passed into months and the months into years, the memory of those tragic incidents faded by degrees until it was almost too dim to be painful.



**PART II. — THE UNKNOWN FACTOR**  
**NARRATED BY CHRISTOPHER JERVIS, M.D.**

**XI. — MR. PENFIELD OPENS THE BALL**

THE mountain that was in labour and brought forth a mouse is familiar to us all; but none of us, I suspect, and certainly not I, have ever heard of a mouse that was in labour and brought forth a mountain. Yet, since we are dealing with impossibilities, the one metaphor seems as good as the other. But I shall not argue the question. The second metaphor occurs to me only as illustrating the truth that trivial actions of unimportant persons may generate disproportionately momentous results; a proposition that is obvious enough to be grasped without any metaphor at all. And as to its application to the strange and tragic story that I have to tell, perhaps I had better leave that to develop in due course, merely remarking that the name of the super-prolific mouse was Nathaniel Polton, and that he happened to be our laboratory assistant and Dr. Thorndyke's devoted henchman.

Our direct contact with the case occurred quite casually. The occasion was a visit of our old friend, Mr. Joseph Penfield, of George Yard, Lombard Street, to our chambers at 5A King's Bench Walk. Ostensibly, it was a professional consultation, but conducted with Thorndyke's habitual informality; an informality which at once scandalized and delighted our legal friends.

At the moment, Mr. Penfield was seated cosily in an easy-chair drawn up before the fire, with his toes on the kerb and his silver snuff-box and a glass of sherry on a small table by his side.

"Well," he said, "that seems to dispose of all my difficulties. Now I know all about it, or think I do, thanks to your learned and lucid exposition. I suppose that a solicitor of nearly forty years standing and experience ought not to have required it, but somehow, when I come here to discuss points of law with you, I feel like a mere schoolboy."

"It is a very misleading feeling," said Thorndyke. "The fact is that you usually consult us on problems that are outside your own special province and inside ours. On questions of property law or conveyancing you could probably make us feel like schoolboys, whereas on subjects such as survivorship or presumption of death, in which medical or scientific knowledge is helpful, the advantage is with us."

"That is true," Mr. Penfield agreed, with more emphasis than the rather obvious explanation seemed to merit. "Very true."

He paused with a reflective air, looking steadily at the fire. Then, having refreshed himself with a delicate pinch of snuff and an infinitesimal sip of sherry, he continued:

"I am glad you mentioned the subject of presumption of death, because it happens to be one in which I am somewhat interested at the moment."

"Are you proposing to make an application?" Thorndyke asked.

"No," replied Penfield. "On the contrary, I am considering the expediency of contesting one. I have not quite made up my mind, but, as I am executor and trustee for the person whose death it is sought to presume, the onus seems to rest on me to contest the application. My duty is obviously to consider the interests of my client; and, since the presumption of death is not the same thing as the fact of death, there is always the possibility that the person who is presumed dead may be in fact alive. It would be exceedingly unpleasant if, when death had been presumed and the estate distributed, the client should turn up alive and demand an account of my stewardship. I should feel very unhappy if I had acquiesced passively in the application."

"I suppose," Thorndyke suggested, "there are substantial grounds for believing the person to be dead?"

"There must be. The case for the application is that there is good reason to believe that the person was murdered; and, though there is no direct evidence of the murder and the body was never found, the person has never been seen or heard of since the date of the presumed crime. As that date is so recent—only about two years ago—a substantial body of circumstantial evidence must be available to render the application possible. But I have not gone into that question."

"And as to the collateral circumstances; I suppose you know all about them?"

"Indeed I don't; and I am not much interested in them, since they can hardly be material to the issue. The question is whether this woman is or is not presumably dead. That is all that the court has to decide, and that is all that interests me."

"So," I remarked, "your client is, or was, a woman."

"Yes; a Mrs. Schiller."

"Not Lotta Schiller!" I exclaimed.

"Ah. Then you know the name, and perhaps some of the circumstances?"

"We do, indeed. Polton was acquainted with the lady, and he took an almost morbid interest in the circumstances of her disappearance. He has collected every scrap of information bearing on it and he was actually present at the search for the body, making moulds and photographs of the footprints. He probably has the photographs still."

“Ha,” said Mr. Penfield, “very interesting; though a footprint seems rather to connote a living person. However, what you tell me puts an end to my hesitation, I shall contest the application if I can secure your support. What do you say?”

“I say, yes, certainly,” replied Thorndyke. “The case is entirely within our province.”

“It is more than that. You not only have the general knowledge and experience but you have the particular knowledge of the facts of this case, which should be invaluable in cross-examination. And then,” he added with his queer wry smile, “you have the further attraction to me that you are able to prepare your own brief.”

“Let us rather say, part of it,” said Thorndyke. “We must depend on you for the general facts of the case. There is the motive, for instance. Why does someone want to presume this woman’s death? Who are the parties? Is the husband one of them?”

“He is not. No doubt he would be interested to know whether he is a husband or a widower, but he is not interested in the legal sense. He has nothing to gain, and he is not a party to the application. The motive is a sum of about twenty thousand pounds, and the applicant is the sole beneficiary under Mrs. Schiller’s will, who stands to gain that sum of money if the application succeeds. These facts do not seem very relevant to the issue, which is simply whether the woman is alive or dead; but I agree that you will want a general outline of the case. Perhaps a brief sketch of the history of my relations with Mrs. Schiller might do for a start. The details could be filled in later.”

Thorndyke having agreed to this suggestion, Mr. Penfield took a pinch of snuff and began his narration.

“About five years ago—I can’t give you exact dates or figures as I am speaking from memory—but a little over five years ago, Mrs. Schiller came to my office to ask me to draw up her will and to take custody of it and of certain monies in her possession. She was a stranger to me, but she brought a letter of introduction from one of my clients—now deceased—and I agreed to undertake the business, though I was not very favourably impressed by the lady herself; a flashy, golden-haired baggage, painted like a clown and powdered like a miller, and very free and easy in her manners. However, it was a small affair and perfectly simple; a matter of about three hundred pounds, left by the will to one sole beneficiary; so I drafted a short will in her presence, read it over to her, and, at her request, appointed myself sole executor. Having made an appointment for the following morning, I got the will engrossed and made the necessary arrangements with the bank.

“When she arrived on the following morning, bringing with her the money in notes, some further arrangements had to be made. As she was in the habit of moving about a good deal and had no permanent address, she wished me to act as her man of business and manage her financial affairs, such as they were. I need not go into details. The arrangement constituted me her agent with power to receive and pay monies on her account; and when the will and the other document had been signed and witnessed in my office, the transaction was complete. She left my office immediately and I never saw her again or received any communication from her.”

“She left you her address, I suppose?” said Thorndyke.

“Yes. She was then living in lodgings at a place called Linton Green—Corby Street, I think, was the exact address—and I remember that the landlady’s name was Wharton. But that is of no consequence as she had left those lodgings when I made my inquiries and the landlady did not know where she had gone. She had promised to keep me informed of her whereabouts when she changed her address, but she never did; which, for a time, was no concern of mine, as I had no occasion to communicate with her.

“But then there came a new development. A certain rather wealthy man—a Mr. Charles Montagu—died (I regret to say that he, also, was murdered. It is a distinctly unsavoury case altogether). Well, this man had bequeathed to a certain Miss Dalton a sum of about twenty thousand pounds. There was some delay in regard to the probate of his will owing to the fact that some large payments—over a thousand pounds—had been made in cash and not accounted for in the books. Another unsavoury detail; for there could hardly be a doubt that those payments represented blackmail, especially as the man was murdered. However, the will was eventually proved; but the probate was barely completed when Miss Dalton died.

“It then appeared that she had made a will leaving the bulk of her property to Mrs. Schiller; who, as the residuary legatee, became entitled, also, to the twenty thousand pounds. But now there was a fresh difficulty. Not only was the whereabouts of Mrs. Schiller unknown; it was not certain that she was alive, or even that she had been alive at the time of Miss Dalton’s death. On this question I could, of course, give no information. I tried to get into touch with her through the usual channels but had no success; and so this matter remained in abeyance for a time.

“Then the position was clarified in a very startling manner. There was yet another murder (I must really apologize for these sordid details) and it appeared that Mrs. Schiller was under some suspicion of being at least an accessory. That, however, does not concern us. The material fact is that she was proved to be alive, and, consequently, the bequest took effect; and I duly notified the claim on her behalf, disregarding the criminal details. But the astonishing thing that now transpired was that she had been living all this time at a place called Jacob Street within a short bus ride of my office.

“But the uncertainty which had just been cleared up was almost immediately succeeded by another; which is the one that concerns us. First, Mrs. Schiller disappeared. Then traces of her were discovered which led the police to believe that she had been murdered. But no body was found and no actual proof of death was obtained. On the other hand, the woman has never been seen or heard of since the disappearance. It appears that the police have made all possible inquiries, but have not been able to discover any traces of her. Their attitude, I understand, is entirely noncommittal; she may be dead or she may be alive, but there is no positive evidence either way.



"So that is the position; and our function—or perhaps I should say yours—will be to examine the known facts and assess the probabilities. If there are clearly good grounds for presuming death, it might not be worth while to do more than watch the case in my absent client's interest. We shall be better able to judge when we know exactly what facts the applicant relies on."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I take it that you have not yet received copies of the affidavits?"

"No. I have had no formal notice of motion; only an informal, and quite friendly, notice of the proposed application. And, for my part, I am not going to be unnecessarily contentious. I don't particularly care whether the woman is alive or dead. I am only doing what I conceive to be my duty to an absent client, and I shall certainly not oppose the application if, when you have examined the facts, you think it ought to succeed. As soon as I receive the copies of the affidavits, I will let you have them, and you can then advise me as to our further proceedings."

This concluded the business, and, shortly afterwards, Mr. Penfield rose, and having pocketed his snuff-box and waved away the proffered decanter, shook our hands and departed.

"Quite a promising case," I remarked when he had gone, "though Penfield does not seem enthusiastic. But he never is if there is any criminal element. It will be interesting to see what sort of case the applicant's lawyers have made out."

"I expect," said Thorndyke, "that they will take the same line as Penfield has taken."

"Yes," I agreed, "and, after all, it seems a perfectly logical view, though I suspect that you won't concur. But really all that the court has to decide is whether the probability that the woman is dead is so great as to justify the presumption that she is dead. The various collateral circumstances do seem, as Penfield maintains, to be irrelevant."

"The question is," Thorndyke replied, "what is meant by collateral circumstances? Penfield is assuming that facts and circumstances which appear to have no bearing on the main issue are irrelevant and may be disregarded. But until those facts are examined, it is impossible to say whether they are or are not relevant. It is a capital mistake to classify facts in advance as relevant and irrelevant, and to limit consideration of them to those which appear relevant."

"Still," I persisted, "there are the plain physical facts; and if they are such as to establish an overwhelming probability that the woman was murdered, the various other facts, such as her personal character and way of life, for instance, do really seem to have no bearing. The simple issue is whether she is dead or alive. If she is dead, that issue is settled. How she came to die or what were the factors that brought about her death are interesting questions, but not material to the issue. However, the known facts may not be conclusive enough to justify a decision. We shall be better able to judge when we have seen the affidavits."

"I don't expect that they will tell us anything new," said Thorndyke. "We have heard the whole story of the search from Polton and Elmhurst, and we read the account of what happened at the time. We probably know all the facts on which the applicant will rely, judging from what Penfield said."

"You may, but my recollection of them is rather dim. I am afraid I did not quite share Polton's enthusiasm. After all, it was no special concern of ours."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "let me refresh your memory. Put in a nutshell, the case amounts to this: A woman was murdered in Lotta Schiller's rooms at Thirty-nine Jacob Street. The person who committed the murder let himself in with Lotta Schiller's keys."

"Or perhaps with some similar, or skeleton keys," I suggested.

"No. One key was found in the lock and conclusively identified as Lotta's own key. At the time of the discovery of the murder, Lotta had already disappeared and could not be found or heard of by the police. Some time later—I have forgotten the dates—her handbag was found on the bank enclosing the British Camp in Epping Forest. It contained a key-pouch from which two keys were missing, one being the latch-key and the other the key of the room in which the murder seemed to have taken place. Inside the camp the police found a locket belonging to Lotta, and, incidentally, made by Polton, and containing a portrait of our friend, Vanderpuye."

"Yes, I remember that. Poor Vanderpuye! He will wish he had gone back to Africa when he hears that the scandal is going to be revived."

"Probably," Thorndyke agreed, "though his evidence will refer only to the date on which he last saw Lotta. But to continue: as the finding of these things indicated the probability that the woman had been murdered and her body disposed of in the neighbourhood, the police arranged an exhaustive search of the camp for further traces of her, dead or alive. The result of that search was the discovery of a series of footprints, apparently of a man and a woman, which proceeded side by side to a point near the place where the locket was found. Here the ground was trampled in a way that suggested a struggle, and there was a rather obscure impression of a woman's body lying in a supine position. From this point the footprints continued, but they were those of the man only. There were no further footprints of the woman; and it is suggested that the impressions of the man's feet were somewhat deeper than they had been before."

"The single track of footprints crossed the camp to the north-west side until they reached the enclosing bank, and here some further discoveries were made. It was seen that the man had climbed up the bank twice—the first time apparently to reconnoitre. Near the foot of the bank was another, very obscure, impression of a woman's body lying on the ground. Near it a button was picked up. It was a very distinctive button, painted by hand, and was conclusively identified by a Mr. Pedley

as a button from Lotta's jacket. On a broken twig, half-way up the bank, a wisp of a green material was clinging, and this shred Mr. Pedley identified as exactly similar to the material of her jacket and dress. Finally, at the top of the bank, the earth showed marks as if some heavy object had been dragged across the summit.

"That, as Inspector Blandy put it at the time, was 'the end of the trail.' On the outer side of the bank was the turf of the green ride, which would not have shown impressions in any case; but the fact is that no tracks or traces of any kind were found outside the camp, while inside the enclosure, there was no sign anywhere of the ground having been disturbed. It can be taken as certain that the body—if there was a body—was not buried in the camp; and no traces of either the man or the woman could be discovered anywhere else.

"Those are the facts that I think we shall find embodied in the affidavits, together with evidence that the woman has not been seen or heard of since her visit to the forest with Vanderpuye. On them will be based the application for the court's permission to presume that Lotta Schiller is dead; and I ask you, Jervis, as an experienced medico-legal practitioner, whether you still think that collateral facts, such as the woman's personal character and way of life, are not material to the issue."

"I still don't see that they are," said I, "though, as you apparently do, I suppose I am wrong. But it seems to me that the facts that you have stated point very strongly to the conclusion that the woman was murdered and her body concealed somewhere in the forest. There appears to have been an adequate motive for the murder; to get possession of the keys and to eliminate a person who might have been dangerous. For it is practically certain that Lotta Schiller would either have known or guessed who committed the murder in her rooms.

"The *prima facie* evidence that she was murdered seems to me extremely strong; and when we add to it the fact that she has never since been seen or heard of, the probability becomes overwhelming, and certainly enough, in my opinion, to warrant the presumption that she is dead."

"Q.E.D.," Thorndyke commented with an appreciative chuckle. "You have put the case for the applicant with admirable lucidity. Unfortunately, it is that case that we have to demolish if we can do so by fair means and consistently with what we believe to be the truth. Wherefore I now call upon my learned friend to bring his mighty intellect to bear on the opposite proposition. Come, now, Jervis, here is an opportunity to exercise your wits and utilize your experience. You have just given a masterly exposition of the reasons for presuming that Lotta Schiller is dead. Now cross over to the other side and see what reasons you can find for presuming that she is alive."

With a strong and growing suspicion that I had, as usual, overlooked some material fact, I promised to reconsider the case, and, as a first indispensable step, to refresh my memory as to the whole set of circumstances; to which end I repaired to Polton's lair, and, having conveyed to him the tidings of the proposed application, had no difficulty in obtaining the loan of his voluminous collection of newspaper cuttings, which I bore off to study at my leisure.

---

## XII. — TOM PEDLEY RECEIVES VISITORS

THE question with which Thorndyke had closed his narration had rather taken me aback; but what had really surprised me was his clear and complete recollection of the case in all its details. Yet it ought not to have surprised me, for the thing had often happened before, but I always failed to allow for a fundamental difference between us; Thorndyke was a genuine criminologist and I was not. By me, the report of a criminal case was read with mild interest, and then, if it did not concern us, was straightway dismissed and forgotten.

Not so Thorndyke. To him, every case was a problem; and if there was any element of mystery or obscurity, he would study it, evolve one or more possible solutions, and retain the case in his memory until it was cleared up—if ever it was—and the actual solution was disclosed. It was a useful habit, for, apart from the mental exercise amounting in effect to experience, there was the practical advantage that if an obscure case was ultimately referred to us—as often happened—it found Thorndyke fully informed as to the facts and perhaps with a solution already arrived at.

This, I suspected, was the present position. Reading attentively through Polton's collection of reports, I realized that the whole case, including the murder of Emma Robey, was profoundly mysterious. But I also realized the significance of Thorndyke's question. Lotta Schiller was definitely implicated in the murder.

This, Penfield would have said, was not material to the question whether she was dead or alive. But it was material. The disappearance of a person who is under suspicion in regard to a murder, calls for a much more critical consideration than that of a person who has no known motive for disappearing.

In due course the notice of motion was served on Mr. Penfield, and copies of the affidavits were sent on to us; and as I read them through, I saw that Thorndyke had been right. The facts sworn to were concerned exclusively with evidence of Lotta Schiller's death. The murder of Emma Robey was referred to only incidentally (in an affidavit by a Mrs. Bigham) in connection with the man who, accompanied by a woman, had let himself into the premises of 39 Jacob Street with a latch-key. Evidently, the inference advanced by the applicant would be that this man had already murdered Lotta Schiller and possessed himself of her keys.

Thus the case for the application was fairly clear. We could see what "the other side" proposed to prove; and, taking the facts at their face value, it was a reasonably good case. But the next question was, What did Thorndyke propose to prove,

and what was he going to do about it? Assuming—as I did—that he had already considered the case and probably arrived at some provisional conclusions, my expectation was that he would follow his usual practice and begin by seeking to enlarge his knowledge; by searching for some new facts to supplement those already known; and mighty curious I was as to what line his investigations would take, and not a little surprised when his intentions were disclosed.

“So,” he remarked on the following day, “my learned friend has studied the affidavits and the Poltonian dossier and now knows all the available facts? Probably he has found them a little sketchy?”

“On the contrary,” I replied, “I thought that we had a pretty full account of the case. What more do you want to know?”

“I want to know all that I can learn. For instance, there is Lotta Schiller, the central figure in the case. What do we know about her? She is little more than a name; a sort of algebraical symbol. I want to turn her into a real person; to know what she was like, physically, mentally, and morally.”

I was about to object that such knowledge was not likely to help us much in opposing the application, but fortunately I saw the red light in time.

“And how do you propose to get that knowledge?” I asked

“The most likely source is Mr. Thomas Pedley. He, apparently, knew her quite intimately and should be able to tell us quite a lot about her. So I wrote to him a day or two ago, and he has kindly given me an appointment for to-morrow afternoon. May I take it that I shall have your support at the interview?”

As it happened, fortunately, that I had the afternoon free, I accepted gladly—indeed, I may say eagerly. For my curiosity about this visit was intense. That its object was simply to get a description of Lotta Schiller’s appearance and personality seemed incredible; and I hoped that by listening attentively to Thorndyke’s questions I might get some inkling of what was really in his mind.

Jacob Street we found to be a shabby, old-fashioned Street turning out of the Hampstead Road, in which Mr. Thomas Pedley’s studio was distinguishable by a green-painted wooden gate bearing the number 38A in well-polished brass characters, and by a small brass plate at the side inscribed “T. Pedley” surmounted by a shining brass bell-knob. A tug at this resulted in the distant jangling of a large bell, followed by the opening of the gate and the appearance thereat of a big, hearty, pleasant-faced man who surveyed us for a moment with a friendly blue eye and then, apparently recognizing us or taking our identities for granted, bade us “come along in”; whereupon we followed him along a stone passage and across a small yard to the studio, the size of which, and especially of the great north window, I found quite impressive.

“It is very good of you, Mr. Pedley,” said Thorndyke, “to let us come here occupying your time with matters in which I don’t suppose you are much interested.”

“Oh, I am interested enough,” replied Pedley, “but I am afraid you will find me rather disappointing, for I really know nothing about Lotta Schiller or her affairs.”

“Well,” Thorndyke rejoined with a smile, “that is a fact, to begin with, and not entirely without significance. But at any rate, you know more about her than I do. So I stand to learn something.”

“I am afraid it will be mighty little,” said Pedley. “But perhaps a cup of tea may brighten my wits. Yours probably don’t need any brightening.”

He led us across to the tea-table which had been placed, with three armchairs, in front of the fire, and, having installed us, proceeded to make the tea at a gas-ring by the large sink; and while he was thus occupied I cast inquisitive glances around, and was not a little impressed by the fine china and elegant table appointments and the various signs of a refined and fastidious taste in the furnishing of the place, which contrasted rather oddly with the sink, the cooking stove, and the working appliances.

“I think,” said Pedley when he had poured out the tea and taken his seat, “that, as you know what information you want and I don’t, you had better treat me as a witness. You ask your questions, and I will answer as well as I can.”

“Very well,” said Thorndyke, producing a note-book and opening it, “then, as I have never seen Mrs. Schiller and have no idea what she was like, we will begin with her personal appearance. Can you give me a description of her?”

Pedley was obviously astonished—as well he might have been—but he replied readily enough:

“Yes, I can do that all right, for it happens that Inspector Blandy made the same request, and I drafted out an exhaustive description and gave him a copy. I can show you the original draft.”

He went to a shelf on which was a long row of linen-bound books, each having on its back a paper label bearing a date.

“Let me see,” said he, running his eye along the row, “it would be about 1930. Yes, here we are.”

He picked out the little volume and brought it to the table, explaining, as he turned over the leaves:

“This is the note-book that I was using at the time. It contains all sorts of notes; sketches, drawings, and written memoranda, and, as I date every entry, it serves well enough as a diary. This is the draft that I made for Blandy.”

He handed the open book to Thorndyke, who glanced through it rapidly though with close attention and, I thought, some signs of surprise.

"But, Mr. Pedley," he exclaimed, "this is an extraordinarily complete description. You seem to have observed everything and forgotten nothing."

"Well, you see," Pedley replied, "that is an artist's job; to look at things attentively and remember what he has seen. But I am glad you approve. Blandy was quite pleased, though he wanted one or two points elucidated."

"For instance?"

"Well, there were the ears. He asked me if I could draw them from memory, which, of course, I could and did."

"He was quite right," said Thorndyke. "A drawing is better than the best verbal description. I wonder if you would kindly do the same for me?"

Though still looking a little puzzled, Pedley complied readily. On a small cartridge paper block he drew, very deliberately and yet quickly, a pair of ears, facing each other.

"There," he said, taking off the sheet and handing it to Thorndyke, "you see they are just normal, well-shaped ears with a small Darwinian tubercle on the right one. I have marked in the line of the jaw to show how they were set."

Thorndyke thanked him for the drawing, and, having examined it, put it away carefully in his wallet. Then, glancing once more at the description, he said:

"There is one point here that seems to require some amplification. You say that the hair had some peculiarity of texture that made it seem variable in colour. I don't quite understand that."

Pedley grinned. "Blandy again," said he. "He didn't understand it and neither do I. So I couldn't tell him anything beyond the bare fact that it certainly did seem to change colour in different lights. The change was very slight and I don't suppose the majority of people would have noticed it at all. But there it was; and I've never seen any other hair like it before or since."

"Do you think," I suggested, "that it might have been dyed or faked in some way? Women do all sorts of queer things to their hair in these days."

"I thought of that," replied Pedley, "but there was one circumstance that seemed to exclude it. Dyed or faked hair, as you know, won't bear close inspection, especially at the roots. But Mrs. Schiller had no objection at all to a close inspection. When Polton wanted a sample of her hair, she made no difficulty but let him cut it off himself. He separated out a little tress and cut it off close to the roots, exposing the skin of the scalp, and, apparently, he noticed nothing unusual there."

"Did you ever mention the peculiarity to her?" asked Thorndyke.

"No; and I don't think she was aware of it herself."

"By the way," said I, "what did Polton want a lock of her hair for?"

"He was making a locket for Mr. Vanderpuye, and it was arranged that there should be a specimen of her hair set in one side to face the portrait in the other."

"Oh, yes, I remember the locket—the two lockets, in fact—but they were empty when I saw them. I never heard what was to be put in them."

"As to the portrait in Vanderpuye's locket," said Thorndyke; "was it a miniature or a photograph?"

"It was a photograph; but not from life. She painted a self-portrait in water-colour and Polton did a reduced photograph of it."

"Was it a fairly good likeness?"

Pedley grinned. "It wasn't a likeness at all. There was no resemblance whatever to Lotta, and hardly any to a human being."

"But I wonder Vanderpuye didn't object," said I, "seeing that a likeness was what he wanted."

"He did; in fact he was really angry. He wanted me to paint or draw a portrait of Lotta of which Polton could make a reduced photograph to fit the locket. But she would not have it, nor would she allow Polton to do a photograph of her. She insisted that the portrait should be her own work, and from that she wouldn't budge. So poor Vanderpuye had to accept her drawing; but I shall never forget Polton's face when he first set eyes on it. He thought that it was a practical joke, but he realized his mistake in time."

"But what was it like?" I asked, a little bewildered by his account of the incident.

"It was a drawing of a woman's head such as might be done by a child of nine or ten—not a clever child, mind you, but just an ordinary child with no natural aptitude for drawing."

"But," I exclaimed, "I don't understand this. Wasn't she a professional artist?"

"She claimed to be one, but, of course, anyone can call himself an artist. The fact is that she couldn't draw and she couldn't paint."

"Do you mean that she drew badly," Thorndyke asked, "or that she, literally, couldn't draw at all?"

"Her drawing," replied Pedley, "was like that of an ordinary child; and I am quite sure that she couldn't do anything different."

"This is rather remarkable," said Thorndyke, "and it suggests one or two questions. The first is as to her state of mind. Was she cranky enough to believe that she really could paint?"

Pedley chuckled. "Blandy again," said he. "That is what he wanted to know and I rather dodged his questions. But I won't hedge with you because I have thought the matter over since, and I have come to the conclusion that she was a rank impostor. There was nothing cranky about her. She was a pretty shrewd, level-headed young woman, and I am sure that she had no delusions about her painting. It was a deliberate fraud. What her object was in posing as an artist, I have no idea; but what I am quite clear about is that she just took advantage of the present fashion for freak pictures and started producing freaks. Anybody can do it. All you have to do is to paint something quite unlike a normal picture and leave it to the highbrows to explain it to the multitude. But she knew all about it, and she had got all the highbrow jargon at her finger-ends."

"That," said Thorndyke, "partly disposes of the next question, which is how she maintained the pose. Did she ever offer her work for sale?"

"No. She spoke of an intention to send some of her stuff to an exhibition, but she never did send any."

"I suppose she signed her pictures with her own name?"

"She didn't sign them at all, properly speaking. She used a cipher—a sort of conventionalized flower with a little circle on each side of the stalk."

"It all sounds rather tortuous and secretive," I remarked.

"Yes," Pedley agreed, "but she was secretive in everything. Polton first drew my attention to her capacity for keeping her own counsel. But the secrecy about her paintings I don't understand. It looks rather as if the artist pose was a temporary stunt which she meant to drop when it had served her purpose, whatever that may have been."

"It does," said Thorndyke, "and yet the brass plate by her door seems to exclude the idea of secrecy. It was a public announcement."

"It wasn't very public," replied Pedley. "It was only a small plate, about six inches by four, with just the bare name in small copper-plate script. It wasn't very easy to read from the pavement even when it was new, and, by the time she had kept it polished for a few weeks and rubbed most of the black out of the engraving, it was nearly illegible. No passing stranger could have read it."

"That seems to answer my objection," said Thorndyke. "And now, to come back to the description. I suppose you don't possess a photograph of her?"

"No," replied Pedley, "and I never saw one."

"Did you ever draw a portrait of her?"

"Not from life. I had thought of suggesting that I should paint her portrait and then I decided that I had better not. But I made one or two trial sketches from memory to see how a profile portrait would look. They are in that note-book that you have. Would you like to see them?"

"I should, very much," replied Thorndyke, handing him the book and watching him, expectantly, as he turned over the leaves.

"This is the best one," said Pedley, passing the book back, "and as the others were preliminary trials, we can disregard them."

Thorndyke examined the drawing with deep interest, as also did I, though what chiefly interested me was the liveliness of the representation and its finished character. It might have been a careful drawing done direct from the model.

"This is rather more than a sketch, Mr. Pedley," said Thorndyke. "It gives the impression of an actual portrait, but, of course, I can't judge as to the likeness. What do you say about it? Is it really like her?"

"Yes," replied Pedley. "I should say it is quite a good likeness."

"Do you think it would be recognized by anyone who had known her?"

"Oh, certainly. Looking at it now, after all this time, it recalls her to me perfectly. You see, in drawing from memory one instinctively chooses the most characteristic and easily remembered aspect."

"Yes, I see that," said Thorndyke. "But you seem to have a rather remarkable memory."

"Not remarkable," replied Pedley. "I have a good memory, and I have made a point of training it. But, in effect, all drawing is memory drawing. You can't look at the model and draw at the same time. You have, first, to look at the model with concentrated attention and try to memorize the part you are working on. Then, as a separate act, you draw it; and then you compare what you have drawn with the actual facts and correct your drawing if necessary. Memory drawing is only the same thing with a longer interval between seeing and drawing."

Thorndyke pondered this with his eyes fixed on the portrait. At length he said:

"If this is a perfectly recognizable likeness of Lotta Schiller it may be of some importance as the only existing record of her personal appearance. I wonder if you would allow Polton to bring a camera here and take a photograph of it."

"Of course I would, with the greatest pleasure. But why take all that trouble? Better just slip the book in your pocket and let me have it back when you have done with it."

"That is very gracious of you, Mr. Pedley," said Thorndyke, "and it will certainly be much more convenient. I didn't like to ask you for the loan as I understood that the book contained some private memoranda."

"You needn't have been so punctilious," Pedley replied with a smile. "I have no secrets, and, if I had, I shouldn't write them in my note-book. No, Doctor, I give you the free run of the book if the sketches and notes are of any interest to you. Perhaps you might like to see the finger-prints that Polton took from that poor murdered woman. They are in the book some where. Shall I see if I can find them?"

"I don't know that they are of much interest now," said Thorndyke, handing him the book nevertheless, "excepting as to Polton's improvised method of taking them."

"And his motive for doing it," I added. "It wasn't a very correct proceeding, and I never understood why he wanted to meddle."

"I think that is pretty clear," said Pedley. "He wanted to know, then and there, whether it was a case of suicide or murder. Ah, here are the prints."

He returned the book to Thorndyke, who, notwithstanding what he had said, looked at the rather feeble impressions with some interest; which seemed to deepen as he looked, for, presently he produced his lens from his pocket and made a closer examination, finishing up by viewing the prints with the book held at arm's length.

"Quite a creditable performance," he remarked, "considering the very inadequate means. What do you think of them, Jervis?"

He handed me the book with his lens, and I examined the prints with some curiosity.

"Yes," I agreed, "they are not bad; rather weak and faint, but you can make out the pattern quite clearly, even in the last three fingers, where the impression seems to have partly failed. I shall make a note of the method for use in a similar emergency. And, by the way, the method is not new to us. The original Thumbograph was provided with an inking-pad."

I returned the book to him, and, when he had closed it and slipped it into his pocket, I waited expectantly for the next question. But there was none. Apparently the "examination in chief" was finished.

I say "apparently," for with Thorndyke you never knew when the examination had really ended. He had a way of directing a conversation without appearing to and thus allowing the information that he was seeking to transpire, as it seemed, spontaneously; and I had a faint suspicion that, on the present occasion, Pedley was being gently guided along the paths of reminiscence in the desired direction.

And yet it seemed incredible; for though Pedley's account of his relations with Lotta Schiller was amusing enough, described in his quaintly humorous way, it was utterly trivial and seemed to have no bearing whatever on our problem. The way in which she had opened the acquaintance by a transparent pretext and thereafter adopted him as her dearest friend, in spite of his struggles to escape, was rather funny, but relevant to nothing that concerned us. At least, so I judged; though even then my judgment was confounded by Thorndyke's concentrated attention to these trifling reminiscences and by the little aids to amplification that he applied.

"It is a quaint picture," he remarked with an appreciative chuckle; "the masterful lady and the lover malgré lui."

"Not lover," protested Pedley. "There was not even a pretence of that."

"But you seem to have been on quite affectionate terms," Thorndyke maintained.

"On her side only," said Pedley, "and that was all bunkum. It was just a pose, like her painting. But it was very queer. I never understood what her game was. She called me 'Tom' from the very beginning, and soon it came to Tom, dear, or darling or duck. But it was all verbal; there was no demonstration of affection. Anyone listening in an adjoining room might have taken us for an engaged couple; but our actual behaviour was perfectly matter-of-fact."

"Do you mean that there were no physical endearments? Did she, for instance, never kiss you?"

"Lord, no! I shouldn't have let her. But she never made any approach to that sort of thing. As I say, it was purely verbal. I took it to be just a silly habit of speech, especially as she used the same terms to others. Why, she even called Polton a duck, and as to poor Vanderpuye—but his case was different. He took the endearments quite seriously. Still, even he was not on kissing terms. He swore, at the inquest, that he had never kissed her, and I suspected that he had made an attempt and not brought it off."

"Very odd," Thorndyke commented, "particularly as the modern woman seems to be so far from squeamish in such matters. Did the verbal endearments extend to written communications? How did she address you in writing?"

"She never did, and I am glad she didn't; for if her handwriting was at all like her drawing, it would have taken some deciphering. But she never wrote to me, and I gather that she never wrote to Vanderpuye. It almost looks as if she avoided putting any of her nonsense down in black and white, though there was nothing very incriminating in it."

"Not incriminating," said Thorndyke, "but, after all, she was a married woman, and compromising letters are apt to be dangerous things if there happens to be an unfriendly husband in the back ground."

"I don't think her husband was unfriendly. The position seemed to be that they had separated by mutual agreement and gone their respective ways, simply ignoring the marriage. On the few occasions when she referred to him, she did so without the slightest trace of animosity."

"Apparently she was not very communicative about him."

"No; he was rather a shadowy figure. All I learned from her was that his name was Carl, that by profession he was a sort of travelling wine merchant, that he was, in a sense, domiciled somewhere in Germany, but spent most of his time rambling about the Continent with occasional visits to this country and the United States. That is all that she let drop. Of course, I never asked any questions."

This apparently exhausted Pedley's store of reminiscences, for the conversation now drifted in the direction of his work and mode of life; and when he had shown us some of his paintings and taken us on a personally conducted tour of his premises, including the very pleasant little cubicle bedroom that he had built in a corner of the studio, we felt that we had stayed long enough.

"It is most kind of you, Mr. Pedley," said Thorndyke, "to have let us take up so much of your time and to give us so much help in our inquiry."

"I am glad to hear that I have been helpful," replied Pedley, as he escorted us along the paved passage. "It seemed to me that I was laddling out some rather small beer. But I enjoyed doing it. To a solitary man a real good chin-wag comes as a refreshing novelty."

With this exchange of courtesies and a hearty handshake we took our departure, and, crossing the Hampstead Road, set a course for the Temple by way of the less-frequented back streets. For some time we walked on in silence; but presently, according to custom, I ventured to put out a cautious feeler.

"Pedley's estimate of the conversation was rather like my own, and we are probably both wrong; but, apart from the description and the portrait (the value of which is not obvious to me), I don't see that we have learned anything very significant."

"That," replied Thorndyke, "must be because you have not got the issues in this case clear in your mind."

"But I think I have. The simple issue is whether or not Lotta Schiller is presumably dead."

"Yes, but put it another way. Either the woman is dead and her body concealed in some unknown place, or she is alive and keeping out of sight. The issue is between the alternatives of a concealed dead body or a concealed living person."

"She would be mightily well concealed to keep out of sight for two years with the police on the look-out for her all the time. I should have thought it practically impossible considering all the modern means and facilities at their disposal."

"Still," said he, "the possibility of her being alive is the one that concerns us, and the value of the information that we have got from Pedley is in its bearing on that question. What I recommend you to do is this: when you get home, while the matter is fresh in your memory, take a sheet of paper and write down a full report of our conversation with Pedley. Then read it over and extract from it any facts, explicitly stated or implied, without regard to their significance, and write them down on another sheet. Finally, consider those facts, separately and together, in relation to the two alternatives that I mentioned. I think you will find Mister Pedley's small beer more nourishing than it appeared at the time."

---

### XIII. — THORNDYKE BECOMES SECRETIVE

THORNDYKE'S suggested procedure for extracting the nourishment from Mr. Pedley's "small beer"—which I duly put into practice—proved highly effective. But yet it was not effective enough. For while it brought into view several facts which might be important in certain circumstances, it threw no light on their application to our present problem; wherefore, and because the reader, quicker in the uptake than I, has no doubt already noted them, I shall make no further reference to them. But if not very enlightening, my study had the effect of stimulating my curiosity as to what was in Thorndyke's mind. That he had a definite theory concerning Lotta Schiller's disappearance, and that his theory was strictly relevant to the main problem, I had no doubt, and since I could make no guess as to the nature of that theory, I could only seek enlightenment by observing his proceedings and trying to deduce their object. This, however, turned out a complete failure, for the more I saw of his methods, the more bewildered I became, and the less able to connect them in any way with Mr. Penfield's case. I shall therefore put my observations briefly and baldly on record without unnecessary comments.

A few days after our visit to Pedley, Thorndyke, when he came in to lunch, took from an inner pocket a couple of documents and deposited them in the cabinet in which such things were usually kept; and I noticed that they went into the drawer which contained Mr. Penfield's papers.

"You have been to Somerset House," said I, having recognized the official copies.

"Yes," he replied. "An unnecessary visit, perhaps, but one never knows what unexpected questions may arise during the hearing; so I have provided myself with certified copies of two of the wills concerned in Penfield's case. We have a copy of

the third, Lotta Schiller's."

"Whose are the other two?" I asked.

"One is that of Barbara Dalton who left the twenty thousand pounds to Lotta. The other is that of a Mr. Charles Montagu, which contains, among many other legacies, the bequest of twenty thousand pounds to Barbara. Would you like to look over them?"

"No, thanks," I replied. "They don't interest me, unless they contain something unexpected or curious. Do they?"

"No, they are quite simple and straightforward, and, of course, they are not disputed."

"Then I think we can leave them to Penfield, if they come into the case at all."

Thus the matter was dismissed, leaving me with a faint feeling of surprise that even Thorndyke should have concerned himself with such remote antecedents. But apparently it was only another instance of his almost fanatical insistence on knowing all the facts.

The next proceeding of his that attracted my attention had, at least, some connection with Penfield's case, though I failed utterly to discover any relevancy. It took the form of an exhaustive interrogation of Vanderpuye, of whom we now saw a good deal as the Long Vacation had brought him back from his travels on the South-eastern Circuit. It was not, of course, a formal interrogation, which would have been quite alien to Thorndyke's usual methods. But Vanderpuye was perfectly willing to talk about his liaison with Lotta Schiller—it had been the great adventure of his life—and a little skilful guidance of the conversation brought out all the details. But of these conversations, which seemed to elicit nothing that was new even to me, I shall record only one; and that one chiefly because it led to further activities on Thorndyke's part. We had been discussing Pedley's portrait of Vanderpuye and the incidents connected with the painting of it, when my colleague led off in a new direction with the remark:

"It was a very successful portrait; a faithful likeness and an extremely becoming one, too. I am rather surprised that you did not get Pedley to paint one of Lotta. I should have thought that you would have liked to have a portrait of her."

"I should," Vanderpuye replied emphatically, "and I begged her to let him paint one of her, but she refused flatly. It was at the time when the lockets were being made, and I wanted him to paint her portrait so that I could have the original to hang beside my own and a little photograph of it to carry about with me in my locket. But she was most obstinate and perverse. She insisted on painting the portrait herself, and she wouldn't even agree to letting Polton take a photograph of her for the locket. It was really very awkward. I had seen her work and I knew that she couldn't paint a portrait. But she stuck to her decision and I had to accept her self-portrait. But I was very annoyed."

"Then I infer that it was not a very good likeness?" Thorndyke suggested.

"Bah!" exclaimed Vanderpuye. "It was not a likeness at all. But you can see for yourself"; and, as he spoke, he unshackled the locket from his watch-guard and handed it to Thorndyke, who carefully prised it open and looked curiously at the little portrait.

"I was going to remark," said he, "that as I have never seen the lady, I could hardly judge the likeness. But I see that I was wrong. This drawing only faintly resembles a human being and certainly could not be a recognizable likeness of any particular person. By the way, did she give you the original drawing?"

"No, she never offered it to me, and I should not have accepted it if she had."

"I ask," said Thorndyke, "because her work as an artist may have some bearing on the case that is pending and I should have liked to produce a specimen. But this is rather small, particularly if the judge's eyesight should happen to be at all defective. What do you think, Jervis?"

I took the locket from him and gazed in astonishment at the incredibly crude and childish drawing—though Pedley's description had prepared me for something abnormal—which, small as it was (about the size of a shilling) offered evidence enough of the artist's incompetence. But I couldn't understand Thorndyke's difficulty, and said so.

"I don't see that the size matters. It would be quite simple to make an enlarged photograph; that is, if Vanderpuye would give his permission."

"But of course," protested Vanderpuye. "I should be delighted to help in any way. By all means take the locket and let me have it back when you have done with it."

Thereupon, having thanked the owner warmly, Thorndyke slipped the little bauble into an envelope and folded it up securely; but I noticed that instead of locking it up in the cabinet according to his usual custom, he stowed it carefully in an inner pocket. It was a small matter but it attracted my attention; and when, on reflection, I realized how adroitly Thorndyke had managed to obtain possession of the trinket without asking for the loan, I began to suspect that there was more in the transaction than met the eye. Accordingly, I followed the fortunes of the locket closely to see whether any ulterior purpose should come into view. But apparently there was none. On the following day Thorndyke handed the locket to Polton, who gazed at it fondly and then returned it.

"I don't want the locket, sir," said he. "You are forgetting that I did the miniature. I have the original negative that I made from the drawing, which will be much better for doing the enlargement as it is a good size already."



"Of course," said Thorndyke. "My wits must have been woolgathering. Why didn't you remind me, Jervis?"

I replied that my wits were probably on the same quest, as I had suggested the borrowing of the locket, but protested that no harm had been done.

"No," he agreed, turning the locket over in his hand; "and I am glad to have seen the little bauble again. It is a charming specimen of goldsmith's work and it does Mr. Pedley and his executant very great credit. How on earth did you manage, Polton, to work the hair into that beautifully regular spiral? Hair isn't a very kindly material, is it?"

"It's all right, sir, if you know how to manage it. I just soaked two of the hairs from the little tress that I had cut off and wound each of them tightly on a thin steel spindle. Then I carefully heated the spindle, and, when it was cool, the hair slipped off in a little close cylinder like a cylindrical spring. After that, it was quite easy to work it into a flat spiral on the card."

"So you used only two of the hairs. What did you do with the remainder of the tress? Did you throw it away?"

Polton crinkled slyly. "No, sir," said he, "I've got the regular craftsman's vice. I never throw anything away. You see, even a hair comes in handy, if it's long enough, to string a small bow for use on the turns. Would you like to see what's left of it?"

Without waiting for an answer he went to one of his innumerable cabinets, and, from a labelled drawer produced a seed envelope inscribed in pencil "Mrs. Schiller's hair," which he handed to Thorndyke; who drew out of it a little tress of pale brown or dull flaxen hair neatly tied up with bands of thread.

"I don't see anything unusual in it," said I, as Thorndyke held it at arm's length in the light of the window.

"No," he agreed, "but we haven't Pedley's trained colour sense; and probably the peculiarity that he described would be noticeable only in large masses. But it couldn't have been very conspicuous even then, as nobody else seems to have observed it."

He pulled the tress out taut, and, having measured it against a two-foot rule on the bench, wrote the length (nine and a half inches) on the envelope. Then he re-coiled the tress and slipped it back into its receptacle.

"I am going to rob you, Polton," said he. "This specimen had better go with the rest of the possible exhibits; and on the remote chance of its having to be produced in court, you may as well sign your name on the envelope under the description."

This ceremony was duly performed, and, when Thorndyke had declined my derisive offer to witness the signature, he put the envelope in his wallet and we then reverted to the enlargement of the portrait.

I make no comment on these proceedings, having already said that I found myself utterly unable to connect any of them with Mr. Penfield's problem. Nor shall I, for obvious reasons, say anything about certain other activities which Thorndyke carried on in his private laboratory with the door locked; which from experience I judged to be experiments connected with his inferences from the facts known to me. No doubt they would have been highly revealing if I had known what they were; but, in accordance with the queer convention that existed between us, by which Thorndyke gave me every opportunity to observe the facts but refused to disclose his inferences or hypotheses until the case was concluded, I was left in the dark; and even Polton, bursting with curiosity, could only gaze wistfully at the locked door.

Of what went on, then, in the private laboratory, I had no knowledge at all; but in two other instances I was permitted, so to speak, to inspect the backs of the cards. Thus, on a certain day, returning at lunch time I perceived my colleague pacing up and down the lower end of King's Bench Walk in earnest conversation with one Mr. Snuper. Now, Mr. Snuper was a very remarkable man. Originally a private inquiry agent, he had been employed by Thorndyke on one or two occasions to collect information or to keep certain persons under observation; but he had proved so ingenious, resourceful, and dependable, that Thorndyke had engaged him permanently; and a very valuable member of our staff he had proved in making inquiries and observations where it was undesirable for us to appear.

But what could this meeting portend? Usually, Mr. Snuper's appearance foreshadowed some more or less sensational developments. But at present the Schiller case was the only one that we had on hand in which sensational developments were possible; but of that case we seemed to be in possession of all the relevant facts. Our problem was concerned with the application of those facts and seemed to offer no opening for Mr. Snuper's activities.

But my bewilderment reached a climax that very evening when, entering our sitting-room, I found Polton placing an easy-chair before the fireplace and setting beside it a little table on which were a whisky decanter and a box of cigars. I watched him with growing suspicion, and when he added an awl, borrowed from the workshop, suspicion grew into certainty.

"Expecting the superintendent?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "Mr. Miller is coming by appointment at half-past eight."

"You don't know what about, I suppose?"

"No, sir, I do not. I suspect it is that Schiller case, but that is only a guess; and I don't mind telling you, sir, that I am fairly eaten up with curiosity. I can see that there is something in the wind, and that somebody is going to get a surprise."

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, I know the symptoms of old, sir. The Doctor is in one of his exasperating moods; as secret as an oyster and as busy as a bee. He has been locked in his laboratory doing all sorts of things that are really my job; developing photographs, mounting specimens for the microscope, making micro-photographs, and the Lord knows what else. I know that much, because I've done the clearing up after him."

I laughed at his undisguised inquisitiveness, but not without sympathy.

"It seems to me," I remarked, "that you have been doing Snuper's job; keeping what the plain-clothes men call 'obbo' on the Doctor."

"Well, sir, there's no harm in keeping him under observation when his actions seem to invite it; and I believe he likes to be watched. It's part of the game. Why, only this morning I saw him colloquing with Mr. Snuper on the Walk. He knew I could see him from the window. And now there's Mr. Miller coming, and he isn't giving much away. And what do you make of that?"

He produced from his pocket a little slip of mahogany about four inches by two in which was a shallow, elongated cavity about two and a half inches by one, with straight sides and rounded ends, and a little round hole about a sixteenth of an inch wide, just outside the middle of the cavity.

"I made it from the Doctor's own full-scale drawing," Polton continued, "and, as he said nothing about its purpose, I suspect it is part of the surprise packet."

"It looks rather like some sort of a microscope slide," I suggested; but at this moment, as a quick footstep became audible ascending the stair, Polton picked up the slide and returned it to his pocket, smiling guiltily as the door opened and Thorndyke entered.

"I see we are to have the pleasure of a visit from Miller," I remarked.

He glanced at the little table and then asked with a smile:

"Is that information received or observation and inference?"

"Both," I replied, "but the inference first. It was the awl that clinched the diagnosis."

"Yes," Thorndyke chuckled, "it is wonderful how Polton remembers all the likes and dislikes of our visitors. He would have made a perfect innkeeper. How do you do it, Polton?"

"Well, sir," he replied with a gratified crinkle, "the proper study of mankind is man, and that includes Mr. Miller—and by the same token, here he is."

The crescendo of approaching footsteps culminated in the characteristic knock, and, as Polton threw the door open, the superintendent entered and saluted us with a comprehensive smile, which took in the three easy-chairs and the small table.

"It's nice to see you all again," said he, when the preliminary greetings and hand-shakings—which included Polton—had been disposed of. "Quite a long time since I was here. Don't get many excuses to come now that I am kept bottled up in the office."

We chatted inconsequently for a minute or two and then adjourned to the chairs, when Thorndyke and I lit our pipes while Miller carefully selected a cigar and Polton poured out the whisky.

"Well, Doctor," said the superintendent, thoughtfully operating with the awl on the proximal end of the cigar, "I've managed your little business. Rare job it was, too. Had to get the Assistant Commissioner's permission, of course, and he wasn't at all ready to give it. But I showed him your letter and coaxed him a bit and at last he gave way. But he wouldn't have done it for anyone else, and no more would I for that matter; and he stipulated that the information was to be considered strictly confidential and personal to you."

"You know that you can depend on my discretion, Miller. But supposing it were required to be used in evidence? May I take it that he would consent?"

"That you would have to settle with him. You weren't proposing to challenge the conviction, I suppose?"

"No. The conviction, whether good or bad, is no affair of mine."

"I wonder what is your affair—and so did the A.C., especially what you wanted the finger-prints for. How ever, I suppose we shall know in due course, as you seem to hint that you may need our collaboration later. At any rate," he concluded, producing a bulky, sealed envelope from his pocket, "here is the dossier of the worthy Louisa Saunders, if that was her name—apparently it was, as it agreed with the initials on her clothing—all complete; personal particulars, finger prints, prison portraits, summary of the police-court proceedings, everything that you asked for; and you notice that the envelope is sealed with wax and marked 'Secret documents.'"

He delivered the package to Thorndyke, with a malicious leer in my direction, and, when my colleague had thanked him very warmly for his friendly offices, the transaction was concluded and the conversation drifted into other channels, mostly connected with the work of the Criminal Investigation Department. But though the superintendent's "shop" talk was highly interesting to listen to, it does not belong to this history. Nor was I very attentive to it; for my mind was occupied with the questions, Who the deuce was Louisa Saunders, what concern was she of ours, and what could Thorndyke possibly want

with her finger-prints?

These questions, and the mystery surrounding the dossier, gave me abundant material for thought during the next few days; as, apparently, in a different way, they did to Thorndyke. For, once more, to Polton's exasperation, he locked himself in his laboratory and resumed his mysterious doings; and as these appeared, from Polton's reports, to be mainly of a photographic nature, I surmised that he was making reproductions of the "secret documents," but for what purpose I could not even guess.

Thus the time ran on, the Long Vacation ran out, and the day fixed for the hearing drew nearer. Once or twice we had communications from Mr. Penfield, chiefly relating to Thorndyke's request that certain witnesses should be summoned to appear in court for cross-examination on their affidavits; and once I observed among the letters delivered by the first post a large, well-filled envelope addressed to Thorndyke which looked to me like a report from Mr. Snuper. But that was only a guess, though Snuper's handwriting was a good deal more distinctive than his person.

Otherwise Thorndyke's preparations seemed to be complete, so far as I could judge with no knowledge whatever as to their nature; and I looked forward eagerly to the approaching date of the hearing, when, as I hoped, the obscurities in which I groped vainly should be made clear.

---

#### XIV. — THE PROBATE COURT

THE morning of the day appointed for the hearing found us with all preparations completed and—speaking for myself and Polton—all agog for the opening of the play. As the Law Courts were close at hand Thorndyke and I put on our wigs and gowns before starting, and, thus figged out and accompanied by Polton carrying a small suitcase, we set forth betimes, crossing the Temple by way of Crown Office Row and Fountain Court and finally emerging from Devereux Court into the Strand opposite to the main entrance of the Royal Courts of Justice, and, crossing the road, entered those august premises and made our way to the court in which the hearing was to take place.

With the exception of the usher and Mr. Turner, Penfield's managing clerk, we were the first arrivals; but shortly after us came Mr. Longford, the applicant's solicitor, escorting his client, Miss Dalton, and a gentleman whom I correctly diagnosed as Mr. Carl Schiller. As we knew Mr. Longford slightly, we exchanged a few words of greeting, and he then introduced us to his two companions; and as we were making polite, but not too topical, conversation, we accompanied it by a mutual inspection.

Miss Dalton, "the applicant," was a decidedly good looking woman of about thirty-five; but I was not much interested in her, my attention being more attracted by Mr. Schiller, whom I took the opportunity to examine as closely as good manners permitted. Not that he was a particularly striking personality, but he was (or had been) the husband of the mysterious Lotta, and he had the added interest of being present to learn whether he was a presumptive widower or only a mere husband. So I looked him over as we talked (as also, I noticed, did Thorndyke) and listened critically to his speech, in which I detected a faint German accent which seemed to agree with his rather Teutonic appearance. He was a smallish man, about five feet seven, spare and slight in figure, long-necked and bottle-shouldered, blond in complexion, with a rather scanty moustache and beard of a delicate ginger tint and eyes of a peculiar greenish hazel. His eyebrows were considerably darker than his beard, rather broad, and set in an almost straight horizontal line. As to his hair, it was probably of a similar colour to his beard or perhaps lighter, but as he had greased it with grease in order to comb it smoothly back over the crown of his head, I was unable to judge. On the whole, I considered him a fairly good-looking man, and our brief contact left me with a rather favourable impression.

During our short talk there had been other arrivals. Mr. Lorimer, the applicant's counsel, had entered in wig and gown and was now in close conference with Mr. Longford at the solicitor's table. Mr. Pedley had slipped in and quietly seated himself on a back bench where, presently, he was joined by Inspector Blandy and by two middle-aged women who arrived together and who, having espied Pedley, at once seated themselves beside him. But the most interesting arrival to me was a rustic-looking gentleman who drifted in by the swing door, and, having gazed about him vaguely, wandered slowly up the court towards the solicitor's table; for in him, with my usual start of surprise, I suddenly recognized the inscrutable Mr. Snuper.

He certainly enacted the part of a country cousin to a finish. The mixture of curiosity and boredom with which he stared about him was absolutely convincing, and the dropsical watch which he drew from his pocket and solemnly compared with the clock might have been an heirloom from some ancestral yeoman. But what was he doing here, masquerading under our very noses? Unable to imagine what his function could possibly be, I determined to keep an eye on him and try to solve this mystery for myself. But now the clock on the gallery announced the near approach to the hour and bade us take our seats, which we accordingly did; Miss Dalton was given a chair at the solicitor's table; Mr. Schiller selected a front bench with a restfully high back; Snuper shuffled into a seat behind him, and Mr. Lorimer joined us at the counsels' bench; and hardly had we taken our places when the usher threw open the door beside the bench and the judge bustled in and took his seat.

I looked at him with a good deal of interest since, as there was no jury, the decision of the case lay with him. But apart from this, I was attracted and interested by his personality; which was in several respects of an unusual type. He had none of that monumental repose that one associates with the occupants of the judicial bench. In fact he was the liveliest judge that I have ever met. He bobbed up and down in his chair, he turned to confront each speaker whether witness or counsel and leaned out sideways to address them with a curiously friendly and confidential air in keeping with his general conduct

of the proceedings, which was that of carrying on a sort of family consultation.

Nor was his vivacity only bodily. He was very much alive mentally and seemed to follow every stage of the proceedings with intense, almost eager interest, watching the speaker and dropping in occasional comments in a quick emphatic manner entirely free from judicial solemnity. But he was an excellent judge, attentive, helpful and friendly, and as informal as was permissible in the circumstances.

When his Lordship had settled himself in his chair and had taken a rapid survey of the court, he turned expectantly towards Mr. Lorimer, the applicant's counsel, who thereupon rose to open his case.

"Is the application opposed?" the judge asked, when Mr. Lorimer had set forth the nature of the case.

"I am not quite clear, my Lord, as to the extent of the opposition. No affidavits have been filed in answer, and there have been no pleadings."

The judge glanced inquiringly at Thorndyke, who thereupon rose to explain: "The position, my Lord, is this: the executor of Lotta Schiller's will is also her solicitor and man of affairs, and, as the legal presumption at present is that she is alive, he has thought it necessary to safeguard her interests by ensuring that all facts adverse to the presumption of death are brought to the notice of the court."

"But you have filed no affidavits?"

"No, my Lord; but, if, in the course of the hearing, it should seem to be necessary, I shall ask for an adjournment to enable me to file affidavits in answer or to call witnesses."

The judge smiled pleasantly. "I see. The good old principle of not leaping before you come to the stile. Very well."

He nodded to Mr. Lorimer, who continued: "As this is an application to presume death, the facts in issue are those relating to the probability of death; but it seems to me desirable that I should, very briefly, explain the circumstances which have made this application necessary.

"About five years ago—on the 16th August 1928, to be exact—Lotta Schiller executed a will leaving the whole of her very small property, about £300 in all, to her friend, Barbara Dalton; or, if Barbara should die before her, to Barbara's younger sister Linda. At about the same time, Barbara made a will in similar terms with the difference that she gave her chattels, excepting her violin, to Linda. The violin, with the residue of her estate, about £250, was left to Lotta. Thus, at the time, these two wills were quite unimportant. But on the 28th of May 1930, a certain Mr. Charles Montagu died, and it then appeared that by his will a sum of £20,000 was left to Barbara Dalton and a similar sum to Linda. These bequests seem to have been quite unexpected by the beneficiaries, and it may have been that Barbara might have made some modification of her will if there had been time. But there was not. For some reason, a considerable delay occurred in the probate of Mr. Montagu's will, and in the meantime Barbara died. Then, since Lotta Schiller was the residuary legatee under Barbara's will, the further sum of £20,000 accrued to her.

"But now a new difficulty arose. When it came to distributing Mr. Montagu's estate, the whereabouts of Lotta could not be discovered. The usual advertisements were issued but there was no response. So, for a time, the matter remained in abeyance; it was not certain that she was alive and there was the added difficulty that, not only could the money not be paid to her, but no evidence existed that she was entitled to it, since it could not even be proved that she had been alive at the time of Barbara's death.

"Then came an announcement in the papers of Lotta's sensational disappearance and the suspicion that she had been murdered; and the astonishing fact transpired that, all this time, she had been living in lodgings at 39 Jacob Street, Hampstead Road. Either she had never seen the advertisements or—which seems incredible—had ignored them. But, however that may have been, as soon as Barbara's executor became aware that Lotta either was, or had recently been, alive, he endeavoured to get into touch with her, but without success. Nor have his efforts, repeated from time to time, had any better results; and now, after the lapse of two years, since it appears nearly certain that Lotta Schiller is dead, Miss Linda Dalton, the surviving beneficiary under Lotta's will, acting on the advice of her solicitor, is applying to the court for permission to presume the death of the testatrix in order that the will may be proved. As the facts on which we rely in support of the application are principally those connected with the disappearance of the testatrix, I shall now proceed to a more detailed account of that incident.

"On the 16th of July 1930, Lotta Schiller engaged furnished rooms at 39 Jacob Street, Hampstead Road. She gave no references but paid a month's rent in advance; and that payment and all subsequent payments were made in cash although she had a banking account, which suggests that, for some reason unknown to us, she did not wish to disclose her whereabouts to any of her friends. This suggestion is supported by the fact that during the whole of her residence in Jacob Street she made no local acquaintances excepting Mr. Pedley, an artist who lived next door, and Mr. Polton and Mr. Vanderpuye, both of whom were introduced to her by Mr. Pedley.

"During this time she seems to have made a pretence of practising as an artist. But this must have been a mere pose, as we have evidence that her work was quite incompetent, which is not surprising, seeing that she had never previously been known to paint or even to draw. However, it enabled her to strike up an acquaintanceship with Mr. Pedley which soon grew into definite friendship, and thereafter she used frequently to visit his studio. In this way she presently made the acquaintance of Mr. William Vanderpuye, a barrister of the Inner Temple, who came to the studio to have his portrait painted by Mr. Pedley. This new acquaintance soon ripened into a quite intimate friendship, accompanied on her side by

unabashed flirtation and on his, perhaps, by real affection."

I need not report the rest of Mr. Lorimer's opening, since it dealt with matters with which we are familiar and which have already been recorded. In close and conscientious detail he described all the circumstances connected with Lotta Schiller's disappearance, including the murder of the ill-fated Emma Robey and the search by the police for Lotta, the discovery of the relics, and, finally and at considerable length, the exploration of the ancient British camp and the various efforts which had been made during the last two years to get into communication with Lotta.

Meanwhile, since I was not much concerned with the speech, I entertained myself by observing what was going on in the court; watching the judge, who was listening with an air of intense concentration to the counsel's recital, the one or two strangers who drifted in by the swing door and soon drifted out again, and especially Mr. Snuper. Not that he offered much entertainment. At first he had seated himself directly behind Mr. Schiller, but had gradually worked his way along the bench, apparently to get nearer to the speaker, and there he sat listening open-mouthed, seeming to be as much engrossed with Lorimer's recital as the judge himself. As to Mr. Schiller, after the opening statement, he appeared to take little interest in the proceedings, having, no doubt, heard it all before. Most of the time he sat with his eyes closed, his head reposing restfully against the high back of the seat as if he were asleep; though, from time to time, he opened his eyes and even raised his head to look about him, but subsided almost immediately into his former semi-somnolent state.

It was during one of these temporary awakenings that a very odd thing happened. Mr. Lorimer had come to the end of his narrative and was just beginning his argument, when Mr. Schiller opened his eyes and looked drowsily at the counsel. Then, suddenly, his eyes opened wide and a most strange expression of dismay appeared on his face. I looked at him in astonishment. He seemed to be making an effort to move, but his head remained fixed as if it were attached to the back of the seat. Almost immediately his predicament was observed by Mr. Snuper, who hastily slid along the seat towards him, at the same time fumbling in his pocket. I heard him murmur, "Don't move, sir," and some other words which I could not make out, and, as he spoke, I saw him quickly open a pair of folding pocket scissors. Then, with these in his hand, he leaned over the back of the seat, and the next moment the prisoner was free, smiling a little wryly, tenderly feeling the back of his head, and looking round curiously at the spot on the bench-back which Snuper was now carefully scraping with a pocket knife.

What he was scraping I could not see, but there must have been some foreign matter on the bench-back, for I saw him hold up the knife for Mr. Schiller's inspection and then wipe it on an envelope which he produced from his pocket and returned there after having folded it. But even then he was not satisfied, for he continued his scraping, wiping the knife on another piece of paper, and finally, having felt the surface with his hand, gave it a vigorous rub with his handkerchief. Meanwhile, Mr. Schiller, having acknowledged Snuper's services with a smile, moved along the bench, and, taking the precaution to examine the surface by sweeping his hand over it, leaned back and once more closed his eyes.

It was a queer episode, trivial enough to a casual observer and over in less than a minute; apparently unobserved, too, excepting that the judge cast one quick, inquisitive glance during the scraping operation. But its triviality was not quite convincing to me, and I continued to keep an eye on Mr. Snuper notwithstanding that he was now once more the open-mouthed listener, and I noticed that he seemed to be imperceptibly creeping along the bench towards its farther end. He had just reached his goal when Mr. Lorimer's speech came to an end, and, as the counsel sat down and preparations were being made for the reading of the affidavits, I saw him rise, and, having anxiously consulted the ancestral turnip, steal away quietly towards the swing door and vanish without a sound. So whatever his purpose might have been in attending at the hearing, it had apparently been achieved.

The first of the affidavits to be read was that of Thomas Pedley, and, as it set forth all the material facts, I did not quite see why Thorndyke had asked for his attendance for cross-examination. Nor did my colleague elicit any new facts of importance. His purpose was evidently to stress the significance of those facts that had been stated, and this he did most effectually.

"You have said, Mr. Pedley," he began, "that you were somewhat intimately acquainted with Mrs. Schiller for about five months. During that time, did you learn much about her as to her past history, her former places of abode, her friends and her relatives?"

"No," replied Pedley. "She never referred to her past at all, and she never mentioned any friends or relatives except her husband, and she only referred to him on one or two occasions, and then very slightly."

"Would you be able to recognize her handwriting?"

"No. I have never seen any writing of hers."

"But the signature on her pictures?"

"She did not sign her pictures. She used a conventional mark somewhat like a flower."

"Did you ever see a portrait of her husband or of herself?"

"I never saw a portrait of her husband, and the only portrait of herself that I ever saw was one that she drew for reduction to put into a locket that she was to give to Mr. Vanderpuye."

"Was Mr. Vanderpuye satisfied with her portrait?"

"No. He begged her either to let me paint her portrait or to ask Mr. Polton to take her photograph. But she refused

absolutely. She insisted on painting the portrait herself, and did so."

"Was her portrait a good likeness?"

"It was not a likeness at all. It bore no resemblance to her."

"Do you recognize this?" Thorndyke asked, handing a mounted photograph to the usher, who passed it to the witness.

"Yes," Pedley replied with a faint grin. "It is a photograph of Mrs. Schiller's portrait of herself."

"And do you recognize this locket?"

As he spoke, Thorndyke produced from the suitcase Polton's mysterious wooden slide, on which Vanderpuye's locket had been fixed by a clip, opened to show the miniature and the hair, and provided with a pair of lenses, one over the portrait and the other (a coddington) over the hair.

"Yes," replied Pedley as the usher handed it to him, "it is Mr. Vanderpuye's locket, and it contains Mrs. Schiller's portrait of herself and a specimen of her hair."

Here the locket and the photograph were passed up to the judge, who looked first at the photograph and smiled broadly and then peered through the lens at the miniature and compared it with the photograph.

"Yes," he remarked, "one can readily believe that this is not a good likeness, unless the testatrix was a very unusual-looking woman." Before returning the "exhibit" he applied his eye to the other lens and examined the hair. Then he turned sharply towards Pedley and asked:

"Was there anything at all peculiar about Mrs. Schiller's hair?"

"Yes, my Lord," was the reply, "but I can't say exactly what it was. There seemed to be something unusual in its texture."

"Ha," said the judge, "so it appeared to me. However—"

Here he handed the locket to the usher, and, as the latter conveyed it to Mr. Lorimer, he seemed to reflect on the circumstance as if it had suggested some idea to him. Lorimer, on the other hand, was not interested at all, bestowing only an impatient glance at the two exhibits and pushing them along the desk to Thorndyke, who passed them on to me. Naturally, remembering Pedley's description of Lotta's hair, I examined it with keen interest, but the light was not good enough, and the magnification not sufficient to show much detail. All that I could make out was a faintly speckled appearance quite unlike that of normal human hair. Reluctantly I returned the exhibits to Thorndyke, who, when he had put them back into the suitcase, resumed his cross-examination.

"Apart from this drawing of Mrs. Schiller's, have you ever seen any portrait of her?"

"No portrait drawn from life. I once drew a portrait of her from memory."

"Is this the portrait that you drew?" asked Thorndyke, handing to the usher Pedley's own note-book, fixed open with a rubber band, and a photograph.

Pedley looked at them with a shy grin and replied:

"Yes. The original drawing is in the book, and this is a photograph of it."

"Is the portrait a good likeness?"

"I should say that it is a fairly good likeness. I think it would be recognizable by anyone who knew her."

The book and the photograph were passed up to the judge, who inspected them with apparent interest, and from him they were conveyed to Lorimer, who glanced at them almost contemptuously and pushed them along to Thorndyke. Evidently the learned counsel regarded my colleague's proceedings as a regrettable waste of time, and he made no secret of his relief when Thorndyke sat down, indicating that his cross-examination was finished.

As Lorimer made no sign of re-examining the witness, and it was now within a few minutes of the luncheon hour, the judge announced the adjournment; where upon we all stood up; his Lordship whisked out by the private door, Polton hurried forward to seize the suitcase, and the occupants of the court trooped out by the swing door. We followed almost immediately, and, issuing into the Strand, set a course for our chambers by way of Devereux Court.

---

## XV. — MR. LORIMER OBJECTS

AS we approached the end of Crown Office Row I observed with interest, but no surprise, a rustic-looking person who appeared to be making a leisurely survey of the old houses in King's Bench Walk. Needless to say it was Mr. Snuper, apparently unconscious of our existence until Thorndyke, with the nearest approach to eagerness of which he was capable, accosted him. Then he turned with a start of surprise and he and my colleague drifted down the Walk together, apparently in earnest conversation. I slowed down my own progress to keep an eye on them, for I was devoured by curiosity as to Snuper's proceedings in court. But there was little to see and less to hear, for neither of them was addicted to shouting, and they were near the garden end of the Walk before any visible action took place. Then I thought I saw Snuper hand something to Thorndyke, but I could not see what it was, and, as it disappeared instantly into my friend's pocket, I judged that it was lost to me, at least for the time being; whereupon I abandoned my spying and hurried indoors in quest of lunch.

As the table had been laid by Polton's deputy, who was in the act of bringing in the food, I sat down to wait for Thorndyke's arrival; but when he looked in a few minutes later, it was only to beg me to proceed with the meal in his absence.

"I have a little job to do in the laboratory," he explained. "It will only take me a minute or two, but there is no need for you to wait."

Accordingly, as we had to be back in court punctually, I lifted the cover and fell to; but in less than five minutes Thorndyke joined me; and, looking at him critically, I seemed to detect, under his habitual impassiveness, an expression of satisfaction and even of elation, suggesting that the "little job" had turned out a success. Which led to speculations on my part as to the nature of that little job, and in particular, whether it had any connection with Mr. Snuper's activities. But, of course, I asked no questions, and, equally of course, Thorndyke volunteered no information.

When the hearing was resumed after lunch, Mr. Lorimer rose to request that Miss Linda Dalton's evidence might be taken next, to enable her to catch a train; and, as the judge raised no objection, she took her place in the witness-box and her affidavit was read. Most of it was concerned with her claim under the will, but it finished up with the statement that she had last seen Lotta Schiller early in June 1930, and that since then she had received no communication from her nor had any knowledge of her until she heard of the disappearance.

When the reading was finished, Thorndyke rose to cross-examine.

"Do you happen to remember what kind of dress the testatrix was wearing when you last saw her?"

Miss Dalton smiled. "I do, indeed," she replied. "It was a very ugly dress and I thought it rather eccentric. The bodice and skirt were a sort of dull violet and there was a broad turn-down collar of a deep orange and sleeves of the same colour. It was a dress that one could not forget."

"Did the testatrix play any musical instrument?"

"Yes. She played the violin."

"Did she spend much time practising?"

"Latterly, she did. My sister Barbara used to make a little income by playing in a small orchestra—at a cinema, I think—and she got Lotta an engagement at the same place, and they used to practise together; and, of course, she was playing for some hours every day in the orchestra."

"You will, of course, remember her appearance quite well. Will you look at this portrait and tell me whether you consider it a good likeness?" As he spoke he handed to the usher a photograph which I saw was the reproduction of Pedley's drawing.

Miss Dalton looked at it rather blankly.

"Is this supposed to be a portrait of Lotta?" she asked; "because I don't think it can be. I can't discover the faintest resemblance to her."

Glancing at Lorimer, I thought I detected a faint smile on his face. The judge, on the other hand, looked surprised and keenly interested; and, when the photograph was passed up to him, he examined it closely, turned it over to examine the back, on which a number had been pencilled, and made a note.

Meanwhile, Thorndyke had produced a small portfolio which was handed to the witness.

"In that portfolio," said Thorndyke, "are half a dozen photographs. Will you look through them and see whether any of them resemble Lotta Schiller?"

Miss Dalton glanced quickly at the first two which came to hand but at the third she paused. Then she took it out and said:

"This is a portrait of Lotta Schiller; a very odd one, but an excellent likeness. And so is this other one," she added, taking it out and holding it up.

"You feel no doubt that those two photographs are portraits of Lotta Schiller?"

"None whatever. They are both unmistakable."

The two portraits were now passed up to the judge, who examined them with intense interest and compared them minutely with Pedley's drawing. When he had looked at the backs and made his notes, he passed them down but still seemed to reflect with a rather puzzled air, and when they reached me I could understand his surprise, for the discrepancy between the drawing and the photograph seemed incredible in the case of a competent artist like Pedley. However, there was no time to consider the point, for Thorndyke had finished his cross-examination, and, a minute later Miss Dalton left the box, and, with a wave of the hand to Mr. Schiller, tripped out of the court.

The next witness was Mrs. Mitchens, whose affidavit set forth concisely the facts known to her relating to the case from the 16th of July 1930, when Lotta engaged the rooms, to the time of her disappearance, including the finding of Emma Robey's body. When the reading was finished, Thorndyke rose and led off with the question:

"Would you recognize Mrs. Schiller's handwriting if you saw it?"

"No," was the reply. "I have never seen her hand writing; she had no occasion to write to me—at least she never did write, and, as she always paid her rent in cash, there were no cheques."

"Did she ever play any musical instrument?"

"No, never; but she had a violin. I didn't know it until after she had left, but then, as I was going through her things to store them, I found it under the bed."

"When you were going through her things, did you come across a dress with a violet bodice and skirt and orange-coloured sleeves and a broad collar of the same colour?"

"No indeed, sir; and I don't think Mrs. Schiller would have worn such a dress. Her costumes were usually rather quiet and tasteful. But I only found one or two dresses and I am sure there was nothing of that kind among them."

"When Mrs. Schiller engaged your rooms, did she give you any references?"

"No. She paid a month's rent in advance—in cash."

Here Thorndyke again produced the portfolio, and, when it had been handed to the witness, said:

"I want you to look through those portraits and see if you can find any that you think is like Mrs. Schiller."

Mrs. Mitchens turned over the first two portraits and then, as she came to the third, she picked it out, and, holding it up triumphantly, announced:

"That is Mrs. Schiller."

The judge, who had been watching eagerly, now held out his hand for the identified portrait; and when it was passed up to him, he looked at it with intense interest, and, leaning out towards the witness, said:

"Now, Mrs. Mitchens, are you perfectly sure that this portrait is really like Mrs. Schiller?"

"I am perfectly sure, my Lord," she replied. "It's a speaking likeness."

On this his Lordship scribbled a note and then asked to have the portfolio handed up to him. When this had been done, he picked out two photographs and passed them down to the witness.

"Did you look at these two portraits?" he asked.

"Yes, my Lord," she replied, "but they are not Mrs. Schiller. They are not the least bit like her."

The judge noted down the answer and then, having passed the portfolio back, nodded to Thorndyke, who now put his final question.

"Did Mrs. Schiller ever receive visitors?"

"Only Mr. Pedley and Mr. Vanderpuye. I never saw anybody else."

On this, Thorndyke sat down, and when Mrs. Mitchens had been released from the box, the name of the next witness—Mrs. Bigham—was called, and a very unprepossessing woman advanced with something of a swagger. The evidence contained in her affidavit was of some importance in regard to the disappearance, but when it came to cross-examination, Thorndyke confined himself to the question of identification. Producing the inevitable portfolio, and passing it to her, he asked:

"You say that you knew Mrs. Schiller well by sight; do you think you would be able to recognize a portrait of her?"

"I am quite sure I should. I've got a rare memory for faces."

"Then will you look at the portraits in that portfolio and tell me whether any of them appears to be a portrait of Mrs. Schiller?"

Mrs. Bigham opened the portfolio with a judicial air, and, pursing up her lips, glared critically at the top photograph and thrust it over with the remark, "That ain't her," and passed on to the next, which she dealt with in the same fashion, and so on with the others until she came to the fifth; at which she gazed intently for an instant and then, picking it out and holding it aloft with the face towards us, exclaimed, "That's her."

I recognized it as the reproduction of Pedley's drawing, and so did the judge, who listened with rapt attention for the next question.

"You are quite sure that that portrait is really like Mrs. Schiller?"

"Lord, yes," was the reply. "It's her spit image. I reckernized it at the first glance."

"There are two others that I want you to look at very carefully. They are numbered three and four."

The witness turned over the photographs and selecting two, held them up for our and the judge's inspection. They were the portraits that had been identified by Miss Dalton.

"If you mean them," said Mrs. Bigham, "I can tell you that they ain't Mrs. Schiller. Nothink like her."

"You are quite sure of that?"



“Positive. They ain’t no more like her than what I am.” With this answer Thorndyke appeared to be satisfied, for he asked no further questions; and, when he had sat down and Mrs. Bigham had—somewhat reluctantly, I thought—vacated the box, I waited with some interest for the next item; and when it came, it was not altogether unexpected. For some time past I had noticed signs of restiveness on the part of the learned counsel for the applicant; and I was not surprised. For I had an uneasy feeling that Thorndyke had been taking some slight liberties with the legal proprieties. That was evidently Mr. Lorimer’s view, and he now gave expression to it.

“I am unwilling, my Lord,” he began, “to occasion delay in the hearing, but there seems to have been a departure from customary procedure on the part of the opposition to which I feel bound to object. My learned friend appears to be raising an entirely new issue, of which we have had no notice, and supporting it by the production of documents—to wit, photographs—the existence of which has not been disclosed to us.”

“Yes,” the judge agreed with a smile; “the learned counsel does certainly seem to have sprung a little surprise on us.”

Here he cast a somewhat quizzical glance at Thorndyke, who thereupon rose to reply.

“I shall not deny, my Lord, that some apology seems to be due to my learned friend, but I would submit that the raising of a new issue is only apparent. There are really two issues in this case; one is whether the person known as Lotta Schiller, who disappeared in Epping Forest is, or is not, presumably dead; the other is whether that person was the testatrix. We have all assumed that Lotta Schiller of Jacob Street and Lotta Schiller, the testatrix, were one and the same person. There seemed to be no reason to question the identity. Nevertheless, I considered it desirable, *ex abundantia cautelarum*, to test the correctness of our assumption; with the surprising result that there now seems to be some doubt whether we are not dealing with two different persons.”

Lorimer and the judge both smiled appreciatively at Thorndyke’s ingenious evasion, and his Lordship replied:

“That is quite true, though it does not answer the learned counsel’s objection. But the question of identity has been raised, and it has evidently got to be settled before the other issue can be considered. So the problem now is, what is to be done about it? You mentioned at the opening that you might ask for an adjournment to enable you to file affidavits in answer or to call witnesses. Are you going to apply for an adjournment now?”

“I think, my Lord,” replied Thorndyke, “that, in view of the conflict of testimony, some new evidence is required, and I should wish to call witnesses; but, as those witnesses would have to attend for cross-examination, there seems to be no object in filing affidavits, and time would be saved by not doing so. We are now at the week-end, and I submit that if your Lordship would consent and my learned friend would agree, he and I might confer in the interval and thereby avoid the necessity for an adjournment.”

The judge looked a little dubious at this suggestion, but, as Lorimer signified his agreement and was evidently anxious to get on with the case, his Lordship consented to the arrangement and adjourned the hearing for the week-end.

As the court rose, Lorimer turned to Thorndyke, and spoke to him in a low tone. Then they walked together to the solicitors’ table and apparently held a short discussion with Turner and Longford; at the end of which they came back and we set forth in company towards the Temple.

“We have arranged about the conference,” said Thorndyke. “The solicitors prefer to leave the matter for counsel to settle, so Lorimer and I are going to dine together and then adjourn to his chambers for the pow-wow. That will leave us a free week-end.”

Accordingly, when he had shed his wig and gown, he went off with his learned opponent and I saw him no more until about eleven o’clock, when he turned up at our chambers in obviously good spirits.

“Well,” I asked, “how did you get on with Lorimer?”

“Admirably,” he replied. “He is quite a reasonable fellow and I had no difficulty in getting him to see my point of view. I had to tell him more than I wanted to, but as we were alone it didn’t matter.”

“And what did you arrive at?”

“We agreed to treat the question of identity as a separate issue to be settled definitely before going on to the main issue. I made him understand that whichever way it went the result would not affect his case.”

“The devil you did!” I exclaimed. “I should like you to make me understand that. It seems to me that if you make out your contention of two different persons, his case collapses at once.”

He regarded me with an exasperating smile. “That, you know, Jervis, is because you have not been following the evidence in this case, or have not reflected sufficiently on its significance. Turn it over in your mind between this and next Monday and see if you cannot anticipate the revelation that I hope to make at the next hearing.”

With that tantalizing hint I had to be content. Of course, I did not trouble to “turn it over in my mind.” I realized that Polton had been right as usual. Thorndyke’s devilish machinations in his laboratory had been the prelude to “a little surprise for somebody”; and I was going to be one of the surprised.

---

## XVI. — SUPERINTENDENT MILLER INTERVENES

OF what took place during the week-end I am not very clear. On the Saturday Thorndyke was out and about most of the day making, as I assumed, his final arrangements; which assumption was confirmed by a late telephone message from Superintendent Miller asking me to "let the Doctor know that Miss Rendell had been warned and would attend in court on Monday." Who Miss Rendell might be I had no idea and I did not inquire. For the time being my curiosity was in abeyance.

One small piece of enlightenment I did indeed acquire. Finding Polton at a loose end in the laboratory, I attacked him facetiously on the subject of Mr. Snuper's watch, which I suggested was a disgrace to an establishment that included on its staff a first-class artificer. "Really," I concluded, "I think you ought to provide him with something less prehistoric for the credit of the house. Just get him to show it to you."

Polton regarded me with a cunning and crinkly smile. "I've seen it, sir; in fact I made it. But it isn't a watch, though it has hands that you can set to time for the sake of appearances. It is really a camera; but Mr. Snuper carries his watch in another compartment of the same pocket."

"A camera!" I exclaimed. "But it can only be a mere toy."

"Well," Polton admitted, "it isn't much of a camera; just a makeshift. But it answers Mr. Snuper's purpose, as you can use it anywhere without being noticed, and a poor photograph is, for him, better than no photograph. It is a record, you know, sir."

"And what sort of picture does it give?"

"Better than you would think, sir. The negative is half an inch by five-eighths, and it will bear enlarging up to four inches by five. It has a beautiful little lens and the definition is perfect. Perhaps you would like to see it. I've got it in for recharging."

He produced the illusive turnip from a drawer and exhibited it with excusable pride; for it was a miracle of ingenuity, with its arrangement for changing the film, which also set the shutter, and that for setting the hands. But almost more surprising were the tiny negatives, microscopically sharp, which Polton also showed me, and the clear and admirable enlargements; which caused me to view the turnip and its creator with a new respect.

The following day Thorndyke spent mostly in his private laboratory, making, as I supposed, some final preparations for the resumed hearing. But I had no idea what they might be, nor did I speculate on the subject. I had given the problem up, and reserved my curiosity for the promised revelation on the morrow.

Apparently I was not alone in this attitude, for, when we took our places in court on the Monday morning, I detected in Mr. Lorimer an air of lively expectancy; and the judge, as soon as he had nipped into his seat, glanced at the counsel for the applicant with evident curiosity; whereupon Lorimer rose to make his announcement.

"During the week-end, my Lord, I have conferred with my learned friend, and we have agreed, with your Lordship's consent, to treat the question of identity as a separate issue, to be disposed of before taking any further evidence on the main issue."

"That seems a reasonable proceeding," said the judge. "Evidently it would be futile to consider the presumption of death until we know whose death it is sought to presume. Are there any new witnesses?"

"Yes, my Lord. I am calling Mr. Carl Schiller, the testatrix's husband, whose affidavit has been filed. When he has given his evidence, as I have no other witnesses to identity, I have agreed that my learned friend should, with your Lordship's consent, produce his evidence forthwith."

The judge nodded, and thereupon Mr. Schiller stepped into the witness-box and stood there, listening attentively while his affidavit was read. It was quite short, setting forth merely that he had not seen or heard of, or from, his wife for more than three years, and that he had no knowledge whether she was alive or dead. When the reading was finished, Lorimer took the portfolio, which was handed to him by Thorndyke, and passed it across to the witness.

"There is some conflict of testimony, Mr. Schiller," said he, "as to which of the portraits in this portfolio is a true portrait of your wife. Will you kindly look through them and see whether you can settle the question for us?"

Mr. Schiller opened the portfolio and went systematically through the whole of its contents—some seven or eight photographs. Having looked at them all, he selected one and held it up for inspection; and I saw that it was Pedley's drawing, or rather the reproduction of it.

"This," said he, speaking with a perceptible German accent, "is the only one that seems to me to resemble my wife, and it is quite a fair likeness. The others I do not recognize at all."

I was a good deal surprised, and so, I think, was the judge; for Schiller's evidence directly contradicted that of Miss Dalton (who was not present on this occasion). However, there was nothing to be said as the witness had looked carefully through the whole set of photographs, and, as neither the judge nor Thorndyke questioned the evidence, the witness was released and returned to his seat, or rather to a seat at the extreme end of the bench, and Thorndyke called his first witness, a Mrs. Matilda Wharton; whereupon a pleasant-looking elderly woman stepped into the box.

"What is your full address, Mrs. Wharton?" Thorndyke asked.

"I live at 16 Corby Street, which is a turning out of the Linton Green Road."

"Have you ever been acquainted with Mrs. Lotta Schiller?"

"Yes. She lodged with me for about three years."

"Did her husband live with her?"

"No. He travelled about a good deal, but when he was in London he used to call on her and they used to go out together. But he never lived in the house. I think he used to stay at hotels."

"On what kind of terms were they?"

"They seemed quite friendly though not affectionate; but shortly before she left there seemed to have been some sort of disagreement, for she became rather strange in her manner and appeared to avoid him."

"When, and in what circumstances, did she leave you?"

"She left me on the 13th of June 1930. She went out one morning and never came back; but she sent me a telegram saying that she had gone away and would write. She never did write, but a couple of days later her husband came to the house and told me that she had been suddenly called abroad and that she would not be coming back for some months. He paid what was owing and took away her belongings, including her violin. I have never seen or heard of her since."

"Was there anything remarkable about the manner of her departure?"

"Well, it was rather strange. She said nothing about going away before she went out, and she had nothing with her but the things that she stood up in."

"During the time that she lodged with you, did she receive many visitors?"

"No. The two Miss Daltons used sometimes to call to see her or to take her out; and once or twice Mr. Montagu—the poor gentleman who was murdered—came to see her or to fetch her out."

Here Thorndyke gave me—and not me alone—the first of the surprises by producing from the suitcase a small oil painting, which I recognized as a sketch of Pedley's that I had seen hanging on the wall of Polton's private room.

"I want you, Mrs. Wharton," said he, passing it across to her, "to look at this painting and tell me whether the figures in it suggest any particular persons to you."

The witness examined the painting closely and then at arm's length.

"Of course," she said cautiously, "I can't recognize any of these people, but the woman looks to me very much like Mrs. Schiller."

"In what respect is she like Mrs. Schiller?"

"I think it is chiefly the dress. It's rather a peculiar dress and Mrs. Schiller had one just like it; in fact she was wearing that very dress on the morning that she went away. But the figure is like her, too, and the colour of her hair. Still, it is only a resemblance. I don't say it actually is her. You see, there are no features to recognize it by."

"And as to the other figures; do they seem to suggest anybody that you have known?"

Mrs. Wharton again looked at the picture critically. At length she replied, in a rather doubtful tone:

"It's only a mere guess as they have their backs to us, but I think the taller of the two men rather reminds me of Mr. Montagu. I often used to see him in the street and he was always dressed in this way, and he had a habit of gesticulating with his umbrella as he talked, as this man seems to be doing; and the umbrella in the picture seems to have an ivory handle as his had. And he seems to be about the right height, comparing him with the other man. Still, I don't profess to be able to recognize him."

"Of course you can't," said Thorndyke; "but I must compliment you on your memory and powers of observation. And now I will try you with something that it is more possible to be certain about."

Here he produced the inevitable portfolio and passed it across to her. Meanwhile the picture was handed up to the judge, who looked at it curiously and returned it; and I noticed that Lorimer examined it with more than his usual faint interest in exhibits. But attention was now focused on Mrs. Wharton, who, at Thorndyke's request, was looking very carefully through the collection of portraits. When she had examined them all, she very deliberately selected two, which she held up with their faces towards us, and which I could see were the two that Miss Dalton had recognized.

"These," said she, "are portraits of Mrs. Schiller. They aren't very flattering, but they are quite good likenesses."

The judge inspected them with a surprised and rather puzzled expression and then glanced at Thorndyke; who, as he received the portfolio, took from it Pedley's drawing and passed it across to the witness.

"What do you say to this? It is supposed to be a portrait of Mrs. Schiller. Is it a good likeness?"

The witness looked at it with evident surprise. After a prolonged inspection she handed it back, shaking her head.

"I don't think it can have been meant for Mrs. Schiller," said she. "It doesn't seem to me to be like her at all. It looks like quite a different person."

This evidently completed his Lordship's perplexity, for he asked that the portfolio should be passed up to him, and, when

he had it, he laid the three portraits in a row on his desk and made a prolonged and careful comparison. But clearly he could make nothing of them, for he finally gathered them up, and, glancing at Thorndyke with raised eyebrows, handed back the portfolio.

Among the new arrivals in court I had noticed a rather prim-looking lady dressed in a neat and becoming uniform which associated itself in my mind with the idea of “chokee”—formerly known familiarly as “the jug.” And so it turned out to be; for, when Mrs. Wharton had vacated the box—there being no cross-examination—the lady in question took her place, and, facing Thorndyke with professional composure, introduced herself as Miss Julia Rendell, a Female Officer at Holloway Prison. Thereupon, Thorndyke produced the everlasting portfolio; but he did not on this occasion pass it across to the witness. Instead, he opened it, and, selecting from the collection the two photographs which Mrs. Wharton had identified, sent them across for the lady’s inspection.

“Do you recognize those two photographs, Miss Rendell?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied promptly. “They are incomplete copies of two prison portraits of a prisoner named, or known as, Louisa Saunders.”

“Do you recognize these two?” he asked, handing over two other photographs which he had just fished out of the suitcase.

“Yes. They are the original portraits, or facsimile copies of them.”

“Are they good likenesses of Louisa Saunders?”

“Yes, quite good. I recognized them at once.”

“When did you first see Louisa Saunders?”

“On the 13th of June 1930 at the evening receptions. She had been arrested that morning and remanded in custody.”

“Do you know any particulars of the charge on which she was arrested?”

“Yes. I accompanied her, with some other remands, to the police court and was present at the hearing. She was charged with having uttered a forged one-pound note and with having in her possession four other forged notes.”

“Did she plead ‘Guilty’ or ‘Not guilty’?”

“Not guilty.’ She said that the notes had been given to her in a bundle and that she had no suspicion of their being bad notes.”

“Was any evidence given to show that she knew the notes to be bad notes?”

“No. The only evidence against her was that she had offered the bad note in payment for some goods that she had bought, and that she had the other notes in her possession. But, as she would not give any account of herself or say where she had obtained the notes or who had given them to her, she was convicted and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment.”

“Is that, in your experience, a usual sentence for this offence?”

“No. I should say that it was an unusually lenient one.”

“Did the prisoner give any address?”

“No. She would give no account of herself whatever except her name.”

“Was there any evidence that Louisa Saunders was her real name?”

“None beyond the fact that her clothing was marked with the initials ‘L. S.’”

“Was she a married woman or a spinster?”

“She refused any information about herself, but, as she was wearing a wedding ring, we entered her as a married woman.”

“While she was in prison, was her hair cut?”

“No. It was rather short when she came in, and, as she was perfectly clean, there was no necessity.”

“Do you remember how long it was when she was discharged?”

“So far as I remember, it was about down to her shoulders.”

“On what date was she discharged?”

“On the 12th of December 1930, at noon.”

“I suppose you don’t know whether anybody met her when she left the prison?”

“As a matter of fact, I do. I happened to be going out of the prison at the same time, and I saw a man who seemed to be waiting for her at the corner of Hilmarton Road. At any rate, she crossed the road and joined him.”

“Do you remember what he was like?”

“Not very clearly. I did not notice him particularly and should not know him if I were to see him. All that I remember

about him is that he seemed to be a fairly well-dressed man and rather short."

"You saw the prisoner, Saunders, at receptions on the day of her arrest; you accompanied her to the police court; and you saw her in the street when she left the prison. Do you remember how she was dressed on those occasions?"

"I remember that she was wearing a rather conspicuous dress with sleeves a different colour from the bodice and skirt."

Here Thorndyke produced Pedley's sketch and passed it across to the witness.

"I want you," said he, "to look carefully at that picture and tell me whether it recalls anything to your memory."

The witness looked at the painting attentively for a few moments, and then replied:

"The woman in the picture reminds me strongly of Louisa Saunders. She is like her in figure and in the colour of her hair, and the dress is exactly like the one that Saunders was wearing when she came to the prison and when she left it. Of course, I can't identify her as Saunders because the face is not recognizable, but otherwise the resemblance seems to be complete."

This concluded the examination-in-chief, and, as Thorndyke sat down, Lorimer rose to cross-examine.

"Is it not rather remarkable," he asked, "that you should have so clear a recollection of this prisoner after the lapse of so long a time?"

"I don't think so," she replied. "A prison officer is expected to be able to remember and recognize persons, and Saunders was a rather unusual prisoner. Most of the women who come in at receptions are of the lowest class; and then the dress that she was wearing was a distinctly striking one. And," the witness added with a deprecating smile, "a female prison officer, like any other woman, is apt to have a good memory for an unusual dress."

"This one," his Lordship remarked, "certainly seems to have made a deep impression on the ladies who had seen it, judging by the evidence, as they all remembered it clearly. But the photographs give a very misleading rendering of it, though one can see that the sleeves and collar are of a different colour from the bodice. The painter has still some advantage over the photographer."

"In the matter of colour, my Lord," said Lorimer. "Not in respect of personal identity. I do not admit that the figure in the painting has been identified."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the judge. "I was referring only to the colour of the dress. No one has suggested that there has been actual identification of the person."

With this, Lorimer opened a new subject. "You have said that you were present at the police court proceedings. Was any evidence produced to show that the accused had any guilty knowledge of the character of the notes?"

"None except the fact that she had the notes in her possession and had passed one of them."

"Was there any evidence that her explanation of the way she came by those notes could not be true?"

"No. But the trouble was that she refused to say where she got the notes or who gave them to her."

On receiving this answer Lorimer discreetly closed his cross-examination, having apparently made his point, which seemed to be that the accused might quite possibly have been innocent, the conviction notwithstanding. Why he should stress this point I could not quite see, unless he was beginning to entertain the same suspicion as that which was creeping into my own mind.

I had listened to Miss Rendell's evidence with intense interest; indeed, I had been considerably startled, not only by the identification but by the curious coincidence of dates. But my interest was feeble compared to his Lordship's. The new identification had evidently astonished him, and, when the date of the prisoner's arrest was mentioned he hurriedly turned over his notes and made some comparisons; and when the photographs were handed up to him, he spread them out in a row and rapidly compared them. There was no need for a prolonged examination, as I realized when they reached me, for the two pairs appeared to be from the same negatives. The only difference was that the "originals" showed a black batten with the prisoner's name chalked on it fixed across the chair and occupying the foot of the portrait, whereas, in the "incomplete copies" the batten had been masked out.

But there were other interested listeners besides the judge and me. Mr. Schiller, although he still made a show of keeping his eyes closed, was evidently wide awake. Inspector Blandy followed the evidence with close attention; and Superintendent Miller, who had slipped quietly into the court some time previously with my friend, Dr. Oldfield, was listening and watching attentively, though he must have known all about Miss Rendell's evidence.

As the latter lady made her dignified exit from the box, the judge cast a quick, expectant glance at Thorndyke; then the name of the next witness was called, and Dr. James Oldfield came forward and presented himself to be sworn and to give evidence.

In his case, as in that of the previous witness, the examination began with the passing across of the two "incomplete copies."

"Will you look at those two photographs, Dr. Oldfield," said Thorndyke, "and tell us whether they seem to be portraits of any person whom you have ever seen?"

Oldfield examined the photographs closely for nearly a minute; and as he looked at them, there stole gradually over his

face an expression of surprised recognition. At length he replied cautiously:

"These photographs appear to me to be portraits of Emma Robey, the woman who was murdered about two years ago at 39 Jacob Street, Hampstead Road."

"Can you say definitely that they are portraits of Emma Robey?"

"I don't like to swear, positively, that they are. The woman had been dead about three weeks when I examined her body, and some changes had occurred. But I feel a strong conviction that these are portraits of her. Would it be permissible for me to refer to my notes?"

"When did you take the notes?" the judge asked.

"I made them in the mortuary in the presence of the body, and I compared and verified them, point by point, after I had written them."

"Then you may certainly refer to them," said the judge.

On this, Oldfield produced from his pocket a small book, and, opening it at a marked place, made a systematic comparison of the notes and the photographs. When he had finished, he announced:

"I have compared the description in the notes, detail by detail, with the photographs, and I find that they agree in every respect except one. That is that the hair in the photograph is considerably shorter than the hair of the corpse when I examined it."

"Did you note the exact length of the hair?"

"I did not measure it, but I noted it in the description as just down to the shoulders."

"With that exception, you find complete agreement between your description and the photographs?"

"Yes; the agreement is complete in every detail."

"And, apart from the written description, do you recognize the portraits as being like Emma Robey?"

"Yes. As soon as I saw the photographs I felt that they were portraits of somebody whom I had seen; and when I tried to recall who that somebody was, I suddenly realized that she was Emma Robey. I may say that I have now no doubt that these are really portraits of her."

At this point my attention was attracted by Mr. Schiller; who had suddenly awakened, and now, pulling out his watch and glancing at it with a startled air, stood up abruptly, and, with a little bow to the judge, began to make his way slowly and silently towards the door. As he rose, so also did Inspector Blandy and Superintendent Miller, both of whom moved off unobtrusively in the same direction. I followed the three figures eagerly with my eyes as they converged on the exit, Schiller leading and slightly quickening his pace. One by one they passed out, and as the door swung to noisily, after the last of them, the judge (who had also been observing the exodus) took the photographs in his hand and remarked:

"This is a most extraordinary affair. These portraits have now been confidently identified as three different persons."

"My submission is, my Lord," said Thorndyke, "that those three are one and the same person."

"That would seem," the judge began; but at this moment a heavy thump on the swing door sent it flying inwards, and, through the opening came a sound as of several persons scuffling, mingled with low but excited voices. Then, in the midst of the confused noises, a pistol shot rang out. And as the door swung to, the sounds became more muffled and distant. After a short interval, at a sign from the judge, the usher hurried towards the door, and, having peered out cautiously, disappeared, and the door swung to after him. There was a brief silence during which we all waited expectantly. Then the usher reappeared, in company with Superintendent Miller, and announced:

"This officer, my Lord, has a communication to make to your Lordship."

The judge made no comment but looked inquiringly at Miller, who stepped up to the bench and made his "communication."

"I have to inform your Lordship," said he, "that Mr. Carl Schiller has just been arrested on a charge of having murdered his wife."

"Is it permissible," asked the judge, who seemed more interested than surprised, "for you to give any particulars of the charge?"

"It is quite permissible, my Lord," replied Miller, "as the prisoner will be brought before a magistrate immediately. The arrest was made on an information sworn by Dr. Thorndyke, and the charge is that the accused did, on the 12th of December 1930, at Number 39 Jacob Street, Hampstead Road, murder his wife, Lotta Schiller, by forcibly administering poison to her."

"Ah," said the judge, "thirty-nine, Jacob Street. Then the Epping Forest tragedy, if there ever was one, is irrelevant to the case of this poor woman?"

"Quite irrelevant, my Lord," Miller agreed.

The judge reflected for a few moments; then, addressing the court, that is to say the counsel and solicitors, he said:

"You have heard this officer's remarkable announcement. Obviously this new information involves at least the suspension of these proceedings. If there is evidence that Lotta Schiller was murdered, there must be evidence that she is dead; and if her death can be proved, that proof excludes the idea of presuming it. The hearing will therefore be adjourned sine die."

On this, we all rose. The witnesses—there were no spectators—faded out of the court, and we were preparing to depart also. But the judge made no sign of retiring. Instead, he craned out of his seat towards Thorndyke, and, in a low voice, suggested his desire for a little further enlightenment. Accordingly Thorndyke stepped over to the bench, and Lorimer and I had no false delicacy about following him.

"Well, Doctor," said the judge, "as you seem to have been making use of the Probate Court for your own purposes, I think that the least you can do is to satisfy our legitimate curiosity. Now, what I want to know is, what has happened to the woman who personated Lotta Schiller at 39 Jacob Street, and what part did she take in the crime?"

"There was no woman, my Lord," replied Thorndyke. "The person who was known at Jacob Street as Lotta Schiller was Carl Schiller, dressed and made up as a woman."

"God bless me!" exclaimed the judge, "it sounds incredible. I suppose you have clear evidence as to the identity?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "The two persons are identical in their physical characteristics; in size, eye-colour, form of features, and in the exact shape of the ears."

"That won't carry you very far in support of a capital charge," the judge commented.

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "It would be of no use excepting for corroboration. But there is one piece of evidence that is quite conclusive. Providence has been kinder to us than to the criminal. It happens that Carl Schiller has a most unusual type of hair."

"Ha!" the judge exclaimed. "There is something queer about the hair, is there? I thought, when I looked at the locket, that it was odd-looking hair. Very unusual, is it?"

"It is more than that, my Lord. It presents one of the rarest of anomalies. This ringed hair, as it is called, each hair being marked by alternate light and dark bands, is of such extreme rarity that, in the whole of my professional experience, I have never before met with a case. Only a very few examples exist in museums."

"That is fairly impressive," said the judge. "But the specimen in the locket, which, I suppose, is what you rely on, appertains to the lady. Do you know as a fact that Carl Schiller has hair of this character?"

"I do," replied Thorndyke. "There, again, Providence has been kind to us. During the last hearing, a very curious accident happened in court. Mr. Schiller's head became in some way stuck to the back of the bench, and it was necessary for a person who was sitting in the bench behind him to cut the hair in order to liberate him. The piece of hair which was cut off came into my possession, and, of course, as soon as it was examined with the microscope, the murder was, literally, out."

The judge's eyes twinkled. "Ha!" said he. "Now I wonder how that gentleman's head became stuck to the bench? Do you happen to know?"

"I don't actually know," Thorndyke replied, "but I have certain suspicions."

"So have I," said his Lordship.

---

## XVII. — OBSERVATIONS ON THE ART OF DISGUISE

IT might perhaps be of interest, if space permitted, to describe in detail the trial of Carl Schiller for the murder of his wife, Lotta. But space does not permit, nor is there any need for such description, since all the facts brought forward in evidence against him are known to the reader of this narrative. It is, however, one thing to know the facts, but quite another to perceive their application or the inferences deducible from them. I had known all the facts that were known to Thorndyke; but it was not until I had heard him reconstruct the course of the investigation that I perceived their exact connections and understood how, by piecing them together, he had evolved his startling conclusion.

The trial had run its course to its inevitable end. The jury, without leaving the box, had brought in their verdict of "Guilty"; the judge had pronounced sentence of death; and the prisoner had descended the stairs from the dock, vanishing for ever from the sight of men; and the spectators, having thus witnessed the fall of the curtain, rose and began to surge out through the open doors. I followed them as soon as I could, and, presently, in the great hail, encountered Polton, Pedley, and Vanderpuye, whom I joined to wait for Thorndyke.

For my part, I had looked on at the unfolding of the drama, at the piling up of the deadly evidence, with no single twinge of pity or compunction, even when the judge had assumed the black cap and pronounced the final words of doom. But it was otherwise with our two friends. For them it had been impossible, as they looked on the white-faced brute in the dock, facing his accusers like a caged wild beast, to forget the ties of friendship and even of affection that had once bound them to him. Looking at their pale and troubled faces, I realized that it had been a painful ordeal which had left them shocked and saddened. So, too, Thorndyke, when he came out and joined us, was instantly aware of their distressed state of mind, and, with his invariable sympathy and kindness, sought for some means of distracting their thoughts from their late

painful experience.

"I am wondering, Polton," said he, "whether the resources of 5A King's Bench Walk are equal to an impromptu dinner for five?"

"The resources of Number 5A, sir, are unlimited," was the confident reply, in a tone of persuasive eagerness.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I am in a position to ask our two friends to give us the very great pleasure of their society this evening."

He glanced inquiringly at Pedley and Vanderpuye, both of whom accepted the invitation with almost pathetic promptitude; whereupon Polton excused him self and darted off like a lamplighter, while we, since it was still some time short of any reasonable dinner hour, meandered down the Old Bailey to Ludgate Hill in search of a much-needed cup of tea. When we had disposed of this, with as much lively conversation as Thorndyke and I could produce for the occasion, we set forth at a leisurely pace for the Temple by way of the Embankment.

Polton's estimate of the resources of 5A King's Bench Walk was justified by the result, though I suspected that the Rainbow or some other excellent Fleet Street tavern had been pressed into service. But however that may have been, the dinner to which we sat down in due course did credit to the establishment, handsomely supported as it was by the products of our own cellar, which Polton had raided to some purpose (though his own place at the table was marked ingloriously by a bottle of lemonade). The unobtrusive service was conducted by William, Polton's domestic understudy, aided by a mysterious stranger of waiter-like aspect, who lurked in the background performing curious feats of legerdemain with dishes and covers but never intruding into William's domain.

The opening stages of a good dinner "when beards wag all" are not adapted for sustained conversation. So, for a time, what talk there was concerned itself for the most part with cheerful trivialities. But at the back of all our minds was the drama which we had seen played out to its tragic end a few hours before, and inevitably it had to come to the surface sooner or later. But it was not until the manducatory pace had slowed down and the wine had circulated that the subject, hitherto taboo, was broached, and even then only indirectly.

"Before I forget," said Thorndyke, "let me make restitution." He produced from his pocket Pedley's note-book and Vanderpuye's locket, and, pushing them across the table towards their respective owners, added:

"There is no need for me to tell you how much I am indebted to you both for the loan and the use of these things. You have heard the evidence and you know what invaluable light they threw on the mystery."

Pedley took up the book and pocketed it without remark; but Vanderpuye hesitated, looking at the little bauble as it lay on the table with intense disfavour. Eventually, however, he picked it up and dropped it into his pocket with something of a gesture of disgust.

"Your property, Polton," said Thorndyke, "is, as you see, on the mantelpiece, and is now at your disposal, with many thanks for the loan."

"You were very welcome, sir," replied Polton, "but I think that the loan benefited me more than it did you. It has given the picture a new interest for me, whereas I don't see that you got much help from it except for the colour of the lady's dress."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that when you hear the whole story, as you shall some day, you will find that the picture played a more important part in the investigation than you have realized."

"If it did," said I, "there is at least one point that I have missed, for I had the same idea as Polton; in fact I rather wondered why you produced the picture in court at all."

"The principal object in producing it," he replied, "was to help the witnesses to remember the dress. The photographs gave no such help; but the dress was of vital importance in fixing the dates. A further purpose was to ascertain whether the figure of the woman was recognizably like Lotta Schiller."

"Yes; but you seem to hint at some other function that the picture served; and you hint at some future occasion when we shall hear the whole story of the investigation. But why a future occasion? We are all here, and I think we are all in the same condition as to our interest in the case. Speaking for myself, I am still mystified. I have heard all the evidence and found it perfectly conclusive; but what I cannot understand is how you came to build up the whole scheme of evidence out of nothing. Where did you get your start? What first put you on the track? It seemed to me that from the moment when Penfield proposed the case, you went straight ahead as if you had a considered theory already in your mind."

"But that, in effect," he replied, "was the actual position. When Penfield informed us of the impending application, he was not, so far as I was concerned, opening a new subject, but only introducing a new phase of a problem that I had already considered in some detail. But the story of the investigation is a rather long one, and, if you all really want to hear it, you had better draw up your armchairs round the fire and prepare yourselves to listen in comfort."

There was no doubt about the desire to hear the story. Polton was "on broken bottles" of curiosity, and our two guests, each in his own way, were eager to learn how the tangled skein had been unravelled. Accordingly we drew the armchairs up to the fire and Polton placed conveniently by them the little tables with their decanters and cigar boxes, while William and the alien waiter—who now came out into the open—swiftly cleared the table of its now irrelevant burden. Then, when the two operators had finally departed, Thorndyke began his story.



"The account of the actual investigation has a necessary prologue; necessary because it explains how suspicion first entered my mind in the absence of any positive suggestion from without. Jervis knows, because I have often told him, that in the early days when I had little or no practice, I used to occupy myself in the study of hypothetical cases. I would consider how a particular crime could be planned and executed with the greatest amount of security against detection; and, when I had established the principles, I would apply them by working out in detail an imaginary crime. Then I would study this crime to discover its weak points and the signs by which it might be recognized in real life. The method was a really valuable one, for a hypothetical crime, systematically studied, yields practically as much experience as a real one.

"Now, the most important crime from a medico-legal point of view is the deliberately planned murder. Accordingly, I gave special attention to this type of crime, and, after trying over a number of different methods, I decided that by far the most secure from the chance of detection was that of a fictitious person. It seemed to me that if this method were skilfully planned and efficiently carried out it would be almost undetectable."

"I am not quite sure," said Vanderpuye, "that I understand what you mean by creating a fictitious person."

"Well, let us take an imaginary case. We will suppose that a man whom we will call John Doe has some reason for wishing to eliminate a certain person. That person may be an unwanted wife. John Doe may wish to marry another woman; or he may be haunted by a blackmailer. The reason, whatever it may be, is a permanent one. The person whom he desires to eliminate is an abiding hindrance to happiness or a menace to his safety. Now, supposing him to adopt my method, let us follow his procedure.

"He begins by assuming a disguise which so far alters his appearance that he would not be easily recognized by anyone who knew him, and that gives him certain new and easily recognizable characteristics."

"That would not be particularly easy," I remarked.

"It would not," Thorndyke agreed, "but we will consider that question separately. Now we will assume that John Doe has so disguised himself and has taken a new name. Let us say, Richard Roe. Under that name he takes up his abode in a neighbourhood where he is not known and there assumes a character which will bring him into fairly close contact with a limited number of people. He may open a shop or an office or practise some kind of avocation whereby he will become well known by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and more intimately known by a few; and in that way he will carry on for some months, at least, until he has become a well-established character in the locality.

"Then he proceeds to commit his crime, at his own selected time and place. He is not hurried. He can make his arrangements at his leisure. He has no occasion to take any measures for concealment of the identity of the criminal. On the contrary; the more definitely the crime is connected with Richard Roe, the more perfect will be his security. All that is necessary is to avoid any actual witnesses of the crime or any need for him to escape quickly. Probably the most perfect method would be to lure the victim to his premises, and, having committed the murder, to lock the corpse up in those premises and quietly take his departure.

"He is still, you see, not hurried or in any danger. He simply sheds his disguise and now has no connection with the murder. Some days, or perhaps weeks, will elapse before the body is discovered; in which time he can go abroad or to a distance, write to his friends describing his travels, and, in due course, after a discreet interval, return to his usual places of resort and to the circle of his old acquaintances.

"Meanwhile the body has been discovered and the police are in full cry after the murderer, Richard Roe. They have an excellent detailed description of him, vouched for by a number of reliable witnesses who knew him quite intimately and would certainly recognize him if he were produced. But he never is produced; for, in the moment when John Doe shed his disguise, Richard Roe ceased to exist. The police are, in fact, searching for a purely imaginary person."

"Yes," said I, "it certainly appears to be a very perfect scheme. But yet there seems to me to be one snag. The victim is in some way connected with John Doe, and it might be noticed that the murder is very opportune for him. For instance, the murdered person might be his unwanted wife, with whom he is known to have been on bad terms."

"I don't think that there is much in that," Thorndyke replied. "You see, the identity of the murderer is not in question. He is a known person—Richard Roe—and, consequently, no suspicion can possibly fall on any other person. Still, the matter is worth noticing. It would undoubtedly add to the murderer's safety if the corpse also could be disguised or rendered unrecognizable. We will bear that fact in mind. And now let us consider the question of disguise, remembering that a mere stage make-up would be useless; that it would have to be efficient out of doors in daylight and that it would have to be used constantly over a considerable period of time.

"To change a man's appearance so completely that his friends or acquaintances would not recognize him is not easy. But it can be done. There used to be a wig-maker in Russel Street, Covent Garden, who made a regular profession of the art of disguising, and who was able to produce the most surprising transformations. But his methods were rather elaborate, the results not at all comfortable to the subject, and, in continuing cases, the clients had to attend daily to have the make-up renewed. This would hardly do for a long-term disguise, and certainly not for an intending murderer. He would have to do his own make-up, and it would require to be reasonably comfortable.

"However, we need not dwell on the difficulties of purely male disguise, for there is another kind that is comparatively easy and extremely convincing; change of sex. When it is possible, it is completely effective; for a marked change of appearance can be produced with very little actual disguise. And the change of appearance becomes of less importance,

since the change of sex creates a new personality. To his new acquaintances John Doe is a woman, and if any of them should subsequently meet him, a slight resemblance to that woman would pass unnoticed.

"Moreover, the present fashions are favourable to such personation. Women's hair is worn in all sorts of ways, from a close crop to a mop of fuzz; and it is not only waved or curled artificially but is also dyed or bleached, quite openly and without exciting remark. Again, there is the extensive make-up, which is almost universal and is a recognized fashion; the painted lips, the tinted and powdered cheeks, the false eyelashes and the pencilled eyebrows. All these materially alter the appearance, and by management could be made to alter it profoundly. A man, by simply dressing as a woman and adopting a feminine mode of wearing the hair, with some use of the lipstick and the eyebrow pencil, would at once be considerably disguised; probably enough to pass unrecognized by persons who knew him only slightly; and if he had previously worn a beard or moustache, his appearance would be totally changed. Even his friends would not recognize him.

"But it is a method that is subject to very severe limitations. To certain types of men it would be impracticable. For a tall man it would be very unsuitable. A six-foot woman would be rather remarkable; but conspicuousness is what a disguised man would need to avoid. Then a dark man would be almost impossible, for no amount of shaving would get rid of a dark beard, and no paint or powder would cover it up. A man with a bass voice would also be impossible. It is difficult to modify the voice appreciably, and anything like an assumed voice would attract attention. Other peculiarities such as a very large nose or marked hairiness of the chest or limbs would create difficulties.

"And now let us see what would be a really suitable case, remembering that the object is to produce a woman of an ordinary type whose appearance would not attract notice. He would be the opposite of the types which we have excluded; that is to say, he would be a rather small, slight, blond man with somewhat small features, a light voice, and not too much hair on his chest or limbs. Such a man, if he shaved twice a day and used the make-up judiciously, might pass as a very ordinary-looking woman, provided that, before making his appearance in his new character, he let his hair grow long enough to allow of some kind of feminine mode. And, conversely, if one suspected a woman of being a man in disguise, one could postulate a man of this type as the one to be sought for; and such a suspicion might reasonably arise if a woman who had committed a crime disappeared immediately and permanently."

"I should have thought," said I, "that the voice would have created a difficulty."

"I think you exaggerate the difficulty," he replied. "There are voices which are unmistakably masculine or feminine; but there are a good many others—more, I think, than we realize—that are not at all distinctive. Between a deep female voice, especially if the lower register is habitually used, and a light male voice, there is very little difference. On hearing such a voice proceeding from another room, it is often difficult to say whether the speaker is a man or a woman. The fact is that our ideas are based on extreme or typical forms.

"And now to resume our argument. We have considered only physical disguise; change in appearance. But there is also what we may call psychological disguise; the adoption of feminine habits and modes of behaviour and the creation of circumstances suggesting a feminine personality. These would act by suggestion and leave observers with an unshakable conviction of the personator's sex, the more powerful because unconscious. But the most convincing of all would be a love affair with a man, preferably a somewhat scandalous one which would give rise to gossip. The suggestive effect of this would be intense. It would completely forestall any possible question as to the sex of the personator.

"Incidentally, we may note that the latter would be wise to associate with women as little as possible; for women, having an intimate knowledge of the ways of their own sex, might notice some discrepancy of habit or behaviour into which a man might be betrayed by the lack of such knowledge.

"And now, having considered the 'fictitious person' method in the abstract, we may proceed to observe its application in the case of R. v. Schiller."

He paused to pay certain little attentions to his guests. Then, when our glasses and pipes were recharged and Polton had refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff, he commenced his narration.

---

## XVIII. — THE INVESTIGATION REVIEWED

"IT would be a paradox," Thorndyke began, "to say that the unravelment of the complex scheme for the murder of Lotta Schiller began before the murder was committed; but it is a fact that, as each of the later developments came into view, it found me with a body of considered data to apply to the solution of the problem presented. At first, this was not an investigation ad hoc. Until Penfield proposed his case to me, I was an outsider, watching with little more than academic interest the unfolding of a train of events in which I was not personally concerned. Hence, when the question of the Presumption of Death was raised, I had not to embark on an investigation de novo, but only to test and verify conclusions already formed.

"For me, the starting-point was the murder of Charles Montagu. The interest of that crime from a medico-legal point of view lay in the unusual method adopted by the murderer—the forcible administration of poison. But there were other elements of interest, and, thanks to Polton's enthusiasm, we were kept fully supplied with the published records of the case. We had the lurid descriptions of the murder and of the mysterious artist on whom suspicion at first lighted, and a full report of the inquest; but above all, we had Pedley's remarkable little picture of Gravel-pit Wood.

"That picture made a deep impression on me. There it is on the mantelpiece, and, if you will look at it attentively, I think you will understand its effect on me. There are three figures. One, the taller man, was recognized by Blandy as Charles Montagu; and there we see him going to his death. The shorter man must have been the murderer; and we can see him there, leading his victim to the appointed place. But, to me, the most impressive figure was that of the woman. Who was she, and why was she there? Obviously she was spying on the two men, and apparently trying to hear what they were saying. The strong suggestion was that she was in some way related to one of them; and, since she never came forward to give information, the natural inference was that she was related to, or connected with, the shorter man. For, if her relations had been with Montagu, she would surely have denounced the murderer.

"But, above all, what impressed me was the terrible position that this unfortunate woman had placed herself in; the dreadful peril in which she stood. For her life hung on a thread—the thread of her silence. If she had not actually witnessed the murder, she certainly knew who the murderer was. A word from her could have sent him to the gallows; and she alone in all the world had that fatal knowledge. It was an awful position. The man had committed his crime and vanished without leaving a trace. He must have believed himself to be absolutely safe; and yet, in fact, his life was in this woman's hands. If ever an inkling of the truth should leak out, she was doomed. The ruthless ferocity of the crime made that practically certain.

"I must confess that the thought of the dangers that encompassed that unhappy woman caused me a good deal of discomfort; which was revived from time to time when I used to see the picture hanging in Polton's room; and I was haunted by an uneasy expectation that, sooner or later, I should hear of the murder of some woman which should justify my forebodings. But the months passed, and I began to hope that the woman had had the wisdom to keep her secret and that the danger had passed.

"Then, at last, came the murder of Emma Robey; and, immediately, my suspicions were aroused. It was a bizarre, theatrical crime with many curious features; but the one that instantly attracted my attention was the method adopted by the murderer—the forcible administration of poison. Not only was it the same method as that employed in the murder of Montagu; the poison used was the same poison.

"Now, when we consider the inveterate tendency of criminals to repeat their procedure, it is evident that this similarity of method suggested at least a possibility that the murderer of Emma Robey might be the same person as the murderer of Charles Montagu; and if that possibility were entertained, it carried with it the further possibility that poor Emma Robey might be the woman in the picture. There was, of course, no evidence that she was; all that could be said was that, in the only respect in which comparison was possible—the colour of the hair—they were so far alike that they might have been the same person. And at that I had to leave it for the time being. I waited hopefully for Emma Robey to be identified, assuming that, when she was, we should get into the world of realities. But she never was identified, and, after a time I decided, as also, I think, did the police, that Emma Robey was a fictitious name and that the marking on the clothing was a plant, done deliberately to confuse the issues. But who she really was remained a mystery.

"And now we come to another remarkable feature of this strange crime. I mean the absence of any real attempt to conceal its authorship."

"You are not forgetting the locked door," I reminded him, "and the elaborate suggestion of suicide?"

"No," he replied, "but I don't regard that as a serious attempt. The police did not entertain the idea of suicide for a moment, and neither did I. The whole circumstances shouted 'murder.' Nor did the murderer seem to expect that the pretence would be accepted, otherwise she would have made the discovery herself and called in the police. But she would not run this risk but took the more prudent course of absconding, and in doing so, frankly abandoned the pretence of suicide."

"But," I objected, "why the pretence at all?"

"It seems to me," he replied, "that there were two objects. First, it was a 'try-on,' a gamble on the infinitesimal chance that the appearance of suicide might be accepted. What the criminal thought of that chance may be judged by the fact that she did not stay to see whether it came off. She preferred definitely to incriminate herself by flight. As to the other motive, we shall come to that presently.

"To return to the crime; I repeat that, disregarding the pretence of suicide, there was no attempt to conceal the identity of the murderer. There was the corpse in Lotta Schiller's room, locked in with Lotta Schiller's key, and Lotta, herself, nowhere to be found. When once it was decided that this was a case of murder, Lotta was the obvious presumptive murderer. She alone had access to the rooms and there was no one else on whom any sort of suspicion fell. All that remained for the police to do was to arrest her and bring her to trial.

"But Lotta had disappeared; and notwithstanding the most intense and energetic search, the police failed to discover the slightest trace of her. Now, as Jervis remarked recently, it is not very easy, in these days of telephones, wireless, and a very perfect police organization, for a known person to disappear without leaving a trace; especially a rather conspicuous person like Lotta Schiller. Yet no sign of her was discovered until the finding of the handbag in Epping Forest.

"I am inclined to regard the planting of those relics in the forest as a tactical mistake. It never deceived the police, though Blandy very wisely made a search so exhaustive as to settle the question for good. Of course, the absence of a body damned the scheme. If there had been a murder, there must have been a body in the camp, and there would not have been those admirably selected clues; and the appearances could have been so easily produced by one person with two pairs of shoes.

The only effect on the police was to confirm their conviction of Lotta's guilt and to spur them on to further efforts to lay hands on her.

"But, as you know, their efforts failed utterly, though the search never entirely ceased during the two years that followed; for Scotland Yard has a long memory and does not readily accept defeat. Nevertheless, in all that long pursuit, not the faintest trace of Lotta Schiller ever came to light.

"So much for the crime itself. Now let us see how these developments appeared to an experienced and deeply interested onlooker. To me, the most striking fact was the one which I have just mentioned; the virtual acceptance by the criminal of the authorship of the crime. Apart from the perfunctory suicide tableau, which the murderer obviously did not rely on, there was not the slightest effort to dissociate Lotta Schiller from the murder; indeed, it almost seemed as if the onus of the crime were being deliberately cast on her.

"This curiously defiant attitude interested me profoundly. What could it mean? This was no crime of impulse with an unpremeditated flight. It was a carefully prepared murder, the procedure of which had been arranged and considered in advance. The only explanation that suggested itself to me was that Lotta Schiller had never been in any danger at all; that before the crime was committed, a means of escape had been provided, so secure as to render any other precautions unnecessary. And here, I think, we have the principal motive for the suicide deception; to disguise the criminal's confidence in her immunity from the danger of discovery.

"But what could be the nature of this infallible means of escape? I could think of only one; and the facts fitted it so perfectly that I adopted it as a working hypothesis. I decided that here, for the first time in my experience, I had met with a criminal who had put in practice my method of the fictitious person; that Lotta Schiller was a disguised person with a fictitious personality who, having committed the murder, had simply dropped the disguise and forthwith had virtually ceased to exist.

"You will see how completely this hypothesis agreed with and accounted for all the circumstances. It was just a reproduction of the case of John Doe. Here, in the assumed character of Lotta Schiller, he lures his victim into his premises, in which everything has been prepared, commits his murder at his ease without danger of disturbance or interruption, removes all incriminating traces, and, in this case, arranges the sham suicide tableau, goes away, removes his disguise, if he has not removed it already, and, having now changed back into the personality of John Doe, watches unconcernedly the pursuit of the non-existent Lotta Schiller. If he had been perfectly wise, he would have left it at that; but he was not perfectly wise, and he elected to play the fool in Epping Forest and thereby offer to the police an unnecessary suggestion of deception.

"Having accepted this hypothesis, I asked myself the further question: assuming Lotta Schiller to be a disguised person, who and what was the real person and what was the nature of the disguise? Was she really a woman, or was she a man disguised as a woman? I decided, for several reasons, that she was more probably a man. In the first place, as I explained just now, change of sex is, as a long-term disguise, much easier and far more effective than any other kind. Then the crime looked like a man's crime. Poisoning is characteristically the woman's method; but not forcible poisoning. That requires such an amount of strength as to make it certain that the crime can be carried out. Then there was a curious little point that cropped up in the evidence at the inquest and that seemed to me very revealing. In proof of the essentially proper character of his relations with Lotta, Vanderpuye swore that he had never kissed her; that she had absolutely forbidden any intimacies of that kind.

"Now, if we assumed that Lotta was a woman, this was rather extraordinary, considering that their relations were almost those of lovers. But if we assumed that Lotta was a man, the anomaly was quite easily explained. By careful shaving, a blond beard can be rendered quite invisible. But it cannot be rendered impalpable. By the sense of touch—especially the touch of the sensitive lips—the invisible stubble would be instantly detected. Hence, in such a case, physical endearments would have to be avoided most strictly.

"The position, then, at this stage, was that I believed the murderer of Emma Robey to be some unknown man at whose identity I could not even make a guess. For he had vanished without leaving a trace; or rather, I should say, leaving only deceptive traces in the form of a well-known but non-existent woman.

"But there remained the problem of Emma Robey herself. As the time ran on and the police failed to discover any missing woman of that name, it began to dawn on me that here, probably, was another fictitious person; that the marked underclothing had been a 'plant' and that there was no such person as Emma Robey. But if there was not, then who was the murdered woman? Again, it was impossible to make even a guess; though, at this time, when I used to look occasionally at the picture in Polton's room, I would ask myself whether it might not be that the two unknown figures in that picture were Emma Robey and her murderer.

"But this was mere speculation. It could not be tested or verified and it led nowhere. As the months slipped by and no new facts came to light, it began to look as if the Jacob Street murder would have to be added to the long list of unsolved mysteries. And so the matter rested for a couple of years. And then came Mr. Penfield; and with his arrival on the scene my role of the detached onlooker was exchanged for that of an authorized investigator.

"Now, before Penfield had spoken a dozen sentences, I saw that we were going to get some important new light on the problem; for we were now in a world of realities in which systematic inquiries were possible. But from Penfield himself, as he sketched out his case, I gathered several illuminating facts. Let us see what they were.

“First, we learned that Lotta Schiller was a real person. But Penfield’s case dealt with two Lottas; one, the testatrix, who was certainly the real Lotta, and another, the lodger at 39 Jacob Street, who was assumed to be the same person.

“Then we learned that there was some sort of connection between Lotta and Charles Montagu. The nature of it was not clear, but there had certainly been a contact of some kind.

“We learned, further, that Montagu had apparently been blackmailed, and that the blackmail had been assumed to be connected with the murder.

“Then Penfield could give us the address where Lotta was lodging when she was last heard of; and we gathered the significant fact that those lodgings were near Gravel-pit Wood.

“Finally, Penfield gave us a description of Lotta. It was very sketchy, but, such as it was, it seemed roughly to agree with what we knew of the appearance of Lotta the lodger (as we may for convenience call her, to distinguish her from the testatrix, whom we may call, simply, Lotta). But it agreed equally well with the woman in the picture and with Oldfield’s description of Emma Robey.

“Here, then, was some valuable new material; and, as soon as I had settled definitely with Penfield, I proceeded to sort out the facts and to seek to add to them. I began by inspecting Lotta’s will at Somerset House and trying to memorize her signature, and, as a matter of routine, I secured copies of the wills of Montagu and of Barbara Dalton. From the former of these I learned nothing fresh, and from Barbara’s only one trivial and apparently insignificant fact; which was that she had bequeathed all her chattels to her sister Linda, with the exception of her violin, which she gave to Lotta; from which it was reasonable to infer that Lotta was able to play the violin. But that fact, though I noted it, seemed to have no possible bearing on our inquiry.

“And now I addressed myself to the really important question: Was the lodger at Jacob Street the same person as Lotta the testatrix? The most likely source of the relevant facts was Mr. Thomas Pedley, with whom I accordingly communicated without delay; and, having received from him a most gracious invitation, I descended on him, supported by Jervis, at the appointed time.

“I must admit that, whatever my expectations may have been, the results of that interview were beyond my wildest hopes. Tom Pedley was a mine of information. He was a first-class observer, with an indelible memory and the valuable gift of imparting his knowledge by means of drawings. I need not go into details as most of them are known to you, but I will take the results in order.

“First, we learned that Lotta the lodger was a sham artist; an absolute sham, a complete impostor. Pedley assumed that she was posing deliberately for some reason unknown to him. This was an important fact, for, to this extent at least, she was masquerading in a false character.

“Next, we learned that, although Pedley had been on terms of fairly intimate friendship with her for many months, he knew absolutely nothing about her as to her past history or her friends or relations, excepting the rather shadowy husband. In respect of everything concerning herself, she was uncommunicative to the point of secretiveness.

“Then there were two very significant facts. One was that Tom had never seen her handwriting, and apparently no one else had; for she never wrote either to Tom or to Vanderpuye, and avoided the use of cheques by paying her rent in cash. She did not even sign her pictures. The other was her perverse refusal to have either a drawing or a photograph of her made for the locket, coupled with the fact that her own self-portrait bore no resemblance to her whatever. The great significance of these two facts was that, when the woman disappeared, all traces of her personality disappeared, too (as she believed). No portrait remained to be shown, studied, or compared with any known person, and no scrap of writing, or even the recollection of any, to be compared with letters or documents. The two facts, taken together, offered a distinct suggestion of preparation for a disappearance.

“The forced friendship with the remarkable manifestations of affection—entirely verbal and unaccompanied by any kisses or other physical endearments—was significant, especially as the woman seemed to have no other friends until Vanderpuye arrived and became the object of similar platonic affection. But I have already referred to the value of a flirtation as support for a ‘change of sex’ disguise.

“And now we come to the description and the incomparable note-book. That description was quite masterly, and to me an unexpected windfall. For, if I was right in my suspicion that Lotta the lodger was a man disguised as a woman, this description, with its wealth of exact detail, was substantially a description of the man himself. Thus, we learned that the woman’s height was about five feet seven without her high heels, that she had ears of a certain distinctive shape (of which Tom gave us a drawing), and that her eyes were of a greenish hazel. Now, these were characteristics that no disguise could appreciably alter. It followed, therefore, that the man, if he existed, must be about five feet seven inches in height, must have ears of that particular shape, and greenish hazel eyes. But Tom was able to supplement this description by an excellent memory drawing, the existence of which had been unknown to Lotta.

“But the real windfall was the hair. As soon as I had heard Tom’s description I realized that we had got a means of definite and certain identification, since Vanderpuye’s locket contained an authentic specimen which could be examined. For the condition was obviously abnormal. I suspected it to be ringed hair, since there seemed to be no other possibility; but, whatever it was, the microscope would make its nature clear. So we had got one totally unexpected item of evidence.

“It was, however, not the only one. Another point of unexpected importance emerged when Tom, in handing us his note-

book, showed us the finger-prints of poor Emma Robey. They did not appear to be of any interest as the unfortunate woman was dead and buried, but I looked at them to see how Polton's improvised method had answered; and then I made a curious discovery. The finger-prints showed that Emma Robey had been a violin player."

"How did they show that?" Vanderpuye interrupted, eagerly.

"By the signs of pressure and friction on the finger tips," Thorndyke replied. "You must remember that finger-prints show other things besides the distinctive pattern; thickenings, for instance, of the epidermis due to particular ways of using the hands. Thus a professional violinist or a regular player develops thickenings of the skin—little corns, in fact—on the tips of the four fingers of the left hand which are used in stopping the strings. They do not appear on the fingers of merely occasional players, and so are indicative of the professional or serious player. The traces that they leave on the finger-prints are quite characteristic since they are raised above the general surface, and, owing to their hardness, the pattern tends to be worn flat. These, by the way, were not at all well marked; just little areas of indistinctness in the centre of each print. Still, they were quite unmistakable, and they established beyond doubt that Emma Robey had been a regular violin player.

"The significance of the discovery remained to be proved. I had inferred that Lotta Schiller had been a violin player; but the inference might have been wrong. Meanwhile, the evidence, such as it was, supported the suggestion that Lotta Schiller and Emma Robey were one and the same person.

"These were the chief facts that we learned from Tom Pedley, and you will see that it was a rich haul; for these facts were the foundation of my case. When we came away from the studio I had the skeleton of the case sketched out pretty completely in my mind. Of course, that case was purely hypothetical and it might be entirely fallacious. Its truth or its fallacy could be tested only by further investigation, and I applied myself forthwith to the task of verification.

"The first step was to examine the locket, which Vanderpuye very kindly placed at our disposal. I took it up to the laboratory at once and examined it under the microscope with a strong top light. A single glance showed that the hair was ringed hair, though, owing to its light colour, the rings were quite indiscernible to the naked eye or even through a weak lens. But with strong magnification it was perfectly clear; so we now had an infallible touchstone which could be applied confidently to any individual suspected of being Lotta the lodger.

"But we had to find that individual; and we had to seek further evidence as to whether Lotta the lodger was or was not a fictitious person. But this question was closely bound up with that of the identity of Emma Robey. For if Emma was, as I suspected, Lotta Schiller, then Lotta the lodger must be someone else. Accordingly I turned my attention to this question, and I began by ascertaining the latest date on which the real Lotta had been seen alive. Now, we knew from the affidavits that she had never been seen by any of her friends after she had left her lodgings at Linton Green. From that time she was never heard of by them until her reported disappearance in the Forest.

"The first thing, then, to be done was to find out the exact date on which Lotta disappeared from her lodgings; to which end I dispatched the invaluable Snuper to Linton Green to make inquiries of Mrs. Wharton, Lotta's landlady. He began by asking if she could give him Mrs. Schiller's present address, which, of course, she could not; but instead gave him those particulars which you have heard in evidence.

"This information did not appear to help us at all; for, as Lotta left her lodgings in the morning of the 13th of June 1930 and the lodger did not appear in Jacob Street until about a month later, there was nothing to show that they might not be one and the same person. So I had to look for evidence elsewhere, and I did not quite see where I was to look for it. The position was very tantalizing. I had the finger prints of Emma Robey, and, if I could only have compared them with those of Lotta Schiller, the question would have been settled. But where was I to look for them? There is only one place in which the finger-prints of unknown persons may be found; Scotland Yard. But it seemed practically useless to look for the finger-prints of Emma Robey in that place. For whether she were or were not Lotta Schiller, she was presumably a respectable woman. Still, it was not absolutely impossible that they could be there; and, since there was no alternative, and that I might feel that I had left no possibility untested, I made a good photograph of the finger-prints in the note-book, and, armed with this, went to the Yard and sought out our old friend, Miller. He made no difficulty about taking me round to the Finger-print Department and presenting my photograph of the prints to the search officer. And then, behold the miracle! The finger-prints of Emma Robey were actually in the files; and, of course, there were also the prison photographs and a summary of the particulars.

"At first it seemed as if the discovery did not help us much, for the name attached to the prison portraits was Louisa Saunders. We seemed merely to have got another unknown person. But the particulars were much more enlightening. It was noted that the prisoner's underclothing was marked with the initials L. S., which agreed with the name that she had given, Louisa Saunders, but it agreed equally well with the name of Lotta Schiller. The most striking fact, however, was that Louisa had been arrested in the afternoon of the 13th of June 1930—the very day on which Lotta had left her lodgings, and after her departure from them. The agreement was so complete as to be almost conclusive.

"But there was yet another agreement. From Mrs. Wharton, Snuper had learned that Lotta was practically a professional violinist. But the finger-prints of Louisa Saunders were obviously those of a regular violin player. The impressions of the corns were extremely well marked; and now I understood why they had been so ill-defined in Emma Robey's prints. During the imprisonment the corns had atrophied from disuse, and become worn down.

"The facts thus disclosed left no doubt in my mind that Louisa Saunders was really Lotta Schiller; and, since Louisa was certainly Emma Robey, it followed that Emma Robey was Lotta Schiller. From this it followed that Lotta the lodger was

some other person; and the question was, who could that person be? And now it was possible to suggest an answer to that question. The telegram that Mrs. Wharton had received had certainly not been sent by Lotta; for it would have disclosed her address, which she had refused to give to the police. But since Carl Schiller had called at the lodgings later to settle the rent and remove Lotta's possessions, it was evident that he knew where his wife was. Apparently, he had sent the telegram to prevent Mrs. Wharton from making inquiries about her missing lodger. Evidently, then, there were reasonable grounds for suspecting that Lotta the lodger was in fact Carl Schiller. But nothing more than suspicion. It had yet to be ascertained that his physical characteristics were such as to make the disguise possible; and this could not be decided until I had seen him or obtained a detailed description of him.

"At this point it became necessary to take Miller into my confidence to some extent, as I needed his help for the next stage of the inquiry. He was perfectly willing, personally, to let me have copies of the prison portraits and the particulars, but he asked for a letter which he could show to the Assistant Commissioner, whose permission was necessary, and I accordingly sent him one, with the result that, as you remember, he called on me and brought the copies with him. Of these prison portraits I made copies with the name board masked out and put them, with a photograph of Pedley's portrait and a few dummy portraits, in a portfolio to be produced in court.

"And now I was ready for the opening of the case in the Probate Court, when I hoped to make the decisive move. But I was in a difficulty in regard to the procedure. For the correct course would have been for me to disclose the information that I possessed to Penfield, who would have passed it on to the other parties. But this was clearly impossible. Very unwillingly, I was compelled to adopt the quite irregular course of proceeding without the disclosure of material facts or discovery of documents, in the hope that I should be able to make my essential points before Lorimer objected.

"But I must admit that I was far from confident that morning when we set out for the Probate Court. For I had to settle certain questions, and to settle them quickly, and the opportunity might be lacking. And the results might not be those which I expected, in which case I should have to start the whole inquiry afresh. I have seldom been more anxious about a case than I was on that morning.

"The questions that I had to answer were: First, was Louisa Saunders actually Lotta Schiller? Second, did Carl Schiller's physical characteristics agree with Tom Pedley's description of Lotta the lodger? Third, had he ringed hair? The first question would probably be easy to dispose of, but the other two were subject to all sorts of contingencies. In the first place, Carl might not be there, although I suspected that he would; for his absence would be rather remarkable, considering his obvious interest in the case and the fact that his affidavit had to be read and that I had asked for his attendance. But even if he answered the description, there was the difficulty of obtaining a specimen of his hair. I had discussed this matter with Snuper and we had considered a number of plans, but, in the end, I had to leave it to his ingenuity and readiness to take advantage of any opportunity that should present itself.

"You know what the upshot was. When Schiller was introduced to us, I saw at a glance that he agreed perfectly with the description. He was about five feet seven inches in height, he had greenish hazel eyes, his ears exactly resembled Pedley's drawing, and the right one had a small Darwinian tubercle while the left had none; his profile, where it was not concealed by the beard, corresponded perfectly with Pedley's portrait, and, as he was talking with Jervis, I noted that his smooth, high-pitched voice would have passed quite well as a woman's voice. The agreement was complete. There was not a single discrepancy; and, for my part, I had no doubt that here was Lotta the lodger, the murderer of Lotta Schiller.

"But my belief was not to the point; nor did it amount to certainty. There remained the question of the ringed hair. That was the final test; and you will notice that it acted both ways. Lotta the lodger certainly had ringed hair. If this man had ringed hair, he was certainly the lodger. If he had not ringed hair, he was certainly not the lodger, no matter how complete was the agreement in all other respects. So that the identity of this man still remained to be proved; and I considered very anxiously whether it would be possible to get the sample of hair that was necessary for the proof or disproof. It looked an almost impossible task.

"I glanced towards Snuper, who had followed us into the court, and made the agreed signal to indicate his quarry; whereupon he got to work with his ridiculous little camera and managed to take two excellent profile portraits. Then he subsided into his seat and lay in wait for his victim; who presently seated himself close by, and then, as Lorimer made his opening speech, leaned his head against the back of the bench and closed his eyes.

"I watched Snuper anxiously and could see that he was keeping in close proximity to Schiller's head. But that was all that I could see; for Snuper has all the conjuror's skill in concealing his movements and diverting the attention of the onlookers. What he actually did was to wait until Schiller raised his head for a moment, and, in that moment to deposit a thick smear of a quick-drying adhesive on the back of the bench just where the head had been resting. It was a most audacious proceeding but apparently no one noticed it—not even Schiller himself. And it was perfectly successful, as I realized in the sequel; for, the next time that Schiller tried to move his head, it was stuck fast to the back of the bench and had to be released by Snuper's scissors. Then I saw what had happened and was on tenterhooks while Snuper scraped away the adhesive—ostensibly to clean the back of the bench—for fear the judge should intervene and impound the scrapings for examination. However, all went well, and Snuper took an early opportunity to escape; and then I knew that the sample was safe, whatever it might turn out to be.

"You know, in effect, what the result was. When we arrived at the Temple in the lunch interval, I found Snuper waiting for me, modestly triumphant at his success, and received from him his little camera and a folded envelope which enclosed some sticky material and a small tuft of hairs. I need not say that I lost no time in taking the latter up to the laboratory for

examination. There I picked out a few hairs, and, laying them on a slide with a drop of bergamot oil and a cover-glass, and, placing the slide on the stage of the microscope, put my eye to the eye-piece.

"It was a dramatic moment, for the life of Carl Schiller hung on the answer to my question. And the answer was given at the first glance. The hairs were ringed hair, plain and unmistakable; and it was now certain that Lotta the lodger and Carl Schiller were one and the same person. But that person was the murderer of Emma Robey; and the final question that remained was whether Emma Robey was the same person as Lotta Schiller.

"I went back to the court confident of being able to dispose of this question before the inevitable objection. And so it turned out. When Linda Dalton identified the prison portraits, my case was complete. For her identification was so confident and positive that it left no doubt in my mind, and I now knew that abundant confirmation could be obtained. Lorimer's objection came too late to hinder me, for I could, if I had chosen, have had Carl Schiller charged then and there."

"Why didn't you?" I asked. "Why did you go on with the case in the Probate Court?"

"The rest of my proceedings," he replied, "were for the benefit of the police. They would want to be able to make out a prima facie case before they committed themselves to an arrest, and, in fact, I had promised Miller to provide him with enough evidence for the purpose. But it was as important to me as to him; for we had to make sure of a committal. It would have been a disaster if the case had failed in the magistrate's court. Besides, the latter proceedings were a sort of rehearsal; they enabled us to see exactly what evidence we could produce at the trial.

"Well, I have now retraced the course of the investigation and you can see how the mass of circumstantial evidence grew up as each successive fact came into view. There is no need to go into details of the preparation of the case, such as the composite photographs and the other exhibits which were produced in court, nor to speculate on those questions of which we shall never know the answers."

"That is all very well, sir," said Pedley, "for the learned lawyer and scientist, but simple folk like myself would like to have some sort of answers to those questions. For instance, I should very much like to know why the deuce Schiller elected to take up his abode next door to me and adopt me as his dearest friend. It could hardly have been a mere coincidence."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "that seems incredible. But if it would comfort you to guess at his motives, I think you have something to go upon. He would have been looking about for a suitable neighbourhood where he was not known and for a likely stranger to adopt as a friend. He would have seen your name and address mentioned in the papers as that of the 'mysterious artist,' and he might have noted that, as you never came forward to give information and appeared to have been unaware of the murder, you were certainly not a busy or inquisitive person. Your neighbourhood was perfectly suitable to him, and your profession ideal for the purpose of striking up an acquaintance, provided that he could pose as a fellow artist; and that the present fashion for childish and barbaric painting made quite possible, with a judicious use of the current jargon. I think he made a very good choice."

"I should have thought," Pedley objected, "that the fact of my having seen him in the wood that day would have put him off."

"But, my dear Pedley, he didn't know that you had seen him. You are forgetting. The police kept your information to themselves. It never appeared in the papers. And, after all, though you had seen him, you never recognized him. No, my friend, I don't think that there is much mystery about his having selected you; but there are some other questions that are a good deal more difficult to answer."

"You mean," I suggested, "how it happened that Lotta allowed herself to be convicted of an offence that she had not committed, for I have assumed that Schiller planted those notes on her, deliberately, and that she knew it, though, of course, she couldn't guess at his object. But why didn't she say where she had got them?"

"Probably," Thorndyke replied, "she was so terrified of him, knowing him to be a murderer, that she did not dare to put the blame on him; and it is even possible that she accepted the prison willingly as a sanctuary from him. But we shall never know the actual facts, and it is not very profitable to speculate on them."

"You speak, Jervis," said Vanderpuye, "of his object in planting those notes on her. What was his object?"

"I take it," said I, "that his object was to get her safely out of the way while he was making his preparations to personate her and be ready to make away with her when she came out, before she had time to get into touch with her friends; and I assume that he knew that she would rather go to prison under a fictitious name than make a scandal and exasperate him. What do you say, Thorndyke?"

"I think you are probably right," he replied, "but we don't know, and we never shall. Nor does it really concern us. We knew enough to defeat a really talented criminal, and that should satisfy us."

"Even though," I suggested, "it knocks the bottom out of the infallible scheme of Mr. John Doe?"

"But does it?" he retorted. "I think, Jervis, you are overlooking some very material facts. In the first place, Schiller did not carry out John Doe's programme completely; and it was his departure from it that was his undoing. John Doe, having committed his crime, simply shed his disguise and disappeared, leaving no trace, and, thereafter, making no sign. If Schiller had done this, no question would ever have arisen. But he elected to stage the bogus murder in the Forest, and thereby left a loose end.

"Then you are overlooking the enormous effects of unforeseeable chance. The ringed hair was a chance in a million, and



that of Polton's taking the dead woman's finger-prints and Pedley's preserving them was almost as great. Yet, if you subtract those two infinitely improbable circumstances, there is no case left. Schiller would have been perfectly safe, for I could never have got beyond the stage of suspicion.

"Further, you overlook the fact that, in spite of all these adverse effects of chance, Schiller's scheme did succeed. For two whole years he was at large and totally unsuspected. It is an actual fact that when Penfield came to me, not a single individual in the world, except myself, had any doubt that the person who disappeared in the Forest was really Lotta Schiller. Even the police, who rejected the bogus murder, did not question the identity."

"Still," I persisted, "the undeniable fact is that his scheme did fail, and that he is going to be hanged."

"Yes," Thorndyke admitted, "his scheme was defeated by the unforeseen and unforeseeable. His failure illustrates the truth of Herbert Spencer's dictum that social phenomena are too complex for prevision to be possible. But without prevision, no plan can be devised that will certainly produce the effects intended. That is where social reformers and all sorts of other planners fail. They take no account of the unknown factors. But it commonly happens that the unknown factors turn out to be the operative factors, as they did in the case of Carl Schiller."

"That is very true, sir," said Vanderpuye; "and the operative unknown factor in his case was the existence of a gentleman named John Thorndyke."

---

THE END

# THE DR. THORNDYKE OMNIBUS



Richard

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN